

BUFFOONERY



R. Eugene Jackson

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*Many thanks to my friend,
Granny (Sean) Winn,
formerly a professional puppet-maker and clown,
for her advice and special tips.*

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FARCE. There are nonstop laughs and endless opportunities for cast members to showcase physical humor in this fun circus extravaganza. When Mrs. Hatchet, an animal activist, and her rent-a-judge and bumbling bodyguards descend on The Bungling Brothers' Circus, they manage to confiscate every circus animal—even the clowns' invisible dog! And to make matters worse, Mrs. Hatchet erases all the tattoos off the Tattooed Man. Bad luck continues when the dimwitted high-wire walker falls and breaks both of his legs because he rigged his safety net upside down. And with just three days left until opening night, the Ringmaster must find a way for the show to go on with the only circus folks he has left: the clowns!

Performance Time: Approximately 100-120 minutes.

CHARACTERS

(4 M, 8 F, 11 flexible, opt. extras)

(With doubling: 4 M, 7 F, 8 flexible)

RINGMASTER: Ringmaster for the Bungling Brothers' Circus; has an oversized handle-bar mustache and a whistle and megaphone around his neck at all times; wears a dress shirt, tie, top hat, and red tailcoat; male.

TUTTI FRUTTI: Ringmaster's wife and Tutti Frutti the clown; wears a clown costume and makeup; female.

OLIVIA: Ringmaster's petite daughter who hates clowns and plays "Atlas the Thug," the strongest and most vicious man on earth; has an oversized mustache and wears a strongman costume with balloons under her shirtsleeves for muscles; female.

MADAME CLARE DE LUNE: Gypsy fortuneteller who carries a "crystal" ball made out of a rubber ball; wears traditional Gypsy fortuneteller garb; female.

CLOWN 1: Circus clown who plays a "tiger"; wears a tiger clown costume; flexible.

CLOWN 2: Circus clown who plays a "tiger"; wears a tiger clown costume; female.

CLOWN 3: Circus clown who plays a "tiger"; wears a tiger clown costume; flexible.

CLOWN 4: Circus clown who plays a "tiger"; wears a tiger clown costume; flexible.

BO: Similar to Moe of The Three Stooges; flexible.

FRIZZY: Similar to Larry of The Three Stooges; wears a huge frizzy wig; flexible.

SURLY: Similar to Curly of The Three Stooges; bald (wears a skullcap); flexible.

HAYWIRE: Dimwitted high-wire walker; wears a high-wire costume; flexible.

MRS. PRUDNELLA HATCHET: (Prude-NELL-a) An animal activist recently deposed as president of B.E.A.S.T.L.Y.

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(Broads for Ending the Scandalous Treatment of Livestock); wears a suit and carries a very large tote; female.

JUDGE CHEATUM: Mrs. Hatchet's rent-a-judge; wears a judge's robe and graduation cap and carries an oversized gavel; flexible.

HANSEL: Mrs. Hatchet's hungry bodyguard; male.

GRETEL: Mrs. Hatchet's hungry bodyguard; female.

LANG: A potato peeler who plays Hobo the Clown; wears a hobo clown costume; male.

TIPSI TURVY: Circus clown; has a hugely padded stomach and wears a tacky dress, an apron, a scraggly wig, and thick glasses; female.

LYON: Top-notch tenacious tiger tamer from Tunisia; wears an animal-tamer circus costume; flexible.

TATTOO MAN: Circus tattoo man who later plays Weeping Willie the clown; tattoos cover his face and neck but the rest of his body is covered with clothing; wears a clown costume; male.

FISH: Circus clown; wears a clown fish costume or can be dressed as a clown who has a large fish hand puppet with a miniature plastic sword; flexible.

PATRON: Clown who can't find his seat; wears a clown costume; flexible.

SHOPPER: Circus clown; female.

EXTRAS (opt.): As additional Clowns, Circus Folks, or Circus Audience Members.

NOTE: For flexible roles, change the script accordingly. If desired, clown costumes can be ordered from clown shops online or they can be handmade.

OPTIONS FOR DOUBLING

CLOWN 1/SWORD FISH (flexible)

CLOWN 2/SHOPPER (female)

CLOWN 3/PATRON (flexible)

CLOWN 4/FISH (flexible)

SETTING

The Bungling Brothers' Circus.

SET

Outside the tent of The Bungling Brothers' Circus. There is a trailer or a small open tent SR. Crates, trunks, and portable chairs and/or benches are at various places.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

Act I: Outside a circus tent.

