

Bishop & Fuller

The Yowling Cat Story

by Bishop & Fuller

I run off at the mouth. I always have, since I was a little girl. My friend Chrissie took a psychology class and said it came from having three brothers so I kept talking so my mom would notice me. That was like a bolt of lightning. I said hey, that's true, it's like I keep talking to get a little love. Chrissie said realizing that would cure me and now I could shut up. But it didn't. I still run off at the mouth.

That's not why Sonny and I broke up. We hardly ever talked and when we did it was all about the sonsabitches where he worked. I never talked about the sonsabitches where I worked because there wasn't room at the table for all the sonsabitches. We broke up because I can't cook for crap and he's too stupid to live and the sex wore us out. It didn't have a thing to do with talking. Or with love.

I just have stuff to say and nobody ever to hear it.

The first thing I did when Sonny moved out was to get two cats. I needed that more than a husband. I never had to wash their cat food dish, I'd just fill it back up. I could talk and talk and pet'em and talk and they loved that, whereas if I petted Sonny it always led to other things.

How I got them. Max, there was an ad for free cats and there was a children's book which I really loved where the little boy was Max. So that was Max. And Cleveland, I got Cleveland from the pound and she

was fixed already. Then I got Max fixed so they were both fixed. Like me and Sonny, it struck me. That was a pretty strange thought.

So I would put up snapshots of Cleveland and Max on Facebook. Everybody puts cats up there or their kids. And I had stories about Cleveland and Max but nobody really wants to hear about your cats, it's like moms telling how smart their kids are, I don't want to hear that. I don't have kids and if I did they wouldn't be smart.

Though I guess other people also have stuff to say and nobody listens.

But I got an email about this "storytelling" night in Nevada City, which is where I live outside of. Gold Rush Country they call it to tourists but I joke to my cousins in Omaha don't rush for the gold cause I never saw any gold. There's a community center where they do plays and music, I guess, and they have a night where people tell stories.

You can sign up to tell a story. It has to be true and you have three minutes to tell it. If you take too long there's a piano player and he starts playing and then you have to stop. You don't have to have talent, anybody can do it. Most of the stuff that happened to me over the span of my life took longer than that to stop hurting, but I talk pretty fast. This month's theme was *Creatures* and I thought, well, Max and Cleveland are creatures. So am I.

So Friday night I fed the cats, and I said, hey, I'm gonna tell everybody what funny cats you are and you'll be famous. And they both meowed, like saying *Right on!* They were a lot of love. Though you never get enough.

They called it "Story Time for Grownups." Maybe sixty people on folding chairs, just a plain assembly room but they'd put up some nice India cotton hangings on the wall behind this podium and mike, piano at the side, and you could buy wine or coffee and cookies at a table but I didn't — five bucks for a little dinky glass of wine. I found the old lady with the sign-up sheet and signed up. I was halfway down the list.

Starting out they had three storytellers with ten minutes each. I guess they were more experienced. One guy talked about his dog dying and I was crying at the end. Then a fat lady told about her aunt who collected fossils, which was funny, she paid a lot of money for a fossil rat. Then some guy with a hassle about his credit cards but that one cut too close to the bone.

Other people have problems too, I guess the lesson is from that.

So they worked their way down to the amateurs like me. The ones before me were okay but I thought, well, I won't disgrace myself. The one thing I know how to do is talk. Shutting up is something else.

The story was about how Max got lost and my being so scared and the funny way I found him. I had only three minutes so I wasn't going to tell why Cleveland was named Cleveland because the river caught fire in Cleveland even though the fire was before I was even born. At the pound they called her Sophie, but she hopped up on the stove and got singed by the flame, so I named her Cleveland. But I told that part anyway. People laughed. That felt great.

Then I told how Max disappeared and Cleveland started meowing and meowing, it must be she really missed Max. They'd fight a lot, not really fight but squabble like me and Sonny till we just got sick of the squabble and split. But still I missed the poor dummy so maybe Cleveland missed Max. Love hangs on.

I looked under the porch, back yard, out in the neighborhood and we were going to put up signs but we didn't. Maybe *we* being me and Cleveland. When I was a kid I wanted a sister, not a cat, but my point was that Max was gone and Cleveland started meowing and then I realized I had about thirty seconds left to tell the story.

They had a timer where you could see it.

