

## TEACHING AMERICAN HISTORY PROJECT – 2009-2012

### *Lesson Title – The Triangle Factory Fire of 1911 From Debra St Jean*

Grade - 8

Length of class period – 3-4 45 min. classes

Inquiry – (What essential question are students answering, what problem are they solving, or what decision are they making?)

How do different newspapers and magazines cover the same news story?

Objectives (What content and skills do you expect students to learn from this lesson?)

Students will:

- learn the facts surrounding the Triangle Factory Fire of 1911 in NYC
- compare the New York Times' articles of the fire with the articles from the Chicago Sunday Tribune of the same date (March 26, 1911)
- compare the magazine (*The Outlook*) article's perspective with that of the newspapers' points of view
- analyze the motives and intent of each print source

Materials (What primary sources or local resources are the basis for this lesson?) – (please attach)

The primary sources used come from *Digital History.com*

1. The Triangle Factory Fire - *New York Times*; March 26, 1911, p. 1
2. The Triangle Factory Fire – *Chicago Sunday Tribune* – March 26, 1911, p. 1
3. The Triangle Factory Fire – *The Outlook*

Activities (What will you and your students do during the lesson to promote learning?)

- Students will read the first articles from the New York Times and answer questions related to the article.
- As a class we will discuss the contents of the articles.
- Students will read the articles from the Chicago Sunday Tribune and discuss the differences and similarities in these articles and those in the New York Times.
- Students will read the magazine account of the fire from *The Outlook*, and discuss the differences and similarities between the three print articles.
- Students will discuss the possible intent/agenda of the different articles.

How will you assess what students learned during this lesson?

- The teacher will use the answers to the questions and the discussion to assess students.
- The students will create a political cartoon that expresses their opinion on the Triangle Factory Fire.

Connecticut Grade Level Expectations-

- Standard 1 – Describe the influences that contributed to American social reform movements.
- Standard 1 – Weigh the impact of the Industrial Revolution and urbanization on the environment.
- Standard 1 - Analyze and draw conclusions on immigration's impact on the United States at different stages in its history.
- Standard 2 - Compare information about the same event using a variety of primary sources.
- Standard 2 – Evaluate the credibility of a speaker
- Standard 2 – Create written work that expresses a personal opinion on a historical event
- Standard 3 - Compare and contrast two or more interpretations of a historical event.

- Standard 3 – Justify why people might have different points of view on a historical or contemporary issue.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ SS # \_\_\_\_\_

## **The Triangle Factory Fire** New York City, 1911



**Directions:** You will be reading three primary source articles of the Triangle Factory Fire of 1911. Answer the questions below and compare and contrast the contents of the three different articles.

I Read the articles from the *New York Times*.

1. Who were the victims of the fire, and how did they die?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Why did so many people die in a building that was fireproof?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Is the article's intent only to inform the reader about the fire? Explain.

II Read the articles from the *Chicago Sunday Tribune*.

4. What similarities and differences can you identify between the articles in the *New York Times* and the *Tribune*? Are the tone and focus of both newspapers the same? Explain.

III Read the article from *The Outlook*.

5. Describe how the article in this magazine differs from the newspapers. What is the focus of this article?

6. What “call to action” does the author of the magazine article suggest?

7. Which of the three articles covers the Triangle Factory Fire most effectively? Explain.

8. Who was to blame for the fire, and what do you think would have been a fair punishment at the time?

9. Why is it less likely that this kind of fire could happen today?

## The Triangle Factory Fire

*Digital History ID 1109*

Date: 1911

**Annotation:** At 4:40 p.m., Saturday March 25, 1911, a fire broke out at the Triangle Waist Company, a clothing manufacturer. Within 15 minutes, 146 of the factory's workers were dead. The victims included at least one 11-year-old, two 14-year-olds, three 15-year-olds, sixteen 16-year-olds, and fourteen 17-year-olds.

All but one of the owners and office staff, who worked on the building's tenth floor, escaped, climbing on the roof of an adjacent building. But many of the seamstresses, mainly teenage girls from the Austro-Hungarian empire, Italy, and Russia who earned \$7 a week, found themselves trapped on the building's eighth and ninth floors. The door to one staircase and another exit was blocked by smoke and flames. A fire escape collapsed under the weight of women trying to escape. Thirty women died when they jumped down an elevator shaft.

The ladders on the horse-drawn fire trucks only reached the six floor. To escape the suffocating smoke, some 70 girls jumped out of windows (some holding hands), 100 feet above the ground. Firefighters tried to catch them with ten-foot nets, but the force of the fall was too great.

The fire's last survivor, Rose Freedman, who was 17 at the time of the disaster, died in 2001 at age 107.

