

GODS WAITING ROOM

Written by

Richard Silvester

Rickysilvester@ihug.co.nz
+6421411334

IN CLOSE UP:

A weathered old finger tracks a line down the page of a phone book, stopping on the name Albert Graves. A thick black pen slicing through the entry, unceremoniously condemning it to history.

INT. ALL SOULS CHAPEL - PRESENT DAY

Standing next to a large photo of an elderly man (Albert) the Chaplain addresses the congregation of the All Souls Chapel.

CHAPLAIN

We are gathered here today to honor
the life of Albert Graves.

Albert wearing the same charcoal morning suit as in the photo, watches proceedings with jangling nerves from the entrance way. He scans the small airy space.

Familiar faces fill the pews and it's standing room only on the edges.

Albert exchanges a comforting smile with those that turn to acknowledge him.

CHAPLAIN (CONT'D)

A remarkable man who has worked
here with us for as long as I can
remember. But I will let those who
knew him best take over from here,
Colin.

A nervous middle aged man, takes the stage, reading from his notes.

COLIN

Hello, I'm Colin, Director here at
Purewa, um... As our Chaplain
mentioned Albert has had quite the
distinguished career with us, from
his fifteenth birthday up until
recently, a remarkable service only
interrupted by... well... a
distinguished service of another
kind..."

ON ALBERT:

Albert has overseen thousands of funerals, but none had made him this jumpy. Closing his eyes, he leaned into the door jam taking a deep breath.

VICTORIA (O.S.)

Oh relax.

A familiar voice chirped as an elegantly dressed woman takes Alberts hand.

VICTORIA (CONT'D)

Its not every day you go to your own funeral, come on.

The only space left was in the back row next to June, an ancient wee thing and something of a regular, who took no notice as Albert and Victoria squeezed past, hunched in her mobility scooter, a tattered phone book from '87 sticking out of the basket.

COLIN

...and there he moved full-time from the mortuary to assistant funeral director. A man of routine, a man who cared for the deceased with a respect few these days reserve for the living. A quiet man who kept to himself mostly.

Colin looks up from his script and at Alberts picture.

COLIN (CONT'D)

Well no that's not quite true is it Albert.

EXT. ST HELIERS BAY VILLAGE - FLASH BACK - DAY 1

Seagulls hover over the tide line as Albert walks through God's waiting room in the lazy light of early morning. St Heliers village was not the first place in the world to be tagged with the moniker, and looking around at Albert and the other early risers you couldn't argue it didn't fit the seaside suburb.

As was the case every morning first stop on his commute was the bakery, not the busy franchise run by the Asian family, with their production line cheesy scrolls and miniature pizzas, no Victoria's Bakery, the tiny shop opposite the library the one with the jingle bells in the doorway that dutifully announced Alberts arrival.

INT. BAKERY - FLASH BACK - DAY 1

VICTORIA (O.S.)

Morning Albert, won't be a tick.

Victoria called from out back.

ALBERT

No rush.

Victoria, a widow who had broken a few hearts in her day and still believed in dressing immaculately what ever the occasion, waltzed out from behind the counter swinging two brown paper bags.

VICTORIA

There you go hun, one B&E and
corned beef with pickled onions for
later.

ALBERT

Thanks.

Albert replied, taking his offerings and heading for the door.

VICTORIA

Albert?

Victoria's voice compelling Albert to freeze before turning expectantly.

ALBERT

Yes Victoria.

VICTORIA

You get seven across?

ALBERT

Auspicious!

VICTORIA

Thanks, now don't you go telling
June I cheated.

ALBERT

My lips are sealed.

EXT. PUREWA CEMETERY - FLASH BACK - DAY 1

The manicured grounds of the cemetery held no menace, quite the contrary, the precise orderedness of the place was calming for Albert as he continued along enjoying his bacon and egg pie. The rows of grave stones getting older and older as he moved closer to the buildings in the middle of the grounds that made up the funeral home, mortuary and chapels of Purewa. In the distance ground staff were busy preparing a fresh grave.

INT. CORRIDOR - FLASH BACK - DAY 2

The fluorescent lights were buzzing with the excitement of imminent life before bursting forth their white light with a pop as one after the other came to life down the ceiling of the long stale corridor.

The institutional echo of leather soles on linoleum followed Albert down the corridor and through the swinging double doors into the mortuary.

INT. MORTUARY - FLASH BACK - DAY 2

Another flick of a switch, another pause, then more banks in the ceiling gave up their promise of illumination and bathed the shiny metal benches and polished white floors in strong artificial light.

ALBERT

And how is everyone this morning?

Albert addressed the room while removing his jacket and hanging it causally on the back of a office chair, before heading to the large bank of mortuary drawers recessed into the back wall of the room, a tuxedo hanging from one of the large commercial handles.

