

## IT'S A WONDERFUL DEATH

by K.Windle

**Setting:** The home of Christine and Andrew Bailey. On stage one can see the living room with a hall way leading off to front door and a door leading off to the kitchen. There is a settee, armchair and coffee table. It is present day, early in the evening. There are several birthday cards on the mantelpiece. Andrew is slumped on settee watching TV; Christine walks in from kitchen carrying a glass of wine. Andrew has a half full glass of lager.

### CAST

Andrew Bailey

Christine Bailey

Francis Wilson

Lynne Bailey

Susan Maynard

Bill Fontaine

Death

### ACT ONE

- Christine** Right then, that's the curry in the oven; it'll be ready in about half an hour.  
( **takes a sip from the wineglass, before placing it on the occasional table at the side of the settee. She stands looking in a mirror and starts to reapply makeup** )
- Andrew** As long as it's better than that mushroom stroganoff that you made for dinner.  
(**pretends to be sick** )
- Christine** Don't blame me. It was Jamie Oliver's fault!..... I don't know what's wrong with you, anyway? You always used to like mushrooms, when we first got married.
- Andrew** No, I always used to like sex when we first got married. I would have ate anything then; just to keep my strength up. Now days, I'm a bit more discerning... Call me fussy, but I've developed a fondness for stuff that's edible.
- Christine** But they were organic. Hand picked.
- Andrew** Well they tasted like they were picked by a pig, that used its mouth, swallowed them and then delivered them to market, via its other end. ( **takes a swig of lager to finish glass** )
- Christine** Okay! I get the message! You don't like mushrooms! .....( **continues applying make up** )  
..... by the way, your packing up for tomorrow is in the top of fridge..... I've done you some nice mushroom sandwiches.
- Andrew** ( **annoyed** ) Are you deliberately trying to wind me up?
- Christine** I'm kidding, I'm kidding, okay.
- Andrew** ( **somewhat placated** ) Oh, right.
- Christine** Yeah, we've run out of bread, it's just mushrooms.

**Andrew** ( **looking round over shoulder , holding fist up, but said jestingly** ) If I come round there, you'll know about it!

**Christine** ( **looks and does small laugh** ) If you come around here, you won't have to hit me, cause I'll have fainted from the shock of seeing you move off that settee! .....You haven't lifted a finger since you got up!

2/

**Andrew** ( **holds hand up in the air** ) There! That's five fingers lifted, all at once. Happy?

**Christine** I'd have been more impressed with all ten.

**Andrew** ( **who has emptied his glass during this exchange** ) Well I couldn't give you the full ten, cause the other five are holding this empty glass. ( **holds glass up and waggles it** ) You couldn't do us a refill Love, could you? Before you get settled.

**Christine** Christ! What did your last slave die of? ( **snatches glass off him** ) Can you guess how many fingers I'm holding up, right now? ( **holds up two fingers and quickly sends them** )

**Andrew** ( **In a childlike voice, making pleading puppy eyes** ) But it's my birthday.

**Christine** Yes, and you've had forty eight of 'em, so surely they've lost some of their novelty for you by now.

**Andrew** ( **Scowling** ) Forty seven if you don't mind! And no, they never lose their novelty for me, because people get you a drink when you're thirsty. ( **ushers Christine out with hand** )

( **Christine takes glass into kitchen and returns with it replenished . Hands it to Andrew and then sits down on settee beside him** )

**Christine** ( **looks at TV screen and scowls** ) Oh not the History channel again! You'll never learn anything watching that rubbish you know..... Big Brother's on the other side; put that on.

**Andrew** ( **with disbelief** ) Big Brother! I'll learn nothing watching the History Channel, but I'll learn something watching Big Brother ?

**Christine** That's right ! You've already seen every episode of, 'The World at War' at least fifty times, where as Big Brother is sociology in action.

**Andrew** ( **raising voice** ) Sociology in action! I've heard it all now.

**Christine** Oh don't start.

**Andrew** Don't start ? You're the one who's starting!.....About all I could learn from Big Brother is how to scream and shout, mindlessly, for hours on end. ( **as an after thought** ) And I wouldn't need that! I've already got a good teacher.

