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Cast of Characters

JAN

BRIDGET

CLAIRE

MAC / RAINDROP 1

SHIRLEY / RAINDROP 2

AVA / RAINDROP 3

BECKY / RAINDROP 4

AL / RAINDROP 5

TIM / RAINDROP 6

MARLENE / RONNY

BELINDA / HAILY

DON / NARRATOR

RAELYN / LAKE

MARGE / CLOUD

STEW / SUN

RAINDROPS, HAILSTONES, LUNATICS

by Alan Haehnel

(Light up on a park bench. JAN enters with a cup of coffee, sits on the bench, looks up at the sky, and breathes a heavy sigh of satisfaction.)

JAN. Nice. Know what I did yesterday? Quit. Quit my job. I was a sound engineer. Know what I'm going to do next? Neither do I. In a week or so, I'll worry about it. I've got options. For now, I'm just going to enjoy sitting on this bench with my coffee, slight chance of rain, no chance of stress.

I've been living in a cave for the past six years, a glass cave full of knobs and sliders and buttons and... Hear that bird? That's a real bird. That's amazing. I can see it. For the past six years, birds have been tracks on sound effects CDs. I'm free!

Hm. Thought I felt a raindrop. Raindrops and coffee. That reminds me. Spending my days in that cave was one thing, but the animals...the weirdos I had to deal with!

I'll admit it. I'd probably already been doing the job about a year too long when they came in. They wanted it all for next to no money and under 40 minutes. I should have known things weren't going to go so hot once I saw how good they were at ignoring me.

(JAN exits. The lights come up on a sound studio. Sound booth upstage center, several microphones and stands downstage of it. The door opens and JAN comes in, extremely business-like. Behind her are BRIDGET and CLAIRE. They all come in talking simultaneously. BRIDGET doesn't respond to JAN at all until the second time JAN says "Capiche?")

JAN. All right, the main thing to remember is that actors are generally idiots, so keep them away from the equipment in here. The microphones are for talking into—they are not for grabbing, caressing, punching, head-butting or otherwise touching in any way. Make that clear to your people first thing, capiche?

BRIDGET. *(To CLAIRE:)* Do you have the scripts? I didn't pick up the scripts. Did you pick up the scripts?

CLAIRE. I've got them.

BRIDGET. And the sketches. The sketches will help set the uh, the uh...

CLAIRE. Tone.

BRIDGET. Tone! Right, yes. The tone. Did you bring them?

CLAIRE. I have...

BRIDGET. Because they'll help with the tone. We should hang them up. Did you bring tacks?

JAN. Capiche?

BRIDGET. *(To JAN:)* Do you have tacks?

JAN. Are you in charge?

BRIDGET. *(Wandering away:)* Because it would be good to put them up. We could have one here.

CLAIRE. She is. Bridget. She's the director.

BRIDGET. And one over here.

CLAIRE. But, uh, she's distracted. What did you need?

JAN. Tell your actors: No touchee the microphones.

CLAIRE. Gotcha.

BRIDGET. And right over here, we'll hang up two of the sketches. Perfect.

JAN. And no, I don't have tacks and nothing goes on the walls.

CLAIRE. Bridget, we don't have tacks.

BRIDGET. What about that sticky stuff? You know, it's sort of like Silly Putty, but...

JAN. Nothing...

CLAIRE. Nothing on the walls, Boss. It's not allowed.

BRIDGET. Are you sure? It will really help with the tone, don't you think?

JAN. No touch. No touch—microphones, walls, equipment of any kind—no touch. This is a sound studio. Sound. You're here doing a cartoon gig, right?

BRIDGET. Yes. It's an animated piece I wrote, in fact, entitled...

JAN. Right. Voices. They make sound. I record the sound for you. Nobody has to touch or tack or Silly Putty nothing. Sound. And tell your people not to spit, either. They don't have to french the microphones; I'll adjust the levels. And do not, not, not let them tap.

CLAIRE. Tap?

JAN. (*Demonstrating:*) Is this on? Is this on? Testing, testing. Do-not-let-them-do-that.

CLAIRE. Right. No tapping.

(As JAN speaks the following monologue, BRIDGET speaks simultaneously to CLAIRE, not paying any attention to JAN until she comes over the intercom as "God.")

JAN. Okay, so bring your people in. I'll be in the booth here. I can hear everything you say; nobody has to shout just because I'm behind the glass. You stay out here, I stay in there, we'll get the job done. I'm not going to even bother to ask if you understand what I just said because you're not even listening. Typical.

(She goes into the sound booth, sits down, puts on headphones, and adjusts the microphone she uses to communicate to the people outside the booth. Whenever speaking from the booth, JAN's voice comes over the microphone.)

BRIDGET. (*To CLAIRE:*) Is everyone here? Do we have all of them?

CLAIRE. I think so. We should probably get started.

BRIDGET. I have to tell you, I am nervous. I am more than just a bit nervous.

CLAIRE. It will go fine. We're ready.

BRIDGET. The sock puppets! Did you finish the puppets?

CLAIRE. Yeah, I did, Bridget, but I'm not so sure we want to...are you sure about using...

JAN. *(With reverb:)* This is God speaking. *(BRIDGET screams loudly. JAN grimaces, the scream amplified over her headphones.)* Ow. Warn me when you're going to do that.

BRIDGET. That startled me. I am so startled. Wasn't that startling. Feel my heart. Feel it!

JAN. It was a joke. A tiny little sound engineer joke.

BRIDGET. *(Whispering to CLAIRE:)* I am beginning to suspect we are not dealing with competent help here.

JAN. I can hear you.

BRIDGET. *(Still whispering:)* She can hear us. Even when we whisper.

JAN. Listen, you have hired the studio and my incompetent services for 40 minutes. The clock started as soon as we walked in the door, so you now have 37 minutes and 13 seconds left.

BRIDGET. I didn't know the clock was started. *(To CLAIRE:)* Did you know the clock was started? I certainly didn't know the clock was started.

JAN. 36 minutes and 59 seconds. 58. 57.

BRIDGET. Stop that counting. You stop that counting!

CLAIRE. Why don't we just bring everybody in and get started, okay? Bridget? Okay?

BRIDGET. I think she is still counting in there. Silently, she is still doing it.

JAN. 36. 35. 34.

BRIDGET. I knew it!

CLAIRE. Boss.

BRIDGET. Is this the only space we have to work in?

CLAIRE. This is it.

BRIDGET. And she is the only sound engineer...

CLAIRE. For the money, in the timeframe we have, she is it; this is it. I'm going to go bring in the cast. I'll be right back.

