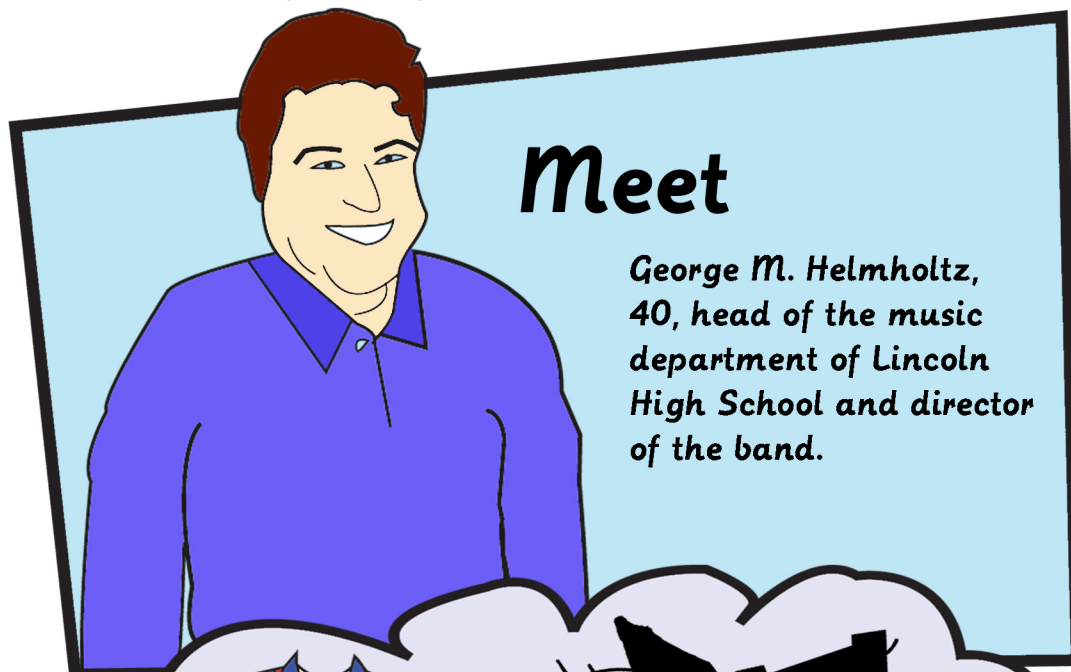


The Kid Nobody Could Handle (1955)

