

POTHOLE-TERGEIST

By Conrad E. Davidson



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SYNOPSIS: A poltergeist has taken up residence in the potholes of a friendly neighborhood street. First, it forces an innocent young girl named Anne to listen to a recitation of the capitals of obscure nations of the world. It gets even worse when a street cleaner tries to help and is sucked into the pothole to face his eighth grade geography teacher! How do you get rid of a pothole-tergeist? Perfect as a play or reader's theatre, with lots of fun characters and even a chance for a cast member to provide wacky sound effects!

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(4 male, 4 female, 1 either)

STREET SWEEPER (m)	Out-of-work English professor. <i>(59 lines)</i>
ANNE HYDRUS (f)	7 years old. <i>(2 lines)</i>
MRS. HYDRUS (f).....	Her excitable mother. <i>(12 lines)</i>
MR. HYDRUS (m)	Her father, eager to defend his family. <i>(5 lines)</i>
VOICE/MISS MAGOOMBA (f).....	A possessed spirit, interested in the minutia of geography. <i>(37 lines)</i>
OFFICER (m)	Defender of the people. <i>(10 lines)</i>
TEEN BOY (m)	Interested in TEEN GIRL. <i>(3 lines)</i>
TEEN GIRL (f).....	Interested in TEEN BOY. <i>(2 lines)</i>
SOUND EFFECTS (m/f)	Creates sound effects with the aid of a microphone and amplifier throughout the show.

SETTING

A bare stage representing Sixth Avenue SE, the four hundred block. A stale, uninspired humdrum of a night in the midsummer of the year at thirty minutes to eleven.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

The actors can dress in the style of costumes often used for reader's theatre productions (dark colors, nondescript, etc.) or they could dress in costumes specific to the occupations of the characters. If the style of production is reader's theatre, all performers would need ring binders to hold scripts, stools or chairs, and possibly speaker stands. The production can be performed without props.

PRODUCTION HISTORY

Pothole-tergeist was first produced by the Minot State University Communication Arts Department on October 18 and 20, 1990. Production personnel consisted of:

STREET SWEEPERRobert Hubbard
 VOICE/MISS MAGOOMBA..... Vicki Hume
 MRS. HYDRUS/TEEN GIRL Kristen Knutson
 MR. HYDRUS/TEEN DRIVER..... Mark Haider
 ANNE HYDRUS.....Kena Davidson
 OFFICER..... John Geiser
 SOUND EFFECTSGene Curtiss
 DIRECTOR Conrad E. Davidson
 SET & LIGHTS.....Joey Metzger
 REHEARSAL ASSISTANTCheryl Opp
 POSTER DESIGN..... Karen Davidson

Pothole-tergeist was presented as part of Mouse River Players' Authors Workshop on October 16, 1988.

STREET SWEEPER Charles "Chip" Decker
 VOICE/MISS MAGOOMBA.....Paula Brevik
 MRS. HYDRUS Roxanne Goettle
 ANNE HYDRUS/TEEN GIRLMandy Nuzzo
 MR. HYDRUS.....Randy Keller
 TEEN DRIVER/OFFICER..... Rob Nuzzo
 SOUND EFFECTS Don Greene

RESIDENT DIRECTOR..... Sandra E. Karnack
 DIRECTOR Theresa E. Dixon
 LIGHTS Mary Decker
 SOUND Lee Popp

AT RISE: *A bare stage, except for chairs (or stools), one for each cast member. STREET SWEEPER'S chair is centerstage. A microphone on a floor stand sits next to SOUND EFFECT's chair. House lights dim. As stage lights come up, actors file in, each carrying a reader's script in a black ring binder. They stop in front of their respective chairs, then turn and face the audience. They are dressed in semi-formal attire (blacks and whites). STREET SWEEPER, wearing work clothes, enters and crosses to center chair, then turns and faces the audience. Pause. All sit. STREET SWEEPER opens ring binder, then the cast does the same. Pause. STREET SWEEPER looks at the audience a moment and then begins.*

STREET SWEEPER: *During the totality of a stale, uninspired humdrum of a night in the midsummer of the year, when storm clouds hung ominously in the sky ...*

SOUND EFFECTS: *Mild thunder.*

...it being thirty minutes to eleven one evening, I commandeered my street sweeper through the city streets ...

SOUND EFFECTS: *A heavy motorized vehicle traveling along.*

...through, for the most part, rather dreary districts, and, as the Venetian blind of the night pulled firmly over the sky's eye, I found myself on Sixth Avenue SE, the four hundred block, my favorite, one which I longed to sweep, for it always gave me pride to sweep for such fine folk as could be found on that block. I was alone in my street sweeper — I'm always alone in my street sweeper. The block looked as it usually did, some lights on, some lights off, in the houses as I passed them, swishing the dust of the day, but then I saw something not quite normal at the northern end of the block, a small child sitting next to a large, steaming pothole that hadn't been there the previous week. I thought I heard a voice, but couldn't be sure; the wire brushes of the sweeper obscured my auditory sensibilities.

