

THE LITTLE LARRIKIN



BILLY HUGHES SINNER OR SAINT

A YOUNG WELSH SCHOOLTEACHER DISCOVERS A LOST DIARY AND
TRAVELS HALF WAY AROUND THE WORLD TO FIND THE TRUTH ABOUT
ONE OF AUSTRALIA'S MOST CONTROVERSIAL PRIME MINISTERS

THE STORY

William Morris "Billy" Hughes was one of the most extraordinary figures in Australian political history. He helped found the Australian Labour Party, shaped the Federal Constitution, and became Prime Minister at a time when the young nation was beginning to establish its credentials on the world stage. To many people he was the "little digger", a hero who led Australia to victory in the first world war. To others he was "the little rat", a naked political opportunist who split the Labour Party when it would no longer follow in the conservative directions he intended.

Merid Thomas, a young Welsh schoolteacher confronts these contradictions when she discovers Hughes' lost autobiography in an old farmhouse remotely connected to his boyhood. Leaving a somewhat stormy relationship with a militant Welsh nationalist Merid travels half way round the world in order to discover the truth about Hughes. . . and perhaps, by implication, about herself and her own political inclinations.

Her itinerary in Australia follows roughly the same path as Hughes himself. She arrives in Queensland, moves on to Sydney and eventually encompasses both Melbourne and Canberra - interviewing the "experts" and re-experiencing the country from Hughes' point of view.

In Melbourne she meets up with a young Greek waiter who firmly rejects his own cultural origins in favour of becoming more fully "Australian". To this idea Merid is clearly attracted, but the old relationship back home continues to exert its own influence - especially after her boyfriend is arrested for damaging an English bulldozer.

Against this background of changing personal and cultural relationships the stormy drama of Hughes career unfolds. We enter with Merid into the key political crises of his life: the traumatic conscription battles, and the splitting of the Labour Party that followed. We also get, for the first time, something of his private life: the beloved daughter who died having an abortion while Hughes as minister for health was pushing a "populate or perish" line, the affection he held for his native Wales, the larrikan practical joker who loved to prick the bubble of pretension - even in the highest councils of global diplomacy.

But just as Merid enters into Hughes life, he enters into hers. Unable to stand back from her investigations Hughes himself intervenes in the present, still wanting the last word, still seeking to justify the intricacies of a life that unmistakably determined the substance of what Australia is today.

THE LITTLE LARRIKIN

Screenplay

by

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1. EXT. WELSH FARMHOUSE

DAY

MERERID

RHYS

A small car drives up to a tumbledown old farmhouse near the village of Llansantffraid in north east Wales. It is raining, and as the car stops its two occupants tentatively regard the house through the windscreen wipers. Mererid is about 30, her friend Rhys a few years older.

RHYS

(disappointed)

Is this it, then?

Mererid cuts the engine, the wipers stop and her view of the house is blurred by the rain. For a moment she doesn't move, a little shocked by the condition of the place herself.

MERERID

He lived alone after aunty died. I haven't been here myself since I was a little girl.

RHYS

Well, Mererid, you haven't exactly inherited a palace, love.

They step out of the car and, avoiding puddles, push on in through the front door.

2. INT. LOUNGE ROOM

DAY

MERERID

RHYS

As they come in Rhys flicks a light switch, but the power is off. They take a few seconds to adjust to the gloom of the small and dusty lounge room.

Mererid goes to a framed photograph on the mantelpiece. It shows a wedding party outside an old stone church.

MERERID

That's them before the war. Mum was a bridesmaid.

Rhys approaches, looks over her shoulder.

MERERID

Can you get a box or something?

RHYS

(glancing around at the general poverty of the place)

You won't need a big one will you?

She takes the framed photo and stacks the two beside it on top. There's obviously not much else worth taking from here so she heads towards the kitchen.

3. INT. ATTIC

DAY

RHYS

MERERID

Meanwhile Rhys has climbed up a small staircase leading to a manhole in the ceiling. As he slides the panel across and pokes his head through:

RHYS

Come and look at this

Mererid climbs up after him. They glance around a room stuffed full of all manner of bits of furniture, farm implements, clothes, an old valve radio, heaters, etc.

While Rhys fiddles with the radio Mererid opens a trunk. There are a few more photos which she picks up and holds, and then beneath some moth eaten lace table cloths she uncovers a parcel of small boxes tied together with string.

Curious, she lays the photos to one side and slides the string off, revealing a label on the first box which reads:

"RT. HON. W.M. HUGHES K.C. M.P."

MERERID

Rhys -

He comes over, takes one of the boxes and opens it.

RHYS

Old reel to reel audio tapes.

MERERID

Who's W.M. Hughes?

4. EXT. NATIONAL LIBRARY, ABERYSTWYTH DAY

An exterior shot establishes the magnificent National Library at Aberystwyth, Wales.

Over this we get the standard musical introduction to a 1950s newsreel item (Cinesound - Australia). A commentary fades up through the music:

COMMENTATOR

(voice over)

Billy Hughes - teacher, actor, labourer, boundary rider, umbrella salesman, and Prime Minister - a man who sat in the Australian Parliament for 50 of the most turbulent years in the world's history

MERERID
RHYS.

We are in the magnificent reading room of the National Library, close on the small screen of a microfilm reader. The cinesound report has cut to the scene of Billy Hughes addressing a parliamentary luncheon in his honour on the occasion of his 88th birthday.

HUGHES

Amongst my many other positions, one that I still hold most dear was that of secretary of the Waterside Workers Union, and now, Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed as one of these . . .

Much laughter breaks out amongst the audience, Hughes himself laughing along heartily with the rest.

HUGHES

And I'm glad to say this . . . and I'm able to say it too, that when I walk down George Street and the cleaners are at work they all touch their hats to me. And as long as they do that I know I'm not far off the beaten track . . .

Applause and cries of "hear" "hear" swell round the room. Across the screen now flows a sequence of archival film footage, photographs, cartoons and newspaper cuttings, songs that give us a kind of "headline" introduction to the life of Billy Hughes.

The voice over continues:

COMMENTATOR

(voice over)

.... Hughes was born in London of Welsh parents but spent much of his childhood in Wales living with aunts at both Llandudno and Llansantffraid.

He migrated to Australia at age 22 and, after a series of harsh bush jobs which permanently affected his health, he arrived in Sydney where he helped found the Australian Labour Party.

From his first election in 1894 Hughes was never out of parliament and achieved leadership of the country shortly after the disastrous Gallipoli campaign .

One of his first acts as Prime Minister was to make a triumphant return to Britain in 1916 where his stirring speeches galvanized the Empire's resolve during its darkest hours. However, his effort to impose conscription back home lead to a split in the Labour Party from which it never fully recovered. Hughes formed a coalition with the conservatives and remained Prime Minister until 1922 when he was eventually dethroned by the emerging Country Party.

Perhaps his finest hour was at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 where in company with other world leaders, including fellow Welshman, Lloyd George, he forged an independent foreign policy for his young, adopted nation.

In 1939 he staged a remarkable comeback and came within 4 votes of again achieving the Prime Ministership against a determined bid by the young Robert Menzies.

To many he was an impossible personality, having employed no less than 100 private secretaries. But when at last the rasping voice was stilled, tributes came from all over the world. More than 2,000 wreaths, including one from Winston Churchill.

We see shots of the funeral in Sydney here.

COMMENTATOR

(voice over continued)

The little man with the flailing arms, the snappy sentences, and the theatrical hesitations ... Billy Hughes, the "little digger".

The film runs through and the screen goes white. We pull back to see Mererid stop the microfilm reader.

RHYS

There's a mass of contradictions for you.

MERERID

He's like a Lloyd George only he did it all on the other side of the world.

RHYS

Either way- there's not much to look up to.

MERERID

(disagrees)

Two little Welshmen overseeing the decline of the British Empire ? I find that fascinating.

RHYS

But they were part of the British Empire.
There's nothing particularly Welsh about the way they ended up.

MERERID

I don't know- the gift with words, the ability to sway large audiences, a certain concern with the underdog. . . I should think this put them firmly outside the Anglo Saxon establishment.

RHYS

Concern with the underdog! They were warlords. They filled a leadership vacuum when the British had run out of steam and simply took things in the same old direction.

MERERID

Not the same direction, surely.

RHYS

I'd rather judge people by what they do than where they came from.

MERERID

I'm sure that'll make a great topic for discussion at the next meeting of the Felinheli defence group.

RHYS

Haven't seen you there for a while.

MERERID

I've been busy.

RHYS

Yeah.

It's like an accusation.
Mererid buries a reaction.

6. INT. SMALL WELSH SCHOOL (CLASSROOM) DAY

MERERID
CHILDREN

A history lesson is drawing to a close in Mererid's classroom. One of the children is reading from a textbook:

CHILD

Conditions in the mines and factories in the worst days of the Industrial Revolution amounted to little more than a form of slavery. One consequence of these harsh conditions was to drive many Welsh people from their native land to seek a better life in Canada, the United States, Patagonia or Australia

A bell rings off and there is a general bustle of closing books and packing up for the day. Mererid talks above the noise:

MERERID

Thank you Owen. I want you all to finish that chapter for yourselves by Monday. And remember your exams next week. I don't want any slacking off before the holidays

But the kids are already heading for the door. They ad-lib their goodbyes and after they have gone Mererid takes one of the Hughes tapes out of her briefcase and heads for the audio-visual room next door.

7. INT. SMALL WELSH SCHOOL (A.V. ROOM)

DAY

MERERID

Mererid comes in, threads up the reel to reel recorder with the Hughes tape, plugs in a cassette player to dub off the material, then puts on a set of headphones.

The voice is that of an old man who's speech is impaired to a certain extent by his deafness. Mererid strains to hear it through the scratches and hisses of the slowly degrading tapes.

She goes back over the first part again.

HUGHES

(voice over)

I have for along time promised my friends and colleagues that I would undertake a proper accounting of my life in order to set down in black and white the truth of the matter after so much conjecture and debate.

As the tape rolls we cut to

8. INT. PARLIAMENT HOUSE CANBERRA (SMALL OFFICE)

DAY

HUGHES

AUGUSTUS JOHN

PRIVATE

SECRETARY

Hughes is alone in the last office that he occupied in parliament house, Canberra - a small, backbencher's office, crammed with books, photos and memorabilia.

He is speaking into a 1950s tape recorder which is partly hidden in the large box that also doubles as his hearing aid.

HUGHES

(cont'd)

Almost every day now my telephone rings with an earnest query from some journalist or newspaper editor wanting to check this or that aspect of my career. You may well wonder as I first did, why this

new interest in my life after so many years of neglect and relegation to the scrap heap. Well, it's just occurred to me that these opinion holding monsters are actually polishing up their obituaries on me ! Well I can certainly assure them of one fact: I never gave up without a fight and I'm certainly not ready to cash in my chips just now thank you very much. So they can go on polishing until the cows come home. These tapes are the real story, and they're certainly not going to get their hands on them- even if they could understand Welsh. . .

He is interrupted by a knock at the door and hastily closes the lid of his hearing aid box in order to hid the tape recorder, unplugging the microphone and readjusting the ear piece.

HUGHES

Come in.

Hughes' last private secretary pokes his head around the door.

PRIVATE SECRETARY

Time for your sitting, Bill.

HUGHES

(impatiently)

Yes, yes, alright

The private secretary ushers in Augustus John who carries easel, brushes and palette and sets up as Hughes eases himself into a more comfortable arm chair around the front of the desk.

PRIVATE SECRETARY

Mr. Augustus John.

Hughes nods a brief ,impatient "hullo".

ARTIST

I can assure you Mr. Hughes, I will do you justice, sir.

HUGHES

Justice? Brother, with a face like this I don't want Justice - I want Mercy!

They both laugh.

9. INT. NEWSPAPER OFFICE

DAY

RHYS

MERERID

SECRETARY

Mererid holds a copy of the "Daily Post" with the headline : "FIREBOMB CAMPAIGN MENACE" She reads. . .

MERERID

The incendiary devices are hidden in carrier bags and left outside their targets- whereas in previous years arsonists would break into empty buildings before starting fires. . .

Rhys is in a mocking, playful mood.

RHYS

Ah- the Red Dragon strikes at mid-night !

And nobody knows who it is.

It could be me, it could be you. . .

(as Helena the secretary comes in)

it could even be Helena, couldn't it, Helena ?

Rhys smiles at Helena who goes to her typewriter. But Mererid is tired of Rhys's games.

MERERID

But these bags, anyone- a kid even, could pick it up and have the thing go off in their face.

RHYS

They're going to destroy Felinheili with their bulldozers, Mererid, just as surely as if they dropped a bomb on it.

Mererid doesn't look too sure.

10. EXT. LLANSANTFFRAID CEMETRY

DAY

MERERID

RHYS

VICAR

The vicar prays over an open grave. Rhys and Mererid stand a little to one side.

VICAR

And so, Lord, accept into everlasting life this, thy humble servant Dafyd Thomas. May his soul rest in peace.

MERERID

Amen.

Mererid throws a small bunch of flowers in on top of the coffin, stands head bowed for a moment, then takes the hand of the vicar as he extends it. They shake. Rhys also shakes his hand, nodding a thanks and Mererid and Rhys move off.

