

**VISITING MR. GREEN
BY JEFF BARON**

**A Study Guide
By Martin Andrucki
Charles A. Dana Professor of Theater
Bates College**

THE AUTHOR. Born and raised in New Jersey, Jeff Baron studied film-making as an undergraduate at Northwestern University and went on to complete an M.B.A. (Master of Business Administration) at Harvard. He then entered the corporate world, but his interests in stage and screen ultimately trumped his inclinations toward business, and he has become a successful author of dramatic works for theater, film, and television.

He is best known for *Visiting Mr. Green*, which was first produced in 1996 in Massachusetts, enjoyed a long run in New York starting in 1997, and has since been staged in theaters throughout the United States and Europe.

According to a 2008 interview with the Official London Theatre Guide, the original idea for the relationship between the two characters in this successful play came from a friend of the author. In the interviewer's account, the friend came to [Baron] with a fantastic idea for a film. The friend had recently been volunteering as a visitor to an old man who had no family left to brighten his days. Baron describes the situation as 'a lovely greeting card', a tale to warm the soul, but lacking any drama.

By "lacking in drama" we can assume that the playwright meant that the relationship described by his friend was without interesting or compelling conflict—the key element in any successful dramatic situation.

This missing ingredient turned up when the author developed a custodial relationship with an ageing member of his own family:

After a few years, with [his friend's story] tucked away for a rainy day, Baron's mind was drawn back to the tale when his relationship with his own grandmother altered. She was of an age and culture where, though she needed assistance, she was too stubborn to actively accept help. Baron had to pretend to win a television in a sweepstake just so that he could replace her old set that no longer showed a picture. 'Our relationship changed a little bit. She took care of me and now I was taking care of her... as much as you can take care of someone that doesn't really want to be taken care of. When his grandmother died, he felt that it was time for him to write again, and his friend's story of the two men separated by age came back to mind, only this time he had a greater insight into their relationship. At the time he had never written a play, but the piece felt more

suiting to the stage than the big screen and with his history of watching theatre he decided to have a crack at it.

So the playwright took the situation from his friend's story and synthesized it with his own experience of caring for an irascible elder and produced the conflict-ridden plot of *Visiting Mr. Green*—a play about a young man sentenced by a judge to assist an old man he has nearly run over in a fit of reckless driving.

THE SETTING. The action takes place in Mr. Green's apartment on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, a place that "*looks as if nothing new has been purchased for [it] since the 1950s, and it also looks as if nothing has been discarded since then. . . . It is extremely cluttered with, among other things, old telephone books, newspapers, piles of mail and a bouquet of dead flowers.*"

The clutter is important because it is the outward expression of the spiritual and emotional disorder of the apartment's inhabitant. The playwright is preparing us to meet a character who is not simply set in his ways, but almost pathologically resistant to change.

And as Mr. Green does change through the course of the action, so does the place he inhabits. At the beginning of the final scene the lights come up on an apartment that is "*neater and cleaner than we've ever seen it. There are fresh flowers in the vase.*" Mr. Green has replaced the desiccated bouquet of the first scene with living flowers that suggest the spiritual rebirth he is himself experiencing as the play draws to an end.

THE PLOT. The action takes place over the course of nine scenes, seven of which take place on successive Thursday nights. Those are the times when Ross Gardiner, a 29-year-old business executive, visits Mr. Green in fulfillment of a court-imposed sentence for reckless driving. As Ross explains it in Scene 1 of the first act, "I was driving the car you walked in front of. *That's* why I'm here. My punishment is community service. I'm supposed to come here and help you once a week for the next six months."

But Mr. Green, an 86-year-old retired dry-cleaner, somewhat cantankerously rejects the offer of assistance: "So tell this judge I don't need any help." Ross is only too happy to accept this rebuff, and vows to inform the social worker in charge of the case that, at Mr. Green's insistence, the deal is off. The scene ends with the apparent termination of the very brief acquaintance between these two men.

But Ross returns the following Thursday, informing Mr. Green that the judge refused to change his sentence. The visits will continue, even over the old man's objections. With this second visit, Ross and the audience begin to discover some of the quirks of Mr. Green's singular character.

