

Far Away was first performed at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs, London, on 24 November 2000, with the following cast:

YOUNG JOAN	Annabelle Seymour-Julen
HARPER	Linda Bassett
TODD	Kevin McKidd
OLDER JOAN	Katherine Tozer

Director Stephen Daldry
Designer Ian MacNeil
Lighting Designer Rick Fisher
Sound Designer Paul Arditi

The production transferred to the Albery Theatre in the West End on 18 January 2001, with the same cast.

The play received its American premiere at the New York Theatre Workshop, on 1 November 2002, directed by Stephen Daldry, and performed by Alexa Eisenstein, Marin Ireland, Frances McDormand, Chris Messina and Gina Rose.

Characters

JOAN, a girl

HARPER, her aunt

TODD, a young man

*The Parade (Scene 2.5): five is too few and twenty better than ten. A hundred?***1.**

HARPER's house. Night.

JOAN I can't sleep.

HARPER It's the strange bed.

JOAN No, I like different places.

HARPER Are you cold?

JOAN No.

HARPER Do you want a drink?

JOAN I think I am cold.

HARPER That's easy enough then. There's extra blankets in the cupboard.

JOAN Is it late?

HARPER Two.

JOAN Are you going to bed?

HARPER Do you want a hot drink?

JOAN No thank you.

HARPER I should go to bed then.

JOAN Yes.

HARPER

It's always odd in a new place. When you've been here a week you'll look back at tonight and it won't seem the same at all.

JOAN

I've been to a lot of places. I've stayed with friends at their houses. I don't miss my parents if you think that.

HARPER

Do you miss your dog?

JOAN

I miss the cat I think.

HARPER

Does it sleep on your bed?

JOAN

No because I chase it off. But it gets in if the door's not properly shut. You think you've shut the door but it hasn't caught and she pushes it open in the night.

HARPER

Come here a minute. You're shivering. Are you hot?

JOAN

No, I'm all right.

HARPER

You're over-tired. Go to bed. I'm going to bed myself.

JOAN

I went out.

HARPER

When? just now?

JOAN

Just now.

HARPER

No wonder you're cold. It's hot in the daytime here but it's cold at night.

JOAN

The stars are brighter here than at home.

HARPER

It's because there's no street lights.

JOAN

I couldn't see much.

HARPER

I don't expect you could. How did you get out? I didn't hear the door.

JOAN

I went out the window.

HARPER

I'm not sure I like that.

JOAN

No it's quite safe, there's a roof and a tree.

HARPER

When people go to bed they should stay in bed. Do you climb out of the window at home?

JOAN

I can't at home because – No I don't.

HARPER

I'm responsible for you.

JOAN

Yes, I'm sorry.

HARPER

Well that's enough adventures for one night. You'll sleep now. Off you go. Look at you, you're asleep on your feet.

JOAN

There was a reason.

HARPER

For going out?

JOAN

I heard a noise.

HARPER

An owl?

JOAN

A shriek.

HARPER

An owl then. There are all sorts of birds here, you might see a golden oriole. People come here specially to watch birds and we sometimes make tea or coffee or sell bottles of water because there's no café and people don't expect that and they get thirsty. You'll see in the morning what a beautiful place it is.

JOAN

It was more like a person screaming.

HARPER

It is like a person screaming when you hear an owl.

JOAN

It was a person screaming.

HARPER

Poor girl, what a fright you must have had imagining you heard somebody screaming. You should have come straight down here to me.

JOAN

I wanted to see.

HARPER

It was dark.

JOAN

Yes but I did see.

HARPER

Now what did you imagine you saw in the dark?

JOAN

I saw my uncle.

HARPER

Yes I expect you did. He likes a breath of air. He wasn't screaming I hope?

JOAN

No.

HARPER

That's all right then. Did you talk to him? I expect you were frightened he'd say what are you doing out of your bed so late.

JOAN

I stayed in the tree.

HARPER

He didn't see you?

JOAN

No.

HARPER

He'll be surprised won't he, he'll laugh when he hears you were up in the tree. He'll be cross but he doesn't mean it, he'll think it's a

good joke, it's the sort of thing he did when he was a boy. So bed now. I'll go up too.

JOAN

He was pushing someone. He was bundling someone into a shed.

HARPER

He must have been putting a big sack in the shed. He works too late.

JOAN

I'm not sure if it was a woman. It could have been a young man.

HARPER

Well I have to tell you, when you've been married as long as I have. There are things people get up to, it's natural, it's nothing bad, that's just friends of his your uncle was having a little party with.

JOAN

Was it a party?

HARPER

Just a little party.

JOAN

Yes because there wasn't just that one person.

