

STEP-DOG-FATHER

Written by

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1 - EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - NYC - MORNING - PRESENT DAY

RYAN, tall, fit, pleasant demeanor, holds the door to a West Village Loft Building open for CHIP, an adorable little Scottish Terrier Pinscher Mixed with Chihuahua flair.

RYAN (V.O.)

*Meet CHIP... also known as Charlie
"Chip" Archibald McDaniels Matluck
The 1st... that's the full name of
this feisty fourteen-year-old pup.*

Ryan scoops Chip up, carries him down the steps and gently sets him on the sidewalk.

Chip shakes it off, his harness shifting as spit flies off his tongue. Ryan averts his face to avoid the saliva shower.

RYAN (V.O.)

*We may be the best of friends now,
but it wasn't always this way. ~~You
should've seen him the night we
met.~~*

RYAN VO: (12-13 seconds)

"My Minglewood Blues" by Kelley Swindall plays.

2 - INT. ALI'S APARTMENT - WEST VILLAGE - NIGHT

TEXT ON SCREEN: "Christmas Eve, 2019"

COUNTRY MUSIC is playing.

SMALL GATHERING of FRIENDS kicks back, feeling good.

Door opens. Ryan pokes his head in.

RYAN

Hello?

BRIAN, 33, looks up from the couch, noticing.

BRIAN

There he is...

Brian stands, embraces Ryan in a warm hug.

RYAN

BRIAN.

BRIAN

RYAN...

Brian turns back to ALI, 32, a beautiful brunette, warm, welcoming, flirty as she gets up from the couch to meet Ryan.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

This is Ali. It's her apartment.

Ryan and Ali shake hands, sparks apparent as they size one another up, both smiling and intrigued.

RYAN

Nice to meet you. Great place.

ALI

Thanks. Welcome. Make yourself at home...

They hold their handshake a moment too long. DREAM SEQUENCE of GOOGLY-EYES between them.

"You Can Call Me Darlin'" by Kelley Swindall plays.

Ryan snaps out of it, remembering himself.

RYAN (V.O.)

Naturally, I turned to the dog to keep it from getting awkward. (3 seconds)

Ryan breaks the moment by acknowledging Chip.

RYAN

Hey... look at this guy...

Chip springs off a lap onto the floor.

Ryan squats to introduce himself.

ALI

Oh, that's my little guy, Chip...

Chip blows him off, headed straight for the kitchen. Ryan takes it in stride.

RYAN (V.O.)

That pretty much sums up how Chip felt about the whirlwind romance that followed. (4 seconds)

4 - INT. ALI'S APARTMENT - WEST VILLAGE - MORNING

Ryan enters with a duffel bag and suitcase. Ali follows him in, carrying a bag of Ryan's things.

RYAN (V.O.)
*Ali assured me he'd perk up once I
 moved in... she wasn't wrong. (5
 seconds with a pause)*

BARK! BARK! BARK!

Ryan notices Chip on the couch, puts his duffel bag down.

RYAN
 Hey Chip! Remember me!?

Ryan approaches, takes a knee on the floor beside the couch, ready to pet Chip. He stops in his tracks.

CHIP
*Your dumbass face again? How could
 I forget? (4 seconds)*

Ryan turns to Ali, shocked.

RYAN
 Did you hear that? Chip just spoke
 to me.

ALI
 Awww... he's just excited that
 Daddy's home! You bark when you're
 happy, don't you, buddy?

RYAN
 No, I mean, he actually...

Ali's confused look makes Ryan reconsider. He trails off, turning back to Chip.

RYAN (CONT'D)
 Spoke to me...

Chip hops off the couch to sniff around.

Ryan turns back to Ali, now already gone to the kitchen. He stays with Chip, listening to him, in complete shock.

CHIP
*DADDY... Boy, I am eighty-four-dog-
 years-old. I'm the head of this
 household, not you. Besides, I've
 seen your kind before. You won't
 last. Not if I can help it... (15
 seconds)*

Chip saunters off.

