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Money Makes You Happy

A play

Francis Beckett

Samuel French — London
www.samuelfrench-london.co.uk



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MONEY MAKES YOU HAPPY

First performed at the Bridewell Theatre, London, from 17th to 27th July 2007, and the White Bear Theatre, London, from 31st July to 5th August 2007, by Baseless Fabric Theatre Company.

Jeremy Bunter	Jamie Griffiths-Jones
Miriam	Katy Balfour
Ruth	Nicki Walsh
Hugh Houndsby	David Zezulka
Carol	Sarah J. Malter
Gary	David Zezulka
Magdela	Sarah J. Malter

Directed by Joanna Turner
Lighting and Sound Engineer Kelli Marston
Stage Manager Alex Carruth

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(See also page ii)

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CHARACTERS

Ruth, a lawyer, about 30
Jeremy Bunter, a writer, about 30
Miriam, Ruth's sister, late 20s
Hugh Houndsby, marketing executive, 30s
Carol, contract publishing company executive, 30s
Gary Graft, political advisor, 30s
Magdela, entrepreneur, 30s

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

The action of the play takes place in the living-room of Ruth's expensive London house

SCENE 1 One summer afternoon
SCENE 2 Late the same evening
SCENE 3 The next morning, breakfast
SCENE 4 The following evening
SCENE 5 The next morning, early
SCENE 6 11a.m. that same morning
SCENE 7 The following morning
SCENE 8 Early the same evening
SCENE 9 The following evening

Time—the present

MONEY MAKES YOU HAPPY

Scene 1

The living-room of Ruth's house in Golders Green, north London

There are two chairs and a coffee table

Jeremy enters, wearing a coat and carrying a small rucksack. He is ill at ease. Looking about him, he starts to sit on a chair

Miriam enters. She is brisk, talkative and moves all the time. She points to the other chair

Miriam That's the best chair for you.
Jeremy Oh. Oh, right-oh, then.

Jeremy moves towards the other chair and moves it, but does not sit on it

Miriam Only she likes that one herself. You know how it is, hard day, likes her own chair at the end of it. I don't know how long she'll be, could be forever if she's got a case conference. Probably shouldn't have let you in. She always says don't let strangers in. Still, too late now. Not being funny, you know, only …
Jeremy I'm not exactly a stranger.
Miriam No, of course, I know, you said, you're … who are you again?
Jeremy Jeremy Bunter.
Miriam Yes, that's it, you said, and you're … Jeremy Bunter? You're not the author of *Trekking to Paradise*, are you?
Jeremy Well, yes. What a pleasure to meet someone who remembers it. It's years ago, everyone seems to have forgotten, and then —

especially someone as young as, well, as you obviously are. I could sign your copy for you, if you wanted.

Miriam I never heard of it, only Ruth showed it to me, your name on the cover, you signed her copy. Bit friendly, what you wrote. You must know her pretty well. Are you one of her lovers? I lose track, there's been so many. Sorry, didn't mean that exactly. Only it's true. Well, sort of true.

Jeremy Well ...

Miriam Anyway, I'd make you a cup of tea, only I've got to go and feed the baby.

Jeremy You have a baby?

Miriam No, her baby, silly.

Jeremy (*deeply shocked*) Ruth's baby?

Miriam She's not the only one, you know, lots of people have babies.

Jeremy But Ruth ... I'm sorry, I wasn't expecting that. She never told me. How long has this been going on — I mean, how old is the baby?

Miriam Well, I say baby — you know, they grow so fast, one minute they're lying there in their own ——

Jeremy How old is the baby?

Miriam The next day they're into everything, little terrors. Can't turn your back on them for a moment.

Jeremy How old is the baby?

Miriam Three.

Jeremy Three! She's had this baby for three years!

Miriam Well, three next birthday. Two, really.

Jeremy So you're ... you're a kind of nanny.

Miriam No way. You wouldn't want strangers looking after your baby. That's a job for family. I'm her sister.

Jeremy You're Miriam!

Miriam Told you about me, did she? That's nice. I'm living with Ruth right now, only it's just temporary, 'til I get sorted out, and I look after Ben. It suits me, and it suits her. I mean, she's all high-powered and clever and a lawyer and all that. I'm the stupid sister.

Jeremy Surely not.

Miriam So that's it. I'll go and feed Ben, you sit and make yourself comfortable. Read a newspaper if you like. Or a book.
Jeremy There isn't a newspaper. Or a book.
Miriam No, she hates things lying about, making the place look untidy. I meant, if you'd brought a newspaper with you. Or a book. Then you could read it.

