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МАЛЕНЬКАЯ ХОЗЯЙКА  
БОЛЬШОГО ДОМА

Jack London  
THE LITTLE LADY  
OF THE BIG HOUSE

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**THE LITTLE LADY OF  
THE BIG HOUSE  
by Jack London**



## 1.

“**Paula**<sup>1</sup>,” **Dick Forrest**<sup>2</sup>, a rich rancher, said to his wife, a vivacious, athletic, and self-aware woman. “My best friend, **Evan Graham**<sup>3</sup>, will arrive tomorrow morning. Tell the servant to put him in the **watch-tower**<sup>4</sup>. I hope he will work on his book.”

“Graham?—Graham?” Paula asked. “Do I know him?”

“You met him once two years ago, in **Santiago**<sup>5</sup>. He had dinner with us.”

“Oh, one of those naval officers?”

Dick shook his head.

“The **civilian**<sup>6</sup>. Don’t you remember that big blond fellow—you talked about music with him for half an hour?”

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<sup>1</sup> **Paula** — Паола

<sup>2</sup> **Dick Forrest** — Дик Форрест

<sup>3</sup> **Evan Graham** — Ивэн Грэхем

<sup>4</sup> **watch-tower** — сторожевая башня

<sup>5</sup> **Santiago** — Сантьяго

<sup>6</sup> **civilian** — штатский

“Oh, to be sure,” Paula vaguely recollected. “He’d met you somewhere before ... **South Africa**<sup>1</sup>, wasn’t it? Or **the Philippines**<sup>2</sup>?”

“That’s right. South Africa, it was. Evan Graham. Next time we met was on the boat on the **Yellow Sea**<sup>3</sup>.”

“But **who about him**<sup>4</sup>, and what about him?” Paula queried. “And what’s the book?”

“Well, first of all, **beginning at the end**<sup>5</sup>, **he’s broke**<sup>6</sup>—that is, for him, he’s broke. He’s got an income of several thousand a year left, but all that his father left him is gone. But he doesn’t whimper. He’d graduated from the university. His book covers last year’s trip across **South America**<sup>7</sup>, West coast to East coast. The Brazilian government voluntarily gave him an honorarium of ten thousand dollars for the information concerning unexplored portions of **Brazil**<sup>8</sup>. Oh, he’s a man, a real man! You know the type—clean, big, strong, simple; been everywhere, seen everything, knows most of a lot of things, straight, looks you in the eyes—well, in short, a real man, indeed!”

**Ernestine**<sup>9</sup>, Paula’s sister, clapped her hands, and exclaimed: “And he will come tomorrow!”

Dick shook his head reprovably.

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<sup>1</sup> **South Africa** — Южная Африка

<sup>2</sup> **Philippines** — Филиппины

<sup>3</sup> **Yellow Sea** — Жёлтое море

<sup>4</sup> **who about him** — кто он такой

<sup>5</sup> **beginning at the end** — если начать с конца

<sup>6</sup> **he’s broke** — он разорён

<sup>7</sup> **South America** — Южная Америка

<sup>8</sup> **Brazil** — Бразилия

<sup>9</sup> **Ernestine** — Эрнестина

“Oh, **nothing in that direction**<sup>1</sup>, Ernestine. Many nice girls like you have tried to hook Evan Graham. And, between ourselves, I couldn't blame them. But he's had fast legs, and they've always failed **to get him into a corner**<sup>2</sup>, where, dazed and breathless, he could mechanically mutter 'Yes' and come out of the trance to find himself roped, thrown, and married. Forget him, Ernestine. Graham is not for you. He's old like me—just about the same age, forty years old—and, like me, he's seen a lot. He knows how to run away in time. He doesn't care for young ladies. He is merely old, and very wise.”

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<sup>1</sup> **nothing in that direction** —здесь ничего не получится

<sup>2</sup> **to get him into a corner** — загнать его в угол

## 2.

“Where’s my little boy?” Dick shouted, walking through the Big House in quest of its Little Lady.

He came to the door that gave entrance to the long wing. It was a door without a knob, a huge panel of wood in a wood-paneled wall. But Dick knew the secret; he pressed the spring, and the door swung wide.

“Where’s my little boy?” he called again.

A glance into the bathroom was fruitless, as were the glances he sent into Paula’s wardrobe room and dressing room. He passed the short, broad stairway that led to her empty divan. He noticed a **drawing easel**<sup>1</sup>.

“Where’s my little boy?” he shouted out to the sleeping porch; and found only a demure Chinese woman of thirty, who smiled with embarrassment.

This was Paula’s maid. Dick had taken her, as a child almost, for Paula’s service, from a fishing village on the Yellow Sea.

“Where is your mistress?” Dick asked.

“She maybe with young ladies—I don’t know,” she stammered; and Dick swung away on his heel.

