

THE BUTLER'S SON

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. TERMON, A GRAND NORTHERN IRISH ESTATE - EARLY EVENING,
JULY 1914

Aerial shot of postman cycling up a long lane past meadows,
wood and stream.

He gets off his bicycle at the imposing front door of
Termon, leans it against the wall, produces a telegram from
his satchel and rings the bell.

The door is opened by ROBERT EDWARDS, the butler, a
distinguished man in his early forties. He takes the
telegram.

INT. TERMON KITCHEN. SOON AFTER

Close-up of Robert's hands opening telegram.

Close-up of telegram reading

TO EDWARDS, BUTLER, TERMON,
CARRICKMORE, TYRONE

ANGLO-JAPANESE ALLIANCE CONTRACT
ENDED STOP ARRIVING HOME TODAY STOP
MAKE TERMON READY STOP

MAJOR MARTIN

CUT TO:

A row of faces looking shocked,
from left: VIOLET, a housemaid,
MRS RAPIER the Cook and Violet's
mother, Robert, his wife MARIA, a
senior housemaid, and their son
MAX, 18, a handsome youth with an
open, optimistic, intelligent
face.

MRS RAPIER
Frollocks and fiddlesticks, he
didn't give us much notice, did
he?

She turns to Robert.

MRS RAPIER (CONT'D)
Better get cracking on dinner,
then. Usual suspects?

ROBERT
I imagine so, after a year in
Japan. Vegetable soup, Irish stew,
spotted dick and custard?

MRS RAPIER
My thoughts exactly. Come on,
Violet.

She wipes her hands on her pinafore, and bustles off,
followed by Violet.

ROBERT
Maria, you'd better get the master
bedroom aired. Max, can you nip up
to Fox's and get two bottles of
Bush? I think Nurse has been at it
again.

EXT. THE ROAD TO CARRICKMORE VILLAGE - SOON AFTER.

Max is cycling along with his knapsack on his back. The Major's Rolls-Royce Silver Ghost comes the other way,
driven by a soldier.

As it passes, Max sees Major Martin sitting in the back
seat on the far side, looking straight ahead.

On the side closest to Max sits a beautiful Oriental woman.
Her eyes meet Max's for a moment, then they are gone. Max
looks back, wobbles and nearly falls off the bike as it
skids to a halt.

Close-up of his face as he blinks, his mouth open.

INT. TERMON KITCHEN - HALF AN HOUR LATER

Max enters to find NURSE, an ancient crone in a nightdress,
making hot milk in a saucepan, and his collie Fido sitting
on the floor. Fido comes to Max, his tail wagging, and Max
ruffles his head.

MAX
Hello, chum.

As Max takes two bottles of Bush from his knapsack, Nurse
pours the steaming milk into a mug.

NURSE

I hear the Major's back with some
Chink floozie.

MAX

What? I imagine she's Japanese,
Nurse. I saw her briefly in the
car.

NURSE

Jappo? God help us. They eat dogs
out there. You'd better keep an
eye on Fido.

Fido looks up at Max, an ear cocked.

MAX

Indeed. Cook's ordered the new
Japanese cookbook, Fifty Ways to
Wok your Dog.

Nurse looks at him suspiciously, then waves her hand in a beckoning fashion.

NURSE

Here, give me some of that. The
Major won't miss it.

She uncorks the Bush and pours a generous tot into the milk.

MAX

Are they having dinner?

NURSE

No, they're banjaxed from the
journey. Went straight to bed.

She nods at a pot on the range.

NURSE (CONT'D)

There's some Irish stew if you
want it.

EXT. WOODLAND WALK BY LAKE - NEXT DAY

MUSIC CUE: The humming chorus from Puccini's Madame Butterfly

Max, out walking with Fido, rounds the corner of an ancient oak and comes face to face with MAJOR MARTIN, the owner of Termon estate, in army uniform and smoking a cigar, and a beautiful young Japanese woman in a lilac kimono with a burnt orange sash. This is KUMIKO ASANO.