Ryan stays frozen on one knee, stunned, realizing only he heard the ***crotchety-grandpa-voiced dog channeling Burgess Meredith in Grumpy Old Men and Rocky.***

RYAN (V.O.)
I wasn't sure if I was going
nuts... (3 seconds)

Ryan is a statue, lost in thought as Chip stares him down.

5 - INT. ALI'S APARTMENT - WEST VILLAGE - KITCHEN - DAY

Ryan makes up a bowl of dog food for Chip at the counter.

RYAN (V.O.)
But I definitely knew I was gonna
have a crack at being Chip's dog-
daddy, whether he liked it or not.
(5-6 seconds)

Chip enters passed his dog bed, expectantly.

CHIP
Chop, chop, Wolfgang Suck... I've got
a hot date with a cold pillow. (6
seconds)

Chip whimpers, impatient as he watches Ryan mix his dog food in a bowl at the kitchen counter.

RYAN (V.O.)
*Once an unstoppable force in the
table scraps game, Chip had lost a
step or two thanks to the removal
of a tumor in his lower jaw.*

Ryan, dog bowl in hand, exits the kitchen with Chip scampering around at his feet, eyeing his food.

RYAN (V.O.)
*Still, he was an extra cute beggar
of the highest degree.*

Chip stands on his hind legs, paws up in begging position.

RYAN (V.O.)
*Roll over. Play dead. Paw. He had
all the moves. (15 seconds)*

Ryan snaps, pointing to a dog bed.

Chip tilts his head, waving his paw vigorously.

Ryan continues snapping and pointing.

RYAN
Go to mat, Chip! You go...

Chip BARKS back, stomping his paws.

CHIP
Not on your life, buddy... Now put
the bowl down and get lost. (4-5
seconds)

Ryan SIGHS, then puts Chip's food down and watches him scarf.

RYAN (V.O.)
It was clear I wasn't about to
teach this old dog any new tricks...
(3 seconds)

6 - EXT. SIDEWALK - WEST VILLAGE - MORNING - FALL 2020

Ryan strolls with Chip, walking slow. He glances over, notices Chip sizing up a collection of bike locks.

RYAN (V.O.)
But I figured a little neighborly
etiquette wasn't too much to ask.
(3 seconds)

Ryan pulls him away first.

RYAN
Get a life, Chip...

Ryan pulls him away, walks ahead, frustrated. Chip scampers to catch up.

CHIP
This *is* my life, you idiot! I'm a
dog. (3 seconds)

Ryan continues walking ahead, annoyed.

RYAN (V.O.)
*Chip the dog literally leaves his
mark. I had to respect it. (3-4
seconds)*

7 - INT. ALI'S APARTMENT - WEST VILLAGE - AFTERNOON

Ryan carries Chip into his work station on the couch, sits and tries to make Chip comfortable beside him.

CHIP

Why are your hands so sweaty? I'm
going to smell like wet dog!

Ryan puts his feet up, grabs his laptop and pets Chip softly.

RYAN

See... isn't this nice?

Chip stands, shakes off Ryan's affection, then hops off the couch and exits.

CHIP

Let's get something straight...
this is my house, bitch. You just
live here. (5-6 seconds)

Ryan watches Chip go, hurt.

RYAN (V.O.)

There were trust issues to say the
least... (2-3 seconds)

7A - INT. ALI'S APARTMENT - WEST VILLAGE - NIGHT

Ryan works from the couch, typing away.

FRONT DOOR OPENS. Ryan keeps working, doesn't look up.

RYAN

Heyyy....

Ali enters, carrying groceries and a handbag, venting about her day.

ALI

I've had such a day... I am at the
end of my rope--

RYAN (V.O.)

Chip had... DADDY ISSUES.

Chip bolts passed her, hops up on the couch, makes himself cozy on Ryan's lap, disrupting his work flow.

CHIP

Look Ma! Best friends... (2
seconds)

Ryan holds his laptop out, annoyed with Chip's antics.

