

# Honeygirl

Based on a true story



by R. K. Wigal  
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My name is Smokey. I'm an unspectacular, common, ordinary, household tomcat. I have the usual green eyes that most cats have, and my medium-gray fur is neither long nor short. I have lived with a family named Smith since I was a kitten of six weeks. I was taken to live with them in the summer of the time when the period of great fear and anxiety was coming to an end. I'm seven years old now.

There were four Smiths in the early times: the master, Sam; the mistress, Ruth; two young boys, Kit and Ken. We all lived in a small house in a community of many such small houses. Our yards, front and back, were also small. The yards weren't fenced in, so any cat or dog in the neighborhood could enter at will. That notwithstanding, we were comfortable in our surroundings. We were a happy lot. We, all of us, were a family.

The master was of average height and slight build with black hair combed straight back and grey-brown eyes. He had an easy smile. He spent most of his days away from early morning until late afternoon. The mistress, a little shorter than the master, was also of slight build with wavy brown neck-length hair and blue eyes. She wore glasses. She was cheerful and hummed freely. She spent her days at home raising her boys and taking care of me. The boys were just plain skinny. Kit, of average height for a boy of six, had curly brown hair, parted on the left, and blue eyes like his mother, the mistress. He was always quiet and serious. Two and a half years younger than Kit, not quite four, and a bit shorter, Ken had straight brown hair, also parted on the left, and grey-brown eyes like his dad, the master. He was energetic, playful and laughed readily. He and Kit,

like the mistress, both wore glasses. Additionally, Ken's left eye squinted in harsh light. Both boys spent most days away from early morning until mid-afternoon.

The summer after my arrival I was left alone one day. I'd been left alone before, but this time something was not the same. Something was slightly different in the demeanors of the master and the mistress. The two boys apparently didn't notice this. They were the same as they always were when they went out: eager to go anywhere with Mom and Dad. Anyway, all I could do was sit and wait. Mind you, I was curious, but not overly concerned.

My wait wasn't long. The two boys burst through the front door into the living room, animated, chattering excitedly to each other. The mistress entered next carrying a large cardboard box followed by the master who shut the door. The mistress walked to the center of the room and set the box down onto the floor.

The master said, "Come and take a look, Smokey."

Already curious, I needed no encouragement. I wandered over, raised up on my hind legs (I had to stretch a bit due to the box's height), and peered into the box. Inside, tail wagging vigorously, was a honey-colored cocker spaniel puppy. I didn't know what to make of the animal. I simply stared in wonder.

"Her name is Honeygirl," Ken said, his smile as broad as the Pacific, "I hope you like her, Smokey." I could see that Ken was already quite taken by and completely attached to Honeygirl. Well, I liked Ken and I could learn to like Honeygirl as well. There was something about her...

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Honeygirl settled in quite nicely. She learned, under the mistress' tutelage, that when she needed to relieve herself, if she scratched on the back door with her paw, she would be let out into the back yard where she could do her duty freely. She also learned to speak and to sit up.

Honeygirl was friendly and eager, and I couldn't help liking her from the day she arrived. The only thing that annoyed me about her was that she loved to lick my face. I could definitely do without that. Still, after we got to know each other, we'd play together on occasion, mostly chasing each other around the house and yard. But neither of us was the other's primary interest.

I've always been the master's cat. The master, even now, strokes my fur and scratches my back, which I enjoy thoroughly. I like to perch on his shoulder when he sits in his favorite chair and listens to his radio programs. We've been best friends since I first arrived.

Honeygirl, on the other hand, was Ken's from the beginning...and he was hers. They were inseparable. He always had his arm around her or was chasing after her. In the world of animals and humans, theirs was the rarest of friendships. Even more so than mine with the master.

Honeygirl was not here long when it was decided that she would have much of the length of her tail removed. Humans, for some reason I don't understand, like cocker spaniels to have short tails. So she was taken away. She was brought back a day later with her newly stubbed tail wrapped in white bandaging. She whined a little and tried to lick her tail, but she couldn't quite reach it. Ken held her much of the time, talking gently to her, trying to comfort and soothe her. She recovered quickly, though, and she and Ken were able to continue their customary antics. The following summer, Honeygirl had become an adult dog. She still had some puppyish playfulness in her (she never really lost that), but she was physically mature. There was a short period of time when her behavior had changed. She began shaking as if shivering. I didn't understand it at the time, but I learned later at least some of what had happened. In the meantime, Ken was talking to the mistress.

"Mom, what's wrong with Honeygirl?" There was serious worry on his face.

"Honey, the mistress said, "I took her to the veterinarian today while you were in school. A veterinarian is an animal doctor. The doctor said that Honeygirl is going to have puppies."

"Puppies! Wow, Mom! That's swell!"

Ken's mouth dropped nearly to the floor when the mistress said, as gently as she could, "Honey, there's some bad news. It's why she's been shaking."

Wide eyed, with worry in his voice, he asked, "Why Mom?"

"She has a condition called nervous paralysis. The doctor said that he thinks she will be all right, but if Honeygirl lives through this, she can never be allowed to have puppies again. Otherwise, she could die.

"Oh Mom..." tears streamed down his cheeks.

Not long after, the shaking finally stopped. A few days after that, four very cute, somewhat mongrel puppies were born.

Ken hovered over Honeygirl like a doting mom. "Is she going to be okay, Mom?" Ken couldn't help being anxious.

"Yes I think she is, Ken. I believe the worst is over."

