

HOUSE OF CARDS

(ESTIMATED SCREEN TIME: 8.40)

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MELBOURNE

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HOUSE OF CARDS

There is reason to believe the substance of the following events actually took place in Queensland. They are still the subject of private research so some amount of name and place camouflaging has been necessary.

The basic facts are these.

A society doctor in the 1890s. It's a prosperous and gregarious time in Australia and he and his attractive wife are at the very centre of the fling. They hold the kind of parties that make news. People look to them as the moulders of a lifestyle unique to the new country. The money originally comes from his family-- a large squattocratic clan with vast land holdings seized two generations before around Bendigo. The family fortune had been swollen by goldrushes and the demand for beef.

Doctor and Mrs. Mainwaring are the darlings of Melbourne society. He is intelligent and cultured, a man of liberal opinion and tory tastes. The touchable, accessible, matinee idol of a hundred menopausal dreams. Rich and bored hypocondriacs stack the imported leather couches of his surgery. But beneath the surface the man seethes.

Not long after the honeymoon he and his wife begin to indulge in an orgy of domestic brawling-- her jealousy and suspicions about the motives of certain patients-- his intellectual frustrations at the meaninglessness of his practice, the wasted time on non-existent illnesses, the constant self-repression involved in his bedside manner, even the occasional real blood and guts of a profession his mother herded him into. The whole scab beneath the band-aid, in living colour.

Over several years the angst compounds itself. It builds into an ongoing despair which his social position and the clannish conventions of his family force inwards. In all the ruthless logic of the various circumstances that have trapped him there is no safety valve. Not even children. Just a spiritual-less black, lurching barrenly into the years before him.

Eventually he cracks. He kills his wife's maid who he's had a slight on and off affair with, and buries her, somewhat amateurishly, in the garden. In due course her husband, the groundsman, finds the body and suspecting the truth confronts Mainwaring with it. Now thoroughly demented, but cool to the end (his ten years of boarding school serving him well) our doctor calms the man down. He somehow manages to anaesthetise the outraged husband and in the quiet recesses of his surgery dissects him.

Things rush towards a pitch. He plans a dinner party in which he, in a moment of flamboyant empathy with the servant class, will cook himself. Local society is abuzz. Is this the new direction the bunyip aristocracy will have to take? Merchant's wives, public figures, relatives, jostle each other to get on the list. Social columnists sharpen their quills. The night arrives but only a select few have made it. They are people Mainwaring chooses as a representative sample of all that has made his life empty and mad.

Jokes ring off the walls of the dining room, quips about Mainwaring joining a "Cooks Trades Union" punctuate an odd culinary compliment or two and long stretches of monotonous conversation which eventually leads to a query about the meat. "Is it pork?" A theory is presented that it's uncommonly like wild boar the colonel once trapped in New Guinea. Mainwaring is deadpan. "It's the missing housemaid."
 Laughter all round.
 More eating.
 Silence.
 Horror.

After the hysterical explosion that follows, when some of the women have been sedated and shuffled upstairs the men, the clan heads and government officials present, urgently debate a course of action. The consequences soon become clear.

The country is on the verge of vast change. The move to unionism and the state of play between protectionists and free traders, monarchists and republicans, country interests and city interests, will colour the nature of the new federation of states being mooted. A sensation of the order before them would give the opposition the ammunition they need. The press would go berserk.

Eventually a consensus is reached. The thing must be hushed up. The appropriate authorities are informed that Dr. Mainwaring will be committed to his home under medical care for the rest of his life. A large parcel of inner city property owned by the family moves into the public trust and eventually a teaching hospital is built there.

We close on an empty figure in an empty house, and the jubilant news that the Commonwealth of Australia has just been formed.

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Although the show is set in period this is not as big a problem as it might seem. Melbourne is still very much a "Victorian" city in the cultural and architectural sense, and boasts many buildings that haven't changed much since the 1890s. (Though this won't last of course).

