

## Cuddle Time

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A short play

By

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CHARACTERS:

MARTHA: female, somewhere past 50, but her body feels older than her age.

SWEETIE: a scruffy young male. Could be a teenager. Energetic, and a bit spoiled.

SETTING:

A small, spare studio apartment.

TIME:

Early morning, after sunrise, in (perhaps) the not too-distant future.

(NOTE ON STAGING: Everything indicated such as bathroom, kitchen area, kitchen faucet, fridge, can be suggested through movement, light and sound. For instance: faucet water could be alluded to via a dripping sound, bathroom via light and sound of toilet lid. No realistic set is needed, nor recommended, other than something representing a bed and nightstand and assorted minimal props. The disconcerting and ominous light radiating in from the outside world is what matters most. )

At rise: A small, spare studio apartment.

An interior door leads to a utilitarian bathroom.

An exterior door leads to the building's hallway.

The morning light seeping through a shredded-curtained window is a dirty blood-orange glow; a bit hazy and quite surreal.

MARTHA is asleep in her bed.

SWEETIE, dressed in faded t-shirt and loose shorts, is curled up, on top of the dingy covers, at the foot of the bed.

They are both snoring. Otherwise, no sounds.

Sweetie opens his eyes, yawns, stretches, and observes Martha.

Good morning!

SWEETIE

Martha just snores.

Gooooood morning!

SWEETIE

No change from Martha.

I SAID: "Gooood morning!"

SWEETIE

On all fours, Sweetie moves closer to Martha and nudges Martha's body with his head.

Good morning, Martha!

SWEETIE

Nothing. So he pounces up and down on all fours.

Martha startles awake.

MARTHA

Oh Sweetie. Good morning, my dear.

Sweetie rubs his face on Martha's.

SWEETIE

So...whatcha got planned for us to DO today?

MARTHA

You hungry, dear?

SWEETIE

Wanna go on an adventure? Huh? Huh?! Huh?!!!

MARTHA

Just give me ten more minutes. 'Kay?

SWEETIE

Let's me and you go for a WALK today,'kay?! It's been ages since we went outside and smelled the EARTH and dug some HOLES and I know I can sniff out where I buried that last BONE you rewarded me and it will be so fun fun fun to finally leave this -

MARTHA

You gotta pee? Just give me five more minutes, 'kay Sweetie?

Martha coughs. It's an ugly, worrisome sound.

SWEETIE

Sweetie wants to go PLAY in the PARK today! Pretty pretty pretty PUH-LEAZE!?

Martha grasps a glass of grey water from her bedside table, takes in the small amount left in the glass, sniffs it, drinks it anyway.

SWEETIE

When was the last time we frolicked fancy free in the park, huh? I so miss Buddy and Otis and Daisy and that little Weiner-looking gal who I had my eye on and I can't stop dreaming about and whose name is...ack...what's Weiner girl's name? It's been so long since I sniffed her butt and I just know she wants to sniff my butt butt butt, again; I just know she does does does! So can we puh-leaze puh-leaze puh-leaze go to the -

MARTHA

Okay, okay...I'm getting up. I'm getting up! I. AM. Getting. UP!

Martha manages to sit up. Another coughing fit.

SWEETIE

(more curious than concerned)

Huh. You're looking a little green around the gills again today, Martha. Ha ha! "Green around the gills!" That's the lingo I learned last time we were at the park! (*Oblivious to Martha's escalating coughs*) Geeez. When was that? Cold, wet, white stuff was all over the ground and I made yellow puddles and streams and I whizzed on that obnoxious red-haired lady you were always yap yap yapping with who belongs to that fru-fru poodle and you whimpered to HER that SHE was "looking a bit green around the gills" and -

Martha moves to get herself up out of bed, but the coughs just keep coming.

