

The Jungle Study Guide

The Jungle by Upton Sinclair

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Plot Summary

The *Jungle* is a novel by writer Upton Sinclair. In this novel, Jurgis Rudkus is an immigrant to America from Lithuania. Jurgis came to America with his fiancée, her stepmother and five children as well as his future brother-in-law, cousin, and Jurgis's father. This family of eleven thought they could make a fortune working in Chicago's stockyards based on things told to them from friends who had also immigrated. However, when they arrive in Chicago, they discover that working in the stockyards is much more difficult than any of them could ever imagine. *The Jungle* was a groundbreaking novel in its day that exposed some of the atrocities of the stockyards, the meat industry, and the difficulties of the poor working class.

Jurgis Rudkus has brought his fiancée, her stepmother, brother, five step-siblings, a cousin, and Jurgis's father to America from their homeland of Lithuania in the hopes of making their fortunes in the Chicago stockyards. Jurgis finds a job almost immediately, and this gives the family hope that they will soon be able to make a good living. They decide to buy a house to avoid the cost of renting when the money dwindles to nothing. However, they are worried about being cheated, so they have not one, but two lawyers check over the deed.

Jurgis and his family move into their new home and buy furniture on credit. The home is crowded, but they feel satisfied with their purchase until they learn of the hidden costs associated with home ownership. Jurgis and his family did not know that they would have to pay interest each month, nor that they would have to pay annual taxes, an annual water fee, and for the cost of putting in a sidewalk and sewer system. However, with the women deciding to go to work as well as the men, they manage to scrap by each month.

Jurgis works on the killing beds of one of the packing houses. The job is hard and the pay is not very good, especially when the rules prevent the men from getting paid for all the time they put in, but it pays better than what the rest of the family is making. Therefore, when Jurgis hurts his ankle and is forced to stop working for several months, the family suffers. Jurgis loses his job, but he's able to find another even though it is less favorable than the killing beds.

As Jurgis struggles, other members of the family also struggle. Marija, the cousin of Jurgis's wife, works painting cans. However, when she has a dispute with her supervisors over the number of cans she is being paid for, she loses this job. For weeks Marija is out of work. When Marija finally finds another job, it is as a meat trimmer. On several occasions, she cuts her hand bad enough to have to stop work for months at a time.

Jurgis's wife Ona works sewing hams into their bags. Ona comes into contact with a boss at the packing house who finds her attractive. The boss tells Ona if she does not have intimate relations with him, he will make sure her entire family is blacklisted at the packing houses. Ona submits to this man. When Jurgis finds out, he beats up the boss.



This causes Jurgis to be arrested. While Jurgis is in jail, his family is unable to pay the payments on their house. They become homeless. On the day Jurgis is released from jail, Ona goes into premature labor with their second child and dies.

Jurgis has been blacklisted at the packing houses and must go into Chicago to find work. Jurgis finds a job at a farm equipment manufacturer, but loses his job when the plant shuts down. Jurgis then finds work at a steel mill, but when his toddler son drowns in the muddy street outside their boarding house, Jurgis leaves the city. For several months Jurgis hoboos through the country side, finally returning to the city just as winter begins to set in.

Jurgis struggles to find work, eventually finding a job stringing phone lines in tunnels under the city. However, Jurgis is injured by a speeding train that breaks his arm. The accident leaves him unable to work for months. He has no choice but to beg on the streets. One night, Jurgis is befriended by a drunk, wealthy man in a bar. The man gives Jurgis a hundred dollar bill. When he tries to change it, the bartender steals it. Jurgis gets into a fight with the bartender, only to find himself arrested and jailed for ten days.

When Jurgis is released from jail, he teams up with a former cellmate and begins robbing people for money. Then Jurgis becomes involved in an election scam that takes him back to the packing houses. When the packing house workers strike, Jurgis crosses the picket lines and becomes a scab. Unfortunately, one night Jurgis sees the man who slept with his wife and attacks him again, causing him to be arrested again. Jurgis makes bail and runs away to the city.

One night, while living on the streets, Jurgis hears a speech by a Socialist. Jurgis adopts the Socialist Party immediately, gets a new job, and finds his scattered family. Jurgis discovers that Marija has become a prostitute to provide for Ona's stepmother and three children. Jurgis begins providing for the stepmother, but Marija makes the decision to remain a prostitute, convinced she has no opportunities outside of her chosen lifestyle.



Chapters 1-2

Summary

Jurgis and Ona have just gotten married. They are throwing a reception for their friends, family, and co-workers. All the people at the party are workers in the local packing houses, most of them immigrants from Lithuania. These people work from morning to night six days a week, rarely able to find time to relax and celebrate as they are doing on this night. The party lasts until the early hours of the morning, even though most of these people will have to report to work at seven that morning.

Jurgis grew up in the country in Lithuania. Jurgis lived alone with his father and worked hard on the farm. When Jurgis first saw Ona, he fell head over heels in love. However, Ona's father was not interested in allowing his daughter to marry a poor farmer. When Ona's father died, leaving his widow, seven children, and a cousin without the means to support themselves, the family decided to move to America where Ona's brother Jonas has a friend who claims it is easy to make a future there. Jurgis and his father Antanas decide to go with them so that Jurgis and Ona might get married.

The trip to America is difficult as the family is naive and cannot speak English. They are taken advantage of several times, but they finally arrive in New York. The family then travels to Chicago and seek directions to the stockyards. When they arrive, the family seeks out Jonas's friend and discover that he owns a small delicatessen. This man sends them to a boarding house owned by a fellow Lithuanian, Aniele Jukniene. When the family is settled, their friend takes them on a tour of the stockyards and packing houses.

Analysis

This first chapter introduces the main characters of the novel: Jurgis and Ona Rudkus, Ona's stepmother, Elzbieta, her cousin Marija, her brother Jonas, Jurgis's father Antanas, as well as Elzbieta's five children. This family has come to America to make their fortune. They have only been in America for a short time, but they have made many friends, and they have started to make a life for themselves. At this point in their lives, they have found some happiness despite the fact that they are forced to work long hours for what little wages they are able to earn.

This chapter also introduces many of the Rudkus's neighbors and friends. All the people at the wedding reception are working class people who work alongside Jurgis and Ona in the packing houses in the Chicago stockyards. These people work in difficult situations that are not always safe or sanitary. They work long, hard days in order to provide for their families in a world where the poor have no recourse other than hard work or begging on the street.



The narration moves back in time in this chapter, taking the reader back to the moment when Jurgis first saw Ona and decided he would make her his wife. Jurgis and Ona are very young and clearly very much in love. The decision to come to America is supposed to be a new start for this couple whose families are both struggling to survive under the oppressive government of their homeland. They have high hopes for the future. The reader can feel the optimism coming off the page, suggesting that this optimism might not be fully realized.

The reader gets the first indication of trouble when the family goes to explore their new hometown. The stockyards are a dirty, smelly place. There are several large packing houses close together that employ most of the local people. The roads are unpaved. The houses are mostly old and cheaply built, and the area is overcrowded. The family could not even find a decent place to live. Instead, they find themselves sharing the personal rooms of their landlady, thirteen people to one room. However, the family is so excited about the future that it has not occurred to them to think they might have made a mistake in coming to America.

Discussion Question 1

Who is Jurgis? Where is he from? What is his life like in America? What is he celebrating in this first chapter?

Discussion Question 2

What is a packing house? What do these people do in the packing houses? How difficult is this work?

Discussion Question 3

Why does the family decide to move to America? What do they believe they will find in America? How will America be different from Lithuania?

Vocabulary

Lamentation, disclosing, brawny, laboriously, lovesick, portion, vacant, youthful, aprons, delicatessen, battered, disappeared, happiness, particulars, furiously, describes, imagination, distance, chimneys, suggestions, stockyards, packinghouses, streaming, draining, festering, economical, arrangement, troublesome, characteristics, especially, annoying, unhealthful, commonly, topographical.



Chapters 3-4

Summary

Jakobus, the delicatessen owner, takes the Rudkus family on a tour of the packing houses. They see many interesting things which are mild compared to the things the packing houses hide from visitors. The visit makes the men excited about getting jobs at the packing houses, though Jurgis is determined that Ona and Elzbieta will not work. Jurgis goes in search of a job the next day and is hired almost immediately.

Jurgis begins working the next day on the killing beds. It is his job to sweep the debris from the killing of cows into vents in the floor. Jurgis is impressed with the amount of money he will be making each day. When Jurgis arrives home, he learns that Jonas might have a job. Marija and Anatanis are also looking for work, but have had no luck thus far. As they have had so much good luck, they begin to think about a more permanent home. They have found a brochure for the purchase of a new home. The payments on the home would be less than monthly rent and would provide them with something they would one day own as opposed to rent going nowhere. After doing some calculations, they decide they could afford to buy one of these houses.

Shortly after deciding to buy a house, Marija gets work painting cans. Then, Jonas starts working in another of the packing houses. The family goes to see the house and decides that it is perfect for them, but they hesitate to show the agent their enthusiasm out of fear of being cheated. However, that night they decide to go forward with the purchase. Elzbieta, Ona, and Jakobus go to sign the deed. Jakobus looks at the deed, and he is frightened by the word 'rent' that used repeatedly throughout the deed. For this reason, they get a lawyer to look it over. When the lawyer tells them everything is fine, they sign it. Later, they regret having done so. When Jurgis returns home and hears the story, he rushes out to have another lawyer review the deed. Again he is assured that the deed is to purchase the house.

