

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

including BLACK MASK MAGAZINE

DETECTIVE STORIES

THE MAN IN THE EMPTY CHAIR	<i>Agatha Christie</i>	3
TO THE MAN ON TRAIL	<i>Jack London</i>	34
THE TELEPHONE FISHERMAN	<i>T. S. Stripling</i>	41
THE RETURN OF PRINCE ZALESKI	<i>M. P. Shiel</i>	81
REHEARSAL FOR MURDER	<i>Ben Hecht</i>	134

DETECTIVE NOVELETTE

IF I SHOULD DIE	<i>Hugh Pentecost</i>	96
-----------------	-----------------------	----

BLACK MASK MAGAZINE

THE TOUGHER THEY COME	<i>Ben Ray Redman</i>	21
-----------------------	-----------------------	----

CRIME STORIES

A SUDDEN DREAD OF . . . NOTHING	<i>A. H. Z. Carr</i>	65
EXHIBIT A	<i>William O'Farrell</i>	128

CHRISTMAS STORY

NOEL, NOEL	<i>Barry Peroune</i>	89
------------	----------------------	----

EQMM "FIRST"

PROBATION	<i>Marian Lloyd Dix</i>	57
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DETECTIVE DIRECTORY

<i>Robert P. Mills</i>	126
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The best of the new and the best of the old

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Cover painting by GEORGE SALTER (Murder in a Diving Bell)

How did Jack London feel about the writing of his own time, when he himself was just beginning to spread his literary wings? The best picture we have is in Irving Stone's biography, SAILOR ON HORSEBACK. Mr. Stone wrote that Jack London "was amazed at the enormous amount of printed stuff that was dead: no light, no life, no color shot through it. He was puzzled by the countless short stories written lightly and cleverly but without vitality and realism. Life was so strange and wonderful, filled with an immensity of problems, dreams, and heroic toils, yet these printed fabrications dealt with the sentimental commonplaces. He felt the stress and strain of life, its fevers and sweats and wild insurgences — surely this was the stuff to write about!"

Indeed it was — it always was and always will be. And did Jack London practice what he preached? He certainly did! We now bring you Jack London's first story — we repeat, his very first published story. It appeared, only a few weeks before his twenty-third birthday, in the January 1899 issue of "Overland Monthly" . . . Read "To the Man on Trail" and marvel at the vitality, the rugged and vigorous style, of a new writer still in his early twenties, living in a Victorian world which we now realize was excessively polite and prudish, and accustomed, in its literary taste, to the ornate, the pretentious, and the elegant. No wonder Jack London's first story marked the debut of a new force — think of the impact it must have had on the gentle and genteel readers of more than half a century ago!

TO THE MAN ON TRAIL

by JACK LONDON

DUMP IT IN."
"But I say, Kid, isn't that going it a little too strong? Whisky and alcohol's bad enough; but when it comes to brandy and peppersauce —"
"Dump it in. Who's making this punch, anyway?" And the Malemute Kid smiled benignantly through the clouds of steam. "By the time you've

been in this country as long as I have, my son, and lived on rabbit-tracks and salmon-belly, you'll learn that Christmas comes only once per annum. And a Christmas without punch is sinking a hole to bedrock with nary a pay-streak."

"Stack up on that fer a high cy-ard," approved Big Jim Belden, who

From THE SON OF THE WOLF; copyright, 1900, by Jack London; renewed

had come down from his claim on Mazy May to spend Christmas, and who, as everyone knew, had been living the two months past on straight moose meat. "Hain't forgot the hooch we-uns made on the Tanana, hev yeh?"

"Well, I guess yes. Boys, it would have done your hearts good to see that whole tribe fighting drunk — and all because of a glorious ferment of sugar and sour dough. That was before your time," the Malemute Kid said as he turned to Stanley Prince, a young mining expert who had been in two years. "No white women in the country then, and Mason wanted to get married. Ruth's father was chief of the Tananas and objected, like the rest of the tribe. Stiff? Why, I used my last pound of sugar; finest work in that line I ever did in my life. You should have seen the chase, down the river and across the portage. We struck the Yukon just behind the first ice run and the tribe only a quarter of an hour behind. But that saved us; for the second run broke the jam above and shut them out. When they finally got into Nuklukyeto, the whole Post was ready for them. And as to the foregathering, ask Father Roubeau here: he performed the ceremony."

