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CHAPTER II

THE TONGUE EVER TURNS TO THE ACHING TOOTH

di Sonia Antinori

CHARACTERS

HELEN LEWIS *The youngest of the elderly ladies is Welsh and Welsh speaking. She is a classical singer of a certain reputation. She is a nationalist, a republican and is left oriented.*

GWENDOLYN GWYN *The eldest is a country lady who still lives in the valleys. Her family was one of the better ones of her tiny village. During the Second World War she was happily employed at the Ministry of Food. A fervent monarchist, she proudly displays her OBE Grand Cross Star pinned to her chest.*

LINDA FREER *In her early eighties, from England originally, she followed her husband when he was posted to Cardiff. She worked for Tupperware for many years, winning the best seller prize at one of the first Welsh Tupperware jubilees. She doesn't speak Welsh, but sent her five children to a Welsh school. A devoted Christian and very active in the church, she is more conservative than she likes to show.*

CARYL HUGHES *Seventy two years old, she came to Cardiff, from a miners' village in the valleys, to work in the Sixties. She learned Welsh as an adult after the devolution. Always dedicated to Labour, she has been volunteering all her life.*

SALLY *The presenter of a popular TV programme. A young, beautiful woman, but aesthetically spoiled by heavy make-up and an exaggerated attitude, which is supposed to make her likeable. She tries to please everyone all of the time.*

The set of a television talk show: couches and a round table. Three elderly ladies enter. All of them are attired elegantly, but only the youngest one can carry it off. A technician shows them to their places. The young female presenter enters. She waits for all the ladies to settle down, before realising that one is missing. Her nervousness is apparent as the eldest lady enters with a walking frame. She turns to help her and the old lady smiling signals with her hand that she can manage on her own. The presenter waits a moment and sits down in the middle. Under everybody's scrutiny the old lady lets herself drop backwards into her seat. In the meantime, a technician takes the walking frame off set. Each of the ladies had distinguished herself in some way, at some stage of her life. In a way they are identity icons and they have been invited to discuss the recent European



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elections and other political issues.

The old lady smiles ironically and triumphantly. She is the only one wearing fire red lipstick, which lends her beauty.

The make-up artist enters to make some final touches to the presenter. The youngest smooths down the pleats on the eldest's skirt. This is mirrored by the other two, who adjust each other's hair. They whisper compliments to each other. The make-up artist removes the powder compact and hurries off the set. Everybody seems as if they are on speed, except the eldest lady; she holds the same position throughout everything.

SALLY (*overacting in a furious crescendo until the end of her speech*) Hallo everybody. Are you well, happy and alive? I hope you are feeling very good today, 'cause we are going to have a great, a special, even extraordinary – that's the right word - an extraordinary episode of "Looking back in peace". As you can see we have a large company here today and I'm pleased to welcome four wonderful women into "Sally's Cosy Corner"! (*Musical theme.*) I have to confess to you that I almost feel embarrassed: I really don't know how to start today. At best I should announce all of these outstanding guests' names at the same time, to avoid favouritism, right?! Did you know there was once a world famous singer, a pop singer I guess (*look to Helen*), who was able to move each vocal cord independently (*Helen nods vigorously*), yes it's true and if that's the case I should have four! (*Laughs at her own joke.*) Actually I don't know which side to start, but you have to start somewhere. I'm afraid that if I start on (*avoiding pointing at a particular side in a completely stiff position*) this side or that side, there is a risk of being misinterpreted. Of course, we are not dead yet. We are still alive and kicking. But I'll ask the technicians in the control room for some help now, 'cause I know that they have come up with a marvellous solution. Chance will choose for us now. Guys, please switch the random spot on! Go ahead!

The lights fade out slowly, while a strong white spotlight starts to swing on the four guests, before it stops, lighting up Linda Freer. A recorded male voice, with a sensual tone, sounds in the studio.

VOICE Linda Freer was born to an English family in Exeter. Her father worked as a bus driver for the city bus company and her mother was a housewife. She married John, a public accountant and followed him to Wales when he had to move to the capital for work reasons. Linda had grown up in Devon, in very religious surroundings and kept good old fashioned values into her late years, when she set up and ran a successful charity for young, single mothers. Linda has five children. She was awarded the MBE¹ in 2009 for her services to the community.

Lights fade in, spot is fading out.

SALLY Wow, Linda, how nice to have you here. Did you see how our spotlight chose Linda first because actually she is the only visitor here, isn't she? Really English, an English speaking, strong committed beautiful woman, as we hear. Hi, Linda!

