

*The*  
GERMAN WORKER  
*Working-Class Autobiographies  
from the Age of  
Industrialization*

Translated, edited,  
and with an Introduction by

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Adelheid Popp,  
Factory Worker

Adelheid Popp (1869–1939) was the fifteenth child of a family of weavers. Her father was an alcoholic who died young, leaving Popp's mother struggling to raise the family. Forced to work since childhood, Popp was a maid, a seamstress, and a worker in a variety of factories in Vienna. At sixteen she became a Social Democrat and soon after rose to prominence as founder and editor of the *Working Women's News* (*Arbeiterinnen Zeitung*) and a leader of the Austrian Social Democratic women's movement. After World War I, she was a representative in the Austrian parliament. Her autobiography, which had a preface by August Bebel, was intended to inspire other working women (as well as to inform the middle class). Aside from Karl Fischer's autobiography, which was excerpted earlier, Popp's was the only working-class autobiography to attract much public attention. It even appeared in an English translation with a preface by Ramsey MacDonald. (The translation here is new.) In this section of her autobiography, Popp shows us the Vienna of the early 1880s from the perspective of a desperate and impoverished working girl. There is no better description from a female perspective of the demoralizing search for work and the

dilemmas of holding on to a job even in the face of sexual pressures from superiors.

### [FINDING WORK]

It was a cold, severe winter, and the wind and snow could come unhindered into our room. In the morning when we opened the door we first had to hack away the ice on it in order to get out, because the entrance to our room was directly on the courtyard, and we had only a single glass door. My mother left the house at five-thirty because she had to start work at six. An hour later I went out to look for work. "Please, I need a job"—it had to be repeated countless times. I used to be on the street for almost the whole day. We couldn't heat our room—that would have been extravagant—so I wandered around the streets, into churches, and to the cemetery. I took along a piece of bread and a few kreuzers to buy myself something at noon. I always had to hold back the tears forcibly when my request for work was denied and I had to leave the warm room. How gladly I would have done any work, just so I wouldn't have to freeze. My clothes got wet in the snow, and my limbs were stiff from the hours of walking around. What's more, my mother was getting more and more resentful. My brother had found work; snow had fallen, so he was busy\*—of course the pay was so low that he could hardly support himself. I was the only one still without work.

I couldn't even get work in the candy factories, where I had assumed they would need more help at Christmastime. Today I know that almost all of the Christmas work is done several weeks before the holidays; the factory women have to work day and

Translated from Adelheid Popp, *Die Jugendgeschichte einer Arbeiterin*, ed. Hans J. Schütz (Berlin/Bonn: J. H. W. Dietz Verlag, 1980), 48–60. Originally published with a preface by August Bebel (Munich: Ernst Reinhardt Verlag, 1909).

\* Possibly shoveling snow.

night for weeks, and then right before the holidays they are dismissed without consideration. At that time I still had no idea how the production process was carried out. How piously and faithfully I used to pray for work in church. I sought out the most celebrated saints. I went from altar to altar, kneeled down on the cold stones, and prayed to the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, the Queen of Heaven, and many other saints who were said to have special power and compassion.

I didn't give up hope, and one day I decided to put the few kreuzers I had for my lunch into the collection box for the Holy Father. On the same day I found a purse containing twelve guilders. I could scarcely contain my joy, and I thanked all the saints for this favor. It never occurred to me that some other poor devil might have been driven to despair by the loss of the purse. To me twelve guilders was such a great amount that I never thought that a poor person could have lost it. I didn't know anything about the responsibility of handing in things you found to the police. All I saw was the merciful hand of the saints in the purse lying in the way. That evening I joyously embraced my mother; I was so happy I couldn't speak; I could only get out the words "twelve guilders, twelve guilders." There was nothing but joy in our room now; and as if to crown our good luck, the next day I was summoned to report to a sandpaper and emery board factory, where I'd asked about work a few days earlier and they had taken down my name.

My new workplace was on the third floor of a building that was used exclusively for industrial purposes. Not having known the bustle of a factory, I had never felt so uncomfortable. Everything displeased me—the dirty, sticky work; the unpleasant glass dust; the crowd of people; the crude tone; and the whole way that the girls and even married women behaved.

The owner's wife—the "gracious lady," as she was called—was the actual manager of the factory, and she talked just like the girls. She was a nice-looking woman, but she drank brandy, took snuff, and made unseemly rude jokes with the workmen. The owner was very ill, and when he came himself, there was always

a violent scene. I pitied him. He seemed to me to be so good and noble, and I gathered from the behavior and whole manner of his wife that he must be unhappy. At his instructions I received a different, much more pleasant job. Up to then my job had been to hang the papers, which were smeared with glue and sprinkled with glass, onto lines strung rather high across the workroom. This work exhausted me greatly, and the owner must have noticed that it wasn't suitable for me, because he instructed that from then on I was to keep count of the papers that were ready for processing. This work was clean and I liked it a lot better. Of course when there wasn't anything to count, I had to do other kinds of work.

The factory was rather far from our apartment, and I couldn't go home for lunch.\* I stayed in the workroom with the other women; we fetched soup or vegetables from the restaurant, and we had coffee for the afternoon. I always sat off by myself and read a book. I was reading *The Robber Knight and his Child* [*Der Raubritter und sein Kind*], which was in one hundred parts. The others laughed at me and made fun of my innocence because I got embarrassed at their talk.

They often spoke of a Herr Berger, who was the company's traveling representative and was expected back about then. All the women raved about him, so I was curious to see the man. I had been there for two weeks when he came. Everything was in a dither, and the only talk was of the looks of the traveler they so admired. Accompanied by the owner's wife, he came into the room where I worked. I didn't like him at all. That afternoon I was called into his office; Herr Berger sent me on an errand and made a silly remark about my "beautiful hands." It was already dark when I returned; I had to pass through an empty anteroom that wasn't lighted; it was half-dark since it got light only through the glass door leading into the workroom. Herr Berger was in the anteroom when I came. He took me by the hand and inquired sympathetically about my circumstances. I answered

\* Workers ate their major meal at noon, so long lunch breaks (frequently one and a half hours) with time to go home were the norm.

him truthfully and told of our poverty. He spoke a few words, taking pity on me and promising to use his influence to get me higher wages. Of course I was delighted with the prospect opening up to me, for I was getting only two and a half guilders a week, for which I had to work twelve hours a day. I stammered a few words of thanks and assured him that I would prove myself worthy of his solicitude. Before I even knew what was happening, Herr Berger had kissed me. He tried to calm my fright with the words, "It was just a fatherly kiss." He was twenty-six years old, and I was almost fifteen, so fatherliness was out of the question.

Beside myself, I hurried back to my work. I didn't know how I should interpret the incident; I thought the kiss was disgraceful, but Herr Berger had spoken so sympathetically and had held out the prospect of higher wages! At home I did tell of the promise, but I said nothing about the kiss because I was ashamed to talk about it in front of my brother. But my mother and my brother were happy that I had found such an influential protector.

The next day I was overwhelmed with reproaches from one of my coworkers, a young blond girl whom I liked most of all. She reproached me for having taken her place with the traveler; up to now, if he had something to do or an errand to run, she had done it; he loved her, she protested through tears and sobs, and now I'd put an end to everything. The other girls joined in too; they called me a hypocrite, and the gracious lady herself asked me how I'd liked the kisses of the "handsome traveler." The incident of the previous evening had been observed through the glass door, and they interpreted it in a way very insulting to me.

I was defenseless against their taunts and sneers and longed for the hour when I could go home. It was Saturday, and when I received my wages, I went home with the intention of not returning on Monday.

When I spoke of the matter at home, I was severely scolded. It was strange. My mother, who was always so intent on raising me to be a respectable girl, who always gave me instructions and

warnings not to talk to men ("You should only allow yourself to be kissed by the man you're going to marry," she used to impress upon me)—in this instance my mother was against me. She said I was going too far. A kiss was nothing bad, and if I was getting more wages as a result, then it would be silly to give up my job. In the end she held my books responsible for my "overexcitement." My mother got so mad about my "pigheadedness" that all the splendid things I'd been lent—*The Book for Everyone* [*Das Buch für Alle*], *Over Land and Sea* [*Über Land und Meer*], and *Chronicle of the Times* [*Chronik der Zeit*] (that's how far advanced I was in literature)—were thrown out the door.\* I collected them all again, but I didn't dare read in the evening, although I'd usually been allowed to read longer on Saturdays.