Intermission

Act II: Interior of a circus tent.

PROPS

- | | |
|---|--|
| Crystal ball (rubber ball painted silver) | Arm sling |
| Clipboard | Crutches, for Haywire |
| Pencil with no lead | 2 push brooms |
| Watch, for Ringmaster | Sound-maker |
| Watch, for Clare de Lune | Suitcase |
| Whistle | 4-6' ladder |
| Megaphone (opt.) | Desk |
| Large colorful handkerchief | 5 Chairs |
| 2 Stools or small chairs | Fake cell phone |
| Whip or 4'-6' pole | Fishing pole |
| Two 12" balloons for Olivia's muscles | Huge fake fishhook |
| Dust on Haywire's shoulders and arms (baby powder) | Large fake worm |
| Hat pin | Bandages |
| Pin | Crutch, for Tutti |
| Fake handlebar mustache | Real or small stuffed cat |
| Large tote bag, for Mrs. Hatchet | Bicycle horn |
| Plastic baseball bat | Oversized ticket |
| Popcorn | Mop |
| Slices of bread | 5 Tiger costumes, for Clowns 1-4 and Weeping Willie (Only a headpiece and tail are needed) |
| Oversized gavel (plastic or padded) | Large, colorful handkerchief, for Weeping Willie |
| Long stiff leash with dog collar attached but no dog | Clown baker costume, for Olivia |
| Five foot tall pencil with used eraser or a giant fake eraser | Plastic sword |
| 2 Police batons (plastic or padded) | Oversized bib |
| List | Purse, for Shopper |
| | 5 Shaving cream pies |
| | 1 Whipped cream pie |
| | Doughnuts, cakes, and/or other misc bakery items |

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Open sack labeled "flour"
(filled with baby powder)

Miscellaneous trash

Thick glasses (Available at
most online clown shops)

Empty pan

Oversized pepper shaker

Box of salt

2 Plastic eggs

Large wooden spoon or
paddle

Glass, cup, or bottle of
water

Two 12" powder puffs (Can
be made by covering a
12" diameter circular
piece of foam rubber with
a fluffy material. Be sure
to add a strap on the back
to hold it with.)

2 Towels

SOUND EFFECTS

Slide whistle going up	Applause (recorded, opt.)
Slide whistle going down	Recorded music may be used for all band cues.
Hand clawing a filled balloon	Sousa type march (live or recorded)
Hissing and mewling of a large cat	Can-can music (live or recorded)
Conk	Small bell tinkles
Whimpering cat	Misc sound effects: woodblock, drum, cowbell, cymbal, trash can lid, other odd-sounding instruments as desired.
Fanfare (live or recorded)	
Upbeat march (live or recorded)	
Few bars of loud circus music (live or recorded)	
Cheering (recorded, opt.)	

NOTE: Some sound effects are better if they are performed live backstage. For example, when a character is hit with a hand or fist or gavel, it is better timed if someone backstage simultaneously strikes a woodblock, drum, metal trash can lid, bass drum, cowbell, etc. The odder the noise, the funnier it will be. Sound effects may be downloaded from the internet. E.g., if the roaring of a lion is needed, simply type into your computer's search engine: "Sound effect: lion roaring."

SPECIAL EFFECTS

Balloon muscles: Twelve-inch balloons are blown up less than half way and inserted on top of Olivia's arm muscles underneath loose sleeves. The balloon that rotates below her arm should be coated with baby powder so that it moves smoothly against the skin.

Fake barbell with helium balloons: For the bar, use a 2' long x 1 in diameter Styrofoam rod painted black. For the weights, use 24" helium-filled balloons. The helium-filled balloons are tied off and then their lips are slipped onto the rod and secured with rubber bands or string. The balloons will maintain their lifting power for only about five hours. The barbell will look purposefully fake as the balloons will tilt up while the bar remains parallel to the ground.

Fake barbell without helium balloons: If helium is not available or otherwise cannot be used, fill the balloons with air or use regular balls in place of the balloons. Punch holes in the balls so the bar can be attached to each one. Tie fishing line onto each end of the barbell and suspend it from a long fishing pole that is maneuvered from offstage. It's okay for the pole to be seen by the audience. Note: This option will cause some problems when the Stooges are handling the barbell. When Madame tells Olivia to release the barbell and Olivia refuses, Madame crosses to her, takes a large hatpin from her headdress, and pops both balloons.

