



MELANIE TAIT is an award-winning playwright, journalist, author and radio-maker. Her plays include *The Vegemite Tales*, *The Appleton Ladies' Potato Race* and *A Broadcast Coup*. Melanie worked for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation as a journalist for twelve years and has written for *Guardian Australia*, *Guardian UK*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *Island Magazine*, *Mamamia* and *news.com.au*. Melanie curated the much-lauded live storytelling series *Now Hear This*, which she presented on ABC Radio National for five years. She lives in Sydney with her two extremely naughty little dogs, Mabel and Goldie.

THE  
**APPLETON**  
LADIES'  
POTATO  
RACE  
MELANIE TAIT



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enquiries@currency.com.au

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## CHARACTERS

PENNY ANDERSON, 38–45, GP, recently returned to Appleton after a long time away

BEV ARMSTRONG, 60–75, Appleton Show Society President

BARB LING, 60–75, Appleton Show Society Secretary and aunt to Penny and Nikki

NIKKI ARMSTRONG, 38–45, Appleton Ladies' Potato Race Champion and hairdresser

RANIA HAMID, 30–45, artist, Appleton Ladies' Potato Race Champion and new Appletonian

## TRANSITION

*The sun is rising on a beautiful, idyllic day in Appleton, the very dream, the picture postcard (!) of country life.*

*Maybe signs drop down to the stage: 'Welcome to Appleton! Population 1,557'; 'Appleton—a tidy town since 1987!'; 'Appleton, Australia's Best Potatoes!'*

*PENNY, 40, is neatly and conservatively dressed. She's gearing up for her first day in a new surgery. In her old home town. She's very much alone, but also nervous, excited, but on the whole confident about 'changing lives'.*

*The following are voice-overs, except for PENNY.*

STING: *[a sung radio jingle]* Apple-ton home of the pot-a-to!

This is our commu-nity rad-yo!

Potato FM!

RADIO ANNOUNCER: *[your standard baby boomer who loves the guts out of his own voice]* Giddy up, Appleton, time to get out of bed for a new day in our little highland paradise! Call in to Bazza's Bulletin Board and let me know what's happening in your street!

TALKBACK 1: Crop swap's this weekend.

TALKBACK 2: Home-grown only, Baz. Bring store-bought and you'll be banned for three weeks ...

TALKBACK 1: And, yairs, I'm looking at you, Doris Pearce—

TALKBACK 2: Is it me? Oh! It's me! Yep, g'day. Please. Can we all stick to the speed limits this morning?

PENNY: *[to the audience, she's a talkback caller, but we're experiencing her live, as she speaks into her mobile phone]* Penny Anderson here! Or should I say, Doctor Penny Anderson? I'm the new GP in town! I'm so excited about being back here, back in my home town, and I wanted to let you know the surgery opens this morning and every morning at eight a.m. Bulk billing as usual. No freckle too small, nothing leaky too embarrassing! Bring me your boils, your pus and your asthma attacks./ I want to see them all!

RADIO ANNOUNCER: Yep, righto, next caller.

TALKBACK 3: Yeah, Bluey's Staffy's out again. I'm callin' the council if that f—/

RADIO ANNOUNCER: Keep it clean, not far from the news.

TALKBACK 4: [*posh voice*] Long-time listener, Barry, first-time caller—thinking about abandoning the Spit Bridge at peak hour for the quiet streets of Appleton—any advice?

TALKBACK 3: I've got some advice. Bugger off!

RADIO ANNOUNCER: And, thank God, it's news time.

STING: It's news time on community rad-yo,  
Apple-ton, home of the pot-a-to!  
*The news theme plays briefly before fading out.*

## SCENE ONE

*Appleton pub—it's all about the ancient stink of beer and sticky bar mats. We can hear the tinker of a few poker machines, the gentle hum of the races being played on TAB screens.*

*You know within this pub there are men jeering or commiserating with their chosen televised game or race. Those who aren't jeering are staring into space, drinking mindlessly.*

*BEV, 65, sits at a table with a pile of notes and her usual attitude. She's a tough woman, resents whatever it is she's doing at any time, and gives off the air of someone who suffers zero shitheads.*

*BARB, 65, is a woman who's chief goal each day is to leave everyone feeling a little better and this People Pleaser Extraordinaire is on her way back to the table, armed with the bistro buzzer that lets you know when your counter meal is ready.*

BARB: All ordered, Bev. Usual for you, Masterchef Special for me.

BEV: No-one can cook a T-bone like Old Bluey.

BARB: I love Bluey's Masterchef Special. Have you ever had one, Bev?

BEV: The last seventy-nine meals I've had at this pub, Barb, I've had with you. Have you seen me have one?

BARB: I haven't, Bev. It's when Bluey cooks whatever the star dish was on last week's 'Masterchef'.

BEV: I know what a Masterchef Special is, Barb.

BARB: This week, it's smoked tomato soup with poached pork and basil mousse—doesn't that sound marvellous?

BEV: What it sounds like, Barb, is a bowl of wank. I'm surprised Bluey's feet aren't stuck to the kitchen floor for all the wank. Why does he want to get all posh?