That was a sad Sunday! I was depressed, and what's more I was scolded the whole day.

On Monday my mother awakened me as usual and impressed upon me as she left for work not to do anything stupid, but rather to remember that in a few days it would be Christmas.

I went out intending to control myself and go to the factory; I got as far as the door and then I turned around. I had such a dreadful fear of unknown dangers that I preferred to go hungry than to suffer disgrace. Everything that had happened—the kiss and the reproaches of my coworkers—seemed a disgrace to me. Besides, I had been told that one of the girls always enjoyed the traveler's special favor. But he was changeable; if a new girl came who pleased him more, then she would take the place of the previous one. All indications were that I had been chosen as the new favorite. That scared me a lot. I'd read so much in books about seduction and fallen virtue that I imagined the most hideous things happening. So I didn't go in.

But what was I to do? At first I looked for work; I would have taken anything offered to me, but three days before Christmas people don't add to their work force. I wandered around the streets, and when evening came, I went home at the usual time.

\* All three titles were popular periodicals with serialized novels.

I didn't have the courage to confess that I hadn't been at the factory. The next two days I did the same thing. All my efforts to find work were fruitless. I was gripped by dreadful despair; then I regained hope that some accident might help me out. I needed less than two guilders, because it hadn't even been a full workweek.

I had read so much of the omnipotence of God, of help in the hour of need, of virtue rewarded, and the like things that I convinced myself that help would come to me too. So I knelt in fervent prayer at the altar, and then, with a searching look, I went back out into the street. Maybe I'd find another purse and bring home more money than expected. I went to where the women crowded around the fish stalls to do their shopping for dinner. Although I'd always imagined fish as something very delicious, in my desperation I had no appetite for it. I just wanted money. Crazy thoughts ran through my head, but I shrank back in horror from carrying them out. It got to be afternoon. People hurried home with their packages to prepare for happy times with their loved ones. Everyone was getting off work, and I too was expected at home. But where would I get money?

Then I had a thought. I had an aunt who was in service with a countess; for us this aunt was the embodiment of refinement; her position with the countess lent her this aura. We called her the "city aunt" (that always seemed so impressive to us), and when she would occasionally visit us, we paid her the highest respect. She was considered very pious, and the church she always attended received many contributions from her. I now hoped that she would help me. I didn't find her at home; she was in church. I looked for her there, but she was already gone. I knelt at the altar, and, crying and sobbing, prayed that God and the saints would win favor for me in my aunt's heart. When I think back on it now: all I needed was two guilders and all my trouble and heartaches would have been gone. At that time I didn't yet know how much money was needlessly squandered, how many people lived in excess while others pined away in poverty. At that time I wasn't yet aware of these differences, or at

least I didn't consider their injustice. I considered everything an unalterable arrangement, prescribed by God.

I have never forgotten these hours and the whole suffering of my childhood and youth. And even today, despite the many years that have passed, I can't pass by crying children without asking them the cause of their tears. At such times I always recall my own tears and how I thirsted for sympathy. Even as a poorly paid working woman, I've given many an hour's wage to strange crying children who have told me of their troubles on the street.

I found no sympathy. My pious aunt, whom I finally found, did treat me to coffee and cake, but when I finally ventured to state my request, she remained hard and pitiless. She admonished me to go right home; it was, after all, Christmas Eve, and so I would be expected. I begged and cried, but she was unmoved; with pious sayings, she refused me any help. Her last word was: everyone must humbly bear the consequences of his own deeds. So, I was back on the street. There were far fewer people to see, but the windows glittered brightly, and I could see many decorated Christmas trees.

Under no circumstances did I want to go home. What was I supposed to say? I was afraid and ashamed. My behavior of the last few days now seemed to me very wrong. I imagined the horror of my mother—my poor tormented mother, who had to count every kreuzer and who had pinned so many hopes on me. Could I cause her so much pain and disappointment? My remorse and anguish got greater and greater. If only I'd controlled myself and stayed at the factory, I said to myself. Now I too thought everything had been exaggerated—my fear of the traveler, my shame in front of my coworkers, and my worry about my respectability. All I could feel now was how wonderful it would be if only I could go home with my wages. I turned into a street leading down to the Danube, thinking that it had to be easier to jump into the water than to go home with my guilt.

As I was hurrying down one of the most fashionable streets toward my new goal, the water, I was approached by an elegant gentleman. My tears flowed uninterruptedly and my body was

shaking with sobs. He asked me where I was going at such a late hour and why I was crying. This had to be my salvation; this was definitely providential! All my hopes returned, and I told him my troubles. I had to have two guilders; otherwise I couldn't go home. How agreeably and kindly the gentleman spoke. He wanted to give me ten guilders, but I would have to go with him because he didn't have any money with him. I didn't know what held me back, but in spite of my distress I didn't go into his apartment with him. When we got to the house where he wanted to take me, I asked if I might wait until he came out with the money. As he urged me and tried to lure me in, I broke loose and ran away. I had been overcome with such a dreadful fright, and the looks the man gave me had so scared me, that without thinking I raced away in the direction of home. There I met my brother, who had been looking for me for a long time and was about to go to the factory to ask about me.

Do I have to tell about what the rest of Christmas Eve was like? How neither my mother nor my brother could see what was going on inside me, how they couldn't understand my motives and couldn't forgive me? They called me naughty and lazy. Me, lazy! At an age when other children are playing with dolls and sitting in school, when they are taken care of and protected from everything—at that age I had to go out into the world and carry the heavy yoke of work. At an age when others were still savoring the bliss of childhood, I had already forgotten childlike laughter and was thoroughly imbued with the feeling that my destiny was to work.

For many years the burden of my childhood weighed on my soul and made me prematurely serious and averse to gaiety. Much had to happen, something great had to step into my life, in order to help me prevail over myself.

I found work again; I grasped at everything offered me to show my willingness to work, and I still had some hard times. But finally things got better. I was referred to a large factory that stood in the best repute. Three hundred women and about fifty men were employed there. I was put into a large room where

sixty women and girls worked. There were twelve tables by the windows, and at each table sat four girls. Our job was to sort the merchandise that had been manufactured; other women counted it, and a third group branded it with the company's stamp. We worked from 7:00 A.M. to 7:00 P.M. At noon we had a one-hour break and in the afternoon a half hour off. Although there was a holiday during the week I started there, I got the full week's wages paid to beginners. That was four guilders. I'd never been paid that well. Besides, there was the prospect that if I applied myself well I'd get a fifty-kreuzer increase in a few months. I received it after only six weeks, and in half a year I was already making five guilders a week; later I got six guilders.

It seemed to me that I was almost rich. I figured out how much I'd be able to save over a few years, and I built castles in the air. Since I was used to extraordinary deprivations, I would have considered it extravagant to spend more now on food. As long as I didn't feel hungry I didn't take into account what I was eating. All I wanted was to dress nicely. When I went to church on Sunday no one should recognize me as a factory girl; I was ashamed of my work. Working in a factory always seemed to me to be degrading. When I was still an apprentice, I'd often heard it said that factory girls were bad, loose, and spoiled.\* They were spoken of in the most insulting words, and I too had picked up this false notion. Now I myself was employed in a factory where there were so many girls.

The girls were friendly; they instructed me in my work in the most amiable manner, and they introduced me to the customs of the business. The girls in the sorting room were considered the elite of the personnel. The owner himself chose them, whereas the hiring for the machine room was left to the foremen. Men and women were together in the other rooms; but in my room there were only female employees. Men were used as extra help only when the heavy packages of sorted, counted, and labeled goods were moved to the courtyard. At noon we could eat our

\* Popp had earlier been apprenticed to a laceworker.

lunch at the factory. In nice weather we sat or reclined on the bundles of goods in the glass-covered courtyard. In winter we were allowed into the machine room. We weren't allowed to stay in the sorting room, where it would have been much more comfortable, because the merchandise would have picked up the smell of our food.

