

Story for performance #675  
webcast from Northampton, near Boston at 07:38PM,  
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Source: Andrew Cockburn, 'The puppet who cleared the way for Iraq's destruction', *The Guardian online*, 26/04/07.

Tags: [disease](#), [food](#)  
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'You ought to get someone who knows to look at that.'

And so here I am looking for someone who knows. There are signs in the reception area of the hospital arrowing people to fractures, x-ray 1, x-ray 2, outpatients, phlebotomy, neurology, radiology, podiatry, cardiology, antenatal, colposcopy, occupational health, maternity. And still I don't know where to go.

A wavy grey haired woman sits behind a desk, head tilted upwards, her eyes seeing over the big white counter spreading out in front of her. Her name badge says 'Information'.

She looks up as she senses me move closer to the desk.

'Yes?'

'I've got an x-ray appointment?'

'Yes?' 'Where do I go?'

Mrs Information points at the signs and then away from them to the long corridor: 'Down there and first left.'

I scan all the signs for extra clues, then point:

'There?' 'No!' Mrs Information makes a large gruff gesture, arm swinging out from her centre in a curve, resting at full span left.

'That way! And then left again!'

I obey, and, surprisingly, arrive as directed.

The x-ray waiting area is chaired in red vinyl, set out in three rows back to back. There's a copy of a Turkish language newspaper and some English magazines scattered about. The magazines all have photos of huge white women with headlines slashed over them in red: 'Down from 16 stone in 2 weeks—diet secrets revealed inside'. The Turkish paper has one side in English, its headline is 'Racism troubles community'.

The information desk is empty but the nearby office door is open and a blonded woman sorts through papers in the drawer of a desk; she looks up as I come towards her.

'Yes?'

'I have an appointment?' I hand over my blue slip of paper. She hands me a plastic shopping basket full of faded cloth.

'Go to the cubicle over there. Take all your clothes off the top half, and put them in here. Then come back.'

The cubicle curtain is scruffy and bunched and provides some little privacy while I replace my street clothes with what they call a gown. On returning to the waiting room I obediently take my seat—one of the red vinyls next to the fat magazines. I am following the rules.

Near the desk three women are grouped to listen to the blonde woman now talking about last night. I can't help but listen in.

'So I went to the consultant's place, yes, Beryl's place, you know, our area expert.'

'What was it like?'

'The house was a-mazing. Five stories. And a basement. In that kind of minimal style. But all hidden behind the Georgian front. You know. An American designer apparently.'

She sighed and shifted her weight onto the other foot, making her hip bulge out to one side. She looked wistfully up to the ceiling, 'Really lovely.'

'Did you eat there?' one of the others asked.

'Oh yes! You know she made this huge salad? In a great big bowl. In layers. Big layers of lettuce. Not iceberg or cos from the regular supermarket. No. Oak leaf or one of

those specialist ones. Then there was a layer of peas. Frozen peas! Still frozen. Not cooked at all, just laid out in the next layer...'

She paused and looked at her audience.

'Then a layer of peanuts, salty ones...'

'Sounds like she's an expert chef too!'

'Yes. Then layered on top of that were thin sliced matchsticks of celery. And then a layer of green peppers, and then slices of water chestnuts. And on the top was boiled eggs. Sliced, looking like lots of little suns with white rings. It's called Layered Salad. And there was a dressing...'

A sudden squelch of shoe on hospital floor and a flash of red causes every one of us in the waiting room to turn and watch as a man rushes past. He is almost running, arms outstretching, forward and back to propel him more quickly to his destination.

Startled out of the silence I pull the gown closer, adjusting the single thread ribbon that ties it together at my neck. I venture towards the drinking fountain nearby. While leaning over the water arc I hear a muffled voice call out. I look around towards the group, seeking some direction, 'Was that me?' 'Maybe.' 'Where do I go?' 'Over there, just follow him over there to the next room on the right.' I pick up my plastic basket of clothes and follow.

The man in red is there. Calm now. The radiographer. The specialist with his huge room of looking equipment. 'Put your basket there, have you taken off your bra?' 'Yes'.

'Lean up against this. Chin up here.'

He places his hand firmly against my back and pushes me against the big cold metal plate, steps away for a moment, then returns.

'A bit higher. Lift your chin up.'

He walks away and his voice calls from a distance:

'Okay. Now. Deep breath. In.'

Silence.

'And again.'

Silence.

'Okay. That's it.'

I step away from the plate to collect the basket.

'The pain has moved up.' I tell him.

'Looks okay to me. The consultant will do a report. He does nightly briefings, it'll be sent to the surgery. Don't think there's any real damage.'

He turns away in dismissal towards his next call. I walk out through the waiting room to the changing cubicle, slip my head out of the loop of the gown and get back into my own clothes. As instructed I take the basket to the desk, and drop the gown into the laundry skip.

'Really? Oh that's great...'

The women are interrupted in their admiration for the salad chef by a call from up the corridor. They break out of the huddle.

'I need some help here!'

The radiographer is calling 'Something's not quite right. What's everyone doing? Why aren't you paying attention?'

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Helen Idle.*