

Three Plays

by

Frank Hatherley

- | | |
|------------------------|-----|
| 1. MANLY MATES | 5 |
| 2. MY HENRY LAWSON | 107 |
| 3. OPEN FOR INSPECTION | 197 |





SYDNEY AUSTRALIA

Copyright © Frank Hatherley, 2015

This edition published in 2015 by DSPress, a division of
David Spicer Productions – www.davidspicer.com.au

ISBN 978-1-326-48679-2

All rights reserved

Copying for Educational Purposes: The Australian Copyright Act 1968 (Act) allows a maximum of one chapter or ten per cent of this book, whichever is greater, to be copied by an educational institution, for educational purposes, provided it has given a remuneration notice under the Copyright Agency Limited (CAL) under the Act. Except as permitted under the Act, for example a fair dealing for the purposes of study, research, criticism or review, no part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form without prior written permission from the publisher.

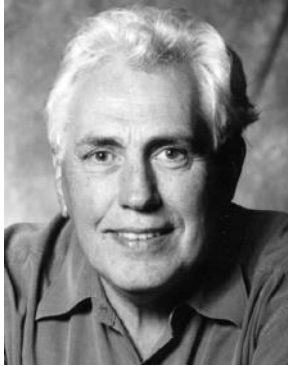
Performance: Any performance or public reading of ***Manly Mates***, ***My Henry Lawson*** or ***Open For Inspection*** is forbidden unless a license has been received from the author's agent. The purchase of this book in no way gives the purchaser the right to perform the plays.

For performance right contact:

David Spicer Productions
PO Box 2280, Rose Bay North, NSW 2030, Australia
Email enquiries to david@davidspicer.com
Website: <http://www.davidspicer.com.au/shows>
Phone: (+612) 93718458

INTRODUCTION

by Frank Hatherley



These three plays were first presented by the Peninsula Theatre Company, a group of enthusiasts whose unlikely base was The Community Centre, North Narrabeen, Sydney. It's not easy to get a new Australian play produced and it's virtually impossible to get a community theatre company to stage one. So I say three cheers for the Peninsulas who, under the crazed control of Michael Richmond and Bob Bolton, actually had a policy to do regular Australian drama, and new ones, too. They talked me into writing these three plays in three years, which was pretty amazing.

‘MANLY MATES’, by Frank Hatherley,
presented by the Peninsula Theatre Company,
November 2003.

Directed and designed by Frank Hatherley.
John Shearer as Keith; Erin Nevins as Pat;
Nev Dorrington as Key; Pamela Rome as Peg;
Michael Miller as Bob; Richard Womack as Norm;
Jennie Dibley as Mollie; Wendy Lewis as Virginia;
Greg Eccleston as Baz; Morgan Rouse as Brian;
Robert Sharpe as Joe.

‘MY HENRY LAWSON’, by Frank Hatherley,
presented by the Peninsula Theatre Company,
August-September 2002.

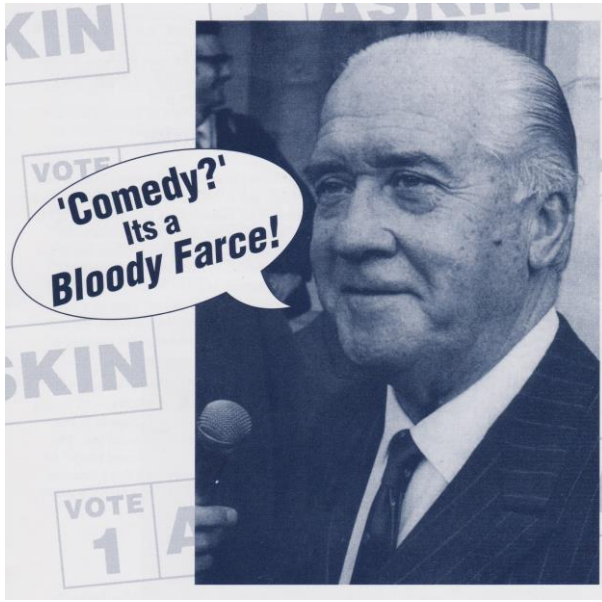
Directed and designed by Frank Hatherley.
Trudi Boatwright as Bertha;
Michael Richmond as Paterson;
Greg Eccleston as Lawson

‘OPEN FOR INSPECTION’, by Frank Hatherley,
presented by the Peninsula Theatre Company,
November 2000.

Directed by June Lees. Set designed by Frank
Hatherley, June Lees and Michael Richmond.
Sophie Carter as Hattie; Bob Bolton as Paul;
Kerry Borthwick as Griselda;
John Shearer as Ralph; Sue Carter as Victoria;
Bob Crowley as Guy; Kate Butler as Tina;
Cliff Bowles as Chook.

