

"THE RUNNER"

Written by
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INT. CINEMA - SCREENING ROOM - DAY

The darkened theatre, empty. HARRY WILKINS sits facing the screen.

HARRY

The movies. The big screen; the glamour, the magic. Then, after another mouthful of popcorn, you sit there and think, "I want a piece of that action".

INSERT: A park. RYAN JONES jogging, wearing headphones.

HARRY (CONT'D)

Easy? Nah, unless you happen to be a carpenter in the director's office.

INSERT: A bedroom. NIGEL OSCARWARD getting ready while absorbed in a book, titled "100 Ways to Get into the Movies, by Lucky Chancer". He has chocolate around his mouth.

HARRY (CONT'D)

So, the Runner: Dry-cleaner, tea-maker, script transporter, breakfast master... cast-looker-afterer. This ain't no easy ride.

INSERT: A street. BRIDGETTE WHITE strutting along like she's on the catwalk, fussing with her hair.

INT. WHITE ROOM - DAY

HARRY sits at a desk, holds out his hand to the audience.

HARRY

Harry Wilkins, pleased to meet you.

FADE TO:

MAIN TITLES

FADE IN:

INT. FILM STUDIO - CORRIDOR - DAY

Backstage. HENRY scrambles up the corridor juggling three COFFEES and a plate full of DOUGHNUTS. He bursts in --

INT. FILM STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

A bustling film set. Two lead actors, PATRICK and FLORENCE, waiting to start. Director STEVEN ELLIOT rounds on Henry.

STEVEN

You're late! Mr Haller is waiting for his coffee. He won't start without it.

HENRY

Sorry sir, my legs aren't what they used to be.

STEVEN

Don't let it happen again!

Henry hands Patrick and Florence their coffees. Steven hustles everyone into place, ready to begin --

PATRICK

What's this?!

STEVEN

That would be your coffee.

PATRICK

Look!

STEVEN

Coffee with two sugars, chocolate and marshmallows, as specified.

PATRICK

There's no cream! My rider clearly states that I, Patrick Edward Bethany Haller, before a single camera focuses up, before one word is uttered from my lips, will have fresh whipped cream on my coffee!

He throws the offending drink on the floor.

STEVEN

Of course. My apologies. I will deal with it personally.

Steven catches up with Henry, throwing an arm around his shoulders.

STEVEN (CONT'D)

Henry, I've been thinking long and hard about that pesky leg of yours, and I really think you should take a few days off...

HENRY

That's very kind of you, sir--

STEVEN

And then a few more. Then a month. Then twelve more. Then don't come back.

(MORE)

STEVEN (CONT'D)

(beat)
You're fired.

He stomps off.

HENRY

But, but, but... this is my life!

Steven yells for his Assistant Director:

STEVEN

Samantha! I've had to let Henry go.

She produces a clipboard.

SAMANTHA

Reason? Should I put "difference of opinion", or "religion" again?

STEVEN

Got to keep the talent happy, even if it is an over-indulged windbag. Upshot is, I need a new runner.

SAMANTHA

I'll get Harry on the line, get him to start up Project Runner again.

STEVEN

And no time-wasters!

He storms off to deal with the crew. Samantha takes out her MOBILE.

INTERCUT:

INT. HARRY'S OFFICE - DAY

Harry has his feet up on his desk, reading the newspaper. The phone rings.

SAMANTHA

Harry. He's only gone and lost another one.

HARRY

Christ. What was it this time?

SAMANTHA

I'm putting Scientology. Poor Henry.

HARRY

Henry was a pro. Listen, my service ain't supply and demand.

SAMANTHA

I know, just find me someone
who's... well, who knows how to
make coffee.

HARRY

This geezer's having a laugh. It'll
cost him double.

SAMANTHA

You've got two days.

She rings off.

HARRY

Bloody amateurs.

INT. NIGEL'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

NIGEL comes down the stairs, engrossed in his book, oblivious
to everything. NIGEL'S MUM gets off the phone.

NIGEL'S MUM

Mikey! Mikey!

She steers him from bumping into the kitchen counter.

NIGEL'S MUM (CONT'D)

You've been accepted -- and you've
got chocolate around your mouth.

