

# **STEAMBOAT MICKEY**

*A Play by Daniel Rover Singer*

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*In spite of daunting obstacles, a bankrupt but ambitious young artist moves from Kansas City to 1920s Hollywood determined to find success making animated cartoons. Based on real events in the life of Walt Disney.*

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***PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE:** This play incorporates projected animation and images (in the public domain as of 2024) as links between the scenes and to provide a visual illustration of how the medium was evolving as a result of the action. There should be piano music (live or pre-recorded) used during transitions between scenes, played in the period style of silent-movie accompaniment.*

## **6 CHARACTERS (4 men/1 woman w/doubling)**

WALT DISNEY, 17-26, an ambitious cartoonist

ROY DISNEY, 26-34, Walt's brother, a bank teller

UB IWERKS, 18-27, a shy, prolific artist

LILLY BOUNDS, 25-29, a young studio assistant

CHARLIE MINTZ, 30-32, a New York cartoon distributor

WILFRED JACKSON, 22, an apprentice animator

**“Steamboat Mickey” takes place in Kansas City, New York and Los Angeles from 1919 to 1928. The action is continuous in 17 scenes with no intermission (approximately 90 minutes).**

## **STEAMBOAT MICKEY**

*SET: Films (animated cartoons) and super-titles (lettered in the style of silent-movie dialogue cards) are projected throughout the show, so there must be a projection surface at the back of the set. Ideally, there could be a classy old proscenium frame around a movie-screen. Otherwise the stage is a neutral space with a desk, two drawing tables, a few chairs and a period animation camera.*

*PRE-SHOW PROJECTION: early business card, “Walt. Disney, Cartoonist.”*

### **Scene 1: AN OFFICE**

*PROJECTION: “Pesmen-Rubin Agency, Kansas City 1919”*

*(UB IWERKS, 18, seated at a drawing table, speedily drawing;  
WALT, 17, a bundle of nervous energy, enters with a portfolio.)*

WALT:

Hi.

UB:

Yeah?

WALT:

It’s my first day. They told me to see the guy in back. I guess that’s you.

UB:

That’s me. The guy in back. You ever work as an artist before?

WALT:

Heck no. I’m only seventeen.

UB:

You can sit over there.

WALT:

Am I your assistant?

UB:

Heck no. There’s a stack of assignments there.

WALT:

You’ll have to help me out a little. At first.

UB:

Mr. Pesmen and Mr. Rubin, they like their ads to look cartoony. That’s why they hired me, and I’m guessing that’s why they hired you. You know, inanimate things that look like people. Things that look softer or rounder than they really are. They think people like those sort of exaggerated qualities in ads.

WALT:

Is that true?

UB:

What do I know about advertising? I’m just the guy in the back.

WALT: (*showing UB his portfolio*)

See, here’s what I showed ‘em. Some of these I drew for my high school paper, the McKinley Voice. Most of the rest I drew in France, during the war.

*PROJECTION: WALT’S DRAWINGS*

UB:

You were in France? Weren’t you a little young to be fighting in France?

WALT:

Not fighting, no. You see, my brother Roy enlisted in the Navy, and I guess I was sorta jealous. The Red Cross was taking seventeen-year-olds, so I fibbed a little and upped my age by a year. By the time I got there, the fighting was over, but I drove an ambulance, and made signs for the camp. Some of them are in there... See, this one’s showing the way to the latrine... you can see the fellow’s legs under the door, with his pants down.

UB:

“And don’t steal the toilet paper.”

WALT:

Yeah! (*Laughs*)

UB:

Kinda juvenile. (*WALT is stung. Beat.*) I like your animals.

WALT:

Yeah, well, I grew up on a farm. I used to draw everything. What do you think?

UB:

I think you should get to work.

WALT:

Okay. (*Sits at desk.*) Where do I start?

UB:

Well, the bosses do the rough layouts. We fill in the details: backgrounds, lettering, basically everything. See? (*Holds up his work.*)

*PROJECTION: VARIOUS EXAMPLES OF PERIOD ADVERTISING ILLUSTRATIONS, PREFERABLY BY UB IF ANY EXIST.*

WALT:

Is this your stuff?

UB:

Yup.

WALT:

You're good.

*PROJECTIONS END.*

UB:

You can start with the tractor. Make it look a little inflated, like a balloon. You can add some clouds and birds in the sky, if you like. Just be quick about it. Try not to spend more than half an hour on anything.

WALT: (*incredulous*)

*Half an hour?! How do you draw anything in half an hour?*

UB:

Look, what’s your name?

WALT:

Walter. “Walt.”

UB:

Look, Walt. That’s what the job is. Draw as fast as you can. If you don’t, you won’t last a week. Do a rough sketch with red or blue pencil. Show them. Get their approval. Listen to their suggestions. Then finish it with ink. Got it?

WALT: (*starts to sketch*)

Got it. Have you been here long? (*UB shakes his head ‘no.’*) How old are you?

UB:

Eighteen.

WALT:

What’s your name?

UB:

“Ubbe.” [*Rhymes with “tubby.”*]

WALT:

What?

UB:

Ubbe Iwerks. Don’t laugh.

WALT: (*suppressing a laugh*)

Wow, where’d you get a name like that?

UB:

It’s Dutch.

WALT:

So you were born in Holland?

UB:

No, I was born here in Kansas City. Can't you tell by my accent? *(Beat.)* My friends call me “Ub.”

WALT:

Am I your friend?

UB:

Not yet. Get to work.

*(They both draw. A period of silence, then...)*

WALT:

Hey Ubbe, what would you think if I...?

UB:

Shh.

*(Another pause. They draw. But WALT is distracted.)*

WALT:

Ubbe, I gotta ask you something.

UB:

What?

WALT:

Is this what you like to do? I mean, is this the kind of thing you like to draw?

UB:

Of course not. This is just a job.

WALT:

What would you rather be doing?

UB:

You know, when you go to the pictures, and they show a cartoon first?

WALT:

Yeah, like Felix the Cat?

UB:

Yes! That’s what I’d like to draw.

WALT:

Really! Me too!

UB:

Really? Here, look at this. (*Pulls out a book. WALT goes to UB’s desk.*)

WALT:

“Animated Cartoons: How They Are Made.”

UB:

I got it from the library. I’ve been practicing.

WALT: (*opening the book*)

It’s four months overdue.

UB:

I’ve been practicing a LOT.

WALT: (*thumbing through*)

Look, there’s Gertie the Dinosaur. Did you see that?

UB:

Maybe fifty times. I love Windsor McKay. Do you know how many drawings it takes to make a five-minute cartoon? Seven thousand, two hundred. Twenty-four frames a second.

WALT:

Wow [*or whistles*], that’s a helluva lot of drawings!

UB:

But you don't have to do it that way. Windsor McKay makes a new drawing for every frame. He doesn't mind re-drawing the background over and over. But listen to what Lutz says: (*finds a bookmark, reads*) "...plan the work so that the lowest possible number of drawings need to be made for any particular scenario."

WALT:

What's that mean?

UB:

See, McKay's process is obsolete. At the New York studios they trace the drawings onto celluloid.

WALT:

Celluloid? You mean, a sheet of clear plastic? (*A light-bulb goes on in his head.*) Oh, so the background shows through! You don't have to re-draw it!

UB:

And then, let's say you want to draw a character running. You draw the body –

WALT: (*overlapping excitedly*)

You draw the body once, and then you only have to animate the legs, on another piece of celluloid that you lay over the top!

UB:

And once you've drawn one cycle of motion...

WALT:

You can photograph that drawing cycle over and over! Hey, what do you say we go to the pictures sometime, and look at the cartoons together?

UB:

Sure! How about tonight? I think there's an "Out of the Inkwell" this week.

WALT:

Naw, I hate those Fleischer cartoons.

UB:

Why do you hate them?



WALT:

They don't make any sense.

UB:

Cartoons never make sense. They're just supposed to be silly.

WALT:

I know, but you know how when you're watching Charlie Chaplin? He falls down, and you feel sorry for him. He gets up again, and you cheer him on. I don't see why cartoon characters can't be like that.

UB:

That's ridiculous. Why should I care what happens to a cartoon character?

WALT:

Why *shouldn't* you care?

*(Enter ROY DISNEY, 26, looking a bit tired.)*

ROY:

There you are.

WALT:

Roy! How you doing? *(Shakes ROY's hand.)*

ROY:

Not too bad. I wanted to congratulate you on your first day. Make sure you weren't jabbering instead of drawing.

