

Wuthering's: A Serious Comedy Episode 4

By

SG Byron

WUTHERING'S: A SERIOUS COMEDY EPISODE 4
MUSIC: INTRO 1

INTRO VOICE

You're listening to Wuthering's: A Serious Comedy,
brought to you by Francis Hardy Productions.

(SOUND + INTRO TO THIS POINT ALWAYS THE SAME)

(ALLY AND GEORGE WITTER, POSSIBLY IN FUNNY VOICES,
AT THE START OF EACH STORY AS OUTSIDE OBSERVERS,
LIKE A MODERN, TWO-PERSON GREEK CHORUS)

MUSIC: INTRO 1 FADE OUT

GEORGE

What will Mr Wuthering and and his motley crew do next?

ALLY

Their outfit is like a runaway train. It could go in
any direction, and you fear the worst.

GEORGE

It's a little bit exciting, isn't it?

ALLY

Carnage is never exciting, George. I've told you this
before.

GEORGE

Yes, you have.

ALLY

We've been married many years, and I like to think I've
made progress in instilling proper values. Values which
are sadly missing at Wuthering's Cake Shop.

GEORGE

Yes, it's very sad.

ALLY

No, not sad, George - infuriating. Those urchins are
running riot!

MUSIC: INTRO 2

(DIALOGUE AND INTRO 2 FADE OUT)

SOUND: TOAST POPPING UP, SPREADING BUTTER ACROSS

MR WUTHERING

In 22 years abroad, I tasted many strange and exotic foods. There was green tea in China, ravioli in Rome - frankfurters on Fifth Avenue. There was naan bread in Mumbai, pitta bread in Greece, and soda bread in Wales. But I never lost my taste for the simpler things. On my return to England, I looked forward to beans on toast.

Surely I didn't have to travel 10,000 miles for beans on toast? But, you see, I did. I had been in restaurants in these foreign lands, and asked for what is a straightforward meal. If they understood me at all, they tried to make it fancy. I had a half a mind to go in the kitchen myself and tell them 'No! The bread must be sliced.' The most meagre variety, suffocated in plastic and sent down the chute of a factory. Then you know what you're getting.

Another thing I like is television, and I missed it terribly. I once sat in a teepee on the Canadian Prairies, worrying about bears. I'd been told the grizzlies were long gone, but you only need one to give you trouble.

Anyway, it was Christmas, and Christmas Day on Albert Square is, as everybody knows, very special. Who had died? I had no way of knowing.

After a long day at work, I love a bitta telly. What's on?

TV NARRATOR 1

And now, new Monday night drama. With strong language, and scenes some viewers may find distressing - The Day That Broke Britain.

MUSIC: 'BATTLE' INTRO 'THE DAY THAT BROKE BRITAIN'

SOUND: CRISP PACKET AND MUNCHING

TV NARRATOR 2

A long time ago, in a land just outside your window, ordinary people lived side by side in perfect harmony. No-one ever argued, and no-one was ever racist.

MR WUTHERING

Ah, historical fantasy. I like those. Maybe there'll be dragons.

TV NARRATOR 2

Then, one day, this peaceable nation decided to have a vote. They voted on whether to remain members of the Eeee-yooo, a distant and mysterious collective of

(MORE)

TV NARRATOR 2 (cont'd)

countries that met in distant and mysterious places. It was a polling day more terrifying than any ever seen before.

SOUND: DRAMATIC MUSIC

The future hung in the balance. Then, on 24 June 2016, it was revealed that 51.9% of the population had voted to Leave, and 48.1% to Remain.

SOUND: B-MOVIE EFFECTS - SCREAMS

MR WUTHERING

Statistics? I thought this was a drama. I'll stay with it. Maybe this is one of those intellectual ones.

TV NARRATOR 2

The results ripped through the land like an earthquake. It changed the fabric of right-wing magazines forever. But it also changed lives. This is the story of the day that broke Britain.

SOUND: CARTOON FAST-FORWARD

MR WUTHERING

45 minutes gone by and nothing's happened. They had a vote, and then what? I feel like I've heard this word 'Brexit' a thousand times, and I still don't know what it means. What is a 'Brexit'? Is it a kind of Cyclops?