MANLY MATES

A Comedy



CAST

Keith, 43
Pat, 23
Key, 40
Norm, 62
Bob, 63
Mollie, 61
Peg, 55
Virginia, 32
Baz, 26
Brian, 23
Joe, 45

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Bob, Norm, Molly and Kitty have some basis in historical reality, though everything they say and do is pure invention. All other characters, events, schemes and embarrassments are entirely fictional.

SCENES

A private bar, The Hotel Manly, January 8th, 1972.

ACT ONE

1. Morning 2. Noon

ACT TWO

3. Afternoon 4. Night

SETTING

This first-floor room, once a handsome Art Deco 'Cocktail Bar', is now reserved for 'special occasions'. No longer plush – in fact in urgent need of redecoration – it contains three low tables and numerous scattered chairs, and two bar stools before a once-impressive bar. A large photograph with its own brass lighting unit hangs over the bar: a group of smiling men on a fishing trip hold the tentacles of a large dead octopus. There's a main door u/s which leads to the hallway and stairs, and a trophy cabinet d/s with numerous cups and photographs of rugby league teams and fishing expeditions. A raised platform features an old upright piano: this area is used for 'shows'. A door at the rear of the platform leads to a WC: a handmade sign says BLOKES. There are pictures of the Queen and Prime Minister McMahon. Windows to a spectacular view fill the 'fourth wall', facing the audience.

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

10 a.m. The room hasn't been cleaned since New Year's Eve celebrations the previous weekend. Some homemade decorations are still in place, including the words 'WELCOME 1972'. There's the sound of a key in the door lock. When they appear – KEITH is wearing a floral shirt, shorts, long socks, sandals; PAT is in a too-tight bar 'uniform' buttoned down the front, hair piled up, mini skirt, high heels, lurid handbag.

KEITH: *(entering)* This is the 'Octopus Room'. Sometimes we hire it out for meetings, but mostly it's for Saturdays – *(his first sight of the mess)* Shit!

PAT: What?

KEITH: Scuse my French.

PAT: *(looking about)* Happy New Year.

KEITH: Nobody's bloody been in here since last weekend.

PAT: Looks like you all had a good time.

KEITH: Bloody Dot.

PAT: Someone's left a trophy on the trophy cabinet.

A large pair of panties hangs from the cabinet. KEITH goes to them.

KEITH: I told her to make sure the Octopus was done before she buggered off.

PAT: Naughty Dot.

KEITH: She couldn't get to Surfers quick enough, silly tart. *(Holds up the panties.)* Our latest trophy.

PAT: Some party.

KEITH: *(shoving them in cabinet)* Betta believe it.

PAT: (*changing subject*) I've been to Surfers. Goovy place.

KEITH: (*moves to decorations*) There's some big talent quest on.

PAT: Is she any good?

KEITH: Sings like a cockatoo.

PAT: Ah. (*Of the room*) Musty, isn't it.

KEITH: (*points*) The toilet here's for men only, or the 'visiting talent'. Plumbing's packed up. Ladies down the corridor to the right.

PAT: Do I have to wear this tight outfit?

KEITH: (*casual*) Undo the top button if you like.

PAT: (*she does, moving downstage*) Wow, look at the view! Over the wharf and up the harbour. I've always loved this old building.

KEITH is pulling down decorations.

KEITH: Come on, darlin, we've only got a few minutes before they start arriving.

PAT: What's this? A stage?

KEITH: Sometimes we have entertainment.

PAT: This is such a terrific old room. And there's the octopus!

She goes behind bar, puts down her handbag, clicks on overhead display light, inspects photograph.

Who are all these blokes? Oh, wait a tick, hey, there's you!

KEITH: Can you start work now, please.

PAT: (*starts clearing decorations round the bar*)

Did you really catch that octopus?

KEITH: No, but we paid for the fella that did. We had some Yanks with us.

PAT: It's a monster.

KEITH: Some sort of Australian record.

PAT: Groovy.

KEITH: Put all the crap in a heap.

PAT: When do the customers come?

KEITH: Hard to say today, blokes off on their holidays.

PAT: Like Dot.

KEITH: Dot hasn't missed a Saturday since – God knows when – since she twisted herself at some Amateur Night at Dee Why.

PAT: Sounds painful.

KEITH: She rocks and she rolls does our Dot.

PAT: Dances, too, eh?

KEITH: How's *your* performance skills?

PAT: In the shower I'm a sensation.

KEITH: I bet you are.

PAT: You'll never know.

KEITH: (*serious*) Look, it's pretty important, Sat'dees up the Octopus. Pattie, isn't it?

PAT: Patricia.

KEITH: Call me Keith.

PAT: Right, Keith.

KEITH: It's not just the business, Pat. These are my mates.

PAT: Right, Keith.

KEITH: Just... string em along a bit, eh, Pat... keep em smiling.

PAT: Like Dot does.

KEITH: It's a sort of a trial for you, okay?

PAT: A test run.

KEITH: My mates can be very generous if they like you.

PAT: Sounds good, Keith.

