

CONDENSED CLASSICS

THE MASTER OF BALLANTRAE

By ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

Condensed by Jennell Conroy



Robert Louis Stevenson was born of cultured parents, Nov. 13, 1850, in Edinburgh, Scotland. From infancy his health was delicate. His schooling was therefore desultory, but he early adored the tales and poems read to him by his devoted nurse Alison Cunningham, and so began the passion for literature which dominated his life. His father, Thomas Stevenson, an able civil engineer, desired Louis to follow his profession, but after more than three years' study he abandoned it. He next read law to please his father, but he genuinely cared only for writing. Perhaps no figure in literature is more loved for sheer valiance of spirit than Robert Louis Stevenson. He devoted all his life to the pursuit of high courage and dauntless gaiety. In France and California, in the Adirondacks and the South Sea Islands, he pursued the will of the wisest, health, which always eluded him. From 1880 to his death in 1894, his wife was a source of strength and inspiration; yet called from friends he suffered physical pain and weary disappointment. Much of his best work was written in bed. Nevertheless in 17 years he produced four volumes of essays, seven romances, five collections of fantastic tales, two of South Sea yarns, three of poetry, five volumes of travel and topography, one of political history, and left material for several posthumous works. "Treasure Island" is perhaps the best loved of his romances. Stevenson said: "If this don't fetch the kids, why, they have gone rotten since my time." And again, as he wrote it: "It's awful fun, boys' stories; you just include the pleasure of your heart, that's all."

THE Duries of Ballantrae were a strong family in Scotland from the days of David I. Their ups and downs I pass over, to come to that year 1745 when the foundations of this tragedy were laid.

There was my lord, studious, tactful and retired from the world. There was the master (James in baptism) with his father's love of study; but what was tact in the father changed to black dissimulation in him. Though ever in broils, invariably he left his partners in mischief to pay the piper. The second son, Mr. Henry, was neither able nor bad; an out-of-doors, solid sort, who had had an active hand from a boy in the management of the estate. In the house also was Miss Alison Graeme, an orphan, comely and self-willed, heiress to a fortune and, because of my lord's necessities, pledged in marriage to the master.

Then came the uprising for Prince Charlie. Against the wishes of the other three the master elected to ride with the prince; which left Mr. Henry to take King George's side, this being a common policy of great houses in that day. So the master rode to the North. Then came the word of Culloden and the master's death. After a decent time Mr. Henry, to preserve the estate, married Miss Alison, although he no more than any other doubted her love for the master's memory.

But the master was not dead. He had escaped to sea, his escape being not to his credit. At sea he was captured by a pirate ship. By the most ingenious devilry he secured the treasure of the pirate ship as she was about to fall into the hands of a king's cruiser, and escaped with it to the swamps on the American shore. One man he took to guide him out of the swamp, and dirked him to death after they were safely clear of it. Thence he continued his march to French Canada, although forced on the way to hide his treasure in the wilderness. This we learned from a Colonel Burke, an Irish soldier of fortune, who came in the night to plead money for the support of the master, who was then in France.

There was a letter from the master which threw Mr. Henry in a passion. "He calls me a niggardly dog!" he cried. "But if I ruin the estate I shall stuff him, the blood-sucker! And all this I foresaw when he elected himself and not me to go with Prince Charlie."

The rap made in our accounts by the master's demands became a sore embarrassment. As steward of the estate I must needs ride to Edinburgh and there raise new loans on hard terms to keep old ones afloat; and this held for seven years. Mr. Henry shying everything to the last farthing to raise more money, and yet more money; winning for himself thereby no better title than miser with the countryside as well as at home; for never a word of this business did he even tell to the old lord or Mrs. Henry, it being the devilish malice of the master to require this secrecy and the loyal nature of his brother to comply.

The odium attaching to Mr. Henry and the knowledge, which came to me, that the master all this time had also a pension from the Scotch fund in Paris, became too great a burden for me. I took it on myself to tell Mrs. Henry how her husband had already sent 7,000 to the master. Thereafter no

further moneys were sent abroad, and the telling did much to check a widening restraint between Mr. Henry and my lady, a great joy to me.

