

must have rained there recently. The sea was crisp and dark to the horizon and glittering with points of light. Keith, had he come, would have been walking among the grass and stone.

Jack kicked the icy water at her.

'Come and paddle.'

She walked in over her ankles but it was very cold.

On the Wednesday he took her to Hereford. She had gently suggested taking her mother, not as a chaperone but because she thought she'd like a shopping session. Jack resisted so she did not press him.

He drove fast and seemed happy. It was sunny again and the town was busy because of the market. Judith had not been there for about five years, and was amazed again at the lushness of the countryside, the huge and orderly fields, the land undulating as if to an instruction to be interesting but easy to manage.

In the market she noticed the burry west English voices and the middle class English placeless accents, occasionally a Welsh voice tangling of home. In the livestock section they stopped at the penned sows, looked at one huge pig, its pink back bristled with blonde hair like a human arm. It lay on one side and she thought that it could never get to its feet. The efficient banks of dugs lay in the litter like repeated features of some machine.

Among the stalls of crockery and mass produced clothes she enjoyed the slow-moving press, the unexpected glimpses, through alleyways of backs and shoulders, of jars of sweets, a row of G clamps, cheap radios. After a lot of thought, she bought from a Sikh a fleecy underblanket for the double-bed. Jack followed her dutifully with a plastic bag of small purchases.

Later they sat in the nave of the cathedral. She let her head drop back and stared up through the near solid bars of light to the vault, so dim that it seemed miles away. From outside she thought the building ugly, red and knobly and small. Inside she felt the huge spaces like unfathomable water. Like the tarts or a theatre, only more so. She laughed at the thought. Looking at Jack, she felt a sudden warmth for him.

'This is like being married' she said.

'The ceremony you mean?'

'No, the day out. The whole day. Like married people spend their time.'

Notes: Mundi.
'I suppose this do make it official then' Jack said. 'With this plastic bag I thee wed.'

They walked around the building and discovered on display in a glass case Mappa Mundi, a medieval map of the world. Using the modern diagram and notes posted to one side, they gradually began to understand the old geography. Jerusalem at the centre of the flat disc; the Red Sea literally red like an ox tongue; the pyramids like stepped palaces; Britain small and shapeless on the lower rim. Like a wrinkled foetus, Jack said. The tip of his finger on the glass covered a large part of what they supposed was Wales.

'There you are' Jack said. 'That's what they thought then. Nobody bothered to go and find out what it was really like. They thought god had explained.'

Studious tourists ambled past, pointing things out about carvings and traceries. Once, but only once, she saw a man in clerical robes.

When they went out they sat by the river. She stretched out, watched the sky pass, felt herself relax for the first time in weeks. It was because Jack was beginning to loosen here. For the first time since he had come home and said that Keith knew. Watching the clouds shredding against the blue, she thought that it was not quite guilt.

He had come back off his double shift on the same bus as Keith. They had sat together and walked up from the town together.

The three sat in strained quiet and at seven Jack went out. Judith went to bed quite early but Keith stayed up, staring dully at the television. She heard Jack come back and shortly afterwards his foot on the stairs. The bedroom door swung open. She blinked into the light and saw Jack leaning on the jamb. He was not swaying. He walked to her and sat on the bed. There was the smell of beer and smoke in his clothes but he seemed sober.

'He knows' he said quietly.

'Of course. Did you think he was an idiot?'

'Just innocent.' He paused. 'I mean somebody told him.'

'I didn't.'

'I know.'

'Who did?'

He waved his hand and walked back to the door.