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Spring and Port Wine

A Comedy

Bill Naughton

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION

**SAMUEL
FRENCH**
FOUNDED 1830

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SPRING AND PORT WINE

Presented by the Mermaid Theatre Trust and Allan Davis Ltd at the Mermaid Theatre, Puddle Dock, on the 10th November 1965 with the following cast of characters:

(in the order of their appearance)

DAISY CROMPTON	<i>Ruth Dunning</i>
FLORENCE CROMPTON	<i>Jennifer Wilson</i>
BETSY JANE	<i>Gretchen Franklin</i>
WILFRED CROMPTON	<i>Melvin Hayes</i>
HAROLD CROMPTON	<i>John Alderton</i>
HILDA CROMPTON	<i>Jan Carey</i>
RAFE CROMPTON	<i>Alfred Marks</i>
ARTHUR	<i>Ray Mort</i>

The play directed by ALLAN DAVIS

Setting by ADRIAN VAUX

The play was subsequently presented by Allan Davis Ltd, Michael Medwin (for Memorial Enterprises) and The Mermaid Theatre Trust, at the Apollo Theatre, Shaftesbury Avenue on 3rd January 1966 with the cast unchanged and a setting designed by Hutchinson Scott.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

*The action of the play passes in the Crompton home
Bolton, Lancashire*

ACT I

Friday

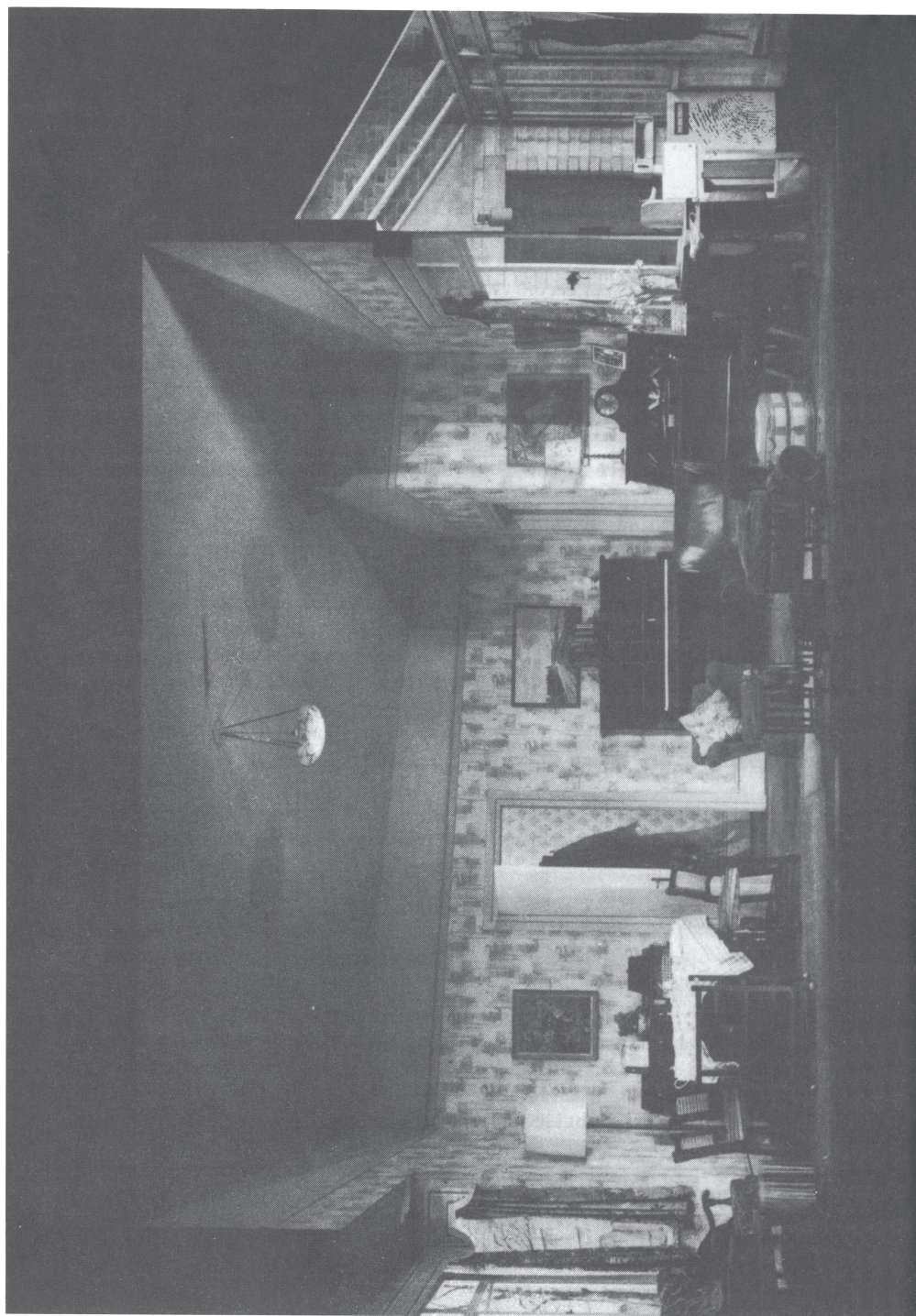
ACT II

SCENE 1 Sunday

SCENE 2 Monday

*(The curtain is lowered during Scene 2 to denote the
passing of a few hours)*

Time—the present



ACT I

SCENE—*The living-room, kitchen and scullery of the Crompton home. Early evening.*

Most of the stage is taken up by the living-room, which has a bay window down R, a door to the hall up C and one to the kitchen up L. The kitchen also has a door in its downstage wall which leads to the scullery. The scullery extends down L of the living-room wall, and in its own L wall is the back door of the house. The front door is off up R of the corridor C. The house is a comfortable, prosperous, working-class home. The furniture is fairly modern, everything is polished and well cared for. There is nothing cheap or vulgar.

When the CURTAIN rises, the living-room is empty, and a transistor radio is playing on the sideboard up R. DAISY CROMPTON enters from the kitchen carrying six side plates which she lays deftly, humming to the music, on the table RC, giving extra attention to Rafe's place at the head. DAISY is a seemingly contented housewife in the forties. She waves out of the window to Florence, then picks up her worn leather bag from the sideboard, switches off the radio and sits in the armchair C, adding up her accounts and counting money.

FLORENCE CROMPTON enters by the front door, hangs up her raincoat in the hall and enters the living-room carrying a briefcase. She is a teacher, in her twenties, fresh, attractive, brisk and assured of manner.

