

### Fickle feline friends forever

adapted from an article by **Rowan Pelling**

1 "Faithless trollop!", yelled my husband from the window. I would have flushed red, if his gaze weren't fixed grimly on the next-door garden. I immediately knew exactly what scandalous scene was unfolding there. Our golden-red Maine Coon cat, Aubrey, had clearly been caught sidling out of our elderly neighbour's house.



2 There, doubtless, she had been employing her gamut of gullible human seduction techniques: rubbing her silky-soft fur against Gladys's naked calves, fixing her amber eyes in wide, hypnotic stare and purring at a frequency guaranteed to activate dopamine and other feel-good chemicals in the brain. A routine that's inevitably rewarded with slices of chicken or ham (too rich for a cat fed mostly on dried food) that are then regurgitated all over our quilt. Such are the reliable joys of cat ownership.

3 So this week's announcement that cats are more autonomous than dogs and don't suffer separation anxiety when parted from their owners seems to spring straight from the School of the Bleedin' Obvious — although the study actually came courtesy of the school of Veterinary Behavioural Medicine at the University of Lincoln.

4 Every cat lover knows that you don't own cats so much as enable them. True, you might lay down some cash for your feline friend, but you'd be wise to think of it as a transfer fee — or a deposit on their future 27: you provide an abode and they graciously accept to share some of it with you (though woe betide the human who thinks they have first claim on the chairs or beds), until they find somewhere more comfortable down the street.

5 Eight cats have passed through our house in 20 years of marriage and they've all been studies in treachery. Our first Maine Coon, Wavell, wandered for miles whenever an east wind blew, his thick red tail held aloft like a pennant. People would phone us from all corners of Cambridge, saying they'd found our cat plaintively mewing at their front door. His cousin Minerva cared for no one, slept outside and stalked the street's back gardens like a vicious wraith, seeking winged things to murder.

6 I can only conclude we cat-owners actively thrive on regular doses of rejection — rather like those ardent Romeos who redouble their amorous efforts when treated cruelly. We are pathetically grateful that they choose

to spend any time with us when they could naff off entirely. The freedom cats symbolise is a freedom we envy: a little loosening of the ties that bind. Why live in one house, when you could live in 10? Why eat one dinner when you could have a dozen?

- 7 Dogs, by contrast, are so containable. Pen a hound in your garden and you become aware of how easily your own movements can be curtailed, how limited life can be. But when your cat wanders, it reminds you of the endless adventures that await those who travel.

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