LINDA Hi, Sally! Hi everybody!

¹ Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire.



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SALLY So let's begin to find out something about you. Linda, tell us please, how long have you been living in Cardiff up 'til now?

LINDA Oh, it's already been, let's see, I think (*she pauses*) yeah 49, almost 50 years.

SALLY Is that true?

LINDA Yes. Next February it will be a round number.

SALLY Well, Linda, then you are actually much more Welsh than me, but don't say it out loud! You don't look old enough to have been here for such a long time.

LINDA Oh, I do. I am more Welsh than a Welsh cake. (*Laughings.*) Sorry, I am joking. Yes, we were still young at the time.

SALLY How was your first impression back then? New environment, new people, new language? Did you feel somewhat lost?

LINDA Oh, no! We were so enthusiastic about starting a new life. Wales: a completely different culture and such a nice people! In the '60s my husband was sent to South Wales, so we moved, but had to wait for the house to actually be finished. When we asked the builders when they would finish, they said 14th February! That was a lovely gesture, so we actually moved in on Saturday 13th February and woke up on Valentine's Day in our home. And we've been in that house ever since. We moved overnight with 2 cars, two girls and a bird chicken cage and...

SALLY (*interrupting*) Thank you Linda, very charming story. Let's continue with our introductions. (*Launching the next introduction.*) Come on, whose turn will it be?

Same light effect, this time stopping at Caryl. Same recorded voice.

VOICE Caryl Hughes hails from a miners' family in the Rhondda Valley. She moved to Cardiff in the Seventies and worked as a secretary for the local newspaper. Married to Ken, she learnt Welsh as an adult after deciding to put her two children into a Welsh school. Caryl worked for the Labour party as a campaign supporter. She has been awarded an MBE for her voluntary political services.

SALLY Welcome Caryl, it's wonderful that you are here, thank you for having joined us in the Cosy Corner! Such a cosy person! It's not a joke. This incredible creature spent her whole life using her energy to support a party because of her beliefs, isn't that great? And with two children!

CARYL Hello! Nice to be here.

SALLY And Caryl as we just heard, you found time to learn Welsh. How did you do it?

CARYL (*with a strong British accent*) Ydy, mae hyn yn gywir, ond mae'n ddrwg gennyf oherwydd nad oedd fy Cymraeg yn swnio'n berffaith ar bob.²

² Yes, this is correct, but I am sorry because my Welsh doesn't sound perfect at all.



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SALLY (*speaking perfectly*) O diar Caryl eich Cymraeg yn anhygoel, a chithau wedi dweud nad oeddech yn siarad gair tan y datganoli.³

CARYL Diolch yn fawr Sally.⁴ I'm what everybody refers to as "ar y bont" on the bridge. I can read and understand it but I don't have enough practice to speak it fluently.

SALLY Diolch yn fawr Caryl.⁵ (*With a sudden hysterical touch*) Let's carry on with the next lady!

Light effect as usual. Spot on Gwendolyn. Now instead of the male voice, a majestic operatic passage starts. The lady begins to smile and move her head elegantly from side to side. The presenter is slightly upset, but she and the others wait until the music stops. With an unavoidable overlapping effect the male voice covers the last chords.

VOICE Helen Lewis is one of Cardiff Opera House's iconic singers, whose repertoire encompasses Richard Strauss, Mozart, Händel, Verdi, Bizet and Massenet. Well known for her interpretations of passionate heroines, she was born to a family of musicians. She's a keen pianist, mother of twin girls and devoted wife. Both a Welsh speaker and nationalist, Helen has campaigned militantly for the independence of Wales. She was finalist at the recent European Opera Awards and her success at the last exhibition was due to her gift of producing soaring notes.

In the middle of the introduction Sally stands up waving to the technicians, trying to stop the recording, which comes to its inevitable end. Linda and Caryl are both embarrassed, although they try to gloss over it. Helen stiffly remains in position, while Gwendolyn is still smiling. Sally is completely upset, tension is growing horribly.

SALLY (*unexpectedly cheers up, screaming with joy*) Guys! This was another one of your little tricks! Wow! Those men are terrible! But we can't fall into a trap, can we?

LINDA (*smiling relieved looking to Caryl seeking feedback*) I thought it was a mistake! I was wondering what was happening.

