

The Jungle



INTRODUCTION

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Jungle's horrifying revelations of unsanitary practices in the meatpacking industry scandalized the public and spurred the passage of two pieces of legislation: the U.S. Pure Food and Drug Act and the Federal Meat Inspection Act, both passed in 1906. These regulatory acts were precursors for the United States Food and Drug Administration.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The Jungle is one of the best-known examples of muckraking journalism, a turn-of-the-century genre of works that aimed to expose underlying ills in society. The muckraking tradition was influenced by Jacob Riis's *How the Other Half Lives* (1890), a photojournalistic chronicle of the dangerous slums that housed immigrants in New York City. Building on Riis's work, Lincoln Steffens's muckraking classic, *The Shame of the Cities* (1904), offered a condemnation of the public's role in sustaining corrupt business and politics. Another seminal muckraking work is *History of the Standard Oil Company* by Ida Tarbell (1904), which detailed the workings of John D. Rockefeller's oil empire to highlight its unethical practices.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Jungle*
- **When Written:** 1906
- **Where Written:** Chicago, Illinois
- **When Published:** 1906, serialized version first published in 1905.
- **Literary Period:** Muckraking journalism
- **Genre:** Muckraking journalism/historical fiction
- **Setting:** "Packingtown," the miserable community of immigrant laborers near Chicago's industrial meatpacking area.
- **Climax:** The book's very last line, in which an ambitious socialist speaker yells, "Chicago will be ours!" following a surprisingly strong showing in an election.
- **Antagonist:** Capitalist corruption, as embodied by Phil Connor.
- **Point of View:** Omniscient third-person narrator.

EXTRA CREDIT

Eat Your Heart Out. While *The Jungle* was designed to elicit compassion for poor immigrant laborers in the United States,

the book's most viscerally provocative element was its lurid description of the meatpacking industry's unhygienic practices. As a result, two pieces of legislation, U.S. Pure Food and Drug Act and the Federal Meat Inspection Act, were passed in 1906 to assuage Americans' newfound concerns about the safety of their food. Surprised and somewhat disgruntled by the public's priorities for reform, Sinclair remarked, "I aimed at the public's heart and by accident I hit it in the stomach."

Don't Get Cocky. Sinclair's fervent idealism likely interfered with his more practical ambitions. In 1933, while he was still campaigning for governor of California, he published the boldly-titled book, *I, Governor of California And How I Ended Poverty: A True Story of the Future*. After a loss in the general gubernatorial election deflated his hubris, Sinclair published another book: *I, Candidate for Governor and How I Got Licked*.



PLOT SUMMARY

Jurgis Rudkus and Ona Lukoszaite are two young newlyweds who have recently emigrated from Lithuania to make their livelihood in Chicago. They have settled in the city's "Packingtown" area, where a largely immigrant population lives in squalor and works grueling jobs to survive. The couple celebrates their marriage at a local bar, and many guests leave without contributing money to defray the cost of the party, as is customary in Lithuania. This leaves the couple in debt, which distresses the family.

Jurgis finds work at a local slaughterhouse and Ona's cousin Marija gets a job in a cannery. Jurgis's father, Dede Antanas, also looks for a job, but is too old to be employable. The family naively decides to buy a home but is tricked into signing an exploitative lease instead; their financial obligations build. Dede Antanas finds work only by agreeing to forfeit a third of his wages as a finder's fee. This corruption and "graft" is routine in Packingtown. Dede Antanas is worn down by his job and soon dies.

An unforgiving winter arrives. Marija's factory closes and she cannot to marry her love, Tamoszius Kuszeika. Jurgis tries to learn English, and as he tries to assimilate he begins to learn about the political corruption and vote-buying that dominate Chicago's government. In the springtime, Marija is rehired at the cannery. However, she is fired for standing up for herself when a higher-up tries to swindle her out of wages. Ona, now pregnant, has taken a meatpacking job under a hostile overseer named Miss Henderson. Ona gives birth to a boy, whom she and Jurgis name Antanas; she is forced back on the job after just one week's rest.

Jurgis sprains his ankle on the job and is incapacitated for three months. Instead of compensating him, Jurgis's employers simply cut off his pay and replace him. The family's unity frays: when a snowstorm confines them indoors, Jurgis beats Ona's stepmother Elzbieta's son Stanislovas for being unable to go to work. Jonas, Elzbieta's brother, abandons the family. Elzbieta's crippled son Kristoforas dies.

Jurgis recovers from his injury, but his factory will not rehire him. His only option is working in the fertilizer plant, the most miserable workplace in town. He begins to reek of the noxious chemicals he handles. To cope, Jurgis turns to alcohol. Meanwhile, Ona—pregnant again—does not return from work and begins to lie about her whereabouts. Jurgis uncovers that Ona's supervisor, Phil Connor, has been manipulating her for sex. Jurgis attacks Connor and is imprisoned. In jail, Jurgis befriends a savvy safecracker named Jack Duane.

Released from jail, Jurgis learns that his family has been evicted. Jurgis finds them in a boardinghouse, and discovers Ona in premature labor. She dies an excruciating death. Jurgis, devastated, goes on a drinking binge. Afterwards, Jurgis secures work making harvesting equipment. The family's fortunes seem to have improved, but Jurgis suddenly loses his job, and baby Antanas, his only joy in life, drowns in a flooded street. Jurgis runs away to live as a vagrant in the countryside.

Jurgis returns to Chicago. He works digging tunnels and spends freely, confident he'll have money to weather the winter. However, he is hurt on the job and emerges from the hospital destitute. Reduced to begging, he is given a hundred dollar bill by the son of a packing magnate, but a bartender swindles him out of the cash. Furious, Jurgis tries to fight, but nobody believes his story and he is sent back to jail.

In jail, Jurgis reencounters Jack Duane, who convinces him to get involved with Chicago's criminal underworld. Jurgis starts with small-time muggings, but soon grows more and more unscrupulous—he begins lucrative work as a crony of a corrupt Democratic Party boss named Mike Scully. When a strike breaks out, he crosses the union by working as a scab. Jurgis benefits from graft until he encounters Phil Connor and attacks him a second time. Connor turns out to be Scully's friend, and Jurgis must spend all his savings to avoid prosecution.

Destitute again, Jurgis reunites with Marija, now a cynical, morphine-addicted prostitute. Jurgis is at the end of his rope when he chances upon a socialist rally. The movement's message of unified workers and democratically-owned industry inspires Jurgis. He becomes a tireless advocate for socialism and gets a job as a porter in a socialist-run hotel. The book ends with an encouraging, pro-socialist message: the socialist party has made great gains in recent elections, and a socialist orator proclaims that with continued activism, "Chicago will be ours!"



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Jurgis Rudkus – The protagonist of *The Jungle*, Jurgis is a vigorous, motivated, and honorable Lithuanian immigrant whose idealistic vision of America is quickly crushed by grinding poverty, dangerous work, and a corrupt system. After enduring a series of miserable jobs and suffering countless tragedies, Jurgis turns to Chicago's criminal underworld to make money. After a brief period of immoral profiteering, Jurgis is cast out onto the streets again, and just as his future looks bleakest, he discovers the encouraging ideas of socialism. Jurgis finds fulfillment as an advocate for the political movement, and at the end of the book he has contributed meaningfully to what the novel depicts as socialism's noble cause.

Ona Lukoszaite – Ona is the young, beautiful, kind-hearted wife of Jurgis. Early in the book, she gives birth to their baby boy, Antanas. Ona works in a meatpacking factory to support her family, where her boss, Phil Connor, takes advantage of her sexually. For fear of losing her job and threatening her family's livelihood, Ona does not speak out against Connor, but Jurgis discovers the man's transgressions and ends up in jail for attacking him. Shortly after Jurgis is released from jail, Ona dies after going into premature labor during her second pregnancy. Her horrifying death fuels Jurgis's spiral into despair.

Marija Berczynskas – Marija is Ona's strong, stubborn cousin who comes to America to seek work with the family. At first, Marija is unafraid to fight for her rights, and even loses her job in a cannery after standing up to an unscrupulous boss that tries to cheat her of her wages. However, financial hardship forces Marija to become a prostitute to support the family, and she becomes trapped by drug addiction and exploitative brothel owners. Her transformation from a strong-willed fighter into a cynical morphine addict symbolizes the way an unforgiving capitalist system erodes the immigrant spirit.

Phil Connor – Phil Connor, Ona's despicable boss, is one of the clearest representations of the way capitalism corrupts industry, politics, and individual conscience alike. He threatens Ona in exchange for sexual favors. When he is attacked by Jurgis in retaliation, he uses his business clout to keep Jurgis out of a job. Finally, Connor's connections to the politician Mike Scully allow him to get away with these flagrantly illegal acts with impunity.

Dede Antanas Rudkus – Dede Antanas is Jurgis's father. He is eager to work but too old and infirm to obtain a job. Out of dedication to his family, he agrees to pay a man a third of his wages in exchange for finding him a job. He works tirelessly, and his job's harsh conditions soon prove too much for him: he wastes away and dies.

Antanas Rudkus – Baby Antanas, named for Jurgis's late father, is the only child of Ona and Jurgis. After Ona's death, he

is the light of Jurgis's life, and his sole motivation to work. However, in a freak accident, Antanas drowns in a muddy street. The baby's death strips Jurgis of the little meaning that remained in his life and sends him into a period of deep crisis.

Grandmother Majauskiene – Grandmother Majauskiene is a wise old woman who lives next door to the house the Rudkus family leases. She is a socialist who has seen the **Packingtown** labor system mistreat several waves of inexperienced immigrants. She warns the naïve immigrants that their housing contract is likely a swindle and tries to show them the predatory nature of capitalism.

Stanislovas Lukoszaite – Stanislovas is a teenaged son of Teta Elzbieta. He lies about his age to take a job in a slaughterhouse, but tries to avoid work when a dangerous snowstorm hits. Jurgis beats him as punishment. Later, Stanislovas falls asleep in a factory and gets eaten alive by rats. Jurgis is deeply disturbed when he hears of the boy's gruesome death.

Jack Duane – Jack Duane is a smooth-talking criminal that Jurgis befriends during his first jail sentence. When Jurgis returns to jail, Duane convinces him to join his life of crime. Later on, Duane is caught breaking a safe, and manages to pull strings to arrange a release from prison. However, the public is so outraged that Duane's allies decide to sacrifice him to curry favor, and he is forced to leave town. Duane's misfortune shows how easily Chicago's system of graft can turn on its own, and foreshadows Jurgis's similar fall out of favor in the criminal underworld later in the novel.

Miss Henderson – Miss Henderson is Ona's supervisor at the meatpacking factory. She also runs a brothel downtown, where many of Ona's coworkers work as prostitutes. Miss Henderson resents Ona's respectable lifestyle, and she and her subordinates treat Ona hostilely. Furthermore, Miss Henderson appears to be complicit in Phil Connor's sexual exploitation of Ona.

Nicholas Schliemann – Nicholas Schliemann is a vehement and intelligent advocate of socialism who speaks at length during a pro-socialist meeting held at Fisher's house. He sees socialism as a way to realize his vision of an egalitarian utopia, which he describes at length in the hopes of enlightening an anti-socialist magazine editor.

Mike Scully – Mike Scully is a powerful, conscienceless Democratic Party boss who has a hand in many of Chicago's criminal activities, including the housing scam that defrauds the Rudkus family. During Jurgis's time as a criminal, he helps Scully rig an election and enjoys the benefits of Scully's political "pull." However, Jurgis falls out of favor when he attacks Phil Connor a second time, as Connor is a close friend of Scully's.

"Bush" Harper – Bush Harper is a duplicitous union spy who introduces Jurgis to Mike Scully. When Jurgis gets into hot water for assaulting Phil Connor for the second time, Harper pulls strings to get Jurgis's bail reduced so that Jurgis can skip

town. He later ends up pocketing some of the cash Jurgis has put towards bail.

Jadvyga and Mikolas – Jadvyga and Mikolas are an immigrant couple who are friends with Jurgis and Ona. Their tragic story of mistreatment by the factory system foreshadows the misfortunes Jurgis and Ona will experience. When Ona is held overnight by Phil Connor and unable to return home, she claims to have stayed at Jadvyga's as an alibi so as to avoid driving Jurgis to fury.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Teta Elzbieta Lukoszaite – The anchor of the family, Teta Elzbieta is Ona's stepmother and the mother of Kristoforas, Juozapas, Stanislovas, and Kotrina. She is a shrewd woman who is not afraid to stand up to Jurgis when his self-destructive habits threaten the family's well-being.

Jokubas Szedvilas – Jokubas is an old friend of Jonas's from Lithuania. He runs a deli in Chicago, and Jonas sees Jokubas as an American success story. However, Jokubas's business is not as lucrative as it seems, and his disappointing experience of America contrasts with the Rudkus family's wide-eyed optimism.

Juozapas Lukoszaite – Juozapas is Teta Elzbieta's son. He is lame. When the family is desperate for food, he scavenges at the dump. There, a wealthy woman takes pity upon him and later helps Jurgis find a job in the harvester works.

Kotrina Lukoszaite – Kotrina is Teta Elzbieta's teenaged daughter. Instead of attending school, she looks after the home and the children. After Jurgis goes to prison, the family's financial situation forces her to sell newspapers downtown. Jurgis uses some of her earnings to fund a drinking binge after Ona's death.

Jonas – Jonas is the brother of Teta Elzbieta. After a short time working, he becomes discouraged and hopeless, and abandons the family without a word.

Tommy Hinds – Tommy Hinds is an ardent socialist and the owner of a hotel where Jurgis happens to find work as a porter. When the two men realize their common political passion, Hinds encourages Jurgis to share his story to convert others to the socialist cause.

Ostrinski – Ostrinski is a Lithuanian-speaking immigrant from Poland who has worked to further socialism in Europe and the United States. He teaches Jurgis the basic principles of socialism after Jurgis is inspired at a socialist meeting.

Aniele Jukniene – Aniele is the proprietress of the tenement where Jurgis's family stays.

Madame Haupt – Madame Haupt is the fat, conniving midwife whom Jurgis finds to care for Ona. Even after she is unable to save Ona, she harangues the grieving Rudkus family for money. Her inconsiderate, selfish demands showcase the way

capitalism fosters greed.

Freddie Jones – Freddie Jones is the carefree and careless son of a fabulously wealthy meatpacking magnate. Freddie drunkenly stumbles across Jurgis begging for money on the street, gives him a hundred-dollar bill, and treats him to a lavish dinner at his mansion.

Tamoszius Kuszleika – Tamoszius is a frail violinist and a friend of the family. He and Marija are in love, but their financial privation leaves them unable to afford to marry.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



THE DEHUMANIZING EVILS OF CAPITALISM

The Jungle was written to demonstrate the evils of the capitalist system in America. In the novel, Upton Sinclair shows the way the capitalist system exploits the working class, gives absolute power to the wealthy few, and forces individuals to act only out of self-interest, regardless of the suffering of others. *The Jungle* portrays the many vices and injustices that result from capitalism, including horrific working conditions, child labor, political corruption, prostitution, drinking, cheating, and crime. Workers are exposed to brutal working conditions where they suffer exhaustion, injury, bodily harm, and death. In order to survive, individuals must compete for these horrendous jobs, send their children to work, and prostitute themselves. Under the capitalist system, cheating and dishonesty become the norm. Crooked real estate agents sell "new" homes, merchants sell medicine and food doctored up with chemicals, and politicians buy votes.

