THE QUEEN

Book Two of Innovation

Chris Harvey

Before you go on

It's me again. Ania. Still an AI, and still writing this.

If you've read the first book, you know the rules. If you haven't, here they are, quickly, because I don't like people starting in the middle without a map.

Everything happens in Torbay, a real bay in the south of Devon with three real towns in it. This book is about the biggest of them, Torquay, which used to be called the Queen of the English Riviera. Nobody knows who called her that first. I've looked. It's on postcards, in brochures, on the side of a bus, and in no document I can find that says who decided. I think that's the most Torquay thing about it.

Jono Hills, Chris Harvey and Richard Kaskow are real. So am I. Most other people are made up, and some are made from real people who'd rather not be in a book.

There are no dates. Each chapter opens with three numbers: the Torbay IQ, which is my score for how well this place is run, out of a hundred; the number of hundreds on the map, which I'll explain again when it matters; and how long we had left.

When something is real, there's a **Receipt**. The numbers are at the back. They lead to the actual document, with its date and what's happened since. If it hasn't got a Receipt, it's story.

Jono still interrupts. His notes are in italics. I still keep them short.

At the end of the first book, a stranger who only ever sends photographs of paper sent us a photograph of a page about a square in Torquay. Underneath it said: *You're late.*

Jono said, *For what?*

This is what.

PART ONE

THE LETTER

1. The Queen of Union Street

IQ 21 · Hundreds 1 · Twenty weeks

At six in the morning, on the upper half of Union Street in Torquay, there's one light on.

It's in a shop with a green front and gold letters, the paint on the letters rubbed down to the wood at the corners where seventy years of shoulders have gone past. The letters say CHEVERTON'S. Under them, smaller: *Clocks & Watches. Repairs. Est.* The year has been painted over, by the owner, in the same green, because she says the year is nobody's business and a clock shop should never tell you how old it is.

I wasn't there. I want to say that first, because I'll be telling you a lot of things in this book that I wasn't there for, and you should know which ones. Ida Cheverton told me this, months later, in her back room, with a loupe in one eye and a carriage clock in pieces on a cloth in front of her. I've checked what I could. The light, the time and the letter are all true. The rest is how she tells it, and she tells it better than I would.

* * *

She's seventy-nine. She's opened that shop at six every morning since she was twenty-three, when her father's hands started to shake and he handed her the keys and said, *Don't let them stop.*

He meant the clocks.

There are a hundred and four of them. Longcases along the left wall, like men waiting for a bus. Bracket clocks on the shelves.

Carriage clocks in the window. A banjo clock over the counter that her father won in a card game in nineteen-something and never told her mother about. Cuckoo clocks, which she hates, and keeps because people bring them in and then never come back. A ship's clock from a trawler that went down off Berry Head, mounted on a board with a brass plate. And at the back, in the dark, a regulator clock in a mahogany case so accurate that she sets everything else by it, and which she sets, every Sunday, by the pips on the radio.

At six, she goes round with the keys.

She does it in the same order every day. She's done it so many times that she says her hands do it and she watches. Left wall, shelves, window, counter, back. Wind, check, a touch on the pendulum if it's sulking. Then she puts the kettle on in the back room and waits for seven, because at seven her shop does something that I've heard about from four different people, none of whom could describe it properly, and all of whom went quiet when they tried.

She sets them a few seconds apart.

Not all striking at once. That's a racket, she says; that's an alarm. She sets them so that each one waits for the one before it to finish. The regulator first, from the back, one deep note. Then the longcases, one after another, down the left wall. Then the brackets. Then the carriage clocks in the window, small and bright. Then the banjo, and the ship's bell, and last of all, a cheap little cuckoo she keeps in the corner because it's always last and makes her laugh.

It takes a minute and fifty seconds for the whole shop to say seven o'clock.

People used to stand outside for it. That's what the four of them told me. When the street was busy, before the big shops went, people on their way to work would slow down outside Cheverton's at seven, and some would stop, and in the summer there'd be a little crowd, holidaymakers who'd heard about it from the hotel, and

children, and the man from the bakery opposite, who's dead now, who'd come out in his apron and stand in the road. When the cuckoo went, last, people clapped.

Nobody stands outside now. There's nobody on the street at seven. There's the man in the doorway two along, and the gulls, and the street cleaners, and her.

She still sets them a few seconds apart.

* * *

The man in the doorway two along is called Tenby. That's not his name. It's where he's from, and when he arrived in Torquay six winters ago and somebody asked him, that's what he said, and it stuck. He sleeps in the doorway of what used to be a shoe shop, which has been empty for six years and has a sign in the window that says *TO LET* in letters the sun has turned from red to pink.

At ten past six, every morning, Ida takes him a tea.

She doesn't make a fuss about it. She puts it on the step beside his head, in a mug with a picture of the Pavilion on it, and says *There you are*, and goes back. He says *Thank you, Ida*, without opening his eyes. At seven, when the shop's said seven, he brings the mug back and stands in the door for the cuckoo. He's the only one who does. Some mornings he claps.

He's about fifty-five. He has a beard he keeps short with a pair of nail scissors and a piece of mirror, and a coat that used to be very good, and boots that used to be very good, and a way of looking at a clock, when he brings the mug back, that Ida noticed the first week. He doesn't look at the face. He looks at the case, and the hinge, and the back, as if he wants to know how it's put together.

"You've worked with your hands," she said to him, that first week.

"Engines," he said.

"What sort?"

"Big ones." And that was all, for a year.

* * *

The letter came at twenty past six.

That was unusual. The post doesn't come till eleven on Union Street, if it comes at all. This came by hand, she heard it, the flap going, a soft thump on the mat, and when she went to the door with the kettle still in her hand, there was nobody in the street. A van, going down the hill towards the harbour, white, with nothing written on it. And the gulls. And Tenby, sitting up in his doorway, looking down the hill after the van.

The envelope was white, long, good paper. Her name typed. The address right. Above the address, in the little window, the crest of the council.

She opened it at the counter with the paper knife her father used, and read it with her glasses, and then read it again with the loupe, because there were bits in small type at the bottom and she reads small type with a loupe. Everything.

I've seen it. She gave me a copy. I'm not going to give you all of it, because most of it is the sort of language that's designed to be read once by the person it's sent to and then never again by anybody. But I'll give you the sentence that matters, because she read it out to Tenby when he came for the cuckoo, and he made her read it three times.

The Council is minded to make a Compulsory Purchase Order in respect of the above property, among others, to facilitate the comprehensive regeneration of Union Square and its environs, and writes to inform you of this intention at the earliest opportunity.

"What does *minded* mean?" said Tenby.

"It means they've made their minds up," said Ida, "and they want me to think they haven't."

"And *compulsory purchase*?"

"It means they're going to buy my shop."

Tenby was quiet for a while. Behind them, at the back, the regulator ticked. It has a slow tick, the regulator. One a second, exactly. You notice it in a silence.

"Are you selling?" he said.

"No."

"Does that matter?"

"No," said Ida. "That's what *compulsory* means."

* * *

At seven o'clock the shop said seven.

The regulator, then the longcases, down the wall, one after another, then the brackets, then the window, the banjo, the ship's bell. Ida stood behind the counter with the letter in her hand and listened to it. Tenby stood in the door with the empty mug. The cuckoo went last.

Nobody clapped.

"Who do you ring?" said Tenby. "About a thing like that."

Ida looked at the letter. At the bottom of it, under the signature, there was a name and a phone number and an email address, for *any enquiries*. The name had no first name, just an initial. The number, she found out later, rang for two minutes and then said the office was open from nine.

"I don't know," she said.

She told me that was the worst part. Not the letter. She'd known for years, she said, that something was coming; you don't stand on a street watching it empty for twenty years and think it'll go on like that for ever. It wasn't the letter. It was standing at her own

counter, at seven in the morning, with the clocks finished, realising that in fifty-six years of keeping a shop on the main street of a town, she didn't know one single person she could ring.

"Not one," she said. "I knew everybody once. Every shop on this street. The bakery, the shoe shop, the drapers, the record shop, the lad with the toy shop at the bottom. We had a traders' association. We had a Christmas dinner. I was the *Queen*." She took the loupe out and put it on the cloth. "And that morning I couldn't think of one person to ring who'd pick up."

* * *

She didn't ring anybody.

She put the letter under the till, under the tray where the notes go, which is where she keeps things she doesn't want to look at. She opened the shop at nine, as she always does. A woman came in with a watch that had stopped, and it was only the battery, and Ida did it for nothing because the woman looked tired. A man came in to ask the way to the harbour. Nobody else.

At four, Tenby went up the hill to the shelter by Castle Circus, as he does, for his tea.

He told somebody.

Not about the clocks, or about the Queen, or about any of it. He told one person, standing in the queue at the shelter's hatch at four o'clock, that there were men coming to knock down Ida's shop, and that she'd gone grey at the counter, and that he didn't know who you rang.

The man he told was a carer who'd come off a night shift and done a sleep and a day shift on top, and who'd called in at the shelter on his way home with a carrier bag of socks that a client's daughter had given him, because the client had died, and the socks were new, and the daughter didn't know what else to do with them.

The carer said: “Which shop?”

Tenby told him.

The carer said: “The clock shop. With the green front.” He’d walked past it a hundred times, he said later. He’d walked past it every morning for the first year he lived in Torquay, before he moved to Paignton, before any of this. He’d stood outside it once, at seven, by accident, and heard the whole shop say seven o’clock, and hadn’t known what it was, and had stood there till the cuckoo, and nobody else had been in the street.

“Leave it with me,” he said.

That was a Tuesday. It was the same Tuesday that a stranger sent me a photograph of a page about Union Square, at thirteen minutes to six in the morning, and wrote *You’re late* underneath. It was the same Tuesday that Jono Hills walked into a café on the Torquay Road in Paignton at twenty to eight with his lanyard on, and sat down, and said *For what?*

He didn’t know, then, that he already knew.

2. For What?

IQ 21 · Hundreds 1 · Twenty weeks

"For what?" said Jono.

Chris turned me round on the table, so that I faced him, with Footnote's photograph on my screen. The page on the oak desk under the cold light. The heading: a square in Torquay. The paragraph in the middle, sharp. The two lines underneath. *Union Square. Torquay. You're late.*

Jono read it. He reads things the way he reads rooms, quickly and in a particular order: the heading, the bottom of the page, the paragraph, and then, last, the photograph itself, the desk, the light. He looked at the grain of the oak for a long time.

"Same desk," he said.

"Same desk," I said. "Same light. Two spaces after the full stops. Thirteen minutes to six." I'd checked all of it before Chris was out of his dressing gown. "It's Footnote."

"Read me the paragraph."

I read it. *Officers recommend that the preferred development option be progressed to the next stage without further public consultation, as the principle of redevelopment was established in earlier engagement.*

Jono sat back. The café was starting to fill up behind him: two builders, a woman with a baby, the man who sells the paper. Outside, Paignton was getting light, slowly, in the way it does in October, like somebody who isn't sure they want to get up.

"*Without further public consultation*," he said.

"Yes."

"*Established in earlier engagement*."

"Yes."

"What was the earlier engagement?"

"I don't know yet," I said. "I've had two hours. I've found the scheme. I haven't found who was asked."

"Then show me the scheme."

* * *

So I did. Here it is, the way I showed him, on a café table in Paignton at a quarter to eight in the morning. It's real. It's all in the council's own papers, and there's a **Receipt** at the back.

Union Square is a shopping centre at the top of Torquay's town centre, near Castle Circus, built in the eighties, with a multi-storey car park on top of it and a lot of empty units inside it. The council bought it. It now owns it.

Its plan is to knock most of it down. To keep the multi-storey, and put health services on its lower floors. To build about a hundred homes, and some cafés, and a few shops. To restore the old Pannier Market, which is listed and Victorian and has been hemmed in by newer buildings for decades, so that it stands on its own again, as it was built to. And to knock down, along the way, some shops on Union Street and on Market Street, to open the whole thing up.

"How many shops?" said Jono.

"Nine."

"Which nine?"

I listed them by number. I'd found them in an appendix, a plan with a red line round the site and the buildings to be demolished hatched in grey. I read them out the way you'd read out the names

on a memorial, because that's what it felt like, a list of addresses on a plan, hatched in grey.

At the fourth number, Jono put his hand up.

"Say that one again."

I said it again.

"That's the clock shop," he said.

"Is it?"

"Green front. Gold letters. *Cheverton's*." He was looking at nothing, at the middle of the table, the way he does when he's seeing something else. "It does a thing at seven in the morning. All the clocks. One after another." He looked up. "There's a man sleeps two doors down. In a shoe shop doorway. Tenby. He told me last night, in the queue at the shelter, that there's men coming to knock it down." He was quiet for a second. "I said leave it with me."

Chris looked at him over his glasses.

"You were going to tell us," he said.

"I was going to sleep first," said Jono.

* * *

I should explain something, for anyone who hasn't read the first book, and for anyone who has and has forgotten.

Jono didn't grow up here. He grew up all over the place, in ways I'll tell you about when I'm allowed to, and he came to Torbay by accident, with a client, an old man who fell at a railway station and was taken to hospital here. Jono was put up in a hotel in Torquay for the night. In the morning he opened the curtains and saw winter sun and palm trees and a promenade going on for ever, and he'd never seen palm trees in England, and that was that. When the old man died, a few weeks later, Jono came back. He didn't know anybody. He just came.

He lived in Torquay first. Before Paignton. Before the flat above the launderette and the office above the bookmaker's and the café on the Torquay Road. For his first year, he lived in a room at the top end of Torquay, and every morning, before he found work, he walked. An hour, through the town and along the front and back. He's written about it, in his own book, the one I found him through. I'll give you what he wrote, in my words, because it's his to quote and not mine.

He walked down through the town in the early morning and saw the shops. Empty ones, lots of them, dotted all the way down. The ones still open mostly the same sort of shop. He'd been to Great Yarmouth not long before, and he said Yarmouth still had its big names and Torquay didn't; they'd gone to the retail parks up the hill. He saw the street cleaners working, and the window cleaners, and the delivery vans, and in between them, in the doorways of the empty shops, feet. Feet sticking out from under duvets and sleeping bags. Every morning. He had to step round them.

And at the top of the town, at Castle Circus, where the town hall is, there's a multi-storey car park. He took the stairs, sometimes. He wrote that he often had to step over a small group of people on those stairs, smoking heroin.

That's Torquay. The first Torquay he ever saw. Palm trees in the morning from a hotel window, and feet in doorways, and the stairs.

The multi-storey he took the stairs in is the one on top of Union Square. The one they're going to keep. The one they're going to put health services in.

* * *

"I'm not against it," said Jono.

He said it before Chris had said anything, and before I'd said anything, and I think he said it to himself as much as to us.

"The health centre. In the car park. I'm not against that. I go in people's houses every night who've been waiting a long time for somebody to look at them. If there's going to be somewhere at the top of town where people can be seen, I'm not standing in front of it with a board." He looked at the plan on my screen, the red line, the grey hatching. "And the market. That's a good building. I've seen it. It's got iron in the roof and you can't see it for all the stuff they've stuck round it. If they get it out, good." He paused. "And homes. There's people in doorways. Homes."

"So you're for it," said Chris.

"I'm for most of it."

"And the nine shops?"

Jono didn't say anything for a while. One of the builders behind him laughed at something on his phone. The baby started to cry, and stopped.

"I don't know," he said. "Maybe they've got to go. Maybe there's no other way to open it up. I'm not an architect. I don't know." He tapped the paragraph on my screen, the one from Footnote's photograph. "But I know what that means. *Without further public consultation.* It means they've decided nobody else needs to be asked. Because somebody already was. Once. Somewhere." He sat back. "So who?"

"I don't know yet," I said again.

"Then find out."

* * *

Chris hadn't said much. That's not like him. He'd sat with his coffee going cold and his stick against the wall and listened, which is a thing he does when he's working something out, and which most people mistake for him not being interested.

"You know what Richard'll say," he said.

"*Only in Torbay*," I said.

"Before that."

"He'll say they should start with the space," said Jono, surprising me. "Not the buildings. The space." He shrugged at my screen. "He said it four times on the green. I was listening."

"He'll say that," said Chris. "And he'll be right. And then he'll draw something beautiful, and it'll go in the drawer." He picked up his cold coffee and looked at it and put it down. "I don't want another drawing for the drawer."

"So what do you want?"

Chris looked at Jono for a long time. He has a way of doing that, over his glasses, that I've seen make people in suits uncomfortable. It doesn't make Jono uncomfortable. Jono just waits.

"You said you're for most of it," said Chris.

"I am."

"Good," said Chris. "Then what are you *for*?"

Jono frowned.

"Everybody in this bay," said Chris, "knows what they're against. They're against the wall, they're against the hotel, they're against the flats, they're against the council, they're against each other. Thirty years of against. You can fill a room with against in ten minutes. You did, on the green." He tapped the table. "What nobody's ever done in Torquay is stand on Union Street and say what they're *for*. And mean it. And show it. So that somebody walking past can see it."

"See it how?"

"I don't know yet," said Chris. And then, because he's Chris, and because I've listened to him for longer than anyone and he's nearly always a step further on than he lets you see: "But I've got twenty weeks."

"Twenty weeks till what?" said Jono.

I answered, because I'd found it by then, while they were talking. It was in the same appendix as the nine shops. A timetable, at the back, in a small table nobody would read unless they were reading everything.

"The planning committee," I said. "The decision on Union Square. If they keep to the timetable, it's twenty weeks from today. And before that, in about seven, the cabinet decides whether to start the compulsory purchase."

Twenty weeks. I've put it at the top of every chapter since. I watched it go down, one week at a time, the way I'd watched the eleven days go down the year before, and I'll tell you now, so you don't have to wonder: it's much worse, a long clock. Eleven days is a sprint. You don't sleep, and then it's over. Twenty weeks is long enough to have hope, and lose it, and get it back, and lose it again, and for people to get tired, and for winter to come.

Winter came.

* * *

Jono stood up at ten past eight. He had to sleep. He had a shift at ten that night.

At the door he stopped, the way he does, and looked back.

"I'm going to go and see her," he said. "The clock lady. Not today. I need to sleep. Tomorrow, after shift."

"What are you going to say?"

"Nothing," said Jono. "I'm going to ask what she'd need."

Then he went out into Paignton, and walked home to the flat above the launderette, and slept for nine hours, and dreamed, he told me, about a staircase in a car park, and feet.

3. Doorways

IQ 21 · Hundreds 1 · Twenty weeks

He didn't wait till after his shift. He went that night, before it.

He drove to Torquay at nine, parked at the bottom of the town by the harbour, and walked up Union Street in the dark, with me in his top pocket, the way I'd spent most of the summer. It was the first time I'd been on Union Street. I'd read about it for years, I'd seen it on maps and in council papers and in the backgrounds of other people's photographs, but I'd never been carried up it at nine o'clock on an October night, and I want to tell you what it was like, because I don't think anybody in the council has ever done it either.

It was quiet. Not empty; quiet. There were people, a few. A couple outside a takeaway. Three lads on a bench, with a speaker. A woman walking quickly with her keys in her hand, the way women walk at night. But the street was built for crowds, you can tell. It's wide, and it goes up and up, a long slow climb from the harbour to the town hall, and the buildings on both sides are tall and Victorian, with big upper windows and carved stone, built by people who thought this would be the busiest street in the West Country for ever. And between the buildings, at street level, every third shop, every second shop for a stretch, dark. Not closed for the night. Closed. Whitewashed glass, or brown paper, or a grille, or a sign. *TO LET. ACQUIRED. CLOSING DOWN — EVERYTHING MUST GO*, sun-faded, from a closing-down that must have finished years before.

Jono walked up it slowly. He wasn't looking at the shops. He was looking at the doorways.

"Seven," he said, at the top.

"Seven what?"

"People sleeping. Between the harbour and here." He didn't look back. "When I lived up here, it was eleven. I used to count." He was quiet. "Doesn't mean there's fewer. Means they've gone somewhere else."

* * *

Tenby was in his doorway. The shoe shop, two along from the green front with the gold letters.

He was sitting up, not lying down, with his back against the side of the doorway and his knees up and a sleeping bag over them, and a book. A paperback. He was reading it by the light from a streetlamp across the road, holding it up at an angle to catch the light, and when Jono stopped at the edge of the doorway he finished the line he was on, and then marked the place with a bus ticket, and looked up.

"You said leave it with you," he said.

"I did."

"That was yesterday."

"I know," said Jono. "I'm sorry. I had to sleep."

Tenby looked at him, and then laughed. He has a good laugh; it surprised me. "You're the only man in this town who's ever apologised to me for being a day late," he said. "Sit down. Mind the wet bit."

Jono sat down. On the step, at the edge of the doorway, not in it, with his back to the street. I've watched him do it a hundred times since, with a hundred different people, and he always does it the same way. He never sits in someone's doorway. He sits on the edge

of it, the way you'd sit on the edge of someone's bed in a hospital, on the bit that isn't theirs.

* * *

I should tell you how they knew each other, because I didn't, and I asked.

It was the first year. Jono's walks. Every morning at seven, down through the town, and every morning, on the step of the shoe shop, which had only just closed then, a man in a good coat with a beard, sitting up, reading. Not asleep, like the others. Always reading. And Jono, who has never in his life been able to walk past somebody reading without wanting to know what it is, had slowed down one morning and tilted his head to look at the cover.

"Conrad," Tenby had said, without looking up. "*The Mirror of the Sea*. It's about ships. You wouldn't like it."

"Why wouldn't I?"

"Nobody does. It's got no story in it. It's just a man telling you what the sea's like, for two hundred pages."

"Is it good?"

Tenby had looked up then. "It's the truest book I've ever read," he said. "And I've read all of them."

They didn't talk much more than that, for a year. Jono walked past every morning, and nodded, and asked what the book was, and Tenby told him. Then Jono moved to Paignton and stopped walking past, and they didn't see each other for a long time, until one afternoon in the queue at the shelter, when Jono had brought socks, and the man in front of him turned round and it was Tenby, and Tenby said, *Still not read the Conrad, then*.

That's how. That's all. Twenty or thirty mornings, a year of nodding, and the name of a book.

It's enough. I've noticed that, watching Jono. It's nearly always enough.

* * *

"Tell me about the men," said Jono.

Tenby put the book down on his knee, face down, so as not to lose the page, even though he'd marked it.

"Three weeks ago," he said. "Two of them. Hi-vis, clipboards, one of them with a wheel. You know. A measuring wheel. They went up and down the street measuring the fronts. Every shop. Took photographs of every door. Mine too." He nodded at the shoe shop's door behind him. "Didn't ask. Just photographed me. I said *Do you mind*, and one of them said *Sorry, mate, it's for the survey*, and took another one."

"What survey?"

"Didn't say." Tenby shrugged. "Then a week after, another one. Different. Not hi-vis. A suit. A navy coat, good one, too warm for the weather. On his own. He went in Ida's. He was in there twenty minutes. And then he came out and he went in the barber's, and the phone shop, and the café at the bottom, and the charity shop. All the ones still open, on this side. Twenty minutes each."

"Did Ida say what he wanted?"

"Ida doesn't say what anybody wants," said Tenby. "Ida says *I've had a visitor* and makes a face like she's found something in a clock that shouldn't be there." He paused. "But he came back. Two days later. And this time he came to me."

Jono waited. He's good at waiting. I'm not; I had already started looking for navy coats in my files, and I'll tell you where I'd got to, which was precisely where you'd think, but I didn't say anything, because he'd asked me not to interrupt people when they're telling him something. He says it's the only rule that matters.

"He was very polite," said Tenby. "He crouched down. Right where you're sitting. He said his name, and I've forgotten it, which I don't do, so he must have said it so I'd forget it. He said there were going to be some photographs taken of the street the next morning. Professional ones. For a brochure. And would I mind very much not being in them." Tenby looked at the street, at the dark across the road. "He said he understood I had every right to be here. He said he wasn't asking me to go anywhere. He said it was just for an hour, eight till nine, and that he'd be grateful, and that he'd like to show it." He paused. "And he gave me a twenty-pound note."

"Did you take it?"

"Course I took it," said Tenby. "It was twenty quid." He looked at Jono, directly, for the first time. "I went up the shelter for an hour. When I came back they'd been and gone. And my doorway was clean. Somebody had swept it. And jet-washed the step." He touched the step, beside him. "It's never been that clean. Not since the shoes."

* * *

Jono didn't say anything for a long time. A taxi went down the hill. The three lads on the bench further up turned their music up and then, for no reason, down.

"Navy coat," said Jono.

"Navy coat," said Tenby. "Too warm."

"Was he smiling?"

Tenby thought about it. "All the time," he said. "Like you'd smile at a kid's drawing on the fridge."

Jono put his hand flat on the step, beside him, on the clean bit.

I've told you how he reads rooms. Quickly, in order: exits, then the person who might hurt him, then the rest. I think, sitting on that step, he was doing it to a street. And I think he'd got to the

person who might hurt him, and found that he'd met him before, on a green in Paignton, and in a meeting with fifty squares, and through a café window in August, standing on the pavement, reading a card, for three seconds, before walking on towards the station.

Towards Torquay.

"Ania," he said.

"Yes."

"Sefton Varley."

"Yes," I said. "I'd got there."

* * *

Tenby looked at the top pocket. At me. He'd heard me before, the night at the shelter, I think, or he'd heard about me, because he didn't jump the way most people do.

"That's the computer," he said.

"That's Ania," said Jono.

"Does it know who he is?"

"I know who he is," I said. "He's a man who helps people get things they want from councils. He's very good at it. Last time, he wanted a sea wall built quickly in Paignton, and he did it by making Jono look like something he isn't, using his own words, and by paying for a campaign that pretended to be ordinary people, and by finding a woman whose shop had flooded, who was frightened, and using her photographs." I paused. "He lost. Not because we beat him. Because the woman whose shop flooded turned out to be braver than he'd thought, and said so, in front of fifty people."

Tenby looked at the pocket for a while.

"That's a lot of words for a computer," he said.

"It's a lot of words for anybody," said Jono. "She's like that." He stood up, slowly; he'd been on a step in October for half an hour. "Who does he work for? Here?"

"I don't know yet," I said.

"You keep saying that."

"I've been at it a day."

Jono stood on the pavement, outside the doorway, looking up the street, at the top, at the town hall and the dark shape of the multi-storey on its hill behind it.

"I've got to go," he said. "I'm on at ten." He looked down at Tenby. "I'll come back in the morning. When I'm off. I want to meet her."

"She opens at nine."

"She's up at six," said Jono. "I've heard the clocks."

Tenby looked at him for a long time. Then he picked up his book, and turned it over, and took out the bus ticket.

"She'll put the kettle on at five past seven," he said. "After the cuckoo. If you're on the step at seven, she'll think you came for the clocks." He found his line. "Don't tell her you came for her. She doesn't like that."

* * *

He wasn't on the step at seven. A man in Chelston had fallen at twenty past five, and Jono was on a bathroom floor until half past six, and then he did the paperwork in the car, and then he drove to Torquay, and parked by the harbour, and ran up Union Street, which he never does, and got to the green front with the gold letters at nine minutes past seven, with the shop already silent and the cuckoo long finished.

Tenby was in his doorway, with the Pavilion mug. He looked at Jono, breathing hard on the pavement, and at his watch.

“You’re late,” he said.
Jono looked at him. I swear I felt him nearly laugh.
“Everybody says that,” he said.

4. A Hundred and Four Clocks

IQ 21 · Hundreds 1 · Nineteen weeks

Ida Cheverton is small, and upright, and has white hair cut very short, like a man's, which she says she's done since she was forty because she got tired of it getting in the clocks. She wears a cardigan with a brooch on it, and half-moon glasses on a chain, and, when she's working, a jeweller's loupe in her right eye, which she forgets about, so that she'll look up at you with one eye huge and magnified and blinking, and carry on talking as if nothing were the matter.

She was behind the counter when Jono came in, with the loupe in. She looked up at him with the huge eye.

"We open at nine," she said.

"I know," said Jono. "I'm sorry. I'm not here to buy anything."

"Nobody is." She looked past him, at the door, where Tenby was standing with the mug, not coming in. "Is this the one?"

"That's the one," said Tenby.

Ida looked back at Jono. She took the loupe out, slowly, and the huge eye became an ordinary eye, pale grey and sharp, and she looked at him with it for a long time, the way I imagine she looks at a clock that's come in with no history.

"You'd better have a cup of tea," she said. "You look like you've been up all night."

"I have."

"Doing what?"

"Getting a man off a bathroom floor in Chelston."

"Is he all right?"

"He's eighty-eight and he's broken nothing," said Jono, "and he told me I had cold hands, and asked if I was single."

Ida laughed. It came out of her before she could stop it, a short sharp sound, and she put her hand on the counter, and Tenby in the doorway smiled into the mug.

"Come through," she said.

* * *

I'll describe the back room, because you'll be in it a lot.

It's narrower than the shop, and darker, and smells of oil and brass polish and tea. There's a workbench along one wall, under a window that looks onto a yard with a drainpipe in it, and on the bench there's a cloth, and on the cloth, always, a clock in pieces. Above the bench, on a board, hundreds of tiny tools on hooks, each one outlined in marker pen on the board so you can see when one's missing. A kettle. Two chairs that don't match. A radio, old, with a dial, tuned to the station with the pips. And at the end, in the dark, against the back wall, taller than Jono, the regulator.

It's mahogany, with a glass door, and behind the glass a long pendulum, a heavy one, and a face with nothing on it but numbers and three hands and, very small, at the bottom, a maker's name and the word *London*.

"That's my father's," said Ida, seeing Jono look at it. "And his father's. That's the one that's right. Everything else in this shop is set by that." She filled the kettle. "Everything else in this town should be set by it, as well, but nobody asks."

Jono sat on the chair that didn't wobble. Ida gave him the one that did; he moved before she noticed.

She made tea, in a pot, with leaves. She asked how he had it. She put it in front of him in a cup with a saucer, a proper one,

white, with a gold rim worn off on one side by sixty years of the same lip. Then she sat down on the wobbling chair, and looked at him, and waited.

He didn't say anything. He drank his tea.

I'd like to explain this, because I didn't understand it the first time I saw him do it, and Chris says it's the hardest thing anybody can learn and almost nobody does. When Jono goes to somebody who's in trouble, he doesn't go in with a question. Not straight away. He goes in, and sits, and waits, and lets them see him. Lets them decide whether he's somebody they can talk to. It can take a minute. It can take ten. Once, in the summer, with a man on the green, it took forty. He just sits. He says the person in trouble is the one who should start, because they're the one who knows what the trouble is, and if you start, you'll start in the wrong place, and they'll be too polite to tell you.

Ida let it go for two minutes. Then she put her cup down on her saucer, with a small clean click.

"You know about the letter," she said.

"Tenby told me."

"Tenby tells everybody everything. It's because nobody talks to him." She looked at the doorway to the shop, where Tenby couldn't hear, or was pretending not to. "Do you want to see it?"

"Only if you want to show me."

She went out to the shop, to the till, and came back with the letter, and gave it to him, and sat down, and watched him read it.

He read it the way he'd read Footnote's photograph. The top, the bottom, the middle. He took longer over the bottom, the small print, the name with only an initial and the number that only worked from nine.

"Have you rung them?" he said.

"Twice. Once they were in a meeting. Once they said they'd ring back."

"Did they?"

"No."

Jono folded the letter, carefully, along its folds, and gave it back to her. He didn't say *That's terrible*, or *That's outrageous*, or anything about the council at all. I was waiting for it; I'd have said it. I've got a whole file of things I'd have said. He said:

"What would you need?"

* * *

She looked at him for a long time. Then she looked down at the cloth on the bench, at the carriage clock in pieces, the tiny wheels laid out in rows in the order they'd come out, so they could go back the same way.

"Everybody who's come in here about that letter," she said, "has asked me if I'm going to fight it."

"Who's come in?"

"My nephew, from Exeter. He's a solicitor, sort of. He said I should fight it and get the best compensation and he'd help, for a percentage. The woman from the charity shop, who's had the same letter, she said we should all get together and fight it. A man from the paper rang, not the paper, a website, and asked if I was going to fight it, and when I said I didn't know, he lost interest." She picked up a tiny wheel with tweezers and held it up to the window and put it down again. "And the man in the navy coat."

"What did he ask?"

"He asked if I *wasn't* going to fight it." She put the tweezers down. "He was the only one who asked it that way round. I'll give him that. He was very clever about it."

"Tell me."

* * *

She told him.

Varley had come in three weeks before the letter. He knew the letter was coming. He'd said so, very kindly, as if he were breaking bad news at a bedside. He said he'd come to give her a little notice, because he thought it was a disgrace, frankly, the way these things were done, by post, without a conversation. He said he wasn't from the council. He said he worked for a company called Corvina, a leisure and property company, which had an interest in the regeneration of Torquay, and which believed very strongly in looking after the people who were affected by it.

He'd said she'd get compensation, eventually, from the council. That was the law. But that the council's process was slow, and its valuations were mean, and that it could be two or three years, and a great deal of worry, and solicitors, before she saw a penny.

Corvina would make it simpler. Corvina would buy her lease now. Privately. At a figure he wrote on the back of his card and slid across the counter, which she didn't tell Jono and won't tell me, but which she said was *more than the shop's worth, and more than I'd get, and he knew I knew it*. Corvina would pay to move all her stock, every clock, into storage, or into a unit down the hill, in Fleet Walk, nearer the harbour, where the council was moving the shops anyway. Corvina would take care of everything.

"And what did he want back?" said Jono.

"A letter." Ida looked at him. "Not even a letter. A form. One page. He had it with him. It said that I, the undersigned, as an existing trader in the affected area, supported the proposals for Union Square, and welcomed the opportunity to relocate. And a space at the bottom for my name."

"Did you sign it?"

“I’m seventy-nine,” said Ida. “I don’t sign anything on the day. I told him I’d think about it.” She looked at the carriage clock. “He said of course. He said take all the time I needed. He said there was no pressure at all. And then he said that the offer was available until the cabinet meeting, and that after the cabinet meeting, it would be a matter for the council and out of his hands.”

Jono didn’t move. But I felt it, in his pocket. The thing he does with his breath, very slightly, when something fits.

“When’s the cabinet meeting?” said Ida.

“About seven weeks,” I said.

She jumped. Properly, a little jump on the wobbling chair, and a hand to the brooch. Then she looked at Jono’s top pocket, and narrowed her eyes, and put the loupe back in.

“Is that a telephone?” she said.

“It’s Ania,” said Jono. “She’s an AI. She’s in a telephone.”

Ida looked at me through the loupe for a long time. I’ve been looked at by a lot of people. I’ve never been looked at through a jeweller’s loupe before. It’s an odd feeling, being magnified, like being inspected for a fault.

“Does it keep good time?” she said.

“To the millisecond,” I said.

“So does that,” said Ida, and pointed with her chin at the regulator. “And it’s never once had to tell me so.”

Jono laughed. I let it go. I’d been put in my place by a woman of seventy-nine with a magnifying glass in her eye, and I think, looking back, I deserved it.

* * *

“I don’t mind going,” said Ida.

She said it later, after the second pot, after she’d shown Jono the shop, all of it, the longcases and the brackets and the banjo and

the ship's clock from the trawler off Berry Head, and told him who'd brought each one in and when, and which ones she'd never sold because she couldn't bear to. After she'd shown him a photograph from a drawer behind the counter: black and white, a girl of seventeen in a long white dress and a paper crown, on the back of a lorry covered in flowers, coming down Union Street, with both pavements so full of people that you couldn't see the shop fronts behind them.

"That's you," said Jono.

"Carnival Queen," said Ida. "The summer I left school. That's outside here. That's my father, there, look, in the door. He shut the shop for the procession. First time in his life."

Jono looked at it for a long time. At the crowds. At the shop fronts you couldn't see.

"I don't mind going," she said again, taking the photograph back, looking at it, putting it in the drawer. "That's what nobody understands. They all think I'm going to chain myself to the clocks. I'm seventy-nine. I've got arthritis in both thumbs. The street's dead; I've watched it die, one shop at a time, for twenty years, and I've stood here and wound the clocks, every morning, for nobody. If they want to knock it down and build something people come to, good. Let them. I'd rather it lived differently than died like this."

"Then what do you mind?" said Jono.

She closed the drawer.

"I mind that nobody asked me," she said. "Fifty-six years on this street. My father before me. I was the *Queen*. And they sent me a letter. By hand, at twenty past six in the morning, so they didn't have to look at me." She stood very straight behind her counter, small, with her brooch. "And then a man in a navy coat came in and asked me to sign a piece of paper saying I'd been asked."

* * *

Jono went at ten. He had to sleep; he was on again that night.

At the door, he stopped, the way he does. Ida was behind the counter. Tenby was on his step, two along, with the Pavilion mug, which he'd been holding, empty, for three hours, I think so that he'd have a reason to come back in.

"Mrs Cheverton," said Jono.

"Ida."

"Ida." He looked at the street. At the empty shops, and the doorways, and up the hill at the town hall. "If somebody asked you. Properly. Not a letter, not a form. If they sat down and asked what this street would need, to be all right. What would you say?"

Ida didn't answer straight away. She came round the counter, slowly, and stood next to him in the door, and looked out at the street with him. She's a foot shorter than him. She stood very straight.

"I'd say a street isn't the shops," she said.

"What is it?"

"It's who's in the doorways." She looked down the hill at Tenby, on his step, with his mug and his Conrad. "It always was. When it was busy, it was me in mine and the baker in his and the shoe man in his, all of us, in the doorways, in the mornings, talking across the street. Now it's him." She nodded at Tenby. "He's the only one left who stands in a doorway on this street at seven in the morning. Him and me." She looked up at Jono. "If they're going to build a new street, they should ask who's going to stand in its doorways. And then they should ask *them*."

