Prologue

David Evan Griffiths stood next to the large bay window, looking out over the rolling grounds of the Sussex estate. He was 87 years old, stood with a stoop, was still slim and had a shock of white hair, his vanity in old age. He was waiting for a reporter from Time magazine who wanted to write the story of the Griffiths family. A wry grin cracked his lips as events and people flashed through his mind like a kaleidoscope.

He glanced away from the vista and towards the open door of the walk-in safe, where the journals, diaries, letters and the other papers he had acquired over the last seven decades resided. The history of the Griffiths family in one location. The loss didn't bear thinking about should something happen to it all. The information contained in the safe was a microcosm of the twentieth century. Hardly an event of any importance that had impacted on the world in the last fifty years or more hadn't been influenced or in some cases caused by a member of his family. In many cases, indeed, he had been the prime mover of events. He looked back out of the window, enjoying the sight of the deep frost sparkling in the sunlight, the sea, his ruling passion, was a dark blue in the distance.

There was a noise behind him and the door swung open. A young man stood in the doorway, a briefcase in his hand.

`Come in, come in,' Griffiths repeated. `Good of you to come all this way.' As always, in spite of the fact that the interview was taking place at the request of the magazine, Sir David made it appear as though the favour was for him. The young man walked purposefully across the wide expanse of carpet, his hand outstretched.

`It's very good of you to see me, Sir,' he said in a soft east coast American accent which Sir David placed immediately as Bostonian. The reporter tried hard not to be overpowered by the wealth surrounding him nor by the sheer presence of the man standing in front of him. He realised that he was shaking hands with a legend of the twentieth century. Sir David's achievements sprang to mind and in spite of himself the young man cringed inwardly. He's just another man he thought.

They settled opposite each other in leather wing-backed chairs and the reporter took out his tape recorder and asked permission to switch it on. With a gleam in his eyes Sir David nodded his acquiescence. Coffee was served by a butler who then silently withdrew.

`I've been thinking how to start,' Sir David said. `It's easy to say I'll begin at the beginning but it's difficult to know where that is precisely. In retrospect and believe me, young man, at my age you spend a great deal of time in retrospection, it was the events of 1890 that changed our lives irrevocably. I've been looking through the files and papers of the period, reminding myself about the early years. It's strange how in our arrogance we think that we have total control over our destinies. We haven't. Destiny controls us. Decisions we make play a part, but each tiny event builds on the last and affects the next. This goes on until we have lived out our lives, for better or for worse. For many of us, we hope it is for the better. I have outlived my contemporaries, friends and, thankfully, my foes. My family is still around me. That has always been the source of our strength, the family.' He lapsed into a meditative silence for a few seconds and then focused his considerable intellect on the man opposite.

`When I look back on the early days, I think what a pretentious and precocious ten year old I must have been. But there again, in those days we grew up a lot faster than children do nowadays. It was not unusual for a twelve year old to be working down a coal mine, as most of my friends did, and at fifteen you were a man. I think it gave me an insight into the adult world. Childhood should last as long as possible. Naturally, no child agrees with me but most octogenarians do!' Sir David gave a chuckle which turned into a mild coughing fit. `Blasted bronchitis. The wretched doctors said it'll be another fortnight at least before I can get out. That's why I agreed to the story. You wanted a short, sharp interview.' The reporter nodded. `Instead, I'm offering you a chance to use that lot,' Sir David waved his hand in the general direction of the room safe, `to put together the full story. It'll take time but I think you'll find it worth your while.' Before the reporter could say anything Sir David went on. `I estimate that interviewing me will take the next two weeks at least. The papers are yours to browse through whenever you want but they must not,' he emphasised his words with a shake of his right index finger, `be taken from here. If you put together the story to my satisfaction I will arrange publication. I have read some of your work and I think it's good. You show an insight into events that is sadly lacking with most journalists nowadays.'

The reporter was surprised and excited at the same time. Publication of a book or a series of books about the Griffiths family would make him famous, even wealthy. Knowing some of the history of the man sitting before him he knew that he was being

offered a ringside seat at the story of events and people that had shaped and changed the century.

`What if you don't like what I find?'

