The CALL of the WILD

JACK LONDON



TIMELESS CLASSICS

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1
Trouble Ahead

Buck did not read the newspapers. If he did, he would have seen some bad news. Trouble was coming. Not just for himself, but for every dog with strong muscles, from Puget Sound to San Diego. This was because, in the Arctic darkness, a precious yellow metal—gold—had been found.

Thousands of men were rushing to the frozen Northland. These men needed dogs. They wanted heavy dogs with strong muscles and furry coats. Big dogs would be able to work hard. And their furry coats would protect them from the cold.

Buck lived on a large estate in the sunny Santa Clara Valley. Judge Miller's place, it was called. The house stood back from the road. It was half-hidden among the trees. A wide porch

ran around its four sides. At the rear of the house were stables, where a dozen grooms worked. There were rows of servants' cottages. And there were long grape arbors, green pastures, orchards, and berry patches. There was also a water pump for the well and for a big cement swimming tank. Judge Miller's sons took a dip in the tank every morning.

Buck ruled over this great estate. Here he was born. Here he had lived all four years of his life. There were other dogs here, but they did not count. They came and went. Many of them lived in the kennels. Some, such as Toots and Ysabel, lived in hidden corners of the house. On the other hand there were the fox terriers. These dogs would yelp at Toots and Ysabel looking out the windows at them.

But Buck was neither house dog nor kennel dog. The whole place was his. He went into the swimming tank or went hunting with the Judge's sons. He would go with Mollie and Alice, the Judge's daughters, on early morning walks. On winter nights he would lie at the Judge's feet by the fire in the library. He carried the Judge's grandsons on his back, or

rolled them in the grass. He roamed wherever he pleased. For he was king over all the creeping, crawling, flying things of Judge Miller's place, humans included.

Buck's father was Elmo, a huge St. Bernard. Elmo had been the Judge's constant companion. It seemed that Buck was going to be very much like his father. Buck was smaller, though—he weighed only 140 pounds. His mother, Shep, had been a Scotch shepherd dog. Buck took great pride in himself and carried himself like a king. Hunting and other outdoor activity had kept down the fat and hardened his muscles.

This was the kind of dog Buck was in the fall of 1897. But because Buck did not read the newspapers, he did not know that gold had been discovered in the Klondike. And he did not know that one man at Judge Miller's place was about to change his life forever.

Manuel, one of the gardener's helpers, had a terrible weakness—he loved to gamble. And in order to gamble, he needed money. But the wages of a gardener's helper are barely enough to support a wife and children, let alone to gamble.

One night the Judge was at a meeting of the Raisin Growers' Association. His sons were busy planning a sports event. No one saw Manuel and Buck go off through the orchard. Buck thought they were just out for an evening walk. No one saw them arrive at the little train station known as College Park—nobody except the man who was waiting there for them. When this man talked with Manuel, money passed between them.

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

"Twist it, and you'll choke him plenty," said Manuel. The stranger grunted in agreement.

Buck had accepted the rope with quiet dignity. He had learned to trust people he knew. He gave them credit for a wisdom beyond his own. But when the ends of the rope were placed in the stranger's hands, Buck growled. He did this to show the men he didn't like what was happening. His pride led him to think that this was all he needed to do. Once the men saw he wasn't happy, they would remove the rope.

But to Buck's surprise the rope tightened around his neck, shutting off his breath. In quick rage he sprang at the stranger, who was ready for him. The man grabbed him by the throat, and with a twist, threw Buck over on his back. Then the rope grew even tighter. Buck struggled in a fury, his tongue hanging out of his mouth, his big chest heaving. Never in his life had he been so badly treated! And never in his life had he been so *angry*. But as the rope tightened, his strength left him. Soon his eyes glazed over. He knew nothing when the train stopped and the two men threw him into the baggage car.

TIMELESS CLASSICS

The CALL of the WILD

Buck is much bigger and stronger than the other dogs. But he wasn't born to the savage life of the Alaskan frontier. Is it too late for him to learn the "law of club and fang"? Can he survive the bitter weather, a vicious rival, and the deadly mistakes of his bungling owners?

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