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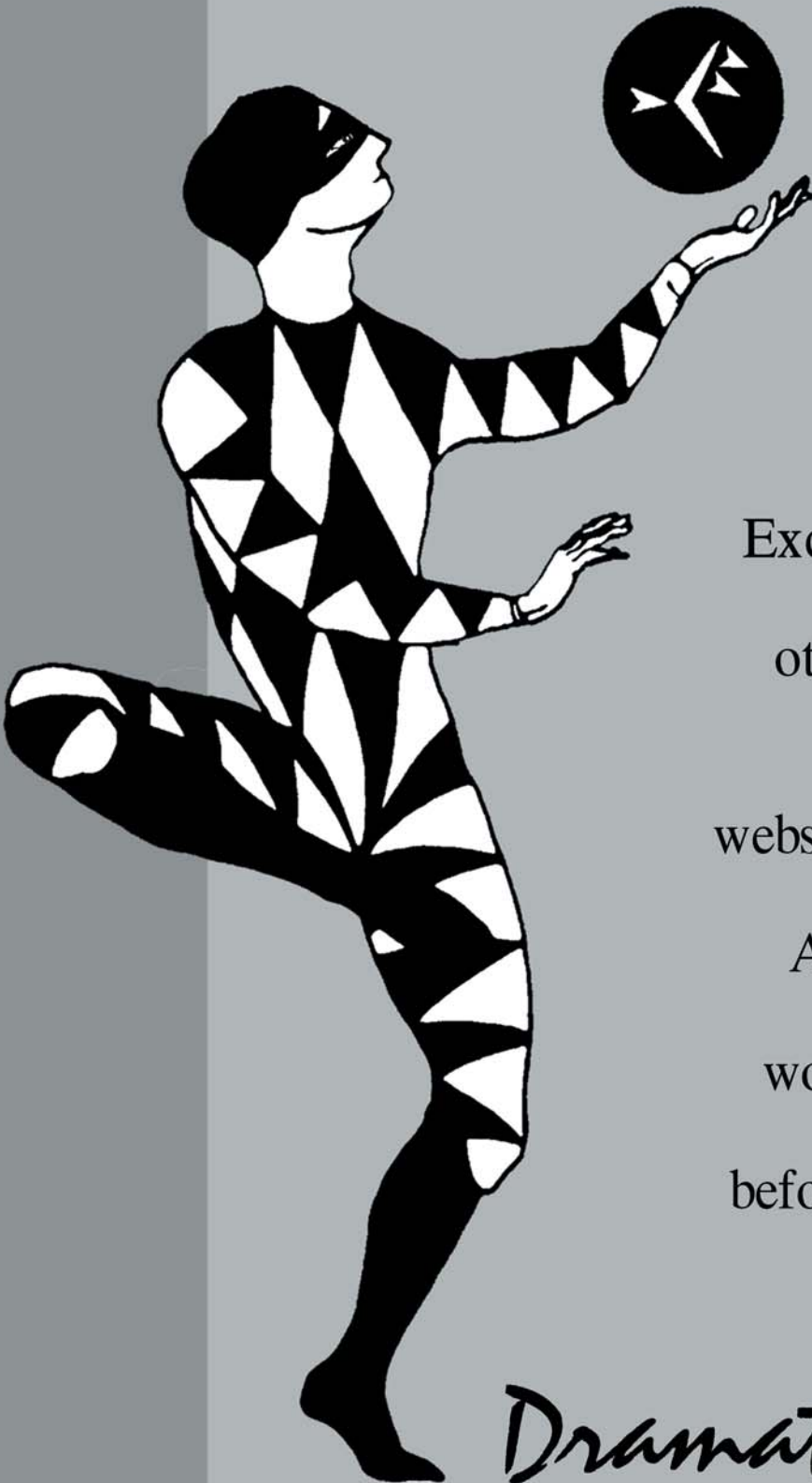
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*Dramatic Publishing*



A One Act Play

# **the kid nobody could handle**

An episode from  
Kurt Vonnegut Jr.'s  
"Welcome to the Monkey House"

By  
Christopher Sergel



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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Based upon The Work  
WELCOME TO THE MONKEY HOUSE  
by KURT VONNEGUT JR.

