

Burning Daylight

By JACK LONDON

AUTHOR OF

"The Call of the Wild," "White Fang," "Martin Eden," Etc.

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SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I.—Elam Harnish, known all through Alaska as "Burning Daylight," celebrates his 30th birthday with a friendly crowd of miners at the Circle City Tiroll. He is a general favorite, a hero and a pioneer in the new gold fields. The dance leads to heavy gambling in which over \$100,000 is staked. Harnish loses his money and his mine but wins the mail contract of the district.

CHAPTER II.—Burning Daylight starts on his trip to deliver the mail with dogs and sledges. He tells his friends that the big Yukon gold strike will soon be on, and he intends to be in it at the start. With Indian attendants and dogs he dips over the bank and down the frozen Yukon and in the gray light is gone.

CHAPTER III.—Harnish makes a sensational rapid run across country with the mail, appears at the Tiroll and there is another characteristic celebration. He has made a record against cold and exhaustion and is now ready to join his friends in a dash to the new gold fields.

CHAPTER IV.—Harnish decides where the gold will be found in the up-river district and buys two tons of flour, which he declares will be worth its weight in gold before the season is over.

CHAPTER V.—When Daylight arrives with his heavy outfit of flour he finds the big flat desolate. A comrade discovers gold and Harnish seizes it, investing in corner lots and striking other miners and becomes the most prominent figure in the Klondike.

CHAPTER VI.—Harnish makes fortune after fortune. One lucky investment enables him to defeat a great combination of capitalists in a vast mining field. He determines to return to civilization and gives a farewell celebration to his friends that is remembered as a kind of blase glory.

CHAPTER VII.—The papers are full of "The King of the Klondike," and Daylight is feared by the money magnates of the country. They take him into a big upper deal and the Alaskan pioneer bids himself amid the bewildering combinations of high finance.

CHAPTER VIII.—Daylight is bemused by the money men and finds that he has been led to invest his eleven millions in a manipulated scheme. He goes to meet his disloyal business partners at their offices in New York City.

CHAPTER IX.—Confronting his partners with a revolver in characteristic frontier style, he threatens to kill them if his money is not returned. They are bowed into submission, return their belongings and Harnish returns to San Francisco with his unimpaird fortune.

CHAPTER X.—Daylight meets his fate in Dede Mason, a pretty stenographer with a crippled brother, whom she cares for. Harnish is much attracted towards her and interested in her family affairs.

CHAPTER XI.—He becomes an element in large investments on the Pacific coast and gets into the political ring. For a year he goes to inspect one of his properties in the country and momentarily is attracted back to the old life on the lone-some trail.

CHAPTER XII.—Daylight gets deeper and deeper into high finance in San Francisco. He makes frequent runs into the country thus retting close to nature, but his mind is still in the speculation trend. Very often, however, the longing for the simple life well nigh overcomes him.

CHAPTER XIII.—Dede Mason buys a horse and Daylight meets her in her saddle trips. He begins to indulge in horseback riding and manages to get into her company quite often.

CHAPTER XIV.—One day Daylight asks Dede to go with him on one more ride, his purpose being to ask her to marry him, and they center away, she trying to analyze her feelings.

CHAPTER XV.—For the sake of his love, Daylight undertakes the scheme of building up a great industrial community among the hills. He wins her reward by interesting himself in her crippled brother.

CHAPTER XVII.

For six weeks hand-running Daylight had seen nothing of Dede except in the office, and there he resolutely refrained from making approaches. But by the seventh Sunday his hunger for her overmastered him. It was a stormy day. A heavy south-east gale was blowing, and squall after squall of rain and wind swept over the city. He could not take his mind off of her, and a persistent picture came to him of her sitting by a window and sewing feminine fripperies of some sort. When the time came for his pre-luncheon cocktail to be served to him in his rooms, he did not take it. Filled with a daring determination, he glanced at his note-book for Dede's telephone number, and called for the switch.

At first it was the landlady's daughter who was raised, but in a minute he heard the voice he had been hungry to hear.

"I just wanted to tell you that I'm coming out to see you," he said. "I didn't want to break in on you without warning, that was all."

"Has something happened?" came her voice.

"I'll tell you when I get there," he evaded.

She came herself to the door to receive him and shake hands with him. He hung his mackintosh and hat on the rack in the comfortable hall and turned to her for direction.

"They are busy in there," she said, indicating the parlor, from which came the boisterous voices of young people, and through the open door of which he could see several college youths. "So you will have to come into my rooms."

She led the way through the door opening out of the hall to the right, and, once inside, he stood awkwardly rooted to the floor, gazing about him and at her and all the time trying not to gaze. In his perturbation he failed to hear and see her invitation to a seat.

