

Four Plays about Disability

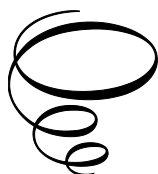
Four Plays about Disability:

Agency

By

James MacDonald

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To Matt Ryan

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	ix
Foreword	xi
<i>Wellclose Square</i>	1
<i>Unsex Me Here</i>	71
<i>Gnarled</i>	151
<i>Cripplegate</i>	187

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In one real sense, I am indebted to anyone who has anything to do with me. The university department that has engaged me and the students who have collaborated with me have displayed a uniform goodwill that deserves to be acknowledged because my circumstances are so exceptional. Drama may be an attractive discipline, but it still requires uncommon commitment and teamwork, and the students who worked on these plays demonstrated exemplary levels of both. Directors are a playwright's first audience and best friends and Martin Harvey and Matt Ryan have been dear friends in their fraternal desire to bring my work to life. Each is a consummate artist, devoting a lifetime to theatrical excellence.

Exeter University's drama department has been my creative home for years. From my first days as a post-graduate, my work has been welcomed with collegiate enthusiasm and esteem. How many post-graduates have their work placed on examination papers? If I've benefitted from positive discrimination, the work makes its own statement, and students have validated my efforts in ways that anyone would applaud. Professor Peter Thomson brought me into the department. His support has been life-sustaining, his approach to teaching idyllic. He advised me, "Make sure as far as you can that everybody is involved and that everybody has a good time". I can think of no better advert for theatre in general, especially in response to those who hold negative views about art.

Joyce Carol Oates has championed my work for well over a decade. Her prodigious talent is matched by her unique warmth as a human being. All the people I refer to are ideal ambassadors of the creative spirit.

Intellect Books was my first publisher, bringing out three collections of my plays for undergraduates. I am especially grateful now for their permission to republish two of the plays in this volume. James Marshall and Thomas Fahy, two literary friends in the United States, have accompanied me throughout my journey, always stressing my strengths.

Matt Ryan coordinated and directed two sterling Zoom readings of my recent plays with esteemed actors. My heart overflows with tribute. In my sunset years, the people who've interacted with me have endowed me with

the agency of an able-bodied life.

Inna and Susan, my next-of-kin, literally keep me alive, for which gift I wish them eternal life.

FOREWORD

The pedagogical element of these plays is that they are intended to provide challenges for students of performance. They were written as the concluding segment of a second-year undergraduate module in Interpretive Acting, with an equal distribution of the parts to accommodate however many students there are in the group. Their application beyond the module is to any group of students desiring an *ensemble* performance text.

The presentation of the performances was to move beyond the intimacy of small-cast plays to a more “public” form of theatre, removing “the fourth wall” so that performers project to the public. This has informed the historical and political nature of the themes.

“Agency” is a critical term in discussions of social inclusion. Agency signifies acceptance, recognition, empowerment. My plays in general examine the lives of people with disabilities in pursuit of their quest for agency. Disability adds a completely new dimension to theatre education by presenting students with a different way of experiencing the world. Disabled characters are not merely added to the cast list; disability pivots the drama.

The themes are set during some of the best-known and best-loved periods in history, and the plays ask, “How does disability enhance your awareness of this subject?” Three of the plays are set in periods likely to be familiar to students who have emerged from further education and who will also have encountered the periods in popular television series, single dramas and documentaries. The fourth focuses on contemporary Russia but from a perspective that gives the student a completely new take on an immediately topical crisis. In as much as the play is autobiographical, the subject is handled in far greater depth than British students are usually exposed to.

University drama in Britain assumes the identity and proportions of the European conservatory, combining the classroom, laboratory and detailed *praxis*. Each of my plays underwent a six-week rehearsal period during which the historical background and issues were explored at exhaustive length, and every member of the group had a clear idea of the issues involved. Students and general readers are invited to spend as much time and attention as possible on the plays because the perspective is unfamiliar

and challenging.

