

The Art of Feline Diplomacy

By Richard Corfield

It didn't take long for Uno to get her paws under the table. Deploying charm and a head butting degree of true-grit in equal measure she has inserted herself into the life of the family as though she has always been a part of it.



I mentioned in my first story about Uno (*Pet Birman of the Year Runner-Up story, Winter 2013. Ed.*) that as soon as she came to us she had only two speeds: ahead-full and fully-asleep. This is still the case, although she no longer stops mid-pelt and flops over on her side for an emergency catnap so intense she looks as though she's just been injected with an industrial-sized dose of scopolamine. She slows now, then sits, then lies, then dozes and for a few precious minutes peace settles over the household like snow blanketing woodland at dusk.

She spent the first two weeks assessing the opposition in the form of the other cats. It was interesting to watch.



With Stanley – our six-and-a-half kilo answer to a feline Arnold Schwarzenegger – she openly flirted, jumping forward, then leaping stiff-legged backwards when he came in her direction, and batting him on the nose with her paw.

Stanley is a simple soul, and despite the fact that he long ago had his encounter with reproductive destiny, he is no more capable of ignoring an attractive young lady's charms than any other male of whatever species. It is comical now to watch him allow her to nip morsels of food from under his mighty slaving jaws, and any day now I expect to wake up and find that Uno has managed to insert a ring through his nose.

Errol, our ageing Birman male, was a different proposition. Since he is no longer troubled by memories of unrequited ardour, Uno has had to resort to a different page of her mind-control hymn book. She seems to have deduced that simple physical exhaustion is the best answer for Errol, coupled with deftly



administered does of coquettish Daddy's Girl. She jumps on his head, then sweeps his feet from under him. Then she sits on him and then she washes him. Simple. Errol is visibly bemused by the fact that a unpredictable and almost unmanageably active presence has arrived to ripple the tranquil autumn waters of his life, and even more mystified to find that it bears more than

a passing resemblance to the young cat he used to see reflected in his drinking water. Yet, Errol tolerates Uno with good grace and is often to be found lumbering after her in a game of cat and mouse that Uno visibly slows down to accommodate him. With his arthritic joints this generally means that by the time he has cranked himself into motion Uno has already orbited the garden three times and stopped for a bite to eat. But there is tolerance there and perhaps even affection.

I was consumed for months by guilt that I was betraying Errol by getting another Birman. I don't feel quite so bad now.



But with our two tortoiseshell females, ah, that is another story. Wyndham, our dark tortoiseshell, is aloof at the best of times, and after firing a couple of warning biffs across Uno's nose with her narrow, agile, front paws – each of which sports enough cutting equipment to perform simultaneous brain surgery on a dozen three-headed hydras – Uno got the message and has maintained a respectful distance. This is not to say that they do not play with each other. They do and it is good-natured.

With Dotty, our light coloured tortie, acceptance is still coming – with all the alacrity of a glacier grinding across the North German Plain at the start of the last ice age. Dotty was the madame of the household and is less than impressed by the arrival of an interloper. When they confront each other it is invariably accompanied by a noise like a



blunt electric saw cutting though the steel of a rusty pressure cooker. Something between a growl and hiss with subsonic undertones that have Uno backing away faster than a departing tube train with her belly flat to the floor and an expression of fawning sycophancy plastered across her beautiful face.

I have a feeling that I am watching one of the great philosophical conflicts when I see these two, when an irresistible force meets an immovable



For Audrey, With love

object. I suspect that some form of compromise will be reached, otherwise the fabric of our universe will be sorely tested as it tries to accommodate two such mighty egos.

One thing is for sure. There are no feline favourites in this household. All are loved equally. It remains to be seen whether such a universal emollient will heal the scars of Dotty's wounded pride.

Meeet Oscar and Hugo, two new arrivals in our household. We already have two other Birmans, Leo and Archie, but we had room for more so we had a look on the Welfare website and Angie also suggested our new boys as they were in need of a home and needed to be homed together.

We don't know too much about their past except that their owner died suddenly. Oscar is 11 years old and a cream point and Hugo (who was Nemo but that is no-one in Latin so we had to change that) is a lilac point, 7 years old.

Pet Birman Awards

2013 Entrants

OSCAR & HUGO

Oscar is quite a character and he has an exceptionally LOUD VOICE, probably because he is slightly deaf. He was understandably unsettled so has been a little assertive towards the others – including his chum Hugo but all he does is hiss or meow in their faces! He has chased Leo and Archie but they can get out of his way so it never came to blows.

Oscar cannot jump as he has a hip problem, no one knows the cause but before he came to us he was x-rayed so we know it's not a major problem. He can run around and play and he has a technique for getting onto chairs, sofas and our quite high bed; he uses his strong front legs and claws his way up. He is very determined about it too. In fact he is very determined about most things and is using his LOUD MEOW to train us to do his bidding.

When he's allowed outside we have a tree that he will be able to climb, as part of the trunk split away and is on a slope up from the ground so Oscar will simply be able to walk up it.



HUGO

Hugo is a real softie and follows us about to be stroked; he loves to come to bed with us and curls up in the crook of your arm. He gives you little licks too. He has a really thick coat so it's good that he has been well trained and loves being groomed, even his tummy. Both cats had a good look around their new home of course and Hugo stood in the fire grate looking up the chimney for some while.



OSCAR

When Oscar and Hugo were at the cattery before homing they slept in igloo beds so we bought them one each. They used one once but now spurn them in favour of armchairs and sofas - typical!

It is lovely to think these charming boys have a home again and they will be with us for the rest of their (hopefully long) lives. And who really cares about the mountain of fur all over the floor!

Marian Chapman

