



No More Dying Then

Ruth Rendell

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What kind of a person would kidnap two children?

That is the question that haunts Wexford when a five-year-old boy and a twelve-year-old girl disappear from the village of Kingsmarkham. When a child's body turns up at an abandoned country home one search turns into a murder investigation and the other turns into a race against time. Filled with pathos and terror, passion, bitterness, and loss, **No More Dying Then** is Rendell at her most chillingly astute.

With her Inspector Wexford novels, Ruth Rendell, winner of the Mystery Writers of America Grand Master Award, has added layers of depth, realism and unease to the classic English mystery. For the canny, tireless, and unflappable policeman is an unblinking observer of human nature, whose study has taught him that under certain circumstances the most unlikely people are capable of the most appalling crimes.

No More Dying Then Details

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From Reader Review No More Dying Then for online ebook

Lauren says

The most difficult, uncharacteristic Wexford novel thus far doesn't necessarily have the most successful mystery, but its risky and ambitious character work makes up for that.

Mike Burden's beloved wife has died unexpectedly before the start of this novel, and Burden, usually a buttoned-up, polite, tirelessly engaged man, has responded to this situation by becoming a *total asshole*. That's a decision of Rendell's that I'm impressed with, because she really doesn't stint on how angrily and harmfully Burden responds to his grief. Often, mystery series protagonists have fake flaws--they're alcoholics who never hurt or disappoint anyone; they have serial divorces in their past but somehow are always faithful, understanding partners in the present--and I like that Burden is allowed to behave in a genuinely ugly manner here. He's neglectful of his children, he takes advantage of his sister-in-law's help, he's rude and aggressive, he's fiercely jealous of attention, and, to top it all off, Rendell is explicit that part of his pain, at this point--about ten months after his wife's death--isn't *just* grief. Rather, the "prudish" Burden had had an extremely healthy, enthusiastic sex life within his marriage, and now he's going out of his mind with erotic frustration. It is, in short, either the best or the worst time for him to run into the attractive, Bohemian mother of a missing boy.

A missing boy is in fact what we have here, in a case that everyone finds eerily similar to the recent unsolved disappearance of a young girl. Wexford remains suspicious of the girl's stepfather, a charming, drift-through-life, carelessly selfish never-do-well named Swan, and that suspicion leads him back into the past to the death of a *third* child. The case is well-balanced, with Wexford's investigation proceeding methodically while Burden's is feverish and slipshod but occasionally almost hauntingly productive. It's like if someone mashed-up Tana French's mental-breakdown mystery novel *In the Woods* with something much more down-to-earth. The contrast works, especially since Rendell has spent several volumes now building up the laidback warmth between Wexford and Burden, earning both the blow-up and the reconciliation they have here:

The room was very still. Soon I must lift my head, Burden thought, and take away my hands and see his derision. He didn't move except to press his fingers harder against his eyes. Then he felt Wexford's heavy hand on his shoulder.

"Mike, my dear old friend..."

It's Rendell's commitment to how bad things can get that makes the forgiveness of them, both here in and with Mike's sister-in-law, land. Even though the mysteries here are good, the heart of this novel is the worst time of a good man's life.

Sara says

In an earlier book in the series (Wolf to the Slaughter), a young policeman is tested by his passionate involvement with a woman who features in the case. In this novel, Inspector Burden experiences the same thing. His bereavement has left him terribly vulnerable...but fortunately his involvement does not lead to disaster. That's as close as I will get to a spoiler.

Rendell never disappoints when it comes to her depth of insight into people. Burden is a conventional, unimaginative man, who refuses to use profanity or tell dirty jokes, and as a result is often made fun of and misunderstood. When he loses his beloved wife Jean, he feels even more alienated from others, since they have no idea of the passion that he and Jean shared from the beginning. "They never seemed to dream that you could hate promiscuity and adultery because you knew what marriage could be and had experienced it to such a degree of excellence that anything else was a mockery, a poor imitation." For him, there are no easy "fixes."

Definitely a novel, and not just a murder mystery.

Jaksen says

Ahah! An Inspector Wexford book I really liked!

The good inspector and his associate, Mike Burden, really have a challenging case this time. Someone has just kidnapped a little boy; someone else kidnapped a young girl a short while ago. Are the cases connected? Is someone in their small village abducting children, and if so, why are all the police's leads leading nowhere?

