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SF PERUSALS

EVENTIDE

by Barney Norris

SAMUEL FRENCH

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ISBN 978-0-573-11493-9

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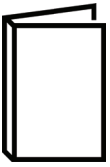

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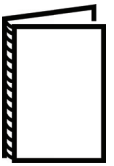

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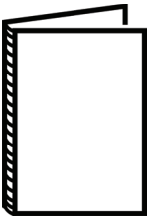

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Barney Norris was born in Sussex in 1987. Upon leaving university he founded the touring theatre company Up In Arms with Alice Hamilton. His plays include *While We're Here* (Up In Arms, Bush Theatre and tour), *Echo's End* (Salisbury Playhouse), *Eventide* (Arcola Theatre, London and tour), the acclaimed *Visitors* (Up In Arms, Arcola Theatre and tour) and the short plays *Every You Every Me* (Salisbury Playhouse 2015 and tour 2017), *Fear Of Music* (Up In Arms / Out of Joint) and *At First Sight* (Up In Arms, Latitude Festival and tour). His book, *To Bodies Gone: The Theatre of Peter Gill*, is published by Seren, and his first novel, *Five Rivers Met on a Wooded Plain*, was published by Transworld in 2016. Barney was nominated for an *Evening Standard* Award in 2014 and won the Critics' Circle Most Promising New Playwright Award in the same year.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Eventide was the second full-length play I wrote, and was intended as a celebration of the pub I'd worked in while I was writing my first play, *Visitors*. Getting that show off the ground took an enormous amount of work, and I couldn't have a full time job while I was doing it. So my dad put me up in his spare room in Andover in Hampshire, and for food money I used to cycle out to this pub called The Cricketers in the village of Tangley and work on the bar there a few days a week. Tangley is a precious place to me, a glimpse of a world I feel I come from but can't seem to work out how to live in now. It has a sense of imperviousness about it, a feeling in its steep lanes that it will outlast a lot of the noise that this century is making. Or that was the feeling I got from it, anyway. This play was written out of love, about people I feel very close to, and it's undoubtedly one of my proudest achievements. I wanted to say, in miniature, that the raucous, riotous, poetic spirit of the landscape that produced me may be beset around with dismal stories, and challenged and confounded, but for all that, it is undoubtedly beautiful. It is worth celebrating. It is deeply human, and full of heart. I hope that comes across in the writing.

Eventide was first presented by Up In Arms and Arcola Theatre in association with the North Wall on 25th September 2015, with the following company:

Mark – Hasan Dixon
John – James Doherty
Liz – Ellie Piercy

Director – Alice Hamilton
Designer – James Perkins
Lighting Designer – Simon Gethin Thomas
Sound Designer – George Dennis
Production Manager – Tamsin Rose
Company Stage Manager – Charlie Young
Assistant Stage Manager – Rebecca Denby
Costume Supervisor – Jennie Quirk
Producer – Chloe Courtney
Assistant Director – George Nichols
Marketing and Production Assistant – Rachael Harrison

CHARACTERS

JOHN – a pub landlord
MARK – a young man
LIZ – a village organist

You're pretending this isn't your life. You think it's going to happen some other time. When you're dead you'll realise you were alive now.

Caryl Churchill, *Mad Forest*

ACT ONE

MARK *is sitting with a toolkit. Enter* **JOHN** *with a log basket.*

JOHN Bloke walks into a pub. And he goes to the bar and orders a pint and while he's waiting for it, this feller sidles up to him and says do you wanna buy a ferret? 'Scuse me? Our hero replies. Do you wanna buy a ferret? The feller says again. Not really, says our man. Ah, but this is no ordinary ferret, says the other feller. No no no. This ferret gives the best blow job in the world. You what? Says the first bloke. I'm telling you, says the stranger, I am in possession of a ferret that gives the best blow job in the world. However, it's coming up Christmas and I've got a tax bill to pay, so I need to realise some of my assets, and for that reason I'm willing to let you have this ferret for the ever so reasonable sum of five hundred quid. A monkey for a ferret? Asks the first bloke. Monkey's five hundred quid, Mark, in case you're not as down with the kids as I am. Case you're not street. Where was I? Tell you what, says the other feller, don't just take my word for it. I can see you're the sort of bloke likes to know what he's buying, fair enough. I respect that. I admire it. So why not pop in the gents and give him a test run? And he slips this ferret in the other feller's pocket, and the other feller's not sure what to do, so rather than give it back and risk offence, he goes off to the gents. He's English, see, he doesn't want to say no directly. So he goes in this cubicle, and he's alone with this ferret, and he thinks, this has got to be a practical joke. There's no way I'm letting my cock anywhere near this ferret's teeth. But he's in the cubicle now. He'll feel like an idiot if he comes out without having tried it. And he thinks to himself, wouldn't it be amazing if it was true? Wouldn't it be an amazing thing if there was