People seemed to like the story but kind of wondering where is this going so I tried to make it faster but I had to explain that Max was a moody cat so I was worried. But Cleveland kept yowling all night and I thought maybe she needs to go out. When I was seven we had a dog named Buster, he always had to be let

out, the back yard was full of dog turds but Cleveland had a cat pan. I got her some water, thought maybe she's hungry but I was almost out of the dry cat food they have on sale at Safeway but this week they didn't and I was almost out. They put some chemical in to give it the taste of chemical fish.

People looked like I was getting off the subject.

So Cleveland was yowling and yowling and I tried to go back to bed but she kept on so finally I got up, went out, put her in the car and locked the car. Damn cat, I'm thinking, I love her but I just can't stand the yowling. It must have been like my mother felt. There were four of us kids and always raising hell and she didn't have enough love to spread around.

But I got back to bed, I thought omigod she's going to be so cold out there on the vinyl seats. So I got up and went out to take a couple of pillows out there, it's a '92 Honda, good mileage although it looks pretty bad but it's red which is maybe safer cause people see you coming. Not that I wanted a red car, we'd had a big old clunker but it was a shame to go to the grocery store with that.

Then I heard the piano. Just a tinkle. The signal to stop. I'd gone way over.

I never liked to get up in front of people. In school you'd have to give book reports but I didn't know what to say except that I'd read it so mine were pretty short. And we did a play and I had three lines and forgot my lines and just stood there till I remembered and said "I wonder when the doctor's going to come" but the doctor had come in already. I just needed to finish this damn story.

So Cleveland was in the car, I went back to bed but I heard this *meow meow meow* that sounded like Max. This was like four in the morning and I had to get up early for dental work at the clinic, they charge half what a regular dentist does and I brush my teeth and I floss but I needed two molars out and a crown. My mother lost all her teeth.

The piano tinkled again. They were trying to get me off, get me to end this horrible story. Horrible story, no, it wasn't horrible story, it was a very funny story, it wasn't funny when it was happening but when I

told it to people they always laughed, at least they tried to be polite, and I went on and on and then I notice I need to go to the bathroom.

I'm about to tell how I went to the garage and there's Max. He's perched up on the hood of the car, he's looking at Cleveland inside the car, she's got her feet up on the steering wheel, and they're both yowling away. I had to laugh.

I start to tell it but I've been talking forever and I see people out there, they're shuffling around, and from that point on I don't remember what I said, I just went on and on. I talked about my mother and her teeth, how she worked all her life and she went to the tax office when they wanted to dun her for taxes about her teeth and all I was trying to say was that I went to open the door and it was Max, it was really Max and I was really happy then, I was really moved but I couldn't stop, I needed to finish but I couldn't stop.

I look out at the people out there. The audience. They're deathly pale. Rigid, like in front of a firing squad.

And the lady who's the host that introduces people, she doesn't know what to do. The piano player makes more tinkles and he's ready to bang into big tumultuous chords and I'm just trying to end a sentence, just stop it, not even end the story but just end the sentence but it keeps on like the monkey swinging on vines from branch to branch that can't stop without falling into the lion's jaws and on and on and I can't even remember the name of my cat.

Then he hits a big heavy chord and I start screaming, screeching, ripping things, India cotton hangings, ripping them down and the clip lights on a pole crash down and people holding me down but I just keep screaming and screaming and screaming—

I did not do that, actually. What I did when the piano player started playing *Climb Every Mountain* was to say that at four in the morning I went out to the car and found the cats and brought them in. Then I

made a cup of coffee. People gave a little bit of applause and I sat down. I listened to one more story then I left.

The screaming part was in my dream that night. Next morning I had to go down to the Safeway and I was so embarrassed. I didn't see anybody I knew but I don't know many people. Somebody would walk past without looking at me, which is what people do, but it felt like they couldn't stand to see me. I really needed to scream but I had no opportunities. We all have that problem once in a while, I guess.

Max died a couple of years ago. I've still got Cleveland but she's on her last legs. I wish I hadn't named her Cleveland, it was funny at the time but then you live with old jokes. *Sophie* might have been more personal, the whole point being you want some love. At least I take better care of my teeth.

The story was just one night my cat was yowling and I put her out in the car and then the other cat was sitting there. That was the story. After that time it never seemed like much and I never told it again. Funny coincidence, I guess I thought. And some kind of crazy yowling love even though they were fixed. Three minutes is pretty short. I still get the shakes.

And my friend Chrissie, I never told her, she would have had some kind of interpretation. She talks as much as I ever did, I think. There's a need to.

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