

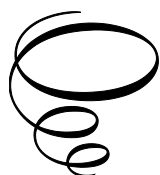
Eight Performance Texts about Disability

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By

James MacDonald

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To Thomas Fahy, with more than gratitude

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These performance texts were all written for undergraduate students of Drama at the University of Exeter.

Theatre is quintessentially collaborative, the more so as we progress in the post-dramatic era. Martin Harvey and the companies of performers have taken these texts and have transformed them into wonderfully viable spectacles worthy to stand alongside the best in a department's history of distinguished work. University drama, at its most serious, emerges from the European tradition of conservatory, where the rehearsal space is a forum for investigation. In the course of exploring the issues raised by these texts, we have been able to ask questions about the phenomenon of disability in a culture where diversity is welcomed and where answers are given tentative validity. In positing alternatives, no one has ever come forward with a definitive response, especially in a field of endeavour where immediacy is given primary importance. The dramatic crises arise mainly from instances of exclusion, but the multi-layered focus of spectacle avoids the certainty of a single answer, even in the case of *Lameday*, with its mass protest concluding the performance. My aim, in writing about disability, has always been to share my experience with others but leaving people free to respond as they will. Thomas Fahy and I differ somewhat in our interpretations of one of the plays. Without wishing to be abstruse, I still believe in the open-ended nature of drama, especially when my task has been to write rounded characters for a large group of performers. The world view may be off-centre, but the characters need to be sufficiently complex for performers to inhabit them. I have always been supremely fortunate in working with people who enjoyed working with me. Martin and I have been working together for 30 years. Without his contribution, these plays would not exist. The student performers supersede their tyro status through their signal dedication to the work. And most display a thoroughgoing aptitude for theatre that ranks with classical musicians' in terms of artistic appreciation. The students who worked on these texts were equally enthusiastic about the whole range of dramatic literature.

Thomas Fahy, to whom this volume is dedicated, co-edited *Peering Behind the Curtain*, one of the earliest critical studies devoted to disability theatre. The volume included one of my early plays, together with an interview Tom

conducted about my views on disability theatre. He has remained a steadfast friend in need for 20 years. And his essay closing this volume is searing enough to put every reader on immediate disabled alert.

But disability awareness remains highly developmental as long as disabled people are beyond the mainstream of cultural awareness. The central aim of Disability Studies programmes must be to recognise people with disabilities as worthwhile members of the community whose experiences enrich our awareness of the human condition.

A decade ago, Joyce Carol Oates responded to a chance email by arranging for an essay of mine about disability to be published in *Boulevard*. Ms Oates is a supreme artist, not least in her exemplary support of literature. She is indefatigable in her brilliance. And she has paid me the consummate tribute of encouraging the best in my writing. My gratitude is boundless.

Cambridge Scholars have displayed rare commitment in their support of this publication, and it is my heartfelt hope that their efforts will be rewarded by a much wider audience for disability issues. Joyce Carol Oates calls disability rights the new frontier, and Cambridge Scholars are exemplary pioneers.

These texts are dramatic works of fiction.

INTRODUCTION

This edition collects together my first and my latest in 40 years of writing performed plays. The performances have been under the radar because the subject matter has been outside popular awareness. Until very recently, “disability” has been the province of specialists who tried to cure it, like an illness, or at least to minimise its impact as much as possible. The breakthrough from which these plays benefit is the growing realisation that what cannot be cured must be not only endured but understood and accepted by the able-bodied world. These plays, as such, are not about disability but about the public’s awareness of the phenomenon of disability.

Until very recently, disability as an artistic subject has been in the hands of able-bodied specialists who have researched the subject by talking with disabled people, as scientists research a subject and then report their findings. Now disabled people are speaking for themselves because they have been so *enabled* by enlightened thinking. My published plays, numbering 20 in all, are the fruits of this enlightenment.

Born with cerebral palsy, I have never drawn an able-bodied breath. My whole life has been experienced as a disabled person, adjusting my expectations and rewards to my special circumstances.

“The master trope of social disqualification,” disabled campaigners Sharon L. Snyder and David Mitchell famously describe their plight (*Cultural Locations of Disability*, 126).

These plays were written to be performed by undergraduate students of drama, and they are intended to be viable as performance texts, with a legitimate statement to be made and understood, as effective pieces of theatre. In so far as they were understood admirably by seriously proficient performers and a highly gifted director, their statement is admirably made. They reflect three score and ten years of disabled living.

