

PRAISE FOR RUTH WARE'S
INSTANT *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLER

in a dark, dark wood

An NPR Best Book of the Year • An *Entertainment Weekly* Top Ten Summer Read • A *BuzzFeed* “31 Perfect Books to Get Excited About This Summer” Pick • A *Publishers Weekly* “Top Ten Mysteries and Thrillers” Pick • A *Bookreporter* Summer Reading Pick • A *New York Post* “Best Novels to Read This Summer” Pick • A *Shelf Awareness* “Book Expo America 2015 Buzz Book” Pick

“Prepare to be scared . . . Really scared! When I read this page-turning book about a bachelorette party gone wrong, I almost bit all my fingernails off!”

—Reese Witherspoon

“Who pulls a gun at a bachelorette party? The answers are unveiled with Gillian Flynn–style trickery.”

—O, *The Oprah Magazine*

“Reese Witherspoon’s making it into a movie, so read the book now. Before bed at your own risk.”

—*theSkimm*

“Just try to guess how sinister this plot can get (hint: VERY).”

—Marie Claire

“[It] packs a noirish punch that would make the Queen of Crime herself proud.”

—*Bustle*

“Ware hews [close] to the new genre of twisty-mystery women’s books.”

—*Vulture*

“Ruth Ware has written an exciting and amazing book that never stops circling the reader and clapping its cold hands over her eyes.”

—Peter Straub, *New York Times* bestselling author

“The pulse-quickenning plot will keep you up until the small hours.”

—*Good Housekeeping*, UK

“Read it on a dark and stormy night—with all the lights on.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

“An enchantingly unsettling thriller with mysterious characters and a classically spooky setting.”

—*Shelf Awareness*

“[It] will appeal to fans of Gillian Flynn’s *Gone Girl* and Paula Hawkins’s *The Girl on the Train*.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

“You’ll find it almost impossible to put this twisting, electrifying debut down . . . [The] foggy atmosphere and chilling revelations will leave you breathless.”

—*Entertainment Weekly*

“A sinister mood lurks in [*In a Dark, Dark Wood*].”

—*ELLE*, UK

“Ware writes with verve and energy, building up the suspense and keeping the pages flying.”

—*Library Journal*

“Ware’s debut novel sets the stage for her to become a household name . . . Engaging, suspenseful and mysterious.”

—*RT Book Reviews*

“Haunting.”

—*styleboston*

“WARNING: This book is hot. Do not pick it up late at night or if you are in a dark, dark wood . . . Ruth Ware has a gift. This British author’s first foray into fiction is a hit . . . it delivers a punch and keeps you guessing—an ideal August psychodrama that reminds us why mysteries remain such fun—except at night.”

—*New York Journal of Books*

“I raced through this, totally unable to put it down . . . Dark, smart, and compulsive.”

—Nicci Cloke, author of *Lay Me Down*

“So gripping. So glad my hen days are behind me. It’s going to be huge.”

—Tamar Cohen, author of *Dying for Christmas* and *The Broken*

“Likely to be the next *Gone Girl*.”

—*Surrounded by Books*

“If the premise might be the sort that Agatha Christie would have toyed with had she been a twenty-first-century graduate, Ware’s analysis of the power games some women revel in—and the toxicity in the undertow of some female friendships—is more reminiscent of Sophie Hannah, Christobel Kent, or even Gillian Flynn and Harriet Lane.”

—*Independent*

“The best thing about *In A Dark, Dark Wood* is the eerie atmosphere it creates for this ill-fated weekend, never overwrought, just ominous enough, the glass house where the guests are trapped ‘dark and silent, blending into the trees, almost invisible.’”

—*USAToday.com*

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THE WOMAN IN CABIN 10

RUTH WARE



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This book is a work of fiction. Any references to historical events, real people, or real places are used fictitiously. Other names, characters, places, and events are products of the author's imagination, and any resemblance to actual events or places or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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To Eleanor, with love

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In my dream, the girl was drifting, far, far below the crashing waves and the cries of the gulls in the cold, sunless depths of the North Sea. Her laughing eyes were white and bloated with salt water; her pale skin was wrinkled; her clothes ripped by jagged rocks and disintegrating into rags.

Only her long black hair remained, floating through the water like fronds of dark seaweed, tangling in shells and fishing nets, washing up on the shore in hanks like frayed rope, where it lay, limp, the roar of the crashing waves against the shingle filling my ears.

I woke, heavy with dread. It took me a while to remember where I was, and still longer to realize that the roar in my ears was not part of the dream but real.

The room was dark, with the same damp mist I'd felt in my dream, and as I pulled myself to sitting I felt a cool breeze on my cheek. It sounded like the noise was coming from the bathroom.

I climbed off the bed, shivering slightly. The door was shut, but as I walked across to it, I could hear the roar building, the pitch of my heart rising alongside. Taking my courage in both hands, I flung open the door. The noise of the shower filled the small room as I groped for the switch. Light flooded the bathroom—and that's when I saw it.