I, and the mistress, saw the relief fill his face. He was all teeth, but he was unable to speak. He could only take Honeygirl into his arms and hold her. And he held her long.

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Another summer came upon us, and with that summer came another house in a far different place. The house itself was scarcely larger than the house we moved from, but the yards were a major improvement. There was almost no front yard at all, but the back yard was immense, and there was a huge vacant lot on the sunset side of the house. The driveway, on the sunrise side of the house, was also rather large; all hard dirt. The master would take advantage of that hard dirt driveway. The house was not the only new thing to occur that summer. In August, the mistress gave birth to a third son. She named him Michael.

I have already said that Ken was playful. He absolutely adored play. One day, shortly after we moved into our new home, I was lying on the living room floor. I was swishing my tail a little. Ken placed his foot on my tail, not to hurt, but to stop it's motion. He'd hold his foot there for a minute, and then remove it. He did this for several minutes. Every time his foot came down on my tail, I'd give out a token growl. Another cat might have struck out at Ken, but I knew Ken was playing. So was I. The mistress laughed and said of me, "He's not doing anything. He's just lying there, taking it."

Ken's favorite object of play was, of course, Honeygirl. She, it turned out, loved to play equally as much as Ken. I remember a day that summer when the two of them were in the back yard. Ken tried to approach her because he wanted to hold her and pet her. He moved toward her and, just as he got within a very few feet of her, she darted off, ran several yards and then stopped. Ken ran to try to catch her, but as soon as he got close enough, she darted off again. "C'mon, Honeygirl," he pleaded. "Wait for me!" Several more times Honeygirl darted off again and then waited. She teased Ken unmercifully. She enjoyed playing with Ken as much as he enjoyed playing with her.

Two summers later, the mistress noticed something. Honeygirl was once again laden with puppies. The mistress did not have the heart to tell Ken. She simply monitored Honeygirl looking for any signs of the dreaded nervous paralysis. The birthing day got nearer and nearer, but Honeygirl exhibited no abnormal signs whatsoever. When the second litter was born, Honeygirl was perfectly fine. A decision was made, then, that Honeygirl and the puppies would be kept in a large cardboard box in the master bedroom...at least for the time being.

As soon as Ken learned of the new puppies, his whole body tensed as he became engulfed with fear. "Mom, is Honeygirl going to get nervous paralysis again? Is she going to die?" He tried to be brave, but he was on the verge of tears.

"Ken," she said, "if Honeygirl hasn't developed nervous paralysis by now, then she is never going to get it. Honeygirl is going to be all right."

Ken let out an enormous sigh of relief. "Oh mom, I was soooo scared.

"I know, Ken. I was too."

Ken went into the master bedroom and sat on the floor next to the cardboard box containing Honeygirl and the puppies. He petted her over and over. "I love you, Honeygirl." Ken felt that he would have his Honeygirl forever, now.

A word, now, about little Michael. He was completely enamored of the puppies. To him, a puppy, that is, a dog, was "goggy." He couldn't yet say the word "doggy". His favorite was the one blond pup in the bunch. That pup, more than any of the others, looked like a cocker spaniel.

I haven't mentioned Kit up to now, but he played a key role in the events that were to follow. The master, at this time, had two automobiles. One he drove to work. It was functioning well. The other was up on blocks, wheels removed, sitting on the hard dirt driveway. The master loved to work on cars. Kit loved to help him. They spent a great deal of time together working on this car, especially the engine, and they both were covered in grease. Kit was truly his father's son.

When the puppies were a few weeks old, it was decided that they and their mother would be taken from the master bedroom and kept in the car that was up on blocks in the driveway. The weather was warm enough that the pups would suffer no ill effects due to the climate. So that night, Kit, upon instructions, put Honeygirl and her puppies in the car. He tied Honeygirl with a rope so that she wouldn't stray too far from her progeny. Ken had already bid her goodnight, just as he did every night from the time he first encountered her.

In the morning, Ken awoke and dressed himself as quickly as he could. He wolfed down his breakfast of Cheerios, wasting not even a second of time. As happened every day, he could not wait to see his Honeygirl. When he stepped out the back door onto the driveway and looked toward the car, he froze in his tracks, transfixed, struck completely dumb. He wanted ever so desperately not to believe his eyes. Outside the door of the car was the lifeless body of Ken's own beloved Honeygirl hanging by the rope that had been tied around her neck. Ken, instantly overwhelmed like he had never been in his entire life, broke down instantly, inconsolably. "No!" he shouted. He then turned and ran back into the house. "Mom," he screamed, "Honeygirl's dead!"

"What?" She simply did not want to believe what she had just heard.

"Honeygirl's dead. She hanged herself."

The mistress, Kit, and the master all went outside. The mistress immediately broke into tears. Kit was nearly completely shattered. Kit's pain of guilt and remorse was easily as great as Ken's pain of loss. The mistress cried very hard, not only for Honeygirl, but also for her two sons. The master did not cry, but his pain was unmistakable. He set about the task he knew he had to perform.

Laws be damned, Honeygirl was buried in the back yard. Her grave had no marker, but Ken knew exactly where she lay and he visited her every day. He talked to her every time he visited her as if she were still alive. He never stopped saying how much he loved her.

Of Honeygirl's puppies, four were given away. The blond one was kept. Little Michael is the one who named him. The pup was named Goggy. Goggy would become Michael's dog just as Honeygirl had become Ken's.

Finally, never let it be said that cats don't cry. I can assure you they do. On that day, I lost one of my two most beloved friends and I cried more than I have ever cried, either before or since.