

THE SUNDAY TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

# Ruth Rendell

'A literary  
phenomenon'  
GUARDIAN

## Dark Corners

HER FINAL NOVEL

## **Contents**

About the Book

About the Author

Also by Ruth Rendell

Title Page

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

Chapter Twenty-Two

Chapter Twenty-Three  
Chapter Twenty-Four  
Chapter Twenty-Five  
Chapter Twenty-Six  
Chapter Twenty-Seven  
Chapter Twenty-Eight  
Chapter Twenty-Nine  
Chapter Thirty  
Chapter Thirty-One  
Chapter Thirty-Two  
Chapter Thirty-Three  
Chapter Thirty-Four  
Chapter Thirty-Five  
Chapter Thirty-Six  
Chapter Thirty-Seven

Copyright

## **About the Book**

**When Carl sells a packet of slimming pills to his close friend, Stacey, inadvertently causing her death, he sets in train a sequence of catastrophic events which begins with subterfuge, extends to lies, and culminates in murder.**

In Rendell's dark and atmospheric tale of psychological suspense, we encounter mistaken identity, kidnap, blackmail, and a cast of characters who are so real that we come to know them better than we know ourselves.

Infused with her distinctive blend of wry humour, acute observation and deep humanity, this is Rendell at her most memorable and best.

## About the Author

**Ruth Rendell** was an exceptional crime writer, and will be remembered as a legend in her own lifetime. Her groundbreaking 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. *Dark Corners* is her final novel.

## ALSO BY RUTH RENDELL

### **OMNIBUSES:**

COLLECTED SHORT STORIES  
COLLECTED STORIES 2  
WEXFORD: AN OMNIBUS  
THE SECOND WEXFORD OMNIBUS  
THE THIRD WEXFORD OMNIBUS  
THE FOURTH WEXFORD OMNIBUS  
THE FIFTH WEXFORD OMNIBUS  
THREE CASES FOR CHIEF INSPECTOR WEXFORD  
THE RUTH RENDELL OMNIBUS  
THE SECOND RUTH RENDELL OMNIBUS  
THE THIRD RUTH RENDELL OMNIBUS

### **CHIEF INSPECTOR WEXFORD NOVELS:**

FROM DOON WITH DEATH  
A NEW LEASE OF DEATH  
WOLF TO THE SLAUGHTER  
THE BEST MAN TO DIE  
A GUILTY THING SURPRISED  
NO MORE DYING THEN  
MURDER BEING ONCE DONE  
SOME LIE AND SOME DIE  
SHAKE HANDS FOR EVER  
A SLEEPING LIFE  
PUT ON BY CUNNING  
THE SPEAKER OF MANDARIN  
AN UNKINDNESS OF RAVENS  
THE VEILED ONE  
KISSING THE GUNNER'S DAUGHTER  
SIMISOLA  
ROAD RAGE  
HARM DONE  
THE BABES IN THE WOOD

END IN TEARS  
NOT IN THE FLESH  
THE MONSTER IN THE BOX  
THE VAULT  
NO MAN'S NIGHTINGALE

**SHORT STORIES:**

THE FALLEN CURTAIN  
MEANS OF EVIL  
THE FEVER TREE  
THE NEW GIRL FRIEND  
THE COPPER PEACOCK  
BLOOD LINES  
PIRANHA TO SCURFY

**NOVELLAS:**

HEART-STONES  
THE THIEF

**NON-FICTION:**

RUTH RENDELL'S SUFFOLK  
RUTH RENDELL'S ANTHOLOGY OF THE MURDEROUS MIND

**NOVELS:**

TO FEAR A PAINTED DEVIL  
VANITY DIES HARD  
THE SECRET HOUSE OF DEATH  
ONE ACROSS, TWO DOWN  
THE FACE OF TRESPASS  
A DEMON IN MY VIEW  
A JUDGEMENT IN STONE  
MAKE DEATH LOVE ME  
THE LAKE OF DARKNESS  
MASTER OF THE MOOR  
THE KILLING DOLL  
THE TREE OF HANDS

LIVE FLESH  
TALKING TO STRANGE MEN  
THE BRIDESMAID  
GOING WRONG  
THE CROCODILE BIRD  
THE KEYS TO THE STREET  
A SIGHT FOR SORE EYES  
ADAM AND EVE AND PINCH ME  
THE ROTTWEILER  
THIRTEEN STEPS DOWN  
THE WATER'S LOVELY  
PORTOBELLO  
TIGERLILY'S ORCHIDS  
THE SAINT ZITA SOCIETY  
THE GIRL NEXT DOOR



# Dark Corners

Ruth Rendell



## AN INTERVIEW WITH RUTH RENDELL

'But why the fascination with psychopaths? ...

