

# Parsons' Lot

Mike Cockett

Ben Truscott looked out over Parson's Lot. He had known it all his life. As soon as he could escape domestic surveillance, he and his mates were out on the Lot as they called it playing all the usual games of childhood and getting up to various sorts of mischief such as lighting fires. The Lot was a sort of waste ground at one end with a marshy area fed by a stream in wet weather, a copse on a slight rise and beyond the copse a flat area, the site of informal football matches and other games. He could hear faint shouts of children playing. He knew exactly how big it was. It was 21,2 acres in an uneven rectangle. 923,472 square feet big enough for generations of children to hide in and invent games and frighten each other with stories of ghosts and lurking child abductors and now it was to be built on and he could be one of the builders.

He unfolded the outline plan of the development and tried to relate it to the ground in front of him. It was massive. He still wasn't sure why they had been so keen to have him involved. It was really out of his league. Did he really want this? They were going to bulldoze his childhood memories.

He folded the plan and stuffed it into a jacket pocket and turned to leave. He caught a glimpse of someone in the distance by the copse, standing very still and apparently watching something through a pair of binoculars. Woman. She seemed to be wearing a red headscarf or something. He thought nothing more of it and left for home.

He paused before slipping his key into the front door and entering. "I'm home," he shouted. Doreen came into the hall from the kitchen wiping her hands on a towel. "No need to shout," she said.

"I thought you were upstairs."

"Why would I be upstairs?"

Ben didn't reply.

Doreen turned to go back to the kitchen. "Janey's home," she said over her shoulder.

"Oh great." Ben slipped his coat off quickly and hung it on the hall stand. "Where is she?"

"Up in her room."

"Is she staying?"

"I don't know. She hasn't said."

"Well didn't you ask her?" There was an edge to Ben's voice.

Doreen had disappeared into the kitchen and there was no reply.

Ben began climbing the stairs. Janey's room was in the attic and when he reached the landing he could hear her singing. He paused. He didn't catch the song at first and then it reached the soaring chorus, Skyfall. Even without the backing, Janey had that precision and richness which makes a true singer.

Ben carried on up the stairs and knocked on the attic door. The singing stopped and the door flew open. "Daddy," Janey whooped and she flung herself into his arms and they hugged till they almost fell over.

Ben pushed her away and held her for a moment at arm's length. "Let's have a look at you." She angled her head and pouted, "What do you think?"

"Not too bad I suppose." She pulled away and punched him playfully on the arm.

“Ouch,” he said. “What was that for?”

She smiled at him.

“I almost waited until you’d finished singing. Still Adele is it?”

“Well I haven’t moved on to opera, if that’s what you mean.”

“I didn’t mean that.”

“It’s something to do with this room. It takes me back. Suddenly I’m singing the old songs.”

Ben smiled, “I love it. You sang Skyfall at your last school concert. You blew them away. I still remember that slight pause when you finished and then them shouting and applauding.”

“Now Dad. Don’t start.”

“I won’t, I won’t. It’s all right but a voice like that. It shouldn’t go to waste.”

Janey turned to the bed and began unpacking her holdall. Not much in there Ben noticed.

“So why are you home?”

She spoke without turning, serious now, “Why do you think?”

He looked at her. She glanced at him over her shoulder. He turned away and stared at a poster of Ed Sheeran on the wall, one she had not taken with her. He supposed she had moved on to some other love.

Eventually he said, “The meeting.”

“Yes,” she said, “The meeting.” She fiddled with a T shirt she had lifted from the holdall then turned.

“Dad. Do you know what you’re getting in to?”

“Why wouldn’t I know? Anyway, what to you mean by ‘getting into’?”

“Well there are things being said at college.”

“What sort of things?”

“I think you know.”

“The environment. I suppose and heritage.”

“Among other things.”

“Listen Janey. Sometimes you can’t take on the whole world. I have to think about you. I don’t want you to be saddled with debt for half your life.”

Janey sat on the bed, “Don’t put it on me, dad.”

Ben moved across to sit on the bed next to her. She laid her head on his shoulder. They were quiet for a time then Janey said, “How is mum doing?”

“How did she seem when you turned up?”

“Distant.”

“Yes.”

“You haven’t heard from Tom then?”

“No.”

They sat in silence for a while and then Janey took her dad’s hand and squeezed.

“You couldn’t have stopped him, Dad.”