(CLAIRE exits. BRIDGET fidgets with the scripts, looks at the microphones, adjusts a stand, all the while studiously trying to ignore JAN. JAN leans back in her chair in the booth, relishing CLAIRE's anxiety.)

BRIDGET. I know you're back there. I know you're still doing it.

(JAN leans forward, adjusts a knob, then speaks into the microphone with the "God voice.")

JAN. 34 minutes and 53 seconds. 52. 51.

BRIDGET. Oh, that is very professional. I am so in awe of your professionalism.

JAN. The end is near!

BRIDGET. You are so very clever. I hope you're pleased with yourself.

JAN. The apocalypse is nigh. 33. 32. 31.

(CLAIRE enters with the cast of 12 actors—MAC, SHIRLEY, AVA, BECKY, AL, TIM, MARLENE, BELINDA, DON, RAE-LYN, MARGE and STEW. They freeze as BRIDGET throws her fit.)

BRIDGET. Stop it! Stop it, stop it, stop it, stop it!

CLAIRE. Uh, Boss? Here is the cast.

BRIDGET. She kept doing the counting thing in there.

(BRIDGET stands rigid as CLAIRE speaks.)

CLAIRE. Yeah. I'm sorry about that, but these people—these are the folks, if you remember, you selected for their voice talents? In the audition? To play the characters?

(BRIDGET stares out, hyperventilating.)

MAC. I could go for a cup of coffee. There's a new place not far from here.

(Others begin to ad lib assent as they turn around to leave.)

CLAIRE. No, no—no one leave, please. We have a very narrow time frame we're working with, here.

JAN. 32 minutes and counting.

BRIDGET. You see? You see?! I can't work with the pressure of knowing she is back there counting like that!

CLAIRE. I understand, Boss. *(Turning to JAN:)* In the booth, please...we will keep track of the time. Do not give us a countdown.

JAN. Just keeping everybody up to date.

RAELYN. 32 minutes? What are we supposed to accomplish in 32 minutes?

CLAIRE. It's a short segment. We can do it.

STEW. I don't know the first thing about my character. I haven't even seen a script.

CLAIRE. We realize that, but we have it all under control.

DON. Where are we supposed to be?

CLAIRE. All of your questions will be answered momentarily, really.

MAC. I could be back in a jiffy with coffee for everybody.

AVA. I could go for that!

CLAIRE. We do not have time for a coffee run, so please, just bear with us for... *(Turning desperately to BRIDGET:)* Boss. Bridget! The actors are here. We need to start.

BRIDGET. She has started a clock running in my head. I can hear it ticking off the seconds. Tick, tick, tick, tick!

CLAIRE. Boss, how about this? Later on, we will probably want to bring out the sock puppets.

BRIDGET. *(Suddenly brightening:)* Oh, the sock puppets. I love that idea. I really love that idea. You got those done?

CLAIRE. I did. I don't think they'll be absolutely necessary, but...

BRIDGET. Can I see one?

CLAIRE. Let's wait.

BRIDGET. Just a peek?

CLAIRE. Later, okay? We should probably get started right...

BRIDGET. Hey, everybody, wonderful to see you! Let's get started, shall we?

CLAIRE. Oh, thank the Lord and sock puppets.

BRIDGET. I'm Bridget and I think we've got a wonderful project we'll be working on today. Now, we're doing kind of a unique experiment that I'm excited about. We don't usually bring in the full cast of voice talent simultaneously for an animation, as you know, but, in this case, I really hoped to see if we might be able to build a stronger sense of community and unity that might inform this short piece we'll be creating today.

JAN. Really? I just thought you were trying to do this on the cheap.

(BRIDGET stands still again, boiling.)

CLAIRE. Boss, Boss, you're doing great. I'll take care of the engineer. Deep breath, deep breath. *(Pause.)* Remember the puppets.

BRIDGET. Oh, the puppets! Should we do them yet?

CLAIRE. I, I...don't think the timing is quite right. How about setting everybody up, huh?

(As BRIDGET continues to speak, CLAIRE goes into the booth and speaks to JAN. We see them talking, but don't hear anything. Clearly, CLAIRE is pleading with JAN not to antagonize BRIDGET. JAN protests that BRIDGET is an idiot who doesn't know what she's doing. CLAIRE understands but stresses they have to get the job done. JAN throws up her hands and acquiesces. CLAIRE exits the booth, leans against the door and crosses herself.)

BRIDGET. All right, why don't we just get into our configuration here. Let's see, let's see, where is that clipboard? Clipboard, clipboard, clipboard...Claire! *(CLAIRE, from the booth, points to the clipboard BRIDGET is looking for.)* Oh, there it is. All right—Mac, Shirley, Ava...

SHIRLEY. Excuse me. Yes, thank-you. I'm not going by Shirley anymore. I had my name changed to Child of the Earth Number 36, 215. (*Others look at her oddly.*) I was tired of going through my days with a name that had nothing to say. Child of the Earth Number 36, 215 is a consciousness-raising statement. (*AL whistles the theme from "The Twilight Zone" under his breath.*) I don't find that funny in the least.

BRIDGET. Right. Anyway, uh, could we get Mac, Child of the Earth Number 36...

SHIRLEY. Thousand 215.

BRIDGET. Thousand 215—I'll make a note right here—and also Ava, Becky, Al and Tim, all right over here, in a group. You are our raindrops today.

BECKY. (*Moving with the others into position:*) Oh, goody-goody, gumdrops.

BRIDGET. Not gumdrops—raindrops! Ha, ha.

BECKY. (*Laughing sarcastically:*) Ha, ha, ha. (*To AVA:*) Wow.

STEW. Bridget.

BRIDGET. Stewart. So good to see you. Was that you in the flea commercial on television? You were the first flea to die, weren't you?

STEW. That was a deceptively challenging role.

BRIDGET. You pulled it off, though; you really did. I went out and bought the product. I have a can of Flea for All in my closet now and I don't even have pets. You were that convincing.

STEW. Thank-you, Bridget, but I do have some concerns here. I haven't seen a script. I normally prepare for at least two weeks. I haven't even heard what role...

BRIDGET. You are the sun, Stewart.

STEW. Who's son?

BRIDGET. The sun in the sky, Stewart.

STEW. Ah, the sun! An astrological piece. I really wish I had been able to prep.

BRIDGET. You will be great; I know it. I'm going to have you stand right over there. (*Consulting clipboard:*) And, let's see...The Lake—Raelyn.

RAELYN. Right here.

BRIDGET. Raelyn, wonderful. You are The Lake and you will stand right over here.

RAELYN. Okey-dokey, here I am. Standing water.

BRIDGET. And Ronny today will be played by Marlene.

MARLENE. Yo.

BRIDGET. So good to see you, Marlene. Thanks for being here.

