**HARRISON BERGERON by Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.**

THE YEAR WAS 2081, and everybody was finally equal. They weren't only equal

before God and the law. They were equal every which way. Nobody was smarter

than anybody else. Nobody was better looking than anybody else. Nobody was

stronger or quicker than anybody else. All this equality was due to the

211th, 212th, and 213 th Amendments to the Constitution, and to the unceasing

vigilance of agents of the United States Handicapper General.

Some things about living still weren't quite right, though. April for

instance, still drove people crazy by not being springtime. And it was in

that clammy month that the H-G men took George and Hazel Bergeron's fourteen-

year-old son, Harrison, away.

It was tragic, all right, but George and Hazel couldn't think about it very

hard. Hazel had a perfectly average intelligence, which meant she couldn't

think about anything except in short bursts. And George, while his

intelligence was way above normal, had a little mental handicap radio in his

ear. He was required by law to wear it at all times. It was tuned to a

government transmitter. Every twenty seconds or so, the transmitter would

send out some sharp noise to keep people like George from taking unfair

advantage of their brains.

George and Hazel were watching television. There were tears on Hazel's

cheeks, but she'd forgotten for the moment what they were about.

On the television screen were ballerinas.

A buzzer sounded in George's head. His thoughts fled in panic, like bandits

from a burglar alarm.

"That was a real pretty dance, that dance they just did," said Hazel.

"Huh" said George.

"That dance-it was nice," said Hazel.

"Yup, " said George. He tried to think a little about the ballerinas. They

weren't really very good-no better than anybody else would have been, anyway.

They were burdened with sashweights and bags of birdshot, and their faces

were masked, so that no one, seeing a free and graceful gesture or a pretty

face, would feel like something the cat drug in. George was toying with the

vague notion that maybe dancers shouldn't be handicapped. But he didn't get

very far with it before another noise in his ear radio scattered his

thoughts .

George winced. So did two out of the eight ballerinas.

Hazel saw him wince. Having no mental handicap herself, she had to ask George

what the latest sound had been.

"Sounded like somebody hitting a milk bottle with a ball peen hammer, " said

George .

"I'd think it would be real interesting, hearing all the different sounds,"

said Hazel a little envious. "All the things they think up."

"Urn, " said George.

"Only, if I was Handicapper General, you know what I would do?" said Hazel.

Hazel, as a matter of fact, bore a strong resemblance to the Handicapper

General, a woman named Diana Moon Glampers. "If I was Diana Moon Glampers,"

said Hazel, "I'd have chimes on Sunday- just chimes. Kind of in honor of

religion . "

"I could think, if it was just chimes," said George.

"Well-maybe make 'em real loud," said Hazel. "I think I'd make a good

Handicapper General."

"Good as anybody else," said George.

"Who knows better then I do what normal is?" said Hazel.

"Right," said George. He began to think glimmeringly about his abnormal son

who was now in jail, about Harrison, but a twenty-one-gun salute in his head

stopped that.

"Boy!" said Hazel, "that was a doozy, wasn't it?"

It was such a doozy that George was white and trembling, and tears stood on

the rims of his red eyes. Two of of the eight ballerinas had collapsed to the

studio floor, were holding their temples.

"All of a sudden you look so tired," said Hazel. "Why don't you stretch out

on the sofa, so's you can rest your handicap bag on the pillows, honeybunch."

She was referring to the forty-seven pounds of birdshot in a canvas bag,

which was padlocked around George's neck. "Go on and rest the bag for a

little while," she said. "I don't care if you're not equal to me for a

while . "

George weighed the bag with his hands. "I don't mind it," he said. "I don't

notice it any more. It's just a part of me."

"You been so tired lately-kind of wore out," said Hazel. "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."

"Two years in prison and two thousand dollars fine for every ball I took

out," said George. "I don't call that a bargain."

"If you could just take a few out when you came home from work," said Hazel.

"I mean-you don't compete with anybody around here. You just set around."

"If I tried to get away with it," said George, "then other people ' d get away

with it-and pretty soon we'd be right back to the dark ages again, with

everybody competing against everybody else. You wouldn't like that, would

you?"

"I'd hate it," said Hazel.

"There you are," said George. The minute people start cheating on laws, what

do you think happens to society?"

If Hazel hadn't been able to come up with an answer to this question, George

couldn't have supplied one. A siren was going off in his head.

