

BOYNTON (CONT'D)

"Trust?" What the--

Boynton adjusts his reading glasses and turns the page. He looks perplexed.

BOYNTON (CONT'D)

Well, this is strange. It's not the last will *I* saw.

(to Matt)

It says that the estate is to remain in trust until your 35th birthday...

(reads)

"On the condition that Matthew Tipton take my faithful dog, Bella, into his home and keep her in good health and happiness until his 35th birthday, December 16th, 2004."

MATT

(bursts out)

*What?! That's crazy!*

Ephraim stifles a giggle.

BOYNTON

(continuing)

"Should Bella expire for any reason before this date, or should Mr. Tipton refuse this charge, the bequest shall go to..."

He looks up at Matt.

BOYNTON (CONT'D)

"...The Humane Society."

INT. BOYNTON'S PRIVATE OFFICE -- LATER

Matt paces Boynton's office, in a sputtering rage.

MATT

She can't have been in her right mind. I'm going to contest.

BOYNTON

Matt, I've been Maggie's lawyer since before you were born. You know as well as I do, she wasn't crazy, she was just being Maggie.

He laughs and waves a paper.

BOYNTON (CONT'D)

She insisted on seeing a psychiatrist just a month or two ago. Now I see why. She had him write an attestation as to her soundness of mind.

MATT

But why would she *do* this?! She knows I'm allergic to that...*rat!*

BOYNTON

Maybe she wanted Bella to be with family.

MATT

I'm not *family* to-- My building doesn't even *allow* pets.

BOYNTON

Well, you'll have to work that out. It's only for six months.

Matt sits down and puts his head in his hands.

BOYNTON (CONT'D)

Look, Matt, if you contest, you might win, but it could take years, and the court fees would seriously reduce the value of the estate. Why don't you just try it her way? I mean, how hard can it *be*?

EXT. FIFTH AVENUE IN THE 50'S, NEW YORK CITY -- LATER

Matt trudges, yanking the little dog on a retractable leash. He totes an overflowing shopping bag full of her bed and toys. The leash tangles an annoyed female pedestrian. As Matt unravels it from her ankles, she steps on his hand with her spike heel. Ouch.

Matt pulls Bella, who resists and slides along the pavement, growling. Directly in front of Tiffany's, Bella squats and takes a dump. Matt's mortified. A uniformed guard stands at Tiffany's door. Matt glances up at a nearby street sign that shows a \$250 fine for not cleaning up after your dog. Matt smiles at the guard, who stares at him. Matt looks at the turd with disgust. No way is he going to pick it up. The guard looks away to open the door for a customer. Matt backs away from the turd nonchalantly, denying ownership. Then he bolts from the scene of the crime, drags Bella yelping behind him.

INT. VETERINARY OFFICE WAITING ROOM -- LATER

The waiting room's sign reads: "Dr. Tierney's Waiting Room. Sit! Stay!" It teems with pets and their quirky New York owners. Matt sits among them miserably, Bella at his feet. A big dog drools all over his knee. To his right, a parrot picks at the shoulder of his jacket and squawks "HELLO!". Its old lady owner smiles at Matt like he's one of them. A door opens. The vet, FRANCESCA TIERNEY, 30's, black, neat, in a lab coat, comes out.

FRANCESCA

Who's next?

The receptionist points at Matt. Francesca smiles.

FRANCESCA (CONT'D)  
 Oh, Bella's new Dad! Come on in,  
 Mr. Tipton. I'm Francesca Tierney.

INT. VET'S OFFICE -- MOMENTS LATER

Bella stands on a metal table. Francesca listens to Bella's heart with a stethoscope. Smiles, ruffles the dog's head.

FRANCESCA  
 Hmm. Considering all her problems,  
 she seems to be doing ok.

MATT  
 (uneasy)  
 Problems?

FRANCESCA  
 That's her file.

She motions to a gigantic file on the table. It's taller than the dog. Matt's eyes pop.

FRANCESCA (CONT'D)  
 Now these...

From under the table she produces several boxes of pills.

FRANCESCA (CONT'D)  
 ...they're for her heart. And  
 these drops go in her eyes every  
 other day.