For some time Mererid is alone with her thoughts but as they pass through an older part of the cemetery a grave catches Rhys' eye.

RHYS

There's something you should see.

He leads her over towards a grave which bears the inscription: "In Loving Memory of Jane Hughes"

RHYS

Billy Hughes' mother. She died here on a visit back from London. He would have been about 7 years old at the time.

They look at it for a moment, then . . .

MERERID

I've been thinking, perhaps I may go out to Australia.

Rhys frowns, surprised.

RHYS,

Australia?

They move away from the grave, back towards Mererid's car.

MERERID

Well, with the summer holidays coming on I've no other commitments for a while.

RHYS

There's only your work on the paper. We need all the help we can get with the Marina issue about to explode again.

MERERID

But it's the paper I'm thinking about. I'd like to use the trip to develop this article about Billy Hughes.

RHYS

You're not expecting the Feinheili Herald to pay the fare are you?

She smiles.

MERERID

With the money from uncle's house I should have more than enough.

RHYS

But Hughes ended up such an old Tory! He abandoned his Welshness.

MERERID

And from what I've heard- his socialism, his idealism, his commitment to ordinary working people and many more things besides. What so intrigues me is why - why did he change?

RHYS

Who cares! There are more important local issues.

MERERID

This is a local issue. It's about someone - not unlike us, 100 years ago. Someone who ends up on the other side of politics, on the other side of the world. It's this ... this personal journey he takes, not only philosophically, but geographically as well. He abandons a middle class upbringing in Wales to suffer extreme poverty in the Australian bush from which he emerges with a vision of a fairer more equal society.

RHYS

Which vision he promptly throws in the rubbish bin.

MERERID

But in the process he takes the Establishment by the scruff of the neck and turns it upside down.

RHYS

He joined the Establishment. He became an integral part of it. Perhaps that's what really interests you. . . .

MERERID

What ?

RHYS

The comfortable life

MERERID

Just what exactly are you accusing me off Rhys ?
Of running away from some struggle that you consider to be important ? I'm trying to understand a man from a culture like ours who shaped a society on the other side of the world.

RHYS

But into what and for whom ? Your Billy Hughes betrayed the working class by feeding it the lie that so called "parliamentary democracy" was the way to change things. Well, it changes nothing ! You hardly have to go out to Australia to find that out. Their parliament's been sacked by a Governor General.

MERERID

Well, if you believe that, why stand for local council?

Rhys is temporarily checkmated. They reach the car. He allows a small smile.

RHYS

I'm different.

Mererid laughs sarcastically.

MERERID

Mr. Untouchable.

RHYS

I just think you're using these tapes as an excuse.

MERERID

For what?

RHYS

To . . . turn your back on things. To get something out of your system.

MERERID

I don't think you can fully understand a place until you leave it.
Maybe I want to look at Wales from the outside for a change.

RHYS

I'll miss you.

MERERID

I'm only talking about a couple of months.

RHYS

Are you?

MERERID

Just like a boomerang - I'll come back.

Rhys is not so sure.

11. EXT. LLANDUDNO BEACHFRONT

DAY

HUGHES
JOHN PAYNE

A boomerang arcs across the park in front of some caves overlooking the Llandudno beach front. It is caught by John Payne. Hughes is standing beside him marvelling at the display. Both are in their late teens.

HUGHES

(voice over)

At 15 I became a student teacher and very much influenced by the poet Mathew Arnold who was our school inspector. Through him I was introduced to the writings of John Stuart Mill, Thomas Carlyle, and Karl Marx.

The boomerang is caught and thrown again.

Their revolutionary ideas struck me like a thunderclap. Suddenly London, and England itself seemed no longer so attractive, steeped as it was in a privileged world where there was little hope of real advancement for the son of a Welsh cabinet maker.

The boomerang is caught for the second time and the two young men walk on down through the park towards the Llandudno pier. They notice a couple of ships coming from Liverpool - close enough in to be impressed by their size.

HUGHES

(in awe of it)

Oh Wow!

Boomerang temporarily forgotten the two boys marvel at the size of the ships. Hughes peers at the flags.

HUGHES

It's a Dutch merchantman. . . and there's a Mexican steamer.

PAYNE

The largest man made machines in the history of the world .

HUGHES

Wouldn't it be great to be on that steamer now- heading for . . .
Acapulco.

PAYNE

Mexico? Why Mexico?

HUGHES

(shrugs)

I want to feel warm for a change. I want to see a bright tropical sun.
And I want to live in a place where it doesn't rain everyday.

Payne looks frankly dubious.

HUGHES

Besides, there's a large Welsh colony in Patagonia. I might even try
my luck down there.

PAYNE

You should think about Australia, it's as hot as hell in summer.
Great mobs of land - all you have to do is squat on it. And they'll
even pay you to go there.

HUGHES

(scoffs)

Look, if they're paying you to go there there's got to be something
wrong with the place.

PAYNE

There's a boom on Will, they're crying out for people, ordinary
peasants like us are making their fortunes every day.

HUGHES

I've heard the squatters control the government and are just as bad
as our aristocracy.

PAYNE

Australia's an island continent, right. Utterly dependent on shipping. If you could control the unions that work the wharves you could control. . . everything ! Squatters or no squatters, they're powerless if they can't get their wool to Liverpool.

Hughes is clearly struck by this new thought.

HUGHES

This "boom" though, it's all on paper isn't it? Land changes hands for even more fabulous sums without anything actually being produced ... except more land.

PAYNE

Of which there's a whole continent full, man!

Hughes takes the boomerang, feels its weight, lost in thought.

HUGHES

What's it actually used for ?

PAYNE

(with a sly, ambiguous grin)

For catching birds, of course.

HUGHES

It's a bit primitive, isn't it?

PAYNE

When the aborigines invented this 20,000 years ago they were the most advanced people on earth.

Hughes draws the boomerang back and hurls it out across the circle of druids stones and out across the pier and as we follow its path across the sea beyond, the film itself seems to spiral through a montage of Welsh landscapes which then dissolve through to the image of a Qantas Jumbo taking off over London and finally

spirals round to a second montage of contrasting, dry, outback Australian landscapes.

12. INT. JUMBO JET

DAY

**MERERID
PASSENGERS**

While the plane's video screen traces the path of the jet across a computerised map of Australia Mererid continues to listen to the dub of the Hughes tapes on her Sony Walkman. She is looking out the window, down at the harsh desert landscapes.

HUGHES

(voice over)

In order to find the most advanced people on earth I boarded the SS Duke of Westminster on the 8th of October, 1884, and six weeks later arrived in Brisbane. Nothing in Europe could have prepared me for the great fright of the Australian outback. One physically exhausting job followed another: railway ganger, boundary rider, grape picker, assistant blacksmith, I tried them all. I even worked as a cook and a waiter. This I found, I had some aptitude for.

13. INT. KOSTAS TAVERNA (MELBOURNE)

DAY

**GEORGE KOSTAS
MR. KOSTAS
MRS. KOSTAS
MR. SITARENOS
CUSTOMERS**

It's a busy Friday night in Kostas Taverna, a prosperous, medium-priced restaurant in the inner Melbourne suburb of Richmond. George Kostas, the son of the family who run the restaurant, is busy at the coffee machine when his mother emerges from a private, inner room.

MRS. KOSTAS

Georgi! Can you spare a moment?

George stops frothing milk and follows his mother into the private room where his father sits drinking Uozo with a stranger.

MR. KOSTAS

Georgi, this is Mr. Sitarenos.

George nods hello, sits. His father pours him a drink.

MR. KOSTAS

Mr. Sitarenos is just arrived from the old country.

MRS. KOSTAS

From our village.

George nods, wondering what it's all about.

MRS. KOSTAS

He has a daughter, Maria. A very clever girl.

George doesn't react. There's an awkward moment.

MR. KOSTAS

Your age, Georgi. And a scholar no less.

MR. SITARENOS

(producing a photo of her)

She teaches languages at Athens University.

MRS. KOSTAS

(proudly)

And from our village too.

GEORGE

(touch impatiently)

Yes, Mum, so you said.

MR. KOSTAS

Your mother and I were just saying that you are due for a trip home,
Georgi.

Alarm bells start ringing for George. He glances briefly at the photo.

GEORGE

Home?

MRS. KOSTAS

You haven't been since you left school.

MR. SITARENOS

Perhaps you and Maria could meet while you're there. Her mother and she would be pleased to show you Athens.

Georges turns to his parents.

MR. KOSTAS

George, she's from our village, son.

GEORGE

The only village I'm from is Richmond. For gods sake, this is Australia, I'm 37 years old.

MR. KOSTAS

Yes, and far too old to still be a bachelor.

George gets up and storms out of the room.

MRS. KOSTAS

Georgi!

His mother follows him and yells from the doorway across the restaurant.

MRS. KOSTAS

Georgi!

MRS. KOSTAS

You are going home to Greece and that's the end of it.

GEORGE

(flinging off his apron - storming out onto the street)

I'm going to Sydney and that's the end of that!

The buzz of the restaurant dwindles to a silence. Mrs. Kostas hangs there staring after George's exit, her face showing her concern.

14. EXT. RAINFOREST WIDE BAY (QUEENSLAND) DAY

HUGHES

TOM

Over a slow panning shot of the coastal rainforest north of Noosa:

HUGHES

(voice over)

Back in Queensland I now found myself an outlaw. In those days you couldn't leave your job without permission, and if you did the notorious Queensland police force hunted you down like wild dog. My Welsh mate, Tom Payne, had absconded from a job cutting cane near Maryborough and I'd decided to join him for the mad escape to Brisbane.

The sound of hacking through a jungle grows louder until Hughes and Tom Payne emerge, exhausted, into a small clearing.

HUGHES

You told me you knew this country like the back of your hand.

They sit and drink from a precious billy can of water.

TOM

Tewantin can't be far now. We should be there come sunset.

HUGHES

You've been saying that for days!

But Tom doesn't seem to be listening. He stretches out, head on his hands - dreaming...

TOM

What I wouldn't give for a big feed of chops and sausages, smothered with peas and heaps of potatoes cooked in their jackets, stuffed full of melted butter....

HUGHES

Tom! Will you listen to me, man. We're lost! We've no food, and we haven't a damn clue how far it is 'till we find some more.

TOM

We've still got our water though. That's the main thing. A man can go for weeks without food, but barely a day or so without water.

Tom shoulders his swag and climbs back up onto his feet, but in doing so he knocks over the billy that they've been drinking from.

HUGHES

Tom!

Hughes dives for it, but too late. The precious water spills into the ground.

HUGHES

Thanks for reminding me, brother.

PAYNE

Not to worry, Will, there's plenty of rivers around.

Hughes rolls his eyes and they shamle on. We dissolve through a series of shots of them hacking their painful way through the thick coastal scrub, gradually becoming more and more worn down. To buoy their spirits a little they've begun prompting each other with bits from Shakespeare's "The Tempest". (III, 3).

HUGHES

"... the sea hath caused to belch you up and on this island where...

PAYNE

"... on this island where man doth not inhabit. . . ."

HUGHES

"... where man doth not inhabit, you amongst men being most unfit to live. I have made you mad, and . . ."

PAYNE

"...and even with such like valour. . . ."

HUGHES

I know, I know, - "... even with such like valour men hang and and drown their proper selves."

Suddenly, they come upon a stagnant pool and fall upon it thirstily, only to spit it out almost immediately.

HUGHES

Salt!

TOM

I told you we were getting close to the sea.

HUGHES

Tom - you're optimism is killing both of us.

TOM

Shh -

HUGHES

What?

TOM

Hear that -

But Hughes of course, even at this early stage was going deaf. He shakes his head impatiently.

TOM

Breakers mate. Breakers!

Elated, Tom picks himself up and heads in the direction of the sound; summoning what energy he's got left, Hughes follows. They clamber through jungle and finally emerge onto a wide, but empty beach.

HUGHES

(voice over)

The Pacific Ocean at last, but not a solitary sign of human or animal life to be seen anywhere. No cheering campfire, no house or shack, no horse or cart tracks ... nothing.

They stagger along the beach until Hughes collapses back down onto the sand.

HUGHES

It's no use Tom. I've had it.

Tom sinks beside him. For some moments they say nothing.

TOM

So this is it. Half way round the world to die like Burke and Wills on a beautiful tropical beach.

Suddenly, as if from nowhere there's the sound of a cock crowing. At first it seems like a mirage. Tom hardly dares believe it. Then the cock crows again. Their eyes are wide open, even Hughes can hear it. They sit bolt upright. Afraid it may disappear.

HUGHES

That's the sweetest music I've ever heard.

Tom leaps to his feet and jogs up a nearby sand dune.

TOM

Tracks, Will. Tracks!

A couple of faint, but unmistakable wagon tracks run parallel to the sand dune for a bit then lead off inland. The cock crows for the third time.

HUGHES

(voice over)

Not all the choirs of Wales could have produced such delicious harmony.

As we see them walk towards a ramshackle bush hut:

HUGHES

(voice over cont.)

We staggered on towards a timber getter's hut whose dear wife revived us with tea, condensed milk, ration sugar and melon pie - large portions of melon pie. We were safe, alive and safe.

