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Dramatic Publishing

A Musical in One Act for Bad Children

The Bad Children

Book and Lyrics by Shirley Jackson

Music by Allan Jay Friedman



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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(THE BAD CHILDREN)

The Bad Children

A Play in One Act

FOR SEVEN CHILDREN, EXTRAS IF DESIRED

CHARACTERS

THE WITCH

THE ENCHANTER

HANSEL

GRETEL

MOTHER

FATHER

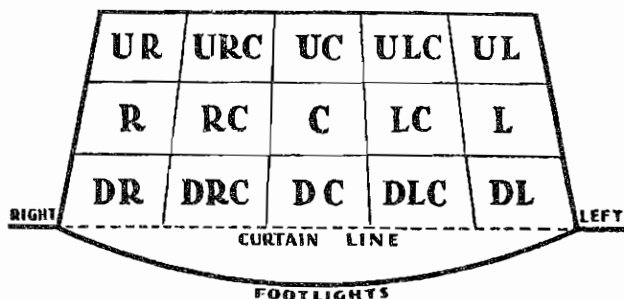
RABBIT

FOREST ANIMALS, *if desired*

PLACE: *A clearing in a forest.*

TIME: *Early morning, the twenty-seventh consecutive day of rain.*

CHART OF STAGE POSITIONS



STAGE POSITIONS

Upstage means away from the footlights, *downstage* means toward the footlights, and *right* and *left* are used with reference to the actor as he faces the audience. R means *right*, L means *left*, U means *up*, D means *down*, C means *center*, and these abbreviations are used in combination, as: U R for *up right*, R C for *right center*, D L C for *down left center*, etc. One will note that a position designated on the stage refers to a general territory, rather than to a given point.

NOTE: Before starting rehearsals, chalk off your stage or rehearsal space as indicated above in the *Chart of Stage Positions*. Then teach your actors the meanings and positions of these fundamental terms of stage movement by having them walk from one position to another until they are familiar with them. The use of these abbreviated terms in directing the play saves time, speeds up rehearsals, and reduces the amount of explanation the director has to give to his actors.

PROPERTIES

GENERAL: Witch's house, hollow tree, bench and long cloth, pebbles on ground, breakfast tray and quarter pound of butter (wrapped) beyond Witch's house, lunch tray, jar of mustard, kettle with lid and magic ingredients behind hollow tree, box of birdseed off D R.

MOTHER: Bundle of wood slung over her back.

FATHER: Bundle of wood slung over his back.

WITCH: Wand.

RABBIT: Straw hat and suitcase.

PRODUCTION NOTES

The music for the songs in the play should be appropriate nursery rhyme tunes, or folk or well-known children's songs. A single piano will provide sufficient accompaniment. If desired, in order to simplify production, the songs may be "talked."

At rise of curtain, a second Rabbit, identical to the one that appears in the play, should be concealed under the long cloth that covers the bench at C stage. Just prior to the first entrance of Mother and Father, and after the Witch and the Enchanter hide behind the gingerbread house, the concealed Rabbit leaps from beneath the bench and hurries out D R. This Rabbit supposedly is the same one who was turned to butter by the Witch and served with the breakfast tray.

For added effect, a flashbulb can be used along with the flashes of light whenever the Witch changes the Rabbit to butter, birdseed, etc.

Nothing adds more to the polish of a production than the quick picking up of cues. Unless there is a definite reason for a pause, train your actors to come in with their speeches "on the heels," so to speak, of the preceding speeches. When a production lags, audience interest likewise will lag.

It is always advisable during the last week of rehearsals to hold one or more sessions during which the actors merely sit around in a circle and go through lines only, with the express purpose of snapping up cues.

The Bad Children

SCENE: *A clearing in a forest. There is a gingerbread-and-candy house U R, where the WITCH lives. A hollow tree, the home of the ENCHANTER, is U L. At C stage is a bench, covered with a long cloth reaching to the ground. This bench is used variously during the course of the play as a table, a seat, or an incantation stove. If available, a forest background may be used.*

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: *It is early morning, the twenty-seventh consecutive day of rain, and the atmosphere is somewhat gloomy. The stage is empty. The WITCH comes out of her house, stretching and yawning.*

WITCH. Ah, there's nothing like waking up on a good rainy day in the forest. Makes you glad to be alive. [*Calls.*] Fillybuster? [*Pause; then louder.*] Fiiiiiillybuster?

