

- KEEPING FAITH -

Proposal for a returning series

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Bringing up kids of 9 and 6 and a three-month-old baby – the baby was either a happy accident or a big mistake depending on how the day's going – is quite enough for FAITH HOWELLS (38). After 14 years running a small high street law firm in Camarthen with her husband, EVAN, she's been a stay-at-home mum for 18 months, leaving him to run the practice (crime, family law and anything else that comes through the door). He's been assisted by CERYYS, an avowedly single and attractive 30 year-old solicitor. Although a little jealous of CERYYS, Faith secretly relishes not going into battle at work each day and running the home. She's grown comfortably into the role – literally - having put on a few pounds since she hung up her business suit.

Evan's practice is struggling through the economic downturn, but they're getting by, and life is comfortably predictable ... until one morning he leaves for work and never arrives.

When hours turn into a day, then several days, it becomes clear that something terrible and completely out of character has happened. On top of her anguish and alongside coping with the children, Faith is forced back to the office to try to keep

her livelihood going. There's no body – Evan can't be proved dead – so there's no life insurance. It takes all her formidable reserves of willpower to begin to return to her former hard-nosed, lawyerly self. She's pitched straight back in at the deep-end – CERYS doesn't do crime – and Faith finds herself in police stations at midnight and in court first thing next morning defending the town's low-life and unfortunates. A Welsh Erin Brokovich, she's tough, maternal, sardonically (and sometimes touchingly) witty, fearlessly brave, and doesn't give up on people, even the hopeless cases that most would think don't deserve her help. She jokingly refers to herself as 'a rock in a frock'.

While holding the practice together and being strong for her family, she also has to cope with the abiding fear that Evan has disappeared with another woman. Her best friend and confidante – the wine-drinking, irreverent and overly-confessional LISA - is patching up her own marriage following her husband's unfaithfulness, and Faith sees more than a faint echo of Lisa's recent history in her own. She's been preoccupied with children and their sex life had hardly been thriving. Could she inadvertently have driven him away?

As well as being beset by self-doubt, Faith also has to deal with the increasing problem of Evan's extended family – all deeply embedded in the local community over many generations – who can't help wondering if she had a hand in her husband's disappearance. The situation is complicated by the fact that Evan is the third generation of his family to have run the firm and his father, TOM, attempts to force his way back into the practice aged 75. When Faith fends him off, Evan's

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 looking for clues. She ends up talking to Steve, a twice convicted robber (now reformed, he insists), who claims that several months before Evan's disappearance, he saw him climb into a car in Swansea with a man he knows to be an enforcer for a notorious criminal family; a man who has killed and got away with it.

Steve's improbable lead starts Faith along a road which takes increasingly darker turns as she slowly picks her way through the complex loyalties and rivalries of a criminal underworld and discovers that her husband had got himself caught up with the GLYNNS, a ruthless and murderous criminal family, whose tentacles spread from Milford Haven through the South Wales belt to the Severn Bridge and beyond. With several detectives on the family payroll, they operate one of the

UK's biggest marijuana growing and amphetamine manufacturing operations.

Their 'farm' and 'factories' nestle in the most unlikely and beautiful corners of the countryside: nothing in this world is ever quite as perfect as it at first appears.

Faith's search for answers takes this ordinary mother struggling through the familiar everyday world, into the ugly, dangerous, criminal world that sees drugs grown and cooked up in remote farms and disused mine workings shipped out across the country and abroad in a multi-million pound operation. Suffering shock after shock, she finally learns that Evan hadn't become corrupt and criminal as she feared, but had been lured into bad company from which he couldn't extricate himself, and having been leaned on to do the Glynn's dirty work – laundering money, warning off witnesses and more – he had gone to the police for help. But instead of being offered protection, he was recruited as a paid informer against his own clients. As Faith draws closer to the truth, she starts to fear that the two detectives who recruited her husband weren't the straight arrows they appeared to be, but more corrupt than the criminals they were pursuing. And to make life even more complicated, she becomes riddled with guilt when she starts to develop feelings for Steve.

