

# Man's Best Friend

Tim Lehnert

## Cast of Characters

LUCIE: A young or middle-aged woman  
JEFFREY: A middle-aged man  
BAGEL: A dog (substantial non-speaking role, played by a person)

(The characters' race/ethnicity is not important)

## Set and Prop Requirements

- A counter or high table upon which is a clipboard, some papers, and possibly a laptop.
- An additional table or bench, upon which are animal-related items like a dog crate, cat carrier, toys, etc. (If no table, these items could be on floor upstage).
- A low, wire enclosure (could be like the thin, easily-removable, wire fencing used around a flower-bed). An aquarium could also be used for this purpose. A tortoise is within.
- A tortoise - either an actual one, or a stuffed or plastic version.

**SETTING:** The reception area of an animal shelter.

**AT RISE:** LUCIE is standing behind the counter, looking at some papers or a laptop. UPSTAGE KIMBERLY (the tortoise) is on the floor behind wire fencing or similar (not well lit or in darkness).

*JEFFREY enters with BAGEL (on a leash) and places a folder firmly on the counter.*

JEFFREY: This is *not* working out.

LUCIE: I'm sorry?

JEFFREY: It's quite simple. I adopted *this* dog (*points at BAGEL*) from *you* people, and now I'm returning him.

LUCIE: You can't just walk in and--

JEFFREY: I can, and I will. You gave him away, now you can take him back.

LUCIE: OK, when did you adopt, uh (*looking at dog*) . . . wait a sec, that's Bagel!

JEFFREY: Yes, that's what *you* people called him. I renamed him Maimonides, but feel free to call him . . . um . . . Bagel. After all, he *is* yours.

LUCIE: Awwww . . . Bagel! Sweetheart! (*Strokes dog lovingly*). Really, Bagel-boy, what happened?

(JEFFREY *hands leash to LUCIE with BAGEL still attached to it*).

JEFFREY: And here's the little agitator's paperwork.

(JEFFREY *places folder on table, and begins to leave*).

LUCIE: Wait, wait, hold on!

(JEFFREY *turns and faces LUCIE*).

Look, I can't just . . . scan him in (*gestures at BAGEL like she's waiving a scanner*) and throw him back on the shelf.

We do a comprehensive eval on all our animals; if we missed something, we need to know what it is.

JEFFREY: Fine (*JEFFREY returns to counter*).

LUCIE: (*Looks down at papers*). Ok, so you've had Bagel or May, may . .

JEFFREY: Maimonides.

LUCIE: Right, you've had him for ten days.

Typically, there's an adjustment period when a dog joins a household. Some anxiety is not uncommon.

JEFFREY: How anxious should I feel? Because I'm definitely on edge.

LUCIE: I meant the *dog*.

JEFFREY: Oh . . . *him*, he's very pleased with himself, no worries there.

LUCIE: (*Looking down at papers*). It says he's house-broken, but has that been a problem?

JEFFREY: Oh, he's full of it, but he doesn't make a mess, if that's what you're asking.

LUCIE: Is he . . . aggressive?

JEFFREY: Yes.

LUCIE: He doesn't *look* aggressive (*peers at BAGEL and strokes him*). You aren't a meanie Bagel boy, are you? The eval says he's even-tempered.

JEFFREY: Bah (*makes dismissive gesture*).

LUCIE: We're *very* careful about placing aggressive dogs, we wouldn't want anyone to get hurt. When we had him, he didn't display—

JEFFREY: I don't care *what* your paper says, *I'm* the one living with him.

LUCIE: Oh-kay.

Um . . . has he bitten anyone?

JEFFREY: No.

LUCIE: Does he fight with other dogs?

JEFFREY: No.

LUCIE: Is he territorial, growling, snapping or showing any other signs of aggression?

JEFFREY: Physically, no.

LUCIE: So . . . he's *not* aggressive.

JEFFREY: He is, but it's more . . . what you'd call . . . *verbal*.

LUCIE: Ahh, excessive barking. That can mean a number of things; some breeds are more prone to it than others.

