



# FACTORY

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*Extracts from an  
 unpublished novel of that name.*

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THE Clicking Room comes first . . . they stand before specially prepared boards of soft wood and sweep their curved and pointed knives around the galvanised iron patterns placed on the skin . . . they stand side by side . . . they do not look up when you enter . . . they have to cut their four hundred pair a day at the Modern Shoe . . . they do not speak to each other . . . they have no time for a quick draw . . . no smoking here . . . fling the skin on the board . . . grasp it in your fingers . . . pull to see the direction of the stretch . . . place your pattern so that the grain on the vamp will meet the pull of the lasting without give . . . round with the knife . . . watch your fingers . . . blood from a gash spoils the leather . . . keep going . . . don't cut beyond the pattern . . . keep in . . . keep in . . . that little gash at the end of the stroke means

waste . . . you can't lay your pattern plumb with the edge, if the leather is gashed . . . remember that all these little odd-shaped pieces of leather are to be sewn together by machinists to form the uppers of shoes . . . and there must be no flaws in the upper . . . but there are flaws in the skin . . . miss the flaws . . . cut round the flaws . . . but no waste, curse you, no waste . . . Use your brains . . . You are a Clicker . . . Clickers are superior . . . Clickers wear a collar and tie . . .

Swiftly men . . . thrust the spike that projects from the edge of your knife's handle through the little holes in the pattern . . . those little pricks are to guide the machinist . . . but God Almighty, they'll never see those marks . . . the light . . . the artificial light . . . the strain on the eyes . . . and suede . . . they might be hard to see in

suede, but they are plain in patent . . . anyway, that's none of your business . . . you are a Clicker . . . you are paid four pounds one per week to make little odd-shaped pieces of leather . . . you are nothing else but a Clicker . . . those little odd-shaped pieces of leather leave you . . . they go on . . . they are grouped in bundles and go on to the Machine Room . . . forget them . . . you are a Clicker . . . they go on . . .

The Machine Room is an oven . . . the iron roof is just above your head . . . and the girls with curved backs sitting in rows on old stools . . . the long benches and the black machines like heathen idols hungry for sacrifice . . . and the girls that lay their hands upon them . . . that lay their small hands, their large hands upon them . . . or their fat hands, cheap-ringed . . . or hands that tremble . . . or old hands that should be resting on laps . . . or hands that weep . . . or hands confident, untiring . . . and fingers that dart and manipulate . . . that control . . . that get covered with the blackness of box leather . . . that dip between breasts for handkerchiefs whereon to wipe the sweat that beads the forehead.

These hot days, and only a leaky bath at home . . . and the forewoman hovering . . . hovering . . . hovering . . . hovering and the forewoman hovering . . . and creeping Jesus Clynes and the forewoman hovering . . . and the buzz and whir and flap of unguarded

belts . . . and the stink of armpit sweat . . . and the buzz and whir . . . and against your knee the knee press that raises the wheel to release the upper . . . let it down . . . br-r-r-r . . . it is an approaching wind . . . it rises . . . rises . . . the floor trembles . . . the bench vibrates . . . there are a hundred machines . . . the tortured leather writhes from the savagery of needles . . . and the Perforator and the bang-bang, bang . . . and the bang-bang, bang . . . and the confetti of leather for the worn shoes upon your feet to trample on . . . and Skivers that shear the edges of leather so that they can be beaded . . . and Post Trimmers that sew the upper to the lining and with thin, narrow knives trim the lining level with the sewn edge. . . .

It is hot in the Machine Room. . . . It is terribly hot in the Machine Room with a North wind blowing . . . and Elly Vickers can do four hundred pair a day on the Binder . . . over a pair a minute on the Binder . . . Elly is a star . . . two bob a week extra for Elly . . . watch her girls . . . watch Elly on the Binder.

And Vera is a star . . . a Vamper must be good . . . she sews the backs to the vamp and the upper is complete . . . Vera is a plain machinist no longer . . . she is a Vamper . . . three bob a week extra for her . . . and she started like you, Tessie . . . at fourteen years old she was sewing linings . . . keep at it, Tessie . . . In

eight years you will be a Vamper at two pounds five a week like Vera . . . won't your mother be pleased? . . .

Out on the street girls leaned against the wall or sat on the curb. The curved backs of the seated girls were warm from the Summer sun. White blouses, yellow linen blouses, silk blouses, a blue jumper stretched tightly across shoulders revealing between the pulled strands of wool the pinkness of an artificial silk slip.

Around them the ground was littered with apple cores and orange peel.

They talked and called out to the employees of an opposite factory. They made facetious remarks to those who passed.

A dark sedan, polished, with large soft wheels pressing the ground, slowed up to cross the gutter. It dipped and rocked. The driver bumped on his seat. The car hesitated then moved swiftly forward.

A half-starved dog approached the girls, sniffing.

"For Gord's sake look at that dorg. The poor thing's starvin.' Look at the bones stickin' out places. Some one's lost 'im." The girl in the blue jumper pointed as she spoke.

"Our dog never gets out. He's as frightened as anything," said Mabel, a girl with a heavily powdered face.

