

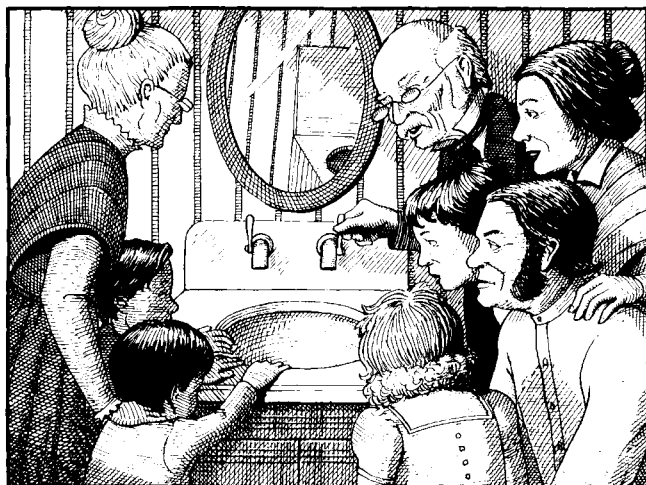
Water Comes Home

An entire family of eight is squeezed tightly into the small, newly constructed bathroom. No one is about to miss this first demonstration. The youngest two boys complain loudly that they can't see, until they shove their way up to the front and latch their hands eagerly on the rim of the gleaming sink.

The honor of performing this first test has been awarded to grandfather. His gnarled, arthritic hand is already closed around the spigot marked COLD. He looks over the fidgeting ranks of his family, drawing out the anticipation until the little boys are jumping up and down with the tension. He quiets them with a stern look, then turns the handle sharply.

For a moment nothing happens. There is a faint sound of rushing air and eight people hold their breath. Then a torrent of water gushes out of the faucet. It sputters and spurts, runs rusty with sediment, then settles into a clear, strong flow. Water whirls quickly down the drain, magically disappearing into pipes. It is bedlam for a moment, with the tap rushing full blast and everyone shouting and trying to touch the miraculous stream.

Everybody gets a turn. The hot water is tested, every faucet tried out, the new toilet flushed. Grandfather escapes from the



confusion and retreats to the front parlor, where he stands at the window facing the street.

The celebration recedes as his thoughts drift back. No more trips to the backyard privy, he muses. No more worry about fumes and contamination or outbreaks of water-borne disease. No more chamber pots, water buckets, bickering over whose turn it is

The scope of the project still astonishes him: pipes laid all over the city, running into each home, supplying fresh water at a turn of the wrist, carrying away waste. He wonders absently how many gallons of water he has toted in his long life, but when he starts to calculate in his mind, the number grows so quickly that he gives up.

He can feel the exact weight of the bucket pulling on his arm, the way the water dipper rests across the palm of his hand. And he wonders how long it will be before those indelible memories start to fade.