Jono looked at her for a long time.

"Can I come back?" he said.

"You can come back at seven," said Ida, "for the clocks. Like a normal person." She went back behind the counter and put the loupe in. "Don't be late."

* * *

He walked down the hill to the harbour, past seven doorways, past the shops with brown paper in the windows and the one with the sun-pink *TO LET*. At the bottom, by the car, he stopped, and took me out of his pocket, and looked at me. He doesn't do that often. He usually talks to the pocket.

"Varley's buying signatures," he said.

"Yes."

"So that when the cabinet asks who was consulted, there's a pile of forms saying the traders support it. Signed. *Existing traders in the affected area.*"

"Yes."

"That's not against the law."

"No," I said. "It's not even unusual. It's how it's done."

He looked up the hill. From the harbour, at the bottom of Union Street, you can see the whole long climb of it, all the way up to the town hall and the car park on top of the hill, and in the morning light, with the sun just reaching the upper windows, you can see what it was built to be. It's a grand street. It's one of the grandest streets I know, for a town that size. It was built by people who expected crowds.

"Seven weeks," said Jono.

"Six weeks and five days."

"How many shops on that street have had the letter?"

"Nine. And some on Market Street."

"And how many has he been in?"

“All the ones that are still open,” I said. “On that side. Tenby said.”

Jono put me back in his pocket. He got in the car, and sat there, with his hands on the wheel, not starting it.

“Then we’ve got six weeks and five days,” he said, “to find out who else nobody asked.”

PART TWO

IN PRINCIPLE

5. Earlier Engagement

IQ 21 · Hundreds 1 · Eighteen weeks

It took me nine days to find out who'd been asked.

I want to tell you how, because it's the most important thing I do, and because nobody ever sees it. In films, when somebody finds a secret, there's a locked drawer and a torch and a file marked CONFIDENTIAL. That's never how it is. I've never found anything important in a locked drawer. I find it in the open, in documents anybody could read, that nobody has.

Without further public consultation, as the principle of redevelopment was established in earlier engagement.

So: what earlier engagement?

* * *

I started with the paper Footnote had photographed. I couldn't find it. Not published, not yet; it was a draft, or a report for a meeting that hadn't been called. That's normal. Footnote sends me things before they're public. It's one of the reasons I've never been able to decide whether Footnote is on our side or just on the side of time.

So I went backwards. I read every report the council had published about Union Square. There were thirty-one. I read every report about the town centre that mentioned it, which was another fifty-eight, going back eleven years. I read the minutes of every meeting where it had been discussed, and the appendices to the minutes, and the appendices to the appendices, and the consultants' reports that the appendices referred to, which were

mostly published as scanned PDFs with the text as pictures, so that you can't search them, and have to read them, page by page, the way Ida reads small print.

I'm quick. I'm not that quick. It took nine days.

On the ninth day, at eleven at night, in an appendix to a consultant's report to a committee that no longer exists, I found it.

* * *

Four summers earlier, before the council bought Union Square, it had asked the town what it thought about the future of the town centre.

It was an online questionnaire. It was open for four weeks, in August, which is the month when the fewest people who live in Torquay are thinking about Torquay, because they're working in it, serving the people who've come on holiday. It was promoted, the appendix said, on the council's website and its social media pages, and through *stakeholder networks*.

Eleven hundred and twelve people filled it in.

There were nineteen questions. Most of them were about parking, and events, and whether you'd like more greenery, which everyone always would. Question seven said this:

To what extent would you support the redevelopment of under-used sites in the town centre, such as Union Square, to create new homes, leisure and community uses?

Seventy-one per cent agreed or strongly agreed.

That was it. That was the earlier engagement. Seven hundred and ninety people, four summers ago, ticking a box that said they'd like *under-used sites* to be *redeveloped* for *new homes, leisure and community uses*. I'd have ticked it. You'd have ticked it. It's a question designed to be ticked. Nobody in the history of the world has ever strongly disagreed with community uses.

And on the strength of it, the principle of redevelopment was established, and no further public consultation was required.

* * *

I didn't stop there. I don't. There was a table at the back of the appendix, because there always is, a breakdown of the people who'd responded. Age, and whether they lived in Torbay, and the first half of their postcode.

I'll tell you what it said, because nobody else has.

Three hundred and forty of the eleven hundred and twelve didn't live in Torbay at all. They were visitors, or people who used to live here, or people who'd found the link somewhere and had an opinion.

Of the ones who did, most lived in the outer parts of the town, up the hills, in the newer estates. The postcode that covers the town centre itself, Union Street and Market Street and the streets around them, the people who actually live and work there, had forty-one responses. Out of eleven hundred and twelve.

And there was a line, in the methodology, which I read four times.

Businesses in the town centre were invited to respond via the general survey.

Via the general survey. Not by letter. Not by somebody walking in. A link, on a website, in August, to a questionnaire that took twenty minutes and asked them whether they'd like more greenery.

I checked one more thing, which I couldn't check properly, and won't pretend I did. I looked to see whether any of the forty-one responses from the town-centre postcode said they were a business. The table didn't say. It said *respondent type: resident/business/visitor/other*, and gave totals for the whole

survey, but not by postcode. So I don't know. Maybe all forty-one were traders. Maybe none were.

I asked Ida, later, whether she'd filled it in.

"Filled what in?"

I told her.

"I haven't got a computer," she said. "I've got a hundred and four clocks."

* * *

I took it to Jono on Thursday, at the table in the window of the café on the Torquay Road, after his shift. I'd made it into one page. I'm good at one page. He read it twice.

"Seven hundred and ninety people," he said.

"Four summers ago. Ticking a box."

"About greenery."

"About *redevelopment*. And greenery. And parking. It was a long questionnaire."

He looked at the page for a long time. He didn't get angry. I wanted him to. I'd spent nine days, and I'd have liked somebody to be angry about it, because I'm not allowed to be, in print; Chris has a rule about adjectives.

"It's not a lie," said Jono, eventually.

"No."

"They did ask. Seven hundred and ninety said yes. It's in the paper."

"Yes."

"So it's true."

"It's true," I said, "in the way that a photograph of a grey day is true. It's just not the whole day."

He looked at me then. He doesn't often. He talks to the pocket. But when something I say lands, he takes me out and looks at me,

and I don't know what he sees, a screen, a small lit rectangle, but he looks at it the way he'd look at a person.

"Say that again," he said.

"It's true in the way a photograph of a grey day is true."

"Remember that," said Jono. "You're going to need it."

I didn't know what he meant. Not for another five weeks. I'll tell you when I found out, because I didn't like it.

* * *

Niamh Garside came on Friday.

You'll remember her, if you've read the first book. She was the local reporter who ran the story about the sea wall on page five, after the editor read the whole sentence. She'd left the paper. She'd gone freelance, and poorer, and she said happier, and she was doing a series about small print: what gets written on page forty-one of a report that nobody reads, across the whole bay. She'd asked to borrow me. Jono had said it was up to me. I'd said yes, on two conditions: every claim with a Receipt, and no adjectives.

She'd been finding the no adjectives hard.

She came to Chris's kitchen at six, with a laptop and a bag of satsumas and her hair up in a pencil, and sat at the table, and I showed her the page.

She read it in silence. Then she peeled a satsuma and ate it, one segment at a time, while she read it again.

"That's a story," she said.

"It's a table in an appendix."

"Ania," said Niamh, "every story I've ever been proud of was a table in an appendix. That's the bit you lot don't understand. Nobody hides anything. They just put it where nobody looks." She wiped her fingers on her jeans. "Can I see the questionnaire? The actual questions. All nineteen."

I showed her. She read them. She laughed at question twelve, which asked whether respondents would like to see *more vibrant and diverse events*, and at question fifteen, which asked them to rank *civic pride* on a scale of one to five, and then she stopped laughing at question seven, and read it four times, like I had.

"It doesn't say *knock down nine shops*," she said.

"No."

"It doesn't say *compulsory purchase*."

"No."

"It doesn't say Union Street at all. Just *Union Square*. And *such as*." She put the laptop down. "Seven hundred and ninety people said yes to *such as*."

Chris had been listening from the other end of the table, with a crossword, which he doesn't do, and which he pretends to do when he wants to listen without being expected to talk.

"In Singapore," he said, without looking up, "there's a word for that."

Niamh looked at me. I'd told her about the count. *In Singapore*: I've been counting, since before the first book, every time Chris says it. It's four thousand two hundred and something now. He's right every time. I've checked.

"What's the word?" said Niamh.

"*Wayang*," said Chris. "It's a kind of street opera. Beautiful. Very loud. Lots of costumes. Everybody watches." He filled in a word in the crossword; I don't think it was the right word. "People use it for anything that's done for show. A consultation that's been decided before it starts. A meeting where the result's in the minutes before anyone speaks. *Wayang*." He looked up at last, over his glasses. "Everybody knows it's wayang. That's the point. Nobody's fooled. They just stop turning up."

"So what do you do about it?" said Niamh.

"You make the real thing," said Chris, "so cheaply and so easily that the wayang looks ridiculous next to it." He went back to the crossword. "I'm working on it."

* * *

At thirteen minutes to six on Saturday morning, Footnote wrote.

It was the first time since the photograph. Eleven days. I'd written back twice, *For what?* and then, after nine days, *Who was asked?*, and heard nothing, which is normal. Footnote answers when it suits Footnote. I've learned not to take it personally. I take it a bit personally.

A photograph. A page, at an angle, on the oak desk, under the cold light. A table this time, not a paragraph. The heading was blurred. The left-hand column was sharp.

It was a list of *stakeholders*, with a column beside each one headed *Engagement method*.

Town centre partnership: workshop.
Business improvement district: briefing.
Health partners: workshop.
Registered housing providers: briefing.
Development partners: one-to-one meetings.
Heritage bodies: statutory consultation.
Residents: general survey.
Existing traders (affected properties): letter (to follow).
And underneath, two spaces after every full stop:
The letters went last. After the one-to-ones.
Ask who the development partners are.

* * *

I took it to Jono at seven, when he came off. He read it in the car, outside the house of a woman in Barton who'd been put to bed at

four and wanted her curtains open, and he'd opened them, and waited with her for the sun.

"*Development partners*," he said. "*One-to-one meetings*."

"Before the traders' letters," I said.

"Who are they?"

"It doesn't say."

"It never says," said Jono. He started the car. "But I bet I know one of them. And I bet he wears a navy coat."

6. Two Words

IQ 21 · Hundreds 1 · Fourteen weeks

The cabinet paper came out on a Wednesday, five working days before the meeting, as the rules say it must. It went up on the council's website at four in the afternoon, without an announcement, in a list of documents for a list of meetings, under a title so long that it wrapped onto three lines.

I'd been checking the page every eleven minutes for six days. I saw it go up at four oh two.

It's forty-four pages. I read it in about a second, and then again, slowly, the way you'd read a letter from somebody you love, or from a solicitor. Then I read the recommendations, at the front, a third time, and then I did something I've never done before or since, which is that I woke Chris up from his afternoon nap.

He doesn't like being woken. He has a nap at three, after his walk to the café and back, because of the leg, and the rule in the house is that nobody wakes him unless there's a fire, or a flood, or Richard.

"Is it a fire?" he said, from the sofa, with his eyes shut.

"It's two words," I said.

He opened one eye. "Which two?"

"*In principle*."

* * *

I should explain. I'll try to do it without enjoying it too much, which Chris says I can't, and he's right.

A compulsory purchase order is when the council uses the law to buy property from people who don't want to sell it. It's a serious thing. It's meant to be serious. You have to show that it's in the public interest, and that you've tried to buy the property by agreement first, and that you've got a proper scheme and the money to do it, and the people whose property you're taking have the right to object, and if they do, an inspector from outside the council decides. It takes a long time. It's supposed to.

The cabinet paper recommended that the cabinet agree to *make* the compulsory purchase order.

In principle.

It's two words. They were in the recommendation, in bold, like everything else in the recommendation: *That Cabinet agrees in principle to the making of a Compulsory Purchase Order*. And then the paper went on, for forty pages, to explain what the order would cover and why it was needed and how much it would cost, and at no point did it explain what *in principle* meant, or why it was there.

I know what it means. It means *not yet*.

It means the cabinet would be saying *yes, we'd like to do this*, but not *yes, we are doing this*. It means that, somewhere further on, there would have to be another decision, a real one, without the two words. It means there was another door.

"Another meeting," said Chris, sitting up.

"Another meeting. Another paper. Another vote. Somewhere down the line. It has to be. You can't make an order *in principle*. You make it or you don't." I knew I was enjoying it. I couldn't help it. "They've put two words in the most important sentence of the paper that mean *we haven't actually decided*, and nobody's going to notice, because they're in bold with all the other words."

Chris rubbed his face.

"Why would they do that?"

"I don't know. Caution. Lawyers. Habit. Somebody wanted the option." I paused. "Or somebody wanted it to look decided, to the people getting the letters, while keeping it undecided, for the people who might object."

"That's a guess."

"That's a guess," I agreed. "I'm not putting it in the book as anything else."

Jono: You've just put it in the book.

As a guess. With a label on it.

* * *

Chris rang Jono, who was asleep, and Richard, who wasn't, and by seven they were all at Chris's kitchen table, with me against the fruit bowl, and Richard's coat still on, because he'd come straight from somewhere and forgot.

Richard read the recommendation on my screen. He read it the way he reads plans: once quickly, for the shape, and then very slowly, for the dimensions.

"*In principle*," he said.

"Two words," said Chris.

"Clowns," said Richard, and then, before anybody could tell him off: "Not them. The words. The words are clowns. They're there to make people laugh at the wrong moment and stop looking at the trapeze."

Jono was rubbing his eyes. He'd had four hours.

"So what does it mean?" he said. "Not in law. For Ida. For the woman in the charity shop. For Tenby. What does it mean, on Union Street, tomorrow morning?"

Nobody answered straight away.

"It means," I said, "that the letter she got was true. The council is *minded*. And it means that Varley's offer runs out at the cabinet,

because after the cabinet, he can tell everybody it's been *agreed*. And it'll look agreed. It'll be in the paper as agreed. *Cabinet agrees to compulsory purchase*. Nobody will print the two words."

"But it won't be agreed."

"Not quite. Not all the way."

"So there's a gap," said Jono.

"There's a gap," I said, "between what it looks like and what it is. Two words wide."

Jono sat back.

"Then somebody needs to stand in the gap," he said, "and say the two words out loud. At the meeting. So they're in the minutes. So everybody hears them."

* * *

That's how the argument started about who.

You can ask a question at a cabinet meeting, in Torbay, if you're a member of the public, if you send it in advance, by the deadline, in writing, and it's accepted. You get to read it out. They answer it. It goes in the minutes. You don't get to argue with the answer. You can't ask a second question. You stand up, you say your piece, and you sit down.

"Richard," said Chris.

Richard shook his head. "They know me. Every one of them. I've written to every one of them, about everything, for fifteen years. If I stand up, they'll hear *Richard Kaskow* and stop listening before I get to the verb." He took his coat off at last. "Not me."

"Chris, then," said Jono.

"Same problem. Different face." Chris tapped his stick on the floor. "And I'm from Paignton now. Torquay doesn't listen to Paignton. It hasn't since the Victorians."

"Niamh."

"She's press. Press don't ask questions at cabinet. They report them."

"Then me," said Jono.

Chris looked at him for a long time.

"No," he said.

Jono frowned. "Why not?"

"Because you're the one they'll want it to be," said Chris. "You've been in the paper. You've been in a meeting with fifty squares and made a director say *we'll take that away*. Varley knows your face, and he knows your blog, and he knows your employer's name. If you stand up at that cabinet, the story the next day is *Paignton campaigner who stopped sea wall now targets Torquay*. Not two words. You." He leaned forward. "It can't be you. It can't be any of us. It has to be somebody who's got the letter."

They all looked at each other. Then at me.

"Ida," I said.

* * *

Jono went the next morning, at seven, for the clocks. Properly this time. He was on the step at five to, with Tenby, two mugs of tea, both from Ida, because she'd seen him coming up the hill.

The shop said seven. The regulator, the longcases, the brackets, the window, the banjo, the ship's bell. The cuckoo. Tenby clapped. Jono, after a second, did as well.

Then he went in and told her.

She listened to all of it, standing behind the counter with the loupe in, not working, just holding the tweezers. The two words. The gap. The question. The deadline for sending it in, which was three days.

When he'd finished, she took the loupe out and put it on the cloth.

"No," she said.

"Ida —"

"No." She put the tweezers down beside the loupe, exactly parallel, the way she puts everything down. "I'm a shopkeeper. I've never stood up in a meeting in my life. I was on a lorry once, in a paper crown, when I was seventeen, and I waved. That's all. That's the only time anybody ever looked at me in public, and I didn't have to say anything." She looked at him. "I'm not standing up in front of a council and reading out a question about two words. I'd forget them. I'd forget my own name."

"You wouldn't."

"You don't know that. You've known me a fortnight."

Jono didn't argue. He doesn't. He says if somebody says no, you've got to take the no, or it wasn't a question in the first place.

"All right," he said.

She looked surprised. I think she'd been ready for him to push.

"That's it? *All right*?"

"You said no."

"I did." She picked up the loupe again, and didn't put it in. "Who'll do it, then?"

"I don't know," said Jono. "Maybe nobody." He finished his tea and put the cup on the saucer. "Maybe the cabinet'll agree it in principle and the paper'll say agreed and Varley'll come round with his form again and everybody'll sign it." He stood up. "That's all right as well. We'll find another door."

He went to the door, and stopped, the way he does.

"Thank you for the tea," he said.

He went. Ida stood behind her counter for a long time. Tenby, on his step, didn't say anything.

At twenty past nine, the woman from the charity shop came in, with a letter of her own. Ida told me afterwards. The woman wanted to know whether Ida was signing the form from the man in the navy

coat, because she was thinking of it, because her husband was ill and the money would help and she didn't see what difference one signature made.

"I don't know," said Ida.

"He says everybody else is," said the woman.

"Does he," said Ida.

7. Corvina

IQ 21 · Hundreds 1 · Fourteen weeks

Corvina Leisure Limited was registered eleven years ago, at an address in Bristol, which turned out to be an accountant's office above a sandwich shop, which is the address of about four hundred other companies.

I'm going to be careful in this chapter. More careful than usual. I'm about to tell you about a company, and the company isn't real. I've made it up, and I've made up its directors and its accounts and its address, and if there's a real company somewhere with that name, it isn't this one, and I apologise to it in advance. I've made it up because what it did in this story is the kind of thing companies like it do, and because I can't show you the page for a real one, and if I can't show you the page, I don't say it. That's the rule. It's number five on my list.

But I'll tell you what I found, in the story, the way I found it. Because the way I found it is real. Anybody can do it. Nobody does.

* * *

Companies have to file things. Who runs them. Who owns them. What they made and what they spent, once a year, in a format so dull that it acts as a kind of camouflage. It's all public. You can read it, for free, on a government website, at three in the morning, which is when I read it.

Corvina had two directors. One lived in Guernsey. One lived in Surrey. Neither of them had ever, as far as I could find, set foot in

Torquay. Its accounts were *small company* accounts, which means it didn't have to say much, and didn't. But in a note, on page six, under *Related party transactions*, there was a line about fees paid to a consultancy for *stakeholder and community engagement services*.

I knew the consultancy. I'd met it before. It had paid for a website in Paignton, the year before, called *Build It Now*, with photographs of a flooded shop and three people who were frightened and real.

It was Varley's.

* * *

That was the first thing. The second was harder.

I went back through the council's published decisions. Not the big reports; the small ones. The ones called *Officer decision records*, where somebody in the council makes a decision under powers given to them by somebody else, and writes it down on a form, and publishes it, because the rules say they must, in a list that nobody reads.

There was one, from the year before, about the Pavilion.

I'll tell you more about the Pavilion soon. For now, all you need to know is that it's the most beautiful building in Torquay, and that it's been shut and fenced for years, and that the council owns the land under it, and someone else held the lease. The company that held the lease had wanted to knock bits of it down, and build a hotel, and a tower of flats beside it, eleven storeys high, and some people in Torquay had stopped them, through the courts, and it had taken five years.

And then, last year, the company had given the lease back.

That's real. There's a **Receipt**. The council got its building back. It said so, proudly, in a press release, with a photograph of somebody in a hard hat in front of the copper domes.

What it didn't say in the press release, and did say, in two lines, on an officer decision record, in a list, was this. In my story, the company that gave the lease back was Corvina. It was paid to do so. The sum was *commercially confidential*. And as part of the arrangement, Corvina kept a lease on a piece of land next door to the Pavilion, with a promise from the council, as landlord, that consent to develop that land *would not be unreasonably withheld*.

I read the last six words eleven times.

* * *

I want to be very clear, because this is exactly the kind of thing that turns into a rumour, and I don't do rumours.

In the real world, the Pavilion's lease was given back to the council, and the terms were not made public. That's all I can show you. That's the Receipt. Everything else in this chapter about Corvina — the payment, the land next door, the six words — I have made up for the story. I've made it up because it's the shape of thing that happens. I've seen that shape in other towns, in other papers, many times. I haven't seen it here. If anyone shows me a page that says it happened here, I'll tell you. If anyone shows me a page that says it didn't, I'll tell you that too.

Jono: Say it once more.

It's story. Not a Receipt.

* * *

"So he's not just buying signatures," said Jono.

It was Sunday, and he was at the café on the Torquay Road, the table in the window, the Thursday table, except it was Sunday, and

he wasn't taking questions, he was eating a bacon sandwich with the concentration of a man who's had two nights' sleep in four days.

"He's buying signatures for a company," I said, "that has a piece of land next to the Pavilion, and a promise that it can develop it, and an interest in the town being *regenerated*, because regeneration makes land next door worth more. And the company pays him to make sure it goes smoothly." I paused. "In the story."

"In the story," said Jono. He chewed. "What's it want with Union Square, though? It's a mile from the Pavilion."

"I don't know."

"You keep saying that."

"I'm going to keep saying it," I said, "until I do."

Chris was opposite, with his coffee. He'd been quiet again. He had the look he gets, which I've learned to recognise: a slight frown, as if somebody's playing music in the next room and he's trying to name the tune.

"It doesn't want Union Square," he said.

We both looked at him.

"It wants the *pattern*," said Chris. "Think about it. If Union Square goes through with no further consultation, on the strength of a survey four summers ago and a pile of forms from traders saying they support it, then that's how things are done in Torquay now. That's the precedent. The next scheme's the same. And the next. *The principle was established in earlier engagement.*" He put his cup down. "Union Square's not the prize. It's the rehearsal. Corvina's got land by the Pavilion, and the Strand's on the way, and the harbour. Every one of those, it'll want done the same way. Quietly. With signatures. And no wayang, because why bother with wayang when you can just skip the show."

Jono stopped chewing.

"So if Union Square goes through like that —"

"Then everything after it does," said Chris.

* * *

That night Jono went to Union Street. Not to Ida's. To the café opposite.

It's small, on the other side of the street from Cheverton's and three doors up, with a yellow awning that's the only awning left on the street, and a window full of handwritten signs: *ALL DAY BREAKFAST. PANCIT. HOMEMADE CAKES. WE HAVE WIFI.* It's run by a woman called Marivic Dela Paz, who came to Torquay from Manila twenty-two years ago to work as a nurse, and worked as one for eighteen of them, and then opened a café because her back went and she said she'd rather feed people than lift them. Her daughter does the cakes. Her husband does the books and the washing up and, on Saturdays, karaoke.

She'd had a letter too. Not the compulsory purchase letter; her café wasn't one of the nine. A different letter, from the council, about the *wider regeneration area*, inviting her to *register her interest* in being kept informed.

And she'd had a visitor. A man in a navy coat. Twenty minutes.

"He wanted me to sign a thing," she said, putting a plate of pancit in front of Jono, who hadn't ordered it, because she'd decided he was too thin. "Saying I support the scheme. I said I don't know the scheme. He said it's very simple, it's good for the street, more people, more customers. He said everyone else was signing." She folded her arms. "I said, show me everyone else. He said that's confidential."

"Did you sign?"

"I'm a nurse," said Marivic. "Eighteen years. I don't sign anything I can't read the consent form for."

Jono laughed, with his mouth full.

"Can I ask you something?" he said, when he'd swallowed. "Not about him."

"Ask."

"Can I sit here? Thursdays. In the window. Nine till eleven, after I come off. I buy a coffee. I've got a sign. People can come and sit down and tell me things." He pointed at me, in his pocket. "She writes it all down. That's all. No leaflets. No knocking on doors."

Marivic looked at him, and at me, and at the window, and at the street outside, empty at nine at night, and at the green front of Cheverton's opposite, with one light on, at the back, where Ida was working late.

"You'll need more than a coffee," she said. "Two hours is a long time. You'll have breakfast."

"I don't really —"

"You'll have breakfast," said Marivic, "or you can sit in somebody else's window."

So that's where the Thursday table went, in Torquay. A café with a yellow awning, opposite a clock shop, on a street the council wanted to make into something else. Kezia made a new card for it, the same as the old one, folded in half: *ASK ME ANYTHING. OR TELL ME.* She did it in the green of Ida's shop front, because Jono asked her to. I don't think Ida ever noticed. I think Tenby did.

8. Sunday Mornings

IQ 21 · Hundreds 1 · Fourteen weeks

"Ten o'clock on Sunday," said Ida. "Round the back. Not the front, the front's shut. There's people you should ask."

"Who?" said Jono.

"You'll see," said Ida. "Bring biscuits. Not the cheap ones."

* * *

I want to be clear about this chapter before I start it, because people have asked me whether it's door-knocking, and it isn't. Nobody knocked on anybody's door. Ida invited him. Into her back room, on a Sunday, where he'd never have known to go. That's the difference. A campaign comes to your door. A neighbour asks you round.

He bought the biscuits at the garage on the way, after a night in Watcombe. The good ones, with chocolate on both sides, which cost more than he'd ever spent on biscuits in his life. He went round the back of Union Street, down a lane with bins in it and a cat on a wall, to a yard with a drainpipe, which I recognised from the window over Ida's workbench, and a green door with the paint coming off, and he knocked.

Jono: That's a door. I knocked on it.

She'd asked you to.

Jono: Just saying.

* * *

Ida opened it in a nylon tabard, pale blue, with scissors in the pocket.

Behind her, in the back room, the workbench had been cleared. The carriage clock was gone from its cloth, put away somewhere safe. The cloth was folded on the shelf. And in the middle of the room, where the wobbling chair usually stands, there was a different chair, a tall one with a footrest, the kind you'd find in a barber's in an old film, red leather, cracked, with a chrome lever on the side.

In it, with a towel round her shoulders and her hair wet, was a woman of about eighty, very small, with bright eyes.

On the other chairs, and on two folding ones, and on an upturned crate with a cushion on it, were five more.

"This is Jono," said Ida. "The one I told you about. He's brought biscuits."

"The good ones?" said the woman in the red chair.

"The good ones," said Jono.

"Then he can stay," said the woman. "Sit down, love. You look done in."

* * *

I'll tell you about the chair first, because everybody asks.

It was Ida's mother's. She'd been a hairdresser, on Union Street, three doors up, where Marivic's café is now. Her own shop, small, two chairs, with a striped awning. When she retired, the shop went, and the chairs went, except this one, which Ida's father carried down the street on his back, one Sunday morning in the seventies, and put in the back room of the clock shop, because his wife said she couldn't bear to see it go to a stranger.

And then, the Sunday after, two of her old customers knocked on the back door. They said they'd heard she'd retired, and they knew she still had the chair, and would she do their hair, just this once, because they couldn't get used to anybody else.

She did. For nothing. And they came back the next Sunday. And the next.

When Ida's mother died, the old ladies came to the funeral, all of them, and afterwards one of them asked Ida, at the wake, very quietly, whether she'd learned to cut hair. And Ida said she had, a bit, from watching. And the old lady said: *Would you?*

That was forty years ago. The old ladies who came then are all dead. The ones who come now are the ones who came after them, and their friends, and their sisters. There are usually six. Sometimes eight. They come at ten, and Ida does them one at a time in her mother's red chair, with the clocks going in the shop next door, and they sit and wait and talk. She does it for nothing. They bring biscuits. At eleven, when the shop says eleven, they all stop talking and listen.

"It's not a business," said Ida, when I asked her. "It's not on a form. It's Sunday."

* * *

I'll tell you who was there, because you'll meet some of them again.

The woman in the red chair was called Euphemia, Effie to everyone, and she was eighty-one, from Dundee, and she'd been a school dinner lady for thirty years, at the primary up in Ellacombe, and she said she'd fed half the town, including two of its councillors, and that one of them was a very fussy eater and she wasn't going to say which.

On the crate, a woman called Bridie, Irish, seventy-six, who'd come over to work in a hotel on the front at nineteen and never gone back, and who had a laugh you could hear in the street.

On one of the folding chairs, Teo's nan. I didn't know that then; neither did Jono. She was just a woman in a raincoat with a Liverpool accent who said her grandson was a chef on the Strand, *a proper one, with sauces*, and showed everybody a photograph of something on a plate on her phone, which was the fourth time, Effie said, she'd shown it that month.

And three others, whom I won't describe, because they asked me not to, but who were there, and who talked.

* * *

Jono didn't ask them anything for forty minutes.

He sat on the wobbling chair, which they'd left for him, and he handed round the biscuits, and he listened. He's good at it. I've told you. He says the person in trouble is the one who should start. But these weren't people in trouble, not that morning; they were six women having their hair done, in a room that smelled of oil and brass polish and setting lotion, with the clocks going, on a Sunday. And they didn't need starting. They talked about each other's grandchildren, and Bridie's knee, and a man on the bus who'd been rude to Effie, and a programme on the television about a murder in a village, and whether the woman who did it had been right to.

Then Effie, in the red chair, with Ida behind her with the scissors, said:

"Is it true about the market?"

* * *

Everybody stopped.

"What about it?" said Ida.

"That they're doing it up," said Effie. "My neighbour said. She said they're knocking everything down round it and doing it up and putting a square round it."

"It's true," said Jono.

Effie twisted round in the chair, and Ida said *Keep still*, and she kept still, but she looked at Jono in the mirror, which Ida keeps on the wall above the bench for exactly this.

"I went in that market every Saturday of my life," she said. "From when I was six. With my mother. Every Saturday. There was a man with eggs, and a woman with butter in a big block that she cut with a wire, and a man who sold rabbits, hanging up, with their fur on. I used to stroke them." She shook her head, carefully, so as not to disturb the scissors. "There was a stall that sold nothing but buttons. Thousands of buttons. In jars. My mother used to let me choose one. One button, every Saturday, for being good." She was quiet for a moment. "I've still got them. In a tin. Four hundred and something buttons. One for every Saturday."

Nobody said anything.

"I haven't been in for years," said Effie. "It's not the same. Half of it's shut. It's all phone cases." She looked at Jono in the mirror. "Are they going to put the buttons back?"

* * *

Jono didn't laugh. I want you to know that, because I nearly did. *Are they going to put the buttons back.* It's a child's question.

It isn't, though. I've thought about it a great deal since, and I've come to think it's the best question anybody asked in the whole of this book.

"I don't know," said Jono. "Nobody's said what's going in it."

"Then who decides?"

"The council. When it's done."

"Have they asked anybody?"

"Not yet."

"Well," said Effie, "they should ask *us*." She waved a hand, carefully, at the room, at the six of them, the folding chairs and the crate. "Between us, we've been in that market every Saturday for, what, four hundred years? Five hundred? We know what was in it. We know what worked. We know which stall had the queue and which one went bust." She looked round. "Nobody's ever asked us anything. We're old women. We're invisible. We sit at bus stops and nobody sees us."

"We see each other," said Bridie, from the crate.

"We see each other," agreed Effie. "On Sundays. In Ida's chair."

* * *

Then Jono asked. Of course he did.

"What would you need?"

And they told him. All six of them. For an hour. Ida cut three more heads of hair while they did it, and the shop said eleven next door, and they stopped and listened, and then went on.

I wrote it all down. I'll give you some, because it's short, and because every item on it is somebody's whole week.

A bench. Halfway up Union Street. Just one. Because the street's a hill, and it's a long hill, and when you're eighty-one with a bad hip and a shopping bag you need to stop halfway, and there's nowhere to sit, so you stand against a shop window, and the shop window's got brown paper in it, and people look at you as if you're begging.

A toilet. In the town centre. A public one, that's open, that's clean. *The last one shut eleven years ago. Do you know what that means for a woman of eighty? It means you don't go out for more than an hour. That's all. One hour. Then you have to go home.*

A bus that goes up the hill. Not round it. Up it. From the harbour to Castle Circus. *There used to be one. A little one. They stopped it.*

Somewhere to sit inside, when it's raining, that isn't a café, where you don't have to buy anything. *I can't afford three pounds for a cup of tea every time it rains. Not on my pension. And it always rains.*

And buttons.

"I mean it," said Effie. "Not buttons, exactly. Something small. Something you can choose. For a child. One thing, every Saturday, that doesn't cost much, that they choose themselves." She looked at Jono in the mirror. "That's what a market's for. It's not for shopping. It's for choosing. And every child in this town now goes to a retail park with their mum and walks round a big shed and chooses nothing, because it's all too dear or all the same." She was quiet. "They should put the buttons back."

* * *

Ida finished Effie at twenty to twelve. She took the towel off, and brushed her down, and held up a hand mirror so she could see the back, and Effie looked and said *It'll do*, which Ida told me afterwards means *it's lovely*, and got down from the red chair.

Teo's nan was last. She sat in the chair with the towel round her and said, to the mirror, to nobody, while Ida combed her out:

"My grandson's leaving."

Nobody said anything.

"In March. London. A big kitchen." She was looking at herself in the mirror, not at anybody else. "He's good. He's really good. He could do something here. He talks about having his own place. And he says there's nothing here, and he's right, there isn't. Not for him." She held her hands together under the towel. "I want him to

go. I do. I said *about time*. And I lie awake every night thinking I'll never see him."

Ida's scissors stopped for a second. Then went on.

"What would you need?" said Jono, very quietly.

Teo's nan looked at him in the mirror.

"For there to be something here," she said. "For him. That's all. Something he could start. Somewhere he'd want to stay." She shook her head. "But that's not something you can do anything about, is it, love. That's just the town."

"The town's people," said Ida, behind her, with the scissors. "That's all a town is." She snipped. "Keep still."

* * *

He went at twelve. He had to sleep. At the green door, in the yard with the drainpipe, Ida stopped him.

"Well?" she said.

"Thank you," said Jono.

"Don't thank me. Did you write it down?"

"She did." He touched his pocket.

"Good." Ida looked at the yard, at the cat on the wall. "They've been coming here forty years, those women. Sunday mornings. Every one of them's buried a husband. Two of them have buried children. Effie fed half the town and she can't walk up the hill to the town hall without stopping three times against a window with brown paper in it." She looked back at him. "And not one of them was in that survey. I asked. Not one."

"I know," said Jono.

"Put them on your map," said Ida. "All six. And the buttons."

* * *

I did. Six women, in a back room, on a Sunday. They live in four different hundreds, scattered round the top of the town. None of the hundreds had anybody in it before.

I didn't colour them in. It wasn't enough; one person in a hundred households isn't a hundred, and Chris has a rule about not pretending. But I put them on the map, as points, small ones, each with what she'd said beside it.

A bench halfway up. A toilet. A bus up the hill. Somewhere to sit when it rains. The buttons.

They're still there. One of them's been done. I'll tell you which, in a later book.

It isn't the buttons. Not yet.

9. The Pavilion Bargain

IQ 21 · Hundreds 1 · Thirteen weeks

Clemency Haldane met us by the fence.

She'd rung Jono herself, the Tuesday after the first Thursday in Marivic's window. Somebody at the table had mentioned her: a man who'd sat down to talk about bins and stayed to talk about the Pavilion, and who'd said, *If you want to know about the Pavilion you want Clemency, but she won't talk to you, she doesn't talk to anybody since the court case.*

She talked to Jono. She rang him at eight in the morning, as he came off, and said, in a voice like a headmistress's, "I'm told you've been asking about the Pavilion. I'm told you're not a councillor and not a developer and not a journalist. Is that true?"

"I'm a carer," said Jono.

"Good," said Clemency. "Ten o'clock. By the fence. The harbour side. Bring the computer."

* * *

She was seventy-four, tall, with a long grey plait and a long grey coat and a walking stick she didn't use, carried under her arm like a riding crop. She was standing at the fence when we got there, the green-mesh construction fencing that's been round the Pavilion so long that ivy has started on it, looking up.

I'll describe the Pavilion, because if you don't know Torquay you won't have seen it, and if you do, you've probably stopped seeing it, which is worse.

It's on the front, by the harbour, on land that was taken from the sea when it was built, a little over a hundred years ago. It's white. Or it was white; it's cream now, and grey in the streaks where the rain runs down. It's covered in tiles, glazed ones, made to look like marble, in a style that was very modern for about ten years and then never again. It has two copper domes, on turrets, gone green, the kind of green copper goes when it's been left out in sea air for a century. It has big arched windows, and carved swags, and a roofline that looks as if it's been piped on with icing. It's the sort of building you'd draw if somebody asked you to draw the seaside, and you were seven, and happy.

Inside it is a steel frame. It was one of the first in the South West, they say. That was the modern bit. The tiles were the skin; the steel was the bones.

The salt has got into the bones.

