

BIRDBRAIN

by

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FADE IN:

INT. PET WORLD/OFFICE - DAY

Small cluttered cubbyhole separated from the main store by a large glass window. Paperwork, coupons, pet supply samples cover every available flat surface.

Looking over and around the paperwork, MR. BEENER, pet store owner, (late middle-age, stocky build, more-bark-than-bite) interviews a clean-cut young man of around 20-something.

Mr. Beener waxes eloquent, nearly forgetting JEREMY is there.

MR. BEENER

And, another thing...what does Congress know about the small businessman anyway? Those clowns think money just rolls in like water.

Jeremy furtively glances at his watch below the level of the desk while nodding enthusiastically.

JEREMY

Yessir, I'm sure you're right.

MR. BEENER

Right? You're darn tootin' I'm right.

Mr. Beener stops, leans forward, scrutinizes Jeremy over the top of his glasses.

MR. BEENER (CONT'D)

A kid your age just starting out. What do you know about franchise taxes and payroll taxes, and the cost of employee bene.. say, you're not married, are you?

JEREMY

No sir.

MR. BEENER

Well, I'd hope not. Kid your age oughta be thinking about getting himself established...getting his feet on the ground. There's always plenty of time for...

Off Jeremy's look, Mr. Beener interrupts himself to turn and scan the store.

An elderly female customer hobbles toward the office.

MR. BEENER (CONT'D)

Mrs. Wheatley, looking for more tropical fish. She oughta fill the tank with dirt and stick a plastic flower in it.

Mrs. Wheatley waves at him. Mr. Beener waves back, struggles to his feet and launches himself toward the door.

MR. BEENER

9 A.M.

JEREMY

Sir?

MR. BEENER

Be here 9 A.M. And, don't be late. I can't stand people who are late. Don't develop the habit.

JEREMY

You mean I'm hired?

MR. BEENER

9 A.M. Don't forget.

Jeremy, rises to his feet hand outstretched. TOO LATE. Mr. Beener is disappearing through the doorway.

JEREMY

(subdued)

Yessir. 9 A.M.

Jeremy stands transfixed watching through the window as Mr. Beener bustles off to greet the waving fingers of Mrs. Wheatley.

EXT. SIDEWALK, FRONT OF PET WORLD - DAY

SALLY, perky pageboy, girl-next-door type, and Jeremy's girlfriend, waits impatiently. At the sound of the door opening, she turns, crosses her arms, and fixes Jeremy with "a look."

SALLY

(tapping her foot)

Well, I was beginning to wonder.

JEREMY

I got the job.

SALLY

What took you so long?

JEREMY
 (louder)
 Sally, I GOT THE JOB!

Sally jumps up and down, grabs Jeremy's arm.

SALLY
 What? Really? Are you kidding me?
 When do you start? I'm hungry let's
 eat. How much does it pay?

JEREMY
 I don't know. I forgot to ask.

SALLY
 Oh, Jeremy you idiot. Well, it's a
 start. Come on lets eat, now that
 we can pay the rent. Awesome!

JEREMY
 Yeah, OK. Sure.

Sally pulls Jeremy excitedly down the sidewalk toward the
 fast food place.

INT. FAST FOOD RESTAURANT - A SHORT TIME LATER

Jeremy wolfs down a couple of cheeseburgers while Sally
 pokes at her salad, removing the cucumbers and onions.

SALLY
 So, what's the job like? I mean
 what do you have to do?

JEREMY
 We didn't talk about it. Guess I'll
 find out in the morning.

Jeremy pops a couple of fries into his mouth, checks the
 passersby on the walk outside.

SALLY
 Well what *did* you talk about? You
 were gone for over an hour. I mean
 REALLY.

JEREMY
 Sally, I don't know. Mr. Beener
 just rattled on about Congress for
 a while then said be there at nine
 o'clock.

SALLY
 Probably dog poop.

Jeremy, starting to dip another fry in the ketchup, stops cold.

JEREMY

What?

SALLY

You'll probably be cleaning up dog poop.

JEREMY

No way. Why would he hire somebody like me to clean up dog poop? No way. I'd say marketing or promotion maybe...that sort of thing-- management type stuff.

SALLY

Really. Dog poop.

JEREMY

Get out of here.

Jeremy feints squashing hamburger ketchup in Sally's face. She ducks and threatens to retaliate by throwing a salad tomato, but Jeremy grabs her hand.

SALLY

(suddenly serious)

Maybe this is our break, Jer. Maybe now you can finish school. We could even get married soon. You think?

JEREMY

I don't know. Maybe so Sally. Maybe so. Anyway, at least it's a start.

SALLY

(light-hearted again)

Well... we'll see Mr. VP of Dog Poop.

Jeremy shakes his head vigorously, takes another big bite of cheeseburger.

JEREMY

Hey no way. Not me.

Sally smiles knowingly, pops a cherry tomato into her mouth.

INT. PET WORLD/FRONT WINDOW - DAY

Jeremy cleans out puppy cages. He picks up soiled newspapers as puppies climb all over his arms, bite his fingers, step in poop and SHRED the papers with fierce GROWLS and mock attacks.

JEREMY
Say, give me a break here!

Mr. Beener pops in checking up on things. He watches Jeremy's efforts, smiles to himself.

MR. BEENER
How goes it?

JEREMY
Oh hi. Good. Real good.

MR. BEENER
When you finish here start on the fish tanks. We're getting a delivery of tropicals in the morning.

JEREMY
Yes sir, Mr. Beener.

Mr. Beener straightens the dog food display in the store window, adjusts the price sign.

MR. BEENER
You got questions. Ask. OK?

JEREMY
Yessir, Mr. Beener. Will do.

