

The Honourable Gentleman

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. WAR OFFICE - DAY

Title over action: 1919

Civilians walk past soldiers standing guard outside the entrance. An army captain approaches. This is ROBERT Campbell, 33, moustached, respectable looking, although should have faint scars on his face.

Robert hands one of the guards his papers. The guard inspects them, then studies Robert.

GUARD

Go right in sir.

Robert nods and heads towards the entrance, pocketing his papers.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Robert sits outside a door. Waiting. He fiddles with his cap.

On Robert: Apprehensive.

The door opens. Robert stands, puts his cap on and enters the room.

INT. BRIGADIER'S OFFICE - DAY

Robert walks through the room towards three officers sitting expectantly. In the centre is the BRIGADIER, he is flanked by his subordinates. When Robert reaches them, he stands to attention and salutes the Brigadier.

ROBERT

Captain Robert Campbell, first
battalion, East Surrey Regiment,
sir.

The Brigadier salutes back.

BRIGADIER

At ease Captain.

Robert stands at ease.

BRIGADIER

Sit down.

Cautiously, Robert takes off his cap and sits before the tribunal. The Brigadier examines a document in front of him.

BRIGADIER

We have your written testimony
here, which will be included on
your record. But given the contents
of your statement, the War Office

(MORE)

BRIGADIER (cont'd)
 felt it prudent to conduct a more
 thorough investigation into the
 circumstances and events that
 occurred during the course of your
 internment. Do you understand?

ROBERT
 Yes sir.

BRIGADIER
 We need to corroborate your
 testimony with your verbal account.
 So, in your own words, tell us what
 happened.

On Robert: Staring into the middle distance, reminiscing.

INT. HALLWAY, CAMPBELL FAMILY HOME - DAY

SFX: Knocking at the front door.

LOUISA (O.S.)
 Gladys, answer the door.

Title over action: August 1914.

A girl bounds down the stairs towards the door, this is
 GLADYS Campbell, late teens, simple dress. She opens the
 front door. Standing outside is Robert, 29, handsome in his
 officer's uniform. With him is Lieutenant WILLIAM Morrith,
 24, youthful, equally as dashing.

GLADYS
 (excited)
 Robbie!

ROBERT
 Hello trouble!

Gladys pulls her brother into a big, affectionate hug.

GLADYS
 I thought you were travelling right
 away?

ROBERT
 We were fortunate enough to be
 granted twenty four hours leave. So
 here I am.

GLADYS
 (looking to William)
 And who's your friend?

William removes his hat and kisses Gladys' hand.

WILLIAM
 Lieutenant William Morrith, miss.

Gladys is flattered, never had a man in uniform address her like this before.

ROBERT

The Lieutenant is my best man,
nobody I'd rather have by my side.
That also means I can keep him in
check.

William grins, taking the hint, he lets go of Gladys' hand.

WILLIAM

Come, come Captain. We are bound
for France and marching off to war.
Surely you won't deny a bold
warrior some time with such a
beauty?

ROBERT

(laughing)

I can and will you dog!

GLADYS

Mama will so pleased to see you.

ROBERT

Where is she?

GLADYS

In the kitchen.

Robert heads for the kitchen, Gladys and William are left alone, Gladys leads William into the sitting room, both are enjoying each other's company.

INT. KITCHEN, CAMPBELL FAMILY HOME - DAY

A middle aged woman stands at the kitchen counter preparing a lunch. This is LOUISA Campbell. Robert enters. He stands at the door and knocks. Louisa turns.

LOUISA

(stunned)

My darling boy.

Robert walks towards her. She walks up and embraces him.

LOUISA

I thought you couldn't come?

ROBERT

I was given leave.

LOUISA

For how long?

ROBERT

Just tonight. I sail tomorrow.

LOUISA

Well, at least we have tonight.
(steps back and studies
her son)
You're all skin and bones. The army
doesn't feed you?

ROBERT

(grinning)
They feed us just fine.

