Aaron & Clarence

Belinda Cole

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Copies of this book can be obtained from:
Belinda Cole
Mobile: 0433 408 755
E-mail: lincode55@gmail.com

Cost: $32.50 (plus postage and packing)

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5% of the proceeds from the sale of this book will be donated to Junction Housing: an organisation that helps those who aren't lucky enough to have an Edna Byrne or a Clarence the cat to intervene on their behalf.

It is also an organisation which provided me not only stable housing but also the space and freedom to write this book.

For Victoria.
Who decided to be my friend just when
I needed a friend the very most.

CHAPTER 1

Aaron lay in bed listening to the sound of Dad bashing Mum's head into the kitchen wall. He didn't want to listen. He screwed his eyes shut, huddled down under his blue UFO quilt, and held his pillow tight against his ears; but he could still hear Mum pleading with Dad to stop.

'Please, please stop. I'm sorry. I won't do it again.'

'Too right, you won't,' Dad snarled in reply.

Aaron heard Mum's head hit the wall again. He lay still and wished with all his might that he wasn't eleven years old. He wished he wasn't scrawny for his age and most of all he wished he wasn't frightened of Dad. If only he was big and burly and strong. Then he wouldn't be cowering here in bed. No, if he was big and burly and strong, he'd march right out there, grab Dad by the scruff of his neck, and shake him.

'Leave my Mum alone,' he'd say.

Then he'd shake Dad again and keep shaking him until Dad promised not to hurt her anymore. Then he'd march him off to the bathroom and make him wash his mouth out with soap because of all the bad words he'd used.

Aaron smiled at the thought of the surprised look on Dad's face if he stood up to him. But he knew it wasn't going to happen. Not today anyway. He could still hear Dad yelling at Mum in the next room. So, instead of marching out and grabbing Dad by the scruff of the neck, Aaron did the only other thing that he knew how to do. He put his fingers in his ears and started to hum.

At first, he didn't hum very loudly, but after concentrating hard his humming filled his head. The more Aaron concentrated the louder the humming got until it vibrated through his whole body, even in the pit of his belly where he had that queasy butterfly feeling he always got when Dad hit Mum.

As the humming vibration swirled through his body, Aaron drifted away to his humming place, the one place where he was safe from Dad. Sometimes Aaron stayed in this safe place for hours. Sometimes he stayed only a few minutes. But he never, ever, came back until it was safe to do so. When he came back Dad was always gone. Sometimes Dad had left the house, and Mum would be crying in the next room. But most times Dad was passed out drunk.

If anyone had asked him, Aaron wouldn't have been able to explain how he knew when it was safe to come back from his humming place. He just did. It was like there was something inside him watching over him. But this time when Aaron came back, something was different. Something wasn't right. All his warning antennas were up. His scalp and his arms were prickling but it wasn't a bad, danger prickling. It was a – you better pay attention prickling.

Over his eleven years of life Aaron had learned to pay attention to these warning pricklings. So, he lay very still, breathing slowly and deeply paying attention with his whole body. As he concentrated, he realised something truly remarkable. The humming was still there, but it wasn't coming from inside him. It was coming from outside of him. Something outside of him was causing a humming vibration to come up through his left cheek where it touched the pillow and spread through his body.

Aaron opened his eyes and found himself looking into an enormous pair of amber cat's eyes. A very big ginger cat was sitting on his pillow and it was purring so loudly that his bed was shaking.

This was truly unexpected, but for some reason it wasn't frightening. There was something kind and gentle about the cat. Aaron smiled, put his arm around its neck and went straight back to sleep. It was a good restful sleep with no bad dreams.