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(THE KID NOBODY COULD HANDLE)

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THE KID NOBODY COULD HANDLE

*A One-Act Play*

For 4 Men and 3 Women

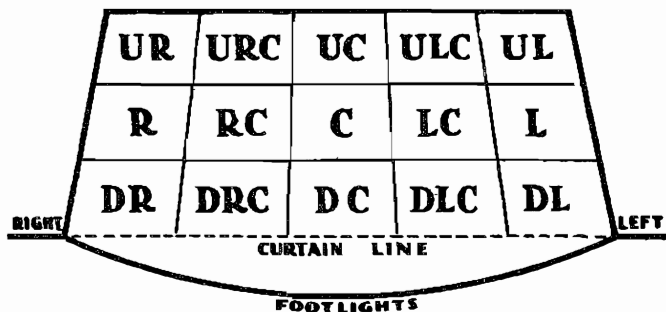
Extras

CHARACTERS

NEWT . . . . .	<i>Observer</i>
MARGIE . . . . .	<i>Waitress</i>
GEORGE HELMHOLTZ . . . . .	<i>High school music teacher</i>
GRACE HELMHOLTZ . . . . .	<i>His wife</i>
BERT QUINN . . . . .	<i>Restaurant owner</i>
JIM DONNINI . . . . .	<i>A problem young man</i>
MRS. CRANE . . . . .	<i>English teacher</i>

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## 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: UR for *up right*, RC for *right center*, DLC for *down left center*, etc. A territory designated on the stage refers to a general area, rather than to a given point.

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**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.

## CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS

**NEWT:** He is a pleasant and observant man who sees below the surface, and in his casual way helps the audience to realize what is actually happening to the others in this play.

**MARGIE:** She is a waitress in a small restaurant, just starting work the first thing in the morning when we see her. Hence she is still a bit unfocused. She should have a waitress uniform of some sort.

**GEORGE HELMHOLTZ:** A high school music teacher, George is convinced that his dream of a perfect high school band is the best dream any man could possibly have. He is a kind and gentle man who wants to be useful, but when driven by events, he finds a surprising strength.

**GRACE HELMHOLTZ:** She doesn't take her husband George too seriously, though she is both pleased and embarrassed by his public affection for her. She is dressed for a trip when we see her.

**BERT QUINN:** He is a lonely, unhappy man who has trouble eating, sleeping, or enjoying himself. (He's well described by Newt early in the play). Late in the play there is a moment when he suddenly has a hope about the boy Jim. While this should not be overplayed, he should take a moment with it, so that with Newt's help, it will register with the audience.

**JIM DONNINI:** This is the "Kid Nobody Could Handle." He's been treated badly by life and his response is to

retreat into blank nothingness, his eyes, as suggested, as expressionless as oysters. His other response is to strike back. His progression from sullen retreat to a first sudden hope for the future is marked and sincere. He should wear clothes that proclaim his rebellion, the most important part of which is a pair of shiny boots, if possible with a jingling chain on them. (NOTE: Since these boots have to be pulled off on stage, they should be large enough to come off easily).

MRS. CRANE: She is an understandably upset and concerned high school English teacher.

## PROPERTIES

GENERAL: Small table with checked tablecloth, two chairs, table and chair, parking meter, locker, small podium, waste basket, musical instrument cases (optional).

MARGIE: Silex full of coffee, tray of food.

GEORGE HELMHOLTZ: Car steering wheel, money, baton, lighted flashlight, trumpet with velvet cover on it.

GRACE: Overnight bag.

JIM: Mop, leather jacket, cigarettes and matches in pocket of leather jacket, bottle containing liquid, trumpet.



## THE KID NOBODY COULD HANDLE

The curtain is rising to reveal a stage with several playing areas.

At R, there's a suggestion of a portion of a quite ordinary small restaurant. All that's required is a small table with a checked cloth and two chairs. If desired, however, this can be elaborated with another table or so and perhaps a section of counter. There should be a parking meter standing in front and to the side of the restaurant area.

At UC and to stage L, there are several chairs arranged as classroom seats, teacher's desk and a locker. A small podium at L, facing front, and any other available props that would suggest a high school music room. A few instrument cases placed besides the locker would be helpful.

A small, humorless man, BERT QUINN, is revealed sitting at the restaurant table toying sourly with some food on the plate before him. If desired, a few extras may be seen crossing downstage, either to R or L, apparently on the sidewalk.

NEWT: (As curtain is rising) It's early morning—some people going to work, some to school. (Indicates R) That's Bert Quinn's restaurant. Bert eats his own food—not because he likes it, but because he saves money that way.

(MARGIE is entering R with a Silex full of coffee)

BERT: (Calling R without looking up) Margie—

MARGIE: (As she's pouring more coffee into his cup) Yes, Mr. Quinn?

BERT: I'd like more—(Realizing) Thank you. Did the Kid finish mopping?

