

Happy Days 1937
(Mainstreamspanking)

Happy Days

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Wilfred Massey's three-act farce *Happy Days* concerns Reggie Blougham (pronounced Bloom) and his fiancée Leslie Royston, 'who, as all fiancées should be, is young, very pretty and very charmingly dressed'. The third character in the triangle is Ruth Eltringham, who is 'three years younger than Leslie, equally pretty, but in a fluffy, irresponsible way', and who has a habit of throwing herself at men 'with much sinuosity of the hips' in a way that 'would gain her admittance into Hollywood with no questions asked'. For reasons that are as unimportant as they are complicated, the two girlfriends are going to stay in Reggie's flat while he spends the night with his upstairs neighbour, the artist Jimmy Harbottle.

Reggie is an idle young man who is dependent on the good will of an uncle who holds his inheritance in trust until he turns thirty. Unfortunately for him, by the terms of his mother's will he'll only be paid an allowance if he can prove he has done some work, so he writes the occasional piece, such as an essay about a happy home life that he recently submitted to a newspaper competition. Even more unfortunately, the uncle has ideas about whom he should marry, won't approve of Leslie, and has threatened to cut off the allowance altogether if Reggie doesn't get engaged to the ugly, foul-tempered daughter of an industrialist. Most unfortunately of all, the competition essay has won the first prize of five hundred pounds – so long as Reggie can demonstrate that everything in it is completely true, and that he really has a Happy Home with a Happy Little Wife. 'We have to guard against dishonest people who might enter the competition purely for the sake of the prize money,' explains the paper's elderly emissary. If he wants the cash, he has to produce the Happy Little Wife. But Leslie has gone out and Ruth has already been introduced as *not* the wife, so Reggie has to think quickly. The first woman through the door is thrust into the role of Happy Little Wife: Twinky Farrell, an artist's model who has been posing for Jimmy.

Next morning, at the top of the second act, Ruth is still not yet dressed ('whatever is permissible', says the stage direction) when she starts teasing Leslie with the suggestion that she is jealous of Twinky, and we get the first sign of where their relationship is headed: 'My child,' says Leslie, 'There are times when I positively *ache* to lay violent hands on you!' She makes a rush for Ruth, but a quick apology forestalls the immediate risk of 'summary vengeance' administered upon the seat of whatever is permissible. But despite all her denials, Leslie *is* jealous. And as the act goes on, she gets something more to be jealous about.

When the *Daily Comet* reporter arrives to interview Reggie and his Happy Little Wife, Leslie has stepped out again, and Twinky is still up in Jimmy's flat, so Ruth is taken to be the Happy Little Wife – and if she isn't, Reggie risks being sued for fraudulent misrepresentation, so they play along, unaware that Leslie is outside the door listening to them as they make mutual declarations of love. The interview comes to an end and the reporter leaves them enjoying a long, passionate kiss – whereupon Leslie loses her temper. A *mêlée* follows, with Jimmy (who has grown fond of Ruth) remonstrating with Reggie while Leslie confronts Ruth:

LESLIE: *What you want is a jolly good smacking!!*

RUTH: *Oh yes?*

LESLIE: And for two pins I'd give you one.

RUTH: You and who else?

LESLIE: Me and nobody else!!!

RUTH: If you could!!

LESLIE: I'll show you whether I could.

Bangs down onto settee, pulls Ruth over her knees and begins to spank her.

*RUTH: Oh!! Ow!! ... OW!! Let me go! LET ME GO YOU BIG BULLY!! ... OW!! OW!!!
You big bully! Stop it!*

LESLIE: This will teach you, you little –

There is wildest pandemonium. Leslie is slapping Ruth, Ruth is screaming at the top of her voice.

And with that, the Editor of the *Daily Comet* walks in. 'So this is the Happy Little Home,' he says – and the curtain falls.