SWEETIE (CONT)

(still all about him)

...Hey. Listen, Martha. You ever even TRY to put a grotesque pink bowtie on my head and I'm gonna have to really rethink this arrangement we've got goin' on here. I just wanna give you fair warning, because we've been together for so long now. But I think sometimes we need to be reminded of the consequences of our actions. And pink bow ties are unacceptable! BUT, I know you love me wayyyy too much to even THINK about doing anything to interfere with my naturally handsome, um...(gesturing to his own face)...whatever you call this thing.

Martha's coughing fit finally finishes. She picks up one slipper and looks for its pair. Sweetie joins in the search while continuing to yap.

SWEETIE (CONT)

Sooooo...let's go on a frolicking adventure in the park today so you can show me off and I can sniff some Weiner-girl butt butt butt and hunt hunt hunt down that buried bone and -

Sweetie gives up his search and grabs the slipper Martha is holding, knocking her off a bit off balance.

MARTHA

Ack. Sweetie! No!!

SWEETIE

(running around with the slipper)

Play play play play play play!!!!

MARTHA

Sweetie, stop it! Give me my - (*cough*)

SWEETIE

(ignoring her command)

Play time! Play time! Play time!

MARTHA

(shuffling towards bathroom)

Settle down, Sweetie. I need some caffeine in me before I can figure out...(*cough*)...

Sweetie spots the missing slipper (*YAY! He's so smart!*) He abandons the slipper he's holding, grabs the missing one and - like the brilliant victor he is - races and drops the slipper in front of Martha's feet, forcing her to stop her momentum towards the bathroom.

MARTHA

Ha ha. There's the left one! Good boy! Now what did you do with my right slipper?

Sweetie, seeing Martha's eyes searching, grabs his cue and runs to the other slipper, retrieves it, and delivers to her feet.

SWEETIE

I'll take my reward now, Martha!

MARTHA

Thank you, Sweetie. Now my tootsies will be all comfy and cozy!

SWEETIE

Ummm...What do I get now? Huh? Where's my treat, huh? Treat?! NOW! Treat?!!!

Martha puts her slippers on.

MARTHA

Was Sweetie a good boy last night?

SWEETIE

Uh oh. I know that tone of voice. Inspection time. Ummm...do I got this?

MARTHA

(peering into bathroom)

Let's see what we've got in here.

SWEETIE

(peering in)

Whew! Yup! I used the pee pad this morning!

MARTHA

Good boy, Sweetie! You used the pee pad again! Such a good boy! What we are gonna do when we run out of pee-pads, I just don't know. Hmmmm...? Do I have to tinkle? (*Checks in with her own body*) Nope. But that's not a healthy sign, Sweetie. If Dr. Montrose were still...well, she'd wag her finger at me and tell me to hydrate more.

Martha goes to the 'kitchen' sink and turns on tap. A thin stream of grayish water trickles out.

SWEETIE

Water! Water water water water! Sweetie wants some water!!!

MARTHA

Looks like another forced water ration day, my dear. Alas, no coffee for me this morning. Again. (*trying not to dwell*) 'Kay. Let's see what we've got left in the fridge.

SWEETIE

Sweetie wants some water! Water water water water!

Martha open the fridge. No light emerges. A wicked smell does, though.

MARTHA

Ack! Electric's out. Again. Wonder if it will ever...? Oh well. Fiddle dee-dee. We won't go there. Let's take a look-see at what we've got left that's salvageable.

SWEETIE

Picnic time! We gonna pack a picnic to take to the park?! Yippee! Yippee! Yippee! Yip -

Sweetie coughs.

MARTHA

(reopening a slim package of meat)

Yay! Lookie-lookie! We've got a bit of bologna left! (*pronounces it "bolonie" and takes a sniff*) Oof. Yikes. (*sniffs again*) But I think it should be fine and dandy for you to eat.

Sweetie breaks down into an awful sounding coughing fit.

MARTHA

Oh Sweetie! Sweetie Sweetie Sweetie. Let's see what we can find for you to drink.

