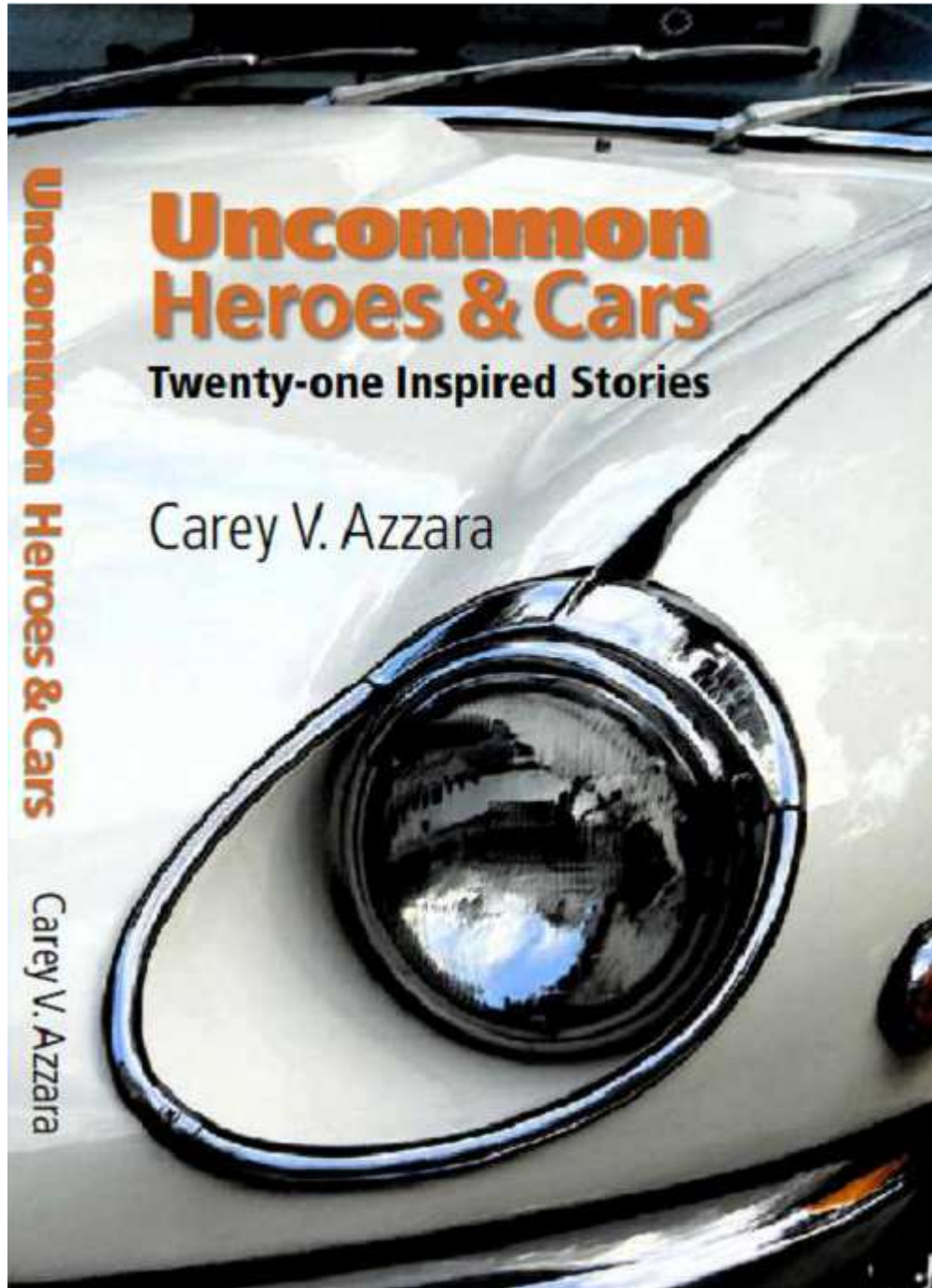


Bernoulli KO's an Intruder

A short story from the book:



The two sisters stared at him, then at one another, and again at the cat. The cat purred, and simultaneously the sisters announced, "That's the cat I want." The two girls laughed as they realized how often they tended to say the same thing at the same time.

