

WOODEN OVERCOATS
EPISODE ONE – THE BANE OF RUDYARD

By
David K. Barnes

Rudyard Funn ~ FELIX TRENCH
Antigone Funn ~ BETH EYRE
Eric Chapman ~ TOM CROWLEY
Georgie Crusoe ~ CIARA BAXENDALE
Madeleine ~ BELINDA LANG
Mayor Desmond Desmond ~ STEVE HODSON
Rev. Nigel Wavering ~ ANDY SECOMBE
Marjorie ~ ELLE MCALPINE
Jerry ~ MAX TYLER
Tanya / Lift Voice / Nurse ~ SARAH BURTON
Bill ~ PIP GLADWIN

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SCENE 1.

MADELEINE: (V.O.) Now, hidden in the English Channel is an island called Piffing. On the island is a village: Piffing Vale. And the village has a square, and the square has this lovely little antique's shop, but opposite the antique's shop... is a funeral home. Which is where much of this little chronicle will be set, I'm afraid. You see, I want to tell you all about a man named Rudyard Funn. He owns the funeral parlour, he's responsible for all the funerals in Piffing Vale, and today he experienced what was undoubtedly the worst day of his life – which, to be honest, was probably long overdue.

THEME TUNE: SINISTER BUT
ENERGETIC.

ANNOUNCER: *Wooden Overcoats* by David K. Barnes. Episode One: *The Bane of Rudyard*.

SCENE 2.

A CHURCHYARD. IT'S RAINING.
REVEREND NIGEL WAVERING
GIVES THE EULOGY.

WAVERING: We gather here today to celebrate the life of Stanley Jessop Carmichael, who was taken from us only five days ago...

REVEREND NIGEL WAVERING
DRONES ON QUIETLY IN THE
BACKGROUND.

MADELEINE: (V.O.) It all began with a funeral. The antique dealer, Stanley Carmichael – whose shop was immediately opposite Rudyard's premises – had led a life of peace and ordered calm for some eighty-nine years, and been subsequently crushed to death by a granite sundial.

WAVERING: (OFF, UNDER ABOVE) and whose passing shall, I am sure in saying, be mourned greatly by many within our community. Some of you will have known him intimately, others, like myself, only as an acquaintance. I enjoyed popping into his shop for a browse and a chat.

FOCUS AGAIN ON WAVERING.

I confess that I never actually bought anything from him, his prices being quite steep actually – though I did have my eye on that sundial, and I might still be tempted if it came down in price – hint hint...

WAVERING CONTINUES UNDER
MADELEINE'S NARRATION.

MADELEINE: (V.O.) Stanley's relatives pricked up their ears at the prospect of getting something for that granite sundial, whilst nearby – his eyes sunken and his skin pale and drawn – stood Rudyard, looking at his watch and wishing strongly that the Reverend wasn't an agnostic.

WAVERING: (OFF, UNDER THE ABOVE) but I'll just leave that with the family to mull over for the time being. Instead, let us think of Stanley, of the warm and happy times we all shared with him, and take solace in the fact that, even now, as we stand here,

WE AGAIN FOCUS ON WAVERING.

his spirit is undoubtedly looking down at us from his place with God. Unless you don't believe in that sort of thing, which I won't hold against you. Mind you, God probably will, unless He doesn't exist, in which case He won't have anything to complain about, really.

RUDYARD: (COUGH) Reverend.

WAVERING: Sorry, did somebody-

RUDYARD: Reverend.

WAVERING: Oh hello, Rudyard.

RUDYARD: You're rambling.

WAVERING: Sorry?

RUDYARD: You're rambling again.

WAVERING: Oh God, am I?

RUDYARD: Yes.

WAVERING: So sorry – where was I?

RUDYARD: His spirit looking down on us // from his place

WAVERING: - from his place with God – yes, thank you, right – looking down at us from his place with, um... no, actually, I don't suppose we could have a quick show of hands, could we-

RUDYARD: No, no, come on-

WAVERING: If you believe in God, could you put your hand up – can we do that? – Put your hand if you, er... Yes, about half. So what I might do is do the service twice-

RUDYARD: We don't have time.

WAVERING: Once with God in it and the other with-

RUDYARD: No, we're over-running.

WAVERING: Well, I thought I might read out a few Psalms.

RUDYARD: Which ones?

WAVERING: I don't mind, I'd be happy to take requests if anyone's got any-

RUDYARD: No no no, we're sixteen minutes behind schedule, nearly seventeen – Georgie. Wake up! (SNAPS FINGERS)

GEORGIE: (SUDDENLY WAKES UP) I don't want to.

RUDYARD: We need the coffin in the ground, now.

GEORGIE: Sir, it's a very heavy coffin.

RUDYARD: What's your point?

GEORGIE: I'm the only pallbearer.

RUDYARD: Oh stop moaning, put your back into it.

GEORGIE: (IRRITATED SIGH) Fine... (EXERTION AS SHE PICKS UP A COFFIN)

WAVERING: Do we have time for some funny anecdotes?

RUDYARD: We're late as it is and it's pissing it down, so no.

JERRY: (OFF) You're ruining everything!

RUDYARD: There you are, Reverend! You're losing them.

WAVERING: Oh, I thought they were rather getting into it.

JERRY: (OFF) Not him, *you!*

RUDYARD: Me?!

