



Jack London - Croc-Blanc (Illustrated) (French Edition)

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Dutch Courage is a collection of short stories by Jack London that was originally published in 1922, about six years after his death. It gathers together ten stories that had not been included in any of his previous short story collections. The preface by London's widow Charmian, which is more confusing than helpful, states that the common thread that binds these stories together is that they are all suitable for young audiences. Be that as it may, even though many of these stories feature teenaged protagonists and were originally published in boy's pulp magazines like *The Youth's Companion*, they don't seem as dumbed down or as tame as some of London's more obviously youth-oriented fiction like the short stories in *Tales of the Fish Patrol* or the novel *The Cruise of the Dazzler*. However, you won't find the sort of bleak fatalism that permeates famous London works like *The Call of the Wild* or "To Build a Fire". These stories are all straightforward examples of entertaining adventure fiction, devoid of philosophy or politics.

With one exception, the stories included in *Dutch Courage* are some of the first works London ever wrote. London's first published story, "Typhoon Off the Coast of Japan", written when he was 17, was the winning entry in a writing contest sponsored by the *San Francisco Morning Call*. In this descriptive sketch, seal hunters in their scattered boats struggle to return to their schooner before a big storm hits. Once safely on board, the crew rides out the typhoon as it pummels their ship. It is an impressive piece of work for a teenager, and shows the nascent talent that would spawn a stellar career. There are other selections that are even more auspicious. "Chris Farrington, Able Seaman" is a better, more fictionalized account of the "Typhoon" story. In "The Lost Poacher," another sealing schooner inadvertently drifts into Russian waters, forcing the crew to face the possibility of capture and imprisonment in the salt mines of Siberia. "In Yeddo Bay" is a more comical tale of a young sailor in Yokohama who loses his purse, then must find a way to get back to his ship with empty pockets.

Not all the stories deal with sailing. The brief and predictable "Bald-Face" is the only tale of the Klondike Gold Rush included here. "The Banks of the Sacramento," one of the better offerings, features a fourteen-year-old boy, the son of a mine watchman, who is left to mind the operation while his father is out of town. The title selection, "Dutch Courage" involves two young men attempting to climb Half Dome in Yosemite. "An Adventure in the Upper Sea" takes place in a hot air balloon. The originality of the setting, unfortunately, is the only good thing it has going for it.

The final entry in the book, "Whose Business is to Live," is by far the longest, and unlike the others it was written at the tail end of London's career. It takes place in 1914 during the Mexican Revolution. When the American Navy lands in Veracruz, the offended Mexicans retaliate against any gringos they can find. A small party of Americans in Tampico must make a 50 mile trip upriver to rescue their stranded loved ones. It offers nonstop action, but it's somewhat of a confusing mess. It demonstrates the overindulgence characteristic of many of London's later stories.

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