Meanwhile Mike Burden is going through a crisis of conscience, of emotions, of family, and all due to the fact that he is suddenly, and tragically a widower. (Not a spoiler; this happens off-scene before the book starts.) Mike is more than totally bereft; he is lost, anchorless, a complete misery walking. When he becomes involved with the mother of the missing child, however, all bets are off and the once-prudish, highly opinionated and somewhat bigoted Burden becomes a different man as his interest in the woman turns into an obsession. Wexford is left to go it alone as Mike's need for this woman begins to threaten the investigation, his job and his family. But, I'm getting into spoiler territory here ...

There are several interesting characters to spice up the plot; a lot of weird settings including the remains of a mansion which burned down during WW1. I thought I had it figured out; I thought I knew where this was all going. I was totally and utterly wrong, and yet this is one of those mysteries where the reader is going to say, OMG, should have seen that coming! But didn't.

I read this in a little over a day. Compelling and insightful, this is a more mature mystery than some of Rendell's early works. I thoroughly enjoyed this one, but chopped off one star because of the behavior of one character who seemed - to me - to be a little 'off.' In other words, he - or she - seems to act out of character. But then we all do that from time to time, don't we?

Bettie? says

Read by..... Robin Bailey
Total Runtime..... 6 Hours 43 Mins

Description: *This novel deals with the disappearance of a small boy. Six months earlier, a twelve-year-old girl disappeared in the same vicinity, and was never found. So the two events terrify the community and galvanize Chief Wexford and his deputy Burden into action. At the same time, Burden is having a very hard time dealing with the loss of his wife to cancer about nine months earlier. In fact, the secondary plot of Burden's emotional struggles almost overshadows the mystery itself. Rendell handles both sides of her story with smooth professional polish. The plotting is believable and skillful, the writing is excellent, the characterizations are insightful.*

This is the one with the missing small boy, and we learn about Burden's sad widower status.

3* From Doon With Death (Inspector Wexford, #1)

3* A New Lease of Death (Inspector Wexford, #2)

3* Wolf to the Slaughter (Inspector Wexford, #3)

2* The Best Man to Die (Inspector Wexford, #4)

3* A Guilty Thing Suprised #5

3* No More Dying Then (Inspector Wexford, #6)

3* Murder Being Once Done (Inspector Wexford, #7)

3* Not in the Flesh (Inspector Wexford, #21)

2* The Vault (Inspector Wexford, #23)

Lara says

As a brief St. Luke's Little Summer in mid-October gives the village of Kingsmarkham a respite from the coming winter, Chief Inspector Reginald Wexford and his colleague Mike Burden are caught up in the case of a young boy gone missing. But in this most puzzling and potentially heart-rending investigation, when Wexford most needs his trusted right-hand man, Burden keeps going strangely missing himself. Even when he's around the police station, he's not there, not really. He's angry, morose; not at all himself.

In fact, Burden is deeply in mourning for his wife, Jean, who as the novel opens has died of cancer a few months previously. His world has literally been shattered; Jean's sister, Grace, is at his house, helping care for him and his two children. But Burden is angry, confused, grief-stricken. He takes Grace's assistance and her child-care for granted, never seeming to realize how much she does for them - or the personal career sacrifice she's made in order to care for all three of them. His life is empty and Burden can no longer see how to move forward without the one woman he's loved for so long.

So when he meets the missing boy's mother, Gemma, and sees how completely unlike she is to Jean, Burden's repressed sexual urges and need for love nearly send him out of his mind, making him act in quite an unprofessional way. He's so vulnerable and we feel pity for him, yet know he can no more deny what is between himself and the anxious mother of the missing boy than he could the need to eat or sleep. He's never met anyone like her and he can't stop himself. In a way, they are each grieving and become each other's comfort.

So Burden is about to learn some things - about life, about love, about loss and parting. But meanwhile, his family is drawing further away from him and, if his job performance doesn't perk up, likely he'll lose that,

too.

Meanwhile, Wexford continues to investigate both the current case and the one it increasingly appears tied to, the previous murder of a little girl some months before that, until now, has gone unsolved. Could the two events be connected? Wexford must find out - either with Burden, or without him.

By this novel in Rendell's "Wexford" series, both Wexford and Burden are becoming more rounded, intriguing characters. We're getting to know them much better as people, outside the police station and the cases in which they are involved. Her characters are growing - and that includes the "side" characters, the other cop shop residents, the coroner (who is also Wexford's doctor) and the members of as each man's family. I especially love the instances of humor Rendell injects into her characters, with Wexford tossing off quotes by Shakespeare and references to George Eliot and Burden completely missing the point of what Wexford has said - let alone who said it.

