

Excerpt from

Puppy Chow is Better Than Prozac

By Bruce Goldstein

My Little Black Magnet

Chapter – 24

It was one of those hazy, hot and humid mornings. The air was thick and muggy. It smelled like homeless people-piss with a slight dab of curry. It was 6:23 A.M. on the island of Manhattan. Lexington Avenue was just waking up. The streets were deserted except for a few blue suit wearing early birds trying to catch the corporate worm. *Wiggle, wiggle, wiggle*, they squirmed. I stood around waiting for the perfect moment when nobody was around so the puppy could poop, I could scoop, and we could both scoot back upstairs. The puppy had different plans. As soon as I put him on the ground, he went smack on the red brick under my awning. “Oh shit.” I panicked. My heart was ticking. Beads of sweat the size of jelly beans formed on my brow. My temperature was rising. My armpits were dripping. Balls of moisture slithered down my body like nervous serpents. I was hoping the few early risers who were out and about were too caught up in their own Monday morning mayhem to notice mine. I had to act fast. Fire in the hole. I dove down deep into my pocket to dig out my plastic bag glove. Then I dove down to the ground. I started the procedure. As I was squishing the puppy poop in my left hand, I kept sticking my neck up like a puppy periscope to make sure the coast was still clear. There weren’t any people nearby, so I grabbed my pup by his scruff in my right hand. I tucked him under my arm like a sack of potatoes, and I got up in slow motion. As I was coming up for air, there was an intruder alert. I froze half-way at the height of a fire hydrant. My jaw dropped. She came out of nowhere. She was running across Lexington Avenue like a guided missile. Brunette. There was nowhere to run. I was frozen. I was under attack. She was dodging yellow traffic. She was waving her arms, jumping up and down, screaming something at me. “Ohmagah–Ohmagah–Ookatdapupeeeeeee!” I couldn’t make out what she was saying. “Ohmagah–Ohmagah–Ookatdapupeeeeeee!”

“What did I do? Did my dog shit in a no crap zone? Did I leave a stain on the sidewalk?” My dog took a dump, and now I had to take the blame for a crime that I did not commit.

Whoever she was, she was coming right at me. “This is going to be the most humiliating moment of my life. God help me.” I just sat there crouched in mid air holding a puppy in one hand—a bag of crap in the other. Despite the stink emitting from my doggy baggy, there was no stopping this woman. She proceeded to close in on me. As she was hovering over me, she made it perfectly clear she wasn’t interested in me.

“Ohmagah–Ohmagah–Ookatdapupeeeeeeee! Ookatdapupeeeeeeee!”

Right before my very eyes her eyes blew up to the size of baby matzoth balls. Her voice went all giddy yap, yap, squeaky. She regressed back to early childhood. She acted like she was three. She acted as if I wasn't even there. Like the puppy in my arms was floating in the air. “Hi, pup-peeeeeeeee. Hi, pup-peeeee-uppee-uppeeeeeeee,” she said. She squeezed his cheeks like he was her grandchild. “Oh, you are just too cuuuuuuuute,” she said. Then this grown working woman in a beige business suit got down on her hands and knees to rub my puppy's tummy. I had never felt more invisible.

When my eyes looked down I almost fell down. I couldn't believe she let her guard down. Her nice white buttoned-down shirt wasn't completely buttoned. She was showing. I was blushing. She just didn't care. She didn't seem to care about the smell emitting from my puppy's rear-end either or the bag of crap in my right hand. All she cared about was my puppy. And my submissive pampered puppy didn't care what she did. As long as she kept doing it. He was lying on his back, like a furry turtle loving life. She was just getting to know him better. “Are you a widdle boy or a widdle girl?” she asked.

After thorough investigation, she found out for herself.

“Uh-ohh, I see a liddle pee-pee. Look at your little puppy pee-pee. You're a liddle boy, all right. And what's your liddle widdle name?”

That was a tricky question. She wasn't talking to me. I felt like a broken-down goateed parking meter with a brown paper bag over my head that the dog's leash just happened to be tied to. Dead silence. I was scared to open my mouth, frightened of what words might come out. It felt like she had called me up in front of the class to make a speech in a foreign language, English. I was scared to make a mistake. Afraid I'd slur thanks to my lithium, my *slithium*. I had the worst case of cotton mouth. But she was waiting for an answer.

“Bruce, c'mon say it. Say it. Speak. Come on, you could do it,” my subconscious kept nudging me. “Just speak to the nice woman. She won't bite. Just say something.”

Considering that I didn't teach my puppy how to speak yet, considering I wasn't the greatest puppy ventriloquist yet either, I had no choice but to answer for him. The one who got me into this mess. Finally, after a *very* dramatic pause, I responded.