We cut to a high, wide shot placing the bush hut in its coastal setting.

HUGHES

(voice over cont'd.)

But the lessons of a cruel and iniquitous law remained with me- as much as the sense of mateship that bonded workers against such oppression. Out of such feelings the Australian Labour Party would grow. Although it took the cataclysm of the great 1890s depression to finally force it into being.

15. EXT. HOTEL BEER GARDEN (NOOSA)

DAY

MERERID

"WAITER" (HUGHES)

CUSTOMERS

The high, wide shot of the bush hut dissolves through to an even wider, higher shot which encompasses the coastal plain north of Noosa, Queensland. Hughes diary voice over proceeds as the camera continues to pull back to include the outside garden of a modern tourist hotel:

HUGHES

(voice over cont'd.)

Like many Australians, however, I now turned my back on the bush and sought employment in the coastal cities. In this way I became an umbrella repairman, oven maker, pantryman, cook, sailor, actor, and always from time to time my old standby - the waiting profession.

The long pan and zoom back ends on Mererid. We discover her listening to the last part of the above tape on her Sony Walkman whilst sipping from an exotic tropical drink in the beer garden of the Noosa pub which commands such a stunning coastal view.

At this point, however, she switches off the tape and puts it aside as a thin, wiry little waiter with a large hearing aid, smart waistcoat and sharp, precise gestures comes to gather up her empty glass.

"WAITER"

Another 'Malibu Sunset', madam?

MERERID

Ah- no thanks.

She stands and moves off. The "waiter" follows her progress with a keen, almost predatory interest. A few yards away she stops, struck by the resemblance between him and the images she's seen of Hughes. She frowns and swings round to catch another look. The "waiter" himself caught staring at her, quickly turns away and busies himself with clearing tables. Mererid shakes her head, puzzled, and walks on out of the beergarden.

16. INT. PARLIAMENT HOUSE, CANBERRA (SMALL OFFICE) NIGHT

HUGHES

AUGUSTUS JOHN

Again, Hughes is in his office dictating the autobiography. It is late at night. He is surrounded by piles of books and notes, and newspaper clippings to aid his memory.

HUGHES

(into microphone)

All this wandering from one job to another was fine for a while but I soon grew tired of my physical and spiritual rootlessness. I was 24 years old and going nowhere - fast. This state of affairs called for action and I made a major strategic decision. I decided that if the mountain wouldn't come to me I'd have to go to it. I packed my swag and headed for Sydney.

In the background the artist continues to paint Hughes' portrait.

17. EXT. MANLY FERRY (SYDNEY HARBOUR)

DAY

GEORGE

Hughes words continue over a shot of George Kostas.

George admires the view of Sydney Harbour from the bow of the Manly Ferry as it rounds the Sydney Opera House and heads towards Circular Quay.

HUGHES

(voice over)

Many years have passed but the memories of my first arrival in that great harbour are still as fresh and vivid as those of yesterday. My clothes were rags, my possessions a few books, I did not know a soul in the entire state and the dole had not yet been invented.

The ferry docks at Circular Quay and George walks across the short gangplank.

HUGHES

(voice over cont.)

As I walked down the gangplank of the S.S. Maranoa I had but one half crown to my name. However, I was in Australia. We were about to witness the first socialist government in the world. What need had I of crowns or half crowns for that matter. Here, every man could be a king!

18. EXT. SYDNEY STREETS (INNER CITY) DAY

GEORGE
BUSKER

George wanders somewhat aimlessly through Sydney's crowded inner-city streets. He looks and feels like a loner. He walks past a busker playing the sax, the big-city bluesy theme seems to match George's mood. He throws a few coins in the busker's open instrument case.

The music follows George as he passes a travel agent's shop window. Inside are displayed several posters of the Greek Islands. George quickly turns away, and wanders on towards a Stock and Station Agent's shop.

In the window is a hand written sign reading: "Locksmith wanted, urgent".

We hold on the sign.

Then pull back to discover Hughes standing there in the "rags" that he described himself wearing when he first landed in Sydney. He rubs his chin, assessing his chances, then plunges on into the shop.

19. INT. STOCK & STATION AGENCY (SYDNEY) DAY

HUGHES
CLERK
MANAGER

Hughes marches smartly into the shop, assuming a confident even commanding air - despite his physical appearance. For a few moments a clerk behind the counter continues to write figures in his ledger.

HUGHES
(voice over)

I quickly learned that in order to survive, with or without socialism, one had to be enterprising.

Hughes clears his throat.

CLERK

(without looking up)

Yes.

HUGHES

Good morning. I believe you're looking for a locksmith.

The clerk's eyes dart up immediately, but the hope fades as he takes in Hughes' ragged clothes, the books under one arm. The clerk looks frankly dubious.

CLERK

You - are a locksmith?

HUGHES

Will Hughes, locksmith, that's me.

(fumbles in his pockets)

I er ... seem to have left my card back at the shop. Still, how can I be of service?

Despite his misgivings the urgency of the matter forces the clerk to take an act of faith.

CLERK

Well, Mr. er... Hughes, it's rather embarrassing really. We've lost the key to our safe and we er..., would like it opened as a matter of urgency. Some documents you see, require submission in a court of law - this afternoon.

HUGHES

Ah, yes, I know the problem. Surprisingly common, so there's no need to feel embarrassed, just show me the way and I'll hop straight into it.

CLERK

Just a moment.

The Clerk pokes his head round an inner doorway and confers in low voice with someone inside. Hughes throws a nervous glance back out on the street.

HUGHES

(voice over)

For good measure I kept half an eye peeled to the front door. If the game was up I could still make a pretty good run for it.

The Clerk re-emerges from the inner office and holds the door open.

CLERK

If you would be so kind, Mr. Hughes.

Hughes goes on through. The man inside rises from his desk.

CLERK

Our manager, Mr. Hartwell.

Hughes and Hartwell shake.

MANAGER

How do you do.

The manager hangs there uncertain. Hughes nods, and jerks his head at him - indicating for him to move away from the safe.

HUGHES

Yes, I will need plenty of room.

MANAGER

(concerned)

There won't be any explosions will there?

HUGHES

Oh no, no. Goodness me no.

(rolling up his sleeves)

Oh yes. An old Chubb (adjust for brand name) I know them well.

Now let me see....

So begins a great pantomime. Hughes taps the safe, takes a glass from the manager's desk, listens to the safe through it. Walks around it tapping the walls, the floor, the cupboard beside it all the while frantically looking for something he hopes is going to be there. Finally he gets down on all fours, then flat out on the floor.

Above him the Manager and the Clerk exchange wide-eyed expressions of disbelief, shrug, what can they do.

Meanwhile, on the floor Hughes' face gives an expression of delight. He's found what he's been looking for. The missing key is wedged behind a bookshelf under some sawdust. He stands, confidently dusting off his shabby clothes.

HUGHES

If you'll be so kind as to leave me with it. I should have it opened in a minute or two.

MANAGER

(worried)

Leave you with it?

HUGHES

Oh yes, this is a highly confidential procedure.

MANAGER

But there's over £250 in there.

HUGHES

Sir, I am a professional gentleman. If I were to reveal the secrets of my trade, it would be tantamount to me throwing away the skills I've acquired over a lifetime.

MANAGER

Oh very well.

The manager and the Clerk back out nervously.

As soon as they're gone Hughes chuckles, dives behind the bookshelf, retrieves the key and opens the safe. He takes another moment or two to stuff the key in a back pocket, then opens the door, gesturing theatrically towards the safe like a magician who's pulled off a successful stunt.

HUGHES

Your safe, sir.

MANAGER

Oh - thank you very much.

CLERK

Could you make us another key?

HUGHES

That'll be another £1, I'm afraid.

The Clerk looks to the Manager who nods.

CLERK

Of course, I'll fix you up straight away.

Hughes smiles, follows the clerk to a till in the front office.

HUGHES

(patting his back pocket)

I'll ah, drop the new key around tomorrow.

20. EXT. SYDNEY UNIVERSITY

DAY

**MERERID
HISTORIAN**

HISTORIAN

That's a load of old codswallop.

The historian, a woman in her 30s, hands one of the audio cassettes back to Mererid. They are strolling through the cloisters of Sydney University.

HISTORIAN

At the time this locksmith story's supposed to have happened he says in another book that he was droving sheep in outback Queensland - or working as a cook on coastal steamers, depending which edition you read. At this stage he also claims he was 22 but he was actually 24 because he lowered his age to get a free passage to Queensland. On other occasions he would also have us believe that he was born in either Wales or London, or even Liverpool .

MERERID

So - you don't think the tapes can be genuine?

HISTORIAN

My dear, I wouldn't have a clue. They may well be authentic Hughes, but that's no guarantee of their veracity. "Authentic" and "Hughes" do not compute.

MERERID

I'm sorry?

HISTORIAN

The man was what we'd call a bullshit artist.

MERERID

But, but he was the Prime Minister of Australia.

HISTORIAN

I rest my case.

They walk on.

HISTORIAN

You see, he often embellished his own adventures in order to romanticise this early part of his life. I've no doubt some of these things actually happened but which ones and in what order is a total mystery. He was a con artist, a practical joker. He loved to take the

mickey. He was a larrikan, and he'd do anything for a laugh even if it meant cracking a joke against himself. You've only got to look at the story of the peaches.

MERERID

Ah yes - where his horse goes lame and he meets the mother of a bushranger.

HISTORIAN

More likely to have been a bicycle than a horse.

They reach the Academic Common Room.

HISTORIAN

Feel like a beer?

21. EXT. BUSH ROAD (OUTBACK N.S.W.)

DAY

HUGHES

MRS. HALL

MRS. HALL

Can I offer you a cup of tea, young fella?

Hughes looks up from mending the flat tyre on his up-turned bicycle. A handsome, but elderly woman has come to the front gate of a small cottage opposite where he's broken down. Hughes is surrounded by spare tyres and patches and bicycle pumps and tubes of glue.

HUGHES

(raising his hat)

That'd be very kind of you madam, thank you very much.

He sticks the patch on and holds it while she disappears inside again.

HUGHES

(voice over)

I finally got a "real job" when I answered an ad in "The Daily Worker" for Labour Party organisers. This found me back on the road again

but now there was a new found purpose to my life. At last I was able to give free expression to all the principles and ideals I'd be striving towards. And as chance would have it ,I'd just broken down outside a very important little cottage near Eugowra....

Mrs. Hall brings the cup of tea across and Hughes stops work.

MRS. HALL

You're not from around these parts, young fella?

HUGHES

No, ma'am , I'm signing up people for the new Labour Leagues. For four shillings you can have the satisfaction of belonging to a group that's striving to lift the circumstances of the poorer people in our community.

MRS. HALL

Four shillings! I'd want more than a bit of satisfaction for that much.

HUGHES

You see, ma'am, we have this funny notion that parliament's ripe for the plucking. You've got your Free Traders on one side and your Protectionists on the other, but nowhere is the voice of the ordinary working people heard. And we are by far the greatest part of the population. If we can unite the working class behind the Labour Leagues then state power is assured.

MRS. HALL

I'm not sure I hold with socialism though.

HUGHES

But, ma'am, the idea of socialism is still being formed. Nowhere in the world has it actually been tried yet. It's simply a philosophy of sharing, of replacing the profit motive with the co-operative motive. from each according to their ability to each according to their need. For example, in the country we will put a tax on land so any acreage

that isn't put to useful purposes will have to be sold. Thus lowering the price of land and making it available to people who will put it to good use.

She smiles and takes his empty cup back. He holds her look.

HUGHES

(voice over)

Little did I realise I had just signed up the aunt of Ben Hall, a bushranger who's relatives in this part of the world were as thick as the leaves in Vallambrosa.

22. EXT. SMALL COUNTRY TOWN (N.S.W.)

NIGHT

HUGHES
SHOPKEEPER

Hughes is peering in through the window of a General Store.

HUGHES

(voice over)

So, by the time I'd reached Eugowra the Mechanics Institute was so packed to the rafters for my public address that virtually every shopowner in town had closed early in order to be there. And, as usual I had not eaten a thing all day.

Hughes knocks on the window. A woman inside looks up from her knitting, but makes no move to let him in. So Hughes knocks again, with a pleading expression on his face. Reluctantly she comes forward....

23. INT. SMALL SHOP (EUGOWRA)

NIGHT

HUGHES
SHOPKEEPER

She opens the door, Hughes squeezes in.

HUGHES

(tipping his hat)

Sorry to bother you, but I wondered if there was any food....?

SHOPKEEPER

Food?

They both look around the shop. It's mostly dry goods - hardware, farm implements, slate pencils, reels of cotton.

SHOPKEEPER

There's half a dozen peaches I could let you have.

She uncovers a bowl at the back of the counter, they look delicious, Hughes' eyes light up.

HUGHES

Oh, thank you very much.

SHOPKEEPER

That'll be six pence thanks.

Hughes pats his pockets, stalling.

HUGHES

Oh, ah, I had 4/-. But I'm afraid that went on my accommodation at the local hotel.

She looks dubious.

HUGHES

I'm sure there'll be a lot more money coming in tonight. I've a packed hall full of potential converts waiting for me down the end of the street.

