RANDOM HOUSE eBOOKS

The Face of Trespass

Ruth Rendell

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ruth Rendell was an exceptional crime writer, and will be remembered as a legend in her own lifetime. Her ground-breaking debut novel, *From Doon With Death*, was first published in 1964 and introduced readers to her enduring and popular detective, Inspector Reginald Wexford.

With worldwide sales of approximately 20 million copies, Rendell was a regular *Sunday Times* bestseller. Her sixty bestselling novels include police procedurals, some of which have been successfully adapted for TV, stand-alone psychological mysteries, and a third strand of crime novels under the pseudonym Barbara Vine.

Rendell won numerous awards, including the *Sunday Times* Literary Award in 1990. In 2013 she was awarded the Crime Writers' Association Cartier Diamond Dagger for sustained excellence in crime writing. In 1996 she was awarded the CBE, and in 1997 became a Life Peer.

Ruth Rendell died in May 2015.

Available in Arrow by Ruth Rendell

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THE FACE OF TRESPASS

Ruth Rendell

ARROW BOOKS

For Don

I have peace to weigh your worth, now all is over,
   But if to praise or blame you cannot say.
For, who decries the loved, decries the lover;
   Yet what man lauds the thing he’s thrown away?

Be you, in truth, this dull, slight, cloudy naught,
   The more fool I, so great a fool to adore;
But if you’re that high goddess once I thought,
   The more your godhead is, I lose the more.

Dear fool, pity the fool who thought you clever!
   Dear wisdom, do not mock the fool that missed you!
Most fair,—the blind has lost your face for ever!
   Most foul,—how could I see you while I kissed you?

So . . . the poor love of fools and blind I’ve proved you,
For, foul or lovely, ‘twas a fool that loved you.

Rupert Brooke

Before

The new Member of Parliament finished his after-dinner speech and sat down. He was not, of course, unaccustomed to public speaking but the applause of these men who had been his schoolfellows brought him a slightly emotional embarrassment. Accepting the cigar which the chairman of the Feversham Old Boys' Society was offering him covered for a moment this disturbance of his poise and by the time it was lit for him he was more at ease.

'Did I do all right, Francis?' he said to the chairman.

'You were absolutely splendid. No platitudes, no dirty stories. Such a change to hear a crusader against social outrage! It almost seems a pity we don't have capital punishment any more so that you could abolish it.'

'I hope I wasn't a prig,' said the new Member quietly.

'My dear Andrew, you left-wingers always are, but don't let it worry you. Now do you want another brandy or would you like to—er, circulate?'

Andrew Laud refused the brandy and made his way to one of the tables where his former housemaster sat. But before he reached it someone tapped him on the shoulder and said, 'Congratulations, Andy, on the speech and your success in the by-election.'

'Jeff Denman,' said the M.P. after a moment's thought. 'Thank God for someone I know. I thought I was going to be stuck with old Scrimgeour there and that foul fellow Francis Croy. How are you? What are you doing these days?'

Jeff grinned. 'I'm fine. Now that I'm knocking thirty my family are getting over the disgrace of my driving a van for a living, so if you ever feel like moving house to live among your constituents I'll be happy to oblige.'

'I might at that. Come and have a drink? You know, everyone here seems so *young*. I can't see a soul I know. I

thought Malcolm Warriner might be here or that bloke David Something I used to have those fierce arguments with at the debating society.'

'Mal's in Japan,' said Jeff as they went up to the bar. 'He'd be one of your constituents, as a matter of fact, if he were at home. Which brings me to one who isn't here but *is* a Waltham Forest constituent. Remember Gray Lanceton?'

The Member, to whose back this had been addressed, turned and emerged from the crush with two halves of lager in his hands. 'He'd have been a year behind us. Tall dark bloke? Wasn't there a bit of a fuss when his mother remarried and he threatened suicide? I heard he's written a novel.'

'*The Wine of Astonishment*,' said Jeff. 'It was obviously autobiographical, about a sort of hippie Oedipus. He shared my flat in Notting Hill with me and Sally for a bit but he didn't write anything more and when he started to feel the pinch he took Mal's place for somewhere to live rent-free. There was some sort of messy love affair too, I gather.'

'He's living in my constituency?'

