

**THE FIRST
HARRY HOLE
THRILLER**



The Bat

JO NESBO

OVER 30 MILLION BOOKS SOLD WORLDWIDE



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About the Book

HARRY IS OUT OF HIS DEPTH.

Detective Harry Hole is meant to keep out of trouble. A young Norwegian girl taking a gap year in Sydney has been murdered, and Harry has been sent to Australia to assist in any way he can.

HE'S NOT SUPPOSED TO GET TOO INVOLVED.

When the team unearths a string of unsolved murders and disappearances, nothing will stop Harry from finding out the truth. The hunt for a serial killer is on, but the murderer will talk only to Harry.

HE MIGHT JUST BE THE NEXT VICTIM.

Appearing in English for the first time, *The Bat* is the legendary first novel from the worldwide phenomenon Jo Nesbo.

About the Author

Jo Nesbo is a musician, songwriter, economist and author. *The Bat*, his first crime novel featuring Harry Hole, was published in Norway in 1997 and was an instant hit, winning the Glass Key Award for best Nordic crime novel (an accolade shared with Peter Høeg, Henning Mankell and Stieg Larsson). This bestselling novel appears in English for the first time.

Check out www.jonesbo.co.uk.

ALSO BY JO NESBO

The Redbreast

Nemesis

The Devil's Star

The Redeemer

The Snowman

The Leopard

Phantom

The Bat

Translated from the Norwegian by Don
Bartlett

Jo Nesbo

VINTAGE

Introduction

I WANTED TO write. Something. Anything.

It was 1996 and I was gigging hard with my band at night while working as a stockbroker during the day. It was a strange Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde existence, and with hindsight I don't know how I survived that year. Well, perhaps I didn't. I couldn't sleep, although that was all my body wanted. So I asked for some time out, first from the boss at the brokerage firm and then from the band.

And then I went to Australia. Why Australia? Mostly because it wasn't Oslo.

And I thought if I was bored I could start on the novel I had promised myself (and a girl I knew who worked at a publishing house in Oslo) I would write.

I didn't see as much of Australia as I had planned. But I wasn't bored.

I wrote. For eighteen hours some days. For just twelve on others.

I stayed in a little hotel room in the Kings Cross area of Sydney, which at that time was where you went for drugs and sex. And, after my first hit, I was hooked. On writing. Like a junkie, this was what it was all about, from the moment I woke to the moment I fell asleep, exhausted by the travails of the day. Like a junkie, I stole whatever I came across to get the drug. Australian history, bar culture, the Sea Life Aquarium and Sydney Opera House, prostitution in Darlinghurst Road, the Aboriginal storytelling tradition I found in books at the Australian Museum, a display of classic Australian entertainers and clowns, travelling fairs, the birth and longevity of the hippy movement in and

around Byron Bay, gay culture and drag queens in Australia's San Francisco, Australian rugby, a parachuting course outside Newcastle.

All this and more ended up on the pages that grew and grew in volume, and which were given a title from an Aboriginal Australian legend. The Bat Man. But which had to be changed in English as others had the rights to a very similar name. (No, the Aboriginals wouldn't sue me, but ...)

I arrived back home. Told the band I'd written the last song for a while. And told the boss at the broker's I didn't have time to work there; life was flying past and there were other things I had to do. Because I was - as I said - hooked.

Then I sent the manuscript to the publishing house where the girl I knew worked.

I no longer had a job and wondered what the future would bring. And I slept well.

A few weeks later the phone rings, and I answer: 'Jo Nesbo.'

And the voice at the other end says: 'Tell me, who is this Harry Hole actually?'

The book was published in the autumn of 1997.

Jo Nesbo
Oslo, 31 August 2016

WALLA

1

Sydney

SOMETHING WAS WRONG.

At first the female passport official had beamed: 'How are ya, mate?'

'I'm fine,' Harry Hole had lied. It was more than thirty hours since he had taken off from Oslo via London, and after the change of planes in Bahrain he had sat in the same bloody seat by the emergency exit. For security reasons it could only be tipped back a little, and his lumbar region had almost crumbled by the time they reached Singapore.

And now the woman behind the counter was no longer smiling.

