

THERE WERE BRAVE MEN BEFORE AGAMEMNON

(Draft 3)
Screenplay by
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THERE WERE BRAVE MEN BEFORE AGAMEMNON

CLOSE SHOT - A WOMAN

laying on a wooden floor.

Her face is obscured by her long, thick, wiry black hair as she violently throws her head side to side.

She CRIES.

GROANS.

In pain or in ecstasy we cannot yet tell.

CUT TO:

CLOSE SHOT - THE WOMAN'S FEET

CURL UP as her CRIES peak.

CUT TO:

CLOSE SHOT - THE WOMAN'S THIGHS

crushing a cushion.

Her sleek, coffee-colored legs SHUDDER VIOLENTLY as the action brings her to a VOCAL ORGASM.

She rolls onto her back.

Spent.

INT. DERELICT HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

HIGH ANGLE - LOOKING DOWN ON THE LIVING ROOM

A room, literally decomposing around her. Cobwebs infest the ceiling area. Wallpaper droops off damp, rot-speckled walls like peeling skin.

The woman lays, catching her breath on a tattered Persian rug. She runs her fingers lazily over her body.

WOMAN V.O.

(intimate; like a prayer)

Come down off your cross, Mr.

CAMERA STARTS A SLOW DESCENT onto the woman.

We can see enough of her body to know she is young and non-white. What's left is covered by an old stained smock given shape by a rope tied around her waist.

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WOMAN V.O. (CONT'D)

I've been patient.

CAMERA DROPS DOWN, DOWN.

WOMAN V.O. (CONT'D)

I've suffered enough.

CAMERA RESTS on a MID SHOT of the woman. Her full red lips the only feature visible under her mess of hair.

SAME SCENE - 10 MINS LATER

CLOSE SHOT - A BISCUIT TIN

Dusty. Dinged-up. An exhausted red candle melted onto the lid.

Bony brown hands ENTER FRAME removing the top. Slowly. With a sense of ritual.

The woman takes two small photographs out of the tin. Lays them side by side on the floor.

CLOSE SHOT - THE PHOTOGRAPHS

A studio portrait of a mixed-race boy of around 8 in bow tie and smart apparel, posing with a teddy bear. He's joined by a little girl in the next -- 4 years old tops -- wearing a pretty, frilly dress.

EXTREME CLOSE SHOT - A TEAR DROP

hits the picture of the boy. It spreads across the image, warping the boy's features.

WOMAN V.O. (CONT'D)

(with bite)

I've earned it.

CHILDREN'S LAUGHTER O.S.

CUT TO:

INT. FARMHOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

A wind-up TIN SOLDIER stands on the corner of a large mirrored dresser.

Moustached. Chipped. Dented. About 6" tall.

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Two OUT OF FOCUS shapes come at the soldier in the mirror.

A child's hand ENTERS FRAME snatching the soldier away.

CUT TO:

EXTREME CLOSE SHOT - CHILD'S HAND

turning the key in the soldier's back.

Dry, aged mechanics CRACK and GRIND.

EXTREME CLOSE SHOT - THE TIN SOLDIER'S FEET

touch down on the wooden floor.

A METALLIC WHIRRING as the soldier obediently marches across the floor.

WOMAN V.O.

So come down off your cross.

The soldier comes to a wall. It's arms and legs keep working until it finally topples over.

The WHIRRING starts to slow. As do the rust-freckled limbs.

WOMAN V.O. (CONT'D)

I've done my bit...

(a beat)

It's about bloody time you did yours.

CAMERA SLOWLY MOVES IN on the soldier, laying prone on the wooden floor.

EXPLOSIONS O.S.

Distant at first but steadily GROWING in volume and frequency.

The CRIES OF SOLDIERS.

GUN SHOTS.

GROWING

GROWING.

THERE WERE BRAVE MEN BEFORE AGAMEMNON

CAMERA RESTS on an EXTREME CLOSE SHOT of the toy soldier's pitted, white face just as the HIGH PITCHED SCREAM of an INCOMING BOMB completely dominates the soundscape.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. ABANDONED CHURCH - FIRST LIGHT

EXTREME CLOSE SHOT - YOUNG MAN

Waking with a SCREAM.

The young man -- dressed in a British soldier's uniform circa the Great War -- leaps off the pew he'd been resting on. His eyes pry into the surrounding darkness.