HARPER

No, there'd be a few of his friends.

JOAN

There was a lorry.

HARPER

Yes, I expect there was.

JOAN

When I put my ear against the side of the lorry I heard crying inside.

HARPER

How could you do that from up in the tree?

JOAN

I got down from the tree. I went to the lorry after I looked in the window of the shed.

HARPER

There might be things that are not your business when you're a visitor in someone else's house.

JOAN Yes, I'd rather not have seen. I'm sorry.

HARPER Nobody saw you?

JOAN They were thinking about themselves.

HARPER I think it's lucky nobody saw you.

JOAN If it's a party, why was there so much blood?

HARPER There isn't any blood.

JOAN Yes.

HARPER Where?

JOAN On the ground.

HARPER In the dark? how would you see that in the dark?

JOAN I slipped in it.

She holds up her bare foot.

I mostly wiped it off.

HARPER That's where the dog got run over this afternoon.

JOAN Wouldn't it have dried up?

HARPER Not if the ground was muddy.

JOAN What sort of dog?

HARPER A big dog, a big mongrel.

JOAN That's awful, you must be very sad, had you had him long?

HARPER No, he was young, he ran out, he was never very obedient, a lorry was backing up.

JOAN What was his name?

HARPER Flash.

JOAN What colour was he?

HARPER Black with a bit of white.

JOAN Why were the children in the shed?

HARPER What children?

JOAN Don't you know what children?

HARPER How could you see there were children?

JOAN There was a light on. That's how I could see the blood inside the shed. I could see the faces and which ones had blood on.

HARPER You've found out something secret. You know that don't you?

JOAN Yes.

HARPER Something you shouldn't know.

JOAN Yes I'm sorry.

HARPER Something you must never talk about. Because if you do you could put people's lives in danger.

JOAN Why? who from? from my uncle?

HARPER Of course not from your uncle.

JOAN From you?

HARPER

Of course not from me, are you mad? I'm going to tell you what's going on. Your uncle is helping these people. He's helping them escape. He's giving them shelter. Some of them were still in the lorry, that's why they were crying. Your uncle's going to take them all into the shed and then they'll be all right.

JOAN

They had blood on their faces.

HARPER

That's from before. That's because they were attacked by the people your uncle's saving them from.

JOAN

There was blood on the ground.

HARPER

One of them was injured very badly but your uncle bandaged him up.

JOAN

He's helping them.

HARPER

That's right.

JOAN

There wasn't a dog. There wasn't a party.

HARPER

No, I'm trusting you with the truth now. You must never talk about it or you'll put your uncle's life in danger and mine and even your own. You won't even say anything to your parents.

JOAN

Why did you have me to stay if you've got this secret going on?

HARPER

The lorry should have come yesterday. It won't happen again while you're here.

JOAN

It can now because I know. You don't have to stop for me. I could help uncle in the shed and look after them.

HARPER

No, he has to do it himself. But thank you for offering, that's very kind. So after all that excitement do you think you could go back to bed?

JOAN

Why was uncle hitting them?

HARPER

Hitting who?

JOAN

He was hitting a man with a stick. I think the stick was metal. He hit one of the children.

HARPER

One of the people in the lorry was a traitor. He wasn't really one of them, he was pretending, he was going to betray them, they found out and told your uncle. Then he attacked your uncle, he attacked the other people, your uncle had to fight him.

JOAN

That's why there was so much blood.

HARPER

Yes, it had to be done to save the others.

JOAN

He hit one of the children.

HARPER

That would have been the child of the traitor. Or sometimes you get bad children who even betray their parents.

JOAN

What's going to happen?

HARPER

They'll go off in the lorry very early in the morning.

JOAN

Where to?

HARPER

Where they're escaping to. You don't want to have to keep any more secrets.

JOAN

He only hit the traitors.

HARPER

Of course. I'm not surprised you can't sleep, what an upsetting thing to see. But now you understand, it's not so bad. You're part of a big movement now to make things better. You can be proud of that. You can look at the stars and think here we are in our little bit of space, and I'm on the side of the people who are putting things right, and your soul will expand right into the sky.

JOAN

Can't I help?

HARPER

You can help me clean up in the morning. Will you do that?

JOAN

Yes.

HARPER

So you'd better get some sleep.

2.

Several years later. A hat-makers.

1.

JOAN and TODD are sitting at a workbench. They have each just started making a hat.

TODD

There's plenty of blue.

JOAN

I think I'm starting with black.

TODD

Colour always wins.

JOAN

I will have colour, I'm starting with black to set the colour off.