"Reckon it'd fall all apart," said Hazel.

"What would?" said George blankly.

"Society," said Hazel uncertainly. "Wasn't that what you just said?

"Who knows?" said George.

The television program was suddenly interrupted for a news bulletin. It

wasn't clear at first as to what the bulletin was about, since the announcer,

like all announcers, had a serious speech impediment. For about half a

minute, and in a state of high excitement, the announcer tried to say,

"Ladies and Gentlemen."

He finally gave up, handed the bulletin to a ballerina to read.

"That's all right-" Hazel said of the announcer, "he tried. That's the big

thing. He tried to do the best he could with what God gave him. He should get

a nice raise for trying so hard."

"Ladies and Gentlemen," said the ballerina, reading the bulletin. She must

have been extraordinarily beautiful, because the mask she wore was hideous.

And it was easy to see that she was the strongest and most graceful of all

the dancers, for her handicap bags were as big as those worn by two-hundred

pound men.

And she had to apologize at once for her voice, which was a very unfair voice

for a woman to use. Her voice was a warm, luminous, timeless melody. "Excuse

me-" she said, and she began again, making her voice absolutely

uncompetitive .

"Harrison Bergeron, age fourteen," she said in a grackle squawk, "has just

escaped from jail, where he was held on suspicion of plotting to overthrow

the government. He is a genius and an athlete, is under-handicapped, and

should be regarded as extremely dangerous."

A police photograph of Harrison Bergeron was flashed on the screen-upside

down, then sideways, upside down again, then right side up. The picture

showed the full length of Harrison against a background calibrated in feet

and inches. He was exactly seven feet tall.

The rest of Harrison's appearance was Halloween and hardware. Nobody had ever

born heavier handicaps. He had outgrown hindrances faster than the H-G men

could think them up. Instead of a little ear radio for a mental handicap, he

wore a tremendous pair of earphones, and spectacles with thick wavy lenses.

The spectacles were intended to make him not only half blind, but to give him

whanging headaches besides.

Scrap metal was hung all over him. Ordinarily, there was a certain symmetry,

a military neatness to the handicaps issued to strong people, but Harrison

looked like a walking junkyard. In the race of life, Harrison carried three

hundred pounds .

And to offset his good looks, the H-G men required that he wear at all times

a red rubber ball for a nose, keep his eyebrows shaved off, and cover his

even white teeth with black caps at snaggle-tooth random.

"If you see this boy, " said the ballerina, "do not - I repeat, do not - try

to reason with him."

There was the shriek of a door being torn from its hinges.

Screams and barking cries of consternation came from the television set. The

photograph of Harrison Bergeron on the screen jumped again and again, as

though dancing to the tune of an earthquake.

George Bergeron correctly identified the earthquake, and well he might have -

for many was the time his own home had danced to the same crashing tune. "My

God-" said George, "that must be Harrison!"

The realization was blasted from his mind instantly by the sound of an

automobile collision in his head.

When George could open his eyes again, the photograph of Harrison was gone. A

living, breathing Harrison filled the screen.

Clanking, clownish, and huge, Harrison stood - in the center of the studio.

The knob of the uprooted studio door was still in his hand. Ballerinas,

technicians, musicians, and announcers cowered on their knees before him,

expecting to die.

"I am the Emperor!" cried Harrison. "Do you hear? I am the Emperor! Everybody

must do what I say at once!" He stamped his foot and the studio shook.

"Even as I stand here" he bellowed, "crippled, hobbled, sickened - I am a

greater ruler than any man who ever lived! Now watch me become what I can

become ! "

Harrison tore the straps of his handicap harness like wet tissue paper, tore

straps guaranteed to support five thousand pounds.

Harrison's scrap-iron handicaps crashed to the floor.

Harrison thrust his thumbs under the bar of the padlock that secured his head

harness. The bar snapped like celery. Harrison smashed his headphones and

spectacles against the wall.

He flung away his rubber-ball nose, revealed a man that would have awed Thor,

the god of thunder.

"I shall now select my Empress!" he said, looking down on the cowering

people. "Let

the first woman who dares rise to her feet claim her mate and her throne!"

A moment passed, and then a ballerina arose, swaying like a willow.

Harrison plucked the mental handicap from her ear, snapped off her physical

handicaps with marvelous delicacy. Last of all he removed her mask.

She was blindingly beautiful.

"Now-" said Harrison, taking her hand, "shall we show the people the meaning

of the word dance? Music!" he commanded.

