

# The Professor

*By Jenny Butler*

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I have been through darker nights and more anguished days than you have ever known. I have been beaten up and let down by the worst of humanity so your hyperbolic language doesn't scare me. Having had a loaded gun pressed against my temple means a harsh reproach from one such as you will not have me crying in a corner. Cryptic references and bamboozlement will not wash with me, in fact will wash over me, as I do not fear straight-talking truth.

The academy now is a different sea to the one you, in your formative years, sailed so plainly and easily through – it is one of barely weathered storm-wavy waters and mutinous departmental crews. And being here and now, early career and up-and-coming, I am prepared for this in a way that you could not be, still peering through a lens from a different era. As for your outmoded views on women in academe: If you think I am a delicate flower, I'll be belladonna and if you think I am made of glass, I will shatter and cut you to pieces.

While you were sipping from a bone china teacup in your mother's living room, I was working my fingers to the bone. While you were relaxing on your sun holiday, I was cleaning a holiday-home. The university halls are no longer the reserve of your cosseted class, your fortunate few. I can see you for what you are behind prestigious awards, behind sizeable grants, behind

lecturer-above-the-bar promotions, behind 'your' study that the postdoctoral fellow and the doctoral student work doggedly on.

The credibility threads that intertwine to mesh the professional fabric of your life would be rent if used to carry my life's burdens. You huff and you puff, murmur in consternation when scholars more insightful, more astute than you are acknowledged and about this your Iago-tongue flaps incessantly in cornered colleagues' ears. Failing students might make you feel good, powerful even, but know this: you fail at being a decent human being and, ultimately, you fail at life.

Professor, you must know that people have not worn tweed coats with elbow patches since the 1970s and you must know that we know you sew them on yourself in an attempt to look distinguished. No such thing as 'academic facts' or the scholarly life; there are just facts and life.

The time will come when 'people like me' will stick their boots in the door of your ivory-towered room, force their way in. They will tear down the shelves of outmoded theories, shred to pieces the bound collections of passé pontifications, and there will be no going back. Come up with all the theories you like, all the peer reviewed publications and all the keynotes you can muster, but do not underestimate me and my kind, my dear professor.