

Welcome to the sample of 'Salt in the Wounds' – roughly 10% of the book. I hope you enjoy it – and there's a link at the end if you'd like to buy it.

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Author's Note

Salt in the Wounds is set in Whitby, on the North East coast of England. As I'm British and the book's set in the UK, I've used British English. The dialogue is realistic for the characters, which means that they occasionally swear.

This is a novel. I've taken some slight liberties with the number of police officers there would be in Whitby. Other than that I have tried to stay faithful to the town and its history.

As it's a work of fiction names, characters, organisations, some places, events and incidents are either products of the author's imagination or used fictionally. All the characters in this book are fictitious. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

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Spring 2015: Scattering the Ashes

The top of this hill then.

Just the two of them.

Together. One last time.

It was the right decision. Ash had been through enough.

The right place as well. High on the cliff top, where Grace could watch the sun rise out of the sea every morning. Look south to Whitby and north towards the hills. See the gorse bloom in the spring.

Where a seagull could float up to her on a thermal.

And where he could talk to her. Look up from the beach as he walked Archie. Tell her everything was alright. That Ash was doing well at school. That they were coping. His book was taking shape...

He stood on the cliff edge. Or as close to the cliff edge as someone who was afraid of heights could stand.

There were two small boats out at sea, one stationary, the other – red and white, low at the back with a fishing party – chugging round in circles.

He looked 200 feet down to the grey water of the North Sea. Then he pulled the blue/green tube out of his pocket. Unscrewed the lid. Held it in his right hand. Raised his arm and tilted his wrist.

“You’re sure, Michael?”

“You know I am, Dilip. We’ve discussed it. I’ve thought about it. I’ve walked the dog and thought about it some more. What can we do? It’s the only decision we can take.”

“You know that... Once we do this there’s no going back?”

“Dilip... Dilip, you’ve explained everything. A hundred times.”

“I’m sorry, Michael. I have to ask.”

“We’re ready.”

At first nothing happened. Very gently, he shook the tube.

And the last of his wife’s ashes – held back so he could have one final moment with her – slid out into the pale spring sunshine. For an instant the wind dropped and they hung in the air in front of him. Almost a cloud, he thought.

He gazed into it. Trying to see her face in a cloud of ash.

The cloud drifted slowly away to the north. To the hills, to the gorse bushes burning yellow.

He tried to watch it. Follow its journey. But the wind picked up and it was gone.

A single tear rolled down Michael Brady’s cheek.

“Take care, sweetheart,” he whispered. “Take good care on your travels.”

And then he turned and walked back down the cliff path to his car.

Time to drive into Whitby. Time to collect the keys to the house. Time to drive across the Pennines and finish packing. And in a few days, time to drive back with his daughter.

Time to start a new life.

But there’d never be enough time to heal...

Chapter 1

“This is a cool town, Dad. Two garden centres and a garage.”

“This is Pickering, Ashley, not Whitby.”

“Oh, and a Chinese takeaway. And a car park. I’ll certainly be coming here with my friends. If I make any, that is.”

Was he supposed to reply? He drove across the roundabout by the Forest and Vale and started up the road to Whitby.

“Twenty miles to go,” he said. “Thirty minutes. Forty at the most.”

“You know I don’t want to move to Whitby, don’t you?”

“You have told me, yes. Once or twice.”

“OK, just so you know.”

Brady sighed. What else could he do? They couldn’t live in Manchester any more. And they’d discussed it a hundred times...

“Look, Ash, Whitby will be fine.”

“Dad, Whitby is the other side of the country. And it’s fine for a holiday. As long as you’re there for three days and you want to eat fish and chips and walk on the beach. But no-one could want to live there. No-one who’s not your age. Or dead.”

Pickering gave way to the North York Moors. He’d wanted a sunny day to welcome them. A good omen for their new life. But the clouds were dark grey, the Moors bleak and foreboding.

There was a whine from the back of the Tiguan. “Archie needs a wee,” Ash said.

“OK, there’s a car park just up here on the right.”

Brady indicated and turned in. He parked the car facing the Hole of Horcum, a huge bowl in the Moors, formed – legend had it – when Wade the Giant scooped up a handful of earth to throw at his wife.

“You coming?”

“As if.” Ash was already busy on her phone.

“OK. Five minutes. I’ll just walk Archie across the road.”

Brady lifted the tailgate. A black and white Springer Spaniel did his best to jump out. “Patience, Archie. Just wait a minute. You need your lead on.”

They walked across the road. A path led through a gap in the fence to the edge of the giant’s bowl. Archie had a wee, sniffed the heather, decided this was a good place for a long walk. Brady looked down into the hole Wade had made and saw the paths winding across the hillside. Archie was right.

“But not today,” he said. “We need to unpack. But we’ll be back, I promise. And there’s a beach waiting for you as well.”

Archie reluctantly jumped back into the car. An expectant look produced the obligatory biscuit.

“You OK?” he asked, getting back into the car.

“Yeah, I’m good.” Her mood had lightened. He still couldn’t get used to how quickly it changed.

‘Teenage girls, Mike,’ someone had said to him. ‘I say something to mine one day, she’s fine. Say the same thing the next day and I’m the worst father in the world. Take my advice, mate. Day she turns 13, fly to Argentina. Come back when she goes to university.’

“Let’s go,” he said. “Or the removal van’ll overtake us.”

He drove out of the car park. The road bent round to the left and started to dip downhill. “Fylingdales,” he said, pointing to the right. “It used to be three giant golf balls when I was your age.”

“What is it then?”

“Early warning system. Part of the RAF. Supposed to give us four minutes’ warning if Vladimir Putin wakes up in a bad mood.”