UB:

So far, just jabbering.

WALT:

Ubbe, I want you to meet my brother Roy, banker extraordinaire.

ROY: *(shaking hands with UB)*

Sorry, what was your name?

UB:

Ubbe.

ROY:

No joke?

UB:

No joke. Ubbe Iwerks.

ROY:

Nice to meet you, Ubbe.

WALT:

Ubbe and I both love cartoons, so I figure we're on our way to making our own animated cartoons someday.

ROY:

Really!

UB: (*overlapping ROY*)

Ha! You're very ambitious.

WALT:

Why not? You rather sit here and draw tractors for the rest of your life?

ROY:

Shh! Walt, pipe down! You don't want your bosses to hear you talk like that on your first day! Use your brain!

WALT:

Sorry, Roy. I guess I get a little ahead of myself. I just get so... impatient, like I'm gonna bust, y'know?

ROY:

I know. That's why it's a good thing you've got me looking out for you. Ubbe, would you excuse us for a second? (*Draws WALT aside, and coughs a bit.*)

WALT:

What's up?

ROY:

Do me a favor and find something to do tonight that will keep you out of the house for a couple hours.

WALT:

Ahhh, Edna coming over for a little canoodling?

ROY:

That’s none of your business, little brother.

WALT:

Sure thing, Roy. Ubbe and I are going to the pictures to watch the cartoons.

ROY:

Fine.

WALT:

But, um, I could use a little financial extension till payday.

ROY: *(pulling a coin from his pocket):*

Sure, here’s a quarter. *(Coughs)*

WALT:

Thanks, Roy. You got a cold?

ROY:

Naw, just allergies. And don’t come back before nine, okay?

WALT:

Okay. Roy -- I sure appreciate you letting me sleep on your sofa. I’ll start kicking in for room and board as soon as I get paid, I promise.

ROY:

I know you will. *(Coughs.)* I got to get back to the bank. Nice to meet you, Ubbe. *(UB nods. ROY exits.)*

UB:

Is he okay?

WALT:

Oh, he’s a great guy. My other brothers are a little strange, but Roy and I have always been thick as thieves. My whole family -- (*UB is pointing to WALT’s desk with his pencil*) -- what?

UB:

Get to work. (*WALT realizes he is misbehaving, returns to his desk, and starts to draw. But he is obviously distracted. Finally, he chuckles.*) What now?

WALT:

I was just thinking, “Iwerks.” It sounds like an ophthalmologist.

UB:

Yeah, I know.

WALT:

Maybe “Iwerks-Disney” would sound better than “Disney-Iwerks.”

UB:

Better for what?

WALT:

If we opened our own cartoon studio.

UB:

What makes you think I’d want to go into business with you?

WALT:

Well, think about it! Wouldn’t you rather be drawing cartoons than an ad for... winter underwear?

UB:

Sometimes, when I’m inking an ad, I fantasize that the drawings come to life, and start bouncing around on the page. The long-johns move around like there’s an invisible body inside ‘em, and they start kicking everything else in the ad...

WALT:

See, you’re a natural! What do you say?

UB:

I’ll think about it.

*(They return to their drawings, then, at the same time, they look up and think about the future... BLACKOUT.)*

## **Scene 2: ANOTHER OFFICE**

*PROJECTION: “IWERKS & DISNEY, Commercial Artists.”*

*(UB at a different drawing table. Enter WALT.)*

UB:

Walt! Look at this. I added twenty-dollar bills gushing out from the top of the oil well. That should inspire their investors!

WALT:

Ub, you just started that this morning!

UB: *(grinning)*

I am very fast. *(WALT sighs, turns away, lights a cigarette.)* What’s the matter, Walt?

WALT:

I just hate to see your talent wasted on these damned ads. I was hoping we’d be making cartoons by now.

UB:

I don’t mind. I like to draw, and it’s not like we don’t have good clients. You’re a great salesman, Walt. We have a great little company. You should be very proud of yourself.

WALT:

Why does an animation camera have to be so damned expensive? I asked Roy to lend us the money, but he said it wasn’t a good risk.

UB:

Your brother’s a very smart man. You should go to the Kansas City Film Ad Company and ask about that job.

WALT:

I went this morning.

UB:

Yes, and? *(Pause. WALT looks restless.)* Oh. They offered it to you?

WALT:

I’m sorry, Ub, I told them we were partners... that we only worked as a team--

UB:

It’s okay, Walt. You should take it. It’s a great opportunity. We have good clients, I’ll be okay.

WALT:

Are you sure? *(UB nods.)* Listen Ub, you’re a good guy. I’d like to work with you again. If I can ever figure out a way to make my own animated cartoons, I’m gonna call you. Okay? *(Extends his hand. UB shakes it.)*

UB:

Okay. Thanks, Walt. Good luck. *(WALT exits. UB goes back to his desk, but notices a crumpled up paper that missed the wastebasket. He picks it up to throw it away, but first uncrumples it and looks.)* “Walt Disney, Walt Disney, Walt Disney, Walt Disney...” Huh. He practices his signature! *(BLACKOUT.)*

### **Scene 3: ANOTHER OFFICE**

*PROJECTION: “KANSAS CITY FILM AD COMPANY.”*

*PROJECTION: One of KANSAS CITY FILM AD’S crude, stop-motion ads.*

*(WALT sets up a shot at an animation camera stand. Enter UB.)*

UB:

Walt!

WALT: (*they shake hands*)

Ub, you son-of-a-gun! Welcome to Kansas City Film Ad! You can take that desk over there. Louie just quit to move to California.

UB:

Are there jobs in California?

WALT:

I hear you can either be a gold miner or a movie star.

UB:

Hmm, no thank you. It's a good thing you got me this. We were down to our last client, and I think he was giving me work out of pity. I just couldn't run a business by myself.

WALT:

I know. But look on the bright side. Now we don't have to buy an animation camera. We can use this one at night.

UB:

They'll let us work on our own stuff here at night?

WALT:

Well, no. We can use the equipment, but we can't stay in the building. Liability, I guess. We can set up in my brother's garage.

UB:

Move this whole rig every night?

WALT:

Sure! The only thing we have to buy is film-stock, ink, and celluloid, but I figure, we buy a few cels, and wash the ink off after they're photographed so we can use them over again.

UB:

What if something goes wrong with your exposures? Then you don't have anything to re-photograph.

WALT:

That’s a risk all right.

UB:

They don’t have cels here we could borrow?

WALT:

Welcome to Kansas City Film Ad! Their idea of animation is jointed, paper cut-outs, like it’s still 1905! Can you believe it?

UB:

Sometimes I think we should just move to New York, and get a job at Fleischer’s.

WALT:

Sacrilege, Ub! Wash your mouth out with soap.

UB:

Have you tried to get them to do cel animation here?

WALT:

Oh yeah. “I’m not paying you sit on your ass and draw all day!” he said. But then I told him about my old business partner who could draw a frame of animation in less than a minute, and here you are!

UB:

A frame a minute? Are you out of your mind?

WALT:

No, you can do it! I’ve watched you. Here, sit down. I cut out the middle of the desk and put in a thick piece of milk-glass, just like we talked about. There’s a light bulb underneath so you can see the drawing you just drew. Just be careful, it gets a little hot. And there’s pegs across the bottom that match holes punched in the paper, so the drawings always register.

UB:

Can I move the pegs to the top so they aren’t in the way?

WALT:

You can do whatever you want, my friend.



UB:

So what are we working on today?

WALT:

Sing-along slides. Lots of lettering. The question is, what are we working on *tonight*? I’ve got an idea for a cartoon series. I thought we would call them “Laugh-O-grams.”

UB:

Laugh-O-grams?

WALT:

Yeah! “A Laugh-O-gram by Iwerks and Disney.” We take a famous fairy tale, and update it with modern jokes. Like “Little Red Riding Hood,” or “Jack and the Beanstalk,” only we put in lots of gags. Here, I made some sketches. (*He shuffles through a handful of sketches, on half-size sheets of paper.*) What do you think?

UB:

We should pin these up on the wall, so we can see them all at once.

WALT:

Good idea... (*Hears something, puts away the sketches hastily.*) Oops, we’re going to have to keep quiet about this during the day. Here -- here’s the lyrics you need to make slides for.

UB:

I don’t see how you can focus on this with Laugh-O-gram ideas running around in your head.

WALT:

Honest, sometimes I feel like I’m gonna explode.

