

# Ra-Kit's Initiation

**Zak Bates Eco-adventure Series, Volume 0**

W. Bradford Swift

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RA-KIT'S INITIATION

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# RA-KIT'S INITIATION

W. Bradford Swift

In W Bradford Swift's visionary fantasy, *Dominion Over All*, Zak Bates is blackmailed by Ra-Kit, the last living magic cat, to accompany her and her companion, Sampson the flying dog, on a daring adventure to save the animal kingdom from annihilation.

But where did Ra-Kit's magic come from? Is she really five-hundred years old or is that just part of the mythology she's woven for herself? What did Ra-Kit have to do to be initiated into the secret clan of magic cats?

In *Ra-Kit's Initiation*, these questions and more are revealed in a quirky romp around London in the mid-1800s. It's a digital short for animal lovers of all ages.



# Dominion Over All



WHEN the last living magic cat and her flying canine companion show up on your doorstep with an offer you can't refuse, it can sure throw a wrench into an otherwise normal teenage life.

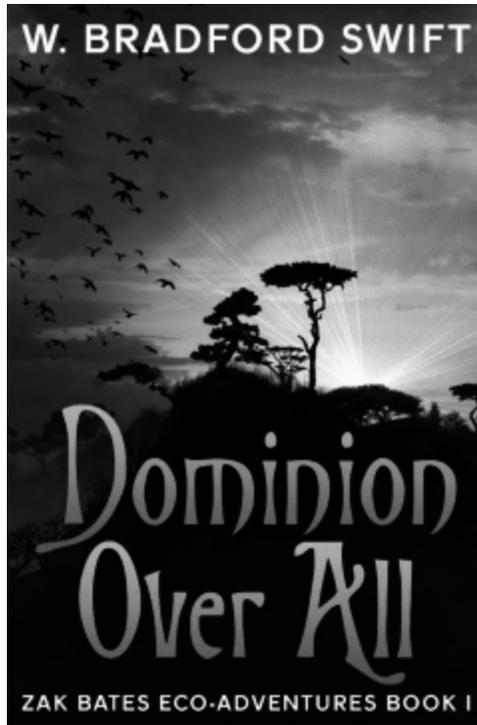
Zak must persuade the world governments to stop poisoning the planet, or face a global rebellion of animals that could cost millions of lives and throw the world into chaos.

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## Chapter One



ZAK'S FIRST ECO-ADVENTURE had been a roaring success. He had spoken with passion and commitment to the world leaders at the World Environmental Summit [1] urging them to mend their ways before it was too late. Not long after, he found himself with his new friend and eco-teammate, Sampson the flying dog, lounging around the park across from his home, recuperating from a very trying few weeks.

Eventually, he got up the nerve to ask the question that he'd had since first meeting Ra-Kit, who claimed to be the last magic cat on earth. They'd met at the animal hospital where Zak's canine companion, Angus, had been brought after being hit by a car. Ra-Kit saved Angus' life only to turn around and blackmail Zak into helping her with the mission to speak for the animal kingdom at the World Environmental Summit.

Zak took a moment to clear his throat before asking the question. "Sampson, do you mind if I ask you a question that has been burning a hole in my mind for weeks?"

"Sure, Zak, fire away," Sampson replied, rolling over on the grass so he could better see his new friend.

"Well, you've been with Ra-Kit for quite a few years, right?"

"Yes, that's right," Sampson replied.

"Have you been her companion since the very beginning?"

"Oh, no," Sampson replied. "We've been together for several decades but not from the beginning. Why do you ask?"

Zak paused, trying to think of the best way to ask the question, then decided the direct approach would be best.

"I was just wondering how Ra-Kit became a magic cat. I mean, was she born with her magical powers or what?"

Sampson chuckled at the question. “Well, I don’t know that anyone knows for absolute certainty how that came about, but I can tell you the generally accepted story—the one that’s on file at the Animals’s Spiritual Frontier. I guess you could say it’s the official version and the one I was directed to when I asked that same question not long after becoming Ra-Kit’s companion. Would that be helpful?”

[1] As chronicled in *Dominion Over All*, Book One of the Zak Bates Eco-adventure series

“Yeah, that would be great,” Zak replied, sitting up and plucking a blade of grass from the ground to chew on.

“Well, the story as I learned it starts back in the 1800s—1863 to be exact—when the cat that we now know as Ra-Kit was less than a year old—”

“Wait a minute. I thought she told me she was over five hundred years old,” Zak said with a confused look on his face.

“Yeah, well, I’ve heard her refer to several different ages. She tends to be a little creative when it comes to her true age. All I know is the story I learned while visiting the Spiritual Frontier, which, like I said is the official version. Now, do you want to hear it or not?”

“Sure. Sorry. Go ahead,” Zak said as he pretended to lock his lips shut.

“Good. As I was saying, the story begins in London, England in 1863, where a very young and precocious cat is trying to survive in a most troubling time.”



## Chapter Two



THE SCRAWLED NOTE HAD been ominous if a little vague in the details.

Midnight, on the bridge. Come alone.

Times were tough for everyone—two-legged and four-legged alike, but it was far worse to be on your own these days. So, Allie had followed the instructions. Now, look where she'd ended up.



“QUICK WITH THAT CHEESE!” Master Cat Beemer shouted to his crew. “No telling how long we have before the two-legs awaken and we have to scrub the whole mission.”