MARLENE. Yeah, good to be here, but, uh, this is a paying job, right?

BRIDGET. Oh, yes, yes, yes. Of course. You're a professional; of course it's a paying...

MARLENE. So when does that happen?

BRIDGET. What's that?

MARLENE. The paying part.

BRIDGET. Oh, well, I don't really...

CLAIRE. We'll be taking care of that right after the session.

MARLENE. Perfect. Who am I and where do you want me?

BRIDGET. You'll be on this microphone right here, and here is your script for your role as Ronny.

MARLENE. Uh-huh.

AVA. Hey, we're raindrops, right?

BRIDGET. Yes, yes, all...six of you, yes.

AVA. But the script has these individual raindrop parts—Raindrop 1, Raindrop 2...who says what?

BRIDGET. Oh, well, that's um, uh, um, uh...

CLAIRE. *(To the RAINDROPS, pointing to MAC, SHIRLEY, AVA, BECKY, AL, and TIM as she counts:)* Raindrops 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6. Done.

BRIDGET. Yes. Precisely. Exactly who I planned to have doing those roles. Right. *(Looking at clipboard:)* Let's see now, where are we? Narrator—that's Don.

DON. Present.

BRIDGET. Very good. You'll stand right here.

DON. *(Going to his place, reading from the script deeply and dramatically:)* Ah, the world, full of cycles.

BRIDGET. Oh, uh, well...this won't be quite so—heavy as that.

BECKY. Yeah, Don—check out the title: “Ronny the Raindrop.” Something tells me this ain't the voiceover for “Criminal America.”

DON. I was in the running for that gig. I was a top contender.

BECKY. Oh, yeah? Nice. *(To AVA:)* They had it narrowed down to him and just 900 others.

(AVA lets out a very loud, honking laugh. Everyone turns to her.)

AVA. Sorry. It's my laugh. It's just kind of...sorry. *(Hitting BECKY:)* Don't say funny stuff.

BECKY. Ow!

BRIDGET. The role of Cloud today will be played by Marge.

MARGE. Marge here, reporting for cloud duty.

BRIDGET. Cloud duty. That is so...you are all such funny people. This is going to be such fun, I can just tell. Could I have you right over there, please?

MARGE. I'll just float on over. Cumulonimbus.

DON. You're looking especially wispy today.

MARGE. Are you flirting with me?

DON. I just might be.

MARGE. Good. I haven't had a nice restraining order placed on anyone in almost a month.

DON. Ooo. Nasty weather coming in.

BRIDGET. And last but certainly not least, the part of Hailey will be animated by our good friend Belinda. Belinda, you will stand behind that last microphone right there.

BELINDA. Okay, but, I need to ask you one question, please.

BRIDGET. Yes, what is that, Belinda?

BELINDA. Do you have a picture of the part I'll be playing? A sketch?

BRIDGET. You know, I am so pleased you brought that up, so pleased you reminded me. Before we do our read-through, that would be the perfect way to establish the...uh, uh, the uh...

CLAIRE. Tone.

BRIDGET. Tone! Yes, for our work here today. Plus, we have a little secret weapon of directing we are going to unveil after our reading, don't we, Claire?

(BRIDGET signals with her hand to indicate the sock puppets.)

CLAIRE. Yes, that will be...that will be something, when we reveal that secret weapon of ours.

BELINDA. That's great and everything, but could I see the sketch, please, of my character? I would really like to see that.

BRIDGET. Oh, sure, sure—this is a great time. Claire, do you have...

CLAIRE. Got 'em, right here.

BRIDGET. We originally were planning to post these around the room, but certain circumstances beyond our control wouldn't allow that to happen.

JAN. Yeah, listen everybody, my name is Jan, also known as certain circumstances beyond our control, also known as the person who runs this studio who will not, for what should be obvious reasons, allow people to come and stick stuff all over my walls. And speak-

ing of things you cannot do, which I have already seen some of you do, which you were supposed to be warned first thing not to do—leave the microphones alone. You are here to make noise. Sounds. Noise and sounds do not leave fingerprints or bodily fluids of any kind. Thank-you for your attention and have a nice cartoon. 31 minutes left.

BRIDGET. Well. Wasn't that pleasant and incredibly professional? Moving on. Here are the sketches of your characters, in no particular order. My hope is that, by showing you these drawings, you'll get a real sense for the flavor of each character. (*CLAIRE holds up the sketches, one at a time, starting with The Sun. The depictions are bland and predictable.*) Here is our Sun. Stewart, here you are.

STEW. Uh-huh. Yes. Yes. This is really, this is really...actually, I get nothing at all from this. I've looked at the dialogue and now I look at this, and I'm just not getting a clear sense of character. What does this Sun want? That's where I like to start. What does this Sun really want?

BECKY. Stew, I know what your Sun wants.

STEW. Well, I'll listen, but that's really not something that another actor can simply dictate. It has to be part of my personal, you know, internalization.

BECKY. Yeah, but Stew, your character just wants to be hot.

(Everyone laughs at this, AVA most loudly, with her snorting laugh.)

AVA. *(Trying to get her laughing under control:)* Ha, ha, the sun wants to be hot. Oh, that's a good one. Oh, I'm laughing again. I hate my laugh. *(She hits BECKY again.)* I told you no funny stuff.

STEW. You know, I take my craft seriously, and I have very little patience for those...

BECKY. Oh, lighten up. *(To AVA:)* Hey, did you get that one? Lighten up—he's the sun? *(AVA snorts a couple more times in laughter, then suddenly gets angry and hits BECKY again.)* Ow!

AVA. No more funny! I hate my laugh!

MAC. Hey, you know I'm really getting ready for that coffee. This seems like a good time for a break.

CLAIRE. Everyone, please. We'll have just enough time to get this done only if we stay focused. Next sketch?

BRIDGET. Yes, that would be wonderful. (*CLAIRE shows the sketch of the Raindrops. They look like five typical raindrops with faces on them.*) All right, here we have our band of little rascals—our raindrops.

AL. Well, I'll be darned. Those look an awful like your basic...raindrops, don't they?

MAC. I was noticing that.

TIM. Yeah, and if I could just point something out, here, then I'll shut up. You won't hear from me again, except for in the little raindrop crowd scenes, though you won't actually be able to pick me out. I'll blend in. That's what I do. See, I'm designated Raindrop 6. A quick perusal of the script will bear out the fact that there are actually no individual lines for Raindrop 6. Raindrop 6 is never named.

CLAIRE. Oh, I thought...

