

# LIFE WITHOUT ME

DANIEL KEENE



CURRENCY PRESS  
SYDNEY

## CURRENCY PLAYS

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In our most trivial walks, we are constantly, though unconsciously, steering like pilots by certain well-known beacons and headlands, and if we go beyond our usual course we still carry in our minds the bearing of some neighbouring cape; and not till we are completely lost, or turned round—for a man needs only to be turned round once with his eyes shut in this world to be lost—do we appreciate the vastness and strangeness of nature. Every man has to learn the points of compass again as often as he awakes, whether from sleep or any abstraction. Not till we are lost, in other words not till we have lost the world, do we begin to find ourselves, and realize where we are and the infinite extent of our relations.

*Henry David Thoreau*  
*Walden, Chapter Eight*

*for*  
*Monica Maughan*

*Life Without Me* was first produced by Melbourne Theatre Company at the Sumner Theatre, Melbourne, on 14 October 2010, with the following cast:

|              |                   |
|--------------|-------------------|
| NIGEL        | Robert Menzies    |
| JOHN         | Greg Stone        |
| ROY WILLIAMS | Brian Lipson      |
| ALICE JARVIE | Deidre Rubenstein |
| MRS SPENCE   | Kerry Walker      |
| TOM          | Benedict Hardie   |
| ELLEN        | Kristina Brew     |

Director, Peter Evans

Set and Costume Designer, Dale Ferguson

Lighting Designer, Matt Scott

Composer, Jethro Woodward

Assistant Director, Matt Scholten

The Melbourne Theatre Company production of *Life Without Me* was produced in association with the Melbourne International Arts Festival.



## CHARACTERS

NIGEL, hotel clerk, about 40

JOHN, a hotel guest, about 50

ROY WILLIAMS, a salesman, late 50s

ALICE JARVIE, a guest, mid 50s

MRS SPENCE, Nigel's mother, about 70

TOM, a guest, mid 30s

ELLEN, his wife, mid 30s

## SETTING

The lobby of a two-star hotel. The place has seen better days.

At rear, centre, an elevator. To the elevator's right, the door to the stairs. Mid stage left, the entrance (a revolving door); either side of the entrance, a couple of battered sofas, side tables, table lamps. Mid stage right, the check-in desk; behind the desk, the door to the office. A large fish tank downstage of the desk. Front of stage, left of centre, a grouping of three armchairs and a coffee table.

Above the lobby, left and right, the small balconies of two of the hotel's rooms.

All directions are given from the viewpoint of the audience.

Note: if an interval is desired, it should follow Scene Three.

## SCENE ONE

*Evening.*

*Darkness.*

*The sound of thunder, howling wind and rain, the crackle of lightning. Lights rise to reveal NIGEL standing by the fish tank, gazing into the empty water. After a few moments he moves slowly to the revolving door and looks out briefly. He turns away and moves to behind the desk. He takes the register from under the desk and opens it. He slowly runs his finger down the page, reading. He closes the register and puts it back under the desk. He moves from behind the desk and approaches the elevator. He is about to press the button when a light bulb above the desk expires with a soft 'pop'. NIGEL moves back to the desk and looks up at the bulb. He turns and goes into the office. He returns with a fresh bulb. He climbs up onto the desk to remove the expired bulb. He isn't quite tall enough to reach the light fitting; he stands on his toes, teetering on the brink of falling.*

*An enormous crash of thunder rattles the building. NIGEL falls, landing behind the desk with a sickening thud; at the same time, the revolving door spins open in a blast of wind. Refuse and dead leaves blow wildly across the lobby, followed by JOHN, who is literally blown through the door; his overcoat soaking wet, his umbrella turned inside out. He carries a small suitcase.*

*The revolving door stops spinning. JOHN stands dripping, breathless. He lowers his umbrella and tries to close it, as NIGEL slowly emerges from behind the desk, looking dazed, a trickle of blood running from the bridge of his nose. He sees JOHN.*

*The storm outside gradually begins to ease and die away throughout the following.*

NIGEL: That's very bad luck.

JOHN *looks up, startled.*

An open umbrella indoors is bad luck.

JOHN: [*still struggling with the umbrella*] I know.

NIGEL: Then could you please close it?

JOHN: You're bleeding.

NIGEL: I fell.

JOHN: Are you alright?

NIGEL: I don't know.

*JOHN finally manages to close his umbrella.*

Can I help you with something?

JOHN: Do you have a room?

NIGEL: We have a lot of rooms.

*JOHN approaches the desk.*

JOHN: Do you have a vacant room?

NIGEL: Quite a number.

JOHN: Could I have one?

NIGEL: Just for tonight?

JOHN: I'm not sure yet.

*NIGEL reaches under the desk and fetches a large tissue; he dabs at the blood on his nose.*

NIGEL: Do you have a reservation?

JOHN: No.

NIGEL: You thought you'd just turn up...

JOHN: Is that a problem?

NIGEL: Not for me. But most people make arrangements. They reserve a room.

JOHN: I haven't, so can I—?

NIGEL: How do you manage?

JOHN: Pardon?

NIGEL: Just drifting from place to place...

JOHN: Excuse me?

NIGEL: ... hoping you'll be able to find a room.

JOHN: I don't drift from place to—

NIGEL: Because there are times when I'd have to tell you that we don't have a room available, we're booked up, full.

JOHN: Are you?



NIGEL: No, not at the moment.

JOHN: So I can have a room.

NIGEL: What kind of room would you like?

