

THE ORANGE CAT

By Kenneth A. McCoy

Many years ago I took a weekend trip to my grandparents' cabin in the Colorado Rocky Mountains. I'd been there several times before but this time would pave a path that would take me well into the future.

I happened to notice a bright orange porcelain cat sitting on one of the window sills in the kitchen. It was a Siamese type cat, one that you might find cast in bronze or gold inside a Pharaoh's tomb buried deep beneath an Egyptian desert. It stood about 18 inches tall and had a long slender neck. Majestic. It was painted in various shades of bright orange causing the appearance of shadows as if the sun was slightly to the right. The world stopped

spinning. Nothing else on earth existed at that moment but me, that cat, and the space between us. After a moment I made my way over to the cat and picked it up. Looking at it closely I realized that it had some age as the glazed paint on the porcelain had tiny fissures all over it. I was enthralled. I'm not exactly sure how much time passed while I was standing there holding that cat but I'm sure if anyone had seen me they might have been a little bit confused at my wonderment.

As the years passed I would always spend a few minutes staring at this cat when I visited the cabin. It was the very first thing I did when I walked in the door. No one could ever understand what it was with me and this cat. I guess I didn't really know either. It was sort of primeval as if it were built into my DNA to love this cat.

Just few years ago I was sitting in my Grandmother's living room having a conversation with her about the cabin, all of the years we've enjoyed it, the fun times, and the time spent there that we would rather erase from history. The cat got brought up and my grandmother began to tell me the story behind the cat.

When my mother was a young girl, the people that lived in the neighboring farm were going to visit another small mountain town for the weekend. They had invited my Mom and

my Grandmother agreed that she could go along with them. Before they left my grandmother handed my Mom a couple of dollars and told her to use the money to buy herself something. When my Mother returned from the trip my Grandmother met everyone outside in anticipation of their arrival and stories from the weekend. She had expected to see a bag full of taffy or a handcrafted toy in my Mother's hand. Instead, my Mom handed her an object wrapped in plain paper. When my Grandmother opened it, there was a brand new, bright orange porcelain cat with a little feather sticking out of its mouth. A tear came to her eye and her heart began to melt as she tried to comprehend the selflessness that my Mother had displayed.

I left my Grandmother's house that afternoon content and satisfied with a new understanding of my infatuation with this cat.

This last fall I was back up at the cabin and, of course, the first thing I did was go to find the cat. This time however the cat wasn't there. I spent the next twenty minutes searching all over the cabin for the cat. When I couldn't find it I walked up the road to the point of cell phone coverage and called down to my mother to find out what had happened to the cat. She didn't know. I then phoned my Grandmother. She didn't know either. I was

crushed. The rest of that weekend was miserable. The weather was poor. The fishing was a disaster. The whole trip turned out to be a disappointment.

A few months had passed and because it was winter I hadn't made it up to the cabin again. As it is every year with my family, we all gathered at my Grandmother's house on Christmas morning to share gifts and have breakfast together. A couple of the younger kids passed out each gift under the tree to the appropriate person. Once all of the gifts had been delivered the chaos of wrapping paper, tape, bows and boxes ensued. I had just finished admiring a gift from my aunt and uncle when I looked down to pick up the next package. This one simply said "From: Santa". I found it odd at first but then realized that I was this year's victim of the never-ending prank gift. There's always at least one. I began unwrapping the gift with some serious trepidation. About half way into the process I noticed that it had gotten awfully quiet in the room. I looked up from the task at hand and realized that everyone was looking directly at me. I knew right then that everyone in that room was in on this gag. When I finally got the wrapping paper removed and opened the box, there was the orange cat. My heart exploded and I couldn't hold back the tears of overwhelming

emotion that filled my entire being. A huge grin crossed my face, I jumped up out of my seat, ran over to my Grandmother and pulled her out of her chair and threw my arms around her. At that moment, as it had happened years before, the world stopped spinning. This time was just a little bit different though. Instead of the cat, nothing else on earth existed except for me and my grandmother. I'm certain that more than a couple of people in that room were confused by my wonderment.

Today that same silly old orange cat sits proudly on the mantle above my fireplace.

THE END