She remains unimpressed, standing there arms folded she nods towards a sign behind the counter reading:

"The Man Who Gives Credit Is On Holidays".

Hughes looks up from the sign back to her, smiles weakly.

HUGHES

(voice over)

Clearly, this member of the merchant class was neither a relative of bushrangers nor a friend of Labour's.

HUGHES

I've got six penny stamps.

SHOPKEEPER

We don't take stamps.

HUGHES

8 penny stamps?

She sighs, and somewhat morosely, puts the six peaches in a paper bag. Satisfied, Hughes tips his hat and hurries off to the meeting.

24. INT. CHURCH HALL (EUGOWRA)

NIGHT

**HUGHES
CHAIRMAN
DIGNITARIES
AUDIENCE**

Close on the bag of peaches, it rests on a wooden table centre stage, behind which stands Hughes who has just risen to his feet. On either side of him are seated the chairman of the meeting and several local notables. In the body of the hall is a crowd of local farmers, labourers, families, kids, dogs etc, waiting to be thrilled by the oratorical skills of the current goanna oil salesman - in this case Hughes. For many country people this was the best, the only live entertainment

HUGHES

Voters of Eugowra! Let us consider for a moment, the causes of unemployment.

One of the local women comes in behind Hughes, and trying to be helpful, but unobtrusive, empties the peaches out of their paper bag onto a clean china plate. Hughes, smiles, nods his thanks and continues.

HUGHES

The causes of unemployment, and some possible remedies. Private ownership of land is undoubtedly a primary cause, private ownership of capital is another. In Australia where there is sufficient fertile land for 50 million people and food in abundance ...

He breaks off as he notices the chairman help himself to a peach from the plate, but quickly buries his reaction. The chairman is totally oblivious to the effect this is having on the famished speaker.

HUGHES

... er food in abundance, it is absurd that with a population of under 5 million we should have unemployed men, women and children starving ...

On the "starving" Hughes' voice cracks a little as he tries to ignore the shire councillor on the other side help himself to a second peach.

HUGHES

In order to have a large pool of labourers on tap when demand goes up. Private Enterprise deliberately fosters unemployment. It needs unemployment. Unemployment keeps the workers docile. Because those who are "lucky" enough to have a job are kept chained to their ringbolts in the industrial inferno just as surely as were the galley slaves of old to the oar by fetters of iron.

Now the chairman helps himself to his second peach and Hughes has to loosen his collar slightly, his heart sinking, his voice on the edge of breaking down.

HUGHES

Socialism, on the other hand is the complete opposite to this. Socialism is a philosophy of sharing

This time the plate is passed along the front table and a 4th and 5th peach disappear. Hughes can barely contain himself, but ever the professional he presses on ...

And the belief that Socialism can be achieved only by a coup, whether violent or peaceful, could only be entertained by those who fail utterly to understand what Socialism is.

The plate comes back to the centre directly in front of Hughes with the one remaining peach on it. He leans forward dramatically resting both hands on the table for effect - but in fact he's trying to cut off further access to the plate.

HUGHES

Voters of Eugowra! Socialism is an organic thing. It will come, if it is to come, as I believe it will - in due time; just as manhood comes to a boy. And it's coming will cause no more astonishment than does a boy's arrival at what we call manhood. That is to say it will cause no astonishment at all, for its growth will have been so gradual as to almost escape attention.

But over these last few lines the last peach is plucked out from virtually underneath him. Hughes is ashen faced, the puff seems to have gone out of him.

HUGHES

(almost wistfully)

But a boy needs food, food to grow, just as socialism needs recruits. And that's why I'm here tonight. To seek food, voters of Eugowra, recruits for the Labour Leagues. Sign up with us now and ensure that your voice is heard in parliament where the real power to change our society has always been, and will always remain.

He resumes his seat with thunderous applause, smiling weakly and barely daring to look at the plate full of peach pips sitting in front of him.

HUGHES

(voice over)

A year later I was carried into the colonial parliament of New South Wales on a tide of support for the new party, and a few years after that I found myself on the train to Melbourne as a Labour member of the first parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia.

25. INT. PUBLIC PHONE, CENTRAL STATION, SYDNEY NIGHT
(INT. NEWSPAPER OFFICE, CAERNARFON (WALES)) DAY

MERERID
SECRETARY
RHYS
HUGHES

Mererid is making an international phone call from a public phone in Central Station, Sydney. She glances at the 8pm departure time for the Melbourne Express on a nearby video screen then turns her attention back to the phone as it's answered.

The secretary, Helena, picks it up in the small cluttered office of the community newspaper which has, nevertheless, a fine view of Caernarfon's famous castle. During the phone conversation we intercut between Sydney (Night) and Caernarfon (Day).

SYDNEY

MERERID

Hullo? Is Rhys there? I tried at home but there's no answer.

(listens)

What? He's what?

Mererid strains to hear through the noise of the Public Address which now announces:

PUBLIC ADDRESS

(voice over)

The Melbourne Express for Goulburn, Wagga, Wagga, Albury and Melbourne, departing in 5 minutes from platform one. All aboard please.

CAERNARFON

SECRETARY

He's been arrested.

(listens)

Something to do with damage to a bulldozer.

MERERID

A bulldozer?

Rhys enters

SECRETARY

Oh - here he is now. I'll put him on.

She holds out the phone for Rhys.

RHYS

Hullo? Mererid! Where are you?

SYDNEY

MERERID

In Sydney, but I'm just about to leave for Melbourne.

CAERNARFON

RHYS

No, no, it's nothing, really.

(listens)

Well, yes, I suppose I could go to goal. If I have to I will.

(listens)

Look, I don't expect you to do anything. You do what you have to, and I'll do what I have to.

SYDNEY

MERERID

Oh that makes me feel great. Really terrific. What am I supposed to say to that?

(listens)

I don't see it as just my "Australian Adventure" Rhys. I told you, I'm trying to fathom what it means to be Welsh - what it means to be Australian. How a man changes ...

(listens)

Yes - but saying that makes me feel like I shouldn't be here. Like I'm betraying something if I stay here. . .

(listens)

Oh that's just stupid!

CAERNARFON

RHYS

Look, the trial's in two weeks, why don't you call me when you've had a chance to calm down.

SYDNEY

MERERID

(almost yelling)

Don't patronise me! I don't need to calm down.

There's a tense pause. Mererid feels like she's had this argument a 100 times before.

There's another announcement:

PUBLIC ADDRESS

(voice over)

Last call for passengers on the Melbourne Express, all aboard, please.

MERERID

Look, I haven't got any coins left - the red light is flashing ...

CAERNARFON

RHYS

Nobody ever achieved anything by sitting on their backside, Mererid.

This line goes dead. Rhys sighs, drops the phone. In one corner of the office a television set is on, he swings round and turns the volume up.

There's a documentary on the Falklands War, we see images of the incident where the "Galahad" troop landing ship was bombed, resulting in severe casualties for the Welsh Regiment on board - one of the worst setbacks for the British in the whole war. Rhys turns to the secretary.

RHYS

That bomb could've been dropped by a Welsh speaking pilot from Patagonia. Our brothers on the other side of the world....

(shakes his head)

Incredible.

SYDNEY

Mererid stands there holding the phone then slowly hangs up.

Suddenly, a small wiry little man sweeps past her carrying official looking despatch boxes and an umbrella. His suit is smart but of a different era. Mererid double takes, frowns at something vaguely familiar about him. Then picks up her own suitcase and quickly follows towards the waiting train.

26. INT. "DE LUX" CABIN MELBOURNE EXPRESS

NIGHT

HUGHES

PRIVATE

SECRETARY

As the train lurches forward Hughes comes in to his cabin, throws his despatch box on the 3/4 size bed, winds the arm of an old phonograph player on the dressing table and drops the needle on a recording of Lloyd George's famous 1911 Budget Speech.

He hangs up his coat, mouthing the words of the speech which he obviously knows by heart. He also makes the appropriate expansive gestures- as if rehearsing a performance.

There's a knock on the door.

HUGHES

Come in.

A younger man, a private secretary, enters with an arm-full of papers.

SECRETARY

The cables from Gallipoli, sir. Only the top few have been decoded.

Hughes eagerly takes the sheaf of papers and quickly scans through them.

HUGHES

Good god! Another frontal attack on Lone Pine and another bloody disaster!

He sighs, stops the phonograph, the secretary waits, ready to copy down any replies.

HUGHES

The British General Staff couldn't lead a flock of homing pigeons. Two regiments of light horse, the flower of our army, wiped out for less than 24 yards of godforsaken rock in the middle of bloody nowhere!

He throws the cablegrams angrily aside.

HUGHES

The whole thing was a cock-up from the start. They should have been evacuated months ago - soon as it was clear they'd been landed in the wrong place.

SECRETARY

Should we do a Press Release, Sir?

HUGHES

Good God no! We don't want the public to find out. Recruiting figures are bad enough as it is. Send a brief to Murdoch though. He's pretty good at turning these disasters into something we can crow about: "gallant retreat", "birth of a national legend" - that sort of thing.

SECRETARY

Can we blame someone, Sir?

HUGHES

Well, we can blame Churchill, but I don't think it would be too politic at the moment. Much as I admire him, the man can be a complete dill, sometimes.

SECRETARY

And the Prime Minister?

HUGHES

I don't think Fisher's terribly interested in the war. He's almost as ineffectual as Asquith. Our revered leader seems to have some aversion to even talking about the crisis in recruitment. No - I'm afraid Andrew Fisher is due for the old golden handshake.

SECRETARY

It won't be easy sir - to mobilise the numbers without him knowing.

HUGHES

My dear boy, I don't intend to mobilise anyone except Mr. Fisher - in the general direction of a cosy High Commissionership somewhere. All I have to do is play on his finely developed sense of honour.

SECRETARY

(grins)

Never a problem for you, sir.

HUGHES

Don't be impertinent.

Hughes holds the stern glare at his secretary, then breaks into a slow smile as he puts the record back on.

27. INT. CLUB CAR MELBOURNE EXPRESS

NIGHT

MERERID

WHARFIE

HEADMASTER

SAILOR

GEORGE KOSTAS

WAITERS

PASSENGERS

The club car is a fairly cheerful place with a bar at one end and arm chairs ranged down both sides facing towards each other. The effect of which is to encourage random conversations with total strangers. The waiters wear smart, starched waist coats and there are little round tables everywhere with holes to slip your glasses into. Coffee and tea are available, but with a 13 hour trip ahead of them virtually everyone is into a bit of serious drinking.

Mererid has ensconced herself in a corner chair hoping to catch up on a bit of quiet reading: one of the many biographies of Hughes.

A large, florid man in his late fifties drops into the seat beside her, notices the cover to the book and launches straight in.

WHARFIE

Billy Hughes, eh? The "little rat!"

MERERID

I beg your pardon.

WHARFIE

Well, that's what I call him

(grins)

But I'm an old wharfie. Retired now. Or retrenched rather, made redundant by large aluminium boxes. . . . containters.

MERERID

I thought he was supposed to be the "little digger"?

WHARFIE

(shakes his head)

We can never forgive him for what he did to our union. Or the Labour Party - although he's pretty far back in the queue of monsters there these days.

The wharfie laughs, and as is the case in these situations a third drinker, sitting opposite, joins in - a sort of headmaster type.

HEADMASTER

He only became Prime Minister because Andrew Fisher was too honest.

MERERID

How was that?

HEADMASTER

In late 1915, Fisher made a deal with the opposition that he wouldn't bring some bill on for another couple of weeks. Well, soon as his back is turned, old Billy as deputy PM promptly goes and introduces the thing.

MERERID

So -

HEADMASTER

Fisher's "honour" is impugned. He carpets Hughes and orders him to resign. Hughes says "no". "You're the one who made the deal, it's your problem".

WHARFIE

The bloody little larrikan, eh ? What a hoon.

HEADMASTER

So Fisher resigns.

WHARFIE

Incredible.

HEADMASTER

Too honest for his own good, see. It always happens to the best of the Labour men: Fisher, Evatt, Whitlam.

MERERID

But Hughes started off as a champion of the underdog, didn't he? I mean he called himself a socialist ... when he joined Labour.

WHARFIE

I suppose he had to put something on the application form.

HEADMASTER

If you ask me Hughes was just an opportunist. He didn't forge new ideas he just dressed up old ones and sold them at a discount.

WHARFIE

That's right, he went with the flow. That's all he was - an opportunist.

HEADMASTER

He was cunning, I'll give him that much. After the First War he decided to cash in on his charisma, and feeling a bit broke he sent his private secretary to Sydney who calls up a number of industrialists and says "old Bill's a bit worn out by his service to King and Country and anyway I thought you'd like to know the Melbourne establishment have passed around the hat and collected quite a sum". So the secretary gets all these promises from Sydney and goes back to the Melbourne Club and says "listen Sydney are chipping in all this money for a presentation to Bill and I thought you wouldn't want to be left out of it...."

The wharfie and the headmaster laugh.

MERERID

No - is that true?

WHARFIE

I know he got a fat cheque for £25,000 quid no questions asked, and a lovely scroll to go with it.

A sailor has come up and plonked himself in a seat nearby.