Wellclose Square throttles received notions of the Whitechapel Murders (concurrent with the television series *Ripper Street*) by focussing on a *privileged* section of the East End and then introducing the element of disability to nuance the presentation. The play does not suggest that Jack the Ripper was disabled, but Michel Foucault speculates that he may well have been a member of the British aristocracy, indeed a Royal physician, and the play presents a denouement where the physician takes it on himself to conduct “experiments” on a (fictitious) disabled Royal. The audience are duly invited to consider possibilities that one of the most heinous and unsolved crimes in British history had its origins in notions of ethnic cleansing and genetic engineering.

Wellclose Square is set in a Jewish enclave in the East End and focuses on racial and ablest prejudice in late Victorian England. *Unsex Me Here* is a Holocaust play that deals with the relatively little-known atrocity of Hitler’s euthanasia programme against disabled people—what Glenn Bryant has called “a quiet genocide”.

The victims here are not despised members of an alien culture, they are indigenous children, and their executioners are their natural carers. The eponymous reference to Lady Macbeth’s early declaration is a chilling reminder of the nurses’ unnatural cruel duty: they must violate their nurturing instincts for the Nazi sense of the common good.

Gnarled examines Victorian values from a specifically disabled view by focusing on a hideously disabled protagonist who flouts mores by daring to go forth as a prostitute and brothel keeper. She not only challenges notions of decency but actively subverts them by exposing the covert lusts within the respectable women she tempts. The play has been intended for a module in Victorian culture. Again, disability affords a radical insight into familiar terrain by concentrating on a central character who ought to be hidden if not quietly put to death. The most radical element of her narrative is that she is based on an actual figure who lived on into her 80s despite her astounding vulnerability. In researching her personal history, I discovered facts about the culture and period I had not known, and students, too, will discover a startling view ignored by the best-known chroniclers.

Cripplegate is an autobiographical meditation on my experience, instructive because it offers a radical view of our contemporary world and of interest because it focuses on a familiar crisis in an unfamiliar way. A Russian

woman applies for asylum by presenting herself as the wife of a disabled man who is without means of support. To the Home Office barrister, this is the most blatant and fraudulent case of opportunism, and the play opens with a view of the asylum hearing. Miraculously, the justice accepts the marriage, and the subsequent action explores how the couple survive despite huge barriers. Ultimately, this is intended as the most triumphant portrayal of disabled life because it presents survival on entirely disabled terms. As one disabled friend put it, “We are equal to everyone else, even though our lives have been totally different”.

These are far and away my most successful plays, and their success is a significant gauge of disability awareness and advancement. Too often disabled awareness has been limited to simply recognising that someone has a disability. These plays explore the experience of living disabled, of disabled people being mistaken as quasi-criminals simply for asserting their right to be recognised as innocent human beings. The plays then show that “disability” is in the mind of the able-bodied observer who would remove the supposed miscreant. The plays feature dramatic scenes where such removal is attempted. And, in exploring these scenes, students are asked to consider the moral justification of the action. If the credibility is held in doubt, it is important to remind students that this may be their introduction to disability prejudice and the first step toward understanding disabled awareness. The ramifications of exclusion lead to the discovery that disability extends to being under-educated and little employed. It is then perfectly apt to remind the students that even today disabled people experience life on very different terms from their own.

The students’ acceptance of these plays reflects great credit on their genuine acceptance of disability. They were fully committed to understanding whatever I wanted to tell them about my lifetime’s experience of prejudice. A favourite fantasy is to imagine my tormenters in a rehearsal room in the company of the students working on these plays. In an ideal world, wide acceptance of disability would replicate the students’ acceptance of me and of these plays. Sixty students applied to be in my next play after seeing a performance of *Unsex Me Here*.

The strides taken in disabled development have been nonetheless modest. But the distinction between the medical approach to disability and the social is a defining breakthrough, acknowledging that people with disabilities deserve acceptance for who they are rather than as fraudulent human beings whose conditions need correction.

