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March to April 1826

Emmy Carter sat on the low wall near the corner of their alley, alone as usual but enjoying the mild sunshine and hugging her knees as she watched the bustle of the busy Manchester street. Her contentment turned to anxiety as she saw her mother come out of their house and say a loving goodbye to George Duckworth, heedless of who was watching them kissing. Why could she not be more careful with her men-friends in public? Even in Little Ireland, where only poor people lived, none of the respectable women would speak to “that Carter woman” or let their children play with her daughter.

Scowling now, Emmy drummed the heels of her broken-down shoes against the wall and shoved back the hair that was hanging in a matted tangle over her shoulders. It wouldn’t last with this man, any more than it had lasted with the others. Her mother never seemed to pick men who would be faithful or even treat her kindly, and when they went off with other women—as they invariably did—Madge would weep and wail for days, before searching desperately for another protector.

George Duckworth might be good-looking in a beefy sort of way, though he had a bit of a belly on him, but Emmy never felt comfortable with him. Something about the way he looked at her made her shiver and want to cross her arms protectively in front of her chest. She was glad she had not yet grown a woman’s body and wished she need never do so if it made men look at her like they did her mother.

She sighed. Why was her mother so besotted with George? Certainly, since he'd been coming to visit, they'd eaten far better than usual because he was generous enough with his money, but Emmy would much rather have gone hungry. She was used to that. It didn't frighten her. George did.

He strode off down the street, arms swinging, shapeless felt hat pulled down over his forehead, and Madge twirled round a couple of times as she did when happy about something, then sauntered back into their house with a dreamy smile on her face. Sticking her tongue out at the boy across the road Emmy followed her mother inside, listening to the footsteps echoing up the three flights of rickety stairs above her and trying not to make any noise herself as she followed. It was a game she played with herself sometimes, turning into a shadow. It was useful when she was out after dark.

"There you are! Guess what? We're moving." Madge danced her daughter round the room. "Moving, moving, moving—away from this hovel! What do you think of that, eh?"

Emmy pulled away. "But you said we'd be staying here. And these are the best rooms we've ever had." The attic was large, with room for Madge to sleep in one corner behind a ragged curtain. There was even a tiny room on the other side with a proper door to it. This was the first time Emmy had ever had somewhere of her own to sleep, and even if it was under the slope of the roof and you could only stand up in the middle of it, she loved having somewhere to take refuge when men came to visit her mother. In their last lodgings she'd had to go and sit outside on the stairs whenever her mother had a visitor and it had been cold in winter as well as uncomfortable, with men going up and down the stairs at all hours.

Madge made a scornful noise in her throat. "Well, they're not the best rooms *I've* ever had. I was born to a decent family with a whole house of our own, a big one. And when I was with your father we lived in style, with four bedrooms and a maid to do the rough work. Why, Emerick would have given

me anything I wanted—*anything at all!*—and after he died I was so upset they feared for my life and . . .”

Even though she'd heard this story so many times she could have recited it by heart, Emmy didn't interrupt but lost herself in her own thoughts and let her mother run on. What did it matter if they'd once lived well? *She* couldn't remember it. *If* it was true! All she could remember was going to bed hungry many a time, and wearing old clothes that had holes in until a kind neighbour mended them and taught her to sew when she was five. Which had annoyed her mother so much she had provided Emmy with better clothes from then on. Well, most of the time, anyway.

Madge's voice droned on and on, talking about George now. Emmy knew that if she said anything disapproving about him her mother would grow angry and lose that happy expression—and it would not change a thing. When her mother decided on something she never listened to anyone else, let alone considered what might go wrong. No, she just rushed in and did whatever took her fancy. At thirteen going on fourteen, Emmy knew she had far more common sense. She often thought her mother was like a butterfly, fluttering around aimlessly most of the time and never settling for long anywhere.

Until George appeared in their lives it had been a while since the last regular protector and Emmy had hoped there wouldn't be another, that her mother would stay in this job, which involved singing as well as serving booze. Madge might even—it was the girl's dearest wish—stop having visitors at night. Emma hated the men coming to their room, absolutely hated it, especially now they had started looking at her as well.

What a stupid thing to wish for! Even if they didn't need the money, her mother didn't consider life complete without a man and kept fooling herself that one of them would marry her so that she'd be *safe*. Her mother used that word with such longing it sometimes brought tears into Emmy's eyes. As far as the girl could see there was no safety anywhere in the world and it was a stupid thing to hope for.

