Ruth Rendell

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Ruth Rendell bestsellers – from Arrow Books

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- ☐ To Fear a Painted Devil
- ☐ The Tree of Hands
- ☐ Vanity Dies Hard

Ruth Rendell

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.

MAKE DEATH LOVE ME

Ruth Rendell

ARROW BOOKS

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To David Blass with love

In writing this novel, I needed help on some aspects of banking and on firearms. By a lucky chance for me, John Ashard was able to advise me on both. I am very grateful to him.

R.R.

1

Three thousand pounds lay on the desk in front of him. It was in thirty wads, mostly of fivers. He had taken it out of the safe when Joyce went off for lunch and spread it out to look at it, as he had been doing most days lately. He never took out more than three thousand, though there was twice that in the safe, because he had calculated that three thousand would be just the right sum to buy him one year's freedom.

With the kind of breathless excitement many people feel about sex – or so he supposed, he never had himself – he looked at the money and turned it over and handled it. Gently he handled it, and then roughly as if it belonged to him and he had lots more. He put two wads into each of his trouser pockets and walked up and down the little office. He got out his wallet with his own two pounds in it, and put in forty and folded it again and appreciated its new thickness. After that he counted out thirty-five pounds into an imaginary hand and mouthed, thirty-three, thirty-four, thirty-five, into an imaginary face, and knew he had gone too far in fantasy with that one as he felt himself blush.

For he didn't intend to steal the money. If three thousand pounds goes missing from a sub-branch in which there is only the clerk-in-charge (by courtesy, the manager) and a girl cashier, and the girl is there and the clerk isn't, the Anglian-Victoria Bank will not have far to look for the culprit. Loyalty to the bank didn't stop him taking it, but fear of being found out did. Anyway, he wasn't going to get away or be free, he knew that. He might be only thirty-eight, but his thirty-eight was somehow much older than other people's thirty-eights. It was too old for running away.

He always stopped the fantasy when he blushed. The rush of shame told him he had overstepped the bounds, and this always happened when he had got himself playing a part in some dumb show or even actually said aloud things like, That was the deposit, I'll send you the balance of five thousand, nine hundred in the morning. He stopped and thought what a state he had got himself into and how, with this absurd indulgence, he was even now breaking one of the bank's sacred rules. For he shouldn't be able to open the safe on his own, he shouldn't know Joyce's combination and she shouldn't know his. He felt guilty most of the time in Joyce's presence because she was as honest as the day, and had only told him the B List combination (he was on the A) when he glibly told her the rule was made to be broken and no one ever thought twice about breaking it.

He heard her let herself in by the back way, and he put the money in a drawer. Joyce wouldn't go to the safe because there was five hundred pounds in her till and few customers came into the Anglian-Victoria at Childon on a Wednesday afternoon. All twelve shops closed at one and didn't open again till nine-thirty in the morning.

Joyce called him Mr Groombridge instead of Alan. She did this because she was twenty and he was thirty-eight. The intention was not to show respect, which would never have occurred to her, but to make plain the enormous gulf of years which yawned between them. She was one of those people who see a positive achievement in being young, as if youth were a plum job which they have got hold of on their own initiative. But she was kind to her elders, in a tolerant way.

'It's lovely out, Mr Groombridge. It's like spring.'

'It is spring,' said Alan.

'You know what I mean.' Joyce always said that if anyone attempted to point out that she spoke in clichés. 'Shall I make you a coffee?'

'No thanks, Joyce. Better open the doors. It's just on two.'

The branch closed for lunch. There wasn't enough custom to warrant its staying open. Joyce unlocked the heavy oak outer door and the inner glass door, turned the sign which said *Till Closed* to the other side which said *Miss J. M. Culver,* and went back to Alan. From his office, with the door ajar, you could see anyone who came in. Joyce had very long legs and a very large bust, but otherwise was nothing special to look at. She perched on the edge of the desk and began telling Alan about the lunch she had just had with her boy friend in the Childon Arms, and what the boy friend had said and about not having enough money to get married on.

