

# **"THE FLYING DOCTOR"**

Screenplay by  
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Based on a true story;  
the books *North and Aloft* and  
*Western Wings of Care* by  
Dr. Timothy O'Leary

FADE IN:

EXT. GRASSY FIELD AND WOODLANDS - DAY

SUPER: "Montpellier Hill, Ireland - 1941"

The thunder of hooves as TWO HORSES WITH RIDERS tear across a field, clumps of grass and mud flying in their wake.

The horses are snorting heavily, veins throbbing on the sides of their heads. Suddenly, a ditch emerges ahead of them; the riders pull the reins tight and the horses leap in synchronicity.

Breathless, for a second, as they take to the air.

The FIRST RIDER - YOUNG TIM O'LEARY (16) - and his horse 'PINNYBALL' land safely on the other side of the ditch. Young Tim looks back as the SECOND RIDER - JAMES (17) - and his horse clatter down, the hind legs splashing into the ditch water.

Young Tim laughs.

YOUNG TIM

Akai, can't ya keep up,  
Jimmy?

(to Pinnyball)

Come on Pinnyball, let's show  
him how it's done!

Young Tim then leans forward, pointing his nose in the direction he wishes to travel.

The two horses, one slightly wet in the rear quarters, reach the edge of a forest. They cut along the outskirts, breaking dead branches and thrashing past bushes.

James with determination pulls his reins and grits his teeth. He shakes the reins.

JAMES

(commanding  
the horse)

Yah! YAH!

Young Tim ducks an outstretched branch, which whizzes past his head and into James' arm that's shielding his face.

JAMES

Jesus!

Young Tim looks ahead - a large oak tree, on its side, toppled in a storm a few years ago, covered in moss.

YOUNG TIM

That's it, Pinnyball.

Pinnyball leaps, hooves scraping the bark and moss, and lands safely on the other side.

James and his horse follow closely behind, jumping at the last second - they are gaining on Young Tim and Pinnyball.

Young Tim looks to his right; they're neck-a-neck.

A large hedge is ahead of them. The two boys brace themselves as their horses leap. James' horse is upset, whinnying.

JAMES

No!

In mid-air, James' horse collides with Pinnyball, knocking him sideways.

CRASH! Pinnyball lands atop Young Tim. James hits the ground in a tuck-and-roll. He gets his bearings and looks to his friend Young Tim, who is wincing in agony.

JAMES

Tim, are you alright?

James runs to Young Tim's side.

YOUNG TIM

(irritated)

Do I look bloody alright, ya  
ejit?

James looks down to Young Tim's boot - both the tibia and fibula are snapped ragged just below the knee. They jut out

ten inches from his riding boot, crossed like an ostrich wishbone.

James faints and keels over.

YOUNG TIM

James? Jimmy? Akai, wake up  
you bastard!

INT. DUBLIN HOSPITAL - DAY

Outside of Young Tim's room, FLORRIE O'LEARY (40s) is stressed and pacing. His brother MICHAEL O'LEARY (40s) puts his arm around Florrie's shoulders.

FLORRIE

I never should-

MICHAEL

Don't blame yourself,  
Florrie. A boy's gotta find  
his own path.

FLORRIE

But, they're talking about  
amputation. You're a doctor,  
Michael - are they going to  
take Timothy's leg?

MICHAEL

Not if I can help it. I've  
called in a favour with a  
specialist pal of mine - the  
finest orthopaedic surgeon in  
Ireland. If anyone can save  
it, he can.

FLORRIE

Where the hell is he then? My  
boy's in there in pain.

CUT TO:

Young Tim in bed, clutching his leg in agony. A NURSE injects a dose of morphine. Young Tim slowly calms down, still grimacing.

MICHAEL (O.S.)

He's on a skiing holiday in Spain, but he's on his way back. Should be here tonight.

INT. DUBLIN HOSPITAL, OPERATING ROOM - NIGHT

Young Tim is stretched out on a table, unconscious. MEN IN GREEN SMOCKS and rubber gloves arrange surgical tools on a stainless steel side-table. The SPECIALIST steps forward with a drill, whirling, in his hands.

TIM O'LEARY (V.O.)

On first inspection, the specialist said he couldn't save my leg, but my dad and Uncle Michael insisted that he must try. He told them he'd give it a go, but that gangrene was very likely, even if he could rescue it. The operation took six hours. The surgeon drilled a hole right across and through my anklebone, using a carpenter's drill - slotting in an eight-inch long steel pin.

INT. DUBLIN HOSPITAL - DAY

Young Tim is recovering in bed, with his leg set in plaster, on a gantry with a sandbag weight on it.

TIM O'LEARY (V.O.)

The pin remained through my ankle for a few weeks, until the shattered shinbones began to knit back together. As I lay there repairing, doped up on morphine, I thought to myself: God Almighty must have wanted me to keep both my legs, and obviously had greater deeds planned for me.

YOUNG TIM'S P.O.V.:

A HANDSOME DOCTOR - in a white coat, with a stethoscope draped around his neck - is stood at the end of Young Tim's bed, checking his medical chart. A PRETTY NURSE walks up beside the doctor.

Young Tim focuses momentarily on the pair, raising his eyebrows, before falling into a foggy haze of morphine-induced sleep.

EXT. DUBLIN HOSPITAL - DAY

SUPER: "Three months later"

Young Tim is grinning as he limps out of the hospital doors on crutches, with the help of his father Florrie.

EXT. O'LEARY FARM - DAY

Young Tim looks down at his injured leg thoughtfully, as he strokes Pinnyball's nose.

CUT TO:

With a defiant glare in his eyes, Young Tim hobbles over holding a saddle, which he loads on to Pinnyball's back.

EXT. GRASSY FIELD AND WOODLANDS - DAY

Young Tim slaps the reigns onto Pinnyball, galloping along.

TIM O'LEARY (V.O.)

I'll be first to admit that I was terrified. *What have I got to prove?* Akai, maybe I was being foolish. But, I thought, courage wasn't the lack of fear - it's feeling the fear but doing it anyway.

Pinnyball, with Young Tim onboard, deftly leaps the offending hedge that almost led to losing his leg.

Young Tim's face is aglow with triumph.

EXT. UNIVERSITY - DAY

SUPER: "University College, Dublin - Eight years later - 1949"

TIM O'LEARY, now older, his hair swept back, is walking fairly confidently, with only a hint of a limp. He has books under his elbow.

TIM (V.O.)

After getting an early taste of the medical world while I was recuperating from my steeplechase accident, I knew that I wanted to be a doctor. So, I studied hard - and fought hard.

CUT TO:

INT. GYMNASIUM, BOXING RING - NIGHT

TIM (V.O.)

I represented Ireland for my University's team in Med School.

Tim - dressed in shorts and vest - is ducking and weaving, and jabbing; his hands are lightning quick. BAM! Tim's glove connects with his RIVAL, who is out-for-the-count before he even hits the mat.

TIM (V.O.)

The accident seemed so very long ago.

Tim lifts one arm in the air, celebrating his victory as a few ONLOOKERS clap and cheer. A scar is visible on his leg.

FLASH TO:

EXT. UNIVERSITY - DAY

Dressed in gown and cap, Tim is again holding his arm in the air, on stage at a graduation ceremony in front of the University buildings.

Other GRADUATES clap from the seated AUDIENCE area, as Tim takes his diploma from a PROFESSOR who shakes his hand profusely.

TIM (V.O.)

My mother and father couldn't have been more proud of me, at my graduation. But, they wouldn't be so proud of my girlfriend, who was watching, too - from the trees across the way.

CUT TO:

RENEE, a beautiful young woman, leaning beside a tree, and waving to Tim. Her long flowing dress and curled locks are tussled by the light breeze.

TIM (V.O.)

Renee. Sweet Renee. I fell in love with her. Head over heels. But, sadly, I knew my family would never approve of her - a hairdresser. We were educated landed gentry in Ireland, above the working class.

INT. STABLE BARN - DAY

A giggle emanates from behind a bale of hay. With flushed faces and smiles, Tim is lying beside Renee, plucking a piece of straw from her hair. From the waist up, his back is bare and she is wearing a bra.

RENEE

When you get to Australia, you're going to forget all about me aren't ya, Tidge?

TIM

Don't be an ejit, Renee. I'm gonna find a doctor job somewhere that comes with a house and a car and then I'm going to send for you and we'll get married.

RENEE

You promise?

TIM

I'm gonna take care of you  
and you can take care of me  
and we'll have a tribe of mad  
Irish kids who'll terrorize  
the nuns.

Renee laughs.

TIM

You never have to worry about  
me, Renee. I'm a one woman  
man - I only ever have one  
woman at a time.

(laughs  
mischievously  
)

Renee thumps Tim on the arm, as their eyes lock. They kiss passionately.

CREAK! The barn door opens, and Renee and Tim freeze in their embrace.

Tim's dad, Florrie, is wielding a pitchfork - he stabs a bale of hay and carries it out of the barn on the end of the fork.

Tim and Renee are relieved and laugh in hushed tones.

EXT. AIRPORT - DAY

An airplane is preparing for take off. Tim hugs Renee goodbye, as his father Florrie and FAMILY look on.

Tim ascends the stairs to the door and looks back for a second before entering the plane.

CUT TO:

MAP as Tim's plane cuts a dotted line 'flight path' from Ireland, stopping en route in India-

TIM (V.O.)

I worked as a volunteer  
surgeon in Bombay and  
Calcutta - had the pleasure  
of working alongside the  
great Mother Theresa.

INT. BOAT - NIGHT

Tim is walking through a thin ship's corridor, ducking the  
low ceiling.

TIM (V.O.)  
I then shipped out to  
Australia as a Doctor On  
Board.

EXT. BOAT, DECK - DAY

Tim is leaning against a guard-railing, looking out across  
calm blue sea.

CUT TO:

Land is on the horizon. Tim is wearing a different shirt as  
he looks out to the mass of land ahead.

TIM (V.O.)  
Australia. A million miles  
from home. Now here was my  
new home.

Tim looks down at the letter he was writing, held in his  
hand: "Dear Renee..."

Tim nods to himself and takes a deep breath.

EXT. DOCK - DAY

SUPER: "Sydney, Australia - 1953"

Tim walks down the gangplank looking around at all the  
sights and sounds of the port.

CREW MEMBERS are bustling, tying the rope to the harbour,  
and unloading crates.

INT. HOUSE - DAY

SUPER: "Tralee, Ireland"

A number of IRISH WOMEN are sat in a small living room, chatting amongst themselves. Renee sweeps into the room, positively glowing in a long, beaded, white satin wedding dress. Her cheeks are rosy and she is grinning from ear to ear.

RENEE

Well, what do you think?

AUNTIE HANNAH

Renee! You shouldn't try on the whole outfit - it's bad luck!

Auntie Hannah purses her lips and shakes her head disapprovingly.

RENEE

Don't be so superstitious, Auntie! Besides you won't be at the wedding in Australia, and I want you to see the full effect.

Renee's MAM approaches, looking over her eye glasses on the tip of her nose.

RENEE

(cheery)

Oh, mama - it's beautiful. You've made me the most beautiful dress in the world.

MAM smiles.

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

Tim is tearing 'Job ads' from the newspaper. He screws four of them into tiny balls and throws them into a cup.

TIM (V.O.)

I had come this far. Now I left it up to the Big Man to decide my fate. All decent

doctors' jobs, in different corners of this massive island.

Tim unravels the first ball that he pulls out of the cup.

TIM  
Cape York Peninsula.

Tim looks to a map of Australia, pinned haphazardly to the wall.

TIM  
The Outback.

TIM'S P.O.V.:  
Tim focuses in on the map and the region where he will soon be relocating.

TIM (V.O.)  
The Royal Flying Doctors Service - providing a 'Mantle of Safety' for the Australian outback.

(pause)  
The first flight was undertaken by the flying doctors in May, 1928; providing healthcare to even the farthest, most isolated reaches of the continent.