The ladies at the Mission said this world was a vale of tears and only a preparation for the next life. Emmy had met the ladies three moves ago. They ran a Bible School every Sunday for poor children and she still went there sometimes, even though it was a long walk from here. The ladies gave you bread and cheese if you listened to their stories and learned to sing their hymns. Some of the tunes were nice, but the words were long and Emmy often had no idea what she was singing about. But it was always warm in the Mission and they told you stories from the Bible as well as singing hymns.

They'd even started teaching Emmy to read and she could now spell out the simpler words and write her name quite clearly. Her mother had laughed at that and for a while it had amused her to practise reading with her daughter, something Madge was really good at. They would spell out words together on a cracked slate she'd brought home one day. Then she'd grown tired of that game, in spite of Emmy's pleas for more lessons, and the slate had vanished one night in a sudden move.

"Where are we going to live this time, then?" Emmy asked when at last her mother stopped speaking and sat staring into space.

"Northby, where I grew up. But we won't be going there for a week or two yet."

"But you always say you'll never go back. And we won't know anyone in Northby. You said your mother and father were dead."

"Well, I've changed my mind about going back, haven't I? And we'll know George. He has an alehouse there and it must bring in good money, for he's never short of a shilling or two. So we'll be *safer* there."

"Are you going to work for him?"

"Maybe." Madge sighed and added, "You do what you have to in this world, my girl, or else you starve—as you should understand by now." She looked at Emmy and added thoughtfully, "We'll have to see if we can get a regular job for you as well. George said he'd help me find one. You're more than

old enough, for all you're so short and skinny. I was a woman grown at your age, though I've always wished I were taller." She frowned as she studied Emmy. "You're getting far too pretty for your own good, or you would be if you'd do something with all that hair. We'll wash it before I go to work and comb out those tangles. But I'm not having you messing around with men, so we'll keep your skirts short and your tops loose then you'll still look like a child. It'll be safer."

As if Emmy would mess around with men. She hated them! And if they went to Northby they'd be in George Duckworth's power, which made her shiver to think of it. Here at least she always felt that if anything happened to her mother she could ask the ladies at the Mission to help her find a place in service. They'd offered to do that already, but she couldn't leave Madge, who wouldn't be able to cope on her own. Besides, the two of them had fun together sometimes. No one could make you feel happy like her mother did when she was in a good mood. That was one of the reasons why men liked her.

When Madge went out to work that night Emmy went to bed and bolted the door of her room from inside. She was not tired and as she lay there staring up at the night sky through the tiny skylight, she kept seeing again the gloating expression on her mother's face and hearing the boasts about what George had promised to do for them. A whole house of their own, good furniture, nice clothes, plenty to eat . . .

Why should he do all this? It didn't make sense. He wasn't a kind man, whatever her mother said. Even Emmy could tell that.

When she got back from work late that night, Madge Carter checked her daughter's bedroom door and smiled to find it locked. Lighting a candle, she used it to stare at herself in the specked mirror on the mantelpiece, grimacing at what she saw. One of the younger women had called her a "silly old bugger"

tonight. She wasn't old, not really, but she wasn't young, either. She'd been pretty once and it upset her to see the wrinkles round her eyes, the faded colour of her hair and the sagging skin under her chin.

Emmy looked very like the way her mother had in her youth and the contrast made Madge feel worse about herself. Her daughter had the same light brown hair falling in waves about her shoulders, though her eyes were hazel with gold flecks like her father's had been, not blue like her mother's. Emerick had had such pretty eyes for a man.

Madge sighed as she moved away from the mirror. In the daytime men no longer looked at her as she walked by, though she could still pass for pretty in night's kinder shadows. But once your looks faded you had no chance of bettering yourself. George was her last chance, she was quite sure of that. If she didn't keep him happy it might be hard to find another man to love her. If only . . . but it was no use lingering on what might have been. When Emerick had died suddenly and agonisingly of a pain in the belly, she and her daughter had been sent away by his family and the money they'd given Madge hadn't lasted. She had not dared ask them for more and soon found out then how useless the words *if only* were when you and your child needed something to eat.

She sighed and went to stare out of the dormer window at the rain, which was now pelting down and turning the cobbled street and rows of grey slate roofs to shiny black in the moonlight. Feeling a bit down, she picked up the bottle of gin she'd brought home with her, unable to resist the warmth it gave—not to mention the feeling that everything would turn out well this time. She was glad Emmy had gone to bed because her daughter looked so disapproving when she drank. As if a woman who'd been as badly treated as Madge had didn't deserve all the comfort she could get! Finding a glass, she poured out a measure and took a good swallow, sighing in relief as warmth began to spread through her body.