Recently, they had decided to adopt an animal—they *needed* to. It was part of their healing. While both sisters adored dogs, it seemed more manageable, given their busy schedules, to find a cat they liked. As luck would have it, the local animal shelter had recently found Bernoulli, although that wasn't his name yet. The shelter had received an anonymous phone call from a woman who claimed the cat had attacked her. The abandoned Maine Coon cat had been crouched in the corner of an alleyway looking much disheveled when the rescue workers approached him.

While there was no evidence of the attack the woman had mentioned, once the cat had been captured, he was placed under quarantine for several weeks before being released for adoption. After a good bath—Maine Coons don't mind water—a grooming, and plenty of healthy food, Bernoulli was looking and feeling great.

He had become available for adoption on the same day the girls showed up at the shelter, and it was love the minute they saw him. This Maine Coon was, by all comparisons, an oversized cat, but not fat. He was muscular and powerful, especially for a house cat. People in the neighborhood called him either Bernie or Mr. B., and they said his name with a hint of respect. It seemed warranted, given his stance and the prowess he conveyed.

Bernoulli, or Bernie, as the girls also called him most of the time, was a loving companion. They all lived together in a low-rent but spacious and scrub-brush-clean apartment. It was a great neighborhood, and they were fortunate to find an affordable place so close to public transportation and lots of amenities. Kate thought the property owner was especially kind to them. When they'd signed the lease, she surmised, "Perhaps he knows about our misfortune, Jena."

Kate was a medical technician with ambitions to become a member of the city's rescue squad, which was part of the fire department. Jena was working on a graduate degree in political science. She spent most of her waking hours, when not in the classroom, either teaching or volunteering. The sisters looked alike. In fact, sometimes people mistook them for twins, but they were actually born two years apart. Kate was older and Jena reminded her of that fact frequently; she loved teasing her sister.

The Sisters' Loss

The sisters had started living together after losing their parents several years before when a drunk driver in a pickup truck broadsided their compact car. The drunk walked away with only minor injuries, but their parents were not as lucky. The double loss had been devastating, and if they hadn't had each other, it would have been too much for the sisters to bear.

The closeness they already shared had deepened as they leaned on one another for strength and purpose. It had drawn them together and at times locked out everyone else.

Now, after years of grieving, they were slowly regaining the lives they had put on hold. Rescuing a cat was part of the process and it was overdue.

When they brought the cat home, the first order of business was to decide on a name that fit him. One of the activities both girls had once enjoyed was sailing. Their dad had taught them how to sail as soon as they were old enough to swim. It was a pleasure the family of four had enjoyed for years, but up until recently, the sisters had avoided sailing; the memories just made it too painful.

However, as part of the healing process, the grief counselor they were seeing had encouraged them to regain that part of their lives and they had. They decided to honor their parents' memory by naming this big cat Bernoulli, which comes from the Bernoulli's principle related to sailing. Bernie seemed to take to his new name quickly—or perhaps he had fallen in love with the girls as quickly as they had with him, and any name they wanted would have been okay.

Bernie Sails

Most cats are not fond of water, but Bernie is not like most cats. One of his favorite things to do is to climb aboard the 24' sailboat his girls own and go sailing. He likes to sit on the bow and look out at the water, but he is also willing to hold the jib sheet with his paw if one of the girls asks him to. Yup, the cat is a sailor.

Bernie doesn't think of himself as a pet. From his point of view, the two girls are in his care. Whether they go sailing with him, out for a walk, or take a car ride, he is there to watch over them. Moreover, he does a dog-like job of it.

Animals have a sixth sense about people; they seem to know when possible danger is lurking. We often attribute this ability to dogs, but cats have it, too. Bernie is particularly good at sorting out the good from the not-so-good people and the downright bad folks the girls encounter. At least the girls think so, and they heed his watchful eye, taking steps to avoid the people he seems wary of when they are out with him. Who knows how accurate his sensibilities are? The girls trust him, and regardless of what anyone thinks, that's all that counts.