KEITH: (*moves to trophy cabinet*) I'll get something to put the decorations in.

PAT: Oh, wow.

KEITH has 'opened' the entire cabinet – it swings back on a hinge – revealing a hidden doorway through which he exits.

That's so spooky.

KEITH: (*off, with clicks*) Bloody bulb's gone!

PAT: What's it for in there?

KEITH: *(returning with cardboard box)* It's our bolt hole. Most old Sydney hotels've got one somewhere.

They load the box with decorations.

PAT: A 'bolt hole'?

KEITH: Leads out to the yard. We haven't used it for bolting in years.

PAT: Who would you want to bolt from?

KEITH: Exactly, these days the local cops are well on-side.

PAT: Good to know.

KEITH: It's a storeroom now, full of paint tins and ladders. And we keep a couch for afternoon naps. Wanna have a look?

PAT: I'll take your word for it.

KEITH: *(moving to the exit with box)* Bucket and mop's in here as well. You'll need em before the day's over.

PAT: Oh?

KEITH: I'll bring em in behind the bar.

OFF: crash, bang!

Shit! Remind me to get a bulb.

PAT takes the chance to have a closer look at the men in the photograph. She scribbles in a small notebook.

PAT: Oh, oh, yes!

She covers up as KEITH enters with mop and bucket.

KEITH: There's a bottle of strong bleach in the bucket. And some rubber gloves.

PAT: Groovy. So why are the local police 'well on-side'?

KEITH looks at her: she realises she's overstepped.

No, I mean, why wouldn't they be? On our side. *(He's still looking.)* I've got a boyfriend who's a

policeman. I'm thinking of dumping him, actually. His gun makes me nervous.

KEITH: *(breaks away)* Really.

He places the bucket beside the bar, returns to close the cabinet.

PAT: *(persisting)* I'm sure I recognise one of your friends in this photograph, Keith. Isn't that -?

KEITH: Pat.

PAT: Patricia.

KEITH: You ask too many bloody questions.

PAT: Sorry.

KEITH: This is a private room for a private gathering of mates, alright? The Octopus Room. It's a sort of a club. We meet every Saturday, nobody bothers us, nobody asks questions. Today I'm short of my regular barmaid, Dotty old Dot, so I've asked you, Pat, to fill in, even though you've only been at the Hotel Manly a few weeks. I like you. I like the look of you. Where you from?

PAT: Brookvale.

KEITH: You'll do fine. Serve the beer and the whisky on request, keep your smile bright, your nose clean, and please undo another button on your uniform. It'll help you with your tips. Oh. Tips go in here, in this bowl.

He crosses to fetch large ornate bowl from the piano.

PAT: That should hold a bit.

KEITH: And when it's full Dot does her little act.

PAT: I'm really not that sort of barmaid.

KEITH: *(challenging)* I've seen you giving blokes the eye. Sniffing about. Looking for action.

She doesn't respond.

Do you want to stay or not? I can easily go downstairs and pull someone else off the public bar.

PAT: I'm in.

To show acceptance, she undoes another button.

KEITH: Good girl. *(He pats her bottom as he passes to the bar. She has to bear it.)*

Everything's ready for you here. Beer glasses, middies only. Nobody pays unless I say so. Keep your tips bowl on your tray at all times. Oh, and the phones will be arriving during the morning.

PAT: Phones?

KEITH: Is that another question?

PAT: Sorry.

KEV arrives, fag in mouth, besuited, with fat briefcase and rolls of architect's plans. PAT escapes behind the bar.

KEV: G'day, mate.

KEITH: G'day, Kev. You look flushed.

KEV: Hot. Been to a bloody meeting at Fairlight. Absolute waste of time. Could've been with Shirl.

KEITH: How's she going?

KEV: Due any minute according to her mum.

He takes a colourful shirt from his briefcase and proceeds to take off his suit jacket, tie and white business shirt.

KEITH: How'd it go?

KEV: This drongo reckons his view's gonna be 'impeded'. *(Prissy voice)* "Oo, no, your block will impede my view." He's got lawyers and some committee of local whingers all lined up. They keep telling me I'm in the wrong bloody zone.

KEITH: Didn't you check before you bought?

KEV: There's a bloody big development rig on the other side of the road.

KEITH: Probably in another zone.

KEV: I told this bloke, Mr. Impeded: we can all

make a dollar here, mate. Wait and see how high I'm going then build higher!

KEITH: Have a drink, mate. *(Beckons to PAT.)*

KEV: Gotta get the place rezoned, mate. Can't hang about paying loads of interest. I've overspent bigtime. I'll bring it up at Council, move a motion.

PAT arrives just as KEV strips to the waist.

PAT: Can I get you a drink, sir?

KEV: Who's this?

KEITH: She's new, just for today.

KEV: Where's Dot?

KEITH: On one of her quests.

KEV: Oh, right. *(He appraises PAT.)*

PAT: Can I?

KEV: Mmm?

PAT: Drink?

