

# *The Jungle*

By

Upton Sinclair

## Chapter 8

Yet even by this deadly winter the germ of hope was not to be kept from sprouting in their hearts. It was just at this time that the great adventure befell Marija.

The victim was Tamoszius Kuszleika, who played the violin. Everybody laughed at them, for Tamoszius was petite and frail, and Marija could have picked him up and carried him off under one arm. But perhaps that was why she fascinated him; the sheer volume of Marija's energy was overwhelming. That first night at the wedding Tamoszius had hardly taken his eyes off her; and later on, when he came to find that she had really the heart of a baby, her voice and her violence ceased to terrify him, and he got the habit of coming to pay her visits on Sunday afternoons. There was no place to entertain company except in the kitchen, in the midst of the family, and Tamoszius would sit there with his hat between his knees, never saying more than half a dozen words at a time, and turning red in the face before he managed to say those; until finally Jurgis would clap him upon the back, in his hearty way, crying, "Come now, brother, give us a tune." And then Tamoszius' face would light up and he would get out his fiddle, tuck it under his chin, and play. And forthwith the soul of him would flame up and become eloquent—it was almost an impropriety, for all the while his gaze would be fixed upon Marija's face, until she would begin to turn red and lower her eyes. There was no resisting the music of Tamoszius, however; even the children would sit awed and wondering, and the tears would run down

Teta Elzbieta's cheeks. A wonderful privilege it was to be thus admitted into the soul of a man of genius, to be allowed to share the ecstasies and the agonies of his inmost life.

Then there were other benefits accruing to Marija from this friendship—benefits of a more substantial nature. People paid Tamoszius big money to come and make music on state occasions; and also they would invite him to parties and festivals, knowing well that he was too good-natured to come without his fiddle, and that having brought it, he could be made to play while others danced. Once he made bold to ask Marija to accompany him to such a party, and Marija accepted, to his great delight—after which he never went anywhere without her, while if the celebration were given by friends of his, he would invite the rest of the family also. In any case Marija would bring back a huge pocketful of cakes and sandwiches for the children, and stories of all the good things she herself had managed to consume. She was compelled, at these parties, to spend most of her time at the refreshment table, for she could not dance with anybody except other women and very old men; Tamoszius was of an excitable temperament, and afflicted with a frantic jealousy, and any unmarried man who ventured to put his arm about the ample waist of Marija would be certain to throw the orchestra out of tune.

It was a great help to a person who had to toil all the week to be able to look forward to some such relaxation as this on Saturday nights. The family was too poor and too hardworked to make many acquaintances; in Packingtown, as a rule, people know only their near neighbors and shopmates, and so the place is like a myriad of little country villages. But now there was a member of the family who was permitted to travel and widen her horizon; and so each week there would be new personalities to talk about,—how so-and-so was dressed, and where she worked, and what she got, and whom she was in love with; and how this man had jilted his girl, and how she had quarreled with the other girl, and what had passed between them; and how another man beat his wife,

and spent all her earnings upon drink, and pawned her very clothes. Some people would have scorned this talk as gossip; but then one has to talk about what one knows.

It was one Saturday night, as they were coming home from a wedding, that Tamoszius found courage, and set down his violin case in the street and spoke his heart; and then Marija clasped him in her arms. She told them all about it the next day, and fairly cried with happiness, for she said that Tamoszius was a lovely man. After that he no longer made love to her with his fiddle, but they would sit for hours in the kitchen, blissfully happy in each other's arms; it was the tacit convention of the family to know nothing of what was going on in that corner.

They were planning to be married in the spring, and have the garret of the house fixed up, and live there. Tamoszius made good wages; and little by little the family were paying back their debt to Marija, so she ought soon to have enough to start life upon—only, with her preposterous softheartedness, she would insist upon spending a good part of her money every week for things which she saw they needed. Marija was really the capitalist of the party, for she had become an expert can painter by this time—she was getting fourteen cents for every hundred and ten cans, and she could paint more than two cans every minute. Marija felt, so to speak, that she had her hand on the throttle, and the neighborhood was vocal with her rejoicings.

Yet her friends would shake their heads and tell her to go slow; one could not count upon such good fortune forever—there were accidents that always happened. But Marija was not to be prevailed upon, and went on planning and dreaming of all the treasures she was going to have for her home; and so, when the crash did come, her grief was painful to see.

For her canning factory shut down! Marija would about as soon have expected to see the sun shut down—the huge establishment had been to

her a thing akin to the planets and the seasons. But now it was shut! And they had not given her any explanation, they had not even given her a day's warning; they had simply posted a notice one Saturday that all hands would be paid off that afternoon, and would not resume work for at least a month! And that was all that there was to it—her job was gone!

