

The morning air was fresh, and the sun was just peaking over the top of the small row of terraced houses, as Mark heaved his bin bag out onto the pavement ready for collection later that day. His neighbour, Anne stood in her front garden with a warm cup of tea and she smiled as she saw him.

‘Thanks for helping out at the stall at the village fair on Saturday,’ she said. ‘I hope it didn’t put you off us all!’.

‘Not a problem. I’m new to Middleton, as you know, and it was really nice to join in. I think I’m going to like it here.’

‘Well –’ she sipped from her coffee ‘– it was good of you to help out, and I’m sure others will have noticed.’ Mark noticed Ann glance to an upstairs window of a house opposite, where a net curtain twitched.

‘It was nice to meet the neighbors, too.’

‘All of them?’

There was a slight hesitation in her voice that took Mark by surprise. There had certainly had been one or two eccentric characters, but he’d put that down to the vagaries of village life, rather than anything genuinely troubling.

Of course, Mark knew just what Ann was referring to. The spate of unusual – some might say mysterious - goings-on in the local area. Things going missing from washing lines. Car alarms going off in the middle of the night. The socks planted at a jaunty angle on Mr Jones’ geraniums.

Yes, Mark knew exactly what Ann meant. It was his job to know. And he was there to sort it out.