Analysis

Jakobus gives the Rudkus's a tour of the packing houses, and they see the many interesting things that go on inside. The packing houses use every part of the animals they butcher, mostly cows and pigs. This includes the meat, the skin, the hoofs, and the innards. The family is quite impressed by what they see, but there are many things they do not see. It never occurs to any of them to question what they see and do not understand, or what they do not see. Jurgis, and the other men in the family are excited to begin working in the packing houses.

Jurgis gets a job right away and makes more money than he could ever imagine when he lived in Lithuania. For this reason, the family is even more optimistic about their future. They decide to buy a house with the money they have left from their travels. It is



a nerve wracking experience and they are extremely cautious, but in the end they make the purchase because they believe it is what is best for their family. The reader, however, can see in their extreme caution that there could be problems with this purchase in the future. At this time, though, the family is doing well and their American dream appears to be coming true.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Jakobus take the family on a tour of the packing houses? What kinds of things do they see?

Discussion Question 2

Why is Marija looking for work? Why does Jurgis not want Ona and Elzbieta to work? What is the difference between these women in Jurgis's mind?

Discussion Question 3

Why does the family decide to buy a house? What are some of the advantages of owning a house over renting? Why is the family so cautious about this purchase?

Vocabulary

Imprisonment, employee, sunshine, establishment, protection, welfare, responsible, ignorant, nature, profanity, stupendous, mortal, devised, generation, aggregation, supported, directly, indirectly, products, fertilizer, gathered, galleries, rushed, murder, excitement, cruel, payments, explained, translate, variations, covered, consult, companion, striving, lawyer, swindled, recollection, debate, precious, trembling, depended, bargain, reject.



Chapters 5-6

Summary

The family buys furniture on credit and moves into their new home. The house is small, and the rooms are overcrowded with the large family, but they have a roof over their heads and will soon have money in the bank. At the same time, Jurgis has settled into his job and finds that he enjoys it even as his coworkers complain. Jurgis is approached by the union, but he laughs them off because he does not think that the things the union wants to change are necessary. A friend of Jurgis's, Tamoszius, tells him some of the truths of the packing houses, but Jurgis refuses to believe him.

Jurgis's only concern at this point is his father Antanas. Antanas desperately wants a job, but he is too old to find employment in the packing houses. For months, Antanas goes in search of work. Finally, Antanas is given a position in the pickle rooms, the basement of the packing houses where meat that has been soaked in chemicals are fished out of their vats. Antanas' job is to sweep this left over chemical filled water off the floors. It is a wet and dirty job, but Antanas is happy to finally have a job.

All the jobs are dangerous. Marija has learned that the job she has was taken from a woman with a small child to support who became ill with tuberculosis. Jonas's job shoveling guts allowed him to witness the supervisors distracting government inspectors so that the men can cut up illegal types of meat. Jurgis himself was part of a crew who butchered sick and dead animals that are not supposed to be used.

Jurgis and Ona have put off their wedding time and again in a desire to have enough money to pay for everything. It does not help that Elzbieta insists that they have a traditional wedding. However, they finally decide they have waited long enough and hope that most of the cost of the reception will be returned to them in donations from their friends and family.

Not long after they buy the house, the family meets a neighbor who is also from Lithuania. This woman tells them about the hidden fees in the deed they signed, specifically the interest they must pay each month. Jurgis confronts the agent and makes him tell them about all the fees in the deed he did not explain before. They learn that in addition to their monthly payment of twelve dollars, they will also be expected to pay seven dollars in interest. Then, once a year they will be responsible for the taxes on the property and a water payment. Also, sometime in the future, they will be responsible for the cost of installing a sidewalk and sewer. This news surprises and shocks the family, but they realize they have no choice but to accept these fees. Ona immediately sets out to find work along with Elzbieta's eldest child, twelve year old Stanislovas.



Analysis

The family moves into their new home and everything seems perfect in their world. However, at work they are all beginning to hear and see things that suggest a difficult future ahead for them. Things at the packing houses are not as perfect as they had thought at first. Things go on that are against the law, processes that use meat that has the potential of sickening hundreds of people who consume it. However, Jurgis refuses to see these things as a foreshadowing of trouble for him and his family in the future.

The family learns shortly after moving into their home all the hidden fees that they will be responsible for paying. This includes interest and taxes. The family had believed they were saving money by buying, not renting. Now, however, they discover they will be paying out as much each month as they would have had they rented and will have annual payments on top of that. It is a situation that places the family in a difficult financial position, forcing both Ona and Elzbieta's son Stanislovas to get a job. The reader knew there would be trouble when the family first began discussing the purchase of this house.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Antanas want a job? Why does Jurgis continue to allow his father to search for work even though he knows it is policy for the packinghouses not to hire older men? How does Antanas get a job? What is wrong with this?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Jurgis refuse to hear bad things about the packinghouses? Why does he turn down the unions when they approach him? What does Jurgis think of the illegal activities taking place in the packinghouses? Why?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Ona get a job? Why did she not get a job before? Why does Stanislovas get a job? Is it legal for Stanislovas to get a job? Explain.

Vocabulary

Somber, raised, nonchalance, routine, gored, broken, injured, proceeded, conversation, inspector, packers, fodder, predecessor, crushed, profession, curious, compared, incidents, threescore, uneven, delay, calculating, stifled, discovered, engaged, remorseless, comply, document, lard, creatures, beautiful, unpleasant, automatically, quantity, sallied, consulting, conference, interview, presents, surprised, reported.



Chapters 7-8

Summary

After the wedding, Jurgis works harder to make a life for his new wife. Jurgis makes Ona take the streetcar to work, but she is too shy to speak to the conductor and a misunderstanding over a transfer causes her to have to walk a distance in the rain. This causes Ona to get sick, an illness she never fully recovers from. At the same time, the children at home are sick constantly because there is no sewer for the house, and the waste collects under the house. Antanas, too, develops a worrisome cough from the wetness associated with his job. The chemicals in the water also cause him to develop sores in his feet that never heal.

Winter comes. The weather is very cold, and there is often several feet of snow on the ground. It becomes difficult for the Rudkus's to get to work by walking, but they cannot afford to ride the streetcars everyday. Stanislovas suffers the most when he develops a deep fear of the cold after seeing a coworker lose his ears to the extreme temperature. Jurgis finds himself forced to beat Stanislovas each morning to make him go out into the cold. During this winter, Jurgis begins eating his meals at the local saloons where it is required that he buy at least one drink. This leads many men to develop a drinking problem, but Jurgis fights this demon off because of his love for Ona.

Marija has fallen in love with Tamoszius and they become engaged. However, the wedding must be put off until Jurgis and Ona can pay back money Marija has allowed them to borrow for the family. Then the canning factory where Marija works is shut down, and Marija no longer has an income. Marija must start using her savings to pay her part of the house payment. At the same time, work slows on the killing beds, and Jurgis sees his pay cut in half.

Jurgis has seen enough on the killing beds that he has begun to understand the purpose of the union. For this reason, not only does Jurgis join the union, but he encourages all the people in his family to join as well. However, the union does not solve much for the family. Jurgis begins to attend the union meetings, and he learns English so that he might begin to understand the purpose of the union and how to make things better for his family.

Analysis

The health of the Rudkus family is beginning to suffer from the poor work and living conditions of the stockyards. Antanas is the one who worries the others the most because his working conditions are particularly poor. It is a difficult situation for such an old man who was already suffering from a bad cough before his move to the country in Lithuania. The discussion of his failing health suggests to the reader that Antanas might



not be long for this world, taking away Jurgis's beloved father as well as another source of income.

The winter in Chicago is a very difficult one. This family is not fully prepared for just how bad the weather is about to get. The packing houses do not have air conditioning or heat, leaving the workers unprotected from the weather. Their house, too, does not have heat. The family is constantly cold, constantly fighting the weather. This makes them miserable and vulnerable to illness and death. This chapter foreshadows more trouble to come for this family.

Marija has found love, but again money keeps her from getting married. Marija also wants to have a traditional wedding, but she has not saved enough money to do so. For this reason, the wedding is postponed. When Marija almost has enough money, she loses her job when the canning factory is closed down for a lack of demand. This places Marija in a difficult position and delays her wedding even further. Once again, money troubles change the direction of these people's lives.

Jurgis and his family have all joined the unions, but they do not see any change in their circumstances. Jurgis seems to think that the union has the power to change things immediately, but this does not happen. For this reason, Jurgis begins learning English so that he can understand more of what happens at the union meetings. This is proof of Jurgis's determination to be in control of his life and his future. This is an all important determination that will get Jurgis through some of the darker moments in his life.

Discussion Question 1

What is causing Antanas' illness? How could this have been avoided? Why does the old man not attempt to change his situation?

Discussion Question 2

Why do Marija and her fiancé delay their wedding? Why is money an important factor in their plans? What happens to delay their plans even more?

Discussion Question 3

Why has Jurgis begun to learn English? How will this help him in dealing with the people around him? Why did he not learn it earlier?

Vocabulary

Carcass, inconvenience, streetcar, containing, frankfurters, infinite, cosey, pleasure, wonderland, intending, condition, convention, practice, shiver, understood, attached, condition, workingmen, downstream, refusing, deadly, brutalizing, gospel, missionary,

disillusionment, affliction, allies, rescued, embarrassment, inquiringly, surroundings, perspiration, operation, representation, similarity, developing, confidential, discovery.



Chapters 9-10

Summary

Jurgis begins going to school to learn to read and write English. Jurgis also gets his naturalization papers and becomes a citizen. Soon after, Jurgis is paid to vote in the local elections.

Jurgis begins learning more and more about the way things work in the stockyards. There is a man called Mike Scully who owns most of the businesses outside of the packing houses and controls most of the local government. Even the packing house owners are fearful of Scully and work under his thumb. The packing houses themselves operate on the edge of legality, often stealing water from the city among other things. A man who crosses Scully or the packing houses bosses is a man who will never be able to provide for his family in the stockyards again. Jurgis learns more and more of the illegal and unsanitary practices in the packing houses from other people who work in the stockyards.

