

# A Disturbance in Lampeter Town

By Heledd Bianchi

“Right then girls. Ready to call on Mrs Edwards now. One final stop for calennig collecting before tea time. I’ll treat you then to your favourite egg, chips and beans at Mark Lane Caffi on the way home, if you’re good”, Carys said encouragingly. Catrin and Betsan were elated. This news was music to their ears.

“Can we stop at Conti’s Ice Cream parlour for a knickerbockerglory too?” they chirped.

“Well, we’ll see how stuffed you both are after calling at Mrs Edwards.

An exhausted Carys, a young mother of twenty three and her two young children; Catrin, age eight and Betsan, age six had been trudging up and down the icy, cracked paving slabs of the narrow, windy streets in the small Welsh town of Lampeter for several long hours now. It was the usual routine for the three every New Year’s eve, to knock on doors and visit their elders, where they would be fed with an abundance of fancy cakes washed down with sweet, warm, tea. Their father would always stay in Cardiff as he was a baker and this was a very busy time of year for him. All the trudging was worth it as at every house called Catrin and Betsan would receive one pound calennig as good fortune for the New Year ahead. Every one pound calennig saved went towards their Saturday Sweet shop purchase which was usually rationed at not a penny more than ten pence; Daddy’s strict orders, for the protection of their teeth. It had to be said that father’s rule had certainly paid off as they both had healthy white teeth.

The eagerness the two sisters felt at the beginning suddenly began to diminish as their limbs became heavier; it wasn’t just the home visits that tired them, it was also the continuous stopping and starting as their Mum Carys chatted with the locals about nothing in particular. That was the trouble of living in such a small town; everybody knew everybody so getting from one place to another without any interruptions was practically impossible!

Cartrin and Betsan’s feet were aching terribly when they finally got to Mrs Edward’s door, their final stop.

“Siwmae ferched annwyl, dewch mewn i’r tan” said Mrs Edwards as she opened the door to her cosy nest. They always received a warm welcome from the elderly in Lampeter. In the three scuttled along the dark narrow passageway as if entering a rabbit’s burrow, and into a piping hot living room where a bright orange crackling fire awaited them. It certainly lit up the room; without it, the living room would look quite dingy and characterless.

“Te, ie”, Mrs Edwards sang. “Ie, plis” answered the girls, having comfortably nestled into the flowery patterned dining chairs which matched the once upon a time flowery carpets; but after years of soot spitting from the fire and mucky feet trudging, the flowers had become more mottled. What a spread Mrs Edwards had laid out for them on her formica dining table. She always remembered that Carys and Catrin’s favourite cake was bara brith spread with salted cardiganshire butter and Betsan’s favourite was raspberry jam tarts. Well, they couldn’t resist, even though they had politely accepted Jamaican ginger cake at Mrs Philip’s at number seven, Church Street, Mrs Davies’s homemade welsh cakes at number nine, Bridge Street and not forgetting Mr and Mrs Evans’s cheesy scones at number eleven, New Street!

Decoratively adorned in a higgledy piggledy fashion along the glowing coal fire hung a plethora of socks, stockings and oversized pants. Although the undergarments were drab, the assortment of fluorescent pegs they clung on to brightened them up a treat. Within ten minutes of chitter chatter, there was a knock on the door. “Well, well, who shall be calling this time of day. I’m not expecting any more visitors” said Mrs Edwards as she stood up from her sturdy emerald green armchair. She waddled, then squeezed herself through the narrow gap between Carys’s chair and the living room door. Betsan and Catrin peeped at one another and smiled nervously. Mrs Edwards anxiously opened the door and exhaled with a sigh of relief as she discovered it was only PC Reynolds, a tall stout figure of a man, who was well liked and respected in the neighbourhood. He would call by from time to time to check that she was well as did he too with the other elderly in Lampeter.

“Hello there PC Reynolds. Lovely of you to call by. All well here thanks. Carys and the girls have just popped ‘round for tea and cake and a bit of warmth. Fancy a brew.”

“No ta Mrs Edwards, I’m not stopping long. I’m just doing the rounds as we’ve had a spot of bother, which requires some attention. Tell me now, Mrs Edwards. Have you noticed anything suspicious over the past week? We’ve had a few things crop up but what with it being the Christmas period we had to put investigations on hold.”