Miriam starts to exit, then turns

Well, sit down, then. Make yourself comfortable.

Jeremy sits down. He looks as uncomfortable as it's possible to be

That's it. You don't look so untidy now.

Miriam exits

Jeremy jumps up

Jeremy Miriam! Miriam, when's Ben going to be three?
Miriam (*off*) February.

Jeremy feverishly unwraps his rucksack, gets out a notebook and pen and a small pocket diary, and begins to do calculations

Ruth enters

Jeremy does not see her

Ruth What are you doing in London? You hate the place.
Jeremy (*reacting to her*) I wanted to see you.
Ruth You could have rung.
Jeremy It was kind of a spur of the moment thing.
Ruth Yes, you're kind of a spur of the moment person. I remember that. (*Referring to the rucksack*) What's that doing there?

Jeremy launches into what is clearly a prepared speech. As he speaks, he turns to face the audience and does not see Ruth

During the following, Ruth picks up his rucksack, examines it with distaste and exits

Jeremy I've always wondered what your home looked like. Odd, we shared so much and I never saw the place you lived in. You appeared like magic at Solva station on Friday nights, always so pleased to see me, a gift from heaven. I'd take you sailing, we'd have a few pints in the Royal George and go home to bed. Then you came less and less, and then you stopped coming at all. And I thought it didn't bother me, I pottered round the village, wrote a chapter or two, didn't like it, tore it up. But I found myself wondering, and I woke up this morning and I thought: I'd really like to know why she's not coming to Solva any more. (*As he reaches this triumphant finale, he turns round, just in time to see Ruth*)

Ruth enters, carrying two cups of tea and hands one of them to Jeremy

Ruth I suppose you want to know why I stopped coming to Solva.
Jeremy It did cross my mind, yes.
Ruth Not easy with a small baby.
Jeremy I bought you something.

Jeremy reaches for his rucksack, which no longer there

Where's my ——
Ruth In the cupboard. Can't have it on the floor, making the place look like a campsite.

Jeremy goes to put his tea on the table

Use a coaster, you'll stain the table.

Ruth moves a coaster towards him and he puts his tea on it

Jeremy Yes, well, I didn't know about the baby, did I? I mean, it's not something I'd forget. I don't think. You didn't tell me, did you?

Jeremy waits. Ruth occupies herself about the room, plumping cushions, picking up Jeremy's papers and putting them in a neat heap, and does not seem inclined to answer

I didn't think you were keen on having children.

Ruth I wasn't. I didn't intend to, but you have to deal with realities.

Jeremy You could have ...

Ruth Yes, I could have. But it wasn't a bad moment, professionally, to take a few months out. So I decided to have the baby.

Jeremy Do you remember that summer, that last summer we spent together?

Ruth Yes, I think about that summer, sometimes.

Jeremy We were happy then. I think.

Ruth Yes.

Jeremy And fairly soon after that ...

Ruth I stopped coming. It was time.

Jeremy Time for what?

Ruth Just time. Where are you staying in London?

Jeremy Ah. Well. Well, I could go and stay with — I've got a friend in Shepherd's Bush. I suppose I could see if he'll put me up.

Ruth Are you staying long?

Jeremy No. Tonight, maybe tomorrow night.

Ruth That's OK then, you can stay here. There's a spare room. So long as it's just for a night or two.

Ruth picks up the teacups and goes out. Jeremy fails to see she's gone

Jeremy Really? Oh, good, I wasn't — you don't have to, I can always get myself sorted out. Only I admit I've got a marked preference ...

He notices she's gone

I always hated it when she did that.

Black-out

Scene 2

The same

Ruth is dressed more casually and Jeremy has discarded his coat. They are sitting at the coffee table with a bottle of wine between them

Ruth Yes, of course Ben could be your child. What difference would it make?

Jeremy Is he like me?

Ruth In some ways, but I think I can train him out of that. Look, Jeremy, having a small child doesn't exactly fit your lifestyle, does it? So long as you've got the price of a pint, and a rented room to rest your head, you're happy. I mean, Jeremy, I'm terribly fond of you, but working doesn't figure a lot in your life, does it?

Jeremy Well, I have been working on the sequel to *Trekking to Paradise*.

Ruth You've been working on it for ten years. Ever since *Trekking to Paradise* came out, and you were the handsome young toast of literary London. And how much have you written?

