

EVAN ONLY KNOWS

RHYS BOWEN



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Rhys Bowen



ST. MARTIN'S MINOTAUR ■ NEW YORK

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This book is dedicated to Helen O'Connell and her father, Thomas Fearnall of North Wales, who appears in a cameo role at her request.



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Chapter 1



The Land Rover pulled up abruptly at the side of the narrow road. A young man jumped out, his mouse brown hair and pasty face blending in with the beige of his raincoat. It was midsummer and the sky was cloudless, making the raincoat a strange choice of garment. Equally strange, it was coupled with a pair of large green gumboots that appeared too big for him. He paused, looking and listening in both directions up and down the pass, before grabbing something from the seat of the Land Rover and sprinting to a nearby stile. He looked around once more before starting to wrap the stile in a spiderweb fashion, with bright yellow plastic tape. The tape read KEEP OUT. When the stile was effectively blocked, the young man ran back to the Land Rover and took off, tires spraying gravel. As he drove up the pass, he picked up a mobile phone and pressed the redial button.

“Sector Three now secured, sir,” he said.

“Well done,” came the crackling voice down the line. “Now get the hell out of there before the notice.”

At that very moment an elderly Rover was driving up the Llanberis Pass at a sedate twenty-nine miles per hour, clearly infuriating the driver of a white van behind it. The van bore the inscription LEEKS—THE PROUD SYMBOL OF WALES, STOPPING LEAKS—the proud aim of Roberts-the-Plumber of Bangor. It tried unsuccessfully to pass on numerous occasions but was reduced to impotent honkings, which the driver of the Rover didn’t seem to hear.

At last, beyond the small village of Nant Peris, the Rover finally turned off the road to a parking area outside an old churchyard. Three sheep that had been cropping grass around the lichen-covered gravestones leaped up in alarm at the sound of the car and trotted away to safety behind the old church. The Rover’s doors opened and three elderly gentlemen got out, each straightening their creaking joints slowly and cautiously. Although they weren’t wearing clerical collars but weatherproof windcheaters and stout walking boots, they had an aura of innocent surprise and unworldliness in their faces, usually seen in choirboys or monks. These three were, in fact, Church of England vicars and knew nothing of the austere lifestyle of the monastery. They stood, breathing deeply and looking around with expectation.

“I bet these old stones could tell many a tale,” one of them said, walking over to the moss-grown wall that surrounded the churchyard.

“If they could, you wouldn’t understand it, because it would be in Welsh.” The second, the most cherubic-looking of the three, chuckled.

“Anyway, we’re not going to take time to explore now.” The third, leaner and fitter looking than his companions, hoisted a rucksack onto his back. “We want to make the summit before the weather changes.” He raised his eyes to the mountains that rose steeply on either side. The sky was a perfect blue, without a cloud in sight.

Then turning his back on the churchyard, he crossed the road where the sign indicated a footpath up the green slopes beyond. His companions followed him until they came to a stile, straddling a drystone wall. Behind the wall was a rising pasture, dotted with sheep, but the stile was impassible. It was tied across with yellow plastic tape.

The first clergyman stopped and waited for his companions to catch up.

“They can’t do this!” he exclaimed, his face pink with anger as he pointed at the taped stile. “It’s a public right of way, that’s what it is. It’s always been a public right of way, and if any bolshie farmer thinks he can stop us from crossing his field just by putting up a piece of tape, then he can think again.”

“Easy now, Ronald,” the cherubic vicar said, putting a hand on his friend’s shoulder. “Maybe the path is under repair, or is waterlogged. I’m sure there are plenty of alternate routes up to the summit.”

“He’s right, old man,” the third clergyman said in languid, aristocratic tones. “No sense in raising your blood pressure over nothing. Remember what the doctor said.”

Ronald sighed and turned away. “You’re right. Let’s take a look at the map and see where the other paths start.”

But ten minutes later they were at a similar stile farther up the pass, facing a similar strip of yellow tape and the words KEEP OUT scrawled on a piece of cardboard. This time Ronald nearly exploded.

“That’s it. Back to the car. We’re going to find the nearest police station and make this farmer open up his damned public right of way!”

“Sorry about this, lads, but my hands are tied.” Superintendent Meredith spread his hands in a gesture of apology, seeming to refute what he had just said. He was a big man with multiple chins that quivered as he shook his head. “We’ve had a directive from the powers-that-be that we’re to give the Min of Ag all possible cooperation in carrying out this unpleasant task.”

“It’s not going to be easy,” a voice from the audience muttered.

“Look, I know it’s not going to be easy, especially for those of us who work closely with the community, but it has to be done.” The superintendent attempted an understanding smile. “I feel just as badly as you do about this. But it has to be stopped now. It should have been stopped before it got to Wales. It could have been if they hadn’t sat there twiddling their thumbs until it was too late.”

“Bloody English, when have they ever sent us anything but bad news?” came another growling mutter from the back of the room.

If the superintendent heard this, he pretended not to. “So we’ve just got to buckle down, all pull together, and make sure that there is no unpleasantness, right?” He was the only one who nodded. “The Min of Ag inspectors are already in the area. You’ll be approached for assistance as needed.” He looked around the audience of blank faces, then went on, “So that’s about it. Let’s make this go as smoothly as possible, shall we then? And if it looks as if there’s going to be trouble, don’t hesitate to call for backup. Got it? Right then.” He stood up, brushed off his hands as if they had crumbs on them, and strode from the room.

“All in this together, my arse,” one of the young policemen muttered over the scraping of chairs as they got to their feet.

Constable Meirion Morgan fell into step beside a fellow officer. “All right for him, isn’t it, Evan—sitting here in his office. I bet he’s never been within twenty miles of a herd of sheep in his life.”

The fellow officer he had spoken to, Constable Evan Evans, smiled in agreement. He was a big chap with the build of a rugby player and a boyish face women found appealing. “You know what I’m counting on, Meirion?” he muttered confidentially. “I’m just hoping they’ll take their time before they get to us up on the mountain.”

Meirion Morgan returned the grin. “Oh, that’s right. You’re transferring to plainclothes, aren’t you?”

“I’m due to start my course next week.”

“Lucky bugger,” Meirion said. “Still, I’m not saying that you don’t deserve it.”

“I’ve been waiting long enough for the transfer to come through,” Evan said. “I applied over a year

ago. I was beginning to think they'd never accept me."

"They'd have been daft if they hadn't, seeing the kind of help you've already given them."

"People don't always take kindly to outside help, do they?" Evans commented.

They joined the crowd filing from the briefing room. "You really want to do that kind of thing, do you?" Meirion asked. "Can't say it appeals to me. Too much stress and terrible hours. I dare say I lack ambition, but I like being home at a reasonable time and not being called out at three in the morning."

"I think I'll like it just fine," Evan said. "I did start a CID training course once, when I was on the force down in Swansea."