As memories of her husband flooded through her she sipped daintily from the glass—only sluts drank out of the bottle. Emerick had been kind as well as good-looking and fun. George couldn't hold a

candle to him. He could be ruthless, cruel even. She knew that. But with him looking after her she felt safe again—well, more or less.

Cradling the glass in her hands she sat on, her feet aching from all the running to and fro tonight. She wished George were with her now. He'd have driven away these miseries with his strong, warm body and his exciting plans for getting rich.

When she grew tired she rested her head on her arms and woke up later, shivering, to a dark room, rain still beating against the windows and a fire that had gone out. As she stumbled across to her bed she admitted to herself that she was dreading going back to Northby, something she'd sworn never to do. Her father and mother had been a pair of old miseries and she'd been glad to get away from them and their suffocating respectability. They might be dead but her brother Isaac was still living in the town with his ugly old hag of a wife. He had married for money but it hadn't brought him much joy when he was younger and she doubted that things would have changed since.

It was a long time before Madge could get to sleep, thinking of the price she might have to pay for being with George. Would have to pay. And in Northby, of all places. She was not so stupid she didn't realise what he wanted her for. But she also knew she could make him laugh, surprising amusement out of him as no other woman could. She prayed it would be enough to hold him.

Hands stuffed into his pockets, Jack Staley watched his father Jem and brother Tom black their faces with soot from the chimney and listened to them joking with one another. He felt so furious at the way they were risking their lives that the words he'd been holding back burst out. "They'll be waiting for you!"

Big Jem Staley grinned at his second son. "They won't, you know. We've planned it all out careful-like. They've only got one watchman at Rishmore's tonight because th'other 'un fell ill." He winked.

“Suffering from a severe case of knock on the head. Old Phil won’t give us no trouble. We s’ll smash up them damned new weaving machines afore they can bring in the military.” He cocked his head on one side. “Sure tha doesn’t want to come wi’ us, lad?”

“Aye, very sure, Dad. I don’t agree with what you’re doing.”

Big Jem’s expression darkened. “I should *make* thi come. I’m ’shamed to see a son o’ mine holding back when there’s summat important to be done.”

“You couldn’t force me,” Jack said simply, folding his arms and staring challengingly at him. “I’m near as big as you two now an’ I’d kick up a right old fuss. You couldn’t keep what you’re doing secret with me yelling an’ struggling all down the street.”

Tom broke the tension, as he usually did. “An’ you’re twice as stubborn as we are, too.” He laughed, cuffing Jack affectionately about the ear. “Leave him be, Dad. He allus was an old sobersides.”

But a sob from his mother made Jack grab his father’s arm and beg once again, “Don’t do it, Dad! Look how you’re upsetting our Mam.”

Jem glanced towards his weeping wife, a guilty yet stubborn look, then shook his head. “She’s allus gettin’ upset about summat. Any road, I can’t let th’other lads down. Not now. Nor I don’t want to.”

Jack kicked the toe of his shoe against the table leg in a rhythm that emphasised his words. “You’re wrong about all this, Dad. *Wrong!* Violence won’t get you anywhere an’ it won’t stop the Rishmores from using them power looms, neither. *It won’t!*” To his mind you had to be stupid as well as dishonest to steal or damage the property of other people, especially ones as rich and powerful as the Rishmores who had just taken delivery of some new power looms at the mill. The handloom weavers like his dad were up in arms about it, but you couldn’t stop progress or prevent the rich from doing as they pleased. Look how old Mr Rishmore ordered folk around at work, even his own son, and dismissed them on the spot if they didn’t do exactly as he said.

Jem shrugged and wrapped a muffler round his neck to hide the lower half of his face. "Suit thyself, lad. But don't come crying to me when they throw thi out of work because a damned metal monster has taken thy place in t' mill. All I can get now is damned checked cloth to weave, an' me a skilled weaver an' all. Things'll get worse if we don't do summat, mark my words. If women can work them new machines, why should they take men on at all when it costs 'em twice as much in wages? Who'll be the breadwinners then? Women, that's who. It's unnatural, that's what it is, an' we won't stand for it!"

He went across to give his wife a quick, bracing hug. "Don't wait up for me, Netta love."

He said that quite often, Jack thought, though it was usually because he was going out to the alehouse for a wet with the lads.

She flung her arms round her husband's waist, begging, "Don't go, Jem! Think of the childer, if you won't think of me."

