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If the Suit Fits

Or the Day it Rained Clients

A One-Act Farce "Suited" for High School Festival Competition

Approximate Playing Time: 35 min.

by

Gordon C. Bennett

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DRAMATIS PERSONAE

4M, 4W or 3M, 5W

ELIZABETH WALKER, attorney, a competent professional in her late thirties. Although nicely dressed, she wears flats, not heels. She's rather uncomfortable with Marty, who generally calls her "Aunt Bet."

MARTY, an impish boy about 10-12, is Ms. Walker's nephew. (Make Marty her niece, if you have more females than males.) He/she's making notes for a school project; at times, a real smart-alec. The actor may be older than twelve but needs to look young.

MARY GOODLADY, a rather overbearing woman, fifties. Well-dressed, she wears gloves and carries an umbrella, which she leaves about.

TRACY, her daughter, is a young woman of about 17—attractive, quite short, and rather intimidated by her mother.

COACH WILBUR HOFFA, a slight man in his thirties, socially awkward. He doesn't look or act very athletic. He tends to drag his sentences, and has trouble getting names right.

JOHN WELLESBY, Coach Hoffa's father, fifties, is egotistical. He's a well-known TV personality who lives the "good life." He wears a toupee and carries an expensive cane.

HOPE SWOPE, a slender woman in her late twenties, and a professional dancer. However, her ankle's in a cast and she's hobbling about on crutches.

BARNEY WESCOTT, early twenties, extroverted, works as a stock boy in a grocery but seeks a more substantial job. He clearly "has his cap set" for Tracy Goodlady.

SETTING

Ms. Walkers's law office

ETC.

Black Box or Box Set

Make it authentic or keep it simple, depending on your circumstances: minimally, a desk and chairs and/or a settee, a lamp, a small book case full of legal works, and two exits—one to the hallway and back door to the building, the other to the main entrance and front door. There may be a few diplomas or framed documents on the wall, if you have a wall, and somewhere a sign reading, 'ABSENT LAW, CHAOS.' (See Production Notes) There are few stage directions, leaving the director with considerable latitude in adding crazy business and developing the characters---perhaps through improvisation.

If the Suit Fits
by Gordon C. Bennett

SETTING: MS. WALKER'S law office.

AT RISE: MS. WALKER is seated at her desk, angled, with MARTY sitting to one side, making notes. TRACY is sitting on the other side with her mother, MARY GOODLADY, a few steps away. GOODLADY swings an umbrella, using it to punctuate her lines.

WALKER

Well, Tracy, You haven't said much so far. How do *you* feel about all this?

TRACY

Well, Ms. Walker—

GOODLADY

(Advancing) She feels just awful, that's how she feels!

WALKER

Tracy, are you as upset as your mother?

TRACY

Who, me? I guess I—

GOODLADY

She's even more upset! Horrified! Absolutely horrified!

WALKER

I see. You must understand, Mrs. Goodlady, that discrimination in such a case—

GOODLADY

Heightism! Let's call it what it is! Heightism!

WALKER

That heightism in such a case, where the defense can use the issues of proficiency and performance...heightism in such a case—

GOODLADY

And don't tell me that heightism is going to be hard to prove—

WALKER

Is going to be hard to prove!

MARTY

How do you spell heightism, Aunt Bet?

GOODLADY

I don't think it's so hard to prove. Of course, you're the lawyer, Ms. Warren.

MARTY

Of course she is, and a darn good one too!

WALKER

Marty!

MARTY

My teacher, Ms. Kleinfeld, says our democracy is built on law!

GOODLADY

(Ignoring him) My little Tracy is just five foot two and she has to take all kinds of abuse in the locker room. Other students call her “pint-sized”.

MARTY

I've heard some of those jokes... “You're so short you can sit on the curb and swing your legs.” Or—

WALKER

Marty! You be quiet when I'm talking to clients.

GOODLADY

Basketball is a flawed game, Ms. Warren. When it was invented in the late nineteenth century the basket was set at ten feet above the floor. In the intervening years the average height of our young people has increased substantially but they've never raised the basket.

WALKER

I understand, Mrs. Goodlady.

GOODLADY

The average height on Tracy's team is five foot eleven. Imagine! What do their mothers feed them to make these girls grow so large? The Goodlady family pituitary gland is normal. It's not Tracy's fault we haven't produced a family of freaks!