Interpreted by Tracy Kim

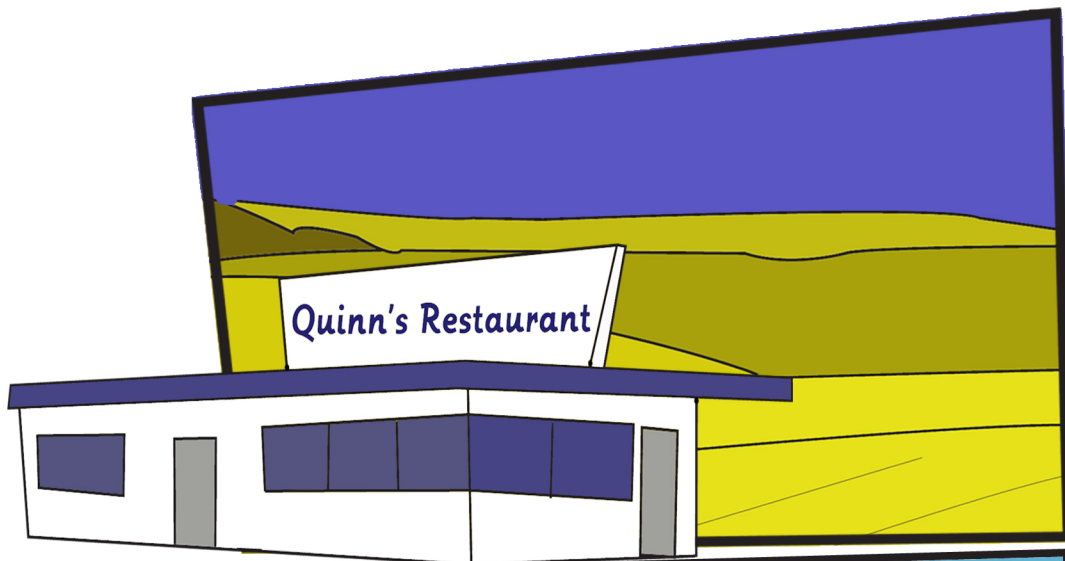


Meet

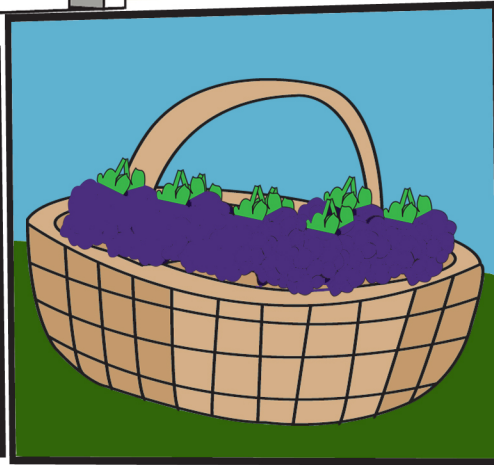
George M. Helmholtz,
40, head of the music
department of Lincoln
High School and director
of the band.



Life treated him well. Each year he dreamed the same big dream, the dream of leading the finest band on the face of the Earth. Each year the dream came true.

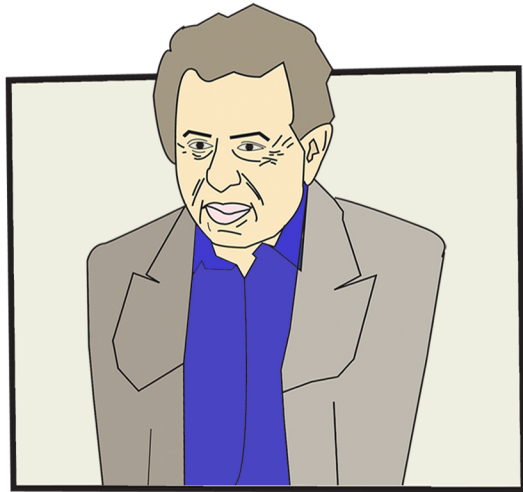


Ten years before, Helmholtz had sold the hill behind the restaurant to Bert Quinn. All the hill had meant to him was a panting climb, free blackberries, taxes, and a place for band picnics.

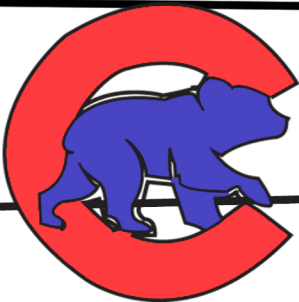


Meet

Bert Quinn, the restaurant owner, a bachelor, a small, dark, humorless man. A man with poor health who could not sleep, could not stop working, and could not smile warmly.



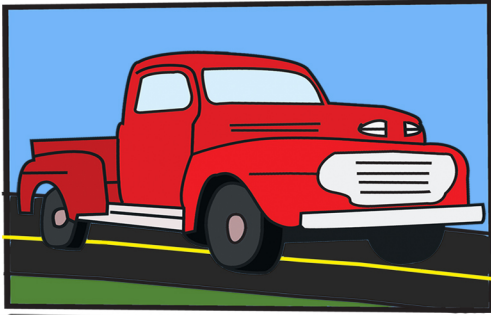
"This is my brother-in-law's kid by another marriage, Jim Donnini, and he's from the south side of Chicago. He's very tough. His mother's dead, and his old man married my sister but walked out on her. Then the court didn't like the way she was raising him and put him in foster homes for a while. Then they decided to get him clear out of Chicago, so they stuck me with him."