Jeff smiled. 'You said "my constituency" like a bridegroom saying "my wife", with shyness and great pride.'

'I know. For weeks I've been thinking, suppose I lose the election and still have to come and talk to you lot? What a fool I'd have felt. Does he like living there?'

'He says the Forest gets him down. I've been out there and I was surprised that there are such remote rural corners left only fifteen miles out of London. It's a weatherboard cottage he lives in, at the bottom of a forest road called Pocket Lane.'

'I think I know it,' said the M.P. and, reflectively, 'I wonder if he voted for me?'

'I'd be very much surprised if Gray even knew there was a by-election, let alone voted. I don't know what's happened to him but he's turned into a sort of hermit and he doesn't

write any more. In a way, he's one of those people you've committed yourself to help, the misfits, you know, the lost.'

'I should have to wait till he asked for that help.'

'No doubt you'll have enough on your plate without Gray Lanceton. I see Scrimgeour bearing down on us with the headmaster in tow. Shall I melt away?'

'Oh, God, I suppose so. I'll give you a ring, Jeff, and maybe you'll come and have a meal with me at the House?'

The Member set down his glass and composed his features into that earnest and slightly fatuous expression which, generally reserved for babes in arms and the senile, seemed to do equally well for those pedagogues who had once awed him into terrified submission.

1

It was sometime in early May, round about the fifth. Gray was never sure of the date. He had no calendar, he never bought a paper and he'd sold his radio. When he wanted to know the date he asked the milkman. The milkman always came on the dot of twelve, although he had no difficulty about knowing the time because he still had the watch she'd given him. He'd sold a lot of things but he wasn't going to sell that.

'What day is it?'

'Tuesday,' said the milkman, handing over a pint of homogenised. 'Tuesday, May the fourth, and a lovely day. Makes you feel glad to be alive.' He aimed a kick at the young bracken shoots, hundreds of them all tightly curled like pale green question marks. 'You want to get them ferns out of your garden, plant annuals. Nasturtiums'd do well there and they grow like weeds.'

'Might as well keep the weeds.'

'Them ferns'd get me down, but we can't all be the same, can we? Be a funny old world if we were.'

'It's a funny old world now.'

The milkman, who was easily amused, roared with laughter. 'I don't know, you are a scream, Mr L. Well, I must be off down the long long road that has no turning. See you.'

'See you,' said Gray.

The forest trees, which came very close up to the garden, weren't yet in full leaf but a green sheen hung over them, and this bright veil made a dazzlement against the sky. It was prematurely, freakishly hot. Gleaming in the sunshine, the beech trunks were the colour of sealskin. A good metaphor that, he thought, and thought too how once when he was a writer he would have noted it down for future use.

Maybe some day, when he'd got himself together and got some money and rid himself finally of her and . . . Better not think of it now.

He'd only just got up. Leaving the front door open to let some warmth and fresh air into the dank interior, he carried the milk into the kitchen and put the kettle on. The kitchen was small and very dirty with a slightly sunken floor of stone flags covered with a piece of linoleum curling at its edges like a slice of stale bread. All around him, as he waited for the kettle to boil, were those kitchen appointments which had been the latest mod cons in eighteen-ninety or thereabouts: an earthenware sink, a disused range, an enamel bathtub with a wooden cover on it. The kettle took a long time to boil because it was coated with burnt-on grime and the gas burner wasn't very clean either. Inside the oven it was even worse. When he opened the oven door a black cavern yawned at him. A good many times last winter, sitting in front of the lighted oven in the Windsor chair, sitting in front of the black cave with the gold-tipped blue flames quivering in its heart, he'd been tempted to put out the flames, lay his head within that open door and wait. Just wait for death—'do something foolish', as Isabel would put it.

He wouldn't do it now. The time for that was past. He would no more kill himself over her than he would over his mother and Honoré, and the time would come when he'd think of her as he did of them—with irritable indifference. Not yet, though. Memories of her still in the forefront of his mind, lying down with him at night, meeting him when he first woke, clinging to him through the long empty days. He drugged them down with cups of tea and library books but they were a long way from being exorcised.

The kettle boiled and he made the tea, poured milk over a couple of Weetabix and sat down to eat his breakfast on the bath counter. The sun was high, the kitchen stuffy because the window hadn't been opened for about a hundred years.