"Did you now? I never knew that. What in heaven's name were you doing in Swansea? You don't look like a South Welshman, don't sound like one either."

Evan laughed. "I was born up here, but my dad got a job with the South Wales Police, so we moved down there when I was ten."

"And you were on the force down there then? What made you decide to move back?"

"Several things." Evan left it at that. "My mum still lives down there."

"Can't say I'd want to," Meirion said as they drew level with the cafeteria door. "I've only been to the city once and I felt hemmed in, if you know what I mean. Coming for a cuppa?"

"No thanks, I'd better be getting back," Evan said. "I'm a one-man shop up in Llanfair, and something always seems to happen when I'm away."

"You've got several farms around you, haven't you?" Meirion grimaced. "So have we. I'm not looking forward to it one bit, but I suppose the super is right. It has to be done."

He gave Evan a friendly nod as he pushed open the swing door into the cafeteria. Evan got a pleasant whiff of sausage and chips before the door swung to again. He paused and looked back longingly. He'd been surviving on his own for a couple of months now, and he wasn't the world's best cook. After a lifetime of living at home and then being looked after by Mrs. Williams, he was discovering that cooking wasn't as simple as it seemed. Things that looked easy enough usually required ingredients he didn't possess and never turned out like the pictures in the cookery books. Of course he could always buy a meat pie or bangers and chips at the Red Dragon across the road, but that was defeating the whole purpose of this exercise. The whole reason he was putting himself through this was for Bronwen. She had made it very clear that she wouldn't marry him until he'd had a taste of fending for himself.

Evan came out of the Caernarfon Police Station and went to retrieve his motorbike. Another good thing about transferring to the CID, he decided, would be giving up that bloody motorbike. It had been issued to outstation officers as part of an efficiency drive, so that they could cover outlying farms more easily, but Evan had never really taken to it. Not that he minded the wind and rain in his face. He'd been brought up in the mountains, after all. He just didn't feel any affinity for motorbikes.

He kicked it to life and pulled out of the station yard. It wouldn't have been so bad if he'd been issued an impressive 1000cc model, but this bike was so underpowered that it barely made it up the hill to Llanfair. Any burglar could easily outrun him up a mountainside.

The last of the housing estates was left behind, and green uplands soared on either side. A stream danced merrily beside him. Flowers grew in profusion, spilling over the drystone walls. The high pastures were dotted with sheep. It was the perfect pastoral scene, one that he usually relished, but today he looked around with a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach. This was the calm before the storm. Maybe nothing would ever be the same again.

The town of Llanberis was chockablock with families on holiday. The ice cream vendor and the souvenir shops were doing a roaring trade. There was a long line waiting for the next train on the little rack railway up Mt. Snowdon, and a cheerful *toot-toot* announced that it had just started its climb to the summit. Evan slowed as holidaymakers strolled across the road, trailing children and dripping with

cream. He wondered what would be happening to them. Would they all be sent home? Would the whole area be quarantined?

He negotiated the holiday crowds successfully, then let the throttle out as the road narrowed and the pass rose ahead, snaking up to the high country. He felt the exhilaration of wind in his face. Green walls rose on either side, topped with sheets of scree and the rocky crags he knew so well—Snowdon and its outcroppings on his right, and, beyond the thin finger of lake, the twin peaks of the Glydr on his left. Evan knew every route up the mountains, every challenging climb in the area, but there hadn't been much time for climbing recently.

Nant Peris, with its old church and graveyard, passed on his right. Then there were no more houses until Llanfair. As he pulled up outside his little police substation, he saw a car parked outside it and a white-haired man standing at the station door. On hearing Evan he marched toward him.

"Are you the officer who is supposed to be on duty here?" he demanded in a well-bred English voice.

"That's right, sir. Constable Evans. How can I help you?"

"Aren't police stations supposed to be manned at all times?"

"Sorry, sir. I'm the only officer stationed up here, and I was called down to headquarters," Evan said. "There's a telephone outside, and they will always send up a squad car in an emergency. So what can I do for you?"

"What you can do is go and talk to some damned farmer," the man said. "We're here on a walking holiday, and we were just about to hike up Glydr Fach when we found the path had been blocked off. Evan glanced over at the car where two other elderly men with round cherubic faces watched from wound-down windows. "My fellow members of the clergy and I have been coming here every summer since 1956, and until now we have had no problems."

Evan was just realizing the implications of the man's complaint. "The path was blocked, you say?" he asked.

"Taped across, more like it," one of the other elderly gentlemen chimed in from the car. "Lots of yellow plastic tape. And not just one path either. We drove up to the second footpath, and it had tape across it too. And the words 'Keep Out.'"

"Some bolshie farmer trying to deny an ancient right of way," the first man said. "It happens from time to time. Some chap thinks he can ignore a public footpath across his land. But we never let them get away with it. We'd like you to go and talk to him, Constable. Let him know that it's against the law to block off a right of way."

"I'll come down and see it with you," Evan said, "but I don't think the farmer had anything to do with it this time. I don't know whether you've been reading the papers, but I'm afraid that foot-and-mouth disease has spread to this part of Wales. I was just at a briefing in Caernarfon, and it doesn't look good. It seems it's only a matter of time before the farmers here have to slaughter their flocks."

The man's bluster evaporated. "But that's terrible," he said with concern. "So you think that was why they've blocked off the footpaths?"

"I would imagine so, sir. I understand the Ministry of Agriculture's men are already in the area doing inspections, and they'll be doing everything they can to stop the disease from spreading—which would mean closing footpaths, I expect."

"Of course, I quite understand," the vicar said, nodding to his fellows. "They wouldn't want to risk having anyone carrying infected soil on his boots. Well, this is a setback, I must say."

"It will completely spoil our holiday," one of the men in the car said.

"I should think it will spoil a lot of holidays," Evan said. "The timing couldn't have been worse, right at the beginning of the school summer holidays too. It will be a disaster for all the local business people."

“Yes, I suppose it will. Never thought of that.” The vicar stood staring up at the mountains with a wistful look on his face. “So what do you suggest, Constable? Do you think we should get out as soon as possible and try somewhere else?”

Evan glanced up at the hills, from which came the sporadic bleating of sheep. “You’re a clergyman, you say? Then I suggest you gentlemen do some serious praying. We’re going to need it.”

Chapter 2



Evan watched the car drive away. He pictured the same scene being replayed all over the area, families packing up and leaving, souvenir shops and cafés with no customers. Everyone in the area would be affected somehow. But with any luck he'd be out of it—sitting in a classroom in Colwyn Bay, taking notes on the art of surveillance and the psychology of the criminal mind. He stood outside the police station, staring up at the hillside. Some of this year's lambs, now fat and fleecy, were chasing one another in a last fling of youthful exuberance. Higher on the hillside he could see the square white building of Owen's farm. As he watched, a squat, solid figure wearing a cloth cap and gumboots came striding purposefully down the track toward the village with two black-and-white sheepdogs at his heels. Farmer Owens was heading down to the village. Evan wondered if he'd heard the bad news yet. If he hadn't, it would be kinder coming from Evan himself than from some officious young chap at the Ministry of Agriculture. He hurried up the track to meet the farmer.

