

“The 3rd Footman”

ORIGINAL TV SERIES BIBLE

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“He does a ridiculous job, very poorly.”

Logline:

In a 1901 summer home, self-important 3rd footman Gryffwn Mandrake plots to climb to his dream position of Butler but finds the process requires hard work, dedication and skills he has no intention of mastering.

THE PREMISE:

In a 1901 summer home, a self-important 3rd Footman leads the staff on impractical and bizarre exploits while striving for promotion, money, and sex. Irresponsible, myopic, incompetent, delusional, and unaware Gryffwn believes his advancement to Butler will be inevitable. It's not.

THE SERIES OVERVIEW:

The 3rd Footman is an inimitable blend of modern and eccentric storylines within an historical and characteristically rigid world. It is a situation comedy that follows self-deluded Gryffwn Mandrake and his weird adventures with the rest of the domestic staff in a turn of the century summer home.

On his first day of work for the Foxglove family, Gryffwn accidentally kills the housekeeper. Despite this, he irrationally assumes that he will still be promoted to Butler – the only position that he feels himself worthy of performing. But things get complicated with the arrival of a new, proficient, and overly aggressive housekeeper, Fabrice, who will be responsible for choosing the new Butler.

Gryffwn has allies with progressive housemaid Elizabeth, 2nd Footman Maxwell, and Charlie the over-educated groundskeeper. Although he faces strong competition from the dashing and narcissistic 1st Footman, Freddie Parks, it is his own lack of skill as well as an inclination for shortcutting that continually prohibits him from rising in station. Also, with the Foxglove family finances falling, he may not even get to be the 3rd Footman much longer.

During the series, Gryffwn discovers time and time again that it takes a lot more than a superiority complex to get the job done. Through his struggles, we learn that - whatever the time period - deep, true, and meaningful things like love, compassion and friendship are never based on status or money, well not that much anyway.

WORLD OF THE STORY

Key Locations in Newport:

Scented Geranium Cliff

Scented Geranium Cliff, at 17 Maritime Lane, is a moderate size summer cottage – that is to say only about 60 rooms total and a staff of 35. Architect Fredric Hartigan (whose rejected idea for the Lincoln Monument in Washington D.C. was to have the former president being surprised during a bath) designed and built Scented Geranium Cliff in 1861. The Foxgloves bought the home in 1888 from Rumford Beddings, the original owner. For the last thirteen years the family – who have four other homes in Reinbeck, New York City, Bournemouth (England), and Paris (France), have only used Scented Geranium Cliff in the summer. Scented Geranium overlooks the ocean and is near the other summer cottages of Newport's upper class.

What you don't need to know is that the main part of the house consists of five gorgeous bedchambers, a lovely sitting room, two ladies' dressing rooms, and four lavatories upstairs. On the ground floor there is a beautiful library, a large dining room, an elegant receiving room, a morning room, an ornate parlour, an entrée, and a moderate sized ballroom. The house is filled with good taste and priceless artwork.

But we don't get to see this part of the house. Because all the bona fide action takes place on -

The Servant Side:

The Butler's Pantry – where the majority of the serving preparations are done and where the upper and visiting domestics take meals. It is a large workroom. Most of the china and silver is also stored here in big cabinets. It's a good meeting place where servants of any station can be found.

The Kitchen – On Chef Lenoir's instructions, *La Cuisine* has been remodelled and updated from the original. It now sports two gas stoves along with a small coal one. It is a level below (in the basement), and is connected to The Butler's Pantry and The Scullery by two large dumb waiters (footman not withstanding).

The Carriage House – This building, as the name implies, is where the carriages are kept and one or two horses (most of the horses are at the stables down the hill that the Foxgloves share with two other families). Rita Foxglove, the only son and heir, also keeps his "horseless carriage" here. The building is not attached to the main house. The grounds and gardening staff live here.

Gryffwn's Room – a small rectangle with two beds, a desk, and two armoires crowded into it. Gryffwn shares the 3rd floor room with Maxwell Percy, 2nd Footman.

The [Butler's] Office - A large office that also serves as Stoddings' bedchamber. Here is where most of the financial records for the staff and house expenses are kept. After Stoddings is injured, Fabrice takes it over.

The Housekeeper's Room – The housekeeper is one of three staff, with the Butler and the Chef, to have a room of her own. The room is three times the size of Gryffwn's with the bed and wardrobe at one end and a desk and cabinet at the other.