SALLY Everybody knows the queen of the Cardiff Opera House! We are so proud of her. Ladies and gentlemen here we are: I am happy to have no less than Helen Lewis herself at Sally's Cosy Corner today!

HELEN Thank you Sally. That was very funny. Really.

SALLY The point is, Helen, that you don't need any introduction, not now, not ever. Everybody has a picture of you in their minds, when you were at the European Opera Gala a couple of months ago.

HELEN Oh, it was an incredible experience, to be there with such great artists I had always been fond of.

³ Oh dear Caryl your Welsh is amazing, you said that you didn't speak a word until the devolution!

⁴ Thank you, Sally.

⁵ Thank you Caryl.



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SALLY Surely it was the same for them, having the honour to know you personally.

HELEN You are too generous, Sally.

SALLY I could say you are too modest, Helen.

HELEN I'm talking about the real cream of the crop, the best of the best.

SALLY Tell us some names.

HELEN Oh, I'll be very modest and mention only one: Placido Domingo.

SALLY Wow, Helen, he's a fascinating guy.

HELEN Yeah!

SALLY I am as curious as a cat, but we should carry on with our program and ask the naughty guys to introduce (*smiling*) or rather reintroduce, our last, but absolutely not least guest!

Light effect focusing again on the oldest lady.

VOICE Gwendolyn Gwyn, was born in Pontygwaith, as the first of five children. During the Second World War she worked for the Ministry of Food. After the war she continued to serve in social service for the rest of her life. Her constant activity was always based on a strong personal ethos and has been recognised by an OBE⁶.

SALLY Hi, Gwendolyn, how are you? (*Gwendolyn doesn't answer.*) Gwendolyn told us that she never misses an episode of "Looking back in peace". So I could award her a medal for that too! Thank you Gwendolyn. (*Gwendolyn doesn't answer. Sally is getting a bit nervous, but tries to gloss it over.*) So ladies, I would like to start our daily conversation on the exciting issues we are supposed to debate today. Linda, did you vote last Thursday?

LINDA Of course. It's a duty and a right at the same time.

SALLY That's correct! Helen?

HELEN Yes, Sally, I haven't missed any political elections since I was 21!

SALLY Wow, Helen, another record! Caryl? I think this is actually a rhetorical question, isn't it?

CARYL Indeed. I am a voter by default. I have always campaigned for political issues, trying to get people involved. We were a very strong Labour family, especially as we were a mining family.

SALLY So, did you also help boost political participation?

⁶ Officer (of the Order of) the British Empire.



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CARYL When I was younger we used to knock on doors and say we were part of Labour.

SALLY How did people react?

CARYL Oh, we had a lot of fun and there were strange incidents too. People saying, "Would you mind looking after the children while I go and vote?" And they would go to the cinema instead!

SALLY I can't believe it.

CARYL These things happened all the time. I once had a lady who never, ever missed voting, but she told me that she couldn't leave her husband at the time. So I offered to stay while she went. When I got into the house to look after her husband he was laid out in his coffin!

SALLY Oh dear!

CARYL Anyway, there was a lot of fun to be had. We used to make up songs whilst canvassing, we'd be singing on the van's speaker. (*Suddenly starts to sing emotionally. The others react embarrassed.*)

Oh it's our delight on a dirty night,
Any time through the year,
To gaily go out canvassing for good old Ernie dear
To do his very bidding and get soaked right through to our skirts,
Oh it's our delight to go canvassing for Miriam, Liam and Burt.

SALLY Oh my goodness! We have got another singer here. Actually not bad at all. Helen, what do you think?

HELEN Lovely!

CARYL There was fun involved in politics in those days. Every time you had any success you'd have a party.

SALLY Well done, girl. What about you, Gwendolyn? Did you vote in the European Elections?

Gwendolyn doesn't answer.

HELEN I am sure she did.

Gwendolyn doesn't intervene.

SALLY Certainly she did. This is a round table of active, participative, socially responsible, civilly engaged, politically reflected clever old girls who are in touch with the times, if I may suggest the definition. (*Laughing*) How did this form of self-consciousness grow inside you, Helen?

HELEN I was 13 back then. I spoke English to my mother because my grandfather was from Bristol. I thought all things Welsh were boring, irrelevant and old fashioned, because



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my mother was an Anglophile. That generation wasn't taught Welsh in schools.

CARYL Like me. Welsh people shouldn't have to learn Welsh, they should be taught when they are children, because we are Welsh. You tend to think differently when you speak the language.

