

Out of This Furnace Study Guide

Out of This Furnace by Thomas Bell (novelist)

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Contents

Out of This Furnace Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Part 1, Chapters 1-5.....	4
Part 1, Chapters 6-10.....	7
Part 1, Chapters 11-15.....	10
Part 1, Chapters 16-20.....	13
Part 1, Chapters 21-22.....	15
Part 2, Chapters 1-5.....	17
Part 2, Chapters 6-10.....	19
Part 2, Chapters 11-14.....	21
Part 3, Chapter 1-6.....	23
Part 4, Chapter 1-5.....	27
Part 4, Chapter 6-10.....	30
Part 4, Chapter 11-15.....	33
Part 4, Chapter 16-18.....	35
Characters.....	37
Objects/Places.....	41
Themes.....	43
Style.....	45
Quotes.....	47
Topics for Discussion.....	53

Plot Summary

Out of This Furnace by Thomas Bell is the story of a Slovak family's immigration to America. The novel tells the story of one family and its trials and tribulations as they make their way from Hungary to America. The story of three generations of the Kracha family is given in the novel from the first immigrant in the family, George Kracha to the third generation represented by Dobie Dobrejcek. The reader follows the family as they make their way in America.

Out of This Furnace is written in novel form but it describes the life the immigrants faced when they came to America. It opens with George Kracha walking from his village in Hungary to board a ship. He spends his money for a party for a woman and arrives in New York with fifty cents in his pockets. He walks from New York to White Haven, Pennsylvania where his relatives work for the railroad. He begins his work career in America. He eventually follows his friends and relatives to work in the steel mills. The work is hard and the hours are long for subsistence wages. His wife takes in boarders, which is the only way workers can get ahead and accumulate savings. He opens his own business, and eventually loses everything.

The story continues with the next generation. George's daughter marries Mike, who works in the steel mills. She also takes in boarders. When Mike is killed in a steel mill accident, she has to make ends meet since there is nothing but \$75 in benefits from the company. Her children comprise the next generation with Dobie as the main character. Each generation has it a little easier than the previous, but the work in the mills is still long and the wages low. Technology makes each generation's life a little easier but the reader watches as each generation is a little more Americanized than the previous one.

The reader also sees how the Great Depression affects the workers and how they cope with it. Dobie survives by doing illegal electric wiring for people whose power was cut off for non-payment. Collective bargaining and the right to organize were a part of Section 7(a) of the NIRA, one of the depression era programs.

This interesting novel also tells the story of the labor movement from the point of view of the workers. Dobie is active in organizing the steel workers. The full violence of the early days of the labor movement is not evident in the book, but there are things like firings and reprisals from management. Dobie is working two or three days a week when newer workers are working full time.

Out of This Furnace is an interesting and delightful novel. Readers will find the book informative about the kind of life the workers led and how they survived.



Part 1, Chapters 1-5

Part 1, Chapters 1-5 Summary

Out of This Furnace by Thomas Bell is the story of a Slovak family's immigration to America. The novel tells the story of one family and its trials and tribulations as they make their way from Hungary to America. The story of three generations of the Kracha family is given in the novel from the first immigrant in the family, George Kracha to the third generation represented by Dobie Dobrejcek. The reader follows the family as they make their way in America.

"George Kracha came to America in the fall of 1881, by way of Budapest and Bremen. He left behind him in a Hungarian village a young wife, a sister and a widowed mother; it may be that he hoped he was likewise leaving behind the endless poverty and oppression which were the birthrights of a Slovak peasant in Franz Josef's empire. He was bound for the hard-coal country of northeastern Pennsylvania, where his brother-in-law had a job on a railroad section gang," (Part 1, Chapter 1, p. 3).

George's brother-in-law had sent him directions so he could find his way once he arrived in America. If he lost his way, he was to ask the police for directions. There were many stories about new immigrants who arrived in America and were robbed, beaten and killed and George was determined not to let that happen to him.

As George was boarding the ship in Bremen for the twelve day voyage to America, he met Zuska and her husband John Mihula. They were from a province near Zemplinska and were heading for Pittsburgh where Zuska's sister lives. George is quite taken with Zuska and arranges a party for her birthday. George gets drunk and takes some liberties with Zuska, who repels his advances. The party costs George most of his money for his trip to Pennsylvania and means that he has to walk from New York to Pennsylvania.

When he shipped docks, he waits at immigration for Zuska and Milhula. They want him to spend a night with them and Milhula's cousin who is coming to meet them, but George declines. He has Zuska's sister's address in Pittsburgh and says he will keep in touch with them. He does not tell them that he has no more money and has to walk to White Haven, Pennsylvania. They say their goodbyes and George leaves.

Since his fifty cents is not enough for a train ticket, he begins to walk and walks until it is dark. He spends the night sleeping in a haystack. He travels by day, asking directions and taking any rides that are offered. When he runs out of food, he begs for food from strangers. He finally arrives in a town and finds that it is White Haven. He asks for directions and then follows the railroad tracks until he comes to a shanty where his brother-in-law and sister are.



George tells them the story of his nine day walk from New York. He had to walk, he tells them, because he was robbed. The only one who ever learned the truth from George was Joe Dubik and that was at a later time. George tells him not to tell Francka the story of Zuska.

George soon learns that he is a father. His wife Elena has given birth to a son, named Djuro. A month later, in April, he learns that the boy has died of fever. The letters from his wife are written by a priest who soon begins to suggest that George send for his wife and mother. George cannot do so at the time. It takes him a year to repay Andrej the loan for his trip to America. He finally borrows some money from his sister and adds it to what he saves and sends it to Elena to pay for her trip.

She arrives in February. George returns from his job duties and finds Andrej waiting for him. He finds Elena sitting in his sister's kitchen. He is happy to see her but is surprised at how thin and pale she appears. She apparently has the goiter. Elena spends the night at the Sadler's since they have to fix a room for her and George. The next day they move furniture and fix a room for Elena and George. They have no pots and pans or anything else but George tells her not to worry. They will get everything they need in time.

Elena does not appear to be happy and George does not know why. She is not the same healthy and lively woman he left in Hungary. She becomes pregnant and they await the arrival of their child. At this time Joe decides to send for his girlfriend Dorta, who arrives around Thanksgiving. They marry three weeks later. The night of the wedding, Elena gives birth to a daughter, whom they named Mary.

Even though George helped build the railroad, his job is mostly concerned with maintaining the part that is already built. He farms during the summer to provide food for his family. The Kracha's move as the railroad company need them to move. They have a second daughter, Alice at Bear Creek and a third, Anna, at Plymouth.

Joe Dubik leaves the railroad and takes a job in the steel mills. George misses his friend, who urges him to come work in the steel mills. He also counsels George about his unhappy marriage. Elena is always tired and not feeling well. In the meantime, Andrej and Francka are planning to move to Homestead where Andrej will work in the steel mills until there are labor problems in Braddock and the mill closes due to a lockout. They eventually make the move since there is a union contract at Homestead, which is not the situation at the Braddock mill where Dubik works. George stays with the railroad at this time, planning to follow his brother-in-law to the steel mills as soon as he can. They make the move in September.

Part 1, Chapters 1-5 Analysis

The book opens with George Kracha immigrating to America and tells the story of his journey. He leaves Hungary with enough money for his trip and is aware of the stories about newly arriving immigrants being beaten, robbed and killed. He is determined not



to let that happen to him. What he is not prepared for is the young couple he meets on the ship and he spends his money on a birthday party for Zuska. This is his travel money to Pennsylvania. He does not tell them that he has no money and has to walk to Pennsylvania when they part in New York. This indicates his pride and stubbornness since he does not ask them for help. He also does not think of taking a job anywhere along the way to earn some money.

When George arrives in White Haven, he does not tell his family the truth about spending the money on a party and a woman. He tells them he was robbed. The only one who learns the truth is Joe Dubik who George shares a room with. They become the best of friends.

George sends for his wife Elena. He is distraught at how pale and thin she is and at the fact that she has goiter. He is determined to see her fattened up and happy. She becomes pregnant and they become the parents of daughter Mary. Daughters Alice and Anna follow as they move around and live in different camps, according to the needs of the railroad. Tired of all of the moving around, George and his family move to Homestead where George will work in the steel mills with his brother.



Part 1, Chapters 6-10

Part 1, Chapters 6-10 Summary

Francka meets George and his family at the train station in Homestead since Andrej is working. Elena and George comment on the smokiness of the air. The pollution comes from the mills, Francka explains as she leads them through the streets to her home. There is only one room. Francka says they do not need more than that since rents are so high. Andrej tells his boss about George and is told to talk to him again after he arrives, so George does not know if he has a job or not. He says he may move to another steel mill town.

Francka tells Elena that there will be another room available in their yard later that week. They decide to take the room for the time being, since accommodations are hard to find. Francka tells them where they can buy furniture. Andrej comes home the next morning and eats a big breakfast. He tells George that he has talked to his boss and that he will talk to George. When the foreman arrives, the three go to a saloon to talk and Andrej puts three dollars into the foreman's pocket. The foreman tells Andrej to bring George to work with him that night and he will see what he can do.

As soon as George receives his first pay, he and Andrej go to visit Dubik. They ride by ferry and walk. When they arrive at the small frame house, they find Dorta who has had a baby. They wake Dubik and the men sit down to talk over a bottle of whiskey. They earn more money than at the railroads but they work more hours in Braddock. The men and Dorta talk about the pros and cons of finding a house and taking in boarders, waiting till they can afford a house without boarders, moving to a farm and other possibilities. George says he had enough of farming in Hungary. George and Andrej leave for home around seven that evening.

Since there is a man, Mike Dobrejcak, from Dubik's Hungarian village arriving, Dorta rents a house the next day. By Christmas, she has three boarders along with Mike. Around Christmas, the area is destroyed by fire. George arrives with a little money he has saved, offering them what help he can. They do not need the money since they were able to save most of their clothes and furniture. They just need a place to live which they soon have since the steel company builds new houses on the site of the destroyed ones.

The following summer, Francka buys a house in Munhall Hollow, a place just south of Homestead. The house has three rooms and is a twenty minute walk from the mill. Francka has a son that they name Victor after they are living in their own house.

At this time, contract negotiations begin at the steel mill. Frick is a partner of Carnegie who owns the steel mill. He has broken the union at another plant and they assume he will try the same thing in Homestead. Searchlights and a fence are erected around the



mill during the negotiations which feed the rumors of impending trouble. There is talk of a strike. The men talk about the situation. George worries about not being paid.

Two days before the end of the current contract, Frick closes the mill. On July 6, Pinkerton guards arrive. The men find out when the powerhouse siren blasts and wake them that morning. The whistle stops blowing after the men filter out into the street. George returns to bed and awakes after the battle has begun. The people cannot see through the fence, but they can hear the gunfire. George cannot reach the mill so he looks for Andrej. There are rumors of dozens of men having been killed.

George finds Francka by her home and finds that Andrej went to see what the trouble was about and has not returned. When he does, he tells them that the fighting ended with the surrender of the Pinkerton guards. They are arrested. The next day the funerals begin for the dead. The union men are in control until Monday, when a General arrives with troops and arrests them. The men are ordered back to work on the company's terms in ten days. Very few accept the terms and are evicted from the company owned housing. In Pittsburgh at the end of the month, Frick is shot and wounded by an anarchist.

