

family withdraw all support and turn hostile, leaving her not only alone, but an object of suspicion amongst their many friends and business associates. Faith soon finds that the town has divided in two: those on her side, and those who believe she murdered her husband.

Determined to find Evan and at the same time terrified of what she might find, Faith starts to try to find her missing husband using her own resources. People vanish all the time, she learns - some as the result of a breakdown, others having spent months, even years carefully constructing an alternate identity into which they slip unannounced. None of these makes any sense to Faith: she knew Evan better than he knew himself ... At least that's what she believes until, prompted by an odd, anonymous phone call, she starts sifting through his criminal clients

FAITH'S CHARACTER

Warm, maternal, optimistic, dryly and ironically witty, and above all else, a coper.

Her dad was a Port Talbot steel worker laid off in the 80s and on the scrap heap for years while Faith's mum took whatever jobs she could – office cleaner, washer-upper at the hospital kitchens - to keep the family fed. Faith has seen a strong woman hold a traumatised family together, and she's now she's trying to do the same without the bitterness that overtook her mother, who never lived to the light at the end of the tunnel.

She's a big, practical, motherly, enfolding presence, friendly with everyone and frightened of no one, except doctors, assistants in clothes shops and the tax man.

She knows every copper in an herp r 7 thou é h)she's d 2 e0ce

would like, but she still forgives them none the less. And this is part of her secret: she accepts life as it is. She imparts this quality to her clients and in the most improbable situations – like the battle between a social-climbing client and his neighbour whose stinking drains spoil all his attempts at entertaining – and manages to bring warring parties together to create unlikely resolutions.

the most. And the fear that her missing husband has been disloyal – and the furious desire for him not to have been – is what drives her in her mission to find him. And the longer we know her, and the more we realise how much she has staked on his loyalty, the more we fear for her if she should find out the worst.

Sometimes it's a burden being the one everyone turns to. Sometimes she wants to shout and scream and rail at the world, and occasionally she does; she'll drink too much chardonnay, erupt in a volcano of wonderful, colourful, lucid, pin-point-sharp observations that nail everything perfectly, and then she'll carry on. That's all you can ever do – carry on, and keep your hopes alive.

When it comes to close friends, especially Lisa and some of the girls in the book group she joins, she's the one who always gets opened up to. Something about being a lawyer makes people think she won't blab and will be full of good advice. She's always given too much information – affairs, fantasies, screwed-up sex lives, jealousies, fears – she hears it all. She loves it really, but since Evan's gone there is a big hole – he was the one she used to confide in. Now she has to carry it all by herself. There is no one on the next pillow to pass the secrets to, so sometimes she ends up talking to him, imagining he's there.

As the series progresses, the darker side of her bubbles up and confronts her: the flip-side of being strong and determined, is that she's capable of being tough and confrontational to the point of shocking herself. Down deep, there's *violence* inside her; *rage*. It's the rage of the woman slighted, the woman whose sense of

security and validity was wrapped up in being the mother at the centre of the family, and someone, or something has taken that away from her. She didn't suffer her tough childhood, get through college and raise a family to be abandoned!

Faith's search for Evan ultimately becomes a search for herself: where does a woman like her, who can't trade on looks or glamour, who has to rely on her own resources, get her sense of self from? Is she merely re-enacting her mother's martyrdom? Has she subconsciously chosen a man, who, like her father, dropped out of his role in his prime? Is God, or the universe, or whatever the hell it is that sets the challenges for our lives like some invisible assault course, telling her she needs to be a little more selfish? Encouraged by Lisa, she flirts with the idea, and eventually it leads to her falling a little in lust, then love with Steve, the supposedly reformed robber. When they eventually have sex – like teenagers in the back of his car – it's the first time she's been disloyal to anyone in her life. It feels wicked, sinful, wretched, but it's also intoxicatingly liberating.

So when Evan does reappear (several series in), he returns to a very different Faith

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A small town law firm has the whole of life passing through the door. It's a world of light and shade, sadness and laughter.

The bulk of Faith's practice is crime, mostly petty – drunk dust-ups, thieving, the odd domestic assault - but occasionally a murder or a rape that sends shockwaves through a small community and briefly turns her into a pariah for representing a suspect already condemned in the media.

No matter who they are, Faith gives every client the benefit of the doubt. She'll get a local prostitute a £20 fine, then lend her a tenner for 'lunch', knowing it's going on a pint and a fix. She almost admires the ingenuity and courage of a teenage joyrider who steals the bank manager's BMW and takes it on a 120 mph rampage, but at the same time gets furious with social services who let him be so neglected that all his problems are compounded by being locked away. Her friendliness and warmth aren't just tools to get her by, they're heartfelt – she cares, deeply, and never leaves her conscience at the court door.

Faith's cases are all about transgressions that are really about a client's problems that run far deeper. Her interest stretches to the person underneath, and at her best she solves client's real problems. When she defends with a divorced man who has been stalking his ex-wife, she ends up helping him admit his loneliness and manages to match him with an equally lonely woman who has developed a shop-lifting habit. She pulls off a similar trick when defending a disgraced clergyman who has been exposing himself in public. The humiliation has brought him to the

brink of suicide when Faith digs out of him the fact that he lost his belief in God and had spent twenty increasingly desperate years living a lie.

She also deals with family law and all manner of petty disputes, often finding herself playing the role of arbiter. Among the many cases that come through the door is that of divorcing parents who go to war over custody of a beautiful 5-year-old daughter they dress up like a living doll. It takes Faith to bang heads together and make them see they care more about the reflected adulation than the child herself. Often it's the trivial things that open the door to the real issues: the divorcing couple who end up physically fighting outside a courtroom over which of them gets to keep a signed Status Quo album and a woodland scenes jigsaw puzzle are really burying the pain of the son they lost in a car accident. When Faith confronts them with the truth, it clears the way for a genuine emotional resolution.

But her practice isn't all misery. Often there's a lot of humour, like when she defends an exhibitionist lesbian couple who play loud music and keep the curtains open when they shouldn't to retaliate against their bigoted neighbours. Her clients are looking at a possible prison sentence for contempt of court when Faith uses her

deal with a dispute over a shared driveway that escalates in a series of tit for tats before climaxing in an attempted electrocution by a sabotaged lawnmower; she represents a woman who, when she started going to Weightwatchers with her best friend, entered into a friendly Facebook rivalry with her which spiralled into increasingly vicious libels that ultimately cost them both their jobs. And then there is the cat that routinely messes on the neighbour's garden until one morning the owner finds it on her doorstep – stuffed.

These incidental stories are domestic, personal and familial and rooted in emotions and frustrations we can all understand: small scale dramas with universal resonance that actually tap into the essence of all our everyday struggles for survival. And this is the heart of the series: no matter how ordinary or mundane our lives, we all at times find ourselves in an elemental struggle to stay afloat and keep faith that things will get better. Faith arrives in people's lives when emotions

corrupt than the criminals they are supposed to be hunting. She can't redeem these people or turn them with human warmth or a few insightful words. Acting alone, she has to take them on, face her fears, confront the fact that there is something that can be called truly evil, and accept the possibility that it has claimed the man she loves.

END

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