“You mean if someone tells him he has to live in Whitby?”

He laughed. “Very good,” he said.

He glanced across at her. She was her mother. The same mouth, the same dark brown hair. Maybe a shade or two lighter. The hint of green in her eyes. Sassy, argumentative, assertive. All the qualities that had attracted him to Grace. But which might make her teenage years an interesting challenge...

He reached across and squeezed her hand. Surprisingly, she squeezed back.

“We’ll be fine,” he said. “You, me, Archie... And we’re here, the top of Blue Bank.”

Whitby was spread out below them, squeezed between the Moors and the sea, the ruins of the Abbey guarding the town.

“Are you looking forward to this, Dad?”

She surprised him with the question. *Was* he looking forward to it?

Yes, some days he was. Some days the thought of getting up, dropping her at school, coming home, writing, looking out of his window at the sea, walking Archie on the beach, more writing in the afternoon, cooking dinner for the two of them, talking over the meal, doing some research at night, offering to help Ash with her homework while he still could.

Yes, some days he was looking forward to it.

And some days it terrified him.

Dropping Ash at school, coming home to an empty house, looking at the rain lashing horizontally off the North Sea, trudging along a sodden beach with an equally sodden

dog, coming back to an empty house, cooking a meal he ate on his own because Ash was going out and had forgotten to tell him. Another early night as he tried to escape the pain...

“Of course I am,” he said.

And he drove down Blue Bank, through Sleights and into Whitby.

Chapter 2

“You sure you’ll be OK?”

“I’ll be fine, Dad. I’m going to watch a film. And encourage Archie to sleep on the sofa.”

“Don’t you dare...”

“What time will you be back?”

“Ten. No later. Trust me, Ash, I don’t want to go. You know I hate parties. Especially birthday parties for middle-aged men.”

“Have you got a key?”

“Who’s the parent here? Yes, I have. I’ll see you at ten. Do you want me to say ‘happy birthday?’ to your Uncle Bill for you?”

“No. You know I don’t like him.”

“He’s your uncle.”

“He gives me the creeps.”

Brady turned to go. “Dad,” Ash said. “One last thing...”

“What?”

“Don’t get in a car with anyone that’s been drinking.”

He smiled. So far so good then. She’d listened to something he’d told her. Something based on bitter experience...

He walked past the park, down the hill and up the other side. Why was he worrying about getting himself fit again? Rule out the seafront and it was impossible to walk anywhere in Whitby without walking up a hill.

Brady rang the bell of his sister’s house. Four bedrooms, detached, two cars in the drive. Did a detective really need a personalised number plate? He could think of better ways to spend £500. Just the middle aged equivalent of having your name on a t-shirt.

He hadn’t been lying. He hated parties. People round for dinner? A perfect evening. Well, it had been, once upon a time.

Parties where he had to make small talk with a lot of people he didn’t know? He’d rather take Archie for a walk. He’d rather take Archie for a walk in the rain.

Kate answered the door. His big sister. If three years older still counted as a big sister. "Michael. Come in."

They hugged. The hug of a brother and sister who'd always been friends.

Kate stepped back and looked at him. "Are you growing a beard? And letting your hair grow?"

"I thought I might. Now I'm a writer..."

"You know your beard's got a touch of grey don't you?"

"My daughter is 13. She's told me. Several times a day."

"It definitely makes you look... I'm not sure... A bit Chris Hemsworth."

"Who?"

"*Thor*, Michael. But older. And without the hammer. And the six pack..."

She took his coat. "Ash didn't want to come then?"

"She's watching a film. And giving Archie too many biscuits. You know how it is at that age: grown-up parties where they don't know anyone..."

"I do. We've all been there. How's she doing?"

"OK, I think. But she's a teenager now: I'm the last one to know."

"Both mine have gone out," Kate said. "Maddie's got a new boyfriend." Her tone of voice suggested she wasn't impressed.

"Is Bill alright with that? The girls missing his party?"

"He's delighted. Anything to avoid Maddie's boyfriend. And we're going out tomorrow. Just the four of us."

She took him into the lounge. Maybe 20 people. Ten o'clock couldn't come soon enough.

Let's get this over and done with.

First stop, the birthday boy. Detective Chief Inspector William Calvert. Pink faced, slightly overweight. A man who'd be a lot happier when he didn't have a police medical to worry about.

What was that word Ash had started using? Gammon? Yep, it worked for Bill.

They shook hands. "Happy birthday, Bill. I didn't bother with a card. Thought this might look better on the mantelpiece."

His brother-in-law laughed. "Thanks, Mike. I'm in need of reinforcements. Kate's gin shelf is taking over." He glanced down at the bottle. "Laphroaig. Thank you."

"How's it feel then? Five years to go?"

"Bloody brilliant. Whitby can just behave itself for the next five years. No crime. Nothing happening. Then I can do my duty and take Kate on a cruise."

“No crime? That’s optimistic...”

Bill shook his head. “We’re on top of it. We know who the villains are.”

Until there are new ones.

But he was out of it now. Whatever happened, it was someone else’s problem.

“Kate says you’re going to write a book. Story of the investigation.”

“That’s the plan.”

Bill looked sceptical. “I don’t see the point. It’s not going to change anything.”

Because the story needs to be told. Because I owe it to Grace.

“Besides,” he added. “You’ve always been a copper. That’s all you’ve ever wanted to do. That’s what you told me, first time I came round to your house when I started seeing Kate. Three months of tapping away at your laptop and you’ll be itching to nick someone.”

Brady shook his head. “Not any longer. That part of my life’s over.”

“So why haven’t you retired? Kate said you were still on leave – ”

“A year’s sabbatical, technically...”

