

## Plato's Republic

We had been wanting a kitten for ages when a friend turned up with a tiny ginger tom rescued from an abandoned litter. We called him Plato. He was bad tempered from the start. Unpredictable and vindictive, he could bear a grudge for days.

I was weeding in the front garden one day. Plato, still a kitten, was chasing and murdering butterflies. The neighbourhood kids were cycling up and down.

"Is that your cat?" one asked.

"Yes". I smiled indulgently.

"He chases us. We hate him." They sped off.

A minute later a woman walked by with two magnificent pedigree cats on leads.

"Oh, there's that little kitten who comes into our garden to play!"

Plato scampered up to a freshly dug patch of earth at her feet, squatted and deposited a foul-smelling puddle of poo. Retching, she dragged her cats away.

Plato looked malevolent and smug. He'd had a good day.

As in any abusive relationship, there were moments of apparent love and affection. He would allow us to pet him for a while, but at a stroke his eyes would cross maniacally, his ears flatten, and the red mist would descend. He would clamp his whole body to an arm or leg, biting and gouging with his back legs. Our limbs were scarred and lacerated like self-harmers.

Once we had to rescue a friend who was watching TV when Plato decided to 'play'. We heard shouts for help and found him whimpering, folded like a foetus into an armchair, with the cat underneath waiting to sink his teeth into any piece of flesh that poked over the edge.

We decided that Plato must be neutered. It took three of us to wrestle him into the cat basket. We picked him up later that day and drew lots to decide who would open the basket

and let him out. We knew we were in for it when he sat with his face to the wall, the back of his neck bristling with menace. Our nerves frazzled with suspense. Nothing. Perhaps the snip had tamed him? He waited until we went to bed that night, prowled into the bedroom and reaching under the duvet from the bottom of the bed, he raked his claws backwards and forwards ripping at the soles of our feet.

We have owned and met many other cats since. My sister had a cat that for a time brought her tropical fish (presumably until the owners of the fish noticed and put a lid on the tank); another hunted worms and on one memorable occasion proudly presented her with a potato. A friend's cat had a striking white face and black fur round one eye. It would run up her hessian wallpaper and hang in a corner like a Clockwork Orange spider. But none of these achieved the notoriety that Plato did, or inspired such undeserved devotion.