

The diaries that gave away the devil in disguise

Carol Midgley TV review



Catching a Killer

Channel 4

★★★★★

Cold Feet

ITV

★★★★☆

One word could describe **Catching a Killer: A Diary from the Grave** — exceptional. You might add two more: “extraordinary” and “riveting”. But how crass “riveting” sounds when we are talking about the slow, sadistic murder of a lovely man who thought that he had found love, but in fact had met disguised evil. I wondered how Peter Farquhar, an academic and former English teacher loved by his students, might have felt knowing that his personal journals in

which he thanked God for finding Ben Field after years of loneliness were being read out on primetime TV. Maybe part of him would be pleased: they were beautifully written and revealed a pure soul. “Ben can love me!” he wrote, declaring it a miracle.

Alas, as this film delicately eked out, “Ben” was a psychopath who was slowly poisoning Farquhar with drugs while hiding things so he thought he had dementia and persuading him to make Field the beneficiary of his will. Finally, Farquhar died in his chair,

Field feeding him whisky and making his death look like alcohol poisoning. The cameras followed the dogged police investigation, interweaving it with witness interviews, detective briefings and footage from Field’s phone until it felt almost like a drama.

“It’s like something from *Midsomer Murders*,” a detective said — and it really was. It was a bit shocking when we were shown the post mortem after Farquhar’s body was exhumed. You don’t often see that on TV, the grave soil in a dead man’s abundant hair after he has been buried for quite some time. His hair still held traces of the drug and the pathologist could still smell the whisky in his stomach. It was remarkable, but involved an intimacy that I wasn’t sure we had earned.

We saw the moment of Field’s arrest, with him bare-chested, then yawning and smirking in the back of the police

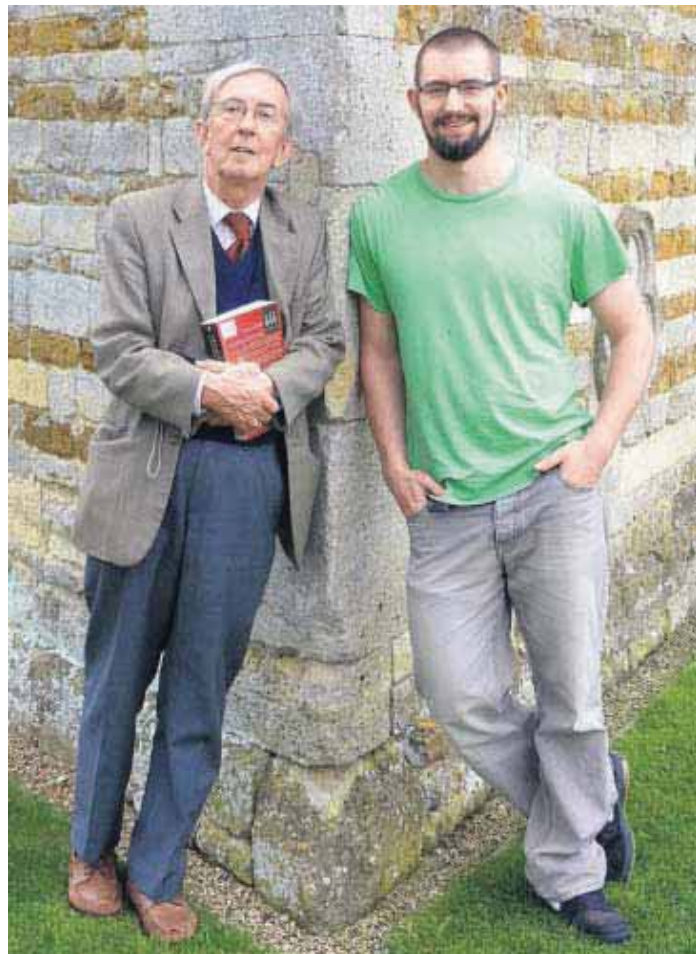
van in full psychopath mode, then asking for a book because he suspected it would be a “dull time”. He is serving a 36-year sentence, and in DCI Mark Glover and his team we got to see the police at their best. Too late for poor Farquhar, but evil, having briefly triumphed, lost in the end.

Cold Feet is back for a — my goodness, can it be a *ninth* series? — and it is as off-the-peg slick and shiny as ever. Yet you already get a sense



that it is struggling for storylines and needs new characters desperately because the “Adam and Karen in love” story could become very boring very quickly and I already don’t much care. There was much of the same old, same old last night, but the moment when Jenny (Fay Ripley) removed her wig to reveal her chemo-ravaged hair to be a few white wisps was visceral.

The subplot about Adam (James Nesbitt) being suspended from work for offending a younger worker was also strong. In a colleague’s leaving speech he had said that HR stood for “hand relief”, which I thought was quite funny (shame on fogleyish me), but someone complained that it “belittled women”. Anyway, it was zeitgeisty and showed how *Cold Feet* is nicely placed to spotlight the gap between the middle-aged and millennials, the characters as they age turning into their parents. I think we can all find that “relatable”.



NICKY JOHNSTON/ITV/BIG TALK

Beloved academic Peter Farquhar with his murderer, Ben Fields