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***THE WOMAN
WHO TOILS***

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The Woman Who Toils

**Being the Experiences of Two Gentlewomen as
Factory Girls**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

[CHAPTER I](#)

[CHAPTER II](#)

[CHAPTER III](#)

[CHAPTER IV](#)

[CHAPTER V](#)

[MARIE VAN VORST](#)

[CHAPTER VI](#)

[CHAPTER VII](#)

[CHAPTER VIII](#)

[THE MILL](#)

[CHAPTER IX](#)

CHAPTER I

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTORY

Any journey into the world, any research in literature, any study of society, demonstrates the existence of two distinct classes designated as the rich and the poor, the fortunate and the unfortunate, the upper and the lower, the educated and the uneducated—and a further variety of opposing epithets. Few of us who belong to the former category have come into more than brief contact with the labourers who, in the factories or elsewhere, gain from day to day a livelihood frequently insufficient for their needs. Yet all of us are troubled by their struggle, all of us recognize the misery of their surroundings, the paucity of their moral and esthetic inspiration, their lack of opportunity for physical development. All of us have a longing, pronounced or latent, to help them, to alleviate their distress, to better their condition in some, in every way.

Now concerning this unknown class whose oppression we deplore we have two sources of information: the financiers who, for their own material advancement, use the labourer as a means, and the philanthropists who consider the poor as objects of charity, to be treated sentimentally, or as economic cases to be studied theoretically. It is not by economics nor by the distribution of bread alone that we can find a solution for the social problem. More important for the happiness of man is the hope we cherish of

eventually bringing about a reign of justice and equality upon earth.

It is evident that, in order to render practical aid to this class, we must live among them, understand their needs, acquaint ourselves with their desires, their hopes, their aspirations, their fears. We must discover and adopt their point of view, put ourselves in their surroundings, assume their burdens, unite with them in their daily effort. In this way alone, and not by forcing upon them a preconceived ideal, can we do them real good, can we help them to find a moral, spiritual, esthetic standard suited to their condition of life. Such an undertaking is impossible for most. Sure of its utility, inspired by its practical importance, I determined to make the sacrifice it entailed and to learn by experience and observation what these could teach. I set out to surmount physical fatigue and revulsion, to place my intellect and sympathy in contact as a medium between the working girl who wants help and the more fortunately situated who wish to help her. In the papers which follow I have endeavoured to give a faithful picture of things as they exist, both in and out of the factory, and to suggest remedies that occurred to me as practical. My desire is to act as a mouthpiece for the woman labourer. I assumed her mode of existence with the hope that I might put into words her cry for help. It has been my purpose to find out what her capacity is for suffering and for joy as compared with ours; what tastes she has, what ambitions, what the equipment of woman is as compared to that of man: her equipment as determined,

1st. By nature,

2d. By family life,

3d. By social laws;

what her strength is and what her weaknesses are as compared with the woman of leisure; and finally, to discern the tendencies of a new society as manifested by its working girls.

After many weeks spent among them as one of them I have come away convinced that no earnest effort for their betterment is fruitless. I am hopeful that my faithful descriptions will perhaps suggest, to the hearts of those who read, some ways of rendering personal and general help to that class who, through the sordidness and squalour of their material surroundings, the limitation of their opportunities, are condemned to slow death—mental, moral, physical death! If into their prison's midst, after the reading of these lines, a single death pardon should be carried, my work shall not have been in vain.

CHAPTER II

Table of Contents

IN A PITTSBURG FACTORY

In choosing the scene for my first experiences, I decided upon Pittsburg, as being an industrial centre whose character was determined by its working population. It exceeds all other cities of the country in the variety and extent of its manufacturing products. Of its 321,616 inhabitants, 100,000 are labouring men employed in the mills. Add to these the great number of women and girls who work in the factories and clothing shops, and the character of the place becomes apparent at a glance. There is, moreover, another reason which guided me toward this Middle West town without its like. This land which we are accustomed to call democratic, is in reality composed of a multitude of kingdoms whose despots are the employers—the multi-millionaire patrons—and whose serfs are the labouring men and women. The rulers are invested with an authority and a power not unlike those possessed by the early barons, the feudal lords, the Lorenzo de Medicis, the Cheops; but with this difference, that whereas Pharaoh by his unique will controlled a thousand slaves, the steel magnate uses, for his own ends also, thousands of separate wills. It was a submissive throng who built the pyramids. The mills which produce half the steel the world requires are run by a collection of individuals. Civilization has undergone a change. The multitudes once worked for one; now each man works for himself first and for a master secondarily. In

