

freezing overtake him. As he is dying, he has an out-of-body experience: first he sees himself walking with his companions and discovering his frozen body; then he hears himself telling the old-timer from Sulphur Creek that he was right about not traveling alone in the brutal cold. Once the dog senses that the man is dead, it leaves him and heads for camp, where it knows it will find "other food-providers and . . . fire-providers."

## Characters

### Dog

The dog is a "big native husky" and the man's only companion on the trail. While it depends upon the man for food and for warmth from campfires, the dog is "not concerned in the welfare of the man" and obeys him only to avoid being whipped. The dog is motivated by instinct. Critics Earle Labor and Jeanne Campbell Reesman describe the dog as a "foil" to the man. A foil is a character who sets off, or emphasizes, by way of contrast the traits of another character. In this case, the dog's reliable instincts contrast with the man's faulty human judgment. Unlike the man, the dog can sense that the temperature is below minus fifty degrees Fahrenheit, and despite the natural insulation provided by its fur coat, the dog does not travel willingly in such weather. After it falls into the water on the river trail, the dog instinctively knows how to save itself by cleaning the ice from its legs and feet. Later, while the man freezes to death as a result of his unreliable powers of reason, the dog instinctively knows how to survive by curling up in the snow; ultimately, it senses the man's death and saves itself by leaving for camp on its own.

### Man

The protagonist in "To Build a Fire" is known simply as "the man." He is a *chechaquo*, or newcomer, who undertakes a nine-hour walk in brutally cold weather to meet his companions at an old mining camp during his first winter in the Klondike. Accompanied by a dog but lacking both its instincts and its physical adaptation to the cold, the man freezes to death before reaching camp. At the beginning of the story, the man is described as being "without imagination . . . quick and alert in the things of life, but only in the things, and not in the significances." Thus, when he first sets out, the

man notices that it is uncomfortably cold, but he cannot imagine that he is risking death by hypothermia. As critic James I. McClintock points out, the man does not at first think in terms of life versus death, or of the weakness of human beings versus the power of nature, but rather in terms of his own ability to solve any difficulties through the power of reason. He believes that all he has to do to survive is to "keep his head," and he laughs when he remembers the "womanish" warnings spoken by an old-timer. Critics Earle Labor and Jeanne Campbell Reesman observe that it is in fact the man's pride in his "own rational faculties" that finally results in his demise.

### Old-timer

The old-timer from Sulphur Creek is the man's major source of advice in the story. Although he never actually appears in the story, the old-timer and his words of wisdom are frequently remembered by the man. For example, the old-timer once told the man how cold the temperatures could get in the Klondike. He also advised the man about the absolute necessity of building fires and—most importantly—warned him never to travel alone when the temperature drops below minus fifty degrees Fahrenheit. The old-timer's advice is at first remembered with mild derision by the man, who considers his warnings "womanish" and overcautious. But as the man's condition becomes increasingly perilous, he admits that the old-timer was right about never traveling without a companion "after fifty below." Critic James I. McClintock describes the old-timer as someone whose "experience has given him the imagination to continue living" in extremely cold temperatures but who nevertheless stays indoors rather than risk death on the trail during winter.

## Themes

"To Build a Fire" is about an unnamed man who embarks on a nine-hour trek across the Klondike's harsh winter landscape to meet his companions at a mining camp. Against the advice of an old-timer, the man makes the journey alone, except for a dog, and as a result of a series of disasters, he freezes to death before reaching camp. The man's behavior and his ultimate fate highlight the story's themes of survival in the wilderness, the individual versus nature, and death.

phrase "it happened" to introduce the two disasters—first when the man breaks through the ice, and next when his fire is extinguished. Literary critics have noted that the cumulative effect of such repetition is to make the man's death by freezing seem inevitable.

### *Naturalism*

"To Build a Fire" has been called a naturalistic story. Naturalism is a literary movement which developed during the late nineteenth century. Influenced by scientific determinism as well as by Darwin's theory of evolution, naturalism contends that human beings are determined by their heredity and the laws of nature and are thus controlled by their environment and their physical makeup rather than by spirituality or reason. As a naturalistic creature, the man in "To Build a Fire" lacks imagination, and although he tries to survive by using reason, he is overwhelmed by the forces of nature.