Sir David chuckled. `Twenty years ago I would have reserved the right to edit anything I didn't like. Now I am only interested in the truth being told, warts and all.' He held up his hand. `Don't misunderstand me, as far as the family is concerned there are few warts. I believe that we have acted as honourably and decently as we could. We've cut a few corners, trod on a few toes and made a few enemies, but on the whole I think history will judge us favourably. So, in answer to your question, you can use anything you find.'

`Fair enough, and I must say that's mighty generous of you.' The reporter sipped at his coffee, giving himself time to think the matter through. `I'll need to clear it with my editor.'

Sir David looked at the young man and tapped his steepled fingers together before saying, `I've already agreed with your editor. He says you can stay as long as it takes.'

The reporter grinned warily. The cunning old fox, he thought, still as sharp as a tack even at his age. `Where will I stay?'

`Here, of course. There are twenty bedrooms and we have better facilities than a five star hotel.'

At that moment the door opened and a beautiful black-haired girl entered the room, smiling sweetly. Sir David's heart stopped beating for a second as it seemed that his beloved sister had walked into the room. He collected himself and made the introductions.

The reporter was tongue-tied. The girl was slim, had a vivacious if cheeky smile and was perfectly at home in her jodhpurs and hacking jacket.

`Gramps, I've been told to tell you that we'll be out for dinner and don't forget that the Foreign Secretary will be here for tea.'

Sir David nodded. He hadn't forgotten. In April Dr. David Owen, Foreign Secretary to the Wilson government would be visiting South Africa to hold talks with Ian Smith on the future of Rhodesia. Sir David had a great deal to contribute to those talks. His granddaughter waved the riding crop she was holding by way of farewell and breezed out of the room.

`My granddaughter,' he said by way of explanation. `Sian.'

`How's that again? Did you say Sharn?'

`That's how it's pronounced but we spell it S. I. A. N. She's named after my sister.' A faraway look came into Sir David's eyes and then he pulled himself together. `Why don't you rewind that contraption,' he pointed at the tape recorder, `and let's begin. I think we need to start in early 1890 .

BOOK 1

Dai's Story

1890

IT WAS A TYPICAL wet autumn day. I was in the front room with my nose pressed to the window looking up the road trying to see my father. In spite of the heavy rain and fading light I could see still the glow from the colliery furnaces, a constant reminder of the hell on earth the people of Llanbeddas endured in order to extract a meagre living, digging into its bowels.

Long streets, six deep, stretched along the valley and up the hillside. On the other side of the river, a mile away, was the colliery, the reason for the existence of our village and many more like it. They ran into each other, one house in one village, the next door house in another.

I was ten in 1890 and I had never been further than five villages to the north although once I went as far south as Pontypridd, the market town where the rivers Taff and Rhondda meet. I had bought a small present for myself at one of the market stalls, a little tin soldier in a red jacket and black breeches. I carried it in my pocket or took it to bed with me, a constant reminder of that wonderful day.

Today I heard my brother and sister squabbling in the living room. They were twins and always fighting. I wanted to tell them to be quiet; they were disturbing my concentration as I willed Da to come into sight. If I did not wish him to come home now I knew he would do a double shift and I would not see him for at least another twenty-four hours.

I turned from the window to shout and as I did they fell silent. I let out a deep breath and turned back to my vigil. I was in the front room, not used much except when the vicar called which was not often, or at birthdays and Christmas. It was small with a settee along one wall and a chair either side of the fireplace. Recessed either side of the chimney were shelves, one with Mam's best china, the other with the family Bible and brass ornaments she had acquired in ten years of marriage. Their eleventh wedding anniversary was next month, the twelfth of November. The room would be in use then; everybody would be there. Sion, Sian and myself were more excited at the prospect than our parents were.

I pressed my nose harder against the window and strained my eyes looking along the road, wishing with all my heart for him to come. It was a week since I had last seen him he was working double shifts to make extra money but he had promised

to come home early tonight. I knew he would be tired but he would play with us for a while, ask us about school and in a stern voice tell us to finish our greens.

For a few seconds I sensed rather than saw the two figures coming along the street through the dusk. There was no mistaking his big frame and the way he walked. His heavy, determined tread distinguished him from the shuffling gait of his friends. His stubborn pride prevented him from showing how tired he was. I was told by most of my relations, Grandmother in particular, that I had inherited the same pride as my father. I rushed from the room into the short passageway and threw open the front door. He was only a few yards away when I ran out into the rain and threw my arms around him. He ruffled my hair as we stepped back into the house.