She had scrutinised his passport with conspicuous interest. Whether it was the photograph or his name that had initially put her in such a cheery mood was hard to say.

'Business?'

Harry Hole had a suspicion that passport officials in most places in the world would have added a 'sir', but he had read that this type of formal pleasantry wasn't especially widespread in Australia. It didn't really matter; Harry wasn't particularly accustomed to foreign travel or snobbish - all he wanted was a hotel room and a bed as quickly as possible.

'Yes,' he had replied, drumming his fingers on the counter.

And that was when her lips had pursed, turned ugly and articulated, with a pointed tone: 'Why isn't there a visa in your passport, sir?'

His heart sank, as it invariably did when there was a hint of a catastrophe in the offing. Perhaps 'sir' was used only when situations became critical?

'Sorry, I forgot,' Harry mumbled, searching feverishly through his inside pockets. Why had they not been able to pin a special visa in his passport as they do with standard visas? Behind him in the queue he heard the faint drone of a Walkman and realised it was his travelling companion from the plane. He had been playing the same cassette the whole flight. Why the hell could he never remember which pocket he put things in? It was hot as well, even though it was getting on for ten o'clock at night. Harry could feel his scalp beginning to itch.

At last he found the document and placed it on the counter, to his great relief.

'Police officer, are you?'

The passport official looked up from the special visa and studied him, but the pursed mouth was gone.

'I hope no Norwegian blondes have been murdered?'

She chuckled and smacked the stamp down hard on the special visa.

'Well, just the one,' Harry Hole answered.

The arrivals hall was crowded with travel reps and limousine drivers, holding up signs with names on, but not a Hole in sight. He was on the point of grabbing a taxi when a black man wearing light blue jeans and a Hawaiian shirt, and with an unusually broad nose and dark, curly hair ploughed a furrow between the signs and came striding towards him.

'Mr Holy, I presume!' he declared triumphantly.

Harry Hole considered his options. He had decided to spend the first days in Australia correcting the pronunciation of his surname so that he wouldn't be confused with apertures or orifices. Mr Holy however, was infinitely preferable.

'Andrew Kensington. How are ya?' the man grinned and stuck out an enormous fist.

It was nothing less than a juice extractor.

'Welcome to Sydney. Hope you enjoyed the flight,' the stranger said with evident sincerity, like an echo of the air hostess's announcement twenty minutes earlier. He took Harry's battered suitcase and began to walk towards the exit without a backward glance. Harry kept close to him.

'Do you work for Sydney police?' he initiated.

'Sure do, mate. Watch out!'

The swing door hit Harry in the face, right on the hooter, and made his eyes water. A bad slapstick sketch could not have started worse. He rubbed his nose and swore in Norwegian. Kensington sent him a sympathetic look.

'Bloody doors, eh?' he said.

Harry didn't answer. He didn't know how to answer that sort of comment down under.

In the car park Kensington unlocked the boot of a small, well-used Toyota and shoved in the suitcase. 'Do you wanna drive, mate?' he asked in surprise.

Harry realised he was sitting in the driver's seat. Of course, they drove on the bloody left in Australia. However, the passenger seat was so full of papers, cassettes and general rubbish that Harry squeezed into the back.

'You must be an Aboriginal,' he said as they turned onto the motorway.

'Guess there's no fooling you, Officer,' Kensington answered, glancing in the mirror.

'In Norway we call you Australian Negroes.'

Kensington kept his eyes trained on the mirror. 'Really?'

Harry began to feel ill at ease. 'Er, by that I just mean that your forefathers obviously didn't belong to the convicts sent here from England two hundred years ago.' He wanted to show he had at least a modicum of knowledge about the country's history.

'That's right, Holy. My forefathers were here a bit before them. Forty thousand years, to be precise.'

Kensington grinned into the mirror. Harry vowed to keep his mouth shut for a while.

'I see. Call me Harry.'

'OK, Harry. I'm Andrew.'

Andrew ran the conversation for the rest of the ride. He drove Harry to King's Cross, holding forth the whole way: this area was Sydney's red-light district and the centre for the drugs trade and to a large extent all the other shady dealings in town. Every second scandal seemed to have a connection with some hotel or strip joint inside this square kilometre.

