

# Illicit love's survival game

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JOYCE HOPKIRK on the real victim of Cecil Parkinson's extra-marital affair

OF all the grieving characters in the Parkinson affair it is the child yet to be born that gets my sympathy.

After all, the pill comes of age this year, so presumably Miss Keays decided, as many women in their middle thirties do these days, to have the child and face the consequences.

And it was his child - a cabinet minister's - that she decided to have. She had every reason to hope that he would get divorced and that they would marry. But as countless women involved with married men would tell her - they promise one thing but often do another.

Mr Parkinson's future may look bleak today. (Who's going to pay such rapt attention to his conference speech this Thursday as they would have done had it been last week?) But the baby's immediate future looks bleaker.

An unmarried mother still has a tough time in today's so-called permissive Britain. I know she will have the financial support both of him and of her wealthy parents, but she's in the same psychological situation as any woman who gives birth without her man to hold her hand.

And Sara Keays's baby will have the added disadvantage of being labelled "Parkinson's love child" all its life - unlike the illegitimate offspring of a former top Labour plenipotentiary.

It would be different were Cecil Parkinson to disappear to the obscurity of an East End reform home and earn his way back to life like John Profumo. But while he is still at the top and a minister of the Crown, imagine the child's first day at school and the many semi-public events in its life.

Who was it who said that the most interesting thing about ourselves we don't want to talk about? So why did Parkinson talk? His wife Ann was said to be against it. Certainly Mrs Thatcher wanted the matter to be kept quiet.

But rumours grew into facts and the news was leaked by a Labour luminary to their only media support, the Daily Mirror. However, the reports were suppressed because the Mirror people thought - honourably - that they should follow the same line as they did once before when the scandal involved one of their own top Labour women: a private life should be private.

But then a garbled account appeared in Private Eye. Cecil

Parkinson, in the optimistic belief that it would be a nine-day wonder, confirmed the rumours through a solicitor's statement and thereafter threw it open to a rather scandalised public as well as the gleeful anti-Thatcher lobby.

Wouldn't it have been better for the baby to grow up in relative anonymity, as has many a love child, including the Harrow-educated son of a beautiful writer? And for the unhappy triangle to face up to private harassment, however long endured?

Yet why should it matter that much what a politician does in private? Aren't we being hypocritical, when adultery flourishes all around us, to expect them to behave better than us?

After all, this cabinet minister has only lied to his wife, not to the House of Commons as John Profumo, apparently unforgivably, did during the Christine Keeler scandal of 1963.

Politicians can survive mere adultery, as Mr Parkinson's colleagues can testify. The difference here is that there's a baby involved.

In the game of illicit love it's usually the man who survives best. Power and money don't change that. In this case Mr Parkinson obtained the forgiveness of both his wife and his boss and went back home to Pimlico saying: "We've been married a long time. We'll get over it."

The loyal wife, hearing that her husband had promised to marry his lover, says with admirable understatement that, yes, she is very upset. And with great courage she appears at his side, mouth but not eyes smiling, while they face up to the ordeal of their public dinner.

Meanwhile the abandoned secretary, promised a financial settlement, drives off alone to the whitewashed cottage in the country to await the birth.

This can't be a story with a happy ending. The wife has lost the ability ever again to trust her husband totally, the mistress has lost a potential husband, the baby a father and Mr Parkinson - what about him?

Only time will tell, but it's my guess those irate calls from women to the Conservative Party headquarters mark the start, not the end, of a stormier journey ahead.

● Joyce Hopkirk will shortly become Woman's Editor of The Sunday Times.