

was upon him. Jurgis had nothing to put on but his shoes and his coat, and in half a minute was out of the door. Then, however, he realized that there was no need of haste, that he had no idea where to go. It was still dark as midnight, and the thick snowflakes were sifting down—everything was so silent that he could hear the rustle of them as they fell. In the few seconds that he stood there hesitating he was covered white.

He set off at a run for the yards, stopping by the way to inquire in the saloons that were open. Ona might have been overcome on the way; or else she might have met with an accident in the machines. When he got to the place where she worked he inquired of one of the watchmen—there had not been any accident, so far as the man had heard. At the time-office, which he found already open, the clerk told him that Ona's check had been turned in the night before, showing that she had left her work.

Seven o'clock came, the hour when the great packing machine began to move. Jurgis ought to have been at his place in the fertilizer-mill; but instead he was waiting, in an agony of fear, for Ona. It was fifteen minutes after the hour when he saw a form emerge from the snow-mist, and sprang toward it with a cry. It was she, running swiftly; as she saw him she staggered forward and half fell into his outstretched arms.

"What has been the matter?" he cried, anxiously. "Where have you been?"

It was several seconds before she could get breath to answer him. "I couldn't get home," she exclaimed. "The snow—the cars had stopped."

"But where were you then?" he demanded.

"I had to go home with a friend," she panted—"with Jadyga."

Jurgis drew a deep breath; but then he noticed that she was sobbing and trembling—as if in one of those nervous crises that he dreaded so. "But what's the matter?" he cried. "What has happened?"

"Oh, Jurgis, I was so frightened!" she said, clinging to him wildly. "I have been so worried!"

They were near the time-station window, and people were staring at them. Jurgis led her away. "How do you mean?" he asked, in perplexity.

"I was afraid—I was just afraid!" sobbed Ona. "I knew you wouldn't know where I was, and I didn't know what you might do. I tried to get home, but I was so tired. Oh, Jurgis, Jurgis!"

He was so glad to get her back that he could not think clearly about anything else. It did not seem strange to him that she should be so very much upset; all her fright and incoherent protestations did not matter since he had her back. He let her cry away her fears; and then, because it was nearly eight o'clock, and they would lose another hour if they delayed; he left her at the packing-house door, with her ghastly white face and her haunted eyes of terror.

There was another brief interval. Christmas was almost come; and because the snow still held, and the searching cold, morning after morning Jurgis half carried his wife to her post, staggering with her through the darkness; until at last, one night, came the end.

It lacked but three days of the holidays. About mid-night Marija and Elzbieta came home, exclaiming in alarm when they found that Ona had not come. The two had agreed to meet her; and, after waiting, had gone to the room where she worked, only to find that the ham-wrapping girls had quit work an hour before, and left. There was no snow that night, nor was it especially cold; and still Ona had not come. Something more serious must be wrong this time.

They aroused Jurgis, and he sat up and listened crossly to the story. She must have gone home again with Jadyga, he said; Jadyga lived only two blocks from the yards, and perhaps she had been tired. Nothing could have happened to her—and even if there had, there was nothing could be done about it until morning. Jurgis turned over in his bed, and was snoring again before the two had closed the door.

In the morning, however, he was up and out nearly an hour before the usual time. Jadyga Marcinus lived on the other side of the yards, beyond Halsted street, with her mother and sisters, in a single basement room—for Mikolas had recently lost one hand from blood-poisoning, and their marriage had been put off forever. The door of the room was in the rear, reached by a narrow court, and Jurgis saw a light in the window and heard something frying as he passed; he knocked, half expecting that Ona would answer.

Instead, there was one of Jadyga's little sisters, who gazed at him through a crack in the door. "Where's Ona?" he demanded, and the child looked at him in perplexity. "Ona?" she said.

"Yes," said Jurgis. "Isn't she here?"

"No," said the child, and Jurgis gave a start. A moment later came Jadyga, peering over the child's head. When she saw who it was she slid around out of sight. For she was not quite dressed. Jurgis must excuse her, she began, her mother was very ill.

"Ona isn't here?" demanded Jurgis, too alarmed to wait for her to finish.

"Why no," said Jadyga. "What made you think she would be here?" Had she said she was coming?

"No," he answered. "But she hasn't come home—and I thought she would be here the same as before."

As before? echoed Jadyga in perplexity.

"The time she spent the night here," said Jurgis.

"There must be some mistake," she answered, quickly. "Ona has never spent the night here."

He was only half able to realize her words. "Why—why?" he exclaimed.

"Two weeks ago Jadyga! She told me so—that night it snowed and she could not get home."

"There must be some mistake," declared the girl again; "she didn't come here."

He steadied himself by the door-sill, and Jadyga, in her anxiety—for she was fond of Ona—opened the door wide, folding her jacket across her throat. "Are you sure you didn't misunderstand her?" she cried. "She must have meant somewhere else."

