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# THE CALL OF THE WILD WHITE FANG

Jack London



# The Call of the Wild

## White Fang



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(英语原文本)

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## *Introduction*

Among writers of his generation, Jack London (1876—1916) probably had the most dramatic career. Pulling himself up from the bottom of society, he became the first millionaire author in America by sheer will and hard work. Though he professed to be a socialist and declared "class war" on the capitalist system, he heartily enjoyed all that money could buy and squandered several fortunes like a true hedonist. The most popular writer of his time, he wrote too much too hurriedly: a total of forty-eight books within the short span of sixteen years (nineteen novels, eighteen books of short stories and articles, three plays and eight autobiographical and sociological books). As a result, some of his polemic work soon became dated and his fame declined after his death. Yet, discarding the "potboilers" and sifting through the confused ideology, today's readers the world over still find London's best books full of vigor and meaning, and look upon him as one of their best-loved American writers.

Jack London was born in San Francisco on January 12, 1876, the illegitimate son of an itinerant astrologer of Irish descent and a mother who earned her living as a spiritualist. When Jack was eight months old, his mother married John London, a mi-

grant worker of English extraction, and named the boy John Griffith London. From the time little Jack began to notice things, there never was economic security in the family. At the age of ten, he was selling newspapers in the streets. Before he turned thirteen he had left school to win bread for the family. As he recalled later, "My place in society was at the bottom. Here life offered nothing but sordidness and wretchedness, both of the flesh and the spirit ..." (*What Life Means to Me, The Cosmopolitan*, 1906) Nevertheless, young Jack, who had inherited his father's strong physique, imaginative brains and good looks, was "early resolved to climb". Whether fighting for his newspaper routes in 'Frisco or raiding oyster beds in the Bay, whether sailing on a sealing cruise to the Far East or camping among goldminers in the Klondike, young Jack always won out by dint of his prowess, wits and sheer brute force. "Exulting in my young life, able to hold my own at work or fight, I was a rampant individualist ... I was a winner." (*How I Became a Socialist, The Comrade*, 1903)

Despite such bravado, however, he found he could not climb up the social ladder by physical strength. Fourteen hours' work a day left him too tired to do anything else, sailing was interesting but unprofitable; and not everyone found an El Dorado in Alaska. He resolved to make up for his loss of formal education and try his hand at writing. He finished high school in one year and went on to study at the University of California for a semester; he read voraciously, from literary classics to popular stories, from Locke, Hobbes and Hume to Spencer, Nietzsche and Marx; he wrote short sto-

ries for fifteen hours a day and sent them steadily to all kinds of magazines, which as steadily rejected them until *To the Man on Trail* was accepted by a magazine in San Francisco in 1898. When his first collection of short stories *The Son of the Wolf* was published in 1900, Jack London was well on his way to fame and fortune.

*The Call of the Wild* (1903), which established London's reputation as an author, is generally regarded as the best of his novels. It was written at a time when London was in the throes of one of his not infrequent periods of depression, and was meant to be a tale of 4,000 words. When the "quota" was completed in four days, the writer was surprised to find that the story had only just begun and was carrying him far beyond the original theme and scope. So he wrote on and on, totally absorbed in the fate of Buck, a cross between a St. Bernard (a powerful, intelligent dog originally bred to rescue travellers lost in the Alpine snows) and a Scottish sheep dog (known for its cleverness and agility). When Buck finally shed his ties with civilization and became the leader of a wolf pack in arctic Alaska, the tale had turned into a novel and the author had spent a hectic month writing it. The book was an instant success.

What is there in this dog story, then, that makes it a classic of world literature? There is, as is usual with most of London's works, a gripping plot full of action and violence, as well as the exotic flavor of the Far North. More than anything else, there is a moving tug of war in Buck between his ties with man and "the call of the wild" that makes this "primordial beast" almost human, so that the reader feels for him through every step of

his transformation. Indeed, the discerning reader could not fail to sense, through Buck's vicissitudes and torments, the excruciating ambivalence of man's attraction to and alienation from society as long as the law of *EAT OR BE EATEN* holds sway.