Strictly speaking, of course, these plays are less about disability than about the everyday world from a disabled perspective. They reflect how able-bodied people respond to disability. Not all people, by any means. But drama is about crisis, so these plays are intended to reflect how people at their most problematic respond to disability.

Formal judgement is a trope that runs throughout this cycle. Tribunals feature in two of the texts; flouting the law figures in all of them, because disability complicates orthodoxy, and because disability rights test the status quo far beyond established boundaries. Michel Foucault writes about “docile bodies” in *Discipline and Punish* (138), and Tobin Siebers references this in his discussion (“Foucault and the Government of Disability” 2015).

Ideally, plays of this magnitude would be produced on one of Britain’s premier stages. Disability remaining a minority issue, however, the productions were little more than a classroom exercise, albeit at a Russell Group university and directed by a director whose professional credits include successful productions of *King Lear* and Arthur Miller’s late plays.

The volume opens with *Calliper*, my first play for undergraduate drama students. Inasmuch as the students and I were new to one another (and I to the task of writing for students), the production had squirmish elements for me, in retrospect. I so wish our collaboration had been what it became throughout my 30-plus years of collaboration. I am, I hope, duly grateful to colleagues for sharing the load with their genuine skill and commitment. A further snag was the fact that a professional play agent, interested in helping me, had grave misgivings, about the commercial potential about any play from a disability perspective. This was axiomatic of the times. But the play does focus truthfully on painful discrimination, and I overheard two audience members in wheelchairs opine, “He’d have to be disabled to know that”, referring to the play’s depiction of discrimination.

Disabled Nation, a generation later, reflects a seismic shift in disability awareness. A panoramic view of contemporary Britain, it places disability at the heart of its cultural dynamic. A right-wing newspaper hosts a goodwill event with the intention of displaying its popular humanity, with inside-page appeal. Against every benign expectation, the event assumes a life of its own and develops front-page proportions beyond anyone’s ability to control its force or direction. Token awards become instruments of political influence. Private meetings are given sinister, quasi-criminal significance, and what begins as a special -interest Sunday outing concludes with government ministers ducking for cover.

Lameday develops the striking image offered by Brueghel’s *The Cripples* to explore the 16th century conflict between Flanders and Spain. Goethe and Schiller examine the same period in *Egmont* and *Don Carlos*. A specifically disabled gaze is given both a personal and political dimension in the crisis

of a Flemish mayor whose estranged wife wants him to take charge of their disabled adolescent daughter. He also keeps an eye out for the town's resident crippled beggar, whose presence assumes larger importance as the narrative progresses. Disability assumes pivotal importance with the arrival of the Duke de Alwa and his edict to execute all the lame people in the town, sparking local resistance. The disabled gaze was tested in production through a difference of interpretation between me and Martin Harvey. In the opening moments, the beggar Clovis discovers part of a dead foetus, whose mother is revealed to be a novice. Under pressure, she names Clovis as the father, though this is largely interpreted as being untrue. Martin suggested I firm up the relationship, probably to heighten the impact of the social scandal. But I wanted to demonstrate the relatively modest aspirations of disabled people, and explained that this was based on the experience of a disabled man I knew who was happy enough to arouse the jealousy of a husband, without the wife's infidelity being true.

Beggar on Crutches was written for a group half the size of *Disabled Nation's*. It features young disabled women, literally, begging for a sympathetic response to their plight. As such, they assume the presence and authority of a female gang, demanding money from those who would see them as objects of charity. Their leader is a graduate with a first-class degree. Able-bodied, she would be immediately slotted into a five-figure job with excellent prospects for promotion. As the victim of severe cerebral palsy, however, she faces a situation where her achievements are ignored, where she is judged on her liabilities which render her socially unacceptable.

The main plot is counterpointed by the presence of the disabled city councillor, who defends the status-quo position of disabled people's acceptance of tokenism, in this case, a clerical position in a disabled charity, under the supervision of an able-bodied manager without a degree of any kind.

This is not dissimilar from the circumstances of a friend with cerebral palsy whose progress in a law firm was stymied by her physical appearance. Isolated from clients, she was given no work, despite her law degree from Edinburg University. Over-qualification is commonplace among graduates, but when education is offered as a career strategy, excellence ought to be rewarded, especially for people with disabilities whose impairments preclude them from fulfilling unskilled roles. In this case, positive discrimination is a virtual necessity, since it makes proper use of genuine skills.

