

The Mouse and the Cat: A Beast Fable

by Daniel Curzon

"I just want to be your friend," said Pussy. She looked most sincere, her yellow eyes the very picture of friendliness. She was lying outside Millie Mouse's home, which was a hole in the wall of a condo in San Francisco.

"Oh, I don't think so," said Millie Mouse. "I've heard that you want to eat mice."

Pussy's eyes narrowed, her dark, luxurious fur quivering on her back. "How can you say such a thing! It's not true."

Millie kept her distance. She had new babies to look after, tucked away in some shredded newspaper in the back. She was a single mother now, her husband having gone out one day and never having returned.

"Just come out for a minute or two," Pussy said. "We can romp together. It will be great fun. I promise. You can ride on my back."

Millie Mouse moved a step closer to the opening. Pussy looked very big but also very friendly. Her tail was snapping back and forth. A chill ran down Millie's back. She couldn't quite put a name to it, but she sensed a problem with Pussy. "I think I will stay inside," she said.

"But why?" Pussy cried. "Just because I'm a cat you don't think I'd . . . ?"

"I've heard rumors, and they weren't very complimentary."

"Rumors? What sort of rumors?"

"Of cats catching mice and dispatching them."

"That's a lie. We're not all the same! I'm surprised at you, Millie, for falling for such nonsense. Surely you aren't stereotyping me!"

Millie felt a wave of guilt wash over her. What if she was wrong? She might miss out on a fine romp, a ride on Pussy's back, and possibly even a new friend. All because she had failed to take into consideration Pussy's individuality. She had attended a Sensitivity Training Session on just such matters a few weeks earlier at the Mice for Ralph Nader Meeting in Berkeley.

Millie crept closer to the opening. "How do I know that you won't eat me? You're so much bigger than I am," she said.

"How will the world ever get better if we creatures don't learn to trust each other," Pussy said. "Calling each other names and thinking the worst of others is the cause of most of the world's problems. I'm just lonely and rather unhappy living here in this condo without much to do. I can't read, and the owner won't let me out. He's not here half the time, and when he is he just strokes me a little bit and then goes to sleep. I sleep too much myself, and it's making me lose the energy and drive I had as a kitten, which wasn't that long ago! Please, Millie, throw off the old prejudices and categorizing

and let's start a brand new world in which cats and mice can live together in harmony and peace!" Pussy held out her paw in the most pitiful of manners.

Millie hesitated slightly. "So you swear then that you won't eat me if I come out there?"

"On my mother's grave!" Pussy declared.

"I'm so sorry I ever doubted you. It was small-minded and petty and terribly, terribly wrong of me to misjudge you. Can you ever forgive me?" Millie drew a big breath and scampered through the hole toward the waiting cat.

Pussy kept her promise. She didn't eat Millie Mouse. She just bit her and batted her around until she was dead and left the body for Millie's babies to find.

MORAL: Modern children's books are crap.