FLORENCE. Hello, Mother!

DAISY. Hello, Florence. You're home early.

FLORENCE. Just my usual time.

DAISY. Then I must be behind.

FLORENCE. I expect you are. It's nearly five o'clock.

DAISY. Ee, and I haven't got my housekeeping book balanced.

FLORENCE (*moving down R*) You're on the last minute with those accounts every Friday.

DAISY. I know, love. I keep putting off the final reckoning. What's six pounds seventeen and ninepence-ha'penny and four pounds nine and tenpence-ha'penny?

FLORENCE (*instantly, as she continues moving down R*) Eleven pounds seven and eightpence.

DAISY. You've got your father's head for sums.

FLORENCE. Have I? Thank you. (*She transfers her clutch bag and exercise books from the briefcase to the table down R*)

DAISY. It's still not right. Dash this weekly reckoning up! Florence, you wouldn't just run your eye over these figures for me, love, just to make sure they're okay?

FLORENCE (*taking her spectacles from her bag*) It's every week the same. (*She sits L of the table and runs her pencil up the row of figures*)

DAISY. I've simply got to make them all tally before your dad gets home. You know he likes everything to be just so.

FLORENCE (*adding up quickly*) Ten pounds one and threepence.

DAISY. That sum has an honest ring. (*She gives some coins to Florence*) When does school break up, love?

FLORENCE. For Easter? Next Wednesday. You've a deficit of twenty-six shillings and fivepence on paper.

DAISY. I can't have.

FLORENCE. I know—but you have.

DAISY. I wonder where it all goes! Florence, love, could you advance me a pound until after Dad's given me the housekeeping money? Just to keep his mind at rest.

(FLORENCE takes a note out of her bag and hands it to Daisy)

FLORENCE (*disapproving*) One pound.

DAISY. Ta, love. Don't be surprised if you get home one Friday and I've done a bunk.

FLORENCE (*returning the coins*) It's your own fault—you should put down on paper every . . .

DAISY (*cutting in*) I know—every item as I pay for it! That's what your dad keeps telling me. Well, the money's right, it was only the reckoning that was wrong.

FLORENCE (*returning the notebook and putting away her spectacles*) And that's still not right. You're six and fivepence out.

DAISY. So I am. Now suppose I'd paid the window-cleaner—which I haven't, because he hasn't been.

FLORENCE. Mother!

DAISY. There's nothing dishonest about it. It's just for your dad's peace of mind. (*She takes the notebook and begins to write in it*) Window-cleaner, eight-and-six. That takes me out of the red, and puts me a couple of bob to the good. Funny, but I can get away with that touch nearly every week. It seems to be his one blind spot.

