

WPA Alabama Writers Project  
Short Stories by:  
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A MILL WORKER'S DAUGHTER

Ina Deal is a waitress, and a good one, too, if quick and agreeable service and a pleasing personality are a test of efficiency. At 25, Ina looks more like a school-girl than a mature young woman with a six-year-old daughter.

She's small and dainty. In her low-heeled shoes, she couldn't be more than

five feet high, and she has a slender waist with just enough curves to give a hint of grace lying beneath her neat, white apron. Her eyes are blue and

her hair, done in a short wave, is brown with a little tinge of gold, and her red mouth is so small that words seem to have difficulty getting out when she

talks; and when they do get out they have a slight nasal sound that makes you think they might have come through her nose after all.

Ina had been serving meals to me and smiling across the counter for some time before I ventured any purely personal chatter. At first she evaded-always politely-any inquiries about her family, her past, her ideals and her theories about living. Even when it was explained that I wanted to write the story of a waitress and believed hers would be interesting, she still refused. You can imagine how surprised I was when she leaned across the counter weeks later and said, "Are you still writing stories about people? Well, I think I'll tell

you about myself. I'd just like to see what kind of story you can write about me."

I looked at her doubtfully. "You mean," I said, "you're willing to tell me all about yourself?"

"Now, is that nice?" she jested; "Yes, Honey, I'll tell you anything you want to know about me; but I bet you wouldn't write some of the things I could tell you. If I told you everything about me, you'd think I was terrible."

She hurried away to another customer. When she returned to my counter she continued: "I used to keep a diary, but I was scared Mamma would find it and read it, so I burnt it up. Sometimes I wish I'd of kept it up, 'cause I had lots of fun readin' about some of the things I used to do."

"Must have been interesting," I suggested.

"Yes, Honey, some of it was. I wrote everything I did in my diary. That's why I was scared somebody might read it. Oh, I don't care what anybody thinks about me now; but I used to be kind of 'shamed of some of the things I did, till I found out everybody else was doin' things twice as bad and thinkin' nothin' of it, and all the time pretendin' to be nice people, too. So I thought, what's the use tryin' to hide behind pretences? Somebody's bound to find out about you sooner or later, so you might as well just be yourself and tell everybody to 'tend to their own business. Ain't that what you say?"

I nodded approvingly.

"You know," she continued, "you ought to meet my cousin. She's got a swell

story. she

/ wrote her story once and sent it to one of those true magazines, which is a stairway to the second floor, where three bedrooms and a bath open into a narrow hall. A wide, banistered front porch has a swing, now but they might take it later on. She told me I ought to send in two or three chairs, and a few potted ferns and other plants. The house

my story, but I says, 'Shucks! I ain't no good at writin' stories.' is heated by a furnace in its basement, entered by a narrow stairway from

Then she said she'd write my story and send it in for me; but we never the kitchen. Household expenses are possibly above the average for a mill

did say anything more about it. So you think you can make any kind of a worker's family; but since all the children, as well as the father, have

story out of what I tell you, it's all right with me." regular employment, the family can well afford a few luxuries, such as a

"I'd like to know something about your family, also," I said. housemaid, a family car, and other modern conveniences.

"I'll tell you about them, too," she replied.

Ina and I sat in the swing and her parents remained on the porch and

"When could we talk?" talked with us a few minutes. Ina's little girl occasionally kept intruding

"Anytime you say. I get off at eight, if you'd like to take me home. a stream of trivial queries and complaints.

Maybe some of the family'll be there and you could meet them. I want you Ina's parents have been married 23 years and have lived in the same

to see my little girl, anyway." place nearly as long. Mr. Deal, a tired-looking man at 52, has thin, gray-

Ina and her child live with her parents who have three other child- ing hair, blue eyes, and a large mouth that droops at the corners. He works

ren, a son and two daughters, also living at home. They live in a large, at the nearby steel mill where he has been employed for more than 30 years.

two-story house near the Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Company's He appears to take little interest in the affairs of his family, but is quite

steel plant. The furniture in their home is comfortable and <sup>of</sup> excellent fond of Ina's child and spends a good deal of time watching after her and

quality. Most of it appears to have been in use for many years. The catering to her whims. "If Yvonne's a spoiled little brat," said Ina, "I

lower floor includes a dining room and kitchen, large livingroom in guess Daddy's to blame for that."

which is a stairway to the second floor, where three bedrooms and a bath open into a narrow hall. A wide, banistered front porch has a swing, two or three chairs, and a few potted ferns and other plants. The house is heated by a furnace in its basement, entered by a narrow stairway from the kitchen. Household expenses are possibly above the average for a mill worker's family; but since all the children, as well as the father, have regular employment, the family can well afford a few luxuries, such as a housemaid, a family car, and other modern conveniences.

Ina and I sat in the swing and her parents remained on the porch and talked with us a few minutes. Ina's little girl meanwhile kept intruding a stream of trivial queries and complaints.

Ina's parents have been married 29 years and have lived in the same place nearly as long. Mr. Deal, a tired-looking man at 52, has thin, gray-ing hair, blue eyes, and a large mouth that droops at the corners. He works at the nearby steel mills where he has been employed for more than 30 years. He appears to take little interest in the affairs of his family, but is quite fond of Ina's child and spends a good deal of time watching after her and catering to her whims. "If Yvonne's a spoiled little brat," said Ina, "I guess Daddy's to blame for that."

duct their affairs. She feels that her husband has forsaken her. Asked what he thought about child discipline, Mr. Deal said: "Me and

Lucy tried to raise our young'uns right, and we did purty well with

"Mr. Deal," she said, "should take a firmer stand. If he would, I them when they was frowin' up; but when they got grown they commenced goin' their way. It's a mighty hard thing to keep up with young'uns this

day and time. You never know what they're up to, nor what they're goin'

to get into next. Lucy still worries 'bout them a heap, and she's allus

tellin' me I ought to see about them, and I'll be to blame if they get into

anything they oughtn't to, they'll just have to get out the best way they

can. I done the best I could to give them the right start, and it's up to

them now to make the best of it. I didn't get much education myself, but I

got sense enough to know what's right, and I know the way people's livin'

these days ain't gonna bring them to no good.

Mrs. Deal, tall and slightly stooped is two years younger than her

husband, but appears older. She is a well-mannered woman, a little formal

but friendly. She likes to talk, and once the ice is broken, she seems to

resolve into a bundle of words that can scarcely wait for expression.

Most of her chatter however, can be traced to anxiety over the welfare of

her children and a deep craving for sympathy in her futile efforts to con-

can't help it. When he told me of his plan to build the plane, I begged

duct their affairs. She feels that her husband has forsaken her in their mutual task of disciplining their family.

"Mr. Deal," she said, "should take a firmer stand. If he would, I don't believe the children would be so reckless. Oh, I tell you, they're a problem. They just keep me worried to death half the time. If it isn't one thing, it's another. Now, there's Sanford . . ."

Sanford, Ina explained later, is the only son and the oldest of the children. He is a tall, neat young man, 27 years old, with thin, brown hair and blue eyes, very quiet, who can be induced to talk at length on but one subject, aviation. But he is not an aviator. He started working at the steel mills with his father when he finished high school and was recently promoted to the position of timekeeper. He studies flying as a hobby and hopes to adopt aviation as a vocation. At present, he and a companion are building a 'two-seater' in the latter's yard, and they expect to have it ready for a trial flight within a month or so. It is anxiety over this dreaded event that puts a tremor in Mrs. Deal's voice when she speaks of her son.

"Sanford tells me I shouldn't worry about him," she said, "but I can't help it. When he told me of his plan to build the plane, I begged

and pleaded with him not to do it, but he wouldn't listen. He'd just put his arms 'round me and say, 'Oh, Mamma, don't act like that. Plenty of people fly planes and never get hurt. Besides, I'm going to build a service-able crate and put the best engine in it that money can buy.'

"But that didn't keep me from worrying, just the same. Then when he and Bill started working on the plane I just couldn't stand it any longer. Every time I'd hear a plane pass over I'd think of Sanford, and I'd get so nervous and weak I could hardly stand. I finally broke down and was under the doctor's care for over a month. When Sanford saw what worrying over him had done to me, he said he was sorry he ever started building the plane, and that he'd sell his interest in it as soon as it was finished. He really is the most tenderhearted one of the children. He was nearly crying when he told me that, and I really believe he meant what he said at the time, but since I'm feeling a little better I think he's changed his mind about selling the plane. Oh, well! I guess I'll just have to get reconciled to the idea of his flying. It seems to be the only thing he ever thinks of, anyway. But there's one thing I can say for Sanford..."

Mrs. Deal's discourse was suddenly interrupted when Yvonne, who had been cutting capers on the bannisters, lost her grip on the railing and fell,

sprawling on the carpet of green lawn some four feet below the edge of the porch. Mrs. Deal's nervous gesture of rescue had missed and the lines of her face were drawn in an expression of tragedy. But only for a moment, for Yvonne, apparently unharmed by the tumble, sprang to her feet almost immediately laughing jubilantly, as if she thought she had performed a very clever stunt. Ina and Mr. Deal laughed too, but Mrs. Deal only smiled a smile of relief, rather than merriment, for she said, "Well, I don't see anything funny about it. The child's likely to break a limb climbing around like that sometime." And as Yvonne came back up the stairs Mrs. Deal sent her inside and admonished her to 'behave yourself for awhile and go upstairs and see if Faye needs me for anything.'

When the child had gone Mrs. Deal said, "I guess I shouldn't have sent her up there to get in Faye's way. She's trying to get dressed to go to a dance tonight. I don't approve of my girls going to dances, but it looks like I don't have much say-so about what they do any more. But if the other children were as considerate as Faye is when they go out at night, I wouldn't have any cause for worry. Faye always tells me when she expects to be back, and she insists that her young man must get back home at the promised time. It's the same way when she has to work late

at the store. She always telephones me what time she will be home."

A car stopped in front of the house and a young man got out and came up the walk.

"That's Faye's date," said Mrs. Deal, rising; "I'd better go and see if she's ready." She spoke to the young man as he came up the steps and invited him into the living room. Mr. Deal excused himself, also, and followed them.

