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Opening extract from  
**The Christmas Eve Ghost**

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Published by  
**Walker Books**

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Mam earned a living for the three of them by doing other people's washing. There were no washing machines in those days and it was very hard work.

She did not have enough money to pay someone to look after Bronwen and Dylan, so, early in the morning before it was light, she had to leave them while they were still asleep.

She pushed the big old pram uphill to the better part of the city where the well-off people lived, to collect their dirty washing.



Mam hurried from house to house, delivering the clean washing and piling up the pram with dirty sheets and towels and shirts and pillowcases.

Then she ran back as fast as she could, worrying and fretting all the way because she hated having to leave the children all alone in the house.

But somehow she always managed to get back before they woke up, in time to make their breakfast porridge.



As soon as she had washed up the breakfast things, Mam set to work.

At the back of the house was a narrow room with a stone floor, called a wash house. In it were a sink, a wash tub and a big iron mangle for wringing out the wet washing.

In the corner was a little brick fire-place with an iron door, and above it was a metal basin with a wooden lid. This was called a “copper”.

Bronwen and Dylan watched as Mam lit the fire with sticks and newspaper and put bits of coal on top. Then she filled the basin with cold water from the sink tap and put the lid on.





When the water was hot, Mam pushed the sheets and towels into the basin with soap flakes and began to boil them clean.

Then she stood bent over her wash tub, rubbing and scrubbing at the smaller things with a bar of yellow soap, while the wash house filled up with steam.

When all the things were properly clean she rinsed them in the sink.

After that she wrung them through the big iron mangle.

Sometimes Bronwen and Dylan helped to turn the big wheel, which worked the rollers that squeezed the water out of the washing.

It made them feel very big and strong, turning and turning that wheel for Mam. You had to be careful not to pinch your fingers in the rollers as the washing went through.

The grey sudsy water drained into a big tub underneath. When that was done Mam emptied the tub in the back yard.



If the weather was fine she carried all the washing outside in big baskets and pegged it out on the clothes line to dry.

But if it rained she dried it in the kitchen, draped over wooden frames called “clothes horses” or raised up to the ceiling on a pulley. On those days Bronwen and Dylan ate their dinner among the wet sheets.



Next came the ironing. There was no electricity in their house, so Mam heated up her flat iron over the kitchen stove. She had to take great care not to make it too hot in case it scorched the linen. That would have been a great disaster.

When it was all finished and aired, she folded it beautifully and piled it neatly in the old pram, ready to push it back up the hill early the next morning.



Mam was a big sturdy woman but she did get very tired and she hated the city dirt.

In the evenings she was mostly too tired to do anything but sit in her chair and look into the fire, remembering the green valley where she had lived as a child, and wishing that they were all back there again.

Sometimes she told Bronwen and Dylan thrilling stories about dragons and hauntings, and wicked devils with tails, and ghosties which came down the chimney at night.