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<sup>1</sup> **drawing easel** — мольберт



"Where's my little boy?" he shouted, just as a big limousine pulled up.

"I wish I knew," a tall, blond man in a light summer suit responded from the car; and the next moment Dick Forrest and Evan Graham were shaking hands.

The servants carried in the hand baggage, and Dick accompanied his guest to the watch tower quarters. The two men were almost of a size. Graham was a clearer blond than Forrest, although both were equally gray of eye, and equally and precisely similarly bronzed by sun. Graham's features were in a slightly larger mold; his eyes were a little longer. His nose was a little straighter as well as larger than Dick's, and his lips were a little thicker, and a little redder.

Forrest threw a glance at his wrist watch.

"Eleven-thirty," he said. "Come along at once, Graham. We don't eat till twelve-thirty. **I am sending out a shipment of bulls**<sup>1</sup>, three hundred of them, and I'm proud of them. You simply must see them. What saddle do you prefer?"

"Oh, anything, **old man**<sup>2</sup>."

"English? — Australian? — Scottish? — Mexican?" Dick insisted.

"Scottish, if you please," Graham surrendered.

They sat their horses by the side of the road and watched the herd.

"I see what you're doing—it's great," Graham said with sparkling eyes.

They turned their horses back for the Big House. Dick looked at his watch again.

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<sup>1</sup> **I am sending out a shipment of bulls** — я отправляю партию быков

<sup>2</sup> **old man** — старина, дружище

“Lots of time,” he assured his guest. “I’m glad you saw those bulls. They are nice indeed. Over there are the fish ponds, you’ll have an opportunity to catch a mess of trout, or bass, or even catfish. You see, I love to make things work. The water works twenty-four hours a day. The ponds are in series, according to the nature of the fish. The water starts working up in the mountains. It irrigates a score of mountain meadows before it makes the plunge and is clarified to crystal clearness in the next few rugged miles; and at the plunge from the highlands it generates half the power and all the lighting used on the ranch. Then it subirrigates lower levels, flows in here to the fish ponds.”

“Man,” Graham laughed, “you could make a poem about the water. I’ve met fire-worshippers, but you’re the first real water-worshiper I’ve ever encountered ...”

Graham did not complete his thought. From the right, not far away, came a mighty splash and an outburst of women’s cries and laughter. They emerged in a blaze of sunshine, on an open space among the trees, and Graham saw an unexpected a picture.

And in the center of the pool, vertical in the water, struck upward and outward into the free air, while on its back, slipping and clinging, was the figure form, Graham realize that it was a woman who rode the horse. Her slim round arms were twined in **stallion-mane**<sup>1</sup>, while her white round knees slipped on the sleek.

Graham realized that the white wonderful creature was a woman, and sensed the smallness and daintiness of her. She reminded him of some

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<sup>1</sup> **stallion-mane** — грива

**Dresden china figure**<sup>1</sup> set absurdly small and light and strangely on the drowning back of a titanic beast.

Her face smote Graham most of all. It was a boy's face; it was a woman's face; it was serious and at the same time amused. It was a white woman's face—and modern; and yet, to Graham, it was all-pagan. This was not a creature and a situation one happened upon in the twentieth century.

The stallion sank. Glorious animal and glorious rider disappeared together beneath the surface, to rise together, a second later.

“Ride his neck!” Dick shouted. “Catch his foretop and get on his neck!”

The woman obeyed. The next moment, as the stallion balanced out horizontally in obedience to her shiftage of weight, she had slipped back to the shoulders.

“Who ... who is it?” Graham queried.

“Paula—Mrs. Forrest.”

“**My breath is quite taken away**<sup>2</sup>,” Graham said. “Do your people do such things frequently?”

“First time she ever did that,” Forrest replied.

“Risked the horse's neck and legs as well as her own,” was Graham's comment.

“Thirty-five thousand dollars' worth of neck and legs,” Dick smiled. “That was the price the breeders offered me for the horse last. But Paula never has accidents. That's her luck. We've been married ten or a dozen years now, and, do you know, sometimes it seems to me I don't know her at all, and that nobody knows her, and that she doesn't know herself.”

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<sup>1</sup> **Dresden china figure** — фигурка из дрезденского фарфора

<sup>2</sup> **my breath is quite taken away** — у меня дух захватило

### 3.

The lunch-time came. Graham took his part in the conversation on breeds and breeding, but the delicate white of Paula on the back of a great horse was before his eyes the entire time.

All the guests drifted into the long dining room. Dick Forrest arrived and precipitated cocktails. And Graham impatiently waited the appearance of the woman who had worried his eyes since noon.

She entered. Graham's lips gasped apart, and remained apart, his eyes ravished with the beauty and surprise. Here was no a child-woman or boy-girl on a stallion, but a **grand lady**<sup>1</sup>.

