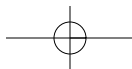


In Time of Peace



In Time of Peace

A NOVEL



Thomas Alexander Boyd

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

Brian Bruce

Rvive Books

2009

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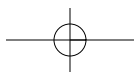
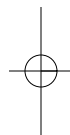
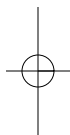
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*To
Betty Grace Boyd*



Introduction

AT THE CONCLUSION of Thomas Boyd's semi-autobiographical World War I novel *Through the Wheat*, William Hicks walks toward the German lines through rifle and machine gun fire to retrieve his own machine gun. Oblivious to danger and the suffering of his comrades, he is emotionally empty and without hope. Boyd's last novel, *In Time of Peace*, concludes with Hicks caught in a similar situation while protesting outside a Minnesota factory. But instead of being overwhelmed, Hicks has an epiphany. With a clear understanding of what he has to do, Hicks leads his fellow workers as they charge towards the guards keeping them out of the factory. By the time he wrote *In Time of Peace*, Boyd was no longer a soul numbed Marine fresh from the battlefields of World War I. He was a political activist committed to changing what he felt was an unjust system.

Boyd's journey from Marine to communist organizer was not as implausible as it might seem. He grew up without the steady influence of either of his parents. His father died before Boyd was born. His mother, an opium-addicted nurse, never settled in one place long enough for Boyd to live with her for more than a few months. As a child he shuttled between the

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homes of aunts and grandparents until the age of fifteen. Along the way he picked up a hodgepodge of interests and beliefs that included a love of literature, Christian Science beliefs, and a life long interest in Ohio history.

Throughout his life Boyd absorbed the ideas of those he admired and those closest to him. His personal history— which included a grandfather who lost a farm to his creditors—and his own experiences in combat and as a factory worker made him favor the ideas of the left. But it was the Great Depression's impact on his career that led him to communism. Convinced that the capitalist system had failed him and the nation, Boyd flung himself into communist politics and decided to use his position as an author to advance the communist cause.

Boyd owed his career as a writer to his first wife Margaret "Peggy" Smith. A working reporter and aspiring novelist, Peggy literally pushed Boyd into a career as a reporter and then helped him create a book page for the St. Paul Daily News. As literary editor Boyd gained access to the lively community of writers in St. Paul and a reason to introduce himself to visiting authors. It was in his capacity as editor that Boyd met F. Scott Fitzgerald. Boyd's relationship with Fitzgerald proved pivotal to the careers of both Tom and Peggy Boyd. Fitzgerald gave Peggy's first manuscript to his editor Maxwell Perkins. Charles Scribner's Sons published it under the title *The Love Legend* in 1922. A meeting between Boyd and Perkins resulted in Tom's decision to write a book about his war time experiences. When his manuscript was rejected by Scribner's Boyd sent it to Fitzgerald who took it back to Scribner's and persuaded them to publish the book.

Praised by critics for its honesty and realism, *Through the Wheat* enjoyed popular success and launched Boyd's productive if uneven career. Over the next twelve years Boyd produced five novels, four biographies, and dozens of short stories. Some of his works were quite good. Others reflected the time and

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economic pressures under which they were written. Regardless of their quality Boyd's major works can be placed in one of three categories: works about World War I, works of history (mostly connected with Ohio), and works of political propaganda. All of Boyd's books and short stories display his talent for vivid storytelling.

Despite the success of *Through the Wheat*, Boyd never wrote another novel about World War I. He wrote several short stories about the war in 1923 and 1924 that were collected in *Points of Honor* (1925). For a book of stories it sold well, but despite its success, the stories in *Points of Honor* represented Boyd's last serious effort to write about the war.

A year before publishing *Points of Honor*, Scribner's published Boyd's second novel. Based on a 19th Century diary, the plot of *The Dark Cloud* (1924) follows a young man's adventures as he works his way across the pre-Civil War Ohio. In 1925, Scribner's published *Samuel Drummond*, Boyd's second historical novel set in Ohio. Based on Boyd's grandfather's struggle to establish and maintain a large farm outside Defiance, Ohio, *Samuel Drummond* represented an advance for Boyd in terms of character creation and emotional depth. Max Perkins believed that Boyd was on the verge of a major breakthrough.

Unfortunately, *Samuel Drummond* did not catch the attention of readers and failed to sell out its initial printing. Two years passed before Boyd published another book. Then, in 1928, Boyd produced a novel and a biography that resurrected his career. The novel, *Shadow of the Long Knives*, was a surprise hit with readers and critics. Set in colonial Ohio, the novel told the story of an American frontiersman's struggle to come to grips with changing loyalties during the American Revolution and his rebellious son. *Shadow of the Long Knives* also displayed a deep sympathy for the plight of Native Americans, that was uncommon at the time. The plot grew out of research Boyd had done in order to write his first biography. Published

by Minton Balch, *Simon Girty: White Savage* was not a success, but it gave Boyd confidence in his ability as a biographer.

The success of *Shadow of the Long Knives* boosted Scribner's faith in Boyd. When Boyd told Perkins that he wanted to write a biography of Revolutionary War General Anthony Wayne, Perkins issued a contract for the book and gave Boyd an advance. Carefully researched and filled with exciting action scenes, *Mad Anthony Wayne* (1929), delighted readers and critics. It became Boyd's second most popular book and provided him with temporary financial security. Confident of another success, Boyd began work on a biography of Light Horse Harry Lee.

Many things in Boyd's life changed between the publication of *Mad Anthony Wayne* and *Light Horse Harry Lee*. He divorced Peggy Boyd and quickly married Ruth Fitch Bartlett. In 1931, Boyd moved to Hollywood to work on a screenplay with one of his retired Marine Corps commanders, who had connections with a movie studio. A few weeks after Boyd arrived in California, Scribner's published *Light Horse Harry Lee*. Despite the quality of the research and writing, the book failed to sell. To make matters worse, the movie studios rejected his screenplay. His attempts to find full time employment as a screenwriter at other Hollywood studios also failed. Even his publisher seemed to have abandoned him. The failure of Boyd's Lee biography and the harsh economics of the publishing business in the early thirties led Scribner's to reject all of Boyd's subsequent manuscripts and proposals. These setbacks, combined with the collapse of the United States economy, convinced Boyd that the nation's economic and political systems were inherently flawed. He felt the solution was to embrace what he believed to be the more just communist system.

Boyd moved to Vermont where he joined a local unit of the Communist Party USA. In 1934, the Party chose him to be its candidate for governor. He lost, but his commitment to the

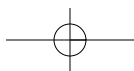
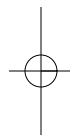
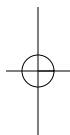
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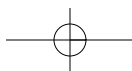
Communist cause remained strong. That same year, Minton Balch agreed to publish a biography and a novel by Boyd. Both were ultimately works of political propaganda. The biography, *Poor John Fitch, Inventor of the Steamboat*, cast John Fitch as a proletarian hero denied the recognition and wealth he deserved by a conspiracy of the early American elite. While not effective as a biography nor as propaganda, the book did renew interest in Fitch, who was recognized as the true inventor of the steamboat.