TANYA: (OFF) You horrid little man! Stop hurrying things along!

RUDYARD: Don't you know what a schedule is?

TANYA: (OFF) So rude!

RUDYARD: This isn't my only gig today, you know! I've got Mr. Askey to measure up in half an hour.

JERRY: (OFF) He's not dead.

RUDYARD: He doesn't look healthy, though, does he?

TANYA: (OFF) Stop talking! We're trying to honour Stanley.

RUDYARD: Honour Stanley? You didn't even like him!

TANYA: (OFF) How dare you!

RUDYARD: I noticed at the shop you slipped that carriage clock down your blouse when you thought no one was looking!

TANYA: (OFF) (GASP)

RUDYARD: And the dressing table!

CROWD MUMBLES ANGRILY.

JERRY: (OFF) I knew it!

TANYA: (OFF) Oh shut up. Bill swiped the portrait of Eva Braun.

JERRY: (OFF) Bill! I wanted that portrait!

BILL: (OFF) Well you can't have it!

THWACK AS BILL PUNCHES
JERRY IN THE JAW.

JERRY: Ow!

BILL: I'm sorry, Jerry, I just lost control-

THWACK AS JERRY PUNCHES
BILL IN THE JAW.

Ow!

AN ARGUMENT AND PHYSICAL
FIGHT BREAKS OUT AMONGST
THE CROWD.

WAVERING: Oh now, now come on, everyone, stay calm – Jerry, put that shovel down!

OFF, A CLONK OF SOMEBODY HIT
WITH A SHOVEL.

BILL: (OFF) Ow!

RUDYARD: All right, Georgie, get the body in the ground.

GEORGIE: Sir, they don't look very happy.

RUDYARD: Of course they don't look happy, it's a funeral. Off you go.

GEORGIE DROPS THE COFFIN IN
THE GRAVE.

SCENE 3.

MADELEINE: (V.O.) Their service completed, Rudyard Funn and Georgie Crusoe fled the cemetery and hurried back to the funeral home. Established by “local character” and serial bigamist Gilbert Funn in the fifteenth century, Funn Funerals had always maintained a solid reputation for being the only funeral home on the island.

FUNN FUNERALS. FRONT DOOR
OPENS. A BELL ABOVE THE
DOOR TINKLES. IT IS STILL
RAINING OUTSIDE.

RUDYARD: Of course, we could be onto a good thing back there. You saw Stanley’s widow?

GEORGIE: That sad old lady.

RUDYARD: Yes, when she took a swing at her son-in-law, I think she fell into the grave instead. I don’t know if it was fatal but it looked promising to me.

DOOR CLOSSES. BELL TINKLES.
RAIN IS MUCH QUIETER.

GEORGIE: Do you think we’ll ever have a quiet funeral?

RUDYARD: Asking for the impossible never helped anyone.

GEORGIE: People smiling and swapping funny memories... I’m just not sure that *every* funeral should end in violent conflict.

RUDYARD: Georgie, once you've been here for a few more months you'll realise that funerals will *a/ways* end in bloodshed and there's very little that you or I can do about it. Now go and get the measuring kit. I want to go to Mr. Askey's and see if he's dead yet.

GEORGIE: Are you sure it's worth the bother?

RUDYARD: We've gone round every day for the last six weeks and I'm not giving up now. Hop to it! (CLAPS)

GEORGIE: (SARCASTIC) Yes sir...

GEORGIE OPENS DOOR AND
EXITS.

RUDYARD: And get me a dry jacket! And another hat! Where's Antigone? Antigone!

THE PHONE RINGS. RUDYARD
ANSWERS.

(WITH BRISK, AGGRESSIVE EFFICIENCY) Now look here! Yes? ... Stanley's widow? Ha! I knew it! – No, nothing, sorry. We can fit her in at six o'clock – I'd leave her in the ground for the moment, it'll save time in the long run... No, she shouldn't have been brawling at her age... Of course I'd have fancied my chances against her. I'm thirty-five and she was eighty-two. See you at six.

PUTS PHONE DOWN.

(CALLING) Georgie, we've got a full day ahead of us! Where's Antigone?

GEORGIE: (OFF) Try the mortuary!

RUDYARD BEGINS BANGING ON
ANOTHER DOOR.

RUDYARD: (CALLING) Are you in the mortuary, Antigone? Antigone?
Are you in the mortuary, Antigone? Antigone? Are you in
the-

DOOR FLIES OPEN.

ANTIGONE: WHAT?!

RUDYARD: I'm back.

ANTIGONE: I'd rather look at the corpses!

DOOR SLAMS SHUT.

RUDYARD: Oh for-

HE KNOCKS ON DOOR POLITELY.
DOOR FLINGS OPEN.

ANTIGONE: Does rest in peace mean nothing to you?

RUDYARD: I don't hear the guests complaining. Got room for
another?

ANTIGONE: Is it Mr. Askey?

RUDYARD: Not yet – this one's a bonus.

MADELEINE: (V.O.) That's Antigone, Rudyard's *twin* sister despite actually being born one week afterwards. The poor dear had been diagnosed with depression within twenty minutes of being born: a world record which gave her no consolation at all.

ANTIGONE: So how was it today?

RUDYARD: The vicar's getting worse, and of course it was raining, and inevitably it ended with a punch-up over a portrait of Eva Braun, but personally I found it all very moving.

