

# Reporter on \$5 a Week Eats Farina and Cheese, and Reads Wordsworth

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In order to avoid confusion, statistics in regard to The Call's diet squad will be given but once week. Next Sunday will disclose my extravagances, all my foolish expenditures. This midweek article is impressionistic rather than scientific. It is to allow me to vent my feelings. One can become very emotional in a two by four tenement bedroom.

Every night at 2 I go to bed. Around 6 I am aroused out of a sound sleep by noises. The milkman clatters along the hall outside my door. Mrs. Janowitz greets him. They exchange sallies. He repasses and is gone. Then my door is opened softly and Mrs. Janowitz steals in and puts my quart of milk on the table, and steals out. Unless she closes the door, either the two-year-old or the four-year-old child of the house will stick his head in and snigger.

## *The Wash Hung Out*

Around 7 the noises increase. Pulley lines outside the window on the court obey - squeaking and squealing - the tugs of other Mrs. Janowitzes hanging out their wash. They talk together, loudly, feelingly and continuously in a language that I cannot understand. Then all the housewives, numbering twenty, in our house continue to express opinions and state facts about God knows what. Cats accompany them in a loud minor. Cats never purr in this neighborhood, they never mew. It is always an inharmonious yowling, night and day.

Then children stick their heads out of windows and holler. We surmise that it is because they want their breakfast, so they can go to school. Babies chime in, mimicking their elders. They seldom cry. No attention is paid to them if they do, so they don't.

## *"Fletching" for Nutriment*

By this time the rising noises have diminished to ordinary and I doze off. Ten o'clock see me rise. There is food in the room but I do not want to eat. Why eat when you are all alone? It seems sordid, bestial even, to prepare food which you do not want to eat and crouch over the table that is too small to hold your books and stove, both, but that holds them just the same, and gobble your food, if you have a lot and Fletcherize it, if your supplies are running low, so that you will get the maximum amount of nutrition from a minimum amount of food.

Yesterday morning I had farina, a roll and butter and a cup of milk. The farina was wormy. I noticed when I poured it out of the box. The small grains were matted together, cobweb like, but I gritted my teeth and thought of sailors and their wormy fare and when the stuff was done I ate a large dish of it. There is enough left over to fry for supper.

### ***The Evening Banquet***

My next meal is at 6, and I usually have an appetite then, because I have been working. I come home quickly through the dark, along Madison Street, dodging baby carriages, pushcarts, meandering couples and horse cars. For the street is so small that they all mingle. And all the while I must be careful of my step for the pavement is slimy with mist and refuse. I have my choice every evening of potato soup, rice or fried farina, with a cup of cocoa and a roll, and then I rush away again.

At 12, I am through work and back to my room again. Although it is midnight, the East Side is never lonely. There are groups of men before every saloon, couples taking leave of each other lingeringly, cats communing by the ash cans that decorate the front of every home, loping along from porch to porch. They hold sway now. The kids that swat them, that wear them thin, are asleep.

### ***Theater Supper Minus Theater***

Having reached my room, I partake of a third meal. Cocoa and a roll and some fruit.

And all the while, many times a day, I have to keep saying to myself "What a dear, cozy little room this is. What nice, long, solitary, enjoyable hours of reading I shall have here." I repeat. I pile the adjectives on. But I cannot convince myself. In the first place, I do not like solitude. I do not like to eat alone. I do not like to keep my mouth shut all the time. I like to talk. Everybody likes to talk and one cannot talk to oneself.

When I sit down to a meal, I say to myself: "According to the diet the United Charities dietician gave you, you are getting plenty to eat. Think of the barefoot boy. Blessings on thee little man! All he ate was bread and milk and I think something was said about berries but he did not live on the East Side.

### ***Hunger and Wordsworth***

And then I think of Wordsworth and "The world is too much with us." And I meditate upon how spiritual I shall become by the simple, well-balanced life. I contemplate tacking on the wall the signs, "Take no thought for your body, what ye shall eat," and "Man does not live by bread alone." But I know that I am taking far more thought of my body now than I ever was before. I spend more time and energy skimping and counting the cost than I ever did before. And so it's no fun. The first week isn't over yet, so I cannot say whether I am making it. If I fail to make the money that I have go, I shall have to do without. I am trying not to be careless. Every time I make a move toward a chewing gum stand in the subway I check myself. Every time I want a paper I have to reconsider. I cannot pass Loft's without thinking of the wonderful hot chocolate fudge sundaes that are within.

### ***One Out of Thousands***

And when I think that the majority of girls in this city are always having to stop and consider and count the cost, and feel in their pockets, I realize the high cost of living. The shop girls' pay, the waitresses', are not going to be raised in proportion to the cost of living. The middle class working girl is the one that is suffering. Why should the "society" women, in Chicago last winter, and the diet squad this winter, set about telling her how she should live, how she should economize? Why should the Women's Health Organization talk of the "cost of high

living” and be “scandalized” at the thought of putting butter on Graham bread? Hasn’t the working girl a right to little luxuries, such as butter? Besides, it isn’t just the eating question. Any “society” woman of not too sensuous a disposition can content herself on an eight-cent meal, if she can have a light, large room to eat it in and knows it is just temporary. It is the sordid surroundings of poverty that make it hard. Lest the purpose of the diet squad of The Call be misunderstood, it is best to say here that we are not trying to prove whether it can or whether it can’t be done. Of course it can be done. It has been proved again. I want to show the dull misery of “just skimping along” and the damnable mockery of any “society” woman setting an example.