“Uh, he doesn'th have a nameth yeth.”

Unfortunately, she had no idea what I said. “Excuse me.” She asked the same question over again. I was anxious and jittery just looking at her. She was so pretty. When she asked me what his name was again, I answered the best that I could.

“Uh, he doesn'th have a nameth yeth.”

“Ahhh, isn't that cuuuuuute, the widdle puppy doesn't have a name yet. What are you gonna call him?”

“Uh, uh I don't knoweth yeth.”

“Wha-da-yah-mean, you don't know yet? You godda give him a name. All puppies need a name. He looks like a little bear. You should call him *Bear*.”

“I dunno, maybe. I haveth to think about eth.”

“Don't take too long,” she said. “How old is the little guy anyway?”

“He'th–thonly-sixth-andth-a-half-thweeks-tholdth.”

“How old?”

“Sixth-andth-a-half-thweeks-tholdth.”

“Aww, he’s just a babeeeeeey. I miss my dog when he was a puppy. He was so tiny too. You guys are going to have such a great life together. Just wait. You’ll see. This is only the beginning.”

The beginning of what? There was no chemistry between us. The puppy didn’t even like me. I was just the guy that kidnapped him and yelled at him. I was his foster parent. He might have been cute and I might have been taking care of him, but at this point in time I had a better connection with my dead plant collection. I didn’t understand what long-term puppy effect this lady was talking about. The only thing I knew for certain was that I couldn’t believe this was really happening. Puppy pinch me. I was in shock that a woman this stunning was kneeling down next to me making casual puppy conversation instead of hailing a taxi. After a while, I felt comfortable enough with this woman to plop myself down on the ground. I stopped worrying about how I sounded. I wasn’t worried what I looked like. The way she was looking at me reminded me of somebody I used to know. Somebody I used to be real close with.

As I crouched down by a dirty curb, I looked into this woman’s eyes. I felt her breath. I felt something I hadn’t felt in a long time. I missed looking deep into somebody’s eyes. I realized how much I missed a woman’s company. How much I missed affection. Female attention. I missed goose bumps and tingles. I missed being attracted to somebody. I missed communicating. Talking to this woman in the street made me realize that Paige wasn’t the only one out there for me. Thanks to my puppy publicist for introducing me, I was able to see there would be other women in the four seasons of my future dreams. He lured her to me. She brought hope and understanding that there was somebody else out there for me. Someone who would correct my grammar and table manners. Who was the right one for me. Who would appear at the right time for me. When I was ready—I was far from ready. It was going to take a long time before I let my guard down and let another woman take my breath away.

At least fifteen minutes had gone by, and this woman wouldn’t put my puppy down. But she had no idea how much her talking meant to me. I valued every word she said to me. She made my day. She made the puppy’s day when she was rubbing his belly and hit his jackpot by accident. He started frantically shaking his little chubby leg, purring like a baby wookie.

“Warr-rr-uuu,” said Chewie.

“I got the spot. I got the spot,” she said. “My dog used to do that. I used to have an American Lab. He was tall and his nose was pointy. Is yours all Lab? He looks like he has a little Rottie in him.”

“No. He’s all Labth. He’s an Englishth Labth.”

“What a friendly face. He’s a happy guy. He’s so beautiful. He has so many expressions. Just look at the size of the head on that munchkin. He’s gorgeous. Just look at those paws. He’s gonna be huuuuuge, ya know. He’s gonna be huuuuuge. I hope you have a big enough apartment.”

“I hope I haveth a big enough apartmenth too,” I cringed, half smiling.

“You hear that pup-peeEEEEEEEEEE, you’re gonna be a big boy someday.”

Then if this woman wasn’t excited enough, she raised her voice up an octave to the key of parakeet. “I love you pup-peeEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!” she tweeted.

I could have lived with the bird calls all day. It was the embarrassment of holding that same bag of puppy crap that was getting to me. I had to get out of this stinky

situation. Fast. But I had a little problem. The woman wouldn't stop playing with him. She looked like she was in some kind of a trance. Her blue eyes were hypnotized by my baby's blue eyes. I didn't know how to break the spell. Then I thought if I get up from my crouching position and started walking away the woman would get the hint and go to work. I thought wrong. When I started walking towards the trash can on the corner of Twenty-seventh Street to dispose of the damaged goods, the woman was still attached to my puppy like crazy glue. She was hot on my trail. As I kept walking and walking she kept talking and stalking. Every time she got too close to my puppy, the farther I had to extend my right arm attached to the two brave fingers that dangled the swinging puppy poop pendulum pouch away from her face. It was hard to keep the bag still. God forbid some doody fell out on her. I had never seen anything like this in my life.