**Document:** 141 Men and Girls Die in Waist Factory Fire; Trapped High Up in Washington Place Building; Street Strewn with Bodies; Piles of Dead Inside Three stories of a ten-floor building at the corner of Greene Street and Washington Place were burned yesterday, and while the fire was going on 141 young men and women at least 125 of them mere girls were burned to death or killed by jumping to the pavement below.

The building was fireproof. It shows now hardly any signs of the disaster that overtook it. The walls are as good as ever so are the floors, nothing is the worse for the fire except the furniture and 141 of the 600 men and girls that were employed in its upper three stories.

Most of the victims were suffocated or burned to death within the building, but some who fought their way to the windows and leaped met death as surely, but perhaps more quickly, on the pavements below.

All Over in Half an Hour. Nothing like it has been seen in New York since the burning of the General Slocum. The fire was practically all over in half an hour. It was confined to three floors the eighth, ninth, and tenth of the building. But it was the most murderous fire that New York had seen in many years.

The victims who are now lying at the Morgue waiting for some one to identify them by a tooth or the remains of a burned shoe were mostly girls from 16 to 23 years of age. They were employed at making shirtwaist by the Triangle Waist Company, the principal owners of

which are Isaac Harris and Max Blanck. Most of them could barely speak English. Many of them came from Brooklyn. Almost all were the main support of their hard-working families.

There is just one fire escape in the building. That one is an interior fire escape. In Greene Street, where the terrified unfortunates crowded before they began to make their mad leaps to death, the whole big front of the building is guiltless of one. Nor is there a fire escape in the back.

The building was fireproof and the owners had put their trust in that. In fact, after the flames had done their worst last night, the building hardly showed a sign. Only the stock within it and the girl employees were burned.

A heap of corpses lay on the sidewalk for more than an hour. The firemen were too busy dealing with the fire to pay any attention to people whom they supposed beyond their aid. When the excitement had subsided to such an extent that some of the firemen and policemen could pay attention to this mass of the supposedly dead they found about half way down in the pack a girl who was still breathing. She died two minutes after she was found.

The Triangle Waist Company was the only sufferer by the disaster. There are other concerns in the building, but it was Saturday and the other companies had let their people go home. Messrs. Harris and Blanck, however, were busy and ?? their girls and some stayed.

Leaped Out of the Flames. At 4:40 o'clock, nearly five hours after the employes in the rest of the building had gone home, the fire broke out. The one little fire escape in the interior was resorted to by any of the doomed victims. Some of them escaped by running down the stairs, but in a moment or two this avenue was cut off by flame. The girls rushed to the windows and looked down at Greene Street, 100 feet below them. Then one poor, little creature jumped. There was a plate glass protection over part of the sidewalk, but she crashed through it, wrecking it and breaking her body into a thousand pieces.

Then they all began to drop. The crowd yelled "Don't jump!" but it was jump or be burned the proof of which is found in the fact that fifty burned bodies were taken from the ninth floor alone.

They jumped, they crashed through broken glass, they crushed themselves to death on the sidewalk. Of those who stayed behind it is better to say nothing except what a veteran policeman said as he gazed at a headless and charred trunk on the Greene Street sidewalk hours after the worst cases had been taken out:

"I saw the Slocum disaster, but it was nothing to this." "Is it a man or a woman?" asked the reporter. "It's human, that's all you can tell," answered the policeman.

It was just a mass of ashes, with blood congealed on what had probably been the neck.

Messrs. Harris and Blanck were in the building, but they escaped. They carried with them Mr. Blanck's children and a governess, and they fled over the roofs. Their employes did not know the way, because they had been in the habit of using the two freight elevators, and one of these elevators was not in service when the fire broke out.

Found Alive After the Fire. The first living victims, Hyman Meshel of 322 East Fifteenth Street, was taken from the ruins four hours after the fire was discovered. He was found paralyzed with fear and whimpering like a wounded animal in the basement, immersed in water to his neck, crouched on the top of a cable drum and with his head just below the floor of the elevator.

Meantime the remains of the dead it is hardly possible to call them bodies, because that would suggest something human, and there was nothing human about most of these were being taken in a steady stream to the Morgue for identification. First Avenue was lined with the usual curious east side crowd. Twenty-sixth Street was impassable. But in the Morgue they received the charred remnants with no more emotion than they ever display over anything.

Back in Greene Street there was another crowd. At midnight it had not decreased in the least. The police were holding it back to the fire lines, and discussing the tragedy in a tone which those seasoned witnesses of death seldom use.

"It's the worst thing I ever saw," said one old policeman.

Chief Croker said it was an outrage. He spoke bitterly of the way in which the Manufacturers' Association had called a meeting in Wall Street to take measures against his proposal for enforcing better methods of protection for employes in cases of fire.

