

# ***THE HALF-CRIPPLE***

**by Krzysztof Pieczyński**

Characters:

HALF-CRIPPLE, age 49, actor

GIRL, age 20, actress

OLD ACTOR, age 65

MIDDLE-AGED ACTOR, age 40

YOUNG HALF-CRIPPLE, age 23

YOUNG ACTOR, age 23

DIRECTOR K., age 45

DIRECTOR F., age 50, looks much younger

COMPOSER J., age 45

ACTOR JOHNNY, age 45

DIRECTOR PETER, age 30

TWO MALE USHERS, young, of a bouncer-like built

A word from the author:

*The figure of HALF-CRIPPLE cannot possibly have any physical defects; by no means, which is rather obvious. The rest will be explained later on.*

ACT I

SCENE 1

*Empty stage, dark curtains, some light. An actor comes onto the stage, about fifty years old, not more than that, dressed casually in a sports jacket and corduroy trousers.*

## HALF-CRIPPLE

Why should it always be me who am so unlucky when we come forward to take a bow? Either I come up first and then others push me all the way back, and they, appearing one by one, receive the gradually growing applause, or I come out last, closest to the curtains, modestly leaving one side of the body behind the fabric, and when I'm finally smiling, ready to receive that one payment of ours that really counts, the curtains fall and the applause dies out. I always have this kind of luck. But let's just imagine, wouldn't that have been nice: the whole troupe comes out on the stage and they leave an empty spot in the middle, and only when the clapping reaches its highest I appear on the stage and take this tiny little spot in the very middle. Wow! Then my fellow actors leave to the sides and I remain in the centre, and then I spread my arms pointing to the sides, I don't even want to suggest whose gesture this belongs to, and they stream to my arms just like the little arteries reach the heart of hearts. My dear, beloved children. Then come the lights, applause, some weeping of joy, of course, a few spasms here and there; even incidents of fainting, and flowers, flowers, and more flowers. And the girls... young and beautiful... paying homage... to me. I transfer the flowers to the main female character and some other re-creators, or should I say - creators of the roles. We leave the stage accompanied by the echo of comments and whispers. And a jealous colleague says about me: 'He's had quite an evening tonight.' I change slowly and wash my sweaty face. Tomorrow I'll collect quite a bit of money for the outrageous number of performances given. Someone will say: 'You've acted your heart out this month, Maestro.' Or: 'You have had quite a few shows this month, Sir.' Perhaps the latter is better, let's leave the grandiose titles to those more deserving.

And then the girls outside the theatre. Waiting for the autograph. Freezing but hot, young and beautiful. "Take it easy girls, don't rush it. I'll give one to each of you". And they say: "Just have a look who's leaving, all by himself... Why don't you run up to him and ask for an autograph..."

I must admit that when looking at those beauties, I get this funny feeling that here they are, so genuinely interested, such a talkative gaggle, and me, a dirty old man with just one thing on my mind. Naughty, naughty. And one of them, the most beautiful one, actually blushes giving me a pad and a pen. When collecting my autograph, she says thank you by curtsying like a well brought up pupil from before W.W.II. And she's a tall beastie, much taller than I am.

*A young girl in autumn wear enters the stage.*

YOUNG GIRL

Sir! Maestro!

HALF-CRIPPLE

No, no, young lady, please do not address me like that.

YOUNG GIRL

But sir, please do not... I am Brigit.

HALF-CRIPPLE *(to himself)*

Here I stand, hopeless. Forty-nine years of age knocking at my door. Forty damn nine, so painful and so hopeless. Everybody's gone by now. Why are you persecuting me? I'm cold and tired; I have worked very hard today. A morning rehearsal of four hours and at home I do not exactly idle away 'cause I read a lot, and then three hours at the theatre on top of that. It's after ten o'clock at night now, I'm all sweat, and I might catch a cold or lose my voice. I cannot possibly risk the organ because of this youngster and her crazy ideas. She's standing with me at the theatre and if anyone noticed us that would be a disaster. And on top of everything else, she's not saying anything. For God's sake, say something, I am tired, I have just finished my work! Holy cow, you can see the steam coming out of your mouth, it's that cold, one should really stomp the feet and beat the hands to stay comfortable. *(Loudly now)* What time is it now, child? *(To himself)* It's better to assume this unassuming tone, and to hell with all the rest, as long as I do not commit myself. If she does not give an answer within the next three minutes then... what the hell, I'll take it back on her. *(Loudly now)* Hey! What's the time?