SERIES OF SHOTS

Overturned pews.

Boarded up windows.

Prayer books scattered across the floor.

"GO HOME" carved into the alter.

SILENCE.

The man collapses back onto the pew.

FRANK WHYTE is a young looking 30. Finely handsome. Almost pretty.

He starts rolling a cigarette with shaking hands.

EXTREME CLOSE SHOT - AN OPEN PRAYER BOOK

on the ground. It's pages dance in a draft.

The text is in GERMAN.

EXT. ABANDONED CHURCH - EARLY MORNING

A small, simple church atop a grassy hill.

Frank steps out into the blinding morning light. He makes his way down towards the road, a small suitcase in hand.

CAMERA LIFTS UP over Frank. UP, UP, PAST the roof of the church, RESTING on a stunning vista of the jagged green hills that lay beyond.

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SUPERIMPOSE:

"NEW ZEALAND 1919"

EXT. HIGHWAY - TAVERN - MIDDAY

A pile of wood and corrugated iron haphazardly thrown together. A set from "THE CABINET OF DR. CALIGARI".

Frank, out on the road. He picks up the pace when he sees the tavern.

A few mangy horses are tied up outside. But it's a large grey mare and a classic old buggy that peaks Frank's interest.

A WOMAN sits on the buggy. Her deep brown eyes visible over the top of a woolen shawl. Eyes that lock on Frank.

Frank tips his cap at her.

She turns away.

INT. TAVERN - MIDDAY

A MASKED MAN in work apron -- hammer in hand -- steps off a ladder into Frank's path. It's a prosthetic mask. The type developed to hide war injuries.

A beat and Frank steps around the man. Crosses to the bar.

The only other action in the tavern is centered around a card game at a back table.

A group of drunk, rowdy spectators flank the two players.

The player facing the bar is roughly Frank's age. As striking as Frank, but darker. And oily. He is one-armed, the sleeve of a filthy tweed jacket pinned up past the elbow.

This is COUSINS.

His opponent sits with his BACK TO CAMERA. A large, imposing figure in a stained, white shirt and thick navy suspenders. He is old. His hair, snow white.

The motley crew that cheer and jeer are all in Cousins' corner.

CUMMINGS is a short, bespectacled, snarling character.

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BRIAN is consumptive looking. As thin as a rake and yellow toothed.

JAMES is a robust, native Maori boy. Younger than the rest. The moustache, goatee and blood-red kerchief around his neck evoke a Mexican bandit.

Last is GUMMER. Large. Bearded. A bear of a man.

ISAACS O.S.

(with a cockney accent)

A beer is it?

Frank faces ISAACS, a portly, middle-aged publican.

COINS JINGLE across the bartop.

ISAACS

A soldier's first is always free.

FRANK

(with an English accent;

educated; not aristocratic)

My war's over, Dad.

DRUNKEN LAUGHTER O.S.

A WHIP PAN from FRANK to the

BACK TABLE

where a grinning Cousins drags his winnings -- a kitty of dead matchsticks -- towards his seat.

ISAACS

It'll go in the alms box, son.

THE SKID of CHAIR LEGS and RAISED VOICES O.S.

The old man rises and, in an impressive show of strength, tips the table over. Cards, matchsticks and bottles are sent flying.

He bounds for the door.

Cousins charges after him. Picks up a length of wood off the masked man's work station and exits, his cronies close behind.

Frank crosses to the window.

WHAT HE SEES

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Cousins' strikes the old man on the back of the head as he is climbing onto the buggy. The shawled woman stands up on the seat, SCREAMING.

BACK TO SCENE

FRANK

Shit.

EXT. TAVERN - MIDDAY

Frank charges down the steps. HITS COUSINS with the ferocity of a linebacker.

The wood shoots out of Cousins' hands.

The men HIT THE DIRT.

Cousins reaches for the wood but Frank beats him to it. LIFTS IT HIGH above his head.

EXTREME CLOSE SHOT - COUSINS' EYES

widen in anticipation of a blow.

WOMAN O.S.

NO!

All eyes on the woman.

Her face now visible, the shawl having fallen away.

RUA. 24. A native Maori. A raw yet unmistakable beauty with a pixy face and waif-like frame. A dress strap teasingly down over a bony shoulder.

CAMERA MOVES IN on Frank.

Mesmerized.

CAMERA MOVES IN on Rua.

Ditto.