For one thing, he doesn't lock his door. Shocked by such carelessness on the part of a New York apartment dweller, Ross demands to know why Mr. Green would take such a risk. "In case I forget my key," the old man responds in a show of illogic worthy of Gracie Allen. Ross also brings up Mr. Green's mail, which he found lying on the floor of the building's lobby: "Your mailbox must have been so full it popped open. (*Mr. Green takes the mail from Ross and throws it on a shelf where there's already a huge stack of unopened mail.*)" So we take it that Mr. Green has little interest in communicating with the outside world.

Then, when Ross proffers some food to Mr. Green—whom he suspects of neglecting to eat—the older man "*Panics, points to the door, yells*. No! Get it out of here! Get it out!" What in the world could provoke such an extreme reaction to a container of soup from a local deli? We soon learn when Mr. Green cries out, "Quick! It's *traife!* . . . Don't touch anything! . . . I'll have to bury everything. Get it out!"

"*Traife,*" as the playwright explains, is a Yiddish term for food that is not kosher, and which would render the cooking and eating apparatus of the house un-kosher if it were to come in contact with it. One way of purifying such defiled objects is by burying them in the earth for a specified period of time. It is the prospect of such a non-kosher disruption of his ritually pure home that throws Mr. Green into a state of agitation. This is an important element in his character, revealing his passionate attachment to the strict requirements of Orthodox Judaism. He calms down only when Ross assures him that the soup is from a kosher establishment in the neighborhood and is therefore fit for him to eat.

As he begins to savor the soup he is reminded of someone else's cooking: "It's not like Yetta made. . . . Yetta made a soup . . . *That was a soup.*" Yetta, we soon learn, was his late wife, recently deceased—so Mr. Green is newly alone in the world. Ross asks him to talk about his family, but Mr. Green is reluctant to divulge much information about his personal life.

ROSS. So tell me about Mrs. Green. I know she was a good cook. What else?

MR. GREEN. Nothing else. She's gone. She left me. . . .

ROSS. [Your social worker] told me you don't have any children.

MR. GREEN. No. I don't.

ROSS. And your other relatives?

MR. GREEN. Gone. Everyone's gone.

So as the second scene ends, we are left with a picture of Mr. Green as a man with no living relatives who paradoxically leaves his door unlocked while pushing away the intrusive world with its unwanted visitors, unopened mail, impure food, and unwelcome questions.

As is clear, the playwright's strategy is to reveal new bits of information about his characters in each scene, building up a rounded identity for each as the play progresses. In the third scene of Act 1, Ross discovers Mr. Green lying on the floor,

apparently unable to pick himself up after a fall. When he ravenously devours the food Ross brings, the younger man is convinced that weakness brought on by hunger is the cause of Mr. Green's accident. Ross offers to supply him with groceries, but he refuses. Finally Ross accuses him of trying to kill himself through neglect and starvation:

ROSS. Let me put it this way . . . If you don't eat, you'll die. . . . Like you said, I don't really know you, you don't really know me . . . It's just . . . I'm kind of surprised. You seem like a very religious man, so I'm sure you know this – I even remember it from Hebrew school. Jews aren't allowed to commit suicide. . .

MR. GREEN. Are you Jewish?

ROSS. (*Imitating Mr. Green.*) Who told you I wasn't?

And with this discovery, and Ross's teasing response, the scene ends.

The following scene, one of the longest in the play, continues the pattern of successive revelations, ratcheting up the importance of the information disclosed. Now that Mr. Green knows that Ross is Jewish, he begins to warm toward his weekly visitor. He queries him about his family's immigrant origins, tells him stories from his own parents' experiences in the old country, instructs him in the rudiments of kosher housekeeping, and tells him a touching story about how he met his wife on the Lower East Side. Meanwhile, Ross begins tidying up the cluttered apartment, removing useless junk, putting things in their proper place, replacing burnt-out light bulbs—in sum, clearing away some of the detritus of Mr. Green's isolated existence and brightening his gloomy world. As a mark of growing trust, Mr. Green shows Ross a picture of his late wife, Yetta, and extols her virtues:

You see that look on her face? That was her. That was Yetta. You walked in and then. . . . She was so happy to see you. Even if you just went to the corner for the newspaper. You came back in and . . . you could see it . . . how much she loved you.

At the end of this encomium, Ross "*reaches over and gives Mr. Green's shoulder a squeeze.*" This affectionate, haltingly intimate gesture provokes a further emotional declaration from the old man: "You know, Ross . . . I think the good Lord sent you to me. And I hope he sends someone to you. Someone just like Yetta. You're a nice boy. A girl would be lucky to get a fella like you."

