

EXT. SCRANTON, PENNSYLVANIA - EVENING - 1937

The autumn sun sets behind dusty Appalachian mountains rich with coal deposits.

EXT. SCRANTON - COAL MINE - CONTINUOUS

Pick axes and shovels sit outside the mine entrance. A wooden sign reads: GREYLOCKE COAL MINE

An OLD CODGER rocks in a chair, playing his harmonica. Spit flies everywhere. He's better at that than carrying a tune.

TIC TIC TIC

A brass clock chimes 5:00.

OLD CODGER

Well, butter my butt and call me a
biscuit.

He pulls a lever on a factory steam whistle. It SCREECHES.

OLD CODGER (CONT'D)

Quittin' time!

Cones of light slowly emerge from the dark cave. One by one, miners exit. They turn off helmet lamps. Faces are covered in soot. Some men cough. Others discuss the work day.

STOCKY MINER

I told Earl not to strike that seam
but did he listen? Jeez God no.

They carry tiny cages with a canary in each one. The canaries turn off tiny helmet lamps. Beaks covered in soot. Some birds whistle. Others discuss the day.

STOCKY CANARY

Didja hear that sour note Rick
struck after lunch?

GRUFF CANARY

Hear it?! It made my feathers
crawl.

In this mine, canaries are the stars.

BINOCULARS POV

The miners release the canaries into a large domed AVIARY. Men and birds part ways.

BOBBY (O.S.)

Cole, we're gonna be late.

INT. AVIARY - SECLUDED PERCH - CONTINUOUS

COLE COOPER, a child canary with yellow feathers and determined eyes, peers through makeshift binoculars.

BOBBY

We're gonna be late, Cole.

Behind Cole paces BOBBY, an anxious canary the same age who wears Coke-bottle glasses made from real Coke bottles.

Cole ignores his pal in favor of bird watching.

BINOCULARS POV

More miners exit with a variety of canaries. Orange ones, green ones, short, tall, etc.

There are Spanish Timbrados, German Rollers, Russian Singers. Accents match breeds. The birds are immigrants like the miners.

Some cages are empty. Cole furrows his brow. Curious.

After the last dawdler, Old Codger locks the mine. Cole, let down, stuffs his binoculars in a knapsack. He sees the clock.

COLE

Bobby. We're gonna be late!

He flies off. Bobby sighs and follows.

INT. AVIARY SQUARE - MINUTES LATER

Cole and Bobby soar through the Aviary, a bird version of a coal mine patch town with:

Houses (nest boxes), police precinct (donut box), bank (piggy bank), movie theater (View-Master). You get the idea, right?

NEWSBIRD, a scrappy canary with a newsboy cap and a satchel of papers, waves a *Caged Chronicle*.

NEWSBIRD

Extra, extra! Read all about it!
Experts declare bird in hand worth
two in bush.

Passers-by pass him by without purchasing newspapers.

BIRD BATH FOUNTAIN

Canaries in shower caps bathe in dirty water. A shadow falls over them as a young boy opens the Aviary to change the water.

CITIZEN CANARIES

All hail He-Who-Cares-For-Us.

Smiling birds bow before the boy who lovingly pets them.

FEEDING TROUGHS

Cole and Bobby bank past MALE CANARIES eating sunflower seeds.

MALE CANARIES
Good luck, Cole.

PREENING PARLOR

Cole and Bobby zing by LADYBIRDS having feathers fluffed.

LADYBIRDS
Best of luck, Cole.

Everyone notices Cole, but not Bobby.

BOBBY
I'm auditioning too. How come no
one ever notices me?

SMACK!

He flies head first into a window. Birds laugh. A janitor slaps a round sticker on the glass. Happens all the time.

COLE
Happy now?

Bobby bobs his head yes.

EXT. GILDED CAGE - CONTINUOUS

The Gilded Cage, a golden dome terrarium with touches of greenery, looms above the community like a castle in the sky.

INT. GILDED CAGE - CONTINUOUS

Cole and Bobby enter an atrium with multi-leveled stages. A rapt audience watches male canary contestants face the --

COUNCIL OF ELDERS

-- who are a trio of canaries sitting on lofty perch swings. Behind them blinks a neon sign for AVIAN IDOL.

Accompanied by a band playing bells and chimes, the contestants whistle for the Elders. One performs bluegrass.

Shivers run through voluptuous Elder POLLY, a ditzy hen with blonde head feathers that don't match her tail feathers.