This action resulted in the master's return to us, a great curse to the household; for in all matters of contention, though Mr. Henry might be right, the master had the trick of setting him in the wrong. He still demanded money, and, to satisfy him, the entail was broken and a great piece of land sold; and all the while he ceased not to lay siege to the heart of Mrs. Henry, carrying it on so deftly that I scarce knew if she was aware of it herself, she whom I doubt not still loved him.

This brings me to the night when he laid the most unbearable of insults on Mr. Henry. "I never knew a woman," said the master, "who did not prefer me, nor—I think—who did not continue to prefer me to you." At which Mr. Henry coldly struck him on the mouth.

"A blow!" cried the master. "I will not take a blow from God Almighty! I must have blood for this!"

They fought beyond the shrubbery. I bringing the candles for them. From the first Mr. Henry showed himself the stronger, which so surprised and confused the master that he tried foul play, but got only the length of Mr. Henry's sword through the body. He fell, apparently lifeless.

Mr. Henry shook with sobs. I led him into the house, and told the old lord and my lady; but going back to bring in the body, I found it gone. A good riddance, I thought, whether dead or alive, but the night's work threw Mr. Henry into a fever, and his mind was never again the same clear mind as of old.

The old lord died, and to my lady and Mr. Henry, now my lord, was born a boy, and to that boy my lord became a slave, which had not been so with his first child, Katherine. He would pass by his wife as though she were a dog before the hearth to come at the boy. Without doubt this was in the nature of a judgment on my lady, she who had been so cold so many years to every mark of his tenderness; but to me it was monstrous, and I was emboldened much as I loved him, to say so; but my saying so only served to send my lord sick to bed and to earn for me from my lord the word that I was no better than an old maid.

This brings me to that morning in April 1764, that the master returned to us again, this time with an Indian servant. With his return my lord and lady, I urging them on, took ship for New York, where my lady had property through her father. This voyage, so I thought, will at one stroke rid them of the master and weave them closer together.

Twenty days it took the master to learn where they had gone; whereupon he also sailed for New York, and I on the same ship, praying that he would go down, even with myself with her, if it would but take the master also. I looked forward with new to the day he should set foot in New York; but our ship was a slow sailer, and other ships which sailed later arrived before us; so it happened that my lord had word of the master's coming and prepared for him. There was suspicion of more than one murder, it seems, to the master's hand during the earlier stay he made in America, and so now he found it a better business to leave New York and hunt in the wilderness for that treasure which he had buried so many years before.

At this time all the evil the master had done seemed borne in a flood upon my lord's brain. He became moody and took to drink. There has been talk that he conspired with the crew which the master had hired for his expedition, bribing the leaders to make way with his brother. There is no evidence of that, but it is true that the master's Indian servant to save his life, as he said, did bury him alive, with the intent to resurrect and restore him later by the agency of some secret oriental trick.

My lord and a party, I being of it, followed the master, and it was when the East Indian was lifting his body from the grave that we came upon them. I thought for a moment that the eyelids fluttered. Others say that the lips strove to speak, that his teeth showed through his beard, which may have been, for I was busy elsewhere, for at the first disclosure of the dead man's eyes, my lord had fallen to the ground. When I raised him he was a corpse.

I buried him there; my lady laid an equal stone to each; and there where they died, side by side, they lie to this day.

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Water Telescope Finds Missing Body. Miss Emily McCarthy, a nurse of Meriden, Conn., disappeared and her hat was found in Black pond, indicating that she had drowned, probably by wading into the water in the dark and becoming confused.

Every effort to find the body by dragging failed, so Scout Executive John D. Roberts made a water telescope from a keg with a glass bottom. Holding this over the side of a boat and peering into the depths of the pond, the body of the missing nurse was finally seen and brought ashore.—Boy Scout Bulletin.

In Ye Stone Age. John Plomasturus—What's that poet fellow jumping around with so much glee for?

Eddie Stonehatchet—He sent a new poem to the editor of the Stone Age Gazette and the letter dropped on the editor's foot.