ANTIGONE: (EXASPERATED) Brilliant. So that's another grieving widow we'll have to apologise to.

RUDYARD: No we won't.

ANTIGONE: Why not?

RUDYARD: She fell into the grave and died before I left.

ANTIGONE: She did *what*?

RUDYARD: It's been a very productive morning.

ANTIGONE: You really have no concept of what "good service" is, do you?

RUDYARD: I love to disagree with you and I'm doing it now.

ANTIGONE: I've been in the mortuary all morning and do you know what I've been up to?

RUDYARD: I'm sure I don't want to know.

ANTIGONE: I have spent the past five hours mixing formaldehyde and methanol with clementines. And a tiny – a *tiny* – dash of cinnamon. That's what I've been doing. For five hours.

RUDYARD: Should I ask why?

ANTIGONE: To try and make our embalming fluid smell nicer. So the bodies will smell nicer. Because have you ever really *smelt* a body, Rudyard?

RUDYARD: Why do we still talk to each other?

ANTIGONE: Now, thanks to me, they'll smell brighter. Fresher. Not like bodies at all. That's the sort of service I'm striving for, Rudyard. I want them to forget that the body is a body.

RUDYARD: Yes, that'll work. "Our grandad's dead but don't worry because he smells like Christmas."

ANTIGONE: It's attention to detail, Rudyard. It's how to run a business. You wouldn't know.

RUDYARD: We get them the body in the coffin in the ground *on time*.

DOOR OPENS.

GEORGIE: Sir, your other jacket's been eaten by moths. I saw the whole thing.

RUDYARD: Not now – Georgie, how long did it take to get the coffin in the ground this morning?

GEORGIE: A couple of seconds.

RUDYARD: Now *that's* a good service.

GEORGIE: Because I dropped it.

RUDYARD: But it got where it needed to be, and that's what they pay us for.

ANTIGONE: Rudyard, for the very last time: they don't want chaos, they don't want stress, and they don't want a relative dead before the first has even been buried!

RUDYARD: Oh how do you know what they *want*?

ANTIGONE: In the name of sanity, Rudyard, we've got to turn this business around before people decide-

RUDYARD: (OVERLAP) Look, I've got a very busy day ahead so will you just get back into that mortuary-

THE FRONT DOOR OPENS. BELL
TINKLES. STILL RAINING
OUTSIDE. DOOR CLOSES. BELL
TINKLES. RAIN QUIETER.

BEAT.

ERIC: (AFFABLE) Hello!

RUDYARD: (BEAT) Yes?

ERIC: Eric! Eric Chapman! I'm new to the place! Just arrived!

GEORGIE: Good morning-

RUDYARD: Georgie. Leave it to the professionals. (TO ERIC) Good morning. We've not met.

ERIC: No. Because I'm new. To the place.

RUDYARD: You don't need to brag about it. I have met people before.

ERIC: You're Mr Rudyard Funn, of Funn Funerals?

RUDYARD: That's correct.

ERIC: Terrific name. I suppose you put the Funn in Funerals?
(POLITE CHUCKLE)

RUDYARD: (BEAT) No, of course we don't. (BEAT) That's obscene.

ERIC: Sure. Never mind, well-

ANTIGONE: (CLOSE) Hello Mr. Chapman.

ERIC: Argh, Jesus!

ANTIGONE: (CLOSE) Is this too close?

ERIC: A little bit.

ANTIGONE: Sorry.

ERIC: Don't mention it.

ANTIGONE: Sorry. I'm Antigone. Sorry. Pleased to meet you.

ERIC: Likewise – call me Eric. Are you in charge?

ANTIGONE: I'm the mortician. Where the action is! (SHRILL) Ha ha ha!

ERIC: (POLITE) Ha ha. I bet there's not much *you* don't know about the body, eh Antigone?

ANTIGONE: (BEAT) That sounded like a double meaning.

GEORGIE: It's called flirting.

ANTIGONE: Oh! Gosh! Is it?

ERIC: (EMBARRASSED) Well now-

ANTIGONE: No! It was lovely, smashing, do it again. Have I made it awkward? Damn-

RUDYARD: (CLEARS THROAT) Haven't got all day.

ERIC: Yes, so: Rudyard, Antigone, and-

GEORGIE: Georgie, hi.

ANTIGONE: That's enough.

ERIC: I saw you at the funeral didn't I?

GEORGIE: Yeah, helping out. It's a job.

RUDYARD: Georgie: don't give away company secrets.

GEORGIE: I was only-

ANTIGONE: Hang on – were you at the funeral this morning?

ERIC: Yes, I was.

RUDYARD: (BORED, AS IF USHERING ERIC OUT) And I'm sure you were impressed with what you saw, Mr Chapman, but we really are frightfully-

ERIC: Actually, I wasn't *entirely* sure it came off.

RUDYARD: (BEAT) I'm sorry?

ERIC: For a start, it got a little bit violent, didn't it?

RUDYARD: (COLD) Did you think so?

ERIC: At the end, yes.

RUDYARD: I'm not sure what funeral you were watching, Mr Chapman, but all I saw was good clean mourning.

ERIC: Didn't someone die?

RUDYARD: A very convenient place for it to happen. Georgie?

GEORGIE: I'm not convinced-

RUDYARD: There you go. Don't let us keep you, Mr Chap-

ERIC: And I thought there could have been a greater attention to detail - stop me if I'm getting too critical.