FLASH TO:  
EXT. OUTBACK - DAY

The front wheel of the small plane glides above the sweeping, infinite desert landscape below. A bush or sun-fried tree breaks the monotony now and then.

A 'roo hops out and skips over the sandy dirt terrain, leaving footprints.

EXT. CHARTERS TOWERS - DAY

SUPER: "Charters Towers"

Basic-looking buildings. An overview of a two-storey structure. Next door, a roofless shower block - a WOMAN is taking a shower. She braces herself for the cold water. The water tank above her is open to the elements and filled with a couple of squirming SNAKES and other wildlife, unbeknownst to her.

The woman continues to shower, as CAPTAIN MARTIN GARRETT walks out of the main building, grinning and offering an outstretched hand to Tim.

MARTIN

(Aussie accent)

G'day, you must be the new flying doc'.

TIM

The name's Tim O'Leary.

They shake hands.

MARTIN

Martin Garrett.

TIM

Ah, the pilot.

MARTIN

That's right. There isn't a plane out there that has beaten me. That includes "The Dragon."

Martin nods to the small propeller plane parked nearby. Tim smiles as the wind picks up, blowing sand over the two men.

MARTIN

So, you're from Ireland?

TIM

What gave me away? The accent or my surname?

MARTIN

Nah, your pasty white skin.

Tim laughs.

MARTIN

Come on, let's go get a brew  
and we can talk some more.

CUT TO:

INT. CHARTERS TOWERS, LOUNGE - NIGHT

Martin passes a can of beer to Tim. They crack their cans  
open and take a sip.

Tim lights a cigarette.

MARTIN

So, you got a ball-and-chain?

TIM

Back home. Renee.

Tim reaches inside his shirt pocket and produces a black  
and white photo of Renee.

Martin takes the photo and admires it.

MARTIN

Pretty girl.

TIM

Akai, she'll be coming over  
to join me soon and then  
we'll be getting married.

MARTIN

Good luck to you, mate.  
You'll soon meet my missus,  
Beth - you'll like her.

(pause)

Hope you don't get air-sick.

Tim raises his eyebrows.

TIM (V.O.)

Of course, I wouldn't be much  
of a flying doctor if I got  
sick on a plane - but, it  
wasn't through lack of trying  
on Martin's part. The next

few days were filled with the kinds of 'bumpy landings' that were commonplace in the bush.

EXT. BUSH LANDING STRIP - DAY

A small propeller plane, "The Dragon" bumps down on a rough patch of ground.

TIM (O.S.)  
Jesus Mary Joseph!

EXT. MARSH - DAY

TIM (V.O.)  
Even getting stuck in boggy ground.

The plane lands and the wheels get mired in the mud.

MARTIN (O.S.)  
Shit. You're getting out to push, mate.

INT. DRAGON, COCKPIT - DAY

TIM (V.O.)  
Akai, and those were just the times when we could find a suitable place to land.

Martin is holding the controls and looking out through the small windshield. Tim is stood behind Martin's chair.

TIM  
We're landing - down there?

EXT. ROUGH BUSH - DAY

The plane flies overhead - below, brambles and dense brush.

MARTIN (O.S.)  
Nah. But, I got an idea.

CUT TO:

A DRIVER in a small buggy drives along the brush, beating it down by reversing over it again.

TIM (V.O.)

Martin was a resourceful chap. He radioed a bloke on the ground to drive his buggy over the grass and bush to flatten it and create a makeshift landing strip.

CUT TO:

The plane landing, bumpily, but safely.

CUT TO:

TIM (V.O.)

Just in time for a spot of 'plane-side surgery.'

Using the tail-plane as a surgical table, with a roll of bandages, syringe and a few tools placed neatly on it, Tim waves forward the patient, A TEENAGER.

TIM (V.O.)

Outback patients have to travel long distances to see the doctor, often many hundreds of kilometres... The inconvenience and hardship that resulted from non-attendance of a doctor at routine bush clinics was rarely appreciated by those who had been responsible for supplying the service... For that reason, the Flying Doctor Service was asked to provide a regular service, with continuity of medical care.

TEENAGER

It's my tooth, doctor. It's killing me.

TIM

Right, right - step over  
here, laddie. Open wide.

Tim looks inside.

TIM

Infected by the looks of it.  
You'll be needing an  
injection of painkiller so I  
can remove it.

Tim takes a syringe from the tail and squirts it into the  
air to remove the air bubbles.

EXT. CHARTERS TOWERS - DUSK

Tim is stood outside, and he spins around.

TIM (V.O.)

As a doctor, I was able to  
help a lot of people. But,  
the real highlight of my day  
was still to come.

RENEE (O.S.)

Tidge!

TIM

Renee!

Renee runs into Tim's arms. They entwine one another.

TIM

I've missed you, darlin'.

RENEE

Next time, don't move so  
bloody far away!

Tim laughs as he holds her tight.

TIM

Never again, darling. You're  
here with me now.

BOOM! FLASH CUT TO:  
EXT. OUTBACK - DAY

Tim is staggering, as the horizon shifts cock-eyed. His head is bleeding dark red. Behind him, the smouldering wreckage of a plane crash. Twisted metal and smoke.

TIM

Nooooooooo!

Renee is lying dead, skewered right through with a tube of steaming metal.

Tim rushes to her.

TIM

(anguish)

God - take me instead! Please  
God. No!

CUT TO:

INT. TIM'S ROOM - DAWN

Tim awakes in a cold sweat, Renee peacefully asleep beside him. He takes in his true surroundings - a darkened room, a clock by his bedside.

Tim reaches for his glasses case, next to the clock, and throws his legs over the side of the bed, rubbing his tired face.

INT. DRAGON, COCKPIT - DAY

TIM (V.O.)

That next day, my friend and pilot Captain Martin Garrett taught me the basics of flying 'The Dragon' - the plane that took us on many flights to emergencies across the Outback.

Martin points down below through the window.

MARTIN

Tidge, look down there -  
that's what we call 'The Iron  
Compass'.

Below, the long railway track extends through the desert.

MARTIN  
Whenever in doubt, the  
railway track is our guide.

Tim nods.

MARTIN  
Here, don't stand there like  
a lemon. A flying doctor  
should know how to fly - take  
this.

Martin stands abruptly, letting Tim sit down and take the  
controls.

TIM  
Careful, you ejit.

MARTIN  
No worries, mate.

The plane rocks.

MARTIN  
Hold her steady.

TIM  
I'm learning, remember.

MARTIN  
It's like riding a horse,  
mate. You know how to do  
that, being a lad from  
Ireland.

Tim's eyes look cold and distant.

TIM  
Just tell me how to steer  
this bucket of bolts.

Martin smiles.

MARTIN

Pull right back as hard as  
you can.

Tim pulls hard and the nose lifts quickly and dramatically.

EXT. SKY - DAY

Martin and Tim howl with fear and cheers as the plane loop-de-loops!

INT. DRAGON, COCKPIT - DAY

MARTIN

Alright, alright - strewth.  
You need a few more lessons,  
but not bad for a first go.

Martin takes back control.

EXT. RURAL AIRSTRIP - DAY

The Dragon lands, the wheels rolling dustily over the sandy ground.

Aborigine CHILDREN run out to greet the plane. Happily and gleefully, they circle the stopped plane and touch the wings and bodywork in amazement and awe.

One CHILD smooths his hand over the rivets, admiring the huge iron bird.

The door opens and Tim waves at the children. They swarm around him at waist height. Tim pats their heads and tickles them.

With the showmanship of a magician, and with the lightning fast reactions of his boxing days, he catches a FLY in mid-air with his hands.

The children laugh and their eyes open widely. With one fly wing between his forefinger and thumb, Tim reveals the captured fly. He holds it to the ear of a LITTLE ABORIGINAL

CHILD who giggles at the sounds of the wriggling and fluttering bug.

Tim looks over the heads of the children to an ELDER, a man in his 40s.

The Elder smiles warmly and is holding an old weathered stick as a cane.

TIM (V.O.)

Over the years, I received so many gifts of Aboriginal artefacts that they'd crafted - spears, nullanullas, boomerangs, didgeridoos, clapsticks, bark paintings - my house was full of them.

MONTAGE OF IMAGES:

Tim conducting check-ups on VARIOUS ABORIGINE PATIENTS - listening to a heartbeat with a stethoscope, dressing a small wound.

INT. DRAGON, DOORWAY - DAY

Tim waves goodbye, pulling the door shut and eclipsing the crowds of ABORIGINE PEOPLE and CHILDREN seeing them off.

MARTIN (O.S.)

We have an air-drop, Tim.  
Over at Edward River Mission.

EXT. RURAL AIRSTRIP - DAY

The propellers start whirring round. Moving forward. Faster, faster. Lift off, the Dragon takes to the skies.

EXT. SMALL TOWN - DAY

SUPER: "Edward River Mission, Cape York Peninsula"

Over little makeshift buildings, the Dragon flies overhead.

INT. DRAGON, REAR - DAY

Tim lugs a heavy and enormous hessian bag.

TIM  
Akai, Martin. What is this?

MARTIN (O.S.)  
(shouting)  
A whole hindquarter of  
bullock. The butcher didn't  
want to keep us waiting, so  
dispensed with the niceties  
such as deboning.

Tim shakes his head and pulls open a trap-door to reveal  
the dropping hatch. The bag barely fits through the hole.

TIM  
Just say 'when.'

EXT. SMALL TOWN - DAY

JOHNNY, a lanky young Aboriginal man, and a FRIEND are  
watching the plane.

JOHNNY  
Mail drops here.

INT. DRAGON, COCKPIT - DAY

Martin signals - similar to the movement of flushing a  
toilet chain.

MARTIN  
Now, mate.

INT. DRAGON, REAR - DAY

TIM  
(to himself)  
Bombs away.

He shoves the bag through the hatch.

INT. DRAGON, COCKPIT - DAY

MARTIN  
(to himself)



and they would certainly  
accuse us of a hit-and-run  
job if we left without doing  
a circuit.

Martin's face is a picture of worry. Tim's brow is  
furrowed.

TIM (V.O.)

No doubt at this point, my  
colleague was wondering about  
his future. What would the  
Coroner say? What would  
Chappie - Mr Chapman, the  
Superintendent of the  
Anglican Mission at Edward  
River - think of this  
treasonous act.

MARTIN

I'll loop back around. See if  
he's okay will you, Tim?

INT. DRAGON, REAR - DAY

The hatch is still open and Tim approaches.

EXT. DRAGON, REAR - DAY

Tim's head pops out again. Far down below is the small  
town.

EXT. SMALL TOWN - DAY

THREE ABORIGINAL MEN take aim with their spears. As the  
plane turns in the air for another pass.

They throw their missiles.

EXT. DRAGON, REAR - DAY

Tim spots a flying spear and pulls his head in, as it  
narrowly misses where his head was.

INT. DRAGON, COCKPIT - DAY

MARTIN

(alarmed)  
Bloody hell! They're aiming  
at us.

EXT. DRAGON - DAY

Another spear swoops just beneath them.

INT. DRAGON, COCKPIT - DAY

Tim joins Martin at the front.

TIM  
Sweet Mother of God - what  
would happen if one of those  
spears hit the propellers?

MARTIN  
We'd be goners, mate!

EXT. SMALL TOWN - DAY

The Dragon flies into the distance.

TIM (V.O.)  
It wasn't until later that  
night that we heard Chappie  
on the radio and we found out  
that we were off the hooks!  
No Coroners Court, no  
investigation - Johnny, who  
was Chappie's right-hand man,  
apparently had a very sore  
shoulder, but was otherwise  
fine and dandy.

(pause)  
We were so relieved, I could  
have embraced the  
transceiver!

EXT. FARM HOUSE - NIGHT

Bugs are clicking and whirring in the cool night. Dark for  
miles around, except the porch lights of a solitary farm  
house.