Eventually production resumes at the mill and Frick brags that the union has been broken. During this time, George secures a job at the mill in Braddock. Dorta and Joe move to a new brick house on River Street and it is two months before she finds George and Elena two rooms in the houses where the fire had been. Elena eventually rents two more rooms and rents them to boarders.

The work in the mills is hard and physically demanding. It is also dangerous work that results in accidents and injuries to the workers. The rhythm of life in all steel towns is the same with two twelve hour shifts a day, seven days a week. One week they work days, the next week nights. This means that they work twenty-four hours straight on the day of the turn. This leads to short-temper and accidents. Many of the men exist on hope—the hope for a better life.

Part 1, Chapters 6-10 Analysis

The Kachas arrive in Homestead. They stay with Francka and Andrej until their room is ready on the same yard where the Sadlars live. The living quarters are only one room and rents are expensive in Homestead so the Kachas decide to take the room with Francka. George meets with Andrej's boss and secures a job. Andrej has to slip the man three dollars before he is told to bring George to work with him that night. George is hired and when he receives his first pay, he and Andrej cross the river to visit Dubik. The three men renew their friendship and discuss their living and working situations.

Since Dubik has a man from his Hungarian village arrive, Dorta rents a house and takes in boarders. That summer, Francka buys a house and soon after, becomes pregnant after twelve years of marriage. Their son, Victor, is born in April. She has scrimped and



saved during their marriage to be able to buy a house. They later move again to a brick house on River Street.

That summer, the labor contract at the mill is being renegotiated. Frick is trying to break the union and brings in Pinkerton guards, as is common practice in the days when unions are fighting for recognition. The resulting violence leaves ten people dead and at the end of the month, Frick is shot in Pittsburgh. As a result of the labor problems in Homestead, George gets a job in Braddock and moves his family there.

Bell discusses what work in the steel mills is like at this time. The hours are long and the work dangerous. There are many injuries and accidents, especially on the days the men have to work twenty-four hours straight. Attempts to unionize or engage in union activities often result in violence. They live on the hope of a better life.



Part 1, Chapters 11-15

Part 1, Chapters 11-15 Summary

As George and Joe are walking to work, Joe tells George that his family is moving to Cherry Alley. It is a little more expensive but Joe says it is worth the money to get away from the cinder dump. While at work, George feels the earth shake and hears a deep boom. He and his co-workers see a cloud of smoke over H furnace, where Dubik works. George runs over to the area. Many men, including Joe Dubik, are injured by the explosion. He finds Dubik and takes him outside and carries him on his back to his home. George goes to find a doctor for him.

They take Joe to the station in a wagon and put him and the other injured men on a train to Pittsburgh where they will be tended to at the hospital. George tells Dorta that Elena will watch the kids while she is gone. Joe dies two days later.

"Officially, it was put down as an accident, impossible to foresee or prevent, its horror accentuated by a grim coincidence. In a larger sense it was the result of greed, and part of the education of the American steel industry. The steel companies were using ever larger percentages of the earthy Mesabi ores, which were cheaper to mine and handle than the massive rock ores but which demanded—as the ironmakers were learning—a variation in technique to prevent choking the furnaces," (Part 1, Chapter 11, p. 54).

Several weeks after Joe's funeral, George and Mike Dobrejczak are talking in Dorta's kitchen. George says he wants to leave the mill and is thinking of going into business. Dorta comments on how Mike and Joe always used to talk about leaving the steel mill. Dorta starts to talk about Joe and how he felt he had no life once he began working in the steel mills. George lets her talk. She says she does not need money and that she will continue to take in boarders. She finally stops talking and tells George to tell them about the business he wants to open.

George is thinking about buying the butcher business, which is being run by the butcher's widow with the work being done by two employees. George says that all he needs is someone to keep the books. He discusses his plans for the business. He will do his own slaughtering and sell products that others do not and he will do it cheaper so it will be affordable to more people. He says that going into business is the way to become rich in America. A month later, in October 1895, George buys the business and begins to prosper.

George likes working at his own business and he is successful. There are a lot of expenses he has to pay but every time he hears the mill whistle he is reminded of the fact that he does not have to go back there. The only different in their living arrangements is that Elena does not take in boarders anymore. They have new furniture. Elena had been sick with premature menopause when she stops renting rooms to boarders.



Francka and Andrej have another son which they name Andy. Francka and George's mother dies in Hungary and their sister Borka announces she is coming to America. Since Francka does not want Borka in her house, she will stay with Elena and George and will be able to help Elena around the house. Thirteen year old Mary reports that her mother is always crying and George urges Elena to see a doctor to find out what is wrong. George never discusses his business with her.

It is an election year and even though George likes the barroom discussions that take place, he has little interest in politics. He is not a citizen and cannot vote. Mike applies for citizenship as soon as he becomes of age. George is distrustful of rich and powerful men. George tells Mike his views.

"There are men in that mill who were born here, whose fathers and grandfathers were born here. They know more English than you'll ever learn. And what good is their vote doing them? They have to work in the mill and eat dirt like any greenhorn. Let me tell you, I've been in America long enough to learn that it's run just like any other country. In Europe your emperors and dukes own everything and over here it's your millionaires and your trusts. They run the country to suit themselves, and don't think they're going to let you interfere every few years with your miserable vote. Get that into your head. Your vote means nothing," (Part 1, Chapter 14, pp. 66-67).

George also invests in some property in the area where it is rumored the railroad is going to have new lines running through. He does not brag about it but he uses almost all of his spare cash hoping to profit from it in the future. George's sister Borka arrives before Christmas. She takes over all of the household duties from Elena.

One day a woman enters his butcher shop and places her order. George recognizes her as Zuska Mihula, the woman from the ship when he came to America. She tells him that her husband died the previous year and that she moved to Braddock. She has two young children and came to Braddock because her sister lives in the town. He fills her order and does not charge her.

Part 1, Chapters 11-15 Analysis

An accident at the steel mill results in the death of Joe Dubik. The death of his friend makes George rethink working in the mills. Several weeks later, George tells Dorta that he is thinking of buying the butcher's business. The job at the steel mills barely allows a family to survive. The way to become rich in America is to go into business. George does this and buys the butcher business in October, 1895. He began to prosper with his business, George Kacha, Meat Market.

Francka is not enthused about George's business. He tells her he is doing well and she tells him that he can lose it all. She is skeptical about his business and does not want to talk about it that much. She also appears to be a little jealous because her husband is still working in the mill.



George has no interest in politics. He never applies for citizenship and cannot vote. Mike applies for citizenship and is interested in the elections. He wants George to support Bryan but George, who puts a poster in his store window, removes it. He does not want any trouble from the mill. George does not tell Mike but he has been advised to stay out of politics from another shopkeeper. George tells Mike to keep quiet about his political views and that his vote, when he votes, will mean nothing. He is still going to have to work at the mill.

Zuska appears in his butcher shop and George is happy to see her again. Her husband has died the previous year and she is living in Braddock with her sister. They flirt a little with each other.



Part 1, Chapters 16-20

Part 1, Chapters 16-20 Summary

George has always been technically faithful to Elena. The opportunity for infidelity has never really arisen and there is not much that one can do in a small town that is not known to the people. There is also a scarcity of women. Dorta begins receiving offers of marriage three months after Joe's death. She finally marries Steve Radilla, a widower.

The reappearance of Zuska has George rethinking his philosophy of extra-marital affairs. He had thought it was safer to drink rather than fool around. Now he is beginning to think about Zuska. He sees her in his shop and on the street. They are both fifteen years older than at their first meeting. After Dorta's wedding he tells Zuska that she will probably be the next to marry and she replies that she is too old to think of such things. Zuska's sister tells George that she thinks Zuska will marry one of her boarders.

When Zuska comes into the shop again, she tells him that she met Borka and his daughters at a picnic. They talk of his family and then Zuska tells him that Borka said that when he first came to America, he had to walk from New York because he had lost all of his money. He tells her that he lost it by sleeping in a haystack. She says that if he had come back, her husband's family would have helped him.

Zuska moves into her own room that fall. She works as a dressmaker. Borka tells George that rumor has it that Zuska is thrown out by her brother-in-law when she refuses to marry one of the boarders. George teases Zuska about it the next time she appears in his shop. She tells him that one of the boarders came home drunk and tried to get into bed with her. After a month, George asks for and receives an invitation to visit her at her room. George later regrets the situation and sits at Wold's Bar drinking, saying he will not show up at Zuska's. However, he does go there.

The next month Zuska moves into larger quarters. It has been difficult visiting Zuska with her two boys sleeping in the room. He is giving Zuska money to help her pay her bills. He only visits her late at night, trying to keep their relationship a secret but their relationship is known by Thanksgiving. It is Francka who brings the situation out into the open in George's home, in front of Elena. George tells Francka that he is getting from Zuska what Elena could never give him, which makes Elena cry. He tells Francka to mind her own business. He finally slaps her and then leaves the house. He spends the evening drinking at the Turner Hall social club.

He tells Zuska what happened when he sees her at the end of the week. She tells him they can stop visiting if it is causing him trouble but he feels that the worst is already over. During the week, George spends as much time as possible away from his home, even though there is no change in the way Elena acts. He is sleeping on the couch and one night Elena appears and tells him to come to bed where he will sleep better. He finally does



His affair with Zuska hurts his business. Many respectable housewives will not buy from him. He now has competition from a Hungarian Jewish butcher named Spetz whose store is on the same street. At the same time, nothing comes of the rumored railroad expansion and he still holds the property on Halket Avenue. The bank wants five hundred dollars on the principle of his mortgage. George manages to negotiate with the bank so he does not lose the property. He puts the lots up for sale and that night tells Zuska his problems.

Elena becomes ill again. They send for the doctor who examines Elena and says he will return in the morning. They ask if they should send for a priest and he tells them that they should. George stays with Elena who apologizes for not being the kind of wife he wanted. She tells him she never recovered from the birth of their son. George tells her that they will talk about it when she is better. Elena dies before the priest arrives and George tells the girls that their mother is dead. They bury Elena in the Irish cemetery in an elaborate funeral.

Francka attends the funeral. When she, Andrej and the boys are preparing to depart, she makes a comment about Zuska having the decency to stay away. "The dead was in her grave and the living were picking up where they had left off," (Part 1, Chapter 20, p. 100).

Part 1, Chapters 16-20 Analysis

In this chapter the reader watches the relationship between George and Zuska develops. Zuska moves out of her sister's house and into her own rented room. Eventually, George talks her into inviting him to visit. After Zuska leaves the shop, George thinks about the situation and wishes he had not forced the invitation. He spends several hours in the bar deciding he will not go, but goes to visit Zuska in the end.

Their relationship becomes known since Zuska has moved into larger quarters. Borka does not say anything, but Francka comes to George's house and confronts him in front of Elena. They argue back and forth and George finally tells his sister to mind her own business. When she will not quit, he slaps her and leaves the house.

George's business suffers due to his affair with Zuska. Many of the respectable housewives will not deal with him. Since many of them have boarders, the effect on his business is significant. He also has problems with the bank over the lots he bought in anticipation of the railroad expansion.



