

Pishoo was like Venice

She was essentially a decent being, what we call in Persian, najib

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January 24, 2002

The Iranian

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The character traits that I dislike in cats are the same that I dislike in humans: self-absorption, moodiness, indifference, hedonism, manipulateness, a streak of cruelty... everything that was left out of Pishoo the day they made her. Oh, she was a cat all right. Of that there can be no doubt: she was graceful and contained as only a cat can be; she was also picky and liked her creature comforts. But that's as far as her "catness" went.

In all her sixteen-and-a-half years, she never once harmed any other living creature. She could stare at a bug forever, crouching in an attack posture, shaking her rump occasionally to indicate that she was going to pounce... and never did! She would address the birds who came to visit her on the deck outside, or follow a butterfly through slit eyes, alert and interested but never ready to hurt. At the height of excitement during the games she played with us -- hide-and-seek, attack-and-retreat, and variations -- she was mindful of keeping her claws pulled in so as not to scratch us inadvertently.

In those sixteen-and-a-half years, the place that Pishoo occupied in our lives not only grew but crystallized in a warm, brilliant core, so that her death leaves us more disconsolate than most, the meaningful center of our actual and our symbolic home, gone.

She had many of the qualities you ideally look for in anyone who shares your life. She was courteous, kind, compassionate, always present when you needed her. Sometimes, she had obviously been awakened when we called her, but she still sleepily made her entrance, jumped next to you, and resumed her nap. Not for her to turn a deaf ear or make a disdainful retreat. Convivial and sociable to the extreme, she was never as contented as when there were people around, whether guests whom she could welcome or family members whose activities she could share.

At a big party last year, with people standing around everywhere, Pishoo was her customary self, lying on the floor, right in the middle of the dining room. One guest asked if Pishoo wasn't afraid somebody would step on her. No, she wasn't afraid, she never had been. I remember that she was still almost a baby when a little boy, a friend's son, remarked how unusual it was that Pishoo never jumped like other cats, even when there was a loud noise or a commotion.

It wasn't that Pishoo was more like a dog. Pishoo was Pishoo. In the play about Mae West, "Dirty Blonde", one of the characters says about the actress that she was as

idiosyncratic as Venice, explaining that there is no place on earth about which you can say that it's a little like Venice. Either it is Venice or it's something else.

Thus with Pishoo. She was a unique little creature unto herself. She didn't steal, she didn't cheat, she didn't manipulate, and she had no mystery, no dark corners. Dark corners may be alluring to some; to me, they hide cobwebs at best, if not some other lurking nastiness. I'd always rather see airy brightness, with nothing hidden. That's how Pishoo was, with a flame that burned clear and high. She was essentially a decent being, what we call in Persian, najib. We were blessed to have her in our lives. All we can hope is that she is now conversing with the birds and the butterflies in the meadows of her native Normandy.