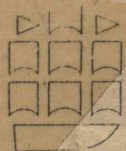

THE CALL OF THE WILD

JACK LONDON

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1500 word vocabulary



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Note: Words with a star* are outside stage 4 of the New Method Supplementary Readers and are not explained in the text. These extra words are in a list on page 107.

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He moved the club to his right hand

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One

JOURNEY INTO THE NORTH

Buck did not read the newspapers, so he did not know that trouble was on its way for himself and for every other strong, warm-haired dog. Because men had found a yellow metal called gold, thousands were rushing into the Northland. These men wanted dogs, and the dogs they wanted were strong and heavy dogs which could work hard and which had long coats to protect them from the snow and ice.

Buck lived at a big house in a sunny valley. The house was called Judge Miller's place. It stood back from the road, half hidden among the trees. The roads to the house passed through wide-spreading lawns and under the branches of tall trees. There was even more space at the back of the house than at the front. There were many buildings, servants' houses, green fields and woods.

Buck ruled over all this like a king. He was born here and he had lived the four years of his life here. It was true that there were other dogs: it was such a big place. But the other dogs were not important. They came and went and they lived outside or in the corners of the house.

Buck was not like these dogs. The whole place was his. He swam or went hunting with the Judge's sons; he stayed at the side of the Judge's two daughters on long walks at sunset or in the early morning; on winter nights he lay at the Judge's feet before the big fire in the library; he carried the Judge's grandsons on his back or rolled

them in the grass. Among the other dogs he walked proudly, for he was king—king over all living things of Judge Miller's place.

Buck's father, a large St. Bernard, had been the Judge's close companion, and Buck tried hard to follow in the way of his father. He was not so large as his father because his mother, Shep, had been a Scotch shepherd dog; but Buck was able to behave like a true king. Although Buck had great pride, he was not a spoilt house-dog. Hunting and other outdoor delights had kept down the fat and made his body strong. And his love of water had kept him healthy.

This was Buck in the autumn of 1897, when the discovery of gold in the Klondike drew men from all over the world into the frozen North. But Buck did not read the newspapers. Nor did he know that Manuel, one of the gardener's helpers, was a bad man. And Manuel needed money.

One night when the Judge and the boys were out, Manuel took Buck for a walk. No one saw them go off through the woods to a small station. At the small station a man talked with Manuel and gave him some money.

Manuel put a piece of thick rope around Buck's neck. Manuel told the stranger, "If you pull it sharply, he won't be able to breath."

Buck allowed Manuel to put the rope around his neck, for he had learned to trust in the men whom he knew. But when the ends of the rope were placed in the stranger's hands, he growled*: he made an angry noise to show that he was not at all pleased. To his surprise, the man pulled the rope round his neck, shutting off his breath. In quick anger he sprang at the man, but the man met him mid-



way. The man caught hold of him near his throat* and, with a quick turn of the hand, threw Buck over on his back. Then he pulled the rope without mercy while Buck struggled angrily, his tongue hanging out of his mouth and his great chest moving up and down without result. He had never in all his life been treated so shamefully, and he had never in all his life been so angry. But

his strength left him and his eyes closed. He knew nothing when the train arrived and the two men threw him on it.

The next thing he knew was that his tongue was hurting. The noise of the train told him where he was. He had often travelled with the Judge and he knew the feeling of riding on a train. He opened his eyes, and danger came into them. The man sprang for his throat, but Buck was too quick for him. His teeth bit the man's hand. They did not stop biting until the rope around his neck was pulled again.

The man spoke about that night's ride in a little hut on the San Francisco water-front.

"I get only fifty for it," he said, "and I wouldn't do it again for a thousand."

There was a bloody handkerchief around his hand.

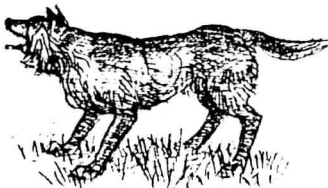
"How much did you pay for the dog?" the other man demanded.

"A hundred," was the reply. "Not a cent less."

"I'll give you a hundred and fifty," said the other man. "The dog is worth it."

Buck was unable to think clearly and suffering great pain; he attempted to face the two men; but he was thrown down and the rope was pulled again and again. Then the rope was removed, and he was thrown into a cage.

