

BURNING DAYLIGHT

By Jack London

JACK LONDON.

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SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

BURNING DAYLIGHT, Elam Harnish, is introduced to the reader as he enters a Circle City dance hall, saloon and gambling house like the whirlwind that he is. Possessed of a tidy fortune and sure of making a vast one, Burning Daylight proceeds to stir up the life of the gambling house. The men and women all admire him, for he is of the type that dominates. Essentially a man's man, Burning Daylight resents, or rather fears, the wiles of the women who frequent the dance hall. But he is afraid to be even civil to a woman, because he dreads the idea of being mastered by anybody or anything, and to surrender to a woman means, in his mind, that he is conquered. Drink leads to boasting, and in the turmoil that follows Burning Daylight shows his amazing muscular strength. He wins all the tests and downes all the giants that come before him. Then comes a poker game—the greatest ever played in the Klondike. Burning Daylight's luck deserts him at the end, and he rises from the table penniless—worse than "broke."

Then the indomitable courage of this master among men shows itself. He declares himself in readiness to accomplish an impossible task—to run the mail to Dyea and back with a dog team and an Indian. And so Burning Daylight goes forth, over the frozen, trackless wastes, while behind him bets are made and taken on the chances of his returning inside of sixty days. As the indomitable man goes on his way the difficulties that come to him seem too vast to be overcome, and his hardy Indian companion and his dogs are remorselessly prodded on by this man from the Southland, who by all the odds, should be the softer and should succumb first. At last the Indian breaks. He is lashed to the sled, and, thus handicapped, Daylight gets to Dyea. For the return the indomitable man gets a fresh Indian and new dogs, and the terrific journey is repeated. At Selkirk Daylight is two days late, but he gets a new dog team, and the rest is easy. He reaches Circle City and plunges into the "rival," winning his victory and the acclaim of the crowd that had seen him depart on his heartbreaking journey. Then, without rest, this amazing man makes a wild night of it. He outdances men and women, too; wins at roulette, and then, still soaring alumber or any respiration, start at daybreak, with three partners and a dog team, for the newest gold strike in the upper country along the Stewart.

Then comes the battle for gold. Strike after strike is explored. Daylight sees himself the dominant figure along the Yukon and in the golden Dawson. Discouraged frequently, he refuses to allow life's loaded dice to beat him, and in the end comes victory and millions. He is at length a great mine owner, and the slumy big pile he had sworn to own in the Circle City dance hall days is his. And so Daylight leaves the Yukon behind for new fields of endeavor. His departure is an event of great importance, and as the vessel swings clear this all conquering man weeps a little. He tears off his cap and waves it. "Goodby, you—all!" he called. "Goodby, you—all!"

CHAPTER XIV.

No blaze of glory did Burning Daylight descend upon San Francisco. Not only had he been forgotten, but the Klondike along with him. The world was interested in other things, and the Alaskan adventure, like the Spanish War, was an old story. Many things had happened since then, exciting things were happening every day, and the sensation space of newspapers was limited. The effect of being ignored, however, was an exhilaration. Big man as he had been in the Arctic game, it merely showed how much bigger was this new game, when a man worth eleven millions and with a history such as his passed unnoticed.

He settled down in the St. Francis Hotel, was interviewed by the cub reporters on the hotel run, and received brief paragraphs of notice for twenty-four hours. He grinned to himself and began to look around and get acquainted with the new order of things and things. He was very awkward and very self-possessed. In addition to the stiffening afforded his backbone by the conscious ownership of eleven millions, he possessed an enormous certitude. Nothing abashed him, nor was he appalled by the display and culture and power around him. It was another kind of wilderness, that was all, and it was for him to learn the ways of it, the signs and trails and water holes, where good hunting lay and the bad stretches of field and food to be avoided.

As usual, he fought shy of the women. He was still too badly scared to come to close quarters with the dashing and resplendent creatures his own millions made accessible. They looked and looked, but he concealed his timidity that he had a sense of something moving boldly among them. Nor was it his wealth alone that attracted them. He was too much a man and too much an unusual type of man. Young yet, barely thirty-six, eminently handsome, magnificently strong, almost bursting with a splendid virility, his free trail stride, never learned on pavements, and his black eyes, hinting of great spaces and unwearied with the close perspective of the city dweller, drew many a curious and wayward feminine glance. He saw, grinned knowingly to himself, and faced them as so many dangers, with a cool demeanor that was a far greater personal achievement than had they been famine, frost or food.