I can't wait to read more of these two and highly recommend anyone interested to start with the first novel in the series, "From Doon With Death".

Liz says

Chronologically, this comes before *Murder Being Once Done*. And this is the book where Mike Burden, Wexford's second-in-command, becomes a Real Human Being. Burden's wife, Jean, has died of cancer; not yet forty years old, Mike Burden is desperately lonely. His wife's sister, Grace, has come to live with him and care for his children, giving up her own career as a nurse (temporarily, she believes) to do so. Grace is much like Jean in many ways – motherly, a good housekeeper, and orderly and efficient person – and Mike admires those qualities greatly. But the spark of attraction is missing, and Mike and Jean had enjoyed an active and loving intimacy. In his misery, Mike takes Grace for granted, ignores his children, and falls hard for the mother of a missing child in the case he is investigating. Is the boy's disappearance related to that of a young girl who went missing less than a year before? And will Mike Burden's romance with the boy's mother, a bohemian redhead actress who is nothing like his late wife, be a blessing or a curse to him? Really good read, and I'm enjoying the development of Wexford and Burden very much.

Allan Nail says

Finally!

I don't know what has kept me coming back to this series, but I'm glad I held on. Perhaps it was the strength of the later, stand-alone novels I'd read of Rendell's, but this series had so many problems in the first five volumes. What made the difference? Two things: characters, and technology.

Primarily, this series is about what all good series (hold on a sec, maybe I'm jumping the gun on "good" for the Wexford series) are: the characters. What has been odd at times is the focus Rendell places on Burden, the nudge-winkingly named understudy of the titular Wexford who seems to be so much more interesting to the author. Yet, the books are a part of the Wexford series. Still, I'm starting to see what she's doing now, even if she wasn't aware of it in the beginning. Much like Doyle's detective, these stories are really about Burden, much as the Holmes stories are about Watson (Really, they are). Wexford comes in to make the

intuitive leap (Holmes never really deduces anything-- he's really all about inductive reasoning) and the human drama centers around Burden, who in this novel is still grieving the loss of his wife, who apparently died in between books. The focus on Burden becomes necessary because Rendell's made Wexford too perfect; the worst you can say about him is he can be a bit prickly. Burden, who is so stoic and conservative in the earlier novels, here reveals a vulnerability, even a recklessness, that while not Rebus in nature by any stretch, gives us a chance to see a more dimensional character. Finally. I'm still digesting, but it seems as though Rendell has created (at least in this novel, but it seems to be pointing in a particular direction--we'll see how it goes) Wexford as a comic foil to Burden's pathos.

The second thing that makes this book so much better is a minor thing, but it goes far in correcting a near-fatal error for me. Rendell largely avoids technology. More than anything else, technology can date a story, and in the earlier books Rendell clearly, obviously, places her stories in the 60s. I kid you not, the installation of an elevator plays centrally in the previous novel as an intruding, unwanted advancement, and the novel instantly becomes a period piece as a result. This novel? No technology. It could have happened (almost) at any time. It almost makes up for the fact that Wexford is a grandfather in this book and, 40+ years later is newly retired. How old is this guy?

OK, rambling. This is a welcome change, and I can only hope it is a trend going forward. We'll see tonight...

Donna says

Read again 01/02/17 for maze mystery discussion group.

Even though I loved this book a year ago, I had forgotten the specifics completely. It was still good and perhaps enhanced by recognizing some old characters from former titles in the series.

OK, so why did someone not put me on to Ruth Rendell earlier? It took her death a few months ago for me to read her first Inspector Wexford mystery and now this one is even better than that. The setting is a small English town, but not so provincial as St. Mary Mead. Wexford is a great detective and puts together the clues well once they all come to him. This is a complicated story of two child kidnappings more than six months apart which come together in the search for suspects. The interaction between Wexford and his next in command Burden is wonderful, even when it is strained as in this story. I will go on to read more of these -- in order this time.

J.R. says

A five-year-old boy goes missing and, in short order, circumstantial evidence connects it to the earlier disappearance of a 12-year-old girl in the same neighborhood.

Chief Inspector Reg Wexford is immediately involved in sifting clues but receives little help from a self-absorbed Inspector Mike Burden, his usual sounding board and second-in-command.

