

Christmas in the Boathouse

by Aeronwy Thomas

The following recollection is by Dylan Thomas's daughter, Aeronwy Thomas - an account of a Christmas day at the Boathouse. Probably Christmas Day 1950 when she would have been aged 7. It has been specially written for Carmarthenshire for use during the 50th Anniversary celebrations her father's death.

In the grate hung huge swathes of holly, singed at the edges, and red berries peeped from behind jugs and plates on the sideboard. Dolly, our treasure, kept winking at the mistletoe hung over the door of the dining room. Delicious roast smells were coming from the kitchen. "Your father will be here soon" said Mother.

She kept running to see whether he was back from the pub. Even on Christmas Day he liked to keep to routine. I followed her to the front door to see my father's portly figure swaying down the path. He was accompanied by one of the Williams' brothers, a set of strong shoulders and a lean body, and they were carrying a doll's house. My father was veering towards the cliff. "Look out!" I shouted as the house swayed and the Williams' brother pulled my father back from the brink. My moment of surprise and triumph was overwhelming and I burst into tears. (My brother looked disgusted, knowing that the doll's house made by a local carpenter was made for me. But then we all admired the wooden house and its contents, and I settled down to put them in order).



The Thomas Family - left to right; Aeron, Dylan, Dylan's Mother Florence, Llewelyn, Colm and Caitlin
© Rollie McKenna

It was time for lunch. On the table set with a tablecloth, lace inlay on the corners, arrived a turkey on a blue and white oval dish. (Around this centrepiece sprigged with thyme from the garden were serving dishes of mashed potato, swede, sprouts and roast potatoes cooked by Dolly. Christmas pudding must have followed with custard, everyone's favourite). We pulled cheap crackers, plastic prizes falling out on the floor. We couldn't really understand the jokes, though clever Llewelyn said the riddles were easy. (Once we were asked where fish kept their money. In a fishy wallet made of seaweed, I offered. The answer: In a riverbank, was beyond me). Then it was time for games chosen by my father.

Charades, I begged, and Mother brought armfuls of costumes and hats from her wardrobe. (I mimed the words spaghetti and macaroni, syllable by syllable, as I put on a different hat for every scene. Everyone poked fun. I pulled on a bathing cap as I mimed "spa". I imagined myself walking down the quay of some sea village like ours and having a dip in the special sea waters. Although everyone explained that the spa waters are usually spring waters I found that I'd forgotten from last year).

We opened out presents in the afternoon: books from my parents, chocolates from Granny with Mum pulling a disapproving face. My father started to read to himself from "Mary Poppins", "The Secret of Spiggyholes" and school stories by Angela Brazil.

It was becoming too hot in the small room with the heavy scent of leftovers, sherry and dried fruit, and time for my father to leave for Brown's for a sociable drink. I was feeling full and tired. (I started to play on the tin whistle Father Christmas had brought me and Mother told us it was time for bed... what, so early? ...and yes, she was going out too).

(The tide was rushing through the square hole in the garden wall and I stood on the veranda watching the waters rise in our back garden, reflections of the bright lights of the house on its surface). Mother was calling so I went upstairs, took my torch from under the pillow and opened out my favourite new book to finish off a perfect day. I was very proud that I knew how to read after a year or two at school but Dad mustn't know. He was going to read Grimms to me tomorrow.



Aeronwy Thomas

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