

Bill & Bert

"Morning, Bert," said Bill, as he sat on the seat beside his friend.

"Morning, Bill," Bert replied, adding: "Nice day, by the looks of it."

- Yes, it is, Bert; the Spring has sprung.
- What's that, Bill? You've been stung?
- No, I ain't been stung, Bert.
- Well, why did you say you had been?
- I didn't say I'd been stung, Bert. I said the **Spring has sprung**. You knows, the old rhyme we used to say at school."
- Oh that, Bill. Let's see: 'The Spring has sprung, the grass is ris' - what comes next?
- I don't rightly remember, Bert. 'Twas a long time ago. But I remembers once hearing someone on the wireless saying: 'The Spring has sprung, the grass is ris. I wonder where Ralph Whightman is.'
- What he want to say that for, Bill? We all knows where Alf Whiteman is - lying in the graveyard - been there for ages.
- No, Bert, not Alf. I said **Ralph**.
- Ralph? There never was a Ralph among them Whitemans; leastways, not that I recalls.
- I don't mean the Whitemans in the village, Bert. I was talking about someone on the wireless when we were just little nippers.
- Little kippers? Someone on the wireless talking about little kippers?
- No, Bert, not *kippers*. I said '**nippers**'. When we were just nippers after the war, there was someone on the wireless called Ralph Whightman.
- Oh, that Ralph Whightman! Why didn't you say so, Bill? I remembers my old Daddy used to like listening to him on Country Magazine on the Home Service.
- Ah yes, Bert, we used to have the Home Service and Light Programme in them days and there were interesting things on the wireless then. They were good days.
- So they were, Bill, so they were. I used to love the Spring when we would run through Dauks Meadows with all them wild flowers around us.
- Can't do that now, Bert. It's all houses, houses, houses where them meadows used to be. 'Tis a shame.
- Yes, you're right, Bill; it ain't the same. But the daffadowndillies are just lovely on the roundabout here by the Rose and Crown.
- They are indeed, Bert, thanks to them cancer people. If the countryside's gone, we can at least see them here.
- That's right, Bill, we can at least have a beer, though I don't see what that has to do with the countryside.
- I didn't say it did, Bert. I said even if we're not in the countryside, we can see daffadowndillies **here**.
- Well, I knows we can see them here. Go on, Bill, go and get us a beer each; I've a terrible thirst.

So Bill went off into the Rose and Crown, leaving Bert dreaming and gazing at the daffodils. He soon returned with two pints of best bitter. They sipped their pints as Bill said:

- Them daffadowndillies reminds me how the North Field on the Downs used to be covered with cowslips each Spring; it was lovely: all yellow and golden.

- What you mean 'olden', Bill? It was like that till just three years back.
- I knows it was, Bert. I said '**golden**'; the hillside was just all golden each Spring till them developers came along and churned it all up.
- Damn shame, if you ask me, Bill. Them councillors wants their heads examining, letting the Downs be carved up to make a golf course, specially as it's too expensive for local people to play there.
- Too right, Bert. 'Tis just a playground for billionaires. I do miss the cows on the Downs; I loved watching them grazing there.
- The clowns lazing there? What you talking about, Bill? You saying them golfers are clowns?
- No, Bert, I was talking about the **cows** that used to be on the **Downs**. I said I liked watching them **grazing** there.
- So did I, Bill, so did I. A bloody shame. I don't like all them houses where we used to play as nippers; but I suppose people got to live somewhere. But they didn't have to destroy the Downs for rich foreign golfers.
- No they didn't, Bert. They ought to have built it in one of them Arab states where they've got more money than they knows what to do with. They needn't have built it here.
- What's that, Bill, we need to get a beer? A good idea! My turn, I think.

Bill was not inclined to correct Bert's mishearing this time; indeed, he was more than happy to see Bert go off into the Rose and Crown. Bert soon reappeared with two pints of bitter.

- Thanks, Bert. They do sell a good pint here.
- They certainly do, Bill. They certainly do.
- I was thinking, Bert, the bluebells will soon be blooming up in Frenches Woods. They were lovely last year.
- Yes, Bill, they were indeed. I wonder how long it'll be before them developers gets their hands on Frenches Woods.
- I don't think they can, Bert. Didn't them green people get some sort of preservation order or summat put on them woods?
- They did, Bill, they did. And I thought there was some protection on the Downs; but them bloody councillors still gave permission. I don't think them preservation things are worth the paper they're written on.
- Don't be so gloomy, Bert. Drink up your beer. There's nothing like a bit of malt to make things seem better.
- What you mean, Bill? You can't make things wetter with salt! Besides, why should I want to make things wetter?
- I didn't say '*salt*', Bert; I said '**malt**' - malt makes things seem **better**.
- So it does, Bill. So it does.

Our two friends quietly sipped their beer until Bill broke the silence again.

- Look, Bert, that's the first waps I've seen this year. Over there flitting under the eves.
- A waps under the leaves? I don't see one, Bill.
- No, Bert, under the **eves**. Look up there.
- Oh yes, Bill, I sees it. Must be a queen out of hibernation looking fo somewhere to start a new nest.

- I expect 'tis, Bert, and I expect other insects'll be coming out if this fine weather holds.
- Course they will, Bill. There were bees flitting round the camellia in my garden yesterday.
- Oh your camellia, Bert. It's a right treat every year. All them lovely pink flowers. I don't know how you does it.
- I'm just lucky, I guess, Bill. But 'tis nice and sheltered where we've got it; it don't get too troubled by frost.
- I know, Bert. Poor Mrs Cooper's always losing hers to frosts. I told her it needed to be more sheltered. But she don't listen.
- Yes, you're right, Bill. She is a bit missin'; she ain't never been the same since she lost her husband. Poor old thing.
- Well, Bert, I heard she's going to be selling her house. She says she'll be living with her daughter.
- Selling up that gert, big house? Yes, I think you're right, Bill, she really oughter.
 - I said 'daughter', Bert, not 'oughter'. She's talking of going to live with her daughter down on the south coast.
 - Oh, her daughter. Yes, Bill, that'll be better for her. So she'll be selling up soon, then?
 - She will, Bert. This Spring I was told. She'll be able to give that old house a right good Spring clean.
 - Don't talk to me about Spring cleaning, Bill. Mavis has started already. Everything's all over the place at home; it ain't comfortable.
 - I must start my Spring cleaning, Bert. I likes to brush away the old cobwebs of Winter and let the Spring air in.
 - What, Bill? A spring hair pin? What do you mean?
 - Bert, you're getting worse. I said '**let the Spring *air in***'; freshen up the house, like. Start the Spring cleaning.
 - Don't talk to me about Spring cleaning, Bill. Mavis has started already. Everything's all over the place at home; it ain't comfortable.
 - Well, Bert, perhaps we need another pint to make you comfortable.

With that Bill went off into the Rose and Crown again, while Bert watched two butterflies flitting around the flowers in a planter outside the pub.

- Thanks, Bill. Seems like the warm weather has brought out them butterflies too. Yes, Spring's really under way.
- It is, Bert, it is. Let's drink to Spring and Spring Cleaning.
- I'll just drink to Spring, Bill, if you don't mind.

Bill did not mind, and the two old friends raised their glasses to Spring.