Motes of dust dancing in it turned the beam of sunshine into a solid shaft that burned his neck and shoulders. He ate his breakfast in the destruction that wasteth at noonday.

This was her most usual time for phoning—this and, of course, Thursday evenings. While he'd adjusted more or less to not seeing her, he still couldn't manage the problem of the phone. He was neurotic about the phone, *more* neurotic, that is, than he was about other things. He didn't want to talk to her at all but at the same time he passionately wanted to talk to her. He was afraid she'd phone but he knew she wouldn't. When the tension of wanting and not wanting got too bad he took the receiver off. The phone lived in the horrible little parlour Isabel referred to as the 'lounge'. He thought of it as 'living' there rather then standing or just being because, although for days on end it never rang, it seemed alive to him when he looked at it, vibrant, almost trembling with life. And when he took the receiver off on Thursday evenings it seemed baulked, frustrated, peevish at being immobilised, its mouth and ears hanging useless from the dangling lead. He only went into the 'lounge' to answer the phone—he couldn't afford actually to make calls—and sometimes he left the receiver off for days.

Finishing his breakfast and pouring himself a second cup of tea, he wondered if it was still off. He opened the 'lounge' door to check. It was on. Saturday or Sunday he must have replaced it, turning the phone to stare at him like a squat, smug little Buddha. His memory had got very bad since the winter. Like an old man, he could remember the past but not the immediately recent past; like an old man, he forgot the date and the things he had to do. Not that there were many of those. He did almost nothing.

He opened the window on to the greening sunlit forest and drank his tea, sitting in an armchair covered with some early, perhaps the very earliest, prototype of plastic, a brown shiny fabric worn down to its cloth base at the arms

and on the seat. There was only one other armchair. Between the two chairs was a low table, its legs made of moulded iron, its top burned by cigarettes from the days when he'd been able to afford cigarettes and marked with white rings from the base of the hot teapot. A stained Turkey rug, so thin that it wrinkled and rucked when he walked on it, lay in the middle of the floor. Apart from these, the only furnishings were Mal's golf clubs resting against the wall under the phone shelf and the paraffin heater on which she'd broken the perfume bottle and which, throughout the winter, had mingled her scent, evocative and agonising, with the reek of its oil each time it was lighted.

He pushed away the thought. He finished his tea, wishing he had a cigarette or, preferably, a whole packet of twenty king-size. Almost hidden by the golf bag under which he'd concealed it, he could see the grey cover of his typewriter. It wouldn't be true to say he hadn't used it since he came to this cottage Mal called the hovel. He'd used it for a purpose he liked thinking about even less than he liked thinking about her, although the two were one and inextricably linked. To think of one was to think of the other. Better dwell instead on Francis's party, on getting away from this hole to London if only for a weekend, to meeting there some girl who would replace her—'with eyes as wise but kindlier and lips as soft but true, and I daresay she will do'. To getting money together too, and finding a room, to sloughing off this dragging depression, this nothingness, even to writing again . . .

The phone gave the nasty little prefatory click it always made some ten seconds before it actually rang. Ten seconds were quite long enough for him to think in, to hope it was going to ring and at the same time to hope the click wasn't from the phone at all but from the worm-eaten floorboards or something outside the window. He still jumped when it rang. He hadn't learned how to control that, although he had managed to regard his reaction very much as a

convalescent regards the headaches and tremors he still has. They will pass. His reason and his doctor have told him so, and meanwhile they must be borne as the inevitable aftermath of a long illness.

Of course it wasn't she. The voice wasn't husky and slow, but squeaky. Isabel.

'You do sound tired, dear. I hope you're eating properly. I just rang to find out how things are.'

'Just the same,' he said.

'Working hard?'

He didn't answer that one. She knew he hadn't done a day's work, an hour's, for three years; they all knew it. He was a bad liar. But even if he lied and said he was working, that didn't help. They only asked brightly when 'it' was coming out and what was it about and said how marvellous. If he told the truth and said he wasn't they told him never to say die and would he like them to try to help get him a job. So he said nothing.

'Are you still there, dear?' said Isabel. 'Oh, good. I thought they'd cut us off. I had a lovely letter from Honoré this morning. He's really wonderful with your mother, isn't he? It always seemed so much worse somehow, a man having to care for an invalid.'