The other four cats that made up his gang nodded silently and bent that much harder to the task. Everyone knew the last thing you wanted was to get on Beemer's bad side. The only thing worse would be to get on Doggin's black list. If that happened, you'd be cut loose from the clan, then left to beg on the streets like the hundreds of other feral cats of London in 1863.

It was far better to lick a bulldog's boots, as it were, and to do what Doggin and his right-hand cat, Beemer, ordered. So, they all worked diligently to clean out the two-legs' pantry as fast as possible, which is probably why no one noticed the three mice watching their every move.

“Jaco, where's Allie? Didn't I tell you to keep an eye on her and make sure she survives her first outing?”

“Sorry, boss,” Jaco replied without pausing from pushing a large loaf of bread towards the edge of the shelf. “She was here a minute ago. Said she needed to go check on something upstairs. I thought she'd be back by now.”

“You idiot! You call that looking out after her? The only thing she's likely to find upstairs are two-legs, and that'll be nothing but trouble for all of us. Stay

here and make sure no one slouches off. I've got to go find her. Doggin will have us all hanging from the watchtower if anything happens to her. He has great plans for our newest recruit."



ALLIE'S SLEEK BLACK coat made her a near perfect cat burglar. Her only shortcomings were her misty green eyes that were so bright they almost glowed in the dark, but she'd learned early on to squint whenever necessary to keep the risk of detection to a minimum. She did so now as she leapt to the top of the chest-of-drawer. Just as she had hoped, she found the ornately decorated box within which she felt sure would be the treasure that would place her in good stead with Doggin for years to come.

Her plan was simple. Find a two-leg's bauble that Doggin could trade in for the much more valuable commodity of food, thus demonstrating to him an easier and more lucrative way to collect food. And her plan would have worked perfectly if it hadn't been for the blasted mice who were even now pattering across the two-legs' bed alerting them to the double burglary in progress.

Allie sniffed around the top of the chest for a few moments. As best she could tell, the box wasn't even locked. She confirmed her conclusion by nudging the top open with her nose, revealing small compartments filled with baubles of every size and description. She reached for the shiniest one she could see—a simple ring with a single crystal clear stone in its setting.

Just as she grabbed it with her teeth, she felt a firm grasp on the nape of her neck as she was yanked away from the chest and thrown into a musty canvas bag. She struggled to regain her balance but couldn't get any solid footing. Tossed from side-to-side as she was carted away, she inhaled the dust from within the bag. She fought to keep from sneezing but knew it was just a matter of seconds before her natural instincts would take over. She took one final gulp and swallowed, then exhaled a final time in an attempt to blow the dust from her nose, but it was too little, too late. She sneezed and sneezed until she felt like she was about to turn inside out. As soon as she finished one sneeze, the dust would return to her nose, and she'd have to sneeze again. Finally, her body appeared to adapt to the musty conditions, and she lay quietly in the bag. The motion contin-

ued for several minutes. She didn't know where they were carrying her, but she doubted she'd be pleased with her new destination.



## Chapter Three



“QUICK, EVERYONE. TAKE what we have and let’s scam!” Beemer shouted as he flew into the pantry. “The two-legs have Allie, and our goose is cooked if we don’t get her back.” The rest of his crew was experienced and trained to make quick getaways, which was why Doggin had assigned his youngest recruit to Beemer’s gang. Now, he’d pay for it with his hide...unless he could somehow rescue her.

“Jaco, come with me,” Beemer ordered. “The rest of you get this stuff back to Doggin. If he asks where we are, tell him we’ve been unavoidably detained, but assure him that we’ll be back very soon, and do not under any circumstance tell him what really happened. Show him how much we pilfered this evening. That should distract him long enough. We’ll be back as soon as we can...hopefully with Allie.”

The other three cats threw the half-full bag of food into the cart and pulled it away to their hideout while Beemer and Jaco went looking for where the two-legs had taken Allie.

“Let’s head to the river,” Beemer said as he started off in that direction. “These two-legs don’t have much imagination when it comes to exterminating cats. That’s almost certainly the direction they’ve headed.”

Sure enough, the two cats caught up with a tall two-legs carrying a burlap bag over his shoulder, a couple of inches of his nightgown sticking out below his overcoat. Even though it was early September, the night temperatures were cold with the first hints of winter that were just around the corner. It was clear to Beemer that the two-leg meant to finish his business as quickly as possible so he could get back to the warmth of his bed. So he wasn’t particularly surprised when the man reached the bridge and, without a moment of hesitation, tossed the bag with a

squirming Allie into the cold, dirty water of the Thames. Without bothering to look down, the two-leg turned and retraced his steps.

“Quick, down this way to the river’s edge. We have to keep an eye on that bag and pray that it stays afloat long enough for us to pull Allie to safety.” Beemer ran around the edge of the bridge with Jaco close behind.

What they saw didn’t put their minds at ease. Already the burlap was collecting water and dipping under the waves before coming back up, then dipping under the surface again.

“Allie, keep fighting!” Beemer yelled. “We’re here. We’re going to get you out. You’ve got to stay afloat just a little longer.”

“Down there!” Jaco shouted, pointing to where a weeping willow hung over the river. “Maybe we can reach her from the branch.”