Magic tricks: Simple and inexpensive magic tricks can be ordered from magic shops online.

**“WE’RE GOING OUT THERE
AND SHOW OUR AUDIENCES
THAT WE’RE NOT QUITTERS,
WE’RE NOT STOPPERS,
WE’RE NOT CORKS!”**

—OLIVIA

ACT I

(AT RISE: Outside the circus tent of The Bungling Brothers' Circus. There is a trailer or a small open tent SR. Crates, trunks, and portable chairs and/or benches are at various places. Madame Clare de Lune, a fortuneteller dressed in traditional Gypsy garb, is sitting onstage with her crystal ball in her hands.)

MADAME: *(To crystal ball, in a mysterious, fortuneteller voice.)*

Oh, crystal ball, no more bad news, please! *(Ringmaster, attired in a dress shirt, a tie, a top hat, and sporting an oversized handlebar mustache, enters SR. He carries a clipboard and a pencil with a broken lead and has a whistle and a megaphone [opt.] around his neck at all times. Sees him.)* Ringmaster. *(To crystal ball, gently slaps it.)* I told you, no more bad news.

RINGMASTER: Am I the bad news, Madame Clare de Lunatic?

MADAME: *(Correcting.)* That's Clare de Lune.

RINGMASTER: Well, you're the craziest person I know, so Clare de Lunatic fits perfectly.

MADAME: You are not the bad news. But you bring it.

RINGMASTER: No, I don't.

MADAME: Even though you may not know it.

RINGMASTER: Know what?

MADAME: The bad news.

RINGMASTER: What makes you think I have bad news?

(Madame rubs one hand over her crystal ball.)

MADAME: I looked into my crystal ball and saw the future.

RINGMASTER: The future?

MADAME: That you would be calling a meeting of the circus troupe this morning at nine o'clock. *(Looks at her watch.)* You are late.

RINGMASTER: Yes, well, I forgot—

MADAME: Your morning coffee.

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RINGMASTER: My morning coffee.

MADAME: To feed the dog.

RINGMASTER: To feed the—

MADAME: And to sharpen your pencil.

RINGMASTER: And to sharpen my pen— *(Realizes.)* Will you stop repeating what I'm saying before I say it! Yes, I broke the lead in my pencil when I—

MADAME: Used it to clean out your earwax.

RINGMASTER: Used it to clean out my— *(Embarrassed.)* No, no. I was using it to stir my coffee.

MADAME: Then why is the lead still in your right ear?

RINGMASTER: What? *(Puts his index finger into his right ear and pulls the "lead" out. Note: Lead is not visible to the audience.)* Oh. How did that get in there?

MADAME: I just told you.

RINGMASTER: Stop it, Madame, I don't want to hear it. *(Throws the "lead" down and looks at Madame's crystal ball.)* Besides, you can't tell the future by looking into that crystal ball.

MADAME: True.

RINGMASTER: I knew it!

MADAME: Because this is not my crystal ball. This is a fake.

RINGMASTER: What happened to the real one?

MADAME: I smashed it.

RINGMASTER: Why?

MADAME: It told me something I didn't want to hear...bad news.

RINGMASTER: That's no reason to smash it.

MADAME: It told me this circus will fold within the month.

RINGMASTER: *(Outraged.)* What?! It said my circus will close?! Give me that stupid, imbecilic, fortunetelling liar! *(Grabs the "crystal ball" from Madame and holds it above his head, threatening to toss it to the ground.)* Aren't you going to stop me?

MADAME: Why? The crystal ball can take care of itself.

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RINGMASTER: Here goes! *(With a big grunt, he tosses it to the ground. It bounces and Madame catches it.)* What the—?! It didn't break! How did you do that?

MADAME: *(Smiles.)* It bounces but never breaks.

RINGMASTER: Enough of this. We're getting ready for our finest season. No way is my circus going to close. No way! *(Blows whistle with his signature sound, several mixed long and short sounds that will be repeated later in the same order. Madame holds her ears. With a megaphone or in his loudest voice, announces.)* Boooyoys and girls and adults of aall ages! The Bungling Brothers Circuuuuuuus preeeeesents...

MADAME: Wrong speech.

RINGMASTER: What? Oh. Oh, right. *(Clears throat.)* Ahem. *(Using megaphone or loudly.)* All personnel are to report here immediately for an important meeting!