Riley's General Store - Since Seamus O'Riley (Elizabeth's father) dropped the O in 1887 so he wouldn't sound Irish; Riley's has supplied ice, veggies, and dry goods to many of the Newport Mansions. It is on Lower Thames (pronounced with the 'th') Street in Newport. It is about 2 miles from Scented Geranium and most of the other mansions.

The Grounds - The lovely manicured lawns of Scented Geranium Cliff surround the house. There is a back patio area as well as a lovely flower garden and water fountain in front.

Some Background Information:

Newport, RI circa 1901

In the 120-year-old United States status is everything. But with no official titles or class system allowed, the rich society creates its own social position around its wealth and bases it upon the European models of royalty. In this world, the Astors, Vanderbilts, Stewarts, Olrichs and the rest of the 400 (the official club of the most wealthy and elite in the US) rule an upper-class society based solely on how much and, more importantly, how old the family money is. In Newport, huge summer homes like The Breakers, Rough Point, Rose Cliff, and Château sur Mer dominate the landscape. Yes, Newport is where the rich, and regrettably, the *Nuevo Riche*, of New York and Pennsylvania come to have their parties, *thé danses*, and of course to make a show of their decorated, ostentatious, and very large balls.

It's a good time to be rich. But it's even a better time to work for the rich!

All the servants get their room, board, and clothing paid for in addition to their salaries. And while their employers are slaving away exchanging calling cards in the sitting room, the staff are the ones who get to have all the fun cooking, cleaning, and washing up in the kitchen.

Of course there is a hierarchy among the servants too. A degree of reverence is awarded to those folk who work for the best families. It is okay to be housemaid at the Berwind's (first generation wealth), but you have more status if you work for Mrs. Stuyvesant Fish (old money). In the same regard, to be a Footman is better than a Coachman but to be the Butler is to truly be important.

Servant rankings and duties:

Butler – in charge of the domestics. Runs the house staff in determining pay scales and hiring and firing. Always educated and usually speaking more than one language. Pours the wine at supper. Both the Butler and the Housekeeper are highly respected by the family and addressed by their surnames.

Housekeeper – In charge of the female staff and the house when the family is away. She runs the house along with the Butler. Well educated and very well paid, for a woman at least.

Chef – Highest paid domestic and in charge of the kitchen. A family will only have one Chef, always French.

Valet – The gentleman's gentleman. Educated and has good taste. Usually speaks German or French. Sees to his gentleman's needs in clothes and friendship. Addressed by his surname.

Ladies' Maid – Much like the Valet. Both are very well paying positions, respective to their gender. She is also normally addressed by her surname.

The Nanny – She is about the same rank as a Ladies' Maid, but her responsibilities are only with the children. Educating, cleaning and keeping them away from their parents.

Steward – Scented Geranium doesn't have one so who cares?

1st Footman - The footman should always be nice looking and well mannered as they often converse with and are seen by the family and guests. Their duties include, standing by doors, riding on carriages, serving the supper (very important), and seeing to a gentleman who does not have his valet with him. The first footman is next in charge of the male staff after the Butler.

2nd Footman - like the first Footman but not paid quite as well or addressed with quite the same standing.

3rd Footman – like the other Footmen but is the first to do cleaning and lifting duties and the last to act as a Valet. He never gets to pour the wine at dinner. At Scented Geranium, he also sees to polishing the silver. He receives less money than the other footmen of course.

Downstairs Maid – Primarily attends to cleaning, but must also be respectable as she is sometimes seen by guests. She will fill in for a Ladies' Maid if a visiting lady has not brought her own along. Will also fill in for the Housekeeper if needed. Scented Geranium has two downstairs Maids; Elizabeth is senior.

Upstairs Maid – Like the downstairs maid but is rarely seen by the family. Scented Geranium has 3 upstairs Maids. None of whom can read or write with any mastery.

Servants Cook or Sous Chef – Does the cooking for the staff and helps the Chef during the main meals.

Kitchen Maid – They assist the chef, i.e. do most of the actually cooking.

Head Grounds Keeper – in charge of all the outside staff and sees to the gardens and the grounds. He has 14 staff underneath him. None of which have any formal education.

Coachmen – Drive and maintain the carriages. Usually uneducated.

Scullery Maid - The lowest of all the staff in pay and status. They see to the cleaning of the kitchen and the washing up. Usually younger and never have a formal education.

