

PROLOGUE

(ESME TEMPLEWOOD ENTERS. SHE IS AN OLD LADY DOING HER SHOPPING. SUDDENLY THE DEVIL APPEARS)

DEVIL. Ha ha!!
ESME. Who the Devil are you?
DEVIL. Don't you recognize me?
ESME. **(SQUINTING)** Are you our milkman? I paid you Friday.
DEVIL. I am not your milkman!
ESME. Wait a minute. I know you. Off the telly.
DEVIL. **(PROUDLY)** Maybe!
ESME. You're the one causing all the trouble. You're that Tony Blair.
DEVIL. I am the Prince of flaming Darkness, you old hag.
ESME. Well, there's no need for language. What do you want?
DEVIL. I thought you might be willing to help me.
ESME. In what?
DEVIL. A little pact.
ESME. A little packet of what?
DEVIL. A pact. A deal. How would you like to live for ...ever?!!!
ESME. Oooh, I'm not sure. Can I phone a friend?
DEVIL. It's the opportunity of a lifetime.
ESME. Well, I'll think about it. Bye for now, dear.
DEVIL. What is there to think about? Either you agree to live forever or I kill you right here.
ESME. Can I just finish my shopping?
DEVIL. Oh, what's the bloody point? **(HE MAKES TO KILL HER!!)**
ESME. Hang on! Live forever you say?
DEVIL. That's right.
ESME. Forever and ever. Amen?
DEVIL. If you will.
ESME. How do I know you really are the Devil and not some camp old Satan worshipper on his way back from an office party...
DEVIL. You'll just have to trust me.
ESME. Trust the Devil? There's an offer you don't get every day of the week.
DEVIL. You agree to live forever and I guarantee you will remain active, supple and very healthy.
ESME. Sounds too good to be true. And what do you get in return?
DEVIL. Oh, hardly anything, really. Nothing at all, infact. A mere soupcon!
ESME. Well, what?
DEVIL. Your soul!

(HE LAUGHS INSANELY)

ESME. You're not from Reader's Digest are you?
DEVIL. Jesus Chr- **(STOPS HIMSELF)** No, I am not.
ESME. Very well, you're on.
DEVIL. **(PRODUCING FORM)** Excellent. If you'll just sign there, there and there.
ESME. Always forms to sign.

DEVIL. Tell me about it. I'm trying to set up an 'online' soul collection service – you know, cut down on the paperwork, it's the way forward.

ESME. **(HAVING SIGNED UP)** Tell me something, Mr Flaming Darkness, why is there so much pain and suffering in the world?

DEVIL. Oh, here we go, that old chestnut....

ESME. You know, war, famine, Ulrika Johnson... Why inflict all this misery onto us?

DEVIL. **(SHRUGS)** Everyone needs a hobby.

(BLACKOUT. ESME AND THE DEVIL TROT OFF HAPPILY)

SCENE ONE

(THE TEMPLEWOOD RESIDENCE. CHARLIE ASLEEP IN ONE OF THE CHAIRS. A NEWSPAPER LIES OVER HIS FACE. AFTER A MOMENT, MARK AND CATHERINE APPEAR)

CATH. Go on.

MARK. But...

CATH. You've got this far.

MARK. I'm nervous.

CATH. Is that why you just farted?

MARK. Yes.

CATH. It really stinks.

MARK. Sorry.

CATH. That your father?

MARK. Yes.

CATH. Is he dead?

MARK. Asleep. Come on, let's go.

CATH. No, we'll wait for him to wake up.

MARK. This is going to be a disaster.

CATH. Don't think it's ever any different for every young beau who ever brings his fiancée home to meet his family for the very first time who isn't nervous, because it hardly ever isn't.

MARK. But no-one has a family like mine.

CATH. That's what I used to think. It's embarrassing for me, you know, having a mother related to Saddam Hussein and a father who's invented a new kind of cheese.

MARK. I mean, take my grandmother...

CATH. Ooh, now, I love little old grannies. The wrinkles, the gossip, the dribble...

MARK. My grandmother isn't like that.

CATH. Stop worrying, she'll just love me. How could she not? I mean, why do you think I've gone to all the effort of making her a trifle?