News of Faith's initially wholly innocent involvement with Steve spreads like wildfire throughout the community and confirms her in-laws' worst fears. They intensify their campaign against her and eventually manage to convince a local detective to act on their suspicions. More than happy to have a tilt at a defence lawyer, the detective sets about trawling through every facet of her life in a search

for incriminating information. More than once, Faith finds herself arrested and questioned on suspicion of murder. These moments of confinement represent her lowest points, during which she even starts to wonder whether Evan's family have a point and she has suffered some sort of temporary insanity.

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Straddling the ordinary and the extraordinary, the familiar with the murkiest corners of the human soul, KEEPING FAITH follows the struggle of one hard-working, good-hearted single mother to battle for her clients, keep belief in herself and bring order out of the chaos her husband left in his wake. She's the lawyer you'd want – she knows what it's like to suffer a bitter injustice, and is still living through it.

Far more than a legal procedural, KEEPING FAITH, is an extended, authored, character-driven narrative with episodic closure, but with an over-arching crime mystery that gradually unfolds over several series. The themes of love, commitment, betrayal, and recovering from the pain of loss, interweave with a tense, surprising and slowly-ratcheting thriller. Nothing is ever quite as it seems - Faith inhabits a world in which injustice passes for justice, and where the most honest and loyal people she knows are her criminal clients - but her enduring hope that Evan is still alive and still in love with her, keeps driving her on in the face of impossible odds.

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 Camarthen station, and even though she's a defence lawyer, most can't help feeling warmly towards her. She often knows their mums, sisters, husbands, wives and all their foibles, too – it's a small town and she's not afraid to work her contacts and apply a little moral pressure to help her clients.

Ordinary in so many ways, it's Faith's ability to cope with adversity and put all life's traumas into perspective which is her exceptional quality. Far more reassuring than a priest or a nurse (she never judges, for one thing) her clients come to her for so much more than a lawyer – she'll affirm them, understand them, forgive them, talk to the partners they've let-down and betrayed – and give them what they need to make a go of their lives. They don't always do as she

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.

Like all of us, she's beset by plenty of weaknesses – chocolate, wine, the little custard pies from the baker's, George Clooney, and she can't help herself being jealous of slim women, especially slim women who *flaunt* it! There's a part of her that has always dreamed of the life she could have had – working in London, married to a rich man, glamorous holidays, gym-toned body, nannies for the children – and she's bright and smart enough to have had it, but her *soul* is here, in these ancient streets and the rich green countryside. This is *life* for her: all significant human experience, aspirations and disappointments contained in one complex, stratified, clannish, gossip-filled small town.

Like a doctor or a priest, she sees people in their myriad crises and understands the complex social fabric of this changing community. It's not just made up of people who have been here for ever, there are more and more incomers arriving all the time: from Eastern European migrant workers to refugees from the South East to the lost souls who come west in search of something mystical or just a simpler, saner existence, only to find that under the microscope of a small community, their lives are thrown into starker and starker relief. But aside from Faith's in-laws and their friends, Faith knows there's loyalty here - the human quality that she values

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 – a woman who's no longer bottling anything up, a woman who's grown, a woman who's honest in a way he has never been. Can they salvage their marriage? It's a whole new and daunting challenge for both of them.

FAITH THE LAWYER

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 local knowledge to uncover evidence of the neighbour's past peccadillos. Faced with the risk of exposure, he quickly withdraws his complaint.

In similar vein, Faith will find herself dealing with the frustrations and eruptions of ordinary people whose lives turn upside down and take bizarre turns: she will

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 they are unable to contain or express erupt in crime or conflict. She helps them because she has lived and is living it all. She understands that no one behaves badly for no reason, and with her special trick of honesty and acceptance brings her clients to the point of insight, even if she doesn't get them off or win their cases.

Alongside delivering truth to her clients, Faith is engaged in the ever more consuming and ominous search for the truth of what happened to Evan. This takes her entirely out of her experience and far beyond her comfort zone as she enters a far darker, more brutal world of organised crime and detectives more calculatingly

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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