a ferret who gave the best blow job in the world? And isn't that worth a little risk, a thought like that? So he takes a deep breath, and opens his flies, and five minutes later he's back in the bar with a grin a mile wide, saying he has to get to a cashpoint. So he buys this ferret, and takes it home, and he shows it to his wife. I've bought a ferret, he says. Why? Says the wife. Well this is no ordinary ferret, he says. This ferret gives the best blow job in the world. That's wonderful, says his wife, but what do you want me to do with it? Easy, he says. Teach it to cook and fuck off.

MARK *laughs.*

MARK That's good that is, I like that.

JOHN Mm.

MARK It's got a twist at the—

JOHN Jokes don't want deconstructing, Mark, it spoils 'em. Let it remain as a beautiful snowflake.

MARK Right. Yeah.

JOHN *starts to fill the log basket with firewood.*

Stocking up?

JOHN Mm.

MARK Hot day for a fire.

JOHN Blaze in my grate every day of the year. It's part of what people come for, you know?

MARK Oh yeah.

JOHN Horrible mangy dogs and an unpleasantly hot public bar. That's what I'm selling really. More than the ham, egg and chips. All kinds of places shift food and drink, it's sweat and dogs make me distinctive.

MARK Fair enough.

JOHN She meant a lot to you didn't she.

MARK Not – yeah. She did, yeah.

JOHN I suppose it's not my place.

MARK You're all right.

JOHN Guess you're getting it from everyone.

MARK Not every one's got as big a mouth as you.

JOHN That's my job, isn't it. Ask all the awkward questions. Listen to all the awkward answers. Know all the secrets. That's the art. Innit. Sometimes all your life feels like a falling away of everything from you, don't you think? I think that. And when you get to considering it, it's hard to see the point really, innit. Where was I? You have to carry on though.

MARK No 'have to' about it, far as I see.

JOHN Mm?

MARK Time just keeps fuckin' happenin' to you, don't it. 'Have to' makes it sound like there's a – I dunno, like there's a choice. It's more like – it's like you're on a Megabus, right, or maybe a National Express, I dunno, and you pass a crash on the other side of the motorway, and you want to have a look, you know? But before you can get a proper goosey you're past it, and the road's going on, and you're hurried away from the scene of the accident. Like. Yeah. Because you're headed for Plymouth or wherever, you weren't meant to stop there. That's what absolutely everything is like. Fuck it, anyway. How are you, John, are you all right? It's not a great day for you either is it.

JOHN Today?

MARK What with—

JOHN I know what you're saying. It's not great, no.

MARK What will you do, do you think?

JOHN I don't know. Sit perfectly still. Don't have the energy for anything except a drink.

MARK It's not good, man.

JOHN Not in the long run, no, but I get a certain bitter pleasure from it now. And I don't know what's so wrong with sitting perfectly still. When Chris Marsden announced he was going to retire – you remember Chris Marsden, used to play centre mid for Southampton? – he went on the radio and said his plan was to go to a beach in Greece and just sit there. In the sun. And the interviewer asked him, joking like, don't you think you'll get bored? He just laughed, he said no mate, I think I'll get tanned.

MARK *laughs.*

You ever read W.H. Davies?

MARK Don't think so.

JOHN He was a tramp. And a poet. For a little while he lived in a shed at the bottom of Edward Thomas's garden. Who was a manic depressive. And also a poet, who died in the war. Which is one of the best comedies never written. Not the war, the two poets. And W.H. Davies wrote this poem, 'a poor life this if, full of care, we have no time to stand and stare'. You know that?

MARK *Four Weddings and a Funeral.*

JOHN It was the Center Parcs advert actually, but never mind. What I'm saying is, W.H. Davies, when he was living in Edward Thomas's shed, he wasn't a million miles from here. All in the shadow of the Forest. Same as Chrissy Marsden, see? And I don't think people recognise that there's a distinctive outlook which belongs to this part of

the world, which is about sitting around doing fuck all for as long as you possibly can. That's what it's all about, isn't it, pubs and cricket or whatever. Sitting around doing nothing. And people associate that with laziness, but it's not. It's the embodiment of a – of a philosophy. Consider the lily.

MARK What?

JOHN They toil not, neither do they spin.

MARK What?

JOHN Fucking Bible, innit. Bible's full of stuff about not having to work. Parable of the prodigal son's all about that. Don't worry about putting a shift in, fuck off on a jolly and we'll do you a roast.

