

CHECKING OUT

by
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Characters

Nigel Smith – early twenties

Jacqueline – early twenties

Mr. Keys – around forty

Voice of **Nicole**

Place – A room on the seventh floor at the Gallery Hotel, London.

Time – 11.00 a.m.

The stage area is divided unequally between the main room S.L. and an adjacent bathroom S.R. A door connects. The offstage bedroom is located S.R. and the main door to the hotel room is offstage S.L. Two French-windows open S.R. and S.L. onto an adjoining narrow ledge running along the front of the stage. The walls are decorated with reproductions of well known paintings that might be found in the nearby gallery. In the main room there is a chair and a table S.L. on which is placed the hotel book and a pen in a holder. There is another small table upstage with a telephone and a side light.

Lights are switched on and Keys enters S.L. followed by Nigel. Keys wears the hotel uniform. He is officious and pompous. He

carries Nigel's case with disdain. Nigel wears thick glasses. He is awkward, nervous and currently very depressed.

Keys Your room, sir. I trust you will find it comfortable.
The bathroom and the bedroom are through there.
Nigel Right.

Keys switches on the side light on the upstage table.

Keys Your key, sir.
Nigel Oh... yes. Thank you.
Keys I'll put your case here, sir.
Nigel Yes... please.

Nigel turns away from Keys.

(Dismissively) Thank you.

Nigel, assuming Keys has gone, takes Nicole's previously opened letter from his pocket. He unfolds it sadly. He is about to re-read it when Keys clears his throat.

Keys Yes?
My tip, sir.
Nigel Oh... er...

Nigel fumbles through his pockets but finds nothing.

Keys Never mind... sir. Checking out time tomorrow is eleven
a.m. precisely, sir.
Nigel Right.

Keys exits S.L. Nigel turns to Nicole's letter again. We hear the voice of Nicole as Nigel reads

V.O. Nicole Cher Nigel, cela fait longtemps que je voulais te dire tout ça, en fait, presque tout de suite après que l'on ait commencé à sortir ensemble – si on peut appeler ça sortir ensemble – j'ai compris que j'avais commis une grosse erreur en sortant avec toi. Pour être franche, je ne t'aime pas et je ne t'ai jamais aimé. Tu as été une petite distraction et, je le reconnais, un bon moyen de passer, sans avoir à déboursier un centime, un été ennuyeux à mourir, loin de mes vrais amis. Sois honnête, Nigel! Tu n'as pas imaginé j'espère, un seul instant, que tu étais mon genre d'hommes? Non, je ne le pense pas. En tous cas, n'essaie pas de me voir ou de m'appeler. C'est bien mieux ainsi, si on ne se revoit plus. Sois heureux dans ta vie. Adieu. *(Dear Nigel, I have been meaning to tell you this for some time, in fact quite soon after we started going out together – if you can call it that – when I realised I had made a terrible mistake in having you as a boyfriend. Quite frankly, I do not love you and I never did love you. You were only a distraction and a way of saving myself money during a very boring summer while I was far away from my real friends. Let's face it Nigel, did you ever really think that you would be good enough for me? Ha, I don't think so. Don't try to call me. I think it is completely for the best that we never meet again, ever. Have a nice life. Goodbye.)*

Nigel Nicole.

Nigel folds the letter and puts it back in his pocket. He opens his case and takes out a large framed photo of Nicole. He looks at it sadly.

(To Photo) Why?

Nigel places the photo on the upstage table. He then goes to the S.L. windows and opens them. He looks down at the street below and swallows hard. He closes the windows. He crosses to the table and sits. He takes some note paper from the hotel book and picks up the pen. He thinks for a moment and then begins to write, speaking the words aloud as he writes them.

Dear everyone who knows me. You will probably think I have been very foolish when you find this note... and me. Perhaps I am, but I am desperately miserable. My heart is completely broken and I see no point in being alive, so I am going to throw myself out of the window. Don't try to stop me... although you couldn't anyway, because by the time you read this note it will be too late. I, Nigel Smith will be no more. Goodbye. *(Beat.)* Nigel. *(Beat.)* Smith.

Noticing his watch, he takes it off and looks at it. He chuckles to himself then writes.

P.S. I leave my luminous Star Trek watch to my brother Jake.

Nigel places the watch carefully on the table. He looks at the photo again. He writes.

P.P.S. If you read this Nicole, it is because I love you and

I cannot live without you.

Seizing the photo.

WHY?

