

DON'T HATE THE MOTHER

Maybe her tea leaves fell in a certain way.

Or she drew the Ten of Wands in the future position in her spread – this can indicate that you are about to experience the very worst of something, you must prepare for sudden change and disruption. Or The Moon card, which can represent uncertainty and emotional vulnerability. Maybe even The Hermit. An innocuous-looking image, but can be interpreted as a harbinger of future strife and turmoil.

Or her crystal ball turned black.

Perhaps she lit a candle and somebody who had been dead for years spoke to her but only managed to reveal the first letter of their surname. Like that's a thing.

It's easy to be sceptical about all that medium crap but that armchair fortune-teller got one of her kids away fast. Too fast. She tied a label around the boy's neck and ditched him on a train before I even arrived in town.

The Wallace woman couldn't say for sure that it was me who was coming but she had faith in her tea leaves or Tarot cards or rune stones or whatever she used.

One of the worst things I see in people now is how easily they believe in something. Anything.

Little Henry Wallace escaped me. One boy. Gone.

One boy. Safe.

Hinton Hollow.
Population 5,119.

More than enough to infect. To test. To darken. Dampen. Devour.

So, don't hate the mother. She wasn't choosing between her children. She didn't pick her favourite to stay with her. She didn't give one away. She got in there before me. She made a decision that day so she would not have to make a choice once I arrived.

She picked them both.

She saved them both.

The locals think she is mad. Mad for the way she dresses. Mad for the way she wears her hair. Mad for the way that she talks to her children, kisses them goodbye, for the food that she buys and the hunched way that she walks. Her spirit makes them uncomfortable.

And they will think she is mad because she put her youngest son on a train by himself and told him not to talk to anybody or say where he is from until a week has passed.

I see her. I watch her.

SOME THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT THE MOTHER

She is not mad.

She is good.

Better than them.

Better than you, even.

I like her.

As long as the rest of the town behaves as I expect they will, there will be no need to taint the Wallaces.

THREE THINGS

Little Henry was one hundred and seven miles away when I arrived for my first sweep of the old town. I just wanted to get things moving before Detective Sergeant Pace arrived. Nothing fancy. A couple of disturbances, perhaps. To get the ball rolling.

It's not quite as simple as finding someone and making them evil. That is not how it works. I can't just pick a person and turn them into a killer or a fraudster or have them create Facebook. I have to massage what is already within them.

Sometimes I get adultery or shoplifting or cheating on a school test.

On that first breeze through the town I got three things:

- Some salted pork
- An angina attack
- A broken window