RUDYARD: OK, I'll stop you there. (GETS HIT IN THE CHEST)

ANTIGONE: Shut up. Carry on, Mr Chapman.

ERIC: Eric.

ANTIGONE: Gosh.

ERIC: I have to say, it all looked a little bit grim. I mean, it's a funeral, hardly party time, but even so – I always think these occasions should be a celebration of life rather than going on about death. You know what I mean?

RUDYARD: Nope.

ERIC: Ah. I mean I don't want to be made even more miserable, I want to remember those happy, magnificent memories; I want a cheerful atmosphere. Bright flowers, music, funny recollections-

ANTIGONE: Sweeter smelling fluids?

ERIC: Exactly! Fluids?

ANTIGONE: I think they're very important.

ERIC: Sure thing – that's what I mean, sorting out those little details, pushing the boat out. Or the hearse out, ha ha. That's just my two cents, for what it's worth.

RUDYARD: (BEAT) Well. I don't know what planet you live on, Mr Chapman, but-

ANTIGONE: Thank you, we'll bear those things in mind! Won't we, Rudyard?

RUDYARD: Over my dead-

ANTIGONE: Smashing.

ERIC: Anyway, I thought I'd swing by-

ANTIGONE: Any time!

ERIC: Thank you!

ANTIGONE: Any time at all.

ERIC: Yes – I was just swinging by to see the competition.

RUDYARD: (BEAT) Competition?

ERIC: Yes.

ANTIGONE: You mean like a raffle?

ERIC: Not exactly-

RUDYARD: I hate raffles.

ERIC: That's a strange thing to hate – anyway, I meant you lot.
Funn Funerals, the local competition. In funerals.

RUDYARD: You're an undertaker?

ERIC: Clients prefer "funeral director."

ANTIGONE: (NERVOUS) You're just visiting, though?

ERIC: Oh no, I live here now. Setting myself up.

ANTIGONE: Your own funeral home?

ERIC: Yep! Chapman's. Not quite as catchy as Funn Funerals but there we are. Heh.

ANTIGONE: Where are you going to be?

ERIC: You know the antique dealer you buried? Stanley Carmichael? I'm taking over his premises.

ANTIGONE: Just across the square?

ERIC: That's right. Opposite you, actually. We'll probably see a lot of each other! Compare notes, swap stories! Down the pub. Mine's a light ale, by the way. Ha ha. Yes. (BEAT) (CLEAR S THROAT) Er. Did someone die in here? Ha ha!

RUDYARD: Goodbye, Chapman.

ERIC: Oh, sure. Um. Glad to meet you, Rudyard. Antigone.

ANTIGONE: (COLD) Chapman.

ERIC: Georgie.

GEORGIE: See you later-

ANTIGONE: That's enough.

GEORGIE: (IRRITATED SIGH)

ERIC: OK. Um. Enjoy yourselves.

DOOR OPENS. BELL TINKLES.
THE RAIN HAS STOPPED. BIRDS
TWITTER.

ERIC: Ah! The sun's come out!

HE STEPS OUTSIDE. DOOR
SHUTS. BELL TINKLES.

RUDYARD: Well. If he thinks I'm going to buy him a light ale, he's very much mistaken.

ANTIGONE: (IRRITATED, STARTS PACING) Oh shut up, Rudyard! This is actually very serious!

GEORGIE: He seemed fine.

ANTIGONE: No he didn't, Georgie! Coming over here, waving his credentials in our faces – giving us *feedback*! My God!

GEORGIE: I thought you liked him?

ANTIGONE: Liked him? *Liked* him?

GEORGIE: Yeah. You were talking about fluids and everything.

ANTIGONE: That's professional chit-chat, for God's sake – do you think I *like* gorgeous handsome men, do you?

GEORGIE: Um-

ANTIGONE: Exactly! It's disgusting! (CONFLICTED TREMOR OF EXCITEMENT) It's disgusting.

RUDYARD: I can't think of a scenario where I *would* buy someone a light ale.

ANTIGONE: Rudyard! Focus! He is serious competition!

RUDYARD: Him? Competition? Were you listening to the man?

GEORGIE: No, she wasn't! She was gazing into his eyes-

ANTIGONE: Georgina! Go and make some tea.

GEORGIE: We haven't got a kettle.

TILL DRAWER OPENS, ANTIGONE
GRABS SOME NOTES, TILL
DRAWER CLOSSES.

ANTIGONE: Buy one.

GEORGIE: (IRRITATED SIGH) Fine.

DOOR OPENS, BELL TINKLE,
DOOR CLOSSES, BELL TINKLE.

ANTIGONE: Rudyard, we're finished. I think I'll take a cyanide capsule.

RUDYARD: We are not finished! We're an established firm, going back centuries; nobody round here's going to book a funeral with a complete stranger!

ANTIGONE: (GASP) Rudyard! Look at his shop!

RUDYARD: What is it?

ANTIGONE: He's already changed the sign! Chapman's! Just like he said!

RUDYARD: (WORRIED) I'll admit he's working quickly.

ANTIGONE: That does it. You've got to see the Mayor. Tell him this village isn't big enough for two funeral homes.

RUDYARD: That's not a bad idea, actually. I'll see him now.

DOOR OPEN, BELL TINKLE. IT'S
RAINING.