Jeremy Well, I've thrown most of it away.

Ruth How much?

Jeremy I've written the first chapter. Well, part of it, anyway.

Ruth In the morning you put in a full stop, and in the afternoon you take it out again.

Jeremy Well, full stops matter.

Ruth I gave you the name of an agent I knew. Did you talk to her?

Jeremy Yes. Not to any good effect, I'm afraid.

Ruth What did she say?

Jeremy She said, "Look, Jeremy, your strength is young people. Backpackers in search of Utopia. Get back to that. And this time, can you make the young people Americans?'

Ruth Maybe she was right.

Jeremy Ruth. I was a student when I wrote *Trekking to Paradise*. I write about different things now.

Ruth You're still trying to make the money you made from *Trekking*

to Paradise last a few more months. Church mice give you handouts from the collection.

Jeremy I work.

Ruth Sometimes you write an article, and from time to time you sell one. You're not exactly prime father material.

Jeremy Do all fathers have to be accountants or lawyers?

Ruth No, but it helps. Look, Jeremy, I think the world of you, but this child arrived and I thought, I either do this on my own, or I do it with a man who's grounded, who's serious about life, who's going to make some money and be some sort of rock for me. Not a kind of cheerful butterfly, sitting in a village on a lovely stretch of the Pembrokeshire coast and thinking, "Tomorrow I'll write the definitive twenty-first century novel", pint in one hand and spliff in the other.

Jeremy I suppose proper fathers have a latte in one hand and a mobile phone in the other. You must have seen something in me you liked.

Ruth I thought you were exotic. Public school, English, languid — what did you care about security? We didn't meet people like you in Stoke Newington.

Jeremy I though you were exotic. East End girl made good, Jewish, driven, organized — what did you care about creativity? We didn't meet people like you in Herefordshire.

Ruth You were hunting and holy communion.

Jeremy You were persecution and *pesach*.

Ruth It was time to move on.

Jeremy Were you going to tell me about the baby?

Ruth No.

Jeremy Were you ever going to see me again?

Ruth I suppose I assumed you'd find a replacement quite fast. You were great for romantic weekends — even a whole summer — in a pretty seaside fishing village. But with a child, I wanted a *mensch* or no one.

Jeremy Maybe you could turn me into a *mensch*.

Ruth Too big a job.

Jeremy Did you find a replacement for me?

Ruth It wasn't like that exactly, was it? I mean, we had a strictly weekend romance. What we did in the week …

Jeremy I didn't do anything much in the week.

Ruth rises and picks up the wine bottle and the glasses

There's still some in the bottle.

He stands and takes a glass from her, then moves behind her and puts one arm round her waist, holding the other hand with the glass in it in front of her. She fills it, then tries to remove his arm. He resists. He takes the wine bottle from her and pours the rest into his glass

Ruth A *mensch* wouldn't drain the bottle.

Jeremy gives her the glass, untouched

Ruth takes wine and glasses and exits

Black-out

SCENE 3

The same. The next morning, at breakfast

Miriam enters carrying a tray with three mugs. She puts the tray down on the table

Miriam (*calling*) Coffee! Shall I give Ben his breakfast? It's nearly time for you to go.

Ruth enters

Where's Ben? You haven't left him with ...

Ruth Couldn't tear them apart. Jeremy's explaining existentialism and Ben's blowing bubbles. Or maybe it was the other way round.

Miriam You've left Jeremy looking after Ben? But he ... he's not ... he wouldn't know what to do if — Jeremy's not Jewish, is he?

Ruth Miriam, non-Jewish people have been bringing up children for quite a few years now. He'll be fine.

Miriam Well, if you're sure. He's a bit vague, isn't he, and I mean, well, he's a man. He wouldn't know what to do if ... and Ben's only

really used to you and me. He might find it a bit strange being left with this strange man.

Ruth Oh, all right, you can rescue Ben.

Miriam Jeremy won't feed him. They don't grow if you don't feed them.

She goes out, and comes straight back in, shocked

Jeremy's put this huge mound of food in front of him. Forcing all that down him! Poor little thing, he's only got a little stomach.

Jeremy enters

Jeremy Perhaps I should leave things to Miriam.

Miriam He's not a horse, you know.

Miriam exits

Ruth She likes to organize things in her own way.

Jeremy Do you think young Ben liked me?

Ruth Seemed to. You were a bit different from what he's used to, anyway.

Jeremy He's a bit young to notice that.

