

How can you keep so quiet when.

She held herself to him and away and heard herself laughing and they slid round and the duvet slid to the floor and she almost couldn't keep on him because of coming.

Stupid bloody Friday man you've been a naughty girl you've. Egman.

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Home.

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Professor Prys-Thomas took the piece of stiff white card and looked at it through the lower lenses of his bifocals. Keith watched his eyes reading the closely pencilled notes. The Professor was smiling a slight, polite smile amid the groups of smalltalkers remaining in the large room.

'Thanks, Keith. Well done' Huw Jones said, touching Keith's elbow, and he moved away quickly to talk to a hovering committee member.

Keith had started his talk quite confidently. He had decided to be simple and factual. Jones had wanted the perspective of the ordinary working man or something and, partly resisting that, Keith had read lists of statistics and given details of accounts to the last farthing. He was put off when Emllyn stepped in late at the back of the room, and touched by his turning up. The door creaked loudly and heads turned in the back rows. Keith stopped in mid-sentence and then picked up again in the wrong place, realized his mistake and tried to go back, felt his face burning and finally cut a whole section of his talk. He got nervously through to the end and there was polite applause. As he sat down he saw Emllyn smiling and raising his hands to show his applause. Keith pulled off his glasses. This is nothing to do with me, he thought. This is somebody else.

The Professor's talk mostly passed him unnoticed. Not hearing the words, Keith listened to the way he balanced his sentences, spoke quietly, paused in the right places for the laughs his dry humour elicited. His accent was sometimes

middle-class English but would occasionally swoop into a string of Welsh vowels.

Gradually the shape of the talk seeped through to Keith as he came out of his daze. Prys-Thomas said that the town — our town, he said — was on many frontiers. And he worked through a series of points that developed this: the frontier of rural and industrial; the frontier of farmland and desert; the frontier of moorland and dense forest, and others he produced almost casually, huge ideas. And there was anecdote and detail. Keith could see Jones leaning forward, elbows on table, his hands meshed with only the index fingers pointing forwards, pressed together. He nodded from time to time, signalling alertness. Once he glanced nervously at Keith, and Keith knew that he was thinking that it had been a mistake to put an amateur and a professional on the same platform.

And after, the smalltalking knots of people. Morgan shook his hand. Oilly slipped off to the rugby club where Prys-Thomas, accompanied by Huw Jones and Mrs White, would meet him later.

'An interesting talk you gave' Keith said to Prys-Thomas.

The Professor smiled his wide smile, the bifocals down on the end of his nose.

'Nothing compared to your scholarship.' His voice was quiet and reasonable. 'You amassed a prodigious amount of detail. I was most impressed by that.'

Keith was pleased, though he felt the tinge of irony. Encouraged, he talked and produced from his yellow plastic bag the brown-mottled election handbill.

'You found this locally?' The irony was gone.

Keith told him where he'd found the card.

'My grandmother used to live in Buchan Row' Prys-Thomas said. 'You know what these are don't you? They're notes for a lay-sermon or a discussion at a chapel meeting. See the subheadings: *Dinistr y Deml* — the Destruction of the Temple; *Dinistr Jerusalem* — the Destruction of Jerusalem; and here, *Dinwedd y Byd* — the End of the World. Powerful stuff.'

And there was no mockery in his voice. Keith felt that Prys-Thomas was even a little moved by the pencil marks.

Huge ideas, though in a religious mode. It was like a parallel

universe in science fiction, Keith thought, though for real, and too complex to find words for, and in another language.

Prys-Thomas quietly handed back the card and was led away by Jones. Keith made his excuses. He would not feel comfortable with Olly and Jones in the bar, smarming around a captive celebrity. He heard Prys-Thomas's voice as they went: '— you see the Welsh consciousness was only partly affected by industrialization. Town-dwelling, clearly defined working hours and so on were only partly accepted, so we have this extraordinary map in the south of overlapping communities amazingly heterogeneous which aren't cohesive really, aren't urban quite, but which certainly aren't —',

In the hallway at the foot of the wide stairs on the chessboard tiles, Keith saw O, sniffing and dripping. He dripped hesitantly towards Keith. One whitened hand held the collar of his anorak tight to his neck.

'Hiya but' Keith said. 'I didn't see you in there.'

'What? Oh no.' O looked a message at Keith, as if he were finding words. Just then a group of people passed through the hallway, pulling on their coats. Keith could see O watching them over his shoulder. O looked down and made as if to speak again. As soon as he said 'roughing mill stand' Keith moved to the door. The stand. There was always something. He couldn't understand why O had such difficulty telling him. He cursed and called a thanks over his shoulder as he stepped out.

On the steps, Emlyn was talking to O.G. Morgan. Em stopped as soon as he saw Keith and came to him.

'I was coming down to the TA for a pint' Em said by way of explanation or apology. 'I thought, damn me, it en far, I thought, I'll pop down the Park and see the boy.'

Keith explained that he had to rush. They walked quickly to the gates that opened into the town. He would just make the half past nine bus that took the nightshift in.

At the door of the Trenwydd Arms he paused to say goodnight to Em.

'That Prys-Thomas bloke's a clever chap.' Em fingered his cap. 'A bit showy with it mind. Hey, and let me tell you this now.' He pointed a finger at Keith. 'Your talk was your talk was b-bloody good.'

Keith went on to the bus stop, not caring about having to go in

to work. He felt relief and disappointment. He wasn't sure whether it was Em's praise that made him happy, or the picture of himself and Jack pissed on the museum steps, which had so relaxed him earlier when it came into his mind as Jones had introduced him.