The novel proved to be a much better book. *In Time of Peace* described the efforts of William Hicks to find success in America during the 1920s and 1930s. Confronted by all the evils of unregulated capitalism — back breaking factory work, unscrupulous politicians, shifty real estate agents, the mirage of easy wealth to be made in the stock market, the pitfalls of credit, and a climate of conspicuous consumption — Hicks fails to achieve economic stability. Boyd relates Hicks' story with such insight and feeling that when Hicks rises up to lead the victims of the Depression against the moneyed interests, the reader feels the excitement of his decision to fight for change and justice. *In Time of Peace*, received some positive reviews and might have been the beginning of a new and successful phase of Boyd's career, but he died suddenly and unexpectedly of a cerebral hemorrhage before it was published.

During his short life Thomas Boyd produced a number of significant and entertaining books that deserve more attention than they have received. *In Time of Peace* is among Boyd's best and most fully realized novels. It is worthy of a modern audience, especially given our current economic conditions, and should be fascinating for readers with an interest in the writers of the "Lost Generation," American literary history, and of course for those who simply enjoy a good story.



In Time of Peace



CHAPTER ONE

POWER WITH A startling whine vibrated along the ceiling of the plant. Under a pale light that failed before it reached the distant corners of the room the night shift shuffled and leaned forward. Overhead, wheels whirred, and revolving belts slapped loudly.

In the shaking, rattling atmosphere Hicks moved with tense rapidity toward his own machine. An immense, compact mass of shining steel, it stood resplendent in a far corner of the shop. From the round turret the tools bristled like guns on the deck of a destroyer. Opposite the turret the convex steel collar was a fantastic target holding the end of a long metal bar as a bull's-eye. Breathing a great lungful of tobacco, Hicks dropped the cigarette he had been smoking, crunched it under his heel without slackening his pace, and strode up to the machine as if confronting a powerful adversary.

"Now God damn you," he muttered aloud and turned the current on.

Checking his micrometer, he dropped it in a pocket of his flannel shirt, which was the only part of his army equipment or experience that seemed to have any civilian utility. Puttees,

breeches, and a tunic bedecked with the usual medals lay in a shabby trunk at his aunt's house in Ohio, where he had gone after his discharge from the hospital. For a month he had prowled restlessly around the small town, looking for a job, seeing the high school and his name on the honor roll, meeting people he had known since childhood—with bewildered eyes. Abruptly conscious that he had returned to an indifferent and even hostile world, he had gone to Chicago and had found this factory job before his bonus money had been exhausted. He was twenty-one, he had been back from France six months, and his life in the machine shop was as empty of meaning as the war had been.

With a wary, determined glance Hicks reached for a lever. Down the carriage slid the turret, toward the whirling, round steel bar; over it a cool, milky fluid splashed the hot metal. When the bit gored the specified depth, he jerked the lever, and the turret backed slowly over its lengthwise course. Again he yanked at the lever. The turret came forward, and with a swift motion of his hand Hicks swung the heavy object till the reamer pointed to the hole the drill had made. Simultaneously he spun a wheel with his left hand, bringing the shaping tool crosswise against the whirling bar. Up from the sharp edges came long steel shavings, smoking hot. As the end of the bar pared down to the shape of a flanged cone, Hicks released the turret lever and reached for his micrometer. While a strong, steady pressure of his left hand guided the shaping tool, he held the micrometer against the cone till it measured within a sixty-fourth of an inch of the size it was set. Swiftly reversing the crosswise carriage, he brought the cutting tool against the bar and held it there till the cone-shaped end was severed.

“One down!” he yelled into the noise of the machine, “and ninety-nine to go!”

For the first hour every movement was painful, but when his sore muscles had limbered he began to feel strong and tri-

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umphant. He was no longer bothered by his grease-soaked pants or by the lacerations with which the steel shavings had marked his wrists and forearms. He was conscious of nothing save his power over the machine. Strength carried him like a steady wind that fills a sail to flowing.

At nine o'clock the long steel bar had dwindled to a stump too short to be gripped by the collar of the lathe. Hicks turned and shouted into the whirl and clatter of the shop: "More steel!"

The foreman, who had been prowling among the rows of men at the smaller lathes, saw that Hicks had stopped and beckoned to one of the helpers. "Martin!" he yelled, jerking his thumb.

Hicks shut off his motor and joined Martin on the way to the storeroom.

Martin was blond, ruddy, and six feet tall. He had a slanting forehead and wide cheekbones and looked like a mixture of Indian and Viking. But, as he and Hicks bent over a pile of the long steel bars, Martin dropped to one knee, resting.

"How you makin' it?"

"Goin' strong," Hicks said.

"Better take it easy."

"I know." Hicks nodded. Though he recognized Martin as an experienced workman whose advice should be heeded, he never could believe when he was working with such effortless strength that he would be poisoned by exhaustion by four o'clock in the morning. Besides, what was the point of lying down when you felt like working so that you could work when you felt like lying down? "You ready?"

"Up she goes," Martin said.

They strained together, lifting the great steel bar, and, with legs bowed and shoulder muscles bulging, carried it across the floor to the automatic turret lathes.

With all his weight on the lever Hicks tightened the collar

around the bar. "There, by God," he said, and started up the humming motor.

It was a little past nine. Nearly three hours before the bell would clang for the thirty-minute break at midnight. Hicks glanced back at the pile of flange-shaped cones he had made that evening. The size increased his triumph. He set himself to beat the production record of the man on day shift—not to compete with the day man, but simply as a gauge of his growing power over the machine. Eagerly he lunged from one lever to another.

Exactly at midnight the electric current was shut off. Wheels and revolving belts jiggled shrilly to an abrupt stop. The older men and the married ones reached slowly under their machines for dinner pails, while the younger, freer workmen hurried toward the door.

"Time out," Martin called. "Let's eat."

Hot from exertion, Hicks plucked at his shirt front and blew against his bare, sweating chest. "Jesus," he said.

Together they went through the silent shop and up the back alley to Halsted Street, where, in the middle of the block, the white exterior of an all-night lunch room gleamed under a dingy street lamp. Inside, workmen lined the counter three deep, shouting a confusion of orders to the fat cook sizzling hamburgers on the griddle.

With sandwiches and coffee in their hands, Hicks and Martin edged into a corner. Half-consciously Hicks rubbed his left shoulder, as if he felt the weight of his army pack again.

Martin looked at him comprehendingly. "Tough, huh?"

"It's all right up to midnight," Hicks said, "but along about two o'clock it gets pretty tough."

"Always will be that way," Martin said calmly. "That's the trouble with this damned night work. A man's not built for it." He paused. "And the hell of it is, it don't do any good. Six months out of the year they work the pants off you, then they

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shut down and out you go on your bare ass, and if you can't find another job that's your tough luck!"

"It's a lousy way to live," Hicks agreed. "I'd hate having to spend the rest of my life at it."

Over his high cheekbones Martin's deep-set eyes appraised Hicks soberly. "You're all right. You can walk out of here and into a white collar job any day."

Hicks's simple eyes wavered with embarrassment. In the army, singling a man out for an easier post was an insult to the man himself, but here it was to be regarded as a compliment. He looked at Martin—honest, rugged, competent. "Why me?" he said defensively. "Why don't you get a white collar job yourself?"

Martin shook his head. "Hell, I've fooled around machinery ever since I was a kid. Nope." He grasped his coffee cup with a large steady hand and grinned. "I'd look swell behind a ribbon counter, wouldn't I?"

"Twenty-five after!"

"Let's shove," Martin said.

Cigarettes, the last till half-past six next morning, were hastily lighted. Smoking avidly, the men re-crossed deserted Halsted Street and jostled down the black alley.

