SHERWOOD ANDERSON

MARCHING MEN

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Anderson S.

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Содержание

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BOOK I

CHAPTER I

Uncle Charlie Wheeler stamped on the steps before Nance McGregor's bake-shop on the Main Street of the town of Coal Creek Pennsylvania and then went quickly inside. Something pleased him and as he stood before the counter in the shop he laughed and whistled softly. With a wink at the Reverend Minot Weeks who stood by the door leading to the street, he tapped with his knuckles on the showcase.

"It has," he said, waving attention to the boy, who was making a mess of the effort to arrange Uncle Charlie's loaf into a neat package, "a pretty name. They call it Norman—Norman McGregor." Uncle Charlie laughed heartily and again stamped upon the floor. Putting his finger to his forehead to suggest deep thought, he turned to the minister. "I am going to change all that," he said.

"Norman indeed! I shall give him a name that will stick! Norman! Too soft, too soft and delicate for Coal Creek, eh? It shall be rechristened. You and I will be Adam and Eve in the garden naming things. We will call it Beaut—Our Beautiful One—Beaut McGregor."

The Reverend Minot Weeks also laughed. He thrust four ringers of each hand into the pockets of his trousers, letting the extended thumbs lie along the swelling waist line. From the front the thumbs looked like two tiny boats on the horizon of a troubled sea. They bobbed and jumped about on the rolling shaking paunch, appearing and disappearing as laughter shook him. The Reverend Minot Weeks went out at the door ahead of Uncle Charlie, still laughing. One fancied that he would go along the street from store to store telling the tale of the christening and laughing again. The tall boy could imagine the details of the story.

It was an ill day for births in Coal Creek, even for the birth of one of Uncle Charlie's inspirations. Snow lay piled along the sidewalks and in the gutters of Main Street—black snow, sordid with the gathered grime of human endeavour that went on day and night in the bowels of the hills. Through the soiled snow walked miners, stumbling along silently and with blackened faces. In their bare hands they carried dinner pails.

The McGregor boy, tall and awkward, and with a towering nose, great hippopotamus-like mouth and fiery red hair, followed Uncle Charlie, Republican politician, postmaster and village wit to the door and looked after him as with the loaf of bread under his arm he hurried along the street. Behind the politician went the minister still enjoying the scene in the bakery. He was preening himself on his nearness to life in the mining town. "Did not Christ himself laugh, eat and drink with publicans and sinners?" he thought, as he waddled through the snow. The eyes of the McGregor boy, as they followed the two departing figures, and later, as he stood in the door of the bake-shop watching the struggling miners, glistened, with hatred. It was the quality of intense hatred for his fellows in the black hole between the Pennsylvania hills that marked the boy and made him stand forth among his fellows.

In a country of so many varied climates and occupations as America it is absurd to talk of an American type. The country is like a vast disorganised undisciplined army, leaderless, uninspired, going in route-step along the road to they know not what end. In the prairie towns of the West and the river towns of the South from which have come so many of our writing men, the citizens swagger through life. Drunken old reprobates lie in the shade by the river's edge or wander through the streets

of a corn shipping village of a Saturday evening with grins on their faces. Some touch of nature, a sweet undercurrent of life, stays alive in them and is handed down to those who write of them, and the most worthless man that walks the streets of an Ohio or Iowa town may be the father of an epigram that colours all the life of the men about him. In a mining town or deep in the entrails of one of our cities life is different. There the disorder and aimlessness of our American lives becomes a crime for which men pay heavily. Losing step with one another, men lose also a sense of their own individuality so that a thousand of them may be driven in a disorderly mass in at the door of a Chicago factory morning after morning and year after year with never an epigram from the lips of one of them.

In Coal Creek when men got drunk they staggered in silence through the street. Did one of them, in a moment of stupid animal sportiveness, execute a clumsy dance upon the barroom floor, his fellow—labourers looked at him dumbly, or turning away left him to finish without witnesses his clumsy hilarity.

Standing in the doorway and looking up and down the bleak village street, some dim realisation of the disorganised ineffectiveness of life as he knew it came into the mind of the McGregor boy. It seemed to him right and natural that he should hate men. With a sneer on his lips, he thought of Barney Butterlips, the town socialist, who was forever talking of a day coming when men would march shoulder to shoulder and life in Coal Creek, life everywhere, should cease being aimless and become definite and full of meaning.

"They will never do that and who wants them to," mused the McGregor boy. A blast of wind bearing snow beat upon him and he turned into the shop and slammed the door behind him. Another thought stirred in his head and brought a flush to his cheeks. He turned and stood in the silence of the empty shop shaking with emotion. "If I could form the men of this place into an army I would lead them to the mouth of the old Shumway cut and push them in," he threatened, shaking his fist toward the door. "I would stand aside and see the whole town struggle and drown in the black water as untouched as though I watched the drowning of a litter of dirty little kittens."

The next morning when Beaut McGregor pushed his baker's cart along the street and began climbing the hill toward the miners' cottages, he went, not as Norman McGregor, the town baker boy, only product of the loins of Cracked McGregor of Coal Creek, but as a personage, a being, the object of an art. The name given him by Uncle Charlie Wheeler had made him a marked man. He was as the hero of a popular romance, galvanised into life and striding in the flesh before the people. Men looked at him with new interest, inventorying anew the huge mouth and nose and the flaming hair. The bartender, sweeping the snow from before the door of the saloon, shouted at him. "Hey, Norman!" he called. "Sweet Norman! Norman is too pretty a name. Beaut is the name for you! Oh you Beaut!"

The tall boy pushed the cart silently along the street. Again he hated Coal Creek. He hated the bakery and the bakery cart. With a burning satisfying hate he hated Uncle Charlie Wheeler and the Reverend Minot Weeks. "Fat old fools," he muttered as he shook the snow off his hat and paused to breathe in the struggle up the hill. He had something new to hate. He hated his own name. It did sound ridiculous. He had thought before that there was something fancy and pretentious about it. It did not fit a bakery cart boy. He wished it might have been plain John or Jim or Fred. A quiver of irritation at his mother passed through him. "She might have used more sense," he muttered.

And then the thought came to him that his father might have chosen the name. That checked his flight toward universal hatred and he began pushing the cart forward again, a more genial current of thought running through his mind. The tall boy loved the memory of his father, "Cracked McGregor." "They called him 'Cracked' until that became his name," he thought. "Now they are at me." The thought renewed a feeling of fellowship between himself and his dead father—it softened him. When he reached the first of the bleak miners' houses a smile played about the corners of his huge mouth.

In his day Cracked McGregor had not borne a good reputation in Coal Creek. He was a tall silent man with something morose and dangerous about him. He inspired fear born of hatred. In the

mines he worked silently and with fiery energy, hating his fellow miners among whom he was thought to be “a bit off his head.” They it was who named him “Cracked” McGregor and they avoided him while subscribing to the common opinion that he was the best miner in the district. Like his fellow workers he occasionally got drunk. When he went into the saloon where other men stood in groups buying drinks for each other he bought only for himself. Once a stranger, a fat man who sold liquor for a wholesale house, approached and slapped him on the back. “Come, cheer up and have a drink with me,” he said. Cracked McGregor turned and knocked the stranger to the floor. When the fat man was down he kicked him and glared at the crowd in the room. Then he walked slowly out at the door staring around and hoping some one would interfere.

In his house also Cracked McGregor was silent. When he spoke at all he spoke kindly and looked into the eyes of his wife with an eager expectant air. To his red-haired son he seemed to be forever pouring forth a kind of dumb affection. Taking the boy in his arms he sat for hours rocking back and forth and saying nothing. When the boy was ill or troubled by strange dreams at night the feel of his father’s arms about him quieted him. In his arms the boy went to sleep happily. In the mind of the father there was a single recurring thought, “We have but the one bairn, we’ll not put him into the hole in the ground,” he said, looking eagerly to the mother for approval.

Twice had Cracked McGregor walked with his son on a Sunday afternoon. Taking the lad by the hand the miner went up the face of the hill, past the last of the miners’ houses, through the grove of pine trees at the summit and on over the hill into sight of a wide valley on the farther side. When he walked he twisted his head far to one side like one listening. A falling timber in the mines had given him a deformed shoulder and left a great scar on his face, partly covered by a red beard filled with coal dust. The blow that had deformed his shoulder had clouded his mind. He muttered as he walked along the road and talked to himself like an old man.

The red-haired boy ran beside his father happily. He did not see the smiles on the faces of the miners, who came down the hill and stopped to look at the odd pair. The miners went on down the road to sit in front of the stores on Main Street, their day brightened by the memory of the hurrying McGregors. They had a remark they tossed about. “Nance McGregor should not have looked at her man when she conceived,” they said.

