



Are Cats People?

My family loves cats. I didn't grow up with this love, preferring dogs, as did my mother, who wouldn't allow a cat on the premises. But my husband grew up in a home with cats, and over the years my children acquired a few—all of whom I came to love. We still have two, Calvin, now 13 (his brother, Hobbes, unfortunately, is gone) and Kitty, 10. (Yes, that's her unimaginative name!)

While researching old books for other content, I came across the following little piece of wit, an essay asking, "Are Cats People?" and read it right away. I think you'll agree its humor is worth sharing. For the love of cats!

Enjoy,

Linore Rose Burkard



Are Cats People?

Oliver Herford

If a fool be sometimes an angel unawares, may not a foolish query be a momentous question in disguise? For example, the old riddle: "Why is a hen?" which is thought by many people to be the silliest question ever asked, is in reality the most profound. It is the riddle of existence. It has an answer, to be sure, but though all the wisest men and women in the world *and* Mr. H. G. Wells have tried to guess it, the riddle "Why is a hen?" has never been answered and never will be. So, too, the question: "Are Cats People?" seemingly so trivial, may be, under certain conditions, a question of vital importance.

Suppose, now, a rich man dies, leaving all^[52] his money to his eldest son, with the proviso that a certain portion of it shall be spent in the maintenance of his household as it then existed, all its members to remain under his roof, and receive the same comfort, attention, or remuneration they had received in his (the testator's) lifetime. Then suppose the son, on coming into his money, and being a hater of cats, made haste to rid himself of a feline pet that had lived in the family from early kittenhood, and had been an especial favorite of his father's.

Thereupon, the second son, being a lover of cats and no hater of money, sues for possession of the estate on the ground that his brother has failed to carry out the provisions of his father's will, in refusing to maintain the household cat.

The decision of the case depends entirely on the social status of the cat.

Shall the cat be considered as a member of the household? What constitutes a household anyway?

The definition of "Household" in the^[53] Standard Dictionary is as follows: "*A number of persons living under the same roof.*"

If cats are people, then the cat in question is a person and a member of the household, and for failing to maintain her and provide her with the comfort and attention to which she has been used, the eldest son loses his inheritance. Having demonstrated that the question "Are Cats People?" is anything but a trivial one, I now propose a court of inquiry, to settle once for all and forever, the social status of *felis domesticus*.

And I propose for the office of judge of that court—myself!

In seconding the proposal and appointing myself judge of the court, I have been careful to follow political precedent by taking no account whatever of any qualifications I may or may not have for the office.

For witnesses, I summon (from wherever they may be) two great shades, to wit: King Solomon, the wisest man of his day, and Noah Webster, the wordiest.

And I say to Mr. Webster, “Mr. Webster, what are the common terms used to designate a domestic feline whose Christian name chances to be unknown to the speaker?” and Mr. Webster answers without a moment’s hesitation:

“Cat, puss, pussy and pussy-cat.”

“And what is the grammatical definition of the above terms?”

“They are called nouns.”

“And what, Mr. Webster, is the accepted definition of a noun?”

“A noun is the name of a person, place or thing.”

“Kindly define the word ‘place’.”

“A particular locality.”

“And ‘thing’.”

“An inanimate object.”

“That will do, Mr. Webster.”

So, according to Mr. Noah Webster, the entity for which the noun cat stands, must, if not a person, be a locality or an inanimate object!

A cat is surely not a locality, and as for[55] being an inanimate object, her chance of avoiding such a condition is nine times better even than a king’s.

Then a cat *must* be a person.

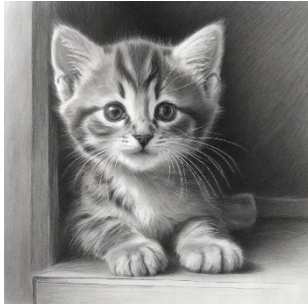
Suppose we consult King Solomon.

In the Book of Proverbs, Chapter XXX, verse 26, Solomon says: “The coneys are but a feeble folk, yet they make their houses in the rocks.”

A coney is a kind of rabbit; folk, according to Mr. Webster, only another word for people.

That settles it! If the rabbits are people, cats are people. Long lives to the cat!

Oliver Herford, *Neither Here Nor There*, 1922



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