



Read-Aloud Princess Sweetsocks

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You might think working at an animal shelter is the best job in the world. After all, what's not to love about spending time with cute, cuddly animals all day?

But playing with the animals is barely a fraction of the work we do at Animal Haven.

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There's the cleaning—not just the kennels and the cages—but the entire place: the examination room, the storage closets, the bonding room where the animals get used to being with humans, and the Quiet Room for animals who get stressed out.

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Then there's taking care of the animals—walking them, bathing them, grooming them, feeding them. We even make our own pet food!

But despite all this work, not every animal knows how to show their appreciation. Many of our cats and dogs might hiss or bark at you or run away when you try to pick them up.

Ask: "What do you notice? What do you wonder?"

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But of all the animals I'd met at Animal Haven, none were as challenging as Princess Sweetsocks.

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When Princess Sweetsocks came to us, she'd been living in an empty lot in the neighborhood. She was tiny, dirty, and cute as a button.

She was also incredibly mean.

Or at least she was to me.

Ask: "What do you notice? What do you wonder?"

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I don't know who came up with her name, but she definitely wasn't sweet.

During the first days of her stay, my job was to help cut up this huge quilt into equal pieces. We were going to use it to line the cat kennels so that our kittens could be more comfortable.

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When I opened Princess's cage, I heard a growl. Two glowing eyes burned back at me.

"It's okay," I said softly. But the second I put my arm in, she yowled and hissed. Before I knew it, she shot out of her cage and hid under a shelf. It took my boss half an hour to get her out.

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Princess Sweetsocks was afraid. She wasn't used to being around people.

I mean, how would you feel if a giant tried to pick you up? That's what I kept telling myself, anyway.

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I tried playing with her, petting her, offering her treats but nothing I did made her like me any more.

“I should just quit,” I told my boss, KT.

“Just because things don’t work out right away doesn’t mean they can’t improve,” KT said. “Before she can get adopted, Princess has to learn to be comfortable around humans. And I know just the human for the job.”

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KT showed me the shelter’s schedule. She explained that every day, twice a day, for twenty minutes, Princess would go to the Quiet Room with a volunteer.

And that volunteer would be me.

Ask: “What do you notice? What do you wonder?”

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So every day, twice a day, I took Princess’s cage into a small room. I would open the cage door, and then sit down on the other side of the room.

Then I’d start talking so that she could get used to my voice. At first I said things like, “Hi, my name is Shay. My favorite food is popcorn.” Stuff like that. But then I started talking to her about my day, like she was a person.

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Sometimes she came out of her cage, but other times she stayed put.

We did that for four months until one day, after I opened her door, she came up to me and brushed up against my hand. She even let out a little purr.

That’s when I knew all this work was worth it.