Written across the steamy mirror, in letters maybe six inches high, were the words STOP DIGGING.

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PART ONE

- CHAPTER 1 -

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 18

The first inkling that something was wrong was waking in darkness to find the cat pawing at my face. I must have forgotten to shut the kitchen door last night. Punishment for coming home drunk.

“Go away,” I groaned. Delilah mewed and butted me with her head. I tried to bury my face in the pillow but she continued rubbing herself against my ear, and eventually I rolled over and heartlessly pushed her off the bed.

She thumped to the floor with an indignant little *meep* and I pulled the duvet over my head, but even through the covers I could hear her *scratching* at the bottom of the door, rattling it in its frame.

The door was closed.

I sat up, my heart suddenly thumping, and Delilah leaped onto my bed with a glad little chirrup, but I snatched her to my chest, stilling her movements, listening.

I might well have forgotten to shut the kitchen door, or I could even have knocked it to without closing it properly. But my bedroom door opened outward—a quirk of the weird layout of my flat. There was no way Delilah could have shut herself inside. *Someone* must have closed it.

I sat, frozen, holding Delilah’s warm, panting body against my chest and trying to listen.

Nothing.

And then, with a gush of relief, it occurred to me—she'd probably been hiding under my bed and I'd shut her inside with me when I came home. I didn't remember closing my bedroom door, but I might have swung it absently shut behind me when I came in. To be honest, everything from the tube station onwards was a bit of a blur. The headache had started to set in on the journey home, and now that my panic was wearing off, I could feel it starting up again in the base of my skull. I *really* needed to stop drinking midweek. It had been okay in my twenties, but I just couldn't shake off the hangovers like I used to.

Delilah began squirming uneasily in my arms, digging her claws into my forearm, and I let her go while I reached for my dressing gown and belted it around myself. Then I scooped her up, ready to sling her out into the kitchen.

But when I opened the bedroom door, there was a man standing there.

There's no point in wondering what he looked like, because, believe me, I went over it about twenty-five times with the police. "Not even a bit of skin around his wrists?" they kept saying. No, no, and no. He had a hoodie on, and a bandanna around his nose and mouth, and everything else was in shadow. Except for his hands.

On these he was wearing latex gloves. It was that detail that scared the shit out of me. Those gloves said, "I know what I'm doing." They said, "I've come prepared." They said, "I might be after more than your money."

We stood there for a long second, facing each other, his shining eyes locked on to mine.

About a thousand thoughts raced through my mind: Where the hell is my phone? Why did I drink so much last night? I would have

heard him come in if I'd been sober. Oh Christ, I wish Judah was here.

And most of all—those gloves. Oh my God, those gloves. They were so professional. So *clinical*.

I didn't speak. I didn't move. I just stood there, my ratty dressing gown gaping, and I shook. Delilah wriggled out of my unresisting hands and shot away up the hallway to the kitchen, and I just stood there, shaking.

Please, I thought. Please don't hurt me.

Oh God, where was my phone?

Then I saw something in the man's hands. My handbag—my new Burberry handbag, although that detail seemed monumentally unimportant. There was only one thing that mattered about that bag. My mobile was inside.

His eyes crinkled in a way that made me think he might be smiling beneath the bandanna, and I felt the blood drain from my head and my fingers, pooling in the core of my body, ready to fight or flee, whichever it had to be.

He took a step forwards.

"No . . ." I said. I wanted it to sound like a command, but it came out like a plea—my voice small and squeaky and quavering pathetically with fear. "N—"

But I didn't even get to finish. He slammed the bedroom door in my face, hitting my cheek.

For a long moment I stood, frozen, holding my hand to my face, speechless with the shock and pain. My fingers felt ice-cold, but there was something warm and wet on my face, and it took a moment for me to realize it was blood, that the molding on the door had cut my cheek.

I wanted to run back to bed, to shove my head under the pillows and cry and cry. But a small, ugly voice in my skull kept saying,

He's still out there. What if he comes back? What if he comes back for you?

There was a sound from out in the hall, something falling, and I felt a rush of fear that should have galvanized me but instead paralyzed me. *Don't come back. Don't come back.* I realized I was holding my breath, and I made myself exhale, long and shuddering, and then slowly, slowly, I forced my hand out towards the door.

There was another crash in the hallway outside, breaking glass, and with a rush I grabbed the knob and braced myself, my bare toes dug into the old, gappy floorboards, ready to hold the door closed as long as I could. I crouched there, against the door, hunched over with my knees to my chest, and I tried to muffle my sobs with my dressing gown while I listened to him ransacking the flat and hoped to God that Delilah had run out into the garden, out of harm's way.

At last, after a long time, I heard the front door open and shut, and I sat there, crying into my knees and unable to believe he'd really gone. That he wasn't coming back to hurt me. My hands felt numb and painfully stiff, but I didn't dare let go of the handle.

