



No Pets Allowed
Cummings, Monette A.

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I CAN'T tell anyone about it. In the first place, they'd never believe me. And, if they did, I'd probably be punished for having her. Because we aren't allowed to have pets of any kind.

It wouldn't have happened, if they hadn't sent me way out there to work. But, you see, there are so many things I can't do.

I remember the day the Chief of Vocation took me before the council.

"I've tried him on a dozen things," he reported. People always talk about me as if I can't understand what they mean. But I'm really not *that* dumb.

"There doesn't seem to be a thing he can do," the Chief went on. "Actually, his intelligence seems to be no greater than that which we believe our ancestors had, back in the twentieth century."

"As bad as that?" observed one of the council members. "You do have a problem."

"But we must find something for him to do," said another. "We can't have an idle person in the State. It's unthinkable."

"But what?" asked the Chief. "He's utterly incapable of running any of the machines. I've tried to teach him. The only things he can do, are already being done much better by robots."

There was a long silence, broken at last by one little, old council member.

"I have it," he cried. "The very thing. We'll make him guard of the Treasure."

"But there's no need of a guard. No one will touch the Treasure without permission. We haven't had a dishonest person in the State for more than three thousand years."

"That's it, exactly. There aren't any dishonest people, so there won't be anything for him to do. But we will have solved the problem of his idleness."

"It might be a solution," said the Chief. "At least, a temporary one. I suppose we will have to find something else later on. But this will give us time to look for something."

So I became guard of the Treasure. With a badge. And nothing to do—unless you count watching the Key. The gates were kept locked, just as they were in the old days, but the large Key hung beside them. Of course, no one wanted to bother carrying it around. It was too heavy. The only ones who ever used it, anyway, were members of the council.

As the man said, we haven't had a dishonest person in the State for thousands of years. Even I know that much.

Of course, this left me with lots of time on my hands. That's how I happened to get her in the first place. I'd always wanted one, but pets were forbidden. Busy people didn't have time for them. So I knew I was breaking the Law. But I figured that no one would ever find out.

First I fixed a place for her, and made a brush screen, so that she couldn't be seen by anyone coming to the gates. Then, one night, I sneaked into the forest and got her.

It wasn't so lonely after that. Now I had something to talk to. She was small when I got her—it would be too dangerous to go near a full grown one—but she grew rapidly. That was because I caught small animals and brought them to her. Not having to depend on what she could catch, she grew almost twice as fast as usual, and was so sleek and pretty. Really, she was a pet to be proud of.

I don't know how I could have stood the four months there alone, if I hadn't her to talk to. I don't think she really understood me, but I pretended she did, and that helped.

Every three or four weeks, three of the council members came to take a part of the Treasure, or to add to it. Always three of them.

That's why I was so surprised one day, to see one man coming by himself. It was Gremm, the little old member, who had recommended that I be given this job. I was happy to see him, and we talked for a while, mostly about my work, and how I liked it. I almost told him about my pet, but I didn't, because he might be angry at me for breaking the Law.

Finally, he asked me to give him the Key.

"I've been sent to get something from the Treasure," he explained.

I was unhappy to displease him, but I said, "I can't let you have it. There must be three members. You know that."

"Of course, I know it. But something came up suddenly, so they sent me alone. Now, let me have it."

I shook my head. That was the one order they had given me—never to give the Key to any one person who came alone.

Gremm became quite angry.

"You idiot," he shouted. "Why do you think I had you put out here? It was so I could get in there and help myself to the Treasure."

"But that would be dishonest. And there are no dishonest people in the State."

"For three thousand years. I know." His usually kind face had an ugly look I had never seen before. "But I'm going to get part of that Treasure. And it won't do you any good to report it, because no one is going to take the word of a fool like you, against a respected council member. They'll think you are the dishonest one. Now, give me that Key!"

It's a terrible thing to disobey a council member. But if I obeyed him, I would be disobeying all the others. And that would be worse.

"No!" I shouted.

He threw himself upon me. For his size and age, he was very strong—stronger, even, than I. I fought as hard as I could, but I knew I wouldn't be able to keep him away from the Key for very long. And if he took the Treasure, I would be blamed. The council would have to think a new punishment for dishonesty. Whatever it was, it would be terrible, indeed.

He drew back and rushed at me. Just as he hit me, my foot caught upon a root, and I fell. His rush carried him past me, and he crashed through the brush screen beside the path. I heard him scream twice, then there was silence.

I was bruised all over, but I managed to pull myself up and take away what was left of the screen. There was no sign of Gremm, but my beautiful pet was waving her pearl-green feelers as she always did in thanks for a good meal.

That's why I can't tell anyone what happened. No one would believe that Gremm would be dishonest. And I can't prove it, because she ate the proof.

Even if I did tell them, no one is going to believe that a fly-catcher plant—even a big one like mine—would actually be able to eat a man.

So they think that Gremm disappeared. And I'm still out here—with her. She's grown so much larger now, and more beautiful than ever.

But I hope she hasn't developed a taste for human flesh. Lately, when she stretches out her feelers, it seems that she's trying to reach me.

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