

THE CALL

BY PATRICIA CORNELIUS



Currency Press,
Sydney



Principal Sponsor



Chartered Accountants
& Business Advisers

CHARACTERS

GARY, in his 20s

DENISE, in her 20s

CHUNK, in his 20s

ALDO, in his 20s

HORACE, a chicken plucker

LIDDY, a chicken plucker

DIEGO, a chicken plucker

CUNI, a factory worker

JACK, a factory worker

BILLY, a factory worker

DOC, a meat-rendering plant worker

BUG, a meat-rendering plant worker

BOY, a meat-rendering plant worker

An ensemble of four actors: three men and one woman.

DENISE plays LIDDY, BILLY, BOY.

CHUNK plays HORACE, CUNI, BUG.

ALDO plays DIEGO, JACK, DOC.

SETTING

A battery hen farm; an mdf board factory; a meat-rendering plant.
These work scenes are both real and visions of hell.

In a stolen car; outside a club; in a home; on a bridge; at the gym;
in a cage.

The scenes move quickly and unnaturally from space to space.
The suggestion of place is a more satisfying conceit.

GARY *peers through the mesh of a cage. It's unclear if he's inside the cage or out. He stares intently as if transfixed. Slowly and quietly he makes the clucking sounds of a brooding chook. He commits himself so utterly to chook talking it seems possible that his mind has slipped into a strange and terrible place.*

GARY: It's a sad life.

Lights slowly reveal three workers—two men, HORACE and DIEGO, and one woman, LIDDY. They are dressed in white overalls and wear paper caps on their heads. They each hold partially feathered dead chooks.

HORACE: Have a look at it, would you?

LIDDY: What's he doing?

HORACE: He's in love, Liddy, like I'm in love with you.

LIDDY: Yeah, you love me, Horace. Do you?

HORACE: You're my chook.

DIEGO: He's talking to it.

HORACE: What's that, Dago? You say something?

DIEGO: He's preparing it for its death.

LIDDY: The chook can't understand him, Diego. Gary can't speak chook. Can he?

HORACE: He's not talking dying, he's talking love. Gary wants to con onto the chook. He's in love with her.

LIDDY: No, he's not. Is he? Can you talk chook, Horace?

HORACE: He wants to fuck the chook.

LIDDY: No, he doesn't. Does he?

HORACE: We're meant to pluck them, Gary, not fuck them.

LIDDY *giggles madly.*

DIEGO: Gary remembers that they're chickens. I forgot.

HORACE: What's that, Dago? Can't understand you.

DIEGO: Fuck off, Horace.

HORACE: That's it, that's it, now you're getting the hang of it.

LIDDY: What's he saying to the chook now?

HORACE: Forget her, Gary, she's no fucking good for you, mate. Call it off. She'll break your heart, mate. She's a tease, she's been round the block, that one. Done the rounds. No satisfaction there, mate.

GARY *remains transfixed.*

Jesus Christ, I've left it too late, he's fallen for her. The fucking slut's got him wrapped round her little finger.

LIDDY: No, she hasn't. Has she? Does he really love her? Does he, Diego?

DIEGO: Don't listen to Horace, Liddy.

HORACE: He's head over, Liddy, he's totally infatuated. Don't know whether I can save him.

LIDDY: Save him, save him.

DIEGO: Leave him alone, Horace.

HORACE: What's that you're saying, Dago? Can't understand.

DIEGO: Fuck off, Horace.

HORACE: Right, got you now, why didn't you say so?

LIDDY: Save him, save him.

HORACE: I'm going to try, Liddy. Gary's a good bloke and he deserves to be saved. That slut's got him by the short and curly and I'll bloody well chop her head off if I have to.

LIDDY: Chop it off, Horace.

HORACE: Hey, Gary, me man, you've got to give her up. She's not our kind.

LIDDY: No, she's not.

HORACE: She's unclean, she's diseased.

LIDDY: She's a dirty slut, Gary.

HORACE: She's conned you, mate. Those breasts, they're fake.

DIEGO: You're a fucking idiot, Horace.