LOUISA

Clearly not, but we can put that
right.

SFX: Gladys laughing from the living room.

LOUISA

What's that?

ROBERT

That would be Gladys getting
acquainted with my second in
command.

LOUISA

(inquisitive)
I see. What's he like?

ROBERT

Now, I know that tone. Gladys is
too young for all that.

LOUISA

But it's nice to know that she's
attracting attention, and from an
officer no less.

ROBERT

Mother...

LOUISA

(ignoring him)
What is he like?

ROBERT

Lieutenant Morrith? He is a model
officer, loyal to his men and
committed to doing his duty with
the honour and dignity that is
expected of him.

LOUISA

He follows your example.

ROBERT

I hope so. But he is still a
soldier in His Majesty's Army so is
unworthy of Gladys' affections.

LOUISA
I don't think so.

 ROBERT
Mother...

 LOUISA
I think an officer would be a good
match. That's all.

Louisa goes back to the counter.

On Robert: Smiles to himself.

INT. DINING ROOM, CAMPBELL FAMILY HOME - NIGHT

Louisa, Gladys, William and Robert sit around the dinner table. Gladys and William sit next to each other, Robert and Louisa sit next to each other. Louisa has gone very quiet this evening.

 GLADYS
When do you leave?

 ROBERT
First thing in the morning. We need
to get to Southampton, then on to
France and from there we'll go
wherever we're told.

 GLADYS
 (to William)
Is it true what they say? That it
will all be over before Christmas?

 WILLIAM
Certainly. We will be there and
back in no time at all.

 LOUISA
What about the Germans?

 WILLIAM
Madam I assure you, the Germans
will be fleeing back to Berlin with
their tails between their legs once
we're through with them.

 GLADYS
 (to Robert)
Is that true Robbie?

 ROBERT
Of course.

Louisa is unsettled by Robert's confidence.

GLADYS

Wonderful.

(to William)

So you're not scared to meet them?

Beat. William hesitates for a moment. Robert looks at him, awaiting his response.

WILLIAM

(unconvincing)

No...On the contrary, I'm looking forward to it...

(composes himself)

...Because we have the best soldiers...

(looks at Robert)

...The best leaders...

(back to Gladys)

...And comfort in the knowledge that we cannot lose.

Gladys and William engage in private conversation. Louisa turns to Robert.

LOUISA

It's not true, is it?

ROBERT

(sighs)

I don't know. Who can know for sure if it will be as easy as all that? But we will do our job, and if we do it right we will be home soon.

LOUISA

I'm sure you will, I just find myself thinking...

ROBERT

You shouldn't, you'll just end up worrying and that doesn't help anyone. There's no sense worrying over something you cannot control.

Louisa looks at Robert.

LOUISA

My beautiful boy. My brave young man.

Robert holds his mother's hand. They look into each other's eyes for a moment.

LOUISA

If you'll excuse me, I'm going to go to bed, I've rather a headache. Gladys, can you clear the table.

Robert and William stand as Louisa exits. Gladys starts collecting plates, she exits to the kitchen.

WILLIAM
Is everything alright?

ROBERT
Fine.

Robert stands and goes after his mother. William, left alone, starts helping Gladys clear the table.

INT. LOUISA'S BEDROOM, CAMPBELL FAMILY HOME - NIGHT

Louisa sits on her bed, a candle flickers on the bedside table. Robert slowly enters.

LOUISA
I should have expected this day
would come from the first moment
you joined the Army. I just didn't
prepare myself for it.

ROBERT
I'm prepared for it, as long as I
am that's all you need.

Louisa says nothing.

ROBERT (CONT.)
I'll write, as often as I can if
that will set your mind at ease.

LOUISA
You can write to tell me you're
safe and well, but I'll only
believe it when you're back here
where I can hold you.

Robert sits on the bed and hugs his mother. They hold the embrace.

EXT. CAMPBELL FAMILY HOME - DAY

Robert and William stand in front of a car facing the house. Gladys and Louisa stand before them. Gladys gives Robert a hug.