Presently, Faye came out, followed by her escort, and made a brief introduction. The young girl was wearing a flowing, pink evening gown and glittering dance slippers. She is two years younger than Ina, but she has all of Ina's physical characteristics, except that she is slightly taller and her voice is high-pitched and ringing, while Ina's is low and resonant.

"They're engaged," said Ina as the couple drove away. "Been engaged 'bout six months but I don't think they'll ever get married.

Faye's crazy 'bout him, all right, but he drinks a lot and she's scared he might turn out to be a drunkard. She says she don't never intend to marry a drunkard. He takes her to a dance nearly every Thursday night: sort of a club dance, you know.

"Me and Faye used to go to lots of dances together before I got married. That was when we was in high school. We used to have the grandest shoes and had them charged to her account. Faye says she likes for her times goin' places together---parties and dances and picnics, all the time. We always double-dated. I wouldn't ever have a date 'less she was along, for them 'ol beliefs, 'cause nearly everybody says the kid favors Faye sure and she wouldn't go nowhere without me. If Mamma got after her 'bout any-thing I'd always take up for her and she'd do the same for me. That's the way it was up until I had to quit school. She went on and finished but I

had to quit in the seventh semester.

"When my baby came, Faye took to her right away. 'Course the rest of the family seemed to think lots of the baby, but not like Faye. Faye was crazy 'bout her right from the start. She'd go and get her out of her crib as soon as she got home from school, and she'd tend to her all after-

noon..When she finished school she stayed home and took care of Yvonne so's

I could go to work. Mamma's health is bad most of the time, so she couldn't tend to Yvonne and do her house work, too. When Faye got her job at the drug store we hired a maid to take care of the baby and help Mamma.

"Faye still takes up a lot of time with Yvonne, and the kid's crazy

'bout her. A lot of people think Yvonne loves Faye more than she does and undernourished appearance indicate that she is entirely too fragile me; and Faye says I don't pay as much attention to the child as a mother

should. Faye takes her to town sometimes when she has a day off and for the hard work of a waitress. buys things for her. Last week she bought her a new dress and a pair of shoes and had them charged to her account. Faye says she likes for her friends to think Yvonne is her little girl. Well, that wouldn't be hard for them to believe, 'cause nearly everybody says the kid favors Faye more than she does me. I hope she does, 'cause Faye's a lots prettier---- I mean Faye's really purty, and I'm not.

"Faye works at the drug store down on the boulevard. She's been working there 'bout three years now. Dr. Waites wants her to study pharmacy and take an examination so's she can fill prescriptions when he's not there. She's s'posed to get off at five, but when Dr. Waites has to go down town or some place in the evenings she stays on till closin' time."

"Where does Vivian work?" I asked, referring to the younger sister.

"She used to work at the cafe with me," said Ina, "But she got a job at the Parkview Inn a few weeks ago. She don't make as much money over there as she did at my place, but she gets a whole lots more tips, and that makes up for the difference in pay I guess."

Vivian is 20 years old. She is tall and graceful but her pallor and undernourished appearance indicate that she is entirely too fragile

for the hard work of a waitress.

"Vivian's the family pet," continued Ina. "She has her way about most things, and she's been humored so much that she's got kind of selfish. But if you don't give in to her she'll throw a fit. She is like Mamma in that way. The only difference is that Mamma has nervous fits and Vivian just has plain temper fits.

"Well, you ought to of seen them both havin' a fit at the same time 'bout a year ago. That was when Mamma found out Vivian had been married to Bob Denton for six months without letting her know about it. That like to of killed Mamma. She thought it was terrible 'cause Vivian her 'angel child' was married to a 'common, good-for-nothing soda water jerker,' and was meetin' him and spending nights with him in cheap

hotels when she was 'spose to be spendin' that night with girl friends. I had a date that night and we was sittin' right out here on the porch. I guess he didn't know what to think. He left party

"I knew all about it long before Mamma got wind of it, and told soon after the fuss started and he never has asked me for another Vivian she ought to quit goin' with Bob before Mamma found out. You date till yet.

see, I didn't think they was married even if Vivian did tell me that

"When he was gone, I went in where Mamma and Vivian was, and they was. I told her she ought to be ashamed for goin' places with I saw that Mamma was just about to faint. I didn't know whether to Bob. But, Honey, do you think she'd pay any attention to me? Well, phone the doctor or the insane asylum but I finally got her to bed I guess I couldn't blame her for that; she knew that I had done things and called the doctor. Then Vivian left and went up to Bob's, but

just about as bad, or worse, myself.

"But the funny part was when Mamma found out. Believe me, I've seen Mamma throw lots of fits, but the way she carried on that night beats all. She would walk up and down the room, wringin' her hands and cryin'; and she would grab Vivian like she was goin' crazy and say, 'Oh, my little girl, my baby! why did you do it? You knew it would kill me; you knew I couldn't stand it.' Then after a while Vivian got mad. That was when Mamma threw her arms 'round her and said, 'He can't have you. I'll die before I'll let you go away with him.' Vivian didn't say much till then; but when Mamma said that, Vivian turned loose, and what she said was enough to kill Mamma sure enough. Then she started bawlin', too.

"I had a date that night and we was sittin' right out here on the porch. You see, she worked in a doctor's office right after she finished school, and she learned lots of things that Bob didn't think she knew. Soon after the fuss started and he never has asked me for another date till yet.

"When he was gone, I went in where Mamma and Vivian was, and I saw that Mamma was just about to faint. I didn't know whether to call the doctor or the insane asylum but I finally got her to bed and called the doctor. Then Vivian left and went up to Bob's, but

I didn't tell Mamma she was gone.

"Daddy was workin' that night, but when he came in next mornin", Mamma wanted him to go up to Bob's house and bring Vivian back home. But Daddy wouldn't do it, and I was glad he wouldn't, 'cause it looked better for her to go on and live with Bob, since she claimed to be married to him. Besides, it was a good idea for her to find out what a sap she'd made of herself. She thought Bob didn't ever look at another girl, but I knew he was 'steppin' out all the time. And she found out about him, too, after she had lived at his house 'bout a month."

"What did she find out?" I asked.

"Honey, she found out plenty! Well, I might as well tell you about it. She found some medicine in Bob's pocket and she knew what it was for. You see, she worked in a doctor's office right after she finished school, and she learned lots of things that Bob didn't think she knew. When she asked Bob about the Medicine, he told her he was takin' it for cold. But Vivian said she knew better. Well, they had a big fuss about it, and Vivian come home cryin' and told Mamma all about it. Then Mamma went to the 'phone and called up the doctor who filled Bob's pre-

I assured her that nobody would hear of the matter from her. Then, after a pause, I suggested that I was anxious to hear her own story.

him the situation, so he finally came out with the truth. He told

In the half-light that issued from the living room window I could see her brief smile fade into an expression of solemnity that resembled

"Well, Vivian went right over and got her things, and she nev-

er went back. Bob's married again now, or 'spose to be. Lord I

pity that girl---his wife, I mean. Vivian never had nothin'else

"Well," she began, "I guess I better tell you about Alec. That was my

husband--Alec Kardatsky. Sounds like Russian, don't it? But it's German.

works ever now and then, but she won't even wait on him if she can

help it. You'd think a man like that would have enough shame about

That's where his parents live now--or did, last time I heard from him. But

him to stay out of sight; but not him. I really don't think he's

right bright, though. It makes Vivian mad when she hears me say that

about Bob; but then I tell her she's not right bright either, or else

she wouldn't of had nothin' to do with him in the first place."

"I remember how nice his voice was; and he was so good-lookin'and polite

She rambled on for some moments with fragmentary gossip about

Bob's family. Then, suddenly she paused and looked at me quizzically.

"I hope," she said, "you won't tell anybody about Bob's folks, don't

let anybody know I told you. Especially, don't mention it to Vivian,

'cause if you do I'll catch hell from now on."

I didn't know that at first, or I might not of ever gave him a date with me.

I assured her that nobody would hear of the matter from me. Then, after a pause, I suggested that I was anxious to hear her own story.

In the half-light that issued from the living room window I could see her brief smile fade into an expression of solemnity that resembled pain, and silence fell between us was as sombre as the vague shadows that crept along the ill-lighted street.

"Well," she began, "I guess I better tell you about Alec. That was my husband--Alec Kardatzky. Sounds like Russian, don't it? But it's German. His parents came from Germany, but he was born in this country--in St. Louis. That's where his parents live now--or did, last time I heard from him. But when I met him, him and his parents was visitin' kinfolks here in the city. They stayed most of the winter, and Alec didn't want to miss school since he had just one more year to finish, so he went to high school here.

"I remember how nice his voice was; and he was so good-lookin' and polite. He wasn't conceited either, like most of the boys whose folks has money. Nearly all the girls was crazy 'bout him. He had a good-lookin' car, and he would take crowds of boys and girls around in it all the time. He made love to some of the girls he dated, but he wasn't serious about it. 'Course I didn't know that at first, or I might not of ever gave him a date with me.

"The first time he asked me for a date, I said, 'No; Mamma won't allow me to have dates. 'Course that wasn't so; I just made up my mind to give him that excuse and out him off so's he'd want to make a date with me all the more. I knew he'd keep on askin' me and he did. Then one day he wanted to take me to a girl friend's party, and I told him I'd let him take me if he'd get a date for Faye, too. So he got a date for Faye and we went. And after we left the party we went for a long ride. I think I fell in love with him that very night. Honey, he was the nicest thing! He didn't try to get fresh and mushy like most boys used to do that was datin' me. He told me all about his family and what he expected to do when he finished high school and college. After that I had dates with him 'bout once a week, and Faye had a date and went along with us most of the time. I could tell you 'bout lots of places we went and things we did, but it wouldn't do any good and it would take too long, and you wouldn't be interested anyway."

I said, "All you've told me so far has been quite interesting."

