



MR EUCALYPTUS

A play
by
Solon

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THE CHARACTERS

Major Characters

Bill: A journalist

Mary: His aunt

Nick: A Cretan migrant

Lofty: A newspaper boy

Minor Characters

A Radio Announcer

A Cretan dancer

A Cretan waiter

An Olympic flag bearer

An Olympic torch bearer

THE SETTING

A row of three single-storey Victorian cottages in Roseberry Street; a wide tree-lined street in Richmond, an inner suburb of Melbourne. The cottages, with small frontages to Roseberry Street, are joined together with party walls. A long narrow passage, running along the party wall, gives access to three rooms leading to the kitchen at the rear.

The cottages are occupied by Bill, Nick and Mary. The indoor action takes place in the characters' kitchens which are all similar in shape and size but different in décor and appearance, reflecting their owners' idiosyncrasies.

Bill's kitchen is gloomy and messy, with unwashed dishes in the sink, betraying the bachelor status.

Nick's kitchen is neat and tidy. There is a profusion of family photographs and Cretan memorabilia: testimonies to Nick's nostalgia for his homeland; and an abundance of utensils evidencing his love of food.

Mary's kitchen, also her writing den, has a bohemian quality. There are bush paintings on the wall, aboriginal artefacts on the mantelpiece, all reflecting her passionate love of her country.

Outdoors, the action revolves around Roseberry Street and Nick's veranda which fronts a small garden with a graceful eucalyptus tree in the centre. The garden is enclosed with a picket fence and a gate on which is affixed an old brass sign warning: "Beware of the dog."

On the right, a street sign identifies Roseberry Street. On the far right, a Radio Broadcasting studio. On the far left, an open space for the enactment of past events.

SUMMARY OF ACTS

ACT I

SCENE 1 TIME: Monday, 5th November, 1956. Day after Russian invasion of Hungary. Early morning.
PLACE: Broadcasting studio – Roseberry Street – Nick’s verandah.
ACTORS: Radio Announcer, Nick, Lofty, Mary, Bill

SCENE 2 TIME: Same day, following Scene 1.
PLACE: Mary’s kitchen.
ACTORS: Bill, Mary

ACT II

SCENE 1 TIME: Thursday, 22nd of November 1956. Olympic Games Opening.
PLACE: Olympic Stadium – Broadcasting Studio
ACTORS: Olympic athletes, Bill

SCENE 2 TIME: Same day, later that evening
PLACE: Nick’s kitchen
ACTORS: Nick, Bill

SCENE 3 TIME: Sometime later
PLACE: Nick’s veranda – Kafenió in Nick’s village
ACTORS: Nick, Cretan waiter, Cretan dancer

ACT III

SCENE 1 TIME: Friday, 7th December 1956. Day after Water Polo game clash between Russia and Hungary. Early morning.
PLACE: Broadcasting Studio – Roseberry Street – Nick’s veranda
ACTORS: Radio Announcer, Nick, Lofty, Mary

SCENE 2 TIME: Same day, some time later.
PLACE: Nick’s kitchen
ACTORS: Nick, Mary

I N T E R V A L

ACT IV

SCENE 1 TIME: Next day, morning.
PLACE: Bill's kitchen
ACTORS: Bill, Mary

SCENE 2 TIME: Same day, afternoon.
PLACE: Football Oval
ACTORS: Lofty, Smackers, Bill

ACT V

SCENE 1 TIME: Saturday, 19th January 1957. Last day of the Argus. Early morning.
PLACES: Roseberry Street – Nick's veranda
ACTORS: Nick, Lofty, Mary

SCENE 2 TIME: Same morning, sometime later.
PLACE: Mary's kitchen
ACTORS: Mary, Bill

ACT VI

SCENE 1 TIME: Same day. Evening.
PLACE: Broadcasting Studio.
ACTOR: Bill

SCENE 2 TIME: Same evening. Sometime later.
PLACES: Roseberry Street – Nick's veranda - Nick's kitchen
ACTORS: Nick, Bill

ACT VII

SCENE 1 TIME: Saturday, 26th January 1957. Mid afternoon. Australia Day.
PLACES: Mary's kitchen
ACTORS: Bill, Mary

ACT VIII

SCENE 1 TIME: Monday 4th February 1957. Nine days after Bill's death.
Early morning
PLACES: Nick's veranda – Roseberry Street
ACTORS: Nick, Lofty, Mary

GLOSSARY OF GREEK WORDS

Greek words in this play have been rendered in phonetic English, with accents on stressed syllables.

The words are listed as they appear in the play, with their English translations.

Igía	:	Health
Mezzédes	:	Meaty snacks
Tavérna	:	Popular eating house
Kalí Nícta	:	Good night
Kafenío	:	Coffee Shop
Krassí	:	Wine
Níko	:	Short name for Nicholas (Nick)
Spanakópita	:	Spinach pie

SYNOPSIS

- THE EVENTS:** The action unfolds over three months, from late spring in November, 1956 to late summer, in February 1957. Three major events occur during this period: the Soviet invasion of Hungary; the 16th Olympic Games; and the demise of the “Argus” newspaper. The play also moves back in time to past events in the lives of protagonists.
- THE CHARACTERS:** The play deals with the personal crises facing each of the protagonists at this particular juncture of their lives.
- Bill is faced with the sudden “death” of the “Argus” newspaper, around which his life revolves and the growing realization of his own death. As he reviews his life, he comes to terms with himself and Amanda, the great love of his life and the driving force behind his search for inner truth.
- Bill’s impending death confronts Mary with her own mortality and her repressed guilt over the suicide of her husband, Timothy, in Paraguay.
- Nick is obsessed with the death of his first son, Vasso, in the Cretan war and his conflicting loyalty to his living son, Dimitri. He is trapped in his past but Bill’s death helps him to resolve his “dilemma”.
- Lofty is caught in a classic love/hate relationship with his father. He develops aggressive tendencies but is saved by the paternal love shown him by Bill, his football idol.
- THE THEME:** The play is about the redemptive power of love and the triumph of the human spirit.



MR EUCALYPTUS

ACT I - Scene one

MONDAY, 5th NOVEMBER 1956; DAY AFTER RUSSIA'S INVASION OF HUNGARY. EARLY MORNING.

AS THE AUDIENCE ASSEMBLES, A NEW DAWN IS BREAKING OVER THE AUSTRALIAN HORIZON AND THE BIRDS IN THE BUSH BURST INTO JOYOUS SONG, GREETING THE BIRTH OF ANOTHER DAY.

WHEN THE PLAY STARTS, THIS GLORIOUS SYMPHONY OF NATURE IS SHATTERED BY A CACOPHONY OF WAR SOUNDS; SOLDIERS MARCHING; GUNS RATTLING; TANKS RUMBLING.

THE WAR SOUNDS FADE OUT AS THE RADIO ANNOUNCER APPEARS IN THE BROADCASTING STUDIO.

ANNOUNCER: [CHEERFULLY]

Good morning, folks. This is Radio 3BR, your bright Radio Station, on this fifth day of November of our Olympic year 1956 and this is yours truly, Rod Cameron, with your favourite breakfast show. And we begin our program, on this sunny spring day with our Argus special news bulletin.

[ON A MORE SOMBRE NOTE]

Budapest, the besieged capital of Hungary was crushed today by massive Russian military forces. Russian tanks and troops struck swiftly to capture the other key Hungarian cities in the sudden pre-dawn offensive to restore Soviet authority.

At the United Nations, Russia vetoed an American resolution in the Security council calling for an end to Soviet intervention and the General Assembly was called into emergency session to consider the situation.

[PAUSE]

Well folks, this is quite a turn. The big question now is how this conflict will affect our Olympic Games. Australian officials are concerned that Russia may boycott the games because of the hostile world reaction to its invasion of Hungary. Here, in our Olympic host city of Melbourne, die-hard anti-communist migrants have vowed to demonstrate and harass Russian athletes and officials. There is open, defiant talk of violence and disruption. Our Olympic officials are working hard to defuse the situation and ensure that all teams get the traditional Australian fair go. I'm sure all of you folks will agree with this sentiment and I would love to hear your views later on in the talk-back segment of our program. And don't forget folks, you can read the latest news on the Hungarian crisis in the Argus, your favourite

morning newspaper. Because, truly folks,, whether it's world news or local news, the Argus is always first with the news.

THE ANNOUNCER LEAVES AS LOFTY WEARING AN ARGUS CAP APPEARS AROUND THE STREET CORNER, CARRYING A PILE OF NEWSPAPERS.

LOFTY: [IN A CHANTING MONOTONE]
War in 'Ungary... read all about it... in the Argus... paper.
[TALKS TO AN IMAGINARY CUSTOMER]
Paper, mister?
[PAUSE]
Ta... Russkis clobber 'Ungary... read all about it... in the Argus... paper.

HE STANDS STILL, ON THE LOOK OUT FOR CUSTOMERS.
NICK, WEARING TRADITIONAL CRETAN GARB, EMERGES FROM HIS COTTAGE WITH A CUP OF GREEK COFFEE.
HE SITS DOWN ON A BATTERED WICKER CHAIR ON THE VERANDAH AND, IN BETWEEN SIPS OF COFFEE, TALKS TO THE EUCALYPTUS TREE.

NICK: Good morning, Mr Eucalyptus.
[SNIFFS THE AIR]
It's a nice, spring day.
[NOSTALGICALLY]
You should see Crete in the spring, Mr Eucalyptus. The earth is warm and the jasmine and the honeysuckle smell sweet. The fields are full of wildflowers. There are red poppies and white and yellow daisies.

LOFTY: War in 'Ungary... read all about it... in the Argus... paper.

NICK: [SUDDENLY ALERT]
The newspaper boy.

LOFTY: Russkis clobber 'Ungary... read all about it... in the Argus... paper.

NICK: [LEANING FORWARD]
This little one worries me, Mr Eucalyptus. My son, Dimitri, says he is very aggressive.

LOFTY: [SPOTTING A CUSTOMER, OFF STAGE]
Paper, mister?
[PAUSE]
Be with you in a jiffy.
[GOES OFF]

War in 'Ungary... read all about it... in the Argus... paper.

NICK: [CONFIDENTIALLY]
Dimitri, doesn't want me to be here on my own. He wants me to be with him... in his fish shop. But I like it here... I have more space... more freedom.
[PAUSE]
You know, Mr Eucalyptus... Grace... Dimitri's wife, is Australian... and I... well... I am a Cretan.
[PAUSE]
I am not complaining, Mr Eucalyptus. Grace is a good wife for Dimitri... and a good mother. They have two little sons... may God keep them well. But we are different... we have different cultures.
[PAUSE]
For Dimitri, it's alright. He loves Australia. You know, during the war, when he was a boy, he played with Australian soldiers. He used to wear their hats and go around, shouting he was Australian.
[PAUSE]
It's nice to be young and have dreams, Mr Eucalyptus. Your country is good for young people.

LOFTY: [OFF STAGE]
War in 'Ungary... read all about it... in the Argus... paper.
[NICK LISTENS INTENTLY]
Russkis clobber War in 'Ungary... read all about it... in the Argus... paper.

NICK: [RESUMING]
You see, Mr Eucalyptus, Dimitri is protective. He says to me: "Father, don't talk so loud, the neighbours will hear you." And I say to him "And who are these neighbours...?"
[POINTS FIRST TO HIS RIGHT, THEN TO HIS LEFT]
... on my right, there is Bill and on my left, his aunt, Mary. Both good people... may God keep them well.
[PAUSE]
I tried to make him understand. I said to him: "Listen, Dimitri, Mr Eucalyptus and I are good friends...
[NODS SADLY]
But he wasn't listening. He said to me: "Father, normal people don't talk to trees."
[PAUSE]

LOFTY EMERGES FROM THE STREET CORNER AND
SHUFFLES UP TO NICK'S COTTAGE

LOFTY: Good day, Nick.

[POINTS TO THE DOG SIGN]

This sign 'ere says: "Beware of the dog". But there's no dog in this house, Nick. There's a wog in this house.

[LAUGHS LOUDLY]

You are not a dog Nick. You are a wog.

MARY COMES OUT OF HER COTTAGE EYEING LOFTY
WARILY

MARY: What's all this commotion?

LOFTY: [CAUGHT OFF GUARD]

Oh, hello, Miss Mary.

MARY: Why were you yelling?

LOFTY: [ON THE DEFENSIVE]

I wasn't Miss Mary.

MARY: Don't lie to me, Lofty.

LOFTY: [TONGUE IN CHEEK]

Well... me and my mate, Nick..., we were havin' a bit of a chat. Nick doesn't speak Ostralian so I do all the yakking.

[TRYING TO DISTRACT HER]

Wanna read the paper, Miss Mary?

The Ruskis are clobberin' the 'Ungarys.

MARY: You don't say!

LOFTY: Fair dinkum, Miss Mary.

[HE OFFERS HER A PAPER]

It's all here, in the Argus.

MARY BUYS A PAPER

MARY: I wasn't aware the Argus had changed its literary style.

LOFTY: [OUT OF HIS DEPTH]

Ugh!

MARY: The Russkis and the 'Ungarys... clobbering each other.

LOFTY: That's right.

MARY: I like your vernacular version of the news.

LOFTY: [DISDAINFULLY]
Honest, Miss Mary! Sometimes you talk like some of them Pommy toffs in the movies.

MARY: Them Pommy toffs speak proper English.

LOFTY: I speak Ostralian English.
[SUDDENLY RESTLESS]
Gotta go and sell some papers now. So long Miss Mary.
[WAVES TO NICK]
See you later, Nick.
[GOES OFF]
War in 'Ungary... read all about it... in the Argus... paper.

MARY: [TO NICK]
Lofty is a typical Australian larrikin, Níko. But we mustn't judge him too harshly. The poor boy has to cope with a drunken father who regularly bashes his mother.
[PAUSE]
I hope Lofty hasn't upset you.

NICK: [RISING]
Coffee, Mary?

MARY: Not just now, Níko.
[GLANCING IN THE DIRECTION OF BILL'S COTTAGE]
I'm expecting Bill, anytime now.
[WAVES]
I'll be back for coffee later.

SHE RETURNS TO HER COTTAGE
NICK SITS DOWN

NICK: Mary is a good friend, Mr Eucalyptus. She was trying to tell me something... about this little one, Lofty.
[PAUSE]
Did you hear him, Mr Eucalyptus? I did not understand his words but I felt his anger. It was in his voice; in his laugh.
[REFLECTIVELY]
But why me, Mr Eucalyptus?
[POINTS TO HIS CLOTHES]
Maybe, it's my Cretan clothes. Dimitri doesn't want me to wear them. He says people here don't like foreigners who dress differently.

BILL COMES OUT OF HIS COTTAGE, HOLDING A
MANUSCRIPT AND LOOKING DAPPER IN A DARK

BLUE SUIT WITH A RED CARNATION ON HIS LAPEL

BILL: [CHEERFULLY]
Top of the morning, Nick.