The two dogs ran forward to meet him, tails wagging furiously.

"Mot, Gel, get back here," the farmer commanded, and the dogs scurried back to his heels.

"I was just coming to see you, Mr. Owens," Evan said.

"And I was just on my way to see you, Constable Evans," the farmer said. "I must have called the station ten times and all I got was the bloody answering machine."

Evan noted that the farmer had called him constable instead of by his first name. "So you've already heard, have you?" he asked. "I was on my way to warn you."

"Well, then, you're too bloody late," Farmer Owens snapped. "I've had some pale-faced young prick in a raincoat telling me I'm under quarantine until further orders. I can't move any stock; I can't sell any stock. I've got a field full of fat lambs ready for market, look you. Who do they bloody well think they are, coming up here from London and dictating to us?"

"I suppose they're only doing their job," Evan said, wincing as he said it at the triteness of the remark. "They're trying to stop the disease from spreading even farther."

"Then they're doing a pretty poor job of it, aren't they? They could have contained it in Cumberland when they had a chance."

"I agree, but they obviously didn't realize how serious it was going to be. Look how quickly it crossed the Pennines and spread to the Lake District."

"But there are no cases that I've heard in our area yet," Farmer Owens said. "What gives them the right to go around slaughtering stock willy-nilly, just in case the disease might come here?"

"I suppose they're trying to create something like a firebreak, to halt the spread southward."

"They're not using my animals as a firebreak," Farmer Owens said so aggressively that his dog cowered. "Do you know how long it's taken me to build up that stock? I've got a couple of breeding rams that cost me a year's income, and some young idiot from Whitehall tells me to be cooperative when the army arrives to slaughter them?"

"Look, I'm really sorry," Evan said.

"Sorry isn't good enough. Well, I'm not going to take it lying down, I can tell you that, Evan *back*. It's my land and I have a right to keep trespassers off it, haven't I?"

"Trespassers, yes, but ..."

“Then I want you to help me enforce it. Next bloody young squirt in a raincoat who tries to come through my gate, you arrest him for me.”

Evan laughed. “You know I can’t do that.”

“Then I’ll have to do it on my own. But I’m warning you right now—let them try and bring the army trucks up to my farm. They’ll not find it easy. I’m building roadblocks across both my tracks and I’ll be waiting with my shotgun.”

Evan chuckled nervously. “Come on now, Mr. Owens. How would it help if you wound up in jail?”

“Just making my stand, look you, Evan. I don’t really intend to hurt anyone, but if my little skirmish makes the daily papers and I can get public sympathy on the side of us farmers, maybe I have done some good. I’m writing to the minister of Agriculture today. I’m telling him that I keep my rams separate from the rest of the flock, so there’s no need to slaughter them if it comes to that.”

Evan didn’t reply. He had a feeling that hundreds of such letters had been landing on the minister’s table.

“Or I was thinking of putting them in my van one night and driving them across to my cousin’s place on Anglesey. Surely this stupid foot-and-mouth won’t be able to jump across the water to get there, will it?”

“And what if your rams have been exposed and you’re the one who brings the disease over there? He bent to pat the sheepdog’s head, so that he didn’t have to look the farmer in the eye. “Look, I know this is terrible for you, but it’s the same for everyone, isn’t it? This is one of those times when we all have to do things we don’t like for the good of the whole. I bet your dad didn’t want to go off to fight in World War Two, did he? But he went just the same.”

“You’re talking like a sanctimonious little bugger, you know that?” Farmer Owens glared at Evan. “It’s all right for you, isn’t it? What have you got to lose? How would you know what it’s like to work your whole life for something, then watch it taken away from you? It will break my wife’s heart, you know.”

“I’m really sorry—”

“You said that before, didn’t you? I dare say you are, but you’re not prepared to help us keep those bastards out, are you? Good day to you then, Constable. I’ve got work to do. I’m driving the flock up to the high pastures. They’ll not be so easy to catch up there!”

He turned on his heels and strode back up the track with the dogs running at his heels. Evan watched him for a while before he turned for home. When he got back to the police station, his answering machine was blinking furiously. Probably Mr. Owens, he thought, and pressed the play button.

“Constable Evans, where have you been?” came the imperious female voice that he recognized so well. “The most extraordinary thing has happened. I went to go out of my back gate and some malicious person has taped it shut. And I think I know who it was too. I saw the Parry Davies woman out on the path this morning with her horrid little dogs. It would be just the kind of thing she would do to spite me. And one of her dogs left a nasty calling card just outside my gate too. Please go and confront her. I am just getting the scissors to remove her tape.”

Evan sighed. For once Mrs. Powell-Jones, wife of the Reverend Powell-Jones, minister of Capel Beulah, was not his major problem. But he’d have to go and face her before she had a confrontation with the brainless twit from the Ministry of Agriculture who was sealing footpaths without explanation. He let the answering machine play on as he went through the mail. Among the letters was one from police headquarters in Colwyn Bay. He opened this eagerly. It would be the details of his new assignment.

Then he sat there, staring in horror and disbelief. The message was from the Chief Constable, bringing him to the point.

~~To all personnel in North Wales Police. Due to the current emergency situation, all training sessions will be postponed. All leave, apart from compassionate, is cancelled until further notice. I hope I can count on all of you to make this difficult process go smoothly.~~

Evan dropped the letter, got up, and paced the room. So there was to be no escape after all. He imagined having to restrain Bill Owens as his prize rams were led to the execution pit, and of the same scene being played over and over with other farmers who had become his friends. Even visiting Mr. Powell-Jones seemed preferable to sitting here brooding at this moment.

Surprisingly that encounter went remarkably smoothly. When Mrs. Powell-Jones realized why her back gate had been taped shut, she was more than cooperative.

“Anything I can do to stop this awful disease from spreading, Constable Evans—anything at all. You just have to ask. We all have to pull together at moments of crisis like this. Mummy was wonderful in the war, you know. She rallied the whole community. I will speak to my husband and arrange a meeting in the village hall. We’ll need volunteers to patrol the area and keep intruders out of the fields. You can start with that monstrosity, the Everest Inn, Constable Evans. Go up there and sort them straight. Just because people come there and pay exorbitant amounts, they’ll think they have the right to hike and climb wherever they please.”

Evan left with a full list of instructions and in need of a drink. He went home for a hurried snack of bread and cheese then headed across the road to the Red Dragon, looking forward to a Guinness and good cheering up. The bar was full as he pushed open the door and ducked under the oak beam. There was the usual hum of chatter in Welsh and figures silhouetted in the smoky fogg. He stood in the doorway, feeling the tension slip away, then eased his way through the crowd up to the long oak bar with his usual cheerful, “*Noswaith dda*, everyone.”