He replaces the photo and puts the pen back in its holder. He stands. He takes a final look at Nicole and then purposefully goes to the S.L. windows. He opens them and climbs out onto the ledge. As he looks down he begins to hyperventilate and is about to be sick. He hurriedly climbs back through the windows, closing them behind him. He holds his handkerchief to his mouth as he runs to the bathroom. He lifts up the toilet lid but is not sick. He takes some deep breaths and wipes his face. He is struck by an idea. He flushes the toilet and smiles. He enters the main room and sits at the table again. Taking the pen, he crosses out the 'throw myself out of the window' line and writes.

'I have decided to drown myself'.

Nigel enters the bathroom and kneels in front of the toilet bowl. He pauses for a brief moment before putting his hand on the flusher. He then places his head deep in the bowl and flushes. After a few moments he surfaces, coughing and spluttering, minus his glasses. He wipes his soaking head on a nearby towel. Realising he is without his glasses, he reaches down into the bowl and retrieves them. Frustrated, he closes the toilet lid and enters the main room. He scowls at Nicole's photo. He surveys the room and notices the side light on the table. He switches the light off and then on again. He smiles. He returns to the note to amend the text.

'I have decided to electrocute myself'.

He returns to the side light and attempts to take out the bulb. He burns his fingers. He switches the light off. Taking a handkerchief from his pocket he removes the bulb and places it carefully on the table. Holding the light in one hand he takes one final look at Nicole's photo before he puts his finger in the empty socket. He switches the switch. There is a loud buzzing noise, the flickering of the room lights, a brief spasm from Nigel accompanied by a muted scream and then darkness. Pause.

Ow!

Nigel feels about the darkened room looking for the bulb. There is a knock at the door.

Keys (Off) Hello? Hello in there? Mr. Smith? Mr. Smith?
Nigel Er, yes... yes... just a moment.

Nigel fumbles his way towards the chair. He finds the hotel book and sits, pretending to read. He still holds the bulb. More knocking.

Keys (Off) Mr Smith?
Nigel Come in.

Keys enters S.L. holding a torch.

Keys Mr Smith?
Nigel Yes?

Keys picks out Nigel with the beam. Nigel is visibly trembling from

the effect of his electrocution.

Keys I was wondering if you knew anything about the hotel being in complete darkness, sir?
Nigel Oh, is it? I hadn't noticed.

The lights come on.

Keys Ah, let there be light.

Keys notices the bulb in Nigel's hand. and takes it.

Playing with electricity can be very, very dangerous, sir.

He replaces the bulb in the side light and switches it on. He then approaches Nigel menacingly.

I hope not to have to call on you again, sir.

Keys exits S.L.

Nigel *(Ridiculing)* Sir!

Nigel angrily switches off the lamp. He crosses out the 'electrocute' line on his note. He thinks. He opens up the hotel book and reads. He smiles. He goes to the telephone and picks up the receiver.

(To phone) Hello... hello, room service. Yes, yes, er, food, yes. I'd like to order some food please... I don't know, something that comes with a knife... A knife, yes, a

big knife... Yes, a fillet steak, that sounds fine... No, no vegetables... No... Room, yes, er – *(looks at key ring)* room 719... How big is the knife please?... How big is the knife?... Good... Thank you.

Nigel replaces the receiver and amends the note once more.

(To himself, mumbling) I have decided to *(then audibly)* stab myself.

He re-reads the letter to himself making a couple of small changes. He looks at the photo of Nicole.

Ha!

Nigel explores different places on his body to inflict the fatal wound. He feels faint suddenly and so goes to the S.L. windows and opens them. He takes some breaths. He removes his glasses and rubs his eyes. Sound of birds above him. Nigel looks up and gets one in the eye.

Ugh!

He takes out his handkerchief and wipes his eye. He closes the window. He is uncertain what to do with the dirty handkerchief. There is a knock at the door. Thinking it may be Keys again, Nigel moves towards the bathroom to hide.

Jac. *(Off)* Room service.
Nigel Ah.

Nigel puts the handkerchief in his pocket and exits S.R. He enters S.L. holding a steak knife. He studies it as Jacqueline enters S.L. Jacqueline wears a maid's outfit and is carrying a tray with a covered salver. She is about Nigel's age and wears identical glasses. She also seems very depressed. She puts the tray down and wipes her eyes with a tissue. Nigel, whilst examining the knife, manages to cut his finger. He enters the bathroom, closing the door behind him. He looks at the wound and starts to feel very faint. While removing his glasses he collapses, the glasses being placed on the toilet lid as he falls. Jacqueline removes her own glasses as she continues to wipe her eyes. She checks to see that she is alone and then from a pocket takes out a silver locket on a chain. She puts her glasses down on the table as she opens the locket and addresses it.