"Well," she continued, "I will just tell you 'bout one of the times--the one I'll never forget. One Sunday, Alec took me to Muscle Shoals to see Wil-son Dam. Faye and her date was plannin' to go with us, but when the time come Alec rolled up his pants legs and got out. He got drenched to the skin in no time."

to go, she couldn't, so we went by ourselves. We had a grand time goin' through the power plant, and Alec rented a boat and took me rowing on the river. We had a picnic basket that I had meant to spread when we got there but we forgot all about it till way in the afternoon. When we did think of it, it was startin' to rain, so we had to eat in the car.

After that we went to a picture show, and when we came out it was rainin'.

But Alec said we'd better start home anyway, 'cause it was beginnin' to get dark by this time. I told him I was scared of drivin' in the storm; but he wasn't afraid and told me there wasn't nothin' to worry about as long as he drove slow.

"So we started on home. The road was almost covered with water, and there was slippery mud in places; and all the time it was gettin' darker and the lightnin' and thunder was gettin' worse. Then all of a sudden Alec stopped the car and looked like he could bite a nail in two. He leaned out and looked at the front tire. It was flat as a flitter. We didn't have a spare either, 'cause Alec had used it when we had a flat on the way up there.

"Alec rolled up his pants legs and got out. The mud came up over his shoes and it was rainin' bull frogs. He got drenched to the skin in no time.

I said 'alec, what are we goin' to do?' And he said he would have to stop and get some help. It was a good little bit before anybody would stop; but finally one man stopped and Alec asked him to send help from the first service station he passed. The man said he would, and Alec got back in the car and we waited. We sat there 'bout an hour and nobody come. Honey, I'm tellin' you, I was scared stiff. It was dark as pitch, 'cept when the lightning flashed, and then it seemed like we might be struck any minute.

"After awhile, when the rain slacked up a little, Alec decided to go up the road to find a telephone. I wouldn't let him leave me there by myself, so he let me go along with him. It was luck that Alec had a flashlight in the car or we never could of seen our way along that dark, muddy road. We come to a filling station 'bout a mile up the road, and the man there said he got our message but he couldn't send any help till his brother got back with his car. He said he expected his brother to be back in 'bout an hour or so if we could wait. Alec said, 'Good Lord! what else can I do? We'll have to wait.'

"In a minute the man looked at me. He saw that I was shakin' like a leaf in a storm. We was both soaked to the skin and it was gettin' colder all the time. The man said, 'You all better get some dry clothes on or you're gonna be sick sure 'nough'. There was a tourist camp across the road that had nice

little cabins with heater stoves in them, and the man told us we ought to go over there and get our clothes dry.

Alec thought it was the thing to do, so we went over and got a cabin with two rooms. But there wasn't but one stove, so both of us had to use it to dry our clothes.

"When we was left alone, Alec said we ought to take our wet clothes off and wrap up in blankets while they got dry by the stove. But I said, 'No, I won't take off my clothes.' And he said, 'Well, you'd better, if you don't want to take a cold.' Then he went on in the other room to undress. I took off my shoes and stockin's and put them by the stove. The room was still damp and chilly, 'cause the fire had just been built and it hadn't had time to heat up yet, so I got a blanket off the bed and wrapped it 'round me on top of my wet clothes. In a few minutes Alec yelled, 'Comin' in! And I said, 'All right, come on in.'

"When he opened the door and I saw he was barefooted and didn't have any clothes on 'cept a blanket he was holdin' 'round him, it made me feel sort of scared for one thing, but he looked so funny holdin' his wet clothes in one hand and tryin' to pick up his shoes without losin' hold on his blanket that I finally had to laugh. He laughed too, and come on in and hung his clothes

by the stove. At first he thought I was undressed, 'cause I had the blanket 'round me; but when he looked around and didn't see my clothes nowhere he said, 'Honey, what did you do with your clothes?' And I said, 'Honey, what do you think? Why I got 'em on silly.' He said, 'If you expect to get them dry that way we'll be here all night,' and he tried to argue me into takin' them off. Then I started coughin' and he told me if I didn't take off those wet clothes he would take them off for me, and he pulled the blanket off me like he really meant it. So I told him to go on back in the other room and I would undress.

"Well, I took off part of my clothes and hung them up. But when he came back in, he looked at them and said, 'Honey, what you tryin' to do? You tryin' to put on a strip-tease act or somethin'? I know that's not all the clothes you wear.' But I told him I wasn't goin' to take off any more, so he said, 'We'll see about that.' He took hold of my blanket and I jerked loose and jumped in the middle of the bed with the blanket pulled tight around me. Then he came over and got hold of the blanket again and I was scared he was goin' to pull it off, so I guess I went sort of crazy or somethin' 'cause all of a sudden I hawled away and hit him in the face as hard as I could.

"I'll never forget how funny he looked when I did that. He didn't say a word; just sit there on the side of the bed lookin' at me like he didn't know what to think. Then he bent over with his face in his hands and started cryin'--cryin' like a baby, honey; can you imagine it! Well, that's what got me. I felt ashamed of myself for treatin' him like that when he'd always been so nice to me, and I told him I was sorry I lost my temper. But he just kept sittin' there and I wouldn't say a word, so after a little, I crawled over and kissed him. Honey, that was the first big mistake I ever made, and it caused me lots of heartaches afterwards; but it's one mistake I've never felt sorry for."

"Was that the first time you ever kissed him?" I inquired.

"Oh, no," said Ina; "I don't mean that. I'd been goin' with him 'bout a year then and we was practically engaged. You see, he didn't go back to St. Louis with his folks. He stayed on and finished high school here and got a job in town. He said he'd decided not to go to college till I finished school and could go with him; but it was the way I kissed him and the way he took it that made things so different after that." She stared, moodily, at the little gold band on her finger.

"And so you married him," I suggested.

"Not right away. Alec wanted me to, and I wish I had now. If we had gone on and married then, I guess our lives never would of been messed up like they was. But I wanted to go on and finish school. I didn't have the slightest idea there was goin' to be any trouble. But that's where I was wrong. Honey, you wouldn't believe I was so dumb about things. Why, I didn't even know what was wrong with me when I nearly passed out in school and was brought home as limber as a rag. Mamma sent for the doctor and he told me what was the matter I just couldn't believe it. But I had to believe it; there wasn't anything else to do.

"Well, Mamma made me tell her everything 'bout me and Alec. She just sit there by the bed and cried all the time I was tellin' her. I was crying, too. But after a while Mamma got hysterical and started sayin' all kind of mean things 'bout me and Alec. 'Course I didn't care 'bout myself, but she didn't have no right to blame Alec for anything, 'cause it was all my own fault. But Mamma kept on ravin' like that till I was 'bout crazy myself. I got up and started to leave, but she called Sanford and made him put me back to bed.

"When Mamma told Daddy 'bout everything he got madder than I've ever

seen him in my life. He said he was goin' to kill Alec if it was the last thing he did. Sanford was mad too, and he said he would kill Alec if Daddy didn't. They all carried on like that 'round here till nearly midnight. Then Daddy and Sanford left. I thought they was goin' to kill Alec, so I got up and started to follow them. But Faye stopped me and told me they was only goin' to talk things over with Alec.

"They come back in 'bout an hour, and they had Alec with them. He must of been scared, 'cause he was white as a sheet. He come over and fell down on his knees by my bed and started cryin', and he told me we was goin' to be married in the morning. That made me feel so happy I could of squeezed him to death. But I knew all the time he would be like that. I didn't care what the rest of them thought; they could hate him for anything. I was sorry for him and me too, if they wanted to, but I couldn't never hate him for anything. I was sorry for him though, 'cause he wanted us to have a nice church wedding--and if I'd of married him when he wanted me to, we could of had one--but Mamma and Daddy wouldn't hear to such a thing after what had happened.

"Next mornin' I was better, and I got up and dressed for our weddin'. We had it right there in the living room. Alec wanted to take me with

him right away, but Mamma said I wasn't in no condition to leave home now, so I stayed home and he come to see me nearly every night.

But he never would stay long, 'cause everybody treated him so hateful

that he said he'd rather not be around them. He said he was goin' to

take me back to St. Louis with him soon as I got to feelin' a little

better. I can say one thing for Alec; he meant to do the right thing

all along, but my folks just wouldn't let us live our own lives."

There was a note of Pathos in her voice. I asked, "Wouldn't they let you go to St. Louis with Alec?"

"They wouldn't let me go anywhere with him," she said. "And they didn't like for him to come to see me. It was like I didn't even have

a husband; I never got to live with him a day in my life. 'Course I

could of gone away with him anyway, I guess, and sometimes I think I

should of done it; but every time I made plans to go Mamma would have

one of her fits and the whole bunch would talk me out of it. They said

I ought to stay with them till the baby was born, at least. So I stayed.

"Then 'bout a month before my baby was born Alec lost his job and went back home to St. Louis. And a little later he got a job in Ohio. We wrote to each other regularly, but I always will believe he wrote more letters

than I got. Mamma had a habit of openin' other people's mail.

"When Yvonne was born Faye sent him a telegram to tell him, and he sent one back and said he would come to see me and the baby right away. But I got a letter from him a few days later that said he couldn't get off from work to come, but he would send money for me and the baby to come there and live with him as soon as I was able to make the trip. Well, I never could make up my mind to go. The folks was so crazy 'bout the baby that they couldn't bear to hear me talking 'bout takin' her away with me, so I finally just gave up the idea. And after 'bout a year Alec gave up tryin' to get me to come.

"Yes, "I've still got all the letters he wrote me, 'cept one. That was the hateful one he wrote me, askin' me to give him a divorce. At first, when I read it, it made me mad that I tore it to pieces. I wouldn't even answer it for some time. But after thinkin' it over awhile I could see that he was right in wantin' a divorce. If I wasn't goin' to ever live with him as his wife, why shouldn't he have his freedom to marry some one else? So I went on and got the divorce. He may be married again now, for all I know. We didn't

write to each other much after that. He's never seen Yvonne, but I sent him a little picture of her. He used to send presents to her at Christmas and on her birthday, but I guess he's 'bout forgot all about us by now. I guess that's best anyway."

"Do you still love him?" I asked.