Part 1, Chapters 21-22

Part 1, Chapters 21-22 Summary

After the funeral, George has problems coming to terms with what Elena said about not being the kind of wife he wanted. He misses her but not in the way a man misses his wife. He tries to forget her words. He wishes now that he had treated Elena better and had not had the affair with Zuska. He even goes to talk to the priest about the situation and feels better afterward. He waits a month before beginning to visit Zuska again.

His business is not improving financially and he uses all of his money for Elena's funeral. He is now in debt and the situation is not looking good. He discusses the situation with Zuska and she suggests he ask some of the local businessmen if they want to buy the lots and talk to the bank. She then tells him that she is pregnant and they decide they will get married.

On Monday, the United States declares war against Spain. On Saturday, Zuska and George are married. That summer, George loses everything. When he is drunk he beats Zuska and is jailed. She is gone when he is released. He loses his lots, his home and his business.

Daughter Mary meets George when he is released from jail. They go to Dorta's house. Her younger sisters are staying with Francka. Andrej, Mike and the boarders are at Dorta's. The men eat and leave for work. Dorta tells Mike what she knows about who bought his belongings. The day is the third anniversary of Joe's death. George tells Dorta that he does not want to stay in Braddock. He does not know where he will go.

Dorta tells him that Mary has a job at the end of summer and does not want to leave Braddock. She will be paid to watch a young boy while his parents are gone for the summer. Dorta asks him if it is true that Zuska was taking his money before she left him and he says yes. He would bring money home from the shop and it would be missing in the morning. Dorta tells him that in spite of all that has happened, he would still take Zuska back if she would have him.

George obtains a job in the mill at Munhall after about a month and rents a room. He sent Francka money for the support of his two younger daughters. It takes him a while to get over the loss of his shop and even longer to get over the loss of Zuska.

Part 1, Chapters 21-22 Analysis

After Elena's funeral, George tells Zuska of his financial problems and finds out she is pregnant. They marry a week later. Several months later, George's world falls apart. He beats his wife and is put in jail. He loses his lots, his home and belongings and his business because of his bad business investment in the lots. Zuska has been stealing from him and is gone when he is released from jail.

George returns to work in the steel mills, but this time at Munhall. He is basically starting over again with nothing, but three daughters to support.

Part 2, Chapters 1-5

Part 2, Chapters 1-5 Summary

Part 2 is the story of Mike Dobrejcak. Mike is twenty-five years old in 1900 and has been in America for eleven years. He has worked in the steel mill for ten of those years and is still earning fourteen cents an hour. Mike has gone to school to learn to read and write English and learned some American history in the process. The population of Braddock has doubled since Mike arrived. Immigrants other than Slavs have arrived to work in the mills. There is still a housing shortage and rents are high. There is racial tension between the different ethnic groups in Braddock. The first generation of immigrants, like Kracha, stayed out of politics. They kept their mouths shut. They were just glad to have jobs.

Mike's younger brother, Joe, comes to Braddock in 1901. He leaves his wife in Hungary. He boards at Dorta's and obtains a job at the mill. Mike is not yet married, in spite of Dorta's telling him it is time for him to find a wife. He tells Dorta he has not found the right girl yet. The truth of the matter is that he is attracted to Mary Kracha. By the summer of 1901, Mary is promoted working for the Dexters. She goes with them when they summer away from Braddock. Her sister Alice also works at the Dexter's house.

Carnegie sells his steel plants to J.P. Morgan and U.S. Steel Corporation is formed. The new corporation quickly serves notice that they will not tolerate unions.

When the Dexters return to Braddock in September, Mary goes to see Dorta on a day when Mike is home. Mike finds her in the kitchen talking to Dorta and comments on how good she looks. They talk about Mary's summer at the ocean. Mary has to leave and Dorta tells Mike to walk her home to the Dexter's. He changes clothes and walks with her. They make plans to meet on Thursday night since that is the next time that they are both off from work.

Mike and Mary meet again on Thursday and again on the following Thursday. They go for walks. They spend their time off together for the next few weeks. Mary travels to Munhall on Sundays to see her sister, who is still living with Francka. Borka has married one of Francka's boarders and is pregnant.

Mike is introduced to the Dexter family. Mary shows him around the house. It is the first house he has been in that has electricity, a telephone, and a bathroom. Mike asks Mary if she thinks they could ever have a house like the Dexter's have. They decide they will not but Mary says she will do everything she can to help Mike. They are married in the spring of 1902. The following March, she gives birth to a boy, John Joseph.

At the end of the month, there is another accident at the steel mill. Nine men are killed and five are burned badly. Mike is at home when the explosion occurs and is told about



it by their landlord. Mary is worried when Mike leaves for work and tells him to be careful.

Mike and Mary move in May. They have two rooms now. The town around them is growing and developing further, but in November, the mill announces wage cuts. In addition, Mike is working fewer hours because of a slowdown. It is a hard winter for them, and in spring, they find that Mary is pregnant. The slowdown continues with Mike and the others working part-time when Mary gives birth to a daughter, Pauline, in November. This is the month in which Mike votes for the first time.

Things change in the spring. The wage cut and hours are restored. Alice elopes and goes to Cleveland and the youngest sister Anna goes to work for the Dexters. Mike and Mary are in debt from the long winter. Mike is upset because of their financial situation. All those years and he does not feel like he has accomplished anything. He wants a better life for them than they have. Mary suggests they rent more rooms and take in boarders but Mike will not hear of it. However, they do not have a choice. They can barely live on his salary and by the end of summer they have rented extra rooms and have six boarders.

Part 2, Chapters 1-5 Analysis

The town of Braddock has grown in the eleven years that Mike has been there. As there are now immigrants from different nations, there are also racial tensions in the town. Bell points out the difference between the first and second generations of immigrants. The first generation, like George Kracha, just want jobs. They are not interested in politics and keep their views to themselves. The second generation, like Mike, is interested in politics.

Mike meets Mary Kracha in Dorta's kitchen after Mary returns from her summer at the shore. He is quite taken by Mary and, at Dorta's suggestion, walks her home. The two begin their courtship. They marry in the spring of 1902 and the following March, they become the parents of a son, and later a daughter.

Mike votes for the first time in the same month when his daughter is born. He is proud of his and the Slavs' position in America because the barroom owner, Joe Perovsky is elected as a councilman. He feels it is quite an accomplishment for a Slav who has only been in the country for twenty years.

When the economic slowdown ends and Mike's wages and hours are restored, he realizes that they can barely live on his salary. The only way they can get ahead is to take in boarders. He finally consents and by the end of summer, they have six boarders.



Part 2, Chapters 6-10

Part 2, Chapters 6-10 Summary

Dorta gives Mary some pointers about being a boarding missus. She basically tells Mary to let the boarders know the rules and to stick to the rules. Anyone who does not like it can move someplace else. Dorta tells Mary not to be afraid to yell if she has to and not to think that she has to treat the boarders as if they are family. Mike agrees with Dorta and tells her that he will end her business if he thinks it is too much for her.

Taking in boarders helps them financially because they are out of debt by spring and are able to begin to save some money. They are able to buy new clothes, items for the house and they can go out for entertainment once in a while. All of their boarders take part in their Christmas dinner.

George comes to visit them in spring and says that the railroad is finally building the extension on Halket Avenue. The people who own property there sold it for a nice profit, including Joe Perovsky. George and Mike talk about the building that is taking place in the town. George is a little critical of the furniture that Mike and Mary have bought, saying they could have found a better use for the money. They talk of their working situations. George tells Mike that there is a slowdown beginning and the men hope it is only the normal summer slowdown.

It is not the normal summer slowdown and eventually the mills begin putting workers on part time. At first Mike welcomes the fewer hours, but then begins to worry that he will be switched to another job. He tells his foreman that if he is moved to one of the labor gangs that he will quit. By the end of the year, Mike is working three days a week and the workers are being paid with scrip. Eventually, the steel mill cuts wages and resumes paying in cash.

It is an election year and the steel mill is strongly indicating how their workers should vote. Some men are fired for not following the company directions and supporting the candidates that the company wants. Mike follows the company directives and votes a Republican ticket.

Mary has another son as the slowdown begins to end. Wages are raised for the unskilled workers. Some men, including Anna's beau, Barry Baraj, enlist in the military when they lose their jobs.

Life slowly returns to normal for Mary and Mike. Mary does not want to become pregnant again, which results in some difficult situations for them. They attend church every Sunday with the children. Mike feels that he is treated as an equal in church.

Mary becomes pregnant again and tells Mike in January. The baby is due in August or September. Mike is concerned with Mary's health but she tells him not to worry. In July, while ironing, Mary collapses. The doctor tells them that she is in no danger of



miscarrying but must stay in bed for a few days. He also tells her to rest during the day when she feels like she needs to.

"Mary stared up at him. With six boarders, three children and a husband to look after, meals to cook, clothes to wash, her hours were from four-thirty in the morning to nine at night, seven days a week. And he was telling her to sit down whenever she felt like it, to rest in bed for a while every day!" (Part 2, Chapter 10, p. 173).

The doctor tells Mike to bring in a girl to help Mary. He writes a prescription for Mary and leaves. Mary wants Mike to get some sleep before his shift at the mill begins. They discuss ending the boarding business. They have some money saved that will help them out. Their baby, Agnes, is born in September. They sell their extra furniture and household items and move into three rooms on Washington. They are happy to be alone but miss the extra money from the boarders. They have to use their savings.

Part 2, Chapters 6-10 Analysis

Mike is opposed to Mary taking in boarders but it is the extra work by Mary that allows them to pay off their debts and begin saving. They are able to rise above subsistence and buy some items and clothing that they want. George is somewhat critical of the furniture that they spend their money on, saying they should have spent the money more wisely.

There is another economic slowdown, the worst in many years. Mike, worried about being shifted to work on one of the labor gangs, tells his foreman he will quit if they try to shift him.

The election year has the company interfering with the worker's rights to vote for the candidate of their choice. Some men are fired for not following the company's voting directions. Mike votes a Republican ticket, according to the orders of the company.

During Mary's fourth pregnancy, a fainting spell brings an end to their boarders. They move into three rooms on Washington, selling their extra furniture and household items. Without the extra money from the boarders, they have nothing but Mike's subsistence level wages. They begin to draw down their savings.



Part 2, Chapters 11-14

Part 2, Chapters 11-14 Summary

Mike leaves work one day, telling Bodnar he will meet him later for a drink. He wants to get home to see Mary and the kids. They sit down to a good dinner and Mike pays attention to the children. After dinner, the older children go out to play and Mike and Mary talk about their finances and the things that they need. They are in debt. They have a book with the local merchants and Mary tries to give them something every payday. Mike is still not working full time. Mike's pay does not cover all of their expenses. They still have money in the bank but their savings is diminishing. Mary suggests that they move to a larger house so she can take in boarders. Mike will not allow it. He says that is not why he brought the subject up.

It is time for mid-term elections and the steel mill company is again indicating how its workers should vote. On election day, they round up workers and remind them where their wages came from. They also provide them with sample ballots. Mike is one of the men in the group they round up. He is determined to vote for Eugene Debs, the Socialist, no matter what the company wants. Afterwards, Mike waits to be fired for his vote, but he receives his pay as usual without a discharge notice.