TRACY

(Upset) Really, mother!

GOODLADY

Now Tracy's a fine athlete. Everyone says she has an excellent shot, and she drools very well too.

TRACY

Dribbles, Mother! Dribbles!

GOODLADY

Coach Hoffa admitted that he cut her from the team because of her height. Isn't that so, dear?

TRACY

(Wearily) Yes, Mother. *(To MS. WALKER)* He said I'm no good at rebounding.

MARTY

Well, Duh.

GOODLADY

The game was invented in 1891. Players were midgets compared to now. Today you have six foot six players who can ram-bunk the ball!

TRACY

That's slam-dunk, Mother!

GOODLADY

They ought to raise the hoop a foot or so. *(Noticing Marty)* Why is he writing this down?

WALKER

That's my nephew, Marty. He's taking notes for a school project on the legal profession. *(To Marty)* I'll want to examine that notebook later.

MARTY

No way, Aunt Bet. It's X-rated.

*MS. WALKER makes a face at MARTY.
Beat, then:*

WALKER

Mrs. Goodlady, you're right. In basketball, size matters. But a lawsuit against Coach Hoffa is just—foolish.

GOODLADY

How dare you call me foolish! I say that basketball's un-American if it discriminates against the shorter players! Surely a smart plaintiff's lawyer can convince a judge and jury that heightism is a particularly sinister type of injustice!

WALKER

I don't think so, Mrs. Goodlady. Tracy, what do you think? How would such a lawsuit affect your relationships at school, with the team, and with your girl friends?

GOODLADY

(*To TRACY*) Don't wrinkle your nose, dear. (*To MS. WALKER*) Tracy feels exactly as I do, counselor! Women have to take a stand with no thought for the consequences. Consider Lucretia Mott, Susan B. Anthony, and Billie Jean King. (*To TRACY*) Isn't that right, dear?

TRACY

Well, I guess that—

GOODLADY

It's a matter of principle!

WALKER

Principle? Interest is what we'll get, and the media could make this very unpleasant for you and your family. And frankly, my legal colleagues will call this a nuisance case. Look here, Mrs. Goodlady. If the heightism, as you call it, resulted in material or personal damage—then...who knows? But all we have is a girl being denied a seat on the bench with the other basketball players.

GOODLADY

Ms. Walker, I—

WALKER

Now if it was a boys' team your daughter might have a case – I say only *might* – but at least we could argue sexism. That's a big deal these days—but heightism?

GOODLADY

Very well then! We'll take our case elsewhere. Somewhere in this town there lives an attorney with a sense of outrage and the courage to tackle a difficult case. Come, along, Tracy! We're going to sue Coach Hoffa for house and home. Not to mention the athletic department and the school board!

MRS. GOODLADY grabs her daughter and they start to leave. But at this moment, COACH HOFFA enters.

GOODLADY

Oh... it's you!

HOFFA

(*Surprised*) Ah— (*Sighs; clears his throat*) —Yes. Hello, Macy–Stacey—I mean—ah—Tracy!

GOODLADY

Despicable man! Persecutor of the small, denigrator of the diminutive!! We're out to find a judge and jury to cut you down to size, Mr. Hoffa—and that's the long and short of it!

SHE exits, dragging her daughter and leaving her umbrella behind..... HOFFA, stunned, looks at MS. WALKER and MARTY and shrugs.

WALKER

You are Coach Hoffa?

HOFFA

Ah—yes.

WALKER

If you've come about the lawsuit Mrs. Goodlady dreamed up, you've wasted a trip, Mr. Hoffa.

MARTY

We told her she hasn't got a prayer.

WALKER

There's no precedent for it.

MARTY

We told her to get lost.

WALKER

Marty! What's this “we” business?

MARTY makes apologetic gesture.

HOFFA

Well, that's ah—fine. Truth is, I came here about something else. My father.

WALKER

And who is your father, Mr. Hoffa?

HOFFA

Ron—ah—I mean John—John Wellesby.

WALKER

Wellesby the newscaster?

MARTY

The one with the bushy eyebrows; looks real smug?

HOFFA

That's him, all right.

WALKER

Hmm... Wellesby?