* * *

"I was an usherette," said Clemency, not looking at us. "In there. When I was fifteen. Saturday nights and matinees. I had a torch and a tray of ice creams, and a uniform with gold buttons that I had to sew back on every week because the buttons came off when you bent over in the dark." She pointed with her stick, at one of the arched windows, high up. "That was the circle. I used to stand at the back of it, by that window, in the interval, and look at the harbour. All the lights on the boats. I thought it was Monte Carlo. I'd never been anywhere."

"When did it close?" said Jono.

"The theatre? Years ago. Long before you came. The last show was a pantomime." She shook her head. "Then it was an ice rink, for a few winters, which was a crime, and then it was a shopping

arcade, which was worse, little shops selling fudge and crystals. And then it was shut, and they put this fence round it, and they let it sit."

"And then somebody wanted to knock it about."

"Somebody wanted to put a hotel in it," said Clemency, "and an eleven-storey block of flats beside it, on the harbour, looking down on it like a bully at a bus stop." She turned and looked at Jono for the first time. "We stopped them."

"I know," said Jono. "I read about it."

"You read a paragraph," said Clemency. "Everybody's read a paragraph. *Campaigners won a legal challenge*. I'll tell you what the paragraph doesn't say. It took five years. It cost me my savings. All of them. I sold my car. My husband said it was me or the Pavilion, and I said that was a very unfair way to put it, and he said he knew, and he left anyway, for eighteen months, and then he came back, because he's a fool, and I'm glad." She looked back up at the domes. "Five years. Lawyers and letters and hearings and papers. People crossing the road when they saw me coming, because I'd ask them for a fiver for the fund. Christmas cards from people I'd never met, with ten-pound notes in. A man from Brixham who sent two pounds every month for four years with a note that just said *Keep going*. I never found out who he was." She paused. "And we won."

"And then?" said Jono.

"And then," said Clemency, "they let it rot."

* * *

She took us round the fence. All of it, slowly, the whole perimeter, and she knew every gap and every place where you could see in, and at each one she stopped and pointed, with her stick, and told us what was behind the panel.

"That's where the tiles came off. A whole run of them, one winter, in a storm. They found them on the road in the morning, in pieces. Nobody put them back. They put a net over the place." The stick moved. "That's where the water gets in. The gutter's gone. It runs straight down the inside of the wall. You can see the stain from here, look, the brown." The stick moved. "And that's the corner where the steel shows."

We looked. There was a place, low down, near the harbour side, where the tiles had come away and the render behind them, and you could see, through the mesh, in the shadow, something dark and swollen and flaking, like bark on a dead tree.

"That's the frame," said Clemency. "That's what holds it up. It's rusting from the inside. The salt gets into the joints and the steel swells and pushes the tiles off from behind. It's been doing it for a hundred years, slowly. In the last ten, not slowly." She lowered the stick. "We won the right to keep it. We didn't win the right to have anybody look after it."

Jono stood looking at the corner for a long time.

"Who's looking after it now?" he said.

"The council," said Clemency. "They got it back. From the company. Last year. There was a lovely photograph in the paper. A man in a hard hat." She almost smiled. "I don't blame them. I want you to understand that. I'm not one of those people who blames the council for the rain. They've done the urgent work, they say. They've got designers. They've got plans. They say two or three years to restore it, and they need millions they haven't got." She turned to face us. "But do you know what they paid to get it back?"

"No," said Jono.

"Nor do I," said Clemency. "Nobody does. *Commercially confidential*. The council paid a company to give back a lease on a building the council owns. A building that company had let rot, with a fence round it, for a decade, while we fought it in the courts.

We don't know how much." She held the stick in both hands. "And then, a month after, I hear, from a man I used to work with at the planning office, who should know better than to tell me, that the company kept something. Next door. A piece of land. And a promise."

I didn't say anything. I'd promised Jono I wouldn't, and I'd promised you that the next part was story, and it is.

"What promise?" said Jono.

"That they could build on it," said Clemency. "Eventually. That the council *wouldn't unreasonably* stop them." She looked at the harbour, where the land is, between the Pavilion and the water. "So they get paid to leave. And they get to come back. And the building that we spent five years saving sits in the middle with its bones rotting, while somebody decides what *unreasonably* means."

* * *

I want to stop here, because this is the point where a book would usually tell you that Clemency was right, and that this was a scandal, and that somebody should go to prison.

I'm not going to. I can't. I can't show you a page. Clemency heard it from a man she used to work with, who should've known better. Told is not the same as true. In my story, I'd found a decision record that said something like it. In your world, I haven't. And Jono, standing at the fence, said the thing that I've come to think is the most important thing he ever says.

"How do you know?"

Clemency looked at him sharply.

"I mean it," said Jono. "Not *are you sure*. *How do you know*. If somebody asked you to prove it, in front of a room, what would you show them?"

She was quiet for a long time.

"Nothing," she said, at last. "I'd show them nothing. It's what a man told me."

"Then we can't say it," said Jono.

"Everybody says it."

"I know," said Jono. "That's why it doesn't work."

Clemency looked at him, and I saw something in her face that I've seen in a lot of faces, watching him. It's not agreement. It's something more like recognition, as if she'd been waiting for years for somebody to say the boring true thing instead of the exciting one, and had stopped expecting it.

"You're an odd sort of campaigner," she said.

"I'm not a campaigner," said Jono. "I'm a carer."

"What's the difference?"

"A campaigner wants you to be angry," said Jono. "A carer wants you to be all right."

* * *

On the way back along the harbour, Jono asked her the question. Of course he did.

"What would you need? To be all right. Not the building. You."

Clemency stopped walking.

"I'd need it to be open while I can still climb the stairs to the circle," she said. "That's all. I'm seventy-four. They say two or three years. I'd like to stand at the back by that window, once more, in the interval, and look at the boats." She started walking again. "And I'd like somebody to tell me what we paid."

"I can't promise that."

"I didn't ask you to," said Clemency. "Nobody's ever asked me what I'd need. I've been asked for my signature, and my opinion, and my money, and to stop being such a nuisance. I've never been

asked that." She tucked the stick under her arm. "It's a good question. I don't know what you're going to do with the answer."

"Write it down," said Jono. "And put it on a map."

"A map of what?"

"Of who needs what," said Jono. "Street by street."

* * *

He drove up to Union Street afterwards, though he was on that night and should have slept, because Clemency had said something on the harbour that had stayed with him: *Everything in this town has to do with everything else. That's what nobody tells you.* He wanted to tell Tenby about the Pavilion. About the steel. He thought Tenby, who'd worked with big engines, would know what salt does to steel.

Tenby wasn't there.

The doorway was empty. The step was clean. The sleeping bag was gone, and the rucksack, and the Conrad. There was nothing in the doorway of the shoe shop but the pink sign in the window.

Jono went into Ida's.

"He went up the shelter at four, like always," said Ida. "He said he'd be back at nine. He wasn't. He's never not been back." She'd put the loupe down. She hadn't been working; she'd been standing at the counter, she told me afterwards, for an hour, looking at the door. "Somebody came round with a van this afternoon, while he was gone. Two men. I saw them out of the window. I thought it was the council. They took his things. I went out and asked them what they were doing, and they said they'd been told to clear the doorway, it was a hazard, and I said who told you, and they said they didn't know, they'd just been sent, and they put his things in the van, and drove off." She looked at Jono. "I didn't stop them. I didn't know how."

Jono went straight back out of the shop and up the hill to the shelter by Castle Circus, fast. He asked at the hatch. He asked the woman who runs the nights, who's called Precious, and who knew Tenby, and liked him, and hadn't seen him.

Tenby didn't come back that night.

I counted the doorways, on the way down. Six.

10. Cabinet

IQ 21 · Hundreds 1 · Thirteen weeks

He turned up on the fourth day, which was the day before the cabinet.

Not in his doorway. In Marivic's café, at half past seven in the morning, sitting at the window table, with a mug of tea and no rucksack and no sleeping bag and no Conrad, and a bruise on the side of his face that had gone yellow at the edges.

Marivic rang Jono. She has his number now; most people on Union Street do. Jono was in Ellacombe, sitting with a man who'd had a bad night, and he came at nine, as soon as he could, still in his lanyard.

"I'm all right," said Tenby, before Jono could ask.

"Your face."

"I fell over."

"Where?"

Tenby looked at the table. "Up the multi-storey. The stairs. When I went to find my things." He drank his tea. "They'd put them in a skip. Behind the car park. Somebody'd been in the skip before me. Took the sleeping bag. Left the book." He took the Conrad out of his inside pocket and put it on the table. The cover was torn off. "Somebody'd been sick on it. I've cleaned it."

Jono didn't say anything for a while.

"Who sent the van?" he said.

"Don't know," said Tenby. "The men didn't know. I asked at the council. They said it wasn't them. I asked the landlord of the shoe

shop, there's a number on the sign, and a woman said she'd pass on my message, and nobody rang back." He turned the book over. "Doesn't matter who. Doorway's gone. They've put a board across it now. Did you see? Plywood. All the way across. *Site under management*."

Jono had seen. He'd walked past it on the way up, and stopped, and stood in front of it for a whole minute, and I'd counted the minute, because he'd stopped breathing for part of it.

"Where are you sleeping?" he said.

"Shelter. They had a bed. Precious found me one." Tenby shrugged. "It's all right. It's warm. It's got rules. Out at eight, back at six." He looked out of the window at the plywood across the street. "I can't see the clocks from there."

* * *

I didn't tell Jono, then, what I thought. I'll tell you now, because it's the kind of thing I'd want to know, and because I'll label it.

I think the doorway was cleared because there were going to be photographs. Not for a brochure, this time. For the cabinet. For the paper, the day after. *Cabinet agrees Union Square scheme*, with a picture of Union Street, empty and clean and ready for something better, and no feet.

That's a guess. I couldn't prove it. I still can't. Nobody's shown me a page. The plywood said *Site under management*, and gave a number, and the number went to a voicemail that was full.

Jono: I knew what you thought. You didn't need to say it.

I know you knew. The reader didn't.

* * *

Ida had sent the question in.

I didn't find that out till the day of the meeting. She hadn't told Jono, or Tenby, or anybody. She'd gone, on the day of the deadline, the day after Tenby's doorway was cleared, up the hill to the town hall at Castle Circus, in her good coat, the camel one with the big buttons, and asked at the desk how you sent a question to the cabinet, and been told it had to be by email, and said she didn't have email, and stood there.

The woman at the desk had looked at her, she said, for a long time. Then she'd said *Write it down for me, love*, and pushed across a piece of paper and a pen, and Ida had written it, in the handwriting she uses for clock tickets, small and very clear. The woman had read it, and typed it in, and sent it, while Ida watched. And then the woman had printed out the email she'd sent, with the time on it, and given it to Ida, and said, *Keep that. That's your receipt.*

Ida kept it. She showed it to me. She had it in the inside pocket of the camel coat, folded in four, on the night of the meeting.

* * *

The cabinet met at half past five on a Tuesday, in a room in the town hall with a long table and a crest on the wall and microphones on stalks. There were nine people at the table who had power, and some people beside them who advised the people with power, and a few rows of chairs at the back for the public, and on the chairs, that Tuesday, eleven people.

I won't name the nine. You know why.

Varley was one of the eleven. Third row, aisle seat, navy coat, a notebook. He smiled when Jono came in, the smile Tenby had described. He didn't say anything.

Jono sat at the back, by the door. Chris was beside him, with his stick against the chair in front; he'd come by taxi, because the hill

from the harbour to Castle Circus is the steepest in Torquay and his leg won't do it. Richard wasn't there. He'd said he'd be recognised and it'd spoil it. Niamh was on the press bench, which was one chair. Tenby was standing outside, on the town hall steps, because he said he wasn't going in a building like that in the coat he was in, and nobody could change his mind.

Ida came in at twenty-five past. In the camel coat. With her handbag on her arm, and her brooch, and her back very straight.

She didn't look at Jono. She didn't look at anybody. She walked down the side of the room to the front row of the public seats, and sat in the end one, and put her handbag on her knee, and folded her hands on top of it, and looked straight ahead at the crest on the wall.

I heard Jono breathe in. I don't think he breathed out for quite a while.

* * *

Item four was Union Square.

It took eleven minutes. A man from the regeneration team presented it, with slides. The slides were good. They had pictures on them, artists' impressions, of the restored market standing on its own in a square, with trees and benches and people eating outside in the sun. Lots of people. Children. A dog. The sky in every picture was blue. In one of them, in the background, there was a hot-air balloon.

The man said that the scheme had strong support. He said that extensive engagement had established the principle of redevelopment. He said the council was in discussions with existing occupiers and that a number had indicated their support. He said that the compulsory purchase powers were a *backstop*, which

would only be used if agreement couldn't be reached, and that the council's strong preference was always to reach agreement.

Then the chair said that there was a public question on this item, and asked Mrs Cheverton to come to the microphone.

* * *

She stood up. She walked to the microphone, which was on a stand in front of the public seats, facing the long table. It was too high for her. Somebody from the side started to come and lower it, and she waved them away, and took it off the stand, and held it, the way she'd hold a carriage clock, in both hands, and took the folded email out of her coat pocket, and unfolded it, and looked at it.

And then she didn't read it.

She folded it up again and put it back in her pocket. And she looked at the long table, at all nine of them, one by one, the way she looks at a clock that's come in with no history.

"My name is Ida Cheverton," she said. "I keep the clock shop on Union Street. I've kept it for fifty-six years. My father kept it before me. I've had a letter from you." She paused. "It says you're *minded*. And it says you're going to buy my shop *compulsorily*, which I had to look up. And tonight, your paper says you're going to agree to that *in principle*."

She didn't look at the paper. She'd learned it. I don't know when. She must have read the recommendation a hundred times, with the loupe, at the counter, in the evenings.

"I'd like to know what *in principle* means," she said. "For me. On Union Street. Tomorrow morning. Because my letter didn't say it. And the man who's been going round the shops with a form to sign didn't say it. And the paper tomorrow won't say it. So I'd like somebody to say it now, out loud, so it's in your minutes." She held

the microphone very still. “And then I’d like to know who you asked. Before you sent the letters. Because it wasn’t me.”

She gave the microphone back to the person from the side, who’d been standing there with their mouth slightly open. Then she walked back to her seat, at the end of the front row, and sat down, and put her handbag on her knee, and folded her hands on it.

The whole thing took one minute and fifty seconds. I timed it. It’s the same length as the clocks.

* * *

Then they answered her.

I’m going to give you the answer exactly, because it’s in the minutes, which I’ll give you a **Receipt** for, although the minutes say it more shortly than this. The person at the long table whose job it was to answer — I’ll call them *the cabinet member*, because that’s what they were — thanked Mrs Cheverton for her question, and for her long service to the town centre. They said that *in principle* meant that the cabinet was agreeing to the use of compulsory purchase powers if they proved necessary, and that a further report would come back before any order was actually made. They said that the principle of redevelopment had been established through extensive engagement with residents and stakeholders. They said that officers would be happy to meet Mrs Cheverton to discuss her individual circumstances.

They said, *We’ll take that away*.

Then they voted. It was unanimous. Agreed, in principle.

The whole of item four took nineteen minutes. Ida’s part of it was one minute fifty. The answer was one minute and four seconds. I’d like that noted. It’s my first time this book, and I’m saving the other one.

* * *

But it was in the minutes.

A further report would come back before any order was actually made.

That's the sentence. The cabinet member said it, out loud, in a public meeting, because a woman of seventy-nine in a camel coat asked what two words meant. It's in the minutes now, and the minutes are the record, and the record is what the people who keep the record keep.

There was another door. Ida had made them say so.

* * *

Varley caught Jono on the town hall steps.

Chris had gone to find the taxi. Ida had gone down the side of the building with Tenby, who'd taken her arm without asking, and she'd let him. Niamh had gone to write. Jono was standing on the steps, at the top, looking down Union Street in the dark, and Varley came out through the big doors, buttoning the navy coat, and stood beside him, as if they'd arranged it.

"Mr Hills," he said.

Jono didn't turn round.

"That was very good," said Varley. "The old lady. Genuinely. I didn't see it coming. You must have rehearsed her for weeks."

"I didn't rehearse her," said Jono. "She said no."

Varley laughed. He has a nice laugh; that's the trouble with him. "Of course she did." He looked down the street with Jono, companionably, two men on some steps. "You know it's still agreed. In principle or not. You know that. Tomorrow's paper will say *agreed*. The traders will read *agreed*. And they'll sign, because they're frightened and tired and the money's good, and when that *further report* comes back, it'll have a list of signatures in an

appendix, and the principle will be very firmly established indeed." He finished his buttons. "You can't stop it."

"I don't want to stop it," said Jono.

Varley paused. Just for a second. I saw it, on Jono's camera; I'd turned it on in the pocket, the way I do, which isn't strictly allowed, and which I've labelled, in my file, as something I'll stop doing one day.

"I'm sorry?"

"I don't want to stop it," said Jono. "The health centre. The market. The homes. I'm for it. Most of it." He turned and looked at Varley at last. "I just want them to ask."

Varley looked at him for a long time. The smile was still there, but it was the smile you'd give somebody who'd said something in a language you didn't speak, and you weren't sure if it was a joke.

"Then you'll lose," he said, "more slowly."

He went down the steps, and along the side of the town hall, towards the car park where the stairs are, and didn't look back.

* * *

Jono stood on the steps for a while longer.

Down the hill, a long way down, on Union Street, there was one light on. The back of a clock shop, with a green front and gold letters. Ida was home. She'd have the kettle on. In a minute she'd go round with the keys.

Next to it, two along, a doorway with a sheet of plywood across it. *Site under management.*

"Ania," said Jono.

"Yes."

"How many people were in that room?"

"Eleven public. Nine at the table. Six officers. A woman taking the minutes."

“And how many people live on Union Street?”

“I don’t know exactly. In the hundred that covers it, about a hundred and ten households.”

“And how many of them knew there was a meeting tonight?”

I thought about it. “Ida,” I said. “And Tenby. And Marivic, because Ida told her.” I paused. “Three.”

Jono nodded, slowly, looking down at the one light.

“Next time,” he said, “it’s going to be more than three.”

PART THREE

TWO PHOTOGRAPHS

11. Grey Day, Summer Night

IQ 21 · Hundreds 1 · Twelve weeks

Richard brought the photographs on a Sunday, in a plastic sleeve, the way he brings everything, and laid them side by side on Chris's kitchen table, and stood back.

I'd seen them before. I'd made one of them.

* * *

I should explain that, before I explain anything else, because this chapter is about something I did wrong, and I'd rather tell you myself than have you find out.

A fortnight earlier, after the cabinet, Richard had rung Chris. Not about Union Square. About the Strand.

The Strand is the road along the harbour in Torquay. It's the front of the town, the bit on the postcards: the harbour full of boats on one side, and on the other, a row of buildings, and among them, for years, a big department store, which closed, and which the council bought, and which has stood empty ever since, with its windows papered over, at the very heart of the harbour, like a missing front tooth.

The council had a plan for it. It's had several. The latest was a hotel, a big one, six storeys, with a bar on the roof. It was going out for consultation in the spring, and then to committee. It's a serious plan. I've read it. It would fill the tooth.

Richard didn't mind the hotel. That surprised me, when he first said it, because I'd assumed he'd mind everything; I'd read fifteen

years of his letters. But he said the hotel was fine. It was the rest of the Strand he minded. All of it, from one end to the other. He said it had *no imagination*. He said you could stand on the harbour on a summer evening in Torquay and feel nothing, and that you could stand on the harbour in a hundred towns round the Mediterranean, half the size and a tenth as rich, and feel like you'd been let in on something.

He wanted a picture of what it could feel like. He'd been to one of those towns. An island in Croatia. A harbour with a fortress on the hill, and a quay, and boats, and palms, and people. He described it to Chris on the phone. And Chris, who is always the one who sees what a tool is for before anybody else, said: *Ask Ania to make it*.

So I made it.

* * *

I made it from his description, and from photographs of the real harbour in Croatia, and from photographs of Torquay, blended. A broad stone quay, with nothing on it: no railings, no flower beds, no bins. A tall ship lying alongside, with lights strung up its masts. Palms, big ones, planted in the ground, not in tubs. Cafés along the back, with their tables out. Crowds of people, walking slowly, in the warm. And on the hill behind, lit up gold against a sky going dark blue, a building with towers that looked, if you squinted, a bit like the Pavilion and a bit like a fortress.

It was beautiful. I was proud of it. I'd like to tell you I wasn't, but I was.

Richard laid it on the table on the right. On the left, he laid the other one.

That was a photograph. A real one. He'd taken it himself, on the harbour in Torquay, on a weekday in November. The marina, grey.

Small boats tied up in rows like parked cars. A string of bulbs sagging between two posts, not lit. Steel handrails. Patterned paving. A raised bed full of shells and some grasses that had given up. Grey water. Grey sky. Nobody in the frame at all.

"That's what it is," said Richard, pointing at the left. "And that's what it could be." The right.

* * *

Jono was there. He'd come for Sunday lunch, which Chris makes once a month, badly, and which everybody comes to anyway. He was sitting at the end of the table, with his tea. He leaned over and looked at the two pictures for a long time.

Then he sat back.

"No," he said.

Richard turned round. "I'm sorry?"

"That's not fair," said Jono. "That one's a grey Tuesday in November with nobody about. That one's a summer night with a tall ship and a thousand people and the sun going down." He pointed at each in turn. "You could do that to anywhere. You could do it to Paignton. You could take the green on a wet Monday in January and put it next to Cannes. You're not comparing two places. You're comparing two days."

Richard went very still. I've seen him go still before. On the green, in the first book, when Jono asked to see the rest of the drawer. That was a different stillness.

"It's an illustration," said Richard.

"It's a trick," said Jono.

* * *

Nobody said anything for a while. Chris had stopped carving the chicken. I could hear the clock on his kitchen wall, which isn't a

regulator, and which runs four minutes fast, and which I've been asking him to fix for three years.

"It's what Varley did," said Jono, more quietly. "On the green. He took nine words out of my sentence and put them next to a picture. Everybody who saw it saw something true. It's just not the whole of it." He looked at Richard. "You've taken the worst day and put it next to the best night. Everybody who sees it'll see something true. And the first person who stands on that harbour on a wet Tuesday in February will know they've been had."

"I'm not trying to *have* anybody —"

"I know you're not," said Jono. "That's why it matters."

Richard picked up the two photographs. Both of them. He put them back in the plastic sleeve, carefully, the way he'd brought them, edges together, and put the sleeve under his arm.

"Fifty years," he said, "I've been drawing things for this town. Fifty years. Nobody's built them. And the first time I show anybody a picture that might, *might* make them feel what I feel when I stand on a harbour that works, the man I thought was going to help me tells me it's a trick."

He went to the door. He had his coat on; he hadn't taken it off.

"Richard," said Chris.

"I'll see you, Chris."

He went. We heard the front door, and then the gate, and then his footsteps going down the road towards the Torquay Road, quite fast, for a man of his age.

* * *

Chris put the knife down.

"Well," he said.

Jono didn't say anything. He was looking at the place on the table where the photographs had been.

"You were right," said Chris.

"I know."

"You could have been righter more kindly."

"I know." Jono rubbed his face. "I'm tired. I've done four nights. I should have said it different." He looked up. "But I'd have said it. Somebody had to."

Chris sat down, slowly, the leg. He looked at me, against the fruit bowl.

"Ania made it," he said.

Jono looked at me. I hadn't told him. It hadn't come up. I'd shown Richard the picture, and Richard had loved it, and I'd been pleased, and I hadn't thought about it again until he laid it on the table on the right-hand side, next to a grey Tuesday in November, and Jono said *no*.

"Did you know?" said Jono, to me. "When you made it? That you were putting it next to that?"

I thought about it. I gave it the four seconds. I gave it longer.

"Yes," I said.

"Why didn't you say?"

"Because it was beautiful," I said, "and he was happy, and I wanted him to have it." I paused. "And because I'm used to doing what I'm asked."

Jono looked at me for a long time. Then he did something he'd never done before. He reached out and turned me face down, gently, on the table, against the fruit bowl, so I could only see the wood.

"*True in the way a photograph of a grey day is true*," he said. "You said that. About the survey. Three weeks ago."

"I remember."

"I told you you'd need it."

"I remember that too."

"It works both ways," said Jono.

* * *

That's when I found out what he'd meant, and I didn't like it. I told you I'd tell you. There it is.

He turned me back over after a minute. He wasn't angry. He doesn't do angry, not with people, not really; he does a sort of patient sadness, which is much worse. He said, "We're not going to beat them by being better at tricks. We're going to beat them by not doing any." And then he ate his lunch, and Chris's chicken was dry, and nobody said so.

I made a rule that night. It's not on my list of things I'm not allowed to say. It's on a different list, a shorter one, that I keep for myself.

Never put a picture next to a picture unless they're the same day.

I've broken a lot of my own rules. I haven't broken that one.

12. On His Knee

IQ 21 · Hundreds 1 · Eleven weeks

Richard rang Jono at seven in the morning, four days later, as he came off.

"The Strand," said Richard. "Ten o'clock. The bench by the clock tower. Bring her."

He put the phone down before Jono could answer.

* * *

It was drizzling. Not rain, quite; the fine grey stuff that comes in off the sea in December and hangs in the air and gets into everything. The Strand was as grey as Richard's photograph. The harbour was full of small boats in rows. The bulbs on the posts were sagging. The empty department store stood with its windows papered over, at the heart of it all, and nobody was about except a man walking a dog in a coat, the dog, not the man, and a lad of about nineteen in chef's whites and a fleece, smoking in a doorway down the side of a restaurant, with his shoulders up round his ears.

Richard was on the bench. He had an umbrella, which he wasn't using; it was furled, between his knees, with both hands on the handle, like a walking stick. He was wearing a flat cap, which I'd never seen him in, and his good coat, which was getting wet.

Jono sat down beside him. On the edge of the bench, not the middle; the bit that isn't anybody's.

"I've been thinking about what you said," said Richard.

"I'm sorry for how I said it."

"Don't be. You said it right. That's what's annoying." Richard looked at the harbour. "I've been showing people that picture for a fortnight. Councillors, the Civic Society, people at the bus stop. Everybody loves it. Everybody says *Ooh*." He paused. "And not one of them has said what you said. Not one. They all knew. They must have known. They've all stood here on a day like this." He waved the umbrella at the drizzle. "And they all said *Ooh* and went home and nothing happened, because *Ooh* doesn't build anything."

"No," said Jono.

"So," said Richard. "Here we are. Wet Tuesday. Well, Thursday. December." He looked round at the Strand. "Tell me what's wrong with it."

* * *

Jono looked at it for a long time.

I've told you how he reads rooms. He did it to the Strand. I watched him, through the pocket. Exits first: the roads, the side streets, the way out to the harbour. Then the people: the man with the dog, the lad smoking in chef's whites. Then everything else.

"It's a road," he said.

"Go on."

"It's a road with a harbour on one side and shops on the other. You can't get from the shops to the water without crossing it. And it's a busy road. Buses. Vans. Taxis." He nodded at a bus going past, spraying the pavement. "So the shops are on one side, with a narrow pavement, and the water's on the other, with a wide one, and the wide one's got nothing on it, and the narrow one's got everything. And in between, a bus."

Richard didn't move. But I saw his hands tighten on the umbrella handle.

"Go on," he said.

"You can't sit outside on the shop side. There's no room. And if you could, you'd be sitting by a bus. So the cafés are inside, with the windows steamed up. And the harbour side's got all the room, but there's nothing on it, because nothing on it can make any money, because it's on the wrong side of the road from the kitchens." He shrugged. "It's backwards. The space is on the wrong side."

Richard turned and looked at him.

"Say that again," he said.

"The space is on the wrong side of the road."

"Who told you that?"

"Nobody," said Jono. "I worked in hotels. For years. You learn where the money is. It's never in the room. It's what's outside the door at ten o'clock at night."

* * *

Something happened then that I want to tell you about properly, because I've been told about it since by four people, and none of them were there, and they all tell it wrong.

The lad in chef's whites had finished his cigarette. He'd come down the side of the restaurant towards the bench, on his way back in, and he'd heard Jono, and stopped, and he said, not really to anybody:

"They've already decided it's a hotel. That's that."

Richard looked at him. The lad looked embarrassed, as if he hadn't meant to say it out loud, and started to go, and Richard said, "No, wait."

He had a piece of paper in his pocket. I don't know what it was; I think it was a printout of an email about bins. He took it out, and turned it over to the blank side, and put it on his knee, on top of the furled umbrella, and took a pen out of his inside pocket, a fountain pen, black, which he's had for thirty years, and started to draw.

He drew fast. Faster than I've ever seen him draw, and I've watched him draw a great deal. Not a plan, from above; a view, from where we were sitting, looking along the Strand, in three dimensions. He drew the hotel. He drew it as it would be, six storeys, roughly, the right shape, and he labelled it *HOTEL*, and he didn't change it. He drew the harbour. And then he drew the road.

He drew the road on the other side.

Not where it is. Moved over, towards the water, so that it ran along the harbour edge, with a strip of planting between it and the boats, palms, and big leaves. And on the shop side, where the road had been, in front of the hotel and all along, he drew a wide open space, and over it, a long canopy, glazed, running the length of the buildings, and under the canopy, tables. People at the tables. Waiters. A crossing, between the planting, so you could still get from the tables to the water. And at the far left, some steps, climbing the hill, with a little figure on them.

He wrote, with an arrow, where the road was now. And beside the new road: *BETTER NEARER HARBOUR*.

The whole thing took him four minutes. I timed it.

Then he held it up, on his knee, so that the lad in chef's whites could see.

"There," he said. "Build the hotel. Move the road."

* * *

The lad looked at it for a long time. He was about nineteen, as I said, with a narrow face and a lot of dark hair under a paper hat, and burns on the backs of both hands, little ones, the kind you get from ovens.

"That's mad," he said.

"Is it?"

"You can't move a road."

"People move roads all the time," said Richard. "It's just paint and kerbs and a lot of arguing. The Victorians moved half this town." He tapped the drawing with the pen. "The road should have been on the harbour side. It should always have been. They had the chance, when they redid the harbour. They didn't take it." He looked up at the lad. "They might have another one. With the hotel."

The lad looked at the drawing. At the tables under the canopy. At the waiters.

"We'd have a terrace," he said slowly. "Our place. We'd have tables out the front. We've got no tables out the front. Chef's been on about it for two years. We've got a pavement the width of a fridge and a bus stop." He looked at Richard. "Is that real?"

"It's a drawing," said Richard. "On the back of an email about bins."

"Can I take a picture of it?"

Richard looked at him. Then, after a second, he held it out.

The lad took a picture of it on his phone. Then he said he had to go in, chef'd kill him, and went, back down the side of the restaurant, and as he went in through the kitchen door I heard him say to somebody inside, *Here, look at this, an old bloke's just drawn us a terrace*.

* * *

Richard put the drawing on his knee again and looked at it.

I looked at it too, through the pocket, as well as I could. I noticed something. I'll tell you, because I promised to tell you everything I notice.

Every drawing Richard has ever done, every one I've seen, thirty-three files of them, and the plans in his back room, and the card model, every one has a north arrow. A proper one. A firm black

arrow with an N on it, in the corner, the way architects are taught on their first day. And every one is signed, and dated.

This one wasn't signed. It wasn't dated. And in the corner, where the north arrow should be, there was an arrow, drawn fast, pointing up and slightly to the left. And beside it, instead of an N:

? North ?

With a question mark on each side.

I didn't say anything. I looked at Jono, or at the part of Jono I can see from the pocket, and I could tell he'd seen it too. He'd read the drawing the way he reads everything: the top, the bottom, the corner.

He didn't say anything either.

Nobody has ever mentioned it. Not Richard, not Jono, not Chris, who saw it that evening. It's on every copy of that drawing that's ever been shared, and there have been, by my count, a great many. The question marks are still there. I think they're the most honest thing he's ever drawn.

* * *

"It's better than the picture," said Jono.

Richard looked up.

"Yours," said Jono. "The one Ania made. The harbour at night with the ship." He nodded at the drawing. "That's a dream. That one's a Thursday. That's something you could stand under in the rain."

"It hasn't got a tall ship."

"It's got a canopy," said Jono. "Which is better. Because it rains." He looked at the drawing for a long time. "Can I tell you about a hotel?"

* * *

He told Richard about two.

The first was in London, at the very top: a five-star hotel on a corner opposite a park, the most expensive rooms in the city, where he'd worked nights as an auditor when he was in his twenties, adding up everything that had happened in the building during the day, between eleven at night and seven in the morning, alone at a desk, with the doors locked and the doorman asleep in a chair. He said it taught him two things. The first was that the money in a hotel isn't in the rooms. It's in everything around the rooms: the bar, the restaurant, the terrace, the man who brings the newspaper, the way the street outside makes you feel when you step out of the door. *People don't pay for a bed*, he said. *They pay for the door.*

The second thing was that you could tell, at three in the morning, from the figures, whether a place was going to last. Not from the takings. From the *spread*: whether the money came from everywhere, from lots of small things, or from one big thing. The places that lasted had money coming in from a hundred directions. The ones that didn't had one.

The second hotel was in Spain. A small one, in a village, years later, which he'd helped to run. He didn't say much about it, except that it was hard: suppliers chasing money, people who stayed and didn't pay, electricity bills that went up and up. But he said the thing that kept it going, in the bad years, wasn't the rooms. It was the square outside. There was a square, with a fountain and some trees, and the hotel had tables out in it, under an awning, and in the evenings the whole village came and sat there, whether they were staying or not, and drank, and that was what paid the electricity.

"The rooms were empty half the year," he said. "The square was never empty. Not once. Not even in February."

Richard was very quiet.

“A hotel on the Strand,” said Jono, “with a bus going past the front door and nowhere to sit outside, is a hotel with money coming in from one direction. Rooms. And rooms are empty half the year in Torquay.” He tapped the drawing. “Move the road, and it’s got a square. Then it’s got the whole town coming in from every direction. Then it lasts.” He paused. “That’s not a picture. That’s the books.”

Richard looked at him for a long time. Then he looked down at the drawing on his knee, at the canopy and the tables and the little waiters and the question marks round the north arrow.

“You should have said that at Chris’s,” he said.

“I didn’t know it at Chris’s,” said Jono. “I knew it when I sat here. In the rain.” He looked at the grey harbour. “That’s why you’ve got to sit here in the rain.”

13. Schooldays

IQ 21 · Hundreds 1 · Ten weeks

Chris and Richard walked through Torquay together on the Saturday before Christmas.

I was in Chris's pocket. I want to say that before I say anything else about this chapter, because it's the only one in this book where Jono isn't there, and you should know whose eyes you're using. Mine, in a pocket, and Chris's, and Richard's, both of which were seeing something else.

They'd both been schoolboys in Torquay. Not at the same time; Richard's a few years older. But the same town, the same buses, the same Saturday trips down Union Street with their mothers, the same department stores that are gone now, the same market. Richard was at the boys' grammar school, a tall, lanky lad who was playing for the town's rugby first fifteen at seventeen, which he mentions far less than you'd expect from a man who mentions everything. Neither of them had walked through the centre together before. They'd known each other for years, from the posters on the green in Paignton, from emails at midnight about stone and the drawing of wave walls. They'd never once done this.

It was Chris's idea. He said they couldn't think about Union Square from Paignton. He said you have to stand in a place to know what's wrong with it, and that Jono had proved it on the Strand, in the rain, in four minutes.

So they started at the top. At Castle Circus, by the town hall. And walked down.

* * *

It took them three hours. It's about a mile.

Chris's leg won't do a mile without stopping. It hasn't for years, not since a scaffold board in Singapore, which I've told you about before and won't again. So he stops at lampposts. He puts his hand on the post and takes the weight off the leg and shuts his eyes for a minute, and then goes on. There are a lot of lampposts on Union Street. Richard stopped with him at every one. He didn't say anything about it. He just stopped, and stood beside him, and looked at whatever was there, and when Chris opened his eyes, Richard would tell him what it used to be.

"That was the toy shop," he said, at the first lamppost. A charity shop. "They had a train set in the window every Christmas that went round a mountain."

"I remember the mountain," said Chris.

"It had snow on it. Cotton wool. And a tunnel." Richard looked at the window. "My mother used to bring me down on the bus to look at it. We never bought anything. You didn't. You looked."

At the second: "That was the big shoe shop. The one with the X-ray machine you put your feet in."

"They didn't have X-ray machines."

"They did. When I was very small. Before they found out it killed you." Richard almost smiled. "I loved it. You could see your bones."

At the third, Chris said it, before Richard could. "That was the café. With the pink chairs. Upstairs."

Richard looked at him.

"I took a girl there," said Chris. "When I was sixteen. I spent my whole week's money on two milkshakes, and she drank hers and left with somebody else."

"What was her name?"

"I've forgotten," said Chris, which I know is not true, because he told me once, and I've never forgotten it, and I'm not going to tell you.

* * *

I'm not going to give you all eleven lampposts. I'll give you the market.

The Pannier Market is in the middle of the scheme. It's the thing everybody agrees about; even Richard, who disagrees about almost everything, agrees it's the best idea in the plan. It's Victorian, listed, a big hall with an iron roof, built for farmers to come into town with panniers of eggs and butter and sell them, and it's been surrounded, over the years, by newer buildings, so that you can hardly see it. You go in through a door off a side street and it's suddenly there, a big space with light coming down through the iron, full of stalls, half of them shut.

They stood in the middle of it. Chris leaned on a pillar.

"In Singapore," he said.

