

On the Move - by Audrey Goodwin

For the third time Bertie was dumped unceremoniously from his comfortable spot on the cushions to the floor. What was going on? For days now the place had been a mess of boxes and furniture stacked in all the wrong places. It was so unsettling and Sheena was a pain jumping out at him from all different hidey holes. He slipped out of the room into the kitchen to investigate his food bowl. It was empty as usual. Sheena had once again finished his leftovers. He stared through the flap in the outside door. Brr, it looked cold; snow lay thick on the ground. He was not looking forward to going out in it, but he would have to very soon. He could not use that smelly tray, it had not been emptied and Sheena had used it twice, she didn't seem to mind. He was more fastidious than her; he looked again at the snow perhaps he could wait a little longer. He went to find his sister, dodging through the legs of the girls as they carried armfuls of stuff to the living room where the whole family was gathered laughing and chattering. The bedroom doors were open, he looked inside the first room, such a mess, stuff piled everywhere. Ah! There she was curled up on those books near the window. He'd pay her back for some of the tricks she'd played on him, he'd give her a scare. He went into stalker mode creeping round the bed and round a big cardboard box. As he got within a foot of her he gave an ear-splitting yowl. Shocked Sheena jumped up, legs stiff and tail held straight in the air. Suddenly the books began a sideways topple to the floor and she scrambled to hold her footing among magazines and novels. Seconds later Sheena raced by Bertie and down the corridor. The attic ladder, down from its usual place in the ceiling, was where she made for. Bertie groaned closing his eyes. She'd done it again. It was not that long ago that she had got herself shut in the roof space. Hours were spent looking for her; she was so stupid at times never stopping to think about her actions. Well he'd have to leave her to it for now, he had more pressing matters outside. He ran to the kitchen door and with only the slightest hesitation went through the cat flap.

He was shocked to find the snow buried his legs and a bit of his underbelly, he had to jump out of it to make any headway towards the fence. When he finally got there he was so cold he could not leap to the fence top. He had to stick his claws into the wood and haul himself up then run across the top taking care not to get scratched by the hawthorn hedge that grew on the other side. He reached the tree and deftly slid down its trunk into the field. The snow was not so bad near the hedge but the field was thickly covered. Bertie now much relieved, scrambled back up the tree behind his favourite second home and sat looking around. There was nothing to see but snow not even the pheasants that his sister liked to stalk; it was unusually quiet the horses were not stamping and snorting around either. He would have liked to go visit big George, He didn't mind if he sat on his back, he was quite friendly when you got to know him, but Snowy was a different matter. He could be uppity when he felt like it, he had seen him unseat his young rider a couple of times and he liked to kick out for no reason at all. No, Snowy was not to be trusted. Looking again at the snow he decided to forgo the trip to the stables. It was so cold he would have to make his way back to the kitchen and get warm again. He jumped down into the garden landing almost up to his neck in a snow drift. He fought his way back to the cat flap and safety. Shaking first himself, then his paws one by one, at last he got rid of the freezing stuff, then he sat down and licked himself all over till he was free from snow and almost dry. Bertie could hear laughter from the living room as he walked out of the kitchen. The hall was empty, the ladder returned to its resting place in the ceiling. Oh dear, this did not bode well for Sheena. He strolled down to the bedrooms, every door was closed. He called Sheena by name as he stood outside each door, not a sound. Either she was not there or she was not answering him. The living room door was nearly closed but by leaning on it he pushed it open. He slipped inside checking the chairs and settee for his sister - not there. He went round the back of the furniture. No Sheena, feeling cross now he looked over to where the family were busy wrapping things and packing them in boxes. He felt disturbed, what was going on, why all this activity? Just then he spied the twitching tip of Sheena's tail. There she was, behind that box next to his favorite spot near the radiator. He might have known, trust her to pinch his place. He settled silently by the side of the settee and watched what was going on. Moments later he was asleep exhausted by his trip outside and his search for Sheena.

He awoke when the food box was rattled. He stretched and yawned languidly looking over to where Sheena should be. She was gone, the family had also gone. Of course Sheena was gone, there was food to be had. He stretched again then walked sedately to the door. It was almost closed, he had to hook his claws into the edge of it to pull it open. He could hear strange noises coming from the kitchen. Quietly he put his head round the door and stared. There was Sheena being pushed into a plastic box with a see-through door. She was struggling and furiously hissing, her claws scrabbling at the plastic trying to stop herself from being put inside. Bertie panicked, he wasn't having any of that, the last time he had been put in a box like that he had been taken to a strange place that had bright lights and funny smells. A man in a green suit picked him up and poked and prodded him in a most undignified way, he had stuck a needle into his body then the next thing Bertie knew he was waking up feeling sick and sore. Oh no, it was not going to happen again, not if he could help it. Bertie shot between out stretched arms trying to block his way and dived through the cat flap that was mercifully still open.

Ugh! It was wet and slushy in the garden but at least he could move now, he was up and on the fence in moments. By the time he'd reached the tree then dropped into the field he had calmed down a little. He walked by the hedge passing the place where his sister got herself stuck last year. He felt guilty now. His sister - what was happening to her? Maybe he should go back and see what was going on. No, he could not face it again. What was he going to do? Maybe he could visit the stables, yes that's where he'd go. But he would have to take the long way around, he was not going to get caught crossing his garden, oh no. Half an hour later Bertie entered the farmyard. It was quite churned up so he kept to the side of the buildings to avoid stepping into muddy puddles and piles of wet snow. The top half of the stable doors were open, he breathed a sigh of relief and jumped up onto one. Big George turned to look at him then went back to eating. Bertie decided to risk sitting on George's back hoping he would allow him to stay and get warm. The horse took no notice so Bertie went to sleep only to be woken later by the farmer checking his horses were alright before shutting them in for the night.

Slipping out of the stable into the gloom of the coming night Bertie decided to go home. He returned the way he had come moving quietly through the fields looking neither left nor right till he found himself at his own door. The house was in darkness, not a light anywhere. With some trepidation he went inside. There was a full dish of his favorite food. That was strange, why hadn't Sheena eaten most of it. He stood and listened, the house was silent and cold. His hackles rose, something was very wrong. He crept into the hall then slowly pushed open the living room door. Empty, the room was empty! He turned and searched through the house calling for his sister. The whole house was empty. What was he to do? Suddenly he made up his mind, he would visit Max the Manx. He took off down the avenue to the house where his friend lived. Creeping up to the back door he pushed his head through the cat flap and called Max by name.

"Good to see you old chap, come in it's cold with that flap open".

Max led the way into the sitting room and they settled in front of the dying fire, Bertie breathed a long sigh of relief.

"Ok tell me, what brings you here at this time of night?"

Bertie told his tale, right from the moment strange happenings started in his home up to his flight from the dreaded box and his visit to the stables. Max sat silent for a while thinking things over then he sat bolt upright and patted Bertie on his shoulder, he turned his head and stared at him.

"I just want to know what's happening Max."

"You're moving old son that's what's happening, just like your young friend Tilly did. I advise you to get straight back and wait till they come for you."

He was home in no time. He sat in front of his favourite radiator after eating his fill and waited. Max was right. What other explanation could there be. He'd been a fool to run like that. Slowly he stretched out on the carpet and went to sleep. Waiting . . .