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THE PREACHER'S CAT By Lorraine Standish

When our new preacher arrived in 2011, he brought with him, a teenage son, a wife and one very friendly black cat named Blueberry (no, I don't know why he wasn't called Blackberry). Blueberry loves coming to church functions and visiting with all the members. He is not allowed to go to worship services on Sunday morning, but will often try to sneak in behind someone until he is intercepted by an usher and ushered out! But he is persistent and often sneaks in with someone who comes in late, and sneaks up to the altar by going under the pews. He will quietly hide under one of the front pews and listen to the sermon. He especially seems to like me and my husband, and comes to greet us as we come into church. He's more like a puppy than a cat.

So when we came to a Bible Study, taught by the pastor, he followed us into the Fellowship Hall and jumped up on the table to greet everyone. One by one he greeted each person at the table. But when he came to us, he laid down in front of us and stayed there for the full hour. He let me pet him and was very calm and quiet. I think he felt the sadness in us, and I think he knew that we had suffered the loss of both our daughters. He was trying to comfort us with his quiet presence. An angel in a black cat's body. A sweet and gentle angel.



ANIMALS AND HEALING

Lorraine
Standish

Comfort Cat

A moment of grief, a moment of grace

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WHEN YOU HAVE TO BURY your children, it doesn't matter how long they've been gone, you never stop missing them. My husband, Myles, and I lost both our daughters. Linda's alcoholism brought her life to a tragic end at age 45. Renee passed away at 48 after a long fight with breast cancer. It's been more than eight years since our girls died, but some days grief still hits me so hard, it's as if I just kissed them goodbye for the last time.

Like the other day. When Myles saw me staring at our girls' pictures on our mantel, he could tell what was troubling me. "Oh, sweetheart," he said, taking me in his arms. "We're going to Bible study tonight. That always makes you feel better."

That evening our pastor, his wife and their son greeted us in the fellowship hall. I hid my sadness behind a smile and returned their hugs. Just as everyone took their seats, who should jump up on the table but the littlest member

of the pastor's family, their black cat, Blueberry (I have no idea why he wasn't named Blackberry). He's so friendly, he's more like a puppy than a cat.

He went around the table and greeted the students one by one, nuzzling them to be petted. Each obliged, as usual. (Then Blueberry came to me. I stroked his fur absently. Normally he would jump off the table with a swish of his tail and take his leave of our class once everyone had petted him. But that night he stretched out and lay down right in front of me.

He stayed there for the entire hour of Bible study, lying still except for the occasional searching glance at me. His eyes would look deeply into mine as if he could see the sadness in my soul. Then his gaze would intensify, as if he had some message he wanted to impart.

Finally it came to me. "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." It wasn't the verse we were studying that night, but it was the one I needed.