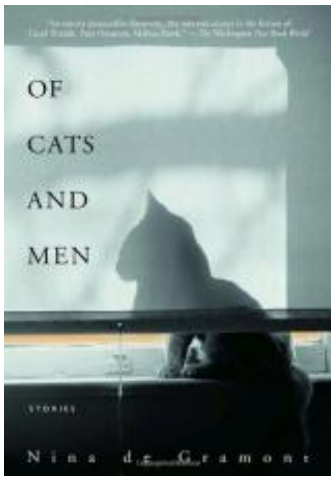
ReadingGroupGuides
The online community for reading groups

Of Cats and Men

by



About the Book

Haughty Bengals, faithful Maine coons, and feral strays: These are the haunting familiars that animate Nina De Gramont's critically acclaimed debut collection of short fiction. Prowling through every story, these enigmatic creatures expose the hidden fears and passions of the female heart, and illuminate the profound truths of men and love.

A young woman finds two dark surprises in her home: a magpie dismembered by her mischievous cat, and an unsettling glimpse of her fiancé?s secret inclinations?

A pregnant housewife quietly suffers a visit from her troubled brother-in-law while her hidden anger comes to life in the suddenly hostile behavior of her docile house cat?

A frustrated newlywed clings to the last vestige of her well-appointed upbringing--a pampered Himalayan high point--until a rangy stray cat shows her the true meaning of marriage?

As clever, finessed, and keen as the feline disposition it celebrates, **Of Cats and Men** marks the arrival of an exciting new voice in fiction.

Discussion Guide

1. In the story "By His Wild Lone," Mia says, "How much of a pet can a cat really be? Remember how the cat walks? 'Through the Wet Wild Woods, waving his wild tale, and walking by his wild lone.' That's the thing. Cats will accept what comfort they can get, but when it comes down to it, they'll always take care of themselves." On the whole, does this statement apply to the cats in the stories? What about the men and women?

2. After discovering that her brother-in-law has let her cat run away in "The Closest Place," Tessa says to her husband,

Ben, "If we were a pride of lions or a pack of wolves, we'd devour him. We'd fall on him and destroy him. Tear him from limb to limb for the good of the pack. The protection of the family." Are there other stories in **Of Cats and Men** in which a character expresses similarly intense feelings of family loyalty and protectiveness?

3. In both "Scuffling" and "The Closest Place," something happens to a feline character that mirrors what a human character desires. What are these incidents and what do they indicate about the characters' ability to control the behavior of cats versus people?

4. In "The Wedding Bed," Camille, a graduate student from a wealthy, sophisticated, upper middle class family, describes her Persian cat Penny as a "luxury," and says of her husband, who works as a roofer, "Joe could live anywhere. He would be just as happy inside the van, with the yellow cat." Yet, Camille sets out to "court" the stray. Is Camille's attempt to befriend the yellow cat an effort to compensate for feelings toward Joe? Is Camille aware of the similarity between her father's disparaging remarks about her husband and the alley cat? Do you think these attitudes influence her feelings and behavior?

5. Several of the stories revolve around an outsider (human or feline) who significantly alters the dynamic between a couple. In which stories does this happen? In each of these stories, is there an existing flaw in the relationship that is magnified or is it a case of a new element being introduced?

Author Bio

n/a

Critical Praise

"The author weaves cats into each story so deftly that they function as both poetic figures and complex characters."

Of Cats and Men

by

Publication Date: September 28, 2012
Paperback: 244 pages
Publisher: The Dial Press and Bantam Dell Publishing
ISBN-10: 0385335032
ISBN-13: 9780385335034