"Won't you sit down," she repeated.

"Look here," he said, in a voice that shook with passion, "there's one thing I won't do, and that's propose to you in the office. That's why I'm here. Dede Mason, I want you, I just want you."

So precipitate was he, that she had barely time to cry out her involuntary alarm and to step back, at the same time catching one of his hands as he attempted to gather her into his arms.

"Oh, I know I'm a sure enough fool," he said. "I—I guess I'll sit down. Don't be scared, Miss Mason. I'm not real dangerous."

"I'm not afraid," she answered, with a smile, slipping down herself into a chair.

"It's funny," Daylight sighed, almost with regret; "here I am, strong enough to bend you around and the knots in you. Here I am, used to having my will with man, beast or anything. And here I am sitting in this chair, as weak and helpless as a little lamb. You sure take the starch out of me."

"I—I wish you hadn't asked," she said softly.

"Mebbe it's best you should know a few things before you give me an answer," he went on, ignoring the fact that the answer had already been given. "I never went after a woman before in my life, all reports to the contrary notwithstanding. The stuff you read about me in the papers and books, about me being a lady-killer, is all wrong. There's not an iota of truth in it. I guess I've done more than my share of card-playing and whisky-drinking, but women I've let alone. There was a woman that killed herself, but I didn't know she wanted me that bad or else I'd have married her—not for love, but to keep her from killing herself. She was the best of the bolting, but I never gave her any encouragement. I'm telling you all this because you've read about it, and I want you to get it straight from me."

"I can't marry you," she said. "I like you a great deal, but—"

He waited a moment for her to complete the sentence, falling which, he went on himself.

"I haven't an exaggerated opinion of myself, so I know I ain't bragging when I say I'll make a pretty good husband. You could follow your own sweet will, and nothing would be too good for you. I'd give you everything your heart desired—"

"Except yourself," she interrupted suddenly, almost sharply. "Don't you see?" she hurried on. "I could have far easier married the Elam Harnish fresh from Klondike when I first laid eyes on him long ago, than marry you sitting before me now."

He shook his head slowly.

"That's one too many for me. The more you know and like a man the less you want to marry him. Familiarity breeds contempt—I guess that's what you mean."

"No, no," she cried, but before she could continue, a knock came on the door.

His eyes, quick with observation like an Indian's, darted about the room while she was out. The impression of warmth and comfort and beauty predominated, though he was unable to analyze it; while the simplicity delighted him—expensive simplicity, he decided, and most of it left-overs from the time her father went broke and died.

She re-entered the room, and as she crossed it to her chair, he admired the way she walked, while the bronze slippers were maddening.

"I'd like to ask you several questions," he began immediately. "Are you thinking of marrying somebody else?"

"There isn't anybody else. I don't know anybody I like well enough to marry. For that matter, I don't think I am a marrying woman. Office work seems to snail me for that."

"I struck me that you're the most marryingest woman that ever made a man sit up and take notice. And now another question. You see, I've just got to locate the lay of the land. Is there anybody you like as much as you like me?"

But Dede had herself well in hand. "That's unfair," she said. "And if you stop and consider, you will find that you are doing the very thing you disclaimed—namely, nagging. I refuse to answer any more of your questions. Let us talk about other things. How is Bob?"

Half an hour later, whirling along through the rain on Telegraph Avenue toward Oakland, Daylight smoked one of his brown-paper cigarettes and reviewed what had taken place. It was not at all bad, was his summing up, though there was much about it that was baffling. There was that liking him the more she knew him and at the same time wanting to marry him less. That was a puzzler.

Once again, on a rainy Sunday, weeks afterward, Daylight proposed to Dede. As on the first time, he restrained himself until his hunger for her overwhelmed him and swept him away in his red automobile to Berkeley. He left the machine several blocks away and proceeded to the house on foot. But Dede was out, the landlady's daughter told him, and added, on second thought, that she was walking in the hills. Further more, the young lady directed him where Dede's walk was most likely to extend. Daylight obeyed the girl's instructions, and soon the street he followed passed the last house and itself ceased where began the first steep slopes of the open hills. The air was damp with the on-coming of rain, for the storm had not yet burst, though

the rising wind proclaimed its imminence. As far as he could see, there was no sign of Dede on the smooth, grassy hills. To the right, dipping down into a hollow and rising again, was a large, full-grown eucalyptus grove. Here all was noise and movement, the lofty, slender-trunked trees swaying back and forth in the wind and clashing their branches together. In the squalls, above all the minor noises of creaking and groaning, arose a deep thrumming note as of a mighty harp. Knowing Dede as he did, Daylight was confident that he would find her somewhere in this grove where the storm effects were so pronounced. And find her he did, across the hollow and on the exposed crest of the opposing slope where the gale smote its fiercest blows.