'Here we are,' Andrew said suddenly. He pulled into the kerb, jumped out and took Harry's suitcase from the boot.

'See you tomorrow,' Andrew said, and with that he and the car were gone. With a stiff back and jet lag beginning to announce its presence, Harry and his suitcase were now alone on a pavement in a town boasting a population roughly equivalent to the whole of Norway, outside the splendid Crescent Hotel. The name was printed on the door next to three stars. Oslo's Chief Constable was not known for largesse with regards to accommodation for her employees. But perhaps this one was not going to be too bad after all. There must have been a civil service discount and it was probably the hotel's smallest room, Harry reflected.

And it was.

2

Gap Park

HARRY KNOCKED WARILY on the door of the Head of Crime Squad for Surry Hills.

'Come in,' boomed a voice from inside.

A tall, broad man with a stomach designed to impress was standing by the window, behind an oak desk. Beneath a thinning mane protruded grey bushy eyebrows, but the wrinkles around his eyes smiled.

'Harry Holy from Oslo, Norway, sir.'

'Take a pew, Holy. You look bloody fit for this time of the morning. I hope you haven't been to see any of the boys in Narc, have you?' Neil McCormack let out a huge laugh.

'Jet lag. I've been awake since four this morning, sir,' Harry explained.

'Of course. Just an in-joke. We had a pretty high-profile corruption case here a couple of years back, you see. Ten officers were convicted, among other things for selling drugs - to one another. Suspicion was raised because a couple of them were so alert - round the clock. No joke really.' He chuckled contentedly, put on his glasses and flicked through the papers in front of him.

'So you've been sent here to assist us with our investigation into the murder of Inger Holter, a Norwegian citizen with a permit to work in Australia. Blonde, good-looking girl, according to the photos. Twenty-three years old, wasn't she?'

Harry nodded. McCormack was serious now.

'Found by fishermen on the ocean side of Watson's Bay - to be more precise, Gap Park. Semi-naked. Bruising suggested she had been raped first and then strangled, but no semen was found. Later transported at the dead of night to the park where the body was dumped off the cliff.'

He pulled a face.

'Had the weather been a little worse the waves would definitely have carried her out, but instead she lay among the rocks until she was found. As I said, there was no semen present, and the reason for that is that the vagina was sliced up like a filleted fish and the seawater did a thorough job of washing this girl clean. Therefore we have no fingerprints either, though we do have a rough estimate of time of death . . .'

McCormack removed his glasses and rubbed his face. 'But we don't have a murderer. And what the hell are you gonna do about that, Mr Holy?'

Harry was about to answer but was interrupted.

'What you're gonna do is watch carefully while we haul the bastard in, tell the Norwegian press along the way what a wonderful job we're doing together - making sure we don't offend anyone at the Norwegian Embassy, or relatives - and otherwise enjoy a break and send a card or two to your dear Chief Constable. How is she by the way?'

'Fine, as far as I know.'

'Great woman, she is. I s'pose she explained to you what's expected of you?'

'To some extent. I'm taking part in an invest—'

'Great. Forget all that. Here are the new rules. Number one: from now on you listen to me, me and me alone. Number two: you don't take part in anything you haven't been instructed to do by me. And number three: one toe out of line and you'll be on the first plane home.'

This was delivered with a smile, but the message was clear: paws off, he was here as an observer. He might just as well have brought his swimming things and a camera along.

'I gather that Inger Holter was some kind of TV celeb in Norway?'

'A minor celeb, sir. She hosted a children's programme broadcast a couple of years ago. I suppose before this happened she was on her way into oblivion.'

'Yeah, I've been told that your papers are making a big thing of this murder. Couple of them have sent people here already. We've given 'em what we've got, and that's not a great deal, so they'll soon be bored and bugger off home. They don't know you're here. We've got our own nannies, so you won't have to take care of them.'

'Thank you for that, sir,' Harry said, and he meant it. The thought of panting Norwegian journalists looking over his shoulder was not a welcome one.

'OK, Holy, I'll be honest with you and tell you how the land lies. I've been told in no uncertain terms by my governor that councillors in Sydney would like to see this case cleared up as soon as possible. As usual, it's all about politics and dosh.'