KEV: Middy, love.

PAT: *(big smile)* Coming right up. *(Returns to bar.)*

KEV: *(gazing, to KEITH)* Where'd you find her?

KEITH: Downstairs.

KEV: *(so she can hear)* Get her to undo a button.

(He resumes donning his 'Saturday shirt'.)

Thing is, mate, if I do get it rezoned, every bludger around's gonna fling up units and mine won't be so exclusive. D'ya think that matters?

KEITH: How much are you asking per unit?

KEV: 45, 50 grand.

PAT: *(shocked, arriving with the beer)* 50 thousand dollars for a unit!

KEV: Yeah?

KEITH: *(warning)* Hey –

KEV: In the market, are you, darlin'?

PAT: How many bedrooms?

KEV: *(taking the beer)* One'd be enough for us, I reckon. What's your name?

PAT: Patricia.

KEV: Beauty, Pat. My name's Kev. Here's a little something for yourself, first of the day by the look of it.

He drops pocketful of change into the tips bowl, watches her reaction.

PAT: *(noncommittal)* Thanks, Kev.

He watches her walk away.

KEV: Beauty. *(He folds his jacket, shirt and tie into the briefcase.)* Should be quite intimate today. Gordo's gone to Kiama with the kids. Don't suppose Bob's gonna make it today, or 'Sir Robert', as we'll all have to bloody call him from now on.

KEITH: I'm not expecting him.

KEV: He'll be swankin off with Mollie if it's Randwick.

KEITH: I think it's Canterbury.

KEV: Any good tips yet?

KEITH: Not yet, mate.

KEV: I could do with a couple of certs, mate, I can tell you.

KEITH: You and me both.

KEV: Sometimes a cert – I mean, a really solid Octopus cert – is as good as a suitcase full of money. Got another tricky meeting after lunch. Harbord. Every bugger's into property all of a sudden.

KEITH: *(loudly, as a warning to KEV)* G'day, Norm. *NORM has entered, ramrod straight, horn rimmed glasses, dressed in pressed summer safari suit, heavy gold bracelet and rings. He carries a newspaper racing form guide.*

NORM: Morning, gentlemen.

KEV: How's the form, Norm? We're both desperate for inside info.

NORM: Oi. What's the suit trousers for?



Bertha Lawson with Joseph ('Jim'), 1889

MY HENRY LAWSON

A Drama

CAST

Bertha Lawson
A.B. 'Banjo' Paterson
Henry Lawson

SCENES

Prologue. NSW Poetry Society. July 1923

1. Paterson's Office, Bond St, Sydney. April 1896
2. Beside a Creek, West Perth. August 1896
3. The Lawsons Flat, North London. March 1902
4. Rented House, Manly, Sydney. December 1902
5. Cliff Top, North Head, Sydney. December 1902
6. Public Ward, Sydney Hospital. December 1902

Epilogue. The Poetry Society Meeting

The play is written to be performed without an interval.

PROLOGUE

July, 1923. BERTHA LAWSON, black-shawled, prim-hatted, a well-covered 46, addresses a meeting of the New South Wales Poetry Association.

BERTHA: My Henry Lawson was regarded by many - certainly by me - as the greatest poet our great nation ever produced, though I never heard him refer to himself as such a thing. 'Poet' was too high-falutin' for my Henry Lawson. He preferred something more working-class - like 'scribbler' or 'spinner of yarns'. In conversation with that other giant of Australian verse and balladry, Andrew Barton Paterson - 'The Banjo', as we know him - I have heard Lawson call himself a 'pote' - p.o.t.e. - which I took to be some kind of more acceptable colonial beast. A 'bloke' who instinctively shunned and derided 'po-ets' might comfortably share a drink with a 'pote'. And, alas, my Henry Lawson shared drinks with many 'blokes'. But this is not an occasion for biographical reminiscence. My first selection from the poetical legacy of my Henry Lawson dates from our early life together. I venture to suggest that my contribution to 'After All' was not insignificant. This, then, must date from 1896.

She reads with exaggerated effect:
The brooding ghosts of Australian night
 have gone from the bush and town;
My spirit revives in the morning breeze,
 though it died when the sun went down;
The river is high and the stream is strong
 and the grass is green and tall,
And I fain would think that this world of ours
 is a good world after all.

*Now the lighting dims, and the set is
changing. BERTHA is assisted in her costume
change. From under the formal outfit a young
girl emerges.*

It well may be that I saw too plain,
 and it may be I was blind;
But I'll keep my face to the dawning light
 though the devil may stand behind!
Though the devil may stand behind my back,
 I'll not see his shadow fall
But read the signs in the morning stars
 of a good world after all.

Rest, for your eyes are weary, girl –
 you have driven the worst away –
The ghost of the man that I might have been
 is gone from my heart today;
We'll live for life and the best it brings
 till our twilight shadows fall;
My heart grows brave, and the world,
 my girl, is a good world after all.

