

LEFT HAND, RIGHT HAND

by

HAZEL SALISBURY

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This play was first staged in the 1991 finals of the Notts Drama Association's competition at the Charnwood Centre, Long Eaton and publication is a joint venture between them and the Playwrights Publishing Company

THE AUTHOR

A lifetime's interest in the theatre and live performance led Hazel Salisbury to write plays. After graduating in English at Durham University, she immediately abandoned literature as a career, taking a diploma in Anglo-Saxon Archaeology followed by two years research on the Illuminations of early manuscripts. Finding this a little over-specialised, she spent fifteen years in 'dirt archaeology', Investigating early and prehistory in the East Midlands, spending half her life living in caravans in gravel pits in the remoter parts of the Trent Valley, leaving her with a passion for hot water, electricity and mains drainage, but nostalgia for long hot summers working out of doors

Since one life is too short to devote to only one career, she retrained in law and qualified as a solicitor in 1987. After some years in private practice with a Nottingham firm, she is now Commercial and Planning Solicitor at Nottinghamshire County Council

Hazel's published works are all related to archaeology and she is joint editor for the Thoroton Society, which publishes an annual journal of local history and archaeology in Nottinghamshire. She is a keen member of her local amateur drama group, Roclaveston Players, who first produced this play and has written a radio play and two full-length plays for the stage, one based on events in early 19th century Tollerton, where she lives. She is married to a doctor in general practice, but hastens to add that although he suggested the original idea for this play, and much vital advice, the story is not based on his own experiences, nor on those of any of his colleagues

CAST

THE SURGERY STAFF

- DR ELIZABETH WILLIAMS - a medical GP in her early sixties.
- DR TONY GREEN - her partner, in his late twenties, early thirties.
- MRS DEIRDRE ELLIOT - the surgery receptionist, the same age as or slightly younger than Dr Williams.

THE PATIENTS

- MR TIM BRADMORE - an anxious man in his thirties or forties.
- MRS SHEILA BRADMORE - his wife, younger than her husband.
- MRS FLETCHER - a mother.
- JANICE FLETCHER - her daughter, a child.

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(The action of the play takes place in the consulting room of DR WILLIAMS and DR GREEN's surgery. It is suitable for a small stage, giving the intimate atmosphere of a surgery and requires only the simplest of sets. One entrance up centre from corridor between Mrs Elliot's office on left and waiting room on right. On the Doctors' desk is a computer screen and keyboard. A chair for patients is adjacent to the desk, with a second chair on the opposite side).

SCENE I

(As the curtains open DR GREEN is seated at the desk at the end of his morning surgery. MRS ELLIOT enters from her office.)

DR GREEN: How many waiting now, Mrs Elliot?

MRS ELLIOT: Only one more for you, Doctor. The rest are for Dr Williams. She just phoned to say she's on her way and could she have a word before you start on your calls.

DR GREEN: Oh not this morning, I'm behind schedule already. What's it about, do you know?

MRS ELLIOT: She didn't say, Doctor.

DR GREEN: It'll be the computer again. Has she been complaining about it?

MRS ELLIOT: She did say it took up rather a lot of space on her desk.

DR GREEN: If we were not sharing the same consulting room she wouldn't have it on her desk. Do you know she promised me a separate office if I took this partnership, and how long have I been here now? Three years next month.

MRS ELLIOT: Is it really, Doctor?

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DR GREEN: Yes Mrs Elliot, it is really. It was a different story when she was desperate for help. "You'll be making changes," she said. "I'm retiring in a year or two, so you'd better organize things the way you want them," she said. And since I arrived she's blocked everything I've tried to do.

MRS ELLIOT: You have to make allowances - it hasn't always been easy for her you know.

DR GREEN: Does that excuse her making it impossible for me?

MRS ELLIOT: If you think she's difficult, you should have seen her father. One of the old school he was, a proper tartar. He used to terrify me as a child, and it wasn't just me. If he thought you were wasting his time ... well, let's say you didn't do it twice. 'Course it made no difference - he was the only doctor in the village so we hadn't any choice.