At this time, George fractures his arm and lives off his accident compensation. He has a boarding missus who pampers him. He appears in Braddock when Anna's second baby is christened. He goes to visit Mary. They look at a newspaper article that announces the ordination of Joseph Mihulu of Johnstown. Joseph is Zuska's oldest son.

George tells them that Andrej is still working but his two boys have been laid off. It is Johnnie's eleventh birthday and Mary is baking a cake. They have the celebration while George is there. Mary invites George to stay the night since Mike has to go to work. The next day Anna's baby will be christened.

George goes out drinking. When he returns to Mary's, a man comes and tells him that Mike is dead. George has to awaken Mary and tell her the bad news.

Part 2, Chapters 11-14 Analysis

Mike and Mary are having a difficult time financially. Mike is still working part time hours and his pay does not cover their expenses. They are in debt and rapidly depleting the little savings they have remaining. Mike feels that he is discriminated against because he is Hungarian. He feels that the good jobs and promotions go to the Irish and English.

During the elections the company again indicates how its workers should vote. Mike casts his vote for Eugene Debs, the Socialist and then waits to be fired. He receives his pay as usual without a discharge notice. Mike does not like the inequality and the living conditions or the injustices that he sees.



George comes to visit for the christening of Anna's second child. He stays with Mary and Mike. Mike goes to work that night and George goes out drinking. When he returns, a man appears and tells him that Mike is dead. George tells Mary that bad news.



Part 3, Chapter 1-6

Part 3, Chapter 1-6 Summary

Mike's body is brought to Mary's house. He is buried on a wintry day. After the last guest departs, Mary feeds the kids and puts them to bed. She receives thirteen hundred dollars from the company under the accident compensation plan. The year is 1914. Mary moves as quickly as possible, before the end of the month. It hurts her too much to be in quarters she shared with Mike. Mary moves to two rooms around the corner from her sister Anna.

"She was at this time a few months past thirty. She had four children, the oldest eleven, the youngest not yet two. She had something over a thousand dollars in the bank, a knowledge of housework and dressmaking, and her two hands. Thus equipped she took up where Mike had left off," (Part 3, Chapter 1, p. 210). She cannot go out of her home to work for long because of the children so she takes in whatever work she can find. She has a regular two day a week job cleaning and doing laundry for a dentist and on those days Anna watches the younger children. Johnny takes a wagon and goes out looking for coal and wood. He secures a job selling papers the second summer after the death of his father.

Mary talks the situation over with Joe and Dorta. Dorta tells her to do the best she can for herself and the children. Joe suggests that she take in boarders. Dorta says that things have changed due to the war. There are not that many people coming to America now and the ones that do board want fancy surroundings. Dorta suggests that Mary should remarry. Joe suggests a widower named Paul Czudek. Mary says she is not ready yet.

Anna's husband John obtains a job as head bartender and they move to a town twenty miles away. Mary thinks of moving to Homestead and having her father live with her but George objects to the plan. By spring Mary is desperate and goes to see George, who is not given the chance to object. She rents a small house in Munhall Hollow, not far from Francka.

George arrives a few days after Mary moves. They do not discuss the amount of the rent but when he is paid, he gives her ten dollars. Mary says it is not enough. George goes out drinking. Francka tells her to take whatever he gives her and when he is drunk, to go through his pockets and take what she needs. Mary says she cannot do anything like that. She says that George is just looking for an excuse to leave. She finally tells him that she needs at least thirty dollars a month and he agrees to pay the amount.

Johnny, who still attends school with Pauline, secures a job delivering wallpaper. When the school year ends, he goes to work in a glass factory. This is the largest employer of child labor in the area and more or less trains the children for future work in the steel mills. At the end of summer, Johnny returns to school and Mary misses the income he



added to the household. Prices have risen due to the war. George is still resentful of living with her and will not give her more money. He resents having to rise earlier, to walk further to work, to have dinner later and to be so far from the bars.

On Christmas Eve, Mary waits for George to arrive home with his board. She becomes concerned when he is late. A neighbor stops by to say that he has been arrested. She puts the children to bed and she and Johnny go to Homestead. They have no money and find that George also does not have any money, but they talk to the officials and have him released from jail. Prohibition is now in effect. They reach home at midnight and George has not said one word on the walk. He goes right to bed when they arrive home.

They have no Christmas presents so Mary sends Johnny to buy some fruit, nuts and candy and put them in stockings for the children, along with some nickels. They write a note from Santa Claus saying there are no presents due to the war but he will try to bring some for Greek Christmas.

Johnny is having problems in school and wants to work instead. Mary cannot swear under oath that he is sixteen in order for him to obtain working papers. He manages to obtain them on his own. The next day he obtains a job at the mill and they move to North Braddock, near Alice.

They still struggled to make ends meet, even with Johnny's money. Shortly after New Year's, Mary comes down with Spanish influenza. She refuses to get the proper rest even though she is told to rest by the doctor. She is eventually diagnosed with consumption and the doctor wants her to go to a sanitarium. Mary says she cannot leave her children. The doctor tells her that Pauline also has consumption and must accompany Mary to the sanitarium. It will take a month to make the arrangements and he will try to have the younger children included. The doctor says that if she is smart she will stay there for the full time, probably a year.

They are accepted by the sanitarium in April. They have to make various arrangements and buy certain items before they can leave. Johnny goes to live with Alice and takes part of the furniture with him. Before leaving, she visits Mike's grave.

There is the possibility of a strike in the plant that Johnny works in and he writes his mother about it. The A.F.L. is targeting the steel industry for organization and the steel mills respond by paying time-and-a-half for work over eight hours per day. There is no reduction in working hours. Union organizers appear in Braddock and are soon arrested. There is talk of a strike and the company makes preparations.

The day of the strike Johnny walks to the mill with his uncle Frank and stands around outside. Frank is Alice's husband. State troopers arrive on the scene. Johnny stays away from the mill after the first morning. He spends the time making trips on his bicycle and goes to visit his Aunt Anna in Donora. He tells her he is afraid to go to work at the mill while the strike is in progress and that Frank feels the same way. Johnny asks Anna



if she thinks her husband could find him a job in Donora. He finds the boy a job working in construction.

Johnny likes working outside. When he goes to collect his paycheck, he finds a deduction of two dollars for purchases, which he questions. One of the other workers tells him that they all have that deduction. It is graft and they tell him that he does not have to come back on Monday if he does not like the deduction. He remains at the job until the end of November when the weather becomes bad. He returns to Braddock and goes back to work at the steel mill, in spite of the strike. The strike ends in January and the workers receive a ten percent increase in wages. Frank does not return to the steel mill, having secured a job in the railroad shops at Pitcairn.

At Christmas, Johnny goes to visit Mary. He tells them that he now goes by the name of Dobie. After the visit, Mary catches a cold and her condition turns for the worst over the next few months and she is moved to a semiprivate room. Agnes and Mikie visit her every day. They have been in the sanitarium for more than a year and she no longer asks about when she can return home. She thinks about dying and wonders what will happen to her children. She tells them stories about their father since they hardly knew him and one day dies in her sleep.

Part 3, Chapter 1-6 Analysis

Mary has to find a way to support herself and the children after Mike's death. She moves to a different place around the corner from her sister. She finds housework and laundry to earn some money. She secures a regular two day a week job with a dentist and his wife and Anna watches the younger children while she is away. Her income does not cover their expenses but it helps her stretch out the money in the bank for as long as she can.

Mary eventually moves to Munhall Hollow and has George come to live with her. George does not want to pay as much board as Mary wants him to and they quarrel. He finally agrees to Mary's request of thirty dollars a month.

Mary comes down with the flu and then is diagnosed with consumption. She also finds out that Pauline has consumption. The doctor wants her to go to a sanitarium to recover and makes arrangements to include the younger children.

Labor problems occur as the A.F.L. targets the steel industry for organization. Johnny and his Uncle Frank stay away from the mill during the strike and Johnny finds a job in construction in Donora, where his Aunt Anna lives. Since union organization usually results in violent confrontations, neither man wants to go near the steel mills during the strike. Johnny goes to Donora and works in construction until November when he returns to the mill. The strike ends in January.

After a visit from Johnny at Christmas, Mary's condition turns for the worst. Johnny announces that he goes by the name of Dobie, which is what the men in the plant call

him. Mary spends time with the younger children telling them of their father, who they hardly knew. She dies one day in her sleep.



Part 4, Chapter 1-5

Part 4, Chapter 1-5 Summary

Dobie continues to work in the steel mills. Mikie is working the mills now. Dobie is planning on moving to Detroit. Mikie says he would like to come with but Dobie tells him to stay where he is until he learns the trade. He has three years remaining in his apprenticeship, then he can go where he wants.

When Mary dies, Dobie and Anna receive the insurance money. There is a discussion over who will take in the two younger children. Nobody wants them. Anna finally takes Agnes and Dobie takes Mikie with him at Alice's house. Dobie has completed his apprenticeship that year and announces that he is going to Detroit, since he cannot find any better jobs in the area.

Dobie spends five years working in Detroit. He obtains his first job at the Chrysler plant and then moves to work in other plants. "Detroit was flooding the world with cars, Detroit was booming, Detroit was full of young men away from home for the first time. Dobie enjoyed himself. He made good money and he spent it almost as fast as he made it," (Part 4, Chapter 1, p. 263).

At Dobie's last job in Detroit, the men notice a shortage in their checks due to a change in rates. They decide to have a work stoppage if the situation is not corrected. If they do not protest, their next pay might be less. They are thrown out of the plant that night. After a week, Dobie departs for Pittsburgh where he finds a job in an electric shop. This is the beginning of the Great Depression.

Economic conditions in the country continue to worsen even though many people try to paint a rosier picture. Dobie's company cuts wages and by May, Dobie is only working two days a week. The hotel in East Pittsburgh where Dobie lives is owned by Joe Perovsky. He was the bartender who won the office of councilman in Braddock, until his downfall during the 1919 steel strike. Perovsky also has a speakeasy and pretty much let the people do as they want, as long as they pay the rent. His business is suffering from the Depression. He eventually goes back to work in the steel mills.

Dobie, who is two weeks behind in his rent, tells Joe he will also have to leave. He does not make enough since he is only working two days a week. He will stay if Perovsky will let him run a tab until he is working again. If not, he will go to his uncle's in Braddock. Perovsky tells him he can stay.

Many of the mills are closed as the economy worsens. Factories everywhere are laying off. His aunt and uncle, Alice and Frank are evicted and their furniture sold at auction. The rest of his family is not doing much better than he is. In Donoro, his Aunt Anna is doing housework since her husband is only working two days a week. Agnes works in a



chain store for a pittance. Dobie is supporting himself by making illegal electrical hookups for people who have had their utilities cut off.

Agnes receives her inheritance from her mother and marries George Hornyak. Her maid of honor is a girl named Julie who captivates Dobie. On a visit, he tells Julie the story of his grandfather who is living with him at Perovsky's now and waiting to receive his pension. He asks Julie about getting married in June. His father will live with them and they will have his pension to help them financially. He gives her the gold signet ring he received from his mother before she entered the sanitarium.