“She thinks I should have tried harder.”

“Dad, I know. The university course was driving him mad. He felt trapped. He was only doing it because he was trying to please you and mum.”

“Not me. I didn’t pressure him.”

Janey let go of Ben’s hand and stood. She walked to the window and stared out.

She said quietly, “I’ve heard from him.”

“What?”

“He texts me but doesn’t want me to tell you where he is.”

“Where is he? Is he all right?”

“He’s all right. He’s working in a bar in Portugal, but he won’t say where.”

“We’ve got to tell Mum. She keeps thinking he’s dead. She feels ....”

Ben’s mobile rings. He looks at the screen and then switches it off.

Janey looks at him, “What was that?”

“Oh, you know, cold callers, that sort of things.” He stood up and walked towards the door.

Janey spoke sharply, “Dad. That wasn’t a cold call. In any case you didn’t answer it.”

“No. I could see who it was from. Listen Janey. If you are coming to the meeting tonight you have to be ready for it to get pretty heated.”

“I know.” Janey paused. “Whose side are you on Dad?”

He turned to look at her for some time before he spoke. Then he said, “Whose side are you on Janey?”

Again there was silence. Eventually she said, “I want to be on your side Dad, but...” She didn’t complete the sentence.

Ben sighed, “And that depends of whether I bid for the contract or not.”

“Yes.”

“Look, Janey. I mean, we’re comfortably off now but I have to think about the future. I’ve got no pension to speak of, there’s your course and who knows what Tom will cost us...”

Janey held up her hand. “Enough Dad. I know all the arguments. You are either in there or out of it completely for years. You’ll be rooting for social housing and all that. Do you think you have a hope in hell against big money, where ever it’s coming from?”

“But..”

“No buts Dad. I’m on the side of people and the environment and that’s where you should be. That’s where you always used to be. There’s a lot more going on than you know about.”

Janey folded her arms, challenging him with her look.

Ben reddened, “Principles are very costly. In the end you have to face realities. I’m not saying you shouldn’t care..”

Janey cut in, “I hope not Dad, because it’s the way I was brought up.”

Doreen eased a tray of scones out of the oven and slid them onto a cooling rack. She did this without thinking. She didn’t know why she was making scones except that it was something she did when people came for tea. Somehow, she was treating Janey like a visitor. Ben and Janey came into the kitchen. Janey took a deep breath, “Oo scones warm from the oven. Lovely.”

Doreen didn’t respond. Ben stood by the door, hesitant. Then he said, “Janey has some news.” Doreen looked up sharply.

Janey said quickly, “I’ve heard from Tom.” Doreen seemed to shudder, “Tom. Is he all right? Where is he?”

“Yes he’s fine. He’s .. he said he was sorry but he needed to get away.”

“Where is he?”

“He’s somewhere in Portugal.”

“Portugal, why would he be in Portugal?”

Janey hesitated, “Listen Mum, he tried to tell you. University wasn’t for him especially not that accounting and finance course or whatever. I know he was brilliant at maths and the careers advisors recommended it and all that but...” she ran out of steam.

Doreen sat down heavily on a kitchen chair. She ripped off a sheet off kitchen paper and dabbed her eyes.

“Well, at least,” she said, “he is alive.” She dabbed her eyes again. “Why didn’t he tell me? Just going off. He must have known how I’d feel, how worried I’d be. And why did he contact you and not me?” Janey could feel irritation rising in her mother.

“Mum,” she said quickly, “You know Tom. He probably didn’t know what to say. I mean he hardly spoke at the best of times.”

“He’s spoke to you.”

“Not spoke, texted. It’s all by text in bits and pieces. Anyway, he did want you to know he was all right.”

“Well that’s something, I suppose. What is he doing in Portugal?”

“Well this is it. I think he went with someone.”

“With someone. What do you mean? A girl?”

“Well I think it might be more of a woman.”

“Someone older. Tom!”

“He just texted ‘met someone’ I texted ‘who, where?’ He came back with ‘pop concert.’ That was it. Next thing I know I’m getting texts from Portugal.”

“Tom didn’t go to pop concerts. What was he doing there? What sort of concert?”

“The only band he ever showed interest in was one called Muse. I guess that was it.”

“And now he’s in Portugal with some woman. What’s he doing for money?”

“He’s working in a bar.”