`Mam will be angry with you, Dai,' he smiled, his teeth gleaming white in his coal black face. `You've got dust all down your side.'

`That's okay Da, I put my old clothes on so it won't matter. I knew you'd come and I wanted, eh . . .' I trailed off, embarrassed at my show of affection.

He realised how I felt and said: `Well then, it won't matter, will it? Come on, let's go and see what's for tea.' He opened the door into the living room, off which was our small kitchen. This room was the same size as the room in front. It had a table and five chairs, an open fire with an oven on one side, Da's easy chair and Mam's dresser along one wall. It was warm and clean.

`I'm home Meg,' he called upstairs.

`I realised that love, when I heard Dai rushing out. I'll be down in a minute. Your water's in the kitchen. I'll come and scrub your back when you're ready.'

The twins grinned at Da but did not rush to him; he was too dirty for them, covered as he was from head to foot in coal dust and white streaked where the rain had washed the black away. I followed him when he went out the back, into the small yard and stripped off, shaking as much dust from his clothes as possible before he came back, wet from the rain. I had lifted the bath from its hook on the wall in the yard and put it down in the kitchen. I poured hot water from the first of our large saucepans, heating over the fire. While I went for another saucepan, Da added cold water from the tap. He quickly washed, climbed out of the bath, carried it outside and poured the black water down the drain. He brought the bath back, ready for the next lot of water.

`That's better, eh Dai? I'm white after all. I was beginning to doubt it for a while back.' Mam came in just then, bent over the bath and kissed him.

`Dai, go and see what your brother and sister are up to.' She turned back to Da. `Now where's the soap?' She put her hand in the water and Da grabbed her arm. `Stop it Evan, the children,' I heard her say as I closed the door.

In the living room Sion was starting to build another kite from bits of sticks and paper while Sian played with her doll. I sat in Da's chair and waited for him to come in. I heard my Mam squeal and say: `Evan, you've splashed me, look you. This is the last time I scrub your back, just you wait and see!' She was always making the same threat.

The door to the room we were in opened and he came in, a towel wrapped around him. `I'll go and dress Meg while you lay the table.' He gave us a merry wink and went up the narrow stairs to the front bedroom.

I helped lay the table and Mam put a pot of stew in the middle. The smell made my mouth water. The twins were already at the table waiting for Da to come down, impatient to eat.

`Hurry up, Da,' called Sian, always the greedy one. `I'm hungry.'

`All right, all right, miss; I'll be there in a minute.'

I leant forward, lifted the lid and sniffed. `Hmmmm, that's good. Have a smell, Sian,' I teased her.

She knew what I was up to and poked her tongue out at me, a cheeky smile on her face. She had black hair like Mam's and the same blue eyes. She was very pretty and one day she would be as beautiful as our mother. She was precocious, cheeky and adorable. We spoilt her even if there was little to spoil her with.

By the time the colliery had deducted the rent from Da's pay and we paid for the food and other necessities, there was not much left over. Mam and Da were determined we should have an education and they wanted to send us to the big school down the valley. They saved every penny they could to pay for it. By the rules of life as far as they applied to our valley I should start in the colliery next year, at the old age of eleven. The thought filled me with dread. I'd seen the effects on other children, old men by the time they were twenty: through Mam, Da had learnt the benefit of a good education and was as determined as she that we had one.

Mam had been a school teacher in the local school until a few years earlier. Her best friend, Sian after whom our Sian was named, had given up teaching to have a baby. Six months after the baby was born Sian's husband was killed in a pit accident. Knowing the dire straits she was in, Mam gave up her job to let Sian have it. This was

Mam all over. Although we had needed the money at the time _ when was there a time we did not need money? Mam had not hesitated to help.
Mam devoted her time to teaching the twins and me. She had shown me pictures of other countries, firing my imagination with tales of America, South Africa and Australia.

Now every spare penny went into a little box hidden in their bedroom, ready for when I was old enough to go down the valley". Next year, instead of crawling down the smaller, stinking, rat infested wet holes of the colliery I would be going to school; normally this was limited to the rich. To get there, I needed excellent marks in the entrance examination. If I did not get them I would lose my place to someone whose father was rich and influential. When I protested, Da had shrugged and said it was the way of the world. Thanks to Mam, though, I was a long way ahead of my classmates and because I worked hard I stayed ahead. I didn't enjoy it and would have preferred to be out with my friends but my fear of going down the mines and my dreams not coming true stopped me.