One day I'll buy an umbrella.

SCENE 4.

MADELEINE: (V.O.) Rudyard scuttled across the village square and up the steps leading into Piffing Hall. He was shown into the office of the Right Honourable Mayor Desmond Desmond, a man who felt that the most wonderful words in the English language were, “I’m sure it’s going to be fine.”

**THE MAYOR’S OFFICE. DOOR
OPENS.**

MARJORIE: Mr. Rudyard Funn to see you, sir.

MAYOR: (DISTRACTED) Oh, thank you, Marjorie.

DOOR CLOSES.

RUDYARD: Your Worship, I really am most desperately sorry to... er, where are you?

MAYOR: Down here, Rudyard. Under the desk.

RUDYARD: Why?

MAYOR: Oh, I’m just... sitting here. You know. Doing a bit of thinking... Big world out there.

RUDYARD: (BEAT) Yes, I came in to ask you-

MAYOR: Rudyard, do you know what the difference is between a village... and a town?

RUDYARD: Um, well, a town has a greater area-

MAYOR: (AS IF CONFIRMING SUSPICIONS) Yes.

RUDYARD: A higher population-

MAYOR: Mmhmm-

RUDYARD: More amenities-

MAYOR: Amenities, yes.

RUDYARD: ... A Mayor-

MAYOR: Yes – oh God – well, exactly, yes.

RUDYARD: I actually came to see you about-

MAYOR: We have to *do* something with our lives, haven't we, Rudyard? Don't you think?

RUDYARD: (IMPATIENT) Yes.

MAYOR: I look at my seal sometimes, and all my envelopes, and I read my name and, "Have I done enough?" I ask myself. Am I even Right Honourable? Because I don't feel it.

RUDYARD: Well, to call yourself Right Honourable you have to be a judge or a Privy Councillor.

MAYOR: Really? (BEAT) I've got to change all my stationery now – you see, this is just the sort of thing I'm talking about. What have I earned? What have I achieved? (BEAT) God knows we have to try and justify ourselves, somehow...

RUDYARD: (BEAT) I don't like the man across the road from me.

MAYOR: And then what with my sister passing the bucket last week – top drawer send-off you chaps gave her, by the way.

RUDYARD: Oh! Thank you!

MAYOR: Pity it rained.

RUDYARD: Yes, well.

MAYOR: Can't help that.

RUDYARD: No.

MAYOR: Or the ground subsidence – still, we all laughed... Seeing her flopping about like that – anyway, do you know what I've decided to do, Rudyard? I'm going to turn this village into a *town*. That's what I'm going to do. I mean, things must expand, mustn't they?

RUDYARD: Probably.

MAYOR: You think so? Mmm. Good... She used to say terrible things to me, my sister-

RUDYARD: I've got a problem, actually.

MAYOR: Have you? Can I help? Because I'd really like to be useful.

RUDYARD: I think you can be. You see, your Worship... there's this man.

MAYOR: He's not worth it.

RUDYARD: Yes – what? – no, I mean, this man is opening a new funeral home. Directly across the road from mine.

MAYOR: Is that a problem?

RUDYARD: We can't have *two* funeral homes, can we?

MAYOR: Can't we? Why not?

RUDYARD: Well. It'd be ridiculous.

MAYOR: I don't want to look ridiculous.

RUDYARD: Exactly. If we had two funeral homes, why not two fire stations? Two hospitals? Two Mayors?

MAYOR: Two Mayors? Could it really get that far?

RUDYARD: I'd hate to speculate.

MAYOR: Help me up, would you? (IS HELPED UP) Yes, I think we'd better stab this in the bud immediately. Thank you, Rudyard.

RUDYARD: Thank *you*, your Worship.

MAYOR: Gets me out of the office anyway!

RUDYARD: Out from under the desk!

MAYOR: We won't talk about that.

OPENS DOOR.

MAYOR: (CALLS) Marjorie! Cancel my appointments for today!

MARJORIE: (OFF) There aren't any.

MAYOR: (BEAT) Thank you! Off we go, Rudyard.

SCENE 5.

MADELEINE: (V.O.) Upon arriving at Chapman's, Rudyard, and the until recently Right Honourable Mayor Desmond Desmond, discovered that the place was about ready to open – and it wasn't yet even midday. Rudyard braced himself for a sinister journey into the unknown.

CHAPMAN'S. UPBEAT, QUIET
JAZZY PIANO MUSIC.

MAYOR: Wasn't this place an antique's shop a few hours ago?

RUDYARD: I don't understand... How has he managed to *do* all this?

MAYOR: Bit flash, isn't it? All these happy colours. Not a patch on your set-up. Look, there's not a speck of dust anywhere.

RUDYARD: I mean... he arrived *this morning*.

MAYOR: Has to be said, though, these sofas are very comfy.

MAYOR BOUNCES GENTLY.
SPRINGS SQUEAK.

Is that a coffee machine?

RUDYARD: (STILL STUNNED, NOT REALLY LISTENING) Yes.

MAYOR: Does your place have one of those?

RUDYARD: We bought a kettle half an hour ago.

THE “BING” OF AN ELEVATOR. ITS
DOORS SLIDE OPEN.

LIFT VOICE: Doors opening.

ERIC: Hi, sorry to keep you waiting! As you can imagine – all go here!

RUDYARD: Is that a lift?