Usually this greeting was returned warmly, often with the offer to buy him a pint. Betsy the barmaid’s face would light up on seeing him, and she would usually pull the neckline of her T-shirt just a little lower, leaning forward provocatively across the bar. Tonight, however, he was met with stony faces.

“Hello, Betsy *cariad*,” Evan said, more than a little surprised. “The usual, if you don’t mind.”

“I’m busy at the moment,” Betsy said frostily. “You’ll just have to wait your turn.”

“Hang on a minute,” Evan said. “Have I done something to upset you?”

Betsy went on calmly drawing a pint with just the right amount of froth on top. “You’ve upset everyone, haven’t you?”

“By doing what?”

“If you don’t know, we’re not going to tell you.” She put the pint down in front of a small wiry man. “There you are then, Charlie *bach*, get that down you and you’ll feel a lot better.”

Evan turned to the elderly man. “Charlie?” he said. “What’s this all about then?”

Charlie only half met his gaze. “Owens-the-Sheep was in here already. He told us about you. Said you weren’t even sympathetic. Told him a lot of guff about doing his duty. I thought you were one of us, Evan *bach*.”

“Of course I’m on your side,” Evan said. “But there’s not much I can do, is there? I can’t arrest the blokes from the Ministry of Agriculture for trespassing, like Mr. Owens wants me to do. And I certainly can’t stand by and watch him keep the army at bay with his shotgun.”

“But it’s just not right, is it?” Charlie Hopkins demanded. “He’s worked all his life to build up the

flock. Do you know how much he paid to buy one of those rams from a fancy breeder in the South? How's he going to start again if they slaughter the lot? He'll be ruined, that's what he'll be."——

"It's not as if we've had any cases in the area, is it?" Evans-the-Milk turned to join in the conversation. "I've been talking to the dairy farmers and none of them have tested positive yet. But they've got to stop selling their milk, just the same."

"If you want my opinion," Evans-the-Meat, the large, blustering butcher, poked his head between the other men, "it's a bloody English plot to wipe out Welsh sheep. They know our lamb is better than theirs and fetches a higher price, so this is a good excuse to finish us off."

"Oh come on, Gareth *bach*." Evan attempted a chuckle. "Look how many English flocks have already been slaughtered. It was really only a matter of time before it reached us."

"I'm with Evans-the-Meat for once," Evans-the-Milk said, draping an arm around the other man's shoulders. "They've no right to come interfering in Wales. We've got our own Assembly now, haven't we? They should be making the rules, not some idiots in London."

"I tell you one thing," Evans-the-Meat went on, fired by the support around him. "I'm going to stand by Owens-the-Sheep, no matter what."

"Me too." A well-built young man in dirty overalls edged his way into the circle. "I've already told him I'll bring the bulldozer to help build a blockade across his tracks. Let's see how keen those army blokes are if they have to slog half a mile up the mountain."

"I knew we could count on Barry-the-Bucket," the butcher said, beaming at him proudly. "One of us, that's what you are, boyo. Llanfair born and bred."

"I think it's wonderful of you, Barry," Betsy said, a smile replacing the cold stare that usually repelled his advances. "A true champion of our village, that's what you are. Not like some I could name."

"Does that mean you'll go with me to the dance at the Rhyl Pavilion on Saturday?" Barry asked.

"I might think about it," Betsy replied, smoothing down her T-shirt. "I think that bravery should be rewarded. We should stand up for ourselves, that's what I say. My old dad's been dusting off his shotgun so that he can help too."

"God help us. Your dad never could shoot straight even when he was sober," Charlie Hopkins said. "He's more likely to shoot one of us in the back."

"Or kill off one of Bill Owens's prize rams!" Evans-the-Milk added as the men began to laugh.

"Know what I heard, boys? I heard he's planning to drive his sheep up to the top of the Glydrws. Evans-the-Milk said with a smirk. "Well, that's all his land, isn't it? I can just see those army blokes scrambling over rocks and leaping around precipices trying to round them up! And Bill Owens says that if they make him bring his dogs up there, he's going to give them the wrong commands so they just run around in circles!"

The men at the bar broke into more noisy laughter. Evan smiled too, but he couldn't shake off the feeling of hollow dread in his stomach. This had become a game for the other inhabitants of Llanfair, a kind of Robin Hood quest against the English authority. And he had been instructed to give them outside authority every assistance. He was now one of the enemy.

Chapter 3



As soon as he had finished his pint, Evan slipped out of the Red Dragon. The men at the bar had become quite jovial, thinking up more and more absurd schemes to thwart the British army and the Ministry of Agriculture. He couldn't find it in his heart to warn them that they'd find themselves in serious trouble. He suspected most of the talk was bravado anyway.

He came out into pink twilight. At this time of year the sun didn't set until after nine, but it had already sunk behind Snowdon, plunging the village itself into gloom. The high slopes above were still bathed in glowing light, and the sheep on them were tinged with pink. As he watched, a buzzard soared out from the high crags and circled against a clear sky. Such a perfect evening would have lured him up onto the slopes to watch the sun sink into the distant sea, but the slopes were now off-limits. He hadn't realized until this moment how much this crisis would affect his own life too.

Instead Evan began to walk up the village street, past the row of cottages where he now lived, past the shops where Evans-the-Meat and Evans-the-Milk spent their days annoying each other, until finally he came to the low wall of the school playground. A light was shining in the schoolhouse window. Evan pushed open the gate and hurried across the playground.

"Bron," he called as he opened the front door. "It's me. I need a hug or a double brandy or both."

"Wait a second. Don't open that door yet," Bronwen's voice commanded. "I've got Prince William in here."

It had been a day of many surprises, but this one bowled him over. What on earth could Prince William be doing in a village school in Wales? Learning about his subjects for the day when he became the next Prince of Wales? Finding out firsthand about the foot-and-mouth outbreak? But weren't princes always surrounded by a security escort? So why hadn't Evan been stopped as he crossed the playground and opened the door?

After what seemed like an eternity Bronwen opened the door. She was dressed in jeans and a checked blouse. Wisps of hair had escaped from the long braid she always wore down her back. She looked a little flurried and not at all like someone who was entertaining a prince.

"It's okay, you can come in now," she said. "I've got him shut in the kitchen."

"Prince William? Shut in the kitchen?"

Bronwen looked at Evan with a mysterious smile on her face. "Yes, would you like to come and meet him?"

"Now? Well, I suppose ... I'm not properly dressed." It began to dawn on him that she could be playing a joke. "Should I be wearing my crown, do you think?"

She took his hand. "Come along. Don't keep him waiting. In you go."

She opened the kitchen door. Evan stepped inside, looked around an apparently empty kitchen until something appeared from under the kitchen table. He found himself looking at a fat, curly lamb. "But that's a sheep!" he exclaimed.

"Allow me to introduce you. This is Prince William — Eirlys Lloyd's pet lamb." She burst out laughing. "Evan, you should have seen your face! You thought I had the real Prince William here."

