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Infancy

A Comedy in One Act

by Thornton Wilder

A Samuel French Acting Edition



New York Hollywood London Toronto

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CHARACTERS
(In Order of Their Appearance)

OFFICER AVONZINO

MISS MILLIE WILCHICK

TOMMY

MRS. BOKER

MOE

Infancy

Central Park, New York. In the Twenties. One or more large park benches. Some low stools at the edges of the stage in indicate bushes.

Enter PATROLMAN AVONZINO, *a policeman from the Keystone comic movies with a waterfall moustache, thick black eyebrows and a large silver star. Swinging his billy-club jauntily, he shades his eyes and peers down the paths for trouble. Reassured, he extracts a small memorandum book from an inner pocket of his jacket and reads:*

AVONZINO. "Wednesday, April 26 . . ." Right "Centra' Park, Patrol Section Eleven, West, Middle." Right! "Lieutenant T. T. Avonzino." Correct. Like Tomaso Tancredo Avonzino. "Eight to twelve; two to six. Special Orders: Suspect mad dog, black with white spots. Suspect old gentleman, silk hat, pinches nurses." (*Reflects.*) Pinch babies okay; pinch nurses, nuisance. (*Puts the book away, strolls, then takes it out again for further instructions.*) Probable weather: late morning, percipitation—percipitation like rain. (*Strolls.*) Seven to eight-thirty, no nuisances. Millionaires on horses; horses on millionaires. Young gents running in underwear; old gents running in underwear. (*Reflects.*) Running in underwear, okay; *walking* in underwear, nuisance. Eight-thirty to nine-thirty, everybody late for working, rush-rush, no time for nuisances. Nine-thirty to twelve: babies. One thousand babies with ladies. Nuisances plenty: old gents poisoning pigeons; ladies stealing baby carriages. Nuisances in bushes: young gents and young girls taking liberties. (*Hotly.*) Why can't they do their nuisances at home?

That's what homes are for: to do your nuisances in. (*He shields his eyes and peers toward the actors' entrance at the back of the Stage; emotionally.*) Here she comes! Miss'a Wilchick! *Baby!*—prize baby of Centra' Park. (*He extracts a handbook from another pocket of his jacket.*) "Policeman's Guide. Lesson Six: Heart Attacks and Convulsions." No. No. "Lesson Sixteen: Frostbite." No! "Lesson Eleven:" . . . Ha! "An officer exchanges no personal remarks wid de public." Crazy! (*In dreamy ecstasy.*) Oh, personal re-marks. It's personal remarks dat make-a de world go round; dat make-a de birds sing. (*Indignantly.*) Nobody, *nobody* wid flesh and blood can live widout'a personal re-marks. Ha! She comes . . . ! (*He steals off by the aisle through the audience.*)

(*Enter from the back* MISS MILLIE WILCHICK, *pushing* TOMMY's *baby carriage.* TOMMY, *now invisible in the carriage, is to be played by a full-grown man.* MILLIE *brings the carriage to rest by a bench. She peers up the various paths in search of* OFFICER AVONZINO. *Disappointed, she prepares to make herself comfortable. From the foot of the carriage she brings out a box of chocolates, another of marshmallows and a novel. Before sitting down she talks into the carriage.*)

MILLIE. . . . lil sweet lovums. Miss Millie's lil lover, aren't you? Yes, you are. I could squeeze lil Tommy to death, yes. I could. Kiss-kiss-kiss, yes, I could. (*Again peering down the paths.*) Don't know where Mr. Policerman is! Big handsome Officer Avonzino. He take care of Miss Millie and lil lover-boy Tommy . . . Hm . . . Maybe he come by and by. (*She sits on the bench and selects a candy.*) . . . Peppermint . . . strawb'ry? . . . Well, and a marshmallow. (*She opens the novel at the first page and reads with great deliberation.*) "Doris was not strictly beautiful, but when she passed men's heads turned to gaze at her with pleasure." Doris was not strictly

beautiful, but . . ." (*A squeal of joy.*) Oh, they don't write like that any more!! Oh, I'm going to enjoy this book. Let's see how it ends. First, there must be one of those chawclut cream centers. (*She turns to the last page of the novel.*) "He drew her to him, pressing his lips on hers. 'Forever,' he said. Doris closed her eyes. 'Forever,' she said. The end." (*Delighted cry.*) They *don't* write like that any more. "For e . . . e . . . ever." Could I say 'forever,' if his lips . . . 'e-e-v' . . . were pressed on mine? (*She closes her eyes and experiments.*) . . . e . . . ver . . . for . . . e . . . Yes, I guess it could be done. (*She starts dreaming.*) Oh, I *know* I could write a novel. (*She dreams.*)

(*Slowly* TOMMY'S *hands can be seen gripping the side of his carriage. With great effort he pulls himself up until his head appears. He is wearing a lace-trimmed cap.*)

TOMMY. Fur . . . evvah . . . Do-rus . . . nah . . . strigly boo-toody . . . (*Fretfully.*) I can't say it . . . boody-fill . . . Why don't they *teach* me to say it? I want to LEARN and they won't teach me. Do-rua nah stackly . . . boody . . . Fur evvah . . . (*Near to wailing.*) Time's going by. I'm getting owe-uld. And nobody is showing me *anything.* I wanta make a house. I wanta make a house. I wanta make a bay-beee. Nobody show-ow-ow-s me how-ta.