Intruder Beware

On a typical weekday, Bernie is home alone, not doing much of anything. Late in the afternoon, he hears a noise at the back door that immediately puts him on alert. The noise is glass breaking. "What's this?" he says to himself. "It sounds like someone broke a windowpane on the back door and is in the apartment."

Although the girls are not home, he is still on guard. He slips behind a couch, watching the two men who are now moving slowly through his domain.

One of the intruders remarks, "Hey, Burt, did you see something move?"

Burt sneezes and then answers, "Yeah, the people who live here have a cat. I'm allergic to cats. I hate cats!" He sneezes again and says, "Glen, do you see anything worth taking?"

Glen is in the living room and doesn't respond. He is face to face with the biggest cat he has ever seen. Now perched on a shelf, Bernie hisses at him, his sharp teeth in full view. With a low, frightening growl, Bernie raises a paw with his claws fully extended. Glen is too frightened to speak. All he can manage to do is move backward cautiously. He moves a little to his left and gets ready to bolt out of the room. Just as he is about to make a dash for the hallway, Bernie puts his paw under a displayed crank handle from the sailboat's winch. He bats it hard, sending it hurtling like a line drive into Glen's head. Glen falls to the floor with a thud.

Burt calls out, "Hey, Glen, are you okay?"

Burt enters the room, but at first, he doesn't see anything. Then he looks down and sees his thief partner lying on the floor, his head bloodied. Glen is obviously unconscious. Burt whirls around thinking that someone must be in the room, but he doesn't see anyone.

He calls out again. "Who's there?" Of course, there is no answer. He tries to stay calm, but he is rapidly starting to freak out. Nervously, he shouts, "Don't come near me! I have a gun!"

Bernie doesn't make a sound.

Burt is frantic and unsure what to do. He keeps turning in a circle, thinking someone is going to jump out at him. He mutters to himself, "It's too risky to carry Glen out. We'd surely attract attention. On the other hand, we can't just stay here."

Of course, he still doesn't know who knocked Glen out, and his fear turns to panic. "I don't know who you are, but trust me, I'll get you for this!" he yells. Again, there is no answer, which makes him even more frantic.

Finally, he decides that although they might be conspicuous, he has to carry Glen out and get him medical treatment. He thinks to himself, "After all, we haven't actually stolen anything yet, so technically we only broke in and entered, but there hasn't been a theft." He estimates that if they're caught, the most they would likely get is six months' jail time—at least he hopes that would be all they'd get.

He struggles to pull Glen up and over his shoulder. He stumbles toward the hallway on his way to the back door, but before he is halfway across the room, he sees Bernie perched on a bookcase close to the back door. All in a rush, he understands who knocked Glen out. The color in his face drains away and his knees become weak, then he sneezes. Burt remembers aloud, "The damn cat my mom had always liked to scratch me. He didn't bother anybody else in the family, only me."

His mom used to say, "Cats can smell the fear on you."

Whether or not that was true then, it is certainly true now. Bernie knows Burt is scared out of his wits. To make matters worse—for Burt, that is—he is carrying Glen over his shoulder, rendering himself rather defenseless. Bernie is in a pouncing position on the edge of the bookcase, his tail swishing back and forth. He prowls around the top of the bookcase and then returns to his pouncing position. He seems to be taunting Burt, daring him to go for the door.

Burt yells, "Get back, cat, or I'll hurt you!"

Bernie hisses at him as if to say, "We'll just see who does the hurting, punk."

Bernie is emboldened by Burt's fear, and Burt is more frightened now than he was a few minutes ago. He feels trapped between a proverbial rock and a hard place. Staying isn't an option. Glen is getting heavier by the minute. However, every time Burt takes a step toward the door, Bernie lashes out at him, claws fully extended, as if to say, "Go ahead, just try it, you dumb ass. I'll rip you apart." Well at least that is what Burt imagines the cat is saying.