Burden has fallen in love with the mother of the missing boy, which makes him a burden (excuse the pun) and not a plus to the investigation. I've always considered Burden somewhat of a prig, but he goes beyond

that in this novel. Okay, he's grieving for his wife who recently died. That does not excuse the poor treatment of his devoted sister-in-law and his children and definitely makes him unworthy of Wexford's affection.

With little help from anyone else, Wexford goes along in his normal astute manner and unravels the cases, which prove to be only tenuously connected and have motives different than I'd suspected.

Not the best in the series, but still worth reading for Rendell's sure characterization, insightful psychological probing and beautiful prose.

Dyah Subagyo says

Let the shelf speaks for itself.

Really. How many ways can you spell 'boring' and 'recycled as carbons'?

The crime is damnable vanilla. Kid-napping, in the strictest sense of the word. Just when you thought that you definitely cannot invest more time in this book and decided to read it intermittently, you then realized, aghast, that alas, this book features the one and inimitable English Puritan distilled and personified, our very own ~~walking skeleton~~ Michael Burden.

Jeez. I cannot sympathize with him. He is a copper in his prime age with a very ancient, unforgiving mind who refuses to fathom and understand human flaws. Even his superior, who is maybe 20 years older, is more flexible.

It is rare that a suffering character does not elicit sympathy, but Mike Burden manages to do so. He is so unlikable I cannot help but secretly crow with muted delight that he, he, he, our sainted, holiest-than-thou policeman, is being shoved forcibly into a situation where he can see his true nature, which is ugly.

I had deemed this book boring based on the crime. I then decided afterwards that this book is unsalvageable judging from the character Rendell chose to put in the limelight.

James Barnard says

This is an interesting one from Ruth Rendell and, with hindsight, seems to mark the point at which she'd decided that Chief Inspector Wexford, rather than his sidekick DI Burden, would be the audience's main point of identification. For the first and only time, Burden takes centre stage, and nowhere more so than here does he live up to his surname. Wrong decisions? Check. Unprofessional conduct? Check? Inappropriate relationships with witnesses and potential suspects? Check.

The story is a fairly run-of-the-mill mystery, by Rendell's standards, but the main interest is in the reader's despair over the grieving Burden's conduct and how long it's going to take him to pull himself together. He emerges from the novel as a wiser, but just as judgemental, man, paving the way for Wexford – hitherto a rather gruff, hard-boiled authority figure – to complete his transition into a liberally minded voice of reason.

So, not the most groundbreaking book of Rendell's, but one that fits nicely into the evolution of what was, by now, becoming a very interesting range.

Hal says

One of Rendell's best. It is moving and insightful. She artfully avoid her tendencies to show off her learning and to cook up endings that have almost nothing to do with the rest of the book. Instead, she creates realistic characters and a believable conclusion here. If you are new to her work, this volume in the Inspector Wexford series is an ideal place to start.

I especially appreciated her portrait of Wexford's primary aide and colleague, Michael Burden, whose psyche is explored in great depth and with tenderness.

Peggy says

I have read several of these Inspector Wexford books. This one is particularly good. A 4 year old boy has disappeared outside his own house while playing with others in the neighborhood. This after a 12 year old girl had disappeared months earlier and had never been found. Instead of just being a police procedural about finding the links in the cases and solving the mystery, this story focuses especially on Wexford's right hand man, Inspector Burden. Burden's wife has died of cancer and he is not coping. His sister-in-law has put her life on hold to come care for Burden's 2 children, but he is treating her like a servant and completely ignoring his children. He is so miserable his work is suffering. Then he meets the exotic, bohemian mother of the missing boy. So begins a torrid affair that threatens to sweep Burden over the cliff emotionally. Wexford solves the case without the help of his friend Burden. I found the story compelling and interesting because the dual tales.

Swapna says

Engrossing book with an unconvincing ending

Julia says

I haven't read many books by Ruth Rendell but enjoyed the others that I read more than this one. The story spends more time on the personal aspects of Inspector Burden (who works with Inspector Wexford) than on the actual mystery. (Or at least that was my impression.) Burden's wife has died; he is having a hard time concentrating at work, doesn't pay attention to his children, and has an affair with a woman with whom he has very little in common.

I also felt that the ending was too much *deus ex machine* (view spoiler).

If I had read more of the earlier books and understood more about who Burden was before his wife's death I might have been more sympathetic to the character.