MARK. Because you're stupid?

CATH. No, silly, because I want to blackmail her into accepting me. Surely she'll be pleased that her little Marky is getting wed.

MARK. I can only remember Granny being pleased once. That's when she ran over my father in a tractor.

CATH. What was she doing in a tractor?
MARK. About 60 miles an hour.
CATH. She sounds quite a raver.
CHARLIE. **(stirring)** Great big wobbly dangly ones.
CATH. I think he's waking up. **(gently)** Mr Templewood. Mr Templewood. Aw!
He's still flat out. Isn't that cute? **(shouts loudly)** Mr Templewood.
CHARLIE. **(waking)** What the....?
CATH. Hello!
CHARLIE. Who are you?
CATH. I'm Catherine. I'm engaged to marry your son.
CHARLIE. Jesus!
MARK. Nothing like breaking the news gently.
CHARLIE. John!
MARK. Hello, dad.
CHARLIE. Well, this is very nice. It's about time you brought a nice girl home and you are very nice. Very nice indeed.

(CHARLIE HUGS CATH CLOSELY)

Great chest.
CATH. He does get easily excited, doesn't he?
MARK. Well, now you've been introduced...
CHARLIE. Oh, but you must stay for tea. Granny will be thrilled.
MARK. No, she won't. She hasn't been thrilled since the day she trod on my hamster.
CATH. Oh, I love hamsters. Was it a fluffy brown one?
MARK. Well, it was a sort of mushy red one when she'd finished with it.
CATH. I used to have a hamster. We called it Juan. It was a Spanish hamster. Mother said it had a look of me.
CHARLIE. Did it have big marracas?
MARK. Dad!
CHARLIE. I'll go and get your Granny.

(CHARLIE LEAVES)

CATH. He seems nice. For a pervert.
MARK. Yes. Catherine, you've got to promise me something.
CATH. Anything, darling. As long as it doesn't involve plant food...
MARK. You've got to promise..
CATH. Cos you know how I get that rash...
MARK. You have to promise me...
CATH. Just one whiff of Baby Bio and I'm scratching myself for weeks...
MARK. Listen...darling.... You've got to promise that your opinion of me won't change when you meet my grandmother.
CATH. Why would it change? Honestly! She's not a monstrous freak or anything, is she? **(SHE LAUGHS, ANNOYINGLY)**
MARK. Yes.
CATH. Oh.
MARK. So, promise me.
CATH. Well....

MARK. You promise?
CATH. All right, I'll do my best.
MARK. Good.
CATH. But no promises.

(CHARLIE ENTERS WITH ESME, THE OLD LADY FROM THE PROLOGUE. SHE IS DIFFERENT – SMART CLOTHES, NO LONGER FRAIL, EVERY INCH YOUR STANDARD MINI-SERIES BITCH)

ESME. Well, well, look what the fucking tide's dragged in.
MARK. Grandmother, this is Catherine. Er, my fiancée.
CATH. Hello.
ESME. Slut.
CATH. What?
MARK. Now, granny....
CHARLIE. Now, mother...
CATH. Now then, who's for Scrabble?
ESME. Sod off.
CATH. I must say, you're very different from every other little old lady I've ever met.
ESME. Well, don't get used to it. You're not stopping. See her out, Charles.
CHARLIE. She's staying for tea.
ESME. She can kiss my fanny. She's not staying where she's not wanted.
MARK. Grandmother, for heaven's sake...
ESME. Don't you start.
CHARLIE. Why don't we all sit down and have a nice cup of tea?
ESME. She's not drinking tea out of my best china.
CATH. I'll have a mug.
ESME. And I'm certainly not wasting good milk and sugar on her.
CATH. Oh, I don't take sugar. I'm sweet enough.
ESME. Tart!
MARK. Really, is this all necessary?
ESME. I happen to be in my own house. I think that gives me some right in choosing with whom I take tea with.
CATH. I think you added a superfluous 'with' in that sentence.
ESME. Oh, piss up a rope.
MARK. Granny!
CATH. It's all right, Mark, I know when I'm not wanted. I'm off.
ESME. You certainly are.
CATH. And after going to the trouble of bringing you a present, too.
ESME. You shouldn't have bothered.
CATH. I wish I hadn't now. It's nothing really, just a little trifle.
ESME. Well, what is it?
CATH. It's a little trifle. Would you like some?
ESME. Oh God! Get her out of my sight!
MARK. That's it! We've put up with your histrionics and bad manners for long enough. You never used to be like this. What happened to the sweet old lady who dangled me in her tights and let me play with her dentures?