It was the holiday rush that was over, the girls said in answer to Marija's inquiries; after that there was always a slack. Sometimes the factory would start up on half time after a while, but there was no telling—it had been known to stay closed until way into the summer. The prospects were bad at present, for truckmen who worked in the storerooms said that these were piled up to the ceilings, so that the firm could not have found room for another week's output of cans. And they had turned off three-quarters of these men, which was a still worse sign, since it meant that there were no orders to be filled. It was all a swindle, can-painting, said the girls—you were crazy with delight because you were making twelve or fourteen dollars a week, and saving half of it; but you had to spend it all keeping alive while you were out, and so your pay was really only half what you thought.

Marija came home, and because she was a person who could not rest without danger of explosion, they first had a great house cleaning, and then she set out to search Packingtown for a job to fill up the gap. As nearly all the canning establishments were shut down, and all the girls hunting work, it will be readily understood that Marija did not find any. Then she took to trying the stores and saloons, and when this failed she even traveled over into the far-distant regions near the lake front, where lived the rich people in great palaces, and begged there for some sort of work that could be done by a person who did not know English.

The men upon the killing beds felt also the effects of the slump which had turned Marija out; but they felt it in a different way, and a way which made Jurgis understand at last all their bitterness. The big packers did not turn their hands off and close down, like the canning factories;

but they began to run for shorter and shorter hours. They had always required the men to be on the killing beds and ready for work at seven o'clock, although there was almost never any work to be done till the buyers out in the yards had gotten to work, and some cattle had come over the chutes. That would often be ten or eleven o'clock, which was bad enough, in all conscience; but now, in the slack season, they would perhaps not have a thing for their men to do till late in the afternoon. And so they would have to loaf around, in a place where the thermometer might be twenty degrees below zero! At first one would see them running about, or skylarking with each other, trying to keep warm; but before the day was over they would become quite chilled through and exhausted, and, when the cattle finally came, so near frozen that to move was an agony. And then suddenly the place would spring into activity, and the merciless "speeding-up" would begin!

There were weeks at a time when Jurgis went home after such a day as this with not more than two hours' work to his credit—which meant about thirty- five cents. There were many days when the total was less than half an hour, and others when there was none at all. The general average was six hours a day, which meant for Jurgis about six dollars a week; and this six hours of work would be done after standing on the killing bed till one o'clock, or perhaps even three or four o'clock, in the afternoon. Like as not there would come a rush of cattle at the very end of the day, which the men would have to dispose of before they went home, often working by electric light till nine or ten, or even twelve or one o'clock, and without a single instant for a bite of supper. The men were at the mercy of the cattle. Perhaps the buyers would be holding off for better prices—if they could scare the shippers into thinking that they meant to buy nothing that day, they could get their own terms. For some reason the cost of fodder for cattle in the yards was much above the market price—and you were not allowed to bring your own fodder! Then, too, a number of cars were apt to arrive late in the day, now that the roads were blocked with snow, and the packers would buy their cattle that night, to get them cheaper, and then would come into play

their ironclad rule, that all cattle must be killed the same day they were bought. There was no use kicking about this—there had been one delegation after another to see the packers about it, only to be told that it was the rule, and that there was not the slightest chance of its ever being altered. And so on Christmas Eve Jurgis worked till nearly one o'clock in the morning, and on Christmas Day he was on the killing bed at seven o'clock.

All this was bad; and yet it was not the worst. For after all the hard work a man did, he was paid for only part of it. Jurgis had once been among those who scoffed at the idea of these huge concerns cheating; and so now he could appreciate the bitter irony of the fact that it was precisely their size which enabled them to do it with impunity. One of the rules on the killing beds was that a man who was one minute late was docked an hour; and this was economical, for he was made to work the balance of the hour—he was not allowed to stand round and wait. And on the other hand if he came ahead of time he got no pay for that—though often the bosses would start up the gang ten or fifteen minutes before the whistle. And this same custom they carried over to the end of the day; they did not pay for any fraction of an hour—for “broken time.” A man might work full fifty minutes, but if there was no work to fill out the hour, there was no pay for him. Thus the end of every day was a sort of lottery—a struggle, all but breaking into open war between the bosses and the men, the former trying to rush a job through and the latter trying to stretch it out. Jurgis blamed the bosses for this, though the truth to be told it was not always their fault; for the packers kept them frightened for their lives—and when one was in danger of falling behind the standard, what was easier than to catch up by making the gang work awhile “for the church”? This was a savage witticism the men had, which Jurgis had to have explained to him. Old man Jones was great on missions and such things, and so whenever they were doing some particularly disreputable job, the men would wink at each other and say, “Now we’re working for the church!”