Hicks went back to his machine and turned on the motor. Four or five feet of the steel bar remained before it became too short to use. He swung warily back into the series of swift, jerky motions demanded by the lathe. After an hour's work, he had made six flanged cones. Not enough, he realized, and tried to go through the complicated manual at a swifter rate.

By half-past two Hicks had come to the end of the bar. As he turned away from the machine he reeled, and his eyes were heavy. He shook his head to regain his balance. "Jesus," he muttered, feeling cold sweat on his legs beneath his greasy pants, "four hours to go!" In a cracked, dismayed voice he shouted: "More steel!"

Martin veered toward the storeroom door, and Hicks joined him slowly. Beside the steel bars Hicks's knees doubled under him and he sat down, his eyes looking dazedly on the floor.

Martin was silent for a moment. Then he said: "Ol' Gimlet Eye's been keepin' pretty close track of you the last half hour. Don't want to stay here too long or he'll bawl hell out of us."

Hicks nodded but didn't move.

"Come on," Martin urged him.

"All right." He stood up dazedly and bent slowly over a bar. His lip curled weakly as he straightened under the weight, and he staggered forward on awkward legs. That upward twitching of his lip opened a floodgate of self-pity; then he rallied, using the uncontrollable twitch as an expression of scorn. Hell, he'd gone through Belleau Wood, hadn't he? It would take more than a bar of steel to cave him in!

At the machine again, Hicks tightened the collar on the bar. It was harder now and took more time. Swinging the turret around from the stop-tool for the next operation, he gashed the palm of his hand on the sharp-edged drill. He looked in surprise at the blood running down his wrist and decided to ignore it.

But the cut slowed him up. At four o'clock he lost all hope of getting higher production. The machine had become a monster demanding constant efforts which it was torture for his sore muscles to make. He would do well to achieve the regular quota by morning.

Through the whir of power and the clack of leather belts Hicks became aware of a stealthy presence behind him. It distracted him, but for a while he kept to his work and tried to push from his consciousness the fact that he was being covertly watched, judged, checked up on. Unable to endure it any longer he finally turned.

Old Gimlet Eye, the foreman, stood at his shoulder.

"How's it running?" the foreman asked suspiciously.

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“All right,” Hicks said.

The foreman held up one of the flanged cones Hicks had made. “Here’s a bum one; you got a couple more in the pile. You want to watch it—that steel costs money.”

Hicks nodded, holding the cutting tool firmly against the whirling bar with one hand while his other gauged the size with his micrometer.

“You been slowin’ down the last couple hours.” The foreman’s dry voice rasped through the hum of the big machine. “What’s the matter? Can’t you make it?”

“I can make it,” Hicks answered doggedly.

“Speed it up a little, then,” the foreman said, and went to stand behind another machine.

Hicks tightened his lips and stared with resentful determination at the spot beneath the milky stream where the tool bit into the whirling bar. It was no longer a contest between himself and the machine: it was a contest he had to wage against both the machine and the foreman. For the machine was firmly on the foreman’s side. As Hicks realized this he also realized that he could never make headway against the combination. It was always the same. Every night, once his sore muscles had limbered up, he worked with increasing strength and confidence till after midnight, when, hour by hour, the machine gained over his tired body. There was only an exhausting, monotonous rhythm which the owners of the machine had imposed—ten hours a day, twelve hours a night.

Hicks worked steadily through a haze of angry bafflement. Five o’clock. Sluggishness pervaded his thoughts and muscles till every movement was like straining through a boggy swamp with a great glare of light beating down on his head through darkness.

With the abruptness of escaping steam the power was withdrawn. The overhead wheels and connecting belts, whirling crazily from sheer momentum, jiggled slowly to a dead stop,

and a bell clanged once in the stillness. It was half-past six. Hicks hung up his micrometer and stiffly bent over, disconnecting the motor from the turret lathe. Carrying his coat over one arm, he merged with the shuffling mass of young and middle-aged moving toward the door.

Blinking under the sunlight of the empty street, Hicks went toward the bridge over the canal and walked up Wells Street to the elevated station. He slowly climbed the iron stairs and sat waiting, looking at his oil-soaked shoes and pants, which made his flesh crawl as if his clothes were lousy. When the Wilson Avenue Express came past he hurried aboard and found a seat at the far end, where he scrouged into the corner like a baffled mole drawing away from daylight. The train lurched around the business district and swung northward. Along the paralleled tracks passed loop-bound cars in which he could see men like himself, but wearing clean white collars, shop girls and stenographers pertly rouged. Weary and begrimed, Hicks assuaged his envy of the personal respectability in the men's appearance by despising them for their soft-handedness, for their clerkly willingness to stand behind counters piled with articles they couldn't afford to buy, for their glib certainty of being better than workers like himself. He knew the kind of men they were. He knew their insecurity. He shared a room with one of them.

A few steps south of Wilson Avenue station Hicks left the jerky express and walked lamely past blocks of new apartment houses to the recently constructed but already shabby building in which he had lived since his discharge from the army. At the end of a long, dark corridor he opened the door to a room nine by twelve and dropped on the scarred, sway-backed bed.

At four Hicks opened one eye to the afternoon sunlight beating in through the window. He lay looking at his roommate's tousled bed and thinking that in less than two hours he would be back at the machine again. Moving a little, he

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brought a sore muscle into play. He winced, muttering in a mildly outraged tone: "Jee-sus."

Heavy footsteps, slightly limping, clomped down the corridor. The door opened. Hepburn, who had had a machine-gun bullet in his leg, came in, tilting his gray felt hat over jocular but evasive eyes.

"Golly, you still in bed?"

Hicks sat up and shuffled into his slippers. He looked at the grease-soaked pile of clothing on the chair by the bathroom door. "Don't be a dope all your life," he muttered. "If you'd done a twelve-hour shift last night you'd be in bed, too."

Hepburn's neat, dark head tilted, and his protruding brown eyes stared at Hicks as if trying to bluster through his perpetual state of bewilderment. "Why n't you get a good job?"

Hicks laughed sarcastically. Hepburn worked in the local office of a national credit-rating agency where twenty or thirty men all found piles of little yellow slips at their desks each morning. "Like yours, I suppose?" Hicks asked.

"Sure, like mine. Down at the office—nine o'clock. Stick around my desk half an hour, then out on the street the rest of the day. If I want a cigarette, I smoke it. If I want a drink, I take it. If I go by a movie I'd like to see, I go in and see it."

Hicks put on his grease-marked underclothes, which had been clean the day before. "Yeah? And what good are you?"

"I do my job," Hepburn said defensively.

Hicks laughed. "Carryin' little slips of paper around for guys to write on! You call that a job? Christ, a ten-year-old kid could do that!—or some girl at a telephone."

"I get paid for it, don't I?"

"Sure," Hicks went on, "but your job's just a front that credit agency puts up so it can charge more for its services. You don't do anything, and neither does it."

"Okay," Hepburn said, "but what of it?"

"Jesus," Hicks muttered, climbing into his greasy pants, "I

should think you could see what of it! Listen.” He paused, one shoe on, looking up at Hepburn earnestly. “Remember that time at Gondrecourt when Freddy Morf came up and asked us all whether he should take the job of company clerk or not? Remember? We all said, ‘Sure, it’s a soft job, go ahead.’ But when he asked if we’d take it ourselves if we had a chance, we all said, ‘No, the hell with it.’”

Hepburn nodded. “He didn’t take it, did he?”