NICK STANDS UP

Don't get up. I'm on my way to Mary's.
[POINTS TO THE MANUSCRIPT]
I've been up all night... polishing this thing off.
[GRINS]

The story of my life.
[PAUSE]

Mary will be pleased. She's been on my back for the last four months to finish it... which is fair enough, because I've been at it, for four years now... since the Korean war of 1952, in fact. That's when Mary planted the idea in my mind.

[PAUSE]
But I don't think I was meant to write books, Nick.
[AS AN AFTERTHOUGHT]

But I am a journalist, so I must be a writer of sorts, I suppose.
[WITH SELF-MOCKERY]

A writing hack, my colleagues call me.
[SURVEYS THE STREET]

Well, we must get together again, Nick. I miss your ouzo, mate; and your company.

NICK: [SMILING]
Ouzo?

BILL: [GRINNING]
No, Nick. No ouzo. I promised Mary I'd lay off the grog while writing my biography. Not an easy thing for a journalist but Mary is a hard boss. She kept my nose to the grindstone. Though, I must admit that when I got going, I didn't need much coaxing. The stuff just poured out of me. I've never had such an explosive burst of creative energy before.

[WAVES AT A PASSER-BY]

Good morning, Mrs Doherty.

[TO NICK]

Well, I must press on. These are busy times, Nick. What with the Olympics and all the shenanigans at the Argus.

[WAVES]

I'll catch up with you, one of these nights, Nick.

WALKS OVER TO MARY'S COTTAGE

NICK:

I like Bill, Mr Eucalyptus. He is a good man.
[HE LOOKS OVER THE STREET, PICKS UP HIS COFFEE CUP
AND GOES BAK TO HIS COTTAGE]

ACT I – Scene Two

MARY IS SEATED AT HER KITCHEN TABLE SURROUNDED BY REFERENCE BOOKS, SCRIBBLING AWAY ON A WRITING PAD. BILL ENTERS

- BILL: [VERY MUCH AT HOME]
Good morning, gorgeous.
- MARY: [SIGHTING THE MANUSCRIPT]
Bill! You've done it.
- BILL: [TOSSES THE MANUSCRIPT ON THE TABLE]
Yes, my love. All done. Finished.
- MARY: [PICKS UP THE MANUSCRIPT]
I can't believe it.
- BILL: The trials and tribulations of an earth traveller. How's that for a title?
- MARY: Too pretentious.
- BILL: How about... the earthly capers of William Patrick Reilly?
- MARY: The title doesn't matter one whit.
[SHE HUGS THE MANUSCRIPT]
Oh, I will always cherish this manuscript.
- BILL: It's in you trust, as from now, my love. With the express proviso that it must be buried in a bank vault and brought back to life only after my soul abandons my body.
- MARY: I'm proud of you, Bill.
[SHE PLANTS A KISS ON HIS CHEEK]
And so will future generations.
- BILL: Is that a eulogy or an epitaph?
- MARY: It's a tribute. To a great Australian
- BILL: Praise me, Mary, but don't bury me... yet. The quack says there is still some life left in this feeble body.
- MARY: [SUDDENLY DEJECTED]
I don't find that very amusing.

BILL: I'm sorry, Mary.

MARY: You haven't had any alcohol for four months and your health has improved out of sight.

BILL: There was a lot of euphoria in that writing, Mary. The end was almost an anti-climax.

MARY: Well, writing may be your therapy then.

BILL: Food for thought, Doctor Reilly. But me thinks a strong cup of tea may be a better remedy for this patient's flagging spirit.

MARY: Sorry, I forgot about tea.

BILL: [JABS HER CHIN, AFFECTIONATELY]
My fault, I distracted you.

MARY: [BOWING GRACEFULLY]
Thank you, kind sir. Tea shall be served soon.

BILL: You sound terribly British.

MARY: Lofty said the same thing this morning.

BILL: How is Lofty?

MARY: As cheeky as ever. And giving Niko a hard time.

BILL: Is he? I must talk to the little blighter.

MARY: I wish you would. You're the only one he listens to.

BILL: His coach says he's been roughing up some of the kids.

MARY: Lofty has troubles at home, Bill.

BILL: I'll fix young Lofty.
[HE PERUSES MARY'S WRITING]
How's the Argus story going?

MARY: It's going very well. It is at an interesting stage in the middle of the last century...
[PAUSES FOR EFFECT]

BILL: Go on, I am all ears.

MARY: ...when Edward Wilson, a radical Londoner, bought the paper for three hundred pounds from its founder, a fiery Scot, called William Kerr.

BILL: Wilson was a classical reformer; in the eighteenth century tradition.

MARY: Indeed, he was. For immediately attacked the Governor General and the importation of convicts. He also took up the cause of the miners and small farmers.

BILL: The world was seething with change then. Even the Times of London was radical.

MARY: When Wilson's health failed another canny Scot, Laughlin MacKinnon, took over the paper.

BILL: The Scots were great newspaper pioneers.

MARY: This character, MacKinnon, was interested in money, not radical causes. So he turned the paper sharp right towards the establishment.

BILL: Well, you seem to be having fun.

MARY: I am enjoying myself immensely. I keep company with wealthy press barons, some of whom I love and some of whom I loathe.

BILL: It's amazing how the cycle has swung full circle. Here we are, almost one century later, and the Argus is back in British hands.

THEY DRING THEIR TEA.

MARY: Socialist hands, nevertheless.

BILL: Our British bosses may preach socialism but they practice cut-throat capitalism.

MARY: They let the Argus go back to its radical roots.

BILL: For how long? Radicalism doesn't sell papers.

MARY: Don't be such an obnoxious pessimist.

BILL: The paper is losing money Mary; and circulation. The Argus is like a rudderless ship, drifting in a stormy sea.

MARY: The Argus has weathered such storms before.

BILL: [WITH A SIGH OF RESIGNATION]
Well, I hope you're right.
[STARES PERNIVELY AT HER MANUSCRIPT]
What will you do when you finish the Argus book?

MARY: I will write another book. That is what I usually do.
[PAUSE]

BILL: Why don't you write about Paraguay?

MARY TENSES UP

It's an important part of your life, Mary

MARY: I am not chronicling my life. I am chronicling other people's lives.

BILL: You made me do mine.

MARY: Yours was an extraordinary life.

BILL: So was yours. You lived in the last two decades of the 19th Century...

MARY: [CUTS HIM SHORT]
That part of my life was very painful.

BILL: [GENTLY]
Those two decades were vital and exciting Mary. There was a stirring of national pride. An awakening of radical ideas like republicanism, socialism and feminism. Ideas which are just as important and relevant today. The story needs to be told, Mary. For the new generations of Australians who will shape this country's future.
[PAUSE]

MARY STANDS UP, A TEAR TRICKLING DOWN HER FACE.

BILL GETS UP AND HUGS HER.

I'm sorry if I have stirred up old memories, Mary.
[PAUSE]

I know Timothy died in Paraguay. I know you had your miscarriages and hard times there. Now you have repressed that part of your life, but you have to face these ghosts from your past, Mary. You have to come to terms with those bad events of your life.

MARY: Stop it, Bill.

[DABS HER EYES]
I'd rather talk about something else.

BILL: All right. Let's talk about more mundane matters.
[PAUSE]
How's life in Roseberry Street?

MARY: [SMILES]
Now you've gone from sublime to the ridiculous.

BILL: There is life in Roseberry Street, I hope.

MARY: Yes. And it is dull and boring.

BILL: I got so absorbed in my writing, I forgot about Roseberry Street.

MARY: You haven't missed much.

BILL: Anything... unusual happen?

MARY: Maureen O'Hara had a baby.

BILL: Is that... unusual?

MARY: It was her sixth in a row. A record for Roseberry Street.

BILL: Well, Father Flanagan should be pleased with his Catholic flock.
[HE HAMS IT UP]
And our leaders should be pleased that the people have heard their pleas... to copulate and populate... so that this country shall not perish from the face of this earth.

MARY: [MARY BRIGHTENS UP, RESPONDING IN SIMILAR VEIN]
And our politicians will exalt the mothers of our nation and honour them for their heroic efforts.

BILL: We would like a pair of pompous politicians.

MARY: Or a pair of thespians in a playful mood.

THEY HAVE A QUIET CHUCKLE

BILL: What else is new in Roseberry Street?

MARY: The Flannerys have sold their house.

BILL: What ! The Flannerys deserting Richmond? Their ancestral home for generations?

MARY: A Greek family moved in.

BILL: Another one? Why, that's sensational! I'll run the story on the front page of the Argus, with a big headline: "Greek invasion of Richmond. Beachhead established in Roseberry Street."

MARY: The good old Irish Australian families are moving out, Bill. To the new housing estates in the orchards and market gardens of outer Melbourne.

BILL: The working class graduating to middle class.

MARY: Pursuing the great Australian dream: the Brick Veneer house on a quarter acre block with all modern conveniences.

BILL: Mark my words, Mary. These post-war migration waves will transform this country.

MARY: It's about time we removed our British shackles.

BILL: That sounds like treason to me.

MARY: It's patriotism to me.

BILL: Are you saying we should sever our umbilical cord with mother Britain?

MARY: I am saying we should grow up and be ourselves.

BILL: Well, these are exciting times. I've even seen an antenna on one of the roofs.

MARY: Yes. Roseberry Street now has a television set.

BILL: At least! The world is coming to Roseberry Street.

MARY: Television will end our terrible isolation.

BILL: This is the dawn of a new age of Australia.
[CHECKS HIS WATCH]
Well, it's time to go back to the good ship Argus and see if it's still afloat.

MARY: Why are you so overflowing with gloom and doom this morning?

BILL: I don't know the cause, Mary but I know the cure. Two quick drinks:
one to dispel the doom and one to relieve the gloom.

MARY: Don't you dare.

BILL: I have always dared.

MARY: You are daring death.

BILL: I have done that before.

MARY: In war. Not in peace.

BILL: Death has no boundaries.

MARY: [DEJECTED]
Death has raised its ugly head again.

BILL: I'm sorry Mary. I'll take myself off now and leave you in peace.
[KISSES HER ON THE CHEEK]
Thanks for the cuppa. And don't worry about me. I'm a big boy now.

MARY: [TENDERLY]
You will always be a little boy to me.

BILL: Bless you, my love.

HE THROWS HER A KISS AND LEAVES.
MARY SMILES SADLY THEN SITS DOWN
AND STARTS READING BILL'S MANUSCRIPT.

ACT II – Scene One

THURSDAY, 22ND NOVEMBER, OLYMPIC GAMES OPENING.

STIRRING BAND MUSIC HERALDS THE MARCH PAST OF OLYMPIC ATHLETES. A YOUNG AUSTRALIAN ATHLETE, CARRYING THE OLYMPIC TORCH, RUNS UP TO THE OPEN SPACE, NOW THE OLYMPIC STADIUM, AND LIGHTS UP AN IMAGINARY COULDRON. ANOTHER ATHLETE JOINS HIM, CARRYING THE OLYMPIC FLAG.

THE ATHLETES STAND TO ATTENTION AS THE OLYMPIC HYMN IS PLAYED AND AN OFFICIAL'S VOICE, OFF STAGE, ANNOUNCES THE OPENING OF THE 16TH OLYMPIC GAMES.

THE ATHLETES RUN OFF AS BILL APPEARS IN THE RADIO BROADCASTING STUDIO.

BILL: Good evening listeners. This is Bill Reilly on Radio Station 3BR with his views behind the news. The Olympic opening today was the most magnificent spectacle ever staged in the history of Australia. It was enthralling, inspiring and quite unforgettable. With perfect precision, highlight followed highlight: the stirring massed bands display; the proud pageantry of the march of nations; the spectacular release of the pigeons' the solemn raising of the Olympic flag; the swelling crescendo of the beautiful Olympic hymn. But the most soul-stirring moment came when our own torch bearer ignited the Olympic cauldron. That was Australia's greatest moment of fulfillment. There couldn't have been a better choice for this dedication ceremony than this young athlete, a junior champion with his career ahead of him, a symbol of this young nation and its brilliant future. The 16th Olympiad has opened with a splendor and dignity that cannot have failed to impress the world. From here on, the games belong to the athletes. It's over to them.

BILL LEAVES THE STUDIO.

ACT II – Scene Two

NICK'S KITCHEN LATER THAT EVENING. NICK IS SEATED AT THE TABLE BROWSING THROUGH A FAMILY PHOTO ALBUM. BILL ENTERS, CARRYING TWO BOTTLES OF OUZO IN A PAPER BAG.

BILL: [EBULLIENTLY BUT LITTLE UNSTEADILY]
Here I am, Nick.

NICK: [WELCOMES HIM WARMLY]
Bill!

BILL: And look what I have here.
[HE LAYS THE BOTTLES ON THE TABLE]

NICK: [DELIGHTED]
Ouzo!

BILL: Beware of Aussies bearing gifts.
[GRINS]
I actually swapped them for whisky... with a Greek official... it was a fair exchange... an exchange of gifts, actually... in fine, Olympic spirit.

NICK: [FONDLING THE OUZO WITH UNDISGUISED AFFECTION]
Bloody ouzo!

BILL: Now, now Nick. You're swearing like an Aussie trooper. That's a healthy sign of assimilation into our Australian culture [PAUSE] whatever that is.

NICK: Sit down Bill.

BILL: I will, my friend, but first I must make a confession...

NICK FETCHES TWO GLASSES

...assuming you are still my father-confessor, Nick.
[SIGHS WITH MOCK RELIEF]
You are! That's a relief.
[SOLEMNLY]
Well, today Nick, I broke my abstinence. My alcoholic abstinence. Four months of terrible drought have come to an end.
[SMILES]

Actually, my colleagues insisted I should have a drink... to celebrate the opening of the Olympic Games.

[PAUSE]

My colleagues and I gather at the local pub Nick... after the day's work is done, to talk shop and partake... of refreshments.

[PAUSE]

It's a tradition, Nick. A trade tradition.

[PAUSE]

I respect tradition, Nick. So I had a drink with my colleagues... and one drink led to another... and another... and there was an inevitable progression from then on.

[PAUSE]

I only hope my liver can survive the onslaught. It is afflicted with a condition, known, as cirrhosis.

[PAUSE]

The old ticker is not in good shape either. The quack wants me to cut out the grog.

[PAUSE]

Alcohol has been an occupational hazard for me, Nick. I've had two long, careers in my life: soldiering and journalism; both, susceptible to the seductive power of alcohol.

[CONFIDENTIALLY]

Of course I am not an alcoholic. Alcohol has never conquered me. I can leave it alone if I want to but I like meeting my mates in the pub, for a drink and a yarn. And if my number comes up... well, I'll just pack up and go...

NICK: [POURS THE OUZO]
Drink?

BILL: You're such a gracious host, Nick. How can I refuse?

NICK: [RAISES HIS GLASS]
Igía, Bill.

BILL: Igía, Nick. Good health mate.
[SAVOURING THE OUZO]
Ah, nectar of the gods... well not quite. The Greek Gods at Mount Olympus were quaffing wine... by the gallon. They were ungodly, at times, those ancient Greek Gods, Nick.
[HE WINKS]
Imbibing and bedding women, like us mortals.

