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JACK LONDON

THE
CALL
OF THE
WILD

with an introduction by ROBERT A. W. LOWNDES



Complete
and Unabridged

The
CALL
of the
WILD

JACK LONDON

AIRMONT PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC.
22 EAST 60TH STREET • NEW YORK 22

An Airmont Classic
specially selected for the Airmont Library
from the immortal literature of the world

THE SPECIAL CONTENTS OF THIS EDITION

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The Call of the Wild



JACK LONDON (1876-1916)

INTRODUCTION

Some men are destroyed by an inner rebelliousness which keeps them at odds within themselves and the world; some become destroyers; and some achieve a precarious balance whereby they may make lasting contributions in the arts, etc., at great cost to themselves. Such persons are usually called "romantics."

Such an one was John Griffith London, born in San Francisco on January 12, 1876, of parents who had emigrated to California from the Middle West. His father, a Civil War veteran who had never recovered from battle wounds, young London knew only as a shattered person. His own accounts of his early life seem exaggerated; hardship there was, but nothing like the grinding poverty and cruel treatment that was the lot of Charles Dickens.

He did not like the name, "John Griffith"; he changed it to Jack, and made everyone accept the change. He quit school at the age of fourteen, but was already widely read in romantic fiction (an obscure novel by Ouida he later considered most influential), books of sea voyages and exploration, and dime novels—all of which emphasized glamour, adventure, and at the least indifference to the conventional means of making a living. The free public libraries, which Jack discovered when his family moved to Oakland, were London's real grammar school. He followed Kipling's works from the time they first appeared, with an enthusiasm that was lifelong.

The keynote is "glamour." All his life Jack London sought a magical solution to his problems, a quick, sure, and colorful road to success, requiring no more of him than courage and action. Despite his reading, he was not the bookish, shut-in sort of daydreamer. He went to work in a cannery, staying long enough to acquire a lasting hatred of machinery, factories, and the whole industrial system. He borrowed three hundred dollars from the Negro woman who had nursed him as a child and bought a sloop, in order to engage in petty piracy—robbing oyster beds in San Francisco bay.

Fortunately for young London, and American letters, this enterprise grew tiresome after a while; he switched sides and the *Razzle Dazzle* now sailed in service of the Fish Patrol, where its young master often clashed with his former associates in piracy. When he was seventeen, he took a job on a sealing schooner, bound for Japan and the Bering Sea.

Mill work followed for a brief period; he found it no better than factory work. He thought of becoming an electrical engineer, but the hard labor which started this project deterred him. Labor groups were rising after the panic of 1893, and Jack joined Kelly's Industrial Army which toured the United States, in a transcontinental march on Washington. But politics had no glamour for him, and when the movement began to peter out, he left the "army" and continued his travels as a hobo. This venture was cut short by a three-month prison sentence for vagrancy.

Everything in his life, thus far, had made him ripe to embrace Marxian Socialism, which was sweeping the ranks of the depressed, but this did not lead him to the career of revolutionary. His prison sentence convinced him that he needed an education. He returned to Oakland, borrowed money from his sister, and turned all his energies into preparing for college, accomplishing the remarkable feat of cramming a four-year course into one.

He won a newspaper prize for a description of a typhoon. Now Jack had a goal in mind: he wanted to become a writer, sure that there was a fortune for him here. His boyhood hero, Ouida's Signa, had won fame at the piano; Jack London would conquer the world at the typewriter. He would learn the techniques at college.

The University of California was a disappointment; it did not offer any short cuts, any rapid course in practical writing. No one sympathized with him or recognized his needs. He wrote continuously in his spare time, sending manuscripts to magazines through-

out the country, without success. A few acceptances by local papers offered small encouragement, and lack of funds cut short his college career. There was only gruelling manual labor in a laundry for him now.

Then, gold was discovered in the Klondike. Here was the glamorous opportunity; he went north. But courage and physical strength were insufficient; he found no gold, and scurvy sent him back home, empty-handed, it seemed. Again he plunged into writing, working day and night on a rented typewriter, producing tramp tales, sea tales, Klondike tales, essays and poems. There was gold in the journals he brought back with him from the Klondike, but the refining process was long and hard.

His first story appeared in "The Overland Monthly." Pay was small, but further acceptances followed, and he began to sell to other markets. There was no royal road for him, but he kept on; in two years, he was making a living at the typewriter. A collection of short stories, *The Son of the Wolf*, was published by Houghton Mifflin in 1900. Four other books followed, each from a different publisher.

The big strike came when *The Call of the Wild* was published in 1903; it not only became a best seller, but received critical acclaim.

He never enjoyed the process of making money, but admitted that he would always be a victim of the money-spending habit. He looked with disgust on what he called, "the stacks of hack I'm turning out!" Inwardly, he still sought glamour, action, adventure. He was supporting a wife and daughter, as well as his mother and nephew. He kept open house.