Years ago, as I have written elsewhere, an agent described my disabled world as hideous and uncommercial if exposed to the theatre-going public. A fringe theatre director seemed to bear this out by confessing to me candidly, “I find you repulsive-looking”. The world has moved on from that alienating nadir. I’ve had close to 20 plays featuring disability performed as university coursework. Francesca Martinez, another playwright with life-defining cerebral palsy, has featured in a television series and has had her play *All of Us* performed at the National Theatre. These advances are part of the clarion call for disabled agency in an era when the curse is being taken off notions of *difference*. *Diffability* ought to be the cultural fashion trend, and those of us who celebrate its advent need to bless everyone who has helped to bring it about.

WELLCLOSE SQUARE

Wellclose Square is an actual London location between Cable Street and The Highway in the Tower Hamlets area. In 1888, when the play is set, it was a Jewish enclave featuring a cross-section of Jewish immigrants. *East End Chronicles* (Ed Glinert, Penguin, 2006) includes an account of the square in which a shaman (religious spiritualist very like Ezekiel Sue) is featured. As a community leader, he would have been at least tolerated, even by the Jewish Orthodoxy, and the play speculates that his importance would have been enhanced in a period of crisis, like the Whitechapel murders.

Various sources note that the Ripper's killing spree may have started with the mysterious slaying of a Jewish girl in June that year. The play speculates that this early victim was a Russian immigrant, freshly arrived from the Ukraine and in need of shelter. The character encounters two disabled men, an itinerant who offers to provide for her at his hovel, and a paraplegic looked after by Ezekiel Sue. She is frightened by the first but solaced by the second because he is more disabled and thus less threatening, and my idea was to ask performers and audiences/readers if disability is more acceptable if it is "contained"? The wider cross reference asks the same question about the Jewish community. Confining them to a single location limits their impact, though at moments of crisis they are among the first to be vilified.

Disability figures in the denouement, where the Ripper suspect begins to perform a medical "experiment" on a disabled royal in the cause of genetic engineering. "Eugenics", as it began to be called, was the central tenet of Francis Galton in his research into evolution, 1883. Galton (1822-1911) was half-cousin to Charles Darwin (*Origin of the Species*). The play's William Yarborough would have been an early and passionate disciple of both men, and the suggestion that he may also have been a dastardly killer is intended to present [performers/audiences/readers) with the possibility that our notions of "difference" (and the consequences) may be linked to the very core of civilisation.

Wellclose Square delighted me. It's a wonderfully vigorous concoction: expressible only in theatrical terms. If only the students had time to explore it! Given the constraints of the timetable, they're almost bound to settle for caricature... The Square is palpably a microcosm - and every character is shaded by 'outsiderdom' - a condition that has many shades.

(Of the production tribute)

It's *very* rarely that students make gestures like that. They were authenticating you without realising it – because they realised you'd authenticated them. It was one of the loveliest moments I can remember. Wonderful!

—Peter Thomson Professor of Drama Exeter University

Performed by second-year Interpretive Acting students at Exeter University's Roborough Studio under the direction of Martin Harvey on 27 March 2013.

Christopher Gentleman	Jack Wrighton
Woman	Rosie White
Sonya	Heidi Lawry
Berth	Disney Burke
Tsilla Zingerman	Anya Williams
Grisha	Gruffydd Evans
Abram	Andrew Trzcinski
Camilla Lady Marcatta	Lucy Hirst
Ezekiel	Sue Jake Francis
Joseph Shreda	Tom Myles
Lord Marcatta	Oliver Wheatley
Rabbi Adler	Harry Kingscon
Dina Rubina	Rosie White
William Yarborough	James Manton
Clare	Gruffydd Evans
Annie Crook	Georgia Leigh

Late Victorian London,

(Dialogue in inverted commas is meant to indicate the characters are speaking Russian.)