NICK LAYS PLATTERS OF SLICED TOMATOES, CUCUMBER,

CHEESE AND OLIVES ON THE TABLE. HE ALSO SLICES THICK SLABS OF BREAD WITH A SHARP KNIFE ON A BREAD BOARD.

Hello! What's this? A feast?

NICK: Mezzédes.

BILL: Oh, yes. Mezzédes. Greek snacks...
[TASTES AN OLIVE]
Brings back memories of warm nights in tavernas; eating, drinking and celebrating life before dying in some senseless war.

THE GENTLE SOUNDS OF HARP AND FLUTE
ARE HEARD SOFTLY IN THE BACKGROUND

BILL: You'd have been proud of your ancestors, today Nick. The Olympics were magnificent. What a wonderful legacy the Ancient Greeks have left us... after twenty seven centuries, in this far-away, fair city of ours, their Olympic ideals of peace and friendship live on.
[MUSING]
You know Nick, I fought in many wars, but I have never felt any affinity or affection for any of those alien lands in which I found myself fighting. But with Greece, it was different. With Greece it was like coming home. To my spiritual home.
[PAUSE]
It may have been the romantic view of Greece I formed when I was a student. I was fascinated by ancient Greek history and philosophy.

NICK SITS DOWN AS THE STAGE DARKENS AND THE SPOTLIGHT FOLLOWS BILL, GLASS IN HAND, MOVING TO THE OPEN SPACE – FACING THE AUDIENCE.

I first saw Greece in 1915 when we landed on the island of Lemnos, on our way to Gallipoli to fight the Turks. Then again in 1941, when Hitler invaded Greece to bail out his mate, Mussolini. We were chasing the Italians, across Libya, at the time, when suddenly we were shifted from the burning African desert to the icy mountains of Greece to fight the German invaders.

HE WAXES LYRICAL AS HE RECALLS HIS
WARTIME EXPERIENCES IN GREECE

I will never forget that moment when our ships steamed towards Piraeus. The shores of Greece seemed so strangely like home. The hard light, the grey-green trees clothing the steep hills, and the clear water

evoked memories of our own cities. It was stranger still to find ourselves among a friendly people who showered us with flowers and welcomed us with open arms.

[PAUSE]

We joined the fight, but we couldn't stop the German mechanized divisions which poured down from Yugoslavia. We had to fall back on new lines of defence and, by some strange fate, we made our last stand at Thermopylae.

[WITH WONDER]

Never, in my wildest dreams could I have imagined that I would be standing in the ancient Thermopylae pass, to meet the German hordes, just as Leonidas and his valiant men did, 2500 years before, when they faced the might of the Persian armies. What historic irony. Hellenic civilization, which was to enlighten the world, stood at the crossroads then, just as our own civilization, which sprang from its roots, faced a similar threat now: the threat of destruction, by Teutonic barbarians, of the principles of freedom and democracy, and individual conscience and thought.

[PAUSE]

I stood there and sensed the presence of those ancient Greek warriors. For a fleeting moment, I felt I was one of them, waiting for the Persians to arrive.

[LOST IN THOUGHT]

Was Amanda right? Had I fought here before? Or was it just a flight of fancy?

[SMILES]

Amanda was the love and the bane of my life. I met her in France, where she was serving as a nurse during the First World War. Amanda was an eccentric, aristocratic English lady who believed in re-incarnation. She claimed I had been a Spartan in a previous life and had fought against the Persians alongside Leonidas in the same Thermopylae pass we were standing in now. My rational mind couldn't accept that metaphysical claim... yet... I felt strangely familiar with the place.

[PAUSE]

I was absorbed in these thoughts when suddenly a German Stuka plane dived low and just had enough time to jump for cover before a bomb burst right over the spot where I stood.

[SMILES]

After that, I decided to stay close to earth and concentrate on this life.

HE SIPS SOME OUZO, SAVOURS IT APPRECIENTLY
THEN RESUMES HIS NARRATIVE

BILL: At Thermopylae, we were fighting a rearguard action to prevent the Germans from reaching the beaches, where our troops were assembling

for evacuation. My battalion was cut off and we marched down the coast, where we were ferried by some Greeks to the island of Skiáthos. From there we sailed in a lugger to the island of Chíos where we joined another vessel leaving for Crete with a large number of Greek officers and men.

[PAUSE]

We sailed from island to island and, by now, I began to feel like that mythical Greek wanderer, Ulysses, on his way home to Ithaca from the Trojan War, drifting in the wine-dark Aegean waters and dodging the deadly dangers, lurking in the shadows of that mysterious sea. Some 3000 years later, we were also drifting in the same waters and dodging, this time, the deadly dangers of German craft, seaborne and airborne. And, like Ulysses and his men, the fates favoured us, for finally we made it to Crete to fight yet another battle.

[PAUSE]

When we landed in Crete, I wanted so much to see the ancient ruins of the palace of Knossos, the centre of that remarkable Minoan civilization which flourished in Crete 2000 years before Christ.

The palace was only three miles from Heráclion, the seaport we were defending but the Germans gave us no time for sightseeing. They were preparing an airborne attack and we had to get ready for them.

[PAUSE]

None of us had fought paratroopers before, but we figured they were, basically, foot soldiers, falling from the sky and would not be able to do much damage, until they landed and regrouped. So, we aimed to knock them off in the air first and, if they managed to land, finish them off on the ground.

BILL STARES INTO THE DISTANCE LISTENING INTENTLY

BILL: I can still hear the sounds of those German planes coming over, in wave after wave. It was an awesome sight, seeing those paratroopers, thousands of them, dropping from their planes and floating over the blue sea, against a bright, blue sky. But they were sitting ducks, for as they came down, we shot them in the sky or picked them off the trees and those we missed were hacked to death by the Cretan fighters.

[WITH A TINGE OF SADNESS]

Among the boughs of olive trees, we could see the white silk of the parachutists, still in their full equipment, hanging suspended from the branches, swaying gently to and fro in the light breeze. The dead were everywhere. Bodies lay in the open grass and along the road.

Equipment was strewn in all directions: grenades, helmets, bayonets and ammunition boxes. And, as if to remind us of our common humanity, the dead bodies also carried their human mementoes: photographs of loved ones never to be seen; postcards never to be

posted; writing pads for letters never to be written. War seemed such a sad and tragic waste.

[HIS VOICE AND FACE HARDENING]

But there is no room for sentiment or sympathy in war. There is only duty, death and destruction. In Crete, we were fighting a new kind of war and making history. Never before had one army tried to conquer another from the air. We didn't know then, fighting as we were for survival, that the campaign in Crete would influence the course of the war against the Nazis. But we knew we couldn't hold on to Crete. We had no reserves, no transport, no air defence and hardly any communications. We were outnumbered and outgunned but still we kept attacking. Against overwhelming odds, time and again, we went up the slopes and swept the Germans from the hills, sending them fleeing and capturing hundreds of prisoners. But in the end we had no choice but to retreat.

THE SOUNDS FADE. BILL TURNS TO NICK AND
RAISES HIS GLASS

BILL: To your people, Nick. They loved their freedom and fought the Germans with a ferocity we did not understand and, sometimes, did not approve. But we admired their courage and their pride. They fought with only their daggers and captured rifles and they cared not a damn about the Germans' wrath or retribution. They just went after them and we marvelled at their audacity and their passion. We watched with awe, small boys carrying rifles as big as themselves, chasing the Germans without concern for life or limb.

[SADLY]

We won the battles, but we lost Crete. It was a sad day when the order was given to move south, over the mountains to Sphakiá, for evacuation.

BILL MOVES BACK TO THE KITCHEN AS NICK SUDDENLY GRABS THE KNIFE, EYES BURNING WITH HATRED AND STABS THE BREAD BOARD

NICK: Sphakiá: That's where Vasso was killed.

BILL: Vasso died for his country Nick. For Freedom. That was his destiny
[PAUSE]
I think we fought enough battles for one night, Nick. We must get some sleep now.

[HE EMBRACES BILL]

Kalí níkta, my friend. Good night.

NICK: Kalí níkta, Bill.

BILL: [PATS HIM ON THE SHOULDER]
Try and get some rest Nick. And let bygones be bygones.
[HE LEAVES]

ACT II – Scene Three

SAME EVENING, SOMETIME LATER.
NICK COMES OUT OF HIS COTTAGE AND SITS IN
THE VERANDAH

NICK: It's dark, and quiet Mr Eucalyptus. People are asleep and I am wide awake.
[PAUSE]
Bill talked about the war tonight.
[PAUSE]
When I think of the war, Mr Eucalyptus, I think of Vasso, my dead son. And I always hear his song. A Cretan song he loved very much.

A CRETAN FOLD SONG IS HEARD.
A CRETAN WAITER APPEARS, IN THE OPEN SPACE, WITH A TABLE AND A CHAIR AND SETS UP SHOP. THE SPACE NOW IS NICK'S VILLAGE SQUARE WITH THE KAFENIO IN ITS CENTRE. THE WAITER STANDS BY, AS NICK DREAMILY WANDERS OVER AND SITS DOWN, FACING THE AUDIENCE.

NICK: [TO THE WAITER]
Krassí.

THE WAITER NODS AND LEAVES
THE FOLK SONG FADES

When Vasso died in the war, he was only eighteen. He wanted to join the resistance but his mother would not let him. She had a premonition he would die.

[PAUSE]

The men in the resistance met here, in the kafenío. The Germans watched all the houses so it was safer to meet here.

[PAUSE]

The kafenío was in the village square and the people met there to eat, to drink, to talk, to play or just pass the time. The Germans never suspected the kafenío was a meeting place for the resistance.

THE WAITER RETURNS WITH A CARAFE OF WINE AND A GLASS. HE POURS SOME WIN IN THE GLASS THEN LEAVES.

NICK SIPS THE WINE WHILE HE TALKS.

The resistance men wanted me to make a decision. So, I accepted the inevitable. It was Vasso's fate to fight the Germans just as I had fought the Turks when I was his age.

[PAUSE]

So we went to the kafenío, and sat at a table next to the resistance man. We spoke from a distance, quietly. I said: “Vasso will go.” and the resistance man said: “He must leave as he is. You will be told where and when. May God be with us.” Then he got up and left.

[PAUSE]

I ordered some wine and Vasso and I drunk together, not as a father and son, but as two comrades. I said to him: “Go with the help of God and the blessing of your mother.” And he said: “Thank you, father. You will be proud of me.”

THE CRETAN FOLK SONG IS HEARD AGAIN. NICK DRINKS IN SILENCE AND STARES AT THE EMPTY SQUARE WITH SAD EYES. THE FOLK SONG FADES AND NICK RESUMES HIS NARRATIVE.

NICK:

On the beaches, near Sphakiá, thousands of soldiers were left behind and they went up to the mountains to hide. The resistance organized supplies and helped them to escape.

[PAUSE]

On their way to the mountains one day, Vasso and two comrades ran into some Germans. They opened fire first and killed three Germans before retreating. As fate would have it, Vasso tripped and broke his leg. The other two wanted to fight but Vasso urged them to run. They knew their mission was to get the supplies to the soldiers in the mountains. So Vasso pinned the Germans down long enough for his comrades to escape. Then, he came out firing and was cut down.

[PAUSE]

My Vasso kept his promise. He died like a hero and made us all proud.

[GLANCES AROUND, NODDING SADLY]

This village square was a happy place once. We celebrated our weddings here, our christenings; our festivals. Those were happy times, when the wine flowed and the tables were laden with food; when our musicians played and our songs were sung; when our young ones danced and the old folk watched with pride and joy.

THE WAITER RETURNS, CLEARS THE TABLE AND LEAVES

And my Vasso would lead the dance. Always. He was a good dancer, my Vasso. The best in our village.

THE CRETAN FOLK SONG IS HEARD AGAIN
A YOUNG CRETAN DRESSED IN TRADITIONAL CRETAN COSTUME, DANCING A CRETAN FOLK DANCE, MAKES HIS WAY TO THE OPEN SPACE. NICK STANDS UP WATCHING THE DANCER SPELLBOUND

He had a lean body, my Vasso, and he danced with such grace. He was like a God, when he was dancing.

NICK'S EYES GLISTEN WITH TEARS

If only his mother were here to see him.

[PAUSE]

She went not long after his death. She died one night, in her sleep, grieving for her dead son.

AS THE DANCER DANCES HIS WAY OUT, NICK STRETCHES OUT HIS ARM AS IF TO HOLD BACK THE VANISHING FIGURE

Wait Vasso, Don't go yet. Wait for your mother.

THE WAITER RETURNS, GATHERS THE TABLE AND CHAIR AND LEAVES. NICK STANDS MOTIONLESS, STARING IN THE DIRECTION OF THE DEPARTED DANCER AS THE FOLD SONG DIES OUT. HE LOOKS ABOUT HIM, AS IF LOST, THEN SLOWLY WENDS HIS WAY BACK TO THE VERANDAH.

Memories, Mr Eucalyptus... memories. We can't escape our memories.

[NODDING SADLY]

I am tired, Mr Eucalyptus. I think I'll go and lie down and hope my poor soul will find some peace.

HE SHUFFLES, HEAD BOWED, BACK TO HIS COTTAGE

ACT III – Scene One

FRIDAY, 7TH DECEMBER 1956. DAY AFTER
WATER POLO GAME CLASH BETWEEN RUSSIA AND
HUNGARY. THE ANNOUNCER APPEARS IN THE BROAD-
CASTING STUDIO.

ANNOUNCER: [CHEERFULLY]

Good morning folks. This is 3BR, your bright Radio Station, on this Friday, the 9th day of December in our Olympic year 1956 and this is yours truly, Rod Cameron with your favourite breakfast show. And, we kick off our program, on this warm summer day, with our Argus bulletin.

[FORMALLY]

Vicious fighting in the Hungary versus Russia water polo game, yesterday afternoon, shattered the Olympic Games. A blow which split the eyebrow of a Hungarian player sent blood pouring into the water and set off a violent demonstration which was seen live on television screens all over the world.

[INFORMALLY]

Well, this is really a shame folks because, so far, we've had a beautiful run with our Olympics. Life at the Olympic village was lovey-dovey and even our much maligned weather has been magnificent. People in the know say our Olympic Games have been the friendliest. Melbournians, take a bow; overseas visitors, without exception, say you are a wonderful log. So, I sincerely hope this is only an isolated incident in what has been, overall, a relaxed, easy-going, Olympic atmosphere. There, I said my piece, folks. Please do call me later in the program and tell me how you feel. In the meantime, folks, let us not forget the Argus, your favourite morning newspaper. Because, truly folks, when it comes to news, the Argus wins the race by a mile. So, buy the Argus now, and back a winner, all the way.

THE ANNOUNCER LEAVES AS LOFTY
TURNS UP IN ROSEBERRY STREET
TO SELL HIS NEWSPAPERS

LOFTY: Water polo fight... Russkis clobber 'Ungarys... read all about it... in the Argus... paper

[PAUSE]

Paper, mister.