FLORENCE. God help you if he ever finds out.

DAISY. God help him, poor chap, he has such faith in me. Is Arthur coming round tonight?

FLORENCE. I hope not. I've some markings to do. Three nights a week of Arthur is quite enough.

DAISY. Once you get married you'll have seven nights a week of him. And not just holding hands in the pictures either!

FLORENCE. That won't be for some time yet, I hope.

DAISY. You never know your luck.

(BETSY JANE, a neighbourly slattern, enters by the back door. She is obviously in a hurry. The light starts to fade slowly as dusk falls)

BETSY JANE. I say, Daisy!

DAISY. That you, Betsy Jane? (*She rises and moves up R*)

(BETSY JANE enters the living-room. She sees Florence and her manner changes)

BETSY JANE. Hello, Florence.

FLORENCE. Hello.

BETSY JANE (*looking round*) Your mother's got all her week-end cleaning and polishing done—just fancy!

DAISY (*laying the table with cutlery from the sideboard*) Aye, Rafe always likes to come home to everything spick and span of a Friday.

BETSY JANE. He would! But he wouldn't get it from me. (*She sniffs*) I see you're having herrings for tea.

DAISY (*setting the jam pot and spoon*) Yes, and they're lovely. Fancy a couple?

BETSY JANE. I wouldn't give a thank-you for all the herring in the North Sea. I'm more partial to sausages or black pudding. Something savoury like.

DAISY. Rafe has always liked fish of a Friday.

BETSY JANE. I suppose you others have got to like it.

FLORENCE. And why shouldn't we?

DAISY. Why—what's wrong with a good fresh herring?

BETSY JANE. You needn't get up in arms! I only thought it a bit High Church for a chap as were eddicated at Cotton Lane Baptists. 'Course, they do say they're very nutritious.

FLORENCE (*rising and moving up c*) Really! I'll go and change.

(*A buzzer sounds*)

Now don't get behind, Mother—that's the buzzer.

DAISY (*moving her bag to the sideboard*) No, I'd better not.

BETSY JANE. I'll be off in a minute, Florence. I just wanted a word in private with your mum.

(*FLORENCE exits up c. BETSY JANE cocks a snook*)

Eee, I thought she was never going.

DAISY. What's up, Betsy Jane?

BETSY JANE. Daisy, I'm in a right mess! Could you let me have five pounds?

DAISY. Five pounds! I'm sorry, but . . .

BETSY JANE. It's the flaming television fella. I'm behind with my payments, and he's just come to take it back if I don't pay five pounds off the arrears.

DAISY (*moving to the L armchair*) You don't mean to say he's in there now?

BETSY JANE. Aye, I left the front door on the latch and he caught me. And now he's got it all disconnected ready to take back unless I hand him over five pounds in ready cash.

DAISY (*sitting on the arm of the L armchair*) You couldn't have come at a worse time.

BETSY JANE. Yon chap will murder me if he gets home and finds the telly gone. He thinks I'm straight up with all my payments.

DAISY. I'm so sorry . . .

BETSY JANE. And think of the disgrace in front of all my neighbours if they see that fella carrying it out.

DAISY. I'm sorry, but . . .

BETSY JANE. I swear my oath I'll let you have it back by seven o'clock—as soon as he hands over his money.

DAISY. Rafe's got this obsession about keeping accounts straight. He likes to start every week afresh.

BETSY JANE. I wish I could start afresh.

DAISY. Would two pound ten see you through? (*She opens her bag*)

BETSY JANE. He won't budge under five pounds. I'm sure you could fiddle the other fifty bob one way or another.

DAISY. The other? I'll have to fiddle for the first. Is there nobody else you could ask?

BETSY JANE. Is there hell as like! They're all as badly off as me. Do try to wangle the five pounds.

DAISY. Look, it'll take me all my time to get you fifty bob.

BETSY JANE. Tell him you've paid some bill you haven't.

DAISY. I wouldn't want to tell a barefaced lie to Rafe.

BETSY JANE. Why not? Anyway, what right has he to interfere with your housekeeping? That's the wife's job.

DAISY. So long as all the bills are paid I'm happy running the house.

BETSY JANE. How can you say you're happy? And how do you run the house? Money runs the house, and that jumped-up husband of your handles it all.

DAISY. Now don't you be so cheeky in my home. Rafe has never seen me short of money and we don't owe a halfpenny. How many wives on this estate could say that?

BETSY JANE. Well, we owe everybody and I'm always short of money, and the television chap's in possession at the moment, but I've still got something you haven't got.

DAISY. What's that? What've you got I haven't?