TODD

I did one last week that was an abstract picture of the street, blue for the buses, yellow for the flats, red for the leaves, grey for the sky. Nobody got it but I knew what it was. There's little satisfactions to be had.

JOAN

Don't you enjoy it?

TODD

You're new aren't you?

JOAN

This is my first hat. My first professional hat.

TODD

Did you do hat at college?

JOAN

My degree hat was a giraffe six feet tall.

TODD You won't have time to do something like that in the week.

JOAN I know.

TODD We used to get two weeks before a parade and then they took it down to one and now they're talking about cutting a day.

JOAN So we'd get an extra day off?

TODD We'd get a day's less money. We wouldn't make such good hats.

JOAN Can they do that?

TODD You'd oppose it would you?

JOAN I've only just started.

TODD You'll find there's a lot wrong with this place.

JOAN I thought it was one of the best jobs.

TODD It is. Do you know where to go for lunch?

JOAN I think there's a canteen isn't there?

TODD Yes but we don't go there. I'll show you where to go.

2.

Next day. They are working on the hats, which are by now far more brightly decorated ie the ones they were working on have been replaced by ones nearer completion.

JOAN Your turn.

TODD I go for a swim in the river before work.

JOAN Isn't it dangerous?

TODD Your turn.

JOAN I've got a pilot's licence.

TODD I stay up till four every morning watching the trials.

JOAN I'm getting a room in a subway.

TODD I've got my own place.

JOAN Have you?

TODD Do you want to see it? That's coming on.

JOAN I don't understand yours but I like the feather.

TODD I'm not trying. I've been here too long.

JOAN Will you leave?

TODD My turn. There's something wrong with how we get the contracts.

JOAN But we want the contracts.

TODD What if we don't deserve them? What if our work isn't really the best?

JOAN So what's going on?

TODD I'll just say a certain person's brother-in-law. Where does he work do you think?

JOAN Where does he work?

TODD I'm not talking about it in here. Tell me something else.

JOAN I don't like staying in in the evenings and watching trials.

TODD I watch them at night after I come back.

JOAN Back from where?

TODD Where do you like?

3.

Next day. They're working on the hats, which are getting very big and extravagant.

TODD I don't enjoy animal hats myself.

JOAN I was a student.

TODD Abstract hats are back in a big way.

JOAN I've always liked abstract hats.

TODD You must have not noticed when everyone hated them.

JOAN It was probably before my time.

Silence. They go on working

JOAN It's just if you're going on about it all the time I don't know why you don't do something about it.

TODD This is your third day.

JOAN The management's corrupt – you've told me. We're too low paid – you've told me.

Silence. They go on working

TODD Too much green.

JOAN It's meant to be too much.

Silence. They go on working

TODD I noticed you looking at that fair boy's hat. I hope you told him it was derivative.

Silence. They go on working

TODD I'm the only person in this place who's got any principles, don't tell me I should do something, I spend my days wondering what to do.

JOAN So you'll probably come up with something.

Silence. They go on working

4.

Next day. They are working on the hats, which are now enormous and preposterous.

TODD That's beautiful.

JOAN You like it?

TODD I do.

JOAN I like yours too.

TODD You don't have to say that. It's not one of my best.

JOAN No it's got - I don't know, it's a confident hat.

TODD I have been doing parades for six years. So I'm a valued old hand. So when I go and speak to a certain person he might pay attention.

JOAN You're going to speak to him?

TODD I've an appointment after work.

JOAN You might lose your job.

TODD I might.

JOAN I'm impressed.

TODD That was the idea.

JOAN Will you mention the brother-in-law?

TODD First I'll talk about the money. Then I'll just touch in the brother-in-law. I've a friend who's a journalist.

JOAN Will you touch in the journalist?

TODD I might imply something without giving the journalist away. It might be better if he can't trace the journalist back to me.

JOAN Though he will suspect.

TODD However much he suspects. One thing if I lost my job.

JOAN What's that?

TODD I'd miss you.

JOAN Already?

5.

Next day. A procession of ragged, beaten, chained prisoners, each wearing a hat, on their way to execution. The finished hats are even more enormous and preposterous than in the previous scene.

6.

A new week. JOAN and TODD are starting work on new hats.

JOAN I still can't believe it.

TODD No one's ever won in their first week before.

JOAN It's all going to be downhill from now on.

TODD You can't win every week.

JOAN That's what I mean.

TODD No but you'll do a fantastic body of work while you're here.

JOAN Sometimes I think it's a pity that more aren't kept.

TODD There'd be too many, what would they do with them?

JOAN They could reuse them.

TODD Exactly and then we'd be out of work.

JOAN It seems so sad to burn them with the bodies.