JEFFREY: It's not so much the quantity or volume of the barking. It's what's conveyed.

LUCIE: Okay . . .

JEFFREY: It's his *attitude*.

LUCIE: But you said he wasn't aggressive.

JEFFREY: Well again, physically, no.

You see, I wanted a boon companion, a trusted ally, and that's not what I got. Maimonides, er . . . Bagel, is less bosom buddy and more instigating loudmouth.

LUCIE: Bagel?

JEFFREY: Your familiar with the concept of gas lighting?

LUCIE: Yeah . . .

JEFFREY: That's what's happening. It's like he's turning the screws on me little by little, sling by sling, arrow by arrow.

LUCIE: Uh-huh.

JEFFREY: My home isn't grand, but it is *my* sanctuary, *my* refuge. It's where I find peace.

We're emerging from a very trying period in our nation's history. I can't have a dog--or anything else for that matter--impinging on the harmony of my space.

LUCIE: I think I understand.

JEFFREY: And that's what he's doing, *impinging*, with his editorializing and armchair philosophizing.

LUCIE: You don't like him getting on the furniture.

JEFFREY: He can lie on the sofa all he wants, but I'd prefer if he kept his *opinions* while doing so to himself.

And I don't appreciate the agenda you people have.

LUCIE: Um . . . we try to find homes for unwanted and abandoned animals. It's in our mission statement.

JEFFREY: Sure, that's what you say, but I know what's really going on: you farm out these little Judases to unsuspecting people like *me*, and *then* you have the nerve to run those "Donate your old vehicle to the Eden Park Animal Protection League" ads.

I'd sooner drive my car into the Bay than hand it over to *you* people.

LUCIE: We barely break-even on some of those donations, but let's stick to the dog. You're saying that Bagel, or, uh, . . . Mayonnaise is too opinionated?

JEFFREY: Yes, exactly. And why this cultural premium on sharing anyway? Why does everyone feel the need to provide their *take* on things, no matter how wrong-headed or ill-informed? Same with this dog; if it was just personal matters—I've got a crush on the Shih-Tzu on the next block—that would be fine, but he's always got to weigh in on issues of the day.

LUCIE: A dog can't exactly . . . I mean they don't---

JEFFREY: I'm sure you're one of these animal rights types that thinks dogs can do no wrong, that they're so pure and loyal and superior, and if there are any problems it's the owner's—oh excuse me—the human companion's fault.

LUCIE: Not exactly, it's just that I'm not sure how these opinions of Bagel's would manifest—

JEFFREY: Oh, they manifest, believe me. It's like he's trying to goad me. Not to use too much of the lingo of the day, but it's a constant stream of micro-aggressions.

LUCIE: Ironic, you'd think they'd be macro because he's— (*indicates dog's large size*).

JEFFREY: That's supposed to be funny?

LUCIE: Yeah, because macro—

JEFFREY: I know what it means.

Look, I understand that not everyone sees the world the way I do; that's fine, but there's a time and place.

I don't know if he spouts off to provoke me and get under my skin, or if he just doesn't know any better. . . . Regardless, he stays here.

LUCIE: You don't want Mayonnaise expressing his political and social views in the home.

JEFFREY: Thank you!

LUCIE: I guess that's fair.

JEFFREY: Do you know what I'd like *more* than my pet agreeing with me on such matters? Me not knowing! Let's just do the walks, the belly rubs, the tail-wagging when I come through the door and leave it at that.

No need to discuss the Middle East, January 6, the Supreme Court, our former presid—you get the picture.

LUCIE: Bagel was talking about the Supreme Court?

JEFFREY: Yes, he wants to expand it and end senate confirmation hearings. He thinks they're ridiculous.

LUCIE: (*Coos and strokes BAGEL appreciatively*) OK, just so I'm totally clear, the dog is not aggressive, at least physically, is housetrained, and doesn't exhibit significant *visible* behavioral problems. However, he *is* able to communicate certain . . . views.

JEFFREY: This is what I've been telling you.

LUCIE: Got it.

(*Looks at Bagel closely*) You seem to have been taking good care of him, he looks great.