In the Tiber uses the disabled gaze to reevaluate a pivotal event in American history, relating the Civil War and its aftermath to the Ugly Laws, which forbade disabled people from appearing in public. The title alludes to the Ancient Roman solution of disposing of disabled people in the river. The further allusion is to this period of history as “Roman circus”. In Part One, an adolescent with cerebral palsy escapes from a freak show where she is the star attraction into a Washington DC brothel where her appearance would frighten off potential customers. The high-voltage political crisis intensifies the personal crisis, and this crisis, in turn, sheds new light on the familiar historical episode. Freed men and women, despite their continuing difficulties, were still less afflicted than the disabled, whose very appearance was contraband. This historical perspective is intended to add texture to the dramatic statements being made in the earlier plays. In *Disabled Nation*, a young man whose mobility is restricted to a skateboard is being depicted as quasi-criminal mainly because he appears unsightly. The lead protagonist in *Beggar on Crutches* is denied the benefits of her hard-earned degree because of her asymmetrical appearance and slurred speech. As an adolescent, I was never invited to parties and was even requested to leave a social gathering because my appearance upset the guests. My most persistent difficulty as a singleton was being mistaken as a drunk.

Part Two of *In the Tiber* holds disabled people to account for the failures of Reconstruction to guarantee the rights of Freedmen. A Unionist non-commissioned officer, charged with keeping the peace on the post bellum Gulf Coast, responds to the Mechanics Institute Massacre (in which a horde of Freedmen are slaughtered as they try to register to vote) by attempting to kill a disabled plantation owner, a case of one member of a minority paying for crimes against another minority.

Tikkum Olam and *Women and Cripples* make use of personal experience to further explore issues of sexuality and disability. My marriage was open to public scrutiny because my wife was a Russian asylum seeker and because I was in receipt of disability benefit. I was not even sure that my marriage did not violate the terms of my council tenancy agreement. Our asylum hearing was a gruelling experience, in any case, in which Inna was depicted by the Home Office barrister as a quasi-criminal opportunist, exploiting someone on the lowest social echelon. Our graduate status seemed to count for very little alongside our appearance as dubious transients desperate for state benefit. Even the fact that an Englishwoman would be unlikely to marry me was introduced as evidence against us. We won through in the end because the court accepted my written deposition. And the drama is heightened for maximum effect. But the legal discourse has transcriptional

authenticity. And Martin evoked dramatic precedent in rehearsals by referencing the trial scene in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* for a corresponding scene in our play where the mother of the cerebral palsied boy protests against the Russian care worker:

HAZEL (*standing*): No! I can't bear this another minute!

RITA: We must have order.

HAZEL: Put me in jail—I dare ya! I can't listen to this—she makes me sick at my stomach. “We love each other deeply.” What the fuck are you on about? I'm his mother—you think I don't love him? Let him look at me. He don't know me!

IDA: Because you're never with him. He doesn't know you. Now you're frightening him!

JP becomes agitated, verbally as well as physically. IDA cradles him.

It's all right, my darling. Nobody's going to hurt you.

HAZEL: Take your hands off him!

JP reacts violently. In stylised fashion, he speaks the following:

JP: Man deserves to stay with his wife, if he's done nothing wrong. Yet here I am, over here, on my own. So either I've done something wrong, or I'm not a man. Maybe that's precisely what I've done wrong.

Women and Cripples focuses on the relationship between disabled protagonist and able-bodied carer, and in this way exemplifies the work of Tobin Siebers, Robert McRuer and others in recognising sexuality as part of disabled life (*A Sexual Culture for Disabled People*, 2012). This extends the frame of sexual reference beyond heterosexual orthodoxy and conventional intercourse. In both plays, the carer immediately offers marriage to the man. But it is more arranged marriage than marriage of convenience because it is a genuine union complete with physical intimacy. Tom Shakespeare and Dan Goodley, among disability theorists, have emphasised the importance of dependence in examining the social model of disability (Shakespeare, 2005; Goodley, 2016). And issues of dependency feature throughout these texts. Two prominent post-war films feature this dependency in their portrayals of disabled men and able-bodied women. These views of dependency extend our view of sexuality beyond heterosexual orthodoxy by revealing the women as being more proactive than the heterosexual stereotype. In Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window*, the protagonist is temporarily

confined to a wheelchair and must depend on the ministrations of an insurance company nurse and a partner whose solicitude is the source of much friction between them. He claims to be equivocal toward her because of her position in high fashion; but the controversy is played out while he is utterly dependent on her, and we cannot avoid bringing this dependence to bear on our perception of the dynamics between them.

