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The God Seeker

By Sinclair Lewis

SYNOPSIS: Aaron Gadd, rising young builder of pioneer St. Paul, is married to Selene Lanark. He has given up all ideas of becoming a missionary, preferring to be an honest carpenter, a good employer and a solid citizen. To this pair has been born their first child, Ethan Allen Gadd. Now go on with the story—

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

DOORS WERE not often locked in St. Paul in those days, and while they were reading on that early spring evening 'in 1851, the man was able to walk in without warning. He had the stealth of a Black Wolf devastatingly revived.

They looked up, and just inside the door, staring at them in the clear light of their whale-oil lamp, was a man, tall, erect, clean-shaven, ironed-of-eye, with a cane cocked under his left arm—a figure out of Boston.

Selene sprang up with a hand at her leaping breast and fled to Aaron with "It's Papa!" Standing with his arm about her, Aaron saw that incredibly this was Caesar Lanark, more sinister without his beard than he had ever been with it. There was no shadowing now of his contemptuous twist of cheeks.

But his voice was very civil, a little amused:

Precisely, my dear girl. It is the prodigal father, with an interest in well-fatted calf. I am glad to note these signs of petit-bourgeois comfort, and I hope to see my grandson, of whose rarity I hear almost hysterical praise on every hand. Oh, yes, I have been poking about town for twelve hours—time enough for a man of resolution, cleansed by philosophy, to do many amusing things. For instance, I have just come from the charming log cabin of Mr. Seth Buckbee, from whom I have purchased enough of his stock to give me a controlling interest in Buckbee & Gadd—or Lanark, Gadd & Buckbee, as I presume it will now be christened.

Selene was shivering. "Aaron! You won't let him! We had such a good, decent business! Not let him ruin it!"

Aaron said steadily, stroking the frightened Selene into silence. "I'll insist on a contract so that you can't interfere with my specifications as builder. Lanark, I'm not going to have you play with my firm as one of your side activities."

Lanark was grave. "Agreed. I shall have to take it seriously. I am, as I once boasted to you, a man of some substance, but I have recently been associated with two Eastern gentlemen in certain dealings in Wisconsin lumber land. And while they didn't reap all my sowing, they obtained quite a creditable harvest. Selene..."

NEITHER of them had seen Caesar Lanark look lonely before.

"I have been well slapped. I am not repentant, not of anything, but I would prize your friendship. If I have not been a good father to you, perhaps I can be a good grandfather to loosely fastened to his body as

he rose, but his voice was deep and quiet and resolute.

They talked late that night. Elijah had, through these years from 1833 to 1853 (he was 38 now) been laboring as a farmer, patent-medicine salesman, ditch-digger, printer, clock-maker, tanner. For five years now he had been organizing and speaking for abolitionist societies. He was married, with a daughter, and had a cottage near Lake Opedia, in York State. He had been sent to Minnesota by a committee headed by Gerrit Smith and Horace Greeley, ostensibly to look into the swindling of the Sioux by Government agents, but actually . . .

"My two real tasks are to see whether industries in Minnesota—employers like you—are becoming powerful, rapacious and tyrannical enough so that it's time to start labor unions, and to open up a new Minnesota Underground Railroad for escaped slaves. With the Fugitive Slave Law, the older route through Wisconsin is getting crowded and dangerous. I shall expect your help in this."

"Yes, sure," said Aaron, a little uncomfortably.

"I see from your house that you are not rich yet. But I also see from your confident manner and from the politeness of the soldiers to you that you will be rich."

"Yes, maybe."

"Aaron, will you run through escaped slaves for us—as Dad did, the old devil?"

"Ye-es, I suppose I will."

"'E-will!" announced Selene—her first offering.

"I know you will. But I have a more tedious—eventually more dangerous—job for you. In the East we're beginning to form workingmen's associations to get better wages and work conditions."

"I shall return East in a few days, but first I must ask you to commit business suicide by advising your own workmen to form a union. I am your conscience—as Father was. Where am I to sleep tonight, Sister Selene?"

The firm had forty regular employees, and at rush-times they used over a hundred. When Aaron told his partners that he intended to invite the hands to form a union and alleged that this would insure the peace of the firm as well as prosperity of the men, there was the riot that he expected.

BUT THAT gentleman-anarchist, Caesar Lanark was less obstructive than the plain and kindly Buckbees. Lanark was not interested, since he now had half a dozen local investments. But Seth Buckbee screamed.

"I'm not going to have any underlings or outsiders telling me how to run my business!"

Aunt Lou was meeter. She remarked, "I ain't makin' any sugar tarts for no chisel-stealers." Aaron explained that if she agreed, she would be showing a true Christian spirit. That did not work—she said she had one already. So he faced his three partners and shouted that if they did not yield, he would quit and start a firm of his own. That did it—beautifully or comically or both. He called the workers together, in the warehouse, to encourage them to organize the first considerable labor body ever seen between Milwaukee and the Rockies.

The 40 men sat on sawbucks, benches, boxes, in the long dusty shed; carpenters, painters, plasterers and paperers, brick and stone masons, odd-job laborers, timekeepers. A York state cement worker, the first in Minnesota, rose:

"I'm not much of a hand for piety, but I think we had ought to open this labor meeting with prayer, like we were back home. How about Reverend Stone?"

A few grumbled but no one snickered, and Willington Stone, brick mason and Methodist lay-preacher, known as "Reverend" prayed.

Aaron spoke with sharp brevity. Veteran workers like them need not be told of the advantages in forming a union—a custom which he believed would become common in the future. As a fellow on the other side of the fence, maybe he ought to buck them, but personally he'd rather deal with a lot of satisfied fellows than try to cut their throats and get his own cut. He would get out now, and leave them to organize.

Later, he asked the big Swede how it had all come out.

"Oh—all right."

"Did you get organized?"

"Yea."

"Why aren't you more enthusiastic, Lars?"

"You want to know?"

"Prob'ly not, but let's have it."

"A union that the boss starts, dat must be for him, not for us."

"Well, it's a start, ain't it?"

"Yea, sure, it's a start—a tink. G'night."

THE RESULT, after a couple of months more, was a union constitution stating that, in cases of intolerable underpayment, they would, standing together as

one, demand a raise.

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Campbell to Talk On ABC Forum

Alex Campbell of Ft. Wayne, U.S. Assistant Attorney General, is featured on the legal forum to be presented on American Broadcasting Co. radio stations in Indiana at 9:30 p. m. (CST) Wednesday. The program was recorded from a Public Affairs Television show entitled, "On Trial," sponsored by the New York City Bar Association and televised in New York City Tuesday.

The program will be a discussion involving the admissibility of FBI reports in evidence.

Participating with Mr. Campbell will be John Amen, New York lawyer and Nuremberg war crimes prosecutor. Prof. Thomas L. Emerson of Yale Law School and Clifford J. Durr, a Washington attorney.

MARGARET TO BROADCAST

NEW YORK, Sept. 26 (UP)—

Margaret Truman will make her only radio appearance of the year Dec. 20 on the American Broad-

casting Co.'s "Carnegie Hall" program. It was announced to-day.

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