

## THE ROAD TO NAB END – Chapter Three

A thin self-confident man, uncle Eric was head of the local Mechanics Institute. He knew all about inventions, and was always making speeches. 'Uncle Eric', mother said, 'has the gift of the gab.' He was written up in the newspaper as one of the first in our town to have electricity installed in his house. The rest of us considered it quite an honour.

I was taken to celebrate uncle Eric's triumph. We crossed the unmarked boundary that separated the poorer from the richer parts of town and found uncle Eric waiting for us at his garden gate. He led us into a dark room where we stood about wondering what was going to happen. Other people followed until the room was quite full. The word 'electricity' sounded sinister to me. Nervously, I held mother's hand and tried not to fidget.

With a slightly tipsy uncle Eric dragging out the drama, and with everyone else shouting 'One, two, three!' the room was suddenly flooded with an entirely new and magical light. The light was soft, yet blinding; it made us blink. It reached everywhere, right into the corners of the room. It came from a glittering bulb hanging from the ceiling. There was no flame, spluttering, or hissing; there was no smell as with gaslight. From the look of astonishment on the faces around me, there might have been a thousand bulbs above our heads. The air was filled with a barrage of congratulatory 'ahs' and 'ums.'

As if to acclaim the coming of the golden age, uncle Eric and aunt Pearl served hot meat pies, black puddings that scalded our tongues, and great slabs of cold, potted meat. For 'afters' there was hot rhubarb pie smothered with cream. There was lots of beer.

When there was nothing left to eat or drink, we picked up sticks and trailed back to our homes by the mills. Before leaving we all sang 'For he's a jolly good fellow.' Uncle Eric stood there blinking, a contented Cheshire-cat look on his face. Everyone agreed that uncle Eric and aunt Pearl had put on a 'reet luvly do.' The talk going home was more about black puddings than about science.

