

WINSTON, N.C., 1909— As time passed, Helen could be up and doing some things around the house. Sis Nan returned to her home, and Mother took away the bed in the parlor. Though Helen still wore her bandages, she went back to her normal summer routine of watching the younger children, helping in the kitchen while staying close to Mother.

Papa and Mother saved visiting and relaxing for the evening hours when they retreated to the front porch to enjoy the night air. There they talked and regained the energy they spent at work during the day. One night Helen was sitting on the porch with them. The evening was peaceful with a slight breeze moving the leaves of the vines that Mother had planted at the side of the porch. The vines formed a thick green curtain that filtered some of the noise coming from the textile mill that had been built recently a few blocks away.

Since the mill opened, Mother had tried to shield her family from the effects of having the mill nearby. Others in the community said their town was getting ahead by becoming industrialized, but Mother resisted the growth that the mill represented. The mill was an unwanted neighbor that moved to town, right down the street from her.

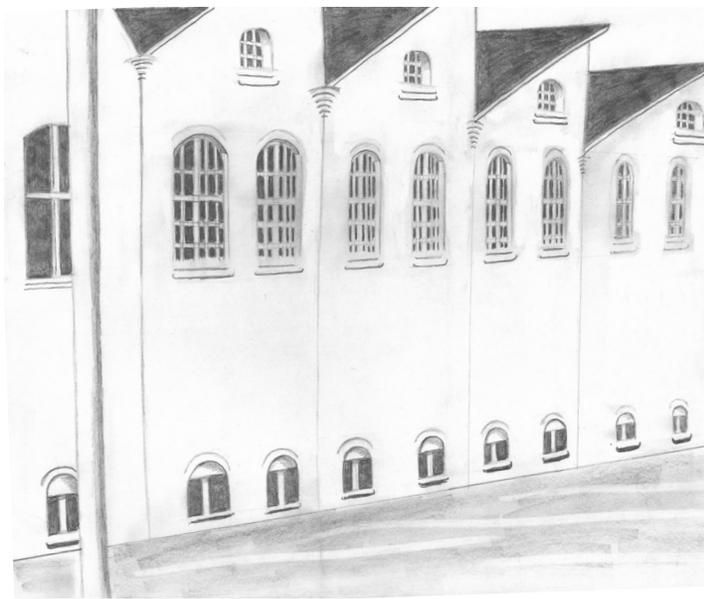
Helen looked in that direc-

tion. “Why does the mill have to be so close to town, right where we live?” she asked.

Papa didn’t welcome the mill either, but he knew it was good for business. Putting Jack down to toddle about the porch, he leaned forward and propped his elbows on his knees to explain. “Not long ago,” he said, “mills were located near the river so they could use the energy from the water wheel to run the machinery. But now that electricity can provide the power, mills can be built where they are convenient to the marketplace, to the railroad and to the people who will work there.”

Helen knew when Papa mentioned the workers living close to her family, he hit on the problem that most bothered Mother. She was a stickler for things being the best that she could make them, and she was surely worried about the village of smaller houses that had been built around the mill. She had said it before, and she said it again. “Those houses will change the value of our home.” She added, “Some of them are so small that the folks must eat, sleep and work in the same room.”

“Now, Mother,” Harry interrupted, “our YMCA was established to help men like the ones who have come to work in the mills. They’ve left their farms and the only life they knew. Some of them



*Sawtooth Building*

have brought their families with them, but many young men have broken their ties to home and have come to town to make a new start.”

Papa turned to Helen again and tried to explain. “Some big changes have taken place on the farms near here. You see, farmers used to grow and make almost all the things they needed, food and clothes, furniture and houses. They didn’t need much money because they didn’t have much to buy. Now, all over the south, farmers are pouring everything into raising some kind of cash crop. Around here the crop is tobacco or wheat or sometimes cotton. If they don’t get the price they expect at the market in the fall, then they don’t have enough money to pay for what they need.”

“And,” Harry added, “you should hear some of the men

hoped things would be better.”

“Or,” Mother broke in, “they would move to town where they hoped things would be better.” Mother had given up trying to sew as twilight had turned to dark. She had been listening while Papa and Harry talked.

Now Mother returned to the idea of the mill. “Some people say the mill owners are doing a wonderful thing by bringing the poor farmers to work in the factories and mills. Giving them work, giving them a home and saving them from poverty, those are good things. But something has gone wrong between what started as a good idea and what is actually happening.”

Her voice became softer as she switched her thinking from the houses to the people who lived in them. “I see women going to work all day in the mill. And I see young children your own age, Helen, going to work in the heat and a din of machinery. Oh, I know the women and

children worked hard on the farm, but some of the children are working full time when they’re just too young. They should be in school.”

Papa stood and walked to the railing of the porch next to Harry, then walked to stand behind Mother’s chair. Papa rested his hands on Mother’s shoulders.

“Well,” he said, “all of us are dreaming of a better life and looking for a place to try new ideas. That’s what brought people across the sea to America and from the north to settle on the farmland in the south. Now hope brings them from the farms into town, still looking for something better for themselves and their families.”

### next chapter—Girls fill bucket

*Adapted and reprinted with permission. Written by Helen Marley based on her mother’s stories; illustrated by Thorne Worley. Provided by the N.C. Press Foundation, Newspapers in Education.*

**ACTIVITY:** Compare the economic troubles described in the chapter to forces described in today’s news. What changes took place during Helen’s childhood? What changes do print and/or online newspapers report today?

**HISTORY:** When factories close, some are converted to other uses. Built as a hosiery mill, the Sawtooth building in Winston-Salem now serves as a visual arts center. Have factories in your community been converted?