

THE JUNGLE

Thrilling Story of Packingtown
Novel That Has Startled Nation

By Upton Sinclair

THE story of "The Jungle," Upton Sinclair's novel, which caused the government investigation into the methods employed by the Beef Trust, has its origin in an actual Packingtown romance.

A simple-minded coterie of Lithuanians arrive in Chicago seeking employment, and are conducted to Packingtown by a friend. Jurgis, a giant in strength, is betrothed to Ona, and the first chapter tells of the wedding in all its grotesqueness. After much tribulation the entire family obtains work in the stockyards—all but Ona, who, Jurgis said, should never work.

The terrible tale of the slaughter houses is told with almost revolting detail—the filth, the overworking of hands, the struggle to keep up with the pacemakers, is all vividly depicted. The little family buys a house on the instalment plan, only to find they have been swindled, and Ona is forced to seek work to meet the actual living expense and the interest on the purchase contract, of which they learn too late.

Just as Ona and Jurgis pay Marija what they owe her, Jurgis turns his ankle and is laid up for months. His nature begins to change. He becomes gross and savage with pain. Starvation stares the family in the face.

Then Ona confesses, under compulsion, that in order to save the entire family from financial destruction and loss of jobs, Connor, foreman of her department in the yards, had forced her to receive attentions from him. Jurgis almost kills her. Then he rushes blindly to the yards and tries to kill Connor, sinking his teeth into him, and is dragged off by a dozen men. Jurgis is then arrested, and spends Christmas eve in prison, awaiting trial.

Later he is sentenced to thirty days in prison. Finally he is released and returns to what was once his home. Another family has it.

Jurgis traces his family to a shanty to find his wife dying. He seeks a midwife, who laughs in his face when he tells her he has only a dollar and a quarter, but she finally relents and goes with him. At the door of the shanty Marija meets and entreats him to go away until the morning. He walks the streets all night, and reaches home in the morning in time to close his wife's eyes in death. Then he takes to drink in earnest.

Jurgis is blacklisted in every packing house by Connor, but finally obtains a job with the Harvester Trust.

He was taken to the Bessemer furnace, where they made billets of steel—a dome-like building the size of a big theater. Jurgis stood where the balcony of the theater would have been, and opposite, by the stage, he saw three giant caldrons, big enough for all the devils of hell to brew their broth in, full of something white and blinding, bubbling and splashing, roaring as if volcanoes were blowing through it—one had to shout to be heard in the place. Liquid fire would leap from these caldrons and scatter like bombs below—and men were working there, seeming careless, so that Jurgis caught his breath with fright. Then a whistle would toot, and across the curtain of the theater would come a little engine with a car load of something to be dumped into one of the receptacles; and then another whistle would toot, down by the stage, and another train would back up—and suddenly, without an instant's warning, one of the giant kettles began to tilt and topple, flinging out a jet of hissing, roaring flame. Jurgis shrank back appalled, for he thought it was an accident; there fell a pillar of white flame, dazzling as the sun, swishing like a huge tree falling in the forest. A torrent of sparks swept all the way across the building, overwhelming everything, hiding it from sight; and then Jurgis looked

through the fingers of his hands, and saw pouring out of the caldron a cascade of living, leaping fire, white with a whiteness not of earth, scorching the eyeballs. Incandescent rainbows shone above it, blue, red and golden lights played about it; but the stream itself was white, ineffable. Out of the regions of wonder it streamed, the very river of life; and the soul leaped up at the sight of it, fled back upon it, swift and resistless, back into far-off lands, where beauty and terror dwell—then the great caldron tilted back again, empty, and Jurgis saw to his relief that no one was hurt, and turned and followed his guide out into the sunlight.

They went through the blast furnaces, through rolling mills where bars of steel were tossed about and chopped like bits of cheese. All around and above giant machine-arms were flying, giant wheels were turning, giant hammers crashing; traveling cranes creaked and groaned overhead, reaching down iron hands and seizing iron prey—it was like standing in the center of the earth, where the machinery of time was revolving.