MADAME: Since I already know what this is about, I shall depart. *(Starts to exit.)*

RINGMASTER: Madame Clare de Lunatic, sit down!

MADAME: Somehow I knew you were going to say that.

(Madame sits. All the Clowns, Lyon, Tattoo Man, and other Circus People wearing partial costumes and no special makeup enter and sit or stand before the Ringmaster. Note: Extras and Stagehands might be used here to increase the size of the group. Tattoo Man carries a big colorful handkerchief and has tattoos covering his face and neck, but the rest of his body is covered with clothing. Lyon carries a stool and a whip or a long pole. He sits on his stool.)

RINGMASTER: *(Taking roll.)* [Clown 1, Clown 2].... *(Instead of saying "Clown 1," etc., he uses their clown names, which the actors or director will designate. Tries to mark them off on his roster, but there is no lead in his pencil.)* Darn broken pencil! *(Throws pencil down and looks around.)* Okay, where's Tutti Frutti? Where's my wife? *(Looks about.)* Tutti Frutti, where are you?

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(Wearing part of her clown outfit but no clown makeup, Tutti enters SR.)

TUTTI: Here I am, sweetie, in person and with puckered lips.

(Tutti kisses Ringmaster. Others whistle and make lovey-dovey noises.)

RINGMASTER: *(Embarrassed.)* Don't do that in front of all these people.

TUTTI: Okay, let's go out behind the barn and do it.

(Tutti grabs Ringmaster's hand and starts to pull him off SR. Ringmaster holds back.)

RINGMASTER: Tutti, not now. Just sit down somewhere.

(Tutti takes Ringmaster's arm.)

TUTTI: I'd rather stand here beside my big, strong husband.

RINGMASTER: That reminds me...where's Atlas the Thug, the strongest and most vicious man on earth?

TUTTI: *(To Ringmaster, points off SL.)* There. I see him.

RINGMASTER: *(Calls off SL.)* Atlas?! Atlas the Thug?!

OLIVIA: *(Offstage, in a high-pitched, breaking voice.)* Here I am. Over here. *(As the Others turn their attention in her direction, she enters. She is a small young woman pretending to be a male with an oversized mustache and dressed in a strongman costume. Clears her throat and speaks in a deep voice.)* Ahem! Here I am. Check this out. *(Flexes her arm "muscles," which are enlarged by a balloon under each shirtsleeve. Note: See Special Effects for balloon muscles.)* What do you see? Muscles, right? Big muscles. Big, hard muscles. *(Grunts while striking several poses to show off her "muscles.")*

RINGMASTER: Excellent. I see you've been taking the vitamins I suggested.

(Clown 1 approaches Olivia.)

CLOWN 1: Let me feel.

OLIVIA: No! Don't touch me! You're a clown. Stay away!
Stay away! *(Tries to move away.)* Stop!

(Clown 1 grabs Olivia, holds her tightly, and squeezes a "muscle.")

CLOWN 1: Yep. It's big. A little spongy, but— *(Smiles and purposefully moves the balloon so it drops down to the underside of Olivia's arm. Feigns alarm.)* Oops! Your muscle drooped!

(Olivia pulls away from Clown 1 and accidentally moves closer to Clown 2.)

OLIVIA: Now look what you've done!

RINGMASTER: You've dislocated her— *(Catches himself.)* I mean, *his* muscle!

CLOWN 1: *(Smiles.)* Soooooorrrryyy.

TUTTI: Oh, dear!

(Everyone laughs except Ringmaster, Tutti, and Olivia. Clown 2 approaches Olivia.)

CLOWN 2: *(To Olivia.)* Let me feel...because I loooove strong men.

OLIVIA: No! I don't like clowns. Stay away from me! Don't!

CLOWN 2: Just a little feel. *(Holds Olivia and uses a pin hidden in her hand to pop the other balloon. Feigning surprise.)* Oh, my!

(Everyone laughs except Ringmaster, Tutti, and Olivia. Ashamed, Olivia pulls away from Clown 2 and cowers.)

TUTTI: *(To Ringmaster.)* This is not going well, is it?

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RINGMASTER: *(To Olivia.)* Atlas, you are a fake! Your muscles are limper than a piece of wet spaghetti. You're the weakest strongman I've ever seen.

TUTTI: Sweetie, don't be so hard on her.

RINGMASTER: *(Correcting.)* Him. She's a him.

TUTTI: Oh, right. Sorry. Him.