"It's the same old thing," he said. "I want you and I've come for you. You've just got to have me, Dede, for the more I think about it the more certain I am that you've got a sneaking liking for me that's something more than just ordinary liking. And you don't dast say that it isn't; now dast you?"

"Please, please," she begged. "We can never marry, so don't let us discuss it."

Daylight decided that action was more efficient than speech. So he stepped between her and the wind and drew her so that she stood close in the shelter of him. An unusually stiff squall blew about them and thrummed overhead in the tree-tops, and both paused to listen. A shower of flying leaves enveloped them, and hard on the heel of the wind came driving drops of rain. He looked down on her and on her hair, wind-blown about her face; and because of her closeness to him and of a fresher and more poignant realization of what she meant to him, he trembled so that she was aware of it in the hand that held hers. She suddenly leaned against him, bowing her head until it rested lightly upon his breast. And so they stood while another squall, with flying leaves and scattered drops of rain, rattled past. With equal suddenness she lifted her head and looked at him.

"Do you know," she said, "I prayed last night about you. I prayed that you would find that you would lose everything—everything."

Daylight stared his amazement at this cryptic utterance.

"That sure beats me. I always said I got out of my depth with women, and you've got me out of my depth now. Well, you've just got to explain, that's all."

His arms went around her and held her closely, and this time she did not resist. Her head was bowed, and he could not see her face, yet he had a premonition that she was crying. He had learned the virtue of silence, and he waited her will in the matter. Things had come to such a pass that she was bound to tell him something now. Of that he was confident.

"I would dearly like to marry you," she faltered, "but I am afraid. I am proud and humble at the same time that a man like you should care for me. But you have too much money. There's where my abominable common sense steps in. Even if we did marry, you could never be my man—my lover and my husband. You would be your money's man. I know I am a foolish woman, but I want my man for myself. And your money destroys you; it makes you less and less nice. I am not ashamed to say that I love you, because I shall never marry you. And I loved you much when I first came down from Alaska and I first went into the office. You were my hero. You were the Burning Daylight of the gold-diggings, the daring traveler and miner. And you looked it. I don't see how any woman could have looked at you without loving you—then. But you don't look it now. You, a man of the open, have been cooping yourself up in the cities with all that that means. You are becoming something different, something not so healthy, not so clean, not so nice. Your money and your way of life are doing it. You know it. You haven't the same body you that you

man then. You are putting on flesh, and it is not healthy flesh. You are kind and genial with me, I know, but you are not kind and genial to all the world as you were then. You have become harsh and cruel. I do love you, but I cannot marry you and destroy love. You are growing into a thing that I must in the end despise. You can't help it. More than you can possibly love me, do you love this business game. This business—and it's all perfectly useless, so far as you are concerned—claims all of you. I sometimes think it would be easier to share you equitably with another woman than to share you with this business. I might have half of you, at any rate. But this business would claim, not half of you, but nine-tenths of you, or ninety-nine hundredths. You hold back nothing; you put all you've got into whatever you are doing—"

"Limit is the sky," he grunted grim affirmation.

"But if you would only play the lover-husband that way. And now I won't say another word," she added. "I've delivered a whole sermon."

She rested now, frankly and fairly, in the shelter of his arms, and both were oblivious to the gale that rushed past them in quicker and stronger blasts. The big downpour of rain had not yet come, but the mist-like squalls were more frequent. Daylight was openly perplexed, and he was still perplexed when he began to speak.

"You've left me no argument. I know I'm not the same man that came from Alaska. I couldn't hit the trail with the dogs as I did in them days. I'm soft in my muscles, and my mind's gone hard. I used to respect men. I despise them now. You see I spent all my life in the open, and I reckon I'm

an open-air man. Why, I've got the prettiest little ranch you ever laid eyes on up in Glen Ellen. That's where I got stuck for the brickyard. You recollect handling the correspondence. I only laid eyes on the ranch that one time, and I so fell in love with it that I bought it there and then. I just rode around the hills, and was happy as a kid out of school. I'd be a better man living in the country. The city doesn't make me better. You're plumb right there. I know it. But suppose your prayer should be answered and I'd go clean broke and have to work for day's wages? Suppose I had nothing left but that little ranch, and was satisfied to grow a few chickens and scratch a living somehow—would you marry me then, Dede?"

"Why, we'd be together all the time!" she cried.

