



# Baboons and Bureaucrats

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My friends and I head to the local coffee shop, walking down the sidewalk with the spring sun shining above us while a cool breeze pushes against us.

My friends approach a patio table with an umbrella in front of the coffee shop. They reshuffle and push the chairs around the table. Then they begin sitting down.

"I'll grab the coffees," I call to the group.

Jeff answers, "And add extra sugar and cream to mine."

I open the door that rings a dangling chime as I enter.

I approach the counter.

The barista leaves the kitchen and approaches the other side of the counter.

"Ah, you must be new," I said.

She smiles and adds, "I just started yesterday."

"I'm a regular, so you'll see me around. I think this place is almost my second home."

She smiles again and adds, "Well welcome home, stranger. How may I help you?"

"Four medium cappuccinos – one with extra sugar and cream. The others are regular."

She rings up the order, "That'll be eighteen fifty."

I slide the wallet out of my back pocket and slip the credit card from one of the slots. Then I pass the card to the barista.

She studies the credit card and looks up at me, and asks, "I'm sorry, but I need to see your ID, sir. I hate to do this to you, but I don't know you yet, even though this is your second home."

"No problem. I'm happy you've asked. You know - with all the identity theft and stuff going around."

I pull my driver's license from the wallet and hand it to her.

She holds the credit card in one hand the driver's license in the other. Her eyes move from one to the other. Then she holds up the license and compares the license's photo to me.

I smile and wave my right hand a little.

She returns the driver's license and slides the credit card into the machine.

Then she adds, "I see your driver's license is about to expire."

"Oh, shoot. I knew I have been forgetting something."

I glance at the expiration date and see my license is valid for another two weeks. Then I slip the license back into my wallet.

"You may want to go early. My brother just renewed his driver's license and he said it was a nightmare. He said they acted like bunch of dumb apes down there, at the license bureau."

"Apes, huh."

The machine spits out the receipt.

She hands me the credit card. Then she tears the receipt and passes it to me with a pen...

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The alarm buzzes at 8 AM.

I reach over and push the snooze bar. Then I roll to my left side, and reposition the blankets.

After a minute, I jerk my legs and roll over and force myself out of bed as a thought flashes through my mind - I must go and renew my license. I grab a towel and head to the bathroom for a shower. Luckily, I have a day off from work and can make the trip to the Department of Motor Vehicles, or DMV for short. I keep thinking - that stupid trip to the DMV - dumbass motherfucking Van-Dycks.

After showering and dressing, I approach the desk and begin searching for my birth certificate. I slide one desk drawer open, shuffle papers around in the drawer, and sort through the stacks. Then I close it. After approaching the bottom drawer, I spot it at the bottom under a stack of utility bills. Then I grab a recent credit card bill from the top desk drawer and slide the documents into a folder.

I head to the kitchen and place a coffee cup in the Nestle Gusto. I grab any coffee cartridge, plop it into the machine, add water, and push the magic button, and the machine buzzes to life. Then I pop a bagel into the toaster. After minutes, the toaster spits the bagel out, and I lather a thick layer of cream cheese onto it and wrap it in a napkin. Then I grab the folder, bagel, and coffee cup and head out the door, starting my trip to the DMV.

I drive slowly and rationally to the DMV while eating my bagel and sipping my coffee. As I pull up to the plaza, I see the parking lot is filled with cars. I glance at my watch - 9 AM exactly.

I park the car and jog to the front door of DMV. Before opening the door, I see a long line of people standing. "Damn," I utter under my breath. Every time I come here, the lines become longer and move slower.

I open the door and stand in line in the last position, fidgeting, glancing at my watch every several minutes, glancing at the sea of faces around me.

About every five minutes, I move a step forward.

After an eternity, I reach the help desk.

An old lady stands there, staring at me blankly. She does not smile, blink, or yawn.

I state in my happy voice, "I'm here to renew my driver's license."

She snaps, "Let's see your documents."

I pull the birth certificate and a credit card statement from the folder and hand it to her. Then I slide my wallet from my back jean's pocket. I open it and slip the driver's license out and hand it to her.

She places the documents on the counter and studies each document as her index finger traces through all the information. Then she pushes the documents towards me. "The date on your

birth certificate is too old. You must get a new birth certificate that is issued within one year from today's date."

"What?" After the information sinks into my mind, I ask, "Are you seriously? When I renewed my driver's license two years ago, I used this same birth certificate. I had no problems then," pleading with her with my sad voice.

"The Motor Vehicles has updated its procedures to renew a driver's license. You must bring a recent birth certificate."

Then she pushes a checklist printed on light blue paper across the counter.

I glance at her, smirk, and shove the checklist into my jacket pocket.