"Well," Rendell says in her precise voice, "I do empathise with people who are driven by dreadful impulses. I think to be driven to want to kill must be such a terrible burden. I try, and I think I succeed, in making my readers feel pity for my psychopaths, because *I* do."

*Sunday Telegraph* magazine, 10 April 2005

## CHAPTER ONE

FOR MANY YEARS Wilfred Martin collected samples of alternative medicines, homeopathic remedies and herbal pills. Most of them he never used, never even tried because he was afraid of them, but he kept the lot in a cupboard in a bathroom in his house in Falcon Mews, Maida Vale, and when he died they went, along with the house and its contents, to his son Carl.

Carl's mother recommended throwing it all out. It was junk, harmless at best, possibly dangerous, all those bottles and jars and sachets just taking up room. But Carl didn't throw it out because he couldn't be bothered. He had other things to do. If he had known how it, or one particular item among all the rest, would change his life, transform it, ruin it, he would have emptied the lot into a plastic bag, carried the bag down the road and dumped it in the big rubbish bin.

Carl had taken over the former family home in Falcon Mews at the beginning of the year, his mother having moved to Camden when his parents divorced. For a while he thought no more about the contents of his bathroom cupboard. He was occupied with his girlfriend Nicola, his novel *Death's Door*, which had just been published, and with letting the top floor of his house. He had no need of those two rooms plus kitchen and bathroom, and great need of the rent. Excited though he was about the publication of his first book, he was not so naïve at twenty-three as to suppose he could live by writing alone. Rents in central London had reached a peak, and Falcon Mews, a crescent looping out of Sutherland Avenue to Castellain Road in Maida Vale, was

highly desirable and much sought-after. So he placed an advertisement in the *Paddington Express* offering accommodation, and next morning twenty prospective tenants presented themselves on his doorstep. Why he chose the first applicant, Dermot McKinnon, he never knew. Perhaps it was because he didn't want to interview dozens of people. It was a decision he was bitterly to regret.

But not at the beginning. The only drawback Dermot seemed to have was his appearance - his uneven yellow teeth, for instance, his extreme thinness and round shoulders. But you don't decide against a tenant because his looks are unprepossessing, Carl told himself, and no doubt the man could pay the rent. Dermot had a job at the Sutherland Pet Clinic in the next street and produced a reference from the chief veterinarian there. Carl asked him to pay each month's rent at the end of the previous month, and perhaps the first mistake he made was to request that it be paid not by transfer into his bank account, but in notes or a cheque in an envelope left at Carl's door. Carl realised that these days this was unusual, but he wanted to see the rent come in, take it in his hand. Dermot put up no objection.

Carl had already begun work on a second novel, having been encouraged by his agent Susanna Griggs to get on with it. He didn't expect an advance payment until he had finished it and Susanna and his editor had read and accepted it. There was no payment promised on paperback publication of *Death's Door*, as no one expected it to go into paperback. Still, what with being both a published author with good prospects and a landlord receiving rent, Carl felt rich.

Dermot had to enter Carl's house by the front door and go up two flights of stairs to get to his flat, but he made no noise and, as he put it, kept himself to himself. Carl had already noticed his tenant was a master of the cliché. And for a while everything seemed fine, the rent paid promptly

in twenty-pound notes in an envelope on the last day of the month.

All the houses in Falcon Mews were rather small, all different in shape and colour, and all joined together in long rows facing each other. The road surface was cobbled except for where the two ends of the mews met Sutherland Avenue and where the residents could park their cars. The house Carl had inherited was painted ochre, with white window frames and white window boxes. It had a small, very overgrown back garden with a wooden shack at the end full of broken tools and a defunct lawnmower.

As for the alternative medicine, Carl took a couple of doses of something called benzoic acid when he had a cold. It claimed to suppress phlegm and coughs, but it had no effect. Apart from that, he had never looked inside the cupboard where all the bottles and jars lived.

