

SHADOW

by Susan Bennett

What should she do? She already had a cat but this poor little scrap looked so pathetic she had agreed to take it home with her and look after it. It had been dumped at reception that morning by some students who rapidly left before anyone could ask questions. At home she took the carrier into the kitchen, put out bowls of food and water and then opened the door. Slowly, uncertainly, a long white body with tabby markings emerged and then slunk along the wall and hid behind the jukebox in the corner, and only came out to eat or drink or use the litter tray. The vet confirmed that she was a female cat about two or three years old and in good health. As soon as we got back home she once again made for the back of the jukebox. As this was her favoured spot it was decided to name her Ami after the makers – the Automatic Musical Instrument Company. Whenever their other cat, mild mannered Dante, tried to make friends with the new arrival he quickly got sent away by this snarling, spitting tiger who would give him a thwack across the head - until that is she came into heat. Then she tried to interest him with soft sounds and views of her bottom but he didn't know what all the fuss was about, he had been neutered some years earlier and so had no idea. He just quietly left the room. So back to the vet we went and Ami was duly splayed. Thankfully, she didn't return to her earlier unfriendly personality and now she tolerated Dante. Ami became more affectionate and would allow people to pick her up – but not for long, except for me. She became my shadow. Everywhere I went she was there, even on night time trips to the toilet. She would get up and lead the way, sit at my feet and then guide me back to the bedroom. Whenever I sat down she would leap onto my lap purring away. I always felt guilty when I had to disturb her slumbers when I needed to get up.

Ami would spend hours at the window watching the comings and goings of the birds in the garden but when finally the door was opened for her she hesitated to step outside, and almost immediately she was crying for the door to be opened so she could come back inside. Maybe, they mused, she had belonged to someone who lived in a flat without access to outside space. Eventually she became more courageous and would stay out longer, but never went far from the house. When I sat in the garden to soak up the summer sun Ami would stretch out beside me. It is said that pets, particularly cats, choose their owners and Ami certainly chose me!