ACT ONE

The main action takes place in an East End square that serves as a microcosm of the East European immigrant community. Self-contained, it combines an artisan culture at one end with a more middle-class, exotic, culture at the other. Sweatshop and town house commingle in a European atmosphere that is foreign to native East Londoners, who view these inhabitants with distrust or with open hostility. CHRISTOPHER GENTLEMAN looks out at the audience.

GENTLEMAN (*addressing the audience*): There! Out there. That's where England's fetid multitude hovel and spew their disgust at the lot they were handed as free-born citizens. And they look on this lot as the cause of it all. (*Wanders across to two young women hawking simple dresses from a makeshift street stall.*) Are you aware of the hostility you arouse? Young woman? The Pall Mall Gazette calls you a pest and a menace. (*To the other woman.*) You're a cancer as far as the Standard's concerned. And the tragedy is you don't know it. Haven't a sentence of English between you, have you?

SONYA (*intended to be speaking Russian*): "He doesn't think we speak English".

BERTH: "Well, don't prove him wrong, you dolt. He's obviously a policeman".

GENTLEMAN: That way is Tillbury Docks, is it...where you vermin come into the kingdom.

SONYA (*small voice*): Yes, sir. It's that way.

GENTLEMAN: What's that? So you do understand? Don't worry, I'm not going to hurt you. I'm not John Law.

BERTH: That's right. That's Tillbury. It's no odds to us. We came to the square as babies...as babies.

GENTLEMAN (*with irony*): I'm sure you were.

This introduces a prologue in the area alluded to.

TSILLA, a young woman, bewildered, is accosted by two dockside sharps.

ONE: Are you alone? Is somebody with you? Are you going off somewhere else? America maybe? The US of A.

TWO: Reckon we ought to find out her name first.

ONE (*to TSILLA*): Your name? What they call you?

TWO: What...is...your...name?

TSILLA (*pointing to herself*): M-m-m?

ONE: That's right. The handle you go by. Name...name...God almighty.

TWO: We're using the wrong approach.

ONE: Right—you have a go then...Christ God almighty.

TSILLA: Tsilla.

TWO: I only said...

ONE: Shet up. (*To TSILLA.*) What was that, darlin'?

TSILLA: Tsilla...Tsilla

TWO: Cilla—marvellous! Her name's Priscilla.

ONE: Where exactly does that get us?

TWO: We'll take you where you want to go, Cilla. Put yourself in our hands.

TWO starts to lift her bag.

TSILLA (*intended to be speaking Russian*): "What are you doing there? Bandits! Let go!"

ONE: We told you you don't need to worry.

TWO: What's that she's speaking?

TSILLA: "You leave me alone".

WOMAN (*approaching them*): Leave the poor poppet alone, can't you. Plenty others here you can meddle with.

ONE: If you'll pardon us, madam. Her people engaged us to meet her off the boat.

(*To TSILLA.*) Your father and me are bosom pals, we are. We're like that. Two peas in a pod.

WOMAN: "You weren't expecting anybody, were you, my dear?"

TSILLA: "You speak Russian! Oh, thanks to God. These villains tried to steal my baggage!"

WOMAN: "Did they offer to sell you a ticket to America?"

TSILLA: "I think they did, yes."

TWO: We thought she was all on her lonesome.

WOMAN: I know you did. Why do you think I intervened?

ONE: Well, now don't mistake us as part of the criminal element. It's like I said—

TWO: You should have been here on time. Poor lass was at her wits' end.

WOMAN: And you helped put her there. (*To TSILLA.*) "Come with me, dear."

ONE (*already going after someone else*): What's the matter, darling? Lost your best friend?

TSILLA (*to the WOMAN*): "Thanks to God you arrived when you did. We had a terrible crossing from Libau...five days we were tossed on the deck like dead fish...no space between us at all. The ponies they kept in the hold had it better—fed and watered. We had nothing, almost."

