



VISITORS

BY **BARNEY NORRIS**



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VISITORS
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VISITORS premiered at the Arcola Theatre in London in March 2014. It was directed by Alice Hamilton, the production design was by Francesca Reidy, the lighting design was by Simon Gethin Thomas, and the sound design was by Frank Moon. The cast was as follows:

ARTHUR	Robin Soans
EDIE	Linda Bassett
STEPHEN	Simon Muller
KATE	Eleanor Wyld

CHARACTERS

ARTHUR, 70s, a farmer.

EDIE, 70s, a farmer's wife.

STEPHEN, 30s, middle-management in an insurance firm.

KATE, 20s, a university graduate.

The play is set in the main room of a farmhouse in north Wiltshire.

VISITORS

ACT ONE

Scene 1

The main room of a farmhouse in Wiltshire. Edie and Arthur are sitting in chairs.

EDIE. We were having coffee on the beach. From a flask. And I had the lid and you drank straight from the nozzle. We walked there didn't we, that's the only way to get over. Up early, breakfast in the hotel, then down to the cove and up again round the cliff path till you see the second beach stretching out under you. It was cold, with the wind off the sea. We were just about warm enough in the sun but when you went into the shade ... The sun was on the shingle so we thought we'd sit down. And we saw the most beautiful thing. She was all in white.

ARTHUR. Edie —

EDIE. Not now Arthur. She was all in white and in a way it was very unflashy. A simple dress almost, sheer down her sides then trailing out behind her. High neck, low back. You can do that if you have the figure. I don't think I ever did. She looked completely herself. Alive. A woman, you know. White teeth. Dark skin. The groom was just a boy. He looked too young for her. I suppose they must have been the same age. She would have better suited an older man, someone with a bit of — something about him. But you could tell they were enjoying themselves.

ARTHUR. We had a lovely wedding.

EDIE. Oh ...

ARTHUR. In the church. A beautiful day. You wouldn't think it,

my luck, but the sun and the trees and the churchyard, 'member? They'd mowed the grass. 'Member the smell of it. Lovely day, bright in the church with the light coming in through the windows. That was the happiest day of my life. I remember you coming up the aisle, and your dad, and my heart beating that hard. When I was young I used to worry about crying at the altar. When I was a boy and imagined it, I used to be really worried I'd burst into tears. But it wasn't like that. I felt proud, and so, excited. Felt like we were getting it done.

EDIE. Then we came here. It's always been so light here. Dark in the kitchen and I used to sing while I made tea in the morning, do you remember how your father hated that? He was funny. Were our lives like everyone else's? The mornings always seem so light, though they're not as bright as the middle of the day. I love how sharp the line across the garden cuts the air when you catch a sight through the window. That's the best way to dry clothes. They can't improve everything. Back then our nearest neighbours were the Joneses and the Parks. I liked the Joneses, where did they go? They had those dogs. But they were nice people. Did they have enough or go bust, which was it?

ARTHUR. Didn't mind those dogs. Meant he couldn't sneak around.

EDIE. You always knew Ted Jones was going round his yard with the barking, yes. He didn't go mad? Am I remembering — ? It was yellow wallpaper when I first came here. I did feel grown up. That was the first time I felt grown up and it was exciting, because we weren't really, were we?

ARTHUR. I used to worry before we were married. Used to worry there was something wrong with me. 'Cause I had a beautiful girl, and some days, when I didn't see you, I didn't miss you. I was happy to just get on. You were always so pleased to see me, I used to wonder, how can I only miss her some of the time? Then I'd miss you something terrible, wouldn't be able to sleep for thinking.

EDIE. It's all right. I was the same. I didn't think about you either. I used to worry about you was all. You out there in the wheat fields and me in town with whatever errands. I worried I might not get home in time to get your tea out.

ARTHUR. Edie —

EDIE. We mustn't make a thing of today. It'll be harder for her.

ARTHUR. This might be the last time we're ever alone like this.

EDIE. No it won't. I don't know what you think's happening but it's not like that.