OLIVIA: *(Desperate to reaffirm herself.)* No, wait. I'm strong. I really am. And I can prove it.

RINGMASTER: *(Skeptical.)* I'm listening...

(Olivia whistles loudly toward SL or she blows on the Ringmaster's whistle that hangs around his neck.)

OLIVIA: Bring it on!

(Similar in appearance to Moe of "The Three Stooges," Bo enters SL.)

BO: *(To Olivia.)* Bringing it on! *(Turns SL and calls off.)* Bring it! *(Fizzy and Surly enter, easily carrying a fake barbell. Note: See Special Effects for fake barbell with helium or fake barbell without helium. Fizzy is on one end of the barbell, while Surly is on the other, leaving the bar in the middle open. They hit Bo with the middle of the barbell. Moe falls to the ground. Sound effect. Note: Each time anyone falls or is hit by another, a sound effect is heard. While it should appear that the characters hit each other, they only pretend to do so. Likewise, when Bo is knocked down by the rod of the barbell, the rod should never actually strike him.)* Ohhh! *(Angrily mumbling to himself, stands up.)* Hey! You two can't do that to me! *(Turns SL and points.)* Get back there and come in again!

(Fizzy and Surly look at each other and shrug.)

FRIZZY/SURLY: Okay.

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(As Frizzy and Surly go SL, they knock Bo down from behind. Sound effect.)

BO: Ohhh! *(Angrily mumbling to himself, stands up.)* Hey! I told you not to do that! Now, bring it! *(Anticipating that they will run over him again, he ducks, and they pass the bar over his head as they head CS. Sound effect: Slide whistle going down as he ducks. Bo rises. Sound effect: Slide whistle going up.)* Ha! Missed me! *(Still holding the barbell, Frizzy and Surly turn in a circle, again knocking Bo down. Sound effect. Bo stands.)* Frizzy, did you just run into me?

FRIZZY: *(Nods.)* Yeah.

BO: Take that.

(Bo hits Frizzy. Sound effect.)

FRIZZY: Ouch!

BO: Surly, did you just run over me?

SURLY: Yeah, so what?

BO: So this. *(Twists Surly's nose. Sound effect: Hand clawing an air-filled balloon.)*

SURLY: Owww, owww, owww! *(Raises his fist to strike back, but he does not.)* Ohhhhhh!

BO: So get over there and give her...*him*...the barbell. *(As Surly and Curly start to move.)* Wait. Stop. You can't do that.

SURLY: Can't do what?

MOE: Carry a 2,000-pound barbell like that.

SURLY: Two thousand pounds? Why, this thing don't weigh no 2,000 pounds. It only weighs —

(Bo strikes him. Sound effect.)

BO: What did you say?

SURLY: Ouch! I didn't say nuttin'. I was gonna say sumpin' — *(Bo strikes him again. Sound effect.)* Ouch! But I

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didn't say nuttin'. (*Bo does not hit him. Sound effect. Surly looks around.*) What was that?

BO: That was this.

(*Bo hits Surly. No sound effect.*)

SURLY: Ouch!

FRIZZY: (*To Surly.*) You did say sumpin'. You said this barbell don't weigh no 2,000 pounds.

(*Bo strikes Frizzy. Sound effect.*)

BO: What did you say?

FRIZZY: Owww! I didn't say that. He said that. (*Points to Surly.*)

BO: (*To Surly.*) You said that?

(*Bo strikes Surly. Sound effect.*)

SURLY: Ouch! I didn't say that. (*Points to Frizzy.*) He said I said that.

(*Bo strikes Curly and Surly in the stomach, then on the chest, then on the forehead. They react each time. Sound effects with each hit.*)

BO: Well, you ain't supposed to say that! So don't say it. (*Hits Curly and Surly again. Sound effects. Curly and Surly cringe but hold onto the barbell. To Olivia.*) Here's your 2,000-pound barbell, Atlas.

SURLY: (*To Bo.*) That ain't Atlas. That's—

(*Bo strikes Surly. Sound effect.*)

BO: That's Atlas.

SURLY: Ouch! That's Atlas?

BO: That's Atlas.

FRIZZY: That's Atlas?

(Bo strikes Frizzy. Sound effect.)

BO: Ain't that what I just said? *(To Frizzy.)* So what's his name?

FRIZZY: Atlas.

BO: *(To Surly.)* And what does this barbell weigh?

SURLY: *(Easily lifts his end of it up and down.)* About two ounces.