“You should do what I’m going to do. It’s all planned. One last piss-up with the lads, take my pension and sod off to the golf course. You could have played the mental health card. Early retirement...”

Brady shook his head. “It’s too final. I’m 95% there. But only 95%. And I don’t play golf.”

“You’ll change your mind. Getting a drink would be a good start. You want a beer?”

“Yeah, sure. Thank you.”

“There’s a few in the fridge keeping cold. Go and help yourself.”

Brady walked into the kitchen. The fridge door was already open.

“Is the selection as good as Bill says then?”

She turned round. Dark hair pinned up. Grey eyes. His first impression was how determined she looked. The sort of girl that ignored her father’s pleas and buckled on armour in *Lord of the Rings*.

“It’s what you’d call a Bill selection,” she said. “Bud, Estrella, San Miguel. Bill Calvert goes to Benidorm. There’ll be an Amstel and a bowl of peanuts if you look hard enough.”

Brady laughed. “Michael Brady,” he said, holding out his hand.

“Frankie Thomson. And I know.”

“You know what?”

“Know who you are. Everyone knows you’ve come to live in Whitby. And as you’re Kate’s brother and still look like a cop. Well,” she added, “A cop who’s growing his hair...”

“It didn’t take much working out.”

“No. Sorry.” She turned back to the fridge and grabbed two bottles of beer. “I’ll leave you to find the Amstel and the peanuts. My boyfriend gets thirsty when we’re taking a taxi.”

Brady settled for a bottle of Estrella. There was a buffet laid out and he was hungry. But he was a man who played by the rules. He’d wait for Kate to say something.

He looked at his watch. 7:50. Ten minutes to walk home. Two hours then. He went reluctantly back into the lounge. And came face to face with Bill’s boss.

Brady recognised him. A conference on drug trafficking.

He held out a well-manicured hand. “Alan Kershaw.”

What little silver hair he had left was cropped close. A smooth face. A man who was carefully climbing up the ladders. Who made sure the snakes were delegated to someone else.

“Michael Brady. We met - ”

“At the conference in Birmingham,” Kershaw finished for him. “You gave a presentation on drugs. County lines.”

Brady remembered. He’d asked a question. A reasonably intelligent one. “I hope you haven’t needed the information?”

“In some places. Whitby? No, not yet.”

Kershaw glanced at a woman across the room. Very evidently his wife. “Two minutes,” he mouthed. “You must excuse us,” he said. “Another engagement. But you’re not 50 every day.”

He turned to go. Then he changed his mind and turned back to Brady. “I hope you’re happy in Whitby, Mr Brady. Someone said you were writing a book. I’ll put it on my Christmas list. But remember you’re Michael Brady, writer. A civilian. You left DCI Brady in Manchester. We don’t need him in North Yorkshire.”

Brady didn’t know how to reply.

Just play a dead bat.

“I’ve no intention of doing anything else. And being a father to my daughter.”

Kershaw nodded. “The best way. And now, if you’ll excuse me...”

The evening wore on. Kate finally declared the buffet open, he had another beer and found that he didn’t dislike quiche as much as he thought he did. Dutifully clapped when Bill had stumbled through a self-congratulatory speech. Learned that the neighbour had a problem with slugs. “Are you a gardener, Mike? Good soil in Whitby. You’ll be surprised what you can grow, despite the wind off the sea.”

He couldn't wait.

He found Bill, told him to be careful now he was old and went looking for his sister. "I promised Ash I'd be back."

"You can't go."

"Why not? I've got to, Kate. I promised her."

"Five minutes, Mike. I've a surprise for you."

"It's Bill's birthday, not mine."

"And you're my brother. Just be patient. I'm re-introducing you to Whitby society."

The doorbell rang. "Go ahead," Kate said. "Answer it."

"What is this? Some prank call?"

"No. Do as you're told. Open the door."

What else can you do when your big sister gives you an order? He opened the front door. And looked at a face he hadn't seen for nearly five years.

"Bloody hell. Patrick."

"How are you doing, Mike? Hell's teeth, what's that on your face? You're going grey."

The light was still on in her bedroom. Brady put his head round the door. "Hi, sweetheart. Sorry I'm a bit late. Everything been OK?"

"Yeah. Sure, I let Archie out before I came to bed."

"Everyone sends their love."

"OK, that's cool."

"And I met Patrick."

"Who's Patrick?"

"I talked about him once. He was my best friend at school. He's got a business in Whitby now. Really successful. And he's got a new wife. Tall, really good looking. Looks like a model."

"If you say so."

She was tired. He tiptoed over and kissed her.

"Ugh, you've been drinking. Late home *and* you're drunk."

"Two beers, Ash. You sleep tight. Love you."

"Love you too, Dad. And Dad..."

"What, love?"

"Don't be late again. You don't want to be grounded."

Chapter 3

This was the moment he'd been dreading. Ever since he'd made the decision to move. As they'd driven across the M62. As he'd stood in the shower that morning.

"You're sure you don't want me to come in with you?"

Ash shook her head. "Year 8? It's not going to look good if I walk in holding hands with my daddy."

She was right. Obviously. They'd been to the school. Met the headteacher. Met the head of year. Met everyone they needed to meet.

"I'll be fine, Dad."

He still thought she looked nervous. But what else could he do?

"OK. Have a good day. I'll collect you at four."

"You too. Don't waste all morning talking to your friend. Go home and get writing."

She opened the door and climbed out. Walked into school in her all-too-clearly brand new uniform.

"She's strong. She'll be fine," Brady said out loud. He didn't know if he was trying to reassure himself – or sending a message to Grace.