SALLY Yes, when someone asks you if you can speak Welsh and you can say yes, it's wonderful.

HELEN The point was that it had no status. You had to speak English. Then hopefully you could go and live in England. At my school 90% were Welsh speakers, but Welsh was looked down on as a peasant language.

SALLY Actually right up to today some people think that it's more important to speak English properly than Welsh, 'cause you actually need English, 'cause the world speaks English. (*Slight turmoil among the ladies.*)

HELEN Things changed mainly thanks to a minority, who were regarded as freaks because they conceived Wales as a nation and thought the Welsh language deserved a status like any other.

SALLY Don't shoot the messenger. I have to keep things balanced.

LINDA The Welsh language is very important and it's my greatest sadness that I don't speak it.

HELEN I still speak to my brother in English, the revolution didn't touch him. Sitting around a table on Christmas day, I'd speak English to my grandmother and brother, Welsh to my uncle and I would force my mother to speak to me in Welsh.

Laughing.

SALLY It's wonderful to be able to speak your own language.

HELEN It changed the world. In the Seventies people struggling for the Welsh language were spat on in the streets. People thought their actions were disgusting. I suppose it's hard for us to imagine now... the sit-ins, marching, protesting, it was considered delinquent behaviour. It was a fight, it was a battle and fortunately we won and it has grown and it's wonderful. When the assembly opened and the queen came down (although I am a republican) I thought, I can't believe it, I can't believe we have an assembly.

SALLY I think it's amazing!

HELEN I also assume that Welsh will end up as a living language, should the present trend continue until next century, assuming that there are people left on the island of Britain at that time.

Silence.

SALLY Caryl, why did you make the decision to send your children to a Welsh School?



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CARYL One day I walked past the Welsh school and I heard them all singing in Welsh and thought it would be lovely to have my children speak Welsh.

HELEN When the first Welsh language school was established, allowing children from non-Welsh speaking households to have their education in Welsh, people were becoming much more knowledgeable about the background of Welsh culture.

CARYL At the time we began to realize that we're Welsh and we're living in the capital city of Wales and our own language was not actually spoken here. So we sent them both to a Welsh speaking school.

SALLY (*to Caryl*) You told me that it wasn't at all easy.

CARYL We had to fight hard for it. Their first primary school was attached to an English primary school and our children were bussed in from all areas of Cardiff, as it was the only Welsh primary school at the time. The residents of the area used to lie in the road to stop the buses and the children from going to school, because they didn't want Welsh speaking people there.

SALLY I guess it was new and people felt threatened.

LINDA You had a bit of bother with the Welsh nationalists, burning people's holiday homes.

CARYL There was a lot of antagonism.

LINDA There was definitely a feeling of aggression, we often went to parties and you would have one little corner where everybody would be speaking Welsh. You would go up and try and introduce yourself and they would not be particularly keen to have a chat with you.

HELEN Because that meant they would have to leave behind the people who spoke their language.

SALLY I remember when I was a child and they burnt the cottages down.

CARYL Welsh people at the time didn't have the money to buy these cottages, so the English came down and bought most of them. That was frustrating but burning them...

SALLY The rest of Britain were dead against the Welsh because of the few who had done what they done.

CARYL They classed us as vandals, vagabonds, racists... bad. It was awful.

HELEN No one really knows who was behind it. The question remains, who were Meibion Glyndwr, as the arsonists use to call themselves? What did they actually achieve with those attacks? Why did they stop when they did?

LINDA Fanatics they were. The Free Welsh Army and that, it was the Welsh IRA. It was



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the wrong way.

HELEN Back then Welsh nationalist campaigners were regarded as flirting with fascism, trying to get rid of the English. But we simply saw ourselves as Nationalist. It just meant that you considered that a Wales without the Welsh language wasn't Wales.

SALLY You were only standing up for your own country.

CARYL They didn't understand that it was just about raising Wales back to its feet, financing our people properly, making sure we had all the benefits which the South East had -and still has - Just like Scotland now.

LINDA I wonder what will happen if Scotland becomes independent, which they might well do. What will Britain become then? Will Wales also start thinking about independence? I don't know. It's all happening a bit too fast.

SALLY And I suppose when you get older you don't like changes.

Silence.

LINDA I'd love to see Wales remain part of the UK, I am not wholeheartedly for devolution. I know Scotland is going down that road, but the way I look at it is "divided we fall and united we stand", we can still have our nationality and stay within the UK.

SALLY You mentioned Gwendolyn's favourite motto.

