

The City of Cats and the City of People

Cat lover Felicity Lyons remembers a CATalytic domestic arrangement

“The city of cats and the city of people exist one inside the other, but they are not the same city”
Italo Calvino

In this story, Felicity Lyons recounts some of the difficulties experienced by urban animals specifically, mixing the human and felines. It concerns two people moving in together, each with their own beloved cats, and the humans' dilemma of trying to sustain their relationship, through bitter and protracted feline fistcuffs.

In Felicity's words:

As a single person living on my own in Newtown and with three cats, I guess I could be described as perhaps a loner, who has some kind of cat thing going on. True, 'the catz' and I do hang out together domestically: we often listen to music or watch TV together and sitting in the garden is another favourite collective past-time. I confess that most nights of the week they do sleep on the bed. Nonetheless, I am a cat owner that recognises distinctions between the city of humans and that of cats, as Calvino suggests in the aforementioned quote.

My life had been pretty harmonious, living on my own with four adored cats so when I chanced upon a charming, single guy, I'd met my match. Even better, he was a cat lover too—a package deal with two cats of his own. Cat-Man and I hit it off straight away and, within weeks, we decided to move in together. It was a big decision planning our new life and our proposed moggy mansion. Two humans and six cats living under one roof, think about the implications of this intended, blended, cat-loving family.

Time and distance has made me realise that our best plans were doomed. For starters, moving the cats from our previous abodes to our new residence took a great deal of organisation. A mini bus was hired for the haul and additional cat cages were secured from friends to load half a dozen cats onto the bus. I estimate we loaded 50 kilos of cat on that bus - cat supplies, toys, bedding—everything to make a happy home for us all. So with cats in cages safely buckled into seat belts, it was time for us to hit the road. It was a logistical nightmare and literally and aurally caused an up-roar. As soon as the engine turned over the six cats wailed their displeasure and continued, loud and clear, throughout the journey. Collectively, their caterwauling managed to create a wall of sound that reverberated around that mini bus and rattled our brains. Despite all this noise, Cat-Couple drove the puss-in-bus, without speaking to our house of intended bliss.

Unfortunately, things did not improve once we reached our destination. Unloading the cats from the bus to the house was an open-air broadcast to inform the neighbours that 'the animals' had moved in next door. Inside the house, the yowling opera reached fever pitch and no amount of cuddling, coddling or coaxing would silence our brood of frightened felines.

Drastic action was required so it was decided that in the short term, at least for the night, the cats' accommodation arrangements would be strategically based on segregation. My cats upstairs, his downstairs—with refreshments and bathroom facilities provided on each level of the house. However, a major obstacle to the success of this plan was that sleeping arrangements for the humans was not based on the

same segregation model. In the wee hours of the night, physical and vocal disputes ensued between the felines, as his sought out their bed rights, and mine seeking similar nocturnal pleasures. We were woken to hissing, spitting, fangs snapping, claws flaying and fur flying around, making the house resemble a cotton plantation battered by a storm.

Over time, a pattern developed between the humans and the cats in the household. Day and night forays and fracas occurred between the cats. There were bouts of biffing, head butting and back arching on this unintentional battlefield. Tactical responses and retaliations on behalf of His and Her felines ensued.

Every altercation resulted in the humans leaping in the air with fright and attempts were made to separate the brawling parties. And, in time, feelings of angst between the cats spilled out and seeped into the human relationship.

Visitors to our house were typically divided between being enthralled or appalled with our living arrangements, their judgements varied according to their own pet preferences. Cat lovers took to us and our clowder of cats, while dog lovers took to the front door, tails firmly tucked in fright.

Our dreams of setting up a fun house with loving felines eroded. Our intended 'love-nest' turned into a house-of-horrors—too many cats and two people not relating. Something had to give—someone or something had to go. I was catatonic. My sleep and nerves were shot to pieces because of the stresses of this cataclysmic living arrangement. But I'll stop being catachrestic* here.

The obvious solution was for the humans to move out and live their lives separately, each with their respective cats. However, as is the case with matters of the heart, sometimes 'the obvious' gets overlooked, or ignored. As fate would have it, Cat-Man decided to leave the house as a solo player - no longer my Cat-Man, no longer a Cat-Man. He left all the cats behind with me and I became their sole carer.

Since the ex-human-cat lover and I parted company, the number of cats in my company has reduced to three due to natural causes. It would be a mistake to assume that my life is back to where I commenced this story - living alone and with my cats in Newtown. On the contrary, my life is very different now. I learnt a lot about the city of humans and the city of cats through my experience and, this includes the following tip from me to you:



“Two humans and six cats living under one roof, think about the implications of this intended, blended, cat-loving family.”

If intending to set up a household of people with lots of cats, visit the Cat Care Society <http://www.catcaresociety.org/social.htm> for information regarding 'Feline Social Behaviour and Aggressive Problems Between Family Cats' - the cats will love you for it and, this information may save your human relationship too! A good resource for human behaviour and aggression problems would be www.relationships.com.au

Good luck and happy city living one and all.

*catachesis - misuse or strained use of words



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