

## **The Call of the Wild**

by Jack London

(Adapted book. Pre-Intermediate level)

### **Chapter 1. A Caged Animal**

Judge Miller's place was a big house in the sunny Santa Clara Valley with wide grass lawns at the front and trees all around. At the back, there were stables for the horses and small houses for the servants - the people who worked there. There were long walks where grapes grew, orchards full of fruit trees, and fields for the horses. There was also a small swimming pool where Judge Miller's boys swam on hot afternoons.

Buck was different from the other dogs at Judge Miller's place. Some of the dogs, like Toots and Ysabel, were house dogs who stayed inside nearly all the time. Others lived outside in kennels - small houses for dogs. But Buck was not a house dog or a kennel dog. He could go where he wanted. He swam in the swimming pool and went for walks with Judge Miller's daughters. Judge Miller's grandchildren rode on his back and played on the grass with him. On cold nights, Buck lay next to Judge Miller's feet in front of the fire. Buck was king of Judge Miller's place, and he was not afraid of anyone or anything.

Buck's father had been a big St. Bernard, and his mother a shepherd dog, so he too was a big dog. He was much-loved, and he was quietly very proud of himself, but he did not become just a soft house dog. He liked running outside, and swimming, and this outdoor life kept him strong and healthy.

Buck did not know in the fall of 1897 that life had now become very dangerous for every strong, thick-coated dog in America. Men had found gold in the north, and now thousands of them were going there to look for more. These men needed strong, thick-coated dogs that could pull their sleds in the cold. Because he knew nothing about this, Buck

was not worried when Manuel, one of Judge Miller's gardeners, took him out across the orchard one evening. Buck thought they were going for a walk. Judge Miller was not at home that evening, and no one from the house saw Buck leave with the gardener.

Manuel took Buck to the railroad station, where a man was waiting for them. The man talked with Manuel for a moment, and gave him some money. Then Manuel put a thick rope around Bucks neck. No one had ever put a rope around Bucks neck before, but Buck had learned to trust the people he knew. They had always been kind to him, and no one had ever hurt him.

But when Manuel put the end of the rope in the stranger's hands, Buck growled angrily. He did not like the stranger taking the rope, and he wanted to show that he was unhappy about it. To Buck's surprise, the rope was suddenly pulled tight around his neck, so he could not breathe. Angrily, Buck jumped at the stranger, but the man caught him by the neck and threw him onto his back. Then the rope was pulled tighter and tighter. No one had ever done anything like this to Buck before, and he tried to fight against it. He had never felt so angry in his life, but he still could not breathe well. After a few moments, he could not fight anymore. His eyes closed, and he blacked out - he could not think or move.

When Buck could think again, he knew that he was on a train. He had traveled on trains many times with Judge Miller Buck opened his eyes, and when he saw the stranger from the station he became full of proud anger. He felt like a king who had been put in prison.

The stranger tried to hold Buck by the throat again, but Buck was too quick for him. His mouth closed around the strangers hand, and he bit hard. The stranger pulled the rope tight again, but Buck would not open his mouth. He kept biting until he could not breathe.

Later that night, they got off the train and the stranger took Buck to a shed - a small wooden building - at the back of a bar in San Francisco. Another man was waiting for them there, and he threw Buck

into a cage while the stranger looked at his bloody hand. Buck lay in the cage, feeling full of anger. His mouth and throat hurt badly where the man had pulled the rope again and again. He could not understand it. What did they want from him, these strange men? Why were they keeping him in this cage? What was going to happen to him?

In the morning, four men came and moved the cage. They were bad-looking men, and Buck growled and tried to bite them, but it only made them laugh. They put the cage in a wagon - a truck pulled by horses - and for Buck a long trip began. He traveled on a boat first, and then he was put on another train. For two days and nights, Buck traveled in a railroad car, and for two days and nights he had nothing to eat or drink. He was not upset about the food, but he was very thirsty. The thirstier he became, the angrier he became. His throat was still hurting from the rope, and now it was dry too. By the time the train arrived in Seattle, Buck had become a red-eyed, angry animal. He jumped wildly around his cage, growling and barking loudly, and he wanted to kill anyone who came near him. He was no longer the old Buck that Judge Miller had known.

In Seattle, four men took Buck in his cage into a small yard - an area at the back of a house which had a high wall around it. A big man in a red sweater came out to look at Buck, and Buck, barking and biting, threw himself against the side of the cage. The man smiled and went and got an ax and a club - a heavy stick with one thick end.

“You aren’t going to take him out now, are you?” asked one of the four men.

“I am,” replied the man in the red sweater, hitting the cage with his ax.

The four men ran across the yard and climbed to the top of the wall, so they could watch safely. The man in the red sweater hit the cage with his ax again and again, trying to open it. Every time the ax came down, Buck growled angrily and bit at the cage.

“Now, you red-eyed devil,” said the man in the red sweater, when the cage opened at last. He dropped the ax and picked up his club.

Buck really was a red-eyed devil. His hair was standing up, his mouth was open, and his red eyes were full of anger. He had two days and two nights of anger in his body, and he threw himself at the man in the red sweater. But while he was still in the air, something hit his body hard and he fell on his back. He had never been hit by a club and he did not understand. He stood up, growling angrily. Then he threw himself at the man again, and again he was hit to the ground. His anger would not let him stop. Again and again he jumped up, and again and again he was hit down by the man’s club.

There was blood coming from Buck’s nose and mouth and ears, and there were bloody marks on his beautiful coat. As Buck got slowly to his feet one more time, the man in the red sweater hit him hard on the nose. It hurt terribly, and Buck roared like a lion. He attacked the man again, but the man caught him under his mouth and threw him back into the air. Buck fell to the ground on his head, and for a short time, he blacked out.

When Buck woke up, the man in the red sweater touched his head, and then brought him water and meat. Buck drank thirstily, and ate the meat from the man’s hand. The man had won, but Buck was not broken. He now knew that he could not win a fight against a man with a club. He had learned that lesson, and he never forgot it.

Other dogs arrived in the yard over the next few days, in cages and on ropes. Some were angry like him, and others were quiet, but the man in the red sweater became master of them all. As Buck watched, he learned the lesson again and again: a man with a club is a master and a law-maker, and you must do what he tells you.

Sometimes men came to see the man in the red sweater. They gave him money and took away a dog. Buck did not know where the dogs went, but he was always glad when he was not chosen. One day his time came too. A small man called Perrault came to look at the dogs,

and when he saw Buck his eyes lit up. He could see that Buck was special. “That’s one good dog!” Perrault said. “How much?”

“Three hundred dollars,” said the man in the red sweater. “That’s nothing for a dog like that!”

Perrault smiled. Everyone was looking for strong, thick-coated dogs, so they were very expensive now. It was true that three hundred dollars was not a lot of money for such a good dog. He gave his money to the man in the red sweater, and took Buck and another friendly dog called Curly away.

Buck never saw the man in the red sweater again - or Seattle. Perrault took Buck and Curly onto a boat, where they met their other new master, a large dark man called Francois. Buck felt no love for Francois, but he was a good man, and he knew how to work with dogs. Francois had brought two other dogs onto the boat - a sad-faced dog called Dave and a large, white dog called Spitz. Spitz seemed friendly at first, but Buck soon learned that while Spitz was smiling, he was planning something mean - and at their first meal Spitz took some of Buck’s food. Dave was not interested in anything. He did not go near the other dogs, and he did not like them to go near him. One day the ocean was very rough, and the boat went crazily up and down. Buck and Curly were frightened and they barked and ran around like wild animals. Dave just looked up at them, a little annoyed, and then went back to sleep.

Day and night the boat moved on through the ocean. Every day was the same. But Buck could feel that it was getting colder, and one morning, the boat stopped moving. Everything seemed different and exciting. Buck could feel that something had changed. Francis took the dogs up onto the boat’s deck - the open top part - and when Buck put his feet down, they went into something cold, soft, and white. He jumped back, frightened. There was more of the white stuff falling through the air. Buck opened his mouth and caught some. It was like fire on his tongue for a moment, and then, suddenly, it had gone. Buck could not

understand it. He tried again, and everyone laughed at him. Buck felt embarrassed, but he did not know why. He had arrived in the Northland, and it was his first snow.

## **Chapter 2. Into the Northland**

Buck's first day in Canada, on Dyea Beach, was terrible. Everything here was very different from his quiet life in the sunny Santa Clara Valley, and Buck felt that he was back at the beginning of time. The dogs and men here were not town dogs and men. They were wild, and their only rule was the rule of club and teeth. The dogs did what they were told so that their masters did not hit them, and they fought to stay alive. Buck had never seen dogs fight like these ones.

