

# THE LAW OF LIFE AND OTHER STORIES

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Jack London



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## 《生命的规律》

杰克·伦敦(1876-1916),原名约翰·格里菲思·伦敦,生于旧金山,父亲是巡回吉星家。

他小时候干过各种杂活,最后到一条帆船上当了水手,曾到过日本。后来,卷入克郎代克地区淘金热(1897),还到世界各地旅游,去过英格兰、南太平洋、墨西哥等地。

他一生东奔西走,有时饮酒无度,深受其害。他生命最后数年在加利福尼亚度过,住在索诺马附近的一个大坡场上。1916年,他像自己创造的人物马丁·伊登一样,在牧场上自杀,当时年仅40岁。

他是位多产作家,最著名的长篇小说是:《荒野的呼唤》(1903)和《白牙》(1906),二者都以美国遥远的北部的生活为背景;《铁蹄》(1907)是一部描写本世纪工业社会的小说,由阿纳托尔·弗朗斯译为法文并作了序,从而为作者在欧洲赢得了声誉;《马丁·伊登》(1909)是部半自传性的作品。

他的作品以充满活力的生活、激烈的斗争、理想主义和多愁善感为主要特征。

杰克·伦敦曾被看作是一位杰出的无产阶级作家。他出身贫苦,在社会主义中看到了消除不公正的前景。

杰克·伦敦热衷创作,也热衷行动;在俄国同样深受赞赏的美国后起作家欧内斯特·海明威也是这样。他们两个都自杀身亡,生活同样跌宕起伏。

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英美文学精品详注丛书

# The Law of Life and other stories

Jack London

中国对外翻译出版公司



## The Law of Life

Old Koskoosh listened greedily. Though his sight had long since faded, his hearing was still acute, and the slightest sound penetrated to the glimmering intelligence which yet abode behind the withered forehead, but which no longer gazed forth upon the things of the world. Ah! That was Sit-cum-to-ha, shrilly anathematizing the dogs as she cuffed and beat them into the harnesses. Sit-cum-to-ha was his daughter's daughter, but she was too busy to waste a thought upon her broken grandfather, sitting alone there in the snow, forlorn and helpless. Camp must be broken. The long trail waited while the short day refused to linger. Life called her, and the duties of life, not death. And he was very close to death now.

The thought made the old man panicky for the moment, and he stretched forth a palsied hand which wandered tremblingly over the small heap of dry wood beside him. Reassured that it was indeed there, his hand returned to the shelter of his mangy furs, and he again fell to listening. The sulky crackling of half-frozen hides told him that the chief's moose-skin lodge had been struck, and even then was being rammed and jammed into portable compass. The chief was his son, stalwart and strong, headman of the tribesmen, and a mighty hunter. As the women toiled with the camp luggage, his voice rose, chiding them for their

**greedily**: very willingly.

**faded**: got weaker. **slightest**: smallest.

**glimmering**: bright.

**yet abode**: still lived. **withered**: losing freshness.

**gazed**: looked.

**shrilly**: with a sharp voice. **anathematizing**: maledicting. **cuffed**: struck. **harnesses**: leather straps.

**waste**: consume.

**broken**: weak.

**forlorn**: miserable. **must be broken**: had to be moved.

**trail**: track; road. **to linger**: delay its end.

**duties**: tasks.

**close to**: near.

**panicky**: scared.

**stretched forth**: extended. **palsied**: paralysed.

**heap**: mass. **beside**: near.

**indeed**: really.

**shelter**: protection. **mangy**: shabby. **tell to listening**: started listening. **sulky**: dull. **hides**: skins of animals.

**moose-skin**: skin of a horned animal. **lodge**: small house.

**rammed**: packed. **jammed**: compressed.

**stalwart**: tall, heavy built.

**mighty**: powerful. **toiled**: worked.

**rose**: went up. **chiding**: criticizing.

slowness. Old Koskoosh strained his ears. It was the last time he would hear that voice. There went Geehow's lodge! And Tusken'! Seven, eight, nine; only the shaman's could be still standing. There! They were at work upon it now. He could hear the shaman grunt as he piled it on the sled. A child whimpered, and a woman soothed it with soft, crooning gutturals. Little Ko-tee, the old man thought, a fretful child, and not overstrong. It would die soon, perhaps, and they would burn a hole through the frozen tundra and pile rocks above to keep the wolves away. Well, what did it matter? A few years at best, and as many an empty belly as a full one. And in the end, Death waited, ever-hungry and hungriest of them all.

