

The Jungle

By

Upton Sinclair

Chapter 30

Jurgis had breakfast with Ostrinski and his family, and then he went home to Elzbieta. He was no longer shy about it—when he went in, instead of saying all the things he had been planning to say, he started to tell Elzbieta about the revolution! At first she thought he was out of his mind, and it was hours before she could really feel certain that he was himself. When, however, she had satisfied herself that he was sane upon all subjects except politics, she troubled herself no further about it.

Jurgis was destined to find that Elzbieta's armor was absolutely impervious to Socialism. Her soul had been baked hard in the fire of adversity, and there was no altering it now; life to her was the hunt for daily bread, and ideas existed for her only as they bore upon that. All that interested her in regard to this new frenzy which had seized hold of her son-in-law was whether or not it had a tendency to make him sober and industrious; and when she found he intended to look for work and to contribute his share to the family fund, she gave him full rein to convince her of anything. A wonderfully wise little woman was Elzbieta; she could think as quickly as a hunted rabbit, and in half an hour she had chosen her life-attitude to the Socialist movement. She agreed in everything with Jurgis, except the need of his paying his dues; and she would even go to a meeting with him now and then, and sit and plan her next day's dinner amid the storm.

For a week after he became a convert Jurgis continued to wander about all day, looking for work; until at last he met with a strange fortune. He

was passing one of Chicago's innumerable small hotels, and after some hesitation he concluded to go in. A man he took for the proprietor was standing in the lobby, and he went up to him and tackled him for a job.

"What can you do?" the man asked.

"Anything, sir," said Jurgis, and added quickly: "I've been out of work for a long time, sir. I'm an honest man, and I'm strong and willing—"

The other was eying him narrowly. "Do you drink?" he asked.

"No, sir," said Jurgis.

"Well, I've been employing a man as a porter, and he drinks. I've discharged him seven times now, and I've about made up my mind that's enough. Would you be a porter?"

"Yes, sir."

"It's hard work. You'll have to clean floors and wash spittoons and fill lamps and handle trunks—"

"I'm willing, sir."

"All right. I'll pay you thirty a month and board, and you can begin now, if you feel like it. You can put on the other fellow's rig."

And so Jurgis fell to work, and toiled like a Trojan till night. Then he went and told Elzbieta, and also, late as it was, he paid a visit to Ostrinski to let him know of his good fortune. Here he received a great surprise, for when he was describing the location of the hotel Ostrinski interrupted suddenly, "Not Hinds's!"

"Yes," said Jurgis, "that's the name."

To which the other replied, “Then you’ve got the best boss in Chicago—he’s a state organizer of our party, and one of our best-known speakers!”

So the next morning Jurgis went to his employer and told him; and the man seized him by the hand and shook it. “By Jove!” he cried, “that lets me out. I didn’t sleep all last night because I had discharged a good Socialist!”

So, after that, Jurgis was known to his “boss” as “Comrade Jurgis,” and in return he was expected to call him “Comrade Hinds.” “Tommy” Hinds, as he was known to his intimates, was a squat little man, with broad shoulders and a florid face, decorated with gray side whiskers. He was the kindest-hearted man that ever lived, and the liveliest— inexhaustible in his enthusiasm, and talking Socialism all day and all night. He was a great fellow to jolly along a crowd, and would keep a meeting in an uproar; when once he got really waked up, the torrent of his eloquence could be compared with nothing save Niagara.

Tommy Hinds had begun life as a blacksmith’s helper, and had run away to join the Union army, where he had made his first acquaintance with “graft,” in the shape of rotten muskets and shoddy blankets. To a musket that broke in a crisis he always attributed the death of his only brother, and upon worthless blankets he blamed all the agonies of his own old age. Whenever it rained, the rheumatism would get into his joints, and then he would screw up his face and mutter: “Capitalism, my boy, capitalism! ‘Ecrasez l’infame!’” He had one unfailing remedy for all the evils of this world, and he preached it to every one; no matter whether the person’s trouble was failure in business, or dyspepsia, or a quarrelsome mother-in-law, a twinkle would come into his eyes and he would say, “You know what to do about it—vote the Socialist ticket!”

