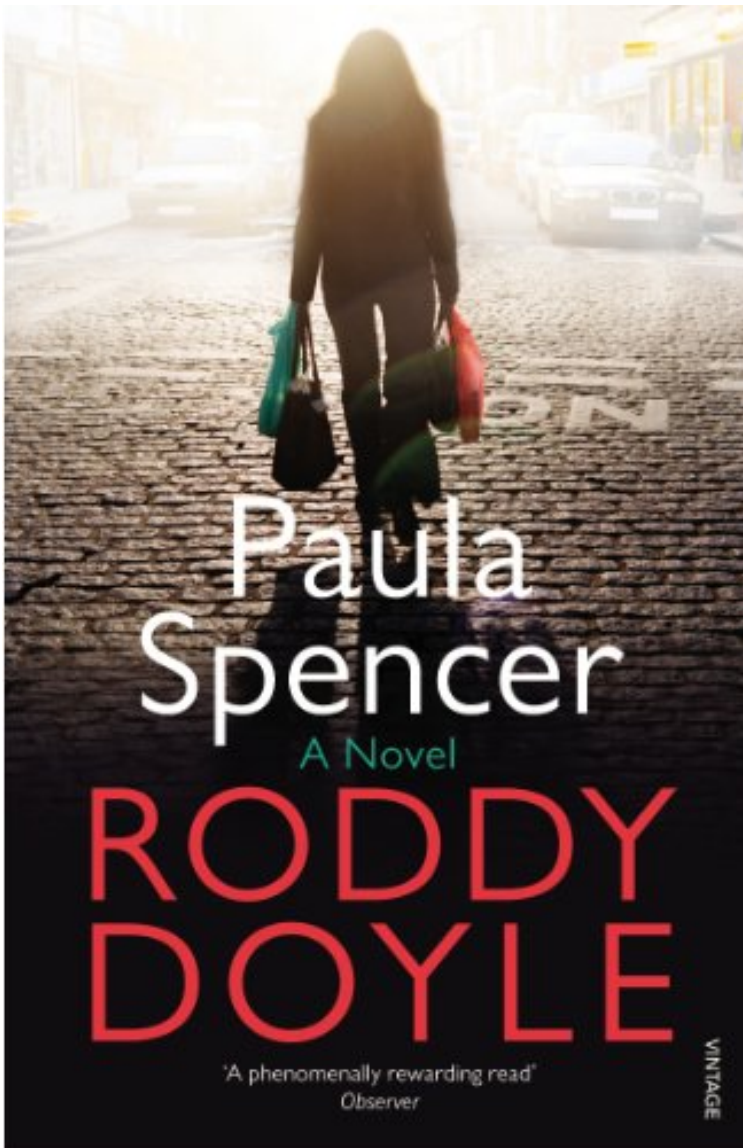


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Paula Spencer



Par Roddy Doyle
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurWhen we first met Paula Spencer - in *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* - she was thirty-nine, recently widowed, an alcoholic struggling to hold her family together. Paula Spencer begins on the eve of Paula's forty-eighth birthday. She hasn't had a drink for four months and five days. Her youngest children, Jack and Leanne, are still living with her. They're grand kids, but she worries about Leanne. Paula still works as a cleaner, but all the others doing the job now seem to come from Eastern Europe, and the checkout girls in the supermarket are Nigerian. You can get a cappuccino in the caf, and her sister Carmel is thinking of buying a holiday home in Bulgaria.ExtraitShe copes. A lot of the time. Most of the time. She copes. And sometimes she doesnt. Cope. At all. This is one of the bad days. She could feel it coming. From