“He never went to bars. He said they were too noisy and drink made him sick. I thought it was a blessing given what goes on these days.”

There was silence for a few moments then Janey said brightly, “What about those scones Mum? Lovely buttery scone while they’re still warm.”

Doreen got up and began automatically halving the scones whilst Janey got the butter from the fridge. Ben eased himself from the door and sat down at the table. Ben and Janey bit into the scones and caught dribbles of butter on their chins. “Well,” Janey said, “you still make the best scones in the universe.”

Doreen sighed, “I’ll have to tell them at church. I’ve been pretending he’s busy with exams. They’ll have to know. Sister Bernadette asks after him all the time. She was very good, you know, when he had his trouble.”

“Well,” Ben said, “At least she’ll understand.”

Janey glanced at the kitchen clock, “I think we’ve got to be going dad.”

Ben approached the concert hall with some trepidation. As he mounted the steps his worst fears were realised. Councillor Strickland greeted him with his usual exaggerated bonhomie. “Ben. Great to see you. I called but you didn’t answer.”

He turned and called over a young woman.

“Sophie will show you to your place. Ben Truscott,” he said to her, “You have the seating plan.” Then he turned to glad hand the next arrival.

Sophie smiled an aggressive PR smile. “This way, Mr Truscott.” She strode off and Ben followed. He found himself on the platform on a second row of seats. Others were already in place. There was Fred Bishop who managed Plumbworld and Dan Hardcastle of Ibstock’s the builder’s merchants. He knew them both well.

Ben looked round interior of the concert hall set inside the town hall, a massive gothic revival testament to the self-confidence, the self-importance and, Ben guessed, the

pomposity of the civic leaders of the time. The great organ above the tiered choir rows was seldom heard these days. The hall hosted minor pop concerts and Strictly Come Dancing competitions. At least the last of these fitted the setting. Ben remembered his grandmother talking of ballroom dancing to, who was it? Alyn Ainsworth or Ted Heath. No, it couldn't have been. He was a prime minister. His mother said they had once had Tommy Steele in his early days.

He looked at the platform, plenty of self-confidence and pomposity there. There was Mayor Bill Finton, in his chain of office. Councillor Strickland who had pressganged him onto the platform. He had almost refused but it would not have been good way to go about landing one of the contracts. There were others on the platform he didn't know. Charlie Bowers the chairman of the chamber of commerce was there, of course, but who were the two blokes sitting behind him, leaning forward in a tight conversation with him. He had not seen them before. They wore smart business suits and could have been bank managers but for their dark hair worn a little longer than was now fashionable and something about their faces, Slavic came to mind.

Ben looked round the hall. He couldn't see Janey. She had gone off with friends. There were the expected tribes, Greenpeace, the Parish council and supporters. Doreen would have been with them but even after news of Tom she couldn't be persuaded out. There was the English Heritage, National Trust group and then an eclectic group Ben could not be sure of, perhaps the residents association. Some, he supposed were simply spectators expecting entertainment. He looked back at the platform. The two Slavic gentlemen had finished their conversation with Charlie and were leaning back, occupied with their mobile phones.

He hardly needed to pay attention to the main presentation. He had heard it all at a private view. The VR video was new but was simply a flashier version of the model which had been on display in the town hall. There was of course, a lauding of the benefits to the locality of a major infrastructure development, assurances that a significant proportion of the dwellings would be affordable. There was praise for the funders of the project who were showing their confidence in the locality and its people by investing millions of pounds.

Ben spent most of the time observing the audience. He had expected a much livelier crowd. There had certainly been noisy demonstrations outside but inside the hall was tense but attentive. The presentations came to an end and there was a cursory request for any questions. There was a slight pause, to the extent that the Mayor seemed about ready to wind up. Then a woman stood up and a murmur ran around the hall. The most striking thing about the woman was her startlingly red hair. She was carelessly dressed, that is dressed as if she didn't really care. She waited for a microphone to be passed to her, then she began. "Isobel Parkhurst, Greenpeace." A murmur in the hall again. "It says in your submission that a full environmental impact study has been undertaken. What were the results of that study?" She stood and waited.

There was some shuffling on the platform and a man Ben recognised as one of the council officials stood, it seemed somewhat reluctantly. He cleared his throat, "Well, as you can see on the plans, the environment of the development has been carefully considered and there is distinct provision for the, eh, environment, parks, play areas, the planting of trees and so on. The full impact survey will be published on the website in due course."