ERIC: Mr. Mayor, it's a pleasure to meet you. Eric Chapman. There's some chocolate truffles in the bowl there, help yourself.

MAYOR: Oh, lovely. (EATS ONE)

ERIC: Would you like the tour? I'd love to show you around! It's still not quite finished-

MAYOR: Perhaps another time, Mr Chapman.

RUDYARD: You've got a lift.

MAYOR: Now, er, I don't know quite how to say this, but, er...

ERIC: How to say what, Mr Mayor?

MAYOR: Well... it's very naughty of you to have done all this. Isn't it?

ERIC: Is it?

MAYOR: Without permission, I mean.

ERIC: But you gave me permission.

MAYOR: Did I?

ERIC: I mean, before I came here I was calling back and forth with your people, and everything got sorted, and er...

HE LOOKS THROUGH A FOLDER.

Yes, here we are – there's your signature.

MAYOR: Yes... The smiley face in the O there; it's definitely mine... You must understand, I don't always *read* everything I'm given. I'm usually kept very busy.

ERIC: I'm sure! Don't worry about it!

MAYOR: What do you think, Rudyard?

RUDYARD: (STILL STUNNED) It's a really nice lift.

ERIC: Thanks, Rudyard!

MAYOR: Yes, well even with all this, I mean... I am the Mayor, aren't I? And I have the perfect right to change my mind.

ERIC: (WORRIED) Do you... not want me here?

MAYOR: No no no, it's not that, but, er, you see, it's just, er... Rudyard?

RUDYARD: Sorry? (SNAPS OUT OF IT) Yes, er... now look here.

ERIC: Yes?

RUDYARD: We've already got a funeral home.

MAYOR: Exactly. We've already got one. And with the best will in the world, we can't have two funeral homes, can we?

ERIC: Why?

MAYOR: Because then, you see, we'd, apparently have to have two hospitals. You see.

ERIC: That's a great idea.

MAYOR: Is it? Oh, good, I'll get onto that.

ERIC: Brilliant.

MAYOR: But, nevertheless, a village just can't sustain two funeral homes, can it?

ERIC: You could be right there.

MAYOR: Could I?

RUDYARD: Told you so.

ERIC: But you know what *could* sustain two funeral homes?

MAYOR: No.

ERIC: A town.

MAYOR: (BEAT) A town, you say?

RUDYARD: N-no. No-

ERIC: Don't get me wrong, this is a great village – but I think it's going to be an even greater town. And I want to help you do that in the only way I can: with a funeral home.

MAYOR: Can I ask a question?

ERIC: Go for it.

MAYOR: If we had two funeral homes, would we need two Mayors as well?

ERIC: No. That's ridiculous.

MAYOR: Mm. Excellent. In that case, I hereby pronounce this funeral home: open!

RUDYARD: What?!

APPLAUSE FROM CROWD
OUTSIDE.

What are they all doing there?

ERIC: We're taking advance orders. Just a service we provide.

RUDYARD: I-I-I... wha-

MAYOR: Well, I won't take up any more of your time, Mr. Chapman.

ERIC: Please, Mr. Mayor, it's Eric!

MAYOR: Best of luck, Eric! If you're ever at a loose end, do pop by the Hall. Sometimes we have movie nights.

ERIC: I'll remember that! And if you need our services – it's on the house.

MAYOR: Oh! Tremendous. Looking forward to it now.

RUDYARD: Now, now- now hang on-

MAYOR: Glad to have you here, Eric.

ERIC: Mr. Mayor!

MAYOR: Oh no no - call me Desmond. TTFN.

ERIC: Catch you later, Desmond!

MAYOR: Shall I leave the doors open?

ERIC: If you would!

DOORS OPEN. CROWD ATMOS
OUTSIDE.

Rudyard, sorry I can't stay and chat – can I get you anything?

RUDYARD: How-

ERIC: Tell you what: make yourself a coffee!

HE CLAPS RUDYARD ON THE
BACK.

ERIC: I better see to that queue. Enjoy yourself! Don't forget the truffles! (OFF) Good morning ladies and gentlemen – oh, er, afternoon now!

CROWD CHORTLE.

I'm delighted to say: welcome to Chapman's! And remember: We put the fun in funerals!

CROWD APPLAUSE.

RUDYARD: *Chapman.*

LIGHTNING FLASH.

SCENE 6.

MADELEINE: (V.O.) After a coffee and a couple of truffles, Rudyard stormed out, seething with resentment. He kicked a small dog and got bitten by its owner. Having gotten back to Funn Funerals, Rudyard set down a chair by the window and stared out across the road, muttering out loud to his only real friend in the world.

FUNN FUNERALS. GRANDFATHER
CLOCK ETC.

RUDYARD: (CONTEMPT) Look at them all... Smiling... Happy... It's a funeral home! Who the Hell do they think they are? Eh?

MOUSE SQUEAK.

RUDYARD: Exactly... I give him... a week.

MOUSE SQUEAK.

Alright. Maybe two.

MOUSE SQUEAK.

He might have Gold Blend and lounge music, but you can't put a gloss on the mechanics. Get the body in the coffin in the ground on time... That's what it's about...

MOUSE SQUEAK.

And I bet his corpses don't smell of cinnamon.

MOUSE SQUEAK.

RUDYARD: (GRIM SMILE) Yeah. We'll see who runs this village.

DOOR OPENS.