Mr. Green proceeds to praise marriage, dispensing grandfatherly wisdom in his new role as Ross's counselor and confidant. It is at this moment that Ross, lured into a confessional mood by Mr. Green's new openness, reveals a crucial piece of information about himself:

MR. GREEN. Believe me, find yourself the right girl, and you'll . . .

ROSS. There *is* no right girl. . . . Not for me, Mr. Green.

MR. GREEN. I'm telling you, Ross. For every boy . . . there's a girl.

ROSS. (*After a pause.*) Not if you're gay.

It takes Mr. Green a moment to grasp what Ross is telling him, and when he does, he is deeply shocked and can only respond to retreating from the kitchen to his bed, leaving Ross alone on stage "*pondering what just happened. . . .*" This complication brings the first act to a close.

Act Two begins on another Thursday night, a week later. Given what passed in the previous scene, the two men approach one another with a certain degree of hesitancy, perhaps reluctant to return to the personal depths of their last encounter. Ross announces he has been promoted, Mr. Green asks if he will be making more money, Ross says he will, and Mr. Green opens the floodgates by saying, "So now you can afford to get married. . . . Maybe you didn't know this. Jewish boys are not *faygeles*." ("Faygele" is a Yiddish word meaning "little bird," and is used as a derogatory term for a homosexual.)

In response, Ross decides to educate Mr. Green about the complications of his sexual identity—a subject that makes the older man intensely uncomfortable. "Why can't we talk about this?" Ross demands, and proceeds to tell the story of his life as a gay man, describing his first romance, his mother's discovery of his orientation, and his father's annihilating rejection. "Was this how *everyone* was gonna react? I became completely self-conscious. . . . My mission in life was to never say or do anything that might make someone think I was gay."

As a result, his affair with his first gay lover, Paul, breaks down, and he forces himself to date women. But that turns out to be unacceptable, so he finally just decides to see no one. It was hearing Mr. Green talk about his happiness with Yetta that brought home to him the unbearable loneliness of his celibate life, prompting him to open up to the older man.

But Mr. Green still can't accept the fact of Ross's homosexuality. He tells him it's dirty, contrary to God's will, unmanly, a sordid matter of sex in public toilets and "bother[ing] little boys." Ross is outraged by Mr. Green's negative views, and accuses him of regarding homosexuals in the same demeaning way that people have often looked at Jews: "All I'm saying is that being Jewish you know what it's like to be hated for something you can't change."

Ultimately, Mr. Green accuses Ross of betraying his parents by being gay, and in a sudden surge of bitterness he orders the younger man to, "Get out of my house! . . . You and my daughter. You think you know *everything*." With this accusation we encounter the major revelation of this scene. As we learned earlier in the play, Mr. Green has represented himself to Ross and his social worker as a man without children. Now we discover that was false. In fact he has a daughter, Rachel, who has betrayed him by marrying a non-Jew. "Here's what you and Rachel learned in college. You learned how to exterminate the Jews. Mazeltov. Thanks to you two, no more Jews will

be born. You're finishing the job for Hitler." Ross counters with an argument drawn from Mr. Green's own religious tradition:

ROSS. But if Rachel is Jewish, the children would be Jewish.

MR. GREEN. Yeah. . . Jewish like you. Who needs it?

And with that insulting rejoinder, Mr. Green shuts his bedroom door on Ross, bringing the scene to an end.

Ross's next visit takes place on the following Sunday, breaking the pattern of Thursday visits. The disruption of the Thursday-to-Thursday cycle is in part a result of the turmoil of the previous scene, which has led Ross to decide that he can't keep visiting this emotionally-frozen old man. "Let's not do this anymore," Ross says. "From now on I'm just gonna leave some groceries outside your door on Thursday night."

But it turns out that Ross has more than groceries on his mind on this Sunday morning. He also wants to know if Mr. Green's daughter, Rachel, is aware that her mother has died. He presses this point because, among the piles of unopened mail that he has been carrying up from the lobby, he has found a number of letters from California, all addressed, in the same handwriting, to Yetta—presumably letters from her daughter. Mr. Green resists any further exploration of this possibility, but Ross insists, finally opening one of the letters and reading it aloud. It's filled with details about Rachel's family—how her three children are attending college, how she and her husband will have to cope with an empty nest, and how they look forward to continuing their careers. And it ends with concern about not hearing from her mother, with expressions of love, and with a promise to send a recent picture of her family in her next letter.