INT. FARM HOUSE, NURSERY - NIGHT

The door opens, and light from a kerosene lamp in the hallway cuts a slice into the darkened room. Half of a BABY'S CRIB is illuminated. A BABY is stood, beneath a mosquito net, crying loudly.

MOTHER rushes in and scoops up baby.

MOTHER  
Shhhh. There, there.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Tim and Martin are sat either side of a round table with a few glasses in front of them. The decor is dark wood paneling and a long bar at the end of the room.

MARTIN  
Strewth, that was a relief  
about Chappie's man.

TIM  
I thought we'd knocked his  
block off.

MARTIN  
Poor bastard. Next time,  
he'll think twice before  
running for the mailbag, in  
case it's half a cow!

Tim smirks a bit, with relief. Martin catches his eye and chuckles guiltily.

INT. FARM HOUSE, BEDROOM - NIGHT

BABY (O.S.)  
(crying loudly)

The Mother turns and awakes. She nudges her husband, the FATHER.

FATHER  
What is it?

MOTHER  
He usually sleeps right  
through the night.

FATHER  
Don't worry. Probably just  
hot and bothered.

Father turns back over to sleep as Mother gets up.

INT. FARM HOUSE, HALLWAY - NIGHT

In her nightdress, Mother takes the kerosene lamp from a  
hook in the hall and brings it into the nursery.

INT. FARM HOUSE, NURSERY - NIGHT

The door opens again, and Mother walks in. Baby is crying.

Mother places the lamp on a chest of drawers.

MOTHER  
Whatever's the matter?

The light catches the gleaming beady eyes - and shiny  
scales - of a MULGA (KING) BROWN SNAKE, sat hissing inside  
the cot!

MOTHER  
Oh my God!

Mother leaps forward to grab Baby, her arms outstretched.  
The brown snake lurches forward, fangs exposed.

SNAKE  
Hsssss!

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Tim and Martin are rocking with mirth, in a cloud of  
cigarette smoke.

BETH GARRETT enters, with long dark hair and a friendly face.

MARTIN

Beth, come over here and meet  
Tidge - Doctor Timothy  
O'Leary, I mean.

Tim stands respectfully and shakes her hand.

FREEZEFRAME on Beth:

TIM (V.O.)

Beth Garrett was a remarkable woman, by all accounts. She would later go onto become a trail-blazing female pilot in her own right.

BETH

Good to meet you, Tidge.  
Sorry to spoil your night,  
boys. Just heard from Vern,  
there's a call for you -  
Mulga brown snake bite.

Tim and Martin exchange concerned glances and stand from their table.

EXT. FARM HOUSE - NIGHT

Tim, holding his medical bag, and Martin walk up to the porch. The Father is outside, with his head in his hands, sobbing. He looks up, with bagged wet eyes. He shakes his head.

TIM (V.O.)

We were too late. The call came at 11pm and it was 2am when we arrived to the remote farm house. The baby was long since dead.

INT. FARM HOUSE, NURSERY - NIGHT

Tim walks into the room.

TIM (V.O.)

He was a deathly white colour  
and we counted nineteen  
separate bite marks on his  
little body.

Mother is crying as she cradles the whitened lifeless baby  
in her arms.

In the cot, the rigid body of the snake stares back at Tim.

TIM (V.O.)  
The father heard his wife's  
screams.

FLASHBACK:  
Father runs in.

TIM (V.O.)  
He rushed to the kitchen  
where a large kettle of water  
was simmering on the stove -  
always left full overnight in  
case hot water was needed to  
warm the baby's bottle.

FLASHBACK:  
Father in the kitchen, pours steaming hot water into a  
saucepan.

TIM (V.O.)  
Boiled the snake alive.

FLASHBACK: Father throws the hot water on to the snake in  
the cot. The snake thrashes then dies.

Tim kicks the empty saucepan lying beside his foot.

INT. CHURCH - DAWN

Tim is sat in the pews. He places his hands on the bench  
before him as his eyes linger on the crucifix at the front.  
Then he lowers his head in prayer.

His fingers grip the bench strongly and purposefully.

INT. CHARTERS TOWERS, LOUNGE - DAY

Tim is sat with a mug of tea, staring quietly into space. He appears contemplative after the previous night's events.

THUMP! THUMP!

Tim's eyes widen.

INT. CHARTERS TOWERS, RADIO ROOM - DAY

VERN (50s), a large bespectacled man with headphones around his neck, is wielding a broom stick, which he again thumps the ceiling with.

TIM (V.O.)

Vern's broomstick summoned me... Another radio call - an emergency.

Vern sits back in front of the rudimentary equipment that is a lifeline for the Outback residents.

TIM (V.O.)

Technology was basic then, we didn't even have aircraft mounted radio systems onboard RFDS flights. In 1958, I would campaign to get these systems installed as standard, improving communications within the service.

EXT. CHARTERS TOWERS - DAY

The propellers are spinning.

CUT TO:

Lift off, the Dragon takes flight.

TIM (V.O.)

Not that we had anything to prove, but after a call like last night, this next emergency seemed even more important than usual.

INT. DRAGON, COCKPIT - DAY

MARTIN

Mrs Smart called in - her son's complaining of belly ache and she's found blood in his stools.

TIM

Doesn't sound good.

CUT TO:

EXT. HOUSE, FRONT PORCH - DAY

Tim, with stethoscope, is examining SIMON SMART, a little boy. His mother, MRS SMART, watches keenly.

TIM

To be honest with you, Mrs Smart, I can't find much wrong with Simon. He seems to be in good health.

MRS SMART

I see - well, he's had abdominal pains all morning and-

TIM

Yes, yes - blood in his stools. Can't have that.

Tim turns to Martin.

TIM

(to Martin)

We'll have to take them in. Just to be sure.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Martin and Tim watch as Mrs Smart organizes Simon and his BROTHERS and SISTERS, all wearing their Sunday Best and all carrying boxes and suitcases.

MARTIN

(to Tim)

We'll be loaded to the gunnels. What's with all the swag?

INT. DRAGON - DAY

Rattling as The Dragon takes off, the plane is heavily packed with the Smarts and their cargo of possessions.

INT. DRAGON, COCKPIT - DAY

Martin and Tim exchange glances.

Tim turns back toward Mrs Smart. She smiles openly.

CUT TO:

EXT. CHARTERS TOWERS - DAY

The Dragon is landed and the door opens. Tim exits first.

TIM

Mrs Smart, is somebody meeting you?

Mrs Smart and her children emerge. A FLEET OF FOUR VINTAGE CARS suddenly arrives alongside the plane.

MRS SMART

Thank you, Doctor - I see Dad has just arrived. He'll take us straight to the hospital and I'll ring you later, with the doctor's verdict of young Simon's condition.

Tim looks to Simon who is carrying a hefty parcel to a car, where MRS SMART'S DAD is waiting, smiling.

TIM

Don't worry, Mrs Smart. I'm sure everything is going to

turn out fine. As I said, he probably got a wallop in the tummy and a tiny blood vessel burst and now it's clotted over - after a few days taking it easy, you won't know it ever happened.

MRS SMART

Doctor, I can't thank you enough for your help and kindness. It's a load off my mind. What would we do without our Flying Doctor?

CUT TO:

Tim waves as the caravan of cars depart.

JOCK, a muscular moustachioed man, walks over.

JOCK

See you met, Mrs Smart and her brood.

TIM (V.O.)

Jock, our Medical Superintendant.

TIM

Oh yes, her son, Simon, has abdominal-

JOCK

Abdominal pains. Right, right.

Tim shoots Jock a glance.

JOCK

Don't feel too badly about it, Tim... Max brought her in... Farrel brought her in... and I brought her in...

TIM

All the parcels and suitcases.

JOCK

Her family lives here and she is very attached to her mother. She makes the trip regularly by Land Rover, but how much more comfortable and speedy is the trip by plane!

Jock pats Tim hard on the back.

JOCK

Come here, Tim - the boys at The Towers have a little shindig planned for you.

Jock and Tim walk towards the building.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

TIM (V.O.)

Renee and I were betrothed.

SLOW-MOTION - A beaming Tim and Renee leave the church as FRIENDS throw rice at the happy couple. Renee is wearing a simple white gown and Tim is wearing a smart suit with a white buttonhole flower.

SUPER: "September 10th, 1953"

TIM (V.O.)

Two of Ireland's children had found each other, and became man and wife in Australia. You couldn't find a happier pair of human beings that day. 'Renee' - Catherine Marion Burke - became Mrs O'Leary and everything seemed perfect.

FREEZEFRAME: Tim and Renee kiss lovingly, and the friends cheer wholeheartedly.

FADE TO BLACK.

SUPER: "Six Weeks Later"

TIM (V.O.)

When she first requested to come along, I had been very diffident about it.

FADE IN.

INT. DRAGON - DAY

Renee is beaming as she steps onboard and looks around.

TIM (V.O.)

I had always resisted taking all but the most essential persons on any flights. It was all too easy to allow the Service to project the 'Cooks Tour' image, where visitors took precedence over patients for available seats. There is a constant demand for medical and other visitors to travel with us.

Tim follows onboard and holds Renee's hand.

INT. DRAGON, COCKPIT - DAY

Tim watches as Renee looks over the cockpit with wonderment.

TIM (V.O.)

I finally weakened when she said she would attend the hospital and learn the elements of sterilisation of instruments, as well as the fundamentals and get a 'quickie' course on dental nursing. In those days, we didn't have Nursing Sisters on the staff and we appreciated any help we could get.

Renee kisses Tim on the cheek.

TIM (V.O.)

So, it was decided - on this particular flight of some three days, Renee would come with us on the first stage to Georgetown, Forsayth and Einasleigh. Then we would leave her at Gregory Springs with the Manager, Bob Murphy and his family.

CUT TO:

Martin flying the plane. The sky is turning to dusk.

TIM (V.O.)

Bob had very kindly offered to drive Renee to Cheviot Hills, a neighbouring Station run by Bob's brother Lex, where we planned to pick her up for our return flight... Of course, the best laid plans of mice and men are subject to vagaries; flight planning - in the days of old piston engines and wood and fabric aeroplanes - was subject to a thousand different possibilities for disruption... This particular flight started to fray at the edges almost as soon as we turned our noses for home...

EXT. GREGORY SPRINGS - DUSK

Tim and Renee hug and kiss.

RENEE

Take care.

TIM

I love ya.

RENEE

Be safe. I love you, too.

Tim climbs back aboard the Dragon and waves, an outspread five-fingered wave, held tall aloft his head.

INT. FORSAYTH, HOUSE, BEDROOM - NIGHT

A darkened room. Two single beds, side by side, and Martin is lying in bed, staring up at the ceiling.

Tim sits on his bed, and then lies down.

MARTIN

Tim, you awake?

TIM

What's on your mind?

MARTIN

Beth and I, now keep this under your hat, but we're fairly confident that a baby is on the way.

Tim smiles broadly and reaches over, shaking Martin's hand.

TIM

That's great. Congrats.

MARTIN

Cheers, mate - can't be sure but we're seeing the doctor in the next couple of weeks, then we'll have the mystery solved.

TIM

You're a lucky man.

MARTIN

How about you, Tim? Any sprogs on the way?

TIM

Soon. Renee and I will be knee-deep in little ones.

They both laugh.

CUT TO:

A silent room, then BOOM! Light pours in. A MAN - JACK - runs in, and shakes Tim awake.

JACK

Doctor! Doctor! Wake up!

TIM

Akai, Jack - what is it?!  
What's wrong?

Martin checks his watch. 2.35am.

EXT. FORSAYTH, FIELD - NIGHT

Holding kerosene lamps, a GROUP of MEN are gathered around a HORSE, laying down, bleeding from the chest.

Jack strides over, with Tim and Martin following.