UB: (*looking at the lyrics, starts to sing*)

“Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer do...”

UB & WALT: (*singing*)

“I’m half crazy, all for the love of you...”

*(They get to work. BLACKOUT.)*

**Scene 4: A GARAGE**

*PROJECTION: “Roy’s Garage, Several Months Later.”*

*PROJECTION: ONE OF THE LAUGH-O-GRAMS*

*(UB at a drawing table, WALT at the animation camera.)*

WALT:

Let’s break for the night, Ub, it’s almost midnight.

UB:

Good. My hand is so cramped I can hardly hold the pencil. By the way, this is the last pencil. We’ll need more for tomorrow.

WALT:

Dammit, Ub, why the hell do you have to go through them so fast?

UB:

What do you want me to do, draw with blood? I can’t draw without pencils.

WALT:

Yeah, yeah, I know. I just don’t have any more cash. And I can’t risk “borrowing” any more supplies from Film Ad. How many more feet do we have to shoot?

UB:

Two hundred and forty.

WALT:

Jesus. I wish I could get more for these Laugh-O-grams. Or find a cheaper way to make them.

UB:

What can be cheaper? All our equipment is borrowed, you and I work for nothing, and we’re using your brother’s garage. All you pay for is film stock and developing. It doesn’t get any cheaper!

WALT: ( *pacing*)

How about... if we advertise, “Animation school for young artists! Learn how to make animated cartoons for a small weekly tuition!”

UB:

We hardly know what we’re doing ourselves. How can we pretend to be teachers —?

WALT:

Horse-patooties, Ub. We know as much about this business as anybody. We get some students in here to ink the cels, and so on. We get free labor AND money coming in.

UB:

Who’s going to teach them? I don’t have time.

WALT:

I can show ‘em the ropes. And how about this? What if we incorporate? That way we can sell stock in our corporation. Raise a sack-full of cash. Roy explained the whole thing to me. “Laugh-O-gram Films Incorporated.”

UB:

People won’t invest in cartoons! They’d never make their money back.

WALT:

Oh, I can talk people into anything. See, that way, if we need to hire employees, then when money’s tight, we can pay ‘em in company stock.

UB:

You can’t eat company stock, Walt.

WALT:

And we have to figure out a way to make the cartoons more interesting, so the theaters will pay more for them.

UB:

Well... I have an idea...

WALT:

What? (*Pause.*) What?

UB:

Well, you know how the “Out of the Inkwell” characters come out of a real inkwell? What if we shot some live-action, like an actor, against a white wall, and then drew cartoons around them afterwards?

WALT:

So you see a person running around with cartoon characters? How would you combine them?

UB:

That’s easy, I can figure out how to put ‘em together. It might cost a little more, but it would be unusual, a novelty.

WALT:

Yeah, say, like a fairy-tale. Like Alice falling down the rabbit-hole, and in her dream all the characters could be cartoons.

UB:

Exactly!

WALT:

Let’s do it. We’ll get a little girl, and set up the camera, and tell her what’s going on around her-- (*Enter ROY, looking pale and drawn, but acting upbeat.*) -- Roy! We’ve just come up with a great idea! Listen!

UB:

Roy, you don’t look so good. Sit down. (*Gets ROY a chair.*)

ROY: (*sits*)

I’m fine, Ub. Don’t make a fuss about me.

WALT:

Roy, what’s wrong? Are you sick?

ROY:

Walt, I’m moving west. Doctor says I’ve got to go someplace warm and dry, and just rest for a year or two.

WALT:

Why, what’s the matter?

ROY:

I’ve got TB, Walt. Must have picked it up while we were overseas.

WALT:

Roy! Why didn’t you tell me?

ROY:

It’s kinda hard to get your attention these days.

WALT:

I know, but you’re my brother! If you’re sick, maybe there’s something I can do to help!

ROY:

There’s nothing you can do, Walt. I’m sure the California sunshine will fix me right up.

WALT:

Aw, Roy. I’m gonna miss you.

ROY:

Don’t worry, you don’t have to move out of the garage right away.

WALT:

That’s not what I mean. I meant, well, I was hoping, if our little Laugh-O-grams are a hit, me and Ub are gonna quit Kansas City Film Ad and start our own animation company. And I was hoping you might take care of the books for us.

ROY:

Gee, Walt, you’re a pretty good businessman...

WALT:

No, I’m not, Roy, you’re the whiz with money and numbers. I’m the artist in the family.

ROY:

Well, sorry I can’t help you, Walt. Maybe when I’m feeling better, we can talk about it.

WALT:

Okay. Once you get settled, we’ll come out for a visit. What d’ya say, Ub? I hear it’s a paradise!

UB:

Sure, Walt.

ROY:

Okay. So what’s the great idea you wanted to tell me about?

WALT:

Oh, it’ll keep. Why don’t you go hit the hay? We can talk about it in the morning.

ROY:

Okay. G’night, boys. (*Exits.*)

WALT:

G’night, Roy.

UB:

Good night, Roy. (*To WALT:*) Poor fellow, I hope he’ll be all right.

WALT:

Sounds like California will fix him right up. Wow, imagine that, my big brother out west! I hear the sun shines all winter long. Heck, maybe we should move out there too.

UB:

You can’t do animation there, Walt. All the studios are in New York.

WALT:

That’s just because New Yorkers think they live in the center of the universe. I don’t give a damn about New York and neither should you. Now listen, I’ve got some ideas about this picture. Let’s get a little girl. Cutest little girl we can find. And we’ll have her sitting, yawning, like she’s bored. Then a little cartoon rabbit runs by. She chases it down a rabbit-hole.

UB:

Just like “Alice in Wonderland.”

WALT:

You’re right. (*Frowns. Paces, then his eyes light up; we can see his mind reeling.*) How’s this: a little girl comes to visit a studio where they make animated cartoons. I show her a drawing board—

UB:

You? Are you going to be in it?

WALT:

Yes, now hear me out. I show her a drawing board, and as she watches, the drawings on the board come to life, right before her eyes! Then she goes home, and that night, she falls asleep, and DREAMS that a little cartoon rabbit goes by. See, her visit to the studio has inspired her, y’know? So she falls down the rabbit-hole. She can just stand against a white background, and pretend she’s falling, with her arms up, like this... (*WALT demonstrates.*) And we can draw in some things for her to fall past. Then, *bam*, she falls right on her fanny. When she stands up, there’s a whole bunch of animals staring at her, thinking, “What are you doing here?” And she grabs one by the tail – can she grab a cartoon animal by the tail?

UB:

Sure, I can draw that. But are we using dialogue balloons, or cutting to cards with dialogue on them?

WALT:

No no no no no, I think we can do it without dialogue. If the audience has to stop to read, it slows down the action. It’s all pantomime. If somebody yells, you just see little lines popping out of their mouths... (*He demonstrates, holding his hand*

*in front of his mouth in profile, fanning out his fingers and jerking his hand back and forth) If someone sings, you see musical notes popping out, and things...*

UB:

You'll have to get the actress to pretend that she's--

WALT:

Don't worry, I can direct the actress. Now, let's come up with some gags that happen when she's surrounded by these animals... (*WALT continues to talk as we BLACKOUT.*)

### **Scene 5: OFFICE & HOSPITAL PORCH**

*PROJECTION: WALT'S FILM "ALICE'S WONDERLAND"*

*(LIGHTS UP on ROY, in a wicker rocking chair, fanning himself, and holding a letter. Opposite, WALT appears in a separate pool of light. He's just finished writing a letter. He eats beans out of a tin can with a spoon. When he finishes his beans, a realistic mouse appears at the back of the desk, operated by an unseen puppeteer. The mouse is shy at first but then allows WALT to pet its back.)*

ROY: (*reading*)

“July, 1923. Dear Roy, glad to hear you are feeling so much better and are thinking about remaining in Los Angeles. I can picture you working at a bank in Hollywood and chatting with beautiful movie stars who come in to make enormous cash deposits. Things are not so good here. “Alice’s Wonderland” is the best Laugh-O-gram I have ever made – it’s got every lavish, expensive trick in the book, and a few new things too. It’s been shown in all the big eastern markets, but if the exhibitors are paying their bills, the reps aren’t handing over the cash. I am so naïve when it comes to contracts that I think the distributor took me to the cleaners. “Laugh-O-grams Incorporated” is more broke than ever. Ub has gone back to Kansas City Film Ad, and I have filed for bankruptcy. Wish you were here to help me find a way out of this mess. To tell you the truth...”