JOHN: I want a room with a bed in it.

NIGEL: They all have beds.

JOHN: So any room will do.

NIGEL: Do you want a room with a view?

JOHN: Of what?

NIGEL: You can have a room with a view of the front of the building on the opposite side of the street or you can have a room with a view out the back of the building.

JOHN: What's out the back of the building?

NIGEL: The back of another building.

JOHN: I see. Then I'll have—

NIGEL: Of course there are rooms on either side of the building whose windows face the sides of other buildings.

JOHN: Fine. I'll have—

NIGEL: Or you can have a room with no view at all.

JOHN: No view at all?

NIGEL: Nothing.

JOHN: Aren't there any windows?

NIGEL: There are windows in all our rooms. At least one window per room.

JOHN: So there must be a view.

NIGEL: Not necessarily.

JOHN: If you look out of a window... you see something.

NIGEL: Yes, you might see something, but you might not necessarily describe what you see as a view.

JOHN: What would you describe it as?

NIGEL: No idea really.

*JOHN takes off his dripping overcoat.*

JOHN: Is there somewhere that I could hang this?

NIGEL: You can hang it in your room.

JOHN: I don't have a room, yet.

NIGEL: No.

JOHN *folds his overcoat and lays it on top of his suitcase.*

JOHN: These rooms with no view... what do you see when you look out the window?

NIGEL: Another window in this building.

JOHN: Pardon?

NIGEL: It's the way the building's built. You see, in the centre of this building is a... I'm not sure what you'd call it. I suppose you could call it a shaft.

JOHN: A ventilation shaft?

NIGEL: Are you an architect?

JOHN: No.

NIGEL: Oh. Anyway, the rooms in the centre of this building have windows that look out onto this shaft. And across the other side of the shaft are... other windows looking out onto the shaft.

JOHN: That's a view of something.

NIGEL: I don't think that a view of the building that you're actually in counts as a view. A view, for my money, has to be of something else, of another building, at least, otherwise you're not—

JOHN: I'll have one of those... with a view of the ventilation shaft.

NIGEL: Sorry, they're all taken.

JOHN: All of them?

NIGEL: They're very popular.

*Pause.*

JOHN: What rooms are available?

NIGEL: There are several. Front, back and side.

JOHN: One at the front.

*Pause.*

NIGEL: You're shivering.

JOHN: I'm cold. I'm wet through.

NIGEL: I thought that you might be ill.

JOHN: I probably will be. These rooms at the front...

NIGEL: If you take a room at the front you'll be woken very early on account of the traffic. It gets very noisy.

JOHN: I'll have a room at the back then.

NIGEL: There's no sun back there, no light at all. Very gloomy.

JOHN: If you were staying here, what room would you choose?

NIGEL: Here? I wouldn't stay here.

JOHN: Where would you stay? Perhaps I'll go there.

NIGEL: You don't know what you want, do you?

JOHN: It's late, I'm tired. I want a room.

NIGEL *checks his watch*.

NIGEL: It's only eight o'clock.

JOHN: Could I just have a room? I don't give a rat's arse which one.

NIGEL: There's no need to get aggravated.

JOHN: But you're aggravating me.

NIGEL: I find that hard to believe.

JOHN: I'm telling you that you are.

NIGEL: I would have thought just the opposite.

JOHN: What, that you're being helpful?

NIGEL: Helpful isn't the opposite of aggravating.

JOHN: What is?

NIGEL: What am I, a thesaurus?

JOHN: I just want a room. This is a hotel, isn't it?

*Pause.*

NIGEL: You came in here not knowing whether or not it was a hotel?

JOHN: Of course I knew it was a hotel.

NIGEL: Then I don't understand your question.

JOHN: It was rhetorical.

NIGEL: I see.

JOHN: I'll have a room at the front, I like to wake up early.

NIGEL: That's entirely up to you. [*He produces the register and turns it to face JOHN.*] Name and details there. Payment is in advance.

JOHN: Do you have a pen?

NIGEL: Not at the moment.

JOHN: But—

NIGEL: Do you have one?

JOHN: I might have.

JOHN *searches through his pockets.*

NIGEL: I usually carry a pen on me.

JOHN: But not tonight?

NIGEL: I didn't mean at work. I don't carry a pen at work.

JOHN: I would have thought it might be useful.

NIGEL: Well, if you can't find one it would be.

JOHN *pulls a pencil from his jacket pocket.*

JOHN: I've got a pencil.

NIGEL: A pencil...

JOHN: Will that do?

NIGEL: Something written in pencil can be erased.

JOHN: But—

NIGEL: You write your details in the register... [*shutting the register*] and when I open it in the morning... [*opening the register*] they're gone. Erased.

JOHN: Who... who would erase them?

NIGEL: It would be as if you were never here, as if you never existed.

JOHN: [*sotto*] Oh, for God's sake... [*Pause.*] What if I press hard, so that the pencil leaves an indentation? Then if someone erases my details during the night, we can still read them.

NIGEL: It'd be very difficult in this light. You see [*looking up*] I was just about to put in a new light bulb when you—

JOHN: We could rub it, we could rub the side of the pencil, [*demonstrating*] rub the lead of the pencil, over the indentation, and that way read what was written there.

NIGEL: Could we?

JOHN: The indentation itself wouldn't be coloured by the lead, but the paper around the indentation would, so that the words I'd written and had been erased would appear as white letters. It would be... like a negative of what I'd written.

NIGEL: How do you know all this?

JOHN: All what?