TIM. No, no—don't worry about it. I'm just saying. Also, you'll see in this sketch here, there are five raindrops. Not six. So, since I'm raindrop 6, I'm basically not in any way represented in this sketch. But that's okay. You don't need to say anything. I know, I know—I've heard it pretty much all my life: "Just an oversight"; "Don't take it personally"; "We never meant to exclude you" and so on and so on. You know, I was left out of my high school yearbook—one of those "not present for photo" guys—and my parents, when they packed up to head on home after a nice family vacation, they left me behind. That happened on several occasions, actually. I've wandered, by myself, through Yosemite, Disneyland, Niagara Falls—I've been abandoned in some very scenic places. So this is not a bad thing, being essentially a non-existent Raindrop number 6. It's what I've come to expect. Question, though, and then, I promise, I'll just fade away again: Do you want me here? Am I actually hired for this spot or was that an oversight as well?

CLAIRE. No...

TIM. Okay, I'll just go. Sorry.

CLAIRE. I mean, no, it's not an oversight. You are on the list. We need you, as a raindrop. We apologize for not...

TIM. So, you don't mind if I stay?

BRIDGET. Not at all, Tom. You are an integral part of this cast.

TIM. It's Tim, actually. But that's okay. I'll shut up now. I'll speak when you need me, but nothing more.

(Pause.)

BECKY. *(To AVA, pointing at the door they came in:)* Do you suppose that door is a portal between the real world and la-la land? *(AVA stifles a laugh, then punches BECKY.)* Ow.

(CLAIRE shifts to the next sketch, this one of Hailey the Hailstone—a round character with bumps.)

BRIDGET. Right, right. Here we go. This is Hailey the Hailstone, a real gem of a character.

BELINDA. This is me?

BRIDGET. Yes, yes, that's, uh, that's you, your character, all right.

BELINDA. See, I have a major problem with this.

BRIDGET. You do?

BELINDA. Yeah. This is a fat character. Again. I am always doing the voices of fat cartoon characters.

BRIDGET. Well, I...

BELINDA. I am not fat. *(To AL:)* Am I fat?

AL. No, nope. Not fat from where I'm standing.

BELINDA. But apparently, people think I have a fat voice. I do not have a fat voice. What constitutes a fat voice, anyway? I have been cast as a hippo, a Christmas tree that gets rejected because it's too wide for the doorway, a bowling ball and, most recently, an overweight hamster for a public service commercial ending with the motto: "Care for your pets. Don't overfeed them." What am I supposed to think?

BRIDGET. I...I...

BELINDA. Listen, I know that we're short on time, but I need to know something. I need to try something.

CLAIRE. We really don't...

BELINDA. I cannot continue as a professional character voice artist until I get this information.

BRIDGET. Will it take long?

BELINDA. I just need to borrow the cast for a couple moments to get their honest opinion. Please.

BRIDGET. Well, I...all right.

BELINDA. You guys don't know me.

MARGE. I actually did read opposite you for that hippo bit. I was the monkey.

BELINDA. That's right. You were the skinny monkey and look at you! You're definitely fatter than I am.

MARGE. Nice to work with you again, too.

BELINDA. I mean, you carry it well; you look fine, but the point is... Everybody, do me a favor, please. Close your eyes. Everybody, just close your eyes and listen. Now, as I speak, I want you to visualize a character with my voice. An animal, say, or some inanimate object. Okay? I'll recite something neutral. A tongue twister. Eyes closed, everybody?

MAC. I see a cup of black coffee.

BELINDA. Please! I need your help.

MAC. Sorry. Go ahead.

BELINDA. Uh... How much wood could a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck could chuck wood?

MARLENE. That's no good. I'm only seeing woodchucks.

BELINDA. Are they fat?

MARLENE. Uuuuuuuh...

BELINDA. All right, never mind the tongue twister. “To be, or not to be; that is the question. Whether ’tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles
And by opposing, end them.” Okay, has everybody got a vision?
(Ad libs in the affirmative.) Good, good. Open your eyes. All right, then, uh—you!

AVA. Me?

BELINDA. Yes. What did you see speaking with my voice?

AVA. I saw a bird.

BELINDA. A bird! A bird! That is wonderful. I feel so much better. A bird is not a hippo—or a hailstone.

AVA. A flightless bird.

BELINDA. Okay, but it’s a bird. That’s the main thing. A bird is not a fat...

AVA. Like a turkey, all plump and ready to be slaughtered for a Thanksgiving dinner. I saw all the fixings. I saw the stuffing coming out if its... *(BECKY hits her.)* Ow!

BELINDA. Great. Thank-you for not helping my cause at all.

AVA. Sorry. I was just telling you.

BELINDA. *(Pointing to STEWART:)* You, what did you see?

JAN. Hey, fat-voice, I see the clock ticking, that’s what I see. You are the most dysfunctional bunch I have ever seen.

BRIDGET. And you are the most...the most... You are the most...

JAN. Thanks very much. I appreciate that.

CLAIRE. Bridget, ignore her. Belinda, you know, I grew up in the Midwest, and we got a lot of hail out there. I have to tell you, this character you’re playing today—this Hailey the Hailstone—this is, as hailstones go, a thin one. Really. This is a svelt hailstone.

BELINDA. You’re just saying that.

CLAIRE. You do not have a fat voice. This hailstone is...

AL. Fit. That is one in-shape hailstone, if you don't mind my saying so. When I look at that sketch and match it with your voice, well, it gives me a hankering for one major thunderstorm.

BELINDA. *(To AL:)* You really think so?

AL. Oh, yeah.

BELINDA. So you don't think I have a fat voice?

AL. I don't think you have a fat anything.

BELINDA. Well, thank-you. We can go on now.

BRIDGET. Great. Great! That's...I'm very happy. The sketches—we were just moving along with our sketches.

CLAIRE. Boss, the time.

BRIDGET. Quickly, then, with the rest of our sketches, we have seen our Sun and our Raindrops and our very in-shape Hailey the Hailstone, which leaves us with just our depictions of... *(CLAIRE holds up the sketch of the Cloud.)* Cloud! Yes. As you can see... *(CLAIRE switches to the next sketch quickly.)* Whoopsie, okay.

MARGE. I guess the cloud just cleared.

BRIDGET. Right, yes—the cloud just...

CLAIRE. Boss.

BRIDGET. And here we have our central character, Ronny the Raindrop. Ronny, here... *(CLAIRE switches sketches again.)* Claire, you're not even giving time enough for the tone to get, you know, toned.

MARLENE. No problem. I saw me—Ronny. I was a raindrop. Got it.

BRIDGET. Good, good. So, our final sketch, then, is of our lovely lake.

RAELYN. Oo, I have quite the shoreline, don't I?

DON. I noticed that as soon as I saw you.

RAELYN. Yeah, and I noticed your eyes.

DON. Did you?

RAELYN. Uh-huh. I thought to myself, those really need to be scratched out.