SOUND EFFECTS: Swishing of brushes on asphalt.

STREET SWEEPER: *(Continued.)* I stopped the street sweeper some fifteen feet south of the pothole, and saw right away that the girl sitting next to the pothole was little Anne Hydrus, a fine girl, seven years old. I got out of the sweeper. "Is that you, Anne?" I asked, stepping to her side. "Shouldn't you be in bed?" No response. "Anne, your parents know where you are?" Before Anne could respond, if indeed she were going to respond, I heard a voice, deep, yet dark, dominating, bellowing, coming from some abysmal depth, eloquent, with a faint aspirant quality resembling a voice paved with pea gravel.

VOICE: The capital of Upper Volta is Ouagadougou.

STREET SWEEPER: I had looked away from little Anne Hydrus when I heard the voice, so I didn't know if it had come from her mouth, and I wasn't sure the statement was correct. But I'm no dummy. I knew it wasn't Anne, because little girls weighing fifty pounds don't have voices deep, yet dark, dominating, bellowing, seeming to come from abysmal depths. The voice came from some other where. "Come, Anne." I tapped her shoulder. "I'll take you to your house."

VOICE: Wait. Anne isn't finished. The capital of Tonga is Nukualofa.

STREET SWEEPER: "Listen, you with the almanac," I said, trying to sound equally deep, yet dark and abysmal, "you have no right forcing little Anne to sit here and memorize the capitals of obscure nations of the world."

VOICE: Nothing is OBSCURE.

STREET SWEEPER: "Oh yeah," I said, using the only retort I could think of. I tugged on little Anne, but she was stuck to the pavement.

VOICE: She goes nowhere. The capital of Fiji is Suva.

STREET SWEEPER: Déjà vu hit me.

SOUND EFFECTS: a dull thud.

STREET SWEEPER: (*Continued.*) I was in eighth grade geography, incarcerated for fifty-five minutes day-in, day-out. Oh, horrors! I snapped out of it, my memory the least of my worries. I had a little girl, who I couldn't pry loose from the pavement in front of an educated pothole, which was holding her captive for a geography lesson. I realized something might be going down, so to speak. "Anne, speak to me."

ANNE HYDRUS: (*Raising her hand as if in class.*) The capital of Tonga is Nukualofa.

VOICE: Gooooood.

STREET SWEEPER: "I can keep up this vigil for as long as you want, Pothole. I'm not deserting little Anne Hydrus in the street." I set myself for an all-nighter, sat next to little Anne, and draped my jacket around her shoulders.

SOUND EFFECTS: door slam followed by running feet coming from a short distance.

MRS. HYDRUS: (*Screeching.*) Get your hands off my daughter.

STREET SWEEPER: I turned toward the Hydrus house. Mrs. Hydrus, visibly agitated, pointed at me, a look of panic distorting her face, or maybe it was the rollers wound tightly to her head. She had a tennis racket in hand. She looked angry. I stood up, having resolved many years ago never to trust angry women with tennis rackets.

MRS. HYDRUS: (*Screeching.*) Get your hands off my daughter, pervert.

STREET SWEEPER: Mrs. Hydrus, let me explain. I was sweeping the street, when I saw your daughter sitting next to this pothole, just as she is now, listening to a voice reciting the capitals of the nations of the world. I tried to take her into the house, only she doesn't move.

MRS. HYDRUS: So tell me, who was reciting the capitals of the world?

STREET SWEEPER: The pothole.

MRS. HYDRUS: (*Laughing.*) The pothole?

VOICE: The capital of Bhutan is Thimbu.

MRS. HYDRUS: You a ventriloquist or something?

STREET SWEEPER: A gnawing, slightly turbulent burble in my stomach tried to tell me something.

VOICE: The capital of Andorra is Andorra la Vella.

MRS. HYDRUS: Knock it off.

STREET SWEEPER: At that moment, Mr. Hydrus walked around the corner onto Sixth Avenue SE, carrying a bag of groceries. He set it on the sidewalk.

MR. HYDRUS: Hello, Dear, anything wrong?

MRS. HYDRUS: Nothing we can't handle. Get the groceries, did you?

STREET SWEEPER: Mrs. Hydrus whispered something in her husband's ear.

SOUND EFFECTS: inaudible whispering.

MR. HYDRUS: I'll call the police.

STREET SWEEPER: Mr. Hydrus went into his house.

SOUND EFFECTS: hurried steps receding in the distance followed by a door opening and then slamming shut.