“Let’s go,” Beemer replied as he streaked towards the tree in an effort to reach it before the bag passed under it. “Hold onto me, so I can reach...out...just...a...”

Beemer stretched himself out over the river, dangerously close to falling in himself. At the last moment, he felt Jaco’s reassuring grasp on his hind legs. He had to time his final lunge just right...just as the bag passed within a few inches of him. It was too far. He couldn’t make it. The image of an irate bulldog chewing off his ears flashed in his mind. Doggin would take only too much pleasure in making him pay for losing Allie on her first mission. At the last second, Beemer yelled back to Jaco, “Let me go!”

As soon as he felt Jaco ease up, he coiled his powerful rear legs and leapt into the water, landing on the now soaked bag.

“Gotcha!” he yelled just before taking on a mouthful of water. *Now, what in the hell have I done?* he wondered as the bag dipped below the surface, threatening to drown both cats. Holding onto the bag with his front claws, he kicked with all his might with his back legs. As they reached the surface again, he shouted to Allie, “I’ve got you, Allie! Just stay calm and do whatever you can to stay afloat.” He looked towards the shore where he saw Jaco following his journey down the river. He knew the old wive’s tale that cats couldn’t swim wasn’t true. It’s just that cats hated the water so they did everything they could to avoid it. He heard Allie’s pleading meow, and it spurred him on, even though he was already tiring as he fought to keep the two of them afloat.

The next few minutes his entire focus was on survival and keeping Allie and his head above water. He lost all track of time, how far they had traveled and

whether or not Jaco was even still with him on the shore. He felt his strength weakening and was lightheaded from oxygen deprivation. If he blacked out, it would be all over for both of them, so he shook himself to stay conscious, but it didn't seem to help. It was just delaying the inevitable. He was about to die.

"Hang on, Beemer!" Jaco called from shore. "I've almost got you."

The sound of his friend's voice was like a cold spray of water on his face, or maybe it was the actual cold spray of water that woke him up. He looked around. They were nearing an outcropping of rocks, and in the center of it stood Jaco. Somehow he'd leapt from rock to rock until he positioned himself near where Beemer was headed. With his last ounce of strength, he struggled towards the rocks, and slowly made headway. With his last kick, his legs contacted something under the water. A rock—solid ground. With weak, trembling legs and help from Jaco, he pulled Allie and himself out of the water and onto the rocks where he collapsed.

It was close to dawn when the three water-soaked cats slowly made their way back to Doggin's hideout, passing along the way of the two-legs' large vessels. With only mild interest, Beemer glanced at the ship. "Where do the two-legs go in those things?" he asked, though he really didn't expect Jaco to know.

"Why, it takes them to America!" Jaco replied with enthusiasm. "One of these days I'm going to jump on one of those ships and go there myself, I am, I am. I hear those ships are filled with mice and rats. Plenty of food for catters like you and me. Whatta you say, want to go with me on an adventure?"

"No way," Beemer replied. "I'm a Londoner true blue. Besides, I've had more than enough adventure for one day. Enough to last a year or more."

"How about you, Allie? Ever wondered what life in America would be like?" Jaco asked, but he could hardly get a word out of the waterlogged Allie, who just shook her head, mortified by the trouble she had caused.

No one spoke again until they were within sight of Doggin's place. "Let me do all the talking," Beemer said as they made their way down the steps that led to the basement of the pub that Doggin's two-legs owned and where Doggin served as one of the bouncers. Doggin was one of the largest and meanest bulldogs Beemer had ever had the misfortune to run into, but as long as you stayed on the dog's good side and did his bidding, he'd leave you alone. The only problem was that there seemed to be a lot more room on his bad side than his good, so

Beemer and the others of the cat clan were constantly fighting among themselves to be one of the few that Doggin would leave alone.

Jaco nodded. He was more than happy to let Beemer lead the way. After all, he seemed to have a way with Doggin that no one quite understood, so he figured if anyone could talk themselves out of trouble, it would be Beemer.

Allie wasn't so sure. "I have something that—"

"I don't want to hear a peep out of you, do you hear?" Beemer stopped and stared at her hard. "You've done quite enough for one day. Doggin might have taken a fancy to you early on, but I can assure you that his temperament changes faster than the direction of the wind. So, shuddup and let me do the talking."

Allie opened her mouth as though to disagree, but noticing the look on Jaco's face, decided it best to stay quiet...at least for the moment. The three of them snuck down the final few steps, only to run smack dab into Doggin as he was about to leave.

"Well, look at what the cats drug in...their own scrawny, soaked caucuses. Where in the hell have you been — bathing in the Thames?"

Beemer stepped forward as Jaco hid behind the large orange tabby. Allie tried to step in front of Beemer, but he deftly pushed her away. "We had a bit of a run in with the two-legs, but all have been put to the right now. Sorry to be so long in getting back. What did you think of the haul? Pretty nice for a night's work, wouldn't you say?"

Doggin scoffed. "I wouldn't say. I mean, the loot was okay, but you alerted the two-legs. Now they're all up in arms about a new gang of burglars. Our best defense was our ability to fly under their watchful eyes. Now, you've gone and blown it. And I hear that you almost lost our new recruit to them as well."

Beemer glanced over to Allie despite himself. It would be so easy to simply turn it all back on her. After all, it had been her fault for not obeying his orders, but that wasn't his style. If he turned her over to Doggin, he'd lose the trust of all the other cats, and that would never do. They all depended on each other for their survival. No, better to take Doggin's wrath on his own shoulders this time.