By and by they came to the place where steel rails were made, and Jurgis heard a toot behind him, and jumped out of the way of a car with a white hot ingot upon it, the size of a man's body. There was a sudden crash and the car came to a halt, and the ingot toppled out upon a moving platform, where steel fingers, and arms seized hold of it, punching it and prodding it into place, and hurrying it into the grip of huge rollers. Then it came out upon the other side, and there were more crashings and clatterings, and over it was flopped, like a pancake on a gridiron, and seized again and rushed back at you through another squeezer. So amid deafening uproar it clattered to and fro, growing thinner and flatter and longer. The ingot seemed almost a living thing; it did not want to run this mad course, but it was in the grip of fate, it was tumbled on, screeching and clanking and shivering in protest. By and by it was long and thin, a great red snake escaped from purgatory; and then, as it slid through the rollers, you would have sworn that it was alive—it writhed and squirmed, and wriggles and shudders passed out through its tail, all but flinging it off by their violence. There was no rest for it until it was cold and black—and then it needed only to be cut and straightened to be ready for a railroad.

It was at the end of this rail's progress that Jurgis got his chance. They had to be moved by men with crowbars, and the boss here could use another man. So he took off his coat and set to work on the spot.

It took him two hours to get to this place every day and cost him a dollar and twenty cents a week. As this was out of the question, he wrapped his bedding in a bundle and took it with him, and one of his fellow workmen introduced him to a Polish lodging house, where he might have the privilege of sleeping upon the floor for ten cents a night. He got his meals at free lunch counters, and every Saturday night he went home—bedding and all—and took the greater part of his money to the family. Elzbieta was sorry for this arrangement, for she feared that it would get him into the habit of living without them, and once a week was not very often for him to see his baby; but there was no other way of arranging it. There was no chance for a woman at the steel works, and Marija was now ready for work again, and lured on from day to day by the hope of finding it at the yards.

In a week Jurgis got over his sense of helplessness and bewilderment in the railmill. He learned to find his way about and to take all the miracles and terrors for granted, to work

without hearing the rumbling and crashing. From blind fear he went to the other extreme; he became reckless and indifferent, like all the rest of the men, who took but little thought of themselves in the ardor of their work. It was wonderful when one came to think of it that these men should have taken an interest in the work they did; they had no share in it—they were paid by the hour and paid no more for being interested. Also they knew that if they were hurt they would be fung aside and forgotten—and still they would hurry to their task by dangerous short cuts, would use methods that were quicker and more effective in spite of the fact that they were also risky. His fourth day at his work Jurgis saw a man stumble while running in front of a car, and have his foot smashed off; and before he had been there three weeks he was witness of a yet more dreadful accident. There was a row of brick furnaces, shining white through every crack with the molten steel inside. Some of these were bulging dangerously, yet men worked before them, wearing blue glasses when they opened and shut the doors. One morning as Jurgis was passing a furnace blew out, spraying two men with a shower of liquid fire. As they lay screaming and rolling upon the ground in agony, Jurgis rushed to help them, and as a result he lost a good part of the skin from the inside of one of his hands. The company doctor bandaged it up, but he got no other thanks from any one, and was laid up for eight working days without any pay.

Most fortunately at this juncture Elzbieta got the long-awaited chance to go at 5 o'clock in the morning and help scrub the office floors of one of the packers. Jurgis came home and covered himself with blankets to keep warm, and divided his time between sleeping and playing with little Antanas. Juozapas was raking in the dump a good part of the time, and Elzbieta and Marija were hunting for more work.