The Jesuit took the pipe from his lips, but could only express his gratification with patriarchal smiles, while Protestant and Catholic applauded.

"By gar!" ejaculated Louis Savoy, who seemed overcome by the romance of it. "By gar!"

Then the first tin cups of punch were passed around, and the Malemute Kid's frightful concoction did its work. The men of the camps and trails unbent in its genial glow, and jest and song and tales of past adventure went round the board. Aliens from a dozen lands, they toasted each and all. It was the Englishman, Prince, who pledged "Uncle Sam, the precocious infant of the New World;" the Yankee, Bettles, who drank to "The Queen, God bless her;" and together, Savoy, and Meyers, the German trader, clanged their cups to Alsace and Lorraine.

The Malemute Kid arose, cup in hand, and glanced at the greased-paper window, where the frost stood full three inches thick. "A health to the man on trail this night; may his grub hold out; may his dogs keep their legs; may his matches never miss fire."

Crack! Crack! — they heard the familiar music of the dogwhip, the whining howl of the huskies, and the crunch of a sled as it drew up to the cabin. Conversation languished while they waited the issue.

"An old-timer; cares for his dogs and then himself," whispered the Malemute Kid to Prince, as they listened to the snapping jaws and the wolfish snarls and yelps of pain which proclaimed to their practiced ears that the stranger was beating back their dogs while he fed his own.

Then came the expected knock, sharp and confident, and the stranger

entered. Dazzled by the light, he hesitated a moment at the door. He was a striking man and a picturesque one in his Arctic dress of wool and fur, standing six foot two or three, with proportionate breadth of shoulders and depth of chest, his smooth-shaven face nipped by the cold to a gleaming pink, his long lashes and eyebrows white with ice, and the ear and neck flaps of his great wolfskin cap loosely raised. Clashed outside his mackinaw jacket, a beaded belt held two large Colt revolvers and a hunting knife; he carried, in addition to the inevitable dogwhip, a smokeless rifle of the largest bore and latest pattern.

As he came forward, for all his step was firm and elastic, they could see that fatigue bore heavily upon him.

An awkward silence had fallen, but his hearty "What cheer, my lads?" put them quickly at ease, and the next instant the Malemute Kid and he had gripped hands. Though they had never met, each had heard of the other and the recognition was mutual. A sweeping introduction and a mug of punch were forced upon him before he could explain his errand.

"How long since that basket-sled, with three men and eight dogs, passed?" he asked.

"An even two days ahead. Are you after them?"

"Yes; my team. Run them off under my very nose, the cusses. I've gained two days on them already—pick them up on the next run."

"Reckon they'll show spunk?" asked Belden in order to keep up the

conversation, for the Malemute Kid already had the coffeepot on and was busily frying bacon and moose meat.

The stranger significantly tapped his revolvers.

"When'd yeh leave Dawson?"

"Twelve o'clock."

"Last night?"

"Today."

A murmur of surprise passed round the circle. It was just midnight, and 75 miles of rough river trail was not to be sneered at for a twelve hours' run.

As the stranger ate the rude fare, the Malemute Kid attentively studied his face. Still youthful, the lines had been firmly traced by toil and hardship. Though genial in conversation and mild when at rest, the blue eyes gave promise of hard steel-glitter.

"So that's how me an' the ol' woman got spliced," said Belden, concluding the exciting tale of his courtship. "How 'bout yerself, stranger—married man?"