He had come down to the States to play the man's game, not the woman's game, and the men he had not yet learned. They struck him as soft—soft physically, yet he divined them hard in their dealings, but hard under an exterior of supple softness. It struck him that there was something catlike about them. He met them in the clubs and wondered how real was the good fellowship they displayed and how quickly they would unseat their claws and gouge and rend. "That's the proposition," he repeated to himself. "What will they all do when the play is close and down to brass tacks?" He felt unwarrantably suspicious of them. "They're sure sick," was his secret judgment, and from bits of gossip dropped now and again he felt his judgment well buttressed. On the other hand, they radiated an atmosphere of manliness and the fair play that goes with manliness. They might gouge and rend in a fight—which was no more than natural—but he felt, somehow, that they would gouge and rend according to rule. This was the impression he got of them—a generalization tempered by knowledge that there was bound to be a certain percentage of scoundrels among them. Several months passed in San Francisco, during which time he studied the game and its rules and prepared himself to take a hand. He even took private instruction in English and succeeded in eliminating his worst faults, though in moments of excitement he



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was prone to lapse into "you-all," "knowed," "sure" and similar solecisms. He learned to eat and dress and generally comport himself after the manner of civilized men; but through it all he remained himself, not unduly reverential nor considerate and never hesitating to stride roughshod over any soft faced convention if it got in his way and the provocation were great enough. Also—and unlike the average run of weaker men coming from back countries and far places—he failed to reverence the particular tin gods worshipped variously by the civilized tribes of men. He had seen totems before and knew them for what they were.

Tiring of being merely an onlooker, he ran up to Nevada, where the new gold mining boom was fairly started—just to try a flutter," as he phrased it to himself. The flutter on the Tonopah Stock Exchange lasted just ten days, during which time his smashing, wild bull game played ducks and drakes with the more stereotyped gamblers, and at the end of which time, having gathered Florida into his flat, he let go for a net profit of half a million. Whereupon, smacking his lips, he departed for San Francisco and the St. Francis Hotel. It tasted good and his hunger for the game became more acute.

And once more the papers sensationalized him. Burning Daylight was a big letter headline again. Interviewers flocked about him. Old files of magazines and newspapers were searched through and the romantic and historic Elam Harnish, Adventurer of the Frost, King of the Klondike and Father of the Sourdoughs, strode upon the breakfast table of a million homes along with the toast and breakfast foods. Even before his elected time he was forcibly launched into the game. Financiers and promoters and all the fetsam and jetsam of the sea of speculation surged upon the shores of his eleven millions. In self-defence he was compelled to open offices. He had made them sit up and take notice, and now, willy-nilly, they were dealing him hands and clamoring for him to play. Well, play he would; he'd show 'em, even despite the elated prophecies made of how swiftly he would be trimmed—prophecies coupled with descriptions of the bucolic game he would play and of his wild and woolly appearance. He dabbled in little things at first—"stalling for time," as he explained it to Holdsworth, a friend he had made at the Alta-Pacific Club. Daylight himself was a member of the club and Holdsworth had proposed him. And it was well that Daylight played closely at first, for he was astounded by the multitude of sharks—"ground sharks," he called them—that stocked about him. He saw through their schemes readily enough and even marvelled that such numbers of them could find sufficient prey to keep them going. Their rascality and general dubiousness was so transparent that he could not understand how any one could be taken in by them. And then he found that there were sharks and sharks. Holdsworth treated him more like a brother than a mere fellow clubman, watching over him, advising him, and introducing him to the magnates of the local financial world. Holdsworth's family lived in a delightful bungalow near Menlo Park, and here Daylight spent a number of weekends, seeing a fineness and kindness of home life of which he had never dreamed. Holdsworth was an enthusiast over flowers and a half lunatic over

raising prize poultry, and these engrossing madnesses were a source of perpetual joy to Daylight, who looked on in tolerant good humor. Such amiable weaknesses tokened the healthfulness of the man and drew Daylight closer to him. A prosperous, successful business man without great ambition, was Daylight's estimate of him—a man too easily satisfied with the small stakes of the game ever to launch out in big play. On one such week end visit Holdsworth let him in on a good thing, a good little thing, a brickyard at Glen Ellen. Daylight listened closely to the other's description of the situation. It was a most reasonable venture, and Daylight's one objection was that it was so small a matter and so far out of his line; and he went into it only as a matter of friendship. Holdsworth explaining that he was himself already in a bit, and that, while it was a good thing, he would be compelled to make sacrifices in other directions to develop it. Daylight advanced the capital, \$50,000, and, as he laughingly explained afterward, "I was stung, all right, but it wasn't Holdsworth that did it half so much as those blasted chickens and fruit trees of his."