“Duw duw”, replied Mrs Edwards in a guttural voice. Can’t say I’ve heard or seen anything PC Reynolds. Mind you I haven’t been out much over the Christmas period. Just had the telly for entertainment, you know, what with everybody busy with their families, see. Why do you ask?. What’s been going on ‘ere?”

“Well, Dotty Peters from Penbryn had a sapphire heart shaped pendant pinched from her dressing table the night before Christmas Eve. Very sad indeed as it was given to her as a gift by her late husband Tomi to celebrate their Ruby Wedding anniversary”.

“Ach, that’s terrible.” Mrs Edwards gasped Who would do such a thing to poor Dotty? She hasn’t a bad bone in her body has that one.”

“Well, I’d like to say that was the only incident but unfortunately there were two more. They say things happen in three. Penny Pebbles had her Sunday Best pinched from her washing room on Boxing night and Minny Magi at BJ Jones Designer clothes Shop reported a considerable amount of head scarves missing from the stock room a few days before shutting shop for Christmas. You know how scrupulous she is with her stock?”

“Yes, yes PC Reynolds, indeed she is. Well, I never. What on earth is the World coming to? Lampeter used to be such a safe place. You think you know everybody, don't you? Right you are then. I shall keep my wits about me. God bless”. That evening Carys, Betsan and Catrin left Mrs Edwards house stuffed to the brim. There was certainly no desire from the children to stop off at Mark lane Caffi now. Onwards they marched in an upbeat tempo along Church Street and up the long steep slope of Penhill feeling recharged with an abundance of energy all of a sudden. As they stomped along they routinely played 'I Spy' to distract their attention from the struggling incline ahead back to Auntie Doriann and Uncle Dennis's three bed semi detached modern house, which they stayed at every school holiday.

Auntie Dorian and Uncle Dennis's house was such a contrast to the other town house. It was very spacious, light and modern; not at all pokey, draughty or dark. They also had an electric, mock log fire, so no soot spitting here. As the girls drew closer to the back door of the house they were greeted by their excitable cousin, Sammy who having clocked them from the kitchen window, flung the kitchen door open and pounced on to the three, hemming them into the bagonia and tulip pots which peeped prettily at them. Sammy was their lively cousin who was only five .He hadn't seen his cousins for seven long weeks, since the last school break as the girls lived in Cardiff.

“Come and play with Jimmy and Jemima” screeched Sammy excitedly as he dragged Betsan and Catrin through the kitchen and past the lounge diner which was bamboozled with a banquet, laid out for the local neighbours to welcome the New Year in. In to the porch and up the steps they twisted, leaving Carys and Dorian gassing in the kitchen.

“Who's Jimmy”? Who's Jemima? said Betsan and Catrin eagerly.

As they entered Sammy's bedroom, his face suddenly dropped as he opened an adidas shoe box .

“They've gone. They were sleeping right here after I gave them their afternoon snack yesterday”.

Sammy searched throughout his bedroom, spilling toy boxes on to the floor. Catrin and Betsan played with Sammy's action men while Sammy turned his bedroom upside down. Suddenly Betsan let out an almighty squeal. She had picked up a figurine which resembled an action man but was in fact, a stiff, leathery, dried up dead frog!

“Oh no”, cried Sammy, “that's poor Jimmy”! Jemima must be here too”, cried Sammy!

Later on that evening the guests began to arrive. The children had just about recovered from the incident with Jimmy the frog. The majestic oak table in the through lounge diner was laden with a variety of savoury quiches, three different types of trifle and fruit flan, salmon, tuna and egg mayo vol au vents and a colourful cheese board with crackers to suit every palate. Conversations flew as the neighbours clustered into several groups according to age and social background. The elderly chapel goers were huddled together by the fireplace, sipping dry sherry and discussing the latest gossip; the young chapel goers were playing follow my leader between the kitchen and lounge diner, transporting endless cups of tea back and forth whilst cackling about good deeds and such, then there were the

professionals, obstructing a through area as they discussed unfair treatment in the workplace and how they longed for that holiday abroad or a break to their beautiful villa in Costa del Sol. Mr Lewis's children, Pegi and Dafydd who lived next door spent most of the evening under the dining room table eavesdropping and giggling, while Sammy, Carys and Betsan played Twister and Murder in the Dark in Sammy's bedroom. As the party got into full swing, the front door bell chimed the jingle bells tune.

