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Betrayal

by Harold Pinter

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Off the Cuff

Pets-R-Us

Pets seem to fill a basic need for some individuals and the type of pet a person picks is often indicative of their personalities. In some cases it may be a mother complex — that feeling of having someone, or in this case, something dependent on you — that makes someone a pet lover.

For others, it is a means of seeking status. The short-lived Hollywood fad of stocking one's swimming pool with young piranhas would be an excellent example of this. It's a shame the habit was discontinued so quickly, since it would have eventually succeeded in thinning out the less talented people and would have improved the quality of future motion picture entertainment.

Unfortunately, most University students are unable to have a pet while they are going to school: University housing and off-campus landlords tend to balk at the thought. But students will continue to smuggle such furry, feathered or finned contraband into their abode as long as Kitty Litter, birdseed and plastic shipwreck dioramas are available in stores. And students must use care in their choices — some animals are simply not amenable to the restricted living arrangements that coincide with being either a student or a jail inmate.

For example, puppies are cute and cuddly, and nearly as intelligent as most houseplants, but they need lots of space and attention and discipline. Eventually this delightful little creature will grow up to be that most obnoxious of animals — a dog. Dogs will chew on anything, including shoes, furniture, draperies and the occasional visitor. As the dog grows older it will develop an indescribably hideous flatulence problem which the animal will use to strategically ruin your every romantic moment by rendering the air unbreathable.

On the other hand, cats require very little care. That may well be what causes many people to dislike them with such intensity.

Cats are dishearteningly indepen-

dent. No person has ever truly owned a cat. Indeed, a cat's attitude seems to be that they are doing you a favor by allowing you to feed them and that you in turn, are doing them a grave disservice by not acknowledging their natural superiority.

Felines also attempt to maintain an aura of aloof dignity. This is totally abandoned when they come into contact with catnip. These otherwise haughty creatures will come unglued at the slightest scent of the stuff. And afterwards they act as if the undignified act had never taken place. It is strangely reminiscent of the relationship between alcohol and our national legislators.

Birds are another popular pet. They require much less space and care than cats and dogs do, but there are also drawbacks to keeping birds as pets. Birds are noisy. Cockatoos have raised sheer obnoxiousness to an art form. Likewise, no matter what the salesperson told you, your parrot will adamantly refuse to learn any words, with the sole exception of those you uttered once while attempting to open a stubborn bottle of beer. The bird will shriek those words loudly and clearly the first time your elderly aunt with heart trouble drops in for a visit.

A near perfect pet is a fish. They are quiet, they don't choke on furballs, they rarely smell (except when you forget to change their water at least once a year), they don't beg for table scraps, and they don't shed hyperallergic hairs.

Turtles are another easy pet to maintain. They are docile and unobtrusive, but they are also about as interesting as a piece of plywood.

Of course, there are pets of a more uncommon nature. However, these pets are not recommended for collegiate living. Pets such as lizards and snakes are two species that fall into this category.

While very interesting to watch and handle, reptiles will never waste a moment trying to find a way out of their terrarium. They will stay hidden until late

into the cold, dark night when they will venture out in search of the first warm body they can find to slither up next to. Not a very pleasant thought if yours is the warm body found.

Monkeys are another uncommon pet, and there's a good reason for that. Monkeys, especially spider monkeys from South America, are simian Q-ships. These playful and adorable little creatures have a disposition about as pleasant as a Bengal tiger with hemorrhoids, and the teeth to match. Often they will look for any opportunity to qualify you for the nickname "three fingers."

Tarantulas are another pet without a large following — surprised? Tarantulas are usually brought home by small children and proudly exhibited to their mothers, who immediately beat them — the tarantulas, not the kids — to death with a baseball bat.

Personally, I take a more pragmatic view of pets. Let's face it, certain creatures are going to be with us whether we like it or not so we might as well make them feel at home.

Cockroaches are a prime example; they are indestructible. It has been determined that cockroaches are capable of surviving a nuclear war. Now doesn't that make you feel a little bit silly and impotent for chasing them around with a can of Raid?

Cock roaches are also the fastest things on earth. As soon as they perceive a threat to their very existence (i.e. descending footwear) they attain speeds heretofore only dreamed possible by Albert Einstein. The silence of their movement can only be explained by the fact that they go from standing still to light-speed without bothering to inform the sound barrier on their way through it. And since nothing can be done to eliminate them, I hereby call for their adoption as the official pet of the collegian.

My motto has always been: if you can't beat 'em, feed 'em.

— TOM JEFFRIES

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Spectrum

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