'Don't see why.'

'You would if you had to do it, Gray. It's been a great blessing for you, your mother having got married again and to such a wonderful man. Imagine if you had the looking after of her.'

That was almost funny. He could scarcely look after himself. 'Isn't that a bit hypothetical, Isabel? She married Honoré when I was fifteen. You might as well say, imagine if my father had lived or I hadn't been born or mother'd never had thrombosis.'

As always when the conversation became what Isabel called 'deep', she switched the subject. 'What d'you think? I'm going to Australia.'

‘That’s nice. What for?’

‘My friend Molly that I used to have my typing bureau with, she lives in Melbourne now and she wrote and asked me. I thought I might as well go before I get past it. I’ve fixed on the beginning of the first week in June.’

‘I don’t suppose I’ll see you before you go,’ Gray said hopefully.

‘Well, dear, I might drop in in I have a spare moment. It’s so lovely and peaceful where you are. You don’t know how I envy you.’ Gray gritted his teeth. Isabel lived in a flat over shops in a busy Kensington street. Maybe . . . ‘I always enjoy a quiet afternoon in your garden. Or wilderness,’ she added cheerfully, ‘as I should call it.’

‘Your flat will be empty, then?’

‘Not a bit of it! The decorators are moving in to do a mammoth conversion job.’

He wished he hadn’t asked, for Isabel now began to describe, with a plethora of adjectives, precisely what alterations, electrifications and plumbing work were to be undertaken in her absence. At least, he thought, laying the receiver down carefully on the shelf, it kept her off nagging him or harking back to the days when his life had looked promising. She hadn’t questioned him about his finances or asked him if he’d had his hair cut. Making sure that the blether issuing distantly from the phone was still happily going on, he eyed himself in the Victorian mirror, a square of glass that looked as if had just been breathed on or, possibly, spat on. The young Rasputin, he thought. Between shoulder-length hair and uneven beard—he’d stopped shaving at Christmas—his eyes looked melancholy, his skin marked with spots, the result presumably of a diet that would have reduced anyone less healthy to scurvy.

The mirrored face bore little resemblance to the photograph on the book jacket of *The Wine of Astonishment.* That had looked rather like a latter-day Rupert Brooke. From Brooke to Rasputin in five months, he thought, and then he

picked up the phone again to catch the breathless tail end of Isabel's sentence.

'. . . And double glazing in every single one of my rooms, Gray dear.'

'I can't wait to see it. D'you mind if I say good-bye now, Isabel? I have to go out.'

She never liked being cut short, would have gone on for hours. 'Oh, all right, but I was just going to tell you . . .'

Hollowly through the phone he heard her dog barking. That would fetch her. 'Good-bye, Isabel,' he said firmly. With a sigh of relief when she had finally rung off, he put his library books into a carrier bag and set off for Waltham Abbey.

Drawing a cheque to cash was the traumatic highspot of his week. For half a year he'd been living on the royalties he'd received the previous November, a miserable two hundred and fifty, drawing at the rate of four pounds a week. But that didn't take into account the gas and electricity bills he'd paid and Christmas expenses at Francis's. There couldn't be much left. Probably he was overdrawn already and that was why he waited, tense and uncomfortable by the bank counter, for the cashier to get up and, having flashed him a look of contempt, depart into some nether regions to consult with higher authority.

This had never happened and it didn't happen now. The cheque was stamped and four pound notes handed over. Gray spent one of them at the supermarket on bread and margarine and cans of glutinous meat and pasta mixtures. Then he went into the library.

On first coming to the hovel, he'd determined, as people do when retiring temporarily from the world, to read all those books he'd never had time for: Gibbon and Carlyle, Mommsen's *History of Rome* and Motley's *Rise of the Dutch Republic*. But at first there had been no time, for she had occupied all his thoughts, and then when she'd gone, when

he’d driven her away, he’d fallen back on the anaesthesia of old and well-loved favourites. *Gone with the Wind* would just about be readable again after four months’ abstinence, he thought, so he got that out along with Dr James’s ghost stories. Next week it would probably be *Jane Eyre,* Sherlock Holmes and Dr Thorndyke.