He pushed her roughly away. "I *am* thinking of them childer. Six on 'em we've raised, Netta Staley, an' what for? To see 'em go hungry, that's what. To see our Jack take a job in that damned mill like a slavey, 'stead of getting his own loom upstairs here. We have to show Rishmore we shan't put up with it an' *force* him to stop buying them damned machines."

His anger made Netta sink down on her chair and close her eyes, but tears still trickled down her cheeks. "They'll call out the soldiers on you," she said in a dull voice. "Mr Rishmore threatened it an' he'll do it too. You'll be shot and killed like my uncle was at Peterloo. It's not ten year since that happened an' it'll happen again. An' I'll never forgive you for dragging our Tom into it. Never."

"He didn't have to drag me, Mam," Tom said gently. "I happen to agree with him."

She looked at him, all her love for her handsome first-born showing in her face. "Then you're as daft as he is, lad. What shall me and the kids do if owt happens to you two?"

"Ah, nowt's going to happen to us. We can allus run away if there's trouble, can't we?"

“Right, then, are thi’ ready, Tom lad?” Jem crammed his old felt hat down over his eyes and turned to leave, stopping briefly to call to Jack, “Keep that door latch on, son. I don’t want anyone comin’ in an’ seein’ we’re not home.”

When the sound of his father’s footsteps had died away and all that was left was the patter of rain beating against the windows, Jack went across to put his arm round his mother’s shaking shoulders. “Don’t take on, Mam. They’ll likely be all right.”

But she continued to weep and made no effort to go to bed. “Four on ’em there are upstairs, four childer younger than you. Your dad doesn’t care about me, but he ought to think about them.”

Jack didn’t say anything. Maybe his father would care about her more if she didn’t nag him all the time and make his life a misery. He felt sorry for them both. They should never have got wed, they were so unsuited. And his father drank too much, which had left the rest of them hungry more than once. It wasn’t so bad now because though handloom weaving paid less and less, for all his father and Tom’s hard work, Jack and Meg were bringing in money as well. But he would never forget going to bed with an empty belly when he was younger and seeing his mother go without to give the little ’uns a bite or two more. His dad had never gone without, though.

Meg, who was only eighteen months younger than he was, crept down to join them.

“You should have gone with ’em, our Jack.” She scowled at him. “I’d be with Dad if I were a man.”

“Then it’s a good job you’re a girl, isn’t it?” he threw back at her.

An hour later they heard hoofbeats, then shouting and shots in the distance. Netta moaned and began to sob again, but when Jack went towards the door, she screamed and flung herself in front of him. “You’re not going out!”

“Just to see what’s happening, Mam.”

“No. You’re not leaving this house!”

She fell into such a passion of weeping he couldn't leave her. He and Meg had to half-carry her back to her chair.

They were still sitting in front of the fire half an hour later when the door burst open, sending the clumsy wooden latch clattering to the ground. As the parish constable came striding in, Netta moaned and clutched Jack's hand.

"Mrs Staley?"

Jack was puzzled. Eli Makepeace knew perfectly well who she was because Northby was a small town.

His mother nodded, her eyes huge with fear in her thin face.

Eli took a deep breath and said it baldly, because there was no way to soften such news. "I'm afraid your husband's dead. He was shot while attacking the property of Mr Rishmore. And your son Thomas has been arrested and taken to prison."

She let out one piercing scream then fainted.

Jack tried to get to her, but the constable stepped between them and when Jack would have shoved him out of the way, the soldier who had accompanied him stepped forward, raising his rifle threateningly.

"We need to have a word with you first, lad," Eli said. "You see to her, lass!"

Jack hardly heard him. He was watching Meg kneel beside their mother, tears running down her cheeks. She had been their father's favourite. Although Jem Staley was big and rough, he had loved his children and Jack had a hundred memories of him cuddling or teasing the younger ones, calling Meg his little pet lamb . . . He couldn't believe his father would never do so again.

He stood still, not daring to give way to his own grief. He wanted to, though, wanted to weep like a great baby because the last thing he'd done was quarrel with his father—and now they could never make it up.

Eli looked severely at him. "Where have you been tonight?"

He pulled his thoughts together hurriedly. "At home with my mother."

The constable ran a hand across Jack's shoulders and squinted at his face, touching his hair briefly.

The soldier still had his rifle at the ready, so Jack stood still and let them do as they chose. At other times he liked and respected Eli Makepeace for they were both in the church choir. Tonight, however, Eli was on *their* side.

"His hair's dry an' so are his clothes," Eli said in a formal voice. "Will you bear witness to that for me?"

