RANDOM HOUSE eBOOKS

Going Wrong

Ruth Rendell

Contents

About the Book
About the Author
Title Page
Dedication

Chapter One
Chapter Two
Chapter Three
Chapter Four
Chapter Five
Chapter Six
Chapter Seven
Chapter Eight
Chapter Nine
Chapter Ten
Chapter Eleven
Chapter Twelve
Chapter Thirteen
Chapter Fourteen
Chapter Fifteen
Chapter Sixteen
Chapter Seventeen
Chapter Eighteen
Chapter Nineteen
Chapter Twenty
Chapter Twenty-One

Copyright

About the Book

Guy still believed that Leonora loved him, as she had when she was a young girl, when he led a street gang around London’s Notting Hill Gate, a world away from her family home in a mews house in Holland Park. Leonora’s mother in particular didn’t care for her dark-looking boyfriend, especially when she found out about shoplifting and the drugs.

Guy’s obsession with Leonora increased as the years passed, and as they grew apart. He always believed she would come back to him. But even when Leonora told him it could not be like that, that life was not a fairy tale, he could not, would not, accept the truth. And the murderous madness began to take hold of him.

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.

Going Wrong

Ruth Rendell

arrow books

To Fredrik
and Lilian

CHAPTER ONE

SHE ALWAYS HAD lunch with him on Saturdays. This always happened, was an absolute, unless one of them was away. It was as certain as that the sun would rise in the morning, sparks fly upward and water find its own level. He found comfort and reassurance in it when things were bad. Whatever else might happen to bring him doubts and make him afraid, he knew she would have lunch with him on Saturday.

Usually, when he went to meet her at one o'clock on Saturday, he was optimistic. This time he might persuade her to have dinner with him one evening in the week or let him take her to a theatre. She might agree to see him before next Saturday. One day she would, she was bound to, it was only a matter of time. She loved him. There had never been anyone else for either of them.

When he repeated those words to himself as he walked to their meeting, he felt a tremor of apprehension. His heart misgave him. He remembered what he had seen. Then he told himself for the hundredth time that it was all right, he was worrying unnecessarily. He held up his head and braced himself.

He was on his way to a wine bar quite near to where he had first met her. She had chosen it, knowing he would have picked somewhere expensive. If he arrived in a taxi she would remind him of his wealth, so he was on foot, having got out of his cab at the top of Kensington Church Street. He was wealthy by the standards of all but the really rich, and seemed a millionaire in the eyes of most of the people she knew. Lefty, 'green' do-gooders, who thought there was

something morally proper about not having a freezer or a microwave, about going on camping holidays and riding a bike. He could have given her anything she wanted. With him she could have a beautiful life.

She would come to their meeting by walking along the Portobello Road. Its picturesqueness appealed to her, the Saturday stalls, the hubbub, the people. That was what he disliked, it reminded him too much of the bad parts of his childhood and youth, of what he had left behind. Instead he took the long austere Kensington Park Road, the wide impersonal avenue which led northwards. The trees were dark green and dusty with high summer. It was hot, the sun white on the pavements, the air above the tarmac distorted into dancing glassy waves by the heat. She disliked his sunglasses, she said they made him look like a mafioso, so he would take them off when he came into the darkness of the restaurant. He was hoping they would meet this side of the restaurant, she coming from the west, from where she lived on the other side of Ladbroke Grove. Then she would see he hadn't come in a cab.

He glanced down the mews on the left. He couldn't help it, though it hurt him rather, bringing a sweet and bitter nostalgia. In one of those pink-painted, window-boxed dolls' houses she had lived with her parents, the one with the balcony like a firegrate and a front door white as whipped cream. It was as if she had chosen this place for their lunch today to torment him. Only she was not the kind who did things like that. The point was she had no idea it would torment him, she no longer understood how he felt, and he had to make her understand. He had to make her feel the way she used to feel about him when she passed the block of council flats where *he* had grown up, a few streets away in Westbourne Park. For a moment he wondered what it would be like to know that she yearned for him as he did for her, that the mere sight of a place where he had lived would bring to her a rush of memories and tenderness and longing

for the sweetness of the past. He thought stoutly, I can make her feel like that again.