That first day, Buck learned a lesson that he never forgot. Curly, who was always very friendly, moved toward a husky dog, but the dog jumped at her, biting. In a moment her face was cut open from her eye to her mouth, and a big group of huskies ran up to Curly and stood watching. Buck saw them, mouths open and eyes shining, but he did not understand what they wanted at first. Curly jumped back at the husky who had hurt her, but he pushed her back. She fell to the ground, and suddenly, the other huskies moved forward. This was what they had wanted. They jumped onto Curly, growling and barking, and Buck could no longer see her. He could only hear her terrible cries.

It happened so suddenly that Buck could not believe it. Francois jumped into the circle of blood-hungry dogs, hitting them with his ax. Three other men with clubs helped to send them away. But it was too late. Curly was already dead. Her body lay covered with blood in the snow. Buck saw Spitz watching. Spitz opened his mouth and made a laughing sound, and from that moment, Buck hated him.

After that, Buck often woke up in the night and saw poor Curly's broken body in his head. But he had learned that once you fall to the

ground, you are finished. Well, Buck would make sure that never happened to him.

Another awful thing happened to Buck that first day. Francois put him in a harness and made him pull a sled. It felt very new and strange.

Francois' dogs had to do what he told them at all times. If they did not, he hit them with his whip. Buck had been a king in the Santa Clara Valley, and he did not like being a workdog at first, but he did his best. The other dogs pulling the sled watched Buck carefully and Dave bit Buck's leg when he made a mistake. Spitz was the leader - he was at the front of the dogs - and he could not bite Buck. So Spitz growled angrily at Buck for every mistake, and he pulled hard on the harness so that Buck went the right way. Buck learned easily, and with Spitz, Dave, and Francois teaching him, he was soon making fewer mistakes.

"These three are very good dogs," Francois told Perrault. "That Buck pulls very hard, and he is learning fast,"

Perrault worked for the Canadian government, taking things for them from one place to another, across the snow. He needed good dogs to pull his sled. That afternoon, Perrault brought back two more dogs, both were huskies, called Billee and Joe. They were brothers, but they were as different as night and day. Billee was kind and friendly, but Joe was an angry dog, and he was always growling. When Billee and Joe arrived, Spitz was ready to fight with both of them. He bit Billee and Billee ran away crying, but Joe was not frightened of Spitz. Joe put his ears back and showed his teeth, growling fiercely at Spitz. He looked so terrible that Spitz soon left him alone.

In the evening another dog arrived. He was an old husky with just one eye and his name was Sol-leks, which means The Angry One. Like Dave, Sol-leks asked for nothing and he gave nothing. He only wanted to be left alone. There was just one thing that made Sol-leks angry. He did not like anything near him on the side where he had no eye. Not knowing this, Buck went too close to Sol-leks on the wrong side on that

first day, and Sol-leks bit him on the shoulder. After that, Buck was always careful, and he never had a problem with Sol-leks again.

That first night, Buck had problems sleeping. At first, he went into the tent, which looked warm and well lit, but he was soon sent away by Perrault and Francois. Buck lay down on the snow outside, but there was an icy wind and he could not sleep. Where were the other dogs from the sled team? Buck knew that they were not in the tent. Had they found someplace warm? He went to look for them, but could not find them anywhere. Cold and tired, he walked around the tent until suddenly, his feet went through the snow, and he felt something warm. He jumped back, frightened, but then he heard a friendly little bark. There, in a hole under the snow, lay Billee.

So that was how they did it! Buck had learned another lesson. He found a place for himself, and not without a few problems, made himself a hole. He climbed in, and his body soon made the hole warm. It had been a long, difficult day, and in a few moments he was asleep.

Buck did not wake up the next morning until he heard people moving in the camp. At first he did not know where he was. It had snowed in the night, and his body was now completely covered, so for a moment he felt very frightened. He had never before been trapped - caught in a place that he could not get out of. But all wild animals are frightened of traps. Buck's ancestors - the grandparents of his grandparents - had probably lived in the wild many years before. They had probably fallen into traps and felt terrible fear.

Suddenly, Buck could feel that fear in his blood. He growled fiercely and jumped up out of his hole, sending up a white cloud of snow. When he saw the white camp, he knew immediately where he was. He remembered everything that had happened, from his walk with Manuel to digging the hole the night before.

Perrault brought three more huskies that morning - Dolly, Dub, and Pike - and all nine dogs were put into the harness. I Soon, they were moving up the trail toward Dyea Canyon, pulling the sled. The work



was hard, but Buck found that he did not dislike it. All the dogs seemed happy to work, but Buck was very surprised by Dave and Sol-leks. In the camp, they had not been interested in anything or anyone, but now they were new dogs, changed completely by the harness. They seemed to love their work, and they did not like anything that made the work go badly.

Perrault and Francois had put Buck between Dave and Sol-leks, so that they could teach him. Buck was learning quickly, but every time he made a mistake, Dave still bit him. Buck wanted to bite back at first, but Francois whipped him. So he soon saw that it was better to do what he was told. By the end of the day, he was working so well that Dave was no longer biting him. He was feeling Francois' whip much less too.

It was a hard day. They traveled over deep snow to the great Chilcoot Divide, which opens into the sad and lonely North, and late that night they arrived at the camp on Lake Bennett. Here, thousands of men looking for gold were building boats ready for the spring, when the ice would break up, melt and turn to water. Buck made a hole in the snow and slept deeply. He was tired from the long, hard day.

Perrault had to take some things to Dawson, hundreds of kilometers away. It was a long, difficult journey, and this was just the beginning of it. Day after day, Buck worked hard pulling the sled. Perrault, Francois and their team always left camp in the dark, and when the sun came up, they were already several kilometers up the trail. Perrault went first, pushing down the snow so it was easier for the dogs. He knew the ice well, which was important, because the ice in the fall was very thin and very dangerous.

It was always dark in the evening when the team camped. The dogs ate their fish and then went away to sleep in the snow. Buck was always hungry. He had quickly learned that he had to eat as fast as the other dogs, or they would try to take his food. All the time, he watched and learned.

If you did not change and learn, you would die. One day one of the huskies took some of the men's meat when Perrault was not looking. So the next day, Buck did the same thing. He had never taken anything from anyone in the Santa Clara Valley, but he had already learned that here everything was different. The only rule here was the rule of club and teeth. The man in the red sweater had taught Buck that.

Buck soon became very strong. He ate anything he could find, and his body used every piece of food to become stronger. Buck could see and smell better than ever before. At night he heard the smallest sounds, and he always knew immediately whether they were the sounds of dangerous things or good things. Buck learned to bite the ice out of his feet with his teeth, and to break the ice on a water hole with his front legs. He always seemed to know where the wind would come from, and he always found the warmest place to sleep.

Buck learned these things by watching, but they also came to him from his ancestors. Buck's ancestors had run wild with other dogs in the forests, and had caught and killed their own meat. Sometimes, on cold nights, Buck put his nose up to the sky and howled like a wolf. Buck's ancestors had howled like this before him, and it was like an old song coming through him from them.

### **Chapter 3. The Wild Animal Grows**

Life on the trail, pulling the sled, was hard. Buck was becoming a good sled-dog, but he was also changing, and the wild animal inside him was growing and growing. Because he was still busy learning, he tried to stay away from fights. He was careful not to show his anger toward Spitz, but Spitz was always trying to start a fight with him. He was worried that Buck would take his place as leader of the sled team. The fight would come one day, and because both dogs were so strong and proud, it could only end with the death of one of them.

One evening, not far into their journey, the team camped at Lake Laberge, under a cliff. It was dark, the snow was coming down, and the wind cut into them like a white-hot knife. Perrault and Francois made a fire on the ice of the lake, and Buck dug a warm hole for himself under the cliff.

Dinnertime came, and Francois brought out fish for the dogs. Buck was so warm in his hole that he did not want to leave it. But he was hungry, so he ate his food. When he went back to his hole he found that there was another dog in it. A growl told him that the dog was Spitz. Buck had always tried not to fight with Spitz, but this was too much. The wild animal inside him roared, and he jumped angrily on Spitz. Then the two dogs ran out of the hole, ready to fight. It seemed that the terrible day had come.

