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A Separate Peace

A Play

Tom Stoppard

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION

**SAMUEL
FRENCH**
FOUNDED 1830

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A SEPARATE PEACE

First presented on BBC TV 1960

CHARACTERS:

John Brown

Nurse

Doctor

Nurse Maggie Coates

Matron

Nurse Jones

The action takes place in the reception office and a ward
in a private Nursing Home

Time—the present

A SEPARATE PEACE

SCENE 1

The office of the Beechwood Nursing Home; 2.30 a.m.

Behind the reception counter sits a uniformed Nurse. A car pulls up outside

John Brown enters. He is a biggish man in his late forties, with a well-lined face: calm, pleasant, implacable. He wears a nondescript suit and overcoat and is carrying two zipped grips. Looking around, he notes the neatness, the flowers, the nice Nurse, and is quietly pleased

Brown Very nice.

Nurse Good evening . . .

Brown 'Evening. A lovely night. Morning.

Nurse Yes . . . Mr . . . ?

Brown I'm sorry to be so late.

Nurse (*shuffling papers*) Were you expected earlier?

Brown No. I telephoned.

Nurse Yes?

Brown Yes.

Nurse I mean . . . ?

Brown You have a room for Mr Brown.

Nurse (*realizing*) Oh!—Have you brought him?

Brown I brought myself. Knocked up a taxi by the station.

Nurse (*puzzled*) But surely . . . ?

Brown I telephoned, from the station.

Nurse You said it was an emergency.

Brown That's right. Do you know what time it is?

Nurse It's half-past two.

Brown That's right. An emergency.

Nurse (*aggrieved*) I woke the house doctor.

Brown A kind thought. But it's all right. Do you want me to sign in?

Nurse What is the nature of your emergency, Mr Brown?

Brown I need a place to stay.

Nurse Are you ill?

Brown No.

Nurse But this is a private hospital—

Brown smiles for the first time

Brown The best kind. What is a hospital without privacy? It's the privacy I'm after—that and the clean linen. . . . (*A thought strikes him*) I've got money.

Nurse —the Beechwood Nursing Home.

Brown I require nursing. I need to be nursed for a bit. Yes. Where do I sign?

Nurse I'm sorry, but admissions have to be arranged in advance except in the case of a genuine emergency—I have no authority—

Brown What do you want with authority? A nice girl like you. (*He moves*) Where have you put me?

Nurse (*moving with him*) And you have no authority . . .

Brown (*halting*) That's true. That's one thing I've never had. (*He looks at her flatly*) I've come a long way.

Nurse (*warily*) Would you wait just one moment?

Brown (*relaxing*) Certainly. Have you got a sign-in chit? Must abide by the regulations. Should I pay in advance?

Nurse No, that's quite all right.

Brown I've got it—I've got it all in here . . . (*He starts trying to open one of the zipped cases, it jams and he hurts his finger. He recoils sharply and puts his finger in his mouth*)

The Doctor arrives, dishevelled from being roused

Nurse Doctor—this is Mr Brown.

Doctor Good evening. What seems to be the trouble?

Brown Caught my finger.

Doctor May I see?

Brown holds out his finger; the Doctor studies it, looks up: guardedly

Have you come far?

Brown Yes. I've been travelling all day.

The Doctor glances at the Nurse

Brown Not with my finger. I did that just now. Zip stuck.

Doctor Oh. And what—er . . .

Nurse Mr Brown says there's nothing wrong with him.

Brown That's right—I . . .

Nurse He just wants a bed.

Brown A room.

Doctor But this isn't a hotel.

Brown Exactly.

Doctor Exactly what?

Brown I don't follow you.

Doctor Perhaps I'm confused. You see, I was asleep.

Brown It's all right. I understand. Well, if someone would show me to my room, I shan't disturb you any further.

Doctor (*with a glance at the Nurse*) I don't believe we have any rooms free at the moment.

Brown Oh yes, this young lady arranged it.

