

An excerpt from *Fall of Giants* by Ken Follet

Billy pulled on his shirt. It was the one he had worn to school yesterday. Today was Thursday, and he changed his shirt only on Sunday. However, he did have a new pair of trousers, his first long ones, made of the thick water-repellent cotton called moleskin. They were the symbol of entry into the world of men, and he pulled them on proudly, enjoying the heavy masculine feel of the fabric. He put on a thick leather belt and the boots he had inherited from Wesley, then he went downstairs.

Most of the ground floor was taken up by the living room, fifteen feet square, with a table in the middle and a fireplace to one side, and a homemade rug on the stone floor. Da was sitting at the table reading an old copy of the *Daily Mail*, a pair of spectacles perched on the bridge of his long, sharp nose. Mam was making tea. She put down the steaming kettle, kissed Billy's forehead, and said: "How's my little man on his birthday?"

Billy did not reply. The "little" was wounding, because he was little, and the "man" was just as hurtful because he was not a man. He went into the scullery at the back of the house. He dipped a tin bowl into the water barrel, washed his face and hands, and poured the water away in the shallow stone sink. The scullery had a copper with a fire grate underneath, but it was used only on bath night, which was Saturday.

They had been promised running water soon, and some of the miners' houses already had it. It seemed a miracle to Billy that people could get a cup of cold clear water just by turning the tap, and not have to carry a bucket to the standpipe out in the street. But indoor water had not yet come to Wellington Row, where the Williamses lived.

He returned to the living room and sat at the table. Mam put a big cup of milky tea in front of him, already sugared. She cut two thick slices off a loaf of homemade bread and got a slab of dripping from the pantry under the stairs. Billy put his hands together, closed his eyes, and said: "Thank you Lord for this food amen." Then he drank some tea and spread dripping on his bread.