MARK Yeah, I never get that one.

JOHN Why not?

MARK I don't know why people give more credit to the bloke who fucked off and cocked up then came home than the bloke who stuck around and got on with things.

JOHN I think it's about getting converts.

MARK How?

JOHN Well it was a new religion, wasn't it. Christianity. So it was like a message to say, be nice to floating voters. They'll end up deciding the election.

MARK Right.

JOHN Or something else.

MARK What?

JOHN Well I was just thinking, maybe it's a way of saying, try and do something with your life. Be deliberate, you know?

During your life, try and make one conscious decision. Cos you'll always have where you came from. So you might as well have a go at trying to find something else for as long as you've got a home to come back to, and not just truck along the same furrow for ever.

MARK It'll all get better, you know, John.

JOHN It might get number. I'll give you that. But it'll always have happened, and nothing that's happened to you, really happened to you like that ever gets better, does it. It might get number, I'll give you that. Look at me. I ought to be comforting you.

MARK No—

JOHN You did care for her, didn't you.

MARK It's strange. Cos I did, I can admit that now, I did. Yeah. And I feel – but I've no more right to grieve than anyone else, have I. Cos. No reason to feel any – more than anyone else. And sure, we were close for a while, at school or whatever, yeah, and I loved all that, when we were at school, but not for any real reason, only because we shared a few classes, you know? And I've never had the kind of girlfriend where you're – you know, where you're happy, so I don't know, but I think people who are close like, I mean properly close, like, maybe I mean people who are in love, sort of thing, there must always be more to it than that, mustn't there? Some – feeling you both have, which is more than just sharing a few classes, and you fancying her and her not minding you. Which is more or less. Maybe not for the likes of me, maybe I'll end up taking what I can get or have to stay on my own for ever, or whatever, but for the likes of her, you know? There must be actual love that's like a thing, that exists. Don't you think? So I don't feel more important than anyone else. No. I don't feel I should be, anyway. So it's strange how I'm feeling today.

JOHN How, strange?

MARK Because I loved her, to be honest. Yeah. Yeah. I've never said that to anyone before.

JOHN Not even to her?

MARK Course not. Fuck. Last of all to her.

JOHN But you loved her.

MARK I still do. That doesn't stop, does it.

JOHN No. It just becomes something you can cope with. Or that's what we must both hope.

MARK Sometimes I sort of wish I'd never felt anything in my life.

JOHN I hear that.

MARK Yeah?

JOHN Or I wish things could be undone. Like, if Cath had run over my foot when she drove off, you know, so I could hate her a little bit and undo some of what I actually feel. But she didn't. Well. Wouldn't have worked anyway. You just have to live with the feelings that happen to you, don't you. Everything I ever felt about her is still there. Look at us. I could cry, and I haven't even had my breakfast. Do you want a drink?

MARK I'd better not.

JOHN Let me stand you a beer. You're earning that today. This is my last day as a landlord, let me stand you a beer.

MARK Just a bottle, not a pint.

JOHN All right. I might have one with you.

MARK Don't you need to start prepping lunch, mate?

JOHN In a bit. There's a little while left.

Enter **LIZ.**

LIZ Morning!

JOHN Hello, Liz, you all right?

LIZ I'm OK, how are you?

JOHN Wanna hear a joke?

LIZ Really?

JOHN Go on, little joke.

LIZ Go on then.

JOHN Bloke walks into a pub. And he goes to the bar and orders a pint and while he's waiting this feller sidles up to him and says, do you wanna buy a ferret? 'Scuse me? Our hero replies. Do you wanna buy a ferret? The feller says again. Not really. Ah, but this is no ordinary ferret, says the other feller. This ferret gives the best blow job in the world. You what? Asks the first bloke. I'm telling you, says the stranger, I am in possession of a ferret that gives the best blow job in the world. However, it's coming up for Christmas and I've got a tax bill to pay, so I'm gonna let you have it for the ever so reasonable sum of five hundred quid. Five hundred quid for a ferret? Asks the first bloke. Tell you what, says the other feller, you don't just have to take my word for it. Why not pop in the gents and give the little feller a test run? And he slips this ferret in the other feller's pocket, and the other feller goes off to the gents, and ten minutes later he's back in the bar with a grin a mile wide, saying he has to get to a cashpoint. So he buys this ferret, and takes it home, and he shows it to his wife. I've bought a ferret, he says. Why? Says the wife. Well this is no ordinary ferret, he says. This ferret gives the best blow job in the world. That's wonderful, says his wife, but what do you want me to do with it? Easy, he says. Teach it to cook and fuck off.