The girls who lived near the factory went home at lunch, and they had the best of it because they could get a better, hot lunch. For a few weeks I went to lunch with acquaintances. That was true torment. I had to walk quickly for twenty-five minutes, then I gulped down my hot lunch as fast as I could and rushed back to work, arriving always breathless and harried. I couldn't take it for long, and I preferred to stay at the factory.

From the women in this factory you can judge how sad and deprived the lot of the factory women is. Here were recognizably the best working conditions. In none of the neighboring factories were the wages so high. We were envied everywhere. Parents considered themselves fortunate if they could get their fourteen-year-old daughters positions there when they left school. Everyone strove to give the most of themselves, lest they be dismissed. In fact, married women, whose husbands had spent years learning a trade, tried to get them into this factory as assistants, because then their livelihoods would be more secure. But even here in this "paradise," everyone was badly nourished. Those who stayed in the factory during lunch break bought sausage or scraps from a cheese store for a few kreuzers. Often they ate buttered bread and cheap fruit. Some drank a glass of beer and sopped bread in it. When we got disgusted by this food, we fetched our lunch from the restaurant. For five kreuzers we got either soup or vegetables. It was rarely well prepared, and the smell of the fat they used was sickening. We often felt such disgust that we threw the food away, preferring to eat dry bread and console ourselves with the thought of the coffee we'd brought for the afternoon.

The factory owner often passed through the courtyard as we were eating lunch. Sometimes he stopped to ask us what good

Share

things we had. If he was in an especially good mood, or if the woman he spoke to was pretty and knew how to complain, he'd give her money so she could buy something better. That always made me angry; it seemed humiliating to me and provoked me.

We also tried going to a cheap eatery. For eight kreuzers you got soup and vegetables. Sometimes two girls would spend another eight kreuzers to split a piece of boiled meat. I used to go to the eatery during the time I was sick, and the doctor prescribed good food as the most important thing for me. But after my condition had improved and I was stronger, I couldn't stand spending so much. I really wanted to save money for a rainy day.

In general, the only girls who ate well were those supported by their families. But there were only a few of them. More often the working girls had to support their parents or pay for baby-sitting for their children. How self-sacrificing these mothers were! They saved kreuzer after kreuzer to better the lot of their children and to enable them to make gifts to the baby-sitter so that she would take good care of the children. Many women often had to provide for their unemployed husbands; they underwent double deprivation because they had to meet the household expenses alone. I also got to know the much-maligned frivolousness of factory girls. To be sure, the girls went dancing and they had love affairs; others stood in line at a theater at three o'clock in the afternoon so that they could see an evening performance for thirty kreuzers. In the summer they went on outings and walked for hours in order to save a couple of kreuzers of tram fare. For a few breaths of country air they had to pay with days of tired feet. If you want you can call all that frivolity, or even pleasure-seeking or debauchery, but who would dare to?

I saw among my coworkers—the despised factory women—examples of the most extraordinary sacrifices for others. If there was a special emergency in one family, then they chipped in their kreuzers to help. Even though they had worked twelve hours in the factory and many still had an hour's walk home, they mended their own clothes, without ever having been taught how. They took apart their old dresses to fashion new ones from the separate pieces, which they sewed at night and on Sundays.

Nor did they rest during the lunch or afternoon breaks. Their sparse meal quickly out of the way, they would knit, crochet, or embroider stockings. And despite their diligence and thrift, every one of them was poor and trembled at the thought of losing her job. They all humbled themselves and put up with the worst injustices from their superiors, lest they lose their good jobs and go hungry.

Many girls had the misfortune of being especially favored by one of the superiors. Then suddenly he'd change his attitude. She couldn't do anything right anymore; no longer was she promoted; instead of a wage increase, she received reprimands. She was threatened with dismissal, and so the poor girl was harassed until she couldn't stand it any longer and left of her own accord.

Then there would be rumors about some of the ones to whom this happened. People would whisper, she's been seen on certain streets showily dressed or leaning out the window to entice men. She was always condemned, and I too was outraged. No one considered whether it would have turned out differently if at the outset the girl had abandoned resistance and yielded to her superior.

At the time I knew nothing of either hidden or open prostitution; I hadn't even heard the word. Later on, when I could better judge cause and effect, I began to think differently of these girls, especially when, in the course of the years I worked in the factory, I got to know a lot of older women of whom it was said they owed their privileged positions to certain relations with a superior. Or when a woman made a scene with the foreman because he suddenly began to oppress her because he'd gotten tired of her and preferred to have her out of the way so that he might, unhindered, "bless" a new girl.

At that time I didn't reflect on any of this; I just tried to do my work properly and not get in anyone's way. What's more, such things didn't happen in the room where I worked. There wasn't a friendly or kind word from our foreman. He was a tyrant of the worst sort, and he must have seen the workers as a slave gang. No one dared to complain about him. He was regarded as the most privileged employee of the company, to which he was,

without doubt, truly dedicated. He had probably long since forgotten that he had once been a worker in the same factory.

I didn't want to leave my mother ever, and I wanted to arrange it so she wouldn't have to work anymore. I was just as thrifty as my coworkers, and if one day I did spend a couple of extra kreuzers, I literally went hungry on the next day. I knew even then that I could not save up a fortune for myself. But I did want to provide for my mother, and I wanted to have a nest egg to save her from going into the hospital in case she got sick. She had a great distaste for hospitals. Like the other workers, I considered myself lucky to be in this factory, and I anxiously guarded against anything that could lay me open to blame.

"A good boss"—that was the general opinion of our employer. But in the case of this very factory owner, one can see how profitable is the exploitation of human labor. He, who really did grant his workers more than most other entrepreneurs; he, who would continue for weeks to pay the wages of men and women who were sick; he, who in case of a death made a considerable contribution to the survivors; and he, who almost never rejected a request if someone turned to him in need—despite all this, he had gotten rich through the productive labor of the men and women working in his factory.

## Doris Viersbeck, Cook and House Maid

Doris Viersbeck (ca. 1869–?) worked in several wealthy Hamburg households. She says little of her background except that she came to Hamburg in 1888 from a village in Holstein. After a few years in service, she quit to get married, and we know nothing of her later life. The publication of Adelheid Popp's autobiography prompted Viersbeck to send her story to the same publisher. She may also have had encouragement from her brother, a teacher in Hamburg who occasionally wrote articles for newspapers. In the section presented here, Viersbeck describes the agonizing months between May 1889 and February 1890, when she served in the household of the tyrannical and capricious Frau Sparr. Although the conditions described here may seem extreme, Oscar Stillich's study of several hundred Berlin servant girls suggests that such overwork and abuse were quite common (see Introduction, n. 60). Viersbeck has no class consciousness, but she probably speaks for hundreds of thousands of servant girls when she says, "I just wanted to be treated as a human being, and this right is all too often denied to servants." Her lucid, straightforward story is a vital source for understanding the transition from rural to urban life for women.

## [LIFE DOWNSTAIRS]

In this house they kept a manservant to attend to the master; the women had told me about that when I'd been introduced to them. I say the women—there was an old lady (the gentleman's wife) and a younger woman, her daughter-in-law. Together they ran the household. The manservant had been in the house since the previous fall, as he told me soon after my arrival; that was probably as long as he would stay, he added. "Why?" I asked, "don't you have it good here?"

"Oh, definitely," he said, "I didn't mean that, but you'll see all sorts of things here."

"A few days ago we got a new maid," he continued, "she'll be down soon and then we can eat supper together. It's about time as far as I'm concerned, because I have to put the master to bed at ten o'clock."

"Put the master to bed?" I asked.

"Yeah, didn't you know that the master is crippled, and he's not right in the head either?"

"No," I said, "nobody told me about that."

"Yeah," he went on, "and the lady's often a bit wacky, too."