Gwendolyn doesn't comment. Everybody looks at her for a little while and then they carry on talking.

CARYL I feel very Welsh and state Welsh as my nationality, most of my grand children are Welsh speakers, but I still feel we just ought to be part of the UK whilst retaining our individuality.

SALLY Actually you both earned the MBE for your services.

CARYL Yes, I was awarded it three years ago.

LINDA I was awarded it in 2009 and was invited to London to receive my medal from the Queen.

CARYL Yes, me too of course.

SALLY As I said today's episode is special. It could become very exciting. Caryl how was it?

CARYL We went the night before and slept in a hotel in Earls Court. My brother agreed to be the chauffeur.

SALLY You were allowed to enter the Palace by car?



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CARYL Yes, we had a sticker to put on the window, we drove through central London right to Buckingham Palace.

LINDA It was wonderful. Stewards were showing us the way down the Mall. I remember how it felt feeling to join the queue of cars (*to Caryl*); cars of all sorts weren't there?

CARYL Yes, there were Rolls Royces alongside Minis.

LINDA A wonderful experience, then we had to wait patiently until the sniffer dogs came out.

CARYL Then eventually it was your turn to drive to the back of the Palace.

LINDA It was fantastic; we were all dressed up in our hats. We got out of the car, then I said goodbye to my guests. You are allowed to have up to four guests.

SALLY Do you have to go in alone?

LINDA Of course, you have to walk up these stairs with red carpet and the Beefeaters are lined up there and your heart is pounding and then they check your name: Linda, Mrs Freer.

CARYL A strange way of saying things.

LINDA Then you are shown into this huge room, with big pictures and lots of fire places.

HELEN It might be called the picture gallery.

CARYL I am not sure. It was in December and it was freezing cold in there.

LINDA We are told the queen is very austere.

CARYL Well, it was freezing and you had to stand around for so long, then someone came out to tell you what you could and couldn't do.

LINDA It was "Ladies if you are wearing gloves you must either keep them on or leave them here. You are not allowed to carry them." So I left my gloves.

SALLY Wow, I can see in my mind an image of you both dressed to the nines. Did you wear gloves as well, Caryl?

CARYL No, I didn't.

LINDA Then he said: "When your name is called you walk into the room, you turn to face the Queen, you curtsey and you walk forward." And then: "The Queen will talk to you; as a sign that she is finished she will extend her hand like that, the minute the hand is extended your time is over, so you shake her hand, curtsey again and go off to the right." And he said "If she talks to you, you must remember to refer to her as Ma'am" (*to Caryl*) "You must remember. It's Ma'am as in spam, it's not Mum, it's Ma'am." Then it happens and you go in and there're all your guests sat there, the orchestra is playing up on the balcony, it was a



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wonderful experience.

SALLY And now you sometimes proudly wear your MBE medal with civil ribbon, I guess.

CARYL Not really. Today it's in a box. It doesn't really mean much to me.

LINDA I also keep it in a box, but I wear it once a year, on Remembrance Sunday.

CARYL It means that if I wanted to, I could get married in St Paul cathedral! (*Laughs*).

LINDA I was proud to have been nominated, because I knew nothing about it until I received the letter.

CARYL I do use it after my name, particularly with my job, because I think it helps a little when you are trying to make an impression. They might look at it and say "Oh yes, she is who she says she is." You know what I mean?

LINDA To me it does actually have a great significance, it means I am a member of the British Empire. That's what it means.

CARYL Because you come from the South of England. They are very into the Royals down there. Londoners even more so.

HELEN Too many people feel a strange connection to the Royal Family. It's weird, I don't understand it. It's a very strange thing.

LINDA Well, I don't know about now, because they have so many mixed races in London, they can't all feel the same, but the old Londoners, yes, they were all for Royalty.

CARYL Do you think that the Queen and the Royal family have the same following today as they had 30 years ago?

LINDA Well, judging by the crowds that they draw, yes I suppose they do.

HELEN Because those people don't read history books. Well if you did look at the history of the Royal family, you wouldn't wish to know them.

SALLY Wow. That's harsh Helen! Why?

HELEN (*she laughs*) Because they're all German!

Caryl laughs.

LINDA The only thing is there's no better alternative.

CARYL Well, we can think about alternatives, we could have an elected President, as other countries do, how about that?