## Historical Context

### *Late Nineteenth- Early Twentieth-Century America*

Although Jack London's "To Build a Fire" was first published in 1908, the story was inspired by the Klondike Gold Rush, which began in 1897. America's focus during the early years of the twentieth century was much the same as it had been during the closing years of the nineteenth century. The country had recently undergone significant expansion across the western plains and along the Pacific coast. In 1898 America expanded offshore as well, with the annexation of Hawaii and—as a result of the Spanish-American War—Guam, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico.

The late nineteenth century also saw an influx of immigrants into the United States and, with it, the opening of Ellis Island in 1891 as a processing station for the new Immigration Bureau. Immigrants became an important part of the country's industrialized economy, which produced not only the textiles of earlier years but also focused on mining as well as on the production of steel and heavy machinery. Whole families became involved in the work force. Labor laws were passed and labor unions were formed in response to unsafe working

conditions and to the economic depressions which occurred in 1893-97.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries brought about an increase in the number of public schools and libraries. By 1900 most states had compulsory education laws, and an increasing number of women were graduating from college. During the early 1900s, when London published "To Build a Fire," the short story as a genre was experiencing enormous popularity.

The Klondike Gold Rush—beginning in 1897 and lasting until 1910—contributed to the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century atmosphere of territorial expansion and industrial growth, with their attendant economic cycles of boom and bust. The Klondike also proved to be a rich source of inspiration for much of London's most successful fiction.

### *The Klondike Gold Rush*

A rich vein of gold was discovered in August 1896 by George Cormack at Rabbit Creek, off the Klondike and Yukon rivers in northwestern Canada. The rush to Canada's Klondike region began a year later, after steamships loaded with prospectors and their gold docked in San Francisco. Reports of the prospectors' success set off a mania for gold. By then the richest claims had already been staked out, but this did not prevent many people, including Jack London, from heading North. This "stampede" of goldseekers had a profound effect on northwestern Canada. In Dawson, a city created as a result of the rush, Americans outnumbered Canadians by a ratio of five to one. The influx also affected Canada's western neighbor, the American territory of Alaska, through which many of the would-be prospectors traveled on their way to the Klondike. In 1890, there were approximately 4,000 white settlers in Alaska; by 1910, thanks to the Klondike stampede and to later discoveries of gold in Alaska itself, that number had increased to 36,400.

Jack London spent time in both Alaska and Canada. In "To Build a Fire" he writes about the Yukon trail that winds in and out of Alaska and Canada: "[The] main trail—that led south five hundred miles to the Chilcoot Pass, Dyea, and salt water; and that led north seventy miles to Dawson, and still on to the north a thousand miles to Nulato, and finally to St. Michael on Bering Sea. . . ." Thousands of goldseekers traveled this and other

contemporaries to applaud him as the "successor to Poe" and the "equal of Kipling" (see Charles Child Walcutt's discussion of early criticism in his *Jack London*, 1966). However, not all of the Klondike stories were considered at the time to be of the same high quality as "To Build a Fire." London freely admitted that his principal aim in writing was to make money; thus many of his stories of men and dogs at odds with each other in the frozen north were published in adventure magazines and were written to satisfy a reading public that was fascinated by tales of daring exploits. The result was that many of the Klondike stories were criticized as lurid and hastily written potboilers. It has been pointed out that when London published collections of these magazine stories, he did not distinguish between those of good and bad quality. Hence his 1910 collection, *Lost Face*, contains a mixture of both good and bad stories, including "To Build a Fire." In consequence, a 1910 review in the *Nation* acknowledged London's talent but condemned the blood and violence in his stories, declaring that London "seems to us the victim of a disease of the fancy from which, and from the effects of which, it is impossible not to shrink" (as quoted by John Perry in his *Jack London: An American Myth*).

The variable quality of London's writing causes difficulties for critics today as well. In a 1967 article for *Studies in Short Fiction*, for example, Earle Labor and King Hendricks reprint a 1902 version of "To Build a Fire" which London wrote for a boy's magazine and compare it with the author's later, more famous 1908 version in order to prove that "Jack London was not merely a prolific hack, but, contrary to modern critical opinion, an astute craftsman who understood the difference between juvenile fiction and serious literary art." In his 1986 article for the *Journal of Modern Literature*, Lee Clark Mitchell observes that London's "flat prose," "childish plots," and reputation for hasty writing has caused "embarrassment" for some critics, but argues that in the case of "To Build a Fire," London wrote carefully rather than sloppily, trying to achieve a particular effect in the story. Finally, Robert Barltrop has asserted that because his books continue to be popular, London "cannot be dismissed" by critics but should instead be ranked as an important writer (in Barltrop's *Jack London: The Man, the Writer, the Rebel*).