ANTIGONE: Rudyard! You're talking to that mouse again, aren't you?

RUDYARD: Her name is Madeleine.

ANTIGONE: It's not normal.

RUDYARD: Antigone, you spend twenty-three hours a day in a mortuary; don't tell me what's normal. Off you go, Madeleine, we'll continue this later.

MOUSE SQUEAKS AND DARTS
AWAY.

ANTIGONE: You haven't moved all afternoon.

RUDYARD: I don't need to move. I'm plotting.

ANTIGONE: Where's Georgie?

RUDYARD: Day off. No work. Plotting.

ANTIGONE: Rudyard, for the first time in our lives we've actually got competition, which means we could really do with having some friends – so could you get out there and make some?!

RUDYARD: (MUMBLE) I'll do it tomorrow.

ANTIGONE: Have you at least gone round to check up on Mr. Askey?

RUDYARD: Who?

ANTIGONE: (GRITTED TEETH) Mr. Askey. The man we've been waiting to die for six weeks. Because, so help me, I need to embalm somebody, and it could quite easily be you.

RUDYARD: (SNAPPING) Look, Mr. Askey's immortal, he'll never die, so what's the point in talking about it?

TELEPHONE RINGS. RUDYARD GRABS AT IT.

Now look here! Georgie? What? Right. I'll see you there.

SLAMS DOWN PHONE.

RUDYARD: Mr. Askey's dead.

ANTIGONE: Is he?

RUDYARD: Yes. (BEAT. SUDDEN REALISATION) Oh my God, Mr. Askey's dead!

ANTIGONE: How?

RUDYARD: Heart attack! Half an hour ago! It's all round the village! Antigone, I'm... I'm so *happy*!!!

ANTIGONE: Took him long enough.

RUDYARD: He's dead he's dead he's dead he's dead-

ANTIGONE: Rudyard!!

SHE SLAPS HIM.

RUDYARD: Gah!

ANTIGONE: Stop being happy and get over there now!

RUDYARD: Sorry, yes, get over there, yes! I'm gone! Rudyard is back in the game!

HE PULLS OPEN FRONT DOOR.

BELL TINKLE. IT'S RAINING.

Rudyard is going to get wet! Have the mortuary ready.

ANTIGONE: And Rudyard-

DOOR SLAM. BELL TINKLE.

Don't cock it up.

MOUSE SQUEAK.

SCENE 7.

MADELEINE: (V.O.) Before you judge Rudyard too harshly at his delight at an old man's demise, I should tell you that Mr. Askey was Rudyard's old P.E. teacher at school, so his delight is almost entirely justified. Rudyard met Georgie at Mr. Askey's bijou residence at five-forty-five.

HALLWAY OF ASKEY'S BIJOU
RESIDENCE. FRANTIC
KNOCKING.

GEORGIE: OK, OK!

DOOR OPENS.

RUDYARD: (FALLS IN, PANTING) Georgie!

GEORGIE: Sir.

RUDYARD: Say it again for me, won't you, say it again.

GEORGIE: Alright: "Mr. Askey's dead." But listen-

RUDYARD: YES! Get in there my son, whatever that means!

GEORGIE: Yeah, I ought to say-

RUDYARD: God I've been looking forward to putting him in the ground. Can't mock me for losing the two hundred metre dash now, can you, *Mr Askey*?

GEORGIE: Before you get excited-

RUDYARD: Right, yes, got to straighten up, yes. (PULLS HIMSELF TOGETHER) Think grave. How do I look?

GEORGIE: Miserable.

RUDYARD: Great. Let's go.

GEORGIE: But sir-

A DOOR OPENS.

NURSE: Could we please have some quiet out... oh.

DOOR CLOSSES.

It's you, Mr. Funn.

RUDYARD: Afternoon, Nurse. May I take this opportunity to convey my most profound condolences?

NURSE: Thank you, Mr. Funn.

RUDYARD: I'm sure my apprentice Miss Crusoe here has already carried out our preliminary duties so I think in the interests of efficiency we should let the dog see the rabbit. If you'll take me through-

NURSE: Well, this is actually rather embarrassing...

RUDYARD: (BEAT) Oh please don't say it's a false alarm.

NURSE: In a sense, yes-

RUDYARD: Oh for- Georgie, you said he was dead!

GEORGIE: He *is* dead!

RUDYARD: But- (SIGH) nurse, one of us in this corridor is deeply confused and I'm beginning to think it might be you.

NURSE: No-

RUDYARD: I knew it, she's mad; grab her, Georgie.

NURSE: I'm not mad!

RUDYARD: That's what a mad person would say; Georgie!

GEORGIE: Let's do this.

DOOR OPENS.

ERIC: Rudyard! Great to see you!

RUDYARD: Chapman?

ERIC: Busy afternoon, eh? Hello Georgie!

GEORGIE: Hey Eric-

RUDYARD: Stop flirting! Nurse: I demand this man be told to vacate this bijou residence immediately.

ERIC: Look, this is my bad, and I've *really* got to apologise for this one but-

NURSE: Mr. Askey requested it.

RUDYARD: He what?

NURSE: With his final words he said he couldn't bear to get buried by such a feeble little weed as Rudyard Funn.

RUDYARD: But-

ERIC: An interesting man. He wanted to see my gold medals in the two hundred metre dash.

