

Tucker's Day Off

nick

A good dog gets a day off from being a dog.

1

Written by nick

Once upon a time, there was a lot. On the lot was a house and around that house there was a fence. Surrounding the fence and the house and the lot was miles upon miles of desert.

One would think that this would be enough to guaranty a man's possessions would remain unmolested and his castle untouched by uninvited pilferers. But alas, unfortunately this lot and house and desert lay on Earth. That says it all to any familiar with Earth as we all know just how nutty a planet can get.

So the owner of the house got a dog. A large dog of a ferocious breed. Through future events he came into the possession of another dog and another. Until by the time our story starts Tucker came into a family. There was the pitbull Bright Eyes and the retriever mix Rusty and there was Tucker. Tucker wasn't of a palatable lineage and preferred the fact. He was a mutt with questionable parents much less ancestry and he was loved.

Tucker was loved by the man in the house and by Bright Eyes and Rusty and by a lovely young lady who lived in LA and came to visit regularly.

But on the day when our story starts Tucker was troubled. His mood was not at all sympathized in the weather as it was bright sunny and cool on the desert. Winter would be coming in a few months and the bite had been taken off the sun by a continuous cool breeze throughout the valley.

Tucker however, inside, was glum. He felt winter had come early in his heart. He had been working for four long years now at this house. He had prevented with the help his associates, over 400 burglaries to the house. His man friend, Ben, was very proud of him and the other dogs and fed them regularly in reward.

It was work no doubt and tough in its way. To stay alert through days of dullness, always on ones toes, even during sleep; tends to where a dog out. Also Tucker had become aware of his age. He wasn't getting any younger and at 6 years old he was halfway through his life. Life was short and he wanted a day off.

Not just any day off would do. Face it, even outside the fence there wasn't much to do in Lucerne Valley. Not yet anyway, though the people folk seemed determined to make life interesting in spite of the desert and all. One human lady would ride up and down in her car splashing dust all over and shouting at midnight! Tucker reckoned that she showed the best k-9 sense of any of the rest though. Tucker knew he would do that, if he could drive.

No Tucker wanted a break. He wanted a day off from being a dog. He would like to get out there and see life through the eyes of a human for a change. Of course this was impossible but he could dream in any case.

2

Written by nick

The glum mood stayed with him all day and into his dreams that night. He tossed and twitched and his jaws flexed as he pondered and puzzled over the problem. He found himself running in circles and not getting anywhere.

In a flash of light that started somewhere in his dream and followed him back to the real world he snapped awake and found that the light did not diminish with alertness. It grew brighter more solid; gained texture and form.

Tucker shielded his eyes lest he be blinded and lowered his head to the onslaught of energy until as suddenly as it came, it abated. There before him was a cat. Now under normal circumstances Tucker, like any good dog, would simply devour the cat (If possible). But this time the cat had such a presence and was really such a very cat-ish cat, that the poor dog was given to pause.

And well that he did, as this was no ordinary cat. This cat was named simply Ohm. Where he went things happened. Good or bad did not matter to Ohm. Only that it was interesting. And here was a very interesting dog.

"Dog," began the feline in a regal manner, which he found useful in gaining obedience.

"Tucker." The cat seemed startled by being interrupted and stared. Tucker took it for incomprehension, "My name is Tucker," he said, "Not, 'dog'".

At this the cat almost laughed but it came out as a purr, "You will be interesting I think. I was traveling from dreams to dreams looking for good sport and fell into your line. I was confused as I thought it was a human dream and now that I see it was not I am satisfied that this will truly prove amusing." The tips of the cat's whiskers began then to shine then the light moved to the rest of his coat. It began to sparkle and crackle with power. "You wanted a day off Tucker. I would like to see what happens when you get it."

The shining fur began to pulse with inner fury and the cat looked not at all friendly but cold in the deepening glare. "One question Tucker: where would you like to spend this day?"

The answer to that question was known so well to the dog that it came to the fore instantly despite the confusion he felt by this crazed Christmas tree ornament of a cat-thing, "I would like to go to LA."

In an instant he was there.

Or was he? If he had been looking for himself he would never have found it. He didn't smell like Tucker and most certainly did not look at all like Tucker. He looked like a 6-year-old human boy with sandy blond hair and lanky arms and legs clothed in shorts and shirt; both too big for him.

He felt dizzy. He sat down. That was much too high off the ground for comfort.

