



The Jacket, Or the Star Rover

Jack London

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A framing story is told in the first person by Darrell Standing, a university professor serving life imprisonment in San Quentin State Prison for murder. Prison officials try to break his spirit by means of a torture device called "the jacket," a canvas jacket which can be tightly laced so as to compress the whole body, inducing angina. Standing discovers how to withstand the torture by entering a kind of trance state, in which he walks among the stars and experiences portions of past lives. I trod interstellar space, exalted by the knowledge that I was bound on vast adventure, where, at the end, I would find all the cosmic formulae and have made clear to me the ultimate secret of the universe. In my hand I carried a long glass wand. It was borne in upon me that with the tip of this wand I must touch each star in passing. And I knew, in all absoluteness, that did I but miss one star I should be precipitated into some unplummeted abyss of unthinkable and eternal punishment and guilt.



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