“No, he didn’t take it. He was a good guy. When there was a tough job on hand all of us stuck together—and it didn’t take long to find who the gold bricks were, either.”

“So now you think anybody’s a gold brick that takes a soft job?” Hepburn asked defensively. “Well, lemme tell you, I don’t make as much a week as you do.”

“No,” Hicks agreed. He wanted to add: “But you think you’re pretty slick to be wearing a white collar like somebody’s boss,” only he realized Hepburn would take it as a personal affront. “I know it’s not so easy for you, either,” he said.

Hepburn was perplexed. He pushed in his cheek with his forefinger and gnawed soberly. “The trouble with you is, you’re sore at your job.”

“No, I’m not sore at the job itself. But I’m damned if I’ll spend the rest of my life like this. This twelve-hour shift is worse than two on and four off in a front line trench!”

“Then why don’t you quit?” Hepburn demanded.

“I’m going to,” Hicks said recklessly. “I’m gonna get the hell out of here!”

Hepburn was startled. “Not sore at me, are you?”

Hicks shook his head. “Hell, no.”

“Ummm!” Hepburn’s brown eyes bulged with shrewdness. “You’re goin’ up to see that Hughes girl?”

“Maybe I am.” Hicks thought of Patsy Hughes as he had seen her the day she came to get a story at Great Lakes Hospital, of her wide gray eyes and her short, straight-bridged nose. She

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was pretty and intelligent. He had never met any one else so pretty and intelligent.

“Oh, Jesus,” Hepburn pleaded, his face screwed up with pitying disgust, “you’re not gonna quit your job just so you can chase after that girl?”

Hicks flushed. “You can put it that way if you want to.”

“Then why are you gonna quit?” Hepburn persisted.

Badgered, Hicks scowled. “I want to get something out of life, that’s why.”

“Ha ha!” Hepburn slapped his thigh. “If that’s all you want there’s plenty of dames right around here that’ll give you all you want.”

Hicks glared. He put on the old overseas cap he wore to work and started toward the door.

Hepburn’s mirth wavered. “Golly, you’re not gonna marry her, are you?”

Hicks opened the door. “That’s up to her.”

“Oh, God!” Hepburn uttered a short, hollow laugh that was only partly jocular. “That settles it; the guy’s gonna get married. Hey, Hicks! What do you want for a wedding present?”

Hicks went on down the ragged, carpeted corridor and turned east toward Wilson Avenue. At the Greek restaurant under the elevated tracks he ordered his usual evening meal. As he sat with a cigarette in his fingers, drinking his second cup of coffee, he became fully aware of the decision he had made. It had come upon him with disconcerting force and suddenness. Three weeks ago Patsy had lost her job on the newspaper and had been forced to go back and live with her parents. Since then his Sundays had been bleak and unendurable. Now he was going to quit his job, the only one he had been able to find in Chicago. How would he get another? For a moment he felt blanched and shaky. Then his lip curled derisively. “Grow up, you dope!” he muttered, and went out whistling through the dusk.

CHAPTER TWO

LINED ON either side by tall, frame houses with the peaked roofs and jigsaw trimmings of the 1890's, the shady street lay quiet under Sunday stillness. Hicks walked in a slow, triumphant daze, carrying his heavy traveling bag. Beside him was Patsy in a light blue dress, floppy panama, and white buck oxfords. She had met him in the steel-webbed tunnel of the station, and Hepburn's taunts as well as his own last-minute anxiety about giving up his job had vanished at sight of her watchful gray eyes.

Turning a corner, they came upon a row of red brick houses with arched doorways and low stone steps. Neither pretentious nor dilapidated, the row had a friendly air of peaceful living. Hicks grinned down at Patsy. "This is our house." He pointed a little enviously. "We've just been to New York on our vacation—"

"Oh, Paris!" Patsy laughed.

"And London, Moscow, and Berlin," Hicks nodded. "But we're glad to be home, too!"

"Only the chauffeur forgot to meet us," Patsy complained. "As a matter of fact, the third one *is* ours."

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It was an auspicious coincidence, Hicks felt, following Patsy up the steps. And the way she had accepted his fantastic statement made it seem as if it could easily be turned into reality.

At the door Patsy stopped, wrinkling her short nose. "I ought to warn you," she said, "we're in for a fishing trip with the family."

"You can't scare me," Hicks laughed. "I'd go to a church supper so long as we could be together."

"Well"—Patsy was dubious—"but you've never been fishing with Mother and Pop."

In the narrow hall Mrs. Hughes, very straight of figure, sharp of feature, and precise of speech, extended her hand. "How do you do, Mr. Hicks."

"Bill, Mother," Patsy corrected her.

Hicks smiled hopefully.

Mr. Hughes appeared from the living room. He had mild, speculative eyes, a proud, curving nose, and a shock of white hair. "Well, Bill," he began with embarrassed heartiness, "glad you're up here."

"Patsy has told us about you," Mrs. Hughes said, as if she could see that the part of a parent devolved entirely upon her. "I visited my cousins in Ohio once when I was a girl. You come from good people, William," she added severely.

Patsy giggled. "Mother, you make it sound like a reproach. He can't help it." She gave her father a distracted look. "Pop, if we're going fishing, hadn't we better go?"

"Yes, yes," Mr. Hughes said in a gruffly wistful voice.

Gravely tightening her thin lips, Mrs. Hughes fetched a large basket from the kitchen. Hicks carried it to the front door while Mr. Hughes drove the Ford around from the alley.

Mr. Hughes released the clutch abruptly, and the Ford jerked forward. From the motor came a clanking noise, like the hammer of a bearing, but Mr. Hughes accepted it indifferently. A few blocks farther on, where cars fled past a crossing in an

incessant stream, he stopped and edged into the traffic with the Sunday driver's cautious slowness. Keeping close to the curb, he motioned vaguely toward the large, expensive houses. "How do you like our Millionaire Row?" he called to Hicks above the pounding of the motor.

Mrs. Hughes turned around, nodding in a critically appreciative manner. "Some of the houses are really beautiful."

Patsy said casually: "With plenty of money and a street four miles long to experiment with they couldn't help building a few good-looking houses, Mother."

"Is it really four miles long?" Hicks asked incredulously.

Patsy nodded carelessly.

"But they're not all millionaires?" Hicks demanded.

"They're all very rich," Patsy said.

Hicks divided the city's population by four. The result was a mile of rich men's houses to every sixty thousand people. He expostulated in a low tone: "Jesus!"

Kept close to the curb by swift cars prowling shark-like through the traffic, Mr. Hughes drove cautiously along the avenue, descended a winding hill to a long, dingy street till he came at last to a congested four-lane highway, where he patiently waited to slip into the northbound stream.

After jogging for an hour in a crawling, irately honking procession, the Ford scuttled up a rise in the concrete road, and Lake Nicollet lay ahead.

Raising a smell of freshly sprinkled lime, they crunched over the gravel in the crowded parking space and stopped. Mr. Hughes went to the pavilion and stood waiting while a thick-faced Swede policeman discoursed with the girl at the counter. Hicks carried the basket to the dock, and they waited for Mr. Hughes. When the policeman had finished talking to the girl, Mr. Hughes was assigned a boat, and they disposed themselves upon the seats. Hicks pushed off and slid the oars back into the locks.

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“Now, Bill,” Mr. Hughes directed without looking up from his tackle, “just row out in the middle of the lake—anywhere out there!”

