

## THE ROAD TO NAB END – Chapter Twenty Two

At long last I made up my mind to leave Lancashire and go to London. There was the chance of a job at the Bow Bridge Iron Foundry, which Mr Dimbleby at the brickworks had told me about. He also gave me a letter of recommendation. I was sixteen.

As the time for my departure approached, I became more and more excited. I'd been promised a ride in a lorry from Manchester to London by another friend of Mr Dimbleby. It would cost me five shillings instead of twenty-five charged by the railway. Failing the Bow Bridge Iron Foundry, I'd look for work somewhere else in London.

Only Mr Dimbleby at the brickworks and my sisters, Jenny and Brenda knew that I was leaving.

On the day of my departure, I took leave of mother without telling her what I was up to. I was afraid that there would be a scene and she would attempt to stop me from going. After all, I was the last of her brood to fly away. Mother had a way of knowing what was going on. Unlike father, who lived in another world, there was a bond of understanding between us. We didn't have to declare our love. The hug I gave her told her all she wanted to know.

I didn't think father would be interested in my departure, so I didn't say anything to him either. Not that there was enmity between us. His silence at times may have been hard to bear, but it was something that we'd got used to. I respected him for what he was: an honest and courageous man. He set me the example of being a good worker. All he wanted was a fair day's pay for a good day's work. After returning from the war in 1918, he never sought money for money's sake; he never took an unearned pound; he never earned much beyond what he needed to survive.

I had felt for him as I watched the cotton industry collapse under his feet. More than any of us, he had believed that it would never die.

Although I didn't have a job to go to and had neither friends nor a place to stay in London, Jenny and Brenda did nothing to dissuade me from leaving. I could tell from her eyes that Jenny was not as sure as Brenda about my going to London but her doubts and fears remained unspoken. Both my sisters promised to explain to mother what I was up to when I had gone. I promised to write.

My worldly possessions including my two pairs of overalls and my only suit – the suit I got for Jenny's wedding – I carried in a small, battered cardboard suitcase. The suit had been let out as far as it would go and was still a bit short in the arms and legs, but it would have to do.

It was dusk by the time I found Mr Dimbleby's friend in Manchester. I had been told to be at a garage by the central bus station not later than six.

As I entered, a bundled figure of a man, wearing a box-like cap, a muffler and a coat that reached down to his boots, left a little office in one corner and walked toward me. He had a blank, scrawny face.

‘You the young ‘un for London?’ he asked, eyeing my valise.

Putting on a bold look and trying to sound older than my sixteen years, I said I was.

‘Well then,’ he went on ‘don’t muck abaht; jump in, we’ve got a long way to go.’

My head was reeling with thoughts of home and the new life ahead of me. My going to London was not only a matter of finding a job, it was a matter of adventure. I’d been standing at the level-crossing and watching the trains chugging their way south for weeks before my departure. As I had leaned over the gate, I’d wondered what the people of the south were really like. Were they like us?

As the lorry approached the brow of a hill, I was woken from my daydream by the sound of the driver’s voice.

‘Tha’s leaving Lancashire’ he said.

‘Cheshire’s at top of ‘ill’.

With that he slammed the lorry into gear.

‘Good-bye Lancashire,’ I said, a frog in my throat.