

When I lift the lid on the cookstove and slip in another stick of wood, the sweet smell of seasoned birch perfumes the air. Blue is curled up on the sheepskin in the little nook by the stove. Kate has her chunky, shiny black Border Collie body stretched out on the rug. Runo went out in full winter gear to start the tractor and move snow. Jick has his orange self full length on the bed. And I am sitting here in perfect comfort, though the snow is still drifting down and the thermometer is reading 12 F, the same temperature we've had all day. So, all is well, one might think, but there is one inhabitant of the cabin here on Coe Creek who is not at all happy.

Tony has taken refuge in the cat carrier, his choice location for a good nap even in more pleasant circumstances than those he has discovered the past couple of days. Yesterday morning, there was some snow on the ground, but both kittens went out and streaked for the hay barn. I didn't see much of them all day, and they certainly weren't sitting on the porch in front of the door as the snow came down. But, by evening, they were relaxed here in the cabin once again and probably assumed that the odd, cold, white stuff we called snow was a temporary aberration. It was not. Although, in this era of climate change, we cannot be sure we will even have a winter, for most of us humans and the animals with whom we, in some way, share this space, the expectation is there. So, when the snow and cold come in the fall—sometimes, as early as the beginning of October—we are not shocked.

I suppose, though, to a big teenaged kitten, almost fully grown but still not a “cat” in maturity or knowledge, the cold, wet, white stuff that was just outside the door was a frightening change in environment. Tony had probably planned on making his usual rounds. First, he would sharpen his claws on the pine board and batten siding of the cabin. Then, he would cross the porch and play with the dangling end of the clothesline. On into the woodshed where he would look around to see if there might be something new there. Finally, it was only to squeeze under the gate and dash to the hay barn. There, he could wrestle with Little's kittens. Tiring of that activity, it would be time to head back to the cabin for some real rest and relaxation and maybe, a bite to eat.

This morning, though, there was more than just a little snow on the porch. Tony and Jick stood there waiting as I opened the door for them. Jick rushed out. Tony reached out a tentative paw, drew back, and retreated. We repeated this exchange several times during the forenoon hours.

Jick, in the meantime, had made that run to the hay barn. I saw him there when I came in after morning chores. And a few hours later, Jick came home, lay on the rug under the table, and began washing away the snow on his paws. Tony watched, and perhaps, he was ashamed of being such a timid kitten. That might have been the reason that this afternoon, when Jick was ready for another outdoor session, Tony followed him out. I didn't see them for an hour or so. Then, Jick was at the door, wanting to come in. When he came, I called Tony, and he tiptoed through the snow from the woodshed to the house. He went to bed in the cat carrier, and I haven't heard from him since.