"Only when you first told me. I was caught off guard."

She put her hands on his cheeks and reached up to give him a kiss. "I thought I told you about

Eirlys's lamb. You know young Eirlys from Bryn Hyfryd Farm, don't you? The poor little thing came to me quite distraught today. It seems her father has been told that his flock might have to be slaughtered and that would have included all animals on the property. Well, Prince William has been a house pet all his life, so I told her to bring him down to me and I would look after him until this scare is over."

The lamb came cautiously to check out Evan's shoes.

"Bron, are you sure that's the thing to do?" Evan asked. "I'm not sure exactly how foot-and-mouth is spread, but isn't there a chance he could be infected?"

"He's been a family pet, Evan. They're not going to go around slaughtering all the sheepdogs and farm cats, are they? Anyway, I think they're overreacting."

"Don't you start," Evan said. "I've had a bad day with Farmer Owens shouting at me and everyone at the pub telling me I'm a traitor. What am I supposed to do when I've been instructed to give the Ministry of Agriculture every assistance, eh?"

Bronwen slipped her arms around his neck. "You poor thing. It must be beastly for you. Sorry - beastly isn't exactly the right word, given the circumstances, is it."

"I'm sure you'll know a way to make me feel better." Evan pulled her toward him to give her a kiss. There was a crashing sound behind them. The lamb looked up guiltily from an overturned vegetable basket. Bronwen went over and began putting the vegetables back into it. "I can see I'm going to have to lambproof the house," she said.

"You really think you can keep him here?" Evan asked.

"Why not? He's been a house pet up at the farm."

"Yes, well, a farm, that's different. They have all the outbuildings for him to run around in. You only have three rooms. I take it he's not house-trained."

"Not exactly. I've been doing quite a bit of mopping up. I'm thinking of investing in disposable nappies, but I don't want to make him feel stupid."

"Feel stupid." Evan chuckled. "Isn't it wonderful how women go daft over baby animals?"

"Oh, and men don't make more fuss of their dogs than they do of their families? Anyway, the important thing is that Eirlys adores him, and I'm just trying to help her save him."

"You're a softie." Evan stroked her cheek. "Now you'll be paying more attention to him than to me."

"Ah, so that's why you don't want him here - you're jealous."

"Listen, Bron, I just want you to do the right thing. What sort of example would you be setting your children if you show them how to hide farm animals from the ministry? I've already had Owen the-Sheep today telling me that he was going to ship his prize rams off to his cousin in Anglesey under cover of darkness."

"And why not?" she asked. "If they are not infected, why slaughter them? This whole thing is ludicrous, Evan. They should test each animal, and those that are healthy should be allowed to live. But they slaughter all herds within so many miles of each outbreak."

"I suppose they must know what they are doing," Evan said hesitantly. "Look, I feel as badly as you do about this. I think it's a wretched business. I felt dreadful today telling Bill Owens that he couldn't count on me to help him. I've been instructed to offer all assistance to the ministry and to the army. I don't have any choice."

Bronwen looked at him with a half smile. "I seem to remember several occasions on which you were instructed to keep your nose out of murder inquiries and you didn't."

"Well, yes, but I didn't actually disobey. Circumstances just presented themselves"

Bronwen laughed. "Oh yes, of course."

"But this is different. It's a national emergency, isn't it? You and I aren't experts. We don't know

how the disease is spread or if saving one sheep from a flock will have disastrous consequences later.

Bronwen went over and put her arm around the lamb. “So you’re saying I shouldn’t keep Prince William here? I should send him back to be *k-i-l-l-e-d*?” She spelled out the word. The lamb looked up at her and gave a pathetic *baa* as if it understood.

“You do what you think is right, Bron. You are a responsible person.”

“My children count on me, Evan. They look up to me.” She gazed at him, her eyes pleading. “I can’t let one of them down, can I? Especially not now that—” She broke off. “I had a piece of bad news today, actually. You remember I had a visit from the county education office inspectors last spring? Well, I’ve now seen their official report.”

“They can’t have found anything to criticize in your teaching,” Evan said angrily.

“Well, no. They thought I was doing a good job, considering”

“Considering what?”

“That I had to deal with the outdated concept of multiage-level teaching. They feel the children in the village are being deprived of the chance to become world citizens at a young age. The village school is making them grow up with no clear picture of the outside world and its problems. They are being cocooned. So what they suggest is that this school and the one in Beddgelert be closed and the kids shipped down to a new, modern primary school to be built on the outskirts of Porthmadog.”

“But that will be a half-hour’s journey for them. And what’s wrong with growing up sheltered, I’d like to know?” Evan demanded. “The longer they can be kept away from drugs and violence, the better, if you ask me.”

“Me too,” Bronwen said. “And they’ll be in an environment where not everybody speaks Welsh so they’ll soon think it’s cool to speak English to each other. I think it’s a bad idea all around. It’s not final yet, but this is their recommendation.”

“Stupid,” Evan muttered. “What would happen to you if they closed this school?”

“I dare say I’d be offered a job at the new school on the coast.”

“That would mean you’d lose your house too.”

“Well, I thought I might be moving in with you when we finally get married,” she said, getting her feet again with a small laugh. “That was the general idea, wasn’t it? And we might find we have to move somewhere else for your work, anyway. You might be assigned to headquarters.”

“And pigs might fly,” Evan muttered.

“Why wouldn’t you?” She looked up at him, startled.

“They’ve postponed all training sessions until the emergency is over. Who knows how long it will take.”

Bronwen moved closer and wrapped her arms around him. “Oh, Evan, I’m sorry. What a horrible blow for you. You were so looking forward to it.”

“That’s not the main thing right now, is it?” Evan said. “Now I’m going to have to betray people who have become my friends. I’m the one who’s going to have to restrain Farmer Owens when he shoots his sheep.”

“That’s just not fair, Evan.”

“I know. But then I’d be petty to grumble about my situation when these poor farmers are losing their entire livelihood.”

Bronwen slipped her arm through his. “Look, we were planning to go and meet each other and our families when your course was over, weren’t we? Why don’t we do it now instead? I’m on holiday after all.”

Evan made a face. “I’m not. They’ve cancelled all leave too.”

“Oh dear. So it looks as if you’re stuck with it, doesn’t it?”

“It looks that way.”

“In which case I’d better open a bottle of wine. We’ll need to drown our sorrows.”

“Good idea.” ~~Evan opened the drawer and got out the corkscrew. “Better get out the large glasses.”~~

Bronwen lifted a bottle from the bottom of the dresser, then stopped, the bottle poised in her hand.

“You know what you could do? Why don’t you ask to swap with a policeman who is usually behind the desk at headquarters. Explain what a lot of harm it will do to your relationship with the community and how much better it would be to send an outsider up here in your place.”

“That would be great,” Evan said. “I don’t think they’d go for it, but it’s worth a try, isn’t it?”