While Spitz and Buck were running in circles around each other, Perrault suddenly shouted. A big group of huskies had arrived in the camp from one of the Native American villages. They could smell food, and they were wild with hunger. Perrault and Francois hit the huskies with their clubs, but one of them already had its head in a food box. The food box fell onto the ice, and in a moment, several village huskies were eating everything up. They howled when the men hit them with their clubs, but they were too hungry to run away.

The other sled-dogs heard the noise and came out of their holes. Buck had never seen dogs like these huskies. They were so thin that he thought their skin would break. Their eyes were wild, and they were mad with hunger. The village huskies ran toward Buck and his team, and the sled-dogs were pushed back against the cliff. There was a terrible noise as the fighting began. Billee was crying, Dave and Solleks were fighting bravely together, and Joe was biting like a devil. Three village huskies jumped at Buck, cutting his head and legs, but Buck bit the throat of one of them. When he felt the warm taste of blood in his mouth, he became even fiercer. He jumped at another husky, but then suddenly felt teeth on his own throat. Spitz was biting him.

Perrault and Francois ran to help their sled-dogs, but the village huskies immediately turned back toward the camp, looking for more food. Buck threw Spitz off, but the village huskies, sent away by the men once more, were coming back toward the sled-dogs. Billee suddenly jumped through the circle of huskies and ran away across the ice. The other sled-dogs followed, but as Buck got ready to jump, he suddenly saw Spitz running toward him. He knew that if he went down now, the village huskies would tear him to pieces. Buck stood strong when Spitz came at him, and then he ran across the ice after the other sled-dogs.

Later, the nine sled-dogs came together in a forest across the lake. The village huskies had not followed them, but the team was badly hurt. One of Billee's ears was cut to pieces, and he cried all night. Joe had lost an eye, and Dolly, who Perrault had brought into the team at Dyea, had a badly hurt leg. All of them were covered in bites and cuts.

The next morning, the sled-dogs walked slowly back to camp, where they found Perrault and Francois looking angrily at their things. The huskies had eaten half their food, and had bitten through the harnesses and Francois' whip. Francois looked down at his poor dogs.

"Oh, my friends," he said quietly. "I hope the bites from those wild huskies don't turn you into mad dogs. What do you think, Perrault?"

Perrault shook his head. Dawson was still more than six hundred kilometers away, and they could not make such a long journey with sick, mad dogs. For two hours, the men worked to fix the harnesses. Then the team left. They were on the hardest part of the trail, and the dogs were all badly hurt. The journey was going to be very difficult.

They went along the Thirty Mile River. The water was wild, and the river was only covered in ice in the quiet places. The river was nearly fifty kilometers long, and the team was on it for six terrible days. Again and again, Perrault, walking at the front, fell through the ice. He held a long stick which he put across the ice to stop him from falling

under the water. But it was terribly cold that week, so every time he fell in, he had to make a fire. He knew that he must dry his clothes, or he would die from the cold.

Once, the sled broke through the ice and Dave and Buck fell into the water. The dogs were half-dead when the men pulled them out, and their coats were covered with ice. Perrault and Francois built a fire and made the dogs run around it until the ice had melted and their coats were dry.

Another time, the ice on the river was broken, and the only way forward was to go up a cliff. Perrault went first, and pulled the dogs up one by one on a rope made from the harnesses. Francois came up last, after the sled, and then they used the rope to get back down on the other side. By nighttime they were back down on the river, but they had only traveled half a kilometer all day.

When they got to Hootalinqua, the ice was a lot stronger. Buck and the other dogs were exhausted - terribly tired - but because they were late, Perrault made them start earlier each day and finish later. Buck's feet were not as hard as the huskies' feet, and they hurt him badly. When they camped every evening, he lay down like a dead dog, and could not even get up for his food. So Francois took the tops off his shoes to make some little shoes for Buck. The shoes made a big difference to Buck's feet. One morning, when Francois forgot Buck's shoes, Buck lay down on his back and put his feet in the air. He would not move without his shoes, and even Perrault, who was normally so serious, had to smile.

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At the Pelly River one morning, they were putting on the harness when Dolly suddenly went mad. She gave a big, long howl, and then jumped at Buck. Buck could see immediately that she was dangerous, and he ran away, fast, with Dolly following him. Buck was running for his life, and he could hear Dolly just behind him, growling madly. He ran for nearly half a kilometer, and then heard Francois calling to him.

He turned back, and when Buck had run past his master, Francois hit Dolly hard on the head with his ax. Buck fell against the sled. He was exhausted and could hardly breathe. Spitz, seeing his moment, jumped on Buck, and bit him hard.

Francois stopped Spitz with the worst whipping the dogs had ever seen.

“He’s a devil, that Spitz,” said Perrault. “One day he’ll kill Buck.”

“That Buck is a bigger devil,” Francois replied. “I watch him all the time. One day he will get angry, and he will eat Spitz up and spit him out on the snow. I know it.”

After this, there was war between Spitz and Buck. Spitz could see that Buck wanted to take his place as leader of the sled team. Most dogs from the south did not work well in camp and on trail. They were too soft, and they died from the work, the cold, and the hunger. Buck was different. He was as strong and clever as a husky, and now, just like Dave and Sol-leks, he had that strange pride that comes to dogs who work in the harness. That pride made the sled-dogs jump up every morning and work hard they last camped at night. It made some dogs work until their last breath, and die happily in their harness. Now Buck had that pride too, and it made Spitz feel worried about his job.

Buck began to make Spitz’s job as leader difficult for him. He started to come between Spitz and the other dogs. When one of the sled-dogs did not get up in the morning, Spitz always got very angry, but now Buck tried to stop Spitz from jumping at them. Dave and Sol-leks did not change, but the other dogs stopped doing what Spitz told them. They became very difficult. They were always fighting, and the team no longer worked together well. Francois knew that there would soon be a big fight between Buck and Spitz. And he knew it would be a fight to the death.

## **Chapter 4. A Born Leader**

In Dawson, there were many men and dogs, all hard at work. All day and night they went up and down the main street in long teams, doing work that horses did in the Santa Clara Valley. Mostly they were husky dogs, and every night at nine, twelve and three o'clock, they sang their night song.

With the Northern Lights burning coldly above, and the land frozen under a coat of snow, the dogs sang of the pain of living. It was a song full of sadness - the same sadness their wild fathers had known, the same fear of the cold and dark. It woke up strong feelings in Buck, and as he sang with them, it took him back to the beginnings of life.

After seven days in Dawson, the team got back onto the Yukon Trail and left for Dyea Beach again. Perrault wanted to make a record trip - to go faster than anyone else that year. The dogs were well rested, the snow on the trail was harder now, and he was not carrying a heavy load. They had a good run on the first two days, but the team was not working well together. Buck had taught the other dogs not to fear Spitz, and now they made all sorts of trouble. One night Pike stole Spitz's fish, another night Dub and Joe fought against him, and Buck himself never went near Spitz without growling fiercely. The dogs fought amongst themselves too, and sometimes the camp was full of barking and howling. Francois whipped them, but as soon as he turned away, they started fighting again. Francois knew that it was Buck who was making trouble, but Buck was always too clever to get caught.

Near the River Tahkeena one night, Dub dug up a rabbit, but the rabbit got away. Immediately the team was after the rabbit, barking and howling, and fifty police dogs who were camped nearby soon joined the chase. The rabbit ran for its life down the river, with the dogs close behind. Buck was at the front, growling hungrily as he ran. He was driven forward by that need from old times to kill with his own teeth, to wash his nose in warm blood. He felt the life running through his body as he flew along under the stars.

Suddenly Spitz ran away from the other dogs. As they followed the river around a long bend, he went across the land and came to the river again ahead of them. The rabbit saw Spitz's large, white shape ahead, but it could not turn back. As Spitz's white teeth broke its back, it gave a terrible, loud cry. Hearing this sound of dying life, the other dogs barked and howled hungrily, but Buck did not make a sound. He ran straight at Spitz. He hit him shoulder to shoulder, and the two dogs rolled over and over in the snow.

Spitz, back on his feet, bit Buck on the shoulder and jumped away. Buck knew that this was it. The time had come for their fight to the death. He and Spitz moved around each other in circles, growling, their ears back, and Buck suddenly seemed to remember this from another time. From deep inside him, he remembered the white woods, and the moonlight, and the excitement of the fight. In the whiteness, everything was quiet. Nothing moved, only the breaths of the other dogs rising in the cold air as they watched, eyes shining.

Spitz was a good fighter. He had fought and won against all kinds of dogs across the Northland. Now, every time Buck tried to bite his neck, Spitz bit back. Again and again, Buck tried to bite Spitz's snow-white neck, and every time Spitz bit back and jumped away. Buck tried running at him, but Spitz jumped lightly away each time, biting Buck's shoulder.