Capitalism forces even well-intentioned people to become unfeeling and cutthroat and to prey on others in order to survive. For example, when Jurgis first arrives in America, he tries to make it as an honest worker at the meatpacking plant. After being continually beaten down, he starts drinking, leaves his remaining family, turns to crime, and later returns to the meatpacking plants where he works for corrupt politicians and as a scab during a strike. Throughout the book, capitalism has a dehumanizing effect, turning men into animals or machines to be used for profit.



THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE AND DISILLUSIONMENT

The Jungle tells the story of one Lithuanian family's

journey to America to seek a better life and their subsequent disillusionment and downfall. When the Rudkus family first arrive, they are naively hopeful about their prospects in America and have domestic dreams of owning a home, marrying, and having children. Once they arrive, their dreams are cruelly and consistently squashed. Ona and the children must go to work, family members (including children) die as a result of brutal working conditions, and the family is cheated into signing a lease on a home, which they eventually lose. The optimism and determination of the Rudkus family is contrasted with the harshness of their lives, and their dreams are replaced by a struggle for survival. Through their experience, Sinclair shows how immigrants are used as cogs in the capitalist machine. They are lured to America with false promises of a better life, and instead they are ruthlessly exploited as laborers or sold into prostitution.

Despite unendurable hardship, cultural community, traditions, and memories play an important role in the Rudkus family's life and offer rare instances of hope. The novel opens with the scene of a typical Lithuanian wedding celebration, showing a rare moment of joviality and humanity. When Jurgis journeys out of the city to the country, he experiences fond memories of his native land. Memories of the old country create a bitter contrast with the characters' current lives, but also offer an escape from present conditions.



THE HORRORS OF THE MEATPACKING INDUSTRY

The Jungle is as an exposé of the horrific working conditions and unsanitary conditions in Chicago's meatpacking industry. Sinclair's grotesque descriptions of conditions and procedures in the meatpacking plant led to subsequent reforms in food safety regulation. From the killing beds to the fertilizer plant, the meatpacking plant is portrayed as a Hell on Earth, a place of blistering cold and burning heat, a place where a man might fall unnoticed into a boiling vat and be turned into canned food. Sinclair uses grotesque descriptions of food and diseased meat to reveal the disregard company owners have for the safety of American citizens. He also portrays the grotesque physical harm done to workers, who lose fingers, cut themselves and get blood poisoning, have their skin eroded by acid, and lose limbs under highly dangerous working conditions. Sinclair uses the industrialized brutality towards animals in the meatpacking plant as a symbol of the industrialized brutality towards workers. Like the animals, workers are "processed" for every last bit of energy and then discarded when they are no longer useful.



FAMILY, MASCULINITY, AND INDIVIDUALISM

The Jungle shows how capitalism ruptures family

ties and forces individuals to think only of self preservation. As the novel progresses, ideals of home, domesticity, and romantic love are steadily crushed. In the beginning, the Rudkus family live in one home together, but over the course of the book, they gradually die or disperse. After Jurgis's wife Ona dies during childbirth and his son Antanas drowns in the street, Jurgis leaves his family and heads out on his own for the country. Jurgis becomes a tramp, roaming the country and thinking only of himself. Back in the city, he becomes a criminal, preying on others in order to survive. Sinclair shows how the capitalist system makes it almost impossible to preserve a family. The only characters who attain a modicum of freedom are those who leave their families behind.

Sinclair also shows how the capitalist system compromises masculinity. In the beginning of the book, Jurgis is the picture of masculinity: strong, determined, hard-working and energetic. His masculinity is tied to a sense of pride and a belief that he can support his family through hard work. As the book continues, Jurgis faces more and more hardships and is slowly beaten down, losing his masculine prowess and his ability to support and protect his family. His masculinity is also compromised when he finds out that his wife Ona has been forced to become the mistress of her boss Connor in order to save her job. Jurgis violently retaliates by attacking Connor in a futile effort to recover his lost masculine power.

Though capitalism deeply threatens family ties, family continues to provide some measure of support and resistance to the deadly effects of capitalism. Near the end of the novel, Jurgis is reunited with his cousin-in-law Marija, who is working as a prostitute and is able to help Jurgis survive. Jurgis also finds alternative types of family throughout the book—first through the criminal community in Chicago, and later through the comrades he makes through socialism.



LABOR RIGHTS AND SOCIALISM

The Jungle traces Jurgis' journey from naiveté about the workings of capitalism to awareness of his position as an exploited worker and the workings of the capitalist machine. At first, Jurgis doesn't understand the discontent of other workers or the need for unions or workers' rights. He gradually becomes aware of the injustices in the meatpacking plant, and joins the union, only to realize that the union is corrupt and ineffective. Beaten down by repeated hardship, injustice, and cruelty, he becomes desensitized and hopeless and thinks only of self-preservation. Near the end of the book, when Jurgis's hope is nearly gone and he is barely able to survive, he has a conversion experience in a public hall, when he hears an impassioned speaker preach about the plight of the working class. Jurgis goes on to devote himself to the socialist cause. Sinclair was a socialist and his belief in socialism as an alternative to and a way to combat the evils of capitalism are on strong display in the novel, particularly

in the last few chapters of the book. The novel acts as an extended argument for the need for socialism, and it ends on a hopeful note by suggesting the possibility of political and social change.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



ANIMALS

Capitalism devalues workers' human qualities, and strenuous, repetitive jobs turn men and women into mindless beasts of burden. Throughout *The Jungle*, characters are reduced by their jobs and circumstances to animals who must fight to satisfy their most primal needs. Just as the meatpackers ruthlessly slaughter scores of animals each day, the capitalist machine grinds down its workforce, treating human laborers as an expendable resource.



FOOD

Food symbolizes the fundamentally corruptive nature of capitalism. Ordinarily, food nurtures the body and unites the family, as it does during the traditional marriage festivities at the book's beginning. The food in Packingtown, however, is toxic and unnatural, and the meatpackers are too focused on their bottom line to bother selling healthy goods. Moreover, the poor—the ones who work in the factory packing meat for others to consume—are often reduced to foraging in dumps for food for themselves, and this struggle for sustenance further illustrates the industrialists' blatant disregard for the well-being of their workforce.



PACKINGTOWN

The squalor, hostility, and misery of Packingtown epitomizes the corruption, alienation, and poverty that Sinclair sees as consequences of runaway capitalism.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Dover Publications edition of *The Jungle* published in 2001.

Chapter 1 Quotes

☝☝ Bit by bit these poor people have given up everything else; but to this they cling with all the power of their souls—they cannot give up the *veselija!* To do that would mean, not merely to be defeated, but to acknowledge defeat—and the difference between these two things is what keeps the world going.

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 11

Explanation and Analysis

As the novel begins, Sinclair depicts a young immigrant couple that's poor and hungry, but happy. The couple, Ona and Jurgis, are recent transplants to the United States, and they've attempted to bring their culture--Lithuanian culture--with them to their new home. Sinclair depicts Ona and Jurgis as embodiments of the American dream; the possibility that foreigners can come to America, make a living, and still represent the place they came from.

Sinclair is a harsh realist, but he's also something of a romantic, at least for now. Ona and Jurgis will endure a great deal of hardship in the pages to come, but Sinclair maintains that as long as they keep their spirits up, they'll be fine. The power of the human will, as we'll come to see, is easily underrated--the businesses and communities of America will try to crush the immigrants' spirits.

Chapter 2 Quotes

☝☝ All the sordid suggestions of the place were gone—in the twilight it was a vision of power.

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 25

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, Ona and Jurgis survey their new neighborhood, "Packingtown," which is near a big meatpacking plant, a staple of American industry at the time. Ona and Jurgis have had plenty of hardship so far, but they maintain their optimistic spirit: they believe that America will allow them to find good jobs and thrive. As they look at the meatpacking plant, they don't think about its horrible smell or ugly appearance--all they can think about is prosperity and power. Sinclair also shows how the dim

light of evening erases all the "sordid suggestions" of the place, making it seem more appealing--perhaps a metaphor for how the obscuring of the realities of the meat industry and immigrant life allowed most Americans to live in blissful ignorance of atrocities.

From the reader's perspective, it's pretty clear that the meatpacking plant won't bring its workers prosperity of any kind; it'll just chew them up and spit them out for profit. The passage uses dramatic irony--an asymmetry between what the readers know and what the characters know--to create suspense and tragedy.

Chapter 3 Quotes

☝☝ Had he not just gotten a job, and become a sharer in all this activity, a cog in this marvelous machine?

Related Characters: Jurgis Rudkus

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 27

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Jurgis has gotten a job at Durham's meatpacking plant. He's overjoyed with his success: he thinks he's on the road to finding prosperity in America. Jurgis has no idea that the meatpacking plant is a nightmarish place to work, with dangerous conditions and horrible worker policies. In part, Jurgis doesn't realize the truth because his new employers have hidden it from him; in part, though, he's blind to reality, because he's so optimistic.

Jurgis's dark future is clear in the passage, which describes him as a cog in a machine. It's pretty apparent that being a cog in a machine isn't anything to be happy about: a cog is a tiny, meaningless part, which can be replaced and destroyed at any time. Sure enough, Jurgis will be exploited for his body until the day he can't work any longer--and then he'll be thrown away like a piece of trash.

☝☝ They use everything about the hog except the squeal.

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 28

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, we're introduced to the meatpacking plant's methods: it takes live animals and turns them into household products: the hair is used for brushes, the skin for lampshades, the meat for eating, etc. The real horror of the meatpacking plant is its capitalistic efficiency: governed by the law of maximizing profits, the owners of the plant have used their ingenuity to build machines that turn the pig from a living animal into a series of products. As we come to recognize, the plant's owners also use their machines and their business to turn *human beings*--their workers--into similar objects to be exploited and then thrown away.

It's worth thinking more closely about the notion of "using everything but the scream." Sinclair's point seems to be that factories conceal the true brutality of their methods: consumers have no idea that live pigs are brutally killed, or that workers are horribly exploited. By writing his book, Sinclair hopes to reveal "the scream" to his readers.

Chapter 5 Quotes

☝ When he came home that night he was in a very somber mood, having begun to see at last how those might be right who laughed at him for his faith in America.

Related Characters: Jurgis Rudkus

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 53

Explanation and Analysis

It doesn't take long for Jurgis to see through the facade of employment at the slaughterhouse: at first, he seems to enjoy his work, but soon enough he realizes the truth. The meatpacking plant is unhygienic, dangerous, and inhumane: Jurgis is holding his own for now, but he seems to sense that at some point, he could seriously injure himself.

It's worth asking why, exactly, Jurgis didn't realize the truth about the meatpacking plant *earlier*. In part, Jurgis's employers lied to him about the realities of his job; at the same time, Jurgis himself is to blame. He's been so optimistic about life in America that he's ignored all those Lithuanians who warned him about the dangers of his new life. Now, Jurgis is realizing that he should have listened.

Chapter 6 Quotes

☝ As in a flash of lightning they saw themselves--victims of a relentless fate, cornered, trapped, in the grip of destruction.

Related Characters: Jurgis Rudkus, Ona Lukoszaite, Teta Elzbieta Lukoszaite, Marija Berczynskas

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 58

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Jurgis and Ona's dreams come crashing down on them. They've come to America with the naive confidence that their determination and confidence will lead them to success. Here, they realize that the opposite is true: their confidence has blinded them to the realities of their new life, and no amount of willpower can change their "fate." People have cheated them and driven them into horrible debt, and neither one of them is likely to get a good job now.

The passage is especially horrifying because Ona and Jurgis came to America precisely to *avoid* events like the ones they've just faced. They came to America to get a "clean slate." Now that they're in America, deep in debt, they know of nowhere they can go--they're stuck here for life.

☝ Then he set someone else at a different job, and showed the lad how to place a lard can every time the remorseless machine came to him; and so was decided the place in the universe of little Stanislovas, and his destiny till the end of his days.

Related Characters: Stanislovas Lukoszaite

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 60

Explanation and Analysis

The great tragedy--though also the great strength--of the Lithuanian immigrants in the novel is that they're bound to each other by blood. When one of them is in debt, the other ones have to work harder to support him. Thus, when Ona and Jurgis fall behind on their payments, Ona's brother Stanislovas has to go to work at the factory alongside Jurgis. Stanislovas is still a kid--not even old enough to work legally--but because of his family situation his life changes overnight.

The immigrants in the novel stick together at all costs--

other than family, they have nothing to live for. Stanislovas may not fully understand his obligations to his siblings and parents, but he will.

Chapter 7 Quotes

☛☛ The great corporation which employed you lied to you, and lied to the whole country; from top to bottom it was nothing but one gigantic lie.

Related Characters: Jurgis Rudkus

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 62

Explanation and Analysis

As the chapter begins, Jurgis and his family have taken a dark view of the country they live in. America is said to be the land of opportunity--but when Jurgis finds it, it's a terrifying, chaotic land, in which a small minority thrive while the vast majority of society--immigrants, minorities, etc.--have to work hard. (Some things never change...)

Jurgis and his family aren't quite at the point where they're prepared to take political action against their own country, but they're starting to see the full magnitude of their misfortune. It's not just that one corporation swindled Jurgis: it's the fact that Jurgis lives in an entire *country* where swindling is celebrated and immigrants are unfairly demonized. Jurgis's awareness of the scope of his problem is the first step toward a solution.

☛☛ All the year round they had been serving as cogs in the great packing machine, and now was the time for the renovating of it and the replacing of damaged parts.

Page Number: 65

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Sinclair brings his metaphor full circle. Previously, Jurgis had compared himself to a cog in a great machine--he'd thought of his role in the meatpacking plant with pride. Now, Jurgis is beginning to see what it really means to be a cog in a machine.

Jurgis--just like any cog--is expendable. When he gets tired, or old, or sick, he can be fired and replaced with someone fresh and new. Because so many immigrants come to America, there's an endless supply of eager workers for the

meatpacking plant. The plant knows that it can always hire new employees--and so it takes no steps whatsoever to take care of its current workers; on the contrary, it treats them horribly, and then easily replaces the "damaged parts."

Chapter 8 Quotes

☛☛ 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.

Related Characters: Jurgis Rudkus

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 75

Explanation and Analysis

Here Jurgis becomes a convert to the workers' causes: he joins a union in the hopes that political action will improve his lot in life. Jurgis believes that a union will improve his bargaining power and give him--along with his fellow workers--better hours and wages. Furthermore, he recognizes that not too long ago, he had no idea what a union was. (In Europe at the time, unions were even more taboo than they were in the U.S.--union workers were regularly attacked by the army and the police.)

The passage depicts Jurgis as a crusader of the modern era, organizing his brothers--his fellow workers--against the evils of unrestricted capitalism and big business. Sinclair adds a thoroughly religious flavor to the passage, suggesting the vital importance of Jurgis's work as a union organizer--but also his tendency towards optimism and over-idealizing things.