WALT: (*overlapping*)

“To tell you the truth, I have never felt so low. The court has taken all my stuff, but has allowed me to keep my camera and my reel of “Alice’s Wonderland,” into



which I have poured my heart, sweat and tears. I believe it is a high-quality product, and I’m just hoping that somehow, someone will take a chance on me, and give me a break. I could sure use it. Love, Walt.”

*(BLACKOUT on WALT. PROJECTION ENDS.)*

ROY: *(as telegram)*

“WALT. COME TO CALIFORNIA. ROY.” *(BLACKOUT.)*

### **Scene 6: HOSPITAL PORCH**

*PROJECTION: “HOLLYWOOD 1923.”*

*(ROY, seated as before. WALT rushes on wearing a cowboy hat.)*

WALT:

Hey, Roy! Yee—haw!

ROY:

Shh, Walt, keep your voice down. There’s lots of folks sleeping at this hospital.

WALT:

Look at ya, Roy! The picture of health!

ROY:

I’m feeling fine, Walt. How are things at Uncle Robert’s house?

WALT:

I think I’ve worn out my welcome. This morning he said I’d have to pay five dollars a week if I wanted to stay. Y’know, I was thinking, you and I could rent a room together, and split the cost.

ROY:

Sure, Walt. I’ll be back to work soon, but what about you? I can’t afford to carry us both.

WALT:

I’ve been out there looking, every day, Roy. I’ve been to all the studios, asking for directing jobs. I’m just too green, I guess. Hey, you remember I got that press card in Kansas City when I was supplying footage to the newsreels? Well I used it to sneak into Universal yesterday. What a hoot! So much going on, everywhere you looked. I was watching Lon Cheney set up a shot for “The Hunchback of Notre Dame,” but some stuffed shirt saw me and had his goons throw me out. And then, on the way home, the streetcar had to stop and wait ‘cause Mac Sennett was shooting a chase scene with the Keystone Cops right down Glendale Boulevard! *(They laugh.)*

ROY:

Walt, I know you probably don’t want advice from me...

WALT:

I know what you’re gonna say. It don’t make sense to set up my own cartoon studio, because cartoons are too labor-intensive and there’s no profit in them.

ROY:

Nope. I think you should stick to what you know. Nobody else is making cartoons in Hollywood. Labor is cheaper in California. Maybe you can give those New York outfits a run for their money.

WALT:

Well, Roy, funny you should say that. It just so happens I got a telegram from New York today. *(Takes a telegram from his pocket.)* I wrote to Margaret Winkler, remember her? The distributor who handled Felix the Cat? Well, I told her I was opening an animation studio in Hollywood. And she says, listen to this: “Will pay fifteen hundred dollars each for six new episodes of ‘Alice’s Wonderland.’” Fifteen hundred dollars each! And if she likes them, an option to order another six.

ROY:

How much will they cost to make?

WALT:

Half that, tops. Seven hundred and fifty dollars profit on each one. What do you say, Roy, shall we do it?

ROY:

We? What d’ya mean, we?

WALT:

I need you, Roy! I can’t make pictures and run the company at the same time. You gotta help me. Besides, it’ll be fun!

ROY:

I don’t know anything about making cartoons.

WALT:

You’ll be running a production company. It’ll be like any small business.

ROY:

I don’t know, Walt. I’m supposed to sleep every afternoon, and not overtax myself. But... let’s talk about it.

WALT:

Swell, Roy! That’s swell. I’m going to wire Ub and get him out here. And the little girl who plays Alice, let’s see if we can get her out here, too. Margaret Winkler asked specifically for the same actress. And we’ll need some new equipment, so we’ll need to borrow some money. Uncle Robert’s probably good for a hundred. And do you think he’ll let us use his garage?

ROY:

Slow down, Walt. Take it easy.

WALT:

And what d’ya say we bring your fiancée Edna out here to help with inking and painting? I bet she’d be terrific at it. What d’you say?

ROY:

I get it, Walt, I get it. Okay, brother, sign me up.

*(WALT whoops for joy, and grabs and shakes ROY’s hand.)*

WALT:

Terrific! Oh, Roy, you won’t regret it. How about this: “Disney Brothers Productions.” No, no! The “Disney Brothers Studio.” Doesn’t that sound swell!

*(BLACKOUT.)*

**Scene 7: ANOTHER OFFICE**

*PROJECTION: “Disney Bros. Studio, Hollywood.”*

*PROJECTION: ONE OF THE ALICE COMEDIES*

*(UB at a drawing table, rattling off a drawing a minute. ROY at a desk, sifting through papers. LILLY, 25, at another desk, with white gloves on, drawing ink onto a clear plastic “cel.” WALT enters and approaches UB.)*

WALT:

How’s that new sequence coming along, Ub?

UB:

Not yet.

WALT:

I want to see it! Show me!

*(Exasperated UB flips through the drawings.)*

*PROJECTION SHOWS THE SEQUENCE OF DRAWINGS*

Swell, Ub, swell. But when Alice leans forward suddenly like that, the cat should be close enough that her arm knocks him down, *bam!* Right on his fanny!

UB:

Why does everyone have to fall on their fannies all the time?

WALT:

Because it’s funny.

UB:

I think it’s getting repetitive.

WALT:

Okay, you think of something funnier.

UB:

I don't have time. A drawing a minute, remember?

WALT:

Then shut up and draw. We've got a deadline. (*Whispering, to ROY:*) Roy, who's that?

ROY:

Lillian Bounds, our new inker. Walt, do you have a minute?

WALT: (*his attention on LILLY*)

Yeah, I'll be right back. (*To LILLY:*) Hello.

LILLY (*flustered, rising*):

Oh! Hello. You must be Mr. Disney. I mean, the OTHER Mr. Disney. I'm Lilly Bounds. This is my first day.

WALT:

I know. It's a small office. I would have noticed you.

LILLY:

Of course. Your brother was very kind to give me a job.

WALT:

Well, Roy's wife's been doing most of our inking, and she was getting a little upset -- I mean, a little behind. What I mean is, uh, we really needed another inker. (*An awkward pause.*) What do you think of the cartoon process so far?

LILLY:

It seems pretty straightforward, Mr. Disney.

WALT:

You can call me Walt. None of that “Mr. Disney” stuff around here. Did you meet Ub?

LILLY:

No. Hello, Ub.

UB:

Forgive me, I’m on a deadline.

WALT:

Ub draws the action, one frame at a time. He has to make twenty-four drawings for every second of film.

LILLY:

You must be very talented, Ub.

UB: *(flustered)*

Must be!

LILLY:

And what do YOU do here, Mr.-- I mean, Walt?

WALT:

I do a little of everything. I come up with stories and gags.

LILLY:

Gags?

WALT:

Jokes, funny things, and such, y’know? Also, I draw, I help with the photography, and I run around the office a lot, helping to push things along. Speaking of which, I’d better let you get back to your work. Ub draws so fast, there’s a lot of inking waiting for you.

LILLY:

Thanks, I’ll get back my desk.

WALT:

You’re welcome. I mean, thank you.

*(LILLY sits at her desk. WALT feels embarrassed at his awkwardness.)*

ROY:

Walt, can I speak with you?

WALT:

Yes, Roy. What’s up?

ROY:

Well, it’s not good news. Margaret Winkler’s handing over the reins of her business to her new husband, Charles Mintz, who seems to think the Alice Comedies are tired and too expensive.

WALT:

What? Let me see that. (*Takes the letter, reads.*) That cheapskate, know-nothing bastard--!

ROY:

Shh, there’s a lady present.

WALT:

Let’s politely inform Mr. Mintz that the Alice Comedies are wildly popular, getting top-notch reviews in the papers, and that the more money they invest in them, the better the quality will be. Any reasonable businessman will understand that, right?

ROY:

Walt, businessmen aren’t reasonable. They are all trying to screw each other. And they’ll certainly try to screw us if we’re not careful.

WALT:

God—(*corrects himself*)—Gosh-darn-it, Roy. I wish there was a way to distribute our own pictures. (*LILLY takes off her gloves, stands up and puts on her sweater.*) That way we could keep the bastards from screwing us out of every-- (*notices LILLY*) -- I’m sorry Miss Bounds. I get a little carried away when I’m... upset.

LILLY:

It’s not that. It’s just that it’s six o’clock. Unless you need me to work overtime?

