

EXTRACT

HALF & HALF

DANIEL KEENE



Current Theatre Series
Currency Press • Sydney
in association with
Playbox Theatre, Melbourne

CURRENT THEATRE SERIES

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enquiries@currency.com.au
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Set by Dean Nottle.

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For Robert and Dan

It will be exactly like this life! – The same garden,
Deep, deep, thick, dim. And towards noon
People will enjoy themselves at being reunited there
Who never met and who do not know

One from another. You will have to dress
As if for a party and go in the night
Of the lost, all alone, without love and without lamp.
It will be exactly like this life...

O. V. de L. Milosz
from *Symphonie de Novembre*
translated by Kenneth Rexroth

Half & Half was first produced by Keene/Taylor Theatre Project in association with Playbox Theatre at The C.U.B. Malthouse, Melbourne, on 3 July 2002 with the following cast:

NED

Dan Spielman

LUKE

Robert Menzies

Director, Ariette Taylor

Designer, Adrienne Chisholm

Designer, Richard Roberts

Lighting Designer, Philip Lethlean

Composer, Darrin Verhagen

CHARACTERS

NED, about twenty-five

LUKE, about forty-five

SETTING

An old house.

The kitchen.

The kitchen covers the entire width of the stage. There is a sink, a stove, a refrigerator, cupboards, benches, etcetera set around the walls. Audience right is a doorway leading to the hall; audience left is a doorway to the sitting room. Along the back wall of the kitchen is a large window. Through the window a few tall trees can be glimpsed; and large expanse of sky. A table and two chairs stand in the centre of the kitchen.

ACT ONE

Morning

Ned sits at the kitchen table doing a newspaper crossword puzzle

He comes to a particularly difficult clue

He rises from the table and slowly paces the kitchen

After a few moments he quickly returns to the puzzle

He contemplates the puzzle for a long moment

He carefully tears the page with the puzzle out of the newspaper

He screws the page into a ball and tosses it over his shoulder

Long pause

Luke appears from the hall and stands in the doorway

He is wearing a blue silk dressing gown

- I found this
- it's mine
- can I wear it?
- you're wearing it

Luke walks slowly into the kitchen

- is there anything to eat?
- what would you like?
- what is there?
- all sorts of things
- I'd like some eggs
- how would you like them?

- on a plate
- how many?
- three should do
- I've only got two
- two will be fine
- what will I eat?
- haven't you eaten yet?
- I was waiting for you
- why?
- I thought we could have breakfast together
- you can eat something else
- what?
- look in the cupboard
- I don't need to look in the cupboard I know what's in the cupboard it's my cupboard
- then why are you asking me what you should eat?
- I fancied an egg
- one egg wouldn't be enough
- I'd settle for one on toast
- I don't want toast just the two eggs on a plate
- anything else you want?
- coffee black
- you used to drink your coffee white
- I don't any more
- why's that?
- I don't know it's a complete mystery to me

Luke sits at the kitchen table opposite Ned

- do you plan on staying long?
- I haven't made any plans
- you must have made some
- why's that?
- people usually do

- do they?
- haven't you ever heard of it?
- I've heard of it I just didn't believe it
- why not?
- it didn't sound as if it could be true
- you don't have a suitcase
- I don't need one
- did you leave everything behind?
- I left a depression in the mattress I'd been lying on
- have you been ill?
- I've never felt better
- you don't look well
- neither do you
- I'm not ill
- you should knock on wood when you say that
- but I'm not superstitious
- are you religious?
- I think religion is just superstition
- do you know anything about theology?
- bits and pieces
- bits and pieces of theology are no good to you they won't get you anywhere
- I'm not that interested
- not interested?
- no
- I find that amazing
- so how long do you intend staying?
- as long as you'll have me
- how long do you think that will be?
- I've no idea
- you haven't given this very much thought have you?
- none at all

Long pause

- where have you been for the past nine years?
- it's closer to ten
- have you been in prison?
- what crime do you think I've committed?
- you may have committed more than one
- that's true
- or none at all
- why would they jail an innocent man?
- it's been known to happen
- do you think it did?
- I might not have been here when you arrived I might have moved on there might have been strangers living here
- this was our mother's house
- I might have sold it
- why would you sell it?
- if someone made me the right offer
- I'd have to agree to it
- if I could find you
- you'd have to find me
- what if I couldn't?
- then you couldn't agree to any offer no matter what it was we both have to agree the house belongs to both of us this was our mother's house she bought it herself she worked and slaved to earn the money to buy it she bought it for us it was all she had to leave us
- you don't like this house
- I've never liked this house
- if I sold it you'd have half the money
- I knew you'd be here I knew you wouldn't have moved on
- I'm not ready to move on just yet
- you'll probably die here you'll be laid out in the front room just like her

- I don't think they do that any more
- what?
- lay people out in the front room
- it was only ten years ago how much can have changed in ten years?
- quite a lot
- in any case once a person's dead they can have anything they want if you want to be laid out in the front room I'll make sure they do it with all the trimmings
- what makes you think you'll outlive me?
- I couldn't leave you to the mercy of strangers
- we're all at the mercy of strangers
- I thought you said you knew nothing about theology
- I said I knew bits and pieces
- what bits? what pieces? you've got me fascinated
- what do you intend to do?
- about what?
- about your situation
- what's my situation?
- I wasn't expecting you
- are you expecting someone else?
- I've gotten out of the habit of expecting anything
- I knew you'd be surprised
- I don't usually open the door to people after ten o'clock at night
- do you often get people coming around late at night?
- I don't get anyone coming around I discourage it
- I would have arrived earlier if my circumstance had permitted
- what circumstance?
- the circumstance I was in at the time of my departure
- departure from where?
- I had to travel cheaply the journey was long and uncomfortable and the bus was running well outside its advertised schedule
- where did you come from?