Spitz was untouched, but Buck was covered with blood and was breathing hard. All the time the silent circle of dogs stood watching, waiting to finish off the dog that went down first. As Buck became tired, Spitz began jumping at him, and once Buck fell over The circle of nearly sixty dogs all got up, ready to move in, but Buck got back on his feet. The fight was not over yet.

Buck had something that could bring greatness - he had a head full of ideas. He fought well with his body, but he could fight with his head too. He ran at Spitz, going toward his shoulder, but at the last moment he jumped low and bit Spitz's left front leg. There was the



sound of breaking bone, and suddenly the white dog was on three legs. Three times Buck tried to jump at Spitz, then he ran in and broke the dog's right front leg too. In terrible pain, Spitz tried to stay standing. He saw the silent circle, eyes shining, tongues out, moving toward him. He had seen it many times before, when he had fought and won against other dogs. But this time it was him who had lost the fight.

Buck could feel the breaths of the other dogs on his back. He jumped in and out, and this time he pushed Spitz down. Buck looked on as the circle closed until he could see Spitz no more. He had made his kill and it felt good.

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“What did I say? I told you that Buck was the biggest devil,” said Francois the next morning when he found that Spitz had gone and Buck was covered in bites and cuts.

“That was one big fight,” said Perrault, as he looked at Bucks back.

“We'll have a good trip now,” said Francois. “No more Spitz, no more trouble.”

While Perrault put everything onto the sled, Francois put the dogs in the harness. Buck walked up to Spitz's place at the front of the team, but his master, not seeing this, put Sol-leks in the leader's place. Buck jumped angrily at Sol-leks, pushing him away and standing in his place.

“Look at that!” Francois laughed. “He killed Spitz, so he thinks he have his job!”

“Go away, Buck,” Francois said, but Buck would not move. Francois pulled Buck from the sled and put Sol-leks back at the front of the team. But as soon as he had done it, Buck again pushed Sol-leks away and took his place.

Francois was angry. He went to get his club and came toward Buck. Buck remembered the man in the red sweater, and he moved away slowly. But when Francois called Buck to go in his old place in front of Dave, Buck moved further away. He wanted to be leader of the

team. Buck had fought for that place, and it was his. He would not be happy with anything less.

Perrault came to help, and for nearly an hour he and Francois tried to catch Buck. Buck did not try to run away, but just moved round and round the camp. He would come only when he had what he wanted. Francois sat down, and Perrault looked at his watch. They were already more than an hour late leaving. They looked at each other: they had lost the fight. Francois put down the club. He took Sol-leks out of the harness and put him back in his old place, then called to Buck. At once Buck moved happily into his place at the front of the team. The harness was put on, they pulled the sled out of the ice, and off they went.

Francois already knew that Buck was a good dog. That day he saw just how special he was. Buck was a born leader. He was even better than Spitz at thinking quickly and doing the right thing immediately. But his greatest strength was in pulling the team together. During Spitz's last days, the other dogs had become difficult and badly-behaved. Now Buck began to change all that. He went at Pike again and again for his laziness, and Joe too quickly learned that Buck was master now. At the Pink Rapids, Perrault bought two huskies called Teek and Koono to replace Spitz. The dogs all began to work as a team again, and Francois could not believe the change.

"I've never seen a dog like that Buck!" he shouted. "He's worth a thousand dollars - what do you say, Perrault?"

Perrault nodded his head and smiled. He could see they really might make their record trip. The trail was good and hard. The run along the Thirty Mile River, which had taken them ten days coming in to Dawson, took them just a day going out. Across more than a hundred kilometers, they flew so fast that the men could not run with the sled and were pulled behind it at the end of a rope. And after only two weeks, they came over White Pass and saw the lights of Skagway below.

It was a record trip, and for three days everyone in Skagway wanted to talk to Perrault and Francois, and see their team. But then

Perrault and Francois were sent away to work in another place. Francois called Buck to him, put his arms around him and cried over him. Then he and Perrault were gone from Buck's life, like all the other men before them.

## **Chapter 5. The Long, Hard Trail**

A Scottish-Canadian man took Buck and his team now, and they started back along the same old trail to Dawson. It was a very different trip this time because they were pulling a big load of letters, and it was hard, heavy work. Buck did not like it, but he had pride in his work, and he made every dog in the team pull hard.

Every day was very much like another. They left in the dark before the sun came up and camped at night. There were a hundred other dogs camping with them, and some of them were fierce fighters. But Buck fought with the fiercest and quickly showed them that he was master. Soon he only had to show his teeth and the other dogs moved away.

After he had eaten in the evening, Buck loved to lie near the fire, watching the orange flames jump and dance. Sometimes he started to think of Judge Miller's big house in the sunny Santa Clara Valley, but then he remembered the man in the red sweater, Curly's death, and the great fight with Spitz. Often as he lay there, watching his new master cook, he dreamed of another, different man. This man was shorter, with longer arms and long hair. He also had hair on his body, and wore nothing but an animal skin. He moved like a cat, as if he was always afraid of something, and he carried a long stick with a big stone on the end.

Sometimes in Buck's dreams, the hairy man slept by the fire, and then Buck saw black eyes in the circling darkness around him. He heard the noise of bodies moving and knew that they were great animals of the night, looking for food. Dreaming there by the fire, these sounds and

sights of another! world sometimes made the hair on Buck's back stand up until he growled softly. Then the Scottish-Canadian man shouted at him, "Hey, you Buck, wake up!" and suddenly the other world was gone and today's world came into his eyes.

It was a hard trip with their heavy load, and when the team arrived in Dawson, they were tired, thin and weak. The dogs really needed a week's rest, but after only two days they were back on the Yukon Trail again with another heavy load. The dogs were still tired and the drivers were not happy. To make things worse, it snowed every day, so the trail was soft and the pulling was hard.

The drivers were good to the dogs, but the dogs were losing their strength. Since the beginning of the winter, they had traveled nearly three thousand kilometers. Buck kept the team working, but Billee cried every night, and Joe was more bad-tempered than ever.

But it was Dave who had the worst time. Something was wrong with him. He became more and more bad-tempered, and always found someplace to sleep as soon as they camped. After he was out of his harness, he did not get back on his feet again until the next morning, and sometimes in the harness he cried out in pain. The driver looked at him, but could find nothing wrong. All the drivers talked about Dave in the evenings, and one night they brought him to the fire, and touched his body in different places. Dave cried out many times. Something was wrong inside, but the drivers could not find any broken bones, and they could not understand it.

When they arrived at Cassiar Bar, Dave was so weak that he kept falling in the harness. The Scottish-Canadian man stopped the team and took Dave out of the harness, putting Sol-leks in his place near the front of the sled. He wanted to let Dave rest, and run next to the sled without pulling it. But Dave hated being taken out, and he cried when he saw Sol-leks in his place. With his pride in the trail, he could not let another dog do his work.

The sled team started to move again, and Dave ran at Sol-leks, biting him and making the sled stop. Crying with pain, Dave tried to jump back into the harness. The driver whipped him to send him away, behind the sled where he could run easily. But he would not go. The driver started the dogs again, but the sled did not move. Dave had bitten through the harness, and was now standing near the front of the sled in his usual place.

He looked at the driver, begging him with his eyes to let him stay there. The driver thought for a moment. Other drivers talked of how some dogs' hearts broke when they were not allowed to work. Some had died when they were taken out of the harness because they were hurt or too old. Dave was going to die, and it was better that he should die where he wanted to be - working. So he was put back in the harness, and he pulled proudly as he always had. Sometimes he cried out in pain, and several times he fell down and was pulled along by the sled.

When they camped that night, the driver made a place for Dave by the fire. In the morning, he could not get up, but he tried to pull himself slowly toward the harness until his strength was finally gone. The last time the rest of the team saw Dave, he was lying in the snow breathing heavily. But they heard him howling sadly until they had gone into a small wood.

Here the sled stopped. The driver walked back toward the camp they had just left, and they heard the sound of a gun- Then the man hurried back. The dogs were told to go forward, and the sled moved off along the trail. But Buck knew, and every dog knew, what had just happened at the camp.

## **Chapter 6. Journey to Death**

Thirty days after they had left Dawson, Buck and his team arrived in Skagway, weak and exhausted. All the dogs had lost weight, Pike and Sol-leks were both limping, and Dub had hurt his shoulder. They were

dead-tired. In less than five months, they had traveled four thousand kilometers, and they needed a good, long rest.