LINDA The Royals are still important. People are really pleased with... ehm, ehm, Katherine ehm... I've forgotten her name already. What's her name? Kate. We've always



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had a Royal family. I don't think we would be better with a republic. I think we'd miss the Royal family if they were gone.

SALLY (to Gwendolyn) Do you remember the investiture of Prince Charles here in Wales? (Gwendolyn doesn't answer). I think you were already blazoned with your Grand Cross Star of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire.

Instead of answering Gwendolyn smiles shining.

LINDA The street was decorated with bunting, there was fancy dress and there was tea, sandwiches and cakes. The ceremony, that had taken months to organise, the crowds along the routes were chanting, not chanting, cheering. Waving flags. Yes.

CARYL We all remember that. It wasn't really important for me, but we enjoyed the parties. As the Queen went through the street we were all half expecting her to be blown up.

SALLY Yes, there were bombs or something.

CARYL But nothing happened, it was all very peaceful.

Laughter.

HELEN The movement for the defence of Wales put bombs over pipelines. The investiture of the (ironical) Prince of Wales was going to happen at Caernarvon Castle.

LINDA There was a bomb in the Temple of Peace, in Cathay's Park in the city centre, the morning of the announcement.

HELEN We were against the investiture. So we demonstrated at the announcement. John Jenkins was in the army as a dental orderly, and they put bombs all over Wales.

CARYL There was the Free Wales Army, who we all laughed at, because they had uniforms. But during the investiture they were all jailed for nine months, because they were so afraid of them.

HELEN Two people blew themselves up in Abergele, they wanted to blow up the train track as the Prince of Wales came in. There is still a commemoration every year to remember those martyrs.

LINDA So it's a murky area, there was this violence.

HELEN The bombs were never planted to hurt people, just to disrupt the ceremony.

LINDA There were thousands of soldiers around on the day of the investiture. The government was very worried.

HELEN Because we felt as if we were under attack, we felt we needed to defend ourselves.



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LINDA A shot was fired at the time and the horses all went gaga!

CARYL It was more important a few weeks later when men went to the moon. That was much more important.

SALLY Oh yes, the summer of '69.

CARYL Much more exciting.

SALLY But also Charles and Diana's marriage was a very Welsh affair. The dress, particularly.

LINDA Yes, designed by David Emanuel.

SALLY Because he was Welsh.

LINDA From Porthcawl.

SALLY It was a big thing for Wales that *the* dress was being made by a Welshman and sewn by Welsh seamstresses. In the end it was a worldwide event.

CARYL It was on telly. I was a bit starry eyed about that.

HELEN When it came out it was a right shock, this great big huge thing. The gown was massive, with a ridiculously long train and huge sleeves that went out at the bottom and made it look ridiculous.

LINDA I didn't say anything, because I thought, you can't say anything about this, so I kept it to myself but I thought "Oh no!" Everyone kept quiet about it.

CARYL When it first came out of the royal carriage it was horrible! All creased, crushed silk and that train that went on forever.

LINDA You know she could have worn anything really. The sleeves were from here to here.

SALLY So... ridiculous?

HELEN It was ridiculous.

LINDA You couldn't say anything.

HELEN And I kept thinking that it was made in Wales, for Pete's sake!

CARYL I wondered if the rest of the world thought that the Welsh liked fluffy, extravagant designs.

LINDA We were geared up for perfection and it wasn't quite perfection.

SALLY They made a mistake with the material or something, you know?



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CARYL We felt thoroughly disappointed 'cause you know although I don't feel a royalist, the Royal family are our artefacts, they are like a living museum, like the pope in Rome. Some people go to visit canals, some go to Madam Tussaud's and some want to see the Queen. Even if we did finally become a republic, we couldn't kill 'em.

SALLY Well I like the fact that they are here. The world is sort of becoming a uniform place. You can travel to another country and it's not that different from the rest, I think all that (*she pauses*). Well I can't mention any brands, but you know what I mean. Everything is quite flat and I enjoy differences. In the UK the Royals make a difference. Once I was in Vietnam on a trip, on the Mekong Delta. They took us in one of the canoes that go through the Mangroves. A guide was with me and all of a sudden, in this perfect English, in the middle of these Mangroves, he turns around to me and says "Can you explain the constitutional role of the Queen in British politics to me?"

LINDA And she is still working at her age.

HELEN Working?

LINDA She's got to wake up in the morning and dress up well, to be nice.

SALLY Actually this has been a woman's main duty forever.

LINDA Duty and right.

SALLY This means that first and foremost she is a woman like everybody else.