Tommy Hinds had set out upon the trail of the Octopus as soon as the war was over. He had gone into business, and found himself in

competition with the fortunes of those who had been stealing while he had been fighting. The city government was in their hands and the railroads were in league with them, and honest business was driven to the wall; and so Hinds had put all his savings into Chicago real estate, and set out singlehanded to dam the river of graft. He had been a reform member of the city council, he had been a Greenbacker, a Labor Unionist, a Populist, a Bryanite—and after thirty years of fighting, the year 1896 had served to convince him that the power of concentrated wealth could never be controlled, but could only be destroyed. He had published a pamphlet about it, and set out to organize a party of his own, when a stray Socialist leaflet had revealed to him that others had been ahead of him. Now for eight years he had been fighting for the party, anywhere, everywhere—whether it was a G.A.R. reunion, or a hotel-keepers' convention, or an Afro-American businessmen's banquet, or a Bible society picnic, Tommy Hinds would manage to get himself invited to explain the relations of Socialism to the subject in hand. After that he would start off upon a tour of his own, ending at some place between New York and Oregon; and when he came back from there, he would go out to organize new locals for the state committee; and finally he would come home to rest—and talk Socialism in Chicago. Hinds's hotel was a very hot-bed of the propaganda; all the employees were party men, and if they were not when they came, they were quite certain to be before they went away. The proprietor would get into a discussion with some one in the lobby, and as the conversation grew animated, others would gather about to listen, until finally every one in the place would be crowded into a group, and a regular debate would be under way. This went on every night—when Tommy Hinds was not there to do it, his clerk did it; and when his clerk was away campaigning, the assistant attended to it, while Mrs. Hinds sat behind the desk and did the work. The clerk was an old crony of the proprietor's, an awkward, rawboned giant of a man, with a lean, sallow face, a broad mouth, and whiskers under his chin, the very type and body of a prairie farmer. He had been that all his life—he had fought the railroads in Kansas for fifty years, a Granger, a Farmers' Alliance man, a "middle-of-the-road" Populist.

Finally, Tommy Hinds had revealed to him the wonderful idea of using the trusts instead of destroying them, and he had sold his farm and come to Chicago.

That was Amos Struver; and then there was Harry Adams, the assistant clerk, a pale, scholarly-looking man, who came from Massachusetts, of Pilgrim stock. Adams had been a cotton operative in Fall River, and the continued depression in the industry had worn him and his family out, and he had emigrated to South Carolina. In Massachusetts the percentage of white illiteracy is eight-tenths of one per cent, while in South Carolina it is thirteen and six-tenths per cent; also in South Carolina there is a property qualification for voters—and for these and other reasons child labor is the rule, and so the cotton mills were driving those of Massachusetts out of the business. Adams did not know this, he only knew that the Southern mills were running; but when he got there he found that if he was to live, all his family would have to work, and from six o'clock at night to six o'clock in the morning. So he had set to work to organize the mill hands, after the fashion in Massachusetts, and had been discharged; but he had gotten other work, and stuck at it, and at last there had been a strike for shorter hours, and Harry Adams had attempted to address a street meeting, which was the end of him. In the states of the far South the labor of convicts is leased to contractors, and when there are not convicts enough they have to be supplied. Harry Adams was sent up by a judge who was a cousin of the mill owner with whose business he had interfered; and though the life had nearly killed him, he had been wise enough not to murmur, and at the end of his term he and his family had left the state of South Carolina—hell's back yard, as he called it. He had no money for carfare, but it was harvest time, and they walked one day and worked the next; and so Adams got at last to Chicago, and joined the Socialist party. He was a studious man, reserved, and nothing of an orator; but he always had a pile of books under his desk in the hotel, and articles from his pen were beginning to attract attention in the party press.