TODD No I think that's the joy of it. The hats are ephemeral. It's like a metaphor for something or other.

JOAN Well, life.

TODD Well, life, there you are. Out of nearly three hundred hats I've made here I've only had three win and go in the museum. But that's never bothered me. You make beauty and it disappears, I love that.

JOAN You're so . . .

TODD What?

JOAN You make me think in different ways. Like I'd never have thought about how this place is run and now I see how important it is.

TODD I think it did impress a certain person that I was speaking from the high moral ground.

JOAN So tell me again exactly what he said at the end.

TODD 'These things must be thought about.'

JOAN I think that's encouraging.

TODD It could mean he'll think how to get rid of me.

JOAN That's a fantastic shape to start from.

TODD It's a new one for me. I'm getting inspired by you.

JOAN There's still the journalist. If he looks into it a bit more we could expose the corrupt financial basis of how the whole hat industry is run, not just this place, I bet the whole industry is dodgy.

TODD Do you think so?

JOAN I think we should find out.

TODD You've changed my life, do you know that?

JOAN If you lose your job I'll resign.

TODD We might not get jobs in hats again.

JOAN There's other parades.

TODD But I think you're a hat genius.

JOAN Unless all the parades are corrupt.

TODD I love these beads. Use these beads.

JOAN No, you have them.

TODD No, you.

3.

Several years later HARPER's house, daytime

HARPER

You were right to poison the wasps.

TODD

Yes, I think all the wasps have got to go.

HARPER

I was outside yesterday on the edge of the wood when a shadow came over and it was a cloud of butterflies, and they came down just beyond me and the trees and bushes were red with them. Two of them clung to my arm, I was terrified, one of them got in my hair, I managed to squash them.

TODD

I haven't had a problem with butterflies.

HARPER

They can cover your face. The Romans used to commit suicide with gold leaf, just flip it down their throat and it covered their windpipe, I think of that with butterflies.

TODD

I was passing an orchard, there were horses standing under the trees, and suddenly wasps attacked them out of the plums. There were the horses galloping by screaming with their heads made of wasp. I wish she'd wake up.

HARPER

We don't know how long she'd been walking.

TODD

She was right to come.

HARPER

You don't go walking off in the middle of a war.

TODD

You do if you're escaping.

HARPER

We don't know that she was escaping.

TODD

She was getting to a place of safety to regroup.

HARPER

Is this a place of safety?

TODD

Relatively, yes of course it is. Everyone thinks it's just a house.

HARPER

The cats have come in on the side of the French.

TODD

I never liked cats, they smell, they scratch, they only like you because you feed them, they bite, I used to have a cat that would suddenly just take some bit of you in its mouth.

HARPER

Did you know they've been killing babies?

TODD

Where's that?

HARPER

In China. They jump in the cots when nobody's looking.

TODD

But some cats are still ok.

HARPER

I don't think so.

TODD

I know a cat up the road.

HARPER

No, you must be careful of that.

TODD

But we're not exactly on the other side from the French. It's not as if they're the Moroccans and the ants.

HARPER

It's not as if they're the Canadians, the Venezuelans and the mosquitoes.

TODD

It's not as if they're the engineers, the chefs, the children under five, the musicians.

HARPER

The car salesmen.

TODD

Portuguese car salesmen.

HARPER

Russian swimmers.

TODD

Thai butchers.

HARPER

Latvian dentists.

TODD

No, the Latvian dentists have been doing good work in Cuba. They've a house outside Havana.

HARPER

But Latvia has been sending pigs to Sweden. The dentists are linked to international dentistry and that's where their loyalty lies, with dentists in Dar-es-Salaam.

TODD

We don't argue about Dar-es-Salaam.

HARPER

You would attempt to justify the massacre in Dar-es-Salaam?

She's come here because you're here on leave and if anyone finds out I'll be held responsible.

TODD

It's only till tomorrow. I'll wake her up. I'll give her a few more minutes.

HARPER

Did you see the programme about crocodiles?

TODD

Yes but crocodiles, the way they look after the baby crocodiles and carry them down to the water in their mouths.

HARPER

Don't you think everyone helps their own children?

TODD

I'm just saying I wouldn't be sorry if the crocodiles were on one of the sides we have alliances with. They're unstoppable, come on.

HARPER

Crocodiles are evil and it is always right to be opposed to crocodiles. Their skin, their teeth, the foul smell of their mouths from the dead meat. Crocodiles wait till zebras are crossing the river and bite the weak ones with those jaws and pull them down. Crocodiles invade villages at night and take children out of their beds. A crocodile will carry a dozen heads back to the river, tenderly like it carries its young, and put them in the water where they bob about as trophies till they rot.