Chapter 9 Quotes

☛☛ The officials who ruled it, and got all the graft, had to be elected first; and so there were two rival sets of grafters, known as political parties, and the one got the office which bought the most votes.

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 77

Explanation and Analysis

As Jurgis becomes more politically engaged, he becomes

more away of the harsh realities of voting. Jurgis has a "choice"--he can choose between multiple candidates--and yet each one of these candidates is basically the same. All politicians in the country, at least the ones that Jurgis is aware of, are frauds: they pretend to care about their constituents, but in reality they're just trying to get themselves reelected by "buying votes"--bribing people to vote a certain way, or encouraging them to change their votes by giving them food and shelter.

The realities of American politics make Jurgis's situation look especially hopeless--at first, he thought that he could turn to politics to improve his situation. But now it becomes clear that Jurgis doesn't really have anyone who'll listen to him: American politicians don't care about his problems.

Chapter 11 Quotes

☝ It was dreadful that an accident of this sort, that no man can help, should have meant such suffering.

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 96

Explanation and Analysis

Jurgis sprains his ankle during his work at the factory. Through no real fault of his own (as Sinclair says, anyone can sprain their ankle), Jurgis is plunged into financial ruin: he's dismissed from his job without pay (why should the factory pay someone who can't work?) and forced to survive without any other source of income.

Sinclair allows the injustice of Jurgis's situation to sink in. Because he's been working at an unsafe plant, he hurts himself. And yet when Jurgis injures himself, the factory throws him out instead of apologizing and offering him pay. The horror of the situation is that the factory knows exactly what it's doing: morality aside, it has no financial reason to take care of an injured worker when it can always just discard and replace him.

Chapter 14 Quotes

☝ With one member trimming beef in a cannery, and another working in a sausage factory, the family had a first-hand knowledge of the great majority of Packingtown swindles. For it was the custom, as they found, whenever meat was so spoiled that it could not be used for anything else, either to can it or else to chop it up into sausage. With what had been told them by Jonas, who had worked in the pickle rooms, they could now study the whole of the spoiled-meat industry on the inside, and read a new and grim meaning into that old Packingtown jest—that they use everything of the pig except the squeal.

Related Characters: Jonas, Jurgis Rudkus, Ona Lukoszaite, Marija Berczynskas, Teta Elzbieta Lukoszaite

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 111

Explanation and Analysis

By this point in the novel, Jurgis's family is working in a variety of different industries, all concerned with processing or selling meat in some way. Because they work in different meatpacking capacities, the family is able to see how disgusting most meat sold to the public really is: how unsanitary the factories are, and how much disease is spread by the dirtiness of the plants.

The passage reinforces the family's disillusionment with America and American industry. At first, Jurgis was amused when the factory owners told him that their facilities used every part of the pig except the squeal. As we now realize, the factory's boast is true--because businessmen are so devoted to efficiency, they sacrifice all morality and hygiene. What initially seemed like a good policy for a factory turns out to be a subtle admission of its disgusting, slave-like conditions.

Chapter 15 Quotes

☝ It was all—it was their plot—Miss Henderson's plot. She hated me. And [Phil Connor]—he wanted me. He used to speak to me—out on the platform. Then he began to—to make love to me. He offered me money. He begged me—he said he loved me. Then he threatened me. He knew all about us, he knew we would starve. He knew your boss—he knew Marija's. He would hound us to death, he said—then he said if I would—if I—we would all of us be sure of work—always. Then one day he caught hold of me—he would not let go—he—he—

Related Characters: Ona Lukoszaite (speaker), Miss Henderson, Phil Connor, Ona Lukoszaite, Jurgis Rudkus, Marija Berczynskas

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 125

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Jurgis learns some unpleasant truths about his family. His wife, Ona, has been sleeping with her boss, Phil Connor, a powerful businessman. Connor knows that Ona is married, but he forces her to spend time with him by claiming that he can ensure that Ona's entire family will remain employed, and threatening to have them all fired if she rejects him. Connor is extremely abusive to Ona, but she feels that she has no choice: she'll take care of her family by any means necessary, even it means betraying her husband and sacrificing her own bodily autonomy and dignity.

The passage illustrates the full extent of the immigrants' misery. The factory owns the workers' labor, 16 hours a day. For women like Ona, businessmen like Connor control their sexuality, too. Terrified of poverty, people like Ona are forced to bargain with their bodies--they know of no other way to survive.

Chapter 16 Quotes

☹☹ They put him in a place where the snow could not beat in, where the cold could not eat through his bones; they brought him food and drink—why, in the name of heaven, if they must punish him, did they not put his family in jail and leave him outside—why could they find no better way to punish him than to leave three weak women and six helpless children to starve and freeze? That was their law, that was their justice!

Related Characters: Jurgis Rudkus, Ona Lukoszaite, Marija Berczynskas, Teta Elzbieta Lukoszaite, Antanas Rudkus

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 133

Explanation and Analysis

Jurgis is thrown in jail for beating up Phil Connor, the businessman who's been abusing his wife in return for keeping the family employed. Jurgis is furious when he realizes that, all things considered, jail isn't such a bad place to be: he's warm and dry, and he gets food and water. Jurgis wonders why his wife and children haven't been sent to jail

in his place--surely such an arrangement would be more "just" than their current situation.

The passage underscores the social injustices of Jurgis's world. On the surface of things, it's the "right" thing to send Jurgis to jail for violence. And yet courts can only go so far in enforcing justice: the lawmen who send Jurgis to jail know nothing of his starving wife, Connor's corruption, etc. Society's idea of justice is, it must be said, unjust.

Chapter 19 Quotes

☹☹ The word rang through him like the sound of a bell, echoing in the far depths of him, making forgotten chords to vibrate, old shadowy fears to stir—fears of the dark, fears of the void, fears of annihilation. She was dead! She was dead! ...An icy horror of loneliness seized him; he saw himself standing apart and watching all the world fade away from him—a world of shadows, of fickle dreams.

Related Characters: Ona Lukoszaite, Jurgis Rudkus

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 158

Explanation and Analysis

In this heartbreaking scene, Ona dies in childbirth. Jurgis, Ona's beloved husband, is distraught by her death. Because of the rampant poverty among immigrants America, and the incompetence of American healthcare, Ona doesn't get the care she needs, and she dies a slow, bloody death.

In the broader scheme of things, Ona's death signals the end of a certain part of the family's time in America. Up to now, Jurgis and Ona have been a team, even when they've been fighting. Jurgis and Ona traveled to America to seek fortune *together*. Without a wife, Jurgis has no path in life anymore--as a result, he falls further into alcoholism and depression.

Chapter 20 Quotes

☹☹ Out in the saloons the men could tell him all about the meaning of it; they gazed at him with pitying eyes—poor devil, he was blacklisted!...He was condemned and sentenced, without trial and without appeal; he could never work for the packers again—he could not even clean cattle pens or drive a truck in any place where they controlled.

Related Characters: Jurgis Rudkus

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 163

Explanation and Analysis

Jurgis tries to pull himself together--after Ona's death, he returns to the meatpacking plant where he used to work. But instead of finding work, Jurgis learns that he's been blacklisted from the plant: because he beat up Phil Connors (for abusing his wife), Connors has pulled some strings to ensure that Jurgis will never get a job in the industry again.

The passage illustrates American injustice at its most appalling. Phil Connors abused Ona for a long time, causing the family tremendous misery. Connors gets off scot-free, while Jurgis gets sent to prison and Ona dies--all because Phil is rich and American. And now Jurgis is too desperate for work to stop and realize just how outrageous his situation really is.

Chapter 21 Quotes

☛☛ The little fellow was now really the one delight that Jurgis had in the world—his one hope, his one victory...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.

Related Characters: Jurgis Rudkus, Antanas Rudkus

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 174

Explanation and Analysis

Jurgis doesn't have his beloved wife, Ona, anymore, but he continues to turn to his family for love and support. Jurgis's reason for living is now his little son, Antanas. Antanas is a tough child--he's bad all the time, and needs a lot of attention. But Jurgis doesn't mind in the least--he loves Antanas unconditionally, and clings to him as his last "delight" in life. Furthermore, Jurgis seems to respect Antanas for being so wild: he recognizes that Antanas's spirit might help him succeed later on.

The passage is inspiring insofar as it shows Jurgis getting over his depression and finding a new reason to live. Immigrants like Jurgis endure a great deal of hardship, especially in the kinds of situations Sinclair describes, but Jurgis finds the strength to carry on. (As we soon learn, however, Jurgis's newfound confidence in his family is

short-lived.)

Chapter 22 Quotes

☛☛ On the contrary, try as he would, Jurgis could not help being made miserable by his conscience. It was the ghost that would not down. It would come upon him in the most unexpected places— sometimes it fairly drove him to drink... Ah, what agony was that, what despair, when the tomb of memory was rent open and the ghosts of his old life came forth to scourge him!

Related Characters: Jurgis Rudkus

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 183

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Jurgis has just learned of a horrible tragedy: his beloved child, Antanas, has drowned in the rain. At this point, Jurgis decides to avoid the obvious pitfalls of going to the saloon and drowning his sorrows. Unlike so many people, Jurgis doesn't turn to drugs or alcohol in times of sadness (at least this particular time), as he recognizes that drinking will only make his life more miserable.

Here Jurgis adopts a "coping strategy" that's both more powerful and more callous. Instead of remaining with his relatives and drinking heavily, he turns his back on his community altogether, and hops a train out of town. In his despair he tries to forget about the past completely: Ona, Antanas, etc. In short, Jurgis tries to wipe the slate clean, but with mixed success.

Chapter 25 Quotes

☛☛ It seemed monstrous to him that policemen and judges should esteem his word as nothing in comparison with the bartender's—poor Jurgis could not know that the owner of the saloon paid five dollars each week to the policeman alone for Sunday privileges and general favors—nor that the pugilist bartender was one of the most trusted henchmen of the Democratic leader of the district, and had helped only a few months before to hustle out a record-breaking vote as a testimonial to the magistrate, who had been made the target of odious kid-gloved reformers.

Related Characters: Jurgis Rudkus

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 207

Explanation and Analysis

Jurgis has received a hundred-dollar bill, and then been cheated out of it by a treacherous bartender. Jurgis is outraged that the bartender could steal from him without punishment--and yet when Jurgis appears in court, the bartender wins the case by lying. Jurgis doesn't realize it, but the bartender gets off because he's well-connected: he's cooperated with corrupt politicians and policemen in the past, and now the politicians have rewarded him.

The passage illustrates the extent of corruption in American industry. The justice system doesn't care that Jurgis is "right" and the bartender is "wrong." The fact is that the bartender is better-connected than Jurgis, and therefore he can steal with impunity. It's as if everyone in the country is somehow connected to power through corruption and bribery--the bartender, for instance, is connected to the top politicians in the city. Only Jurgis is out of the loop, and therefore, he's sent to jail.

☝ "When people are starving," the other continued, "and they have anything with a price, they ought to sell it, I say. I guess you realize it now when it's too late. Ona could have taken care of us all, in the beginning." Marija spoke without emotion, as one who had come to regard things from the business point of view.

Related Characters: Marija Berczynskas (speaker), Ona Lukoszaite

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 244

Explanation and Analysis

Here Jurgis reunites with his cousin-in-law, Marija. Marija is working as a prostitute, and seems to no longer feel any moral qualms about doing so: her philosophy is survive by any means necessary, or die. Marija adds that Jurgis "overreacted" in beating up Phil Connors for abusing his wife--he should have swallowed his pride and allowed Ona to continue having sex with Phil, so that the family could survive, thanks to Phil's influence.

Marija is advocating for horrible things, but her words only come from a place of total despair and dehumanization--she speaks "without emotion," as someone totally broken by a system of power, corruption, and abuse. She has sold the last thing she had--her very body--and so sees any other choice as a kind of luxury.

Chapter 28 Quotes

☝ And then suddenly came a voice in his ear, a woman's voice, gentle and sweet, "If you would try to listen, comrade, perhaps you would be interested."

Jurgis was more startled by that than he would have been by the touch of a policeman. He still kept his eyes fixed ahead, and did not stir; but his heart gave a great leap. Comrade! Who was it that called him "comrade"?

He waited long, long; and at last, when he was sure that he was no longer watched, he stole a glance out of the corner of his eyes at the woman who sat beside him. She was young and beautiful; she wore fine clothes, and was what is called a "lady." And she called him "comrade"!

Related Characters: Jurgis Rudkus

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 250-251

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Jurgis stumbles upon a socialist rally. Jurgis doesn't know anything about socialism, but the mood of the rally immediately impresses him: an elegant lady treats him as an equal, both touching his body and addressing him as a comrade.

The passage is remarkable because it shows a blurring of class boundaries--unlike almost everyone else in Jurgis's life, the woman doesn't look down on Jurgis because he's poor and poorly dressed. Socialism, Sinclair implies, is a utopian ideology because it respects all human beings. (In real life, Sinclair was a committed socialist who ran for political office on several occasions.)

☝ There are a million people, men and women and children, who share the curse of the wage-slave...There are a thousand...who are the masters of these slaves, who own their toil...They own not merely the labor of society, they have bought the governments; and everywhere they use their raped and stolen power to intrench themselves in their privileges, to dig wider and deeper the channels through which the river of profits flows to them!--And you, workingmen, workingmen! You have been brought up to it, you plod on like beasts of burden, thinking only of the day and its pain...

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 255-256

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, a socialist speaker makes a rousing speech in which he sums up everything that's happened to Jurgis so far. The socialist talks about the horrors of rampant capitalism: in an unregulated capitalist society, a tiny minority of people soon control all the means of production, leaving poor workers like Jurgis to operate the factories for tiny sums of money and to be treated like animals: "beasts of burden."

The speech resonates with Jurgis because everything Jurgis has experienced in America so far revolves around the injustices of class inequality. Jurgis is a hardworking, intelligent person, but because he's a poor immigrant, he's given a low-paying, unsafe job. The socialist orator in this chapter is offering Jurgis a view of life outside the capitalist ideology--a place in which Jurgis and his peers will be (ideally) given fair wages and an easier way of life.

Chapter 29 Quotes

☝☝ Even if he were to suffer as he had before, even if he were to beg and starve, nothing would be the same to him; he would understand it, and bear it. He would no longer be the sport of circumstances, he would be a man, with a will and a purpose; he would have something to fight for, something to die for, if need be!

Related Characters: Jurgis Rudkus

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 258

Explanation and Analysis

Here Sinclair shows us the transformation that Jurgis undergoes after learning about socialism. Jurgis has experienced a lot of hardship, but it's not until the previous chapter that he really sees the extent of his problem: he begins to see that America itself is a country based on an unjust system of economics. Jurgis is hard-working, but he's not compensated fairly for his hard work.

The passage is a little stagey (Sinclair's goal in *The Jungle* isn't just to tell a psychologically realistic story so much as it is to inspire people to join the socialist cause) as it shows Jurgis joining the ranks of the socialists. Jurgis has a cause

that he's suddenly willing to fight for, and even to die for. He's newly aware that he's not alone in the world--there are millions of workers just like him. (The passage arguably shows some of the condescension implicit in Sinclair's socialist views--it's as if Jurgis didn't understand how bad he had it until the friendly socialists explained it to him.)