**Christine** Do you mean me?

**Andrew** Well, there isn't anybody else here.

**Christine** How dare you! I don't scream and shout for hours on end.

**Andrew** Yes you do! It's all, do this, don't do that, watch this, don't watch that, don't go for a drink with my mates down the pub, why don't I help more around the house? Why don't I ask my bosses at Preston's for a rise, only I deserve one because I've worked there long enough !  
( **makes pincer movement with hand** ) Nag, nag, nag , nag, bleedin' nag.

**Christine** Well if I do, it's only out of frustration! Why don't you help me more around the house? It wouldn't kill you! .... you might as well be dead for all the company you are.

**Andrew** Look! Leave it Chris. Can't we have this one night off?

**Christine** Oh that's right! Just like an Ostrich sticking its head in the sand. ( **affects manlike deep voice** ) We do have a problem, but I don't wish to talk about it now.

3/

**Andrew** But we don't talk do we ? That's my point! We just finish up shouting at one another.....  
Just leave it.

( **Christine gets up and picks a carrier bag up from behind armchair. She slumps back onto settee and takes some knitting out of bag and begins knitting. Then after perhaps 30 seconds** )

**Christine** Why don't you put that DVD on that our Lynne sent you, for your birthday?

**Andrew** (**incredulous**) What, The Little Mermaid? ..... call me overly suspicious, but I can't help thinking that our Lynne had herself in mind when she picked that..... I mean it's not really my cup of tea is it?

**Christine** Well there's no sex, violence or car chases in it, if that's what you mean?

**Andrew** That is not what I mean, as you well know!... for a start it's a cartoon.

**Christine** So's, 'The Simpson's', but you watch that, don't you?

**Andrew** There's no comparison is there, really? One's childish and unfunny and..

**Christine** ( **jumping in** ) The other's a Disney film about a mermaid.

**Andrew** (**sarcastically**) Oh, very good Dear. You wouldn't have a needle and thread handy would you? Only my sides have split.

**Christine** Anyway don't be so ungrateful, It's the thought that counts..... and don't you forget to thank her when you see her.

**Andrew** I'll just practice shall I? ( **in a very stilted monotone** ) "Oh, thank you for the DVD, Love. It is smashing and will provide me with endless hours of visual entertainment"

**Christine** You can be a sarcastic pig at times you can! You'd have had something to say if she hadn't bought you anything for your birthday, wouldn't you?

**Andrew** But surely she could have used a little bit of imagination. Even socks or pants would have been more useful than that! ( **points to where DVD rests on top of TV** ) I mean, She's not a kid anymore, is she.

**Christine** ( **sarcastically with forefinger pointing to chin** ) Hmm, I wonder why the Aussie's call us whinging Poms.

**Andrew** Like I'm bothered, what a set of uncultured deportees think about us!

**Christine** Uncultured deportees! What about Rolf Harris?

**Andrew** ( **frowns for short while then shakes head** ) Conceded.... Look, I'm trying to watch this, why don't you just button it and get on with that? ( **points to Knitting** ) knit one, purl one, knit one purl one.( **mimics knitting action** )

**Christine** ( **throws knitting violently back into bag** ) because I, want to watch the telly! And we're not having this on and that's final! ( **picks up remote control and changes channel** )

**Andrew** ( **In a childlike voice** ) But it's my birthday!

( **His plea falls on deaf ears. Both settle down to watch TV. Andrew keeps sighing and fidgeting, clearly getting more and more frustrated** )

4/

**Andrew** This is priceless this is! ( **points to screen** ) You've got a gay black man, arguing with a lesbian White Witch, in a Jacuzzi!..... I don't know about sociology, it's more like freakology!

**Christine** That's not a proper word.

**Andrew** Well it's a good choice then, 'cause this isn't a proper programme!

( **At back of room Death appears from hallway and watches silently** )

**Andrew** ( **after perhaps thirty more seconds, Andrew jumps up and looks through fourth wall window** ) That's it! I can't stand this any longer! I'm off to the pub for a swift pint.