GLADYS
It was lovely to see you.
(to William)
You'll write, won't you?

WILLIAM
Of course.
(to Louisa)
Thank you for your hospitality Mrs
Campbell.

Louisa doesn't say anything, merely nods, she is welling up.

WILLIAM

We'd best be off.

William turns and climbs into the car. Robert steps forward and gives Louisa a kiss on the cheek. Nothing else needs to be said. He turns and climbs into the driver's seat. They wave, before driving off.

On Gladys and Louisa: Watch the men leave for war, Gladys waves, Louisa remains still.

FADE TO:

EXT. MONS - DAY

British soldiers everywhere. Robert, William and their men march through the street. At the head of the group is the company commander, CAPTAIN BENSON, 30s, short hair, moustached.

WILLIAM

Can't help but notice there's no Belgian soldiers around here.

CAPTAIN BENSON

That's because there are no Belgian soldiers Lieutenant. The Germans had something to do with that. We're it for now.

On William: Slightly put off by Benson's words.

ROBERT

They may have had their way with the Belgians, but not with us.
(to the men)
Right boys?

The soldiers cheer in agreement. They march on in good spirits.

EXT. BRITISH POSITIONS, MONS CANAL - DAY

Robert and William supervise the men digging fire trenches in front of a railway bridge. On the other side of the bridge, other units are digging in.

ROBERT

You alright?

WILLIAM

I'm fine.

ROBERT

We'll be moving on in a few days, that'll help take your mind off things.

WILLIAM

I'm fine Robert. Really.

They share a look. Robert nods.

WILLIAM

I'm going to check on the boys.

William heads towards the busy troops.

CAPTAIN BENSON (O.S.)

Campbell.

Robert turns to see Captain Benson.

ROBERT

Sir.

CAPTAIN BENSON

Defences up yet?

ROBERT

They're coming along.

CAPTAIN BENSON

Well try and speed it up. We've had reports of sporadic enemy activity along the canal. I want us prepared should they show.

ROBERT

We'll be ready sir.

CAPTAIN BENSON

Good.

Benson moves on. Robert turns to the troops.

ROBERT

Come on boys, let's pick it up.

On Robert: Concern.

FADE TO:

EXT. BRITISH POSITIONS, MONS CANAL - DAY (LATER)

The next morning. The men relax in and around the fire trenches, chatting and smoking. Some are exploring the street ahead of the positions. A WOMAN emerges on to the street holding a basket of apples. She offers the basket to the troops. Robert and William watch on as a PRIVATE takes an apple.

PRIVATE

(holding up the apple)

How about that sir?

ROBERT
 Congratulations Private Winkworth,
 you've found breakfast.

Private Winkworth takes the basket from the Woman.

ROBERT
 Say thank you, Private.

PRIVATE
 Err...

ROBERT
 Merci.

PRIVATE
 (to Woman)
 Merci.

The men laugh at Private Winkworth's appalling accent. He then hands out apples. He hands one to Robert.

ROBERT
 Thank you Winkworth. We should
 consider ourselves lucky that your
 skills as a scrounger surpass your
 skills as a translator.

PRIVATE
 Yes sir.

ROBERT
 Still, you'll have plenty of time
 to practice. I'm sure we'll be here
 long enough.

WILLIAM
 You think?

ROBERT
 I wouldn't be surprised.
 (to Private Winkworth)
 Be sure to give that woman her
 basket back.

Private Winkworth goes back up the street and gives back the basket. As he does, distant gunshots echo through the morning. That gets the troops' attention. They focus up.

WILLIAM
 Could be scouts?

ROBERT
 (alert)
 No. Something else.
 (calling)
 Private! Get back here!

Private Winkworth starts sprinting back through the street towards the British positions. As he reaches the trenches there's a crack! Private Winkworth is hit and collapses.

WILLIAM

Contact!

End.

To be continued...