

Jack london's to build a fire essay

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Jack London's To Build a Fire To Build a Fire is the story of a man who strives to reach a camp through extreme cold but eventually dies because he is not able to light a fire. At first, the man is unafraid and thoughtless because he has never experienced anything similar before and he does not feel in danger.

He merely thinks that it is very cold: " It certainly was cold, was his thought" (London 2002, p. 143). Gradually his journey proves more and more difficult, and he accidentally wets his feet when the ice cracks beneath him.

He knows he needs to build a fire to dry his feet, but he makes the mistake of building the fire beneath a tree which is covered with snow and the snow extinguishes it. The useless struggle to relight the fire proves the absolute frailty of the character in the story and of man in general. London's character cannot use his numb hands or feet to hold the matches and he can't even kill the dog, as he had planned, to warm himself in its carcass. All the elements are significant, as the man becomes a victim of the environment which completely incapacitates him. The detailed struggle is very significant as the painful endeavors to use his own body point to the extreme feebleness of man, who can only live under very strict conditions, at a certain temperature with a certain amount of oxygen, and so on: " It did not lead him to meditate upon his frailty as a creature of temperature, and upon man's frailty in general, able only to live within certain narrow limits of heat and cold; and from there on it did not lead him to the conjectural field of immortality and man's place in the universe" (London 2002, p. 144).

The protagonist of the story can be said therefore to evolve, from a reckless person to a man who is aware of his own frailty in front of nature. The fact that the instincts of the dog prove stronger than the mind of man and make him more fit for survival, is very ironic. The story ends with the dog going in search of the other " fire-providers": " Then it turned and trotted up the trail in the direction of the camp it knew, where were the other food-providers and fire-providers" (London 2002, p. 146). The dog is fit for survival, although man has the inventiveness and the power to create fire.

Therefore, London's protagonist represents the inventive spirit of mankind which is nevertheless bent by the presence of the natural forces. In the course of the story, the character evolves from a reckless man to one who desperately clings to his chances for survival. References: London, Jack (2002). *The Call of the Wind, White Fang and To Build a Fire*. New York: Modern Library Classics.