He'd met Grace from work. Ash was in the school play. The first night. Front row seats. He'd kissed her. 'I've always liked you in that jacket. Brings out the colour in your eyes.' Held her hand as they walked across the road to the car park. 'Do you want a drink before we go up to school? I'm sure a day saving the NHS merits a gin.' He hadn't heard the car accelerating. Maybe he had. He wasn't concentrating. Suddenly an engine was screaming. He turned round. A black car. Felt his wife's hands punch into his back. He stumbled forward. Three steps. Four steps. Tripped. Fell. Put his left hand out to break his fall. Broke his wrist. But knew she'd saved his life...

An hour later Brady finally dragged a very wet, very reluctant dog off the beach. "The bacon sandwich stall opposite the amusement arcade" Patrick had said. And there he was. Jeans, black jacket and still the half puzzled, half amused look he'd had even as a 12 year old.

"Morning," Brady said as they shook hands. "And sorry again for having to dash off the other night."

"No problem. Kate told me about Ash. No problem at all."

Patrick turned to his right. He made a theatrical gesture of introduction.

"Michael, I would like you to meet my good friend, Dave. The man who makes the best bacon sandwiches in Whitby. Possibly in the world. David, Michael Brady. One time detective, now another writer to add to Whitby's growing collection."

Dave looked about 60. Maybe slightly younger. His face had all the battle scars of a long career in the front row of a rugby scrum. He leaned over the counter and stuck

out a ridiculously large hand. “Pleased to meet you,” he said in a broad Geordie accent. “What’ll it be?”

Brady smiled. One of those people you liked immediately. “Patrick told me I had no choice in the matter. Two mugs of tea, please. And two bacon sandwiches.”

Dave started laying bacon on the griddle. “What are you then? Local or tourist?”

“Local, I guess. I grew up here. I’ve just come back. Rented a house for 12 months.”

“So I’ll be seeing you again then?”

Brady looked up at the sun. “If every morning’s like this and the bacon sandwiches are as good as he says, then yes.”

“They’re not. They’re better.”

Dave flipped half a dozen rashers of bacon over and turned round. “I’d best get to know you if you’re local. Oven bottom or baguette?”

“Oven bottom,” Brady answered. “Providing it’s this morning’s.”

“Cheeky sod. I’m at the bakery by six. Bacon? As it comes or crispy?”

“Crispy. No question.”

“Two out of two so far. But now we come to it...”

Dave turned and faced him. “Tomato sauce? Brown sauce? No sauce?”

The question hung in the air.

“Take care,” Patrick said. “This is how he judges people. So as the good Inspector Callahan would say, ‘What’s it gonna be, punk?’ Red sauce or brown sauce?”

Why not? Red sauce or brown sauce? It seemed a reasonable way of judging people. It had to be at least as accurate as the psychometric tests at his last promotion board.

“None of the above,” Brady said. “There’s a pan on the hob. I’m willing to bet it’s got plum tomatoes in it. And not from the cash and carry either.”

Dave leaned forward and high-fived him over the counter. “Welcome to Whitby, young man. Gold star. Just don’t bugger it up by asking for Earl Grey.”

They took their sandwiches and mugs of tea and walked 50 yards up the road. The slipway went down to the beach, the pier – long, curved, punctuated by the lighthouse – stretched out into the North Sea. “Over here,” Patrick said, gesturing to a bench by the bandstand. He took his backpack off his shoulder and sat down.

Brady looked out across the harbour. Let his eyes drift up to St Hilda’s Church and the Abbey on top of the hill.

“Pleased to be back?” Patrick asked. Then, “I’m sorry. That was a stupid question. We all heard what happened. And I’m truly sorry I couldn’t be at the funeral. Let me start again. How are you doing? How’s Ash doing?”

“Can I come back to you at four o’clock? See how her first day’s gone?”

“She’ll be fine.”

“I hope so. She seems to make friends easily. She’s good at sport. We both know what a difference that makes.”

Brady took a bite of his bacon sandwich. “You weren’t lying were you? The secret of success in life. Do one thing and do it bloody well.”

There was a whine from near his feet. He looked down. “Play fair, Archie, you’ve had your breakfast. Maybe a bit of bread if there’s some left...”

“What made you leave Manchester?” Patrick asked.

He was conscious of something as he fell. Something flying over him. Something green. The colour of her jacket...

There’d been a bang. Impact. Someone had screamed. Then silence. A moment of silence. Then a noise. A noise he’d never stop hearing. The noise of his wife landing. Half on the road, half on the pavement.

Three noises.

And a fourth.

A car accelerating into the distance.

Brady looks up. A grey Merc brakes sharply, swerves to avoid her. A mini stops on the other side of the road. A young woman climbs out, phone already to her ear.

A second person screams.

“Grace? Grace!” Brady stumbles towards her. Suddenly aware of a pain in his left arm. Shoulder as well. Where he fell on the road.

More cars backing up now. Someone directing the traffic. The young woman running across the road. “I’ve phoned the police,” she says. “And the ambulance.”

“I am the police,” Brady says uselessly.

He’s bending over her now. Takes his jacket off, wincing with the pain. Put it under her head, he thinks. Make her comfortable. He remembers the first aid training just in time. ‘Don’t ever move someone’s head.’ His wife’s head stays resting on the kerb.

A crowd is gathering. He glances up. Two people recording it on their phones. When did that take over from offering to help?

“Grace,” he says. “Grace. Look at me. Talk to me.”

Her eyes flicker. Move towards Brady. Don’t focus on him. “Ash...” she whispers. “Ash?” It sounds like a question.

“She’s fine, sweetheart. She’s at school. I’ll phone. She’ll be fine.”

