



Letter from a Mill Girl

By Cynthia Overbeck Bix

Lowell, Massachusetts
September 21, 1835

- 1 Dear Mama,
- 2 I have arrived in Lowell at last. I have so much I want to share with you!
- 3 The journey here seemed to go on forever. Tears stung my eyes as we bumped along in the wagon past our neighbors' farms. I whispered goodbye to our snug little town where I knew everyone and everyone knew me. With every mile the train carried me farther and farther away from home.
- 4 Cousin Abigail met me at the depot. I immediately recognized her by her red hair—just like Papa's. She took me straight to the boardinghouse, so regrettably I only got a brief glimpse of the town center. How I yearned to stop for a moment and just absorb it all! The streets are lined with building after building, all crowded and close together. And so many people and horses and carriages are hurrying here, there, and everywhere. It's wonderfully noisy and busy and bright.
- 5 Our boardinghouse is built of red brick. It rises three stories tall, and our unit is joined to others on both sides. There are 36 girls living here, with four girls and two beds in each room. Abigail is in a room with older girls. I share a bed with a pleasant, quiet girl named Anne, who is 14—just like me! A cheery younger girl named Mary and a third girl, Susan, complete our room. I shouldn't say it, but Susan is a bit stuck-up. Anne confided in me that she believes it's because we're new, while Susan is a veteran, having already been here for five months. The four of us share a single pitcher and basin for washing up. We are all crammed in like hens in a chicken coop.





- 6 Mrs. Chase keeps the house. There are such a lot of rules! We must be ever so quiet coming into the house and always hang up our bonnets, shawls, and coats in the entry. We must never be rude or loud. And we must all be in bed by ten o'clock.
- 7 I must say they feed us plenty. Yesterday's noon dinner was a hearty codfish hash with fresh apple pie, warm biscuits, and hot coffee. One nice surprise is that there are books for us to borrow. I know Papa thinks I read too much for a farm girl, but, oh, Mama, I am so eager to read them.

- 8 Well, I had better stop now. It's almost bedtime, and tomorrow I go to the mill to see about acquiring a position. I hope I am hired right away and will soon be earning enough money that I can send some home to you and Papa. I really hope I can send enough to help out with the boys' education.

Your loving Grace



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Test Questions

Circle the correct answer.

1) Which is the best summary statement of Grace's letter to Mama?

- a) Grace hoped to get a job in the mill, so she sadly left the comfort of her hometown.
- b) Grace wanted to live in a boardinghouse, so she sadly left the comfort of her hometown.
- c) Grace longed to see her cousin Abigail, so she decided to go on a train trip.
- d) Grace wanted to read a lot of books, so she moved away to find more books.

2) What does the word *yearned* mean as it is used in the paragraph below?

Cousin Abigail met me at the depot. I immediately recognized her by her red hair—just like Papa's. She took me straight to the boardinghouse, so regrettably I only got a brief glimpse of the town center. How I **yearned** to stop for a moment and just absorb it all! The streets are lined with building after building, all crowded and close together. And so many people and horses and carriages are hurrying here, there, and everywhere. It's wonderfully noisy and busy and bright.

- a) admired
- b) desired
- c) despised
- d) adored

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Test Questions (continued)

- 3) Reread the paragraph below. Use the information from both the passage and the picture to determine the meaning of the phrase *like hens in a chicken coop*.

Our boardinghouse is built of red brick. It rises three stories tall, and our unit is joined to others on both sides. There are 36 girls living here, with four girls and two beds in each room. Abigail is in a room with older girls. I share a bed with a pleasant, quiet girl named Anne, who is 14—just like me! A cheery younger girl named Mary and a third girl, Susan, complete our room. I shouldn't say it, but Susan is a bit stuck-up. Anne confided in me that she believes it's because we're new, while Susan is a veteran, having already been here for five months. The four of us share a single pitcher and basin for washing up. We are all crammed in **like hens in a chicken coop**.

- a) Grace was given plenty to eat and didn't worry about going hungry.
- b) Grace liked hens living with them in the boardinghouse.
- c) Grace was crowded together with many other girls in the boardinghouse.
- d) Grace had to share a water basin with the other girls in the boardinghouse.

- 4) What is Grace's overall tone in her letter to her mama?

- a) weary
- b) rude
- c) depressed
- d) eager

- 5) Which sentence best explains why Grace moved away from home?

- a) I share a bed with a pleasant, quiet girl named Anne.
- b) I hope I am hired right away and will soon be earning enough money to send home to you and Papa.
- c) With every mile the train carried me farther and farther away from home.
- d) She took me straight to the boardinghouse, so regrettably I only got a brief glimpse of the town center.