SAILOR

Well, I reckon he earned every penny of it.

WHARFIE

(rolling his eyes)

Oh here we go -

SAILOR

After all he won the war for us.

WHARFIE

I think the blokes in the trenches had a fair bit to do with it.

The club car is gradually filling up and amongst the people coming in we notice George Kostas going to the bar to get himself a beer.

SAILOR

Yeah and when Billy Hughes tried to boost their numbers, your pinko ancestors made sure it didn't happen.

WHARFIE

So we saved a few lives, what's wrong with that?

MERERID

You're talking about the conscription issue? The referenda....

George joins the party, as freely and easily as anyone else.

GEORGE

In my day they didn't need referenda, they just pulled your birth date out of a barrel borrowed from Tattsлото, and when they had enough cannon fodder they stopped. It's the only lottery I'm glad I never won.

The Sailor scrambles to his feet, drains his glass and walks off.

SAILOR

Ah - pinko subversives! I'm going to drink with some real Australians.

WHARFIE

(laughs)

What are they?

The wharfie also gets up.

WHARFIE

What'll you have?

GEORGE

Beer thanks.

Mererid shakes her head, the headmaster also gives the wharfie his empty glass and turns back to his newspaper.

This leaves Mererid and George relatively alone.

MERERID

I didn't realise people out here took their politics so seriously.

GEORGE

(smiles)

We don't - but that's never stopped us Aussies having a good argument about it.

She smiles back at him.

MERERID

You don't look Australian to me.

GEORGE

My mother thinks I'm Greek. Fact is I don't think it matters where you come from - it's what you stand for that counts.

MERERID

And what do you stand for?

GEORGE

I think you'd better come to our restaurant one night and find out.

Mererid smiles, thinks about it. But then she's vaguely distracted again by the same, thin little man she saw getting on the train. He's sitting right down the other end of the club car, hiding behind a newspaper but really listening in to everything that's been going on.

We close in on the paper and notice it's banner headline announcing that Prime Minister Hughes has received a hero's welcome in England. The date is February, 1916.

28. ARCHIVAL SEQUENCE

The close up on the newspaper with its photo of Hughes and Lloyd George visiting a mine in Wales turns into an animated sequence of movie footage, cartoons, songs, and still photographs drawn from Hughes' triumphal return to Britain for the first six months of 1916.

During this time he also visited the front in France. The newspapers followed his every move, and reprinted most of his speeches. Hughes seemed to be what a war weary Britain had been waiting for. The headlines tell the story.

This dissolves through to

29. COUNTRY ROAD (NEAR LLANSANTFFRAID)

DAY

HUGHES
MRS. HUGHES
BABY DAUGHTER
DRIVER
SECRETARY

An open car drives through the countryside approaching Llansantffraid in Wales. In the back seat are Hughes and his wife (Mary Campbell) and their baby daughter about 9 months old. In the front seat sits a driver and Hughes' current private secretary. Hughes is alternately playing with his daughter and showing her the view.

HUGHES

(voice over)

On my way to Llansantffraid, journeying through the most lovely valley in the world, I felt as if Providence had translated me to a sweet, green land upon whose peace the din of war had never broken. And yet I knew that thousands of the bravest men had died in order to dam back the blood-red flood of war from surging through these fair valleys. I knew too, that peace without liberty is a barren thing and has never been won save through men in whose veins love of country is a passionate fervour.....

The car pulls up at a small country church.

30. EXT. LLANSANTFFRAID CHURCH (WALES)

DAY

HUGHES
MRS. HUGHES
BABY DAUGHTER
DRIVER
SECRETARY
VICAR
MR. OLDFIELD
MR. & MRS. JONES
SCHOOLCHILDREN
COURIER

As the Hughes party alight from the car they are met by the Rev. R. Fielden.

VICAR

Welcome home, Mr. Hughes

HUGHES

Thank you, my wife, Mary.

The vicar and Mrs. Hughes shake hands.

VICAR

May I also present Mr. Oldfield our local schoolmaster. And Mr. & Mrs. David Jones, who asked especially to meet you.

As Hughes and Jones shake. He's an old man in his late 60s.

MR. JONES

I was at your mother's funeral, sir.

HUGHES

(surprised, delighted)

Were you really?

MR. JONES

We called you little Willy then. I was a lad of 20 myself. I distinctly remember you throwing a handful of flowers into the grave.

Hughes nods, still visibly affected by the memory.

VICAR

(leading the party on)

It's this way, sir.

The group moves on towards the gravestone of Hughes' mother and stand silently around it. Mrs. Hughes places a bouquet of flowers on it, and for a few moments they continue to stand with heads bowed.

Suddenly the solemnity is broken by the voices of children bursting into song. Mr. Oldfield's class have gathered as a choir in a nearby lane and now give a rousing rendition of the Australian National Anthem: "There is a land where summer skies"

As the song finishes Hughes goes forward to shake hands with the children while in the background a military courier arrives on a motorbike. The secretary goes over to take the message.

He opens the telegram, it reads:

"Presence requested at urgent meeting of the Imperial War Cabinet".

31. INT. CABINET ROOM (LONDON)

NIGHT

HUGHES

LLOYD GEORGE

ASQUITH

HAIG

OTHER GENERALS

ADJUTANTS

The War Cabinet, with Hughes present, listens to a grim report from the supreme commander, Field Marshall Haig. Behind and around the table moves a ceaseless flow of adjutants, carrying telegrams, whispering in general's ears. . . The room is dominated by a huge map of France with a broken red line indicating the trench system of the Western Front.

HAIG

In view of the failure of all units to achieve their primary objectives, the Chiefs of Staff and I have therefore resolved to call off the attack across the Somme.

There is deadly silence as the full impact of what this means sinks in.

ASQUITH

But you had the greatest artillery bombardment in the history of the world. We heard the guns here in London, the ground shook in Downing Street.

HAIG

It appears our bombardment, although it cut the wire and churned up a lot of mud, did little real damage to the Bosche's heavy machine gun units. Their trench system now runs so deeply underground they can weather any barrage and still emerge ready to fire as soon as our advance starts.

HUGHES

So when you pound the enemy's line for four days all you really do is throw away the element of surprise and achieve nothing but further slaughter of our men.

Haig bristles at this.

HAIG

We're doing our best, Mr. Hughes. There's no immediate danger to Paris. We've held the Bosche for two years.

HUGHES

Held, yes. But advanced nowhere. At this rate both sides will simply bleed each other to death.

Hughes' attitude clearly has an unsettling effect on the room.

ASQUITH

We're all aware of the tragic scale of the thing, Bill.

HUGHES

Tragedies are made by God. This fiasco is man-made. It's another disaster on the scale of Gallipoli. What we clearly need are new tactics, new men at the helm.

This sends a ripple of horror through the room. Haig is flabbergasted.

HUGHES

In my day if a man didn't achieve what he was contracted to do, we sacked him. It was as simple as that. Frankly, what's wrong with the British Army is you've too many men with pips and crowns on their

shoulders because their well connected families paid for them. In our army men are promoted on their merits.

This is really setting the cat among the pigeons.

HAIG

I'm sure we all appreciate your gallant speeches, but swaying public opinion and waging wars are two different matters entirely. War is, of necessity, a sanguine business.

HUGHES

War! This isn't war. It's outright bloody murder!

All hell breaks loose, cries of "shame" and murmurs of dissent rumble round the table.

Asquith leans in an aside to Lloyd George

ASQUITH

Forgodsake David, talk to him in Welsh and calm him down.

LLOYD GEORGE

Bill, the reason we've asked you here is to pass on some bad news. I'm afraid your Australian 5th Division has borne much of the brunt of the attack.

HUGHES

As usual.

LLOYD GEORGE

The fact is they've lost more than half their strength.

This is a real shock for Hughes.

HAIG

And unless reinforcements are increased dramatically, the Australian Divisions, starting with the 5th, will have to be broken up.

HUGHES

Why? The Australian Division have done more than their share.

LLOYD GEORGE

No one's denying it, Bill. The simple arithmetic is that your voluntary recruiting programme is supplying less than 6,000 men a month.

HAIG

To save the 5th we'll need 32,000 in the next 4 weeks and 16,000 a month after that.

For the first time Hughes seems lost for words.

HUGHES

(quietly)

I shall return to Australia immediately.

32. INT. "ROOMETTE CABIN" (MELBOURNE EXPRESS) _____ DAY

MERERID

HUGHES

Mererid is sitting in her small cabin on the Melbourne Express as it makes its way through Melbourne's inner suburbs. She's writing a post card to Rhys. We hear the words as she writes.

MERERID

(voice over)

Dear Rhys, I'm afraid with people's life stories it's sometimes a question of the more you find out the less you know. I'm beginning to wonder how much effect the death of Hughes' mother had on him. And if the orphaned childhood isn't more or less the clue to his abrasiveness, his resilience, his apparent lack of real emotion. As if when she died some softer part of him died also. The trouble is, of course, he never talks about his feelings, his relationship with his family, absolutely nothing of his private life at all.

(she smiles as she writes it)

I guess all you men are the same.

Then she glances out the window to gain further inspiration and notices that the train has arrived at Spencer Street station - the end of its 600 mile journey from Sydney.

It jerks to a halt and the thin, wiry little man dashes past on the platform. Some impulse in Mererid urges her to follow him. She quickly grabs her bags and hurries out.

33. INT. SPENCER STREET STATION (MELBOURNE) _____ DAY

MERERID

HUGHES

GEORGE

As Mererid hurries out of the carriage she notices the little man disappear inside the station vestibule and quickens her pace....

HUGHES

(voice over)

On my return to Australia the same enthusiasm I had encountered in Britain greeted me at Spencer Street station. I had placed Australia centre stage in the titanic conflict that now engulfed the whole world. The warmth of my reception everywhere convinced me that the impetus of our new found recognition should not be lost.

Mererid runs into the vast vestibule of the station building and seems to be immediately swallowed up in it. She looks anxiously around but the little man is nowhere to be seen.

HUGHES

(voice over)

Australia had to be prepared for a total war effort. Britain, France and Germany all had conscription. We alone stood back from this final sacrifice....

GEORGE

Need a lift ?

Mererid swings round, surprised.

MERERID

Ah, thanks, but I . . . I've got this kind of childhood urge to ride in a tram.

Somewhat flustered she starts trying to fathom a transport map of Melbourne. George points out a tram route on it.

GEORGE

The No. 79 goes right past our place in Chapel Street.
You'll find me behind the cappucino machine most nights. Just ask for George.

MERERID

Yeah, OK, I'll do that.

34. INT. LABOUR PARTY HEADQUARTERS (MELBOURNE) DAY

HUGHES

TRADE UNIONISTS

PARTY OFFICIALS

MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

Hughes is in conference with the Federal Labour Party Executive - the effective policy making body of the party. Hughes was not automatically a member of the executive, although he was leader of the party and the Prime Minister. He therefore has come to them somewhat cap in hand, but that hardly cramps his style....

HUGHES

Gentlemen, the Italian front has collapsed at Caporetto and our latest intelligence is that the Russian front is soon to follow. You can imagine the crisis we will soon face on the Western Front if the Germans are able to concentrate their whole force there.

TRADE UNIONIST

But the war is 10,000 miles away, Bill. There's already 13 million men in uniform. What conceivable difference will another 100,000 make?

HUGHES

If Britain loses this war she'll suffer a defeat certainly, but we'll be occupied. Britain would be just as powerless to stop the Germans marching in here as Germany was powerless to stop us marching into New Guinea at the beginning of the war.

PARTY OFFICIAL

Bill, you can't impose conscription unless the people are behind it. You can't do it by decree - there'd be blood in the streets.

HUGHES

That's why I intend to hold a referendum.

There's general consternation in the meeting.

TRADE UNIONIST

You'll never win it, Bill.

HUGHES

That remains to be seen.

MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT

You'll have the farmers against you because they're worried about manpower shortages, you'll have the catholics because they're Irish, you'll have the women because they won't want to lose their sons, and you'll have the army because they're all volunteers and proud of it...

TRADE UNIONIST

And you'll have the Labour Party against you because conscription goes against everything we've stood and fought for.

HUGHES

That's why I'm here. That's why I'm asking you men - the Labour Party Executive - to join with me. If we present a united front and you have the guts to come with me on this - 90% of the country will follow. Because we're fighting for conscription like we're fighting for our lives.

There's dead silence in the room. Hughes waits, looks around.

HUGHES

Well, does anyone have anything to say?

CHAIRMAN (HOLLOWAY)

Yes, Bill, I do.

HUGHES

(with a cheeky smile)

Well, then, let the orator speak....

CHAIRMAN (HOLLOWAY)

We, too, will be going around Australia in the next few months, Bill. And we will be fighting against conscription like we're fighting for our lives.

The smiles slowly fades on Hughes' face.

35. ARCHIVAL SEQUENCE

A short sequence of archival footage, cartoons, photos, songs and headlines outline the circumstances and issues of the great conscription debate which raged across Australia in 1916 and 1917 and virtually divided the country into two warring camps.