MARK *laughs again.* **LIZ** *doesn't.*

LIZ You're awful, John, you know that?

JOHN It's a reputation I try to live down to. Lemonade?

LIZ Yes please.

JOHN I'll get it.

LIZ You don't have to—

JOHN Glad to. Don't worry. Always silver service when you come to The White Horse.

LIZ Well. Thanks.

Exit **JOHN** *with the log basket, which is now full of firewood.* **LIZ** *lights up.*

Sorry – do you mind if I smoke?

MARK Go ahead.

LIZ This is the smoker's table, isn't it.

MARK I think you can smoke anywhere outside really, but this is where people come, innit, yeah.

LIZ Sort of behind the bikeshed I suppose. Because it feels a bit naughty. Sex sex sex, isn't it.

MARK What?

LIZ Smoking. I don't know where sex stops and smoking begins.

MARK No?

LIZ Cos you start to become sexualised, don't you. When you're growing up, you start to feel – but you don't realise maybe that that's what's happening. Not straight away. All you know is you want to do something – I don't know, you feel – and

there's this ban on tobacco advertising, so that must be naughty, right? So maybe you wanna do that. And James Dean's always smoking, and you just know he's shagged every night, and deep down you know it's about getting laid really, you do know, so they sort of get—

MARK Linked in your head.

LIZ That's it! And there's all the – I don't know, there's a sort of phallic aspect, isn't there? Look at that. Of course a penis is bigger than that, in most cases, but all the same. Do you want one?

MARK You're all right.

LIZ Or maybe it's more about nipples, I don't know. Maybe fags are like, a flight from sexuality, maybe it's wanting to get back to sucking on nipples, while you're growing up, after a ride, so you get something to put in your mouth. And it's not a cock, it's a thumb to suck. But on fire. I'm Liz by the way.

MARK Oh. Mark.

LIZ Hi Mark. Sorry, I – mm. Sure you don't want one?

MARK Actually would you mind?

LIZ Course not.

MARK Thanks.

MARK *lights up.*

LIZ God, I was gasping. I don't like to smoke in the car. I volunteer for Contact the Elderly, do you know them?

MARK Erm—

LIZ They had some very good adverts about two years ago, sort of riffing on *When Harry Met Sally*, do you remember them?

MARK I don't think so.

LIZ Anyway, that was how I heard about them. They're great. Their thing is that older people get very isolated, very alone, so they arrange these tea parties. And you can volunteer either to host one where you live or to drive the elderly people to and from these parties, and stay with them while they're there to make sure they're all right.

MARK Nursery school for old people.

LIZ Yeah, I suppose. Anyway, I live in a shoe box so I can't have people round, but I can drive, so I volunteer for that bit, which I love. But the trouble is it means I don't like to smoke in my car, or it stinks of fags and I worry they'll think I'm degenerate, or choke to death on second-hand smoke. So whenever I get to the end of a drive I'm always gasping.

MARK Right.

LIZ You don't smoke usually?

MARK No. I always thought I'd smoke when I grew up, cos my Dad did—

LIZ Then it killed him?!

MARK It did actually, yeah.

LIZ Oh God, I'm so sorry.

MARK No, but it wasn't that that stopped me.

LIZ No?

MARK It was the smoking ban, really. You know? Cos my idea of smoking couldn't actually come true, like, by the time I started earning enough money to buy any fags. So there didn't seem much point in it. Yeah. There you go, that's how it goes, isn't it.

LIZ Little bit of your cultural inheritance robbed from you.

MARK Yeah.

LIZ Is it true they're putting the war memorial back up today?

MARK What?

LIZ Well I'm playing for this funeral this morning. I'm the organist for the church, you see. And this funeral, it's this girl from round here who drove her car into the war memorial and died last week. So sad. She was back from university and driving too fast, and apparently she didn't have her car with her in London so she hadn't been driving for a few months and she was out of practice and she sort of lost control. It's so sad, isn't it. I don't think they should let such young people on the roads, they can't be trusted. It's a wonder she didn't hurt anyone else. But anyway, the vicar told me when I was parking my car, I always park my car there first then have my fag here and a lemonade to spruce up because I don't like smoking near the church in case Jesus sees me, the vicar said there's actually going to be work being done on the war memorial today, while the bloody hearse goes by! They'll be putting it back together while she gets driven past, how tasteless is that?

MARK Right.

LIZ Did you know her, the girl who died? Are you from round here at all?