I remember the barista's comments and read about baboons' behavior. The first rule pops into my mind - Baboons are very clever. When a baboon faces a choice - the easy way or the hard way, they always choose the easy way. The baboons chase all the distractions away so they can sit and socialize with the other baboons. The bureaucrats show no concern. They scare people away permanently by forcing them to fill out complicated forms or spotting every tiny error on their documents, demanding the people to redo them.

I grab my documents, run to my car, and rush to the courthouse downtown.

I enter the building and study the Directory.

I become confused over the numerous department names: Family Court, Circuit Court, Misdemeanor Court, and so on, and so on until ad nauseam. Finally, I spot the office I need - Court Clerk, Office 401.

Another fact about baboons pops into my mind. Rule 2 - Baboons create complicated, hierarchical societies. Every baboon precisely knows their position in the hierarchy, and which apes control and lead the herd.

I run up the stairs to the fourth floor and burst through the door.

All heads turn to watch me as I enter.

The old office building has a mildew-smell lingering in the air, which is common in the south. The immense humidity during the summer rots and molds everything that it touches. Then I realize I came across Rule 3. Baboons can adapt themselves to any

environment and any habitat - whether they occupy a desk in a brand new office building with fresh paint and new furniture, or sit in old condemned buildings or in the dusty back rooms of factories, or office cubicles arranged in a maze. They sit at their desks counting everything they see - the number of beans in a jar, the quantity of staples in a stapler, or the number of wood shavings in a pencil sharpener. They scrutinize every document, searching for i's with missing dots or t's missing their crosses.

Then an elderly woman strolls to the counter. She bears a resemblance to the old lady at the DMV - a relative perhaps. I'm amazed because all baboons look like. - a cold, calculated stare, the long snout, the sharp, yellowing teeth, the puffy cheeks, and hair sticking up in wild clumps. They all come from the same gene pool.

I approach the counter and remove my documents from the folder.

After reaching the counter, she asks, "May I help you."

"I need to get a new birth certificate," I said. I pause to catch my breath and add, "They told me at the DMV that I needed a birth certificate that is dated within a year of today's date."

"Oh, the DMV changed its rules. We've been getting many requests lately."

Then she pushes a form across the counter, "Please, fill this out."

I rotate the document and examine the first page, skimming through all the questions and blank lines.

I chuckle and add, "It's like you want my whole life history. I don't see religious affiliation, or whether I forgot to return all my library books when I was a kid."

She raises one eyebrow and enlarges her eyes showing the whites. Apparently, my joke does not amuse her.

Then I remember Rule 4 about baboons. They show displeasure by raising their eyebrows and showing the whites of the eyes.

I close my mouth and grab a pen, and start filling in those numerous blank lines.

She walks to her desk and sits down, chatting with her colleague who sits directly across from her.

Perhaps she is not a complete baboon. She didn't sit next to her friend to groom and pick lice and bugs out of her hair, and swallow those tasty morsels, or at least I couldn't see it. Although I cannot

hear their conversation, several words sound like grunts. Baboons constantly grunt throughout the day as the grunts form the core of their language.

Then I remember the fifth rule of baboons. Baboons will live, socialize, eat, and drink with the same individuals their whole lives, remaining side by side with the same baboons for the rest of their lives. If anything, that would be depressing.

I glance in her direction.

She picks up a fork and stabs at bits of food in a casserole - an American concoction of noodles, broccoli, chunks of mysterious white meat of dubious origin held together by a thick glue of pale gravy. Crunchy worm-like onions and specks of ant-like seasonings wiggle across the gravy as she picks at the food with her fork.

Then she pops the fork with food into her mouth, chewing it, and then swallows it.

I grimace as my stomach churns and grumbles. I taste acid in the back of my throat as the bagel and coffee want to flee from my stomach the quickest route possible. I bend my head down and massage my stomach. After a minute, the sickness subsides and fades. Then I remember Rule 6 - baboons are omnivores. They can eat anything. Nothing is too rotten, disgusting, or unappetizing for the baboons.

I begin filling the remaining blanks on the application as best I could and leave several blanks here and there. After 15 minutes, I reach the end of the application and scrawl my signature and scribble the date.

I clear my throat, "Uh-uh." Then I mutter, "I'd filled it out the best I could."

She turns to stare at me. Then she drops the fork onto the casserole, slowly rises from her chair, and returns to the counter. She takes the application and studies every detail. Then she lays the application on the counter and moves her finger to a blank line.

"You forgot your father's birthday."

"Oh, that's right." I start thinking - I know he was born in 1960 and we always celebrate his birthday in July but the date keeps eluding me. We normally dine at an expensive restaurant on the weekend closest to his birthday. Then I raise the pen and scribble July 13, 1960.

She takes the application and returns to her desk. She slides the keyboard near her and strikes several keys.

I become nervous, and pray that a wrong date will not ruin my day.

