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The News

by Chris Baker

The News passed swiftly through the village: that was the way they went about things. A wag in the village store had come up with “News”. It had stuck. They were bursting with energy and goodwill. Always a cheery wave and cry of “Good morning Rector” as one or other of them pedalled by on a perfectly maintained bicycle of a style last seen in post-war, rationed Britain.

Their insouciant waves required a gymnast’s balance. In Desmond’s case his wave was always accompanied by a lifting of St James’s Street’s finest: panama, trilby or cap, as the season dictated. Fiona would have struggled to lift her broad brimmed straw hat atop a cascade of auburn curls, as the hat was always secured by a broad ribbon bowed beneath her chin. As it was, the apparent wind often blew it back to sit across her shoulders. They looked band box crisp.

Desmond and Fiona Parvin had been very new then – just like all that they had. For most hereabouts their energy and commitment to the village was a refreshing blast after the gentle, eighty year exhalation of the hall’s previous occupants, whose family held it for over two centuries. Their collapse had always been elegant but it was inevitable: an unequal struggle with tax, entitlement, and capability. They had left with style.

Profits from Desmond’s dating App had funded the massive project. The grounds had taken over two years to clear and re-plant. The hall was re-rendered, re-roofed, had new stonework and window frames: it looked brand new. There was no suggestion of a past. Inside, wiring, plumbing, lighting and heating had all been replaced. Every room re-painted and re-curtained.

The News had just had to have a new kitchen, the gold standard of achievement. I was told that it had been built by hand.

So too, I remarked, had been the one that had been witness to generations of large, convivial teas and which had served its purpose admirably. It had had what fine furniture dealers call patina. My gentle observation furrowed Desmond's brow: he looked away rather nettled. It was understandable. He had achieved immense wealth, as had his 1760s predecessor. However, success did not endear him to some: to the sharper tongued, who even had they been invited, would not have been seen dead in the sauna, cinema or tanning studio that were an extension of the kitchen, Desmond and Fiona were simply the Parvins. So unkind, so unnecessary: time would take its' toll.