

# Land of Legend

## Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

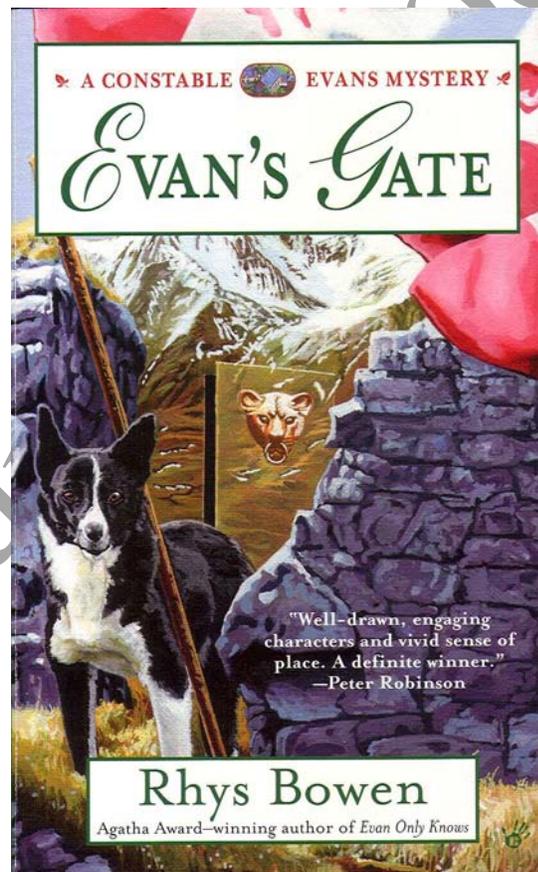
Wales has to be one of the most convivial places on earth. It enjoys breathtaking scenery, melodic village choirs, and, with its Celtic heritage, a tradition of literary excellence that includes the likes of Dylan Thomas, Robert Graves, and Dafydd Ap Gwilym. In the works of contemporary mystery novelist Rhys Bowen we find the same regard for the well-turned phrase, the same eye for the beauty of the Welsh landscape, and the same ear for the idiosyncrasies and cadence of the Welsh language.

### Rhys Bowen

She was born in Bath, England, not far from the Welsh border. As a child Rhys spent summers with her aunt in a little village in Wales. After completing her schooling in England, Austria, and Germany, she went to work with the BBC in London, which broadcast her first play, *Dandelion Hours*, followed by several other plays. The urge for sunshine drove Rhys to move to Australia, where she met her future husband, also a native of England. They relocated in San Francisco in 1966, where they have lived ever since.

Lacking a market for her plays in the U.S., Rhys sought a different outlet for her creative urges. Her first children's picture book, published under the name Janet Quinn-Harkin, won several awards and established Rhys in a new career.

Children's books, young adult books, adult historical romances and sagas time



to turn her hand to what she followed until she decided it was finally enjoyed reading most: mysteries — the sort of mystery that gives the reader a genuine sense of time and place as well as a rattling good story.

As she reflected on her childhood summers spent with relatives in North Wales, Rhys realized she had a great setting for a mystery series: the wiley publican, the domineering landlady, the

battling ministers, the postman who reads people's mail, the local constable who struggles to keep the peace while not alienating his neighbors—all existed in villages very like Llanfair. But readers tend to identify an author's name with a particular subject and style of writing, so she adopted a new pen-name for her latest literary effort. She chose her Welsh grandfather's name, Rhys Bowen. When asked if her tales are true-to-life, she insists, "there really was an Evans-the-Post who read all the mail!"

***Evan's Gate***  
**(Berkley Prime Crime, 2004)**

Like other novels in this series, *Evan's Gate* is set in the village of Llanfair, in rural North Wales. During the course of renovating his cottage, Constable Evan Evans (yes, you read correctly) begins to dig a water line outside his front door. To his horror he soon uncovers the skeleton of a small child. Evans believes it is the body of a former playmate of his, who had vanished in the mountains decades earlier. Adding to the mystery, another child has recently disappeared, while playing on a nearby beach. The girls are very similar in appearance, and the family of the earlier child have only recently returned to the region. Evans is forced to consider the possibility that there is a serial killer lurking amidst the tranquility of rural Wales. Adding to the complications in his life, Bronwen, his bride-to-be, questions his relationship with the attractive (and pushy) American forensic scientist investigating the case, who clearly has set her sights on the unsuspecting constable. Before he solves the case Evans must confront the legend of the *Twlwyth Teg* — fairies who live in the mountains, and abduct little children.

***A delightful alternative***

Rhys Bowen offers the reader an delightful alternative to hard-boiled crime novels and gritty thrillers. She manages the difficult task of combining a light touch and a sense of humour with plots that are deeper and more serious than those found in most cozies. Reminiscent of M.C. Beaton's Hamish MacBeth novels set in the Scottish Highlands, Bowen's Constable Evans series perfectly captures the ambiance of the landscape and the unique qualities of the people who live there. *Evan's Gate* succeeds in combining not one, but two, mysteries set against the engaging world of an appealing cast of characters in an idyllic setting. Other novels in the Constable Evans series include *Evan Blessed* (2005), *Evan Only Knows* (2003), *Evans to Betsy* (2002), *Evan Can Wait* (2001), the deliciously titled *Evan & Elle* (2000), *Evanly Choirs* (1999), *Evan Help Us* (1998), and the first in the series, *Evans Above* (1997). The Welsh do enjoy playing with language.

In addition to her Constable Evans series, Rhys has written a mystery series set in New York City during the early part of the twentieth century, where feisty Irish immigrant Molly Murphy uncovers many a dark secret. This series includes *Murphy's Law* (2001), *Death of Riley* (2002), *For the Love of Mike* (2003), and *In Like Flynn* (2005)

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