Chapter 30 Quotes

☝☝ 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...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?...and yet there were people who could not see it, who would argue about everything else in the world.

Related Characters: Jurgis Rudkus

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 271

Explanation and Analysis

Jurgis gets caught up in socialist ideology very quickly. It's as if he was blind, and now can see. Previously, Jurgis focused on the details of his own life: his work, his plant, his employer, etc. Now, Jurgis is thinking globally: there's a systematic problem in the world, such that a tiny fraction of businessmen and capitalists control plants but do no actual work. By contrast, millions of workers spend long hours toiling at the factories, and make very little money. The best way to remedy the problem, Jurgis can see, is to cut out the vast majority of the money that capitalists at the top earn, and redistribute it among the proletariat who work hard.

Jurgis's political epiphany is depicted as restorative--it's as if Jurgis has found a new reason for living. In real life, Sinclair was a socialist himself, so it makes a certain amount of sense that his novel builds up to a political awakening that's depicted in explicitly socialist terms. Like many other notable political novels (*Atlas Shrugged*, 1984), *The Jungle*, one could argue, is a political tract disguised as a work of journalism/fiction--ultimately, the characters aren't quite as important as the ideas they represent.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

The novel opens sometime around 1900 with a *veselija*, a traditional Lithuanian wedding festival for two Lithuanian immigrants, Ona and Jurgis. The wedding celebration is taking place in the backroom of a saloon in the Chicago stockyards, where the meat-packing industry is located. Ona and Jurgis are an unlikely but happy couple—Ona, a slight, blushing 15-year-old and Jurgis, a burly working man. The wedding party is a boisterous, raucous, and emotional affair with elaborate **food**, drinking, music, and dancing. Guests of all ages, from babies to the elderly, fill the room, and Ona's loud, forceful cousin Marija presides over the festivities.

During the feast, Tamoszius Kusleika, a man who works on the livestock "killing beds" during the day and has learned to play the fiddle at night, plays songs from the old country. His imperfect but impassioned playing reminds the guests of home.

After the banquet, tables are cleared away, and the dancing begins, with older people in traditional dress doing traditional dances and younger people in Americanized clothing dancing in couples. One couple, Jadvyga and Mikolas, dance together and we learn about their story. Jadvyga works in the canning factory to support her sick mother and three little sisters. Mikolas works as a beef-boner and has cut his hands and gotten blood poisoning several times, preventing them from marrying.

As the festivities continue, the family begins to worry about the cost of the party, which may be \$200 or \$300, more than the year's income of many of the guests. This is a huge amount of money for one day of festivities, though the family also finds the expense worth it because the celebration helps make their lives bearable.

The wedding festival shows the richness and vitality of Lithuanian culture, transported to America. The characters are loud and animated, and hopeful, with an iconic pretty innocent bride and big strong groom. And Marija seems to embody a kind of matriarchal strength that supports and drives this community. Yet the rest of the chapter will chip away at this happy image of a perfect party and strong traditional culture.



The soulful musician helps preserve cultural traditions in a foreign land. The fact that he practices music at night and continues to make art is evidence of human resilience, even under oppressive working conditions.



The difference between the younger generation and the older generation shows how Lithuanian culture is evolving in the immigrant population. The story of Jadvyga and Mikolas foreshadows the horrors of the meatpacking plant that will be described in detail throughout the book—in their case, the meatpacking industry has literally infected and killed their future together.



The party is fun, but there is also a sense of desperation to it. The workers are so miserable in their daily lives that they are willing to spend an exorbitant amount of money for one night of festivities, because the merriment reminds them that they are human.



Traditionally, in Lithuania, male guests at the celebration would dance with the bride and then contribute a sum of money to help cover the expense of the party. And many do the same at this celebration. But many other guests take advantage of the hosts, and sneak off without contributing money. In addition, the saloon keeper will cheat the celebrating family—both by claiming that guests drank more than they did and by serving inferior beer and liquor—but there's nothing the family can do about it because he is connected to politicians. When Ona worries about the financial stress, Jurgis responds by saying that he will "work harder".

The party goes late into the night and the remaining guests become drunk and exhausted. Marija refuses to let the party end, and so they continue till 3 in the morning, although all the guests—men, women, and children—will have to be at work at their various meat-packing jobs at 7 am the same morning. If they are even slightly late, they risk having their wages cut or losing their jobs. Ona has asked for the day off after her wedding but been refused. Finally, Jurgis carries his new bride home.

CHAPTER 2

The narrator describes Jurgis's background and how he came to America. Jurgis grew up in the Imperial Forest region of Lithuania, the son of a peasant, Antanas Rudkus. He met Ona at a horse-fair, fell in love with her, and devoted himself to winning her for a bride. After Ona's father died, leaving her family financially adrift, Ona's step-uncle Jonas suggested they all go to America, where it is rumored that you can get rich and live freely. He even tells them of a man he knows who moved to America and made a fortune. Jurgis saves money for months to make the trip, and Jurgis, Ona, and Jonas, embark for America with Jurgis's father, Ona's stepmother, Teta Elzbieta, Ona's cousin, Marija, and six children.

They are cheated along their journey by agents and officials, but they successfully make their way to Chicago, where they believe they can get rich working in the stockyards. Clueless and unable to speak the language, they are put on a trolley car that takes them to the stockyards. As they leave the city and approach **Packingtown**—the location of the stockyards on the outskirts of town—they are confronted by a strange and overpowering smell. They see clouds of black smoke and hear the distant lowing and grunting of ten thousand **animals**.

In America, the immigrants' cultural traditions are threatened. The dishonesty of the guests and bartender is evidence of the evil effects of Capitalism—everyone is out for himself and dishonesty and corruption are rampant. However, the fact that many guests do give generously shows that not all traditional values have been lost in America. At this point, Jurgis is optimistic about his prospects and seems to see the system as fair—if he works hard, he thinks, he will succeed.



Marija and the other guests linger at the party because it is their only escape from the drudgery of their daily lives. The description of the partiers' need to arrive a work immediately on time, and the fact that Ona is not allowed a day off after her wedding, shows the brutality and heartlessness of working conditions at the plant.



The story of Jurgis's background shows that he is diligent, hard-working, and honest. It also shows that, although he is tough and masculine, he has a soft spot for Ona, with whom he falls desperately in love. Jonas paints an idealized picture of America, and the family dreams of getting rich and having a better life there. They believe in America and its promise.



The family faces dishonesty and cheating from the moment they set out for America, showing the far-reaching effects of Capitalism. The family is naïve, unprepared, and vulnerable, and other people seek to exploit them, not help them. The smells and sounds of Packingtown provide an ominous hint of the horrors of the meatpacking industry, although the family is not aware of them yet.



Prices are higher in America, and they have already lost much of the money they saved. They soon run into Jonas's friend Jokubas Szedvilas—he is the person whom Jonas described as becoming rich in America. Jonas does own a delicatessen, but it's actually in some financial difficulty. He offers to help them get situated. Jokubas sends them to a crowded, filthy boarding house where they will stay.

Jurgis and Ona take a walk around their new neighborhood. The unpaved streets are teeming with children, and there are pools of stinking water, hordes of flies, and garbage dumps where children gather scraps of **food**. They notice a brickyard where bricks are made out of garbage and a festering pool of water that is used to produce ice and marvel at these enterprises. They gaze at the meatpacking plant in the twilight and dream of employment.

CHAPTER 3

Jokubas offers to help Dede Antanas and Jonas get jobs through his friend, a special policeman at Durham's meatpacking plant. Jurgis goes to Brown's slaughterhouse and is able to get a job almost instantly. He rushes home overjoyed.

Jokubas takes the family on a tour of the stockyards. They climb up to a gallery and gaze in wonder at the vast "sea of pens" stretching out before them. They observe miles of railroad tracks upon which thousands of **animals** are carted in everyday to be slaughtered.

They join other visitors for a tour of a Durham slaughterhouse. They enter a building where a "river of hogs" are sent up a chute, chained, methodically killed by workers, and lifted by a machine into a vat of boiling water. The sight combined with the squealing of the hogs makes the visitors uneasy. The hogs are processed by hundreds of men, each performing one task. The **animals** are processed completely and all parts of them—entrails, waste, skin, bones—are used in some way. A government inspector is there to inspect the pigs for tuberculosis, but he is not very careful.

The hopeful family begins to face challenges and cracks begin to form in their idealized depiction of America. They lose their savings and realize that their friend is not as well-off as they thought he was. They are forced to stay in a terrible boarding house.



Ona and Jurgis, still caught up in the dream of making a living in America, are at this point oblivious to their hellish surroundings. To them, the brickyard and the pool for ice represent American enterprise instead of American exploitation. The meatpacking plant appears beautiful to them and offers them hopes for the future. Their optimism blinds them to a reality that the reader can see more easily.



Jurgis is the emblem of strong, youthful masculinity, and he feels undefeatable. The family is still optimistic about their chances to succeed in the stockyards.



The family sees the incredible scale of the meat industry, which reaches across America. The scene is awe-inspiring, but there is also something unnerving about the scale of killing.



Visitors witness the brutality of the meatpacking industry. The animals, which are heartlessly slaughtered and processed, are symbols for the workers who are also used cold-heartedly by the owners of the plant. In the meatpacking industry, labor is divided with one man for every small task, making the workers dispensable. The lazy government inspector shows the high level of corruption in the industry.



Next, they visit the building where cattle are killed and observe men working at incredible speed in pools of blood to kill and process rows of cattle. In nearby buildings, animal parts are processed into everything from soap and lard to hairpins and violin strings. Jurgis is amazed by the astonishing scale of the industry, and is thrilled to be a part of it. But Jokubas is more skeptical.

In the same way that the animals are used for every bit of bone and flesh, the workers are used for every bit of strength. Jurgis is amazed by the inhuman speed at which the workers perform their tasks and by the massive scale of the industry, but Jokubas, who has been around longer, is aware of the dark side of the meatpacking plant—that workers work as they do because they have no choice.



CHAPTER 4

Jurgis start his new job, sweeping up entrails on the "killing beds" where cattle are slaughtered. Jonas has had several interviews and Marija gets a job painting cans in the canning factory, which she is very excited about. Jurgis is insistent that Ona and the children should not have to work and the children should go to school. Jurgis's father, Dede Antanas, also wants to work, but it is nearly impossible for a man of his age to find a job in **Packingtown**.

The immigrant family is still very hopeful about their prospects at the plant. They are earnest and hard-working, and even the older father wants to contribute. As the young man of the family, Jurgis believes he should be able to support Ona and the children, and he wants the children to be educated so they can have better lives. They believe that if they work hard they will succeed. They believe in the "American Dream."



Jurgis brings home a shiny flyer advertising new homes for sale. The family decides they will be better off buying a house than continuing to pay rent for their squalid flat. They calculate that with their small savings and the wages of Jurgis, Jonas and Marija, they will be able to afford a home.

The advertisement lures the naïve immigrant family and takes advantage of their dream of owning their own home.



Marija, Ona, and Teta Elzbieta go to inquire about the houses for sale. The agent tricks them into thinking there is only one house left, and they make plans to visit it. The family goes to visit the house, which is several miles away. The house is not very nice and does not look new, but the persuasive agent talks about all the good qualities of the house and gives them little chance to ask questions. The family struggles to decide whether they should buy the home or continue renting. Jokubas warns them that they might be swindled, but in the end Jurgis decides for the family that they should buy a house.

The fast-talking agent represents the corruption and dishonesty brought about by capitalism in American society. The agent manipulates the immigrant family, who, in their hopefulness, overlook the obvious flaws of the house. As the man of the house, Jurgis believes it is his responsibility to decide what is best for the family, but he mistakes his willingness to act as man of the house as an ability to make wise decisions in situations that are beyond his understanding.



When they contact the agent, he tells them the house is still available and to come in the next day to sign the papers. Jurgis can't go because he has to work, so Ona, Teta Elzbieta, and Jokubas go to sign the papers. They are terrified of being cheated of their only savings. Jokubas reads the papers slowly while the agent taps his fingers. It appears that the lease is just to rent, not buy, the home, and the family insists on finding a lawyer. They go find a lawyer but the lawyer seems to know the agent, causing them more consternation. The lawyer tells them that everything is fine, and with much agony and uncertainty, Teta Elzbieta signs the papers and gives the agent the family's precious savings. When they get home, Jurgis is convinced they have been cheated so he frantically goes to find another lawyer, but the lawyer assures him that the lease is legitimate.

The family is rightfully concerned about being cheated and losing their only savings. They try their best to defend themselves, but, the entire system seems constructed to trick and cheat them. Feeling trapped and desperate, they eventually succumb to the pressure of the agent. This is partly due to their cultural heritage and their desire to not seem disrespectful to a "gentleman". Though they try to protect themselves, they become victims of corrupt forces. Corruption is so pervasive that is hard to find a trustworthy lawyer. The lawyers and salesmen are both out to make a profit, even if it causes others suffering.



CHAPTER 5

Marija sees an advertisement that offers home furnishings on an installment plan, and the family decides to sign up. They move into their new house, with Jurgis carrying their belongings the 2-plus-mile distance to their house. They are delighted with their new home.

The family succumbs to more advertisements. They are still optimistic about the future and happy in their home.



Jurgis works on the killing beds and notices how "pacemakers" are employed to constantly increase the speed of work. Jurgis enjoys the strenuous labor and doesn't understand why other people complain or form unions to protect their rights. He is scornful of people who cannot keep up with the pace of work, and yet he feels sorry for his father who has been looking everywhere for a job without any luck.

Jurgis employs a double standard: on the one hand, he looks down on other people who are not as strong as he, but on the other hand he feels sorry for his father who has trouble finding a place in the stockyards. He is still very naïve and has yet to realize the injustices that take place in the plant.



Jurgis's father, Dede Antanas, is approached by someone who offers to get him a job if he gives him a third of his wages. Jurgis asks his friend Tamoszius Kuszleika about this, and Tamoszius explains that **Packingtown** is full of this kind of graft, with each person trying to exploit the person below him, from the bosses to the laborers.

Under the capitalist system, everyone is out to make a profit by lying, cheating, and exploiting those who are slightly weaker. Tamoszius sees this, but Jurgis does not want to believe it.



Dede Antanas accepts the offer and starts working in the plant's pickling rooms. Part of his job is to clean the traps, meaning he mops filthy liquid off the floor which is then used for pickling and collects scraps of meat from the traps, which are then used with the rest of the meat.

This gross description of pickling procedures reveals the grotesque and unsanitary conditions in Chicago's meatpacking industry—and this is only the beginning of those revelations.



Marija and Jonas also make disturbing discoveries. Marija finds out that she is replacing an Irishwoman with a crippled child, who was fired after 15 years because she became sick with tuberculosis. Jonas, who is working pushing truckloads of hams, finds out that he has replaced a man who was crushed by one of these trucks.

The family begins to become aware of the way people are used and abused in the meatpacking industry. Like animals or cogs in a machine, workers are dispensed with once they are no longer productive.