Up the face of the hill climbed the McGregors. In the mind of the boy a thousand questions wanted answering. Looking at the silent gloomy face of his father, he choked back the questions rising in his throat, saving them for the quiet hour with his mother when Cracked McGregor was gone to the mine. He wanted to know of the boyhood of his father, of the life in the mine, of the birds that flew overhead and why they wheeled and flew in great ovals in the sky. He looked at the fallen trees in the woods and wondered what made them fall and whether the others would presently fall in their turn.

Over the hill went the silent pair and through the pinewood to an eminence half way down the farther side. When the boy saw the valley lying so green and broad and fruitful at their feet he thought it the most wonderful sight in the world. He was not surprised that his father had brought him there. Sitting on the ground he opened and closed his eyes, his soul stirred by the beauty of the scene that lay before them.

On the hillside Cracked McGregor went through a kind of ceremony. Sitting upon a log he made a telescope of his hands and looked over the valley inch by inch like one seeking something lost. For ten minutes he would look intently at a clump of trees or a spot in the river running through the valley where it broadened and where the water roughened by the wind glistened in the sun. A smile lurked in the corners of his mouth, he rubbed his hands together, he muttered incoherent words and bits of sentences, once he broke forth into a low droning song.

On the first morning, when the boy sat on the hillside with his father, it was spring and the land was vividly green. Lambs played in the fields; birds sang their mating songs; in the air, on the earth and in the water of the flowing river it was a time of new life. Below, the flat valley of green fields was patched and spotted with brown new-turned earth. The cattle walking with bowed heads,

eating the sweet grass, the farmhouses with red barns, the pungent smell of the new ground, fired his mind and awoke the sleeping sense of beauty in the boy. He sat upon the log drunk with happiness that the world in which he lived could be so beautiful. In his bed at night he dreamed of the valley, confounding it with the old Bible tale of the Garden of Eden, told him by his mother. He dreamed that he and his mother went over the hill and down toward the valley but that his father, wearing a long white robe and with his red hair blowing in the wind, stood upon the hillside swinging a long sword blazing with fire and drove them back.

When the boy went again over the hill it was October and a cold wind blew down the hill into his face. In the woods golden brown leaves ran about like frightened little animals and golden-brown were the leaves on the trees about the farmhouses and golden-brown the corn standing shocked in the fields. The scene saddened the boy. A lump came into his throat and he wanted back the green shining beauty of the spring. He wished to hear the birds singing in the air and in the grass on the hillside.

Cracked McGregor was in another mood. He seemed more satisfied than on the first visit and ran up and down on the little eminence rubbing his hands together and on the legs of his trousers. Through the long afternoon he sat on the log muttering and smiling.

On the road home through the darkened woods the restless hurrying leaves frightened the boy so that, with his weariness from walking against the wind, his hunger from being all day without food, and with the cold nipping at his body, he began to cry. The father took the boy in his arms and holding him across his breast like a babe went down the hill to their home.

It was on a Tuesday morning that Cracked McGregor died. His death fixed itself as something fine in the mind of the boy and the scene and the circumstance stayed with him through life, filling him with secret pride like a knowledge of good blood. “It means something that I am the son of such a man,” he thought.

It was past ten in the morning when the cry of “Fire in the mine” ran up the hill to the houses of the miners. A panic seized the women. In their minds they saw the men hurrying down old cuts, crouching in hidden corridors, pursued by death. Cracked McGregor, one of the night shift, slept in his house. The boy’s mother, threw a shawl about her head, took his hand and ran down the hill to the mouth of the mine. Cold winds spitting snow blew in their faces. They ran along the tracks of the railroad, stumbling over the ties, and stood on the railroad embankment that overlooked the runway to the mine.

About the runway and along the embankment stood the silent miners, their hands in their trousers pockets, staring stolidly at the closed door of the mine. Among them was no impulse toward concerted action. Like animals at the door of a slaughter-house they stood as though waiting their turn to be driven in at the door. An old crone with bent back and a huge stick in her hand went from one to another of the miners gesticulating and talking. “Get my boy—my Steve! Get him out of there!” she shouted, waving the stick about.

The door of the mine opened and three men came out, staggering as they pushed before them a small car that ran upon rails. On the car lay three other men, silent and motionless. A woman thinly clad and with great cave-like hollows in her face climbed the embankment and sat upon the ground below the boy and his mother. “The fire is in the old McCrary cut,” she said, her voice quivering, a dumb hopeless look in her eyes. “They can’t get through to close the doors. My man Ike is in there.” She put down her head and sat weeping. The boy knew the woman. She was a neighbour who lived in an unpainted house on the hillside. In the yard in front of her house a swarm of children played among the stones. Her husband, a great hulking fellow, got drunk and when he came home kicked his wife. The boy had heard her screaming at night.

Suddenly in the growing crowd of miners below the embankment Beaut McGregor saw his father moving restlessly about. On his head he had his cap with the miner’s lamp lighted. He went from group to group among the people, his head hanging to one side. The boy looked at him intently. He was reminded of the October day on the eminence overlooking the fruitful valley and again he

thought of his father as a man inspired, going through a kind of ceremony. The tall miner rubbed his hands up and down his legs, he peered into the faces of the silent men standing about, his lips moved and his red beard danced up and down.

As the boy looked a change came over the face of Cracked McGregor. He ran to the foot of the embankment and looked up. In his eyes was the look of a perplexed animal. The wife bent down and began to talk to the weeping woman on the ground, trying to comfort her. She did not see her husband and the boy and man stood in silence looking into each other's eyes.

Then the puzzled look went out of the father's face. He turned and running along with his head rolling about reached the closed door of the mine. A man, who wore a white collar and had a cigar stuck in the corner of his mouth, put out his hand.

"Stop! Wait!" he shouted. Pushing the man aside with his powerful arm the runner pulled open the door of the mine and disappeared down the runway.

A hubbub arose. The man in the white collar took the cigar from his mouth and began to swear violently. The boy stood on the embankment and saw his mother running toward the runway of the mine. A miner gripped her by the arm and led her back up the face of the embankment. In the crowd a woman's voice shouted, "It's Cracked McGregor gone to close the door to the McCrary cut."

The man with the white collar glared about as he chewed the end of his cigar. "He's gone crazy," he shouted, again closing the door to the mine.

Cracked McGregor died in the mine, almost within reach of the door to the old cut where the fire burned. With him died all but five of the imprisoned miners. All day parties of men tried to get down into the mine. Below in the hidden passages under their own homes the scurrying miners died like rats in a burning barn while their wives, with shawls over their heads, sat silently weeping on the railroad embankment. In the evening the boy and his mother went up the hill alone. From the houses scattered over the hill came the sound of women weeping.

For several years after the mine disaster the McGregors, mother and son, lived in the house on the hillside. The woman went each morning to the offices of the mine where she washed windows and scrubbed floors. The position was a sort of recognition on the part of the mine officials of the heroism of Cracked McGregor.

Nance McGregor was a small blue-eyed woman with a sharp nose. She wore glasses and had the name in Coal Creek of being quick and sharp. She did not stand by the fence to talk with the wives of other miners but sat in her house and sewed or read aloud to her son. She subscribed for a magazine and had bound copies of it standing upon shelves in the room where she and the boy ate breakfast in the early morning. Before the death of her husband she had maintained a habit of silence in her house but after his death she expanded, and, with her red-haired son, discussed freely every phase of their narrow lives. As he grew older the boy began to believe that she like the miners had kept hidden under her silence a secret fear of his father. Certain things she said of her life encouraged the thought.

Norman McGregor grew into a tall broad-shouldered boy with strong arms, flaming red hair and a habit of sudden and violent fits of temper. There was something about him that held the attention. As he grew older and was renamed by Uncle Charlie Wheeler he began going about looking for trouble. When the boys called him "Beaut" he knocked them down. When men shouted the name after him on the street he followed them with black looks. It became a point of honour with him to resent the name. He connected it with the town's unfairness to Cracked McGregor.

In the house on the hillside the boy and his mother lived together happily. In the early morning they went down the hill and across the tracks to the offices of the mine. From the offices the boy went up the hill on the farther side of the valley and sat upon the schoolhouse steps or wandered in the streets waiting for the day in school to begin. In the evening mother and son sat upon the steps at the front of their home and watched the glare of the coke ovens on the sky and the lights of the swiftly-running passenger trains, roaring whistling and disappearing into the night.

Nance McGregor talked to her son of the big world outside the valley and told him of the cities, the seas and the strange lands and peoples beyond the seas. “We have dug in the ground like rats,” she said, “I and my people and your father and his people. With you it will be different. You will get out of here to other places and other work.” She grew indignant thinking of the life in the town. “We are stuck down here amid dirt, living in it, breathing it,” she complained. “Sixty men died in that hole in the ground and then the mine started again with new men. We stay here year after year digging coal to burn in engines that take other people across the seas and into the West.”

When the son was a tall strong boy of fourteen Nance McGregor bought the bakery and to buy it took the money saved by Cracked McGregor. With it he had planned to buy a farm in the valley beyond the hill. Dollar by dollar it had been put away by the miner who dreamed of life in his own fields.