Out come a more and more bottles. Matt begins to panic. He sneezes.

FRANCESCA (CONT'D)  
 Now she's borderline diabetic so  
 you'll have to make sure she eats  
 on time, every six hours, or she  
 could have a seizure. At her age  
 that could be fatal.

She heaves a 10 lb. bag of dog food onto the counter.

FRANCESCA (CONT'D)  
 Only Science Diet Senior, no table  
 scraps like Maggie gave her.

Bella whines.

FRANCESCA (CONT'D)  
 Oh, and you'll have to give her  
 an insulin shot once a day.

She pulls out a vial and a syringe. Matt looks faint. To the growing pile of supplies she adds a baby toothbrush. And some empty plastic jars with lids.

MATT  
 Err, what are those for?

FRANCESCA

Oh, urine samples. Every two weeks. Hers, not yours.

She laughs. Matt stares at the jars in horror.

EXT. STREETS -- MOMENTS LATER

Matt stands on a corner with Bella and loaded down with the bags. He tries to hail a cab. The cabbies point at the dog and shake their heads as they speed by. Matt runs up to one at a stoplight and negotiates with him. The cabby nods yes. He pops the trunk of his taxi, which is full of bullet holes. Matt verifies a hole by putting his finger through it. He puts the bags in the trunk, then Bella too, closes it, and leaps into the cab.

EXT. MATT'S APARTMENT BUILDING -- LATER

The cab pulls away, leaving Matt and Bella a short distance from his building. Coming the other way on the street is Cynthia. Matt scoops up Bella and hides her inside his raincoat. He races into the building past the doormen, schlepping the big bags. He runs for the elevator. He gets in, relieved as the doors begin to close.

CYNTHIA (V.O.)

Hold it, please!

She elbows her way into the elevator. She smiles.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

Matthew! I *thought* that was you. I was sorry to hear about your aunt. Have you given any more thought to the penthouse?

Bella whines. Matt covers it with a high pitched:

MATT

Hmmmmmm!!! Yes!!! Still very interested!

CYNTHIA

You know, Matt, I've got some pull, but the Board's going to be very selective who gets the apartment. They might take months to decide. Would you be able to pay cash?

MATT

I could...in six months.

She looks at him. With the raincoat wrapped around him and his nervous expression, he looks more like a flasher than someone with a few million to spare. He sneezes.

CYNTHIA

Are you cold? It's almost 80 degrees outside.

Bella gives a muffled woof. Matt coughs and hacks to cover. He sees the Science Diet poking out of the bag. Pretending to lose his balance, he leans on it and squashes it out of sight. He steps on a squeaky toy. He wheezes with the same sound.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

God!! Are you all right?!

Cynthia reaches out to steady him. He recoils from her and huddles in the corner of the elevator, looking insane.

MATT

NO!!! I mean, I'm very contagious.

The doors open. He grabs the bags, gets out and turns.

MATT (CONT'D)

Believe me, you do *not* want what I've got.

The doors close on a bewildered Cynthia.

INT. MATT'S APARTMENT -- MOMENTS LATER

In his high-tech kitchen, Matt carefully measures 100g of Science Diet Senior and pours the dry pellets into a bowl.

MATT

There. Dinner is served.

Bella looks balefully at the bowl and back at him.

MATT (CONT'D)

Well, go on. It's healthy.

Bella lays down and sighs.

MATT (CONT'D)

Yeah, well, sorry. Doctor's orders.

He sneezes.

On the counter is a head of lettuce and some vegetables. He opens the fridge and removes some meat. Bella's ears prick up. He looks at his watch.

MATT (CONT'D)

You know, you have to eat that in the next half hour, so you'd better dig in.

He throws a steak into a sizzling pan and starts chopping mushrooms and shallots. Bella sits up and whines.

MATT (CONT'D)

Oh, no. Not at \$16 a pound!

He pushes her toward her bowl.

MATT (CONT'D)  
Now, eat! Come on!!

She looks up at him defiantly, like "Yeah, make me."

INT. MATT'S KITCHEN -- MOMENTS LATER

Matt stands at the stove holding the bowl of dog food. His plate of steak sits untouched on the counter.

