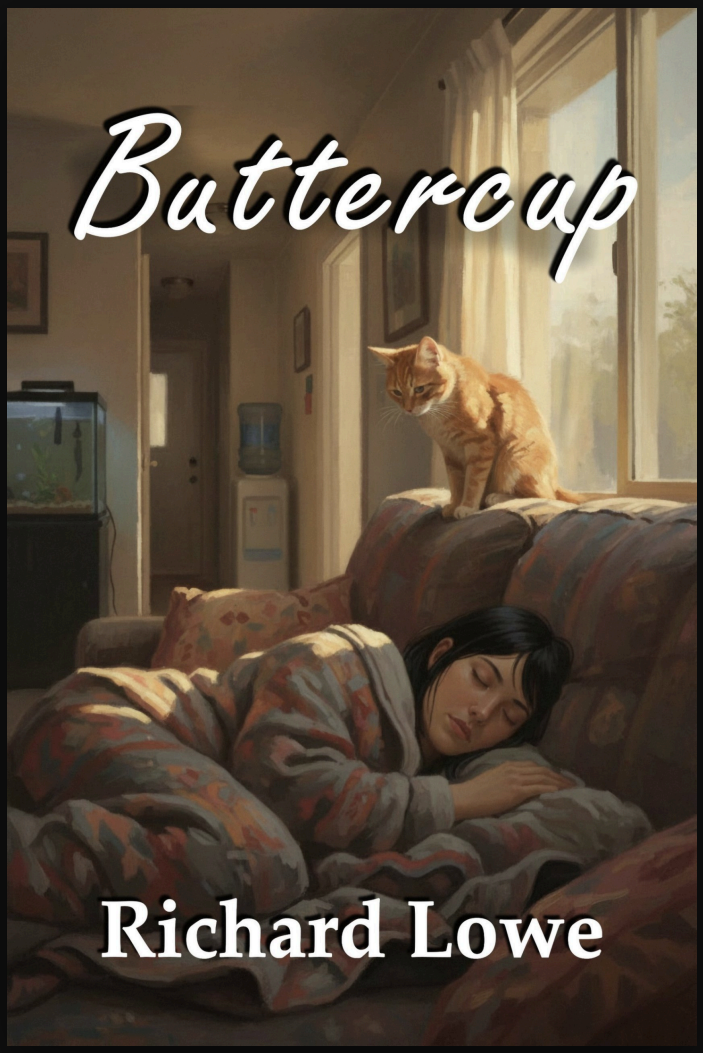
A FREE COMPANION TO BUTTERCUP

The Sunny Patch

A keepsake companion to Buttercup: the household, the timeline, the rooms, questions for your book club, and pages to keep the story of an animal you have loved.



RICHARD LOWE

How to Use This Companion

Keep it beside the book, bring it to your book club, or fill in the back pages for an animal of your own.

Buttercup is a true memoir told by a small orange cat. She was pulled from a river at two weeks old, chose Richard Lowe at the shelter by climbing the wire of her cage, and spent ten years in a 780 square foot apartment in Los Angeles watching over Claudia, whose severe asthma shaped every room. Claudia died on January 31, 2005. Buttercup died two weeks later. The vet said she died of grief.

Inside: the household, the timeline, the places, questions for discussion, and keepsake pages for an animal of your own.

> *They grieved each other. That is the truest sentence I know about both of them.*

The book follows a long illness, medical emergencies, and the deaths of a woman and several animals, including the moment Buttercup is put to sleep at the vet. This companion keeps to what happened and where.

Part 1: The Household

Five animals and two people in 780 square feet, plus a few who passed through.

WHO	WHAT TO KNOW
Buttercup	The narrator. Small, orange, loud when it counted. Thrown in a river in a sack, revived with CPR by a stranger, and taken to the shelter. She claimed the bookshelf in her first week.
Him	Richard. Low, steady voice. Worked from a closet office at night and on weekends. Kept every room at the right temperature for Claudia.
Claudia	The woman who stayed home. Funny, opinionated, warm. Severe asthma and daily Kenalog shots left her skin always damp and warm. On good days she cooked all afternoon and sang.
Tabby	Enormous, gray and striped, with a torn ear and a scar along his jaw. There before everyone. Caught drops from the water cooler spigot for an hour at a time. The bedrock of the apartment.
Midnight	Small, dark and frightened. Lived under the bed and loved one narrow strip of afternoon sun. She had asthma too, and hid her cough for years.
Hades	A small orange and white dog, with ears too big for his head, that Claudia's son wanted. Stole a whole pizza on his first night.
The chinchilla	Gray, round, unimpressed. A temporary resident who stayed for years, running her wheel at three in the morning.
The fish and Dexter	Small bright fish, then a brown snail Claudia named Dexter, after a cartoon boy in a lab coat. He lived about a month.

