

**I'M
WITH
HER**

VICTORIA MIDWINTER PITT



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For Lucy

CHARACTERS

ACT ONE: THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

Prologue:	Seeds, Waking
Woman 1	Nikki Keating
Woman 2	Julie Bates
Woman 3	Patricia Madigan
Woman 4	Pam Burrige
Woman 5	Julia Gillard

ACT TWO: THROWING THE ELEPHANT

Woman 6	Marcia Langton
Woman 7	Marion Blackwell
Woman 8	Anne Aly
Epilogue:	The Persistence of Dreams

NOTES

I'm With Her is a piece for eight performers. The original production involved some doubling of roles. A full eight-member cast is the best embodiment of the play and strongly recommended. The structure of the five monologues of Act One and three of Act Two should be maintained. The play makes use of projection for text and images. For simpler stagings, projections can be read out loud. Projections can be downloaded at www.imwithhertheplay.com

ACT ONE: THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

PROLOGUE

Eight white stools in a broad semi-circle on a bare stage, white back and side walls. Text and images are projected onto this backdrop throughout the play.

Eight women enter and stand.

1.

WOMAN 7: When I was little I loved getting up and just going out into the bush. You'd fill your back-sack with oranges and out you'd go.

This was 1934, right up high in the Great Dividing Ranges. Formidable country. Very steep and scrubby. No straight paths—all scrambling and climbing.

You had to be *observant*, to know how to get home. There's a shape to all the stillness and movement.

It's an *ecosystem*. Every single bit, connected. It's innate to your being to understand how it functions.

Slow it down, let all the living pieces come apart.

2.

WOMAN 6: Selma, Alabama, 2006. A woman named Tarana Burke begins a movement to connect with other survivors of sexual abuse, most of them young women of colour. She frames her movement as a call:

PROJECTION: Me Too

WOMAN 5: Hollywood, 2017. Some of the most famous women in the world step forward to expose the harassment and abuse they've endured.

WOMAN 1: As the world struggles to understand—

WOMAN 8: How can this have gone on so long?

WOMAN 3: Why didn't someone say something?

WOMAN 5: Why didn't someone do something?

WOMAN 1: —those women pick up Tarana Burke's call.

WOMAN 4: In a day, from all over the world, five million of us answer:

ENSEMBLE: Me Too.

WOMAN 2: In the days and years that follow millions more of us tell
our story.

WOMAN 8: Like little dots joining up to make a picture.

WOMAN 3: The impulse, once it gets going, is not easily turned off.

WOMAN 8: The picture does not come to stillness; it *spreads* ...

WOMAN 1: ... in so many directions ...

WOMAN 3: ... with so many questions ...

WOMAN 1: ... about what women are actually living with.

WOMAN 4: We are here to join that conversation.

WOMAN 6: We are here, on land where women have kept and carried
stories for tens of thousands of years ...

WOMAN 2: ... to tell the stories of eight women,

WOMAN 6: And to hear together, the questions all our stories carry ...

WOMAN 4: Is this ever going to change?

WOMAN 5: Is this just the way things are?

WOMAN 8: Do we *accept* this?

WOMAN 6: Do we?

Pause.

WOMAN 7: Slow it down, pull it apart.

Observe.

Some parts are dying, and fighting not to die.

Other parts are coming to new life.

Deep in the dirt.

Sit.

They sit.

Listen.

Pause. Hearing the sound of the room.

[*Looking out across the audience*] Seeds. Waking.

PROJECTION: I'M WITH HER

NIKKI KEATING

Nikki Keating performed by WOMAN 1.

1.

NIKKI KEATING: Growing up, I didn't know what I wanted to be. The very loud, very excitable child.

Maybe an actor?

I kind of wanted to be heard. I knew I wanted to be heard.

She stands.

I was ten when I got my period for the first time.

At school, all the girls around me were little girls, but by eleven, I had a woman's body.

