

***CARADOC
EVANS***



MY NEIGHBORS

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Stories of the Welsh People

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I

LOVE AND HATE

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By living frugally—setting aside a portion of his Civil Service pay and holding all that he got from two butchers whose trade books he kept in proper order—Adam Powell became possessed of Cartref in which he dwelt and which is in Barnes, and two houses in Thornton East; and one of the houses in Thornton East he let to his widowed daughter Olwen, who carried on a dressmaking business. At the end of his term he retired from his office, his needs being fulfilled by a pension, and his evening eased by the ministrations of his elder daughter Lisbeth.

Soon an inward malady seized him, and in the belief that he would not be rid of it, he called Lisbeth and Olwen, to whom both he pronounced his will.

"The Thornton East property I give you," he said. "Number seven for Lissi and eight for Olwen as she is. It will be pleasant to be next door, and Lissi is not likely to marry at her age which is advanced. Share and share alike of the furniture, and what's left sell with the house and haff the proceeds. If you don't fall out in the sharing, you never will again."

At once Lisbeth and Olwen embraced.

"My sister is my best friend," was the testimony of the elder; "we shan't go astray if we follow the example of the dad and mother," was that of the younger.

"Take two or three excursion trains to Aberporth for the holidays," said Adam, "and get a little gravel for the mother's grave in Beulah. And a cheap artificial wreath. They last better than real ones. It was in Beulah that me and your mother learnt about Jesus."

Together Olwen and Lisbeth pledged that they would attend their father's behests: shunning ill-will and continually petitioning to be translated to the Kingdom of God; "but," Lisbeth laughed falsely, "you are not going to die. The summer will do wonders for you."

"You are as right as a top really," cried Olwen.

Beholding that his state was the main concern of his children, Adam counted himself blessed; knowing of a surety that the designs of God stand fast against prayer and physic, he said: "I am shivery all over."

A fire was kindled and coals piled upon it that it was scarce to be borne, and three blankets were spread over those which were on his bed, and three earthen bottles which held heated water were put in his bed; and yet the old man got no warmth.

"I'll manage now alone," said Lisbeth on the Saturday morning. "You'll have Jennie and her young gentleman home for Sunday. Should he turn for the worse I'll send for you."

Olwen left, and in the afternoon came Jennie and Charlie from the drapery shop in which they were engaged; and sighing and sobbing she related to them her father's will.

"If I was you, ma," Jennie counseled, "I wouldn't leave him too much alone with Aunt Liz. You never can tell. Funny things may happen."

"I'd trust Aunt Liz anywhere," Olwen declared, loath to have her sister charged with unfaithfulness.

"What do you think, Charlie?" asked Jennie.

The young man stiffened his slender body and inclined his pale face and rubbed his nape, and he proclaimed that there was no discourse of which the meaning was hidden from him and no device with which he was not familiar; and he answered: "I would stick on the spot."

That night Olwen made her customary address to God, and before she came up from her knees or uncovered her eyes, she extolled to God the acts of her father Adam. But slumber kept from her because of that which Jennie had spoken; and diffiding the humor of her heart, she said to herself: "Liz must have a chance of going on with some work." At that she slept; and early in the day she was in Cartref.

"Jennie and Charlie insist you rest," she told Lisbeth. "She can manage quite nicely, and there's Charlie which is a help. So should any one who is twenty-three."

For a week the daughters waited on their father and contrived they never so wittily to free him from his disorder—Did they not strip and press against him?—they could not deliver him from the wind of dead men's feet. They stitched black cloth into garments and while they stitched they mumbled the doleful hymns of Sion. Two yellow plates were fixed on Adam's coffin—this was in accordance with the man's request—and the engraving on one was in the Welsh tongue, and on the other in the English tongue, and the reason was this: that the angel who lifts the lid—be he of the English or of the Welsh—shall know immediately that

the dead is of the people chosen to have the first seats in the Mansion.

The sisters removed from Cartref such things as pleased them; Lisbeth chose more than Olwen, for her house was bare; and in the choosing each gave in to the other, and neither harbored a mean thought.

With her chattels and her sewing machine, Lisbeth entered number seven, which is in Park Villas, and separated from the railway by a wood paling, and from then on the sisters lived by the rare fruits of their joint industry; and never, except on the Sabbath, did they shed their thimbles or the narrow bright scissors which hung from their waists. Some of the poor middle-class folk near-by brought to them their measures of materials, and the more honorable folk who dwelt in the avenues beyond Upper Richmond Road crossed the steep railway bridge with blouses and skirts to be reformed.