A sinister aspect of London's work is his championing of white supremacy. Although this attitude does not appear in "To Build a Fire," it



Travellers along Alaska's Yukon Trail, c. 1897.

does manifest itself in a number of his Klondike stories, where Anglo-Saxons are represented as superior to the indigenous people they encounter in Alaska and Canada. In *Jack London: An American Myth*, John Perry notes that London's belief in Anglo-Saxon superiority was "a reflection of the time," and was thus overlooked in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by the magazines who published his stories as well as by people who read them. Perry also remarks that "London's faith in Anglo-Saxon superiority seems at odds with itself, considering his best-drawn and most convincing characters are half-breed Indians, who live simple lives of honor and respect in the wilds, while his brutal whites, the chosen race, are limned as savage elementals."

## Criticism

### Jill Widdicombe

Widdicombe is a freelance editor of college textbooks who lives in Alaska. In the essay below, she examines the mysterious effect of the merci-

degrees below zero was to him just precisely fifty degrees below zero. That there should be anything more to it than that was a thought that never entered his head. (Excerpt from "To Build a Fire")

Referring to the above passage, James I. McClintock asserts that this "quick and alert" man tries to use reason instead of imagination to get him past his difficulties and safely to camp but that human rationality proves to be helpless against the Klondike's "killing landscape." In the same vein, Earle Labor and Jeanne Campbell Reesman refer to the frozen landscape as a powerful enemy or "antagonist," asserting that the man "falls into misfortune because of . . . an overweening confidence in the efficacy of his own rational faculties and a corresponding blindness to the dark, nonrational powers of nature, chance, and fate."

In the context of "To Build a Fire," then, "imagination" is the ability to recognize one's limitations. As it happens, the man does not possess this ability until it is too late. From the beginning, he is aware of and responds to the intensity of the cold. At first, he greets this ruthless cold matter-of-factly and with relatively mild surprise: "It certainly was cold, he concluded, as he rubbed his numb nose and cheek-bones with his mittened hand." This reaction seems especially low-key when compared with the dog's response in the paragraph immediately afterward: "The animal was depressed by the tremendous cold. It knew it was no time for traveling."

As the story progresses, the man becomes more keenly aware of the magnitude of the cold. Nevertheless, this awareness does not fundamentally alter his mundane response to the unearthly "cold of space": he feels only a "pang of regret" after realizing that he should have covered his nose and cheeks against frostbite; he is only "a bit frightened" at the speed with which his fingers go numb when he removes his mittens; he is merely "angry" at his bad luck when he plunges knee-deep through the ice on the river-trail. It is not until snow falls from a tree and extinguishes his poorly placed fire that the man becomes "shocked" rather than merely surprised and at last acknowledges "his own sentence of death" as a result of this calamity.

Readers of "To Build a Fire" have judged the man's casual response to the cold to be at best naively reckless and at worst downright stupid. They have argued that the man was not being reasonable by relying on his own ability "to keep his head" and arrogantly ignoring the old-timer's



In the context of 'To Build a Fire,' then, 'imagination' is the ability to recognize one's limitations. As it happens, the man does not possess this ability until it is too late."

advice to travel with a partner. Some have pointed out that at the very least, he should have dispensed with "traveling light" and instead used his dog as a pack animal for hauling extra supplies—a practice that was not only customary in the Klondike but logical as well. Most obviously, the man never should have been so foolish as to build his second fire underneath a snow-laden tree.

Rational or not, the man's behavior is what makes "To Build a Fire" such a powerful story. His inability to imagine himself in danger from the cold and his fruitless attempts at "keeping his head" once he recognizes that death is near constitute behavior most of us can understand. Such disasters as fires, earthquakes, tornadoes, and floods bring with them enough eye-popping or ear-splitting devastation to make them clearly life-threatening. However, the extreme cold of frosty landscapes or "the White Silence," as London describes it, is so quiet and abstract that it does not immediately appear to be lethal. Besides for most people, cold is easily rendered harmless by well-insulated houses and central heating, so that like the man in "To Build a Fire" (who has come from and is going to a warm cabin) we tend to forget that human beings are "able only to live within certain narrow limits of temperature."