It seemed to be about an hour after sunrise in this place. There was a hard floor. Not having experience with concrete he didn't know how to place the sidewalk of Temple Street in Los Angeles.

He began to walk around, to smell the place out. He found that the plants and trees were kept in little squares of dirt and sniffed those carefully establishing easily enough that they were indeed used to relieve bladders by the inhabitants of this place. He felt reassured. He began to wag his tail. Then a shock struck home. He had no tail. He was not

himself.

This is putting it lightly. I mean he was rocked with revelation. The crazy cat thing had done; something, to him. He didn't even have a stub where his tail had been. He was sad about that for bit when the second bomb dropped in his consciousness.

His back hurt and so did his forward paws. He hadn't walked for twenty feet and his body was killing him. He was not a dog.

2

Written by nick

Now imagine you woke up to be in a dog body. I wonder can you truly appreciate the feeling that Tucker was going through at that moment?

Tucker decided to make the best of the situation. He was a young dog at heart and knew how to roll with the punches. He wanted to settle this matter of his body first.

He set about sniffing each inch of himself from head to foot to get a decent bearing of what this thing could be expected to do. He found two things: 1) that it was very difficult to smell or lick his back, he determined to pay closer attention to humans to find how they managed this. And 2) that he inhabited a young human body of approximately 6 years of age and that it was shampooed and scrubbed with soap and water that came from a tap with too much chlorine. That he had eaten bacon and eggs last and before that he had had spaghetti with rice pudding for dinner.

With those essentials taken care of he stood up and held onto a fence behind him.

Vertigo set in but he pushed on through it. One foot after the other came much easier than he had expected and he began walking and then jogging down the street. He loved the smells of the city and wanted to find a park. He had heard a lot about parks from Bright Eyes back home and he longed to see if it was really true.

As he ran down the street he was detained by a pungent smell from an alley which broke right from the straight line of the street. Going back in a ways he found the smells were overpowering. It was as if a thousand beings had used this space for a combination lavatory, pub, hideout, morgue and place of general foulness. It was like a scientist discovering the Library of Congress. It was all of his most interesting bushes and fence posts rolled into one and put to the power of five.

He could have spent the day there. And, sadly for this story, might have done just that if a panicked call for help had not distracted him from his studies.

"Help! Murderer! Help!" A medium sized gray haired dog came pelting around the corner of the alley hell bent for leather. "Help," it whined, "there's a man, wants to get me, butcher me and feed me to humans at a ball game on little buns with ketchup." The poor thing was shaking like he believed it too.

"What man?" Asked tucker.

"Not that you'd understand being a human and all but I need your help. You see that man's gonna try to take me away to the pound and I don't think I'll live to see tomorrow." The frightened dog looked around the alley realizing that it dead-ended and decided to hide behind the trashcans.

"Well I do understand you and I'll try to help." Tucker turned toward the front of the alley and prepared himself. The gray dog's jaw dropped in astonishment as it realized that this human had understood more than just general emotion but the whole concept of what he had said. He waited to see what would happen.

In a second the dogcatcher rounded the corner and came face to face with Tucker in aggressive pose. "What in the hell are you doing there kid?" He breathed. Tucker smelled three types of liquor on his breath from ten feet away. This man was trouble.

3

Written by nick

Tucker his defensive pose and bared his fangs and let loose a long growl. "Go away bub. Before this gets out of hand."

If he had been even ten inches taller this would have probably worked but the fat slovenly dogcatcher had no charity in his heart and saw in this kid only a small oddity, which was keeping him from his job.

He went to shove past Tucker to the now terrorized yet also growling gray dog.

Tucker lunged at the man. He got about three feet in the air and was coming toward the throat with his fangs bared when the man reacted. Shock superseded his usual caution. The law took poorly to child abuse.

Fearing for his precious life unreasonably out of context with the size of the child bearing down on him he let loose a heavy blow at Tuckers nose. It connected and Tucker dropped flat to his back and had the wind knocked out of him. Panic took hold as he felt his lungs burning, unable to take in air. Struggling for his very life he fought to take in a breath but all that came was a strangled wheeze. This left his lungs burning as if he had added kerosene. The second breath was no easier if a bit deeper and it was a full minute before he could think of anything other than oxygen.