"I'm sorry, Doggin," Beemer replied, hunching his shoulders and looking as docile and submissive as possible. "It won't happen again. You can cut my rations in half if you want as my punishment."

"I've already cut them into thirds," Doggin replied, "For your entire crew. And that's just for starters. I'm sure I can think up some other ways to teach you a lesson in the coming days."

"I have something that might help," Allie said softly as she stepped around Beemer and smiled at Doggin. "May I show you?"

"Allie, what did I—" Beemer started but was interrupted by Doggin.

"Why, the little cat does know how to talk. What do you have to say for yourself?"

"Only this," Allie replied as she hunched over and began to cough and gag.

"What the...?" Doggin said as he stepped back, alarmed.

"Must be a hairball," Jaco replied.

Allie ignored them but continued to gag and retch until finally, she coughed up a volume of water left over from the Thames...and the brilliant diamond ring she'd stolen.



## Chapter Four



“WHAT IS THAT?” DOGGIN asked once he’d regained his composure, staring at the pool of water with the ring in its center.

“It’s a bauble,” Allie replied just barely audibly. “It’s easily worth five times the amount of food we pilfered last night. I dare say we couldn’t steal as much food as this could be traded for in three months of nightly raids, not to mention how much attention that many raids would bring down on us. But if we just stole a bauble or two a month like this one, we’d all be sitting pretty for the rest of our lives.”

“You don’t say?” Doggin replied, suddenly taking a renewed interest in what lay before him. “You know, I’ve seen these on some of the wealthier two-legs, now that you mention it. They do seem to like their baubles, as you call them. “Where did you find it?”

Allie opened her mouth as though to answer, then paused. “Well, we’ll talk about that,” she replied as she pushed the ring out of the pool of water and towards Doggin. “This is yours in exchange for doubling our rations instead of cutting them.”

“Why...are you...?” Doggin blinked several times, apparently shocked by Allie’s reply, then he chuckled darkly. “I think our new recruit might be a keeper.” He picked the ring up in his mouth and dropped it in the pouch he wore around his neck.. “Keep a close eye on her, Beemer. I’m holding you responsible if anything happens to her.”

“Yes, sir,” Beemer replied, stunned by the turn of events. “She’ll not leave my sight, day or night.”

Over the next year, Doggin’s coffers grew richer as did his whims and desires for more. With it, Allie’s and Beemer’s alliance grew stronger as well. Allie’s size, shape, color, and prowess made her the perfect burglar. She was small for her age,

slender and coal black. She could slide through the night on her soft cat paws without detection, and her sinewy frame gave her incredible leaping abilities. Meanwhile, Beemer ran the support crew, who assisted Allie in the break-ins. It was no longer necessary to steal food from the pantries of the rich. Instead, they focused on their “baubles”—mostly jewelry of the rich ladies—and tried to keep their missions down to only one or two per month, despite Doggin’s insistence that they could pull in more loot by expanding their territory and their frequency of raids.

Allie and Beemer realized the danger of too many raids. Already, the two-legs knew something had invaded their secure homes and were taking actions to try to protect their valuables. The security was becoming tighter and tighter, and more and more homes were guarded not only by the police but, more dangerous for Allie and her crew, by a rash of Dobermans and other guard dogs.

Overall, life was good for Doggin and his cat clan, with Beemer and Allie on top of it all. “This life might be a dung heap,” Beemer said frequently, “but at least you and I are on top of the heap.” Allie had to reluctantly agree their lives were far better than the other stray animals of London, where most of them had to depend on scrounging what they could from the garbage or begging for scraps from the rear entrances of stores and other pubs. The contrast started playing on Allie’s conscience as the gap between their lives and those of the other animals grew larger until one day she could stand it no longer.

“Beemer, can I ask you a question?” she asked after the two of them had enjoyed a particularly rich and filling meal and were lounging around the basement of the pub.

“Sure, what is it, my fine feline friend?”

Surprised that she’d caught him in such a good mood, she suddenly didn’t know quite what the question was she wanted to ask. She finally decided on the direct approach. “Do you ever worry about all the other stray animals that don’t have it as good as we have it?”

“Honestly, no,” Beemer replied. “Why should I? We’re the ones who take the risk to live the life we do. We’re the ones who end up in a canvas bag tossed into the Thames if we’re caught.”

Allie shuddered at the reminder. It hadn’t been the only close call she’d had in the past year. By her calculation, she’d easily used up at least three of her ten lives. At this rate, she’d be lucky to make it to three or four more, but then again,

few feral animals lived more than a couple of years, often succumbing to disease or starvation in the first few years. Three or four would be considered old age by most strays' standards.

"Yes, I understand that we're the ones who take the risks so should reap most of the rewards, but still, don't you think we could maybe help out at least a few of the less fortunate?"

Beemer, who'd been stretched out on a stack of old canvas bags, opened one eye and stared at Allie. "You can't be serious," he replied. "Can you imagine what Doggin would do if he found out we were giving to the poor? He'd skin both of our hides and hang them out on the pub sign to dry."

*He wouldn't dare skin my hide, Allie thought. I'm too important to him and the system he has going.* But she decided it wouldn't be wise to point that out to Beemer, so instead, she replied, "Yes, I guess you're right. I'm sure you know best."