MARGIE: No, sir.

BERT: (Irritated) Tell him—hurry, and then get to school.

MARGIE: (As she's going; casually) I tell him every morning.

NEWT: Bert isn't really a well man. He can't sleep, can't digest his food and can't stop working. He has only two moods: one suspicious, the other arrogant. The first applies when he's losing money, the second when he's making it.

(NEWT steps upstage a few steps and nods L)

Over here is Lincoln High School—that large classroom is for the band—run by George Helmholtz—whose head is always filled with band music.

(GEORGE HELMHOLTZ, holding a car steering wheel as though driving, comes shuffling on L. His wife, GRACE, as though in the seat beside him, shuffles with him)

George is driving his wife to the bus before school this morning, because she's going to spend a few days with relatives. (GEORGE apparently turns the car towards the audience and then apparently stops)

GEORGE: (To his wife) Before you go, I'd like a kiss.

GRACE: (Looking about, embarrassed) I kissed you before we left the house.

GEORGE: I'd like another. (With a sigh, she gives him a brief kiss)

NEWT: (Summing up) Very affectionate fellow.

GRACE: Try to collect from the school for the money you paid to get the music copied.

GEORGE: The minute I get there.

GRACE: (Concerned) I could've fixed breakfast for you.

GEORGE: I'll stop at Bert's restaurant.

GRACE: After he took such advantage of you on that land deal?

GEORGE: What's the difference? (Affectionately) How about another—

GRACE: (Amused, apparently hopping out of car, carrying overnight bag) Back in a few days.

GEORGE: (Calling after her) Phone me tonight.  
(GRACE goes off L while GEORGE apparently continues slowly R in car)

NEWT: (Meanwhile) Each year George dreams the same big dream. He dreams of leading as fine a band as there is on the face of the earth. And, in a sense, each year his dream comes true. It comes true because George is sure that a man couldn't have a better dream. Faced by his unnerving sureness, Kiwanians, Rotarians and Lions pay for band uniforms that cost twice as much as their best suits, school administrators let George raid the budget, and youngsters play their hearts out for him.

(During this, GEORGE has apparently parked the car near the restaurant—don't let the actor be elaborate—by propping the wheel against a standing parking meter)

And when the youngsters don't have any talent, George gets them to play on guts alone.

(Before going into restaurant, GEORGE glances about, sees he's alone, takes a step forward and then raises his arms as though to lead a band)

GEORGE: A-one, a-two, a-three—

(He brings arms down and there's a burst of beautiful band music that he apparently leads for several seconds. He gestures for the end, the sound cuts out—and humming the continuation of whatever music was played, he walks into restaurant)

(NOTE: A rousing Sousa march would be a good choice and the sound cues should be carefully rehearsed)

NEWT: (Smiling) That music was all in George's head. But he cares so much, he makes everyone hear it.

(GEORGE is seating himself at the table with BERT, and the sounds of heavy construction work may begin here, though kept as background)

BERT: (Calling R) Fried eggs, coffee and toast for Mr. Helmholtz.

NEWT: (Wryly, toward sounds) The noise of real life. Waddling, clanking, muddy machines tearing the hill behind the restaurant to pieces, with trucks hauling the pieces away. Those sounds put Bert in his arrogant and boastful mood.

BERT: How many eyes saw that hill back there before I did? Thousands, I'll bet. And not one saw what I saw. (In wonder, chewing on toothpick) How many eyes?

GEORGE: Mine, at least.

BERT: (Amused) Yours.

(MARGIE, the waitress, is bringing tray to GEORGE)

GEORGE: (Pleasantly) All the hill meant to me was a hard climb, some free blackberries, taxes, and a place for band picnics. (To MARGIE) Thank you. (She exits)

BERT: You inherit the hill. and it's nothing but a pain in the neck. So you figure you'll stick me with it.

GEORGE: The price was more than fair.

BERT: (Gleefully) You say that now—now you see the shopping district's got to grow. Now you see what I saw.

(A wiry YOUNG MAN, sullen, withdrawn, wearing jeans and gaudy shiny black boots with a jingling chain on them, is coming on, mopping mechanically)

GEORGE: (As he's eating; not really interested) Yes, but too late. Too late.

BERT: What do I do when I get your hill? (Gestures toward sound) I'm tearing down your hill. And now everybody wants to build a store where the hill was.

GEORGE: Um. (Nodding to boy) Hello. (Without response, the boy keeps mopping)

BERT: We all got something. You got music, I got vision.

NEWT: (Smiling) And it's perfectly clear to Bert which one has the money.