Sounds of horses on cobbles.

SCENE ONE

April, 1896. A solicitor's cluttered room at the offices of Street and Paterson, 24 Bond Street, central Sydney. ANDREW BARTON PATERSON, a handsome 33, well-groomed though now with coat removed and sleeves turned up, sits at his busy desk, making notes from a bundle of papers and correspondence. Unseen by him, BERTHA enters - 19, attractive, shy. Eventually, he looks up.

PATERSON: This is Street and Paterson.

BERTHA: Yes.

PATERSON: Solicitors.

BERTHA: Yes.

PATERSON: Do you have an appointment?

BERTHA: Yes.

PATERSON: You do?

BERTHA: Actually, yes.

PATERSON: With Mr. Street? He's -

BERTHA: With Mr. Paterson.

PATERSON: I'm Mr. Paterson.

BERTHA: I know.

PATERSON: I'm not expecting you.

BERTHA: Oh, dear.

PATERSON: I have but one client this afternoon
and he's so late I've given him up for dead.

BERTHA: Yes.

PATERSON: What was to have been the nature of
your visit?

BERTHA: I'm not sure.

Impasse. Bertha looks about the room.

*Paterson looks at her appreciatively: she is
confident of her attractions.*

PATERSON: Well - Miss -

BERTHA: Is this the 'dingy little office'?

PATERSON: Ah.

BERTHA: 'Where a stingy ray of sunlight struggles
feebly down between the houses high?'

PATERSON: (*correcting*) 'Houses tall'.

BERTHA: 'And the foetid air and gritty of the
dusty, dirty city/ Through the open window
floating, spreads its foulness over all?'

PATERSON: This is it.

BERTHA: I think you were exaggerating a touch.

PATERSON: Poet's license.

BERTHA: I've heard about that.

PATERSON: Most unsuitable in a solicitor.

BERTHA: (*flirtatious*) Surely not.

PATERSON: Facts, facts, facts, that's what's
wanted.

BERTHA: 'The round eternal of the cash-book and
the journal'.

PATERSON: You've read my book, Miss -

BERTHA: Who has not?

PATERSON: That's very gratifying.

She looks out the window.

BERTHA: 'My window-sill is level with the faces in
the street'...

PATERSON: Ah. That's not mine.

BERTHA: I know.

He's baffled, but enjoying himself.

PATERSON: Well. My luck's in. An attractive
young lady has arrived for a non-existent
appointment highly conversant with the new go
in Australian poetry.

BERTHA: Thank you for the compliment, kind sir,
but I assure you I do have an appointment.

PATERSON: Oh?

BERTHA: With my husband.

PATERSON: Your husband.

BERTHA: He's rather late.

PATERSON: Who is rather late?

BERTHA: My husband.

PATERSON: (*prompting*) Who is...?

BERTHA: I am Mrs Henry Lawson. (*Offering her hand*) How do you do.

He smiles, doesn't take her hand.

PATERSON: I don't think you are.

BERTHA: Indeed?

PATERSON: I think not. I know Mr. Lawson pretty well. I've acted for him on several occasions, drunk with him, swapped ballads with him. If you, pretty young Miss, were his wife, believe me, I would know about it.

BERTHA: Nevertheless, it is so.

PATERSON: How long have you been married?

BERTHA: Three days.

PATERSON: Where were you married?

BERTHA: Weldon's Matrimonial Agency.

PATERSON: In Phillip Street?

BERTHA: Next to the Hotel Metropole.

PATERSON: That tallies.

PATERSON: 'Harry'?

BERTHA: We love each other very much.

PATERSON: What does his mother say?

BERTHA: She doesn't know yet. Neither does mine.

PATERSON: Louisa will certainly have something to say if it is so.

BERTHA: It is so.

PATERSON: How long have you known Mr. Lawson... Harry?

BERTHA: For six months. My mother runs MacNamara's Bookshop in Castlereagh Street.

PATERSON: Your mother married old MacNamara?

BERTHA: I came up from Gippsland to be with them.

PATERSON: How's the book trade?

BERTHA: Yours is selling very well.

PATERSON: What about Harry's?

BERTHA: He's hot on your tracks. 'Then fast the horsemen followed where the gorges deep and black/ Resounded to the thunder of their tread...'

PATERSON: (*a trick question*) Harry's been in New Zealand, hasn't he?

BERTHA: Yes, he went there to escape from me.

PATERSON: It didn't work.

BERTHA: (*shrugs*) He came back. He'd written me a pome. One week later we were married.

PATERSON: Some pome.

BERTHA: 'We'll live for life and the best it brings till our twilight shadows fall/ My heart grows brave, and the world, my girl, is a good world after all.'

Pause. He is forced to concede.

PATERSON: Well... Mrs Lawson... and you don't know what this meeting is all about?

BERTHA: Something about money, I believe.

PATERSON: (*quickly*) I can't give him any money.

BERTHA: Harry has plans.