Critic James I. McClintock emphasizes this point when he remarks that, even had the man been capable of imagining his own mortality before he set out on his journey—that is, even if he had traveled with a partner—there is no guarantee that he would have survived nature at its most extreme during a Klondike winter. Ultimately, McClintock argues, imagination is proof against unimaginably cold temperatures only if it keeps us indoors when they occur.

tive, tableau-like style of the latter shapes a narrative world free of contingency—as free in the future as in the past, and therefore as inevitable as determinism requires.

Source: Lee Clark Mitchell, "‘Keeping His Head’: Repetition and Responsibility in London’s ‘To Build a Fire,’” in *Journal of Modern Literature*, Vol. 13, No. 1, March, 1986, pp. 76–96.

### Joan D. Hedrick

In the following excerpt, Hedrick discusses London’s depictions of “aloneness,” comradeship, and death in “The White Silence,” “In a Far Country,” and “To Build a Fire.”

His purse exhausted after a year at the University of California, in 1897 London joined the second wave of fortune-hunters in the Klondike. He returned with little more than a case of scurvy to show for his efforts, but the stories he wrote from his Alaskan experience established his literary career. In them we can see the lineaments of a hero who would never appear in London’s “civilized” fictions. He represents the most fully mature and human character London was to imagine. The aloneness of this Alaskan hero is different from the aloneness of London’s romantic heroes. Martin Eden’s aloneness grows out of a syndrome of self-abasement and self-exaltation like that which was operating in London’s consciousness as he entered the middle class. The Alaskan hero’s aloneness is based on a more realistic assessment of his strengths and weaknesses. He understands that there is something stronger than he—Death. Death is the ultimate equalizer, and in this awareness London wrote a handful of stories that imply the need for human solidarity.

In *Jack London and the Klondike*, Franklin Walker provides a carefully researched account of London’s day-by-day adventures, against which he parallels his use of similar experiences in his fictions. Walker contributes significantly to our knowledge of London’s sources and artistic techniques, but he does not analyze the more subtle movements that occurred in London’s inner life, as he internalized the white landscapes of Alaska. For this, one must turn to James McClintock’s *White Logic*. McClintock traces the movement of London’s consciousness from the affirmation, in the early Malemute Kid stories, of the individual’s ability to master the universe, to an awareness of “a more complex view of reality” in which “limited protagonists . . . [reach] an accommodation with a hostile, chaotic cosmos

by living by an imposed code,” to a loss of faith in the ability of the code to order the universe. Then the cycle begins over again, as London “turns to race identification” to provide the illusion of mastery that the individual hero could not sustain. McClintock’s ground-breaking analysis of London’s Northland stories [*White Logic*, 1975] is the starting point for this chapter, and his work makes it unnecessary to dwell in detail on London’s Alaskan fictions. It is sufficient to point out the pattern that emerges from a comparison of three stories: “The White Silence,” “In a Far Country,” and “To Build a Fire.”

The first story is about three people (plus one unborn) traveling in mutual comradeship; the second is about two men who are together but who are not bound by comradeship ties; in the third story “the man,” as he is designated, insists on defying sourdough wisdom and traveling alone. Death enters each story. “In a Far Country” and “To Build a Fire” deal with unnecessary death—death that could have been avoided had the protagonists the imagination to perceive their finitude and their need to rely on others for mutual support and protection. The relationship between Cuthbert and Weatherbee in “In a Far Country” hinges on mutual fear and suspicion. Together in a cabin for the duration of the Alaskan winter, their distrust of each other encourages waste of food and fuel rather than the economy that is necessary for mutual survival. In the end they kill each other over a cache of sugar. The man in “To Build a Fire” believes that “a man who is a man” travels alone. He reads no message in the vast Alaskan landscape, nor does he understand, in human, mortal terms, the significance of sixty-five degrees below zero. When he breaks through the ice and wets himself to his knees, his limbs begin to freeze before he can get a fire started to dry himself out. Only when death is upon him does he realize his own mortality.