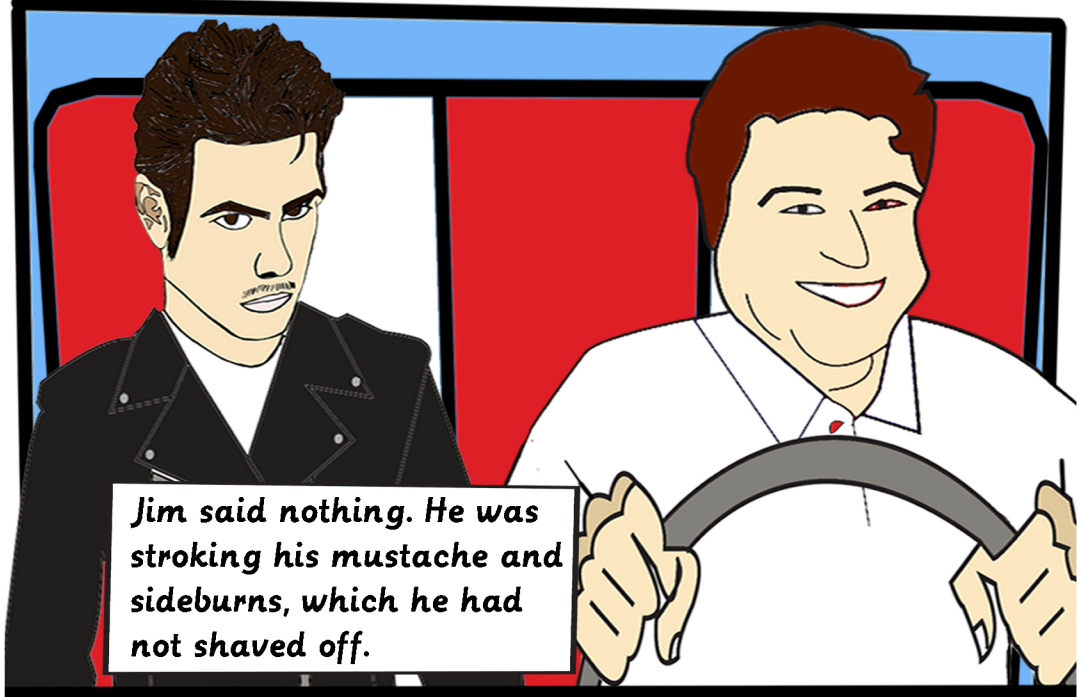
Meet

Jim Donnini, a small boy but with tough, stringy muscles standing out on his neck and forearms. He mopped like a robot, jerkily, brainlessly, but took pains not to splash suds over the toes of his black boots.





"Like listening to music?" said Helmholtz to Jim brightly, as they rode to school in Helmholtz's car.



Jim said nothing. He was stroking his mustache and sideburns, which he had not shaved off.

The seat springs of Helmholtz's old car creaked under Jim as he shifted his weight. Helmholtz took this as a sign of interest, and he turned to smile in comradely fashion. But Jim had shifted his weight in order to get a cigarette from inside his tight leather jacket.



Rivers of students flowed between classrooms, pausing in friendly eddies, flowing on again. Jim was alone.

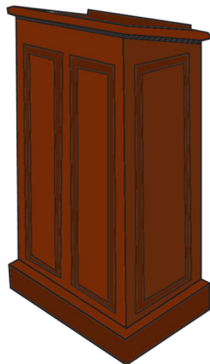


"Hello, Jim! Say, I was just thinking about you. We've got a lot of clubs and teams that meet after school. And that's a good way to get to know a lot of people," said Helmholtz.



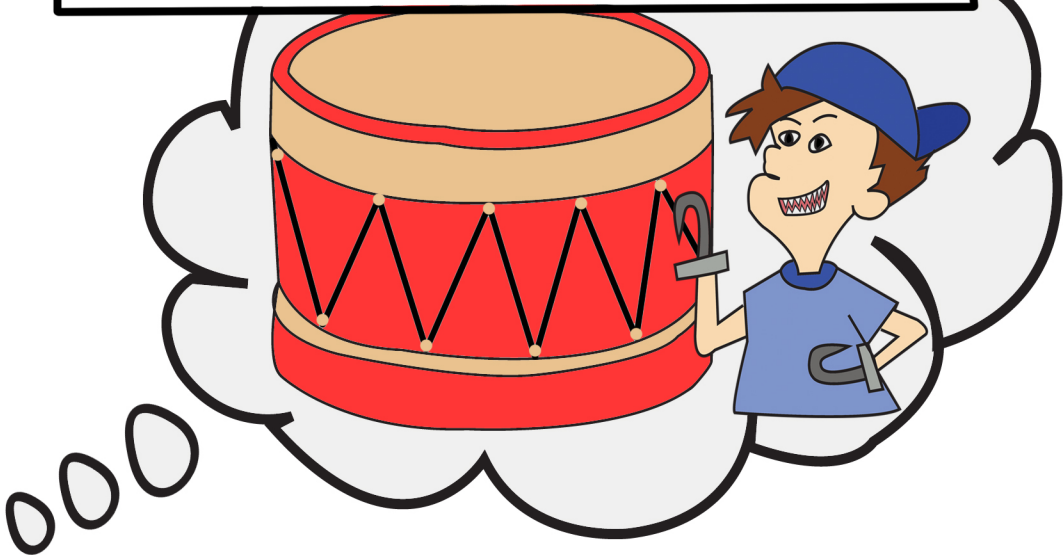
Jim measured Helmholtz carefully with his eyes. "Maybe I don't want to know a lot of people," he said. "Ever think of that?" He set his feet down hard to make his chains jingle as he walked away.