As a companion piece to *The Call of the Wild*, *White Fang* (1906) tells an interesting tale of the reverse transformation of an arctic "wolf" (actually three quarters wolf and one-fourth dog) into a domesticated creature called White Fang. Apart from vivid details about the Alaskan wilderness, the unfolding story reveals that the law of *EAT OR BE EATEN* applies not just to the jungle, but symbolically to the human process of domestication. However well he responded to "love", "White Fang knew the law well — to oppress the weak and obey the strong", for this was the greatest lesson London had learnt from his own experience and was to emphasize in all his major works. Taken together, then, *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang* make up not only a complementary set of thrilling adventure stories, but actually represent London's narrative art and social philosophy at their most vivid.

It is to be noticed, however, that even in London's finest writings, there is an unmistakable obsession with the jungle law. Whether it is Buck or White Fang, the ruthless captain of *The Sea Wolf* (1904) or his own image in *Martin Eden* (1909), they are all "primordial beasts", or Nietzschean heroes. Even when he is depicting the misery of the toiling masses as in *The People of the Abyss* (1903) or their rebellion against their oppressors as in *The Iron Heel* (1908), London could never shake off his Nietzschean

admiration for the strong, or his condescending pity for the weak. He was always "proud to be one of Nature's strong-armed noblemen", though he knew that his place should be with people of his own class. That may explain why as the most successful writer of his time he was also the most lonely and tragic — a tragedy born of conflicting values and ideals that would not let him be either Buck or White Fang in real life, but finally drove him to despair and suicide at the early age of forty.

Pan Shaozhong (潘绍中)



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1. *Chlorophyll a* and *Chlorophyll b* were determined by the method of Arar and Collins (1971) using a Shimadzu 1010 spectrophotometer.

# 1

## *Into the Primitive*

"Old longings nomadic leap,  
Chafing at custom's chain;  
Again from its brumal sleep  
Wakens the ferine strain."

Buck did not read the newspapers, or he would have known that trouble was brewing, not alone for himself, but for every tidewater dog, strong of muscle and with warm, long hair, from Puget Sound to San Diego. Because men, groping in the Arctic darkness, had found a yellow metal, and because steamship and transportation companies were booming the find, thousands of men were rushing into the Northland. These men wanted dogs, and the dogs they wanted were heavy dogs, with strong muscles by which to toil, and furry coats to protect them from the frost.

Buck lived at a big house in the sun-kissed Santa Clara Valley. Judge Miller's place, it was called. It stood back from the road, half hidden among the trees, through which glimpses could be caught of the wide cool veranda that ran around its four sides. The house was approached by gravelled driveways which wound about through widespreading lawns and under the interlacing boughs of tall poplars. At the rear things were on even a more spacious scale than at the front. There were great stables, where a dozen

grooms and boys held forth, rows of vine-clad servants' cottages, an endless and orderly array of out-houses, long grape arbors, green pastures, orchards, and berry patches. Then there was the pumping plant for the artesian well, and the big cement tank where Judge Miller's boys took their morning plunge and kept cool in the hot afternoon.

And over this great demesne Buck ruled. Here he was born, and here he had lived the four years of his life. It was true, there were other dogs. There could not but be other dogs on so vast a place, but they did not count. They came and went, resided in the populous kennels, or lived obscurely in the recesses of the house after the fashion of Toots, the Japanese pug, or Ysabel, the Mexican hairless—strange creatures that rarely put nose out of doors or set foot to ground. On the other hand, there were the fox terriers, a score of them at least, who yelped fearful promises at Toots and Ysabel looking out of the windows at them and protected by a legion of housemaids armed with brooms and mops.

But Buck was neither house-dog nor kennel dog. The whole realm was his. He plunged into the swimming tank or went hunting with the Judge's sons; he escorted Mollie and Alice, the Judge's daughters, on long twilight or early morning rambles; on wintry nights he lay at the Judge's feet before the roaring library fire; he carried the Judge's grandsons on his back, or rolled them in the grass, and guarded their footsteps through wild adventures down to the fountain in the stable yard, and even beyond, where the paddocks were, and the berry patches. Among the terriers he stalked imperiously, and Toots and Ysabel he utterly ignored, for he was king—king over

all creeping, crawling, flying things of Judge Miller's place, humans included.