The soldier stepped forward and made sure of this for himself before nodding. "Aye. This one's definitely not been outside."

Eli turned back to Jack, his voice a little less harsh. "Why didn't you go with your father, Jack lad?"

"Because I'm not stupid." But now he almost wished he had, because he was at home safe and Tom had been clapped in jail. He realised Eli was speaking again and forced himself to attend.

"Well, you've done the right thing. Mr Rishmore wants a list of them as stopped at home. I'll see your name goes on it. It'll likely keep you your job."

Jack would have liked to tell him to mind his own business, but he'd been working in the mill for long enough to know you didn't get on the bad side of old Mr Rishmore. Gesturing towards his mother he said, "Thanks. She'll need my wages now."

Eli nodded and stepped back. "Aye. She's lucky to have a sensible son like you."

As he and the soldier turned to leave, Jack followed them to the door and asked in a low voice, “Where have they taken Dad’s body?”

“To the church hall. He’ll go into a pauper’s grave unless you’ve money put by for a proper burial?”

Eli looked questioningly at the lad, who shook his head.

“And our Tom?”

“He’ll likely wind up in Lancaster County Gaol till the next Assizes. It’s a serious matter, machine breaking is.”

Jack had to ask it, though the words nearly choked him, “Will they—hang him?”

Eli shrugged. “That or transport him. He was a damned fool. The whole town’s full of fools, it seems, my own cousin among them.” He clapped Jack on the shoulder, the only sympathy he dared offer, then moved towards the door, signalling to the soldier to follow him.

When the two men had left, Jack leaned his head against the wall near the door and tried to hold back the sobs that were choking his throat, but they wouldn’t be held in. He couldn’t believe his dad was dead. Jem Staley had always dominated this house, been so full of life and vigour. And Tom—further sobs came out, strangled, harsh noises—Tom had been Jack’s best friend as well as his brother. He could not imagine life without him.

It was a minute or two before he could control himself enough to turn and then he saw Meg still kneeling by their unconscious mother, chafing her hands and weeping quietly.

She looked up as he came across the room and offered in a small, tight voice, “I’m sorry for what I said to you, Jack. You were right not to go out tonight. Do you think Sam Repley was with them?”

“Aye, I should think so. He’s another damned hothead like our Tom.”

She sobbed aloud at that, a rare thing for a lass who usually kept her feelings to herself.

He put his arm round her, saying, “Meg, Meg.” But what comfort could he offer when he still felt raw with his own grief?

She stared down at her lap. “I’ve allus liked Sam. Even when I were a little ’un.” Her voice was dull, her whole body drooping.

Jack gave her another hug. She wasn’t quite fifteen, but she seemed older suddenly. “Eh, love, you allus did choose a hard road. Could you not have settled your fancy on a lad as wasn’t so wild?”

“Sam’s allus been special. An’ he cares about me, too. He said so.”

“You should be thinking of our Dad an’ Tom now, not an outsider.”

“I am thinking of them. But I’m thinking of all as were out machine breaking tonight as well. I heard you ask if they’d hang our Tom. They might hang them all.” She began sobbing.

He could not think of anything to say that was worth saying, so he watched his mother. She was conscious now, he could tell from the way her eyes were moving behind her closed lids. “Mam?” he said gently.

She groaned and kept her eyes closed as if she didn’t want to face reality.

“Mam,” he said more urgently, and at last she opened her eyes.

“Tell me it isn’t true?” she begged, clutching his arm.

“You know it is.” He expected her to weep hysterically or even faint again, but she didn’t.

Swallowing hard, she sat up and asked, “What are we going to do, Jack? How can I feed them childer now?” Her voice rose. “I’ll kill myself, aye an’ them too, afore I let anyone put us in the poorhouse.”

“It won’t come to that.” But he couldn’t be certain. He looked round, feeling bitter. Recently they’d been living more comfortably than ever before, but now, despite his brave words, he couldn’t think how they would possibly manage—always supposing Mr Rishmore let him stay on at the mill. He wasn’t

earning a man's wages yet. Old Rishmore didn't pay you full wages till you were eighteen. Said he wasn't encouraging early marriage. His mother's voice, low but still throbbing with suppressed hysteria, made him look round.

She clutched his arm. "Promise me you won't leave me, Jack. Promise me you'll always be there to look after us. Promise you won't desert us like your father did."

"No one can always be there," he protested.

She screamed and shook him, then began to weep hysterically, saying, "Promise me, promise me!" over and over.