Then she inserts the official paper for birth certificates into the printer as the printer whirs into life. After several seconds, the printer spits out the paper.

She grabs the paper, signs it, and presses the paper with the official court seal.

Then she walks to the counter, "That'll be thirty dollars sir."

I grumble and count the cash from my wallet and hand it to her.

She takes the money and lays the birth certificate on the counter.

I place the new birth certificate next to the old one and compare them. They are identical, except the old birth certificate had yellowed more with a frayed crease through the center, where I always fold the certificate in half.

She writes a receipt and hands it to me.

I slide the documents in my folder and return to the DMV.

I approach my place at the end of the line that moves slowly.

After another hour, I approach the same woman.

I'm not sure if my anger has started playing tricks on me, but she seems to smirk ever so slightly as I approach the counter.

I pull out my new birth certificate, driver's license, and credit card statement. She studies all the documents.

A man exits from one of the numerous offices that form a straight line at the back of the DMV. The overweight man struggles breathing while an unhealthy reddish hue has infested his skin.

The workers in the office become quieter, shuffling more papers and tapping keyboards louder. The workers look down as he passes, and once he had passed, they sneak glances at him. He walks to one of the desks and drops a bundle of documents into the tray.

Then Rules 7 and 8 for baboons pops into my mind. Rule 7 - Baboons always know the exact hierarchy and they always fear, envy, and compete with the higher ranking baboons. Rule 8 - higher-ranking baboons usually develop severe health problems over time as they become afflicted with high blood pressure,



hardened arteries, and high cholesterol. The leadership role wreaks havoc on their bodies.

Once the higher-level baboon had returned to his office and closed the door, the woman slaps the documents onto the counter and snaps, "You need one more proof of address."

"What?"

"Didn't you read the checklist?"

"The checklist?"

"I gave you a checklist this morning."

Then I remember. I reach into my front jacket pocket and pull out a crumpled light blue paper. I unravel it on the counter and slide my hands across it to smooth out the creases and crinkles.

She points to the top center of the paper, and I begin reading the heading - Two Proofs of Address. Then a list of approved documents follows the heading.

I let out a long sigh. Then I grab the light blue paper and shove it into my pocket, shaking my head back and forth. I turn to go.

The old lady snaps, "Next customer."

I rush to my car, jump in, and speed home. I run into the house, searching for anything with my name and address on it. I search the pile of utility bills accumulating in the bottom desk drawer.

I finally see a water bill with my name on it.

I glance at my watch - sssshhhhit. The license bureau will close within ninety minutes.

I run to the car while my stomach starts growling and grumbling, screaming for food. But I drive the thought of food and hunger from my mind. I return to the license bureau, violating numerous traffic laws in the process.

I run to the door and rush in and stand at the end of the long line, again.

I just made it as a security guard flips the sign on the door - Closed.

He looks at me, nods his head, and says, "You've just made it."

I look for my nemesis, standing behind the wooden counter.

She glances at me as her eyes widen and she jerks her head back in surprise.

After another eternal hour standing in line, I approach the old lady, remove all my documents from the folder and slap them down onto the counter in front of her.

"I finally got everything," sighing with relief.

She shuffles through the documents. She holds the documents up and straightens them on the counter to make the pile align up neatly. Then she places the stack on the table. Then she adds, "Did you bring your proof of health insurance?"

"What?"

"A proof of health insurance."

My mouth hangs open while my eyes squint for several seconds. Then I snap, "I don't understand. I didn't see health insurance on the list."

I begin pulling out the light blue paper from my pocket while she pulls a light pink paper from a stack and places it in front of me.

Then she states, "The department has just updated its requirements for a driver's license."

I study the pink paper and see a fourth column has been added - Proof of Health Insurance."

My heart starts racing while my face reddens. I just want to scream at her, but I inhale a deep breath, keeping my anger under control.

I ask slowly, punctuating every syllable clearly, "What does health insurance have to do with a driver's license?"

"I didn't come up with the regulations, sir. I only make sure we follow them."

"But a driver's license only shows proof a person can operate a motor vehicle?"

"Then perhaps you should write to your legislator. They are ones who write the laws that the department must follow."

I want to stand my ground and argue with her, but I know that would be futile. Although she appears old and frail, baboons are exceptionally strong.

I grab the documents and pink checklist and shove them into the folder and turn to go, muttering "damn it" under my breath.

After exiting the DMV, I scream "God damn it," as I shake my fists at the heavens.

The guard peers outside and snaps the door lock shut with a click.

I stomp my way towards the car and scream, "Those god damn baboons have made everything impossible!"

Then understanding invades my mind. I must say those baboons are very clever. When no one was looking or noticing, the baboons grabbed control of our government, and what becomes even more frightening - a large gathering of baboons forms a congress, and they sure have made a mess of everything.