"Ah, more merry visitors" piped Mr Lewis, the cheerie, balding local primary School Headmaster.

"Oh, hello there, PC Reynolds. Come in, come in. You're just in time for the mulled cider. The Mrs has given it a right good kick this year, let me tell you. Top secret mind. Sworn to secrecy" he teased as he ushered PC Reynolds into a sea of jolly faces.

"I'm sorry to interrupt this fine gathering this evening. I shan't be stopping long, I'm afraid, although it is tempting, especially as I've just been informed that Mrs Lewis has concocted a right gem of a recipe this year. If it tops last year's recipe, the wassail singing is sure to flow merrily. Hu hum. I thought I would seize this opportunity while you are all gathered here to assist with my investigations. As you may have already heard, we've had a spot of bother happen over the Christmas festivities." The once bustling sound of chatter came to a halt as bodies swivelled round abruptly, ears pricked back as the town folk listened intently. "We've had several accounts of missing items in the town, of late. Poor Dotty Peters had a sapphire heart shaped pendant pinched from her dressing table the night before Christmas Eve. Very sad indeed as it was given to her as a Ruby Wedding Anniversary gift by her late husband Tomi, god rest his soul. Penny Pebbles had her Sunday Best pinched from her washing room on Boxing night. They say things happen in threes, well it did on this occasion; Minny Magi at 'BJ Jones' also reported several scarves gone missing. I don't mean to put a dampner on your evening. I just want you to keep your ears to the ground and your eyes peeled. All I'm saying is Be cautious."

"Well, do you know, Johnny, Penrhewl has been drinking quite heavily lately since he caught his wife Magi cavorting in the gentleman's toilet in the Castle Green pub?" Winnie Wyn, from the elderly chapel cluster piped

"Oh ie, duw duw", chirped the others in unison.

"What about Dai Tatws, Bobi Greengrocer's son?" bellowed Uncle Dennis.

"Perhaps he was the culprit? He's going through a bad patch of late. T'was only the other week, he was caught by Mrs Do Goody two Shoes spraying fluorescent paint spray on the walls of the town hall"

"Mmmmm" murmured the pursed lips in the room.

"No, no, no, no, they wouldn't do such a thing" said Mrs Bowen from the Post Office.

"What about that Spanish family who've moved in to North Road over the summer? Does anybody know their history, you tell me?"

"Aye, aye, must be one of them" protested the gathering.

“Yes, yes, my Daniel said that the two young boys who started school in September were a bit odd. They were very quiet; didn't speak a word of English, let alone any Welsh! I wonder what brings them 'ere, then?” gobbled Mrs Bowen.

PC Reynolds paced up and down the woolly carpet when suddenly a loud scream came from upstairs. The room fell silent. Next came the heavy pounding of feet. In shot a distraught Carys, totally oblivious to the serious matter that was being discussed.

“Look, look what I found clinging on to the toilet roll in the bathroom.”

“Let me see, let me see” said Sammy as he leapt from behind the settee where he had been hiding with Betsan.

“Yes, Jemima, you're alive”

Aunty Dorian quickly grabbed the frog from Carys's cupped hands before Sammy had a chance to reach for it.

“What have I told you about bringing frogs into the house?”

“Sorry Mami, it won't happen again”

but Aunty Dorian didn't believe a word.

“Aaaargh, Jemima, get back,” screeched Sammy excitedly.

“What have I told I told you about bringing them frogs in to the house” shouted his mother. “She's probably gone to join the rest of her family, and about bloomin' time too!”

“I've got to catch her Mami. It's really cold out tonight. She'll freeze to death.”