Contrary to what one would have expected, all this radicalism did not hurt the hotel business; the radicals flocked to it, and the commercial travelers all found it diverting. Of late, also, the hotel had become a favorite stopping place for Western cattlemen. Now that the Beef Trust had adopted the trick of raising prices to induce enormous shipments of cattle, and then dropping them again and scooping in all they needed, a stock raiser was very apt to find himself in Chicago without money enough to pay his freight bill; and so he had to go to a cheap hotel, and it was no drawback to him if there was an agitator talking in the lobby. These Western fellows were just “meat” for Tommy Hinds—he would get a dozen of them around him and paint little pictures of “the System.” Of course, it was not a week before he had heard Jurgis’s story, and after that he would not have let his new porter go for the world. “See here,” he would say, in the middle of an argument, “I’ve got a fellow right here in my place who’s worked there and seen every bit of it!” And then Jurgis would drop his work, whatever it was, and come, and the other would say, “Comrade Jurgis, just tell these gentlemen what you saw on the killing-beds.” At first this request caused poor Jurgis the most acute agony, and it was like pulling teeth to get him to talk; but gradually he found out what was wanted, and in the end he learned to stand up and speak his piece with enthusiasm. His employer would sit by and encourage him with exclamations and shakes of the head; when Jurgis would give the formula for “potted ham,” or tell about the condemned hogs that were dropped into the “destructors” at the top and immediately taken out again at the bottom, to be shipped into another state and made into lard, Tommy Hinds would bang his knee and cry, “Do you think a man could make up a thing like that out of his head?”

And then the hotel-keeper would go on to show how the Socialists had the only real remedy for such evils, how they alone “meant business” with the Beef Trust. And when, in answer to this, the victim would say that the whole country was getting stirred up, that the newspapers were full of denunciations of it, and the government taking action against it, Tommy Hinds had a knock-out blow all ready. “Yes,” he would say, “all

that is true—but what do you suppose is the reason for it? Are you foolish enough to believe that it's done for the public? There are other trusts in the country just as illegal and extortionate as the Beef Trust: there is the Coal Trust, that freezes the poor in winter—there is the Steel Trust, that doubles the price of every nail in your shoes—there is the Oil Trust, that keeps you from reading at night—and why do you suppose it is that all the fury of the press and the government is directed against the Beef Trust?" And when to this the victim would reply that there was clamor enough over the Oil Trust, the other would continue: "Ten years ago Henry D. Lloyd told all the truth about the Standard Oil Company in his *Wealth versus Commonwealth*; and the book was allowed to die, and you hardly ever hear of it. And now, at last, two magazines have the courage to tackle 'Standard Oil' again, and what happens? The newspapers ridicule the authors, the churches defend the criminals, and the government—does nothing. And now, why is it all so different with the Beef Trust?"

Here the other would generally admit that he was "stuck"; and Tommy Hinds would explain to him, and it was fun to see his eyes open. "If you were a Socialist," the hotelkeeper would say, "you would understand that the power which really governs the United States today is the Railroad Trust. It is the Railroad Trust that runs your state government, wherever you live, and that runs the United States Senate. And all of the trusts that I have named are railroad trusts—save only the Beef Trust! The Beef Trust has defied the railroads—it is plundering them day by day through the Private Car; and so the public is roused to fury, and the papers clamor for action, and the government goes on the war-path! And you poor common people watch and applaud the job, and think it's all done for you, and never dream that it is really the grand climax of the century-long battle of commercial competition—the final death grapple between the chiefs of the Beef Trust and 'Standard Oil,' for the prize of the mastery and ownership of the United States of America!"