RUDYARD: (ANGRY SIGH)

ERIC: Got to say, I wasn't expecting business to take off quite so quickly!

NURSE: You're doing a most proper job, Mr. Chapman.

ERIC: Thank you, Nurse. I think we'll collect him first thing tomorrow. Anyway, must run – good to see you Rudyard, Georgie! Enjoy yourselves!

HE OPENS FRONT DOOR. BIRD
SONG AND NATURE.

(INHALES) Ah!

HE WALKS OFF. DOOR CLOSES.

NURSE: What a charming man! I hear he's still a bachelor!

RUDYARD: So am I.

NURSE: Yes. Well. Hardly surprising, is it?

OTHER DOOR CLOSES.

GEORGIE: Ah well. Can't win 'em all, eh, sir?

RUDYARD: (DEEP, ANGRY BREATHS)

GEORGIE: Sir? You alright?

RUDYARD: (SUPPRESSED RAGE) ... I... am... so... (NORMAL) Six o'clock.

GEORGIE: Six o'clock?

RUDYARD: Six o'clock! The cemetery! Stanley's widow! Stanley Carmichael's widow in the cemetery at six o'clock!

GEORGIE: Oh yeah, I forgot about-

RUDYARD: What time is it?!

GEORGIE: About five to six, but you'll never get there-

RUDYARD DASHES PAST,
YANKING OPEN THE DOOR. IT
BANGS AGAINST THE WALL AND
REMAINS OPEN. IT'S RAINING.

Sir! Oh for God's sake – Rudyard! Come back you stupid-

LIGHTNING.

SCENE 8.

MADELEINE: (V.O.) Rudyard raced down the cliff, past the trees and through the streets, with the speed that would have finally impressed Mr Askey had he not already been dead. His lungs aching for breath, his limbs trembling with the effort, Rudyard tumbled into the cemetery at exactly one minute past six to discover...

SUNSHINE AND BIRDSONG.
BACKGROUND SOUND OF
PEOPLE HAVING A LOVELY TIME.
CHATTING. LAUGHING. CHILDREN
PLAYING.

RUDYARD: (BREATHING HARD FOR A WHILE) It's... it's all...

WAVERING: (OFF) Ah, there you are, Rudyard!

RUDYARD: Reverend... What's going on?

WAVERING: Well, I arrived to oversee the preliminaries on Mrs Carmichael's, er, transferral to a better world – if such a place exists – which I'm not certain about one way or the other – and I found that her family and friends had been gathered together already for the funeral!

RUDYARD: (BLEAK) For the funeral?

WAVERING: Since the deceased was already here and sensibly dressed, he just got it done and out the way. Young fellow named Eric. Got his own funeral practice, I understand. I'm hearing marvellous things about it. He's got a coffee machine, you know.

RUDYARD: Chapman.

WAVERING: Led them all in a couple of sing-songs, actually. Even had my speech prepared for me - very succinct, it was. Breezed through it all in no time.

RUDYARD: Chapman.

OFF, WE HEAR A SPLASH AND
SOME LAUGHTER.

WAVERING: Oh, he also found a lake. Over there. I think we're all going boating in a minute... He owns a boat, you know.

RUDYARD: *Chapman.*

WAVERING: Anyway, I'd better be getting back to it. We're having jelly and ice cream. Bags of fun! Goodbye, Rudyard – or, er, should I say: enjoy yourself!

WAVERING SHAMBLES AWAY.

RUDYARD: (PULLING HIMSELF TOGETHER) I see. I see. Well.

ERIC: Hello Rudyard.

RUDYARD: (YELLS. BEAT. GETS BREATH BACK) Oh. It's you. (BEAT) Did a fair job, I hear. Congratulations. (BEAT) Don't think it's always like this. They won't hand it you to on a plate, you know. They won't do that. This is very much the exception. (BEAT) Well? What? (BEAT) What? (BEAT) You can talk, can't you? (BEAT) Well say something!

ERIC: (BEAT) Rudyard... Have a nice evening.

PAUSE. ERIC WALKS AWAY
THROUGH THE GRASS.

RUDYARD: What do you... what do you mean, have a nice evening?... What did you mean by that remark? Chapman! What if I don't want to have a nice evening? Eh? What if I don't – Chapman! What did you mean? Chapman! (BEAT) *Chapman.*

MADELEINE: (V.O.) Today had been the worst day of Rudyard's life – until tomorrow came along and topped it. I was there to jot it all down, from first hand observation, and a little bit of gossip I picked up later. And, of course, being his only real friend in the world, Rudyard tells me everything. My name is Madeleine. I'm going to be the first mouse to write a Sunday Times Best Seller. And I know for a fact that Rudyard wants to revenge himself on Eric by... well, we'll burn that bridge when we come to it.

END MUSIC

ANNOUNCER: *The Bane of Rudyard* was written by David K. Barnes and was performed by Felix Trench as Rudyard, Beth Eyre as Antigone, Tom Crowley as Eric, Ciara Baxendale as Georgie, Steve Hodson as the Mayor, Andy Secombe as Reverend Wavering, Elle McAlpine as Marjorie, and Belinda Lang as Madeleine, with additional voices by Pip Gladwin, Sarah Burton, and Max Tyler. Original music composed by James Whittle. The programme was recorded at ArtSpace Studios by Tom Gillieron and was directed and produced by Andy Goddard and John Wakefield.