HOFFA

It's his—ah—professional name. Hoffa sounded rather gangster-ish, so he changed it years ago.

WALKER

But you kept the name. I must say, Mr. Hoffa, that's seems rather... brave—in light of your father's behavior.

HOFFA

He doesn't think I'm—ah—brave. Just stupid. When we're together, I so often—ah—say the wrong thing. Do something impolite or impolitic. I'm terrible with names—uh—Ms. Stalker.

WALKER

I noticed that.

HOFFA

I'm always so nervous around him. As a boy he was in—intimidating. He treated me like a pet dog. Called me “Fido” or “Spot.” Sent me to obedience school to—to learn some manners. When I wanted a piece of candy he made me sit up and beg. (*Barks plaintively*) Arf! Arf!

MARTY

Did you hang around fire plugs a lot?

MS. WALKER frowns at MARTY, makes a cutting-the-throat gesture.

HOFFA

My father never ever praised me. Only the opposite. I couldn't—ah—do anything right. Well, I *was* a mess. I flunked out of obedience school. I've got a terrible self-image, Ms. Talker, and it's—ah—my father's fault. My psych—ah—psychiatrist is very clear on that. She'd make an excellent witness.

MARTY

How do you spell psychiatrist?

WALKER

S-h-r-i-n-k.

HOFFA

My trainer—ah—my psychiatrist has made it clear to me, how my father destroyed my psyche. He never really wanted—ah—children. He just wanted a trophy wife and some occasional—ah—sex. He needed someone to reflect his glory, tell him and everyone else what a marvelous talent he was. My mother finally divorced him for his vanity—I mean, insanity!

WALKER

But his work in the media forces him to interact with lots of people!

HOFFA

He doesn't care about them. The only face he likes is what shows up in his shaving mirror. Mostly he uses people. Those he can't use he'll just—lose. Like me!

WALKER

I'm sorry.

HOFFA

I tried to please him, the old misanthrope. I tried to act like the puppy he once had—when he was a boy. When I was six my trainer taught me to bring him his newspaper—like a Pomeranian. When I was eight my father said to me, “Stop acting like a dog, kid! It's time you grew up!” I kept telling him I was growing up as fast as I could but I needed a longer leash! *(Barks dolefully)* “Arf! Arf!”

WALKER

That's awful!

HOFFA

Best I could do. I'm not really a canine! *(Beat)* I did a make-over. I got rid of my collar *and* the leash. At eighteen I made a conscious decision to be more—ah—macho. Thought I could make it in the world of athletics. Tried to prove myself.

WALKER

Did it work, Mr. Hoffa?

HOFFA

Not really. Me with the spindly legs? But as they say, if you can't do it—you teach it.

WALKER

You became a coach. *(HE nods)* But where do I come in?

HOFFA

Ah...I want to sue my father for two million dollars!

MARTY

I don't believe it!

HOFFA

Would you believe half a million?

MARTY

That's cool.

WALKER

Stifle yourself, Marty! (*To HOFFA*) Now I see what you're driving at. A parental malpractice suit!

MARTY

Malpractice?

WALKER

I'll spell it for you later.

MARTY

But what does it mean, Aunt Bet?

WALKER

Mr. Hoffa's father failed in his parental obligations; indeed, his treatment of his son produced the personal issues you see before you including deep feelings of neglect and inferiority. We can sue Mr. Wellesby for money equivalent to the damages his son has suffered.

HOFFA

That's what I think! But is it—ah—possible?

WALKER

There may not be any exact precedents, but there are many other malpractice cases—surgeons and psychiatrists are being sued for giving improper or misleading advice to clients who acted on that advice to their detriment. In this case—

*MR. WELLESBY enters, waving his cane.
HE addresses his son briskly.*

WELLESBY

What's this? Well, well, if it isn't my boy Wilbur John Hoffa, the colossal pest, the bane of my existence, the crabgrass in the lawn of my life! What are you doing here?

HOFFA

(*Cowering*) Nothing, father—ah—that is, Ms. Hawker's an old friend. Well, not a friend, exactly, but an acquaintance. Well, not really an acquaintance but—ah—but—ah—

WELLESBY

Stop your stammering and beat it, Wilbur. Get back to your gymnasium. Your students need you!

HOFFA

I'll—ah—call you later, Ms. Gawker.