(Bo strikes Surly. Sound effect.)

BO: That's 2,000 pounds.

SURLY: Owwww! That's what I was gonna say next.

BO: *(To Olivia.)* Here's the barbell you whistled for, Atlas.

RINGMASTER: Well, it's about time.

OLIVIA: Thanks, Bo. *(They easily hand it to her, and she groans under its supposed weight.)* It's heavy!

RINGMASTER: *(To Bo, Frizzy, and Surly.)* You three can go on back to the monkey cage now.

BO: Right.

(Bo, Surly, and Curly turn to go.)

RINGMASTER: And be sure to lock yourselves inside.

(Surly turns back to the Ringmaster.)

SURLY: What? Why, I oughta—

(Surly grumbles aloud and shows his fist. Bo grabs Curly's fist and holds it still.)

BO: You oughta do what the man says.

SURLY: Okay, I will. *(Bo releases Surly's fist.)* But, first, I'm gonna give him such a—

BO: Grab him, Frizzy.

(Frizzy takes one of Curly's arms.)

FRIZZY: I got him, Bo.

(Bo takes Curly's other arm. Together, Bo and Frizzy drag Curly backward, kicking and screaming, off SL.)

RINGMASTER: *(To Tutti.)* Remind me to fire those three numbskulls.

TUTTI: Then who would clean out the monkey cages?

(Pause.)

RINGMASTER: Okay, we'll keep them a while longer. *(To Olivia.)* All right, Atlas. Show us what you've got.

OLIVIA: You're not going to believe this! Just watch!

(With lots of panting and gasping, Olivia pretends to struggle to lift the barbell over her head. Aware of her fakery, the Others boo and make snide comments.)

CLOWN 1: This is called taking fakery to new heights.

TATTOO MAN: *(Cries and wipes tears with his handkerchief.)*
You mean, he's not really lifting what he's lifting?

(Clown 1 glares at Tattoo Man. Ringmaster and Tutti urge Olivia on. Finally, Olivia raises the dumbbell high over her head. The Others boo her.)

OLIVIA: *(Disappointed.)* Why is everybody booing? You should be cheering. I just lifted 2,000 pounds over my head.

MADAME: You're not fooling anybody, dear.

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(Others ad-lib agreement.)

OLIVIA: What do you mean?

MADAME: If you're going to cheat, you need to build a more convincing barbell.

OLIVIA: What are you talking about?

MADAME: Honey, that's two balloons attached to a rod.

OLIVIA: It's not. Look...I'm sweating, I'm puffing, I'm exhausting myself under this oppressive weight.

MADAME: Then let it go.

OLIVIA: What?

MADAME: Release the barbell.

OLIVIA: *(Angrily.)* I am not going to do that. *(Without thinking, she releases the dumbbell and places her hands on her hips in defiance.)* This is a legitimate, 2,000-pound— *(Madame points upward toward the rising barbell. Note: Or if the non-rising barbell method is used, Madame crosses to Olivia, pulls a big hat pin from her headdress, and pops both balloons, leaving Olivia holding the rod.)* Oh, no! No, no!

TUTTI: Oh, dear!

RINGMASTER: *(To Olivia, sarcastically.)* Maybe you need a heavier barbell.

OLIVIA: If it were any heavier, I couldn't lift it.

RINGMASTER: You're a failure, Atlas! A big, fat failure.

TUTTI: *(To Ringmaster.)* Sweetie, don't.

OLIVIA: *(Starts to cry.)* Ohhh, I'm not a big, fat failure! I'm not! I'm not!

MADAME: Yes, you are.

OLIVIA: *(Sniffs.)* Well, maybe a little, skinny failure. *(Cries.)*

RINGMASTER: A strongman doesn't cry.

OLIVIA: You said I wasn't strong, so I can cry if I want to. *(Cries louder.)*

RINGMASTER: *(Disgusted.)* Atlas, you are fired!

OLIVIA: *(Pleading.)* What? You can't fire me. Daddy, please!

CLOWN 3: Daddy?

(Ringmaster approaches Olivia and clamps his hand over her mouth.)