When he was fourteen and she was eleven they had wandered these streets. His gang. Not innocent children at all, tough kids, white and black, big for their ages most of them, brilliant shoplifters, inveterate smokers of marijuana. Those were the early days of his dealing and very well he had done at it, made a little fortune leading schoolchildren astray. They were rich, some of those schoolkids, with parents living on the ‘right side’ of Holland Park Avenue. His mother had never known or cared where he was so long as he didn’t bother her, and why would he? He was five feet ten and shaving, taking a girl of eighteen about, still going to school most days, but rich enough to forget about all that. Taxis were what he used for transport when he wasn’t driving his girlfriend’s car.

But she . . . He had loved her from the first, from the moment she came down Talbot Road and stood there on the corner watching them, four of them sitting on the wall having their first joint of the evening. She was small and very young, with a grave face, hungry for experience. The others weren’t interested but he went on looking at her and she went on looking at him, it was love at first sight for both of them, and when the joint came round to him he stuck it on a pin and handed it to her and said, ‘Here – don’t be shy.’

Those were the first words he ever said to her. ‘Here – don’t be shy.’ So gently he said them that Linus had given him his long Muhammad Ali look and spat in the gutter. She took the joint and put it to her lips, made it wet of course, they always did the first time. But she wasn’t sick, she didn’t do anything stupid, just gave him that heart-breaking smile of hers that ended with a small giggle.

Her parents stopped it a month later. They stopped what they called ‘playing in the street’. It was dangerous, anything might happen to her. Of course they went on meeting, he and she, after school, on the way to school and

the way back. There had never been a time since then when he hadn’t known her, gaps of course, three and four months long, when she was at college, but never a real separation. No separation of her from him was possible, he told himself as he came into the wine bar and went down the spiral staircase.

He paused to take off his sunglasses. The place had a thirties theme and the music they were playing was a selection from Astaire and Rogers movies. All around the walls were photographs of old film stars like Clark Gable and Loretta Young and long-forgotten people that meant nothing to him. She was there already, she was sitting at the bar with an orange juice talking to the French boy who was the barman there. He wasn’t jealous. He liked looking at her when she was unaware of being watched.

She was a very dark girl in the way Celts can be dark, which is not at all the way of Indians or Middle Eastern people or even the Spanish. Her skin was always brown, summer and winter, but now in a hot summer she was deeply tanned. None of her features was beautiful, except her dark blue eyes, but they added up to beauty, to something entirely pleasing and satisfying. They made you say, this is how a nice, good, intelligent, interesting woman of twenty-six should look. Her face in profile was what he saw now, the small straight nose, the chin that was slightly too big, lips that were a red rose petal and its mirror image, the eyebrows that flew off into her hairline. Her hair was a page’s in a Rossetti painting. Her mother had once said that, her *mother*. It was the darkest that brown can be without being black, hanging just below her ears like a metal bell, a fringe cut across her forehead. She was in white, white shorts to the knees, white shirt with big sleeves rolled up, a belt that was red, white and blue joining them up but slack on her tiny waist. Her brown legs were very long, long enough and shapely enough to wear thick white socks and trainers and still look beautiful. Those absurd

earrings! Black vases with double handles, like something out of the mummy's tomb. They moved him, those earrings, to an unbearable tenderness.

The barman must have whispered something to her. She turned round. He would have given anything to see delight dawn on her face, to have seen her face as his would be when he saw hers. If only he could have deluded himself that her expression was not – dismay. Gone at once, wiped away by duty and politeness and the decent goodness that was so much a part of her character, but there first of all. Dismay. Disappointment that he was there already, that he hadn't been late or sent at the eleventh hour a message that he couldn't come. It felt like a long thin pin going into his heart. Then he deluded himself. He was imagining it. She was pleased to see him. Why else make and keep these regular Saturday arrangements? Look at her smile! Her face was suddenly radiant.

'Hallo, Guy,' she said.