Gummer's BIG BOOT catches a distracted Frank in the ribs. He YELPS. Rolls off Cousins.

Cousins scrambles to his feet. The posse advance on Frank.

COUSINS

Wait.

They obey.

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Frank gets up.

COUSINS (CONT'D)
(after a long beat)
You got a problem choosing sides,
soldier.

A signal from Cousins. The posse reenter the tavern.

The old man, unconscious at the front wheel of the buggy.
Frank and Rua load him onto the backseat.

The task complete, Rua leaps onto the driver's seat.
Takes the reigns.

FRANK
Which way are you headed?

No reply.

FRANK (CONT'D)
South?
(a beat)
I'd appreciate a ride.

Rua's eyes drift off Frank. He turns to what's caught her eye.

Her shawl. Discarded in the dust.

Frank crosses to retrieve it.

A CRY from Rua and the buggy is sent bucketing back onto the road.

FRANK (CONT'D)
Wait!

She's already a speck in the distance by the time he hits the road.

ON COUSINS

Standing in the doorway. Watching.

Frank turns back, facing Cousins.

The men lock eyes.

EXT. KING COUNTRY TARANAKI BORDER - COUNTRY ROAD -
AFTERNOON

MONTAGE - FRANK'S JOURNEY

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A) Frank, back on the endless country roads. Rugged farmland, left and right.

B) Frank, walking. He pulls a piece of paper from his pocket.

INSERT SHOT - PIECE OF PAPER

with some clumsy directions scrawled across it.

BACK TO SCENE

Frank pockets the paper and continues on his way.

C) Frank, wading through a sea of sheep. The air is thick with the BLEATS of the pulsating, squirming animals.

A granite faced old farmer on horseback watches Frank move through his stock.

D) Frank passes an abandoned farmhouse in a field gone to seed. The house has been badly burnt. Rust has bitten holes into the iron roof.

E) LOW ANGLE shot through a barbed-wire fence that finds the handsome soldier as he continues down the road.

Frank wears Rua's shawl across his shoulders. He brings it up to his face. Inhales her.

EXT. FARM - GATE - DAY

Frank arrives at a broke farm gate.

WHAT HE SEES

A house in the colonial regency style, sitting atop a small hill a hundred yards or so inside the property.

BACK TO SCENE

A rusted old letterbox juts out of the ground at an odd angle. The box dangles limp off the post.

Frank swings the box around to read the name upon it.

CLOSE SHOT - FRANK

Unsettled by what he's read.

Frank considers the house again, this time with new eyes.

Frank steels himself and enters the property.

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CAMERA TILTS DOWN off Frank as he steps over the cattle grill to the head of the letterbox FOREGROUND.

The name scrawled across it is DEIGENHART.

A GERMAN NAME...

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

A single level house in general disrepair. A broad veranda encircles it. A tattered old UNION JACK hangs limp off a porch rail.

The front door is ajar.

Frank knocks.

Twice.

No answer.

He enters.

INT. FARMHOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

Frank steps inside the master bedroom. The old man is sprawled out across a large, iron framed bed. He SNORES LOUDLY. It's a deep sleep.

Frank scans the room.

WHAT HE SEES

A pair of female undergarments amongst the general mess on the floor.

CUT TO:

THE HALLWAY

Frank moves quietly down the hallway.

CUT TO:

THE LIVING ROOM

A small table. Two frayed armchairs and a lamp. An all but empty whiskey bottle on the table.

Frank knocks back the last mouthful.

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A commemorative plate celebrating George V sits on the mantelpiece. But it is the FRAMED PICTURE OF A SOLDIER beside it that has Frank's interest.

A framed studio portrait of a New Zealand soldier. Young. Blonde. Couldn't be older than 25. "WILHELM DEIGENHART" is scrawled in pen in the bottom right hand corner.

CUT TO:

A SMALL BEDROOM (WILHELM'S ROOM)

adjacent to the living room. Again, sparsely furnished. A dresser. Bookcase. The bed is immaculately made.

The small bookcase is packed with the classics. "Shakespeare". "Dante". "Goethe". "Cervantes".

EXTREME CLOSE SHOT - FRANK'S FINGER

runs across the quilt, disturbing a thick layer of dust.

This isn't a bedroom.

It's a museum.

Frank approaches the dresser. A tin soldier stands on it. Frank picks it up. Looks it over. The chipped face. The key in the back.