So wild was her appearance that he feared for her reason and could not refuse what she asked. "I promise I'll do my best, Mam."

It was some time before she stopped weeping then she fixed her eyes on his face and demanded, "You won't go getting married and leaving us with nothing?"

"Mam, that's not fair," Meg put in.

Netta rounded on her. "You shut up, you young slut! We s'll be lucky if you've not gotten a bairn in your belly, the way you've been carrying on with that Sam."

Jack saw his sister flinch as if their mother had struck her and stepped between them as he often did. "Mam, if I do get married it'll not be till the little 'uns are grown an' able to look after theirs. An' I'll allus make a home for you." There was nothing he could do to help his father now and his brother's fate was in the hands of the judge, but somehow he would find a way to look after his mother and the others, that he vowed most solemnly. And as Joey was only two, it would be a good many years before he would be free of that promise. He knew it and did not flinch from it, not when he saw the anguish on his mother's face, not when he thought of Shad, Joey and young Ginny going hungry.

On that thought, he called up the stairs, knowing the children could not help but be awake after all the noise for the walls were thin, "Come on down, you lot."

They stood huddled by the foot of the stairs, pressed close together. His mother made no move towards them so Jack did, gathering them to him and saying in a voice which broke on the dreadful words, "You heard it all, didn't you? Our Dad's been killed and our Tom's in prison."

The two youngest looked up at him only half understanding the significance of this and Shad gulped audibly as he nodded. He was old enough at eleven to know how hard it was to set bread on the table every day.

"Us Staleys cannot do owt now but stick together," Jack went on. "We mun help one another as best we can. An' help our Mam, too." He'd hoped his mother would come over to them to reinforce what he was saying, but she didn't. She stayed where she was, on her own, sobbing and rocking to and fro, still perilously close to hysterics. He knew then that the main reason he must stay with her was the children. Someone had to care for them properly and his mother grew more selfish as she grew older. He looked across at Meg, also standing by herself, and jerked his head in a silent invitation to join them.

She stepped across and put one hand hesitantly on Ginny's shoulder, then all of the children were hugging one another, weeping together for their father and brother.

Jack didn't need the knocker-up rapping at his bedroom window in the morning to wake him because he'd hardly slept. Tom usually shared this bed with him, while Shad and Joey slept on a mattress in the corner. It felt wrong to have the whole bed to himself, lonely too. And in his mind's eye he kept seeing Tom, manacled and perhaps bleeding, because the soldiers weren't gentle when they were dealing with a riot.

His mother stared at him when he went downstairs at his usual time to go to the mill and said, “Eh, you look different, older!”

Jack certainly felt different. He knew himself to be a man grown now, one with heavy responsibilities—and all this just two weeks past his sixteenth birthday. It wasn’t fair, but then life rarely was. He must just get on with it. And the first thing to do was see if he still had a job.

It was all for nothing, Jack kept thinking as he joined the other people making their way towards the big brick building that dominated the town. The new machines were still there and now many families were deprived of their breadwinners, his dad was dead, Tom in jail—and all for nothing. Folk nodded to one another but there were no cheery greetings and banter. Not this morning. And more than one face showed eyes swollen by tears.

The big mill gates were closed, with only the little side gate open, so they had to queue to get in. Constable Makepeace was standing outside with a soldier, both of them very watchful, so no one said anything as they stood there in the rain.

Inside Isaac Butterfield stood in the little boxed-in shelter, with his wages book on its wooden stand, checking them in one by one. He was as much part of the mill as the Rishmores were.

As his turn came Jack held his breath, praying they would not turn him away.

Mr Butterfield looked at him, then said his name as usual and ticked the big book.

Jack let out his breath and passed through the gate. Maybe there was hope still. He shuddered as he looked round the rain-slicked mill yard. There were signs of damage everywhere: stones and pieces of broken glass swept into piles, the windows of the weaving shed gaping to the weather.

Mr Graslow was standing outside his little office in the weaving shed. He nodded to Jack and muttered in a low voice, “Sorry about your father, lad.”

“Thanks.” Jack went to fetch the broom and started his first job, sweeping out Mr Graslow’s little office with even more care than usual. He then went to fill the oil cans. One or two people muttered words of sympathy as he passed and he wished they wouldn’t because they made him want to sob like a little lass.

Some faces were missing. No one commented or asked where they were.