When Helmholtz returned to the podium for a rehearsal of B Band, there was a note waiting for him, calling him to a special faculty meeting.



Special Faculty Meeting:
Someone has broken into the school and wrecked the office of Mr. Crane.

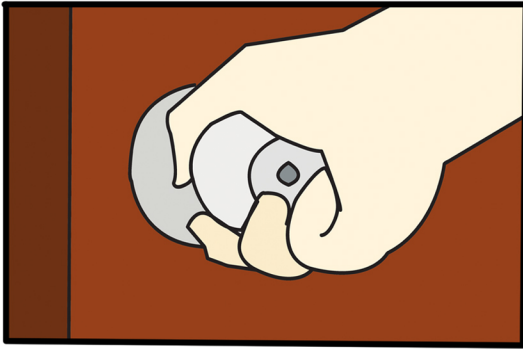
That night, in his dream, Helmholtz saw a boy with barracuda teeth and claws like bailing hooks.



The monster climbed into a window of the high school and dropped to the floor of the band rehearsal room. The monster clawed to shreds the heads of the biggest drums in the state. There was nothing for Helmholtz to do but dress and go to the school.

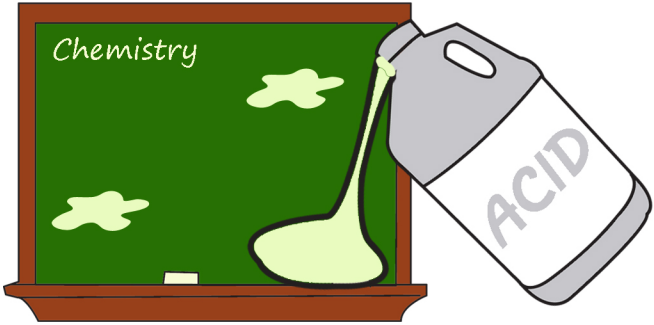


At two in the morning, Helmholtz caressed the drumheads in the band rehearsal room. The drums were unharmed. He could hear the great horns roaring, could see them flashing in the sunlight, with the stars and stripes and the banner of Lincoln High.



Helmholtz heard a furtive noise in the chemistry laboratory next door. Helmholtz sneaked into the hall, jerked open the laboratory door, and flashed on the lights.

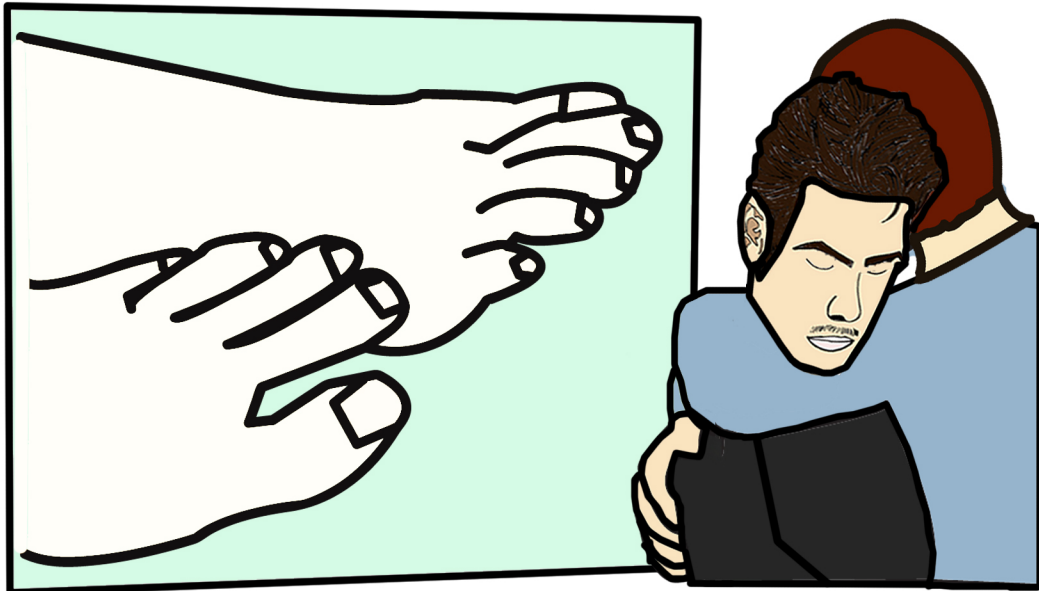
Jim Donnini had a bottle of acid in both hands. The scene was the most repulsive thing Helmholtz could have looked upon. Jim smiled with thin bravado.