When first he saw her, even when she had spoken to him, he found it hard to speak. For a moment. He took her extended hand and kissed first her left cheek, then her right. As he might kiss any woman friend. And he felt her lips move in the accepted way against his left cheek, his right.

'How are you?' He had managed it. The ice that held the back of his tongue frozen was broken.

'I'm fine.'

'Will you have a real drink now?'

She shook her head. Wine she would drink sometimes, spirits never, and she mostly kept to fruit juices and fizzy water. It was a long time since the days when, after school, they had sat on a gravestone in Kensal Green Cemetery drinking the brandy Linus said fell off the back of a lorry. You can drink a lot of brandy when you are eighteen and fifteen. Your heads are strong and your stomachs made of iron.

He asked the barman for another orange juice and a vodka and tonic. Somewhere in the world there must be perfect sun-ripened oranges without seeds, oranges as big as grapefruits and sweet as heather honey. Those were the ones they should have here to squeeze for her into a tall crystal glass, frosted white all over from a freezer, a glass from Waterford, precious, chased with leaves and flowers, which would be smashed when she had drunk the contents. Thinking of it made him smile. She asked him what amused him and began frowning when he explained.

'Guy, I want you to stop thinking about me like that. Stop thinking of me in those terms.'

'What terms are those then?' he said.

'Romantic fantasy. It has nothing to do with the world we actually live in. It's like a fairy story.'

'I don't only think of you like that.' He looked deeply at her, spoke in a slow, measured and reasonable way. 'I believe I think of you in every possible way a man can think of a woman he loves. I think of you as the nicest girl I know and the most beautiful. I think of you as unique, as clever and gifted, and everything a girl should be. I think of you as my wife and the mother of my children, sharing everything I have and growing old with me, and me being as much in love with you in fifty years' time as I am now. That's how I think of you, Leonora, and if you can tell me any other ways a man can think of the brightest star in his heaven, well, I'll do those too. Does that satisfy you?'

'Satisfy me! It isn't a question of satisfying me.'

He knew she had heard that speech of his before, or something very like it. He had composed it long ago, learnt it by heart. It was nonetheless true for that and what else could he say but the truth? 'Please you then. I want to please you. But I don't have to say that again, you know that.'

'I know I'm not going to be your wife, I'm not going to be the mother of your children.' She looked up when the

orange juice came, gave the barman the smile that should have been his. ‘I’ve told you enough times, Guy. I’ve tried to tell you nicely. I’ve tried to be honest and behave properly about this. Why won’t you believe me?’

He didn’t answer. He raised his eyes and looked sombrely at her. Perhaps she took this heavy look of his for a reproach, for she spoke impatiently.

‘What is it now?’

It was hard for him but he had to ask. If he didn’t ask now he would do so later. If not today, he would ask tomorrow on the phone. Better ask now. Better to know. He had to know what he must fight against, if he had an adversary. His throat dried a little. He badly didn’t want his voice to be hoarse.

‘Who is he?’

His voice *was* hoarse. He sounded as if someone had him by the throat. She was surprised. He had caught her off guard.

‘What?’

‘I saw you with him. Walking along Ken High Street. It was last Tuesday or Wednesday.’ He was pretending, in a breathless voice, a casualness he didn’t feel. It was not only the day that he knew, indelibly, but the hour, the precise time to the minute, the precise spot. He could find it if he was to go there now, as if their footprints were engraved in the pavement. He thought he could find it blindfolded or in his sleep. And he could see them, the two of them, images petrified in his memory, their happy faces – no, not that, he was inventing that – outside the Kensington Market.

‘A little runt of a fellow,’ he said, and now he was savage. ‘Ginger hair. Who is he?’

She hadn’t wanted him to know. That gave a scrap of comfort. Her cheeks reddened. ‘His name’s William Newton.’

‘And what is he to you?’

‘You’ve no right to ask me these questions, Guy.’

‘I have a right. I’m the only person on earth who has a right.’

He thought she might dispute that but she only said sulkily, ‘OK, but don’t make such a big thing of it. Remember, you did ask, so you have to accept the answer.’ Did she know how that made his heart fall through his body? He looked at her, holding his breath. ‘I’ve known him for about two years as a matter of fact. We’ve been going about together for a year. I like him very much.’