Then was the moment, among the trees, ere they began the descent of the hill, that Daylight might have drawn her closely to him and kissed her once. But he was too perplexed with the new thoughts she had put into his head to take advantage of the situation. He merely caught her by the arm and helped her over the rougher footing. At the edge of the grove he suggested that it might be better for them to part there, but she insisted that he accompany her as far as the house.

"Do you know," he said, "taking it by and large, it's the happiest day of my life. Dede, Dede, we've just got to get married. It's the only way, and trust to luck for it's coming out all right."

But the tears were threatening to rise in her eyes again, as she shook her head and turned and went up the steps.

CHAPTER XVIII.

When the ferry system began to run, and the time between Oakland and San Francisco was demonstrated to be cut in half, the tide of Daylight's terrific expenditure started to turn. Not that it really did turn, for he promptly went into further investments. Thousands of lots in his residence tracts were sold, and thousands of homes was being built. Factory sites also were selling, and business properties in the heart of Oakland. All this tended to a steady appreciation in the value of Daylight's huge holdings. But, as of old, he had his hunch and was riding it. Already he had begun borrowing from the banks. The magnificent profits he made on the land he sold were turned into more land, into more development; and instead of paying off old loans, he contracted new ones. As he had pyramided in Dawson City, he now pyramided in Oakland; but he did it with the knowledge that it was a stable enterprise rather than a risky placer-mining boom.

Work on Daylight's dock system went on apace; yet it was one of those enterprises that consumed money dreadfully and that could not be accomplished as quickly as a ferry system. Not content with manufacturing electricity for his street railways in the old-fashioned way, in power-houses, Daylight organized the Sierra and Salvador Power Company. This immediately assumed large proportions. Crossing the San Joaquin Valley on the way from the mountains, and plunging through the Contra Costa hills, there were many towns, and even a robust city, that could be supplied with power, also with light; and it became a street-and-house-lighting project as well. As soon as the purchase of power sites in the Sierras was rushed through, the survey parties were out and building operations begun. And so it went. There were a thousand maws into which he poured uncaring streams of money.

In the spring of the year the Great Panic came on. The first warning was when the banks began calling in their unprotected loans. Daylight promptly paid the first of several of his personal notes that were present-



His Argument About Her and Held Her Closely.

ed; then he divined that these demands but indicated the way the wind was going to blow, and that one of those terrific financial storms he had heard about was soon to sweep over the United States. How terrific this particular storm was to be he did not anticipate. Nevertheless, he took every precaution in his power and had no anxiety about his weathering it out. And in the end, when early summer was on, everything began to mend. Came a day when Daylight did the unprecedented. He left the office an hour earlier than usual, and for the reason that for the first time since the

panic there was not an item of work waiting to be done. He dropped into Hegan's private office, before leaving, for a chat, and as he stood up to go, he said:—

"Hegan, we're all hunkadory. We're pulling out of the financial pawnshop in fine shape, and we'll get out without leaving one unredeemed pledge behind. The worst is over, and the end is in sight. Just tight rein for a couple more weeks, just a bit of a pinch or a flurry or so now and then, and we can let go and spit on our hands."

For once he varied his programme. Instead of going directly to his hotel, he started on a round of the bars and cafes, drinking a cocktail here and a cocktail there, and two or three when he encountered men he knew. It was after an hour or so of this that he dropped into the bar of the Parthenon for one last drink before going to dinner. By this time all his being was pleasantly warmed by the alcohol, and he was in the most genial and best of spirits. At the corner of the bar several young men were up to the old trick of resting their elbows and attempting to force each other's hands down. One broad-shouldered young giant never removed his elbow, but put down every hand that came against him. Daylight was interested.

"It's Slosson," the barkeeper told him, in answer to his query. "He's the heavy-hammer thrower at the U. S. A."



"We're Pulling Out of the Financial Pawnshop in Fine Shape."

C. Broke all records this year, and the world's record on top of it. He's a husky all right all right."

Daylight nodded and went over to him, placing his own arm in opposition.

"I'd like to go you a flutter, son, on that proposition," he said.

The young man laughed and locked hands with him; and to Daylight's astonishment it was his own hand that was forced down on the bar.

"Hold on," he muttered. "Just one more flutter. I reckon I wasn't just ready that time."

Again the hands locked. It happened quickly. The offensive attack of Daylight's muscles slipped instantly into defence, and, resisting vainly, his hand was forced over and down. Daylight was dazed. It had been no trick. The skill was equal, or, if anything, the superior skill had been his. Strength, sheer strength, had done it. He called for the drinks, and, still dazed and pondering, held up his own arm and looked at it as at some new strange thing. He did not know this arm. It certainly was not the arm he had carried around with him all the years. The old arm? Why, it would have been play to turn down that young husky's. But this arm—he continued to look at it with such dubious perplexity as to bring a roar of laughter from the young men.