"Great prospects!" I thought.

The maid, Käthe, was a small, slight, tired-looking girl with curly brown locks on her head. I pitied her and asked whether she was tired. "Oh, yes," she said, "you don't get any rest here the whole day." Exhausted, she sat down on a chair to eat her supper, but she barely had the first bite in her mouth when the bell rang. "One, two," she counted and jumped up to go upstairs. The poor thing, I felt sorry for her; she seemed to be very young and was probably anemic too. She came right back down again with a little glass in her hand; it had been left upstairs. "Yes," she complained, "that's how it always is here; you have to

Translated from Doris Viersbeck, *Erlebnisse eines Hamburger Dienstmädchens* (Munich: Ernst Reinhardt Verlag, 1910), 28-40, 42-50, 56-62, 65-69.

climb the stairs for every little thing, and that makes me so tired."

"Oh, it'll get better," said the manservant. "Just wait till the old lady has one of her spells. Then she gets an ice pack on her head, a hot pack on her body, and a hot-water bottle for her feet. I'm responsible for the ice pack, the cook for the mud pack, and the maid for the hot-water bottle. Then we'll be running into each other on the narrow stairs." We laughed at the joke and thought, "Surely it won't get that bad."

Nothing more was asked of me on this evening, but the poor little tired maid had to run upstairs several more times. I would have been happy to have done one of the trips for her, but I was a stranger and didn't know the ways of the household. Finally, at about eleven-thirty, we could go to bed. My fellow worker was not very talkative and generally not especially friendly to me. I didn't blame her for it; it was most likely due to exhaustion. I didn't ask any more questions; I'd already seen and heard enough to give me something to think about. Anyone who is or has been in service can sympathize with me about how unpleasant the first day with new employers is.

The next morning I had to prepare coffee for the household. Käthe showed me a full coffee can and said, "Just make it real strong, that's the way they're used to it." Well, I was all ready to do that, if only I could. But coffee drinking in this house wasn't as simple as you'd think. In the dining room the table was set for two people; that was Käthe's job. Then I had to prepare a tea tray for the master; Heinrich, the manservant, picked it up at seven o'clock. On the tea tray there had to be a full coffeepot, a little creamer, a little sugar bowl (of course also filled), a cup, and a plate of buttered rolls. The second, somewhat bigger, tea tray was picked up by Käthe a little later and carried upstairs for the two ladies. On this tray I had to put a coffeepot, a creamer, and a sugar bowl (all a bit larger than before), as well as two cups; instead of buttered rolls, there had to be a silver breadbasket with breakfast rolls and black bread, a butter cooler with

butter, two plates, and two knives. "Well, now that takes care of the third coffee service," I thought. Things were really done differently here than at the Möllers.\* I never saw or heard anything about coffee serving there.

The daughter-in-law's two daughters, a girl of eighteen and a younger one of twelve, drank coffee in the dining room. The latter had to go to school; otherwise, as Käthe told me, she would have preferred to drink her coffee in bed—comfort loving and lazy as she was. Käthe spoke with respect and admiration only of the eighteen-year-old girl. The way she came to us in the kitchen that day took my heart by storm too. Her manner was simple and elegant. She bade us a friendly good morning and said truthfully that she had just come down to see the new cook. At this she nodded to me. She had wonderful blond hair, a peaches-and-cream complexion, fresh red lips, and splendid violet eyes. I had never seen so much beauty in one face. She asked me if I minded if she helped with the cooking now and then—she so much wanted to learn to cook. I said it was OK and she left, saying, "Grandma and Mama will be right down."

And so they were. These ladies were nice to me too. The younger lady had a basket of keys, and Frau Sparr a cookbook. I could tell right off that they weren't as stingy as the Möllers. They almost always had dessert—Frau Sparr had told me about that when she'd hired me. I had told her that I didn't have any experience with desserts because the Möllers rarely had such delicacies, but that I really wanted to learn. That's why she brought along the cookbook. "There are a lot of nice recipes in this book," she told me. "When you can make all of them, you'll be a perfect cook." For today they picked a cold pudding that was easy to prepare. "Read through the recipe a few times so you know how it's done; we always like to take the cookbook right back upstairs," she said. That was too bad; I thought it would be at my disposal. I could do without it for today, but that might not always be true. Frau Sparr told me more about the meat dish and

\* Her previous employers.

the soup and how they were supposed to be prepared. She ended almost every sentence with "Right, Gustchen?" turning to her daughter-in-law.

She would reply, "Yes, Mama, just as you say," or "That's fine with me, Mama." [ . . . ]

"Oh, yes, one more thing," said Frau Sparr, coming back again, "we just can't take the name Doris, it sounds so old-fashioned. We'll call you Dora; that sounds a lot nicer." I wasn't asked whether I agreed to this. [ . . . ]

There was plenty of good food here; in fact, eating and drinking seemed to be the main activity. They had to have a hot breakfast at eleven o'clock even though they ate dinner at three o'clock. Of course this was my responsibility, and I also had a great deal of housework to do, so that it sometimes looked impossible to get everything done. The worst thing was that they never left us in peace to do our work. Ten times or more you were called away to do this or that, and then afterward they wondered why we were so far behind in our work. For example, every morning I had to take the big twelve-year-old girl to the streetcar ten minutes away from the house, because the little miss found going by herself so "boring"; she really would have liked to have had us pick her up too, but no one could get away at that time. Käthe had actually done it at first, but she really couldn't get her work done on time and just left it. That wouldn't do either, so finally it was decided that "Hennichen" would have to come home alone. The name Little Henny really didn't fit her at all because she was very big and fat for her age. The manservant always called her "our elephant girl," and often added that it was no wonder that she was so fat because she and her Grandpa ate like "a couple of barn threshers." The old man was also very fat, much to the sorrow of the manservant because he had to put up with him. The old man could still walk if he was heavily supported. In the summer the manservant had to take him for an hour's walk every day, and in the winter push him in a wheelchair. On his return the manservant would always tell us about the master's crazy ideas. For instance, one day he

didn't want to go past the post office; and another time the manservant had to follow along with him behind a girl in light clothing because the master claimed it was "our Dora," and he wanted to know where she was going; it was hard to make him give up his ideas. [ . . . ]

If the bell rang once, it was for me; twice was for the maid; and three short rings meant the manservant was wanted. When they rang for me, I was allowed first to ask at the speaking tube what they wanted; the maid and the manservant had to rush right upstairs, and often just for a trifle. At the speaking tube I had to say, "What do you wish?" That's what the ladies wanted. If there was no answer, I had to run upstairs. Now, frequently I had something on the stove that couldn't be left for long. At the very least I had to take it off to make sure that it wouldn't boil over or burn, because the conferences upstairs could drag on. But this took too long for the ladies, so they rang again, loud and long, and when possible a third time, before I got upstairs. I was received crossly with mean looks. "My God, where have you been?"—that was the usual beginning. My apologies were not accepted. "Empty excuses" they called them. It often happened that they'd send for me many times a day for no reason at all. Then they'd say scornfully as I left, "See how fast you can get away!" And so they drove us pointlessly to exhaustion. Little Käthe had it the worst; how they tormented her with the constant running upstairs and downstairs! And then they complained about her unfriendly mood. They didn't seem to notice that she was tired and worn-out—or they didn't want to notice.

The manservant was a cheerful twenty-three-year-old young man. The previous fall he had been discharged from the military where he'd been with the Wandsbeck hussars; he told us a lot of funny stories, and that helped get us through a lot. But he only occasionally had work downstairs because the master took up most of his time. He was with us downstairs in the evenings from nine to ten o'clock; we were supposed to eat supper together then, and he had all sorts of arrangements to make for the night. Among other things, he had to take another tea tray of food and

cold coffee upstairs, because the master slept badly at night and passed the time by eating. These people didn't ask whether the manservant got any rest.