"No, I can't say that I do. I loved him terribly up until Yvonne came, but I don't guess I loved him so much after that, or I would of gone up there to live with him in spite of everything. I guess my love for my baby just took the place of his love, and that's the way it's been ever since.

I asked if she expected to marry again.

"Yea," she replied, "if I meet the right kind of a man--one that will make a good husband as well as a good father for Yvonne. Mamma and Daddy don't want me to marry. Well, they don't seem to want any of us to marry, for that matter; but they 'specially don't want me to marry again, 'cause it's against Mamma's religion for a divorced person to marry again, 'Course, Daddy don't b'long to any church, but he sort of sides with Mamma on religion, anyway, and he goes to church with her sometimes. Mamma tried to raise all us to be religious. We went to church and Sunday school regular when we was

kids, but don't any of us go now. Honey, after workin' all week, I'm always too worn out to go anywhere much on Sunday."

"Tell me something about your work," I said.

"Well, there ain't much to it 'cept waitin' on people; but it's hard work, all the same. Sometimes it's mighty hard not to lose your temper when you have to wait on people. But most of my regular customers are purty nice. If a tough customer comes in I always try to sic a new girl on him, if we have a new girl workin' with us. It's a dirty trick, all right, but it serves a good purpose; it's a good way to break in a new girl, and it's a good way to give a tough customer a tough break. 'Course you can't let loose and tell the boss this scheme, 'causee you're liable to get fired. But me and the boss get along all right, I guess. We must, 'cause I been workin' for nearly three years.

"I got better hours than the other girls. There's six girls in all, you know. I work from six in the mornin' till two one week and from eleven till eight the next. I get \$14 a week and Sunday off. That's four dollars more than Vivian makes and she works at a nicer place than me. 'Course she gets more tips than I do, though.

" I've had other jobs offered me--most of them just propositions, of

course, where you're expected to do something in return-- but some of them was honest offers; but I just never did bother about them. They say, 'Once a waitress, always a waitress!' and I guess that's just about right. Waitin' on tables ain't the easiest job in the world, but I get a lot of fun out of it all the same. I meet lots of people all along. Who knows! I might meet the right man there some day?"

Alabama  
Story of  
Loyd and Edna Lewis,  
315 34th St.,  
Ensley, Alabama.

A STEEL MILL WORKER AND HIS WIFE.

By Edward F. Harper.

Paralleling the great steel plant of the Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Company on the south is one of the oldest residential sections in the Ensley district. Here dwellings, ranging from modern apartment buildings to small, cozy bungalows and three and four room shot-gun houses badly in need of repair line the broad avenues that connect Ensley with its sister city, Fairfield. The older residences are near the business area. Some of these are small dwellings of the cottage type; others, which in earlier days were the homes of the more prosperous class, are large commodious buildings, usually of massive frame construction. The newer homes are farther out toward Fairfield. Here the bungalow predominates. The terrain is flat and even and one lawn joins another like an endless green carpet bordered at intervals by well-kept hedges and studded here and there with shade trees, small cedars and other shrubbery.

At one time this section was occupied almost exclusively by families of the steel mills' employes, but with the advent of modern transportation facilities many of the older families moved to other sections of the city, leaving vacancies which were gradually filled by new-comers of the district, many of whom have other occupations than that of steel worker. However, the steel worker is predominant.

About a mile from the business area in this section is the home of Loyd and Edna Lewis. It is a small yellow bungalow enclosed in front by a low, well-kept hedge and a narrow yard. There is some shrubbery on either side of the walk leading up to the steps. The small porch, except for a few gay potted flowers and a rubber door mat, has no other appointments. The house has six rooms: living room, dining room, kitchen, two bed rooms and a bath, and there is also, a small latticed back porch. It is not a new house, but it has been recently redecorated and the floors and woodwork revarnished. Because the rooms are unusually small, there has been but little opportunity for choice in the matter of arranging furniture, which, for the most part, is new and of modernistic design.

Loyd Lewis is an employe of the Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Company. He works at the company's Pratt City plant where he is classified as blacksmith-mechanic. He is twenty-seven years old, of medium height and weighs about 160 pounds. Decidedly brunette, his dark complexion and high cheek bones are hereditary characteristics from four generations back, where a male ancestor in his paternal line was a full-blood Cherokee Indian. He is neat in appearance and in the choice and wearing of his clothes shows attention to style and good taste.

His wife, Edna Lewis, also dark, is twenty-six. She is of medium height, slender, and her hair, dark brown and quite straight, is parted on one side and has a full boyish bob. She, too, is carefully groomed, but seems to be less concerned with appearances than her husband.

The couple have been married about three years. They have

no children. They moved to their present house about a year ago. Prior to that time they lived with Loyd's parents, an arrangement brought about by circumstances rather than choice, for, as Edna says, "If we could have had our way about it we would have got a place of our own to start with, even if it wasn't nothing more than two-room shack; but we didn't have any furniture and, of course, Loyd didn't have any money saved up, and he wasn't getting in much time at the shops either, so we just had to make out the best we could for awhile."

Loyd's parents and their two other children, a girl, 23, and a boy, 17, live in the same community, within a few blocks of his home. His father, also, works for the Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Company. "He has been working there about fourteen years," says Loyd. "He's sort of a all-round handy man, I guess you would call it; he's worked in nearly all divisions of the plant. He didn't have enough education to hold down a big job. He might have got through the third grade; and I doubt if mamma got much farther than that herself."

Before coming to Birmingham in 1917, Loyd's parents operated a small farm in Elmore County. They came of agrarian families that were "well-to-do and well-thought-of" in that county. "Daddy was the youngest boy in the family," says Loyd, "so naturally he was spoiled; he never had any work to do. In fact, none of the kids on the plantation had much to do, because granddaddy Lewis hired men to do the work." Loyd thinks it caused her to be as irresponsible as his father.

"When Mamma and Daddy got married," says Loyd, "they started farming a tract of land near the Lewis plantation. No, Daddy didn't own the farm; he didn't own anything that I know

of except Mamma and us kids. He was proud of us, but only because we were his. He didn't give a darn what we did, just so long as we let him feel that he was the boss. Everybody had to bow to his will; if they didn't he would get drunk and raise hell. He used to make my blood boil, the way he bullied Mamma around. Yes, Mamma does drink too, now and then, but she never gets nasty about it."

Loyd has a son's affection for his mother. He admits that she has never taken much interest in housekeeping, but says that she has always been a good mother and has always provided good meals for her family. He often buys presents for her and visits her regularly. Until recently, his sister, Julia, shared his affections. Her elopement with a bootlegger, however, aroused his indignation and he has never forgiven her he says, for "being such a darned little fool." For his father, he shows nothing but resentment, because of the way he used to treat their mother he says. But he does give his father credit for being a good provider. He says, "We always had plenty to eat and wear. Daddy was always buying of knick-knacks and little treats for us kids. I guess he thought we ought to be grateful to him for it, but how can you be grateful to any one you have learned to despise?"

Loyd has an eighth-grade education. He says that he could have gone to high school, but that he "didn't see any use in it then." "I got nutty about the gals about that time," he explained. "I didn't have sense enough to study. I figured I had to get a job and make some money so I could keep up with the rest of the crowd I was running around with. Daddy helped me get the job at the T.C.I. Work was good then, so I got pretty good pay to start with, and I spent all I made running around to parties and

raising hell. I drank a good deal too, but I can't stand to look at the stuff now. I got dog sick on it two or three times and that cured me. Edna will tell you about one of the times; she had to put me to bed and nurse me back to life. That was before we got married. I haven't touched a drop since."

Loyd met his wife while visiting friends in West End. She was living with her grandmother and an uncle. Her parents died when she was a small child. "I don't remember mother," she says; "Grandma is the only mother I have ever known. She and uncle Jim treated me swell. I had anything they could afford. But Grandma was strict on me. She wouldn't think of letting me stay away from church or go to dances and other places that she thought weren't nice for young girls. She did not approve of Loyd at first; he was such a 'harum-scarum young upstart' she used to say. Even after we got married many of our friends did not think we would make a go of it. They knew that Loyd and I didn't like the same things. He liked dances and wild parties, and I always felt out of place at such affairs. But I think he's about settled down now that we have our own home to think of. I bet we haven't been to a picture show in over a month. Loyd just stays home and reads most of the time when he is not working."

Loyd says that it is the furniture bills, house rent and grocery bills that have him "tied down." He still wants to "get out and raise a little hell once in awhile," and he vows that he will yet, when he gets his debts paid out. "Why, just look at me!" he says: "all this sitting around the house is making me look like a stuffed toad. While we were going to dances I managed to keep a fairly decent figure, but look at me now! Why, I bought six suits of clothes a year ago and now

I can't hardly get them on with a shoe horn. I bought Edna a lot of new dresses, too, but it looks like she isn't going to have a chance to wear them anytime soon."

Edna says that she likes pretty clothes but that she doesn't believe in being extravagant. She lets her husband select nearly all her clothes, because she thinks he has good taste about such things. She also likes attractive furnishings for the home; pretty draperies, neat doilies and counterpanes. She is especially talented in needlework and crocheting. Loyd, also has this rather feminine accomplishment. Edna says that Loyd began doing needlework when he was only a small boy.

"Yes, it does seem like a strange hobby for a man," she said, "but not when you understand why he got started doing it. You see, he has always hated the untidy habits of his family ever since he was old enough to notice them. He used to beg his mother to buy pretty pillows and counterpanes for his bed, but she paid no attention to the "silly whims," as she described his longing for beauty. But after awhile he learned how to embroider from some of the ladies in the neighborhood, and pretty soon he had every plain thing in the house decorated with his needlework. But he's no amateur now. Look at this piece. You see, it's better than any of my work." Edna takes pride in showing her friends dozens of pieces which she and her husband have made together.

Edna had two years in high school. She likes reading occasionally, but prefers visiting as a past time. She keeps a neat house and enjoys preparing appetizing dishes for her guests. She is especially fond of vegetables, but Loyd refuses to eat them; he must have his meats.