Grace sighs. Seems to relax. There’s a small trickle of blood on the road. From the back of her head. A cut, Brady tells himself. Just cuts and bruises.

He turns his head. Sees Grace's right leg. Her trousers are ripped. Her leg ridiculously bent. Doesn't want to look. Forces himself to look. Sees the bone, clearly visible.

He hears someone in the crowd throwing up.

There are sirens. An ambulance. Two paramedics. Then police sirens. Two lads in uniform. One of them vaguely familiar.

Now he's just a spectator. Watching as the paramedics stabilise Grace's head. Gently, oh so gently, manoeuvre her onto the stretcher.

Someone has draped a blanket round his shoulders.

"You alright, boss?" the vaguely familiar one says.

"I'm fine. I need... I must go with her."

A uniform helps him into the ambulance. A different uniform tells him to sit down. Grace is within touching distance. Brady tries to reach out to her. Aware of the pain in his wrist. Grits his teeth. Touches his wife. Whispers, "I love you."

Brady shook his head. "There was no alternative. Ash passed the place every day on the way to school. I'd have done the same if I'd gone back. We didn't get anyone for it. People pussyfooting round the station, not daring to talk in front of me. We had no choice."

"So you came home?"

"What else could I do? How much longer was I going to sit by her bed? Six months? A year? Two years? I had to make a decision."

"What did they say?"

"Said there was no hope. So I *had* to make the decision. For Ash. The kid's life was on hold. And she needs someone. At least I've got a sister here. God knows she isn't going to ask me if she has a problem with her periods."

A seagull flew down and landed a few feet away. Archie growled: it ignored him and stared at the bacon sandwiches. "I swear to God," Patrick said, "The bastards get bigger and more aggressive every year. If evolution means anything the seagulls will conquer Whitby in the next 500 years."

"The other thing about Ash," Brady said. "It wasn't just having Kate nearby. She's all I've got now. I sort of felt – I don't know, maybe this sounds stupid – I sort of felt I'd be closer to her in a small town. She's reached that age now. 'Where are you going?' 'Out.' 'Where?' 'Nowhere special.' 'Who with?' 'Just friends.' I remember Kate saying exactly the same to Dad. Next thing she's bringing Bill home."

Patrick's face clouded. "Did you ever say anything to her? About that night? Or to your dad?"

Brady shook his head. "What was the point? She was in love. Keeping quiet was the only option."

There was another whine. More pitiful than the last. Brady looked down. A pair of brown eyes stared back at him. He admitted defeat. "Once," he said. "Just this once. Not every morning, OK? You understand? It's *definitely* not happening."

He stood up – "Give me a minute, Pat" – and walked back to Dave's stall.

He was back two minutes later. Archie was close to smiling. "A cooked sausage," Brady said. "Left over from yesterday. Rescued from the bin. But he's a Springer. He'll eat an abandoned barbecue. Anyway, enough of this serious talk. We're men. We only talk about football or sex. How bad are Middlesbrough this year? And Kara. Bloody hell. Congratulations. A whole new meaning to punching above your weight."

Patrick laughed. "Not bad to your first question. They'll make the play-offs. I'll take you to the next game if you're free. And in answer to the second, I'm still not sure..."

"How did you meet her?"

"On holiday. I was in Marbella. I've got a house there. It was just after Sofia and I divorced. It was all a bit bloody. Well, a lot bloody. I wanted some time away."

Brady looked at a man who clearly couldn't believe his luck. "I'm still in shock. I went round to some friends for drinks. She was there. She'd been doing some work with a photographer out there. Six months later we're married."

Brady smiled at him. "That's good. I'm pleased for you. Really pleased."

"Hang on," Patrick said. "There's more... She's pregnant."

"Ah, Patrick. Fuck. That is brilliant. Just brilliant. Does Dave sell champagne?"

Patrick shook his head. "Don't say anything. I'm not supposed to know."

"What? Why not?"

"I don't know. Maybe she's waiting until she's sure. I'm not going to say anything. You know, spoil her moment..."

"So how did you find out?"

"By accident. I found the test. Two blue lines. She'd dropped it in the bathroom bin, safe in the knowledge that I never go anywhere near the bathroom bin."

"Except..."

"Except I'd thrown my last razor blade away. Not that you'll know what razor blades are any more... I needed a shave. I thought there were some in the cupboard. There weren't." Patrick shrugged. "So I went through the bin for the one I'd thrown away."

"Textbook detective work. All the best clues are discovered by accident."

They'd tried for another one. A brother or sister for Ash. But his job, Grace's job... It just never happened. "I think the window's closed," Grace had said one day. In truth, they'd both known it for a while. "Shall I have a vasectomy?" he'd said. But he'd never got round to it. Then Ash had come home and said she was in the school play...

“It’s going to cause trouble,” Patrick said.

“The pregnancy? Why? Kara must be healthy. If looks are anything to go by. And a baby is hardly going to stop you working.”

“No.” Patrick nodded across the road, “Sofia’s family...”

A man in his mid-thirties was walking towards them. He was speaking on his mobile. Perfect teeth. Perfect designer stubble. Perfect cashmere coat draped over his shoulders. A shame he was two stone overweight. And rapidly going bald.

He nodded at Patrick and stopped. “Enzo,” Patrick said. “How are you?”

“Good.” He was clearly Italian. But his accent was local, overlaid with English boarding school. “And maybe better this afternoon. I bought a new horse at the weekend. She’s running at Thirsk.”