Warm blood poured out of his nose as he found his feet slowly in the now empty alley. He looked for his new-found friend and saw that he was gone. He got up and stumbled to the corner of the alley. That was when he heard it. "Murderer! Help! Kidnapper! Help us!" The distressed calls of a half dozen k-nines in dire struggle for life and death it seamed.

Looking down the street he saw it. A vehicle painted lifeless gray with the bold black words, "City Pound" on its front. It pealed out, leaving behind it a cloud of half-burned gas and oil. As it passed him Tucker could make out the sweaty fat man at the wheel and in the back he saw rows of cages all filled with animals pleading for help.

He found the pound building in the afternoon. He followed the lingering scent of the old truck and directions given by friendly passers-by.

The building itself was squat, bleak and barb wired. It looked like a miniature Auschwitz. Tucker went inside. "I want to speak with your prisoners."

The lady at the desk looked affronted only as long as it took her to see that it was a six year old boy in front of her. At which time she smiled with delight only for the time it took her to realize that the boy had a recently bloodied nose. At which time she made many clucking sounds and coos and insisted on ministering to the boy until he was cleaned up and stuffed with sweets from a jar on the desk.

"Now", she smiled down at him, "What did you want?"

Tucker looked back up at this woman with new-found respect. Anyone who could make that short work of his protests would need to be handled with care. "I would like to look at the dogs, if that's all right with you. Thank you." The word structures seemed to meet his thoughts by their own accord.

The woman was pleased. More importantly, she let him in to see the dogs.

Final Chapter

Written by nick

He asked to go alone using similar strange phrases and she was happy to let him. Once past the blocker he was sure he could find his friend and free him. He searched for a while with success. The gray dog was whimpering in a cage by himself in the corner of the place. Tucker looked and found the key. He unlocked the fence for his friend and was just saying hello when, "What're you doing there boy?!" The alcohol sogged voice of the fat warden croaked. His eyes widened in shock when he saw who it was. "Eh? What're you doing here? See here I didn't want'a do nothin' before and I don't want nothing to do with no crazy kiddy now. You gotta leave." And he pointed the way to the exit.

"No you see here! I took a hit from you once but I'll be damned if you'll catch me again. You have my friends here and I won't let you kill 'em."

"Kill?" The man smiled in what he felt was a most comforting way. Tucker shivered. "We don't kill stupid animals kid. We take care of 'em. Look out for 'em."

Tucker could smell that he was lying and told him so. "Look you little brat! You put that damned beasty back in the kennel and scram or I'll put you in the box to boot!" The man supremely confident in the transcendent wisdom of bullying knew that he was doing the right thing in putting this whelp in his place.

But Tucker wasn't fooled. He backed up and swung open three more cages. Dogs came out to his aid and stood by him against the now frightened man.

The tubby watch keeper began to turn tail and sound alarm. He was soon silenced by means of tripping over three large dogs that got under his feet with a conviction and having his face sat on by a shabby English Setter. His panicked, muffled cries soon gave way to the refuge of the week as he fainted dead away.

Tucker helped move him into a cell and took his keys. He knew how to drive though didn't know how he knew.

He opened cage after cage to let the animals free. But to his surprise not all the dogs wanted out. Apparently the color tags on the cages meant different things. All dogs with a purple tag were dying to go as their time was short for this Earth should they stay while those with green tags were divided and the yellow tag held its occupant captive with something more vital than the bars or lock of his cage. For the yellow tag meant hope. That the animal under its protection had been given a proper home and would not want to leave. No matter what.

It was fair enough. To Tucker if they wanted to stay they were entitled but if not he would help them get away. Having all the dogs in the truck required getting rid of the cages as they took up too much space. With Tucker at the wheel the trip back to Lucerne Valley was a journey worthy of its own title and so not covered here.

But when he got back Tucker had a plan. The crazy lady with her drinking and her wild driving and barking at night understood dogs better than anyone in the valley desert he called home. He went to her and explained the situation. She phoned the pound and got the truck picked up and formally adopted the dogs as her own. Later she was to be so occupied with the dogs that she would forget about drinking and forget her terminal boredom as well.

Tucker in the meanwhile found that when he woke up the next morning he was again back to work by his familiar home protecting it from unwanted visitors. Which was pretty much everyone until Ben said they were okay.

He went at his work with a new interest and will. Tucker had had a good day off.

And far away, yet right beside his newfound interest Ohm was pleased and the great cat purred.

The end.

By Nick Bylsma