our new society where tradition plays no part, where the useful is paramount, where business asserts itself over art and beauty, where material needs are the first to be satisfied, and where the country's unclaimed riches are our chief incentive to effort, it is not uninteresting to find an analogy with the society in Italy which produced the Renaissance. Diametrically opposed in their ideals, they have a common spirit. In Italy the rebirth was of the love of art, and of classic forms, the desire to embellish—all that was inspired by culture of the beautiful; the Renaissance in America is the rebirth of man's originality in the invention of the useful, the virgin power of man's wits as quickened in the crude struggle for life. Florence is *par excellence* the place where we can study the Italian Renaissance; Pittsburg appealed to me as a most favourable spot to watch the American Renaissance, the enlivening of energies which give value to a man devoid of education, energies which in their daily exercise with experience generate a new force, a force that makes our country what it is, industrially and economically. So it was toward Pittsburg that I first directed my steps, but before leaving New York I assumed my disguise. In the Parisian clothes I am accustomed to wear I present the familiar outline of any woman of the world. With the aid of coarse woolen garments, a shabby felt sailor hat, a cheap piece of fur, a knitted shawl and gloves I am transformed into a working girl of the ordinary type. I was born and bred and brought up in the world of the fortunate—I am going over now into the world of the unfortunate. I am to share their burdens, to lead their lives, to be present

as one of them at the spectacle of their sufferings and joys, their ambitions and sorrows.

I get no farther than the depot when I observe that I am being treated as though I were ignorant and lacking in experience. As a rule the gateman says a respectful "To the right" or "To the left," and trusts to his well-dressed hearer's intelligence. A word is all that a moment's hesitation calls forth. To the working girl he explains as follows: "Now you take your ticket, do you understand, and I'll pick up your money for you; you don't need to pay anything for your ferry—just put those three cents back in your pocket-book and go down there to where that gentleman is standing and he'll direct you to your train."

This without my having asked a question. I had divested myself of a certain authority along with my good clothes, and I had become one of a class which, as the gateman had found out, and as I find out later myself, are devoid of all knowledge of the world and, aside from their manual training, ignorant on all subjects.

My train is three hours late, which brings me at about noon to Pittsburg. I have not a friend or an acquaintance within hundreds of miles. With my bag in my hand I make my way through the dark, busy streets to the Young Women's Christian Association. It is down near a frozen river. The wind blows sharp and biting over the icy water; the streets are covered with snow, and over the snow the soot falls softly like a mantle of perpetual mourning. There is almost no traffic. Innumerable tramways ring their way up and down wire-lined avenues; occasionally a train of freight cars announces itself with a warning bell in the city's midst.

It is a black town of toil, one man in every three a labourer. They have no need for vehicles of pleasure. The trolleys take them to their work, the trains transport the products of the mills.

I hear all languages spoken: this prodigious town is a Western bazaar where the nations assemble not to buy but to be employed. The stagnant scum of other countries floats hither to be purified in the fierce bouillon of live opportunity. It is a cosmopolitan procession that passes me: the dusky Easterner with a fez of Astrakhan, the gentle-eyed Italian with a shawl of gay colours, the loose-lipped Hungarian, the pale, mystic Swede, the German with wife and children hanging on his arm.



"THE STREETS ARE COVERED WITH SNOW, AND OVER THE SNOW THE SOOT FALLS SOFTLY LIKE A MANTLE OF PERPETUAL MOURNING"

In this giant bureau of labour all nationalities gather, united by a common bond of hope, animated by a common chance of prosperity, kindred through a common effort, fellow-citizens in a new land of freedom.

At the central office of the Young Women's Christian Association I receive what attention a busy secretary can spare me. She questions and I answer as best I can.

