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Dramatic Publishing

SOFT SOAP

A Full-Length Play

By

DAVID ROGERS



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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DAVID ROGERS

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(SOFT SOAP)

ISBN 0-87129-529-6

SOFT SOAP

A Full-Length Comedy

For Eleven Women, Fourteen Men, Extras as desired.

DONNA a pretty Midwestern Tech junior
TOMMY SMITH a nice-looking senior at Midwestern Tech
PHYLLIS, PHIL, LOUISE. other Midwestern Tech students
BETTY BROWN a pretty transfer student
SALLY JOHNSON Betty's roommate
MARY Louise's friend
PROFESSOR GOLD the absent-minded professor
STEVE JONES the professor's assistant
MISTY WEATHERBY . . the Ann Landers of the Weatherby clan
SPRING WEATHERBY Misty's beautiful reporter daughter
DR. SONNY SKIZE. Spring's boyfriend
DR. CLEMENT WEATHERBY Misty's husband
MRS. FLOOD. a nurse at Weatherby General
MATT TURNEY. the town attorney
FLASH FLOOD Mrs. Flood's ex-husband
TEMPEST FROST. the glamorous Head Nurse
HALE STORM . . . the slick and evil head of the legal department
WINDY, DEWEY muscular, young orderlies
PATIENT at Weatherby General Hospital
OFFICER FOGG a security guard at the hospital
NURSE at Weatherby General Hospital
PROSECUTING ATTORNEY
THE JUDGE
FOREPERSON OF THE JURY at Misty's trial
ANNOUNCER begins *Yesterday's Tomorrow*
INTERCOM VOICE. at Weatherby General Hospital
STUDENTS, PATIENTS. extras

Time: The Present. Fall.

*Place: Students' Lounge, Midwestern Tech;
the Weatherby home and hospital.*

ACT ONE

Scene One

The stage is divided in half.

Stage R is the Students' Lounge in a dormitory at Midwestern Tech. The room is a typical students' lounge and can be as attractive or as functional as you wish to make it.

The door to the room is DR. Along the wall at R is a long study table with one chair at either end and two chairs faced into it. A large picture is on the wall above the table. A large chair and lamp are UR in the corner. URC, in the back wall, is a window with a window seat. The window is draped and right of it is a small picture. Just right of UC, angled slightly (depending on the theatre sight lines) is the left wall of the room which stops about C. This wall contains a window, with painted backing. The wall ends in the window drapes which match those of the other window. Just right of C there is a small sofa or loveseat that faces front. Left of the sofa and at right angles to it is a small armchair. DC is a television set which is kept low so it will not interfere with sight lines. It is angled away from the audience into the lounge and placed so that students in the lounge may see it from any area.

Stage L is an enlarged television screen. There should be a

frame that looks like the rim of a television set with proportionately large dials on the left, thicker side of the frame. The frame should be angled up from DL to meet the lounge wall at C. The screen is either curtained in a neutral-colored fabric to look like a television set that is not in use or, preferably, covered by a scrim. The television screen is the area in which all soap opera scenes are played. Settings for these scenes should be simple, sparse, easily-moved and set well down stage for sight lines. Only the area of the stage that is in use is lit.

SCENE: The Students' Lounge. TOMMY SMITH, a nice-looking senior, and DONNA, a pretty junior, are at the table R playing backgammon. STEVE JONES, a graduate student, is in the chair UR marking papers. He is slightly older and more formally dressed in a shirt, tie and jacket. Two GIRLS are playing cards on the floor URC. DONNA throws the dice and moves her markers. TOMMY throws the dice and zooms through his moves. He has obviously won.

DONNA (rising). That drives me up the wall. Why do you always get a double six when you need a double six?

TOMMY (also rising). I can't help it. I'm just lucky.

DONNA. You have some strange power over the dice! (She is annoyed and picks up her books and handbag, then moves to the chair left of the sofa. She sits and reads. TOMMY sits down and starts to set up another game.)

(PHIL and PHYLLIS, two students, enter.)

PHYLLIS. Hurry up! We don't want to be late, Phil.

PHIL. Phyllis . . . we got fifteen minutes! It's only quarter to three.

PHYLLIS. You know how crowded the lounge gets. The whole student body watches *Yesterday's Tomorrow*. (They sit on the sofa to wait.)

(MARY and LOUISE enter.)

LOUISE. I can't wait to see today's episode.