Mam often said that education produced dreams, but it was hard work that would bring them to reality.

Da came down and sat at his usual place. We bent our heads and he said a quick grace in Welsh. Mam lifted the top off the pot and the rich aroma filled the room. Sian pounced on the serving spoon, had her fingers gently rapped by Da, pouted and let Mam serve.

After the dishes were washed we sat around the table with our slates and chalk. Even the games we played were educational. For instance, we were each given a letter and then had to write down the names of places, birds, flowers, rivers, kings, historic battles and so on. We had played this game so often even the twins, though only eight, did well. Somehow Da always came last.

The next morning I was up at six thirty. By that time Da had been in work an hour and Mam, after seeing him off, was back in bed. I stoked the fire and got some coal from the back shed. I put on half a bucket, emptied the remainder in the polished coalscuttle alongside the grate, grabbed the other tin bucket and let myself out the front door.

It had stopped raining though the sky was overcast, the threat of rain still heavy in the air. I hurried along the street in the direction of the colliery. At the corner shop I turned left and ran down the steep hill towards the river. I exchanged `Good

mornings' with the people I met, speaking Welsh. Welsh was our natural language, English was foreign to us. At home we spoke English and like some others we were bilingual; most spoke only Welsh and refused to learn English, in spite of the fact that thousands of immigrants from England came into the valley looking for work. Some of the older Welsh families even moved further west, where the English seldom came. The immigrants were not wanted in our valleys; the men said, `they are stealing our jobs, yes Bach, and the very food from our mouths!'

I hurried along the bank of the river, the filthy water swirling only a foot below my feet. There had been a lot of rain recently and the river was swollen to nearly twice its usual depth. Granddad said that when he was a boy the water had been clean enough to swim in and the fish caught in half a day could feed a family for a week. But nowadays, the only things living in the water were the rats, as big as kittens. For many years the water had been used to wash the coal from the colliery. As a consequence it was as black as night with a peculiar, horrible smell.
What it gave us though was as much coal as we needed . . . free.

I reached the part of the river where the bank had collapsed and the water had spread over a larger area. With the rain more coal than ever would be washed down. It would reach this spot and the widening of the river would deposit coal near the sides of the banks. I slipped off my socks and shoes and stepped into the cold water.

Twenty minutes later, my feet numb and black, I had both buckets full. Rather than dirty my socks and get my shoes wet, I walked back bare footed. I was so used to this that I did not feel the stones and cinders underfoot. I stopped every few hundred yards to rest and threw stones at any rats I saw. I arrived home as the rain started again. I was annoyed because I had hoped for another load before breakfast. Instead, I washed my feet and sat drying them in front of the fire, Mam's old school atlas on my knees.

I opened it to the map of America and as I followed the rivers and towns my dreams took over once more New York, Pittsburgh, and west to Denver and San Francisco. One day I promised myself, one day. Unlike my parents and the twins, my friends laughed at my daydreams. What they were not aware of was that Mam and Da shared a similar dream. Why didn't we go? Why didn't we pack up and go? _ the family, that was why. The Welsh older generations had a tight grip on the children, which was why we wandered less than other nationalities.

Granddad had now turned to God, trying hard to save his soul before the dust in his lungs killed him. Ours was a typical close knit Welsh family, with our grandparents and uncles living within a mile of our house.

`Dreaming again, Dai?' Mam interrupted my thoughts.

I closed the atlas guiltily. `Only a bit Mam. I was thinking about us _ all the family I mean.' I paused, uncertain how much I could say. `I mean, why don't we just go? You want to, Da wants to, and I want to. You keep saying there's a whole world out there. Couldn't we go and find it? Find a better life. Not,' I added hastily, `that life isn't good here. It's just . . .' I hesitated, not knowing how to go on.

`I know, Dai,' she knelt beside my chair. `I know what you mean. But just think. There's all the family, our friends. Grandmother especially has only got Aunt Olive and me.' She paused. `And there's Grandma and Granddad. What will they do without us?'

`Mam, Mam, Mam, you know they'll do very well. They've got four others besides Da and look how many grandchildren they've got. No Mam, we'll rot and die here, strangled by our family.'