But it was easier for the Scottish-Canadian man to use newly-arrived dogs that were ready to work immediately, and on their fourth day in Skagway, Buck and his team were sold to two men from the States. Charles was a pale, middle-aged man with weak and watery eyes, and Hal was a young man of nineteen or twenty, with a knife and a big gun on his belt. Anyone could see that both men were completely out of place in the Northland.

When Buck arrived with the other dogs at the Americans' camp, he could see at once that these people were not well-organized. The tent was badly put up, the plates were unwashed, and there were things lying everywhere. As well as Charles and Hal, there was also a young woman. Her name was Mercedes and she was Charles's wife and Hal's sister.

Buck watched these people, feeling worried, as they took down the tent and put their things on the sled. They worked slowly, but not sensibly or carefully. When the men put a big bag at the front of the sled, Mercedes told them to put it at the back. Then, after they had moved it and put other things on top, she said that she needed it again.

Three men from another tent came out to watch, smiling to each other and laughing.

"Do you think it will move?" one of the men asked.

"Why wouldn't it?" said Charles, annoyed.

"I was just asking," the man said quickly. "You've got a big load there. It looks very heavy."

Charles turned his back and got the sled ready, then Hal took out his whip. "Mush!" he called to the dogs. "Let's go!" The dogs pushed against the harness for a few moments, then stopped. They could not move the sled.

"Lazy animals! I'll teach them," shouted Hal, getting ready to hit them with his whip.

“No, Hal, don’t!” cried Mercedes, pulling the whip from him. “Poor darlings! You must promise you will be good to them, or I won’t come.”

“You know nothing about dogs,” said her brother. “You have to whip them to make them work. You ask anyone. Ask one of those men.”

Mercedes looked up at the men, who were still watching. “They’re weak as water, if you want to know,” said one of the men. “They need a rest.”

“Rest! Huh!” said Hal, and his whip fell on the dogs. They pushed against the harness with all their strength, but they could not move the sled.

“I don’t care what happens to you,” said the man. “But to help those poor dogs, I’ll tell you that you should break out that sled. It’s frozen in the snow, and you need to push it out.”

Hal did what the man said, and this time Buck and his team were able to pull the sled forward. They moved ahead, trying as hard as they could with the whip coming down on them. But they had not gone far when the road turned and went around a bend into Skagway’s main street. With such a heavy load, it would be difficult even for an experienced driver, but Hal was new to driving dogs. The sled fell over, and half the things came off it. The dogs did not stop. Buck was angry because of the heavy load and the whipping, and he started to run, with the rest of the team following.

“Stop! Stop!” cried Hal, but he fell over and the half-empty, sled went over him. People stopped to watch and laugh as the dogs ran on through the town. Things went flying from the sled and lay all over Skagway’s main street.

Some kind people caught the dogs, picked everything up, and explained a few things to the Americans. They needed a smaller load and more dogs, they were told. Charles and Hal listened unhappily, and then began to take things out of their load. Mercedes cried when things were taken out of her clothes bags and thrown away. She cried about

everything, and said she would not go with them. Then, at last, she stopped crying and began to throw away all their things, even those things that they really needed.

That evening, Charles and Hal went out and bought six new Outside dogs - dogs that were not from the Northland. Together with Buck and his old team, and Teek and Koonaa, the two huskies that had been bought on the record trip, Charles! and Hal now had fourteen dogs. But the Outside dogs knew nothing, and they did not like the harness or the trail, while the old dogs were exhausted. Only the two men were happy - and proud too - because they had never seen another sled with fourteen dogs. They did not know that this was because in the Northland, one sled could never carry enough food for fourteen dogs.

Late next morning, Buck led the long team slowly up the street. He had traveled between Salt Water and Dawson four times now, and his heart was not in the work. The Outside dogs were frightened and nervous, and the old team did not trust their new masters. This woman and these two men did not know anything, and it soon became clear that they could not learn either. They loaded the sled so badly that every day they had to stop more than once to reload it. And it took them so long to put up and take down camp that some days they traveled less than twenty kilometers.

At first, when the exhausted huskies pulled weakly, Hal gave them more food. Mercedes fed the dogs secretly too, so one day, Hal saw that they had used half the dog food and were only a quarter of the way to Dawson.

Now the underfeeding began. Hal started giving the dogs less food, and tried to make them travel further each day. But the dogs could not go faster, and Charles, Hal and Mercedes could not get started earlier in the morning. They did not know how to work the dogs, and they did not know how to work themselves either.

The first to die was Dub. Without rest and care, his bad shoulder got worse and worse until at last, Hal had to shoot him. Outside dogs



were never strong enough to live with very little food, so one by one they also died - all six of them. These three people now saw what Northland travel was really like.

Mercedes stopped crying for the dogs, and started crying for herself and arguing with her brother and husband. The more difficult life became, the more they argued. The great patience of the trail, which comes to men who work hard and stay kind, could not be found by these three people. Every bone in their bodies hurt, and hard words were on their lips from morning till night. While they argued about everything, the camp stayed half made, the fire was not lit and the dogs were not fed.

Mercedes was soft and pretty, and people had always been kind to her, so she found this hard life impossible. She no longer worried about the dogs, and sat on the sled because she was tired. For the dogs, tired and hungry, this new load was too much. Charles and Hal begged her to walk, but she sat in the snow crying and refused to move.

At the Five Fingers, when there was no more dog food left, they sold Hal's gun for some frozen horse skin. It was poor food for the dogs. The skin was so hard that they almost could not eat it, and the horse hair made their stomachs hurt.

Through all this, Buck pulled himself along at the front of the team, feeling as if this were a bad dream. Hal had decided that the dogs should work even harder, and he used the whip and the club to teach them this lesson.

Buck pulled the sled when he could, and when he could not pull anymore, he fell down. But the whip and the club soon made him get back onto his feet. His beautiful coat had lost its shine. The hair hung down, covered in dried blood where Hal's club had hit him, and you could see every bone through his skin. The rest of the team too, were half dead - like bags of bones with a little flame of life burning weakly.

When the sled stopped, they fell down in the harness like dead dogs, and the flame seemed to go out. Then the club or whip came down

on them, the flame lit up weakly and they pulled themselves painfully to their feet.

The day came when Billee, who had always been so kind and friendly, could not get up. Hal hit Billee on the head with his ax, then cut him out of the harness and pulled his body away. Buck saw, and the other dogs saw, and they knew that this thing was very close to them. The next day Koono died too, and only Joe, Pike, Sol-leks, Teek and Buck were left.

## **Chapter 7. Out of the Harness**

It was beautiful spring weather, but neither dogs nor people could see it. Every day the sun came up earlier and went down later, and all day it shone. The silence of the winter was broken by the great soft sound of the land waking up, as things began to live and move again after the long icy months. Trees turned green, birds sang, and from every hill came the sound of running water. Everywhere the snow was melting away, and the branches of the trees were bending and breaking. The sun ate away at the ice on the Yukon River from above, while the river pushed to break free from below.

With life waking up all around them, and the sun beating down, one day Charles, Hal, Mercedes and their team of dogs walked slowly into John Thornton's camp. Mercedes was crying, Hal was shouting, and the dogs dropped down as if they were dead. Charles, his eyes watering, sat down to rest, and Hal walked over to talk to John Thornton.

John Thornton had been camped at the mouth of the White River since December. His feet had become frozen in the winter, so his friends had left him there to get well while they went up the river to get a raft. Thornton was working when the Americans arrived, cutting an ax handle from a piece of wood. He knew immediately what these people

were like. Hil asked him what he thought about the trail. But Thornton knew that Hal would not listen to anything he said.

“The ice is breaking,” Thornton told him. “The bottom of the trail will fall out at any moment.”

“They told us that up above,” replied Hal. “They told us we wouldn’t get to White River, but here we are!”

“They were right,” said Thornton. “You’ve only got here with the luck of fools. I’ll tell you honestly, I wouldn’t go onto that ice for all the gold in the Northland.”

“That’s because you’re not a fool, I suppose,” said Hal. “Well, we’re going on to Dawson.” He took out his whip. “Get up, Buck! Get up! Mush!”

Thornton knew that you could not stop a fool, and he went on cutting his ax handle. But Hal could not get his team started. As the whip bit into the dogs, left and right, John Thornton breathed in. Solleks pulled himself up first, then Teek, and then came Joe, crying with pain. Pike fell twice and then got up at last. But Buck did not move. He lay quietly where he had fallen. The whip bit into him again and again, but he did not cry or fight against it. Several times Thornton nearly spoke, but he stopped himself. Hal now took out his club, and hit Buck hard, but Buck still refused to move.