The master didn't give us any peace down in the basement either. There was a hand bell over his bed that rang downstairs; it was there for him to use when he woke up at noon in order to call the manservant if he happened to be downstairs at the time. Sometimes he'd ring the bell constantly during the night. I complained to Frau Sparr about it and asked her to disconnect the bell for the night because we needed to get some sleep. It was always late enough anyway before we could get to bed, never before twelve and often not till twelve-thirty or one o'clock. But what did she reply to me? "What are you talking about? The bell is there to be rung, not to be turned off. If the master rings he has some wishes, and they must be respected at all times." I replied that that's why he had the manservant sleeping in his room, and he had a bell on his nightstand to wake him. "Well, he can't find it sometimes," she said. "Don't make such a fuss about it."

The lady was always very crude in the way she spoke; she seemed to have no education at all, and she had an evil tongue. Her sarcastic talk and false suspicions could drive a person to despair. Shortly after this she ordered me to make a fresh cup of coffee for the master every night at two o'clock; he didn't like the cold coffee, and reheated coffee was even worse. I looked at her in astonishment and told her that I really couldn't guarantee that I'd always wake up. "Oh," she said in her usual sarcastic tone, "just let me take care of that, I'll see that you wake up." "Right, Gustchen?" she said, turning to her daughter-in-law. Gustchen agreed with a nod of her head.

I did it for two weeks and then I went on strike. When I complained that in the long run I just couldn't hold up if I got so little sleep, she replied, "You're big and fat, you'll hold up. I want it this way and the master prefers to have fresh coffee." Up to this time she'd been right about my waking up; her loud and prolonged ringing did the job beautifully, although sometimes I

could barely resist the temptation just to stay in bed. I was simply too tired, having gone to bed exhausted from work an hour before and then also having to listen to the master's constant ringing. On this evening I told the manservant that I couldn't get up to bring up fresh coffee; I asked if he would be so good as to take the little alcohol stove upstairs with him so he could heat up the master's coffee. He thought I was really right in finally revolting against this abuse, as he called it. Because it really wasn't the master who'd demanded to have hot or fresh coffee; the "old lady" had just talked him into it. "You don't like that old cold coffee at night, do you, hubby? Dora can always get up and make you a fresh cup of coffee; she could gladly do that for her old sick master, Johann. I'll tell her today." The master had said that you really couldn't demand that. "Nonsense," she'd said, "what do you pay servants for?"

Herr Möller was right, she did often have the devil in her. It seemed like the devil didn't even give her any peace at night either. The manservant said that she often spooked around upstairs like a ghost, peeking into the master's room and climbing up and down the stairs. Up to now I hadn't noticed her, but on the night that I'd determined not to wake up, she suddenly appeared in our room, like a ghost in a long, flowing white nightgown, with her hair down. She shook me on the shoulder, and not very gently either. "Get up! Get up! Make coffee for the master!" she called several times; I considered whether the best thing to do would be to jump up in her face, also like a ghost, or to pretend to keep sleeping. I chose the latter. But it didn't help. I finally had to wake up, but I wasn't going to get up. I was determined I wouldn't. So I asked her what she wanted. "The girl still has to ask," she yelled. "You're supposed to get up and make coffee for the master."

"No, Frau Sparr," I said, "I told you yesterday that I couldn't do it anymore. I'm not getting up because I just got to sleep, and I have to get up tomorrow at six o'clock to work. Anyway, there is coffee up there and Heinrich will heat it up for the master."

As I said this I sat upright because I was really afraid that she would slap my face, and I wanted to be in on the fight. Well, nothing happened; she dropped her fists. She must have considered that I wasn't alone in the room, and that Käthe would have taken my side; she had no use for Frau Sparr because she tormented Käthe all day long. As Heinrich said later, Frau Sparr would certainly have gotten the worst of it "in the scrap." Of course Heinrich thought the story was pretty funny. Frau Sparr rushed out of the room, snorting that she'd never known such colossal impudence.

"Impudent again," I thought. You soon got used to being called this every time there was a difference of opinion; and I often wondered after such scenes whether I'd really behaved impudently without provocation. I could always say no with a clear conscience. I just wanted to be treated as a human being, and this right is all too often denied to servants. Like my sister, I consoled myself; she had very good employers now but had also had the opposite experience here in Hamburg. She too had been labeled with this flattering trait; and I knew for certain that she was anything but impudent. I have to mention one more incident; it's just too ridiculous. My sister's mistress had ordered her to put on a clean white apron whenever she made the bed. This order wasn't hard to carry out and so she'd followed it. But one day they were out of clean white aprons and so she had put on a clean blue apron. The lady saw it and my sister apologized; but with her hands clasped and raised, looking toward heaven, she [the lady] implored, "Dear Lord, help me to withstand the impudence of this girl!" Now, what is more impudent—appealing to God about such a trifle or putting on the blue apron?

As for me, I couldn't think about getting any sleep on this night. These scenes disturbed me more than I wanted to admit. I began to get a case of "nerves," something unknown to me before. That morning, I was awakened at five o'clock instead of six. I knew that an angry, bitter day would follow. At six o'clock the ladies ordered coffee upstairs; of course it wasn't good enough and it was sent back down; it had to be made fresher, and even

then, it didn't taste much better. But, unfortunately she had a cook who couldn't make decent coffee; and so it went the whole day. I just had to swallow a lot of the insults. Did she think she was making me docile this way? If she did, she was very wrong; she would have achieved a lot more with kindness. The next night she tested my mood. She rang again at two o'clock, but I ignored it, and I'd locked the door of our room to prevent a nighttime assault. Once again I had to get up at five o'clock; that would be the last time, I thought to myself. I made up my mind to tell the lady that it wasn't necessary to go to work before six o'clock. In the morning I was greeted with abuse. "A terrible mess," "laziness," and the like rained down upon me—that is, although my name wasn't mentioned, it was all laid on me because I was the only one there. I never got in a word, but I never got up again at five o'clock, and the ladies had to get used to it. Of course I had to put up with a lot of bitter and vile words.

There were similar scenes with Käthe and Heinrich, but with each at a different time. When she was mad at one of us, then the others were her pets—that was the most disgusting thing. She seemed to expect that we would join in her malice, but she didn't have any luck with that.

I was unhappy in these surroundings and wrote to my dear mother, asking her whether she thought I should give notice on the first of August, so that I could be out of there on the first of November. Frau Sparr had prudently hired me with a three-month period of notice; and I'd let myself be persuaded. Käthe and the manservant had been smarter, they had only one month's notice. My mother wrote back to me that it would make a very bad impression if I wanted to change jobs after only half a year; anyway, it couldn't be that bad, for her sake I should hold out for a year. What did my good mother know about conditions in Hamburg and bad employers? She meant well for me, I knew that, and I didn't want to distress her, so I said nothing on the first of August. Oddly enough, it had been going very well recently. Frau Sparr was behaving tolerably, and we were breathing a lot easier. To be sure, the manservant didn't trust the peace.

"She's just that way as long as you can still give notice; afterward the war will start up again," he said to me. She had acted the same way with the previous cook, who then suddenly got sick and had to go to the hospital; she'd had her fill of the irritations. As ridiculous as that sounded, I didn't really doubt it, for no one knew better than I that it could easily happen from this vile treatment.