The family begins to struggle financially. They manage to get through winter despite unexpected expenses. When spring comes, they expect things to get better. However, Marija is unable to make her part of the house payment. During the summer, the work picks up. Then, they are working such long hours that they never see the sun except on Sundays. Marija gets her job back when the canning factory opens again, but then she loses her job when she has a dispute with the supervisors over the number of cans they are paying her for. It takes weeks for Marija to find another job, but finally she is hired as a beef trimmer, trimming the meat off the bones.

Ona, too, is unhappy in her work. She is convinced that her supervisor dislikes her. Several prostitutes work alongside Ona, and they too seem to dislike her, too. Ona, thanks to Marija's experience, manages to keep her tongue and avoid Marija's fate.

Ona has a baby boy that summer. The baby is called Antanas, for Jurgis's father who has passed away. Jurgis adores his new son, but there is little time in which he can spend with him because of his work schedule. At the same time, Ona decides to go back to work after only a week, even though the doctor has recommended she nurse the child for several months. This causes Ona to have womb problems for the rest of her life.

Analysis

As time passes, Jurgis learns more and more about the practices of the packing houses. Most of their practices are illegal and dangerous to both the workers and the consumers who buy their products. This chapter focuses more on the indifference of the local government and business owners toward the people who work in these packing houses. It is a difficult life, and there really is little recourse for workers and their families



who find themselves unemployed due to injury or death. It is a difficult life, a life balanced on the edge of survival and homelessness.

Summer brings more work, therefore more money. However, the family continues to struggle because they are still catching up from the deficits of winter. Then Marija loses her job because of her own stubbornness and a dispute with her supervisors. The reader can see that Marija is too proud to be dealing with a system in which the rich are out to get richer and do not care about the people who work for them. However, Marija has spirit, and the reader hopes that she will survive this difficult place where she lives.

Ona struggles as well, but she has a weaker character than her husband and her cousin. Ona works with people who dislike her for being a good girl. This makes Ona's working life difficult for her, but she is smart enough to keep her mouth closed. At the same time, Ona has a baby. This makes Jurgis very happy, but it adds another mouth to the family that needs to be fed and cared for. This is a new burden that not only takes a toll on the family financially, but it takes a toll on Ona's health as well. This suggests that there might be great unhappiness in the future for Jurgis and his family.

Discussion Question 1

Why does the packing house boss care if Jurgis is a naturalized citizen of the United States? Why does Jurgis go along with it? Why is Jurgis paid to vote? What does this say about the election process during the time in which this novel is set? Is this a fair way for the government to go about elections?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Marija lose her job? Was Marija right in her argument against her bosses? Why was she fired? What recourse did she have?

Discussion Question 3

What impact does it have on the family when Ona has a baby? Is this a good thing? What toll does this baby have on Ona? What does this suggest about her future?

Vocabulary

Visitor, ordinary, exhibiting, vats, pelts, hoisters, rheumatism, butchers, trimmers, renewed, artificial, tuberculosis, artificial, scarcely, interesting, statistics, industries, peculiar, diseases, mutton, afflictions, phantom, deemed, suffered, neuralgia, womb, ailments, treatment, specialist, diagnosis, operation, depression, account, responsibility, confinement, health, continued, calamity, ought, personality, haunting, excitements.



Chapters 11-12

Summary

Rumors of job cuts begin to float around the stockyards, and Jurgis begins to worry. Marija is not worried, however, because there was one recently where she works. For this reason, Marija feels comfortable enough with her savings to put it in the bank. However, when there is a run on the bank, she takes her money out of the bank and never puts it back.

Jurgis and Ona are doing well at the end of summer. They also have some savings in the bank and hope to save more when they finish paying for their furniture. When winter hits, Jurgis fights the elements to make sure everyone gets to work safely each morning. However, one day on the killing beds a steer gets free and goes wild. Jurgis injures his ankle when he jumps out of the way. At first he does not think the injury is serious, but soon the pain is so bad that he asks to see the company doctor. The company doctor claims it is only a sprain. Since it is not the company's fault, there is little he can do. Jurgis is forced to remain home for several weeks to allow his ankle to heal without pay. This leaves the family once again in an economic pinch that causes Ona to have to nearly empty their bank account just to feed the family.

For weeks Jurgis suffers with his ankle. Unable to stand to watch his family suffer anymore, Jurgis begins walking on the ankle and finally goes back to work. However, after only one day the pain is too much and Jurgis cannot stand it. The family calls a doctor and learns that Jurgis has misaligned a tendon. The tendon is pushed back into place, but Jurgis must stay off of it for a few more months to allow it to heal. About this same time, Jonas disappears. Due to the financial need, they decide to send two of the boys to work in the city selling newspapers. At the same time, Ona becomes pregnant and begins suffering from depression.

When Jurgis is finally fit to return to work, he finds that his job is not waiting for him. For this reason, Jurgis begins the long search for more work. This time he is thinner and not as strong as before, so he has trouble finding a job.

Analysis

Jurgis and Ona are finally ahead and feel secure in their lives. However, this does not last long. As winter comes on, Jurgis is injured at work. This leaves Jurgis unable to work for months as he waits for his ankle to heal. Unlike modern times when a person cannot work, they have no other way to make money. For this reason, Jurgis is forced to lie still and watch his family slowly starve to death on Ona, Marija, and Stanislovas' earnings only. It is a very difficult time that underscores how precarious life is for working people like the Rudkus family during this time period.



The family has begun to struggle financially in a way they have never done before. Things are beginning to look bleak in the light of Jurgis's inability to work. Jurgis is a man who is humiliated by his inability to provide for his family, so he tries to return to work, but the pain is too much. Finally they discover that the company doctor misses, or did not care enough, a serious element to the injury that could have been easily repaired. For this reason, Jurgis must be out of work even longer. Jurgis ends up spending nearly all winter laid up. It is a dark and difficult time for the family that is made worse by the disappearance of Ona's brother, Jonas, and the necessity of sending two of the younger boys to work. Things are beginning to look very dark for this family.

Discussion Question 1

How is Jurgis injured? Why does the company doctor claim it is not the company's responsibility? What is done for Jurgis?

Discussion Question 2

Why is Ona having bouts of crying? What is happening that makes her feel this way? How does Jurgis respond?

Discussion Question 3

What happened to Jonas? Why does the family not do more to find him? What does the family believe happened to him? What does the author imply happened to him?

Vocabulary

Fascinating, seriousness, rascal, everlasting, hypocrisy, delight, stricken, resource, imagining, beautiful, peevish, greater, regardless, possible, inroad, account, pitiful, chemicals, accustomed, penal, offense, quantities, selfish, members, splitters, unskilled, dependent, liable, promise, limitations, circumstances, skilled, instance, merciless, carelessness, occasion, acquaintance, damaged, article, members, bitterness.



Chapters 13-14

Summary

Elzbieta's youngest child dies of an apparent bout of food poisoning by eating sausages made in the local packing houses. Elzbieta is beyond herself with grief and insists that he have a proper burial even though there is not enough money for it. Elzbieta earns the money by begging the neighbors for help. Jurgis continues to search for work. Finally, he finds himself forced to apply at the fertilizer plant, the one place most men would rather starve than work at. The smell is so bad that no one wants to be near it. The stench is impossible to wash it off. The summer slowly passes. Elzbieta is forced to get a job as well.

As Elzbieta works in the sausage factory, she learns of the spoiled meat, trash, and rats that are used to make it. This job makes Elzbieta begin to lose her concern for humanity and her own life. Elzbieta learns to accept life for what it is. The whole family has become beaten, no longer passionate about anything. At this same time, Jurgis develops something of a problem with alcohol. The thought of Ona keeps Jurgis from becoming a complete drunk.

Baby Antanas is sickly during his first year of life, suffering all the normal ailments of babyhood. Ona, too, is becoming sicker each day. Ona has developed the same cough that eventually killed the elder Antanas. At the same time, Ona is pregnant again, and this is taking a toll on her health.

Analysis

Jurgis proves his determination to provide for his family when he takes a job no one else wants. It is a difficult job, but Jurgis is desperate, and he is not afraid of hard work. This shows the reader how far the family has fallen and how determined Jurgis remains. Despite Jurgis's new job, the family still struggles. It's necessary for Elzbieta to get a job, leaving a twelve year old child home to care for the smaller children.

The author tells the reader more about the atrocities that go on in the packing house by describing the spoiled meat that is used to make sausage. The reader can imagine that in the year this novel was published, these stories must have been received with a great outcry.

The health of the members of Jurgis's family is beginning to suffer, especially Ona who is not only ill quite frequently, but also expecting a second child. It is a difficult time, and few in the family are happy, let alone optimistic about the future. The tone of the novel has shifted quite a bit from the initial chapters, leaving the reader despairing for their survival.



Discussion Question 1

How does Elzbieta's son die? Why does Jurgis refuse a funeral for the child? How does Elzbieta earn the money for the funeral? What does this say about her desperation?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Jurgis take a job in the fertilizer plant? Why is this place considered worse than starving? Is it? Does it help the family?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Jurgis feel the desire to drink? What perpetuates this desire? For what reason? How does Jurgis resist it?

Vocabulary

Arranged, sausage, graven, menagerie, instead, miraculously, incredible, appearance, adulterated, nozzle, latter, spout, provided, entire, presumably, sickening, department, reeling, sickening, unseen, wounded, helpless, hysterical, persuaded, argue, allowed, unbearable, together, explain, pregnant, unthinkable, contemplate, dreadful, serious, nervousness, cough, developing, moaning, weeping.