During the bank holiday, called by the President, many of the banks do not reopen. Agnes has her insurance money in the local bank which is being liquidated. Agnes does not know if she will receive any of her money.

With the passage of NIRA, Section 7(A) called for collective bargaining and the election of union representatives. Since many of the company bosses perform the functions of labor organizers, Dobie, and many others, refuse to vote in the labor elections. He does not want any part of company unions. Legitimate unions organizers eventually show up in Braddock and within a week have five hundred signed cards for membership. The company union is called the E.R.P.

"It was almost, but not quite, funny. As a labor union the E.R.P. was a joke but the company wasn't going to trouble and expense to provide laughs for anyone. Its purpose clearly was to circumvent the law and to hamstring genuine organization by splitting the men, supplying an approved refuge for the timid and the servile, isolating the recalcitrant," (Part 4, Chapter 5, p. 292).

Dobie and others feel that the purpose of company unions is to prevent the real union from organizing the workers and giving them legitimate representation. Dobie talks other workers into joining the legitimate union. Julie is not happy about the time he is spending on unions activities but he promises her that it is only for a while. He is elected secretary and Julie supports him by saying that he is the best man for the position. His election is mentioned by his foreman at the mill, even though union membership is supposed to be secret.

Part 4, Chapter 1-5 Analysis

After the deaths of Mary and Pauline, the family squabbles over the insurance money and who will take in the younger children. Anna finally takes Agnes and Mikie goes to live with Dobie at Alice's house. When Dobie completes his apprenticeship, he moves to Detroit and works in the auto industry. He makes good money and spends it, enjoying the life he has until they increase the deductions from the worker's wages and they refuse to work. He is thrown out of the factory and goes to Pittsburgh, obtaining work in the electric shop where he worked as a boy. This is the beginning of the Great Depression and he and others have no idea of what is coming.



The Depression brings changes for the family. Dobie stays on at Joe Perovsky's rooming house in East Pittsburgh, running a tab because he cannot afford to pay. Alice and her husband are evicted and Anna's husband is reduced to working two day weeks while Anna does housework wherever she can find it. Agnes works at a chain store and when she receives her inheritance from her mother, she marries George Hornyak. At the wedding, Dobie meets her maid-of-honor, Julie, and falls in love.

Dobie has George living with him at Perovsky's rooming house. He straightens out the pension problems with the company and asks Julie to marry him. The old man will live with them and they will have his pension to help them out.

The Depression brings with it the NIRA and section 7(A) which calls for the election of union representatives and collective bargaining. The steel mill sets up its bosses in the form of labor organizers and forms company unions. Dobie refuses to vote or take part in the company unions. When legitimate unions organizers appear in Braddock, Dobie and others joined. He becomes very active in union activities giving speeches and encouraging other workers to join. His election to the position of secretary is mentioned by his foreman at work.

At this time most unions are secretive, even though they are legal. There is always the chance of reprisals from employers in terms of firing and blacklisting.



Part 4, Chapter 6-10

Part 4, Chapter 6-10 Summary

Dobie arrives home one day to find a letter from Agnes. She says she plans to marry in December and wants them to come to the wedding. Her previous fiance, George, pulled out two months before the wedding. This man, Martin is a widower. Dobie is skeptical about the marriage, but Julie says it may work out. He has a steady job. Dobie says that Agnes is of age and they cannot stop her from marrying Martin if this is what she wants to do.

The union is still keeping Dobie busy. At the end of the year, many workers want the unions to seek recognition. There are some warnings from the company regarding seeking union recognition. The union men are working fewer hours than the company men. In February there is an incident in Pittsburgh where some striking lodges are expelled from the union. Dobie is very upset about the incident and wants to know how long the union thinks that their members are going to put up with the discrimination they have in the mill. They are paying fees and the union is doing nothing about the situation.

Finally, there is a meeting of the rank-and-file delegates from the different lodges. They develop a plan to present to the union where they all seek recognition at once. If they are refused recognition, they plan to strike. The union pretty much leaves them to handle the situation on their own. They write letters indicating who the collective bargaining committees are for the various mills. Most are ignored and the company refuses to meet with them.

Management finally agrees to meet with the bargaining units. Dobie is on the unit for his mill. The meeting begins with Flack, the Superintendent finding out who works in which section of the mill. He then asks for proof that they are the representatives of the workers and wants the membership list of union members. Flack says the company has to know how many men they represent and who they are. Their company has a policy of negotiating with any unit the men want, but they have to know exactly who the unit represents. They also do not have the authority to negotiate a contract for the company. The union has to deal with the City Office. Dobie's group leaves the office.

That evening Dobie tells Julie what happened at the meeting. She asks if there will be a strike and he says he does not know. They need experienced people to help with a strike and they need funds for strike relief. There are rumors that the company is preparing for the strike by buying arms, hiring guards and strikebreakers. They are questioning workers about whether or not they will be loyal to the company during a strike. Union leader Tighe tries to head off the strike by saying they are not yet ready.

While they are sitting in a bar, a radio newscast announces that there will be no steel industry strike and that there has been a vote to accept the proposal of a special Labor Board. Dobie feels relieved to hear the news. Back at the union office, the



representative tells them that everyone is against them, the company, the union, the government and the A.F.L. Many workers across the country become more cynical about unions.

When he arrives home, he finds that George is going to visit Dorta. George tells Dobie that he should go with him since she was like a mother to his father. Julie will go with them. As they walk through the town, George points out where various shops had once been. At Dorta's, George and Dorta tell Julie and Dobie how life used to be when they were young. They talk about the relatives and Julie tells Dorta that Agnes is pregnant. When talking about the situation with the union, Dorta tells him that his father was in favor of unions.

As economic conditions improve, Dobie works more hours and by spring, he and Julie pay off their furniture. They go back into debt by buying a washing machine. While walking home, they meet people that they know and catch up on the latest news and gossip. Julie says she could make most of their clothes if she had a sewing machine, but Dobie says their next item will be a refrigerator. They begin to talk about the things that they would like, including a house. Dobie says that they will have all of those things one day.

They arrive home to find a lot of people around their home. It seems that George collapsed and was found on the steps. He is lying on the couch now and says he does not want a doctor. After the neighbors leave, he tells them that he was walking in the door when he felt like he was hit on the head. He has apparently suffered a stroke since his left side is partially paralyzed. He is much better the next day even though he is stiff. The stroke does not recur.

Part 4, Chapter 6-10 Analysis

Agnes is engaged to be married in December and invites Dobie, Julie and George to come to Braddock for the wedding. She is now engaged to a widower named Martin, since her first fiance, George, ran out on her two months before the wedding.

Having George Kracha living with them presents no problems for Julie and Dobie. They both get along well with him. He is old and goes to bed early and keeps himself occupied during the day. His pension helps them out financially.

Dobie becomes more involved in the labor movement. He is against the company unions and helps to enlist members for the real union. He is elected secretary of the lodge and is one of the representatives to management. He learns how things work. When they meet with management, a Mr. Frick, he wants a membership list of the union members so the company knows who the group represents. At this time union activities usually result in reprisals from the company so the lists are secret.

When the representatives of the groups from the different companies meet, they send a petition to the national saying they all want recognition or they will strike. At another meeting, the union gets them to accept a special Labor Board. Many workers across the



nation who have high hopes feel that they have been sold out and begin to change their feelings toward unions. Dobie is relieved that there is no strike.

Dobie and Julie talk about the things they want and cannot afford, as they walk home after buying a washing machine. They both have their dreams and Dobie tells Julie they will get everything they want one day. When they arrive home they find that George has had a stroke. He is stubborn and does not want a doctor. His condition is improved the next day and he is walking, even though he is stiff.



Part 4, Chapter 11-15

Part 4, Chapter 11-15 Summary

All of the steel towns experience a drop in union membership. Dobie has been put on two and three day weeks and has not told Julie, but he cannot keep it from her much longer. Dobie is still involved in trying to organize and gain recognition for the steelworkers. When they plan a new campaign, Tighe has their charters revoked and asks for police protection of the Amalgamated headquarters. They appeal to the A.F.L. Executive Council but are not supported.

Dobie is discussing the situation with some of his co-workers. "Sure, and look what happened to him. And Moore in Weirton. Fired as soon as the NRA was killed. And compared to us they're big shots, at least people have heard about them. The point is, we can't afford to wait. There's nothing to hold the company back now from doing anything it likes. We can't expect any protection from the union or the Government. The union will be lucky if it don't have to go underground. And I need my job," (Part 4, Chapter 11, p. 343).

The men feel that they have to go ahead with the union organization attempts. They still feel that they can win an election even though many of the workers have stopped paying dues. Dobie feels that they can take over the E.R.P.'s Pittsburgh district if they get enough men to support them and he feels that the support is there. They all need to work together and to stick to labor issues, like wages and benefits.

The next week they talk to the other men, Burke and Hagerty and tell him of their plans to run for election as Employee Representatives. They are all elected. They decide to ask for a twenty percent wage increase, paid vacations, the end to food box debts and representation of the U.S. Steel board. Flack throws them out of his office but they do not stop in their role of representing the workers. They continue to have meetings to handle the worker grievances and requests but the company basically ignores them.

At this time John L. Lewis forms the Committee for Industrial Organization. This is a committee within the A.F.L. that is dedicated to organizing industrial unions. The C.I.O. is immediately popular with workers across the country.

Dobie is at Anna's, engaged in a discussion with a man named Steve from Uniontown. They are talking about politics. He tells them how they defeated some big business interests by actively campaigning against candidates who represented business against workers in any way. After the discussion, Julie, Dobie and George are driven to the train station for their trip home.

In the middle of the night they are awakened by a thumping sound. They find George on the floor in his room apparently suffering another stroke. They bring the doctor in and notify the family, but George dies the next afternoon. In the next few days the family



arrives for the funeral. Mikie comes from New York and Dobie goes to meet him at the train station. They talk during the drive to the house. Mikie has a good steady job that pays more than his brother receives and there are no layoffs. He says he has forgotten how dirty Braddock is.

The house is filled with family and friends who are there for George's funeral. They are all talking and visiting as Julie keeps serving them food while they await the arrival of the priest for the funeral. George is buried next to Pauline. By late afternoon all of the visitors have departed. Mikie and Dobie go out to buy food for dinner and they talk as they are walking. Mikie asks Dobie if he feels his job is threatened by automation and Dobie says no because the machines still break down and need to be repaired. Mikie says he could never live in Braddock again.

They continue their discussion during dinner, with Julie taking part. Mike talks about his life in New York. Dobie says he would like to visit some day. Mikie takes pictures of them before he leaves to catch the train back to New York. A few days later, Dobie learns that Julie is pregnant. They have to watch their spending now because they do not have George's pension check to help them out.

Part 4, Chapter 11-15 Analysis

Dobie is in the same position as many other workers involved in union activities. He is experiencing problems with the mill in that he is only working two or three days a week while other newer workers are working full time. Reprisals against workers involved in union activities are not uncommon at this time.