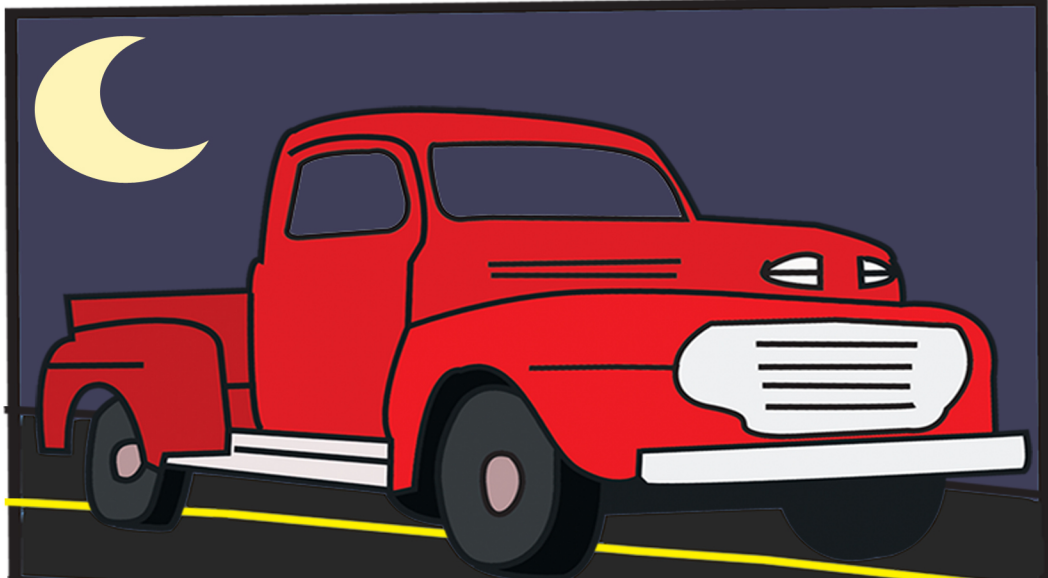
Helmholtz opened a locker and took a trumpet from it. He thrust the trumpet into Jim's arms. "There's my treasure. I give it to you to smash." said Helmholtz. Jim looked at him oddly as he laid down the trumpet.

Helmholtz pulled Jim's boots off and threw them into a corner.





Jim Donnini was barefoot now. The boy shivered, then quaked. Jim's head lolled, as though he waited only for death. Helmholtz was overwhelmed by remorse. He threw his arms around the boy.



Helmholtz drove Jim to Quinn's restaurant. The soft pats of Jim's bare feet on the sidewalk echoed down the empty street. And all was still.



The following day at Quinn's, Helmholtz walked in to see Jim. Helmholtz picked up the trumpet. He kissed the cold mouthpiece and pumped the valves in a dream of a brilliant cadenza.

Helmholtz had thought that his greatest treasure, the trumpet, could buy a soul for Jim. The trumpet was worthless. Deliberately, Helmholtz hammered the trumpet against the table edge. He bent it around a coat tree.



Jim Donnini's eyes filled with pity and alarm. They came alive. They became human. Helmholtz had got a message through.