ESME. She was a dead hollow shell, completely worthless. This is life. This is living.

MARK. Well, it's not a very nice life.

ESME. It suits me.

CATH. Well, I think you're just horrid. I have never been so badly treated in all my life. No, tell a lie, when I was in hospital for appendicitis and they treated me for piles, that was...

ESME. Dr Who!

CHARLIE. What?

ESME. That's who she reminds me of. That character from Dr Who.

CATH. The glamorous assistant?

ESME. Davros his name was. Ugly fucker. Looked after the Daleks.

MARK. Grandmother, whether you like it or not, and I assume you don't, I love Catherine and she loves me and we intend to get married. The sooner the better.

ESME. Oh, stop mincing and get her out of here.

MARK. Not until you've heard me out.

ESME. Oh, I want to hear you out all right. I want to hear you out the room.

MARK. I'm not leaving until I've said my piece.

ESME. Very well. I'll go.

(ESME MAKES TO LEAVE, MARK GRABS HER)

MARK. No!

CHARLIE. Careful, son.

ESME. Get off me, you idiot.

MARK. Not until you hear Catherine say she loves me and name our wedding day.

ESME. Over my dead body. Will you get off me.

MARK. No. Catherine?

CATH. What?

MARK. Say you love me.

CATH. Well....

ESME. Ha! See, she's dithering. They always do. Oh, why did you have to get involved with a brainless ugly floozy!

CATH. Here, who have you been mixing with?

MARK. She means you.

CATH. Oh.

CHARLIE. Everyone. Let's calm down.

MARK/ESME. Oh, shut up!

MARK. Cath, just name a date for our wedding. Any date.

CATH. I don't know any.

ESME. Stupid bint!

MARK. Then, for heaven's sake, just say you love me.

CATH. I...I...I...I...

ESME. Moosey? Ha! She's changed her mind.

MARK. Never. Catherine?

CATH. Well, things are different now, Marky. For a start, I don't think your grandmother has really taken to me.

ESME. That's a fucking understatement.
CHARLIE. I quite like you.
ESME. That's only 'cause you want to get into her knickers.
CHARLIE. True.
MARK. Catherine, you can't let me down. You just can't.
ESME. She can and she has.
MARK. Shut up. Once and for all, just shut up!
ESME. **(a real challenge)** Make me.
MARK. I will. I will.
CHARLIE. Be careful!
ESME. She doesn't want you now, Mark..
MARK. No! Catherine?
CATH. I...
ESME. She doesn't love you now, Mark..
MARK. Grandmother, I'm warning you...Cath?
ESME. She hates us, Mark.
MARK. Don't, Gran. Cath?
ESME. She hates you now.
MARK. Oh, shut up. For Christ's sake, just SHUT UP!!!!

(AND AS MARK SCREAMS, HE LASHES OUT AT ESME, WHO FALLS WITH A SATISFYING THUD TO THE FLOOR. THERE IS A DREADFUL PAUSE)

CATH. Well, that shut her up.
MARK. Oh God! Oh my God!
CHARLIE. I told you to be careful.
MARK. She wouldn't stop. I had to stop her.
CATH. Well, you've certainly done that.
CHARLIE. Drastic, but effective.
MARK. Is she breathing?
CATH. Oh, I don't think so, no. People usually do this when they're breathing... **(SHE DEMONSTRATES)** and she isn't. She isn't doing anything. She's just lying there. Like she's dead.
MARK. She'll just be concussed.
CATH. You think so?
CHARLIE. There are no vital signs.
CATH. What are they?
CHARLIE. I don't know. I read about them in a Patricia Cornwell.
CATH. Oh, she's very good, I like her.
CHARLIE. I prefer the early ones. Scarpetta seems more vulnerable....
MARK. Look! She can't be dead. She can't be.
CATH. Well, either that or she's decided to hibernate.
MARK. Granny! Wake up! Wake up!