“Well, good luck with that,” Patrick said, clearly not meaning it. “Enzo, this is - ”

Brady stood up. “I don’t need introducing. Michael Brady. And I remember you, Enzo. I used to work for your dad in the summer holidays. A misspent youth as a bingo caller.” What he remembered was a little boy of seven or eight. Running round the amusement arcade like he owned it. “How is your dad?” he asked. “I always liked him.”

Enzo shrugged. He clearly didn’t remember Brady. “Old. He had a fall. But he still thinks he’s in charge.”

“Give him my best will you? Tell him I said hello.”

Enzo clearly wouldn’t. He nodded at them both, tapped a number into his phone and walked towards the town.

“No love lost there,” Brady said.

“Enzo thinks I dishonoured his sister. You know his dad’s values. Family, loyalty. Enzo takes them to extremes.”

“What happened?”

“Bluntly, we couldn’t have children. Endless IVF. We threw any amount of money at it. Sofia started drinking. Marriage bloody guidance. Counselling. Then it was more than drinking. In the end it was all too much for me.”

“So when Enzo finds out about Kara...”

“Right. He’s not going to be telling me when his horse is due to win.”

Patrick stood up. “I’m sorry, Mike. I’m going to have to get back to work. Got a call with an architect and a planning officer at eleven. Look, why don’t you come round to dinner? And bring Ash. Maybe she’d see Kara as a big sister?” He laughed. “What am I saying? What the hell do we know about how women relate to each other? Anyway, come round on Saturday.”

“Yeah, I’d like that. And Pat - ”

“What?”

“Thank you. That’s the first time I’ve really talked about it.”

“What about all those police psychologists?”

Brady shook his head. “I couldn’t, just couldn’t. They were just... strangers. Doing a job.”

“I know what you mean. Same as marriage guidance. Every psychologist I’ve ever met has been bloody useless. All that training and they haven’t grasped the simple importance of fresh air and a bacon sandwich.”

He screwed the sandwich bag into a ball and threw it towards the rubbish bin. It arced gracefully through the air and fell three feet short. “Bugger,” Pat said as he walked forward to pick it up. “Didn’t allow for the wind off the sea.” He put the bag in the bin, picked his backpack up and held out his hand.

“Thanks again,” Brady said. “I’m grateful.”

“No problem. That’s what best friends are for.”

“Even after five years?”

“Especially after five years. See you Saturday. And hope Ash’s first day has gone well.”

“Me too,” Brady said. “No news is good news.”

“Hello. This is Michael Brady. Ashley’s father. I need to speak to Mrs Clarke.”

“I don’t know if she’s available, Mr Brady. It’s the first night of the school play tonight.”

Sheila? Shirley? What the hell was the school secretary called?

“Shirley. It is Shirley isn’t it? I thought I recognised your voice.”

“Sheila.”

“Sheila, I’m so sorry. I’m at the hospital...”

He’d noticed it when his father died. Auto-pilot. However much grief you’re feeling, however much pain you’re in, it doesn’t matter. Something inside you takes over. Does what needs doing.

“...It’s an emergency,” the auto-pilot said. “My wife, Ashley’s mum. She’s had an accident. I really need to speak to Mrs Clarke.”

Sheila put the phone down. There was a long silence while she walked down the corridor to the school hall.

“Hello?” Sheila had found Mrs Clarke.

Brady explained. Accident. Hospital. Neither of them would be at the play.

“I don’t know, Mr Brady. Maybe I should tell Ashley after the play?”

“But then she’s going to come on stage and see two empty chairs isn’t she?”

“Oh. Of course. I’m sorry. What shall I say to her?”

“Say...”

Say what? ‘Oh, Ashley, there’s nothing to worry about but someone tried to kill your dad and hit your mum instead.’

Say that Grace saved my life? That she’s badly hurt but I don’t know how badly?

The truth would have to wait.

“Tell her that her mum’s had an accident. A fall. She might have broken her leg. I’m at the hospital with her. Tell her I’m sorry.”

The auto-pilot made a second phone call.

“Maria? Hi, this is Michael Brady. Maria, I need to ask you a favour if I can. Grace has had a fall. She might have broken her leg. I’m at the hospital with her. No, I won’t be able to make it to the play. That’s why I’m phoning. I don’t think I’ll be able to collect Ash afterwards. I might be here a while. Would you, could you, take her home with you? Let her stay with Connie tonight?”

And now Grace’s mother. But supposing Ash phoned her Grandmother?

The auto-pilot told some more lies...

Brady picked up the mugs and walked back to Dave’s. “Thanks,” he said, putting them on the counter.

“Alright were they?”

He smiled. “Not bad. Fair to middlin’ as they say in Yorkshire.”

“So I’ll see you every morning?”

“Looks like it. And looks like all I need to do is sit on the seafront for a week and I’ll meet everyone I know in the town.”

“Aye? Who was it this morning then?”

“Enzo Barella? You must know him? I worked for his dad when I was a teenager.”

“Enzo? Everyone in Whitby knows Enzo.” Dave paused. “There’s more there than meets the eye.”

Something in his tone of voice told Brady not to reply. It was one of the most important lessons he’d learned about detective work. There were times when the best way to ask a question was to keep quiet.

“Two children at a posh school. Two flash cars. Two racehorses - ”

Maybe three, Brady thought.

“ - All paid for by one amusement arcade. You do the maths.”

Brady felt it. The old, familiar flicker of interest. He snuffed it out. Time to do as he'd been told. "Don't waste all morning talking to your friend" presumably also meant 'don't waste all morning talking to the bacon sandwich man.'

"Thanks, Dave. You take care, I'll see you tomorrow."

"You n' all," Dave said. "Oven bottom, crispy bacon, plum tomatoes and a left-over sausage for the boss." He tapped his head. "You're in the database now."