JACK

My racehorse, doctor. My one  
and only hope of ever winning  
a Melbourne Cup. He got  
stampeded by roo, and ran  
into a barbed wire fence.  
She's bleeding badly, doc.

Tim takes off his jacket and kneels down beside the animal.

TIM

Hold those lanterns close,  
and bring my needles and  
bandages.

JACK

Can you save her?

TIM

I'll do what I can, but she's  
lost a lot of blood.

The horse eyeballs Tim, as he strokes her nose softly.

INT. FORSAYTH, HOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY

Jack pours a coffee for Tim, who is seated beside Martin at a breakfast table steeped in a fine feast.

JACK

God bless you, both. I can't express my gratitude enough.

Tim bites into a piece of toast. Martin checks his watch.

MARTIN

It's been a long night, but we better be on our way to Georgetown, then Einasleigh this afternoon, and then Lyndhurst.

TIM

Then on to Cheviot Hills. Renee will be waiting for us.

Tim stands as Martin takes another sip of orange juice.

MARTIN

Thanks for the great tucker, Jack.

MONTAGE OF IMAGES - Take offs and landings. Signs: *Georgetown Hospital, Einasleigh, Lyndhurst*. Tim shaking hands with PRESTIGIOUS CHARACTERS, MAYORS, DIGNITARIES, NURSES. Tim looking at a few PATIENTS.

Martin checking his watch: 11.30am... The hands spin around. 1.12pm.... 3.45pm... 4.30pm.

EXT. SKY - DAY

The Dragon flies toward the horizon.

TIM (V.O.)

As planned, we departed Lyndhurst for Cheviot Hills at 4.30pm. The flight normally took about thirty minutes...

A fuzzy cloud begins enveloping the skyline.

TIM (V.O.)

When we reached the halfway point, we could see a thick dust haze just ahead of us.

INT. DRAGON, COCKPIT - DAY

Martin screws up his eyes as he surveys the dusty haze.

TIM (V.O.)

We were barely two minutes into the dusty atmosphere when it became obvious that it was going to be difficult.

MARTIN

Tidge - you better see this.

Tim appears in the doorway.

Martin swings the stick over to port and enters into a steep turn until he is heading back to where they came from.

Martin smiles at Tim.

MARTIN

Sorry, Tim - we'll not make it to Cheviot this afternoon. The dust is getting thicker and my main concern is to return to Lyndhurst ahead of it...

TIM

Right you are.

MARTIN

There are old pilots and there are bold pilots, but there are no old bold pilots!

Tim pats Martin on the shoulder, whilst stroking his chin thoughtfully.

EXT. LYNDHURST, AIRSTRIP - DUSK

The Dragon rolls to a halt and IAN STEWART (30s) approaches behind the wing as Tim and Martin emerge from the plane.

IAN

What's up, lads?

TIM

Ah, Ian. There's a huge dust storm. Won't be making it back tonight.

IAN

Then you must both come home with me. Margaret and I would be delighted to have you.

TIM (V.O.)

An extra couple for dinner was a simple matter for Ian and Margaret Stewart. The genuine hospitality and generosity of the Australian bush folk is legendary and the Stewarts compared with the best.

INT. STEWART RESIDENCE, FRONT ROOM - NIGHT

Ian brings a refreshed glass of gin and tonic to Tim.

Martin stretches out in an arm chair.

IAN

I can drive you to Cheviot Hills after dinner, if you're worried about Renee.

MARTIN

Well, our radio base station at Charters Towers closed down at 5.00 pm, so there's no way to get in touch with her now.

TIM

Akai, that's a 12 hour trip over the most atrocious road imaginable... I can't accept your offer, Ian, but I won't forget it.

IAN

She's staying with Lex Murphy - as a seasoned bushman, I'm confident that he would read a fairly accurate picture of that storm out there. He'll know you wouldn't have risked flying through it, so Renee shouldn't be overly worried about you two.

INT. CHUDLEIGH PARK, BEDROOM - NIGHT

Renee lies, tossing and turning. She pulls back the covers and looks out the dark window.

TIM (V.O.)

Renee never slept a wink. It was the longest night of her life; even though she did not know it then, it was to be her last.

EXT. OUTBACK - NIGHT

Cruel winds conjure up clouds of sand and dust.

The fierce gusts sweep past Lyndhurst and onto the Coast and out to the South Pacific Ocean.

CUT TO:

INT. DRAGON, COCKPIT - DAY

Martin is chatting animatedly to Tim, who is standing in the doorway.

MARTIN

(happy mood)

Right there, we turned around yesterday. We were spot on,

mate. Did you hear the winds last night? Made the right decision there. And, had we carried on, we would have hit the Cheviot homestead on the nose.

TIM

Yeh, yeh - you're superman, aren't you.

MARTIN

Can't take all the credit - not with the luck of the *Oirish* on board.

Martin nudges Tim cheekily.

TIM

I'm sure Renee will be glad to see us.

MARTIN

I'll have you there in a jiff. Then it's just a short drive from the airstrip.

EXT. CHUDLEIGH PARK - DAY

Tim steps out of a car, into Renee's arms.

RENEE

I was so worried about ya, Tidge!

TIM

I know you were, love. I'm here now.

RENEE

Lex said it was probably the storm that stopped you, but I was still worried. I couldn't sleep at all. Thinking about what 'might' have happened to you.

TIM

You can never guarantee times  
with aeroplanes and flying.  
You really mustn't worry so,  
you need to discipline  
yourself, love - take a 'no  
worry' attitude.

RENEE

I'll try, I'll try.

MARTIN

Told you I'd get him back in  
one piece.

Martin playfully pats Renee's arm.

RENEE

Well, I'm relieved that you  
put safety above everything  
else. If it's not right to  
fly, I'd rather you stay put.

Martin smiles, as Renee pulls Tim close for another hug.

TIM

Are you ready to test out  
your training with a few  
patients this morning?

RENEE

I'll give it my best.

TIM

Come on then.

EXT. STATION - DAY

An ELDERLY GENTLEMAN is sat on a wooden chair, in front of  
Tim and Renee. Tim passes an empty needle to Renee with a  
kidney dish.

TIM

The gum is anaesthetised and  
here's a dish for the patient  
to spit into.

Renee nods.

Tim leans forward with a pair of forceps. He reaches into the Elderly Gentleman's mouth. CRICK - the forceps bring out a bloody tooth.

TIM

And Bob's your Uncle.

Tim turns to drop the tooth into the dish, but the dish - and Renee - are gone. Instead, Renee is lying on the grass, her white hands still gripping the kidney dish.

TIM

(shocked)

Renee!

Renee is pale, rigid and covered in sweat. Tim leans down and pats her hand until she opens her eyes.

RENEE

(disoriented)

I don't think I'm going to be such a crash-hot hand at this business.

Slowly Renee gets to her feet with Tim's help.

TIM

Go have a lie down and I'll check in on you.

Renee nods meekly and walks inside.

INT. STATION - DAY

Tim sits down beside Renee, where she is lying on a sofa.

RENEE

Oh, Tidge - I'm so embarrassed! Fainting like that...

TIM

You were sleepless with worry  
last night, it's no surprise  
that you had a funny turn.

RENEE

Still.

TIM

Look, why don't you join us  
for some lunch.

RENEE

No, I can't - I don't want to  
be sick on the way back home.

Tim strokes Renee's face lovingly.

EXT. STATION - DAY

Tim walks outside, where Martin is stood with a few LOCALS.  
Martin passes Tim a mug of tea.

MARTIN

How's she feeling?

TIM

Better. Martin, I'm thinking  
that Renee should sit in the  
backseat on the starboard  
side of the aeroplane.

Martin nods.

INT. DRAGON - DAY

Renee takes her seat in the backseat on the starboard side.

TIM (V.O.)

This I regarded as the safest  
seat on the plane in the  
event of an unscheduled  
sudden stop.

ISOBEL LETHBRIDGE is a lady seated in front of Renee.

TIM (V.O.)

Isobel Lethbridge, from Lyndhurst, sat in the seat in front of Renee. Across the aisle her five-year-old son Ian was strapped into the second seat on the port side...

IAN LETHBRIDGE has his broken left arm in a sling.

TIM (V.O.)  
I sat in my usual place, just behind the cockpit bulkhead.

INT. DRAGON, COCKPIT - DAY

Martin completes the cockpit checks.

EXT. DRAGON - DAY

The propellers start turning slowly.

CUT TO:  
The wheels start rolling forward.

INT. DRAGON - DAY

The passengers - Isobel, Ian, Renee and Tim - get comfortable, grip their arm-rests in preparation for take off.

INT. DRAGON, COCKPIT - DAY

Martin pushes forward, full power.

EXT. DRAGON - DAY

BOB MURPHY (50s) is waving at the increasingly speedy plane.

INT. DRAGON, COCKPIT - DAY

Martin looks concerned, and suddenly brakes and eases the stick back.

INT. DRAGON - DAY

Tim appears puzzled. He gets up.

INT. DRAGON, COCKPIT - DAY

TIM

What wrong?

MARTIN

She's too tail-heavy. You're going to need to rearrange the seating, Tim... If you could stand in the cockpit door for the take-off run and bring one of the rear passengers up to your seat?

Tim looks back into the main cabin, his focus on Renee, sat looking out the window peacefully.

CUT TO:

INT. DRAGON - DAY

Renee is now sat in Tim's seat. She looks up to Tim.

TIM

Good?

Renee nods.

EXT. CHEVIOT HILLS - DAY

Speeding along the airstrip, the Dragon is roaring forward, propellers spinning.

INT. DRAGON, COCKPIT - DAY

Martin is at the controls, Tim stood in the doorway. Both looking forward, eagerly.

The plane lifts off, but not far off the ground.

MARTIN

The old bitch isn't climbing too well, Tim!

Tim looks to the right where there are miles of treeless plains, heading back to Chudleigh Park. Martin turns slightly to the right.

MARTIN

I'll do a circuit to gain height before setting a course for the Towers.

TIM'S POV:

Martin's knuckles are whitening with the forward pressure he is exerting on the throttle knobs. The dials are alive with activity - Air Speed Indicator indicates under 60 knots.

TIM (V.O.)

We were losing height with full power on both engines, and flying uncomfortably close to stalling speed.

(pause)

As we flew along the eastern side of the airfield, I saw people on the ground waving to us. No doubt they thought that we had returned to give them a final low level salute.

EXT. CHEVIOT HILLS - DAY

PEOPLE are waving alongside Bob Murphy.

The Dragon zips by.

TIM (O.S.)

What the hell is wrong with this thing? We don't seem to be able to climb away.

INT. DRAGON - DAY

Tim, standing in the doorway, looks back.

Isobel and Ian are smiling and waving back at the people on the ground.

Renee meets Tim's eyes - she raises a quizzical eyebrow.

RENEE  
Are we coming back to land  
again?

TIM  
No - just circling for  
height.

Tim looks forward again.

INT. DRAGON, COCKPIT - DAY

Martin looks to Tim, meaningfully.

MARTIN  
(urgently)  
Get down the back, Tim! She's  
too nose-heavy!

INT. DRAGON - DAY

Tim turns quickly and looks into Renee's anxious eyes.

RENEE  
What's wrong?

TIM  
Nothing!

Tim swallows.

TIM  
Hang on!

Tim throws himself forward, on to the floor, against the rear bulkhead.

Renee gasps as Isobel's eyes widen with fear.

EXT. SKY - DAY

The Dragon goes into a spin and nose-dives towards the ground.

Tim grabs the legs of the last chair.

TIM  
(shouts)

Look out!

EXT. GROUND - DAY

The Dragon heads straight to the ground, perpendicular. The nose of the Dragon crumples on impact into the hard basalt surface.

INT. DRAGON - DAY

*Screaming!*

A metal water can flies from nowhere cracking into Tim's skull. Blood gushes from his forehead.

EXT. GROUND - DAY

The Dragon, crashed nose-first, bounces back fifteen feet from the point of impact, and - CRUNCH! - lands on its belly.