**Christine** Eh? ..Hey! What about the curry?

**Andrew** Oh, You'll have to warm it up for us when I get back.

**Christine** Charming! I go to all that trouble making you your favourite curry, 'cause it's your birthday, and you can't even be bothered to stop in and spend it with me.

**Andrew** ( stands still as if taking in the import of Christine's words, then sighs heavily ) You're right Love, as ever... but waste not, want not hey? While I'm up, I think I'll go for a jimmy riddle.

**Christine** ( sarcastically ) So, this is romance!

( **Andrew starts to walk towards hall and spots Death. Stopping him in his tracks** )

**Andrew** Chris, Love

**Christine** What?

**Andrew** You haven't ordered me a Grim Reaperagram have you?

**Christine** What you on about?

**Andrew** Then what the heck's that? ( **points to Death** )

**Christine** ( **turns round and sees Death, then startled** ) Who the Hell are you?

**Death** ( **In a solemn death like voice** ) I am Death. I come to take you to the other side, but worry not, for Hell is not thy destination.

**Andrew** Is that you Bob ? Brilliant costume mate; how did you get in? ( **turns to face Christine** ) Did you let him in the back way, Love?

**Christine** ( **sounding suspicious** ) I've let nobody in, back or front, and what's more I locked both doors before I put the curry in.

**Death** I sense disbelief. Watch this...( **Points scythe at budgies cage. The bird, which up until now has been twittering, suddenly stops and falls off its perch, stone dead** )

**Christine** ( **horrified** ) Percy! He's killed Percy! ( **jumps up and runs to cage. Extricates budgies body** ) No! It can't be true!

**Andrew** It's got to be!.... My mate Bob can do some weird things, but even he couldn't do that!

**Christine** ( **cradles body and says sobbingly** ) Poor, poor Percy. I don't believe it! He's stiff already!

5/

**Andrew** Stiff already?

**Christine** Yes, look! ( **bangs bird on table top making loud knocking noise, then sobs louder. Then hands body to Andrew** ) You'll have to bury him in the back garden, with our Dinkie, and our Peter, our Bluey, our Chirpy, our Bobbykins, our Angel, our Pretty Boy ( **takes breath** ) our TomTom, our Dixie, Bluey the second, Frenchie and our Dobby.

**Andrew** Ee, we've had no luck with budgies, have we?

**Christine** ( **angry** ) Luck doesn't come into it! Percy would probably still be alive if you'd have believed that, that thing is who it says it is, straight away!

**Andrew** Oh, so it's my fault is it?

**Christine** Yes!

**Andrew** Well I think it's your fault that Death's here in the first place. You said I might as well be dead for all the company I was, and now look!

**Christine** ( **looks shocked. Turns to see Death busy looking at photographs that are on shelves etc** ) Excuse me, but Is that right? Have you come for Andrew?

( **Death slowly shakes his head** )

**Christine** ( **bordering on hysterical** ) No! You've come for me then?

( **again Death slowly shakes his head** )

**Christine** ( **tentatively** ) Well, who have you come for then?

**Death** Both of you. ( **indicates same with outstretched arm** )

**Christine** ( **distraught** ) I just don't get it! What did we do?

**Death** It's more a question of what you didn't do.

**Andrew** How do you mean, what we didn't do?

**Death** ( **said in normal , non formal, voice** ) Before I go on, do you mind if I drop the grave persona? Only I feel a bit daft doing it, but him upstairs ( **indicates with scythe** ) has asked me for a bit more gravitas. He says it's expected.

**Andrew** ( **Andrew and Christine look at each other nonplussed, then** ) Feel free.

**Death** Cheers, now; what were I saying? Oh yes, It's more a question of what you didn't do.

**Christine** Okay, what didn't we do?

**Death** Well, when was the last time you had your back boiler serviced eh?

**Andrew** Is that it then? Carbon monoxide poisoning?

**Death** ( **motions with hands** ) This place is snided with it. ( **wanders towards settee** )

**Andrew** But, wouldn't that have taken Percy too?

**Death** ( **nods** ) Yeah, eventually. That's why I used him as a little attention grabber.

**Andrew** ( **to Christine smugly** ) So you can't pin that one on me.

**Death** ( **continuing** ) I have to say that you're a tad unlucky though, because it was only when you had your back wall rendered last week, that it became a big problem.  
( **Sits down on arm of chair** ) You had your chimney removed at the same time, see, and the builders filled in the hole and tiled over it. This resulted in a fatal downdraft zone which prevented the carbon monoxide from dissipating, when the wind was blowing in the wrong direction.