ENCHANTER [*poking head out of tree, drearily*]. Well? . . . One of these days you're going to wake me up in the middle of the night and I'm going to—

WITCH. It's morning. And I'm inviting you for breakfast.

ENCHANTER [*mollified now*]. What are we having?

WITCH [*coming R C*]. I'm not sure yet; it depends on what they're having up at the castle, because I thought that rather than bother to cook anything myself I'd just enchant their breakfast down here. Wait a minute. [*Thinks, her hand to her forehead.*] I believe it's griddle cakes and maple syrup and sausages and orange juice and coffee—

ENCHANTER. Well, wake me when it gets here. [*Starts to retire to his tree.*]

WITCH. Don't be silly; I'm just waiting for them to put it on the table. [*Waits, thinking again, then goes to her gingerbread house, waves her magic wand around one corner of it, and returns with breakfast on a tray, which she sets on bench.*] Twenty-seven days of steady rain can certainly give

you an appetite. [*Lifts dish cover.*] It was bacon, not sausages. And there's plenty of coffee.

ENCHANTER [*who has approached bench eagerly*]. I like the castle coffee better than the stuff they serve over at the Duke's palace. Somehow there's more flavor to the castle coffee.

WITCH. The last time I enchanted their breakfast away, they sent a dragon after me. [*With tray in center of bench, WITCH sits right and ENCHANTER sits left of tray. They start to eat.*]

ENCHANTER. What happened?

WITCH [*nodding toward gingerbread house*]. He's inside. I turned him into a violin but I never could learn to play him, so I hung him on the wall. I'll show him to you some day.

ENCHANTER. There's no butter.

WITCH [*annoyed*]. That *always* happens when I take the castle breakfast. Somehow there's something every time that careless kitchenmaid manages to forget when she sets the table. I've got a good mind to complain.

ENCHANTER [*turning away, arms folded*]. Well, I *won't* eat griddle cakes without butter.

[*A RABBIT has entered D I.*]

WITCH. All right, all right. Just a minute. [*Sees RABBIT.*] Hey, you—rabbit?

RABBIT [*pausing D L C*]. Yes?

WITCH [*rising, moving R C*]. Come over here, will you? I want you to do me a favor.

RABBIT [*suspiciously*]. So?

WITCH. Come on *over* here a minute. [*RABBIT moves slowly toward WITCH, who leads him into shadows back of her house.*] We need a quarter pound of butter for our griddle cakes—

RABBIT [*going reluctantly*]. So who has a quarter pound of butter?

WITCH. This doesn't hurt. And I promise I'll turn you right

back after breakfast. [*Flash of light in shadows behind house; WITCH comes back with square of wrapped butter.*] There. I hate to be always jumping up from the table to get things they forgot. [*Sits on bench. Mollified, ENCHANTER begins to eat again.*]

ENCHANTER. You just don't know the tricks of the trade.

Now I get most of my meals from the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York. They know how to set a table *there*.

WITCH. But with daylight saving you have to wait so long for the dining room to open. No, I like my way best.

ENCHANTER. Listen, you want to take my advice. I was enchanting when you weren't even *born*. You just don't *understand* this magic business.

WITCH. I do so. I am, if you please, the most modern kind of witch you can get. It used to be that they had witches who just got into the work by accident—nothing else they could find to do, or they got tired of being nice to people, or something. These days that's all been changed. *Now* you've got to study, go to college, take special courses. Why, if I even *began* to tell you the things I had to take in college just to get to be a little old forest witch you'd be amazed. You'd be *amazed*, I can tell you—things you probably never even *heard* of, I had to take. [*Starts to sing "Witch's Song." On second verse she rises and moves R C, where she continues song. See production notes.*]

WITCH'S SONG

WITCH.

I know all kinds of things beginning with Z,
And beginning with A and beginning with P;
I know how to spell dinosaur, cabbage, and g-nu,
And how to spell Miss-iss-iss-iss-ippi, too.

I know how to turn evil omens to good,
And how to make plastic things out of plain wood,
And how to tame gorgons and scramble roc's eggs,
And how to make monsters with ninety-nine legs.

pull off just one good old-style cattle-rot with nothing but chemicals.

WITCH. Why, I can magic rings around *you*, you old fool!

ENCHANTER. You couldn't magic rings around a mushroom.

Amateur stuff—you learned it in *school*.

WITCH [*rising, leaning toward him*]. Would you like to see me turn you right now into a muffin tin?

ENCHANTER [*rising, leaning toward her*]. You just try it and you'll find yourself turned into a little teensy hoppy toad.