Chapters 15-16

Summary

Winter comes again and the family returns to the struggle of dealing with the weather on top of their hard work. Shortly before Thanksgiving, Elzbieta wakes Jurgis to tell him that Ona never came home the night before. Jurgis goes in search for her, finally finding her outside the plant where she works. Ona tells Jurgis that she spent the night with a friend because the weather made it impossible for her to get home.

A few weeks later, Ona again fails to come home. Jurgis goes straight to her friend's house only to learn not only was Ona not there, but that Ona had never stayed the night with them. When Jurgis finally finds Ona, he demands to know where she was. Ona tries to convince him not to ask, but when this fails, she finally tells him one of the bosses at her job approached her months before and told her if she did not have an intimate relationship with him, he would have her entire family blacklisted with the packing house. This would mean that they would be unable to make a living. Ona submitted to him then and many times afterward. The two nights she went missing, the man had insisted she go to a house in the city he owns and spend several hours with him. The first night a winter storm made it impossible for her to get home. On the second night, a problem with the streetcars caused her to be stranded.

Jurgis becomes enraged when Ona tells her story. Without stopping to think of the consequences, Jurgis goes to the packing house and beats up the boss. Jurgis is arrested and taken to jail.

Jurgis is taken to a cell and left alone for the night. The following morning, Jurgis is taken to court where he is held over for a week to wait to see how Connor, the man he attacked, does with his injuries. Jurgis discovers that it is Christmas Eve and recalls how happy the family was the previous Christmas despite their poverty. Jurgis worries about his family and how they will survive without him.

Analysis

Ona begins disappearing at night. Jurgis quickly discovers she is lying to him and forces her to tell him the truth. Ona is destroyed by having to tell the man she loves the truth. However, Ona's predicament is one that many women in this time period were faced with. Men who had some power, whether it be political or through employment, felt they had the right to do as they pleased to these desperate women. For this reason, Ona was placed in a position where she felt she had no choice.

Upon learning about the terrible thing that has happened to his wife, Jurgis finds his passion. However, this passion is a blind one that keeps him from seeing the consequences of any actions. Jurgis attacks a boss, a man who has power over him through his job and, most likely, the local government. Jurgis is arrested. This situation



could only mean more trouble for the family because Jurgis will more than likely lose his job and his source of income.

Jurgis realizes too late the consequences of his actions on his family. Jurgis's family cannot survive without his income, especially since they are already late with their house payments and struggling with only the income of two women and three children. This shows the reader that Jurgis's love for Ona is so complete that his anger over her injury was too much for him to handle and remember how badly the family needs him. Unfortunately, Jurgis is now in a warm jail where he will get three square meals a day while his family starves without his income.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Ona stop coming home at night? Why does Jurgis worry about her? What is his first assumption about Ona's disappearance? What does this imply about the world he lives in?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Jurgis attack the man who hurt his wife? What would a modern man have done? Why does Jurgis get arrested? Did he have a reasonable defense for his actions? What might happen to him in the future?

Discussion Question 3

Who is Jurgis's judge? What is important about his identity? What does this suggest for Jurgis's chances of getting out of jail quickly?

Vocabulary

Summoned, unconscious, enemy, writhing, seized, hanging, smashing, demon, aroused, madness, consequence, assailant, corridor, packing, furnace, bounded, particularly, wounded, terrified, possessed, furiously, exhaustion, compelled, frenzied, vengeance, defiance, declared, unbelief, rebellion, justice, wronged, society, treated, feelings, reason, affections, senses, interfered, substance, force, mockery, brutal, hideous, upraised, hatred, punish.



Chapters 17-18

Summary

Jurgis gets a cellmate, a young man called Jack Duane. Jack is a safecracker who is in jail on a trumped up charge. Jack tells Jurgis his life story and encourages Jurgis to do the same. After a week, Jurgis is taken back to court where he is tried for his actions. Connor lies about the reason Jurgis attacked him, and the judge believes Connor over Jurgis. Jurgis is sentenced to thirty days plus costs. Jurgis is taken to Bridewell, the state prison outside of Chicago, to serve his sentence. Jurgis spends his days breaking rocks. One day Stanislovas comes to see Jurgis. Stanislovas says the family is desperate, that there is no food and no money. Ona has lost her job due to this ordeal, causing her to take to her bed and cry all day. Stanislovas has also lost his job because he was too afraid to go out in the snow to get to work. Marija has cut her hand, so she is also not working. Elzbieta is also out of work while the sausage department is shut down. Three of the kids are selling newspapers, but it is not enough to pay the house payment. They are late on the payment, and the agent is threatening to throw them out. Unfortunately, there is nothing Jurgis can do but give Stanislovas the fourteen cents in his pocket.

Jurgis is released from jail three days later than expected because he had to stay that long to pay for court costs. When Jurgis is released he gets directions back to the stockyard from a kid who sends him the wrong way and then from a farmer who sends him home. When Jurgis reaches his street, he discovers that his family has been turned out of their home, and the house has been resold. Jurgis goes to Aniele's to find the family. He discovers that Ona has gone into premature labor. Jurgis wants to hire a midwife to care for Ona, but no one has any money. Finally, some of the neighbors and friends gathered give Jurgis all they have, one dollar and a quarter.

Analysis

Jurgis spends a week in jail before he is sentenced to thirty days. This is a total of five weeks Jurgis is away from the family and unable to work. The family is in a desperate way. All the adults have lost their jobs for one reason or another, leaving them with just the spare change the children get from selling newspapers. There is no food, and they are about to lose their home. The family has gone from desperate to worse, leaving them in a position where they will more than likely find themselves homeless and starving. Jurgis is a man who always does his best to support his family, therefore it is with great difficulty that he is forced to sit back and do nothing. It is a helpless situation that the reader feels will lead Jurgis to do something beyond desperation when he finally gets out of jail.

Jurgis gets out of jail late and goes straight home. Jurgis is worried for the family, but he does not even imagine that they have been kicked out of their home until the evidence



is there before him. The family has lost the house because of a lack of payment, leaving them homeless. The family is back where they started in the home of Aniele, but worse off because of the physical and emotional impact of their failure. It is a horrible time made worse by Ona's pregnancy and her early labor. Jurgis has not stopped caring for his wife, however, and he fights to get her help even when he is told that it is hopeless. Jurgis is a good man who clearly loves his wife, but reality is not something he truly understands.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Marija out of work? How common is this? How does Marija's injury compare to Jurgis's hurt ankle?

Discussion Question 2

Why is the family about to lose their house? What will this mean for the family? What does Jurgis do about it?

Discussion Question 3

Why has the family been turned out of their home? Is this legal? Why has the house been resold? Why was the family told the house was new?

Vocabulary

Reeling, noticed, steadily, recollecting, hesitation, another, department, agony, struggle, downtown, grudge, reason, satisfaction, bandaged, cursed, grating, breathed, perplexity, premature, pocketbooks, happening, expected, counted, doctor, allowed, scarcely, promise, arguing, pieces, horrible, trembled, exclaimed, hesitating, demanded, horror, trembling, fright, scream, gasped.



Chapters 19-20

Summary

Jurgis convinces a midwife to come see to Ona for the one dollar and a quarter as well as a promise to pay her twenty-four dollars by the end of the month. Jurgis takes her to the house, but he is again turned out by Aniele and Marija. Jurgis goes to a local saloon where the bartender has pity on him and gives him a meal, a drink, and a place to sleep. Late in the night, Jurgis returns to the house to find Ona quiet. Finally the midwife comes down and tells Jurgis the baby has died and Ona is dying. Jurgis rushes up to see Ona. She focuses on him for a brief second before she dies. Lost in grief, Jurgis takes three dollars from Kotrina, Elzbieta's daughter, who has just returned from selling papers, and leaves.

Jurgis returns to Aniele's after his money runs out and sits with Ona's body. Elzbieta convinces Jurgis to go find a job and continue to help the family for the sake of his son with Ona, Antanas. Jurgis immediately goes in search of a job, but learns he has been blacklisted in the stockyards because of his attack on Connor. For this reason, Jurgis goes into the city to look for a job there. Jurgis looks for weeks and finally, after running into an old friend from the packing houses, he finds a job at a farm equipment manufacturing plant. This is a good job that pays well, allowing Jurgis to begin to pay off the debts his family owes and to care for the family. However, after only a short time, the plant shuts down for a lack of demand.

Analysis

Jurgis has promised to care for Ona all her life. Jurgis tries to keep this promise by getting Ona help during premature labor with their second child, but it is already too late by the time he convinces a midwife to come. Jurgis is emotionally destroyed by Ona's death. Considering the circumstances of their last meeting, the reader can only imagine how many regrets each has at this point. Ona was always something of a frail woman, so her death is not a big surprise to the reader. However, it is a gigantic blow to Jurgis. Ona has always been his motivation, his reason for fighting in this horrible life.

Jurgis spends time getting drunk after his wife's death in a need to numb his emotions. However, Jurgis is not the kind of man who can remain blind and deaf to his family's needs. Jurgis immediately goes in search of a job to care for the family. Unfortunately, he cannot find a job in Packingtown. This situation is as desperate as the family has been since coming to America, and it seems only to grow worse as each day passes. A ray of hope comes when Jurgis gets a job at a farm equipment manufacturing plant. Within nine days of his being hired, the plant closes, leaving Jurgis without an income once again. This is the third job Jurgis has lost since coming to America only three years before, making the reader wonder if Jurgis will ever find a way to support his family that will not end in injury or death.



Discussion Question 1

What causes Ona's death? Why did she go into premature labor? How did her previous health impact her pregnancy and her death?