WOMAN: Not so quick. "My knowledge of Russian isn't that good."

TSILLA: "Sorry."

WOMAN: "Nothing to eat, you say?"

TSILLA: "Very little, I swear."

GRISHA, undersized and deformed, hovers round them.

WOMAN: You'll be wanting a bite and a bath then, I dare say.

TSILLA: "I'm sorry?"

WOMAN: "You'll need food then." (*Looks at GRISHA.*) "Did you come here alone?"

TSILLA: "Absolutely."

WOMAN: "That's what I thought." (*She tosses GRISHA a coin.*) "There is a Russian bathhouse, not far from here. They also check to see if you caught any diseases. How long were you aboard ship?"

TSILLA: "I don't know. It was called *Kursk*. Who are you, exactly?"

WOMAN: "A member of the local Board of Guardians. We look after people off the boats. The local shelter houses residents free of charge. They even provide meals. But it's only temporary. You have to leave after two weeks. And they make it a rule you attend worship. But the synagogue is next door. Come with me...Are you really as young as you look?"

TSILLA: "Do you know an address...Well-close?" (*Tries to show her a piece of paper.*)

WOMAN: "We mustn't loiter—two lone women in a district like this."

TSILLA: "Do you know this address?"

WOMAN: "Which address?" (*Looks.*) "Wellclose Square? Who told you about that? One of the ones that accosted you?"

TSILLA: "Is it far from here?"

WOMAN: "Farther than we're going. Forget all about that."

TSILLA: "But I have relations there."

WOMAN: "What relations? Somebody's ancestors?"

TSILLA: "Family. Mine. Klara Zingerman's brother and his wife."

WOMAN: "Wait a minute. You said you were alone."

TSILLA: "I was alone when those men spoke to me. Can you help me find this address?"

GRISHA: "I can show her...I know where it is."

WOMAN: "The shelter is only for those without families. You can't stay there otherwise."

TSILLA: "Can you help me to find Wellclose Square?"

WOMAN: "You don't need anyone's help if you live there."

TSILLA: "I've never been outside Russia."

GRISHA: Let me take her. I know where it is."

MAN passes by, eyeing TSILLA.

MAN: Got a fresh honeypot, Jacko? (To TSILLA.) I'll meet you out back later on.

GRISHA: Go on, you miserable skipper. (To TSILLA.) "Take no notice."

WOMAN: "I'm only meant to take girls to the shelter."

TSILLA (to GRISHA): "Are you sure you know Wellclose?"

WOMAN: He might want to take you to Flower and Dean Street!

TSILLA: "Thank you very..."

WOMAN: Perhaps I should have left you where you were! (*She goes off.*)

TSILLA: "Why does she look at me like that? There's nothing wrong with that address, is there?"

GRISHA: "It's a walk, that's all. Don't worry. I'll see you're all right."

Back in the square.

GENTLEMAN: And where did you come from, Palestine... Jerusalem...Little Jewry? Poland! You're from Warsaw? There's as many Poles here as there is in War—

SONYA: Rus...

GENTLEMAN: What's that, Rus? (*A beat.*) You're from Russia? Then what do they call this, Little Odessa? It looks too fit somehow. Well kept

English hedges...window boxes. These aren't tenements at all. They tell me a baronet lives here...and nearby some sort of Shaman? (*Pointing to a villa at one end of the square.*) And what are you, part of the Rag Fair? You're a bit off the beaten path, aren't you? (*He looks at their row of dresses.*) It's all right, I'm nobody you need worry about. I'm making a factual survey, that's all. On behalf of your Jewish Board of Guardians, you might say. They were consulted. The East End's attracted national concern, what with the squalour, the crime and the spread of disease. Darkest England, one scribbler called it. Doesn't look like that here, as I say. If these weren't a bit of the old-clo' trade, I'd fancy I was somewhere up West. Marble Arch way somewhere like that. (*Handles the garment.*)

BERTH: Leave that!