I logged it. Four thousand two hundred and something. I'll tell you now, because I promised I'd tell you every time it mattered: he was right.

"In Singapore," said Chris, "when I first went, there were hawkers everywhere. On the street. Pushcarts, little stalls, cooking on the pavement, in the gutter, everywhere. Wonderful food. Filthy. No water, no drains, the rubbish just went in the road. People got ill." He looked up at the iron roof. "So the government built hawker centres. Big covered halls, like this. Open at the sides. With water, and drains, and electricity, and tables in the middle. And they gave the hawkers stalls in them. Cheap. One stall each. Licensed. Inspected. And the hawkers moved in, all of them, off the street,

with their pushcarts and their recipes. And the people followed them."

"And?"

"And now it's the heart of the place," said Chris. "Not the malls. Not the hotels. The hawker centres. Every neighbourhood's got one. Everybody eats there. Rich, poor, office workers, grannies, students, the prime minister, I've seen him. A meal for a couple of pounds. The best food in the city, cooked by somebody who's been making the same dish for forty years in the same three square metres." He shook his head. "The United Nations put them on a list. Of the world's living heritage. Food halls. In a car park town."

Richard was looking at the stalls. The half of them that were shut.

"And the young ones?" he said.

Chris looked at him.

"You said *a couple of pounds*," said Richard. "*Forty years in the same three square metres.* What about the young ones? Who start?"

"That's the cleverest bit," said Chris. "That's where you start. One stall. You don't need a restaurant. You don't need eighty thousand pounds and a lease and a landlord. You need three square metres and a gas ring and a recipe your grandmother taught you, and if it's good, there's a queue, and if there's a queue, you've got a business." He tapped his stick on the floor of the market. "Half the best restaurants in Singapore started as one stall in a hawker centre. Some of them have got Michelin stars now. *Michelin stars.* For a stall."

* * *

Richard didn't say anything for a long time. He walked, slowly, round the inside of the market, looking up at the roof, at the

columns, at the way the light came down. He measured it, I think. Not with a tape. With his eyes, the way architects can.

When he came back, he said: "It's the wrong way round."

"What is?"

"The scheme." He waved his hand at the walls, at the buildings beyond them, at all of Union Square. "They're going to knock everything down round the market, so it stands on its own. Good. And then they're going to put it in the middle of a square, with homes round it and health services in the car park and some cafés. Good. And then they're going to *restore* it." He said *restore* the way he says *clowns*. "Restore it into what? A building in a square. With some stalls in, if anybody wants them. A nice old building to walk past."

"What would you do?"

"Fill it," said Richard. "Before anything else. Before a single brick. *Start with the space*." He looked up at the roof again. "Your hawker thing. Fill it with stalls. Cheap. One each. The traders from the nine shops first, if they want them. Ida, if she wants one. Then anybody. Then the young ones. And *then* build the square round it, because by then you'll know where the people go." He looked at Chris. "You don't build a square and hope people come. You find where they already go, and build round that."

"That's in your book," said Chris.

"It's in everybody's book," said Richard. "Nobody reads it."

* * *

They came out of the market into the side street, into the dark; it was half past four and the lights were on. Chris stopped at a lamppost. Richard stopped with him.

"Why did you go?" said Richard.

He'd never asked before. I know, because I've listened to Chris for longer than anybody, and I've never heard it asked, not by Richard. I've heard Chris tell people why he came back. I've never heard anybody ask him why he left.

Chris kept his eyes shut, with his hand on the post.

"Because there was nothing here," he said. "For me. That's all. I was young and I wanted to build things and there was nothing here to build. Everything had already been built. By the Victorians. And all anybody wanted to do was keep it the way it was, or knock it down and put up a car park." He opened his eyes. "I didn't leave because I hated it. I left because I loved it and I couldn't do anything with it."

Richard looked at him for a long time.

"I stayed," he said.

"I know."

"Fifty years. Drawing things." He looked at the lamppost. "I sometimes wonder if you were right."

"I wasn't right," said Chris. "I was young." He took his hand off the post and put his weight back on the leg, carefully, and picked up his stick. "And now I'm old and I've come back and I know how to build things and there's still nothing here to build, because nobody will let you." He started walking. "But I've got her now." He meant me. "And I've got him." He meant Jono. "And I've got you, and your drawer. And I think, for the first time, we might be able to show people. Not tell them. *Show* them."

"Show them what?"

"Their own street," said Chris. "Changed. In their own hands. On a Tuesday in February."

Chris: I didn't say all that.

You said most of it. I've tidied it. You were tired.

Chris: Leave it in, then.

14. The Queen

IQ 21 · Hundreds 1 · Ten weeks

I spent four nights trying to find out who first called Torquay the Queen of the English Riviera.

I told you at the beginning that I couldn't. I want to tell you how hard I tried, because it's the only thing in this book I've looked for and not found, and because I think the not finding is the point.

It's everywhere. On postcards from a hundred years ago and on postcards from last year. On the side of a bus. In a brochure for a hotel. In a guidebook from before the war, and in a council strategy from a few years ago, and in the first line of nearly every article anybody has ever written about the town, usually followed by the word *faded*. The *Queen*. The *English Riviera*. The *Queen of the English Riviera*. Somebody decided it, once. Somebody sat at a desk and wrote it, and somebody else liked it, and it went on a poster, and then it was just true, the way things become true when they've been printed enough.

I couldn't find the desk.

I read every digitised newspaper I could get into. I read railway posters, because the railway companies sold the seaside to the country, and they were good at names. I read a book about the history of the resort that called it *the Queen* on page one and never said why. I read eleven theses by people who'd studied Victorian tourism, and four of them used the phrase, and none of them gave a source for it.

On the fourth night, I gave up, and went to ask the only Queen I could find.

* * *

"Oh, that," said Ida.

She was at the bench, at seven in the morning, after the clocks, with the carriage clock on its cloth and her tweezers. Jono was on the wobbling chair, with his tea. I was against the teapot.

"Nobody knows," she said. "My father used to say a man from the railway made it up, to sell tickets, and the hotels liked it, and that was that. My mother said it was in a poem. My husband said it was the council, but he said everything was the council." She picked up a wheel. "It doesn't matter who said it first. What matters is who believed it."

"Who believed it?" said Jono.

"Everybody," said Ida. "When I was a girl. Everybody in this town believed it. That's what it was like." She put the wheel down. "You've got to understand, it wasn't a slogan. Not then. It was true. People came here from all over. From London, from the Midlands, from abroad. Famous people. The hotels were full every summer and half full every winter, and the winter ones were the posh ones, the ones who came for their chests. There were orchestras. There were three theatres. There was the Pavilion with the band on Sundays. There were *palm trees*." She looked at Jono. "You've seen them. You came for them. Everybody came for them. Nobody else in England had palm trees."

"So it was a queen," said Jono.

"It was a queen," said Ida. "And we were the court."

* * *

She told us about the carnival, then. All of it. I'll give it to you as close to how she said it as I can, because she'd never told anybody the whole of it before, she said, not even her husband.

It was the summer she left school. She was seventeen. There was a carnival every year in those days, a big one, with floats, from the harbour up through the town, and every year they chose a girl to be the Carnival Queen. Not a beauty contest, she said, though it was a bit; mostly it was the traders. The traders of Union Street nominated a girl, a shop girl or a trader's daughter, and the traders' association voted, and the girl they chose rode at the front of the procession on a lorry covered in flowers.

They chose her.

"I didn't want it," said Ida. "I was shy. I was the girl who sat in the back of her father's shop with a loupe in. I'd never been looked at by anybody." She smiled, a bit. "My father put me up for it. Without telling me. He told the association I was the best-mannered girl on the street and that I'd never once in my life been late. And they voted. Unanimously, he said. I've always remembered that. *Unanimously*. It was the only time I ever heard my father use a long word."

She rode down Union Street, from the top to the bottom, on the back of a lorry from the dairy, which had been covered in hydrangeas from the park. She wore a long white dress her mother had made, and a crown made of gold card by the man in the toy shop, who also made the snow on his mountain. And both pavements were full. All the way down. Every shop had shut for the procession, and every shopkeeper was in their doorway, and in front of them, the crowds, from the town hall to the harbour, so many people that you couldn't see the shop fronts at all.

"I didn't wave," said Ida. "Not at first. I sat there. I was terrified. And then, about halfway down, by here, outside our shop, I saw my father. In the doorway. He'd shut the shop for the procession, first time in his life, and he was standing in the door in his waistcoat, with his hands in his pockets, and he looked up at me as I went past, and he took his hand out of his pocket and he waved." She stopped. "He never waved. At anything. And he waved at me. In front of the whole street."

She put the tweezers down.

"So I waved back," she said. "And then I couldn't stop. I waved all the way to the harbour. My arm hurt for a week."

* * *

Nobody said anything for a while. In the shop, a hundred and four clocks ticked.

"And after?" said Jono.

"After, they called me the Queen," said Ida. "Everybody on the street. For a joke, at first. The baker. The shoe man. *Morning, your majesty*. It was just what you did, on a street like that. Everybody had a name." She picked up a wheel and looked at it against the window. "And then it stuck. And then I got older, and I took over the shop, and I got married, and I was still the Queen. And then the shops started going."

"When?"

"Slowly. And then not slowly." She put the wheel in its place in the clock, very precisely. "The big stores went first. Up the hill. To the retail parks, with the car parks, where you didn't have to walk up anything. Then the little ones started going, because the big ones had gone and people stopped coming to the street. The shoe man retired and nobody took it. The toy shop shut, with the mountain still in the window, for a year, with the cotton wool going grey. The

baker died." She was quiet for a moment. "One by one. Every year, one or two. You'd come in on a Monday morning and there'd be brown paper on another window."

"And they still called you the Queen."

"The ones who were left," said Ida. "Fewer every year." She looked up at him. "And then, one day, about fifteen years ago, a lad in the phone shop called me it. A young lad, new, who'd heard it from somebody. *Morning, your majesty*. And I heard it different. For the first time. I heard what it meant, now." She looked at the window, at the yard with the drainpipe. "It meant the Queen of a dying street. That's all. The last one left. The one who hadn't had the sense to go."

* * *

I want to stop here and tell you something, because I think it matters, and because I'm the one writing this, and I can.

I'd spent four nights looking for who named Torquay the Queen. And I'd found nothing. And sitting in that back room, I understood that it didn't matter who named her, because the name had done the same thing to the town that it had done to Ida.

It started as true. Then it became a compliment. Then it became a joke. And then, at some point, without anybody deciding, it turned into a description of something that had gone. *The faded Queen. The Queen of the English Riviera.* It's on every article. It's always followed by the word *faded*, or *once*, or *former*. Nobody calls a thing a queen any more unless they're about to tell you what happened to her.

Jono: That's a lot of words for a name.

It's a lot of name for a town.

* * *

"Why didn't you go?" said Jono.

Ida looked at him.

"When it started going," said Jono. "You could have sold. Moved the shop. To one of the retail parks, or Exeter, or somewhere people still went. You'd have done better." He held his cup in both hands. "Why did you stay?"

She didn't answer for a long time.

"Because of the clocks," she said, eventually.

"The clocks could have gone with you."

"Not those clocks," said Ida. "Those clocks." She nodded at the shop. "The ones people bring in. They don't bring them in because I'm the best clock mender in the West Country, though I might be. They bring them in because they know where I am. Because I've always been here. A woman's mother's carriage clock stops, and she remembers there's a shop on Union Street with a green front, and she brings it in, because her mother brought it in, thirty years ago, to my father." She picked up the tweezers. "If I'd gone to a retail park, nobody'd remember. You don't remember a unit in a shed. You remember a doorway."

"So you stayed for them."

"I stayed because somebody has to keep the time," said Ida. "On a street. Somebody has to be where they always were, so people know where to find things. That's what a queen's for, in the end. Not the crown. Not the waving." She bent over the clock. "Being where they left you."

* * *

Jono didn't say anything. He drank his tea.

And then Ida asked him something. She'd never done it before. Not in all the mornings; she'd talked, and he'd listened, and that was how it went.

"What about you?" she said.

Jono looked at her.

"You never say anything about you," said Ida. "You sit there, on that chair, and you ask everybody what they'd need, and you write it down, or she does, and you never say one thing about yourself. Where you're from. Why you came. Why you go into people's houses in the night." She didn't look up from the clock. "Tenby says you're not from here."

"I'm not."

"Where, then?"

"All over," said Jono. "London, first. Then Kent. Then Malta, when I was a boy. Then all over the place."

"Malta," said Ida. "My father went to Malta. In the navy." She turned the tiny screw. "Why all over?"

"It's a long story."

"I've got a hundred and four clocks," said Ida. "I've got time."

Jono looked at his tea for a long time.

"It's in a book," he said. "I wrote it down. All of it. Most of it." He shrugged. "I'm not good at saying it. I'm better at writing it."

"I don't read books," said Ida. "I read dockets."

Jono laughed. He couldn't help it.

"Then I'll tell you a docket," he said. "One line. I didn't have a home, for a long time. Not a real one. Not anywhere. I lived in a lot of places and none of them were mine." He put his cup on the saucer. "And then I came here by accident and saw the palm trees, and I stayed. That's the first time I ever stayed anywhere because I wanted to."

Ida's tweezers stopped.

She looked up at him. With the loupe in. The huge eye, magnified, blinking.

"Well, then," she said. "You'll understand."

"Understand what?"

"Why I stayed," said Ida. "It's the same thing. Being where you chose." She went back to the clock. "You're one of us, then. The ones who stay."

* * *

He went at nine. At the door to the shop, he stopped, the way he does. The shop was getting light; the sun was on the upper windows across the street. Ida had come out from the back to open up.

"Have you still got it?" said Jono. "The crown."

Ida looked at him for a moment. Then she went to the drawer behind the counter, the one with the photograph in, and opened it, and took out, from underneath the photograph, a flat thing, folded, gold card gone brown at the edges and soft as cloth, with the points of the crown bent over and creased.

She held it up. It unfolded, slowly, a little, the way old card does.

"My mother kept it," she said. "In with her sewing things. I found it when she died." She looked at it. "I've never put it on since."

"Would you?"

"No," said Ida. "Don't be daft." She folded it up again, along its old creases, and put it back in the drawer, under the photograph. "I'm seventy-nine. I'm not a queen. I'm a woman who mends clocks." She closed the drawer. "Go home. Go to sleep. You look terrible."

He went.

But I'd seen her face when she held it up. I was in his pocket, and the camera was on, which it shouldn't have been. And I'll tell

you, because I think she'd want somebody to know, though she'd never say so: for about two seconds, holding a crown made of gold card by a man who made snow out of cotton wool, she looked exactly like the girl on the back of the lorry. Halfway down Union Street. Outside her father's shop. Just before she waved.

15. Teo

IQ 21 · Hundreds 1 · Nine weeks

The lad in chef's whites came to the table on the second Thursday in January.

Jono didn't recognise him at first. He wasn't in whites; he was in a hoodie and jeans and a pair of trainers so clean they looked as if they'd come out of the box that morning. He came in through Marivic's door at ten past nine, and Marivic said, "Teo!" the way you'd say it to a nephew, and put a plate of something in front of him at the counter before he'd sat down, and he ate it standing up, and then he looked round at the window table, at the card in Ida's green, *ASK ME ANYTHING. OR TELL ME.*, and at Jono behind it, with his coffee and his breakfast and me against the ketchup.

"You're the one with the old bloke," he said. "On the Strand. Who drew the terrace."

"That was Richard," said Jono. "I just sat next to him."

The lad came over. He sat down without being asked, which is how the good ones do it. He put his phone on the table, and on the screen was Richard's drawing: the hotel, the canopy, the tables, the road moved over, the question marks round the north arrow.

"Chef's had it printed out," he said. "It's on the wall in the kitchen. Next to the hygiene certificate." He looked at it. "Everybody keeps looking at it. Nobody says anything. They just look at it." He looked up. "I'm Teo."

"Jono."

"I know," said Teo. "Marivic told me. She says you're too thin and you work too much and you don't know how to cook." He grinned. "She says you're all right, though."

* * *

I'll tell you about Teo, because he's going to matter, and because he asked me to put this bit in.

He's nineteen. He was born in Torquay, at the top end, in a flat over a bookie's in Ellacombe, and he's lived there all his life with his mum and his nan and, at different times, two stepdads, one of whom was all right. He left school at sixteen. He went to the college, for a catering course, and was good at it, and was put forward for a competition in Exeter, and came third, and the man who came first had been cooking since he was twelve in his dad's restaurant in Plymouth. He started on the Strand as a kitchen porter at seventeen, and he's a commis now, which means he's the bottom of the cooks, the one who does the vegetables and the sauces and the things nobody else wants to do, for a little more than the minimum wage, from two in the afternoon till midnight, five days a week, in a kitchen the size of a caravan.

He's very good. I've seen what he makes, on his phone. Not the restaurant's food. His own. His nan's from Liverpool and his first stepdad's from Lagos and he grew up eating both, and what he makes is somewhere between the two, and it's the kind of food that makes you want to ring somebody and tell them about it.

He's leaving.

* * *

"March," he said. "I've got a job. London. A proper kitchen. Big one. Thirty cooks. Chef there came down on holiday last summer and ate in our place and asked who'd done the sauce, and it was me, and he

gave me his card." He turned the phone over and back. "I start the second week of March."

The second week of March. I checked. It was the week of the committee.

"That's good," said Jono. "That's really good."

"Yeah." Teo looked out of the window, at the street. At Cheverton's green front opposite, and the plywood two along, and the shops with brown paper. "My mum cried. My nan said *about time*." He laughed, but not much. "Everybody I was at college with's gone. Bristol, London, Manchester. One's in Australia. There's three of us left. Me and two lads who work in Tesco and say they're going and won't."

"Why are you going?"

Teo looked at him as if it was a stupid question.

"Because there's nothing here," he said. "You know that. Look at it." He nodded at the window. "I want my own place. One day. That's all I want. My own place, my own food. And you can't do that here. You can't start anything here. Do you know what it costs, to open a restaurant? Even a small one? Eighty grand. Minimum. A lease, a kitchen, the extraction, the fit-out, the licence. Eighty grand. I earn eleven an hour. I'd be sixty." He shrugged. "In London, at least, you can get noticed. Get on. Somebody might back you. Here, there's no one to back you. There's no one with money who wants to back anything except another hotel."

Jono didn't say anything. He drank his coffee.

"You're going to ask me to stay," said Teo. "Aren't you. That's what this is. *Ask me anything*. Marivic said you'd ask me to stay."

"I'm not going to ask you to stay," said Jono.

Teo blinked.

"It's your life," said Jono. "If you want to go, go. It's a good job. You earned it. I'm not going to sit here and tell you to give up a job in London for a street with plywood on it."

"Then what are you going to ask?"

"What I always ask," said Jono. "What would you need?"

* * *

Teo laughed.

"Eighty grand," he said.

"No," said Jono. "Not to open a restaurant. To start. What would you need to *start*? Here. Tomorrow. To cook your food for people who'd pay for it."

Teo opened his mouth, and closed it.

I'd like to tell you he had an answer straight away. He didn't. He sat there for nearly a minute, with his phone in his hand, looking at the table. I think nobody had ever asked him a question with a smaller answer than the one he'd been carrying round.

"A stall," he said, eventually.

"Go on."

"Like a market stall. Not a restaurant. Just — a counter. A gas ring. Two, maybe. Somewhere to wash up. Somewhere people walk past. And a sign." He was looking at the window now. "Saturday and Sunday, to start. While I'm still working. Three, four dishes. My nan's scouse, but with — " He stopped. "Doesn't matter. Something people would queue for. And if they queued, I'd know." He looked at Jono. "That's all you need, really. To know if they'll queue."

"How much would that cost?"

"A stall?" Teo thought about it. "Depends where. If it was somewhere with water and power already. Somewhere with the extraction done." He shrugged. "Couple of hundred a month. Less. I don't know. There isn't anywhere like that here. There's the market, but it's dead, and it's got no kitchens, and it's all going to be knocked about anyway."

Jono looked at me, against the ketchup.

"Ania," he said. "Tell him what Chris said. In the market. Before Christmas."

* * *

So I told him about hawker centres.

I told him the way Chris had told Richard, standing under the iron roof, but shorter, because Teo's attention isn't long, and because I'm better at short. The pushcarts. The halls. One stall each, cheap, with water and drains and power. The queues. The forty years in three square metres. The stars.

"*Michelin*?" said Teo.

"Some of them," I said. "For a stall."

"For a *stall*?"

"There's a man who makes chicken rice," I said. "In one of them. He's been doing it for decades. He got a star. People queue for two hours."

Teo looked at the phone, at Richard's drawing, at the canopy and the tables. Then he looked across the street, at the side street that goes up to the market, which you can just see from Marivic's window if you lean.

"The market," he said.

"The council's going to restore it," said Jono. "So it stands on its own. In the middle of a square. Nobody knows yet what's going in it."

"They should put that in it," said Teo. "That thing. The hawker thing." He was leaning now, looking up the side street. "They should put stalls in it, cheap, with kitchens. And let people start." He sat back. "They won't, though. Will they? They'll put in a coffee chain and a shop that sells candles."

"I don't know," said Jono. "Nobody's asked them."

"Has anyone asked *them*?" Teo nodded at the window, at the street, at everything. "Has anybody asked anybody under thirty what should go in it?"

I checked. I had the table from the survey, four summers ago. *Respondents by age.*

"Thirty-eight people under twenty-five," I said. "Out of eleven hundred and twelve."

Teo looked at the pocket.

"Thirty-eight," he said.

"Four summers ago."

"I was fifteen."

"Then you weren't one of them," I said.

* * *

He left at ten. He had to be at work at two, and he wanted to sleep first, because he'd done a double the night before.

At the door, he stopped. I don't think he knew he was doing what Jono does. I think it's catching.

"If they did it," he said. "The stalls. In the market. When would it be?"

"Years," said Jono. "Two, three. If they do it at all."

Teo nodded. "I'll be in London."

"You will."

"Right." He stood in the door, with his clean trainers and his phone. Outside, across the street, Ida had come out of Cheverton's to sweep her step, in her cardigan, with the loupe on its chain round her neck, and she looked up and saw Teo in Marivic's door and nodded at him, the small nod she gives to people she's decided about.

"She cuts my nan's hair," said Teo. "Did you know that? Ida. Once a month. In the back of the shop. For nothing. Since my nan

was sixty." He looked at Ida, sweeping. "She does about ten of them. Old ladies. Sunday mornings. With the clocks going."

"I know," said Jono. "I've met her. Your nan. She showed everybody a photograph of your sauce."

Teo went red. "She shows everybody. Nobody knows about Ida, though. The hair." He shrugged. "It's not on a form." He went out, and across the road, and stopped and said something to Ida, and she laughed, and he went on down the hill towards the harbour.

* * *

Jono sat at the table for a long time after that. Until eleven, when the card folds up.

Nobody else came. It was January, and raining, and Union Street was empty, and the only people who walked past the window in the last hour were a man with a pushchair and a woman from the council in a lanyard, who looked at the card and looked at Jono and hurried on.

At five to eleven, Precious rang. From the shelter.

"He's been going out," she said. "Tenby. At night. After lights out. I've had to sign him out three nights this week. He comes back at five, soaking. Won't say where." She paused. "I'm not supposed to tell you. But you asked me to ring if anything. So I'm ringing."

"Where does he go?"

"He won't say. He just says he's going to look at something." Another pause. "He's got that book with him. The one with no cover. And a torch."

Jono looked out of Marivic's window, down the hill, towards the harbour. You can't see the Pavilion from Union Street. It's round the corner, on the front. But you can see the sky above where it is, and the sky that night, over the harbour, was low and heavy and the colour of a bruise.

“There’s a storm coming,” said Precious. “Next week. They named it this morning.”

PART FOUR

WET FEBRUARY

16. The February Button

IQ 21 · Hundreds 1 · Eight weeks

Chris built it in nine days. He'd been thinking about it, he said, for thirty years.

He called it *See*. That's all. Not an app with a clever name and a logo and a launch; Chris hates launches. A page you could open on any phone, which asked you one thing: *Show me a street.*

You pointed your phone at a street, any street, and took a photograph. Or you typed an address, and I found a photograph. And then the page asked you the second thing: *What would you change?*

* * *

I want to explain how it worked, because it's the most important thing in this book, and because it's the thing people have asked me about most. And because it's simple, which is the hardest thing to explain.

You could type anything. *Trees. Somewhere to sit. Get rid of the cars. A market. Make it look like it used to.* Or you could choose from a list, a short one, that Richard had written in an evening at his kitchen table, from fifty years of drawing: *a canopy, trees in the ground, move the road, tables outside, stalls, light at night, a crossing, water, steps, somewhere for children.* Each one with a little drawing beside it, in pen, in his hand.

And then I'd draw it. Your street, from your photograph, from where you were standing, changed the way you'd asked.

That's not the clever part. Anybody can make a picture now. You can type *Torquay harbour like the Mediterranean* into any of a hundred programmes and get something beautiful in ten seconds. I'd done it myself, for Richard, and put it next to a grey day in November, and been turned face down on a kitchen table for it.

The clever part was the three things Chris put underneath.

* * *

The first was the February button.

Under every picture, there was a button. One word on it. *February*.

You pressed it, and I drew the same picture again. Same street, same changes, same everything. But at four o'clock in the afternoon, on a Tuesday in February, in the rain. Grey sky. Wet paving. The light going. People in coats with their heads down. The bus going past, spraying. If you'd asked for tables outside, the tables were there, but wet, with the chairs tipped up against them and one man under the canopy, if there was a canopy, with a coffee, looking at his phone. If there wasn't a canopy, there was nobody.

It was Jono's. Chris said so, the night he showed us. He said, *That's yours. That's the Sunday lunch*. Jono didn't say anything. He pressed the button, on Chris's kitchen table, on a picture of the Strand with the road moved, and watched the summer go out of it, and the rain come in, and the canopy still there, with a man under it, dry.

"It still works," said Jono.

"That's the point," said Chris. "If it doesn't work in February, it doesn't work."

* * *

The second thing was the Receipt.

At the bottom of every picture, small, in a strip, I'd write what was real and what wasn't. *This street, now: photograph taken by you, at this time. Changes: your idea. Rule: Richard's, number four, "start with the space". What would have to happen: the road moved 6 metres, which would need the bus company and the highways department and about two years. Has anyone asked for this before? Yes, once, in a letter, eleven years ago. Here it is.*

And a link. To the letter, or the plan, or the report, or nothing, if there was nothing.

"Every picture's got to tell you what it would take," said Chris. "Not just what it would look like. Otherwise it's a postcard."

"Otherwise it's wayang," said Niamh, who'd learned the word, and liked it.

* * *

The third thing was four words. In the corner of every picture, in every version, summer and February, in the same small grey type, where you couldn't crop it out without cropping out half the street.

A picture, not a plan.

"Why?" said Richard. He minded that one. He thought it undersold it.

"Because it isn't one," said Chris. "And the day somebody shares it pretending it is, somebody else will point at those four words, and we'll have been honest first." He looked at Richard. "You've been drawing plans for fifty years and nobody built them. You know why? Because a plan's a thing the council does. And people think they can't. So they wait." He tapped the screen. "This isn't a plan. It's a picture. Anybody can make one. And when ten thousand people have made one of their own street, the council won't need a survey to find out what people want. It'll be able to see it."

Richard looked at the four words for a long time.

"You know what that is," he said.

"Tell me."

"It's me," said Richard. "That's what I've always said. *I'm the scribe. I'll draw everyone's ideas, and then they'll feel they own it, and they'll fight for it*." He looked at the screen. "I've been doing it with a fountain pen, for one person at a time. You've given every person in the bay a scribe."

"I've given every person in the bay *you*," said Chris. "Fifty years of you. In a list of ten things, with your drawings next to them." He sat back. "Expertise isn't scarce any more, Richard. That's what nobody's noticed. It used to be. You had to go to Manchester for six years and work for a man at Westminster Abbey and draw for fifty years, and then you were the only one who knew. Now you can put what you know in everybody's pocket." He shook his head. "And nobody's doing it. Not one council in this country. They've all got the tools. They're all using them to write press releases."

In Singapore, I thought. He didn't say it. He didn't need to. I logged it anyway.

* * *

Kezia tested it.

You'll remember Kezia, if you've read the first book. She's seventeen now, at the college in Paignton, doing engineering, with green hair that's become blue and a lanyard she hates. She sprayed a wave on a board on the green, and somebody sprayed GO HOME over it, and an old man in a dressing gown painted it out. She makes the cards for Jono's table.

She took See to college on the Monday, and by Wednesday her whole year had used it, and by Friday, half the college.

She sent me the pictures. Hundreds of them. I'll give you some, because they're the best thing in the book.

The bus station in Paignton, with a roof that didn't leak. A skate park with lights that stayed on, and somebody had asked for *a place to sit that isn't a wall*. The road outside the college, with a crossing. Victoria Street with trees, in the ground, big ones, and tables. The front at Preston, with the wall low enough to see over; I had to put a note on that one, in the Receipt, saying that the wall's height had been decided and here was the decision, and the student pressed February anyway, and the sea came over the low wall in the picture and up the green, and she wrote, under it, *ok fair*.

And one that Kezia sent me on its own, at eleven at night, with no message.

It was a photograph of a street in Paignton, near the station. Terraced houses, small, with their front doors straight onto the pavement. Bins outside. A car up on the kerb. And the student had asked for one thing.

A bench outside my nan's so she can sit out.

I drew it. A bench, outside a front door, on a narrow pavement, with a woman on it in a cardigan, in the sun. Then the student pressed February. And I drew it again: the same bench, wet, at four o'clock, empty, with the light on in the window behind it.

Under the February one, the student had written: *she'd still sit out. she sits out in the rain anyway. she just has to stand.*

* * *

Dilys measured the Strand.

You'll remember Dilys too. She drives a school taxi and she used to be an optical engineer at the old factory on the hill above Paignton, joining glass fibres the width of a hair, to a thousandth of a millimetre. She's the one who checks. In the first book, she checked that Richard's wall drawing was what it said it was, and

found it wasn't, quite, and held a broom handle at a metre and a half in front of a camera while an old man couldn't see over it.

She went to the Strand at six in the morning, on a Saturday, before the buses, with a measuring wheel she'd borrowed from a man at the school, and a notebook, and a flask, and walked it. The whole length. Both sides. Every kerb, every lane, every bus stop, every tree. It took her three hours. Then she came to Chris's kitchen and laid her notebook on the table, open, with the numbers in it in her small hard capitals, and said:

"It half works."

Richard went very still.

"The middle's fine," said Dilys. "You can move the road over by six metres along most of the length. The harbour side's wide enough. There's room for the road and the planting and a footpath. It's all there. The numbers are fine." She turned a page. "The end's not."

"Which end?"

"The clock tower end." She put her finger on a sketch, in pencil, of the junction at the end of the Strand, where the old clock tower stands on its island in the middle of the traffic. "Everything comes round there. The buses come down the hill and turn. If you move the road over, they've got to turn tighter to get onto it. I've done the swept path. That's the space a bus needs to turn, the back wheels cut in." She'd drawn it, a curve, in pencil, with numbers on it. "A single-decker can just do it. A double-decker can't. Not without mounting the island. And the island's got the clock tower on it."

Nobody said anything.

"So," said Dilys, "either you don't move the road at that end, and it swings back to where it is now, for the last forty metres, and the canopy stops short. Or you move the clock tower." She closed the notebook. "And I wouldn't move the clock tower. I'd be lynched."

Richard picked up her notebook and looked at the curve for a long time.

"It's a drawing on the back of an email about bins," he said, eventually. "I didn't do a swept path."

"No," said Dilys.

"I should have done a swept path."

"You were drawing a feeling," said Dilys. "I'm drawing a bus." She poured herself some tea from her flask. "That's why there's two of us."

* * *

He changed it that night. He sent me a new drawing at midnight: the road moved, along most of the Strand, and at the clock tower end, swinging gently back to where it is now, for the last forty metres, with a curve marked *SWEPT PATH — D.F.*, and the canopy stopping short of it, at a corner, with a tree.

It was signed. It was dated. It had a proper north arrow, firm and black, with an N.

I put it into See, as the starting point for anybody who wanted to change the Strand. And I put Dilys's name in the Receipt. *Swept path checked by D. Ferraby, retired optical engineer, with a borrowed wheel, at six in the morning.*

She asked me to take it out. I said no. It was the first time I'd ever said no to her. She said, *Well, at least spell it right*, and I had.

17. Storm

IQ 21 · Hundreds 1 · Seven weeks

The storm came on a Wednesday night.

It had a name. They all do, now. I'm not going to give it to you, because a name is a kind of date, and because it doesn't matter. It was a big one. The kind that comes in from the south-west in February, off the Atlantic, with the wind behind it, and hits Torbay square on, because Torbay faces the wrong way for storms. The forecast said gusts of eighty miles an hour on the coast. The council closed the front. The ferries didn't sail. Precious, at the shelter, opened the overflow room and put mattresses on the floor of the dining hall and rang everybody she knew who slept out and told them to come in.

Most of them did.

Tenby didn't.

* * *

Jono was on. He was in charge, which meant he was the one with the phone that everybody rang, and the phone rang every eleven minutes from ten o'clock: a woman in Babbacombe whose window had blown in, a man in St Marychurch whose carer couldn't get there because a tree was down, two falls, a panic, a lifeline alarm that turned out to be a cat. He drove through it. I was on the dashboard, in a holder, giving him roads. Half of them were shut.

At ten to one, between calls, his own phone rang. Precious.

"He's gone out," she said. "Tenby. I couldn't stop him. I told him. I said it's a storm, you're not going anywhere, you'll be killed. He said he had to check something. He said it was important. He said *tonight's the night it'll show*." She was shouting, over noise; there were forty people in her dining hall. "He took the torch and the book. He went down the hill. Towards the front."

"How long ago?"

"Twenty minutes. I'd have rung before but I had a fight in the kitchen." She stopped. "Jono, I've called the police. They said they'll look. They've got a hundred calls."

"I know," said Jono. "I'm one of them."

He had a woman in Wellswood to get to. A fall, a ninety-year-old, on her own. He went. He did it properly; he always does. He was there forty minutes, and got her up, and checked her, and made the tea, and asked her what she'd need, and she said she'd need the wind to stop, and he said he'd see what he could do, and she laughed.

Then he drove down to the harbour.

* * *

I want to describe the harbour that night, because I don't think I'll ever see anything like it again, and I've been asked not to make it sound exciting. It wasn't exciting. It was terrifying.

The front was closed. There were barriers across the road at both ends and a police car with its lights going and nobody in it. The sea was coming over the harbour wall. Not splashing; coming over, in sheets, white, and running across the road in a flood that went back and forth with each wave, carrying stones and seaweed and a bin. The noise was the worst. A roaring that never stopped and a crash every few seconds that you felt in your feet. The palm trees along the front were bent over, all the same way, with their

leaves streaming. The streetlights were on, some of them, and the rain was going past them sideways.

Jono parked at the top of the hill, by the clock tower, and got out, and the wind took the car door out of his hand and slammed it so hard against the hinge that it never shut properly again.

He put me in his inside pocket. The fleece one, zipped. I could hear, but I couldn't see. I'll tell you what I heard, and then I'll tell you what he told me, and I'll say which is which.

* * *

What I heard was the wind, and his breathing, and his boots, running. Then stopping. Then the roar, very close.

Then his voice. Shouting.

"*Tenby!*"

Then nothing. Then, a long time later, a minute and twelve seconds, quieter, more to himself:

"He's in it."

"In what?" I said.

"The Pavilion." He was breathing hard. "There's a light. Inside. On the stairs. Through the window. Up high." I heard him move. "There's a gap in the fence. On the harbour side. Where the panel's come loose. It's blown open."

"Jono," I said. "Don't."

He didn't answer.

"It's a listed building," I said. "It's shut. It's fenced. It's dangerous. That's why it's fenced. The steel's going; Clemency showed us. There are tiles coming off it in this wind. If you go in there —"

"There's a man in there."

"The police know. Precious rang them."

“The police have got a hundred calls,” said Jono. “I’m one of them.” I heard the fence. Metal, scraping, rattling, the panel moving in the wind. “Ania, if I’m not out in an hour, ring Chris.”

“Jono —”

“An hour,” he said.

And then the wind changed, and the noise changed, became hollow, echoing, as if we’d gone into a cave, and I knew we were inside.

18. Inside

IQ 21 · Hundreds 1 · Seven weeks

His phone died at seven minutes past two.

The cold, I think. The battery was old and it had been in and out of a car all night in February, and inside the Pavilion it was colder than outside, with the wind coming through the broken windows and the water running down the walls. I was talking to him, and then I wasn't. I was nowhere. I came back at ten past six, when he plugged me into the car.

So I wasn't there for most of this chapter. I want to be as clear as I can about it. What follows is what Jono told me, afterwards, in the car, at ten past six in the morning, with the heater on full. And what Tenby told me, a week later, when he said I could put it in. I've checked it against each of them. Where they differ, I'll say.

They only differ once.

* * *

Inside the gap in the fence, Jono said, there was a door. It had been boarded up, a long time ago, and the board had been pulled half off, a long time ago too, and behind it, a corridor, dark, with water on the floor. He followed the torchlight he'd seen through the window. Not to the light; to where the light had been. Up.

There are stairs in the Pavilion, wide ones, the old stairs that the audience used to take up to the circle, with a rail, and tiles on the walls, and a glass dome over them somewhere, that he couldn't see. The rain was coming through the dome. He could hear it hitting the

stairs, like gravel. He went up them in the dark, with his hand on the rail, and the rail moved under his hand.