**Christine** And it's blowing in the wrong direction today?

**Death** Like you've never known... Reminds me, ( **takes sheet of paper out of bag he is carrying** ) I'll have to make out your transfer form again though, because at the moment under cause of death I've put, "very bad wind" and that could be misleading.

**Andrew** ( **In best Victor Meldrew fashion** ) I don't believe it !

**Death** ( **holding sheet towards Andrew and pointing** ) It's true, look, very bad wind.

**Andrew** Not that! I mean I don't believe we're dead !

**Death** Well, technically, you're not, until I rubber stamp this form. ( **holds up form** ) Have you got owt I can press on?

**Christine** You've got some cheek haven't you?

**Death** ( **nonchalant** ) Make no odds to me, I can do it later. Same result.

**Christine** ( **resignedly** ) Here, you can use the coffee table. Why don't you park your bum while you're at it; the chair by the fire is going begging.

**Death** Thanks a lot, I think I will,... as long as you promise not to crack any jokes about Me looking like Death warmed up. Believe me I heard em all.  
  
( **Death does a wheezy laugh as he passes Christine. She grimaces and wafts her hand in front of her nose** )

**Christine** Goodness me! Everyone's entitled to halitosis but you abuse the privilege!

**Death** I, am the foul, fetid creature called Death. What did you expect?..... Roses?...Lavender perhaps? ( **despite this speech Death holds a hand in front of mouth and breaths. As Death sits down he surreptitiously take fresh breath spray from pocket and gives himself a couple of squirts** ).....  
... Maybe I'm getting old, but these days I just can't seem to get warm , mind you, this is a good fire this is. Reminds me of the day I took Joan of Arc. That was a good blaze that was. Ee, I bet they could hear her screaming in Paris. Where was her precious Charles the seventh then, hey?

**Andrew** But she was getting messages from your boss ( **points upwards** ) wasn't she?

**Death** Nah! It was her teenage brother messing about. He used to hide under her bed and give it this one, ( **Death cups hands to mouth and says in spooky voice** ) Joan! Joan! You must lead the French army to victory against the English.

- Andrew** But she did lead the French to victory against us! They lifted the siege at Orleans because of her! That's how she came to be called the Maid of Orleans. ( **looks at Christine and says smugly** ) Now who says you don't learn owt on the History Channel?
- Death** Yes, I agree it was very strange, but the Boss man had nowt to do with it, that's for sure. I mean, how could he?...Both sides were praying to him! The English to ask him to help them kill as many frogs as possible. The French ditto, but the other way about! He couldn't show any bias could he?.....
- Andrew** So what did he do?
- Death** What could he do? He just sat back and let them get on with it.
- Christine** ( **curious** ) Hang on. Are you saying that if only one side was praying to him, he'd have helped them kill their opponents?
- Death** ( **as if surprised by the question** ) Yeah.
- Christine** What about his sixth commandment, 'Thou shall not kill',?
- Death** Ah, but you're quoting the Roman Catholic translation there. The actual wording, which I believe is used by the Jews amongst others, is 'Thou shall not murder'. That's entirely different, that is. So, If you're killing in God's name, you're in the clear. No problem with that whatsoever.
- Christine** That doesn't seem right, that.
- Death** Can you imagine the problems if it wasn't? For instance, how would the British army advertise for new recruits? ( **uses hands to frame imaginary poster** ) Join the Army, ..learn a trade, .... Go to Hell.
- ( **Christine nods head slowly as if taking in the import of his words** )
- Andrew** So, how did Joan of Arc do it?
- Death** She just believed that God was helping her, and sometimes belief is all you need... For instance ( **takes a stamp out of his bag** ) I now believe that I'm going to stamp this form.
- Andrew** ( **As death lifts stamp in air Andrew jumps in and stays his hand** ) Hang on! Not so fast, you can't take us today.
- Death** Why ever not? ( **lowers stamp** )
- Andrew** ( **In a childlike voice** ) It's my birthday.
- Death** ( **sarcastic** ) Well, Happy Birthday to you, but I, am almighty, all powerful Death, do you really think that's going to sway me one way or the other?
- Christine** But you're killing us!