There is a similar view of dependency in *The Small Back Room* (1949), Michael Powell's and Emeric Pressburger's depiction of Home Front wartime through the experiences of a disabled munitions expert and his able-bodied partner:

“Oh, Sue. You could have such a good time without me. I take things from you with both hands. I always will.”

The relationship works because the woman does not object to the man's disability, implying that heterosexual dominance is not a prerequisite of a successful union. For all the sentimentality of the positive narrative, the film admirably anticipates the present-day awareness of disabled accomplishment in pushing back boundaries and showing greater participation of the woman in the union. The film actually presents three sympathetic characters with disabilities, and each is shown making a genuine contribution to the war effort, especially the munitions expert who defuses a bomb, heading a War Office research department as his reward.

In the British Forces, physical disability need not be a deterrent, as *Ryan's Daughter* illustrates, though it does not spare British officers either. *Ryan's Daughter* is another popular film that offers a significant view of disability and sexuality, in the persons of the lame British officer who transgresses social norms with the eponymous heroine and the crippled outcast whose worship of the heroine exceeds normal behaviour. But these are supporting characters in an able-bodied narrative.

The disabled narrative is more central in these texts, where the world view is filtered through the disabled gaze.

Six With Arrows, the closing and most recent text, concerns the end-of-life crisis for a family of women whose patriarch is leaving them. The disability component is in the patriarch's desire to challenge and to defeat handicap through the power of supremely able-bodied love. Might alone is shown to be insufficient; indeed, might may be entirely inappropriate as a response if one thinks in terms of contest. Diversity is intended to broaden the cultural spectrum, not to replace one survival strategy with another. John's sense of

inclusiveness is fine enough for him to welcome as family women from a variety of cultures and with physical and emotional disabilities. His love offers them licence to be themselves, without censure. But this love does not entitle him to live their lives for them, and he perishes in the attempt. The narrative concludes abruptly, with each woman facing the future under her own steam.

Three years ago, the Pulitzer Prize for Drama was awarded to *The Cost of Living*, about disability. Its productions boasted disabled performers, but the author is able-bodied, and this is comparable to awarding the prize in 1926 to *In Abraham's Bosom*, about African Americans but by a white author. Though prestigious, the prize is still based on personal opinion, and the board members could just as well have awarded a play by a disabled author, to John Belluso, for example, or to Susan Nussbaum. *Beyond Victims and Villains* (edited by Victoria Ann Lewis, 2006), collects together seven plays by disabled playwrights. And several of John Belluso's plays are available in standard acting editions. The plays in this volume are authentically the work of a congenitally disabled author, and they were good enough to be performed as part of an undergraduate syllabus. In formally critical terms, this provides agency to someone with level three cerebral palsy in a university department which has yet to admit its first wheelchair bound undergraduate. In financial terms, my relatively modest pay would provoke protest if offered to any able-bodied member of staff. But, as most people would agree, agency is more important than remuneration, especially when this involves a disabled person with proper academic qualifications being authorised to speak about disability. Professor Peter Thomson's testimonial about my work includes the acknowledgement that he considered it a privilege to read the largest of these texts. Shortly before Stephen Hawking died, he was asked if he had any advice to give the disabled. Concentrate on what you can do, he said, not on what you cannot. The realistic goal of all people with disabilities ought to be to pursue the areas of their life where they are *not* disabled. In this way, I have been privileged to have a lifetime's effort recognised in an able-bodied context.

CALLIPER

First performed by members of Exeter University Drama Department at the Bloomsbury Theatre, London, on 29 August 1984 with the following cast:

DORY	Caroline Ann Burns
SHARON	Lisa Shrimpton
EDGE	John Hilton
DHSS OFFICER	Mark Laville
PUBLICAN	Anthony Richards
FIRST PATRON	Mark Probert
SECOND PATRON	Simon Crane
ROLAND	Andrew Dunnett
KITELY	Cameron McLennan
MISS FROMHOLDT	Elisabeth Mansfield
ALAN DEACON	Stephen Tredre
JOYCE DEACON	Penny Taylor
JILLY	Rae Hoole
ANGELA	Lisa Shrimpton
DIANE PEEBLES	Rae Hoole
DIANE'S HEAVY	Mark Probert
INTERVIEWER	Mark Laville
ASSURANCE MAN	Simon Crane

Directed by Vince Miles

The setting throughout is contemporary London

Scene One

DHSS office, London, late afternoon.