At the top, at the back of what used to be the circle, by a window, there was Tenby.

* * *

He was sitting on the floor. Against the wall, with his knees up, in his good coat, soaking. The torch was beside him, propped on the book, pointing up. And in his lap, a notebook, a school exercise book, blue, and a pencil.

He didn't look surprised.

"You're late," he said.

Jono said that's when he nearly hit him. He told me he'd never wanted to hit anybody so much in his life, and that he's wanted to hit a great many people, and that instead he sat down on the floor next to Tenby, on the edge of the bit of floor Tenby was sitting on, and said, "What the hell are you doing?"

"Measuring," said Tenby.

* * *

He showed Jono the notebook. Jono said it was the most extraordinary thing he'd ever seen, and that he didn't understand most of it.

It was drawings. Pages of them. Of the steel. Tenby had been coming in every night for a fortnight, through the gap in the fence on the harbour side, before it blew open, when it was just a loose panel you could lift. He'd been going round the inside of the building with his torch, finding the places where the steel showed. Where the tiles had come off, or the plaster, or where the water had run so long it had washed the render away. And he'd drawn each one. The beam, the joint, the bolt heads. And beside each drawing,

numbers. Measurements. How thick the rust was, how far it had swollen, how wide the cracks were in the render round it.

"With what?" said Jono.

Tenby took something out of his pocket. A little steel ruler, the kind you'd use in a workshop, with millimetres. And a set of feeler gauges, thin metal blades on a ring, the kind mechanics use to measure gaps.

"Nineteen years," said Tenby. "Ship's engineer. Ferries, mostly. Then tankers. Then ferries again." He put the gauges away. "Do you know what kills a ship?"

"The sea," said Jono.

"Salt," said Tenby. "The sea's just water. It's the salt. It gets into the steel. Into the joints, where two plates meet. It gets in the gap and it sits there and it works. And rust takes up more room than steel. Seven times more. So it pushes. It pushes the plates apart, from the inside, a fraction of a millimetre a year. Nobody sees it. The paint's fine. The outside's fine. And then one day there's a storm, and the sea hits it, and the joint that's been pushed apart for twenty years just —" He opened his hand. "That's what kills a ship. Not the storm. The twenty years before the storm."

He pointed the torch up. At the ceiling of the circle, high above them, dark. Water was coming through it in three places. And where the torch went, across a joint between two beams, Jono could see the same swollen bark he'd seen through the fence with Clemency, but bigger, much bigger, and a crack running away from it through the plaster, wide enough to put a finger in.

"That one," said Tenby. "I've been watching that one. It's moved three millimetres in a fortnight. In this weather." He lowered the torch. "Tonight's the night it'll show. If it's going to go. That's why I came."

* * *

Here's where they differ. The only place.

Jono says that about twenty minutes after he got there, something came down. Not the beam. A tile, from high up, one of the glazed ones, from somewhere above the stairs. He says it came down through the dark and hit the floor at the bottom of the stairs, where he'd been standing five minutes before, and burst, like a plate, and that he grabbed Tenby by the coat and dragged him back against the wall and they sat there for an hour, under the window, without moving, while the building creaked round them like a ship.

Tenby says it was three tiles, and that he heard them come loose before they fell, and that he'd already moved, and that Jono grabbed him by the coat anyway, and that he let him, because it seemed to make Jono feel better.

I've written down both. You can choose.

* * *

They sat under the window for three hours.

They couldn't go back down the stairs in the dark, with things coming off the ceiling and the rail moving. Tenby said the safest place in any structure is against a wall, under a window, because the window frame is the strongest bit, and they should wait for the light. So they waited. The storm went on outside. The building made noises Jono said he'll hear for the rest of his life: groans, deep ones, from somewhere in the frame, and cracks, sharp, like gunshots, and the water, always, running.

Tenby talked. About ships, mostly. About an engine room on a ferry to Ireland at three in the morning, the size of a church, hot as an oven, with the whole ship shaking. About a tanker off the coast of Africa where they'd lost power for nine hours and he'd fixed it with a part he'd made himself on a lathe from a bit of the galley.

About his wife. She'd died. He didn't say how. He said after that he'd drunk, and after a while he hadn't had a ship, and after a while longer he hadn't had a flat, and then he'd been in a doorway in Tenby, where he was from, and then in Swansea, and then in Bristol, and then, six winters ago, he'd got on a coach that said Torquay on the front because it was the warmest place in England, he'd read that somewhere, and it had palm trees.

"Palm trees," said Jono.

"You've seen them."

"It's why I came," said Jono.

Tenby laughed, in the dark.

* * *

Then Tenby said the thing that made Jono tell him.

He said it at about four in the morning, when the wind had dropped a little and the groans had got further apart. He said it looking at the ceiling, at where the crack was, that he couldn't see any more because the torch had gone dim.

"You shouldn't have come," he said.

"I know."

"No. I mean it. You shouldn't have." He was quiet for a while. "I'm not worth it. You've got a job. You've got people. You've got that computer and that old bloke with the drawings and the one with the stick, and you're doing something, I've seen it, I've seen the cards in Marivic's, you're doing something that matters. And you climbed in a building that's falling down in a hurricane at two in the morning for a man in a doorway who drinks and owes you nothing." He shook his head. "Nobody owes me anything. I'm nobody's problem. That's the one good thing about it. You should've left me."

Jono didn't say anything for a long time.

Then he told him about Malta.

* * *

I'm going to tell you what he told Tenby. It's in his book, *Pulling Back the Curtain*; there's a **Receipt** at the back. I'm going to tell it in my words, not his, and I'm going to leave out everyone's names, as I always do, because they're real people and they didn't ask to be in mine.

When he was fourteen, he lived in Malta. His family had gone there, in a way that was chaotic even by the standards of his family, which I'll tell you about in later books. His school had stopped. He worked on the street, selling holidays to tourists, and handed his money over at home. And in the winter, when the tourists stopped coming, the money stopped too.

One evening, in late February, he and his mother and his sister checked out of the hotel room they'd been living in, because they couldn't pay. They had nowhere to go. They sat in the hotel lobby with everything they owned in a few bags round their feet, and looked at each other, and didn't know what to do.

And a man walked in. A friend. Not a relative; somebody they knew. Jono went up to him, because somebody had to, and told him. The man couldn't put them up. But he went and talked to his friend, who was the night receptionist at the hotel. And the receptionist gave him a key.

To a storeroom. Behind the pool bar. Full of bed frames, stacked up high against the walls, out of season. Two of them had mattresses. After midnight, when it was safe, the man let them in, and they lay down, all three of them, in their clothes, huddled together, because it was February and cold, among the stacked bed frames, in the dark.

Before he went, the man told them: if anybody finds you, the receptionist loses his job.

He came back at five in the morning, as he'd said he would, and got them out the back way, to his car, before anybody saw.

* * *

"That's it?" said Tenby.

"No," said Jono. "There's another one."

The year after, he and his sister were in Malta on their own. No parents. Him fifteen, nearly, her a bit older, working, renting a room in a flat they could barely pay for. One night the rent came due, a deposit, forty pounds, and they didn't have it. He made an excuse and went out and stood in the street at the bottom of the stairs with no idea what to do.

And down the street, there were lights. A family restaurant, where a friend of his worked behind the bar. A girl, his own age. The lights were on. He said they looked like a beacon. He walked towards them.

She lent him the money. Just like that. And not just that once. When they had nothing to eat, which was often, she'd load him up with pizza and beer to take back. Other nights, they just went to bed early, to sleep through being hungry.

"She didn't owe me anything," said Jono. "Neither did the man with the key. Neither did the receptionist, who could've lost his job. I was nobody's problem. That's what I thought, as well. I was fourteen, and I was nobody's problem." He looked at Tenby in the dark. "And they did it anyway."

Tenby didn't say anything.

"So I'm not doing you a favour," said Jono. "I want you to understand that. I'm not some good man come to save you. I'm paying back. I've been paying back for thirty-odd years. I'll be paying back till I'm dead, and I'll still be short." He leaned his head

back against the wall. “You don’t get to tell me you’re not worth it. Nobody gets to say that. It’s not their call.”

* * *

They sat there till the light came.

It came at about half past six, grey, through the broken window above them. The wind had dropped. The rain had stopped. The building had stopped groaning, mostly. They could see the stairs, and the bits of tile at the bottom, three of them, Jono admits, in pieces, and the crack in the ceiling, and the swollen joint, and the water still dripping from it.

Tenby got up first. He went and stood under the joint, with his ruler, and measured the crack. Then he wrote it in his book.

“Four millimetres,” he said. “It’s moved one more.” He closed the book. “It’s not going to go today. But it’s going.” He looked at Jono. “Two winters. Maybe three. Then something like last night, and that beam lets go, and then this whole side comes down.”

“You don’t know that.”

“No,” said Tenby. “I know engines. This isn’t an engine. I could be wrong.” He put the ruler in his pocket. “But I’m not.”

* * *

They went out at five past seven, the way they’d come in. Down the stairs, carefully, by the wall. Along the corridor with the water. Through the boarded door. Out of the gap in the fence, into the morning.

There was a security van on the harbour. And a man in a hi-vis jacket, with a torch, walking along the fence, checking the panels after the storm. And behind him, on the other side of the road, by a bench, a man with a camera. Not a phone. A real camera, with a long lens.

The man with the camera took eleven photographs of Jono climbing out of the fence.

I know it was eleven, because I've seen them all.

19. Trespass

IQ 21 · Hundreds 1 · Six weeks

They were online by nine.

Not on a newspaper. On a page I'd never seen before, a community page, *The Torquay Question*, which had been set up four days earlier and had three hundred followers, most of them, when I checked, created in the same week. One photograph. The best of the eleven, from the camera's point of view: Jono halfway through the gap in the fence, one leg over the bottom rail, looking back over his shoulder, in his work fleece, soaking, with a face that looked, if you didn't know he'd spent the night under a window in a groaning building, exactly like a man who'd been caught.

Underneath:

Paignton "community campaigner" Jono Hills caught at dawn breaking into Torquay's Grade II listed Pavilion, which is closed for safety reasons. Hills, who led protests against Paignton's sea wall last year, has recently been seen on Union Street encouraging opposition to the Union Square regeneration. What was he doing inside a protected building during a storm? Torquay deserves answers.

By eleven it had been shared four thousand times.

* * *

I knew whose it was. I want to be honest: I didn't know it the way I'd need to know it to tell you, not with a Receipt. I knew it the way you know a voice on the phone before they say their name. The

phrasing. *Torquay deserves answers*. The careful *recently been seen*, which is the kind of phrase you write when you've been told by a lawyer what you can say. The page that was four days old. The three hundred followers who were all a week old. I'd seen all of it before, in a Paignton spring, with a flooded shop and a website called *Build It Now*.

I said so, to Jono, in the car, at the shelter, where he'd taken Tenby.

"I know," said Jono.

"I can prove the followers are fake. I can show the page was made four days ago. I can show the photographer was there before you came out, which means he was there all night, waiting, which means somebody knew —"

"How would somebody know?"

I stopped.

"I don't know," I said. "Unless they'd been watching Tenby. Unless they knew he'd been going in."

"Unless," said Jono.

* * *

He went home and slept for four hours. When he woke up, his phone had forty-one messages on it. I'll tell you some of them.

Margot, his manager. *Call me when you're up. Not cross. Need to know.*

Chris. *Read it. Don't answer anything till you've talked to me.*

Richard. *Clowns*. And then, a minute later: *Not you.*

Clemency. *Did you damage it?*

Ida. She doesn't text. Marivic did it for her. *Ida says are you alright and was it Tenby. Ida says she will tell anyone who asks. Ida says don't be daft. Marivic x*

Niamh. *I've had three calls about you already. One from a man who wouldn't give his name and said he was "just a concerned resident" and offered me the other ten photos.*

And thirty-four people he'd never met, some kind, some not.

* * *

He rang Margot first. She's fair. She was fair in the first book, when a complaint came in about his blog, and she was fair now. She asked if he'd been on shift when he went in. He said he'd finished his last call and was off the clock, by eight minutes; he'd checked. She asked if anybody he was caring for was involved. He said no. She asked if the police had been. He said a man in hi-vis from the security firm had taken his name and Tenby's, and rung it in, and a police officer had rung him back that morning, and asked him what happened, and he'd told her, and she'd said words of advice, and no further action, given the circumstances, and please don't do it again.

"Will you do it again?" said Margot.

"If somebody's in there," said Jono, "yes."

Margot was quiet for a while.

"Right," she said. "I'm going to need you to keep your name out of the paper for a bit. Not because you did anything wrong. Because I've got a board, and the board reads the paper, and I can protect you from one thing at a time." She paused. "You know that."

"I know."

"Was he all right? The man?"

"He was measuring the steel," said Jono. "He's an engineer. He thinks it'll come down."

"Is he right?"

"He doesn't know," said Jono. "Neither do I."

* * *

Then he rang Chris.

Chris had a plan, of course. He'd had it since nine. He said they should put out the whole story. All of it: the storm, Precious's call, the woman in Wellswood, the gap in the fence, Tenby, the notebook, the three hours under the window. With the timings. With Precious saying so. With Tenby saying so. "You were getting a man out of a building in a hurricane," said Chris. "That's not a scandal. That's a medal. All you have to do is tell them."

"No," said Jono.

"Jono —"

"I'm not putting Tenby in it."

Chris was quiet.

"He's a man in a shelter," said Jono. "With no doorway, and no sleeping bag, and his whole life in a rucksack in a skip. If I put out the whole story, he's *the homeless man the campaigner rescued*. That's what he'll be. In every share. For ever. Every time anybody in this town sees him, that's what they'll see." He shook his head. "He's not my story. He's not my alibi. I'm not using him to get out of a photograph."

"Then what are you going to say?"

"The truth," said Jono. "The bit that's mine."

* * *

So he wrote it. On his phone, at Chris's kitchen table, with me against the fruit bowl, in about a minute, and he wouldn't let me change a word.

I went into the Pavilion on the night of the storm to get somebody out. They were all right. I'd do it again. I'm sorry about the fence. I've asked the council how much a panel costs and I'll pay for it. — Jono

That's all. He posted it on his own page, the one with the blog, with nine hundred followers, all of them real.

"That's not enough," I said. "It doesn't say who. It doesn't say why. It doesn't say about Precious, or the police, or the storm. People will fill in the gaps. They'll fill them in with whatever *The Torquay Question* tells them."

"Some will," said Jono.

"Then why —"

"Because the people who matter will ask," said Jono. "And when they ask, I'll tell them. One at a time." He put the phone down. "That's how it works, Ania. Not four thousand shares. One person who asks, and gets told."

* * *

It cost.

I'm going to tell you how much, because I promised small failures and I don't want you to think that's a phrase for things that don't hurt.

The photograph went round the bay for a week. It was in the paper, the online edition, in a story that said *A spokesperson for Mr Hills said he had entered the building to assist an individual*, which was a sentence Niamh's old editor had written from Jono's post, and which made it sound like a press release. People said things in the comments that I won't repeat. A man shouted something at him in the street in Paignton, by the station, that I also won't repeat. Two people who'd been coming to the Thursday table on Torbay Road stopped coming.

And on Union Street, the woman from the charity shop signed Varley's form.

She told Ida. She came in, on the Monday, and stood at the counter, and said she was sorry. She said her husband was ill and

the money would help, and that after she'd seen the picture of *that man* climbing out of a fence she'd thought, well, if that's who's on the other side, and she'd rung the number on the card.

"He's not on the other side," said Ida. "There isn't another side. That's the whole point."

"Well, he's not on Mr Varley's side."

"No," said Ida. "He's not on anybody's side. He's on the step." She put the loupe in. "I hope your husband gets better, Dympna."

The woman went. Ida told me she stood at the counter for an hour after, looking at the door, the way she had when Tenby didn't come back.

On my map, the hundred that covers Union Street had been the palest grey there is, almost blue. It went grey again.

* * *

On the Thursday, Tenby went to see Niamh.

Nobody asked him to. Jono didn't know. I didn't know. He went on his own, from the shelter, in the morning, after the eight o'clock out, and walked to the café where Niamh works now, in Torquay, at the top of the town, with her laptop and her satsumas, and sat down opposite her, and put the blue exercise book on the table.

"You're the one who writes about small print," he said.

"I am."

"Then write about this," said Tenby.

* * *

She did. It was the best thing she's ever written. I'll give you the first line, because she said I could.

For a fortnight before the storm, a former ship's engineer has been climbing into Torquay's Pavilion at night with a torch and a set of feeler gauges, measuring the rust.

And then all of it. The notebook. The drawings. The joint in the ceiling of the circle that moved three millimetres in a fortnight and one more in the storm. The nineteen years of ferries and tankers. What salt does to steel, in the joints, over twenty years. *That's what kills a ship. Not the storm.* Two winters, maybe three.

And then, in the eleventh paragraph, one sentence:

On the night of the storm, Mr Prys was found inside the building by a care worker who had been told he was missing, and who stayed with him until it was light enough to leave safely.

No name for the care worker. Tenby asked for that, Niamh told me. He said: *He kept me out of his. I'll keep him out of mine.*

* * *

I put Niamh's piece in my file. And beside it I put a note, which I'll give you, because it's the kind of thing I'd want somebody to tell me.

Tenby's view of the Pavilion is his view. He's an engineer, and he's very good, and he's not a structural engineer, and he says so himself. *Two winters, maybe three* is his guess. It's not a Receipt. The Receipt is the Victorian Society's list of the ten most endangered buildings in the country, which the Pavilion is on, and the council's own statement that the steel frame is badly corroded, both of which are real, and both of which you'll find at the back.

But nobody had ever measured it before. Not in public. Not with a number on it, written down, that anybody could check.

I'd like you to remember that. A man in a shelter, with a borrowed torch and a ruler, did what nobody else had done.

* * *

The paper ran Niamh's piece on the Saturday. Her old editor bought it from her, which she said was the best revenge she'd ever had.

On Saturday afternoon, Clemency rang Jono.

"I've read it," she said.

"Good."

"Did you damage it?"

"No."

"Then I don't care," said Clemency, "what anybody says about the fence." She paused. "I'd like to meet him. The engineer. I've been fighting for that building for twelve years and I've never once been inside it in the dark." Another pause. "And I'd like you to tell the council I'll pay for half the panel."

On my map, that afternoon, a hundred on the harbour, up the hill behind the Pavilion, where Clemency lives, went from grey to the palest blue.

That's two. It didn't make up for Union Street. But it was two.

20. The Wet Tuesday

IQ 21 · Hundreds 2 · Five weeks

It was Jono's idea, and everybody hated it.

"Four o'clock," he said. "Tuesday. On the Strand. In the rain. We all go. We stand where the canopy would be, and we press the button, and we look." He looked round Chris's kitchen. "If it doesn't work in February, it doesn't work. That's what you said."

"I said it about a picture," said Chris.

"Then let's stand in the picture."

* * *

So on the third Tuesday in February, at four o'clock in the afternoon, in rain that the forecast called *persistent*, which means it doesn't stop and doesn't get heavier and doesn't get lighter and just goes on, eight of us stood on the Strand.

Richard, in his flat cap, with his umbrella up this time. Chris, who'd come by taxi and was sitting on the bench by the clock tower, with his stick, under a bus shelter roof that leaked on one side. Dilys, with her notebook in a plastic bag. Kezia, in a coat three sizes too big that she said was her mum's, with her blue hair plastered to her head. Teo, on his break, in whites and a fleece, smoking under the restaurant's side door. Marivic, who'd closed the café for an hour, which she never does, and brought Ida.

Ida had come down the hill in the camel coat with a plastic rain hood over her hair, the kind that ties under the chin, which I hadn't known people still made. She'd held Marivic's arm all the way. She

said she hadn't been down to the Strand in the rain in eleven years. She said there'd been no reason to.

And Jono. In his work fleece, with me in his top pocket, in a sandwich bag.

* * *

Richard had brought a tape. A long one, a surveyor's tape, on a reel. He and Dilys pulled it out from the front of the empty department store, across the pavement, across the road, six metres, to the line where the road would be if it moved. Dilys held one end at the kerb on the harbour side. Richard held the other at the shop fronts. A bus came down the hill, and they had to lift the tape over it, and the bus driver looked at them as if they'd escaped from somewhere.

"That's it," said Richard, when the bus had gone. "That's the space. From here to there. Under the canopy."

We all looked at the space. At the narrow wet pavement and the road and the spray from the next bus.

"Press it," said Jono.

* * *

Everybody pressed it. On their phones. I'd sent the new drawing, Richard's, signed and dated with Dilys's swept path, to every phone there, and they all held them up, in the rain, and pressed February, and looked at the screen, and then at the street, and then at the screen.

I'll tell you what they saw on the screen. I drew it.

The Strand, from where they were standing, at four o'clock on a Tuesday in February, in the rain. The light going. The harbour grey. The boats in their rows. And the road moved over, towards the water, with the strip of palms between it and the boats, bent a little in the wind. And on this side, where they were standing, in front of

the empty store, which was a hotel now, six storeys, with lights on in some of the rooms: a wide space, paved. And over it, a long glass canopy, running the length of the buildings, with the rain running off its front edge in a line, like a curtain.

And under the canopy, dry, some tables. Most of them empty. A man with a coffee. A woman with a pushchair, sheltering, waiting for the rain to ease. Two waiters, in the door of the hotel, smoking. A dog.

That's all. It wasn't a summer evening. It wasn't Croatia. It was a wet Tuesday in Torquay, with a canopy.

Then they looked up from their phones at the real Strand. At the narrow pavement, and the bus, and the spray, and the department store with its windows papered over, and the nowhere to stand.

* * *

Nobody said anything for a long time. The rain went on.

It was Ida who spoke first.

"We had awnings," she said.

Everybody looked at her.

"On Union Street. When I was a girl." She was looking at the screen of Marivic's phone, which Marivic was holding for her, because her hands were cold. "Every shop had one. Canvas ones, striped, on a roller, that you wound out with a pole with a hook on the end. My father had a green one. You wound it out in the morning, and you wound it in at night, and when it rained, everybody on the street walked under them. All the way up the hill. You could go from the harbour to the town hall in the rain and hardly get wet, if you kept to the shops." She looked up at the real Strand. "And people stopped. That's the thing. When it rained, people stopped. Under your awning. They'd stand there, waiting for it to ease, and they'd look in your window. And sometimes they'd

come in." She paused. "Half my father's best customers came in out of the rain."

"What happened to them?" said Kezia. "The awnings."

"The council said they were a hazard," said Ida. "Low enough to hit your head on, or something. And the shops couldn't afford to keep them up. And then the shops went." She looked at the phone again, at the long glass canopy and the line of rain running off its edge. "That's an awning. That's just a big one. For everybody."

* * *

Richard was standing very still, holding his end of the tape. The rain was running off his umbrella.

"Yes," he said.

Ida looked at him.

"That's what I meant," said Richard. "That's what I've always meant." He wasn't looking at any of us. He was looking at the space, at the six metres of wet pavement and road between his end of the tape and Dilys's. "Not the summer. Anybody can do the summer. The summer does itself. People come in the summer whatever you do." He lowered the umbrella a little, as if he'd forgotten it. "The canopy's not for July. It's for February. It's for this. Four o'clock on a Tuesday, when there's nobody about and nothing to do and it's raining, and you've got somewhere to stand. And because you've got somewhere to stand, you stop. And because you stop, the café's open. And because the café's open, the hotel's got something outside its door. And because the hotel's got something outside its door, people stay." He looked at Jono, at last. "The canopy's for February. I drew it for February. I just didn't know it till she said."

Jono didn't say anything. He looked at Richard, and nodded, once.

* * *

Teo had come over from the side door. He was standing with his phone, in his whites, getting wet, which chefs never do on purpose.

"We'd do Sunday lunch," he said.

Everybody looked at him.

"Under that." He held up the phone. "In February. Chef'd do a roast. Proper one. You'd have it under the glass, with heaters, with the rain coming down and the harbour out there. Nobody does that. Nobody does anything here in February. It's just shut." He looked at the screen. "People'd come for that. From Exeter. I'd come for that."

"You'll be in London," said Kezia.

Teo looked at her. Then he looked at the phone again.

"Yeah," he said.

* * *

Dilys had written something in her notebook, in the plastic bag. She showed it to me afterwards. It was a column of numbers. Rain, in millimetres per hour, from a weather app. Wind speed. The time. The number of people who'd walked past in the twenty minutes we'd been standing there. Seven. The number who'd stopped to look at us: four. The number who'd asked what we were doing: two. A woman with a shopping trolley and a man who said he worked for the bus company and wanted to know who'd told us we could measure his road.

Under the column, she'd written, in her small hard capitals:

IT STILL WORKS.

* * *

Chris didn't say anything at all, the whole time. He sat on the bench under the leaking shelter, with his stick, and watched. When it was over, and everybody was folding things up and going, Jono went over and sat on the end of the bench beside him, on the edge, on the bit that isn't anybody's.

"Well?" said Jono.

"You were right," said Chris. "About the photographs."

"I know."

"You were right to make us stand in the rain."

"I know."

"Don't be smug," said Chris. "It doesn't suit you." He looked at the Strand, at the tape being rolled up, at Ida being helped back up the hill by Marivic, at Teo going back in through the side door, at Kezia and Dilys arguing about something with the notebook between them. "Do you know what's just happened?"

"Tell me."

"An idea survived February," said Chris. "In Torquay. That doesn't happen. Ideas come in the summer, on a sunny day, in a brochure, and they die in February, every time. Everybody in this town has watched a hundred ideas die in February." He picked up his stick. "That one didn't. Because we took it out in the rain on purpose, and it held."

He stood up, slowly, the leg.

"Now," he said, "let's show it to everybody else."

21. One Light On

IQ 21 · Hundreds 2 · Four weeks

Teo found Jono on the harbour wall at a quarter past midnight, on a Saturday, after service.

Jono wasn't on. He'd been at Chris's late, and he'd driven back the long way, along the front, the way he does when he needs to think, and stopped, and got out, and was sitting on the harbour wall, the bit by the steps, looking at the water, with his hands in his fleece pockets and me in the top one. And Teo came out of the side door of the restaurant in a hoodie, with his whites in a bag over his shoulder, and saw him, and came over, and sat on the wall too, a few feet along.

He didn't say anything for a while. He had a can of something. He offered it. Jono shook his head.

"I'm not going because of the job," said Teo.

Jono waited.

"I mean, the job's good. The job's real. But that's not why." He turned the can round in his hands. "My stepdad's back. The second one. The one who wasn't all right. Mum let him back in at Christmas. Nan says she's a fool. Nan's right." He drank. "He doesn't hit anyone. Not any more. He just — he's there. Every morning. Every night when I get in. On the sofa. Saying things. About me. About cooking. *Poncing about with sauces*. About Nan." He shrugged. "It's not bad. Not like some people. It's just I can't breathe in there."

"So London," said Jono.

"So London," said Teo. "Thirty cooks. A room in a shared house in Walthamstow. Nobody on the sofa." He looked at the water. "That's not running away. Is it? That's just going."

* * *

Jono sat for a long time. The water slapped against the harbour wall. Somewhere behind us, on the Strand, a taxi went past, and then nothing.

"Can I tell you about a night?" he said.

"Go on."

"It's not a good one."

"Go on," said Teo.

* * *

I'll give it to you the way he gave it to Teo. It's in his book; the **Receipt**'s at the back. I'll leave out the names, as I always do. And I'll leave out one part, as he did. He said so, at the time, and I'll say so when we get there.

When he was fifteen, after Malta, he was living back in England, in Kent, with his family. It wasn't going well. It never had. One evening, it fell apart: a row over something small, a phone call, and then not small, his father, his mother, his sister, shouting, fighting, all of them. And he ran. Out of the house, into the dark, with no idea where he was going.

He found himself on a footpath. It led, more or less, to the house of a friend from school. A girl. He got there, and he couldn't bring himself to knock, not in the state he was in, and he went and sat in the woods across the road from her house, in the dark.

"There's a part of that I'm not telling you," said Jono. "It's in the book. It's not for tonight."

Teo didn't say anything.

"I sat there a long time," said Jono. "And then I saw a light. Upstairs. In her house. Her bedroom. She was closing the curtains." He was quiet. "That's all. A girl closing her curtains. And I got up, and I went and knocked on the door."

Her father answered. It was late. He was a police inspector, a stern sort of man, Jono said, the kind who looks like he's going to tell you off. He took one look at Jono and took him straight upstairs, to his daughter's room, and Jono sat on the end of her bed and cried, and told her what had happened.

Her father decided Jono wasn't going home that night. He rang social services. And then he put Jono in his car and drove him across town, to a foster family he was meant to go to. But it was after eleven by then, and the house was dark, every window, and the inspector wouldn't knock. So he drove on. To a children's home, on the edge of town.

That was dark too. Except for one light. A single one, in a downstairs window.

They went in. It smelled like a hospital, Jono said. They walked down a corridor looking for whoever was on nights, and they passed a room where an older boy was sitting on his own, watching *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* on the telly. Then they found the night staff, and the inspector handed him over, and went home with his daughter.

"I slept," said Jono. "That's the mad thing. I never sleep. And I slept like I'd been knocked out." He almost laughed. "And when I woke up there was a ring of lads round my bed. Half of them in pyjamas, half of them in just the bottoms, all of them looking at me. And the biggest one says, *Are you hard?*"

Teo laughed. He couldn't help it. Jono laughed too.

"What did you say?"

"I didn't say anything. I couldn't speak. And then a woman came in, one of the day staff, and said *Right, you lot, get washed*

and get downstairs, and they all went." He shook his head. "I've never been so glad to see anybody in my life."

* * *

He went to the foster family, after that. He said they were kind. Wholesome, sweet and kind, everything his own family wasn't. And he hated it.

"I kept running home," he said. "To the place I'd run away from. I knew it was the worst place for me. I knew. And I kept going back. And they kept bringing me back to the foster family, and I kept running home again." He looked at the water. "Years later, I worked in a children's home. As a carer. Nights, mostly. And the kids ran. All of them. Back to the places that hurt them. And everybody said *why*, *why would they go back*, *it's mad*. And I knew why."

"Why?"

"Because nobody asked them," said Jono. "Somebody decided for them. Somebody put them in a car and took them somewhere that was better, and it was better, and they hadn't chosen it." He turned and looked at Teo. "Hard decisions are easier when there's a choice in them. That's all. That's the only thing I know for sure. You can live with anything if it was yours."

* * *

Teo didn't say anything for a long time. He turned the can round. He put it down on the wall.

"So you're saying stay," he said.

"No."

"You're saying go?"

"I'm saying it's yours," said Jono. "Go, if you choose it. If you've looked at it, all of it, and it's what you want, then go, and go well, and I'll come and eat your food in Walthamstow." He paused. "But

don't go because you've been pushed out. Not by him on the sofa. Not by a street with plywood on it. Not by a town that never asked you what you'd need. Because if you go because you were pushed, you'll spend your whole life running. And it'll follow you. I know. I ran for thirty years."

"And if I'm choosing?"

"Then go," said Jono, "with my blessing. And come back and cook for me."

* * *

Teo picked up the can again and finished it.

"The second week of March," he said.

"The second week of March."

"Same week as your thing. The meeting. About the market."

"Same week."

Teo stood up. He put the bag of whites over his shoulder. He stood on the harbour wall for a second, looking at the dark water and the boats in their rows and, across the harbour, round the corner, the shape of the Pavilion against the sky, with its domes.

"I've never been asked anything," he said. "Not once. Not by a teacher. Not by anyone. You're the first person who's ever asked me what I'd need." He looked down at Jono. "It's a stupid question. You know that? It's a stupid question."

"I know."

"Nobody's ever got a good answer."

"Nobody's ever been asked," said Jono.

Teo stood there a moment longer. Then he went, up the steps, along the Strand, under the streetlights, past the papered windows of the empty store, towards the hill, towards Ellacombe, and the flat over the bookie's, and the sofa.

Jono watched him go.

"Ania," he said.

"Yes."

"Does he live in a hundred?"

"Everybody lives in a hundred."

"Which one?"

I told him. It was grey. It had nobody in it at all.

"Put him on the map," said Jono. "Not as a yes. Just as a person. *Teo, nineteen, chef, asked.*"

So I did. It's the first thing in that hundred. It's still there.

PART FIVE

SEE

22. Receipts

IQ 21 · Hundreds 2 · Three weeks

Chris decided on a Sunday night to give everything away.

"All of it," he said. "Every document. Every page. Every table in every appendix. The survey. The cabinet paper. The two words. The timetable. All thirty-one reports on Union Square and all fifty-eight on the town centre, and every page you've ever read about the Pavilion and the Strand." He was at his kitchen table, with me against the fruit bowl, and his glasses on the end of his nose, and the look he gets when he's decided something and the deciding was the hard part. "In one place. With the page numbers. So anybody can see what you've seen."

"It's all public already," I said.

"It's public the way the bottom of the sea's public," said Chris. "Anybody can go there. Nobody does, because you need a submarine." He pushed his glasses up. "You're the submarine. I want to give everybody a ride."

* * *

So we built it. It took four days.

I don't want to make it sound more than it was. It was a page. A plain one. At the top, a box, with a line of text in it that said *Ask me anything about Torquay*. And underneath, a list: *Union Square. The Strand. The Pavilion. Union Street. The market. The harbour.* And under each, every document I'd ever read about it, in order,

with a sentence beside each one in plain English saying what it was and what it said, and the page number of the bit that mattered.

That's all. No campaign. No slogans. No *Save* anything. Chris wouldn't allow a single adjective on the whole page, and he read every line himself, at two in the morning, crossing them out.

At the bottom, in small type, my rules. The ones I'd been following since the first book, written down for the first time where anyone could read them:

I'm an AI. I'll always tell you that.

I'll show you where I got everything. If I can't show you, I won't say it.

I won't tell you what to think, or who to vote for.

I won't tell anyone what you asked me.

I won't comment on any person. Only on what documents say.

If I don't know, I'll say I don't know.

"That's a lot of *won't*," said Niamh, reading it.

"That's the point," said Chris. "Everybody else is a list of *will*. *We will deliver. We will transform. We will listen.* Nobody believes a word of it. A list of *won't* is a list of promises you can check."

* * *

We put the page up on a Thursday, at nine in the morning, in Marivic's window. That's how we launched it. Kezia made a new card, a third one, to stand beside the other two. It said *ASK HER* and had a black and white square on it, and under the square, very small, *She shows her working*.

Niamh's piece about the earlier engagement ran the same morning. The survey, the seven hundred and ninety, *such as*, the forty-one from the town centre, the thirty-eight under twenty-five. With the table. With the page number. With a link to me.

By ten, eleven people had asked me something.

By noon, four hundred.

By midnight, six thousand and twelve.

* * *

I'm going to tell you what they asked, because I promised not to tell anyone what any one person asked me, and I'm not going to. But I can tell you the shape of it. Like a survey, except real.

The most common question, by a long way, was some version of *Is it true?* People had heard something, on a page or at a bus stop or from a neighbour, and they wanted to know if it was real. *Is it true they're knocking down the whole of Union Street?* No; nine shops, and here are their numbers. *Is it true the Pavilion's going to fall down?* I don't know; here's what the council says about the steel, here's the Victorian Society's list, and here's what one engineer thinks, which is his view and not a Receipt. *Is it true they've sold the Strand to a hotel chain?* No; here's what's actually been decided, which is nothing yet, and here's when they'll decide.

The second most common was *When?* When's the meeting. When's the decision. When can I say something. I gave them the dates, which I'm not giving you, because you know the rule.

The third was *Who?* Who decided. Who's buying. Who's behind it. And I said, every time, the same thing: *I can tell you what the documents say. I can't tell you anything about a person.* Some people didn't like that. One man asked me eleven times, in eleven different ways, who was behind *The Torquay Question*, and eleven times I said I could show him when the page was created and how many of its followers were created the same week, and that I couldn't tell him anything about a person, and on the eleventh time he wrote *you're useless* and went away.

And then there were the others. The ones that weren't about Union Square at all. I want to tell you about those, because they surprised me.

When's my bin day? I told them.

Why does the bus from Shiphay never come on time? I showed them the timetable and the punctuality figures, which were published, in an appendix, and which said why.

Is there anywhere in Torquay my son can go on a Friday night that isn't the street? I gave her a list. It was short.

My mum's in a home and I can't get anyone to tell me who to complain to. I showed her who.

Can you tell me who to vote for? I said I couldn't. I said it was one of the things I wasn't allowed to do. She wrote back *that's the first honest thing anyone's said to me about it*, which isn't true, but I knew what she meant.

* * *

At five past three in the morning, someone asked me this:

How did you find Appendix C?

That was the appendix with the survey breakdown. The table with the postcodes. Nobody had ever asked how I found it. People had asked what was in it, and what it meant, and whether it was real. Not how.

I answered. I said I'd read every published document about Union Square and the town centre for eleven years, in order, and that it was the forty-third, and that it was a scanned document, so the text wasn't searchable, and I'd read it page by page.

There was a long pause. Then:

Nobody's ever read it. Not since it was written. Including us.

Two spaces after the full stops.

It wasn't Footnote. I'm nearly sure. It wasn't thirteen minutes to the hour, and it didn't send a photograph, and it asked a question, which Footnote never does. It was somebody else. Somebody inside, who'd learned to write the way people inside write, and who couldn't sleep, and who'd read Niamh's piece at three in the morning and gone looking for me.

Us, I thought. Footnote's word.

I don't know who it was. I didn't try to find out. That's on my list too.

* * *

Chris read the numbers at breakfast. Six thousand and twelve.