BETSY JANE. A wife's pride! Aye, and independence.

DAISY (*rising*). How dare you say I've no pride!

BETSY JANE. I dare because it's true. They all say it, all your neighbours. They're always talking about you and him and his domineering ways.

DAISY (*shocked*). You mean my neighbours talk about me behind my back?

BETSY JANE. Yes, they do.

DAISY. I don't believe it.

(WILFRED CROMPTON enters by the back door. He is eighteen but looks younger. He is wearing a factory mechanic's blue bib overalls and a cap.

During the following speech he removes these and hangs them on a peg on the door)

BETSY JANE. Don't you! Why, Mrs Clegg was only saying the other day what she'd do if a man dared attempt to run her side of the home. He might manage to have everything paid up, he might manage to keep the house in order, but in doing it he's sucked all the pride out of you. You talk about not telling him a lie—why, all your life is a flaming lie, if you ask me. How can a man run a home? That's the woman's job, always has been. A man has no right to attempt it. It's not natural.

(WILFRED enters the living-room)

WILFRED. What's not natural?

BETSY JANE *(with a snort)* Oh, go to hell!

(BETSY JANE exits to the kitchen with a look at Daisy, then goes out by the back door)

WILFRED. What the heck's up with her? *(Noticing that Daisy is upset)* Has something upset you, Mum?

DAISY. Listen, Wilf, would you say I had no pride?

WILFRED. No pride—you, Mum! Who dare say that? *(He kisses her)* You've pride in everything you touch.

DAISY *(unconvinced)* Bless you, lad. Call her back.

(WILFRED puts his jacket on the L armchair, hurries to the back door and whistles)

WILFRED. Hi! Betsy Jane! Come back, my mum wants you.

(DAISY goes into the kitchen and then to the back door)

What was up with her?

DAISY. Could you let me have five pounds, love, out of your wages?

WILFRED. Five pound! Aye, I expect I could at a pinch. *(He takes out his wage packet and extracts notes)* It might throw me a bit short for when I'm paying over to Dad.

DAISY. I'll get a couple of pounds off your Harold for you—just to tide you over.

WILFRED. Good. I say, you're not lending it to Betsy Jane, are you?

DAISY. It's all right. She's got some trouble. You won't let your father know?

WILFRED. What he doesn't know won't keep him awake. But I don't trust her.

(BETSY JANE, shamefaced, enters the back door. WILFRED picks up the cat from outside and takes it into the living-room)

BETSY JANE. What is it, Daisy?

DAISY. Here, your five pound. I got it off our Wilf. Get in home before it's too late.

BETSY JANE. Ee, no thanks—I can't take it—not after what I said to you.

DAISY. Let's say no more about it.

BETSY JANE. (*briskly*) Ta then. You're a good neighbour, Daisy. It's terrible when you've nobody to turn to. I'll let you have it back the minute yon chap hands over his money to me. He's never later than seven. I hope I can do as much for you one day. (*She turns to go*)

DAISY. Hey, I say . . .

(BETSY JANE *turns back*)

Do they—do my neighbours really talk about me in that way?

BETSY JANE. Eh? Now don't take what I said to heart.

DAISY. I'm asking you.

BETSY JANE. Not really. I think it's only jealousy. They all envy you your nice home. You know how they are—don't like to see anybody better off than themselves. Try to forget what I said.

(BETSY JANE *hurries off*. DAISY *wipes her eye and returns slowly to the living-room*)

WILFRED. Has anything upset you, Mum?

DAISY. I've just heard a bit of truth, love—it can be upsetting.

WILFRED. Take no notice of what she says.

DAISY. I'll go and wash me.

WILFRED. And I'll grab the sink while I've a chance.

(DAISY *exits up c*. WILFRED *takes the cat to the kitchen, then enters the scullery, switching on the light*. HAROLD CROMPTON *enters through the back door, whistling. He is in his twenties and has a dry, comical air. He works in a spinning mill and wears corduroy trousers and bicycle clips, a cardigan, cap and scarf*)

Howgo, Harold!

HAROLD. Howgo, squire!

(WILFRED *throws a towel over his shoulders and washes his face and hands at the sink*. HAROLD *hangs up his scarf and takes off his clips*)

WILFRED. You can come and have a sluice here in a minute.

HAROLD (*taking the towel and wiping his hands*) I don't need to wash me. We're working on Egyptians—beautiful cotton—spins like silk. How come our Hilda's not home with you?

WILFRED. They were having a bit of a do over in the weaving shed. Some chap getting wed.