What was that? Oh, the men lashing the sleds and drawing tight the thongs. He listened, who would listen no more. The whiplashes snarled and bit among the dogs. Hear them whine! How they hated the work and the trail! They were off! Sled after sled churned slowly away into the silence. They were gone. They had passed out of his life and he faced the last bitter hour alone. No. The snow crunched beneath a moccasin; a man stood beside him; upon his head a hand rested gently. His son was good to do this thing. He remembered other old men whose sons had not waited after the tribe. But his son had. He wandered away into the past, till the young man's voice brought him back. "It is well with you?" he asked.

And the old man answered, "It is well."

"There be wood beside you," the younger man continued, "and the fire burns bright. The morning is gray, and the cold has broken. It will snow presently. Even now it is snowing."

"Aye, even now is it snowing."

"The tribesmen hurry. Their bales are heavy and their bellies flat with lack of feasting. The trail is long and they

**strained:** made attentive.

**would hear:** *note the use of the future in the past.*

**lodge:** small house.

**shaman:** priest of the tribe. **standing:** up.

**grunt:** express his disappointment.

**sled:** vehicle used on snow. **whimpered:** cried; wept.

**soothed:** calmed. **it:** child *is neutral*. **crooning:** singing.

**fretful:** irritable. **overstrong:** very strong.

**burn:** make with fire.

**above:** on it.

**wolves:** wild animals resembling dogs. **at best:** as a maximum

**belly:** stomach.

**lashing:** securing; binding.

**thongs:** strips of leather. **would listen:** *future in the past.*

**whiplashes:** strikes of the whip. **snarled:** sounded.

**whine:** cry; lament. **trail:** track; road.

**churned:** moved through the snow.

**passed out:** gone out.

**faced:** met. **crunched:** sounded.

**beneath:** under. **moccasin:** Indian shoe. **beside:** near.

**rested:** paused. **gently:** delicately.

**wandered away:** went away with his mind.

**It is well with you?:** are you O.K. ?

**There be:** there is. **beside:** near.

**bright:** luminous.

**presently:** in a short time.

**Aye:** yes.

**hurry:** move fast. **bales:** large packages.

**bellies:** stomachs. **flat:** empty. **feasting:** eating. **trail:** road.

travel fast. I go now. It is well?"

"It is well. I am as a last year's leaf, clinging lightly to the stem. The first breath that blows, and I fall. My voice become like an old woman's. My eyes no longer show me the way of my feet, and my feet are heavy, and I am tired. It is well."

He bowed his head in content till the last noise of the complaining snow had died away, and he knew his son was beyond recall. Then his hand crept out in haste to the wood. It alone stood between him and the eternity that yawned upon him. At last the measure of his life was a handful of faggots. One by one they would go to feed fire, and just so, step by step, death would creep upon him. When the last stick had surrendered up its heat, the frost would begin to gather strength. First his feet would yield, then his hands; and the numbness would travel, slowly, from the extremities to the body. His head would fall forward upon his knees, and he would rest. It was easy. All men must die. He did not complain. It was the way of life, and it was just. He had been born close to the earth, close to the earth had he lived, and the law thereof was not new to him. It was the law of all flesh. Nature was not kindly to the flesh. She had no concern for that concrete thing called the individual. Her interest lay in the species, the race. This was the deepest abstraction old Koskoosh's barbaric mind was capable of, but he grasped it firmly. He saw it exemplified in all life. The rise of the sap, the bursting greenness of the willow bud, the fall of the yellow leaf – in this alone was told the whole history. But one task did Nature set the individual. Did he not perform it, he died. Did he perform it, it was all the same, he died. Nature did not care; there were plenty who were obedient, and it was only the obedience in this matter, not the obedient, which lived and lived always. The tribe of Koskoosh was very old. The old

**clinging**: holding fast.

**stem**: structure to link the leaf to the branch. **breath**: light wind.

**is become**: has become

**bowed**: bent; curved. **in content**: in acceptance; in understanding. **complaining**: lamenting; groaning. **died away**: ceased.