Nurse (*in self-defence*) He telephoned from the station. He said it was an emergency.

Brown I missed my connection.

Doctor But you've come to the wrong place.

Brown No, this is the place all right. I don't want to be a nuisance.

Doctor Did you try the pubs in the town?

Brown I'm not drunk.

Doctor They have rooms.

Brown I've got a room. What's the matter?

Doctor (*after a pause*) Nothing—nothing's the matter. (*He nods at the nurse*) All right.

Nurse Yes, doctor. (*She murmurs worriedly*) I'll have to make an entry . . .

Doctor Observation.

Brown (*cheerfully*) I'm not much to look at.

Nurse Let me take those for you, Mr Brown. (*She goes towards his cases*)

Brown No, no, don't you. (*Picking up the cases*) There's nothing the matter with me . . .

Brown follows the Nurse inside

*The Doctor watches them go, picks up Brown's form, and reads it
Then he picks up the telephone and starts to dial*

SCENE 2

Brown's private ward

It is a pleasant room with a hospital bed and the usual furniture. One wall is almost all window, and is curtained

Brown and the Nurse enter. Brown puts his cases on the bed. He likes the room

Brown That's nice. I'll like it here.

Nurse Will you be all right?

Brown Oh yes, I'm all right now. Picture window.

Nurse The bathroom is across the corridor.

Brown (*peering through the curtains*) What's the view?

Nurse Well, it's the drive and the gardens.

Brown Gardens. A front room. What could be nicer?

Nurse starts to open a case

Nurse Are your night things in here?

Brown Yes, I'll be very happy here.

Nurse opens the case, which is full of money—bank notes

Nurse Oh—I'm sorry . . .

Brown is not put out at all

Brown What time is breakfast?

Nurse Eight o'clock.

Brown Lunch?

Nurse Twelve o'clock.

Brown Tea?

Nurse Three o'clock.

Brown Supper?

Nurse Half-past six.

Brown Cocoa?

Nurse Nine.

Brown Matron's rounds twice a day?

Nurse Yes.

Brown Temperatures?

Nurse (*turning back his bed*) Morning and evening.

Brown Change of sheets?

Nurse Monday.

Brown Like clockwork. Lovely.

The Doctor enters with Brown's form and Elastoplast

Doctor Excuse me.

Brown I was just saying—everything's A1.

Doctor I remembered your finger.

Brown I'd forgotten myself. It's nothing.

Doctor Well, we'll just put this on overnight. (*He administers Elastoplast*)

Brown Must be wonderful to have the healing touch. I should get to bed now—you look tired.

Doctor Thank you. I expect Matron will be along to discuss your case with you tomorrow.

Brown My finger?

Doctor Well, I expect she'd like to meet you.

Brown Be pleased to meet her.

Doctor Yes. A final point, Mr Brown. This form you filled in, where it says permanent address, you've put down Beechwood Nursing Home.

Brown Yes. Well, you never know what the future brings, but for the while I like to think of it as home. . . .

SCENE 3

The hospital office. Morning

The Doctor is at the desk, telephoning

Doctor . . . I have absolutely no idea . . . The nurse said it looked like several hundred pounds . . . His savings, yes. Frankly, I wouldn't be too keen on that—I don't really want the police turning up at the bedside of any patient who doesn't arrive with a life history . . . I think we'd get more out of him than you would, given a little time, and we'd certainly keep you

informed . . . No, he's not being difficult at all . . . You don't need to worry about that—he doesn't seem very keen to run away. He seems quite happy . . .

SCENE 4

Brown's private ward

Brown is in striped pyjamas, eating off a tray. A second Nurse, Nurse Coates (Maggie), is waiting for him to finish so that she can take his tray away. Maggie is pretty and warm

Brown The point is not breakfast in bed, but breakfast in bed without guilt. Rich men's wives can bring it off, but if you're not a rich man's wife then you've got to be ill. Lunch in bed is more difficult, even for the rich. It's not any more expensive, but the disapproval is harder to ignore. To stay in bed for tea is almost impossible in decent society, and not to get up at all would probably bring in the authorities. Even if you had the strength of character there's probably a point where it becomes certifiable. But in a hospital it's not only understood—it's expected. That's the beauty of it. I'm not saying it's a great discovery—it's obvious really: but I'd say I'd got something.