PATERSON: What makes him think that I can give him money?

BERTHA: All will be revealed...

PATERSON: Where is he now?

BERTHA: I'm afraid I don't know.

PATERSON: His appointment was for two o'clock.

BERTHA: I know.

PATERSON: It's now well past three.

BERTHA: He was to meet someone at Angus and Robertson at midday and then join me outside on Bond Street at two.

PATERSON: Have you been waiting on the street for over an hour?

BERTHA: It's of no consequence.

PATERSON: My dear girl, you should have come straight inside.

BERTHA: I did not want to disturb you.

PATERSON: Not in the least. You could have sat down, thumbed through the afternoon rags, the ghastly 'News', had a cup of tea. Would you like one now?

BERTHA: No, thank you.

PATERSON: Sit down immediately. Is there anything I can get you?

BERTHA: Well...

PATERSON: Yes?

BERTHA: I wonder...

The noise of someone's approach puts her off.

It's all right, thank you.

VOICE: Are you there, love? Cooee! Has anyone seen my little woman?

PATERSON: She's in here, Harry.

HENRY LAWSON bursts in - 28, tall, thin, elated, only slightly inebriated.

LAWSON: Christ, I thought for a minute I'd lost her. Hello, my lovely.

He hugs her, kisses her, lifts her off the floor.

Paterson, uncomfortable, puts on his jacket.

BERTHA: I thought I'd come inside, dearest -

LAWSON: Married three days and lost her already! My best aggie down the drain! (*Breaks, holds her at arm's length*) Isn't she something. Look at her.

PATERSON: She is certainly something...

BERTHA: Where have you been, dearest?

LAWSON: Lunch, business, ten quid from Old Stoneface as a wedding present. 'Hoots, mon, the ver-r-ry best t'yer both!' Ten quid, what do you think of that?

BERTHA: That's perfect, Harry. The rent.

LAWSON: Yes, yes, there's plenty left. Bartie, how are you? What say you of the young Mrs Lawson?

PATERSON: I'm - so happy for you.

LAWSON: This is 'The Banjo', Bertha. Some say he's my rival, I say he's a true mate and ink-stained colleague. Bertha, Banjo; Banjo, Bertha.

BERTHA: Hello.

PATERSON: We've met.

LAWSON: I'm a married man. I can hardly believe it.

PATERSON: I wasn't invited to the ceremony.

LAWSON: Nobody was invited to the ceremony. It was a spur of the moment affair. For lovers only.

PATERSON: Not even your mother, I hear?

LAWSON: Louisa? God, no, she'd have had us lined up behind the blood-red banners with a phalanx of the Sisterhood. No Karl Marx, no God, just my little Bertha and me. In this very dress, too, green with red poppies, me in my masher suit, altogether wonderful. I had to borrow a quid to pay the parson. How are you, Bartie? How's business?

PATERSON: Boring. I've spent most of the day trying to screw money out of a poor soul who clearly hasn't got any.

LAWSON: How's turnover?

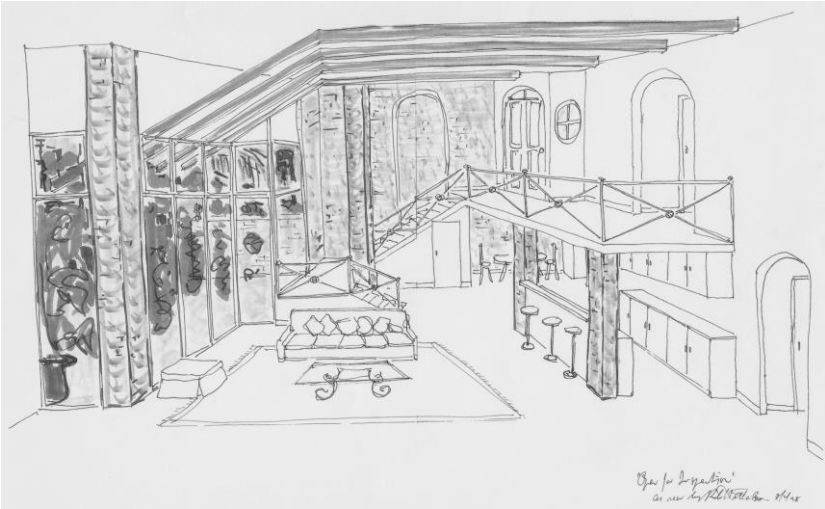
PATERSON: Modest.

LAWSON: How much to ask your opinion these days?

PATERSON: An opinion in this room starts at six-and-eight. In writing, a guinea.

LAWSON: *(at the window)* Where are you living?

PATERSON: Actually, I'm renting a flat just across the road there. Down to the left.