It was a good lesson, however; for he learned that there were new faiths in the business world, and that even the simple, homely faith of breaking bread and eating salt counted for little in the face of a worthless brickyard and fifty thousand dollars in cash. But the sharks and sharks of various orders and degrees, he concluded, were on the surface. Deep down, he divined, were the integrities and the stabilities. These big captains of industry and masters of finance, he decided, were the men to work with. By the very nature of their huge deals and enterprises they had to play fair. No room there for little sharpener's tricks and bunco games. It was to be expected that little men should salt gold mines with a shotgun and work off their worthless brickyards on their friends, but in high finance such methods were not worth while. There the men were engaged in developing the country, organizing its railroads, opening up its mines, making accessible its vast natural resources. Their play was bound to be big and stable. "They sure can't afford tin-horn tactics" was his summing up. So it was that he resolved to leave the little men, to play, alone; and, while he met them in good fellowship, he chummed with none and formed no deep friendships. He did not dislike the little men, the men of the Alta-Pacific, for instance. He merely did not elect to choose them for partners in the big game in which he intended to play. What that big game was, even he did not know. He was waiting to find it. And in the meantime he played small hands, investing in several arid land reclamation projects and keeping his eyes open for the big chance when it should come along. And then he met John Dowsett, the great John Dowsett. The whole thing was fortuitous. This cannot be doubted. As Daylight knew himself, it was by the merest chance, when in Los Angeles, that he heard the tuna were running strong at Santa Catalina and went over himself instead of returning directly to San Francisco as he had planned. There he met John Dowsett, resting off for several days in the middle of a fly-bug Western trip. Dowsett had, of course, heard of the spectacular Klondike King and

his rumored thirty millions, and he certainly found himself interested by the man in the acquaintance that was formed. Somewhere along in this acquaintanceship the idea must have popped into his brain. But he did not broach it, preferring to mature it carefully. So he talked in large general ways and did his best to be agreeable and win Daylight's friendship. It was the first big magnate Daylight had met face to face, and he was pleased and charmed. There was such a kindly humanness about the man, such a genial democraticness, that Daylight found it hard to realize that this was the John Dowsett, reputed of a string of banks, insurance manipulator, president of the lieutenants of vast fortunes and known ally of the Hammersmiths. Nor did his looks belie his reputation and his manner.

Physically, he guaranteed all that Daylight knew of him. Despite his sixty years and snow white hair, his handshake was firmly hearty, and he showed no signs of decrepitude, walking with a quick, snappy step, making all movements definitely and decisively. His skin was a healthy pink, and his thin, clean lips knew the way to writhe heartily over a joke. He had honest eyes of palest blue; they looked out at one keenly and frankly from under shaggy grey brows. His mind showed itself disciplined and orderly, and his workings struck Daylight as having all the certitude of a steel trap. He was a man who knew and who never decorated his knowledge with foolish frills of sentiment or emotion. That he was accustomed to command was patent, and every word and gesture tinged with power. Combined with this were his sympathy and tact, and Daylight could note easily enough all the earmarks that distinguished him from a little man of the Holdsworth calibre. Daylight knew also his history, the prime old American stock from which he had descended, his own war record, the John Dowsett before him who had been one of the banking buttresses of the cause of the Union, the Commodore Dowsett of the War of 1812, the General Dowsett of Revolutionary fame, and that first far Dowsett, owner of lands and slaves in early New England.

"He's sure the real thing," he told one of his fellow clubmen afterward in the smoking room of the Alta-Pacific. "I tell you, Gallion, he was a genuine surprise to me. I knew the big ones had to be like that, but I had to see him to really know it. He's one of the fellows that does things. You can see it sticking out all over him. He's one in a thousand, that's straight, and his workings struck Daylight as having right up to the handle. I bet he can lose or win half a dozen millions without batting an eye." Gallion puffed at his cigar and at the conclusion of the panegyric regarded the other curiously, but Daylight, ordering cocktails, failed to note this curious stare. "Going in with him on some deal, I suppose?" Gallion remarked. "None, not the slightest idea. Here's kindness. I was just explaining that I'd come to understand how these big fellows do big things. Why, d'ye know, he gave me such a feeling that he knew everything that I was plumb ashamed of myself. "I guess I could give him cards and spades when it comes to driving a dog team, though." Daylight observed after a meditative pause. "And I really believe I could put him on to a few wrinkles in poker

and placer mining and maybe in passing a string canoe. And maybe I stand a better chance to learn the game he's been playing all his life than he would stand of learning the game I played up north."

CHAPTER XV.

