

OF ACTORS, POETS, COMPOSERS, AND... CATS



by RUBY ZAGOREN

There are times in the lives of everyone when a cat, speechless and quiet, can share our joys and misfortunes more than any other creature, including other people. Through the years, actors, writers, poets and composers have found comfort, peace of mind, and even understanding among the felines.

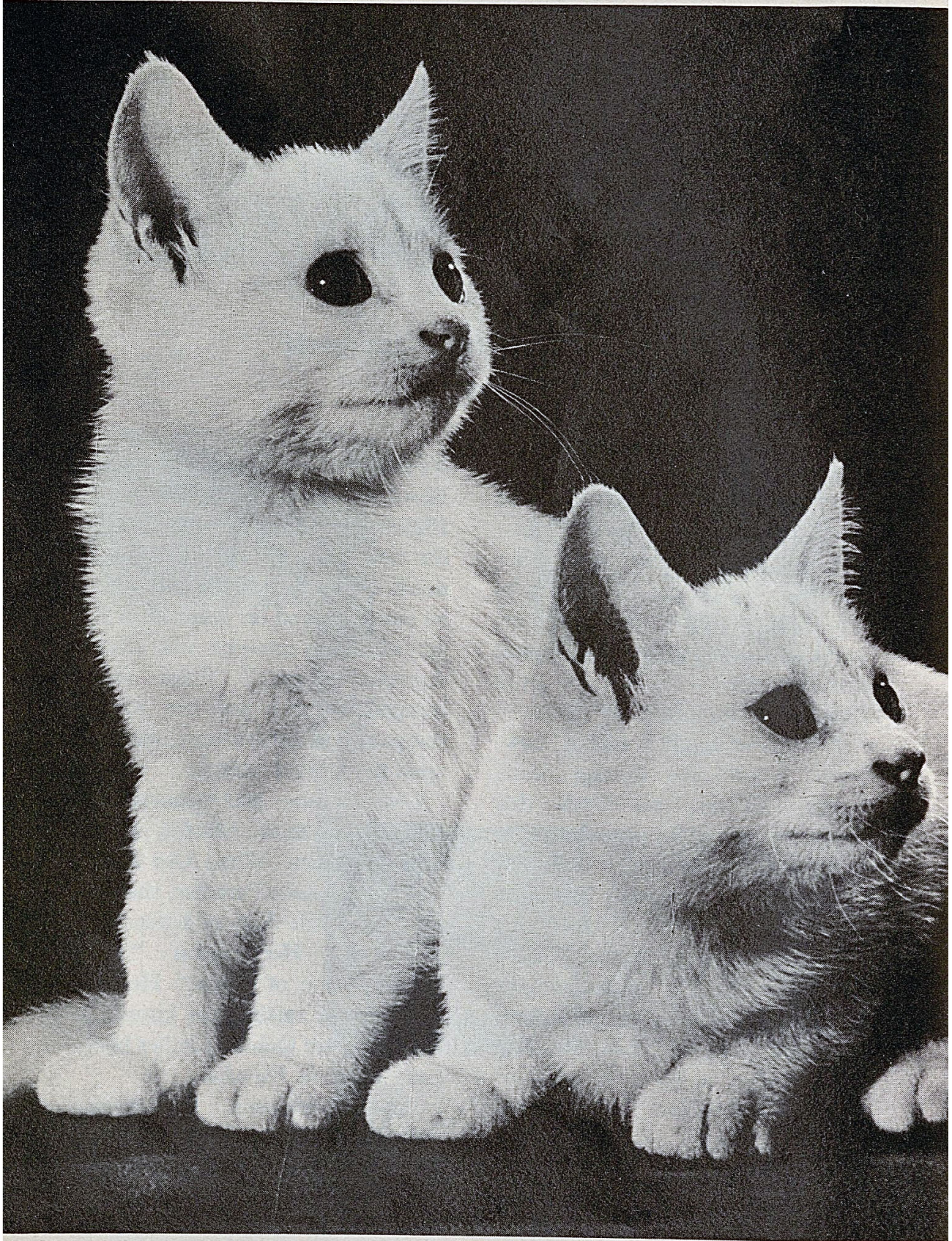
When the English author Lawrence Sterne was writing *Sentimental Journey*, the book that posterity has declared a classic, he kept his pet cat nearby. Writing day after day in Shandy Hall the thoughts that were closest to his heart, Sterne kept the cat as close to him as possible. Sometimes the cat lay upon his writing desk, near his elbow. The cat's purring "kept his emotions at an even temper," Sterne's biographer, Wilbur Cross, wrote years later.

Cats too were able to give companionship to a young boy who lay injured, and who, later, was to become a great New England novelist. Mark Van Doren states in

his definitive biography of Nathaniel Hawthorne, "At nine, playing ball, Hawthorne injured his foot, and so for the next three years was pretty much confined to his house, where he either walked on crutches or lay playing with cats—he was always devoted to cats." These feline companions did not tire of his company and did not make demands upon his limited energies.

Osa Johnson accompanied her explorer husband, Martin, on his trips to Africa. When Osa stayed with him at Lake Paradise, she took along two little Angora kittens into the jungle. Her reason: "They reminded me of home." Her experiences of raising the kittens in the jungle are included in her book, *Four Years In Paradise*.

Emily Dickinson, the recluse poet, lived with her sister, Lavinia, in a big house, behind a thick high hedge in Amherst, Massachusetts. The two sisters kept as many as twelve cats with them at one time. Louisa May Alcott, author of *Little*



There is something about cats, kittens and grownups alike, that has a special appeal to creative people of sensitivity and talent.

Women, also liked cats and had them as pets, as both a child and adult.

Who shared the poverty and illness of Edgar Allan Poe and his child-wife, Virginia, but a little kitten! When winter came and the Poes had no mattress or any other bedding except straw and a white counterpane and sheets, Virginia held a large furry kitten to her bosom for warmth.

In another field of the arts, French composer Maurice Ravel doted on cats. He maintained a whole family of Siamese in his home. Inspired by them, he wrote a song, *Duet of Cats*. When it was completed, he invited a friend to sing it with him. As they practiced, Ravel noticed a movement behind the partly opened studio door. The father Siamese peeked into the room; his whiskers twitched, and then he disappeared. Soon he was back with the Siamese mother and kittens; all the cats entered the studio, and sat down in a semicircle and listened as the new composition was performed.

William Gillette won fame and fortune on the Broadway stage for his portrayal of Sherlock Holmes. Yet when he was at home, alone, he always had one of his three cats sitting in his lap, or following him about. With these creatures, he could relax and be himself. Today Gillette Castle, in a state park overlooking the Connecticut River, has paintings and statuettes of cats in the bedrooms, library and art gallery.

These writers, actors and musicians found a quality among their feline companions that helped them produce their literature, characters and compositions. Cats contributed in an immeasurable manner to their personal lives. Some gained companionship; some gained comfort and affection. Certainly, cats do not care whether a man is famous or wealthy; they give their affection to those who have earned it. Theirs is a dependable affection that did not waver with their personal fortunes.

Whatever their reason, the felines played an important part in the sometimes lonely lives of great people, simply by being themselves and acting the way cats have always acted throughout the ages of their association with humankind.

*Ask your
dealer for
information
on animal diet
supplements.*

HAMSTERS ARE FUN WHEN FED

8 IN 1



A healthy, happy hamster requires proper nutrition. 8 IN 1 HAMSTER products, the world's finest, are made by the leading authorities on hamster nutrition.

8 IN 1 Pet Products, Inc.
40-20 - 22nd Street
Long Island City, N.Y. 11101