Part 2: The Timeline

The book gives few dates. This follows its order.

WHEN	WHAT HAPPENED
Two weeks old	The sack, the river, a stranger's hands pressing her chest. She bites him, then lets him carry her.
The shelter	Days of watching the looking-people. She climbs the wire as he walks past her cage. A cardboard box, his voice the whole way home, stairs up from a garage.
The first weeks	The couch, the bookshelf, the cat in the mirror. Tabby's tail brushes her face in the hallway. Midnight under the bed.
Early on	A Tuesday when she finally presses against Claudia's side, and Claudia cries without a sound. The first winter under his blanket. The first jump into his lap.
Over the years	Nine times the air changes and Buttercup runs to get him. Nine times he reaches Claudia with hands that don't shake.
The wound	A wound on Claudia's leg. A nurse twice a week, and he learns to do the IVs. It heals over months.
Midnight's secret	Midnight comes out at noon and coughs in front of Claudia. The vet, the medicine held to her face, Midnight trembling and holding still.
The middle years	Two cats, one carrier, five miles. The fish tank and the fall in. Dexter. The chinchilla. In the third year, a night alone at the vet.
After that	Hades arrives. Tabby and the bird. Hades bites her leg and Tabby steps in. The Christmas light cable. A day behind the stove in the earthquake. The one time she got outside.
The first disappearance	Claudia is cold in the bed and Buttercup wakes him. She is revived and spends five days in the hospital.
The lung	Claudia wakes breathing wrong; something has given way inside her. Twenty-seven days in the hospital. She comes home on a Tuesday.
January 31, 2005	Pain in her belly, five paramedics, a night in intensive care. Claudia dies at 9:57 in the morning.
A week later	He takes her ashes out to sea off Catalina in a storm. The storm stops for thirty minutes.
The next two weeks	Hikes with Hades in Griffith Park. A needle in the back of Buttercup's neck every day. Then the small room at the clinic.
After	Tabby two weeks later. Midnight not long after. Six weeks on, a bench in a botanical garden. Years later, Florida, and Zeya.

Part 3: The Places

Buttercup knew the apartment by smell, sound and height. Here is where things happened.

Inside the apartment

PLACE	WHAT HAPPENED THERE
The bookshelf	The highest point, with sightlines in three directions. Hers from the first week. Tabby looked at it once and never again.
The tiny office	A closet made into a room. One human, one cat. The squeaking turtle, the forty-seven j's, the ants, the moths.
The sunny patch	A warm rectangle on the bedroom floor in the mornings, contested with Tabby, then shared.
The couch	Where the household gathered in the evenings. Where Buttercup pressed into the cushion Claudia had left.
Outside Claudia's door	Where Buttercup sat on long afternoons and thought at the wood.
The kitchen doorway	The cooking afternoons, the singing, and a small piece of the pot set on a saucer as if by coincidence. Later, where she stared at him until he ate.
The water cooler	Tabby's hallway vigil under the spigot.
Under the bed	Midnight's place. Buttercup's too, on the days the humans had work to do.
Behind the stove	Her shelter through the earthquake, and for the rest of that day.
The porch	Tabby's spot in the slanting afternoon light, and the bird.

Outside

- [ ] **The river bank**, where she was pulled from the water
- [ ] **The Humane Society shelter**, and the noise through the walls
- [ ] **The vet**, five miles away by car
- [ ] **The street below**, and the car she hid under
- [ ] **The boarding place**, which smelled like twenty cats
- [ ] **The ocean off Catalina**, where Claudia's ashes went
- [ ] **Griffith Park**, where he hiked with Hades
- [ ] **The botanical garden**, and the bench
- [ ] **Florida**, years later

Part 4: Questions for Discussion

For book clubs, classrooms, and anyone reading with a cat on their lap.

1. **The honest witness.** Richard chose Buttercup to tell the story because "she saw everything." What does her point of view show that his own telling might not?