Mr. Beener walks off a few feet, stops. Comes back.

MR. BEENER
Jeremy watch the place for a few minutes while I run over to the drugstore. All right?

JEREMY
(from inside a dog cage)
You got it, Mr. Beener. Happy to.

Jeremy struggles to put down more paper before the puppies can shred it.

INT. PET WORLD/FRONT WINDOW - MINUTES LATER

Jeremy works deep inside a dog cage, his rear end poking out.

VOICE
Hello? Can you hear me?

He backs out bumping his head.

JEREMY
Ow! Yes Ma'am.

A blonde woman (RITA) in a very tight dress holds a cage containing a mynah bird. She pushes the cage toward Jeremy.

RITA
I bought this mynah bird in here a week ago.

JEREMY
Yes Ma'am?

RITA
He's not talking!

JEREMY
Was he talking when you bought him?

RITA
No, he wasn't but the owner, Mr. Beezer...

JEREMY
Beener.

RITA
Mr. Beener said he could learn to talk if I spoke to him regular every day. I have talked and talked and talked and he hasn't said nothing.

Rita sets the birdcage on the floor.

Jeremy climbs out of the window, kneels down to get a good look at the bird.

JEREMY
I...I'm not sure what to say...Mr. Beener's stepped out for a minute. Could you...aw...wait. I mean, I just started today.

RITA
Well, I don't mind telling you I'm disappointed. I have talked my head off to this silly bird and he hasn't said a word. Not one word.

JEREMY
Umm, this your first bird?

Rita kneels down beside Jeremy to peer into the cage.

RITA
Oh no. I've had canaries and finches and parakeets.

Rita taps the cage with her fingernail, making kissing noises at the bird.

RITA (CONT'D)

Course none of them could talk. That's why I was sooo looking forward to having my mynah bird to chat with. You do understand, don't you?

JEREMY

Oh, yes Ma'am. I do.

Jeremy scans the strip center parking lot through the window.

JEREMY

I see Mr. Beener coming now. I'm sure he'll answer all your questions.

RITA

You're a real sweetie...thank you.

Jeremy hands the cage back to Rita. As she leaves, Jeremy's cell phone RINGS. He quickly answers it.

JEREMY

Sally, hi. Oh, I'm doing mostly paper work right now.

(listens)

No, I'm serious.

(listens)

A lot of paper work and customer relationship type stuff. In fact, Mr. Beener's already put me in charge of the store on a temporary basis.

(listens)

Yeah. No kidding.

(listens)

OK. Gotta go. Bye.

Jeremy climbs back into the store window to finish his "paper work."

MR. BEENER (O.C.)

JEREMY.

JEREMY

Yes, Mr. Beener?

MR. BEENER (O.C.)

Come here a minute.

Jeremy closes the puppy cage door, carefully avoids stepping on the dog food display, and heads toward the store office.

INT.PET WORLD/OFFICE - MINUTES LATER

Mr. Beener puts down the phone, waves Jeremy in. In the middle of an impossibly-cluttered desk sits the bird cage. Mr. Beener indicates the occupant with a nod of his head.

MR. BEENER

Know anything about birds...mynah birds?

JEREMY

Not a thing.

Mr. Beener leans over the desk, peering into the cage.

MR. BEENER

This bird's supposed to be a talker. Won't say a word. Not one word. Lady brought him back.

JEREMY

Yessir.

MR. BEENER

I want you to talk to him.

JEREMY

What?

Mr. Beener puts his hand on Jeremy's shoulder.

MR. BEENER

Carry him around with you. Talk to him. No big deal. Maybe he'll get the hang of it. I can't sell a mynah bird that won't talk.

JEREMY

Ok. Mr. Beener I'll give it a shot.

MR. BEENER

(patting Jeremy on the back)

That's the spirit. How are the fish tanks coming?

JEREMY

I'm getting started right now.

MR. BEENER

Good lad.

Jeremy, smiles, walks to the door.

MR. BEENER
You forgot something.

JEREMY
Oh, yeah.

Jeremy comes back, picks up the birdcage.

JEREMY
Whatta you want me to say?

MR. BEENER
Birds don't have big brains. Just
simple words like...like Hello.
Thank you. Goodbye...I don't know...
short everyday words like that.
Repeat things a lot. Got it?

JEREMY
Got it.

Jeremy, birdcage in hand, leaves the office.

INT.PET WORLD/FISH DEPARTMENT - LATER

Jeremy,perched on a ladder, wipes algae off of the fish tank
glass with a sponge tool.He talks as he works to the mynah
bird (MIKE). Mike's cage sits on a nearby shelf.

The bird watches his every move.

JEREMY
Hello... Thank you... Goodbye...
Goodbye... Hello...Goodbye. Thank
you...Hello.

As Jeremy stretches to clean the next tank, he accidentally
elbows the birdcage off the shelf.

It lands in one of the larger display tanks and slowly
begins to sink.

MIKE
Help! I can't swim.

JEREMY
(scrambling down the ladder)
OH WOW.

Jeremy grabs the cage, yanks it out of the water, and sets
it on the floor. He inspects the bird carefully.

JEREMY (CONT'D)
Am I glad Mr. Beener didn't see
that. I'd be toast for sure.

Jeremy dries off the cage and resets it in a more secure location. Satisfied the bird's OK, he resumes work.

JEREMY
Hello. Goodbye.
(to himself)
Looks OK.
(sudden realization)
WAIT A MINUTE.

Jeremy scrutinizes Mike closely.

JEREMY (CONT'D)
You said: "I can't swim!"

MIKE
(nothing)

JEREMY
Don't play games with me. YOU TALKED!