DR GREEN: So she just walked into the partnership.

MRS ELLIOT: He was just as bad with her as he was with the patients - seemed to take delight in making her look small in front of folks - patients, colleagues, it made no odds. She had enough problems getting accepted as a woman doctor, without him always dragging her down. He never made her a partner, you know. I never thought she'd stick it.

DR GREEN: Evidently she did.

MRS ELLIOT: For years she did all the work with not so much as a thank you from him. Then she took over when he retired. And he only went then because none of the patients would see him any more.

DR GREEN: That's no reason why she should take it out on me.

MRS ELLIOT: She's not so bad really, not when you're used to her. She's as stubborn as the old man of course, but they think a lot of her in the village now. Even those that don't take to her, they - well I suppose you'd say they respect her.

DR GREEN: Don't I know it. I sometimes think I shall scream if another patient tells me how wonderful she is.

MRS ELLIOT: They wouldn't dare say it to her face though, she'd bite their head off. And there's one or two been quite impressed with you, Doctor. You

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mustn't think they don't appreciate you. Not that Dr Williams doesn't,
but she'd never tell you. She'd think it was soft.

DR GREEN: I'd never have guessed.

MRS ELLIOT: She's not been herself lately. She's never had a partner before and she finds
it hard to let go. I should be patient If I were you.

DR GREEN: I shouldn't be moaning to you like this, Mrs Elliot. Now who's this last one?

MRS ELLIOT: It's Mr Bradmore. You saw his wife yesterday.

DR GREEN: I remember. He's Dr William's patient isn't he? Has he been entered on
the computer yet?

MRS ELLIOT: Not yet, doctor. I haven't had time to start on her list yet.

DR GREEN: You've done wonders coping with mine. I don't know why we can't get
some more help.

MRS ELLIOT: You know how she worries about confidentiality. And anyway, I can read
her writing.

DR GREEN: Which is more than I can. Have you got his notes?

MRS ELLIOT: He wants to talk to you about his wife.

DR GREEN: I see. Better send him in.

(MRS ELLIOT goes to door and calls right, towards waiting room)

MRS ELLIOT: Right Mr Bradmore.

(MRS ELLIOT goes out left to her office. MR BRADMORE hovers in
the doorway)

DR GREEN: Come in, Mr Bradmore.

(MR BRADMORE comes in)

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Take a seat. How's your wife today?

MR BRADMORE: That's what I've come about, Doctor. I'm not happy about her at all. She didn't want me to come, but I'm sure she's not right.

DR GREEN: Is she still bleeding?

MR BRADMORE: I don't know about bleeding, but she's had these terrible stomach cramps. She didn't have a very good night, but this morning, well she can hardly stop herself from crying out with the pain.

DR GREEN: Is she vomiting?

MR BRADMORE: No, just these sharp pains. She tries to hide it, but I can see her catch her breath and she looks grey with the effort.

DR GREEN: We'll have to get her straight into hospital.

MR BRADMORE: But what is it, Doctor? She's always been so healthy. It's nothing serious is it?

DR GREEN: I'm afraid your wife is having a miscarriage.

MR BRADMORE: No, she can't be...

DR GREEN: The hospital will do all they can, but we have to face the fact that she may lose this baby.

MR BRADMORE: (Breaking down in sobs) No, no, I can't believe it, not Sheila.....

DR GREEN: Now come on Mr Bradmore, your wife's going to need all the support you can give her. Just think what she must be feeling.

MR BRADMORE: Are you quite sure, Doctor? There couldn't be some mistake?

DR GREEN: (Rising and going to MR BRADMORE) The sooner we get her in, the better her chances. And even if she loses this baby that doesn't mean she won't have another. It's not your first, is it?

MR BRADMORE: Oh God, I never expected this.

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DR GREEN: Now you go home and make sure she stays in bed till the ambulance arrives. I should pack a case for her. They'll be along very soon.

