



CANNIBAL SANDWICHES

JACK LONDON

BORN IN SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA, 1876
DIED NEAR GLEN ELLEN, CALIFORNIA, 1916



*American writer known for novels and short stories
about survival, including The Call of the Wild,
White Fang, and "To Build a Fire"*

JACK LONDON PACKED many lifetimes into his forty years.

He grew up poor after his father, an astrologer, deserted the family before London was born. At age thirteen he worked in a cannery fourteen hours a day and then (as his mother said) "fell in with bad company." By day he was known as Prince of the Oyster Pirates for his skill in raiding the oyster beds of San Francisco Bay; nights were spent at the First and Last Chance Saloon. He traveled about on freight trains and ships, and by age eighteen was in jail for vagrancy.

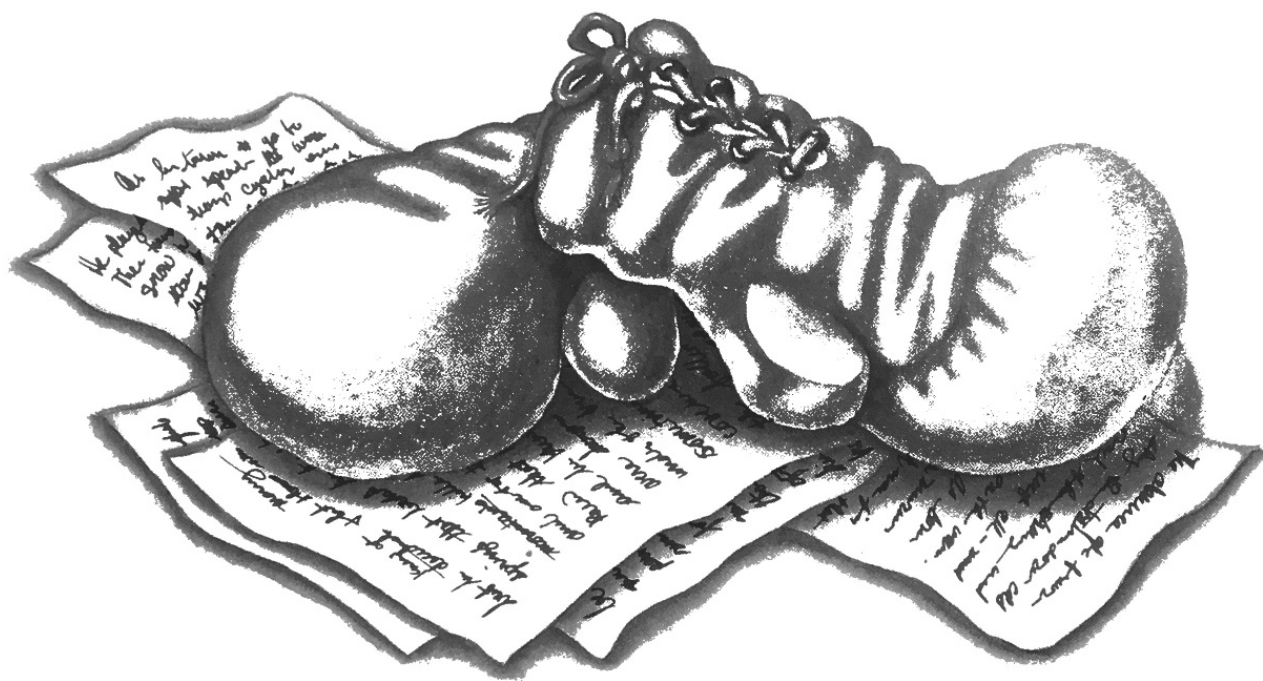
Tired of being a "work beast" and wanting to live by his wits, he began writing fifteen hours a day, forgetting to eat, working on an old typewriter that gave him bleeding blisters and kept his neighbors awake. Rejection slips piled five feet high.

Then he joined the gold rush north to the Klondike. Living on bread, beans, and bacon grease, London did not strike gold . . . until *writing* about the Klondike made him, at age twenty-nine, the most highly paid and widely read author in America.

London reminded many people of a Greek god, with his handsome, tanned face,

strong neck, and eyes that appeared to change color. He lost most of his teeth, often in fights, but he was enormously proud of his body. His image as a ladies' man and rowdy brawler became so exaggerated that other men, when they got into trouble, would pretend to be him.

London left his first wife, Bess Maddern, and their two daughters to marry Charmian Kittredge, who was five years older than he was. They called each other Mate-Woman and Mate-Man. She typed and edited his books and participated in all his adventures.



He loved to box (especially with Charmian), fly kites, and ride bikes and horses. In Hawaii he was one of the first Americans to learn how to surf. He worked as a war correspondent all over the world, and he ran for mayor of Oakland several times, though he never was elected. (Sometimes his books were banned because of his controversial politics.) In his biggest adventure of all, he built a boat he called the *Snark* and sailed it around the world for several years.

London did everything in a big way. When he bought his ranch in California, he planted sixty thousand eucalyptus trees and threw himself into raising stallions and growing grapes. London believed that, through willpower, anyone can do anything. Sometimes he was stubborn and arrogant, and he never took the blame for anything that went wrong.

He had a personal valet, who every evening arranged London's pencils and papers on his desk. London worked at night, sleeping on and off for five hours. In the afternoons he joined guests at the ranch for sports, practical jokes, and challenges — a guest might have to swallow a live goldfish or push peanuts up his nose. After dinner (London liked to eat raw meat — a “cannibal sandwich” of raw beef, perhaps, and as many as two barely cooked wild ducks a day), he played cards or read aloud until it was time to go back to his room to work. He was never seen without a cigarette and was a very heavy drinker.

London died at age forty from an overdose of the pain-killing drugs he took for a kidney obstruction. Whether the overdose was accidental or suicidal is a matter of controversy. His last words to Charmian were, “Thank God, you're not afraid of anything!”

His ashes were buried on the ranch, under a red boulder.

BOOKMARKS

◆ *The Call of the Wild*, the classic dog story, describes how a tame dog named Buck reverts to the wild behavior of a wolf in order to survive. London based Buck on a dog named Jack, who was a cross between a St. Bernard and a Scots shepherd, that he had known in the Yukon.

◆ *White Fang* tells the opposite story, of a wolf-dog that is gradually domesticated. London jokingly called it *The Call of the Tamed*. Wolves were important to London. One of his nicknames was Wolf; he owned a husky named Brown Wolf; the house he built on his Beauty Ranch in the Valley of the Moon was called Wolf House. (Two weeks before the last touches on its lavish twenty-two rooms were finished, the house burned down under mysterious circumstances.)