WALKER

Please do, Mr. Hoffa.

*HOFFA exits and the news anchor drops
rather ceremoniously into a chair.*

WELLESBY

I thought your name was Walker.

WALKER

It is, Mr. Wellesby.

WELLESBY

So he's still having trouble with names. It's really embarrassing for—someone like me.

WALKER

Channel seven, I believe, at six o'clock. It's an honor to meet a news anchor, Mr. Wellesby, despite the way you treat your son.

WELLESBY

Oh, he's nothing to me.

WALKER

So it seems.

WELLESBY

May I call you Elizabeth?

WALKER

You may not. *(Beat)* I don't think I like you.

MARTY

Me neither.

WELLESBY

Who's the brat?

WALKER

That's my nephew, Marty.

WELLESBY

Keep your trap shut, kid. (*To MS. WALKER*) As to Wilbur, don't believe everything that simpering idiot tells you. He gets it from his simpering mother, who won't give me the time of day. (*Beat*) So you don't like me? You're some lawyer—drawing conclusions before hearing both sides of the story!

WALKER

No, they pay the judge to hear both sides. The attorney's going to support her client—if she takes the case in the first place.

WELLESBY

Wilbur's *case*?... (*Changes position*) Ms. Walker, I have my own case. I'm here to file suit against a certain Ms. Hope Swope who appeared on my late show last night.

WALKER

(*Impressed*) Hope Swope, the eminent dancer?

WELLESBY

I interviewed the lady on my arts segment. I don't suppose you saw the show?

WALKER

No.

WELLESBY

Good. It was an A-1 disaster, a calamity of the first order! I asked her a couple of questions and she took offense at what she called my “abrasive attitude.” Anyway, she had an evil glint in her eye. She got up to demonstrate a dance step. She whirled and caught my hairpiece with the fingers of her right hand and there it went!

WALKER

There it went?

WELLESBY

She knocked it right off my head!

WALKER

Really?

MARTY

She knocked off your wig?

WALKER

Toupee?

WELLESBY

Hairpiece!

WALKER

Ouch! On purpose?

WELLESBY

Absolutely! She embarrassed me in front of a million people. My whole viewing audience saw me turn crimson!

WALKER

But what made her so angry?

WELLESBY

I quoted our theatre critic who said she was huffing and puffing in her performance at the Ritz. She was out of shape, she wasn't keeping fit, he said. Too much wining and dining.

WALKER

And that's what set her off?

WELLESBY

(Shrugs) I was just quoting our theatre critic.

WALKER

But that's when she got up and knocked off your rug—I mean...

MARTY

Wig—

WALKER

Toupee—

WELLESBY

Hairpiece! *(Feeling his toupee)* Have I got it on straight? Do you have a mirror?

MARTY

(Getting up) Don't worry. I'll straighten it for you.

WELLESBY

(Points his cane at Marty) Get away from me, kid. I don't want you fooling around with it.
(Feels it again) That feels all right. Now, what about my case against Ms. Swope?

WALKER

If I take your case against Hope Swope, will you treat your son more—fatherly?

WELLESBY

You're my lawyer, not my therapist, Ms. Walker. *(Looks offstage)* Good grief, that's her!

WALKER

Who?

WELLESBY

The woman I'm talking about. Is there a back door to this building?

WALKER

Well, yes... (*Pointing it out*) But...

WELLESBY

I must beat a hasty retreat. You understand. Will you be discrete, Ms. Walker?

MARTY

My teacher, Miss Kleinfeld, says that discretion is the better part of valor. I don't know what that means.

WELLESBY

You have a lot to learn, kid.

WELLESBY exits hastily as MS. SWOPE enters, with a bag slung over her shoulder. SHE is on crutches.)

SWOPE

Hello! You must be Counselor Walker...

MARTY

Attorney-at-law.

SWOPE

And this is your—associate?

WALKER

This is my nephew, who has been a bit too visible – and much too audible – for his own good.

MARTY returns to his seat, taking notes.

WALKER, *Cont.*

Are you Ms. Swope?

SWOPE

Very good. How did you know my name? ESP? Precognition? Are you clairvoyant?

WALKER

None of the above. I've seen you on TV. But what about the crutches, Ms. Swope? A stage accident? I've heard the term “break a leg” but never thought performers took it literally.