The standoff continues for almost ten more minutes. Finally, Burt decides he has to make a run for the door. Although he feels cowardly about it, he positions Glen between himself and the cat before he lunges toward the back door. Bernie is having none of it. Just as Burt's hand reaches for the doorknob, he springs from his bookshelf perch onto the two men, knocking them both to the ground. Now Burt is face down with Glen on top of him—and his ankle hurts like hell.

"Damn it!" he yells. "You stupid freakin' cat!" He is in a good deal of pain and still sneezing.

Bernie takes full advantage of the intruder's precarious predicament. He walks around the men and stops right in front of Burt's face. He is crouched in a ready-to-spring stance, too far to reach, but close enough to pose an immediate danger.

Burt imagines the cat's thoughts. "I know what you're thinking. You're daring me to move so you can feel justified in tearing my eyes out, you bitch of a cat."

For over two hours, Burt is sandwiched between the floor and Glen's body. Bernie is holding him hostage. Finally, and to Burt's relief, someone comes home.

She calls out, "Hello, Bernie. Where are you?" Coming further into the apartment, Kate spots the two men. She gasps, then sees Bernie watching the two thieves, keeping them hostage.

Burt turns his head to look up. "Thank God you're here. Your cat is a menace." He slowly turns his body, trying to get out from under his unconscious partner. "He knocked my partner out and he's been holding us prisoner for almost three hours. Where the hell did you get that monster?"

Kate says nothing. She runs for the phone and immediately calls 911 to report the break-in. She tells the police dispatcher about the two would-be robbers. "Yes, they're still here, thanks to my cat. He detained them."

The dispatcher is silent for a moment. Then she says, "What did you say, miss? Your cat did what?"

Kate answers, "Never mind about the cat. Send someone over here now before these two idiots get away."

After a quick pause, the dispatcher asks for Kate's address and assures her that a patrol car is on the way.

Kate gets out a baseball bat she has stored in a nearby closet and tells Burt, "If you know what's good for you, you'll just lie there until the police show up."

Burt nods his head; he doesn't have any fight left in him and his ankle is throbbing. Glen is starting to come around. Burt turns and sits up to rest Glen's head on his lap, but he does not attempt to move more than necessary.

Bernie is still lurking around, pacing in front of him again as if to say, "Don't even think of doing something stupid."

When the police officers knock on the door, Kate quickly lets them in. The first officer says, "Hold on, there! I hope you're not planning to use that on us."

Kate looks down at the bat and says, "Oh, of course not." As she puts the baseball bat down, she says, "Please c'mon in. The intruders are over there." She points toward Bernie.

Within minutes, the officers put Burt and Glen in handcuffs, read them their rights, and summarily escorts them to the patrol car. In a few minutes, one of the officers returns to take Kate's statement.

He says, "I'm Sergeant Tom O'Malley. You're Kate, right?"

She pauses a moment to look at him, then says, "Yes, have we met?"

"Well, not formally, but I've seen you at the hospital on occasion when we drop off someone who needs medical treatment."

Kate smiles and thinks to herself, "He's rather handsome, isn't he?" Flustered a bit from her moment of reflection, she says, "Well, come in. I guess you need my statement. You might find what I'm going to tell you a little hard to believe, but it's all true." Kate describes the whole incident, including what she has been able to piece together about the events before she came home.

Officer Tom—they are already on a first-name basis—says, "So when you got home, the cat was doing *what?*"

Kate looks him straight in the eye, and says, "You heard me correctly: Bernie had knocked one of the men out." She shows him the bloody winch handle and says, "See?" She adds, "Then when they tried to leave, he pounced on them as they headed for the back door."

"Yes, and then what happened?"

Kate continues, "Well, from what the one guy told me, Bernie held them here. The one with the injured ankle said the cat intimidated him." She laughs and says, "Apparently, he was too scared to move. I found them on the floor. He said he was glad I had finally come home."

Tom shakes his head. "This is the first time I have ever heard of a cat taking down an intruder."