RINGMASTER: *(To Olivia.)* Shhh. Don't say that. *(To Others.)* Just a slip of the tongue. I'm not her — *(Catches himself.)* Uh, I mean, his daddy. *(Olivia removes Ringmaster's hand from her mouth. Olivia's mustache comes off in Ringmaster's hand. Indicating mustache.)* What's this? *(Realizes.)* Oh! Here! I think this is yours. *(Tries to put mustache back on Olivia's upper lip. As Olivia tries to help, their fingers and hands become entangled. With appropriate vocal sounds, Olivia and Ringmaster work to put the mustache back. Finally, the mustache sticks to one of Olivia's cheeks. Note: If mustache does not stick, Olivia holds it in place. Ringmaster pulls his hand away, looks, and then accidentally moves the moustache to Olivia's forehead. Ringmaster grabs one of Olivia's hands and places her index finger over the mustache to hold it in place.)* That looks good.

MADAME: Since when does a mustache grow out of one's forehead?

(Angrily, the Ringmaster clumsily moves the mustache, upside down, to Olivia's upper lip and has Olivia hold the mustache on with her index finger.)

RINGMASTER: Better?

MADAME: Worse.

(Ringmaster pulls the mustache off of Olivia's face and slaps it into her hand.)

RINGMASTER: *(To Olivia.)* Here. Put it in your pocket.

OLIVIA: I don't have any pockets.

RINGMASTER: Well, put it in my pocket. *(Turns and shows her his back pocket. As Olivia tries to shove the mustache in his pocket, giggles.)* Ha-ha-ha-ha. That tickles.

OLIVIA: Sorry. *(Pulls mustache out.)* Now what?

MADAME: Here. Let me. (*Swiftly approaches Ringmaster and Olivia and snatches mustache.*) Now, can we get on with this meeting?

RINGMASTER: What meeting?

MADAME: The meeting you called to tell us the circus is closing.

RINGMASTER: The circus is not closing.

MADAME: My crystal ball never lies. (*Pastes or holds the mustache to her upper lip and giggles. To herself.*) Ha-ha-ha. It does tickle. (*Takes mustache off and sits.*)

RINGMASTER: (*To Olivia.*) As for you, we'll discuss this further after the meeting.

OLIVIA: Yes, Daddy.

(*Avoiding the Clowns, Olivia finds a place to sit. Tutti sits near Olivia.*)

TUTTI: (*Trying to calm Olivia.*) There, there...

RINGMASTER: (*Looks around.*) Now, is everybody here? (*Realizes.*) Haywire? We're missing Haywire.

HAYWIRE: (*Off SL and up high, out of breath.*) Up here, boss!

RINGMASTER: (*Looks upward.*) Haywire, come on down from the high wire. This is a mandatory meeting.

HAYWIRE: (*Off SL, out of breath.*) I can't come down. I'm rehearsing, boss.

(*Everyone looks up.*)

RINGMASTER: I don't care.

HAYWIRE: (*Off SL, out of breath.*) But I'm balancing myself on one hand on a bicycle in the middle of the high wire.

RINGMASTER: Haywire, if you're not down here in two seconds, you're fired.

(*Pause.*)

HIGHWIRE: (*Off SL, out of breath.*) Okay, boss. Here I come. (*Pause. Screams as he "falls." Sound effect: Slide whistle for fall.*) Aaaeeeiiii! (*Those onstage watch the "fall" and react to a loud, long offstage crash. Sound effect. Brief pause. Dressed in part of his high-wire costume, Haywire limps on SL, moaning in pain. He remains SL while he coughs and wipes a lot of dust off his shoulders.*) That hurt!

TATTOO MAN: (*Cries.*) Oh, that poor, poor man!

RINGMASTER: (*To Haywire.*) Maybe you should try working with a net.

HAYWIRE: I have a net, boss.

RINGMASTER: (*Looks off SL.*) I don't see it. Where is it?

HAYWIRE: I laid it out yesterday. Underneath the high wire...just like you told me.

RINGMASTER: (*Shocked.*) It's lying on the ground!

HAYWIRE: Yeah?

RINGMASTER: You dummy! You're supposed to suspend it off the ground, so it'll catch you when you fall!

HAYWIRE: I didn't fall. I jumped.

RINGMASTER: (*Growls.*) Agghh! I'd make you the sideshow idiot, but you're overqualified.

HAYWIRE: (*Doesn't understand.*) Is that good?

RINGMASTER: Sit down! You can do that right, can't you? Sit! (*Haywire sits. To all.*) Our guest speaker for today is... (*Looks closely at his clipboard.*)

CLOWN 1: Guest speaker?

CLOWN 2: (*To Ringmaster.*) We're having guest speakers these days?

CLOWN 3: (*To Ringmaster.*) I didn't know that.