‘What does that mean?’

‘What I say. I like him a lot.’

‘Is that all?’

‘Guy, this is very hard for me to talk about when you look at me like that, William is becoming important to me and I am to him. There, now you know.’

‘Is he your lover?’

‘Does it matter? Yes. Yes, of course he is.’

‘I don’t believe it!’

She tried to say it lightly. ‘Why not? Aren’t I attractive enough to have a lover? I’m only twenty-six, I’m not bad-looking.’

‘You’re beautiful. I don’t mean that. I mean him. Look at him. Five feet six, sandy-haired, a face like a zebra without the stripes – and what’s a zebra without stripes? What does he do? Has he got any money? No, don’t answer that. I could see he hasn’t. A poverty-stricken ginger dwarf, I don’t believe it. What do you see in him? For Christ’s sake, what do you see in him?’

She said equably, looking at the menu, not even looking up, ‘Do you really want to know?’

‘Certainly I want to know. I’m asking you.’

‘Conversation.’ She lifted her eyes. He thought she sighed a little. ‘If he talked to me all day and I never heard another person talk as long as I lived, I’d never get bored. He’s the most interesting man I ever knew. There, Guy, you did ask.’

‘And I’m boring?’

‘I didn’t say that. I said that to me you’re not as interesting as William. Not just you, no one is. You asked me why I go about with him and I told you. I fell in love with William for the things he says and – well, for his mind, it’s as simple as that.’

‘You fell in love?’ Oh, the horror of uttering those words! He would have expected to die before he spoke them, or that speaking them would kill him. He felt weak and his hands went out of control. ‘You’re in love with him?’

She said formally, ‘I am.’

‘Oh, Leonora, you can say that to *me*?’

‘You asked me. What am I supposed to do? Tell lies?’

Oh, yes, tell lies, tell me any lie rather than this awful truth. ‘And you go to bed with him for his conversation?’

‘You want to make it sound ridiculous, I know that, but, yes, oddly enough, in a way I do.’

She ordered melon with prosciutto without the prosciutto, followed by pasta. He had gamba and tournedos Rossini. He made an effort to speak, to say anything, and succeeded only in sounding like some scolding chaperone. ‘I wish you’d have a decent meal for once. I wish you’d have something expensive.’

He could tell she was relieved he had changed the subject, or she thought he had. The truth was he couldn’t bear to go on talking about it. The words hurt. Her words stayed in his ears, pressing and drumming: I fell in love with him.

‘As it is,’ she said, ‘I don’t like you paying. I don’t belong in a world where men pay for women’s food just as a matter of course.’

‘Don’t be absurd. It’s not a question of sex, it’s a question of me earning about fifty times what you do.’ He shouldn’t have said it, he knew that as soon as he had. It was a fault with him, which he recognised, to be unable to resist expressing pride in his success as a self-made man. The frown was back on her face, drawing together those winged

eyebrows. He began to feel angry as well as miserable. That was the trouble. When they were together, on these rare occasions, always in the glare of noon, always in public, he was unable to keep his temper.

'I know you hate what I do for a living,' he said, staring at the two frown lines, the steady blue eyes. 'It's because you don't understand. You don't know the world we live in. You're an intellectual and you think everyone's got your taste and knows what's good and what isn't. It's something you can't understand, that ordinary people just want ordinary pretty things in their homes, things they can look at and – well, identify with if you like, things that aren't pretentious or phoney.'

'"His position towards the religion he was upholding was the same as that of a poultrykeeper towards the carrion he feeds his fowls on: carrion is very disgusting but fowls like it and eat it, therefore it is right to feed fowls on carrion."'

Guy felt himself flush up to his eyes. 'I don't suppose even you made that up.'

'Tolstoy did.'

'I congratulate you on your memory. Did you learn it on purpose to come out with it today? Or is it one of the things *he* says in his marvellous conversation?'