Kate immediately corrects him: "*Two* intruders."

Tom smiles, "Yeah, right, *two* intruders. Kate, your cat is one of a kind!"

He reaches over and puts his hand on hers. "It must have been scary to come home and find these two 'gents'—I use the term loosely—in your apartment. Are you okay now?"

Kate smiles back. She does not move her hand away. "Yes, I'm okay, thanks."

Tom gets up, puts his hat on, and walks toward the door. Then he turns and says, "Kate, there's a great little café near here on the corner of Berkeley Ave. and Forest Street. Would you like to meet for coffee sometime?"

He looks a little embarrassed just for asking, but Kate is delighted.

"Yes, I'd like that very much. Are you off duty on Sunday morning?"

Tom, now feeling more confident, says, "Yes, yes I am, Does ten sound about right?"

Without hesitation, Kate answers, "Perfect, I'll see you Sunday."

When Tom gets back to the patrol car, his partner looks at him with a questioning expression. "What's goin' on, Tom?"

Tom has an impish smile. "Nothin', Phil, not a thing."

Phil starts the patrol car and says under his breath, "Liar."

When Jena gets home, Kate is all a-buzz with what has happened.

Jena says, "Well, the first thing we're going to do is give that cat the best dinner he ever had. The second thing we're going to do is take a trip to the hardware store and get us a better way to lock that back door." She then quickly adds, "But right now, you're going to sit and tell me every juicy detail about this Tom, the police officer character!"

Bernie sits calmly at the sisters' feet, purring as Kate strokes his neck. He listens to her tell Jena all about Tom. Every so often, he looks up at Jena and Kate as if to say, "Sure, the cop's okay, but don't worry, girls, no matter what happens, I've got your back."

Four Years Later

Although Kate and Tom have some good times together, their relationship never blossoms into a long-term commitment. Kate is always busy with her medical career. Tom is busy, too, protecting the community and, as he likes to say, "Catching bad guys." He has become a detective, the youngest on the force. They respect each other's work and they stay friends, but there is no romantic attachment.

Kate eventually becomes a member of the local fire station's rescue squad, which is an accomplishment that gives her great pride. Jena finishes her master's degree in political science and now works in the governor's office,

Bernie is as strong as ever, and has had a few more adventures since his encounter with the two burglars. In fact, he has become amazingly famous. He's been featured in the local newspaper, which has catapulted him into the national news. He's probably one of the most well-known cat heroes around. After his escapades are published, Maine Coon cats become popular, especially with the ladies. However, to date no other cat, Maine Coon or otherwise, has been a match for Bernie's notoriety.

Once the excitement dies down, Bernie, Jena, and Kate are relieved. Being in the spotlight has its rewards, but it is also fraught with a downside. All the attention is wearing. Of course, our hero remains on the alert. The publicity does not change him. Another downside of his reputation is that it makes him the target of a couple of grab-and-run attempts.

Fortunately, none of the attempts to snatch Bernie are significant. However, that changes on one particular Saturday morning. The girls become deathly frightened when a young man in his early twenties runs up to them, grabs Bernie, and runs off. Kate screams at him to come back, but he is too quick and is out of sight in seconds. Jena pulls out her cell phone to call the police. "Hello, I want to report a kidnapping. Someone just stole our cat."

The desk officer says, "Sorry, miss, we don't handle animal kidnappings."

Jena says, "But you don't understand! *Bernie* has been taken!"

The desk officer's tone changes immediately. "Well, why didn't you say so in the first place? We'll get right on it! Where are you?"

Jena gives the officer her location, a description of the kidnapper, and the direction in which he ran off. Then she asks, "Can you please connect me with detective Tom O'Malley?"

The desk officer replies, "Sure thing, miss, hold on."

When Tom gets on the phone, Jena tells him to wait a second and passes the phone to Kate. "What's happening, Kate?" he asks.

"Oh, Tom, somebody snatched Bernie from us in broad daylight." She is frantic and her voice quivers.

