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Family Plays

SUSPECT TO CHANGE

Comedy by
Will Humble

SUSPECT TO CHANGE

"Hilarious is more like it," Linda Formet-Heath wrote in her review for the *Brazosport Facts* (Texas). "Humble has drawn the characters to be someone everyone knows—and periodically wants to shake."

Comedy. By Will Humble. *Cast: 2m., 3w.* This comedy of errors involves love, friendship, misunderstanding, misplaced pride and mistaken identity. As the play begins, a policeman enters and tells Mrs. Teal that her daughter, Tina, was in an automobile accident and has been taken to the hospital. He offers to give her a ride. Mrs. Teal hastily writes a note for her husband: "There's been an accident—taken to hospital." A bit later Tina enters, finds the note and thinks her mother has been hospitalized. There's a kidnapping, a jewelry heist, a purse snatching and a fiancé wannabe who can't get in a word to pop the question. It's funny, funny, funny. The play was written by 17-year-old Will Humble, a home school student, as a class project when he studied playwriting with the A.D. Players in Houston, Texas. *Suspect to Change* was first produced by Brazosport Center Stage as part of an evening of one-act plays. The play is intended for all groups—from teenage to old age. *One int. set. Time: 8 o'clock on a rainy Friday night. Approximate running time: 35 minutes. Code: S1D.*

Family Plays

311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098-3308

Phone: (800) 448-7469 / (815) 338-7170

Fax: (800) 334-5302 / (815) 338-8981

www.FamilyPlays.com

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Suspect to Change

SUSPECT TO CHANGE

***A Comedy of Mistaken Identity
in One Act***

**By
WILL HUMBLE**

Family Plays

311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098

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WILL HUMBLE

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“Produced by special arrangement with
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ABOUT THE PLAY

This comedy of errors involves love, friendship, misunderstanding, misplaced pride, and mistaken identity. As the play begins, a policeman enters and tells Mrs. Teal that her daughter, Tina, was in an automobile accident and has been taken to the hospital. Mrs. Teal hastily writes a note for her husband—"There's been an accident. Taken to hospital."—and puts it by the telephone. She leaves with the policeman. A few minutes later Tina enters, finds the note and thinks her mother has been hospitalized.

There's a kidnapping, a jewelry heist, a purse snatching, and a fiance wannabe who can't get in a word to pop the question. It's funny, funny, funny.

"Hilarious is more like it," Linda Formet-Heath wrote in her review for the *Brazosport (Texas) Facts*. "Humble has drawn the characters to be someone everyone knows—and periodically wants to shake."

The play was written by 17-year-old Will Humble, a home school student, as a class project when he studied playwriting with the A. D. Players in Houston. "Suspect to Change" was first produced by Brazosport Center Stage as part of an evening of one-act plays.

Playing time is about 35 minutes.

AUTHOR'S DEDICATION

To Dad, Mom, Ruth, and Emily

SUSPECT TO CHANGE

Characters

MRS. TEAL—An easily excited, panic-prone, worry-wart

CLEATS—A police sergeant (male or female), professional, but not cold

TINA—Mrs. Teal's daughter. Loves Richard, hates Sabrina

RICHARD—Silent but strong. He's *trying* to propose to Tina

SABRINA—Richard's sister and Tina's ex-best friend

The Teals' Living Room

About eight o'clock on a rainy Friday night

First presented by Brazosport Center Stages under the direction of Marian Bonser with the following cast:

| | |
|----------------------|----------------------|
| Mrs. Teal..... | Karen Kenyon |
| Sergeant Cleats..... | Chuck Hobizal |
| Kristina Teal..... | Christine Tankersley |
| Richard..... | Michael De Acetis |
| Sabrina..... | Stephanie Hickman |

PRODUCTION NOTES

Properties

Stereo—on stage

Lamp—on stage

White dish towel—Mrs. Teal

Policeman's badge—Cleats

Telephone with long cord (or a portable phone)—on end table

Notepad and pencil—on end table beside telephone

Shopping bags, open umbrella—Richard

Glass of water—Tina

Purse, containing many plush ring boxes—Sabrina

Box of facial tissue—Mrs. Teal

Magazines—on end table or coffee table

Coffee mug—Richard

Notepad and pen—Cleats

Costumes

Modern clothing befitting the age and personality of each character. Mrs. Teal has a top coat; Tina a raincoat (any color except blue), and Sabrina a blue raincoat. Other coats, hats, etc., may be added as desired to indicate the rainstorm. Sabrina's clothing is rumpled as the result of the accident she has just been in. Her hair and make-up are also in disarray.