Dermot McKinnon set off for the Sutherland Pet Clinic at twenty to nine each morning, returning to his flat at five thirty. On Sundays he went to church. If Dermot hadn't told him, Carl would never have guessed that he was a church-goer, attending one of the several churches in the neighbourhood, St Saviour's in Warwick Avenue, for instance, or St Mary's, Paddington Green.

They encountered each other in the mews on a Sunday morning and Dermot said, 'Just off to morning service.'

'Really?'

'I'm a regular attender,' said Dermot, adding, 'The better the day, the better the deed.'

Carl was on his way to have a coffee with his friend Stacey Warren. They had met at school, then gone to university together, where Carl had read philosophy and Stacey had taken a drama course. It was while she was still at university that her parents had been killed in a car crash and Stacey inherited quite a lot of money, enough to buy herself a flat in Primrose Hill. Stacey wanted to act, and because of her

beautiful face and slender figure was given a significant part in a TV sitcom called *Station Road*. Her face became known to the public overnight, while her slenderness was lost in a few months.

'I've put on a stone,' she said to Carl across the table in their local Café Rouge. 'What am I going to do?' Other customers were giving her not very surreptitious glances. 'They all know who I am. They're all thinking I'm getting fat. What's going to happen to me?'

Carl, who was very thin, had no idea how much he weighed and didn't care. 'You'll have to go on a diet, I suppose.'

'David and I have split up. I'm finding that very hard to take. Have I got to starve myself too?'

'I don't know anything about diets, Stacey. You don't need to starve, do you?'

'I'd rather take one of those magic diet pills that get advertised online. D'you know anything about them?'

'Why would I?' said Carl. 'Not my kind of thing.'

The waitress brought the two chocolate brownies and the slice of carrot cake Stacey had ordered. Carl said nothing.

'I didn't have any breakfast,' she said.

Carl just nodded.

On his way home, still thinking about Stacey and her problem, he passed the bookshop kept by his friend Will Finsford. It was the one remaining privately run bookshop for miles around, and Will had confided that he lay awake at night worrying about having to close, especially as the organic shop down the road had not only gone out of business but had had the bailiffs in.

Carl saw him rearranging the display of best-sellers in the window and went in.

'D'you have any books on losing weight, Will?'

Will looked him up and down. 'You already look like you're wasting away.'

'Not for me. For a girl I know.'

‘Not the beautiful Nicola, I hope?’ said Will.

‘No, for someone else. A friend who’s got fat. That’s a word I’m not supposed to say, isn’t it?’

‘You’re safe with me. Have a look along the shelves, health section.’

Carl found nothing he thought would be suitable. ‘Come over one evening, why don’t you?’ he said. ‘Bring Corinne. The beautiful Nicola would love to see you. We’ll ring you.’

Will said he would and went back to his window arrangement.

Walking home, Carl realised it wasn’t really a book he wanted. Stacey had mentioned pills. He wondered if there were any slimming medications among his father’s stash of pills and potions, as he had come to think of them. Wilfred Martin had always been thin so was unlikely to have used that sort of thing, but some drugs claimed to serve a double purpose, improving the skin, for instance, or curing indigestion.

Carl thought of his father, a rather taciturn, quirky man. He was sorry Wilfred was gone, but they had never had much in common. He regretted that his father had not lived to see *Death’s Door* published. But he had left Carl the house, with its income potential. Had that been his way of offering his blessing on his son’s chosen career? Carl hoped so.

The house was silent when he got in, but it usually was whether Dermot was at home or not. He was a good tenant. Carl went upstairs and saw that the bathroom door was open. Dermot had his own bathroom in his flat on the top floor, so had no reason to use this one. Probably he’d forgotten to close the door himself, Carl thought, as he went into the bathroom, shutting the door behind him.

Wilfred’s pills and potions were in a cupboard divided into five sections on the left-hand side of the washbasin. Only the topmost section was for Carl’s current use; he didn’t need much space, as his toothbrush and toothpaste and

roll-on deodorant were on the shelf above the basin. Surveying the collection of bottles and phials and jars and packages, tubes and cans and blister packs, he asked himself why he had kept all this stuff. Surely not for its sentimental value. He had loved his father, but he had never felt like that about him. On the contrary, he regarded the pills and potions as mostly quack remedies, rubbish really, and quite useless. A lot of the products, he saw, taking small jars out at random, claimed to treat heart problems and safeguard against heart failure, yet his father had had two heart attacks and died after the second one.