Like the other dogs, he could hardly move, but unlike them, he had decided not to get up. He had felt the thin ice breaking under his feet all day. He could feel that something terrible was going to happen, up ahead on the ice, where his master was trying to send him. He was so tired and weak that the club did not hurt him much. As Hal hit him again and again, the little flame of life inside him died down. He could no longer feel anything; he just heard the noise of the club hitting his body.

Then, suddenly, with a noise like the cry of an animal, John Thornton jumped on the man who held the club. Hal was thrown back, and Mercedes screamed, while Charles watched with his watery eyes.

John Thornton was almost too angry to speak.

“If you hit that dog again,” he said at last, “I’ll kill you.”

“Its my dog,” Hal replied as he moved back toward Buck, with blood on his mouth. “Get out of my way. I’m going to Dawson.”

Thornton was standing between Hal and Buck, and he did not move. Hal took out his knife, and Mercedes screamed again. Thornton hit Hals hand with the wooden ax handle and the knife fell to the ground. He hit Hal’s hand again when he tried to reach for it. Then he picked the knife up himself, and quickly cut Buck out of the harness.

Hal had no fight left in him, and he could see that Buck was too near death to pull the sled. A few minutes later, the team went off down the river, and Buck lifted his head to watch. Pike was leading, and Joe, Teek and Sol-leks were behind, all of them limping and falling. Mercedes was sitting on the sleds with Hal walking at the front and Charles following behind.

As Buck watched them, Thornton sat down next to him and, with kind hands, felt his body for broken bones. There were none, just terrible cuts from the club and whip on a body that had not had enough food for weeks. The sled was almost half a kilometer away now, and Buck and Thornton watched it going slowly over the ice. Suddenly, they saw the back of the sled drop down, and heard Mercedes scream. They saw Charles turn around and try to run back. Then the ice all around the sled fell in, and in a moment, the dogs and people were all gone. There was nothing left - just a big hole in the ice. The bottom had fallen out of the trail.

John Thornton and Buck looked at each other.

“You poor devil,” said John Thornton, and Buck licked his hand.

\* \* \*

John Thornton had still been limping a little when Buck arrived in his camp, but with the warm weather, he was soon moving easily again. Here, lying by the river through the long spring days, watching the water and listening to the songs of birds, Buck too slowly won back his strength.

The long rest felt very good after traveling nearly five thousand kilometers. John Thornton had two other dogs, Nig, a big black dog with eyes that laughed, and Skeet, a little Irish setter. Skeet made friends with Buck at the beginning, when he was too weak to fight her away. She washed and cleaned his cuts every day like a mother cat washing her kittens. Slowly the cuts got better, and Buck's body began to grow healthy and strong again.

Buck was surprised to find that Skeet and Nig did not seem to be jealous of him. As he got stronger, they made him play all sorts of games, which Thornton joined in with too. Suddenly Buck found that he had a new life. He felt love - real love - for the first time. For Judge Miller, in the Santa Clara Valley, he had felt friendship, but for John Thornton he felt wild, burning love.

This man had saved his life, but he was also the perfect master. His dogs were like children to him, and he never forgot a kind word for them. He loved to sit down with them for a long talk. But what Buck loved more than anything was when John Thornton put Buck's head between his hands, with his own head on top, and moved their heads from side to side. Sometimes, when Thornton did this, Buck felt so happy he thought his heart would fall out of his body. Then, when it was finished, he would jump to his feet, his mouth laughing. And John Thornton would look at him and say, "Well! You can almost speak!"

To show his love, Buck would take Thorntons hand in his mouth and press his teeth gently into it. But while Skeet and Nig were always waiting for Thornton to touch them, most of the time Buck was happy just to lie and watch him. Buck watched for hours, looking into Thornton's face for every thought, and following every move. Sometimes, John Thornton would feel Buck's eyes on him, and turn and look at him, his heart shining out of his eyes.

Buck hated it if he could not see John Thornton. He was afraid that Thornton would go out of his life like Perrault, Francois and the Scottish-Canadian man. Often at night, he would wake up full of fear.

Then he would get up and walk through the cold to the tent, where he would listen outside for the sound of his master's breathing.

But Buck's great love for Thornton did not make him soft. He was an animal of the wild that had come in to sit next to Thornton's fire, not a soft Southland dog. He would not steal things from John Thornton, but he would take things from any other man in any other camp. Skeet and Nig were too tempered to fight, but Buck still fought as fiercely as ever with any new dog. He gave no mercy - he never stopped once he had started a fight to the death. He had learned his lesson well: kill or be killed, eat or be eaten.

Buck still felt the past living in him, and when he sat by John Thornton's fire at night he felt every kind of dog behind him. Half-wolves and wild wolves were all there like shadows in the dark, tasting the meat he ate, thirsty for the water he drank. They smelled the wind with him, lay down to sleep with him and dreamed with him.

These shadows seemed to pull him away, and often in his mind he heard a call from deep in the forest. Then he left the fire and ran into the trees. He did not know where he was going or why. But he ran on, deep into the forest, until his love for John Thornton pulled him back to the fire again.

## **Chapter 8. For the Love of a Man**

John Thornton was the only person Buck was interested in, and he was unfriendly toward other men he met. When Thornton's friends, Hans and Pete, arrived with their raft, Buck refused to go near them at first. Once they began traveling, and Buck saw that the men were close to Thornton, he let them touch him. But while Skeet and Nig enjoyed Hans and Pete's touch or kind words as much as Thornton's, Buck would do things only for his master.

"I'm sorry for the man who tries to fight with you when Buck's around," Pete told Thornton once.

Before the end of that first year Pete's fears were shown to be correct. One night at a bar in Circle City, Thornton tried to stop a bad-tempered man called Burton from arguing with another man. When Thornton tried to come between them. Burton hit him and Thornton fell back against the bar.

There was a noise that was more of a roar than a bark or howl, and Buck jumped up onto Burton, trying to bite his throat. Burton put up his arm, but he was thrown to the floor with Buck on top of him. Buck bit the man's throat again, and this time tore it open. The crowd in the bar pulled Buck away, and while a doctor helped Burton, Buck walked up and down growling fiercely. Everyone agreed that Buck had had a good reason to jump at Burton, and he was allowed to go free. But from then on, Buck's name was known in every camp in Alaska.

Later that fall, Buck had to help John Thornton again. Hans, Pete and Thornton were trying to take a boat through some dangerous rapids - parts of a river where water goes very fast over the rocks. Thornton was in the boat, and Hans and Pete were on the river bank, pulling the boat along carefully on ropes. Suddenly, at a very difficult part of the rapids, Hans pulled his rope a little too hard, the boat went over and Thornton was thrown into the water. He was carried fast down the river toward the worst part of the rapids, where they could see clearly that he would drown.

Buck jumped in immediately and swam to Thornton. With Thornton holding onto his tail, Buck swam toward the bank, but they were being pulled down the river too fast. They could hear the roar of wild water crashing over rocks up ahead, and they could feel the river pulling them toward it. Thornton knew that they would be pulled into the wild water before they could reach the riverbank together. As he crashed hard against a large rock, he let go of Buck and held onto it with both hands. "Go, Buck! Go!" he shouted above the roar of the water.

Hearing Thornton shouting, and seeing him holding onto the rock, Buck swam with all his strength toward the bank. The fast water was

still pulling him down the river, and he reached the riverbank just in time. Hans and Pete pulled him out. They all knew that Thornton could not hold onto the rock for long, and they ran back along the bank. There, up-river from Thornton, Hans and Pete tied a rope around Buck's neck and shoulders, and put him back into the water. Buck swam down the river toward Thornton, but he had not gone into the fastest part of the river, and could not get close enough to his master. Hans pulled Buck back to the bank, and the men helped him out. He was half-drowned, but when he heard Thornton's voice coming from the river, he jumped to his feet. He knew that his master was close to death, and he ran ahead of the men back up-river.

Once more Buck jumped in with the rope tied around him, but this time he went straight into the fastest part of the river. He was not going to make the same mistake again. The water took Buck straight to Thornton, who threw his arms around the dog's neck. Hans pulled the rope in, and crashing against the rocks and along the river bottom, Buck and Thornton I were brought to the bank.