SOUND: CARTOON FAST-FORWARD

MUSIC: 'BATTLE' INTRO 'THE DAY THAT BROKE BRITAIN'

TV NARRATOR 1

And The Day That Broke Britain returns at the same time next week.

MR WUTHERING

That's an hour of my life I'll never get back.

MUSIC: INTERVAL

MR WUTHERING

Would you mind clearing that table at the back, Emily?

EMILY

Sorry, I was miles away. I keep thinking about a show on TV last night.

MR WUTHERING

What was it?

EMILY

I'd call it a state-of-the-nation drama. It asked the big questions. What is democracy? What is it to be human? And how do we survive this shattered island? Very powerful stuff.

MR WUTHERING

I obviously tuned into the wrong channel. The one I saw started off well - lots of talk of disaster and peril - but I was soon bored senseless. And all along, they expected us to know what a 'Brexit' was, but never once gave an explanation.

EMILY

Was this The Day That Broke Britain?

MR WUTHERING

That's right. You'd think if they're going to do a drama, they'd have thrown in a few monsters. Or at least a swordfight.

EMILY

Why would they? It's based on real events.

MR WUTHERING

(PAUSE)
Is it?

EMILY

Brexit is Britain's exit - from the EU. Mr Wuthering, where were you on the night of 23 June 2016?

MR WUTHERING

On a tanker in the Antarctic. I wanted to see penguins in their natural habitat, but didn't have much to spare...so it was economy class, if you like. I worked in the kitchen. Or galley, as it was known.

EMILY

Did the ship not have a radio?

MR WUTHERING

They had many radios. But what they broadcast was like a pirate Heart FM - 80s love songs and the like. I wouldn't let staff switch them on.

EMILY

Mr Wuthering, we were watching the same show. Everything you saw was true. Or nearly true.

MR WUTHERING

But it was all so extreme.

EMILY

You said earlier that it was boring.

MR WUTHERING

Were people really screaming in the streets?

EMILY

They were screaming inside.

MR WUTHERING

Did they really try to turn back time?

EMILY

There were experiments. It was amateur stuff.

MR WUTHERING

And middle-class ladies sold voodoo dolls of Nigel Farage on eBay?

EMILY

I have one. But I lost the pins.

MR WUTHERING

Did the leader of UKIP really have a statue built of himself, and then attempt to install it on Trafalgar Square?

EMILY

No. They made that bit up.

MR WUTHERING

This realm isn't what I thought it was.

MUSIC: INTERVAL

MUSIC: 'BATTLE' INTRO 'THE DAY THAT BROKE BRITAIN'

SOUND: B-MOVIE EFFECTS

MR WUTHERING

I watched The Day That Broke Britain again. This time, I was gripped. I could see my own face reflected back at me. It wasn't because I was too close to the screen; it was because this was my own country, faithfully drawn.

Fascination soon turned to horror. I remembered how often I'd said on my travels 'I'm English'. There was a thousand years of history in those two words, from the Norman Conquest to punk rock. I was proud.

Now my cheeks burned with shame. Were they all secretly laughing at me?

I had to do something. There was my little cake shop. It could start there. There had to be some way of celebrating what we did well. Maybe even restore a bitta glory to these shores. There had to be a way to - *make Britain great again.*

MUSIC: INTERVAL

JACK

Visited any graveyards lately?

MR WUTHERING

No, I haven't.

JACK

Were things really so desperate? That the only business investor you could find had to step out of a grave?

MR WUTHERING

To be clear - I never saw Miss Piratti step out of a grave. It was only later that I read about her death, and by then my mind was already set. The good outweighed the bad - that is the nature of business dealing.

JACK

Where is 'the good' in a decayed set of bones that appears and disappears without warning?

MR WUTHERING

Jack, that's a disrespectful way to talk about a remarkable woman. Apologise, right now.

JACK

So-rreee.

MR WUTHERING

I have the sense Miss Piratti is wise. She is also motivated, straight-talking - and sterling is sterling, wherever you find it. It was only later that I realised I could not phone or email her.