She licks a tissue and scrubs his face.

NIGEL

Mum, stop it, I'm twenty-five!

NIGEL'S MUM

You'll always be my little Mikey.

NIGEL

My name's Nigel, mum. Accepted for
what?

NIGEL'S MUM

That runner training scheme I
enrolled you in. They start
tomorrow. The winner gets a job on
the latest Steven Elliot film!

NIGEL

Well, whoop and all that.

NIGEL'S MUM

My son Mikey, working in movies!
The glamour, the red carpet --
maybe I'll go shopping for a new
dress.

NIGEL

Mum, it's a job as a runner, I'm not exactly going to be fluffing actresses.

NIGEL'S MUM

I'll phone the family. Your brother Nigel will be over the moon!

NIGEL

Maybe I'll meet some normal folks for a change.

INT. CAFE - DAY

BRIDGETTE is painting her nails at a table, looking very happy with herself. Her MOBILE rings, HARRY on the line. She puts on a voice:

BRIDGETTE

This is Charmonelle, Bridgette White's personal assistant. She's having dinner with Clooney, I'll see if she can spare a minute.

(shouts)

Ms. White! Phone call for you!

(into phone)

She's just coming, love.

Bridgette changes her voice.

BRIDGETTE (CONT'D)

So sorry! I was just chatting over my next big role. It's a Japanese remake of the Scandinavian remake of the American reboot of that film about the robot Alsatian.

(beat)

No, Clooney's playing the octopus.

HARRY (O.S.)

Good for you, darling. Says here you're up for being a runner.

BRIDGETTE

I'll just have a little chinwag with my P.A.

She holds the phone away, waits a few seconds --

BRIDGETTE (CONT'D)

(P.A. voice)

Bridgette has graciously decided to accept your offer.

HARRY

Ideal, send her to my office at 9
tomorrow morning, sharp as you
like.

BRIDGETTE

(P.A. voice)

Yes, darling. Ciao!

She puts the mobile down, satisfied. Calls over to the next
table:

BRIDGETTE (CONT'D)

Did you hear that, darlings? I've
been offered a role in Steven
Elliot's latest blockbuster.

DINER #1

Congratulations, who are you
playing?

BRIDGETTE

Can't say, darlings, but it'll be a
very demanding role. Lots of
running!

INT. CINEMA - SCREENING ROOM - DAY

RYAN and his girlfriend BETHANY are watching a film. She
nudges him, points at the screen.

BETHANY

Here comes your scene!

They wait in anticipation....

RYAN

Hey! They cut it! I was there,
right there, off to the right! They
cut me out!

INT. RYAN'S HOUSE - LATER

Ryan is making dinner, expertly arranging plates and cups.
Bethany is at the table.

RYAN

I can't believe they cut me out.
And it was raining.

BETHANY

What about yesterday's audition?

He sets a mug of coffee down in front of her.

RYAN

Cast before I even got off the bus, apparently. That's twenty castings and not even down to the shortlist.

BETHANY

Your time will come. We'll just have to keep trying.

(drinks)

Mmm! This is really good coffee. A pity there's no roles for the best coffee-maker in England.

She rises and hugs him. Her MOBILE rings in her pocket. He keeps hold of her as she answers.

BETHANY (CONT'D)

Hello, Bethany May, agent to Mr. Ryan Jones.

He smiles at this, affectionate.

BETHANY (CONT'D)

Yes, he's here. I'll just put you through.

She passes the phone over.

RYAN

This is Ryan.

HARRY (O.S.)

It's your lucky day, sunshine -- you've been selected for the runner training program.

RYAN

That's great! Awesome news.

HARRY (O.S.)

Details will be emailed to your agent. Catch you tomorrow.

He rings off.

BETHANY

What did I tell you?

RYAN

It's only a runner. Not much, but it's something.

BETHANY

(on the dinner)

You arranged all of this. I'm sure you'll be able to impress a big-shot director. You make me proud.

They kiss and settle down to dinner.

EXT. RUNNER TRAINING GROUND - DAY

An open field backed by a wood. Twenty RUNNER POTENTIALS are lined up, RYAN, NIGEL and BRIDGETTE among them. HARRY walks back and forth like a drill sergeant.