In the bakery the boy worked and learned to make bread. Kneading the dough his arms and hands grew as strong as a bear’s. He hated the work, he hated Coal Creek and dreamed of life in the city and of the part he should play there. Among the young men he began to make here and there a friend. Like his father he attracted attention. Women looked at him, laughed at his big frame and strong homely features and looked again. When they spoke to him in the bakery or on the street he spoke back fearlessly and looked them in the eyes. Young girls in the school walked home down the hill with other boys and at night dreamed of Beaut McGregor. When some one spoke ill of him they answered defending and praising him. Like his father he was a marked man in the town of Coal Creek.

CHAPTER II

One Sunday afternoon three boys sat on a log on the side of the hill that looked down into Coal Creek. From where they sat they could see the workers of the night shift idling in the sun on Main Street. From the coke ovens a thin line of smoke rose into the sky. A freight train heavily loaded crept round the hill at the end of the valley. It was spring and over even that hive of black industry hung a faint promise of beauty. The boys talked of the life of people in their town and as they talked thought each of himself.

Although he had not been out of the valley and had grown strong and big there, Beaut McGregor knew something of the outside world. It isn't a time when men are shut off from their fellows. Newspapers and magazines have done their work too well. They reached even into the miner's cabin and the merchants along Main Street of Coal Creek stood before their stores in the afternoon and talked of the doings of the world. Beaut McGregor knew that life in his town was exceptional, that not everywhere did men toil all day black and grimy underground, that not all women were pale bloodless and bent. As he went about delivering bread he whistled a song. "Take me back to Broadway," he sang after the soubrette in a show that had once come to Coal Creek.

Now as he sat on the hillside he talked earnestly while he gesticulated with his hands. "I hate this town," he said. "The men here think they are confoundedly funny. They don't care for anything but making foolish jokes and getting drunk. I want to go away." His voice rose and hatred flamed up in him. "You wait," he boasted. "I'll make men stop being fools. I'll make children of them. I'll–" Pausing he looked at his two companions.

Beaut poked the ground with a stick. The boy sitting beside him laughed. He was a short well—dressed black—haired boy with rings on his fingers who worked in the town poolroom, racking the pool balls. "I'd like to go where there are women with blood in them," he said.

Three women came up the hill toward them, a tall pale brown-haired woman of twenty-seven and two fairer young girls. The black-haired boy straightened his tie and began thinking of a conversation he would start when the women reached him. Beaut and the other boy, a fat fellow, the son of a grocer, looked down the hill to the town over the heads of the newcomers and continued in their minds the thoughts that had made the conversation.

"Hello girls, come and sit here," shouted the black-haired boy, laughing and looking boldly into the eyes of the tall pale woman. They stopped and the tall woman began stepping over the fallen logs, coming to them. The two young girls followed, laughing. They sat down on the log beside the boys, the tall pale woman at the end beside red-haired McGregor. An embarrassed silence fell over the party. Both Beaut and the fat boy were disconcerted by this turn to their afternoon's outing and wondered how it would turn out.

The pale woman began to talk in a low tone. "I want to get away from here," she said, "I wish I could hear birds sing and see green things grow."

Beaut McGregor had an idea. "You come with me," he said. He got up and climbed over the logs and the pale woman followed. The fat boy shouted at them, relieving his own embarrassment by trying to embarrass them. "Where're you going—you two?" he shouted.

Beaut said nothing. He stepped over the logs to the road and began climbing the hill. The tall woman walked beside him and held her skirts out of the deep dust of the road. Even on this her Sunday gown there was a faint black mark along the seams—the mark of Coal Creek.

As McGregor walked his embarrassment left him. He thought it fine that he should be thus alone with a woman. When she had tired from the climb he sat with her on a log beside the road and talked of the black-haired boy. "He has your ring on his finger," he said, looking at her and laughing.

She held her hand pressed tightly against her side and closed her eyes. "The climbing hurts me," she said.

Tenderness took hold of Beaut. When they went on again he walked behind her, his hand upon her back pushing her up the hill. The desire to tease her about the black-haired boy had passed and he wished he had said nothing about the ring. He remembered the story the black-haired boy had told him of his conquest of the woman. “More than likely a mess of lies,” he thought.

Over the crest of the hill they stopped and rested, leaning against a worn rail fence by the woods. Below them in a wagon a party of men went down the hill. The men sat upon boards laid across the box of a wagon and sang a song. One of them stood in the seat beside the driver and waved a bottle. He seemed to be making a speech. The others shouted and clapped their hands. The sounds came faint and sharp up the hill.

In the woods beside the fence rank grass grew. Hawks floated in the sky over the valley below. A squirrel running along the fence stopped and chattered at them. McGregor thought he had never had so delightful a companion. He got a feeling of complete, good fellowship and friendliness with this woman. Without knowing how the thing had been done he felt a certain pride in it. “Don’t mind what I said about the ring,” he urged, “I was only trying to tease you.”

The woman beside McGregor was the daughter of an undertaker who lived upstairs over his shop near the bakery. He had seen her in the evening standing in the stairway by the shop door. After the story told him by the black-haired boy he had been embarrassed about her. When he passed her standing in the stairway he went hurriedly along and looked into the gutter.

They went down the hill and sat on the log upon the hillside. A clump of elders had grown about the log since his visits there with Cracked McGregor so that the place was closed and shaded like a room. The woman took off her hat and laid it beside her on the log. A faint colour mounted to her pale cheeks and a flash of anger gleamed in her eyes. “He probably lied to you about me,” she said, “I didn’t give him that ring to wear. I don’t know why I gave it to him. He wanted it. He asked me for it time and again. He said he wanted to show it to his mother. And now he has shown it to you and I suppose told lies about me.”

Beaut was annoyed and wished he had not mentioned the ring. He felt that an unnecessary fuss was being made about it. He did not believe that the black-haired boy had lied but he did not think it mattered.

He began talking of his father, boasting of him. His hatred of the town blazed up. “They thought they knew him down there,” he said, “they laughed at him and called him ‘Cracked.’ They thought his running into the mine just a crazy notion like a horse that runs into a burning stable. He was the best man in town. He was braver than any of them. He went in there and died when he had almost enough money saved to buy a farm over here.” He pointed down the valley.

Beaut began to tell her of the visits to the hillside with his father and described the effect of the scene on himself when he was a child. “I thought it was paradise,” he said.

She put her hand on his arm and seemed to be soothing him like a careful groom quieting an excitable horse. “Don’t mind them,” she said, “you will go away after a time and make a place for yourself out in the world.”

He wondered how she knew. A profound respect for her came over him. “She is keen to guess that,” he thought.

He began to talk of himself, boasting and throwing out his chest. “I’d like to have the chance to show what I can do,” he declared. A thought that had been in his mind on the winter day when Uncle Charlie Wheeler put the name of Beaut upon him came back and he walked up and down before the woman making grotesque motions with his hands as Cracked McGregor had walked up and down before him.

“I’ll tell you what,” he began and his voice was harsh. He had forgotten the presence of the woman and half forgotten what had been in his mind. He sputtered and glared over his shoulder up the hillside as he struggled for words. “Oh to Hell with men!” he burst forth. “They are cattle, stupid cattle.” A fire blazed up in his eyes and a confident ring came into his voice. “I’d like to get them

together, all of them," he said, "I'd like to make them–" Words failed him and again he sat down on the log beside the woman. "Well I'd like to lead them to an old mine shaft and push them in," he concluded resentfully.

On the eminence Beaut and the tall woman sat and looked down into the valley. "I wonder why we don't go there, mother and I," he said. "When I see it I'm filled with the notion. I think I want to be a farmer and work in the fields. Instead of that mother and I sit and plan of the city. I'm going to be a lawyer. That's all we talk about. Then I come up here and it seems as though this is the place for me."

The tall woman laughed. "I can see you coming home at night from the fields," she said. "It might be to that white house there with the windmill, You would be a big man and would have dust in your red hair and perhaps a red beard growing on your chin. And a woman with a baby in her arms would come out of the kitchen door to stand leaning on the fence waiting for you. When you came up she would put her arm around your neck and kiss you on the lips. The beard would tickle her cheek. You should have a beard when you grow older. Your mouth is so big."

A strange new feeling shot through Beaut. He wondered why she had said that and wanted to take hold of her hand and kiss her then and there. He got up and looked at the sun going down behind the hill far away at the other end of the valley. "We'd better be getting along back," he said.

The woman remained seated on the log. "Sit down," she said, "I'll tell you something—something it's good for you to hear. You're so big and red you tempt a girl to bother you. First though you tell me why you go along the street looking into the gutter when I stand in the stairway in the evening."

Beaut sat down again upon the log, and thought of what the black-haired boy had told him of her. "Then it was true—what he said about you?" he asked.

"No! No!" she cried, jumping up in her turn and beginning to pin on her hat. "Let's be going."