Hicks nodded, pretending enthusiasm to conceal his disappointment that his first day with Patsy was to be spent with a pair of oars in his hands. He bent forward and began rowing steadily till the boat lay midway between the surrounding shores.

Over either side of the boat was dangled a bamboo pole held by Mr. and Mrs. Hughes, who sat with scarcely a movement and without a word. Morning passed, and the heat-drunk sun leered down with bland malevolence, but Mr. and Mrs. Hughes remained in dozing contemplation of their fishing rods.

Patsy squirmed restlessly under her floppy panama. “Bill,” she demanded, “aren’t you hungry?”

Hicks saw her rebellious eyes on her mother’s placid back and grinned. “Sure,” he cautiously admitted. “But then, I’m always hungry.”

Neither of Patsy’s parents spoke. An hour passed. The Hugheses still retained their trancelike posture.

“Pop,” Patsy rubbed the end of her nose distractedly. “Let’s row back to shore!”

Mr. Hughes was naïvely astonished. “What for?”

“So we can eat!” Patsy said emphatically.

Mr. Hughes answered without raising his eyes from the water. “No need to go ashore for just a bite of lunch. Mother,” he consulted Mrs. Hughes, “are you hungry?”

“No,” Mrs. Hughes said, “but perhaps it’s time.”

“We’re hungry,” Patsy maintained, “and it’s about twenty degrees too hot out here!”

Mr. Hughes lifted his head and mildly surveyed the lake. “Bill,” he said, “just row to that cove over there. Then we can eat our lunch, and mother and I can keep on with our fishing.”

He sounded so amiable and reasonable in his single-mindedness that there was no use protesting. Hicks smiled gloomily at Patsy and took up the oars. He had dismally accurate visions of the afternoon passing like the wasted morning.

They ate lunch and neatly replaced the sandwich papers in the basket. Afterward Patsy resumed her novel under the shade of her panama, and Hicks sat hunched in the bow, thinking how fine it was that Patsy, who read novels of which most people had never heard, was going to marry him of whom no one had ever heard. He beamed at her in quiet satisfaction.

It was the middle of the afternoon when Mrs. Hughes started nervously and uttered a hurried, unintelligible sound. Her line was the taut, exact center of ribbed waves on the water's surface. Grave and dignified as ever, she wound up the steadily clicking reel.

"Bet you've an old shoe on the other end!" Patsy gazed over the side, amusedly expectant.

Mrs. Hughes remained composed and silent, watchfully winding in. A small bass, with fluttering gills and flashing tail, came clear of the water. When it was safe in the bottom of the boat, Mrs. Hughes pursed her lips while her slow, determined fingers spiked fresh bait on her hook.

"Mother!" Patsy looked at her in astonishment. "You don't think there's another one in there, do you?"

"Nonsense," Mrs. Hughes rebuked her.

Before sundown it had become obvious to Hicks that the evening would be wasted like the day, in the company of Mr. and Mrs. Hughes, unless he rebelled beforehand. On the way to the pier Patsy and he exchanged mutinous, understanding glances, and when the baskets had been carried to the car and the motor was running they remained together on the graveled parking space.

"Mother, we're going to have supper here," Patsy announced. Mrs. Hughes frowned and looked suspiciously at Hicks.

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“Bill”—Mr. Hughes gave Hicks a hopeful, pleading glance—
“Mother’s got a pretty fine supper waitin’ for us at home.”

“But we don’t want to go home now,” Patsy protested.

“Very well.” Mrs. Hughes gave in reluctantly. “But come home early.”

From the restaurant by the pier Hicks and Patsy watched the sun set over the glittering white yacht club at the farther end of the lake. In the afterglow they walked slowly through the park along the gravel path, where, overhead, the green leaves were softly blotted by the dusk. Soon the broad corridor between the trees was blocked in by blue-black night, and the couples on the benches were anonymous as sparrows.

Too enterprising to be satisfied with a park bench, Hicks led Patsy toward the darkened bandstand. They stealthily climbed the steps. But when they reached the top Hicks heard hurried, defensive sounds, and he turned abruptly.

“Somebody up there already,” he muttered ruefully.

Patsy giggled.

They climbed regretfully down again and sat on the bottom step, close together in the darkness of the pavilion. Kissing for the first time since they had said good-by in Chicago weeks ago, they were unconscious of the wide, flat feet of a policeman crunching on the gravel walk. Suddenly a flashlight glared with intolerable brilliance in their faces. They drew apart in quick, horrified resentment.

The policeman bawled with smug brutality: “Git goin’, you two! Whatcha tryna do, huh?”

Angry and humiliated, Hicks got to his feet, his arm stiffening to his fist.

“Please, Billy!” Patsy’s fingers were sharp on his wrist. Her voice was unsteady with alarm, but she managed to say: “We’d better go home—I promised Mother we’d be back early.”

The policeman stood off, a dark, belligerent figure, as they passed.

“God damn that cop,” Hicks muttered in the safety of the darkness.

Patsy giggled nervously. “You wanted to sock him, didn’t you?”

“Sure I wanted to,” Hicks grumbled. He wouldn’t have, though; it would only have meant a club over his head, a night in jail, and a fine.

“You wanted to sock the editor when I lost my job, too.”

“I’d still like to,” Hicks said. “It was lousy.”

“Well”—Patsy’s voice was coolly rational again—“you can’t blame a man for giving his nephew somebody else’s job.”

Still arm in arm, they walked under the enshadowed, gently stirring trees toward the street-car terminal. Under the bright, overhanging arc lights a crowd waited—women with tired children leaning against their legs, men in shirt sleeves holding infants on their shoulder, small boys noisily circling a popcorn wagon that whistled in shrill abandon.

The first car filled before they could wedge their way to the tracks, but Hicks swung on the second as the motorman slowed down. It was an open car, and the triumphantly pulled Patsy to the front seat, where they sat close together, feeling the night air cool and moist against their cheeks.

“Tomorrow I’m going to get a job,” Hicks said determinedly.

“In a factory again?” Patsy asked.

“Why not?” he demanded.

“You could get a better job,” Patsy protested, “where you wouldn’t have to work such horrible hours.”

“If you marry me, I don’t care how long I have to work,” Hicks said in a tone more dogged than fatuous.

Patsy laughed gently. “Wouldn’t it be funny if I got a job during the day, and you got one at night, and we never saw each other except Sundays?”

Hicks grinned and squeezed her hand against his leg. “You won’t have to get a job,” he promised arrogantly.

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“But I want one,” Patsy insisted. “I don’t want to stay home and wash dishes. I hate washing dishes.”

Hicks laughed. “We’ll have paper plates and throw ’em out the window.”

“And I hate making beds—”

“Idiot!” Hicks mumbled against her blond hair under the limp panama. “We’ll only have one!”

Patsy flushed and looked at the motorman’s broad, indifferent back, then into the moving darkness of the streets, where impatient motorists honked haughtily past the lumbering trolley. “The next corner is ours.” She raised a slim bare arm and tugged at the signal cord.

Mr. and Mrs. Hughes were reading in the living room when they came back.

“Billy has to go,” Patsy announced to them determinedly, forestalling the interview that lurked in Mrs. Hughes’s keenly inquiring eyes.

Hicks muttered “Good-night” and took his traveling bag from the hall.

Patsy followed him out onto the steps. “It’s the house with the cupola just around the corner.” She pointed. “And you don’t need a key. It’s the back room on the second floor.”

Hicks dropped the bag and took her in his arms. “When ’ll you marry me, Patsy? When?”