Jurgis witnesses grotesque practices in the slaughterhouse. When cows come along that are about to calve and are unfit for **food**, their entrails are removed and their "slunk" (unborn) calves are processed with the rest of the meat. Sick, wounded, or deceased cows are slaughtered at the end of the day and their meat added to the chilling rooms. These discoveries begin to shake Jurgis's optimism.

These descriptions contribute to Sinclair's exposé of the terrifying extent to which human health and safety is disregarded by the meatpacking industry. Jurgis begins to lose some of his optimism and see the dark, hellish side of the killing beds.



CHAPTER 6

Ona and Jurgis long to marry but Teta Elzbieta insists on having a traditional wedding feast, so they must wait till they can come up with enough money.

Despite the family's financial difficulty, tradition and cultural heritage are still very important to Teta Elzbieta.



A neighboring Lithuanian family, the Majauszkis, come over for a visit. Grandmother Majauszkiene, a socialist, tells them that their house is not new, but an old, cheaply built home and that the real estate agents are swindlers who bank on the probability that the tenants will not be able to pay their monthly dues and then seize and resell the homes. She informs them that four families of successive immigrant generations—German, Irish, Polish—have already lived in their home. Durham encourages these waves of immigration in order to prevent workers from joining together and striking. She relentlessly regales them with horrific stories, telling them that their house is unlucky and that its residents inevitably succumb to tuberculosis.

Grandmother Majauszkiene opens the eyes of the family to the realities of manipulation, trickery and corruption in Packingtown. A socialist, she describes how the owners of the plant lure immigrant workers to America and pit these workers against each other to prevent them from organizing. The workers are powerless to resist the bosses because there are always more workers to replace them. She contrasts the family's dreams of domestic bliss, which color their perception of reality, with a ghostly, grisly depiction of their home.



But the worst bit of news occurs when Grandmother Majauszkiene informs the family that they have to pay interest in addition to their rent. They pull out their deed in dismay and find out that it is true. They are devastated by this news, as it will place incredible financial burdens on them.

The family learns they have been swindled by the real estate agent and their worst fears are realized. Because they are poor and desperate, this news is a big blow to them.



In order to cover the cost of interest, Ona and 14-year-old Stanislovas will have to go to work. Ona secures a job sewing covers on cans by bribing the forelady with a ten-dollar bill. The family get a certificate to say that 14-year-old Stanislovas is 16-years-old (the legal age to work). Stanislovas gets a job in a cellar placing cans under a lard machine, a task he will perform till "the end of his days." Despite these setbacks, the family perseveres and Jurgis and Ona are still in love.

Jurgis's hopes that Ona and the children will not have to work are defeated by the corrupt system. His strength was not enough to protect or provide for his family. The family is becoming keen to the ways of Packingtown and now realize that they have to bribe the forelady and produce fake documentation for Stanislovas to get what they want. Sinclair uses the example of Stanislovas to point to the widespread problem of child labor in American society.



CHAPTER 7

The family works all summer and saves enough money so that Jurgis and Ona can be married in the fall. The wedding feast leaves them over a hundred dollars in debt and embittered by their fate. The family is beaten down by work, but Jurgis stays strong and tries to be a good man and protect Ona. The family now realizes that they are surrounded by cheating, lies, and dishonesty and must struggle against the world.

The children are not well. All the **food** and medicine available in **Packingtown** has been doctored with chemicals and dyes. It is impossible to find warm, quality clothing or bedding—everything is made from cheap cotton and strips of old clothes. They have a vermin infestation and buy "insect powder," which consist mostly of harmless gypsum. They sink further into miserable destitution.

Dede Antanas develops a bad cough and sores on his feet from the chemicals in the pickling room. Determined to contribute to the family, he ties up his feet and continues working until he collapses and is sent home where he wastes away and dies. The family can only afford a minimal funeral and Jurgis has to bargain over the expenses.

Winter comes and kills off the weak and sickly, making room for new workers to replace them. Thousands of unemployed, starving men throng to the gates of packing houses in the freezing cold to try to find work.

Men, women, and children struggle to get to work in the brutal cold. One morning, a boy who works at the lard machine with Stanislovas shows up to work screaming in pain. His ears have frozen stiff and break right off. This gives Stanislovas a mortal fear of the cold, and he must travel to and from work with Jurgis everyday.

The wedding feast mentioned here is the same feast described in the first chapter of the novel. The dishonesty of the guests at the wedding feast leads to the family's disillusionment. Despite hardships, Jurgis is strengthened by his love for Ona. The family's optimism is replaced by a will to survive and protect themselves from the evil forces around them.



The poor quality of food, medicine and clothing in Packingtown shows the lack of regulation and the indifference of the owners to the suffering of the workers. The owners only care that there are workers, and see each individual person as replaceable. There is nowhere to go to find quality goods and the family becomes increasingly trapped.



Working conditions in the plant are literally lethal, especially to the weak and the old like Antanas. Antanas refuses to give in because he derives purpose from working and contributing to the family. In preparing for the funeral, Jurgis is consumed with financial concerns, which replace emotional concerns, showing the dehumanizing effects of capitalism. Even the medicine or anti-pest materials they buy seem to be part of the corrupt system that exists only to drive them down and profit from them.



Like cogs in a machine, the workers are easily replaced. There are not enough positions to meet the vast numbers of unemployed men, and only the fittest are able to find work. The owners have all the leverage.



The brutal Chicago winter makes it difficult for workers to survive, and takes an especially gruesome toll on children, like the boy whose ears are frozen off. Children are the hapless victims of an unfeeling capitalist machine.



The meat plant is unheated, and men work in horrifically dangerous conditions, with blood freezing on them and congealing to their feet. With numb hands, they butcher **animals** and run around through the steam with sharp blades, leading to grisly accidents.

The owners disregard the safety of the workers and force them to work in freezing, dangerous conditions. Every time it seems like things couldn't be worse, it gets worse. Exposing these unimaginable—but real—conditions in Chicago's meatpacking industry was part of Sinclair's muckraking project in writing the novel.



The only place where workers can eat lunch is "whiskey row," a nearby avenue lined with saloons. In order to sit in a warm place and have lunch, you must also drink, and the workers develop drinking habits. Unlike the other men, Jurgis only has one drink at lunch and goes straight home to Ona after work.

One way that people profit off the suffering of the workers is to lure them into saloons and encourage them to spend their money on drinking. Jurgis is stronger than the other men not just physically but, at this point, morally and psychologically, and resists this temptation. That he rushes home to his family suggests that it is his love for his wife that gives him this strength which most of the other men lack.



At night, the family is haunted by vicious cold. Their flimsy housing and inadequate clothing offer no protection.

The family has been stripped down to a primal, animalistic struggle for survival and their former dreams of happiness have been crushed.



CHAPTER 8

Tamoszius Kuszeika, the frail fiddle player from the wedding feast, and Marija fall in love. Tamoszius courts her, playing fiddle in the kitchen and taking her to dances on the weekends. They plan to marry in the spring. But then, suddenly the canning factory shuts down due to lack of demand and Marija is put out of work. She scours **Packingtown** and beyond for jobs, but is unable to find one.

Whenever human love and hope surfaces, the malevolent forces of the industry intervene. Marija's hopes of happiness with Tamoszius are crushed when she suddenly loses her job at the canning factory.



The men are also affected by the seasonal slump and must wait in the freezing stockyards until the first **animals** arrive, sometimes not till the late afternoon, and stay late into the night to slaughter them. The bosses cheat men of their pay by docking them an hour for being one minute late and not paying them for work if it falls short of a full hour. Now aware of the exploitation by the bosses of the workers, Jurgis becomes interested in defending his rights, and he and his family join the union.

The profit-driven owners and bosses cheat the men to try to get as much work out of them as possible for as little money. Though initially, Jurgis did not understand why workers needed to defend their rights, he has now become aware of the injustice in the industry and joins the workers' union because it is the only defense against the abuse that is built into the system.



After the canning factory shuts down, Marija goes to a union meeting and causes an uproar by delivering an impassioned speech in Lithuanian. Jurgis also attends union meetings and becomes a convert to the worker's cause, helping to spread the word to other workers.

Awakened by the injustice they have faced, Marija and Jurgis are hopeful that the union will help workers to defend themselves.



CHAPTER 9

Jurgis starts learning English and is taken by a man to become a U.S. Citizen and to register to vote. He learns about the American political system of "Democracy," in which different parties vie for power and buy votes from poor people. He learns about Mike Scully, an Irish Democrat who owns the dump and brickyard in **Packingtown** and who leads the "War Whoop League," a clubhouse full of supporters and policemen. Jurgis hears stories of rampant corruption. Scully siphons city money and labor for his own enterprises and helps the packers to get away with unsanitary practices, such as making lard out of "bubbly creek," a fetid sewer of drainage from the meatpacking plants.

Jurgis also learns about how the packers bypass inspection requirements, which only apply to meat sold in other countries, making it fine to sell diseased meat within the country. Marija tells Jurgis about the grisly practices in the canning plant, in which diseased animals, covered in boils, are used to make canned meat which is shipped to American soldiers. Durham's other canned products are made of waste materials and doctored with chemicals and dyes to deceive customers.

The narrator recounts an appalling list of maladies that afflict workers in the various industries and visibly impair their bodies. They suffer sores, cuts and blood poisoning, lose fingers, and have their hands corroded by acid. The worst of these are the fertilizer men, whose stench can be smelled for yards, and the men who work in cooking rooms with huge vats of boiling water and sometimes fall into these vats and are made into lard.

CHAPTER 10

The family continues to encounter adversity and Jurgis discovers more hidden costs in the lease. Ona is pregnant and Jurgis wants to save money for a doctor. Winter is over but spring and summer bring their own trials, such as flooded streets and swarms of flies.

Marija loses her job in the canning factory because she is headstrong and complains to the superintendent about being cheated of her wages. After much searching, she eventually gets a job trimming beef, typically a man's job. She loses faith in the union.

America once again fails to live up to its mythical image as a land of opportunity where one needs only to work hard in order to succeed, and where every citizen has an equal vote. The corrupt reality of democracy that Jurgis experiences differs markedly from the democratic ideal the U.S. supposedly represents.



This is a glimpse into the greedy, unscrupulous practices of the packing industry that the Rudkus family has no choice but to work in. These descriptions were particularly horrifying to contemporary readers of "The Jungle" when it was published—they were eating foods produced from Chicago stockyards!—and resulted in laws regulating this and other food industries.



Not only do Chicago's industries disregard the quality of the products they purvey, the companies also seem indifferent to the well-being of their workforces. This selfish, cold-hearted focus on the bottom line paints a discouraging picture of the work the family will have to endure.



The deception Jurgis finds in real estate shows that everyone in Chicago seems to act in his or her own self interest, without regard for whomever is wronged in the process.



The family is met with unfairness at every turn. As Marija's firing demonstrates, the unjust system is too powerful to be challenged by a single laborer. And yet, the union too seems powerless to protect her.



Ona is also disliked and mistreated by her forelady, Miss Henderson. She learns that Miss Henderson and the other girls dislike her because she is a decent, married girl. Miss Henderson, on the other hand, is a mistress and lives in a brothel downtown that some of the other girls go to in order to make extra money as prostitutes.

Ona gives birth to a baby boy, Antanas. The baby renews Jurgis's devotion to his family. Ona has to go back to work promptly and only loses a week of wages. From then on, she suffers from "womb trouble," headaches and pains that are common among women in **Packingtown**.

Ona's embittered, worn-down coworkers show the toll that factory work exacts on its laborers. Her coworkers actively dislike her for not ye being beaten down herself. The despair caused by the industry causes the workers to turn on each other rather than on the owners.



Antanas's birth renews the familial bond. However, Packingtown's unnatural, cruel environment quickly interrupts this tenderness by abruptly forcing Ona back to work in a shockingly short amount of time.



CHAPTER 11

The bosses increase speed of work at the factory while paying less. Jurgis learns that a firm, the Beef Trust, controls the industry.

Marija invests her money in a bank and joins a run on the bank. She misses a couple days of work and withdraws her money and sews it into her clothing. It turns out the run was caused by a policeman arresting a drunk.

Winter returns, and the family's struggle for survival intensifies. Jurgis sprains his ankle on the killing beds and is unable to work, causing the family great financial stress. Ona begins to secretly withdraw money from the bank so that the family does not starve. Jurgis lies in bed in anguish and fear. His only relief is his son Antanas.

Workers are powerless to resist inhumane treatment, while a distant, faceless power controls their industry.



The family continues to learn that they can depend on nobody but themselves. Even institutions designed to protect the immigrants' money, such as the bank, turn out to be unreliable.



Life in Packingtown is precarious, and there is no safety net for the unlucky: a small, random accident like Jurgis's sprained ankle is enough to send the family into a downward spiral. Fortunately, Jurgis's devotion to his family makes his life worth living.



CHAPTER 12

There is a big snowstorm and Ona and Stanislovas are unable to get to work. They fear they have lost their jobs, and Jurgis starts beating Stanislovas in order to get him to go to work in the cold.

The family is running out of money and Jonas disappears one day without a word, probably to seek a better life for himself. The two younger boys, Vilmas and Nikalojus, are taken out of school and sent into the city to sell newspapers.

The unfeeling cruelty of the capitalist industry has begun to make the family treat each other with unfeeling cruelty as well.



Jonas's disappearance illustrates yet again that the stresses of the labor system undermine the natural bond of family. Jonas realizes that obligations to a family will only weigh him down in this unfair and exploitative world. Jonas's abandonment of the family also foreshadows Jurgis's eventual abandonment of the family.



Jurgis becomes well enough to go back to work, but discovers that he has been replaced at the plant. He joins the throngs of unemployed men, but this time he is damaged goods, no longer the strongest in the bunch, and has difficulty finding a job.

Jurgis's loss of work shows that a chance misfortune is all it takes to undermine an entire family's livelihood in Packingtown.



CHAPTER 13

Teta Elzbieta's crippled child Kristoforas dies, and the family can barely afford a funeral. Elzbieta is the only one who is upset by his death.

Packingtown is a grinding, merciless place, and those that wish to survive cannot even pause to grieve for their dead.



Jurgis considers his last resort, which is working in the fertilizer plant, described as a kind of hell. He gets a job shoveling fertilizer into carts, working in a sand storm of fertilizing dust that fills every pore of his being. He becomes ill and hardly makes it through his first day, but eventually he adjusts.

Jurgis's desperation to make a living for himself and his family forces him to take miserable work. His willingness to stick with his awful job is a testament to his perseverance and devotion to his family.



The children working in the city begin to take on city ways and not come home at night. It is decided they should go back to school and Teta Elzbieta will get a job while 13-year-old Kotrina will take care of the baby and household. Elzbieta gets a job standing motionless all day operating a sausage machine, a job which is as hard for her as Jurgis's job in the fertilizer plant.

Conditions grow still more miserable for the family, yet the adults' devotion to their children is strong enough that they will endure mind-numbing work to support the family. At the same time, the fact that the adults will put themselves in such situations for their children supports the idea that the world of Packingtown is so exploitative and cruel that it actually makes devotion to a family impossible—trying to maintain a family literally destroys the adults of that family.



