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Dramatic Publishing



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The Best Mistake

Drama/Comedy by Jim Knable



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The Best Mistake

Drama/Comedy. By Jim Knable. *Cast: 2m., 2w. with doubling.* Becky and her embarrassingly over-the-top father, Roy, have never gotten along, so when she brings her first high-school boyfriend home to meet him, the last thing she expects it to be is the best mistake she has ever made. When Roy becomes a hero to boyfriend, Will, things look bad. And when Becky's drama teacher assigns them *Hamlet* to present and Roy bursts in on Becky and Will rehearsing, only to recite from the play as the accomplished actor he was before he opened his furniture store, things look worse. Then Becky asks her dad to read from the play and discovers he can't, and things get much more complicated. All of Becky's assumptions about her father fly out the window, and, with help from her mom, Will and even Ms. Newstrom, the drama teacher, Becky pieces together the truth behind her father's illiteracy. She confronts her father and then comes to understand him in all his contradictions. Becky manages to get her dad to start going to a literacy center with the reward being that he gets to play Hamlet's father's ghost in the school production. *Simple staging. Approximate running time: 50 minutes. Code: BH3.*

Playwrights project touring production. (l-r) Steve Klein, Wendy Waddell and Fred Harlow. Photo: Ken Jacques. Cover design: Jeanette Alig-Sergel.

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THE BEST MISTAKE

A Play for Young Audiences

by

JIM KNABLE



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(THE BEST MISTAKE)

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The Best Mistake was commissioned and first produced by the Playwrights Project, San Diego, Calif., and performed at schools and community centers throughout San Diego and Los Angeles counties, February 24, 2000 to March 17, 2000 and February 19, 2002 to March 22, 2002, with the following:

ORIGINAL CAST

Becky Wendy Waddell
Roy Fred Harlow
Will Steven Klein
Helen / Ms. Newstrom D. Candis Paule

PRODUCTION STAFF

Executive Producer Deborah Salzer
Director Laura Stribling
Set Designer Beeb Salzer
Costume Designer Veronica Murphy
Sound Design Peter Hashhagen
Stage Manager Katie Rodda

THE BEST MISTAKE

CHARACTERS

BECKY a teenage girl

WILL her first boyfriend, same age as her

ROY her father, outdoorsy, charismatic

HELEN her mom
(Same actress plays MS. NEWSTROM)

THE BEST MISTAKE

(BECKY, a teenager, enters.)

BECKY. The biggest mistake I made in my young life was bringing my first boyfriend home to meet my father.

(WILL enters.)

BECKY *(cont'd)*. This is Will. Cool, smart, cute, sensitive. Watch. Will, what do you think of my eyes?

WILL. They're really pretty.

BECKY. See?

(ROY walks on.)

ROY. Who's this guy, Becky?

BECKY *(to us)*. This is my father. *(To ROY.)* This is Will, Dad.

ROY. Will, huh? Short for William?

WILL. Yes, sir.

ROY. I knew a guy named Bill once. You related?

BECKY. Dad, please...

ROY. Do you want to come in, Bill, take off your coat?

BECKY. Will, Dad.

WILL. If it's okay.

(BECKY and WILL walk right to a table and three chairs, WILL taking off his coat.)

ROY. This guy Bill I knew had a tattoo of a naked woman riding a pink elephant on his belly. Right here. *(ROY lifts up his shirt and points to his belly.)*

BECKY. Oh no...

ROY. And he used to shake it around like this.

(WILL stares, amazed.)

BECKY. Put your shirt down.

ROY. Yeah, well, look, kid, do you want a beer or something?

BECKY. He's fourteen.

ROY. Younger man, huh? Just like your mom, Beck.

WILL. I'm almost fifteen.

ROY. When I met Becky's mom, I was still on my training wheels.

BECKY. You were twenty-five.

ROY. I was two years younger, still am, go figure. Just like you, Willy; it's like you're already part of the family. Heck, let's arm wrestle.

(ROY grabs WILL and throws him into an arm-wrestling position on the table. Tableau. BECKY steps out.)

BECKY. If I were Will, I would've run right out the front door.

(ROY slams WILL's hand down. Tableau.)

BECKY (*cont'd*). My father's name is Roy Dagger. It's not the name he was born with. It's his stage name. He used to be an actor. And before that, a wrestler. And before that, a sailor.