"What is it you want?"

"Board and work in a factory."

"Have you ever worked in a factory?"

"No, ma'am."

"Have you ever done any housework?"

She talks in the low, confidential tone of those accustomed to reforming prisoners and reasoning with the poor.

"Yes, ma'am, I have done housework."

"What did you make?"

"Twelve dollars a month."

"I can get you a place where you will have a room to yourself and fourteen dollars a month. Do you want it?"

"No, ma'am."

"Are you making anything now?"

"No, ma'am."

"Can you afford to pay board?"

"Yes, as I hope to get work at once."

She directs me to a boarding place which is at the same time a refuge for the friendless and a shelter for waifs. The newly arrived population of the fast-growing city seems unfamiliar with the address I carry written on a card. I wait on cold street corners, I travel over miles of half-settled country, long stretches of shanties and saloons huddled close to the trolley line. The thermometer is at zero. Toward three o'clock I find the waif boarding-house.

The matron is in the parlour hovering over a gas stove. She has false hair, false teeth, false jewelry, and the dry, crabbed, inquisitive manner of the idle who are entrusted with authority. She is there to direct others and do nothing herself, to be cross and make herself dreaded. In the distance I can hear a shrill, nasal orchestra of children's voices. I am cold and hungry. I have as yet no job. The noise, the sordidness, the witchlike matron annoy me. I have a sudden impulse to flee, to seek warmth and food and proper shelter—to snap my fingers at experience and be grateful I was born among the fortunate. Something within me calls *Courage!* I take a room at three dollars a week with board, put my things in it, and while my feet yet ache with cold I start to find a factory, a pickle factory, which, the matron tells me, is run by a Christian gentleman.

I have felt timid and even overbold at different moments in my life, but never so audacious as on entering a factory door marked in gilt letters: "*Women Employees.*"

The Cerberus between me and the fulfilment of my purpose is a gray-haired timekeeper with kindly eyes. He sits in a glass cage and about him are a score or more of clocks all ticking soundly and all surrounded by an extra dial

of small numbers running from one to a thousand. Each number means a workman—each tick of the clock a moment of his life gone in the service of the pickle company. I rap on the window of the glass cage. It opens.

"Do you need any girls?" I ask, trying not to show my emotion.

"Ever worked in a factory?"

"No, sir; but I'm very handy."

"What have you done?"

"Housework," I respond with conviction, beginning to believe it myself.

"Well," he says, looking at me, "they need help up in the bottling department; but I don't know as it would pay you—they don't give more than sixty or seventy cents a day."

"I am awfully anxious for work," I say. "Couldn't I begin and get raised, perhaps?"

"Surely—there is always room for those who show the right spirit. You come in to-morrow morning at a quarter before seven. You can try it, and you mustn't get discouraged; there's plenty of work for good workers."

The blood tingles through my cold hands. My heart is lighter. I have not come in vain. I have a place!

When I get back to the boarding-house it is twilight. The voices I had heard and been annoyed by have materialized. Before the gas stove there are nine small individuals dressed in a strange combination of uniform checked aprons and patent leather boots worn out and discarded by the babies of the fortunate. The small feet they encase are crossed, and the freshly washed faces are demure, as the matron with the wig frowns down into a newspaper from

which she now and then hisses a command to order. Three miniature members are rocking violently in tiny rocking chairs.

"*Quit rocking!*" the false mother cries at them. "You make my head ache. Most of 'em have no parents," she explains to me. "None of 'em have homes."

Here they are, a small kingdom, not wanted, unwelcome, unprovided for, growled at and grumbled over. Yet each is developing in spite of chance; each is determining hour by hour his heritage from unknown parents. The matron leaves us; the rocking begins again. Conversation is animated. The three-year-old baby bears the name of a three-year-old hero. This "Dewey" complains in a plaintive voice of a too long absent mother. His rosy lips are pursed out even with his nose. Again and again he reiterates the refrain: "My mamma don't never come to see me. She don't bring me no toys." And then with pride, "My mamma buys rice and tea and lots of things," and dashing to the window as a trolley rattles by, "My mamma comes in the street cars, only," sadly, "she don't never come."