'Dosh?'

'Well, we reckon unemployment in Sydney will rise to over ten per cent this year, and the town needs every cent we can get from the tourists. We've got the Olympic Games just round the corner, in 2000, and tourism from Scandinavia's on the up. Murder, especially one which hasn't been cleared up, isn't a good advert for the town, so we're doing what we can. We have a team of four detectives on the case plus high-priority access to the force's resources - all the computers, forensic staff, lab people. And so on.'

McCormack pulled out a sheet of paper which he studied with a frown.

'In fact, you should be working with Watkins, but since you specifically asked for Kensington, I see no reason to refuse your request.'

'Sir, to my knowledge I haven't—'

'Kensington's a good man. There are not many Indigenous officers who have come up through the ranks like him.'

'No?'

McCormack shrugged. 'That's just the way it is. Well, Holy, if there's anything else, you know where I hang out. Any questions?'

'Er, just a formality, sir. I was wondering whether *sir* was the right mode of address to a superior officer in this country, or whether it was a little too . . .'

'Formal? Stiff? Yes, I guess it probably is. But I like it. It reminds me that I am in fact the boss of this outfit.' McCormack burst out laughing and concluded the meeting with a bone-crunching handshake.

'January's the tourist season in Australia,' Andrew explained as they lurched forward in the traffic around Circular Quay.

'Everyone comes to see the Sydney Opera House and go on boat trips round the harbour and admire the women on Bondi Beach. Shame you've got to work.'

Harry shook his head. 'Doesn't matter. I break out in a cold sweat around tourist traps.'

They emerged onto New South Head Road where the Toyota sped eastwards to Watson's Bay.

'The East Side of Sydney's not exactly like the East End of London,' Andrew explained as they passed one fashionable house after another. 'This district's called Double Bay. We call it Double Pay.'

'Where did Inger Holter live?'

'She lived with her boyfriend in Newtown for a while before they split up and she moved to a little one-room flat in Glebe.'

'Boyfriend?'

Andrew shrugged. 'He's Australian, a computer engineer and met her when she came here on holiday two years ago. He's got an alibi for the night of the murder and is not

exactly the prototype of a murderer. But you never know, do you?’

They parked below Gap Park, one of Sydney’s many green lungs. Steep stone steps led up to the windblown park that lay high above Watson’s Bay to the north and the Pacific Ocean to the east. The heat hit them when they opened the car doors. Andrew put on a big pair of shades, which made Harry think of a laid-back porn king. For some reason his Australian colleague was wearing a tight suit today, and Harry thought the broad-shouldered black man looked a bit comical as he rolled and pitched up the path in front of him to the viewpoint.

Harry looked around. To the west he saw the city centre with the Harbour Bridge, to the north the beach and yachts in Watson’s Bay and, further in the distance, verdant Manly, the suburb on the northern side of the bay. To the east the horizon curved in a spectrum of various shades of blue. The cliffs plunged down in front of them, and way below the ocean breakers ended their long voyage in a thunderous crescendo among the rocks.

Harry felt a bead of sweat running down between his shoulder blades. This heat was giving him goose pimples.

‘You can see the Pacific Ocean from here, Harry. Next stop New Zealand, after about twelve hundred wet miles,’ Andrew said, spitting a thick gobbet off the edge of the cliff. They followed it down for a while until the wind dispersed it.

‘Good job she wasn’t alive when she fell,’ he said. ‘She must have hit the cliffs on the way down; there were large chunks of flesh torn from her body when they found her.’

‘How long had she been dead before she was found?’

Andrew pulled a grimace. ‘The police doctor said forty-eight hours. But he . . .’

He put a backward-facing thumb in front of his mouth. Harry nodded. So the doctor was a thirsty soul.

‘And you become sceptical when the figures are too rounded?’

'She was found on a Friday morning, so let's say she died some time during Wednesday night.'

'Any clues here?'

'As you can see, cars can park down below and the area is unlit at night and relatively deserted. We haven't got any reports from witnesses, and to be frank, we don't reckon we'll get any.'

'So what do we do now?'

