

Cats Allowed - By Audrey Goodwin

It had been some months since the move, life had changed drastically for Bertie and Sheena. Gone were the open fields and the friendly streets of the village they had grown up in. Bertie missed his old friends especially Max the Manx and big George the great Shire horse he had visited nearly every day. He sat in front of the warm stove looking into the dancing flames thinking of old times; with a sigh he lay down and put his paw over his eyes, day-dreaming that he was back where he belonged. Sheena crept into the room. There he was in front of the fire as usual. He was getting fat and lazy. He was no fun any more. She jumped onto his tail and bit it.

"Ouch" yowled Bertie "Sheena, I'll get you for that" he leapt up claws extended, but his sister was long gone. He ran around the house looking for her, in the kitchen the flap in the door shuddered closed, Sheena was already halfway down the avenue before Bertie had squeezed himself through. He wandered around the garden knowing that she was not there, frightening birds away from the feeding table. He walked back to the kitchen door and put his head through the flap, then changing his mind he pulled it out again. Slowly he made his way to the front of the house and peeked through the hedge. Sheena was a little way down the avenue sat on a wall grooming her fur looking up every now and again perhaps hoping he would come chasing down the road after her.

'No way am I going after her' he said to himself 'I'll hide and jump out at her when she comes back, see how she likes that.' Moving stealthily he slid into the open garage. 'I'll hide in here, no, not under the car, that's the first place she will look'. He walked round the car, the boot was open, jumping in he settled down behind the box that held all the bits necessary to keep the car in good order.

After a while a blue suitcase was placed in the boot and the boot lid clicked down. Bertie lifted up his head in surprise, he had not thought about being shut in and meowed loudly as the engine started. But the car moved off, there was no indication that Bertie's calls were heard so he settled down to wait for the boot lid to be opened again. At least Sheena would not find him. Serve her right, he hoped she looked for him for ages. It was some time later when the car stopped. The boot opened and the suitcase was taken out, Bertie slid out unseen from his hiding place and jumped out into the car park, he desperately needed to relieve himself. He dodged around parked cars making for the green area alongside the fence. When he finally took a good look at where he was he gulped. There was movement all round him. He was looking at row after row of parked cars. People were lifting suitcases out of car boots, talking and laughing, banging car doors. No one took notice of him as he dodged under the nearest stationary car. He sat bewildered for a while. Which one was the one he had come from, he slipped from one row to the next trying to remember how many cars he had run under. It was going to take some time to find it. After a while the car park grew quiet allowing Bertie to search in peace, he sniffed the faint smell of Mark and thankfully realised he had found his car but there was no sign of the driver. He settled down underneath it to await Mark's return. He wondered where he was, the sounds and unfamiliar smell unsettled him. Perhaps this was where Mark and Sue got the food they brought in every week. He looked forward to those days as Sue always brought Sheena and him a tasty treat of crunchy biscuit snacks and tins of delicious meat in thick gravy or jelly. Thinking of it made his stomach rumble, he licked his lips in anticipation of his next meal. Suddenly there was a tremendous noise and the ground beneath his feet seemed to shake. Bertie flattened himself alongside the car wheel hissing with fear, his sharp teeth showing in a demonic grin, ears flattened on his head. At last the sound faded away and normality filled the air space almost like something Bertie could touch. As his heart slowed down its frantic beating he slid out from under the car and looked around, there was nothing that could account for the most horrendous noise he had ever heard in his whole life. Not even the sound of the old traction engine on the farm near to where they used to live made that kind of racket. Where on earth was he? Returning to his place under the car he tried to figure it out. He could hear people coming out of the

building he had seen earlier as he searched for Mark. Perhaps he would be with them, oh if only he would come and take him home, he'd never get in a car again.

Sheena was bored now, she had looked all over for her brother but he had vanished into thin air where on earth was he? Crossly, she sat on next doors wall, swishing her tail back and forth, still watching out in case he came creeping up behind her. It was getting dark now and nearing food time. She decided to do one more search in the garden, no he wasn't there. So she went in half expecting Bertie to jump out at her as she slid through the cat flap. Disconsolately she wandered in and out of the rooms stopping only to meow loudly. After a while she gave up looking and settled down on the couch to doze still expecting Bertie to come charging out to give her a swipe on her ear or at the very least grab her tail. It was late when she went once more into the kitchen to eat, Bertie's dish remained untouched. Sheena went out into the darkness, the evening was cool, the skies clear and filled with stars. A bat flitted by her and she jumped up half-heartedly trying to catch it. The walk to the front gate did nothing to cheer her up. She was missing Bertie, where could he be? She had this awful feeling that he was in trouble and there was nothing she could do about it. She paced up and down in-front of the gate for a while then walked across the road and jumped up and sat on a garden wall. It was there that Bobby found her, he was the first cat they had met when they ventured out after the move. Large and black with a ragged ear and a scar on his head he looked rather fearsome at first sight but as they got to know him they soon became good friends. He was a little gruffly spoken and Sheena did not understand some of the words he used but she was always glad to see him. Tonight she did not even look at him.