Not one of them has forgotten what fate has willed them to do without. At first they look shrinkingly toward my outstretched hand. Is it coming to administer some punishment? Little by little they are reassured, and, gaining in confidence, they sketch for me in disconnected chapters the short outlines of their lives.

"I've been to the hospital," says one, "and so's Lily. I drank a lot of washing soda and it made me sick."

Lily begins her hospital reminiscences. "I had typhoy fever—I was in the childun's ward awful long, and one night

they turned down the lights—it was just evening—and a man came in and he took one of the babies up in his arms, and we all said, 'What's the row? What's the row?' and he says 'Hush, the baby's dead.' And out in the hall there was something white, and he carried the baby and put it in the white thing, and the baby had a doll that could talk, and he put that in the white thing too, right alongside o' the dead baby. Another time," Lily goes on, "there was a baby in a crib alongside of mine, and one day he was takin' his bottle, and all of a suddint he choked; and he kept on chokin' and then he died, and he was still takin' his bottle."

Lily is five. I see in her and in her companions a familiarity not only with the mysteries but with the stern realities of life. They have an understanding look at the mention of death, drunkenness and all domestic difficulties or irregularities. Their vocabulary and conversation image the violent and brutal side of existence—the only one with which they are acquainted.

At bedtime I find my way upward through dark and narrow stairs that open into a long room with a slanting roof. It serves as nursery and parlour. In the dull light of a stove and an oil lamp four or five women are seated with babies on their knees. They have the meek look of those who doom themselves to acceptance of misfortune, the flat, resigned figures of the overworked. Their loose woolen jackets hang over their gaunt shoulders; their straight hair is brushed hard and smooth against high foreheads. One baby lies a comfortable bundle in its mother's arms; one is black in the face after a spasm of coughing; one howls its woes through a scarlet mask. The corners of the room are filled with the

drones—those who "work for a bite of grub." The cook, her washing done, has piled her aching bones in a heap; her drawn face waits like an indicator for some fresh signal to a new fatigue. Mary, the woman-of-all-work, who has spent more than one night within a prison's walls, has long ago been brutalized by the persistence of life in spite of crime; her gray hair ripples like sand under receding waves; her profile is strong and fine, but her eyes have a film of misery over them—dull and silent, they deaden her face. And Jennie, the charwoman, is she a cripple or has toil thus warped her body? Her arms, long and withered, swing like the broken branches of a gnarled tree; her back is twisted and her head bowed toward earth. A stranger to rest, she seems a mechanical creature wound up for work and run down in the middle of a task.

What could be hoped for in such surroundings? With every effort to be clean the dirt accumulates faster than it can be washed away. It was impossible, I found by my own experience, to be really clean. There was a total absence of beauty in everything—not a line of grace, not a pleasing sound, not an agreeable odour anywhere. One could get used to this ugliness, become unconscious even of the acrid smells that pervade the tenement. It was probable my comrades felt at no time the discomfort I did, but the harm done them is not the physical suffering their condition causes, but the moral and spiritual bondage in which it holds them. They are not a class of drones made differently from us. I saw nothing to indicate that they were not born with like *capacities* to ours. As our bodies accustom themselves to luxury and cleanliness, theirs grow hardened

to deprivation and filth. As our souls develop with the advantages of all that constitutes an ideal—an intellectual, esthetic and moral ideal—their souls diminish under the oppression of a constant physical effort to meet material demands. The fact that they become physically callous to what we consider unbearable is used as an argument for their emotional insensibility. I hold such an argument as false. From all I saw I am convinced that, *given their relative preparation* for suffering and for pleasure, their griefs and their joys are the same as ours in kind and in degree.

When one is accustomed to days begun at will by the summons of a tidy maid, waking oneself at half-past five means to be guardian of the hours until this time arrives. Once up, the toilet I made in the nocturnal darkness of my room can best be described by the matron's remark to me as I went to bed: "If you want to wash," she said, "you'd better wash now; you can't have no water in your room, and there won't be nobody up when you leave in the morning." My evening bath is supplemented by a whisk of the sponge at five.