JACK

What is her address? Headstone No.4, Third Row?

MR WUTHERING

Nonsense - her address is on our contract. I looked it up - and this took some doing, because the street names have changed. But it was a fine four-storey house in Bloomsbury. It stood until 1905, when it was demolished and replaced by a block of flats.

JACK

A four-storey house in Bloomsbury...So Miss Piratti was a wealthy woman?

MR WUTHERING

It seems so.

SOUND: CAFE DOOR BELL - OPEN

SOUND: CAFE DOOR BELL - CLOSE

JOE NEXT DOOR

Hi, I'm Joe from next door.

MR WUTHERING

Hi.

JOE NEXT DOOR

We're getting rid of our old mannequins, but before we throw them in the skip, I wondered if you had any use for them?

JACK

(QUIETLY)

In a cake shop?

JOE NEXT DOOR

They're free.

MR WUTHERING

Why - I'm sure we'll think of something. Yes, if they're going? Thank you.

Are you selling up, Joe?

JOE NEXT DOOR

Not at all. But we've had complaints - the mannies are 'too attractive', apparently. New, ugly ones have just arrived.

MR WUTHERING

Well - good luck with that.

JOE NEXT DOOR

Thanks. I'll bring the mannies in now.

SOUND: CAFE DOOR BELL - OPEN

SOUND: CAFE DOOR BELL - CLOSE

MR WUTHERING

Never let anything go to waste, Jack. I learned that travelling. In some places, I saw the most basic materials - what you and I would call scrap - put to good use.

They turned plastic into bottles, metal into cars - timber into houses. If they could do that, what could I do with - whatever a mannequin is made of?

MUSIC: INTERVAL

JACK

I was still no closer to solving The Case of Miss Piratti. Why wait centuries to invest in a cake shop? Perhaps she always propositioned strangers on their lunch breaks - and Mr Wuthering was the first to follow up. But now she was involved, she didn't seem very interested.

I needed that Bloomsbury address. Fortunately, Mr Wuthering is lax about security, and afraid of computers. A covert search of his office and I found their precious contract in a couple of minutes.

The nearest Tube was Holborn. I went there on my next day off.

MUSIC: INTERVAL 'GHOSTMANE'

SOUND: UNDERGROUND TUBE

SOUND: DOORBELL

JACK

Hi, I'm here to do an inspection of the premises.

NEIGHBOUR

No-one told me about any inspection.

JACK

Oh, they didn't?...It was booked three weeks ago.

NEIGHBOUR

I know nothing about it.

JACK

That's too bad - I've come from the other side of London. Would it be possible to inspect just the corridors - and windows? Only I don't know my way around...

NEIGHBOUR
Hang on -

MUSIC: INTERVAL

NEIGHBOUR
You see and hear all sorts 'round here, I can tell you.

JACK
How long have you lived here then? Yep, that - carpet - looks...healthy.

NEIGHBOUR
You call that 'healthy'? This is what I've come to expect from the council. 35 years. To begin with, I kept promising myself I'd leave -

JACK
Really? Let me give a tug at these curtains - yes, thick material. Nothing needed there.

NEIGHBOUR
- but the property was worth more and more all the time. I'd wake up £30,000 richer than I was the day before. I had to stay.

JACK
That's quite a bind. Let me just test this window...It opens.

NEIGHBOUR
Shouldn't you be taking notes?

JACK
I find information is best stored between my ears. That way, I'll always find it again.
(PAUSE)
Can I ask why you wanted to leave?

NEIGHBOUR
It's never just one reason. But...I kept hearing a couple arguing. Could never make out what they said. Ferocious, they were. I could hear things being thrown, angry shouts. It had to be from upstairs.

JACK
Do you have a key for this cupboard?

NEIGHBOUR
You want the meters? Here you go -

SOUND: KEYS JANGLE
Everytime I went up there, it went quiet. The shouting faded away as I went up the steps. Like they knew I was
(MORE)

NEIGHBOUR (cont'd)

approaching. I made enquiries and was told the flats on the first floor were empty. Thought I were going mad.

JACK

Does it still go on?

NEIGHBOUR

It stopped in the summer. Dunno why. What couple argues for so long - and then stops?