HARRY

Right, you miserable lot! Welcome to your day of film runner training. There ain't a red carpet, no V.I.P. treatment, no glam, glitz or any of that old toss.

NIGEL

I thought we were going to be on set--?

HARRY

The world is your film set, son! This ain't Hollywood.

(to the group)

If you get through today, you'll be working on Steven Elliot's latest. You've got four trials ahead of you. Four trials to sort the pros from the twats, as it were.

BRIDGETTE

Just give the job to me already, I'm so much better than these nobodies.

HARRY

O-ho, you're a "somebody", are you? Too hoity-toity to go rummaging through the bushes to dig out a smelly old drunk?

BRIDGETTE

Of course! Who isn't?

HARRY

Tough. First task is called "Find Melvin".

He holds up a photo of MELVIN, a smelly old drunk.

HARRY (CONT'D)

Melvin here's gone awol, and he's supposed to be taking the lead role in some arthouse film or other. Seen last night at Bob's Diner, sighted today in Bran Owl Woods.

(MORE)

HARRY (CONT'D)

A push-back on filming will cost the studio a cool million and you your job. You've got twenty minutes. Find Melvin!

He waves the photo. The group breaks, pushing past Harry. He straightens his jacket and watches them go.

EXT. RUNNER TRAINING GROUND - WOODS - DAY

The group splits into two, heading deeper into the wood, shouting for Melvin.

Bridgette gets her high heels stuck in the mud and swears like a trooper.

Nigel uses a magnifying glass to look for footprints.

Ryan pauses, rattling his brains

RYAN

Melvin, Melvin...

He brings out a bottle of WHISKEY from his bag.

RYAN (CONT'D)

Melvin! Free booze!

A rustle of leaves -- MELVIN appears from within a bush.

MELVIN

I'm a movie star, box-office champ!

Ryan teases him closer with the bottle. Bridgette notices, calls to Harry:

BRIDGETTE

I've found him! I've found Marvin!

RYAN

Hey! It's Melvin... and stop trying to steal my win!

BRIDGETTE

Oh, please. You want to keep your idea to yourself, go copyright it.

MELVIN

I copyrighted me face, once. Some bloke smashed me front teeth out down the pub the next week. I lost the rights to me own face cos I didn't look nothin' like the picture no more.

Bridgette cosies up to him.

BRIDGETTE
 You've got such interesting
 stories, Mervin!

Harry arrives, finding Bridgette with her arm around Melvin.

HARRY
 Nice work, Bridgette. Good old
 fashioned honey trap. Melvin.

MELVIN
 Pleasure as always, Harry.

BRIDGETTE
 So, we can wrap up here and I can
 get on with making invitations to
 my V.I.P. party, yes?

HARRY
 Nowhere near, darling. That was
 only the first trial. Three more to
 go.

Nigel sidles up to Ryan:

NIGEL
 She cheated. You don't seem that
 bothered.

RYAN
 Three more trials, Nige, three more
 chances.

INT. FILM STUDIO - DAY

The crew prepares for a scene, Patrick and Florence on set.
 Steven, Samantha, ROBERT (camera operator) and GINNY
 (clapper) watching.

STEVEN
 Let's go for a take.

ROBERT
 Turn over.

GINNY
 Action!

STEVEN
 That's my line. Action!

The scene begins.

FLORENCE

My darling, this day has been most delightful and your kind gestures of affection have not gone unnoticed. May I be so bold as to request your company at the Gaskell Ball on Friday?

PATRICK

Your request is...

He freezes, looking up at the clock. Steven urges him on.

STEVEN

Still rolling.

PATRICK

That's lunch. It's eleven o'clock.

STEVEN

But you've only got to say three words!

PATRICK

After lunch, sure.

STEVEN

You've said more than that by telling everyone about it!

He throws his hands up in despair. Ginny takes the cue:

GINNY

And action!

STEVEN

Ginny, not yet!

FLORENCE

Patrick, you're so unprofessional.

PATRICK

Got to look after the talent, darling. I'm off for an egg roll.

He saunters off.