WALT:

Oh, not today.

LILLY:

Well good night, then.

WALT:

Good night.

LILLY:

Good night.

WALT:

Oh! Miss – uh – Miss –

LILLY:

Lilly. Call me Lilly.

WALT:

Uh, Lilly, we’re going to the picture-show tonight. They’re screening one of our Alice Comedies, and we want to listen to the audience.

LILLY:

Don’t you stay to watch the feature, too?

WALT:

No. Uh – yes! Yes we do. Watch the feature.

LILLY:

Where?

WALT:

What?

LILLY:

What theater? What time?

WALT:

Oh! The Alex Theater. Brand Boulevard. Glendale. Seven o’clock.

LILLY:

Then I’ll see you there. Good-bye. (*Exits.*)



WALT:

Good-bye, see you later. (*Sighs nervously.*)

ROY:

Look at you, Walt! I’ve never seen you so flustered.

WALT:

I can handle those goddamned distributors, Roy, but I have no idea what to say to a lady. (*Puts on his jacket*)

ROY:

How about we use the back office as an ink-and-paint room, and put the girls back there? It’ll be less distracting. (*Rises, dons jacket*)

WALT:

Good idea! C’mon, Roy. I want to get there early, and start a whispering campaign. “Have you seen this new Alice Comedy? I hear it’s swell!”

ROY:

Okay, okay, let’s go.

*(They exit. UB looks resentfully after them, then returns to his work. BLACKOUT.)*

### **Scene 8: A MOVIE HOUSE**

*PROJECTION: A ROMANTIC SILENT MOVIE, MAYBE VALENTINO. CONTINUES UNDER THE SCENE.*

*(ROY and WALT sit with backs to the audience. After a minute, LILLY enters, and sits two seats down from WALT. They greet each other silently. After about ten seconds, she reconsiders, and moves to the seat next to WALT. He turns and smiles at her. There is an awkwardness at first; WALT is so shy. But as much as they try to ignore each other, they cannot. They whisper back and forth, and giggle, and finally, LILLY leans her head on WALT’s shoulder. BLACKOUT.)*

**Scene 9: BOARDING HOUSE PORCH**

*PROJECTION: “Several weeks later”*

*(ENTER WALT, sporting a pencil-thin moustache, and LILLY, strolling.)*

LILLY:

Thanks for the ride home.

WALT:

It’s the least I could do, Lilly. You were the last girl to leave tonight. And I’ve noticed how well you help train the new girls. I really appreciate your... well, I really appreciate you. I hope you like working for us.

LILLY:

Oh, yes, well, it’s painstaking, hard on the eyes, hard on the hands, hard on the fanny, the office is stuffy and uncomfortable, the pay is bad, and the hours are long. But you and Roy are very friendly. Nobody feels like an employee. It’s more like a big family.

WALT:

Nice to hear you say that.

LILLY:

With one exception.

WALT:

Who’s that?

LILLY:

Why are you so mean to Ub?

WALT:

Mean? I’m not mean to Ub.

LILLY:

Yes, you are. You’re always barking at him to draw faster. Haven’t you noticed how he never smiles?

WALT:

Oh, that’s just the way he is. We’ve been working together for so long, we just dispense with pleasantries. He understands me.

LILLY:

Well, I think a kind word from you would make a world of difference. (*WALT suddenly gives her a peck on the lips.*) What was that for?

WALT:

I wanted to change the subject.

LILLY:

That’s not fair, Walt. I wanted to-- (*He gives her a much longer kiss. She looks into his eyes.*) You always get your way, don’t you? (*He smiles. She pushes him away at arm’s length, and squints her eyes.*)

WALT:

What’s that for?

LILLY:

Wondering what you would look like in a nice suit and tie.

WALT:

I don’t have one.

LILLY:

Which, a nice suit or a tie?

WALT:

I’m not much of a clothes horse. To tell you the truth, I don’t spend a dime on myself. I put everything into the company.

LILLY:

And is that a moustache on your lip? Or just some ink?

WALT:

Very funny. I think it makes me look more distinguished, don’t you?

LILLY: *(sits on settee):*

Walt, let me ask you something. *(She pats the seat beside her. WALT joins her.)*  
When you picture yourself five or ten years from now, what do you see?

WALT:

I see myself as the world’s greatest producer of animated cartoons. I see us rich, living in a beautiful home, traveling first-class through Europe, and having a whole brood of beautiful kids. How does that sound?

LILLY:

And you really think you can get there?

WALT:

Lilly, I know I haven’t got two nickels to rub together right now, but I’ve got so many big ideas I can’t even talk about them. People will think I’m just plain crazy. All I need is a chance. I swear, I’m gonna make some pretty big dreams come true.

LILLY:

That’s fine, Walt. That’s all I needed to hear.

*(She leans forward and kisses him. BLACKOUT.)*

### **Scene 10: OFFICE**

*PROJECTION: “DISNEY BROS. STUDIO 1926.”*

*PROJECTION: ANOTHER ALICE COMEDY – AN EXAMPLE OF A DULL, REPETITIVE SCENE.*

*(WALT, ROY, and CHARLIE MINTZ, 30, in a suit.)*

CHARLIE: *(shaking hands with WALT)*

We meet at last! Charlie Mintz, how d’ya do?

WALT:

Walt Disney.

CHARLIE:

And you must be Roy. How d’ya do? (*They shake hands.*)

WALT:

This is unexpected, Charlie. Please sit down. (*They all sit.*) What brings you all the way from New York?

CHARLIE:

Well, Walt, Roy, New York and Hollywood are worlds apart, and I needed to bring those two worlds together for a few days to make some changes.

WALT:

What sort of changes?

CHARLIE:

Well, I’m gonna be blunt with you, boys. We’re not going to buy any more Alice Comedies. They’re stale as last week’s bread. Now before you go getting all bent out of shape, I have a proposal for you. I was just over at Universal, talking to Carl Laemmle. He wants a cartoon series. No live action, just one-hundred-percent animation. Something about a zany animal, like a rabbit, who runs around, getting himself into lots of crazy mischief. We were thinking: Oswald, the Lucky Rabbit. Now, what do you think? (*WALT and ROY exchange a nod, then WALT picks up a sketch-pad and starts to draw.*)

ROY:

That sounds pretty interesting. How soon could we look at a contract?

CHARLIE:

I’ll have Laemmle’s lawyers draw one up, but he wants to see some sketches before he commits to anything.

WALT: (*showing his sketch*)

Like this?

CHARLIE: (*smiling*)

Exactly what we had in mind! Can I take that with me?

WALT:

Tell you what, give me twenty-four hours to work up some real nice drawings.

CHARLIE:

Beautiful. How ‘bout I meet you guys here tomorrow, six p.m.?

WALT: *(rising)*

Swell. Thanks, Charlie. *(CHARLIE and ROY rise. WALT shakes CHARLIE’s hand.)* We’ll come up with some really swell stuff for you.

CHARLIE: *(shaking ROY’s hand)*

Roy. See you tomorrow. *(Exits.)*

WALT:

Hoo hoo! Oswald the Lucky Rabbit! Oswald the Lucky Rabbit! *(They link elbows and dance around in a circle.)*

WALT and ROY: *(singing)*

Oswald the Lucky Rabbit! Oswald the Lucky Rabbit! *(Walt goes to a desk drawer and brings out a bottle of liquor and a couple of mugs.)*

WALT:

A celebration, Roy! *(Pours a shot for ROY.)* To Oswald the Lucky Rabbit. May he be the luckiest damned rabbit in the whole history of rabbits. *(ROY lifts his mug, clinks it against WALT’s, and they drink.)*

ROY:

Boy, when he started to talk, I thought for sure we were gonna be looking for jobs tomorrow.

WALT:

If I had to shoot one more scene of Alice standing in front of a sheet and waving her arms around, I would have killed myself.

ROY:

What a lucky break, Walt!

WALT:

Y’know, we’re going to need a larger staff. And a bigger studio.

ROY:

I think it’s a bit early to start spending money we don’t have yet.

WALT:

You know that lot we looked at on Hyperion? I think we should put a down-payment on it. Lots of space. We’ll build a nice new studio, with lots of windows. Lots of light.

ROY:

I suppose we could always sell it if the contract falls through.

WALT:

And Roy, I need to get forty dollars out of our savings.

ROY:

Forty dollars, what for?

WALT:

To buy a new suit.

ROY:

What do you want a new suit for?

WALT:

To get married in.

