Tinathy and the 1910 Vermont Cotton Mill

Inspired by Addie Card’s picture being taken by Lewis Hines, which helped to stop child labor.

I felt a shaking on my shoulder. Then my sis yelled, “Get up, you sleepy head!”

She’s three years older than me so she thinks she can tell me what to do.

Her name is Elizabeth. I’m stuck with the name Tinathy.

I threw on my smock and ran out the door to the cotton mill.

The cotton mill was where we worked. “We” means all the kids and parents work. Most of the kids weren’t old enough. Even though they weren’t old enough, the kids have to work because families need the money. The mill owned all the houses we lived in and the town, including the school. We could only make barely enough to survive. If the kids don’t work when they are asked to, the families were forced out of the town.

Addie did the frame next to me.

“Hey Addie,” I said.
“Yeah what?”

“Can you play today?” I looked up. I felt something grab my hair and pull it. All the sudden, I knew what it is. It was the frame. If I go in, I ain’t comin’ out alive.

“Help! Tinathy’s stuck in the frame!” yelled Addie.

The frame got shut down. Giovanni cut my hair so I could get away from the frame. He’s in charge of all of us at the mill... well, and the town, too. At least got me out of the frame.

Soon as I was out, I went back to work.

“Yeah, I can play after work. We can fix your hair, too,” said Addie.

To my surprise, a man walked in.

“What’s your name?” asked Addie.

“I’m Lewis Hine.”

“How old are you?” said Hines.
“I’m 16,” said Addie.

“You look like you’re 12.”

“How do you know?” asked Addie.

I looked up but kept my hands moving.

“My buttons are about an inch apart. You’re as tall as a 12 year old,” said Hines.

Addie whispered to him, "I’m 12, she’s eleven." She pointed to me.

“Hey, Addie, can you look up at the camera?” asked Hines.

“What’s a camera?” asked Addie.

“It’s the box,” said Hines.

“Why should I look at the box?” asked Addie.

“Because it will take your picture,” said Hines.
“What’s a picture?” asked Addie.

“Young lady with the brown hair, do you know what a picture is?”

“Me?” I asked.

“Yes, you,” said Hines.

“I’m Tinathy and, yes, I do,” I said.

“Can you tell Addie what a picture is?”

“OK,” I said. “It makes a mini you on a paper.”

“OK, I’ll look at the box,” said Addie.

She looked at the box. Hines held out a stick with one hand. There was suddenly a quick explosion. There was a big light. As soon as it was there, it was gone. My eyes went big. It took a few seconds for me to see again. I wasn’t sure if I liked it or if I was completely petrified by it.

At lunch, I told Addie, “That was one thing I’ve always wanted to see. And I saw it today!”
“What was it?” asked Addie.

“To see a camera in action.”

We laughed for a bit. ...That is until Jack and Charlie came.

“Hey, it’s Tin-tin,” said Jack.

“Her brain is probably made out of tin. No wonder she almost got killed by the frame,” said Jack.

“Stop!” said Addie.


With that, Addie plunged toward him. “Stop!” I yelled. But it was too late. In a matter of seconds, all the boys, plus Addie, were in a fight.

My sis shook her head. I didn’t want Addie to lose a match, so I backed her up.

“Stop!” yelled Giovanni. Me and Addie crawled away from the fight. And I’m glad we did because the rest of them got the belt – and HARD!
“Lunch is over!” yelled Giovanni.

I went back to work. I moved my hands up and down and all around.

There was a lump of cotton in my throat, but there always was so I wasn’t gonna try coughing it out. Instead, I thought of my old class…. The books I read and how I wanted to be a farmer or a mathematician.

Then I thought of how my whole class would come to the mill someday. We were brought to it and we will die in it.

I woke out of my daze when James, the cart boy, came.

“What?” I asked.

“Lewis Hine wants all of us at the end of the day in front of the mill,” said James.

“How do you know?” I asked.

“He told me to tell everyone in the mill.”

“Even Giovanni and the parents?”
“Of course not,” said James.

With that, he told the next person.

“Have you heard yet?” asked Addie.

“Yeah,” I said. “I wonder why.”

“I don’t,” said Addie.

“What is it then?” I asked.

“He wants to take our picture,” said Addie.

*That makes more sense,* now I thought.

At the end of the day, almost all of us came. Then came the mystery man, Lewis Hine. He had me stand next to my sis, Elizabeth. Addie was next to my sis, too. My hair was in two ponytails in the picture. Now maybe, just maybe, after I die, I will be seen. We, people who make the upper classes live their comfy lives, don’t get known that much.
That night I had my little dinner. It was little because there are so many of us. I have five siblings. My little brothers are twins: Will and Andy. My two older sisters are Elizabeth and Mary. My older brother is Nell. Mary and Nell are the oldest and they are twins, both sixteen. Will and Andy are two years old.

I snuck a piece of bread to give to Jill, my pet rat that I’m not supposed to have. I sleep under the bed with Jill and the spiders. I drew in the dust my plan to earn enough money to get out of the mill with my family and Jill. I don’t want to bring the spiders.

I start work again tomorrow. Tonight, I cuddle up with Jill and doze off to sleep. In my dreams, I’ll dream of being safe: a mathematician or maybe a farmer. Tomorrow, I’ll wake up... and hope I don’t get consumed by the frame. But tonight, I am safe.