Ali smiles at them, instantly charmed, heart fluttering.

ALI
Awww... see!? He loves you!

RYAN
No, he doesn't! He's literally
ignored me all day until the second
you walked in the door.

Ali looks at Chip, looking up from Ryan's lap, being extra
cute, seeming happy. She smirks at Ryan, not buying it.

ALI
Sure... I'm gonna get dinner
started.

Ali heads off for the kitchen.

CHIP
How does it feel to get played like
a fiddle, big guy? (3-4 seconds)

Chip leaves, satisfied. Ryan watches him go.

8 - EXT. RYAN AND ALI'S NEW LOFT - WEST VILLAGE - AFTERNOON

Ryan and Ali stand together, looking up at an apartment
building, smiling and hopeful.

RYAN (V.O.)
*Chip's antics aside, Ali and I were
in love. And ready to build a
future together.*

Chip stands beside Ali, on his leash, looking suspicious.

RYAN (V.O.)
*One that had to include his royal
highness, whether I liked it or
not.*

The three of them approach the stoop of their new home, walk
up the steps and enter.

RYAN (V.O.)
*I was optimistic that a new home
might inspire him to change his
ways. (14 seconds)*

9 - INT. RYAN AND ALI'S NEW LOFT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ali lays on the floor of the new, spacious condo, cuddled up
with a sick, weak Chip, tears in her eyes as she pets him.

RYAN (V.O.)

Turns out that was about to happen anyway. Chippy's constant sampling of anything and everything on the ground finally caught up with him.

Ryan sits with them, rubbing Ali's back.

RYAN (V.O.)

The vets said he'd developed stage four kidney disease and might only have a few weeks to live...

Ryan snuggles in behind Ali, comforting her.

RYAN (V.O.)

Ali had Chip since he was seven-weeks old, he was her baby! She was determined he'd pull through. So, she told the doctors we'd do whatever it takes to get him back on his paws. (23 seconds)

10 - INT. RYAN AND ALI'S NEW LOFT - KITCHEN - MORNING

Ryan stands at the kitchen counter in their beautiful new, light-filled condo, twisting a NEEDLE into an IV drip.

RYAN (V.O.)

He'd need daily medication and fluids to maintain his quality of life. I was all in, hoping Chip would see I was really there for him.

Ryan hangs the BAG OF FLUIDS on the fridge handle. Ali passes behind him, shows some love, appreciating his efforts.

Ali grabs a stool off the ground, then crosses back behind Ryan as he prepares the needle.

RYAN (V.O.)

So, Ali and I became his at-home vets, getting our "routine" on point... A daily game of catch-me-if-you-can. (17 seconds)

Ali, stool in hand, summons Chip.

ALI

Oh Chip...???

Chip scampers off, trying to hide.

CHIP
Shit... (1 second)

10A - INT. RYAN AND ALI'S NEW LOFT - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS
They watch Chip run out of sight behind the bar counter.
Ryan and Ali laugh. They call out to Chip.

ALI
Where you going, baby?

RYAN
We're trying to prolong your life
over here, Chip!

Chip, on the move, trots along the wall underneath the
kitchen table.

CHIP
I've lived long enough! You two go
poke each other instead!
(4 seconds)

Ryan and Ali react. He likes the idea. She thinks he's
adorable.

10B - INT. RYAN AND ALI'S NEW LOFT - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Ali sits on the stool, hugging Chip tight, her face lovingly
up against his. She whispers to a shaking Chip as Ryan lifts
Chip's back scruff, inserts the needle aimed for incision.

CHIP
Happy thoughts, Chip. Bacon--

Chip winces as the needle goes in.

CHIP (CONT'D)
--Ayy! Damn it!

CLOSE UP: Ryan holds the bag up as the fluids go in.

CHIP (CONT'D)
Will someone please check this
yahoo's medical credential? (10
seconds)

Chip calmly sits on Ali's lap as the fluids go in.