GENTLEMAN: What's that?

BERTH: I said leave it. You think anybody will buy that after you've put your dirty paws all over it?

GENTLEMAN: There's no need to get shirty, young woman. We're not like the thieves you were happy to leave behind. No-one's going to rob you in broad daylight.

SONYA: Please, don't be angry, sir. It's only we haven't made a sale all day...and we don't work more than three days a week.

BERTH: "Don't bother to grovel. He's only making fun of us".

GENTLEMAN: If you stopped checking me, you could go about making a sale. (Of WOMAN approaching.) What about this fine lady? Can they help you?

WOMAN: I don't think so. I'd like to lodge a complaint.

BERTH: Whatever it is, you never bought it from us. (*To GENTLEMAN.*) We never saw this lady before...(*To SONYA.*) Did we.

WOMAN: Before you came wandering in. That's exactly my point. (*To GENTLEMAN.*) They're lowering the whole tone of the square—attempting to flog shoddy items like this.

SONYA: No one's forcing you to buy it.

WOMAN: That isn't the point, and you know it. You're attempting to pass off rag-and-bone as though it was...

BERTH: ...genuine merchandise.

WOMAN: Residents here pay precisely for keeping the likes of you out. There are places for people like you. (*To GENTLEMAN.*) They bring the sewage with them wherever they go.

BERTH: The garment you hold in your hand was made on the premises, right over there. All the dresses were.

WOMAN: I doubt that intensely. (*To GENTLEMAN.*) I was threatened by one of her consorts only yesterday forenoon.

BERTH: She's lying—she don't live here.

WOMAN: I'm not going to have it, nevertheless! Decent folk have their rights. With them here, it's almost Whitechapel.

GENTLEMAN: I was ruminating on this very point only a few minutes ago. The area's a veritable cesspool, and the whole place is bubbling up, like a cauldron.

WOMAN: Spare us your rumination—I want action. There must be a civil ordinance against their traffic. Apply it—arrest them on the spot.

GENTLEMAN: I can't do that.

WOMAN: Why not? I've cited the statute.

BERTH: He's not a policeman.

WOMAN: You hold your tongue.

GENTLEMAN: That's correct, I'm afraid.

WOMAN: What! Well, what in thunder are you?

BERTH: Another dossier, like us!

GENTLEMAN: Christopher Gentleman—part of a Royal Commission into East London poverty. I'm charged with making the most comprehensive report.

WOMAN: I didn't ask for reports. I want you to charge them with vagrancy...with lewd and licentious conduct. You're familiar with the word licentious, aren't you? Her ponce importuned me this morning.

BERTH: You shouldn't have given him cause. She looks like she comes from Cock Alley

ABRAM appears from one of the dwellings round the corner.

ABRAM: I see you're interested in our collection, madam.

WOMAN: What? No, not in the slightest. I don't suppose you're a policeman?

ABRAM: I'm these girls' employer. Is there a problem?

SONYA: "She called you a dirty name, I think". (*To the WOMAN.*) This isn't the man that insulted you, is it.

ABRAM: Atsor. (*To WOMAN.*) Let me apologise for them straight away. They've no business outside the workshop.

WOMAN: It's close to committing affray—blocking the thoroughfare, haranguing the private citizen where she sleeps.

ABRAM: And I take it you saw nothing here that caught your eye.

WOMAN: Well, I never really looked. That's not the point.

ABRAM: They never gave you the chance. (*To the women.*) You should be ashamed.

WOMAN: That, again, is exactly my point. They look more like types from Commercial Road.

ABRAM: They're assistants, and ours is a family concern. They've scarcely been out of the workshop. (*Of GENTLEMAN.*) This is your husband, I take it?

WOMAN: Certainly not.

GENTLEMAN: I'm only here to observe.