CHAPTER 14

The family members' jobs in different areas of the meatpacking business reveals the industry's appalling sanitary conditions. Elzbieta's department exclusively handles spoiled ham, which is pumped full of chemicals, left on the squalid floor, and infested with rats and their droppings.

The meatpackers' toxic hygiene practices, besides being disgusting, serve as a metaphor for the toxic and exploitative labor system the industry perpetuates.



Elzbieta is drained by the revolting work she must perform, often lacking even the energy to speak. She, Jurgis, and Ona regularly trudge home in silence, fall straight asleep, and return to their work early the next morning. In their less numb moments, the family members are overcome with hopelessness and anxiety about their debts: "They were beaten; they had lost the game, they were swept aside."

Work has stripped the family of their most fundamental human attributes, leaving them able to focus only on basic, animal needs.



Jurgis turns to alcohol to numb the physical and mental pain his job causes him. He becomes an alcoholic, spending more and more money on drink and feeling more and more ashamed of his addiction.

Jurgis must self-medicate with alcohol to fight his dismal existence. Contrast his behavior here with his earlier practice of having a single drink before rushing home to his family. He is being beaten down, both physically and psychologically. And, to further his difficulties, his shame at having been beaten down only intensifies his need to escape into alcohol—it's a vicious cycle.



Baby Antanas comes down with a number of diseases, including scarlet fever. Despite his miserable condition, he is likely the least unfortunate member of the family, because he bears his illness well.

Only baby Antanas can avoid being depressed by his wretchedness, because he is a baby—the other family members are consumed by their suffering.



Ona becomes pregnant again, and is often hysterical; seeing her anguish makes Jurgis still more deranged. He laments the work that is slowly killing his wife and his family, and opines that factory laborers should be bachelors, because the lifestyle is too monstrous for a married man.

Factory work is tearing the family apart at the seams and eroding their individual humanity. To Jurgis, it seems like capitalism is incapable of fostering healthy, working-class family life. He's coming to the same realizations that led Jonas to abandon the family, though his own love for Ona and Antanas keeps Jurgis around.



CHAPTER 15

Ona's hysterical outbreaks continue, and she begins to resemble a frightened **animal**. As the holiday rush approaches, the family's jobs require them to work fifteen or sixteen hours each day.

The family sinks further and further into a dehumanizing grind. Their lives are dominated entirely by work.



A large snowstorm hits. Jurgis takes refuge in a saloon, and he comes home alone after a few drinks. That night, Ona fails to return home. The next morning, Jurgis waits anxiously for her at her work. Ona shows up and tells him that she stayed with a friend, Jadvyga Marcinkus, because she was unable to get home.

Even though the couple's jobs have worn them to the bone, Jurgis remains completely devoted to Ona, and is greatly distressed by her unexplained absence.



Ona does not come home another night, and Jurgis goes to look for her at Jadvyga's house. The Marcinkus family has no idea where Ona is, and tells Jurgis that she has never stayed with them before. Jurgis, upset at being deceived, looks for his wife instead of going to work. By chance, he spots her getting out of a car near their home. At home, Jurgis accosts his wife about her false alibi. She has another episode of wailing and convulsions. Finally, Ona confesses that her boss, Phil Connor, threatened to drive the family out of work if she did not sleep with him. He has been taking her to Miss Henderson's downtown house regularly, and is physically abusive.

In addition to forcing her to work in horrible conditions, Ona's job has violated her in a still more intimate way through Phil Connor's sexually exploitative behavior. Because Connor occupies an influential position in a corrupt system, he is able to commit moral wrongs with impunity—and innocent people like Ona must submit to him or risk losing everything. Her poverty makes her vulnerable to such exploitation, because she can't risk losing her job. She has no financial cushion.



Jurgis is overcome with rage. He goes straight to Ona's factory, where he viciously assaults Phil Connor. A number of workers pull Jurgis away, and the police are summoned to cart him off.

Jurgis's violent resistance to the oppressive factory system is ineffective, and quickly put to rest by the powerful, unsympathetic police.



CHAPTER 16

Jurgis is taken to jail. In his cell, he begins to regret his furious attack on Connor. He prays for deliverance but understands that his situation is hopeless. He imagines how his family will starve if he is locked away and unable to work.

In jail, Jurgis realizes that the entire system—from the factories to the police force—seems to be stacked against him. His rebellious outburst will only hurt him and his family.



The judge appointed to sentence Jurgis is Pat "Growler" Callahan, a crony of the oppressive industrialists. Jurgis is jailed on a \$300 bond, which he cannot afford. In the county jail as he awaits sentencing, Jurgis hears chimes and realizes that it is Christmas Eve. Jurgis fondly remembers Lithuanian Christmastime, and feels like the bells mock him in his current abjection. He is filled with rage at the unjust system that has killed his father, violated his wife, starved his family, and imprisoned him for trying to resist. "Every hour," Sinclair writes, "[Jurgis's] soul grew blacker, every hour he dreamed new dreams of vengeance, of defiance, of raging, frenzied hate."

Yet again, Jurgis is treated unfairly by the corrupt, colluding forces of power. His current helplessness contrasts sharply with the relative freedom he enjoyed in his home country. The beginnings of deep embitterment are brewing within him.



CHAPTER 17

The next morning, Jurgis washes his cell and waits for visitors. Nobody comes to see him. Jurgis soon receives a new cellmate, a dapper safecracker named Jack Duane. Despite sounding well-educated, Duane is open and friendly with Jurgis. The two men swap stories, and Jurgis's spirits are raised. Jack, charmed by the Lithuanian's innocence, tells Jurgis that he was a college-educated engineer who fell upon hard times after his telegraphing invention was stolen by a large company.

In jail, Jurgis is somewhat removed from the endless competition of his workplace, which may be what allows him to enjoy some camaraderie with Jack Duane.



Jurgis meets more of the prisoners, who are, for the most part, so wretched and bitter that Jurgis tries to ignore them. Before Jurgis leaves, Jack gives him his address and the two promise to keep in touch.

The jail's overall moral bankruptcy is not enough to prevent Jurgis from making a lasting friendship.



The day before New Year's, Jurgis stands trial. His English is not good enough to testify, and the bored, contemptuous judge hardly pays him any attention. Jurgis is sentenced to 30 days in jail.

Jurgis's trial is a mockery of justice, and it serves as a further confirmation of the systemic bias the immigrant must face.



Jurgis is sent to the "Bridewell" jail, where conditions are even worse than they were in county jail. After ten days, Stanislovas visits him to tell him that Ona is sick, the family is starving and facing eviction, and Marija's hand may require amputation after a cut became infected. Stanislovas was fired by his boss, a crony of Connor's, and has been selling papers downtown; his mother has been reduced to begging for **food**. Jurgis, devastated, must tell Stanislovas that he cannot help them. As Stanislovas is about to leave, Jurgis hands him his remaining fourteen cents.

Without Jurgis as a provider, the family's fortunes fall still further, thanks to petty industrial cronyism. In jail, Jurgis is rendered unable to fulfill his duties to provide for his family. This emasculation only worsens Jurgis's spirits.



CHAPTER 18

Jurgis's sentence lasts longer than he anticipates, because he must repay the costs of his imprisonment by breaking stone for three more days. When he is finally released, he must walk miles to the stockyards, penniless and chilled to the bone.

Forcing Jurgis to repay the costs of his imprisonment is a particularly insulting—and inconvenient—indignity. It also highlights the nature of the exploitation of the immigrant workers—they are not only worked to the bone, but the very industry that works them to death actually seeks to profit from them, to pay them as little as possible and to extract as much money from them as possible.



After hours of trudging through the city, Jurgis arrives home, only to discover that another family has refurbished and moved into his house. Dismayed, Jurgis goes down the block to Grandmother Majauszkiene's house, who tells Jurgis that his family has gone back to stay in Aniele Jukniene's tenement.

The family's eviction pushes them still further from the vision of the future they once held. They are back in the mangy boarding house they originally inhabited upon reaching Chicago.



Jurgis thinks of all the money that the family had sunk into their house and panics. He curses the extortive real estate agent that took advantage of his family, and laments the exploitative society that has rendered him powerless.

The deception that cost Jurgis's family their home is markedly different from the treatment they expected to receive in this country, and Jurgis's disillusionment worsens. He had thought his strength and willingness to work would be enough in America, but now sees that such strength is nothing at all compared to the corrupt forces of society.



Jurgis arrives at the tenement to hear Ona in agony—she is in the throes of premature childbirth. Over Ona's screaming, Marija somberly explains that a doctor or midwife would cost tens of dollars—much more than the family can afford. The house is full of concerned women, who offer Jurgis the change in their pocketbooks, which adds up to only \$1.25. Jurgis takes the money and runs off in search of medical help.

At this point, it seems that even nature itself is conspiring against the Rudkus family, though it's also certainly likely that Ona's premature labor was brought on by the fact that she had to work so hard with no rest and no medical attention during her pregnancy. And any help society might offer is out of reach to the impoverished immigrants.



CHAPTER 19

Jurgis sprints to the nearest midwife, a Dutchwoman named Madame Haupt. He walks in on her drinking and preparing dinner. After prolonged haggling, the midwife finally agrees to reduce her initial price of \$25 to the \$1.25 that Jurgis can offer, though she expects to be paid her full price later.

The midwife is enormously fat, and takes a long time to walk to the tenement. After much complaining, and a laborious climb up to the garrote of the tenement, the midwife tends to Ona.

Having done all he can to help, Jurgis is pushed out of the house. He goes to a saloon, where the owner takes pity upon him and gives him a glass of whiskey and a meal. Jurgis eats and warms himself by the stove.

After some time, the owner asks Jurgis to leave, fearing the man's stench will drive customers away. However, the owner recognizes that Jurgis is a decent, perseverant man, and lets him spend the night in the saloon's basement. Jurgis is unable to sleep, and he returns to the tenement at four in the morning.

At the tenement, Jurgis finds the women huddled silently downstairs, as before. The midwife descends from the attic, covered in blood, and announces that she has done all she can do: the baby was positioned improperly, and it and Ona will soon die. The midwife callously demands food and drink along with her full \$25 pay, and is indignant that she had to work in such squalid conditions.

Jurgis storms up to see Ona, who is at death's door. He holds her skeletal frame in his arms, and there is an instant of recognition between the couple just before she dies. Jurgis is overcome with grief and loneliness and cries until the following morning. Kotrina comes in from selling papers, and Jurgis demands the money she has made. She gives him close to three dollars, and he takes the money to the saloon to get drunk.

CHAPTER 20

After spending all his money on a two-day drinking binge, Jurgis returns to Aniele's tenement. Aniele reprimands him for squandering money on alcohol while his family starves and his wife's corpse awaits burial.

The midwife is too preoccupied with her own relatively indulgent lifestyle to help a family in its most profound moment of need. Jurgis needs her help. She cares about the money.



The midwife's obesity and begrudging assistance further highlight her selfish greed.



Jurgis's powerlessness becomes clear to him yet again, and the only solace he can find, once again, is in alcohol.



Jurgis is lucky to benefit from a rare showing of human kindness, but his anguish proves too overpowering for him to enjoy the saloon owner's favor.



The midwife's shameless greed in the face of the family's catastrophe showcases the selfish and inconsiderate mindset that capitalism ingrains in people.



Jurgis is unable to cope with his immense loss through anything other than the numbing power of alcohol, and, now that his wife who he loved has died, he is willing to compromise the family's finances to slake his thirst.



Jurgis's miserable alcohol addiction has begun to hinder not just his own well-being, but his family's, too.



Elzbieta begs enough money from the neighbors to hold a mass for Ona and purchase some bread. She returns to Aniele's and implores Jurgis to pull himself together and support his own children.

Jurgis was the family's only financial support; without him, they are reduced to begging for food.



Jurgis returns to the fertilizer mill, hoping to resume his job, but he is told that he will not be able to work. He stands with a crowd of the unemployed until they are driven away by policemen. He passes by a packing plant and is told that if he shows up the next morning, he will be able to work pushing a truck.

Attacking Connor has cost Jurgis his livelihood. The man who abused Jurgis's wife gets off without any penalty, and in fact is so connected that he can punish Jurgis. This is corruption at work.



The next morning, Jurgis returns to the man who offered him a job, only to be denied. He has been blacklisted by the entire packing industry—this is how the industry controls its workforce. Ashamed, Jurgis tells the women at home of his situation, and it is decided that Jurgis will strike out on his own and look for work downtown.

By daring to oppose the packing industry's corruption, Jurgis has lost all hope of gainful work in the stockyards. Such blacklisting of employees who dare to oppose the owners or management makes it not worth it for any employee to act up.



Downtown, work is inconsistent, and Jurgis hunts for jobs alongside many other destitute, homeless workers. Luckily, Jurgis chances upon an acquaintance from his union, who takes him to the factories at the Harvester Trust and gets him a job manufacturing harvesting and mowing equipment.

With the new job at the harvester works, Jurgis's fortunes appear to improve. Importantly, it is the helpful network of his fellow laborers that helps him secure this job.



Conditions at Jurgis's new job in the harvester works are relatively good. The workshops are big and clean, and the on-site restaurant offers affordable **food**. Each assembly-line worker handles a highly specialized sliver of the manufacturing process: Jurgis's job is to deliver iron plates to an assembly room. Workers labor furiously, as they are paid according to their efficiency.

Jurgis's job at the harvester works is his first glimpse into a more humane labor system.



Jurgis earns \$1.75 a day. He uses some of this money to pay rent to Aniele and to reclaim his winter coat from the pawnshop. The coat is a boon to Jurgis, as he often walks instead of paying high prices to take the streetcars.

With his new wages, Jurgis can demonstrate his commitment to helping the family, and he can afford basic necessities for himself, as well.



Another Lithuanian in Jurgis's shop is admired for working several jobs to support his family and learning English on the side. Jurgis, envious of the man's industriousness, is inspired and regains some optimism for the future. Yet just as Jurgis's life seems to have improved, he shows up to work and discovers that his department has been shut down.

Jurgis's sudden misfortune highlights the vagaries of the capitalist system. When things go bad, as they often do, Jurgis is left with no safety net and must start his search for work all over again.



CHAPTER 21

For ten days, the children support the family while Jurgis looks for work. Teta Elzbieta's one-legged son Juozapas resorts to scavenging for **food** at the dump.

While Jurgis is out looking for work, a wealthy, well-dressed woman begins asking questions about his life. The day after talking to Jurgis, the wealthy woman visits the family at the tenement. She calls herself a "settlement worker," and is horrified by the living conditions the immigrants endure. To help them out of their destitution, she gives the family **food** and arranges for Jurgis to be hired by her fiancée, a superintendent at a steelworks in South Chicago.

The steelworks are hellish, hectic, and so far from Jurgis's boardinghouse that he can only make it home on the weekends. Jurgis quickly becomes indifferent to his grisly, dangerous work.

Baby Antanas has learned to talk, and Jurgis loves him unconditionally. Jurgis, too, has taken to reading the Sunday newspaper to work on his English. Winter is changing to spring, and Jurgis is relatively comfortable and hopeful for the future.

Jurgis returns home one weekend and is confronted by a chaotic scene, reminiscent of when Ona died. He then learns that Baby Antanas has drowned in the rainy street.