Beaut sat stolidly on the log. "What's the use bothering each other," he said. "Let's sit here until the sun goes down. We can get home before dark."

They sat down and she began talking, boasting of herself as he had boasted of his father.

"I'm too old for that boy," she said; "I'm older than you by a good many years. I know what boys talk about and what they say about women. I do pretty well. I don't have any one to talk to except father and he sits all evening reading a paper and going to sleep in his chair. If I let boys come and sit with me in the evening or stand talking with me in the stairway it is because I'm lonesome. There isn't a man in town I'd marry—not one."

The speech sounded discordant and harsh to Beaut. He wished his father were there rubbing his hands together and muttering rather than this pale woman who stirred him up and then talked harshly like the women at the back doors in Coal Creek. He thought again as he had thought before that he preferred the black-faced miners drunk and silent to their pale talking wives. On an impulse he told her that, saying it crudely so that it hurt.

Their companionship was spoiled. They got up and began to climb the hill, going toward home. Again she put her hand to her side and again he wished to put his hand at her back and push her up the hill. Instead he walked beside her in silence, again hating the town.

Halfway down the hill the tall woman stopped by the road-side. Darkness was coming on and the glow of the coke ovens lighted the sky. "One living up here and never going down there might think it rather grand and big," he said. Again the hatred came. "They might think the men who live down there knew something instead of being just a lot of cattle."

A smile came into the face of the tall woman and a gentler look stole into her eyes. "We get at one another," she said, "we can't let one another alone. I wish we hadn't quarrelled. We might be friends if we tried. You have got something in you. You attract women. I've heard others say that. Your father was that way. Most of the women here would rather have been the wife of Cracked McGregor ugly as he was than to have stayed with their own husbands. I heard my mother say that to father when they lay quarrelling in bed at night and I lay listening."

The boy was overcome with the thought of a woman talking to him so frankly. He looked at her and said what was in his mind. “I don’t like the women,” he said, “but I liked you, seeing you standing in the stairway and thinking you had been doing as you pleased. I thought maybe you amounted to something. I don’t know why you should be bothered by what I think. I don’t know why any woman should be bothered by what any man thinks. I should think you would go right on doing what you want to do like mother and me about my being a lawyer.”

He sat on a log beside the road near where he had met her and watched her go down the hill. “I’m quite a fellow to have talked to her all afternoon like that,” he thought and pride in his growing manhood crept over him.

CHAPTER III

The town of Coal Creek was hideous. People from prosperous towns and cities of the middle west, from Ohio, Illinois, and Iowa, going east to New York or Philadelphia, looked out of the car windows and seeing the poor little houses scattered along the hillside thought of books they had read of life in hovels in the old world. In chair-cars men and women leaned back and closed their eyes. They yawned and wished the journey would come to an end. If they thought of the town at all they regretted it mildly and passed it off as a necessity of modern life.

The houses on the hillside and the stores along Main Street belonged to the mining company. In its turn the mining company belonged to the officials of the railroad. The manager of the mine had a brother who was division superintendent. It was the mine manager who had stood by the door of the mine when Cracked McGregor went to his death. He lived in a city some thirty miles away, and went there in the evening on the train. With him went the clerks and even the stenographers from the offices of the mine. After five o'clock in the afternoon no white collars were to be seen upon the streets of Coal Creek.

In the town men lived like brutes. Dumb with toil they drank greedily in the saloon on Main Street and went home to beat their wives. Among them a constant low muttering went on. They felt the injustice of their lot but could not voice it logically and when they thought of the men who owned the mine they swore dumbly, using vile oaths even in their thoughts. Occasionally a strike broke out and Barney Butterlips, a thin little man with a cork leg, stood on a box and made speeches regarding the coming brotherhood of man. Once a troop of cavalry was unloaded from the cars and with a battery paraded the main street. The battery was made up of several men in brown uniforms. They set up a Gatling gun at the end of the street and the strike subsided.

An Italian who lived in a house on the hillside cultivated a garden. His place was the one beauty spot in the valley. With a wheelbarrow he brought earth from the woods at the top of the hill and on Sunday he could be seen going back and forth and whistling merrily. In the winter he sat in his house making a drawing on a bit of paper. In the spring he took the drawing, and by it planted his garden, utilising every inch of his ground. When a strike came on he was told by the mine manager to go on back to work or move out of his house. He thought of the garden and the work he had done and went back to his routine of work in the mine. While he worked the miners marched up the hill and destroyed the garden. The next day the Italian also joined the striking miners.

In a little one-room shack on the hill lived an old woman. She lived alone and was vilely dirty. In her house she had old broken chairs and tables picked up about town and piled in such profusion that she could scarcely move about. On warm days she sat in the sun before the shack chewing on a stick that had been dipped in tobacco. Miners coming up the hill dumped bits of bread and meat-ends out of their dinner-pails into a box nailed to a tree by the road. These the old woman collected and ate. When the soldiers came to town she walked along the street jeering at them. "Pretty boys! Scabs! Dudes! Dry-goods clerks!" she called after them as she walked by the tails of their horses. A young man with glasses on his nose, who was mounted on a grey horse turned and called to his comrades, "Let her alone—it's old Mother Misery herself."

When the tall red-haired boy looked at the workers and at the old woman who followed the soldiers he did not sympathise with them. He hated them. In a way he sympathised with the soldiers. His blood was stirred by the sight of them marching shoulder to shoulder. He thought there was order and decency in the rank of uniformed men moving silently and quickly along and he half wished they would destroy the town. When the strikers made a wreck of the garden of the Italian he was deeply touched and walked up and down in the room before his mother, proclaiming himself. "I would have killed them had it been my garden," he said. "I would not have left one of them alive." In his heart he like Cracked McGregor nursed his hatred of the miners and of the town. "The place is one to get

out of," he said. "If a man doesn't like it here let him get up and leave." He remembered his father working and saving for the farm in the valley. "They thought him cracked but he knew more than they. They would not have dared touch a garden he had planted."

In the heart of the miner's son strange half-formed thoughts began to find lodgings. Remembering in his dreams at night the moving columns of men in their uniforms he read new meaning into the scraps of history picked up in the school and the movements of men in old history began to have significance for him. On a summer afternoon as he loitered before the town's hotel, beneath which was the saloon and billiard room where the black-haired boy worked, he overheard two men talking of the significance of men.

One of the men was an itinerant oculist who came to the mining town once a month to fit and sell spectacles. When the oculist had sold several pairs of spectacles he got drunk, sometimes staying drunk for a week. When he was drunk he spoke French and Italian and sometimes stood in the barroom before the miners, quoting the poems of Dante. His clothes were greasy from long wear and he had a huge nose streaked with red and purple veins. Because of his learning in the languages and his quoting of poems the miners thought the oculist infinitely wise. To them it seemed that one with such a mind must have almost unearthly knowledge concerning the eyes and the fitting of glasses and they wore with pride the cheap ill-fitting things he thrust upon them.

Occasionally, as though making a concession to his patrons, the oculist spent an evening among them. Once after reciting one of the sonnets of Shakespeare he put a hand on the bar and rocking gently back and forth sang in a drink-broken voice a ballad beginning "The harp that once through Tara's halls the soul of music shed." After the song he put his head down upon the bar and wept while the miners looked on touched with sympathy.

On the summer afternoon when Beaut McGregor listened, the oculist was engaged in a violent quarrel with another man, drunk like himself. The second man was a slender dandified fellow of middle age who sold shoes for a Philadelphia jobbing-house. He sat in a chair tilted against the hotel and tried to read aloud from a book. When he was fairly launched in a long paragraph the oculist interrupted. Staggering up and down the narrow board walk before the hotel the old drunkard raved and swore. He seemed beside himself with wrath.

"I am sick of such slobbering philosophy," he declared. "Even the reading of it makes you drool at the mouth. You do not say the words sharply, and they can't be said sharply. I'm a strong man myself."

Spreading his legs wide apart and blowing up his cheeks, the oculist beat upon his breast. With a wave of his hand he dismissed the man in the chair.

"You but slobber and make a foul noise," he declared. "I know your kind. I spit upon you. The Congress at Washington is full of such fellows as is also the House of Commons in England. In France they were once in charge. They ran things in France until the coming of a man such as myself. They were lost in the shadow of the great Napoleon."

The oculist as though dismissing the dandified man from his mind turned to address Beaut. He talked in French and the man in the chair fell into a troubled sleep. "I am like Napoleon," the drunkard declared, breaking again into English. Tears began to show in his eyes. "I take the money of these miners and I give them nothing. The spectacles I sell to their wives for five dollars cost me but fifteen cents. I ride over these brutes as Napoleon rode over Europe. There would be order and purpose in me were I not a fool. I am like Napoleon in that I have utter contempt for men."

Again and again the words of the drunkard came back into the mind of the McGregor boy influencing his thoughts. Grasping nothing of the philosophy back of the man's words his imagination was yet touched by the drunkard's tale of the great Frenchman, babbled into his ears, and it in some way seemed to give point to his hatred of the disorganised ineffectiveness of the life about him.