"She said here," insisted Jurgis. "She told me all about you, and how you were, and what you said. Are you sure? You haven't forgotten? You weren't away?"

"No, no!" she exclaimed—and then came a peevish voice—"Jadyga, you are giving the baby a cold. Shut the door!" Jurgis stood for half a minute more, stammering his perplexity through an eighth of an inch of crack; and then, as there was really nothing more to be said, he excused himself and went away.

He walked on half dazed, without knowing where he went. Ona had deceived him! She had lied to him! And what could it mean—where had she been? Where was she now? He could hardly grasp the thing—much less try to solve it; but a hundred wild surmises came to him, a sense of impending calamity overwhelmed him.

Because there was nothing else to do, he went back to the time-office to watch again. He waited until nearly an hour after seven, and then went to the room where Ona worked to make inquiries of Ona's "forelady." The "forelady," he found, had not yet come; all the lines of cars that came from downtown were stalled—there had been an accident in the power-house, and no cars had been running since last night. Meantime, however, the ham-wrappers were working away, with some one else in charge of them. The girl who answered Jurgis was busy, and as she talked she looked to see if she were being watched. Then a man came up, wheeling a truck; he knew Jurgis for Ona's husband, and was curious about the mystery.

"Maybe the cars had something to do with it," he suggested—"maybe she had gone down town."

"No," said Jurgis, "she never went down town."

"Perhaps not," said the man.

Jurgis ought he saw him exchange a swift glance with the girl as he spoke, and he demanded quickly, "What do you know about it?"

But the man had seen that the boss was watching him; he started on again, pushing his truck. "I don't know anything about it," he said, over his shoulder. "How should I know where your wife goes?"

Then Jurgis went out again, and paced up and down before the building. All the morning he stayed there, with no thought of his work. About noon he went to the police station to make inquiries, and then came back again for another anxious vigil. Finally, toward the middle of the afternoon, he got out for home once more.

He was walking out, Ashland avenue. The street cars had begun running again, and several passed him, packed to the steps with people. The sight of them set Jurgis to thinking again of the man's sarcastic remark; and half involuntarily he found himself watching the cars—with the result that he gave a sudden startled exclamation, and stopped short in his tracks.

Then he broke into a run. For a whole block he tore after the car, only a little ways behind. That rusty black hat with the drooping red flower, it might not be Ona's, there was very little likelihood of it. He would know for certain very soon, for she would get out two blocks ahead. He slowed down, and let the car go on.

She got out; and as soon as she was out of sight on the side street, Jurgis broke into a run. Suspicion was rife in him now, and he was not ashamed to shadow her; he saw her turn the corner near their home, and then he ran again, and saw her as she went up the porch steps of the house. After that he turned back, and for five minutes passed up and down, his hands clenched tightly and his lips set, his mind in a turmoil. Then he went home and entered.

As he opened the door he saw Elzbieta, who had also been looking for Ona, and had come home again. She was now on tiptoe, and had a finger on her lips. Jurgis waited until she was close to him.

"Don't make any noise," she whispered, hurriedly.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Ona is asleep," she panted. "She's been very ill. I'm afraid her mind's been wandering. Jurgis, she was lost on the street all night, and I've only just succeeded in getting her quiet."

"When did she come in?" he asked.

"Soon after you left this morning," said Elzbieta.

"And she has been out since."

"No, of course not. She's so weak, Jurgis, she!"

And he set his teeth hard together. "You are lying to me," he said.

Elzbieta started and turned pale. "Why!" she gasped, "what do you mean?"

But Jurgis did not answer. He pushed her aside and strode to the bedroom door and opened it.

Ona was sitting on the bed. She turned a startled look upon him as he entered. He closed the door in Elzbieta's face and went toward his wife. "Where have you been?" he demanded.

She had her hands clasped tightly in her lap, and he saw that her face was as white as paper and drawn with pain. She gasped once or twice as she tried to answer him, and then began, speaking low and swiftly: "Jurgis, I—I think I have been out of my mind. I started to come last night, and I could not find the way. I walked—I walked all night, I think, and—I only got home—this morning."

"You needed a rest," he said, in a hard tone. "Why did you go out again?"

He was looking her fairly in the face,

and he could read the sudden fear and wild uncertainty that leaped into her eyes. "I—I had to go to—the store," she gasped, almost in a whisper; "I had to go to—the store."

"You are lying to me," said Jurgis.

Then he clenched his hands and took a step toward her. "Why do you lie to me?" he cried, fiercely. "What are you doing that you have to lie to me?"

"Jurgis!" she exclaimed, starting up in fright. "Oh, Jurgis! how can you?"

"You have lied to me, I say!" he cried.

"You told me you had been to Jadyga's house that other night, and you hadn't."

"You had been where you were last night—somewhere downtown, for I saw you get off the car. Where were you?"

It was as if he had struck a knife into her. She seemed to go all to pieces. For half a second she stood, reeling and swaying, staring at him with horror in her eyes; then, with a cry of anguish, she tot-

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