[PAUSE]

Ta.

NICK EMERGES FROM HIS COTTAGE WITH HIS MORNING
CUP OF COFFEE

NICK: Good morning, Mr Eucalyptus.
 [LOOKS OVER THE STREET]
 Summer is here and Christmas is near.
 [SITS DOWN, SIPPING HIS COFFEE]

LOFTY: Water Polo fight... Russkis clobber 'Ungarys... read all about it... in the Argus... paper

NICK: [LISTENING INTENTLY]
 The newspaper boy.

LOFTY: Paper, mister.
 [PAUSE]
 Be with you in a jiffy.
 [GOES OFF]
 Water polo fight... Russkis clobber 'Ungarys... read all about it... in the Argus... paper

NICK: The seasons come and go, Mr Eucalyptus and we grow older. But are we growing any wiser?
 [PAUSE]
 I ask this question, Mr Eucalyptus because I have a dilemma... a dilemma I can't resolve.

LOFTY COMES AROUND THE CORNER, STEALTHILY
 AND EAVESDROPS ON NICK

NICK: You know, Mr Eucalyptus, Dimitri wants me to stay here, with him. But my other son, Vasso, the dead one... he is pulling me back to Crete.
 [PAUSE]
 I have to choose between my two sons. That's my dilemma, Mr Eucalyptus. It is something which is tormenting me and tearing me apart.
 [PAUSE]
 Dimitri brought me here for this reason. To forget the dead.
 [PAUSE]
 I don't know what to do, Mr Eucalyptus. Stay here with Dimitri, my living son? Or go back to Vasso, the dead one?
 [PAUSE]

LOFTY: [CONFRONTING NICK]
 Why, you silly, old bugger! You are talkin' to yourself. You must be stark, ravin' mad mate.
 [WITH RISING AGGRESSION]
 You don't have a bloody clue about what I'm sayin', do you? Well, you must learn the lingo then mate, and speak Ostralian.

[IN A FIT OF RAMPANT RAGE]

Oh, you're a bloody no hoper, Nick. I dunno why I bother talkin' to ya.

MARY: [RUSHES OUT OF HER COTTAGE, TREMBLING WITH RAGE]
Why, you insolent... arrogant idiot

LOFTY: [SHOCKED BY HER FEROCITY]
Fair go, Miss Mary.

MARY: Fair go! You're not giving Níko a fair go.

LOFTY: [ON THE DEFENSIVE]
I didn't mean no harm, Miss Mary.

MARY: No harm! You were abusing Níko.

LOFTY: I didn't mean to Miss Mary. Honest.

MARY: Then apologize to him. Now.

LOFTY: It's got nothing to do with Nick.

MARY: You either apologize, or I tell Captain Bill.

LOFTY: [ALARMED]
Oh, no. Don't do that.

MARY: Well...

LOFTY: [TURNING SHEEPISHLY TOWARDS NICK]
Sorry, Nick. For all the nasty things I said.

MARY: Now don't do that, ever again.

LOFTY: Yes Miss Mary.
[HANGS HIS HEAD IN SHAME]
I'm sorry Miss Mary.
[FUMBLING FOR WORDS]
It's just... that I ... I...
[HE'S CHOKED WITH EMOTION]
...hate my father's guts.

MARY: Why? What has he done now?

LOFTY: Last night... he came home, real drunk. And he started bashin' my mum.

MARY: All right. Calm down, Lofty.

LOFTY: I hit ‘im, Miss Mary. I hit ‘im real hard.

MARY: You shouldn’t have done that.

LOFTY: I had to Miss Mary. He was hurtin’ my mum.

MARY: [WITH A SENSE OF URGENCY]
Now listen to me, Lofty. Where will you be, tomorrow?

LOFTY: At school.

MARY: After school?

LOFTY: I’ll be having a kick with Smackers.

MARY: Where?

LOFTY: At the football oval.

MARY: All right, wait there for Captain Bill.

LOFTY: [OBEDIENTLY]
Yes, Miss Mary.

MARY: And stay away from your father.

LOFTY: Yes, Miss Mary.

MARY: Good. Now go and sell some papers.

LOFTY: All right, Miss Mary.
[TO NICK, NONCHALANTLY]
See you later, Nick.

HE GOES OFF, SPRUIKING

MARY: I apologize for Lofty’s behaviour, Níko.

NICK: [SMILING]
Coffee?

MARY: It’s a bit early for me Níko. I have to do some more work on my book.
I’ll see you later for coffee.

MARY LEAVES – NICK GOES BACK TO HIS KITCHEN

ACT III – Scene Two

NICK’S KITCHEN SOMETIME LATER.
NICK IS BUSY CLEANING A BUNCH
OF SPINACH. MARY COMES IN.

NICK: [ENTHUSIASTICALLY]
Mary!

MARY: You’re making Spanakópita.
[NICK SMILES]
There! The word roll off my tongue perfectly this time.

SHE WATCHES HIM WITH FASCINATION

You should open a restaurant, Níko and wean Australians away from
Steak, sausages.

[PAUSE]

I don’t suggest Spanakópita, of course; that may be too radical a
change; stuffed lamb will do for starters.

NICK: Coffee?

MARY: Oh yes, please. I am now addicted to Greek coffee. I get a craving for it
every morning.

[NICK BUSIES HIMSELF WITH THE COFFEE]

It’s like being pregnant again. When I had my two pregnancies, I had an
insatiable desire for chocolates.

[WITH UNDISGUISED AFFECTION]

You know, Níko, you are really naughty, inviting me over to your
house. You are scandalizing the old dears of Roseberry Street when you
do that.

[PAUSE]

You stir their passions and excite their fantasies. you are a dark
mysterious stranger, from some faraway land, injecting a dose of
romance into their boring lives. I could write a novel about you, if I
were so inclined.

[IN A FLIRTING MOOD]

The ladies of Roseberry Street, my friend, want to believe that you and
I are having an affair. And affair of the heart.

[PAUSE]

If I were twenty years younger, I would have been happy to oblige. It’s
just that I defer to this silly convention that older women should not
seduce younger men.

[A SENSUOUS LATIN AMERICAN LOVE SONG INSINUATES ITSELF IN THE BACKGROUND. MARY MOVES TO THE OPEN SPACE FACING THE AUDIENCE]

In my younger days, many, many moons ago, I had an affair of the heart. It was a wild, romantic fling with a dark, handsome stranger in a Latin American country called Paraguay.

[WITH A SAD, WISTFULL LOOM]

It was a torrid, passionate affair with a tragic end.

[PAUSE]

It was another time, another world. I was young, adventurous then and just as outspoken and outrageous as I am now.

[SMILES]

And very pretty and flirtatious, may I add.

[THE LATIN AMERICAN SONG FADES]

That was in the late nineties. The 19th century was coming to a close and the 20th century beckoned with its glowing promise of a brighter future.

[PAUSE]

The Australia I grew up in was a prosperous country. Immigrants were pouring in then, as they are now. There was a long, economic boom which ended in a crash and some bitter trade-union strikes which ended in defeat. It was an era of social and political ferment. Seditious ideas like socialism and republicanism were widely debated. They were exciting times for me. They appealed to my rebellious nature and I rallied to every cause crying for equality and justice.

[PAUSE]

In those days, there weren't many feminist rebels. A few of us tried to stir women's passions about their roles and rights in society but it was an uphill struggle because social attitudes were very rigid.

[PAUSE]

Timothy Bourke, my husband, was a trade union activist when I met him and was involved in the great maritime strike of 1890. He was a socialist and a friend of William Lane, an Englishman who dreamed of turning Australia into a socialist republic. Timothy came from Irish stock; he was a tall, lean, good-looking man, in the classic Australian mould. We were both young; we shared the same ideals; and we were fired and, being physically attracted to each other, we also ended up in bed together. Those were prim and proper days and tongues began to wag, so we had to get married in a hurry to satisfy the conventions of our Victorian times.

[PAUSE]

The maritime strike collapsed after a long struggle and was followed by an economic depression which dashed the hopes of our ardent socialists. William Lane gave up Australia and began promoting the idea of setting up a commune in Paraguay. This was going to be the model for his socialist Utopia, and he went about selling this dream to our

disillusioned workers, with the evangelical fervour of a new Messiah. He secured a large area of land in Paraguay and sought recruits who had to be white, teetotalers, and could contribute sixty pounds to the cause - a big sum of money in those days.

Timothy, like most Australian men, loved to drink but he willingly renounced alcohol to pursue his socialist dream. Or so he thought. For, in the end Paraguay turned out to be a graveyard of broken dreams.

[PAUSE]

I had grave misgivings about Lane myself. I just didn't trust the man. He was bigoted eloquent pen and persuasive manner which weaved a magic spell over our workers. I had a distinct feeling that we were being conned by my suspicions were swept away by the strong current of excitement and enthusiasm which Lane was able to generate amongst his followers. My father, Paddy, and my brother, Patrick didn't like the idea either but I was carried away by the euphoria and, against my instincts and better judgement, I agreed to join the commune. So, Timothy and I sailed from Sydney with the first group of settlers and, no sooner were we settled in our commune than my worst doubts were confirmed. Dissensions broke out over alcohol and Lane's authoritarian attitude. The idea of the common good quickly gave way to possessive individualism. Factions were formed and began fighting each other. It wasn't long before Lane abandoned the group and went off with his cronies to organise another, more compliant commune. Suddenly, our men were without a leader, and without a cause, and they just fell apart. They began drinking, and drifting, and going downhill very fast. I was pregnant by this time and the pressures began to take their toll. I became ill and had my first miscarriage.

[PAUSE]

Thank God, I had a strong constitution and I recovered very quickly. But Timothy couldn't cope. He lost his confidence and his fighting spirit. He became increasingly morbid and morose and relied on alcohol to ease his pain. Worst of all, he became impotent and that was a big blow to his pride. He sank into a deep depression from which he emerged now and then, his brain besotted with alcohol and his soul crying for help.

THE LATIN AMERICAN SONG IS HEARD AGAIN

It was about this time that I met my dark handsome stranger. He was a Paraguayan rancher who befriended us and from the moment our eyes met, he began to pursue me relentlessly. I have never been wooed so ardently in my life, before or after. Jose had a fiery, Latin American temperament and he never let up until my defences crumbled and I surrendered my burning body.

[CLASPS HER HANDS, ECSTATIC WITH THE MEMORY]

Oh what joy and bliss I had with my lover, Jose. He was also married and, as we were both Catholics, there was never any thought of divorce. So, we enjoyed a passionate, uninhibited relationship until I fell pregnant again.

[PAUSE]

By now, every member of our commune knew of my affair and I was ostracised. When my pregnancy became obvious, Timothy, in a fit of jealousy and self-pity, shot himself.

[PAUSE]

Timothy's suicide shattered me. I miscarried again and was hospitalised for a long time. Then, God bless his soul, my father, my beloved Paddy, turned up in Paraguay, nursed me back to health, and took me home.

[PAUSE]

We were all young, idealistic innocents then, and the heaven we imagined turned out to be a living hell. Life in Paraguay had become a struggle for survival. Timothy couldn't meet the test and destroyed himself. So did a lot of others who were either lost in Paraguay or returned home broken in body or spirit.

[PAUSE]

Paraguay was my crucible; the event which forged my character and shaped my future. That's where I discovered I had a gift for writing; when I began recording my life in a diary.

SHE MOVES BACK TO THE KITCHEN AND SITS HER COFFEE

There, it's all out; my big secret. Bill is right. I must make my peace with Timothy. Let release those repressed guilty feelings towards him.

[PAUSE]

And, I may be able now to tackle that banned book about Paraguay. It would be a cathartic experience; an inner cleansing; a healing of emotional wounds.

SHE GOES OVER AND PLANTS A KISS ON HIS CHEEK

Thanks for the offer, stranger. And thanks for being such a good listener.

SHE LEAVES. NICK SEES HER OFF.

NICK:

[ADDRESSING MR EUCALYPTUS]

Mary is quite a woman, Mr Eucalyptus.

[SMILES]

Just imagine..., if Mary and I had met earlier... when we were young I mean.

[WITH A MISCHIEVOUS TWINKLE IN HIS EYES]

I think we would have made a wonderful couple.

HE GOES BACK TO HIS KITCHEN

INTERVAL

ACT IV – Scene One

NEXT MORNING. BILL IN PYJAMAS IS SEATED AT HIS KITCHEN TABLE, BROODING OVER A CUP OF TEA. MARY ENTERS.

MARY: [CHEERFULLY]
Good morning, Sire.

BILL: [GRUFFLY]
Morning, Mary.

MARY: Felling grumpy this morning?

BILL: Give me a go; I just got up.

MARY: [CASTING A CRITICAL EYE OVER THE KITCHEN]
What a mess!

BILL: I am a bachelor, for God's sake.

MARY: That's no excuse.

BILL: Did you come to visit me or lecture me?

MARY: I've come to see if you're still alive.

BILL: I'm half alive, thank you.

MARY: And talk to you about Lofty.

BILL: [STIFLING A YAWN]
Do you want a cuppa?

MARY: I've just had coffee with Níko.

BILL: Is it that late?

MARY: It's after eleven.

BILL: [POINTS TO A CHAIR]
Sit down, Mary.

MARY SITS DOWN. BILL POURS HIMSELF ANOTHER CUP OF TEA

I'll be right after my second cuppa.
[SITS DOWN]
What's up with Lofty?

MARY: He had a fight with his father.

BILL: Oh!

MARY: And took it out on Níko.

BILL: I better talk to him.

MARY: The boy needs help, Bill.

BILL: I'll talk to him today.

MARY: He'll be at the football oval, after school.

BILL: Good.

MARY: He's expecting you, Bill.

BILL: I'll go to the office for a couple of hours, then I'll catch up with Lofty.

[PAUSE]

MARY: You were out, with the boys last night?

BILL: Yes.

MARY: Drinking I suppose?

BILL: Drowning our sorrows.

MARY: And what were you sorrowing for?

[PAUSE]

BILL: The demise of our beloved Argus.

MARY: [JUMPS UP WITH SHOCK]
What!

BILL: The unsinkable ship is sinking.

MARY: [INCREDULOUSLY]

It can't be true.

BILL: It is. The Argus has been scuttled.

MARY: I can't believe it.

BILL: They should never have sold the Argus to the Poms.
[PAUSE]
Our newspapers are part of our heritage. They reflect our national character; our Australian uniqueness.

MARY: I agree. They should be protected from foreign predators.

BILL: Well, the British are neither foreigners, nor predators. But they sold us out just the same.

MARY: But why Bill? Why?

BILL: It seems our British bosses were in urgent need of cash.

MARY: The bloody traitors! They betrayed us for money!

BILL: Now, you can finish your Argus story. With a burial.

MARY: I must get the facts first.

BILL: That will be hard, my love.

MARY: [WITH DETERMINATION]
I must find out why they committed this monstrous act.

BILL: You'll be up against a wall of silence.

MARY: I'll break the wall down.

BILL: It's an iron wall, Mary.

MARY: And mine is an iron will.
[SHE WALKS AROUND RESTLESSLY]
What must I do?