The precarious balance still held, but at tremendous cost. In his autobiographical novel, *Martin Eden*, the hero commits suicide not long after reaching success as a writer. London traveled to the South Seas; he lived in London's East Side; he was a reporter for Hearst, covering the Russo-Japanese War. At the age of forty, the balance collapsed, and he died, a burned-out man.

In seventeen years, he had produced fifty books; in America, he is best remembered for short stories of the Klondike and novels like *The Call of the Wild*, *The Sea Wolf*, and *Martin Eden*, all of which have been made into movies. Outside the United States, particularly in the Soviet Union, Jack London is famous as the great protester and critic of the industrial system. Here his fame rests on such novels as *The Iron Heel* (1907), and non-fiction like *The War of the Classes* (1904), *Revolution and other Essays* (1910), and *The People of the Abyss* (1903), a study of London slums.

In his study, *The Literature of the United States*, Marcus Cunliffe notes of Jack London that, although his style is crude, and full of journalistic clichés, dissertations on muscle and virility, peculiar jumbings of Marxian and Nietzschean philosophy, etc., he is still remarkably readable. London is a teller of tales, with the power to project his images and events so vividly that the reader hardly notices plot or character deficiencies, stylistic crudities, philosophical absurdities, etc., but is swept along from beginning to end by the glamour projected. "Glamour" originally meant "spell" and Jack London is one of the great spell-casters.

Robert A. W. Lowndes

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ONE

Into the Primitive

“Old longings nomadic leap,
Chafing at custom's chain;
Again from its brumal sleep
Wakens the ferine strain.”

Buck did not read the newspapers, or he would have known that trouble was brewing, not alone for himself, but for every tidewater dog, strong of muscle and with warm, long hair, from Puget Sound to San Diego. Because men, groping in the Arctic darkness, had found a yellow metal, and because steamship and transportation companies were booming the find, thousands of men were rushing into the Northland. These men wanted dogs, and the dogs they wanted were heavy dogs, with strong muscles by which to toil, and furry coats to protect them from the frost.

Buck lived at a big house in the sun-kissed Santa Clara Valley. Judge Miller's place, it was called. It stood back from the road, half hidden among the trees, through which glimpses could be caught of the wide cool veranda that ran around its four sides.

The house was approached by gravelled driveways which wound about through widespreading lawns and under the interlacing boughs of tall poplars. At the rear things were on even a more spacious scale than at the front. There were great stables, where a dozen grooms and boys held forth, rows of vine-clad servants' cottages, an endless and orderly array of out-houses, long grape arbors, green pastures, orchards, and berry patches. Then there was the pumping plant for the artesian well, and the big cement tank where Judge Miller's boys took their morning plunge and kept cool in the hot afternoon.

And over this great demesne Buck rule. Here he was born, and here he had lived the four years of his life. It was true, there were other dogs. There could not but be other dogs on so vast a place, but they did not count. They came and went, resided in the populous kennels, or lived obscurely in the recesses of the house after the fashion of Toots, the Japanese pug, or Ysabel, the Mexican hairless—strange creatures that rarely put nose out of doors or set foot to ground. On the other hand, there were the fox terriers, a score of them at least, who yelped fearful promises at Toots and Ysabel looking out of the windows at them and protected by a legion of housemaids armed with brooms and mops.

But Buck was neither house-dog nor kennel dog. The whole realm was his. He plunged into the swimming tank or went hunting with the Judge's sons; he escorted Mollie and Alice, the Judge's daughters, on long twilight or early morning rambles; on wintry nights he lay at the Judge's feet before the roaring

library fire; he carried the Judge's grandsons on his back, or rolled them in the grass, and guarded their footsteps through wild adventures down to the fountain in the stable yard, and even beyond, where the paddocks were, and the berry patches. Among the terriers he stalked imperiously, and Toots and Ysabel he utterly ignored, for he was king—king over all creeping, crawling, flying things of Judge Miller's place, humans included.

His father, Elmo, a huge St. Bernard, had been the Judge's inseparable companion, and Buck bid fair to follow in the way of his father. He was not so large—he weighed only one hundred and forty pounds—for his mother, Shep, had been a Scotch shepherd dog. Nevertheless, one hundred and forty pounds, to which was added the dignity that comes of good living and universal respect, enabled him to carry himself in right royal fashion. During the four years since his puppyhood he had lived the life of a sated aristocrat; he had a fine pride in himself, was ever a trifle egotistical, as country gentlemen sometimes become because of their insular situation. But he had saved himself by not becoming a mere pampered house-dog. Hunting and kindred outdoor delights had kept down the fat and hardened his muscles; and to him, as to the cold-tubbing races, the love of water had been a tonic and a health preserver.

And this was the manner of dog Buck was in the fall of 1897, when the Kondike strike dragged men from all the world into the frozen North. But Buck did not read the newspapers, and he did not know that Manuel, one of the gardener's helpers, was an unde-