Loyd spends a great deal of his spare time playing bridge

with friends in the neighborhood. Edna doesn't care for the game. Loyd's reading consists almost entirely of detective and mystery stories. On a book rack near his huge lounging chair are scores of magazines bearing such titles as: Thrilling Detective Mystery, Weird Tales, and Startling Adventures. He may occasionally read Good Housekeeping and Cosmopolitan while waiting for new issues of his favorites.

It is about three miles from Ensley to the shops where Loyd works. He has a day shift of eight hours, from seven to three-thirty, with a half-hour for lunch. "I have to get up about five," he said. "I shave while Edna cooks breakfast; eat while she packs my lunch pail. A buddy picks me up about six. That gives us time to make it to the shops and get into our work clothes by seven."

Most of the work in the blacksmith division where Loyd works consists of repair jobs on the company's locomotives. Here worn parts are removed and replaced by new ones which are forged and machined by the blacksmith crew. The shop's equipment consists of a forge and a huge steam-driven hammer, and a number of other machines in the equipment of the average machine shop. "Suppose that a new driver is needed," said Loyd. "A steel bar of the right length will be heated in the forge and beat into shape under the hammer. A crane will be used to handle the bar. The hammer is operated by the hammer boy. The forge smith tells the hammer boy what strokes he wants and the hammer boy works the throttle so as to produce the right strokes. When the piece leaves the hammer it is in the rough. It has to be machined. That's where I come in. I used to be hammer boy; that is, when I started about ten years ago. But now I operate

the lathes and drill press.

"Last year the company signed up for apprenticeship classes with the I.C.S. (International Correspondence Schools) and a good many helpers enrolled for the training. No, I didn't start as an apprentice. If they had had these classes when I first started to work there I would have taken the course. I started as helper because helpers get more pay than apprentices to begin with; but an apprentice has a higher rating when he becomes a mechanic than the man who started as helper. There are different ratings. Mine is seventy-five cents an hour. In heat times we have as many as twenty-five men in our division, but work is on the dray at present. We are only working three days a week, but I think we will go on a four-day run beginning next week."

Loyd doesn't like his work; never has. Not that there is anything hard about it, but because "everything you touch is so dirty and greasy." He often wishes that he had never started working at the shops, but he doesn't think there is much chance of his changing occupations now. He gets along well with his fellow employes, but he seldom mingles with them socially. They call him "Mandy," a nickname which they gave him when he started working at the shops. "I guess they thought he was sort of sissy," says Edna, "because he always went and came from work all dolled up in his best clothes. I never see him in his work clothes, though I have to wash two changes of them for him every week."

I guess I started then. I used to buy all the funny papers in town and invite a few kids down here to help me read them. Pretty soon every little brat in Enslay knew about it and piled in here three-deep. Why, you

Edna says that she is glad Loyd takes an interest in the home. He often helps her with her house work. He sweeps, mops, makes up the beds, irons; but he can't cook, he doesn't like to wash clothes and he refuses to wash dishes. Edna enjoys house work and says she has plenty to keep her busy most of the time. After she gets Loyd off to work in the mornings she usually goes back to bed to get her "beauty nap," as she calls it. She wakes aboutten, dresses and begins her day's work; first, the dishes, then the bed room, then the floors, and finally dusting. By that time there probably may be a dozen of the neighborhood children congregated in the living room or following her from room to room clamoring for her to play games with them or make milk shakes, ice cream or other refreshments. Then she will leave her work for an hour or two and be hostess to this rowdy group of merry-makers. She has no children of her own, but a daytime visitor to the Lewis home seldom finds less than a dozen children there, all seeming very much at home, and "acting," says Loyd, "as if they owned the place."

Loyd says that Edna is to blame for the children's "hanging around all the time," and that he wishes they would stay away; but Edna says that Loyd is "just kidding." She says that he really likes them but he doesn't understand why he can't have the children and an orderly house at the same time. She claims that he is as much to blame as she is for their rowdy visits.

"Yes," groaned Loyd, "I guess I started them. I used to buy all the funny papers in town and invite a few kids down here to help me read them. Pretty soon every little brat in Ensley knew about it and piled in here three-deep. Why, you

couldn't see the floor for the papers and you couldn't see the papers for the kids. When one of them couldn't find a chair or a space on the floor to sit on, he just climbed on the back of that Chesterfield and tried to perch on top of the floor lamp. That's when I got mad. I was just about to take a whack at that little brat with my belt when Edna came in; but I would have licked him anyway if he had broke that lamp. That made me so confounded mad that I ran them all home, and I haven't bought any more funny papers since."

"But they all came back next morning," said Edna. "They come every morning; but they always leave now before Loyd comes home from work; or, if he doesn't go to work, they come in and sit around without much noise. They always look in the ice box, and if they don't see any ice cream in the trays they will say: 'Aunt Maudie (that's what they call me), Aunt Maudie, ain't you gonna make no ice cream today?' And I say: 'Yes, after awhile maybe we will make some.' Then they just sit around or play till I get my work done, and I know there isn't going to be any peace till I have made the cream, so what else can I do? After all, they are lots of company, and I really enjoy playing with them. I have always loved children and I have always had lots of them around me ever since I can remember. Loyd fixed up a big tree for them last Christmas. I'll bet you he spent close to a hundred dollars for presents for those children."

Three lovely Persian kittens have been given living quarters on the latticed back porch. These, are Loyd's pets; but he calls them "pests." "We let them come in the house sometimes," said Edna, "but they simply walk all over Loyd when they are in here, so we keep them out on the porch most of the time. Loyd likes to play with them, but they shed so

badly now; just keeps him busy brushing hair off his clothes.

Any one who visits the Lewis home is certain to receive a hospitable reception. No one can be more courteous and jovial than Loyd, and no one more kind than his wife. They probably have no acquaintances of long standing who have not received from them some little token of esteem; possibly a piece of needlework, a silken boudoir pillow, or a jar of Edna's delicious home-canned vegetables or fruits.

Washington Copy

12/9/1938

L.H.

Story of  
Loyd Wesley Lewis  
315-34th St.,  
Ensley, Alabama

HOBBIES, PETS AND CHILDREN

By Edward F. Harper

When my wife first suggested that we pay a visit to Loyd and Edna Lewis, I immediately began reciting an appropriate group of my cant excuses, which I have compiled and memorized for the sole purpose of winning a reprieve from social obligations when necessary. "And besides," I added by way of clinching my argument, "I expect to spend the evening working on some material on the lives and habits of steel mill workers."

"Well that's just fine," said my wife. "Loyd Lewis can help you. He works at the Pratt City plant of the Tennessee Company, doing some kind of work in the blacksmith division."

"How long has he worked there?" I asked; and as she chattered I drew a fresh sheet of paper across my writing table and began making notes in my usual methodical manner:

Loyd Wesley Lewis, 315 34th Ave., Ensley

Employer: Tennessee Coal, Iron & RR. Co.

Blacksmith division, 8 years

Age: 27

Education: grade school, 2 years high school

Married Edna Burke (age 26) July 1935

No children

"Edna and I were school chums," my wife went on; "About the sweetest girl I have ever known; so even-tempered and sympathetic. I believe she would simply die if she thought

that she had ever offended any one. This seems so strange when you consider that she never knew the loving devotion of parents. They died when she was very small, and her grandmother and uncle took her into their home. I'm sure they were kind to her. They certainly provided every means they could afford for her happiness. They lived only a short distance from my home, and Edna spent much of her spare time with me.

"It was at my house that she met Loyd Lewis among the gay crowd who used to visit with us there. They became engaged almost immediately, but when they married many of their friends predicted that they would never make a go of it, because their temperaments were so different."

"Loyd was carefree and spendthrift. He liked dancing and lively parties. His sort of life didn't appeal to Edna in the least. Her grandmother's religious discipline may have influenced her disposition; but Edna had some definite convictions of her own. Of course, she always accompanied Loyd when he participated in his friends' gaieties, but only because she felt it her duty to be with him and restrain him if he was disposed to drink too much; for, like his parents, Loyd had acquired the habit of drink very early!"

"Do you mean that both parents drank?"

"Yes, both; although his mother was not the addict that her husband was, I have often seen her shamefully intoxicated. Loyd's parents, Robert and Lela Lewis, left a small farm in Elmore County and came to Birmingham in 1916. At that time they had two children, Loyd, who was six, and a girl, Julia, four years younger. Vainly shifting from

one occupation to another for four years, Robert Lewis finally was given a job as helper at the Tennessee Company, where he had been employed in practically the same capacity ever since. He had but little education himself, but provided consistently and ungrudgingly for the education of his children. They seldom lacked food or clothing, and very often he was known to cater to their whims almost to the extent of extravagance. They, however, received little discipline and less cultural training at home. The daughter, Julia, quickly acquired the slovenly habits and indifferent morals of her parents, and at the age of fifteen ran away from home to marry a bootlegger who owned a small farm near Warrior. This humiliated and practically aroused the hatred of her brother, Loyd, who from an early age resented his family's manner of living.

"Loyd had been working at the steel plant for four years before he married, but he had saved nothing of his earnings; so it was through necessity, rather than choice, that he brought his young wife to live in the home of his parents. They bought new furniture on credit for their one room, and Edna decorated it with attractive wall pictures and draperies. It presented a marked contrast to the untidy condition of the remainder of the house occupied by Loyd's parents.

"After two years of patience and persistence Edna managed to save enough out of her husband's earnings to make the down payment on some new furniture, and they rented a small house in Ensley where they set up housekeeping."

"That was about a year ago, wasn't it?" I asked, checking over my notes.

"Yes", said my wife; "and we have had several invitations to call and have dinner with them. Edna is such a fine cook, that I think she might be called an artist in that line."

I made a note of this and underscored it. Then the suggestion caused me to look at my watch. "Too late for dinner," I said; "still I think we should call on them anyway."

The little bungalow which we approached an hour later is yellow and trimmed with burnt orange. It is back about twenty feet from an unpaved street, and the narrow yard is enclosed by a well-kept hedge. There is some shrubbery and the small porch boasts a few gay potted flowers.