MILLIE. (*Waking up.*) Tommy! What are you crying about? Has 'a got a little stummyache? Has 'a got a foot caught? No. (*Leaning over him, suddenly servere.*) Has Tommy wet his bed?!! No. No. Then's what's a matter?

TOMMY. Wanta make a house!

MILLIE. Wants to be petted, yes.

TOMMY. (*Violently.*) Wanta make a baybeee!

MILLIE. Miss Millie's lil lover wants a little attention.

TOMMY. (*Fortissimo.*) Chawclut. Chawclut. Wanta eat what you're eating. Wanta eat what you smell of . . . chawclut.

MILLIE. Now don't you climb up. You'll fall out. It's terrible the way you're growing.

TOMMY. Put me on the ground. I wanta learn to walk. I wanta walk. I wanta walk. I wanta find things to *eat.*

MILLIE. (*Sternly.*) Now Miss Millie's going to spank you. Crying for nothing. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. (*She stands joggling the baby carriage with one hand and holding the opened novel with the other.*) "This little pig went to *mar-ket.*" There! "This little pig . . ." Sh-sh-sh! "Doris was not strictly beautiful, but . . ." Oh, I read that. "This little pig stayed at home." (*She looks into the carriage with great relief.*) God be praised in his glory, babies get tired soon . . . Asleep. (*She walks across the Stage; then suddenly stops.*) I don't know what I'm going to do. My life is hell. Here I am, a good looking girl almost thirty and *nothing ever happens.* Everybody's living, except me. Everybody's happy, except ME!! (*She returns, sobbing blindly to the baby carriage.*) Those silly novels—I hate them—just gab-gab-gab. Now I'm crying so I can't see which is pineapple. (*She chances to look in the direction of the aisle through the audience.*) Oh, my God, there comes Officer Avonzino. (*She clasps her hands in fervent prayer.*) Oh, my God, help a girl! If you ever helped a girl, help her now! (*She rapidly hides novel and candy under* TOMMY'S *blankets, and takes out another book. She arranges herself at one end of the bench and pretends to fall into a reverie.*)

(*Enter* PATROLMAN AVONZINO *through the audience. He steals behind her and puts his hands over her eyes. The following passage is very rapid.*)

AVONZINO. You've got one guessing coming to you! *Who* is in Centra' Park? Maybe who?

MILLIE. Oh, I don't know. I really don't.

AVONZINO. You've got two guessings. Maybe the Mayor of Newa-York, maybe him, you think? Now you got one guessing. Maybe T. T. Avonzino—like somebody you know, somebody you seen before.

MILLIE. Oh! Officer Avonzino!!

(*He leaps on the bench beside her. She is kept busy removing his hands from her knees.*)

AVONZINO. Somebody you know. Somebody you seen before.

MILLIE. Officer, you must behave. You really must behave.

AVONZINO. Action! I believe is a action! Personal remarks and da action.

(TOMMY *has raised himself and is staring enormous-eyed and with great disapproval at these goings-on.*)

TOMMY. (*Loudly.*) Ya! Ya! Ya! Ya! Ya!

(OFFICER AVONZINO *is thunderstruck. He jumps up as though caught out of order by his superior. He stands behind the bench adjusting his tie and coat and star.*)

MILLIE. Why, what's the matter, Mr. Avonzino?

AVONZINO. (*Low and terse.*) *Him.* Looka at him. Looka at him, *looking.*

TOMMY. Ya. Ya. Ya.

MILLIE. Go to sleep, Tommy. Just nice policerman. Tommy's friend. Go to sleep.

TOMMY. (*One last warning, emphatically.*) Ya! (*He disappears.*)

MILLIE. But, Officer, he's just a *baby.* He doesn't understand one little thing.

AVONZINO. (*Blazing, but under his breath.*) Oh no, oh no, ho no, oh no—he got *thoughts.* Turn-a de carriage around. I no wanta see that face.

MILLIE. (*Turning the carriage.*) I'm surprised at you. He's just a dear little baby. A dear little . . . animal.

AVONZINO. Miss Wilchick, I see one thousand babies a day. They got *ideas.*

MILLIE. (*Laughing girlishly.*) Why, Mr. Avonzino, you're like the author of this book I've been reading. —Dr. Kennick. He says babies are regular geniuses in their first fourteen months. He says: you know why babies sleep all the time? Because they're learning all the time, they get tired by learning. Geniuses, he says, imagine!

AVONZINO. *What* he say?

MILLIE. They learn more than they'll ever learn again. And faster. Like hands and feet; and to focus your eyes. And like walking and talking. He says their brains are exploding with power.

AVONZINO. What he say?

MILLIE. Well,—after about a year they stop being geniuses. Dr. Kennick says the reason why we aren't geniuses is that we weren't brought up right: we were stopped.

