

Introduction

Do you have a granny?
Grannies aren't the same as grandmothers. For a start, they don't even have to be women. They are just very old, very unpleasant and seem to cast a shadow that stretches out long before they enter the house. By and large, grannies hate young people. This is because young people have computer games, mobile phones, hair, teeth, good skin and the whole world ahead of them while grannies sit on

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their own in the darkness (to save electricity), knitting and complaining about how much worse everything has got since they were young. The truth is though that they never *were* young... or if they were, they didn't notice.

The book you are now holding was inspired by my own granny, a truly dreadful woman called Esther Charatan who often visited when I was young. I could tell she was coming because my father would be in a terrible mood, my mother (her daughter) would develop a nervous twitch, the dogs would howl and the sun would go in. I was about eight years old when I realized that it was all her fault. It actually came as a great shock. I thought everyone liked her. I thought - because she was my grandmother - that she must be a nice person. In a way, I think

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I began to grow up the day I discovered that she was actually evil.

What do I mean by that? She never murdered anyone. She didn't want to destroy the world. But I think there's another sort of evil that is often overlooked ... and it is this. Granny never did anything to help anyone else. She was rich and healthy (she lived into her nineties) but she was utterly selfish and complained all the time. I remember that she had an argument once with one of her own children - my Uncle Geoff - and didn't speak to him again for seventeen years! As far as I know, she never tried to make anyone happy ... and if you ask me, evil is a perfectly reasonable description of someone like that.

There are some who say you shouldn't be rude about old people and there is a certain

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amount of truth in that. I'd be the first person to help an old lady across the road, for example, even if she didn't want to go. But at the same time, we have to be careful. Being old doesn't necessarily make you right and there have been some very old people who have been very bad indeed. Look at Mr Mugabe, the President of Zimbabwe, who (at the time of writing) is 84 and about as horrible as it is possible to be. Do we need to be polite about him? Or what about Livia, the Roman Empress who poisoned her husband when she was 65? Or even Mr Burns in *The Simpsons*?

No. I see absolutely nothing wrong in poking fun at the elderly if they deserve it. And I would have poked a great deal more at my grandmother (sharp sticks, flaming torches)

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if I'd been given the chance.

In fact she died when she was 93 and I'm glad to think that although she never made anyone laugh when she was alive – I never once heard her tell a joke – she has amused a lot of people as a character in this book. Because, despite my own feelings, *Granny* is supposed to be funny. It's always been my belief that the best way to weaken your enemies, whether they're bullies, politicians or unpleasant relatives, is to laugh at them.

Anyway, a lot of this book is based on truth. Thattlebee Hall is a version of White Friars in Stanmore, where I was brought up. The house had a huge garden and a very old gardener called Mr Lampy. Maud Warden is based on my mother who did play Chopin on the piano and bridge on Tuesdays. I really did have to

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eat those disgusting cream cheese teas when I went to visit my grandmother who lived in a horribly over-heated flat in Mayflower Lodge ... I changed the name to Wisteria Lodge in the book. I often went on holidays to Bideford in Devonshire. And even Anthony Lagoon exists. I worked there in my gap year.

All I can say is that I hope you enjoy reading it more than I enjoyed living it. In all honesty, that shouldn't be too hard.

Anthony Horowitz





Prologue: Heathrow Airport

The storm broke early in the evening and by seven o'clock it looked as if Heathrow might have to shut down. Runway One had disappeared in the rain. Runway Two was a canal. Half the planes had been delayed and the other half were circling hopelessly above the clouds, waiting their turn to land. The wind had blown an Air France DC10 all the way to Luton while, in a

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jumbo jet from Tokyo, seventy-nine Japanese passengers had all been sick at the same time. It was a night no one would forget.

The green Mercedes reached the airport at exactly half past seven, skidding round a corner and spraying water over two traffic wardens, a porter and a visitor from Norway. Swerving across the road, it missed a taxi by inches and rocketed into the car park of Terminal Three. The electric side window slid down and a hand with a signet ring and the initials GW entwined in gold reached out to pluck a parking ticket from the machine. Then the car jumped forward again, shot up three ramps with the tyres screaming and crashed into a wall. Ten thousand pounds' worth of metal and paintwork crumpled in on itself. The engine died. Steam hissed from



beneath the bent and broken bonnet.

The doors of the car opened and three people got out. The driver was a short, bald man. Next to him was a woman in a fur coat. The back seat had been occupied by a twelve-year-old boy.

“YOU TOLD ME TO PARK ON THE FOURTH FLOOR!” the man screamed.
“THE FOURTH FLOOR!”

“Yes, Gordon...” the woman muttered.

