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SF PERUSALS

CHARIOTS OF FIRE

Adaptation by
Mike Bartlett

Based on the Enigma Productions Limited
Motion Picture
by arrangement with Twentieth Century Fox
Film Corporation
and Allied Stars S.A. Panama
Screenplay by Colin Welland

SAMUEL FRENCH

samuelfrench.co.uk

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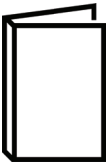
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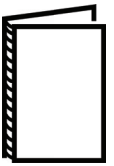
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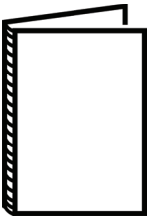
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Plays for the theatre include: *Wild* (Hampstead Theatre), *Game* (Almeida), *King Charles III* (Almeida Theatre/Wyndham's Theatre/Music Box Theatre, New York), *An Intervention* (Paines Plough/Watford), *Bull* (Sheffield Theatres/Off Broadway/Young Vic), *Medea* (Headlong/Glasgow Citizens/Watford/Warwick), *Chariots of Fire* (Hampstead Theatre/Gielgud Theatre), *13* (National Theatre), *Decade* (co-writer Headlong), *Earthquakes in London* (Headlong/National Theatre), *Love Love Love* (Paines Plough/Plymouth Theatre Royal/Royal Court), *Cock*, *Contractions, My Child* (Royal Court Theatre), *Artefacts* (Bush Theatre/Nabokov).
Plays for the radio: *King Charles III*, *Cock*, *Heart*, *The Core*, *Family Man*, *Love Contract* (BBC Radio 4), *The Steps*, *Not Talking* (BBC Radio 3).
As director: *Medea* (Headlong/Glasgow Citizens/Watford/Warwick), *Honest* (Theatre Royal Northampton).
Television includes: *Doctor Foster* (Drama Republic/BBC), *The Town* (Big Talk Productions).

At the 2015 Olivier Awards *King Charles III* won Best New Play and *Bull* won Outstanding Achievement in an Affiliate Theatre. *Love Love Love* won Best New Play in the 2011 Theatre Awards UK and *Cock* won an Olivier Award in 2010 for Outstanding Achievement in an Affiliate Theatre.

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FIRST PRODUCTION INFORMATION

HUGH HUDSON, BARBARA BROCCOLI, MICHAEL G WILSON & MICHAEL ROSE
for
CHARIOTS OF FIRE (STAGE) UK LTD
presents

A HAMPSTEAD THEATRE PRODUCTION

FOR COUNTRY
FOR HONOUR
FOREVER

CHARIOTS OF FIRE

ON
STAGE

CHARIOTS OF FIRE
STAGE ADAPTATION BY
MIKE BARTLETT
Based on the Enigma Productions Limited motion picture
By arrangement with Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation
And Allied Stars S.A. Panama
Screenplay by Colin Welland

Directed by	EDWARD HALL
Designed by	MIRIAM BUETHER
Costumes by	MICHAEL HOWELLS
Choreographed by	SCOTT AMBLER
Additional music and arrangements by	JASON CARR
Lighting designed by	RICK FISHER
Sound designed by	PAUL GROOTHUIS

Original music by
VANGELIS

CHARACTERS

(IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)

HAROLD

ERIC

AUBREY

ANDY

REG

JIM

HEAD PORTER

MR RATCLIFFE – his assistant

MASTER OF CAIUS

MASTER OF TRINITY

CHARLIE

FRANK

VARIOUS SOCIETY REPRESENTATIVES

PRESIDENT OF G AND S SOCIETY

SECRETARY OF G AND S SOCIETY

ROBIN

ALASTAIR

COLIN

JENNIE

SANDY

PROVOST

MR LIDDELL

SAM MUSSABINI

JOHN KEDDIE

FRENCH ATHLETE 1

FRENCH ATHLETE 2

JIMMIE

SYBIL

THE ENTIRE CAST OF THE MIKADO

TOFFY

JACKSON SCHOLZ

CHARLIE PADDOCK

FOSTER

REPORTERS

BIRKENHEAD

SUTHERLAND

CADOGAN

THE PRINCE OF WALES

VARIOUS REPORTERS

MANY DIFFERENT RUNNERS

20 COUNTRY'S OLYMPIC TEAMS

FLORENCE

GEORGES ANDRE

THE FRENCH PRESIDENT

TOM WATSON

ANNOUNCER

STAGEHAND

The action of the play is fast, confident and continuous. Always something to focus on, especially in scene changes.

