

Welcome to the sample of 'The Scars Don't Show' – 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

Welcome to the first book in the Michael Brady Short Reads series.

Michael Brady first appeared in *Salt in the Wounds*, set in Whitby in 2015.

The Scars Don't Show takes you back to the start of his career as a detective. He's in Greater Manchester Police – and desperate to prove himself...

Each of the Short Reads is around a third the length of a normal book. They're books that you can read in an evening. They're the stories that trace Brady's career. That made him the detective he is today...

As I'm British and my books are set in the UK, I've used British English. The dialogue is realistic for the characters, which means they occasionally swear.

This is a work of fiction. All 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.

www.markrichards.co.uk

December 1998: The Nativity Play

The first snowflakes of the winter drifted lazily down as Sarah Cooke reversed her car out of the drive.

She smiled. Perfect. Just perfect. Not enough snow to make driving difficult: enough to make everything magical.

Especially for the nativity play. Especially if your little girl was the Angel Gabriel. If you were walking across the school playground afterwards. Holding her hand as the light faded, the snowflakes swirling and dancing in the streetlights. Telling her for the hundredth time how many sleeps there were until Santa came.

Saying, ‘*Of course* Santa knows how good you were in the play. *Of course* he was watching...’

Sarah glanced up into the rear view mirror. Braked. Gave the mother pushing her pram plenty of time. Waved into the mirror in case she glanced at the car.

Took her foot off the brake and gently started reversing.

Heard the explosion.

The glass shattering.

Inches from her head.

Felt something shower her face. Stamped on the brake. Stalled the car. Tasted blood in her mouth. Gripped the steering wheel. Closed her eyes. Forced herself not to scream.

Felt the blood running down her face.

Knew she had to open her eyes.

Knew she had to turn her head and look.

Knew who she would see.

You've got to open your eyes, Sarah. You've got to look through the window.

Her ex-husband.

Standing. Smiling. The garden spade in his right hand.

“It doesn’t look much, love. Just cuts. Wanted to get your attention. Glad I caught you.”

She was still gripping the steering wheel. Sarah looked down. Saw the blood dripping onto her coat. Knew she had to speak to him.

“Gary. You’ve smashed my car window. You’ve put a fucking shovel through my car window.”

“Don’t swear, Sarah. You know it makes me angry. And the car’s nothing. Bring it into the garage in the morning. We’ll soon fix it. And it’s a spade, sweetheart, not a shovel.”

“And what am I supposed to do in the meantime? How the – How am I supposed to collect Sophie from school?”

She was sitting in her car. Having a normal conversation with a man who’d just put a spade –

Spade? Shovel? How stupid of me. What sort of woman doesn't understand the difference between a spade and a shovel?

– through her car window. A man who was standing on her drive, still casually holding the spade. The one with the green handle. The one he must have taken from the garage.

Gary Cooke put his hand in his pocket. Pulled out a roll of £20 notes. Peeled off half a dozen. Thrust the money through the window. “Get a taxi. And take Sophie out for a pizza. We’re open at eight in the morning. You know John, don’t you? He’s always in early. He’ll sort you out.”

Madness. Beyond madness.

He's never going to let me go.

“Just tell me, Gary. How am I going to explain the cuts to Sophie?”

“Tell her you tripped.”

“Right, Gary. ‘Mummy tripped and hurt herself.’ Almost the first words our daughter learned to say...”

Chapter 1

“You want some advice, Mike? You want a long and happy career in Greater Manchester Police?”

Michael Brady – 26, looking younger, nearly three years into his police career – handed Ernie Moss – 48, looking 58, counting the days to retirement – the coffee he’d been sent for.

“What advice is that, Sarge?”

“Don’t work Christmas Eve. Whatever it takes. ’Flu, Bubonic Plague, saving up every last bit of holiday you have... Don’t work Christmas Eve.”

“You mean it ruins your relationship?”

Moss looked up from the paperwork he was laboriously completing. “No, son. You can leave that to the other 364 days. *Fairytale of New York*. It’s like a cat’s bloody chorus in the cells. Now piss off home to that pretty girlfriend of yours, Happy Christmas and I’ll see you on Monday morning.”

Brady hesitated. “Sarge...”

Moss sighed. “I promise, Mike. The first chance I get after Christmas. I’ll have a word with him. I know you want to be in plain clothes. I’ve recommended you. The boss agrees with me. But there has to be a vacancy. And he can’t conjure one out of thin air. Now for the last time bugger off home and have sex. You’ll have children soon enough. Women are funny things. They don’t feel that romantic when they’ve been puked on at three in the morning...”