'We should have to go in with Mum, and it's not right, is it, two women in a kitchen? Their ways aren't our ways, you can't get away from the generation gap. How old were you when you got married, Mr Groombridge?'

He would have liked to say twenty-two or even twenty-four, but he couldn't because she knew Christopher was grown-up. And, God knew, he didn't want to make himself out older than he was. He told the truth, with shame. 'Eighteen.'

'Now I think that's too young for a man. It's one thing for a girl but the man ought to be older. There are responsibilities to be faced up to in marriage. A man isn't mature at eighteen.'

'Most men are never mature.'

'You know what I mean,' said Joyce. The outer door opened and she left him to his thoughts and the letter from Mrs Marjorie Perkins, asking for a hundred pounds to be transferred from her deposit to her current account.

Joyce knew everyone who banked with them by his or her name. She chatted pleasantly with Mr Butler and then with Mrs Surridge. Alan opened the drawer and looked at the three thousand pounds. He could easily live for a year on that. He could have a room of his own and make friends of his own and buy books and records and go to theatres and eat when he liked and stay up all night if he wanted to. For a

year. And then? When he could hear Joyce talking to Mr Wolford, the Childon butcher, about inflation, and how he must notice the difference from when he was young – he was about thirty-five – he took the money into the little room between his office and the back door where the safe was. Both combinations, the one he ought to know and the one he oughtn't, were in his head. He spun the dials and the door opened and he put the money away, along with the other three thousand, the rest being in the tills.

There came to him, as always, a sense of loss. He couldn't have the money, of course, it would never be his, but he felt bereft when it was once again out of his hands. He was like a lover whose girl has gone from his arms to her own bed. Presently Pam phoned. She always did about this time to ask him what time he would be home – he was invariably home at the same time – to collect the groceries or Jillian from school. Joyce thought it was lovely, his wife phoning him every day 'after all these years'.

A few more people came into the bank. Alan went out there and turned the sign over the other till to *Mr A. J. Groombridge* and took a cheque from someone he vaguely recognized called, according to the cheque, P. Richardson.

'How would you like the money?'

'Five green ones and three portraits of the Duke of Wellington,' said P. Richardson, a wag.

Alan smiled as he was expected to. He would have liked to hit him over the head with the calculating machine, and now he remembered that last time P. Richardson had been in he had replied to that question by asking for Deutschmarks.

No more shopkeepers today. They had all banked their takings and gone home. Joyce closed the doors at three-thirty, and the two of them balanced their tills and put the money back in the safe, and did all the other small meticulous tasks necessary for the honour and repute of the second smallest branch of the Anglian-Victoria in the British Isles. Joyce and he hung their coats in the cupboard in his

office. Joyce put hers on and he put his on and Joyce put on more mascara, the only make-up she ever wore.

'The evenings are drawing out,' said Joyce.

He parked his car in a sort of courtyard, surrounded by Suffolk flint walls, at the bank's rear. It was a pretty place with winter jasmine showing in great blazes of yellow over the top of the walls, and the bank was pretty too, being housed in a slicked-up L-shaped Tudor cottage. His car was not particularly pretty since it was a G registration Morris Eleven Hundred with a broken wing mirror he couldn't afford to replace. He lived three miles away on a ten-year-old estate of houses, and the drive down country lanes took him only a few minutes.

The estate was called Fitton's Piece after a Marian Martyr who had been burnt in a field there in 1555. The Reverend Thomas Fitton would have been beatified if he had belonged to the other side, but all he got as an unremitting Protestant was fifty red boxes named after him. The houses in the four streets which composed the estate (Tudor Way, Martyr's Mead, Fitton Close and – the builder ran out of inspiration – Hillcrest) had pantiled roofs and large flat windows and chimneys that were for effect, not use. All their occupants had bought their trees and shrubs from the same very conservative garden centre in Stantwich and swapped cuttings and seedlings, so that everyone had Lawson's cypress and a laburnum and a kanzan, and most people a big clump of pampas grass. This gave the place a curious look of homogeneity and, because there were no boundary fences, as if the houses were not private homes but dwellings for the staff of some great demesne.

