

AMERICAN LITERATURE SELECTIONS, *CONTINUED*

hand clawed off by a carding machine³ the year before. Some wool had got stuck and he had reached into the machine to grab it, but the machine had grabbed him instead. It mangled all his fingers so bad, they had to cut them off, and part of his thumb too. All he had now was a stump of a hand and a stub of a thumb. He couldn't do regular work anymore, but he had enough of a hand to sweep, and carry the tea buckets. Tom wasn't the only one who'd lost part of himself in a machine in that mill. There were a dozen of them with a finger gone, a toe off, an eye out, where they'd had an accident.

We were all mighty glad to see Tom Thrush come around, for he was saucy and cheerful and would say anything. When he came around we usually asked him some kind of question, just to get him talking. I was mighty curious to know what it had been like to be an orphan boy in New York. One rainy day when he came with the tea for noontime dinner I asked, "Tom, did they make you go to school down in New York?"

"They would have, if they could have caught me."

Because of the rain Hetty'd brought her dinner. "Don't you want to learn things?" Hetty said.

He began to ladle out our tea. "Oh, I wouldn't mind learnin' things if there wasn't no work to it. I wouldn't mind it if they could just ladle it into you the way I ladle out the tea. But there's too much blame work to it. I mean, scratchin' away at the slate to learn your letters, and memorizing whole stacks of tables. Who cares what twelve times anything is? I never had twelve of anything in my life, except strokes from Hoggart's birch.⁴ I wasn't about to multiply them if I could help it."

"You'd better stop talking so much and get our tea poured," Hetty said. "Mr. Hoggart will give it to you good if he catches you standing around and gossiping."

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3. **carding machine:** a machine that has rows of wire teeth, used to untangle wool before it is spun.
 4. **birch:** a rod made of a birch stick used for punishment.