CONDENSED CLASSICS

THE SEA WOLF

By JACK LONDON

Condensation by Cliff B. Carbery



Jack London was born, with the love of adventure in his veins, at San Francisco, Jan. 12, 1876. He started his education at the University of California, but did not finish it there, for the strenuous life was to be his school, and all his teachers, any strange place his schoolroom. Now he was in the Klondike now at sea before the mast; then he was in Japan and seal hunting in Heroin Sea; again he was tramping through the United States and Canada, learning all he could of men and their ways; he was journalist and lecturer, war correspondent in the Russo-Japanese war, and ever and anon making those voyages which kept the eyes of the world upon him. How he broke into the realm of letters he has vividly described: his own great battle with John Barleycorn, told with unusual frankness, did a great deal to set the stage for John's present tragic plight; his own personality kept the great reading public so interested as did the creations of his imagination; his books came thick and fast, beginning with 1900, sometimes two and three a year. He was twice married, first to Beulah Maddern and second to Charmian Kittredge, who plays a large part in his later books. He died Nov. 21, 1916.

THE keen eyes of Wolf Larsen, master of the sealing schooner Ghost, bound for Japanese poaching grounds, spotted the bobbing head of Humphrey Van Weyden amid the waves of San Francisco bay. Into whose waters Humphrey had been thrown as a result of a shipwreck. A few moments more and Humphrey was aboard the Ghost.

Rescued, he faced his rescuer with thanks and a request to be put ashore. The skipper eyed him curiously.

"What do you do for a living?" he asked.

"I—I am a gentleman," Humphrey stammered.

"Who feeds you?"

"I have an income."

Wolf Larsen's lips curled in a sneer. "You stand on dead men's legs. You couldn't walk alone between two surprises and hustle the meat for your belly for three meals. You stay here as cabin boy for the good of your soul. I'll make a man of you."

Instant rebellion leaped into Humphrey's eyes. Before he could protest there came a sudden interruption—a clamor from the real cabin boy, a great husky youth who stood by. Wolf Larsen turned and crashed his fist into the boy's stomach. Crumpled like a wet rag around a stick, the lad collapsed into a heap on the deck.

"Well," said Wolf Larsen meaningly to Humphrey, "have you made up your mind?"

The spark of manhood in Humphrey died out.

"Yes," he replied weakly. "Yes, yes, sir!"

And thus Humphrey passed into the servitude of Wolf Larsen, the Sea Wolf. His blinking eyes, half revealing and half concealing his terror, surveyed his master and thus appraised him: "Massive of build, like a huge gorilla; with a strength, savage and ferocious; features of no evil stamp; eyes of baffling protean gray, sometimes as chill as an Arctic landscape, sometimes all aglow with love-lights—intense, masculine and compelling—which at the same time fascinate and dominate women until they surrender in a gladness of joy and of relief and sacrifice."

His creed, the mighty will which engined Wolf Larsen, was short.

"Life is a mess," he declared. "The big eat the little that they may continue to move; the strong eat the weak that they may retain their strength. The lucky eat the most and move the longest, that is all."

His company on shipboard; seamen sodden and sullen by drink, more animal than human; a group of seal hunters, wild reckless nomads, ignorant of an ordered world—all slaves in body and spirit to the Sea Wolf.

Yet there was a gentle side to Wolf Larsen. He was no ignorant cave man. He could discuss literature with "Hump," roll over his lips the poetic glories of Shelley and Browning, argue the sciences with amazing fluency and be disarmingly charming at times.

As the days rolled on and murderous quarrels made the hours hideous, Humphrey's backbone gradually stiffened. He dreamed of killing the Sea Wolf. But Larsen fascinated him and like some splendid animal, some dangerous beast, held him in a spell. He knew the world should be rid of such a monster, yet Larsen's eyes compelled obedience.

Day by day, with not a gleam of graciousness to break the orgy of brutishness, this tragic drama went on. Humphrey despaired of even a gleam of sunshine. Suddenly fate intervened in the person of Maude Brewster.

Like Humphrey, she came to the Ghost from the sea, saved from a wrecked liner. Like Humphrey, she

expected to be put aboard a passing vessel. But not The Sea Wolf had other plans. She was added to the crew as Humphrey was, and likewise "for the good of her soul."

Maude received the news in wonderment. What kind of a man was this mocking master of the Ghost? She was soon to find out.

The cook had offended Larsen. A rope was coiled around the offender and he was cast overboard in the wake of the ship. A shark rushed for him and Larsen ordered him pulled in. Despite the maddened haste, the shark in the final rush tore away the foot of the victim.