'Now we do what the boss told me, we go to a restaurant and spend a bit of the force's entertainment budget. After all, you're Norway's highest police rep in a radius of more than twelve hundred miles. At least.'

Andrew and Harry sat at a table with a white cloth. Doyle's, a seafood restaurant, was situated at the furthest end of Watson's Bay with only a strip of sand between itself and the sea.

'Ridiculously beautiful, isn't it?' Andrew said.

'Picture postcard.' A small boy and a girl were building sandcastles on the beach in front of them, against a background of a deep blue sea and luxuriant green hills with Sydney's proud skyline in the distance.

Harry chose scallops and Tasmanian trout, Andrew an Australian flatfish which Harry, quite reasonably, had never heard of. Andrew ordered a bottle of Chardonnay Rosemount, 'quite wrong for this meal, but it's white, it's good and it's smack on budget', and looked mildly surprised when Harry said he didn't drink.

'Quaker?'

'No, nothing like that,' Harry said.

Doyle's was an old family-run restaurant and considered one of Sydney's best, Andrew informed Harry. It was peak season and packed to the rafters and Harry presumed that was why it was so difficult to gain eye contact with the waiters.

‘The waiters here are like the Planet Pluto,’ Andrew said. ‘They orbit on the periphery, only making an appearance every twentieth year, and even then are impossible to glimpse with the naked eye.’

Harry couldn’t work up any indignation and leaned back in his chair with a contented sigh. ‘But they have excellent food,’ he said. ‘So that explains the suit.’

‘Yes and no. As you can see, it’s not exactly formal here. But it’s better for me *not* to wear jeans and a T-shirt in places like this. Because of my appearance I have to make an effort.’

‘What do you mean?’

Andrew stared at Harry. ‘Aboriginal people don’t have very high status in this country, as you may perhaps appreciate. Years ago the English wrote home that the natives had a weakness for alcohol and property crime.’

Harry listened with interest.

‘They thought it was in our genes. “All they were good for was making a hell of a racket blowing through long pieces of hollow wood, which they call didgeridoos,” one of them wrote. Well, this country boasts that it’s managed to integrate several cultures into one cohesive society. But cohesive for who? The problem, or the advantage, according to your perspective, is that the natives aren’t seen any more.

‘Aboriginal folks are as good as totally absent from social life in Australia, apart from political debates that affect Indigenous interests and culture. Australians pay lip-service by having Aboriginal art hanging on the walls of their houses. However, we Blackfellas are well represented in the dole queues, suicide statistics and prisons. If you’re Aboriginal the chances of ending up in prison are twenty-six times greater than for any other Australian. Chew on that, Harry Holy.’

Andrew drank the rest of his wine while Harry chewed on that. And the fact that he’d probably just eaten the best fish

dish in his thirty-two years.

'And yet Australia's no more racist than any other country. After all, we're a multicultural nation with people from all over the world living here. It just means that dressing in a suit whenever you go to a restaurant is worth the trouble.'

Harry nodded again. There was no more to say on that subject.

'Inger Holter worked in a bar, didn't she?'

'Yes, she did. The Albury in Oxford Street, Paddington. I thought we could wander up there this evening.'

'Why not now?' Harry was beginning to be impatient with all this leisure.

'Because first we have to say hello to her landlord.'

Pluto appeared unbidden in the firmament.

3

A Tasmanian Devil

GLEBE POINT ROAD turned out to be a cosy, not too frenetic street where small, plain and, for the most part, ethnic restaurants from various parts of the world stood cheek by jowl.

‘This used to be Sydney’s bohemian quarter,’ Andrew explained. ‘I lived here as a student in the seventies. You can still find typical veggie restaurants for people with conservation on the brain and alternative lifestyles, bookshops for lesbians and so on. But the old hippies and acidheads have gone. As Glebe became an “in” place rent went up – I doubt if I’d be able to live here now, even on my police salary.’

They turned right, up Hereford Street and went through the gate to number 54. A small furry black animal came towards them, barking, and revealing a row of tiny, sharp teeth. The mini-monster looked seriously angry and bore a striking similarity to the picture in the tourist brochure of the Tasmanian Devil. Aggressive and generally unpleasant to have hanging from your throat, it said. The species had been almost completely exterminated, which Harry sincerely hoped was true. As this specimen launched itself at him with jaws wide open, Andrew raised his foot and kicked the animal in mid-flight and volleyed it yelping into the bushes alongside the fence.