2. **Climbing the wire.** In the shelter, Buttercup sees that the cats who got out were the ones who made themselves known. Where else in the book does she decide, rather than wait?

3. **Holding the room.** He keeps everything light, calm and a little funny, because Claudia's fear makes her breathing worse. What did that cost him, and how does Buttercup notice?

4. **The route.** Nine times, Buttercup runs for help. How does the household learn to trust her? What does it mean that she never came for anything else?

5. **Two creatures who know.** Midnight hides her cough for years, then shows it to Claudia. Why do you think she chose that day, and that person?

6. **Small griefs.** Claudia cries for days over Dexter, a snail she knew for a month, and over the bird on the porch. Is there such a thing as grieving too much for something small?

7. **Bedrock moves.** Tabby steps between Buttercup and Hades. How does that change the way she sees him, and the bird before it?

8. **Hades.** The most miserable animal he ever had, and the one he needed on the trails. Who in your life turned out to be the right one at the right moment?

9. **Thirty minutes.** The storm stops off Catalina and the birds rise. Claudia's son says something. How do you read that scene?

10. **Keeping him alive, letting him.** "He was keeping me alive with the needle. I was letting him." What is the difference, and why does it matter to her?

11. **Paying attention.** On the bench, what he feels is grief, and also gratitude for having known what he had while he had it. Have you felt both at once?

12. **Doing it anyway.** The epilogue says you never know how it will end, and you take an animal home anyway. Why does the book end in a shelter?

Part 5: Your Animal's Story

Buttercup's life is in the book because someone paid attention. Use these pages for an animal of your own, living or gone.

Name: _____ Years together: _____ Where: _____

QUESTION	WHAT I REMEMBER
How did you find each other? Who chose whom?	
What happened on the first night home?	
Where was their high place, the spot they held against everyone?	
Where was their sunny patch?	
What was their turtle, the toy they carried or defended?	
What did they steal, break or fall into?	
Who else lived in the house, and how did they get along?	
What did they seem to know before you did?	
What did they do when someone was sick or sad?	
What was an ordinary evening like with them?	
What is the story you tell most about them?	

The rooms they knew

Buttercup mapped her apartment by height and smell. Name the places that belonged to your animal and what happened in each.

PLACE	WHAT HAPPENED THERE

A letter

In the last room, Buttercup wants him to know she knew. Write what you want your animal to know.

> *This book is for anyone who has loved an animal and lost one.*

Part 6: Paying Attention Now

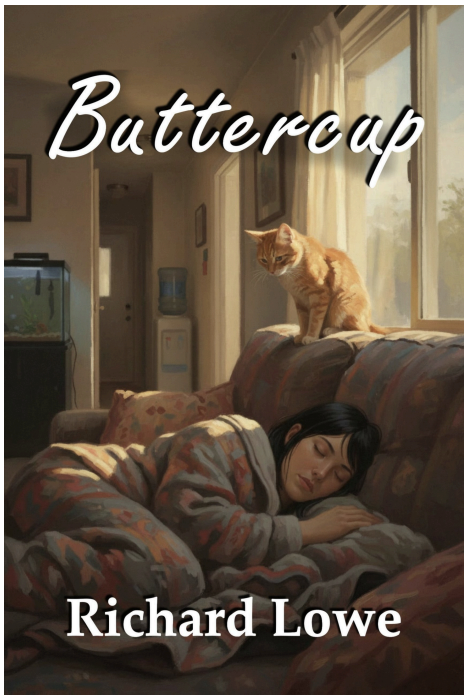
"He had known. On the ordinary days, he had been paying attention." For the animals still with you.

- [ ] Write down one ordinary day with them, start to finish
- [ ] Note their sounds: the greeting, the complaint, the one for emergencies
- [ ] Take a photograph of their high place and their sunny patch
- [ ] Keep the toy, even the one with tooth marks in it
- [ ] Watch what they track that you miss: a moth, an ant, a change in the air
- [ ] Notice who they go to when someone in the house is unwell
- [ ] Tell one story about them out loud to someone who never met them
- [ ] When the carrier comes out, talk to them the whole way

> *You never know, and you do it anyway, because the alternative is a home with no one in it who knows where the sunny patch is.*

The Whole Story

This companion keeps the map of the apartment. Buttercup tells the whole story in her own voice, from a sack in a river to ten years of watching over Claudia, and the two weeks after Claudia was gone.



Buttercup

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