

Princess And Tucker Get Engaged

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I was sitting on the living room couch with my mistress enjoying wine, cheese and crackers. I was munching cheese and cracker bits out of her hand; she was sipping a Cabernet. I tried settling on her lap, but she gently repositioned me on a pillow saying, “Sorry Tucker. No room for both you and the book.” Puffs of my wispy hair floated from my handsome tail into the air and she swooshed them away with her hand.

As much as I enjoyed this special time with Mistress after her late evening swim, I'd love even more to be with Princess, but she was already asleep. Princess doesn't need beauty sleep (*She's already beautiful*). However, we cats sleep 12 to 16 hours a day and Princess is mostly a 16-hour cat. I knew as the mantle clock struck ten she would be snuggling on the silky bed cover in the downstairs bedroom where Master was snoring. *Princess snores too, though not as loudly.*

Mistress and I don't always have wine and cheese at these special occasions. Sometimes we have buttermilk and cookies. *Yes, I love buttermilk!* I spent my first year in a sorority house and learned to eat lots of different foods. I was dreaming about pizza when the clock struck eleven. *Goodness it was late!* Mistress rose just as I heard Master come upstairs followed by the distinctive patter of Princess – the seven toes on each big foot percussing on the wooden stairs.

“Meow,” she greeted in a way querying, “What's up?” Her green eyes enlarged and the long hair on her back stood up in a way that made her look like she was wearing a cape.

I shook my head signaling, “No idea.” But just then a car pulled up into the carport. There was no need for lights this time of the year since it was nearing the summer solstice – Princess' favorite this time of the year. *She adores sunshine.*

Mistress and Master rushed to the back entry and opened the door in obvious anticipation. Princess sprang atop the spare refrigerator that holds summer drinks. She crouched, ears swiveling, tail swishing. I followed my people and sat ready for what I knew not.

Soon, Mistress opened the door and grabbed the person who entered and rejoiced, “Ah, Sweetie! We're so glad you're here!” Master stepped forward and the three of them embraced with lots of excited talk and tears. I sat still, waiting.

Finally, Sweetie saw me. “It's so good to see you too, Tucker!” Suddenly I was airborne and clutched into Sweetie's arms— the same Sweetie of the sorority and my first mistress. I licked her nose just like I used to. Meanwhile I could see out of the corner of my eye that Princess' eyes narrowed into slits and she slumped next to the spider plant. Sweetie gave me a rocking hug and set me back onto the floor. Then diplomatically, she looked up and addressed Princess. “Hi Princess. You look pretty.” *Of course!* Princess loves compliments. She rose, rocked forward and trilled. That's her way of greeting when she can't head butt someone.

The next thing that happened seems a blur. Sweetie produced a small pet carrier like the one we use to travel to visit our veterinarian. As soon as she opened it, a squirming curly white-haired ball of fluff came clattering, yipping and jumping out. I had no idea what it was. Princess hissed and flew off the refrigerator like Cat Woman and landed in front of the thing making it jump and yelp all over the room. Of course, Princess was only doing her job of protecting her family. Pandemonium broke out. Soon the white thing was all over the house with Master, Mistress, Sweetie, Princess and me in pursuit. It all ended in the kitchen where the white ball squatted and made a deposit.

Appalled, everyone halted like statues.

“Disgusting!” Princess huffed, giving up the chase. She strode away with head and tail

high and did not look back.

“Oh, oh!” I meowed leaving the fray.

“Bad boy! Bad boy!” Sweetie screamed.

“We can clean this up.” Mistress suggested.

“I’ll get the paper towels and newspapers.” Master offered.

The white fluff sat there wide-eyed and shivered.

Sweetie excused the thing, “Poor thing. Such a long ride. I should have let him out sooner.” Then she added, “He’s only a puppy. Not yet a year old. He’s just confused. I swear, he really is house-trained.” She accentuated her forgiveness by picking up the thing and holding it close. I have to admit to fleeting jealousy. She used to hug me like that. Just as quickly I remembered how I had gotten confused when I was a kitten. And I reminded myself: I have a new and more mature mistress now.

