Workhouse Diary

Dear Diary,

My life is so unfair! Today has been yet another painfully humiliating day that has been ripped from my life; sixteen hours of sheer torture has gone by but it feels like an eternity. My hands are crimson, blistered and sore from this morning's work. My mind is perplexed. I can't get my head around the truth that kills me inside and the fact that I'm here, squished next to Nancy, when most other children my age have parents, love and a home - a life I've never had, every orphans dream, how would I even begin imagining such a life? Safety and security are what I long for but know I will never have; what I want most is a family, my very own family.

Breakfast, as usual, was gruel, lumpy and wet. There were small things creeping and moving in the depths of the bowl - the thought made me shudder, but starving as I was, I continued eating regardless. What have I done to deserve this? Nancy, my best friend, sat next to me and was nearly sick into her bowl - now that would have made the masters really mad.

About twenty minutes later, the whole room was escorted to the first station of work. Mine, as I could have predicted, was rope picking. The rope was thick, dry and stiff; the sea salt residue in the knots caused searing pain as it worked its way into my tiny blistered fingers. The master was watching us with grey beady eyes and the look he gave us assured us that he needed no further reasons to punish us - he was ready. We all kept our heads down and behaved as we knew we should - I'm glad.

We didn't get lunch today. This happens sometimes and we've all learned that it's best not ask why. We worked for hours on end without a break. The exhaustion is crippling us all.

I was told that next week (on my birthday) I will be old enough to start stone crushing with the older kids - I'm dreading it. I will be thirteen, but after years of poor food, I still look 9. What if things go wrong? What if the older kids bully and tease me? There will be no-one for me - not even my dear Nancy as she won't be 13 until next year. The sadness at the news engulfed me; a small cry at first, but then harder and harder as the sobs took over. Subsequently, I was whipped. I can still feel the cane impression and the blood is still all over my rags. I can't get the memory of the pain out of my head...

Dinner was no better than breakfast, but after having no lunch, I wasn't going to complain. I can't really moan since I was given a fluff free piece of bread even though the water looked like it can from the sewers.

I feel sorry for the little ones who I can hear snivelling in the night, pining for their mothers - I'm surprised they don't get caught and punished.

Now I'm snuggled next to Nancy, shivering cold, wishing I had a place to call home. But I've lived to survive another day.