[*The manservant Heinrich quits.*]

Frau Sparr was often sick too. Life in the house was scarcely tolerable then. I really don't know what was the matter with her. The manservant claimed that she and her daughter-in-law had had a fight, and that it had degenerated in the same way as her kindness on good days. Everything about these people was unnatural. The twelve-year-old daughter told us once that her grandma had taken too much of the morphine that she always had to take to calm her nerves. Curiously, no doctor was consulted. The manservant just said, "The old lady is having her spells." Then we knew; it was time to get out the ice pack, hot-water bottle, and hot pack. The manservant hadn't been exaggerating when he'd told us that all three of them would be in use at the same time. It was true; and what's more, I had to provide relief for Frau Sparr with a massage twice a day; and sometimes I even had to clean her bedroom because Käthe was too noisy for her. Of course I fell behind in my work. It was up to me to get it done, for I had to get the sick one something to eat or drink almost every ten minutes. They'd say, "Make Frau Sparr a little cup of coffee and put a tasty buttered roll with it." After a while it would be: "Frau Sparr doesn't like it, fix a nice cup of tea and put a soft-boiled egg and anchovies on the roll. If there aren't any more anchovies in the cupboard, then you'll have to go get some yourself because we can't spare Käthe up here. And please hurry up!" So it went the whole day. From early morning until late in the evening the loaded trays went up and came back down empty, despite her lack of appetite. And our "healing apparatus" was never just as it was supposed to be either; the hot pack was too cold, the hot-water bottle was too hot, and the pieces of ice

in the ice pack were too big, it pressed down too hard. The next time it was perhaps just the opposite; there was always something wrong. A lot of "blessings" came down the speaking tube onto my head. "You have it good," Käthe said. "You don't always have to be face-to-face with them when they scold you." She couldn't defend herself and had to listen to all kinds of abuse that she really didn't deserve; but she was resentful for days and gave short unfriendly answers; she "sulked" and so the employers labeled her "moody." How in the world could a servant girl ever feel wronged?

Fun-loving Heinrich was gone now, and in his place we'd gotten a forty-year-old bachelor in the house. He looked miserable and ill, and though he made every possible effort to appear bright and cheerful, he just wasn't up to the exertions and tensions, of which there were many here. The doctor advised him to take it easy as much as possible. But you couldn't spare yourself in this house. "Sparing and slaving both begin with the same letter of the alphabet," Georg remarked (that was the new manservant's name). The master liked to have him around but believed that Georg couldn't get him up the stairs alone, so he wanted Dora to support him on the other side—then it would work. So I had to help out again; however, the stairs turned out to be too small for the three of us, and the master ordered Georg to push him from behind and then he could get up. So I had the master firmly by the arm, and he clutched my free hand with his hand, and the manservant had his hands spread out on the master's back. A pretty picture, eh? When the ladies weren't around, it got even better, as Georg also put his hand on my back. When I told him to leave off the nonsense, he said, "Well, around here you have to take every opportunity to fool around so you don't forget how to laugh." There was something to what he said; usually we were in a bad mood and only occasionally were we ready for a laugh. There was always something new to get us down.

One day Frau Sparr had sent me to the post office; I was supposed to deliver thirty marks. When I came back, Frau Sparr was in the storeroom getting out beer and wine for the day. They

were locked behind a grate. I gave her the postal receipt, and that was the end of the matter for me. Shortly thereafter she went upstairs. Sometime later I was summoned to the speaking tube. "Tell me, why didn't you give me the postal receipt?" her voice echoed down the tube. "That sort of thing should be taken care of right away, bring it up immediately!" I replied that I had given her the receipt when I got back, that she'd taken it by the wine cabinet. "Absolutely not," she replied. "I would know. I'm not crazy." I'm not either, I thought, but I didn't say it; but I intended to check to see whether the slip was still in the storeroom. But I looked in vain, I couldn't find it. I was about to go up and tell Frau Sparr when she stormed downstairs, heaping insults of the worst kind on me—of course I hadn't delivered the money; I should own up because she would find out soon anyway; the granddaughter had already been sent to the post office to inquire. I stood there speechless. I didn't know what was happening to me—being accused of being a common thief, it was frightful! The young girl soon came back from the post office and told her mother that everything was OK. "What!" she replied. "What's supposed to be OK? I don't have the receipt. Who knows how the whole thing hangs together?" And still spitting abuse, she went upstairs. The girl threw me a sympathetic look and followed her grandma. She too suffered a lot from the moods of her stepmother and grandmother. You often saw her going around with teary eyes.

I had to cope with my troubles and the extra work caused by this incident. Only a person who's always been honest his whole life and has been so roughly accused can sympathize with how I felt. Toward evening the girl had to fetch something else out of the storeroom and she found the postal receipt in a locked cupboard. She came into the kitchen, obviously very pleased, and showed me the receipt. "Dora, it's a good thing that it's been found, isn't it? Now you can relax again. Grandma is so easily upset, but I didn't doubt your honesty for a moment." These words and also the fact that the receipt was found did cheer me up, but they didn't take away my bitter feelings.

Some readers might say: Why didn't she just leave and find justice somewhere else? And today I do ask myself: Why did you stay after this incident? Yes, well today wasn't then; I was young and knew that I had to earn my living; and what would my dear old mother (who had so strictly raised her children to be respectable) say about her daughter running out on a job? Country people take a much dimmer view of such things. No, I didn't want to distress my mother. And so, the word was: stick it out. I certainly expected to be called to the speaking tube, and to be told that the error had been discovered, but nothing of the sort happened! Never before had working late into the night been so hard for me as on that day, and I went to bed with a heavy heart. I lay there for a long, long time and cried; then I began to think about how I could get out of this house as soon as possible, but in a less conspicuous way. Finally I decided to starve myself until I got ill and they had to send me to the hospital.

With this resolution, with thickly swollen eyes and a raging headache, I set to work the next morning. Secretly I still hoped that Frau Sparr would realize that she'd done me an injustice and would at least mention the fact. But in vain; she swept past me in her careless manner, not deigning to look at me. I couldn't stand it so I asked, "Don't you have something to say to me?"

"What am I supposed to have to say to you?" she replied in an offended tone.

"You could at least admit your mistake of yesterday," I said.

A contemptuous "Bah" was all she had to reply. I starved myself for two whole days, but on the third I couldn't resist. Once again I ate my coffee and bread in the usual way. If there is enough to eat around you, it's not so easy to condemn yourself to starvation and then really carry out the verdict.

Another time, when it once again seemed that it would be impossible to hold out any longer with these people, I drank a half bottle of vinegar. I felt miserable enough afterward, but still not so sick that I had to leave. I didn't want to fake being sick. I wanted the doctor really to find me sick.

Then there came a time when I resolved to do my duty com-

pletely and quietly to put up with all the trouble. But they made it very hard for us to carry out such a resolution. The more quietly and calmly we accepted the undeserved reproaches and scoldings, the more irritable Frau Sparr got. Even her daughter-in-law was incited against us; at least it looked to me as if she was not doing it out of her own conviction, when she "set us straight," as Frau Sparr called it. She was no doubt dependent on her in-laws and had to help out especially her "dear" mother-in-law in order to be on fairly good terms with her.

Sometimes things got pretty hot between them. One morning, it must have been about six-thirty, the manservant came into the kitchen to get the coffee for the master. He looked out of the window opposite the door. "Who in the world is that coming through the garden?" he said turning to me. "Come here quick, Dora!"

"Well, who could it be," I said. "It's probably the gardener; he often gets here early." But, I go over to the window anyway, and what do I see? Frau Sparr with her hair down, her feet in big soft slippers, and a gray nightgown wrapped around her body. Before we could recover from our shock, she came inside, sat down with a sigh in a chair, and asked me to give her a cup of coffee quickly; she'd had a terrible night and had spent the time since two o'clock in the chicken coop. She just couldn't stand any longer being near that ungrateful person upstairs. The "ungrateful one" was of course her daughter-in-law. She continued nonstop the abuse and reproaches against her; not a good hair was left on her. She greedily gulped down the coffee I brought her; she must have been freezing, because it was autumn. It wasn't long before her daughter-in-law came in, fell around her mother-in-law's neck, and kept on begging forgiveness. I left them alone; I didn't want to be indiscreet, and anyway, such emotional scenes offend me when they don't come from the heart. They soon went upstairs, and the whole day long the manservant and Käthe had plenty to say about how nice the two ladies were being to each other. There was no end to the kissing and embracing. "If only it lasts," said the manservant. We knew there wouldn't be peace for long. I

never envied these people for their riches. They didn't have the most wonderful thing there is in this world: peace in the house.