After Nance McGregor opened the bakery another strike came to disturb the prosperity of the business. Again the miners walked idly through the streets. Into the bakery they came to get bread

and told Nance to write the debt down against them. Beaut McGregor was disturbed. He saw his father's money being spent for flour which when baked into loaves went out of the shop under the arms of the miners who shuffled as they walked. One night a man whose name appeared on their books followed by a long record of charged loaves came reeling past the bakery. McGregor went to his mother and protested. "They have money to get drunk," he said, "let them pay for their loaves."

Nance McGregor went on trusting the miners. She thought of the women and children in the houses on the hill and when she heard of the plans of the mining company to evict the miners from their houses she shuddered. "I was the wife of a miner and I will stick to them," she thought.

One day the mine manager came into the bakery. He leaned over the showcase and talked to Nance. The son went and stood by his mother's side to listen. "It has got to be stopped," the manager was saying. "I will not see you ruin yourself for these cattle. I want you to close this place till the strike is over. If you won't close it I will. The building belongs to us. They did not appreciate what your husband did and why should you ruin yourself for them?"

The woman looked at him and answered in a low tone full of resolution. "They thought he was crazy and he was," she said; "but what made him so—the rotten timbers in the mine that broke and crushed him. You and not they are responsible for my man and what he was."

Beaut McGregor interrupted. "Well I think he is right," he declared, leaning over the counter beside his mother and looking into her face. "The miners don't want better things for their families, they want more money to get drunk. We will close the doors here. We will put no more money into bread to go into their gullets. They hated father and he hated them and now I hate them also."

Beaut walked around the end of the counter and went with the mine manager to the door. He locked it and put the key into his pocket. Then he walked to the rear of the bake shop where his mother sat on a box weeping. "It is time a man took charge here," he said.

Nance McGregor and her son sat in the bakery and looked at each other. Miners came along the street, tried the door and went away grumbling. Word ran from lip to lip up the hillside. "The mine manager has closed Nance McGregor's shop," said the women leaning over back fences. Children sprawling on the floors of the houses put up their heads and howled. Their lives were a succession of new terrors. When a day passed that a new terror did not shake them they went to bed happy. When the miner and his woman stood by the door talking in low tones they cried, expecting to be put to bed hungry. When guarded talk did not go on by the door the miner came home drunk and beat the mother and the children lay in beds along the wall trembling with fright.

Late that night a party of miners came to the door of the bakery and beat upon it with their fists. "Open up here!" they shouted. Beaut came out of the rooms above the bakery and stood in the empty shop. His mother sat in a chair in her room and trembled. He went to the door and unlocking it stepped out. The miners stood in groups on the wooden sidewalk and in the mud of the road. Among them stood the old crone who had walked beside the horses and shouted at the soldiers. A miner with a black beard came and stood before the boy. Waving his hand at the crowd he said, "We have come to open the bakery. Some of us have no ovens in our stoves. You give us the key and we will open the place. We will break in the door if you don't want to do that. The company can't blame you if we do it by force. You can keep account of what we take. Then when the strike is settled we will pay you."

A flame shot into the eyes of the boy. He walked down the steps and stood among the miners. Thrusting his hands into his pockets he peered into their faces. When he spoke his voice resounded through the street, "You jeered at my father, Cracked McGregor, when he went into the mine for you. You laughed at him because he saved his money and did not spend it buying you drinks. Now you come here to get bread his money bought and you do not pay. Then you get drunk and go reeling past this very door. Now let me tell you something." He thrust his hands into the air and shouted. "The mine manager did not close this place. I closed it. You jeered at Cracked McGregor, a better man than any of you. You have had fun with me—laughing at me. Now I jeer at you." He ran up the

steps and unlocking the door stood in the doorway. “Pay the money you owe this bakery and there will be bread for sale here,” he called, and went in and locked the door.

The miners walked off up the street. The boy stood within the bakery, his hands trembling. “I’ve told them something,” he thought, “I’ve shown them they can’t make a fool of me.” He went up the stairway to the rooms above. By the window his mother sat, her head in her hands, looking down into the street. He sat in a chair and thought of the situation. “They will be back here and smash the place like they tore up that garden,” he said.

The next evening Beaut sat in the darkness on the steps before the bakery. In his hands he held a hammer. A dull hatred of the town and of the miners burned in his brain. “I will make it hot for some of them if they come here,” he thought. He hoped they would come. As he looked at the hammer in his hand a phrase from the lips of the drunken old oculist babbling of Napoleon came into his mind. He began to think that he also must be like the figure of which the drunkard had talked. He remembered a story the oculist had told of a fight in the streets of a European city and muttered and waved the hammer about. Upstairs his mother sat by the window with her head in her hands. From the saloon down the street a light gleamed out on the wet sidewalk. The tall pale woman who had gone with him to the eminence overlooking the valley came down the stairway from above the undertaker’s shop. She ran along the sidewalk. On her head she wore a shawl and as she ran she clutched it with her hand. The other hand she held against her side.

When the women reached the boy who sat in silence before the bakery she put her hands on his shoulders and plead with him. “Come away,” she said. “Get your mother and come to our place. They’re going to smash you up here. You’ll get hurt.”

Beaut arose and pushed her away. Her coming had given him new courage. His heart jumped at the thought of her interest in him and he wished that the miners might come so that he could fight them before her. “I wish I could live among people as decent as she,” he thought.

A train stopped at the station down the street. There came the sound of tramping of men and quick sharp commands. A stream of men poured out of the saloon onto the sidewalk. Down the street came a file of soldiers with guns swung across their shoulders. Again Beaut was thrilled by the sight of trained orderly men moving along shoulder to shoulder. In the presence of these men the disorganized miners seemed pitifully weak and insignificant. The girl pulled the shawl about her head and ran up the street to disappear into the stairway. The boy unlocked the door and went upstairs and to bed.

After the strike Nance McGregor who owned nothing but unpaid accounts was unable to open the bakery. A small man with a white moustache, who chewed tobacco, came from the mill and took the unused flour and shipped it away. The boy and his mother continued living above the bakery store room. Again she went in the morning to wash the windows and scrub the floors in the offices of the mine and her red-haired son stood upon the street or sat in the pool room and talked to the black-haired boy. “Next week I’ll be going to the city and will begin making something of myself,” he said. When the time came to go he waited and idled in the streets. Once when a miner jeered at him for his idleness he knocked him into the gutter. The miners who hated him for his speech on the steps, admired him for his strength and brute courage.

CHAPTER IV

In a cellar-like house driven like a stake into the hillside above Coal Creek lived Kate Hartnet with her son Mike. Her man had died with the others during the fire in the mine. Her son like Beaut McGregor did not work in the mine. He hurried through Main Street or went half running among the trees on the hills. Miners seeing him hurrying along with white intense face shook their heads. "He's cracked," they said. "He'll hurt some one yet."

Beaut saw Mike hurrying about the streets. Once encountering him in the pine woods above the town he walked with him and tried to get him to talk. In his pockets Mike carried books and pamphlets. He set traps in the woods and brought home rabbits and squirrels. He got together collections of birds' eggs which he sold to women in the trains that stopped at Coal Creek and when he caught birds he stuffed them, put beads in their eyesockets and sold them also. He proclaimed himself an anarchist and like Cracked McGregor muttered to himself as he hurried along.

One day Beaut came upon Mike Hartnet reading a book as he sat on a log overlooking the town. A shock ran through McGregor when he looked over the shoulder of the man and saw what book he read. "It is strange," he thought, "that this fellow should stick to the same book that fat old Weeks makes his living by."

Beaut sat on the log beside Hartnet and watched him. The reading man looked up and nodded nervously then slid along the log to the farther end. Beaut laughed. He looked down at the town and then at the frightened nervous book-reading man on the log. An inspiration came to him.

"If you had the power, Mike, what would you do to Coal Creek?" he asked.

The nervous man jumped and tears came into his eyes. He stood before the log and spread out his hands. "I would go among men like Christ," he cried, pitching his voice forward like one addressing an audience. "Poor and humble, I would go teaching them of love." Spreading out his hands like one pronouncing a benediction he shouted, "Oh men of Coal Creek, I would teach you love and the destruction of evil."

Beaut jumped up from the log and strode before the trembling figure. He was strangely moved. Grasping the man he thrust him back upon the log. His own voice rolled down the hillside in a great roaring laugh. "Men of Coal Creek," he shouted, mimicking the earnestness of Hartnet, "listen to the voice of McGregor. I hate you. I hate you because you jeered at my father and at me and because you cheated my mother, Nance McGregor. I hate you because you are weak and disorganised like cattle. I would like to come among you teaching the power of force. I would like to slay you one by one, not with weapons but with my naked fists. If they have made you work like rats buried in a hole they are right. It is man's right to do what he can. Get up and fight. Fight and I'll get on the other side and you can fight me. I'll help drive you back into your holes."