These deaths were avoidable, and the way to avoid them is clearly through human solidarity. But if solidarity can prevent some unnecessary deaths, it cannot, of course, undo the inevitability of death. That is the reality London faces in “The White Silence.” The Malemute Kid is traveling with Mason, his close companion of five years, and Mason’s Indian wife, Ruth. London establishes the odds early in the story. They have two hundred miles to travel and only enough food for six days. The reader may expect a tale of struggle and sacrifice in which—perhaps—the trio united can cope with nature’s odds against them. But this is not, London hints in

early manhood in Tennessee. Although Mason bears some resemblance to London's description of his ideal Man-Comrade, who, he wrote, should be both "delicate and tender, brave and game," and "who, knowing the frailties and weaknesses of life, could look with frank and fearless eyes upon them," he also has traces of the "smallness or meanness" that was explicitly not a part of London's conception. For, earlier in the story, Mason—over the Kid's gentle protest—brutally whipped a dog who was unfortunate enough to fall in the traces. The weakened dog is subsequently devoured by her teammates. Mason is very much an ordinary man, loving his wife, loving life, having no grand philosophy but only a realistic practicality that says life must go on. He does not appear an idealized Man-Comrade but only a garrulous traveling companion, full of stories and gab. Indeed, the extent to which his rambling monologues fill up the story makes all the more awesome his death—marked by a sharp report, followed by silence.

In this story London portrays death as an event with a human character that quickly yields to a nonhuman force—the White Silence, which "seem[s] to sneer" in the moment before the Kid performs his last act of comradeship. Death is clearly harder for the survivor than for the dying. It is easier for Mason to die than for the Kid to live with the knowledge of death. He has been forced to participate in a ritual confirmation of death's power and man's finitude. Worse, he has had, in the name of comradeship, to break the bond that makes death human, that made death bearable for Mason. He is now alone. In terror, he lashes the dogs across the waste of land.

Unlike the man in "To Build a Fire," the Malemute Kid has the imagination to perceive in the vast silences of the Northland the message of his finitude. He knows the value of comradeship. But neither his imagination nor his sensitivity can protect him from the pain of loss, the pain of experiencing death before death through the death of another to whom he is bound. Written within months after London learned of John London's death (he died while Jack was in Alaska), this story probably draws on the emotions of that loss. In one stroke London lost a father, a comrade, and a model of male working-class identity. In "The White Silence" the Kid is almost in the role of a redeemer: he takes the suffering of Mason on himself; by acquiescing in Mason's request that he not be left to die alone, the Kid takes that aloneness on himself. He redeems Mason's death and renders it human. But the unspoken question hanging in the silence,



The Alaskan hero's aloneness is based on a more realistic assessment of his strengths and weaknesses. He understands that there is something stronger than he—Death. Death is the ultimate equalizer, and in this awareness London wrote a handful of stories that imply the need for human solidarity."

the question that fills the Kid with fear, is this: Who will redeem his own death?

As McClintock writes, this story ends in an ambiguous balance between human significance and human futility. The Kid has shown himself to be a true comrade. It remains to be seen whether or not someone will yet be a true comrade to him. This future, which is beyond the scope of the story, depends on whether or not the Kid can be open and trusting of others, whether or not he can be passively receptive to the significance that others might invest in his life; whether or not, in religious terms, he can leave his salvation up to others. If he cannot, then it is hard to escape the conclusion that, by severing the bond between himself and Mason, he has condemned himself to a living death.

"In a Far Country," written probably a few months after "The White Silence," suggests that death may also come in nonredemptive ways. Cuthfert and Weatherbee are bound together by their situations, but, not being bound emotionally, they engage in a ghastly inversion of comradely rituals. They are united not in life-giving rituals like washing and eating, but in their mutual disregard for cleanliness, order, and economy. London suggests that the reasons for their mutual suspicion are their class differences. Weatherbee is a lower-class clerk, Cuthfert a Master of Arts who writes and paints. Both think of themselves as gentlemen but, London

*the Seven Gables*, and then succumbed to the repressed sexuality of *The Blithedale Romance* and the tortured symbolism of *The Marble Faun*. But the real similarities are in their choices of theme and in their modes of retreat from the primary truth of their earlier work. Both write about characters who suffer from their aloneness. Hawthorne was able to distinguish between an aloneness that is human and necessary, indeed, inescapable, and an aloneness that is inflicted on oneself out of overweening pride, that is to say, between the aloneness of the modern hero, Hester Prynne, and that of the romantic hero, Arthur Dimmesdale. Both London and Hawthorne attempted to retreat from aloneness through the sentimental Victorian strategy of love and marriage. What neither of them fully understood was that, in using a platitudinous domesticity to shield them from the terror of aloneness, what they were seeking was not a comrade, a mate, a wife, but something altogether different: a mother.