There were people coming and going in the yard and office all morning, and men mending the broken windows, but no one in the weaving shed with its rows of noisy, clanking machines looked up, just kept their heads down and worked steadily. There was one woman in between each pair of machines tending them, the odd child fetching and carrying for the women, while the few men left in the mill now mainly worked in the engine house or drove the drays that fetched the yarn or took the bolts of cloth to be finished or dyed.

Jack had been kept on when other lads were turned off, either because they’d grown older or because the machines had been changed. Mr Graslow, the overlooker, said he was a smart young fellow and was training him up to act as assistant overlooker when he was older and the mill grew bigger, as Mr Rishmore said it would. Jack had been proud of being singled out for that, though if there were any other sort of work available he’d not have chosen to work in such a noisy, stifling place as the mill, with its rows of machines thumping away day in, day out. Now, as main breadwinner, he was terrified of being turned off and for all his grief he worked harder than any of the others.

The hours passed and Mr Graslow didn’t say a word about the machine breaking. What did this mean? Only—if they were going to turn Jack off, why had they let him start work? When Mr Rishmore dismissed anyone, they usually had to get out of the mill straight away, often with him beating them about the shoulders with his walking stick.

After the half-hour dinner break, during which people ate their snap in near silence, the overlooker laid a hand on Jack's shoulder as he was about to go back to his work.

"Mr Samuel wants to see you in the office."

Feeling a hundred years old Jack nodded and crossed the yard to stand in front of the polished wooden counter in the outer office.

The elderly clerk in the corner had his head down and was scratching busily with his quill, while Mr Butterfield, the head clerk, was standing behind the counter, grim-faced. He greeted the lad with, "Wait over there, Staley."

There were no seats, so Jack stood by the wall for a good half hour until the worry had built up inside him like a ton of lead. He felt sure now that he was going to lose his job, then they'd all be turned out of their house and have to go on the tramp to beg for a living. Or be sent to the poorhouse.

At last he heard a bell ring and Mr Butterfield came out from behind the counter to show him into the master's room.

Mr Samuel, the master's son, who was the same age as Mr Butterfield, was sitting behind his father's big polished desk today, looking very stern. He said nothing, staring at Jack as if sizing him up. The lad stood quietly. He had never been inside this room before but it was just as luxurious as folk said, with a thick carpet on the floor, velvet curtains at the window and solid pieces of well-polished mahogany furniture everywhere you looked. He felt so nervous he wondered if he'd even be able to frame a word.

Mr Samuel was not as severe in his dealings with the operatives as his father, but he was still strict enough. He fined those who came late to work or who disobeyed the rules by leaving the places where they toiled without permission. There were rules for everything, it seemed sometimes. You had to sweep the floor where you worked four times a day, oil the machinery at regular intervals, not speak to

anyone while you were working except about the work itself. Folk joked that you had to piss carefully, too, or they'd fine you for doing that wrongly. No one was joking today, though.

Jack usually managed to escape without a fine and he'd have to be doubly careful now, because they would need every farthing he could earn. Every single one.

If he still had a job.

"Go and stand in front of the desk," Mr Butterfield whispered, giving him a poke to make him move forward.

Mr Samuel picked up a piece of paper and studied it.

Feeling resentful as well as afraid Jack stood where the clerk pointed, clasped his hands tightly in front of him and waited. What did the paper say? Surely there was nothing they could accuse him of?

Mr Samuel finished reading, set the paper down and stared at Jack again. "You didn't go machine breaking with your father and brother last night, Staley. Why not?"

"I didn't think it was right, sir."

"Why not?"

"Because you can't stop progress, even when it hurts you and yours. And because the machines were your family's property, not ours."

Mr Samuel consulted another piece of paper. "I'm told you go to church regularly and are a member of the choir."

"Yes, sir." The main reason he went to church was for the school Parson ran after the Sunday services, where you could learn to read and write. Jack didn't particularly enjoy the services or hold any strong religious beliefs, but Parson had coaxed him to join the choir when they found his voice had developed into a good baritone. He enjoyed the singing.

“Parson Bradley speaks well of you, says you’re an apt pupil, rarely miss a reading class. And he says your voice would be missed from the choir.”

“Yes, sir.” He would thank Mr Bradley later for those kind words.

“I’ve decided not to dismiss you, but I’ll be watching you carefully from now on. As long as you continue to attend church regularly and sing in the choir and—”

Jack debated whether to agree, then realised he could not build his new life on lies. “I’m sorry, sir, but I don’t think I’ll be able to do that, though I’ll be sorry to miss my Sunday classes, I shall indeed.”

Mr Samuel’s expression grew chill. “Explain yourself, if you please.”