Without it is black—a more intense black than night's beginning, when all is astir. The streets are silent, an occasional train whirls past, groups of men hurry hither and thither swinging their arms, rubbing their ears in the freezing air. Many of them have neither overcoats nor gloves. Now and then a woman sweeps along. Her skirts have the same swing as my own short ones; under her arm she carries a newspaper bundle whose meaning I have grown to know. My own contains a midday meal: two cold

fried oysters, two dried preserve sandwiches, a pickle and an orange. My way lies across a bridge. In the first gray of dawn the river shows black under its burden of ice. Along its troubled banks innumerable chimneys send forth their hot activity, clouds of seething flames, waving arms of smoke and steam—a symbol of spent energy, of the lives consumed and vanishing again, the sparks that shine an instant against the dark sky and are spent forever.

As I draw nearer the factory I move with a stream of fellow workers pouring toward the glass cage of the timekeeper. He greets me and starts me on my upward journey with a wish that I shall not get discouraged, a reminder that the earnest worker always makes a way for herself.

"What will you do about your name?" "What will you do with your hair and your hands?" "How can you deceive people?" These are some of the questions I had been asked by my friends.

Before any one had cared or needed to know my name it was morning of the second day, and my assumed name seemed by that time the only one I had ever had. As to hair and hands, a half-day's work suffices for their undoing. And my disguise is so successful I have deceived not only others but myself. I have become with desperate reality a factory girl, alone, inexperienced, friendless. I am making \$4.20 a week and spending \$3 of this for board alone, and I dread not being strong enough to keep my job. I climb endless stairs, am given a white cap and an apron, and my life as a factory girl begins. I become part of the ceaseless, unrelenting mechanism kept in motion by the poor.

The factory I have chosen has been built contemporaneously with reforms and sanitary inspection. There are clean, well-aired rooms, hot and cold water with which to wash, places to put one's hat and coat, an obligatory uniform for regular employees, hygienic and moral advantages of all kinds, ample space for work without crowding.

Side by side in rows of tens or twenties we stand before our tables waiting for the seven o'clock whistle to blow. In their white caps and blue frocks and aprons, the girls in my department, like any unfamiliar class, all look alike. My first task is an easy one; anybody could do it. On the stroke of seven my fingers fly. I place a lid of paper in a tin jar-top, over it a cork; this I press down with both hands, tossing the cover, when done, into a pan. In spite of myself I hurry; I cannot work fast enough—I outdo my companions. How can they be so slow? I have finished three dozen while they are doing two. Every nerve, every muscle is offering some of its energy. Over in one corner the machinery for sealing the jars groans and roars; the mingled sounds of filling, washing, wiping, packing, comes to my eager ears as an accompaniment for the simple work assigned to me. One hour passes, two, three hours; I fit ten, twenty, fifty dozen caps, and still my energy keeps up.

The forewoman is a pretty girl of twenty. Her restless eyes, her metallic voice are the messengers who would know all. I am afraid of her. I long to please her. I am sure she must be saying "*How well the new girl works.*"

Conversation is possible among those whose work has become mechanical. Twice I am sent to the storeroom for

more caps. In these brief moments my companions volunteer a word of themselves.

"I was out to a ball last night," the youngest one says. "I stayed so late I didn't feel a bit like getting up this morning."

"That's nothing," another retorts. "There's hardly an evening we don't have company at the house, music or somethin'; I never get enough rest."

And on my second trip the pale creature with me says:

"I'm in deep mourning. My mother died last Friday week. It's awful lonely without her. Seems as though I'd never get over missing her. I miss her *dreadful*. Perhaps by and by I'll get used to it."

"Oh, no, you won't," the answer comes from a girl with short skirts. "You'll never get used to it. My ma's been dead eight years next month and I dreamt about her all last night. I can't get her out o' me mind."

Born into dirt and ugliness, disfigured by effort, they have the same heritage as we: joys and sorrows, grief and laughter. With them as with us gaiety is up to its old tricks, tempting from graver rivals, making duty an alien. Grief is doing her ugly work: hollowing round cheeks, blackening bright eyes, putting her weight of leaden loneliness in hearts heretofore light with youth.