BERT: Think big. That's what vision is. Keep your eyes wider than anybody else's.

GEORGE: (Still regarding the mopper) That boy. I've seen him around school, but I never knew his name.

BERT: (Smiling cheerfully) Billy the Kid. The stormtrooper. Flash Gordon. (Calling) Hey, Jim! Come here a minute.

NEWT: (As the sullen boy is approaching them, the mop dragging after) George is pretty sensitive. What appalled him was to see that the boy's eyes were as expressionless as oysters.

BERT: This is my brother-in-law's kid by another marriage—before he married my sister. His name's Jim Donnini, and he's from the south side of Chicago and he's very tough.

GEORGE: How do you do?

JIM: (Looking past him; empty) Hi.

BERT: He's living with me now. He's my baby now.

GEORGE: You want a lift to school, Jim?

BERT: (As JIM doesn't reply) He won't talk to me, either. But, yeah, he wants a lift to school. (To JIM. Shortly) Go on, kid, wash up and shave. (Robotlike, JIM goes off R, trailing the mop)

GEORGE: (Concerned) Where are his parents?

BERT: His mother's dead. His old man married my sister, walked out on her and stuck her with him. Then the court didn't like the way she was raising him and put him in foster homes for a while. Then they decided to get him clear of Chicago so they stuck me with him. (Shaking his head) Life's a funny thing, Helmholtz.

GEORGE: (Pushing his eggs away) Not very funny, sometimes.

BERT: (Chewing toothpick) Like some whole new race of people coming up. He's nothing like the decent kids we got around here. Did you notice those boots he wears? And he won't talk, won't run around with other kids, won't study. I don't think he can even read or write very good.

GEORGE: Does he like music at all? Or drawing? Does he collect anything?

BERT: You know what he likes—he likes to polish those boots. The only enjoyment he gets is when he's alone, comic books spread around, and polishing those boots. (Remembering) Oh, he had a collection, too. I took it away from him and threw it in the river.

GEORGE: Threw it in the river?

BERT: Yeah. Eight knives—some with blades as long as your hand.

GEORGE: Oh. (Concerned) This is a new problem at some schools, I guess. (Wanting to sort it out) It's kind of a sickness, isn't it? That's the way to look at it, wouldn't you say?

BERT: Yes, sick. (Tapping his chest) And Doctor Bert is just the man to give him what's good for his ailment.



GEORGE: What's that?

BERT: (Hard) For a start—no more talk about poor, little sick boy. That's all he's heard from social workers and the juvenile court.

(JIM, still expressionless, is re-entering R, now wearing a leather jacket)

GEORGE: But actually—

BERT: Actually he's a bum. Well, I'm going to ride his tail till he straightens up and flies right, or winds up in the can for life.

GEORGE: (Nodding toward JIM; warning) Bert—

BERT: (Going right on) One way or the other. (Directly to JIM) Believe it, boy!

GEORGE: I see. (To JIM) I'm parked in front. (Without a response, JIM goes out to stand by the parking meter. GEORGE gets up, putting some money on the table) That right? (BERT nods and GEORGE puts a separate coin by coffee cup. He's depressed) If I knew anything to say to that boy.

BERT: (Picking up money) What's to say? Listen to those bulldozers—really tearing into it.

GEORGE: (Preoccupied) They are—they really are. (As he's going to join JIM, BERT reaches across, picks up the other coin, considers an instant, then goes out R)

BERT: (Holding coin for her) Margie—

(Without talk, GEORGE takes up wheel and he and JIM are apparently driving L. The construction sounds, if used, fade)

NEWT: George tried baseball, football, anything to get a conversation going, but nothing happened. And, of course, he couldn't help trying the most important subject in the world to him.

GEORGE: (Glancing at JIM and clearing his throat) Do you—do you like listening to music? (JIM sighs heavily with boredom) (GEORGE tries again) Ever drum with your fingers or keep time with your feet? (JIM leans his head back, closing his eyes, waiting for GEORGE to give up) (GEORGE tries another approach) Those boots—what's the function of the chains? Are they to jingle? (JIM looks away, but GEORGE presses on) At least you whistle. Even whistling—it can be like picking up the keys to a whole new world.

JIM: (Contemptuously) A new world—

GEORGE: (Eagerly) A world as beautiful as any world can be. (JIM makes a soft Bronx cheer, but GEORGE continues undaunted) There! You've illustrated the basic principle of the family of brass wind instruments. The glorious voice of every one of them starts with a buzz on the lips. (Apparently they've reached a parking place at L, and they're both facing forward)