A man with a large gut who looked as though he had just got up was standing in the doorway with a sour expression on his face as they came up the steps.

‘What happened to the dog?’

‘It’s admiring the rose bushes,’ Andrew informed him with a smile. ‘We’re from the police. Crime Squad. Mr Robertson?’

‘Yeah, yeah. What do you lot want again? I told you I’ve told you everything I know.’

‘And now you’ve told us you’ve told us you’ve told us . . .’ A long silence developed as Andrew continued to smile and Harry shifted his weight from one foot to the other.

‘Apologies, Mr Robertson, we won’t try to kill you with our charm, but this is Inger Holter’s brother and he would like to see her room if that’s not too much trouble.’

Robertson’s attitude changed dramatically.

‘Sorry, I didn’t know . . . Come in!’ He opened the door and went ahead of them up the stairs.

‘Yeah, in fact I didn’t even know Inger had a brother. But now you say it of course I can see the family likeness.’

Behind him, Harry half turned to Andrew and rolled his eyes.

‘Inger was a lovely girl and a fantastic tenant – indeed, a source of pride for the whole house and neighbourhood too, probably.’ He smelt of beer and his diction was already a bit slurred.

No attempt had been made to tidy Inger’s room. There were clothes, magazines, full ashtrays and empty wine bottles everywhere.

‘Er, the police told me not to touch anything for the moment.’

‘We understand.’

‘She just didn’t come back one night. Vanished into thin air.’

‘Thank you, Mr Robertson, we’ve read your statement.’

'I told her not to take the route round Bridge Road and the fish market when she came home at night. It's dark there and there are loads of blacks and Chinks . . .' He looked at Andrew Kensington in horror. 'Sorry, I didn't mean to . . .'

'That's fine. You can go now, Mr Robertson.'

Robertson padded down the stairs and they heard bottles clinking in the kitchen.

The room contained a bed, a few bookshelves and a desk. Harry looked around and tried to construct an impression of Inger Holter. Victimology: putting yourself in the victim's shoes. He could just about recall the impish girl off the TV screen with her well-meaning, youthful commitment and innocent blue eyes.

She was definitely not a home bird. There were no pictures on the walls, just a poster of *Braveheart* with Mel Gibson - which Harry remembered only because for some incomprehensible reason it won an Oscar for Best Film. Bad taste, as far as films go, he thought. And men. Harry was one of those who felt personally let down when *Mad Max* made a Hollywood star out of him.

A photograph showed Inger sitting on a bench in front of some colourful Western-style houses with a gang of long-haired, bearded youths. She was wearing a loose, purple dress. Her blonde hair hung down flat against her pale, serious face. The young man whose hand she was holding had a baby in his lap.

On the shelf there was a pouch of tobacco. A few books about astrology and a roughly hewn wooden mask with a long, bent nose like a beak. Harry turned the mask over. *Made in Papua New Guinea*, it said on the price tag.

The clothes that weren't lying on the bed and floor hung in a small wardrobe. There wasn't much. A few cotton blouses, a worn coat and a large straw hat on the shelf.

Andrew picked up a packet of cigarette papers from the drawer in the desk.

'King Size Smoking Slim. She rolled herself some big cigarettes.'

'Did you find any drugs here?' Harry asked.

Andrew shook his head and pointed to the cigarette paper.

'But if we'd hoovered the ashtrays I wouldn't mind betting we'd have found traces of cannabis.'

'Why wasn't it done? Didn't the SOC people come here?'

'First of all, there's no reason to believe that this was the scene of the crime. Second of all, smoking marijuana is nothing to shout about. Here in New South Wales we have a more pragmatic attitude to marijuana than in certain other Australian states. I wouldn't rule out the possibility that the murder could be drugs-related, but the odd reefer or two is hardly relevant in this context. We can't know for sure if she used other drugs. There's a fair bit of coke and designer drugs on the go in the Albury, but no one we've spoken to has mentioned anything, and there wasn't a trace of anything in the blood tests. At any rate, she wasn't on the serious stuff. There were no needle marks, and we have a reasonable overview of the hard-core users.'