TODD

I'm just saying we could use that.

HARPER

And the fluffy little darling waterbirds, the smallest one left behind squeaking wait for me, wait for me. And their mother who would give her life to save them.

TODD

Do we include mallards in this?

HARPER

Mallards are not a good waterbird. They commit rape, and they're on the side of the elephants and the Koreans. But crocodiles are always in the wrong.

TODD

Do you think I should wake her up or let her sleep? We won't get any time together.

HARPER

You agree with me about the crocodiles?

TODD

What's the matter? you don't know whose side I'm on?

HARPER

I don't know what you think.

TODD

I think what we all think.

HARPER

Take deer.

TODD

You mean sweet little bambis?

HARPER

You mean that ironically?

TODD

I mean it sarcastically.

HARPER

Because they burst out of parks and storm down from mountains and terrorise shopping malls. If the does run away when you shoot they run into somebody else and trample them with their vicious little shining hooves, the fawns get under the feet of shoppers and send them crashing down escalators, the young bucks charge the plate glass windows –

TODD

I know to hate deer.

HARPER

and the old ones, do you know how heavy their antlers are or how sharp the prongs are when they twist into teenagers running down the street?

TODD

Yes I do know that.

He lifts his shirt and shows a scar

HARPER

Was that a deer?

TODD

In fact it was a bear. I don't like being doubted.

HARPER

It was when the elephants went over to the Dutch, I'd always trusted elephants.

TODD

I've shot cattle and children in Ethiopia. I've gassed mixed troops of Spanish, computer programmers and dogs. I've torn starlings apart with my bare hands. And I liked doing it with my bare hands. So don't suggest I'm not reliable.

HARPER

I'm not saying you can't kill.

TODD

And I know it's not all about excitement. I've done boring jobs. I've worked in abattoirs stunning pigs and musicians and by the end of the day your back aches and all you can see when you shut your eyes is people hanging upside down by their feet.

HARPER

So you'd say the deer are vicious?

TODD

We've been over that.

HARPER

If a hungry deer came into the yard you wouldn't feed it?

TODD

Of course not.

HARPER

I don't understand that because the deer are with us. They have been for three weeks.

TODD

I didn't know. You said yourself.

HARPER

Their natural goodness has come through. You can see it in their soft brown eyes.

TODD

That's good news.

HARPER

You hate the deer. You admire the crocodiles.

TODD

I've lost touch because I'm tired.

HARPER

You must leave.

TODD

I'm your family.

HARPER

Do you think I sleep?

JOAN comes in and walks into TODD's arms.

You can't stay here, they'll be after you. What are you going to say when you go back, you ran off to spend a day with your husband? Everyone has people they love they'd like to see or anyway people they'd rather see than lie in a hollow waiting to be bitten by ants. Are you not going back at all because if you're not you might as well shoot me now. Did anyone see you leave? which way did you come? were you followed? There are ospreys here who will have seen you arrive. And you're risking your life for you don't know what because he says things that aren't right. Don't you care? Maybe you don't know right from wrong yourself, what do I know about you after two years, I'd like to be glad to see you but how can I?

JOAN

Of course birds saw me, everyone saw me walking along but nobody knew why, I could have been on a mission, everyone's moving about and no one knows why, and in fact I killed two cats and a child under five so it wasn't that different from a mission, and I don't see why I can't have one day and then go back, I'll go on to the end after this. It wasn't so much the birds I was frightened of, it was the weather, the weather here's on the side of the Japanese. There were thunderstorms all through the mountains, I went through towns I hadn't been before. The rats are bleeding out of their mouths

and ears, which is good, and so were the girls by the side of the road. It was tiring there because everything's been recruited, there were piles of bodies and if you stopped to find out there was one killed by coffee or one killed by pins, they were killed by heroin, petrol, chainsaws, hairspray, bleach, foxgloves, the smell of smoke was where we were burning the grass that wouldn't serve. The Bolivians are working with gravity, that's a secret so as not to spread alarm. But we're getting further with noise and there's thousands dead of light in Madagascar. Who's going to mobilise darkness and silence? that's what I wondered in the night. By the third day I could hardly walk but I got down to the river. There was a camp of Chilean soldiers upstream but they hadn't seen me and fourteen black and white cows downstream having a drink so I knew I'd have to go straight across. But I didn't know whose side the river was on, it might help me swim or it might drown me. In the middle the current was running much faster, the water was brown, I didn't know if that meant anything. I stood on the bank a long time. But I knew it was my only way of getting here so at last I put one foot in the river. It was very cold but so far that was all. When you've just stepped in you can't tell what's going to happen. The water laps round your ankles in any case.