When I have fitted 110 dozen tin caps the forewoman comes and changes my job. She tells me to haul and load up some heavy crates with pickle jars. I am wheeling these back and forth when the twelve o'clock whistle blows. Up to that time the room has been one big dynamo, each girl a part of it. With the first moan of the noon signal the dynamo comes to life. It is hungry; it has friends and favourites—

news to tell. We herd down to a big dining-room and take our places, five hundred of us in all. The newspaper bundles are unfolded. The *ménu* varies little: bread and jam, cake and pickles, occasionally a sausage, a bit of cheese or a piece of stringy cold meat. In ten minutes the repast is over. The dynamo has been fed; there are twenty minutes of leisure spent in dancing, singing, resting, and conversing chiefly about young men and "sociables."

At 12:30 sharp the whistle draws back the life it has given. I return to my job. My shoulders are beginning to ache. My hands are stiff, my thumbs almost blistered. The enthusiasm I had felt is giving way to a numbing weariness. I look at my companions now in amazement. How can they keep on so steadily, so swiftly? Cases are emptied and refilled; bottles are labeled, stamped and rolled away; jars are washed, wiped and loaded, and still there are more cases, more jars, more bottles. Oh! the monotony of it, the never-ending supply of work to be begun and finished, begun and finished, begun and finished! Now and then some one cuts a finger or runs a splinter under the flesh; once the mustard machine broke—and still the work goes on, on, on! New girls like myself, who had worked briskly in the morning, are beginning to loiter. Out of the washing-tins hands come up red and swollen, only to be plunged again into hot dirty water. Would the whistle never blow? Once I pause an instant, my head dazed and weary, my ears strained to bursting with the deafening noise. Quickly a voice whispers in my ear: "You'd better not stand there doin' nothin'. If *she* catches you she'll give it to you."

On! on! bundle of pains! For you this is one day's work in a thousand of peace and beauty. For those about you this is the whole of daylight, this is the winter dawn and twilight, this is the glorious summer noon, this is all day, this is every day, this is *life*. Rest is only a bit of a dream, snatched when the sleeper's aching body lets her close her eyes for a moment in oblivion.

Out beyond the chimney tops the snowfields and the river turn from gray to pink, and still the work goes on. Each crate I lift grows heavier, each bottle weighs an added pound. Now and then some one lends a helping hand.

"Tired, ain't you? This is your first day, ain't it?"

The acid smell of vinegar and mustard penetrates everywhere. My ankles cry out pity. Oh! to sit down an instant!

"Tidy up the table," some one tells me; "we're soon goin' home."

Home! I think of the stifling fumes of fried food, the dim haze in the kitchen where my supper waits me; the children, the band of drifting workers, the shrill, complaining voice of the hired mother. This is home.

I sweep and set to rights, limping, lurching along. At last the whistle blows! In a swarm we report; we put on our things and get away into the cool night air. I have stood ten hours; I have fitted 1,300 corks; I have hauled and loaded 4,000 jars of pickles. My pay is seventy cents.

The impressions of my first day crowd pell-mell upon my mind. The sound of the machinery dins in my ears. I can hear the sharp, nasal voices of the forewoman and the girls shouting questions and answers.

A sudden recollection comes to me of a Dahomayan family I had watched at work in their hut during the Paris Exhibition. There was a magic spell in their voices as they talked together; the sounds they made had the cadence of the wind in the trees, the running of water, the song of birds: they echoed unconsciously the caressing melodies of nature. My factory companions drew their vocal inspiration from the bedlam of civilization, the rasping and pounding of machinery, the din which they must out-din to be heard.

For the two days following my first experience I am unable to resume work. Fatigue has swept through my blood like a fever. Every bone and joint has a clamouring ache. I pass the time visiting other factories and hunting for a place to board in the neighbourhood of the pickling house. At the cork works they do not need girls; at the cracker company I can get a job, but the hours are longer, the advantages less than where I am; at the broom factory they employ only men. I decide to continue with tin caps and pickle jars.