This laughter aroused him. He joined in it at first, and then his face slowly grew grave. He leaned toward the hammer-thrower.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

"son," he said, "let me whisper a secret. Get out of here and quit drinking before you begin. The young fellow flushed angrily, but Daylight held steadily on. "You listen to your dad, and let him say a few. I'm a young man myself, only I ain't. Let me tell you, several years ago for me to turn your hand down would have been like committing assault and battery on a kindergarten."

Slosson looked his incredulity, while the others grinned and clustered around Daylight encouragingly.

"Son, I ain't given to preaching. This is the first time I ever come to the penitent form, and you put me there yourself—hard. I've seen a few in my time, and I ain't fastidious as as you can notice it. But let me tell you right now that I'm worth the devil alone knows how many millions, and that I'd sure give it all, right here on the bar, to turn down your hand. Which means I'd give the whole shooting match just to be back where I was before I quit sleeping under the stars and come into the ben-coops of cities to drink cocktails and lift up my feet and ride. Son, that's what's the matter with me, and that's the way I feel about it. The game ain't worth the candle. You just take care of yourself, and roll my advice over once in a while. Good night."

He turned and lurched out of the place, the moral effect of his utterance largely spoiled by the fact that he was so patently full while he uttered it.

Still in a daze, Daylight made to his hotel, accomplished his dinner, and prepared for bed.

"The damned young whippersnapper!" he muttered. "Put my hand down easy as you please. My hand!"

He held up the offending member and regarded it with stupid wonder. The hand that had never been beaten! The hand that had made the Circle City giants wince! And a kid from college, with a laugh on his face, had put it down—twice! Dede was right. He was not the same man. The situation would bear more serious looking into than he had ever given it. But this was not the time. In the morning, after a good sleep, he would give it consideration.

CHAPTER XIX.

Daylight awoke with the familiar parched mouth and lips and throat, took a long drink of water from the pitcher beside his bed, and gathered up the train of thought where he had left it the night before. He reviewed the easement of the financial strain. Things were mending at last. While the going was still rough, the greatest dangers were already past.

His mind moved on to the incident at the corner of the bar of the Parthenon, when the young athlete had turned his hand down. He was no longer stunned by the event, but he was shocked and grieved, as only a strong man can be, at this passing of his strength. He had always looked upon this strength of his as permanent, and here, for years, it had been steadily oozing from him. As he had diagnosed it, he had come in from under the stars to roost in the coops of cities. He had almost forgotten how to walk. He had lifted up his feet and been ridden around in automobiles, cabs and carriages, and electric cars. He had not exercised, and he had dry-rotted his muscles with alcohol. And was it worth it? What did all his money mean after all? Dede was right. It could buy him no more than one bed at a time, and at the same time it had made him the abject of slaves. It tied him fast. Which was better? he asked himself. All this was Dede's own thought. It was what she had meant when she prayed he would go broke. He held up his offending right arm. It wasn't the same old arm. Of course she could not love that arm and that body as she had loved the strong, clean arm and body of years before. He didn't like that arm and body himself. A young whippersnapper had been able to take liberties with it. It had gone back on him. He sat up suddenly. No, he had gone back on it! He had gone back on himself. He had gone back on Dede. She was right, a thousand times right, and she had sense enough to know it, sense enough to refuse to marry a money-slave with a whisky-rotted carcass.

He got out of bed and looked at himself in the long mirror on the wardrobe door. He wasn't pretty. The old-time lean cheeks were gone. These were heavy, seeming to hang down by their own weight. He looked for the lines of cruelty Dede had spoken of, and he found them, and he found the harshness in the eyes as well, the eyes that were muddy now after all the cocktails of the night before, and of the months and years before. He looked at the clearly defined pouches that showed under his eyes, and they shocked him. He rolled up the sleeve of his pajamas. No wonder the hammer-thrower had put his hand down. Those weren't muscles. A rising tide of fat had submerged them. He stripped off the pajama coat. Again he was shocked, this time by the bulk of his body. It wasn't pretty. The lean stomach had become a paunch. The rigid muscles of chest and shoulders and abdomen had broken down into rolls of flesh. And this was age. Then there drifted across the field of vision of his mind's eye the old man he had encountered at Glen Ellen, coming up the hillside through the fires of sunset, white-headed and white-bearded, eighty-four, in his hand the pail of foaming milk and in his face all the warm glow and content of the passing summer day. That had been age. "Yes, siree, eighty-four, and spryer than most," he could hear the old man say.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)