"Nah then young un, what's up with you? You look as if you've got the world sat on your shoulders" said Bobby as he leapt onto the wall beside her. Sheena looked at him then started to yowl till he begged her to stop.

"Come on tell me all about it" He gently head butted her till she settled down.

"It's Bertie, he's lost and it my fault. If I hadn't of teased him this morning he would still be here. I can't find him" she sobbed "I know something is wrong, he'd never stay away all this time, it's all my fault."

"Hush now you'll wake every one up, say it all again slowly."

Sheena repeated what had happened, this time calmly. She felt better just telling someone.

"Well it seems to me as your brother is big enough and wise enough to look after himself, he will probably turn up in his own good time just to teach you a lesson."

"Oh do you think so, you really think he's alright?" said Sheena cheering up.

"Sure to be, I'd bet my tail on it." Bobby jumped down and stuck his tail into the air and walked away laughing.

Sheena watched him go then turned back towards her house. She decided to go home and wait in the hope Bertie would come back overnight. Along the road Widgit joined Bobby "What's up with her" he nodded towards Sheena "she was making a right racket."

"She's lost her brother." answered Bobby.

"Huh! He won't be far, he's hardly moved out of his house since they got here."

"Well where is he then?"

"I don't know, perhaps he's been catnapped."

"Now don't you go saying things like that to Sheena, she's upset enough." Bobby said angrily turning away from him, he walked back towards Sheena watching her as she returned to her front gate. Widgit jumped on to his wall then down into his front garden, walked to his door and lay on the door step hoping that Bobby would come back and go hunting with him. He fancied going into Tigger's road but he knew he needed Bobby with him. Tigger and his mates were always on the look out for a lone cat but they had the cutest female living at the end of the road. She really was beautiful, her green eyes and sleek cream coat enchanted him and he was sure she fancied him. Sheena was ok but not a patch on Cleo, any way Sheena ignored him, she liked Bobby. What did she see in him? He was

ugly and large, his coat as black as soot. Widgeo felt his slim body and white and orange coat was so much more handsome, true he did not act as bold as Bobby but he made up for it in cunning, though he said so himself. He stood up and walked to the gate. No sign of Bobby now, ah well, perhaps he'd give up the thought of visiting Cleo this evening.

The night was alive with sounds, at regular intervals the aircraft roared by the car park till the early hours of the morning. Every time one landed a group of people came by dragging suitcases and chattering on their mobile phones. Cars were loaded up and moved away, calm now Bertie watched and listened from his hiding place under the car hoping the right person would return. Morning came and still he waited only now he had another problem, he was hungry, very hungry. He kept thinking of his dish of food, he could even smell it! He sniffed again, yes he could smell something that made his mouth water and his tummy rumble. The car park was quiet now, no people were coming or going, he slid out from behind the rear wheel following the smell, he saw a white van with its side open and a couple of people waiting in front of it, the smell was from there. He ran quickly across the road to the dust bin by the side of the van and jumped up balancing on the rim. There he saw open boxes with bits of beefburgers and bun in them some covered in sharp tasting yellow stuff others had red stuff over them. Balanced on the rim of the bin he grasped a piece of meat ignoring the sauce on it. Keeping an eye on the people near the van he hungrily began to devour his find. My, it was good, as soon as he had eaten it he grabbed another chunk this time he carried it back to his hiding place. He could not leave the car too long for fear of being left behind when Mark came back. After a while he fell asleep and dreamt of home and his sister. What would he give to be back there now, even living in the new area would be better than being stranded goodness knows where. The slamming of car doors woke him with a start, his heart started pumping faster as he hoped he would be found this time. More people were walking by dragging suitcases. No one stopped beside his car, all went quiet again. Sadly he settled down, the long wait had begun. Between dozing and dashing over to the green to relieve himself then sneaking food from the burger van the hours passed.

