

**THE RED-HOT DOLLAR,
AND OTHER STORIES
FROM THE BLACK CAT**

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The red-hot dollar, and other stories from the Black cat by H. D. Umbstaetter & Jack London

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H. D. UMBSTAETTER & JACK LONDON

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H. D. UMBSTAETTER

INTRODUCTION

BY

JACK LONDON

THE RED - HOT DOLLAR


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THE BLACK CAT

By
H. D. UMBSTAETTER

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
JACK LONDON



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Introduction

It is indeed a pleasure to write an introduction for a collection of tales by Mr. H. D. Umbstaetter. His stories are "Black Cat" stories, and by such designation is meant much. The field of the "Black Cat" is unique, and a "Black Cat" story is a story apart from all other short stories. While Mr. Umbstaetter may not have originated such a type of story, he made such a type possible, and made many a writer possible. I know he made me possible. He saved my literary life, if he did not save my literal life. And I think he was guilty of this second crime, too.

For months, without the smallest particle of experience, I had been attempting to write something market-

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able. Everything I possessed was in pawn, and I did not have enough to eat. I was sick, mentally and physically, from lack of nourishment. I had once read in a Sunday supplement that the minimum rate paid by the magazines was ten dollars per thousand words. But during all the months devoted to storming the magazine field, I had received back only manuscripts. Still I believed implicitly what I had read in the Sunday supplement.

As I say, I was at the end of my tether, beaten out, starved, ready to go back to coal-shoveling or ahead to suicide. Being very sick in mind and body, the chance was in favor of my self-destruction. And then, one morning, I received a short, thin letter from a magazine. This magazine had a national reputation. It had been founded by Bret Harte. It sold for twenty-five cents a copy. It held a four-thousand-

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word story of mine, "To the Man on Trail." I was modest. As I tore the envelope across the end, I expected to find a check for no more than forty dollars. Instead, I was coldly informed (by the Assistant Sub-scissors, I imagine), that my story was "available" and that on publication I would be paid for it the sum of five dollars.

The end was in sight. The Sunday supplement had lied. I was finished—finished as only a very young, very sick, and very hungry young man could be. I planned—I was too miserable to plan anything save that I would never write again. And then, that same day, that very afternoon, the mail brought a short, thin letter from Mr. Umbstaetter of the "Black Cat." He told me that the four-thousand-word story submitted to him was more lengthy than strengthly, but that if I would give permission to cut it in half, he would im-