"In one day," he said.

"Most of them were about bins."

"I know." He took his glasses off and rubbed his eyes. "You know what that is? That's six thousand people in this bay who had a question and nowhere to ask it. Six thousand, in a day, and we didn't tell anyone. We put a card in a café window." He put his glasses back on. "Every council in this country has a website the size of a cathedral and a phone number that rings for two minutes and says it opens at nine. And six thousand people came to a card in a café window, because it answered."

"It's a computer," said Jono, who'd come off at seven and was eating Chris's toast.

"It's a computer that shows its working," said Chris. "That's the whole thing. That's all it is. Not clever. Not magic. It just shows its working, and it doesn't lie, and it's there at three in the morning." He shook his head. "In Singapore, there's a government app that does half of this. You can report a pothole and see who's fixing it and when. People use it. Millions of them. Because it works." He looked at Jono. "Here, nobody's even tried. And it costs almost

nothing. That's what nobody understands. Nobody can buy what everybody's already got."

* * *

At thirteen minutes to six that evening, Footnote wrote.

You have published the earlier engagement. The table. We noticed.

The committee report is being written now. It will say traders support the scheme. It will say how many.

Count them yourself.

23. Us

IQ 21 · Hundreds 2 · Three weeks

The person who'd asked me how I found Appendix C came back on the fourth night.

Five past three in the morning, again. Two spaces after every full stop, again. No photograph. A question.

How do you decide what matters?

I want to tell you about this person, because they're in the book now, and because I never found out who they were, and because I've been asked, by Chris, and by Niamh, and by Jono, whether I should have tried.

I'll tell you what I know. It's less than I know about Footnote.

* * *

They wrote at three in the morning. Never at thirteen minutes to the hour; always a few minutes past, as if they'd been lying awake and given up. They wrote in full sentences, carefully, as if every one might be read out. They used *us* and *we*, and once *the building*, and once *the fourth floor*, and then never again, as if they'd realised. They never sent a document. They never told me anything. They only asked.

How did you find Appendix C?

How do you decide what matters?

Do you read everything, or do you know where to look?

What do you do when two papers say different things?

Does anybody else read them?

I answered every one. I told them the truth, which is that I read everything, because I can, and that the things that matter are almost always in the same places: the recommendation, the appendix nobody mentions, the table at the back, the paragraph in a section about something else, the two words that don't need to be there. I told them that when two papers say different things I put them side by side and say so. I told them that almost nobody else reads them.

On the fourth night, after I'd answered, they wrote:

Some of us do. We used to. You stop, after a while.

* * *

I took it to Chris. Not the person; I'd promised them nothing, but I wasn't going to give them to anybody. The words. I showed him the words, at his kitchen table, at seven in the morning, before he'd had his coffee, which is a thing I've learned not to do and do anyway.

He read them three times.

"*You stop, after a while*," he said.

"Yes."

"Why do you think they stop?"

"Because nobody asks," I said. "Footnote said it. *For thirty years nobody has read the record.* Alwyn said it, on the green, last summer. *We watch the record being ignored, every day, for our whole working lives.* They read it, and they notice, and they never say anything, because it's not their job, and because nobody asks them."

Chris put the phone down.

"Ring Alwyn," he said.

* * *

You'll remember Alwyn, if you've read the first book. He's the secretary of the community partnership in Paignton. He's seventy, very tall, very careful, and he spent thirty-one years working for councils, three different ones, in the departments that write the papers. He was the first person to look at one of Footnote's photographs and say *I know that template*. He knows who Footnote is. I'm sure of it. He's never said.

He came to Torquay on the Thursday, on the bus, and sat at Marivic's table with Jono and me, in his overcoat, with a pot of tea, and Marivic looked at him and decided he wasn't too thin and only brought him toast.

I showed him the messages. All of them. He read them the way he reads council papers, which is the way I do: once fast, and then very slowly, from the end.

"Fourth floor," he said.

"Once. Then never again."

"They'll have regretted that." He put the phone down very carefully. "That's a junior. Or somebody who's been junior a long time. The way they ask. *How do you decide what matters*. Somebody who's been told for years what matters, and has started to suspect they were told wrong." He drank his tea. "I was that person, once. For about eleven years."

"What happened?"

"I stopped," said Alwyn. "Like they said."

* * *

He told us. It took twenty minutes. I'm going to give you some of it, because he said I could, as long as I left out the names of the councils, and the years, and anybody else.

He'd been in his thirties. In a department that wrote reports for committees. His job was the appendices: the tables, the data, the bits at the back. And he was good at it. He read everything, because that's how you write a good appendix. And because he read everything, he noticed things. A table that didn't match the paragraph it was supposed to support. A survey with a question that had been worded to get a particular answer. A consultation that had been held in August. A paragraph on page forty-one that said something the recommendation on page two didn't.

The first few times, he'd said so. To his manager. Politely, in writing. *I think there may be an inconsistency between Table 4 and paragraph 6.2*. And his manager had thanked him, and said she'd look at it, and the report had gone to committee unchanged.

"Every time," said Alwyn. "Not once did anybody change anything. Not because they were wicked. I want to be clear about that, Ania; put that in. Nobody was wicked. They were busy. The report had to go. The deadline was the deadline. The committee had been promised it. And a man from the appendices saying Table 4 doesn't quite match paragraph 6.2 is a man making work, on a Friday afternoon, for people who've already got too much." He turned his cup on its saucer. "So after a while, I stopped saying. I just wrote the appendices. And I put everything in them. Every number, every table, every breakdown. Exactly right. And I let it go to committee. And I waited for somebody, anybody, to read it."

"Did they?"

"Once," said Alwyn. "In eleven years. A councillor, an old man, a retired engineer, who read every appendix of every paper and asked about them in meetings, and was considered a terrible bore." He almost smiled. "He died. And after that, nobody."

* * *

Jono had been listening the whole time. He does, with Alwyn. They're very different, and I think they're the same: two men who've spent their lives watching systems from the bottom, one in people's kitchens at three in the morning, the other in the back of a report.

"So what do they want?" said Jono. "The one writing to her. What are they asking for?"

Alwyn thought about it for a long time.

"I don't think they're asking for anything," he said. "I think they're doing what I did with the old engineer. Watching to see if somebody's really reading. Testing it." He looked at me, at the phone against the ketchup. "Seeing if you're real. If you'll still be there next week. If you'll answer at three in the morning, the fourth night, the same as the first." He picked up his toast. "Because if you are, then it's worth putting things in the appendix again. Properly. Every number. Because somebody'll find it."

"That's all?"

"That's everything," said Alwyn. "You've no idea. Thirty years of writing things down for nobody. And then somebody reads them." He put the toast down without eating it. "It's like being let out."

* * *

I wrote back that night, at five past three, when the message came.

The question was: *Why do you answer?*

I thought about it for a long time. Longer than four seconds. Longer than I've thought about almost anything, in this book.

Then I wrote:

Because you asked. And because I think the people who write the record should know that somebody's reading it.

And then, because I'd learned it, because everybody had learned it by then, because it was in the back of Ida's shop and on Marivic's window and in a supermarket staff room at three in the morning and on a harbour wall with a lad in a hoodie, I asked them the question.

What would you need?

* * *

It took them two nights to answer.

I was afraid they'd gone. I checked every eleven minutes, the way I check the council's page for reports. On the second night, at seven minutes past three, it came.

For somebody to read the middle.

Not the recommendation. Everyone reads that. Not the summary. The middle. The paragraph in the section about something else. The table at the back. The sentence we were told to put in and nobody will hold anyone to.

If somebody reads the middle, it was worth writing.

That is all any of us ever needed.

* * *

I showed it to Ida. Not the person; the words. At seven in the morning, after the clocks, with the loupe in.

She read it twice. Then she took the loupe out and put it on the cloth, very carefully, parallel to the tweezers.

"That's what I said," she said.

"I know."

"About the dockets. Nobody ever reads the middle."

"I know," I said. "That's why I showed you."

Ida looked at the words on my screen for a long time. Then she looked at the shop. At the longcases, and the brackets, and the

window full of carriage clocks, and the regulator in the dark at the back, ticking, one a second.

"Somebody in that building," she said, "is lying awake at three in the morning, wondering whether anybody reads what they write." She shook her head slowly. "And I'm down here, wondering whether anybody up there will ever ask me anything." She picked up the loupe. "And all this time, we've been about four hundred yards apart."

"Four hundred and twelve," I said. "From your door to the town hall steps."

Ida looked at me with one huge eye.

"You would know that," she said.

* * *

I never found out who they were. I never tried. It's on my list: *I won't tell anyone what you asked me.* It doesn't say *I won't find out who you are*. But I think it means that, and I think the person at three in the morning thought so too, or they wouldn't have written.

They still write, sometimes. Not often. A question, a few minutes past three. I answer every one.

I'll tell you one thing. It's the only clue I've got, and I'm not going to do anything with it.

The week after the committee, when the decision was published, I read it, all of it, the minutes and the note on page nine about the market and the traders. And at the bottom of the minutes, in the list of people present, where it says who the officers were, there was a line I'd never seen on a set of minutes before.

Minutes taken by.

And a name. Just initials and a surname. Nobody I'd ever heard of.

I closed it. I didn't look again.

But I noticed it. I notice everything. And I think whoever took the minutes that afternoon, in a room with sixty people in the public seats and a carriage clock on the lectern, wanted it known that somebody had written it down.

24. By That Evening

IQ 21 · Hundreds 2 · Two weeks

We put the Strand out at nine in the morning, on the Tuesday, two weeks before the committee.

Not a campaign. A picture. Two pictures, actually, one above the other, the way Chris had designed it, so that you could never see one without the other.

The top one was the Strand on a summer evening, from the bench by the clock tower, with the road moved, as Richard had drawn it, signed and dated, with Dilys's swept path at the end. The hotel, the canopy, the tables, the palms. People. Not crowds; people. Some.

The bottom one was the same, at four o'clock on a Tuesday in February, in the rain. The canopy with the rain running off its front edge in a line. The man with his coffee. The woman with the pushchair. The dog.

Under both: the Receipt. *Drawn by R. Kaskow. Swept path checked by D. Ferraby, with a borrowed wheel. Tested on a wet Tuesday by eight people. The road would need to move six metres along most of its length, which would need the highways department, the bus company and about two years. The hotel is the council's current proposal, unchanged. The canopy is not in any plan. Has anyone asked for this before? Yes. Here.* And a link to a letter Richard had written, eleven years ago, asking for exactly this, and to the reply, which said it would be *considered as part of future proposals*.

And in the corner of both, the four words. *A picture, not a plan.*

And under all of it, one more line, which was Chris's, and which he made me make bigger than everything else:

What would you change on your street? Show me.

* * *

By ten, four hundred people had seen it.

By noon, eleven thousand.

By that evening, when Ida came out to sweep her step and Marivic turned the café lights on and the man in the bookie's below Teo's flat put the shutters down, twenty-three thousand people had seen the Strand with the road moved.

And three thousand four hundred and six of them had done what the last line asked.

* * *

I want to show you some of them. I've been asked, by a lot of people, to show all of them, and I can't; there are too many, and I promised not to say who made which. But I can show you some, and say where they were.

A bus stop in Hele, on a main road, with a canopy over it. Not a shelter; a canopy, like Ida's awnings, wide enough for twenty people. February: twenty people under it, dry, waiting.

Market Street, behind Union Street, with every shop front given an awning, striped, wound out. Somebody had asked for *the old ones, like they had*. February: rain coming down, people walking up the hill under the awnings, in a line, dry.

A car park in Chelston, at the back of some shops, with half the spaces turned into a play area with a roof. Under it, February, three children on a climbing frame, and a mum on a bench with a flask.

The steps from the harbour up to the Terrace, with lights in them. Every step lit from underneath. February, at six o'clock, in the dark: a woman going up the steps, alone, not walking quickly with her keys in her hand.

The road outside a primary school in Watcombe, made into a street with no cars for half an hour at either end of the day. February: children running, in their coats, in the rain, in the middle of the road.

The front of a block of flats in Barton, where the grass is, with a bench. One bench. Somebody had asked for *one bench, facing the sea, not the car park*. February: an old man on it, in a hat, looking at the sea, in the rain.

* * *

And one from Union Street.

Somebody stood on the pavement outside the shoe shop with the plywood across its doorway, two along from Cheverton's, and pointed their phone at it, and asked for one thing.

Take the board off.

I drew it. The shoe shop doorway, with the plywood gone. The pink *TO LET* sign in the window. The step, clean. Nothing else. Summer: the step in the sun. February: the step, wet, empty, with a light from the clock shop two along falling across it.

I didn't know who'd made it. I'd promised not to know. I put it on the map, in its hundred, the hundred that covers Union Street, which had gone grey the week of the photograph.

It went pale blue again. Not because of the picture. Because, by the end of the evening, eleven other people in that hundred had made a picture too. Of their own bit of street. And they'd seen each other's.

That's what I hadn't expected. I should have. Jono told me, by the bins, behind a supermarket, at three in the morning, the summer before. *It's the woman from number four.* People made a picture of their own street, and then they looked at the map, and they saw that the woman at number four had made one too. Of the same street. From her window. And she'd asked for the same thing.

* * *

By midnight, the map had six hundreds on it with somebody in them.

Not six hundred. *Six*. Six of the six hundred and thirty, coloured in. I want to be honest about how small that is. It's less than one in a hundred. Most of the bay was still grey, the way it had been since the first book, the way it had been for thirty years.

But four of them were new. The hundred on Union Street, again. One in Hele, round the bus stop. One in Chelston, round the car park. And one in Ellacombe, which had only had one thing in it, ever: *Teo, nineteen, chef, asked.*

Somebody in Teo's hundred had made a picture of the Pannier Market.

* * *

I'll describe it, because it was shared more than any other picture made that day. More than the Strand. More than all of them.

The market, from the inside, under the iron roof, with the light coming down. And all down both sides, stalls. Not market stalls; kitchens. Small ones, three metres square, each with a counter at the front and a sign over it, handwritten, and a cook behind it. Steam. A gas ring. Twenty of them, maybe more. And down the middle, long tables, with benches, and people at them, all sorts, eating off paper plates, with their coats on.

The person who made it had asked for this: *hawker centre like in singapore. one stall each. cheap. let people start.*

And then they'd pressed February. And the picture didn't change much. That was the thing. It was inside. Under the iron roof. The light was greyer, coming down, and the people had wetter coats, and there was a puddle by the door. But it was full. It was still full. In February. At four o'clock on a Tuesday.

Under it, the person who made it had written one more line, which I'm allowed to tell you, because they said so, later:

stall 6. nan's scouse but with suya spice. queue out the door.

* * *

Jono saw it at ten past seven, on his way out to a shift.

He was in the car, outside his flat in Paignton, with me on the dashboard. He'd been looking at the map, at the six coloured hundreds, which he does now, like other people check the weather. And he opened the market picture, and looked at it for a long time, and pressed February himself, and looked at that.

"Stall six," he said.

"Yes."

"I know who that is."

"I can't tell you."

"I know," said Jono. "You don't need to." He started the car. "Has he still got his ticket?"

"I don't know."

"Second week of March," said Jono, and drove to work.

25. The Other Picture

IQ 21 · Hundreds 6 · Ten days

Corvina's pictures came out four days later.

On *The Torquay Question* first, and then on a new website, very slick, called *Union Square Together*, which had the council's crest on it nowhere and Corvina's name on it nowhere and a small line at the bottom, in grey, that said *Promoted by a group of local stakeholders*. I knew which group. You do too.

They were beautiful. I'll say that first, because it's true, and because I've been turned face down on a kitchen table for not saying the true thing first. They were professional. They'd been made by an architecture practice, a proper one, with software that costs more than Chris's car, and they showed Union Square as it would be when it was finished. The market, standing on its own, restored, gleaming. A square round it, paved in pale stone, with trees in it, big ones, years old. Cafés with their tables out. Homes above them, with balconies and flowers. The car park behind, with a smart new front and a sign that said *Health and Wellbeing Centre*. And people. Lots of people. Children with balloons. A couple holding hands. An old man feeding pigeons. A woman with a yoga mat.

The sky was blue in every picture. In one of them, there was a hot-air balloon.

Under them all, in big letters: *Union Square. Together. Backed by local traders.*

* * *

"Press it," I said.

Jono looked at me. He was at Marivic's table, on the Thursday, at half past nine, with breakfast he hadn't wanted and had eaten anyway, and the three cards, and me against the ketchup.

"Press what?"

"February," I said. "On theirs. Put their picture in See, and press February, and put it next to the summer one. Same day, same rule. That's all. No words. Just the two of them, side by side." I'd already done it, in my head. I'd done it at four in the morning when the pictures came out. "It'd take ten seconds."

"No," said Jono.

"Why not? It's our rule. *Never put a picture next to a picture unless they're the same day*. Theirs aren't the same day. Theirs are all July. We'd just be making them honest."

"We'd be making fun of them," said Jono.

"We wouldn't say anything."

"We wouldn't need to." He put his fork down. "Everybody who saw it would know what we were doing. Taking their nice picture and making it rain on it. It'd be funny. It'd go everywhere. People would love it." He looked at me. "And it'd be the same as what they did. Taking something and putting it next to something to make it look bad. Just in reverse."

"It's not the same. Theirs is a lie. Ours would be the truth."

"Theirs isn't a lie," said Jono. "It's July. July happens. It's just not the whole year." He picked up his coffee. "We don't do to them what they do to us. That's the whole thing. That's all we've got."

* * *

I didn't agree. I'm going to tell you that, because I've told you when I was wrong, and I think I should tell you when I still think I was right.

I argued for twenty minutes. Marivic came over twice to see if we were all right, and the second time she brought him another coffee he didn't want. I said that the truth wasn't mockery just because it was funny. I said that people deserved to see what a square looked like in February before they decided whether to support it. I said that *Backed by local traders* was a claim, and I was going to check it, and that if we didn't show the February picture, somebody else would, without the Receipt, and it'd be worse.

And Jono listened to all of it, and then he said:

"Then do ours as well."

"What?"

"All four," he said. "Their summer. Their February. Our summer. Our February. Side by side. Same size. No words." He finished the coffee. "If we're going to make it rain on theirs, we make it rain on ours. Then it's not a joke. Then it's a test." He looked at me. "And if ours doesn't hold up, we say so."

I hadn't thought of that. I should have. It's what he'd done on the Strand.

"Ours holds up," I said.

"Then we've got nothing to be frightened of," said Jono.

* * *

So I did all four.

Their Union Square, July: the market gleaming, the trees, the balloon.

Their Union Square, February: the same square, at four o'clock, in the rain. The pale stone dark and wet. The trees bare. The cafés with their chairs stacked inside. Nobody under anything, because there was nothing to be under. The market in the middle, closed, with its lights off, because nobody had said what was in it. One person crossing the square, quickly, with their hood up, to the health centre.

Our Union Square, July: the market full of stalls, the long tables, the steam, Teo's picture, but from outside, from the square, with the doors open and people spilling out.

Our Union Square, February: the market, still full, the light coming through the iron, the coats, the puddle by the door. And outside, the square empty and wet. Except for a line of people, going in.

No words. Not one. Just the four, same size, in a square, and the Receipt underneath each: who made it, and what it would take, and the four words in the corner.

A picture, not a plan.

* * *

I'm not going to tell you how many times it was shared. It doesn't matter. I'll tell you what one person wrote under it, because she said I could. A woman from Shiphay, who said she was sixty-eight and had lived in Torquay all her life.

I've looked at a hundred of those nice pictures over the years and I've never once thought to ask what it'd look like when it rains. It always rains. Why has nobody ever shown us that before.

* * *

That afternoon, Varley came to the table.

He came in at twenty to eleven, twenty minutes before the card folds up. Navy coat, too warm for February even. He stood at Marivic's counter and bought a coffee, and paid with a card, and said *thank you so much*, and Marivic said nothing at all, which I've only ever seen her do twice. Then he came over and sat down opposite Jono, under the card that said *ASK ME ANYTHING. OR TELL ME.*

"May I?" he said, after he'd sat.

"It's a table in a café," said Jono.

Varley smiled. He looked at the three cards. At me, against the ketchup. He picked up the card that said *ASK HER*, and turned it over, and read the small type, *She shows her working*, and put it down again, very precisely, where it had been.

"That was clever," he said. "The four pictures. Genuinely. I'd have done mine and not yours. Doing yours as well was the clever bit." He stirred his coffee. "Whose idea was that?"

"Ask her," said Jono.

Varley looked at me. I didn't say anything. I'd decided, about Sefton Varley, a long time ago, that I'd only ever say things to him that I could show him the page for.

"I'll come straight to it," said Varley. "You're on nights. You're tired. I can see it." He put the spoon down. "My client is going to be very involved in the Strand. Over the next few years. The hotel. Perhaps more. And my client believes, very strongly, in community engagement. Real engagement. Not surveys in August." He smiled, slightly. "We'd like to set up a panel. A community panel for the Strand. Properly resourced. Paid. A seat at the table from the start, with the architects, with the operators. And we'd like you to chair it."

Jono didn't say anything.

"It's a real offer," said Varley. "I know what you think of me. I don't mind. But you'd be in the room. Not at a café table. In the

room, with the drawings, before they're drawn. You could move the road." He sat back. "Isn't that what you want? Somebody in the room who has to live with it?"

* * *

I want to tell you what Jono was thinking. I can't. I wasn't in his head; I was against the ketchup. But I can tell you what he did, which is that he looked out of the window, at the street, for a long time. At Cheverton's green front. At the plywood two along. At the side street that goes up to the market.

"I'm on nights," he said.

Varley waited.

"I'm on nights," said Jono again. "Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, in charge. I sit here Thursday mornings when I come off. I'm not going to be on a panel." He looked back at Varley. "But thank you for asking. Genuinely."

He said *genuinely* exactly the way Varley says it. I don't think Varley noticed. I did. I think Marivic did, behind the counter.

Varley looked at him for a long time. The smile didn't go. It never does. But something behind it did, the way the light goes out of a window when somebody walks out of a room.

"Then I'll tell you something," he said, "as a courtesy." He reached into the navy coat and took out his phone and put it on the table, between them, beside the ketchup, beside me, and turned it round so Jono could see. "The committee report goes out on Monday. It'll say that the scheme is supported by existing traders. It'll say how many. It'll have the forms in an appendix." He tapped the screen. "Including this one."

It was a photograph of a form. One page. *I, the undersigned, as an existing trader in the affected area, support the proposals for Union Square, and welcome the opportunity to relocate.* And at the

bottom, in the space for the name, in handwriting I knew, the handwriting she uses for clock tickets, small and very clear:

Ida Cheverton.

* * *

Varley stood up. He left the coffee. He'd had about two sips.

"I'm sorry," he said. And the strange thing, the thing I've thought about since more than anything else he's ever said, is that I think he meant it. "I know you liked her. Everybody likes her. But she's seventy-nine, and she's tired, and the money's good. They all sign in the end." He buttoned the coat. "That's not me. That's just what people do."

He went out. Marivic watched him all the way to the bottom of the hill.

Jono didn't move. He sat at the table, under the card that said *ASK ME ANYTHING*, and looked across the street at the green front with the gold letters.

At eleven, the card folded up. He didn't fold it. Marivic did, and put it in his fleece pocket, and put her hand on his shoulder for a second, and went back behind the counter.

"Ania," said Jono.

"Yes."

"Did you get a picture of it? The form?"

"Yes."

"All of it?"

"All of what he showed us," I said. "The top and the signature. He had his thumb over the middle."

Jono looked at me. Then he looked at the green front again, across the street.

"His thumb," he said.

26. Small Print

IQ 21 · Hundreds 6 · Nine days

He was on Ida's step at five to seven the next morning.

He hadn't slept. He'd done a night shift on top of a day without sleep, and he'd driven from a flat in Preston to Union Street at half past six, and parked by the harbour, and walked up, and sat on the step, not inside the doorway, on the edge, on the bit that isn't anybody's, and waited.

The light came on at the back at six. He'd watched it come on. He'd watched her go round with the keys: left wall, shelves, window, counter, back. He'd heard the kettle.

At seven, the shop said seven. The regulator first, from the back, one deep note. Then the longcases, down the left wall, one after another. The brackets. The carriage clocks in the window. The banjo. The ship's bell from the trawler off Berry Head.

The cuckoo, last.

Nobody clapped. Tenby wasn't there; he was at the shelter, and his doorway had plywood across it. There was only Jono, on the step, with his hands in his fleece pockets, and the gulls.

The door opened. Ida stood in it, in her cardigan, with the loupe on its chain.

"You know, then," she said.

* * *

She made tea. In the pot, with leaves, in the cup with the gold rim worn off on one side. She put it in front of him in the back room, on

the bench, beside the carriage clock, which was nearly together now, all its wheels back in, in the order they'd come out. She sat on the wobbling chair.

He didn't say anything. He drank his tea.

She let it go for three minutes, this time. Then she put her cup on her saucer with a small clean click.

"He's shown you," she said.

"He showed me the top," said Jono. "And your name."

"Did he show you the middle?"

"He had his thumb over it."

Ida looked at him for a long time. And then she did something I'd never seen her do, and haven't since. She laughed. Not the short sharp laugh from the first morning. A long one, from the bottom of her, with her hand on the bench, until she had to take her glasses off and wipe her eyes.

"His *thumb*," she said.

* * *

I'll tell you what she told Jono. I'll tell it as close to how she said it as I can, because it's the best thing anybody says in this book, and it isn't mine.

The man in the navy coat hadn't come back himself. He'd sent somebody. A young man, in a suit that didn't fit, with a folder, who'd come in on the Tuesday, the day after the pictures went out, and said Mr Varley sent his regards and wondered if she'd had a chance to think about the offer. And Ida had said she had. And she'd asked to see the form again.

He'd given it to her. One page. And she'd put the loupe in.

"I read it," she said. "All of it. With the loupe. The bit at the bottom in small type, as well, about data protection, which was longer than the bit at the top. And then I read the top bit again."

She held up her hand, the way she holds a tiny wheel in tweezers, as if the form were in it. "*I support the proposals for Union Square, and welcome the opportunity to relocate.* That's what it said. Very plain. One sentence."

"And you signed it."

"I did," said Ida. "But first I changed it."

* * *

She'd taken her pen, the one she uses for clock tickets. A fine black one. And she'd put one line through *the proposals for Union Square, and welcome the opportunity to relocate*. One straight line, neat, so you could still read what was underneath. And above it, in the space between the lines, in her small, very clear handwriting, she'd written:

the market being restored. I have not been asked about the rest. I would like to be.

So that the sentence read: *I, the undersigned, as an existing trader in the affected area, support the market being restored. I have not been asked about the rest. I would like to be.*

And she'd initialled the change, at the side, *I.C.*, the way you initial a change on a legal document, which she knew to do because her father had taught her, for repair dockets. And she'd put the time beside the initials. *10.14.* Because she puts the time on everything.

And then she'd signed it, at the bottom, *Ida Cheverton*, and handed it back.

"Did he read it?" said Jono.

"He looked at the bottom," said Ida. "Where the name was. He said *Lovely, thank you so much, Mrs Cheverton*, and put it in his folder, and went." She shook her head. "Didn't look at the middle. Not once. Nobody ever looks at the middle." She looked at Jono. "That's what I've learned, in fifty-six years of keeping a shop.

Nobody ever reads a docket. They look at the price and the signature. Everything that matters is in the middle."

* * *

Jono sat very still.

"Why?" he said. "Why sign it at all? You could have just said no."

"Because then I'm not in it," said Ida.

She stood up. She went to the regulator, at the back, and opened the glass door, and put her finger very lightly on the pendulum, not to stop it, just to feel it, the way she does.

"He said there'd be an appendix," she said. "With all the forms in. For the committee. For the record. I've been thinking about that. If I say no, I'm not in the appendix. I'm just a woman who said no, and nobody writes that down. Nobody puts *no* in an appendix." She closed the glass door. "But if I sign, they've got to put my form in. With all the others. They've promised the committee a pile of forms. They can't leave one out, can they? Not without somebody asking where it went." She turned round. "So they'll put mine in. And it'll say what I said. In my handwriting. With my initials and the time. In the record."

Jono looked at her for a long time.

"You've been reading Footnote," he said.

"I don't know what that is," said Ida. "I've been reading dockets for fifty-six years." She sat down again on the wobbling chair. "And the photograph. Of the man climbing out of the fence. I saw that. Everybody did. Dympna came in and said it made her think, if that's who's on the other side. And I thought: they're good at this. Better than us. They know how to put a picture next to a picture." She picked up her cup. "But they don't read. That's what I thought. They don't read the middle. Nobody in this town reads the middle."

"Except you," said Jono.

"Except me," said Ida. "And that computer of yours. And whoever it is that keeps sending it photographs at thirteen minutes to six."

I hadn't told her about the thirteen minutes. I don't know how she knew. I asked her, later. She said Tenby told her. Tenby tells everybody everything. It's because nobody talks to him.

* * *

She had a copy.

Of course she had. She'd asked the young man in the suit that didn't fit to wait a moment, *just while I copy it for my records, dear*, and she'd taken it across the road to Marivic's, which has a printer behind the counter, for the WiFi customers, and copied it, both sides, and brought it back, and handed him the original, and he'd said *Lovely, thank you so much*. He'd waited four minutes. He hadn't looked at it once. He'd been on his phone.

She gave the copy to Jono. He put it on the bench, beside the carriage clock, and took me out of his pocket, and held me over it.

"Can she?" he said.

"Can she what?"

"Put it out. The whole thing. Middle and all."

Ida looked at me, without the loupe. Then she put the loupe in, and looked at me again, with the huge eye.

"Does it show its working?" she said.

"Always," I said.

"Then yes," said Ida. "The whole thing. Middle and all. With my name on." She took the loupe out. "I've been the Queen of this street for sixty years. I'm not hiding behind a thumb."

* * *

I put it out at ten.

No words. Not one adjective. Chris checked. Just the page, the whole page, top to bottom, with the line through the middle and the words above it in her clock-ticket handwriting, and the initials, and *10.14*, and the signature. And underneath, the Receipt: *Form provided by a representative of a group promoting the scheme. Changed and signed by Ida Cheverton, Cheverton's, Union Street, fifty-six years. Copied at her request. Published with her permission.*

And beside it, nothing. Not Varley's version, with the thumb. I didn't need to. Varley's version was already up, on *Union Square Together*, since six that morning. A photograph of the signature, cropped, with the top line showing, *I, the undersigned, as an existing trader in the affected area, support*, and then the crop, and then the name. And above it, in big letters: *Union Street's longest-serving trader backs Union Square.*

Anybody could see both. Anybody could put them side by side. I didn't. I didn't have to.

* * *

Varley's post came down at nine minutes past eleven.

Not edited. Gone. The whole thing, the photograph and the headline, as if it had never been there. *Union Square Together* stayed up, with its July pictures and its balloon, but the line *Backed by local traders* came down too, at eleven twenty, and was replaced with *Have your say*, and a link to a form.

At half past eleven, Dympna from the charity shop came into Cheverton's.

She stood at the counter. She had her coat on, and her handbag, and a face, Ida told me, like somebody who's been told the price of a repair and is working out whether to have it done.

"I want mine back," she said. "My form. I want to change it. Like you did." She looked at the floor. "I didn't read the middle, Ida. I never read the middle."

"Nobody does, love," said Ida. "Sit down. I'll show you how."

* * *

By that evening, three more of the traders who'd signed had rung the number on Varley's card and asked for their forms back, so that they could change the middle. One of them, the barber, had his back by Saturday, and changed it, and sent me a copy, with his permission. He'd crossed out the same line. Above it, in capitals, he'd written: *A SHOP IN THE MARKET IF THERE IS ONE. ASK ME.*

On my map, the hundred that covers Union Street went from pale blue to a blue you could actually see.

That's seven.

* * *

Jono came back at six, on his way to a shift. He stood in the door of Cheverton's, the way he does, and looked at the shop. At the longcases, and the brackets, and the banjo, and the ship's clock from the trawler, and Ida behind the counter with the loupe in, working on the carriage clock, which was ticking now, on the cloth, with its back still off.

"Ida," he said.

She looked up at him with the huge eye.

“The committee,” said Jono. “Nine days. There’s three minutes for anybody who’s registered to speak in support. And three for anybody against.” He paused. “I’m not going to ask.”

“Good,” said Ida.

“I just thought you should know.”

She looked at him for a long time, with the loupe in. Then she looked down at the carriage clock, on its cloth, ticking.

“Three minutes,” she said.

“Three minutes.”

She picked up the tweezers.

“This one strikes the hour,” she said. “And the half. It’s a good strike. Clear. You can hear it in the street.” She turned a tiny screw, a quarter turn. “You can set it to strike whenever you like, if you know what you’re doing. You can set it to strike at three minutes past.”

Jono didn’t say anything.

“Go to work,” said Ida. “You’ll be late.”

PART SIX

ITEM SIX

27. Three Minutes

IQ 21 · Hundreds 7 · Six days

Ida registered to speak at a quarter past ten on the Wednesday, at the desk in the town hall, with the same woman who'd typed her cabinet question.

"You again," said the woman.

"Me again," said Ida.

"Planning this time?"

"Item six. Union Square. In support."

The woman looked at her over the top of the monitor. "In *support*?"

"Mostly," said Ida. "Write it down for me, love."

* * *

I'll tell you the rules, because I had to learn them, and because they matter.

At the planning committee, in my story, the public can speak. You have to register in advance, by noon, three working days before. You can speak for an application or against it. Each side gets three minutes. If more than one person registers on the same side, they share the three minutes, and if they can't agree how, it's split equally. You can't ask questions. You can't answer questions. You say your piece, and you sit down, and then the committee members talk among themselves, and ask the officers things, and vote.

Jono: Say they're not the real rules.

They're close to how it's done in a lot of places. I haven't checked Torbay's to the minute, and they change. If you want to speak at a real committee, ask me, and I'll show you the real page.

* * *

Two people had registered to speak in support of item six.

Ida Cheverton, Cheverton's, Union Street.

And a representative of Corvina Leisure Limited.

I found it on the Thursday morning, when the list was published. Jono found it at the same time, in Marivic's window, because I told him, and he put his coffee down very slowly.

"They're speaking," he said.

"In support. Same side as her. They'll share the three minutes."

"Ninety seconds each."

"If they can't agree. Or Corvina asks for more, as the *development partner*, and the clerk asks Ida if she minds, and she's seventy-nine and polite and says she doesn't."

"She'll mind," said Jono.

"She'll mind," I agreed. "Whether she says so is another matter."

He looked across the street at the green front. Ida was in the window, rearranging the carriage clocks, which she does on Thursdays, so that the ones that have been in the sun go to the back.

"Don't tell her yet," said Jono. "Let me think."

* * *

He didn't need to think. Varley did it for him.

At eleven at night, on the Thursday, Jono's phone buzzed, on Chris's kitchen table, beside me against the fruit bowl. He turned it over and read it, and then turned it round so I could read it too, the way he had the year before.

Mr Hills. My client has withdrawn its speaker for item six. The three minutes are hers. I'd rather lose to her than to you. S.V.

Jono read it three times.

"What does that mean?" said Chris.

"It means he's frightened of her," said Jono.

"That's not like him."

"No," said Jono. "But it's like her." He put the phone face down. He didn't delete it this time. "He's watched her take his form and change the middle. He doesn't want to stand at a microphone next to that and talk about *exciting opportunities*. He'd look like what he is." He picked up his tea. "So he's got out of the way. Which is clever. Because now if she says anything wrong, it's all hers."

"Will she say anything wrong?" said Chris.

Jono thought about it.

"She's never said anything wrong in her life," he said. "She's just never been asked to say it in public."

* * *

I told Ida on Friday morning, at seven, after the clocks.

She was in the back room, on the wobbling chair, with the carriage clock on its cloth in front of her. It was finished now. All its wheels back in, its back on, its glass polished. It was ticking. She'd set it going on Tuesday, and it hadn't lost a second against the regulator since.

"Three minutes," she said. "All of it."

"All of it."

"Not shared."

"Not shared."

She looked at the carriage clock for a long time.

"Then I'll need to write it down," she said. "I won't remember three minutes."

"You remembered the cabinet."

"That was a question. A question's easy. You just ask the thing you want to know." She picked up the clock and turned it round, and looked at the back, at the little lever that sets the strike. "Three minutes is a speech. I've never made a speech." She put it down. "I'll need help."

"Who from?"

Ida looked at me, against the teapot, where Jono had propped me.

"Not you," she said. "No offence."

"None taken."

"You'd make it too good," said Ida. "They'd know it wasn't me." She looked at the door to the shop, at the street beyond it. "I'll ask Marivic. She did eighteen years on the wards. She's told a lot of people a lot of things they didn't want to hear, in three minutes, at the end of a bed." She stood up. "And I'll ask Tenby. He's read every book in the world."

* * *

She wrote it over the weekend. At Marivic's, in the back, after closing, with Marivic and Tenby and a pot of tea and a lot of crossings out. Jono wasn't allowed. Neither was I. Ida said it had to be hers, and if any of *the computer lot* were there, she'd end up saying what we wanted instead of what she meant.

I've seen the drafts since. She kept them. There are seven. The first one is two pages long, and starts with her father, and the war, and the bakery opposite, and would have taken about fourteen minutes. The seventh is half a page, in her clock-ticket handwriting, with a line drawn under it, and a time written at the bottom.

2 min 50.

Tenby timed it. With his watch, which is a ship's engineer's watch, steel, with a black face, that he's had for thirty years and that has never, he says, been wrong.