AVONZINO. That's a right. He gotta the right idea. Miss Wilchick, I see one thousand babies a day. And what I say is: stop 'em. That's your business, Miss Wilchick; that's my business. There's too many ingeniouses in Centra' Park right now: stop 'em. (TOMMY *begins to howl.* AVONZINO *points at him with his billy-club.*) What did I tell you? They all understand English. North'a Eighth Street they all understand English.

MILLIE. (*Leaning over* TOMMY'S *carriage.*) There, there. Nice policerman don't mean *one* word of it.

AVONZINO. (*Looking at the actors' entrance; they are both shouting to be heard.*) Here comes another brains. I go now.

MILLIE. Oh, that must be Mrs. Boker—I'm so sorry this happened, Mr. Avonzino.

AVONZINO. I see you later, maybe—when you get permission from the professor—permission in writing, Miss Wilchick. (*He goes out through the audience.*)

(*Enter* MRS. BOKER *pushing* MOE'S *carriage.* MOE *starts crying in sympathy with* TOMMY. *Both* WOMEN *shout.*)

MRS. BOKER. What's the matter with Tommy, good morning, on such a fine day?

MILLIE. (*Leaning over* TOMMY.) What's a matter?

TOMMY. CHAWCLUT!! STRAWBRY!! I'm hungreee.

MILLIE. Really, I don't know what ails the child.

MRS. BOKER. (*Leaning over* MOE'S *carriage; beginning loud but gradually lowering her voice as both babies cease howling.*) . . . K . . . L . . . M . . . N . . . O . . . P . . . Q . . . R . . . S . . . T . . . Have you ever noticed, Miss Wilchick, that babies get quiet when you say the alphabet to them? . . . W . . . X . . . Y . . . A . . . B . . . C . . . D . . . I don't understand it. Moe is mad about the alphabet. Same way with the multiplication table. (*To* MOE, *who is now silent.*) Three times five are fifteen. Three times six are eighteen. When my husband has to keep Moe quiet: the multiplication table! Never fails! My husband calls him Isaac Newton.—Seven times five are thirty-five. Eight times five are forty. Never fails.

MILLIE. (*Intimidated.*) Really?

MRS. BOKER. (*Pointing to the silent carriages.*) Well, look for yourself! Isn't silence grand? (*She sits on a bench and starts taking food out of* MOE'S *carriage.*) Now, dear, have some potato chips. Or pretzels. What do you like?

MILLIE. Well, you have some of my marshmallows and candy.

MRS. BOKER. Marshmallows! Oh, I know I shouldn't!—Have you noticed that being around babies makes you think of eating all the time. I don't know why that is. (*Pushing* MILLIE *in raucous enjoyment of the joke.*) Like, being with babies makes us like babies. And you know what *they* think about!!

MILLIE. (*Convulsed.*) Oh, Mrs. Boker, what will you say next!—How is Moe, Mrs. Boker?

MRS. BOKER. (*Her mouth full.*) How *is* he!! Sometimes I wish he'd be sick for *one* day—just to give me a present. (*Lowering her voice.*) I don't have to tell you what life with a baby is: (*Looking around circumspectly.*) It's *war —one long war.*—Excuse me, I can't talk while he's

listening. (*She rises and wheels* MOE'S *carriage to a distance; returning, she continues in a lowered voice.*) My husband believes that Moe understands every word we say.

MILLIE. Mrs. Boker!

MRS. BOKER. I don't know what to believe, but one think I do know: that baby lies on the floor and listens to every word we say. At first my husband took to spelling out words—you know—but Albert Einstein, there—in two weeks he got them all. He would *look* at my husband, *look* at him with those big eyes! And then my husband took to talking in Yiddish—see what I mean?—but no! In two weeks Albert Einstein got Yiddish.

MILLIE. But, Mrs. Boker!! It's just a baby! He don't understand *one word.*

MRS. BOKER. *You* know that. *I* know that. But—(*Pointing to the carriage.*) does *he* know that? It's driving my husband crazy. "Turn it in and get a dog," he says. "I didn't ask for no prodigy," he says, "All I wanted was a baby—" (*Lowering her voice.*) Of course, most of the time my husband worships Moe . . . only . . . only we don't know what to do with him, as you might say.

MILLIE. Oh, you imagine it, Mrs. Boker!

MRS. BOKER. Listen to me!—Have some of these pretzels; they'll be good after those sweets. Listen to me, Junior's at the crawling stage. He does fifty miles a day. My husband calls him Christopher Columbus.—My husband's stepped on him five times.

MILLIE. Mrs. Boker! You've got a play-pen, haven't you?

MRS. BOKER. PLAY-PEN!! He's broke two, hasn't he? We can't afford to buy no lion's cage, Miss Wilchick,—besides, Macy's don't sell them. Now listen to me: Christopher Columbus follows us wherever we go, see? When I get supper— There he is! He could make a gefilte fish tomorrow. That child—mad about the bathroom! Know what I mean? My husband says he has a "something" mind—you know: d. i. r. t. y.

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