His father, Elmo, a huge St. Bernard, had been the Judge's inseparable companion, and Buck bid fair to follow in the way of his father. He was not so large—he weighed only one hundred and forty pounds—for his mother, Shep, had been a Scotch shepherd dog. Nevertheless, one hundred and forty pounds, to which was added the dignity that comes of good living and universal respect, enabled him to carry himself in right royal fashion. During the four years since his puppyhood he had lived the life of a sated aristocrat; he had a fine pride in himself, was ever a trifle egotistical, as country gentlemen sometimes become because of their insular situation. But he had saved himself by not becoming a mere pampered house-dog. Hunting and kindred outdoor delights had kept down the fat and hardened his muscles; and to him, as to the cold-tubbing races, the love of water had been a tonic and a health preserver.

And this was the manner of dog Buck was in the fall of 1897, when the Klondike strike dragged men from all the world into the frozen North. But Buck did not read the newspapers, and he did not know that Manuel, one of the gardener's helpers, was an undesirable acquaintance. Manuel had one besetting sin. He loved to play Chinese lottery. Also, in his gambling, he had one besetting weakness—faith in a system; and this made his damnation certain. For to play a system requires money, while the wages of a gardener's helper do not lap over the needs of a wife and numerous progeny.

The Judge was at a meeting of the Raisin Growers' Association, and the boys were busy organizing an

athletic club, on the memorable night of Manuel's treachery. No one saw him and Buck go off through the orchard on what Buck imagined was merely a stroll. And with the exception of a solitary man, no one saw them arrive at the little flag station known as College Park. This man talked with Manuel, and money chinked between them.

"You might wrap up the goods before you deliver 'm," the stranger said gruffly, and Manuel doubled a piece of stout rope around Buck's neck under the collar.

"Twist it, an' you'll choke 'm plentee," said Manuel, and the stranger grunted a ready affirmative.

Buck had accepted the rope with quiet dignity. To be sure, it was an unwonted performance: but he had learned to trust in men he knew, and to give them credit for a wisdom that outreached his own. But when the ends of the rope were placed in the stranger's hands, he growled menacingly. He had merely intimated his displeasure, in his pride believing that to intimate was to command. But to his surprise the rope tightened around his neck, shutting off his breath. In quick rage he sprang at the man, who met him halfway, grappled him close by the throat, and with a deft twist threw him over on his back. Then the rope tightened mercilessly, while Buck struggled in a fury, his tongue lolling out of his mouth and his great chest panting futilely. Never in all his life had he been so vilely treated, and never in all his life had he been so angry. But his strength ebbed, his eyes glazed, and he knew nothing when the train was flagged and the two men threw him into the baggage car.

The next he knew, he was dimly aware that his



tongue was hurting and that he was being jolted along in some kind of a conveyance. The hoarse shriek of a locomotive whistling a crossing told him where he was. He had travelled too often with the Judge not to know the sensation of riding in a baggage car. He opened his eyes, and into them came the unbridled anger of a kidnapped king. The man sprang for his throat, but Buck was too quick for him. His jaws closed on the hand, nor did they relax till his senses were choked out of him once more.

"Yep, has fits," the man said, hiding his mangled hand from the baggageman, who had been attracted by the sounds of struggle. "I'm takin' 'm up for the boss to 'Frisco. A crack dog-doctor there thinks that he can cure 'm."

Concerning that night's ride, the man spoke most eloquently for himself, in a little shed back of a saloon on the San Francisco water front.

"All I get is fifty for it," he grumbled; "an' I wouldn't do it over for a thousand, cold cash."

His hand was wrapped in a bloody handkerchief, and the right trouser leg was ripped from knee to ankle.

"How much did the other mug get?" the saloon-keeper demanded.

"A hundred," was the reply. "Wouldn't take a sou less, so help me."

"That makes a hundred and fifty," the saloon-keeper calculated; "and he's worth it, or I'm a square-head."

The kidnapper undid the bloody wrappings and looked at his lacerated hand. "If I don't get the hydrophoby—"

"It'll be because you was born to hang," laughed