As well, House of Cards could easily be managed with the major emphasis on half a dozen interiors-- the "living room" the quintessential focus of Victorian life anyway. So a 13 episode series using Divvy 4's resources would manage it. Parts of Parkville and an authentic, late nineteenth century country house would serve as exteriors, adding something like the following set constructions:

Mainwaring Living/Dining Room
" Surgery/Waiting Room
" Private Quarters
Country House Living Room
Government Officials Office
Newspaper Office
Groundsman's Cottage Living Room.

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Major Characters: Mainwaring, His Wife, His Parents, Aunts and Uncles (2 each), Groundsman, Maid, Patients/Guests (6), Government Officials (3), Journalists (2), Country House Extras (4).

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A tentative 13 episode breakdown might be as follows:

1. Early life of Mainwaring. Growing up on the family estate. Horses. Yarra Brae. Local girls. His mother pushing him on the fatal course. His father distant, moral. Mainwaring leaves for medical school.
2. The young medical student. New theories. Radical ideas. Meets his wife. Courtship and, against some resistance from the baronial estate in Bendigo, marriage.
3. Married and graduated, they plan a grandiose house on family block in the city-- Parkvillish. One faint hint of trouble between them.
4. The marriage worsens. The practice grows. No children. Some glimpses of the life of the times. Perhaps an occasion at the Princess Theatre.
5. Practice flourishing. Parties. Domestic despair deepens. First hint of flirtation with the maid.
6. A political crisis. Vists to the country. Groundsman bashes his wife.
7. Family clashes. The clan head dies. Feuding among the relatives. Mainwaring loses out on the will but his practice now big enough to survive it. Maid causing more problems.
8. The murder of the maid and all that leads up to it.
9. The groundsman finds the body and is also dispatched.
10. The dinner party.
11. The post dinner party debate. Intense lobbying.
12. The deal concluded. Medical documents drawn up.
13. Finish on Mainwaring alone. The house. The new Commonwealth. The hospital that eventually rises on the land handed over.

1. Ext. Exhibition Buildings

LONG SHOT FROM IN FRONT OF THE EXHIBITION BUILDING PROPER, THE CAMERA BEGINS TO MOVE TOWARDS IT AS THE NARRATOR OPENS HIS SPIEL.

Narr. It's silly isn't it. The things you hear, what you want to believe in. This place is a tomb. Everybody in this city. We trample on the graves of nameless convicts. Nine to five prisoners who've thrown us forward and landed us damp and wide-eyed on the troubled beach of our own time.

THE CAMERA PICKS UP THE NARRATOR IN FRONT OF THE MAIN DOORWAY. AND SLOWLY RESOLVES HIM INTO FOCUS.

Narr. We're the latest flower. Different slightly from everything that has gone before. But similar too, of course. In the little time capsule of ourselves we also carry the sins of the past. And occasionally some of its dignity.

CAMERA AND NARRATOR ARE WALKING SIDE BY SIDE ALONG THE FRONT OF THE BUILDING TOWARDS THE WEST WING. THE NARRATOR LEANS IN SIDEWAYS TO THE CAMERA, CONFERRING INTIMATELY WITH IT.

Narr. There's this story. One of the many attempts to break out of gaol. Like the ancient mariner the bearers of the tale are the recipients of dark secrets. There's only a few of us left. The story jumps and kicks inside you like a foetus. Impatient to get out. This is what actually happened.

THE CAMERA PLAYS OVER THE WESTERN DOORWAY AND PANS DOWN TO FIND THE NARRATOR IN ONE OF THE EMPTY STATUE NICHES. HE CROUCHES HOLDING HIS KNEES, LEANING INTO THE WALL TALKING SECRETIVELY INTO THE MIKE.

Narr. A society doctor in the 1890s. It's a prosperous, gregarious time in Australia and he and his attractive wife are at the very centre of the fling. They hold the kind of parties that make news. People look to Doctor and Mrs. Mainwaring as the sculptors of a lifestyle unique to the new country. For, swollen by the gold rushes, Melbourne has become the capital of the Southern World.