MARY (doubtfully). I don't know, Louise. Now that Delilah has recovered from the heart transplant and is back on the soccer team, what else can happen?

LOUISE. Mary, *Yesterday's Tomorrow* always thinks of something. (They sit on the window seat.)

(Two or three more STUDENTS enter and settle in for the show. They are followed immediately by SALLY JOHNSON, a senior, who brings in pretty BETTY BROWN.)

SALLY (showing BETTY around). And this is the Students' Lounge.

BETTY. Very nice. Sort of crowded.

SALLY. Only at three o'clock. We all watch *Yesterday's Tomorrow*.

BETTY. What's that? (TOMMY, still seated, looks up at her in surprise.)

SALLY. You don't know what *Yesterday's Tomorrow* is?

BETTY. No.

TOMMY (rising and coming over to BETTY). It's a soap opera.

SALLY (insulted and correcting TOMMY). It is a continuing daytime drama. Oh, this is Tommy Smith. My new roommate, Betty Brown. She's a transfer student.

TOMMY (impressed with BETTY). Wanna play backgammon?
BETTY. Another time.

SALLY. Didn't they watch *Yesterday's Tomorrow* where you came from? I thought every college student in America watched.

BETTY. Maybe they did. I was always too busy.

(A few more STUDENTS enter and sit. By now, the room should be crowded. BETTY and SALLY pay no attention to the other STUDENTS.)

SALLY (amazed). Gee! Here at Midwestern Tech they had to move all the three o'clock classes to four.

BETTY. Why?

SALLY. No one went to class. They were all watching *Yesterday's Tomorrow*.

TOMMY. What's your major?

BETTY (reluctantly). It's . . . it's sort of psychology.

TOMMY. Sort of psychology? (STEVE rises and starts toward the door.)

BETTY. I'm going to study with Professor Gold. That's why I transferred.

TOMMY. Professor Gold! That's parapsychology. Mental phenomena. It's practically gypsy fortune telling.

BETTY (annoyed). No, it's not! It's perfectly respectable scientific discipline and Professor Gold is the foremost authority in this country.

SALLY (stopping STEVE as he passes). If you're studying with Professor Gold, you should meet Steve Jones. He's the professor's assistant. (To STEVE.) This is Betty Brown.

BETTY (impressed). You actually work with Professor Gold! I hear he's fantastic. Is it really thrilling to . . .

STEVE (bored with her). It's a nice job. No heavy lifting.
BETTY (going right on). I don't get to meet him till my conference tomorrow. You see, I have this project I'm working on . . . It's an absolutely new theory . . .

STEVE. There is no absolutely new theory. Excuse me. (He starts off.)

SALLY. You're going? *Yesterday's Tomorrow* is just starting.

STEVE. That's why I'm going. Not only have soap operas set back dramatic art a hundred years, they've set back thinking to the dawn of time. (He exits.)

BETTY (looking after STEVE, sarcastically). Charming, isn't he?

SALLY (explaining). Oh, well . . . he's a grad student.

PHIL (from the back). Somebody turn on the set!

SALLY (sitting on the sofa arm). Yes, it's time!

OTHERS (ad libbing). I can't imagine what's going to happen . . . I hope Dr. Sonny's on today . . . The last one was great . . . (PHYLLIS rises from the sofa, moves to the small television set and switches it on. Lights begin to come up on stage L and down on the Students' Lounge.)

BETTY. Well, maybe I'll go back to the room and go over my notes.

TOMMY. Please stay. I didn't mean to put down parapsychology. I just don't know much about it.

BETTY (starting to go). That's all right.

TOMMY. You can't do anything till tomorrow anyway. You'll like *Yesterday's Tomorrow*. Please.

BETTY. Well, all right. (She and TOMMY sit. Everyone stares at the set. The lights in the Students' Lounge are out.)

(Another STUDENT runs in yelling "Just made it!")

ANNOUNCER (offstage in portentous tones). The pages of the

calendar slip off into infinity and the hopes and fears, the troubles and joys we anticipated yesterday for tomorrow are here. It is today. (The lights go up full on the television set. The curtain opens or the scrim dissolves. See Production Notes.)

SCENE: The Weatherby living room. (For the purposes of these scenes, designations such as R or C refer only to location within these sets.) A short wall at right angles to the frame of the television screen. The wall holds only the front door. A long wall parallel to the footlights stretches off L. In the center of this wall is a sofa with a picture above it. Left of the sofa is a small table with a telephone. (Additional furniture is at the discretion of the director.)