“Watch you don't slip out there” PC Reynolds piped. “The paths are icy tonight. Hang on a minute. Let me get you some light”

He flashed a torch light behind Sammy as he tip toed carefully in between parked cars and 'round frost bitten hedges in search of the fidgety frog. “I'll stay here by the door” hollered Aunty Dorian. “Knowing our luck, she'll be making her way back into the house again. She's taking you all on her merrygoround, let me tell you. She's not twp”. One by one, the elderly chapel goers popped their heads out too, followed eagerly by Winnie Wyn and Mrs Bowen. Within thirty seconds flat, Uncle Dennis, Mr Lewis, Carys, Catrin, Betsan and the others had shot out onto the street to watch the show.

“There she is, I just seen her over there.” Screamed Carys.

“No no, she's just gone again, under your car Mr Lewis. There, there, no not there, there, behind that weel.” whailed Mrs Bowen.”

PC Reynolds flashed his lamp up and down, side to side, round and round. What a merrygoround Penbryn had become.

“No, no, she's gone again. You've just missed her, she's gone over the wall, there. No that wall, into your garden Mr Lewis.”

Catrin and Betsan leapt over Mr Lewis's garden wall and cwtched down low so that they could get as close to the ground as possible. They nimbly zig zagged on all fours, ducking their heads under the lowly hung tree branches and scurried across the pebbled ground in search of Jemima the fidgety frog. “It's allright. I think I can see

her.” cried Catrin encouragingly as she clambered into Pegi and Dafydd’s wooden playhouse.

“I just need to shut this door tight” shouted Betsan as she gingerly clambered into the damp playhouse wrenching the stiff door behind her.

“Let me get some light on you both, be careful you don't slip now” PC Reynolds said reassuringly as he flashed his torch full beam onto the playhouse.

Inside the playhouse Betsan spotted Jemima sitting still in the far corner. She slid her hand slowly across the floor so as not to frighten the poor frog.

“I've got her. She's safe. Look Sammy. I've got Jemima”

Betsan flung open the door and thrust her cupped hand up in to the air to reveal her find only to be bowled over by what appeared to be a feathery mass.

“Well, well, well, what have we got 'ere then? PC Reynolds shone his torch to discover that there was indeed another creature on the loose. He dimmed his lamp so as not to frighten the feathery creature.

“I'll keep hold of her.” Cried Catrin as she wrapped her coat 'round the creature so as not to get hurt by its' flapping. “She's a goose Sir and she only has one eye Sir”

To his delight, PC Reynolds' recognised the bird instantly. “Aha, we've met before. I know this goose. She's come from Dai Jones's farm in Llanwnnen, a few miles away. Her name is Gwyneth,

“Look, look. What's that shining inside the playhouse” shouted Catrin.

PC Reynolds shone his lamp full beam through the open door of the playhouse

“It's Mrs Peters' sapphire pendant” answered Betsan and Catrin in unison.

“Ww... Eh... le, le... Duw Duw” the town folk sang in harmony.

“And look, look, it's Mrs Pebbles's Sunday Best and Mrs Magi's head scarves. They're all 'ere, squealed Betsan”

“Well, I hope you don't think we took them PC Reynolds” cried Mr Lewis. “The Mrs will be horrified.”

“What on earth is all this commotion out ere? Can't you be quiet. Some of us are trying to sleep. I've got one of my migraines... been a bit too generous with my home brew!”

And with that Mrs Lewis slammed the back door tightly shut and in doing so, infuriatingly jammed her dressing gown so had to re open and shut again!

“Hu hum, hu hum”. PC Reynolds cleared his throat once more. “Well it looks like we've found our culprit. They can be crafty little beggars these geese; especially those of the one eyed variety! Three cheers to Jemima the frog for taking us on this merry wild goose chase. And last but not least, three cheers to Betsan and Catrin for capturing Gwyneth and Jemima.

“Hip hip hwre, hip hip hwre, hip hip hwre” the town folk sang in Solidarity.

The rest of the evening ticked by triumphantly with as the merry gathering sang Traditional Welsh Wassail songs, joycefully ending with *Blwyddyn Newydd Dda I Chi* to the strange, yet charming compliment by Peter Post, the postman on his tin whistle and to the majestic, resonating, umpa pa chords by Uncle Dennis on his brass tuba.