Such was the new home in which Jurgis lived and worked, and in which his education was completed. Perhaps you would imagine that he did not do much work there, but that would be a great mistake. He would have cut off one hand for Tommy Hinds; and to keep Hinds's hotel a thing of beauty was his joy in life. That he had a score of Socialist arguments chasing through his brain in the meantime did not interfere with this; on the contrary, Jurgis scrubbed the spittoons and polished the banisters all the more vehemently because at the same time he was wrestling inwardly with an imaginary recalcitrant. It would be pleasant to record that he swore off drinking immediately, and all the rest of his bad habits with it; but that would hardly be exact. These revolutionists were not angels; they were men, and men who had come up from the social pit, and with the mire of it smeared over them. Some of them drank, and some of them swore, and some of them ate pie with their knives; there was only one difference between them and all the rest of the populace—that they were men with a hope, with a cause to fight for and suffer for. There came times to Jurgis when the vision seemed far-off and pale, and a glass of beer loomed large in comparison; but if the glass led to another glass, and to too many glasses, he had something to spur him to remorse and resolution on the morrow. It was so evidently a wicked thing to spend one's pennies for drink, when the working class was wandering in darkness, and waiting to be delivered; the price of a glass of beer would buy fifty copies of a leaflet, and one could hand these out to the unregenerate, and then get drunk upon the thought of the good that was being accomplished. That was the way the movement had been made, and it was the only way it would progress; it availed nothing to know of it, without fighting for it—it was a thing for all, not for a few! A corollary of this proposition of course was, that any one who refused to receive the new gospel was personally responsible for keeping Jurgis from his heart's desire; and this, alas, made him uncomfortable as an acquaintance. He met some neighbors with whom Elzbieta had made friends in her neighborhood, and he set out to make Socialists of them by wholesale, and several times he all but got into a fight.

It was all so painfully obvious to Jurgis! It was so incomprehensible how a man could fail to see it! Here were all the opportunities of the country, the land, and the buildings upon the land, the railroads, the mines, the factories, and the stores, all in the hands of a few private individuals, called capitalists, for whom the people were obliged to work for wages. The whole balance of what the people produced went to heap up the fortunes of these capitalists, to heap, and heap again, and yet again—and that in spite of the fact that they, and every one about them, lived in unthinkable luxury! And was it not plain that if the people cut off the share of those who merely “owned,” the share of those who worked would be much greater? That was as plain as two and two makes four; and it was the whole of it, absolutely the whole of it; and yet there were people who could not see it, who would argue about everything else in the world. They would tell you that governments could not manage things as economically as private individuals; they would repeat and repeat that, and think they were saying something! They could not see that “economical” management by masters meant simply that they, the people, were worked harder and ground closer and paid less! They were wage-earners and servants, at the mercy of exploiters whose one thought was to get as much out of them as possible; and they were taking an interest in the process, were anxious lest it should not be done thoroughly enough! Was it not honestly a trial to listen to an argument such as that?

And yet there were things even worse. You would begin talking to some poor devil who had worked in one shop for the last thirty years, and had never been able to save a penny; who left home every morning at six o’clock, to go and tend a machine, and come back at night too tired to take his clothes off; who had never had a week’s vacation in his life, had never traveled, never had an adventure, never learned anything, never hoped anything—and when you started to tell him about Socialism he would sniff and say, “I’m not interested in that—I’m an individualist!” And then he would go on to tell you that Socialism was “paternalism,” and that if it ever had its way the world would stop progressing. It was

enough to make a mule laugh, to hear arguments like that; and yet it was no laughing matter, as you found out—for how many millions of such poor deluded wretches there were, whose lives had been so stunted by capitalism that they no longer knew what freedom was! And they really thought that it was “individualism” for tens of thousands of them to herd together and obey the orders of a steel magnate, and produce hundreds of millions of dollars of wealth for him, and then let him give them libraries; while for them to take the industry, and run it to suit themselves, and build their own libraries—that would have been “Paternalism”!

Sometimes the agony of such things as this was almost more than Jurgis could bear; yet there was no way of escape from it, there was nothing to do but to dig away at the base of this mountain of ignorance and prejudice. You must keep at the poor fellow; you must hold your temper, and argue with him, and watch for your chance to stick an idea or two into his head. And the rest of the time you must sharpen up your weapons—you must think out new replies to his objections, and provide yourself with new facts to prove to him the folly of his ways.