SAMANTHA

Let's take ten, people. Bernard...?

BERNARD (make-up and hair) turns around, his face caked in stage make-up.

BERNARD

Yes, chicken?

SAMANTHA

The make-up is for the cast,
Bernard.

BERNARD

Just testing out the goods,
chicken. We don't want the talent
coming out in a rash. They test
this stuff on dogs, you know.

Steven and Samantha walk and talk.

SAMANTHA

Is this Patrick really worth all
the hassle? You're going to have a
stroke.

PATRICK

His family put up half of the
budget, rich bastards. Here I am,
can't even get a decent runner. Do
you know what I had to do this
morning? I had to collect his dry-
cleaning, wash his car, drive him
here and make him eggy bread!

SAMANTHA

Trust in Harry.

Patrick scowls just as WILLIAM (stills photographer) walks
past, wearing an eye patch. It CLICKS like a camera, snapping
Patrick's moody face. William walks off, satisfied.

WIPE TO:

EXT. RUNNER TRAINING GROUND - DAY

The RUNNERS are assembled, tired and mucky.

HARRY

Right. Task two. Time to show me
what you're made of.

BRIDGETTE

I'm made of pure talent.

HARRY

Shut yer trap.

BRIDGETTE

How rude!

HARRY

You ain't here to stand around
shooting your mouth -- you're
runners, and that means fetching
and carrying!

(MORE)

HARRY (CONT'D)

Task two is the Four Items of Cinematic Being. Somewhere in this field is a film script, a call sheet, a production bible and a clapperboard. Fetch and carry!

TRAINEE RUNNER

Isn't that kind of the same as the last task, conceptually speaking?

HARRY

We're on a budget.

NIGEL

What was the third one, again...?

He has a notepad and pencil poised.

HARRY

Son, the first rule of runner training is to use your box.

NIGEL

How is watching tv going to help me remember?

HARRY

Blimey, I didn't think they let school out this early.

He carries on down the line of runners, smartening a few up. RYAN leans in to Nigel.

RYAN

Hey, do you need a hand?

NIGEL

Sorry, I'm trying to do this under my own steam. That'll show my mother I can be independent. She's so overbearing!

(beat)

Actually, could you tie my shoe for me, please?

HARRY

Right! On the count of three!

The runners get ready. Harry counts down and blows his WHISTLE. The runners charge.

WIPE TO:

INT. FILM STUDIO - DRAWING ROOM - DAY

A drawing room scene, Samantha presiding. Patrick and Florence are running lines, pestered by Ginny. FAY (costumer) is chatting intimately with BILLY (sound recordist).

SAMANTHA

Everyone! Places, please. And Fay, do stop flirting with Billy, this is a film set not a dating agency.

BILLY

We're discussing the scene.

SAMANTHA

That's not what it looked like.

FAY

Where's the director?

SAMANTHA

Steven has gone for a little lie down.

PATRICK

Well if the director is entitled to a nap, I'm going for one too.

FLORENCE

We've only just got back from lunch!

PATRICK

So I need to let it settle. Got to keep the talent happy and burp-free. You wouldn't have a film without me.

FLORENCE

God, you're as bloated as your ego.

STEVEN enters, battle-tired.

STEVEN

Right, let's get this train-wreck moving.

SAMANTHA

Florence! Patrick! Places!

BERNARD

Oh crumbs, I was hoping for a lie down with Patrick.

The crew takes its places.

STEVEN

Turn over.

BILLY
Sound rolling.

Steven waits for Ginny.

STEVEN
Clapper. Ginny!

GINNY
Action!

STEVEN
Clapper!

She claps.

STEVEN (CONT'D)
Action.

Patrick and Florence begin the scene.

FLORENCE
Word of your leaving has affected
me deeply, and with the Gaskell
ball only two days hence.

PATRICK
I will return in time to accompany
you. The importance of everything
depends upon my delivery of this
letter to the Mayor of Eastbourne.

FLORENCE
I will await your swift return.

Billy takes off his headphones.

BILLY
Right, ciggie break.

STEVEN
Cut! Ciggie break?

BILLY
(exiting)
Union rules, mate, look it up.

FAY
(exiting)
Ooh, if you're having one I'll join
you.

