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PENGUIN ACTIVE READING

LEVEL 4

How Green Was My Valley

Richard Llewellyn



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at's the book about?

Look at this picture. Discuss these questions. What do you think?



- 1 What was life like for the people who lived in this valley in Wales?
- 2 What does the title of the book suggest about the changes in the valley during the storyteller's lifetime? What were the reasons for those changes?

1.2 What happens first?

Look at these pictures of some of the children in the Morgan family. What do you think? Write the letters.



Huw



Ivor



Davy



Angharad

- 1 ☐ Which of the children marries first?
- 2 ☐ Who leaves home after an argument with his father?
- 3 ☐ Who goes to school each day?
- 4 ☐ Who runs away to look after the older boys?

Life in the Valley

*'Miners must fight together. It's no good one mine striking.
All the mines must strike at the same time.'*

I am going to pack my two shirts and my best suit in an old blue cloth and leave the Valley. I am worried about this old blue cloth. If I lose it, I will feel guilty for the rest of my life. It belonged to my mother and she tied it around her hair when she cleaned the house. Her hair was fair and thick, and always very pretty even when it turned white. My father met her when she was sixteen and he was twenty. He had just left a farm for a job at the ironworks. As he came singing up the street one night, he saw my mother upstairs in the house where she was working. She looked down at him, he fond of her, and they were married six weeks after that. Later, my father went down the **mine**. We lived in a **coal** mining village and most of the men worked there.

In those days, miners earned plenty of money. On Saturdays, the women put on their best clothes and waited outside their front doors for their husbands and sons. Black with dust, the men walked up the Hill. When they reached their houses, they threw their **wages** to the women. Saturday was a good day.



mine /maɪn/ (n/v) a deep hole in the ground that is dug to reach gold, silver or other material

coal /kəʊl/ (n) a hard black material that is dug out of the ground and burned to produce heat

wage /weɪdʒ/ (n) money that is paid for the number of hours, days or weeks that an employee works. A *minimum wage* is the lowest amount of money that an employer can legally pay to a worker.

After they had bathed, my father and my older brothers put on their best clothes. Saturday dinner was always special; on Sunday, of course, no cooking was done because we spent most of the day at the **chapel**. When we sat down, with me on my mother's knee, my father shared out the soup. I can still smell that soup. It was a smell that made me feel warm and comfortable.

'Eat plenty,' my father said. 'Eat plenty, my sons.'

We did not speak when we were eating. After the plates were empty of soup, then of meat and vegetables, there was cake with thick cream, and a cup of tea.

While my oldest sister, Ceridwen, washed the dishes in the kitchen, my father and brothers sat in the next room. Sometimes I was allowed to sit on my father's knee. Then, if he and the boys were going to Town, my mother gave them some money from the box on the shelf above the fire in the kitchen. My father always said that we should not waste money, but there were not many things to spend it on in those days. There were drinks in the café of the Three Bells, and sometimes trips to sing in valleys on the other side of the mountain.

Bronwen came from the other side of the mountain. My oldest brother, Ivor, met her when he went over there to a singing competition. He started talking to her in her father's shop and he missed the competition.

My father laughed. 'Beth,' he said to my mother, 'we'll lose Ivor soon. He'll be the first to marry.'

'Well,' my mother said, 'it's time.'

One Saturday afternoon, we heard the sound of a horse outside the door. My father and brother stood up to welcome the visitor. Ivor opened the door.

'Father,' he said nervously, 'this is Bronwen's father.'

By the time my mother had made the tea, they were friends. Bronwen's father got very drunk at the Three Bells before he went home that night. My father had a couple of sodas too, but he always knew when to stop.

Then, one Saturday, Bronwen came over alone. I will never forget seeing her on the Hill. It was steep and she was carrying a big, heavy basket, but she walked up it easily.

'Hello, Huw,' she said.

I was so shy that I ran and hid behind the wall bed*.

'What is it?' my mother asked me. Then Bronwen called from the front door.

'Come in, child,' my mother said.

She looked at Bronwen for a long time and then she hugged her. In five minutes my mother knew everything about Bronwen, and Bronwen learned everything about Ivor's childhood.

*wall bed: a bed in the kitchen that was pulled down from the wall at night

chapel /'tʃæpəl/ (n) a small church, or a special room, in which some Christians practise their religion; the religious services held in a *chapel*

bronwen often came over the mountain on Saturdays after that first visit, but

I was always shy. I have loved her all my life. It is silly to think that a child could fall in love, but I was fond of Bronwen that Saturday on the Hill.

But that is in the past.

We had a good time at Ivor's wedding. He wore a new black suit when he married Bronwen in the chapel that every man in our village had helped to build. Everybody said how beautiful Bronwen was. My mother and Bronwen's mother cried at the front of the room. My father and Bronwen's father stood next to them with my older brothers Ianto, Davy and Owen. I was with my sisters and my other brother, Gwilym, standing with my aunts and uncles.

I shall never forget the party after the wedding. There was food in a big tent, and drink in a small one. Everybody in the village and from all the surrounding farms brought something. In the evening, we sat on the grass and sang songs. There were prizes for the best singers, and I was chosen as the small boy with the best voice. My father was pleased because singing was important to him. That night he held my hand tightly all the way home.

Then Ianto married a girl who was staying in the village with relatives. He went to work for her father and they moved away. My mother said that Ianto mixed with the wrong people. He did not contact us for many years and Mother always worried about him.

Davy was the clever one in the family. He wanted to be a doctor but our doctor, Dr Richards, said that he was too old to start studying, so he too worked in the mine. When there was an accident underground, the men always sent for Davy. But he became very moody, and one night my father asked him why.

'Father,' Davy said slowly, 'I'm not happy.'

'What's wrong, Davy?' my mother asked.

'Everything,' Davy said. 'Everything. But nobody seems to notice. And if they do, nothing is done. Next week, the bosses are cutting our wages. Why? There's as much coal coming out of the mine – more than last year. But the ironworks are closing and the men from the ironworks will come to our mine for work.'

'They'll go anywhere that they can find work,' my father said.

'To our mine,' said Davy. 'And when those ironworkers come, some of them will offer to work for less money and the managers will employ them. The older and the better-paid men will lose their jobs. And you'll be one of them, if you're not careful.'

'That's silly,' my father said, and laughed. But that is what happened. The ironworkers started to work in the mine for little more money than some of the young boys. A lot of the more experienced men lost their jobs. Dai Griffiths was one of them and he was one of the best workers in the Valley.



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Green Was My Valley

by Llewellyn

British English

Classic

Leaving his home in a Welsh mining village for the last time, Huw Morgan remembers his childhood. The valley was green then, unspoilt by waste from the mine. The happiness of his family and friends had not yet been destroyed by cruel gossip and terrible pain. Since then, so much has changed.

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