“Go down there and be forceful,” Bronwen said, handing him the bottle.

The lamb trotted up to him and bleated again.

“Oh no. Every time he sees a bottle he’s hopeful,” she said, laughing.

“Well, he’s not getting my Rioja.” Evan turned his back on the lamb. “Oh, and Bronwen, he doesn’t expect to sleep in your bedroom, does he?”

The next morning Evan drove his own car, instead of the police-issued motorbike, down the hill to headquarters. As he was getting out he heard his name called and looked up to see a familiar figure in a fawn-colored raincoat crossing the station car park.

“Hello, Sarge, what are you doing here?” he called. “Oh sorry, I meant Detective Inspector, of course. I keep forgetting.”

“So do I,” former Sergeant Watkins admitted. “One of the girls on the front desk just yelled ‘Inspector’ after me three times before I realized she was talking to me. It takes some getting used to.”

“So what are you doing here? I thought you were stationed in Colwyn Bay now.”

“They’ve sent me back here, now that DCI Hughes is one step away from God and will only take the most important of cases. Bad timing, eh? I arrive back and you’re off to HQ to start your course.”

“Not any longer. All courses have been postponed. I’m stuck here with instructions to help the Ministry of Ag.”

“Bad luck. It’s a bugger, isn’t it?”

“Especially for those of us who live and work out in the countryside. They all think I’ve turned traitor, but what else can I do?”

“I know. Sometimes our job stinks. But I seem to remember you’ve got a lot of leave piled up. Haven’t you?”

“At least five weeks. I didn’t take a proper holiday last year, but —”

“Well then,” Watkins cut in, “why don’t you make yourself scarce for a couple of weeks until the worst is over?”

Evan sighed. “I wish I could, but in case you haven’t heard, they’ve cancelled all leave too.”

“Oh right. Except for compassionate,” Watkins said.

“Yes, but I don’t think they’re likely to be compassionate to me when I tell them it upsets me to do my job, are they?”

He expected Watkins to laugh, but the inspector was looking at him thoughtfully. “So how is your mum these days? Last time I heard she was poorly.”

“Yes, she did have a nasty touch of bronchitis last spring.”

“Takes a long time to get over—bronchitis, so I’ve heard.”

“Oh no, she’s up and around again now, just fine.”

“I said, it takes a long time to get over bronchitis,” Watkins repeated patiently. “It can easily turn into pneumonia. You never did get time to go and visit her in the spring, did you? These things can flare up again when you least expect them, you know.”

“Can they?”

Watkins burst out laughing. “Sometimes you’re as thick as a plank, Evans.”

“Oh, I see.” Evan laughed too. “But I couldn’t ask for compassionate leave right now. It wouldn’t be right.”

“Do you want to be out of the area or don’t you?”

“Of course I do.”

“Well then.” Watkins sucked through his teeth as he thought. “Tell you what. I’ll have a word with old Bill Mathias who does the duty roster. He owes me a favor, as it happens. I’ll tell him about your poor mum and let’s see what he can do.”

“If you can pull this one off, I’ll be in your debt for life,” Evan said.

Watkins slapped him on the back. “I won’t forget that, boyo. When you’re working for me in the plainclothes division, you’ll be getting all the three A.M. stakeouts. And I’ll have you writing all my reports for me.”

“Worth every second, if you can spirit me out of here.”

“Well, go on then. Get lost,” Watkins said, giving him a gentle shove. “It won’t do if you’re seen hanging around here. We don’t want them to think it’s a conspiracy, do we?”

Evan hurried back to his car. He had scarcely arrived back in Llanfair before the phone rang.

“What did I tell you?” Watkins’s voice boomed down the line. “I’m a bloody miracle worker, that’s what I am. I told Bill Mathias about your old mum and how poorly she has been, and he said no problem. He’ll just leave you off the roster, quiet like, so that the super doesn’t notice. So there you are. Get packing.”

“Bloody brilliant,” Evan exclaimed. “I’ll go and tell Bronwen right now, and I’d better call my mum to tell her we’re coming.”

“So it’s ‘take Bronwen to meet the old folks at home time,’ is it?”

“That’s right. I’m not looking forward to it, I can tell you,” Evan said. “In fact restraining crazy farmers only just wins out over sitting with my mother and Bronwen in the same room.”

“Bit of a tartar, your old mum, is it?”

“No, I wouldn’t say that. But she’s very good at stirring, if you know what I mean.”

“Knowing how to make you feel guilty? I’ve got a wife who’s an expert at the same thing. She never yells or has tantrums—she just has to give me this pained look.”

Evan chuckled. “Yes, I’d say that describes my mum pretty well. She’s not such a bad old thing. It’s just that she’s never quite forgiven me for moving so far away.”

“Playing on the old guilt, like I said. Rather you than me, boyo. Oh, and Evan, you owe me a pint.”

“Anywhere other than the Dragon. The atmosphere is decidedly frosty at the moment.”

“It can wait till you come back,” Watkins said. “Go on. Bugger off before I realize that I’m getting soft.”

Chapter 4



“It was a good idea of yours to slip away without telling anyone,” Bronwen said as she climbed into the passenger seat of Evan’s car. “We don’t want the whole village speculating that we’ve run away together.”

Evan laughed. “It will be a bloody miracle if we do slip away unnoticed. You know what this place is like. It’s round the village in ten minutes each time I come to visit you—and what time I leave again too!”

“I can’t imagine that anyone is awake at this hour to watch us leave.” Bronwen peered out at the starry night where just a faint glow over the eastern mountains announced that dawn was not far off.

“And a good thing too, seeing that we’re carrying illegal cargo,” Evan commented as he got beside her.

Bronwen swung around to the backseat where a mournful-looking lamb peered at her from its crate. “We had to take him with us, Evan. What if they had decided to have him slaughtered while we were gone? It would have broken Eirlys’s heart.”

“But it’s still illegal, *cariad*. You know as well as I do that any transportation of livestock is forbidden at the moment. We’ll be in a hell of a jam if we’re stopped.”

“He’s not livestock; he’s a pet. That’s completely different.”

“He’ll still look like a sheep to any road check that we might meet,” Evan said.

Bronwen nestled up close to him. “You wouldn’t want to see a little girl’s special pet killed, would you?”

“I do things for you against my better judgment,” Evan said. He started the engine. It coughed several times before roaring to life loudly enough to awaken most of the village. “If we’re stopped, I shall claim no knowledge of what you’ve stowed in my backseat. I’ll tell them you’re a hitchiker picked up with dubious cargo.”

Bronwen laughed. “Lucky you haven’t given me a ring yet, or you’d be sunk.”

“Yes, well it’s not official yet, is it? That’s what we’re doing now. Making it official.”

He let out the clutch and the car moved away from the curb. At that moment he saw a strange specter in his rearview mirror. A large figure was flapping its way after them, arms waving in a distraught fashion. “Oh no.” Evan stopped the car.

“What is it?”

