

"World War I: Remembering the War to End All Wars"

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1000 Words**

In November of 1918, a woman named Elizabeth Toll begins a job working in a munitions factory for World War One, in Seattle, Washington. As the "War to End All Wars" ends, Elizabeth continues to make barely any money at all. Outraged, she participates in the Seattle General Strike, demanding adequate pay and the shutting down of factories. Upon the strike's failure, Elizabeth's future is at stake. World War One, even with its many positive effects, had a very negative impact on the common people of America.

The snow crunches under the streetcar's wheels as I catch a lift to my first day at work. I, Elizabeth Toll, am one of the unfortunate women to pick up a factory job in Seattle during November of 1918. I pick up the November tenth newspaper, and read as the streetcar bumps along. As the streetcar pulls up to the factory, I hand the driver his money. Working in a factory seems frightening, yet intriguing to know men's work. Most men are serving in the war, so women are needed to fill their jobs. That's why I'm starting work here, in one of Seattle's munitions.

I step into the chaos of people working hard on manufacturing weapons for the military. After finding the manager, I ask what I need to do on my first day. He barks out in a commanding voice that suggests years of ordering people around, "Yer' new? Well missy, get workin'!" He points to the left, not stopping to ask my name. "Whatcha' waitin' for, honey? Get workin'," he demands. Startled, I rush over to the machine. This is going to be a long day.

My alarm wakes me the next day. I was dreaming a nightmare about the horrible conditions of the factory: strenuous labor, unbreathable air, it even ended with a bomb detonating! Time for day two, I guess. Snatching the newspaper, the headline catches my eye: "PEACE!" The war has ended! I read the article, sucking in every hopeful word. The paper states an armistice was signed, and troops would be sent home! But what does that mean for my job?

Throughout the next few weeks, my questions remain unanswered. I still work relentlessly. I start to develop a cough, increasing my doubts of the factory's safety. Every day I notice more homeless individuals out on the streets on my way to work. It's depressing to see the men who served, paid with complete abandonment. One December morning, walking to work from a restaurant where I stopped for breakfast, I spotted a man sitting on the snowy curb. Pitying his situation, I offer him some of my hot coffee and a partially-eaten breakfast roll, "Here, sir..."

He looks up, surprised, "O-Oh?" A badge pinned onto his shirt glints in the light, catching my eye. Not being a professional in military rankings, I have no idea what the badge means. The light also glints off of his prosthetic leg, lost in battle, I would guess. I kneel to give him the coffee and roll, and he takes them from me and thanks me, "Why... Thank you so much..."

I nod, "No, thank *you*. For serving."

His face lights up bittersweetly, and I continue my way to work. I figure he was left to the streets because of an inability to obtain a job after being dispatched. It's so unfair.

Christmas comes and goes. The new year of 1919 is celebrated. Contrary to my hopes, the factories *still* haven't increased my pay. I thought that after the war, the government would loosen their restrictions on wages, but my hopes are of no avail. It's horrible, being a single woman trying to survive on less than half of a man's wage. I've sold numerous belongings, yet I

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still worry if I'll have enough money to pay rent. As the temperature drops, I worry about the heating bills, too.

I somehow make it through January, and reading the newspaper, I see that many others are in my same situation. If so many people are suffering because of this, then why hasn't anyone done anything yet? And that's when I hear the news. On February Sixth, a strike is organized: my one chance to voice my concerns!

At 10:00 A.M. on Thursday, February Sixth, I leave the factory with many of my peers. I estimate about sixty-thousand protesters, many of which **are** carrying signs.

I cheer with the crowd, and a newspaper reporter approaches me, "You, ma'am, could you tell us why you've come out to the strike?"

It's difficult to hear him over the crowd, so I project my answer, "We're dying out here! No one could *possibly* survive on two cents an hour! And not to mention the conditions we work in!"

"What's your name, miss?"

"Elizabeth Toll."

It's been weeks since the end of the strike, and nothing's happened. I won't have enough money to pay my February rent, will I be evicted to the streets? Will I die of hypothermia? Or could something much worse happen to me? Who knows what happens to young women out on the streets... I'm terrified of the future to come, fearing most that there isn't much of a future left for me. To me, the "War to End All Wars" appears more like the "War to End All Hope."

World War One, known as the "War to End All Wars," impacted many aspects of the United States in both positive, and negative ways. The industries across America exploded into the "Roaring Twenties," increasing productivity and efficiency. With stock markets rising, surges of profit benefitted business owners. Being across the Atlantic from the actual fighting, the United States remained unscathed, becoming a worldwide leader amongst countries still recovering. Negatively, because of inflation, prices rose while wages dropped. Many Americans were affected by this, inspiring strikes like the Seattle General Strike, shown above. Getting a job became somewhat of a competition, and with the rise of Prohibition, crime swept across the country.

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