One of the consequences of all these things was that Jurgis was no longer perplexed when he heard men talk of fighting for their rights. He felt like fighting now himself; and when the Irish delegate of the butcher-helpers' union came to him a second time, he received him in a far different spirit. A wonderful idea it now seemed to Jurgis, this of the men—that by combining they might be able to make a stand and conquer the packers! Jurgis wondered who had first thought of it; and when he was told that it was a common thing for men to do in America, he got the first inkling of a meaning in the phrase “a free country.” The delegate explained to him how it depended upon their being able to get every man to join and stand by the organization, and so Jurgis signified that he was willing to do his share. Before another month was by, all the working members of his family had union cards, and wore their union buttons conspicuously and with pride. For fully a week they were quite blissfully happy, thinking that belonging to a union meant an end to all their troubles.

But only ten days after she had joined, Marija's canning factory closed down, and that blow quite staggered them. They could not understand why the union had not prevented it, and the very first time she attended a meeting Marija got up and made a speech about it. It was a business meeting, and was transacted in English, but that made no difference to Marija; she said what was in her, and all the pounding of the chairman's gavel and all the uproar and confusion in the room could not prevail. Quite apart from her own troubles she was boiling over with a general sense of the injustice of it, and she told what she thought of the packers, and what she thought of a world where such things were allowed to happen; and then, while the echoes of the hall rang with the shock of her terrible voice, she sat down again and fanned herself, and the meeting gathered itself together and proceeded to discuss the election of a recording secretary.

Jurgis too had an adventure the first time he attended a union meeting, but it was not of his own seeking. Jurgis had gone with the desire to get

into an inconspicuous corner and see what was done; but this attitude of silent and open-eyed attention had marked him out for a victim. Tommy Finnegan was a little Irishman, with big staring eyes and a wild aspect, a “hoister” by trade, and badly cracked. Somewhere back in the far-distant past Tommy Finnegan had had a strange experience, and the burden of it rested upon him. All the balance of his life he had done nothing but try to make it understood. When he talked he caught his victim by the buttonhole, and his face kept coming closer and closer—which was trying, because his teeth were so bad. Jurgis did not mind that, only he was frightened. The method of operation of the higher intelligences was Tom Finnegan’s theme, and he desired to find out if Jurgis had ever considered that the representation of things in their present similarity might be altogether unintelligible upon a more elevated plane. There were assuredly wonderful mysteries about the developing of these things; and then, becoming confidential, Mr. Finnegan proceeded to tell of some discoveries of his own. “If ye have iver had onything to do wid shperrits,” said he, and looked inquiringly at Jurgis, who kept shaking his head. “Niver mind, niver mind,” continued the other, “but their influences may be operatin’ upon ye; it’s shure as I’m tellin’ ye, it’s them that has the reference to the immejit surroundin’s that has the most of power. It was vouchsafed to me in me youthful days to be acquainted with shperrits” and so Tommy Finnegan went on, expounding a system of philosophy, while the perspiration came out on Jurgis’ forehead, so great was his agitation and embarrassment. In the end one of the men, seeing his plight, came over and rescued him; but it was some time before he was able to find any one to explain things to him, and meanwhile his fear lest the strange little Irishman should get him cornered again was enough to keep him dodging about the room the whole evening.

He never missed a meeting, however. He had picked up a few words of English by this time, and friends would help him to understand. They were often very turbulent meetings, with half a dozen men declaiming at once, in as many dialects of English; but the speakers were all

desperately in earnest, and Jurgis was in earnest too, for he understood that a fight was on, and that it was his fight. Since the time of his disillusionment, Jurgis had sworn to trust no man, except in his own family; but here he discovered that he had brothers in affliction, and allies. Their one chance for life was in union, and so the struggle became a kind of crusade. Jurgis had always been a member of the church, because it was the right thing to be, but the church had never touched him, he left all that for the women. Here, however, was a new religion—one that did touch him, that took hold of every fiber of him; and with all the zeal and fury of a convert he went out as a missionary. There were many nonunion men among the Lithuanians, and with these he would labor and wrestle in prayer, trying to show them the right. Sometimes they would be obstinate and refuse to see it, and Jurgis, alas, was not always patient! He forgot how he himself had been blind, a short time ago—after the fashion of all crusaders since the original ones, who set out to spread the gospel of Brotherhood by force of arms.