

U **P** The L_a_d_D_E_R

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U **P** (up you go)

By March Schrader

NOTE: *This play is previously unpublished but was a recorded Zoom performance at Theatre Tree in Port Jefferson, NY. To see it, search Up The Ladder March Schrader on YouTube.*

WHY I LIKE IT: *Drama Editor JANET EHRLICH COLSON writes... BAILY wants to move up a notch in the evolutionary hierarchy, but middle management doesn't see the need for change. And hey, if you thought keeping up on your license and rabies tags was hard in the here and now, try cutting through the administrative red tape in the afterlife (or rather in the period of trans-incarnation when this play takes place):*

BAILY

This time when I go back, I want to be, a human.

(Associate laughs.)

What, what, what's so funny.

ASSOCIATE

I've never been asked that before. What makes you think you're a good candidate to be human?

BAILY

I understand a lot of human things.

ASSOCIATE

Such as.

BAILY

Zoning laws.

In Up The Ladder, March Schrader's incisive writing makes us laugh while giving us a good think about and what it means to be human. The dialogue is sharp and the timing spot-on as the characters ponder aspirations and set expectations for the next life. Do we really need a pedigree? An orthopedic mattress? What about color vision?

ASSOCIATE

You don't know what you don't know. There's always some small way to improve. I mean the fact that you don't see that tells me you have plenty to keep striving for.

We already knew that the K9 series comes better equipped in some areas of understanding than their human counterparts – beyond zoning laws. And thanks to an even higher entity, there's a jar of treats on the counter. This is a play with bite.

Up The Ladder
March Schrader

March Schrader
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The waiting area of a government agency. Something similar to the DMV or Social Security. Rows of chairs. A lit-up number system to inform who will be next and at what window.

The age and gender of these two characters are unimportant.

Baily – Sitting on a chair waiting for their number to be called. They have a dog tag on a chain around their neck.

Associate – Behind the counter. There is a bowl of “treats” and a big number 3 on the counter.

COMPUTER-GENERATED VOICE

“Now serving number K914 at window 3. Now serving number K914 at window 3.”

Baily double-checks their tag, confirming their number then heads up to the counter where the Associate is standing.

ASSOCIATE

Good morning. How are you today?

BAIL

I'm . . . Okay.

ASSOCIATE

Only okay. It's a great day. Just look at that ether.

BAILY

It's nice. I guess.

ASSOCIATE

Treat?

BAILY

No, thank you.

ASSOCIATE

Do you have any requests for moving forward?

BAILY

I'm a little nervous that I don't have any paperwork or license.

ASSOCIATE

Don't need it. I've got your information right here. Let me see your tag.

(Associate reaches over the counter and tries to grab Baily's tag. Baily flinches back.)

Sorry.

BAILY

Instinct. You caught me off guard.

ASSOCIATE

I should have asked. Can I double-check your number?

(Baily picks up their tag and holds it out to Associate. Associate checks the number against a computer.)

Yup, it's you. It's almost never wrong. Do you have any questions?

BAILY

I have. In fact, I was wondering . . .

ASSOCIATE

Yes.

BAILY

It seems as if this is getting kind of repetitive.

ASSOCIATE

Well it is. I mean you start, you end, you start all over again. Treat?

BAILY

(Shakes their head no.)

I get that. But I was thinking, maybe there could be something different.

ASSOCIATE

I'm sure you're aware we don't like any straying.

BAILY

I wasn't thinking so much about straying but more like moving up.

ASSOCIATE

What would you consider up? You've done quite a bit.

BAILY

Right, that's what I'm saying. I feel like I've done every K-9 thing.

ASSOCIATE

Not everything, there are still things to accomplish and learn.

BAILY

But don't you think I could learn those things by, you know, moving up. I really think I'm ready.

ASSOCIATE

I'm not clear about what you mean by that. Ready for what?

BAILY

This time when I go back, I want to be, a human.

(Associate laughs.)

What, what, what's so funny.

ASSOCIATE

I've never been asked that before. What makes you think you're a good candidate to be human?

BAILY

I understand a lot of human things.

ASSOCIATE

Such as.

BAILY

Zoning laws.

ASSOCIATE

Really?

BAILY

There's a line and you can't build this, if you don't have that.

ASSOCIATE

See. Nobody understands zoning laws.

BAILY

Well, I've given a lot of thought to why we all can't get along.

ASSOCIATE

Why can't we all get along?

BAILY

Because, we, it's, I don't really know, yet, it's a human problem.

ASSOCIATE

Here's the thing,

(Looking around to make sure that no one is listening.)

Becoming a human, isn't really a move up.

BAILY

What?

ASSOCIATE

You didn't hear that from me.

BAILY

That's very disappointing. What's the point of trying if there's no reward.

ASSOCIATE

You do the right thing because it's the right thing.

BAILY

I haven't bitten anyone for, I don't know, a bunch of lifetimes, and you should know there have been plenty of times when I think it would have been totally within my rights to bit someone.

ASSOCIATE

You see, if you were truly enlightened you wouldn't even think about it.