BILL: Use intelligence.

MARY: Journalistic intelligence?

BILL NODS

Who do you suggest?

BILL: Tom. He is an old hand in this business.

MARY: Tom Shaunessy?

BILL: Tom has contacts in London.

MARY: What's Tom saying?

BILL: His British sources say the Argus was a Suez casualty. With another paper in Glasgow.

MARY: It's a plot then.

BILL: Our British bosses built a new headquarters and had no money to pay the builders.

MARY: Surely you don't believe that.

BILL: They had dollars in Canada but they couldn't shift them to Britain.

MARY: The plot thickens.

BILL: Our bosses led the opposition to the invasion of Egypt and...
[HE CLEARS HIS THROAT, AFFECTING AN UPPER CLASS ENGLISH MANNER]
...they incurred their Government's displeasure, dear girl.

MARY: It's a political plot then.

BILL: The Chancellor of the Exchequer refused them permission to transfer their Canadian dollars to Britain.

MARY: A political pay back.

BILL: And two century-old newspapers had to go.

MARY: It's a cowardly conspiracy.

BILL: Sold to their rivals. Facing extinction.
[SHE PACES AROUND THE KITCHEN]

MARY: How reliable are Tom's contacts?

BILL: Very reliable but not quotable.

MARY: I'll use the conspiracy theory.

BILL: They could sue you for libel.

MARY: I hope they do. Then I will become a martyr and the book will become a best seller.

BILL: [JABS HER CHIN AFFECTIONATELY]
You're still a rebel at heart, my darling, aren't you?

MARY: I'll expose the bastards.

BILL: You'll have to mind your manners, Mary. You're not dealing with Australian politicians.

MARY: I had a feeling this book would be controversial.

BILL STANDS UP, DEEP IN THOUGHT

BILL: The Argus will officially expire on the 19th of January.

MARY: Well, I better get back to work and finish my book, then.

BILL: And I'll get Tom Shaunnessy on the job. He'll love this assignment.

MARY: [KISSES HIM]
Thanks Bill.
[FROWNS AT THE DISHES]
I'll come back later and wash up.

BILL: I'll clean up my own mess, thank you.
[FIRMLY]
Now, run along like a good girl. I want to make myself respectable.

MARY: Don't forget Lofty.

BILL: Don't worry about Lofty.

MARY: And Bill?

BILL: Yes?

MARY: Remember, you are still a writer.

BILL: I am, first and foremost, a journalist.

MARY: You must keep writing, Bill.

BILL: The Argus wasn't only about writing, Mary. It was a way of life.
[PAUSE]
It will not be easy to fill that vacuum.

MARY: You're an old warhorse, Bill. You will adapt.

BILL: I'll take each day as it comes. That's one thing life taught me.

MARY: And you will have to give up alcohol. You've gone downhill since you started drinking again.

BILL: I'm all right, Mary.

MARY: You are not all right. You look ghastly.

BILL: [FEELS HIS CHIN]
A shave and a shower will take care of that.

MARY: [INSISTENTLY]
You must stop drinking, Bill.

BILL: [JOSTLES HER PLAYFULLY]
If you don't go quietly, I'll throw you out.

MARY: Don't push me, you brute.

BILL: [SMILING]
I'm not pushing. I'm shoving.
[SLAPS HER RUMP]
Off you go.

MARY: All right, all right. I know when I'm not wanted.

BILL: Good.

MARY: Don't forget to brief Tom.

BILL: I will not forget. I promise.

MARY: We'll show the scoundrels.

BILL: Yes. We'll show them.

[SHEPHERDS HER TOWARDS THE DOOR]

Now go back to your book, Mary Reilly, and unleash your vitriolic pen against those British villains.

MARY:

[AFFECTING AN ENGLISH MANNER]

That will be a pleasure, dear boy.

SHE LEAVES. BILL SMILES, SHAKES HIS HEAD, GULPS DOWN THE REST OF HIS TEA AND WANDERS OFF TO HIS BATHROOM

ACT IV – Scene Two

SAME DAY, AFTERNOON. LOFTY WEARING AN “ALL BLACK AND YELLOW SHASH” RICHMOND CLUB GUERNSEY, RUN ON TO THE OPEN SPACE, NOW A FOOTBALL OVAL, BOUNCING AN AUSTRALIAN RULES FOOTBALL. BILL SHOWS UP SHORTLY AFTER AND WATCHES FROM THE SIDELINE. LOFTY SPOTS HIMD RUNS TOWARDS HIM, BOUNCING THE BALL.

LOFTY: Hi, Captain Bill.

BILL: Hi, Lofty. How’s footy?

[LOFTY BOUNCES THE BALL WITH RESTLESS ENERGY]

LOFTY: Great.

BILL: Your coach says you’re improving.

LOFTY: [PLEASED]
Yeah?

BILL: He says you’ll be playing with the seniors soon.

LOFTY: Gee! That’s great.

BILL: He says you’re talented... dedicated... hard working.

LOFTY: [OVERWHELMED]
Gee Whiz!

BILL: And aggressive.

LOFTY: Yeah. I’m keen.

BILL: Aggression serves a purpose, Lofty. But it must be used carefully and wisely.

LOFTY: I dunno what you mean, Captain Bill.

BILL: Well, aggression is an attitude of mind. Like wanting to win.

LOFTY: [GRINS CHEEKILY]
Yeah. I want to win. Like all the time.

BILL: Good. To win, you must kick goals.

LOFTY: Oh yeah. I love kicking goals.

BILL: And to kick goals, you must have the ball.

LOFTY: Yeah.

BILL: You must concentrate on the ball.

LOFTY: Yeah.

BILL: You must concentrate on the ball.

LOFTY: Yeah.

BILL: Not on the other player.

LOFTY LOOKS PUZZLED

If you thump the other player, you lose your concentration. You lose the ball.

LOFTY: But ya got to thump ‘em.

BILL: Why?

LOFTY: To stop ‘em from thumpin’ you.

BILL: If they thump you, that’s fine.
They’ll lose the ball.

LOFTY: [PONDERES THE THOUGHT]
You mean... we mustn’t thump ‘em.

BILL: That’s what I mean.

LOFTY: But if we don’t thump ‘em, they’ll think we’re softies.

BILL: They can think what they like, as long as you kick goals.
[PAUSE]
That’s what I did, when I was playing the game.

LOFTY: You were a champ, Captain Bill.

BILL: I became a champ because I was playing the ball.

LOFTY: You mean you didn't thump 'em?

BILL: I did in the beginning. Then I got wise and I stopped.

LOFTY: And they didn't... thump you?

BILL: No.

LOFTY: And they let you kick goals?

BILL: They couldn't stop me.

LOFTY: [INTRIGUED]
How did ya do that?

BILL: Well, when someone thumped me, I'd turn around, smile and say: "I like you, fella."

LOFTY: [HIS EYES WIDE-OPEN WITH AMAZEMENT]
No kiddin'.

BILL: No kidding.

LOFTY: Well, I'll be buggered.

BILL: If you do that, you'll be a champ like me.

LOFTY: [WITH SUDDEN EXCITEMENT]
You think so, Captain Bill?

BILL: Yes, but you must follow the golden rule.

LOFTY: [CONFUSED]
What's that?

BILL: Loving them, not thumping them.

LOFTY: You mean... I gotta love... those mugs?

BILL: Well, to begin with, you mustn't call them mugs.

LOFTY: Yeah?

BILL: You must think of them as good blokes.

LOFTY: Yeah?

BILL: It has worked for me.
And it will work for you.

LOFTY: [TRYING TO DIGEST THE MESSAGE]
You mean... you want me to do... this lovin' stuff?

BILL: Only if you want to be a champ.

LOFTY: It's gonna be awful hard, lovin' those mugs.

BILL: [RAISING HIS HAND]
No, not mugs. Mates.

LOFTY: [THE PENNY SUDDENLY DROPS]
Gee! Some of them are mates. You know, school mates.

BILL: Will you give it a go?

LOFTY: [TENTATIVELY]
Well... I wanna be a champ... like you, Captain Bill.

BILL: Good. You can start at home then.

LOFTY: [CONFUSED AGAIN]
Ugh!

BILL: You'll have to love your dad, first.

LOFTY: [SUDDENLY AGITATED]
But I hate my dad.

BILL: No, you don't.

LOFTY: He bashes my mum.

BILL: I know.

LOFTY: And he hates me.

BILL: [PATS HIM GENTLY]
No, Lofty. He loves you.

LOFTY: [SHAKING]

My dad never loved me.

BILL: Maybe he doesn't know how

LOFTY: I dunno what you mean

BILL: [SOFTLY, COMPASSIONATELY]
Your dad had a hard time when he was a kid.
[PAUSE]
His father left him... that's pretty tough, for a little boy... to be abandoned by his father.
[PAUSE]
That little boy is still there, Lofty... inside you dad... feeling unwanted and unworthy... still crying out for someone to love him.
[PAUSE]
Will you tell this little boy... that you love him?

LOFTY: [SHOCKED]
What! Tell my dad... that I love 'im?

BILL: Is that a hard thing to do?

LOFTY: I never done that before.

BILL: Do it Lofty, and he'll return your love.
[PAUSE]
And he'll stop bashing your mum.

LOFTY: [STARING AT HIM, DISBELIEVINGLY]
Ya reckon?

BILL: Yes. The next time he comes home drunk, go up to him and tell him you love him.

LOFTY BOUNCES THE BALL FURIOUSLY

Will you do that?

LOFTY: I dunno whether I can.

BILL: Well, you want to be a champ, don't you?

LOFTY: Yeah.

BILL: Then a champ you will be. Greater than me.

LOFTY: [DUMBSTRUCK]
Greater than you?

BILL: Yes.

LOFTY: How can I do that?

BILL: You do it in your head.

LOFTY: In my head?

BILL: Yes. That's where it all happens.

LOFTY: I dunno what you mean.

BILL: I mean your thoughts, Lofty.

LOFTY: Yeah?

BILL: Think good thoughts about people and you will get good thoughts back from people.

LOFTY: [CONCENTRATING HARD]
Yeah?

BILL: Give your dad loving thoughts and you'll get loving thoughts back from your dad.

LOFTY: Yeah?

BILL: The same goes for your football mates and everyone else.

LOFTY: Yeah?

BILL: If you learn this lesson and apply it in your life, you will be a winner.

LOFTY: [OVERAWED]
Gee!

BILL: Think of your mind as a powerhouse, Lofty; generating power. If the thoughts that go through your mind are good, they'll generate good or positive power. If they are bad, they'll generate bad or negative power. Do you follow that?

LOFTY: You mean... like electricity? Positive and negative?

BILL: You're getting the drift.

LOFTY: Am I?

BILL: Yes. Thoughts are energy, Lofty. Like electricity. They affect your mood, your behaviour and your relationships with other people. They determine what you are, and what you become.

LOFTY: [INSTINCTIVELY, FEELING HIS WAY TOWARDS THIS TRUTH]
Yeah. Like smiling? Sometimes, when I'm sellin' papers, people smile at me and I smile back.

BILL: Yes. Smiling is like saying: "I like you."
Only silently.

LOFTY: So I can say it with a smile. I can let 'em know I like 'em like that.

BILL: Spot on. Now start thinking good thoughts about your dad. And when you're ready, tell him how you love him.

LOFTY: [GRIPPED BY DOUBTS AGAIN]
You really think my dad loves me?

BILL: Why don't you ask him?

LOFTY: [SEIZED BY PANIC]
Ask him? How?

BILL: You'll know. When the time comes.

LOFTY: Gee! That's gonna be hard.

BILL: [UNFOLDING A PARCEL]
Here, I want you to have this. It's my football Guernsey.

LOFTY IS MESMERISED BY THE GUERNSEY. BILL TOSSES IT TO HIM

Here, take it.

LOFTY: [TOUCHES IT WITH REVERENCE]
Gee!

BILL: I played all my senior games in this Guernsey. I hope it brings you as much joy and luck as it did for me.

LOFTY: Gee, Captain Bill! I dunno what to say.

BILL: Why don't you wear it?

LOFTY: [LOOKS BEWILDERED]
What, now?

BILL: Yes, now.

LOFTY: [CHANGING GUERNSEYS]
But, why? I mean, why me, Captain Bill?

BILL: Because I've never had a son, Lofty.

LOFTY: Yeah?

BILL: And I love you like a son.

LOFTY: [OVERCOME WITH EMOTION]
Gee, Captain Bill. I didn't know that... I... I ...

BILL: Say it, Lofty. Don't be scared.

LOFTY: [HE TRIES BUT HIS TONGUE IS TIED]
I... I....

BILL: I love you too.

LOFTY: [WITH A SIGH OF RELIEF]
How did ya know?

BILL: I read your thoughts.

LOFTY: How did you do that?

BILL: You'll find out for yourself one day.

LOFTY BECOMES SUDDENLY EXHUBERANT. HE LETS OUT A LOUD YELL AND JUMPS UP WITH JOY.

LOFTY: I'm gonna be a champ like you, Captain Bill.

BILL: I'm sure you will, Lofty.

LOFTY: [HE TOUCHES HIS NEW GUERNSEY WITH AWE]
Gee. I must show my mate Smackers.

ON AN IMPULSE, HE STAB-KICKS THE BALL TO BILL WHO TAKES THE PASS, THEN MOVES BACKWARDS ANTICIPATING THE NEXT PLAY. BILL KICKS THE BALL BACK TO LOFTY WHO TAKES IT ON THE RUN.

BILL: Good play, Lofty.

LOFTY: I'll go and find Smackers now
[RUNS OFF BOUNCING THE BALL]
See you later Captain Bill.

BILL: [WAVES]
Good luck, champ.
[HE WALKS AWAY WITH A BIG SMILE]

ACT V – Scene One

SATURDAY, 19TH OF JANUARY 1957. LAST DAY OF THE ARGUS. EARLY MORNING.

NICK COMES OUT OF HIS COTTAGE AND SIIN THE VERANDAH WITH HIS MORNING CUP OF COFFEE

NICK: Good morning, Mr Eucalyptus. It's going to be hot, today.
[PAUSE]
This is my first summer in your country. January in my country is cold. Here, it is hot. People go to the seaside.
[PAUSE]
And how the time has passed. The Olympic Games are over and we have a new year. I think 1957 will be a good year for me, Mr Eucalyptus. A year of change.
[CONFIDENTIALLY]
Last night, Mr Eucalyptus, I had a dream.
[LEANING FORWARD]
I dreamt I was in my village. The square was deserted. There was not a soul in sight.
[STIRS UNEASILY IN HIS CHAIR AND LOOKS TO HIS LEFT, THEN TO HIS RIGHT]
I was sitting in the kafenío, all alone, and Vasso suddenly appeared, out of nowhere, in a sort of a haze.
[HE CROSSES HIMSELF WITH REVERENTIAL AWE]
He stood there and spoke to me as I speak to you now. He said: "Don't worry about me, father." And he vanished.
[PAUSE]
Vasso used to say that to me, whenever I was worried.
[HE LAPSES INTO MEDITATION]

LOFTY LOBS UP ON THE STREET CORNER WITH HIS NEWSPAPER

LOFTY: [MOURNFULLY, LIKE A DIRGE]
Say goodbye... to the Argus... paper.
[PAUSE]
Last edition... of the Argus... paper
[PAUSE]
Paper, mister.
[PAUSE]
Ta.
[HE STANDS STILL]

NICK: The newspaper boy. He has changed this little one, Mr Eucalyptus. He has lost his anger. And he shows respect now. He talks to me like an old friend.