The musicians scrambled back into their chairs, and Harrison stripped them of

their handicaps, too. "Play your best," he told them, "and I'll make you

barons and dukes and earls."

The music began. It was normal at first-cheap, silly, false. But Harrison

snatched two musicians from their chairs, waved them like batons as he sang

the music as he wanted it played. He slammed them back into their chairs.

The music began again and was much improved.

Harrison and his Empress merely listened to the music for a while-listened

gravely, as though synchronizing their heartbeats with it.

They shifted their weights to their toes.

Harrison placed his big hands on the girls tiny waist, letting her sense the

weightlessness that would soon be hers.

And then, in an explosion of joy and grace, into the air they sprang!

Not only were the laws of the land abandoned, but the law of gravity and the

laws of motion as well.

They reeled, whirled, swiveled, flounced, capered, gamboled, and spun.

They leaped like deer on the moon.

The studio ceiling was thirty feet high, but each leap brought the dancers

nearer to it.

It became their obvious intention to kiss the ceiling. They kissed it.

And then, neutraling gravity with love and pure will, they remained suspended

in air inches below the ceiling, and they kissed each other for a long, long

time .

It was then that Diana Moon Clampers, the Handicapper General, came into the

studio with a double-barreled ten-gauge shotgun. She fired twice, and the

Emperor and the Empress were dead before they hit the floor.

Diana Moon Clampers loaded the gun again. She aimed it at the musicians and

told them they had ten seconds to get their handicaps back on.

It was then that the Bergerons' television tube burned out.

Hazel turned to comment about the blackout to George. But George had gone out

into the kitchen for a can of beer.

George came back in with the beer, paused while a handicap signal shook him

up. And then he sat down again. "You been crying" he said to Hazel.

"Yup, " she said.

"What about?" he said.

"I forget," she said. "Something real sad on television."

"What was it?" he said.

"It's all kind of mixed up in my mind," said Hazel.

"Forget sad things," said George.

"I always do," said Hazel.

"That's my girl," said George. He winced. There was the sound of a rivetting

gun in his head.

"Gee - I could tell that one was a doozy, " said Hazel.

"You can say that again," said George.

"Gee-" said Hazel, "I could tell that one was a doozy."

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**Harrison Bergeron**

Harrison represents the part of the American people that still longs to try hard, flaunt their attributes, and outpace their peers. At age fourteen, Harrison is a superior physical specimen: seven feet tall, immensely strong, and extremely handsome. The government does everything in its power to squelch Harrison, forcing him to wear huge earphones to distort his thinking, glasses to damage his sight and give him headaches, three hundred pounds of metal to weigh him down, a ridiculous nose, and black caps for his teeth. But none of the government’s hindrances, including jail, can stop Harrison. His will to live as a full human being is too strong. The government calls Harrison a genius, but he is remarkable less for his brains than for his bravery and self-confidence. When he escapes from jail, he is utterly convinced that he will succeed in overthrowing the government.

In addition to his remarkable strength of body and will, Harrison has an artistic, romantic soul. He removes his empress’s handicaps with the careful touch of a sculptor. He instructs the musicians in their craft, showing them exactly how he wants them to play by singing to them. He dances so beautifully that he manages to defy gravity, springing thirty feet to the ceiling with his empress, where he kisses her. Vonnegut hints that Harrison is something of a superman, and it is clear that if he succeeds in his plan to overthrow the government, he will father a line of superior children. But the murder of Harrison and his empress shows that in the America of 2081, those who are brave enough to show off their gifts will not be allowed to live, much less procreate.

**George Bergeron**

George is an everyman, a character most readers will understand and relate to. Smart and sensitive, George has been crippled by the government’s handicapping program. He makes intelligent remarks and thinks analytically about society, but his mind is stunted. Every twenty seconds, noises broadcast by the government interrupt his thoughts, preventing sustained concentration. In addition to being smart, George is also stronger than the average man and must wear forty-seven pounds around his neck to weigh himself down. Although George is mentally and physically gifted, he is spiritually unremarkable. When Hazel suggests that he remove a few of the lead balls from the bag that weighs him down, George refuses to entertain the idea, unwilling to risk jail. A law-abiding man, he believes that America in 2081 is a much better place than it was in the old days, when competition existed. George, a slightly above-average person with a healthy respect for the rules, stands in for the reader, who may be all too willing to go along with government regulations that thwart individual freedoms and uniqueness. By showing us the unhappiness of George’s existence, Vonnegut asks us to question our own passivity and perhaps even our support for the laws of the land.