Isobel Parkhurst still had the microphone, "Sir, I find that answer entirely unsatisfactory as I suspect you knew I would so let's get more specific. Parson's Lot is an area of wetland. In times of heavy rainfall, it absorbs water and releases it in a controlled way thus avoiding flooding downstream. This is a well-known phenomenon and indeed in many areas wetlands are being restored in order to manage flood risk. Does the environmental survey include a study of the flood risks of draining Parson's Lot?"

At this point councillor Strickland stood up. "I think I should inject some common sense into this argument," he said. This provoked some further murmuring and sniggering in the audience. "We all know," he went on, "that Greenpeace does a great job in looking after our environment. And they are right to point to the consequences of our proposals. However, we are seldom offered very clear-cut choices. This development, it is true may lead to a slightly increased flood risk, which we would have to manage. On the other hand, the overall benefit to our community is enormous and, in my opinion, that plus side outweighs the relatively small increase in possible flooding. Now I think we should move on."

Isobel Pankhurst smiled, "I think there might be further issues to raise." She passed the microphone to the person next to her. With a jolt Ben realised it was Janey. She stood, "My name is Janey Truscott." she said. Strickland's head jerk up and he looked hard. "I have been studying the consequences of climate change for the building industry."

"Ah climate change. Well I'm sure we are all happy with a bit more sunshine," Strickland cut in.

Janey ignored the interruption. "2017 was both the hottest and the wettest year on record. The forecast is for an increased number of extreme weather events. Could you tell me how this development is designed to cope with both extreme storms and extreme heat?" There were murmurs of support from around the hall.

Strickland was now on his feet. "Now, young lady. We have employed senior architects and designers working to the highest standards....."

Someone in the audience called out, "Answer her question."

"As I was saying, we have employed senior architects and designers and a full environmental impact report will be published in due course."

Janey said, "And we all know what that means. When it's too late." She sat down and passed the mic. along the row. It was another surprise for Ben. Sister Bernadette stood up, only her veil marked her as a nun.

"Gentlemen," she said, "I see that almost without exception you are male. I wished to ask you about the impact on the local community. I note that large parts of existing housing are to be demolished, the school playing field reduced, the community hall demolished. What is to replace these facilities?"

Strickland again took the floor, "I think you can see from the plans that we have a designated proportion of affordable housing and open space and recreational facilities. As the community grows we will doubtless be adding further community facilities."

"Mister Strickland," Sr Bernadette cut in, "We already have a community. We have a parish. We have a community events committee. We have street parties in some areas. You seem to be talking of a new community. Does this mean that this will not include current residents?"

"Of course it will," Strickland was clearly rattled. "We will be working hard to place all displaced by the development in accommodation which will in fact be an improvement on their current conditions."

"Forgive me if I don't find that reassuring," Sister Bernadette said sharply and there were the first signs of disruptive behaviour from the crowd. There were angry shouts and calls to "tell the truth for once."

The mayor did his best to calm things down but sister Bernadette had not finished. "Could you tell us where the funding for this development is coming from?"

Strickland was up again, "You know perfectly well that such information is commercially sensitive and it is not in the public interests for it to be revealed." There were shouts and ironic laughter. "Who's getting the paybacks? Affordable housing? You must be joking."

Sister Bernadette had passed the mic to a neatly dressed older man. It became clear to Ben that these attacks had been planned. The man coughed into the microphone and then announced himself. "David Harvey, Parsons' Lot preservation committee." There was some stirring on the platform and glances between the principal movers. "You say in your brochure," David Harvey continued, "That Parsons' Lot is common land under the control of the Local Council. I must tell you sirs that this is not the case. Parsons' Lot, as I am sure you know is not common land. It was a gift in 1870 from the right Honourable Jeremiah Parsons to the people of this area to be preserved in perpetuity for the preservation of the environment and for the recreation and education of the common people. I quote from the deeds of gift. By what right do you believe you can build on this land?" At this the hall erupted as if a signal had been given. People started tearing up the glossy brochure they had been given and threw balls of paper towards the platform. The Mayor banged a gavel on the table shouting order and then, almost unheard, he declared the meeting closed. The platform party filed off. Ben remain in his seat looking at the chaos and did not move till the hall had almost cleared.