Thirty minutes later Brady put his key in the front door of a three-bedroomed terrace house in Stockport.

Four weeks. Four weeks today since we moved in...

He walked into the hall and hung his coat up.

“I’m back,” he shouted upstairs.

“I’m in bed.”

“Five minutes...”

Brady walked through into the kitchen. Opened the fridge and poured himself some orange juice. Decided he was too tired to make a sandwich. Felt a lot less tired when he saw Grace.

She was sitting up in bed reading, wearing one of his old t-shirts, dark brown hair tumbling to her shoulders.

And better looking every time I see her...

“Tough night?” she said.

He shook his head. “Not really. About the same as a Saturday night. Teenagers making the most of their fake IDs. Girls who can barely stand wanting a Christmas kiss.”

Grace raised her eyebrows. “Come and get into bed, PC Brady. I’m not drunk but...”

Brady shook his head. “Give me ten minutes. I need a shower first. I’ve been arresting drunks all night. I need to wash it off me.”

He unbuttoned his shirt and threw it in the laundry basket. “What time are we at your parents’ tomorrow?”

“Twelve-ish?”

“Are we sleeping in your old bedroom?”

“I’m sleeping in my old bedroom. You know how strait-laced my mother is.”

“Bloody hell, Grace, we’ve bought a house. We’re getting married next year. Does she think we sleep in separate bedrooms?”

“I can’t change her, Mike. It’s only for two nights.”

“I’ll creep along the corridor in the middle of the night.”

“The floorboards creak. Now get undressed. I want to see *Police Magazine’s Arse of the Year*. And don’t waste time in the shower. You’re not the only one that thinks two days is a long time...”

Chapter 2

“You want to walk down to the pub, Mike? Half an hour while Val and Grace are getting dinner ready?”

Not really, no. Because after last night I don't want a drink. And you're going to ask me if I'm still in uniform. And you're going to ever-so-subtly suggest that your only daughter could have done better...

"If Valerie's alright with it, George. You're sure there's nothing I can do to help?"

"We're better off out of the way. Come on, G&T, time for a chat and then come back and carve the turkey."

Michael Brady walked into the kitchen, kissed Grace, hopefully asked if there was "anything *at all* I can do to help" – and reached reluctantly for his coat.

"You're still in uniform then, Mike?" Brady's future father-in-law said as they walked back from the Horseshoes.

"At the moment..."

"No sign of you getting into plain clothes any time soon?"

"I've been on the course," Brady said. "I've passed all my exams. My name's gone forward. Now I'm waiting for a vacancy..."

"You don't want – " George Miller broke off to wave at someone in a BMW he'd been chatting to in the pub. Who, just on what Brady had seen in the half-an-hour that had become an hour, must be well over the limit. "You don't want me to put a word in for you? I play golf with Charlie Broadbent. Chief Constable? Can't do any harm."

"No, really. I appreciate what you're saying, George – and I'm grateful. But – "

But having a word with the Chief Constable won't do any good because he hasn't got a clue who I am. And if I'm going to get into plain clothes I'm going to do it on my own. And there's already enough bitching about wet-behind-the-ears graduates being fast-tracked...

"But you want to do it on your own? Well, I admire that in you. I just wonder if you made the right career choice, Mike? We've a young lad in the office. Paul Naylor. You might know him? Graduated at the same time as you. Sharp boy, very ambitious. He'll be a partner in five or six years."

They were back. They scrunched across the gravel and through the front door. George was lightly scolded by a wife who clearly knew from experience what 'just walking down to the pub for half an hour' really meant. Brady didn't get off so lightly. "You stink of smoke, Michael. Go and have a wash. And change your shirt. And be quick. Dinner's ready..."

If his father had drilled one thing into him, it was saying thank you. Brady handed his future mother-in-law the flowers – an early morning walk to the village shop – and kissed her on the cheek. "Thanks, Valerie. We've had a lovely Christmas. Thank you for everything."

"It's been lovely having you, Mike. You take good care of my girl, won't you?"

He shook hands with George – "Think about the discussion we had, Mike. I only want what's best for you." "I will, George. I promise" – and climbed into the car.

"Remember to wave," Grace said as she slid in next to him.

Brady dutifully waved. And hoped Grace didn't notice the sigh of relief as he drove off the gravel and onto the country lane.

"You alright?" she said, five minutes later.