I saw again those strong hands in the pale latex gloves.

I don't know what would have happened next. Maybe I would have stayed there all night, unable to move. But then I heard Delilah outside, mewing and scratching at the other side of the door.

"Delilah," I said hoarsely. My voice was trembling so much I hardly sounded like myself. "Oh, Delilah."

Through the door I heard her purr, the familiar, deep, chainsaw rasp, and it was like a spell had been broken.

I let my cramped fingers loosen from the doorknob, flexing them painfully, and then stood up, trying to steady my trembling legs, and turned the door handle.

It turned. In fact it turned too easily, twisting without resistance under my hand, without moving the latch an inch. He'd removed the spindle from the other side.

Fuck.

Fuck, fuck, fuck.

I was trapped.

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- CHAPTER 2 -

It took me two hours to prize my way out of my bedroom. I didn't have a landline, so I had no way of calling for help, and the window was covered by security bars. I broke my best nail file, hammering away at the latch, but at last I got the door open and I ventured out into the narrow hallway. There are only four rooms in my flat—kitchen, living room, bedroom, and tiny bathroom—and you can pretty much see the full extent of it from outside my bedroom, but I couldn't stop myself from peering into each doorway, even checking the cupboard in the hallway where I keep my hoover. Making sure he was really gone.

My head was pounding and my hands were shaking as I made my way outside and up the steps to my neighbor's front door, and I found myself looking over my shoulder into the dark street as I waited for her to answer. It was around four a.m., I guessed, and it took a long time and a lot of banging to wake her up. I heard grumbling, over the sound of Mrs. Johnson's feet clumping down her stairs, and her face when she cracked open the door was a mixture of bleary confusion and fright, but when she saw me huddled on the doorstep in my dressing gown, with blood on my face and on my hands, her expression changed in an instant and she took off the chain.

"Oh my days! Whatever's happened?"

"I got burgled." It was hard to talk. I don't know if it was the chilly autumn air, or the shock, but I had started shivering convulsively

and my teeth chattered so hard I had a momentary horrible image of them shattering in my head. I pushed the thought away.

"You're bleedin'!" Her face was full of distress. "Oh, bless my soul, come in, come in!"

She led the way into the paisley-carpeted entrance to her maisonette, which was small and dark and grimly overheated, but right now felt like a sanctuary.

"Sit down, sit down." She pointed to a red plush sofa and then went creakily to her knees and began to fiddle with the gas fire. The gas popped and flared, and I felt the heat rise a degree as she got painfully to her feet again. "I'll make you some hot tea."

"I'm fine, honestly, Mrs. Johnson. Do you think—"

But she was shaking her head sternly.

"There's nothin' to beat hot sweet tea when you've had a shock."

So I sat, my shaky hands clasped around my knees, while she rattled around in the tiny kitchen and then came back with two mugs on a tray. I reached out for the closest and took a sip, wincing at the heat against the cut on my hand. It was so sweet I could barely taste the dissolving blood in my mouth, which I supposed was a blessing.

Mrs. Johnson didn't drink but just watched me, her forehead wrinkled in distress.

"Did he . . ." Her voice faltered. "Did he *hurt* you?"

I knew what she meant. I shook my head, but I took another scalding sip before I could trust myself to speak.

"No. He didn't touch me. He slammed a door in my face—that's the cut on my cheek. And then I cut my hand trying to get out of the bedroom. He'd locked me in."

I had a jolting flash of myself battering at the lock with a nail file and a pair of scissors. Judah was always teasing about using the proper tools for the job—you know, not undoing a screw with the tip of a dinner knife, or prizing off a bike tire using a garden trowel.

Only last weekend he'd laughed at my attempt to fix my showerhead with duct tape, and spent a whole afternoon painstakingly mending it with epoxy resin. He was away in Ukraine and I couldn't think about him right now. If I did, I'd cry, and if I cried now, I might never stop.

"Oh, you poor love."

I swallowed.

"Mrs. Johnson, thank you for the tea—but I really came to ask, can I use your phone? He took my mobile, so I've got no way of calling the police."

"Of course, of course. Drink your tea, and then it's over there." She indicated a doily-covered side table, with what was probably the last turn-dial phone in London outside an Islington vintage-retro boutique. Obediently I finished my tea and then I picked up the phone. For a moment my finger hovered over the nine, but then I sighed. He was gone. What could they reasonably do now? It was no longer an emergency, after all.

Instead, I dialed 101 for nonemergency response and waited to be put through.

And I sat and thought about the insurance I didn't have, and the reinforced lock I hadn't installed, and the mess tonight had become.

I was still thinking about that, hours later, as I watched the emergency locksmith replace the crappy bolt-on latch of my front door with a proper deadlock, and listened to his lecture on home security and the joke that was my back door.

"That panel's nuffing but MDF, love. It'd take one kick to bash it in. Want me to show you?"

"No," I said hastily. "No, thanks. I'll get it fixed. You don't do doors, do you?"