Sue had been frantically searching the surrounding roads and drives near her new home, she had already been in contact with the local Blue Cross to see if Bertie had been brought in injured or as a stray but had drawn a blank. Neighbours had not seen him and she had even phoned her friends in the area they had moved from to alert them that Bertie may be making for his old home, so far there was no word from them. As the days passed Sheena became more and more depressed barely eating and refusing to go out, she was looking decidedly bedraggled. Sue wondered whether she should take Sheena to the vet but Mark told her to wait a bit as finding Bertie would bring her out of it. The two girls had made lost cat posters and persuaded the local shops to put them in their windows. Still no sign of Bertie, neighbours stopped Sue in the street to ask if there was any news, even the ones who secretly thought `That's one less cat to use my garden as a toilet or a hunting ground for catching birds from the feeding table.` still asked about Bertie.

"There's one good thing about all this upset." Sue said to Mark as she updated him on the latest news of what was going on "I think I've got to know most everybody around here a lot quicker than I ever thought was possible." Mark sighed as he said goodbye. Would they ever see Bertie again, had he been run over and dragged himself under a hedge unseen to die all alone? These were dark thoughts that he had not voiced to Sue but he could not help but think about.

One day followed another for Bertie but he was not quite alone. The people working in the fast food van had noticed him as he grabbed food and were helping him by leaving out a dish of water and leftover cooked meat. They were debating whether to try and capture him and get him into a cat sanctuary.

"How are we going to do it?" said Miles

"Best to get his confidence, make friends with him."

"If he's a feral cat he won't like contact." Miles said as he flipped over a burger.

"I don't think he's feral he is in too good a shape to have been born wild, now things are a little slower I think I will try and find out where he is hiding."

"A good idea." said Miles as he wiped the counter clean.

"Look out, here he is again, no time like the present."

Andy slowly opened the van's back door and slipped quietly out ready to follow Bertie when he carried off his food. Bertie noticed the movement as he grabbed his meat and slipped quickly away. He was over the road and dodging under cars in moments. Andy kept him in sight for a short while then lost him when cars started arriving.

"Better luck next time." said Miles as Andy came back.

"I was thinking when I was walking back, we never see the stray when a plane lands. He only comes when the passengers have all de-planed and left the vicinity. Don't you think that's strange?"

"Never gave it a thought, but now you come to mention it I think you're right, perhaps he's waiting for someone."

"Yeah, perhaps he is. We'll give him a few more days then if he's still here after the week end I'll phone the rescue people."

The next day rain started, a few drops at first then a real downpour. Bertie spent a miserable day hiding underneath the car, searching every group of passengers as they came hurrying by. The fast food van remained closed for hours, no food added to his misery. He did not fancy hunting in the rain for mice or leaving the car to go further afield so he lay there and dozed. He cheered up in the late evening when he noticed a familiar aroma. He quickly made his way to the van and was soon devouring a dish of cat food delighted at the change of diet. Within minutes he ran back to the car feeling so much better.

"He enjoyed that, but he didn't stay around."

"Good idea of yours to glue that mirror on the open flap side. I saw him before he saw me, got a head start on him. I followed him and saw the row he's hiding in." Miles started to clear the prep area putting things in their right place and wiping down. "He's thinner than he was when we first saw him."

"Perhaps we shouldn't wait much longer before calling the cat rescue people."

Full and resting Bertie cheered up, maybe the next plane would be the right one. Another one had just landed. It was a while before people started to come into the car park but his heart made its usual leap as heard footsteps coming towards the car.

"Hi darling, just got out to the car, have you heard anything about Bertie?"

"Not a thing, oh Mark I'm so pleased you got that job finished early. We've missed you so much what with Bertie lost and Sheena going into a decline, now the girls have started to believe the worst I'm at my wits end."

"Hang on a minute, I'm at the car, what the----!"

Bertie dashed out mewling loudly, nearly tripping Mark up as he joyfully twirled around his legs.

"What's up, Mark what's all that racket?"

"It's Bertie he's here! He must have been in the car boot when I put the suitcase in, would you believe it he's been here waiting for me all this time, listen to him telling me." Mark put the phone next to Bertie.

Sheena who lay disconsolately across Sue's knee suddenly sat bolt upright and yowled "Bertie!"

After checking him over seeing he looked pretty fit Mark sat him on the back seat of the car, Bertie climbed up onto the parcel shelf to look out at the place he had existed in for nearly a week. Mark drove out of the airport car park onto the open road passing the burger van on the way. Andy and Miles looked at the car as it went slowly by. On the parcel shelf sat Bertie bolt upright, he turned his head to look at the fast food van. Andy saw the look and raised his hand in a salute saying under his breath `Well done old chap.`

As they turned onto the road that took them home Bertie sighed, stretched out on the shelf and went into a deep untroubled sleep.

This story is entirely a figment of my imagination, any resemblance to a cat or person is not intentional.

Submitted by Audrey Goodwin