Everything done for our benefit was so arranged that others could admire it. For instance, every noon the maid had to set our table according to a definite plan. Nothing could be missing; the manservant got a glass of beer, and every day Frau Sparr herself made us a fruit bowl of all the fruits that were in season. We ate with silver-plated forks and spoons, and the silver platters could never be forgotten; in fact there were even knife-rests. The table had to be set hours before we ate so that the delivery people could admire it—and admire it they did. How often we had to hear, "You really have it made!" Their words were accompanied by greedy looks at our elegantly set table. Usually I didn't say anything at all, but when I did, it was usually something like, "Not everything that glitters is gold." For how rarely did all three of us eat together at our beautiful table! It was normal for the bell to disturb one of us at mealtimes, often two of us were called, and sometimes all three. We'd quickly shove our plates into the oven; then, by the time we'd carried out the orders, our meal-time would be over, and we had to gulp down our food with our plate in our hand. But our beautifully set table had been admired by others, and so had served its purpose.

Käthe's and my room was also very nicely furnished; nothing was lacking that might contribute to our comfort; the manservant said the furnishings were "fit for a prince." It was too bad that we had absolutely no use for our princely room; on the contrary, you just had to spend more time cleaning it. That was time we could have better used for other things, like mending stockings and underwear. There was no free time for these things; we had to do all the most essential things at night, and our eyes regularly closed with exhaustion. One time, on her nightly rounds, Frau Sparr discovered me asleep next to a still-lit lamp. She scolded me terribly. She just couldn't understand why I'd sat up so late mending because there was just so much "free" time to do my needlework. I said, "Frau Sparr, please name me just one hour in the evening that we could dedicate to our own affairs,

I don't know of any." Backed into a corner like that, she could only defend herself with the most outrageous sorts of insults.

A few times Käthe and I used our free evening—which we weren't always supposed to take anyway—to fix our torn clothes. We didn't dare let the ladies find out; we stayed quietly in our room. If we heard steps coming from upstairs, we quickly blew out the lamp and remained quiet as a mouse until the danger was past. Actually it was ridiculous that we let ourselves be so intimidated, but we knew for sure that she would have immediately pressed us into service. What's more, Frau Sparr would have acted self-righteous and dressed us down horribly for being liars. To avoid such scenes, of which there were already enough, we preferred to receive no visitors. [ . . . ]

Christmas, that beautiful celebration, was approaching. People always say, "The pleasure of anticipation is the best part." But there could be no talk of pleasure here. There was an awful lot of work waiting for us, because there was going to be a party on the first day of the holidays, and the preparations were being made amidst frightful confusion. Just as we started one job, Frau Sparr would say, "There are still a few days to get that done, better do this or that." She got us thoroughly muddled. I admit that there are preparations for every holiday, and a little extra work doesn't matter; but I know from experience that things can be done quietly and with presence of mind. Already a week before the party she was constantly wailing: "If only you do a good job on the dinner! If only the meat is real juicy, and you've got to be especially careful with the pudding!" So it went every day. At night I dreamed of burned meat, failed pudding, and who knows what all. On Christmas Eve they had all been invited out, and the manservant had to go along because the master was crippled. Käthe had asked for time off to spend the special evening with her parents who lived in Hamburg. So I stayed in the house alone. On any other evening it would have been a blessing to me to be able to do my work quietly without being disturbed. But on this evening I'd have given a lot to have another human being around, not because I felt any boredom—for they'd seen

to it that no boredom would take possession of me—but celebrating Christmas Eve so alone and so piled up with work was something I'd never experienced. I was sad, very sad. I had visions of Christmases back home. How beautiful, how wonderfully beautiful they had been amidst loved ones, good parents, and brothers and sisters! How many joyous Christmas carols were sung, and how great and genuine was the joy at the modest presents under the glowing Christmas tree! "Oh blessed, oh blessed to be a child still!" These words fit my mood, and I cried many tears those hours I was alone. How banal it seemed to be preparing food and drink for mouths and stomachs when the heart and the soul starved and thirsted. We'd been told that we wouldn't get our presents until the next day. That was OK with me, but Käthe would have liked to have been able to tell her parents about them; but patience was called for here.

The first day of Christmas saw us on our feet early. Today I was supposed to prove myself as the "perfect" cook. It was the first large party where the cooking was left solely to me. I put my best into it and thought it came off satisfactorily in every respect. Not that I got a word of appreciation from the ladies—God forbid! But while they were serving, Käthe and the manservant had overheard a lot of praise about the food and its preparation and reported it to me. That was some consolation for me, because now Frau Sparr had no occasion the next day to let loose with a lot of talk about my inexperience, something she liked to do whenever anything went wrong.

Our Christmas presents turned out very well; Frau Sparr wasn't stingy—that was actually the only good thing about her. Our plentiful presents had already been on display the day before in a little room that the visiting ladies and gentlemen had to pass by, and they had to admire how amply the "good" Frau Sparr was bestowing presents on her servant staff. And later, at every little opportunity, we were always hearing, "How ungrateful, eh, Gustchen? They just aren't worth getting so many presents." We'd often say among ourselves that she should save this observation; there would come a time when she could put it to better

use. That's because all three of us intended to give notice on the first of February. Käthe and the manservant could go on the first of March, but unfortunately I'd have to stay until the first of May.

In January, Henny, our "little pet," as her mother liked to call her, was to give a children's ball. The frightful preparations with their unpleasant upheavals—without which nothing was done in this household—were drawing to a close. The day before the festivities Frau Sparr charged me with bathing the white Pomeranian dog so that he too would have a festive appearance. It was only Wednesday, and Saturday was his bath day. Georg, Käthe, and I had to alternate at this job. It was my turn. Even though I still had a lot of things to do at the stove, Frau Sparr demanded that it had to be done before dinner, because I was supposed to bathe not only the Pomeranian but also the white cat, our "little puss." I remarked that I'd never heard that cats would let themselves be bathed, but she snapped, "And there's a lot more that you haven't seen or heard too." Then she said again: "So, do you understand, get going now so that puss will be partly dry by dinner, and she can enjoy her milk at the right time. And how pleased Little Henny will be when not only pup but also puss appears so nice and clean at the ball."

Now I had to step on it so that this extra work would get done too. In the laundry room there was a big wooden washtub that was used as a bathtub for the dog. He could be bathed easily, and after he was dried off, he was wrapped in an old woolen blanket where he lay quietly until he was completely dry. Not so with the cat, who was having her first bath today. As soon as I put her into warm water, she spit and scratched all around horribly, and before I could stop her, she was past me, through the open doors, and up the carpeted stairs, leaving wet footprints behind. Just then a hideous outcry broke out upstairs; the wet cat was caught, and Frau Sparr came into the laundry room with her, screaming abuse at me. I apologized and put in a good word for the frightened cat; but completely ignoring my well-intentioned warning, she yelled at me that she would show me

how well cats could be bathed. I shouldn't presume that it couldn't be managed just because I didn't understand it. As she was saying this, she put the cat back into the water; but she'd barely finished the sentence before the poor animal, hissing and spitting, burst from her hands and jumped up first onto her shoulder and from there onto her head. And there she held fast in such an original pose that I had to laugh out loud, despite Frau Sparr's perilous situation. With each front paw in an ear, the back paws fixed on her forehead, and the dripping tail hanging down over her nose, puss could not be moved to let go of her victim, who of course was all the while crying loudly for help. Everyone came running; even the wet dog had freed himself from his warm covers on account of the noise and watched the comic scene with his tail between his legs. All efforts to get the cat down from its lofty perch were in vain; the poor animal of course feared that it would be put back into the water and so it clung in its uncomfortable place. Frau Sparr had no choice but to go to her room with the cat still on her head, and only there did her daughter-in-law succeed in removing the cat. Georg wanted to call the fire department as a joke, so that the story could be made public. The bath story gave us something to laugh about for a long time afterward. Frau Sparr escaped with a scare and some cat scratches on her face, but the poor cat was a long time in getting over her first trip to the bathtub. For days she lay in a basket behind the stove before she even got up the courage to have some milk. Of course she wouldn't let herself be seen at the children's ball, and her play and somersaults were never again as funny and jolly as they had been earlier.