The whole left side of the plane separates and exposes the inside of the cabin.

Ian is still sat in his seat, appearing shocked and bewildered.

Bob Murphy runs alongside the plane, in a panic. Isobel is climbing out, as Tim staggers from the wreckage his head bleeding, concussed.

FLASHES - Tim tripping over his own feet... the wreckage smouldering... Renee's blue eyes - pale and blank... Martin slumped over the controls, windshield cracked...

Tim is staggering, as the horizon shifts cock-eyed. His head is dark red with blood. His arm is clearly wounded, pierced with shrapnel.

Behind him, the smouldering wreckage of a plane crash. Twisted metal and smoke.

TIM

Nooooooooo!

Renee is lying dead, skewered right through with a HOT EXHAUST PIPE.

Tim rushes to her.

TIM (V.O.)

An exhaust pipe penetrated her back - so, hot that it stopped any bleeding.

Tim pulls together Renee's torn blouse, covering her exposed bosom.

Tim lifts Renee's lifeless body to his, and whispers *The Act of Contrition* in her ear.

TIM

(whisper)

*O my God! I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee, and detest all my sins, because I dread the loss of heaven and the pains of hell; but most of all because they offend Thee, my God, who art all-good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of Thy grace, to confess my sins, to do penance, and to amend my life. Amen.*

Tim stands, one arm is hanging limp by his side. He walks over to a passenger seat next to the plane and slams his body against it - CRACK! He howls as he pops his dislocated shoulder back into place.

Tim slowly moves his arm again, but winces from the pain.

Sitting down, Tim reaches for a cigarette from a pack in his top pocket. Bob sits down beside him, covered in blood himself.

TIM

Got a match, Bob?

BOB

Do you realise, Tim, we are  
sitting in a pool of high  
octane aviation fuel?

Tim nods and throws the unlit cigarette away.

TIM

Martin?

BOB

He's over there - not  
breathing well.

CUT TO:

Tim stands over Martin's bruised and battered body. His respirations are slow and snoring, blood is oozing from his ears, nose and mouth.

FLASHES - Isobel is wandering around in the distance, aimlessly, dazed... Ian is quietly crying, still sitting in his aircraft seat outside the wrecked hull... Tim has Martin's head in his lap, until he stops breathing completely.

CUT TO:

Martin and Renee's bodies covered in sheets beside a shed.

TIM (V.O.)

Twenty minutes later, Captain  
Martin Garrett was dead... I  
was to be taken by road  
ambulance to Hughenden  
Hospital, some 100 miles to  
the south... Before I left  
Cheviot Hills, I requested to  
be taken to see the bodies of  
my wife and friend.

Tim walks over and pulls back the sheets. He bites his fist as he attempts to contain his overwhelming grief.

Renee with her eyes shut, still radiant.

TIM (V.O.)

Renee looked as beautiful as ever, but pale... She was sat in my seat. It should've been me... *Why couldn't it've been me?*

INT. HUGHENDEN HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Rain is lashing the windows as Tim looks out, lying in a hospital bed; shadows draped across his face and body.

TIM (V.O.)

Going on after the fatal crash would be one of the hardest things I would ever do... I decided that I would remain with the RFDS for the rest of my working life.

(pause)

But, though I survived the crash, my whole world was in pieces and I was on the brink of crashing personally and emotionally.

Tim rolls over to his other side, drenched in sweat and tears.

TIM

(calls out)

Nurse! Nurse!

A NURSE enters, taking a cloth from the side table to mop Tim's forehead.

NURSE

Are you in pain, Tim?

TIM

(whispers)

Morphine. More morphine.

NURSE

Your sister is here.

TIM

(dazed)  
Patricia?

INT. HUGHENDEN HOSPITAL - DAY

Tim puts his legs over the edge of the bed, and PATRICIA (30s) sits down next to him. She is pretty with long, light hair. She puts her hand on his back softly.

PATRICIA  
(Irish)  
Are you feeling up to it,  
Tidge?

Tim nods solemnly, and then smiles as he takes her hand tenderly.

TIM (V.O.)  
News of the crash and Renee's death was broadcast on the local radio in Ireland. When Patricia heard, she made her way over to Australia - going on to later become a flying doctor herself, as a Missionary Nun in Kenya... Akai, she had the bedside manner of a good doctor and the heart of a nun.

INT. PLANE - DAY

Beth is sat at the controls, flying an RFDS Drover plane through the clouds.

TIM (V.O.)  
Others were similarly suffering from the fallout of the crash... Beth was so damaged that her life became a tribute to her beloved Martin - she would work as a RFDS pilot, too.

EXT. GRAVE - NIGHT

Pitch black.

TIM (V.O.)

And me; I just couldn't shake  
the loneliness after losing  
my new bride; my sweet Renee.

PATRICIA (O.S.)

Tim? Are you out here?

TIM (O.S.)

(sobbing  
uncontrollably  
)

In the light of the moon, Tim's outline is lying beside a mound of dirt grave, marked by a wooden cross stuck upright in the ground.

Tim looks over his shoulder, tears wetting his cheeks. His right hand is wrapped around a bottle of whiskey, which he brings to his lips for a slug.

Patricia leans over to comfort him.

PATRICIA

Come on, Tim. Let's take you  
home. Come on.

Tim slowly stands and they leave Renee's graveside.

TIM

Why couldn't it be me, Pat?

INT. CONFESSIONAL, CHURCH - DAY

The door slides back.

TIM

Bless me, Father, for I have  
sinned.

PRIEST (O.S.)

How long has it been since  
your last confession, my son?

CUT TO:

INT. CHURCH - DAY

In the pews, Tim on his knees, his hands clasped together, praying for forgiveness.

INT. PLANE - DAY

In-flight, Tim looks out of the window across the desert below. Lonely scenery.

INT. COCKPIT, PLANE - DAY

CAPTAIN CLIFF PARSONS (40s) is steering the plane.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. PLANE - DAY

Tim's eyes are glassed over as he stares out the window.

TIM (V.O.)

There were many times, after Renee's death, when I would have traded places with some of my dying patients... The price of my life was considerably reduced.

(pause)

Ultimately, the fear of death never preoccupied my mind; in many ways, the fear part of me died that day of the crash... They call it 'fey' in Gaelic - the acceptance of the inevitable nature of death. A stoic fatalism... with good humour. That's my cross to bear.

Outside the window, the Outback stretches for miles. Empty. Barren. Soulless.

EXT. OUTBACK - DAY

The plane lands, kicking up dust and sand.

CUT TO:

The door opens and Tim disembarks.

TIM (V.O.)  
Isolation and alcoholism make  
for deadly partners.

MAN  
In here, doc.

Tim follows a man into a building.

INT. OUTBACK BUILDING - DAY

From the brightness of the desert outside, the interior is dark and shady. A few breaks of light crack through the shutters, illuminating parts of the room.

TIM (V.O.)  
The Outback can be a lonely  
place. I would attend many  
suicides over the years. But,  
this one would be different.

TIM  
Suicide.

MAN  
Attempted suicide. The poor  
bastard's crook.

PATIENT (O.S.)  
(groaning)

Tim stoops down to a writhing figure, the PATIENT, lying on a blood-stained bed.

TIM (V.O.)  
The patient needed lots of  
morphine for the pain. He  
would surely wish that he was  
dead.

MAN  
Multiple gunshots to the  
chest.

Tim nods and opens his bag, pulling out his tools of the trade.

EXT. OUTBACK BUILDING - DAY

Cliff is leaning against the wall, smoking a cigarette quietly. Tim emerges, slamming the door behind him. He seems angry, heated and perplexed.

Cliff stops leaning and stands upright.

TIM

If you're going to kill  
yourself then kill yourself!  
Don't mess it up.

CLIFF

Tim?

Tim spins around, grabbing Cliff by the collar.

TIM

He should have put a rifle in  
the mouth, the damn ejit.

Tim lets go of Cliff's shirt and storms back to the plane.

Cliff watches Tim walk away, with raised eyebrows. He takes one last puff of his cigarette, and then throws the smouldering stub into the dust.

INT. CHARTERS TOWERS, LOUNGE - NIGHT

Tim looks at the bottle of whiskey in his hand. It looks back at him.

EXT. GOVERNOR'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A young and pretty Governess, NITA, opens the kitchen door. A square of light opens into the darkness.

She daintily steps outside with a plate of leftover scraps in her hand.

NITA

Here you go, piggies.

She walks to the pig's bucket and empties the plate.

A twig SNAPS. Nita looks out, trying to pierce the night with her eyes.

Nervous now, she turns and walks back along the cement pathway to the inviting light of the kitchen door.

She steps on something, and appears off balance.

NITA

Argh!

Nita clutches for her left ankle and starts swinging her leg, trying to shake free.

Attached to her leg - a 6-foot long BROWN SNAKE. Nita's shrieks rings out.

INT. GOVERNOR'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The MANAGER, 40s, runs to the kitchen door. He looks out, eyes wide and in shock; he snatches an axe from the tool box by the door.

EXT. GOVERNOR'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Nita is screaming. The snake is chewing on her ankle; its fangs gnawing at the flesh.

The Manager strides over.

MANAGER

Hold on.

He swiftly stands on the body of the snake and with - one blow - removes its head.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. CHARTERS TOWERS, LOUNGE - NIGHT

BANG! BANG! Vern's broomstick. Tim's concentration breaks. He places the bottle on the table and grabs his jacket from the back of the chair.

INT. COCKPIT, PLANE - NIGHT

Tim is standing in the cockpit doorway, as Cliff flies the plane into the black night sky. The stars are out.

TIM (V.O.)

A call from a station south of Torrens Creek... the Governess, a young Polish lass by the name of Nita, had been bitten by a very large Mulga Brown snake... The same type of snake that killed that poor baby in its cot... Time was, again, of the essence.

CLIFF

We're gonna land down there, Tim. But, you'll be a few yards from the house, so - I'm afraid - you'll have to wade through some swamp.

TIM

Akai, I don't mind getting my feet wet.

CLIFF

It's the crocs that I'd be worried about, mate!

CUT TO:

EXT. PLANE - NIGHT

Cliff watches from the plane's door.

CLIFF

Watch your back, doc!

Tim glances back, tutting to himself. He is waist-deep in dark waters, in the midst of a murky patch of wetlands, with submerged trees and bushes all around. He is holding his bag in one hand, a gas lamp in the other; both above his head to avoid getting soaked. The lamp glimmers on the surface.

SPLASH!

Tim turns sharply to his right. A LARGE SHADOW slips back below the water.

Tim wades quicker; the edge is very close.

SPLOSH!

Tim starts climb out, throwing his bag in front of him; he whips around, raising the lamp, as the Shadow's teeth and tail flash past and - SPLASH! - back into the depths.

CUT TO:

EXT. GOVERNOR'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Tim approaches, soaked from the waist down, and holding the lamp and bag.

TIM (V.O.)

In 27 years, I was to treat 15 people for venomous snake bites, as well as about 20 dogs. Four of the people died, three of them from Taipan and one from Mulga King Brown snake envenomation.

INT. GOVERNOR'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Tim enters the kitchen. The Manager meets Tim at the door.

MANAGER

Thank God you're here, Doctor. We did as you said and tied a tourniquet. Should we take it off now?

TIM

That depends. Does this young lady want to remain on the surface of terra firma with one and half legs intact, or does she want a beautiful corpse with both legs intact?

The Manager's face pales and he nods.

MANAGER

Let me know whatever you need.

TIM

Two troughs. One with hot  
water and one with cold.

The Manager leaves through the back door.

INT. DRAWING ROOM, GOVERNOR'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Tim enters to find Nita lying rigid.

TIM

Nita.

NITA

Doctor.

Her leg is grey as marble, with dark blue blotches. The  
tourniquet is tied tight.

NITA

Doctor, do you think I'll  
lose my leg?

