

BILL WALLACE

A Dog Called
KITTY

*Only Ricky can
save the life
of a puppy he
doesn't even want.*

Chapter 1

I don't reckon there's any time as pretty as early in the morning. The time of day when the sun is up, but it hasn't been there long enough to chase the silvery dewdrops off the grass.

It's specially pretty in late spring. The birds are back from their nesting places in the south. All that chirping and fluttering in the trees makes a certain kind of music. Tells you winter's over, and it's time for things to start growing and turning green.

I guess I didn't notice that time of day when we lived in town. When you live in an apartment house in a big city like St. Louis, there aren't many birds and things to study on. There're a lot of car horns to

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listen to. If you look up in the sky, you can see smoke from some of the factories by the river. But there aren't many birds.

Probably the only thing that saved me from listening to car horns and breathing the funny smelling air that hangs over St. Louis like a thick brown cloud was Dad's dream.

Far back as I could remember, Dad was talking about a farm. About how he used to visit his grandparents in the country. And he had this dream about some day moving from the big city and getting a farm all his own.

Mama—she said he was just dreaming. When Dad would get to talking about it too much, she'd remind him of that fact. Always say something about how he didn't know the first thing about farming. How he couldn't leave a good job like he had and all sorts of stuff.

Then, lo and behold, we woke up one morning and found Dad wasn't dreaming anymore.

There was this big moving van parked in front of our apartment. When Mama said something about the neighbors upstairs must be leaving, Dad only smiled and went to open the front door. Mama got downright *upset* when the men started hauling her furniture away. That's when Dad showed her the deed to a house and 160 acres of land in Oklahoma.

Mama didn't do anything but stand and stare at him for a long, long time. Then, she got real pale and sickly looking. And when she commenced crying and laughing—both at the same time—that's when Dad told me and Chuckie to go outside and play. Even out there, we could hear the fussin' and arguin' that came from our place. All the other folks in our end of the apartment complex must have heard it, too. 'Cause they kept looking out their windows or coming out on the sidewalk to see what was going on. Mom and Dad went right on yelling and fussin' until the men from the moving company had everything hauled out and were waiting in their truck.

At last, Dad opened the front door and started down the steps. He stopped and looked back at Mama. Then, in a real soft voice, he said, "I love you more than you'll ever know, Helen. My life wouldn't be much without you." Then, his face got real stern looking. "But me and my sons are moving to that farm in Oklahoma. We want you to come. We need you with us. But, with or without you—I've made up my mind."

I don't remember being so scared about anything as when Dad said that. He marched me and Chuckie to the car. We got in the back, and he got in front. Started the engine.

I was about to cry. I told him I didn't want to go

Who could resist the fuzzy little brown puppy?



Ricky could, that's who. Ever since he was attacked by a dog when he was just a little kid, he's been afraid of dogs. So even though the pup is tiny and skinny, with sad brown eyes and a friendly, wagging tail, Ricky doesn't want it hanging around the farm.

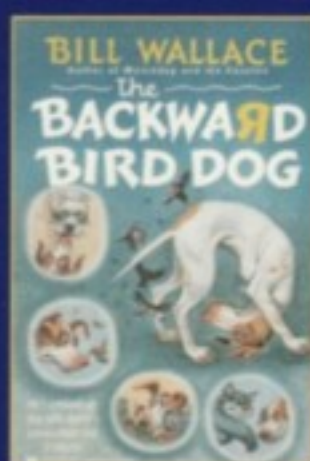
The barn cats aren't about to share their food with a dog, and it looks as if the pup will starve to death unless someone comes to its rescue.


Ricky may be afraid of dogs, but he doesn't want to see one starve. He'll feed the pup until it gets its strength back, and then he'll run it off.

But the pup has other ideas. Can Ricky overcome his fears and find himself the best friend he's ever had?

Winner of three state book awards

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