



home alone
pet care

Dog Walking
Pet Sitting
Feeding

7 Days a Week - 365 Days
Fully Insured
Since 1992

PSI
PetSmart
Innovations

1300 306 756
www.homealone.com.au

The Lady & the Tigre

By Ken Foster



In Alphabet City, on the corner of 6th and C, there was a vacant lot surrounded by chain link and filled with bicycle parts and other random pieces of metal. At the centre of the lot was a small prefabricated shed. There was a crazy little man who spent each day assembling bike parts and selling them, and one night I noticed a light on in the shed and realized that he also lived there.

I lived around the corner, and when Brando moved in with me, I discovered another detail that I had been missing: the crazy man had a dog. Tigre would dash back and forth through the maze of junk, and when Brando passed with me, Tigre sat at the fence and whimpered. He was a funny looking dog—all body with short little legs. It was as if he had been assembled from spare parts as well, and like Brando, he was brindle.

“Hey Brando, look at him!” I said each day, and Brando would look down the street or up at the sky, anywhere but at this dog who wanted his attention. It was very snooty of him, and so I continued to walk him over every day to say hello. Brando continued staring at the sky while Tigre whined and stuck his nose through the chain-link fence to get some of the treats I was carrying in my pocket. Then Brando and I were on our way, down the street and eventually over to Avenue D, where another empty lot contained a flock of chickens. These Brando was happy to give his full attention. He stood frozen and silent, watching as they staggered around the yard aimlessly, squawking. At night, if we passed again, the chickens were gone, and Brando and I would both look at the empty lot wondering where they had gone. One night I looked up and saw them, silhouetted in the branches of a tree. I had grown up in the country, just down the road from a farm where we could pick up eggs and leave money in an unattended jar, but it wasn’t until I moved to Manhattan that I learned chickens can fly.

These stops became part of our afternoon routine: the chickens, the hot dog store, the park, and Tigre in his junk yard on the way home. One day, Tigre slipped out from behind the fence in his frantic attempt to get Brando’s attention. He yipped and bowed and rolled over in front of us, and Brando continued to pretend that he was invisible. I opened the gate and put Tigre in the yard again.

“He wants to fight,” the junk man said. His accent was thick and possibly French—unusual in a neighborhood where most people still spoke Spanish. Tigre was pressing his nose through the gap in the fence and wagging his tale. “He is a fighter!” his owner insisted again. I didn’t have the heart to tell him that his dog had already come after us and that all he had wanted to do was play.

Eventually our routine changed and we didn’t walk by as often. One day, we passed and I realized with a start that they were gone. The lot was being emptied of all of its debris, the little shed was no longer there. One of the neighbors told me that the man had been arrested. For what, I asked.

“I think he stabbed someone,” they said.

A few weeks later, as we walked north on Avenue C toward the pet shop on fourteenth, I spotted Tigre walking on the other side of the street.

“Look who it is!” I said aloud, but of course, Brando didn’t care. My eyes followed Tigre’s leash to the hand that held it, which was attached to a tall blond woman in her late twenties. She was kind of fancy, one of the many newcomers moving into the neighborhood, in boxy, ugly new apartment complexes that had replaced our community gardens. She didn’t seem like his type at all. When we caught up with her, she explained, “I was walking by when they started clearing out all that stuff, and they said I could take the dog.”

There was something extraordinary, seeing him now, still the same dog really, but living a completely different life. In the mornings, we would see them together, playing fetch in the ball fields along the east river, and Brando suddenly was interested, now that Tigre had a proper owner. This was a context that Brando understood, and, frankly, he was probably thinking he might be able to get some attention from the blonde as well.

“Has he been neutered yet?” I asked.

“Soon,” she said.

“Maybe they’ll play once that’s happened,” I said. Brando had issues with unneutered dogs, and although Tigre seemed to be among the older intact dogs that fell under a sort of grandfather clause to Brando’s policy, we didn’t want to risk it.

The next time we ran into them, Tigre was a new dog again, but it wasn’t from the neuter surgery. He was sporting a big heavy cast that ran the length of one of his rear legs. He was hobbling quite contentedly along the blonde woman’s side.

“He broke it in three places. There’s a pin inside,” she said. “I went to work one morning and he wanted to come along—so he jumped out the window.”

Tigre was an old dog—you could see it in the grey hair that had settled around his mouth. He had already lived a colorful life before all of this happened.

“How much is he costing you?” I asked.

“So far? Maybe...six thousand dollars?” She said it flatly, the way someone might discuss the price of a good dinner or a decent apartment, things that could be expensive but so essential that it wasn’t worth complaining about the price. “I didn’t really ask,” she admitted, as if reading my mind.

Tigre was a junkyard dog, but now she was his.

Reprinted with kind permission from the author. *Dogs I Have Met* is the latest book by Ken Foster, published by Lyons Press.

Ken Foster is the author of the bestselling memoir *The Dogs Who Found Me* and a collection of essays, *Dogs I Have Met*, both published in the US by Lyons Press. His work has also appeared in *Salon*, *The San Francisco Chronicle*, *The Village Voice*, *Paper*, and dozens of other publications. His collection of short stories, *The Kind I’m Likely to Get*, was a *New York Times* Notable Book. He lives in New Orleans with his dogs: Brando, a pit bull/Great Dane mix; Zephyr, a rottweiler/shepherd; and Sula, a pit bull who is the figurehead of *The Sula Foundation* www.sulafoundation.org



THE PUPPY PATISSERIE

organic dog treats

- * BBQ Chicken Lickin’ Good
- * Moroccan Lamb Morsels
- * Chicken & Herb Pate Pleasers
- * Peanut Butter Brownie Bones
- * Apple Pie DeLites

Organic ingredients, no preservatives,
no artificial colours or flavours,
wheat-free, and handmade.

Available online at:
www.puppypatisserie.com.au



ORDER NOW FOR
CHRISTMAS

- * Turkey & Cranberry Gobblers
- * Fruity Christmas Pudding Bones