DON. Hm. Happy thought.

(CLAIRE has put away the sketches.)

BRIDGET. All right. I think we are ready, then, to move along to a reading of our script.

DON. What, no sketch of the narrator?

BRIDGET. Oh, well, the, uh, the narrator is actually not a character we see. We simply hear your voice.

MARGE. It's hard to draw hot air.

DON. Ah, so I'll just be a sort of God-like presence, then. I've been called that before. All-seeing, all-knowing...

RAELYN. All-annoying.

BRIDGET. So, then, good, then, right. Let's read through the script.

JAN. I'm assuming you want me to record this?

BRIDGET. Well, since you are the sound engineer, that would make a great deal of sense, wouldn't it?

JAN. Oh, by the way, you now have 24 minutes and 15 seconds.
(Increasing the reverb on each number:) 14. 13. .

BRIDGET. Stop that.

JAN. 12. 11.

BRIDGET. Claire!

JAN. 10. 9.

DON. *(Very dramatic:)* The final countdown!

CLAIRE. Enough! Jan, please! We don't have time for this. Yes, we would like you to record this initial read-through. Please.

JAN. Fine. I just need two things. The first is that magic word you just used twice, but from the mouth of your director.

BRIDGET. You must be joking.

JAN. Just can't seem to get these microphones functioning until I hear it.

BRIDGET. *(Mumbled:)* Please.

JAN. Excuse me?

BRIDGET. *(With utmost sarcasm:)* Oh, please, please, please, great, wise and highly professional sound engineer, would you pretty please grace us by recording this initial read-through, oh, please please please pretty please won't you please?

JAN. Why, sure, Bridget. I'll get right on that.

BRIDGET. Thank-you so very much.

SHIRLEY. I think you all should know that hostility erodes good karma.

JAN. Now, I'll need each of you to give me a quick check of your microphone so I can adjust my levels. Just speak normally and don't...

DON *(Tapping his microphone:)* Test, test, test.

CLAIRE. No, don't!

DON. Is this on? I don't hear anything. *(JAN whips off her headset, throws open the door to the control room and strides over to DON. She stares furiously at him for a long moment.)* You're frightening me.

(JAN suddenly reaches into her back pocket. Everyone cringes slightly, not sure what she is after. She pulls out her wallet, retrieves a dollar bill from it, and thrusts it at DON.)

JAN. Congratulations. You are the one millionth person to tap on my microphone and say, "Test, test." You win this dollar. Take it, go buy a bag of popcorn, put a huge handful in your mouth, choke on it and die. Take the dollar. Take the dollar.

DON. *(Carefully taking the dollar from JAN:)* Thank-you.

(JAN puts her wallet back, walks back to the control room door, then turns to the CAST.)

JAN. Do not touch anything! Sound does not touch. Repeat after me: Sound does not touch. (*The CAST, frightened, repeats the mantra with JAN.*) Sound does not touch. (*She returns to the control booth, sits down, puts her headset back on, and speaks over the intercom.*) Good. Now, please speak normally into your microphones, one at a time, starting at the mike farthest over, on my right.

CLAIRE. (*To MARGE:*) Marge, that's you.

MARGE. Oh. Okay. Hello. My name is Marge Spencer, and I am pleased to be playing the cloud today.

JAN. Good. Next. (*It's DON. He hesitates, not wanting to incur JAN's wrath again.*) Next, sweepstakes winner!

DON. Yes, yes, of course. Hello. I am Don. You have probably heard my voice on several...

JAN. Good. Next.

RAELYN. I will be your lovely lady of the lake today. I took a vacation at a lake once. I almost drowned my brother there, semi-accidentally. Is that enough?

JAN. Plenty. Next.

STEW. I'm Stew. I'm hoping, eventually, to get some direction about how I am supposed to play my character today. I mean, the Sun is a complex symbol. And still, the motivation...

JAN. Perfect.

STEW. The motivation of the character, what he really wants...

JAN. Hey, Sun-guy—shut up. You're done. Next!

STEW. I just...okay. I hope to know more.

MARLENE. I am Marlene. I wait tables down at the Long Wharf. I hate it. I want money for doing voice work and not for sucking up to idiots who send back their club sodas three times because they are, quote, "Not fizzy enough." Enough?

JAN. Good. Next.

BELINDA. Now, I happen to think that the only really fat voice I have heard is James Earl Jones's. He has a truly overweight voice. But you'll notice, even he does voice work for thin cartoons.

JAN. I'm sure it's a conspiracy. Thank-you. Now, raindrops—let me hear from you all at once first and then individually.

BECKY. What should we say?

MAC. On three, let's all say, "We love coffee! Time for a break!" One, two, three...

ALL "RAINDROPS." We love coffee. Time for a break.

SHIRLEY. Actually, I'm opposed to coffee. Coffee production is just another example of how we rape the earth for our personal gratification.

JAN. Okay, I heard that, though I didn't want to. I've also heard enough from Mr. Coffee back there.

MAC. Black, one sugar, please.

JAN. Cute. Somebody else go.

BECKY. Hello, I'm Becky. Some call me Rebecca, and, at various times in my life, three people have referred to me as Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm, but those three individuals are all, coincidentally, dead now.

JAN. Okay. Who else?

AL. I'm Albert North. I don't have much to say except I'm happy to be here and hope that this job will be one of the stepping stones to a long and illustrious career in show business.

JAN. Thank-you, Al the Delusional. Who's left?

AVA. Hi, I'm Ava. I just want everyone to know that my laugh is purely involuntary. I know it's obnoxious and I hate it, too, and I am in therapy now to try to fix it.

JAN. What do you go to, LA?

AVA. *(With her obnoxious laugh:)* LA! Oh, that was good one. You made me laugh. I hate my laugh. Don't do that.

JAN. My apologies. Is that everyone?

AL. *(To TIM:)* You need to go.

TIM. No, remember, I'm basically just about a non-entity here. I'm a crowd member. One of the masses. That's what I do. That's who I am. I've accepted it.

JAN. Great. We're set for your read-through, then.

BRIDGET. All right, wonderful! I am so very excited! This really excites me. I can't think of anything more, more...

MARLENE. Exciting?

BRIDGET. Yes, exactly! So let's get right to it, okay? Claire will read just a few of the descriptions so you can get a sense of the scenes. Claire?

CLAIRE. *(Reading:)* Open to a sunny day, an idyllic picture of a neighborhood crisscrossed by tree-lined streets, dotted with lovely homes and manicured lawns. Birds twittering, breeze blowing.

(MAC whistles like a bird; AL makes the sound of wind.)

BRIDGET. No, no, no. We'll add in all those other sounds later. You don't need to do that.