Mr. Green's only response to the letter is a strangled command to Ross to leave. When the younger man departs, Mr. Green "*opens one of the other letters and finds the photo of Rachel and her family.*" Propelled by the image of his long-lost daughter, Mr. Green begins a frantic search of the apartment for other letters from Rachel that Yetta may have hidden away over the years, and with his attempt to dig up the past the scene ends.

We return to the accustomed Thursday evening visit with Ross's next arrival. As the lights come up we see that Mr. Green's apartment is "*a total mess. Drawers are open and papers are all over the floor. . . . Mr. Green . . . [is] dressed in old pajamas, robe and slippers. He looks terrible. He obviously hasn't washed or shaved . . . in the past three days.*" Momentarily delusional, he rushes around the apartment searching for Yetta and addresses Ross as if the younger man were his long-lost daughter. Ross snaps him out of his illusion, trying to force him to confront the loss he has inflicted on himself and his wife by exiling his daughter from their lives. But Mr. Green will have none of it: "Rachel married a goy. She's dead." ("Goy" is a Hebrew term meaning gentile or non-Jew.)

Despite the old man's emotional stonewalling, Ross reveals his latest attempt to restore Mr. Green's contact with the outside world: he has had his telephone reconnected. And as he leaves, he hands Mr. Green his daughter's California phone number, ending the scene.

A week later, in the midst of a thunder storm, the lights come up on Mr. Green, "*dressed and looking fine.*" His newly-functioning telephone startles him by ringing, but he doesn't answer it. Moments later, Ross appears at his door, dressed in a suit and "*completely drenched.*" We learn that it was he who phoned Mr. Green to inform the old man he wouldn't be coming for his weekly visit. A lunch earlier in the day celebrating his father's sixtieth birthday has left him angry and in emotional turmoil, lurching around the streets of the city without a raincoat or an umbrella.

Ross is upset because, at the lunch, his father did a mocking imitation of a gay waiter who was serving their party. Ross asked him to stop, but instead his father ramped up his mockery, putting on an elaborate performance for his guests, and declaring, "Relax Ross. We're in New York City. Our waiter's a fag. It's not gonna make the national news." Ross can't take any more, and throws down the gantlet: "I say, 'Oh yeah? Well, so is your son.' . . . Then my father says, 'Interesting . . . maybe you can get a job here.'" At which point Ross leaves the luncheon in frustration and rage.

Having told this story about his father's humiliating conduct, Ross then turns to Mr. Green and asks him whether he just stopped loving his daughter when she broke his heart. Getting no response, he heads for the door. But Mr. Green stops him with the play's central revelation: "I never did. . . . I never stopped thinking about her. About Rachel." And with that admission, Mr. Green reaches out to Ross in a gesture that ends in a hug, the two becoming for a moment something like parent and child. At a loss for words, Ross leaves, promising to return, and Mr. Green picks up the slip of paper containing his daughter's phone number "*and looks at it for a moment as the lights go down.*"

That gesture hints at a promise that is fulfilled in the play's final scene as we discover Mr. Green preparing for a visit from Rachel. His apartment is "*neater and cleaner than we've ever seen it,*" and he himself is spruced up in a jacket and tie. To mark the occasion, Ross has brought a lemon meringue pie—the special Sabbath treat that Yetta used to make for Mr. Green every week. We learn that Rachael has named her daughter, Hannah, after Mr. Green's beloved mother, a sign that Rachel has continued to embrace her family—albeit in absentia—all during the decades of her exile from home.

Mr. Green even ventures into the difficult territory of Ross's personal life. "So," he asks, "are you planning to get in touch with that fellow? . . . You know, what's his name . . . Paul." This is the name of Ross's first gay lover, and he is shocked and touched that Mr. Green remembers—and that the older man seems finally to accept his sexual identity.

Mr. Green must now decide where to hang the picture of his daughter and her family that Ross has had mounted and framed, and puts it in a spot where it will be seen immediately by anyone who walks through the front door. Just as the picture is placed, Rachel knocks on that door, and Ross and Mr. Green “*look each other in the eye, and acknowledge what’s happened and what’s about to happen.*” With that look, they are recognizing the immense change that has occurred in this little apartment since Ross’s first arrival. The play ends as Mr. Green calls out to his child, “Come in.”