Patsy shook herself free and laughed. “We can’t keep this up much longer, can we?”

“Christ, no!” Hicks swore exultantly. “I’ll have a job by tomorrow night!”

“Pop might help you,” Patsy suggested. “He knows the town pretty well, and you’ve never even seen it till today.”

“Don’t worry,” he boasted, youthful and eager. “I’ll find my way around.” He ran down the steps, grinning confidently. When he got a job Patsy would marry him. That much was clear, and that was all he wanted.

CHAPTER THREE

WITH THE metallic whine of a great steel saw the first street car careening by the following morning woke Hicks from his strange bed; he was dressed and waiting at the corner when the next one passed.

Scornful of the sleepy clerks who barely glimpsed the day's freshness through the car's smudged windows, Hicks leaned against the back platform, where he could feel the bright sunlight and the windy air. The forward-rushing movement made him feel that he was going somewhere, that he had an important destiny. Each time the car stopped to take on or let off passengers he became irritated, as if someone were trying to hold him back.

Past new red brick apartment buildings in which drug stores and delicatessens were like teeth in chinless faces, on beyond dumpy specialty shops, and into an overawing cavern of office buildings, department stores, banks, and more office buildings, the car crawled, stopping with ever increasing frequency, till finally, in front of the hulking city hall, it was empty of every one but Hicks. Reversing the seats with loud thumps as he walked down the aisle from the front end, the conductor

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mumbled when he returned to the back platform: "Far's we go!"

Hicks stepped down reluctantly. The street car was a lying monster that only ran back and forth instead of carrying people on the road to progress. Hicks realized he would have to find the way unaided. But where? The last time he had needed a job he had spent two weeks in search of one, and wherever he went he had been made to feel that asking for work was outrageous, that not to have a job already was a crime for which he could be taken up by the law.

Like a spy in the enemy's country, he bought a newspaper and crossed the street to an armchair lunch room with a white façade, where, over a cheap breakfast, he sat reading the Want Ad section.

Advertising proposition, Accountants, Agents, Agents, Agents, Barbers, Beauticians, Busboy, Bushelmen—

"Hey, buddy, got an extra dime on you?"

Hicks glanced up, seeing a thin, peaked face under a shapeless hat. He regretfully edged a dime out of his pants pocket.

"Thanks, buddy."

Hicks nodded morosely and went on studying the Want Ads. Dishwashers, Electrician, Garage Mechanic, Glazier, Man with Own Car, Plumber's Helper, Salesman, Salesman, Salesman. Crumpling the paper in disgust, Hicks walked out.

At the next corner he turned aimlessly into a street lined by dingy wooden fronts and flyspecked windows. Between him and a sign hung over a Salvation Army Mission a group of workers from the harvest fields leaned uninterestedly against a blackboard on which a few words and numbers had been chalked. Hicks went slowly toward the men. Among the dull work shirts, coats, and faded jumpers one had on an O. D. jacket, and as Hicks drew closer he noticed on the man's sleeve the Indian Head insignia of his division in the A. E. F. It was like meeting a friend. He stopped and waited diffidently.

Over the man's head the sign announced "National Employment Agency," but from the pale, hard-bitten face of the ex-soldier it was clear there was no job to be had. With his shoulders against the building and his hands behind him, he stared blankly toward a heavy dray that made the pavement rumble as it passed.

"Pretty tough?" Hicks asked.

"I'll say it's tough." The ex-soldier spoke without moving his eyes or changing his expression, which was one of cool, refined bitterness.

"I'm lookin' for a job myself," Hicks admitted seriously.

"Christ," the ex-soldier said, "I've been lookin' three months for one."

By way of commiserating rejoinder Hicks took out a package of cigarettes. He offered it, and they stood smoking in patient silence. One of the men, a round-faced Swede whose head was level with the blackboard, slowly drew a leather change purse from his pocket and sparingly produced a bit of snuff which he thrust between his gums and upper lip. The others yawned or stared blankly at the street.

Hicks straightened, jerking at his hat brim in confused determination. "Well, so long—"

"Here's hopin'."

Hicks continued on down the dismal street past the green baize curtains in the windows of the Salvation Army Mission, where a flabby-faced man in a blue cap with a red band was putting up signs concerning Jesus, Salvation, and Eternity. Two doors farther was a pawnshop, its show windows cluttered with cheap rings, watches, and a formidable display of pistols and revolvers. In front of the next building, a ramshackle flophouse, Hicks turned gloomily back.

He had come back near the employment office when a clerk in shirt sleeves hurried out on the sidewalk. The men pushed inside, and the clerk began swiftly scrawling on the black-

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board.

“Hey, you!” He looked at Hicks and jerked his head toward the door. “Want a job?”

“Sure.” Hicks walked more quickly, following the clerk inside.

Wedging through the crowd, the clerk turned behind the counter and began to hand out questionnaires. He said: “Git busy on these, you guys.”

Everybody but the Swede began to fill in the blanks. He stood glaring at the paper, his face growing redder and redder. “Please!” His voice was desperate, and he pounded the paper with a meaty hand. “I can work! Please!” He held up two powerful arms and looked at the clerk with angry helplessness.

“Here, I’ll fill it out.” The clerk jerked the paper toward himself and scribbled answers to hastily asked questions.

From the street came three workmen who slowly pushed their way to the counter.

“Got all the help you want?” one of them asked diffidently.

“Where you guys from?” the clerk demanded.

“Jist blew down from North Dakota.”

“Wheat fields, huh?” The clerk was dissatisfied and contemptuous. “Chris’ sake! Here, fill these out.” He spiked the Swede’s application on a metal stand and pushed several blanks toward the newcomers.

Crowded beside the ex-soldier against the wall, Hicks said: “Must be a pretty good town, if there’re this many jobs open in a day.”

The ex-soldier’s thin mouth tilted sardonically. “Don’t worry; there’s not.”

Another worker turned in from the sidewalk. His eyes were inflamed, and his nostrils clogged as if from hay fever. He asked into the mass of men: “Jobs all full?”

“Right here, buddy,” the clerk called.

It was growing hot and close inside from the heat and sweat

of so many in so small a place. As the last man struggled toward the counter Hicks and the ex-soldier edged toward the door to stand outside.

“Hey!” the clerk yelled at them over the others’ heads, “if you birds want a job you better keep off that street!”

“What the hell!” Hicks said, and looked at the ex-soldier to see if he shared his surprise. As the ex-soldier’s face was non-committal, Hicks muttered aggrievedly: “Can you figure out what the job’s got to do with whether we stand in here or out there?”

The ex-soldier’s mouth went down in a wry grimace. “For Christ’s sake, buddy. I got a damned good overcoat in hock, and this may be my last chance to get it out before the snow flies! What in hell do I care where we stand?”

Unable to think of a convincing answer, Hicks darkly subsided.

A covered truck of the familiar army type and light brown color rolled up in front of the door, and the driver honked three times.

The clerk swung around the corner and fought his way through, calling brusquely: “Hurry up, you guys!”

As they started out one man demanded: “Hey, where we goin’?”

He was jostled forward by others saying “What the hell do you care?”

“A job!” The Swede beamed, climbing aboard.

Hicks got in last and sat on the edge of the end-gate, his back against the tarpaulin covering. The truck started forward, and he began to speculate as to what kind of job he might expect. In a factory, probably. But at how much a day? If at less than four dollars, he would quit at the end of the week. And no night work! He grinned, remembering Patsy’s crazy prediction on the street car. Yes, and no twelve-hour shifts, either. The luck of finding a job the first morning had increased his courage and optimism.

