

## [Mrs. Buckingham]

W15020

1 Conn. 1938-9 Mrs. Buckingham

A number of small boys are industriously digging in the ground near the tumbled down old knife factory in the village of Reynolds Bridge as I approach it this afternoon, and as I descend the little hill that leads to the factory entrance, they pause to stare at me curiously. They are gathered—four of them—upon a heap of rubbish nearly overgrown with brush and weeds, but bare and brown in huge patches where scrap metal in various stages of disintegration offers no roothold for growing things.

“We ain't doin' anything, mister,” says one. “Just diggin'.” He holds out a grimy little fist for inspection, clutching tightly some bits of wooden knife handles in unfinished state, rusty old blades, corroded and worthless. Assured that I mean them no harm, his companions exhibit their finds, one, with no small degree of pride, pointing to a sizeable bit of mother of pearl, shaped and drilled and apparently ready for use. “I found a whole knife once,” he confides. “Wasn't no good, though. All rusty.”

What do they do with their loot? “Oh, nothin'. We just take it home and put it away. Sometimes we play Knifemakers.” How do they play that? “Oh, we just play.”

Satisfied that there is no cause for alarm, they return to their digging. I go back up the hill and past the mustard-colored “chapel” toward the more populous section of the village. Next house past the chapel in that of Mrs. Buckingham 2 (previously interviewed) and the lady is entertaining company on the lawn. She greets me pleasantly: “Still lookin' for knifemakers?” Her guests are her daughter-in-law and a “lady next door” named Mrs. Fitzsimons.

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“This lady's father used to be a knifemaker,” says Mrs. Buckingham, indicating Mrs. Fitzsimons.

Mrs. Fitzsimons: “Lord, don't ask me anything about it. Sure, my dad worked all his life at it, but I never worked in the knife shop. Dad said it wasn't no place for a girl.

Mrs. Buckingham: “Oh, bosh, Emma. I worked twenty six years at it, and I can't say's it ever did me any harm. Some very nice girls worked in the knife shop, now let me tell you.”

Mrs. Fitzsimons: “Well, dad said the language you heard wasn't the best in the world.”

Mrs. Buckingham: “It ain't in any shop is it?”

Mrs. Fitzsimons: “No, that's true. I worked up in the Marine shop for a while, and there was pretty rough talk up there sometimes.”

Daughter-in-law: “It's the same all over, like Ma says. I used to work in the needle shop in Torrington. You can't tell me anything about it.”

Mrs. Buckingham: “Some of the knifemakers were a pretty rough lot, I'll admit. They said what they pleased, regardless whether they was women around or not, and just as often as not they'd be drunk, but with all that they were goodhearted. Now there was a girl workin' over here to the Thomaston knife company. I remember Chet Sherman—he boards here—comin' home 3 and tellin' me about it. She had some argument or other and lost her job over it, and she needed the work. She was supportin' her mother. So they got together and agreed to give her ten dollars a week until she found another job.”

Mrs. Fitzsimons: “It's a wonder they didn't strike. Dad as always ready to go on strike.”

Mrs. Buckingham: “They probably woulda, in the old days, but work wasn't so good toward the last and they couldn't afford to be so independent. It wasn't like when my father first came to this country, if you lost your job in one company you could go on to another. Why,

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I showed this young man that paper I got with all the knife companies on it. How many was there, young man? Over forty, wasn't there? All over the country, too."

Daughter-in-law: "I think there's one up in Winsted, Ma."

Mrs. Buckingham: "Well, is it doin' anything, that's the question."

Daughter-in-law: "Oh, I don't know about that. They ain't any of them doin' very much right now. I went up here to the clock shop for a job the other day, heard they were hirin' 'em in. And Perley, the employment manager, he said they couldn't take on any married women. He said there's so many young people lookin' for jobs the company feels they oughta give them first chance."

Mrs. Fitzsimons: "My man says that nobody that ever worked anywhere before wants to work in the clock shop these 4 days. That's why they're hirin' in the young help. The young ones don't know any better."

Daughter-in-law: "Maybe something in that. Well, I wish I could get something. I's gettin' tired of stayin' home. A few hours a day and I's through with my housework. And then I have to han? hang around all day. It's monotonous."

Mrs. Buckingham: "Well, you're lucky you get that nice new house. Everything clean and shinin'. It don't take you long to clean up."

Daughter-in-law: "I gorgot forgot to tell you, Mrs. Fitzsimons, they gave me a house-warmin' Saturday night. Bucky and me were just sittin' there with our teeth in our mouth wonderin' what to do with ourselves, when the door opened and in they came. Twenty one of them. What a racket! Honest, I didn't know half of them——"

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It is obvious at this point that there will be no further discussion of knifemakers this afternoon, and I depart in the midst of an animated conversation about the party.