When they were pulled out of the water, Buck and Thornton were both half-drowned. Hans and Pete took hold of Thornton, getting the water out of his body and the breath in. As soon as he could open his eyes, Thornton looked for Buck. Buck was lying as if dead, with Nig howling next to him and Skeet licking his wet face and closed eyes. Once Buck could open his eyes and move again, Thornton looked carefully at his body. He had three broken ribs.

"We'll camp right here, then," said Thornton. And there the group stayed, until Buck's ribs were better and he was well enough to travel.

\* \* \*

That winter, at Dawson, Buck did another incredible thing. Thornton had found himself in a bar with some men who were talking about the things their dogs could do. One man said that his dog could start a sled with a two-hundred-kilogram load, then a second said his dog could start three hundred kilos.



“That’s nothing,” said John Thornton. “Buck can start five hundred kilos.”

“And break it out? And pull it for a hundred meters?” asked Matthewson, one of the men.

“And break it out and pull it for a hundred meters,” said John Thornton.

“Well,” said Matthewson, loudly and slowly, putting a big bag of gold on the table. “Here’s a thousand dollars. I’ll give it to you if he can do it. And if he can’t, I’ll take a thousand dollars from you.”

Nobody spoke. Thornton could feel the blood coming up in his face. He could not believe what he had just said. He did not know if Buck could start a five-hundred-kilo load. Five hundred kilos! He did not even have a thousand dollars. All the men in the bar were watching him, silent and waiting.

“I’ve got a sled outside now with twenty-five twenty-kilo bags of flour on it,” Matthewson went on. “A five-hundred-kilo load. So don’t let that stop you.”

Thornton did not reply. He looked from face to face, and suddenly saw an old friend, Jim O’Brien. O’Brien had made a lot of money from gold, and the sight of his face made Thornton do something he would never normally do.

“Can I borrow a thousand dollars?” Thornton asked him, almost in a whisper.

“Sure,” said O’Brien, putting a big bag of gold next to Matthewson’s. “But I’m sorry, John, I can’t believe the dog can do it.”

Everyone from the bar came out into the street to watch, and bets were taken. Matthewson’s sled, loaded with flour, had been standing in the cold for a while, and it was frozen hard into the snow. None of the men believed that Buck could start it. Now that Thornton looked at the sled, with its normal team of ten dogs lying in front, the idea seemed impossible.

The team of ten dogs were taken out of the harness, and Buck took their place. He could feel the excitement, and he understood that he had to do something for John Thornton. The men all said that Buck was an amazing dog when they saw him. His coat shone, the hair on his neck and back stood up and his muscles showed through his skin, hard and strong.

Then, the crowd fell silent. Everyone could see that Buck was an incredible animal, but twenty-five twenty-kilo bags of flour was too much for any dog, and no one wanted to bet on him. Thornton went to Buck, took his head in his hands and whispered in his ear. "Because you love me, Buck. Do this because you love me." Buck took Thornton's hand in his mouth, pressed it with his teeth and then let go. Then, Thornton moved away.

"Now, Buck," he said.

Buck moved forward a little, then back, then pulled suddenly to the right. There was the sound of ice breaking from under the sled. Again Buck pulled, this time to the left, and the sled moved a little. Buck had broken it out.

"Now, MUSH!" cried Thornton, and Buck threw himself forward. Head down, body almost on the ground, and feet flying, Buck pulled. The sled moved a little, stopped, then moved again. Then at last it started to move slowly forward. The men could not believe it. They had put some wood a hundred meters away to show where the sled had to go to. As the sled began to go faster, Thornton ran behind it, calling to Buck. When the sled came near the wood, a cheer grew up from the men. When Buck went past the wood and then stopped, the cheering turned into a roar. Men threw their hats in the air, full of excitement at what they had just seen.

Thornton fell on the ground next to Buck. He placed a hand on each side of the dog's head, put his face close to Buck's and pulled the dog from side to side.

“Look at that! I’ll give you a thousand dollars for him - no, twelve hundred!” said one of the men, running up to Thornton.

Thornton stood up. His eyes were wet, and there were tears running down his cheeks. “No, sir,” he said. “No, thank you.” Buck took Thornton’s hand in his teeth, and Thornton pushed his body around again. The other men moved away. They could feel that there was something so special between this man and his dog that no one should come between it.

## **Chapter 9. The Sound of the Call**

Because Buck won sixteen hundred dollars for John Thornton that day, Thornton now had enough money to travel east with Hans and Pete to look for a lost gold mine. There were many stories about this mine, and many men had looked for it. Only a few had found it, and more than a few had gone looking and never come back. But people said that the gold from this mine was better than any of the gold in the rest of the Northland.

So John Thornton, Hans and Pete, with Buck and a few other dogs, traveled up the Yukon River with sleds and then on up the Stewart River. John Thornton was not afraid of the wild. He only needed his gun, and then he could go where he liked and stay for as long as he wanted. He hunted for his dinner during the day, and if he did not find it, he kept traveling. He knew that sooner or later he would find something to eat.

Buck loved this life - hunting, fishing and moving from place to place. For weeks they traveled every day, and then for weeks they camped in the same place. While the dogs rested, the men burned holes in the frozen ground and washed pans | of dirt over the fire, looking for gold. Sometimes they were hungry, and sometimes, if the hunting was good, they had lots to eat.

Summer came, and the dogs and men carried the teams load on their backs, and traveled backward and forward across] the great empty land. They rafted across blue mountain lakes and went up and down unknown rivers in small boats cut from the trees. They camped above the woods on mountains under the midnight sun, then came down into summer valleys full of flies, and picked strawberries and flowers there.

That fall, they came to a strange lake country, sad and silent, where there was no life. They traveled on for months and months, through another winter. Once, they found an old trail through the forest, and they thought it would take them to the lost mine. But the trail began nowhere and ended nowhere. Another time, they found a fallen-down hunting cabin - a little house made from wood - and, among some old blankets, a gun. But there was nothing else. They would never know who had built that cabin and left his gun there under the blankets.

Spring came once more, and they found, not the lost mine, but a stony place in a wide valley where the gold showed like yellow butter on the bottom of the men's pans. They did not need to go anywhere else. Every day, the men worked, collecting gold that they could sell for thousands of dollars. They built a small, simple cabin, and every day they filled moose-skin bags with gold and put them along the walls of the cabin.

The dogs had very little to do now, and Buck spent many hours dreaming in front of the fire. More and more often now, he dreamed about the short, hairy man, and sometimes in Buck's thoughts he went with the man into that other world that he remembered. The most important thing about that other world was fear. Sleeping next to the fire or walking by the sea or through the forest, the hairy man was always listening, looking and smelling the air. He was always ready to run, or to climb the trees to stay safe.

With these dreams came also the call from the deep forest that Buck had heard before in his head. The call made him feel a strange, sweet happiness. It made him feel that he was looking and waiting for

something, without knowing what it was. Sometimes he followed the call into the forest. He pushed his nose into the long grasses and breathed in the fat smells of the earth, or lay for hours behind fallen trees, watching and listening. Something made him do these things, and he did not know what or why.

Sometimes when he was lying in the camp, Buck suddenly lifted his head and put his ears up, listening. Then, he jumped up and ran through the forest for hours. He loved to run down dried-up rivers and watch the birds in the woods, but more than anything, he loved to run in the soft light of the summer midnights. He ran listening to the sounds of the forest, and looking for whatever it was that called to him.

One night, Buck woke up suddenly, his hair standing up on the back of his neck. From the forest he could hear the call, more clearly this time than ever before. It was a long howl, like the noise made by a husky dog, but different too. It was like a sound that he had heard before, and he felt that he knew it. He jumped through the sleeping camp and ran silently through the woods. As he came closer to the cry, he went more slowly until he came to an open place among the trees. There, looking out, he saw a wolf sitting back with its nose pointed to the sky.

Buck had made no noise, but the wolf stopped howling and started to smell the air. Buck moved forward slowly, his body low on the ground. He was showing with every move that he was ready to be friendly or to fight. But when the wolf saw Buck he ran away at once. Buck followed, jumping wildly, wanting to stay with him. He followed him along a river bed until they came to a place where trees had fallen, and the wolf was trapped. He turned around, biting and growling, but Buck did not fight. He moved around the wolf in circles, making friendly moves toward him. The wolf was afraid, and ran away once more. But Buck followed him again and again, moving around him each time until he was trapped.