The fire of the Victorian hearth did not burn as brightly as the Alaskan campfire. It replaced intimacy with sentiment and comradeship with courtship. For a relationship between equals, struggling against mutual dangers, it substituted a relationship between a boy-man and a girl-woman who played at being grown-ups. This ploy enabled London to come out of the long sickness and to resume life, but it vitiated his art and provided only a stay of execution for his life.

Source: Joan D. Hedrick, "Journeying across the Ghostly Wastes of a Dead World," in *Solitary Comrade: Jack London and His Work*, The University of North Carolina Press, 1982, pp. 48-55.

### James I. McClintock

*In the following excerpt, McClintock attempts to illustrate his assertion that "To Build a Fire" is London's "most mature expression of his pessimism."*

"To Build a Fire" is London's most mature expression of his pessimism. The nameless "chechaquo" or tenderfoot who confronts the white silence in this short story possesses neither the imagination that gives man an intuitive grasp of the laws of nature and allows him to exercise his reason to accommodate himself to them, nor the "thrice cursed" imagination that convinces man of the absurdity of confronting the unknown with ridiculously finite human powers:

The trouble with him was that he was without imagination. He was quick and alert in the things of life, but

only in the things, and not in the significances. Fifty degrees below zero meant eighty-odd degrees of frost. Such fact impressed him as being cold and uncomfortable, and that was all. It did not lead him to meditate upon his frailty as a creature of temperature, and upon man's frailty in general, able only to live within certain narrow limits of heat and cold; and from there on it did not lead him to the conjectural field of immortality and man's place in the universe.

He does not recognize that man is so finite that the bitterly cold Alaskan landscape inevitably destroys the individual. The rest of the story suggests that man is totally unequipped to face the unknown and inherently too limited to explore life's mysteries and live. If the individual is to survive, he must avoid truth-seeking and "spirit-groping."

Only two other living beings are mentioned in "To Build a Fire": the "old timer" and the dog who accompanies the tender-foot along the "hair-line trail" into the "unbroken white" of the mysterious land. The old timer offers one way to survive, and as it turns out, the only way. In the autumn before the young man takes his fatal journey, "the old timer had been very serious in laying down the law that no man must travel alone in the Klondike after fifty below." His experience has given him the imagination to continue living; but, significantly, he adjusts to the unknown by refusing to venture into it. He remains with other men, away from the trail during the heart of winter. The lesson he attempts to teach the young wanderer is that if one hopes to survive, he must retreat from a solitary confrontation with cosmic power, "the full force of the blow" delivered by "the cold of space" at the "unprotected tip of the planet." The kind of accommodation the Kid makes, practicing the code in order to adjust, is impossible. The dog, however, accompanies the reckless young man into the cold and does survive. Instinct protects him. Nevertheless, instinct gives no comfort to man, since it is unavailable to him. The dog has "inherited the knowledge" from his savage ancestors who, like he, had never been separated from the brutal landscape by civilization. In fact, the dog is part of the inhuman Alaskan wilderness and, like it, "was not concerned in the welfare of the man." The old timer's imagination, then, warns that man cannot confront the depths of experience and live; the dog's instinct for survival is unavailable to man. Having been divorced from nature by civilization, no man is fit to undertake the most arduous journey.

In addition to imagination, the quality that permitted the Malemute kid and other protagonists

Although his temperament and reading called upon him to affirm life, he exhausted the positive as he found himself forced to move from themes of mastery, to themes of accommodation, to themes of failure. His honesty compelled him to deny affirmations. Even the archetypal quest motif and the evocative imagery of the wasteland, artistic elements which distinguish his stories from those of lesser writers, disappear from his fiction as he discovered that it is not undertaking the dangerous and desperate quest that determines the quality of life but, instead, inexorable, external forces of nature and man's irrationality, his link with that nature. The Alaskan nightmare had reached its conclusion, and London retreated from the "Unknown."

Source: James I. McClintock, "Alaskan Nightmare and Artistic Success: 1898-1908," in *White Logic: Jack London's Short Stories*, Wolf House Books, 1975, pp. 79-119.

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Newspaper account of death by hypothermia of a Yup'ik Eskimo couple and their grandchild after their