'It's a piece I like,' she said. 'It's appropriate for lots of the terrible things that people do to other people today. I don't like any of the things you do for a living, Guy, but that's only part of it.'

'Are you going to tell me the rest?'

Her melon came and his prawns. He asked for a bottle of Mâcon-Lugny. He was a long way from an alcoholic but he had begun to drink every day, to drink quite a lot, an apéritif and wine at lunchtime, two or three gins before dinner and a bottle of wine with dinner. If the person he was with wanted to share another bottle or two in the evening, that was all right with him. Even for Leonora he wasn't going to pretend

he didn’t like a drink or deny himself the cigarette he would have after his steak.

‘You have never actually told me, you know. You’ve said why you fancy the ginger dwarf but never quite why you don’t fancy me. Any more, that is. You did once. Fancy me, I mean.’

‘I was fifteen, Guy. It was eleven years ago.’

‘Nevertheless. I was your first and a woman always loves her first best.’

‘Antiquated sexist rubbish, that is. And I must tell you, if you call William a ginger dwarf I shall get up and go.’

‘I’m not going to sit here and be insulted,’ he jeered in a cockney char voice.

‘As you say. I’m glad you said it, saved me the trouble.’

He was silent, too angry to speak. As was often the case at these meetings of theirs he became too angry or too unhappy to eat, in spite of the hunger he had felt a few minutes before. He would drink instead and end up reeling out of the place, red in the face. But he wasn’t red yet. He could see himself in the black glass panel opposite, next to the still of Cary Grant in *Notorious*, a very handsome man with strong classical features, a noble forehead, fine dark eyes, a lock of dark hair falling casually over his tanned brow. He put Cary Grant in the shade. Paradoxically his looks made him angrier. It was as if he had everything already, looks, money, success, charm, youth, so what was there left for him to acquire, what was there he could find to sway her when everything was inadequate?

‘I don’t want a sweet,’ she said. ‘Just coffee.’

‘I’ll just have a coffee too. D’you mind if I smoke?’

‘You always do smoke,’ she said.

‘I wouldn’t if you minded.’

‘Of course I don’t mind, Guy. You don’t have to ask with me. Don’t you think I know you by now?’

‘I shall have a brandy.’

‘Go ahead. Guy, I wish we didn’t quarrel. We’re friends, aren’t we? I’d like us to be friends always, if that’s possible.’

They had been through that before. I fell in love with him. The words buzzed in his ears. He said, ‘How’s Maeve? How’re Maeve and Rachel and Robin and Mummy and Daddy?’

He knew he should have said ‘your mother and father’ and he wished it didn’t give him pleasure to see her small wince when he referred to her parents like that. But he went on, he compounded it, he couldn’t help himself, ‘And their appendages,’ he said, ‘stepmummy and stepdaddy, how are they? Still in love? Still making mature second marriages now they’re old enough to know their own bloody minds?’

She got up. He held her wrist. ‘Don’t go. Please don’t go, Leonora. I’m sorry. I’m desperately sorry, please forgive me. I go mad, you know. When you’re as unhappy as I am you go mad, you don’t care what you say, you’ll say anything.’

She prised his fingers off her wrist. She did it very gently. ‘Why are you such a fool, Guy Curran?’

‘Sit down again. Have your coffee. I love you.’

‘I know that,’ she said. ‘Believe me, I don’t doubt that. You’ll never hear me say I don’t think you love me. I know you do. I wish you didn’t. God, I wish you didn’t. If you realised what a hassle it is for me, how it blights my life, the way you go on and on, the way you never leave me alone, I wonder if you’d – well, if you’d give up, Guy?’

‘I’ll never give up.’

‘You’ll have to one day.’

‘I won’t. You see, I know it isn’t true, all that. You say you fell in love with what’s-his-name but it’s infatuation, it’s a passing phase. I know you really love me. You’d hate me to leave you alone. You love me.’

‘I’ve said I do. In a way. It’s just that . . .’

‘Have lunch with me next Saturday,’ he said.

‘I always have lunch with you on Saturdays.’

‘And I’ll phone you tomorrow.’