For reply, the newcomer opened his watch, slipped it from the thong which served as a chain, and handed it over. Belden pricked up the slush-lamp, surveyed the inside of the case critically, and swearing admiringly to himself, handed it over to Louis Savoy. With numerous "By gars!" Savoy finally surrendered it to Prince, and they noticed that his hands trembled and his eyes took on a peculiar softness. And so it passed from hand to horny hand—the pasted photograph of a woman, with a baby at her breast. Those who had not yet seen

the wonder were keen with curiosity; those who had, became silent and retrospective. They could face the pinch of famine, the grip of scurvy, or quick death by field or flood; but the pictured semblance of a woman and child made women and children of them all.

"Never have seen the youngster yet — he's a boy, she says, and two years old," said the stranger as he received the treasure back. A lingering moment he gazed upon it, then snapped the case and turned away.

The Malemute Kid led him to a bunk and bade him turn in.

"Call me at 4, sharp. Don't fail me," and a moment later he was breathing in the heaviness of exhausted sleep.

"By Jove! he's a plucky chap," commented Prince. "Three hours' sleep after seventy-five miles with the dogs, and then the trail again. Who is he, Kid?"

"Jack Westondale. Been in going on three years, with nothing but the name of working like a horse, and any amount of bad luck to his credit. Sitka Charley's told me about him."

"It seems hard that a man with a sweet young wife like his should be putting in his years in this God-forsaken hole, where every year counts two on the outside."

"The trouble with him is his grit and stubbornness. He's cleaned up twice with a stake, but lost it both times."

Here the conversation was broken off by an uproar from Bettles, for

the effect had begun to wear away. And soon the bleak years of monotonous grub and deadening toil were being forgotten in rough merriment. The Malemute Kid alone seemed unable to lose himself and cast many an anxious look at his watch. Once he put on his mittens and beaver-skin cap and, leaving the cabin, fell to rummaging about in the cache.

Nor could he wait the hour designated; for he was fifteen minutes ahead of time in rousing his guest. The young giant had stiffened badly, and brisk rubbing was necessary to bring him to his feet. He tottered out of the cabin to find his dogs harnessed and everything ready for the start. The company wished him good luck and a short chase while Father Roubeau, hurriedly blessing him, led the stampede for the cabin; and small wonder, for it is not good to face sixty-four degrees below zero with naked ears and hands.

The Malemute Kid saw him to the main trail, and there, gripping his hand heartily, gave him advice.

"You'll find a hundred pounds of salmon eggs on the sled," he said. "The dogs will go as far on that as with one hundred and fifty of fish, and you can't get dogfood at Pelly, as you probably expected." The stranger started visibly. "You can't get an ounce of food for dog or man till you reach Five Fingers, and that's a stiff two hundred miles. Watch out for open water on the Thirty Mile River, and be sure you take the big cut-off above Le Barge."

"How did you know it? Surely the news can't be ahead of me already?"

"I don't know it; and what's more, I don't want to know it. But you never owned that team you're chasing. Sitka Charley sold it to them last spring. But he sized you up to me as square once, and I believe him. I've seen your face; I like it. And I've seen — why, damn you, hit the high places for salt water and that wife of yours!"

The Kid unmittened and jerked out his sack.

"No; I don't need it," and the tears froze on his cheeks as Westondale gripped the Malemute Kid's hand.

"Then don't spare the dogs; cut them out of the traces as fast as they drop; buy them, and think they're cheap at ten dollars a pound. You can get them at Five Fingers, Little Salmon, and the Hootalinqua. And watch out for wet feet," was the Kid's parting advice. "Keep a-traveling up to twenty-five, but if it gets below that, build a fire and change your socks."

Fifteen minutes had barely elapsed when the jingle of bells announced new arrivals. The door opened and a mounted policeman of the Northwest Territory entered, followed by two half-breed dog-drivers. Like Westondale, they were heavily armed and showed signs of fatigue. The half-breeds had been born to the trail and bore it easily; but the young policeman was badly exhausted. Still, the dogged obstinacy of his kind held him

to the pace, and it would continue to hold him till he dropped in his tracks.

"When did Westondale pull out?" he asked. "He stopped here, didn't he?" This was superfluous, for the tracks told their own tale too well.