No Chance to Save Victims. Four alarms were rung in fifteen minutes. The first five girls who jumped did go before the first engine could respond. That fact may not convey much of a picture to the mind of an unimaginative man, but anybody who has ever seen a fire can get from it some idea of the terrific rapidity with which the flames spread.

It may convey some idea too, to say that thirty bodies clogged the elevator shaft. These dead were all girls. They had made their rush their blindly when they discovered that there was no chance to get out by the fire escape. Then they found that the elevator was as hopeless as anything else, and they fell there in their tracks and died.

The Triangle Waist Company employed about 600 women and less than 100 men. One of the saddest features of the thing is the fact that they had almost finished for the day. In five minutes more, if the fire had started then, probably not a life would have been lost.

Last night District Attorney Whitman started an investigation not of this disaster alone but of the whole condition which makes it possible for a firetrap of such a kind to exist. Mr. Whitman's intention is to find out if the present laws cover such cases, and if they do not to frame laws that will.

Girls Jump To Sure Death. Fire Nets Prove Useless Firemen Helpless to Save Life. The fire which was first discovered at 4:40 o'clock on the eighth floor of the ten-story building at the corner of Washington Place and Greene Street, leaped through the three upper stories occupied by the Triangle Waist Company with a sudden rush that left the Fire Department helpless.

How the fire started no one knows. On the three upper floors of the building were 600 employes of the waist company, 500 of whom were girls. The victims mostly Italians, Russians, Hungarians, and Germans were girls and men who had been employed by the

firm of Harris & Blanck, owners of the Triangle Waist Company, after the strike in which the Jewish girls, formerly employed, had been become unionized and had demanded better working conditions. The building had experienced four recent fires and had been reported by the Fire Department to the Building Department as unsafe in account of the insufficiency of its exits.

The building itself was of the most modern construction and classed as fireproof. What burned so quickly and disastrously for the victims were shirtwaists, hanging on lines above tiers of workers, sewing machines placed so closely together that there was hardly aisle room for the girls between them, and shirtwaist trimmings and cuttings which littered the floors above the eighth and ninth stories.

Girls had begun leaping from the eighth story windows before firemen arrived. The firemen had trouble bringing their apparatus into position because of the bodies which strewed the pavement and sidewalks. While more bodies crashed down among them, they worked with desperation to run their ladders into position and to spread firenets.

One fireman running ahead of a hose wagon, which halted to avoid running over a body spread a firenet, and two more seized hold of it. A girl's body, coming end over end, struck on the side of it, and there was hope that she would be the first one of the score who had jumped to be saved.

Thousands of people who had crushed in from Broadway and Washington Square and were screaming with horror at what they saw watched closely the work with the firenet. Three other girls who had leaped for it a moment after the first one, struck it on top of her, and all four rolled out and lay still upon the pavement.

Five girls who stood together at a window close the Greene Street corner held their place while a fire ladder was worked toward them, but which stopped at its full length two stories lower down. They leaped together, clinging to each other, with fire streaming back from their hair and dresses. They struck a glass sidewalk cover and it to the basement. There was no time to aid them. With water pouring in upon them from a dozen hose nozzles the bodies lay for two hours where they struck, as did the many others who leaped to their deaths.

One girl, who waved a handkerchief at the crowd, leaped from a window adjoining the New York University Building on the westward. Her dress caught on a wire, and the crowd watched her hang there till her dress burned free and she came toppling down.

Many jumped whom the firemen believe they could have saved. A girl who saw the glass roof of a sidewalk cover at the first-story level of the New York University Building leaped for it, and her body crashed through to the sidewalk.

On Greene Street, running along the eastern face of the building more people leaped to the pavement than on Washington Place to the south. Fire nets proved just as useless to catch them and the ladders to reach them. None waited for the firemen to attempt to reach them with the scaling ladders.

All Would Soon Have Been Out. Strewn about as the firemen worked, the bodies indicated clearly the preponderance of women workers. Here and there was a man, but almost always they were women. One wore furs and a muss, and had a purse hanging from her arm.

Nearly all were dressed for the street. The fire had flashed through their workroom just as they were expecting the signal to leave the building. In ten minutes more all would have been out, as many had stopped work in advance of the signal and had started to put on their wraps.

What happened inside there were few who could tell with any definiteness. All that those escaped seemed to remember was that there was a flash of flames, leaping first among the girls in the southeast corner of the eighth floor and then suddenly over the entire room, spreading through the linens and cottons with which the girls were working. The girls on the ninth floor caught sight of the flames through the window up the stairway, and up the elevator shaft.

On the tenth floor they got them a moment later, but most of those on that floor escaped by rushing to the roof and then on to the roof of the New York University Building, with the assistance of 100 university students who had been dismissed from a tenth story classroom.