Brady was getting into the car when his phone rang. Patrick. "Don't tell me Enzo's relented? We all need to back his horse this afternoon?"

"Very funny. No. I've cocked up. Sorry. This weekend is Whitby Goth Festival. So next Saturday for dinner if that's OK?"

"Sure. No problem. What's happened?"

"Nothing's happened," Patrick said. "I'm a Goth. Don't laugh, you bastard. Kara spent a year in black leather and ripped stockings as a teenager. She gets nostalgic. And share your wife's interests. That's what they told me in marriage guidance. So twice a year I have to dress up like a Victorian gentleman and listen to Siouxsie and the fucking Banshees."

"I might have to see that..."

"You should. Whitby at its most spectacular. And maddest. You'll enjoy it."

Chapter 4

It was Saturday night. "Dad," Ash said. "Is it alright if I go out?"

"Sure. Where are you going?"

Please, not 'nowhere special.' We've only been here a fortnight...

"Into town? To see the Goths?"

"I guess so. Who are you going with?"

"Two girls from school. Immy and Bean."

"OK, so one of them's called Imogen. I'm still young enough to work that out. Who on earth is 'Bean?'"

"Her name's Jessica. But everyone calls her Bean. Don't ask me why. I've only been – ha, ha, joke, Dad – there a week."

And – as far as he could tell – the week had gone reasonably well. The work she'd been doing in Manchester seemed to have translated to Whitby. There hadn't been any dramas. So far so good. "What time are you going to be back?" Brady asked.

"Nine-thirty?"

He nodded. "That's fine. No later."

“Says the man who promised his lovely daughter he’d be in at ten and was half an hour late.”

“OK, I can’t argue with that. You alright for money?”

She was. The doorbell rang. Ash went to open the front door. “Bye, Dad,” she called.

“Look after yourself,” he called back. “Remember your key.”

The door closed behind her. He glanced out of the window. Three teenage girls walking down the road. All in jeans, almost identical from the back.

“Just you and me, mate,” he said to Archie. “Maybe we should go and start the book.”

An hour later he conceded defeat. ‘Writing is easy,’ he’d read somewhere. ‘You just stare at a blank screen until your forehead starts to bleed.’

If tonight was any guide blood would be dripping onto his keyboard on a regular basis.

“I’ll be an hour, Archie,” he said. “And no is the answer to your next question. It’ll be too crowded.”

He walked down the hill and turned left into town.

Whitby Goth Festival had started in 1994. Brady had been dimly aware of it in a couple of holidays. But this was on a different scale. It was like stepping back into the 19th Century – with the odd medieval jester and visitor from outer space thrown in for good measure.

Along the sea front or over the swing bridge? It looked marginally less crowded on the other side of the bridge. He crossed the bridge, overtook Count Dracula and his bride and turned left into Church Street. He walked along the cobbled street. And there it was...

The jet shop. They’d painted the outside. But it was the same shop. The first time he’d brought her to Whitby. He’d wanted to buy her something.

“What is it?” Grace asked.

“Jet? Technically it’s decaying wood that’s been under extreme pressure. About 200 million years old. It’s supposed to give you spiritual guidance. And inner harmony...”

Grace held the black earrings up and looked in the mirror. “They’re beautiful. Thank you.”

“You have to promise to wear your hair up. You know I’m powerless when you pin your hair up.”

She laughed and fluttered her eyelashes at him. “Whatever you command, sir...”

The shop assistant wrapped the jet black teardrop earrings and held the package out.

Brady took it. "Later," he said. "In the hotel. And next time we come to Whitby I'll buy you the necklace to go with them. But only if you behave yourself, Miss Miller..."

Whitby had split into three. Goths, photographers and – standing outside the pubs with their pints – the spectators. "Best free cabaret on Earth," he heard one of them say.

No question, black was the dominant colour. As far as the Goths were concerned, black was the new black.

Plenty of red as well – or maybe a reddish orange. Was that blood? Or did it just go well with black?

Red hair everywhere. Dark eyeliner. One girl with barbed wire drawn across her face. Plenty of white make-up. Long black coats.

Top hats and skeletons. Victorian wedding dresses. And aviator goggles and leather jackets. 'You'll see a lot of steampunk,' someone had said to him. Not that he knew what steampunk was...

There was a battalion of men in uniform. If he'd been asked to guess he'd have said the Prussian army. Whatever it was, it had invaded Whitby.

Ostrich feathers were in plentiful supply. And so were families. "We thought little 'un would've been frightened," he heard one mother say. "She's been good as gold."

'Little 'un' – complete with curly black hair and fangs – looked about 18 months old.

Small Victorian sunglasses. A man wearing a studded gas mask. His wife wearing a face mask. Looking like the dentist from your nightmares. Black, stretched from ear to ear, sharp spikes protruding outwards. 'Open wide now...'

Plenty of people with horns. *The Devil Rides Out* in Whitby.

"Mike. I wondered if we'd see you."

It was Patrick. He hardly knew anyone in Whitby. So it *had* to be Patrick. The diffident teenager who'd gone to a fancy dress party with a piece of wire round his ankle and claimed to be a homing pigeon...

...And who was now wearing a Victorian top hat. A red and black patterned frock coat. A matching waistcoat. White ruffled shirt. Black silk cravat. Black pinstripe trousers. Boots that a butler could have spent all morning polishing...

"Patrick. Wow. You look - " Brady couldn't find the right word. He could. He just didn't know if you could say it to someone you'd played football with. Someone you'd thrown up with at teenage parties.

"Wow, Patrick. You look stunning."

But not as stunning as Kara.