Edna Lewis, an attractive brunette, invited us into a small, cozy living room, overcrowded by its modest but well-chosen appointments. Her husband, who had abandoned his dress shirt and shoes in conformity with the custom which hot weather imposes on the home habits of steel workers, laid down a magazine and rose to greet us. He is slightly taller than his wife, and his black hair was combed straight back from his high forehead. He possesses none of the physical characteristics that one is accustomed to associate with the blacksmithing trade. He was wearing grey tweed trousers, and his wife was dressed in a neat blue house frock with which she wore toudoir slippers.

"Goodness!" she exclaimed, "you sure caught us off guard." She motioned us to a comfortable brown plush Chesterfield, and crossing the room, snapped off the cabinet radio which was blaring the music of a popular dance orchestra. "We were beginning to think that you were never coming to see us."

Loyd sank back into his huge lounging chair and extended an open package of Paul Jones cigarettes.

"What are you reading?" I asked, casually.

He picked up the magazine and handed it to me. It was Good Housekeeping. "I read these now and then while waiting for the new issues of my favorites." He pointed to a rack of magazines, among which I read the names: Thrilling Detective Mystery, Weird Tales, Startling Adventures, and other similar titles.

"Have much time to read?" I asked.

"Spend most of my spare time reading. Play bridge with the neighbors sometimes. We don't go out much now. Edna's got me pretty well tied down with furniture bills, house rent and grocery bills. Just can scrape up enough to see a movie now and then. We haven't been to a dance in ages. While we were going to the dances I managed to keep a fairly fit figure; but look at me now. All this sitting around at home is ruining my waistline. Why, I bought six suits of clothes just before we went in debt and now I can hardly get into one of them. Maybe when the shop opens up full time again I'll be able to work off some of my surplus weight.

"What hours do you work?"

"From seven to three-thirty, day shift. Have to get up about five; shave while Edna cooks breakfast; then eat while she packs my lunch pail. A buddy picks me up about six. That gives us time to make it to the shop at Pratt City and get changed to our work clothes.

"You work in the blacksmith division, don't you? Did you begin as an apprentice?"

"No, I started out as helper. Helpers get a higher rate of pay than apprentices to begin with. Last year the company signed an educational agreement with the I.C.S. (International Correspondence Schools) and many of our helpers enrolled for apprenticeship training. I would have enrolled if they had offered this training when I began working there. An apprentice has a higher rating when he becomes a mechanic than the man who begins as helper. I started out as hammer boy. A hammer boy operates the throttle of the big steam hammer that is used to beat hot metal bars into shape for machining. Now I work with the drill press and the lathe; that is, I machine the jobs which the hammer turns out in the rough. Most of our jobs are repair work on the company's locomotives. In heat times we have as many as twenty-five men in our division; but work's on the drag at present. We are only working three days a week, but I think we will go on a four-day shift beginning next week."

"What is the average salary for blacksmiths?" I ventured, casually.

"We get paid by the hour," Loyd explained "and have various ratings. Mine is seventy-five cents an hour. We work an eight-hour shift."

He paused and peered through the window beside him as we heard the tread of passing footsteps on the gravel street.

"Hello, Mandy!" called a girl's voice from the street.

"Hello!" Loyd called back.

Edna, who in the meantime had been conversing with my wife, turned to me and explained: "All the folks 'round here call him Mandy. He picked up that nickname when he started working at the plant. The fellows thought he was sort of 'sissy' at first. I guess it was because he always goes and comes from work dressed up in the latest fashion. I've never seen him in his work clothes, though I have to wash two or three changes of them every week."

"They don't think that about you now, do they Loyd?" asked my wife.

"I hope to creak the first cockeyed nut that sticks out his neck like he thinks so," blurted Loyd, grimly.

"But the name has stuck, anyway," said Edna.

It was hardly the time for my wife to mention it, but I can't say that Loyd seemed to take any offense when she suggested that Edna show me some of the fancy needle work which her husband had amassed through years of painstaking devotion to his peculiar hobby. I say peculiar, because it is a rare thing to find a man of Loyd's occupation who can appreciate this particular art; rarer still to find one who is skilled in it.

Among the specimens that Edna brought out of a large cedar chest were embroidered boudoir and buffet pieces, table covers and napkins, and a variety of silken boudoir pillows.

"When did you form this strange habit?" I asked.

"Oh, I don't remember," said Loyd; "just picked it up a long while ago."

"I'll tell you when it started," Edna put in; "His mother told me all about it. He always hated the untidy habits of his family from the time he was old enough to notice them. He used to beg for pretty coverlets and pillows for his bed, and when his mother refused to buy them, some of the women in the neighborhood taught him and he began decorating his plain pillows and coverlets so that he might have the things he liked around him."

"Edna, you have loads of needle work of your own, haven't you?" asked my wife.

"Yes, but I've about quit doing it any more. Between us, we've got more than we'll ever be able to use; and I've given hundreds of pieces away."

"But you'll be doing some of a different kind in a few more years, I suppose?"

Edna looked at my wife and laughed. "No, I suppose not. We've about given up hope. Anyway I don't think Loyd wants any children."

"I don't want any?" exploded Loyd; "I don't want how many more, why don't you say? I practically raise all the neighbors' children now. I wouldn't have room for my own if I had any."

I was beginning to think they were on the verge of a family quarrel when Edna laughingly explained that Loyd did not like the idea of having his house overrun by the neighborhood children.

"But it's mostly my fault," she continued. "I've always played with the children, and when we moved down here away

from Loyd's family I got lonesome while he was at work, so I began inviting the children in for company. I played games with them and always gave them milkshakes and ice cream. Pretty soon I had as many as twenty-five or thirty children coming in almost daily. I didn't realize that they would be such a big expense; and they never hurt anything."

"Oh, no," snarled Loyd; "they never hurt anything. They just walk all over the furniture with their muddy feet; they turn over tables and floor lamps, raid the ice box and pillage every drawer on the place."

"Why, Loyd!" said Edna; "You know it isn't as bad as all that. And besides, you know that you are partly to blame for their coming down here."

"Yes," groaned Loyd; "I used to buy all the funny papers I could find and let some of them come in and read them. Soon every kid in Ensley knew it and crowded in here three deep. Why, you couldn't see the floor for the papers, and you couldn't see the papers for the kids. When one of them couldn't find a chair or a space on the floor to sit on, he just climbed up on the back of that Chesterfield and tried to perch on top of the floor lamp. That's when I got mad. I wanted to take a whack at him with my belt, and I would have if he had broke that lamp. Lucky for him that I caught it just before it hit the floor. I ran them all home, and I haven't brought any more funny papers home since."

It was evident that Loyd was making an attempt to disguise his fondness for children. His chief difficulty seemed to be that he disliked having to pay the price of

their companionship. He had failed to understand why he could not have the children and an orderly house at the same time.

"Did they come back again after being run home?" I asked.

"Oh, yes," said Edna; "They came back next day. They come every day; but they always leave before Loyd gets home from work, or they sit around quietly while he is here. They start coming in about ten o'clock every morning. I always go back to bed when I get Loyd off to work, and they know that I don't get up until ten. They always look in the ice box, and if they don't find what they are looking for they say: 'Aunt Maudie (that's what they call me), ain't you gonna make no ice cream today?' And I say: 'Yes, after awhile maybe we will make some.' Then they just sit around or play till I get my work done; and I know that there isn't any way to get rid of them until I have made the cream, so what else can I do?"

"You could run them home." suggested Loyd.

"Yes," said Edna; "and by Christmas you'd have them all back again by fixing up a big Christmas tree and playing Santa Claus for them. Why, I bet you, last Christmas you spent a hundred dollars on presents and fruit and candy for those children."

Loyd grinned sheepishly. "I don't see how you get any work done with them hanging around all the time." he grumbled.

"Does it take much work to keep a compact little house like this?" asked my wife.

"It doesn't seem so," said Edna; "but it is so crowded that one can hardly use a mop without bumping the handle against the furniture." She rose and started toward the door leading to the dining room, saying, "Come, let me show you the rest of our little home."

All the rooms are of about the same dimensions as the living room, which appears to be about ten by twelve feet; and all the rooms except one are equally as crowded with such furniture as one finds in the usual modern home. There are two bed rooms. One is furnished with an ornate four-poster bedroom suite, with orange spread and draperies to match; the other with a plain iron bed covered with a blue spread.

"This," commented Edna, "is our spare room. When we have overnight company we give them our room and we sleep here. At first we used this as a junk room, but we got tired of sleeping on the floor when we had company, so we bought this extra bed."

The kitchen is immaculate. Small white curtains hang on the windows, and the ivory linoleum glistens in the light. The gas range is snow white porcelain, and there is a kitchen cabinet to match the color scheme. For lack of space the electric ice box had been placed in the dining room, which has modernistic furniture, and another linoleum of variegated pattern covers this floor also.

Loyd opened the door leading to the back porch and three beautiful Persian kittens emerged from the darkness and began purring about our ankles.

"The rest of our family," said Edna. "We have to look them out now and then to get a rest. They simply walk all over us when we leave them in. And they are shedding badly now; it keeps Loyd busy brushing his clothes and washing his hands."

As we returned through the dining room, Edna paused and opened a cabinet, revealing rows of home-canned vegetables and fruits, jellies and spices. "Do you like homemade chow-chow?" she asked us. I acknowledged my fondness for it, and assured her that the whole display looked too tempting for a man of my appetite to gaze on too long. Then my wife introduced a question about recipes for fig preserves. Loyd and I perceived that this was our cue to return to the living room and leave the women to chatter of preserving and canning.

When we were about to depart, Edna brought a large paper bag from the kitchen and handed it to my wife. I could have guessed its contents, and was not surprised when, an hour later, my wife opened the bag and placed three jars of fruit among her own collection. To exchange samples of their canning achievements is a custom of long standing among women of the South.

LENT THE KID FIX IT

Ted Smith works for the Alabama Lint Mills, Inc., where he is a mechanic. He began working for the company in 1924 when he was 16. Years of painstaking effort and hard work preceded his present position.