The performance should require effort – an athletic event itself. By the end the performers should be exhausted.

PROLOGUE

As the audience enters, some young contemporary athletes warm up.

They start to run.

We watch them – the effort. The breathing, the sweat.

Somehow the four contemporary athletes become our four runners in 1924.

HAROLD, ERIC, AUBREY *and* **ANDY.**

The whole sequence builds and builds – a celebration of running itself. Amazing, athletic and real.

Then with a swirling and smoke – we're in...

ACT ONE

Part One

Cambridge station 1919. The sound of steam, smoke. In the middle, now in suit and hat, is **HAROLD ABRAHAMS**, *newly arrived at Cambridge. He has a couple of bags, and a pair of running shoes attached by the laces. Porters run back and forth.*

HAROLD Excuse me?

No one stops.

Hey!

Still no one. He turns to the audience.

Dear Mother, my first day at Cambridge was not ideal. For a start, Adolphe's advice concerning porters was, to be short, inaccurate.

A porter goes past carrying bags.

This would not have been a problem had he not also told me to bring so many of my things. I was carrying far more than anyone else.

At which point **AUBREY MONTAGUE** *appears. Upper middle class, shy and carrying even more than* **ABRAHAMS**. *Three bags, books, golf clubs and two tennis racquets.*

Well – almost anyone.

AUBREY *struggles, and in a clownish moment, everything goes everywhere.* **HAROLD** *looks over and smiles.* **AUBREY***'s frustrated.*

AUBREY Dear Papa, the train was full of other first years, talking as if they knew each other already. By the time I got in at the station, I don't mind admitting, I was beginning to feel rather like a spare part.

AUBREY *gathers them up, inefficiently.*

HAROLD Look like you could do with a hand.

AUBREY Oh.

HAROLD My brother Adolphe, he's ten years older than I am, I sought his advice. Get here early, he said, and you'll have someone to carry your bags, see you to college, you won't have to worry about a thing.

AUBREY Ah.

HAROLD But so much for that – do you speak at all old chap?

AUBREY I'm sorry?

HAROLD Do you speak?

AUBREY Oh yes.

HAROLD Good. There you are. All in hand.

AUBREY Montague... Aubrey. I'm a first year.

HAROLD Aren't we all? Come on. Let's make our own way.

AUBREY Right.

HAROLD *finds himself holding...*

HAROLD Two racquets Aubrey?

AUBREY I often break things.

HAROLD I'd never have guessed.

HAROLD *slings one of* **AUBREY***'s bags on his back. From off we hear a porter,* **REG.**

REG Need a porter sir?

HAROLD Too late I'm afraid, we'll manage on our own.

REG You sure about that sir?

HAROLD *turns and sees* **REG.** *He's scarred, with a bandage across his head, and missing an arm. A First World War veteran.*

HAROLD Oh. Well. Thank you. Caius College please.

He whistles. **JIM** *appears – another veteran, blind, wearing his medals.* **REG** *loads him up with the bags.*

AUBREY That could've been us. A few months older and the things we'd have seen. Stuck in those trenches.

Suddenly with the sound of ringing Cambridge bells, the stage is flooded by undergraduates swirling around with bags and books, gowns, hats. The **HEAD PORTER** *arrives, with his* **ASSISTANT.**

HEAD PORTER Gentlemen! Form an orderly queue please gentlemen!

A queue is formed, **HAROLD** *and* **AUBREY** *near the front.*

AUBREY Did he give you any other tips?

HAROLD Who's that?

AUBREY Your brother? Any other advice?

HAROLD Actually yes. He said the most important thing, when one arrives in Cambridge is to make absolutely, doubly sure that no matter what you always—

HEAD PORTER Name!

HAROLD Ah – Abrahams... Harold.

HEAD PORTER Abrahams. Top of the list. Repton is it?

HAROLD That's right. Left a year ago.

HEAD PORTER Been doing your bit have you? France?

HAROLD No. Joined too late.

HEAD PORTER Oh. Bad luck laddie.

HAROLD I beg your pardon?