Ruth I mean, he doesn't see many men. Certainly not ones who want to talk to him about existentialism.

Jeremy He seemed interested. Perhaps I confused him with the difference between Sartre and Camus.

Ruth Perhaps.

Jeremy Ruth, listen to me. I want to stay with you. I can still write like a dream. I can write whatever the world will pay for. Marketing jargon, tabloid journalism, any old crap. I don't because it doesn't suit me, but I'd do it for you.

Ruth picks up the tray of coffee mugs and goes out

(*Calling*) I used to think it was prostituting myself, doing that, but we're all prostitutes. Are you listening?

Ruth returns

Ruth You used to say it was prostituting yourself, doing that.
Jeremy I hate it when you do that.
Ruth I know.
Jeremy Can I stay tonight?
Ruth Any particular reason?
Jeremy There's something I was thinking of going to in London tomorrow.
Ruth What?
Jeremy You'll laugh. It's the old public school. The old boys' dinner.
Ruth But you hated the place. You said it was all ——
Jeremy Beating, bullying, bigotry and buggery. But they stick together. An old boy wants a job, there's some rich chaps there who'll give him one. There's a chap called Hugh Houndsby.
Ruth A friend of yours?
Jeremy No, I hate the sight of him. Thick, rich rugger player. Used to knock me about every time he found me writing poetry. But he runs a marketing company and he needs writers. He's going to be at the dinner, and I'll talk to him afterwards. Can I stay?
Ruth Yes, you can stay. But just one more night, I don't want you getting comfortable here.

Black-out

Scene 4

The same. The following evening

Hugh Houndsby stumbles in, fairly drunk but not incapable. Jeremy follows

Hugh They do us well, the East India Club. So where's that Armagnac I was promised?
Jeremy Ah. Yes. Must have put it somewhere.

Jeremy goes out. During the following he returns with bottle of Armagnac and two glasses

Hugh (*shouting after him*) You haven't done so badly for yourself after all. Nice house in Golders Green, you'd get three quarters of a million k for this, no trouble. Bought it at the bottom of the market, I hope.

Jeremy Ah. This. Yes. Well, actually —

Hugh You going to pour that stuff, or just wave it about? Here, give it to me.

Jeremy hands the bottle to Hugh, who looks at it and then pours

Hugh Not bad. Not the best, but a cool fifty pounds a bottle. Who'd have thought it — Jeremy Bunter's made a bob or two. Famous author. What's that bloody book called again?

Jeremy *Trekking to Paradise.*

Hugh *Trekking to Paradise.* Well, anyway. Means you can string a few words together. You always could, of course. Used to write poetry at school, didn't you?

Jeremy No. I mean, yes, sometimes.

Hugh Doesn't shift a lot of widgets, poetry.

Jeremy Shift a lot of widgets?

Hugh Not a good marketing tool. Still, you can scribble. One word after another. And what do you want from your old mate Hugh?

Jeremy Well, this is the thing, Hugh. I've reached a crossroads. It's ten years since *Trekking for Paradise*. The next novel just isn't coming. I don't know why. There's a kind of lacuna.

Hugh Went to Laguna last year. Lot to be said for the Maldives. Overrated, of course.

Jeremy Yes. I think it's more that I need a stint in the real world, a time to recharge my creativity. And that's why I thought of you. I thought: Hugh wants people who can write good utilitarian copy. And then, of course, there's the money. I mean, the revenue stream from *Trekking to Paradise* has started to dry up.

Hugh Didn't do you badly. All this. (*Gesturing vaguely about the room*) All yours. Not bad.

Jeremy Well. Yes, it did me well. But I don't feel I'm ready for that sort of work again. So I thought ...

Hugh You thought you'd talk to me. Quite right too. I'm not going to send an old college chap away empty-handed, that's not my way,

even if — we weren't exactly close, were we? But who the hell cares. You're college.

Hugh lurches towards Jeremy, appearing to be about to punch him. Jeremy instinctively cowers and covers his face

Jeremy Sorry. Yes, that's — that's good of you.

Hugh No problem. If I can't help an old college chap in trouble, what's it all for? I've built up this company from scratch, Jeremy. I've built it up by sheer work and determination and know-how.

Jeremy Oh, I see. I always thought it was your father's company.

Hugh Well, he started the thing, of course he did, but he didn't make it what it is today. I started right from the bottom.

Jeremy I heard he left you six million pounds.