"There ain't no gear or cog in the whole plant," says Ted, "that I ain't been over a hundred times in the 15 years I been workin' here. Even them new gins up yonder that wasn't 'sposed to give us no trouble has come in for their share of grief. Mr. Fred (the proprietor) says he needs another mechanic to help keep up repairs; but hell; what he needs is a whole new plant, if you ask me."

The Alabama Lint Mills, Inc., manufactures cottonseed oil and meal, various grades of seed lint, and other by-products from ginned cottonseed. Its half-dozen large, red buildings cover an entire block on the outskirts of the business section, and the premises are enclosed by a high board fence. Near the center of the mill yard is a low, rectangular building that houses the company's offices. It was here that I asked permission to interview Ted Smith, and waited while he was being summoned.

Short, stout and muscular, Ted is 31 years old, but his dark, short-cropped mustache and stubby growth of beard make him appear older. I watched him coming across the mill yard, his small, even teeth showing in a good-natured grin. His gait was slow and leisurely, and he allowed his huge body to sway as if in pure love of movement. His faded overalls were grimy and there was a smudge of grease on his blunt nose and across his right cheek.

"You're Mr. Smith?" I asked, extending my hand.

"That's me," said Ted, "but I reckon you better not shake hands with me." He exhibited his palms briefly, showing that they were thorough-

ly coated with black oil resembling thick paste. "I been puttin' in a new sprinkler system up there, and it's a damn nasty job."

I explained my mission, and he grinned as if he felt flattered. But when I asked if he would be permitted to show me about the plant and explain its various operations, he said:

"I can show you as much as anybody else around here, but I can't do it right now. You see, I got to finish up that sprinkler job. If you can come out here, say next Monday, I'll have plenty of time to take you all over the place. If you want to know about the lives of the workers, I can't tell you much about that. As for me, I been married 'bout three years; got a wife and boy 'bout two years old. I live out west side: 508 Evergreen Street.

"We just got three rooms--one side of the house. Another family's got the other side. If you could come out there tonight, I'll tell you all I know about mill work. Right now, I reckon I better git on back to that sprinkler job before the old man misses me and starts raisin' Cain."

The white, flat-roofed bungalow in which Ted Smith's family has an apartment, has a banistered front porch that almost adjoins the sidewalk. One door from the porch, enters duplex apartments, the Smith's being on the left. There is a living room with practically new furniture, including a modest living room suite, a narrow library table, and a cabinet radio. The next room back is a bedroom, modestly furnished, but not nearly as tidy as the living room. A baby crib is under the double windows, and a two-wheeled push-cart is in a corner nearby. The kitchen is large, and also serves as a dining room. It is equipped with a gas stove, cabinet, breakfast table, electric refrigerator, and the floor is covered with linoleum.

The two-year-old son of the Smiths' has big, smiling brown eyes and coal-black hair like his father's.

Numerous badly-abused toys are strewn about the rooms.

Mrs. Smith is 27, and looks her age. Ted says she was "a purty good-lookin' gal when we married," but a seige of illness after the baby was born caused her to lose considerable weight. Her smile is artificial and cheerless, and there is no evidence of animation in her face except, when little Ted, who is learning to substitute longer phrases for the monosyllables of infancy, causes her eyes to brighten with pride or amusement at his efforts at coherent articulation.

To Ted everything that the child says or does is remarkable, meriting his whole attention. He seemed to be as disappointed as was the child when the mother suggested that it was time for the youngster to retire.

"We always try to get him to bed by eight," said Mrs. Smith, taking the child off his small, red kiddie car, despite shrieks of protest. "As a rule we don't have much trouble with him, but when company is around he thinks we ought to make an exception. If we go anywhere at night, we always leave him with my mother, who lives a little ways down the street. I think she's about got him spoiled, letting him stay up till we get back."

After the child had been removed, screaming, from the room, Ted drew a package of cigarettes from his shirt pocket and began talking about himself.

"Well, I was born right here in Birmingham on the 30th of January in 1908. I was next to the eldest of four children. Sam-- he's the eldest, and named after Pa,--joined the army after he finished school. I just went one year to high school; then I told Pa I was gonna quit and go to work, so's I could buy me some new clothes and have some money of my own. Ma was sick a right smart of the time, and Pa was havin' a purty hard road of it sendin' three kids to school and payin' doctor bills. So Pa said, 'All right, if you want to work, I'll try to get you on at the mills.' He had been workin' for Mr. Fred about 10 years, I reckon, but he was

superintendent there about a year before I started. He has been workin' there 'bout 25 years, altogether, I reckon.

"Pa got me a job doin' errands and odd jobs around the mills. I was 16 years old. At first Mr. Fred said they couldn't put me on. He said to Pa: 'That boy ought 'a be in school; he's just a kid.' But Pa told <sup>him</sup> I didn't want to go to school no more; so Mr. Fred finally said all right, I could go to work there, but he didn't want no playin' aroun' on the job.

"I got three dollars a week to start. It didn't take me long to learn somethin' about all the machinery around. I had the run of the place; I would go from one end of the mills to the other, all the time <sup>u</sup> tryin' how the machinery worked. When anything went wrong and the mechanics had to be called in to fix it up, I was right there lookin' on. Purty soon I got so I could tell when anything was 'bout to get out of fix by the sound it made; and it wasn't long till I knew as much about how to fix it as the mechanics.

"I remember the first time I started workin' on the machinery. There was some trouble with one of the boilers. The mechanics didn't seem to know what was wrong, so I told them what I thought about it. Well, they wouldn't pay no attention to me. They said I didn't know what I was talkin' 'bout; but I knew I could fix that thing in no time if I was given a chance. So I just <sup>a</sup> sit around and watched them tear all the guts out of that boiler, tryin' to locate the grief. They worked on it all day and part of the next day. That was Saturday. They was 'sposed to get off Saturday afternoon, but before they left Mr. Fred come around and ask them when they was gonna have that boiler ready for firin' up. They told him they couldn't find the trouble and asked him to write to the factory about it. Mr. Fred said he would wire the factory to send a mechanic down here and get it fixed. He was losin' money while the boiler was tied up.

"The mechanics knocked off at dinner-time and the plant was gettin'

ready to close for the day when I went up to Mr. Fred's office to see if he wanted me to do anything before I went home; but the main reason was because I wanted to tell him that I could fix that boiler and save him a lot of money. I told him what I thought was wrong with it. At first he didn't pay much attention to me; but when I went on explainin' what I knew about boilers, he looked at me right serious like and said, 'Come on, Kid,'--he always called me 'Kid' ever since I started workin' at the mills. He said, 'Come on and let's go out there and have a look at that thing.'

"Well, Sir, that just suited me. We went out there and I started workin' while he sat on the fireman's bench watchin' me. By one o'clock I had put in new packin' and had the thing back together. Then I went around and turned on the intake valve and the gauge showed that everything was workin' up to notch. Mr. Fred had the boiler fired Monday and he was tickled to death over that job. After that, whenever there was any trouble that the mechanics took too much time on, Mr. Fred would kid them along by saying, 'Where's the Kid? we'll let the Kid fix it.' There was lots of jobs I couldn't fix; but I bet I've saved Mr. Fred plenty of money since I been there.

"Pa wasn't much help to me in gettin' ahead at the mills. I reckon I could have done better if he hadn't been superintendent. You see, he didn't want to push me ahead because he was afraid that the other men might think he was doin' it because I was his son. After I had been workin' there 'bout five years, Pa resigned as superintendent and I made a little more headway. Mr. Fred took me in the office and said he was goin' to make a bookkeeper out of me. He was payin' me \$7 a week then, and I was workin' every day and Sunday. When I went in the office he raised me to \$10 and I had Sunday off.

"But it didn't take him long to find out that I wasn't cut out for

that sort of work. I had fooled around with the mill machinery so long that I felt like it couldn't get along without me. Every time somebody reported trouble anywhere in the mill, I'd slip out of the office and go see if I couldn't fix it 'fore the mechanics was called. Half the time, when Mr. Fred wanted me for somethin', he had to look for me in the mill rooms.

"One day Mr. Fred came out lookin' for me and found me workin' under one of the new gins. 'Well, Kid,' he said, 'whenever you find out how that new gin works, come on over to the office; I want to talk to you.' He thought I was just tamperin' with it for the fun of it; but Mr. Barnes--that's the man who was superintendent after Pa quit--he come up about that time and told him that the machine hadn't been workin' right since it was put in. Then Mr. Fred said, 'Well, we've got mechanics 'round here, haven't we? What are you payin' Etheridge for?'

"I thought Mr. Fred was in a bad mood from the way he talked, so I hurried up with the job and went back to the office to see what he wanted. I expected he was goin' to give me a jakin' up 'bout bein' out of the office so much. But when I went in Mr. Fred said, 'Kid, how would you like to go away to college and study to be a Mechanical Engineer?' I told him I'd like it fine, but I didn't have no money. Then he said he would take care of that. He said he needed a good mechanic 'round the mills. He said he thought I already knew about as much about machinery as Etheridge, but he said he couldn't pay me a mechanic's salary because I didn't have the trainin'.

"Well, I agreed to go to college, Mr. Fred payin' the way, but when we found out that I would have to go back to finish high school before I could take up engineerin', we just let the matter drop; and purty soon after that Mr. Fred let me go back to helping Etheridge in the mill rooms.

"When Etheridge was sent to the mills at Tupelo, I got his place and the same pay he was gettin'--\$25 a week. I held my own purty well until the old

machinery begin to wear out, and Mr. Fred had to put on another mechanic to help keep up repairs. That's the only time me and Mr. Fred ever had any real trouble with each other. He said he had to pay the new mechanic more than me because he had trainin' as a mechanical engineer and I didn't. I told Mr. Fred I didn't see what difference that makes. Then he told me that Engleburger--that was the new mechanic's name--wouldn't work for the same pay as an apprentice. And I said, 'To hell with Engleburger. I'm willin' to work with him, but <sup>I'm</sup> damned if I work under him'. And I walked out madder'n hell.