‘I know,’ she said. ‘I know you will. I know you’ll phone me every day and have lunch with me every Saturday. It’s like being sure Christmas will come round.’

‘Absolutely,’ he said, raising his brandy glass to her, sipping it, then drinking it as he might wine. ‘I’m as reliable as Christmas and as – what’s the word? – inexorable. And I’ll tell you something, you wouldn’t come if you didn’t really love me. The ginge – this William, you’re not in love with him, you’re infatuated. It’s me you love.’

‘I’m fond of you.’

‘Why do you keep on seeing me then?’

‘Guy, be sensible. I only do it now because – well, I needn’t go into that.’

‘Yes, you need go into that. Why do you “only do it now because”?’

‘All right, you asked for it. Because I know how you feel, or I try to know how you feel. I want to be kind, I don’t want to be rotten. I did make promises and whatever to you when we were kids. No person in their right minds would call those promises binding, but just the same. Oh God, Guy, you’re on my conscience, don’t you see? That’s why I have lunch with you on Saturdays. That’s why I listen to all this stuff and let you insult my father and mother and my friends and – and William. And there’s another reason. It’s because I hope – well, I *hoped* – I’d make you see sense, I hoped I’d convince you it was hopeless – sorry about all those hopes – and you’d come to see there wasn’t a joint future for you and me. I had this idea I’d convince you we could be friends and that’s how it’d have been by this time, you agreeing to be my friend – well, *our* friend, William’s and mine. Does that explain it now?’

‘Quite a speech,’ he said.

‘It was as short as I could make it and still say what I meant.’

‘Leonora,’ he said, ‘who’s turned you against me?’ It was a new idea. It came to him as a revelation might,

enlightenment vouchsafed to a faithful believer. Her face, guilty, wary, on guard, showed him he was right. ‘I can see it all now. It’s one of them, isn’t it? One of them’s turned you against me. I won’t do for them, I don’t match up to their idea of what’s good for you. That’s it, isn’t it?’

‘I’m grown up, Guy. I make up my own mind.’

‘You wouldn’t deny you’re a close family, would you? You wouldn’t deny they’ve got a lot of influence on you.’ She couldn’t deny it, she said nothing. ‘I bet they’re over the moon about this William, I bet he’s first favourite with the lot of them.’

She said carefully, ‘They like him, yes.’ She got up, touched his hand with hers, giving him a look he couldn’t understand. ‘I’ll see you next Saturday.’

‘We’ll speak first. I’ll phone you tomorrow.’

She said in an even, cheerful tone, ‘Yes, you will, won’t you?’

He walked off one way and she the other. Once she was out of sight he hailed a taxi. He thought of asking the taxi driver to go to the house in Portland Road where her flat was, go there and thrash the whole thing out with her, maybe with William there as well. He was sure William would be there, waiting for her, listening sympathetically while she complained about lunch and him and what a bore it all was, and then giving her the benefit of his brilliant conversation.

But she wouldn’t say that. She wouldn’t complain about him or say he was a bore. He made a shrewd guess that she wouldn’t mention to anyone that she had even seen him. Because the fact was that she really did love him. Would she meet him like that if she didn’t? Who would believe all that rubbish about conscience and trying to convince him they could be friends? If a woman spoke to a man on the phone every day and met that man once a week it was because she loved him.

Guy paid off the taxi at the entrance to Scarsdale Mews. He had bought the house ten years before when he was nineteen, an unheard-of thing to do. But he had had the money. It was just before the property boom, which had tripled the price of the house in as many years. The second-best part of London, he called it. He had bought the house because it was a mews cottage like the one her parents, at that time, still lived in. Only his was bigger, in a far more prestigious district. A peer, a famous novelist and a TV chat-show star were among his neighbours. The first time he asked her to marry him was when he was twenty and she was seventeen and he took her home to this house of his and showed her the walled garden with the orange trees in Roman vases, the drawing room that had old Lisbon tiles on the walls and a Gendje carpet. The house had the first jacuzzi ever installed in London. He had an eighteenth-century four-poster bed and a Joshagan rug on the bedroom floor. It was better than anything her parents had. He took her to dinner at the Ecu de France where the waiters danced up to you showing you the food on big silver dishes, and then he took her home where he had Piper Heidsieck waiting on ice and wild strawberries.