CHARACTERS. Pairs of contrasting characters—like pistons in an engine— drive the action of many classic narrative and dramatic works. The Greeks give us Phaedra and Hippolytus, Creon and Antigone, Pentheus and Dionysus. Shakespeare gets impressive mileage out of Falstaff and Prince Hal, Antonio and Shylock, Juliet and her Nurse, Brutus and Antony. In narrative fiction, we encounter Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, Huck and Jim, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Movies and television provide an abundance of comic odd-couples: Laurel and Hardy, Abbott and Costello, Hope and Crosby, Luci and Desi, Ralph Kramden and Ed Norton, George Costanza and Jerry Seinfeld. And, of course, the odd couple itself: Neil Simon’s Oscar Madison and Felix Ungar.

Visiting Mr. Green offers yet another pair of polarized personalities. On the one hand we have Mr. Green, a fiercely orthodox Jewish octogenarian living a life of self-imposed physical and spiritual isolation. On the other, we have Ross, a young, gay, secular, urban sophisticate, climbing the ladder of corporate success, and reaching out to an old man who constantly rebuffs him.

As the play begins, **Mr. Green** regards Ross with suspicion, contentiousness, and ironic humor— an emotional strategy for holding the young man at arm’s length. This exchange is fairly typical

MR. GREEN. That was *you* driving the car?

ROSS. Yes.

MR. GREEN. The car that hit me?

ROSS. Actually, I didn’t hit you. . . .

MR. GREEN. And now you’re in my apartment? . . . What is a murderer doing in my apartment?

This kind of needling and verbal fencing forms the texture of Mr. Green’s relationship with Ross through the first several scenes of the play. It all boils down to a single point: “So tell this judge I don’t need any help.” Or, more emphatically put, “Mister! Hey Mister! . . . I don’t even know you. I’m here by myself all day long. This [judge] . . . was never here. Until a few weeks ago, *you* were never here. All of a sudden these people I don’t even know are telling me what to do. What the hell’s going on?”

Mr. Green’s journey through the play takes him from this beginning point, where he wants nothing more than to shut the doors to his apartment and his soul, to the final scene where he is welcoming his exiled daughter back into his home and his heart.

The play is a progression of steps leading from his hermetic isolation at the beginning to his growing openness at the end.

This movement occurs as a series of stages in his relationship with Ross. At first, as we have seen, he fends the young man off. Then, learning that Ross is a fellow Jew, he warms perceptibly toward the younger man, relishing the opportunity to instruct him in the cruelty of Jewish oppression in the old country, and the pain of anti-Semitic bigotry in America. He is comically indignant at Ross's ignorance of many aspects of Jewish tradition and history, and he is grumpily happy to teach him about the intricacies of kosher housekeeping.

But there are serious obstacles in the journey leading to intimacy and affection between these two men. If Judaism provides a bridge between Ross and Mr. Green, it also can function as a barrier between. Mr. Green's brand of Jewish faith, the playwright wants us to believe, comprises a system of beliefs that are often grimly absolutist. His panic at the idea of non-kosher food into his house prepares us for the harsher forms of exclusionary orthodoxy that he exhibits later in the play. When he learns that Ross is gay, he is shocked and disgusted. "Jewish boys are not *faygeles*," he declares, because "It's dirty." Just as he is now ready to throw Ross out of his apartment for being a homosexual, so he once expelled his daughter from his life for marrying a gentile. The playwright wants us to feel that Mr. Green clings so tightly to his orthodox identity that he is strangling his own soul, committing spiritual suicide.

Even after reading his daughter's letters to her mother, he seems determined not to relent in his fierce judgment: "Rachel married a *goy*. She's dead." But something in that encounter with the voice of his lost daughter has put a crack in the wall he has built around himself. Those weekly visits from Ross have weakened his defensive instincts, and when the younger man tells him the story of his father's wounding behavior at the birthday lunch, Mr. Green is moved to confess his continuing love of Rachel, and to hug Ross. Mr. Green has been led out of himself by a man who seems in most ways his opposite.

But is **Ross** really so different from Mr. Green? On the surface, yes. He may be Jewish like Mr. Green, but he is certainly not observant. He is so disconnected from his cultural roots that he doesn't know the town of origin of his Russian grandparents or the words to describe kosher kitchenware. Harvard-educated, he operates on the corporate fast-track, unlike Mr. Green, who never went to college and ran a small, neighborhood dry-cleaning shop. And if Ross does have any religious instincts, they are those of the urban liberal, far removed from the orthodox certainties of Mr. Green. "You don't know a thing about the Good Lord," he tells the old man. "He's not some narrow-minded bigot like you."