"It was 'bout 10 o'clock when I left Mr. Fred's office. At 10:15 I was bathed and dressed and was headed across the mill yard when Pa hollered at me and wanted to know where I was goin'. I told him I was goin' to look for another job.

"But I didn't look. I didn't even want another job. Fact of the matter is, I just hung 'round the house takin' a vacation, you might say.

"After 'bout two weeks I was dyin' to go back to the mills, but I couldn't afford to let Mr. Fred know I wanted to come back. Finally Mr. Fred sent Pa home to get me. He said he had some repair work that had to be done right away, and if I didn't come back he'd have to get another man to take my place, but he'd rather have me.

"Boy, I was tickled to death! That was just what I'd been waitin' for. I wanted to go back with Pa right away, but I decided to wait till next mornin', sort of indifferent like, so Mr. Fred wouldn't think that I was itchin' to come back. When I went in I told Mr. Fred that I had come back to help him out of a jam, and that I didn't intend to stay. But I did stay. We never did get the work caught up, and later, Mr. Fred had to put on another mechanic to help me and Engleburger. The machinery was wearin' out fast and it kept us busy keepin' up repairs.

"I'm makin' \$27 now and the other mechanics get \$30. I got \$35 before the depression and the others got around \$45 and \$50. Most of the laborers are niggers. They get paid by the day,—'bout \$2 on an average.

"Some union men tried to organize the niggers at the mills 'bout ten years ago, but they didn't make much headway. They come to Mr. Fred with a contract askin' for five cents raise on the hour. Mr. Fred tore up the contract and run them out of the office. He said he ain't signin' no contract with his niggers; if they ain't satisfied with what they are gettin' they ought to come to him and talk it over and maybe he can make some other arrangements.

"That made the union men mad, and they called the niggers to a meetin' and set a date for a strike. That was on Wednesday they had the meetin'. They sent a notice to Mr. Fred tellin' him they'd give him till Monday to raise their pay. But Mr. Fred didn't do nothin' about it; he just went on like he never even got it.

"Durin' the rest of the week Mr. Fred strolled 'round through the plant a good bit talkin' to the niggers. But he never mentioned nothin' about the union's notice for a strike. He just talked to them sort of friendly like, askin' them 'bout their wives and children and if any of them needed any help any way. I remember him talkin' to my nigger up in the lint room-- that's Sam who's been helpin' me on my jobs ever since I started workin' at the mills. Mr. Fred asked him: 'Sam, how's that old woman treatin' you these days? Is that boy of yours ever get well enough to go back to work? Sam told him the boy was better but wasn't able to do no hard work yet. Then Mr. Fred said, 'Well, Sam, whenever you think he's well enough, bring him down here and we'll see if we can fix him up some sort of easy job so's he can help you and the old woman out a little.'

"That's the sort of talk that pulled Mr. Fred out of that mess. When

the time for the strike come--that was at 12 o'clock on the next Monday-- only 'bout half of the niggers left their jobs and went over to the office for their pay. Mr. Fred went out to the front of the office where they was standin' 'round and talked to them. He told them that he hated to lose them, 'cause they was mighty good workers; but he said he could get other men to take their places without no trouble at all. He said what he hated most was to see them go on strike when jobs was so hard to find; and if they walked out on him like that, they couldn't ever get a job at his mills no more.

"Well, the niggers didn't know what to do 'bout that. They hung 'round and talked 'bout it awhile, and a few of them went on back to work. Then, after a while, Mr. Fred come out ag'in and told them that maybe they did need a raise and he had been figurin' on givin' them one next month, but he wasn't fixin' to make no deal with the union. He told them he would give them a three-cent raise on the hour beginnin' the first of the month, and if they wasn't satisfied with that they could just come on in and get their pay and get out for good.

"After Mr. Fred said that, he went on back in the office and the niggers got their heads together ag'in and decided to take Mr. Fred's offer. That was the end of the union, and there ain't been no more talk 'bout it since.

"Mr. Fred could pay more all right. He's got plenty money, and he makes plenty. But as long as he can get plenty of cheap labor he's not goin' to pay a cent more than he has to. As for me, now, I'd like to see the men organized. But there ain't but a few white hands, and it's hard as all hell to git niggers to stick up for their rights.

"It was 'bout the time of the union trouble that Pa had a fallin' out with Mr. Fred and quit as superintendent. Pa sided with the union and tried to get Mr. Fred to give in to them; but that wasn't the main reason why he quit. He caught the bailing room foreman shortin' the niggers. They get

paid by the tons of lint they bale, and the foreman was always turnin' their weights in short. Pa caught him at it and told him if he didn't stop it he was goin' to Mr. Fred 'bout it. He said he was tired of the niggers comin' to him complainin' about bein' short. Well, Pa finally had to go to Mr. Fred. He asked him to give him a new foreman for the baling room. But Mr. Fred wouldn't let Pa fire Higgins. He said he'd talk to Higgins hisself. I don't know if Mr. Fred ever said anything to him, but he went right on shortin' the men, and Pa went to Mr. Fred ag'in. This time he told Mr. Fred he would have to git rid of Higgins or he'd quit.

"Well, Mr. Fred still wouldn't let Higgins go, so Pa walked out. I asked Pa if he didn't think I ought to quit too, but he said, no, it was just a matter between Mr. Fred and him, and he would come back to work when Mr. Fred made up his mind to get rid of Higgins.

"Mr. Fred hired Mr. Barnes in Pa's place, and pretty soon he had trouble with Higgins too. Some of the niggers got tired of bein' shorted and quit. Then Mr. Fred begin to believe that Higgins was doin' some sort of crooked work, and he decided to find out where the trouble was.

"I knew exactly how much Higgins was shortin' them niggers. You see, after Pa quit, I begin to do a little checkin' myself. My work is all over the plant, so I'd make a note of Higgins' check sheet when I passed through the baling room, then I'd check it against the output in the lint room. They got a check sheet in the lint room now, but they didn't have none then. I had to figure up the output of the lint room myself. I knew how many pounds of lint each gin would turn out per hour. So, one day Mr. Fred asked me how many tons of lint did I reckon them gins could turn out in a day.

"I didn't know right off what he was up to, but I reached in my pocket and took out the card I'd been makin' my check-up on. He looked at it a minute, then he asked me what I was keepin' that record for. I told him I just wanted

to know how much the gins could turn out in a week. Mr. Fred said, "We've got that record in the office". And I said, "I know you've got the weight of the bales turned out, but you don't have no record to show how much less there is between the lint room and the baler. Mr. Fred asked me a few more questions 'bout the figures on the card, then he put the card in his pocket and went back to the office.

"Well, that little card spelt hell for Higgins. I reckon Mr. Fred told him that figures don't lie, and Higgins couldn't get 'round that. Mr. Fred put me in the baling room to take Higgins' place till he could get another man. At the same time he put a check sheet in the lint room, so we never had no trouble 'bout shortage since then.

"Pa come back, but not as superintendent. He said he didn't want that responsibility no more. He just does odd jobs around the plant, helpin' out the mechanics and fillin' in whenever they need him."

Ted's narrative was interrupted by hollow coughing. I said, "You'd better do something about that."

"I reckon it does sound awful to anybody who ain't used to bein' around the mills," he said finally. "But it ain't nothin' serious. It's just the lint in my throat and lungs that makes me cough like that. Nearly everybody who works in the lint room very long gets it. We've got sprinklers to keep down the lint dust, but you can't get rid of it all. I reckon I ain't been off on account of bein' sick in more'n five years. I eat too hearty to get sick. May--that's my wife--she says I eat like a horse. I eat eight or ten biscuits every mornin' for breakfast, and May's a mighty good hand when it comes to biscuits.

"Sometimes we have ham and eggs for breakfast, but most of the time just bacon and eggs. On Sunday mornin's we sometimes have fried chicken, and I take some of it in my lunch. You see, we work seven days a week, but I get off sometimes to take the family out. I go to work at seven and I don't ever

get home before six. I take a shower and dress at the mills 'fore I come home.

"We eat supper 'bout six. Sometimes May has steak or pork chops. I don't go much for vegetables, 'cept potatoes and butterbeans and stuff like that. I like Italian spaghetti, Irish stew, pot roast and that sort of thing. May eats nearly everything, but she don't eat near enough for her own good. The boy eats purty hearty. May says he takes his appetite from me.

"We go to the show 'bout once a week. We don't belong to no church-- that is, I don't. May used to be a member in the Methodist, I think, 'fore we married. I want the boy to start to Sunday School when he gets a little older. I believe every kid ought to go to Sunday school even if they never do join no church. I want the boy to have a good education, too. I'm goin' to see that he gets a college education if he wants it.

"We been married 'bout three years. May's Pa runs a grocery store, and Pa and Ma used to trade with him. May was workin' in the store is how I met her. She got through grammar school but had to stop there 'cause the doctor said she wasn't in good health, and it would be better to stay out of school a year or two. She didn't ever go back.

"He and May used to get around a good deal 'fore the kid come along. Right after he was born, May took sick and we thought she wasn't goin' to be able to pull through for awhile. The doctor said it was some trouble caused from the boy bein' born too soon. But there ain't nothin' wrong with him, far as we can tell.

"The wage-hour law ain't made any difference at the mills that I can see. I think it is a good law but nearly everybody at the mills was gettin' as much money as the law called for already. Of course, the men ain't workin' as long hours as they did.

"I don't vote. I never have no time to fool with politics. I didn't have nothin' to do with electin' President Roosevelt, but I think he's the best man we ever had in the White House. If I was votin' and he run for a third

term, I'd vote for him. Lots of folks seems to be gettin' tired of him and want somebody else. Well, that's just like most people. They don't want to stick to anything for any length of time. Sometimes I sorta feel like that myself, but I just keep goin' right on at the same old thing.

"Sometimes I think I would like to quit the mill work and get out of this town for good. But even if I did leave here I reckon I would have to keep to mill work, 'cause it's the only kind of work I know. My brother says he could get me a job with his company drivin' a freight truck if I wanted it. Well, I don't know whether I'll take him up on it or not. I reckon the next time you see me I'll still be workin' for Mr. Fred.

7/17/1939

S.J.