JEFFREY: Of course, despite his . . . proclivities, I *am* responsible for his welfare. I've given him only the best food, he gets lots of walks, and I brush his coat daily.

LUCIE: I wish everyone took their duty to their animal as seriously as you.

Had you ever owned a pet prior to uh . . .?

JEFFREY: I had a cat, Leopold, sweet little guy. He died a few years ago, lived to almost twenty.

LUCIE: That's old for a cat. Sounds like that was a positive experience.

JEFFREY: Leo was wonderful, once you got past his quirks.

LUCIE: Uh-huh.

JEFFREY: He was *crazy* about football. Patriots this, Patriots that, it never stopped. You wouldn't think a cat would like football, but *he* sure did. Even in the off-season, he was *still* on about it.

LUCIE: That *is* unusual in a cat. Tennis I can see, but football?

JEFFREY: I know. (*Sighs*) Poor Leo, if he was here today, I'd gladly ask him how next year's rookies are shaping up, just to see those big whiskers quiver with joy.

There's no replacing a cat like that . . . so, I adopted . . . (*gestures at BAGEL*).

Anyway, I'm sorry to have come on so strong, and I know you're doing your best for these animals, but like I said, this dog situation, such as it is, is not viable.

I'd love to help in some other way.

LUCIE: Maybe a dog isn't a good fit. They can be a lot.

What about an animal that's a little less engaged politically, less *divisive*?

JEFFREY: It's a possibility.

LUCIE: We have a very special someone who has been with us for a while. She plays her cards close to the vest, or I should say, *shell*.

JEFFREY: That's refreshing.

LUCIE: (*LUCIE fetches Kimberly, who she places on the counter or table, holding her lightly*). Let me introduce Kimberly.

We think she's in her 50s. We really want to find a good home for her. She's very easy-going . . . what you might call a *neutral* sort.

JEFFREY Kimberly, eh?

(Leans down slightly to speak to Kimberly) Hi Kimberly.

LUCIE: You know what she likes? Sitcoms from the 60s, the kind with a high concept. *Gilligan's Island*, *Beverly Hillbillies*, that type of thing.

JEFFREY: I see.

LUCIE: (*Quietly to JEFFREY*) I'll be honest with you, I don't think she has a clue what's going on in the world. It's all the same to her, she just likes her shows.

JEFFREY: I don't need to control the remote: *Gilligan*, *Jethro*, even *Hogan's Heroes*, they're all fine by me.

LUCIE: I thought you two might hit it off.

JEFFREY: (*Leans down toward KIMBERLY like he's listening*). I know, isn't Gilligan silly? He does his best, but he screws up every time. And then Skipper gets so mad!

(*Straightens up and uses a more serious voice*) I think we'll get along wonderfully, as long as she's willing to give Fox and CNBC a miss.

LUCIE: She's not interested in a bunch of suits yakking away. A hot debate for her is who was the better Darrin on *Bewitched*.

JEFFREY: (*Turns toward KIMBERLY, pauses, nods*). She thinks Dick York, the first one.

(*Addressing LUCIE*) I'm sure Kimberly would be very comfortable *chez moi*, and I'd be delighted to have her.

LUCIE: Fantastic, we have your information on file, so I'll just need you to sign *here . . .* and initial *there*.

JEFFREY: Great, (*signing paper*) thank-you. (*Picks up KIMBERLY and addresses her as they leave*) I have the *perfect* spot for you, it gets some nice sun in the afternoon, but not *too* much—(*EXITS*).

LUCIE: Bye (waves as *JEFFREY leaves*).

*PAUSE*

LUCIE: What did you do?

BAGEL: What? (*as in "what'd I do"?*)

LUCIE: The *Supreme Court*? *January 6*?

BAGEL: I'm sorry, I can't just turn a blind eye to what's happening in this country!

LUCIE: That's fine, but you're a *dog*, you've got to maintain a certain—(*Bagel turns on the charm*). Alright, alright, we'll work on it . . . *together*. (*Bagel continues to charm*). Yes, we'll get you something to eat first, but *then* . . .

**END – BLACKOUT**