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Circling the city hall in a one-way traffic route, the truck turned along a car track, and Hicks began to recognize the buildings he had seen on the way to Patsy's from the railway station—a newspaper plant with the huge presses, half above the level of the street, showing through an enormous window; an old-fashioned office building in brownstone, a disreputable-looking hotel which had a sign on canvas in front of it. In the next block stood the railway station, and Hicks, suddenly apprehensive, called toward the front of the truck: "Hey! They're not sendin' us out of town, are they?"

The question, taken up by other voices, brought back the reply: "Hell, we only got a little way to go."

At the next corner the truck turned, and, instead of the rumble of wheels on firm pavement, it made a hollow noise. Sitting in the back end, Hicks saw the buildings drop away, and the rails and girders of a bridge appeared in place of them. A hundred feet below spread a network of railway tracks, and on the farther side lay a group of long, coal-darkened buildings.

On the other side of the bridge the truck turned sharply to the right and began to roll down toward the massed factory buildings. Unexpectedly, there was a yell from the edge of the road, followed by another yell.

"Hey, you scabs!"

"You lousy scabs!"

"You think you're takin' the bread out of our mouths—you're cuttin' your own throats, you dumb bastards!"

Around the corner of the tarpaulin-covered truck Hicks saw a peg-legged old Irishman shaking a vindictive fist.

"Come down here, ye dirty scuts! Come down here, ye—"

Hicks glanced from the infuriated old striker to the men inside the truck. The Swede was scowling and flushing, as if in terrific communion with himself. The ex-soldier's face had a grim, sardonic smile. None of the men looked at any of the others. Need of work had made stubborn cowards of them all. With a thin smile of fleeting scorn, Hicks reached for the end-

gate. He measured the speed of the truck and the distance to the gravel road—about twenty-five miles an hour and a six foot drop. Hot and shaky, he swung his legs over the end-gate, then lowered himself slowly and began sprinting as soon as his feet touched the ground.

The shock threw him half into a picket's arms. He bent over, rubbing a strained ankle while three or four strikers gathered close.

"Hurt you?"

Hicks shook his head. "I'm all right."

The peg-legged Irishman came up, beaming fiercely. "B' Jesus, y'ain't no scab, are you, lad!"

"I thought there was something funny about that damned job." Hicks grinned shamefacedly and limped up the road. He should have had sense enough to realize, he rebuked himself, that a hurried call for workers meant either an out-of-town contract job or a scabbing expedition. And a scab was worse than a dog robber in the army or a stool pigeon in a shop.

Another truckload of unwitting strikebreakers rumbled downhill. Hicks stepped grudgingly aside and went on up to the bridge, from where he could see the city, beginning with low-roofed shops, towering into great buildings, tier on tier of offices, hotel rooms, department stores, in the midst of which the tall, pallid Athletic Club rose like some dead thing kept steadily embalmed.

A few blocks from the business section he found himself automatically following a trickle of customers through the revolving doors of a large department store. He looked at the neat, obsequious fifteen-and-eighteen-dollar-a-week clerks standing footsore behind polished counters and thought scornfully that even if he got a job there he would be defeated in his primary purpose. You couldn't get married on that. The most elementary calculation told him it was impossible.

But the elevator carried him up the employment office,

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where four men waited in various stages of hopefulness, and a girl behind a mahogany-veneer partition with a metal wicket smiled distantly.

“Mr. Wilgus is not interviewing anybody today.” Exhibiting her profile and using one hand to pat the waves in her bobbed hair, she absently slipped a sheet of paper through the wicket. “Fill out this application, please.”

Standing before a high desk, he tried to answer the questionnaire in a masterly fashion, but as the inquiries were so detailed and personal—barely omitting demands as to how many teeth he had and how often he bathed—he saw that only a genius at autobiography could give the work full justice and so lapsed into haphazard replies.

“There!” he told the girl. “That’s my life history.”

Expressionless, monotonous, and distinct as an automaton, she answered: “Mr. Wilgus will read your application, and if you are needed you will be informed.”

“Jesus!” Hicks muttered to himself, and grinned to keep from feeling small and humble.

By this time it was one o’clock. His hunger partly appeased by a malted milk at a corner drug store, he dodged through the traffic to a street car switchman and demanded: “Say, where are the factories in this town, anyway?”

The switchman ruminatively poked his long iron pole at a coupling. “Well, I got a brother-in-law out at the Sunbeam Assembling Plant. It’s out at the end of the Grace-Hill line.”

“Much obliged,” Hicks said. “Any chance of a steady job out there?”

The switchman stared quizzically at Hicks and finally took hold of his coat lapel, drawing him out of the traffic to the sidewalk. There he said impressively: “Lad, lemme tell you something. There’s no steady job anywhere in this whole country. When they need you, they hire you, but when they can’t make any money out of you, you’re through! Now,” he went on in a

more tolerant tone, "I ain't sayin' anything ag'in the Sunbeam. All I can tell you is, my brother-in-law's been out there four years. Bought a bungalow in that new development, and he's payin' on it by the month. That's all right if you work all the time, and they don't take it into their heads to cut your wages. But now you take last year—they laid him off, and he lost four months. Keep it up like that and first thing he knows he'll be too old for the job and won't have the house paid for yet!"

Hicks nodded gravely. "Sure," he said, "but where do I get this street car?"

"Grace and Fourth—two blocks down," the switchman informed him, adding, "Think it over!"

Hicks began thinking it over from the time he dropped eight cents in the conductor's collection box. He was not at all discouraged by the fate of the switchman's brother-in-law. In fact, he had no immediately higher aims than the possession of a job and a small bungalow. Going to work every morning would be joyously overbalanced by coming home at night. Worry over monthly bills would be more than offset by the satisfaction inherent in paying them and thus being a responsible, dependable member of society. And during occasional layoffs he could read aloud to Patsy or dig in the garden which he already envisioned as a trim appurtenance to the bungalow. To be alive was enough. Time would settle its own concerns.

Ascending a long hill and clattering through the older residential section, the street car bore straight through a wide meadow, picking up speed. From the windows of either side nothing was to be seen but repetitious flashes of wide, shallow, clayey ditches and wooden signs which denominated them—Buena Vista, Vista Del Mar, Graciosa Drive—and at last a newly built, white-painted shack twice the size of an old-fashioned outhouse beside a great billboard which announced "HOMELAND DEVELOPMENT CORP." The sight of so much boastful waste land made Hicks restless.

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The real estate development ended in a fringe of scraggly poplars. But another meadow stretched beyond, and still farther ahead a cordon of brick-faced duplexes stood grim as a fortress wall around the Sunbeam plant. When the car stopped it was opposite a lofty iron gate, barring entrance to the quadrangle which the brick factory buildings formed.

There was a noise of saws and hammers, of steel on steel, a sound of busy industry, and Hicks went boldly up to the gate. A straight-backed, dour man in a gray uniform with an empty sleeve pinned up at the elbow met him on the other side of the lock.

“Lookin’ for a job,” Hicks explained.

The guard gestured with the sub of his amputated arm. “Round the corner to the employment office.”

Hicks loitered amiably, feeling a kinship with fellow ex-soldiers. “What outfit were you in?”

“Outfit? Me?” The guard gave an uncomprehending frown.