ROY. I was down in the submarines, Bill; I went for months with no daylight and no women. Can you imagine?

WILL. No.

BECKY. Now he owns a furniture store.

ROY. I used to wake up in the middle of the night screaming like a baby.

WILL. Wow.

BECKY. My father is a mystery. A lunatic.

ROY. All right, other hand. (*ROY arm wrestles WILL left-handed.*)

BECKY. An embarrassing, a very embarrassing man.

(*ROY slams WILL's other hand down.*)

ROY. Come on, kid, you're not even trying!

BECKY. I'm sure that's why my mother wants to leave him.

(*ROY sticks his finger in his ear and pulls it out.*)

ROY. Whoa, would you look at that. This just came out of my ear; no wonder I thought you've been mumbling.

BECKY. This is the worst torture in the world.

ROY. So you think that's as low as your voice is gonna get?

BECKY. DAD! (*Beat.*)

ROY. Yeah, Beck?

BECKY. Come here.

(ROY gets up and goes to BECKY.)

BECKY *(cont'd)*. Listen, Dad, this guy is very important to me. I don't want you to scare him out of the house.

ROY. What are you talkin' about?

BECKY. You showed him your belly!

ROY. Yeah, well, I don't even want to think about what you've shown him.

BECKY. Dad!

WILL. All we've done is kiss.

BECKY. Stay out of this, Will. *(She pulls her father farther away.)* Look. I know you probably feel weird about him 'cause he's a guy and you're a guy and I'm your daughter, but I'm begging you...no more macho crazy stuff, okay? Will's sensitive.

ROY. Aw, cut the guy a break, Beck; he's as macho as anybody; we're bonding.

BECKY. You're scaring him. Look.

(ROY looks. WILL smiles and waves.)

BECKY *(cont'd)*. Please. Pretend you're a good father. *(Silence.)*

ROY. Boy, you really know what to say.

BECKY. I didn't mean that.

ROY. I know what you mean. *(He turns. He goes to WILL and sticks out his hand to shake. WILL shakes.)* You're a great kid. I like you a lot. I'm glad you're sensitive and dig my daughter. I'm makin' burgers, you want one? *(He checks back with BECKY.)*

BECKY. Better.

ROY. How do you like 'em, burnt or bloody?

(Tableau.)

BECKY. My mother went to go study lions for six months in Africa. She's a zoologist.

(HELEN walks on. She carries a suitcase.)

HELEN. I'll be okay, Becky.

BECKY. Please don't go.

HELEN. I'll come back.

BECKY. What about me?

HELEN. I'll come back for you. *(She walks off.)*

BECKY. But then she decided to stay for six more months. She said that it was much better for her to live away from my father than with him. It's not that I don't love my father. Of course I love my father.

(ROY walks on with an inappropriate apron and a miner's hat with a big light on it that blinds WILL.)

ROY. It's my burger hat. Somethin' wrong with yer eyes, kid?

BECKY. I just wish he wasn't crazy and embarrassing.

ROY. You should see what I wear when I cook lobster.

(ROY exits. WILL smiles at BECKY.)

BECKY. When dinner was over, I grabbed Will and made a run for it.

(ROY enters again without the hat.)

ROY. No dessert?

BECKY. Will has to get home early.

WILL. No, I don't.

BECKY. I'm walking him home.

ROY. Well. It was good to meet you.

BECKY. Come on, Will.

WILL. Good to meet you, too.

(BECKY yanks WILL out of the implied house.)

ROY *(as they go)*. Don't be a stranger! *(He exits.)*

BECKY. I am so sorry.

WILL. What for?

BECKY. If you don't want to see me for a while, I understand.

WILL. What are you talking about?

BECKY. My father.

WILL. Yeah, he's pretty cool.

BECKY. You don't have to say that.

WILL. No, I think he's really cool. I wish my dad was like him. My dad just sits around and does taxes all day.

BECKY. Now you're making fun of me.

WILL. I really like him, Becky. I don't get you.

BECKY. He made you arm wrestle.

WILL. Yeah. That was great.

BECKY. Maybe I don't want to talk to you for a while.

WILL. You should be nicer to him. I think you really hurt his feelings sometimes.

BECKY. Whose side are you on here?

WILL. Side?

BECKY. You're my boyfriend, you're supposed to agree with me when I'm complaining.

WILL. I just think you should give your dad a chance.

BECKY. I've been giving him a chance for fifteen years!

