How Mephisto Moved In

1 One rainy, April night, several years ago, Mephisto found me. I had backed my car into the driveway. I was carrying too many books to manage an umbrella, so I dashed from the garage to the side door of my home, fumbling for my keys.

2 A drenched gray cat appeared as if from nowhere, meowing loudly and insistently. I was not a cat person. My then-housemates were a pair of birds named Grace and Disgrace, and from the avian perspective, cats and birds don't mix. So I sternly said, "Go home! Shoo!" He took my dismissal as encouragement, replying with a little meow that sounded like, "I thought you would never ask." My heart softened. The poor little guy was soaked. Maybe he could come in for just a few minutes and dry off.

3 The visitor wasted no time finding the kitchen and didn't wait politely for me to offer him food. He made his wishes known immediately. "Little cat, you are going to go home as soon as it stops raining," I chided him. "You can wait."

4 In response, he rubbed his damp whiskers against the leg of my jeans and continued his pitiful little pleas for food. Although he certainly looked like he was well-fed, maybe he was lost and hadn't eaten in days!

5 I remembered that cats are supposed to like tuna, although I soon learned that the word "like" doesn't come close to describing what he felt. As soon as I spooned a little tuna into a bowl, he gobbled it immediately and begged for more. He ate the entire can in a few minutes.

6 Bedtime arrived, and it was still pouring rain. Should I let him stay for just one night? Maybe a heartbroken child was crying herself to sleep because of her missing kitty. I had never seen a cat in the neighborhood that looked like him. What if I put him outside and he couldn't find his way home?

7 Then I thought of an even more serious matter. What if he. . . you know. . . did his business on the carpet? I thought long and hard about a way to overcome this potential problem (even though I did not like cats). I poured a pile of the fine gravel the birds used into a disposable roasting pan. Then, feigning resignation to an unhappy fate, I said, "OK, you can stay, but in the morning out you go, rain or shine."

Go to next page

8 When I fluffed my pillows and settled down in bed, I found that there was a slight change in my nightly ritual of reading. There was a cat on my lap. Every time I paused in my petting, he gently touched my face. My head was telling me that this meant that he had a loving home and was accustomed to human interaction, but my heart said, "He likes me!"

9 Neither of us got much sleep. He was used to it, but I awoke not refreshed—and oddly sad—that the moment of truth had arrived. I told him firmly that it was time to go home. He followed me to the back door and sat on his haunches. What a beautiful creature! His coat was mostly gray, with just a few little white hairs on the front of his chest. The rain had subsided. I found myself wishing for another downpour so I would have an excuse to let him stay.

10 "OK, here's the deal," I said. "I'm going to open the door and count to 10. If you walk out, you're on your own. If not, you stay." He cautiously padded over to the door and sniffed the cool air. He had not used the makeshift litter box, so I assumed he would be eager to get back outside. But he stopped before walking out and turned to face me, giving me a look that seemed to say, "What am I, crazy? Leave a place where they serve tuna?" I continued to count all the way to 10—OK, seven through 10 went really fast. He kept shifting his glance from the door back to me and eventually walked over to rub against my legs.

11 "So, you want to stay, huh? Well, I left out some of the details. This isn't final—we need to find out if you're expected elsewhere. If you stay, you will be an indoor cat and you will not terrorize my birds. And your name will be Mephisto." The terms seemed acceptable to him.

"How Mephisto Moved In" by Ginny McCaskey, Cats Magazine, November 2000, Volume LVI, No.11, pp. 19–20 (excerpted text)

Go to next page

5. How does the setting of this passage influence the narrator's decisions?

   A. The cool morning weather makes her shut the door quickly.

   B. The storm makes her play with the cat rather than read.

   C. The weather makes her willing to let the cat into her house.

   D. The dark night makes her eager to look for the cat's owner.

6. "He took my dismissal as encouragement, replying with a little meow that sounded like, 'I thought you would never ask.' **My heart softened**. The poor little guy was soaked."

   When the narrator says, "**My heart softened**," it means that she begins to feel

   A. impatient.

   B. worried.

   C. sympathetic.

   D. excited.

7. Why does the narrator feel "oddly sad" when she wakes up?

   A. She has slept restlessly because of the cat.

   B. She is unexpectedly reluctant for the cat to leave.

   C. She is disappointed that the weather is still cold and rainy.

   D. She thinks about how heartbroken the cat's owner must be.

8. Which definition describes the character of the narrator?

   flat—has only one outstanding characteristic

   dynamic—undergoes a change in the story

   round—is complex and multidimensional

   static—does not change during the story

   A. flat

   B. dynamic

   C. round

   D. static

9. Identify the climax, or turning point, of this passage. Use information from the passage to support your answer. Write your answer in the **Answer Document**. (2 points)

10. Which statement best states the theme of this passage?

    A. New friendships can occur when least expected.

    B. First impressions can be misleading.

    C. Unexpected events can be upsetting.

    D. Unwanted experiences can lead to major conflict.