

Childless Cat Lady

Bernard preferred dogs. He didn't own one when we first met on account of his building's 'No Pets' policy, but he had grown up with dogs—rescues his mum took in and looked after in his childhood home near Stonehenge. Our pets... they're what we talked about and bonded over on our first date.

Bernard preferred dogs, but he didn't mind my Cleo. She mostly kept to herself when he started coming round and rarely made herself known. Cats are good like that. They're not all in your face begging for tummy rubs every moment of the day. She had her space and I had mine. It helped that my space was a four-bed detached with a spacious garden. More than enough room for the two of us. Three, counting Bernard.

Six months after we started dating, Bernard moved in. He was spending so much time at my place, it seemed a waste for him to keep paying rent on his flat in Watford's town centre. Besides, my house was paid for in full. One of the perks of running an online marketing business that brought in more passive income each month than what Bernard earned in a year as a primary school teacher. Bernard preferred dogs, but he quickly warmed to the idea of cohabitating with a cat when he learnt he could live with me rent (and mortgage) free.

One winter morning, Cleo brought home two friends. Well, at least that's what I told Bernard. I happened upon two strays while out walking on the common. The overnight temperature had dropped to below freezing. Frost clung thick on blades of grass. Had I not brought them home, Charlie and Clara would've frozen to death for sure.

Bernard groaned. 'Three cats? Isn't that too many?'

'Three is perfectly normal.'

Clara gave birth two weeks later to four gorgeous kittens. I didn't have the heart to re-home Clara and Charlie's babies. Cooper, Carter, Calista, and Colton needed to stay together—as siblings should. By this time, my business was bringing in close to six figures every month. Bernard preferred dogs, but he didn't mind living with seven cats when I told him he could quit teaching for good and become a man of leisure. He spent most of his days on the golf course perfecting his swing.

We acquired cats eight and nine shortly after we were married and purely by luck. The Garfields next door had asked us to look after their pets while they visited their daughter in New Zealand. Then the pandemic hit, and they were stranded for eight months. It was only natural for their cats to bond with me in their absence. Short of divorcing me, Bernard didn't have the choice but to welcome Luna and Lucy into our lives. Bernard preferred dogs, but the mere thought of

having to go back to teaching a bunch of undisciplined children was all it took for him to accept our two new housemates.

Speaking of children, Bernard and I tried for a family. But after four failed pregnancies and a whole lot of heartache, Dr Catchpole suggested we consider adopting. I took her advice to heart and adopted Bella, Byron, and Binks from the local shelter without consulting Bernard.

Bernard preferred dogs, and it soon became clear that he preferred Karen, a divorcée he'd met on the golf course, over me. Karen lived alone in a two-bed bungalow with her three Irish setters next to the River Chess. Her bed, apparently, was big enough for the five of them.

I eventually sold my four-bed and moved into the manor house on top of North Hill. Me and my twenty feline friends have settled in quite nicely, I must say. The view of the Chess Valley from my dining room window is nothing short of breathtaking.

I'm happy with the way my life turned out.

Really, I am.