The steelworkers attempts to gain recognition are not going well. Tighe revokes the charters of the groups trying to mount a new campaign for recognition. They appeal to the A.F.L. Executive Council but do not receive support. At this time in the labor movement, most of the organization is for craft unions. The steelworkers are an industrial group and there is not much support for organizing them. This is what eventually causes John L. Lewis to form the C.I.O. After this, there is renewed interest in unions.

When George dies, the family gathers at Dobie and Julie's house. Mikie comes from New York. He tells Dobie that he could never again live in Braddock and hints that Dobie should move to a better place. Dobie says he does not think they will ever leave the area. After George's funeral, Dobie learns that Julie is pregnant.



Part 4, Chapter 16-18

Part 4, Chapter 16-18 Summary

The C.I.O. becomes active in organizing the steelworkers by taking over Amalgamated. They have specialists in the area and turn them all loose on the steel industry. They pass resolutions for the publicity value. They flood the City Office with protests and strain the structure of the E.R.P. Dobie likes being around their men and hearing their stories. He is also impressed by the different ethnicities of the men and the fact that they do not play the role of members of a particular ethnic group. They are not afraid to speak or to be overheard.

The company is cited for promoting a company union and Dobie is traveling to Pittsburgh several times a week to talk to investigators and lawyers from the Labor Board. He and Hagerty will be witnesses. When Dobie requests time off to go to Washington where he is to testify, he is refused. If Dobie does not report for work, he can be fired. Dobie reports the incident to the union office who tells him not to worry.

Dobie goes home, packs his bags and says goodbye to Julie. He meets the other witnesses in Pittsburgh. He thinks of Julie on the train ride and arrives in Washington the next day. He meets with John Lewis before going to the Labor Board hearings. The hearings are not as exciting as he thought they would be. He learns from Julie that there are long stories in the Pittsburgh papers regarding the hearings. Dobie feels that the lawyers are far removed from the actual life in the mill. The S.W.O.C. men takes the group sightseeing and out for entertainment. During the whole time, Dobie wonders if he will have a job when he returns to Braddock. He is the last witness to appear and returns home on Christmas Eve.

Julie is with her family in Donora for Christmas and he is supposed to join her. On his way to Donora, he has to stop by the union office and has to pick up his pay. The union office tells him he should not have any problems picking his pay and that he will know if he is fired or not when he opens his pay envelope. At the pay office, his check is for the regular amount and he stops to talk to some of the men on his way out. He tells them of his meeting with Lewis. They talk about Hagerty's testimony of being asked to be a company spy. Dobie says he does not know anything about it and they will have to wait to talk to him. Nobody has heard any rumors about Dobie being fired and they tell him that the fact that he received his regular pay indicates that he has not been fired.

Flack walks in and asks where Hagerty is and Dobie says he does not know. Flack says that he wants to talk with both Hagerty and Dobie. He accuses Dobie of making him look bad in Washington. Dobie says he was under oath and only testified to the truth. Their discussion becomes heated and the other men separate them. Afterwards, Dobie asks Flack straight out if he has been fired. Flack tells him no one will be fired for activities outside of work as long as he is around. Dobie is to report for work as usual on



Monday morning. They agree to forget the incident and Dobie leaves to catch his train to spend the holidays with his wife.

In January, Dobie has to return to Washington. He does not have to testify again and returns to Braddock. While they are awaiting the decision by the Labor Board, the steel industry signs a contract with the S.W.O.C. The union has won its battle against the steel industry and the E.R.P. representative resigns from the E.R.P. "The fifty-year struggle to free the steel towns was nearly over," (Part 4, Chapter 18, p. 406).

There are still plenty of wrongs in the world. There is the problem of the business cycle fluctuations and the resulting lack of work. The union cannot solve the economic problems. There is also the problem of technological unemployment. The new mills uses newer technology. They need fewer men and require different skills. Many workers lose their jobs as a result of technology. There is still the discrimination denoted by the used of the word "Hunky". This is the result of ignorance. The qualities that he admires in the C.I.O. men are that they act like Americans, even though Dobie does not know to call it that.

Dobie thinks it is not where you are born or where your father comes from. It is how you think. He returns upstairs to a sleeping Julie.

Part 4, Chapter 16-18 Analysis

The C.I.O. forms a committee to organize the steelworkers and sends their professionals in. Dobie likes to be around the C.I.O. men and to hear their stories. He is very impressed by them. They do not conform to the behavior expected of any ethnic group. They represent equality to him.

There is an investigation of the company unions in the steel industry. Dobie has to travel to Pittsburgh several times a week to meet with the lawyers and investigators. He is subpoenaed and has to travel to Washington as a witness in the hearings. The company refuses to give him time off and he is threatened with the loss of his job. He attends the hearings and finds that he still has his job when he returns. The company signs a contract with S.W.O.C. before the Labor Board decision is rendered.

Dobie thinks about what the union victory means. There are still many things wrong in the world. There are economic fluctuations that cause work losses, technological unemployment, and pollution caused by the steel mills. There is still a lot of discrimination against foreigners and Hungarians. Dobie wonders what kind of world it is to bring children into, but figures they will have to take their chances, just like he did.



Characters

George Kracha

George Kracha is born in a small village in Hungary. He decides to immigrate to America at the age of twenty-one in order to find a better life and escape the poverty and oppression he suffers under the regime of Emperor Franz Josef. George is naive and falls for a married woman on the boat and spends his money on a party for her so he arrives in America with fifty cents in his pocket and walks to his sister's in Pennsylvania, where he rooms with Joe Dubik. When his wife arrives, he moves into quarters with her and they move around as the railroad company needs them to. They have three daughters: Mary, Alice and Anna.

George begins his own business after the death of Joe. He buys a butcher shop and becomes successful until he loses it all. When his wife dies, he marries Zuska. One night he beats her and is arrested. When he is released from jail, the bank has foreclosed on the lots he owned, his house and furniture and belongings are gone, along with Zuska. Then he returns to work in the steel mills, where he remains until he retires. He eventually moves in with his grandson Dobie and his wife Julie and his pension helps them make ends meet financially. He dies of a stroke.

John Joseph Dobrejczak

John Joseph Dobrejczak is the son of Mary Kracha and Mike Dobrejczak. He is born in 1903. He begins to work delivering wallpaper so he can help his widowed mother. He eventually obtains a job in the steel mill. When labor problems begin, he moves to Donoro and stays with his Aunt Anna, working in construction. At the end of the construction season, he returns to Braddock and works in the mill, in spite of the strike. After his mother's death, he moves to Detroit. After five years, he returns to Pennsylvania, this time to the Pittsburgh area where he works in an electric shop. He eventually returns to Braddock to work in the steel mills and begins to go by the name of Dobie. He marries Julie, who is a friend of his sister Agnes.

Dobie, who was always upset by the unauthorized deductions from pay and the tactics of big business, becomes active in the union movement during the Depression years. He works to organize the Braddock steel workers. The company has him on part time hours, while newer men are working full time, but he and Julie survive because they have George living with them and he has his pension check. After the formation of the C.I.O., Dobie is called as a witness in the investigation of the steel mills and their company unions. He is told that if he does not report for work, he will be fired, even though he has been served with a subpoena to testify. As it turns out, he does not get fired for his court appearance and the company signs a contract with the union.



Elena Kracha

Elena Kracha is George's wife. He leaves her in Hungary when he comes to America and sends for her a year later. In that time their son is born and dies. After she arrives in America, she becomes pregnant and gives birth to a daughter, Mary, and then Alice and Anna. Elena is sickly and spends much of her time in bed. She dies soon after George begins his affair with Zuska.

Mary Kracha

Mary Kracha is the daughter of George and Elena. She is born at the White Haven camp. Mary begins to work for a wealthy family at the age of fifteen and stays there until she marries Mike Dobrejcak and has a son, John Joseph in 1903 and then a daughter named Pauline. There are two more children, Mikie and Agnes. Mary supports the children after the death of her husband until she is diagnosed with consumption and has to go to a sanitarium. She dies in the sanitarium after a little more than a year.

Zuska

Zuska is a woman that George meets on the docks at Bremen when he is on his way to America. She is married to John Mihula and they are also on their way to America to her sister in Pittsburgh. One day she walks into George's butcher shop in Braddock, where she moves after the death of her husband. She has two sons. She and George begin an affair. She is pregnant when Elena dies and a week later she marries George. A few months later she leaves him and Braddock after he beats her.

Joe Dubik

Joe Dubik is a Rusnak or a Greek Catholic who is from Tvarosc in Saria. He works at the White Haven camp and is the first person that George sees when he arrives. Joe becomes George's roommate at the camp and one of his friends and confidants. Joe is twenty-one years old when he meets George and has a girlfriend, Dorta, in Hungary whom he finally sends for and marries. Joe eventually leaves to work in the steel mills. He and Dorta have a child while they are living in Braddock. Joe is killed in an accident at the steel mill in 1895.

Mike Dobrejcak

Mike Dobrejcak is a man from Dubik's village in Hungary. He arrives and stays at the house rented by Dorta. He leaves for America before he is called for military service. He spends three weeks walking to Bremen and works in the First Class kitchen on the crossing. He is paid ten dollars when he reaches America. Mike goes to school to learn



to read and write English. He marries Mary Kracha in 1902 and they have four children together. Mike is killed in an accident at the mill.

Mikie Dobrejcak

Mikie is the third child born to Mary and Mike Dobrejcak. Mikie lives in the sanitarium with his mother and sisters and returns to Braddock after his mother's death. He obtains a job at the steel mill and after completing his apprenticeship, he moves to New York. He returns to Braddock for George's funeral and tells Dobie that he could never again live in Braddock.

Tighe

Tighe is the president of the A.F.L.'s Amalgamated Association and is involved in union organization. He is not that helpful to the steel workers who want their unions to be recognized. The steel workers are more proactive in their organization attempts than Tighe and Tighe basically withdraws his support when they try to act on their own; he withdraws their charters.

Alice Kracha

Alice Kracha is the second born daughter of George and Elena. She is born at the Bear Creek camp. She marries and remains in the Braddock area. Dobie and his brother Mikie live with Alice after their mother's death.

Anna Kracha

Anna Kracha is the third born daughter of George and Elena. She is born at the Plymouth camp. She marries and remains in the Braddock area. Mary's daughter Agnes lives with Anna after Mary's death.

Andrej Sedlar

Andrej Sedlar is the brother-in-law of George. He is married to George's sister Francka. They immigrate to America before George. Andrej works at the coal mining camp in White Haven, Pennsylvania.

Francka Sedlar

Francka Sedlar is the wife of Andrej and the sister of George. After the Sedlar's move to the Homestead area, she eventually buys a house in Munhall Hollow and becomes pregnant. She has a boy named Victor and then a boy named Andy.



Dorta

Dorta is the girlfriend that Joe Dubik leaves behind in Hungary. He finally sends for her and marries her. She and Dubik move to Braddock when Joe takes a job in a steel mill. They have a child. After Joe's death, she remarries. Her second husband is Steve Radilla.

Joe Dobrejczak

Joe Dobrejczak is the younger brother of Mike Dobrejczak. He arrives in Braddock in 1901, leaving his wife behind in Hungary. He obtains a job at the mill and boards with Dorta.