LOFTY: Say goodbye... to the Argus... paper.
[PAUSE]
Last edition... of the Argus... paper
[HE APPROACHES NICK]
Good day, Nick. She's gonna be hot, today, mate.
[PAUSE]
Funny business, this closing of the Argus, Nick. They say the paper went broke. Can't understand how a newspaper can go broke, can you?
[PAUSE]
Captain Bill is very upset. He loves the paper. A lot of the blokes there, were in the war with him. He has lots of mates in the Argus, Captain Bill.
[PAUSE]
It's a shame really, 'cause I liked sellin' the Argus. Now, there's no point in sellin' papers anymore. I'm getting out of the newspaper business, Nick.
[GLANCES OVER THE STREET]
Street is quiet, Nick. People are away, on holidays. It's holiday time, here Nick. Summer holidays.

MARY COMES OUT OF HER COTTAGE

MARY: Good morning, gentlemen.

NICK GETS UP, SMILING.

LOFTY: Morning, Miss Mary. It's gonna be a stinker of a day.

MARY: Yes. It's stifling hot, already.
[TO NICK]
I don't like this heat, Niko.

LOFTY: [PROUDLY]
I'm gonna go camping with my dad.

MARY: Good for you, Lofty.

LOFTY: My dad and I get along now.

MARY: [GREATLY SURPRISED]
Well, that's good news.
[PAUSE]

LOFTY: [FALTERINGLY, SELF-CONSCIOUSLY]
I... I... you know...
[BLURTS IT OUT]
...I started... lovin' my dad.
[REGAINING HIS COMPOSURE]
It's hard yakka, but it works.

MARY: [INTRIGUED]
You don't say.

LOFTY: I'm gonna do it with the footy too.

MARY: You gonna do what with the footy?

LOFTY: I'm gonna love 'em, Miss Mary.

MARY: You gonna love who, Lofty?

LOFTY: The other blokes.

MARY: [STUNNED BY THE REVELATION]
You mean... the other footballers? Your opponents?

LOFTY: Yeah. Thumpin' is out.

MARY: Well! Well!

LOFTY: [WITH AUTHORITY]
You see, Miss Mary, if you love 'em, you don't thump 'em. That way
you kick goals. It's really simple.

MARY: Turning the other cheek is never simple.

LOFTY: You wanna try it sometimes, Miss Mary. It works.

MARY: Well, I am speechless. I don't know what to say.

LOFTY: [GRINNING CHEEKILY]
You can say goodbye to the Argus.

MARY: How do you mean?

LOFTY: Buy the last paper.

MARY: Oh yes. That's what I came for.

[TAKES OUT SOME MONEY]
I'll keep it as a souvenir.

LOFTY: Might as well. There won't be any more.
[THEY SETTLE THE TRANSACTION]
Thanks, Miss Mary. Say hello to Captain Bill.
[GRINNING]
And give 'im my love.
[WAVES TO NICK]
See you later, Nick.
[HE GOES OFF. SPRUIKING]

MARY: [DUMBFOUNDED]
Well! What a transformation!
[POINTING TO BILL'S COTTAGE]
The old master has wrought a miracle.
[TO NICK, WITH RESOLUTION]
I must go back to my writing, Niko. I've started a new book and my
creative juices are flowing.
[WAVES]
I'll see you later for coffee.

NICK WAVES BACK AS MARY GOES OFF.

NICK: I think I'll go and water my tomatoes, Mr Eucalyptus. They're
beginning to ripen already. Soon, I'll have my first crop of Australian
tomatoes. It's a good omen, Mr Eucalyptus.

HE CROSSES HIMSELF

Glory be to God.

HE GOES INSIDE HIS COTTAGE

ACT V – Scene Two

SAME MORNING, SOMETIME LATER, MARY’S KITCHEN.
MARY IS SEATED AT HER TABLE ENGROSSED IN HER
WRITING. BILL ENTERS. HE IS GAUNT OF FACE BUT BRIGHT
IN A LIGHT BLUE SUIT WITH HIS TRADEMARK: A RED
CARNATION, IN HIS LAPEL.

- BILL: [CHEERFULLY]
How’s my pin-up girl, this morning?
- MARY: [LOOKING UP]
Hello! You’re bright and early.
- BILL: We’re burying the Argus today.
- MARY: Funerals are not meant to be cheerful.
- BILL: It’s only a symbolic rite of passage.
- MARY: What will you do? Burn the place down?
- BILL: No. We’ll burn the last paper to come off the press and bury its ashes in an urn. Then, we’ll have a wake to lament our dear, departed friend. And, for those unable to attend, a eulogy will be delivered over the airwaves by a lifelong friend.
- MARY: Captain William Patrick Reilly, I suppose.
- BILL: [BOWS THEATRICALY]
Commonly known as Bill Reilly, the man with the views behind the news.
- MARY: You’re in good spirits this morning, Master Reilly.
- BILL: Buoyant spirits.
- MARY: Why?
- BILL: [PLAYFULLY]
Why not?
- MARY: [SHE GETS UP AND OBSERVES HIM THOUGHTFULLY]
I think you’re hiding something.

BILL: Am I?

MARY: Yes.

BILL: Then have a guess.

MARY: Don't play with me, Bill.

BILL: But I love playing with you.

MARY: I'm not in the mood.

BILL: I am.
[PAUSE]

MARY: Well...

BILL: I'm writing another book.

MARY: [CLASPING HER HANDS WITH DELIGHT]
Oh, Bill. That's wonderful.

BILL: A book about sport.

MARY: [SURPRISED]
Sport?

BILL: Yes. About the influence of sport on Australia's character and development.

MARY: How exciting?

BILL: [ENTHUSIASTICALLY]
Think Mary! All our legends, all our heroes, were born either in the fields of battle or in the fields of sport.

MARY: Two fields in which you have left your mark.

BILL: [PONDERING]
That's what I'll call the book: "Of Heroes and Sporting Legends".

MARY: And will you tell the stories of the cricket wars between the upstart colonies and the mother country?

BILL: Of course. And about our unique game of football. And our Olympic Games.

MARY: Oh Bill! It's so good to see you so vibrant... so alive, again.
[SHE PUTS THE KETTLE ON]
I'll make a special cup of tea; to celebrate this very special occasion.

BILL: [ADOPTING HIS ENGLISH ACCENT]
Jolly good idea.

MARY: I've even baked some scones.

BILL: I say, old girl, not Devonshire tea?

MARY: Yes; with fresh cream; and strawberry jam.

BILL: Oh, I say! What luck!
[HE SITS DOWN, AND REVERTS TO HIS NORMAL SPEECH]
When will your book be released, Mary?

MARY: In a couple of weeks.
[PAUSE]
They've changed the title.

BILL: To what?

MARY: 'Who Killed the Argus?'. There's a big, black question mark on the book cover.

BILL: Sounds like a mystery thriller.

MARY: Well, the Argus was axed in an atmosphere of intrigue and secrecy. Isn't that mysterious?

BILL: Makes sense, I suppose.

MARY: The publishers say it will sell more books.

BILL: It will stir up the politicians, that's for sure.

MARY: And stimulate some public interest, in our press, I hope.

BILL CASUALLY PORES OVER MARY'S WRITING

BILL: Hello! What are you hatching here?

MARY: [SHE SETS THE TABLE, FEIGNING INDIFFERENCE]
Nothing of significance.

BILL: [LOOKS UP WITH SURPRISE]
You're writing about Paraguay.
[WITH SUDDEN EXCITEMENT]
Why, Mary! That's fantastic!
[PAUSE]
Tell me about the book.

MARY: It will be a novel.

BILL: [SURPRISED]
A novel?

MARY: Isn't it strange? I spurned novels all my life and now I am writing one.

BILL: That would be karmic retribution, according to Amanda.

MARY: Well, maybe I was meant to write a novel in my life.

BILL: About your life.

MARY: The heroine will be another woman.

BILL: She will be you, in disguise, Mary.

MARY: That's the only way I can do it.

BILL: You're a great writer, Mary. It will be a great novel.

MARY: [SERVES THE TEA WITH THE SCONES AND SITS DOWN]
And what has inspired your book?

BILL: Lofty.

MARY: [SURPRISED]
Lofty?

BILL: Lofty was the catalyst. The idea was in my head for a long time.

MARY: [WITH WONDER]
Mysterious are the ways of creativity!

BILL: The whole thing crystallised after our session at the oval. In the shower, of all places.

THEY EAT THE SCONES AND DRING THEIR TEA

MARY: By the way, Lofty says hello.

BILL: How is the little blighter?

MARY: In sparkling form.
[PAUSE]
And he sends you his love.

BILL: [FEIGNING SURPRISE]
Oh!

MARY: He is a changed boy, our Lofty.

BILL: I had no doubt he would change. I have great faith in that boy.

MARY: You have worked a miracle with Lofty.

BILL: Is it as dramatic as that?

MARY: You should have seen him this morning.

BILL: Why? What happened?

MARY: He was preaching. I couldn't believe it.

BILL: [IN A PLAYFUL MOOD, FEIGNING IGNORANCE]
Preaching? What?

MARY: [PLAYING HIS GAME]
The gospel of love.

BILL: The gospel of love? By whom?

MARY: By a Richmond apostle. One known as Reilly.

BILL: And pray what may that be?

MARY: Love 'em. Don't thump 'em.

BILL: The little devil. He may end up a saint yet.

MARY: [CLASPING HER HANDS, AS IF IN PRAYER]
And peach now reigns in Lofty's house.

BILL: Glory be!

MARY: The father is no longer bashing the mother.

BILL: Let us give thanks!

MARY: And the son is going camping with his father.

BILL: Halleluiah!

THEY HAVE A GIGGLE. MARY REFILLS THEIR CUPS

MARY: How did you do it?

BILL: I tried an old trick.

MARY: Tell me, I'm intrigued.

BILL: I used good, old fashioned motivation.

MARY: I should have known. You are a great motivator.

BILL: Lofty has the potential to be great at the sport he loves. He is strong, inventive, intelligent. He has the athletic skills; the speed, the agility; the stamina.

MARY: Are you extolling his football virtues?

BILL: [UNDETERRED]
When he runs with the ball, he has the grace of a gazelle. When he leaps in the air to take a mark, he soars like an eagle.

MARY: My! What colourful metaphors.

BILL: It's poetry in motion, Mary. A sheer delight to the eye.

MARY: Did you tell him all that?

BILL: Of course not. I only said he had to start loving people instead of hating them and hitting them.

MARY: As you sow, so you shall reap.

BILL: I also said that he had to start with his father first; then his football adversaries; then all his other enemies.

MARY: Love your enemies; bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you.

BILL: I didn't throw the Bible at him.

MARY: Lofty wants to make himself in your image. You are his God.

BILL: The boy is a champ, Mary. He is destined for greatness.

MARY: Another football hero. Another sporting legend.

BILL: That's what inspired me to write this book.

MARY: Numberless are the world's wonders but none more wonderful than man.

BILL: Wonderful words by a wonderful playwright.

MARY: None other than the Ancient Greek Sophocles.

BILL: I don't agree with Sophocles, though. I think women are more wonderful.

MARY: Some women are.

BILL: You are.

MARY: Charmer.

BILL: You make wonderful scones.

MARY: Go on. Get out of here.

BILL: [GETS UP]
I suppose I better or I'll miss the burial.

MARY: [RISING]
Now, don't grieve too much and don't drink too much, my love. You have a book to write, remember?

BILL: I'll have that book finished by the 26th, alcohol and other distractions notwithstanding.

MARY: The 26th? Which month?

BILL: This month.

MARY: [INCREDULOUSLY]
January?

BILL: Yes. The 26th of January, Australia Day. The book will be a birthday present to Australia.

MARY: But that's only a week away. You're not giving yourself much time.

BILL: It's all in my head. I just have to put pen to paper.

MARY: [SUDDENLY ALARMED]
But why this sudden rush?

BILL: The life-force will not be with me forever, Mary.

MARY BECOMES DEJECTED. BILL LIFTS HER CHIN UP AND GAZES IN HER EYES

Cheer up, sweetheart, I haven't given up the ghost, yet.

[KISSES HER]

Bye, bye, wonderful woman.

[SMILES]

And thanks for the wonderful scones.

HE LEAVES. MARY SITS DOWN, STARING GLOOMILY AT HER MANUSCRIPT.

ACT VI – Scene One

SAME DAY; EVENING. BILL APPEARS IN THE RADIO BROADCASTING STUDIO.

BILL: Good evening, listeners. This is Radio Station 3BR, and I am Bill Reilly with the views behind the news. This is a sad day because the Argus, a dear old friend has passed away. The Argus, dear friends, was born one hundred and eleven years ago when the population of our infant state of Victoria was barely over thirty thousand. Its reporters were at the gold rush. They told of the coming of the steam; the motor car; electricity; and the aeroplane. Its special correspondents covered half-a-dozen wars. But its most exciting and wonderful years were its last. It waged campaigns. It told the truth. It got things done. It gave its staff writers and contributors, dear friends, freedom of expression. They, in turn, had their say and believed implicitly in the things they said. They now feel the loss of their warmest friend. They feel a disappointment that reaches grievous depths in the soul. Yet, they have produced today, the Argus, as you our 170,000 friends, have come to know it – a newspaper of spirit, cheerfulness and courage. It was a gesture, dear friends, of Australian craftsmen joining hands with newspapermen, heads high in a special leave-taking, wanting you to remember them and the Argus as you've always known them and wishing to thank all their faithful friends who stuck to the Argus through the tough times and the good times.

HE LEAVES

ACT VI – Scene Two

SAME EVENING, SOMETIME LATER. NICK IS SEATED IN HIS VERANDAH, DEEP IN THOUGHT. BILL WOBBLES DOWN ROSEBERRY STREET SINGING WALTZING MATILDA.

Oh! Once there was a swagman camped by a Billabong,
Under the shade of a Coolabah tree
And he sand and he watched and waited 'til his billy boiled
Who'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me?

Who'll come a-waltzing Matilda my darling
Who'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me?
Waltzing Matilda and leading a waterbag
Who'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me?

HE REACHES NICK'S COTTAGE. NICK GREETES HIM WITH A BIG GRIN

NICK: [EXHUBERANTLY]
Bill.

BILL: [MOTIONS HIM TO BE QUIET]
Not so loud, Nick.
[LOOKS ABOUT FURTIVELY]
You'll wake up the neighbours.
[POINTS TO THE OPEN ENTRANCE DOOR]
Come inside, Nick
[HE TIPTOES INTO THE KITCHEN FOLLOWED BY NICK]
Good to see you, Nick.
[PATS HIM ON THE SHOULDER]
Sit down mate. Make yourself at home.

