THE ROAD TO NAB END – Chapter Twenty

In the summer of 1929, the cotton industry took another nose-dive. The spinners were locked out to endorse wage reductions. But that only affected father and the lockout was lifted. We breathed freely again for several weeks. One way or another, my family got along. We hung on for our dear lives to the house in Livingstone Road.
By 1931 there were three million people without a job and perhaps a similar number under-employed. Most of my family were now out of work, working part time, or double shifts, or working for less. In late 1931 the industry reached a state of collapse.
By 1932 Britain slipped into the depths of a world depression. At the workers' expense everything was done to keep the industry alive: wages were cut and the hours of work increased. For the same pay, workers were forced to man six, even eight, instead of two or four looms. The fight against six and eight looms went on mill by mill, Todmorden and Burnley weavers leading the way.
At the beginning of 1932 my family was surviving on little more than Gordon's dole and my ten shillings from Grimshaw's. When I got the sack, after Grimshaw's death, it left us with Gordon's money only.
We sat around for hours trying to come up with schemes to make a few shillings.
Armed with a sledgehammer, father earned a few pounds smashing looms that earlier he had tuned with all the skill of a piano-tuner. I watched him destroy his idols – some of them a hundred years old, and thanks to people like him, still in first-class condition. I cannot imagine what went through his head. A hundred years earlier in Lancashire they'd hung people for smashing the first power looms. Now they paid them to do it.
As my indispensable ten shillings had been lost, we fell behind on rent and furniture payments. We spent less and less on food. We got charity bread where we could; for the rest we went hungry.
The local Public Assistance Committee refused help on the grounds that we were 'living on a scale disproportionate to our position.' It was their way of saying that poor people do not live on Livingstone Road.
Two weeks later, having pawned father's war medals and Jenny's wedding dress for food, we put our scant possessions on a flatcart and, in the middle of the night, pushed it to a lodging house in Nab End.
Out of shame we didn't want the neighbours on Livingstone Road to see us go.
The midnight flit from Griffin Street to Livingstone Road had been a triumphant march. The journey through the streets to Nab End was like a funeral. We were all too miserable to talk. We'd been robbed of the only really decent living conditions we'd ever known. There wasn't one of us

who didn’t feel sad and shamed. Even the family clown, Gordon, held his tongue.

Nab End was a come-down; about as far as we could fall. It was worse than Griffin Street. At least we’d had our own cottage there. Nab End was chiefly lodging houses – all of them long past their prime and seedy looking – with vacant faces peering through dirty windows. Six of us occupied one room. Stacked with lodgers from cellar to roof, the place reeked.