Two teenage girls, DORY and SHARON huddle together. EDGE, early 20s, tries to attract their attention. His appearance is dishevelled, but the main feature of this is that he walks with a pronounced limp in some sense due to a badly damaged calliper. The girls watch him suspiciously.

DORY: Willya just listen a minute, Sharon.

SHARON: Tolya I know what I'm doin'.

DORY: But what if they check up on ya. Bound to check up. You don't have no rent book nor nuffink.

EDGE: Fucking useless. Queuing all fucking day. *(Shouts.)* There's a desperate cripple going bonkers out here. *(He hobbles round, looks at the girls.)* I was here before you, yeah? I don't want you taking advantage.

SHARON: You don't have to worry, mate.

EDGE: You what? You trying to take advantage or something?

SHARON: I wasn't doing nothing, honest.

DORY: C'mon, Shar.

EDGE: She was staring though, wasn't she? *(To SHARON.)* You reckon this makes me worth staring at, do you? That's all I need. Gimme the sack when I get out of hospital and then I run into you two—trying to scam the Social. *We're* the ones that need it, you know. Not a coupla slappers already poncing off your boyfriends.

SHARON: You want to watch what you're saying, mate.

EDGE *(sarcastic)*: Don't scare me like that. *(Withdraws a knife.)*

DORY: Don't wind him up.

SHARON: I ent. It's him that's winding.

DORY: But you're letting him. Just ignore him.

SHARON: You get on my tits, you do. I ent afraid of him.

EDGE: I could tickle you, yeah? (*Shows her his knife.*)

SHARON: I ent afraid.

EDGE makes threatening movements with his calliper; they watch him.

DORY: You got the letters, Shar? (*A beat.*) Sha-ron.

SHARON: You see what he's doing?

DORY: Just leave him.

SHARON: But he's cutting hisself wiv it.

DHSS OFFICER appears from behind barrier.

DHSS OFFICER: Who is it making the row?

SHARON: Geezer here pulled a knife.

DHSS OFFICER: Knife? Where? What're you talking about?

EDGE: Don't look at me.

DHSS OFFICER: We're getting ready to close. (*To SHARON.*) I told you this morning you needed to produce a rent book. You haven't brought one, have you.

SHARON: But I got these letters. Says here I pay 15 knicker a week.

DHSS OFFICER (*looking*): This? This is nothing. You need a proper rent book. You could have written these yourself.

DORY: But she din. I promise you.

EDGE: Hey, what about me?

DHSS OFFICER: What, are you all together?

SHARON and DORY (*together*): You must be joking./We never seen him before.

EDGE: I'm disabled.

DHSS OFFICER: Registered?

EDGE: Registered what? I need a card to know I can't walk right? You're effing bonkers.

DHSS OFFICER: Well, what are you here for? Living Allowance? Housing Benefit?

EDGE: No, you see, I had to go to hospital for me leg, and when I come out, bastards make me redundant.

DHSS OFFICER: So it's Incapacity you're after.

EDGE: You fucking wally.

DHSS OFFICER: You have to give us some help to help you. Have you claimed here before? What's your name?

EDGE: Nah, nah, nah, you go back to helping these bits of bird drop. I got better things to do.

DHSS OFFICER: But you came to us, sir.

EDGE: Your eyes are ready to pop, you fucking woofter. *(Stumbles out.)*
Get out of it.

DORY: Wally.

SHARON: I could tickle you.

Scene Two

A pub. Raining out.

EDGE in dispute with a PUBLICAN. TWO MEN in tweeds stand by.

PUBLICAN: I don't have to give you my reasons.

EDGE: I can prove I'm not drunk—I got a bus pass. Disabled.

PUBLICAN: I don't care you got American Express.

EDGE: You heard of discrimination? I'll tell the Office of Fair Trading.

ONE: Here...Terry.

PUBLICAN: Another small one.

ONE: Something noticeable this time.

PUBLICAN: Something noticeable, right, sir.