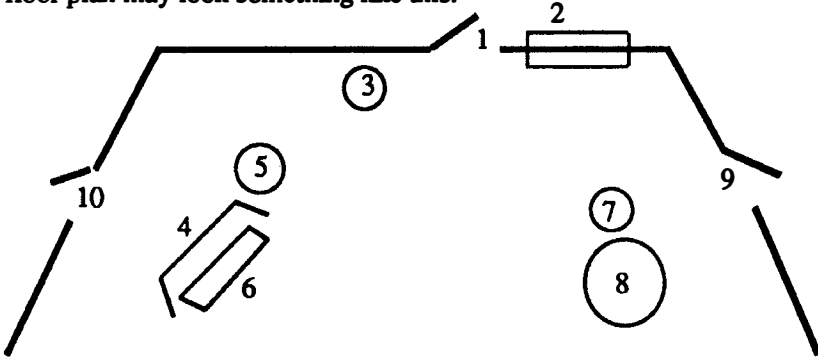
Lights, Sound, Special Effects

Very little special lighting is called for. The stage directions indicate that the room is dimly lighted as the play begins and brightens when Mrs. Teal turns on the lamp.

Music is heard coming from a stereo. There is *lightning* and *thunder* (the lightning, of course, must appear through the window or an open door). *Doorbell* and *telephone* are other sound effects called for.

The Set

The entire play takes place in the living room of the Teal home. The floor plan may look something like this:



- 1 Front door
- 2 Window with curtains
- 3 Hall tree
- 4 Sofa, with pillows
- 5 End table with lamp
- 6 Coffee table
- 7 End table with telephone
- 8 Easy chair
- 9 Door to interior
- 10 Door to kitchen

Add trim props and decorations as desired.

SUSPECT TO CHANGE

[AT RISE the room is dimly lit and opera MUSIC is blaring from the stereo. The DOORBELL rings. Pause. The DOORBELL rings repeatedly. MRS. TEAL enters, wiping her hands on a white dish towel. Loud, persistent KNOCKING disturbs her]

MRS. TEAL. I'm coming! I'm coming! Just a minute! *[She turns off the stereo (MUSIC out), turns on a LAMP, glances through the curtains, gasps, and opens the door]* Hello. Is something wrong?

CLEATS. Good evening, ma'am. *[He flashes his badge]* Sergeant Cleats—City Police Department. May I come in?

MRS. TEAL. Oh. Yes. *[CLEATS enters]* Won't you sit down?

CLEATS. No thank you. Are you related to Kristina Teal?

MRS. TEAL. *[Nervously fidgeting with her towel]* I'm her mother. She went shopping with Richard. They're very close. Sabrina—that's his sister—well, Tina and her are good friends. Although, they really haven't talked much lately. That's how she met him. Tina met Richard. She said they'd be back by seven, but that doesn't mean a thing. She's always late. She was even born late. A week after her due date. Has... has something happened?

CLEATS. I'm afraid this steady downpour has made driving conditions hazardous.

MRS. TEAL. *[Sitting on the sofa, prayerfully]* Oh dear Lord, no.

CLEATS. I regret to inform you that your daughter has been in an automobile accident. Her car apparently swerved and hit a tree on one of the back roads behind the shopping mall. *[MRS. TEAL struggles to control herself]* I have no information concerning her condition, but she and the driver were taken to Grace County Hospital.

MRS. TEAL. *[She puts her hand on her forehead and starts pacing]* Oh, why did she have to go out in this awful weather? What kind of a mother am I? She's practically an hour late and I don't even get the least bit concerned. She could be seriously injured. *[She stops and shrugs]* I guess I can forget the opera now!

CLEATS. Mrs. Teal, are you going to be all right?

MRS. TEAL. I'll be fine. I'm very good at handling coffee. I just need some stress.

CLEATS. Would you like me to drive you to the hospital?

