



Three Cheers for Four-Legged Matchmakers...or Why My Books Feature Canine Cupids by Marcia James



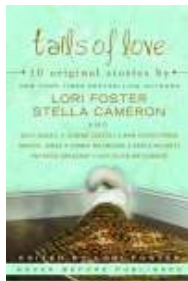
February is all about romance, thanks to Valentine's Day, but it's also Responsible Pet Owners Month. So what better time to discuss Canine Cupids? Don't you just love it when an animal character brings together the hero and heroine in a romance novel? I'm not talking about werewolves or other shape-shifters; just your basic, garden-variety matchmaking cats and dogs. Of course, Smokey, my Chinese crested hairless dog mascot, would object to being called a garden-variety anything. He's very proud of the fact that, in my books, he and his cousins continue to work their magic when it comes to introducing or reuniting soul mates.

Every novel or novella I write includes a Chinese crested hairless dog (or "crestie"), along with other pets. I especially love pairing a big Alpha hero with a tiny crestie sidekick. *Sex & the Single Therapist (S&ST)*, the first in my "Dr. Ally Skye, Sex Therapist" comic romantic mystery series, features a crestie, two mellow cats, and a mixed-breed canine shedding machine named Marty, who plays an important role in the mystery plot.



Sex and the Single Therapist by Marcia James

Fictional heroes and heroines show their softer sides around their pets — a humanizing characterization device Hollywood scriptwriters call “petting the dog.” A fine example of using this device is the movie, *As Good As It Gets*, in which the curmudgeon (Jack Nicholson) falls for a little dog. In *S&ST*, the hero (Detective Zack Crawford) is gruff and all-business until we see him open his heart and his home to Marty. Like Marty, all of my fictional animal characters are homeless — rescued from the streets or adopted from shelters. And my human characters spay or neuter their pets, as responsible pet owners should.



"Rescue Me", Marcia's short story in *Tails of Love* anthology

Animal adoption is such an important cause, especially when so many animals are homeless due to the economy and house foreclosures. In 2009, I contributed an animal-themed story, “Rescue Me”, to author Lori Foster’s benefit anthology, *Tails of Love*. All of the authors’ advances and royalties — over \$10,000 so far — go to the Animal Adoption Foundation (AAF), a no-kill animal shelter in Ohio. This popular anthology, which Berkley reissued in December 2011, offers ten romantic tales featuring four-legged matchmakers. Lori’s as-yet-untitled, June 2012 benefit anthology will also support AAF.



My mascot, Smokey, is a fan of movies and TV shows (as well as books) that feature dogs, either as matchmakers or scene-stealers. Here’s Smokey’s favorite Top Ten list of canine actors — all of whom were rescued from animal shelters:

1. Benji (aka Higgins), the Poodle, schnauzer, cocker spaniel mix star of the *Benji* movies
2. Old Yeller (aka Spike), the mixed breed whose breakthrough role was the lead in the movie *Old Yeller*
3. Sandy, the Airedale-Collie mix from *Little Orphan Annie*
4. Fang, the drooling Neapolitan Mastiff from the *Harry Potter* movies
5. Bruiser (aka Chico), the Chihuahua, and Rufus (aka Chloe), the Bulldog, who starred in Broadway's *Legally Blonde*
6. Kelly, Chip, Topsy, Stella, Zelda, and Bo, the six mixed breeds who played Max in *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*
7. Lucky, the mixed breed from the *Dr. Dolittle* movies
8. Happy, the terrier mix on the TV show, *7th Heaven*
9. Papi, the tiny star of *Beverly Hills Chihuahua*
10. Most of the canine cast of the movie, *Hotel For Dogs*

What are your favorite books, movies, or TV shows that feature animals? Would you like to share — in honor of Responsible Pet Owners Month — any of the ways you think people can be good humans for their furry, finned or feathered pets?

I'll pick several people randomly from the comments on today's guest blog to receive a free e-book of my first comic romantic suspense, *At Her Command* — featuring none other than Smokey himself!

Happy reading!

— **Marcia James**

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