There were in the building, according to the estimate of Fire Chief Croker, about 600 girls and 100 men.

Source: *New York Times*, March 26, 1911, p. 1.

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## **The Triangle Factory Fire**

*Digital History ID 1110*

Date: 1911

**Annotation:** The accounts of the fire at the Triangle Waist Company are wrenching:

"A 13-year-old girl hung for three minutes by her fingertips to the sill of a 10th-floor window. A tongue of flame licked at her fingers, and she dropped to death."

"A girl threw her pocketbook, then her hat, then her furs from a 10th-floor window. A moment later her body came whirling after them to death."

"At a ninth-floor window a man and a woman appeared. The man embraced the woman and kissed her. Then he hurled her to the street and jumped. Both were killed. Five girls smashed a pane of glass, dropped in a struggling tangle, and were crushed into a shapeless mass."

Among those who witnessed the terrible fire was Frances Perkins, who would later become the first female cabinet officer as Franklin D. Roosevelt's Secretary of Labor. She later said: "The Triangle Fire was the first day of the New Deal."

The factory owners were tried for manslaughter, but were acquitted. Nevertheless, the fire had lasting consequences. It inspired new fire safety and zoning laws, as well as mandates for sprinklers and improved fire escapes, and spurred the labor movement to unionize garment workers. It also led New York's Democratic party to push for passage of laws imposing occupational safety and health regulations, and began to call for minimum wages, maximum hours, social insurance and an end to child labor.

### **Document:**

#### **New York Fire Kills 148: Girl Victims Leap to Death from Factory**

One hundred and forty-eight persons nine-tenths of them girls and young women are known to have been killed in a fire which burned out the ten story factory building at the northwest corner of Washington place and Green street, just off Washington square, this afternoon.

One hundred and forty-one of them were instantly killed, either by leaps from the windows and down elevator shafts, or by being smothered. Seven died in the hospitals.

#### **Falling Bodies Hurt Rescuers**

Women and girl machine operators jumped from the eighth, ninth, and tenth floors in groups of twos and threes into life nets and their bodies spun downward from the high windows of the building so close together that the few nets soon were broken and the firemen and passersby who helped hold them were crushed to the pavement by the rain of falling bodies.

Within a few minutes after the first cry of fire had been yelled on the eighth floor of the building, fifty-three were lying half nude, on the pavement. Bare legs in some cases were burned a dark brown and waists and skirts in tatters showed that they had been torn in the panic within the building before the girls got to the windows to jump to death.

The mangled bodies lay there with the spill of the water which the firemen soon were pouring from water towers and hose into the building, soaking them. There was no time to clear away the dead in the street. Inside the building the firemen believed there still were dozens upon dozens of girls and men and they wasted no time upon those whom they knew to be dead.

### **Bodies Lie In Piles**

It was more than an hour and a half before the firemen could enter the floor where the fire started, the eighth, and they came back then with word that a glance showed fifty dead bodies on the floor alone.

In the elevator shaft was a pile of bodies estimated conservatively at twenty-five bodies of girls who had jumped down the elevator shaft after the elevator had made its last trip.

Some of the girls, in jumping, smashed through the sidewalk vault lights on the Washington place side of the building. The bodies that continued to crash upon the vault light finally made a hole in it about five feet in diameter. Just at dusk firemen and policemen were pulling many half nude and burned corpses from this hole.

### **Croker Staggered By Sight**

Inside the building on the three top floors the sights were even more awful. When Fire Chief Croker could make his way into these three floors he saw a tragedy that utterly staggered him that sent him, a man used to viewing horrors, back and down into the street with quivering lips.

The floors were black with smoke. And then he saw as the smoke drifted away bodies burned to bare bone. There were skeletons bending over sewing machines, the victims having been killed as they worked. Other piles of skeletons lay before every door and elevator shaft where the sufferers fell in their effort to escape.

"The worst fire in a New York building," said Chief Croker as he came out among the ambulances and fire apparatus again, "since the burning of the Brooklyn theater in the 70's."

### **Found Living Among Dead**

More than an hour after the last of the girls had jumped policemen who had approached the building to gather up the bodies and stretch them out on the opposite side of Greene street found one girl, Bertha Weintrout, the last girl to leap from the ninth floor, still breathing. Two or three dead bodies were piled alongside her, and as the policemen were moving those away they heard the girl sigh. The police yelled for a doctor, and the girl, still bleeding and dripping wet was hurried to St. Vincent's hospital.