(1.50)

Cut to

2. Ext. 1890 ANZ Bank, Collins Street.

THE CAMERA STARTS ON THE YEAR SCULPTED ON THE TOP OF THE FACADE AND MOVES SLOWLY DOWN UNTIL IT REACHES THE NARRATOR AT THE BOTTOM JUST AS HE FINISHES TALKING.

Narr. The money comes from his family. A squattocratic clan with vast land holdings seized two generations before around Bendigo. The family fortune is stuffed to bursting by the goldrushes and the increasing demand for beef. An early Mainwaring claimed he was at Eureka in the stockade. It's a lie of course. He was in the area and is believed to have been the bastard who raised the alarm after the pub was burnt down, alerting the troopers to the miner's rebellion. In two decades the felon becomes a lord, and in Collins Street its such a cosy tram ride from this Gothic bank to the Medical castles up the Paris end.

((50))

Cut to

4.

3. Ext. Collins Street. Paris End.

THE CAMERA IS WALKING BESIDE THE NARRATOR AGAIN. INTIMATE.

Narr. Not surprisingly, not undeservedly perhaps, Mainwaring becomes the darling of Melbourne society. The touchable, accessible matinee idol of a hundred menopausal dreams. Rich and bored hypocondriacs stack the imported leather couches of his surgery like geriatric sardines.

CAMERA AND NARRATOR STOP.

But beneath the surface, the man seethes.

(.30)

Cut to

4. Int. Royal Arcade

CAMERA ON THE STATUES OF GOG AND MAGOG. MAYBE CAPTURING SOME COUPLES WALKING THROUGH. CAMERA ZOOMS AND CUTS FROM ONE TO OTHER STATUE

Narr. Not long after the honeymoon he and his wife begin to indulge in an orgy of domestic brawling-- her jealousy and suspicions about the motives of certain patients his intellectual frustrations at the meaninglessness of his practice. The wasted time on non-existent illnesses, the constant self-repression involved in the bedside manner, even the occasional real blood and guts of a profession his mother herded him into. The whole scab beneath the band-aid. In living colour.

THE CAMERA CUTS TO A SHOP WINDOW COLOUR TV SET.

(.30)

Cut to

5. Ext Public Library, Swanston St. MCU Of St George And The Dragon.

CAMERA DOES A 360 DEGREE DOLLY AROUND THE STATUE. NARRATOR CROUCHES UNDER IT

Narr. Over several years the angst compounds itself. It builds into an ongoing despair which his social position and the clannish conventions of the family force inwards. In all the ruthless logic of the various circumstances that have trapped him there is no safety valve. Not even children. Just a spiritual-less black lurching into the years before him.

QUICK CUT OVER THE LAST SENTENCE TO THE FLORAL CLOCK IN THE GARDENS OFF ST. KILDA ROAD AND HOPEFULLY SOME TOURISTS THERE TAKING SNAPS.

(.30)

Cut to

6. Ext. Melbourne Gemetry.

CAMERA AND NARRATOR ARE WALKING AGAIN THROUGH THE GRAVES.

Narr. Eventually he cracks. He kills his wife's maid, who he's had a slight on and off affair with. . .

CAMERA PANS DOWN TO A GRAVE. HOLDS IT THERE.

. . . and buries her, somewhat amateurishly, in the garden.

THERE IS A PAUSE. THE NARRATOR JABS AT A POT OF PLASTIC FLOWERS WITH HIS BOOT. THEN CAMERA AND NARRATOR MOVE AGAIN.

In due course her husband, the groundsman, finds the body and, suspecting the truth confronts Mainwaring with it. Now thoroughly demented, but cool to the end (his ten years of boarding school serving him well) our doctor calms the man down. "It's preposterous my dear fellow. Have a drink. Let's sit down and go through it from the beginning. Now where did you say you found the body. . ." It's the oldest trick in the book. The drink he has waiting for the groundsman contains an anaesthetic, and the outraged husband quickly becomes a limp hulk on the persian rug. A bit of shuffling and, in the quiet recesses of his surgery Doctor Mainwaring dissects the man.