They look at each other. The **HEAD PORTER** *smiles, patronising, passive aggressive.*

HEAD PORTER Welcome to Caius. Sign here.

He does.

It's across the courtyard, top right hand corner, and up the stairs.

HAROLD Thank you. What are your names?

HEAD PORTER I'm Rogers, head porter – Mr Ratcliffe, my assistant.

HAROLD Well Mr Rogers, Ratcliffe, I ceased to be called laddie when I took up the King's commission. Is that clear?

HEAD PORTER Yes sir. Crystal clear.

HAROLD *goes.* **AUBREY** *steps forward.*

What's your friend studying then?

AUBREY I've no idea.

HEAD PORTER Hmm. Well one thing's certain, with a name like Abrahams, he won't be in the chapel choir, will he?

HAROLD *unpacks his case, and writes a letter, speaking to the audience.*

HAROLD Mother, Adolphe seemed certain it was a terrible idea, but I feel despite everything that's happened, the way he's behaved and all he's done, Father deserves to know that I'm here. All of what I've been given and achieved is in no small part down to—

There's a knock on the door.

VOICE OFF Shop!

ABRAHAMS *stops writing/unpacking and opens the door. Standing there is* **ANDY,** *Lord Andrew Lindsey, in a very posh suit. Immaculate.*

ANDY Hello. I'm across the corridor. Lord Lindsey. You can call me Andrew, or Lord Lindsey, or Andy, actually. It's up to you.

HAROLD Harold Abrahams.

ANDY Good! Books. Excellent. School?

HAROLD Repton.

ANDY Repton! Marvellous! Eton myself. Hold on... Abrahams. There was a chap, Abrahams, went to Caius, years ago. I read about him. Runner. Broke all kinds of records.

HAROLD My brother.

ANDY Ah! You're the sibling. Smashing.

He pulls a book out from the case.

The Athletic Trainer by Sam Wisdom. Tempted to have a go yourself are you? Yes. Always tricky with famous older brothers isn't it? Probably better off finding your own passions old chap. Don't want to live in the shadow.

HAROLD Drink, Andrew?

ANDY Very good. Can you believe it Harold?

Cambridge at last. About bloody time.

He smiles, warmly. **HAROLD** *gives him a drink.*

Cheers!

They drink together. There's a knock on the still-open door. It's **AUBREY** *– in his evening suit as well. Similar to* **ANDY***'s but not nearly as good.*

AUBREY Oh. Hello.

HAROLD Aubrey! Come in. Drink? This is Lord Lindsey. But we can call him Andrew.

ANDY I'm across the hall. Eton. You?

AUBREY Rugby.

ANDY Oh well. Never mind. Left now, haven't you?

ABRAHAMS *gives* **AUBREY** *his drink.*

AUBREY Thanks.

ANDY Are you getting yourself together then Harold? Ten minutes to freshmans' dinner. You should be changed.

ALL

ALL PEOPLE THAT ON EARTH DO DWELL
SING TO THE LORD WITH CHEERFUL VOICE
HIM SERVE WITH FEAR, HIS PRAISE FORETELL
COME YE BEFORE HIM AND...

ABRAHAMS *finishes his letter as he puts on his suit.*

HAROLD Mother. You wouldn't believe it here. It really is another world.

The formal dinner is set up.

Ancient buildings.

Choirs more beautiful than you could imagine.

A vision. Of England.

GRACE Sanctificet nobis victum qui cuncta creavit. Amen. *("Let him who hath created all things bless for us what there is to eat".)*

A shuffling and quietening as **THE MASTER OF CAIUS** *stands. An older man. Dignified.*

CAIUS I take these college war lists and I run down them. Name after name which I cannot read and which we who are older

cannot hear without emotion – names which are only names to you, the new college, but which to us summon up face after face, the men they were, the men they might have been. The flower of a generation, of England, cut before their time – they died for England and all that England stands for.

Suddenly we're half way through dinner. The talk is loud and confident.

ANDY Gentlemen. Ambitions! What do you want to be? Charlie?

CHARLIE Doctor all the way. Two brothers and a father already in practice, the family expects.

ANDY Boring. But respectable. Frank?

FRANK Lawyer, I think.

ANDY Yes, you are rather argumentative.

FRANK No I'm not!

ANDY Aubrey?