"The shark was not in the reckoning, Miss Brewster," said the Sea Wolf smiling. "It was—shall we say—an act of Providence."

This scene convinced Humphrey that he must kill Wolf Larsen. His courage flared, so brightly that he actually threatened to murder him.

The Sea Wolf intoned a whimsical refrain: "Bravo, Hump, you do me proud. I like you the better for it."

Humphrey winced. He couched his resolution to Maude, with whom he had fallen in love, she counseled against it, protesting that moral courage always defeats brute force, but she failed to convince him. He knew the Sea Wolf too well.

The dancing lights in Wolf Larsen's eyes when he looked into Maude's warned Humphrey that some day the storm would break. And it did. In the midst of the night, he rushed into Maude's cabin to find her in the crushing embrace of Wolf Larsen.

Humphrey flung himself on the monster to be tossed aside like a chip. He rushed again, drawing his knife, plunging the blade into the Sea Wolf's shoulder. Larsen staggered back and Maude seized Humphrey, begging him not to kill. Suddenly the Wolfe collapsed, not from his wound, but as if from some innocuous spell that paralyzed him. The giant was helpless. Humphrey carried him to his berth and realized that opportunity for escape was at hand.

Maude and he put off in a small boat, hoping that they might make Japan, 600 miles away. But the winds and creeping drift of the Pacific intervened and finally the grim adventure ended for a time on a little Arctic island. Here they prepared to remain for the winter.

Suddenly one morning, weeks after, Humphrey saw on the beach the wreck of a vessel, and it was strangely familiar. It could not be—yes it was—the Ghost. The blood chilled in his veins. Wild thoughts of flight or the sudden ending of both their lives entered his mind. Then a wondering cunning succeeded such fears. He would kill Wolf Larsen, kill him as he slept, for all on board were doubtless sleeping. With knife and gun he climbed to the deck. He saw no one. Was the ship deserted after all?

But as he rounded the poop there burst on his gaze the Sea Wolf. Humphrey raised his gun; the trigger clicked sharply. Then silence.

"Why don't you shoot?" coolly remarked the Wolf.

Humphrey could not speak.

"Hump," said the Sea Wolf, slowly. "You can't do it. And after all I have taught you. You know that I would kill an unarmed man as readily as I would smoke a cigar. Bah! I had expected the better things of you, Hump."

Humphrey slowly lowered the gun.

The Ghost's presence was explained calmly by the Sea Wolf. He was caught in a net he had set for his hated brother, "Death" Larsen, his crew were taken away and he was left alone. Pacific storms did the rest.

A strange weariness in the Sea Wolf's bearing, a hesitant, preoccupied air about him puzzled Humphrey. A few days later he again summoned courage to put him out of the way. But this time he saw Wolf Larsen slowly making his way down the deck, his quivering finger tips groping for the hand rails.

Wolf Larsen was blind! No need to kill him.

Maude and Humphrey determined to escape by repairing the Ghost, but the Sea Wolf willed otherwise. Blind and helpless as he was, he craftily contrived to ruin Humphrey's work, determined they should die together, so his grim revenge would be complete. Fiendish cunning and instinct to kill still remained.

A final reckoning was to come. Scorning precaution because he felt the Sea Wolf physically powerless from the suspected presence of a tumor on the brain, Humphrey ventured too near one day. Suddenly the Sea Wolf's stupor passed. The steel-like fingers gripped Humphrey's throat. The trap had sprung.

Maude leaped into action, tearing at Larsen's hands. But for once the Sea Wolf's tremendous will could not spur his weakened body. His fingers twitched and then relaxed and Humphrey was released.

"That was the last play of the Wolf," said Larsen, with his twisted smile. "I'd like to have done for you first, Hump. I thought I had that much left in me."

And so Wolf Larsen faded into unconsciousness, a pitiful ending for this grim sea murderer who pictured himself roaring to death in a blaze of tumult and evil splendor.

Soon the restored Ghost embraced the waves again, freighted with happiness. Then a trail of smoke on the horizon, a rescue and the lovers kiss as the cutter went dancing over the waves on the long road home.

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Cheer up, and you will cheer the Some people are always seen, always heard, and never remembered other fellow.

Some people seldom have car troubles. They use brains as well as gas. Throw your money to the birds, if you must, but be sure they are human buzzards.

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