*(ROY smiles, clinks WALT’s mug again, and they take another drink. BLACKOUT.)*

### **Scene 11: OFFICE**

*PROJECTION: OSWALD IN ‘POOR PAPA’*

*(WALT, ROY and UB; WALT holds a letter.)*

CHARLIE: *(voice-over)*

“Dear Walt and Roy, your first Oswald the Lucky Rabbit picture, ‘Poor Papa,’ was screened last night for the New York booking agents, and the response was deservedly abysmal. The photography was jerky, the action repetitive, the story a mere succession of unrelated gags, and the character of Oswald ugly, flat, and unfunny. Universal cannot recommend it for public showing, and we therefore

cannot accept ‘Poor Papa’ as a satisfactory fulfillment of the terms of our contract.” (*PROJECTION ENDS.*)

WALT:

Goddamned sons-of-bitches! How can they say that about Ub’s animation? He’s the best in the business!

ROY:

Okay, Walt, now just calm down for a second. Maybe they’re making a couple important points.

WALT:

How can you say that?

ROY:

Well, in the first place, the animation IS jerky. We need to replace that goddammed old camera and get ourselves a decent new piece of equipment. And as for “repetitive,” well... you *have* been saving money by recycling a lot of old gag footage.

WALT:

That’s the only way to make any kind of profit!

ROY:

But audiences are getting more sophisticated, Walt. They’re noticing tricks like that.

WALT: (*sighs, after a long beat*)

Ub, you’re awful quiet, as usual.

UB:

Remember when we used to go to the pictures in Kansas City? You complained over and over about cartoonists who were lazy. Their characters lacked personality. The gags were uninspired. There was no story. And now here you are making cartoons, and you’ve fallen into all the same bad habits you used to complain about. (*Starts sketching.*)

WALT

I was naive then. I didn’t know that extra quality would cost so much.



ROY:

You’re capable of making better cartoons, Walt. It’s not too late. We’ll toss “Poor Papa” into the trash and start over. We can carry the staff for another month on our savings.

UB:

Walt, look. (*WALT comes to look at UB’s desk.*) We’ll make him younger, more athletic, and crafty, but he’ll still be a good guy, so he’ll be sympathetic.

WALT:

That’s good! Say, I have an idea for a runaway streetcar story that might work.

ROY:

That’s the ticket, Walt.

WALT:

What if the only gags Oswald gets into come directly from his situation? That way, it’s more like a Chaplin picture?

ROY:

Now you’re talking!

WALT:

Guess it’s a good thing they hated “Poor Papa,” eh, Roy? I really needed a good hard kick in the pants.

ROY:

Well, if that’s all you needed, I could have done it for you!

*(Chases WALT, trying to kick his ass. BLACKOUT.)*

### **Scene 12: UB’S FLAT (LA) & MINTZ’S OFFICE (NY)**

*PROJECTION: OSWALD IN “TROLLEY TROUBLES”*

FEMALE REPORTER VOICE: “Oswald the Lucky Rabbit is a riot! Chock full of humor!”

MALE REPORTER VOICE: “These new Disney cartoons are bright, speedy, and genuinely amusing. The clever way Disney’s creations simulate the gestures and expressions of human beings adds to the enjoyment. This series is bound to be popular with all audiences.”

*PROJECTION ENDS.*

*(LIGHTS UP on UB and CHARLIE MINTZ, separately, speaking to each other on “candlestick” telephones.)*

CHARLIE:

Ub, I just wanted to personally congratulate you on the success of Oswald. Everyone at Universal and here in New York is delighted. De—lighted! They’re funny, they’re smart, they’re crisp. You’ve done a fantastic job, and you should be very proud.

UB:

Thanks Mr. Mintz. Everyone at the Disney Studio works very hard to make the pictures look good.

CHARLIE:

I know, Ub, but I also know that you are the hand that creates Oswald.

UB:

Well... there’s a staff of new animators and assistants that help keep up with the demand, so it’s not just me.

CHARLIE:

I’m sure they’re working under your supervision, right?

UB:

Yes, of course, to keep the drawings consistent.

CHARLIE:

Ub, I want you to consider something. In order to ensure Oswald’s continued success, we’ve decided to take over production. That means WE would be paying you instead of the Disneys.

UB:

But what about Walt and Roy?

CHARLIE:

We want them to continue doing their jobs, but as our employees. The Disney brothers are just too much of a wild card, working independently. We want to make sure we have control of the product.

UB:

So why are you calling me?

CHARLIE:

Frankly, we're concerned that the Disneys may not like the idea. Walt's a hot-head, and might not see the advantage of letting someone else take up the reins. But since Universal owns the rights to Oswald, we'll continue making 'em whether Walt and Roy decide to work for us or not. We just need you, and your team, to do the job right.

UB:

I don't know, Mr. Mintz.

CHARLIE:

We'll double your salary.

UB:

Double my--!

CHARLIE:

Tell me, do you like working for Walt?

UB:

Yes. Well...

CHARLIE:

Well?

UB: *(after a pause)*

I – You know, at the circus, the lions that sit up on command, or the bears that dance when the trainer cracks his whip? Or the organ-grinder's monkey? Some

days I think if he comes over to my desk one more time to yell at me, I’m just going to – to – I – I don’t know what I’d do...

CHARLIE

Ub, why don’t you sleep on it? Don’t mention this to anyone. Let’s talk again tomorrow. Okay?

UB:

Okay. Goodbye. *(Hangs up, and glares into space. BLACKOUT.)*

### **Scene 13: ANOTHER OFFICE**

*PROJECTION: REAL FOOTAGE OF BUSY MANHATTAN STREET - “NEW YORK 1928”*

*(CHARLIE welcomes WALT, who finally wears a nicer suit; they shake hands.)*

CHARLIE:

Welcome to New York City, Walt. I hope you and Lilly are comfortable at the Astor?

WALT:

Very nice, Charlie, thanks. Nicer even than our honeymoon, y’know? Lilly’s shopping on Fifth Avenue today. Couldn’t be happier.

CHARLIE:

So let’s get down to brass tacks. Oswald’s a hit. The audiences love him. The licensees making Oswald badges and Oswald chocolate bars can barely keep up with demand. We want you to keep cranking them out.

WALT:

Swell. Roy and I talked it over, and considering the increase in staffing we’ve needed to boost the overall quality of the pictures, we’ll need to get twenty-five hundred each on delivery. Plus we’ll need a percentage of the gross.

CHARLIE:

Oh, Walt, now wait a minute. I can't give you more than eighteen hundred each. And a percent of the gross is out of the question.

WALT:

Eighteen hundred! Charlie, are you joking? I can't even MAKE them for eighteen hundred!

CHARLIE:

I'm serious, Walt. Take it or leave it.

WALT: *(with rising anger)*

What are you talking about? I came all the way to New York just so you could screw me out of Oswald?

CHARLIE:

Must I remind you, Walt, that Oswald is not your creation, he's ours. We own the character, not you. If you don't want to produce them, we'll produce them ourselves.

WALT:

Yourselves? You don't have an animation company.

CHARLIE:

Yes I do. *(Picks up his phone)* Here, why don't you call Roy and ask him? He'll tell you that Universal has hired your staff. All of 'em. *(WALT is frozen in fury. CHARLIE puts the phone down.)* Now we're prepared to offer you and Roy jobs as well. We want your expertise on our team. What do you say?

WALT: *(swallowing his anger, then)*

Goddammit, Mintz, Oswald's yours. You can have him. In fact, you can stick him up your ass.

CHARLIE:

Don't be too hasty, Walt. We're your company's meal ticket. What will you do without Oswald? Without him you got nothing.

WALT:

There are more characters where he came from. And better ones, too. Better than Oswald the Unlucky Jackass, anyway. You wait and see! *(Exits.)*

*(BLACKOUT.)*

### **Scene 14: TRAIN**

*PROJECTION: 1920s LIVE-ACTION FOOTAGE OF A TRAIN WHIZZING PAST THE GREAT AMERICAN PRAIRIE.*

*(WALT and LILLY sitting side by side. WALT stares into space, a drawing tablet in his lap, a pencil in his hand.)*

LILLY:

Oswald was a stupid name for a cartoon character.

WALT:

How could those backstabbing artists betray me like that? Am I such a tyrant that they couldn't wait to leave when somebody wagged a ten-cent raise at 'em?