Alan had bought his house at the end of not very hilly Hillcrest on a mortgage granted by the bank. The interest on this loan was low and fixed, and when he thought about his life one of the few things he considered he had to be

thankful for was that he paid two-and-a-half per cent and not eleven like other people.

His car had to remain on the drive because the garage, described as integral and taking up half the ground floor, had been converted into a bed-sit for Pam’s father. Pam came out and took the groceries. She was a pretty woman of thirty-seven who had had a job for only one year of her life and had lived in a country village for the whole of it. She wore a lot of make-up on her lips and silvery-blue stuff on her eyes. Every couple of hours she would disappear to apply a fresh layer of lipstick because when she was a girl it had been the fashion always to have shiny pink lips. On a shelf in the kitchen she kept a hand mirror and lipstick and pressed powder and a pot of eyeshadow. Her hair was permed. She wore skirts which came exactly to her knees, and her engagement ring above her wedding ring, and usually a charm bracelet. She looked about forty-five.

She asked Alan if he had had a good day, and he said he had and what about her? She said, all right, and talked about the awful cost of living while she unpacked cornflakes and tins of soup. Pam usually talked about the cost of living for about a quarter of an hour after he got home. He went out into the garden to put off seeing his father-in-law for as long as possible, and looked at the snowdrops and the little red tulips which were exquisitely beautiful at this violet hour, and they gave him a strange little pain in his heart. He yearned after them, but for what? It was as if he were in love which he had never been. The trouble was that he had read too many books of a romantic or poetical nature, and often he wished he hadn’t.

It got too cold to stay out there, so he went into the living room and sat down and read the paper. He didn’t want to, but it was the sort of thing men did in the evenings. Sometimes he thought he had begotten his children because that also was the sort of thing men did in the evenings.

After a while his father-in-law came in from his bed-sit. His name was Wilfred Summitt, and Alan and Pam called him Pop, and Christopher and Jillian called him Grandpop. Alan hated him more than any human being he had ever known and hoped he would soon die, but this was unlikely as he was only sixty-six and very healthy.

Pop said, ‘Good evening to you,’ as if there were about fifteen other people there he didn’t know well enough to address. Alan said hallo without looking up and Pop sat down. Presently Pop punched his fist into the back of the paper to make Alan lower it.

‘You all right then, are you?’ Like the Psalmist, Wilfred Summitt was given to parallelism, so he said the same thing twice more, slightly re-phrasing it each time. ‘Doing OK, are you? Everything hunky-dory, is it?’

‘Mmm,’ said Alan, going back to the *Stantwich Evening Press*.

‘That’s good. That’s what I like to hear. Anything in the paper, is there?’

Alan didn’t say anything. Pop came very close and read the back page. Turning his fat body almost to right angles, he read the stop press. His sight was magnificent. He said he saw there had been another one of those bank robberies, another cashier murdered, and there would be more, mark his words, up and down the country, all over the place, see if he wasn’t right, and all because they knew they could get away with it on account of knowing they wouldn’t get hanged.

‘It’s getting like Chicago, it’s getting like in America,’ said Pop. ‘I used to think working in a bank was a safe job, Pam used to think it was, but it’s a different story now, isn’t it? Makes me nervous you working in a bank, gets on my nerves. Something could happen to you any day, any old time you could get yourself shot like that chap in Glasgow, and then what’s going to happen to Pam? That’s what I think to myself, what’s going to happen to Pam?’

Alan said his branch was much too small for bank robbers to bother with.