**Hazel Bergeron**

Hazel is a one-woman cautionary tale, an average American in an age when “average” has come to mean “stupid.” She does not need a radio permanently affixed to her ear, as George does, because she was never capable of sustained thought. Hazel applauds those who are as incapable as she is, cheering on the unimpressive ballerinas and praising the pathetic performance of the announcer who cannot overcome his speech impediment. Hazel is a dim bulb, but she is also kind. She worries about George and suggests that he remove a few of his weights while he is at home, and she weeps over her son, although she cannot keep him in mind for more than a few seconds at a time. But Hazel is a cautionary tale precisely because her kindness makes no difference. Her stupidity overwhelms her good nature, preventing her from recognizing the absurdity of her society, let alone doing anything to change it.

#### Themes

##### The Danger of Total Equality

In “Harrison Bergeron,” Vonnegut suggests that total equality is not an ideal worth striving for, as many people believe, but a mistaken goal that is dangerous in both execution and outcome. To achieve physical and mental equality among all Americans, the government in Vonnegut’s story tortures its citizens. The beautiful must wear hideous masks or disfigure themselves, the intelligent must listen to earsplitting noises that impede their ability to think, and the graceful and strong must wear weights around their necks at all hours of the day. The insistence on total equality seeps into the citizens, who begin to dumb themselves down or hide their special attributes. Some behave this way because they have internalized the government’s goals, and others because they fear that the government will punish them severely if they display any remarkable abilities. The outcome of this quest for equality is disastrous. America becomes a land of cowed, stupid, slow people. Government officials murder the extremely gifted with no fear of reprisal. Equality is more or less achieved, but at the cost of freedom and individual achievement.

##### The Power of Television

Television is an immensely powerful force that sedates, rules, and terrorizes the characters in “Harrison Bergeron.” To emphasize television’s overwhelming importance in society, Vonnegut makes it a constant presence in his story: the entire narrative takes place as George and Hazel sit in front of the TV. Television functions primarily as a sedative for the masses. Hazel’s cheeks are wet with tears, but because she is distracted by the ballerinas on the screen, she doesn’t remember why she is crying. The government also uses television as a way of enforcing its laws. When dangerously talented people like Harrison are on the loose, for example, the government broadcasts warnings about them. They show a photograph of Harrison with his good looks mutilated and his strength dissipated. The photo is a way of identifying the supposedly dangerous escapee, but it is also a way of intimidating television viewers. It gives them a visual example of the handicaps imposed on those who do not suppress their own abilities. Television further turns into a means of terrorizing the citizens when Diana Moon Glampers shoots Harrison. The live execution is an effective way of showing viewers what will happen to those who dare to disobey the law.

#### Motifs

##### Noise

The noises broadcast by the government increase in intensity and violence during the course of the story, paralleling the escalating tragedy of George’s and Hazel’s lives. When the story begins, a buzzer sounds in George’s head as he watches the ballerinas on TV. As he tries to think about the dancers, who are weighed down and masked to counteract their lightness and beauty, the sound of a bottle being smashed with a hammer rings in his ears. When he thinks about his son, he is interrupted by the sound of twenty-one guns firing, an excessively violent noise that foreshadows Harrison’s murder. Thoughts about the laws of equality and the competition that existed in the old days are shattered by the sound of a siren, a noise that suggests the extent to which the government has literally become the thought police. As Harrison barges into the television studio, George hears a car crash, a noise that connotes the injury of multiple people. The noise that interrupts George roughly at the same time that his son is being executed on live TV is described only as “a handicap signal,” an ominously vague phrase. Vonnegut suggests that the noise is so awful that it can’t be mentioned, just as the murder of Harrison is so awful that George and Hazel can’t fully comprehend it. The final noise George hears is that of a riveting gun, an appropriate echo of the way Diana Moon Glampers killed Harrison.