“Sure,” Hicks said; “in the war.”

The guard scowled and jerked his empty sleeve. “You mean this?”

Hicks nodded embarrassedly.

Clearing his throat, the guard spat with fine deliberation and marksmanship. “This?” he repeated. “I didn’t lose this on no battlefield. I lost it right over there in a conveyor belt.”

Hicks grimaced sympathetically, but could think of nothing to say. He turned and walked around the corner, looking for the employment office. There were several doors and outbuildings, but they were all closed. He wandered around till he finally found a side entrance. There was a sign on the door, but it was not encouraging, for it said “NO HELP WANTED.”

But Hicks had come too far to be turned so easily away. Hearing workmen busy inside, he pushed open the door and went in. When he entered, the end man glanced briefly up at him, the rest bent uninterruptedly over their machines. He

walked up the grease-soaked aisle toward the farther end, where the foreman and the set-up man were rearranging the tools of a huge machine for a new kind of work. Hicks stood waiting, watching the skillful movements with respectful interest till finally the set-up man saw him and nudged the foreman.

He and the foreman stared at each other, and the foreman said: "What's the matter, buddy? Lookin' for a job?"

Hicks nodded hopefully.

"Christ," the foreman groaned disgustedly to the set-up man, "another guy that can't read! Buddy," he pleaded, "didn't you see that sign on the door?"

"Hell," Hicks said, "if everybody believed in signs they'd starve to death."

"No two ways about that," the foreman agreed. "Only, this time that sign means what it says. That's the God's truth."

Hicks tried to gulp down his disappointment.

"Though luck, buddy!" The set-up man spoke in a flat, regretful voice.

"Well, see you some more." Hicks turned back along the oil-darkened aisle to the door. Waiting at the deserted station for the next street car, he felt as much in a foreign, hostile country as if he were on outpost in No Man's Land.

When he arrived downtown the newsboys were besieging late shoppers with cries of "Sports final extry! Poipah!"

Hicks bought one and stood in the vestibule of a tall office building reading the latest Want Ads. Agents, Agents, Agents, they started off as before, then skipped haphazardly among numerous menial, personal-service jobs, and ended with the familiar call for Salesman, Salesman, Salesman. Lighting a cigarette, Hicks disgustedly reopened the paper to the front page. There his casual gaze was unexpectedly focused by headlines which proclaimed:

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STRIKERS BEAT UP WORKER

Employee of Calumet Car Foundry Attacked

Assailed by a horde of rioting strikers, a truckload of workmen belonging to the Calumet Car Foundry Company was held up today on its way to the plant and William Hicks, a recent employee, was jerked to the ground and severely beaten.

Fearing violence from the strikers, the Company had provided its employees with trucks for transportation, but this step, according to H. J. McKee, division superintendent, has now proved unsuccessful. Mr. McKee intimated that he would, therefore, appeal to City Authorities for aid in preventing further disturbances. . . .

“Well, I’ll be damned!” Hicks gave the paper an indignant shake.

“S’matter, fella, she throw you down?” a jocose passerby called over his shoulder.

“Hey!” Hicks glanced quickly up at the top of the front page to discover the name of the paper. “Where’s the News-Dispatch office?”

“Corner Grace and Fifth,” the passerby answered, continuing on into the building.

Hicks creased the newspaper into a flat baton and went hurriedly through the streets. At the corner of Grace and Fifth he discovered the News-Dispatch building was the one he had noticed on the way to the railway station, and, after reading the directory in the lobby, he went determinedly up to the editorial offices.

Adjacent to a scarred table shaped like a horseshoe stood a small, flat desk at which a lone man sat writing in a ledger. He had protuberant blue eyes, a baldish head, a large, regular nose, and chin that caricatured the type made popular in the collar advertisements. He was in shirt sleeves, and his collar

was open at his throat, but on his sleeves, just above where his rolled cuff hid part of his hairy forearm, an ornate monogram was plainly visible. As Hicks walked toward him he looked up brusquely.

"I came up to see you about a story you had in tonight's paper," Hicks explained.

"Yeh?" The city editor was scarcely interested.

Hicks added: "The one about the man who got beat up by strikers."

"Oh, that one." The city editor became more attentive. "What about it?"

"Nothing," Hicks said slowly, "except I'm the man the story is about."

The city editor stared elatedly. He rose and hooked a chair toward him with his toe. "Sit down! Is that a fact? I'm Jones, the city editor, and I'll be glad to hear anything you've got to say!"

Hicks sat down and took out a cigarette, frowning over it and wondering where to begin. "Well, it wasn't true."

"What wasn't true?" Jones looked annoyed.

"I wasn't pulled off the truck," Hicks explained. "I jumped off of my own free will."

Jones frowned, then smiled and announced triumphantly: "I see! You mean when those strikin' Bohunks stopped the truck, you jumped off!"

"The hell I do!" Hicks said indignantly. "When I jumped off the truck it was goin' twenty or twenty-five miles an hour. It wasn't stopped at all. And the guys on it weren't employees: they were a bunch they'd rounded up from employment offices as strikebreakers—scabs!"

Jones flushed and sat back stiffly. He gave a short, exasperated laugh. "Well, if you didn't get beat up, what the devil are you kickin' about?"

Thinking Jones was merely stupid, Hicks began patiently: "because the story in your paper was all wrong. Because"—

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reflecting on the falseness of the story made him belligerent—“because it was a lie. The truck wasn’t stopped. I wasn’t pulled off. Nobody was beaten. And the men weren’t workmen!”

Jones sat back farther. He looked loftily pitying, as if he understood Hicks thoroughly now. When he spoke his voice was clipped with sarcasm. “I got you! You’re one of those guys! Well, listen! Don’t come up here telling us we put lies in the *News-Dispatch*! If you want to get any soapbox speeches into print, you better go over to the Bolsheviks. They’ll spread it on so thick you couldn’t scrape it off with a trowel!”

“What Bolsheviks?” Hicks demanded practically.

“What Bolsheviks?” Jones was flabbergasted.

“Here, have a cigarette,” Hicks offered. If there was a newspaper that published the truth about people, its editors, whoever they might be, were all right with him; he wanted to know about them. “What Bolsheviks?”

Mollified by the cigarette and confused by Hicks’s ingenuousness, Jones’s face became almost agreeable. “Listen,” he said. “I was just kiddin’ you. Forget it!”

“No,” Hicks persisted, “I’d like to know what you meant.”

“You’re a funny guy,” Jones said.

They looked at each other in silence.

Finally Jones said: “I don’t know whether they’re Bolsheviks or not; probably not. But they’re radical as hell—old Billy Sharkey, always runnin’ for mayor or governor on the Socialist ticket, is back of it—and they’re going to begin publication on the fifteenth.”

“A newspaper?” Hicks asked.

Jones nodded. “That’s what they’ll call it, anyway.” He scoffed: “*Farmer-Labor Beacon*! If that’s not the name of a propaganda sheet!”

Hicks disregarded this. “When did you say they intended to start?”

His face becoming heavily satirical again, Jones answered:

“The fifteenth. Why? You thinking of gettin’ a job over there?”

“I hadn’t thought about it,” Hicks admitted. “Well,” he said vaguely, and stood up to leave, “much obliged.”

“Okay.” Jones bent over his assignment book.

Hicks went slowly downstairs. Farmer! Labor! The *Farmer-Labor Beacon*. Passing a rubbish can on the corner, he tossed the *News-Dispatch* inside.