MAC. Did you like that, bird, though? That was a red-winged blackbird.

AL. And I make great wind, if I do say so myself.

RAELYN. Oh, fabulous.

MAC. Just trying to help with the mood, you know.

BRIDGET. I appreciate helpfulness, I really do, but, uh, but, uh...

BECKY. I think she's saying shut up and don't help.

BRIDGET. Well, yes. Not in those terms exactly, but...

MAC. Kill the bird. Got it.

BRIDGET. Thanks. Thank-you. Continuing on—Claire?

CLAIRE. We hear the narrator's voice.

(During the read through, the ACTORS are labeled according to their roles in “Ronny the Reluctant Raindrop.” Each ACTOR puts on a cartoon voice. The NARRATOR speaks with a very smarmy, arrogant tone.)

NARRATOR. Ah, the world, full of cycles.

CLAIRE. Suddenly, people come out of the houses riding various cycles—bicycles, tricycles, unicycles, motorcycles.

NARRATOR. Ha, ha, no, no, not that type of cycle. The cycles we count on to run our lives—morning, noon, and night; spring, summer, winter, fall. A cycle many of us might not think about, but we certainly all rely on, is called the water cycle. The water cycle is actually a very complicated process, but we can break it down into four simple parts: evaporation, condensation, precipitation and collection. The water cycle gives us the characters for our story today. Meet the sun.

SUN. I give you warmth and shine... *(Breaking character:)* I’m sorry. I really have to stop here. Bridget.

BRIDGET. Yes, yes, Stew?

STEW. I need something. I need at least a word to give me a hint on the interpretation of this character.

MARGE. *(To RAELYN:)* “Idiot” comes to mind.

STEW. You know, if you want to take your art lightly, I guess that’s your business, but it’s just that sort of amateur attitude that keeps us vocal animation facilitators from getting the respect we deserve.

MARGE. Look, I’m just as much a vocal whatever as you are, Pal, but I don’t need...

BRIDGET. Comfort!

MARGE. What?

BRIDGET. Stewart, your objective, as the sun, is to provide the maximum comfort to everyone you can. Okay? How about that?

STEW. Comfort. Comfort. I want to bring... I can wrap my mind around that. I’ve got it. Thank-you, Bridget. That’s what I needed. Thank-you.

BRIDGET. And while we've stopped, uh, Narrator? Don?

DON. *(In the same tone as he used for the script:)* Hello.

BRIDGET. Could you be less...

DON. Less, less—handsome? Attractive?

MARGE. You could not possibly be less attractive, Don.

DON. Why, thank-you.

BRIDGET. Less... I get the image you're trying to sell cars. Used cars. That don't work. That is not...that image is not quite what we want.

DON. Say no more. I've got it. Would you like to start again?

BRIDGET. That would be great. From after the first cycles part.

DON. After the bad joke about the bicycles?

BRIDGET. Bad...? You didn't think that worked?

CLAIRE. Bridget, we probably shouldn't stop for any analysis at this point.

BRIDGET. Oh. Okay, right. Yes, from there, after the clever play on words about the cycles.

DON. 10-4, then. *(DON speaks as the NARRATOR again, almost precisely the same as he did before.)* The cycles we count on to run our lives—morning, noon, and night; spring, summer, winter, fall. A cycle many of us might not think about, but we certainly all rely on, is called the water cycle. The water cycle is actually a very complicated process, but we can break it down into four simple parts: evaporation, condensation, precipitation and collection. The water cycle gives us the characters for our story today. Meet the sun.

SUN. I give you warmth and shine so bright; I love to shine with all my might. That's right: I am the sun. My rays send down the heat that makes evaporation possible, turning the liquid water into tiny water molecules that rise into the air. There they collect and form my good friend—cloud.

CLOUD. *(Jolly:)* You see me float without a care, but I'm a boat not on the ocean, but up in the air. When my friend the sun sends the

water into the air, it gathers together to make me, the cloud. I'm not only handy for giving you welcomed shade from the sun—no offense, old friend...

SUN. None taken, Cloudy.

CLOUD. But I am also the gathering place for a whole bunch of very important little guys—the raindrops.

(The RAINDROPS sound like children. They do not speak well in unison.)

ALL RAINDROPS. Here we are, all gathered and ready; sometimes we fall light and other times we come down heavy.

RAINDROP 1. We might make you wet if you get caught out in a storm when we're falling.

RAINDROP 2. But please don't get mad. We're just trying to be helpful.

ALL RAINDROPS. We're the rain, but you can't complain—without us, you'd all be in pain!

RAINDROP 3. Today, we're headed for a great big dive into a great big place.

ALL RAINDROPS. We're going swimming in the lake!

LAKE. *(Motherly:)* Hey, that's me, where the water collects. I'm home for the beavers and home for the ducks. When it rains, it's like a big family reunion, with all those water droplets dropping down like my children from the sky, returning to their home where they can live again for a while. That is, until they evaporate and begin the water cycle all over again!

ALL RAINDROPS. Yeah, hurray, hurray for the water cycle. Woo-hoo for the water cycle. Hurray, hurray!

NARRATOR. But wait just a moment. What is that I see, perched on the edge of Cloud over there?

CLOUD. Huh? Is someone perched on my edge?

NARRATOR. It's little Ronny Raindrop, looking awfully sad. And beside him is his great friend, Hailey the Hailstone. Let's listen in to see what's happening with Ronny and Hailey.

HAILEY. But Ronny, you have to jump. All your raindrop friends are jumping.

RAINDROP 4. Woo-hoo, here I go!

RAINDROP 5. Geronimo!

ALL RAINDROPS. Woo-hoo! Yay! Here I go!

RONNY. I can't. I just can't jump.

HAILEY. Why, Ronny, why can't you jump?

RONNY. Because I'm afraid of heights.

(The SUN and the CLOUD and the LAKE laugh at this, as do the other RAINDROPS.)

HAILEY. Hey, you guys—don't laugh! My friend Ronny is really scared.

SUN. Oh, I'm sorry, Ronny; I didn't mean to be mean. I just have never met a raindrop afraid of heights before!

CLOUD. It is a bit odd.

ALL RAINDROPS. We're sorry, too, Ronny.

LAKE. Come on, Ronny; I will catch you.

RONNY. No, you won't. What if I hit the land?

RAINDROP 1. I hit the land once, but it didn't hurt!

RAINDROP 2. Yeah, me, too—I just sunk in and watered a plant.

SUN. That's right—until I warmed him again and he evaporated.

CLOUD. He came back to me, his old buddy. You will, too, Ronny.

RONNY. Oh, gosh, guys; I don't know about this.

HAILEY. Or maybe you'll become a hailstone like me, Ronny.

