

boards sprang downwards as he moved forward and so he retreated.

In the back bedroom a lampshade still hung on the bulbless wire. A wireframed shade coated with pink plastic. A glassless window, its frames hanging crazy in the sashes, lit the room which was empty except for a cupboard built into a recess.

He knelt before it. The double doors opened easily. There was one shelf on which were a pile of copies of Tibbits, rancid and crinkled with damp. One copy of Good Housekeeping. A wet England's Glory box standing on one end so that the ship pointed downward.

On the floor beneath the shelf, a few small, dirt-blackened books. Two. He picked them up eagerly and examined them, tilting them towards the light. One was embossed with faded gold. A picture of a stiff-jointed camel bearing a moustached man wearing a fez. An arch of gold letters around these figures said: With Gordon to Khartoum. He laid this to one side and looked at the second. It was not easy to see. He took it to the window.

He looked out briefly. Down into the shadowy backyard and the bank of sour yellow grass. The floorboards near the window were slimy where the snow and rain had blown in.

The book was a commentary on the gospels. He leafed through it. Page after page of useless elucidation that somebody, perhaps at this window, had spent hours poring over.

As he fanned through the damp book with finger and thumb, awkwardly because some pages were stuck, he felt something hard. A piece of stiff card fell from the pages to the floor. He picked it up quickly and held it to the light. White. Slightly bigger than a postcard. Faintly tinged with stains that would turn to ugly brown splotches. It bore a black heading in various types:

ELECTION OF
Urban District Councillors

Two black hands with inward pointing fingers bracketed the words:

VOTE AS BELOW

and the rest of the card was made to resemble a voting slip with a numbered list of names: Evans, Harries, Lewis, Phillips, Williams. Next to number 4, Jonah Phillips of Bakehouse, Twyn Gwedog, Baker, a bold X was printed.

No names of political parties. Only the men's trades were noted after their addresses, except for James Evans, who was simply titled 'Gent.' Hard to put a date to it. The variety of types, the lack of party names, and somehow the thickness of the card, all suggested to him the beginning of the century or earlier. There would be ways of finding out.

He turned the card over.

The back was covered in close handwriting. Urgently he looked more closely, moving nearer to the window and tilting the card further. It was in pencil, very precise and clear. There were occasional crossings out. It was sloping slightly and seemed firm. He noticed some Ds, not quite like Moonlow's, but equally sweeping and positive. A little more ornate. In some places the writing was divided into numbered points. There was no name at the beginning. This was not to anyone. Some personal sorting out, planning. He thought of his own notes for the talk, crabbed and tortured and now almost complete.

He had not felt himself to be any nearer to Moonlow, nor to the men he employed. The changes were too great for the mind to hold. His studies had been making mysteries, not solving them. Now that the work was nearly done, he had come out more to escape the feeling of tension between Judith and Jack. Jack was nervy, he knew, and Jude, although she occasionally seemed to try, could not put him at his ease. Even so, Keith felt in the smashed building the presence of the dead people who had moved through it, treated it as their own briefly.

This could be something like contact. He smiled as he held the card at the darkening window. This Jonah, trawled from the wet darkness was being brought into a fading light, and though he had words, he said nothing. The notes Keith held were in a language that was his own, but that he could not understand.

'Nice place you've got here' Jack said, shamelessly.
Come up and see my.