SWOPE

No, no! Happened in the canned foods section! Del Monte, I think!

WALKER

Pardon me?

SWOPE

It happened at Everly's Grocery. There I was, pushing my cart along as smoothly as their carts allow and bang! The biggest tower of canned beets you ever saw fell on my left ankle!

WALKER

Really, Ms. Swope? Beets?

SWOPE

Could have been corn, or succotash. I wasn't paying attention to the particulars. But those cans dropped right on my ankle and snapped it in two!

WALKER

You don't say!

SWOPE

They took X-rays, of course. Dr. Bender says it's the worst break he's seen in years! I'll have to cancel my spring tour, Ms. Walker. I'm losing maybe five or six months income because of that idiot stock boy's stupidity! He built that pile of cans right where I had to walk to get to the frozen waffles!

WALKER

You didn't, er – accidentally – trip over those cans?

SWOPE

No, no—absolutely not. That tower of beets just fell on me!

WALKER

But why?

SWOPE

It was a poorly built tower, Ms. Walker. They were leaning to one side. I might have brushed against the pile but—

WALKER

Were you wearing your contacts, Ms. Swope?

SWOPE

Would I leave home without them?

WALKER

I don't suppose you were walking your dog?

SWOPE

I don't own a dog!

MARTY

Were they diced beets?

SWOPE

What difference does that make?

MARTY

(Chuckles) You got a bad roll of the dice.

SWOPE

That's not funny, kid! *(To MS. WALKER)* This is your nephew?

WALKER

He used to be!

MS WALKER gestures to MARTY to shut his mouth.

BARNEY WESCOTT enters. HE stops dead at the sight of MS. SWOPE, who is equally surprised.

SWOPE

Well, if it isn't the devil himself! *(To WESCOTT)* Do you see these crutches? That ankle? Ms. Walker, this is—

WESCOTT

Good afternoon, Ms. Walker. *(Indicating Marty)* Is this your son?

WALKER

I've never seen this boy in my life!

SHE glares at MARTY, and HE sticks out his tongue.

WESCOTT

Forgive me for interrupting. I'm Barney Wescott.

SLOPE

Rhymes with "hurts a lot." *(SHE moans; falls into a chair)*

MARTY

Wescott—hurts a lot. (*Makes a note*)

WESCOTT

Just call me Barney, Ms. Walker. I suppose she's been talking about me.

WALKER

Are you a stock boy at Everly's Grocery? And did Ms. Swope enter your store yesterday at about...?

SWOPE

It was 3:30 PM, Ms. Warren.

WESCOTT

Yes, that's when she ran into our stack of canned corn. Del Monte's best.

MARTY

Ah...So it's corn! (*Makes a note of it*)

WESCOTT

I have to compliment you, Miss Swope. We had marked them down ten cents a can. You know a bargain when you see it.

SWOPE

Bargain? (*Pointing to her ankle*) Is this a bargain? You broke my ankle, Wescott, and when you're a dancer your ankles are your life!

WESCOTT

The store has witnesses that will testify that you were doing a pirouette for an admirer and lost your balance. That's how it happened.

SWOPE

What? Did you bribe someone to commit perjury? I was just minding my own business, looking for the frozen waffles, when this huge stack of cans fell on my leg, knocking me to the floor. I nearly passed out—perhaps I did. When I came out of it this big lunk was fanning me with some newspaper tabloid—

WESCOTT

It was a People magazine—

SWOPE

And this character, Wescott, is telling me I'll have to pay for the whole stack of beets— (*Rises; swings a crutch at him*)... You—you numskull!

WESCOTT

I never said that, Miss Walker! Anyway, the manager says he'll absorb the cost of the groceries.

SWOPE

You pea-brained lunk-head, I wouldn't buy your beets if they were the last unpolluted food left on earth. (*Pokes him with a crutch, then turns to leave*) You big oaf! I'll call you later, Ms. Walker. We're going to take him and that store to the cleaners!

SWOPE exits, in a huff. WESCOTT smiles wryly; tries to pass it off with a joke.

WESCOTT

It's about time. I don't have a clean suit to my name.

WALKER

This is no joking matter, Mr. Wescott.

WESCOTT

Call me Barney. Are you going to take her case?