(MARK KICKS HER)

CATH. You think that'd shift her, wouldn't you?

(MARK SLAPS ESME'S FACE)

CHARLIE. Hey, don't you do that, lad.
MARK. No, you're right.
CHARLIE. Let me. **(HE SLAPS HER FACE)** Hey, this is fun!
CATH. Stop it, both of you. You're behaving like animals.
MARK. Sorry.
CHARLIE. Grrrr!
CATH. You can't bring her round, it's no good trying, so you'd better just face the facts. Your dear and loving old granny, who was a right cow, is dead. First degree murder, MARK. And you did it.
MARK. Oh God!

(AND THE THREE OF THEM LOOK AT THE BODY.)

THEY EXIT, AS THE DEVIL ENTERS WITH A SMIRK)

DEVIL. Remember this one principle
Our friend, Death's invincible
So don't wait for that final minute
Dig your grave and then dance in it

(HE EXITS)

SCENE TWO

(THE SAME. MARK ENTERS WITH MR FRINGE, THE CAMP UNDERTAKER)

FRINGE. And this is where the tragedy occurred?
MARK. Yes.
FRINGE. Have you ever smelt death, Mr Templewood?
MARK. Can't say I have.
FRINGE. Then take a good sniff around this room. The smell of rotten decay is in its very being. Pistachio?
MARK. No thanks.
FRINGE. I like to crunch on a nut while I'm working. Helps me salivate. Moving on. You obviously want help with the funereal arrangements.
MARK. Yes, please. Have you seen the body?
FRINGE. NO!!!! No, I leave that side of things to my assistants. They're good boys. Filipinos.
MARK. Filipinos?
FRINGE. Well, either that or they've been on the sunbed. They are fantastic embalmers! And the nice thing is, they don't speak a word of English, so you can pretty much say anything you like to them and they won't report you. Which is useful. Yes, the boys look after the corpses and I sort out the domestic arrangements. You know, flowers, transport, beautician. Will you be wanting a full manicure?
MARK. For my grandmother?

FRINGE. For yourself. No bloody good to her, she's dead. You want to look your best on the photos, don't you?

MARK. I hadn't really given it much thought.

FRINGE. Of course you do. We've also got this amazing special effects artiste, who can actually make you cry real tears.

MARK. What does he use? Glycerine?

FRINGE. Mace. Works every time. Did your grandmother's death cause you much grief?

MARK. Only in so much as I killed her.

FRINGE. Well, it's so easily done, isn't it? The heated argument, the sudden aggression, before you know it, there's a bullet in your head, a knife in your back and a poker up your bum. Or was that Friday?

MARK. It was an accident.

FRINGE. That's what they all say, believe me. You'll have to get yourself a better story, otherwise they'll lock you up and throw away the key. Then you'll find yourself sharing a cell with a big hairy sailor called Arthur who wants you to be his wife and call him ChoCho. Dry roasted?

MARK. No, thanks.

(CATHERINE ENTERS)

CATH. Mark, there's some white gungey stuff on my dress.

MARK. Er, Catherine....! **(POINTING TO FRINGE)**

CATH. Oh, hi. I think it shot out of your Grandmother when we moved her stinking corpse.

MARK. This is Mr Fringe.

CATH. Pleased to meet you.

FRINGE. Are you? That makes a change.

CATH. No, I'm usually pleased to meet people.

FRINGE. Yes, but they're not usually quite so pleased to meet me. In my line of business.

CATH. Do you work in a shoe shop?

FRINGE. No, I'm an undertaker. I bury people.

CATH. Aw, that's good of you. Any funny stories or amusing anecdotes?

FRINGE. Actually, yes. One day we accidentally buried a conservative father of two in the unmarked grave of a homeless mother of four!

CATH. Oh I say, how droll. Were they very angry?

FRINGE. No, luckily, they were all dead. **(THEY BOTH LAUGH)**

CATH. It all sounds very exciting. I don't suppose you have anything for these stains, do you? Honestly, you wear a dress a couple of times and it's ruined! Waste of flaming money. Like the trifle.

FRINGE. You can always buy another one, for the funeral.