Pauline Dobrejczak

Pauline Dobrejczak is the second child of Mary and Mike Dobrejczak. Pauline dies of consumption in the same sanitarium that her mother dies in.

Agnes Dobrejczak

Agnes is the fourth child born to Mary and Mike. She marries Martin and remains in the Braddock area.

Victor Sedlar

Victor Sedlar is the son born to Andrej and Francka, after twelve years of marriage.

Andy Sedlar

Andy Sedlar is the second son of Andrej and Francka.

Steve Radilla

Steve Radilla is a widower who marries Dorta after Joe dies.



Objects/Places

Hungary

Hungary is the European country that George Kracha immigrates from in 1881.

New York

New York is where the boat docks when George travels to America.

White Haven, Pennsylvania

White Haven is the town George is headed for upon arrival in America. It is where his sister Francka and her husband Andrej Sedlar live.

Homestead, Pennsylvania

Homestead is the location of the steel mills and is where the Sedlers and Kachas move.

Braddock, Pennsylvania

Braddock is a steel mill town located across the river from Homestead. It is where Joe and Dorta Dubiik move to.

The Cinder Block

The cinder block is an area of Braddock where there is a fire which destroys all of the houses. The company rebuilds the houses and the area where the fire was is always referred to as the cinder block.

East Pittsburgh

East Pittsburgh is the location of Joe Perovsky's rooming house and speakeasy.

Detroit

Dobie spends five years working in the auto industry in Detroit, Michigan.



Pittsburgh

Pittsburgh is where the steel mill's City Office is located. It is also where Dobie travels to meet the investigators and lawyers from the Labor Board.

Washington D.C.

Washington is where the hearings are held to investigate the company unions fostered by the steel mills.



Themes

Desire for a Better Life

The desire for a better life is one of the recurring themes of the novel. All of the immigrants leave their home countries to come to America, hoping to find jobs and a better way of life. George Kracha leaves his wife behind in his small Hungarian village to immigrate to America. When he arrives in New York without money, he walks to White Haven, Pennsylvania where his sister lives. Her husband works for the railroad and George obtains a job there. He leaves Hungary because of the poverty and oppression, as he tells Mike Dubrejcek later in the book. Everything is owned and run by the emperors and dukes with the population subject to them.

The desire for a better life continues in America. He eventually decides that the only way for a man to get ahead is to go into business and he buys a butcher business. However, he is not wise in the ways of business. His business begins to suffer when he openly has an affair with Zuska and the local housewives will no longer buy from him. He buys some lots because he is told he will profit when the railroad expanded. He does not understand the way the mortgage papers read and he ends up losing everything.

George's grandson Dobie and his wife Julie also want a better life. They have been born and raised in the Braddock area. They discuss their dreams one day, talking about the things they want. Dobie tells Julie that they will have a better life. Every time they get out of debt, they buy something else and go back into debt. It will take them time to acquire the items that they want. A better life is a dream of everyone.

The Hard Life

Even though many of the immigrants in the book come to America for the hope of a better life, they have a very hard life once they arrive in America. Those who find work in the steel mills work twelve hour shifts seven days a week for subsistence wages. The work is also dangerous and many men lose their lives in steel mill accidents.

The only way that a family can get ahead is to take in boarders. This means that in addition to a woman taking care of her young children, she also has to do the cooking, cleaning and laundry for the boarders. The rent provided by the boarders is the only way that a family can accumulate any savings and hope to acquire things that they need. It is the only way that a family can escape being in debt. The income earned by the wife is needed to support the family.

Working conditions in the mills do not improve until the days of the labor movement. When Dorta's husband is killed in the steel mill accident, she receives \$75 from the company. Many women have to remarry to survive if their husbands die.



Standing Up For Beliefs

Standing up for beliefs is what Dobie exemplifies. He, like his father Mike, does not like many of the things that he sees around him. He does not like the way he and other workers are treated by employers. The deductions in his pay when he works constructions during the steel workers' strike is an example of this, just as the deduction for food boxes at the steel mill is also.

When Dobie's father Mike becomes interested in politics and voting, George explains the views of the older generation to him. In the old country, the emperors and dukes own and run everything. In America it is the wealthy people and the trusts that run everything. It does not pay to go against the company when it comes to voting. George and the old timers do not take part in any of these activities. Mike votes for Eugene Debs in spite of what George tells him and then waits for repercussions from the company. He stands up for what he believes in.

His son Dobie's involvement in the labor movement exemplifies the same thing. Dobie really believes that things do not have to be the way that they are and that they can be changed. He really believes that unions can result in workers being treated better and having better lives. He risks being fired when he helps organize the workers. He ends up working two or three day weeks when newer workers work full time. Dobie puts up with the hardships because of what he believes in.

Style

Point of View

The story is told from the third person point of view. This third person knows the characters and what they are thinking and feeling. He is the one telling the story of the novel and he is obviously the author of the book. The author is telling the story of life in a Pennsylvania steel town, the town that he grew up in. He is allowing the reader learn of the hardships faced by the immigrants who worked in the steel industry.

Even though the story is fictional, it still describes the living and working conditions of the workers and how they survived the Great Depression. Bell shows what the people had to do in order to survive when work at the mill paid subsistence wages. The story also tells the story of the early days of the labor movement and the attempts to organize the workers from the workers' point of view.

The reader watches the attitudes of each succeeding generation change as the family becomes more Americanized. George and the older generation would not think of speaking their views to the mill management. Dobie and his committees do not hesitate to do what they think they have to do to obtain better working conditions, even if it costs them their jobs.

Setting

There are several settings for the action of the novel as the different characters move around. The steel mill towns of Pennsylvania, mostly Braddock, are the main settings for the action of the novel. This is the town where most of the main characters live. If they do not live and work in Braddock, they live and work in the area around Braddock.

Dobie spends five years living and working in Detroit, so this is also a setting for some of the action of the novel. Dobie works at different jobs and makes good money while he is in Detroit. When he refuses to work until a workplace wrong is rectified, he is fired. He then goes to East Pittsburgh to work in the electric factory. He is living there during the Great Depression until he returns to work in the Braddock steel mills.

Some of the action of the novel is set in Washington D.C. where Dobie goes to testify at the Labor Board hearings. There is a little sightseeing and nightclubbing, but the action is focused on the Labor Board hearings.

New York is also the setting for the arrival of the immigrants. It is where George first arrives in America; he then walks to his sister's in White Haven, Pennsylvania. This latter area is where he lives and works with the railroad for his first few years in America. At the end of the novel, Mikie is living in New York.



Language and Meaning

The book is written in clear and simple English. Even though the main characters are from Hungary, there is little use of foreign terms or broken English. There are a lot of quotes in the books as the characters engage in dialogue but it is easy to understand and fast to read without the reader being slowed down with broken English. There is just enough so the reader has the idea of how the main characters speak. There are a few foreign words in the book but the author explains their meaning so the reader is not left confused by their use.

The author also explains some of the terms used in the steel mills and how steel is made, to give the reader an idea of what working conditions were like in the mills. The descriptions are clear, so the reader always knows what the author is talking about. The author is also very good at describing the hardship of life in the steel mill towns and what it was like for the families that lived there. There are many descriptions of the pollution in the town and how it develops.

The reader will likely appreciate the writing style of Thomas Bell. The book is well written and easy to read. The reader is never bored by his style or his story. Avoiding the use of accented English most of the time makes the book much more enjoyable to read.

Structure

The book is the story of an immigrant family that began with George Kracha. The book is divided into four parts, each being devoted to a different character, even though there is some overlap between the parts as the others family members and friends carry over from part to part. There is one part devoted to each of the following family members: George Kracha, Mike Dobrejcek who is a friend of the family, Mary who is George's daughter and marries Mike, and Dobie, who is the son of Mary and Mike.

Each part of the book has its own chapter numbering, which is a little unusual. This normally would not be noticed unless one is keeping track of the chapters. There is no Table of Contents or Preface in the book. There are quite a few characters that appear during the course of the book. Some of them only appear in certain sections and then do not reappear. For the most part, the characters are easy to keep track of.

The structure works well for the kind of story Bell is telling. The structure illustrates the continuity of the family.



Quotes

"Kracha's story of his walk from New York was a nine days' wonder. The first time he told it he had Francka watching him, listening to every word, and he was shrewd enough to keep it simple. When he came out of Castle Garden his money was in his pocket; when he reached the ferry house and wanted to pay for his ticket it was gone. Kracha spread his hands. There it was. He had given the problem a lot of thinking without getting anywhere, his manner implied, and now he was prepared to hear their speculations," (Part 1, Chapter 3, p. 11).

"Her poor health, or America, had changed her; Kracha never could decide. He had left her a lively, healthy girl, cheerful as the day was long; now she seldom smiled and went about her housework listlessly. She never complained except of tiredness; when Kracha asked her, sometimes gently, sometimes not, what was wrong she invariably replied, 'Nothing.' And that was all he could get out of her. As a wife she was meekly dutiful. Once abed, Kracha demanded little more than consciousness from a woman, but even that little he was unable to arouse in Elena. At his gentlest she yelped more often than she sighed. For a while, he put himself out to humor her, buying her things in White Haven, praising her cooking; to such attentions she responded satisfactorily yet never with enough impetus to carry her over into bed. Kracha consequently felt swindled, then baffled, then angry," (Part 1, Chapter 4, p. 18).

"By the time he rose again the historic battle on the riverfront was several hours old. He breakfasted and then hurried to the upper end of the mill. Not far from the mill's general office building and nearly in line with the open end of Munhall Hollow, a roadway went down between the ten-inch mill and the boiler house to a dock at the foot of the pumping station where excursion boats docked in summer. Here, Kracha was told, two bargeloads of Pinkertons had tried to land and take possession of the mill. They were still there, effectively kept from landing by the union men barricaded on shore, and unable to leave because their tugboat had gone back to Pittsburgh," (Chapter 9, p. 41).

"Hope sustained him, as it sustained them all; hope and the human tendency to feel that, dreadful though one's circumstances might be at the moment, there were depths of misfortune still unplumbed beneath one, there were people much worse off; in fact, what with a steady job in the blast furnaces, a cozy home on the cinder dump, a friend like Dubik here and a dollar to slap down on Wold's bar of a Saturday night, one was as well-favored a man as could be found in the First Ward. And there was always hope, the hope of saving enough money to go back in triumph to the old country, of buying a farm back in the hills, of going into business for one's self," (Part 1, Chapter 10, pp. 47-48).

"'Not because of what happened,' Kracha went on. 'Anyhow, not only because of that. I'm no more afraid now than I've ever been. God knows there is always danger; a man never knows going in if he'll come out on his own two feet. But what good does it do to worry? When your time comes to go, you go; it's up to God,'" (Part 1, Chapter 12, p. 55).



"The only thing he said which made sense was that Bryan was for the workingmen and McKinley for the rich. Mike was, of course, for Bryan, so passionately that Kracha felt sorry for him. To Kracha's way of thinking a little man could logically be for little men, but by his very success in getting nominated Bryan had ceased to be a little man. And the big man who was for the little man didn't exist, never had and never would. Kracha's distrust of big men, rich men, rulers, was profound," (Part 1, Chapter 14, p. 65).