HE SITS DOWN AND STARTS HUMMING WALTZING MATILDA. HE LOOKS AROUND HIM, TRYING TO FIND HIS BEARINGS.

BILL: Hey! This is your kitchen, Nick. Mine has stacks of dishes in the sink.
[SMILES]
I mean to wash them but something always seems to come in the way.
[PAUSE]
Well... I was coming here, anyway, Nick... except that I lost my way... on the way over here.
[LOOKS AROUND, HUMMING WALTZING MATILDA]
That's Waltzing Matilda, Nick. Australia's most popular folk song.

[PAUSE]

Many of my fellow Australians think Waltzing Matilda should be our national anthem. Because strange as it may seem, Nick, Australia doesn't have a national anthem. Oh, we have God Save the Queen but that's Britain's anthem, not ours.

NICK STARTS BREWING SOME COFFEE

We are still an adolescent nation, Nick. We have not reached national maturity, yet. So, we don't have an anthem. We use Britain's. The mother country who gave us birth, tradition, values; and whom we love and hate at the same time. That's why we call the English Poms; because we resent their superiority and because we relish our inferiority.

[PAUSE]

You see, Nick, our first settlers were convicts; starving men and women who were exploited and oppressed by a callous and uncaring ruling class. They were transported to this alien, distant continent and used as slave labour to establish a penal colony; and because they were the dregs of British society, these convicts and their descendants were treated with contempt; that's how the colonial cringe was born and bred into our consciousness and we came to believe that everything made in Britain was superior and everything made in Australia was inferior, so that we had to import everything, from British boots to bishops.

[PAUSE]

Well, we have come a long way since then, Nick but we are still growing up. And that's a very painful process as any adolescent will tell you. We will be 169 years old, this year, Nick. The aborigines, the dispossessed owners of this land, have been around for 40 thousand years... give or take a few thousand years.

[LOOKS AROUND]

Where are you, Nick?

[SIGHTS HIM]

Oh, there you are.

[SMILES]

Sorry for this sudden assault on your ears, mate.

[PAUSE]

I feel very talkative... and evocative, tonight. I always do when I drink.

[PAUSE]

We buried an old friend, today Nick. It was a sad day... very sad.

NICK SERVES HIM A CUP OF COFFEE

Ah! Greek coffee.

[TAKES A BIG SIP]

That'll sober me up.

GULPS DOWN SOME MORE COFFEE. NICK STARTS PREPARING SOME FOOD

Waltzing Matilda was actually a ballad, Nick. A bush ballad, written by Banjo Paterson, one of Australia's finest sons. Banjo was a war correspondent for the Argus, in South Africa, back in 1900, when the British were fighting the Dutch Boers. I remember that year well, Nick, because I had just started school and Mary came home from Paraguay.

[PAUSE]

Banjo was my hero, when I was a boy, Nick. He was a man of many talents, our Banjo. Horseman; sportsman; lawyer; soldier; traveller; poet; novelist; journalist. He loved Australian bush characters and wrote about them in his books. You know people, like jackaroos; bullockies; rough riders; and buffalo hunters. Lovable outback characters from a distant past; some of them extinct; others on the way to extinction.

[PAUSE]

There were many old-timers at the wake who knew Banjo. They recited his poems, sang his ballads and remembered the good old days. They mourned, not only the passing of the Argus, but the passing of an era.

NICK LAYS THE FOOD ON THE TABLE

NICK: Eat.

BILL: Your hospitality is overwhelming, Nick.

HE EATS AND SPEAKS BETWEEN MOUTHFULS OF FOOD

That Boer war in 1900 against the tough Afrikaner bushmen was the first time Australians from the various colonies fought together as a force. The following year, the colonies federated and Australia was unified. It was a year of celebration for our new nation but for me, Nick, it was a year of tragedy.

[PAUSE]

In that year, my mother died, of tuberculosis.

[HE REMAINS QUIET, LOST IN THOUGHT]

NICK: [GESTURING]
Ouzo?

BILL: Why not? This may well be our last supper, Nick.

NICK FETCHES THE BOTTLE OF OUZO, GLASSES AND POURS DRINKS

BILL: [NODDING SADLY]
At the tender age of six, my world suddenly collapsed. I became depressed and wanted to die. In the bleak world of my imagination, I was concocting all sorts of disasters which would bring about my destruction. I remember going about my daily chores, in brooding silence, wallowing in self-pity and misery. Fortunately, the family elders, in their wisdom, decided to leave me alone to cope with my grief and sorrow as best as I could.
[PAUSE]

NICK: Igía, Bill

BILL: Igía, Nick.

THEY DRINK

Despite the loss of my mother, Nick, my childhood was a happy one. I grew up in a loving home and was given the freedom to be myself, at an early age. My father, Patrick, did not remarry and we lived together with Aunt Mary and Grandfather Paddy, a lovable old Irish rogue if ever there was one. Mary became my new mother and my mate. She was into writing and politics and she mixed with a bohemian crowd of artists and writers. My father was a Labour politician and his time and energy were totally consumed by his quest for the political grail. People came in and out of the house constantly and between the artists and the politicians, there was always lively conversation and laughter. Grandfather Paddy became my confidant and lavished more time and affection on me than anyone else. He was a wise witty old man and he entertained me with his Irish jokes and his great stories of the Irish struggles against the English invaders. He was a veritable mine of information, my Grandfather Paddy, and like every good Irishman, he had the gift of the gab. I sat entranced, listening to his tales of woe and war, and his abiding scorn and hatred for the occupiers and despoilers of his beloved land.
[PAUSE]

Paddy left Ireland after the great potato famine, in the middle of last century and settled in Victoria. He grew potatoes, married an Irish lass and raised his two children; Dad and Mary. When Kathleen, his wife, died, he sold the farm and moved his family to Melbourne, to further their education. Paddy was an astute trader as well. He bought potatoes from the growers, went around the shops, and sold them for less than market prices. He made money and bought this row of cottages in which we live now.
[PAUSE]

Bear in mind, Nick, that the Irish were treated like scum in those days. They were the underdogs, the underprivileged members of society. They were seen by some as a direct threat to the British way of life; and perceived by others as a Papist plot to ensnare Protestants into mixed marriages and increase the Catholic influence in the nation. Paddy, bless his soul, never shirked a fight and gave as good as he got. He overcame the ratbaggery of his time and prospered.

NICK FILLS THEIR GLASSES

NICK: Igía.

BILL: Igía, Nick.

THEY DRINK

Like all good Catholics, I attended Catholic college and entered University in 1914 when the first war clouds appeared on the European horizon. I was eighteen at the time and, somehow, I knew I was going to be involved in that war. It had a magnetic attraction for me but it clashed with my father's ideals.

[PAUSE]

You see, Nick, my father and Mary belonged to a pacifist movement which opposed Australia's involvement in the war. But they were running against the popular tide. They were, in fact, viewed by the Empire loyalists as traitors. The British Empire was in its heyday then and Australians were imbued with ideas of loyalty and patriotic duty to the mother country. They turned up at the recruiting depots in a festive mood and most of them, especially the younger blokes, saw the war as a lark, some kind of adventure.

[PAUSE]

I quit university in my first year and joined the Australian Imperial Force, the first Australian army ever formed. My decision caused a lot of anguish in the family but, for me, it was inevitable. I was drawn to the war by some inexplicable, irresistible force. Amanda said it was my destiny.

HIS EYES DROOPING WITH WEARINESS

I hope you don't mind me reminiscing about old times, Nick. It seems as if my whole life is suddenly unfolding before my own eyes.

[PAUSE]

I think I must have been blessed, Nick. I mean, I fought in so many wars and should have died many times. But somehow I survived and was only injured once. That was in France, just before the end of the First World War.

[SMILES]

And that's how I met Amanda.

[PAUSE]

I was hit in the leg with shrapnel when we broke the Hindenburg line, the last German line of defence, in October 1918. I don't remember much except being carried away in a stretcher and losing consciousness. I must have bled a lot, for the doctors operated straight away to save my leg. I remember regaining consciousness and gazing hazily into a lovely pair of green eyes and listening to a soothing, feminine patter. When I came to, this ethereal figure, which seemed vaguely familiar, was still hovering over me like a disembodied spirit, and I remember asking: "Do I know you?" I remember her radiant smile and her voice whispering in my ear: "Yes, we have met before. In another life." I scanned my memory for some kind of recollection but the significance of her message did not sink in because I was still under the influence of the anaesthetic. But I remember feeling strangely comfortable in her presence and drifting blissfully into oblivion, then waking up again, seeing her smiling face and hearing her sweet voice saying: "Welcome back to the world, William. The doctor thought we had lost you, but I knew you'd be back," I remember mumbling something to the effect that I was glad to be back when, to my surprise and utter delight, she bent down and kissed me gently on the lips.

[HE SMILES RADIANTLY]

That's how Amanda renewed her cosmic relationship with me. All that was to unfold later but, in that first encounter, I fell instantly in love and, quite frankly, I wouldn't have cared less if Amanda was a Martian in human form or some other creature from outer space. To me she was an angel; a divine creature who had captivated me and made me deliriously happy.

[PAUSE]

I was transferred to another hospital in London and Amanda returned soon after the war ended. She belonged to an old, aristocratic English family and she introduced me to her social world, in which I felt like a fish out of water. My exploits in the war had given me a certain notoriety and the English upper class treated me like a colonial pet, with the same patronizing condescension which they reserved for foreigners and the lower echelons of their own society. I was uncomfortable in their midst and yearned to be back home. I wanted to settle down and raise a family but this mundane view of my future did not conform with Amanda's cosmic view. She believed she came to this world to save it from destruction and neither marriage, nor family, would distract her from her mission. So, I tagged along aimlessly, unable to break the spell she had cast over me. We were madly in love but it seemed our paths were meant to diverge. She wanted to pursue her cosmic mission and I wanted to return home to pursue my earthly life.

[PAUSE]

And so the fates had their way and we went along our separate, pre-destined paths. I returned home, a wiser, older man, although I was only 23. I was restless and found it hard to adjust to the slow, somnolescent pace of my country. Australia seemed like a strange, lotus land; a sleepy backwater somewhere in the South Pacific, far removed and so unlike the rest of the world. There were wide, open spaces here; vast expanses of emptiness, devoid of human life. There were deserted seashores stretching as far as the eye could see and endless, blue sky with a clear, translucent light which captivated our painters. And there was the bush. Our beloved bush which so inspired our poets.

[PAUSE]

I had to get out of the city, Nick, to rid myself of my restlessness. The bush beckoned and I sought refuge in its bosom. So, my restless soul found solace and solitude in the silence and sounds of our Australian bush. I roamed far and wide, seeing and savouring the peace, the beauty and the majesty of this timeless land, until I was ready to return to the humdrum routine of everyday life.

[PAUSE]

When I got the war out of my system, I went back to university to quench my thirst for knowledge. I was seeking answers to many questions plaguing my mind; “Why war? What was the meaning of life? Why are we born? For what purpose? What is destiny?”

[PAUSE]

Amanda had her metaphysical answers, of course, but I was sceptical and, to her credit, she didn't try to convert me. She said I had to undertake my own search and find the truth for myself. So, I began studying philosophy, anthropology, psychology and, of course, my first passion, history. I buried myself in books and, while my mind was so occupied, my neglected body was also itching for some action, and I found an outlet for this physical energy in sport. I played our own Australian Rules football in winter and that Imperial English game of cricket in summer. All these activities kept me busy and I didn't have any time to pine for Amanda. We were still madly in love and expressed our passion and undying love for each other, in letters which we wrote to each other, regularly and religiously, each week.

[PAUSE]

They say, Nick, that absence makes the heart grow fonder. 'Tis true, I vouch. Thousands of miles stood between us but we were as close as two human beings can ever be. And like everything else, Amanda had a metaphysical rationale for our relationship. To her, our love was spiritual and transcended time, space and matter. We were soul mates and the physical separation was only an illusion because, in spirit, we were always together. Well, I must confess, Nick. I didn't mind spiritual liaisons but my mortal body was aching for her mortal body, and the pain at times was unbearable. So, I sought relief and comfort in the arms of other more earthly and less complex females. I was not

being unfaithful, because Amanda, herself, practised free love of the physical kind. She saw no harm in the pursuit of innocent pleasure. That was one of Amanda's charms. She was always open and honest about herself. And so was I. We did not keep secrets from each other and have never experienced any pangs of jealousy or envy. Our love was unconditional and unfettered by the constraints of conventional morality. So Amanda believed and who was I, a mere mortal, to argue with this divine creature?

HE RAISES HIS GLASS

To Amanda, my English lady.

[HE STRUGGLES TO HOLD BACK HIS SLEEP]

I never saw her again, Nick. She was killed in Italy when British and American forces landed there in 1943. My angel of mercy died pursuing her heroic mission in this life, tending the wounded and the dying, in the titanic struggle to save our world from the evil forces of darkness.

[PAUSE]

I was fighting the Japanese in the jungles of New Guinea when I received the news of her death. In the beginning, I couldn't believe she was gone; it took weeks for that realization to sink in. Then grief and remorse struck and a dark cloud fell over me. I was again a helpless little boy who had lost a loved one and despair and depression filled my soul. I didn't want to live: I couldn't imagine life without Amanda. While she was alive there was hope. Now, life had no meaning.

[PAUSE]

I performed my duties like a robot, and went into battle, disregarding rules and disobeying orders. I really wanted to die and defied death, but I still couldn't get myself killed. In the end, the mosquitoes got me. I passed out one day from malaria and sheer exhaustion. What an ironic twist, Nick. The Japs couldn't knock me out, but the mosquitoes did.

[PAUSE]

Amanda was right Nick. I was not destined to die in war. I had to live to discover my own mission in this life. It wasn't until much later, after I had recovered, that I realised that my quest had only just begun; that the new paths I had to explore lay not in war but in peace. When the atomic bombs fell on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, I saw the light; I knew the way ahead.

[PAUSE]

I had to become a peacemaker, Nick. I had to make peace with myself and the world. This was the task for all humankind. To seek peace. And this search for peace had to be pursued by every soul living on this planet so that violence and destruction could be eradicated, for ever, from the consciousness of the human race.

[WITH WONDER]

Amanda showed me the way. Amanda was my teacher. I know that now.

[PAUSE]

She is still alive, Nick. I still see her and talk to her. Amanda is real Nick. Death isn't real.

[PAUSE]

Death is only an illusion.

HE IS OVERCOME BY PEACEFUL SLEEP. NICK WATCHES HIM WITH CONCERN. HE MOVES CLOSE TO HIM AND WAVES HIS HAND BEFORE HIS EYES. BILL STIRS, HALF OPENS HIS EYES, SMILES BEATIFICALLY, THEN NODS OFF. NICK PATS HIM AFFECTIONATELY ON THE SHOULDER, THEN GOES OUT.

