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# Good Grief

A play adapted by  
**Keith Waterhouse**  
from his own novel

Samuel French — London  
New York - Toronto - Hollywood



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## **GOOD GRIEF**

First performed on a UK tour in 1998, by arrangement with Theatre Royal Bath Productions and Pericles Productions with the following cast of characters:

**June Pepper**

**Pauline**

**The Suit**

**Eric Grant**

**Barman**

**Taxi Driver** }

**Postman** }

Penelope Keith

Sarah Berger

Christopher Godwin

David Firth

Christopher Hackett

Directed by Ned Sherrin

Designed by Tim Goodchild

Lighting by Robin Carter

Sound by Tom Lishman



## **CHARACTERS**

**June Pepper**, the widow of a tabloid editor

**Pauline**, aged about 32, her stepdaughter

**Eric Grant**, about 35, a tabloid executive

**The Suit**, mid-40s to early 50s, a new friend

## SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

The action takes place in June Pepper's home in the London suburbs and *The Duke of Clarence* pub

### ACT I

- SCENE 1 The house. Late winter
- SCENE 2 The house. Morning, a few days later
- SCENE 3 The house. A late winter afternoon
- SCENE 4 Outside and inside the pub
- SCENE 5 The house. Immediately following
- SCENE 6 The house. Morning
- SCENE 7 Outside and inside the pub. Sunday
- SCENE 8 The house. A short while later

### ACT II

- SCENE 1 The house. Early morning
- SCENE 2 Outside and inside the pub. Lunchtime
- SCENE 3 The house. Morning
- SCENE 4 Outside and inside the pub. Lunchtime
- SCENE 5 The house. Evening
- SCENE 6 The pub. Late evening
- SCENE 7 The house. Night
- SCENE 8 The house. Evening
- SCENE 9 The house and pub. Mid-morning
- SCENE 10 The pub. Sunday evening
- SCENE 11 The house. Immediately afterwards

Time — a few months in the present

The set comprises the living room, open-plan staircase and landing of a much-modernized Edwardian house in the prosperous outer London suburbs.

The action is set in the present, over a period of roughly nine months commencing in late winter and going through spring, summer and autumn. Thus the various scene changes are in fact time jumps, marked by June changing into appropriate costumes up in her room while she continues her linking dialogue.

The scene changes are also punctuated by various snatches from the memorial service at St Bride's, Fleet Street, of her late husband Sam, editor of a national tabloid, from which June is just returning as the curtain rises.

Other plays by Keith Waterhouse, published by Samuel French Ltd

Jeffrey Bernard is Unwell  
Our Song

(with Willis Hall)  
All Things Bright and Beautiful  
Billy Liar  
Celebration  
Children's Day  
Whoops-a-Daisy  
Who's Who  
Worzel Gummidge

## ACT I

### SCENE 1

*The living-room, hall, open-plan staircase and landing of June Pepper's much-modernized Edwardian house in the prosperous outer London suburbs. Another area represents the Duke of Clarence, a local up-market pub. Late winter. Immediately after the memorial service*

*Off the landing two adjoining doors lead to June Pepper's bedroom and the spare bedroom, later to be occupied by her stepdaughter Pauline*

*As the CURTAIN rises there is a rousing organ voluntary*

*June Pepper, the widow, a no-nonsense northern lady in her early 50s, enters, smartly but not funereally dressed, and carrying the Order of Service which she puts down on her late husband's desk. After a moment she rather self-consciously addresses him, perhaps directing her remarks to a framed photograph*

**June** Dear Diary. Got up. Grieved ... That what you had in mind, pet? And when to start? You didn't say. As soon as I got back from the hospital? When? Straight after the funeral? I could never have managed that, Sam, too much to do, lad. You wouldn't know, you've never had to organize anything like that. Your mam's funeral, I had it all to do.