AUBREY Perhaps, a journalist?

They laugh.

ANDY A journalist? Whatever for?

AUBREY ...Well I like writing.

ANDY Alright then. Journalism for Montague from Rugby. Dear oh dear.

The **MASTER** *continues. A slow, very different speed to the young men.*

MASTER Now, by tragic necessity, their dreams have become yours. On their behalf let me exhort you, examine yourselves, assess your potential and find where your true chance of greatness lies. For their sakes, for your college and your country, seize this chance, rejoice in it, and let no power nor persuasion deter you in your task.

We're back to the table.

ANDY Harold! Just you left. Ambitions. What will you be?

HAROLD What will I be?

ANDY Yes.

HAROLD *looks straight at him.*

HAROLD Fast.

A moment.

CAIUS Let us pray...

And we're at the Students' Societies Fair ("Squash").

ALL

THE SOLDIERS OF OUR QUEEN, ALL LINKED IN FRIENDLY TETHER.
UPON THE BATTLE SCENE, THEY FIGHT THE FOE TOGETHER.
THERE EVERY MOTHER'S SON, PREPARED TO FIGHT AND FALL IS.
THE ENEMY OF ONE, THE ENEMY OF ALL IS. THE ENEMY OF ONE,
THE ENEMY OF ALL IS.
THE SOLDIERS OF OUR QUEEN, ALL LINKED IN FRIENDLY TETHER.
UPON THE BATTLE SCENE, THEY FIGHT THE FOE TOGETHER.
THERE EVERY MOTHER'S SON, PREPARED TO FIGHT AND FALL IS.
THE ENEMY OF ONE, THE ENEMY OF ALL IS. THE ENEMY OF ONE,
THE ENEMY OF ALL IS.

The tables from the formal dinner have become stalls for various different societies. People everywhere, noise –
HAROLD *and* **AUBREY** *tour the stalls.*

RUGBY CLUB Spot of rugby?

PRESIDENT Gilbert and Sullivan Society!

FLORA Flora and Fauna! All the green things around you, in jars, in nature, grasses, trees, moss.

HAROLD No thank you.

FLORA *Fungus?*

AUBREY*'s come over.* **HAROLD** *takes the different cards he's collected.*

HAROLD Aubrey! Rugby Club, Golf Society, Law, Philately – is that all? You're idle man!

Singing begins. **AUBREY** *turns to face a poster of* **SYBIL** *Evers, a singer in the D'Oyly Carte.*

ALL

THERE EVERY MOTHER'S SON, PREPARED TO FIGHT AND FALL IS.
THE ENEMY OF ONE, THE ENEMY OF ALL IS.
THE ENEMY OF ONE, THE ENEMY OF...

SYBIL*, in the poster, sings a short aria.*

AUBREY Who is she?!

SECRETARY Sybil Evers, bright new star of the D'Oyly Carte.

SYBIL *sings another short aria. A new stall appears, with binoculars and hat, and shouts—*

BIRDWATCHING Birdwatching?

SYBIL *sings another short aria.* **AUBREY** *continues to look at the poster. The stall is manned by the* **SECRETARY** *and* **PRESIDENT**. *They spot* **AUBREY** *staring.*

SECRETARY Wonderful isn't she?

SYBIL *turns and sings a final short aria – captivating* **AUBREY**.

AUBREY She's magnificent.

HAROLD What do you think Aubrey? Gilbert and Sullivan?

AUBREY Did a bit at school but—

HAROLD Perfect. Put my friend down.

AUBREY Now wait a minute. I can't sing!

HAROLD Of course you can, and it's a privilege, singing, gifted to the few, and that's the way it should be. Because—

He sings.

"IF EVERYONE IS SOMEBODY...

The others join in with the line from The Gondaliers, except **AUBREY.**

ALL

"THEN NO ONE'S ANYBODY!"

They laugh, **ABRAHAMS** *signs them up as* **AUBREY** *escapes over to the Athletics Club stall. The* **SECRETARY** *is* **ROBIN.**

ROBIN Athletics?

AUBREY Oh rather – four hundred and forty yards mostly.

ROBIN Fill this in with your best times.

He gives him a clipboard. **AUBREY** *starts to fill it in.*

Haven't come across a chap called Abrahams have you?

AUBREY Yes I have, what about him?