Beaut ceased speaking and jumping over the logs ran down the road. Among the first of the miner's houses he stopped and laughed awkwardly. "I am cracked also," he thought, "shouting at emptiness on a hillside." He went on in a reflective mood, wondering what power had taken hold of him. "I would like a fight—a fight against odds," he thought. "I will stir things up when I am a lawyer in the city."

Mike Hartnet came running down the road at the heels of McGregor. "Don't tell," he plead trembling. "Don't tell about me in the town. They will laugh and call names after me. I want to be let alone."

Beaut shook himself loose from the detaining hand and went on down the hill. When he had passed out of sight of Hartnet he sat down on the ground. For an hour he looked at the town in the valley and thought of himself. He was half proud, half ashamed of the thing that had happened.

In the blue eyes of McGregor anger flashed quick and sudden. Upon the streets of Coal Creek he walked, swinging along, his great body inspiring fear. His mother grown grave and silent worked

in the offices of the mines. Again she had a habit of silence in her own home and looked at her son, half fearing him. All day she worked in the mine offices and in the evening sat silently in a chair on the porch before her house and looked down into Main Street.

Beaut McGregor did nothing. He sat in the dingy little pool room and talked with the black-haired boy or walked over the hills swinging a stick in his hand and thinking of the city to which he would presently go to start his career. As he walked in the streets women stopped to look at him, thinking of the beauty and strength of his maturing body. The miners passed him in silence hating him and dreading his wrath. Walking among the hills he thought much of himself. "I am capable of anything," he thought, lifting his head and looking at the towering hills, "I wonder why I stay on here."

When he was eighteen Beaut's mother fell ill. All day she lay on her back in bed in the room above the empty bakery. Beaut shook himself out of his waking stupor and went about seeking work. He had not felt that he was indolent. He had been waiting. Now he bestirred himself. "I'll not go into the mines," he said, "nothing shall get me down there."

He got work in a livery stable cleaning and feeding the horses. His mother got out of bed and began going again to the mine offices. Having started to work Beaut stayed on, thinking it but a way station to the position he would one day achieve in the city.

In the stable worked two young boys, sons of coal miners. They drove travelling men from the trains to farming towns in valleys back among the hills and in the evening with Beaut McGregor they sat on a bench before the barn and shouted at people going past the stable up the hill.

The livery stable in Coal Creek was owned by a hunchback named Weller who lived in the city and went home at night. During the day he sat about the stable talking to red-haired McGregor. "You're a big beast," he said laughing. "You talk about going away to the city and making something of yourself and still you stay on here doing nothing. You want to quit this talking about being a lawyer and become a prize fighter. Law is a place for brains not muscles." He walked through the stables leaning his head to one side and looking up at the big fellow who brushed the horses. McGregor watched him and grinned. "I'll show you," he said.

The hunchback was pleased when he strutted before McGregor. He had heard men talk of the strength and the evil temper of his stableman and it pleased him to have so fierce a fellow cleaning the horses. At night in the city he sat under the lamp with his wife and boasted. "I make him step about," he said.

In the stable the hunchback kept at the heels of McGregor. "And there's something else," he said, putting his hand in his pockets and raising himself on his toes. "You look out for that undertaker's daughter. She wants you. If she gets you there will be no law study but a place in the mines for you. You let her alone and begin taking care of your mother."

Beaut went on cleaning the horses and thinking of what the hunchback had said. He thought there was sense to it. He also was afraid of the tall pale girl. Sometimes when he looked at her a pain shot through him and a combination of fear and desire gripped him. He walked away from it and went free as he went free from the life in the darkness down in the mine. "He has a kind of genius for keeping away from the things he don't like," said the liveryman, talking to Uncle Charlie Wheeler in the sun before the door of the post office.

One afternoon the two boys who worked in the livery stable with McGregor got him drunk. The affair was a rude joke, elaborately planned. The hunchback had stayed in the city for the day and no travelling men got off the trains to be driven over the hills. In the afternoon hay brought over the hill from the fruitful valley was being put into the loft of the barn and between loads McGregor and the two boys sat on the bench by the stable door. The two boys went to the saloon and brought back beer, paying for it from a fund kept for that purpose. The fund was the result of a system worked out by the two drivers. When a passenger gave one of them a coin at the end of a day of driving he put it into the common fund. When the fund had grown to some size the two went to the saloon and stood

before the bar drinking until it was spent and then came back to sleep off their stupor on the hay in the barn. After a prosperous week the hunchback occasionally gave them a dollar for the fund.

Of the beer McGregor drank but one foaming glass. For all his idling about Coal Creek he had never before tasted beer and it was strong and bitter in his mouth. He threw up his head and gulped it then turned and walked toward the rear of the stable to conceal the tears that the taste of the stuff had forced into his eyes.

The two drivers sat on the bench and laughed. The drink they had given Beaut was a horrible mess concocted by the laughing bartender at their suggestion. “We will get the big fellow drunk and hear him roar,” the bartender had said.

As he walked toward the back of the stable a convulsive nausea seized Beaut. He stumbled and pitched forward, cutting his face on the floor. Then he rolled over on his back and groaned and a little stream of blood ran down his cheek.

The two boys jumped up from the bench and ran toward him. They stood looking at his pale lips. Fear seized them. They tried to lift him but he fell from their arms and lay again on the stable floor, white and motionless. Filled with fright they ran from the stable and through Main Street. “We must get a doctor,” they said as they hurried along, “He is mighty sick—that fellow.”

In the doorway leading to the rooms over the undertaker’s shop stood the tall pale girl. One of the running boys stopped and addressed her, “Your red-head,” he shouted, “is blind drunk lying on the stable floor. He has cut his head and is bleeding.”

The tall girl ran down the street to the offices of the mine. With Nance McGregor she hurried to the stable. The store keepers along Main Street looked out of their doors and saw the two women pale and with set faces half-carrying the huge form of Beaut McGregor along the street and in at the door of the bakery.

At eight o’clock that evening Beaut McGregor, his legs still unsteady, his face white, climbed aboard a passenger train and passed out of the life of Coal Creek. On the seat beside him a bag contained all his clothes. In his pocket lay a ticket to Chicago and eighty-five dollars, the last of Cracked McGregor’s savings. He looked out of the car window at the little woman thin and worn standing alone on the station platform and a great wave of anger passed through him. “I’ll show them,” he muttered. The woman looked at him and forced a smile to her lips. The train began to move into the west. Beaut looked at his mother and at the deserted streets of Coal Creek and put his head down upon his hands and in the crowded car before the gaping people wept with joy that he had seen the last of youth. He looked back at Coal Creek, full of hate. Like Nero he might have wished that all of the people of the town had but one head so that he might have cut it off with a sweep of a sword or knocked it into the gutter with one swinging blow.

BOOK II

CHAPTER I

It was late in the summer of 1893 when McGregor came to Chicago, an ill time for boy or man in that city. The big exposition of the year before had brought multiplied thousands of restless labourers into the city and its leading citizens, who had clamoured for the exposition and had loudly talked of the great growth that was to come, did not know what to do with the growth now that it had come. The depression that followed on the heels of the great show and the financial panic that ran over the country in that year had set thousands of hungry men to wait dumbly on park benches poring over want advertisements in the daily papers and looking vacantly at the lake or had driven them to tramp aimlessly through the streets, filled with forebodings.

In time of plenty a great American city like Chicago goes on showing a more or less cheerful face to the world while in nooks and crannies down side-streets and alleys poverty and misery sit hunched up in little ill-smelling rooms breeding vice. In times of depression these creatures crawl forth and joined by thousands of the unemployed tramp the streets through the long nights or sleep upon benches in the parks. In the alleyways off Madison Street on the West Side and off State Street, on the South Side, eager women driven by want sold their bodies to passersby for twenty-five cents. An advertisement in the newspapers of one unfilled job brought a thousand men to block the streets at daylight before a factory door. In the crowds men swore and knocked each other about. Working-men driven to desperation went forth into quiet streets and knocking over citizens took their money and watches and ran trembling into the darkness. A girl of Twenty-fourth Street was kicked and knocked into the gutter because when attacked by thieves she had but thirty-five cents in her purse. A professor of the University of Chicago addressing his class said that, having looked into the hungry distorted faces of five hundred men clamouring for a position as dishwasher in a cheap restaurant, he was ready to pronounce all claims to social advancement in America a figment in the brains of optimistic fools. A tall awkward man walking up State Street threw a stone through the window of a store. A policeman hustled him through the crowd. “You’ll get a workhouse sentence for this,” he said.

“You fool that’s what I want. I want to make property that won’t employ me feed me,” said the tall gaunt man who, trained in the cleaner and more wholesome poverty of the frontier, might have been a Lincoln suffering for mankind.