"Of course I do. Now, don't worry your pretty little head about it anymore. We need to rest up. Our next excursion is tomorrow."

Allie tried to do what he asked but found the images of starving and abused animals wouldn't let her sleep. Finally, around three in the morning, she dozed off...

...and found herself lying in the same position she'd fallen asleep, but instead of an old canvas bag beneath her, she lay on a billowing cloud colored a soft lavender. As she looked around, she saw standing in front of her an equally lavendered gazelle.

"Hello, Allie," the gazelle said. "I'm Grace. Pleasant dreams?"

"Huh? What?" Allie replied as she shook herself. "Am I dreaming?"

"I don't know, are you?" Grace asked back. "Does it really matter?"

"No, I guess not, as long as I wake up and I'm back where I belong."

"Well, that's what I want to talk with you about." Grace lay down so she was closer to the same level with the smaller animal. "We've been picking up signals from you that you're growing increasingly aware of the suffering of other animals."

"We? We who?"

"I'm on the Council of the Spiritual Frontier. We oversee the entire animal kingdom, and we too have grown concerned with the plight of the animals of Earth. We have a plan to take a more proactive role to try to combat some of the abuses and inequities we're observing that are happening as a consequence of the

increase in the human species—the two legs, as you refer to them. We think you may play an important part in our plan.”

“Me?” Allie replied, dumbfounded by the whole idea. “Why me? I’m no one. I’m just a stray cat working to stay alive like the countless other feral animals. What difference could I possibly make?”

“Yes, that is a good question to ask yourself,” Grace replied. “Here’s another one. What difference do you want to make?”

Allie didn’t know how to answer that question so she stared back at the gazelle. Finally, she decided to try a different tact. “What’s this plan of yours?”

“Oh, I’m not at liberty to tell you that...not yet. But let me ask you this. What if you could make a real difference with the thousands and thousands of animals that are suffering on earth now? Oh, I don’t mean you could eliminate all suffering, but you could ease the burden for some, maybe even for many. Would you?” Grace looked at Allie with a penetrating stare.

“Well, yes, I suppose so...sure. Who wouldn’t?”

“Many,” Grace said. “Unfortunately, far too many, I’m afraid. But not you, right? Would you be willing to dedicate your life to it—a life of selfless service?”

“Whoa, wait just a minute,” Allie said as she felt the question grip her heart. She backed away from the gazelle.

“Why would I do that?” she finally asked, unsure what else to say and figuring she might gain the advantage by asking her own question.

“For the opportunity to live a life that truly matters,” Grace replied unperturbed. “Oh, it wouldn’t be an easy life for sure. It would have as much danger and risk as your current life, and even more adventure. The main difference is that you’d be helping out many other animals, not just yourself.”

Allie thought about what Grace had said for a moment before replying, “You know you’re one hell of a negotiator. You want me to give up the life I have now for even more risk, more danger, and for what? So I can say my life mattered? What kind of deal is that?”

“The best deal you could ever hope to make,” Grace replied softly, “if you’re the kind of cat I think you are.”

*This is a ridiculous dream,* Allie thought as she tried to wake herself up, but try as she did, she remained on the cloud, trying her best not to look at the gazelle as the questions continued to nag at her. There was something about the gazelle’s offer that was strangely, maybe insanelly, attractive. She finally met Grace’s gaze.

“Can I have a few days to think about it?”

“Sure, the ship doesn’t sail until the first of the week,” Grace replied with a light smile.

“What ship?”

“The ship you need to be on that leaves for America on Sunday. If you accept my offer, you need to be on it. Your first mission is on the other side of the Atlantic.” And with that declaration the lavender gazelle evaporated from sight, the clouds following a moment later. Allie felt herself falling and jerked awake, finding herself once more lying beside Beemer on the canvas bag.

Beemer opened one eye to stare at her.

“Are you okay?”

Allie started to tell him about the strange dream but at the last minute thought better of it. Instead, she replied, “Yeah, just a bad dream. Must have eaten too many sausages.” She turned over to go back to sleep, but the haunting questions kept her awake the rest of the night.



## Chapter Five



DESPITE A RESTLESS night by the time dawn broke, Allie had convinced herself it was just a silly dream—one she intended to forget as soon as possible.

Unfortunately, it wasn't that easy. When Beemer and she went out to case the location for their next heist, everywhere she looked all she could see was the terrible plight of so many animals, from the abused workhorses struggling to pull overly full carts while their ribs stuck out with each heaving breath to the mongrel dogs and feral cats that were to be found on every street and down the dark alleys where they scratched out a meager existence.

While she tried to turn a blind eye to it all, Grace's word continued to haunt her. *It wouldn't be an easy life for sure. It would have as much danger and risk as your current life, and even more adventure. The main difference is that you'd be helping out many other animals, not just yourself.*

"Shuddup already!" she finally thought, then realized the startled look on Beemer's face that she'd actually screamed it out loud.

The Lawthrops were repudiated to be one of the most affluent couples in the southern part of London. Doggin had received word from one of his sources that the Lawthrops would be at a party on Saturday night, leaving the house and most of Mrs. Lawthrop's jewels unattended except for the servants, who would be asleep in the basement.