The Foxglove Family (in brief):

Although the show is about the staff and the family will never be seen, it's important to give a little history on the Foxgloves. They are a very proud, well-connected, old money US family, with English, French, and Dutch heritage. They are also one of the founding families of The 400.

In order to be a member of the upper echelon of American Society called "The 400" a family needs to have at least \$1 million dollars or £250,000 in 1901 (about 34 million dollars [£18m] today) going back least three generations, and no one in the family can work. Unofficial rules include being of certain white heritage and Protestant (preferably Episcopalian).

(The 400 [so called for the number of people that The Mrs. Astor and Ward Macalister decided were truly fashionable] really existed. Really. Even though the Foxglove Family did not. Not really. But while we are talking about them . . .)

The Foxglove money can be traced directly to the Foxglove Thread Company and the great Dutch thread boom of 1726 (the very first Gilder that *Maarten van Foxglove* made is on display in the library at Scented Geranium Cliff). Their wealth goes back seven generations and no one in the family has needed to work for the last three. However, the Rufus Foxgloves (Scented Geranium's owners) have overextended a bit lately and are having to tighten their shoe straps in order to avoid eroding their fortune.

The Foxgloves are considered one of the best and most respectable families to work for, despite an unusually high number of bizarre deaths among their domestic staff.

VISUAL REALISATION:

This show takes on the ideas of position, status, and taste as seen from Gryffwn's point of view. The visuals in the show will help to describe how Gryffwn sees and reacts to this world. A voice-over of Gryffwn writing his memoirs will set up the tone, humour, and give background. But Gryffwn is not a reliable narrator and while he describes things as he perceives them, the camera knows better. It shows things as they really are – often juxtaposing the image with the voice over. In this way, the camera is like another character that wants the audience to know what is really happening. The style should not be mockumentary, but rather just single camera - i.e. more Godard than Michael Moore.

The first thing that is often thought of in regards to a period show is that it will be expensive. However "The 3rd Footman" can be a relatively inexpensive show and still look authentic. The costumes and sets will change little, making continuity easy. There will be a need for a few outdoor shots on the grounds but most of the stories will take place on the main sets. In contrast to the often very silly storylines, the physical world they are in should be of the period and real as possible. Just as "Scrubs" shoots in an unused hospital, one ideal location for The 3rd Footman would be to film in an old summer home (like "Brideshead Revisited" or "Dark Shadows"), that way the cast and crew would have a greater freedom to live within the setting. The audience would feel like they are in the world as well.

Although this realistic feel could be achieved by using sets as well.

Another part of the show is the laugh track. The show shouldn't have one. The dry, sardonic, postmodern sense of humour works better without forced laughs. The laugh track does work well for some shows and has a long competent history of punching up the joke, but it works best with programs that are filmed in front of a studio audience. The 3rd Footman should feel real and a laugh track would subtract from that.

STATEMENT OF INTENT:

“People always want to be more than they are, even if they don’t deserve it or have any idea what it is.” – Fredric Hartigan, Designing the Modern Loggia

I’ve always been a big fan of writers like P.G. Wodehouse, Woody Allen, and Tom Stoppard, and how, in their different ways, they could take what is normal world and show the extremes within it. Gryffwn Mandrake is based around a character I used to play in improv theatre. The improvisations usually started in the real world but got increasingly bizarre over time.

In “The 3rd Footman,” I hope to expose the backside of history. The modern and contemporary attitudes of the servants and staff will constantly rub up against the perceived status system in United States society. In this “behind the scenes at *The Age of Innocence*” way the domestic staff can be used to explore the more outlandish and contradictory sides of human nature and the American way of life.

Also, the setting of “The 3rd Footman” is an overlooked period in US history and has a lot of relevance today in showing how far we have come and how far we have not.

Target Audience/Audience Appeal:

There should be something that most age groups will find amusing in the 3rd Footman, though most of the audience will fall into the 18 – 34 age range.

The period and setting of The 3rd Footman will give an original and interesting atmosphere to the sitcom genre, while there will be something in the stories and characters to engage people in present time. The daily issues that make our lives frustrating and funny don’t really change.

Presenting the period in a silly and unconventional way will add to the appeal and should attract viewers in the US and the UK of other off kilter comedies like “Arrested Development,” “Saxondale,” “Scrubs,” “Blackadder,” “Curb Your Enthusiasm” or “Malcolm in the Middle.”