<u>36. INT. MOTEL ROOM (MELBOURNE)</u>	<u>NIGHT</u>
<u>/INT. NEWSPAPER OFFICE (CAERNARFON)</u>	<u>DAY</u>
	MERERID

MELBOURNE

Mererid has placed an international call back to the newspaper office where Rhys works, she waits for someone to answer. In the background her motel TV is tuned to the evening news - the sound is low.

CAERNARFON

The phone rings in a deserted office. We notice a copy of the artwork for the latest edition tacked to a wall. It shows a photo of Rhys on the front page and the headlines "Rhys Williams to stand trial".

MELBOURNE

While Mererid waits, her attention is suddenly grabbed by a TV news item emanating from Wales. She puts the phone down and turns the volume up.

It's a report on the burning of the "Trade Winds" restaurant at Felinheli. Responsibility has been claimed by a shadowy group calling itself the Red Dragons of the Free Welsh Army. Reference is made to the Marina issue which has recently split the Felinheli community.

Towards the end of the report Greek music fades up.....

37. INT. KOSTAS TAVERN (MELBOURNE)

NIGHT
MERERID
GEORGE
MARC PAPAS
JIM O'CONNELL
MRS. KOSTAS
DINERS

The Greek music takes us into the world of Kostas Tavern, a place of loud talk, good food, and bonhomie.

George has brought a couple of friends to meet Mererid: Marc Pappas, a young greek man about George's age and Jim O'Connell an Irish/Australian who has worked on the fringes of the Labour Party. The four of them sit around a table with several bowls of dips at the start of their meal.

George opens a bottle of retsina happily ignoring the somewhat stern, even reproachful glances of his mother who works in the background.

Jim O'Connell is holding one of Mererid's tapes, reading the label, turning it over in his hands reflectively.

JIM

Well, I suppose it's possible he stood up to the British Military Establishment in a cabinet meeting like the one you've just described. He certainly wanted the public back home to know how tenaciously he fought for Australian interests.

George has popped the cork and now starts pouring.

GEORGE

Jim has written a couple of books on the Labour Party.

MERERID

So, do you think these tapes could be genuine?

JIM

(shrugs)

He always said he wanted to leave some kind of political testament. Most of the "experts" believe he simply got too old and lost the energy to do it.

MARC

Like any good trade union leader he wanted to minimise the losses and maximise the gains.

MERERID

So how does the Labour Party feel about him now?

JIM

Depends what faction you talk to.

MARC

The Left can never forget that he split the party and effectively contained the unions, while the Right probably see him as someone in their own image: a pragmatist, a doer. Someone prepared to trade

with the devil if necessary. He was the first professional politician- a brilliant strategist who held power at all costs - even if it meant selling out your mates. He certainly considered himself, intellectually, to be a head and shoulders above the rest.

JIM

And he split the conservatives too, don't forget. He brought down Stanley Bruce's government and later asked John Curtin on what terms he could rejoin the Labour Party ! He crossed the floor so many times and formed so many parties nobody knew whether he was coming or going.

MERERID

So why - why does he persist with conscription if he knows what a terrible shambles the British Military were making of the war?

MARC

He always pushed for compulsory military service, even long before the war. And he joined up himself didn't he? In London - when he was still a kid.

MERERID

Maybe he was always an imperialist? Even before - or despite the earlier socialist ideals ?

JIM

To someone like Hughes, I don't even think Socialism and Imperialism were incompatible. His sort of Socialism would never have included the coloured races, for example.

GEORGE

(laughs)

Or us wogs.

Marc joins in the laughter, it's a familiar use of a formerly perjorative term.

JIM

I also think the public reception Hughes got in England in 1916 went to his head: speeches reported in full in all the papers, invited to stay at Buckingham Palace. It's a far cry from the caves he slept in along Sydney Harbour. And the more he clamoured for total sacrifice the more the English loved it. He'd painted himself into a corner so he had to put on the same blustering performance when he got home.

MARC

Like a lot of Australians Hughes loved the Empire but hated the English who ran it.

GEORGE

Well that's all greek to me.

They laugh, George tops up glasses.

MERERID

I suppose a little Welshman can't always be so logical.

JIM

I know, I'm Irish and we're the same. Us Celts are the original survivors - we had to be, we were the first to be colonised. And that's another clue to Hughes - he's a survivor... like the Welsh themselves. 1000 years of English domination and their language and culture is still intact. Still intact without having national sovereignty, that's the exquisite part.

GEORGE

Well, I'm all for resisting national stereotypes.

MARC

(laughs)

Hey, don't bring your mother into this.

They all laugh.

MERERID
HUGHES
FRANK TUDOR
F. ANSTEY
DR. W. MALONEY
OTHER LABOUR M.Ps.

Mererid walks along the corridors of Parliament House Melbourne which, until 1922 when Canberra opened, was the site of the original Federal Parliament. She is listening to Hughes' voice on her tape recorder.

HUGHES

(voice over)

As I walked towards the Caucus Room on the morning of the 14th November, 1916, I approached the inevitable meeting of the party with a sinking heart. We had lost the Conscription Referendum by a mere 70,000 votes out of 2 million. The shirkers and pacifists, of course, saw this miserable result as a victory and were calling for my head on a plate. Well I'd never dodged a fight in my life and I didn't intend to dodge this one.

Mererid pushes her way through into the Caucus Room. The stormy, climactic meeting of the party is in progress. Hughes sits with other members of the leadership at a long table up one end of the room. The rest of the party are arranged in chairs facing the table. There is almost constant uproar. Speaker after speaker rises to denounce Hughes.

F. Anstey is on his feet:

ANSTEY

The Prime Minister has failed utterly in his attempt to enslave the Australian people, he has failed to snuff out the flame of liberty in this country and most important of all he has failed to destroy the principals upon which this great party was founded. Because we all know that once he'd pushed his military conscription through industrial conscription was sure to follow!

Loud cheers and applause

Dissolve through to:

HUGHES SUPPORTER 1

The Australian Worker has never objected to the use of force in his own interest. He believes in compulsory unionism and the methods that it involves. He excludes the alien from Australia by force. He has never objected to compulsory military service where the object is to protect him from the industrial competitiveness of the Asiatic.

Loud boos and shouts of derision interlaced with scattered but minority applause. Mostly cries of "traitor" "scab" "sit down", etc.

Dissolve through to:

HUGHES DETRACTOR 1

16,000 a month we were told were needed. 16,000! The drain on the workforce would have had catastrophic results on our standard of living. And where did the figures come from? The War Council!
(cries of derision)

The British General Staff! Were they checked? No!
(cries of "shame" "shame")

Are we to trust the Chiefs of Staff after Gallipoli, after the Somme, after Ypres?

Resounds cries of "No" "Never"

Dissolve through to:

L. E. GROOM

(Hughes Supporter)

Those of you who opposed the referendum objected to the conscription of human life. But you forget that membership of any human society carries certain privileges, and certain responsibilities. A man may not claim the benefits of the society in which he lives and then when the existence of that society is threatened decline to be bound by the will of the majority.

Cries of "what majority" and "you lost you fool" "sit down".

Dissolve through to: Frank Tudor who is at the leadership table with Hughes (and soon to replace Hughes as leader of the party). Halfway through this speech Hughes simply takes his hearing aid out and starts writing a letter.

FRANKTUDOR

The present war could never have assumed such disastrous proportions, it could never have been stained with such horrors if conscription had been stopped in Europe!

(loud applause and cheering)

Australia has done its fair share. We have been bled white by the war, our treasury has been ransacked, the bravery of our men, our volunteers has won the praise of friend and foe alike.

(more cheering and applause)

Most of the people who voted in the referendum were in no danger of being called up. And still they said "No!" The troops in the field themselves said "No!" And in the face of the nation's decisive rejection of the question I say to the Prime Minister the party itself now requires an answer. We need some explanation for the trauma that the Labour Movement has been put through - otherwise the Labour Movement will say "No" to you sir, and to your continued leadership of us!

Thunderous applause and cheering.

All eyes turn to the Prime Minister. Hughes sits there composed and inscrutable. The chairman struggles to be heard above the din.

CHAIRMAN

Order! Order! Let the Prime Minister have the floor.

Quite Gentlemen, quiet please.

The shouting ebbs away to a kind of silence. Hughes calmly replaces his hearing aid, gathers his papers together. The Caucus waits, expecting, even anticipating a blast in the typical Hughes style. But he simply rises to his feet, casts his eye around the room and says:

HUGHES

Let those who are with me and the Empire follow me now.

And he breezes loftily from the room taking 23 members of the Federal Labour Party with him.

Absolute pandemonium. Cries of "scabs" "traitors" "judas" "rat" echo round the room.

The uproar fades slowly as we dissolve back to Mererid alone in the room, back in the present, sitting in the chair that Hughes has just vacated. Everything is quite again.

Suddenly she becomes aware of a thin little man scurrying past the open doorway. Gathering her tape recorder she hurries out of the Caucus room.

39. INT. PARLIAMENT FOYER (MELBOURNE) DAY
MERERID

Mererid races into the large, ornate foyer of parliament house with its 19th century portraits, statues of Queen Victoria and gold inlaid decor - displaying all the wealth of the gold rush.

Unfortunately its empty. She turns from one exit to the next unsure which way to go.

Footsteps are heard off. She reacts, heads in that direction.

40. EXT. PARLIAMENT HOUSE (MELBOURNE) DAY
MERERID
HUGHES

Mererid emerges into the sunlight at the top of the long flight of wide, bluestone steps leading down from parliament house towards Bourke Street and the city.

She quickly spots the little man in his quaint, 1920s suit and homburg hat just about to board an old green tram. She flies down the steps towards the stop.

41. INT. MELBOURNE TRAM (TRAVELLING)

DAY

MERERID
PENSIONER
HUGHES
CONDUCTOR
PASSENGERS

The tram moves off just as Mererid manages to scramble aboard. Out of breath she scans the passengers for some sign of him. Her eyes fix on a commuter buried behind a newspaper, it's headline gives the game away: "Hughes Forms Coalition with Libs - Stays PM"

Mererid, sensing the moment of truth moves cautiously forward. She reaches the man and tears the newspaper from his hands - only to discover a rather startled old pensioner - with a hearing aid - who looks nothing like what she expected. He looks her up and down rather savagely. She glances at the paper. It's headline is routinely mundane: "Bicentennial Budget Blowout"

She stammers an apology:

MERERID

Oh - I, I I'm terribly sorry. I thought you were someone else.

The pensioner nervously clutches his newspaper back. Other passengers stare at her. She feels extremely self conscious, and edges towards a seat down the other end of the tram.

Mererid sighs, looks out the window. She must be cracking up! Perhaps its time she thought about going home.

HUGHES

Just what do you think you're doing?

She swings round, startled, blinks, stares open mouthed. He slides into the seat beside her. It's as if the rest of the tram has vanished.

HUGHES

Well?

She looks out the window. The street seems normal enough. Then back inside ... he's still sitting there, waiting - a red, Remembrance Day poppy stuck in the lapel of his coat.

MERERID

I'm ... trying to get at the truth.

HUGHES

I've given you my life story, what more do you want?

MERERID

(thinks about it)

.... the truth.

HUGHES

(sighs, exasperated)

You're not a Welsh nationalist like your boyfriend are you?

MERERID

(standing her ground)

Some things just don't add up....

HUGHES

Those tapes were supposed to be the last word on the matter. Now here you are, splitting the party again, opening old wounds, casting doubts on everything....drinking Retsina with socialists at Greek restaurants.

MERERID

But the historians say

The arms go flailing about

HUGHES

(with great enthusiasm)

Historians! Are you serious! Sitting in their ivory towers, writing remaindered tomes that only their poor bloody students buy -

because they have to No! God help me. Some of us had to work for a living. Besides, I'm the one who was there, remember. I ought to know.

MERERID

But other people who were there, often give a different account of the matter.

HUGHES

Other people who were where? What accounts? What matters?

MERERID

Well - the incident at Warwick Railway station during the second conscription referendum where you claim you were attacked by an angry mob.

HUGHES

(expostulating)

Pacifists and Sinn Feiners, all stirred up by Ryan, the Queensland Premier. They came at me with hammers.

MERERID

Wasn't that just a train examiner with his wheel tapping hammer going about his normal job down on the tracks?

HUGHES

I threw myself into the fray and emerged with knuckles bleeding.

MERERID

You were hit by nothing more dangerous than a rotten egg which knocked your hat off.

HUGHES

In those days the threats against me from the Sinn Feiners were so numerous I even carried a pistol with me.

MERERID

Is that why the police sergeant tried to calm you down?

HUGHES

The Queensland police stood back and did absolutely nothing to defend me.

MERERID

(consulting one of the biographies)

It says here you were taken aside by a plain clothed detective who tried to calm you down after you'd become hysterical as a result of the egg.

HUGHES

(becoming hysterical)

He physically grabbed me. Me! The Prime Minister of the country.

MERERID

So, because you'd been hit by an egg in a little Irish town in outback Queensland, you decided to form the Commonwealth police force.

HUGHES

(growls, frustrated)

Ahh — I don't have to sit here and listen to this!

He stands and pulls the cord to halt the tram at the next stop.

MERERID

You also censored statements by Premier Ryan critical of conscription and when he read those statements in the Queensland Parliament your military authorities seized all the copies of Hansard.