Martha rummages through their kitchen.

MARTHA (CONT)

Perhaps there's a drop of something that might...Nope. Ohhhh! I know! Come on, Sweetie. Come on!

Martha sticks the package of meat into her pocket and scoots Sweetie to the bathroom.

MARTHA (CONT)

(lifting toilet lid and peering in)

Lucky I was able to flush the toilet after my last "number two."

SWEETIE

(between coughs)

Did someone say "poop"?

MARTHA

(lifting seat up)

"If it's brown, flush-it-down. If it's yellow, let it mellow." There you go, boy. Go ahead and drink it while we've got it. But...maybe save some for later, 'kay? On the 'UP' side, it might be a loooong time before we even really need to flush again.

SWEETIE

(between lapping up water)

Ahhh...yeah...ohhhh...yeah...that's goood...sooooo good...

MARTHA

(wandering, aimless in her small space)

Gotta have food to eat to have something to poop! No food, no poop. So no need to flush. Stop it, Martha! Stop thinking so negative. Pooh pooh. Sweetie, some people are a lot worse off than you and me. Don't know who, but somebody's bound to be.

Sweetie emerges from the bathroom, refreshed.

SWEETIE

Ooooookay!!! Ready for my REWARD now!



From under the door to the hallway, a single sheet of raggedy paper is slid through. Martha sees this and goes to retrieve it.

MARTHA

(picking it up, trying to decipher, then searching for her eyeglasses)

Ahhhh! The neighborhood 'News of the week!' Thank goodness for those few trusty tenacious souls who keep us apprised of the outside world! Perhaps today there's something to celebrate? Blessed rain on the horizon? Perchance the discovery of a nearby, forgotten warehouse filled with cans of fruit juice & vegetables and some dried salami and ruffled potato chips and and and soft black licorice and and bottled water and and and -

SWEETIE

A love letter? For meeeee?!!! From Weiner girl who wants to smell my handsome butt?!

MARTHA

(glasses found, reality check)

Oh dear. Says it's gonna be the last news-flyer we're gonna get til who-knows-when.

SWEETIE

(sniffing Martha's pocket)

I smell bolonie!

MARTHA

Council has to conserve the last bits of paper to ration for fuel for winter stoves.

SWEETIE

Bolonie! Bolonie!! Bolonie!!!

MARTHA

Says here: "Reliable word-of-mouth is that the Amazon is officially no more. "

SWEETIE

Sweetie wants BOLONIE!

MARTHA

(digging package out of her pocket)

Wonder which 'Amazon' they mean?

SWEETIE

(howling)

BALOOOOONIIIIIIIEEEE!!!!

Martha continues to read as she breaks off pieces of meat, tossing them in the air towards Sweetie's general direction.

SWEETIE

(leaping to catch in his mouth, perhaps sometimes succeeding)

YAYYYYYY!!! Bolonie!!!!

MARTHA

Says here that...

SWEETIE

MOOOORE Boloniiiiie!!!

MARTHA

(reacting to something she's read)

No! Oh no no no no no.

SWEETIE

(panting expectantly)

Yes! Oh yes yes yes yes! More more more BOLONIE, puh-leeze!

MARTHA

Oh Sweetie. Gwendolyn has passed away. Dear, sweet, sparkly Gwennie.

SWEETIE

Uh oh. It's Weiner girl, isn't it? She got tired of waiting for me at the park, right? The little, heartless traitor has written me a 'Dear John' letter, hasn't she? Come on. You can tell me. My whole being will be blasted into a bazillion little pieces, but -

MARTHA

Apparently she was found by a body clean-up crew a few days ago...

SWEETIE

...um...I can take it...go ahead and just blurt out the hard truths to me...

MARTHA

...leaning against the stump of that burnt-out Red Maple in her back yard. That Maple always was her favorite shade tree. Used to be, she hung black oil sunflower seed in feeders on its branches. Also suet feeders in the Winter, then the sugar-water ones...