HORACE: Hey, Dago, your English is coming along, you'll get there one day. Listen, Gary, what do you see in her when there's young Liddy here? Hey? Liddy's as good as any chook, aren't you, Liddy?

LIDDY: I'm as good as any chook. Am I?

HORACE *pulls LIDDY into his lap and moves as if he's fucking her.*

HORACE: Ooh, I reckon you are, Lid, I reckon you are.

DIEGO: You're a piece of filth, Horace.

HORACE: Just when I think you're getting your tongue around some of our words and you go talk gobbledegook.

DIEGO: I don't speak anything but English, you prick.

HORACE: Lost you, can't understand a word you're saying.

DIEGO: Fuck off!

HORACE: Then you go and surprise me again. [*Moving on LIDDY again*]
Come on, Gary, Liddy's here waiting, I'm warming her up so you can slip in.

LIDDY: Come on, Gary, I don't mind, you can fuck me if you want to.

HORACE *bursts into laughter.*

HORACE: Jesus Christ, did you hear that!? Liddy doesn't mind.

LIDDY: No, I don't mind.

HORACE: Of course you don't, Liddy, that's the wonder of it, you've got no mind.

LIDDY: I've got a mind. I know what I think.

HORACE: Do you? Do you know what you think? What do you think?

LIDDY: I think about things.

HORACE: You don't have to think, all you got to do is feel. Feel old
Horace here.

DIEGO: Jesus Christ!

LIDDY: Patsy Cline was a chicken plucker. She's not dumb.

HORACE *sings 'Crazy'.*

DIEGO: You're not dumb, Liddy.

HORACE: No reason to be insulted, Lid, no-one here thinks, we're all brainless, otherwise we wouldn't be here.

DIEGO: Speak for yourself.

HORACE: Oh, but I do, Dago, I do. I'm the most stupid of all. I've been here the longest and I've no intention of leaving my roost. [*He crows.*]

Look at young Gary; he's so stupid he's fallen in love with a chook.

GARY: It's a sad life.

HORACE: Fucking hell, it's worse than I thought, he feels sorry for her.

GARY: Her entire life's been in a cage. Can't move, can't turn round, can't flap her wings. She's had her beak burned off. She lays a hundred thousand eggs a year and then she's come to us to have her head chopped off. Fucking lousy life.

HORACE: She's a chook.

LIDDY: Chooks feel.

HORACE: 'Course they bloody don't.

GARY: There's nothing in her eyes. Nothing.

HORACE: She's a chook!

GARY: Been nowhere. Seen nothing. Never felt the sun warm on her feathers.

HORACE: They're fed, aren't they?

DIEGO: They're fed crap.

GARY: It's sad.

LIDDY: Poor chooks. Poor poor chooks.

HORACE: Look what you've done, you've gone and upset Liddy.

DIEGO: We forget they're living things.

HORACE: Their hearts beat. So what?

LIDDY: [*distressed*] Their hearts beat.

DIEGO: Not even my dogs eat them.

HORACE: Cows, sheep, pork, it's all shit. What's the diff?

LIDDY: I don't eat them.

DIEGO: They're fed other chooks, ground-up bits of their own kind.

LIDDY: Do you eat them, Horace? Do you?

DIEGO: That's how they got mad cows, feeding cows to cows.

HORACE *sings* 'Crazy'.

HORACE: I'm in an asylum, a place for nutters, for dimwits, for no-hopers.

LIDDY: I got hope!

An electric guitar provides a driving beat. GARY and his mates, CHUNK and ALDO, are in the front seat of a car.

GARY: Fuck.

CHUNK: Fuck.

ALDO: Fuck.

GARY: Fuck.

CHUNK: Fuck.

ALDO: Fuck.

CHUNK: Fuck me!

ALDO: Fucking hell!

GARY: Was that easy!

ALDO: Easy.

CHUNK: A breeze. All I did was turn the key.

They hoot with laughter.

ALDO: Hit the road.

CHUNK: Cut this turkey.

GARY: Get the fuck out of here.

Another united hoot.