No, there was nothing here that would encourage weight loss, Carl told himself. Best throw it all out, make a clean sweep. But what was that in a large plastic zip-up bag in the second section from the top? Yellow capsules, a great many of them, labelled DNP. *The foolproof way to avoid weight gain!* promised the label. Behind the bag of capsules was a box full of sachets also containing DNP but in powder-to-liquid form.

Taking the plastic bag out, he noted that, further down, the label advised using with care, and not to exceed the stated dose, etc. etc. The usual small print. But even paracetamol containers said that. He left the bag of capsules where it was and went downstairs to look up DNP on the computer. But before he got there, the front doorbell rang and he remembered that Nicola – beautiful, clever, sweet Nicola – was coming to spend the rest of the day and the night with him. He went to let her in, telling himself he must give her a key. He wanted her as a more permanent part of his life. With Nicola, his new novel and a reliable tenant, life was good.

For the time being, he forgot all about the slimming pills.



## CHAPTER TWO

AT FIRST, BEING a landlord seemed trouble-free. Dermot paid his rent on the appointed day with the minimum of fuss. That is, he did for the first two months. The thirty-first of March was a Monday, and at 8.30 Carl was, as usual, eating his breakfast when he heard Dermot's footsteps on the stairs. Generally they would be followed by a tap at the door, but this time they were not. The front door closed, and Carl, getting up to look out of the window, saw Dermot walking down the mews towards Sutherland Avenue. Maybe the rent would come later today, he thought.

Carl seldom saw a newspaper except for selected bits online, but he bought a couple of papers on 1 April to see if he could spot the jokes. The best one he had ever heard of - it was published before he was born - was the story that the arms of the Venus de Milo had been found washed up on some Mediterranean beach. Still, today's made him laugh, and by the time he got to his mother's flat, he had forgotten all about the missing rent. It was her birthday as well as April Fool's Day, and Carl was invited to a celebration lunch along with a cousin and two close friends. His mother asked him if she should have invited his girlfriend, and he said Nicola would still be at work in the Department of Health in Whitehall. It was a lovely sunny day and he walked halfway home before getting on the 46 bus.

But there was still the matter of the late rent. There was no sign of an envelope from Dermot. Carl woke up very early the next morning worrying. He disliked the idea of confronting Dermot; he found he had broken into a sweat just thinking about it. He was drinking a mug of very strong

coffee when he heard Dermot's footsteps. If the front door opened, he told himself, he would make himself go out and ask for the money. Instead, Dermot tapped on the kitchen door and handed over an envelope. Smiling and showing his horrible yellowish teeth he said, 'Did you think I was playing an April Fool's joke?'

'What? No, no, of course not.'

'Just a mistake,' said Dermot. 'He who makes no mistakes makes nothing. See you later.'

Carl felt great relief, but just to make sure, he counted the notes. And there it was, as it should be: twelve hundred pounds. Not nearly enough, his mother had said, considering today's prices, but it seemed a lot to Carl.

He filled a bowl with muesli because he was suddenly hungry, but the milk had gone sour so he had to throw the contents of the bowl away. Apart from the milk, though, things were going well and it was a good time to get back to work on his new novel, a more serious venture than his first. Carl looked at the notes he had made about Highgate Cemetery, the research he was doing for his first four chapters. Perhaps he should have made another visit to the cemetery yesterday, but he thought he had enough material to write his first chapter. The only interruption was a phone call from Stacey. It surprised him the way friends unloaded their trivial (it seemed to him) concerns.

'I'm so sorry, Carl.' She seemed to think the simple apology was enough to permit a long misery moan about her weight.

'I'm working, Stacey,' he said.

'Oh, writing, you mean?'

He sighed. People always said that, as if writing were quick and easy. Should he mention the DNP? No, it wouldn't shut her up. On the contrary, it would fetch her round here, and as much as he liked her, he needed to work. Instead he listened, making sympathetic noises, until he told the white lie those who work from home sometimes have to employ.

'Got to go, Stacey. There's someone at the door.'

He still couldn't write. It was absurd and something to feel a little ashamed of, suddenly to be happy, to be carefree, because he'd received a packet with twelve hundred pounds in it. Money that was rightly his, that was owed to him. Now he came to think of it, the rent money was his sole secure income. He couldn't count on more book money for a long time. The rent brought him relief and happiness.

He definitely wouldn't be able to write today. The sun was shining and he would go out, walk up to the big green space that was Paddington Recreation Ground, lie on the grass in the sun and look up through the branches at the blue sky.