"We might be selling Cartref now," said Olwen presently.

"I leave it to you," Lisbeth remarked.

"And I leave it to you. It's as much yours as mine."

"Suppose we consult Charlie?"

"He's a man, and he'll do the best he can."

"Yes, he's very cute is Charlie."

Charlie gave an ear unto Olwen, and he replied: "You been done in. It's disgraceful how's she's took everything that were best."

"She had nothing to go on with," said Olwen. "And it will come back. It will be all Jennie's."

"What guarantee have you of that? That's my question. What guarantee?"

Olwen was silent. She was not wishful of disparaging her sister or of squabbling with Charlie.

"Well," said Charlie, "I must have an entirely free hand. Give it an agent if you prefer. They're a lively lot."

He went about over-praising Cartref. "With the sticks and they're not rubbish," he swore, "it's worth five hundred. Three-fifty will buy the lot."

A certain man said to him: "I'll give you two-twenty"; and Charlie replied: "Nothing doing."

Twelve months he was in selling the house, and for the damage which in the meanseason had been done to it by a bomb and by fire and water the sum of money that he received was one hundred and fifty pounds.

Lisbeth had her share, and Olwen had her share, and each applauded Charlie, Lisbeth assuring him: "You'll never regret it"; and this is how Charlie applauded himself: "No one else could have got so much."

"The house and cash will be a nice egg-nest for Jennie," Olwen announced.

"And number seven and mine will make it more," added Lisbeth.

"It's a great comfort that she'll never want a roof over her," said Olwen.

Mindful of their vows to their father, the sisters lived at peace and held their peace in the presence of their prattling neighbors. On Sundays, togged in black gowns on which were ornaments of jet, they worshiped in the Congregational Chapel; and as they stood up in their pew, you saw that Olwen was as the tall trunk of a tree at whose shoulders are the stumps of chopped branches, and that Lisbeth's body

was as a billhook. Once they journeyed to Aberporth and they laid a wreath of wax flowers and a thick layer of gravel on their mother's grave. They tore a gap in the wall which divided their little gardens, and their feet, so often did one visit the other, trod a path from backdoor to backdoor.

Nor was their love confused in the joy that each had in Jennie, for whom sacrifices were made and treasures hoarded.

But Jennie was discontented, pining for what she could not have, mourning her lowly fortune, deploring her spinsterhood.

"Bert and me are getting married Christmas," she said on a day.

"Hadn't you better wait a while," said Olwen. "You're young."

"We talked of that. Charlie is getting on. He's thirty-eight, or will be in January. We'll keep on in the shop and have sleep-out vouchers and come here week-ends."

As the manner is, the mother wept.

"You've nothing to worry about," Lisbeth assuaged her sister. "He's steady and respectable. We must see that she does it in style. You look after the other arrangements and I'll see to her clothes."

She walked through wind and rain and sewed by day and night, without heed of the numbness which was creeping into her limbs; and on the floor of a box she put six jugs which had been owned by the Welshwoman who was Adam's grandmother, and over the jugs she arrayed the clothes she had made, and over all she put a piece of paper

on which she had written, "To my darling niece from her Aunt Lisbeth."

Jennie examined her aunt's handiwork and was exceedingly wrathful.

"I shan't wear them," she cried. "She might have spoken to me before she started. After all, it's my wedding. Not hers. Pwf! I can buy better jugs in the six-pence-apenny bazaar."

"Aunt Liz will alter them," Olwen began.

"I agree with her," said Charlie. "Aunt Liz should be more considerate seeing what I have done for her. But for me she wouldn't have any money at all."

Charlie and Jennie stirred their rage and gave utterance to the harshest sayings they could devise about Lisbeth; "and I don't care if she's listening outside the door," said Charlie; "and you can tell her it's me speaking," said Jennie.

Throughout Saturday and Sunday Jennie pouted and dealt rudely and uncivilly with her mother; and on Monday, at the hour she was preparing to depart, Olwen relented and gave her twenty pounds, wherefore on the wedding day Lisbeth was astonished.

"Why aren't you wearing my presents?" she asked.

"That's it," Jennie shouted. "Don't you forget to throw cold water, will you? It wouldn't be you if you did. I don't want to. See? And if you don't like it, lump it."

Olwen calmed her sister, whispering: "She's excited. Don't take notice."

At the quickening of the second dawn after Christmas, Jennie and Bert arose, and Jennie having hidden her wedding-ring, they two went about their business; and when