“But this car park’s only got three floors!” the man moaned. He pointed at the wreck of his car. “And now look what’s happened!”

“Oh, Gordon...” The woman’s lips quivered. For a moment she looked terrified. Then she blinked. “Does it really matter?” she asked.

The man stared at her. “You’re right!” he exclaimed. He laughed out loud. “It doesn’t

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matter at all! We're leaving the car here! We'll never see it again...!"

The man and the woman rushed into each other's arms, kissed each other and then grabbed their luggage, which the boy had meanwhile taken out of the boot. They had only two suitcases between them and these looked as if they had been packed in a hurry. Part of a pink silk tie, a striped pyjama leg and a frilly shower cap were poking out of one side.

"Come on!" the man exclaimed. "Let's go..."

But just then there was a flash of lightning and an explosion of thunder and the three of them froze, alone in the middle of the dimly lit car park. A plane roared past overhead.

"Oh, Gordon..." the woman whimpered.

"It's all right," Gordon snapped. "She's not

here. Keep your hair on. We're going to be all right. I'd keep my hair on except I packed it..."

"Come on. We've got to get the tickets," the boy said. And without waiting for his parents he began to walk towards the lifts.

Ten minutes later, the family was queuing up at the British Airways ticket desk. After the darkness of the storm, the building was unnaturally bright, like a television set with the colour turned up too much. There were people everywhere, milling around with their suitcases and carrier bags. A policeman with a machine gun patrolled the area. He was the only person smiling.

"Good evening, sir." The man at the ticket desk was in his early twenties with close-cropped hair and tired eyes. He had his name - **OWEN** - on a badge on his chest but in his

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tiredness he had pinned it on upside down.

“Can I help you?”

“You certainly can, Nemo,” the man said, squinting at the badge. “I want three flights...”

“Three flights, sir?” Owen coughed. He had never seen such nervous-looking passengers. They all looked as if they had just come off the worst fairground ride in the world. “Where to?” he asked.

“America,” the man replied.

“Africa,” the woman said at the same moment.

“Australia,” the boy exclaimed.

“Anywhere!” the man said. “Just so long as it leaves soon.”

“And it’s got to be far away!” the woman added.

“Well, sir...” Owen swallowed. “It would

help if you actually knew where you wanted to go...”

The man leaned forward, his eyes wild and staring. (They weren't staring in quite the same direction, which made him look even more wild.) His clothes were expensive - tailor-made - but the ticket salesman couldn't help noticing that he had dressed in a hurry. His tie was crooked and, more surprisingly, on the wrong side of his neck.

“I just want to go away,” the man hissed, “before *she* gets here.”

The woman burst into tears and tried to hide her face in her mink coat. The boy began to tremble. The ticket-seller's eyes flickered to the computer screen in front of him. The computer screen flickered back. “How about the nine o'clock flight to Perth?” he suggested.

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“SCOTLAND!” The man screamed the word so loudly that several passengers turned to look at him and the policeman dropped his machine gun.

“Australia,” the ticket-seller said.

“Perthect!” the man exclaimed. He snapped a gold Visa card onto the counter. “We’ll have two tickets first class and one in tourist for the boy. Ow!” The man cried out as his wife’s elbow caught him on the side of his head. “All right,” he said, rubbing a red mark above his eye. “We’ll all go first class together.”

“Certainly, sir.” The ticket-seller picked up the credit card. “Mr Gordon Warden?”

“Yes. That’s me.”

“And the child’s name?”

“Jordan Warden.”

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“Jordan Warden.” The ticket-seller tapped the name into the computer. “And your wife...?”

“Maud N. Warden,” the woman said.

“Gordon Warden. Jordan Warden. Maud N. Warden. Right...” He tapped some more buttons and waited as the machine spat out



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three tickets. "Check in at Desk 11. And it'll be Gate 6 for boardin' Mr Warden."

Five hours later, British Airways Flight 777 took off for Perth in Western Australia. As the plane reached the end of the runway and lurched upwards into the swirling night and rain, Gordon Warden and his wife sank back into their first class seats. Mr Warden began to giggle. "We've done it," he said in a quivering voice. "We've beaten her..."

"How do you know she's not on the plane?" his wife asked.

Mr Warden sat bolt upright. "Stewardess!" he called. "Bring me a parachute!"

Just across the aisle, Jordan strained in the soft half-light to get a sight of the other passengers. Had they really done it? Or were

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they going to see that terrible, wrinkled face turning slowly to leer at them in the crowded cabin?

The plane reached thirty thousand feet and turned south on the first leg of its journey across the world.

The events that had begun nine months before were finally over.