He lay there for the rest of the long night; he was angry because his pride was wounded. He could not understand what it all meant. What did these strange men want with him? Why were they keeping him a prisoner in this narrow cage? He did not know why, but he felt that something terrible would happen to him. Several times during the night he sprang to his feet, expecting to see the Judge, or the boys. But each time it was the face of a stranger that looked at him by the yellow light of a small candle. And each time the joyful bark* in Buck's throat was turned into an angry growl.



bark

In the morning four men entered and picked up the cage. They were evil-looking men; and Buck growled and sprang at them through the bars. They only laughed and pushed sticks at him. At first he tried to bite the sticks. Then he lay down and allowed them to lift the cage onto a train. Then he, and the cage in which he was a prisoner, began to pass through many hands. Some men in an office took charge of him; he was carried about on another train; he was put on a small ship;

he was taken off the ship to a big railway station, and at last he was thrown onto another train.

Buck travelled on this train for two days and nights; and for two days and nights he neither ate nor drank. In his anger he growled at everyone who came to him. When he threw himself against the bars of his cage, they laughed at him. They growled and barked like dogs, made noises like cats, or moved their arms and made noises like birds. He knew that it was all very silly; but it hurt his pride, and his anger grew and grew. He did not mind the hunger so much; but he suffered greatly because he had no water.

He was glad for one thing: the rope was off his neck. Now that it was off, he would show them! They would never get another rope around his neck. For two days and nights he neither ate nor drank: during those two days and nights he gathered up a great deal of anger. His eyes turned red with blood, and he was changed into a wild devil. He was changed so much that the Judge himself would not have known him. The men on the train breathed freely again when they carried him off the train at Seattle.

Four men carried the cage from the train into a small, high-walled back yard. A fat man came out and signed the book for the driver. Buck threw himself wildly against the bars of the cage. The man smiled cruelly, and brought out an axe and a club*, a heavy stick.

“You aren’t going to take him out now, are you?” the driver asked.

“Certainly,” the man replied, driving the axe into the cage in order to open it.

The four men who had carried it in immediately ran away. They prepared to watch the show from the top of the wall.

Buck rushed at the breaking wood, bit it and struggled with it. He was madly anxious to get out. The man with the axe was calmly trying to get him out.

"Now, you red-eyed devil," he said, when he had made an opening large enough for Buck's body to pass through. At the same time he dropped the axe and moved the club to his right hand.

Buck was truly a red-eyed devil, as he prepared to spring. His hair stood on end, and his red eyes shone with madness. He sprang straight at the man. In mid-air, just as his mouth was about to close on the man, he received a blow that made him shut his mouth in great pain. He fell to the ground on his back. He had never been struck by a club in his life. He did not understand. With a growl of pain he was again on his feet. He sprang at the man, but again the blow came and he was brought to the ground. This time he knew that it was the club; but he was now so angry that he did not care. He charged a dozen times. A dozen times the club stopped the charge and struck him down.

After an especially fierce blow, he came slowly to his feet, too tired to rush. He moved without strength, the blood flowing from nose and mouth and ears. His beautiful coat was covered with blood. Then the man advanced and gave him a terrible blow on the nose. All the pain which he had suffered was nothing like the great pain he felt now. Buck cried out in anger and again threw himself at the man. But the man, moving the club from right to left, calmly caught him above his throat. At the

same time he pulled down and backwards. Buck turned a complete circle in the air; then he fell to the ground on his head and chest.

For the last time he rushed. The man struck the sharp blow which he had kept back on purpose for so long. Buck was helpless; he fell—and knew nothing more.

“He knows how to break in dogs!” cried one of the men on the wall: “he certainly does!”

Buck slowly opened his eyes. He had no strength. He lay where he had fallen. From there he watched the man who had struck him so many times.

“He answers to the name of Buck,” the man said aloud to himself. He was reading a letter about the cage and Buck. “Well, Buck, my boy,” he went on in a friendly voice, “we’ve had our little trouble. That should be enough. You’ve learned your place; and I know mine. Be a good dog, and all will go well. Be a bad dog, and I’ll beat you without mercy. Do you understand?”

As he spoke he touched without fear the head which he had beaten so hard. Though Buck’s hair stood on end at the touch of the hand, he bore it without growling. When the man brought him water, he drank eagerly. Later he ate a big meal of uncooked meat from the man’s hand.

He knew that he was beaten; but he was not broken. He saw that he stood no chance against a man with a club. He had learned the lesson, and in all his life he never forgot it. It was his first meeting with the law of the club. Life now had a fiercer look.