Discussion Question 2

What does Elzbieta say to Jurgis to make him promise to find a job? Is this speech fair? Why does Elzbieta expect Jurgis to search for work rather than have a funeral for his wife? How does this indicate a change in Elzbieta's attitude toward tradition since her arrival in America?

Discussion Question 3

What kind of job does Jurgis find? How is it different from working in the packing houses? Does Jurgis like the job? Why does it end?

Vocabulary

Manner, commanded, happened, demanded, unsteadily, death, shuddering, recognition, mangled, tortured, seized, shadowy, void, annihilation, loneliness, inconsolable, groping, forlorn, harvester, support, skilled, treated, opposite, jealous, dreamed, attention, required, traveling, monopoly, admiring, performing, outdoors, strength, bitter, necessitating, direction, blessing, assembled.



Chapters 21-22

Summary

Jurgis desperately begins looking for another job, but all the other workers from the manufacturing plant are also looking, making the search impossible. At the same time, one of Elzbieta's youngest children begins searching in the dumps for food, often bringing home large piles of discarded food from the city. One day a charity worker sees him and asks to visit his home. When she does, Elzbieta tells her their story. The woman is so touched that she gives Elzbieta a letter that will help Jurgis get a job at a steel mill. Jurgis gets a job as a rail mover. The place is so far from Packingtown that Jurgis begins staying at a place near the mill. He only goes to Aliene's on Sundays. Jurgis enjoys his visits with young Antanas who has begun to talk. They often share the Sunday paper together with Jurgis reading the funny pages to the toddler. Then one day Jurgis comes home and learns that Antanas has died.

After seeing his son's dead body, Jurgis leaves the house and just walks. After a while, Jurgis jumps a train. Jurgis rides out into the country and begins to walk. When he is hungry, Jurgis buys food from farms he is passing. When Jurgis runs out of money, he begins joining up with groups of hobos and learns from them how to get what he needs. Jurgis eats fruits and vegetables growing wild in the country or steals from local farms. He does work at harvest time and begins to earn money. Jurgis often spends his money quickly on drink and women, afraid that if he kept his money it would be stolen. Jurgis' happiness as a hobo is only dampened by his memories of Ona and Antanas.

Analysis

Jurgis is desperate to find a way to make an honest living for his family, but there are so many other men trying to do the same thing that he cannot find anything. It is the generosity of a charity worker that finally gets Jurgis the chance he needs for a good job. This is the fourth job Jurgis has had since coming to America and one of the least unpleasant. However, this job has its own dangers as Jurgis learns when he burns his hands trying to help a couple of injured men. This situation not only proves the dangers of the work, but it also shows that Jurgis continues to have a sense of morality and a desire to help people in need. Unfortunately, this job only pays for his family to survive. It does not protect it from other dangers.

Jurgis is so hurt by the death of his son that he goes on the road, abandoning his remaining family and his job at the steel mill. Jurgis spends the summer tramping around the country, learning how to live off the land and the kindness of strangers. It is a better life, and Jurgis finds his health coming back to him. However, his conscience bothers him, showing the reader that Jurgis continues to be a man of great moral character who knows what he had and what he has lost. The memory of his losses



make him want to lose himself in drink. However, the memory of the love and happiness he had with his wife and son and the promises he once made to Ona keep him sober.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Elzbieta's son begin searching for food in the dumps? Why can the family not afford to buy enough food for the children?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Jurgis leave Chicago? What about his job? What does this tell the reader about the depth of his despair in losing his son?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Jurgis begin hooking up with other hoboos? What do these others teach Jurgis? What does he do with the knowledge?

Vocabulary

Answered, drowned, seized, exclaimed, excited, decency, kindness, learned, trimmer, glee, damning, impossible, pictures, comical, delight, pronunciation, prattling, irresistible, fashion, outlandish, writhing, suffocating, vileness, amazement, gathered, heaped, accents, quaintest, motionless, perfectly, explanation, believed, sentence, explained, ignorant, climate, exchanged, afterward.



Chapters 23-24

Summary

Jurgis travels back to Chicago with fifteen dollars in his pocket as winter begins. Jurgis begins to look for work, first at the steel mill and then at the local industrial plants. After a month, Jurgis answers an ad in a newspaper and gets a job digging tunnels for telephones. This proves to be a good job until Jurgis is hit in the shoulder by a runaway train. He wakes up in the hospital with a broken arm. When Jurgis is released from the hospital, he is unable to work and has nowhere to go. Jurgis ends up begging on the street.

While begging on the street, Jurgis runs into the son of one of the owners of the packing houses, Mr. Jones. This young man named Freddie hears Jurgis's story and offers to take him home. When they stop to look for a taxi, Freddie gives Jurgis a hundred dollar bill to pay, but then he has the butler pay. Freddie takes Jurgis to his private apartment and feeds him a huge feast. Afterward, Freddie falls asleep, and the butler immediately throws Jurgis out.

Analysis

Jurgis returns to Chicago because it is place he knows, a life he knows. However, work is just as hard to come by as it was before. Jurgis wades in with thousands of others who are out of work and desperate to find employment. It is a difficult time, but Jurgis is one of the lucky who is able to find work. Unfortunately, injury once again leaves Jurgis without a way to survive. This time is different. Jurgis no longer has a family to take care of, but he does not have a family to house and feed him while he heals. Jurgis is a proud man, but he finds himself without home, without money, without food. Desperation is not a big enough word to describe Jurgis's new reality, leaving the reader wondering if he might not have been better off tramping.

Jurgis has a moment of luck when he runs into Freddie Jones. The reader sees the difference in class in this chapter when Freddie repeatedly complains about being left alone at home with only two thousand dollars to spend. Two thousand dollars would keep Jurgis in housing and food for the rest of his life. The differences between their lives is unimaginable and a lesser man might have been so filled with envy that he might have meant Freddie harm or stolen from him. Instead, Jurgis only leaves with the money Freddie gave him. Jurgis again proves to the reader what a good man he is.

Discussion Question 1

What kind of job does Jurgis get? What do they do? How is Jurgis injured? What does the injury mean for Jurgis this time?



Discussion Question 2

Why does Jurgis find himself on the streets? What happens when he runs out of money? What does this suggest for Jurgis's future?

Discussion Question 3

Why does the butler dislike Jurgis? Why does the butler attempt to argue with Freddie about Jurgis's presence in his home? Why does the butler want to search Jurgis before he leaves? Why does Jurgis refuse to let him? Why does the butler throw Jurgis out?

Vocabulary

Bandages, gangrene, horrible, fortunate, mutilated, detention, miniature, inferno, hideous, beastly, bloated, abandoned, progress, opium, escaped, cesspools, wretches, ramshackle, tenements, harlot, sprawling, ferocious, terrified, surrendered, passion, retreated, forgotten, reveling, champagne, honeymoon, disinherit, dueling, imagination, stagger, youngster, sympathetically, blissful, insouciance, sworn.



Chapters 25-26

Summary

Jurgis takes his hundred dollar bill to a saloon to have it cashed, but the bartender steals it. Jurgis tries to beat the man up, but he man gets the better of him and then claims to the police that Jurgis had a knife. Jurgis is arrested once again. In court, the bartender lies and once again the judge believes the victim over Jurgis. Jurgis is sentenced to ten days and costs at Bridewell. When Jurgis arrives at Bridewell, he discovers Jack Duane there as well. When Jurgis is released, he goes to Duane and they go into business together, mugging people on the street. It proves to be quite profitable for Jurgis and he soon gets into other illegal activities with Duane.

One day Jurgis meets Buck Halloran, a lieutenant of Mike Scully's. After Jurgis and Duane do a job for Halloran, Halloran offers Jurgis a job helping with an election scam in Packingtown. Halloran arranges for Jurgis to get a job at one of the packinghouses where he will encourage the men to join the Republican Party and vote for the Republican candidate. Scully, a Democrat, had made a deal with the Republicans that he will allow their candidate to be elected if they will not oppose him when he next comes up for election. Jurgis plays his role well and helps win the election for the Republican candidate.

After the elections, Jurgis continues to work at the packing houses because it is familiar, he has good friends, and he has found ways to make extra money on the side. After a time, however, a strike breaks out. Jurgis goes to Mike Scully and asks for a job while on strike. Scully tells Jurgis that he would be better off if he breaks the strike and becomes a scab. After listening to Scully's explanation, Jurgis does just that. Jurgis finds himself working alongside clerical staff in the killing room.

During the strike, for his own protection, Jurgis is confined to the yards, which means he sleeps there as well. Occasionally Jurgis is able to leave by a railroad in the yards to visit the city. Over time, the packers bring in black men from the south to do most of the work. Jurgis is promoted to boss of the killing room, but he finds it almost impossible to force his scabs to do the work like the men they are replacing.

When the strike ends, the packers refuse to give jobs back to the leaders of the union despite the agreement that ended the strike. For this reason, the union orders another strike. Jurgis has a good deal there so he remains although it is unclear if he will still be a boss when it is all over. Then one night Jurgis returns to the yards drunk from the city and finds himself face to face with Connor. Jurgis attacks him. Halloran helps Jurgis make bail even though Connor is a friend of Scully's and Jurgis disappears into the city.



Analysis

Jurgis turns to a life of crime after he is once again arrested for a fight that was not his fault. Jurgis is tired of being cheated by society, and this helps ease his conscious as he steals from people on the street, gambles, and cheats the government. Jurgis learns through his activities that everyone does something illegal, from the plant owners to the government officials to the thief on the street. Jurgis is simply trying to survive.