ARTHUR. It's just —

EDIE. She was all in white. He wasn't old enough, but they did look lovely standing in their good shoes on the shingle. There was a man in black with a camera buzzing round them. You know how flies land on bright colours? You know how cats sit on cushions? Wherever there's a cushion in a room, a cat will sit on it. That's what beauty's like, people want to be near it. The only thing that's beautiful is youth. That's when you still have your life to live, that's beautiful. That's what people are looking at when they love something. Even you and me. What I'm seeing when I look at you is the whole past, isn't it. Our lives curled round each other like ferns half-furled. They're deceptive, photographs. Wedding snaps especially.

ARTHUR. Why?

EDIE. You look at a wedding photograph, it looks like the end of a story. I s'pose that's the books we read when we're babies. But it's not an ending, is it? It's not a start either. Just another day really.

ARTHUR. Oh.

EDIE. No, I mean, of course it's special. You know I think that. But it doesn't stop there, does it. Nothing's fixed. You have to keep working.

ARTHUR. Oh, I see. Oh yes. You have to keep on.

EDIE. He should be here by now. Is that clock right?

ARTHUR. Wound it up this morning so we'd know when they'd arrive.

EDIE. I wish she'd just come and we could get the first cup of tea out the way.

ARTHUR. This feels like an ending. Doesn't it come quick? Whoosh! Was that it? Yup, that was your life, Arthur. How long do you think we've got?

EDIE. Oh, don't. I've got longer than you have. We used to laugh, didn't we? You used to say you'll never catch me up.

ARTHUR. You won't, you know. I've still got years on you. My young thing.

EDIE. If I could choose any life I don't think I'd have things very different from this. These chairs are very comfortable. Do you get tired sitting up? I've got you, and you make me laugh. Perhaps if I could have been a despot and lived without a thought for anyone else. What are their names, the very bad ones? They could do what they wanted, they were mad, it didn't matter to them. They could have made the shops open later just like that. I suppose we're all mad aren't we, they just got to show it off. But I've enjoyed all this.

ARTHUR. I would have liked to have experienced the sixties.

EDIE. Well you were alive in them.

ARTHUR. I mean I would have liked to have tried LSD.

EDIE. We still could, you know, they still make it. Shall we get some? Would you have liked free love?

ARTHUR. I wouldn't have got any and you would have got loads.

EDIE. There won't be much of that now we've got company.

ARTHUR. Ho ho.

EDIE. Do you miss that? Sexual love?

ARTHUR. Yes.

EDIE. Yes. We could try. Nights when she's out. Bit of romantic lighting. How long did we plan for that holiday? Half my life it seems we talked. All I remember's you complaining about the price of parking.

ARTHUR. Oh my love, I'm sorry.

EDIE. I'm joking, aren't I.

ARTHUR. I've been selfish to you all my life.

EDIE. No you weren't, shut up.

ARTHUR. I was.

EDIE. Don't let's talk about big things now.

ARTHUR. When can I?

EDIE. I don't know. Not today.

ARTHUR. Look — I never could argue with you.

EDIE. You always tried. You'd get so cross because you never had an answer. You'd go out to the boot house to sulk.

ARTHUR. I get a lot done in that boot house.

EDIE. I know you did, love. You've always been good at mending.

ARTHUR. Anyone can fix anything with a bit of care, I wasn't special. Patient.

EDIE. You had a knack.

ARTHUR. Practice.

EDIE. Don't be modest. I've always been proud.

ARTHUR. Didn't you mind?

EDIE. What?

ARTHUR. That everything was mended. We didn't buy much new. I used to wonder, maybe we'd rather a new thing. I always fixed them, but I used to think maybe things broke for a reason. All those women, your friends, used to go on about their machines, their sofas. We never did. I fixed the old ones. Did you feel left out? Would you have preferred it if I'd spent a bit more money? I don't want to have been tight. Did I come across as tight-fisted?

EDIE. Oh my love.

ARTHUR. Does that mean I was or I wasn't?

EDIE. Of course you weren't. Besides, we bought things. All the new electronics. When I wanted a dishwasher we got one, didn't we?