**Death** I'm not killing you! You killed yourselves; remember?

**Andrew** Have a heart !

**Death** I've already got several hearts thank you,.. mostly in canopic jars from The Pyramids.

**Andrew** The Pyramids, wow!...you must be older than you look.

8/

**Death** I bet you wish I could say that about you eh? Instead of quite the reverse. ( **Death and Christine share a laugh, but Andrew is dead pan** )

**Andrew** Why? How old do you think I am?

**Death** ( **picks up form** ) well I thought this was a typing error here, where it says forty seven. You look mid fifties to me. ( **Christine laughs again. Andrew looks wounded** ) And I don't know what you're laughing at ( **addressed to Christine** ) I'm going to have to alter the figure for your weight. You look like you've put a few pounds on since this was filled in last week. ( **smug smile from Andrew** )

**Christine** But I'm on a diet!

**Death** Are you reading the diet sheets back to front? Or are you perhaps eating the diet sheets?  
( **Andrew laughs and Christine digs him in the ribs....Death picks up the stamp again** )

**Christine** Hang on! Can't you show us a little mercy? I mean, it's not every day that you turn forty seven and I haven't given him his special present yet.

**Andrew** ( **curious** ) Really? What is it?

**Christine** ( **looking coy** ) I got some sexy lingerie off t'internet.

**Andrew** Really ! Can you get suspenders in a 38" waist? ( **points to his own waist** )

**Christine** It's for me, not for you, you idiot !

**Andrew** I know! I meant you!

**Christine** Cheeky sod! ( **back to coy voice** ) Anyway, I thought I'd be the last present you unwrap today. ( **puts little finger in mouth** )

**Andrew** ( **lasciviously** ) It really is my birthday!

**Death** ( **embarrassed waving** ) Hello!, Death in the room! Unfortunately lacking a bucket of water, but here all the same!

**Andrew** Sorry, but this just proves a point doesn't it? We're still virile and vigorous; in the prime of life. You can't take us. Please.

**Christine** Pretty please!

**Death** (**looks at the two of them and shakes head and puts stamp back down**) I must be going soft in my old age, I must.

**Christine** So we're reprieved ?

**Death** (**like Churchill Bulldog**) Oh no, no, no, no, no, no, no..... But there is a process that I can apply at my own discretion.

**Andrew** Apply it. Apply it please!

**Death** Okay.... You have until the sands of time have fallen to show me why you deserve a bit longer.... (**reaches into bag and pulls out an egg timer. Andy looks aghast, Christine shrieks. Death laughs**)

**Death** Only kiddin', it's an egg timer ! (**a clap of thunder makes all three jump. Death looks skywards with solemn face**) Sorry Boss. Gravitass.

9/

**Andrew** What was that all about?

**Death** Well, it's like I said earlier. The boss man doesn't like me making jokes, but I keep forgetting myself, so every now and again, he gives me the old thunderclap by way of a reminder. That was worth it though. You should have seen your faces. (**shakes head**)

**Andrew** I think I agree with your Boss. (**points skywards**) That egg timer stunt wasn't very funny.

**Death** Oooh, hark at Harry Hill here! ....Anyway, I don't use the old hour glass now. That went out with the Ark. Nowadays I use this...  
(**stands up and pulls his cloak open to reveal that he is wearing a waistcoat, dicky bow and smart shirt and trousers. He pulls a fob watch from waistcoat pocket and shows it to Andrew by way of explanation**)

**Andrew** You're dressed a bit dapper aren't you ? (**points up and down Death's torso**)

**Death** (**reacts as if noticing suit for first time**) Oh this? Yes, well you're not the only one who's celebrating a birthday today. It's Jesus' birthday today as well. There's a big bash later on; anybody who's anybody will be there.