The phone is ringing. MISTY WEATHERBY enters L. She is a gracious, middle-aged lady; lovely looking, beautifully dressed. She speaks in a gracious manner and never loses her composure. She walks to the phone, picks it up and speaks into it.

MISTY. Hello, Misty Weatherby speaking . . . Why Deirdre! What a surprise! What is it? Anything tragic? Loretta, your high-spirited teenage daughter has run off with a fifty-year-old garbage man? Now, now, now . . . don't cry, darling. It will all work out. What should you do? Well, let me see. The first thing, I think, is to buy a trash compactor. Yes . . . (The doorbell rings.) . . . Yes, do that, dear . . . then call me back. (She hangs up the phone, goes to the door and opens it.)

(SPRING, Misty's young and beautiful daughter, enters. She carries a handbag and, at all times, a small notebook and pen.)

MISTY. Spring, dear . . .

SPRING (as she walks in). Sorry, Mummy. I forgot my key.

MISTY. I didn't expect you home. I thought you were working at the newspaper today.

SPRING. I am. (She holds up the notebook as proof.) But, Mummy, it's tough being an investigative reporter in Weatherby Falls. Once I exposed that butcher with his thumb on the scale, there was nowhere else to go.

MISTY. Cheer up, darling, I know something dreadful will happen soon. (The phone rings again. She goes to it and picks it up.) Hello, Misty Weatherby speaking. No . . . Yes? . . . Well, take my advice. Even if your husband is seeing another woman, go to him, take him in your arms and talk it out. If you communicate, everything will work out. Oh, you're welcome. (She hangs up.)

SPRING. Who was that?

MISTY. Wrong number. (The doorbell rings again.)

SPRING. That must be Dr. Skize.

MISTY. Oh? Sonny?

SPRING. He's taking me to lunch. Let him in, will you? I've got to wash up. (She exits L.)

(MISTY goes to the front door and opens it. DR. SONNY SKIZE, young and handsome, enters. He is dressed in a sport jacket, tie and stethoscope which he wears at all times.)

SONNY. Mrs. Weatherby . . .

MISTY. Come in, Dr. Sonny. Spring will be down in a minute. Would you like some coffee?

SONNY. No, thanks. What I'd really like, Mrs. Weatherby, is some advice.

MISTY. Oh, you've come to the right place for that. (She laughs politely at her little joke.) Now, sit down and tell me what's wrong.

SONNY (as he and MISTY sit on the sofa). It's about Spring.

MISTY. If you can manage a vacation in Bermuda, it's lovely at that time of year.

SONNY. Your daughter.

MISTY. Oh, yes.

SONNY. You know I'm in love with her.

MISTY (nodding wisely). I always say love is the best thing for a surgical resident.

SONNY. But . . . but . . . I can't seem to get through to her.

MISTY. She's so ambitious, Dr. Sonny. Wait. When her career as an investigative reporter begins to go well . . .

SONNY. I feel there's something more to it than that.

MISTY. How perceptive you are. It's just that Spring was engaged once . . . to another young man . . . as handsome and charming as you.

SONNY. I didn't know there was anyone like that.

MISTY. His name was Andy. Andy Thropologist.

SONNY. Andy Thropologist? What did he do?

MISTY. Scientific studies on the origin of mankind, of course. He was writing a book on tribal customs. He wanted to re-research a tribe of cannibals on one of the more backward Hawaiian islands.

SONNY. I didn't know they had cannibals there.

MISTY (in the manner of a travel agent). Oh, the islands have everything. I advised him not to go, but he went.

SONNY. And never came back?

MISTY. They never found a trace of him. Oh, there was some suspicious leftover soup in the compound but no one could prove a thing.

SONNY. I see. And you think Spring is afraid to give her heart again?

MISTY. Only for a little while. Have patience Dr. Sonny Skize . . . (The doorbell rings.) Excuse me. (She rises and goes to the door. SONNY stands politely.)

(MISTY opens the door to admit DR. CLEMENT WEATHERBY, her husband.)

CLEMENT. Hello, my darling. (He kisses MISTY on the cheek.)

MISTY. Clement!

SONNY. Dr. Weatherby.

CLEMENT. Oh, Dr. Sonny.

MISTY. I didn't expect you home.