ROBIN He's only gone and challenged for the college dash.

AUBREY College dash? What's so special about that?

ABRAHAMS *walks across, wearing an overcoat.*

ROBIN Special? It's special because in seven hundred years of trying, no one's ever done it!

HAROLD *starts to get ready for the dash, as the* **MASTERS** *from* **CAIUS** *and* **TRINITY** *enter, talking, in colonnades outside – daytime.*

TRINITY This Abrahams, what do you know of him?

CAIUS His father's a financier.

TRINITY A financier? What on earth does that mean?

CAIUS I believe it's a euphemism.

TRINITY Ah. Yes.

TRINITY *laughs.*

Very good.

CAIUS Repton reports academic achievement, of sorts. They also mention he's arrogant, defensive to the point of pugnacity.

TRINITY They invariably are.

AUBREY *enters with a scarf which* **HAROLD** *flings round, and adopts a swagger.*

HAROLD You know Aubrey. I'd never have expected it. But I'm rather confident.

The **MASTERS** *arrive at their vantage point.*

TRINITY What about this "attempt". Did they say he can run?

CAIUS Like the wind!

AUBREY *and* **HAROLD** *turn the corner, and the stage is flooded with people,* **CROWDS** *waving banners, all out in the courtyard to see the (***TRINITY***) college dash.* **HAROLD** *arrives with* **AUBREY***, looking confident and casual. The* **CROWD** *cheer. (Cheers for the courage of the man and jeers for his downright affrontery.) The cheering continues as* **ROBIN** *tries to get attention.*

ROBIN Right. Chaps. Chaps! Excuse me… Oi!

The **CROWD** *fall silent at last –* **ROBIN** *drops back into his accent and poise.*

Thank you. Let it be known that HM Abrahams of Gonville and Caius has formerly made challenge for the Trinity Court dash!

Cheers.

For those who are not familiar with the rules, they are as follows – the challenger will attempt to run around the perimeter of the court, to and from a fixed point – here – beneath the clock – this clock – within the time taken by the said clock to strike midday. The distance to be covered is traditionally recognised as one of one hundred and eighty-eight paces.

CROWD 2 Do it for Caius!

CROWD 3 Do it for Repton!

STUDENT What have you got on your feet Abrahams? Rockets?

Laughter.

ROBIN We have just a few minutes... Would the challenger ready himself!

HAROLD *takes off his scarf and overcoat, and starts stretching. The* **CROWD** *cheer. Meanwhile, above, we see the* **MASTERS OF CAIUS** *and* **TRINITY** *watching.*

CAIUS Anyone from Trinity challenging this year?

TRINITY Ah. Well. Here at Trinity, we're rather good at mathematics. So the young chaps decided to measure the court and they discovered the precise reason it has never been achieved.

CAIUS What's that?

TRINITY It simply isn't possible. The dash was conceived as a dream, not a reality. Therefore, having made the calculations, our men decided this year to save their breath. Very enterprising.

Still, Hugh, it's not the achievement that counts is it? The taking part.

ROBIN *marks a line on the ground using two of the students' hats.*

ROBIN Mr Abrahams. Your position please.

The **CROWD** *disperses around the theatre, marking the course to be run – we're going through the audience.* **HAROLD** *goes to the line. A hush descends.*

Owing to the absence of any challenger, Mr Abrahams will run alone.

VOICE Not so!

All heads turn to see **ANDY** *hurrying through the* **CROWD**, *his coat over his shoulder, and holding a bottle of champagne. He tosses the champagne to* **AUBREY** *and the coat to* **ROBIN**.

ANDY Andrew Lindsey. I race beside my friend. We challenge the Trinity Court in the name of Repton, Eton and Caius!

Cheers. **ANDY** *turns to* **HAROLD**.

Chaps told me about it over breakfast, I thought I might push you along a bit.

HAROLD Thanks very much!

They shake hands.

ROBIN Gentlemen! Ten seconds! To your marks, please.

They crouch into position for the marks.

Remember, at the first strike of twelve.

All heads turn to the clock.

ROBIN Five.

CROWD Four.

Three.

Two.

One.

A beat. The **CROWD** *do an intake of breath and hold it as—*

The bell sounds twelve times. Stillness.