"Oh, nothing," Allie replied, embarrassed by her outcry. "Just that crazy dream I had last night. Spooked me a bit. I'll be fine. Let's get this done. I need at least one good night of sleep before we pull this off."

"Okay," Beemer replied but continued to look concerned. "You need to get your head in the game. We've got a lot riding on this one. I just got word from Doggin that he expects this to be the largest heist ever. Evidently, he needs it to cover some gambling debts."

“You’ve got to be kidding?” Allie replied, suddenly more angry than embarrassed. “We’re risking our necks so we can cover a bulldog’s delinquent gambling debts? What is this world coming to?”

“Ours is not to ask such questions.” Beemer stopped and turned towards her. “We’ve got a pretty sweet deal going on here. Let’s not blow it. We could be out on the street like all these other poor beasts. You wouldn’t want that, would you?”

Before she could reply, Beemer continued. “Besides, I got plans for us. I was thinking, it’s about time you and I quit pretending there’s not something going on with us, and go ahead and give in to our natural instincts and drives.”

Allie stared at him with a mixture of disbelief, confusion, and surprise on her face. “What are you talking about?”

“You know what I’m talking about. Letting nature take its course.” Beemer suddenly looked a little embarrassed himself. “You and I will make beautiful babies, Allie, and with my size and your smarts, they’ll be a whole new breed.”

“What in the world makes you think I would ever agree to bring a litter into this world that’s already over crowded with unloved and abused animals?”

“Well, because it’s what we do,” Beemer replied simply. “It’s what we’ve always done.”

The rest of the day went downhill from there. Allie continued to see the plight of the animal kingdom everywhere she turned, except now she also thought she saw her own babies mixed into the horrors of the London streets. To make matters worse, every so often she thought she’d see a flicker of lavender out of the corner of her eye, but each time she turned in that direction it would disappear. She began to think she must be going insane and wondered if the high meat diet Beemer and she had been on lately might be laced with something.

She ate only lightly that night, then begged off from the typical night of caterwauling so she could go to bed early. She really needed some sleep before tomorrow’s caper.

But it proved to be another restless night made worse by a visit from Grace.

“Hello, Allie. It’s good to talk with you again. What have you decided?”

Allie looked around her to discover that she was once again among the lavender clouds.

“Am I dreaming?” she asked again.

“I don’t know, are you?” Grace asked back. “Does it really matter?”

"You know, you're pretty good at avoiding my questions."

Grace smiled and nodded. "And yet, I'm the one who asked the first question that you've not yet answered. What have you decided?"

Allie hung her head for a moment, wondering if there was some way to put off this conversation. When she realized there wasn't, she looked up and answered, "I'll do it...even though I don't really understand what I'm agreeing to do," she finished with an edge to her voice.

"That's right; you don't," Grace replied. "Here's all you need to know at this point. Be on the Intrepid tomorrow by noon. That's when it's scheduled to leave port. I'll fill you in more tomorrow."

Allie nodded slowly. "You know, you're asking me to take a lot on faith. Change my whole life around. Don't you think you could give me a little more information?"

"No," Grace replied. "Faith and trust are all we have sometimes. You'll get used to it."

And with that, she was gone, and Allie was once again back on earth sleeping in the pub's basement. She sat up and looked around at the rest of the crew that had become her family...the family that she was about to let down. But the decision had been made and even though she didn't like it, she knew it was the right one. Spying Jaco sleeping in his customary place, she tip-toed over to him and shook him awake.

"I need to see you outside," she said, then walked towards the door.

"Huh, what? You mean now?" Jaco replied with a sleepy shake of his head.

Allie nodded but didn't say anything else until the two of them were outside.

"It's time," she said.

"What? Are you asking me what time it is? I haven't the foggiest—sleeping time is all I know." Jaco replied.

"No, itchit, I said it's time...time for you to go solo...tomorrow night on the heist."

"Whoa, there, now, Allie. I really appreciate your show of confidence in me, but I'm hardly ready to pull off a heist on my own...especially not the most important one of the year."

"Yes, you are. You have to be because..."Allie paused. *Do I dare tell him the truth?* she wondered. Probably a bad idea but she didn't know what else to say. "I won't be there tomorrow. I'll be on my way to America."

“You’ll what? No way! But that’s my dream.”

“So, do you want to go with me?” Allie asked.

“Huh, no...not really,” Jaco replied. “I mean, one day I might want to go, but well...okay, you’re right. It’s not something I’ll ever do. It’s just fun to talk about it. But you? Why are you going?”

“I have another mission I’ve been assigned.”

“By who—Doggin or Beemer?”

“Neither,” Allie replied. “Listen, it’s a long story and too complicated to get into now. The point is that I need you to cover for me. I know you can do it. I’ll be eternally grateful.”

Jaco stood frozen in place. Finally, he shook himself out of his stupor and smiled at Allie. “Okay, if you say I’m ready then I’m ready. I’ll just have to have faith and trust what you say.”

The comment stunned Allie. “How did you...have you been talking...? Oh, never mind. Just thank you, Jaco...and thanks for being my friend. I’m going to miss you.”

“Yeah, I’ll miss you too, but hey, you go get yourself settled in America and who knows, maybe I’ll come visit you one day.”

The two of them nuzzled against each other for a moment before returning to the pub.