WITCH. I'll change you into a guitar and play rock and roll on you.

ENCHANTER. I'll change you into a comic book and tear out all your pages.

WITCH [*as they lean closer and closer to each other, until their faces almost touch*]. I'll change you into a radio and run you all day long.

ENCHANTER. I'll change you into a comb and break out all your teeth.

WITCH. I'll change you into a vitamin pill and swallow you whole.

ENCHANTER. I'll change you into a kite and fly you into a tree.

VOICE [*under bench, supposedly from butter*]. Isn't there anyone around here who can change me back into a rabbit?

WITCH. Shh! Someone's coming. [*Picks up tray. WITCH and ENCHANTER hide behind gingerbread house, threatening one another with gestures. RABBIT leaps from beneath bench and hurries out D R.*]

[*FATHER enters L, followed by MOTHER. FATHER and MOTHER come in front of bench and sing their duet.*]

FATHER-MOTHER DUET

FATHER.

I walked the floor at three A.M.
In spite of my fatigue;
I had no doubts about joining Boy Scouts
And I ran the Little League.

I paid the dough for the Junior Prom,
 Bought padlocks for the bikes;
 I learned to say "Parley-vous Francais"
 And I went on all-night hikes.

Oh, I've been a wonderful father,
 I've done all it said in the books;
 I've been a True Dad, and, man, I've been had——
 Those crooks.

MOTHER.

I saw the Gym Exhibit
 Thirty-seven times;
 I mended the wreck that she made in Home Ec;
 I paid off the March of Dimes.

I bought my Girl Scout cookies;
 I planted the garden she planned;
 I went to the play sponsored by P.T.A.
 And boosted the High School Band.

Oh, I've been a wonderful mother.
 I've read all the columns, and now
 I've done all they said, I'd be better off dead——
 And how.

BOTH.

Oh, we have been wonderful parents,
 With study and practice and hopes (what dopes);
 We've slaved and we've saved, and we have behaved;
 And what are we now, for our time and our prayers
 And our science fairs
 And cleaner airs
 And Papa Bears
 And anxious cares?
 Squares.

MOTHER [*calling toward L*]. Come on, children, we've got
 work to do.

[Now HANSEL and GRETEL come in L, reluctantly. They cross L C.]

GRETEL. Why do we *always* have to work?

HANSEL. Why can't we play all day the way *we* want to?

GRETEL [*stamping her foot*]. I haaaaaate work!

[*The RABBIT has come in D R, pausing there.*]

HANSEL [*suddenly, picking up a rock*]. Watch me throw this rock at that rabbit standing there.

RABBIT. It's too much! It is just simply too *much*! I am getting out of this forest, right now, today, this instant. First, I have to be a quarter pound of butter for a breakfast for a witch, and now an ugly, silly, rude-talking child comes along to throw rocks at me. No! No rabbit needs to put up with this kind of thing—I'm telling you right now; *no rabbit* needs to put up with this kind of thing for one single *instant*. [*Marches across stage to D L and turns.*] I'm going back to my old home in Mr. MacGregor's cabbage patch. I'm telling you all right now—[*Shouting*]—and this is positively my last warning to you—this is one rabbit who isn't going to stand for this kind of treatment for *one more day*. *Do you hear me? One more day.* [*Stomps out D L.*]

FATHER. Children? Hansel, why do you want to hurt the forest animals? Aren't they our friends?

[*The RABBIT suddenly pops in D L again.*]

RABBIT. Friends with that child I am *not*.

HANSEL. I hate animals! [*Threatens RABBIT with rock.*] Get out of here, you silly old rabbit.

RABBIT [*fairly seething*]. Oh, to be a bear! If only for *three minutes*, oooooooh, to be a *bear*, or anything with teeth! [*Rushes out D L in a fit of frustration.*]

FATHER [*moving to children*]. The animals have never hurt you, Hansel. We have been living in the forest for so long that many of the animals have become our friends.

GRETEL [*moving R C*]. Dirty old rabbits!

HANSEL. I wish I could shoot them all! [*MOTHER now joins FATHER.*]

GRETEL. I wish I could go hoooooooooome.

HANSEL [*moving to bench*]. I'm sick of gathering wood in the forest. You always make us work. [*Sits on bench.*]

GRETEL. The *other* kids get to play all day. [*Sits on bench beside HANSEL.*]

MOTHER [*moving behind bench*]. Why, Gretel, you know perfectly well that the other children help their dear, dear mommies and daddies. Remember little Frieda, who bakes almost as well as her mother, and Karl, who helps his father shoe the horses—

HANSEL. Who cares about horses? I wish I had a little foreign sports car.

