

Mill

Breath hissing out in smoky gasps. Boots hitting earth hollow from treading. They come wheezing in thin streams, a few glows from tobacco hands, no gloves: steaming caps and jackets thin against the last of night. Trailing threads from the height: women with muscled hands, lined faces. Children who do not play. It is too early and too late. Walls rough hewed by nature glower down, blacker edged, sharper edged: holding them muffled by the cold. The sluice is white, heard but not seen. None looks. Talking is not for the start of the day.

And the pirns fly in laughing shuttles. Women signal shouting louder, leaving weaving for more homespun. Brightest white and colours waving flags of cotton, rolling patterns rolled away. Looms bang in rattled clatter, cotton dust flies to burning lungs. And the warp and the weft and the thumping, thumping, rising, falling, "watch out, son". Children rush to dart and chatter, fetching, changing, coughing, gone.