BAILY

I don't do it because I kept thinking someday, I'm going to be one of them, a human.

ASSOCIATE

See, that's a possible place for improvement. You shouldn't bit people because it's not nice, not because you're hoping for some kind of reward.

BAILY

Are you telling me that you don't want more from your job?

ASSOCIATE

Nope. I've been doing this for, I'm actually not sure. I mean literally forever.

BAILY

Are you telling me you're content to always be a clerk?

ASSOCIATE

I'm an associate. Clerks do other things. I am defiantly not a clerk. I don't think you understand how this works.

BAILY

We're supposed to learn, get better, and then move up the evolution ladder.

ASSOCIATE

Get better, yes but not move up the evolution ladder, move up the species ladder.

BAILY

Species?

ASSOCIATE

Yes. You're a dog. You're always going to be a dog. You're trying to be a better dog.

BAILY

I'm never going to be anything but a dog? That's disappointing. Why would I want to do better if this is it?

ASSOCIATE

You're a leader. You're an entity that others look up to. You're an inspiration.

BAILY

There might be some satisfaction in that I suppose.

ASSOCIATE

You don't know what you don't know. There's always some small way to improve. I mean the fact that you don't see that tells me you have plenty to keep striving for.

BAILY

Okay. What about going to some other environment?

ASSOCIATE

Environment?

BAILY

There must be other planets out there in the universe.

ASSOCIATE

Oh yes there are.

BAILY

With dogs on them.

ASSOCIATE

Not dogs, like you're a dog. They're out there, but earth dogs only live on earth, the dogs in the Coventus (Co-vent-us) system are quite different.

BAILY

Where's Coventus?

ASSOCIATE

It's not really worth trying to explain because you can never go there.

BAILY

Well that's a wrap on the nose with a wet newspaper.

ASSOCIATE

Sorry.

BAILY

I'm going to be a canine until the end of time?

ASSOCIATE

That's how it works.

BAILY

Then what are my options?

ASSOCIATE

There's an Australian Herder and a German Shepard mix. Very international.

BAILY

Not a purebred?

ASSOCIATE

You've done this enough to know that purebreds are well (whispers) not particularly smart. Have you ever hung out with a Dalmatian?

BAILY

I have. Say no more. But most purebreds have an easier life. You know better kibble. Orthopedic mattresses.

ASSOCIATE

What about a sled dog?

BAILY

That could be interesting, like running the Iditarod?

ASSOCIATE

It's a possibility. You would have to train and earn your way. Just because you'd be a huskie doesn't mean it's a gimmie.

BAILY

A huskie? I could be a college mascot.

ASSOCIATE

College mascots don't really lead a particularly challenging life. If you want to keep moving forward I would say mascot that wouldn't be your best choice.

BAILY

I'd like a slightly easier cycle.

ASSOCIATE

Oh, if you're tired, we could put you to sleep.

BAILY

What? I would be euthanized?

ASSOCIATE

Oh. No. You're energy and energy can't be created or destroyed. What I meant was you'd be suspended in a gentle sleep for a predetermined amount of time and then you would take on your next assignment.

BAILY

I don't know about that.

ASSOCIATE

It's totally up to you.

BAILY

Wait, wait. I know. How about this?

ASSOCIATE

What?

BAILY

I'll be a sled dog, if you take away my colorblindness.

ASSOCIATE

How do you know you're colorblind.

BAILY

I know. Most of us know. You could do that for me right?

ASSOCIATE

I don't really have that kind of authorization.

BAILY

Everybody always has more power than they admit. I find it hard to believe that a lifelong, skilled associate such as yourself doesn't have some sway.

ASSOCIATE

We do all have our special skills.

BAILY

I'm sure you do.

ASSOCIATE

Okay, you're committing to being a sled dog.

BALIY

I guess.

ASSOCIATE

Good, I think you're really going to do some good progressing in the North Country.

BAILY

That's a lovely scarf /tie, [Depending on the actor playing the Associate.] I've never seen a scarf/tie such an intense shade of [Main color of the scarf/tie].

ASSOCIATE

Thanks. I thought you might like it. Treat?

BAILY

Yes. I think I will.

ASSOCIATE

(Holds out a treat. Baily reaches for it.)

Wait.

(After a pause.)

Okay.

(Baily takes a treat and eats it.)

Good pup.

THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS: *Fate and destiny, two things that we as humans have been trying to figure out since the Greeks. Can we control it? Can we change it? Does it even really exist? I was sweeping out my garage and found two dead mice and I thought being a mouse is something of a simple conceit, do they ever want something more? I'll write a play about that, but mice aren't necessarily the most sympathetic animals, everyone has an affinity for dogs. Both Baily and Associate are locked into their lots in life for eternity, trying to make the best of the situations they are in.*

AUTHOR BIO: March Schrader is a theatrical scenic designer, visual arts teacher, and playwright. He has had plays produced in Boston, New York City, Hartford, Long Island, and Michigan. He and his wife currently live Hartford CT with their dog who is getting way more walks now because of the pandemic.