It was like being given a box of jigsaw pieces but not the cover of the box. You have no idea what it is you're making.

I remember once my Mum tapping at me, pulling my dress down. A man was watching me.

It was super confusing.

Something beautiful. Something wrong.

PROJECTION: Nikki Keating

Born Brisbane, 1994

Bartender

2.

NIKKI KEATING: On my résumé, it says bartender and then it lists my skills. Wine and cocktails, kegs and stock, audio and lights, first aid.

What doesn't get listed and what anyone working in hospitality will surely understand, is what we're actually dealing with.

There are all of these tiny little—how you would describe it?—all these moments that happen throughout the night. Most people come to a bar outside the nine to five, when the rest of the city clocks off. It's the place everyone comes to celebrate and to commiserate, and as the night goes on things just get a bit more loose and real.

I was eighteen when I first started working in bars. It looked like fun. I could drink! It seemed smart to me.

Some jobs I got on these [*pointing*], the basics: my Large Breasts. At the time, I absolutely thought I was being hired on merit. Hilarious. Looking back, no. No no no no no.

First thing I learnt—in every bar there's a dress code. For the guys it's all wear the same thing—good jeans, collared shirts. For the girls—and look, I've got no problem with showing skin—for girls, the uniform is basically tight enough so you can see my body. But [*wry laugh*] not so tight I can't bend and lift a keg.

By eighteen we're used to being looked at and commented on.

But what I couldn't understand, was being touched.

3.

NIKKI KEATING: [*at a clip, not too heavy*] Like one time, it was an after party of a wedding. I'm carrying a tray full of drinks and there's music playing. And this guy walks up to me in front of everyone and just drums on my breasts!

Another time, it was a bucks' party. I was sent to take their orders, this group of eighteen, twenty men, all standing around me. And suddenly, the guy next to me takes my face in his hands, and licks me—right across my face!

Just tried to ignore it. Keep it light. Not make it worse.

4.

NIKKI KEATING: So then I'm nineteen, I'm working in a German restaurant, and I have to wear the most embarrassing version of a dirndl you've ever seen. Like about seventy percent of my breasts are out. And this was a 'family restaurant'.

This one night—really busy Friday night, I'm picking up cocktails off the main bar. And I feel someone's fist push against my back and wedge me against the bar. I'm just like, fuck—don't spill the drinks. I was shocked. I was confused.

Like everything was going on and I—

I didn't react.

Pause.

I took the drinks to the table.

I'm extremely grateful for what happened next—it was the guys I worked with who stepped up. These guys, I doubt they fully understood what they saw on my face that night.

They just said, 'Are you okay?'

5.

NIKKI KEATING: My family said, 'Well, why don't you go and do something else?'

Dancing around saying—you're putting yourself in this position.

But I love being a bartender. I love the people I work with.

And—I'm trying to explain this to my Dad—the problem is the scariest part isn't in the bar, it's getting home at the end of the night.

It is such a mundane act—walking on the street, catching a bus. But I've been watched, followed, grabbed. I'll never understand why it happens to me so much.

And there are certain sentences you don't want to say out loud. All the times I was nearly raped.

So, you want me to quit? Where do I go? It's everywhere.

I just used anger, you know. Wore my make-up like war paint. You know when you go into a bar and the bartender is 'you are beneath me don't even look at me'—I did a lot of that.

6.

NIKKI KEATING: Fast forward four years, one night I'm sitting at knockoffs with a friend and she tells me the union has just done this survey on sexual harassment in hospitality.

Even hearing those two things in the same sentence—'sexual harassment' and 'hospitality'—it was like fireworks went off in my head.

The results were *so* dark. It was almost unbelievable. But actually, it was *real* for the first time, what was happening to me. It was happening to everyone.

I'd just worn this shit because I didn't entirely understand it. And over time that'd become—I'm wearing it because all the women around me are wearing it too.