ABRAM (*to WOMAN*): I'm humbly sorry. Allow me to compensate by escorting you to our atelier. This is merely our work-a-day line.

WOMAN: No, it's quite obvious none of you has the least idea what I'm talking about.

GENTLEMAN: Sir? I've been trying to locate Ezekiel Sue. Is he anywhere in the square?

ABRAM: He's in that one there. *(To SONYA.)* What do you plan to do? And what about the dresses? That strumpet was perfectly right—they're tat.

GENTLEMAN approaches one address, SONYA and BERTH another nearby. GENTLEMAN disappears inside.

BERTH: Leave them.

SONYA: I can't do that. You heard what he said.

BERTH: Stay with them then. I'll have better luck without you anyway. Excuse me, Lady Marcatta?

CAMILLA: I've been watching you both for some time.

BERTH: We're not bothering you, I hope.

CAMILLA: Not at all. I admire your perseverance. Why don't you come in?

BERTH: Thank you. *(Motions SONYA forward.)*

SONYA: I'll stay here.

CAMILLA: How dedicated of you.

BERTH: He doesn't deserve it...the hours we work for the pittance he gives us.

CAMILLA: That's very much to my point. I'd like to help you if I can. We can talk out here just as well, if you're anxious, and we can all join in. Your employer expects you to sell those here, does he.

BERTH: Some hope, I'd say.

SONYA: I think he thought they'd be suitable for servants.

CAMILLA: Indeed, yes. Or I might have a better suggestion. The Orphan Asylum at Norwood. They're more likely to buy in bulk...I suppose that's

what he wants.

SONYA: We could just go to Petticoat Lane.

CAMILLA: You mistake me, my dear. I'm pledging this to you. I'm one of the governors, you see? I'll have my Annie collect from you and then deliver them within the week. He has a bulk price, doesn't he?

SONYA: I think so, yes. Shall I get him to call?

CAMILLA: Oh, dear, no. I can't be doing with tradesmen at the door. You find out the price for, say, a dozen shifts, and I'll have Annie fetch and carry. I wouldn't imagine you ran to anything more elaborate? Ball gowns or things of that sort?

SONYA: Made to measure, you mean? Oh, we do.

CAMILLA: I know, yes, The Song of the Shirt.

SONYA: What did you have in mind?

CAMILLA: Something grander than the Jews' Infant School outing anyway. I'm one of their patrons as well.

SONYA: We completed an order for an Empire tea gown only this morning.

CAMILLA: And I was lucky enough to attend the wedding of Leonora de Rothschild on Saturday. The bride's robe was described as "a *chef d'oeuvre* in taste and appointments—white satin resplendent in real Brussels point." The bridesmaids' dresses were of white tulle looped with blue ribbon and velvets over very full slips of white glacé.

SONYA: Yes, well, I'm sure there's nothing like that in our shop. So sorry to trouble you. Are you coming, Berth?

CAMILLA: Don't go. Can't you see I'm trying to place temptation in your path? Your employer is obviously a swine. I'm offering you a way out.

SONYA: I don't follow you.

CAMILLA: Berth does, though, don't you, my dear?

BERTH: I'm beginning to.

CAMILLA: I was certain you didn't come over here *par hasard*. Ah, Saturday's ceremony put me very much in mind of my own treasured nuptials. Every maiden deserves an equivalent. Lord Marcatta plighted his troth to me in the most devoted fashion. Any girl couldn't help but feel exalted. The Chief Rabbi began by offering a prayer to the poor of the Land of Promise, then his Lordship lifted my veil and promised me utter fidelity and love, and I felt on the instant that these were not mere words of ceremony but the vow by which we would regiment our lives and the lives of our people here and abroad. In fact he was confiding to me that wherever we went for the rest of our lives would be parish to us. You see what I mean by "exalted," don't you? The moment was quite, quite divine.

SONYA: Sounds...

CAMILLA: Idyllic? It was.

BERTH: You said you had something for us?

SONYA: Berth!