#### Symbols

##### Harrison Bergeron

Harrison represents the spark of defiance and individuality that still exists in some Americans. He has none of the cowardice and passivity that characterize nearly everyone else in the story. Rather, he is an exaggerated alpha male, a towering, brave, breathtakingly strong man who hungers for power. When he storms into the TV studio and announces that he is the emperor, the greatest ruler who has ever lived, he sounds power-mad and perhaps insane. At the same time, however, his boastfulness is exhilarating. It is an exaggerated expression of the defiant urge to excel that some Americans still feel. When Harrison rips off his steel restraints and handicaps, the physical strength and beauty he reveals reminds some viewers that underneath their own restraints and handicaps, they too are still talented or lovely. But in the end, Harrison, symbol of defiance, is killed in cold blood by Diana Moon Glampers, the administrator of government power. The quick, efficient murder suggests that if a defiant spirit still exists in America in 2081, its days are numbered.

**Vonnegut’s Political and Social Critique**

“Harrison Bergeron” offers vigorous political and social criticisms of both America in general and the America of the 1960s. The political system depicted in Vonnegut’s story is distinctly American and founded on the principles of egalitarianism, which holds that people should be equal in every way. Equality is a beloved principle enshrined in America’s Declaration of Independence in the phrase “All men are created equal,” but Vonnegut suggests that the ideals of egalitarianism can be dangerous if they are interpreted too literally. If the goal of equality is taken to its logical conclusion, we may decide that people must be forced to be equal to one another in their appearance, behaviour, and achievements. “Harrison Bergeron” can also be interpreted as a direct critique of communism. In the 1960s, America was engaged with Russia in the Cold War and had recently struggled through the McCarthy era, when suspected communists were accused and blacklisted from artistic, literary, and political communities. The futuristic American society of “Harrison Bergeron” operates on communist principles, supporting the idea that wealth and power should be distributed equally and class hierarchies should not exist. Like the accused communists of the McCarthy era, anyone not conforming to society’s accepted standards—in a reversal of sorts, anyone not adhering to the communist structure—is sought out and punished. In his story, Vonnegut argues that such principles are foolish. It is unnatural to distribute wealth and power equally, he suggests, and it is only by literally handicapping the best and brightest citizens that the misguided goal of equal distribution can be attained. Similarly, it is unnatural to seek out and punish those who reject social norms.

Some modern readers have interpreted the dystopia depicted in “Harrison Bergeron” as a preview of what might happen to America if such trends as psychiatric drugs and political correctness are allowed to proliferate. The characters in Vonnegut’s story are passive, unthinking, and calm. Although the means of achieving this mental state are externally applied to the body, rather than internally applied to the mind, some readers draw a parallel between the noises that destroy George’s ability to think and the drugs that make modern Americans tranquil and detached. These critics argue that the characters in “Harrison Bergeron,” who lack all passion, intelligence, and creative ability, should be interpreted as a warning about what happens to the members of a society that prizes calm happiness above artistry or intelligence. Other readers see “Harrison Bergeron” as a socially conservative argument against political correctness. Vonnegut himself has connected the story to recent attempts to make people equal using the language of political correctness. According to this argument, the respectful treatment of all marginalized groups may be a slippery slope, as “Harrison Bergeron” suggests. If we begin with the equal treatment of male athletes and their weaker female counterparts, for example, we may end with the insistence that ugly people should be treated as if they are beautiful, and so forth.

Humor

[→](http://www.sparknotes.com/short-stories/harrison-bergeron/quotes.html)

“Harrison Bergeron,” while full of dark themes, is also full of humor, which makes Vonnegut’s serious message both easier to digest and more bitter. Almost every grim event in “Harrison Bergeron” is accompanied by a sly joke or moment of melancholy comedy. For example, the narrator explains that ballerinas are weighed down and masked to hide their lightness and beauty. This deeply sinister image is leavened when we learn that such measures are meant to save viewers from the pain of feeling that they themselves look like “something the cat drug in” in comparison to the dancing beauties on their television screens. Later, the fearful announcement about Harrison’s escape is accompanied by a mournful joke: the announcer has a speech impediment so bad that he must hand over the important news to a nearby ballerina so that she can read it. In a second joke, Hazel says she thinks the incompetent announcer should get a raise simply for trying hard. The pain of the ballerina-turned-announcer, who must hide the loveliness of her own voice, is mitigated by Vonnegut’s description of her disguised voice as a “grackle squawk.”

