

*Acting Edition*

# THE GLAD GAME

by Phoebe Frances Brown

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|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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*THE GLAD GAME* was first performed at Nottingham Playhouse on 23 September 2021 and at Hampstead Theatre, London, on 9 February 2022. It was written and performed by Phoebe Frances Brown. The production was co-produced by Pippa Frith and Nottingham Playhouse, and supported by Arts Council England, Television Workshop, The Bush, and Hampstead Theatre. The performance was directed by Tessa Walker, with lighting design by Robbie Butler, sound design by Iain Armstrong, stage and production management by Maddy Wade. The assistant producer was Courtenay Johnson, and the charity partner was Brain Tumour Foundation. The voiceover cast included Waleed Akhtar, Aimee Berwick, Dominic Brown, Eamonn Brown, Gail Brown, Gemma Caseley-Kirk, Chloe Culpin, Stavros Demetraki, Haydn Gwynne, Sarah Hadland, CJ Johnson, Courtenay Johnson, Jake Kelsall, Lorna Laidlaw, Narisha Lawson, Manjeet Mann, Francesca Millican-Slater, Joe Powell, Sabrina Sandhu, Ben Welch and Alexis Zegerman.

## **DEDICATION**

This play is dedicated to three very special men in Phoebe's life.

Dominic, her younger brother, who was a positive constant throughout her life and illness.

Jake, her boyfriend, who showed loyalty, commitment, understanding and love for her during their relationship.

Eamonn, her beloved dad, who we sadly lost sixteen months before Phoebe. He was her mentor, her sounding block, her inspiration and the driving force behind everything she did during her life.

She was so loved and is missed every day.

## FOREWORDS

My fabulous daughter, Phoebe Frances Brown, aka Phoebe F\*\*\*ing Brown, is the most inspirational, humorous, and highly talented person I've ever known (I'm biased, but it's true!).

She was a very independent and quietly determined little girl, and even as a toddler was totally self-driven and positive. She took control, organised her friends and cousins and led them into playing her games and performing plays, without them really knowing what they'd let themselves into. She was fun to be around, entertained everyone and enjoyed company. She was popular. A unique, wonderfully brave and determined human, who accepted her illness with hope and used it to live her life to the full.

This play is her realisation and acceptance of her future... her way of dealing with that knowledge. It's harsh, raw and not an easy read; it is, however, characteristically sidesplittingly funny at times. Life is cruel and unfair, but Phoebe's talent was to articulate her thoughts and feelings in her own unique way. *The Glad Game* is a guide, a self help manual and a lifeline for those left in a world without Phoebe F\*\*\*ing Brown. It breaks my heart, but also fills it with so much love.

– Gail Brown

### §

We're glad because...

We had the opportunity to work on this brilliant play with the amazing Phoebe Frances Brown. We saw the impact of *The Glad Game* on audiences, on Phoebe's friends and family and perhaps most importantly on Phoebe herself. She channeled so honestly into the play all her frustrations and fears but also all her light and her humour. *The Glad Game* is a brilliant piece of writing; heartfelt, honest and unique. Even though this piece is an autobiography, and an incredibly personal journey through an extraordinary experience, like all good stories it is universal and like all good plays it deserves to be brought to life again.

We hope that *The Glad Game* will be reimagined, shared with new audiences, its words read by other actors, directed by other directors, produced by other producers. It's what good plays need and it's what they deserve. This does not need to be your story to perform it. So please, make another production of it and make it your own, speak Phoebe's words, let it live on in new and exciting ways. Phoebe would absolutely love it.

– Tessa Walker and Pippa Frith  
Director and Producer of *The Glad Game*

## **SPECIAL THANKS**

There are far too many other people who need thanking for me to mention them individually. Their love, care and support for Phoebe, Dominic and me, has been extraordinary. Thank you, to all our wonderful family and friends.

– Gail Brown

§

Adam Penford, Stephanie Sirr and Tess Ellison and Nottingham Playhouse; Daniel Bailey and The Bush Theatre; Leicester Curve; Jake Kelsall; Narisha Lawson; Gemma Caseley-Kirk; Siobhan Cannon-Brownlie; Adam Kes Hipkin, Dan Hipkin and Oliver Bury at Tea Films; Nic Harvey; Television Workshop; Graham Elstone; Jenny Northam; Roxana Silbert; Sarah-Katy Davies; Lynette Dakin.