NICK:

[ADDRESSING MR EUCALYPTUS]

It's a still, warm night, Mr Eucalyptus. The sky is clear and the stars are shining. I think all is well with the world out there.

[PAUSE]

I think my friend, Bill, had too much to drink today. They are great drinkers, your Australians, Mr Eucalyptus. And great fighters.

[PAUSE]

Bill is not well, Mr Eucalyptus. Dimitri says he has a weak heart and that he must not drink. But I understand why he drinks. I think he feels he has lived his life and, may be, now he wants to go.

[PAUSE]

Who knows, Mr Eucalyptus?

[PAUSE]

I'll go and prepare a bed for Bill. I don't think he will be sleeping in his bed, tonight.

[PAUSE]

Good night, Mr Eucalyptus. Let's see what tomorrow brings.

HE GOES BACK TO HIS KITCHEN

ACT VII – Scene One

SATURDAY, 26TH JANUARY, 1957; AUSTRALIA DAY; MID-AFTERNOON. BILL ENTERS MARY'S KITCHEN, CARRYING A CARVED WOODEN BOX AND A MANUSCRIPT. HIS FACE IS STILL GAUNT BUT THERE IS AN AURA OF SERENITY ABOUT HIM NOW. HE IS DRESSED IMPECCABLY, WITH A RED CARNATION IN HIS LAPEL. MARY IS SEATED AT HER TABLE, WRITING.

BILL: [SOFTLY]
Hello, Mary

MARY: [SPRINGS UP WITH RELIEF]
Bill, thank God!
[EYEING HIM ANXIOUSLY]
I was worried sick.
[PAUSE]
Where were you?

BILL: [LAYING THE BOX ON THE TABLE]
In bed... catching up on my sleep.

DROPS THE MANUSCRIPT ON THE TABLE

I was up all night, finishing this.

MARY: [EDGILY]
I can't understand this mad rush to finish this manuscript.
[SHE PROBES HIS EYES]
You look very pale and terribly exhausted.

BILL: Amanda's letters... and mine are in this box.
[PAUSE]
Her solicitor returned them to me after her death. She wanted me to have them.
[PAUSE]
I want you to publish them, Mary.
After I'm gone.

AN UNDERCURRENT OF PANIC SEIZES MARY

MARY: But surely you don't want the public to pry into your private life.

BILL: My biography would not be complete without Amanda.

MARY: Well, in that case, I will put the letters away in the bank vault, with your biography... and I'll go ahead with "Heroes and Sporting Legends".

SHE PATS THE MANUSCRIPT

The publishers are waiting for the manuscript.

BILL: You will have to fill in some gaps, Mary.

MARY: [WITH ALARM]
Gaps? Why don't you fill the gaps?

BILL: I may not have the time.

MARY: What do you mean... you may not have the time?
[PAUSE]
You have all the time in the world now.

BILL: [GENTLY]
I may not be around much longer, Mary.

THERE IS A DEADLY HUSH. ANGUISH CREEPS INTO MARY'S FACE AND BILL TAKES HER BY THE ARM

Sit down, Mary.

HE HELPS HER TO HER CHAIR. MARY SITS DOWN TENSELY, STARING STRAIGHT AHEAD

I'll make some tea.

HE BUSIES HIMSELF WITH THE TEA

I don't like upsetting you Mary.
[PAUSE]
But I feel I must tell you.
[PAUSE]
I think my time has come.
[PAUSE]
It is time for me to go.

MARY: [STUBBORNLY]
I can't understand how you can say... such a thing... so calmly.

BILL: Mary... please... listen.

MARY: How can you be... so sure?

BILL: I knew it... the day we buried The Argus.
[PAUSE]
It was a strong feeling that just grew.

MARY: Feelings can be wrong.

BILL: It's hard to explain, Mary.
[PAUSE]
Amanda said, when I was ready to go... I would know.

MARY: Do you want to go?

[PAUSE]

BILL: I have to go sometime.

MARY: You seem remarkably composed... discussing your own...

BILL: Death?

MARY: You're so detached... so dispassionate.

BILL: I've had a good run, Mary.
[HE STARES INTO SPACE]
I think I've done all the things I was meant to do in this life.
[PAUSE]
I'm quite happy to go now.

HE SERVES TEA. HE SITS DOWN AND THEY
DRINK THEIR TEA, SILENTLY.
HE PICKS UP HIS MANUSCRIPT AND BROWSES THROUGH

BILL: Writing this book brought back memories, Mary... memories of my
football years.
[PAUSE]
They were some of the happiest years of my life.
[SMILES]
Remember, Mary?

MARY: [SMILES FEEBLY]
Do I remember?
[PAUSE]
I was your greatest fan.

BILL: [IN A REMINISCING MOOD]
Remember that grand final when I kicked the winning goal... seconds before the end of the game?
[MARY NODS]
There I was... standing before this solid mass of people... roaring their heads off...

MARY: [IN A SLOW, RYTHMIC TONE, SUDDENLY ELATED]
Boot it, Bill... Boot it, Bill...

BILL: And this eerie silence... descending over the ground... and eighty thousand pairs of eyes... focusing on my figure, in front of the goal posts.

MARY: Boot it, Bill... Boot it, Bill...

BILL: [ENTHRALLED BY THE MEMORY]
That extraordinary hush... the stillness... the subdued excitement.

MARY: Boot it, Bill... Boot it, Bill...

BILL: And the tremendous energy... the expectancy from the crowd... creeping into my consciousness...

MARY: Boot it, Bill... Boot it, Bill...

BILL: And that numb feeling... as if the fate of the whole world hung on that goal.

MARY: Boot it, Bill... Boot it, Bill...

BILL: [STABS THE AIR WITH HIS FIST]
And then bang... the ball going through... and the crowd erupting like a volcano... and swarming onto the ground with the siren... and carrying me off on their shoulders... chanting my name...

MARY: Captain Bill... Captain Bill...

BILL: [CHARGED WITH EMOTION]
What glorious moments, Mary!

MARY: They loved you, Bill. You were their hero.

BILL: It's all here, Mary
[HE TOSSES THE MANUSCRIPT ONTO THE TABLE]

In this manuscript.

THEY FINISH THEIR TEA IN SILENCE

BILL: My radio talk, tonight, will be the last, Mary.

MARY TENSES UP, TRYING HARD TO CONTROL HER PANIC

MARY: What will you talk about?

BILL: Australia's humble origins. Our pioneering struggles. Peace and good will on Earth.

MARY: [LAUNCHES INTO A TIRADE, TO MASK HER EMOTIONS]
I don't know why we bother to celebrate our National Day. No-one seems to care.

[PAUSE]

We must be the least patriotic people on earth.

BILL: Blame our politicians for that. They don't seem anxious to promote the cause.

MARY: [VENTS HER RAGE ON THE POLITICIANS]
This lot in power is the most servile, sycophantic mob of British boot-lickers I can remember for a long time. Why, I have more passion and patriotic fire in my belly than that whole rabble of ratbag politicians who rule us from their ivory towers with an arrogance which borders on contempt.

BILL: [SMILING]
It doesn't take much to spark you off.

HE GOES OVER AND PLANTS A KISS ON HER FOREHEAD

Don't ever change, Mary.

HE TAKES HER BY THE ARMS AND HELPS HER UP

I must go now and do my broadcast. Are you all right?

MARY NODS WITHOUT CONVICTION

That's my girl.

MARY: [WITH DESPERATION, NOT GIVING UP HOPE]
Bill...

BILL: Yes?

MARY: Stick around a little longer.

BILL: I'll be with you in spirit, Mary... wherever I am.

MARY: I'd rather have you here, in the flesh.

BILL: [VERY GENTLY]
Good-bye.

MARY: [CLINGING TO HIM]
Don't go yet.

BILL: I must, Mary.

TEARS TRICKLE DOWN HER FACE

Now, Mary. No tears.

WIPES HER EYES

Keep writing, Mary. Keep busy.

JABS HER CHIN GENTLY

And keep those belly-fires burning.

MARY SMILES WANLY

That's my Mary.

HE DISENGAGES HIMSELF

Good-bye.

MOVES AWAY AND BLOWS HER A KISS

I love you

HE TURNS QUICKLY AND LEAVES. THE FLUTE AND HARP ARE HEARD. MARY STANDS STILL, HER FACE DRAINED, IMPASSIVE, LIKE A MASK. SHE STIRS AFTER A WHILE, TAKES A LETTER OUT OF THE BOX AND READS IT. SHE LOOKS UP, TEARS WELLING UP IN HER EYES. THE MELODY DIES.

ACT VIII – Scene One

MONDAY, THE 4TH OF FEBRUARY 1957. EARLY MORNING.
NICK COMES OUT OF HIS COTTAGE WEARING A SUIT AND TIE. A BLACK ARMBAND IS DRAPED AROUND THE LEFT SLEEVE OF HIS COAT AS A MARK OF MOURNING FOR HIS DEAD FRIEND.

NICK: Good morning, Mr Eucalyptus. It's going to be hot again.
[PAUSE]
I'm starting a new career, Mr Eucalyptus.
[SMILES]
In fish and chips. I'm starting work in Dimitri's fish shop.
[PAUSE]
You know, Mr Eucalyptus, Dimitri always wanted me to work in his shop. But I wasn't interested in work. I wasn't interested in anything.
[PAUSE]
Now that I'm staying, I must work. I must join the struggle. Because life is a struggle, Mr Eucalyptus. We, the living must struggle. We must go on living.
[NODS WISELY]
Such is life.

LOFTY COMES AROUND THE CORNER WEARING BILL'S GUERNSEY, BOUNCING A FOOTBALL. HE MOVES UP TO NICK'S COTTAGE AND STOPS DEAD IN HIS TRACKS AT THE SIGHT OF NICK.

LOFTY: Well, I'll be buggered.
[STARES AT NICK INCREDULOUSLY]
What've you done to yourself, Nick?
[PAUSE]
You look... different, mate.
[PAUSE]
You look... like us. What did ya do that for Nick?
[SHRUGS]
Makes no difference, I suppose, what a bloke wears.
[HE TOUCHES NICK IN AN AWKWARD, TENDER GESTURE]
You're a good bloke, Nick. That's what really counts.
[HE PULLS A NEWSPAPER FROM UNDER HIS GUERNSEY]
Here, your picture's in the paper. Did ya see it?
[HE SHOWS HIM]
'Ere it is, see there. That's you.
[PAUSE]
There's also a story, about you and Captain Bill. How you two were cobbers and Captain Bill wanted you to be a pall bearer, at his funeral.

[HE POINTS TO THE ARTICLE]

It's all there, in the paper.

[PAUSE]

LOFTY:

Captain Bill had a state funeral, Nick. All the bigwigs were there. The Prime Minister and the Governor General. There were lots of people at the funeral. Everyone liked Captain Bill. He won lots of medals in the war. You know, the Victoria Cross and stuff like that. They reckon he was a hero, Nick. To me he was a football champ; and a good mate.

[PROUDLY SHOWS HIS GUERNSEY]

This is his Guernsey... I'm gonna wear it Nick... and play football... like him...

[DEFIANTLY]

'Cause to me, Captain Bill isn't really dead.

[PAUSE]

Not while I'm wearin' his Guernsey. You wait and see, Nick... I'm gonna be a champ... like him.

[BOUNCES THE BALL RESTLESSLY]

Gotta go now, Nick. You can keep the paper.

[TAKES OFF]

I'll be in touch.

[WAVES]

See ya.

NICK LOOKS AT THE PAPER SADLY

NICK:

My friend, Bill, was a fortunate man, Mr Eucalyptus. He died in his sleep, peacefully, without struggle.

[PAUSE]

Bill wanted me to be with him when he went. He honoured me, Mr Eucalyptus. I was very proud to be there, as his friend, and as a Cretan; to pay homage to the hero who fought for my country.

[HE CROSSES HIMSELF]

May his memory be everlasting, Mr Eucalyptus.

[HE STEPS OUT ONTO THE STREET]

I must go now. Dimitri will be waiting.

MARY COMES OUT OF HER COTTAGE

MARY:

Well, hello stranger!

[ADMIRINGLY]

My you do look debonair in your double breasted suit, Níko. The ladies of Roseberry Street will swarm to your shop to buy your fish and chips. They will ogle you in public and privately they will giggle and gossip their heads off.

[SHE INPSECTS HIM]

Now, let's see. It's too hot to wear a coat in a fish shop. Let's take that off and be comfortable, shall we?

SHE TAKES HIS COAT OFF AND HANDS IT TO HIM.
NICK SMILES AND TOSSES IT OVER HIS SHOULDER.

You don't need a tie, either.

SHE TAKES HIS TIE OFF, FOLDS IT
AND SLIPS IT IN HIS COAT POCKET

Also unbutton your shirt to let some air in.
[SHE UNDOES TWO BUTTONS AND GIVES HIM A CRITICAL APPRAISAL]

Now, that's much better.

[PAUSE]

After all, you will not be meeting the Prime Minister of Australia.

[PAUSE]

You will be meeting the people of Australia.

[PAUSE]

Just be your charming, self, Níko. Give them a good feed of fish and chips and they'll love you.

NICK BEAMS WITH DELIGHT, BENDS OVER AND
KISSES HER CHEEK. MARY PRETENDS SHE IS SHOCKED.

Now, now Níko! You shouldn't have done that in public. You will shock the old dears of Roseberry Street and ruin my reputation.

[SHE SMILES IMPISHLY]

Well, now that you've compromised me, I will also kiss you on the cheek and the old dears can go to hell.

[SHE KISSES HIM WITH A BIG GRIN]

There! We are even. Go to your fish shop now and start your new life. Good luck, stranger.

THE FLUTE AND HARP ARE HEARD AS MARY WAVES HIM OFF. NICK SMILES AND WALKS JAUNTILY DOWN THE STREET. MARY STANDS WATCHING HIM. HE TURNS, WAVES AND DISAPPEARS AROUND THE CORNER. MARY WAVES BACK, LOOKS OVER THE STREET WITH IMPISH DELIGHT AND RETREATS TO HER COTTAGE.
THE FLUTE AND HARP CONTINUE ON...



MR EUCALYPTUS

by Solon Papadopoulos (Lawrence Darrell)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE CHARACTERS	2
THE SETTING	3
SUMMARY OF ACTS.....	4
ACT I	4
ACT II.....	4
ACT III.....	4
ACT IV	5
ACT V.....	5
ACT VI	5
ACT VII.....	5
ACT VIII.....	5
GLOSSARY OF GREEK WORDS.....	6
SYNOPSIS.....	7
MR EUCALYPTUS	8
ACT I - Scene one.....	9
ACT I – Scene Two	16
ACT II – Scene One.....	23
ACT II – Scene Two	24
ACT II – Scene Three.....	31
ACT III – Scene One	34
ACT III – Scene Two.....	38
ACT IV – Scene One	43
ACT IV – Scene Two	50
ACT V – Scene One	59
ACT V – Scene Two.....	63
ACT VI – Scene One	71
ACT VI – Scene Two	72
ACT VII – Scene One.....	81
ACT VIII – Scene One	87
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	90