With the panache of a professional Albert opens two of the drawers at once, sliding out two cool bodies in a puff of cold air.

ALBERT (CONT'D)

I talked to her today, she asked for seven across, and guess what the answer was?

Albert continues his morning routine by looking through the paper work that accompanied each body on a clip board, before stealing a moment with the female corpse.

ALBERT (CONT'D)

Auspicious....can you believe that Audry...I know....

Albert then turns to face the gentleman, again checking the paper work.

ALBERT (CONT'D)

So...Ken, lets get you ready for your big day shall we?

Albert lifted the Tux down and gave it a once over, brushing away any bits of fluff.

ALBERT (CONT'D)

So Susan, that's my neighbor, is getting me to look after her cat while she's away. Silly girl is going to some backward country on a mercy mission, anyway the little shit took a chunk out of my chin, scared the life out of me, no offense guys.

Happy with the Tuxedo Albert starts to dress Ken, pulling him up into a sitting position, the excursion causing a fart to slip out.

ALBERT (CONT'D)
Pardon, but better out than in.

CUT TO:

The over sized clock hit midday as Albert removes the second brown paper bag from his jacket pocket and hoists himself up onto a bench to enjoy his lunch.

As if cued by Alberts first bite Colin rolls in a gurney covered in a white sheet. With out looking up Albert mutters under his breath.

ALBERT (CONT'D)
Lunch time, always lunch
time...Dropping off or picking up?

COLIN
Fresh one Bert.

ALBERT
Mr Brooks I presume.

COLIN
Yip, Mr Chambers set to go.

Albert hops down from his perch, pulling a comb from his pocket and while still eating from one hand slicks back Ted's hair.

ALBERT
There you go Ted, looking sharp.

Colin wheels Ted out while Albert starts the introductions.

ALBERT (CONT'D)
So Robert I'm Albert and over there
is Mrs Lancaster. Lets get you
settled in.

INT. ALL SOULS CHAPEL - PRESENT DAY

COLIN
Sometimes he was even known to
spend the night. He didn't like to
leave them alone especially the
younger ones. Albert will be sorely
missed, and not just by us that
work here, but by all that pass
through these gates. I'll now hand
you onto my boys Scott and Nathan
who would like to share their
memories with you all.

Stepping down from the stage Colin gives a stern behave yourself glance at the two cocky younger men taking his place. Scott the older of the two starts to speak.

SCOTT

Albert was a grumpy old coot, and
boy did we give him grief began.

INT. CORRIDOR - FLASH BACK - DAY 2

Scott leans over the top of a gurney for balance, just inches above the body beneath the obligatory white sheet, his feet hovering above the screaming wheels as he hurtles down the corridor before bursting through the double doors of the mortuary with all the energy of a life or death emergency.

INT. MORTUARY - FLASH BACK - DAY 2

SCOTT

Who ordered the dead guy?

Albert looks incredulous.

SCOTT (CONT'D)

Relax, he only fell off once. Where
you want it?

ALBERT

Shouldn't you be in school?

SCOTT

Holidays.

ALBERT

Again?

Albert shudders at the thought, then has an idea. Dramatically he opens up one of the mortuary draws.

ALBERT (CONT'D)

Well while you're here you can help
me with Keith.

Scott points to the gurney he rode in on.

SCOTT

Don't you need to check on this
dude?

ALBERT

That dude can wait. Over here!

SCOTT

I don't have to touch it do I?

ALBERT

Keith doesn't bite. Just grab the tray underneath and help me lift him onto that bench.

With his deflated bravado left at the door Scott heads over.

While Albert shows him where to grip he secretly moves Keith's hand just so.

ALBERT (CONT'D)

On my three. Got it.

Scott nods nervously.

ALBERT (CONT'D)

One... Two.....Three.

SCOTT

ARGHHHH!

Scott screams, jumping back from the body as Keith gently lays his cold hand on top of his.

SCOTT (CONT'D)

What the fuck?

ALBERT

You see it's not the dead that scare me, it's the living you got to be worried about.

Albert slams his open palm onto the belly of the body that Scott brought it. The body lurching up in pain revealing Scott's very much alive brother Nathan searching for his breath.

With that done Albert rolls an empty stainless bench up to the open mortuary door and effortlessly slides Keith off the rollers and onto the bench, whispering in Keith's ear for effect.

Scott and Nathan stare, both white as ghosts.

INT. ALL SOULS CHAPEL - PRESENT DAY

A police woman in dress uniform steps up solemnly to the stage holding her hat.

D.I. RAYNER-WEBB

First of all I would like to extend my sympathies to the Graves' family and friends. It's obvious he will be sorely missed. My name is Detective Inspector Helen Rayner-Webb.