The tram comes to a stop and Hughes storms off - towards the Shrine of Remembrance in St. Kilda Road.

For a moment Mererid sits there kind of stunned. What has she done?

The conductor pulls the cord twice to signal the driver to move on again and just before the tram does so, Mererid leaps off too.

42. EXT. SHRINE OF REMEMBRANCE (MELBOURNE) _____ DAY

HUGHES

DERRO

MERERID

The Shrine of Remembrance is a huge, grey, mausoleum - like structure with Doric columns and wide steps leading up to it. It has a commanding view back up St. Kilda Road towards the city. To one side is the "eternal flame".

Still fuming, Hughes strides up the broad steps towards the columns where he is immediately bailed up by a grubby looking derro in a tattered old army great coat.

DERRO

"Scuse me, mate, have you got 10 bob for an old digger?"

HUGHES

(impatient, fidgeting with his hearing aid)

Come ... come to the good ear, brother.

So the derro wanders round the other side of Hughes and says a little louder, and more confidently.

DERRO

Have you got a quid for an old digger?

HUGHES

(without missing A BEAT)

I think you'd better go back to the first ear.

And he strides on in to the interior of the Shrine leaving the derro open mouthed and empty handed.

Mererid passes the poor befuddled bloke as she presses on in after Hughes.

43. INT. SHRINE OF REMEMBRANCE (MELBOURNE)

DAY

MERERID
HUGHES

As Mererid emerges into the gloom of the Shrine's interior there's a cathedral like feeling that's secular in content. She walks in on a circular mezzanine floor that looks down onto a large bronze statue of a dying soldier. He seems trapped in a contortion of pain. Battered battle flags drape the walls.

Hughes gazes down onto it.

MERERID

(quietly, respectfully)

Why, why push on with a second referendum on conscription when the first had been so decisively rejected?

Hughes simply nods down towards the statue of the dying soldier.

HUGHES

There's the answer to your question.

Mererid glances down at the neo-classical rendition of heroism in agony. She almost winces.

HUGHES

I did it for them. The men in the trenches. They sacrificed everything for us. And when the call went out to help them, Australia said "no."

MERERID

Australia said "no" not just to conscription, but to a number of issues and principals that struck at the very core of its democratic process. Questions of basic human freedoms and the right not to have to kill people. It wasn't just a call for help that they were rejecting. Afterall, the troops themselves said "no" - twice.

HUGHES

Yes, alright, rub it in. It's all water off a duck's back now.

MERERID

Why persist with an issue that was so so patently unpopular?

HUGHES

Any Prime Minister who simply tried to be popular would be a rather pathetic figure indeed. When the ship of state's on fire a single, clear authority is called for ... otherwise, we all go down together - in flames.

MERERID

In other words you just couldn't take "no" for an answer.

HUGHES

My dear girl, if I'd taken "no" for an answer I never would have achieved for Australian what I managed to achieve from the debacle of the Paris Peace Conference.

A clock strikes 11.

Somewhere off the last post sounds, Hughes stands to attention and respectfully bows his head. Mixed in with this is the sound of cannon firing a 21 gun salute, and a voice reading the poem:

VOICE

Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn. They shall not grow old as those who are left grow old ... etc.

Mererid stands there watching it all as the lights slowly fadeHughes keeps his head bowed but cocks half an eye towards Mererid just to make sure all this solemnity is having the right effect.

44. ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE

The sound montage of poem, clock, "Last Post" and 21 gun salute continue over panning images of the wrecked battle fields of France at the end of World War I. There are no figures in the landscape. The carnage has stopped, the guns at last silent.

Only wrecked cannon, tanks, mud, shell holes and the bare skeletons of trees litter the landscape.

These wrecked trees gradually dissolve through to the luxurious green tress of an exclusive golf course near Paris in the summer of 1919.....

45. EXT. GOLF COURSE (NEAR VERSAILLES) _____ DAY

**HUGHES
LLOYD GEORGE
WILSON
3 SECRETARIES**

In one of those social breaks from the Paris Peace Conference, where the real business of state is conducted, Hughes, Lloyd George, and President Woodrow Wilson of the United States are engaged in a game of golf.

Wilson is placing his tee down for the first shot. Their 3 private secretaries are in attendance as caddies.

WILSON

This £20 billion you expect the Germans to pay in war reparations, Mr. Hughes, is far too severe. All you'll really succeed in doing is crippling their economy.

He hits the ball, it's a good shot.

WILSON

And a devastated German economy cannot be good for world trade, surely. It can only lead to more global instability.

Hughes comes up and places his tee down.

HUGHES

Mr. President, when a wrong has been done and suffered then the wrongdoer should, to the full extent of his capacity right that wrong. And that's a matter of fair compensation, not punishment. I also insist

on these reparations as a deterrent to anyone seeking to wreck the peace of the world again.

Hughes hits the ball and it slices off into the rough.

LLOYD GEORGE

Ah ... back luck, Bill.

They all move forward ... and a few minutes later are all searching for Hughes' ball in the thick, bushy grass on the edge of the fairway.

HUGHES

After all, Mr. President, Australia alone has suffered a debt of £300 million as a result of the war, and for a country of 5 million people that's a crushing burden.

Lloyd George is becoming a bit impatient with the searching.

LLOYD GEORGE

Look, Bill, why don't you just start again from the edge of the fairway. I'm sure Woodrow and I wouldn't mind.

HUGHES

(scoffs)

I don't think you should concede anything this early in the game, David. You obviously don't realise the sort of shots I'm capable of.

Lloyd George sighs, and goes on trashing through the long grass with his club.

A few minutes later they're tee-ing off again.

WILSON

But if the world gives Australia German New Guinea, we'll have to give the Japanese all the German islands they've occupied north of the equator.

Wilson swings and hits another shot clear down the fairway.

on these reparations as a deterrent to anyone seeking to wreck the peace of the world again.

Hughes hits the ball and it slices off into the rough.

LLOYD GEORGE

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A few minutes later they're tee-ing off again.

WILSON

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Wilson swings and hits another shot clear down the fairway.

LLOYD GEORGE

(in Welsh)

Bill, this is not the place or the time to raise questions of internal Empire relations. It looks bad here if we show a divided front, let's stick to the areas we agreed on.

Wilson is flummoxed, he can't understand a word of it. He turns to his private secretary.

WILSON

What is it? What is he saying?

PRIVATE SECRETARY

I think it must be their native tongue, sir.

WILSON

What? What native tongue?

PRIVATE SECRETARY

Welsh, Mr. President.

Meanwhile Hughes rounds back on Lloyd George

HUGHES

(In Welsh)

Just as Owain Glyn Dwr played off the divided English barons in the early 15th Century to forge a brief moment of genuine Welsh independence, so too, will I, David, fight for the interests of Australia against a divided world if necessary, to secure the best terms of peace for my small country.

A few minutes later they're tee-ing off again.

WILSON

Am I to understand, Mr. Hughes, that on the question of New Guinea, Australia will insist on annexation against the determination of the rest of the world?

HUGHES

(cheeky grin)

That's it, Mr. President, you took the words right out of my mouth.

Hughes swings and for the third time slices off into the rough.

LLOYD GEORGE

(exasperated)

Ah Bill!

A few minutes later they're slashing at the rough grass in the now familiar search for Hughes' ball.

WILSON

5 million Australians will stand against the interests of 1000 million?

HUGHES

(in Welsh, low to Lloyd George)

Wilson talks like Jesus Christ but he acts like the Kaiser.

WILSON

(sharply)

What was that Mr. Hughes?

HUGHES

I said I speak not so much for the 5 million living Australians, sir, but for the 60,000 who died in this war. I speak for them and the generations to come.

Wilson throws up his arms in despair and Lloyd George, who is thoroughly fed up with thrashing about, surreptitiously takes a new ball out of his pocket and drops it in the grass nearby.

LLOYD GEORGE

Here's you ball, Bill.

Hughes comes over, picks up the ball, closely examines it.

HUGHES

No. That's not mine.

And to Lloyd George's complete despair Hughes simply pockets the new ball and goes on searching.

WILSON

Your obstinacy Mr. Hughes means there can now be no unanimity amongst the allies who've won this war. It's utterly unreasonable.

HUGHES

I think you'll find the French agree with me, Mr. President. Besides, it's a matter of justice, not reason.

LLOYD GEORGE

Justice is blind, Bill.

46. EXT. COURT HOUSE (CAERNARFON)

DAY

PROTESTORS

Close on the statue of "blind" Justice holding her scales and her sword on top the court building opposite Caernarfon Castle.

We hear the magistrate's voice over as we tilt down.

MAGISTRATE

(voice over)

What most amazes me about this case, Mr. Williams, is how a man in your position in the community, a teacher no less, a person with no previous convictions, could even contemplate such a wilful act of destruction ...

At the bottom of the tilt down we discover a small group of protestors: Welsh Language Society, etc. holding placards and banners in support of Rhys Williams.

47. INT. MAGISTRATE'S COURSE (CAERNARFON)

DAY

**RHYS
MAGISTRATE
LAWYERS
SUPPORTERS**

Inside the courtroom the Magistrate continues his address.

MAGISTRATE

Did you even think about the sort of example you were giving to your students when you put sugar in the petrol tank of this machine?

RHYS

Yes, I most certainly did. It was largely on their behalf that I did it.

MAGISTRATE

Well, I'm afraid that only compounds your guilt.

RHYS

The erosion of Welsh culture has to be stopped, your honour, even if that means clogging up a few English bulldozers.

MAGISTRATE

You surely don't expect to stop the legitimate march of progress with a handful of sugar?

RHYS

Depends what you call progress. All I know is that our Welsh language and our culture has had to be struggled for ever since it emerged. Nobody got anywhere by passively lying down and letting the tide roll over them. It's better to die on your feet than live on your knees

MAGISTRATE

Surely, you're not suggesting that the developers involved were about to set their bulldozers against the walls of Caernarfon Castle!

RHYS

No - I shouldn't think so - after all it's an English Castle, designed to keep Welshmen out - not in.

48. EXT. MELBOURNE CRICKET GROUND

DAY

MERERID

GEORGE

FOOTY FANS

George and Mererid are struggling with a couple of meat pies, standing in the outer - part of a crowd of probably 30 or 40 thousand mad footy fans. George is explaining the origins of the game.

GEORGE

On the goldfields in the middle of last century there wasn't much flat land, so some bright spark hit on the idea of kicking the football high instead of along the ground.

MERERID

I thought it was supposed to be a form of Gaelic football.

GEORGE

Oh sure - there's a bit of Irish in there, and a bit of soccer, and a bit of Rugby, and a lot of kangaroo....

She's not sure if he's having a go at her. He grins broadly, then rises in his seat with the crowd, cheering.

Close on a player from Kostas' team (Richmond - "The Tigers") taking a spectacular mark. George and the fans around him are delirious with joy.

GEORGE

See - did you see that leap? That's the kangaroo element.

She shakes her head, smiling.

The hooter sounds but Richmond are still a few points behind, the elation turns to gloom.

MERERID

(sympathetic)

Oh, well, you can't win 'em all .

GEORGE

(throwing the pie bag in a bin)

Bloody Tigers can't win anything.

As they make their way through the exit with the crowd, George risks putting his arm around Mererid. She puts her arm around him. They walk on towards his car.

KOSTAS

Listen, I was wondering if you'd like to come away for a few days - I've got this bit of land up in the Dandenongs.

MERERID

I've said I'd go to Canberra.

George tries to hide his disappointment.

GEORGE

(scoffs)

Canberra! Well - at least there's no danger of you getting sucked in to staying there.

He drops his arm but she holds on around his waist.

MERERID

Maybe ... maybe when I come back.

He holds her look for a moment then they fall into an easy embrace.

49. INT. CORRIDOR/LIBRARY PARL. HOUSE (CANBERRA) DAY

MERERID
HUW PARRY

Mererid and Huw Parry, Hughes' last private secretary, are walking through the corridors of parliament house in Canberra.

PARRY

He was a proper little tyrant to work for really, and I ought to know I was his 116th private secretary. He conned me into the job with a promise that I'd be allowed to collaborate on his autobiography. A promise he used as bait quite a few times apparently.

MERERID

So - he did write something after all?

PARRY

No. It was a load of hot air. He didn't want to write about the big events he just wanted to describe the story of his ordinary day to day life. The trouble is it was exactly that- very ordinary and every time he started to put it down even he got so bored with it he couldn't go on.

They both see the humour of this.

PARRY

He never paid me properly, never used anything I prepared for him, and treated his other staff like nameless slaves. It was one of the most frustrating periods of my life.

MERERID

Why didn't you resign?

PARRY

Oh, I threatened to. And for the first time it produced results. He announced that we'd tackle the autobiography by starting with his old speeches and books of anecdotes.

They reach the parliamentary library and push on in.

PARRY

One day I was working in here, at that desk ...

(he indicates the desk and goes and sits at it)

And poor deluded fool that I was I actually thought I was getting somewhere....

Dissolve back to....

50.. INT. PARLIAMENTARY LIBRARY (CANBERRA)

DAY

HUGHES

PARRY

USHER

TOURISTS

The scene in the library dissolves back to roughly 40 years previously.