'That's a comfort, that's my one consolation. I say to myself when I get nervy, I say to myself, good thing he never got promotion, good thing he never got on in his job. Better safe than sorry is my motto, better a quiet life with your own folks than risking your neck for a big wage packet.'

Alan would have liked a drink. He knew, mainly from books and television, that quite a lot of people come home to a couple of drinks before their evening meal. Drinks the Groombridges had. In the sideboard was a full bottle of whisky, an almost full bottle of gin, and a very large full bottle of Bristol Cream sherry which Christopher had bought duty-free on the way back from a package tour to Switzerland. These drinks, however, were for other people. They were for those married couples whom the Groombridges invited in for an evening, one set at a time and roughly once a fortnight. He wondered what Pam and Pop would say if he got up and poured himself a huge whisky, which was what he would have liked to do. Wondering was pretty well as far as he ever got about anything.

Pam came in and said supper was ready. They sat down to eat it in a corner of the kitchen that was called the dining recess. They had liver and bacon and reconstituted potato and brussels sprouts and queen of puddings. Christopher came in when they were half-way through. He worked for an estate agent who paid him as much as the Anglian-Victoria paid his father, and he gave his mother five pounds a week for his board and lodging. Alan thought this was ridiculous because Christopher was always rolling in money, but when he protested to Pam she got hysterical and said it was wicked taking anything at all from one's children. Christopher had beautiful trendy suits for work and well-cut trendy denim for the weekends, and several nights a week

he took the girl he said was his fiancée to a drinking club in Stantwich called the Agape, which its patrons pronounced Agayp.

Jillian didn't come in. Pam explained that she had stayed at school for the dramatic society and had gone back with Sharon for tea. This, Alan was certain, was not so. She was somewhere with a boy. He was an observant person and Pam was not, and from various things he had heard and noticed he knew that, though only fifteen, Jillian was not a virgin and hadn't been for some time. Of course he also knew that as a responsible parent he ought to discuss this with Pam and try to stop Jillian or just get her on the pill. He was sure she was promiscuous and that the whole thing ought not just to be ignored, but he couldn't discuss anything with Pam. She and Pop and Jillian had only two moods, apathy and anger. Pam would fly into a rage if he told her, and if he insisted, which he couldn't imagine doing, she would scream at Jillian and take her to a doctor to be examined for an intact hymen or pregnancy or venereal disease, or the lot for all he knew.

In spite of Christopher's arrant selfishness and bad manners, Alan liked him much better than he liked Jillian. Christopher was good-looking and successful and, besides that, he was his ally against Wilfred Summitt. If anyone could make Pop leave it would be Christopher. Having helped himself to liver, he started in on his grandfather with that savage and, in fact, indefensible teasing which he did defend on the grounds that it was 'all done in fun'.

'Been living it up today, have you, Grandpop? Been taking Mrs Rogers round the boozer? You'll get yourself talked about, you will. You know what they're like round here, yak-yak-yak all day long.' Pop was a teetotaller, and his acquaintance with Mrs Rogers extended to no more than having once chatted with her in the street about the political situation, an encounter witnessed by his grandson. 'She's got a husband, you know, and a copper at that,' said

Christopher, all smiles. ‘What are you going to say when he finds out you’ve been feeling her up behind the village hall? Officer, I had drink taken and the woman tempted me.’

‘You want to wash your filthy mouth out with soap,’ Pop shouted.

Christopher said sorrowfully, smiling no more, that it was a pity some people couldn’t take a joke and he hoped he wouldn’t lose his sense of humour no matter how old he got.

‘Are you going to let your son insult me, Pamela?’

‘I think that’s quite enough, Chris,’ said Pam.