Hugh Well, not six million smackers in my hand. It was all wrapped up in the business, old son. I had to get down there, get my hands dirty, take some risks. I'm a risk-taker, Jeremy. Business is worth a hell of a lot more than six million now, I'll tell you that for nothing.

Jeremy Is it? Oh, well done, Hugh.

Hugh Six and a half million, I kid you not. See, my father, he was an entrepreneur of the old-fashioned type. No MBAs in his day. No real focus on shareholder value. Not good enough. These days, to be a successful entrepreneur, you need the right letters after your name. Everyone knows a guy with an MBA knows what he's talking about. So when I took over the business, I knew what to do. Lot of dead wood in the company in those days. No dead wood in my company now. Know what business is like today, Jeremy?

Jeremy Don't think I do, Hugh. Tell me.

Hugh It's like climbing the north face of the Eiger — You could slip off any moment. It's like being on the front line in Afghanistan — The enemy's out there somewhere. It keeps me pretty busy, just zapping the opposition. I need to hire chaps to do the simple things. You're a scribbler. I need scribblers. Haven't the time to do it myself.

Jeremy No, of course. You must be a very busy man.

Hugh There's writers, Jeremy, and then there's doers. I'm a doer. If I want a writer, I go into the corridor — figuratively speaking you understand — I go into the corridor outside my office and I shout

"Hack!" and some little chap comes running, licking his pencil, touching his forelock. Can you spell "innovative"?

Jeremy Can I spell it? Well, yes, I think I can.

Hugh And "superb"? And "excellence"?

Jeremy I'm quite good at spelling, Hugh, if you remember.

Hugh Proper writers, we need. Tight marketing copy, not a word that doesn't earn its living. Can you do that?

Jeremy I can do that.

Hugh Right. Here's the deal. You work from home. It's good for you, you don't have to leave your three quarters of a million quid house, and it's good for me because I don't have to pay for your computer and pay bloody London rates for office space for you. You'll be on a freelance contract so I can fire you whenever I like, and you get paid what I feel like paying you. Right?

Jeremy Sounds perfect.

Hugh No need to thank me, it's the least I can do. College man. Fine old place, the college.

Jeremy Well, it had its dark side, Hugh. You must admit.

Hugh What the hell do you mean?

Jeremy Well, you must remember. There was a nasty business with some of the teachers, and a pretty awkward report which they hushed up. I thought of writing an article about it sometime.

Hugh If you mean what I think you mean, Jeremy, old son, then you won't breathe a word to anyone, anywhere, ever, about that, unless you want to find yourself hanging from Nelson's Column by your bollocks.

Jeremy I thought most people knew.

Hugh If they do, they keep bloody quiet. Get the college a bad name. Only dogs shit on their own doorstep. You bloody keep that to yourself. No one bloody talks about it, right. You come to the old boys' dinners and you smile and chatter away, and you don't even let yourself know you know about that. Otherwise we'll all piss on you, unless you happen to be on fire, in which case we'll keep our piss to ourselves. Am I making myself clear?

Jeremy Painfully so, Hugh. Painfully so.

Hugh Good. Was that your first old boys' dinner tonight? I go every year. Best bit, when we stand up over the brandy and sing the college

song. Let's do the chorus one last time, then you can call me a taxi.

Jeremy What, now?

Hugh All right, quietly, don't want to wake the little lady upstairs. There is one, isn't there?

Jeremy Well, yes, and she's ——

Hugh (*singing at the top of his voice*)

United as our faith contrives,
Our debt we now acknowledge,
To those three pillars of our lives,
God, family and college.

Ruth appears in her dressing gown, looking thunderous

Black-out

Scene 5

The same. The next morning

Miriam and Ruth are on stage. Ruth is dressed for work, holding a coffee

Ruth They collect the rubbish this morning. You need to get it all outside and pay the milkman, there's money in the desk drawer. Give Ben the puréed fish I made for lunch, it's good for his brains. You can let Jeremy sleep 'til nine-thirty but no later. He's got someone coming to see him at eleven.

Miriam He was drunk last night, wasn't he?

Ruth Not as drunk as the oaf he brought home with him.

Miriam But he offered Jeremy a job. I heard him. Well, I couldn't sleep, the racket they were making. That's good, isn't it? I mean, any kind of job would be good, wouldn't it? He's got to work, I mean, it stands to reason, not trying to be funny about your boyfriend. I mean ——

Ruth He's not my boyfriend. And I'm not having him work for that oaf.

Miriam Only don't you think ...

Ruth exits, carrying the coffee cup

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