Even the most horrifying moments in the story are characterized by Vonnegut’s dark brand of humor. We learn that Hazel, a sweet but deeply stupid woman, is very similar to Diana Moon Glampers, the Handicapper General of the United States. Although it’s upsetting to discover that the country is being run by imbeciles like Hazel, it is hard not to laugh at Hazel’s idea for using religiously themed noises on Sundays to interrupt the thoughts of smart people like George. When Hazel and George attempt to discuss the difference between the competitive society of yesteryear and the America they live in, George’s respect for the laws that have crippled him is heartbreaking. But the total breakdown of the conversation, brought about by George’s and Hazel’s inability to remember what they were talking about mere seconds earlier, produces a comical effect. Humor comes to the fore even after the Harrison’s murder. In a disturbing exchange, George urges Hazel to “forget sad things” such as whatever made her cry (neither of them seem to know that their son’s murder caused her tears). She answers that she always does forget sad things. Just after this conversation, George is interrupted by a noise that Hazel says sounded like a doozy. In a final bit of broad comedy, George, agreeing, says she can say that again, and Hazel repeats her remark verbatim. The effect is funny and a bit creepy, as the extent of the Bergerons’ lack of self-awareness becomes fully clear.

QUOTES

1. “I think I’d make a good Handicapper General.”   
“Good as anybody else,” said George.   
 “Who knows better’n I do what normal is?” said Hazel.

This passage appears near the beginning of the story. Vonnegut seems to suggest that Hazel’s similarity to Diana Moon Glampers is disturbing because it means that the country is being run by people just as clueless as Hazel. When George says that Hazel is as “[g]ood as anybody else,” we get the idea that she is just as confused and incapable of serious thought as every other average American living in the year 2081. Hazel’s confidence in her understanding of “normal” is both funny and sinister. Her self-confidence in understanding “normal” is amusing, especially because it comes on the heels of her ludicrous suggestion that the government should interrupt thoughts on Sundays with religious-sounding chimes. But it is also a disturbing and subtle reminder that in this futuristic America, the people who run the country are in power not because of their brains or savvy, but because of their normalcy.

2. “The minute people start cheating on laws, what do you think happens to society?”   
. . . . A siren was going off in [George’s] head.   
“Reckon it’d fall all apart,” said Hazel.   
“What would?” said George blankly.   
“Society,” said Hazel uncertainly. “Wasn’t that what you just said?”   
“Who knows?” said George.

This quotation, which appears near the beginning of the story, exemplifies the meandering, nonsensical human interactions that have become standard in Vonnegut’s fictional America. Because he is smart, George is able to formulate an idea that society would disintegrate if people disregarded the laws and to pose that idea as a hypothetical question. But because his thinking is interrupted by one of the innumerable noises the government broadcasts over his radio, he loses track of the conversation completely. Even though Hazel is able to follow his reasoning, he can’t remember what he was talking about moments before, and she isn’t bright enough to get him back on track. The disturbing implication is that America’s laws of equality go unchallenged not because citizens believe in them deeply but because they are too bewildered to figure out what they think of the laws in the first place. If George were able to think in peace for a few hours, he might come to believe that the laws he defends are absurd. However, these laws, against which he would likely protest if he could, are the ones that prevent him from thinking for more than a few seconds at a stretch.

3. [T]hey remained suspended in air . . . and they kissed each other for a long, long time.   
. . . . Diana Moon Glampers . . . came into the studio with a double-barreled ten-gauge shotgun. She fired twice, and the Emperor and the Empress were dead before they hit the floor.

Harrison’s midair dance with his empress near the end of the story is the only moment of unadulterated beauty in “Harrison Bergeron,” and its brutal conclusion suggests the beginning of still darker days for America. Harrison is as amazing as the rest of the world is dull. In a narrative full of stupidity, mediocrity, and terror, Harrison brings strength and beauty into the story by removing his and the empress’s weights and disguisess. Whereas his parents are so compromised that they can hardly put two logical sentences together and merely sit in front of the TV like automatons, Harrison is a whirlwind of activity. He bursts into the studio, takes control, and forces the musicians to play lovely music instead of hackneyed tripe. His physical vigor is superhuman: defying the laws of gravity, he manages to suspend himself and his empress thirty feet above the ground. The long kiss he exchanges with her also provides the only moment of sensual pleasure in the story. But Diana Moon Glampers interrupts Harrison’s dance almost as soon as it has begun. The spare, unflinching language with which Vonnegut narrates her murder of the emperor and empress mirrors the cold, inhuman nature of the deed. It is clear that for all his braggadocio, Harrison never had a chance at unseating the government for good.

### Full Bibliographic Citation

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