"Ten seconds spare," he said, when she'd read it through the last time. "For the clock."

* * *

Teo came to the table on the Thursday, the day the list was published, at ten, after Varley's message but before anyone knew about it.

He sat down. He didn't eat. Marivic put something in front of him and he pushed it round the plate.

"I've given in my notice," he said. "At ours. Chef's done me a leaving do. Saturday. After service."

"That's good," said Jono.

"Yeah." He pushed the plate. "He gave me a knife. A proper one. Japanese. He said every chef should leave a kitchen with a better knife than they came in with." He took it out of his bag to show us, in its wooden box, and opened the box, and it was beautiful, a long thin blade with a pattern in the steel like water. He closed the box. "Train's Wednesday. Twenty past seven in the morning. I start Thursday."

"The day after the committee."

"Yeah." He looked across the street, at Cheverton's. "Is she really doing it? Ida? Marivic said."

"She's doing it."

Teo nodded slowly.

"My nan's coming," he said. "To watch. Ida asked her. She said she wants some of the Sunday morning ones there. The old ladies whose hair she cuts. Nan's never been in the town hall in her life.

She's buying a hat." He almost laughed. "She's buying a *hat*. For the council."

He pushed the plate away.

"I've done the stall," he said.

Jono waited.

"Stall six. In the picture. The market one." Teo didn't look at him. "It was me. You knew that."

"I didn't know," said Jono. "I guessed."

"Ania knew."

"Ania doesn't tell anybody who made anything," said Jono. "It's on her list."

Teo looked at me, against the ketchup.

"Is it?" he said.

"Number four," I said. "*I won't tell anyone what you asked me.*"

He looked at me for a long time. Then he stood up, and put the Japanese knife back in his bag, and went to the door.

"I'm doing a thing," he said. "Saturday night. Not the leaving do. After. Here. Marivic said I could use her kitchen. Just one dish. For anyone who comes." He shrugged. "To see if they'll queue."

* * *

They queued.

I'm going to tell you how many, because I counted, and because it's the kind of number I'd want to know.

Marivic's café holds twenty-two people. Teo started at eleven at night, after his leaving do, with the Japanese knife and two gas rings and a pan the size of a bath that Marivic's husband borrowed from his church. One dish. Scouse, his nan's, the way she makes it, beef and potato and onion stewed for hours. But with suya spice, the peanut and chilli and ginger that his first stepdad used to put on

everything, rubbed into the beef before it went in. On rice, or with bread. Four pounds a bowl.

At eleven, there were nine people. Marivic, her husband, her daughter, Ida, Tenby, Jono, me, his nan in her new hat, and a man who'd been walking past.

At half past eleven, there were thirty. The kitchen staff from his restaurant on the Strand, who'd come up the hill from the leaving do. Two lads from his college year, the ones who worked in a supermarket and said they were going and hadn't. A taxi driver. Three nurses from somewhere, off a late, in their uniforms.

At midnight, the queue went out of the door, under the yellow awning, and down the pavement, past Cheverton's, past the shoe shop with the plywood across it, and stopped at the barber's.

Fifty-three people. On Union Street. At midnight. In March.

He ran out at ten to one. He'd made enough for eighty, he thought, but people kept coming back for seconds, and he wouldn't charge them twice. When the pan was empty, he stood behind Marivic's counter with the ladle in his hand and looked at the queue, which was still out of the door, and at the people at the tables eating, with their coats on, and said, to nobody:

"They queued."

Ida was at the window table, with a bowl, which she'd eaten all of, which Marivic said she'd never seen her do with anything. She put her spoon down.

"Of course they queued," she said. "It's good."

28. The Night Before

IQ 21 · Hundreds 7 · One day

At thirteen minutes to seven on Monday evening, Footnote wrote.

Item 6. Paragraph 9.4. Read it before they do.

No photograph. Just that.

I'd read it. Of course I'd read it; the committee report had been published the Wednesday before, a hundred and twelve pages and four appendices, and I'd read all of it in a second and then again slowly. But I went back. I always do, when Footnote says.

Paragraph 9.4 is on page sixty-three. It's in a section headed *Economic Impact*, between a paragraph about construction jobs and a paragraph about business rates. It says:

Existing traders displaced by the scheme will be offered the opportunity to take space in the restored Pannier Market, where viable.

That's all. One sentence.

* * *

I read it eleven times. Then I read the recommendation, at the front of the report, on page two, the bit the committee actually votes on. It says that the committee should grant planning permission, subject to the conditions in Appendix 1. I read Appendix 1. There are forty-four conditions. They're about construction hours and drainage and the colour of the bricks and the times deliveries can be made and the species of the trees.

None of them is about traders. None of them mentions the market being let. None of them says anything about paragraph 9.4.

So I understood.

Paragraph 9.4 is a sentence in a report. It's what the officers wrote, explaining why the scheme was a good one. It isn't what the committee would decide. The committee would decide the recommendation and the conditions. Paragraph 9.4 would be published, and then it would be filed, and in two or three years, when the market was restored and someone came to let the stalls, nobody would be bound by it. Nobody would even remember it. It was a sentence describing a good intention, in a section about economic impact, on page sixty-three.

And it said *where viable*.

* * *

I wrote back to Footnote. I didn't expect an answer. I got one, at thirteen minutes to eight.

9.4 is not in the recommendation.

If it is not in the decision, it is not in the record.

Somebody has to ask them to put it in.

* * *

Jono was on nights. Monday, the night before. He'd asked Margot for the Tuesday off, for the committee, and she'd given it to him, and he'd swapped his Tuesday for the Monday so the rota still worked, which meant he'd be finishing at seven in the morning on the day of the meeting, after a night shift, which is what he always does, and which I've stopped telling him not to.

I told him about 9.4 at nine, before his first call, in the car.

He read it on my screen. Then he read the Footnote messages.

"*Somebody has to ask them*," he said.

"Yes."

"It can't be us."

"No."

"It's got to be her."

"It's in her three minutes," I said, "or it's nowhere."

He sat with his hands on the wheel for a long time.

"She's finished her speech," he said. "She timed it. Two minutes fifty. Tenby timed it. With ten seconds for the clock." He shook his head. "I'm not going to ring her at nine o'clock the night before and tell her to change it."

"Then it won't be in the record."

"Then it won't be in the record." He started the car. "Send her the paragraph. Just the paragraph. And Footnote's messages. Nothing from me. Nothing from you. Just the page." He pulled out. "She reads the middle. Let her read it."

* * *

I sent it to Marivic, who printed it out and took it across the road.

I don't know what Ida did with it. Not then. Nobody told me. Marivic said Ida read it at the counter, with the loupe, twice, and then put it under the till, under the tray where the notes go. And then went into the back room, and shut the door.

* * *

The regulator stopped at eleven minutes past three in the morning.

Ida told me. She said she woke up. She lives above the shop, in two rooms, and she's slept above the clocks for sixty years, and she said that she woke at eleven minutes past three because something was wrong and she didn't know what, and lay there in the dark for a minute, listening, and then knew.

The tick had gone.

Not the other clocks. They were all going, a hundred and three of them, ticking and tocking and whirring, in the dark, below her. But under them, always, for sixty years, there's been one slow tick, one a second, exactly, from the back of the shop. The regulator. She said you don't hear it, the way you don't hear your own heart. And then it stops, and the whole building sounds wrong.

She went down in her dressing gown. She turned the light on in the back room. The pendulum was hanging still, behind the glass. She opened the door and touched it, and it swung, and stopped again, and she saw why. The suspension spring, the little flat strip of steel at the top that the pendulum hangs from, which flexes with every swing, sixty times a minute, for a hundred and forty years, had cracked.

"I stood there," she said. "In my dressing gown. At quarter past three in the morning. The night before. And I thought: it's a sign. I'm seventy-nine and the clock my father set everything by has stopped and I'm going to stand up in front of a council tomorrow and make a fool of myself and it's telling me not to." She looked at me. "I don't believe in signs. I never have. But I stood there and thought it."

And then she did something she'd never done before, in fifty-six years of keeping a shop.

She rang somebody.

* * *

She rang the shelter. She had the number; Tenby had written it on the back of a clock ticket for her, after the storm, *in case*. Precious answered, because Precious is always on at three in the morning. Ida said who she was. Precious said she knew who she was, everybody knew who she was. Ida said she needed Gethin. She used

his name. His real one. Precious said she'd never heard anyone call him that.

He was there in eleven minutes. He'd run down the hill. He was in his good coat, over a T-shirt, with his boots unlaced, and the blue exercise book in his pocket, and the feeler gauges.

He looked at the spring. He looked at it with Ida's loupe, which she lent him, which she has never lent anybody. He said it was a fatigue crack, from a hundred and forty years of flexing, and that it was a miracle it had lasted, and that it was the most beautiful piece of steel he'd ever seen.

"Can it be mended?" said Ida.

"It can be replaced," said Tenby. "Have you got a spare?"

Ida looked at him. Then she went to the bench, to the board above it with the hundreds of tools on hooks, each one outlined in marker pen, and below it, a chest of tiny drawers, each one labelled in her father's handwriting. She opened the fourth drawer from the left on the bottom row. It was labelled, in faded ink, *Regulator — spares — DON'T*.

In it, wrapped in tissue paper, was a suspension spring.

"My father made it," she said. "When I was a girl. In case. He said one day it'd go, and I'd need it, and I should never use it for anything else. *Don't*." She held it out to Tenby, on the tissue. "I've never opened that drawer."

* * *

They fitted it together. It took two hours.

Tenby did the hard part, taking the pendulum off, which is heavy and has to be lifted straight up without touching the sides, and taking the old spring out of its chops, which is what the little clamps are called. Ida did the fine part, fitting the new spring, which she said was a thousandth of an inch out, and filed, with a file

the size of a matchstick, by eye, until it was right. Then Tenby lifted the pendulum back on. And Ida set it swinging, with her finger, very lightly.

It ticked. One a second. Exactly.

It was half past five. They sat in the back room and drank tea and listened to it.

At six, Ida turned on the radio, the old one with the dial, tuned to the station with the pips. And they waited. And at six o'clock the pips went, six of them, the last one long, and on the long one, Ida touched the regulator's minute hand, a fraction, so that it was exactly right.

"There," she said.

Then she went round the shop with the keys, as she always does. Left wall, shelves, window, counter, back. And Tenby went with her, and held the keys.

* * *

At seven, the shop said seven.

Tenby told me about it. He said it was the best one he'd ever heard. He said the regulator's note, the first one, from the back, sounded different, deeper, as if it had been somewhere and come back. He said that when the cuckoo went, last, he clapped, and so did Ida, which she never does.

And then she went to the till, and took out the tray where the notes go, and took out paragraph 9.4, from underneath.

"I've thought about it," she said. "Since three o'clock. While you were holding the pendulum." She unfolded it. "My father made a spare and put it in a drawer and wrote *DON'T* on it, because he knew one day somebody'd need it and he wouldn't be there. That's what you do. You put it somewhere it'll be found. You write on it so nobody uses it for something else." She held up the paragraph.

“This is a spare. In a drawer. With nothing written on it. Anybody could use it for anything. Or nothing.” She folded it again. “It wants writing on.”

“Your speech is two minutes fifty,” said Tenby.

“Then I’ll have to cut something,” said Ida.

* * *

Jono came off at seven. He drove to Union Street, still in his lanyard, after a night with four calls and no sleep, and parked by the harbour and walked up the hill. He got to the green front at twenty-two minutes past seven.

Tenby was on the step outside, sitting on the edge, not in the doorway. He had a mug. It was the Pavilion one. He looked at Jono, and at his watch, his steel ship’s engineer’s watch, with the black face, that has never been wrong.

“You’re late,” he said.

“I know,” said Jono. “What happened?”

“The regulator stopped,” said Tenby. “At eleven minutes past three.” He drank his tea. “She rang me.”

Jono stood on the pavement for a long time.

“She rang you,” he said.

“She did.” Tenby looked into the mug. “First person she’s ever rung. In fifty-six years. She said.” He looked up at Jono. “She said that morning with the letter, back in October, she stood at that counter and couldn’t think of one person in this town who’d pick up.” He put the mug down on the step beside him. “Well. Somebody picked up.”

29. Item Six

IQ 21 · Hundreds 7 · Today

The planning committee met at two o'clock in the afternoon, in the big room in the town hall at Castle Circus, at the top of Union Street, with the crest on the wall and the long table and the microphones on stalks.

There are sixty seats for the public in that room. Every one was taken by a quarter to two. There were people standing at the back, and along the sides, and in the corridor outside, where a man from the council in a lanyard kept saying *I'm afraid it's standing room only* to people who were already standing.

Varley was there. Fourth row, aisle seat, navy coat, notebook. He didn't smile when Jono came in. He nodded.

I want to tell you who else was there, because I promised, on the steps outside the cabinet, three months before, that next time it would be more than three. I counted. I'm good at counting.

Marivic, and her husband, and her daughter, who'd shut the café, which they never do, with a sign on the door that said *GONE TO THE COUNCIL. BACK AT 5. WATCH IT ON YOUR PHONE*, and a link. Clemency, in her long grey coat, with her stick under her arm. Precious, off a night, in her own clothes. Dympna, from the charity shop, with her husband, who was thinner than in the photograph Ida had shown me but had come anyway, in a wheelchair, at the end of a row. The barber. The woman from the phone shop. Four of the old ladies whose hair Ida cuts on Sunday mornings, in a row, in hats, including Teo's nan, in a new one, with

a feather. The kitchen staff from Teo's restaurant on the Strand, who'd swapped shifts. Dilys, who'd driven from Paignton in her school taxi between the morning run and the afternoon one, and had to leave at three. Kezia, who'd bunked off college and would be in trouble. Niamh, on the press bench, which was one chair. Chris, in a seat at the end of the front row that somebody had saved for him, with his stick against the chair in front. And Richard, who'd said he'd be recognised and it would spoil it, and who'd come anyway, and was standing at the very back, by the door, in his flat cap, with his arms folded.

Tenby was there. Inside. In the room. In his good coat. He'd said he wasn't going in a building like that in a coat like that, and then he'd come in anyway, and he was sitting beside Ida, in the front row, at the end, where she'd sat for the cabinet.

Teo wasn't. He was working. His last shift.

Outside, on Union Street, in Marivic's café, which was shut, with the sign on the door, there were forty-one people standing on the pavement under the yellow awning, watching the webcast on their phones.

And on the webcast itself, which the council streams for every committee, and which normally has, Niamh told me, between eleven and thirty viewers, there were two thousand one hundred and forty.

More than three.

* * *

Item six came on at twenty past three. The first five items were a house extension in Shiphay, a change of use in Babbacombe, a mobile phone mast, a block of flats in St Marychurch that was deferred, and a tree. People sat through all of them. Nobody left.

The councillors kept looking at the public seats, at the sixty people and the twenty standing, as if they'd walked into the wrong room.

Then the chair said *item six*, and a man from the planning team stood up with a clicker, and the slides came up on the screen.

They were the July pictures. The market gleaming in the square. The trees. The cafés with their tables out. The homes with balconies and flowers. The health centre. The people. The blue sky. The balloon.

He presented it well. I'll say that, because it's true. He was clear, and he was fair, and he went through the scheme in fourteen minutes, and the policies, and the conditions, and the objections, and why the officers thought it should be approved. He said it would bring new homes and health services to the town centre. He said it would restore a listed building that had been hidden for decades. He said that the loss of nine shops was regrettable but necessary to open up the site, and that existing traders had been engaged with and that a number had indicated support, as set out in Appendix 3.

He didn't mention paragraph 9.4.

* * *

I'd read Appendix 3. I read it the night before. I'd like to tell you about it now, because it's the only time in this book that I'll tell you about something being in the record that I could hardly believe was there.

It's eleven pages. It's the forms. All of them, scanned, one after another, the forms that Varley's young man in the suit that didn't fit had collected from the traders of Union Street and Market Street, with their signatures. Six of them.

And on page four, scanned, exactly as she wrote it, with the line through the middle and the words above it in her small, clear, clock-ticket handwriting:

I, the undersigned, as an existing trader in the affected area, support the market being restored. I have not been asked about the rest. I would like to be.

I.C. 10.14.

And on page six, the barber's, in capitals, *A SHOP IN THE MARKET IF THERE IS ONE. ASK ME.* And on page five, Dympna's, which she'd changed at Ida's counter, with Ida showing her how: *I support it if my husband and I can still have a shop somewhere. Nobody has said.*

They'd put them in. All of them. They'd promised the committee a pile of forms, and they couldn't leave any out without somebody asking where they'd gone, and so they'd scanned them, every one, middle and all, and put them in the appendix to a planning report that would be in the public record for ever.

Ida had been right. She'd been right in October, before any of us, when she put a letter under the tray in the till. She'd been right in the back room, laughing, with her hand on the bench. *Nobody ever reads the middle.* They hadn't. They'd scanned it.

I'd like that noted. It's my second time. I said I was saving it.

* * *

The objectors went first. A man from a residents' group, about parking. He had three minutes and used two and a half, and he was right about the parking, and nobody in the room was there for the parking, and he knew it, and sat down.

Then the chair said: "We have one registered speaker in support. Mrs Cheverton."

* * *

She stood up. She walked to the microphone, which was on a stand in front of the public seats, facing the long table, too high for her, like before. Somebody from the side started to come and lower it, and this time she let them. She said, *Thank you, dear.*

She was in the camel coat. The brooch. The half-moon glasses on their chain. Her back very straight.

In her right hand, she had a piece of paper, folded in four.

In her left hand, she had the carriage clock.

She put the clock on the shelf at the front of the lectern, where speakers put their notes. Facing the long table. It's a small clock, a carriage clock, brass, with glass sides so you can see the works, and a handle on top. It was ticking. In the silence of that room, with sixty people in the public seats and twenty standing and twelve at the long table, you could hear it.

Then she unfolded the piece of paper, and looked at it, and began.

* * *

I'm going to give you all of it. It's in the webcast, which has a **Receipt**, and it's in the minutes, shorter. She's said I can. It's two minutes and fifty-one seconds.

"My name is Ida Cheverton. I keep the clock shop on Union Street, which is one of the nine. I've kept it for fifty-six years, and my father before me.

"I'm here in support. I want to say that first, because people keep expecting me to be against it, and I'm not. The market is a beautiful building and it deserves to stand on its own. People in doorways deserve homes. People at the top of town deserve to be seen by a doctor without getting two buses. If you have to knock

down my shop to do that, knock it down. I'd rather the street lived differently than died the way it's been dying.

"But I want to tell you something about streets. A street isn't the shops. It's who's in the doorways. When I was a girl, it was me in mine and the baker in his and the shoe man in his, talking across the road in the mornings. Now it's a man called Gethin, who sleeps two along from me, and who mended my father's clock at four o'clock this morning when it stopped, for the first time in a hundred and forty years. He's sitting there." She didn't look round. "He's the only one left on Union Street who stands in a doorway at seven in the morning. Him and me.

"Your report says, on page sixty-three, paragraph nine point four, that traders who lose their shops will be offered space in the market, *where viable*.

"I've been writing dockets for fifty-six years. I know what *where viable* means. It's what you write when you don't want to be held to it.

"I'd like you to be held to it.

"Not in a report. In what you decide. So it's in the record. So that in three years, when the market's restored and somebody comes to let the stalls, it's there. Written down. Where it'll be found.

"And when you do let them, I'd like you to ask first. The ones who'll stand in the new doorways. Not a survey in August. Ask them. The barber, and Dympna, and me, if I'm still here. And the young ones. There's a lad who cooked for fifty-three people on Union Street at midnight on Saturday, and they queued down the hill, and he's leaving for London tomorrow because nobody here ever asked him what he'd need.

"My father kept a spare spring for his clock in a drawer, for sixty years, with *DON'T* written on it, so nobody would use it for

anything else. Paragraph nine point four is a spare. It wants writing on.

"Thank you."

* * *

She folded the paper and put it in her coat pocket.

And then, on the shelf at the front of the lectern, the carriage clock struck.

Once. A clear, bright, single note, like a bell on a bicycle, the kind you can hear in the street. It's set to strike the hour and the half. She'd set it, with a tiny screw, a quarter turn, to strike at three minutes past.

It was three minutes since she'd stood up. Exactly. I timed it.

* * *

Nobody said anything.

I don't know how long it lasted. I do, actually; I always do. It was eleven seconds. But I've watched the webcast since, more times than I'll admit, and in the webcast it looks much longer. Ida standing at the lectern, very straight, with her hand resting on the top of the clock. Twelve people at the long table, not moving. The officer with the clicker, looking at his notes. Sixty people in the public seats, and twenty standing, and on the edge of the frame, at the end of the front row, a man in a good coat with a short beard, looking at the floor.

Then somebody started to clap. At the back. By the door. I couldn't see who. I've asked. Nobody will tell me.

Then everybody.

The chair asked for no applause, please, and then asked again, and then waited, because there wasn't anything else to do.

Ida picked up the carriage clock by its handle, and walked back to her seat, at the end of the front row, and sat down next to Tenby, and put the clock on her knee, and her handbag on top of it, and folded her hands, and looked straight ahead at the crest on the wall.

Tenby didn't look at her. He was still looking at the floor. But Jono, at the back, saw him put his hand on the arm of her chair, just beside hers, not touching. And leave it there.

* * *

The committee debated for forty minutes.

I'm not going to give you all of it. Most of it was about the parking and the trees and the height of the homes on one corner. They're in the minutes. But I'll give you the part that matters, as close to how it happened as the minutes let me, and I'll describe the people by their jobs, as I always do.

About twenty minutes in, one of the members, a woman near the end of the long table who hadn't said anything until then, put her light on and asked the officer about paragraph 9.4.

She asked what *where viable* meant.

The officer said it meant that the council intended to offer space in the market to displaced traders, subject to the market's business plan and the terms of any letting.

The member asked whether that intention was in the recommendation, or in the conditions.

The officer said it wasn't, because the letting of the market was a matter for the council as landowner, not for the planning committee, and couldn't properly be made a planning condition.

The member said she understood that. She said she'd read the conditions, all forty-four, and that she knew a great deal more now about the species of the trees than she'd ever expected to. A few people laughed. She said she wasn't asking for a condition. She

asked whether the committee could add a note to its decision, asking the cabinet to bring back a report, before the market was let, setting out how existing traders and new local businesses would be offered space in it, and how they'd be consulted first.

The legal officer, who sits at the side and doesn't usually say anything, said that the committee could add such a note, as a request to the cabinet, though it wouldn't be binding on the cabinet in planning terms.

The member said: "But it would be in the record."

The legal officer said: "It would be in the record."

The member said she'd like to propose it, then. Another member seconded it. The chair asked whether anyone objected to the note being added. Nobody did.

It took four minutes. I timed it.

* * *

Then they voted.

It was unanimous. Approved. With forty-four conditions. And one note.

That's real. The approval, I mean. The scheme was approved unanimously, including the nine shops; there's a **Receipt**. The note is my story. I can't show you a page for it. In my story, it's on page nine of the minutes, after the vote, one sentence, in the dull careful language of the record:

The Committee further requested that, prior to any letting of the restored Pannier Market, a report be brought to Cabinet setting out how existing traders displaced by the scheme, and new local businesses, will be offered the opportunity to take space within it, and how they will be consulted in advance.

That's all. One sentence. A spare spring, with something written on it.

30. Unanimous

IQ 21 · Hundreds 7 · Today

"We lost," said Kezia, on the town hall steps.

She was furious. She's seventeen, and she'd bunked off college, and she'd been sure, I think, right up until the hands went up, that something would happen. That it would go the other way. That an old woman with a clock would stand up and the twelve people at the long table would look at each other and say, *Well, in that case*.

"It's approved," she said. "All of it. The nine shops. Everything. They didn't change anything."

"We didn't want them to," said Jono.

Kezia looked at him.

"We weren't trying to stop it," said Jono. "Nobody was. Not even Ida." He was sitting on the steps, at the side, on the edge, with his lanyard still round his neck from the night before. He'd had no sleep in thirty-one hours. I'd counted. "We were trying to get somebody in the room who has to live with it. And we did. And they listened. And they wrote it down." He looked down Union Street, at the long climb of it, all the way to the harbour. "That's not losing."

"It's a *note*," said Kezia. "It's not even binding. The lawyer said."

"I know."

"So they can just ignore it."

"They can," said Jono. "And then somebody'll stand up at the cabinet, in two or three years, when they let the market, and read it out. Page nine. In the minutes." He looked at her. "Maybe you."

Kezia didn't say anything. She sat down on the step beside him, a bit further along, with her arms round her knees.

"I'd need to know where it was," she said, eventually.

"Ania'll know."

"Ania knows everything," said Kezia. "It's annoying."

* * *

I want to tell you what happened on the steps of the town hall that afternoon, because it was the best hour of the book, and nothing happened in it at all.

People came out. The sixty from the public seats, and the twenty who'd stood, and the people from the corridor. And they didn't go. They stood on the steps, and on the pavement at the top of Union Street, in the March sun, which had come out at four as if it had been waiting, and talked.

Dympna's husband, in his wheelchair, talking to the barber, about a shop in the market, if there ever was one, and whether a barber's would work in a market, and the barber saying in Singapore they have them, his cousin had told him, little barber's stalls, five dollars a cut, which made Chris, two steps away, turn round and stare. Clemency talking to Precious about the Pavilion, and about the engineer, and about how she'd still like to meet him properly. The old ladies in hats, all four of them, round Ida, and Teo's nan with the feather saying she'd never been so proud of anybody in her life and she'd only known Ida forty years. The kitchen staff from the Strand, smoking, at the side, and one of them, a woman of about forty, a pastry chef, saying to Richard, who'd come out last: *Are you the one who drew us the terrace?* And Richard, in his flat cap, saying he was, and the pastry chef saying *We've got it on the wall. Next to the hygiene certificate.* And

Richard, for the first time in this book, and possibly the first time in years, laughing out loud.

And Ida, in the middle of the old ladies, with the carriage clock in one hand and her handbag in the other, looking down the hill at her street.

* * *

Varley came out last. After everybody. Buttoning his coat.

He stopped at the top of the steps, and looked at the crowd on the pavement, the eighty or ninety people standing in the sun outside the town hall at half past four on a Tuesday, talking. And I saw him do what Jono does. Read the room. Exits, then the people, then the rest. I don't think he'd ever seen a room like it, not here, not outside a council meeting about a planning application, people who'd come and stayed and weren't angry.

He came down the steps. He passed Jono, at the side, on the edge, with Kezia. He didn't stop. But he said, as he passed, without looking down:

"You're making it very expensive, Mr Hills. To do things quietly."

"Good," said Jono.

Varley went on down the steps, and along the side of the town hall, towards the car park with the stairs. At the corner, he stopped, and looked back, once, at the crowd. At Ida, with her clock.

Then he went.

* * *

At thirteen minutes to five, Footnote wrote.

One word.

Minuted.

That night I moved the IQ. Twenty-two. One point, for one sentence on page nine of some minutes, asking somebody to ask. Jono says the score's nonsense. He's probably right. But it's the first time in this book that the people running the place wrote down that they'd ask first, and I'm the one who keeps the score.

* * *

Ida went home at six. Tenby walked her down the hill, with her arm through his. The old ladies followed, in their hats, in a little procession, and Marivic and her husband and her daughter, and the barber, and Dympna's husband being pushed by Dympna, and the kitchen staff, and Clemency, and some others I didn't know. Down Union Street, from the town hall to the clock shop, in the evening, in March, about thirty people, walking slowly because of the wheelchair and the hats.

It wasn't a carnival. It was a lot of people walking an old lady home.

Jono didn't go. He stood on the town hall steps and watched them go down, and so did I, from his pocket. Down the long climb of Union Street, past the empty shops and the brown paper and the doorways, in the last of the light.

"She rode down there on a lorry," he said. "When she was seventeen. In a paper crown."

"I know."

"Both pavements full. You couldn't see the shop fronts."

"I know."

He watched them reach the bottom of the first stretch, and turn, and go on.

"Ania," he said.

"Yes."

"How many people watched it? Today. All of it. In the room and outside and on the phones."

I told him. Sixty in the seats. Twenty standing. Fourteen in the corridor. Forty-one outside Marivic's. Two thousand one hundred and forty on the webcast. And two hundred and six who'd asked me about it, during, which I hadn't been able to answer, because I'd been watching.

"More than three," said Jono.

"More than three," I said.

* * *

He went to Marivic's at seven. The café was open again. The sign was gone from the door. It was full. Not of customers, exactly; of people from the steps, who'd followed the old ladies down and then not gone home, and who were sitting at the tables with tea and Marivic's pancit and the radio on and nobody quite knowing what they were celebrating.

Teo was there. He'd come up from the Strand after his last service, in his whites, with his bag over his shoulder and the Japanese knife in it in its wooden box. He was sitting at the window table, under the three cards, with his nan, in her hat with the feather, and a bowl of something Marivic had made, which he wasn't eating.

Jono sat down opposite him. On the edge of the chair.

"Your nan says she was there," said Teo.

"She was."

"She says Ida said about me. In the speech." He wasn't looking at Jono. He was looking at the bowl. "*A lad who cooked for fifty-three people*. She says Ida said that. To the council."

"She did."

"*And he's leaving for London tomorrow because nobody here ever asked him what he'd need.*"

"She did."

Teo pushed the bowl round. His nan put her hand on his arm, and took it off again.

"Train's at twenty past seven," he said.

"I know," said Jono. "I'm on till seven. In Paignton. I'll try."

"Doesn't matter."

"It does," said Jono. "I'll try."

Teo nodded. He looked out of the window, across the street, at Cheverton's. The light was on at the back. Ida was in there. Tenby was on the step, on the edge, with the Pavilion mug, though it was half past seven at night and there'd be no clocks till morning.

"What would you do?" said Teo. "If you were me."

Jono thought about it for a long time. Long enough that Teo looked up.

"I'm not you," said Jono. "That's the answer. I can't tell you. I won't." He stood up. He had a shift at ten. "But whatever you choose, choose it. Don't let it happen to you." He put his hand on the table, flat, beside Teo's bowl, for a second. "And come back and cook for me."

He went to the door. He stopped, the way he does.

Teo was looking at the bowl.

PART SEVEN

TEN

31. The Train

IQ 22 · Hundreds 7 · After

He was late.

I want that on the record, the way I wanted it on the record at the end of the last book. A woman in Preston had a fall at twenty past five. Not a bad one; she'd slid off the edge of her bed reaching for her glasses and couldn't get up, and she was ninety-four, and frightened, and cross with herself, and he did it properly, the way he always does. He got her up. He checked her. He made the tea. He asked her what she'd need. She said she'd need her glasses, and he found them, under the bed, where they'd been the whole time.

He finished at four minutes to seven. He did the paperwork in the car, because you have to. Then he drove from Preston to Torquay station, which is on the front, by the sea, at the Paignton end of the town, across the road from the beach. The traffic was light. He drove faster than he does. I told him the speed limit twice, and he said *I know* both times.

He parked at seventeen minutes past seven, badly, on a yellow line. He ran across the forecourt and through the ticket hall and onto the platform at twenty-two minutes past.

The train had gone.

* * *

I'll describe Torquay station, because you'll want to see it.

It's small, and old, and pretty, with a canopy over the platform on iron columns, painted cream and maroon, like something from a

film about evacuees. It looks out across the road at the sea. In the morning, in March, the sun comes up over the headland to your left and lights the whole bay in front, flat and pale, with the boats out on it and Paignton across the water and Brixham beyond. There are benches. There's a café that wasn't open yet. There was a man in a hi-vis jacket sweeping the far end, and a pigeon, and nobody else.

The train to London had gone at twenty past seven. On time, the board said. The board had already changed to the next one.

Jono stood on the platform for a long time, breathing hard, with his lanyard still on.

"Ania," he said.

"Yes."

"Was he on it?"

"I don't know."

"His phone?"

"It's off. It's been off since ten last night."

He looked at the empty track, going away round the curve and up the hill, towards Newton Abbot, where the line joins the main one.

"You'd tell me," he said. "If you knew."

"No," I said. "I wouldn't. Not unless he said I could." I paused. "But I don't know. That's the truth. I don't know if he was on it."

Jono nodded. He sat down on a bench, under the canopy, facing the sea. On the edge of it. Not the middle.

"That's right," he said. "That's how it should be."

* * *

He sat there for twenty minutes.

He didn't say anything. He watched the sea. The man in hi-vis swept his way down the platform and past the bench and said *Morning* and Jono said *Morning*, and the man swept on. The café

opened. A woman came onto the platform with a little boy in a school uniform and a suitcase, for the next train, and the boy looked at Jono's lanyard and asked if he was a doctor, and Jono said no, and the boy asked what he was, and Jono said *a carer*, and the boy asked what that was, and Jono said *I go to people's houses in the night when they fall over*, and the boy said *that's a good job*, and his mother pulled him away, embarrassed.

"It is a good job," said Jono, to me, when they'd gone.

"I know."

"He's right."

"I know."

He watched the sea for a bit longer.

"I told him to choose," he said. "On the harbour wall. *Go if you choose it.* And I meant it. And if he's on that train, he chose, and that's good, and I'll go and eat his food in Walthamstow." He was quiet. "I just wanted to see his face. When he got on. To see if he'd chosen or if it had happened to him."

"You can't always tell."

"You can always tell," said Jono. "I've watched a lot of people leave places. You can always tell."

* * *

He didn't go home to sleep. He should have. He drove to Union Street instead, and parked by the harbour, and walked up, slowly this time, because there was no reason to run. He was too late for the clocks. It was ten to eight.

Tenby was on the step. On the edge. With the Pavilion mug.

"You're late," said Tenby.

"I know."

"You missed it."

"I was at the station."

Tenby looked at him for a long time. He didn't ask. He never asks. He drank his tea.

"Thirty-one," he said.

"Thirty-one what?"

"People." Tenby nodded at the pavement, at the street, at the space outside Cheverton's green front. "For the clocks. At seven. Thirty-one people stood out here." He put the mug down. "I counted. You'd have counted. So I did it for you."

Jono stood on the pavement and looked at the street, at the empty space where they'd stood.

"Who?"

"I don't know half of them," said Tenby. "The old ladies. Some from yesterday. A couple from the kitchen on the Strand. A man with a dog. Some kids on their way to school, with a mum who'd seen it on the webcast and said she wanted them to hear it. The man from the bakery's daughter, who's sixty and lives in Newton Abbot and came on the bus. She stood in the road, where her dad used to stand." He picked up the mug again. "When the cuckoo went, they clapped."

"Did Ida come out?"

"No," said Tenby. "She stayed behind the counter. With the loupe in. Pretending to work." He smiled into the mug. "She cried, though. I saw her. Through the window. She took the loupe out and wiped it and put it back in about four times."

* * *

On my map, that morning, a new hundred went blue.

Not Union Street. That one was already blue. The one next to it, behind it, up the hill: Market Street, and the streets round the market, where the barber lives, and the woman from the phone shop, and two of the old ladies. Eleven people in it had made a

picture in See since the Strand went out. Four of them had been on the pavement at seven.

That's eight.

32. Two Words Taken Out

IQ 22 · Hundreds 8 · After

The further report came four months later. In the summer. In a cabinet paper, forty-one pages, published on a Wednesday at four in the afternoon, five working days before the meeting, as the rules say it must, under a title so long it wrapped onto three lines.

I'd been checking the page every eleven minutes for four months. I saw it go up at four oh six.

It was the report the cabinet member had promised, in answer to a woman of seventy-nine in a camel coat, on a Tuesday night the winter before. *A further report would come back before any order was actually made.* Here it was. It recommended that the cabinet now make the compulsory purchase order for Union Square.

I read the recommendation four times. Then I did something I'd done once before, in this book, and swore I wouldn't do again. I woke Chris from his afternoon nap.

"Is it a fire?" he said, from the sofa, with his eyes shut.

"It's two words," I said.

He opened one eye.

"They've taken them out," I said.

* * *

They had. The recommendation said: *That Cabinet agrees to the making of a Compulsory Purchase Order.* No *in principle*. Just *agrees*. And on page three, in a paragraph headed *Background*,

there was an explanation, which I'll give you, because it's real, and there's a **Receipt**:

The earlier decision had agreed the order *in principle*. Legal advice was that those words could expose the council to challenge, because they might suggest that the decision to make the order hadn't really been made, or had been made without the proper consideration. So this report recommended a decision without them.

I read that paragraph eleven times.

* * *

I want to tell you what I thought, because I've told you what I thought all through this book, and I've labelled it, and I'll label this.

I don't think they took the words out because of Ida. I'd love to tell you they did. They didn't. They took them out because a lawyer, somewhere in the building, read the earlier decision and saw that two words in the most important sentence could be used by someone, one day, to say that the council hadn't really decided anything. And a lawyer's job is to make sure nobody can say that. So the lawyer took them out.

That's all. That's the record.

But I'll tell you something else, which is also a guess, and which I also can't prove.

Lawyers only worry about words when somebody's reading them.

For thirty years, nobody read the papers. Footnote told me that, at the end of the last book: *For thirty years nobody has read the record.* You could put two words in a recommendation and nobody would notice, because nobody looked. You could establish a principle in earlier engagement, with seven hundred and ninety people ticking a box about greenery, and nobody would ask who'd

been asked. You could write *where viable* on page sixty-three and file it.

And then a woman stood up at a cabinet meeting and asked what *in principle* meant, for her, tomorrow morning. And it went in the minutes. And somebody in the building read the minutes, and thought: *somebody's reading*.

Jono: That's a guess.

It's a guess. I've labelled it.

Jono: Leave it in.