WALKER

I don't know yet.

MARTY

We reserve judgment. Is that good lawyer talk, Aunt Bet?

WALKER

I think you're catching on, Marty.

WESCOTT

I have to explain something. I didn't come here about the canned corn caper.

WALKER

Ms. Swope said they were beets.

MARTY

My teacher, Ms. Kleinfeld, says the customer is always right.

WESCOTT

Corn, beets, what does it matter?

WALKER

So why are you here, Mr. Wescott?

WESCOTT

It's about being reduced to a snicker.

WALKER

What?

WESCOTT

The point is, I got this job as a stock boy just out of high school, but it's Dullsville. Can't stand grocery stores. I'm interested in show business. Fact is, I was a pretty good actor back in high school. Had the lead in *Our Town*—you may have heard of it.

WALKER

Everybody knows *Our Town*.

WESCOTT

I've had a few acting classes since then, but I can't seem to break into TV. But guess what—I stumbled on a real opportunity... Some rich woman started her own business, recording people's voices for sit-com sound tracks. She's created a digital library of comic voices. There's a lot of money in laugh-lines. A really good snicker can make you three hundred bucks a day.

WALKER

That's nothing to sneeze at.

MARTY sneezes

WESCOTT

Then why is he sneezing?

WALKER

Hay fever.

WESCOTT

Allergies? We've got some products at Everly's—

WALKER

Never mind that. What were you saying?

WESCOTT

Some time ago I saw an ad for a chuckle, so I went to this lady's laugh track agency and auditioned.

WALKER

Just a minute. You're saying this recording company advertises for particular types of voices to create their sound tracks?

WESCOTT

You bet. They already had enough guffaws and belly-laughs, and they had twenty girls doing giggles. Twenty five people doing snickers. But what they really needed was another good chuckle.

WALKER

So you auditioned.

WESCOTT

I practiced my chuckle for two hours watching the Comedy Show on TV. Then I just walked in there and auditioned. Got the job, too. That was fine until one day I took the boss's daughter to lunch and a movie.

WALKER

Who is the boss?

WESCOTT

The studio's owned by a pompous, overbearing woman, but her daughter is very nice—and cute! Well, when the mother found out I'd dated her daughter she was blazing mad. Why would she dislike me? (*Beat*) Maybe because I ride a Harley and she happened to see Tracy on the back of it?

MARTY

Tracy?

WESCOTT

Did I say she's really—cute?

WALKER

You did, yes.

WESCOTT

That's the daughter, Tracy. About sixteen and very—nice.

*MARTY and Ms. WALKER exchange
knowing looks and together say...
"Hmmm!"*

WESCOTT

The old battle-axe called me into her office the next day and demoted me.

WALKER

Really!

WESCOTT

She stopped me right in the middle of a chuckle—I have a terrific chuckle!— (*HE chuckles*) —*and* said that my presence was no longer required. I argued with her and then she reluctantly relented—sort of. She reduced me to second snicker, with a pay cut to boot. That's a bummer. Sometimes you don't even hear the second snicker when you're watching a sitcom, the guffaws drown it out. Don't you think that's cause for legal action, Ms. Warren?

WALKER

Any legal action might get you fired.

WESCOTT

You're a clever attorney. I'll take my chances. (*Looking off*) Uh-oh!

MRS. GOODLADY enters, with TRACY trailing.

GOODLADY

I thought I left my umbrella here.

MRS. GOODLADY picks up her umbrella and notices WESCOTT, disapprovingly.

GOODLADY, *Cont.*

Mr. Wescott, I believe!

WESCOTT

Mrs. Goodlady! (*Consults his watch*) Oh, I think I'm over-parked. (*Turns to leave, does a double-take when he sees Tracy*) Tracy!

TRACY

(*Excited*) Barney!

WESCOTT

(*Elated*) Tracy, I—

GOODLADY

(*Sternly*) You were about to leave...?

WESCOTT

Yes... On the other hand... (*To Ms. WALKER*) Did I say she was cute?

WALKER

You did, yes.

GOODLADY

There is no other hand, Mr. Wescott.

MRS. GOODLADY picks up her umbrella, begins to advance on WESCOTT, when MR. HOFFA enters.

HOFFA

What's happening?

