

But as he drew up the window and leaned out, he gave a sigh of relief. His room was high up at the very top of the great building. From his watch tower he saw a dark and crowded city, the streets defined by a million twinkling lamps; a city upon the banks of an inky river, a city where tall chimneys rose into a murky sky, belching smoke. And he thought that he could hear the hum and roar of a myriad looms—the singing of unnumbered spindles, the clank of the self-cutting mules, the hiss of the endless leather bands.

Yes! this was Shuttleworth after all . . . He heard clogs rattling over cobble stones on the dark mornings of his youth. The acrid odour of yarn came to his nostrils, and he had a vision of a slim girl with a check shawl over her head coming back from the Harrop Company's Mill to the little house in the long mean street after her day's work was done.

Five and twenty years gone—a quarter of a century ago!

Jenny Pennistone, small, insignificant, but with great brown eyes, had nothing to say to the shy, awkward machine minder of nineteen. She had heard, had Jenny Pennistone, that the lad who lived four houses away in Clough Lane, was a bit too fond of pigeon flying, and risked his shillings on the results of the league matches—Jenny came of a serious family.

How it all came back to him!

"What's wrong wi' me, Jenny?"

"What's wrong wi' you, Johnny? I fear the devil's howdin' you. Thou'rt ill spken of in t' factory."

"Jenny listen to me."

"Nay, lad, I can have no carnal talk wi' you. My feyther . . ."

John Barlas shut down the window with a bang. He saw those great brown eyes brimming over with unshed tears, and he remembered the wild anger which welled up in his heart and caused him to say dreadful irreparable words—words which Jenny Pennistone could never forget, words which had sent him desperately out of England to try his fortune.

He got his overcoat, put on a cap, and passed out of the hotel. He walked down the great roaring Church Street with its magnificent shops, its crowds of people gazing into the gleaming windows, took a turn to the right down a street of solid offices, crossed Jubilee Square, where the famous Town Hall raised its tower to the sky, and caught a tram—an electric tram now, not the horse-driven, reversible vehicle of his youth—for Clough End.

Here in the great industrial quarter of the city where the slaves of the loom, the bobbin, and the spindle lived their days, nothing was changed. The immense seven-storied mills blazed with orange-coloured light in their innumerable small-paned windows with the rounded tops. Lorries drawn by elephantine horses moved ponderously in and out of the mill yards; the air was full of a muted thunder and vibration as if all the bees in the world were massing unseen for an attack upon the sons of men.

John Barlas sniffed at the smoky, chemical-laden air. His nostrils dilated with enjoyment, he quivered with pleasure at the music of the looms.

"There's nought amiss wi' this," he muttered, falling back into the speech of his boyhood. "Happen I'll spend Christmas here, reet among it all." And there was a tear in his eye as he turned into a network of small streets to find a lodging.

"Apartments"—that might do. The little house was in the centre of a long row of rabbit hutches similar to itself. It was not three hundred yards away from the Harrop Company's Mills . . .

The door opened and a pale girl of nineteen or twenty with a mass of brown hair, stood looking at him wonderingly.

"You have rooms to let? I want a bedroom and a sitting-room."

The girl's eyes lighted up. "Come in," she said. "I hope we shall be able to suit you."