Setting for 'Open For Inspection'
by Robert Hatherley



The FabAbs Activator, Act Two

OPEN FOR INSPECTION

A Farce

CAST

The Estate Agent
HATTIE FROME

The Owners
PAUL PALMER
GRISELDA QUICK-PALMER

The Prospective Buyers
RALPH GUTTERIDGE
VICTORIA GUTTERIDGE
GUY PEARSON
TINA SPACEY

The Outsider
CHARLIE TOOK ('CHOOK')

SCENES

ACT ONE

1. 1st Saturday Open Day, 1.30 pm
2. The Same, 2.40 pm
3. 2nd Saturday Open Day, 11.30 am
4. The Same, 1.55 pm
5. The Same, 3.05 pm

ACT TWO

6. Wednesday Evening, 3rd Week, 8.00 pm
7. Final Saturday, 1.15 pm
8. The Same, 2.00 pm

SETTING

The open-plan living area of a semi-detached 70's house "delivering a quality lifestyle" in Kirribilli, Sydney. An exposed wooden pillar meets a wooden crossbeam which runs the width of the room. On the bare brick wall facing us is a large painting of yachts on the Harbour, brightly presented in the Ken Done style. An expensive white sofa faces the view. Steps up-right lead to a landing and half-glazed front door. Bedrooms and bathrooms are off-stage up-left, the kitchen is off-stage down-left. There's a patio/verandah for "harbour glimpses" over the heads of the audience on a down-stage extension which also leads to the door to the basement area and back garden.

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

The set is bathed in strong Sydney sunlight. CHOOK is asleep on the sofa, though it's easy to miss him among the cushions. A key in the front door lock. In comes HATTIE, with her fat briefcase, her pile of leaflets, her Catchpole & Co. free-standing 'Open For Inspection' board. She dumps the board on the landing, can't wait to make a call on her mobile phone, one button press.

HATTIE: Hi, Trixie, how's it going, is he in? Yes, I know it's lunchtime, tell me about it. I'm at Kirribilli, the Orange Street semi, 2 till 2.45, then I'm at Neutral Bay for 3, God knows how. Any action on McMahons Point? Shit. Ok, no problem, please ring Mr Lee Pong and ask him politely when the decorators are due. I know he's run out of money, but at least the show flat's got to look finished. And then get Blair to call me. Has mother rung? Well, that's a blessing. Oh... *(she looks down from the balcony)* ...they want 1.2, worth about 850, 875...open plan, 70's, lots of exposed brick, wooden beams, Ken Done painting, someone asleep on the bloody sofa... no, it's all right, see you later. Tell Blair to call me.

HATTIE disconnects, comes down the stairs, approaches CHOOK.

Excuse me, sir, sir, who are you and why are you here? Sir...

CHOOK: Oh, sorry.

HATTIE: That's ok, no worries.

CHOOK: Sorry about that.

HATTIE: I'm from Catchpole's.

CHOOK: Must've dropped off.
HATTIE: The estate agents?
CHOOK: I only got here this morning.
HATTIE: How did you get in?
CHOOK: I've got a key.
HATTIE: Are you... expected?
CHOOK: Oh, yeah, any time I was passing through.
HATTIE: Great, well, Mr. and Mrs Palmer will be here at about 3, after the Open Day, and you can sort it all out then.
CHOOK: Bonza.
HATTIE: But I really must insist that you take your shoes off the lovely white sofa, and we plump up the cushions, and you make yourself scarce for about 90 minutes.
CHOOK: I can do that.
CHOOK gets up. He is not dressed like a relative of Mr. Palmer's.
HATTIE: Are you... a relative?
CHOOK: I'm his cousin.
HATTIE: Is that right.
CHOOK: He won't be at all surprised to find me here, in fact he'll be amazed.
HATTIE considers this, decides not to continue.
HATTIE: Where shall we put your bag?
CHOOK: I've been away a bit, here and there, but he gave me the key, here it is, and told me to look him up any time I was passing through.
HATTIE: Passing through Kirribilli?
CHOOK: Where's that?
HATTIE: How did you get here?
CHOOK: On the ferry.
HATTIE: Look, people are due here in about 20 minutes, Mr...
CHOOK: Chook.

HATTIE: ...Chook, because your cousin's house is up for sale...

CHOOK: Oh, Jeeze.

HATTIE: ...and prospective buyers don't want to see visiting relatives asleep on the nice sofa, right. The place wants to be spick and span and absolutely without a tiny problem of any kind whatsoever...

CHOOK: I know.

HATTIE: ...so clear off, and, when you come back, the Palmers will be here.

CHOOK: Who are they?

HATTIE: *(after a beat)* Are you sure you're expected?

CHOOK: I've got the key.

HATTIE: Well, excuse me, I've got to get things going, open a few windows, put on the military CD...

HATTIE busies herself.

CHOOK: I like this painting.

HATTIE: Really.

CHOOK: My nephew used to paint boats like that. At kindergarten. I'm a bit of an artist meself.

HATTIE: I can't chat, Chook.

CHOOK: Buying and selling houses is rough. I've seen people go completely crazy over houses.