A man who has an office on the third floor of the building in Washington place, across from the burned building, said he looked up upon hearing shrieks and saw a girl climb out of a window on the ninth floor of the Asch building, where the fire occurred. At this time the man, who refused to give his name, says there was no sign of smoke or flame. The girl stood for a moment. Then she jumped. She whirled over and over, a streak of black gown and white underclothing, for nine floors and crashed into the sidewalk.

### **Leap To Their Death**

About the same time Dr. Ralph Fralick, 119 Waverley place, was walking across Washington Square park toward the building and started on a run as he saw the heads of screaming girls at the window sills of the ninth floor.

They stood for a time, the doctor says, on the little ledge. Then a girl jumped and another and another. Some of them fell straight as a plummet and smashed through the vault lights of the street into the basement under the sidewalk. Most of them turned many times, shrieking as they fell.

One girl, the doctor says, deliberately took off her hat and laid on the ledge before she jumped.

### **Man Pushes Many Out**

But the greater number were jumping from the east side of the corner building and landing burned and crushed in Green street. Here one man ran from window to window, picked up girls bodily, and dropped them to the pavement. Either he thought the nets were there to catch them or he believed this was the easiest way.

When he had dropped the last girl within reach he climbed on to the sill and jumped straight out, with a hand raised as a bridge jumper holds his arm upward to balance himself.

All the girls had jumped from the Greene street side of the building and it seemed that the ninth floor ledge on this side was clear when two girls clambered out upon it. One of them seemed self-poised; at least her movements were slow and deliberate. With her was a younger girl shrieking and twisting with fright.

### **Tries To Save Companion**

The crowd yelled to the two not to jump. The older girl placed both arms around the younger and pulled her back on the ledge toward the brick wall and tried to press her close to the wall. But the younger girl twisted her head and shoulders loose from the protecting embrace, took a step or two to the right and jumped.

After her younger companion had died the girl who was left stood back against the wall motionless, and for a moment she held her hands rigid against her thighs, her head tilted upward and looking toward the sky. Smoke began to trickle out of the broken window a few inches to her left. She began to raise her arms then and make slow gestures as if she were addressing a crowd above her. A tongue of flame licked up along the window sill and singed her hair and then out of the smoke which was beginning to hide her from view she jumped, feet foremost, falling, without turning, to the street. It was the Bertha Weintrout, whom the

police found still breathing an hour later under the cataracts spilling from ledge to ledge upon the dead who lay around her.

About 200 other employees, mostly women, in the meantime had got out on the roof of the building, crazy with fright. Across the small court at the back of the building are the rear windows of the New York University Law school.

### **Law Students Save Many**

At the first cry from the burning building, two of the law students, Charles T. Kremer and Elias Kanter, led a party of students to the roof of the law school building, is a story higher than the building where the fire occurred. Kanter and the other students dragged two short ladders to the roof of the law school and by making a sort of extension ladder of the two short ones Kremer got down on to the roof of the burning building and tried to get the girls into orderly line and send them up the ladder to where his school fellows were waiting to grab them to safety.

The students got 150 women, girls, and men away from the burning building in this way.

### **Many Fight For Safety**

At the other end of the roof from the students' ladders, fifty men and women were fighting with one another to climb the five feet to the roof of an adjoining building at the corner of Waverly place and Greene street. The law students say that the men bit and kicked the women and girls for a chance to climb to the other roof and safety.

Kremer, when the last of the group nearest the law school had been saved, climbed down the ladder to the roof of the burning building and went down the roof scuttle to the top floor.

He could see only one girl, who ran shrieking toward him with her hair burning. She had come up from the floor beneath and as she came to Kremer she fainted in his arms. He smothered the sparks in her hair with his hands and then tried to carry her up the narrow ladder to the roof. But because she was unconscious he had to wrap long strands of her hair around his hand and drag her to fresh air in the way. His friend Kanter helped him to get the girl up the ladder to the law school roof and safety.

Source: *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, March 26, 1911, p. 1.

## The Triangle Factory Fire

*Digital History ID 1111*

Date: 1911

**Annotation:** The likely cause of the Triangle Waist Company fire was a discarded cigarette, probably dropped by a male cutter working on the building's eighth floor. Flammable rolls and scraps of fabric quickly caught fire and suffocating smoke spread through the building. The flames ignited many of the seamstresses' skirts and hair.

A memorial service for the victims held two weeks after the fire drew as many as 400,000 people. Civil suits brought by relatives of 23 victims ended with payments of \$75 to each of the families.

Two years before the fire, a new labor organization, the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, had led a three-month strike to focus attention on conditions in workplaces like the Triangle factory.