Enter **JOHN** *with three drinks.*

JOHN An Englishman, an Irishman, a Scotsman, a Dutchman, a Belgian, a Welsh bloke, a Frenchman, a German, a Spaniard, a Uruguayan, a Brazilian, an American, a Canadian mounted policeman, an Indian, an Australian, a Kiwi, a Peruvian, a Slovenian, a Russian, a Ukrainian and a Chinaman walk up to a nightclub, and the doorman says, sorry gents, you

can't come in. Why not? They all ask. The doorman shrugs. Because you haven't got a Thai. Thank God for cheeky beers.

MARK Cheers.

LIZ That was actually much less racist than I expected it to be, John, well done. You can keep that one.

JOHN No, they're like mayflies, jokes. I keep 'em for one day only. After that they're yours to cherish and disseminate or otherwise discard.

LIZ Well I obviously never tell any of them to anyone I know.

JOHN Why not?

LIZ Without being a nun or anything I have sort of constructed a persona that doesn't really leave room for blow job jokes.

JOHN The ferret joke isn't a blow job joke. It's a subversive exploration of the prejudices of its audience.

LIZ Is it.

MARK It's a beautiful snowflake.

JOHN It feints with one overextended comic situation then surprises the listener with a different joke about chauvinist conceptions of women. And in the laughter or the silence it prompts in the listener, which is more genuine and honest thanks to the element of surprise that comes by way of building up the first dummy joke, it invites said listener to learn something about themselves and their own preconceptions.

LIZ It's not, it's a blow-job joke. You're a tosser, John, but I like you for trying to talk your way out. Should you be drinking this early?

JOHN No.

LIZ You will anyway?

JOHN Yup.

LIZ I tell him all the time but I don't think he believes in liver failure, he thinks it's like the tooth fairy or the female orgasm.

JOHN I always start with a cheeky beer about now. Then six or eight of those and then a bit of rosé, maybe a bottle of rosé for the afternoon, then VATs for the evening.

LIZ VATs?

MARK Vodka and tonic.

LIZ Christ, John.

JOHN It's a lot, isn't it.

LIZ It's quite a lot. How many vodka and tonics you drink?

JOHN Sometimes six. Sometimes sixteen.

MARK I suppose you're a big enough bloke like.

LIZ You shouldn't do that to yourself.

JOHN I can hold it. You should stick around some time, you'll find I become quite talkative.

LIZ I find you quite talkative enough.

MARK Do you need so much, to feel it then?

JOHN No, not really. It just helps, is all.

LIZ How?

JOHN Well I think there's some comfort in being able to put your finger on precisely what your problem is, you know? Get

your feelings into boxes. If I was just existentially mournful that'd be awful, but because I've got a drinking problem...

LIZ You've arranged yourself a drinking problem so you can have something concrete to feel depressed about?

JOHN Exactly. No, I just like a drink really. And it's all free for me, isn't it. At the point of delivery. My little alcoholic NHS in there.

LIZ Why do you think you're depressed?

JOHN My wife left me.

LIZ Oh John.

JOHN What?

LIZ You tell such terrible—

JOHN No, she—

LIZ Seriously?

JOHN Yeah.

LIZ Is he joking?

MARK Erm—

LIZ John, I'm so sorry.

JOHN Nearly a year ago now.

LIZ Oh fuck. That's why I never see her around any more?

JOHN That'd probably be it.

LIZ I thought she must have lie-ins or something.

JOHN No. Not here anyway. Possibly she has lie-ins in Marlborough with her new antique-dealing boyfriend.

LIZ A year?

JOHN Yeah, been a while now. It's all over really, bar the attention, seeking suicide attempt. Divorce papers an' everythin'. Scrawl on the line. I've written the first fifty thousand words of an agony memoir about it.

LIZ I've come here every month for a year and you've never said anything.

JOHN Well it's not something you bring up, is it, really. And you never come in the pub, they all have a laugh about it in there, but you have your drink out here, and I'm not gonna bring you a lemonade and tell you a thing like that. My wife left me. Sounds like an awful chat-up line. You might think I was trying it on!

LIZ I just feel so awful.

JOHN I bet you do. I've been on the market for a year, you haven't been buyin'. Not that I'd charge, not for you anyway.

LIZ Oh, John.

JOHN What? What?

Silence.

MARK You must get proper fuckin' hangovers drinking that much, right, John?

JOHN I think I'm always just a bit pissed. 'Specially now. What with... It was already happening before she left, that was how I knew she wasn't making it up. She said something about me and the drink when she left. No, that's unfair. She was clearer than that, I'm being unfair. She said I wasn't the man she'd married any more, and I hadn't been for a long time, and this wasn't the life she'd thought we'd have, and it never had been. And she said she'd turned fifty and it'd made her think, and if she didn't do something with her life

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