MR BRADMORE: (Muttering as DR GREEN guides him out of the surgery) Sheila, Sheila

DR GREEN: (On telephone) Hello, Dr Green here, gynaecology admissions please ... Hello, I've got an emergency admission for a spontaneous abortion at two months. Yes, Sheila Bradmore, 32 Penarth Crescent, Ounnersbury. Her husband's with her. They're waiting for the ambulance. Thank you.

(During this speech DR WILLIAMS enters, puts her bag on the chair by the desk and sits in the other chair)

Elizabeth, morning.

DR WILLIAMS: Busy surgery?

DR GREEN: Fairly. I've got quite a number of calls to do.

DR WILLIAMS: Could you look in on Fred Grice for me? I should have gone yesterday, but you know how it is, and we've got people coming for lunch.

DR GREEN: He's your patient. You know he doesn't like seeing me.

DR WILLIAMS: Since you told him the only thing wrong with him was booze and fags, I'm not surprised.

DR GREEN: I didn't put it in quite those words.

DR WILLIAMS: P'raps you should have. Fred might have accepted that. No use being mealy-mouthed with old codgers like him. I told his wife you'd look in.

DR GREEN: Was that all you wanted?

DR WILLIAMS: No, I want some of that clutter off the desk. I like to look at the patient, not the television.

DR GREEN: It's not a television, as you know perfectly well....

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DR WILLIAMS: Whatever it is it's in my way. What you do in your surgery is your affair, but I'm not having it take over the desk in mine. And you might do better if you concentrated more on the patients and less on a machine. Medicine is not an abstract science you know, it's about real live people.

DR GREEN: I had noticed. I'll see it's moved before your sessions, in future.

DR WILLIAMS: Thanks. Oh and while I remember, we'll have to swap the ante-natal clinic. Charles wants me to go up to town with him on Tuesday. You can cover it can't you?

DR GREEN: I've done it for the last three weeks.

DR WILLIAMS: Have you really, I'd forgotten. You really must stand up for yourself you know. Make Deirdre mark up the diary.

(DR GREEN presses the buzzer for MRS ELLIOT)

I'm afraid it's too late for me to change Tuesday now, but we'll sort it out next time.

DR GREEN: Well, if there's nothing else, I'll get started.

(MRS ELLIOT comes in)

DR WILLIAMS: No, nothing else.

DR GREEN: Mrs Elliot, would you arrange an ambulance for Mrs Bradmore at once. I'm sending her in to the General.

MRS ELLIOT. I'll do that Doctor. (She goes out to her office)

DR WILLIAMS: (Rising and going to desk) Is that Sheila Bradmore? I saw Jim going out in a frightful state about something.

DR GREEN: His wife's having a miscarriage.

DR WILLIAMS: So he found out.

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DR GREEN: He was anxious and came in to see me about her. Just as well, she could have bled to death. I suppose she didn't want to worry him, but she should have had more sense, especially after what I said to her yesterday.

DR WILLIAMS: You told him what the trouble was?

DR GREEN: Of course I did, what do you expect?

DR WILLIAMS: You know he had a vasectomy last year?

DR GREEN: What?

DR WILLIAMS: It's in his notes. Didn't you look?

DR GREEN: But he came about his wife ...

DR WILLIAMS: You should never discuss one patient with another, ducky. Don't they teach you anything at medical school? (Moving down right) Let's hope she doesn't decide to sue.

DR GREEN: You think Oh God.

DR WILLIAMS: Time you started your calls, don't you think?

DR GREEN: What? ... oh, yes. I'll get off then.

(DR GREEN goes out with his bag. DR WILLIAMS takes a key from her bag and unlocks a drawer in the desk. She takes from it a bottle and a glass, pours herself a drink and swallows it. She replaces bottle and glass, relocks drawer and takes a sweet from a tube. She presses the buzzer a number of times, and then crosses to the door, opens it and calls off left)

DR WILLIAMS OK Deirdre, wheel 'em in.