RYAN (V.O.)
He got used to it... (1-2 seconds)

10C - INT. RYAN AND ALI'S NEW LOFT - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Ryan holds the needle in place on Chip's back with one hand, locks the IV drip with his other, then removes it carefully.

RYAN (V.O.)
*And stage four retracted into a
 more manageable stage two... (3-4
 seconds)*

CHIP
 Couldn't meet a real doctor, eh Ma?
 (2-3 seconds)

Ali puts Chip down. He springs to life, shaking the cobwebs out, getting loose, tail wagging vigorously. He eagerly stomps, then gets on his hind legs, begging for his treat.

CHIP (CONT'D)
 Yeah, Chippy's a good boy... Let's
 give him a treat! (3 seconds)

Ali feeds Chip an apple bite. He scarfs it.

ALI
 Good boy. You want another one?

Ryan shakes his head at Chip, amused.

CHIP (O.S.)
 Keep em coming, Mama... Don't be shy.
 (2-3 seconds)

RYAN (V.O.)
 Apparently, THANK YOU was one of
 the few words Chip didn't know. (3-
 4 seconds)

Ali tosses another apple bite on the floor for Chip.

CHIP
 I got it! Ahh, bad toss... (2-3
 seconds)

Chip goes to town, consumed with scooping the bites up.

Chip returns for my treats.

CHIP (CONT'D)
 What, that's it? (1-2 seconds)

INSERT HOME VIDEO FOOTAGE:

CROP TO STAY ON "RYAN"

SFX & FILTER TO ENHANCE "HOME VIDEO" FEEL.

11 - INT. OLD HOMESTEAD STEAKHOUSE - PRIVATE ROOM - NIGHT

TEXT ON SCREEN: JULY 18, 2021

Ryan and Ali stand side-by-side as their RABBI concludes their wedding ceremony and pronounces them husband and wife.

RYAN (V.O.)

Even after tying the knot at a private ceremony which featured him as ring-barrer... Chippity-Do wouldn't give up his status as the #1 man in Ali's life... (9 seconds)

40:59 - 41:09

CRUNCH. RYAN BREAKS THE WRAPPED GLASS WITH HIS FOOT.

FAMILY AND FRIENDS

MAZEL TOV!!!

41:13-41:16

"CELEBRATORY ROCK N ROLL SAXOPHONE INSTRUMENTAL" PLAYS

Ryan calls for Chip, who doesn't run down the red carpet to join them as expected. Instead, he sniffs around.

CHIP

Where are those lamb chops!? Nobody made me a plate... unbelievable... I'm in the wedding party, people! (7 seconds)

RYAN (V.O.)

In fact, his efforts to act-out only grew stronger... (2-3 seconds)

41:26-41:38

END HOME VIDEO FOOTAGE.

12 - INT. RYAN AND ALI'S NEW LOFT - WEST VILLAGE - NIGHT

Ali chops zucchini on a cutting board beside the stove.

BARK! BARK! SOUND of DOOR OPENING.

ALI

Heeyyyy...

Ryan enters with Chip on the leash, sits down on a stool, grabs a baby wipe from a drawer and wipes Chip's paws.

ALI (O.S.) (CONT'D)
How'd he doodie?

RYAN
Dropped a bomb, pee'd on everything a human might touch, the usual...

CHIP
Easy bub, I'm old...

Ali chuckles to herself, then eggs Ryan on.

ALI
Trash bags?

RYAN
So many! And not a single tree or dirt patch.

Ryan undoes Chip's harness, watches him scamper off, then hangs the leash and walks in, turning his attention to Ali.

RYAN (CONT'D)
Yeah... he's a classy guy...

Ryan smiles playfully at Ali, heads into the kitchen.

ALI
Takes after his daddy...

Ali smiles back, flirty.

RYAN
Oh, I'm sure he does...

ALI
I meant you...

He approaches, spoons her as she continues chopping.

RYAN
I know...

Ryan playfully kisses Ali's neck.

