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Manchester Excursion- Travel Report

Hi there! My name is Margaret and I'm working and living at a cotton mill called Quarry Bank Mill. It's near Manchester, from where I came seven years ago. My family sent me here because when my father died, I had to feed my little brothers and sisters. Only because of our excellent contacts did I have the opportunity to work in the mill, where my uncle is one of the provosts. They needed new workers anyway, as the wool industry has experienced some kind of boom, since the fabrication of electric, mechanical spinning wheels and other machines which facilitate and speed up the process of cotton production. For me and my sister, who came with me, it was a great chance, because there weren't a lot of possibilities to work and earn good money as a woman those days.

I was so overwhelmed when I first came here; in the middle of nowhere, in the pure green landscape there was this gigantic brick-lined factory. There was thick, vibrant smoke streaming out of the numerous chimneys. An earsplitting noise, a monotonous rumbling that was already audible several hundreds of meters away, filled up the air. It was a rainy day when we arrived in the mill, the streets were muddy and the lane was littered with potholes filled with a mixture of rainwater and equine excrement. Our finest clothes we wore in consideration of the upcoming interview with Mister Greg were muddy from top to bottom - fortunately our mother wasn't around. Since my little sister was barely twelve and I already eighteen, we were separated from each other right from the beginning. Hanna had to sleep with the other kids in the Apprentice House, a special building only for the children. I myself on the other hand was sent to the other women, in a completely different corner of the property. The separation was to last for the next six years. Even during the daytime we saw each other only on rare occasions. Whereas Hanna had to clean up the machines and floors and had to help with her tiny fingers wherever she was needed, for example to thread the cotton back in the spinning mill or weaving looms when it was ripped out, I stood at one of the machines where the cotton threads were made thinner and more robust. I still work at these machines and it's getting more straining for me every day. I'm working twelve hours a day, interrupted only by short breaks for tea and lunch, in

the low-ceilinged, dark, hot and stuffy room. I have to oversee and control four machines each of which has nearly 250 mandrels. On the one hand it's a monotonous work, but on the other hand I always have to be watchful and concentrated, as the tiniest failure could mean a great loss of wool, time and money.

Besides I'm living in persistent danger. Due to the lack of a hair protector, the machine with its different cogwheels could rip out bunches of your hair at any moment of inattention. Several other women have already lost one or two of their fingers in the mill. What's more, the dispersed dust of the cotton strains the lungs and my throat is always dry and raw. After the seven years I've noticed that my breathing is getting more difficult and I have to cough more often. Not to mention that my hearing is getting worse because of the excessive noise. At regular intervals I have to visit our mill doctor Mister Holland to check up my state of health. Too many colleagues of mine I had to see vanishing because of tuberculosis and other ailments. But I need the money and have no other appropriate opportunity.