### **Document:** The Factory Girl's Danger

By Miriam Finn Scott

On Friday evening, March 24, two young sisters walked down the stairways from the ninth floor where they were employed and joined the horde of workers that nightly surges homeward into New York's East Side. Since eight o'clock they had been bending over shirt-waists of silk and lace, tensely guiding the valuable fabrics through their swift machines, with hundreds of power driven machines whirring madly about them; and now the two were very weary, and were filled with that despondency which comes after a day of exhausting routine, when the next day, and the next week, and the next year, hold promise of nothing better than just this same monotonous strain.

They were moodily silent when they sat down to supper in the three-room tenement apartment where they boarded. At last their landlady (who told me of that evening's talk, indelibly stamped upon her mind) inquired if they were feeling unwell.

"Oh, I wish we could quit the shop!" burst out Becky, the younger sister, aged eighteen. "That place is going to kill us some day."

It's worse than it was before the strike, a year ago," bitterly said Gussie, the older. "The boss squeezes us at every point, and drives us to the limit. He carries us up in elevators of mornings, so we won't lose a second in getting started; but at night, when we're tired and the boss has got all out of us he wants for the day, he makes us walk down. At eight o'clock he shuts the doors, so that if you come even a minute late you can't get in till noon, and so lose half a day; he does that to make sure that every person gets there on time or ahead of time. He fines us for every little thing; he always holds back a week's wages to be sure that he can be able to collect for damages he says we do, and to keep us from leaving; and every evening he searches our pocketbooks and bags to see that we don't carry any goods or trimmings away. Oh, you would think you are in Russia again!"

That's all true; but what worries me more is a fire," said Becky, with a shiver. "Since that factory in Newark where so many girls were burnt up there's not a day when I don't wonder what would happen if a fire started in our shop."

"But you could get out, couldn't you?" asked the landlady.

"Some of us might," grimly said Gussie, who had been through last year's strike, and still felt the bitterness of that long struggle. "What chance would we have? Between me and the doors there are solid rows on rows of machines. Think of all of us hundreds of girls trying to get across those machines to the doors. You see what chance we have!"

"Girls, you must leave that place!" cried the landlady. "You must find new jobs!"

"How am I going to find a new job?" demanded Gussie. "If I take a day off to hunt a job, the boss will fire me. I might be out of work for weeks, and I can't afford that. Besides, if I found a new job, it wouldn't be any better. All the bosses drive you the same way, and our shop is as safe as any, and safer than some. No, we've got to keep on working, no matter what the danger. It's work or starve. That's all there is to it."

The next morning the two sisters joined their six hundred fellow-workers at the close-packed, swift machines. All day they bent over endless shirt-waists. Evening came; a few more minutes and they would have been dismissed, when there was a sudden frantic cry of "Fire!" - and what happened next all the country knows, for it was in the Triangle Shirt-Waist Factory that Becky and Gussie Kappelman worked. The fire flashed through the eighth, ninth, and tenth floors of the great building like a train of powder; girls were driven to leap wildly, their clothes afire, from the lofty windows; and in a few brief moments after the first cry one hundred and forty-three workers, the vast majority young girls, were charred bodies heaped up behind doors they had vainly tried to beat down, or were unrecognizable pulp upon the street far below.

And as for Gussie and Becky, who had gone to work that fatal day knowing their danger, as all the workers knew it, but helpless in their necessity what of them? Gussie was one of those who met a horrible death. Becky, in some way unknown to herself, was carried down an elevator, and to-day lies in a hospital, an arm and a leg broken and her head badly bruised. Frequently the young girl calls for her older sister, but her condition is too precarious for her to stand the shock of the awful truth, and the nurses have told her that Gussie is injured in another hospital. And so Becky lies in the white cot waiting until her wounds and Gussie's shall have healed and they can again be together.

Conservatives, liberals, radicals of all shades and intensity, are agreed in denouncing the criminal indifference that is shown to the murderous conditions in which men, women, girls and mere children are compelled to earn their bread. The Triangle disaster has revealed an appalling state of affairs that exists though the factory district of New York City, and that presumably exists in varying degrees of badness in other cities. From the standpoint of safety of the workers everything was wrong. And yet it is hard to single out one person or institution and say that there belongs the blame. The proprietors of the Triangle Company were violating no law, and were but following the instincts and practices common among manufacturers in their trade. The inspection of Building Department has been inadequate and loose, and ugly stories of "graft" have been set afloat. The ultimate blame must be traced back to the inadequate building laws, and thence to an indifference or unawakened public that allowed such laws to be passed and to continue in existence. The huge modern factory buildings of New York City are what is called "fireproof;" such construction is safest

to the builder and secures him a lower rate of insurance than would non-fireproof construction. The building in which the Triangle fire took place is as sound as ever; outwardly, it bears a few signs of fire, and doubtless the comparatively trivial property loss was covered by insurance. The great impulse that brought the present New York laws into existence was the safety of the dollar and the best profit upon it. The safety of the hundreds of thousands of workers, their possible terrible deaths, the wide spreading tragedies that death would bring upon the workers' families and loved ones such things were given hardly a thought against the mightier dollar.