(Blackout)

SCENE 2

(Afternoon, a fortnight later; the computer has been removed from the desk. DR WILLIAMS is seated at the desk and MRS BRADMORE on the chair by the desk).

DR WILLIAMS: And you're feeling fit again, Mrs Bradmore?

MRS BRADMORE: It's not my health I've come about. It's what that young doctor told my husband that bothers me. He'd no right to let on to Jim, no right at all.

DR WILLIAMS: Had you told him you didn't want your husband to know you were pregnant?

MRS BRADMORE: What if I hadn't? Doctors are supposed to keep quiet aren't they? Not to go blabbing everything out.

DR WILLIAMS: How is Jim taking it?

MRS BRADMORE: How d'you think? He'd hardly be delighted would he? If he shouted at me I could stand it better, but he just mopes round the house looking miserable.

DR WILLIAMS: You gave him a bad fright. He's very fond of you. Have you and he talked about it?

MRS BRADMORE: Not really.

DR WILLIAMS: Mrs Bradmore, I don't know what you want from your marriage. P'raps you feel it's not worth saving. Do you want it to break up?

MRS BRADMORE: No I don't, and if that young doctor had kept his mouth shut I shouldn't have to worry about it,

DR WILLIAMS: No you wouldn't, because you wouldn't be here to worry. Jim was bound to find out one way or another. If Dr Green hadn't told him he'd have read it on your death certificate. You're lucky to be alive, young woman, after ignoring Dr Green's advice the way you did. An hour or two longer and you'd have been dead.

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MRS BRADMORE: I was waiting for Jim to go to work

DR WILLIAMS: You think you can play fast and loose with your health, the way you do with your life, and when it goes wrong you went to blame the doctor. It's about time you grew up, Sheila Bradmore, and started taking responsibility for your own life.

MRS BRADMORE: I - I don't....

DR WILLIAMS: And you can start by showing some appreciation for that husband of yours. Go and talk to him and stop feeling sorry for yourself.

MRS BRADMORE: (Getting up) I don't know who you think you are to come over all high and mighty. Do you tell your husband about all those little trips to the off-licence?

DR WILLIAMS: Well at least I shan't blame the publican if I get cirrhosis of the liver.

MRS BRADMORE: (Huffily) Yes, well, ... I'll think about what you've said

DR WILLIAMS: You do that Mrs Bradmore.

(MRS BRADMORE leaves. DR WILLIAMS takes bottle and glass from desk drawer, pours a drink, and drinks it quickly. There is a knock on the surgery door and DR WILLIAMS hides bottle and glass in drawer, leaving it slightly open as MRS ELLIOT comes in.)

DR WILLIAMS: Oh, Deirdre, come in.

MRS ELLIOT: I've got your appointment list for tonight.

DR WILLIAMS: Oh I er ... I can't face evening surgery tonight. I'm feeling a bit off colour again. Would you ask young Green to cover for me.

MRS ELLIOT: You're not being fair to that young man, Liz.

DR WILLIAMS: Am I not? I've probably just saved him a reprimand from the General Medical Council, so he ought to be grateful.

MRS ELLIOT: You know quite well that you're not. It's not just the way you take advantage of him, you don't treat him properly. It's as if you had no confidence in him at all.

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DR WILLIAMS: On the contrary, I have every confidence in him. He's an excellent right-hand man.

MRS ELLIOT: That's exactly what I mean. You don't treat him as an equal. And you of all people should know how humiliating that is.

DR WILLIAMS: I'm not going to argue with you Deirdre, just let Dr Green know I won't be in tonight. (She walks slightly unsteadily towards the door)

MRS ELLIOT: (Closing the desk drawer with a bang) Hadn't you better lock this drawer?

DR WILLIAMS: Oh, er yes, thank you Deirdre.

(DR WILLIAMS returns to lock drawer and goes out, watched by MRS ELLIOT, who follows her off stage)

(Blackout)