So Jurgis acquired the reading habit. He would carry in his pocket a tract or a pamphlet which some one had loaned him, and whenever he had an idle moment during the day he would plod through a paragraph, and then think about it while he worked. Also he read the newspapers, and asked questions about them. One of the other porters at Hinds’s was a sharp little Irishman, who knew everything that Jurgis wanted to know; and while they were busy he would explain to him the geography of America, and its history, its constitution and its laws; also he gave him an idea of the business system of the country, the great railroads and corporations, and who owned them, and the labor unions, and the big strikes, and the men who had led them. Then at night, when he could get off, Jurgis would attend the Socialist meetings. During the campaign one was not dependent upon the street corner affairs, where the weather and the quality of the orator were equally uncertain; there were hall meetings

every night, and one could hear speakers of national prominence. These discussed the political situation from every point of view, and all that troubled Jurgis was the impossibility of carrying off but a small part of the treasures they offered him.

There was a man who was known in the party as the “Little Giant.” The Lord had used up so much material in the making of his head that there had not been enough to complete his legs; but he got about on the platform, and when he shook his raven whiskers the pillars of capitalism rocked. He had written a veritable encyclopedia upon the subject, a book that was nearly as big as himself—And then there was a young author, who came from California, and had been a salmon fisher, an oyster-pirate, a longshoreman, a sailor; who had tramped the country and been sent to jail, had lived in the Whitechapel slums, and been to the Klondike in search of gold. All these things he pictured in his books, and because he was a man of genius he forced the world to hear him. Now he was famous, but wherever he went he still preached the gospel of the poor. And then there was one who was known at the “millionaire Socialist.” He had made a fortune in business, and spent nearly all of it in building up a magazine, which the post office department had tried to suppress, and had driven to Canada. He was a quiet-mannered man, whom you would have taken for anything in the world but a Socialist agitator. His speech was simple and informal—he could not understand why any one should get excited about these things. It was a process of economic evolution, he said, and he exhibited its laws and methods. Life was a struggle for existence, and the strong overcame the weak, and in turn were overcome by the strongest. Those who lost in the struggle were generally exterminated; but now and then they had been known to save themselves by combination—which was a new and higher kind of strength. It was so that the gregarious animals had overcome the predaceous; it was so, in human history, that the people had mastered the kings. The workers were simply the citizens of industry, and the Socialist movement was the expression of their will to survive. The inevitability of the revolution depended upon this fact, that they had no

choice but to unite or be exterminated; this fact, grim and inexorable, depended upon no human will, it was the law of the economic process, of which the editor showed the details with the most marvelous precision.

And later on came the evening of the great meeting of the campaign, when Jurgis heard the two standard-bearers of his party. Ten years before there had been in Chicago a strike of a hundred and fifty thousand railroad employees, and thugs had been hired by the railroads to commit violence, and the President of the United States had sent in troops to break the strike, by flinging the officers of the union into jail without trial. The president of the union came out of his cell a ruined man; but also he came out a Socialist; and now for just ten years he had been traveling up and down the country, standing face to face with the people, and pleading with them for justice. He was a man of electric presence, tall and gaunt, with a face worn thin by struggle and suffering. The fury of outraged manhood gleamed in it—and the tears of suffering little children pleaded in his voice. When he spoke he paced the stage, lithe and eager, like a panther. He leaned over, reaching out for his audience; he pointed into their souls with an insistent finger. His voice was husky from much speaking, but the great auditorium was as still as death, and every one heard him.

And then, as Jurgis came out from this meeting, some one handed him a paper which he carried home with him and read; and so he became acquainted with the “Appeal to Reason.” About twelve years previously a Colorado real-estate speculator had made up his mind that it was wrong to gamble in the necessities of life of human beings: and so he had retired and begun the publication of a Socialist weekly. There had come a time when he had to set his own type, but he had held on and won out, and now his publication was an institution. It used a carload of paper every week, and the mail trains would be hours loading up at the depot of the little Kansas town. It was a four-page weekly, which sold

for less than half a cent a copy; its regular subscription list was a quarter of a million, and it went to every crossroads post office in America.

