



Darkmans

Nicola Barker

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Shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize, *Darkmans* is an exhilarating, extraordinary examination of the ways in which history can play jokes on us all... If History is just a sick joke which keeps on repeating itself, then who exactly might be telling it, and why? Could it be John Scogin, Edward IV's infamous court jester, whose favorite pastime was to burn people alive - for a laugh? Or could it be Andrew Boarde, Henry VIII's physician, who kindly wrote John Scogin's biography? Or could it be a tiny Kurd called Gaffar whose days are blighted by an unspeakable terror of - uh - salad? Or a beautiful, bulimic harpy with ridiculously weak bones? Or a man who guards Beckley Woods with a Samurai sword and a pregnant terrier?

Darkmans is a very modern book, set in Ashford [a ridiculously modern town], about two very old-fashioned subjects: love and jealousy. It's also a book about invasion, obsession, displacement and possession, about comedy, art, prescription drugs and chiropody. And the main character? The past, which creeps up on the present and whispers something quite dark - quite unspeakable - into its ear.

The third of Nicola Barker's narratives of the Thames Gateway, *Darkmans* is an epic novel of startling originality.

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