The first of February was an uneasy day because all three of us gave notice, Käthe and Georg for the first of March and I for the first of May. Frau Sparr strained every nerve to persuade me to stay. Among other things she promised me a complete new set of choice cooking utensils if only I would stay with her until I got married. Unfortunately, I had no prospects for marriage. I also knew that I'd have to pay dearly for those choice new cooking utensils, and that I'd rather do without them. For a couple

of days she was friendly and smiling and even fawning. On the third day she asked with a friendly smile, "Well, you're going to be reasonable and take my suggestion, aren't you?"

"No, I'm sorry, I can't (I lied), my mother needs my help, I'm going home on the first of May." I was afraid of her anger; that's why I needed this lie, and it seemed to work for me. The phony friendly face did disappear, its place taken by lurking, scornful glances, but for the time being I was spared her abuse. She probably wanted to talk it over with Gustchen first, and she may have thought that it would be well to be on good terms with me as long as possible. Käthe and the manservant were of no value to her now; she dealt with me fairly tolerably. She had something else on her mind now: the whole house was to be redecorated before we left. And that really would be something!

A few days after I had told Frau Sparr I couldn't stay, the grocer called at the door, as he did twice a week to see what we needed. It was the same young man who had recommended me to this house a year before. It was my duty not to forget to order anything. Frau Sparr seldom bothered with him, even if she happened to be downstairs. Today it was different. After I'd finished with the grocer, she called him back, met him in the entryway, and closed the kitchen door behind her. I didn't have to be a busybody to be curious about what she had to discuss with the man. Of course I immediately thought of the old saying: Eavesdroppers hear no good of themselves. But it might be different if I listened; I resolved to try. So I leaned my head against the door, and I could hardly believe my ears when I heard Frau Sparr say to the grocer: "Listen grocer, could you get me another cook by May? A replacement for Dora, but understand, someone just like her, because I've always been very satisfied with her; she'd certainly stay on but her mother needs her."

"Ah, yes, and you know well," she said closing her spiel, "the girls have it good with me."

"Oh, certainly, Frau Sparr," was the last thing I heard the grocer say. I didn't pay much attention to the rest. I really would have liked to have contradicted her, but I kept quiet to preserve

the blessed peace. So you see, dear readers, the eavesdropper hears only nice things. I seemed like a stranger to myself. Frau Sparr satisfied with me? And the way she'd treated me! What would happen to someone she wasn't satisfied with?!

*[The decorators come, making it hard for Dora to get any time off.]*

In the first mail delivery the next morning I got a letter from my brother, inviting me to a concert with him that evening in the Hansasaal; he'd be waiting for me in front of the concert hall between eight and eight-thirty. I was very happy; after all, I hadn't talked to my brother in a long time. But I also knew it would be hard to get away. I shared my doubts with Käthe and the manservant and asked for their advice on whether I dare ask permission from Frau Sparr. They both said, "Definitely, you should do it; today would be a good day." And the manservant offered to let me in on a secret if I'd keep it quiet. I promised, and he told me that Frau Sparr intended to engage a manservant but no maid from the first of March to the first of May. She said that Dora could handle it alone for two months. "So," the manservant said, finishing his story, "see to it that you get out of here now; later it will be absolutely impossible, because we know how this household is." So now this too! When Frau Sparr came into the kitchen that morning without saying "Good morning," my heart just sank. But on the other hand, it was still very tempting to be able to spend a couple of hours in my dear brother's company, listening to a good concert and giving my weary bones some rest. I brought up my plan as amiably as possible. She planted herself in front of me, hands on her hips, and looked at me with her sea-blue eyes so disapprovingly that I understood without a word what she thought of my request. Finally she tapped her forehead with her index finger and looked up imploringly. This expressed what she'd said to me many times: I must be crazy.

My face flushed; did one have to put up with everything from this uncouth woman just because she was rich and I was poor? And again I thought, "Oh, if you could just get out of this house forever!" There was no end to her scolding and abuse, but I was

able to say to her very calmly: "Fine, Frau Sparr, don't get excited on my account. I'm leaving my job today, I'll straighten up the kitchen and then I'll go."

She burst out laughing and said, "There are ways to get obstinate servants back to their work, I'll just show you how we deal with them."

"Do with me what you want, but I'm not staying," I told her.

"You'll stay because I wouldn't give you a groschen of your wages, and without money you won't get anywhere," she replied.

"OK, fine, keep my quarterly wage."

The daughter-in-law was called down, and they discussed it loudly enough that I could hear everything. She wanted to get a policeman, who could surely force me to stay, because there certainly was no law allowing servants simply to leave their employers in the lurch whenever they pleased. I couldn't hear what her daughter-in-law said. With horror I thought to myself: If they can force you to stay, what then? I didn't know the laws that well, and then suddenly it hit me: "Then you'll drown yourself! Just so you don't have to stay here any longer." The lower windows had iron bars on them, but the window on the staircase was halfway up, and I would get out through it at night, and there was a little pond in the back of the garden. Frau Sparr had a shawl sent down, put it on, and stormed out into the street. She called over a policeman and with wild gesticulations seemed to be trying to get him to come into the house with her. But he just shrugged his shoulders a couple of times and went on his way. I'd watched it from a little window in the coal room. She came back inside, snorting with anger. Then the manservant was sent to the gentleman next door. The neighbor came but soon left. In the meantime the manservant had whispered to me: "If you give up your wages, nobody can force you to stay." I got my courage back.

In a moment Frau Sparr came back down with a reasonably tolerable expression on her face and said to me: "Let's make up, OK? You're actually right, we can easily arrange for you to go out today. Go ahead, and everything will be as it was. I know

you well enough to know that you wouldn't cause me so much embarrassment. You're such a good, dear girl." With these last words she even stroked my cheeks.

"Serpent!" I thought. I said aloud, "Oh, no, this time I'm not being good, I'm going." The daughter-in-law had come back in and they both worked on me together. Among other things, they pointed out to me how stupid it would be to abandon three months' wages. "I'll be glad to leave them if I can just get out of here," I said.

Seeing that her efforts were in vain, she started the abuse again and said, "You act as if you were in a hell."

"Well," I said, "it can't be much worse in hell with the devil."

Then she came at me with her fists; she'd have hit me if her daughter-in-law hadn't pulled her back. A peculiar calm had come over me; it must have been the thought that I was going to go, no matter what. I went to my room to pack my things. She screamed after me, "See that you get out of here at once, at once, and take all your things with you at once, or else I'll throw them out after you." I didn't think this scandalous outburst was worth a reply. She would see what I was doing; as a precaution I locked myself in my room; and I packed my things neatly and securely. I felt sorriest for Käthe, who said tearfully, "If you could have at least stayed until the first of March!" I comforted her that it was only a week till then. I knew the others would face some unpleasant days, but I'd had enough of them myself.

Käthe slipped back upstairs; Frau Sparr had forbidden her to speak to me. In a few moments the manservant came to the door with the request that I was to figure out exactly, down to the last pfennig, how much was owed me once the quarterly wage was deducted; Frau Sparr wanted nothing more to do with my affairs. I told the manservant that that wouldn't be necessary; I was due so many marks and so many groschen, and I'd give her the small change along with the quarterly wage. A little while later he came back to tell me that I was supposed to get the money myself upstairs. When I'd gotten all my things ready to go, I went upstairs. Oh my, what grumpy faces I saw! Even the old man,

who'd always been so friendly to me, followed me with nasty looks. There was a paper lying on the table next to the money. Frau Sparr pointed to it imperiously and said, "Please, sign that!"

"I won't sign anything I haven't read," I said.

"Then, please, please," she said with cutting scorn, "if you can read at all."

"Maybe better than you," I said, not wanting her to get the better of me. I read: "The undersigned herewith acknowledges to have broken a contract." I told her, "I'll sign this scrap of paper only if you add 'for which she has given up her quarterly wage.'"

"I won't think of it," she yelled at me, "and if you don't sign it I won't give you this money either."

"Good," I replied, "I'll find justice yet."

With that I was about to go. But the daughter-in-law and the old man said, "She can ask for that, just write it so we're done with the whole thing." Cursing and scolding, she wrote it, and I put my name on this ridiculous document, pocketed what little money there was, and left the unfriendly house forever.