YOUNG GIRL

Sir, would you be so kind as to come to our school for the meeting with an actor, please? Pretty please?

HALF-CRIPPLE

And who is asking?

YOUNG GIRL

Well, I have come to the theatre tonight only to give you this invitation. Our teacher says that such a meeting could be very interesting and much revealing to high school seniors.

HALF-CRIPPLE

But would I.....?

YOUNG GIRL

I beg your pardon?

HALF-CRIPPLE

I was thinking about my schedule and the possibility of finding a slot for you. When is this meeting to take place?

YOUNG GIRL

At the beginning of November; exactly in two weeks' time, at eleven, at the High School under the Invocation.

HALF-CRIPPLE

OK, I'll do it for you; I'll cut out an hour although I'll have to put off thousands of other matters. But that's what our actors' fate is, isn't it? Bye, then.

YOUNG GIRL

Bye!

HALF-CRIPPLE

Bye, bye!

*(The girl leaves)*

HALF-CRIPPLE *(turning around to look at the departing girl)*

She raised the collar of her crimson overcoat. Pushing through the falling patches of fog, she's taking her innocence to God knows where. *(Listening to the echo of departing steps, he's counting them)* Forty-five, forty-six, forty-seven, I'm not prejudiced although I used to be in my childhood. Her dark hair seems to be dissolving in the dark puddle of the night. The heels count the years, but whose years are they? Mine, perhaps? Are these my years, or yours? Or ours? There you go grandpa, it's ours: forty-eight, forty-nine, and she disappears around the corner. Fifty, fifty-one, fifty-two, fifty-three, and then silence.

## SCENE 2

*The theatre cafeteria. The noise of chatting. Enters the HALF-CRIPPLE.*

### HALF-CRIPPLE

Hello, hello, hello there. *(To himself)* Why has only one person greeted me back? The cafeteria, after all, is full of people, and I got a hello from the least important person only, the one who's been acting episodes for the past ten years. Good God, is it possible that me entering the cafeteria is of no consequence to these people? I know all of you, bastards. Only when a star enters you're able to spit out this damn 'hello' but my day will surely come and when I enter the cafeteria and mumble a 'hello', you'll all answer in unison, readily, loudly and eagerly a 'hello' back to me.

You would like to be the boss, wouldn't you? Because in the boss's library there is plenty of rare books and lots of rare records in his collection, and he is the one that can have migraines, and diarrhoeas and stomachaches. You really would like to be the boss, or would you not? The boss - he already has it made, the boss - he can have an opinion on anything, the boss - whether wearing a suit or not - never stops being the boss. The boss may be in a pleasant mood and the boss may be angry; the boss may have a sense of humour and, when laughing, his gold tooth shows, then we cannot possibly question his choice of a dentist. The boss is not feeling very well, good God, what a shame and disgrace; the boss is to go, don't let it happen because if no boss then no gloss, that is nothing at all. So you hate your boss now but some time ago you admired him greatly. Isn't that true? Sure is! Did the boss tell good jokes? Sometimes good, sometimes not so good, but always very clever. You once laughed at the boss's jokes, didn't you? Yes, you did. Maybe not so much as he himself, or definitely much quieter than the rest but, still, in such a way that your laughter could be definitively taken for a sign of approval. Did you try to win his favours?

At the beginning, I did not dare as I was too shy but after a while I found the courage to tell a joke. So what happened? Did they laugh? Yes, they did because I forgot the punch line. In what other way did you try to get closer to the boss? Well, in a bigger company that time I tried to tell a joke again. And what? Did they laugh that time? No, they didn't 'cause they knew the joke. So did you try one more time? Ten days later I tried asking him for a rise? And did he give it to you? No, he just laughed. What happened next? Then the boss somehow stumbled, he was going through a bad patch, his face spelled trouble and everyone knew they wanted to put him out to the pasture. In spite of that, the boss kept telling jokes and appearing publicly with one of the rare birds. Obviously, everyone knew it was just a show of might. So I started laughing at his jokes more and more quietly and finally stopped totally. His situation was unclear for a long time. So I waited a little while and then tried telling a joke in a bigger company. Everyone laughed, including the boss. I waited a few more days and told the very same joke in a different company. The boss didn't laugh at the same joke again but everyone else did. When he retired, they asked me why he hadn't laughed. I told them he didn't get it. In that very way I secured the position of the theatre director and succeeded the boss. And although this was just an episode in my life, which lasted for a short time and ended long ago, I hate the boss to this very day.

### SCENE 3

*Evening at the dressing room. He is warming up his speech and joints-tendons' apparatus.*