Into this maelstrom of misery and grim desperate want walked Beaut McGregor of Coal Creek —huge, graceless of body, indolent of mind, untrained, uneducated, hating the world. Within two days he had snatched before the very eyes of that hungry marching army three prizes, three places where a man might by working all day get clothes to wear upon his back and food to put into his stomach.

In a way McGregor had already sensed something the realisation of which will go far toward making any man a strong figure in the world. He was not to be bullied with words. Orators might have preached to him all day about the progress of mankind in America, flags might have been flapped and newspapers might have dinned the wonders of his country into his brain. He would only have shaken his big head. He did not yet know the whole story of how men, coming out of Europe and given millions of square miles of black fertile land mines and forests, have failed in the challenge given them by fate and have produced out of the stately order of nature only the sordid disorder of man. McGregor did not know the fullness of the tragic story of his race. He only knew that the men he had seen were for the most part pigmies. On the train coming to Chicago a change had come over him. The hatred of Coal Creek that burned in him had set fire to something else. He sat looking out of the car window at the stations running past during the night and the following day at the cornfields of

Indiana, making his plans. In Chicago he meant to do something. Coming from a community where no man arose above a condition of silent brute labour he meant to step up into the light of power. Filled with hatred and contempt of mankind he meant that mankind should serve him. Raised among men who were but men he meant to be a master.

And his equipment was better than he knew. In a disorderly haphazard world hatred is as effective an impulse to drive men forward to success as love and high hope. It is a world-old impulse sleeping in the heart of man since the day of Cain. In a way it rings true and strong above the hideous jangle of modern life. Inspiring fear it usurps power.

McGregor was without fear. He had not yet met his master and looked with contempt upon the men and women he had known. Without knowing it he had, besides a huge body hard as adamant, a clear and lucid brain. The fact that he hated Coal Creek and thought it horrible proved his keenness. It was horrible. Well might Chicago have trembled and rich men strolling in the evening along Michigan Boulevard have looked fearfully about as this huge red fellow, carrying the cheap handbag and staring with his blue eyes at the restless moving mobs of people, walked for the first time through its streets. In his very frame there was the possibility of something, a blow, a shock, a thrust out of the lean soul of strength into the jelly-like fleshiness of weakness.

In the world of men nothing is so rare as a knowledge of men. Christ himself found the merchants hawking their wares even on the floor of the temple and in his naive youth was stirred to wrath and drove them through the door like flies. And history has represented him in turn as a man of peace so that after these centuries the temples are again supported by the hawking of wares and his fine boyish wrath is forgotten. In France after the great revolution and the babbling of many voices talking of the brotherhood of man it wanted but a short and very determined man with an instinctive knowledge of drums, of cannons and of stirring words to send the same babblers screaming across open spaces, stumbling through ditches and pitching headlong into the arms of death. In the interest of one who believed not at all in the brotherhood of man they who had wept at the mention of the word brotherhood died fighting brothers.

In the heart of all men lies sleeping the love of order. How to achieve order out of our strange jumble of forms, out of democracies and monarchies, dreams and endeavours is the riddle of the Universe and the thing that in the artist is called the passion for form and for which he also will laugh in the face of death is in all men. By grasping that fact Caesar, Alexander, Napoleon and our own Grant have made heroes of the dullest clods that walk and not a man of all the thousands who marched with Sherman to the sea but lived the rest of his life with a something sweeter, braver and finer sleeping in his soul than will ever be produced by the reformer scolding of brotherhood from a soap-box. The long march, the burning of the throat and the stinging of the dust in the nostrils, the touch of shoulder against shoulder, the quick bond of a common, unquestioned, instinctive passion that bursts in the orgasm of battle, the forgetting of words and the doing of the thing, be it winning battles or destroying ugliness, the passionate massing of men for accomplishment—these are the signs, if they ever awake in our land, by which you may know you have come to the days of the making of men.

In Chicago in 1893 and in the men who went aimlessly seeking work in the streets of Chicago in that year there were none of these signs. Like the coal mining town from which Beaut McGregor had come, the city lay sprawling and ineffective before him, a tawdry disorderly dwelling for millions of men, built not for the making of men but for the making of millions by a few odd meat-packers and drygoods merchants.

With a slight lifting of his great shoulders McGregor sensed these things although he could not have expressed his sense of them and the hatred and contempt of men, born of his youth in the mining town, was rekindled by the sight of city men wandering afraid and bewildered through the streets of their own city.

Knowing nothing of the customs of the unemployed McGregor did not walk the streets looking for signs marked “Men Wanted.” He did not sit on park benches studying want advertisements, the

want advertisements that so often proved but bait put out by suave men up dirty stairways to glean the last few pennies from pockets of the needy. Going along the street he swung his great body through the doorways leading to the offices of factories. When some pert young man tried to stop him he did not say words but drew back his fist threateningly and, glowering, walked in. The young men at the doors of factories looked at his blue eyes and let him pass unchallenged.

In the afternoon of his first day of seeking Beaut got a place in an apple warehouse on the North Side, the third place offered him during the day and the one that he accepted. The chance came to him through an exhibition of strength. Two men, old and bent, struggled to get a barrel of apples from the sidewalk up to a platform that ran waist high along the front of the warehouse. The barrel had rolled to the sidewalk from a truck standing in the gutter. The driver of the truck stood with his hands on his hips, laughing. A German with blond hair stood upon the platform swearing in broken English. McGregor stood upon the sidewalk and looked at the two men who were struggling with the barrel. A feeling of immense contempt for their feebleness shone in his eyes. Pushing them aside he grasped the barrel and with a great heave sent it up onto the platform and spinning through an open doorway into the receiving room of the warehouse. The two workmen stood on the sidewalk smiling sheepishly. Across the street a group of city firemen who lounged in the sun before an engine house clapped their hands. The truck driver turned and prepared to send another barrel along the plank extending from the truck across the sidewalk to the warehouse platform. At a window in the upper part of the warehouse a grey head protruded and a sharp voice called down to the tall German. “Hey Frank, hire that ‘husky’ and let about six of the dead ones you’ve got around here go home.”

McGregor jumped upon the platform and walked in at the warehouse door. The German followed, inventorying the size of the red-haired giant with something like disapproval. His look seemed to say, “I like strong fellows but you’re too strong.” He took the discomfiture of the two feeble workmen on the sidewalk as in some way reflecting upon himself. The two men stood in the receiving room and looked at each other. A bystander might have thought them preparing to fight.

And then a freight elevator came slowly down from the upper part of the warehouse and from it jumped a small grey-haired man with a yard stick in his hand. He had a sharp restless eye and a short stubby grey beard. Striking the floor with a bound he began to talk. “We pay two dollars for nine hours’ work here—begin at seven, quit at five. Will you come?” Without waiting for an answer he turned to the German. “Tell those two old ‘rummies’ to get their time and get out of here,” he said, turning again and looking expectantly at McGregor.

McGregor liked the quick little man and grinned with approval of his decisiveness. He nodded his assent to the proposal and, looking at the German, laughed. The little man disappeared through a door leading to an office and McGregor walked out into the street. At a corner he turned and saw the German standing on the platform before the warehouse looking after him. “He is wondering whether or not he can whip me,” thought McGregor.

In the apple warehouse McGregor worked for three years, rising during his second year to be foreman and replacing the tall German. The German expected trouble with McGregor and was determined to make short work of him. He had been offended by the action of the gray-haired superintendent in hiring the man and felt that a prerogative belonging to himself had been ignored. All day he followed McGregor with his eyes, trying to calculate the strength and courage in the huge body. He knew that hundreds of hungry men walked the streets and in the end decided that the need of work if not the spirit of the man would make him submissive. During the second week he put the question that burned in his brain to the test. He followed McGregor into a dimly-lighted upper room where barrels of apples, piled to the ceiling, left only narrow ways for passage. Standing in the semi-darkness he shouted, calling the man who worked among the apple barrels a foul name, “I won’t have you loafing in there, you red-haired bastard,” he shouted.

McGregor said nothing. He was not offended by the vileness of the name the German had called him and took it merely as a challenge that he had been expecting and that he meant to accept. With a

grim smile on his lips he walked toward the German and when but one apple barrel lay between them reached across and dragged the foreman sputtering and swearing down the passageway to a window at the end of the room. By the window he stopped and putting his hand to the throat of the struggling man began to choke him into submission. Blows fell on his face and body. Struggling terribly the German kicked McGregor's legs with desperate energy. Although his ears rang with the hammer-like blows that fell about his neck and cheeks McGregor stool silent under the storm. His blue eyes gleamed with hatred and the muscles of his great arms danced in the light from the window. As he looked into the protruding eyes of the writhing German he thought of fat Reverend Minot Weeks of Coal Creek and added an extra twitch to the flesh between his fingers. When a gesture of submission came from the man against the wall he stepped back and let go his grip. The German dropped to the floor. Standing over him McGregor delivered his ultimatum. "You report this or try to get me fired and I'll kill you outright," he said. "I'm going to stay here on this job until I get ready to leave it. You can tell me what to do and how to do it but when you speak to me again say 'McGregor'—Mr. McGregor, that's my name."