"She had hardly gone when he began questioning the wisdom of seeing her at all, and by evening he was regretting his promise as keenly as ever a man regretted rash, foolish speech. He spent the evening in Wold's; by ten-thirty he had made up his mind not to see her. No. He would even offer to wipe what she owed him of the books if only she agreed to deal with some other butcher. It would be worth it. The less they saw of each other the better. She had caused him trouble before; she would infallibly cause him trouble again, if he let her. But he wasn't going to let her. He was going to put his foot down. Beginning now. He stared at himself in the saloon's big mirror approvingly, felling virtuous and safe, good common sense like an iron rod in his hand," (Part 1, Chapter 16, p. 85).

"He missed Elena, but not as a husband misses a beloved wife—that was hardly to be expected. She had long since ceased to be a large part of his life, and her part had never been larger than during the bitter years when he was learning that she could never be the kind of wife he wanted. He had learned it and made shift to accept it. It was accomplished at a cost to them both greater than could be made up in a single lifetime but such tragedies were too common for even those involved to feel unfairly put upon. In short, Kracha was a widower long before Elena died," (Part 1, Chapter 21, p. 101).

"In the old country the Slovaks had been an oppressed minority from the beginning of time, a simple, religious, unwarlike people, a nation of peasants and shepherds whom the centuries had taught patience and humility. In America they were all this and more, foreigners in a strange land, ignorant of its language and customs, fearful of authority in whatever guise. Arrived in America they were thrust—peasants and shepherds that they were—into the blast furnaces and rolling mills, and many of them paid with their lives for their unfamiliarity with machinery and the English language. Even more bewildering were the hostility and contempt of their neighbors, the men they worked with," (Part 2, Chapter 1, p. 123).

"By November Mike was getting only three turns a week, and the first of the year the company announced a wage cut. It brought the wages of unskilled labor down to thirteen-and-a-half cents an hour, the lowest in fifteen years, and convinced many people that the company's offer of United States Steel stock to its employees had been exactly what they suspected, a device to find out how much money the workers could save on the wages they were getting, how much less they could be paid and still keep alive," (Part 2, Chapter 5, p. 145).

"Keeping boarders had recognized customs, a code of behavior for landladies and boarders of which no one who lived in the First Ward was ignorant. Dorta needed to



teach Mary very little. The secret of being a successful boarding missus, she said, was to make the boarders understand from the beginning that she was boss. 'Don't be afraid to yell at them,' Dorta said. 'The more you yell the easier you make it for yourself. If they don't like the way you run your house let them go somewhere else. But I don't think you'll have any trouble. The men who know Mike all respect him and he's not the kind who will stand for any monkey business. The only thing I'm afraid of is that you'll try to work yourself to death,' (Part 2, Chapter 6, pp. 150-151).

"Like practically every other man in the mill Mike at first almost welcomed layoffs. To sleep late, stay up late, have whole days to himself, was a luxury a blast furnace worker could appreciate more than most men. As the panic deepened, as men were laid off for increasingly longer period, he began to worry. His greatest fear became that he'd lose his job as Keough's helper, be put in one of the labor gangs, the stove gang most likely, and rather than submit to that he was prepared to quit," (Part 2, Chapter 8, p. 159).

"'There was a time when I thought I'd surely get a good job sometime. I worked hard. I did what I was told and more. And I've seen them hire Irish, Johnny Bulls, Scotties, just off the boat and knowing no more about a steel mill than Mikie there, and in a year they're giving me orders. Not once or twice but many times. And I've been working in those furnaces over twenty years. I know my job, Marcha. I would take over that furnace tomorrow and make as good iron as Keogh ever did. But I'm a Hunky and they don't give good jobs to Hunkies. God damn their souls to hell,'" (Part 2, Chapter 11, p. 185).

"He had hated poverty and ugliness; he had resented injustice and cried out against that sin of sins, the degradation of man by man, believing the world held few things more precious than human dignity. He had never looked on work and good as more than the beginning of living, matters a man took in his stride as he went gathering life's richer fruits, love and pride, laughter, accomplishment, the things of the heart and the head that lifted man above the brute. He had felt that no human being need go without his portion of comfort and beauty and quietness; the world held enough for all and if some had less than others it was because men had ordered it so and it lay in men's hands to order differently. It had seemed to him that men needed only to have this explained to them and they'd rise and do what was necessary; and when they didn't he felt angry and bewildered. Out of sloth or fear or stupidity they did nothing, they appeared content with little, whom injustice did not seem to burn nor denial embitter," (Part 2, Chapter 13, pp. 198-199).

"She couldn't hope to live on what she earned, only to make the money in the bank last as long as possible. What she would do when that was gone she didn't know, and it was going week by week for food, rent, clothes, coal. She had already learned how quickly people could get used to another's tragedy, how easily they accepted the change that had broken another's life in two. No one was ever unkind but they all had their own troubles, their own problems of living. And a year after Mike's death she sensed that they were still thinking of her as the recipient of thirteen hundred dollars, more money than most of them had ever dreamed of having at one time," (Part 3, Chapter 1, p. 211).



"To the strikers' demands for collective bargaining, for an eight-hour day, for one day's rest in seven, the newspapers retorted that the strikers were foreigners and anarchists and America would never stand for the red rule of Bolshevism. The strike was the work of Huns and radicals, a diabolical attempt to seize industry and establish Bolshevism in America. The steel workers weren't underpaid; some of them made twenty-five and thirty-five dollars a day. The strike was doomed to fail, like all unpatriotic movements. The union leaders expected to make five hundred thousand dollars for themselves out of initiation fees and dues. The strike was a failure. The mills were running full time, men were flocking back to work, the strike was crumbling, the strike had failed, the strike had failed..." (Part 3, Chapter 5, p. 243).

"And for a moment everything that had happened since Mike's death became a bad dream which she needn't take seriously any more because it was only a dream and all she had to do was turn in her sleep, as she always did when a nightmare became unbearable, and she'd awaken and find herself safe in her own bed, with Mike warm beside her," (Part 3, Chapter 6, p. 258).

"As time passed, as the machinery of the country slowed down and the streets darkened with unemployed and it became plain that something was wrong, and even plainer that no one knew what to do about it, Dobie occasionally wondered about those two with a certain grim amusement. Still, they couldn't have done much better by staying," (Part 4, Chapter 1, p. 266).

"The NIRA with its controversial Section 7(A) affirming the right of workers to collective bargaining through representatives of their own choosing—this was inserted largely to head off a thirty-hour work-week bill then before Congress—was passed, and assorted master minds began the preparation of a code for the steel industry. Two days earlier, in the same week that Dobie married, the company posted announcements of its Employee Representation Plan 'in compliance with the principles of the National Recovery Act as sponsored by the President and passed by the Congress of the United States.' Such eager, even precipitant, deference to civil law was touching, but when the election of representatives was held, in the millennial atmosphere of bosses turned labor organizers and the company flinging money around in a fifteen per cent wage increase, Dobie refused to vote; and he was not alone. 'We need a union all right,' he told Julie, 'but not that kind. It's a company union and I don't intend to have anything to do with it,'" (Part 4, Chapter 5, p. 288).

"'The men keep asking me when is the union going to ask for recognition,' he said. 'They say what's the use of having a union if we don't get any protection? They say if we get recognition, good. If we don't, they say we ought to go on strike. But as long as we don't have recognition we can't do anything,'" (Part 4, Chapter 7, p. 306).

"In the face of the union heads' continuing refusal to act, the rank and file, exposed to all



the varieties of intimidation and persecution in the company's repertoire, moved to force a decision. Under the leadership of a group of men which included the veterans of the Weirton and Clairton strikes, two hundred and fifty rank-and-file delegates representing fifty lodges met to formulate a program to be presented to the Amalgamated convention in April. Tighe sputtered in vain. The delegates approved a program whose heart was the demand that the convention authorize all lodges to ask for recognition simultaneously, and to set a strike date if recognition was refused," (Part 4, Chapter 8, p. 313).

"In every steel town union membership had fallen off disastrously; following the collapse of the strike movement Tighe had reported to the A.F.L. convention in October that only some five thousand steelworkers still paid dues. The cold figures were disheartening in themselves, and a withering indictment of the man who revealed them; behind them, unexpressed, was the plight of the men in the mills, stripped defenseless by the union's defection. The tale of union men hounded and discriminated against by their superiors never ended. During the slack of that summer and fall Dobie had been cut to two and three days a week while known company men were getting full time—something he hadn't told Julie. But he wondered when something would happen that he wouldn't be able to keep from her," (Part 4, Chapter 11, pp. 341-342).

"The efficiency of the system was undeniable. A 'request' faced a succession of hurdles: unfriendly Superintendents, Gordon's citations from the constitution of the E.R.P., Flack himself, and the ever-dependable 'corporation policy'; while for those that surmounted all these there waited at the end the bottomless pit of the City Office, whence none returned recognizable, if any returned at all," (Part 4, Chapter 12, p. 353).

"Dobie shrugged again. 'You have to work no matter where you go. Here at least I'm more sure of a job than I would be somewhere else. The kind it is. And—well, I feel at home here. I remember how it struck me that time I got back from Detroit. It was like coming home again after living in a boarding house. I belonged here. When I looked around everything seemed to fit my eyes, if that makes sense. Everything was just where it belonged, the streets, the houses, the mill. It's hard to explain,' (Part 4, Chapter 14, p. 371).

"The C.I.O. swung into action. It formed the S.W.O.C., the Steel Workers' Organizing Committee, which took over the Amalgamated, lock, stock and barrel, and with half a million dollars behind it moved into the steel towns. The change, after the bumbling inefficiency of the old leadership, was startling. There had never been anyone to reply to the company, to newspaper publishers, to civic authorities, in their own language, which was the only language they understood, nobody to fight them in their own front yards, which was the only place where they could be licked. There was now," (Part 4, Chapter 16, p. 284).

"Flack put his handkerchief away. When he spoke again his face was completely expressionless. 'As to your—the matter you mentioned,' he said, 'there has never been any question of discharging anyone for activities outside working hours, and there won't



be as long as I'm in charge here.' His eyes swept the faces around him. 'I want that clearly understood,'" (Part 4, Chapter 17, p. 401).

"Otherwise, it didn't seem to matter as much as it once had. The old heart-burnings, the miserable self-consciousness, even a good deal of the bitterness, were gone. In their place were pride of achievement, a growing self-assurance, a certain degree of understanding that 'Hunky' was only one word in a whole disgraceful dictionary of epithets whose use would continue to spread humiliation and discord until society made that use as unprofitable as it was dangerous. Meanwhile, one was in duty bound to fight it wherever it appeared—under whatever guise, whether it sprang from ignorance or nastiness or a studied purpose. Cherishing freedom and decency, one could do no less," (Part 4, Chapter 18, p. 410).

Topics for Discussion

Why did George Kacha decide to come to America? What happened when he arrived?

What were the living and working conditions like in the steel mill towns? How does this relate to the early days of the labor union movement?

How did George Kracha lose everything?

Why did wives, like Dorta and Mary, take in boarders? Why was it necessary?

Why did Dobie move to Detroit and then return to Pennsylvania?

How and why did Dobie become involved in union activities?

What problems did Dobie face because of his involvement with the unions?