After having lost everything and being blacklisted in Packingtown, Jurgis finds himself back there. However, this time Jurgis works out of the pocket of local boss Mike Scully. This gives Jurgis not only the clout he needs to get a job but more money than he could ever make on his own in Packingtown. Jurgis returns in triumph and prospers, but at the cost of the immigrants who took his place.

Jurgis has returned to Packingtown triumphantly and is making good money. It is a stark contrast to the life Jurgis had the last time he lived in Packingtown. Jurgis has clearly changed since his early days in Packingtown and not all the change is good.

When the workers in Packingtown go on strike, Jurgis initially walks out with them. However, Jurgis sees the advantages of being a scab, so he breaks the strike and returns to work. This pits Jurgis against the men who are in the same place he was not so long ago. Jurgis finds himself helping the very people who caused his family to be homeless and starving, who allowed a man to take advantage of his wife and more than likely led to her death. However, Jurgis does not see it this way. Jurgis is a man who had been desperate and he likes having money and a place to live no matter what he has to do to get it. Jurgis does not want to be desperate again.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Jurgis have a one hundred dollar bill? Why does he try to have it cashed? Why does this cause Jurgis to be arrested again?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Jurgis return to Packingtown? What does he do there? For what reason? How does this benefit Jurgis? Why does he not find his family still in Packingtown?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Jurgis break the strike? What does this say about his loyalties? What does this suggest for his future? Is Jurgis a hypocrite for turning his back on the workers? What might Jurgis have done differently?



Vocabulary

Gamble, government, exultation, election, unholy, Republican, Democrat, corruption, polling, precinct, balance, safecracking, pawn shop, triumph, escorted, plurality, landslides, actual, strikebreaker, scab, forfeiting, silence, trial, explained, bail, strike, trouble, magistrate, beaten, extinguished, remanded, insensibility, victim, precisely, recognized, rage, frenzy, concerned, remainder, confessed, deserving, lantern, remainder.



Chapters 27-28

Summary

Jurgis returns to the city. Again, Jurgis finds himself standing outside factory gates in search of work. Soon, Jurgis is out of money and finds himself stealing from green-grocers and begging again. Jurgis goes to political speeches just to have a warm place to go at night. One night, Jurgis runs into an old acquaintance from Packingtown who tells him where he can find Marija. When Jurgis goes to the address where Marija is, he finds that it is a brothel that is being raided. Jurgis and Marija are arrested. Jurgis spends the night feeling guilty for leaving his family in a position for Marija to feel she had to become a prostitute.

The following morning, after they are released, Jurgis visits with Marija and learns of the hard time she and Elzbieta had after leaving Packingtown. Marija insists that becoming a prostitute is the only option she had to care for the remaining children after Stanislovas died. Marija then tells Jurgis what it is like in this work, both the horror of it and the good. Finally, Marija sends Jurgis to see Elzbieta.

Jurgis wanders the street, too ashamed to return to Elzbieta without a job. To avoid it a little longer, Jurgis finds himself at a speech by a Socialist. At first Jurgis does not listen. In fact, he falls asleep. However, when Jurgis sees how inspired the woman beside him is by the speech, he begins to listen. Jurgis hears truth in the man's speech.

Analysis

Jurgis returns to the city, and once again finds himself begging on the street. Jurgis continuously goes from having everything he could need to being left destitute. It is a difficult existence that shows the reader how easy it is for someone to go from comfort to nothing. This is further illustrated when Jurgis discovers that Marija is a prostitute. It is a sad existence that has left everyone doing all they can to survive.

Jurgis learns how bad life really was for Marija and the others after he left. Not only did Stanislovas die a terrible death, but Marija lost her love to the packing houses and had to give herself up to a horrible life. Marija's prostitution is shameful, but she felt she had no choice and she does not feel ashamed of her ability to care for the family. It was desperation that led Marija to her situation and she is proud that she was able to save the children even if it was at the loss of her own pride.

Jurgis is humbled by Marija and so ashamed of his own actions that he is afraid to go to Elzbieta. It is this situation that leads him into another political speech and the sudden inspiration of a new orator. It is inspiration that Jurgis badly needs at a time when he badly needs it. For this reason, it seems like a turn of wonderful fortune for both Jurgis and the reader.



Discussion Question 1

Who tells Jurgis where to find Marija? Where is she? What is she doing for a living? Why?

Discussion Question 2

What does Marija tell Jurgis happened to young Stanislovas? How does Jurgis feel about this news? Why?

Discussion Question 3

Why is Jurgis ashamed? How does this change his outlook in a way the strike in Packingtown did not? What does this say about Jurgis?

Vocabulary

Prostitute, manhood, flicker, bottomless, torment, unawares, suffer, frostbitten, discovery, wonderful, dreadful, shame, decency, independence, competed, roundup, humanity, hideous, bowed, love, soul, orator, oppressive, intonations, presence, upheaving, trembling, vision, demon, demanding, pronouncing, resistance, prostrate, anguish, despair, demanding, poverty, cease, wrongs, oppose, bludgeon, uncultured.



Chapters 29-31

Summary

Jurgis is so impressed that he goes backstage to speak to the orator. Instead of speaking to the man, who is too exhausted to speak, Jurgis is referred to a man who speaks his own language. The man, Ostrinski, takes Jurgis home with him and they spend most of the night talking about Socialism. Jurgis is inspired.

This gives him the strength to return to Elzbieta and tell her about it. Elzbieta cares little about politics, but is willing to join the party if it makes Jurgis happy. A few days later, Jurgis walks into a hotel to find a job and is given a job as a porter. When Jurgis tells Ostrinski about this, he learns his new boss is a Socialist. The boss learns Jurgis's story and begins using it to illustrate his socialist teachings to out of town visitors.

Jurgis throws himself into the Socialists movement, learning all he can about it and doing what he can to promote it. Jurgis makes many friends in the movement. Jurgis even goes out to Packingtown to help promote Socialism and is impressed by the changes made there since the end of the strike.

Shortly after getting his job at the hotel, Jurgis goes to Marija and tells her to quit working as a prostitute. Marija refuses, claiming that so many men have seen her in this place that she will not be able to go anywhere without someone learning the truth about her past. Besides, Marija is happy with her position and the money she is making. Jurgis tells her that he will no longer allow Elzbieta to take her money.

Jurgis is invited to dinner with a new friend where there is a discussion of Socialism. The orator speaks about what is wrong with society and how he could make it better. Later, there is an election, and the Socialists win big. This will enable them to make a lot of change for the working man.

Analysis

Jurgis learns all about socialism and he realizes that it is a political party that understands the working man and can do all the things he longed for the unions to do when he first working in Packingtown. It is inspiring for Jurgis and gives him hope for the future of the country as well as for him and his family.

Jurgis returns to Elzbieta and vows to take care of her and her remaining children with his newfound hope in the Socialist party. This seems to be fulfilled when Jurgis gets a job as a porter at a hotel and discovers his new boss is also a Socialist. It does seem that by embracing this new political party, Jurgis had found a new life that will lead to a more consistent prosperity for him and his family. Jurgis is fully committed, even returning to Packingtown one last time to help spread the word. Jurgis is happy for the changes made after the strike ended despite his part in breaking the strike. Jurgis has



found the light, like a man who finds religion in prison, and he plans to spread the word as fast and as far as he can.

Jurgis tries to get Marija to quit working as a prostitute, but she feels that she has no chance doing anything else without people learning of her private shame. For this reason, she chooses to remain, deciding this will be her life till she dies. It is a sad life Marija has lived and will continue to live, but circumstances made her feel she had no choice and continues to have no choice. This is what Jurgis is trying to change with Socialism.

The novel ends with the success of Socialism in local and national elections. Jurgis and his friends see this as an opportunity to make big changes and create the kind of country that Jurgis had thought he was coming to when he left Lithuania. It is a new start that gives people like Jurgis hope, the best most people could as for in the life that Jurgis, Marija, Ona, and the others were forced to live.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Jurgis want to learn more about Socialism? Why does Jurgis relate to this political party? What does Jurgis learn about Socialism? Why does this new information only make Jurgis more excited? What does Jurgis think of Socialism?

Discussion Question 2

What does Jurgis find different in Packingtown after the end of the strike? What things could continue to be changed for the better? How does Jurgis believe Socialism can help?

Discussion Question 3

Why is there such a shift in the votes for the Socialist party at the end of the novel? What does this suggest about the sentiments of the country? What does it mean for people like Jurgis?

Vocabulary

Possession, interests, encroachments, prepare, enormous, tribute, government, capitalism, commerce, branch, civilization, socialist, ruthlessness, packers, congratulating, acquaintance, public, considered, incarnation, insensate, marvelous, difference, literally, campaign, pitchfork, advertised, alderman, entered, industrial, distributed, associations, edition, armfuls, appeal, broadside, campaign, manifesto, addressed, district, sympathy, millionaire, invitation, adventure, perpetual, realm, commonplace, uninteresting, movement, terrified, perspiration, embarrassment, dimly, dismay, agony.



Characters

Jurgis Rudkus

Jurgis Rudkus is a young man in his twenties when the novel begins. Jurgis lived in the countryside of Lithuania when he fell in love with a young woman he saw at a fair. Jurgis jumps at the chance to marry this young girl, Ona, when her father dies and her stepmother agrees to the arrangement. Jurgis and his father travel to America with Ona's family where they hope to find their fortune in Chicago.

Jurgis is a strong man who believes that as long as he works hard, he can provide for his family in almost any circumstance. Whenever something bad happens to the family, Jurgis announces that he will just work harder to fix it. However, Jurgis soon learns that working hard is not always enough to help his family survive in the packing houses of Chicago.