Tim stoops down and touches her icy leg.

TIM

No, not all of it anyway.  
And maybe, with a lot of  
prayers and a little bit of  
luck, you may not lose any of  
it.

TIM (V.O.)

I'd collected the appropriate  
antivenin from the hospital  
before I left town. But, in  
order to get blood back into  
the leg, it was going to be a  
long night.

CUT TO:

Two troughs of water; Nita - assisted by Tim and the Manager - alternates her leg between the two troughs of extreme temperatures.

Tim rubs olive oil into Nita's leg.

CUT TO:

A clock on the mantelpiece moves ahead by a few hours to read 5 O'Clock.

NITA  
(groans)

TIM  
That's good. She's starting  
to feel pain in her leg.

The fang punctures begin to bleed gooey blood.

MANAGER  
Can we move her?

TIM  
Yes, if we can get her across  
the wetlands, we can fly her  
to the hospital in  
Townsville.

MANAGER  
The neighbours have a Land  
Rover.

TIM  
Good. I'll meet you at the  
plane and get Cliff to start  
the engines.

INT. TOWNSVILLE HOSPITAL - DAWN

Tim walks in beside Nita on a stretcher, being pushed by two HOSPITAL WORKERS.

TIM  
Take her in there.

TIM (V.O.)

Nita lost three toes and was left with a noticeable limp. But she kept her leg. And her life.

A FEMALE WORKER is standing with a clipboard. She is a foxy young thing.

She eyeballs the hot, sweaty and heroic-looking doctor before her.

The stretcher is wheeled off and Nita reaches for Tim's hand weakly and he takes it briefly and let's go as she is taken away.

TIM

You'll be alright, love.

The Female Worker looks down at Tim's soggy shorts.

FEMALE WORKER

(bewildered)

You're soaking.

TIM

Akai, only my lower half.

Tim leans in closer.

TIM

(whispers)

Perhaps there's somewhere I could take these off?

The Female Worker smiles.

TIM

Just to dry them - you understand.

FEMALE WORKER

Come with me, doctor.

Tim follows the Female Worker up a corridor.

INT. TOWNSVILLE HOSPITAL, ROOM - DAY

Tim's mirrored-reflection is shaving with a razor blade over a small basin. Behind him, the Female Worker is lying atop a gurney-style bed.

TIM (V.O.)

Sure, I lived the bachelor life for a while.

Tim splashes his face with water, washing away the excess shaving cream.

TIM (V.O.)

That was before I met Yvonne.

CUT TO:

INT. CHARTERS TOWERS BASE HOSPITAL - DAY

YVONNE, 26, a nurse, makes her rounds - in slow-motion as she walks. She is perky, brown haired, hazel-eyed.

A FLASH INSERT of RENEE; ALIVE.

TIM (V.O.)

God, Yvonne reminded me of Renee. Everyone thought so. Some would say that the two could have been sisters - separated at birth... She'd graduated nursing in Broken Hill, New South Wales, and took off in a beat-up Volkswagen Bug to work her way around the continent. Providence placed her in the Charters Towers Base hospital where she happened upon an eccentric Irish immigrant widower Flying Doctor in 1957.

(pause)

Not many bushies understood my County Kerry accent, but Yvonne picked it up immediately. She'd heard the accent as a young girl -

where she grew up there were  
 heaps of Irish immigrants  
 working in the BHP mines with  
 her dad before he died, when  
 she was ten.

YVONNE (V.O.)

He had movie star looks - a  
 Spencer Tracey look-a-like,  
 by all accounts. The thick  
 ginger hair, white teeth with  
 perfect bite, and the most  
 stinging blue eyes. I went  
 wobbly at the knees, almost  
 fainting at first sight of  
 the famous 'Doctor Tim'...

INT. STAIRWELL, CHARTERS TOWERS BASE HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Footsteps and singing echo up the stairway.

TIM (O.S.)

*...She was lovely and fair as  
 the rose of the summer  
 Yet, 'twas not her beauty  
 alone that won me  
 Oh no! 'Twas the truth in her  
 eye ever beaming  
 That made me love Mary, the  
 Rose of Tralee...*

INT. NURSES' OFFICE, CHARTERS TOWERS BASE HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Yvonne, her brow furrowed, leaves the office upon hearing  
 the loud singing.

TIM (O.S.)

*The cool shades of evening  
 their mantle were spreading  
 And Mary all smiling was  
 listening to me*

INT. STAIRWELL, CHARTERS TOWERS BASE HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Tim enters into view, leaping up two steps at a time.

TIM

*The moon through the valley  
her pale rays was shedding  
When I won the heart of the  
Rose of Tralee.  
Though lovely and fair as the  
rose of the summer  
Yet, 'twas not her beauty  
alone that won me*

YVONNE (O.S.)

Hey, you there, who are you  
to be making all that racket?

Yvonne leans over the banister to see Tim.

Her knees go weak and she grabs the banister so as not to  
take a tumble.

TIM

*Oh no! 'Twas the truth in her  
eye ever beaming  
That made me love Mary, the  
Rose of Traleeeeeeee!*

He stops and smiles; such perfect white teeth.

TIM

(half  
laughing)

Who am I? Who are you, akai,  
to be asking me, who I am?

YVONNE

I - I'm the nurse on night  
duty.

TIM

(laughs)

I can see that. But, what's  
your name, woman?

YVONNE

Oh, I'm Yvonne Dowdell. And,  
you still haven't told me who  
you are?

Tim keeps ascending the staircase.

TIM

Akai, I'm Tim O'Leary, the flying doctor. I'm here to check up on the patient we flew in yesterday. You know, the back injury stockman from Marpoon who took the nasty fall from the windmill?

YVONNE

I'm sorry - no one told me you were coming--

She loses her breath as she is suddenly eye-to-eye with Tim who has reached the top of the stairs.

TIM

I come and go as I please.

YVONNE

Yes, of course, Doctor O'Leary. I'm sorry, Doctor.

Tim starts walking away, then turns and winks.

TIM

I'll be back here soon then, Yvonne, and you'll have a cuppa tea waiting for me when I do, won't you?

She nodded, her face blushing, then hurried back to her office, fanning her red face.

INT. NURSES' OFFICE, CHARTERS TOWERS BASE HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Yvonne enters, quivering and heart-racing. She puts the small kettle on an oven top. Then she pulls a small compact mirror from her purse.

YVONNE

Oh dear Lord, I'm a mess.

With her other hand, she takes a lipstick from her purse and starts applying it to her pursed lips.

CUT TO:

Tim and Yvonne sit at a small table in the office, drinking tea and laughing together.

TIM

You know, I must have delivered hundreds of outback babies.

(pause)

Many of them named after me! A population of Timothy's is on the rise!

TIM (V.O.)

I'd been busy throwing myself into 'fixing' many of the operational problems with the Flying Doctor Service. So, I hadn't had a steady girl since Renee died, but Yvonne had me thinking I could settle down again.

YVONNE (V.O.)

The other nurses warned me to be careful; said he was damaged goods after the tragic death of his first wife. But, I knew they were just jealous.

TIM (V.O.)

Of course, I was feeling lust for this girl - reminded me of a cross between Liz Taylor in Black Beauty and Queen Liz on her Coronation Day. Yet, there was something familiar and comfortable about Yvonne that intrigued me. She was the right woman at the right time - with her medical background, above average intellect, hilarious outlook and vivacity. And she looked very similar to Renee, too.

Yvonne was virginal,  
Catholic. It was uncanny.

(pause)

I knew this was the beginning  
of something special; the  
beginning of a family.

EXT. O'LEARY RESIDENCE - DAY

A few CHICKENS run around outside a modest Queenslander.

SUPER: "Charleville, Queensland"

YVONNE (V.O.)

Tim and I got married. Then  
the kids - four in five  
years. Needless to say, it  
was a bit of mad house.  
Johnny, Billy, Catherine and  
Jim would run me ragged.

FOUR YOUNG CHILDREN - JOHNNY, BILLY, CATHERINE and JIM -  
tear out of the front door of the house and into the sandy  
yard. All freckled

Yvonne is in hot pursuit. A cigarette in one hand, a cold  
beer in the other.

YVONNE

Kids! No fighting - you hear  
me?

Johnny and Billy already start wrestling each other on the  
ground.

YVONNE (V.O.)

Strewth - Johnny! Billy! Cut  
it out!

Tim walks out from the house and watches the kids.

TIM

Luigi! Wilboy! Stop with the  
horse-play and behave, boys.

Johnny and Billy stop fighting.

CUT TO:

Catherine stroking a pet Kangaroo joey.

TIM (V.O.)

I remember cutting the cord at the hospital and naming my little girl Catherine Marion; named after my first wife Renee... I could sense that Yvonne wasn't pleased so Catherine soon became known to us by her nickname - "Kitten"... Then I gave nicknames to the rest of the kids.

CUT TO:

Jim playing with toy cars in the dust.

TIM (V.O.)

James Louie was "The Lilac" after the New York mobster, Louie the Lilac.

CUT TO:

Johnny punching Billy one more time, for luck.

TIM (V.O.)

Johnny, "Luigi", after another famous mobster. I called Billy "The Knocker" at first because he loved running into walls with his head, but then it was changed to "Wilboy" - because he was the most wilful mongrel of my Australian litter.

INT. O'LEARY RESIDENCE - DUSK

Sat round one big table, all the kids and Yvonne and Tim, with plates of food in front of them. Yvonne sips a glass of beer. NANA MARY, a wrinkled tough-looking lady joins everyone at the table, sipping a beer of her own.

TIM (V.O)

So, that's my family - Luigi,  
Wilboy, Kitten and Lilac -  
and Yvonne and I.

(pause)

And, occasionally, Yvonne's  
mother - the indomitable Nana  
Mary - would visit and stay  
with us.

A KOOKABURRA is sat aloft, perched on a shelf. A DOG  
wanders beneath the table sniffing everyone's feet.

The kids are scrapping and poking each other and noisy. Tim  
watches the scene with a sereneness, a distantness. Nana  
Mary twists the ears of Billy and Johnny.

BILLY

Ow! Ow! Ow!

NANA MARY

Be quiet then and eat up all  
your tucker.

The phone rings and Tim leaves the table to answer it;  
Yvonne's eyes are on him like a hawk. He looks over to her  
and she nods.

TIM

Well, I'm off.

In a comic gesture, Tim raises his hand high, with his  
five-fingers spread out.

TIM

But, just like General McCarthy- I'll be  
back.

Tim slips out the back door and into the early night.

INT. BACK ROOM, O'LEARY RESIDENCE - NIGHT

Nana Mary is folding laundry with Yvonne. Nana Mary takes a  
break from folding and downs her whiskey, licking the top  
of the glass.

NANA MARY

You know Yvonne; I reckon  
 most of your Timothy died in  
 that bloody plane crash  
 thirteen years ago. I mean,  
 how could any fellow get over  
 losing a darling new wife  
 like that, skewered right  
 through, in front of his  
 eyes?

Nana Mary pours herself another large glass of whisky.

NANA MARY

I bet he still blames himself  
 just for having survived...  
 They reckon she was sitting  
 in his seat.

Yvonne sighs loudly.

YVONNE

Why don't you mind your own  
 bloody business Mum and give  
 poor Tim a break. That'd be a  
 change for you.

NANA MARY

Sure, Yvonne, I'll give your  
 darlin' Tim a break all right  
 - I'll break one of his  
 bloody legs!

(laughs)

I'll trip the bugger down the  
 back stairs and break his  
 good leg. That'll stuff him.  
 Then he'll have two gammy  
 legs!

YVONNE

Ohhwah, Mum, you're so bloody  
 vicious.

Yvonne stifles a laugh and then a tear rolls down her  
 cheek.

YVONNE

Oh bugger.

Nana Mary tenderly pushes hair from Yvonne's face.

NANA MARY

It's all so tragic in this  
bloody house.