SWEETIE

(sniffing around, searching)

I mean, as long as I've still got BOLONIE!

MARTHA

Gwennie was so fond of her bird friends. In the “better days” she’d get visits from the migrating hummingbirds, April to September. Sometimes even through to mid-October. And she’d feed the nuthatches, juncos, warblers, woodpeckers, bluejays and chickadees. But every year, fewer and fewer, until finally... Perhaps the grief was what finally took her? Oh, if only we could have gone to see generous Gwennie in her lonely last days.... ...If only the air were safe enough to....ACK!! “If only, if only.” I’ve got to stop thinking like that! We have to be grateful for what we’ve got. Right, Sweetie?!

SWEETIE

Bolonie???

Martha takes the last piece of meat from the package and holds it in the palm of her hand.

MARTHA

Here you go, Sweetie.

SWEETIE

(Snatching and savoring)

Yummmm...Bolonie!

MARTHA

But that’s the end of it.

SWEETIE

More! Sweetie wants MORE!

MARTHA

Dear Gwennie was always such a stubborn optimist. “The birds will come back,” she’d always say. “The birds WILL be back.” That’s the last thing she said to me.

SWEETIE

Birds? Birds? Birds? What’s a “birds” Martha?

MARTHA

That’s how I can honor our friend, Gwennie! Right Sweetie? Just keep thinking on the “bright side!” Think about...think about...think about...

SWEETIE

(physically aggressive)

I want MORE BOLOOOOOONIEEEEE!!!

MARTHA

(suddenly so exhausted)

Settle down, boy. Whew. I just need to be quiet for a wee bit.

SWEETIE

(in her face)

WHERE'S MY GOD-DAMED BOLONIE, *WOMAN*???

MARTHA

(pushing him away, fierce, a first)

DAMN IT, SWEETIE, JUST STOP IT!

SWEETIE

Ouch.

MARTHA

(ashamed, but exhaustion rules out)

Oh, sorry, boy. I don't know why...what...

SWEETIE

Geez.

MARTHA

I'll make it up to you. Promise. But, I just need a little rest. 'Kay?

Martha shuffles to the bed. Sweetie sulks.

SWEETIE

Don't know if I can ever ever forgive you for that abominable behavior.

MARTHA

(sitting on bed, removing her slippers)

When I get up, we can play a game of indoor fetch. How about that? You go find your fetch toy.

SWEETIE

(recovered, running around, searching)

OHHHH! YES!!!! Fetch! Fetch! FETCH!

MARTHA

I don't remember every being so bone tired.

SWEETIE

Bone!!!! Where? Where's the BONE?!!

Martha collapses on top of the bedcovers.

SWEETIE (CONT)

Huh? Ummm...what about my....?!

Sweetie brings his fetch toy to the bed.

MARTHA

Just give me...ten minutes. 'Kay?

Martha raises her arm, attempting to pet Sweetie, but she conks out.

SWEETIE

(jumping onto bed)

But I got my ball ready to go to the park and play. Play play pla....ummm...Martha?

He pushes the ball around on the bed with his nose. Looks at Martha. She is dead silent.

SWEETIE (CONT)

So, I guess I'll just...um...be on guard here...while you...(real concern sets in)...Martha?

Martha does not move.

SWEETIE (CONT)

(never so worried in his life)

Martha?!!! (NO response, a first) MAAAAAARTHAAAAAAAAAAAAA??!!!!!!!

Martha coughs.

SWEETIE (CONT)

(relieved as never before)

Oookayyy...whew. You rest. We can go play in the park another day.

Martha snores. Sweetie really takes her in.

SWEETIE

(snuggling up close to her)

Meanwhile...(now settled in)...it's Cuddle Time.

Sweetie falls asleep. Outside the window, a BIRD chirps. Light glows, then fades out.

END OF PLAY