LILLY:

You're not a tyrant. You're like a father. Stern, but lovable. *(Kisses his cheek.)*

WALT:

I'm glad they're gone. I'll start fresh, with a whole new staff. Train them, treat them well, keep them loyal. I've got to learn from this. I can't let it happen again. *(Starts to sketch.)* I'll tell you something else, Lilly. From now on, nobody is going to own my characters but me.

LILLY:

What are you drawing?

WALT:

When I lived in Kansas City, my room had mice. I used to feed 'em crumbs. They were pretty good company when I was down. Maybe I can come up with a new character, a scrappy little mouse, who always bounces back when he's down. There. Lilly, meet... Mortimer Mouse.

LILLY:

He’s cute. But Mortimer is a terrible name for a cartoon character.

WALT:

Okay. Not Mortimer.

LILLY: *(after a long beat)*

Mickey. Mickey Mouse.

WALT: *(staring at the sketch)*

Mickey Mouse, eh? *(Falsetto:)* Heh, heh. Hi, Lilly, I’m Mickey Mouse! Heh heh heh.

LILLY: *(not impressed)*

Hm. It’s a good thing cartoons don’t have sound.

*(WALT frowns, goes back to his drawing. BLACKOUT.)*

### **Scene 15: OFFICE**

*(ROY and WALT.)*

ROY: *(furious)*

How can you have done it, Walt? You threw it all away! What do we have now? Nothing! We’re finished!

WALT:

We have experience, and know-how, and a new character. We’ll be better than ever.

ROY:

And how am I supposed to raise money to hire a new staff and produce a new cartoon, with a new character that no one’s ever heard of?

WALT:

Roy, that’s your genius. I can take some paper and pencils and a camera and some sweat and create cartoons. That’s what I do. You make the money appear to pay for ‘em. That’s your talent. We’ve been in tight spots before, and we will be

again, but I have every confidence that you’ll be there when I need you, with the money to make it happen.

ROY:

You are a very exasperating brother.

WALT:

Now, what do you think of this story, Roy? Mickey’s on a farm, and he idolizes Charles Lindbergh. He builds a little plane, and offers a ride to his lady-friend, Minnie Mouse.

ROY:

Minnie Mouse?

WALT:

And he’s zooming all over the sky, and the barnyard, and all, scaring the other animals, and things... *(sighs dejectedly)*

ROY:

What?

WALT:

I was just thinking, if only Ub was here. No one could draw this cartoon like he could. The man’s the greatest animator I’ll ever meet if I live to be a hundred.

*(UB enters, having been listening.)*

UB:

Okay, Walt, I’ll draw it for you. But you’d better be nice to me.

WALT: *(overjoyed)*

Ub, you didn’t leave! *(Shakes UB violently by the shoulders.)*

UB:

I couldn’t leave, Walt. I didn’t want to work anywhere else. Even if you are a son-of-a-bitch, who else would let me draw whatever I want, like you do? But I’ll tell you one thing, you are giving me a big fat raise!



WALT:

Anything you want, Ub, anything! Roy, write up a new contract for our star animator. In fact, Ub, how'd you like a share in the company? What d'ya think, Roy?

ROY: (*not sure*)

It's a... great idea.

UB: (*flabbergasted*)

Walt, Roy, thank you. I don't know what to say.

WALT:

Well I can't promise it'll pay off. Remember what you said to me in Kansas City that time? “You can't eat company stock.”

UB:

I didn't think you were even listening.

WALT:

Okay now, come on, Ub, I want to tell you my ideas for this picture, and we'll lay it out together... (*continues*)

(*BLACKOUT.*)

### **Scene 16: OFFICE**

*PROJECTION: “PLANE CRAZY”*

(*ROY, WALT and UB seated, as ROY reads a handful of letters.*)

ROY: (*reading*)

“Dear Mr. Disney, We all enjoyed screening your new cartoon, but do not think the public knows or cares about your little mouse character. Perhaps you could consider animating the adventures of a more well-known comic creation.” “Dear Mr. Disney, Three thousand dollars is a lot to pay for your slick little cartoon, excellent though it may be.” “Dear Mr. Disney, your droll little pictures are delightful, but in the wake of the success of the new sound picture 'The Jazz

Singer,’ we are only looking for sound pictures to satisfy the requests of our customers.” “Dear Mr. Disney...”

WALT:

Stop, stop, stop, I can’t take any more.

*PROJECTION ENDS*

ROY:

Has anyone ever made a sound cartoon?

WALT:

Yeah, I saw one last week. They played the sound on a phonograph, but it sounded like hell, and it wasn’t synchronized at all. It was terrible.

ROY:

So, that’s that. I guess we close up shop?

WALT: (*lost in thought*)

We’d have to fix the soundtrack directly onto the film.

ROY:

Walt, we’re done. We’ve spent everything on those two Mickey Mouse cartoons. No one’s buying them. We’re broke. We’re worse than broke. We’re in hock up to our eyeballs. It’s time to admit defeat.

WALT:

How much can it cost to make one more? I’ve still got a life insurance policy, right? And I don’t need my Ford. Lilly will lend me her engagement ring, if I can convince her it’s important enough.

ROY:

One more! Are you crazy? If you could only hear yourself! You’re talking about hocking everything you own so that you can add some squeaks and honks onto a cartoon about a silly little rodent! I quit! Do you hear me, Walt? I quit!

WALT:

We’re *not done*, Roy. In fact, we’re so close, I can taste it. And I’ll tell you why. All the jokes in these Mickey Mouse cartoons have been visual gags. So *you’re*

*right*, no one’s gonna care if we add a few squeaks and honks to ‘em. But adding sound to a picture has so much more *potential* than just making noise when a character hits a wall. What if the picture *relied on the sound* to get the gags across?

ROY:

How do you mean?

WALT:

Okay, give me a second... (*thinks, then*) ... Let’s say Mickey’s on a... a barge. It’s like a riverboat. He picks up a passenger...

ROY:

Let me guess, Minnie Mouse?

WALT:

Yes, good, he picks up Minnie, and he wants to impress her. So he performs a little concert. But he doesn’t have any instruments, so he uses what’s already onboard the boat.

ROY:

Like what?

WALT:

Uh... they’re transporting farm animals. It could start with a goat. You know how goats eat everything in sight. It eats Minnie’s ukulele and some sheet music. So Mickey cranks its tail like a Victrola, and music pours out of its mouth, like a hurdy-gurdy. (*He hums a few bars of “Turkey in the Straw” and claps his hands.*) See, the sound IS the joke. Everything becomes a musical gag. He could play a cow’s teeth like a xylophone. He could squeeze a goose like it’s bagpipes! Do you see what I’m getting at? The whole seven minutes would have a synchronized score. Everything happens on the beat. No one’s done anything like that.

ROY:

How do you figure out how to draw the action to a musical beat?

WALT:

Ub, you have any thoughts about this?

UB: (*deep in thought*)

You’d have to add the music to the exposure sheet. The chart could indicate where each musical beat falls in relation to the action, so the movement could be timed to the beat.

ROY:

That sounds impossible!

UB:

I practically do that already. I listen to how theater organists watch the picture when they’re playing the accompaniment live. Walt’s right, this would be an incredible novelty. We already know Mickey is cute. He just needs a gimmick. I’m pretty sure this is it.

WALT:

Roy, I know, cartoons stink as a way to make money. I promise, this will be the last thing we try. But I believe in this Mickey character. He’s charming, and devilish, and inventive. He finds clever ways to triumph over hardship. People love that. He takes his knocks and he comes back smiling. I *know* everybody is going to fall in love with him. We just have to give him this chance.

ROY: (*sighing, after a long pause*):

I’ll make some calls.

(*WALT smiles. BLACKOUT.*)

### **Scene 17: OFFICE**

(*WALT, ROY, UB, LILLY, and WILFRED JACKSON, 22, assemble with harmonica, cowbells, kazoo, slide whistle, train whistle, penny whistle, washboard, sticks, drums, etc. There is a playful, jovial atmosphere to the gathering.*)

WALT:

Okay everybody, settle down. Now Lilly, I know we’ve kept you in the dark about this, because we wanted you to be our first audience. Ub’s drawn us a swell new cartoon called “Steamboat Willie.”

LILLY:

I know, Walt. Hazel, Edna and I inked the whole thing! (*General laughter.*)

WALT:

Yes, well, and a beautiful job you ladies did, too.

LILLY:

Thank you. Shouldn't you call it “Steamboat *Mickey*”?

