

Tangerine Slip Cat

by Charles Huschle

I knew my cat was capable of telepathy when I began to have isolated, random, non-cause-related thoughts about food and feelings, little signals, and I realized that the signs — images of tangerines, tuna, bones; the idea of choice; slate, names; the feeling of frustrating unresponsiveness you can get when someone just looks at you and doesn't speak; boomerangs hitting you in the head; mice, marriage, claws, escape — could only be coming from one source: her felinity. Nothing stops The Cat from thinking her dark tangerine thoughts.

She would glance at me in an arch manner, and suddenly I was thinking about catnip. She would brush against my legs and the image of a fish skeleton flashed through me. It had nothing to do with the fact that I am aging, because aren't we all getting a little gray? With a huge meow, accompanied by my “Shit!” she would claw my bare toes on her streak out the opened door: and visions of Alcatraz danced in my head. I bounced around on one foot, nursing the puncture wounds, wondering for the millionth time how she could so easily slip by.

Maybe it's because I wanted to kill that cat that she developed her powers of telepathy. It was surely clear to her — especially when, after yet another escape, I stood outside flinging rocks at the bush where she hid — that I had no great love for her. “You shit, you piss, you eat, you ignore me, you don't come when called, you scratch the furniture to pieces, you broke vases when you were younger — yes, I do not forgive you! — Get your catty ass back in the house!” was probably a clear enough message to her. My friends told me I might as well be married again (I didn't make the joke about all their wives being dogs).

I suspected that some night the cat would interrogate me. She and her nocturnal feline friends would pin me down and ask: What is your motivation? Where is your life going? Who do you love? What do you like? What is the meaning of life? You know the cats have all

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the answers. Her friends would sit around me in a circle and quote Annie Dillard. She would be sitting on my chest, her claws extending and retracting, gently, into my chamois shirt. She might lay a dead mouse beside me, an offering.

There's a small capsule of time that I keep in the top left pocket of that yellow chamois shirt — the memory of a plaza in Venice, the city of cats, suffused with the yellow odor of cat pee. In some ways it's the pinnacle of my existence. My wife, rest her soul, and I are stepping from a vaporetto onto the stone quay; it's spring; the air is salty and humid, the sun soft but hot; there's the scent of espresso too, and the idea of Campari, glass, water, lagoon, and Yugoslavia. I step up from the rocking boat first and I turn to face her — I reach out my hand to help her step up — she takes it but is perfectly athletically capable of ascending on her own — and she is right up next to me, her crooked bright eyes and gap-toothed smile so perfect in the Venetian light.