CLOWN 4: (*To Ringmaster.*) Are you going to serve finger food after?

RINGMASTER: (*Checks clipboard.*) I know I wrote the name down, but I don't see it here. (*Turns the clipboard up, sideways, upside down, backward.*)

MADAME: Try looking in your ear.

RINGMASTER: What?

MADAME: That's where your pencil lead was.

(Ringmaster angrily glares at Madame. Mrs. Hatchet enters SR followed by a Judge and two Police Officers, Hansel and Gretel. Mrs. Hatchet is wearing a suit and carrying a very large tote. The Judge is wearing his official robe and a graduation cap and is holding an oversized gavel. Hansel and Gretel stand guard behind Mrs. Hatchet and the Judge.)

MRS. HATCHET: *(To Ringmaster.)* Out of my way, jellyfish!
(Shoves Ringmaster aside.) I'll take it from here.

RINGMASTER: What?! You...you pushed me!

MRS. HATCHET: Hush your mouth, buster, before I put a fist
in it!

RINGMASTER: You can't talk to me like that!

MRS. HATCHET: I just did.

RINGMASTER: Not at my circus, you don't. *(Steps toward Mrs. Hatchet, Hansel and Gretel move toward him, he backs off.)*
Well, maybe just this once. *(Moves aside.)*

MRS. HATCHET: These are my bodyguards: Hansel...
(Hansel steps forward, smiles, waves, and steps back.) ...and
Gretel. *(Gretel steps forward, smiles, waves, and steps back.)*
They lost their way in the forest, so now I'm fattening them
up. *(Pulls a slice of bread from her tote, tears it into two pieces,
and stuffs each into their open mouths. Hansel and Gretel eat it
without using their hands. Mrs. Hatchet rubs her hands together,
gleeful.)* You see? *(Indicating Judge.)* And this is Judge
Cheatum... *(Judge steps forward, smiles, tips cap, and steps
back.)* ...my own personal judge.

TUTTI: You own a judge?

MRS. HATCHET: Actually, he's a rent-a-judge. I just have
him for the week. But he does what I say...as long as I
reward him. *(To Judge.)* Open up, Judge. *(Judge opens his
mouth. She pulls a handful of popcorn from her tote and shoves it
into his mouth, though most of it falls onto the ground since the*

Judge doesn't use his hands to eat. Cheatum smiles as he chews and swallows popcorn.) And I am Mrs. Prudnella Hatchet.

CLOWN 1: Hatchet? You look more like an ax...a battle ax!

(Others chuckle.)

MRS. HATCHET: Who said that? *(Pulls a plastic baseball bat from her tote and threatens the group with it.)* Who said it? *(Silence.)* The next person who talks out of order gets a major knock on his noggin. Got it? *(Pause. Proudly.)* I am a Beastly.

CLOWN 2: You can say that again!

MRS. HATCHET: Who said that?! *(One at a time, each Clown points to another Clown and says, "He did" or "She did.")* This clowning around is going to stop!

CLOWN 3: But—

MRS. HATCHET: *(Threatening Clown 3 with her bat.)* Right now! *(Clown 3 shrugs.)* Beastly. *(Pause.)* That's... *(Spells.)* ...B-E-A-S-T-L-Y. It stands for "Broads for Ending the Scandalous Treatment of Livestock, Yo."

RINGMASTER: Yo?

MRS. HATCHET: *(Growling at him.)* "Yo." Yes! "Yo"! For the "Y" in "Beastly." "Yo"! What about it?!

RINGMASTER: Uh, nothing...nothing at all.

MRS. HATCHET: It's true I was recently deposed as president of Beastly—

TUTTI: You were deposed?

MRS. HATCHET: Well, perhaps "exiled" would be a more apt term. Still, I'm on the job, doing my duty as a concerned citizen, defending the defenseless, protecting the predators, saving the senseless animals of this planet. *(Exaggeratedly angry.)* And it has come to my attention that Bungling Brothers' Circus—that's you—mistreats its poor, defensive animals! Shameful! Shameful...and disgusting! You will stop that repulsive and loathsome behavior immediately! Is that clear?

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RINGMASTER: But we don't mistreat our animals.

OLIVIA: (*Shyly.*) That's right. We don't.

CLOWN 4: (*Indicating Ringmaster, in jest.*) But he sure mistreats us clowns.

(*Clowns laugh and verbally agree.*)

[END OF FREEVIEW]