RYAN (CONT'D)
You smell nice...

She sets the knife down, turns to face Ryan.

ALI
I'm sorry, can I help you?

RYAN
Uh, yeah...

ALI
Yeah, I think I can...

Things progress to frisky.

PHHHSSSSHHHH!!!

Ali pulls away, distracted.

ALI (CONT'D)
Do you hear that?

Ryan focuses on the sound.

RYAN
Yeah...

Ryan looks around, spots the culprit in the living room.

THEIR POV: Chip's full-stream makes a puddle on the carpet.

RYAN (CONT'D)
CHIP!!!

Chip sniffs around without a care in the world.

CHIP
Oh, that *pisses* you off? How
ironic... (3-4 seconds)

Ryan starts toward the dog, Ali hurries off ahead of him.

ALI
What!? You just went on a walk!!

RYAN
Now do you believe me!?

Ryan glares at Chip from the edge of the kitchen.

Ryan stares daggers back.

RYAN (V.O.)
*That was it. The gloves were off.
This meant war. (3 seconds)*

MONTAGE BEGINS

"Bad to the Bone" by George Thorogood plays

INSERT PHOTO: Ryan and Chip face off like boxers at weigh-in.

13 - EXT. SIDEWALK - WEST VILLAGE - DAY

Ryan anxiously watches Chip sniff a mesh construction fence.

Chip props his butt up against the fence, poops into it.

Ryan looks around, embarrassed. He notices the poop stuck to the fence, mortified.

14 - INT. RYAN AND ALI'S NEW LOFT - WEST VILLAGE - DAY

Ryan enters from the bedroom, stops in his tracks.

RYAN'S POV: Chip scampers off from behind the coffee table.

Ryan, fearing the inevitable, hurries off to check the rug.

Ryan, on hands and knees, sprays a pee stain on the carpet with cleaner, scrubs vigorously with a cloth.

Ali starts her yoga routine.

Ali stops, mid-pose, when she catches a whiff of Chip's pee. She sniffs around, finds the spot, winces, annoyed.

14A - INT. RYAN AND ALI'S NEW LOFT - BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ryan stuffs the RUG in the WASHING MACHINE.

Ryan pulls the rug out of the DRYER, walks out.

14B - INT. RYAN AND ALI'S NEW LOFT - BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS
REMOVED. NO FOOTAGE.

Ryan walks the rug through the bedroom, stops.

RYAN'S POV: Chip humps his little dog bed aggressively.

Disturbed and annoyed, Ryan continues into the living room.

14C - INT. RYAN AND ALI'S NEW LOFT - CONTINUOUS

Ryan, rug in hand, enters from the bedroom, stops.

RYAN'S POV: Pile of DOG POOP in front of the FIREPLACE.

Ryan drops the rug, fed up.

Ryan sets up a dog crate in the middle of the living room. Chip watches him innocently. Ryan stares Chip down.

Ryan carries Chip to the CRATE, puts him in and locks it.

BARK! BARK!! BARK!!!

MONTAGE ENDS. SONG FADES OUT.

15 - INT. RYAN AND ALI'S NEW LOFT - WEST VILLAGE - MORNING

Ryan sits at the kitchen table, typing away.

Chip rests in a dog bed beside Ryan's chair.

RYAN (V.O.)

Then, in a surprising twist, Chip started playing nice. It was weird. I thought, 'does the talking dog have a magical crate?' Something was up.

Ryan glances down at Chip sleeping, smirks to himself.

RYAN (V.O.)

Not that I was complaining... (12 seconds)

Chip's head pops up, suddenly alert.

CHIP

Hm? What? Ehh... wake me for lunch, schmuck. (4-5 seconds)

16 - INT. RYAN AND ALI'S NEW LOFT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Chip snuggles against Ali, asleep on her side of the bed.

Ryan gets in bed quietly.

Chip notices, stands and goes to Ryan instead.

RYAN (V.O.)