'The Great Gatsby,' she said.

It was the name of a book. She was always talking about books. The ring he had bought her was a large sapphire, the size of the iris of one of her eyes. On her and for her he had spent the fortune he had amassed in his teens.

'No, I can't, I'm only seventeen,' she said when he asked her to marry him.

'OK, then, later,' he said. 'I'll wait.'

He still had the ring. It was in the safe upstairs, along with a few other, less worthy, commodities. He wouldn't despair of putting it on her finger one day. She must love him. If she didn't love him she would simply refuse to see him ever again. That was what people did, that was what he did with the girls who chased him. He let himself into his house,

went straight through to the room she said he mustn't call a lounge, but of course he did, what else, and poured himself a brandy. It reminded him, as beautiful cognac always did, of Linus Pinedo's which they had drunk in Kensal Green. Dazed with love and liquor they had lain in each other's arms in the long grass between the graves while butterflies floated above them on the warm summer air.

'I'll love you all my life,' she said. 'There can't be anyone else for us ever, Guy. Do you feel like that too?'

'You know I do.'

She loved him, she always had. Someone else had turned her against him. One of them. One or more had influenced her against him: William or Maeve or Rachel or Robin or the *parents*: Anthony her father and Tessa her mother. And they'd married again, the pair of them, which was why neither of them could any longer afford little mews houses in the second-(or in their case third- or fourth-) best part of London. Guy smiled. Now they were Anthony and Susannah, Tessa and Magnus.

They had turned her against him, deliberately. It was part of a deliberate policy to force her into their mould and separate her from undesirable elements. Anthony the architect, her father, and Tessa with the metallic fingernails and lofty know-it-all voice, her mother. Pretty gentle Susannah, the amateur psychotherapist, her stepmother, and Magnus the solicitor, her stepfather, he of the skull face and manner of a hanging judge.

And the others on the fringe: Robin and Rachel and Maeve. They were in a league against him, the eight against Guy Curran.

CHAPTER TWO

WHEN SHE CHANGED schools it was to Holland Park Comprehensive she went, his school. Her mother didn't like her walking home alone on winter afternoons when it started getting dark at four, so to stop her mother coming for her in the car, Leonora said some 'older friends' would go with her. The older friends were himself and Linus and Danilo, just starting to be known to the local underworld as the Dream Traffic.

Her parents wouldn't just have freaked out if they'd known, they'd probably have emigrated. As time went on, anyway, it was just him walking home. Linus had got himself some O levels and gone to a sixth-form college and Danilo was in trouble breaking into flats. The Dream Traffic had become a one-man show, but going from strength to strength. One autumn afternoon he and she were sitting on a doorstop in Prince's Square, not smoking or anything, just sharing a can of coke and eating potato crisps, when her mother came by in her car. She was driving home up Hereford Road. He expected her to stop but she only waved to Leonora and went on.

'Keep your fingers crossed for me when I get home,' Leonora said.

'Why? What'll happen?'

'I don't know exactly. Maybe a big scene. Maybe I'll get taken to and from school for a few weeks. God, I hope not, that'd be a real drag.'

'You reckon? I bet she does what it says in my gran's woman's magazine.' He spoke in a bright falsetto: '"Don't forbid your children to see their friends. Much better

encourage them to invite their friends home. Then you can get to know them. Remember most people respond well to a happy home atmosphere.”’

That made her laugh. He remembered every word of that conversation, every detail of place and time and, of course, of her. She was wearing blue jeans with a white shirt and a dark blue sweatshirt with a teddy bear on the front of it, a nice cuddly-looking blue denim jacket lined with sheepskin, brown leather boots and a long stripy pink and blue and yellow scarf. Her hair was long then; really long, nearly down to her waist. She hadn’t got a hat on, it wasn’t yet cold enough for that, it was only October. She was thirteen.