JACK

Do you ever hear any other strange sounds?

NEIGHBOUR

Nothing is strange after 35 years.

JACK

Can you hear that?

SOUND: CLANKING CHAINS - SLOW, DISTANT

NEIGHBOUR

It's the plumbing. Mayb' you could have a look at that...?

MUSIC: INTERVAL 'GHOSTMANE'

MR WUTHERING

(ADDRESSING A MANNEQUIN)

What am I going to do with you, you beauty? First of all, you need some clothes. It's not decent to go around naked. What do you mean, you've seen celebrities do it? That doesn't make it okay.

What if Jack or Emily saw me talking to a mannequin? They'd say I was crazy. But I can see you've got a personality. I also think you're good at listening, and I've got a lot to talk about.

Have you heard the awful news? About Brexit? What's that - you voted Leave? I don't think we can be friends.

No, I'm just joking. Because I didn't vote at all. But I've heard about how its broken Britain, and I want to help. Mannie, I need your brains on this. How can I make Britain great again?

MUSIC: INTERVAL

JACK

An unhappy couple lived upstairs - so what? Plenty of those about. The trip to Miss Piratti's address had proved fruitless.

Then I remembered her second visit to the shop. 'You need newspapers', she said. And we had supplied them. What if she meant newspapers from her own time? I searched for these online, but got nowhere.

SOUND: RAIN AND THUNDER

The absence of information gaped at me. It made me claustrophobic in the open air.

There was a phrase for what I had met. 'Known unknowns'. Or - yawning, dispiriting holes in the Universe.

Darkness closed in on me like a cheap tent. If I shut my eyes, I could almost see a brown ant traipsing across the canvas.

I had the detective's weather, alright. But what else?

Did the minds of great detectives go around in circles? Did they ever feel - utterly lost? Even the street I walked down was all wrong. Sherlock Holmes never sidled past charity shops...He never bought hot food at Greggs...

Mr Holmes never visited a library run by the council.
(REALISING)

The library...There were old newspapers in there. They might help me solve Miss Piratti's case.

SOUND: RAIN AND THUNDER - STOP

JACK

I started with papers published in the year of Miss Piratti's death, 1650. It turns out 17th century newspapers are much like those today - concerned with princes, dukes, Parliament, generals, and bishops. I could barely keep my eyes open. Otherwise, they published satirical poems. These were baffling.

I was about to give up when I stumbled across the -
(WITH DRAMA)
Mercurios Fumigosus.

Not a spell, but, in 1653, a new magazine. Soon I was stifling laughter at its rude and comical inventions. Then I saw a verse referring to 'the peerless Dona Piratti'.

Could this be my Miss Piratti?

The work was a mocking tribute to 'The Gentleman Poet'; no other name was given. It poked fun at an autobiography he had written and distributed at his own expense, and at the age of just 33. In between the jokes - and presumably for identification purposes - it stated that he had been bound to marry 'the peerless Dona Piratti' before her 'tragic death from the Plague'.

But in all those stories about princes, dukes, Parliament, generals, and bishops, there had been no mention of the Plague. That's because there was no epidemic in 1650. In fact, almost no-one had died from the Plague at all.

MUSIC: INTERVAL

SOUND: CAFE DOOR BELL - OPEN

SOUND: CAFE DOOR BELL - CLOSE

MR WUTHERING

What do you think?

EMILY

Oh - this is unexpected.

MR WUTHERING

Look at the icing on this cake. I did it myself.

EMILY

(READING)

Education, education, edu-CAT.

MR WUTHERING

I ran out of space.

EMILY

What would be a short word for 'education'?

MR WUTHERING

School. But why would anyone write 'School, school, school' on a cake? It would make no sense.

Do you like the posters? Oasis AND Blur - I didn't want to take a side on that. On every one of the tables, a model shark - its a reference to Damien Hirst's, you know, the pickled shark...? Anyway, its Cool Britannia.

EMILY

(GASP)

Who is THAT?

MR WUTHERING

Obviously, I had the mannequin, it needed a purpose.

(PAUSE)

It's the big man himself. The...the Prime Minister.