HELEN We presume that she is.

CARYL That's the reason that we all tolerate her after all.

SALLY Because the Welsh are tolerant.

LINDA And the English as well.

SALLY Because Brits are tolerant.

CARYL And democrats.

HELEN And women are even more democratic.

SALLY And the Europeans even more so.

CARYL Open minded

LINDA Pacifist.

SALLY Generous.

LINDA Apart from the Germans.



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HELEN Of course, apart from the Germans.

LINDA But we have to stay united, because we remember how hard things were during the war.

HELEN I learnt it at school.

LINDA We can still smell the odour of the plastic of the gas masks we had to go to school with.

SALLY Yes, I read a poem about that I think.

LINDA And the smell of paraffin heaters, which were supposed to keep us warm in the underground shelters. Do you remember Gwendolyn? (*Gwendolyn doesn't answer.*) During the bomb raids on those sleepless nights.

CARYL She wasn't there at the time. She worked for the Ministry of Food.

SALLY She said she enjoyed the war by the way.

CARYL She says she feels guilty saying it.

SALLY But she is honest and she does say it.

CARYL I think it's easy to understand.

SALLY Of course, she was simply safe.

LINDA And well nourished.

CARYL Not just that. She always remembers how she felt coming from Ferndale to Colwyn Bay: the first thing she looked at was the pavements, they were white there and ours were black, in those days there was coal ash everywhere. Do you remember Gwendolyn? Gwendolyn?

At that moment Gwendolyn seems about to answer. All the ladies turn to her apprehensively. She signals her intention of standing up. The presenter is quite upset and jumps up to help the elderly lady. Again Gwendolyn stops her, shaking one hand. She stands up with enormous effort. Everybody is waiting for her to speak. She stands for an instant and then let herself fall back without saying a single word.

SALLY A warm round of applause for Gwendolyn whose testimony has clearly shown us what's worth fighting for.

Everybody applauds. There is a growing feeling of mutual agreement. After a little while Helen, sincerely touched, stands up. All the ladies follow her example. They improvise a tiny standing ovation to the eldest lady, who smiles and nods charmingly.

CARYL Thank you Gwendolyn.



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SALLY Look what you've managed to achieve with such a simple gesture. Unbelievable.

HELEN Indeed.

LINDA Basic values.

SALLY A sense of belonging.

CARYL The EU, I don't know, I think that was the idea, wasn't it, in the beginning?

HELEN I think that was the point: it was democracy inverted, I mean during the war. First everyone had to vote, and then everyone had a gas mask.

LINDA And those gas masks brought home the dangers of war to everybody in every home.

HELEN Our fathers had to move on. Never again. Anyway within Welsh nationalism there are strong feelings towards Europe.

LINDA Sure, Europe should keep us more united. Perhaps it's a good thing we are all in.

SALLY I just think it's a good thing to feel united with more people. It's good to exchange views with more countries, politics and that.

LINDA The government at the time said it was going to be the best thing we had done.

CARYL At the time there were adverts on TV saying how prosperous Germany had become as a result.

LINDA Though for me it also meant that everything became more expensive.

HELEN I think the subsidies we get from Europe have made a massive difference to Wales. The farmers and so on.

CARYL I'm actually a supporter of the European Union, but I'm not a supporter of the way it's going now.

LINDA I suppose they've gone too far, too fast.

SALLY But it looks as if it might not be finished yet.

CARYL They've ignored their own rules, they're allowing countries in which aren't meeting the financial constraints they should be meeting and that's causing huge problems, but I am a supporter of the EU. Do I feel a part of it? Well, yeah of course.

LINDA There are so many problems with some countries' economies that I am unsure if it's a good thing or not. Sometimes I think I have to think about it more.

SALLY I guess we will become part of the EU at some stage, it will simply happen.



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HELEN We needed to be a part of it and we still do, we're a small country, our trade is in Europe. The European aspect made things a lot better than they would have been otherwise. There are things that are definitely wrong with the EU, like anything. But probably more pros than cons. If we leave, what on earth are we going to do?

LINDA I don't know if it is the Britishness in us that makes us hold back from totally embracing Europe and being part of it but I am partial to it. I know that we've belonged to it for a very long time, but it all still feels very new and actually, I don't think it affects me.

SALLY But you said that you vote, didn't you?

LINDA Of course I did.

Silence.

HELEN I wouldn't want to come out of the EU.