Jurgis loses his job once because of an injury to his ankle. This leaves the family in a jam and causes Jurgis to have to take a job in the despised fertilizer factory. Despite the unpleasant smells and work in the fertilizer factory, Jurgis works as hard as he can to support his family. This proves to be impossible when Jurgis discovers that his wife has been seduced and abused by one of her bosses. Jurgis goes to defend his wife's honor and ends up in jail, leaving the family to lose their home and starve.

Jurgis loses it all, his wife and his son. Then, Jurgis continues to lose everything again and again until he finally finds friendship in the Socialist movement and a job that he can do without placing his life at risk.

Ona

Ona is a teenager the first time Jurgis sees her and falls in love with her innocence and beauty. Jurgis changes his entire life to be with Ona, deciding to move to America because Ona's brother believes it is the best way to save the family from the financial struggles his deceased father left them in. Ona is practically a child still, and she goes along with all this without complaint or input.

When the family arrives in America, Ona is left at home to help her stepmother care for her five children. Jurgis does not want Ona to have to work. However, after they buy a house and discover a whole host of hidden fees, Ona is forced to go to work. Everyone is pleased when Ona finds an easy job where she sews hams into their bags each day. Ona, however, is unhappy in the work because her immediate supervisor and most of her coworkers are women who have or still work as prostitutes, and they feel intimidated by a good girl like Ona.

After Jurgis and Ona have been married for a little more than a year, Ona is pregnant with their second child. During this time, Ona is seduced and abused by a boss at the



packinghouse where she works. Ona falls for this man's threats, afraid that if she does not do as he says that her entire family will be blacklisted and unable to make a living. When Jurgis learns about this, he attacks the boss and leaves the family alone to fend for themselves when he goes to jail. Ona becomes depressed and refuses to eat or get out of bed, causing her to go into premature labor. Ona dies after delivering a stillborn child.

Marija

Marija is Ona's cousin. Marija is a tough woman who is not afraid to tell people what she thinks. Marija comes to the stockyards of Chicago thinking that she can conquer the place and the people on her own. It takes Marija time to find a job, but finally finds one painting cans. However, Marija loses this job when she fights her supervisors when they short her paycheck several cans she painted. Marija learns that she should not have spoken up, but she felt so cheated that she cannot help it.

Marija goes on to get a job as a meat trimmer, cutting the meat from the bones of the cows in the packinghouses. However, this is a dangerous job that often leads to deep cuts that can cause death or dismemberment. Marija suffers several cuts, one that is bad enough to cause her to be out of work for weeks. This comes at a time when Jurgis is in jail and the other adults in the family have also lost their jobs, leaving the family starving and homeless.

After Jurgis abandons the family due to the death of both his wife and son, Marija finds herself responsible for five people on her own. After the death of one of Elzbieta's children, the family moves into the city and Marija gets a job as a prostitute. Marija makes a good amount of money, but a lot of it goes to pay expenses in the house. However, Marija makes enough to care for Elzbieta and her remaining three children. When Jurgis returns and tries to get Marija to leave her job, Marija refuses, convinced she will never be able to keep a respectable job again.

Elzbeita

Elzbeita is Ona's stepmother. Elzbeita was born to a wealthy family in Lithuania, but was one of many daughters. For this reason, Elzbeita married Ona's father rather than an aristocrat. Ona's father kept Elzbeita in a respectable way, but when he died, she found herself in deep debt. For this reason, Elzbeita agrees to her stepson's idea of moving to America where they believe they can make a fortune.

Elzbeita remains unemployed through the first year of her life in America because the rest of the adults in the family want her to be able to remain home with her five children. When Ona has her first child, Elzbeita becomes his primary caregiver. However, when Jurgis is injured and the family becomes desperate for money, Elzbeita gets a job. This job has her working with a machine that fills sausage casings with the cooked meat. Elzbeita dislikes this job and in time loses it when the sausage factory closes down for a lack of demand.



Elzbeita loses two children during her years in America. Elzbeita also sees her children forced to go to work at ages that are much too young, even in the time period in which the novel is set. However, she continues to survive, doing her best to keep her family alive.

Jonas

Jonas is Ona's brother. Jonas is the one who came up with the idea to move to America where they might find their fortunes. Jonas is one of the first to become disillusioned, however, as the family struggles first to find work and later to support one another. Not long after Jurgis injures his ankle, Jonas disappears. The family worries that he might have died in the packinghouse, but they cannot find anyone willing to admit this. For this reason, the family prefers to assume he only ran away as he had threatened to do many times before.

Antanas Rudkus

Antanas Rudkus is Jurgis's father. Antanas is an elderly man who suffered from a bad cough before moving to the country in Lithuania. When the family comes to America, Antanas is determined to get a job in order to contribute to the household. However, Antanas is older than the maximum age the packers usually like to hire. For this reason, Antanas has a hard time finding work and eventually has to give a third of his pay to a boss who helped him get work. The work Antanas gets is in a wet, chemical filled room that causes his cough to come back and for him to get sores on his feet that do not heal. Antanas dies not long after the family comes to America.

Baby Antanas

Baby Antanas is Jurgis's son with Ona. The baby has a hard childhood, suffering many illnesses when he is less than a year old. However, Antanas is an intelligent child who is speaking by the age of two and sharing the funny pages in the paper with his father. Unfortunately, Antanas dies not long after his mother. Antanas fell off the sidewalk in front of their boarding house and drowned in the deep puddles in the unpaved street caused by recent rain.

Stanislovas

Stanislovas is Elzbieta's eldest child. At the age of twelve, Stanislovas has a priest create a document attesting to the fact that Stanislovas is two years older than he is so that he can get a job. Stanislovas gets a job working the lard can filling machine at a packinghouse. Stanislovas neither loves nor hates his job, but during the winter he develops a deep fear of the cold when he sees a coworker lose his ears from the cold. For this reason, Jurgis must often beat the child to make him go to work. When Jurgis is in jail the first time, there is no one to make Stanislovas go to work and he loses his job.



Not long after the family becomes homeless, Stanilovas gets a new job bringing beer to some men in the packing houses. One night he is locked in the warehouse where the men work and is eaten alive by rats.

Connor

Connor is a boss at the packing house where Ona works. Connor has a share in a brothel in Chicago where he lives with his girlfriend who is also Ona's immediate supervisor. Connor takes a fancy to Ona and tells her that if she does not have an intimate relationship with him he will make sure she, her husband, and her entire family are blacklisted at the packinghouses. Ona gives in to Connor. When Jurgis learns about this, he beats up Connor and goes to jail for thirty days for it. More than a year later, during strikes in Packingtown, Jurgis will run into Connor and attack him again.

Mike Scully

Mike Scully is a politician in Packingtown. Scully owns many businesses in Packingtown, and this gives him a certain amount of power over the working man and the packers. Scully also runs an organization in Packingtown. It is well known that Scully is a good friend to have. Jurgis works for Scully when he becomes involved in a political scam in Packingtown, unaware that Scully is behind many of the scams and rules that caused his family to become homeless and his wife to die.



Symbols and Symbolism

Newspapers

Jurgis learns to read after joining the union. The newspaper becomes a source of fun for the whole family when Jurgis purchases and reads it to everyone, including his baby son Antanas.

Lard

The packing houses make lard from the remnants of the cows and pigs they kill. This is then put into cans and sold to the public. Stanislovas works the machine that fills the cans.

Trimming Knife

Marija uses a trimming knife in her job as a trimmer. These knives often become slick during a day's work. This is a dangerous situation that leads to many cuts. Marija becomes a victim of this kind of cut while Jurgis is in jail the first time.

Hundred Dollar Bill

Jurgis is given a hundred dollar bill by Freddie Jones, the son of one of the packers. When Jurgis tries to get the bill changed, it is stolen and Jurgis ends up back in jail for beating the thief.

House Deed

Jurgis and his family decide to buy a house. However, when their friend reads the deed, he sees the word rent in it a great deal. This frightens the family into believing they are not going to own the home at the end of the contract. They soon learn that this is not true. However, later they discover that there are many hidden fees in the deed that leave the family struggling financially while living in the house.

Streetcars

There are streetcars in Chicago that provide transportation to citizens for a nickel. Jurgis encourages Ona to ride the streetcars to the packing house because of the distance and the cold. But, she is too shy to ask for transfers, and the price becomes too much for their budget. Later, Jurgis finds himself caught up in the streetcar monopoly that



causes him to have to pay two fares to get from Packingtown to his job at a steel mill, forcing him to stay in a boarding house in Chicago during the week.

Alcohol

Jurgis discovers the joys of alcohol while having his lunch at the many saloons in Packingtown that offer a free lunch with the purchase of a drink. Jurgis likes his drinks and might have become an alcoholic if not for his love of Ona. After Ona's death, Jurgis again falls into the bottle, but he chooses to keep his promise to his wife.

Lard Cans

The lard cans are large, about fourteen pounds apiece. Marija's first job at the packing house is painting these cans for sale. Marija becomes so quick at it that she can paint several cans in less than a minute.

Killing Floor

When Jurgis gets his first job in a packing house, it is working on the killing floor. Jurgis's job is to clear the blood from the floor as others kill and drain the blood of cows moving through the room.

Pickle Room

Antanas works in the pickle room, a basement room where the meat that has been soaked in a chemical filled liquid are removed from the liquid and moved to other rooms. Antanas's job is to clear this liquid from the floor. The chemicals in the liquid causes sores in Antanas' feet that never heal. The moisture and cold in the room causes Antanas to begin coughing and eventually leads to his death.



Settings

Chicago

This novel is set chiefly in Chicago in the early 1900s. The city at this time is overflowing with working people looking for work. There are many factories in the city where men line up at the gates in search of work each morning. There are also slum neighborhoods as well as neighborhoods filled with wealthy, luxurious homes. The author explores the contrast between these neighborhoods when he takes Jurgis, who has been homeless for a few weeks, and allows him to visit the home of Mr. Jones, a packer.

