# JIMMIE HIGGINS; A STORY

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Jimmie Higgins; a story by Upton Sinclair

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### **UPTON SINCLAIR**

# JIMMIE HIGGINS; A STORY



## JIMMIE HIGGINS

## A Story

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UPTON, SINCLAIR

AUTHOR OF "THE JUNGLE," "THE JOURNAL OF ARTHUR STERLING,"
"KING COAL," "THE PROFITS OF RELIGION,"



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### JIMMIE HIGGINS

#### CHAPTER I

#### JIMMIE HIGGINS MEETS THE CANDIDATE

I

JIMMIE," said Lizzie, "couldn't we go see the pictures?"

And Jimmie set down the saucer of hot coffee which he was in the act of adjusting to his mouth, and stared at his wife. He did not say anything; in three years and a half as a married man he had learned that one does not always say everything that comes into one's mind. But he meditated on the abysses that lie between the masculine and feminine intellects. That it should be possible for any one to wish to see a movie idol leaping into second-story windows, or being pulled from beneath flying express-trains, on this day of destiny, this greatest crisis in history!

"You know, Lizzie," he said, patiently, "I've got to help at

the Opera-house."

"But you've got all morning!"
"I know; but it'll take all day."

And Lizzie fell silent; for she too had learned much in three years and a half of married life. She had learned that workingmen's wives seldom get all they would like in this world; also that to have a propagandist for a husband is not the worst fate that may befall. After all, he might have been giving his time and money to drink, or to other women; he might have been dying of a cough, like the man next door. If one could not have a bit of pleasure on a Sunday afternoon—well, one might sigh, but not too loud.

Jimmie began telling all the things that had to be done that Sunday morning and afternoon. They seemed to Lizzie exactly like the things that were done on other occasions before meetings. To be sure, this was bigger—it was in the Opera-house, and all the stores had cards in the windows, with a picture of the Candidate who was to be the orator of the occasion. But it was hard for Lizzie to understand the difference between this Candidate and other candidates—none of whom ever got elected! Lizzie would truly rather have stayed at home, for she did not understand English very well when it was shouted from a platform, and with a lot of long words; but she knew that Jimmie was trying to educate her, and being a woman, she was educated to this extent—she knew the way to hold onto her man.

Jimmie had just discovered a new solution of the problem of getting the babies to meetings; and Lizzie knew that he was tremendously proud of this discovery. So long as there had been only one baby, Jimmie had carried it. When there had come a second, Lizzie had helped. But now there were three, the total weight of them something over sixty pounds; and the street-car line was some distance away, and also it hurt Jimmie in his class-consciousness to pay twenty cents to a predatory They had tried the plan of paying something to corporation. a neighbour to stay with the babies; but the first they tried was a young girl who got tired and went away, leaving the little ones to howl their heads off; and the second was a Polish lady

whom they found in a drunken stupor on their return.

But Jimmie was determined to go to meetings, and determined that Lizzie should go along. It was one of the curses of the system, he said, that it deprived working-class women of all chance for self-improvement. So he had paid a visit to the "Industrial Store," a junk-shop maintained by the Salvation Army, and for fifteen cents he had obtained a marvellous broad baby-carriage for twins, all finished in shiny black enamel. One side of it was busted, but Jimmie had fixed that with some wire, and by careful packing had shown that it was possible to stow the youngsters in it-Jimmie Junior and Pete side by side, and the new baby at the foot.

The one trouble was that Jimmie Junior couldn't keep his feet still. He could never keep any part of him still, the little jack-in-the-box. Here he was now, tearing about the kitchen, pursuing the ever-receding tail of the newest addition to the

family, a half-starved cur who had followed Jimmie in from the street, and had been fed into a semblance of reality. From this treasure a bare, round tail hung out behind in tantalising fashion; Jimmie Junior, always imagining he could catch it, was toddling round and round and round the kitchen-table, clutching out in front of him, laughing so that after a while he sat down from sheer exhaustion.

And Jimmie Senior watched enraptured. Say, but he was a buster! Did you ever see a twenty-seven months old kid that could get over the ground like that? Or make a louder noise? This last because Jimmie Junior had tried to take a short cut through the kitchen range and failed. Lizzie swooped down, clasping him to her broad bosom, and pouring out words of comfort in Bohemian. As Jimmie Senior did not understand any of these words, he took advantage of the confusion to get his coat and cap and hustle off to the Opera-house, full of fresh determination. For, you see, whenever a Socialist looks at his son, or even thinks of his son, he is hotter for his job of propagandist. Let the world be changed soon, so that the little fellows may be spared those sufferings and humiliations which have fallen to the lot of their parents!

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"Comrade Higgins, have you got a hammer?" It was Comrade Schneider who spoke, and he did not take the trouble to come down from the ladder, where he was holding up a streamer of bunting, but waited comfortably for the hammer to be fetched to him. And scarcely had the fetcher started to climb before there came the voice of a woman from across the stage: "Comrade Higgins, has the Ypsel banner come?" And from the rear part of the hall came the rotund voice of fat Comrade Rapinsky: "Comrade Higgins, will you bring up an extra table for the literature?" And from the second tier box Comrade Mary Allen spoke: "While you're downstairs, Comrade Higgins, would you mind telephoning and making sure the Reception Committee knows about the change in the traintime?"

So it went; and Jimmie ran about the big hall with his face red and perspiring; for this was mid-summer, and no breeze came through the windows of the Leesville Opera-house, and when you got high up on the walls to tie the streamers of red bunting, you felt as if you were being baked. But the streamers had to be tied, and likewise the big red flag over the stage, and the banner of the Karl Marx Verein, and the banner of the Ypsels, or Young People's Socialist League of Leesville, and the banner of the Machinists' Union, Local 4717, and of the Carpenters' Union, District 529, and of the Workers' Co-operative Society. And because Comrade Higgins never questioned anybody's right to give him orders, and always did everything with a cheerful grin, people had got into the habit of regarding him as the proper person for tedious and disagreeable tasks.

He had all the more on his hands at present, because the members of this usually efficient local were half-distracted, like a nest of ants that have been dug out with a shovel. The most faithful ones showed a tendency to forget what they were doing, and to gather in knots to talk about the news which had come over the cables and had been published in that morning's paper. Jimmie Higgins would have liked to hear what the rest had to say; but somebody had to keep at work, for the local was in the hole nearly three hundred dollars for to-night's affair, and it must succeed, even though half the civilised world had gone suddenly insane. So Jimmie continued to climb step-ladders

and tie bunting.

When it came to lunch-time, and the members of the Decorations Committee were going out, it suddenly occurred to one of them that the drayman who was to bring the literature might arrive while there was nobody to receive it. So Comrade Higgins was allowed to wait during the lunch hour. There was a plausible excuse—he was on the Literature Committee; indeed, he was on every committee where hard work was involved—the committee to distribute leaflets announcing the meeting, the committee to interview the labour unions and urge them to sell tickets, the committee to take up a collection at the meeting. He was not on those committees which involved honour and edification, such as, for example, the committee to meet the Candidate at the depot and escort him to the Opera-house. But then it would never have occurred to Jimmie that he had any place on such a committee; for he was just an ignorant fellow, a machinist, undersized and undernourished, with bad teeth and roughened hands, and no gifts or graces of any sort to recommend him; while on the Reception Committee were a lawyer