CARYL I definitely feel that I belong to it, although I don't think I would call myself European, I have enough problems trying to explain to people that I'm not English when I'm abroad, forget European!

LINDA I think a lot of it is because we're an island.

HELEN Yes, a little island on our own. It's not that we want to be, but it's how things are.

LINDA But it is for the next generation to decide.

HELEN I've got high hopes for the future. I think the next generation will have a much better life.

SALLY We are now coming to the very thing. It's actually time to start the Sally's Cosy Corner Game! (*Musical theme.*) I beg the ladies to close their eyes and... look back in peace! As usual, we will remember together a particular moment in one of their lives. (*All the ladies except Gwendolyn close their eyes.*) Send in the magical mystery box! (*Somebody from the staff brings along a giant-sized tray of plenty of Tupperware boxes. The random spot switches on it.*) Ready? Go!

All the ladies re-open their eyes.

LINDA (*bursting forth*) Can't be true. How could you...? Unbelievable. (*Moved almost to tears.*) Oh, Sally this takes me back around fifty years.

SALLY It goes back to the time you arrived to Wales, doesn't it?

LINDA (*more moved*) Yes, when I was a young Tupperware seller.

CARYL (*touching her hand with spontaneity*) Hold it in, Linda.

SALLY Don't worry, just in case, we have enough bowls to catch the tears.



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LINDA Oh, sorry. I... I... Well, I'll try again. Just one moment. All right. When we arrived I wasn't really into a real career yet, but I was always a busy person. I did a lot of things. Before I was married I used to run youth clubs in the church. I didn't want to be tied down at home. My poor husband is entirely different to me, he has always been the quiet one, a home bird. And so I decided to start with Tupperware, organising parties and that kind of thing.

SALLY You became a keen Tupperware host, even winning a competition as number one seller.

LINDA It's true. I invited neighbours and then friends to the presentation. It also helped me to socialize with local people, then we had costumed graduation ceremonies and all sort of nice things like treasure hunts, where prizes would be buried in the ground, conventions, annual celebrations with lavish entertainment and zany games to reward Tupperware sales people. It was a bit like reach for the dream, get to the top.

SALLY Wow Linda, thank you, you've shared another great memory you decided with us. So, honourable ladies, we shall also have a little treasure hunt here in Sally's Cosy Corner and pick the question for our daily game. Same procedure as usual. Linda Freer and Caryl Hughes against Helen Lewis and Gwendolyn Gwyn. Let's start with the first team and warm up the sidereal spot of chance! Guys! One, two, three, go! (*The lights fade out slowly, the spot starts to swing on the tray and finishes up pointing at one box. She extracts a scroll and reads.*) What would you tell your grandchildren, on what should life be focused? (*The timer is starting to count down.*)

LINDA Peace.

CARYL Love.

LINDA Faith.

CARYL Hope.

LINDA Charity.

CARYL Politics.

LINDA Solidarity.

CARYL Equality.

LINDA Brotherhood.

CARYL Freedom.

LINDA Responsibility.

CARYL Braveness.



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LINDA Patience.

CARYL Passion.

LINDA Trust.

CARYL Respect.

LINDA Hope.

SALLY Already said! Keep on going. Sixteen seconds left.

CARYL Sex.

Short hesitation.

LINDA Wisdom.

CARYL Generosity.

LINDA Prudence.

CARYL Power.

LINDA Energy.

CARYL Integrity.

LINDA Balance.

CARYL Intensity.

A little slower.

LINDA Constraint.

CARYL Sensibility.

LINDA Pardon.

Almost with effort.

CARYL Happiness.

LINDA Awareness.

CARYL Pursuit of happiness.

LINDA Survival.



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SALLY Stop! Wow. Second team. Spot. Box. Question. (*Usual procedure in half the time.*)
Notch up as many reason as you can to stick to the ideals of your life. Gwendolyn and Helen. Go!

Gwendolyn doesn't start. Helen waits for a couple of second, then starts.

HELEN (*in welsh*) Stay true to yourself. (*She waits again for a reaction from Gwendolyn, then speaks furiously to the end.*) Feel free, choose, grow, fight, keep on fighting, strengthen bonds, don't stay alone, be recognizable, be tough, coherent, change, be sensitive, innocent, dirty and cleansed, intense, burning, mad, suddenly happy, happily mortal, independent, strong, but fragile at the same time, open, determined, starving, bold, resistant, substantial, be alive.

Majestic operatic music. Gwendolyn collapses.
Black.