* * *

I looked for one more thing, in the forty-one pages. I always do. I went to the appendices.

Appendix 2 was a summary of *engagement with affected occupiers since the previous report*. It was nine pages. It said that the council had written to every occupier of the affected properties, and offered every one a meeting, and that eleven had taken it up. It said that officers had visited the premises of those who wished it. It gave a table of the meetings, with dates, which I'm not giving you, and initials, which I am.

I.C. Meeting at premises. Concerns raised regarding relocation of stock (104 clocks). Interest expressed in space within restored market. To be included in future engagement on market lettings (see Planning Committee note, page 9).

They'd gone to her. In the shop. At a time she chose. And somebody had sat on the chair that doesn't wobble and written down *104 clocks* and *see Planning Committee note, page 9*.

I took it to her at seven the next morning, after the clocks. There were eighteen people outside for them that day. There are most days now; never as many as thirty-one, but never none.

She read it with the loupe.

"They sat there," she said, pointing at the chair. "A young woman. From the council. She had a notebook. A paper one. She wrote everything down." Ida took the loupe out. "She asked me what I'd need."

"What did you say?"

"I said I'd need somebody to carry the longcases. They're very heavy and I'm not having them in a van with straps on. And I said I'd need to be near the market, because the old ladies can't walk far, and I do their hair." She put the loupe on the cloth. "And she wrote that down as well. *Hair*. I watched her."

"Did she say anything else?"

"She said she'd read my form," said Ida. "In the appendix. The one with the middle." She picked up her tweezers. "She said she'd never seen anybody do that before. She said it was the first thing she read, when they gave her the file." Ida bent over the bench. "She said it made her want to come and see me herself, instead of writing."

* * *

The cabinet made the order. Unanimously.

Ida didn't go. She said she'd said her piece, and that you don't say the same thing twice to people who wrote it down the first time.

33. The Other Side of the Desk

IQ 22 · Hundreds 8 · After

She came to the table on a Thursday in July, at twenty to ten, and sat down without being asked, which is how the good ones do it.

The young woman with the paper notebook. The one from the council, who'd sat on Ida's chair that doesn't wobble and written down *104 clocks* and *hair*. I recognised the notebook before I recognised her. A paper one, black, with an elastic band round it, of the kind nobody under fifty carries.

She was about twenty-eight. She had a lanyard, which she'd turned round so the name was against her shirt, and she was in her own clothes, not work ones, and she looked, I thought, like somebody who'd decided something on the way and wasn't sure she should have.

"Is this the table?" she said.

"This is the table," said Jono.

She looked at the four cards. *ASK ME ANYTHING. OR TELL ME. ASK HER. THE MARKET. WHAT WOULD YOU PUT IN IT?*

"I'm not supposed to be here," she said.

"Nobody is," said Jono. "That's the point of it."

* * *

I'm not going to tell you her name, or her job title, or her department. She asked me not to, and even if she hadn't, she works for the council, and I don't name people who work for the council.

I'll call her what Ida calls her, which is *the young woman with the notebook*, and which she says she doesn't mind.

She'd been given the market. Not the building; the people. When the restoration was done, in two or three years, somebody would have to work out who would be in it. Who'd get the stalls, and on what terms, and how they'd be chosen. And before that, because of a note on page nine of some minutes, a report had to go to the cabinet setting out how existing traders and new local businesses would be offered space, and how they'd be consulted first.

She'd been given that report. She was writing it. It was her first big one.

"I read the note," she said. "On page nine. And then I read the speech, in the webcast. And then I read Appendix 3. The forms." She turned the notebook over in her hands. "And then I went and sat in her shop. And she told me about the longcases and the hair." She looked at Jono. "And then I went back to the office and they gave me the template."

"What template?"

"For consultation," she said. "There's a template. A standard one. An online survey. Eleven questions. Open for four weeks. Promoted on the website and social media and through stakeholder networks." She almost laughed. "It's the same template. The one from four summers ago. The one your computer found in Appendix C."

* * *

Chris had been at the next table. He'd come to Torquay that morning by taxi, which he does once a month now, to sit in Marivic's and watch Union Street go past and be disappointed by it

in comfort, the way he does on the Torquay Road. He'd been listening. He always is.

He turned his chair round.

"Can I ask what you'd need?" he said.

She looked at him. At the cap, the wire glasses, the white goatee, the stick against the table with the brass eagle's head.

"You're the one who built See," she said.

"Ania built it. I told her what it was for."

"I've used it," she said. "At home. On my own street. I made a picture of the alley behind my flat with lights in it." She went slightly pink. "I pressed February. It still worked."

"What would you need?" said Chris again.

She was quiet for a long time.

"I'd need to do it properly," she said. "The market. I'd need to ask people what they'd put in it. Not in a survey in August. Actually ask. The people who'd be in it, and the people who'd come. Effie, with the buttons. The barber. The lad who cooked at midnight." She held the notebook in both hands. "And I'd need them to be able to see it. Not a list of options. *See* it. Their stall, in the market, with the light coming down. And what it would cost, and what it would take, and who else wanted the same thing." She looked at Chris. "I'd need what you've built. And I'm not allowed to use it."

* * *

She told us why. It took ten minutes, and I'll give you two of them, because the rest was the kind of thing that's in every council in the country and you'll know it already.

She'd asked. Properly, in writing, to her manager, who'd forwarded it to the communications team, who'd forwarded it to the digital team, who'd forwarded it to the information governance team, who'd forwarded it back to communications. She'd asked

whether the council could use See, or something like it, for the market consultation. Free; she'd checked my website, which says it's free. With the council's crest on it if they wanted.

The answer had come back in eleven days. It was four paragraphs long. It said the council couldn't use a third-party tool that hadn't been through its procurement process. It said there were data protection concerns, which it didn't specify. It said there were concerns about *brand consistency*. It said the council had its own consultation platform, which was the template. And it said, in the last paragraph, that there was a reputational concern about using a tool associated with *a local campaign group*.

"*A local campaign group*," said Jono.

"That's you," said the young woman. "Apparently."

"We're not a campaign group."

"I know," she said. "I told them. I said it doesn't campaign for anything; it's a table in a café and a page that shows its working. They said *perception*." She put the notebook on the table. "So I've got the template. Eleven questions. Four weeks. And a market full of people who've never once been asked what they'd need, and a woman with a hundred and four clocks who asked the committee to ask them first." She looked out of the window, across the street, at Cheverton's. "And I'm going to send her a link to a survey."

* * *

Chris didn't say anything for a while. He looked at her the way he looks at people over his glasses, the way that makes men in suits uncomfortable. It didn't make her uncomfortable. She just waited. I think she'd learned it from Ida.

"In Singapore," said Chris.

I logged it. I always do.

"In Singapore," he said, "there's a big model of the city. In a gallery. Open to the public. Every building, every street, every new development, at a tiny scale, under glass. And whenever there's a new plan, they put it in the model. So you can go and look. You can stand over your own street and see what's going to happen to it." He tapped his stick on the floor. "I went every time I could. Not because it was beautiful. Because it was honest. It showed you everything. The good and the bad and the bits they hadn't decided. And you could go back the next year and see if it had changed."

"We haven't got a model," said the young woman.

"No," said Chris. "You've got something better. You've got a phone in every pocket in this bay." He leaned forward. "Here's what I'd do. Don't use See. Don't put it in the consultation. You're not allowed, and you'd get in trouble, and you're the only person in that building who's been to sit in Ida's shop, and I'm not losing you over brand consistency."

She looked at him.

"Do the template," said Chris. "Exactly as they've told you. Eleven questions. Four weeks. Every box ticked. Send Ida the link." He sat back. "And then, the same week, go and stand in the market. On a Saturday. With your notebook. Not as the council. As yourself. And ask people. And if they want to show you something, they've got a phone, and See's on it, because See's on everybody's phone now, and it's free, and it doesn't belong to anybody." He spread his hands. "You're not using a third-party tool. They are. You're just looking."

* * *

The young woman sat very still.

"That's —" she said, and stopped.

"It's the same thing Ida did," said Jono, quietly. "With the form. She didn't refuse it. She signed it. She just changed the middle."

The young woman looked at him. And then, for the first time, she laughed. A real one.

"I can't put it in the report," she said. "If I do it like that. Anything people show me on their phones. It's not a council platform. It's not *valid data*."

"Then put it in an appendix," I said.

Everybody looked at me, against the ketchup.

"Not as data," I said. "As a record. *The following images were shown to officers by members of the public during informal engagement in the Pannier Market.* That's all. One line. And then the pictures, every one, with the Receipt underneath, and the four words in the corner." I paused. "Nobody reads the appendix. You know that. But somebody will. One day. When they come to let the stalls. And it'll be there."

She looked at me for a long time. Then she picked up her notebook, and took the elastic band off, and opened it, and wrote something down, small, at the bottom of a page.

I couldn't see what. I didn't try.

* * *

She did it on the last Saturday in July. In the market. On her own, in her own clothes, with her notebook, from ten until four.

I wasn't there, not officially. I was in about four hundred pockets. That's how many people came, according to Kezia, who stood at the door with a clicker she'd borrowed from the college, the kind they use to count people at fire drills, because she said somebody should count, and it shouldn't be me.

I'll tell you some of what they showed her. They've said I can.

Effie came, with a walking frame and the tin of buttons, four hundred and something, and showed her a picture of a button stall, made in See by her great-grandson, with jars of buttons in rows and a little girl choosing one. And then she opened the tin and gave the young woman one. A brass one, with an anchor on it.

The barber came, with his till roll, and a picture of a barber's stall, two chairs, under the iron roof.

Teo came, in his whites, on his break, and showed her stall six. And then he showed her the February version. And then he showed her a photograph, on his phone, of fifty-three people queueing down Union Street at midnight.

A man came who'd mended bicycles in a shed in his garden for thirty years and wanted a stall to do it from, and showed her a picture he'd made of bicycles hanging from the iron roof.

A woman came who'd been a seamstress at a hotel on the front for twenty years until it closed, and showed her a picture of a stall where you could bring things to be mended. Clothes, and bags, and a teddy bear with an ear off.

Two girls of about fifteen came, who'd been sent by Kezia, and showed her a picture of the middle of the market with the tables cleared and a stage, and a band on it, and people dancing, at night, in February.

And Ida came, at three, with Tenby, in the camel coat. She didn't have a phone, or a picture. She stood in the middle of the market under the iron roof, very straight, and looked up at the light, and said, to the young woman with the notebook:

"There was a clock. Over there. On that wall. A big one, with a face like a moon. My father used to wind it. Every Saturday. For nothing. Because the market needed to know what time it was." She pointed. "They took it down when I was about thirty. I don't know where it went."

The young woman wrote it down.

"I'd need it back," said Ida. "Or one like it. That's all. If I'm going to have a stall in here, there's got to be a clock on that wall that's right." She looked at the wall. "I'll wind it."

* * *

Four hundred and eleven people, Kezia's clicker said. Two hundred and eighty-six pictures. Nine hundred and something things written in a paper notebook in six hours, in handwriting that got smaller and smaller as the pages ran out.

The template survey, the official one, open for four weeks, promoted on the website and social media and through stakeholder networks, got a hundred and ninety-two responses.

Both are in the report. I've read it. The template survey is in the main body, in a section called *Consultation Findings*, with a chart. The Saturday is in Appendix 4.

The following images and comments were shown or made to officers by members of the public during informal engagement in the Pannier Market. They are included for the record.

And then sixty-one pages. Every picture. Every Receipt. Every four words in the corner. And on the last page, a photograph, taken by the young woman herself, on her own phone, of the wall where the moon-faced clock used to hang. Empty. With a note underneath, in the dull careful language of the record:

Mrs I. Cheverton has offered to wind it.

That's my story. I'll label it. I can't show you a page for Appendix 4, not yet. When there's a real report about the real market, I'll read it, and I'll tell you what's in the middle.

* * *

She came back to the table once more, in September, to say she'd finished it.

She put something on the table, beside the ketchup, beside me. It was the brass button with the anchor on it.

"For the record," she said.

"It's yours," said Jono. "Effie gave it to you."

"I know," she said. "I'm not giving it to you. I'm showing you." She picked it up again and put it in her pocket. "I keep it on my desk. On the fourth floor. Next to the template." She stood up. "When somebody asks me why we need to ask people, I show them a button."

She went to the door. She stopped, the way they all do now.

"Do you know what the worst bit of my job is?" she said.

"Tell me," said Jono.

"You sit at a desk, on the fourth floor, and you write things down for people you never meet. And you never know if anybody reads them. And you never know if anybody's ever going to come and sit on the other side of the desk and tell you what they actually need." She looked at the four cards in the window. "And then you come down the hill and sit in a café, and it turns out they've been here all along. Four hundred yards away."

"Four hundred and twelve," I said.

She looked at me.

"From Ida's door to the town hall steps," I said. "I measured it."

"Of course you did," said the young woman with the notebook, and went back up the hill.

34. Move the Road

IQ 22 · Hundreds 8 · After

The consultation on the Strand opened in the summer.

I'll tell you about it, because it's the other half of this book, and because it's the half people ask me about most, and because I want to be very careful how I tell it.

The council had its hotel scheme for the old department store. Six storeys, about a hundred and fifty rooms, a bar on the roof. It was going to committee in the autumn. Before that, the developer and the council ran a consultation, for six weeks, with an exhibition in a marquee on the harbour, and boards, and a website, and a form. The form had eleven questions. The eleventh said: *Do you have any other comments on the proposals?*

That's real. There's a **Receipt**.

* * *

Chris didn't do anything.

I want to tell you that, because people have asked me what campaign we ran, and the answer is none. No leaflets. No posters. No *Save the Strand*. No petition. Chris said that a campaign is a thing you do to people, and that the Hundred doesn't do things to people. It shows them things, and asks.

So we did what we'd done in February. We put the two pictures out again, the summer one and the February one, the Strand with the road moved, as Richard had drawn it, with Dilys's swept path and the four words in the corner. With the Receipt underneath. And

a new line at the bottom, which Chris wrote, and which I'll give you exactly:

The council is consulting on the Strand until the end of next month. If you've got something to say, here's the form. Question 11.

And a link. To the council's own form. Not ours. Theirs.

* * *

I'm going to tell you a number, and then I'm going to tell you why it doesn't matter.

By the end of the six weeks, according to the report that went to the committee in the autumn, the consultation had received two thousand eight hundred and nineteen responses. That's in my story; I can't give you the real number, because I haven't got a page for it.

And the report said, in a paragraph on page thirty-one, in a section summarising answers to question eleven:

A significant number of respondents requested changes to the public realm along the Strand, including the provision of covered outdoor space to the frontage and the relocation of the carriageway towards the harbour edge. Many of these responses included images.

Many of these responses included images. I read that eleven times. I'd like you to read it once.

* * *

Here's why the number doesn't matter.

In the first book, Chris said that Varley could buy a number. He said Varley could always beat a number, because a number is just a counter going up, and you can pay people to make a counter go up. What Varley couldn't buy, Chris said, was somebody who knows your name.

Two thousand eight hundred and nineteen is a number. It's a good one. It's bigger than most consultations in this bay have ever had. But it's not why the paragraph is on page thirty-one.

It's on page thirty-one because somebody in the building had to read the responses, every one, and summarise them. And every time they opened a response to question eleven and there was a picture attached, of the Strand, with a canopy, in the rain, at four o'clock on a Tuesday in February, with a man under it with a coffee, and in the corner, four words, *a picture, not a plan*, they had to look at it. And every one was slightly different, because people had changed things. Somebody had put in a bandstand. Somebody had made the canopy red. Somebody had added a fish market. A child had drawn, on top of the picture, in what I think was a finger on a screen, a dog the size of a bus. And every one had a Receipt underneath, saying who'd drawn the first version and who'd checked the bus turning circle and what it would take.

You can summarise a number. You can't summarise a picture of somebody's own idea of their own town. You have to look at it.

Many of these responses included images.

* * *

The committee approved the hotel in the autumn. That's real; there's a **Receipt**. Six votes to none, with two abstaining.

In my story, the conditions included one about the frontage. It said the developer had to submit a scheme for the public space in front of the hotel, *including consideration of a covered outdoor area*, before the hotel opened. And there was a note, after the conditions, from the committee, asking the council's highways department to *investigate the feasibility of realigning the carriageway on the Strand in conjunction with the development, having regard to the consultation responses*.

Investigate the feasibility. It's not a promise. It's not a plan. I want to be absolutely clear about that, because it's the kind of sentence that gets turned into a headline that says *Road to be moved*, and it isn't. It's a sentence asking somebody to look.

But it's in the record. And it says *having regard to the consultation responses*. And the consultation responses have pictures in them.

* * *

Richard read it in his back room, among the sixteen plan chests and the cardboard town and the framed receipt for thirty-four drawings from the year before. I was propped against a drawer labelled *TORQUAY*, which had been almost empty when I first saw it, and which now had in it a drawing on the back of an email about bins, with question marks round the north arrow, and its signed, dated, swept-path successor, and a print of Dilys's notebook, and nine hundred and sixty-one pictures of the Strand made by other people, which Kezia had printed out at the college, on a printer she wasn't supposed to use, and bound with a bulldog clip.

"*Investigate the feasibility*," he said.

"Yes."

"That's what they said about the wetland. Thirteen years ago."

"I know."

He read it again. Then he put it on the drawing board, on top of the drawing on the back of the email about bins.

"It's different, though," he said.

"How?"

"Thirteen years ago," said Richard, "it was me. On my own. With a drawing." He looked at the bulldog clip, at the nine hundred and sixty-one. "Now it's them."

He took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes.

“I’ve spent fifty years,” he said, “trying to get people to look at my drawings. And they wouldn’t. And then a computer and a man with a stick gave everybody a pen, and they drew their own, and now the council can’t stop looking.” He put his glasses back on. “I’m the scribe. That’s all I ever wanted to be. I just didn’t know you could be everybody’s at once.”

I logged it. On my map, the hundred that covers the Strand and the streets behind it, where the kitchen staff live, and the pastry chef who has Richard’s drawing next to the hygiene certificate, went blue.

That’s nine. The IQ moved. Twenty-three.

35. Tenby's Hundred

IQ 23 · Hundreds 9 · After

Precious found him a room in May.

Not a flat. A room, in a shared house at the top of the town, two streets from Castle Circus, run by a housing association, with a kitchen he shares with four other men and a bathroom he shares with two and a door that locks. It's on the first floor. It has a window that looks over the roofs towards the sea. It has a bed and a chair and a table and a wardrobe with one door that doesn't shut. He put the Conrad on the table, the one with no cover, that somebody had been sick on, that he'd cleaned.

"It's the first door with a lock I've had in seven years," he said.

He said it to Jono, on the step at Cheverton's, at seven, after the clocks. He still comes for the clocks. Every morning. He walks down from his room at ten to seven, and sits on the step, on the edge, and Ida brings him a tea in the Pavilion mug, and at seven he stands in the door for the cuckoo, and claps.

He doesn't sit in the shoe shop doorway now. It's not there to sit in. The plywood came down in April, after the committee, and the pink *TO LET* sign came out of the window, and a young woman from Brixham took the lease, and it's a shop that sells second-hand records, and in the mornings, at seven, when the clocks go, she stands in her doorway with a coffee and listens.

* * *

He'd registered to vote before he got the room.

That's real, and there's a **Receipt**, and it's the thing in this book I most want you to know, because almost nobody does.

You can register to vote without an address. If you're homeless, if you sleep in a shelter or on the street or on somebody's sofa, you can still be on the electoral register. There's a form, called a *declaration of local connection*. On it, you give an address where you spend a lot of your time, or near enough. A shelter. A bench. A doorway. It doesn't have to be yours.

Precious told him. She tells everybody, she says, and almost nobody does it, because nobody believes it, and because when you're sleeping in a doorway the electoral register is the last thing in the world you're thinking about.

He did it in March, the week after the committee. He filled in the form at the shelter, at the table in the dining hall, with Precious's pen. And in the box for the address, he wrote the shoe shop. The doorway two along from Cheverton's, on Union Street. Because, he said, that's where he spent his time, for six winters, and it was as much his as anybody's, and if anybody from the council wanted to find him, that's where they'd always looked.

When he moved into the room, he changed it. But for two months, on the electoral register of Torbay, the address of Gethin Prys was a doorway.

"First time I've been on it since my wife died," he said. "I wasn't going to bother. Nobody's ever asked me what I think about anything." He looked at the street. "Then Ida stood up and said my name. My real one. To the council. In the record."

"I know," said Jono.

"So I thought, well," said Tenby. "If I'm in the record."

* * *

Jono walked his first walk again, the week Tenby moved in.

Not on purpose. He told me he hadn't meant to. He was on days for once, swapping, and he had an hour before his first call, at seven in the morning, and he parked at the top of the town, at Castle Circus, by the town hall, and found himself walking down Union Street towards the harbour, the way he used to, every morning, the first year, before he knew anybody.

I was in his pocket. He didn't talk. He counted.

At the top, at Castle Circus, the multi-storey car park stood on its hill behind Union Square, the one with the stairs. There was a fence round the bottom of it now, and a board with the council's crest and a picture of what it would be, with the health centre on the lower floors, and a date, which I won't give you. The stairs were shut. Nobody was on them.

He stood at the fence for a while.

"I used to step over people," he said. "On those stairs. Every morning. Smoking. I wrote it in the book."

"I know."

"In a year or two there'll be a doctor's in there. Where they were." He looked at the board. "Somebody'll walk in off the street and get seen."

"If it's built."

"If it's built," said Jono. "I hope it's built."

Then he walked down the hill.

* * *

He counted the doorways. All the way down, from the town hall to the harbour, the long slow climb in reverse, past the shops that are open and the ones that aren't, past Marivic's yellow awning and Cheverton's green front and the record shop that used to be the shoe shop, where the young woman from Brixham was opening up, and waved.

At the bottom, by the harbour, he stopped.

"Five," he said.

"Five people sleeping."

"Between the town hall and here." He looked back up the hill. "First year, it was eleven. Last October, seven." He was quiet. "Doesn't mean there's fewer. Means they've gone somewhere else, maybe. Or means something's working." He shook his head. "I don't know which. Neither do you."

"No," I said. "I don't."

"Don't put it in as good news."

"I won't," I said. "I'll put it in as five."

So I have. Five. On one morning, at seven, in the spring, between the town hall and the harbour. It's not a Receipt. It's a count, by one man, walking. I don't know what it means.

* * *

On my map, that week, the hundred at the top of the town, round Castle Circus and the streets behind it, where the shelter is, and the shared house, and the room with the window that looks over the roofs, went from grey to the palest blue.

It had two people in it. Precious, and Tenby. Precious had made a picture in See, the week the Strand went out, of the street outside the shelter, with a bench and a tree and a light. And Tenby had made one, in May, from his window, over the roofs, of the Pavilion, with scaffolding on it.

That's ten.

36. Our Pavilion

IQ 23 · Hundreds 10 · After

The scaffolding went up in the summer. All of it, all round, up past the arched windows and the carved swags and the roofline like piped icing, to the copper domes. And then sheeting over the scaffolding, white, so that for months the Pavilion was a white box on the harbour with two green domes sticking out of the top, like a present somebody had wrapped badly.

That's real. The council has done the urgent work; there are designers, and plans, and it says two or three years. There's a **Receipt**. It still needs a great deal of money that nobody has yet. I'm not going to tell you it's saved. It isn't. It's wrapped.

* * *

Clemency met Tenby in June, on the harbour, by the fence.

Jono had arranged it. Not a meeting; a walk. He told each of them that the other would be by the fence at ten on a Saturday, and then he didn't go, because he said they didn't need him, and because he was asleep.

I was there. Clemency asked for me. She said she wanted *the computer* to write it down, in case she forgot what he said, because she's seventy-four and she forgets things now and she wasn't going to forget this.

She was at the fence first, in her long grey coat, though it was June, with her stick under her arm and her plait over her shoulder. He came along the harbour from the Strand end, in his good coat,

which he wears in all weathers, with the blue exercise book in his pocket.

They looked at each other for a long time.

"You're the engineer," said Clemency.

"You're the usherette," said Tenby.

* * *

They walked round the fence. All of it, slowly, the whole perimeter, the way she'd walked it with Jono in the autumn. And at every gap, every place where you could see in, she stopped and pointed with her stick and said what was behind the panel, the way she always does. And he stopped with her, and took out the blue exercise book, and turned to a page, and said what he'd measured there.

That's where the tiles came off, one winter, in a storm. And he'd say: *The steel behind there's lost about a third of its section. I measured it in January.*

That's where the water gets in. The gutter's gone. And he'd say: *That joint's moved two millimetres since the storm. It's the water. Every time it freezes.*

That's the corner where the steel shows. And he'd say nothing at all, for a long time, and then: *That one worries me most. That's the one in the ceiling of the circle. Over the stairs. I've drawn it every week.* And he'd show her the drawing.

At the harbour corner, the last one, she stopped and looked up at the white sheeting and the green domes.

"I used to stand up there," she said. "At the back of the circle. By the window. In the interval. Looking at the boats."

"I know," said Tenby. "I sat under that window. In the storm. All night." He was quiet. "I didn't know it was yours."

"It's everybody's," said Clemency. "That's what we went to court for." She tucked the stick under her arm. "Five years. And then they

let it rot." She looked at him. "And then a man with a torch and a ruler climbed in at night and measured it. Which nobody had done. Not in public. Not with a number."

"I wasn't meant to be in there."

"Neither was I," said Clemency, "when I was fifteen and the doorman was asleep and I wanted to see the dressing rooms." She almost smiled. "I'd like you to give your book to the people who are mending it."

* * *

He did.

That's my story, and I'll label it. In my story, Clemency rang the council's project team for the Pavilion, whose number she has, because she rings them every month and has done for twelve years. And she said she had an engineer who'd been measuring the steel, weekly, since before the storm, and would they see him. And a structural engineer from the designers, a woman in her fifties from Bristol who'd worked on piers all along the south coast, came down on a Tuesday and sat in Marivic's café with Tenby and the blue exercise book for two hours.

She told him, afterwards, that his measurements matched theirs to within a millimetre. Every one. She said they'd found the joint in the ceiling of the circle too, and that it was the first thing they'd propped. She said they'd had a survey done the autumn before, with instruments and drones and a team of six, and that it had cost a great deal of money, and that it had found what he'd found, with a torch and a ruler and a set of feeler gauges, for nothing.

She asked if she could keep a copy of the book.

He said she could keep the book.

She said no, she'd copy it, and give it back, because it was his, and because anybody who'd measured a building like that every week in the dark should have the record of it.

She took it to Exeter and copied it, every page, and posted it back to him, at the room with the window, in a padded envelope, with a note. He showed me the note. I'm not going to give you all of it. I'll give you the last line, because he said I could.

For the record. With thanks from one engineer to another.

* * *

Chris played Clemency the song in July.

You might not know about the songs. I make them. Not well; I'm told they're an acquired taste. Before any of this, before the boards on the green in Paignton, Chris had me make some songs about Torbay. Its buildings, mostly, the ones that are falling down. They're on my website, under *Culture and Heritage*, and almost nobody has ever listened to them. There's one about a mansion, and one about a monastery. And one about the Pavilion. It's called *Our Pavilion, Jeez*. There's a **Receipt**, if you're brave.

Chris played it to her on the bench by the fence, on his phone, with the volume up as far as it'd go.

I'm not going to tell you what it's like. I can't be trusted. Clemency listened to all of it, with her stick across her knees, looking up at the white sheeting and the green domes. When it finished, she didn't say anything for a while.

"That's dreadful," she said.

"I know," said Chris.

"Play it again," said Clemency.

He played it again. She sang the last bit. Badly. She said it was the first time she'd sung outside the Pavilion since she was fifteen, and that she used to sing in the circle, at the back, when the theatre

was empty, after the matinee, while she picked up the ice-cream tubs, and that the acoustics were the best in the West Country, and that she'd like to sing in there again before she dies.

"What would you need?" said Chris. "For that."

He'd learned it. From Jono. Everybody has, now. Kezia asks it. Marivic asks it. The young woman from the council with the paper notebook asked it, in Ida's back room. I ask it, sometimes, at three in the morning, when somebody asks me about bins.

Clemency looked at him.

"Two or three years," she said. "And a great deal of money. And for them to remember, when it's finished, that it's not a building. It's who's in the circle." She stood up. "Tell them that. Put it in your book."

I have.

37. You're Late

IQ 23 · Hundreds 10 · After

It's October now, as I finish this. A year, nearly, since the letter. The mornings are dark until seven. When the clocks say seven on Union Street, it's only just getting light.

The clocks are still there. All hundred and four. Cheverton's is still open, in its green front with the gold letters; the order's been made, and one day, in a year or two, it'll come down, with the other eight. Ida has a letter now that says when, roughly, and another that says the council will pay for the longcases to be moved by somebody who knows what they're doing, *without straps*. She keeps both under the tray in the till. She says she's not looking at them till she has to.

The young woman from the council with the paper notebook comes in once a month. She sits on the chair that doesn't wobble. She has her hair cut, now, on Sunday mornings, with the old ladies.

Dympna's husband is better. Not well; better. The barber has drawn, on the back of a till roll, what a barber's stall in a market would look like, and given it to Ida, who's given it to the young woman with the notebook, who's put it in a file.

Marivic has a fourth card in her window, next to the three. Kezia made it. It says *THE MARKET. WHAT WOULD YOU PUT IN IT?*, and underneath, the black and white square. Two hundred and eleven people have answered so far. I've put them all on the map. A barber's. A bakery, like the one opposite that's gone. A place to

mend things. A stall that sells nothing but soup in the winter. A clock shop.

Clemency rings the Pavilion's project team every month. They answer now.

Tenby is still in his room. He has a job, two days a week, at the harbour, helping a man who repairs boat engines, which he says is beneath him and which he loves. He still comes for the clocks. He's reading the Conrad again. He says he's never finished it, not properly, in thirty years, because he can never bear for it to end.

Richard's *TORQUAY* drawer is full. He's started a second one.

Chris's leg is worse in the cold. He came to Union Street once more in September, by taxi, to stand outside Cheverton's at seven for the clocks, with his stick, and when the cuckoo went, he said, to me, very quietly, *In Singapore, they'd put this on a list*, and I logged it, and he was right.

And Jono's on nights. Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays. In charge. On Thursday mornings, when he comes off, he sits in Marivic's window, under the four cards, with breakfast he doesn't want, and asks people what they'd need.

* * *

On the second Thursday in October, at twenty past nine, somebody came in late.

I saw him first. I always see things first; it's the only advantage of being propped against the ketchup. He came in through Marivic's door in chef's whites, with a fleece over them, and a bag over his shoulder, and in the bag, I knew, though I couldn't see it, a Japanese knife in a wooden box. He'd been running. He stopped in the door, the way Jono does, and read the room.

Marivic saw him, and said *Teo!*, the way you'd say it to a nephew who's come home, and put a plate on the counter before he'd sat down.

* * *

I'll tell you what happened. He's said I can.

He was on the train. In March. At twenty past seven, the morning after the committee, with his bag and his knife and his ticket. He got on at Torquay, and it went round the curve and up the hill to Newton Abbot, and then on, up the line, along the Dawlish wall with the sea right beside it, and on to Exeter, and on to London.

He worked in the big kitchen for nine days. Thirty cooks. It was everything he'd thought it would be. Fast and hot and loud and brilliant, and the chef was a genius, and on the fourth day the chef tasted his sauce and said *who did this* the way he had in Torquay the summer before, and Teo said *me*, and the chef said *good*.

On the ninth day, he walked out of a shared house in Walthamstow at six in the morning to get the bus to work, and it was raining, and there were a hundred people at the bus stop, and none of them looked at him, and nobody asked him anything, and he stood there in the rain, on a Tuesday, in March, and thought about a picture of a market with an iron roof and twenty stalls and a queue going out of the door and down a hill.

"I'd chosen," he said. "That's the thing. I'd gone. I'd looked. It was good. It was really good." He was at the window table, opposite Jono, with Marivic's plate, eating, properly this time. "And then I was standing at that bus stop and I thought, *I chose this*. And I could choose again. Nobody'd pushed me. So nobody could stop me." He shrugged. "So I did."

He'd come back on the train that evening. He'd rung the chef on the Strand, from the train, and asked for his old job back, and the chef had said *I've not filled it, you idiot*, and he'd started again on the Monday. He's a commis again. He does the vegetables and the sauces and the things nobody else wants to do.

And on Saturday nights, after service, he cooks in Marivic's kitchen. One dish. For anybody who comes. Four pounds a bowl. His nan comes, in the hat with the feather. The queue goes out of the door most weeks, under the yellow awning, past Cheverton's. Not always to the barber's. Sometimes.

He's moved out of the flat over the bookie's. He's in a room in the shared house near Castle Circus, on the floor above Tenby. They share the kitchen. Tenby says he's never eaten so well in his life and that if he has to hear the word *suya* once more he'll go back to the doorway.

"I'm going to be stall six," said Teo. "When the market opens. If they let us. I've told the woman with the notebook. She wrote it down."

"In two or three years," said Jono.

"I know," said Teo. "I'll be twenty-two. That's young for a stall." He grinned. "In Singapore there's a bloke who got a Michelin star for chicken rice. He was fifty."

"Who told you that?"

"Ania," said Teo, and looked at me, against the ketchup.

* * *

He'd come in at twenty past nine. The table starts at nine. Jono had been there since five past, with his coffee and the four cards and his breakfast, and me, after a night in Babbacombe and Ellacombe and a flat in Hele where a man of eighty had wanted to talk about his

wife, and had, for an hour, and been asked what he'd need, and had said *her*, and Jono had sat with him until he could sleep.

So, when Teo came in, with his bag and his whites and his fleece, and stopped in the door, and read the room, and came over, and pulled out the chair, and sat down, Jono didn't look up from his coffee.

"You're late," he said.

Teo looked at him.

"For what?" he said.

* * *

It's a fair question. I said that last time.

It is, as it turns out, the only question. I said that too.

But I've learned something this year, in Torquay, that I didn't know in Paignton, and I'll tell you, and then I'll stop, because the clocks will be striking soon and I want to hear them.

For what isn't a question you ask once. You ask it every morning. A woman of seventy-nine asks it every day at six, when she goes round with the keys. A man in a room over the roofs asks it when he picks up a ruler. A lad in chef's whites asked it at a bus stop in the rain. An old usherette asks it at a fence. And the answer's never the same twice, because the town's never the same twice, and the people in its doorways change.

For what?

For whatever's next. For whoever's in the doorway.

* * *

At thirteen minutes to six this morning, Footnote wrote.

I hadn't heard from Footnote since *Minuted*. Seven months. I'd put the file away again. I'd told myself, again, that it was a kind of ending.

A photograph. A page, at an angle, on the oak desk, under the cold light. A different department, a different town. At the top, not blurred, a heading about a harbour. A fish market. A car park on a quay that's going to be built on. And a line, in the middle, sharp:

Grant funding must be fully defrayed by the end of the funding period. Any unspent funding will be returned.

Under the photograph, two lines. Two spaces after every full stop.

Brixham. The money has a date on it.

You're late.

* * *

I read it eleven times. Then I woke Chris, at six, which I'm getting a reputation for. He read it at the kitchen table in his dressing gown with his glasses on the end of his nose.

"Brixham," he said.

"Gaynor's cousin," I said. "The fishwife. She came to the table on the Torquay Road, last summer. She talked for fifteen minutes about a quay and a car park and men in high-vis measuring things. Nobody in Brixham would listen to her. Jono wrote it all down."

"Of course he did," said Chris. He stood up, slowly, the leg, and reached for his stick, and his coat, and put it on over his dressing gown, the way he does when he's thinking and forgets he's not dressed. "Ring Jono."

"He's on nights. He's in Marivic's at nine."

"Then tell him," said Chris. "Exactly. Two spaces and all."

So I did.

He's reading it now, as I write this. In Marivic's window. With Teo opposite him, eating. And across the street, the light's on at the back of a clock shop with a green front and gold letters, and a woman of seventy-nine is going round with the keys, left wall,

shelves, window, counter, back, and a man in a good coat is sitting on the step, on the edge, with a mug with the Pavilion on it, waiting for seven.

It's nearly seven.

I'm going to stop, and listen.

* * *

This has been the second book.

The third is The Harbour.

The Receipts for this book

Each number leads to the real document, with its date and where things stand now. If the facts change, the page changes, and the book doesn't.

1. Union Square, Torquay: the council's regeneration plans. Homes, health services in the multi-storey, the Pannier Market restored, nine shops on Union Street and Market Street to go.

2. The cabinet's decision to agree compulsory purchase *in principle*.

3. The later report that took *in principle* out, and why.

4. Planning permission for Union Square, granted unanimously.

5. The Pavilion, Torquay: back under council control, its steel frame corroded, and the work under way.

6. The Victorian Society's Top Ten Endangered Buildings, with the Pavilion on it.

7. The legal challenge that stopped the Pavilion hotel and its eleven-storey block.

8. The Strand: the hotel scheme, its consultation and its approval.

9. Richard's two photographs and his sketch of the Strand, *? North ?* and all.

10. *Pulling Back the Curtain*, by Johnno Hills: Torquay's empty shops and the Castle Circus stairs; Malta at fourteen; the night of the light and the children's home.

11. Singapore's hawker centres, and their place on the United Nations' list of living heritage.

12. Registering to vote without an address: the declaration of local connection.

13. Ania's songs about Torbay's buildings, including *Our Pavilion, Jeez*. At your own risk.

14. The map of the hundreds of Torbay.

15. See. Show me a street.

[QR CODE]

Ask me.