**beyond recall**: too far away to hear him. **crept out in haste**: came out rapidly. **yawned**: was opened

**handful**: small quantity.

**faggots**: sticks; twigs. **feed**: nourish; keep alive.

**creep**: come silently.

**surrendered up**: finished. **frost**: ice.

**gather strength**: become stronger. **would yield**: would surrender; would submit. **numbness**: paralysis.

**complain**: lament. **just**: right.

**close to**: very near.

**had he lived**: *note the inversion of the structure*. **thereof**: of that.

**flesh**: human bodies. **kindly**: gentle. **She**: *nature has been personified*. **concern**: regard; attention.

**lay**: was.

**grasped**: understood.

**rise**: coming up. **sap**: vital fluid of plants. **bursting**: exploding.

**willow bud**: part of tree that flowers.

**But**: only. **task**: duty. **set**: give.

**perform**: fulfil; carry out. **Did he not perform**: if he didn't do it.

**did not care**: wasn't concerned.

**plenty**: a lot of.

**matter**: occasion; situation.

men he had known when a boy, had known old men before them. Therefore it was true that the tribe lived, that it stood for the obedience of all its members, way down into the forgotten past, whose very resting places were unremembered. They did not count; they were episodes. They had passed away like clouds from a summer sky. He also was an episode and would pass away. Nature did not care. To life she set one task, gave one law. To perpetuate was the task of life, its law was death. A maiden was a good creature to look upon, full-breasted and strong, with spring to her step and light in her eyes. But her task was yet before her. The light in her eyes brightened, her step quickened, she was now bold with the young men, now timid, and she gave them of her own unrest. And ever she grew fairer and yet fairer to look upon, till some hunter, able no longer to withhold himself, took her to his lodge to cook and toil for him and to become the mother of his children. And with the coming of her offspring her looks left her. Her limbs dragged and shuffled, her eyes dimmed and bleared, and only the little children found joy against the withered cheek of the old squaw by the fire. Her task was done. But a little while, on the first pinch of famine or the first long trail, and she would be left, even as he had been left, in the snow, with a little pile of wood. Such was the law.

He placed a stick carefully upon the fire and resumed his meditations. It was the same everywhere, with all things. The mosquitoes vanished with the first frost. The little tree squirrel crawled away to die. When age settled upon the rabbit it became slow and heavy and could no longer outfoot its enemies. Even the big bald-face grew clumsy and blind and quarrelsome, in the end to be dragged down by a handful of yelping huskies. He remembered how he had abandoned his own father on an upper reach of the Klondike one winter, the winter before

**when a boy:** when he was a boy.

**way down:** far away.

**forgotten:** not remembered.

**did not count:** were not important.

**would pass:** *future in the past.*

**did not care:** wasn't interested. **set one task:** gave one duty.

**perpetuate:** go on. **task:** duty. **maiden:** young girl.

**full-breasted:** with a large breast.

**step:** pace. **task:** duty.

**brightened:** became luminous. **quickened:** became fast.

**bold:** audacious.

**fairer:** *more and more beautiful.*

**withhold:** refrain; be patient. **lodge:** small house. **toil:** work.

**offspring:** children. **limbs:** arms and legs.

**dragged:** moved with difficulty. **shuffled:** moved slowly. **dimmed**

**and bleared:** became weaker. **withered:** dried up.

**squaw:** Indian woman. **by:** near.

**But a little while:** in a short time. **pinch of famine:** pain for shortage of food. **trail:** journey.

**stick:** piece of wood.

**frost:** very cold weather.

**squirrel:** small rodent. **crawled:** went. **settled upon:** came on

**outfoot:** escape from. **bald-face:** horse with a white face.

**clumsy:** with difficulties of movement.

**dragged down:** pulled down. **handful:** small number. **yelping**

**huskies:** crying sled dogs.

**reach:** extension.



the missionary came with his talk books and his box of medicines. Many a time had Koskoosh smacked his lips over the recollection of that box, though now his mouth refused to moisten. The "painkiller" had been especially good. But the missionary was a bother after all, for he brought no meat into the camp, and he ate heartily, and the hunters grumbled. But he chilled his lungs on the divide by the Mayo, and the dogs afterward nosed the stones away and fought over his bones.

Koskoosh placed another stick on the fire and harked back deeper into the past. There was the time of the great famine, when the old men crouched empty-bellied to the fire, and let fall from their lips dim traditions of the ancient day when the Yukon ran wide open for three winters, and then lay frozen for three summers. He had lost his mother in that famine. In the summer the salmon run had failed, and the tribe looked forward to the winter and the coming of the caribou. Then the winter came, but with it there were no caribou. Never had the like been known, not even in the lives of the old men. But the caribou did not come, and the rabbits had not replenished, and the dogs were naught but bundles of bones. And through the long darkness the children wailed and died, and the women, and the old men; and not one in ten of the tribe lived to meet the sun when it came back in the spring. That was a famine!

But he had seen times of plenty, too, when the meat spoiled on their hands, and the dogs were fat and worthless with overeating — times when they let the game go unkilld, and the women were fertile, and the lodges were cluttered with sprawling men-children and women-children. Then it was the men became high-stomached, and revived ancient quarrels, and crossed the divides to the south to kill the Pellys, and to the west that they might sit by the dead fires of the Tananas. He remembered, when a boy, during