**Christine** Jesus' birthday! But it's March the 18<sup>th</sup>!

**Death** Yes, well you didn't think he was born on December the 25<sup>th</sup> did you? That was just to fit in with the Pagan Winter Solstice celebrations! ..You know, make it easier for St Alban to bring Christianity to the masses... There are clues in the Bible if you know where to look for them..... I mean what does Jesus feed the five thousand with? Five loaves and ?

**Christine** Two fishes.

**Death** Exactly!.... Pisces.

( **Andrew and Christine look amazed** )

**Andrew** But I thought the symbol for a Christian was one fish ?

**Death** ( **nodding head** ) Another clue Andrew, but he didn't want to make it too obvious. No one likes an easy crossword, right?

**Christine** So what kind of present does one get for the Son of God?

**Death** Oh that's easy. He collects dragons.

**Christine** Dragons!!

**Andrew** Wait till he sees the one you're bringing him today! ( **indicates Christine with thumb** ) He might just change his mind. ( **Christine scowls** )

**Death** Wrong type of dragon I'm afraid. ( **Christine looks amazed that even Death apparently thinks she is a dragon** ) I mean those ceramic ones that you get in all the fantasy shops.

**Christine** I would never have guessed.

**Death** Well he's going through this Goth phase at the moment, isn't he. ( **shakes head** )

**Christine** Oh, Our Lynne was a Goth for a while during her last year at school. She had her hair dyed jet black and used to wear all this white makeup..... Daft thing is, these days she's on the sun bed twice a week to keep her tan topped up.

**Death** Kids eh?

**Andrew** Anyway, we'd hate to hold you up and make you late. Perhaps we can do all this another day?

10/

**Death** ( **smiles** ) Nice try Andrew, but I'm afraid nothing takes precedence over something as important as death. I mean, it's literally the last thing that happens to you on Earth.

**Christine** Well I never imagined I'd spend my last moments with something as hideous as you.

**Death** Sorry, are you talking to me or Andrew? ( **Andrew looks offended** )

**Christine** ( **pointing to Death** ) You!

**Death** Hey! You're lucky it's me that's come for you.

**Christine** ( **sarcastic** ) Lucky that Death's called on us! Oh excuse me while I dash out and put some lottery on.

**Death** No, what I mean is that obviously I can't officiate at every death, I mean, there's been fifty seven, Worldwide, while we've been talking.... No, usually one of my legion of Angels would have handled you two, but we've had a few call in sick today.

**Andrew** Angels of death calling in sick! The mind boggles!

**Death** Well in fairness, there was a karaoke at Nero's pub, the Burning Fiddle, last night, and I think one or two of them overdid it with the happy juice. ( **makes supping sign with hand** )

**Andrew** Oh, self inflicted wounds, so to speak.

**Death** You've got it. .... Bless em ! It's a harrowing job at times though this is, so I don't blame 'em for letting off steam now and again.

**Christine** So, what? Normally you'd be at home watching repeats of "One Foot In The Grave" on TV Gold I suppose?

**Death** ( **looks at Andrew dead pan** ) Have you got any of that needle and thread left from earlier? Only My sides have split now, as well.....No, I tend to concentrate on the glory deaths myself. J.F.K, John Lennon, Rod Hull, you know.

**Andrew** Hey!, was there a gunman on the grassy knoll like they say?

**Death** What? For Rod Hull? No; he just fell off his roof. He said to me, wasn't it a pity that he wasn't a bird, like Emu, I told him it wouldn't have made any difference, cause emus are flightless. ( **laughs, but then notices that Andrew and Christine aren't, so** ) Tragic. ( **shakes head** )

**Andrew** No, I meant J.F.K. Was there a second gunman on the grassy knoll when J.F.K was assassinated?

**Death** Of course there was! You don't think little old Lee Harvey could have done that on his own do you?

**Andrew** I knew it!..... Who was the second man?

**Death** It was Elvis Presley riding Shergar, and he shot him with a bow and arrow ( **Death sniggers. There is a clap of thunder. Death rolls his eyes and tuts, as if to suggest that he thinks God is a spoilsport** )

**Andrew** Elvis come off it! You're taking the..