

MARTIN EDEN
by **Jack London**

CHAPTER 1

He opened the door with a key and went in, followed by a young fellow who awkwardly removed his cap. He wore rough clothes of a sailor. He did not know what to do with his cap.

The wide rooms seemed too narrow for him. His heavy arms hung at his sides. He did not know what to do with those arms and hands. He watched the easy walk of the other in front of him, and for the first time realized that his walk was different from that of other men. The sweat burst through the skin of his forehead in tiny beads, and he paused and mopped his bronzed face with his handkerchief.

“Hold on, Arthur¹, my boy,” he said, attempting to mask his anxiety with facetious utterance. “This is too much for me now. You know I didn’t want to come, and I guess your family doesn’t want to see me at all.”

“That’s all right,” was the reassuring answer. “You mustn’t be frightened at us². We’re just homely people — Hello, there’s a letter for me.”

He stepped back to the table, opened the envelope, and began to read, giving the stranger an opportunity to recover himself. And the stranger understood and appreciated.

An oil painting drew his attention. There was beauty, and it drew him irresistibly. He forgot his awkward walk and came closer to the painting, very close. He did not know painting. He had seen oil paintings, it was true, in the show windows of shops, but the glass of the windows did not allow him to come closer.

¹ **Hold on, Arthur.** — Подождите, Артур.

² **You mustn’t be frightened at us.** — Не-
зачем нас бояться.

Then he saw the books on the table. He glanced at the titles and the authors' names, read fragments of text, caressing the volumes with his eyes and hands, and, once, recognized a book he had read. He took a volume of Swinburne¹ and began to read. Twice he closed the book on his forefinger to look at the name of the author. Swinburne! he must remember that name. But who was Swinburne? Was he dead a hundred years or so, like most of the poets? Or was he alive still, and writing? He turned to the title-page . . . yes, he had written other books; well, he will go to the library in the morning and try to get some Swinburne's books. He went back to the text and lost himself. He did not notice that a young woman had entered the room. Suddenly he heard Arthur's voice saying:

“Ruth², this is Mr. Eden³.”

He closed the book. “*Mr. Eden!*” Everybody called him just “Eden,” or “Martin Eden⁴,”

¹ **Swinburne** — Суинберн (*английский поэт XIX века*).

² **Ruth** — Руфь

³ **Mr. Eden** — мистер Иден

⁴ **Martin Eden** — Мартин Иден

or just “Martin,” all his life. And “*Mister!*” It was something!

And then he turned and saw the girl. She was a pale, ethereal creature, with wide, spiritual blue eyes and a wealth of golden hair. He did not know how she was dressed, except that the dress was as wonderful as she. She was like a pale gold flower upon a slender stem. No, she was a spirit, a divinity, a goddess. She looked him straight in the eyes as she shook hands, frankly, like a man. The women he had known did not shake hands that way¹. Never had he seen such a woman.

“Will you sit down, Mr. Eden?” the girl was saying. “Arthur told us. It was brave of you² —”

He waved his hand and muttered that he had done nothing at all. He sat down on the edge of the chair, greatly worried by his hands.

¹ **did not shake hands that way** — жали руку по-другому

² **It was brave of you.** — Вы поступили так мужественно.

“You have such a scar on your neck, Mr. Eden,” the girl was saying. “How did it happen?”

“A Mexican with a knife, miss,” he answered. “It was just a fight.”

“Oh,” the girl said, in a faint, far voice, and he noticed the shock in her sensitive face.

He felt a shock himself. There was a brief pause in the conversation.

“This man Swineburne¹,” he began,

“Who?”

“Swineburne,” he repeated, with the same mispronunciation. “The poet.”

“Swinburne,” she corrected.

“Yes, that’s the chap,” he stammered, his cheeks hot again. “How long since he died?”

“Why, I haven’t heard that he was dead.” She looked at him curiously. “Where did you meet him?”

“I never saw him,” was the reply. “But I read some of his poetry out of that book there on the table just before you come in. How do you like his poetry?”

¹ Swineburne — Свинберн

And she began to talk quickly and easily upon the subject that he had suggested. Here was intellectual life, he thought, and here was beauty. He forgot himself and stared at her with hungry eyes. The books were true. There were such women in the world. She was one of them.