CATH. Do people eat trifles at funerals?

FRINGE. Sometimes. Now, I do hate to talk money on such a sad occasion, but have you given thought as to the type of coffin you'd like your late grandmother to be buried in?

MARK. Well, no.

FRINGE. **(PRODUCING A GLOSSY CATALOGUE)** Might I recommend the deluxe? Made from the finest hand-picked American hickory.

MARK. It seems a bit on the pricey side.

FRINGE. It's quality, Mr Templewood.
MARK. Yes, I'm sure, but I want my grandmother dispatched as cheaply and quickly as possible,
FRINGE. **(AFFRONTED)** Well, we do offer a Higher Purchase service with very agreeable interest rates.
MARK. The cheapest, please.
FRINGE. **(FLICKS TO BACK OF CATALOGUE)** We send her off in a converted wheely bin. If you're that keen on cutting costs, we can skip the limousine and just push her to the cemetery.
CATH. Just bury her deep, face down and don't ever dig her up. We'll pay extra.
MARK. I'll deal with this, Catherine.
CATH. Infact, why waste good soil on her?
MARK. Cath...
CATH. Burn the bastard!
MARK. OK! We get the point...
FRINGE. We certainly do. Now, I can get you some fantastic mourners for the funeral itself and we're doing a special discount this month where we throw in a bishop and a grieving lesbian for a tenner.
MARK. What do we want with a grieving lesbian?
FRINGE. She makes animals out of balloons. She's brilliant. I don't know how she does it. Now, how's the deceased's son, your father? Is he baring up?
MARK. Just about. But he too is finding it difficult to hide his true feelings.

(CHARLIE ENTERS WITH BLOW-UP DOLL. HE IS SINGING)

CHARLIE. "I'm in the mood for dancing..." Thought I heard the door. Sorry.

(CHARLIE LEAVES)

FRINGE. I must say, this is the most extraordinary bereavement I've ever seen.
MARK. Yes, well, will there be anything else?
CATH. Or would you just like a drink before the police arrive?
MARK. The police?
CATH. Didn't I mention it?
FRINGE. It can only be expected after a sudden death. It's just routine. Lie through your teeth.
MARK. But I killed her. I'm not proud of the fact, but I'm not sorry either. I am certainly not going to lie about it.
FRINGE. Not lie? What is the world coming to? Well, don't, for heaven's sake, tell them why you moved the body.
CATH. Ah! Now, I can take full credit for that. We were expecting visitors you see, and the last thing you want when you're entertaining is a filthy rotting corpse on your carpet.
FRINGE. And what visitors were you expecting?
CATH. Well, just an undertaker really. Possibly a doctor. And a priest. And I'm having my aura tuned at six.
FRINGE. What you going for?
CATH. Bashful scrubber. Part mistress, part whore.

MARK. Look, I've nothing to hide. As long as Catherine can still be in love with a desperate and pathetic criminal who would actually take someone's life.

CATH. Well, he doesn't sound very nice.

MARK. Me. I mean, me.

CATH. Oh, you're not a hardened criminal. You're just someone who killed the person who gave life to the person who married the person who gave life to you.

MARK. It sounds awful when you say it like that.

CATH. Well, I'm not changing my voice.

FRINGE. I'd better go and check my boys aren't sniffing the chemicals.

MARK. Embalming fluid?

FRINGE. No thanks, I think we've got some.

(CHARLIE ENTERS, SINGING)

CHARLIE. "I see a little silhouette of a man..." It's the police!

(WICKET ENTERS, CHARLIE LEAVES. WICKET CROSSES TO FRINGE AND SHAKES HIS HAND)

WICKET. Wicket.

FRINGE. Pardon?

WICKET. Chief Inspector Wicket.

FRINGE. Oh, hello.

WICKET. Wicket of the Yard no less.

FRINGE. Scotland?

WICKET. Little Hampton.

FRINGE. Never mind. And how do you do?

WICKET. Very well. And yourself?

FRINGE. Can't complain. Plenty of bodies.

WICKET. I bet there are. Now, I won't beat about anyone's bush. I want that mess out there cleaned up.

FRINGE. Have they spilt it again?

WICKET. What?

FRINGE. The lemon juice. They're so clumsy.