MRS. TEAL. *[Heading for the door]* Yes. Let's go. Now. Please.

CLEATS. I'll wait for you to get your coat.

MRS. TEAL. Oh, yes. My coat. *[She struggles to pull it on quickly, still holding the dish towel]* It's a good thing you're driving. I'd probably swerve and hit a tree or something. *[She whirls around suddenly and grabs her hair]* Oh my husband!!

CLEATS. What? What's wrong?

MRS. TEAL. My husband's at a men's retreat at the lake! There's no way I can reach him! How am I going to tell him what's happened? I don't even know when I'll be back home!

CLEATS. Why don't you leave a message?

MRS. TEAL. Good idea. *[Reading as she writes]* "There's been an accident. Taken to hospital. Wife." Oh, this is going to ruin his weekend!

CLEATS. But if he won't know until after—? How will it ruin—? *[MRS. TEAL exits, leaving him alone.]* Never mind. *[He turns off the LIGHTS and exits]*

[The room is briefly illuminated by a flash of LIGHTNING, followed by a crash of THUNDER. After a moment, TINA enters and immediately starts talking. RICHARD follows with his arms full of shopping bags and managing the handle of an open umbrella under his chin]

TINA. Hi, Mom! We're back! Sorry we're so late. I just lost track of the time. And the traffic was terrible. Some of those drivers are crazy! It's like they see a wet street and think, "Oh boy! It's slip-and-slide time!" I had to drive over eighty miles an hour to pass some of them. *[She tosses her rain coat to RICHARD]* Mom? Where are you? Mom? Richard, have you seen her? *[He shakes his head]* That's strange. She never said she was going out.

RICHARD. Well, she might have just—

TINA. How will I get in touch with her? *[Walks over to phone, sees message]* Oh, no. Richard! There's been an accident! She's at the hospital. *[She puts her hand on her forehead and starts pacing; unconsciously imitating her mother]* Oh, why did she have to go out in this awful weather? What kind of a daughter am I? I'm nearly an hour late and I never once called to check up on her. She could have broken her leg and there was nobody here to help her.

RICHARD. Tina, come on. Your mother doesn't call to check on you every time you're a few minutes late.

TINA. Oh, Richard! Remember that ambulance we saw? A car crashed into a tree. Mom could have been in a wreck!

RICHARD. Tina, calm down. She wasn't in a wreck. Her car is still in the driveway.

TINA. *[Very agitated]* Well something happened to her! She's at the hospital. *[Pause, thoughtful]* Maybe she had a heart attack.

RICHARD. How did she write this note?

TINA. I don't know! Don't you *care*?

RICHARD. Of course I do. I'll call the hospital.

TINA. Yes. Good idea. The number's on the emergency sticker. *[RICHARD heads for the telephone]* I need some coffee.

RICHARD. *[Speaking into the phone]* Hello? Do you have a patient by the last name of Teal? Yes, that's right, T-E-A-L. She was in a car accident?

TINA. I knew it.

RICHARD. *[To Tina]* She was only involved in a car wreck.

TINA. Oh. Maybe she wasn't in the car. Maybe she just saw it. Maybe she was run over by a car!

RICHARD. *[Still on the phone]* What is her condition? She's been discharged? I see. All right. Thank you.

TINA. Well? What happened? Where is she?

RICHARD. All I know is she wasn't hurt. She's been discharged.

TINA. Oh, thank You, Lord. Then she must be on her way home now. We'll just have to wait for an explanation. *[She sits on the couch]* But she's okay. That's what matters. All this confusion... I've got such a headache. Richard, there's some aspirin in my purse. Get it for me, would you?

RICHARD. Where is it?

TINA. Probably with my coat.

RICHARD. *[After looking]* No.

TINA. *[Holding her head in her hands]* See if I put it in one of the shopping bags.

RICHARD. Nope. No sign of it.

TINA. *[Exploding]* Are you looking on the ceiling?! It's got to be around here somewhere! *[She noisily searches. RICHARD sticks his arm down a sleeve of her coat, only to find his fingers]* I'm sorry, Richard. I'm just having a bad day. All this rain, the traffic, my mother's in the hospital—I still don't understand why—and my purse has vanished into thin air!