RONNY. How would I do that?

HAILEY. Well, I was a little water droplet just like you, but then I got caught in an updraft and went way up in the atmosphere.

RAINDROP 3. Atmosphere? Gee, Hailey, that's an awful big word.

HAILEY. Sorry. It just means the air that surrounds the earth. When you go high, high up in the atmosphere, it gets cold up there. Oops, here comes an updraft. Up I go!

RONNY. Hey, where's she going?

CLOUD. Don't worry, Ronny—she'll be back! And I bet she'll be bigger than before.

SUN. Unless she gets too close to me, of course!

HAILEY. Whee! Here I come, Ronny! That was fun. How do I look?

RONNY. Wow, you are bigger!

HAILEY. That's because I put on another layer of ice from the upper atmosphere. Boy, it's sure chilly up there.

RONNY. How many times will you do that, Hailey?

HAILEY. I don't know, but pretty soon I'll be heavy enough that I won't go up anymore.

LAKE. Then she'll just come home to me!

RAINDROP 3. Hey, Hailey, Ronny, come down with us!

RAINDROP 4. Yeah, we're just about ready to dive into the lake.

LAKE. Come on down, everybody; the water's beautiful, if I do say so myself!

CLOUD. Time to go, guys!

RONNY. Wait, wait! I'm not ready! I can't do it!

ALL RAINDROPS. (*Ad libs:*) Whee! Come on, Ronny; it's great! Yeah!

HAILEY. Oops, I think I'm heavy enough this time—here I go!

RONNY. Don't leave me, Hailey!

HAILEY. Come on, Ronny. Let's go together!

RONNY. I can't! I'm too scared!

LAKE. Come on down, Ronny!

SUN. You'll be fine.

CLOUD. Go on, son.

HAILEY. Sorry, Ronny—gotta gooooo!

RONNY. Hailey, no! Oh, I'm so lonely now.

SUN. Ronny, it's okay. Everybody's afraid sometime.

CLOUD. That's right.

RONNY. Everyone?

SUN. Sure. But just remember, you're part of a great big, very important cycle.

CLOUD. That's right, Ronny—along with all of us, you're an important part of the water cycle.

RONNY. I am water.

SUN. Yes, you are.

HAILEY. Come on down, Ronny! You'll love it!

RONNY. Hailey?

LAKE. I have her now; she's just fine.

CLOUD. Your friend Hailey, your fellow raindrops, and all of the other forms of falling water—called precipitation—they're all part of the water cycle.

SUN. How would you someday like to be a snowflake, Ronny?

CLOUD. Or a hailstone, like Hailey?

SUN. Or part of a majestic waterfall?

RONNY. I could do all that?

LAKE. Ronny, everyone's waiting for you down here!

HAILEY and ALL RAINDROPS. (*Ad libs:*) Yeah, Ronny! Come on! We'd love to have you!

CLOUD. You could do all that and more, Ronny, but you have to join in and take your place as part of the water cycle.

RONNY. How do I do that?

SUN. Simple, Ronny. Just jump.

RONNY. Will you guys watch to make sure I'm safe?

SUN. Ronny, as long as you're part of the water cycle, Cloud, Lake, Hailey and the rest of your friends will always be with you, and so will I.

RONNY. Well, then, I guess I don't have any reason to be scared, then.

CLOUD. That's the spirit, Ronny.

RONNY. Wish me luck, everybody!

CLOUD and SUN. Good luck, Ronny!

RONNY. Here I gooooooo!

LAKE. Hey, here comes Ronny! I've got you!

HAILEY and ALL RAINDROPS. Go, Ronny, go!

RONNY. This is great! Weeee! I love being part of the water cycle now!

NARRATOR. And so Ronny overcame his fear and learned that, by fulfilling his destiny and becoming part of one of earth's greatest cycles—the water cycle—he would never be alone.

HAILEY. Great to see you, Ronny. Let's go for a swim!

RONNY. That was fun. I can't wait to evaporate again!

CLAIRE. And with the sound of laughter ringing in the air, the scene fades. End of animation.

BRIDGET. *(Clapping her hands:)* Bravo! Bravo! Wasn't that just...I was so impressed with how...you all were just so...oh, that was just so very good. Whew! I am really excited now. We are close, people, after just a single reading which, I am hoping, did get recorded?

JAN. Oops! You wanted me to record that? Gee, I must have forgotten to push the button.

BRIDGET. You're joking.

JAN. Yes, I am. Despite my enormous incompetence, I got your read through.

BRIDGET. How kind of you. Now, we do have a few small issues we need to take care of...

MAC. Hey, you know, before we start on this next part of the session, do you think we might, you know...

RAELYN. Don't you think of anything besides coffee?

MAC. Well, when I have coffee, I think of a lot of things besides coffee. I think of girls and financial planning and the best bus to take to get downtown. I think of all sorts of things. But when I don't have coffee, like this morning because I ran out at home and searched my cupboards for so long that I was late and didn't have time to stop for a cup before I got here, in times like this, no—I don't think of anything else but coffee. I love coffee, I need coffee, I crave coffee, I want coffee, I...

JAN. Hey.

MAC. I feel like I am going to die without coffee.

JAN. Hey!

MAC. What?

JAN. 11 minutes and about 22 seconds—then you can bolt out of here and go get hooked up to an IV at Starbucks, okay?

MAC. (*Setting his watch:*) 11?

JAN. Right. You can do that, huh? You're not going to start tearing things apart, right?

MAC. As long as that timing is firm.

JAN. Oh, it's firm, all right. It is absolutely firm—not a second more.

MAC. Thank-you. Thank-you. This I can do. Good.

BRIDGET. Good, then, uh, let's begin with the raindrops, shall we?

BECKY. Oh, let's.

BRIDGET. You were all terrific and all, but there were just a couple things. Now, some of the lines should have been spoken in unison, and they, well, weren't. And then others were supposed to be ad libs, and they, well...

AL. Also weren't. "Weren't." That's a funny word when you say it by itself.

BELINDA. Weren't. Weren't. That is so strange, isn't it? It kind of twists your mouth up funny. Weren't.

CLAIRE. People!

BRIDGET. Right, yes, exactly. Could we just re-do those ad-libbed sections right now, please? The first one is on page, uh, page, uh...

CLAIRE. Two.

BRIDGET. Page two, right, where it says, oddly enough, in parentheses, "ad libs," just before the line. Everyone there? (*Ad libs of assent from the RAINDROPS:*) Okay. So, this time, we won't do this in unison, but with some ad libs, okay? Are we recording?

JAN. Well, I don't actually know what "we" are doing, but *I* am definitely recording.

BRIDGET. You know, I am doing my best to be civil out here.