They freeze, momentarily. Then WESCOTT recognizes HOFFA.

WESCOTT

Coach Hoffa! Good to see you again. *(They shake hands)* Barney Wescott. Remember when I was in your school and tried out for baseball. You said I was too big to play shortstop!

GOODLADY

He said Tracy was too small to play basketball!

HOFFA

Yes. Ah—basketball is a different game and—

GOODLADY

Different! They're both played with balls, aren't they?

TRACY

Oh, Mother!

TRACY eyes WESCOTT who smiles warmly. THEY gaze at each other; then MRS. GOODLADY sputters:

GOODLADY

Tracy! Put your eyeballs back in your head! Mr. Wescott is not a Rob Lowe, for heaven's sake! You silly girl!

WESCOTT

Silly girl? Mrs. Goodlady, it upsets me when you diss your daughter.

GOODLADY

Mr. Wescott, I'll thank you to stay out of this!

TRACY

Mother, Barney didn't mean to offend—

GOODLADY

And you stifle yourself, girl!

WALKER

(*Flustered*) Mrs. Goodlady, please! Barney, this is not getting us anywhere. I...I—

*MS WALKER spots MR. WELLESBY,
entering.*

WELLESBY

(*Imperiously*) Ms. Warren, will you take my case? And why is my good-for-nothing son back here?

HOFFA

I'm—ah—trying to be good for something!

WELLESBY

That's an impossible agenda!

HOFFA

I'm not afraid of you anymore.

WELLESBY

You're afraid of your own shadow. (*To WALKER*) I can see that you've made no progress on my case, Ms. Walker—despite the damage to my public image caused by that crazy dancer... (*Enter Ms. SWOPE*) ...Ms. Swope! But I have a pressing appointment...

*WELLESBY does a military salute with his
cane and turns to leave.*

SWOPE

Stop right there, you big tub of lard! (*Swinging a crutch*) What are you doing here anyway?

WELLESBY

Stop swinging that thing, you make me nervous!

SWOPE

I asked you a question!

WALKER

He wants to sue you, Ms. Swope...

MARTY

...for exposing his bald head on his news show.

SWOPE

Sue me? That stuffed shirt *insulted* me! He quoted some critic who said I was flabby and out of shape...and my dancing was languid and listless—oh, never mind. Ms. Walker, are you going to take my case against Barney Wescott and Everly's Grocery Store?

WALKER

Well, there are complications. Mr. Wescott is suing Mrs. Goodlady to get his old job back.

WESCOTT snickers, drawing a cold stare from MRS. GOODLADY.

MARTY

He's been knocked down to a snicker. He has a terrific chuckle.

WESCOTT chuckles, drawing another frown from GOODLADY.

WALKER

Miss Swope is suing Mr. Wescott, and Mr. Wescott is suing Mrs. Goodlady. Mrs. Goodlady wants to sue Coach Hoffa, and Coach Hoffa is suing his father, Mr. Wellesby.

WELLESBY

(Astonished) What, what?

WALKER

For malpractice of parenting.

WELLESBY

That whimpering whippersnapper!

WALKER

And Mr. Wellesby is suing you, Ms. Swope.

MARTY

How cool is this? It's a legal merry-go-round!

WESCOTT

Personally, I think that Tracy's got the best case! How many vote for Tracy?

Uncertainly, a few put up their hands. MRS. GOODLADY is increasingly upset.

WALKER

We're not taking a vote, Mr. Wescott. I make the decision as to which case here, if any, has merit.

Brandishing her umbrella, MRS. GOODLADY confronts WESCOTT.

GOODLADY

Mr. Wescott, you are attracted to my daughter and I don't like it. You may be a *sue-er* but you are not a *suitor* for Tracy and never will be. And if you think I'm going to restore your position you've got another groan coming. I'll file for bankruptcy before you defile another laugh track with your inane chuckle!

WESCOTT

Inane, is it? Well, you're insane!

GOODLADY

Insane, you say? Look, I demoted you for good reason and you can't take it. You're a coward, Wescott.

TRACY

Oh, mother!

GOODLADY

Don't "Oh Mother" me! (*To WESCOTT*) Life's a series of setbacks so get used to it. Those who succeed in this world get up off the mat and try something else. Too bad we don't make sob tracks, you'd be a superior sniveler!