Harry looked at him. Andrew cleared his throat.

'That's the official version, anyway. There is one thing they thought you could help us with though.'

There was a letter in Norwegian. 'Dear Elisabeth,' it started and obviously wasn't finished. Harry skimmed through it.

Well, I'm just fine, and even more important, I'm in love! Of course, he's as handsome as a Greek God with long, curly brown hair, a pert bum and eyes that tell you what he's already whispered to you: he wants you now - this minute - behind the closest wall, in the loo, on the table, on the floor, anywhere. His name's Evans, he's 32, he's been married (surprise, surprise) and has a lovely little boy of 18 months called Tom-Tom. Right now he doesn't have a proper job, but drifts around doing things.

And, yes, I know you can smell trouble, and I promise not to let myself be dragged down. Not for the time being, anyway.

Enough about Evans. I'm still working at the Albury. 'Mr Bean' stopped inviting me out after Evans was in the bar one night, and that at least is progress. But he still follows me with those slimy eyes of his. Yuk!

Actually I'm beginning to get sick of this job, but I'll just have to hang on until I can have my residence permit extended. I've had a word with NRK - they're planning a follow-up to the TV series for next autumn and I can carry on if I want. Decisions, decisions!

The letter stopped there.

4

A Clown

'WHERE ARE WE going now?' Harry asked.

'To the circus! I promised a friend I would pop by one day. And today is one day, isn't it.'

At the Powerhouse a small circus troupe had already started the free afternoon performance for a sparse but young and enthusiastic audience. The building had been a power station and a tram hall when Sydney had trams, Andrew elucidated. Now it was functioning as a kind of contemporary museum. A couple of well-built girls had just completed a not very spectacular trapeze number, but had reaped a great round of friendly applause.

An enormous guillotine was rolled in as a clown entered the stage. He was wearing a brightly coloured uniform and a striped hat, obviously inspired by the French Revolution. He tripped and got up to all sorts of pranks to the huge amusement of the children. Then another clown came onto the stage wearing a long white wig, and it gradually dawned on Harry that he was meant to be Louis XVI.

'By unanimous vote, sentenced to death,' announced the clown with the striped hat.

Soon the condemned man was led to the scaffold where he - still to the amusement of the children - laid his head, after much screaming and yelling, on the block below the blade. There was a brief roll of the drums, the blade fell and

to everyone's amazement, Harry's included, it cut off the monarch's head with a sound reminiscent of an axe blow in the forest on a bright winter's morning. The head, still bearing the wig, fell and rolled into a basket. The lights went out, and when they were switched back on, the headless king stood in the spotlight with his head under his arm. Now the children's cheering knew no bounds. Then the lights went out again, and when they came back on for the second time, the whole troupe was assembled and bowing, and the performance was over.

As people poured towards the exit, Andrew and Harry went backstage. In the makeshift dressing room the performers were already removing their costumes and make-up.

'Otto, say hi to a friend from Norway,' Andrew shouted.

A face turned. Louis XVI looked less majestic with make-up smeared over his face and without his wig. 'Well, hello, it's Tuka the Indian!'

'Harry, this is Otto Rechnagel.'

Otto proffered his hand elegantly with a kink in the wrist and looked indignant when Harry, slightly perplexed, made do with a light press.

'No kiss, handsome?'

'Otto thinks he's a woman. A woman of noble descent,' Andrew said, to illuminate.

'Stuff and nonsense, Tuka. Otto knows very well she's a man. You look confused, handsome. Perhaps you'd like to check for yourself?' Otto emitted a high-pitched chuckle.

Harry felt his earlobes go warm. Two false eyelashes fluttered accusingly at Andrew.

'Your friend, does he talk?'

'Sorry. My name's Harry . . . er . . . Holy. Clever number out there. Nice costumes. Very . . . lifelike. And unusual.'

'The Louise Seize number? Unusual? On the contrary. It's an old classic. The first time it was done was by the Jandaschewsky clown family just two weeks after the real