

Kinky

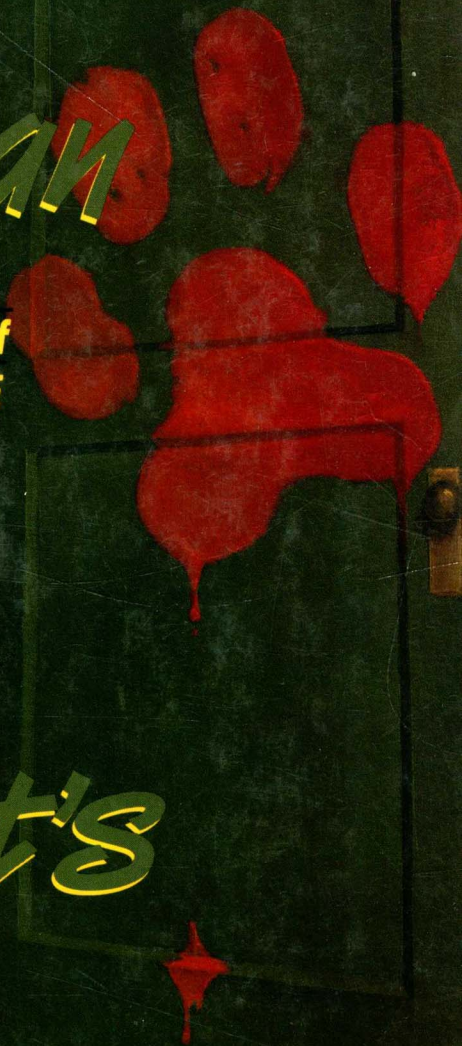
Friedman

**A NOVEL by the author of
GREENWICH KILLING TIME**

When

the Cat's

Away



*When
the Cat's
Away*

KINKY FRIEDMAN

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Friedman, Kinky.
When the cat's away / Kinky Friedman.

p. cm.
ISBN 0-688-07555-X

I. Title.

PS3556.R527W47 1988
813'.54—dc 19

88-13970
CIP

Printed in the United States of America

First Edition

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

BOOK DESIGN BY JAYE ZIMET

The logo consists of the letters 'BIB' in a stylized, serif font. The letters are bold and have a slightly decorative, outlined appearance. The 'B's are larger than the 'I' in the middle.

The word "book" is said to derive from *boka*, or beech.
The beech tree has been the patron tree of writers since ancient times and represents the flowering of literature and knowledge.

*When
the Cat's
Away*

KINKY FRIEDMAN

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By Kinky Friedman

When the Cat's Away
A Case of Lone Star
Greenwich Killing Time

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One magic midnight show
She taught you how it feels
Once, oh so long ago
When rock 'n' roll was real

For Kacey Cohen,
The angel on my shoulder

When
the Cat's
Away

1

Winnie Katz's lesbian dance class was like God. Mankind never saw it, but you always knew it was there.

Of course, Moses had seen God. In the form of a burning bush, interestingly enough. Then he took two tablets and went to bed.

There are people who have seen God since, but we have a place for them. It is called Bellevue and the area around it, for a twenty-block radius, is regarded as having one of the highest violent-crime rates in the city. That's because it's impossible to tell who's insane in New York.

Every seven minutes they let a perfectly normal-looking guy out of Bellevue. He walks a block or two, buys a pretzel on the street, asks somebody what time it is, then has a flashback to the Peloponnesian War. He takes out a Swiss Army knife and cuts some Korean woman's head off. Uses the wrong blade. The one you're supposed to cut nose hairs with. Of course, it isn't his fault.

Not everybody's had the opportunity to be in the Swiss Army.

I listened to the rhythmic thuddings in the loft above me. I wondered what the hell was really going on up there. If somebody's wayward daughter from Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, was being broken down like a double-barreled shotgun, it'd be a hell of a lot of early ballroom lessons gone to waste. On the other hand, what did I know about modern dance?

It was a chilly evening in late January and I was sit-

ting at my desk just sort of waiting for something besides my New Year's resolutions to kick in. If you're patient and you wait long enough, something will usually happen and it'll usually be something you don't like. I poured a generous slug of Jameson Irish whiskey into the old bull's horn that I sometimes used as a shotglass. I killed the shot.

Like my pal McGovern always says: gets rid of the toothpaste taste.

I was dreaming the unisexual dreams of the everyday houseperson, when the phones rang. There are two red telephones in my loft, both connected to the same line, at stage left and stage right of my desk. When you're sitting at the desk they ring simultaneously on either side of what you're pleased to call your brain. While this may upgrade the significance of any incoming wounded you're likely to receive, it can also make you want to jump into your boots and slide down the pole.

I woke with a start, which was a good thing. Daydreaming while smoking cigars can be a fire hazard. It can be as dangerous as drugs and booze unless you know what you're doing. If you know what you're doing, it can be as safe as walking down the street. Long as you're not daydreaming within a twenty-block radius of Bellevue.

2

I watched the phones ring for a while. I'd been dreaming about a girl in a peach-colored dress. Another couple of rings wasn't going to hurt anybody. I took a leisurely puff on the cigar and picked up the blower on the left.

"Spit it," I said.

A woman was sobbing on the other end of the line. I tried to identify her by her sob but I couldn't. Maybe it was a wrong number.

Finally, the voice collected itself somewhat and said, "Kinky. Kinky. This . . . this is Jane Meara." Jane Meara was a friend of mine, a pretty, perky, intelligent girl and one of the authors of the book *Growing Up Catholic*. At the moment it didn't sound like she'd grown up at all.

Grieving women are not my long suit. I have found, however, that a direct, almost gruff demeanor is usually quite effective. Anyway, it was all I had in stock.

"Jane," I said, "pull yourself together. What the hell's the matter? Your guppies die?"

This, apparently, broke the dam. A heartfelt wail was now coming down the line. I put the blower down on the desk. I puffed several times rapidly on my cigar. When I picked up again it was just in time to hear Jane saying, "I wish, I wish my guppies *had* died."

"C'mon, Jane," I said, "what is it? You're cuttin' into my cocktail hour."

I could hear her shoulders stiffen. She sniffled a few more times. Then she said, "My cat's disappeared."

"Relax, Jane," I said. "We'll get it back. What's the cat's name?"

"Rocky."

"What's he look like?"

"It's a she."

"Fine."

I got the pertinent details from Jane. Rocky was yellow and white with four white paws. According to Jane she "looked like she was wearing sweat socks." Rocky'd disappeared—vanished into thin air—right in the middle of a cat show at Madison Square Garden. Jane had stepped away

for just a moment and when she'd returned the cage was empty and the cat was gone.

I pressed Jane for a little more information, made some reassuring noises, and gave her my word I'd hop right on it.

I hung up, walked over to the kitchen window, and watched the gloom settle over the city. Monday night and it looked like it.

The cat show, according to Jane, would be purring along all week and would be closing each night at nine. It was now nudging seven o'clock. I'd have to work fairly fast.

If the cat was still in the Garden, there was always a chance. She might wind up on the wrong end of a hockey stick, but there was a chance.

If Rocky'd gotten out of the Garden and into the street, getting her back would be tough.

Almost as tough as getting back a girl in a peach-colored dress.

3

Finding lost cats is not the most romantic, macho experience a country-singer-turned-amateur-detective might get into. But there was something rather poignant about the hopelessness of Jane Meara's situation that I couldn't bend my conscience quite enough to ignore.

I puffed on my cigar and reflected that I'd never much liked cats myself. Until one winter night about eight years ago in an alley in Chinatown when I'd met the first pussy that ever swept me off my feet.