CAMILLA: She's quite right. I want you to work for me.

BERTH: As housemaids?

CAMILLA: My words, at times, fail me. I don't mean that literally, of course. But you tell me your employer is nasty to you, I say, why bother if there's no need? And there isn't, I promise you. Wouldn't you prefer somewhere far from the sweatshop, the song of the shirt?

Work — work — work!
My labour never flags;
And what are its wages? A bed of straw,
A crust of bread — and rags..."

SONYA: That's not exactly/how it is.

BERTH: Who says it's not?

CAMILLA: Even if it's a distant resemblance. Wouldn't you prefer something altogether removed...as far from it as the East End is from Grafton Street. Don't you realise? I offer you Grafton Street.

SONYA: That's not possible.

CAMILLA (*to BERTH*): Does she doubt that I know such people? (*To SONYA*.) I *was* at the wedding, you know. I was married from there myself.

SONYA: No, I'm sorry, I don't mean that. I mean...how could we move there? *I* couldn't move.

CAMILLA: Nonsense, you just make up your mind to it. You think other young women, exactly like you, with a skill and a respectable trade...a profession for girls in your position...you think they don't have lodgings where they work? Better lodgings for better employment. It's as simple as that.

SONYA: English lasses, you're talking about.

CAMILLA: Mm. Like the ones that helped design the wedding gowns on Saturday. If I was there, don't you think I claim acquaintance with such people? Better than. My husband's a baronet. It's part of our mission from God to introduce the immigrant element into society as we ourselves were introduced....to make us all not merely Anglo-something or other...but simply Anglo. I ask you, what about that?

BERTH: You convinced me—when do we start?

SONYA: It's impossible for me. I'm sensible of your kindness, but...

CAMILLA: If you were sensible, you'd accept.

SONYA: It's not that. Tell her Ladyship why, Berth.

BERTH: She means her father would never allow it.

CAMILLA: Not allow you to better yourself? I never heard the like.

BERTH: *He's* the dreaded employer

CAMILLA: Oh, but that's dreadful...that's—

BERTH: It's worse than that.

SONYA: No, it's not.

CAMILLA: But what could be worse? That's exactly what we've been fighting against...what I want to deliver you from.

SONYA: My mother died early, you see...consumption.

CAMILLA: I understand perfectly, pet.

SONYA: I've taken her place in his life.

CAMILLA: They use that, you see, as a ploy...as their vicious hold.

BERTH: It's worse even than that.

CAMILLA: Well, now what could be worse?

SONYA: Nothing. Shut it, Berth. That's all there is.

CAMILLA: And more than enough, I should say. Sparing your feelings, the man deserves the law down on him.

SONYA: No, don't. Don't do anything.

CAMILLA: I shan't, never fear. He'd only make it worse for you.

SONYA: Exactly. Get Berth out. That'll do. It's better with two girls than three anyway. He was hinting that this morning.

CAMILLA: *Three* of you? Who's the third? Ought I to talk to her, too?

SONYA: No, I tell you to leave it—please!

CAMILLA: Right you are, my dear. I understand. (*To BERTH.*) But, you know, that's typical chauvinism. Lord Marcatta was even guilty of it on our wedding trip, would you believe. He talked about installing me as the High Governess of some outer hinterland or other...as though my life's work was to be a wretched despot. I told him flat, "You'll be lucky not to find yourself abandoned, at that rate...altogether annulled."

As she strolls into her house with BERTH. SONYA begins taking the dresses back to their shop.

Let me explain to you what we have in mind.

In the emporium of EZEKIEL SUE. The mystic is together with LORD MARCATTÀ before a small altar. JOSEPH, athetoid, in a wheelchair, offers up an invocation.

JOSEPH: Elijah the prophet, Elijah the friend, come and help us, lawful judge. Save my life, for you defend those who have suffered unduly, Bring harmony and peace to me, and balm to my afflicted body.