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Dramatic Publishing



THE HANDICAPPER GENERAL

Based on the short story, "Harrison Bergeron"

by

KURT VONNEGUT JR

Adaptation

by

PAT COOK



Dramatic Publishing

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PAT COOK

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(THE HANDICAPPER GENERAL)

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THE HANDICAPPER GENERAL

A Play in One Act
For Two Men and Five Women

CHARACTERS

GEORGE BERGERON	mid-30s
HAZEL BERGERON	his wife, mid-30s
DIANA MOON GLAMPERS	the Handicapper General
HARRISON BERGERON	...	the Bergerons' 14-year-old son
BALLERINA ONE	}	dancers
BALLERINA TWO		
BALLERINA THREE		

TIME: The year 2081.

PLACE: The Bergerons' living room.

CHARACTER NOTES

GEORGE BERGERON: A somewhat sarcastic man. He wears a heavy bag around his neck.

HAZEL BERGERON: George's rather dim wife. She is very sentimental.

DIANA MOON GLAMPERS: A rather mousy woman with a speech impediment. She has an executive air about her.

HARRISON BERGERON: He is tall, graceful and strong. As a result, he is usually covered with handicapper devices.

BALLERINA ONE: A slim dancer of hidden grace, she is beautiful but wears a mask to hide it. She wears heavy bags around her legs and arms to impede her talent.

BALLERINA TWO: Also slim, but with less talent. She also wears bags on her limbs.

BALLERINA THREE: Rather rotund with very little talent. She doesn't wear any devices.

THE HANDICAPPER GENERAL

(Before the lights come up, a fanfare sounds, followed by underlying music. After the fanfare, music dies out. The lights come up stage L to reveal the living room of GEORGE and HAZEL BERGERON. It consists of two chairs, with a small table between them. HAZEL sits quietly for a brief pause and then bursts out sobbing. GEORGE enters, wearing a large bag around his neck.)

GEORGE. Hazel? *(She doesn't hear him.)* Hazel? It's me, George. *(She still doesn't hear him.)* Your husband. *(HAZEL immediately stops crying and looks up.)*

HAZEL. George? Oh. *(She wipes her eyes.)*

GEORGE *(a bit smug)*. Works every time. You were crying again.

HAZEL. Was I? *(She looks at the wiped tears on her hands.)*
Oh, so I was.

GEORGE. What was it this time?

HAZEL. I...I don't know. I never remember, you know that.

GEORGE. Well, it must've been something pretty bad.

HAZEL. It was a doozy, all right. I guess.

GEORGE. That's why I married you, dear. *(He clumsily sits in the chair, repositioning the bag as he does.)*

HAZEL. Because I cry for no reason?

GEORGE. A lot of women cry for no reason.

HAZEL. And that's why you married me?

GEORGE. Yep. I says to myself, give me a woman who's already average. (*HAZEL looks at him adoringly.*)

HAZEL. Oh, George, that's the sweetest compliment. (*She rises and moves to him.*) Oh, I know you always compliment me. First, you tell me I'm plain. Then you tell me I'm mediocre. (*She hugs him from behind.*) And now I'm average! I could just eat you up! (*She tries to snuggle with him.*)

GEORGE (*sheepishly*). Well, things like that just come to me whenever I can put two thoughts together. (*HAZEL stands and rubs her husband's shoulders.*)

HAZEL. I know it's not easy for you now that you have that mental handicapper radio transmitter installed in your head.

GEORGE. I had to be so smart! (*He leans forward and taps one ear.*)

HAZEL (*moves beside him*). Does it bother you, sweetheart?

GEORGE. I'm not one to complain.

HAZEL (*mocking him mildly*). You? Of course not. You're used to it.

GEORGE. Well, that's the whole point. They've started getting creative.

HAZEL. That's so you won't, I guess.

GEORGE. I spend half my time getting my thoughts scrambled and the other half trying to identify what the noise was they just scrambled my thoughts with.

HAZEL. No, you don't complain.

GEORGE. And then, just when I identify the last noise I heard... You're teasing me, aren't you?

HAZEL (*innocently*). What, dear? Who, dear? Me, dear?

GEORGE (*grabs her*). Oh no, not you! (*He reaches around and tickles her.*) Gitchee-gitchee-goo!

HAZEL. Now, stop it! Stop tickling me right now!

GEORGE (*stops*). What, dear? Who, dear? Me, dear? (*He suddenly winces and holds his ear.*) YaHAAA! (*HAZEL looks at her watch.*)

HAZEL. Right on time. What were you saying, George?

GEORGE (*guesses*). Gitchee-gitchee-goo? Does that sound right?

HAZEL. What noise did you hear that time?

GEORGE. Sounded like a train wreck. Metal crashing, people screaming. (*He rises and jiggles his ear.*) You know, like the one they played at the hoopball game last week when our team was getting ahead.

HAZEL. That sure slowed them up. For a minute there, I thought we were going to get a larger score.