MAX
Back from Japan, sir?

MAJOR MARTIN
Evidently. Worst year of my life,
although it had its...rewards.

He looks at the woman beside him.

MAJOR MARTIN (CONT'D)
Kumiko, this is young Max, the
butler's son. Max, this is Kumiko,
my wife.

Max looks at Kumiko. She has a face like a slightly amused
elf, and her eyes are a flickering, iridescent green

Beat
Kumiko bows.

KUMIKO
Good morning, Max.

Max bows back.

MAX
Ohay gozaimash, Kumiko-san.

Kumiko's eyes widen, and she smiles.

MAJOR MARTIN

Don't be surprised. He's read every book in the library.

They walk on; the Major in his uniform and Sam Browne belt,
bearing his moustache before him and trailing an air of
cigar smoke and superiority behind.

And Kumiko, seeming to float beside him.

MAX
Gosh, Fido.

Fido barks.

EXT. SMALL COURTYARD - SOON AFTER

Max walks up to the door then up the steps leading to the
rooms above the coach house where he lives with his
parents.

INT. RUSTIC ROOM - IMMEDIATELY AFTER

Range, two armchairs, dining table, cupboard with china tableware, large window overlooking courtyard.

Maria is stirring a pot of stew on an ancient black range. Max enters and hugs her.

MARIA

Hello, son. Cup of tea? Your father should be home soon after he's finished serving lunch.

Max sits down to read the Belfast Telegraph. A door slams outside. He looks down through the window to see his father crossing the courtyard in his black butler's suit, whistling The Trout by Schubert.

(Pause)

Robert enters the room and kisses Maria.

ROBERT

Smells good, Maria. As always.

MAX

I met the young Madam by the lake with the Major earlier, father.

ROBERT

Yes, she's very striking, isn't she? Quite a lovely person. It seems she was his interpreter when he was in Japan. An orphan, by all accounts.

MARIA

She must be only 20. Far too young to be married.

ROBERT

Ha! You're one to talk.

MARIA

She is a poppet, though. Her hair's like blackberries at midnight.

ROBERT

What a lovely expression, Maria. You should have been a poet.

MARIA

Too busy making stew, sadly.

MAX

Shall we continue the game after dinner, father?

ROBERT

Why not? Where were we?

MAX

You were just about to lose your queen, in which case there would be little point in continuing.

ROBERT

Very funny. I remember the days when I used to beat you.

INT. TERMON HOUSE KITCHEN - NEXT MORNING

Max enters to find Mrs Rapier bending over a pot of tomato and basil soup.

MRS RAPIER

Max, you wouldn't be a dear and get me a bag of flour from McGarrity's?

MAX

Of course, Cook.

Max lifts the lid on another pot and finds marmalade bubbling away.

MRS RAPIER

Want to try these and tell me what you think?

MAX

Love to.

He gets two spoons from the cutlery drawer, and tastes both.

MAX (CONT'D)

Soup's yum, and marmalade's double yum.

MRS RAPIER

Good oh. Prophet in my own land, I am.

EXT. OUTSIDE STABLES IN LARGE COURTYARD - SOON AFTER

Max, knapsack over his shoulder, wheels his bicycle out from a room beside the stables. WILLY MAGEE the farrier appears at the stable door. Up a ladder, ALAN KILPATRICK, the carpenter, is fixing a joist.

WILLY

You going up to Carrickmore, Max?
Any chance of a bag of hoof nails
from Rafferty's?

ALAN

And a gross of six-inches?

MAX

Flipping heck. I'll be charging my usual delivery fee, of course.

WILLY

Naturally. Bugger all from me, and bugger all squared from Alan.

Max laughs.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE ESTATE HOTHOUSE - SOON AFTER

Max leans his bicycle against the wall, and inside finds WILLY MAGEE the gardener and YOUNG WILLY MAGEE the gardener's son sitting on a bench drinking tea.