WILL. Can we stop talking and kiss now?

BECKY (*turns to the audience*). And that was when I broke up with my first boyfriend.

WILL. What did I do?

BECKY. He was too sensitive in all the wrong ways.

WILL. Do you still want to go to the homecoming dance?

BECKY. I went home.

(WILL exits. ROY enters and sits at the table. BECKY enters.)

ROY. Well?

BECKY. What.

ROY. Is he a good kisser?

BECKY. No.

ROY. He's young, he'll learn.

BECKY. I broke up with him.

ROY. Because he's a bad kisser?

BECKY. Because he liked you better than me.

(BECKY storms off to her room. ROY looks after her. He stands and follows.)

ROY (*off*). Becky. Don't slam your— (*SLAM!*) door.

(BECKY enters, wearing a cute sweater and carrying a backpack.)

BECKY. The next day I went to school. It's the law, I had no choice. Drama class was the worst. Will was there, so I had to ignore one whole side of the room.

(WILL enters with a backpack, looking miserable.)

WILL. Becky, please look at me.

BECKY. It was an important day. Ms. Newstrom was announcing who would play what for the spring play.

(MS. NEWSTROM enters, the same actress who played HELEN, wearing eccentric glasses.)

MS. NEWSTROM. Will. You had a fine audition. You will be...drum roll, please...Horatio!

WILL. Thank you.

MS. NEWSTROM. And Becky.

BECKY *(nervous)*. Yes, Ms. Newstrom.

MS. NEWSTROM *(beaming)*. Hamlet.

BECKY. Really?

MS. NEWSTROM. You're a fine actor, my girl. You'll do the part proud.

BECKY *(looks at the audience)*. Ms. Newstrom was also a little crazy. Not as bad as Dad, but the acting thing obviously got to her, too.

MS. NEWSTROM. I'll see you all tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow. May your little lives be rounded with sleep. *(Whispering on her way out.)* Congratulations, Becky.

BECKY. Thanks.

(MS. NEWSTROM exits.)

WILL. Becky?

BECKY (*not looking back*). What is it.

WILL. I miss you.

BECKY. I'm right here, Will.

WILL. Why won't you look at me? (*BECKY sighs. She looks at him. He smiles.*) Your eyes are so pretty.

BECKY (*sighs, back to the audience*). And so I got back together with Will. (*WILL runs over and grabs her hand.*) And the first thing he wanted to do was come home with me. Guess why.

(*ROY enters with a chain saw and goggles.*)

ROY. Well look who's here.

(*BECKY and WILL turn to look at him.*)

BECKY. What are you doing, Dad?

ROY (*pulling his goggles up*). Washing the cat.

(*WILL laughs.*)

BECKY. Shouldn't you be at the shop?

ROY. Nope. That's the nice thing about owning something—take note, Will—you don't have to be there all the time.

WILL. Really?

(*BECKY looks at WILL.*)

ROY (*setting the chain saw down*). So how was school?

WILL. Becky's gonna be Hamlet.

BECKY. Will!

ROY. Becky's gonna be Hamlet?

BECKY. It's a drama class thing. It's no big deal.

ROY. You're gonna be Hamlet? No big deal? Hamlet?!

BECKY. It's just a class play.

ROY. Becky, that's wonderful! I'm so proud of you! Come here. *(He goes to her and hugs her.)* Hamlet. I can't believe it. When's the show?

BECKY. I don't know.

WILL. March 22nd at eight o'clock.

BECKY. It might not even happen.

ROY. Hamlet. That's wonderful, Becky. Hamlet. *(He grabs his chain saw and suddenly gets into character.)* Angels and ministers of grace defend us! O all you host of heaven! O earth! What else? And shall I couple hell? O fie, hold, hold, my heart, And you, my sinows, grow not instant old, But bear me stiffly up. Remember thee! Ay, thou poor ghost, whiles memory holds a seat In this distracted globe. Remember thee! *(He smiles fondly and puts down his chainsaw.)* I love that part. *(WILL applauds.)* Thank you, thank you. You're gonna have a blast, Becky.

WILL. You played Hamlet?

ROY. Yeah. Best thing that guy ever wrote.

WILL. Becky never mentioned—

BECKY. He played Hamlet. There, I mentioned it.

WILL. Where?

ROY. Old Globe. Back in the day.

WILL. Would you come and talk to our class about it?

(Silence. ROY looks at BECKY.)