GRETEL. And who cares about Frieda and Karl? They're no fun—all they do is work; we want to have *fun*.

FATHER [*angrily, raising his voice—and hand*]. Now you two just listen to me—

MOTHER. Gently, dear. Don't lose your temper. Remember, they're only children—*reason* with them.

FATHER [*pacing D L, fuming*]. I'd sooner reason with a plague of locusts—I'd sooner reason with a— All right. [*Calmer now; moves toward bench.*] I'm sorry, my dear little children, but we have to gather our nice wood for today. Unless we all get together and gather our nice, nice wood for today we won't have any nice money, and if we don't have any nice, nice money we won't be able to buy you nice, nice food and—[*Voice rising.*—nice, nice clothes and nice, nice toys and it would serve you—

GRETEL. I *hate* my toys. Everyone else has *much* nicer toys.

HANSEL. You *never* get us *anything* we want.

GRETEL. All we do is come out with you and pick up dirty old pieces of wood, and then when we want some little thing you *always* say no. Like when we wanted to go out on Hallowe'en and burn down people's barns, you wouldn't let us, and went and made us stay home.

HANSEL. Yeah. You never let us do *anything*.

FATHER [*tensely, to MOTHER, trying to control himself*]. I am going to gather wood. It is my job; I am a wood-gatherer. I am going to gather wood. [*Starts R.*] I will not speak another word; I am going to gather my wood. [*Storms out R, almost shouting last words.*]

MOTHER [*hopefully, moving R C*]. Come along, dear children. Maybe we can finish early today and then we can all cook marshmallows over a campfire—

HANSEL [*refusing to budge, arms folded*]. I hate marshmallows.

GRETEL. Who likes marshmallows? [*Starts to wail.*] I want to go hooooome.

HANSEL. Crybaby. [*MOTHER sbrugs hopelessly and wanders out R, after FATHER.*]

GRETEL. I am not a crybaby, you big silly pig!

HANSEL. I am not a big silly pig—you are a crybaby. [*Tune-fully.*]

GRETEL [*starting to pick up tune*]. I am not.

HANSEL. You are so.

GRETEL. I am not.

HANSEL. You are so.

GRETEL. I am not.

HANSEL. You are so.

GRETEL. I am not. [*They fall gradually into musical introduction of "The Echo Song," moving into it naturally from their quarrel; this song is in two parts, one remark following the other, both singing last line, with appropriate gestures.*]

THE ECHO SONG

HANSEL and GRETEL.

You are so . . . I am not;
 You're mean . . . You're mean;
 Nyah to you . . . Nyah to you;
 I won't play with you.
 You're bad . . . You're bad;

You're a pig . . . You're a pig;
Meow . . . Meow;
I won't play with you.

[*The ENCHANTER, upstage with WITCH, is trying desperately to sneak into his hollow tree.*]

WITCH. Shh! [ENCHANTER, *in is haste, falls; there is a great crash; HANSEL and GRETEL look around.*] I hope you broke your magic wand. [ENCHANTER *scrambles to his feet and manages to disappear in his hollow tree.*]

GRETEL. Oh—look! Look at the little house! [*She and HANSEL jump up from bench.*]

WITCH [*to ENCHANTER*]. Any time I want to hide, remind me to take a wizard with me.

GRETEL [*rushing to gingerbread house, followed by HANSEL*]. Hansel, it's gingerbread! [HANSEL and GRETEL *eat greedily, pulling off bricks, vines, window frames, etc.*]

WITCH [*coming to them*]. Now you just wait a minute here, young people. Just what do you think you're doing?

HANSEL. We're eating this little house, stupid.

WITCH. That house happens to be private property, and I'll thank you to leave it alone.

GRETEL. Don't try to tell *us* what to do. You're not *our* boss.

WITCH. That is my house and you had better get away from it, and fast.

HANSEL [*turning to her*]. Say, aren't you a witch?

WITCH [*pleased*]. I am. [*Struts c in front of bench, happy to be recognized.*]

HANSEL [*as he and GRETEL come R C*]. Then aren't you supposed to catch us? And turn us into gingerbread?

WITCH [*shuddering*]. Don't believe everything you hear, son. You just leave my house alone. That gingerbread stuff is all out of date.

GRETEL. You are so an old witch, and you're supposed to catch us and try to turn us into gingerbread but we get away.