White blonde hair tumbled over her shoulders. One half of her face was covered in white make up. Her cheek was decorated with cobwebs. Black lipstick. A black

basque decorated with red bows. Black leather mini-skirt. Thigh-length black boots. A black cloak around her shoulders, the red lining matching the bows on her basque. A black leather cat o'nine tails in her right hand.

Brady didn't know what to do. What was the correct form of greeting? Shake hands? Kiss her on the cheek? Lick the bottom of her boot?

None of the above. "You're wasted in Whitby, Kara. You should take that outfit to Westminster. MPs and all their kinks? You'd make a fortune."

She laughed. "Only twice a year, Michael." She flicked her husband lightly with the cat. "And it keeps Patrick young."

Brady frowned. "Are you sure? That looks like a walking stick to me. How long have you needed that, Patrick?"

"Not just a walking stick," Patrick said. He lifted the stick up. The handle was black lacquer, inlaid with an intricate white pattern. He pulled it gently: an elegant blade slid out.

"Here." Patrick passed it to him. Brady slid it all the way out. Tested the point against his thumb. "That's a serious weapon," he said. "You do realise possessing it is an offence, sir? Or it would have been in my previous life."

"You'd have to arrest half of Whitby, officer. There's enough swordsticks at a Goth weekend to re-run the Charge of the Light Brigade."

Brady passed it back to him. "Have a good night. I've got to get back."

"You don't want to come for a drink with us?"

He shook his head. "No. I'm not dressed for it am I? Besides, I told Ash to be in for 9:30. My standing as a good dad depends on being back before her. And I'm still in trouble for the other night. You two take care."

He watched them disappear down Church Street. Then he turned to walk home. It was even more crowded now. The first really good weather this year and the world and his wife had come to Whitby. And most of them wearing black to celebrate...

He'd been home for half an hour when Ash came in. 9:29 – she'd clearly inherited her mother's punctuality gene.

"Everything OK?" he called out as he heard the door open.

"Sure," she said, putting her head round the door. "We met Maddie."

"Yeah? Your cousin? How's she doing?"

Ash shrugged. "OK, I guess. She's got a new boyfriend."

"Kate said. What's he like?"

"He's older," Ash said. "Twenty? Something like that. He's got a beard. Not grey though. Goodnight, Dad."

“Ash?” Brady called after her.

“What?”

“Put your dirty washing on the landing will you? I need to go full domestic goddess in the morning.”

Chapter 5

Mark Smeaton had just confessed. Thomas Cromwell had everything he wanted. Proof positive of Anne Boleyn’s adultery. It had been easy.

But confessions probably were a lot easier in 1536. No such thing as the duty solicitor. The rack waiting impatiently in the next room...

He put his book on the bedside table – if he could write one-tenth as well as Hilary Mantel he’d be happy – and turned the light out.

Tomorrow morning. Take Archie on the beach, make some scrambled eggs for Ash, start the book.

He rolled over onto his left hand side. Put his right hand out, just as he’d put his right hand out for 20 years. But she wasn’t there.

You can put your hand out as many times as you like. It won’t bring her back...

It was going to be another one of those nights. An hour before he went to sleep. Awake at two, awake at four. Finally dropping off into a deep sleep. And half an hour later the alarm goes off.

“I can give you something,” his doctor had said. “Help you get to sleep.”

There’d never been any chance of that. What was he going to do, take sleeping pills for the rest of his life? He was on his back now, gazing at the ceiling.

Just under two weeks to go. Then it would be a year.

Then three more days... And it would be six months since they’d turned the machine off. “Fuck,” he said out loud. “Just fuck.”

Sometimes it was easier to get up. Admit defeat at three in the morning, turn the laptop on and do an hour’s work. Sorting the details out, the house, her pension. Replying to the solicitors. All the paperwork that went with someone dying. He’d done nearly all of it at three in the morning. Switched on to auto-pilot. And finally fallen asleep an hour later.

He knew what the stats said. The stats were insistent. He’d re-marry. The vast majority of men who are divorced or widowed at 42 re-marry.

But they were wrong. He didn’t want to re-marry. “Time will heal, Michael,” his uncle had said at the funeral. “You’ll meet someone else.”

No, he wouldn’t. All those nights sitting on her bed. Watching the red line go endlessly across the monitor. Watching her. Praying to a God he didn’t believe in.

Did her eyelid twitch just then? No, it didn't. Just the red line, running across the monitor until someone made a decision.

And in one of those nights something inside him had simply turned itself off. He'd reached out. Taken her hand. Lifted it to his lips. "Only you," he'd whispered. "There'll only ever be you."

His phone rang. He'd finally fallen asleep and now his bloody phone was ringing. Phone calls at ten to midnight. They were exactly like phone calls from school.

Sorry to wake you, sir. There's been a shooting.

We're sorry to disturb you, Mr Brady. There's been an incident at school.

Never good news.

It was Kate. What did she want at this hour? Was it Bill? Had his heart attack come early?

"Michael."

One word. That was all she needed to say.

It was bad news. Very bad news. He'd never heard Kate use that tone of voice. But he'd heard it plenty of times before. An equal mixture of panic, shock and fear.

Sarah Cooke. He'd been a detective for six months. Given her his card. "Anything I can do," he'd said. "If you think of anything. If anything happens. Day or night. Call me."

Something had happened. "Get here now. Please. He's back." She'd been whispering. But it was still the same tone of voice.

He was there in ten minutes. Five minutes too late.

"Kate. What's the matter?"

"It's Pat."

Maybe he was still asleep...

Thank you for reading this sample of 'Salt in the Wounds.' I hope you enjoyed it.

You can buy the book by [clicking this link](#).