BARB: Smoked pork is hardly—

BEV: I've got it, Barb. Christ on a bike. Can we have this meeting?

BARB: Hang on, I forgot your shandy.

BEV: Never mind me shandy.

BARB: You can't have your T-bone without your shandy, Bev. We're not in any rush, are we?

BEV: Maybe you're not, but Mark's at home getting stuck into the cans, and Kev's seen better days.

BARB: Bev, you know what I do when I'm stressed out?

BEV: I'm not stressed out.

BARB: Of course, Bev, but this might just help you for times to come. I pretend I'm on 'Australian Story'.

BEV: What?

BARB: 'Australian Story'. The TV show.

BEV: I know 'Australian Story', Barb.

BARB: It's my favourite show, Bev. I hope you watch it.

BEV: What else would I be doing on a Monday night at eight o'clock?

BARB: Have you noticed how calm they all are? Sitting on a chair, telling their story. That's what I do. Pretend I'm on it. Take a few breaths, tell my story. Helps with my stress. Always sorts out my problems.

BEV: Do you set up a camera, for chrissakes?

BARB: You can actually do it anywhere—in the car, hanging out the washing ...

BEV: Righto, Barb, enough of that hippy talk. You got the agenda?

BARB: Of course, Bev.

BEV: Then I call this meeting of the Appleton Show Committee to order.

*BARB makes sure she has all her technology at the ready. It's an iPad and a bluetooth keyboard—a very efficient little set-up.*

BARB: Present is Bev Armstrong, President, and Barb Ling, Secretary.

BEV: Apology from Billy Pope, committee member in charge of livestock.

BARB: Flu?

BEV: Yep. Apology from Billy Smith, entertainment.

BARB: Flu?



BEV: Yep. Apology from Billy Pearce, food and beverage.

BEV: Goodness, that flu's really getting around town.

BEV: No, Barb, he's over in the pokies room, reckons his machine's about to pay out.

BARB: Ah, good luck to him. He could do with a win.

BEV: And an apology from Billy Morton, committee member in charge of the potato races. Dunno what's wrong with him. Bastard hasn't even bothered texting.

BARB: That's an awful lot of apologies, Bev.

BEV: Nothing unusual there.

BARB: But so close to the Show. How many times have either of us sent an apology? In thirty years?

BEV: I don't think you ever have, Barb.

BARB: I most certainly haven't.

BEV: I've only had that one week off.

BARB: Of course.

*A beat.*

First item for the agenda: entertainment.

BEV: The Cold Chisel tribute band is all booked and paid for the Saturday arvo—Bold Sizzle.

BARB: Isn't that fun? Bold Sizzle? And get this—their lead singer's name is—wait for it—Kimmy Farnes ... worth!

BEV: How about that?

BARB: Second item: food and beverage.

BEV: Tracey's setting up at the spud bar with her hot filled potatoes. The CWA'll have cakes and cans of drink in the pavilion.

BARB: The refugee action group wants to set up a stall for some of the refugees to share their food.

BEV: Bloody hell, Barb, it's the Appleton Show, not the multicultural festival. Don't put that down!

BARB: I've never tried any Syrian food, or Ethiopian food! I hear they cook with goat. They've said they'll do it for a gold coin donation.

BEV: So they want to put the locals out of business offering up free food?

BARB: They want to be part of the community, Bev. Meet people.

BEV: If you've got the choice between a hot potato from Tracey for fifteen bucks or some bloody goat curry for a dollar, what are you choosing?

BARB: It's Show Day, Bev, I'm going to eat it all! No rules on Show Day!

Come on. It'll help them feel like they're part of the town. Integrate a bit more, you know?

BEV: Do 'em good to integrate more. Put them at the back entrance of the pavilion. Next item.

BARB: Livestock.

BEV: I've done the stewarding timetable, but we're down two volunteers.

Could you put something on the Facebook about it?

BARB: It's called 'Facebook', Bev.

BEV: Yeah, that's what I said.

BARB: You said 'the' Facebook, Bev. There's no 'the'—

BEV: What difference does it make?

BARB: If you like, my offer is always there—I can put you on Facebook?

It's a beautiful place to stay in touch. When Penny was away all those years, I'd see her photos from Nigeria ... and Sydney—

BEV: Just put it on the Facebook, will ya? Next item on the agenda: the potato race.

BARB: It's the thirtieth anniversary!

BEV: Rubbish, Barb. My poppy won the first race in 1913.

BARB: ... of the ladies' race, Bev.

BEV: After the debacle of '88 we had no choice ...

BARB: Alexander Strumpet righted a great historical wrong. We should be proud, Bev.

BEV: I'm proud the Show survived it.

BARB: Oh ... to run the potato race!

BEV: You're not dead yet, Barb.

NIKKI *enters to deliver drinks to BARB and BEV.*

BARB: Speak of sunshine, see its sparkling rays—

NIKKI: Why? Shandy ... and a lemon squash.

BEV: Potato race.

NIKKI: What about it?

BEV: Why anyone would want to carry a sack of potatoes around an oval is beyond me.

NIKKI: The money, Bev, obviously.

BARB: What a champion. Living and breathing and clearing glasses among us. Like she's a mere mortal, Bev.