Antanas was now over a year and a half old, and was a perfect talking machine. He learned so fast that every week when Jurgis came home it seemed to him as if he had a new child. He would sit down and listen and stare at him, and give vent to delighted exclamations—"Palauk! Muma! Tu mano szirdele!" The little fellow was now really the one delight that Jurgis had in this world—his one hope, his one victory. Thank God, Antanas was a boy! And he was as tough as a pine-knot, and with the appetite of a wolf. Nothing had hurt him, and nothing could hurt him; he had come through all the suffering and deprivation unscathed—only shriller-voiced and more determined in his grip upon life. He was a terrible child to manage, was Antanas, but his father did not mind that—he would watch him and smile to himself with satisfaction. The more of a fighter he was the better—he would need to fight before he got through.

Jurgis had got the habit of buying the Sunday paper whenever he had the money; a most wonderful paper could be had for only five cents, a whole armful, with all the news of the world set forth in big headlines, that Jurgis could spell out slowly, with the children to help him at the long words. There were battle and murder and sudden death—it was marvellous how they ever heard about so many entertaining and thrilling happenings; the stories must be all true, for surely no man could have made such things up; and besides, there were pictures of them all, as real as life. One of these papers was as good as a circus, and nearly as good as a spree—certainly a most wonderful treat for a workingman who was tired out and stupefied, and

had never had any education, and whose work was one dull, sordid grind day after day, and year after year, with never a sight of a green field nor an hour's entertainment, nor anything but liquor to stimulate his imagination. Among other things, these papers had pages full of comical pictures, and these were the main joy in life to little Antanas. He treasured them up, and would drag them out and make his father tell him about them; there were all sorts of animals among them, and Antanas could tell the names of all of them, lying upon the floor for hours and pointing them out with his chubby little fingers.

And then, when he was able to use his hands, Jurgis took his bedding again and went back to his task of shifting rails. It was now April, and the snow had given place to cold rains, and the unpaved street in front of Aniele's house was turned into a canal. Jurgis would have to wade through it to get home, and if it was late he might easily get stuck to his waist in the mire. But he did not mind this much—it was a promise that summer was coming. Marija had now gotten a place as beef trimmer in one of the smaller packing plants; and he told himself that he had learned his lesson now, and would meet with no more accidents—so that at last there was prospect of an end to their long journey. They could save money again; and when another winter came they would have a comfortable place; and the children would be off the streets and in school again, and they might set to work to nurse back into life their habits of decency and kindness. So once more Jurgis began to make plans and dream dreams.

And then one Saturday night he jumped off the car and started home, with the sun shining low under the edge of a bank of clouds that had been pouring floods of water into the mud-soaked street. There was a rainbow in the sky and another in his breast, for he had thirty-six hours' rest before him and a chance to see his family. Then suddenly he came in sight of the house, and noticed a crowd before the door. He ran up the steps and pushed his way in, and saw Aniele's kitchen crowded with excited women. It reminded him so vividly of the time when he had come home from jail and found Ona dying that his heart almost stood still. "What's the matter?" he cried.

A dead silence had fallen in the room, and he saw that every one was staring at him. "What's the matter?" he exclaimed again.

And then up in the gullet he heard sounds of waiting in Marija's voice. He started for the ladder—and Aniele seized him by the arm. "No, no!" she exclaimed. "Don't go up there."

"What is it?" he shouted. And the old woman answered him weakly: "It's Antanas. He's dead. He was drowned out in the street!"

CHAPTER XXII.

Jurgis took the news in a peculiar way. He turned deathly pale, but he caught himself, and for half a minute stood in the middle of the room, clenching his hands tightly and setting his teeth. Then he pushed Aniele aside and strode into the next room and climbed the ladder.

In the corner was a blanket with a form half showing beneath it; and beside it lay Elzbieta, whether crying or in a faint Jurgis could not tell. Marija was pacing the next room, screaming and wringing her hands. He clenched his hands tighter yet, and his voice was hard as he spoke. "How did it happen?" he asked.

Marija scarcely heard him in her agony. He repeated the question, louder and yet more harshly. "He fell off the sidewalk," she wailed. The sidewalk in front of the house was a platform made of half-rotten boards about five feet above the level of the sunken street.