In a flash Master and Mistress scrubbed the kitchen floor pristine again and then everyone settled in the living room to visit. Princess and I watched and listened from beneath an end table. The conversation turned to the white thing.

“What breed is he?” Master asked

“A Havanese,” Sweetie explained, “They originated in Cuba. They’re the national dog there. Very good with children and other animals.”

Princess huffed in a way meaning, “Not likely.” Her tail swished vigorously. I tried calming her by leaning in closer, letting my body touch hers. She shifted her weight slightly away, but kept her keen eyes forward, tail waving wildly.

“What’s his name?” Mistress asked petting the thing.

“His whole name is Machismo. But I usually call him Chismo.”

“I like cheese,” I said to only Princess apropos to nothing.

“Ha!” Princess scoffed. “It’s a joke!”

“ How do you know?” I queried, then remembered that Princess also had lived with a different family or two and had a varied education before joining me here. I assessed the thing and pronounced, “ Well, I think he’s cute.” I meant it too. Then to assuage any envy I added, “And he’s smaller than you.” He looked like a harmless ball of white fluff; albeit one with teeth and nails. Unconvinced of my loyalty, Princess sat up straight, the hairs on her body electrified. Her eyes grew large and she harrumphed. I redeemed myself by adding, “You however, my dearest, are beautiful.”

The people’s conversation soon drifted to the big topic – the real reason for the visit. Sweetie is finally going to marry the Captain, and in only a few days. We met the Captain four years ago, the following summer when they got engaged, then again last Christmastime. He’s a big man who filled the back entry. Most importantly, he is kind to cats. Even Princess likes him, which really says a lot.

We watched while Sweetie extended her arm to display the engagement ring on her meticulously manicured hand. It twinkled like a pretty play thing. Mistress and Master put their arms around their daughter and raved about the ring’s size and beauty. Everyone smiled and cooed. Curious, I ventured from my shelter to the couch to sniff it. It smelled like hand lotion. Then I sniffed Chismo. He smelled like dog. He was still shivering while with this summer heat, I felt hot.

As the clock struck 12:45 , Master yawned and then brought in all the luggage. Soon everyone went to their respective rooms. Chismo was confined to the back entry for the night, newspapers spread on the floor for security. Sweetie went to her old room – now the guest room.

Master, Mistress and Princess settled into the downstairs bedroom. I headed to the cat condo in the living room, which is my summer retreat next to the window.

As I lounged there, I thought about how I'd like marry to Princess. So far she's rejected me. Now with Sweetie's excitement I realized how time is passing me by. At nine, I am a middle-aged cat. That makes me 53 in human years. (My vet explained to Mistress how the first year of a cats life is equivalent to 15 years in human life; the next year adds ten years; subsequent years add four years in equivalent human development.) I'd better get on it, though I know of a man who married for the first time at age 85 and lived to be 104– still happily married.

The next day was a flurry of activity. Princess confined herself to the safety of the downstairs which Chismo couldn't navigate. After much sniffing and circling, Chismo and I became friends and played chase when no one was watching. He ate his meals where I ate mine. Occasionally he helped himself to mine. I am an eclectic eater so I helped myself to his. Chismo is a voracious eater, maybe because he's young, maybe because he's a dog. He was always looking for food and jumping up to get whatever was available.

On the second day Princess ventured upstairs to sun herself on the window seat while keeping one eye open. It was the people's dinnertime and Sweetie was the cook. She had removed her ring to the kitchen counter while washing up and was about to serve meat loaf when Chismo began jumping up and yipping to get his share. *As if!* Master and Mistress were busy setting the table, generally helping and moving about. I was under the side table trying to stay out of the way. Suddenly, Chismo jumped and knocked Sweetie off balance. Sweetie tried to catch herself by reaching for the counter. As she did, the hot pad swiped everything away. Meatloaf plopped to the floor and the ring went flying. Chismo began gobbling before he realized how hot it was. He yelped. The humans shrieked. Princess and I both bristled to alert.