– Tessa Walker and Pippa Frith



**PHOEBE.** When I was dead little, I used to watch the Disney film *Pollyanna* at my Grandma's house. Recorded onto one of those blank video tapes. It's about a little girl called Pollyanna, she's an orphan and because she's an orphan she's moved in with her miserable Aunt who lives in a town full of miserable people, proper Debbie Downers the lot of them. I used to imagine I was like Pollyanna; no parents, plaits, paralysed. I was a strange child. But this little girl had enough courage and resilience to say, "*Yes...even in the saddest of times, there is always something to be glad about.*" This is what she calls The Glad Game.

I'm an actor, aged twenty-eight, diagnosed with incurable brain cancer: this is my story.

§

Hi... I'm Phoebe...and I have a brain tumour, which is why I wasn't here yesterday... so... yeah just thought I should probably let everyone know now at the start 'cause if I look like I'm tired it's probably because I am.

Everyone's jaw drops.

I want to fall through the floor.

I'm glad because...

I'm glad because...

I'm glad because...

§

I'm actually fine by the way. I know what I just said sounds...not great but I really don't want you sitting there worrying about me, I'm all good. Honestly. I'm fine.

I will cry at some points and that's OK. I will have my script in hand because this is what a one woman show on chemo looks like. If you want to cry at some points too that's also OK. I will laugh at some points and I hope you will want to laugh too, I am giving you permission to laugh, please laugh? Basically, I don't want you to leave here today feeling miserable, that's the last thing I want; I'm here performing this show – I'm living the dream.

§

Poor Jake, he had no idea what he was letting himself in for when he swiped right for me. Six foot five, long hair, suitably quirky looking (he looks like a giant cartoon mouse – a sexy giant cartoon mouse). He's a filmmaker, I'm an actor.

We're both into the same Brazilian disco jazz fusion bongo funk.

We're both hideously clichéd and I love it.

It's just the second time I've stayed at his. I'm sat on the end of his bed, I stand up and I'm hit with a sharp pain, bright lights, I can literally see stars... I ring my dad:

*(Dad voiceover:)* "You should see a doctor about that."

My dad, Eamonn, enjoys every single cup of tea he has. He can have six in a day and he will savour every last drop. He's a huge Man City fan, he's maniacal about them so he's been there through the times when City were really shit to now, when they are really, really good – that's the extent of my football knowledge. He's such a big fan he used to have nightmares about Alex Ferguson. True story.

*(Dad voiceover:)* "You should see a doctor about that."

§

I go to Nottingham to film a sketch with my feminist, comedy sketch group: Major Labia. Me, Nish and Gem perform. Siobhan directs. We all write. We've all known each other for years. We all met at The Television Workshop, a drama group in Notts.

I can't put my finger on it, but I feel like something is really wrong with me.

I feel really panicky all the time. I just want to run away. There's something really wrong.

I feel like there's a gun to my head.

*(Dad voiceover:)* "You should see a doctor."

§

"I think I've had a migraine but I'm not really sure..."

*(GP voiceover:)* "Go and get an eye test."

§

Back to London, going about my everyday but every now and again I'm hit with these headaches. I wake up in a daze, stumble to the toilet, sometimes vomit. Like I'm starting every day with a hangover, groggy and shitty and also getting anxious about feeling groggy and shitty...

November 5th. Bonfire night.

Wake up, feel awful. Force myself out of bed, neck pains now which are new.

When I ring my mum to tell her she tells me to come home to Nottingham.

Now.

§

My mum, Gail, is a primary school music teacher and a bloody good one at that. She runs several choirs, recorder groups and directs the year six production

in the summer term each year. She's pretty much out every night doing something or meeting friends. I don't know this yet but my mum will become a Super Mum. She'll tell me to believe in miracles, and I will. Mum is an inspiration.

§

At St Pancras. Feel really weird. Panicky. Not right. Ring my parents in tears. Beg them to pick me up from the station. The train is overcrowded, stuck in a carriage with not just one but two crying babies. I feel every screech and yelp rattle through my body. My head is fucking killing. Dad meets me off the platform. Ring the doctor's when we're in the car. Rush hour and the traffic is so bad. It's dark, get out of the car, it's bonfire night. My head is fucking killing. Rockets scream and bang, bang, BANG. What's that? Surely not another screaming baby in the waiting room? 100 points for Gryffindor! In between his cries, the squealing catherine wheels and the fireworks, I have to rest my head in my hands. Scared it's about to cave in.

§

*(GP voiceover:)* "You should have had an eye test. I'm going to prescribe some low dosage antidepressants, Amitriptyline. Have some paracetamol and go to bed."

I get home and vomit.

I'm in bed for three days.

I have an eye test. There's nothing.