“I’m the main wage earner now, with Dad dead and our Tom—gone. I’ve got a mother, a younger sister and two younger brothers, one only two years old, to support. I’ll have to see if there’s any extra work to be had on Sundays and—”

“On the Sabbath day!”

“Sir, I don’t *want* to break the Sabbath,” Jack said hastily, knowing the Rishmores made a fuss about Sabbath observance, “but I can’t let the little ’uns go hungry and we can’t live on my wages, let alone there’s the rent to find.”

Mr Samuel glared at him. “I’m minded to dismiss you for that impertinence!”

“I wasn’t meaning to be impertinent, sir, truly I wasn’t.” Jack heard his voice cracking with anguish as he got the words out. “But I don’t make promises I can’t keep.”

After a short silence, Mr Rishmore asked, “What sort of work are you likely to find on the Lord’s Day?”

“Anything I can, sir. I don’t rightly know what. Maybe helping out at the livery stables or working on a farm. Whatever turns up. I can’t afford to be choosy, can I? It’ll be life and death for us.”

Mr Samuel was drumming his fingers on the desk now, frowning down at the piece of paper.

“You’re living in one of our houses, are you not?”

“Yes, sir. In Upper Bank Street.”

Silence, then Mr Samuel said, “We must find you another house. You won’t need the third floor now. And I will reduce the rent to sixpence a week on condition that you attend church *every single Sunday.*”

Jack gaped at him. “Sir?”

“They say charity begins at home, do they not? I am a firm believer in Sabbath observance, but I can see that your money will not be enough to feed your brothers and sisters until you’re earning a man’s wages. You would not earn as much on a Sunday as the rent I remit.”

“No, sir. I—don’t know what to say, sir. I’m that grateful!”

“You showed principle, lad, both in refusing to join your father in his criminal attack on our property and in refusing to promise what you could not carry out. See that you continue to live an honest Christian life.”

Jack felt dazed as he made his way back to the weaving shed. Mr Graslow smiled, clapped him on the shoulder and said he was glad not to have to train someone else. But as well as the burden of his sorrow, Jack now had the added burden that for the first time he and his family needed to accept charity. He hated the feeling being beholden gave him, as if someone had put shackles on his feet. Until now he had been able to get away occasionally on fine weekends, going for a tramp across the moors and clambering up the crags. He loved rock climbing, though his mother would have a fit if she knew about that. But now he wouldn’t dare take a single Sunday off.

He looked round as he started to sweep his corner of the floor for the third time that day, and it came to him even more forcibly than before that if he ever had a chance to get away from all this, he

would. His father had protested about him not getting his own loom at home, but any fool could see that the days of handloom weaving were nearly past so Jack had got a job at the mill instead.

The noise of the machines seemed twice as deafening that afternoon and he felt as if the walls were closing in on him. That made him feel angry at his father, who was to be buried in a pauper's grave the next day, angry at Tom, too, for they'd spoiled his life as well as their own.

But he and Tom had shared a bed all their lives, knocked around together, protected one another. He would miss his brother so very much. Tears welled in his eyes at the thought and he brushed them quickly away with his sleeve, hoping no one had noticed.

At the end of the day he put his things away and filed out quietly with the others, saying, "Good night, Mr Butterfield," to the clerk who was counting them out, as he or the other clerk counted them all in every morning.

The following morning Mr Butterfield beckoned to Jack when he arrived at the mill and the lad's heart began to thump in panic. Had Mr Rishmore changed his mind? Was he going to be dismissed after all?

"There's a house in Feather Lane. Mr Samuel says you're to move there at the weekend. And the rent will be sixpence a week only." When Jack said nothing, the clerk added quietly, "He's being very generous. You should be grateful."

"Yes, sir. I am."

"And I mentioned that it's your father's funeral. Mr Samuel says you can have an hour off to attend and he won't dock your wages."

"Thank you, sir." Jack would rather not have gone. It horrified him how his grief for his father was all mixed up with anger. But he would go for his mother's sake. During the night he had heard muffled sobs from the front room downstairs, where she had slept with his father.

Yesterday evening she had looked like an old woman, her hair straggling and unkempt, her eyes red and swollen. And she'd shrieked at little Joey for laughing softly over some game or other. As if a child of two could understand what was happening!

It had galled Jack to see how touchingly grateful she was to the Rishmores for their charity.

Grateful! To the very people who had called in the soldiers and caused his father's death!

He had no older brother to laugh with now, nothing to laugh at, either, and the anger seemed to have settled inside him in a hard, hot lump.