Well that's a really dangerous place for us, if we all we do is stand together and wear it.

If we don't stand *against* it. But that's a huge thing to ask someone to do.

7.

NIKKI KEATING: Well, cue the dark shit.

Not because I wanted to be some sort of hero. The last thing I wanted was to be the face of sexual assault in hospitality...

PROJECTION: November 2017.

**Media Launch: United Voice Hospo Voice Campaign—
Respect Is the Rule**

Nikki Keating is the face of the campaign.

A PUBLIC SPEECH

NIKKI KEATING: When I was nineteen years old, I was working in a German restaurant, serving cocktails.

One night, I felt someone's fist in my back. I was wedged against the bar by someone I couldn't see.

I was confused. I was shocked. I didn't react.

Pause.

And in the middle of the restaurant, on a busy Friday night, this man put two fingers inside me.

I didn't look at him. I turned and walked the drinks to the table.

That signal at the back of our head that says: Don't react. That's not *consent*.

Pause.

This happens every day in hospitality. I have never gone a week without experiencing some level of sexual harassment or assault. Never once.

End of public speech.

8.

NIKKI KEATING: Next day, I got trolled online—of course.

I went to work that night. It was really difficult.

We didn't know what to expect in the bar. Who would come in. What would happen.

But actually, the really big thing happened *behind* the bar.

People started standing up around me.

A guy made a comment about my colleague's breasts and she just turned and repeated it as I was pouring a beer. And we both stopped and together we said to him:

NIKKI KEATING WITH WOMAN 2: Fuck off.

NIKKI KEATING: He said—What? We said:

ENSEMBLE: FUCK OFF.

NIKKI KEATING: I don't think that I caused that. I'm not saying that at all. But I think what everyone saw was that I had spoken up, and it didn't destroy me.

PROJECTION: Within a year, 60 venues across Melbourne took on the rules laid down by the Respect is the Rule campaign. Across Australia, a growing movement of hospitality workers continues to fight to do their work free from harassment.

9.

NIKKI KEATING: I mean, it doesn't have a happy ending. About six months later, I was sexually assaulted by a male patron near the bathrooms.

So, I still experience this, like I still experience it in every aspect of my life, it's just that at work, I didn't have to be the only one to deal with this guy, the whole bar swung into action against him.

The shit you get on the train, walking down the street, you can't always fight back.

That's why I still work in a bar. If it's gonna be my entire life then let's just do this, in here. Because otherwise, if my life was a book, it would be *The Things I Did While I Wasn't Being Assaulted*.

What an insane amount of pressure on your shoulders before you even walk out the door every day, you know?

PROJECTION: Image of young Nikki Keating; image of adult Nikki Keating.

JULIE BATES

Julie Bates performed by WOMAN 2.

1.

JULIE BATES: When the whole #MeToo thing erupted, we started asking ourselves—will we be included in this? Do we want to be?

People just say, well, what do you expect? They assume that if you're a sex worker you've given up your boundaries.

This is a big misunderstanding.

Sex work is work. It's not me throwing my legs in the air, love. It's exactly like you going to work: what you accept in your workplace as being fair and decent and right for you. This is what I negotiate in my workplace.

If we experience violence it isn't because we're sex workers, it's because we're women.

I mean this is what worries me—the young women doing social media pick-ups. The enthusiastic amateurs. They're doing pretty much what I'm doing, going to somebody's home or having them come to my place. Not having met them first.

You probably hope next morning you can boast about it to your girlfriends. That it was fun and you had a good time.

But as sex workers, we don't just go into a stranger's home and cross our fingers.

Nobody touches me without being invited. Nobody. And if they try it on they will be put in their place.

Other women could learn a lot from us. Sex workers are the queens really, of setting boundaries.

PROJECTION: Julie Bates

Born Melbourne, 1949

Lobbyist for Law Reform. Sex worker rights activist. Sex worker.