"Okay, stay where you are. I'm on my way. Don't worry, Kate, we'll get Bernie back."

Kate feels reassured, but she is still overwhelmed with a sense of dread. Jena has her arm around her sister, who is now in tears. "Jena, I don't know what I'll do if we lose Bernie."

Jena, trying desperately to stay calm, says, "Kate, we're not going to lose him. The whole city will be out looking for him, and you know how much Tom loves that cat. He won't stop looking until he finds him."

Bernie is no ordinary cat, and his kidnapper has no idea what he is in for. But he is about to learn the hard way. At first, Bernie isn't sure what has happened, it all takes place so fast. However, shortly after the young man starts to run, Bernie grasps the situation. He decides to wait until his kidnapper has worn himself out running before he makes his move—Bernie is smarter than your average Maine Coon.

As they approach the front door of a rather dilapidated house, someone calls out, "Did you get him, Mickey?"

Before Mickey can answer, Bernie digs his claws into the young man's side. Mickey had been carrying Bernie awkwardly under his arm, but now he screams out in pain and lets go of the cat. "Crap! Damn you cat, that hurt!"

Bernie is already finding refuge up a giant gnarled oak tree. Mickey and Freddy, his kid brother, call to Bernie, but there is absolutely no way Bernie is coming down. Freddy goes to the garage and brings back a ladder. Bernie thinks to himself, "Oh, this should be fun. What a couple of jerks. Who do they think they're dealing with here?"

Mickey starts to climb the ladder. When he is nearly within arm's reach, Bernie hisses at him and climbs a little higher out of reach. "Damn you cat, come over here!" Mickey yells, which helps not at all.

Freddy is yelling, too. "C'mon, Mickey, get him! Go higher!"

Mickey turns, looks down to yell back, and then turns away again. Looking down proves not to be such a good idea.

He yells, "Why don't you come up here and get him yourself, you dipstick?"

His brother replies, "You know I'm afraid of heights."

Mickey thinks to himself, "Yeah, it turns out so am I!"

However, Mickey's predicament is about to end. A patrol car that is out looking for Bernie notices the ladder and young man up in the tree. The officers pull over with lights flashing. "What seems to be the problem, boys?" one officer asks.

Freddy says, "Oh, no problem, officer. Our cat climbed up this tree and my brother is trying to get him down."

The officers, who are already on the alert for Bernie, walk around to get a better look at the cat. When they look up, they immediately recognize Bernie. The officers give one another a quick glance. "Okay, son, you're under arrest," one of the officers says to Freddy. He quickly handcuffs him and puts him in the rear of his patrol car.

He then calls for backup. "Headquarters, we found Bernie. Send backup, please."

"Roger that."

Two more police cars show up within minutes.

The first question they ask is, "Hey, is Bernie okay?"

The officers who are making the arrests laugh. "Yeah, he's fine, but that kid on the ladder looks like he might be in trouble. He apparently found out he's afraid of heights and Bernie is taunting him."

They all laugh until Mickey starts yelling, "Get me down! Get me the hell down from here, and get this damn cat away from me!"

People in the neighborhood have started to gather around, attracted by all the shouting and the sudden bursts of laughter. One of the police officers calls the fire department, and soon a truck from Kate's firehouse arrives. She and Jena are with them. A firefighter helps Mickey down and an officer places him under arrest. Another firefighter climbs up a fire truck ladder to retrieve Bernie, and the big cat is as

cooperative as he can be. When he is on the ground again, the firefighter hands him to Kate. A cheer goes up among the growing crowd of people.

That evening, there's a party at the firehouse. Police and firefighters alike come. They give Bernie an honorary medal that says, "For bravery in the face of adversity."

"Yup," says Tom, "he's one crazy cat." He looks at Kate and says, "Hey, Kate, do you want to get coffee this weekend?"

She looks at him in surprise. He is smiling in kind of a devious way, "You know, coffee?" he says. Then he winks at her.

Jena gives Kate a little shove. "Sure, I'd love to," Kate says with a blush.

Uncommon Heroes and Cars
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