"Yeah, I'm fine. Glad to be going home." He looked across at her, reached out and put his hand on her thigh. "I've missed you."

"I've missed you too," she said, putting his hand back on the steering wheel. "But not on the M56. Concentrate on your driving, my love. There's..." Grace hesitated.

"There's something I need to tell you. It's good news. Sort of. But you won't think so."

"This sounds ominous. What is it?"

"Mum gave me a cheque. She said... Don't get cross, Mike. She said we had to buy a new settee."

You're going to regret saying it. But you're going to say it anyway.

"Bloody hell, Grace, we're saving up for a settee. You know that."

"I do. But she said, when she came round... And you have to admit, Mike, that settee from your old flat isn't... Well, it isn't *Ideal Home* is it?"

"But it was going to be *our* settee, Grace. Now it'll be your bloody mother's settee."

And she'll turn up every fortnight to inspect it...

"You're taking it the wrong way, Mike."

"No, I'm not, Grace. It's our house. *Our* furniture."

"But Mum and Dad can afford it, Mike."

"Right. And they – "

"They what?"

"No, nothing. I don't want to fall out with you. Let's just get home..."

Chapter 3

"Morning, Sarge. Good Christmas?"

"I ate too much. I held my new grandson. City won away. A bloody excellent Christmas thank you, Mike. Yourself?"

"Grace's parents..."

“Oh.” Ernie Moss nodded sympathetically. “Don’t say any more. I’ll light a candle for you. But...” Moss winked at him. “Get yourself in front of a mirror and straighten your tie. You’re wanted upstairs.”

“What? I’m on patrol with Eddie Harvey.”

“You were. You’re not now. Detective Chief Inspector Fitzpatrick would like a word with you. So straighten your tie and two-at-a-time up those stairs. You’ve been called to God’s right hand.”

“Sit down,” Jim Fitzpatrick said two minutes later.

“Yes, sir.”

Fitzpatrick – grey hair combed straight back, worry lines on his forehead, pictures of his grandchildren jostling for a place among the commendations – shook his head.

“Forget the ‘sir.’ ‘Boss’ is just fine.” Fitzpatrick pulled a file towards him, looked up and smiled. “This is the moment in the movies where I intimidate you. Say I’ve been going through your file. You think something’s wrong...”

Brady knew he was supposed to laugh. Realised he was too nervous.

“Edinburgh University? Why Edinburgh?”

It was the first lesson Brady learned from him. *The question they don’t expect, Mike. Ask the obvious question and they’ve got the lie ready and waiting.*’

“I was brought up in Whitby, sir. I wanted to go to a city.”

“You didn’t want to stay up there when you graduated?”

Brady shook his head. “No, sir.” *Dare I risk a joke? Too dark? Too cold? No.*

“Why GMP then? Why Manchester? Why not somewhere closer to home?”

“Because GMP offered me a job, sir. You know I went travelling when I graduated – ”

“Where did you go?”

“The Far East mostly. I spent three months in Japan. Another three months working in a beach bar in Bali...”

Fitzpatrick laughed. “So you decided the weather wasn’t good enough and came back to Manchester?”

“Yes, sir. Sorry, boss. Like I say, I was offered a job. A couple of forces... I don’t know, maybe they thought I’d want to be off again.”

And they were suspicious of graduates...

“And you don’t?”

“No, boss. I’m getting married next summer. We’ve bought a house in Stockport.”

Jim Fitzpatrick nodded. “So... I’ve been going through your file. I’m impressed. You might be the first copper I’ve ever come across who uses semi-colons in a report. But you might just be wasted on Saturday night drunks and RTAs. And... I sense you’re frustrated.”

I’m clearly supposed to be reply to that.

“I’m just doing – ”

“Doing your job? Yes, so was I for about three or four years. I was going out of my mind. By the end of the third year I was wondering if I’d chosen the right career. Exactly like you’re doing.”

Brady started to reply. Fitzpatrick held his hand up. “On the assumption that you’ve got a reasonable pair of trousers and a jacket downstairs, go and get changed. And if you haven’t got a normal tie go and buy one. Stan Bulman’s partner is going to be off for a while. And Bill Slater’s taking early retirement. So congratulations Acting-Detective Constable Brady, there’s a vacancy. And Ernie Moss keeps nagging me. Unless you’ve become attached to working Saturday nights?”

This time Brady did laugh. “No, sir. And yes, sir. I mean ‘boss.’ And yes, I’ve got a tie.”