It was not long afterward that Daylight came on to New York. A letter from John Dowsett was the cause—a simple little typewritten letter of several lines. But Daylight had thrilled as he read it. He remembered the thrill that was his, a callow youth of fifteen, when, in Tampa Bay, through lack of a fourth man, Tom Galsworthy, the gambler, had said, "Get in, kid; take a hand." That thrill was his now. The bald, typewritten sentences of light attenuated cheer, of a private motor seemed gorged with mystery. "Our Mr. Howison will call upon you at your hotel. He is to be trusted. We must not be seen together. You will understand after we have had our talk." Daylight combed the words over and over. That was it. The big game had arrived, and it looked as if he were invited to sit in and take a hand. Surely for no other reason would one man so preemptively invite another man to make a journey across the continent. He met, thanks to "our" Mr. Howison, up the Hudson, in a snugly cozy car, a private motor car which had been furnished him. Whose car it was he did not know any more than did he know the owner of the house, with its generous rolling, tree-studded grounds. Dowsett was already there, and another man whom Daylight recognized had just introduced him. Daylight had seen his face a score of times in the magazines and newspapers and read about his standing in the financial world. He likewise struck Dowsett as a man of power, though he was puzzled in that he could find no likeness to Dowsett. Except in the matter of cleanliness, a cleanliness that seemed to go down to the deepest fibres of him, Nathaniel Letton was unlike the other in every particular. This to enunciation, he seemed a cold flame of a man, a man of a mysterious chemical sort of flame, who under a glacierlike exterior conveyed the impression of the ardent heat of a thousand suns. His large gray eyes were mainly responsible for this feeling, and they blazed out feverishly from what was almost a deathly dead, skin that was the face, the skin of which was a ghastly, dull dead white, more than fifty, looked several times the age of Dowsett. Yet Nathaniel Letton possessed control; Daylight could see that plainly. He was a thin faced ascetic, living in a state of almost morose abstinence, a moken plant under a translucent ice sheet. He had all the seeming of having been purged by fire. Daylight had the feeling that a healthy man on oath would be a deadly offence to his ears, a sacrilege and a blasphemy.

They drank that is, Nathaniel Letton took mineral water served by the smoothly operating machine of a lackey who inhabited the place, while Dowsett took Scotch and soda and Daylight a cocktail. Nobody seemed to notice the unusualness of the very thing, though Daylight looked sharply for the very thing, for he had long since learned that Martinis and their strictly appointed times and places. But he liked Martinis, and, being a natural man, he chose deliberately to drink when he could. Dowsett had noticed this peculiar habit of his, but not so Dowsett and Letton; and Daylight's secret though was—"They sure wouldn't bat an eye if I called for a glass of corrosive sublimate."

John Hammersmith arrived in the midst of the drink and ordered Scotch. Daylight studied him curiously. This was one of the great Hammersmiths; a younger one, true, but nevertheless one of the crowd with which he had locked grapples in the North. Nor did John Hammersmith fail to mention acquaintance of that old affair. He complimented Daylight on his prowess. "The echoes of your name come down to us, you know. And I must say, Mr. Daylight—er, Mr. Harnish—that you whipped us roundly in that affair." Echoes! Daylight could not escape the shock of the phrase. Echoes had cut down to them of the feat into which he had flung all his strength and the strength of his Klondike millions. The Hammersmiths sure must go some when a fight of that dimension was no more than a skirmish of which they deemed to hear echoes. "They sure play an almighty big game down here," was his conclusion, accompanied by a corresponding elation that it was just precisely that almighty big game in which he was about to be invited to play a hand. For the moment he poignantly regretted that rumor was not true and that his eleven millions were not in reality thirty millions. Well, that much he would be frank about; he would let them know exactly how many stacks of chips he could buy. John Hammersmith was young and cat. Not a day more than thirty, his face, save for the admirably put backs under the eyes, was as smooth and limless as a boy's. He, too, gave the impression of cleanliness. He showed in the pink of health; the unblemished, smooth shaven skin of the face shouted advertisement of his splendid physical condition. In the face of that perfect skin, his very fetness and



"We'll shake up the speculating crowd," John Hammersmith proclaimed jubilantly, as they rose to go. "And you are the man to do it, Mr. Harnish." mature rotund paunch could be nothing other than normal. He was constituted to be prone to fatness, that was all. The talk soon centred down to business, though Hammersmith had first to say his say about the forthcoming international yacht race and about his own palatial steam yacht, the Electra, whose recent engines were already antiquated. Dowsett broached the plan, aided by an occasional remark from the other two, while Daylight asked questions. Whatever the proposition was, he was going into it with his eyes open. And they filled his eyes with the practical vision of what they had in mind. (To Be Continued.)

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