The third act begins with a still tableau of the moment where the second left off, with, among other things, Leslie's hand 'uplifted in the act of slapping Ruth'. They are looking in frozen silence at the Editor, all except Ruth, who is facing the wrong way across Leslie's knees and is still protesting: 'You big bully! Let me go!' Leslie releases her, and she declares, 'You'll be sorry for this, you – !' She's cut short by the Editor, who turns out to be a friend of the family and has known her since she was born – and knows she isn't Reggie's wife. He also knows that Twinky doesn't have that honor, having hitherto employed her professional services as a model. Which means that the Happy Little Wife must be Leslie! Reggie still feels the need to explain:

REGGIE: About Ruth. She's a friend of Leslie's.

RUTH: You mean I was a friend of Leslie's!

REGGIE: She – er, she's staying here.

EDITOR: I see. (To Leslie.) Do you always treat her like that when she stays with you?

LESLIE: Oh, no. I – I'm terribly sorry! I –

EDITOR: Oh, don't apologise. Knowing Ruth as I do, I'm quite sure she deserved it.

RUTH: Oh, are you? Well, I'll make you sorry for that crack, anyhow.

EDITOR: Oh! How?

RUTH: Next time you come to see daddy I'll lock up every single drop of the old port – and throw away the key!

And off she goes in a huff. After some pleasant conversation, the Editor is still understandably uncertain about awarding the prize: 'I come into what is claimed to be the ideal Happy Home, and what do I find? A scene of indescribable confusion, everybody quarrelling, my oldest friend's daughter being unmercifully beaten...' Leslie pleads: 'No, really – I wasn't unmercifully beating her – only spanking her for being naughty –' The Editor accepts this and hands over the cheque – whereupon the

other newspaper employees turn up, each of them thinking a different girl is the Happy Little Mrs Blougham.

Luckily the Editor is eventually persuaded to see the funny side, and agrees that Reggie can keep the prize money if he marries Leslie immediately by special licence – the paper can hold off publishing the story until it has become true. Everyone makes up. 'I'm sorry I smacked you, darling,' says Leslie. 'So am I,' replies Ruth, 'but I'll forgive you.' And so the play ends with everyone drinking a toast: '*HAPPY DAYS!*'

The script was first published in the journal *Amateur Stage* in April 1935, six months before it could be legally performed in Britain – it wasn't licensed by the Lord Chamberlain until October 22. It then premiered in Leeds eleven days later at the Pudsey Sunday School on November 2, 1935 (which was a Saturday). It quickly proved a hit with amateur companies, and was later said to be 'record-breaking'. If we single out one other early production, by the Kent-based Hayes Players in February 1937, it is for one very pertinent reason:



Happy Days found its way to some unexpected places in the course of its life. It managed to cross the Atlantic for a high school production in Iowa in 1939, and twenty years later, in 1959, it was professionally produced at the Grand Theatre, Blackpool. Soon after that its history becomes a little harder to trace: after 1962, amateur companies

doing *Happy Days* might be putting on the Samuel Beckett play about a woman buried up to her neck in sand, and from 2007 onwards there is also the musical version of the popular television sitcom set in the 1950s. But the Wilfred Massey comedy soldiered on until the mid-1980s, and still makes an occasional appearance amidst the young pretenders to its title. In May 2013 it turned up in Sweden, in an English-language production by the Gothenburg Drama Group:



Ruth was played by Sanne Anderson, seen here persuading the *Daily Comet* reporter that she is Reggie's Happy Little Wife...



... and here paying the price at the hands of Michaela Celeste Pascoe in the role of Leslie:



When the play first appeared in print in *Amateur Stage*, it was accompanied with some comments from the author, Wilfred Massey. What he had to say about the character of Ruth seems, to a modern reader of the play, a little less than fair:

Wasn't she awful? It only goes to show that a few good swift ones with the back of a hairbrush in early girlhood are well-advised.

I have no problem with Ruth getting a good spanking in her early womanhood – in fact, I like her all the more for it, and I think 'awful' is rather strong. Attitudes to agreeably cheeky young women must have softened since the 1930s.