

WORLD WAR 1 CENTENARY

NEATISHEAD AND BARTON SOCIETY

Presents

TOMORROW IS YOURS

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NEATISHEAD, IRSTEAD AND BARTON TURF COMMUNITY HERITAGE GROUP

TOMORROW IS YOURS

Davy Patterson and Betty Turner are engaged to be married and the locals in their Norfolk village are looking forward to their wedding day—it will be a something to look forward to during the dark days of World War One.

Families and friends are surprised when Davy and his best friend Roger announce that they have enlisted in the army and will be going off to join the fighting in France. Neither of the young men have to join up - they both work for the local farmer and as such they are in protected occupations. But the call to arms and their sense of duty and patriotism appeals to their sense of adventure. Betty is a naïve and friendly girl and she is proud that Davy wants to be a soldier—in any case the war will soon be over and he will soon be back home to get married.

John is the local postman and he knows each family on his rounds. He delivers dreaded telegrams almost daily informing of the death of soldiers over the seas. It isn't long before he delivers that telegram to the homes of Davy and Roger. Betty is devastated but her strength of character shines through and she surprises everyone with her fortitude and the mature way she comes to terms with her beloved Davy's passing. It changes her.

Betty is in church one Sunday when, after the service, the vicar reads out a notice—it is an appeal from the owner of a local stately home which has opened as a voluntary hospital. They are asking for local women to volunteer and to be trained as nurses to look after sick and wounded WW1 soldiers. Betty enrolls and is soon nursing the sick and wounded—she is a committed and compassionate nurse. She tends her charges with patience and dignity until on one occasion, with the thoughts of Davy in her mind, when she's tired after a long shift, the pressures and stresses get the better of her and she explodes in a tirade of anger and self-pity.

Soon, the church bells of victory sound and Betty prepares for her future life without Davy.

Characters: Betty

Davy

Vicar

Off stage voices: Sergeant

Davy's mother

Hospital patient

Narrators: Number to be determined

Narrator John the local postman was always the first to know. . . he'd served his Norfolk village all of his working life. He was one of their community; he knew every family. He had lived amongst them all of his life; he'd gone to school with them and he'd sat in church with them. But now he was the messenger they dreaded and feared. During the dark four years of war John had delivered numerous brown envelopes but it never got any easier for him. He'd delivered that telegram to mothers and wives, sisters and daughters - he'd then walked sadly away as front doors closed behind him followed by muffled screams and sobs of women whose lives had just fallen apart. Yes, . . . John had always been the first to know - he felt their pain because they were his people. He hated this war. Every brown envelope handed over was another family torn apart, another family devastated - and John was always the first to know.



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Narrator John remembered the August morning in 1917 when he'd delivered letters to two families he knew so well. He'd watched the two soldiers growing up; they'd been inseparable friends since childhood, Davy Patterson and his best pal Roger had worked side by side on Kitson's farm. John the postman had waved to them on the fields most mornings as he'd cycled by on his rounds. He'd watched them grow up into two fine young men and now he had a brown envelope for each of their homes. John the postman was always the first to know.



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Narrator The two Norfolk pals were dead, lying somewhere on the battlefields of France and John the postman was the first to know. There'd been a low and gentle drone of bees as he'd walked towards the door on that warm summer morning - Roger's mother's hand had been shaking as she'd taken the telegram and then slowly took it inside. Davy Patterson's family cottage was next door and his widowed mother was at home when John the postman gently tapped on the front door; Davy's fiancé, Betty Turner, was there caring for the elderly lady. A mother was about to hear of her son's loss and Betty, a bride-to-be, was about to learn that the love of her life was no more. Now there would be no wedding and John the postman was the first to know.



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Narrator Davy Patterson and his lifelong friend Roger had been typical of so many young men living and working in rural Norfolk. As agricultural workers at the outbreak of war they were content to be doing their duty for their country by working the land. The village had been looking forward to a wedding; Davy Patterson and Betty Turner had been 'walking out together' for five years and had been engaged for two. People were looking forward to a village wedding to take their minds off the war - it would be so nice to have something happy to celebrate.