FLORENCE
Well, I could powder my nose, laugh
out loud.

BERNARD
You read my mind, chicken.

They exit arm in arm.

PATRICK
I'm going to find myself a whiskey.

SAMANTHA
Time to phone the kids.

All exit except for Steven and Ginny.

STEVEN
Am I the only one who wants to make
this rubbish?!

GINNY
Don't let it get to you, Ste. It's
that actor. He creates a bad
atmosphere.

STEVEN
It's not just him. They won't
listen. I need help. Somebody. I
need that runner, for a start.

GINNY
Harry will come up with the goods.
He always does.

STEVEN
Well, it can't get much worse.

EXT. RUNNER TRAINING GROUND - DAY

The runners are at war -- BRIDGETTE and NIGEL fight over the
clapperboard, RYAN trying to intervene.

BRIDGETTE
Give it to me! I deserve to win!

NIGEL
You don't know the first thing
about the film industry!

BRIDGETTE
I have charisma, darling, I don't
just memorise useless facts no one
will ever hear.

RYAN
Guys, there's got to be better ways
to settle this!

BRIDGETTE
Yes, maybe you could tie his
shoelaces together. Pull his hair.
That'd send him crying to mummy!

NIGEL

I'm not a mummy's boy.

BRIDGETTE

Is she going to hold your hand on your first day at Pinewood Pre-school?

NIGEL

I'm not a mummy's boy! I'm twenty-five!

He yells, pulling Bridgette clean off her feet and taking the clapper for himself, panting. HARRY arrives.

HARRY

Nice one, Nige. Who'd have thought it. You'd make your mother proud.

Nigel's eye twitches.

HARRY (CONT'D)

Ryan, you tried to play it smart, but sometimes you've just gotta knock a bird in the mud. Bridgette, you took a dive, but you showed balls doing it. That's more than I can say for some.

He addresses the other RUNNER HOPEFULS.

HARRY (CONT'D)

You lot! Clear out! Nigel, Bridgette and Ryan here are shortlisted. The rest of you can hop it.

RUNNER HOPEFULS

(leaving)

Charming / Never wanted to be in this poxy film / Who does he think he is / Lock, stock and two short brain cells.

Harry claps his arms around the shoulders of his chosen three.

HARRY

Onwards and upwards. Time for a change of scenery.

INT. WHITE ROOM - DAY

A ticking clock. HARRY sits behind his desk, the three runners lined up in front of it.

HARRY

Right, task number three: The one thing that keeps a production going and the director on his feet for hours on end.

BRIDGETTE

Money.

NIGEL

Well there's a whole host of safeguards in place, I mean where does one begin? Production assistants, schedules and call sheets, an entire ream of paperwork and management concerns, it really boggles the mind.

Ryan nods in agreement, realises Harry is waiting for him to say something.

RYAN

Er... coffee?

HARRY

Bang on, son, and getting the perfect blend is what counts. So, task three: The best coffee maker. Over there are the gubbins, and the objective is to impress me with your best cup o' the black stuff. Think of me as your own personal Gordon Ramsey.

MONTAGE: The runners make coffee chaotically, squabbling with each other and getting it wrong.

They line up again and present their cups. BRIDGETTE hands hers over, watches as Harry drinks. He grits his teeth as if sucking a lemon.

HARRY (CONT'D)

That's got a... mean tang to it.

BRIDGETTE

That's star quality.

HARRY

That's average.

BRIDGETTE

How dare you! I could be beside a pool with George and Brad by now, and you call me average!

HARRY

Be a dear and wait outside. Next.

She exits as Nigel presents his cup. Harry takes a sip and spits it out.

HARRY (CONT'D)
Christ, what the hell is this?

NIGEL
Well, I could tell you're a David Lynch fan.

HARRY
You what?

NIGEL
A David Lynch fan. This coffee is a shocking blend of quixotic imagery that stirs the soul.

HARRY
I'm a fan of coffee, and this ain't it.

NIGEL
It said coffee on the tin.

HARRY
It's bloody decafe, you arse! Next.

Nigel exits. Ryan presents. Harry takes a gulp and sighs in satisfaction.