Maggie If you'd got something, there wouldn't be all this fuss.

Brown Is there a fuss?

Maggie does not answer

They should leave well alone. I'm paying my way . . . Are you pretty full all the time?

Maggie Not at the moment, not very.

Brown You'd think a place as nice as this would be very popular.

Maggie Popular?

Brown I thought I might have to wait for a place, you know. Of course, it's a bit out the way, no passing trade, so to speak. I'm very fond of the English countryside myself.

Maggie Where do you live?

Brown I've never lived. Only stayed.

Maggie You should settle down somewhere.

Brown Yes, I've been promising myself this.

Maggie Have you got a family?

Brown I expect so.

Maggie Where are they?

Brown I lost touch.

Maggie You should find them.

Brown (*smiles*) Their name's Brown.

The Matron enters: she is not too old, and quite equable

Matron Good morning.

Brown Good morning to you. You must be Matron.

Matron That's right.

Brown I must congratulate you on your hospital, it's a lovely place you run here. Everyone is so nice.

Matron Well, thank you, Mr Brown, I'm glad you feel at home.

Maggie takes Brown's tray

Brown I never felt it there. Very good breakfast. Just what the doctor ordered. I hope he got a bit of a lie-in.

Maggie exits with the tray, closing the door

Matron Now, what's your problem, Mr Brown?

Brown I have no problems.

Matron Your complaint.

Brown I have no complaints either. Full marks.

Matron Most people who come here have something the *matter* with them.

Brown That must give you a lot of extra work.

Matron But it's what we're here for. You see, you can't really stay unless there's something wrong with you.

Brown I can pay.

Matron That's not the point.

Brown What is the point?

Matron This is a hospital. What are you after?

Brown (*sadly*) My approach is too straightforward. An ordinary malingeringer or a genuine hypochondriac wouldn't have all this trouble. They'd be accepted on their own terms. All I get is a

lot of personal questions. (*Hopefully*) Maybe I could *catch* something . . . But what difference would it make to you?

Matron We have to keep the beds free for people who need them.

Brown I need this room.

Matron I believe you, Mr Brown—but wouldn't another room like this one do?—somewhere else? You see, we deal with physical matters—of the body . . .

Brown There's nothing wrong with my *mind*. You won't find my name on any list.

Matron I know.

Brown (*teasing*) How do you know? (*Matron does not answer*)

Go for the obvious, it's worth considering. I know what I like: a nice atmosphere—good food—clean rooms—a day and night service—no demands—cheerful staff—Well, it's *worth* thirty guineas a week. I won't be any trouble.

Matron Have you thought of going to a nice country hotel?

Brown Different kettle of fish altogether. I want to do nothing, and have nothing expected of me. That isn't possible out there. It worries them. They want to know what you're at—staying in your room all the time—they want to know what you're *doing*. But in a hospital it is understood that you're not doing anything, because everybody's in the same boat—it's the normal thing. Being a patient. That's what I'm cut out for, I think—I've got a vocation for it.

Matron But there's nothing wrong with you!

Brown That's why I'm *here*. If there was something wrong with me I could get into any old hospital—free. As it is, I'm quite happy to pay for *not* having anything wrong with me. If I catch something, perhaps I'll transfer. I don't know, though. I like it here. It depends on how my money lasts. I wouldn't like to go to a city hospital.

Matron But what do you want to do here?

Brown Nothing.

Matron You'll find that very boring.

Brown One must expect to be bored, in hospital.

Matron Have you been in hospital quite a lot?

Brown No. I've been saving up for it . . . (*He smiles*)

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