WICKET. I'm referring to your grandmother.

FRINGE. What about her?

WICKET. She's dead.

FRINGE. What?

MARK. Chief Inspector, I think you've made a mistake.

WICKET. Are you telling me she's not dead?

MARK. You're talking to the wrong man. My grandmother is dead.

WICKET. And you are?

MARK. Mark Templewood.

WICKET. That's quite a coincidence. Two Mark Templewoods in the same room at the same time of day, both having just lost their grandmothers.

FRINGE. My name isn't Templewood.

WICKET. It isn't?

FRINGE. No. I'm Lucas J Fringe, of Fringe Cut Price Burial Service and Speciality Disco.
WICKET. Why?
FRINGE. It's a living.
WICKET. Why didn't you tell me?
FRINGE. You didn't ask.
WICKET. Get out of my way.
FRINGE. So my grandmother isn't dead?
WICKET. Not as far as I know.
FRINGE. Thank God. I've nothing to wear for a funeral.
WICKET. Just run along, will you?
FRINGE. Pleasure. If you want me, I'll be with the stiff.

(FRINGE EXITS)

CATH. Inspector, permit me to introduce myself. I'm Catherine St Emilion Mamminon. Of the St Emilion Mamminons. We are all very rich, very sexy and very willing. Doubtless you've heard of us?
WICKET. Can't say I have. Now, Mr Templehead.
MARK. It's Wood.
WICKET. Mr Woodhead. **(READING FROM NOTEBOOK)** What can you tell me about this disturbing and distressing case?
MARK. I'll tell you everything you want to know.
WICKET. Watch it, cocky. None of your tricks.
MARK. I don't play tricks.
WICKET. That's what all the clever ones say.
MARK. I want to make a confession.
WICKET. It's too early for that! I need to take fingerprints, put the house under 24 hour surveillance and prepare for many long days of living in cramped conditions with little food, no wireless and sharing sleeping arrangements with three other officers.
MARK. Couldn't you just take me down the station?
WICKET. And miss out all the fun? Not bloody likely. I'll go out and come in again – give you time to get your act together.

(WICKET LEAVES)

CATH. What was all that about?
MARK. I've no idea.

(FRINGE ENTERS)

FRINGE. This place is crawling with police. It's very distracting. Where's the Inspector?
MARK. He stepped outside for a minute.
FRINGE. Listen. Between you and me, I don't think he's a real policeman. If you ask me, he's just a jumped up strippogram with delusions of grandeur. I shouldn't be surprised if he started removing his clothes.

(WICKET ENTERS)

WICKET. It's very hot in here. Do you mind if I take my coat off.
FRINGE. Told you.
WICKET. What are you doing here?
FRINGE. Thought I'd better warn you. There's a journalist snooping about. She wants an interview with Norman Bates here.
MARK. How did she get hold of the story?
FRINGE. Well, don't look at me.
MARK. Catherine?
CATH. I don't know any journalists. I just rang up the local newspaper to put an advert in about your granny's sudden, brutal murder.
FRINGE. Shall I tell her to go away?
MARK. Please.
FRINGE. And watch this one. **(WHISPERS)** Not a real policeman.

(FRINGE LEAVES)

WICKET. I don't think he's a real undertaker. Did you see his hearse?
CATH. Not in those trousers.
WICKET. It's parked outside. It's bright yellow and says – "Honk if you're happy, body on board!"

(CHARLIE ENTERS, STILL SINGING, POPULAR SONG OF THE DAY)

CHARLIE. "A little less conversation, a little more action please." I say, there's a rather attractive young lady here.
CATH. Why, thank you, kind sir.
CHARLIE. Not you. The one in the kitchen.
MARK. Is she a journalist?
CHARLIE. No, some kind of physician. A foreigner. **(EVERYONE REACTS)** Says she has to examine the body **(EVERYONE REACTS)** In order to issue a death certificate. **(EVERYONE REACTS)**
MARK. Must she do it here and now?
CHARLIE. Apparently so. I think she's taken rather a shine to me.
MARK. That's nice.
CHARLIE. Should I ask her for a session?
MARK. Maybe after the autopsy.
CHARLIE. Right, good idea.