Packingtown

Packingtown is a section of Chicago where the packing houses are located. It is in this part of the city that Jurgis and his family settle when they first arrive in Chicago in hopes of making their fortunes in the packing houses. Unfortunately, it is also here that the family is swindled into buying a house with many hidden fees. They end up losing the house when the adult members of the family lose their jobs for reasons beyond their control. Jurgis returns to this place several times in the story. He returns there once to work an election scheme, once to be a strikebreaker, and once to see the changes wrought in the area after the strike.



Themes and Motifs

Family

Jurgis comes to Chicago in the hopes of marrying the woman of his dreams and having a family with her. To this end, Jurgis finds himself the head of a family of twelve. It proves to be a difficult time in Chicago as Jurgis and his family had no clue what it would be like to live in a country where capitalism is alive and well, with the rich man cheating the poor man as often as possible.

For Jurgis, family is all that matters. Jurgis works to provide for Ona and stays away from alcohol to please Ona. Jurgis only wants for Ona to have everything she could desire. With Ona comes her family, so Jurgis takes them in as his own and never again thinks of them as anything but his. When Ona dies, Jurgis goes right out to find a job in order to help care for his family.

For a time, Jurgis realizes that life could be so much simpler without family. Jurgis lives on his own and adopts a criminal lifestyle. In the end, however, he comes back to his moral roots and searches out his family. Jurgis once again becomes the sole wage earner for his family, providing him with everything he can possibly gain. Jurgis is a good man who gives up the simplicity of single life for family, making family a theme of the novel.

Poverty

Jurgis and his family are poor in Lithuania, but they have enough to eat, a place to live, and they are happy. However, they desire to do better, so they decide to move to America where they have been told they could make lots of money. They do not realize that this higher wage is offset by a higher cost of living.

Jurgis and his family buy a house and are shocked by the hidden costs. They work hard, but they never seem to get ahead because each time they have a little money in the bank someone loses their job or someone is injured. Everything comes to a head one winter when Jurgis goes to jail. All of the adults lose their jobs for one reason or another. The family loses their house. They have so little money that they cannot buy food or provide a doctor for Ona when she goes into premature labor.

After Ona's death, Jurgis goes back to work and makes enough to pay room and board for the remaining members of the family. However, with the death of his son, Jurgis is so despondent that he runs away for a time. Jurgis eventually returns to the city, but worse is yet to come. Jurgis is injured and finds himself so desperate that he has to beg on the streets for food and lodging. Later, Jurgis again finds himself on the street during Chicago's harsh winter, leaving him forced to find warmth in political meetings and saloons. Jurgis feels poverty and desperation as often as he feels warmth and security. For this reason, poverty is a theme of the novel.

Socialism

At the end of the novel Jurgis is once again home homeless and moving from place to place to find warmth and food. One night Jurgis wanders into a political meeting in order to find a place to sit and warm up. During this meeting, Jurgis hears a man speaking about the same atrocities that destroyed Jurgis's family. These things inspire Jurgis to learn more about the political movement and eventually embrace it as his own.

Socialism is a political movement that proposes ways to eliminate the class differences and make society equal. At the end of the novel, Jurgis sees in this movement the same hope he wanted from the unions in Packingtown but failed to achieve. As Jurgis embraces the movement, it begins to spread throughout the country and eventually wins multiple major elections nationwide. It is a movement that could save people like Jurgis in the future, making socialism a theme of the novel.



Styles

Point of View

The novel is written in a third person point of view with an authorial voice. The novel is written with a focus on the main character, Jurgis Rudkus. However, the author never really enters Jurgis's mind. Instead, he tells the story as an outside observer.

The point of view of this novel allows the writer to give the reader information that they otherwise would not receive. This allows the author to report on the packing houses and other aspects of the story in a way that does not require an emotional response from the main character. For this reason, the point of view of this novel works with the plot.

Language and Meaning

The novel is written in the early 1900s with a foreign family as the main characters. This allows for many foreign words and phrases in the novel that are often explained either through text or the way in which the words or phrases are used. The language is sophisticated, reflecting the time period in which it is set, but not necessarily the main characters of the novel.

The language of this novel works with the plot because it is a sophisticated language that does not talk down to the reader, but it is simple enough that less educated readers can understand the basics of the plot. The novel includes many foreign words and phrases, as well as words that are associated with the packing houses of the setting. These words are all easily explained in the text. These words also lend some authenticity to the main characters and the setting.

Structure

The novel is divided into thirty-one chapters. The chapters differ in length, some quite short while others are exceedingly long. The novel is written in a linear time line with the exception of the first chapter which takes place several months after the true beginning of the novel. The novel is told mostly in a narrative in which the author tells the story to his readers. He also shares some of the atrocities of the packing houses of the time.

The plot contains one main plot and multiple subplots. The main plot follows Jurgis Rudkus as he tries to survive during the 1900s in Chicago. A subplot follows Jurgis's relationships with his wife and her family. Another subplot follows the atrocities of the packing houses during the time period. Another subplot discusses the shock and devastation of poverty. All the plots comes to a satisfying conclusion at the end of the novel.



Quotes

The occasion rested heavily upon Marija's broad shoulders—it was her task to see that all things went in due form, and after the best home traditions; and, flying wildly hither and thither, bowling every one out of the way, and scolding and exhorting all day with her tremendous voice, Marija was too eager to see that others conformed to the proprieties to consider them herself.

-- Narrator (Chapter 1 paragraph 1)

Importance: This quote describes the boisterous personality of Marija, an important character in the novel. This quote describes Marija as she celebrates at the wedding of Jurgis, the main character, and Ona.

It was not for himself that he suffered—what did a man who worked in Durham's fertilizer mill care about anything that the world might do to him!

-- Narrator (Chapter 16 paragraph 6)

Importance: This quote illustrates Jurgis's dedication to his wife and family and his desire to make the money they need no matter what it does to him.

Jurgis turned away, and then in a sudden rush the full realization of his triumph swept over him, and he gave a yell and a jump, and started off on a run.

-- Narrator (Chapter 3 paragraph 15)

Importance: This is Jurgis's reaction to receiving his first job in America, a job at a packing plant. This illustrates Jurgis's naivety as he begins his new life.

The marriage would have been at once, if they had had their way; but this would mean that they would have to do without any wedding feast, and when they suggested this they came into conflict with the old people.

-- Narrator (Chapter 6 paragraph 2)

Importance: This not only shows how the older people insist on keeping with the traditions of the old country, but also how much the younger people respect them. Jurgis and Ona have wanted to get married since before they left their homeland, but they agree to wait out of respect for their elders.

Over them, relentless and savage, there cracked the lash of want; the morning after the wedding it sought them as they slept, and drove them out before daybreak to work.

-- Narrator (Chapter 7 paragraph 3)

Importance: This quote describes how a desire for money and the things it can buy drives Jurgis and Ona, even the morning after their wedding.

During the early part of the winter the family had had money enough to live and a little over to pay their debts with; but when the earnings of Jurgis fell from nine or ten dollars



a week to five or six, there was no longer anything to spare.
-- Narrator (Chapter 10 paragraph 1)

Importance: This quote describes how Jurgis's pay changes with demand and how that impacts the family. Money is one thing the family desperately needs. Yet, no matter how hard the family works, they never seem to get ahead.

And yet, in spite of this, there would be hams found spoiled, some of them with an odor so bad that a man could hardly bear to be in the room with them. To pump into these the packers had a second and much stronger pickle which destroyed the odor—a process known to the workers as 'giving them thirty per cent.'
-- Narrator (Chapter 14 paragraph 2)

Importance: This quote describes some of the processes in the packing plant, specifically the use of spoiled meat in the canning process. This is part of what shocked and outraged people at the time the novel was written.

But a big man cannot stay drunk very long on three dollars. That was Sunday morning, and Monday night Jurgis came home, sober and sick, realizing that he had spent every cent the family owned, and had not bought a single instant's forgetfulness with it.
-- Narrator (Chapter 1 paragraph 20)

Importance: This is the guilt and regret that adds to Jurgis's grief the Monday after his wife's death. Jurgis spent the weekend drinking away what little money the family had.

He was fighting for his life; he gnashed his teeth together in his desperation. He had been a fool, a fool! He had wasted his life, he had wrecked himself, with his accursed weakness; and now he was done with it—he would tear it out of him, root and branch. There would be no more tear and no more tenderness; he had had enough of them—they had sold him into slavery!
-- Narrator (Chapter 22 paragraph 13)

Importance: This is Jurgis's reaction upon learning of the death of his son.

There were a million and a half of men in the country looking for work, a hundred thousand of them right in Chicago; and were the packers to let the union steward march into their places and bind them to a contract that would lose them several thousand dollars a day for a year? Not much!
-- Narrator (Chapter 26 paragraph 4)

Importance: This quote shows the reaction of the packing houses to the threat of strike.

He could no longer command a job when he wanted it; he could no longer steal with impunity—he must take his chances with the common herd.
-- Narrator (Chapter 27 paragraph 1)



Importance: Jurgis has just learned that he made a mistake during the strike. Now that it is over, he must once again go in search of a job like everyone else.

But he stuck by the family nevertheless, for they reminded him of his old happiness; and when things went wrong he could solace himself with a plunge into the Socialist movement.

-- Narrator (Chapter 31 paragraph 5)

Importance: At the end of the novel, Jurgis has found his family again and has decided to help support them because they remind him of his wife and child. This quote illustrates Jurgis's acceptance of the life he has been given.