But underneath these conspicuous differences, there is a fundamental similarity between Ross and Mr. Green: both are deeply lonely men who have cut themselves off from human intimacy. While Mr. Green's uncompromising certainties have led him to a

life of solitary confinement, it is Ross's anxiety about being homosexual that has turned him into a young loner.

As he confesses to Mr. Green, he couldn't keep up his romance with Paul because shame and confusion about his identity prevented him from openly acknowledging their relationship. Once that affair was over he tried seeing women, but that was disastrous. "I went out with a series of very nice women who fell in love with me and couldn't figure out why I put up this . . . this wall. . . . Finally I just stopped dating."

When he does venture into a gay milieu he's "terrified. . . . You know what I'm afraid of? Meeting someone I like. Then what'll I do? . . . Will I treat him like I treated Paul?" As a result of this confusion and ambiguity, he tells Mr. Green, "I haven't touched or kissed another person in four years. I sort of got used to it."

In other words, Ross is a Mr. Green in-the-making. But his encounter with the older man proves to be a catalyst for change: "[W]hen you started telling me about your life with Mrs. Green . . . how happy you were . . . and then what you said about coming home to an empty apartment . . . I'm not used to it. I hate it." Seeing Mr. Green causes Ross to see himself in a new light, to realize his urgent need to "stop *pretend[ing]*. . . . I've been doing it most of my life. I'm sick of it."

He stops pretending at that dramatic lunch with his father, when he makes a public declaration of his sexual identity. And, as we learn in the play's last scene, he has begun, tentatively, to explore the city's gay social life:

I'm really proud of myself. Yesterday I went running in Central Park with the Front Runners. That's the gay running club. . . . I didn't actually *talk* to anyone, but they meet twice a week, so who knows.

These two characters have changed each other by the end of the play. Ross has pushed Mr. Green back into contact with his daughter, and Mr. Green has taught Ross a lesson by example: "If you wall people out of your life, you will end up like me."

THEMES. It is a custom at the Passover seder to leave the door of the house open and to fill a cup of wine for Elijah in case the prophet should decide to bless the family by paying a visit. Jewish tradition emphasizes Elijah's identity as a helper in times of difficulty, one who "promise[s] relief and redemption, . . . lift[s] downcast spirits, and . . . plant[s] hope in the hearts of the downtrodden." (From the website *angelfire.com*.) Ross is hardly a miracle-working prophet, but his arrival through an unlocked door, and his role in lifting Mr. Green's spirits and planting hope in his heart surely reminds us of Elijah—especially in the emphatically Jewish world of this play.

Miraculous visitors turn up frequently in literary and religious narratives. In Euripides' *Alcestis*, for example, Hercules pays an unexpected call on King Admetus on the day of his wife's death and ends up bringing her back to life. The Gospel of Luke tells the story of the risen Christ, his identity hidden, visiting his downhearted followers in the village of

Emmaus only days after his crucifixion. "When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?' (Luke, 24, 30-32)"

Again, Ross is neither a Herculean hero nor the risen Christ, but like those two eminent figures, he helps to bring life where there was spiritual death, and he gives heart to a man whose understanding was darkened.

These stories seem to tell us that the unknown visitor could be the miracle on our doorstep, the source of life-enriching, or even life-saving grace. Both Mr. Green and Ross are walking around with virtual "Keep Out" signs hung around their necks as the play begins. Mr. Green wants to be left alone to die in bitterness; Ross hasn't touched another human being in four years. Thanks to the arrival of the unknown visitor, and his eventual acceptance by the reluctant host, both characters are reborn.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Why doesn't Mr. Green want to be visited by Ross at the beginning of the play?
2. What discovery begins to change Mr. Green's attitude toward Ross? Why?
3. Why does Mr. Green tell people that he has no children?
4. Can you think of times when a visitor changed things in your family?
5. What are some reasons why people might not want visitors?
6. In general, Ross seems to be concealing the fact that he is gay from most people in his life. Why does he reveal it to Mr. Green?
7. Why does Mr. Green have a telephone that doesn't work? Why doesn't he pick up his mail?
8. Do you think Mr. Green changes his basic attitude about homosexuality at the end of the play? Or just his feelings about Ross?
9. Why is the fact that his daughter married a gentile so important to Mr. Green? What does it mean to him?
10. Why is Ross so angry about his father's behavior at the birthday lunch?