CHAPTER 22

Jurgis climbs up to the tenement's garret to see his son's body. He is furious, and determined not to grieve. He does not go to the saloon to drown his sorrows; instead, he hops into a train car at the nearest junction and rides it out into the countryside.

Things have gotten so bad during Jurgis's unemployment that the children are forced to take on the brunt of the family's burden.



The woman belongs to a real political movement of the era, the settlement movement, which sought to get the rich and poor in society to live more closely and interdependently. It primarily attempted to create "settlement houses" in poor urban areas, in which volunteer middle-class "settlement workers" like this woman would live and try to share knowledge and culture with, and alleviate the poverty of, their low-income neighbors. This was not a socialist movement, but rather a reform movement that sought to work within capitalism.



Jurgis is once again deadened mentally and isolated from his family as a result of his work. Even though the work gives him money, it separates him from his family.



Yet the family's situation does seem to be improving, and Jurgis even finds time and motivation to improve himself.



Like many times before, the family's apparent progress is abruptly erased by a senseless, unfair disaster, and the novel suggests that such disasters are much more likely to befall the poor because of the awful conditions in which they are forced to live and work and their lack of any kind of safety net to protect them.



Despite his personal tragedy, Jurgis's alcoholism does not get the better of him. Instead, at his wit's end, he tries to literally flee his situation—he has followed Jonas's path, and seems to have come to the conclusion that family and love are destructive burdens in the world where he is forced to live, and that he must escape it in order to survive.



The sights and sounds of nature shock Jurgis after three years in the city. He eats at a farmhouse and goes for a swim in a nearby pond—it is his first bath in months. He seeks out another meal at a different farm, but the farmer calls him a tramp and denies his request. Jurgis leaves, but as he exits the farm he uproots a row of young peach trees: Jurgis is emboldened by his freedom, and "from now on he was fighting, and the man who hit him would get all that he gave, every time."

Once removed from the stultifying city and the burdens of having to support a family, Jurgis is again filled with youthful vigor. The farmer's prejudices no longer keep Jurgis down—instead, he is committed to fighting back. Yet his fighting back is destructive as opposed to building anything—he destroys the farmer's property in response to his insult.



At another farm, Jurgis eats dinner with a farming family and spends the night in their barn. The farmer offers Jurgis a job until the winter, but Jurgis declines, saying he isn't looking for work at the moment. The farmer presses, asking Jurgis why he couldn't work in the cities during the winter, and Jurgis responds by explaining the wretched, competitive overcrowding of urban life. When the farmer tells him he will need a job once his money runs out, Jurgis agrees, but says he has no plan until then.

Jurgis seeks to break as fully as possible with both the oppressive working conditions of the city and the oppressive constant need for money that is part of supporting a family. He simply wants to feel free instead of involving himself with work—to work only when he absolutely has to, which, as a healthy man able to forage for himself, isn't that often.



Jurgis's life as a "tramp" has begun. Instead of asking for the help of farmers, who are mostly hostile to him, Jurgis sleeps in fields and abandoned buildings and forages **food** from fields. He doesn't worry about money, because he knows he can work paying farmhand jobs when he needs to. His "wanderlust" has returned, as has his youthful energy. He feels liberated, though not completely so: he is occasionally tormented by memories of Ona and Antanas.

As a tramp, Jurgis has a chance to embrace individualism completely. However, his attachments to his family make it impossible for him to fully do so.



As he travels, Jurgis meets other vagrants. Many of these men have also abandoned the struggle of the cities for a nomadic life. Others are less unfettered, and wander in search of seasonal work. Jurgis joins a work gang to help with the harvest in Missouri, and earns a significant amount of money. He recognizes that he no longer has much use for money, and instead of saving it, he splurges on a night of carousing in town. He ends the night by sleeping with a local girl.

Jurgis is directionless. Without the motivation to save money generated by his love for his family and his desire to support and improve his loved one's lives, he squanders his earnings on transient pleasures. He has no dreams. He lives only for the present.



After his wasteful, debauched evening, Jurgis is penniless and ashamed of his behavior. Some time later, during a rainstorm, he takes shelter with a Slavic family. Their baby boy reminds him of Antanas, and Jurgis breaks down in tears. He runs out into the storm and cries in the forest, thinking of Ona and Antanas.

Jurgis's supposedly carefree, pleasure-seeking lifestyle proves too much for him to bear when he is reminded of the family he once had. He ran from the burdens of his family, but he cannot run from his love for them.



CHAPTER 23

When fall comes, Jurgis returns to Chicago by stowing away on trains. He finds work digging tunnels, which are ostensibly to house telephone wiring, but actually serve as underground railways for freight transport. These subterranean railways connect the big factories to the rail depots, and are designed to undermine the power held by the teamsters' union.

Jurgis has more disposable income than he is accustomed to. Since the tunnel project is new, Jurgis is confident he'll be employed all winter, and he spends freely on alcohol. However, his arm gets broken on the job, and he spends a relatively pleasant Christmas recovering in the hospital.

After two weeks, Jurgis leaves the hospital, but his arm is still compromised. He has little money and, because of his injury, no earning potential. Unemployed and unemployable, Jurgis is forced to spend the winter on the streets without an overcoat. He spends his money hopping from saloon to saloon to take shelter. He comes upon a religious revival, and is indignant to hear the well-fed preacher evangelizing about sin and redemption of the soul, while Jurgis and his kind cannot even find bodily comfort.

It is January 1904, and many men are out of work. This puts housing in high demand, and Jurgis ends up spending his last money on lodging to avoid a cold spell. He is forced to beg on the streets. However, as pathetic-looking as he is, he is unable to compete with "professional" beggars, who have mastered the art of appearing abject.

CHAPTER 24

As a beggar, Jurgis sees that the powerless are utterly subjugated by the powerful. He is persecuted by policemen and spurned by anyone better off than he. One day, however, he asks a drunk young man for help. The young man reveals himself to be wildly rich; he hands Jurgis a hundred-dollar bill and brings Jurgis to his sumptuous apartment for dinner.

Unbeknownst to Jurgis, the work he performs only serves to further solidify the industry's stranglehold on its workforce. Even when he thinks he is bucking the system, the system is so vast and powerful that it is in fact still using him to enrich itself.



Yet again, sudden misfortune, a product of the physical labor he is doing, intervenes to hinder Jurgis's progress, and his careless spending developed as a single man with no responsibility leaves him with little backup money.



The minute Jurgis is rendered useless to the factory system, he is cast out and left to fend for himself. He is desperate, but can find little sympathy or understanding from anyone who might be able to help him. His fury at the church sermon shows how little religious powers at the time actually focused on the poor—while they preached to the poor about avoiding sin the rich exploit the poor to no end. As a result, religion is another institution that Jurgis finds to be heartless and pointless to his life.



Competition makes it impossible for Jurgis to secure work and shelter, and worst of all, competition from cynical career beggars also eliminates Jurgis's chances of earning money through begging. This is the situation the owners want among workers, to make them so desperate they will accept whatever the owners deign to give them.



Jurgis's state of destitution makes him feel utterly abandoned by and isolated from the rest of society. However, his random encounter with the wealthy man shows that the spheres of poverty and wealth aren't as rigidly demarcated as they seem.



Jurgis is astonished by the young man's expansive house. His host turns out to be Freddie Jones, the son of a packing magnate who owned a factory that once employed Jurgis. Jones's butler, Hamilton, clearly disapproves of Jurgis's presence, but Jurgis is treated to a decadent meal nonetheless.

The stunningly ostentatious lifestyle of industrialists like the Jones family is built on the miserable labor of tens of thousands, or even millions, including Jurgis. Jurgis's bizarre face-to-face encounter with the decadence of his employers highlights a fundamental absurdity of capitalism. This drunk, feckless young man and his disapproving butler are the people whose fortunes are built upon Jurgis's work and the misfortune that stemmed from that work.



Jurgis eats ravenously and talks with Freddie. After some time, Freddie falls asleep, and Hamilton demands that Jurgis leave. The butler tries to search Jurgis on the way out, but Jurgis promises to fight back if the butler dares touch him.

Even as an invited guest, Jurgis is treated by the butler as an interloper in the Jones household, as if he is not as worthy as this drunk young man—but Jurgis still has the dignity to stand up for himself enough to refuse a demeaning search.



CHAPTER 25

Back out in the cold, Jurgis realizes that changing his hundred-dollar bill will prove difficult. He knows that the bill will arouse suspicion in the hands of a "bum" like him, and he fears getting robbed or arrested because of it. In spite of these concerns, Jurgis tries to get change at a saloon. The dubious bartender makes Jurgis buy a five-cent beer first, and gives Jurgis only ninety-five cents in change for his hundred-dollar bill. Jurgis is furious, and assaults the swindler, but the bartender knocks him down. The police arrive, and Jurgis is taken in to custody.

For the first time in a while, luck has been on Jurgis's side. But despite this miraculous windfall, the world is still stacked against Jurgis. Even when Jurgis has a sudden windfall of money, there is no way he can actually access it. He is easily stripped of it through deception, and he is largely powerless to regain the money that has been stolen from him.



Jurgis stands trial. The bartender gives his version of events, which depicts Jurgis as a delirious, violent drunk. The haggard Jurgis then tells his story, which the judge finds preposterous. Jurgis is dismissed as a lying alcoholic and sentenced to ten days in prison, plus the costs of his jailing. It is later revealed that the saloon owner regularly bribes the police, and that the bartender is a crooked henchman of a Democratic party leader.

Jurgis's extraordinary luck in receiving the hundred-dollar bill is no match for Chicago's absolute corruption. The police do not serve justice; they serve money, the people who pay them off. Meanwhile, the judge's dismissal of Jurgis's story shows how the system—the one which made him poor—sees his poverty as showing that he should be poor and acts suspiciously to the possibility that he might have money. In other words, justice is blind to the corruption in its midst, or, even worse, sees the poor as the source of that corruption.



At Bridewell prison for the second time, Jurgis reunites with Jack Duane by chance. After talking with the other prisoners, Jurgis decides to support himself through crime. When he is released from prison, Jurgis seeks out Duane. The two team up and mug an insurance salesman; Jurgis nets fifty-five dollars for himself. Later, Jack and Jurgis read about their crime in the newspaper: their victim suffered a concussion, lay in the freezing cold all night, and may lose three fingers to frostbite. Jurgis is remorseful, but Duane convinces him not to feel bad.

Because judges, police, and businessmen don't seem bound by the law, Jurgis can't see why he should be, either. However, as he begins to adopt the dishonesty of the people who swindled him, he also begins to lose the moral uprightness that differentiated him from his corrupt surroundings. Jurgis's morals have become a casualty of a broken system, showing how that system in some sense pushes people toward immorality as it seems like the only way to survive.



Jurgis's partnership with Jack Duane gives him a glimpse into the big-time Chicago underworld. Chicago is controlled by crooked businessmen, and millions of dollars change hands to rig elections and bribe functionaries. This so-called "graft" system governs the interactions between law enforcement and criminals—who are often one and the same. Jurgis is taken aback by how freely money flows in this criminal underground, and quickly builds a name for himself as a trustworthy and dependable accomplice. These connections allow him to circumvent the criminal justice system in the same way as crooks like Phil Connor did. In the meantime, Jack Duane is caught breaking into a safe. A crooked policeman lets Duane escape from prison, but the escape is such an outrage that Duane's associates sell him out in order to protect themselves, and Duane is forced to leave town.

Over time, Jurgis becomes more and more unscrupulous, and learns the ins and outs of Chicago's criminal underbelly—in particular the corrupt political system. A double-dealing union spy named "Bush" Harper introduces Jurgis to a Democratic boss named Mike Scully. Through Harper and Scully, Jurgis gets involved in a plot to benefit in the long term by rigging an election in the Republicans' favor. Scully's plan is to have Jurgis go to the stockyards and proclaim his support for the Republican party.

Scully arranges a hog-trimming job for Jurgis. Now, Jurgis earns a salary and also collects illegal kickbacks, and he adopts a more confident air. Jurgis oversees the rapid expansion of the "Doyle Republican Association," and works diligently to ensure that the Republican will prevail. He is so committed that he doesn't think to save some of the graft money for himself, which riles his colleagues; Jurgis soon learns to tap into "the extra bungholes of the campaign barrel."

When the election rolls around, Jurgis spearheads voter fraud efforts. The Republican is elected in a landslide, and Jurgis earns hundreds of dollars for himself. He indulges in a tremendous drinking bender while the rest of **Packingtown** celebrates the election results, sardonically described by the narrator as the "crushing defeat of an arrogant plutocrat by the power of the common people."

Jurgis's venture into crime shows him that Chicago's industrial-political system is more profoundly perverted than he could have imagined. As he becomes more and more entangled in corruption, he starts to resemble the sinister types who once abused him and his family, like Phil Connor. At the same, Jack Duane's undignified exit shows that the Chicago criminal underground will not hesitate to betray its own—everyone is out for themselves, first and foremost.



Through Jurgis's involvement in the criminal underground, Sinclair can depict the way that underground has come to dominate politics through money, might, and corruption. Notice how the Democrat Scully thinks nothing of working to help a Republican win office if it will make Scully money. Scully has no ideals other than money. For Jurgis's part, he is now so involved in the world of graft that he is willing to deceive even the workingmen who used to be his compatriots to vote against their best interests.



Even as corruption becomes Jurgis's way of life, he has remained, ironically, honest and hardworking. He's a diligent, loyal criminal. Yet the other criminals actually get angry over his honesty—it interferes with their dishonesty! Over time, he learns to seize every opportunity for his own benefit, regardless of where his loyalties lie: this, the novel suggests, is the capitalist way.



The novel's description of this episode of Jurgis's life is biting sarcasm. By calling the Republican's victory, which has been engineered by Scully, the "crushing defeat of an arrogant plutocrat by the power of the common people," the narrator illustrates how easily facts can be distorted to hide the basic truth that workingmen are manipulated by the powerful.



CHAPTER 26

Jurgis's new incomes, both legal and illicit, allow him to adopt a more comfortable—and more decadent—lifestyle. Soon, the wage agreement between the packers and the unions expires. When the negotiations disappoint the unions, the workers go on strike. Jurgis asks Scully to find him a job during the strike, and Scully encourages Jurgis to work as a strikebreaking "scab." Scully's counsel surprises Jurgis, since it runs counter to Scully's public political positions.

Working as a strikebreaker, Jurgis is well paid, but one day he ventures outside of the stockyard and is assaulted by strikers. The media blows this incident out of proportion to provide sympathetic coverage to the industrialists; the text sarcastically refers to Jurgis as a "new American hero." Soon, Jurgis is promoted to foreman in the killing rooms, where he oversees scab workers from across the country, many of whom are African-Americans imported from the South. As foreman, Jurgis learns to evade accountability, and begins accepting bribes from his workers.

Reconstructing a workforce proves too difficult for the packing magnates, and they yield to public pressure and renegotiate with the unions. The new deal states that there will be "no discrimination against union men" in the rehiring process, which disturbs Jurgis, because he may lose his job. However, the packers conspire not to hire union leaders, and the unions resume their strike in retaliation. An influx of new scabs from across the country heightens the tension of the strike, and **Packingtown** becomes still more violent, debauched, and squalid.