A much younger Huw Parry is at the same desk indicated, poring over a range of old newspapers and books scattered around him.

Hughes comes in (now at the same age as we've seen him dictating the tapes at the beginning).

HUGHES

(friendly, personable)

Ah - I see you've found the "Case For Labour" Ted.

(coming up, picking up the book fondly)

HUNGERFORD

Yes, Bill.

HUGHES

Good stuff, eh? That made them sit up and take notice. We came to power on the strength of these articles.

(opening it)

And look at this! I even got Menzies to write the preface. Just think of it, Ted. Menzies endorsing a book about socialism.

They chuckle.

HUGHES

(putting the book down)

Ah - Pig Iron Bob ... long on words but short on action. A wrecker and a destroyer if every I saw one. Menzies could not lead and he would not follow.

Meanwhile, in the background a small group of tourists have been ushered into the library by a tour guide who has been quietly introducing them to it.

USHER

(low)

This is the parliamentary library, ladies and gentlemen. All copies of Hansard are kept here of course, books about the law, history, economics, as well as virtually every newspaper that's printed in the country.....

By this stage Hughes has trailed off his own conversation and has become vaguely aware of this "audience" in the background. They're nudging each other and whispering: "That's Billy Hughes!" Hughes risks the merest flicker of a glance at them out of the corner of his eye and suddenly his whole manner towards Parry utterly changes. He starts pounding his fist on the desk.

HUGHES

(yelling)

Look at this rubbish! You call that work! (throwing the papers in the air). I've never seen anything so sloppy in all my life. It's badly thought through and it's going nowhere! You hear me, nowhere! Start it all again and have it on my desk by 5 o'clock sharp. And pull your socks up lad or there'll be hell to pay!

Hughes rounds on his heel and sails majestically off towards the doorway (past the tourists). As he reaches them he smiles politely, tips his hat like an actor taking a bow, and head high, swans out through the door. The tourists are suitably impressed, and would probably have almost applauded - if they hadn't also been a bit cowed by the performance.

Back at the desk, however, Parry is open mouthed at Hughes' astonishing behaviour.

PARRY

(voice over)

At first I couldn't believe it. Then one glance at the tourists revealed all. He'd been putting on a show for them. "Billy Hughes the fearsome warlord, the fiery particle, the people's hero, uncompromising and undiminished by the passing years". Well I'd had a gut full of all that and he didn't fool me for a minute".

Parry kicks his chair back and storms out after Hughes.

PARRY

(voice over)

I tried to slam the door, but I'd forgotten it was spring driven and nearly broke my arm.

Which only fuels his anger. So as the door slowly closes on its piston-spring device the tourists stare through it, hanging on every word.

PARRY

(out in the corridor)

If you ever try to pull a stunt like that again I'll personally put you under my arm and pull your bloody head off!

51. INT. PARLIAMENT HOUSE CORRIDOR (CANBERRA) DAY

HUGHES

PARRY

Now it's Hughes' turn to look astonished. The little man stares up at this large private secretary fuming down at him and bolts for it up the corridor - with just a glance back to make sure Parry hasn't followed him - before disappearing back inside his office.

MERERID
PARRY

Mererid and Parry walk back down the steps outside parliament house towards a waiting cab at the bottom.

PARRY

It occurred to me later that, without his hearing aid, Hughes probably hadn't heard a word I'd said. He no doubt thought I was as mad, out in the corridor, as I had thought him in the library.

MERERID

So- was he just some sort of cranky old clown prince towards the end? A figure of fun... appearing in movies, nodding off to sleep in parliament?

PARRY

Definitely a sandwich short of a picnic if you ask me.

Mererid does not comprehend.

PARRY

(searching for another metaphor)

Er ... nutty as a fruitcake, few kangaroos loose in the top paddock.

Mererid nods, they reach the cab, she gets in.

PARRY

(in through window)

He stayed in parliament far too long. But that's typical of him too. He was a persistent old bugger.

MERERID

Thanks for your help.

He nods, waves, the cab moves off.

53. INT. CAB TRAVELLING (CANBERRA)

DAY

MERERID

HUGHES

It's something of a shock for Mererid to discover that Hughes is the driver!

He turns fully around to address her in the back seat.

HUGHES

You're not going to believe that load of spiteful rubbish are you?
The man's vindictive because I sacked him.

MERERID

Why did you go through 116 private secretaries?

HUGHES

I was brought up to believe that work ennobled a man. This younger
mob think its something you do to fill in between the restaurant at
lunchtime and the pub at 5 o'clock.

Again he turns around fully to address her, an oncoming car swerves to avoid a head
on collision and zooms past horn screaming.

Hughes mutters an oath in reply and turns back to the road.

MERERID

(concerned)

Do you think you should be driving?

HUGHES

What's wrong with my driving?

MERERID

Well, it's just that I've read where you were one of Australia's worst
drivers.

HUGHES

(turning around again)

Just where the hell do you get all this vicious calumny?

MERERID

(seeing it coming)

Look out!

He turns to front again just in time to stamp on the brakes to avoid slamming into a car ahead that's stopped at the traffic lights. As soon as the light turns green he's hammering on the horn.

HUGHES

Come on, come on! Godstrewth. Some of 'em wait for the green to mature if you ask me.

Mererid is nervous enough to come straight out with it.

MERERID

Did you go a bit dotty towards the end?

HUGHES

How dare you!

MERERID

Why do you never talk about your real feelings?

HUGHES

What have feelings got to do with it?

MERERID

In everything I've read about you there's absolutely no evidence of any private life at all.

HUGHES

My private life is my business. Goodness me. I was a statesman. If I'd let my feelings into it the country would've been in a right old mess.

MERERID

But you never talk about your wife, your children. It's almost as if they didn't exist.

HUGHES

I copped enough flak for what I did. There was no reason to bring them into it.

MERERID

Did you have a family life?

HUGHES

Of course I did! What a question. I loved my children. Why, even when Helen was a little baby - when we took her back to England in 1916, I made sure I spent at least half an hour playing with her every day.

MERERID

She's the one who died, isn't she?

Hughes goes quiet. Doesn't answer, stares directly ahead.

MERERID

You were Minister of Health, pushing a "Populate or Perish" line. Encouraging women to have more children as a sort of forward defence against Asia.

But Hughes' mind is locked on the one thing now.

HUGHES

I was devoted to her. It was senseless. Stupid.

MERERID

How did she die?

Hughes swings the cab into the carpark beside the Blackmountain Telecom tower, and comes to a halt.

Mererid waits. He suddenly seems very old and tired.

HUGHES

I don't know why she couldn't have trusted us... just to tell us - that she needed help. If only she'd talked to us about it. We would have helped her.

Mererid let's him talk it through. There's another pause.

HUGHES

(quietly)

She had an abortion. In England. Died on the operating table, if you could call it that. Mary and I had no idea. We were 10,000 miles away.

He looks out the window of the cab. His eyes moistening slightly at the memory of it.

Then he seems to snap out of it. Gets out of the car.

HUGHES

There's something I want to show you.

54. EXT. VIEWING PLATFORM BLACKMOUNTAIN TOWER (CANBERRA) EVENING

MERERID
HUGHES

As they emerge out of the lift onto the viewing platform of the Telecom Tower on Blackmountain, they behold a breath-taking, birds eye view of Canberra. It's dusk. The almost fairytale swirl of the lights of the circular road system spread out below them.

HUGHES

Builder's labourer I knew once - his favourite Sunday excursion was to take the kids on a tram ride through Sydney showing them all the

great skyscrapers he'd helped put up. He was as proud of those buildings as the architects who designed them.

HUGHES

I suppose I'm one of the few people who can say they helped create a city from scratch.

MERERID

I've heard that the only traffic jams here are on Friday afternoons when most of the population tries to escape from the place.

He smiles.

HUGHES

In the old days, yes. Not anymore. It's a much more sophisticated place now.

MERERID

Is this how you'd like to be remembered? A founder of cities....?

HUGHES

I did a bit more than just kick start Canberra into life! I helped reconstruct the entire trade union movement after it had been devastated by the 1890s depression. I was instrumental in the creation of a system of industrial arbitration.

I was one of the founders of the Labour Party....

55. INT. HUGHES' OFFICE, PARLIAMENT HOUSE (CANBERRA) DAY

HUGHES
AUGUSTUS JOHN

Hughes is back behind the desk in his last office in parliament house, Canberra, dictating his life story into the tape recorder.

HUGHES

..... I helped lay the legislative basis for social and economic justice in Australia. I founded the Australian armed forces, and finally, I won for this country international recognition as an important and independent nation within the world community.

A slow track back from the desk reveals Augustus John putting the finishing touches to the portrait.

The painter puts down his brush. Checks it, stands back.

AUGUSTUS JOHN

All finished, Mr. Hughes.

Hughes stops the tape and comes over to look.

He cocks his head to one side, trying to make up his mind.

HUGHES

Well, I suppose his mother must have loved him, eh, somebody had to.

The artist laughs.

Close on the painting.

56. INT. KINGS HALL, PARLIAMENT HOUSE (CANBERRA) DAY
MERERID

Close on the painting of Hughes and slow pull back to reveal it hanging in its official, historical order between Andrew Fisher and Stanley Bruce. All the other Prime Ministers line the walls around it.

Mererid stands just below it looking up.

HUGHES

(voice over)

When I walk down George Street and the cleaners are at work

they all tip their hats to me. And I know that as long as they do so I can't be too far off the beaten track.

57. INT. CANBERRA MOTEL NIGHT
MERERID
RECEPTIONIST

Mererid comes into the motel and walks towards the lift .

RECEPTIONIST

There's a telegram for you.

She comes across and takes it, rips it open. We read:

"Love of liberty is the love of others,
Love of power is the love of oneself....
Got two years to think about it, Love, Rys

Mererid is stunned.

MERERID

Two years!

58. INT. KOSTAS TAVERN (MELBOURNE) NIGHT
INT. PUBLIC PHONE, CANBERRA MOTEL NIGHT
MRS. KOSTAS
GEORGE
MERERID
DINERS

MELBOURNE

Mrs. Kostas holds the phone.

MRS. KOSTAS

Georgi, for you

George finishes serving a table and comes over. The phone call intercuts between the restaurant and a public phone box in Mererid's motel in Canberra.

GEORGE

Hullo

(lights up)

Mererid!

Mrs. Kostas reacts.

CANBERRA

MERERID

I've decided to go back to Wales.

MELBOURNE

George's happy mood has evaporated, he frowns puzzled, his mother nearby is blatantly listening in, pretending to be drying glasses.

GEORGE

But if he's in gaol, there's no point, is there? There's nothing you can do about it.

CANBERRA

MERERID

I feel I should be there that's all.

MELBOURNE

GEORGE

I don't understand Why?

CANBERRA

MERERID

I don't know why. Why do you need answers?

MELBOURNE

GEORGE

Because I thought weBecause I thought he didn't matter.

Mrs. Kostas drops a glass. It breaks.

CANBERRA

Merid just holds the phone. She doesn't know what to say. Her mind is racing.

59. INT. TULLAMARINE AIRPORT (MELBOURNE)

DAY

MERERID

GEORGE

PASSENGERS

Merid sits alone in the departure lounge at Tullamarine Airport. She looks rather lost, distant, alone. She feels vulnerable.

She's writing in her notebook, attempting to compose the start of her article:

MERERID

(voice over as she writes)

To understand Billy Hughes is like trying to grasp Gwídion - the magician of the old Welsh fables, a fabulous character who always changed his shape and yet, always remained the same. Hughes tried to be all things to all people and succeeded in alienating most of them. His list of achievements is really a bit fanciful. I don't think any politician is the prime mover of anything. They are simply a sort of mouthpiece for something else. . . for the irresistible flow of ideas, the combined force of millions of peoples prejudices and aspirations.

But she's unsatisfied with this. She crosses it all out, crunches up the page and throws it in the bin beside her chair. . . just as George comes up.

GEORGE

(struck by her tiredness)

God, you look awful.

MERERID
(weak smile)

Oh thanks.

GEORGE

You haven't been sleeping on the chairs out here have you.

MERERID

Plane got in late.

GEORGE

Should've given us a ring.

MERERID

At 2 am?

GEORGE

Sorry I wasn't very clear on the phone.

MERERID

I think I got the message.

GEORGE

I just . . . care about you that's all.

MERERID

It's funny when you travel. You sort of lose all your normal props. Suddenly you're in this big city where nobody knows you so you sort of start from scratch and become a different person. Which is probably a good thing- but also a bit destabilising.

A voice comes over the public address.

P.A.
(voice over)

First and final call for passengers on flight QF 1 for London Heathrow via Singapore and Bahrain. All aboard please.

Meridid picks up her small bag .

GEORGE

I can't believe you're really going back.

MERERID

I think I have to- at least that's what the ticket says.

GEORGE

You can always cash them in, you know, you've still got the chit in your boarding pass.

MERERID

It's a bit late isn't it. I don't think I can do that.

GEORGE

I dunno. . .

(slow smile)

I always thought a woman could do anything. . .

She smiles back. We hold on her look, will she stay with him ?

Freeze frame.

DIWEDD

(THE END)