ARTHUR. But was the house dowdy, did you think that?

EDIE. You worry too much. I thought it looked like us. What'll happen after us, d'you think?

ARTHUR. Some stranger will live here.

EDIE. I suppose it's for the best.

ARTHUR. I used to hope the boy'd change his mind. But he's all set up, isn't he. We took too long.

EDIE. Don't talk soft. We'll take a while yet. We've ten years in us. Twenty.

ARTHUR. Christ, imagine that.

EDIE. You do make me laugh. My love. We could lay traps for whoever lives here after.

ARTHUR. What do you mean?

EDIE. False floorboards. Alarm clocks hidden in the walls. Make them believe in ghosts. Look at this. *(She gets up, crosses the room, stands on a creaky board.)* We could make everything make noises like that. Would it be possible to rig a cupboard door in such a way that every time you opened it, something happened to the toaster? Could you do that?

ARTHUR. Maybe.

EDIE. Or a window swing open. Or every time the window swings open for the door to close. I'd love that. *(She neatens the room.)*

ARTHUR. It was so quiet, wasn't it. You could have sat there all day, if you could only keep warm. And watch the light changing through Durdle Door as if you looked into another world. Sit and do nothing. It would be wonderful to live like that.

EDIE. If I could have just one day again with my old legs and my old vitality and know while I had it how precious it was. I wouldn't do anything special, you know I never liked cake or roller coasters or anything, maybe the seaside, nothing particular. I just didn't know how fast it would all get behind me. *(She sits down.)*

ARTHUR. Do you think a lot of people have heart attacks at Lulworth Cove? Walking up that chalk path over the hill? I should think it's a hazard of the landscape.

EDIE. It's all right Arthur. You don't have to be frightened. It's just us two talking together.

VISITORS

by Barney Norris

2M, 2W

In a farmhouse at the edge of Salisbury Plain, a family is falling apart. Stephen can't afford to put his mother into care; Arthur can't afford to stop working and look after his wife. When a young stranger with blue hair moves in to care for Edie as her mind unravels, the family are forced to ask: Are we living the way we wanted? VISITORS is a sharply funny love story that takes a haunting, beautiful look at the way our lives slip past us.

"[T]ackles the difficult subject of dementia with sensitivity and just the right amount of comedy. ... This is the first full-length play by Barney Norris and it is an absolute beauty, by turns funny, tender and desperately sad. It is also a work that will strike resonant chords with many, since it concerns the cruel affliction of dementia. ... That might sound depressing, but this is also a play about a loving and enduring marriage. ... a mixture of tenderness and emotional truth ... great richness and an almost poetic resonance in the writing ... It is much harder to write interestingly about happiness than it is about misery, but Norris often does just that with his loving portrait of a marriage — though there is poignancy and darkness too ... the final scene proves as poignant as those great scenes of departure in the plays of Chekhov. ... [An] exceptional play."

—The Telegraph (London)

"In VISITORS, a tender and often wryly funny first full-length play by Barney Norris, Edie's gradual decline and its effects on her family ... are explored with moving simplicity and unadorned eloquence. Although on the surface VISITORS is a fine-grained, naturalistic play about a couple dealing with the cruel realities of aging, layers of resonance reveal themselves as Edie's new frankness takes hold."

—The New York Times

"[A]stonishingly accomplished. It's a sensitive and wise piece about the pains of ageing and life's transitory nature. ... Yet instead of addressing these subjects in a preachy or assertive fashion, VISITORS quietly illustrates them through the tangled relationships of four skillfully drawn characters. ... Norris is particularly good at evoking the little rituals of domestic harmony, and we see the tiny endearments and physical intimacies that bind together a couple whose lives' rhythms are perfectly synchronised — yet on the brink of being pulled apart. ... as this extraordinarily mature piece demonstrates, Norris is a perceptive and humane craftsman, who finds several layers of comedy in everyday misunderstandings. More than that, he has created an aching love story — and chosen to focus on the elderly, whose romantic experience is so often neglected. He is a talent to watch."

—Evening Standard (London)

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