Jac. Why David, why? You said you loved me. You said I was your love, your life, your reason for being. I don't understand, how could you throw me away as if I was worthless, a toy that you grew tired of. My heart, my life is broken. I will never love again, never. All is futile. Goodbye.

Jacqueline, as if in a trance, goes towards the S.L. windows. Meanwhile in the bathroom Nigel is regaining consciousness. He staggers to the S.R. windows for some air. As he opens them, Jacqueline opens the S.L. windows. She steps out onto the ledge and looks down. Nigel notices her.

Nigel Oh my God! Stop! Stop!

Nigel shuts the S.R. windows. He hurries to save Jacqueline, but in his rush manages to knock himself out on the bathroom door.

Jac. Together, together, I will take you with me. Goodbye world... goodbye life... goodbye David.

Jacqueline closes the locket, kisses it and puts it around her neck. Nigel is now on his feet again. He hurries towards the S.L. windows and seizes Jacqueline from behind.

Ah! Let go of me! Let go! You idiot! Let me go! Let me go!

Nigel pulls Jacqueline, kicking and screaming, into the room.

I want to, don't you see? Let go! All right, you've asked for it now, whoever you are.

She elbows Nigel in a sensitive place. Nigel winded, lets her go. There is a knocking at the door.

Keys (Off) What's the noise? What's going on in there?

Jacqueline grabs Nigel's hair and shakes his head furiously. Nigel manages to seize Jacqueline's legs and pulls her to the floor. Jacqueline beats Nigel on the back.

Nigel Stop! Stop! Please stop, please!
Jac. Let me go! Let me go!

Keys enters S.L.

Keys What the hell...!

Keys grabs Jacqueline by the hair and pulls her away from Nigel.

Come with me, young lady.

He holds her by the hair at arm's length as he addresses Nigel who is still on the floor.

And you, Mr Smith, fighting with the hotel staff is not permitted.

He places his foot squarely on Nigel's fingers. Nigel squeals with pain.

There will not be another warning, sir.

Keys begins to escort Jacqueline away by her hair.

(To Jacqueline) I think you and I both need to have a little talk.

They exit S.L. Nigel gets up, nursing his wounds. He looks to see if Jacqueline and Keys are gone. He puts on Jacqueline's glasses which are lying on the table, thinking that they are his own, but soon realises that there is something not quite right with his vision. He removes the glasses and examines them. He enters the bathroom and then exits into the bedroom. Jacqueline enters S.L. Checking that she is alone, she makes a rude gesture in Key's direction. She squints to find her glasses which are not there.

Jac. *(To herself)* My glasses?

She searches the room. Nigel meanwhile enters the bathroom. He picks up the glasses lying on the toilet lid and compares the two.

Nigel Ah.

He then sees the knife and remembers his darker purpose. He places both pairs of glasses on the toilet lid as he picks up the knife.

Hmm.

Jacqueline hears him and hides behind the chair. Nigel enters the main room. He takes one last glance at Nicole's photo. He holds the knife out before him as he prepares to plunge it into his chest. Jacqueline lets out a scream. Nigel screams too and drops the knife. Jacqueline grabs it and brandishes it towards Nigel.

Jac. What are you doing?

Nigel Don't hurt me! Please! Please!

Jac. What were you about to do with this knife?

Nigel Nothing.

Jac. Don't lie. You were going to kill yourself.

Nigel No. *(Jacqueline approaches with the knife)* Yes – Yes.

Jac. Why? Why?

Nigel A girl.

Jac. A girl? What girl? Hm?

Nigel Nicole. Please... please. *(Beat)* Please.

Jacqueline drops her threatening pose a little.

Jac. Fool!

Nigel What?
Jac. To die for a woman! (*Indicating photograph*) Is this her?
Nigel Yes.
Jac. She's pretty, but not worth dying for.
Nigel And you?
Jac. What?

Nigel points to her locket.

Nigel Oh, yes.
Jac. A man?
Nigel No... David.
Jac. David, he's a man right?
Nigel I hate him!
Jac. I see.
Nigel No, you don't see! David has destroyed my life!
Jac. And is he worth dying for?

There is an embarrassed silence.

Jac. Well...
Nigel I... Sorry, I...
Jac. No, sorry, me... I...
Nigel I... I came for my glasses.

Nigel is bemused.

Nigel My glasses.
Jac. What's your name?
Nigel Jacqueline. What's yours?
Jac. Nigel, Nigel Smith.
Nigel Well, Nigel Smith, maybe we're both fools, eh?

Nigel Yes.
Jac. (*Beat*) My glasses?
Nigel Oh... yes.