TWO: This one's mine, I believe.

ONE: That's handsome of you.

EDGE: Eh, Terry...Tell?

TWO (*to ONE*): You test drove the new Maestro the other week.

ONE: Ah, yes.

TWO: How was she, all right?

ONE: She was that. (*Drinking.*) *Cheers.*

TWO: And...?

ONE: Most impressed, I have to say.

TWO: What, including the voice box?

ONE: Its weakest point, I think you'll find, is the old reliable pushrod engine. Revised, they say. But there's no mistaking tat.

TWO: Hard to think they've been on the market for 20 years.

ONE: I'll say. You know they were brought in by Volkswagon, don't you.

TWO: What she test at?

ONE: Ninety-three round a banked circuit.

TWO: The others, though, do at least a hundred.

ONE: Get away.

TWO: Fiat? Datsun?

ONE: Never. Never on four gears.

EDGE: Datsun's got five. (*They turn to look at him.*) I read you couldn't even fit a fifth gear on a Maestro—the engine's too blinking small. Datsun's a 1.5.

TWO: What about that, eh?

ONE: Even then she'll only do 90-something.

EDGE: Come off it, mate. She's a good five miles quicker in second and third.

ONE (*to PUBLICAN*): Isn't it about time you updated the decor?

PUBLICAN: What's that?

ONE: Place looks like a crypt.

TWO (*giggling*): Or a pit stop.

PUBLICAN sneaks behind EDGE.

EDGE: She can knock four seconds off the Maestro going 50-70.

PUBLICAN (*grabs him under the armpits*): Come on then, Sarjeant. Time you were on your way.

EDGE: Hey, watch it. Why?

PUBLICAN: You're beginning to put the wind up everyone.

EDGE: I wasn't. I was talking motors with these blokes. You ask 'em. Hey, hey. (*The men move slightly away.*)

PUBLICAN: You're not going to make it hard for me, are you?

EDGE: I'm not going to do nothing—I told you I'm disabled.

PUBLICAN (*starting to get him out*): And I'm telling you...leave off annoying the customers.

EDGE: It's peeing out there!

ROLAND (*approaching*): I don't think he meant any harm. Sir? Sir?

EDGE (*to PUBLICAN*): Then why don't you ring the Old Bill. I dare you.

PUBLICAN (*a final thrust outside*): I can...clean my own toilets.

ROLAND goes to help EDGE.

ROLAND: That was inexcusable. Are you all right?

EDGE:...the fuck are you?

ROLAND: I was in there watching you. Can you walk? No, I don't think you're able to walk.

EDGE: Bastard.

ROLAND: Don't worry about him. I'm going to fetch you a taxi. Hold on.

Scene Three

ROLAND'S bedsit in North London. ROLAND helps EDGE to the front door.

ROLAND: Are you all right to stand for a minute? I'll get my key.

EDGE: Can't wait to feel yourself? You fucking perv.

ROLAND: Afraid it's all a bit of a tip.

EDGE: Hallway pongs of dead cat.

ROLAND (*as they enter*): You really ought to have that leg seen to. (*Scurries to him to a chair.*) This one's the most comfortable, I think.

EDGE: What is it, reclining? You tell them all you're a dentist, do you?

ROLAND: That...thing makes your leg look really nasty.

EDGE: It's useless, that's why. What, you think that's how you're going to get me to strip? Frigging chance, mate.

ROLAND: I'm just worried about infection.

EDGE: Yeah, of course you are.

ROLAND: And I can't believe they discharged you from hospital with your leg in that condition.

EDGE:...because it wasn't like this, was it. (*Beat.*) You got a bit of rag or something?

ROLAND: Of course, yes, what exactly do you want.

EDGE: To blow my nose, you nerd. You said it—it's infected. I want to put a fresh bandage on it.

ROLAND: Oh, then shouldn't you go back to hospital?

EDGE: All right, I'll bleed all over your carpet.

ROLAND: I'm ready to do anything you want....

EDGE: What an offer.

ROLAND:...I just think it needs some *professional* care. (*EDGE looks at him.*) Why? What is it?

EDGE: Just get your finger out.

ROLAND leaves momentarily and looks round from his sitting position.

What would you do if I let you suck me off? Would you give me a month's salary?

ROLAND (*off*): We must have the neighbours from hell in this street. We can't hear from one to the next.