HATTIE: That's true. I've got a Gentleman from Hong Kong about to slash his wrists any minute.

CHOOK: Yeah?

HATTIE: He's built this huge block of units and suddenly he needs to get his money back.

CHOOK: I helped a mate sell a house once. He tarted it all up, spent a fortune on paint, and he got back far less than what he paid. He was very stressed.

HATTIE: What did you do?

CHOOK: How'd'ya mean?

HATTIE: Are you a... painter?

CHOOK: Oh, no. My job was to get rid of the previous tenants.

HATTIE: How did you do that?

CHOOK: Nothing too heavy. They were old.

HATTIE: Right.

HATTIE is nervous. CHOOK looks around.

CHOOK: You gotta admit, Big Jack had good taste.

HATTIE: Who's he?

CHOOK: Big Jack, he built this place, I used to work for him, too.

HATTIE: Oh?

CHOOK: Man of business, old Jack, fingers in pies everywhere, whole fists, really. Elbows all over the table.

HATTIE: Did you 'get rid' of anyone for Big Jack?

CHOOK: Sometimes.

HATTIE: I wonder if you could go now...

CHOOK has moved to the pile of real estate leaflets stacked by HATTIE. He picks one up and reads out loud.

CHOOK: 'Superbly spacious harbourside semi delivers a quality lifestyle... filled with sunlight and birdlife...' Shit, eh? Where's this?

HATTIE: Here.

CHOOK: '...huge built-ins', whatever that means, 'stone gas log fireplace... dining space adjoining dream kitchen crafted from American Oak...'

HATTIE: Want to buy?

CHOOK: *(walks to patio as he reads)* 'Step through a wall of glass doors into a tropical paradise of a garden, with a big blue pool... stunning harbour glimpses.'

HATTIE: *(joining him on patio)* Good, eh.

CHOOK: How much they want?

HATTIE: Guess.

CHOOK: I haven't got a clue, a million?

HATTIE: Close.

CHOOK: You're joking.

HATTIE: 1.2 million, to be exact. That's the reserve.

CHOOK: What, for a fake log fire? Where's the 'harbour glimpse', then?

HATTIE points left, looking over the audience.

HATTIE: See? Between those two trees, the palm and gum?

CHOOK: Oh, yeah. Water.

HATTIE: *(moving to the right)* You can see the bridge at night, apparently, over there, when the lights shine through the jungle.

CHOOK: Easy pickings, eh?

HATTIE: Well, you've got to own it first. Buy it at the right time, sell it at the right time, then buy another one with a better view.

CHOOK: Bugger the 'glimpses'?

HATTIE: View, view, view - that's what matters round here. Next up are 'stunning vistas', then 'spectacular panoramas' and, finally, whoopee, 'absolute deep waterfront grandeur'.

CHOOK: What would that be worth?

HATTIE: Anything up to 12 million.

CHOOK: I'm in the wrong game.

HATTIE: If you had twenty million I could sell you a slightly unfinished development the other side of the bridge with views to die for.

CHOOK: Good prospect, eh?

HATTIE: Spare yourself the heart attacks. Look, Chook, can you go, please. In ten minutes this will be our first Open Day, 2 till 2.45.

CHOOK: How many do you have?

HATTIE: Three Saturdays, three Wednesdays, then there's an on-site auction on the fourth

Saturday.

CHOOK: I was an auctioneer once.

HATTIE: Really?

CHOOK: Dairy cattle. Back in Taree, lots of flies, I couldn't stick it.

HATTIE: Where will you go for 90 minutes?

CHOOK: I'll just hang round the front.

HATTIE: Your cousin won't appreciate that, believe me.

CHOOK: He'll be right.

HATTIE: Got any money?

CHOOK: What for?

HATTIE: Here's five bucks. There's a coffee bar down on the wharf.

CHOOK: Any pubs?

HATTIE: Leave your bag here. Hide it in the kitchen.

He takes his battered grip and exits to the kitchen while Hattie continues her preparations.

CHOOK: *(returning)* Thank you.

HATTIE: Not a problem.

CHOOK: I put it in a cupboard. Well, here I go, *(moves up the stairs)* looking out for 'coffee glimpses'. *(At the door, a definite menace)* But I'll be back.

HATTIE watches him go. She checks her watch, reaches for her mobile, calls.

HATTIE: Me again. Is Blair...? Shit, sorry, but shit, he's so... unreliable. What? No, he was a relative, I think... Talking of relatives... did Mother ring? Yes, yes, I'll bring her home a Paddle Pop, yes, a chocolate Paddle Pop... McMahons Point? Well, if he's so broke he's gotta drop the price! Bugger, I need the points, Trixie, I really, really need the points, ok? Tell Blair to call me as soon as he gets in. Nobody

yet, I'm just putting the bloody board out. Bye.

She disconnects, switches on some military music on her CD player, struggles out the front door with the 'Open For Inspection' board. Fade.

In the darkness, the military music swells.