He had decisions to make. As he approached the door he was accosted by Councillor Strickland. He wanted 'a word' he said. He launched straight in. "That was your daughter I gather, making the fuss about climate change and all that stuff."

Ben nodded.

"A bit of a rebel, is she?"

"She cares about the environment."

Strickland took his arm. "Listen Ben. There's a lot in this for all of us. You know what I mean. Have a word with the girl. We wouldn't want her getting into trouble, would we?" He squeezed Ben's arm and walked away. Ben glanced after him. In the doorway the two Slavic gentlemen were standing and staring at him.

A woman approached. She was, he supposed, around sixty, rather shabbily dressed though she had obviously made some effort with her hair and make-up. The lipstick was a rather vibrant red which emphasised what seemed to Ben to be a snarl. She spoke with a snarl.

"You," she said, "I know you."

"Madam," Ben said, "I don't think so."

"Oh I know," the snarl became a sneer, "You didn't notice me. None of you did."

Ben looked round to see if there was any help available.

"Twenty eight years. You learn a lot in that time."

"I'm sorry Madam but I really don't know what you are talking about."

"Trenchard's that's what I'm talking about."

"Trenchard's the accountants?"

"Don't pretend you don't know."

"I know Trenchard's of course."

"Of course you do. But not me. I watched you all, you and that other councillor, Strickland. I saw you. Got some dirty deal up your sleeve have you."

"Madam," Ben looked round for help. "I'm afraid you've got it wrong. I'm not a councillor."

She ignored this, "And now you want to knock down my flat." To Ben's dismay she then burst into tears. He looked round again for help but the last few to leave the hall averted their eyes and hurried on.

"Please madam," he pleaded, "What's wrong?"

She sniffed and pulled out a large handkerchief from her handbag.

"Now look what you've made me do." She blew her nose.

Ben was at a loss.

"Making me make a fool of myself in public."

"Well, actually, there is no one else around so you needn't worry."

"Needn't worry? Worry is all I've got. Made redundant, no pension for another five years and now you want to knock down my flat."

"Look, I'm sorry but you must have the wrong person. I'm not knocking down anyone's flat."

She blew her nose again. "Oh I saw you," she said. "you and that other councillor, that Strickland. I could tell you a few things about him."

Ben looked around again wondering how he might get away.

"Planning to divide the spoils, were you??"

"No, no we certainly weren't."

"Well you will. I've seen it. They think you're just a secretary but you see it all. Old Mr Trenchard would have nothing to do with it but his son. Huh. He got rid of me. Restructuring they called it. Huh."

"Look Mrs. Eh I didn't catch your name.."

"Mrs Benfield if you must know."

"Well Mrs Benfield. I'm a builder. I build things up."

She barked a laugh, "Oh yes, and where will you build? I'll tell you, you'll build on Crescent Row. That's where, where my flat is. You'll do a lot of knocking down before you build up.

So where am I going to live."

"Mrs Benfield. You seem to think I'm somehow in charge of these plans. I haven't even got a contract and.." Suddenly Strickland's warning flashed through his mind. He hesitated. "Well, what they say is you will be compensated and found somewhere to live and, well, the promise is that there will be affordable housing as part of the development.,  
"They say, they say.. I bet you can't wait to get your greedy hands on that contract. Is that what Strickland was promising? Oh I know your sort."  
Mrs. Benfield turned and shuffled off.

Ben drove home and then sat in the car for some time before going in. The encounter with Mrs Benfield had shaken him. He hated confrontations. He was an appeaser and negotiator. People liked working for him and he was proud of that. His business was based of giving satisfaction. He didn't build and run. He built for his local community and where ever possible he stayed out of the line of fire. Now Jenny had drawn fire and already some was being directed at him. He sighed. He would have to talk to Janey, let her see how she was drawing him into a fight that he did not want to engage in. Reluctantly he got out of the car and entered the house. There were voices in the kitchen. He opened the kitchen door. Janey was sitting at the kitchen table nursing a glass of wine. Opposite her was the red haired women.

"Dad," Janey stood up, "this is Isobel. You'll remember her from the meeting."

Ben looked at Isobel and nodded. "I'm very glad to meet you Mr. Truscott," she said.

"Ben, please," he responded automatically. He sensed tension in the room.

"Where is your mother?" he said.

Janey looked up from her glass of wine. "She's gone up to bed," she said. There was a pause. Ben looked from one to the other. "Well, perhaps I'll join her. It looks like you two have things to talk about."

