

# The Homecoming

By Rosemary Cole

Tabby stirred restlessly in her sleep. A strange smell was all around her.

She'd been out since sunset foraging for mice in the bush and had just settled down. She was tired and twitched in her slumber. Suddenly her eyes shot open as a dreaded smell assailed her senses. Terror took hold as she realized what it was.

FIRE.

She screamed an alarm as only a cat can and ran for the 'cat flap' in the back door to escape the sense of danger. A slight breeze had almost swung it closed and only a small gap remained, thus impeding her exit.

She 'Yowled' with all the fury she could muster as she raced around the house to find an escape hole. She leapt at the windows which she knew were securely fastened, but still she tried. In and out of the various rooms she scampered, causing Jenny to wake in alarm.

"What's the matter Tabby? Can't you get out. Surely you've just come in." Then the horrible smell of smoke registered. "Oh My God. Roger." She screamed, shaking the slumbering figure beside her. "For Christ's sake wake up. The house is on fire."

The bedroom was full of smoke and flames had just started to lick around the hanging part of the bedding.

"Come on Roger. I'm going to get Mary"

Roger was out of bed like shot. "Get her right away from the house Jenny then start getting stuff out. I'll get some water in here."

Tabby scampered after Jenny and the child as they fled through the door. The flames starting to leap through the windows as burst in the heat. Soon Roger abandoned the water idea in favour of rescuing valuables.

The old weatherboard house was quickly enveloped and soon the house was a mass of flames.

Tabby kept on running as fast as she could until she could no longer hear the fire or smell that horrible smell. She could see the light from the fire in the distance as she panted and shivered in the cool night air. Agitatedly she started to wash herself to get rid of the smell of fire, but quickly gave up. She was an agitated, hysterical bundle of nerves. Silently she stood shaking staring at the light.

Slowly the hysteria left her and finally lay down mewling quietly to herself.

Finally the terror of the night left her and she at last allowed sleep to overtake her.

Shivering in the pale light of early morning, Tabby stretched and extended her claws. Gone was the terror of last night. Only a memory of fire remained as she got up and walked towards the familiar home of comfort, seeking breakfast.

Slowly she approached the house, twitching her nose and flicking her tail, her large black eyes warily taking the scene of devastation. From a distance of fifty meters she could see the old weatherboard house was no more. Just a pile of ashes and smoke blowing about in the slight breeze.

She crouched down and watched the truck being loaded with the meagre pile of salvaged items by the small group of people. Eagerly Tabby looked for familiar faces but saw none and dared not approach. Silent and watchful Tabby scanned the scene and as the truck slowly drove off, she started yowling pitifully for the life that was no longer.

The weeks past and still no familiar face appeared near burnt house. Everyday Tabby came to the edge of the clearing - never daring to go any nearer.

The first snows blew in the wind and after weeks of loneliness, she heard the sound of a familiar motor. Racing through the undergrowth that had sprung up around the burnt house she could hear familiar voices.

They were back.

Roger spread the plans on the warm bonnet of the old utility truck and was soon joined by Jenny carrying the baby Mary.

“If we build over here, Sweetheart. That will leave us a big area for your garden Jenny. We can get it fenced so Mary can play with wandering off into the bush.”

“Sounds good Roger.” Abruptly she looked down at her legs to see what brushed them. “Tabby!” she almost screamed. “Oh Tabby. We thought we’d lost you. You saved our lives. If it hadn’t been for you we might have died. Oh Tabby I’m so glad we’ve found you.”

Jenny made to pick her up, but Tabby just walked away with tail erect, strolled over to the open truck door and jumped in.

Curling into a tight ball, she immediately went to sleep in the warm cab.

She was happy again.