MATT  
I do *not* believe I'm doing this.

He pours the dog pellets into the pan. They sizzle. He turns his head away from the smelly steam.

MATT (CONT'D)  
Ugh!

He grinds a little pepper in it, shakes in a little salt, adds a pat of butter. Hesitates.

MATT (CONT'D)  
What the hell.

He pours in a slug of red wine. Also pours himself a glass. He shakes the pan and tosses the pellets like a professional chef. Bella watches with interest. He spoons the creation into her bowl. It doesn't look half bad.

MATT (CONT'D)  
There. "Bone" appetit.

He puts it on the floor and watches Bella pad over to it, sniffs...and starts eating. He toasts his accomplishment.

MATT (CONT'D)  
Compliments to the chef.

He drains his glass.

LATER

Matt, wearing rubber gloves, moves a pill toward Bella's mouth. The wine bottle is half empty on the table beside him. He makes train noises like feeding a baby.

MATT (CONT'D)  
Here comes the Choo-choo!

She turns her head away. He sneezes. Tries again.

MATT (CONT'D)  
Choo-choo!

She snaps at him savagely.

MATT (CONT'D)  
Ok, forget the goddamn choo-choo.

He pounces, gets her in a headlock and tries to force her mouth open. She growls and clenches her teeth. The pill pops out of his hand. He tries to catch it, falls over.

Headlock again. He holds her nose. When she opens her mouth to breathe, he drops the pill in and clamps her mouth shut. She growls through clenched jaws.

MATT (CONT'D)  
Now swallow it. Swallow!

A gulp is heard. He lets her go.

MATT (CONT'D)  
All right, then.

She coughs. Clickety-click. The pill sits on the table.

MATT (CONT'D)  
AAARRRGHHHHH!!!!!!!!!!

BELLA  
YAP-YAP-YAP-YAP-YAP!!!!!!!!!!

INT. MATT'S KITCHEN -- LATER

Matt cuts a piece of Brie and, molds it messily around the pill. Groggily, he gives it to Bella. She eats it like candy. Matt sighs. He's learning.

INT. MATT'S LIVING ROOM -- LATER

He finds her curled up on the couch on a pile of clean, folded laundry. She's on his white MIT sweatshirt.

MATT  
Ugh! Get off of that!

He grabs her off and frantically brushes the sweatshirt.

INT. MATT'S BATHROOM -- LATER

He spreads her tiny lips and brushes her teeth with the baby toothbrush. He holds her over the sink.

MATT  
Spit?

INT. MATT'S KITCHEN FLOOR -- LATER

Matt, looking pale, sits behind Bella on the floor. He prepares the syringe, and swallows hard.

MATT  
I can do this.

He pinches her neck carefully, sticks in the needle, squeezes his eyes shut as he pushes the plunger. He pulls the syringe out. Opens his eyes...

MATT (CONT'D)

(weakly)

There. Nothing to it.

...and passes out. Bella turns to look at him.

EXT. WASHINGTON SQUARE PARK -- NIGHT

It's raining. The Park is empty. Matt walks Bella, both look miserable. A young man is loitering. He approaches.

DRUG DEALER

(whispers)

Smoke? Smoke?

Matt shakes his head, annoyed. Could today get any worse?

DRUG DEALER (CONT'D)

Great stuff, man. From Hawaii.  
You look like you could use it.

MATT

I said, no. Leave me alone.

DRUG DEALER

Ok, ok! Most people don't come here at night 'less they're customers.

MATT

Believe me, I wouldn't be out here if I didn't have to be.

DRUG DEALER

You and me both.

Looks at Bella.

DRUG DEALER (CONT'D)

Cute dog.

MATT

Want her?

INT. MATT'S KITCHEN -- LATER, NIGHT

Matt rinses out the empty wine bottle. He's in his pajamas. Bella sits in her basket, damp and wrapped in a towel.

MATT

(to Bella)

You've got everything you need?  
Water? Newspaper? A direct line  
to Satan? Well, good night then.

He leaves. She's alone. She whimpers.

INT. MATT'S BEDROOM -- LATER

He comes in and gets into bed, puts on his eye mask, turns off the light. Soft snoring is heard.