*Pauline, her stepdaughter, aged about 32, enters during the following. She too has been to the memorial service. She carries a handbag*

I can hear you now ... *(In an approximation of her late husband's voice)*  
"Get it bloody done! Don't come running to me over details — I wouldn't know fumed bloody oak from stripped pine." *(She tails off as she realizes Pauline is there)*

**Pauline** Are you all right?

**June** That's a daft question, Pauline, on a day like this. We've just come back from the memorial service — of course I'm not all right.

**Pauline** You know what I mean, June.

**June** I don't know what you mean, no.

**Pauline** You were talking to yourself.

**June** No I wasn't. I was talking to your father.

**Pauline** I see. (*She doesn't*) Would you like another drink?

**June** Why not say *yet* another drink and be done with it? Yes. Please.

**Pauline** Vodka again?

**June** Again. Yes. Vodka.

**Pauline** You're sure you wouldn't prefer some tea?

**June** Vodka.

*Pauline goes reluctantly into the kitchen*

*June resumes her conversation with her late husband, Sam*

Anyway, you'll be glad to hear we did it your way. Regrets I've had a few, including going along with you on Frank Sinatra. How many Fleet Street memorial services have we been to where they had "IDid It My Way"? Not to mention "Death is nothing at all, I have only slipped into the next room". Still, originality never was your middle name, was it, pet? You didn't get where you were before you started coughing up blood by being original, did you? The number of times I've heard you say, "The thought that hasn't already been thunk, isn't worth thinking." and even that wasn't original, you got it out of a fortune cookie. Still.

*Pauline returns from the kitchen*

**Pauline** There's no vodka in the fridge.

**June** No, I don't keep it in the fridge.

**Pauline** But you've always kept it in the fridge.

**June** No, your father kept it in the fridge — I prefer my vodka at room temperature.

*Pauline crosses to the drinks trolley*

You won't find it there — it's in the bedroom.

**Pauline** (*with a frown*) Are you *sure* you're all right, June?

**June** I said I wasn't, didn't I?

**Pauline** But will you *be* all right? Should you be lying down? Would you like me to stay over with you while Jack's at his sales conference in Birmingham? Can I get you anything?

**June** Yes! You can stop being such a tower of strength and get me a drink!

*Pauline goes upstairs and, with a worried backward glance, goes into June's bedroom*

*June resumes her conversation with her late husband*

Do you know what I miss? The office car. You'd think they'd have sent one round, though, on this day of all days, wouldn't you? If only out of respect to you, Sam. I don't suppose it crossed anyone's mind. Or if it did, I bet Bob Carp's already on the same cloud nine you were on. You know he's your successor, don't you? Like you he'll believe he only has to think a thing and he doesn't have to put it into words, it gets done. Fleet Street. Thank God none of you's running the government.

*She glances at the ceiling*

She's moving about up there. She's found the vodka, no problem there, it's on my bedside table, but now she's looking for the brandy — she'll have noticed it was missing from the drinks trolley. (*Calling upstairs*) You're getting cold — it's in the wardrobe ...

*During the following, Pauline descends the stairs carrying a half-empty bottle of vodka and a nearly empty bottle of brandy. She is not privy to June's conversation with Sam — June speaks aloud only when she believes herself to be alone, otherwise it is all in her head. Nevertheless, Pauline has good reason for giving June a curious look as she very pointedly deposits the brandy bottle on the drinks trolley*

As it happens, what with Pauline's Jack having to be in Birmingham, Bob's sidekick Eric Grant ferried us there and back. Very kind of him to go out of his way, considering you couldn't stand the sight of him.

*Pauline pours a very modest measure of vodka with a good deal of tonic water. June, impatient, reaches vainly for the glass*

**Pauline** Ice?

**June** Two lumps.

**Pauline** Cubes. Sugar lumps — ice cubes.

*She carries June's drink off into the kitchen*

**June** (*calling*) You could have brought the ice to the drink instead of the drink to the ice!

*Crossing to the drinks trolley June takes a swift, furtive swig from the vodka bottle*

(*Addressing Sam*) It was a very good turnout. Better than some we've been to. Two thirds full, I'd say — more than half, anyway. Lots of old faces.