TRACY

Mother, you're horrid! (*Hugs WESCOTT*) Barney, she doesn't mean what she says!

GOODLADY

I certainly do! (*Brandishing her umbrella*) Stand aside, girl!

TRACY

You're just a big bully! I think Barney's very nice and you've no right to treat him so badly, just because he rides a Harley with goggles and a leather jacket.

MARTY

The Harley wears goggles?

WALKER

And a leather jacket.

TRACY

Barney works hard and moonlights at your studio to make extra money and he sings in the village chorus

GOODLADY

Bass or tenor?

WESCOTT

I'm a natural bass, Mrs. Goodlady but...

GOODLADY

I never met a bass I really liked...

WESCOTT

I've been singing baritone lately.

GOODLADY

Well then, you *might* amount to something. Maybe I've misjudged you.

SWOPE

As for misjudging people, Mr. Wellesby, you're very good at that yourself. And if you're suing me I'm going to counter-sue!

HOFFA

Take a number, Ms. Swope. My lawsuit precedes yours!

WELLESBY

Don't be stupid, boy. Whoever heard of malpractice of parenting? That's not going to work for you, Wilbur. As for you, Ms. Swope—a counter-suit? You haven't got a leg to stand on!

MS. SWOPE hops about on one crutch and waves the other at WELLESBY.

SWOPE

Oh, that's mean, you big so-and-so! That's really *mean*. But I have to blame Wescott for the broken ankle. He can't keep the aisles cleared! Both of you are absolutely *despicable*!

Among the GROUP there is a general hubbub: ALL ad-lib insults, shout and shove each other....SWOPE uses her crutch in fencing off WELLESBY'S cane, and HE defends his flank from MRS. GOODLADY'S umbrella, etc....Only WESCOTT and TRACY stay out of the fray, doing their own thing—the OTHERS mill about. When everything's at fever pitch MS. WALKER pulls out a whistle from a chain around her neck and blows as SHE hops up on a chair – or MARTY helps her on to her desk – and tries to command attention with a mock-German accent.

WALKER

TEN-HUT! I say, tennnn-Hut!

THEY all freeze.

MARTY

Aunt Bet—where'd you get the whistle?

WALKER

I use it a lot in divorce proceedings.

SHE blows the whistle twice more.

WALKER

Stop this quarreling! All of you—stop this nonsense! This is not World War II! Calm down; this is a respectable office. How can I attract clients with you all here bellowing and screaming? Settle down!

SWOPE

Ms. Walker—

WALKER

Settle down, I say!

SWOPE

We're settled, Counselor.

WELLESBY

I declare a cease-fire!

WESCOTT

We'll try to be good from now on.

GOODLADY

But we have a right to be here, Ms. Walker. We are your clients!

*MS. WALKER stares at them,
contemplating the situation. Then SHE
drops down.*

WALKER

Oh no, you're not! I haven't agreed to take your cases! (*OTHERS Ad-lib negative responses*)
One thing is very clear: I have several conflicts of interests!

MARTY

What's that, Aunt Bet?

WALKER

It's a dilemma. Your cases are chained together. I cannot act as one person's attorney and at the same time take that plaintiff as the defendant in another suit. And with all the counter-suits—it becomes totally impossible.

SWOPE

So we need additional counsel.

WELLESBY

Can you recommend another attorney?

GOODLADY

Or maybe ten of them?

This is Not the End of the Play
Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes

PRODUCTION NOTES

*The framed placard, 'ABSENT LAW, CHAOS,' could be attached on the end of the bookcase facing the audience. Initially it would be mounted near the top, then perhaps drop to the bottom on a wire or metal guide at the end of the play, hitting the floor when it falls but remaining readable (even if the glass cracks). This option, at least, could work with a box set.

If the play is performed “on the road” (i.e., at a Play Festival) with free-standing furniture and no walls, it may be difficult or impossible to work the trick. The framed placard may still be mounted, however.

The director should encourage student actors to exaggerate their roles and stage business in order to make this play a true farce. The students may invent business and test out funnier or more current lines during rehearsal to expand the humor. Theatre games may be helpful in magnifying key moments and raising the energy level of the cast.

The play should run rather fast, with students picking up their cues quickly; which of course, will make the few “pregnant pauses” even more pregnant.