RICHARD. *[Leading her to the couch.]* This isn't exactly how I planned on doing this... But, now that your purse is gone, well... There's something I've been wanting to tell you.

TINA. Not more bad news.

RICHARD. *[He smiles nervously]* Oh, it's good. I hope. *[He blushes and hesitates a moment]* This was supposed to be a surprise.

TINA. You haven't spoiled the surprise yet. *[RICHARD looks uncomfortably shy]* Don't worry. You can tell me.

RICHARD. I don't exactly want to *tell* you something. It's more of a *question* really. It's something I'm hoping you will tell me. After I ask the question, I mean.

TINA. Go ahead.

RICHARD. *[He gulps]* Uh, Tina? *[She looks at him expectantly. He takes her hand in his]* You and I, we... I mean... In your purse, I... *[Abruptly changing his expression]* Do you want to check the Lost & Found at the mall and see if they have your purse?

TINA. *[Perplexed]* No. It'll turn up.

RICHARD. Maybe you just left it somewhere.

TINA. Is that all you wanted to ask me? Look, don't worry about my purse. There wasn't anything extremely valuable in it. I'll just cancel my credit cards and my checking account, replace my driver's license, renew my library card, change the locks on the doors, get an unlisted telephone number, buy a whole new collection of cosmetic accessories, and find the negatives so I can get reprints of my wallet pictures. It's no big deal.

RICHARD. *[With a sigh]* That's what you think.

TINA. What is that supposed to mean?

RICHARD. *[Grinning sheepishly]* I wrote you a letter and put it in your purse.

TINA. You did? You sly fox! *[She laughs and throws a pillow at Richard]* So *that's* why you're so worried about my purse! *[She feels his forehead]* I think you're suffering from a chronic case of lovesickness.

RICHARD. *[Very serious puppy-love face]* Oh yes.

TINA. You silly lover boy! So what did this letter say?

RICHARD. That's what I've been trying to tell you.

TINA. Oh! Well? Don't keep me in suspense.

RICHARD. Remember Valentine's Day?

TINA. [*Fondly*] Oh, I'll never forget. You and I were having a lovely dinner at that Italian restaurant... [*suddenly angry*] ...when your sister Sabrina had to butt in and ruin everything! Then she spilled my drink all over my sweater! I could have strangled her!

RICHARD. I was referring to the "lovely dinner" part.

TINA. Oh. Yes?

RICHARD. [*He nervously clears his throat*] Ever since that night I've been wanting to... to tell you how I feel. Tina, will you— [*He coughs*] Will you please— [*He starts having a coughing fit*]

TINA. [*Patting his back*] Are you okay? Let me get you a glass of water. [*She exits*]

RICHARD. [*Having recovered, he starts talking to himself*] Come on, Richard, you can do this. You didn't have any trouble asking the coat rack! Will you marry me? That's not right. [*He gets down on one knee in front of the couch*] Whenever I'm near you, something stirs within me. No, that sounds like a laxative advertisement. [*Experimenting with his voice*] Tina, darling, will you marry me? Oh boy. [*He rests his head on the sofa*]

TINA. [*Entering with a glass of water*] Richard! What's wrong? Are you sick?

RICHARD. [*Standing up*] No. I'm fine. Sit down. Please.

TINA. [*Quasi-therapist*] I'm concerned about you. You seem tense. Upset. [*She puts the water on the table*] What is it?

RICHARD. [*On bended knee*] Tina, darling, will you— [*The front door bursts open and a frazzled MRS. TEAL enters*]

MRS. TEAL. Oh my poor baby!

TINA. [*Rushing to hug her mother*] Mom! Are you okay?

MRS. TEAL. Yes dear, I know you're okay. Only minor bruises. They told me you'd been discharged so I came home as fast as I could.

TINA. I was so worried about you. Why did you go to the hospital?

MRS. TEAL. I'm your mother! What did you expect me to do?

TINA. What happened?

MRS. TEAL. You don't remember? Oh, no. This must be delayed shock. You'd better lie down.

TINA. I don't understand. How were you involved in a car accident? Richard called the hospital, but—

MRS. TEAL [*Noticing him for the first time*] Oh, hello, Richard. What are you doing on the floor?