

WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE TAMED

by Marie Coady

In my family of adopted pets, I've recently acquired a rather beautiful cat. She's a cream point Himalayan-Persian. She's the kind of cat you don't own, but owns you. She is definitely high maintenance.

Angel came to us with a set of instructions two pages long. They began: "Please take good care of Angel. She needs to be groomed regularly. She gets knots in her fur, and if they are not cared for, can tear her flesh and cause cuts and bleeding."

The thought of Angel's cut and torn flesh sent shivers down my spine. I realized I had taken on an enormous obligation.

This responsibility sent me on a search for a groomer who could deal with Angel's temperament. (This is a nice way of saying that Angel is somewhat snotty)

Since I was new to the cat grooming game, my search began at one of the huge pet supply superstores in a nearby community. They had a grooming section that allowed you to watch the animals being groomed through a window. I joined three small children who stood watching as the groomer placed a cat on a table fitted with Velcro restraints that held the cat's paws anchored to the table. Then a large plastic cone-shaped collar was placed around the cat's neck and a leash, hanging from the ceiling was attached to the collar to hold his head up. The cat was then ready to be groomed, but he didn't look too happy.

At that point, one child said to the others, "I feel sorry for him, don't you?"

The other children quickly agreed. So did I. Needless to say, my search for a groomer continued.

As it turned out, I needn't have searched far, because my quest came to an end close to home at *A Pet's Choice* in Woburn, MA. Entering this tiny shop

is like slipping through the looking glass. It is a Dr. Doolittle land of people talking to animals and animals definitely talking back.

When I closed the door on the real world, I was greeted by the sight of Rocky, an enormous mixed breed Samoyed Belgian Sheep dog, standing on one of the grooming tables. He stood regally as the shop's owner, Valerie Sullivan, combed enough hair off him to make another dog.

Next, I spotted George, the Greyhound, waiting patiently for the next stage of his grooming, while Val's Pomeranian, Pepe, skittered around my feet begging for attention. It seemed only natural for me to pick him up. This move sent Cutie, the black Pomeranian, who has just been shampooed and looked like a drowned rat, into a snit, and she began yipping, insisting on an equal measure of attention.

That's when Wendy Jackson, groomer extraordinaire, stepped forward to relieve me of Angel who was somewhat in a snit. Wendy held her firmly but gently, petting and talking to her. Before long, Angel was putty in her hands.

As Wendy placed Angel on the table to take stock of her knotted fur, Heidi Tweedie slipped in place to continue holding, petting and, of course, talking to angel. No Velcro straps holding Angel's feet, no cone-shaped collar, and no leash to keep her from getting away - just human hands, expert in animal psychology.

In addition to wallowing in tender loving care, animals known to snarl, growl, scratch and rip each other to shreds somehow call a truce. Here in this make-believe world, dogs and cats sit casually on tables side by side either not noticing each other or pretending not to.

The ultimate test of this truce was when Pasquale, the black and white rabbit slid through the rabbit hole and entered this wonderland from beyond the looking glass. Pasquale came in to have six years of nail growth clipped. I was sure George, the Greyhound, would suddenly hear the starter's bell sound and the call, "There goes Swifty!" and leap from the gate to finally catch that dratted rabbit. To my surprise, George chose to peacefully coexist with his arch enemy in a moment suspended in time.

Besides, George was too busy getting his red bandanna fitted securely around his neck to pay attention to an ancient primal urge to chase and catch a rabbit. Bandannas of all colors are Val's trademark, and no animal leaves without one.

This trio of animal lovers, who woo beasts into being groomed, has many things in common. But the most important thing they share is the ownership of multiple pets. Val believes this is an important criteria in selecting groomers to work in her shop. Her job interview always begins with, “How many and what kind of animals do you own?”

In addition to Val's Pomeranian, Pepe, she also has a Great Dane. This Mutt and Jeff combination are seen regularly, walking the trails of the local pond and are guaranteed to turn heads. Val's zoo also includes two cats.

Wendy has three dogs, two cats, four ferrets, one rabbit, and a guinea pig. Wendy is looking for a new landlord. Any takers?

Heidi contributes two dogs and a cat to this menagerie, but will surely acquire more. She's new here from Canada and is just settling in. Give her time and new pets will find her.

Long ago, when the Pawtucket Indians were the only human inhabitants of the “great hill country” of Massachusetts, they believed they had a spiritual connection to all the animals. They believed that each human was protected by an animal spirit guardian. There are still places in Woburn where this spiritual connection exists. One of them is *A Pet's Choice* .

©Copyright 2002; Marie Coady