As you'd expect. Tricia was there, obviously. Your brother Derek was ever so funny — he was a sidesman or usher or whatever they call themselves, as he would be. Apparently Tricia trolls into the church, makes a beeline for him and says, "Which side am I supposed to sit, Derek?" He says, "It's not a wedding, Tricia, you sit where you like!" She goes, "But which side is our family and which is hers?" Hers is me, of course. But I mean to say, Sam. Twenty-five years you've been divorced and she still calls herself your family. In the end she sits next to Pauline across the aisle from me. It went very smoothly, considering. Tommy Little was half-cut, it goes without saying, but you would have him read the Lesson, so there we were. I don't think any of the relatives noticed — they don't, outsiders, do they, they just think he's got a naturally thick voice. Then the readings — I'm afraid your Derek made a complete cock-up of not being dead but only in the next room. Honestly, you'd have thought he was dyslexic. Turns out he's forgotten his reading glasses. Typical.

*Pauline returns with the vodka and tonic*

*June almost grabs the vodka and tonic from Pauline*

**Pauline** I thought I'd make some sandwiches. You ought to eat something, June.

**June** I will — later.

**Pauline** There's chicken roll, Kraft cheese slices, Brussels pâté ...

**June** I'm aware of the contents of my own fridge, Pauline!

**Pauline** Then you'll be aware that every time you open the fridge door it is scraping a dent in your kitchen wall. As well as grazing the back of my hand.

**June** Mine too. It faces the wrong way. Your father was going to fix it but he never got round to it.

**Pauline** So what would you like?

**June** I would like, Pauline, for you to stop fussing!

**Pauline** I'll make you a chicken sandwich.

*Pauline makes for the kitchen. June resumes her conversation with Sam*

**June** So then we had "To Be A Pilgrim". You've got some very good voices on that staff of yours — whatever his faults Eric Grant's a lovely baritone, did you know? No, you were never on singalong terms, were you ...

**Pauline** (*turning back*) White or brown?

**June** Whatever there is.

*Pauline goes into the kitchen*

*June continues, while topping up her glass with a guilty glance towards the kitchen*

The Address. Charlie Whittington did it, and *he'd* had a few, as well. After saying you didn't suffer fools gladly but that you'd helped many a lame dog over a stile — kicked would have been a better word — he gets going down Back Memory Lane and launches into the tale about you and him in that hotel in Nottingham when you were both on the road. Yes, that one. Where one of you was peeing in the sink — you always said it was him, but he says it was you — when you lost your balance and brought the fitting down from the wall and flooded the place. Now if he had to tell that story at all in a place of worship he should have left it at that, but no, he has to go into all that stuff about the plug chain getting caught in your zip — I thought he's never stop. Honestly, you would have thought he'd rented that lectern for the morning.

*Pauline returns from the kitchen*

**Pauline** There's no bread.

**June** So there isn't.

**Pauline** Are you eating enough, June?

**June** If I've eaten all the bread, I'm obviously eating enough, aren't I?

**Pauline** I could pop out for a loaf — or shall I get you a plate of chicken?

**June** I don't want anything, thanks.

**Pauline** I'll do you a plate of chicken.

*Heading back for the kitchen, Pauline glances at June to check she's not looking, and then slyly confiscates the vodka bottle. She goes into the kitchen. During the following she returns with a tray on which there is a cloth, salt and pepper, cutlery, a glass of water and a small salad. This she sets down on a side table*

**June** (*resuming*) Didn't suffer fools. You were a fool to yourself, Sam. I wish I'd been at that lectern instead of Charlie. I could have said a thing or two. Because do you know what I thought when you went, Sam? I thought, you silly sod. Fifty-three years of age, sixty a day, bottle of Bell's a day, and that's only counting what you admitted to, three stone overweight, no exercise. And you were told and told, but you wouldn't *be* told, would you? "I Did It My Way". Thank you very much.

**Pauline** You've got some ham, if you'd prefer it.

**June** No, thank you.

**Pauline** I'll do both. You've got to keep your strength up, June ...

*She returns to the kitchen*

# WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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