

Thou shalt not kill

Timothy Spall and Anne Reid star in a real-life story of greed and murder

DRAMA BBC1 • MONDAY & TUESDAY

THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT

All four eps also available on BBC iPlayer from Monday

'I think that the audience will find the whole story fascinating,' says Anne Reid, 88, who plays one of the victims of predatory psychopath Ben Field (Eanna Hardwicke, see sidebar) in a drama based on real life.

'But what's frightening is that this sort of terrible evil is hiding in plain sight. Ben Field could be anybody – he feels like a normal, loving guy.'

This four-part series explores the deaths of respected teacher Peter Farquhar and retired headmistress Ann Moore-Martin, both deeply religious and neighbours in the Buckinghamshire village of Maids Moreton. It begins as Field seduces his university lecturer, Farquhar, who has struggled with his sexuality, despite the 40-year age gap.

After declaring their love in a betrothal ceremony and changing his will in Field's favour, Peter mysteriously falls

ill. But the real reason for his disorientation and hallucinations is far more sinister – he's being poisoned by Field as he plots his partner's murder.

Following Peter's death, the second episode concentrates on Field's seduction of Ann Moore-Martin (Anne Reid). Although there's a 56-year age gap, he professes to love her, but in reality he's plotting to defraud her, too. Soon she experiences dizzy spells while

'I've never taken drugs, so it was quite a challenge!'

messages appear on her mirrors urging her to give everything to Field. But when Ann's niece Anne-Marie discovers her aunt barely conscious, she alerts the police to her suspicions.

'It makes you sort of question your own life,' continues Anne. 'I don't know whether I would have been taken in by someone like him, probably not. But it's very difficult to judge relationships. Often you look at people and you wonder, "Why are they attracted to each other?" But I've got to imagine that they might be, because she was an intelligent woman who was being drugged – and that was tricky to play. I've never taken

Victims: Plausible Field ingratiated himself into Peter's life...

'It felt like going into a labyrinth'

Enna Hardwicke reveals the challenge of portraying Ben Field

Tell us about Ben Field...

We meet him as one of Peter's students at Buckingham University. He comes across as mature, intellectual, a devout Christian who loves literature. He appears funny, outgoing, affable, but he doesn't have any close friends. As the story progresses, we unveil those layers bit by bit and begin to see what his motivations are.

What was the appeal of playing him?

When I first read the script, I suppose I was shocked – truth really can be stranger than fiction. Actually, playing Ben felt a bit like going into a labyrinth. I had to set aside any horror and disgust I might have felt about what he had done and get into his headspace. Thankfully, there was loads to read and watch to try and understand him. When it's a character who has done such

drugs, so it was quite a challenge!

The third episode then focuses on the police investigation into the crimes, before switching to the court case for the final instalment as Field stands trial for murder.

'Throughout history, the people who become famous in the terrible drama of a murder tend not to be the victims but the murderers,' says Timothy Spall, 66, who

terrible things, there's a real balancing act in telling that story.

What made Peter and Ann particularly vulnerable? They both lived alone. They had close family, but there were still opportunities there for Ben. They say love is blind, and it's very easy to see why you would be taken in, because he was so plausible. Peter and Ann were shrewd people, both teachers who would have been very used to meeting hundreds of young people. They were looking for companionship and, tragically, Ben offered them the exact version of what they needed and came along at a time when they were at their most vulnerable. We see Peter opening up about his sexuality for maybe the first time.

Why has the BBC made a series out of this crime?

This is a story that cries out to be told, because it's a national story in some ways. It could be seen as a cautionary tale about people who might live alone but are shrewd, sociable and part of a community – and yet this person was able to manipulate them and ruin their lives.

Headline news: Field's crimes were eventually exposed (left)



plays Peter Farquhar. 'How much do we know about the victims of Jack the Ripper? Or those killed by Harold Shipman? This story shows you what the people [he preyed upon] were like, so in a sense, it's a tribute to them.'

'It also reveals how brilliant and vivacious these older people were – the subtleties of their lives, their vulnerabilities, strengths, intellectual acumen and weaknesses.'

'It's a massive responsibility when you're playing a real human being who was a family man, as they live on with love in people's hearts. It's never lost on me, and I have done my very best for Peter. I'm not trying to make it sound like some worthy, noble thing, but you're telling a story about someone who's loved and remembered and was alive not that long ago. So you really want to get it right.'

Nick Ficca
100%
TV Guide 5

Evil intent: Ben Field feigned religious beliefs to prey on Peter and Ann