JAN. Oh, that's your best? You might want to consider taking some lessons.

BRIDGET. Now, that...

CLAIRE. Boss, don't take the bait. Time.

BRIDGET. (*After a deep breath:*) Right. So, let's take the line just before the first ad-libbed Raindrops. That's the Lake line. Raelyn.

LAKE. Hey, that's me, where the water collects. I'm home for the beavers and home for the ducks. (*Breaking character:*) Hang on just a second, here. I've got a question.

BRIDGET. What's the matter?

RAELYN. Is “collects” supposed to rhyme with “ducks”? Because all the other guys—the Sun, the Cloud—they start their intros with this rhyming thing, but my first lines—they don’t rhyme.

BRIDGET. They do.

RAELYN. No, they don’t. “Ducks” and “collects” do not rhyme.

BRIDGET. They’re close. They end with the same sound, pretty much.

RAELYN. Same sound? “Keh” and “teh” are not the same sound.

BRIDGET. It’s not “keh” and “teh.” The “s” changes it. It’s “ducks” and “collects.” They end with the “s,” and the “s” sort of...morphs the sound.

RAELYN. Morphs it? I’m not hearing the morphing.

BRIDGET. You’re not hearing the morphing?

MARGE. I get it. I get the morphing.

RAELYN. You get the morphing? Okay, fine—as long as somebody else hears it. I just needed to know if it was supposed to rhyme. I’ll say it like it’s rhyming, even if I don’t get it.

BRIDGET. All right, that’s...that’s that professionalism I admired. Let’s take it again.

LAKE. Hey, that’s me, where the water collects. I’m home for the beavers and home for the ducks. When it rains, it’s like a big family reunion, with all those water droplets dropping down like my children from the sky, returning to their home where they can live again for a while. That is, until they evaporate and begin the water cycle all over again!

(The RAINDROPS speak this next line with a bit of ad-libbing, but not much; it’s still pretty much in unison.)

ALL RAINDROPS. Yeah, hurray, hurray for the water cycle. Woo-hoo for the water cycle. Hurray, hurray!

BRIDGET. No. No, that’s still not quite right. You’re still too much together. It should give the overall effect of, you know, the line, but not everyone saying the same thing.

AVA. Can I say “hurray”?

BRIDGET. Well, yes, but...

AVA. And I love “woo-hoo.” Can I take “woo-hoo”?

BECKY. You want to make “woo-hoo” with who-who?

(AVA laughs with her hated laugh, then catches herself.)

AVA. Oo, you did it again! You made me laugh!

(She gets ready to hit BECKY.)

BECKY. You hit me one more time and I swear...

AVA. Stop with the funny!

BRIDGET. Please. The point is, yes, you can say the lines as written—“hurray” or “woo-hoo”—if you’d like, but not at the same time, and you should add in some other words as well. That’s what we mean by ad libbing, right? So. From the Lake’s last line.

LAKE. That is, until they evaporate and being the water cycle all over again!

(This time the RAINDROPS get it right, but TIM goes on for too long after everyone else has died out.)

TIM. ...that water cycle is just the cat’s meow! I love it, I love it, I love it! Yes, I do! Yee-haw! Let’s all... *(Looking around, seeing his error:)* I have committed the crime of standing out. Forgive me.

BRIDGET. Well, that was so very close. We just need to sort of split the difference between that one and the one we did before and we’ll be all set.

MARLENE. One quick question? Can I?

BRIDGET. Oh, sure, yes.

MARLENE. This, uh, “Ronny the Raindrop” story. Have you gotten paid for this yet?

BRIDGET. Well, uh, that is, I, or we are sort of doing this with the hope...

MARLENE. Gotcha. Follow up question, then: We don't have to wait until it sells to get our money, right?

BRIDGET. Oh, no, no.

CLAIRE. We'll take care of the pay as soon as we're done today.

MARLENE. Good thing. Great, thanks.

BRIDGET. Certainly. Now, uh, uh, uh... You know, I'm sorry, but, Marlene? I just need to know, before we move on to complete our work here, what did you mean when you just said "good thing"?

CLAIRE. Boss...

BRIDGET. Just give me a second. Marlene?

MARLENE. I didn't mean anything by it. I've got bills to pay, that's all.

BRIDGET. And you suppose those bills wouldn't get paid if you had to wait for "Ronny the Raindrop" to sell?

MARLENE. Frankly, probably not.

BRIDGET. Really? And why is that?

MARLENE. Well, for one thing, it's dumb.

BRIDGET. Dumb?

MARLENE. Yeah. I mean, sure, it's a kid's thing and all that, but still, it's an amazingly dumb script. I mean, no offense—you didn't write it, I'm sure; you're just doing your job—but you really don't have much to work with here.

BRIDGET. I see.

MAC. Six minutes to coffee time. In case anyone's interested.

CLAIRE. Six...? Bridget, Boss, we need to get some things done, here. We're almost out of time.

JAN. (*God voice:*) Yes, yes, you are.

BRIDGET. Does anyone else happen to have a problem with "Ronny the Raindrop"? Anyone?

SHIRLEY. Actually, I'm not too thrilled any time human beings decide they need to express their extreme egocentrism by anthropomorphizing such things as natural phenomena. It cheapens existence and deadens the soul. Other than that, I'm good.

BRIDGET. Thank-you. So much.

CLAIRE. Uh, Bridget? Boss? The process is stagnating just a bit. We do...we do have the sock puppets. Bridget?

BELINDA. You know, while we're bringing things up, I couldn't help but notice how often this script referred to weight issues. I mean, I know some of you have assured me I don't have a fat voice, *(She looks to AL who winks at her.)* but I'm concerned that some child struggling with self esteem might look at this Hailey the Hailstone and think that the way to achievement is through weight gain.

MARGE. Come again?

BELINDA. Well, look at her—she seems to take great pleasure in riding updrafts to put on more layers of ice. And only when she gets heavy enough will she be able to fulfill her dream of diving into the lake. I think that is sending a dangerous message.

BECKY. Next thing you know, kids will be hopping on hot air balloons to go get Twinkies.

AL. Hey, I think Belinda has a point.

BECKY. And I think you're just trying to score points with Belinda.

BELINDA. You leave him alone!

CLAIRE. People, please! We need to stay productive!

STEW. We can't achieve a high level of productivity until we have done character work, in my opinion.

CLAIRE. *(Running to grab the pillowcase she brought in earlier:)* All right, everybody, hang on! Bridget here has something very special, very important she wants to share with all of you—it's that "secret weapon of directing" she referred to earlier. *(Handing the pillowcase to BRIDGET:)* There you go, Boss. There they are. *(Whispered:)* The sock puppets. I think it's time.

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!

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