The tragedies that such tragedies bring upon loved ones! Two days after the fire I was in an East Side Street that was a street of funerals. It was crowded with sobbing men and women; children wept with their parents; even little babies must have felt the bitter sorrow, for they clung tightly to their shawled mothers in an agony of terror. Among the poverty-stricken funeral corteges was a hearse containing a rough pine box, and behind the hearse was carried a Jewish wedding canopy, all of black and here I learned the story of another Becky and her Jacob.

Becky Kessler was out on strike for sixteen weeks last year against the Triangle Company, and was among the most valiant of those who struggled for safer and fairer conditions. She picketed about the shop morning and night, in cold and rain; she suffered outrageous treatment from the police; she was three times arrested. When the strike of forty thousand shirt-waist makers was settled, the Triangle was one of the few big shops that did not sign the union agreement, though in order to get its workers back it made a verbal promise to maintain union conditions which promise, by the way, it very quickly forgot. Becky did not want to return, but she was penniless, she was half starved, she owed her kind landlady for four month's lodging, she had an old father in Russia dependent upon her wages; and so, after her sixteen weeks' fight, she was driven by terrible necessity into her old position, and upon terms and conditions dictated by the company.

The Triangle firm had two systems of payment, piece-work and a fixed weekly wage, and it imposed upon each employee whichever method of payment is preferred. Becky was a swift and clever worker; in the busy season, working at the piece-rate work scale, she could make from eighteen to twenty dollars a week. The Triangle Company, seeing how quick she was, with sharp business sense, changed her from piece-work to a weekly wage, and managed to get the same amount of work out of her for half the money. In the case of slow workers the reverse of this process was practiced they were not given a regular weekly wage, but were put upon piece-work. But, though working at half her real value, Becky kept on. Out of her week's earnings she kept one dollar with which to cover her car-fares, breakfasts, and lunches, and the rest she divided between her debts and her father.

Her great sustaining hope was that she was soon to be married. Her life with Jacob would be one of poverty, to be sure, but she would be free from the grind of the shop. Toward the end of winter, Jacob begged her to give up her work and take a rest before their marriage, which was drawing very near; she needed a rest, he insisted, for she was sadly worn from hunger and exposure when she had gone back to the shop, and the strain of her hard, tense work had given her no chance to recover. But she refused. She must work up to the very day of the marriage, for she must come to him with all her debts paid and with some money laid aside for her father. Besides, the marriage was now but a few weeks off. So she worked on, joyously checking off the days till the wedding day. And the end of this love's young dream was what I saw in that East Side street of funerals an incinerated bride-to-be in a pine box, a black marriage canopy, and in the next procession a bowed, white-faced young man with streaming eyes.

How many love-dreams were blasted by that Triangle fire, God only knows. But here is a matter of cold statistics: On one floor of the Triangle shop, where they had fallen from charred fingers, where found fourteen engagement rings.

The dangers that lurk in the factory, waiting their chance, do not menace to the worker alone; they strike blows, often irreparable, upon the worker's relatives. There was little Rebecca, who came from Russia two years ago at the age of sixteen. Too slight to operate a machine, she at first sewed on buttons, and later cut out the fabric underneath lace insertion, for which she was paid \$6 a week. Shortly after her arrival here her father and mother died, back in Russia, leaving a boy of eight, who was taken into a neighbor's family, and a girl of thirteen. This sister Rebecca determined to send for, and she denied herself food, denied herself clothing, held tight to every penny, till at last she had scraped together enough to make the first payment on little Minnie's steerage ticket, which she bought on the installment plan.

Three month ago Minnie arrived, her only baggage the clothing upon her back. Of course Minnie had to go to work at once, but her sister-mother, Rebecca, dared not to stop work even for a day to help Minnie hunt a place. So Minnie looked for herself, and in a little shop on Grand Street she found a boss sufficiently disinterested to take on a little greenhorn like herself at nothing per week. Rebecca, with two mouths to feed on her six dollars, and with the regular installments on Minnie's ticket to pay, had even less for herself than ever. She became very thin and weak; often she wished to stay away, but she dared not do so, not only because she could not afford the loss of a day's pay, but more because she feared her absence would lose her job. The company could not stand for having one of its machines idle for a day, and thus earning nothing for them. Once she fainted at her work. She was taken to a dressing-room, was revived, and instead of being sent home to rest, was sent directly back to her work.