Chismo's mouth was burned. The floor was a mess. The dinner ruined. And the engagement ring was missing!

We all looked at Chismo with chagrin. I backed away."Oh, oh!" slipped out of my mouth again. Princess rose up and hissed. Sweetie cried and flew about the room looking for her ring. Chismo ran to the water dish to slake his sore mouth. Master and Mistress scoured the floor and counter for the missing ring. They were all bumping into each other frantically amidst meat loaf bits, platter, silverware and hot pads.

Finally, Master made a dark pronouncement, " I think he ate your ring."

Mistress retorted," This is just awful!"

Sweetie cried, "My wedding is ruined!"

Princess huffed as if to say , "What can you expect from a dog?" But, oddly she remained upstairs and watched, all the while swishing the just the tip of her tail. Chismo was again banished to the back entry.

"You'll find your ring in a day or two. Simple biology," Master promised.

And so the wait began.

I don't know which was worse, Chismo's whimpering due to his confinement or Sweetie's whimpering due to her searching.

Princess spent the third day lolling on the window cushion. I kept her company, inching closer whenever possible. She began beating me with her tail when I got too close, then resumed the tip twitch when I retreated. Mistress and Master left with Sweetie part of the day to work on wedding plans.

The fourth day was much the same, except Sweetie donned her wedding gown to show it off. Princess and I both watched with interest. Sweetie's dress was big and glittery and she

looked like she wore a cloud on her head. She looked lovely in it. Master and Mistress said so.

I nudged Princess behind her ear and trilled, “ I think you look lovely just the way you are. You don't need a fancy dress. You are fancy enough already.”

To my surprise Princess nudged me back. *Progress?*

On the fifth day the ring remained illusive. A girlfriend of Sweetie's came over and all the humans left for the day with the gown. Chismo remained confined to back entry. I felt sorry for him. It's not his fault he's a dog.

Princess seemed to enjoy having this time for just the two of us and started playing around the house. She and I chased and batted each other. *Exhilarating!* Then she began batting around anything she found on the floor: a piece of tape, a twist tie, a crumb, a shadow. More than usual was about since everyone's attention was on the wedding. She laid on the floor writhing and stretching to her limits. *How graceful she looked!* Soon she plucked something from under the couch in the living room and played it around the carpet. I became interested. When she knocked it onto the hard kitchen floor, it made a distinctive metallic sound. Then, I recognized the twinkle.

“You found it!” I meowed happily.

“ No, I retrieved it,” she corrected. “I just figured they have suffered enough.”

I didn't know to be happy or angry. “ You mean you knew it was there all the time?”

“ Let me just say I was very observant the other day,” she answered as she swung it into a corner.

I wanted to say “ You stinker!” but thought that couldn't advance my romantic cause. Just as soon as, “Good for you” came out of my mouth instead, she yelped in pain.

“ What, my darling? I'm right here!” I offered gallantly without power to really help.

When I saw what happened, I had to stifle a chuckle. The ring had stuck around four of her big toes and she couldn't shake it off. She couldn't walk like that; she could only sit and wait for our family to return.

So, I did what I could. I cuddled next to her.

An hour later Sweetie exclaimed, "Princess found my ring ! Oh thank you Princess!" Before she picked up Princess to retrieve her ring she pointed, "Don't they look cute? They look like a bride and groom: she with the ring, he in his tux (meaning my handsome black and white markings).

So Princess was a superhero after all. Chismo was released from confinement and we two became playmates. Mistress, Master and Sweetie left for the wedding. Everyone was happy. In the evening, after Chismo was exhausted from his day of play I snuggled up to Princess. "So how about it Princess? Don't you think you and I can get married?"

She turned and looked at me squarely and said softly, "Maybe we could have a long engagement like Sweetie." She picked up the same paw that had held the ring and licked it gently soothing sore toes. My heart thumped. I leaned toward her and head butted her. Then I remembered: Sweetie was engaged for three years. So I asked for clarification: "For us, is that in cat years or human years?" She didn't answer in words. She just head butted me back.