Nigel enters the bathroom to fetch her glasses. Jacqueline puts the knife down and takes a sneaky peek at Nigel's note. Nigel enters the main room. He hands Jacqueline the wrong glasses. Putting them on they realise their error. They swap. Finally having the clear sight of vision they are struck by each other's 'beauty'. Pause.

Jac. (*Embarrassed*) I... I – goodbye.
Nigel (*Embarrassed*) Yes – I... Wait, please... I... I... I...
(*Beat.*) I...

Jacqueline bursts into tears, she sits and sobs uncontrollably. She removes her locket.

Jac. I hate him! I hate him! I hate him!
Nigel There, there.

Nigel takes out his handkerchief but remembers its condition. He goes to the bathroom to fetch toilet paper.

Jac. Oh! I hate him! I hate my life! I hate this job! I hate that fascist, Keys.

Nigel enters the main room.

Nigel Who?
Jac. That Mr. Keys, the chief porter of this stupid hotel!
Nigel Oh yes, him.

Jac. He has made my life a misery ever since I've worked here. I'd like to twist his nose. Twist it! Twist it! Twist it! Twist it!
Nigel Shhh, he'll hear you.
Jac. I don't care! Let him!

Jacqueline starts to divest herself of aspects of her maid's uniform, headband, apron etc. and throws them on the floor.

Nigel What are you doing?
Jac. I quit.
Nigel What will you do?
Jac. Dance! Dance with joy! Come on, let us dance together. Come on, Nigel, let's dance away our troubles.

Jacqueline grabs the remote control.

Nigel Well – I'm not really very good – I mean, I'd love to but –

Jacqueline finds a station with upbeat dance music. She starts dancing wildly. Nigel watches and sways awkwardly to the music. Jacqueline grabs Nigel and they dance together. Nigel gradually gets into the swing of it until he is soon dancing with abandon. Jacqueline watches with admiration.

Jac. Go, Nigel, go!

She then takes off her locket and stamps on it.

Take that, David, and that and that! See, I don't care anymore. Ha!

Nigel looks on in surprise. Jacqueline goes to the bathroom. Nigel, turns off the music. He watches as Jacqueline lifts the toilet lid and holds the locket above the bowl.

Farewell, David.

She drops the locket into the toilet and flushes. She waves it away.

Goodbye.

She closes the lid and enters the main room euphorically.

Free, free at last! Nigel, your turn now.

She picks up photo of Nicole and gives it to Nigel.

Destroy her! Destroy! *(Beat)* Do it, Nigel, destroy her power. Do it!

Nigel takes out the photo and proceeds to tear it furiously. He then stamps on the pieces.

Destroy her, Nigel! That's right, destroy her power over your life. You're free, free of her! Yes, stamp on her, Stamp! Stamp! Yes!

Jacqueline screws up Nigel's note and stamps on it. They join hands and jump up and down together shouting with joy.

Nigel Yes!
Jac. Yes!
Nigel Yes!

Jac. Yes!
Nigel Yes!
Jac. Yes!
Together Yes!

They stop and stare at each other. They kiss. There is a sudden knocking at the door followed by Keys' voice.

Keys (Off) Mr. Smith? Mr. Smith?
Nigel It's him again.
Jac. Let's go.
Nigel What?
Jac. Together.
Nigel Together?
Jac. Yes.
Nigel You want to... with me?
Jac. Yes.
Nigel Where?
Jac. Somewhere, anywhere.
Keys (Off) Mr. Smith?
Nigel What about him?
Jac. Leave him to me.

Jacqueline kisses Nigel briefly and sits in the chair.

(In a deeper voice) Enter, imbecile.

Keys enters S.L. Not seeing Jacqueline, he advances on Nigel.

Keys (To Nigel) You, sir, out now!
Jac. (Mocking Keys) You, sir, out now!
Keys (To Jacqueline) You too, young lady. You no longer work

here. You're fired.
Jac. You can't fire me, because I've already quit. I've quit this stupid hotel because you're a fascist and a tyrant and you make me sick, sick, sick!
Keys What did you say?

Jacqueline switches the radio on rebelliously. A lively song plays. Keys advances on Jacqueline. Jacqueline grabs Keys' nose and twists it. She stamps on his foot. Keys grabs Jacqueline by the neck. Nigel jumps on Keys' back. Keys spins and Nigel tumbles to the floor.

Jac. And you, sir!
Jac. Nigel!

Jacqueline throws Nigel the silver platter. Nigel swings it and hits Keys squarely in the face. Keys collapses to the floor unconscious.

Nigel Let's go!
My case!

Nigel grabs his case. He also grabs his watch.

(To Keys) Ha!

Jacqueline and Nigel exit S.L.

Lights down.