As the days went by, other dogs came, in boxes and at the ends of ropes. Some came quietly and some came

growling as he had come. He watched all of them pass under the power of the man with the club. Again and again, as he looked at each cruel fight, Buck remembered the lesson: a man with a club was a lawgiver and a master to be obeyed. This did not mean that Buck had to like the man, though he did see beaten dogs which showed signs of becoming friendly to the man. Also, he saw one dog, that would neither be friendly nor obey, killed in the struggle.

Now and again men came. They were strangers who talked excitedly and in all kinds of ways to the man with the club. When money passed between them, the strangers took one or more of the dogs away with them. Buck wondered where they went, for they never came back. But he feared the future, and he was glad each time he was not chosen.

Yet Buck's turn came in the end. Perrault was a small man who spoke poor English. He also used many strange and rough expressions which Buck could not understand.

"Eh!" he cried, when he saw Buck. "That's a big, strong dog! How much?"

"Three hundred, and he's a gift at that price," was the quick reply of the man with the club. "And it's government money that you're spending. You can't lose anything, eh, Perrault?"

Perrault smiled. As the price of dogs had risen very highly, it was not an unfair amount for so fine an animal. The Canadian Government would not lose, and its letters would not travel slower. Perrault knew dogs. When he looked at Buck, he knew that he was one dog in a thousand—"One in ten thousand," he whispered to himself.

Buck saw money pass between the two men. He was not surprised when another dog, called Curly, and he were led away by the small man. That was the last he saw of the man with the club. As Curly and he looked back at Seattle from the ship it was the last he saw of the warm Southland. Curly and he were taken below by Perrault and given to a man called François. Perrault was French-Canadian, and he had a dark skin; but François, who was also French-Canadian, was twice as dark-skinned. They were a new kind of men to Buck. Although he had no love for them, he learned to respect them. He speedily learned that Perrault and François were fair men, calm and just. They were too wise in the way of dogs to be fooled by dogs.

On the ship, Buck and Curly joined two other dogs. One of them was a big, snow-white fellow from Spitzbergen who had been brought away by a sea-captain. He was called Spitz and was friendly, in an untrustworthy sort of way. He smiled into one's face while he was planning some secret, dishonest trick—as when he stole from Buck's food at the first meal. François struck him before Buck could attack him; and the only thing Buck could do was to take back his bone. Buck decided that François had treated him fairly, and his opinion of him began to rise.

The other dog, called Dave, made no advances, nor received any. Also, he did not attempt to steal from them. He was a dull, unfriendly fellow, and he showed Curly plainly that all he desired was to be left alone. He showed him, too, that there would be trouble if he was not left alone. Dave ate and slept, and took interest in nothing, not even when the ship sailed through rough seas. When Buck and Curly grew excited, half wild with

fear, he raised his head as though annoyed, looked at them, and went to sleep again.

Day and night the ship sailed on. One day was very like another, but Buck noticed that the weather was growing colder. At last, one morning, the ship stopped, and everyone on board was excited. Buck felt excited, as did the other dogs, and he knew that a change was near. François put a rope round them, and brought them outside. At the first step, Buck's feet went down in something very like mud. It was white and soft. He sprang back with a quick growl. More of this white stuff was falling through the air. He shook himself, but more of it fell upon him. He smelt it curiously, then tasted some of it on his tongue. It bit like fire, and the next moment was gone. This puzzled him. He tried it again, with the same result. Those who were watching laughed loudly, and he felt ashamed: he did not know why, for it was his first snow.