GEORGE. It was exciting, though. Wondering just how both teams would end up in a tie, coming down to the last minute with us ahead and then...CRASH!!!, the train wreck over the Megaspeakers and the other team batted the ball and evened the score. (*He exhales mightily.*) I didn't think we'd make it on time, evening it up the very last second. What a game!

HAZEL (*a bit sad*). I suppose.

GEORGE. Oh, *now* what is it?

HAZEL. What?

GEORGE. You tell me.

HAZEL. Oh! Well, I just wish I had something to handicap. (*She moves away from him.*)

GEORGE. Now, hon, you don't need any devices. I mean, look at me. This thing in my ear and this twenty-seven pound bag I have to wear to slow me down. I guess I think more'n most and got stronger legs, so they issued me this stuff, but I'm doing my duty, just like you're doing yours.

HAZEL. But it's just that...I'm so ordinary and unadorned.

GEORGE. Now, you're bragging.

HAZEL. Am not.

GEORGE (*moves to her*). Hazel, nobody likes to hear how average you are. It hurts their feelings.

HAZEL. I can't help it if I was born simple. It's a curse, I tell you!

GEORGE. And that's why I love you so. Your plainness, your vacuousness, your ability to go unnoticed even when you're alone. You have a graceful clumsiness and an apathetic concentration about you. You have reached the pinnacle in mediocrity.

HAZEL. You're going to make me blush in a minute.

GEORGE. I tell you that if they still allowed contests and they had a Mrs. Ordinary, you'd win hands down. Hey, that's an idea! We could maybe get some of the neighbors together, make a week-end party out of it and then you and some of the others could...(*He winces again and holds his ear.*)

HAZEL. What was it this time?

GEORGE. I think somebody just hit a moose with a sledgehammer.

HAZEL. That's 'cause you wanted to compete in something.

GEORGE. Did not!

HAZEL. You shouldn't get ideas like that, you know. You should be more like me. I get ideas too, but I have a short attention...(*She stares off in the distance.*)

GEORGE. Span?

HAZEL. Hm?

GEORGE. Skip it. (*He repositions the bag and sits again.*)

HAZEL. That bag must get heavy.

GEORGE. Oh, I don't mind it, I'm used to it. I don't notice it anymore. (*He thinks.*) It's just a part of me.

HAZEL (*moves to him*). Maybe if there was just some way we could make a little hole in the bottom of the bag and just take out a few of them lead balls. Just a few.

GEORGE. Uh huh. Two years in prison and a two thousand dollar fine for each ball I took out? I don't call that a bargain.

HAZEL. You could take out just a few when you came home from work. I mean, you don't compete with anybody around here. You just sit around.

GEORGE. You think sitting around is easy, with these ear noises and this bag?

HAZEL. We'd only take out one or two of them.

GEORGE. Now if I did what you said then pretty soon other people would try to get away with it and pretty soon we'd be right back in the dark ages again, with everybody competing with everybody else. You wouldn't like that, now would you?

HAZEL. Like what?

GEORGE. What you said?

HAZEL (*curious*). What'd I just say?

GEORGE. God, I love you!

HAZEL. I hate April.

GEORGE. This is June.

HAZEL. So?

GEORGE. Sorry, I thought there might be some logic to this.

HAZEL. I mean I never got the hang of April. It drives me crazy on accounta' it really isn't springtime. (*She thinks.*) That was the month that they...they came and took Harrison.

GEORGE (*remembering*). It's for the best, dear. I knew when he was born there'd be problems. We were lucky to have him for eight years. He's well taken care of. (*He sees*

HAZEL starting to get misty again.) Uhm...anything on the holovision?

HAZEL. What? Oh, I don't know. *(She picks up a remote control and turns the set on.)*

(Lights come up stage R. Three BALLERINAS are dancing to some slightly off-tempo music. BALLERINA ONE and BALLERINA TWO are average size but are wearing large weights strapped to their arms and legs. BALLERINA THREE is rather large and clumsy. The other two fight to stay with her.)

HAZEL. Oh, look. The National Ballet. *(GEORGE watches for a minute as the trio literally fall into each other and knock each other down.)*

GEORGE. Mm. They're much better than last year. *(He winces and holds his ear.) AHAA! (At the same time, BALLERINA ONE stops and grabs her ear. She then rejoins the dance.)*

HAZEL. What was it this time?

GEORGE. Grand piano off a cliff.

HAZEL. Aren't those dancers good? Especially considering that they have those bags of birdshot strapped around their arms and legs.

GEORGE. But they're all the same, that's the main thing. We don't want nobody tuning in and feeling like something the cat dragged in. So they watch these folks and say "Shoot, I can do that!"

HAZEL *(looks at the set).* I bet they could, too. Oh, sometimes it just gets to me. *(She taps the remote and lights black out stage R. She rises.)*

GEORGE. Now what?

HAZEL. It's that Diana Moon Glampers.