The Malemute Kid had caught Belden's eye, and Belden, scenting the wind, replied evasively, "A right peart while back."

"Come, my man, speak up," the policeman admonished.

"Yeh seem to want him right smart. Has he ben gittin' cantankerous down Dawson way?"

"Held up Harry McFarland's for forty thousand; exchanged it at the P. C. store for a check on Seattle; and who's to stop the cashing of it if we don't overtake him? When did he pull out?"

Every eye suppressed its excitement, for the Malemute Kid had given the cue. The young officer encountered wooden faces on every hand.

Striding over to Prince, he put the question to him. Though it hurt him, gazing into the frank, earnest face of his fellow countryman, Prince replied inconsequentially on the state of the trail.

But Father Roubeau could not lie. "A quarter of an hour ago," the priest answered; "but he had four hours' rest for himself and his dogs."

"Fifteen minutes' start, and he's fresh! My God!" The poor fellow staggered back, half fainting from exhaustion and disappointment, murmuring something about the run

from Dawson in ten hours and the dogs being played out.

The Malemute Kid forced a mug of punch upon him; then he turned for the door, ordering the dog-drivers to follow. But the warmth and promise of rest were too tempting, and they objected strenuously. The Kid was conversant with their French patois and followed it anxiously.

They swore that the dogs were done up; that Siwash and Babette would have to be shot before the first mile was covered; that the rest were almost as bad; and that it would be better for all hands to rest up.

"Lend me five dogs?" the policeman asked, turning to the Malemute Kid.

But the Kid shook his head.

"I'll sign a check on Captain Constantine for five thousand — here's my papers. I'm authorized to draw at my own discretion."

Again the silent refusal.

"Then I'll requisition them in the name of the Queen."

Smiling incredulously, the Kid glanced at his well-stocked arsenal. The Englishman, realizing his impotency, turned for the door. But the dog-drivers still objecting, he whirled upon them fiercely, calling them women and curs. The swart face of the older half-breed flushed angrily as he drew himself up and promised in good, round terms that he would travel his leader off his legs, and would then be delighted to plant him in the snow.

The young officer — and it re-

quired his whole will — walked steadily to the door, exhibiting a freshness he did not possess. But they all knew and appreciated his proud effort; nor could he veil the twinges of agony that shot across his face. Covered with frost, the dogs were curled up in the snow, and it was almost impossible to get them to their feet. The poor brutes whined under the stinging lash, for the dog-drivers were angry and cruel; not till Babette, the leader, was cut from the traces could they break out the sled and get under way.

"A dirty scoundrel and a liar!"

"By gar! him no good!"

"A thief!"

It was evident that they were angry — first, at the way they had been deceived; and second, at the outraged ethics of the Northland, where honesty above all was man's prime jewel. "An' we gave the cuss a hand, after knowin' what he'd did." All eyes were turned accusingly upon the Malemute Kid, who rose from the corner where he had been making Babette comfortable, and silently emptied the bowl for a final round of punch.

"It's a cold night, boys — a bitter cold night," was the irrelevant commencement of his defense. "You've all traveled trail, and you know what that stands for. Don't jump a dog when he's down. You've only heard one side. A finer man than Jack Westondale never ate from the same pot nor stretched blanket with either you or me.

"Last fall he gave his whole clean-

up, forty thousand, to his partner Joe Castrell to buy in on Dominion. Today he'd be a millionaire. But while he stayed behind at Circle City, what does Castrell do? Goes into McFarland's, jumps the limit, and drops the whole sack. Found him dead in the snow the next day. And poor Jack Westondale laying plans to go out this winter to his wife and the boy he's never seen. You'll notice he took exactly what his partner lost — forty thousand. Well, he's gone out; and

what are you going to do about it?"

The Malemute Kid glanced round the circle of his judges, noted the softening of their faces, then raised his mug aloft. "So a health to the man on trail this night; may his grub hold out; may his dogs keep their legs; may his matches never miss fire. God prosper him; good luck go with him; and —"

"Confusion to the Mounted Police!" cried Bettles, to the crash of the empty cups.