The next morning around eleven Allie told Beemer that she needed to go out to get a few things for the heist that evening. She felt terrible about lying to him but didn’t know any other way to handle it. As she started to leave, she looked back at the pub’s basement that had been her home for most of her life.

*I’m going to miss this place,* she thought as she looked around. *And I’m going to miss this misfit of a family too.* She glanced over where Beemer was eating a late breakfast of fish. *And I’m going to miss you most of all, even with your crazy idea of starting a family.* She sighed. Change, even what she hoped would be a positive one, was hard.

As she felt a tear start to build in her eyes, she sniffed it under control and turned and walked away. Outside and free, she strutted along the familiar streets on her way to the docks. She’d made it a point to find where the Intrepid was docked earlier so she wouldn’t have to wander around trying to find it. Sure enough, it was evident that the sailors were in the last stages of preparing to leave. And there on deck were several crates with bars and within each one was a large

animal—a lion in one, a bear in another, and next to that one was a lavender gazelle.

*It's Grace!* Allie almost yelled to her, but then thought better of it. What was she doing in a cage? Was she a part of the circus that was being loaded for their trip to America?

Grace saw her at the same moment and waved to her then pointed towards the stern of the ship where a thick rope was still tied to the pier. But unlike the other ropes that had circular guards to keep rats and other varmints from climbing on board, this one was clear. Obviously, Grace had been at work already.

Allie quietly snuck on board and made her way to Grace's cage. "What are you doing caged like a wild animal?" she asked.

"Sometimes, my dear, the best way to stay hidden is to be right out in the open," Grace replied. "The cage fits my purpose for now. You're just in time. See that man there in the trench coat wearing the black armband?"

Allie looked in the direction Grace was pointing and nodded. "Yes, I see him."

"He's your mission," Grace continued. "His name is Henry. He's on the final leg of a European journey and is now returning home to America. He's wearing the black armband because he's in mourning over what he observed while in Europe. Your job is to convince him that the idea that he's been mulling over in his mind is one worth pursuing.

"How am I to do that?" Allie asked.

"By talking him into it," Grace replied. "So step just a little closer."

Allie did as she was told but then jumped back as the large gazelle raised one of her front hooves.

"Stand still," Grace ordered. "I'm not going to hurt you. I just need to touch you for this next part."

Allie started to ask her a question, then thought better of it. She'd probably only get some cryptic answer anyway.

As Grace placed her hoof on Allie's head, she felt a strange sensation like a wave of energy passing between the two of them, then nothing...except that the sounds around her began to change. The chatter of human voices that had been mixed with those of the busy pier changed. Suddenly, it wasn't senseless chatter but words that she could understand.

"What did you just do to me?"

"I gave you a small gift," Grace replied. "The gift of human language. You'll now be able to understand Henry, and just as important, he'll be able to understand you."

Allie stepped back away from Grace, a stunned look on her face. "You can do that...just with a wave of your hoof?"

"Oh dear, you have no idea all of which all I'm capable," Grace said with a chuckle. "Now, back to business. Henry must carry on with his idea, and you must be sure that he does. And if he does, you will have passed your test."

"What idea?" Allie asked, then changed course. "What test? I've got to pass a test? You didn't tell me anything about a test."

"One way to view life is that it's simply a series of tests...and hopefully, we learn from them. You've already passed the test to trust and have faith, so let's not have to repeat that one right now."

"Well, what do I get if I pass this next test?" Allie asked, finding herself becoming annoyed at Grace again and wanting to change the subject.

"You will be admitted," Grace replied.

"Admitted? Admitted to what?"

But Grace was no longer paying attention to her. Instead, she pointed again at Henry. "There he goes. You better catch up. This is a large ship. If you lose sight of him, it could take you days to locate him again."

"But...what?" Allie started, then seeing that Grace was right, ran after the tall man with the black armband. "This conversation isn't finished!" she said over her shoulder.



## Chapter Six



ALLIE TRAILED BEHIND Henry at a safe distance, staying in the shadows and out from under other people's feet as much as possible. She followed him to his room, then stationed herself outside his door, waiting for the right time to make her initial contact.

And when would that be, she wondered. When could she, a four-leg, approach a two-leg for a casual conversation about following your dreams?

*This is ridiculous, she thought. I'll totally freak him out, he'll call the purser and have me thrown from ship...of course, after we're out to sea. I can swim but all the way back to shore?* The more she analyzed her situation, the worse it became.

The opportunity came later in the evening after she'd followed Henry to dinner, but he mostly drank his dinner, having several glasses of red wine, followed up with champagne, and finishing off with an aperitif. As he made his way back to his room, Allie noticed he staggered and swayed a few times, and it wasn't just due to the movement of the ship. Henry was drunk.

Which made it a perfect time to talk to him, at least in Allie's mind. She found it easy to slip into his room behind him, where she hid under his bed as he prepared for sleep, pulling out a flask from a drawer and pouring himself another drink. He retired to bed with the drink and a book, although he didn't bother to open it but lay in bed sipping on his brandy.

After a minute or two, when it was clear he'd settled in for the evening, Allie decided she'd better speak up before he fell asleep or passed out and couldn't be woken.

She didn't know quite how to begin so she starting humming a song she often sang to herself at night to help her rest up. She started as softly as she could then slowly built up in volume, hoping to not startle him out of his skin. It seemed to work.

“Hello, there; what’s this? Piped in music, is it?” he said as he turned to find the source of the sound.

