Anne's Ocicat

story of the month

By Richard W. Jennings, the author of Orwell's Luck
"The Master of Middle American Whimsy"

Porchie, Aubrey's orange cat, a former neighborhood stray, was sitting on the back steps staring at the stars when Reverend Gordon arrived.

He was bearing a gift.

Aubrey was on her computer busily researching invertebrates on drsfostersmith.com.

Invertebrates are the largest group of animals on earth. And right there in Aubrey's room beside her was the smartest of them all, a young Octopus bimaculoides named Sandy.

Sandy was dancing across the rocks inside her marine habitat, and with eight limber legs to use she put on quite a show.

Anne, Aubrey's mother, was in the kitchen frying chicken when the doorbell rang.

She was happily surprised to see the founder of Reverend Gordon's Ranch for Troubled Dachshunds on her front porch.

"It's a long drive from Fosterville, Kansas, to upper Wisconsin," he said. "I almost gave up."

"How wonderful that you persisted," Aubrey's mother said. "Come join me in the kitchen. I'm just making dinner."

"Sure smells good," Reverend Gordon observed, placing a large cardboard box on the coffee table.

"Aubrey!" her mother called. "Come see who's here."

Aubrey, Porchie and Aubrey's mother had recently returned from a working summer vacation at Reverend Gordon's ranch where Aubrey's mother and Reverend Gordon had become fast friends. Aubrey liked him too. She squealed when she recognized him and ran to give him a hug.

Our emotions are strange things. They can change as quickly as room light when a switch is flipped on. In this case what happened with Aubrey, her mother and Reverend Gordon (standing by the sizzling chicken) was a feeling that the three

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of them had always been one happy family.

Aubrey's mother didn't ask Reverend Gordon, "So what brings you to Wisconsin?" What's the point in asking questions to which you already have the answer?

Like a family, they sat at the kitchen table where Aubrey's mother placed dinnerware surrounding bowls of fried chicken, potato salad and a squash casserole rich with cream. There was also a platter of steaming buttered biscuits convenient for cleaning your plate. Each was expected to take as much as they wanted. But no sooner had Reverend Gordon finished saying the blessing than a loud thumping sound came from the living room.

"Oh my goodness!" he exclaimed, pushing his chair away from the table. "I forgot all about the Ocicat!"

Aubrey and her mother exchanged a puzzled glance while Reverend Gordon dashed into the living room. When he returned, he was cradling what appeared to be a baby leopard in his arms.

"I brought this for you, Anne," he explained. "It's really quite rare but someone left it behind after the summer event. He's really so sweet and affectionate, I felt you were the perfect choice."

He placed the little animal in Aubrey's mother's arms. Immediately, the creature jumped up on the table and helped himself to a drumstick.

All three of the dinner companions laughed and they piled their plates with food.

Meanwhile, Porchie, returning from stargazing stopped and stared up at the table.

"Meow," he said.

"Meow," the animal replied, licking his paw.

"They know each other," Reverend Gordon said. "In fact, they became good friends in the cat corral at the ranch this summer." "So he's a cat?" Aubrey's mother asked.

"Not just a cat," Reverend Gordon replied. "An Ocicat."

"What's that?" Aubrey asked. "Part octopus, part cat?"

Reverend Gordon laughed so hard a piece of chicken flew from his mouth onto the kitchen floor where Porchie pounced upon it as if it were a mouse scuttling across the room.

"Let's finish dinner," he suggested, "then I'll explain everything."

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The Ocicat leapt from the table and joined Porchie, nuzzling him like a dog. Soon the two left the room together with Porchie leading the way to show the Ocicat around the house.

"Now this is where I sleep at night," Aubrey heard Porchie explaining. "And here's where I take naps."

As the threesome cleaned up dishes, Aubrey's mother invited Reverend Gordon to stay if he were willing to sleep on the sofa bed in the living room.

"I'd be delighted," he answered.

Later Aubrey overheard him using his cell phone to cancel a reservation at a motel.

As Aubrey's mother put clean sheets on the sofa bed, Reverend Gordon sat down to talk about his present.

"An Ocicat is a new breed much prized by show cat fanciers," he explained. "It's part Abyssinian, part Siamese and part Domestic Shorthair. The result, quite often, resembles a wild African leopard but there's nothing wild about them. In fact, they tend to be outgoing, playful and quite responsive to displays of love. They get along well with children, dogs and other cats. What makes them different from other cats are their sleek, spotted coats that shed very little, requiring a minimal amount of grooming. They're really a wonderful pet for a family. Sadly, however, this little fellow doesn't have a name, although I've been calling him Anne."

Aubrey's mother smiled.

"But if he's a boy, he can't have a girl's name," Aubrey pointed out.

"Is he my cat now?" Aubrey's mother asked.

"Of course he is," Reverend Gordon replied. "If you want him."

"Oh, I want him," she said. "But if he's mine now I'm going to call him Cupid."

With that remark, she gave Reverend Gordon a wink.

The next day, Thursday, was the first day of school. Heidi Nordström, Aubrey's sixth-grade homeroom teacher announced that Friday they'd spend the morning on show-and-tell, so every kid could talk about their summer and get to know each other.

"I hate show-and-tell," Aubrey told her backyard neighbor Bean as they walked from the bus stop. "It's so boring."

"I love it," Bean predictably disagreed. "It's a chance to take my dogs to school."

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Bean had three singing dachshunds and enjoyed any opportunity to show them off.

"Well, if you're going to take your dogs," Aubrey said, "maybe I'll take my cats."

"Cats?" Bean said. "I thought you had just one, the orange one, Poochie,"

"Porchie," Aubrey corrected Bean. "Anyway, my mother has a cat, too. It looks like a baby leopard."

"Well, butter my biscuit and call me Doofus," Bean replied. "I had no idea."

"Just because I like you Bean doesn't mean I tell you everything," Aubrey said.

"You like me?" Bean asked. "I thought you hated me."

"That was a long time ago," Aubrey explained. "Things change."

Bean skipped along the sidewalk the rest of the way home.

"You still take some getting used to," Aubrey added.

Reverend Gordon was still at the house when Aubrey arrived.

"Hi, sweetheart," he greeted her. "How was your day?"

"The question is," Aubrey replied, showing wisdom beyond her years, "how was yours?"

Aubrey's mother laughed aloud as she tried to hide her blushing from Aubrey's view.

Aubrey simply grinned.

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