At last, Buck got what he wanted. Seeing that Buck did not want to hurt him, the wolf finally put his nose against Buck's. Then, they became friendly and played, and after some time the wolf began running again. This time he showed Buck that he wanted him to come with him. They ran side by side in the soft light up the river, into the gorge from where it came, and on through a flat land with great forests and many streams. For hour after hour they ran by the side of these small, cool rivers, as the sun rose higher and the day became warmer. Buck was wildly happy. He knew that at last he was answering the call, running with his wild brother to the place from where the call must surely come. He had done this before, he knew, somewhere in that other world. Now he was doing it again, running free with the soft earth underfoot and the wide sky above.

They stopped by a stream to drink, and Buck remembered John Thornton. He sat down. The wolf started moving forward again, then came back to him, wanting Buck to follow. But Buck turned around and started going slowly back. For nearly an hour, the wolf ran by his side, crying softly. Then he sat down, pointed his nose up and howled. It was a sad howl, and Buck heard it grow quieter and quieter as he traveled back to the camp.

John Thornton was eating dinner when Buck returned. Buck jumped on him, wild with love, pushing him to the ground and pressing his hand with his teeth. For the next two days and nights, Buck never left camp, and followed Thornton everywhere. He followed him while he worked. He watched him while he ate. He saw him get into his blankets at night and out of them in the morning. But after two days, the call from the forest began to pull him away more than ever. Buck could not forget running with his wild brother through the great forests up above the river. He began to go into the woods once more, but the wild brother did not come back.

Buck began to sleep outside at night, staying away from the camp for days at a time. Once he went back up the gorge into the land of forests and streams, and stayed there for a week, looking for the wild brother. He killed his meat as he traveled, and fished in the streams. Near one stream, he killed a big, black bear, in a terrible fight that showed the fierceness he still had hidden inside him.

Buck's hunger for the taste of blood was stronger now than ever before. He was a killer, living by eating the animals that he caught. Buck was living life at its best in a hard world where only the strongest could stay alive. He was intelligent and clever at getting what he wanted, and he had learned many difficult lessons during his hard life in the Northland. All these things made him as great and strong as any wild animal. His body was working perfectly. When he saw or heard something, he could jump toward it or away from it twice as fast as any husky dog. His muscles were as strong as iron, and every part of him was full of life.

Every time Buck left camp and went into the forest, he became at once a thing of the wild. He would kill a rabbit as it slept, and catch in mid-air the chipmunks that jumped a little too late into the trees. Even fish were not too quick for him.

When the fall came, there were more moose in the forest, moving slowly down from the mountains to spend the winters in the warmer valleys below. Buck had already killed a baby moose, but now he wanted a more difficult fight. One day, near the top of the river, he saw a group of twenty moose, and among them a great bull - a male moose.

The bull stood nearly two meters above the ground, with great wide antlers, and he roared angrily when he saw Buck. He had the arrow of a Native American hunter in his back, and because he was hurt, he was bad-tempered and full of hate.

Buck wanted to get the bull away from the herd - the group of moose - and he jumped about in front of it, barking, so that it could not

move forward. Then, when it became so angry that it ran at Buck, he moved away quickly. At first, when he did this, two or three of the younger bulls ran at Buck so that the great bull could move forward with the rest of the herd. But Buck was patient, and after half a day, he was still stopping the great bull from moving forward. The sun was going down, and the younger moose knew that they had to move to lower ground.

At last, the herd moved away, while the great bull stood and watched them leave. He could not follow, because in front of him jumped around this terrible animal who would not let him go. From then on, day and night, Buck never left the bull, and never allowed it to eat, drink or rest. The moose's head dropped lower, and it became weaker and weaker. It began to stand a lot, with its nose to the ground, and Buck had more time to rest and drink. At these moments, watching the bull carefully, it seemed to Buck that he could feel a change in the land. Just as the moose were coming into the land, other kinds of life were too, and the forest and stream and air seemed to tell of it. He could hear nothing and see nothing, but he knew that the land was different and that strange things were happening.

At last, at the end of the fourth day, Buck pulled the moose down. For a day and a night he stayed next to the dead animal, eating and sleeping. Then, rested and strong, he started back to the camp. As he traveled, he could feel more and more strongly the change in the land. There was life here that was different from the life that had been here in the summer. It was not just a feeling that told him this now. The birds sang of it, the squirrels talked about it and even the wind whispered of it. Several times he stopped and smelled the morning air, then moved forward faster than before. He could feel that something terrible was going to happen, or had happened already.

As he came nearer to the camp, Buck came upon a new smell, which led straight toward the little cabin, and John Thornton. His nose was telling him a story, of which only the ending was still unknown.



There was silence in the forest - the birds had gone, and the squirrels were hiding.

As he moved along silently, another smell suddenly pulled him away. He followed it under some trees, and there he found Nig lying dead, with an arrow in each side of his body. Further on, Buck found one of the other sled-dogs crashing around half-dead. He moved around it without even stopping. He could hear the sound of voices coming from the camp. Moving forward slowly, his body low to the ground, he found Hans lying on his face, his body covered in arrows. At the same moment, where the cabin had once been, Buck saw something that made the hair jump up on his neck and shoulders. Anger ran through him, and he forgot about being clever or thinking carefully. Because of his great love for John Thornton, he lost his head.

The Yeehats, a tribe of Native Americans, were dancing around the broken-down cabin when they heard a terrible roar. In a moment, they saw an animal like none they had ever seen before running toward them. Buck jumped at the first man he saw, tearing his throat open, then with another jump he quickly did the same to a second. There was nothing the Yeehats could do. Buck jumped around among them, biting, cutting and tearing. He moved so fast that their arrows went past him and they shot each other. Finally, in terrible fear, they ran into the woods, with Buck still roaring at their feet and pulling them down as they ran.

When the Yeehats had gone, never to come back, Buck returned to the empty camp. He found Pete where he had been killed in his blankets. The smell of every moment of Thornton's terrible fight took Buck to the edge of a deep pool. There, her head in the water, lay Skeet, who had stayed with her master to the end. The pool was dirty, and Buck could see nothing in it, but he knew that John Thornton lay there. He knew this because he had followed Thornton's smell into the water, and no smell came away from it.

All day Buck stayed by the pool or walked around the camp. He already understood what death was, and he knew that John Thornton was dead. It left a feeling of emptiness inside him, a hunger that no food could take away. But at times, when he looked at the bodies of the Yeehats, he forgot his pain and felt great pride. He had killed men, and it had been easier than killing a husky dog. He would not be afraid of men now, unless I they had arrows or clubs.

Night came, and as the moon rose high above the trees into the sky, Buck could feel that there was more new life in the forest. He stood up, listening and smelling. From far away, he heard barking, coming closer and louder. It was something he had heard in that other world. It was the call, pulling him away more strongly than ever. And as never before, he was ready to go. John Thornton was dead. There was nothing stopping him now.

A pack - or group - of wolves had come down from the land of forests and streams into Buck's valley to hunt for meat. As they came into the open space where the camp had been, Buck was waiting for them. They were afraid when they saw him, so big and still. One of them jumped at him, but Buck broke its neck, and fought away three more wolves. The pack moved toward him together now, but standing on his back legs, biting and cutting, he was everywhere at once. He moved so quickly that the wolves could not jump onto him, and at last they moved away a little, afraid.

Then one wolf, long and gray, came forward carefully, in a friendly way. It was the wild brother that Buck had run with for a night and a day. He was making soft noises, and as Buck made a sound in return, they touched noses.

An old wolf came forward now, and Buck smelled his nose. Then the old wolf sat down, pointed his nose at the moon and howled a long wolf howl. The others howled too, and now Buck knew that this was the call. He too sat down and howled. Then, as the wolves jumped away

into the woods, he ran with them, side by side with the wild brother, barking as he ran.

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After a few years, the Yeehats saw a change in the wolves in that part of the country. Some of them now had brown on their heads and nose, with white on their fronts. The Yeehats also talk about a Ghost Dog, who runs at the front of the pack, and who is more cunning than the other wolves. The Ghost Dog takes things from their camps and kills their dogs, but even their best hunters cannot catch it. Some hunters who go after it never come back, and others are found with their throats torn open.

Every fall, when the Yeehats follow the moose from the mountains to lower ground, there is one valley that they never go into. But they do not know that every summer there is one visitor to that valley. It is a great animal with a beautiful coat, like the other wolves, but different from them too. He comes down alone from the land of forests and streams, into an open space among the trees where a yellow stream runs from old moose-skin bags into the ground. He stays here for a time, howling once, long and sadly, before he goes.

But he is not always alone. When the winter comes, and the wolves follow their meat down to the lower valleys, he runs at the front of the pack in the silver moonlight. And his great throat sings a song of the younger world, which is the song of the pack.

- THE END -

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