Mrs. Hydrus tightened her grip on her tennis racket. I realized my sweeper might block traffic coming down Sixth Avenue, so I asked to move the machine. Mrs. Hydrus consented. When I switched on the ignition ...

SOUND EFFECTS: a motor starting.

I heard the voice again, deeper, yet darker, more dominating, more bellowing.

VOICE: The capital of Australia is Canberra.

STREET SWEEPER: Darn, if that voice didn't sound faintly familiar.

As I backed the machine next to the curb ...

SOUND EFFECTS: a heavy motorized machine moving.

I heard a scream.

SOUND EFFECTS: a woman's scream.

STREET SWEEPER: *(Continued.)* I jumped out of the sweeper, glanced in the direction where Mrs. Hydrus had been standing. Instead, she was suspended four feet above the sidewalk, upside down, her dress draped over her head due to the force of gravity, her panties visible to me, God, and everybody. An empty grocery bag rested on the sidewalk. Groceries zipped around her body.

SOUND EFFECTS: three rapidly orbiting objects zipping past.

Frozen pollock fillets ...

SOUND EFFECTS: object zipping by.

sweetened condensed milk ...

SOUND EFFECTS: object zipping by.

... sesame seed buns ...

SOUND EFFECTS: object zipping by.

... spinach noodles ...

SOUND EFFECTS: object zipping by.

... buttermilk ...

SOUND EFFECTS: a heavier object zipping by.

... and rolls of antacid tablets.

SOUND EFFECTS: three light objects zipping by in varying directions.

I had no idea what Mrs. Hydrus intended to cook, but who am I to criticize others' tastes?

MRS. HYDRUS: *(Screaming.)* Make him stop.

STREET SWEEPER: She plucked the spinach noodles from the air, holding them to her breast, and fumbling with her dress to keep it covering what it was supposed to cover.

SOUND EFFECTS: a door slams shut followed by running feet coming from a distance.

Mr. Hydrus ran out of his house, a look of panic distorting his face, or maybe it was the sight of his wife's underwear.

MR. HYDRUS: Stop the sweeper, or I'll beat your brains out.

STREET SWEEPER: I recognized a matching tennis racket in his hand. I ran to the still-running street sweeper and switched off the engine.

SOUND EFFECTS: a motor turned off, winds down.

Then I saw our lady of the levitation ungracefully dumped on the lawn next to the sidewalk, grocery items scattered about her.

SOUND EFFECTS: a body falls on solid ground followed by the crashing sound of grocery items

MRS. HYDRUS: *(Screaming.)* That man is evil.

MR. HYDRUS: The police are on their way.

STREET SWEEPER: "Listen," I said, "this child business I'm accused of will be explained. But, that I am an agent of evil and have the power to raise your wife four feet above the ground, upside down, and hurl groceries around her is as possible as ..."

VOICE: If the capital of Burma is Rangoon, what's the capital of Dahomey?

STREET SWEEPER: I didn't know. Guilt crept into my soul and I saw purple and green. A squad car pulled to a stop in the intersection at the northern end of the block.

SOUND EFFECTS: a car pulls up and screeches to a stop.

An officer got out of the car and walked toward us.

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SOUND EFFECTS: a car door opens and slams shut followed by walking.

OFFICER: What seems to be the trouble here?

STREET SWEEPER: He asked with a definite Socratic air. Mr. Hydrus explained about Anne and his wife's levitation.

MRS. HYDRUS: Don't forget about the capitals of the world. Street Sweeper here recites them in a voice deep, yet dark, dominating, bellowing, seeming to come from some abysmal depth, eloquent, with a faint aspirant quality resembling a voice paved with pea gravel.

MR. HYDRUS: Although he'll deny it, Officer.

VOICE: Accura is the capital of Ghana.

OFFICER: You say that, buddy?

STREET SWEEPER: "No, the pothole did." He looked at me, head tilted slightly, a grin forming at the corners of his mouth.

OFFICER: You expect me to believe a pothole just said Accura is the capital of Ghana?

STREET SWEEPER: He reached for the handcuffs attached to his belt. "Yes," I said, "and I suspect the pothole is responsible for Mrs. Hydrus' levitation."

MRS. HYDRUS: Don't believe him, Officer. He's like one of those types spoken of in the *Inquirer*.

OFFICER: Buddy, let's hear your story. Start at the beginning. How did you happen to get here?

STREET SWEEPER: "It's a long story," I said. "I'm an out-of-work English professor with a Ph.D., no immediate job prospects, a family to feed, and loans to repay."

OFFICER: Cut it with the hard luck story. Just explain in plain, simple terms. What's the bottom line about your activities tonight?

STREET SWEEPER: I related the story to the officer. When finished I said, "And all that is as possible as my convincing you I'm a locomotive." I should not have said that, for I immediately found my arms jerking back and forth mechanically, beyond my physical control. A blast of steam erupted from my mouth.



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