Narrator They were a very popular young couple; he was tall and a strong lad with a quiet unassuming manner and shy ways. Betty was a bubbly girl who chattered constantly and was full of fun and charm.



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She was a generous caring girl who willingly helped out neighbours in need. She worked in domestic service for three days each week in the village 'big house' which was the family home of Major Kitson, the local gentleman farmer and land owner whose family had owned the farm and surrounding fields for generations. For the rest of the week Betty helped her mother who took in washing in order to make ends meet.

Narrator Their village was a small isolated community on the edge of one of the Broads; Betty and Davy both came from agricultural working stock. She had several brothers and sisters and her father was a marsh man cutting reed for a living and taking on other casual farming work when extra hands were needed. Davy lived with just his mother; his father had died some years ago and Davy was the sole bread-winner. His mother was in ill health and his fiancé, Betty, had been generous in helping to care for Davy's mother.

Davy was employed on Major Kitson's farm and the major valued his skills with horses and as a ploughman. Davy lived for his work and he lived for his horses.

Narrator The war rumbled on while the villagers looked forward to a spring wedding. Everyone was therefore shocked when Davy and best friend Roger announced that they had enlisted in the army and would be going off to war. The two men had bowed to pressure to join up - the country desperately needed men and the authorities had stepped up their campaign for recruitment through posters and newspaper headlines. At that time the nation was carried away with flag-waving patriotism and with a sense of duty and service to king and empire. The call to arms had considerable popular support and for Davy and Roger it appealed as an exciting adventure and the two young men were looking forward to getting out there to do their bit.



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Narrator Betty enjoyed a simple naivety about it all - she totally respected her sweetheart's decision. The thought of her darling Davy in a soldier's uniform was such a romantic image. And anyway, he wouldn't be away for long and they would simply delay the wedding for a month or two until he came home. And so the adventure for the two country lads began and Betty joined the other families at Norwich station to wave the boys off.



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Davy Darling Betty, sorry I haven't written for a while. We just haven't
Letter had time - it's been weeks and weeks of training - lots of marching and shooting and drill - day after day. It's tiring - every night we just fall into bed, worn out. But it's great fun Betty. Roger and me feel like real soldiers at last. The grub is good - not as good as home cooking but there's lots of it - tell my mother she needn't worry about me not getting enough to eat.



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You wouldn't like it here Betty because of the noise - there's loud gunfire and hand grenade explosions all of the time. Everywhere on the camp there's shouting and yelling. We practice stabbing dummies with bayonets and we have to yell and scream—you'd think it really funny to hear us. And the sergeants shout orders all day long. Training is nearly over and the sergeant says we can soon have a trip into town—I'll get a photo taken Betty and send it to you . . . /continued

**Sergeant
off stage**

(Yelling) Lights out my little beauties! Nightie night you 'orrible little lot. Get those bloody lights OUT!

Davy . . . I'll have to close now dear Betty. I hope that by the next time I
Letter write I'll have killed some Germans for you. Give my love to my
/continues dear mother, tell her I'll put a special letter in for her next time. All my love from your Davy. We'll be together soon when I come home.

Betty My Darling Davy,

Letter

John the postman almost ran up to our door with your letter this morning, he was as excited to bring it as I was to get it - he sends his best wishes to you. I'm so pleased to hear that you and Roger are enjoying being soldiers - I'm as proud as proud can be of you Davy. I can't wait to get your photograph.

The vicar said a prayer for you and Roger in church on Sunday. He said we had to pray for you both and for all the other village men out there with you. I was really embarrassed and I could feel all of the congregation looking at me - but it was nice of him wasn't it?

We sang your favourite hymn in church, Abide With Me - you always like it Davy.

It sounds like you are enjoying your training but it does sound very very noisy.

I read your letter to your mother, Davy. She started to cry so I told her not to be so silly because you were fine. She seems to be a little better in herself; I took her walking beside the river in the sunshine and she enjoyed it - she told me how you used to swim and fish when you were a little boy. She's looking forward to your letter to her. I'll close now my darling because I need to get this letter posted. Your loving sweetheart. Betty.