“Someone’s running after us. There must be some kind of emergency.”

“*Hen Diawll*,” Bronwen muttered. “Can’t we just drive off and pretend we didn’t see?”

“There speaks the wonderful Miss Price, adored by the whole village?” Evan chuckled as he wound down the window.

The flapping figure caught up and paused, holding on to the roof of the car, gasping for breath. “I thought I’d left it too late, Mr. Evans.” The words came out between gasps.

“Mrs. Williams,” Evan exclaimed, recognizing his former landlady. “Whatever is wrong?”

“Wrong? Nothing at all. I didn’t think you’d have time to make yourselves any proper food for the journey, so I made you one of my egg and bacon pies you like so much, and a *bara brith*, and a few sandwiches, just in case you got hungry.”

“That’s very nice of you, Mrs. Williams, but you really didn’t have to—” Evan began, but she cut him off in midsentence. “Swansea is a dreadful long way away.” She poked her head in through the window. “Good morning to you, Miss Price. I hope you have a lovely trip, just.” She handed Evan a large shopping bag. “There’s a thermos of tea too. You’re going to need some breakfast.”

“Mrs. Williams, I don’t know what to say.” Evan gave an embarrassed laugh. “How did you know we were going to Swansea?”

“Well now, that was easy enough. Evans-the-Milk told me that you’d stopped your delivery for two weeks and so had Miss Price, and then Evans-the-Post said you’d had a letter from your mother saying how she was looking forward to seeing you and to meeting Miss Price.”

“I never thought he’d have the cheek to read my mail. There’s no way of keeping secrets in this village there?” Evan gave Bronwen a look of amused despair.

“And no reason why it should be a secret, either,” Mrs. Williams said. “What could be more natural than taking your betrothed home to visit your mother? Go on, off you go and have a lovely time. We want to hear all about it when you come back.”

She stood there waving as they drove away.

“So much for our secret getaway,” Bronwen said. “Now the whole village will know.”

“If they don’t already. My, but that food smells awfully good, doesn’t it. Is that egg and bacon pie still warm, do you think?”

“If anyone wanted to bribe you, all they’d have to do is know how to cook well.” Bronwen opened the bag and extracted the pie.

“Well, I have been trying to survive on my own, but it hasn’t been easy after Mrs. Williams cooking.”

“I must say, it does smell heavenly,” Bronwen said. “And she’s even provided plates and a knife. I’ll cut you a slice.”

“Look, I see Mrs. Powell-Jones has taken over as usual.” Evan pointed at the banner, draped across the front of Capel Beulah, where the Reverend Powell-Jones was minister. “Village meeting tomorrow night. Foot-and-Mouth Contingency Plans. Let’s all pull together and do our bit!”

The billboard outside the chapel had a new text on it: IT IS REQUIRED OF A STEWARD THAT HE BE FOUND FAITHFUL! Across the street, Capel Bethel’s billboard text was not in sympathy. KNOW MY SHEEP AND MY SHEEP KNOW ME. A GOOD SHEPHERD LAYS DOWN HIS LIFE FOR HIS SHEEP.

“I don’t think Mrs. Powell-Jones’s village meeting is going to run very smoothly, do you?” Evan said. “I’m glad we’re going to be far away.”

As they drove south and the rugged mountain scenery gave way to gentle green hills and distant seascapes, the sun came up over the horizon and the whole eastern sky flamed pink.

“Rain before tonight,” Evan said, glancing at it.

“You’re such a pessimist sometimes.” Bronwen slapped his hand.

“No, just a realist. Let’s hope we get there before it starts in earnest.”

Bronwen’s gaze swept across the countryside, taking in the hillsides dotted with fat lambs and woolly sheep. “It looks so beautiful and peaceful, doesn’t it?” she asked. “It’s hard to believe that only a few miles north of here they are already starting to slaughter whole flocks. Do you think this mass slaughtering actually does any good?”

“I’m not an expert,” Evan said. “But nothing else seems to stop it. They have to try everything, don’t they?”

“It seems like overkill in the true sense to me. Killing healthy animals—that’s just not right.”

As if in agreement, Prince William gave a plaintive *baa* from his crate.

“You wouldn’t think it would take all day just to drive a hundred miles across Wales, would you?” Bronwen commented as the first road signs to Swansea in English and Abertawe in Welsh appeared.

“It would have gone quicker if we hadn’t stopped so many times to let that bloody sheep stretch his legs.” Evan was feeling irritable. He put it down to the egg and bacon pie, plus several of Mr Williams cold beef and pickle sandwiches sitting heavily on his stomach, although the thought of an imminent meeting between Bronwen and his mother could also have had something to do with it.

“It’s stupid that there is no direct road from North Wales to South Wales, isn’t it?” Bronwen went on. “You’d have thought they’d have put one in by now.”

“You know how most people feel—the less contact between North Walesians and South Walesians the better.”

Bronwen chuckled. “We’re a funny lot, aren’t we? It might actually have been quicker to have gone back to England and picked up the motorway.”

“Yes, but not as pretty, eh? We’ve seen some lovely country today.”

“Before it started raining.” Bronwen peered through the streaked windscreen at the gray mist.

“Funny, this is how I always think of Swansea,” Evan said. “It always seemed to rain a lot. Especially when we were playing rugby.”

“Let’s go and visit your old rugby club. That will be fun.” Bronwen rested her hand on his shoulder. “I’m really looking forward to hearing tales of your misspent youth.”

The outskirts of the city came into view—large, uniform housing estates sprawling over hillsides. Evan was beginning to have serious second thoughts about the upcoming encounter. As they drove past row after row of gray, terraced houses, past pavements slick with rain and women in macks and headscarves scurrying home from the corner fish shop, it occurred to him that this could be a very big mistake. Bronwen was, after all, from another world. He hadn’t yet met her family, but she referred to her parents as Mummy and Daddy. And she had been to Cambridge. Therefore she was several rungs above him on the social ladder.

Usually such things didn’t bother Evan, but suddenly he was reluctant to let Bronwen see the place where he had spent his youth. If he could have come up with a credible excuse, he would have turned around and driven away. Instead he gritted his teeth and kept driving until familiar landmarks came into view: the railway station and the castle ruins, the new Quadrant shopping centre, the museum, and beyond it the upscale new waterfront development where the most depressed dockland area had been. Then they could see the old prison with its prime waterfront position and great views across Swansea Bay.

“This is nice,” Bronwen said as the bay itself opened up on their left, gray sea merging into gray sky in the rain, with just a hint of hills visible on the far shore. “I hadn’t realized Swansea was on the seafront.”

“Bristol Channel, actually, but yes, they’re always comparing Swansea to the French Riviera. The resemblance is obvious, isn’t it?”

Bronwen gave him a sharp look. “I think it’s attractive,” she said, “and I like all these old houses. They’ve got character, haven’t they?”