Pam washed the dishes and Alan dried them. It was for some reason understood that neither Christopher nor Pop should ever wash or dry dishes. They were in the living room, watching a girl rock singer on television. The volume was turned up to its fullest extent because Wilfred Summitt was slightly deaf. He hated rock and indeed all music except Vera Lynn and ballads like ‘Blue Room’ and ‘Tip-toe Through the Tulips’, and he said the girl was an indecent trollop who wanted her behind smacked, but when the television was on he wanted to hear it just the same. He had a large colour set of his own, brand new, in his own room, but it was plain that tonight he intended to sit with them and watch theirs.

‘The next programme’s unsuitable for children, it says here,’ said Christopher. ‘Unsuitable for people in their first or second childhoods. You’d better go off beddy-byes, Grandpop.’

‘I’m not demeaning myself to reply to you, pig. I’m not lowering myself.’

‘Only my fun,’ said Christopher.

When the film had begun Alan quietly opened his book. The only chance he got to read was while they were watching television because Pam and Pop said it was unsociable to read in company. The television was on every evening all the evening, so he got plenty of chances. The book was Yeats: *The Winding Stair and Other Poems*.

2

Jillian Groombridge hung around for nearly two hours outside an amusement arcade in Clacton, waiting for John Purford to turn up. When it got to eight and he hadn't come, she had to get the train back to Stantwich and then the Stoke Mill bus. John, who had a souped-up aged Singer, would have driven her home, and she was more annoyed at having to spend her pocket money on fares than at being stood up.

They had met only once before and that had been on the previous Sunday. Jillian had picked him up by a fruit machine. She got him starting to drive her back at nine because she had to be in by half-past ten, and this made him think there wouldn't be anything doing. He was wrong. Jillian being Jillian, there was plenty doing: the whole thing in fact on the back seat of the Singer down a quiet pitch-dark country lane. Afterwards he had been quite surprised and not a little discomfited to hear from her that she was the daughter of a bank manager and lived at Fitton's Piece. He said, for he was the son of a farm labourer, that she was a cut above him, and she said it was only a tin-pot little bank sub-branch, the Anglian-Victoria in Childon. They kept no more than seven thousand in the safe, and there was only her dad there and a girl, and they even closed for lunch, which would show him how tin-pot it was.

John had dropped her off at Stoke Mill at the point where Tudor Way debouched from the village street, and said maybe they could see each other again and how about Wednesday? But when he had left her and was on his way back to his parents' home outside Colchester, he began having second thoughts. She was pretty enough, but she

was a bit too easy for his taste, and he doubted whether she was the seventeen she said she was. Very likely she was under the age of consent. That amused him, that term, because if anyone had done any consenting it was he. So when Tuesday came and his mother said, if he hadn't got anything planned for the next evening she and his father would like to go round to his Aunt Elsie's if he'd sit in with his little brother, aged eight, he said yes and saw it as a let-out.

On the morning of the day he was supposed to have his date with Jillian he drove a truckload of bookcases and record-player tables up to London, and he was having a cup of tea and a sandwich in a café off the North Circular Road when Marty Foster came in. John hadn't seen Marty Foster since nine years ago when they had both left their Colchester primary school, and he wouldn't have known him under all that beard and fuzzy hair. But Marty knew him. He sat down at his table, and with him was a tall fair-haired guy Marty said was called Nigel.

'What's with you then,' said Marty, 'after all these years?'

John said how he had this friend who was a cabinet-maker and they had gone into business together and were doing nicely, thank you, mustn't grumble, better than they'd hoped, as a matter of fact. Hard work, though, it was all go, and he'd be glad of a break next week. This motoring mag he took was running a trip, chartering a plane and all, to Daytona for the International Motor-cycle Racing, with a sight-seeing tour to follow. Three weeks in sunny Florida wouldn't do him any harm, he reckoned, though it was a bit pricey.

'I should be so lucky,' said Marty, and it turned out he hadn't had a job for six months, and he and Nigel were living on the Social Security. 'If you can call it living,' said Marty, and Nigel said, 'There's no point in working, anyway. They take it all off you in tax and whatever. I guess those guys who did the bank in Glasgow got the right idea.'