(MORE)

D.I. RAYNER-WEBB (CONT'D)

As you are all aware the on-going investigation into Albert's disappearance is, for want of a better term, stalled. Until we locate a body we can not speculate on what might have happened to him. We have done our best to reconstruct the last few days before the disappearance. By all accounts he was hit hard by the recent death of Miss Marsden, and for him not to attend her funeral was very unusual especially as he was seen that very day at her grave site.....

EXT. BAKERY - FLASH BACK - DAY 3

Albert whistles a happy tune as he pushes on the door to Victoria's bakery, but worryingly it doesn't budge. He tries again, nothing. Knocks loudly, no reply. He tries peering through the window cupping the sides of his face to see past his reflection, not a thing.

INT. MORTUARY - FLASH BACK - DAY 3

Albert paces the room with the pent up energy of a caged cat. The incessant tick tock of the large clock above the double doors the only thing doing something productive, if only to remind Albert that it was lunch time.

Albert rifles through his jacket pockets but there was no lunch today. Resigned to hunger Alberts pulls himself up onto his perch when the doors open and Colin walks in.

COLIN

Sorry to interrupt your lunch Bert

ALBERT

Whatever?

COLIN

Everything alright?

ALBERT

Fine and dandy.

COLIN

Okay? Just wanted to let you know hair and makeup for Mrs Lancaster is running late and won't be here till two.

ALBERT

Well I'm sure the bomber won't mind.

COLIN
 You going tell me what's wrong
 Bert?

ALBERT
 I just need some air.

EXT. BAKERY - FLASH BACK - DAY 3

Alberts reflection stared back at him in the window of Victoria's bakery. The lights were on but nobody was home.

INT. CORRIDOR - FLASH BACK - DAY 3

Colin and his wife Trish were guarding the doors to the mortuary when Albert arrived back at work.

TRISH
 She just arrived, we wanted to wait
 till you were here before....

Trish pleaded but Albert pushes past without looking up.

INT. MORTUARY - FLASH BACK - DAY 3

Under the strong artificial light the white sheet almost glowed in the centre of the room as Albert approaches tentatively, silently followed by Colin and Trish at a respectful distance.

Albert took a deep breath before slowly rolling back the sheet to find Victoria starring back up at him with dark lifeless eyes. Shock and disbelief riddle his body as Albert's balance starts to waver.

Colin and Trish both tense, ready to rush over, but are stopped short.

ALBERT
 Out! Both of you, out!

COLIN
 Bert you're not in any condition
 to..

ALBERT
 ...We need to be alone!....Please.

TRISH
 We'll just be outside.

Trish conceded, ushering Colin out of the room with a look.

Now alone, Albert gently clasps Victoria's hand as tears come to his eyes.

IN CLOSE UP:

A trembling hand draws an unsteady line through Victoria Marsden's name in the phone book.

EXT. ST HELIERS BAY VILLAGE - FLASH BACK - DAY 4

The dull sky matched the mood of that morning as Albert walked past the familiar block of shops in his best suit.

EXT. BAKERY - FLASH BACK - DAY 4

Pausing as if by instinct at Victoria's Bakery, Albert is met by a bunch of tired looking flowers sitting in the doorway, serving as impassible barrier and forcing Albert on his way.

EXT. PUREWA CEMETERY - FLASH BACK - DAY 4

The gloom was lifting as Albert reached the cemetery.

EXT. GRAVE SITE - FLASH BACK - DAY 4

A fresh grave was being prepared by ground staff as Albert ambled over. Dave smiles and looks up.

DAVE

Hey Bert, you gonna' show us how its done.

ALBERT

Not today boys.

Albert replied as he made some inconsequential adjustments to the artificial grass surround the grave.

DAVE

Well we're pretty much finished here. We go two more in C to get on with. You take care Bert.

As the workers load into their Ute and head off, Albert continues to give the site the once over. Not happy with the squaring of the descender that surrounds the grave Albert uses all his strength to shunt the frame over just a little but the exertion is all too much.

Albert clutches his chest as he blacks out and topples head first into the grave landing with a thud.

FADE OUT.

EXT. GRAVE SITE - FLASH BACK - DAY 4

Family and friends surround Victoria's grave as her casket is slowly lowered into the ground. No one noticing it stopping unevenly 6 inches from bottom.

INT. ALL SOULS CHAPEL - PRESENT DAY

CHAPLAIN

The respect he gave to those who passed through this place was unequalled. A loner in life, a bachelor to his end. But we all know he is now surrounded by friends. You will be missed Bert

The congregation stands and starts to empty the chapel. A few family members hover near the pulpit to thank the Chaplain for the service.

Most of the guests however head toward Albert with hugs and hand shakes before disappearing through the walls. Among the well wishes are Ted, Keith, Audry, Robert and Mrs Lancaster.

Soon Albert and Victoria are alone and hand in hand they too disappear leaving the All Souls Chapel in peace.

THE END