NARRATOR HAS BEEN MIMING DRINKING ACTIONS WITH VARIOUS STATUES AROUND THE CEMETRY AS HE TALKS OF MAINWARING'S RUSE.

(1.00)

Cut to.

7. Ext Pissoir In Queensberry Street.

NARRATOR IS INSIDE CAMERA HOLDS STEADY ON THE EXTERIOR.

Narr. Things rush towards a pitch. He plans a dinner party in which he, in a moment of flamboyant empathy with the servant class will cook himself. Local society is abuzz. Is this the new direction the bunyip aristocracy will have to take? Merchant's wives, public figures, relatives, jostle each other to get on the list.

NARRATOR EXITS THE PISSOIR AND MOVES TOWARDS THE CAMERA UNTIL HIS FACE BLACKS OUT THE LENS.

Social columnists sharpen their quills. The night arrives but only a select few have made it. They are people Mainwaring chooses as a representative sample of all that has made his life empty and mad.

(.40)

Cut to

8. Ext. Macdonalds Takeaway In Victoria Parade.

THE NARRATOR SITS IN THE GUTTER EATING A "BIG MAC"
THE MIKE BETWEEN HIS LEGS. THE CAMERA POSITIONED
TO FILL THE BACKGROUND WITH MACDONALD'S SIGNS.

\Narr. Jokes ring off the walls of the dining room,
quips about Mainwaring joining a "Cooks Trades
Union" punctuate an odd culinary compliment or
two and long stretches of monotonous conversation
which eventually leads to a query about the meat.
"Is it pork?" A theory is presented that it's
uncommonly like wild boar the colonel once
trapped in New Guinea. Mainwaring is deadpan.
"It's the missing housemaid."
Laughter all round.
More eating.
Silence.
Horror.

THROWS HIS BIG MAC AWAY. CAMERA FOLLOWS IT INTO THE
GUTTER AND HOLDS IT THERE.

(1.00)

Cut to

9. Ext. War Memorial Tomb Off St. Kilda Road.

NARRATOR IS LEANING ON WESTERN PARAPET OVERLOOKING SOUTH MELBOURNE IN THE DISTANCE. CAMERA HOLDS HIM IN CU.

Narr. After the hysterical explosion that follows, when some of the women have been sedated and helped upstairs the men, the clan heads and government officials present, urgently debate a course of action. The consequences soon become clear.

CAMERA AND NARRATOR WALK TOGETHER, DESCRIBING A 360 DEGREE TURN AROUND THE MEMORIAL.

Narr. The country is on the verge of vast change. The move to unionism and the state of play between protectionists and free traders, monarchists and republicans, country interests and city interests, will colour the nature of the new federation being mooted. A sensation of the order before them would give the opposition the ammunition they need. The press would go berserk.

NARRATOR MOVES INSIDE THE MEMORIAL.

(.55)

Cut to

10. Int. War Memorial.

CAMERA DIPS OVER THE RAILING TO PICK UP THE NARRATOR
DOWN BELOW WALKING IN A CIRCLE AROUND THE STATUE.

Narr. Eventually a consensus is reached. The
thing must be hushed up. The appropriate
authorities are informed that Doctor Mainwaring
will be committed to his home under medical
supervision for the rest of his life. A large
parcel of inner city property owned by the
family moves into the public trust and eventually
a teaching hospital is built there.

NARRATOR EXITS OUT OF FRAME DOWN BELOW.

(.30)

Cut to

11. Ext. War Memorial.

CAMERA PICKS UP NARRATOR AS HE ENTERS FRAME BELOW
AND EMERGES INTO THE DAYLIGHT. OVER CLOSING LINES
THE CAMERA PANS UP TO A WIDE SHOT OF THE CITY
AND HOPEFULLY ZOOMS IN TO FIND THE EXHIBITION BUILDING
IN THE DISTANCE.

Narr. We close on an empty figure in an empty house.
A crowded city and the jubilant news that the
Commonwealth of Australia has just been formed.

TOMB TO TOMB.

(.25)

Cut to