the minute she woke up. One of those days. It hasnt let her down. Shell be forty-eight in a few weeks. She doesnt care about that. Not really. Its more than four months since she had a drink. Four months and five days. One of those months was February. Thats why she started measuring the time in months. She could jump three days. But its a leap year; she had to give one back. Four months, five days. A third of a year. Half a pregnancy, nearly. A long time. The drink is only one thing. Shes on her way home from work. Shes walking from the station. Theres no energy in her. Nothing in her legs. Just pain. Ache. The thing the drink gets down to. But the drink is only part of it. Shes coped well with the drink. She wants a drink. She doesnt want a drink. She doesnt want a drink. She fights it. She wins. Shes proud of that. Shes pleased. Shell keep going. She knows she will. But sometimes she wakes up, knowing the one thing. Shes alone. She still has Jack. Paula wakes him every morning. Hes a great sleeper. Its a long time now since he was up before her. Shes proud of that too. She sits on his bed. She ruffles his hair. Ruffles thats the word. A head made for ruffling. Jack will break hearts. And she still has Leanne. Mad Leanne. Mad, funny. Mad, good. Mad, brainy. Mad, lovely and frightening. Theyre not small any more, not kids. Leanne is twenty-two. Jack is nearly sixteen. Leanne has boyfriends. Paula hasnt met any of them. Jack, she doesnt know about. He tells her nothing. Hes been taller than her since he was twelve. She checks his clothes for girl-smells but all she can smell is Jack. Hes still her baby. Its not a long walk from the station. It just feels that way tonight. God, shes tired. Shes been tired all day. Tired and dark. This place has changed. Shes not interested tonight. She just wants to get home. The ache is in her ankles. The ground is hard. Every footstep cracks her. Paula Spencer. Thats who she is. She wants a drink. The house is empty. She can feel it before she shuts the door behind her. Bad. She needs the company. She needs distraction. Theyve left the lights on, and the telly. But she knows. She can feel it. The door is louder. Her bag drops like a brick. Theres no one in. Get used to it, she tells herself. Shes finished. Thats how it often feels. She never looked forward to it. The freedom. The time. She doesnt want it. She isnt hungry. She never really is. She stands in front of the telly. Her coat is half off. Its one of those house programmes. She usually likes them. But not tonight. A couple looking around their new kitchen. Theyre delighted, opening all the presses. Fuck them. She turns away. But stops. Their fridge, on the telly. Its the same as Paulas. Mrs Happy opens it. And closes it. Smiling. Paula had hers before them. A present from Nicola. The fridge. And the telly. Both presents. Nicola is her eldest. Paula goes into the kitchen. The fridge is there. You were on the telly, she says. She feels stupid. Talking to the fridge. She hated that film, Shirley Valentine, when Shirley talked to the wall. Hello, wall. She fuckin hated it. It got better, the film, but that bit killed it for her. At her worst, her lowest, Paula never spoke to a wall or anything else that wasnt human. And now shes talking to the fridge. Sober, hard-working, reliable shes all these things these days, and shes talking to the fridge. Its a good fridge, though. It takes up half the kitchen. Its one of those big silver, two-door jobs. Ridiculous. Twenty years too late. She opens it the way film stars open the curtains. Daylight! Ta-dah! Empty. What was Nicola thinking of? The stupid bitch. How to make a poor woman feel poorer. Buy her a big fridge. Fill that, loser. The stupid bitch. What was she thinking? But thats not fair. She knows its not. Nicola meant well; she always does. All the presents. Shes showing off a bit. But thats fine with Paula. Shes proud to have a daughter who can fling a bit of money around. The pride takes care of the humiliation, every time. Kills it stone dead. Shes not hungry. But shed like something to eat. Something nice. It shocked her, a while back not long ago. She was in Carmel, her sisters house. Chatting, just the pair of them that afternoon. Denise, her other sister, was away somewhere, doing something she cant remember. And Carmel took one of those Tesco prawn things out of her own big fridge and put it between them on the table. Paula took up a prawn and put it into her mouth and tasted it. Lovely, she said. Yeah, said Carmel. Theyre great. Paula hadnt explained it to her. The fact that she was tasting, really tasting something for the first time in she didnt know how long. Years. Shed liked it. The feeling. And shed liked the prawns. And other things shes eaten since. Tayto, cheese and onion. Coffee. Some tomatoes. Chicken skin. Smarties. Shes tasted them all. But the fridge is fuckin empty. She picks up the milk carton. She weighs it. Enough for the morning. She checks the date. Its grand; two days to go. Theres a carrot at the bottom of the fridge. She bends down she likes raw carrots. Another new taste. But this one is old, and soft. She should bring it to the bin. She lets it drop back into the fridge. Theres a jar of mayonnaise in there as well. Half empty. A bit yellow. Left over from last summer. Theres a bit of red cheese, and a tub of Dairygold. Theres a packet of waffles in the freezer. Theres two left in the packet Jacks breakfast. Theres something else in the back of the freezer, covered in ice, hidden. Stuck there. The package is red she can see that much. But she doesnt know what it is. Shed have to hack at it with a knife or something. She couldnt be bothered. Anyway, if it was worth eating it wouldnt be there. From the Hardcover edition. From Publishers Weekly The heroine

of Doyle's 1996 bestseller, *The Woman Who Walked into Doors*, returns long widowed (abusive husband Charlo having been killed fleeing the Irish police) and four months sober. Those absences and old relationships mark the year we follow in Paula's new life: she worries that her daughter, Leanne, is following in her footsteps; negotiates her resentment of her bossy older daughter, Nicola; and reconciles with her son, John Paul, now a recovering heroin addict with two kids of his own. Doyle, Booker Winner for Paddy Clark Ha Ha Ha and author of *The Commitments*, does a lot in this novel by doing little: it is John Paul's quiet distance, for example, that serves as a constant reminder of the horrendous mother and pitiful alcoholic Paula used to be. The newfound prosperity of Ireland affects Paula's day-to-day life on the bottom of the economic scale which suddenly looks a lot different. Paula's inner life lacks subtler shades, and her outer life is full of tiring work, abstinence from liquor and family. These aren't elements that automatically make for a have-to-read novel, but in this wholly and vividly imagined case, they do. (Jan.) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.