“No, not quite,” Allie replied, crawling out from under the bed where she’d been hiding. She jumped on the desk next to the bed.

“Holy Mother of—” Henry shouted, leaping out of bed, crossing himself as he did so. “What’s the...am I hallucinating?” He glanced at the drink in his hand and placed it gently on the floor. “Enough of that for this evening.”

“No, you’re not hallucinating, and I’m not a spirit, just a cat...well, a cat who has been sent to you to...to help you with your idea.” Allie didn’t quite know what to say, so she just said what came to mind first.

“My idea? Really?” Henry said as he sat down on the edge of the bed and stared at her. “What about my idea? If you’ve come to try to talk me out of it—”

“No, not at all,” Allie interrupted. “On the contrary. I think it’s a splendid idea, and I’m here to encourage you to take immediate action when you arrive home...no matter what others have said.”

“Oh, I see. You like the idea, huh? Well, I guess that figures. After all, you’re an animal. What’s not to like?”

“Pardon?” Allie said, confused by his comment. What did her being an animal have to do with it? “Oh well, yes, of course, my being an animal might explain it, or it might simply be a great idea. Perhaps you could share with me some more of the details.” *After all*, she thought, *it would be a lot easier to enroll him into taking action if I knew what I was talking about.*

“Well, sure, I guess,” Henry said as he stooped down and picked up his drink. “It’s really quite simple. You see, I saw so much suffering while touring Europe. Animals of all different species, especially domestic animals that were being abused, poorly cared for, starved and beaten. I mean, I have this money...oh, not a great sum of money, but my father was quite successful with his shipbuilding, and he left me a tidy inheritance...far more than I need to live on. So I thought, why not use it for some good?” As he talked about his idea, his enthusiasm grew as did Allie’s.

“So, I thought, why not start an organization that would be dedicated to relieving such suffering in my own country?” For I have seen just as much abuse in America. I’ve even thought up a name for it. Would you like to hear it?”

“Oh, yes, that would be great,” Allie replied.

"I would call it the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals," Henry said, raising his glass to toast the name.

"Why that's...that's a, well, it's a mouth full, that's for sure," Allie said, unsure what else to say. "But it does convey the idea quite well," she added.

"Hmm," Henry said as he mulled over her comment. "You know, you're right. It is a mouthful. Perhaps we could simply call it by its letters for short—the ASPCA. How's that?"

"Splendid," Allie replied, now as excited about the idea as Henry. "So, will you do it? Will you start the ASPCA upon your return?"

"Yes, by golly, I will," Henry replied downing his glass and pouring himself another one, and then offering the flask to Allie.

"No, thanks, not while I'm working," Allie replied.

"Oh, okay, I understand. Well, then, let's shake on it," Henry replied, changing his drink to the other hand and holding out his right one.

Having seen other humans shake on various deals, Allie held out her paw.

"Other one," Henry corrected.

"Oh, sorry." She held out her right paw, and they shook on it.

"Now, you've promised me that you'll proceed no matter what anyone else says, right?"

"Yes, I have and one thing you can count on is that when Henry Bergh makes a promise, he keeps it. Besides, what kind of cad would I be to go back on my word that I gave to a talking cat?"

"Wow, that's incredible," Zak said as Sampson finished his story. "You mean, Ra-Kit was instrumental in convincing Henry Bergh to start the ASPCA on her first mission?"

"Well, like I said, that's the official story straight from the Spiritual Frontier, and I have no reason to not believe it," Sampson replied.

"So, what happened after that?" Zak asked.

"Well, it took a few months after Henry returned to New York to complete the process. But he was as good as his word even though he continued to get a lot of static from his friends and associates. And not long after that Allie was admitted into the elite ranks of magic cats. That's when she became Ra-Kit."

"And is it true that her longevity is due to the fact that all the other cats have agreed to donate one of their ten lives to the clan of the magic cats which leaves

each cat with nine. That would mean, that since she's the last living member of the clan she gets all those extra lives!"

"Yes, that's true," Sampson replied. "Cats all over the world have been very generous with their life energy which has allowed Ra-Kit to continue to serve the animal kingdom for over a hundred fifty years.

"That's really something," Zak said. "And to think, she doesn't look a day over seventy-five."

He stared at Sampson for a long moment before they both broke down laughing.



# Dominion Over All



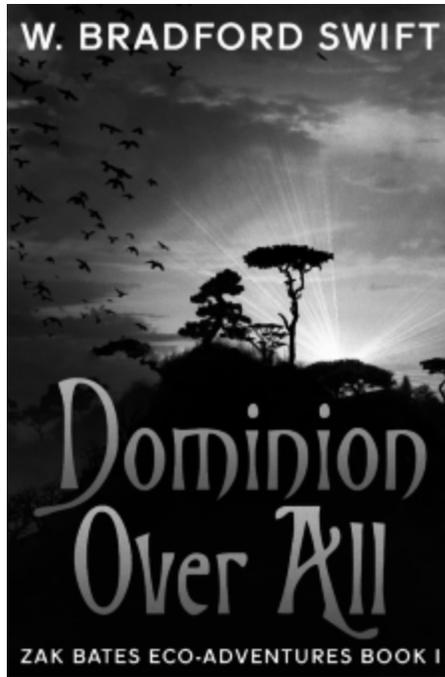
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1





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