WALT:

Well, everybody knows the song “Steamboat Bill.” And everybody's seen Buster Keaton's picture “Steamboat Bill Junior.” So little Mickey's gonna be Steamboat Willie. Now, you know our new man Wilfred Jackson?

LILLY:

Yes. Hello, Wilfred.

WILFRED:

Howdy, Mrs. Disney.

WALT:

As you know, Wilfred wandered in off the street last week and asked if he could help make cartoons. We put him to work washing ink off the cels.

WILFRED:

So all I've learned so far is how to destroy animation. Three years of art school, literally down the drain! (*They laugh.*)

WALT:

Wilfred has some great ideas about the music, and he suggested we put marks on the film for the musicians to keep time to.

WILFRED:

And if it doesn't work, you don't have to put me on the payroll.

ROY:

What payroll? (*ALL laugh.*)

WALT:

Lilly, I’m going to New York next week to see if we can attach the soundtrack right to the film, so it’s always synchronized. Before I go, I just want your opinion of how it sounds. Your unbiased opinion.

WILFRED:

Maybe she should have a beer first. *(ALL laugh.)*

WALT:

Everyone ready?

ROY:

Maybe we should ALL have a beer first! *(ALL laugh.)*

WALT:

Okay, here we go.

*PROJECTION: “STEAMBOAT WILLIE”*

*(They proceed to enact the soundtrack live, with music, sound effects and voices. It’s chaotic and noisy and hilarious and triumphant.)*

*PROJECTION ENDS*

WALT:

There you go, Lilly. What did you think?

LILLY:

I don’t know what to say.

WALT:

Just be honest.

LILLY:

Really? Well, it sounded like an awful ruckus.

ROY:

There you go, boys! The critics rave. “An awful ruckus!”

LILLY:

Well, what do I know? The cartoon is very cute.

WALT:

And once the public hears a *professionally recorded* soundtrack going along with the action, we will be swimming in money.

UB:

I hope the distributors heard that. (*ALL laugh.*) Wait a minute, we don't have a distributor yet!

WALT:

Don't worry. They'll be climbing over each other to get their hands on this picture.

ROY:

Let's not count our chickens, Walt. We'll wait and see what happens. If it's a success then we can move on to bigger and better things.

UB:

Like what?

WALT:

Oh, I have a few ideas kicking around. I haven't talked about them because I have this habit of getting ahead of myself, and I don't want to go shooting my mouth off like some dreamer who never gets anything done.

WILFRED:

Tell us about one of them, at least.

OTHERS: (*generally*)

Yeah, Walt, come on...

WALT:

There's something I've been dreaming about, but you're going to laugh at it.

UB:

You're *supposed* to laugh at cartoons, right?

LILLY:

Now you *have* to tell us what it is.

WALT:

What if there was a cartoon that was a full-length feature? Y’know, an hour-and-a-half long? (*This produces a general stupefied silence.*)

WILFRED:

You mean, an hour-and-a-half of watching Mickey Mouse?

WALT:

No no no. I mean, what if we took a fairy-tale, and developed it like you would a live-action picture, with fully fleshed-out characters, and songs, and things?

UB:

No one would sit through it, Walt. Our characters are too silly. No one would take them seriously.

WALT:

We could set up an art school, and train our animators to draw more like life, like animated paintings in a museum. (*Some titters, and shaking of heads.*)

ROY:

You’re talking about a project that would take years to produce. And it could cost a million dollars.

WALT:

It might.

LILLY:

But what would it be about?

WALT:

I was thinking, “Snow White.”

WILFRED:

“Snow White”?



WALT:

Yeah, y’know, the Grimm Brothers fairy-tale.

UB:

That’s a terrible idea, Walt! Grimms’ fairy-tales aren’t full-length stories. They’re short. And scary. You can’t fill ‘em with gags.

WALT:

I’ve seen silent-pictures based on fairy-tales so I know they have the potential to be... magical. Dramatic. Not just gags.

ROY:

Animation doesn’t sound like the right medium for that kind of story.

WALT:

Actually it’s *exactly* the right medium! I know it’s hard to imagine, but let me try to describe it. Imagine you’ve got a big, beautiful storybook in your hands. You open it, and it’s full of gorgeous pictures. Every page has illustrations on it. Beautiful castles, and forests, and cottages. Like elaborate paintings in a museum. Imagine you fall asleep, and you dream that you can actually visit these places. You’re exploring the castle, and eavesdropping on the people inside, where the story starts to unfold.

WILFRED:

What’s the story?

*(WALT is a wonderful storyteller. His ability cast a spell over his listeners as he inhabits this tale is profound.)*

WALT:

See, there’s a beautiful queen in her throne room. She’s regal but cold-hearted. Every day she expects her mirror to tell her she’s the most beautiful woman in the kingdom. But one day the voice in the mirror tells her that her step-daughter Snow White has become the fairest in the land. Then we meet Snow White. She’s been made a slave in her own house, and she’s forced to wear rags and scrub the castle floors. But her beauty shines through. And as she works, she dreams of someday meeting a handsome prince, who will sweep her off her feet and carry her off to his palace to live happily ever after. But the evil Queen plots to get rid of her. She orders her royal huntsman to take Snow White into the forest and kill

her. The huntsman takes the princess out to the woods, but he can't bring himself to murder her. He tells Snow White to run, to run away, and never come back. Snow White is confused and terrified, lost in the dark woods, but she finally discovers a quaint little cottage to hide in. What she doesn't realize is that the cottage belongs to seven odd little men, who feel sorry for Snow White, and let her stay.

ROY:

That sounds a bit suspicious, Walt. The princess living with seven odd little men?

WALT:

Well, we'll get to know them all—give them all names and personalities, and we'll completely understand that what's going on is strictly on the up-and-up, with no innuendo or hanky-panky going on. Now shush.

So when the wicked queen goes to her mirror and asks “Magic Mirror on the wall, who is the fairest one of all?”—the mirror reveals that Snow White is still alive, and hiding in the forest. Furious, the queen disguises herself as a hideous old hag. She sets out into the woods to find Snow White and kill her with a poisoned apple.

The dwarfs are away at work when the old hag arrives at their cottage. She tempts Snow White with a delicious-looking apple. “Here, deary, look what granny's brought you. Have a bite, ha ha!” Snow White bites the apple and falls down unconscious. When the little men come home from work, they find their princess asleep under the Witch's spell. They are stricken with grief. Snow White is so beautiful that they cannot find it in their hearts to bury her, so they build her a glass coffin, and place her in the forest for all to see.

One day, the prince that Snow White dreamed of rides up on his white horse. He is so taken with Snow White's beauty, even in death, that he kisses her gently on the lips. The kiss breaks the spell. Snow White awakens. The dwarfs are overjoyed to see their princess alive again. They hoot and holler and jump for joy. The prince puts Snow White on his horse, and leads her off to his castle, where they live happily ever after.

LILLY:

Oh, Walt, that's beautiful! I could just see it.

WILFRED:

Is it “dwarfs” or “dwarves”?

UB:

What happens to the evil queen?

WILFRED:

And where do the dwarfs work in the forest? Is there a factory there, or something?

ROY

I don't see how the princess's body would stay fresh in a glass coffin. Seems to me she'd start rotting, even if she's just unconscious—

WALT:

All right, there's a few details to work out. Right now, it's just a dream.

ROY:

Well, your dreams sound damned expensive.

WALT:

Thanks, Roy. Now everybody, show's over. Let's go home. (*LILLY, WILFRED and UB exit; ROY pulls WALT aside.*)

ROY:

Walt, just a second.

WALT:

What is it?

ROY:

I just wanted to say... congratulations. I know I may not be as supportive a business partner as you'd like...

WALT:

Don't say that.

ROY:

Let me finish. I think you've made a good decision with this sound track, and I know it's gonna pay off. I just wanted to say... I'm sorry I doubted you.

WALT: (*touched*)

Thanks.

ROY:

I’m thinking of having a new sign made. And I’d like it to say “Walt Disney Studios.” They’re your cartoons, and I think they should have your name on them.

WALT:

Instead of “Disney Brothers?” Is that what you really want?

ROY:

That’s what I really want.

WALT:

Then that’s the way it shall be. (*Extends his hand.*)

ROY: (*shaking WALT’s hand*)

Then that’s the way it shall be.

(*They regard each other with real affection. BLACKOUT.*)

PROJECTION: “WALT DISNEY STUDIOS est. 1923”

END OF PLAY.