"No Dad," Janey said quickly, "Sit down. Have a glass of wine. It's you we need to talk to."

He sat and looked at the two who now looked even more like conspirators. Janey poured a glass of wine and pushed it towards him.

"Dad," she started, "There are things you should know."

He said nothing.

"As you know, Isobel is a member of Greenpeace and she came to the college to talk to the Building Studies group about environmental issues. One of the examples she used was Parsons' Lot so that got us talking after her talk." Janey glanced at Isobel as if for help.

Isobel took over. "The fact is Mr Truscott...Ben. The whole Parson's lot development is whole lot more complicated and I might say nefarious, blimey," she said "did I just say nefarious," she giggled, "I mean dirty - probably criminal."

Again there was hesitation.

"So, "Ben said with sudden recognition of what was going on. "You intend to expose this whole nefarious business you?"

Janey simply said, "Yes."

"Well that's goodbye to any contract I might have been given. Or any other local contract for that matter. Have you thought of that?"

"Oh, dad. There was never going to be a contract."

"What do you mean.? How do you know that?"

Isobel broke in, "It's all been sewn up. Contracts allocated to the big boys. You and the others were just there as window dressing this evening. That wasn't consultation. It was PR."

“Look,” said Ben, “This is just sounding like conspiracy theory. How can you possibly know all this, be so certain?”

Again, the hesitation and again Isobel spoke.

“We have the files,” she said. “The complete record. All the secret meetings, the financial deals, the contract allocations the ..”

“Just a minute,” Ben said, “How can you possibly have all this?”

Janey answered, “I’m afraid there has been a criminal intrusion into other people’s computer networks.”

“Hacking,” Ben almost shouted, “You’ve been hacking their computers?”

“Well not us exactly. We are just among the receivers of the information.”

“And where is this information coming from?”

Janey gulped some wine and then put the glass down. She looked down at the table.

“Portugal,” she said.

It took Ben a moment to take in the meaning of what she had said. “Tom,” he said eventually, “He’s up to his old tricks. He promised he wouldn’t after all that trouble at school. Sister Bernadette..” he suddenly stopped. “Sister Bernadette is in on it isn’t she?”

The two women nodded. Ben gasped and dropped his head into his hands. “I won’t just lose a contract. We’ll all end up in jail.”

Isobel spoke calmly. “That is possible, but we know something else. We know where the money is coming from. I said it was a dirty business. The money is dirty money, money laundering from the profits of drug running and human trafficking in Eastern Europe.”

Ben looked up. He was breathing hard. He looked from one woman to the other. How could he be in this position? Of course, he was against dirty money, but this was serious commercial and political action. He didn’t do action he did observing and disapproval from the side-lines. He had another thought, “Who’s this women Tom is with? He’s not doing this on his own.”

Janey spoke quietly now, “She’s called Delia. She is brilliant, a mathematical and computer genius an obsessive fan of that group Muse. You can see why she and Tom get on. She plays at hacking, like Tom did. She came across the Parsons’ lot scam and when Tom told her he knew Parson’s Lot, she decided to take it further. So, it’s a long story but here we are.”

Ban sighed. He looked again at the two women sitting there calmly contemplating who knew what sort of future. He was scared. He was scared for himself and he was scared for Janey. Scared and well, proud. His daughter taking a life changing risk for the greater good. He would have run a mile to avoid it but...

“Well,” he said, “what do we do with this information.”

Janey gave a little smile at the word ‘we’.

Isobel was matter of fact. “We already have contacts at the Guardian. They say if the stuff is as watertight as we say it is they will take it up as another of their campaigns.”

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Ben stood looking over Parson’s Lot. It was unchanged but nothing else was as it had been the last time he had been there contemplating building contracts. Strickland was in gaol. Finton had resigned. There had been arrests in Eastern Europe and so far, in spite of the threats, Janey, Isobel, Tom, Sister Bernadette and Delia, whoever she was, were still free and alive thank goodness. Ironically nobody believed he had any serious involvement in the plot. Nobody believed he was anything more than a bystander. Business had picked up. The new council talked of the Preston model, local contracts for local businesses and so on.

There was still the nagging fear that Janey and Tom were now marked individuals with who knew what effect on their futures. He turned from Parsons' Lot. He had had enough of the place.

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