She clung desperately to her strength and her job; she had to, for Minnie's sake. On Friday night before the fire she came home very ill with the grip. Her landlady urged her to stay at home for at least a day. But Rebecca would not consent to this; she said she would lose her job if she did so. All night she tossed about in fever, but the next morning she dressed herself and went weakly back to the shop.

Well Rebecca lost her job, anyhow. She was among those who sought safety by the great building's single fire-escape that gave way, and who were found dead at its foot.

And behind there is left the little Minnie, penniless, unskilled, uneducated the foothold Rebecca was trying to aid her win not yet secured no helpful relatives in Russia, not a friend or a relative in America and even the price of her ticket to this country not yet entirely paid for. "If that factory had been built safe, Rebecca would have seen that Minnie got a chance," Minnie's kind-hearted but poverty-stricken landlady wailed to me. "But what is going to become of her now?"

Yes, what is going to become of her? I had to echo in dismay, knowing the dangers and temptations with which New York surrounds the ignorant, penniless unprotected girl. What is going to become of her? Perhaps the fate that heartless factory conditions inflicted on Rebecca is, after all, a kinder fate than that which these same factory conditions are holding in reserve for little Minnie.

Yes, the danger to the worker is not limited to the worker; it reaches out and strikes down at the very ends of the world. Esther was the main support of her old parents in Rumania,

though her brother Abraham, who was also in New York, contributed all he could. She was a very skilled waist-trimmer, and when she went to work for the Triangle Company after the strike she received \$12 a week. Her excellent work was noticed, and she was soon offered a place over five newly arrived Italian girls, to supervise and instruct them. This offer was presented to her in the light of a promotion, and Esther so regarded it and gladly accepted. Under Esther's instruction, the eager Italian girls made rapid progress and soon were able to do almost as good work as Esther herself; moreover they were willing to do it for \$6 and \$7 a week, which to their non-Americanized standard seemed a tremendous sum. Thereupon Esther was told by the company that they could no longer pay her old wages; she would have to accept a cut or go.

Esther already perceived that, under promise of being promoted, she had been used to train girls who would underbid her; but she was in debt after the long strike; she must send money to her parents, she dared not be out of work, so there was nothing for her but to accept the reduction.

She stayed on, lowering her own standard of living to the very minimum in order that her parents might suffer as little as possible from the cut in her wages.

Esther was paid every two weeks, and Saturday, March 25, her pay was due. On Friday evening she wrote a letter to her parents saying that she and her brother were together sending \$25 for the Easter holidays; Saturday evening, after she had been paid, there would be nothing to do but buy the draft, enclose it, and mail the precious letter.

Esther was paid, as was the custom, before her Saturday's work was quite done, but she never came home with her wages. She was among the scores who were trapped by insufficient exits, and who were crisped and blackened by the flames; her money was lost in the vain, wild rush for life. To pay for her funeral her brother used all his money pawned all his belongings, including his overcoat, save the clothes in which he stood borrowed from all sides. And up in the tenement room which Esther shared with three other girls, in the top of her little trunk, was found the unsealed letter that was to carry her Easter present to her far-distant parents a present that now was never to be sent.

"Won't it ever be safe for us to earn our bread!" the agonized mother of one of the victims cried out to me. And sobbingly she told me of a generation-long struggle against the dangers and oppressions of the worker. As a girl, and even after her marriage, she had been a shirt-waist maker; she had seen the dangers from fire, from disease, from overwork, from underemployment, and she had joined every effort to secure some betterment of conditions. Her husband was a cloak-maker, and he, too, during all his working life had thrown himself into every struggle for improvement. They had tried to save, in order that their children might have an education and not be forced into factories; but the cost of living rose faster than wages, and they had been able to lay nothing aside. Last summer came the cloak-makers' strike, and for long weeks the husband did not earn a penny. Debts piled up; their credit became exhausted; the mother would have gone back to her trade, but she was nursing a new-born baby. In this stress of circumstances they were forced to let their eldest child go to work Rosie, then barely fourteen.

Rosie found a place in the Triangle factory. After the fire she did not come home. The parents searched distractedly among the burned and mangled bodies collected from, in, and about the building. Upon an unrecognizable heap of remains that had been gathered from the Belgian blocks that paved the street they found a tarnished locket, and in the locket were their own pictures. That was how they knew their child.

"For twenty years we have struggled for better conditions!" the mother burst out to me in her black bitterness of soul. "For twenty years! And what have we won? A death like Rosie's! They have made their shops better and safer for their machines and their goods, but for us workers O my God! how long will we have to stand it? How long?"

And that mother who had fought the long fight, and now at the end of it all sat in her dark tenement kitchen, with a new life in her arms, mourning her mangled dead that mother's anguished voice sounded in my ears as the outcry of the millions of workers: "How long must we stand this how long? Will it never be safe for us to earn our bread?"

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