(pause)

You're doubly cursed, dear  
daughter - You're from over  
the border in Broken Hill and  
you married their hero.  
You'll never cut the mustard  
up here in Queensland, dear.

YVONNE

(sighs)

Yeah. And, I've got to  
compete with a dead Irish  
woman's ghost. I can't win...

Yvonne wipes her eyes.

YVONNE

(sniffs)

Jeeze, I do love a good cry.  
I feel much better now. The  
best cries come after a laugh  
and the best laughs come  
after a cry.

NANA MARY

(grunts)

Yeah, it's all right if you  
have the odd cry, but you cry  
far too much, Yvonne. Crying  
is overrated anyway. What  
good did crying ever do?  
Nothing... Whiskey's better.  
Much better.

Nana Mary raises her glass and knocks it back. Then she  
turns to go back to folding, picking up a pair of white  
underpants.

NANA MARY

(thoughtful)  
Yvonne?

Nana Mary pulls at the elastic top of the underpants, then flips her glasses up to inspect them closely.

NANA MARY  
What are these tiny brown spots on the inside of the elastic waistbands on Tim's undies?

Yvonne is folding and doesn't look up.

YVONNE  
How should I know, Mum, why don't you ask him?

NANA MARY  
(scoffs)  
Yeah, right! Talking to Tim about stains on his underpants? No way.

The two women laugh.

CUT TO:  
EXT. TENNIS COURT - DAY

THWACK! A tennis racket sends a tennis ball zipping across the court at 70 miles per hour. The MALE PLAYER returns the ball to the serving FEMALE PLAYER, ALMA, in her 20s. WHACK!

The ball flies back and Alma prepares herself to return the ball.

WHACK! Her racket swings and connects, launching the ball over the net and - out of reach of the Male Player who is stretching but not close enough.

Alma smiles.

ALMA  
Yes!

MALE PLAYER  
(out of breath)

Lucky shot!

ALMA

We'll see.

CUT TO:

A tree adjacent to the chain-link fence of the court is BUZZING. A few lazy WASPS fly back and forth.

CUT BACK TO:

The Male Player resumes the stance for a new game. Alma reaches beneath her white skirt to pull out a tennis ball, which was tucked away.

She bounces the ball a few times to warm it up, and then throws it high in the air; tilting her whole body back in slow motion, following through with a swing of her racket.

Her mouth is ajar, she's grunting - a WASP, with wings beating slowly, is flying downwards... into Alma's open mouth and down, to the back of her tongue, where it lodges its barb.

COUGH! She's choking. Can't breathe. Alma collapses holding her throat with both hands. Her racket clatters onto the ground.

MALE PLAYER (O.S.)

(panicked)

Alma? Alma!

INT. RFDS CHARLEVILLE BASE, RADIO ROOM - DAY

SUPER: "RFDS CHARLEVILLE BASE"

JACK, a large radio operator, tears the headphones from his neck.

He hauls his bulky frame out of the room.

INT. RFDS CHARLEVILLE BASE, STAIRS - DAY

Jack runs, huffing and puffing up the staircase.

INT. RFDS CHARLEVILLE BASE, LOUNGE - DAY

Jack bursts in, and Tim turns around with a mug of tea in his hand.

TIM

Jack?

JACK

(huffing)

Got - a - call. Need - you -  
now.

TIM

Flying?

JACK

No - no time.

INT. RFDS CHARLEVILLE BASE, STAIRS - DAY

Tim hurries down, Jack behind him. On the last step, Tim winces like his leg is causing him pain.

INT. RFDS CHARLEVILLE BASE, RADIO ROOM - DAY

Tim takes a seat at the equipment, placing the headphones on and pulling the microphone closer. Jack wipes the sweat from his brow.

TIM

This is Dr Tim O'Leary and I  
need you to listen very  
carefully and do everything  
that I tell you.

INT. COUNTRY HOME - DAY

Alma is lying out - her breathing laboured - the Male Player is pacing, and DOUG and his WIFE, both 50s, are stricken with worry. Doug is holding a microphone.

DOUG

(scared)

She's turning blue!

TIM (O.S.)

I can hear her having difficulty breathing, you'll have to do an emergency tracheotomy. Have you ever done any sort of operation?

DOUG

Spaying cattle and that's about it. What the hell's a tracheotomy?

TIM (O.S.)

If her breathing continues to worsen, she will soon be unconscious from lack of oxygen. Get your wife to the radio, and get yourself a sharp knife.

CUT TO:

INT. RFDS CHARLEVILLE BASE, RADIO ROOM - DAY

DOUG (O.S.)

Oh my God.

Tim rubs his hands down his face.

WIFE (O.S.)

Doctor, is Alma going to be okay? She's only a guest here and this is the most awful thing to happen. It's the last day of her holiday and I would hate for anything to happen.

Tim shakes his head.

TIM

You need to get her head and neck extended over the arm of the sofa. Can you do that? Someone hold her head between their hands. Someone strong. This is the most vital requirement of all.

(pause)

Now Doug, you must feel for the Adam's apple and start a vertical cut, half an inch below the cartilage extending down for about one and half inches.

Tim takes a breath and the static over the radio seems to crackle indefinitely.

TIM

Got it?

WIFE (O.S.)

He's shaking, Doctor.

TIM

Listen up, you need to get psyched up for this, Doug. We need you to keep it together, okay?

(pause)

You want to cut until air gushes out at you. Then get some plastic tubing and put it into her windpipe so she can breathe.

Tim looks up to the ceiling and closes his eyes. He mouths a silent prayer to himself.

DOUG (O.S.)

(meekly)

I think she's gone.

INT. COUNTRY HOME - DAY

The Male Player is holding Alma's head back. She is flaccid and lifeless.

Doug is holding a pen knife; hovering near her neck. His wife is stunned into silence.

TIM (O.S.)

(shouts)

She will be if you don't act immediately! Her heart can't last much longer!

DOUG  
May God help us all.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. RFDS CHARLEVILLE BASE, RADIO ROOM - DAY

Jack, standing by the door, and Tim, sitting in front of the radio, wait. The crackle of the radio keeps them company.

WIFE (O.S.)  
He has cut very deeply  
doctor. But there's no air.  
She must be dead.

TIM  
Tell him to keep going, but  
for goodness sake, make sure  
that he's in the mid-line. He  
must stay in the mid-line!

GASP! Suddenly, Alma takes a breath.

TIM  
Make sure he's right in the  
middle!

WIFE (O.S.)  
My God, doctor, he's opened  
her windpipe and there's air  
rushing in and out, and  
there's blood everywhere.

TIM  
Okay, good. Try to keep it  
dry. As long as the blood  
doesn't get into that hole.

Tim slumps back exhausted.

TIM  
I'll meet you at the  
hospital. Good work, Doug.

INT. RFDS CHARLEVILLE BASE, SHOWER BLOCK - DAY

Tim looks around, pulling back the shower curtain. Empty. He's all alone.

Tim sits on the floor, holding his leg. He looks pained.

He pulls his eyeglasses case from his pocket and fumbles with it. He drops it and it lands open on the floor. Empty.

He lets out an audible groan and then grabs the case, throwing it across the room. Tim buries his head in his arms.

INT. RFDS CHARLEVILLE BASE, MEDICAL STORAGE CUPBOARD - DAY

Tim opens a medical chest. He pulls his bag close and takes one bottle of morphine from the chest and places it in his bag. Then he reaches for a second bottle-

The door opens suddenly. Jack appears.

JACK

Tim! Just wanted to say bonza work with the radio-assisted tracheotomy, mate. Horrible business, but you were bloody amazing.

TIM

(guarded)

Thanks.

JACK

Um - can I give you a hand with anything.

TIM

Uh - no, just restocking my medical bag.

Tim holds up the second bottle of morphine.

JACK

Alright, mate. Better go back and man the radio.

Jack turns and leaves.

Tim moves to drop the second bottle of morphine into his bag and - with a speedy sleight of hand (in a similar fashion to catching the flies in mid-air) - he motions to drop the bottle and moves his hand, but there is still only one bottle in his bag. The second bottle is seemingly magicked away into nothingness.

INT. DAD'S DEN, O'LEARY RESIDENCE - DAY

Billy cautiously enters the den/office of Tim O'Leary.

His eyes are wide as he looks over the walls of certificates and the desk strewn with papers and packets of pharmaceutical drugs.

The walls are piled high to the window sills with boxes. Billy glances inside an open box carefully - pills; free samples.

YVONNE (O.S.)

Bill!

Billy spins around guiltily.

Yvonne marches over to Billy and takes him by the arm.

YVONNE

You know when Dad's gone, you are not allowed to go into his den. It's boring in here anyway and no place to play for little boys.

BILLY

What are those boxes, mum?

YVONNE

Just free samples from the drug companies - they know how your Dad makes the RFDS drug orders so they give him heaps of samples of all their new products.

Billy nods as he is led out of the den.

YVONNE

I reckon your Dad's a bit of a Bowerbird, because he collects the strangest stuff for his nest. He could open his own bloody chemist shop in there.

INT. O'LEARY RESIDENCE - DAY

Yvonne leads Billy to the kitchen table, where he sits down. He starts playing with a bowl of sugar - taking the spoon and piling mounds of sugar into his mouth.

Yvonne looks over.

YVONNE

Billy!

BILLY

(innocently)

What mum?

YVONNE

Don't I feed you enough?

Billy smiles. Johnny walks in through the backdoor and joins Billy at the table.

JOHNNY

Mum?

YVONNE

Yes, John.

JOHNNY

What does Dad really do, Mum?  
Why's he away so much?

Yvonne senses a discussion and takes a seat at the table across from her boys.

YVONNE (V.O.)

Tim was away so often; always travelling to and from

Brisbane, Charleville, Mt.  
Isa and Cairns. So, I wasn't  
surprised, and the boys  
deserved to know how  
important their Dad's job was  
to the people of the  
Australian outback.

YVONNE

Well, Dad is known amongst  
the medical fraternity as an  
expert in long distance  
diagnostics. He asks a set of  
questions over the phone or  
on the radio to find out  
what's wrong with the  
patient. Then he tells them  
what drugs they should take  
to help cure it.

JOHNNY

How does he know if he hasn't  
seen them?

YVONNE

They tell him their symptoms  
and most of the time he's  
dead right about the right  
medicine to take to make them  
better.

(pause)

Thousands of bushies have  
never met him, yet everyone  
in the outback has their own  
favourite Doctor Tim story.

A smile softens Yvonne's face.

YVONNE

You know, your Dad is a real  
professional, boys. He reads  
all the medical journals,  
studies all the new  
developments and writes  
articles for heaps of  
publications, too. He's got  
so much passion about his

work and about his continued education. In fact, he's about to complete another postgraduate diploma in Aviation Medicine.

(pause)

Billy, you saw all his certificates on the walls in the den.

Billy nods.

BILLY

Dad's so brainy.

YVONNE

And your Dad was awarded a CBE from Queen Elizabeth for helping Outback Peoples. And he was asked to be the Queen's private doctor when she was here for the bi-centenary of Captain Cook's landing in Botany Bay. That was the second time they'd asked Dad to be her tour doctor... She must like him - he did it for her back in 1953 as well.

JOHNNY

(laughs)

God Save the Queen!

YVONNE

Of course, your Dad reckons that he prefers to use the radio than the phone, because you can either talk or listen, but you can't do both at the same time... People on the phone repeat themselves and talk over the top of each other, but on the two-way radio you've got to get your thoughts organized before you

speak and then have to listen carefully.

JOHNNY

But, how does he give them medicine to get better, if he's not there with them?

YVONNE

Oh, once he's confident with his diagnosis, he directs them to their RFDS medical chest. Every homestead has one fully stocked by the service. Your Dad instructs them to grab a numbered bottle, and he dictates the dosage information, and he has them write it all down and repeat the details back to him.

(pause)

There are over two hundred different kinds of drugs in each RFDS medicine box.