## CHAPTER THREE

IT WASN'T APRIL Fool's Day or even May Day but 2 May when the next rent payment arrived.

Carl wasn't as nervous as he had been the previous month. Nicola had spent the night with him, but he had said nothing to her about the rent being late in April. After all, it had come and all had been well. She had gone to work on 2 May before Dermot left the house, so she wasn't there to see Carl listening for his tenant's footfalls on the stair or to see his surprise when the front door closed without Dermot's tap on the kitchen door. Perhaps the rent would come later in the day, and this was in fact what happened.

They encountered each other in the hallway, Carl leaving the house to do some food shopping and Dermot coming in at five thirty from the pet clinic.

'I've got something for you,' said Dermot, handing over an envelope.

Carl thought it strange that Dermot should have carried that envelope containing twelve hundred pounds about with him all day, but still, it wasn't important: he had got his money. He wouldn't have to break into his very meagre and dwindling savings in order to go on a week's holiday with Nicola. They would only be going to Cornwall, not abroad anywhere, but he was looking forward to their stay in Fowey.

Stacey had phoned again in some despair before they left, but on his mobile this time. He told her he was going away but that she must come over to see him when he got back. They'd go out to eat and he would see what he could do to help with her weight problem. Why had he said that? It must

have been the DNP that had come into his mind. He dismissed it. He couldn't help anyone lose weight.

He and Nicola went to Fowey with the couple who had introduced them, and who were still special friends partly for that reason. They had a good time, and by the time they got back to Paddington station, Carl had asked Nicola to come to Falcon Mews. 'I mean to live with me,' he said. 'Permanently.' He felt good about Nicola. They cared about the same things - books, music, the outdoors. She loved that he was a writer. He loved her.

'I'll have to go back to my flat and tell my flatmates, but then I will. I want to. I'd been going to ask you, but ... well, I must be sort of old-fashioned. I thought it wouldn't be right for me to ask and not you. Me being a woman, I mean.'

She moved in three days later.

The day before Nicola moved in, Stacey came round. She and Carl planned to go out to eat at a nearby restaurant. Before that, Stacey used his bathroom to renew her make-up. Perhaps because of her acting and her modelling, she made up very heavily, especially around her eyes.

After a few minutes, Carl went upstairs to fetch himself an antihistamine pill for his hay fever. He left the bathroom door ajar. Stacey followed him in. She was one of those people who, when someone told her of a mild illness or problem, always claimed to suffer from the same complaint. 'Funny you should say that, because I've got hay fever too.' He opened the cabinet and found the antihistamines on the top shelf. Stacey was standing behind him, telling him about her symptoms and peering over his shoulder.

'Where did all this stuff come from?' she asked. 'Do you use it?'

'It was my dad's. I sort of inherited it - you know, when I got the house and the furniture and everything.'

He reached into the cabinet and brought out the package with the yellow capsules. 'This is supposed to make you lose

weight. I expect he got it online.'

'Did your dad use it?'

'He can't have. He was so thin he was practically a skeleton.'

She took the package from his hand and looked at it. 'DNP,' she said. 'Dinitrophenol. One hundred capsules.' Then she read the instructions and looked at the price marked on the package. One hundred pounds.

Carl took the bag from her and replaced it on the shelf, but not at the back.

'I could order some online,' she said. 'But - well, you've already got these. Would you sell me fifty?'

*Sell* them? He knew he should just give them to her, but the hotel he and Nicola had stayed in in Fowey had been pricey, the restaurants they had visited in various other Cornish resorts as expensive as London - the kind they never went to in London - and the holiday, though the costs had been shared with Nicola, far more expensive than he had expected. Fifty pounds for these pills wasn't all that much, but it would be a help. And Stacey could afford it; well, she certainly could if she lost that weight and kept her sitcom job.

'OK,' he said, as he counted fifty out into a tooth mug and handed her the packet with the fifty remaining in it.

He went downstairs, realising as he did so that Dermot was closing the front door on his way out. Could he have heard his conversation with Stacey as he came down the stairs? Perhaps. But what did it matter if he had?

By now Stacey had finished her make-up and joined him. They were going up the road to Raoul's in Clifton Road. Outside on the pavement she handed over the fifty pounds.

He forgot about the transaction, not least because Nicola had moved in and he wondered why they had waited so long; it had been two years since Jonathan had first introduced them. But his novel wasn't going well and he had