§

Stress.

Stress and anxiety.

Living in London trying to be an actor is enough to give anyone a nervous breakdown, never mind a little migraine.

So the most logical thing is to move back to Nottingham with my mum and dad. The ultimate fail. I'm embarrassed and ashamed and so disappointed in myself. There's no way out.

"I feel like there's a gun to my head..."

§

In London. Say goodbye to Jake. We've been seeing each other quite a lot these last few weeks. It feels nice but I'm going so...

I'll see you when I see you then.

§

My brother Dom is helping me move. Been a difficult morning. My room is the basement flat so after I haul a bag up the stairs I have to stop and have a little lie down before he goes down to bring up the rest.

*(Dom voice note.)*

"Yo! Pretty mad I just got a voicemail of you actually, I was literally just going to send you one. Just been for a swim. Did eighty lengths, off the bounce, sorry about that, sixty all off the bounce which is like a kilometre of straight swimming which I was buzzing with... On the way home in the car that Chaka Khan song came on (*Sings.*\*) so I had a proper Phoebe Phoebe moment which was cool... I'm having Bournville, which is like cocoa, on a piece of toast. It's bloody lovely!

I was genuinely going to ring you after the Chaka Khan moment in the car (*Sings.*\*) but yeah... I'll love you and leave you."

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Dom drives me back to Nottingham.

Like my dad, my brother loves sport. He's obsessed. Particularly with cricket. And he's particularly good at it. Cricket is quite like acting. We've had many discussions about this. Dom always says to me, "you know when you go into an audition, it's like going up to the crease. You're letting them know, you're Phoebe Fucking Brown. Do you know what I mean?" And you know what, I do know what he means.

"I'm Phoebe Fucking Brown, I'm Phoebe Fucking Brown, I'm Phoebe Fucking Brown."

§

Back to the doctors.

(*GP voiceover:*) "What are you worried about?"

"That I'm not getting better –"

(*GP voiceover:*) "No – what are you worried about?"

"Well, that I don't seem to be improving and it's starting to affect my vision –"

(*GP voiceover:*) "Are you worried it's a brain tumour?"

I feel like there's a gun to my head.

(*GP voiceover:*) "I'm going to send you for an MRI scan."

§

I do a Major Labia rehearsal with Siobhan, Gem and Nish. I'm seeing double.

I go to Siobhan's thirtieth birthday on Saturday. Siobhan is completely obsessed with Bruce Springsteen. She's gifted a life size cardboard cutout of 'The Boss', which she's grinding up against.

I'm wearing dark sunglasses.

Inside.

At night.

If someone is stood in front of a light, I can't see them.  
I'm basically blind now.

I sit outside on the curb with Nish. Nish is also a nurse.  
She sits with me as I wait for my cab. I tell her I think  
there's something really wrong. I know there is. I'm  
scared.

## §

On the way to the MRI. Can't look out of the window.  
Head down the whole way because it's making me feel  
dizzy.

Scan over. Get home. Get into bed. The landline rings  
almost immediately.

*(Dad voiceover:)* "They've said you need to go to  
Queen's Med now -"

Silence.

All the way there.

Arrivals.

We wait. And wait.

Told it's bad enough to have to stay the night but  
no-one explains to us what's going on;

*(Doctor voiceover:)* "From what we know, there's  
something but we're not allowed to disclose what it is..."

Moved to a private cubicle. I have some morphine.  
Lights off. I can't see properly.

Wait.

Nap.

Wait. For another six hours.

And as though we're in some black, black, blacker  
than black comedy, a pneumatic drill starts pounding  
away at the wall.

(Dad voiceover:) “Would you be able to get my daughter some ear plugs please?”

(Nurse voiceover:) “Yeah, yeah one sec.”

...

(Nurse voiceover:) “I don’t have any ear plugs but I can get you an eye patch?”

(Dad voiceover:) “Sorry – what is going on? Look, my daughter has been waiting.”

(Nurse voiceover:) “I’m really sorry, sir.”

Finally, we’re moved up to the next floor.

More waiting.

I am getting frustrated. I am getting really angry. My head is fucking killing.

Seven hours later.

(Doctor voiceover:) “I’m just going to cut to the chase. We haven’t actually seen the scans but from what has been described over the phone you have a large mass on the left side of the brain. We have to operate. We won’t be able to take all of it out. I do think we can do this.”

## §

“Have you heard of Charly Clive, the star of Channel 4’s hit show *Pure...*”

Every person I speak to says:

“Have you heard of Charly Clive, the star of Channel 4’s hit show *Pure*, she’s got a brain tumour too and she made a show called *Britney* and isn’t she just an all-round amazing and inspiring person...”