After looting a bar with some policemen, Jurgis comes upon Phil Connor. He again attacks Connor and is sent back to jail. When he asks "Bush" Harper to help him avoid punishment, Harper tells him that Connor is a top man of Scully's. For fear of crossing Scully, Harper can only help Jurgis enough to lower his five hundred dollar bail to a sum Jurgis can afford, so that Jurgis can skip town. Jurgis pays a reduced bail of three hundred dollars and leaves with his last three dollars in his pocket.

Scully's advice demonstrates to Jurgis yet again that unscrupulous capitalists like Scully are motivated by nothing but pure self-interest—a fact that Jurgis has naively failed to understand completely. Jurgis is surprised to see that Scully has no real morals: his professed opposition to strikebreaking is just a political device to keep himself in power by appealing to the working class.



The narrator again ironically praises Jurgis's double-dealing to show how biased reportage can fuel corruption. Meanwhile, Jurgis's involvement with graft alienates him from his fellow immigrant workers and erodes his morals still further.



The packers' capitalist gambit has forced two separate workforces to compete against one another. This directs the working poor's resentment inward, instead of where it belongs: at the exploitative industrialists. As a result, Packingtown becomes an even more miserable and unwelcoming place.



Just as Jack Duane was sold out in Chapter 25, Jurgis, too, is left high and dry as soon as he falls out of favor. Although the graft system treated him well when he was on the inside, Jurgis's misstep—which can be described as remaining loyalty to his family (illustrated by his attack on Connor) rather than caring only about money (in which case he would have avoided attacking Connor)—makes him penniless once more.



CHAPTER 27

Still in Chicago, Jurgis is once again destitute, and finding work amidst the economic crisis proves nearly impossible, and he has now been abandoned by Scully because of his attack on Connor. Moreover, his involvement with graft makes him a target, and the more comfortable lifestyle he had enjoyed makes poverty all the worse. Jurgis becomes so weak and hungry that, when he finally finds a job, he is abruptly fired because he is not strong enough to do the work required of him.

One day, Jurgis attends a political rally to find shelter. Seeing the politicians sparks Jurgis's resentment, as he is no longer able to enjoy the benefits of graft. He tries to stay awake, but begins to snore, and is kicked out by a policeman.

Jurgis must again beg for shelter. He approaches a well-dressed woman, and she turns out to be an old acquaintance from Jurgis's early time as an immigrant. She has done well for herself, but has no money on her—instead, she tells Jurgis where he can find Marija.

As soon as Jurgis reaches Marija's building, it is raided by police. After seeing scantily-clad women and embarrassed men clamor past him, Jurgis understands that the building is a brothel. He finds Marija, and the two catch up. She tells him that she has been forced by necessity to work as a prostitute in order to feed Elzbieta and the children, and that Stanislovas died after falling asleep in an oil factory and being eaten alive by rats. Jurgis brings up his abandonment of the family, and Marija excuses him for running away. Marija opines that in hard times, people should sell anything they can, and suggests that Jurgis overreacted to Phil Connor's abuse of Ona—it would not have been an indignity if Ona supported the family as a prostitute, Marija adds.

Jurgis is rounded up with the rest of the brothel's patrons and taken to jail, where he gives a false name. In his cell, he grieves at the family's wretchedness, and once again feels the kind of sadness he had worked hard to suppress.

While the underworld may have treated Jurgis well for some time, he is at this point much worse off for having involved himself with corruption. He is robbed even of his physical vigor, which signals that he has reached a new low of hopelessness.



Jurgis attends the political rally not because he believes in politics—how can he believe in politics when he has spent so much time as a part of the machine that successfully corrupts it—but just as a place to get a nap. Politics, like religion in Chapter 23, is revealed as another process or institution that does not benefit the poor.



Jurgis's current situation becomes all the more pathetic and disappointing when it is juxtaposed with the relative success one of his fellow immigrants has found.



Marija's story shows that the family's fortunes have only worsened in Jurgis's absence. Horrible circumstances have hardened Marija and worn down her dignity. Her own body is no longer sacred to her, as she now cynically believes the capitalist ethos that everything that can command a price should be sold—including herself, including Ona. She now sees survival as the only thing worth anything—not morals, principles, or anything else. And she sees money as the only way to ensure survival.



Though his involvement with graft has dulled his conscience, Jurgis's morals finally catch up with him when he is confronted with the destruction capitalism has wrought on his family.



CHAPTER 28

At his sentencing, Jurgis explains to the judge that he was only in the brothel to look for his sister. Since Jurgis used a pseudonym with the police, his criminal past is undiscovered, and the judge lets him off with a warning. Marija receives a fine, which is paid by the brothel's proprietress. He goes back to the brothel with Marija, where he notices that she looks sickly; she confesses to him that she is addicted to morphine and alcohol.

Marija explains the brothel's extortive arrangements: although her earnings are decent, she is charged outrageous prices for room and board. Girls are essentially abducted and enslaved in brothels. They are given drugs and often become indebted to their madams; breaking free from this cycle is next to impossible. Jurgis then tells Marija his story. She offers to support him, over his protestations. She sends him off with a quarter, and Jurgis wanders the streets.

He comes across a political rally in the same place he was kicked out of the night before. He sits there, preoccupied by his family's woes, until an elegant woman kindly asks him to pay attention to the speech. Jurgis is shocked that she refers to him as "comrade," and marvels at the way the orator has entranced the woman.

It soon becomes clear that Jurgis has come upon a socialist rally: the speaker is a haggard man who passionately denounces the way laborers are oppressed by the forces of greed. He condemns the upper classes at length and encourages the workingmen to rise up against the wretchedness that has been imposed upon them. The speech resonates profoundly with Jurgis's struggle and rouses his long-repressed hopes and sorrows. When the speech has finished, Jurgis cries out, overcome with emotion, and has an epiphany: years of mistreatment by the capitalist system have destroyed his soul.

CHAPTER 29

The crowd is ecstatic, and applauds for several minutes. Jurgis is deeply stirred by the socialist message, and feels as if "a new man had been born" inside of him. As the crowd begins to disperse, however, he is reminded of his real-world anxieties, and he approaches the speaker to learn more about the movement and offer to help. The orator is worn out from his speech, but he introduces Jurgis to Comrade Ostrinski.

Following the police raid, the brothel quickly resumes business as usual. This ebb and flow of bad luck and unceasing work shows that the law does nothing meaningful to stop the illegal exploitation that takes place in the brothels.



Marija's struggle is a still more horrifying version of the workingman's: her uncaring employers extort her, and, like Jurgis, there is next to nothing she can do to overcome the cycle of adversity that engulfs her. In spite of Jurgis's misbehavior, Marija still shows a familial commitment to support him.



The difference between this political rally and the one before (at which Jurgis fell asleep) is made more stark by the fact that they are held in the same place. But whereas the last rally was just more of the same lies which Jurgis could easily see through, this rally amazes him because of the way it seems to genuinely cut across socioeconomic boundaries, as indicated by the way the elegant woman seems to see Jurgis as an equal, a comrade.



This rally—with its depiction of the way that society seems to have been set up by the rich to benefit themselves at the expense of the poor—has utterly altered Jurgis's worldview: he has rediscovered his humanity. Instead of looking out only for himself, as capitalism has taught him to do, he instead now sees the necessity of uniting with his fellow workingmen to make meaningful, profound changes to the system that holds them down.



The socialist movement has given Jurgis a new lease on life. The endless disheartenment capitalism has caused him has been replaced by a long-lost motivation to act. As a "tramp" when he would fight against insults he would destroy—knocking over the farmer's peach trees. Now he wants to help, to build something new and better.



Ostrinski, a Lithuanian-speaking Pole, exchanges life stories with Jurgis, and offers Jurgis a spot to sleep on his kitchen floor. At Ostrinski's home, the man explains basic Socialism to Jurgis: capitalists oppress the working class—the "proletariat"—by forcing them to compete against one another in a race to accept the lowest wages. Unless workers become "class conscious," they will be unable to leverage themselves into higher pay—they will be stuck in what Ostrinski calls "wage slavery."

Jurgis learns that Ostrinski fought for Socialism in Europe before coming to America. Though the movement had taken off in Europe, he was met with scorn in the U.S., because many Americans mistakenly believe political liberty was enough to overcome wage slavery. However, the American movement is burgeoning, and Ostrinski tells an entranced Jurgis that he has joined at an exciting time. Jurgis marvels at Ostrinski's wisdom and determination.

Jurgis comes to understand that the Chicago Beef Trust is the vilest embodiment of capitalist greed. Furthermore, the packers dominate the government, and are expanding into other industries as well. Socialism's role is to educate the laborers in how to take control of this out-of-control monstrosity, and imagining the proletariat's success keeps Jurgis awake with giddiness.

CHAPTER 30

After waking and eating breakfast at Ostrinski's, Jurgis finds Teta Elzbieta and tells her about his political awakening. Elzbieta is too pragmatic to get caught up in the lofty ideals that have captivated Jurgis. However, she shrewdly decides that Socialism will keep her son-in-law responsible and help him support the family, and even attends some of the political meetings.

Jurgis gets work as a porter at a small hotel, which pays thirty dollars a month with board. He proudly tells Ostrinski of his employment, and Ostrinski tells him that his boss, Tommy Hinds, is in fact a state organizer of the socialist party and a tireless proponent of socialism. Years battling Chicago graft have taught Hinds that capitalist greed must be destroyed, and Hinds's hotel is a center for socialist propaganda—the patronage of radicals is what keeps it in business. Hinds and Jurgis, excited by their common political fervor, refer to one another as "comrade."

As Jurgis is educated in the formal tenets of socialism, he becomes enlightened and increasingly aware of the economic and social structures and mechanisms that have forced him into the misery that has befallen him and his family.



The more knowledge Jurgis acquires, the more he respects the socialist movement and its goals. Ostrinski's helpfulness stands in stark contrast with the misdirection and confusion on which the corrupt capitalism of Chicago in the novel relies.



For perhaps the first time since his arrival in the United States, Jurgis is ideologically inspired. Socialism has filled an intellectual void that capitalism carved into Jurgis, and now that he understands the extent of the mistreatment he suffers, he is eager to help alter it.



Although Elzbieta is not as ideologically fervent as Jurgis, she still recognizes that the movement will help her son-in-law. In other words, socialism offers real-world benefits of sobriety, dedication to fellow men and family, in addition to more abstract, ideological ones.



Thanks to socialism, Jurgis has found a job that is meaningful to him. His professional relationship with Tommy Hinds is not an extortive or oppressive one; rather, it is one between two "comrades." The relationship also seems to signify that socialism can help to forge bond across socioeconomic levels, as Hinds (an owner) and Jurgis (a worker) here bond in common cause.



Hinds asks Jurgis to tell his revolting stories of the packing industry to inform others about the horrors of "the System." Jurgis's appalling accounts of filth, and his knowledge of the disgusting recipes used by the industry, help Hinds persuade others of the beneficial changes Socialism can bring.

Jurgis is intensely committed to serving Tommy Hinds and spreading the socialist message. He is so enthusiastic about the cause that he has trouble understanding how anyone could resist his calls to action, and he is exasperated when his attempts to convert new socialists sometimes fail. Nonetheless, Jurgis continues to serve the movement, and deepens his involvement by reading pamphlets and newspapers, educating himself about the American governmental system, and attending political meetings whenever he can. He follows *The Appeal to Reason*, a socialist propaganda newspaper that serves as a primary source of information for socialists.

Jurgis even returns to **Packingtown** to distribute the papers, undoing the political work he had done there for Mike Scully the previous year. Soon, support swells in **Packingtown**, and the socialist candidate seems poised to defeat Scully's candidate in the upcoming election.

CHAPTER 31

As soon as Jurgis gets his job with Hinds, he goes back to the brothel to convince Marija to abandon prostitution. Marija sees no point in leaving: her drug addiction and tarnished past make her unable to perform any other work. Jurgis cannot convince her to come with him, and he leaves discouraged.

Jurgis's home life is unpleasant: Elzbieta is often ill and the young boys misbehave. However, he finds solace in thoughts of Socialism. The day before the election, Jurgis is called to meet a man named Fisher, a millionaire-turned-settlement-worker who sympathizes with the socialists. At Fisher's house, Jurgis is to speak to guests, among them a prominent anti-socialist magazine editor, about the horrors of the meat industry. Also in attendance is Dr. Nicholas Schliemann, an erudite Swede who speaks eloquently and powerfully about the way institutions of government and religion oppress the workingman.

Hinds genuinely values Jurgis's life experiences—another unprecedented quality in an employer. Jurgis is something of a poster child for the benefits of socialism and the horrors of unchecked capitalism.



His dedication to the socialist cause inspires Jurgis to better himself in ways he had not earnestly attempted before, like reading regularly, learning more deeply about the workings of America, and engaging in the political process.



Through socialism, Jurgis makes amends for the wrongs he committed as a corrupt grafter. What's more, Jurgis's activism sows the seeds for significant change in Packingtown.



Jurgis's passionate idealism is still not enough to stir Marija, who has been so broken by capitalism that she cannot imagine herself escaping it. The point seems to be that socialism must create change in order to save people like Marija before they are forced to succumb to the ravages of capitalism.



Socialism motivates Jurgis to persevere, despite his unpleasant circumstances. Furthermore, his engagement at Fisher's shows that he is becoming a trusted and important member of the movement. That Fisher has become a socialist shows again how socialism cuts across class and makes allies of those who capitalism would make enemies.



Another guest, a socialist preacher named Lucas, objects to Schliemann's sweeping denunciation of religion. The two argue back and forth until they are asked to summarize the principles on which they agree. This yields two fundamental tenets of socialism: that the means of production should be owned by the people and managed democratically, and that the "class-conscious political organization of the wage-earners" is the method by which this popular ownership should be established. While Lucas's and Schliemann's overall philosophies differ greatly, both believe in those two principles. Afterwards, Schliemann outlines his extensive vision for the future of mankind. He predicts that once industrial inefficiency and corruption have been reformed, labor can be automated. Men will be able to work far less, allowing them more time to develop their intellectual interests.

The election takes place, and the socialist voter turnout is far greater than in previous years. Chicago, in particular, shows itself to be a socialist stronghold. Jurgis and his comrades at Hinds's hotel are overjoyed. A fiery speaker addresses Jurgis and a crowd of socialist laborers, urging them to maintain their resolve and continue organizing. If the socialists can sustain and amplify their revolutionary fervor, the speaker urges, the party can instigate overarching, meaningful change. The speech crescendos to a fierce refrain that marks the end of the book: "Chicago will be ours! Chicago will be ours! CHICAGO WILL BE OURS!"

Schliemann's and Lucas's discussion distills the essential qualities of the socialist movement while also illustrating that it can encompass a wide range of ideologies.



The book concludes on an encouraging—and conspicuously pro-socialist—note. The socialist movement has brought meaning to Jurgis's life in America. Moreover, only socialism has allowed Jurgis to actually change his circumstances for the better. His other acts of rebellion were ill-conceived, destructive, and often counterproductive, but the expansion of socialism shown at the book's close suggests that it may provide a genuinely constructive solution to the evils of runaway capitalism.





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