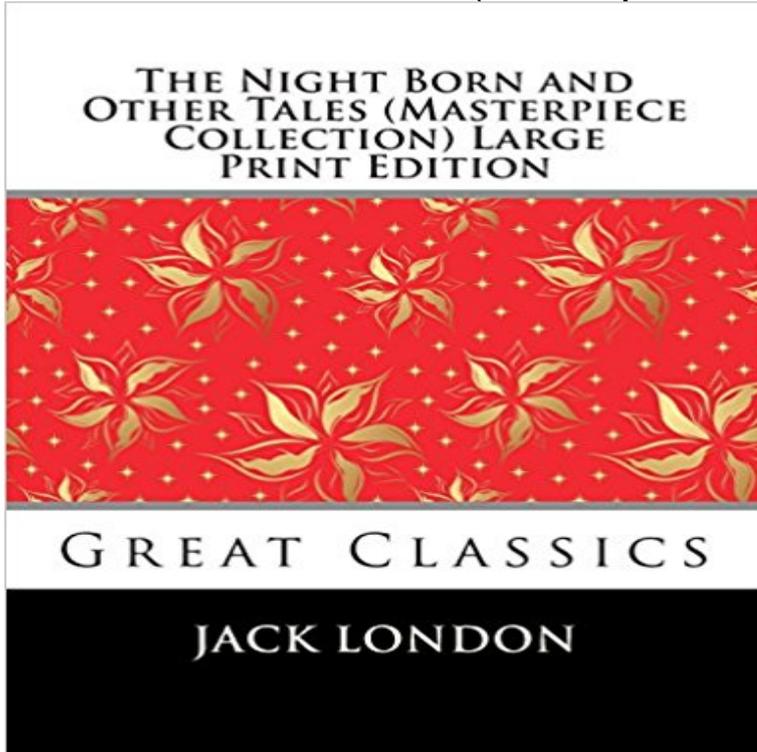


The Night Born and Other Tales (Masterpiece Collection) Large Print Edition: Great Classics (Masterpiece Collection - Great Classic)



It was in the old Alta-Inyo Cluba warm night for San Francisco and through the open windows, hushed and far, came the brawl of the streets. The talk had led on from the Graft Prosecution and the latest signs that the town was to be run wide open, down through all the grotesque sordidness and rottenness of man-hate and man-meanness, until the name of O'Brien was mentioned. O'Brien, the promising young pugilist who had been killed in the prize-ring the night before. At once the air had seemed to freshen. O'Brien had been a clean-living young man with ideals. He neither drank, smoked, nor swore, and his had been the body of a beautiful young god. He had even carried his prayer-book to the ringside. They found it in his coat pocket in the dressing-room... afterward. Here was Youth, clean and wholesome, unsullied the thing of glory and wonder for men to conjure with.... after it has been lost to them and they have turned middle-aged. And so well did we conjure, that Romance came and for an hour led us far from the man-city and its snarling roar. Bardwell, in a way, started it by quoting from Thoreau; but it was old Trefethan, bald-headed and dewlapped, who took up the quotation and for the hour to come was romance incarnate. At first we wondered how many Scotches he had consumed since dinner, but very soon all that was forgotten.

It was in 1898 I was thirty-five then, he said. Yes, I know you are adding it up. You're right. I'm forty-seven now; look ten years more; and the doctors say damn the doctors anyway! He lifted the long glass to his lips and sipped it slowly to soothe away his irritation. But I was young... once. I was young twelve years ago, and I had hair on top of my head, and my stomach was lean as a runner's, and the longest day was none too long for me. I was a husky back there in '98. You remember me, Milner. You knew me then. Wasn't I a pretty good bit of all right? Milner nodded and agreed.

Like Trefethan, he was another mining engineer who had cleaned up a fortune in the Klondike. You certainly were, old man, Milner said. Ill never forget when you cleaned out those lumberjacks in the M. & M. that night that little newspaper man started the row. Slavin was in the country at the time, this to us and his manager wanted to get up a match with Trefethan. Well, look at me now, Trefethan commanded angrily. Thats what the Goldstead did to me God knows how many millions, but nothing left in my soul.... nor in my veins. The good red blood is gone. I am a jellyfish, a huge, gross mass of oscillating protoplasm, aa... But language failed him, and he drew solace from the long glass. Women looked at me then; and turned their heads to look a second time. Strange that I never married. But the girl. Thats what I started to tell you about. I met her a thousand miles from anywhere, and then some. And she quoted to me those very words of Thoreau that Bardwell quoted a moment ago the ones about the day-born gods and the night-born.

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