Bitch, stole my idea.

This is supposed to be my thing.

My awful story turned good.

So I actually did an audition for *Pure* with Charly Clive, she'd already been cast as the lead. I was reading for the part of her only real 'friend' in London. She had a brain tumour and, at the time, unbeknownst to me, I had a brain tumour.

Her face is everywhere.

Her face is FUCKING EVERYWHERE.

FUCK OFF

FUCK OFF

FUCK OFF.

Then I watch *Pure* and she's absolutely brilliant.

I watch it midway through my radiotherapy. I don't want to, I really don't want to because I'm scared. I'm scared because if she's shit, what will that mean? I'm scared that if she's good, what would that mean? I'm scared that if she's really, really good would that just make me want to die? But she's absolutely brilliant. She makes me think that if she can do this, I can do this.

Because you have to be really optimistic to want to be an actor and you have to be really bloody optimistic to want to be an actor when you have a brain tumour.

So:

Charly Clive, star of Channel 4's hit show *Pure*. You gave me some fucking hope, hope in probably the bleakest time of my life. You helped me heal.

Thank you Charly Clive.

A floaty day. Due to the drugs. A weirdly calm day.  
After the whirlwind of the day before it feels good just  
to be able to sit.

Mum, Dad and Dom are with me. It feels like Christmas  
because we play games.

The Major Labia girls arrive, it's emotional. I crack  
funnies but super sad funnies.

Siobhan gives me an eye mask and ear plugs.

Gem gives me some stones for healing.

Nish gives me some crisps.

It gets closer to my next MRI scan and I begin to feel  
panicky.

Ink pumps through my veins to highlight the tumour.

Salt tastes as though it's in my mouth.

It's louder, more uncomfortable.

I lie still for the longest time.

Back in my room, the nurse gives me a massive hug. It's  
such a big, lovely hug. And it goes on for a while.

I really need to speak to someone. Anyone. Please.

Betty, the chaplain, arrives. I tell her everything. All of  
my frustrations and anger. My relief at finally knowing  
what's wrong with me.

*(Betty voiceover:)* "Firstly, you must believe in your  
doctors. You must trust them. It is so important."

I'd never considered it from that angle before.

*(Betty voiceover:)* "Secondly, there are two kinds of  
people who come into hospital. Those who come in  
sick and those who come in and get sick. You will get  
through this. It's going to be hard but trust me, you're  
fit and healthy and you will get through it."

(*Betty voiceover:*) “It’s all a lot right now but trust me, you will be fine.”

I will be fine.

I’m glad because...

I’m glad because...

I’m glad because... A few months previous. Appointment notification: Audition for *Small Island* at the National Theatre. Part: Queenie, the lead. Director: Rufus Norris, the Artistic Director. Stage: Olivier. The biggest bloody stage in the theatre! I’m Phoebe Fucking Brown. Do it. It’s one of the best auditions I’ve ever done. Get fab feedback.

(*Casting director voiceover:*) “She did very well. Please thank her very much. She’s very talented.”

Wait.

(*Agent voiceover:*) “It’s gone to someone else.”

Forget about it.

§

My consultant,

(*Consultant voiceover:*) “It is a massive brain tumour. It’s been there for a very long time. This has been resting on your drive and motivation, which is why you’ve probably been finding it hard to get up in the morning. Yours is an extremely rare case. Brain tumours are graded so if it’s a grade 1 that’s usually just kids, grade 2 is slow-growing and is benign but can still be life-threatening depending on where it’s growing and how big it gets and grades 3 and 4 are higher grades of cancer. Your GP will be shocked to find out you have such a large brain tumour. You’re going to be the talk of the town.”

Paul Byrne, brain surgeon, or God, as I like to call him, assures me:

*(Paul Byrne voiceover:)* “I won’t have done my job successfully if you come out harmed in any way...”

So if I can’t speak, or I’m paralysed or I die – that won’t be good...

He tells me I may have to do radiotherapy and chemotherapy. He tells me it’s mainly grade 2 but on the scans it looks like there are signs of it possibly transforming into grade 3.

I’m not going to think about that.

§

Now you may have forgotten about Jake. Sexy cartoon mouse guy. Well we’ve been texting this whole time. I told him about my MRI, he replied saying “to check there aren’t aliens eating at your cerebral cortex?” Have my first phone call with him this evening confirming it is aliens eating at my cerebral cortex. He laughs. A sad laugh.