"He'd get out if he got a chance."

"No, he wouldn't. He's frightened. I've never seen a dog so

frightened. He hates trams. He's frightened people will tread on him."

"He must be a funny sort of a dorg."

"He'll be like that till he's had a bitch," said a girl with red hair.

"Oo! Gladys. You are awful."

"Well it's true. Phil told me."

"Do you still go with Phil?"

asked Mabel leaning forward so that she could see round the girl in the blue jumper.

"I'm just going round with him till I meet someone else. He wants me to track square with him. To look at him you'd never think he could talk seriously. He talked for a long while about tracking square."

"You should see the swell line that lives over at Annie's place," said a little girl, busily knitting. She constantly hummed "Love in Bloom." The girls called her "Bloom."

"Im! I know 'im," said the girl in the jumper scornfully, "I met 'im at a dance. 'e's a couple of left legs; a real lead boot. 'e trod all over me."

"He's good looking, anyway. I don't care if they can't dance," said "Bloom" decidedly.

"I wouldn't go with a boy that couldn't dance," said Gladys.

"What's Phil like on the toe?" asked Mabel.

"Aw, he's not bad," replied Gladys. "The chap I was going with before, though, he used to enter for competitions."

"How do you get them all?" asked Mabel.

"Oh, I don't know," replied

Gladys, airily.

"I'll bet I do," said the girl in the blue jumper.

"You shut up," said Gladys.

They all laughed.

Several girls emerged from the door of the opposite factory. They wore blue linen uniforms and were self-consciously carrying a new basket ball. They tossed it from one to another. They laughed embarrassedly at each other as if they were conscious of acting childishly.

"Gord! Look at them," said the girl in the blue jumper. "Get inside you lares," she bawled across the street.

One of the girls playing turned and poked out her tongue at the seated group.

The girl in the blue jumper glanced quickly at her companions with her mouth slightly opened. Satisfied that her reaction was justified she raised a curved hand to her mouth and yelled. "Yah, ya lare, Boo Hoo! ya lare."

"Shut up, Elly." Gladys was annoyed.

"Who do they think they are, anyway?" growled Elly withdrawing into a disgruntled contemplation of the players.

"You make yourself cheap, yelling like that," said Gladys looking up and down the street.

"What do you think of that new girl sitting next to Biddy. Gladys?" asked Mabel, noticing Leila Hale walking with Biddy Freeman and Sadie Bryce.

"She'll be all right when she wakes up. I see Ron Hughes eyein'

her off."

"Him," sniffed Mabel.

"Well, you went out with him."

Mabel was silent.

The three girls passed. Mabel jumped up and joined them. They walked slowly down the street.

Sadie was talking. "He ha-waited at the corner for me every night for nearly a fortnight."

"Well, why don't you then?" asked Biddy.

"Who are you talking about?" asked Mabel, interested.

"The chap in the car that waits for Sadie after work. He wants to drive her home."

"I'd go with him quick," said Mabel.

"Oh yair! and walk home," said Sadie.

"He can't do anything in the daytime. You feel safe when it's early."

"That's all right; but he wants to take me to tea first."

"He must be in the money," said Biddy, lightly. She kicked an apple core off the pavement.

"He looks as if he would be a good spender. I think I'll chance it," decided Sadie.

"Aren't you afraid?" asked Leila Hale, timidly.

"Afraid!" exclaimed Sadie, scornfully. "Afraid, nothing."

"How is your affair going, Mabel?" asked Biddy.

"Oh, Les! He's all right."

"How often do you meet him?" asked Sadie.

"Every Wednesday night."

"Doesn't he see you any other night?"

"No."

"Then he's married."

"He is not."

"Did he say why he doesn't meet you oftener?"

"He said he's working."

"Oh yair! That's what they all say."

"I'm sure he's not married." Mabel was troubled.

"How old is he?"

"About thirty-three."

"He's married all right. That's the chap I saw with you last Wednesday, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"He looked married to me. He's worn. Does he ever take you to a show?"

"He doesn't like pictures."

Sadie laughed derisively. "Married men never do. They're frightened of being seen. Where does he live?"

"Footscray."

"Do you know the street he lives in?"

"No, I never asked him. He'd tell me, though."

"You ask him for the street and number. Tell him you might like to write to him some day. I'll bet he puts you off."

"I'll bet he doesn't."

"You try him."

"All right. I will."

The girls turned and began to retrace their steps. At the factory door they stood talking while they waited for the first bell. A second ring was given five minutes later. They must then be standing before their machines.

The factory stirred as if awakened from sleep. It murmured with the switching on of its motors. It growled. It rumbled. A crescendo of sound filled its open spaces. Belts leapt upward and fell thwarted. The walls trembled. Pulleys sped into blurred circles. Louder . . . Louder . . . till its bray was consistent like a running hound.

Standing silently before their machines the workers waited. The second bell rang through the factory's voice. Machines clamored their answer. . . . The complaining cams of the rapid stitcher . . . the scream of the pounder . . . the snarl and tear of furious needles . . . the gnashing teeth of the consolaster . . . the rumble of racks pushed along the wooden floor . . . Hop into it, lads. . . .