Then on the strike of twelve and **HAROLD** *and* **ANDY** *run. They really run! Around the course – which is the aisles of the theatre. Cheering but no music. Just the sound of voice and scuffle. It's messy and scrabbling and taking into account all the dimensions and obstacles of the design and the theatre. It's real.*

Dong! Dong!

HAROLD *is first down the opening straight. They get to the corner, the* **CROWD** *turn in unison.*

Dong! Dong!

HAROLD *is out of breath – which allows* **ANDY** *to take the lead. Next corner.*

Dong! Dong!

Down the third stretch, neck and neck. Round the corner.

Dong! Dong!

HAROLD *starts to move past* **ANDY** *as they turn the final corner.*

Dong! Dong!

The **CROWD** *all run to line the final stretch and count as the men get to the line.*

CROWD Ten!

Eleven!

HAROLD *flings himself at the line.*

Dong! He's done it! The **CROWD** *cheers!*

ANDY *collapses behind* **HAROLD**. *The* **CROWD** *runs to him and he's lifted into the air.* **ANDY** *gets the champagne from* **AUBREY**.

AUBREY Well done! Well done Harold!

HAROLD *smiles and they shake hands, hug. Meanwhile up above...*

CAIUS Did they both manage it?

TRINITY Lindsey missed by a whisker.

CAIUS A pity.

TRINITY Still. It's been done. He proved my mathematicians wrong.

Perhaps they are God's people after all.

Surely there can't be a faster man in the kingdom...

He raises his glass and they drink. Below, the champagne is popped.

AUBREY Harold! Wait! I've just realised! You never told me!

HAROLD What's that old man?

AUBREY Your brother's advice. He said to you – do you remember, that day at the start of term – the most important thing!

HAROLD Oh! Well – the most important thing Aubrey...?

To win!

They carry **HAROLD** *off, as above... They begin to sing* ***"TO BE AN ENGLISHMAN"*** *as they leave...*

STUDENT HE IS AN ENGLISHMAN...

ALL BUT IN SPITE OF ALL TEMPTATIONS, TO BELONG TO OTHER NATIONS,

HE REMAINS AN ENGLISHMAN, HE REMAINS AN ENGLISH...

Which mixes with...

Part Two

A highland gathering – 1920.

Two Scottish boys, **ALASTAIR** *and* **COLIN**, *enter. They're about sixteen, working class, in shorts and caps – it all feels very different to what we've seen so far.*

*A woman (***JENNIE***) enters and puts up some bunting. The boys watch her.*

ALASTAIR Go on.

COLIN No.

Pause.

ALASTAIR She's looking.

COLIN Will you leave it alone? I'm busy.

ALASTAIR Oh, with what? You're taking it all so seriously. It's just a run. What are you up to?

COLIN Warming myself.

ALASTAIR I'm sure she could help you out with that…

COLIN Shut your mouth. I mean for the race. He'll be watching.

Beat.

ALASTAIR *(to* **JENNIE***)* Excuse me? Are you Eric Liddell's sister?

JENNIE Oh – yes.

ALASTAIR What's your name?

Beat.

JENNIE Jennie.

ALASTAIR Me and my friend here, we've come to see Mr Liddell.

JENNIE Yes. We're all pleased he's come. My parents are back from the mission in China, so it'll be good to be together.

And on a gathering day. We'll have a nice time. I hope you boys do too.

She smiles and goes back to the bunting.

ALASTAIR My friend Colin, he's got a question for you.

COLIN What? No I haven't.

ALASTAIR She won't bite, will you Miss Liddell?

JENNIE I should be getting back—

ALASTAIR *(shoving* **COLIN***)* Go on!

COLIN I just wondered if you might like to have a...cup of tea?

JENNIE How old are you?

COLIN Nearly sixteen.

JENNIE You boys should show some respect.

ALASTAIR I don't think that was the answer he was after.

ERIC LIDDELL *enters. Calm, but strong. Wearing a tweed suit.*

ERIC Everything alright there?

JENNIE No it's not.

COLIN *is wide eyed.* **ALASTAIR** *annoyed.*

ALASTAIR Nice suit mister!

COLIN Alastair—

ALASTAIR We're just helping this lady with the decoration, there's no bother—

COLIN Alastair—

ALASTAIR Why don't you go off back where you came from? Mind your own business?!

He laughs, cheeky.

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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