It was nice to be in Chip's good graces, even if I was sleeping with one eye open. And I got a kick out of the little show he was putting on. Such a diva. (9 seconds)

Ryan lifts the comforter to let Chip go under the covers.

CHIP
*Make way, Bub! Here comes the big
 spoon! (3-4 seconds)*

Ryan waits for Chip to settle in, smirks at the SOUND of Chip shaking himself under the covers.

RYAN (V.O.)
*Plus, I wasn't one to turn down a
 good snuggle. (3 seconds)*

17 - INT. RYAN AND ALI'S NEW LOFT - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Ryan stands at the sink, doing the dishes.

RYAN (V.O.)
*Then it happened. The reason for
 Chip's shift became clear. (4-5
 seconds)*

Ali faces Ryan expectantly.

ALI
 Ryan?

Chip, resting on plush blankets in the center of the couch, glances up as Ali enters from the bedroom.

CHIP
Oh boy, here we go... (2 seconds)

Ryan continues doing the dishes.

RYAN
 Yeah?

ALI
 Ryan???

RYAN
 One second... what is it?

ALI
 Ryan!?

Ryan dries a dish, puts it away and turns to Ali, holding up a positive pregnancy test, smiling tears of joy. He's floored with emotion. They lock eyes.

ALI (CONT'D)
 Surprise...

They go to each other.

Ryan wraps Ali in a warm embrace.

RYAN (V.O.)
 Ali would have a new number one in
 her life... and it wouldn't be
 either of us."

Ali notices Chip, ignoring them. She smiles, goes to him.

RYAN (V.O.)
Finally, some common ground...

They both embrace Chip, excited, but he's hardly interested.

RYAN (V.O.)
*He knew it before we did. Pretty
 smart guy that Charlie-Chip. (14
 seconds)*

18 - INT. RYAN AND ALI'S NEW LOFT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ali sits across the couch from Ryan, very aware of Chip resting on his lap. Ryan pets Chip, suddenly smitten.

ALI
 Are you kidding me?

Ryan notices Ali, jealous, gives a rye smile.

RYAN
 What?

ALI
 You've stolen him from me...

RYAN
 Well, that's not true... stolen?

ALI
 He once upon a time loved me and...
 now he doesn't even care... Because
 you've taken him from me.

Ryan gestures toward Chip, resting peacefully on his lap.

RYAN
 I see it. I didn't even like him...

CHIP
 Ooh, burn.

RYAN (CONT'D)
And now he's...

ALI
Well now I'm like chopped liver!
This is ridiculous...

Ali throws up her hands, then folds them in a huff over Chip's betrayal.

Chip looks up, glancing toward Ryan.

CHIP
Guess it's just you and me now,
kid. (2 seconds)

Ryan can't help but smirk and respond in kind.

RYAN
Hey, I hear ya, pal.

Ali gives Ryan a peculiar look. He shrugs it off.

RYAN (CONT'D)
What?

CHIP
Yeah, what? (1 second)

19 - EXT. SIDEWALK - WEST VILLAGE - MORNING - PRESENT DAY

Ryan patiently watches Chip mark a black fence surrounding a tree, leash in hand.

RYAN (V.O.)
These days, I'm home team for Chip.

Leg down, Chip goes for their stoop. Ryan walks with him patiently as Chip climbs the steps on his own.

RYAN (V.O.)
*So take heed all you step-dog-dad's
who've yet to get your due...*

Ryan pets Chip playfully, telling him he did good, then opens the door and lets Chip enter first. He follows.

RYAN (V.O.)
*It just takes time... and
impregnating the mother of your
step-dog-son. No big deal. (15
seconds)*

PULL OUT TO WIDE SHOT as Ryan and Chip disappear inside.

TEXT ON SCREEN, typed out: "THE END... OF THE BEGINNING."

SMASH CUT TO SLIDE SHOW OF CHIP, ALONG WITH THE REAL RYAN AND ALI, PLAYED OVER FUN MUSIC.

CREDITS ROLL.