“Now Longfellow¹ — ” she was saying.

“Yes, I’ve read it,” he was glad to say so. “‘The Psalm of Life,’ ‘Excelsior²,’ and . . . I guess that’s all.”

She nodded her head and smiled, and he felt, somehow, that her smile was tolerant, pitifully tolerant.

“Excuse me, miss. I guess that I don’t know much about such things. But I will know it...”

It sounded like a threat. His voice was determined, his eyes were flashing.

“I think you will know it,” she finished with a laugh. “You are very strong.”

“Yes, I’m not an invalid,” he said. “But most of what you were saying I can’t digest,

¹ **Now Longfellow...** — А вот Лонгфелло...

² **‘Excelsior’** — «Эксцельсиор» (одно из самых популярных стихотворений Лонгфелло)

you see. I like books and poetry, but I've never thought about them. That's why I can't talk about them. How did you learn all this?"

"By going to school, and by studying," she answered.

"I went to school when I was a kid," he began to object.

"Yes; but I mean high school, and lectures, and the university."

"You've gone to the university?" he demanded in frank amazement.

"I'm going there now."

At the same moment a woman was entering the room. The girl left her chair and came to the woman. They kissed each other. That must be her mother, he thought. She was a tall, blond woman, slender, and stately, and beautiful.

CHAPTER 2

Their journey to the dining room was a nightmare to him. But at last he had made it. The array of knives and forks frightened him. Well, he must be careful here.

He glanced around the table. Opposite him was Arthur, and Arthur's brother, Norman¹. How they loved each other, the members of this family! His nature wanted love. It was an organic demand of his life. He had not known that he needed love.

He was glad that Mr. Morse² was not there. The father is too much for him, he felt sure. He had to eat as he had never eaten before, to handle strange tools.

¹ **Norman** — Норман

² **Mr. Morse** — мистер Морз

He was unaware of what he ate. It was merely food¹. Eating was an aesthetic function. It was an intellectual function, too. His mind was stirred. He heard words that were meaningless to him, and other words that he had seen only in books. He said, "Yes, miss," and "No, miss," to her, and "Yes, ma'am," and "No, ma'am," to her mother. And when she or her mother addressed him as "Mr. Eden," he was glowing and warm with delight.

"It was brave of you to help Arthur— and you a stranger," she said tactfully.

"It was nothing at all," he said. "Those boys were looking for trouble². They began to insult Arthur, and— "

He paused. Arthur continued the story, for the twentieth time, of his adventure with the drunken hooligans on the ferry-boat and of how Martin Eden had rescued him.

Martin Eden nodded. He began to tell the company about his sea life, what he saw and what he knew.

¹ **It was merely food.** — Еда как еда.

² **were looking for trouble** — нарывались на неприятности

For the first time he became himself. And while he talked, the girl looked at him with startled eyes. His fire warmed her. She wanted to lean toward this burning, blazing man that was like a volcano full of strength, and health. Ruth saw horror in her mother's eyes — fascinated horror, it was true, but none the less¹ horror. This man from the darkness was evil. Her mother saw it, and her mother was right. She will trust her mother's judgment in this as she had always trusted it in all things.

Later, at the piano, she played for him. And she, glancing at him across her shoulder, saw something in his face.

"The greatest time of my life, you see... It's all new to me, and I like it."

"I hope you'll visit us again," she said, as he was saying good night to her brothers.

He pulled on his cap, and was gone.

"Well, what do you think of him?" Arthur demanded.

"He is interesting," she answered. "How old is he?"

¹ none the less — тем не менее

“Twenty — almost twenty-one. I asked him this afternoon. I didn’t think he was that young.”

And I am three years older, was the thought in her mind as she kissed her brothers good-night.

CHAPTER 3

Martin Eden took out a brown rice paper and a pinch of Mexican tobacco. “By God!”¹ he said aloud, in a voice of awe and wonder. “By God!” he repeated. And yet again he murmured, “By God!”

He had met the Woman. He had sat next to her at table. He had felt her hand in his, he had looked into her eyes. This feeling of the divine startled him. He had never believed in the divine. He had always been irreligious. There was no life beyond; it was here and now, then darkness everlasting. But what he had seen in her eyes was soul — immortal soul that never dies. Nobody had given him

¹ **By God!** — Чёрт побери!