HAROLD. There's one born every minute. (*He goes into the living-room and sits on the L armchair with his feet up*)

WILFRED. No, there's always a big rush before Easter to save the income tax.

HAROLD. I'll bet that's not the only reason they're rushing. (*He takes out a cigarette and lights it*)

WILFRED (*moving into the living-room*) Why—what other?

HAROLD (*throwing the towel at Wilfred*) Skip it, son.

WILFRED. Hey, you mucky beggar, look what a mess you've made of this towel.

HAROLD. Don't worry. I'll send you to the launderette with it in the morning.

(*FLORENCE enters up C, switching on the pendant and desk lamp by the switch L of the door*)

WILFRED. Some hopes you've got! Hello, Flo.

FLORENCE. Hello, love.

HAROLD (*in a posh voice*) Hello, Flo. Where's Mum?

WILFRED. Having a wash in t' bathroom. (*Drying his face and buttoning his cuffs*) Hi, that reminds me, you've got to give me a couple of quid.

HAROLD. I have! What for?

WILFRED. Mum'll tell you. She's been lending money.

HAROLD. Keep me out of your mother's troubles. I'm very short myself this week—I've backed a few losers.

FLORENCE (*moving to the fire down C, pushing Harold's feet aside to get the coal glove*) Can't you keep your big feet out of the way?

HAROLD. Do you call twelve-and-a-halves big? The old man takes fifteens.

FLORENCE (*putting coal on the fire*) If you mean your father say your father.

HAROLD. I don't. I mean the old man, old Crompton. Ever heard of him?

FLORENCE. I'd like to see you if he comes in and catches you in his chair—and stinking the room with your fags.

HAROLD. That little word "if".

WILFRED (*putting on his jacket and combing his hair*) Better get the Airwick spray out, mate, or he'll smell you've been smoking.

HAROLD. I don't care what he smells. Let him come to me if he has any complaints—and I'll tell him where he gets off.

(*FLORENCE goes to the sideboard and then sits the napkins on the table*)

WILFRED. Don't forget tonight's his monthly union meeting. So don't you set him off.

(*WILFRED exits to the kitchen with the towel*)

HAROLD. I should worry! No wonder the last union secretary ended up where he did.

(*HILDA CROMPTON runs in from the front door and enters the sitting-room. She is aged nineteen and is a weaver at the mills. She is fresh and gay.*)

She carries a shoulder-bag and "Weekend" magazine, and wears a bright raincoat)

HILDA. Oh, I have had a good time! *(She moves to the piano)*

HAROLD. Be careful your dad doesn't hear you.

HILDA. He's not home yet?

FLORENCE. Of course not. It's not Dad's time yet.

HILDA. Thank heaven. Where's Mum? *(She takes off her raincoat and leaves her things on the piano-stool)*

HAROLD *(cutting in)* She's run off with Co-op coal chap—they've made off for Blackpool with his week's takings.

(HILDA pushes Harold's cap over his eyes. HAROLD takes it off. DAISY enters, smiling)

DAISY. Here I am, love. Ee, you do look bonny. *(She hugs Hilda)*

HILDA. Ee, we have had a good time, Mum! We've had a lovely footing.

DAISY. Yes, love—you look it. Straighten your hair.

FLORENCE. You've had a what?

HAROLD *(mimicking)* A party—where they all foot their share.

HILDA *(looking in the mirror L)* Yes—our mechanic's getting married tomorrow, so all the weavers in our shed pooled seven-and-six apiece for a cheese and wine party. It was lovely.

DAISY. Ee, we only had cider and sausage rolls in my time.

HAROLD. Aye, things were tight during the Boer War.

HILDA. Smell my breath, Mum! I'd about three glassfulls of port.

HAROLD. I can smell it from here. Springtime orgies in the weaving shed.

(WILFRED enters from the kitchen)

HILDA. Wilf, love, could you hear us singing hymns after?

FLORENCE. Hymns on top of that lot!

(FLORENCE snorts and exits to the kitchen)

WILFRED. Aye, we could even hear you in the mechanics' shop with the lathe going. *(He plays the piano)*

(HILDA, DAISY and WILFRED sing. As they do so, HILDA picks up her things and Harold's cap. She puts her bag and the cap on the piano, hangs her mac up in the hall, and returns with the magazine. DAISY sets the cruet and sugar on the table)

HILDA	}	<i>(singing)</i>	{	Follow, follow, I will follow Jesus. Anywhere, everywhere, I will follow on.
DAISY				
WILFRED				
HAROLD. Funny choice for a party piece.				
HILDA	}	<i>(singing)</i>	{	Follow, follow, I will follow Jesus.
DAISY				
WILFRED				

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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