That was when she had her ears pierced. He went with her to get it done. The things girls did to themselves which were different from what men did were what he liked, he liked the contrast. Even then he was imagining a future when he would buy her diamond earrings. Her mother had been furious, said it was ‘common’ having it done so young. Leonora had begun wearing those fantastic earrings she still liked. The pair she had on while they were sitting on the steps were telephones with the receivers hanging on cords.

He remembered everything because that was the first time she told him she loved him. Nobody had ever told him that before, not even the eighteen-year-old (now twenty) whose sofa bed in a tiny bedsitter he sometimes shared and whose car he drove. Why would they? Who would? Not his mother, certainly. Not even his grandmother, who had persuaded his mother to name him Guy because she said Guy Fawkes was the first Catholic to try and bomb the British Government.

But when in a squeaky voice he said that about being invited to her home and the happy atmosphere, Leonora started laughing. She laughed and laughed and put her head down on her knees, shook her long dark brown hair and shook the phone earrings, looked up at him and said,

‘Oh, Guy, I love you. I do love you,’ and put her arms around his neck and hugged him.

She liked him to say funny things or clever things, so he tried saying them as often as he could. It didn’t come easily but he tried. He was still trying. And she still laughed, though there was a note in her laughter that troubled him. It was surprise.

The interesting thing was that her mother did exactly as he had predicted and got her to invite him home. That was his first meeting with any of them, any of those people that surrounded her. Robin, her brother, wasn’t there. He was away at school, some toffee-nosed public school he went to.

At that time her mother must have been about thirty-eight. She looked exactly like an older, harder version of Leonora: the same olive skin and pageboy face, the dark hair, though hers was done in a sort of knot on the back of her head, the same dark blue eyes, but calculating and watchful. Guy noticed her nails. They were painted silver. They were very long, and curving over at the top like claws but filed to points, and they looked like metal, like pieces of cutlery. Whenever he saw her after that her nails were done a different kind of metal, gold, bronze, brass, or that silver again. Leonora didn’t introduce her mother to him. Why should she? Each knew who the other was, it couldn’t be anyone else. Just the same, the unanswerable remark was made.

‘So this is Guy?’

It was raining. The little mews house was rather dark, with a few lamps lit, making pools of golden light in dim corners. Intense heat came off large gold-painted radiators. There was a polish smell of chemical lemons and lavender. Guy’s home was a dump, scarcely furnished. The furniture was tea chests and mattresses on the floor, a huge television set and stereo, Indian bedspreads pinned up to cover the windows. But he knew what was good, what he would have one day. He looked about him at the late-Victorian bits and

pieces, the pink chaise longue, the Parker-Knoll armchairs and reproduction Georgian dining table. Leonora's mother said.

'Where do you live, Guy? Not far away, I suppose.'

He told her baldly, in the knowledge of her immediate comprehension. She would know at once that Attlee House was unlikely to be the name of a private mansion block. He could see her brain ticking, the wheels turning and slotting things into place, making contingency plans. Leonora was restive, bored with it all.

'Come on, Guy, we'll go up to my room.'

A hand went out to Leonora's arm and rested there, a long pale brown hand with, it seemed to him, preternaturally long slender fingers, and the nails glittering like implements, like things designed for picking bruised or damaged bits out of food.

'No, Leonora, I don't think so.'

'Why not?'

'We shall be eating the minute Daddy comes in.'

They watched television, side by side on the pink chaise longue. She would have taken his hand, he could sense she wanted to, but he gave a tiny shake of his head, and moved an inch or two from her. Daddy came in. He looked more like a handsome human teddy bear than any man Guy had seen before, fair and blunt-featured and stocky without being fat. He called Leonora's mother Tessa, so Guy did too when he had to call her something. There wasn't anyone he called Mr and Mrs, he never had and didn't mean to start; he'd had endless trouble over it at school. 'Tessa,' he said and she looked at him as if he'd called her a bitch or a whore or something. Those eyebrows that were Leonora's, only the skin round them was old and brown and freckled, went up right into her hair.

'You flatter me, Guy,' she said, very sarcastic. 'I didn't realise we were on such intimate terms so early in our relationship.'