TWO

THE LAW OF THE WILD

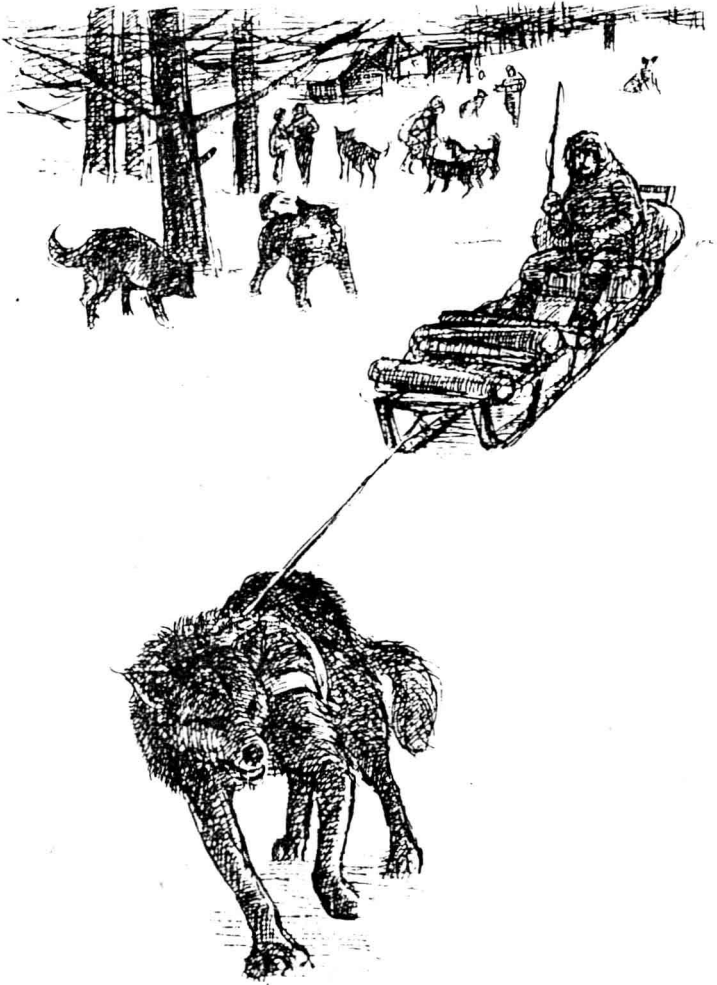
Buck's first day in this new country was like a bad dream. Every hour was filled with sudden surprise. He had suddenly been thrown into the heart of the wild. This was no lazy, sun-kissed life, with nothing to do but waste time. Here there was neither peace, nor rest, nor a moment's safety. It was necessary to be always wide-awake and careful; for these dogs and men were not town dogs and men. They were wild and fierce, all of them.

and they knew no law but the law of force.

He had never seen dogs fight as these wolfish creatures fought. His first experience taught him a lesson which he would never forget. It is true that it did not happen to him, or he would be dead. They had camped near the wood store and Curly, in her friendly way, went near a big dog. Suddenly the big dog sprang at Curly. There was the sound of teeth meeting, and the big dog sprang back. Curly's face was cut open from eye to mouth.

It was the wolf manner of fighting, to strike and spring away, but there was more to it than this. Thirty or forty dogs ran to the spot and stood round the two dogs in an eager and silent circle. Buck did not understand that silent eagerness, nor the way their tongues were moving. Curly rushed at the big dog, who struck again and jumped aside. He stopped her next rush with his chest, in a strange way that pushed Curly off her feet. She never got up again. The other dogs had been waiting for this to happen. They jumped on Curly, with excited noises, all barking and growling.

It was so sudden that Buck was surprised. He saw Spitz laughing; and he saw François, swinging an axe, spring into the crowd of dogs. Three men with clubs were helping him to drive them away. It did not take long. The last of the dogs was driven off two minutes after Curly had fallen down. But she lay there still and lifeless in the blood-covered snow, cut to pieces. The sight of Curly often came back to Buck to trouble him in his sleep. So that was the way. No fair play. Once down, that was the end of you. Well, he would make sure that he never went down. Spitz laughed again, and from that moment Buck felt great hatred towards him.



Buck wore a harness and pulled a sledge

Soon after the death of Curly, Buck received another surprise. François put a harness* upon him: the harness was like the ones put on the horses at home. And as he had seen horses work, so he was set to work, pulling François on a sledge* to the forest and returning with a load of wood. Though this hurt his pride, he was too wise to try to refuse. He began to work eagerly and did his best, though it was all new and strange. François expected everyone to obey him immediately. Dave, who had much experience of pulling sledges, bit Buck's back legs whenever he did anything wrong. Spitz was the leader of the dogs and made certain that Buck did his work properly. Buck learned easily and improved quickly. Before they returned to camp he knew enough to stop at the cry, "Ho!", to go forwards at "Mush!", to swing wide round the corners, and to keep clear of the dog behind him when the loaded sledge went downhill.

"These are very good dogs," François told Perrault. "That Buck pulls very hard. I taught him very quickly."

By afternoon, Perrault, who was in a hurry to be off on his journey with his mail, returned with two more dogs. He called them "Billee" and "Joe". Although these two dogs were brothers, they were as different as day and night. Billee's one fault was his good nature, while Joe was the very opposite and was always barking angrily. Buck received them in a friendly manner, but Dave took no notice of them, and Spitz fought first one and then the other. Billee showed no desire to fight, turned to run, and cried when Spitz's sharp teeth bit him. But when Spitz circled, Joe always turned to face him, hair standing on end, ears laid back, lips moving in anger, mouth quickly opening and closing, and with an evil light in his eyes.