The librarian girl was new. She gave him the sort of look that indicated she liked unwashed bearded men who had nothing better to do than loaf around libraries. Gray hazarded a return of the look but failed in mid-glance. It was no use. It never was. Her hands were stubby, the nails bitten. She had a ridge of fat round her waist and, while he was among the shelves, he had heard her strident laugh. Her lips were soft but she wouldn’t do.

The books and the cans were heavy to carry and he had a long way to go back. Pocket Lane was a deep hole through the forest, a long tunnel to nowhere. The signpost at this end said ‘London 15’, a fact which still amazed him. He was in the depths of the country but the heart of London was only fifteen miles distant. And it was quieter than the country proper, for here no men worked in the fields, no tractors passed and no sheep were pastured. A bright still silence, broken only by the twitter of birds, surrounded him. He wondered that people actually lived here from choice, voluntarily bought houses here, paid rates, *liked* it. Swinging his carrier bag, he passed the first of these houses, the Willises’ farm—so-called, although they farmed nothing—with its exquisite lawns and florist’s shop borders, tulips in red and gold uniforms standing in precise rows as if on parade. Next came Miss Platt’s cottage, smart brother of the hovel, showing what fresh paint and care could do for weatherboard; lastly, before the rutted clay began and the forest closed in, the shuttered withdrawn abode of Mr Tringham. No one came out to talk to him, no curtain moved. They might all have died. Who would know? Sometimes he wondered how long it would be before they

found him if he were to die. Well, there was always the milkman . . .

The hawthorn hedges, fresh green and pearled with buds, ended at the end of the metalled road, and tall trees crowded in upon Pocket Lane. Nothing but bracken and brambles was strong enough to grow under the shade of those trees, in the leaf-mould-crusted clay their roots had deprived of nourishment. Just at this point she had always parked her car, sliding it under the overhanging branches away from the eyes of those most incurious neighbours. How frightened she had always been of spies, of watchers existing only in her imagination yet waiting, she was sure, to relay her movements back to Tiny. No one had ever known. For all the evidence there was of their meetings, their love, none of it might ever have happened. The lush grass of spring had grown over the impress of her car tyres, and the fragile branches which had been broken by that car's passage were healed now and in leaf.

He had only to lift the phone and ask her and she'd come back to him. He wouldn't think of that. He'd think of *Gone with the Wind* and making a cup of tea and what to have for supper. It would be better to think about phoning her after six o'clock when, on account of Tiny, it would be impossible to do so, not now when it was practicable.

They said bracken made a comfortable bed and they were right. He lay on the springy green shoots reading, occasionally going into the hovel for fresh tea, until the sun had gone and the sky behind those interlaced branches was a tender melted gold. The birds and their whispered song disappeared before the sun and the silence grew profound. A squirrel slid down a branch on to the verge where it began to chew through the stem of a small doomed sapling. Gray had long ago got over thinking he was mad because he talked to squirrels and birds and sometimes even to trees. He didn't care whether he was mad or not. It hardly seemed important.

‘I bet,’ he said to the squirrel, ‘you wouldn’t mess about drinking tea or, in your case, eating plants, if you knew there was a beautiful lady squirrel panting for you not four miles away. You’d go right off and pick up the phone. You’re not messed in your mind like humans and you wouldn’t let a lot of half-baked principles get between you and the best lay in Metropolitan Essex. Especially if the lady squirrel had a whole treeful of luscious nuts stored away, now would you?’

The squirrel froze, its jaws clamped round the stem. Then it leapt up the trunk of an enormous beech. Gray didn’t go near the phone. He immersed himself in the Old South until it grew too dark to read and too cold to lie any longer on the ground. The sky above him was indigo now but in the south-west over London a glowing plum-red. He stood by the gate as he always did at this hour on fine evenings, looking at the muted blaze of London.

Presently he went into the house and opened a can of spaghetti. At night the sleeping wood seemed to stir in its slumber and embrace the hovel entirely in great leafy arms. Gray sat in the Windsor chair in the kitchen under the naked light bulb, dozing, thinking, in spite of himself, of her, finally reading almost a third of *Gone with the Wind* until he fell asleep. A mouse running over his foot awakened him and he went upstairs to bed in the silent close blackness.

It had been a typical day, varying only in that it had been warm and sunny, from the hundred and fifty or so that had preceded it.