(*Returning.*) I'm not sure that this is what you want.

EDGE: What'd you bring it for?

ROLAND: I'm sorry. I know, look, you're in considerable discomfort. I'm only trying to help.

EDGE: You got any scoff?

ROLAND: What is it now, food? I'm not a waiter, you know. This is my home.

EDGE: And I happen to be disabled, if you didn't notice. Don't offer what you don't want to give.

ROLAND: I'm vegetarian.

EDGE: What does that mean?

ROLAND: It means I don't eat—

EDGE: What're you giving me, for God's sake?

ROLAND: Egg plant. Nut roast.

EDGE: As long as it's nothing the cat wouldn't eat.

ROLAND goes to the kitchen. EDGE begins attending to his leg, tearing his trousers on purpose and then applying the cloth that ROLAND brought.

Did you say this was somewhere near Wood Green?

ROLAND: What? It's best if we don't shout.

EDGE: What sort of work do you do?

ROLAND (*coming into view*): Didn't you hear me? (*Beat.*) I'm a hospital porter, actually.

EDGE: Yeah, I wouldn't be surprised. Just picture you giving out bedpans.

ROLAND: I'll let you have my bed for the night...I can use that chair. But in the morning I really

think... Wait, what are you doing with—?

EDGE (*brandishing knife*): What, this? It's called a Khanjar knife. Arab, you know? I got it off a PLO

terrorist. Like it?

ROLAND: You're being very silly, you know.

EDGE: You reckon?

ROLAND: I've very little money in the house, and I'm sure I could overpower you in that state. If you want money...

EDGE: You're only too happy to give it to me, eh? What about dropping your trousers. Lemme see what you're made of.

ROLAND: There's no need for this performance, you know. You're not impressing anyone, I assure you. And I was only trying to help you. Those

men back at the pub, they'd have kicked you into the gutter if I hadn't come along. *(Beat.)* I really don't know what you're trying to prove. *(Begins undoing his belt.)*

EDGE: Look at you there—you're scared shitless.

ROLAND: I...what?

EDGE: You're dead easy to get going, ent you? You prize prat.

Scene Four

Office ante-room. Door showing.

An anxious voice on the telephone from behind the door.

VOICE: I'm afraid I have no explanation, Mr Buller. Our records show they were sent out on Tuesday...you should have had them. You know what the post is these days. *(Listens.)* But surely Alvins can give you a day or two's grace. You don't need to tell me about the cost of delay. We'd be most sorry to lose our association with you. We've been in business together for—Of course, I'll get onto it straightaway.

Thank you very much, Mr—*(A second later, shouting.) Miss Fromholdt!*

Door opens and KITELY almost collides with MISS FROMHOLDT.

FROMHOLDT: Just on my way in, Mr—

KITELY: Did you happen to hear what just went down? I told him the documents were sent on Tuesday. I'm not a Charley, am I?

FROMHOLDT: That's when they were sent.

KITELY: He's in no mood to split the difference, you know.

FROMHOLDT: I saw to it myself.

KITELY:...because in that case, they never got there.

FROMHOLDT: Are you sure?

KITELY: He's on the phone raising merry hell about it. What difference does it make? He'll be saying next he can do better with workers in Thailand, and we'll be thinking about where to make cuts. Is there anything else you can think of?

FROMHOLDT: In what respect? Is he complaining of something outside our control?

KITELY: As the customer, he has that right.

FROMHOLDT: Wait a minute.

KITELY: Go on, spit it out.

FROMHOLDT: I'm sure we sent them out, as arranged, by special courier. But now that I think of it...

KITELY: Oh, Christ.

FROMHOLDT:...that might just have been Mr Deacon.

KITELY: Who the—?

FROMHOLDT:...you know—that spastic lad we have on work placement.

KITELY: Tell me it's a dream.

FROMHOLDT: I can't be absolutely—

KITELY:...and I'm Joe *Dolt*. He can't have been given the Buller papers. That's only a three million-pound account.

FROMHOLDT: But isn't he only the courier?

KITELY: I don't care what he is. *We're* not a nationalised industry.

FROMHOLDT: But aren't we obliged to take a certain disabled quota?

KITELY: Who made him a bloody *courier*? I did? Quotas change the towels in the bloody canteen. They're not given anything *important*. You should know that.

FROMHOLDT: What do you want me to do about it?

KITELY: Sack him.