As she crossed the floor, Graham saw two women: one, the grand lady, the mistress of the Big House; other, the lovely equestrienne beneath the dull-blue, golden-trimmed gown.

She was upon them, among them, and Graham's hand held hers in the formal introduction. At table, across the corner from her, it was his hostess that mostly filled his eyes and his mind.

It was a company Graham had ever sat down to dinner with. The sheep-buyer, and the correspondent,

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<sup>1</sup> **grand lady** — светская женщина

men, women, and girls, fourteen in total. Graham could not remember their names. They were full of spirits, laughter, and the latest jokes.

“I see right now,” Graham told Paula, “your place is the caravanserai; I can’t even try to remember names and people.”

“I don’t blame you,” she laughed. “But these are neighbors. They visit us in any time. **Mrs. Watson**<sup>1</sup>, there, next to Dick, is of the old land-aristocracy. That is her grandfather, and that pretty dark-eyed girl is her daughter ...”

And while Paula was describing guests, Graham heard scarce half she said, so occupied was he in trying to understand of her. The pride. That was it! It was in her eye, in the poise of her head, in the curling tendrils of her hair, in her sensitive nostrils, in the mobile lips, in the angle of the rounded chin, in her hands, small, muscular and veined. Pride it was, in every muscle, nerve, and quiver of her—conscious, sentient, stinging pride.

She might be joyous and natural, boy and woman, fun and frolic; but always the pride was there, vibrant, tense, intrinsic. She was a woman, frank, outspoken, straight-looking, plastic, democratic; but she was not a toy.

“Our philosophers can’t fight tonight,” Paula said to Graham.

“Philosophers?” he questioned back. “Who and what are they? I don’t understand.”

“They—” Paula hesitated. “They live here. They call themselves the **jungle-birds**<sup>2</sup>. They have a camp in the woods a couple of miles away, where they read

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<sup>1</sup> **Mrs. Watson** — миссис Ватсон

<sup>2</sup> **jungle-birds** — лесные птицы

and talk. It's great fun for Dick, and, besides, it saves him time. He's a dreadfully hard worker, you know."

"I understand that they ... that Dick takes care of them?" Graham asked.

As she answered, he was occupied with her long, brown lashes. Perforce, he lifted his gaze to her eyebrows. When she smiled she smiled all of herself, generously, joyously.

"Yes," she was saying. "They have nothing to worry about. Dick is most generous, and he encourages the idleness of men like them. For example, **Terrence McFane**<sup>1</sup> is an **epicurean anarchist**<sup>2</sup>, if you know what that means. He will not hurt a flea. He has a pet cat I gave him, and he carefully picks her fleas, not injuring them, stores them in a box, and sets them free in the forest. And the one with a beard—**Aaron Hancock**<sup>3</sup>. Like Terrence, he doesn't work. He says that there have always been peasants and fools who like to work. That's why he wears a beard. To shave, he thinks, is unnecessary work, and, therefore, immoral. Dick had found him in Paris, and assured him: if you ever come back to America, you will have food and shelter. So here he is."

"And the poet?" Graham asked, admiring the smile that played upon her face.

"Oh, Theo—**Theodore Malken**<sup>4</sup>, though we call him Leo. He doesn't work, either. His relatives are dreadfully wealthy; but they disowned him and he disowned them when he was fifteen. They say he is lunatic, and he says they are merely mad. He really writes remarkable verses ... when he writes. He

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<sup>1</sup> **Terrence McFane** — Терренс МакФейн

<sup>2</sup> **epicurean anarchist** — анархист-эпикурец

<sup>3</sup> **Aaron Hancock** — Аарон Ханкок

<sup>4</sup> **Theodore Malken** — Теодор Мэлкин

prefers to dream and live in the jungle with Terrence and Aaron.”

“And **the Hindoo**<sup>1</sup>, there—who’s he?”

“That’s **Dar Hyal**<sup>2</sup>. He’s their guest, a revolutionist. He studied in France, Italy, Switzerland, he is a political refugee from India. Talks about a new synthetic system of philosophy, and about a rebellion against the British tyranny in India. He advocates individual terrorism. He and Aaron quarrel tremendously—that is, on philosophical matters. And now—” Paula sighed and erased the sigh with her smile—“and now, you know about everybody.”

One thing Graham noted as the dinner proceeded. The sages called Dick Forrest by his first name; but they always addressed Paula as “Mrs. Forrest,” although she called them by their first names. These people respected few things under the sun, and among such few things they recognized the certain definite aloofness in Dick Forrest’s wife.

It was the same thing, after dinner, in the big living room. Her laugh fascinated Graham. There was a fibrous thrill in it, most sweet to the ear, that differentiated it from any laugh he had ever heard.

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<sup>1</sup> **the Hindoo** — индус

<sup>2</sup> **Dar Hyal** — Дар-Хиал