“You could say that. And I’m glad you like them because my mother lives in one.” The road swung inland from the seafront and started to climb. Gray mist had washed out the hilltops. Townhill Road appeared through the mist at last with its gray stone, terraced houses, all alike. A whole world of gray.

“These used to be workers’ cottages once, when the steel mills were flourishing,” Evan said. “One of the first housing estates.”

“Great views for a housing estate.”

“Actually all the housing estates are on the hills in Swansea.”

“A very proletariat kind of city.”

“The rich don’t live in the city at all. Ah, here we are then.” He came to a halt outside one of the identical gray stone cottages. He had forgotten how small it was, not much bigger than the tiny two-up-two-down he now inhabited in Llanfair. Small and ordinary looking. He thought he saw the lace curtain tweaked as he pulled up. Sure enough, the front door opened while he was still helping Bronwen from the car.

“Here you are at last then.” His mother stood in the doorway. She seemed to have shrunk. “I thought something had happened to you.”

“It’s a long drive from North Wales, Ma.” Evan continued to hold Bronwen’s hand as she stepped onto the pavement.

“I know that, but there are so many terrible drivers on the roads these days, aren’t there, and all these dreadful big lorries coming across from the Continent and breaking the speed limit, isn’t it?”

“We’re here now and we’re fine.” Evan went up to her and enveloped her in a hug. She felt small and bony, and he couldn’t feel her hugging him back. “So how are you?”

“Not so bad, considering. The doctor doesn’t quite like the sound of my chest yet, but then at my age, what can you expect?”

“Your age! You’re only sixty-five.”

“Don’t shout my age for the whole street to hear.” Evan’s mother looked around, then her gaze fastened on Bronwen. “Does she understand us? *Ydych chi’n siarad cymraeg*, Miss Price?”

Bronwen laughed. “Of course I do. I teach in a Welsh school.”

“Oh, well, that’s nice. It will be a treat to speak my own language for a change.”

“What do you mean, for a change?” Evan asked.

“Nobody speaks Welsh in Abertawe any longer,” she said, giving the city its Welsh name. “It’s all changed. Full of outsiders.

“What about your friends at the Welsh club?” Evan asked.

“Well, they’ve almost all gone now, haven’t they?” Mrs. Evans said angrily, as if they had left on purpose. “Gladys Jones and Mary Roberts both died last year. Dropping like flies, they are.” She suddenly seemed to notice that she was getting wet. “Well, don’t just stand there in the rain then. Come on, inside with you.”

Bronwen looked at Evan. “Do you think Prince W. will be all right in the car a little longer?”

“There’s a shed in the back garden. We can put him there until ...” He glanced at his mother.

The older woman picked up instantly. “You haven’t brought a dog with you, have you?”

“No, Ma. Not a dog. A sheep actually.”

Mrs. Evans laughed and gave him a playful shove. “Go on with you! A sheep—what, to remind me of my childhood home, is it?”

At this point a plaintive *baa* was heard from the interior of the car. Mrs. Evans peered out into the rain. “*Escob Annwyl!* You haven’t really got a sheep in there? You’re not bringing a sheep into my house.”

“It’s a pet lamb, Ma. Bronwen’s been looking after it for one of her schoolchildren, and we couldn’t just leave him at home. It’s all right. Don’t look like that. We can keep him in the shed when it’s raining, and he can be out in the back garden when it’s not.”

“And have him eating all my petunias?”

“We’ll tie him up then. He’s really no trouble. He’s been as good as gold all the way down here in the car.”

“Pet lambs! What will they think of next?” Mrs. Evan shuffled back into the house, her carpet slippers flapping on the linoleum. “I’ve got the kettle on. So what would you fancy for your tea, Miss Price?”

“Please call me Bronwen. And just a cup of tea would be lovely. We’re a little late. We don’t want

to spoil our dinner, do we?"

Mrs. Evans gave her son a strange look. Bronwen also sensed she had said something wrong. Evan put a hand on Bronwen's shoulder. "My mum always has her main meal at midday and just a light meal at night. So it's dinner in the middle of the day and tea in the evening."

"Oh, oh I see." Bronwen flushed. "Well, anything you like at all, Mrs. Evans. I'm not a fussy eater. I'm sure whatever you have prepared will be lovely."

"We're just working-class people, you know," Mrs. Evans said. "Never did get into these fancy ways of lunch and dinner. Your dad was always home for dinner at one when he could make it, wasn't he, Evan? And then we'd have something simple at night."

"I'm sure it will be lovely," Bronwen insisted. "Can I help with anything?"

"No, it's all ready, apart from the eggs. I thought I'd do poached eggs on welsh rarebit if that would be acceptable."

"Lovely," Evan and Bronwen said in chorus.

Evan's mother had led them down a long narrow passage that opened into an old-fashioned kitchen. Willow-pattern plates were stacked on a Welsh dresser. A table was set with a pretty lace-edged cloth. It was piled with a cottage loaf, a large wedge of yellow cheese, and a cake stand with several kinds of cakes and biscuits on it.

"We have a proper dining room," Mrs. Evans said quickly, "but I usually eat in here. It's less lonely somehow. Cozier."

"Of course it is." Bronwen smiled at her. "Evan and I always eat in the kitchen at my place, don't we, Evan?"

"You like to cook, do you, Miss Price?" Mrs. Evans asked as she poured boiling water into a teapot, popped a crocheted cozy over it, and set it on the table.

"I love to. I took a course in French cooking last year, and poor Evan had to sample all my mistakes."

"French cooking — well, we don't go for that around here much. Plain, simple Welsh cooking has always been good enough for my husband and my boy."

Evan came to Bronwen's defense. "You should taste the way she does leg of lamb, Ma — she puts little pieces of garlic under the skin."

"Garlic? I wouldn't want my breath smelling like a Continental myself."

Evan laughed. "I'll pour the tea then, shall I?"

Tea was poured. Eggs on cheese were produced and they sat down to eat. Evan was glad they had something to keep them all busy for the moment. He had hoped that his mother would take one look at Bronwen and embrace her as a future daughter-in-law. This obviously wasn't going to happen. And he supposed he hadn't really expected it to.

"So how is it that you have the Welsh then, Miss Price?" he heard his mother asking. "I thought only poor folks grew up speaking Welsh, but you sound like you've got the hang of it rather well."

"I spoke it as a child, Mrs. Evans. My father worked for an international bank and was posted all around the world—sometimes to places that were not very safe for families. So I was left at home with my grandmother near Denbigh. My father's family were the local squires and of course he didn't speak the local language, but my mother was the schoolteacher's daughter. So my Nain always spoke Welsh to me. My parents were rather angry when they found out I preferred speaking what they thought was a backward language to English. That's when I was sent away rapidly to boarding school."

"A backward language, indeed." Mrs. Evan sniffed. "One of the oldest, finest languages in the world, isn't it? We had poetry when the English were still running around in goat skins."

"I agree completely," Bronwen said. "I always made sure I spent as much time as possible with my

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