HARRY (CONT'D)
That hits the spot. That's a winner right there.

RYAN
You mean I'm through? I did it? I got the job!

HARRY
No, you berk, you just made a decent cuppa.
(shouts)
Oi, you two!

Bridgette and Nigel trudge back in.

HARRY (CONT'D)
All three of you have brought something to the table: Bridgette, your drive and ambition. Nigel, your knowledge and passion. Ryan, your coffee. It's a difficult one, this, but I think I've decided on my winner.
(MORE)

HARRY (CONT'D)

The runner who'll be passing
through into the final task is....

CUT TO:

INT. FILM STUDIO - HALLWAY - DAY

Another scene with the crew. PATRICK is acting up.

STEVEN

Would you please calm down.

PATRICK

I have never been on a set as
disorganised as this.

On the sidelines:

BILLY

It's like watching two monkeys
going for each other's gonads.

BERNARD

At least you can train a monkey.

PATRICK

I bring star quality to this tripe,
and all I get is cheap wine and a
vase of forecourt roses!

FLORENCE

It's a commentary on your
performance, darling: Cheap and
wilting.

STEVEN

I'd kill for a bottle of red! I
haven't had a drink in a year.

PATRICK

It's not my problem you can't hold
your drink.

STEVEN

Right, that's it, you're fired!

PATRICK

You can't fire the lead actor! I
quit! I'll not scrabble around in
the gutter any more, I'm off to the
stars!

FLORENCE

I hope you burn up!

Patrick storms off. The crew trades mutterings:

SAMANTHA

Well, that's that, then.

GINNY

Dole office for me on Monday.

FAY

Fancy a trip to London, myself.

BILLY

Hotel for two?

STEVEN

I'll never work again. I won't even
make the bargain bin.

RYAN enters sheepishly, carrying a round of coffee.

RYAN

Um, excuse me, is this the set of
"The Importance of Everything"?

BILLY

It was, mate. The main face-puller
just bolted.

BERNARD

He had a funny turn, chicken.

Ryan wanders further in, finds Steven with his head in his
hands.

RYAN

It's Mr. Elliot, isn't it?

STEVEN

It was. Who are you?

RYAN

Your new runner. Harry sent me.

STEVEN

Perfect timing. You can lose your
job along with the rest of us.

Ryan hands him a coffee.

RYAN

I find that whenever I face a
problem and need to think, a coffee
helps me focus.

Steven takes a sip.

STEVEN

Say that line again?

RYAN
I said, I find whenever I face a
problem and need to think, a coffee
helps me focus.

Steven lights up, scrambles for a script.

STEVEN
Now say this line here with the
same belief, conviction--!

RYAN
(reading)
I will return, my love, as sure as
the sunlight brings the day, and we
will be together again.

STEVEN
That's it! What was your name
again?

RYAN
Ryan. Ryan Jones.

STEVEN
Ryan, how would you like the
starring role in "The Importance of
Everything"?

RYAN
Well I wouldn't say no!

Steven ushers Ryan to meet Florence, Fay and the others.

On the sidelines:

BILLY
He's done it. He's finally gone
mad.

BERNARD
I think it's sweet.

GINNY
It's a clever move.

Steven turns to Samantha:

STEVEN
Get Harry. We're going to need
another runner.

She makes the call.

SAMANTHA
Harry. Listen, there's been a
development....

INT. WHITE ROOM - DAY

HARRY on the phone.

HARRY
...You're having a bloody laugh!

INT. FILM STUDIO / VARIOUS - DAY

MONTAGE: The rest of the production, joined by Ryan.

-- NIGEL at home, watching television with his MOTHER nagging.

-- BETHANY congratulating Ryan on his role.

-- BRIDGETTE in the same cafe, waiting on a call and redoing her make-up.

INT. CINEMA - SCREENING ROOM - DAY

The premiere of THE IMPORTANCE OF EVERYTHING. Among the rows of movie-goers is HARRY.

HARRY
Task number four, you say? Well, that was Ryan's big break. In this game it's more of a marathon than a race. With passion, determination, a little luck and a lot of coffee, you can make your film dreams come true.

FADE OUT:

END TITLES