The “Appeal” was a “propaganda” paper. It had a manner all its own—it was full of ginger and spice, of Western slang and hustle: It collected news of the doings of the “plutes,” and served it up for the benefit of the “American working-mule.” It would have columns of the deadly parallel—the million dollars’ worth of diamonds, or the fancy pet-poodle establishment of a society dame, beside the fate of Mrs. Murphy of San Francisco, who had starved to death on the streets, or of John Robinson, just out of the hospital, who had hanged himself in New York because he could not find work. It collected the stories of graft and misery from the daily press, and made a little pungent paragraphs out of them. “Three banks of Bungtown, South Dakota, failed, and more savings of the workers swallowed up!” “The mayor of Sandy Creek, Oklahoma, has skipped with a hundred thousand dollars. That’s the kind of rulers the old partyites give you!” “The president of the Florida Flying Machine Company is in jail for bigamy. He was a prominent opponent of Socialism, which he said would break up the home!” The “Appeal” had what it called its “Army,” about thirty thousand of the faithful, who did things for it; and it was always exhorting the “Army” to keep its dander up, and occasionally encouraging it with a prize competition, for anything from a gold watch to a private yacht or an eighty-acre farm. Its office helpers were all known to the “Army” by quaint titles—“Inky Ike,” “the Bald-headed Man,” “the Redheaded Girl,” “the Bulldog,” “the Office Goat,” and “the One Hoss.”

But sometimes, again, the “Appeal” would be desperately serious. It sent a correspondent to Colorado, and printed pages describing the overthrow of American institutions in that state. In a certain city of the country it had over forty of its “Army” in the headquarters of the Telegraph Trust, and no message of importance to Socialists ever went through that a copy of it did not go to the “Appeal.” It would print great broadsides during the campaign; one copy that came to Jurgis was a manifesto

addressed to striking workingmen, of which nearly a million copies had been distributed in the industrial centers, wherever the employers' associations had been carrying out their "open shop" program. "You have lost the strike!" it was headed. "And now what are you going to do about it?" It was what is called an "incendiary" appeal—it was written by a man into whose soul the iron had entered. When this edition appeared, twenty thousand copies were sent to the stockyards district; and they were taken out and stowed away in the rear of a little cigar store, and every evening, and on Sundays, the members of the Packingtown locals would get armfuls and distribute them on the streets and in the houses. The people of Packingtown had lost their strike, if ever a people had, and so they read these papers gladly, and twenty thousand were hardly enough to go round. Jurgis had resolved not to go near his old home again, but when he heard of this it was too much for him, and every night for a week he would get on the car and ride out to the stockyards, and help to undo his work of the previous year, when he had sent Mike Scully's ten-pin setter to the city Board of Aldermen.

It was quite marvelous to see what a difference twelve months had made in Packingtown—the eyes of the people were getting opened! The Socialists were literally sweeping everything before them that election, and Scully and the Cook County machine were at their wits' end for an "issue." At the very close of the campaign they bethought themselves of the fact that the strike had been broken by Negroes, and so they sent for a South Carolina fire-eater, the "pitchfork senator," as he was called, a man who took off his coat when he talked to workingmen, and damned and swore like a Hessian. This meeting they advertised extensively, and the Socialists advertised it too—with the result that about a thousand of them were on hand that evening. The "pitchfork senator" stood their fusillade of questions for about an hour, and then went home in disgust, and the balance of the meeting was a strictly party affair. Jurgis, who had insisted upon coming, had the time of his life that night; he danced about and waved his arms in his excitement—and at the very climax he broke loose from his friends, and got out into the aisle, and proceeded to make

a speech himself! The senator had been denying that the Democratic party was corrupt; it was always the Republicans who bought the votes, he said—and here was Jurgis shouting furiously, “It’s a lie! It’s a lie!” After which he went on to tell them how he knew it—that he knew it because he had bought them himself! And he would have told the “pitchfork senator” all his experiences, had not Harry Adams and a friend grabbed him about the neck and shoved him into a seat.