There was a sadness in her eyes as she laid her hand on my arm. `You're too wise for your age and your own good,' she said softly. `You may be right,' she sighed and then smiled sadly. `Who would have thought such insight in a child of ten?'

`I'm not a child Mam. If it wasn't for you and Da I'd be going down the mine in a year's time. Instead I'll be staying in school, costing you both more than you can afford, with Da killing himself working doubles to make enough money.' I could not help the bitterness in my voice. I loved my parents and wanted them to have a better life before it was too late.

`You may be right, Dai,' she repeated, `but for now there's nothing we can do. We have your schooling to think about and then there's the twins. Until that's all finished we can't think of going anywhere. So let's have no more talk about it.' She stood up.

`Mam, use the money you've saved for our education. It's enough to get us out of here, and before the dust gets Da, like it gets everybody eventually.'

Without a word she went into the kitchen and a few moments later returned with half a loaf and some dripping. She placed them on the table and looked at me thoughtfully. `Did you mean what you said? About the money I mean.'

`Yes, Mam.' I nodded and lowered my eyes to the atlas. Did I mean it? All my dreams about school, getting on in life, revolved around the money and my education. If we spent it emigrating what would happen to my schooling then? I was annoyed at my selfish thoughts. Why think about it? Nothing would ever happen.

We were doomed to stay here for the rest of our lives, living our dreams in our heads and not striving for the reality, at least, not until I was grown up. Then, no matter how much I loved my parents I was going to move on in the world. I would make my fortune and return to take them away to live in a fine house with servants and everything. Sion and Sian would come as well. I wandered into my dream world once more, the atlas still showing the continent of America.

After breakfast I helped the twins with their schoolwork. Neither of them appreciated it. They only wanted to go out and play even though it was still raining. Not so long ago I felt the same way, until one of my friends, three years older than me, started in the mine. He drowned six days later when one of the smaller shafts had been flooded after heavy rain and a pump had failed. After that I spent weeks dreading the thought of my eleventh birthday. Finally, I realised the only way out was as Mam kept saying; I had to work harder than anyone else and continue my education.

The rain stopped about midday and I repeated my earlier trip to the river, returning with another two buckets of coal. Sion and Sian were in the street playing with their friends, a gang of ragamuffins together and always up to mischief. As I staggered around the corner I was in time to see Sian knocking on the door of old Mr Price and then running pell-mell past me. I grinned as I walked towards the old man's house knowing the explosion that was to follow. Sure enough his door slammed open and there he stood, angrily shaking a stick at no one in particular.

This was the first time I had been nearby when his door had been knocked. As he stood there shaking his stick and yelling after the kids I saw there was something wrong but could not work out what for a few seconds.

`You rascals,' he called in Welsh, hopping from foot to foot, looking up and down the road, not knowing which way they had gone. `Just you wait. I'll catch you and when I do I'll give you all the leathering of your lives, look you. Just you wait and see if I don't.'

He was a sprightly old boy in spite of the years he had worked in the mine. As I took in the darned cardigan, the patched trousers and the grey hair, I realised what

was wrong. He was not angry. He was smiling under his fierceness. I was so surprised I stopped and gaped at him.

`After all these years Dai Griffiths and you caught me out. Heh, heh but I had you fooled for long enough didn't I boyo? Heh, heh.'

I smiled back. For the first time I was unafraid of him. I saw a friendly, lonely old man. How did I, a mere ten-year-old boy, see that? I suddenly realised what old age meant and why families stayed together.

`Well, Dai Griffiths, are you going to come in for a cup of tea or are you going to tell your young friends that I'm not really angry at all? Mind you, if you do, then you'll spoil not only their game but mine too. And you must admit I make them run just a little bit faster and give them more spice in the game than anybody else, even that old biddy at twenty one.' Again he laughed. `And just think young Griffiths, if you come inside with me for a cup of tea you'll be a hero in no time. Ha, ha, especially when you leave and tell them all about the live bats and frogs I keep. Don't look so alarmed it's not true. But just think of the stories we can make up to tell them. Well then, are you coming or aren't you?'

I put the buckets of coal on his doorstep and followed him inside. His house was identical to ours, not quite as clean perhaps and certainly shabbier, but there was a friendly air about the place that somehow went well with its smell.