The German got to his feet and began walking down the passageway between the rows of piled barrels. As he went he helped himself along with his hands. McGregor went back to work. After the retreating form of the German he shouted, "Get a new place when you can Dutch, I'll be taking this job away from you when I'm ready for it."

That evening as McGregor walked to the car he saw the little grey-haired superintendent standing waiting for him before a saloon. The man made a sign and McGregor walked across and stood beside him. They went together into the saloon and stood leaning against the bar and looked at each other. A smile played about the lips of the little man. "What have you been doing to Frank?" he asked.

McGregor turned to the bartender who stood waiting before him. He thought that the superintendent intended to try to patronise him by buying him a drink and he did not like the thought. "What will you have? I'll take a cigar for mine," he said quickly, defeating the superintendent's plan by being the first to speak. When the bartender brought the cigars McGregor paid for them and walked out at the door. He felt like one playing a game. "If Frank meant to bully me into submission this man also means something."

On the sidewalk before the saloon McGregor stopped. "Look here," he said, turning and facing the superintendent, "I'm after Frank's place. I'm going to learn the business as fast as I can. I won't put it up to you to fire him. When I get ready for the place he won't be there."

A light flashed into the eyes of the little man. He held the cigar McGregor had paid for as though about to throw it into the street. "How far do you think you can go with your big fists?" he asked, his voice rising.

McGregor smiled. He thought he had earned another victory and lighting his cigar held the burning match before the little man. "Brains are intended to help fists," he said, "I've got both."

The superintendent looked at the burning match and at the cigar between his fingers. "If I don't which will you use on me?" he asked.

McGregor threw the match into the street. "Aw! don't bother asking," he said, holding out another match.

McGregor and the superintendent walked along the street. "I would like to fire you but I won't. Some day you'll run that warehouse like a clock," said the superintendent.

McGregor sat in the street-car and thought of his day. It had been he felt a day of two battles. First the direct brutal battle of fists in the passageway and then this other battle with the superintendent. He thought he had won both fights. Of the fight with the tall German he thought little. He had expected to win that. The other was different. The superintendent he felt had wanted to patronise him, patting him on the back and buying him drinks. Instead he had patronised the superintendent. A battle had gone on in the brains of the two men and he had won. He had met a

new kind of man, one who did not live by the raw strength of his muscles and he had given a good account of himself. The conviction that he had, besides a good pair of fists, a good brain swept in on him glorifying him. He thought of the sentence, “Brains are intended to help fists,” and wondered how he had happened to think of it.

CHAPTER II

The street in which McGregor lived in Chicago was called Wycliff Place, after a family of that name that had once owned the land thereabout. The street was complete in its hideousness. Nothing more unlovely could be imagined. Given a free hand an indiscriminate lot of badly trained carpenters and bricklayers had builded houses beside the cobblestone road that touched the fantastic in their unsightliness and inconvenience.

The great west side of Chicago has hundreds of such streets and the coal mining town out of which McGregor had come was more inspiring as a place in which to live. As an unemployed young man, not much given to chance companionships, Beaut had spent many long evenings wandering alone on the hillsides above his home town. There was a kind of dreadful loveliness about the place at night. The long black valley with its dense shroud of smoke that rose and fell and formed itself into fantastic shapes in the moonlight, the poor little houses clinging to the hillside, the occasional cry of a woman being beaten by a drunken husband, the glare of the coke fires and the rumble of coal cars being pushed along the railroad tracks, all of these made a grim and rather inspiring impression on the young man's mind so that although he hated the mines and the miners he sometimes paused in his night wanderings and stood with his great shoulders lifted, breathing deeply and feeling things he had no words in him to express.

In Wycliff Place McGregor got no such reactions. Foul dust filled the air. All day the street rumbled and roared under the wheels of trucks and light hurrying delivery wagons. Soot from the factory chimneys was caught up by the wind and having been mixed with powdered horse manure from the roadway flew into the eyes and the nostrils of pedestrians. Always a babble of voices went on. At a corner saloon teamsters stopped to have their drinking cans filled with beer and stood about swearing and shouting. In the evening women and children went back and forth from their houses carrying beer in pitchers from the same saloon. Dogs howled and fought, drunken men reeled along the sidewalk and the women of the town appeared in their cheap finery and paraded before the idlers about the saloon door.

The woman who rented the room to McGregor boasted to him of Wycliff blood. It was that she told him that had brought her to Chicago from her home at Cairo, Illinois. "The place was left to me and not knowing what else to do with it I came here to live," she said. She explained to him that the Wycliffs had been people of note in the early history of Chicago. The huge old house with the cracked stone steps and the ROOMS TO RENT sign in the window had once been their family seat.

The history of this woman was characteristic of the miss-fire quality of much of American life. She was at bottom a wholesome creature who should have lived in a neat frame house in a village and tended a garden. On Sunday she should have dressed herself with care and gone off to sit in a country church with her hands crossed and her soul at rest.

The thought of owning a house in the city had however paralysed her brain. The house itself was worth a certain number of thousands of dollars and her mind could not rise above that fact, so her good broad face had become grimy with city dirt and her body weary from the endless toil of caring for roomers. On summer evenings she sat on the steps before her house clad in some bit of Wycliff finery taken from a trunk in the attic and when a lodger came out at the door she looked at him wistfully and said, "On such a night as this you could hear the whistles on the river steamers in Cairo."

McGregor lived in a small room at the end of a tall on the second floor of the Wycliff house. The windows of the room looked down into a dirty little court almost surrounded by brick warehouses. The room was furnished with a bed, a chair that was always threatening to come to pieces and a desk with weak carved legs.

In this room sat McGregor night after night striving to realise his Coal Creek dream of training his mind and making himself of some account in the world. From seven-thirty until nine-thirty he

sat at a desk in a night school. From ten until midnight he read in his room. He did not think of his surroundings, of the vast disorder of life about him, but tried with all his strength to bring something like order and purpose into his own mind and his own life.

In the little court under the window lay heaps of discarded newspaper tossed about by the wind. There in the heart of the city, walled in by the brick warehouse and half concealed under piles of chair legs cans and broken bottles, lay two logs in their time no doubt, a part of the grove that once lay about the house. The neighbourhood had passed so rapidly from country estate to homes and from homes to rented lodgings and huge brick warehouses that the marks of the lumberman's axe still showed in the butts of the logs.

McGregor seldom saw the little court except when its ugliness was refined and glossed over by darkness or by the moonlight. On hot evenings he laid down his book and leaning far out of the window rubbed his eyes and watched the discarded newspapers, worried by the whirlpools of wind in the court, run here and there, dashing against the warehouse walls and vainly trying to escape over the roof. The sight fascinated him and brought a thought into his mind. He began to think that the lives of most of the people about him were much like the dirty newspaper harried by adverse winds and surrounded by ugly walls of facts. The thought drove him from the window to renewed effort among his books. "I'll do something here anyway. I'll show them," he growled.

One living in the house with McGregor during those first years in the city might have thought his life stupid and commonplace but to him it did not seem so. It was for the miner's son a time of sudden and tremendous growth. Filled with confidence in the strength and quickness of his body he was beginning to have also confidence in the vigour and clearness of his brain. In the warehouse he went about with eyes and ears open, devising in his mind new methods of moving goods, watching the men at work, marking the shirkers, preparing to pounce upon the tall German's place as foreman.

The superintendent of the warehouse, not understanding the turn of the talk with McGregor on the sidewalk before the saloon, decided to like him and laughed when they met in the warehouse. The tall German maintained a policy of sullen silence and went to laborious lengths to avoid addressing him.

In his room at night McGregor began to read law, reading each page over and over and thinking of what he had read through the next day as he rolled and piled apple barrels in the passages in the warehouse.

McGregor had an aptitude and an appetite for facts. He read law as another and gentler nature might have read poetry or old legends. What he read at night he remembered and thought about during the day. He had no dream of the glories of the law. The fact that these rules laid down by men to govern their social organisation were the result of ages of striving toward perfection did not greatly interest him and he only thought of them as weapons with which to attack and defend in the battle of brains he meant presently to fight. His mind gloated in anticipation of the battle.

CHAPTER III

And then a new element asserted itself in the life of McGregor. One of the hundreds of disintegrating forces that attack strong natures, striving to scatter their force in the back currents of life, attacked him. His big body began to feel with enervating persistency the call of sex.

In the house in Wycliff Place McGregor passed as a mystery. By keeping silence he won a reputation for wisdom. The clerks in the hall bedrooms thought him a scientist. The woman from Cairo thought him a theological student. Down the hall a pretty girl with large black eyes who worked in a department store down town dreamed of him at night. When in the evening he banged the door to his room and strode down the hallway going to the night school she sat in a chair by the open door of her room. As he passed she raised her eyes and looked at him boldly. When he returned she was again by the door and again she looked boldly at him.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.