A dresser drawer is teasingly ajar. Frank opens it.

WHAT HE SEES

An OLD BEAUMONT FIVE SHOT PISTOL. The initials "W.D." carved into the butt.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - DAY

Water sloshes over the side of a wooden bucket as it's carried up the BACK STEPS.

INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

The screendoor is thrown open and Rua enters carrying the bucket. She lifts it onto the table.

A LOUD THUD O.S.

CAMERA MOVES IN on Rua.

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RUA

(a beat)

Kurt?

No reply.

Rua exits down the hallway.

HIGH ANGLE SHOT - LOOKING DOWN ON BUCKET

Two Eels that swim madly together in the tight space.

CUT TO:

WILHELM'S ROOM

Rua arrives at the doorway. She is instantly taken aback by

WHAT SHE SEES

Frank, unconscious on the floor. The pistol tight in his grip.

LIVING ROOM - 30 MINUTES LATER

CLOSE SHOT - RUA'S SHAWL

on the table.

Rua enters the room with a mug of tea. Frank receives it with shaking hands.

FRANK

Thank you.

He takes a sip.

FRANK (CONT'D)

I'm not accustomed to your weather.

RUA

Weather?

FRANK

All the walking I've done in your lovely country. I've all but worn out my shoes. The climate is temperate enough but

(a beat)

A big change nevertheless.

No reply.

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An anxious Frank gets up. Crosses to the mantel and the photograph of the soldier.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Is this --

RUA

His son.

Frank picks it up. Looks it over.

FRANK

(a beat)

I -- myself -- served. In the holy land. We were stationed in Egypt. We rode in on horseback you know. The whole way. It was quite exhilarating in those early days. You really felt you were travelling in the footsteps of Moses.

RUA

How did you handle their weather?

Touche.

FRANK

Is it common?

RUA

Is what common?

FRANK

What happened to the old man today?

RUA

If you're feeling better I have work to do.

FRANK

How did you come to be with him?

Rua crosses to Frank. Attempts to rip the photograph out of his hand. It falls to the ground, SHATTERING on impact.

RUA

Damn it, boy!

Rua starts gathering the glass up off the floor. Frank joins her. They both reach for the frame simultaneously. Rua snatches it away, cutting her finger in the process.

Frank takes her wounded hand.

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She doesn't pull it away.

They lock eyes.

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CLOSE SHOT - FRANK

A RINGING starts up, within his head.

FRANK

(sotto)

What are you?

Frank leans in to kiss her.

Rua shuffles back against the side of the armchair.

Frank stands.

RUA

(weakly)

Go...

Frank's eyes remain locked on Rua as if in a trance. He slowly starts to undo his belt.

The action brings Rua to her feet.

RUA (CONT'D)

(strong)

GO. GO NOW.

Frank quickly refastens his belt. Exits the living room with pace.

The sound of the FRONT DOOR CLOSING O.S.

Rua crosses to the windows. Throws back the yellowing curtains.

WHAT SHE SEES

The soldier, moving swiftly down towards the road.

EXT. FARM - FRONT GATE - DAY

Frank crosses the cattle grill. He takes a last, long look back up at the house.

INT. FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

CLOSE SHOT - A MEAT CLEAVER

is SLAMMED down on the table top.

Rua dips her hands into the bucket and picks up one of the Eels.

THERE WERE BRAVE MEN BEFORE AGAMEMNON

A juggle and the slippery beast is back in the bucket.

She tries again, this time collecting up the larger animal. She plays with it. Lifts it high and lets it slide down into her other hand.

A SPLASH as it lands back in the bucket.

She picks it up again. Lets it slide down against her neck.

SPLASH

EXTREME CLOSE SHOT - RUA'S BREASTS

The exposed flesh around her breasts is raised. Her nipples so hard they threaten to pierce through her dress.

Rua drops a strap, exposing a breast. She picks up the larger Eel. Positions it to slide back into the bucket over her nipple.

The CREAK of a FLOORBOARD

A startled Rua turns to face

FRANK

standing in the doorway. Just how long he's been there she can't be sure.

Frank rushes her.

She meets him halfway.

They embrace.

The couple fall clumsily onto the table. The bucket falls. The Eels slither aimlessly across the floor.

The SKID OF THE TABLE LEGS with Frank's FIRST THRUST.

END OF SAMPLE