YOUNG WILLY

Going up to Carrickmore, Max?

MAX

Aye. Need anything?

YOUNG WILLY

Don't think so. Dad?

WILLY

Don't think so.

MAX

Glad to hear it. I don't think my knapsack could have taken much more.

YOUNG WILLY

Want some gooseberries for Seamus McGarrity?

MAX

Aye, can do.

Young Willy gets up, wraps a handful in a muslin bag, and hands them over.

EXT. OUTSIDE RAFFERTY'S SHOP, CARRICKMORE VILLAGE - SOON AFTER

Max leans his bike against the wall, and goes inside.

INT. RAFFERTY'S SHOP. - IMMEDIATELY AFTER

On one side, shelves crammed with hardware, from the ceiling everything from hams to bicycles hanging, behind a polished wooden counter shelves of clothes, shoes and boots. dusty sunlight shafts down from skylights.

Owner PAT RAFFERTY is standing behind the counter.

PAT

Ah, young Master Edwards. "What'll it be?

MAX

A gross of six-inch nails and a bag of hoofs, please, Mr Rafferty.
On the Termon account.

INT. MCGARRITY'S SHOP - FIVE MINUTES LATER

Stone floor, bags of potatoes and turnips against the wall, sweet jars on shelves behind the counter.

The bell above the door tings. Max enters. Owner SEAMUS McGARRITY emerges from a side door behind the counter.

MAX

Bag of flour for Cook, please, Mr McGarrity. On account.

SEAMUS

Grand job.

He measures the flour out from a hessian sack behind the counter, then looks back at the rows of glass sweet jars behind him.

SEAMUS (CONT'D)

Like a handful of clove rock?

MAX

I'll take some brandy balls for father, thank you very much.

(MORE)

MAX (CONT'D)

(beat)

Oh, and here's some gooseberries
from young Willy Magee. You'd be a
fool to refuse them.

Seamus laughs.

SEAMUS

Yes, very funny. Too clever for my
own good, you are.

EXT. THE BIG YARD AT TERMON - SOON AFTER

As Max cycles through the archway into the big yard, John Jameson the blacksmith is ringing the bell above the coach house for the workers to come in from the fields for their midday meal.

Willy the farrier emerges from the stables. Alan the carpenter climbs down from his ladder.

Fido comes running to meet Max.

MAX

Lunchtime, chum.

INT. MAX'S PARENTS' LIVING ROOM - SOON AFTER

Max enters to find his mother making vegetable soup.

MAX

That smells delicious, mother.
Would you like some meat to go
with it?

MARIA

That would be lovely, son. Will it
be fresh?

Max laughs, and picks up his father's rifle from where it leans against the china cupboard.

MAX

It'll still be twitching. Rabbit
or pigeon?

INT. ROBERT AND MARIA'S BEDROOM - NEXT MORNING

Maria turns the clock on the bedside table to see that it is 6.30am, and slumps back onto the pillow.

Max enters with two cups of tea.

MAX

Still in bed, mother? Are you all right?

MARIA

I'll be up in a minute, dear, but I seem to have come down with a bit of flu. Cold and shivery and aching all over.

ROBERT

Do you want me to light the fires in the big house, Maria? I can get up now and do it before I serve breakfast.

MAX

I'll do it, father. You stay in bed and keep mother warm.

Max hands his parents the cups of tea.

MARIA

Bless you, son

ROBERT

Thank you, Max.

INT. TERMON HOUSE - SOON AFTER

Max walks through the kitchen and into the dining room, which is dominated by a large table, with a sideboard along one wall for serving dishes. Above the fireplace is an ancient painting of a glum clergyman.

MAX

Cheer up, chum. It may never happen.

He sets to work with paper and kindling.

INT. SAME SCENE - SOON AFTER

With the fire crackling, Max moves into the drawing room, with various sofas and armchairs dotted around the room, French windows looking out at the great oak tree in the middle of the lawn and a grand piano. He continues to the library.