We speak for two hours. A mixture of things; sad things. Hilarious things. I tell him the whole story.

*(Jake voiceover:)* “I need to come and see you.”

This is so much. It’s almost too much for me... it’s been so lovely but we’ve only known each other for two months so I’d absolutely understand if you just want to leave it here...

He says he’s never felt like this before.

He tells me it doesn’t matter if I’m going to get sick and that if we can get through this, we can get through anything.

We say goodbye. It's late. I look around my hospital room, the sink, the bed, the empty chair and think... oh my god! I've actually got a boyfriend!

Next day.

The Major Labia girls and Dom come. They come bearing gifts.

Dom brings a pack of cards.

Siobhan and Gem bring a little flower in a reindeer pot.

Nish brings me some crisps.

A joyful time if a little melancholic.

A day of waiting. And waiting.

Waiting for my meds.

Waiting for my final eye examination.

Waiting for my consent form. The consent form is grim. Like fucking grim.

*(Nurse voiceover:)* "So do you suffer from seizures at the minute?"

"Umm no?"

*(Nurse voiceover:)* "OK because that might happen but we can give you meds for that."

"Right OK."

It's Friday. My operation is booked for next Wednesday. Five days' time. I'm laden with leaflets and instructions for meds. When I'm finally discharged, I burst into tears.

I'm glad because...

I'm glad because...

I'm glad because... I get my hair cut by Shaun.

*(Shaun voiceover:)* "It's just not fair is it? I mean when you think there's paedophiles and mass murderers and the like walking the street and then there's you with your - it's not fair."

Emma comes. Emma is my super posh, super lovely university friend. Emma's big claim to fame is that she used to live in the house from the film *Notting Hill*, the one with the blue door. True story. She flirts with Shaun, telling him all about it and he loves it.

My mum is just there, smiling.

Jake's coming to Nottingham to see me. He's going to meet my parents for the very first time, we've only being going out officially for three days. He tells me he needs some Dutch courage so he is a bit pissed when he arrives. He gets out of the cab with his arms flailing about like Mr Tickle. (*Pretends to be him.*) "Whaay hello." Dad shakes his hand. Mum gives him a hug.

The drink works because he charms them good and proper.

Jake hates the idea of being romantic. It actually repulses him. Yet staying with me, whilst barely knowing me, is the most romantic gesture in the world. He'll see me at my worst, and he will see me at my best and he will see me at all the bits in between.

He loves me.

He makes me a playlist of jazz tunes he thinks I'll like. In hospital and for the next few months these songs will feel like they are running through my veins. They'll keep me sane. I'll cry to songs on that playlist. I'll smile. When I'm not strong enough to stand, I'll get really good at chair dancing and sway and shimmy and dance my little heart out...

§

The night before my op and I can't sleep.

Nish sends me a voice note.

(*Nish voice note.*)

“Well, well, well if it isn’t Phoebe Frances Brown hey? Good evening! How are you? This is literally a quick one as I know you’re going to try and get an early night because you’ve got brain surgery tomorrow do you know what I mean? Going to try and rest up. But this is like a... I want to say ‘all the best’ for tomorrow or ‘good luck’ or ‘I’ve got my fingers crossed type of thing’ but I just don’t think that’s the right tone if I’m really honest with you it’s like, it’s not an audition... But ‘have faith’. I’ve got so much faith in the doctors, in the NHS, in the process, in YOU and your body and, do you know what I mean...? There’s no words to be like ‘don’t get scared’ or ‘be brave, be strong’. It’s like, look it is what it is but you are absolutely bossing it like a pro. You know what I mean. Like honestly. You’ve overcome so much. This is no different. It’s like a small little hurdle. You go for a little brain op in the morning and bish, bash, bosh by the afternoon, you know what I mean, you’re laughing. No. On a serious note. Honestly. I just have so much faith that everything is going to go all as planned and you’re probably going to wake up like, wow. It’s done. Yes I’ll be in touch obviously as soon as you wake up! Everyone wants to be there like ‘Hi Phoebe! How are you?’ Erm. But I’m going to just text your mum to let me know maybe when you’re awake, maybe when it’s okay to have visitors because the next three days also you probably don’t want to see anyone but yes I love you lots and lots and lots and lots and I guess yeah, I’ll speak to you tomorrow you massive fucking rat. No I’m joking. I love you so much. Bye bye.”

Paul Byrne, neurosurgeon.

*(Paul Byrne voiceover:)* “I have done this procedure many times before.”

“I’m not worried. See you in a bit.”

Eyes close.

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