CLEMENT. I decided to take the afternoon off. I felt a little under the weather. (As soon as he says that, SONNY goes to him. As CLEMENT and MISTY talk, SONNY unbuttons Clement's jacket and vest, puts his stethoscope to Clement's heart and listens.)

MISTY. You work too hard, dear.

CLEMENT. Being Chief of Staff at Weatherby General Hospital is not a vacation, Misty. There are pressures, strains . . .

MISTY (to SONNY). Any sign of . . . strain?

SONNY (dropping the stethoscope back around his neck). He's sound as a dollar.

CLEMENT (worried). Is it that bad?

SONNY. No, no. An unfortunate phrase. You're fine, Dr. Weatherby. Just a little tired. I prescribe an afternoon off and a long walk in the countryside with a beautiful woman . . . like Mrs. Weatherby.

MISTY (shrewdly). You'll go far.

(SPRING enters L.)

SPRING. Sorry to keep you waiting, Sonny. I was just freshening up.

SONNY (appreciatively). You look fresh as . . . as . . .

CLEMENT. Spring!

SONNY. Exactly.

SPRING. Oh, Daddy! (She kisses CLEMENT. The phone rings.)

MISTY. Excuse me. (She answers the phone.) Hello, Misty Weatherby speaking . . . Why, Mrs. Flood!

SONNY. The head of the admitting office at the hospital?

SPRING. What could she want?

MISTY (to CLEMENT, her hand over the phone). She says she must see you at once. It's . . . urgent. (CLEMENT nods. In to the phone.) Come right over, Mrs. Flood, but take my advice and don't take the highway. They're repaving around exit twenty-seven. Just come through the town. Right down Maple Avenue. You'll make better time. Good-bye. (She hangs up.)

CLEMENT. There goes our walk in the country.

SONNY. I wonder what could be the matter. (The doorbell rings. MISTY goes to the door and opens it.)

(MRS. FLOOD enters. She is an attractive woman, dressed in hospital whites with a coat thrown over her shoulders. She carries a briefcase. Everything she does is tense and dramatic.)

MISTY. Mrs. Flood!

MRS. FLOOD. You were right. No traffic on Maple Avenue at all.

MISTY. Come in. Would you like a cup of coffee?

MRS. FLOOD (dramatically). I'm afraid . . . there isn't time.

CLEMENT. What's the matter?

MRS. FLOOD. I'm sorry to bother you about the patients, Dr. Weatherby, but . . . they've been disappearing.

CLEMENT. From the hospital?

MRS. FLOOD. Yes. They sign their discharge papers . . . (She pulls a sheaf of papers from her briefcase as proof.) . . . and they are never seen again.

MISTY. Perhaps they've gone home?

MRS. FLOOD. That's what I thought . . . until . . . that handsome young football star, Knute Linebacker.

CLEMENT. I operated on him myself. He was in perfect condition when I discharged him.

MRS. FLOOD. Exactly. Yet three days later his coach called and said he hadn't been to practice. When they went to his apartment, he had not been there since before he left for the hospital. He has not been seen since.

SONNY. That's strange.

MRS. FLOOD (turning to another paper). Then there was Trixie Blades . . .

MISTY. That sweet young ice skating instructor at the Weather-by County Rink? I advised her to change her hair style and she went right to the Olympics. Three gold medals.

MRS. FLOOD. She was treated for a middle ear complaint that disturbed her balance, signed the discharge . . . (She shows it to CLEMENT.)

CLEMENT (reading). Trixie N. Blades . . .

MRS. FLOOD. But the next morning her mother called and said she never reached home.

SPRING (opening her pad and making a note). It sounds like there's a story in this!

MRS. FLOOD (riffing through her papers). Truck drivers . . . stockbrokers . . . high school English teacher . . . that was a nervous breakdown. None of them children, none of them elderly. All between nineteen and thirty-two. All of them physically strong.

CLEMENT. How many in all, Mrs. Flood?

MRS. FLOOD. Forty-seven.

CLEMENT. You should have told me sooner. Sorry about that walk, Misty. I'd better get back to the hospital right away.

SPRING. We'll all go. Somebody's bound to need Mummy's advice, Sonny's a doctor and this could be my chance for a Pulitzer Prize.

MRS. FLOOD. Thank you. I'm especially worried about Matt Turney.

SPRING. The town lawyer?

MRS. FLOOD. Yes. He's thirty-one, healthy and . . . being discharged today!

MISTY. I hope we're not too late! (ALL rush to the door.)

BLACKOUT