CLASSICS LIBRARY · STORY MAP

The Iron Heel

Jack London · *1908 · original English text*

A soft summer wind stirs the redwoods, and Avis Everhard, writing in a peace that feels unreal, waits for a storm. The book is her manuscript, discovered, in the fiction, centuries later, and it breaks off in the middle of a sentence. The hosted text is London's original English, Project Gutenberg #1164, complete as he published it.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

How should a school read a story of oligarchy and revolution, framed as a manuscript from a darker age, without turning the map into a tract, and without missing the human cost the book records?

"The soft summer wind stirs the redwoods, and Wild-Water ripples sweet cadences over its mossy stones."

Chapter I, My Eagle, opening of the manuscript

The Iron Heel is a dystopia and a revolution-story. Avis writes of Ernest Everhard and of an oligarchy that takes the name he gave it. A later historian's foreword already looks back across seven centuries. The manuscript itself ends abruptly; the historian says she must have hidden it before she fled or was captured. Teach the frame, the warning, and the breaking-off, for older students, as London wrote it, not as a program of the library's own.

KEY CHARACTERS

Avis Everhard
The writer of the manuscript, who begins in the redwoods and does not live to finish

Ernest Everhard
Her husband, the socialist leader who names the Iron Heel, and whose end the frame still calls a mystery

The later historian
The voice of the foreword and the closing notes, seven centuries on

The oligarchy
The ruling power the book names the Iron Heel

THE QUIET BEFORE THE STORM

> *"The soft summer wind stirs the redwoods, and Wild-Water ripples sweet cadences over its mossy stones. There are butterflies in the sunshine, and from everywhere arises the drowsy hum of bees."*
>
> Chapter I, My Eagle

> *"This is the end of the Everhard Manuscript. It breaks off abruptly in the middle of a sentence."*
>
> closing footnote of the frame

Grades 10–12
Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01

A Foreword, Seven Centuries On

THE FOREWORD

Before the manuscript, a later historian introduces the Everhard Manuscript as an important document, bristling with errors of interpretation, and already names the Iron Heel as the oligarchy's historic phrase.

- The phrase "the Iron Heel," the foreword says, originated in Ernest Everhard's mind
- The foreword looks back across seven centuries since Avis completed her manuscript
- Keep frame and manuscript distinct when citing; the redwoods sentence is Avis's, not the historian's
- The later voice already knows a long aftermath the manuscript itself cannot finish

02

The Quiet Before the Storm

CHAPTER I, MY EAGLE

Avis begins in a peaceful scene—redwoods, Wild-Water, bees—and is restless. The quiet seems unreal. It is the quiet before the storm.

- The first sentence of the manuscript is exact, including "Wild-Water" and "cadences over its mossy stones"
- "It is so quiet and peaceful, and I sit here, and ponder, and am restless. It is the quiet that makes me restless."
- Ernest Everhard, "my Eagle," enters this life; the personal and the political are already together
- Do not skip the foreword, and do not quote the foreword as if it were Chapter I

03

The Oligarchy Named

THE EARLY AND MIDDLE CHAPTERS

Ernest speaks, organizes, and names the power that is coming down. The oligarchy—the Iron Heel—is not a rumor only. Avis is converted from a more comfortable seeing to a harder one.

- The book is an argument as well as a story; keep both in view
- Jackson's arm, the Philomaths, the bishop's vision belong to this education
- Teach the social conflict as London wrote it, for older students, without turning the map into a pamphlet
- The oligarch class, the book will later say, has a "high ethical righteousness" in its own eyes; that is part of its strength

04

The Manuscript Breaks Off

THE CLOSE OF THE HOSTED FILE

The Everhard Manuscript ends in the middle of a sentence, in the midst of reorganization after a crushed rising. A footnote in the frame says she must have received warning of the Mercenaries, and hidden the manuscript before she fled or was captured.

- "This is the end of the Everhard Manuscript. It breaks off abruptly in the middle of a sentence."
- The historian regrets that she did not live to complete the narrative, and that the mystery of Ernest's execution remains
- Do not invent a last victory the file does not give
- The breaking-off is the book's close; teach it as such

> *"This is the end of the Everhard Manuscript. It breaks off abruptly in the middle of a sentence."*
>
> closing footnote of the frame

05

The Hosted File, and How to Teach It

PG #1164

The hosted text is complete as London published it, original English, 1908. A political novel and a dystopia, for older students.

- Quote Avis's opening from Chapter I, not from the historian's foreword
- The book imagines oligarchy, revolution, and a long night; handle the violence and the doctrine with gravity
- It may be read with other imagined orders of the period, including Herland, as a contrast, not as a pair of programs
- The library's hosting is not an endorsement of London's politics; it is the book, complete, for a prepared class

Oligarchy and Resistance | A Manuscript from a Darker Age | The Quiet Before the Storm | Loyalty in a Long Fight | An Unfinished Record | Courage and Cost

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 10–12

1. The manuscript itself begins: "The soft summer wind stirs the redwoods, and Wild-Water ripples sweet cadences over its mossy stones." A historian's foreword stands first in the file; keep the two voices distinct.
2. The book is a dystopia and a revolution-story, for older students. Teach it as London wrote it, not as a tract of the library's own.
3. The Everhard Manuscript "breaks off abruptly in the middle of a sentence." Do not invent a last victory. The frame says Avis hid the manuscript before she fled or was captured.
4. The phrase "the Iron Heel" is, in the foreword's account, Ernest Everhard's name for the oligarchy.
5. The hosted text is complete as published, PG #1164, original English, 1908.

Quotations are verbatim from the original English text, Project Gutenberg #1164, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/london-the-iron-heel/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.