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BOOK EXTRACT

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JULIA BRADBURY *TELEVISION PRESENTER*

They say a dog needs a master, but Lotte doesn't have one; she has many and they are mostly mistresses. A black Miniature Schnauzer, she was bought principally for my nephew, Jack, as an easygoing hound. Schnauzers are famously even-tempered and they don't moult. Jack wanted one because of a cartoon dog called Lotte that he'd fallen for. She's a funny, scatty little thing, and because we as a family are often on the move she stays with all of us at some time or another. She has her own little routine in each home - with Mum and Dad she has a doggy beanbag that she loves.

When she's staying with me she always escapes from the garden and heads out to run wild through the neighbours' gardens. She doesn't have the standard Schnauzer haircut (a little 'man-beard') - instead she sports a shaggy do. The women in the family are of Greek descent and so we've all got thick, wildish hair - just like her!

JO BRAND *COMEDIENNE*

I grew up with cats, we always had one - and since we lived in fairly rural places I think I can say our cats had a good life. Me and my brothers took ownership of one or other as they came, and sometimes went, but always it was my mum who dealt with the tins or cooking up some seriously smelly 'titbit' from the butcher.

After a long cat-free break we have a feline presence in our house, and in ever increasing numbers - currently four, one with a brood, who were not really invited or expected, but we've found them all 'good homes'.

Their individual personalities are an absorbing distraction from household chores, answering e-mails and contemplating my navel. I am fond of them all. I admire their self-possession and self-assurance, from total indifference to suddenly seeking my undivided attention - sounds a bit like my husband! Make that five 'cats' then, and my children are much the same, so make that seven!

I'm a martyr to the culinary predilections of my entire household!

No doubt I will have cats well into my dotage - the two of us will take off with a caravan in tow, park up on the hardcore of some convenient poet or wit and enjoy a little luxuriant laziness - well, that's my fantasy. Long Live Cats!

GYLES BRANDRETH

*WRITER, BROADCASTER
& FORMER MP*

Many years ago we had two cats, Oscar and Thornton. (Oscar was wild; Thornton was worse.) Oscar ate Spot, our children's beautiful pet goldfish, and at the memorial service (we couldn't have a funeral: there were no mortal remains - Oscar scoffed the lot) I recited this poem, now officially the Shortest Poem in English Literature. It is called "Ode to a Late Lamented Goldfish". (The title is longer than the poem. Read it slowly. It rhymes. It is a traditional poem. And now, I am proud to say, regarded as a bit of a classic.) Here it is - "Ode to a Late Lamented Goldfish" by Gyles Brandreth:

O
Wet
Pet!

GEOFF CAPES

*FORMER BRITISH SHOT-PUT CHAMPION
& FORMER WINNER OF 'THE WORLD'S
STRONGEST MAN'*

My favourite pets are my budgerigars, as I compete at shows throughout the country and it keeps my competitive instinct alive. I would, however, keep them as pets, as I think that birds are wonderful and there are so many different colours to look at now whereas the original colour was just green.

JOHN CHALLIS

ACTOR

Our cat, Fluffy. When we arrived at our current home, eleven years ago, we inherited seven farm cats! Fluffy is the daughter of a feral black/orange/white mother and a visiting grey father. She had one litter of her own, six kittens, and she would lead them through the long grass in a 'crocodile' line from one safe place to another. She has an enormous long tail and very furry black legs with black 'boots' and is always trailing leaves and brambles.

Her cousin, Mortimer, a black and white tom, catches mice and small rabbits and Fluffy will often do a flying bypass and snatch the kill from his mouth.

When she was young Fluffy would not come anywhere near us or the house, but now she is older she wanders into the kitchen and rolls over by the Aga. But she will not let us touch her. Her two daughters, whom we gave to one family in the village and another right down in Dorset, were both given the name Abby - and, coincidentally, a son was called Wiggy - all named after Fluffy's home.

Fluffy gives us so much pleasure and is always somewhere nearby with Mortimer when we are in the garden. Long may they both hunt and be happy!