EMILY

Mr Wuthering, I will only say this once. The public is not ready for Tony Blair.

MR WUTHERING

They were more than ready - it was a landslide victory.

EMILY

22 years is a long time to have been away...

MR WUTHERING

It is.

EMILY

Lucky for you, I can help. I haven't mentioned this before, but I'm a keen student of ancient history, with a special interest the early modern period. Sometimes known as the Age of -

SOUND: DIAL-UP INTERNET (20 SEC)

JACK

R2-D2?

EMILY

Dial-up internet. So I know what happened *after* Cool Britannia and that landslide Labour victory. Every. Sorry. Step. Are you sitting comfortably?

MUSIC: INTERVAL ('SPOOKSICHORD') - 15 OR 30 SEC

MR WUTHERING

It was a dog's breakfast! One thing after another. No, scrap this whole idea.

EMILY

I agree. But...where did this idea come from?

MR WUTHERING

I want to make Britain great again. To celebrate our greatness.

EMILY

I see. Yesss, a Nineties theme is a terrible idea. The trouble is that some people still remember that time - so you can't put anything psst them. What about...the Eighties?

MR WUTHERING

There are good bits and bad bits. So long as we don't accidentally refer to the miners' strike, the IRA, or the Cold War. Or the Falkland Islands -

EMILY

Was there something going on in Iraq?

MR WUTHERING

There most definitely was.

EMILY

I'm just looking at Wikipedia...Quite a lot of hurricanes. Hideous plane crashes...

MR WUTHERING

There was a drought in the US.

EMILY

Band-Aid.

MR WUTHERING

I think that was one of the good things...But what if we just stuck to the music?

EMILY

Great idea.

MR WUTHERING

I'll make a soundtrack for the shop. Queen. I've always liked them. What about...We Are The Champions...?

EMILY

Mmmmmnnnn. It's the lyrics. He sings 'No time for losers'. People might take offence.

(PAUSE)

Can you hear that?

SOUND: CLANKING CHAINS

SOUND: SPOOKY MUSIC

MR WUTHERING

Miss Piratti.

MISS PIRATTI

Keep looking at the records.

MR WUTHERING

(TO HIMSELF)

For once, I've got it right.

(LOUDER)

That's just what we were doing. Your knowledge of music must be extensive. We were talking about the Eighties...

EMILY

She's going -

MR WUTHERING

Already? Miss Piratti, just a moment -

EMILY

She's gone.

(PAUSE)

This appearing and disappearing...it's becoming a problem. I think you should confront her.

MR WUTHERING

She doesn't stay long enough to do that.

EMILY

With these sudden departures - her skills and talents are going to waste.

You need to say how you feel. That's something I think you find difficult. It's a generational thing. Me and my friends are in touch with our emotions; we have names for them, like 'angry' and 'sad'. And we know how to share. You could learn from us.

SOUND: CAFE DOOR BELL - OPEN

SOUND: CAFE DOOR BELL - CLOSE

EMILY

Hi, Jack.

JACK

Hi...Hello, Mr Wuthering. What's this...Cool Britannia?

MR WUTHERING

We're not doing that anymore. Emily's filled me in. Instead, we're compiling a 1980s soundtrack. Giving a lot of consideration to Queen at present. Do you have any strong opinions?

EMILY

I think We Are the Champions is too aggressive for selling cakes.

JACK

We have been misled. Miss Piratti is unlikely to have died of the Plague. And I think she was engaged.

MR WUTHERING

An engagement is neither here nor there...but why would someone lie about how they died?

EMILY

They wouldn't. Anyway, you just missed her.

JACK

What did she say?

EMILY

She said 'keep looking at the records'.

MR WUTHERING

Flash Gordon! I still have the CD.

MUSIC: SWING JAZZ (FATS WALLER)

INTRO VOICE

You've been listening to Wuthering's: A Serious Comedy. Jack Hatton was played by XX, Emily Richpin by YY, Mr Wuthering by XX and Miss Piratti by YY. It was written by SG Byron and brought to you by Francis Hardy Productions. If you enjoyed it, please subscribe and follow us on Twitter @spokenstory.