“Good. Go and get changed. Back here in ten minutes.”

Chapter 4

“Stan? I want you to take Mike Brady out with you this morning.”

Stan Bulman looked less than impressed. A lot less than impressed. “Where’s Norris, boss?”

“He’s severed the tendons in his thumb.”

“What? How the hell did he do that?”

Jim Fitzpatrick looked resigned. “I’d like to tell you he did it vaulting over a wall and arresting Manchester’s most wanted. Sadly the answer is carving the bloody turkey. I suspect he was pissed in charge of a carving knife. So take young Master Brady with you and teach him the ropes.”

“Come on then, Padawan. Investigate this complaint we shall. Complete bollocks it will be.”

Brady followed Bulman – balding, overweight, the evidence of yesterday’s egg mayonnaise sandwich on his tie – down to the car park. Waited while he unlocked a Mondeo that would have given even the most battle-hardened valeter sleepless nights.

“Hang on.” Bulman reached across to the passenger seat, scooped up a pile of papers and threw them into the back seat.

“You don’t mind if I smoke? Well, fuck it. I’m a DS and you’re fresh out of college – ”

“If four years is ‘fresh out of...’”

“Yeah, well, it is in my book. Ten years and you can start to call yourself a copper. What did you do at college anyway?”

“University,” Brady said. “And I read law.”

“Law? Then you’re an idiot. Why didn’t you become a solicitor? Nice suits. Fuck off to the pub on Friday lunchtime. Come back at three and shag your secretary.”

December or not Brady decided he was going to open the window. Either that or die of smoke inhalation. “I wanted to be a detective,” he said simply.

“Right. You’re mental. Fucking criminals now, they’ve no respect. In the old days they accepted they were going to get nicked. Now, you do six weeks’ work, you nick someone. Expensive bloody solicitor turns up and gets them off on a technicality. ’Cos we didn’t do the bloody paperwork right.”

Rumour had it the latest ‘technicality’ had been Stan Bulman losing some evidence. Brady thought it was probably best to keep quiet.

“Joined the lodge, have you?”

“The Masonic lodge? No.”

“Take my word for it, son. Fitz said I should teach you the ropes. Rope number one. You want to get on, join the lodge. Anyway, careers lesson over. We’re here. Twenty-three. Nice house. Looks like she did alright out of the divorce.”

“The report said her ex-husband – Gary Cooke – had stuck a spade through her car window. Covered her in glass.”

“When was that then?”

“Tuesday 15th. She was going to see her daughter in the nativity play.”

“Ten days before Christmas? Bloody stupid time to make a complaint. Anyway, it’ll be bollocks. I know Gary Cooke. He’s a good lad. Done well for himself. She’s pissed off that she didn’t get enough in the divorce. Stone through the window on the motorway I’d say. But fuck it, we’re here. Let’s see what she’s got to say for herself.”

Brady guessed Sarah Cooke was about 30. Three or four years older than him. Long dark hair, hazel eyes, a striking face. A brave smile this morning. Her house an equal mixture of Christmas decorations and scattered toys.

Bulman made the introductions. “And this is Police Constable Brady, who’s playing detectives for the day.”

Brady shook hands. Looked at her face. More than two weeks ago. Any cuts had healed. Or were hidden under her make up.

Sarah Cooke apologised for the mess. “My daughter’s four. I no sooner put the toys away then Sophie gets them out again.”

“Is that her?” Brady said.

There was a picture on the bookcase. A little girl in a long white dress. Angel’s wings and a cloak. A tinsel halo.

Sarah Cooke nodded. “That’s when it happened,” she said. “The day of the nativity play.”

She offered them coffee. Bulman said that would be fine. “Two sugars. And some chocolate digestives to go with it if you’ve got any, love.”

Coffee in hand, reluctantly conceding that a plain digestive would do, Bulman started asking questions. “You say your ex-husband put a spade through your car window. Is that the car, love? The one outside?”

“Yes. It’s the only car I have, obviously.”

“It’s just that the window doesn’t seem to be broken now.”

Brady glanced across at Sarah Cooke. She looked resigned, defeated. Knowing from experience where the conversation was going.

“The window was fixed. You’re probably aware – ”

“That Gary owns a vehicle repair shop? Right. Took my own car in there. Some arse pulling out of a side street. Cracking job they did.” Stan Bulman paused. “You see... The problem’s this. You’ve made a complaint. We can’t see any evidence of the complaint. There weren’t any witnesses, I suppose?”

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