My whole effort now is to find a respectable boarding-house. I start out, the thermometer near zero, the snow falling. I wander and ask, wander and ask. Up and down the black streets running parallel and at right angles with the factory I tap and ring at one after another of the two-story red-brick houses. More than half of them are empty, tenantless during the working hours. What hope is there for family life near the hearth which is abandoned at the factory's first call? The sociableness, the discipline, the division of responsibility make factory work a dangerous rival to domestic care. There is something in the modern conditions of labour which act magnetically upon American

girls, impelling them to work not for bread alone, but for clothes and finery as well. Each class in modern society knows a menace to its homes: sport, college education, machinery—each is a factor in the gradual transformation of family life from a united domestic group to a collection of individuals with separate interests and aims outside the home.

I pursue my search. It is the dinner hour. At last a narrow door opens, letting a puff of hot rank air blow upon me as I stand in the vestibule questioning: "Do you take boarders?"

The woman who answers stands with a spoon in her hand, her eyes fixed upon a rear room where a stove, laden with frying-pans, glows and sputters.

"Come in," she says, "and get warm."

I walk into a front parlour with furniture that evidently serves domestic as well as social purposes. There is a profusion of white knitted tidies and portieres that exude an odour of cooking. Before the fire a workingman sits in a blue shirt and overalls. Fresh from the barber's hands, he has a clean mask marked by the razor's edge. Already I feel at home.

"Want board, do you?" the woman asks. "Well, we ain't got no place; we're always right full up."

My disappointment is keen. Regretfully I leave the fire and start on again.

"I guess you'll have some trouble in finding what you want," the woman calls to me on her way back to the kitchen, as I go out.

The answer is everywhere the same, with slight variations. Some take "mealers" only, some only "roomers,"

some "only gentlemen." I begin to understand it. Among the thousands of families who live in the city on account of the work provided by the mills, there are girls enough to fill the factories. There is no influx such as creates in a small town the necessity for working-girl boarding-houses. There is an ample supply of hands from the existing homes. There is the same difference between city and country factory life that there is between university life in a capital and in a country town.

A sign on a neat-looking corner house attracts me. I rap and continue to rap; the door is opened at length by a tall good-looking young woman. Her hair curls prettily, catching the light; her eyes are stupid and beautiful. She has on a black skirt and a bright purple waist.

"Do you take boarders?"

"Why, yes. I don't generally like to take ladies, they give so much trouble. You can come in if you like. Here's the room," she continues, opening a door near the vestibule. She brushes her hand over her forehead and stares at me; and then, as though she can no longer silence the knell that is ringing in her heart, she says to me, always staring:

"My husband was killed on the railroad last week. He lived three hours. They took him to the hospital—a boy come running down and told me. I went up as fast as I could, but it was too late; he never spoke again. I guess he didn't know what struck him; his head was all smashed. He was awful good to me—so easy-going. I ain't got my mind down to work yet. If you don't like this here room," she goes on listlessly, "maybe you could get suited across the way."

Thompson Seton tells us in his book on wild animals that not one among them ever dies a natural death. As the opposite extreme of vital persistence we have the man whose life, in spite of acute disease, is prolonged against reason by science; and midway comes the labourer, who takes his chances unarmed by any understanding of physical law, whose only safeguards are his wits and his presence of mind. The violent death, the accidents, the illnesses to which he falls victim might be often warded off by proper knowledge. Nature is a zealous enemy; ignorance and inexperience keep a whole class defenseless.

The next day is Saturday. I feel a fresh excitement at going back to my job; the factory draws me toward it magnetically. I long to be in the hum and whirl of the busy workroom. Two days of leisure without resources or amusement make clear to me how the sociability of factory life, the freedom from personal demands, the escape from self can prove a distraction to those who have no mental occupation, no money to spend on diversion. It is easier to submit to factory government which commands five hundred girls with one law valid for all, than to undergo the arbitrary discipline of parental authority. I speed across the snow-covered courtyard. In a moment my cap and apron are on and I am sent to report to the head forewoman.

"We thought you'd quit," she says. "Lots of girls come in here and quit after one day, especially Saturday. To-day is scrubbing day," she smiles at me. "Now we'll do right by you if you do right by us. What did the timekeeper say he'd give you?"

"Sixty or seventy a day."