BILLY

Wow!

YVONNE

He told me that he wants one of you boys to become a doctor when you grow up. That would make him so proud. Do you want to become doctors like your Dad?

BILLY

What do we have to do for that?

YVONNE

That's easy Billy. You'll have to study very very hard at school.

Billy frowns immediately.

BILLY

Well, I don't want to be a  
Doctor then.

JOHNNY

Me neither!

Yvonne smiles.

EXT. O'LEARY RESIDENCE - DUSK

Tim walks up to the house, past the emu, chickens, two wild  
pigs and some KANGAROOS.

TIM (V.O.)

Many say, *home is where the  
heart is*. But, where's your  
home when your heart is  
indescribably broken?

He looks up to the stars beginning to twinkle far above.

INT. O'LEARY RESIDENCE - DUSK

CATHERINE

Daddy!

TIM

Hi Kitten.

Catherine throws her arms around Tim's leg and he smiles,  
with an ever-so slight wince.

OLDER BILLY runs over, too.

OLDER BILLY

Dad, dad - John was beating  
on me and almost knocked my  
bloody teeth out.

TIM

(laughs)

Akai, Wilboy - I've told you  
a million times not to  
exaggerate, boy.

Tim rubs Older Billy's scruff of hair.

Yvonne walks over and Tim kisses her on the cheek.

YVONNE

(quietly)

Good to be back?

Tim looks calm and serene.

TIM

(quietly)

Always. Always.

Yvonne sips from a cold glass of beer.

OLDER JOHNNY

Can I get you a beer, Dad?

TIM

Not tonight, Luigi. Might get  
a call and need to have my  
wits about me.

OLDER JOHNNY

What happens without your  
wits, Dad?

TIM

Too much alcohol and you can  
be intoxicated... And - if  
you're an 'alchy' - you can  
start getting the shakes if  
you don't get *enough* booze,  
Luigi.

(pause)

That's why I'd much rather be  
operated on by a surgeon who  
is a heroin addict than an  
alcoholic surgeon - as long  
as the addict has had his  
"fix" prior to the operation.

OLDER JOHNNY

What do you mean, Dad?

TIM

You see, the alcoholic's  
knife would be shaking like a  
shitting dog and the addict's  
would be strong and true to  
the cut.

The kids fall quiet.

OLDER JOHNNY

Oh - then can I have a beer?

Tim laughs and gives Older Johnny a playful kick away from him.

TIM

Wilboy, come over here for a  
minute.

EXT. O'LEARY RESIDENCE - NIGHT

Tim and Older Billy sit out on the stoop.

TIM

How do you feel about coming  
on one of my trips?

OLDER BILLY

(excited)

Could I? Wow!

TIM

Yes - I'll show you a thing  
or two. The next trip is  
tomorrow - pulling some  
rotten teeth, circumcising  
some newborns - after the  
work's done, I can teach you  
how to fish for Barramundi;  
how's that sound?

Older Billy is grinning.

EXT. PLANE - DAY

Tim and Older Billy are entering the plane and Yvonne, Catherine, John and Jim are waving goodbye.

Tim turns when he gets to the top of the stairs, and - his signature move - he sticks his arm up.

All of the kids copy him.

Tim spreads his fingers into his five-fingered wave, with a big grin. Older Billy does the same beside him.

CUT TO:

MONTAGE OF IMAGES: Plane taking off; KEVIN, 30s, the pilot, at the controls; Older Billy watching gleefully out the plane window at the wild Outback below; the plane landing; Tim with a line of DENTAL PATIENTS; Older Billy mesmerized as he holds the head steady of a OLD MALE DENTAL PATIENT as Tim extracts a painful tooth; the faces of CRYING BABIES as Tim looms over to circumcise them.

EXT. LAGOON - NIGHT

A campfire is raging. Kevin passes a bottle of whiskey to Tim as Older Billy watches the fire.

KEVIN

You know, Bill, circumcised  
foreskins are the best bait  
for Barramundi fishing.

OLDER BILLY

What?

Tim chuckles as he sips his whiskey.

KEVIN

(slurring  
his words)

It's true, mate. Your Dad and  
me swear by 'em. Great for  
Barramundi fishing in the  
Rivers of the Gulf. They're  
colourful, tasty and highly  
durable. You can use 'em over  
and over and over again.  
Tough and tasty... Mmmm.

OLDER BILLY

I'm going to bed. Goodnight  
Dad, goodnight Captain Kev.

Tim comes over.

TIM

Night, Wilboy.

OLDER BILLY

Don't drink too much whiskey,  
Dad. You don't want to get  
them shakes.

TIM

(laughs)

Oh Wilboy, you don't know  
much about your old man, do  
you? This stuff is like lolly  
water for me.

Older Billy rolls over to go to sleep. Tim heartily sings a  
rendition of *Danny boy*.

INT. PLANE - DAY

The echoes of 'Danny boy' ring out over the sounds of a  
plane in flight.

Older Billy and Tim sit together. Tim gives Older Billy a  
wink.

INT. O'LEARY RESIDENCE - DAY

Tim and Older Billy enter, and Catherine charges over to  
Tim.

CATHERINE

Why can't I come on a trip  
with you, Dad?

TIM

Kitten, you're too young.

CATHERINE

That's crap, I'm nearly nine.

TIM

And that's too young.

CATHERINE

No, it's because you hate girls. Nana says so. She says you're a 'misogynist.'

Tim looks over to Yvonne.

TIM

Nice to hear your mother's been teaching the kids a few new words.

Yvonne rolls her eyes. Tim strokes his leg.

Older Billy smiles mockingly at Catherine.

CATHERINE

It's not fair!

Catherine storms out the back door in a rage.

INT. DAD'S DEN, O'LEARY RESIDENCE - DAY

Older Billy walks in, smiling to himself. He takes a seat proudly in Tim's chair at the desk.

TIM (O.S.)

I'll be back in a minute.

Older Billy looks worried and quickly ducks under the desk and cramps tightly into the corner.

Tim enters the room, holding his glasses case. He appears agitated and flustered. Tim shuts the door to the den. He un-tucks his shirt, as he walks over and sits at the desk.

CUT TO:

OLDER BILLY'S P.O.V.: Under the desk, Older Billy sees Tim open his glasses case and take out a vial. He breaks it open, and pulls up his shirt.

Tim injects his belly fat with a dose of morphine.

A tiny drop of blood appears when the needle is removed; staining the elastic waistband of Tim's underpants.

CUT BACK TO:

Older Billy appears confused and stunned.

Tim appears relieved and calmed by the morphine hit.

INT. CONFESSIONAL, CHURCH - DAY

Tim takes a deep breath.

TIM (V.O.)

I spent my entire adult life  
addicted to morphine; the  
result of my steeplechase  
accident at age 16.

TIM

Bless me, Father, for I have  
sinned...

(choked up)

I have... I have lied to my  
family, I have lied to  
myself...

(sniffs)

I have stolen from my  
employers, and - I have a  
habit; an addiction.

A MONTAGE OF IMAGES: Young Tim getting injected over and over in his wounded leg; Tim in med school picking up vials left around the hospital; Tim's sleight of hand with the medical chest - he was actually still holding the second bottle of morphine, which he places secretly into his glasses case; Tim grabbing his glasses case and heading to the den; Tim returning to sit for dinner with the family, calm and serene.

PRIEST (O.S.)

But, you have helped so many  
people.

TIM

I wonder sometimes if it was  
the guilt of Renee's death,  
Father. Or the shame of my  
addiction that kept me  
working as a flying doctor;  
helping others, saving lives.

(pause)

Or, was it that I just needed  
access to a steady supply of  
morphine?

PRIEST (O.S.)

You're selling yourself  
short, my son. You're a good  
man, a good doctor. And it's  
not your place, or my place,  
to judge you.

Tim sits silently.

INT. BEDROOM, O'LEARY RESIDENCE - DAY

Tim is lying in bed, pale and deteriorating.

TIM (V.O.)

In 1980, I was diagnosed as  
having chronic leukemia...  
Ironically, I would be  
prescribed morphine for the  
pain.

Yvonne enters and kneels beside the bed.

YVONNE

Tim.

In a delirium, Tim looks around the room, then his eyes  
fall upon Yvonne.

TIM

Yes, darling.

YVONNE

Some people are here to see  
you.

TIM

See me?

YVONNE

Yes, the health department.

TIM

Right, you better send them in.

CUT TO:

Tim is sitting up in bed, with a pillow at his back.

TWO OFFICERS walk in. One a young man, the other older and more senior in the department.

OLDER OFFICER

Hello, Doctor O'Leary.  
Pleasure to meet with you -  
just sorry that it's under  
these circumstances.

Tim nods lucidly.

OLDER OFFICER

Some discrepancies have come  
to the attention of the  
health department and we're  
trying to get to the bottom  
of it all.

TIM

How can I help?

OLDER OFFICER

There's no way to say this,  
so I'll come straight out  
with it - are you or those  
wayward sons of yours selling  
morphine?

Yvonne is stood silently in the corner of the room. She looks to Tim.

OLDER OFFICER

According to our records,  
you're taking enough

medication for 20 men with cancer.

This information sinks in.

TIM

Of course I'm not selling it.  
Do I look like a dealer? I  
take it all myself.

The officers exchange astounded glances.

YOUNG OFFICER

That's impossible, sir.

The Older Officer raises his hand to quieten the Young Officer.

OLDER OFFICER

Unless you already have a  
predisposition and tolerance  
to the drug..?

Tim raises his eyebrows but remains quiet.

TIM (V.O.)

After over 45 years of usage,  
the body creates a huge  
resistance to pain medication  
and the dose has to be  
increased significantly to  
get the same serenity effect  
as before. So it was a battle  
against myself - keeping my  
leg pain-free and perfectly  
medicated 24/7.

(pause)

Me - a highly functioning  
addict.

(pause)

Like the heroin addict  
surgeon, who's just had his  
fix; all addicts are tragic  
but they can accomplish  
amazing things and even  
contribute to humanity. I was  
proof of that much.

There is a moment of awkward silence.

OLDER OFFICER

Well, I think we're done here. I wish you all the best, Doctor O'Leary. Good bye.

The officers leave the room. Tim lies back down to sleep.

Yvonne takes Tim's glasses case from his bedside dresser - she opens it, curiously - inside a spoon and syringe.

EXT. O'LEARY RESIDENCE - DAY

The officers get into their vehicle.

INT. DEPARTMENT VEHICLE - DAY

The Young Officer turns to the Older Officer.

YOUNG OFFICER

The most decorated flying doctor in history is an addict?

OLDER OFFICER

That man has done more for this country's aviation medicine than any other person past or present. Let's not ruin his good name, sonny.

The Young Officer starts the engine.

OLDER OFFICER

He'll be dead in a few weeks.

EXT. O'LEARY RESIDENCE - DAY

The vehicle drives away.

CUT TO:

A hearse outside the O'Leary Residence.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Timothy O'Leary of Australia's Royal Flying Doctor Service was a man of medicine, a hero to the outback people and actually changed the course of history in aviation medicine around the world.

CUT TO:

EXT. AIRFIELD - DAY

A plane is driving slowly along the strip.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Before Timothy O'Leary's death on July 20<sup>th</sup>, 1987, at the age of 62, he personally saved thousands of lives over the course of three decades.

(pause)

Survived by his wife Yvonne and four kids, his memory and legacy lives on.

(pause)

The RFDS even named a new plane after Doctor Tim. It's still flying proudly over outback Queensland.

Emblazoned on the nose of the plane are the words: "Doctor Timothy."

SUPER:

*"We are taught from a very early age that everything that lives, must eventually die.*

*Those of us who are genuine believers, leave the timing of our deaths in God's hands and accept His ruling unconditionally."*

**~ Timothy Joseph O'Leary (1925-1987)**

FADE TO: Tim waving his five-fingered wave.

THE END.