


WHITE FANG

Jack London

 TIMELESS CLASSICS



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In the Frozen North

A dark forest stood on both sides of the frozen waterway. Silence covered the empty, lifeless land. It was the Wild—the savage, frozen-hearted Northland Wild.

Down the frozen waterway came a string of dogs, pulling a sled. One man walked behind the sled, the other in front of it.

The last pale light of day was fading when they heard the first howl. Then a second howl rose, piercing the silence like a needle. A third howl followed.

“Wolves!” Bill cried. “They’re after us.”

“Meat is scarce,” said Henry. “I ain’t seen a sign of a rabbit in days.”

When darkness came, the men stopped at the edge of the waterway and made camp.

Bill fed the dogs. Then he asked Henry, “How many dogs we got now?”

“Six,” Henry replied.

“Well,” said Bill, “I took six fish out of the bag. I gave one to each dog—but I was one fish short.”

“You counted wrong,” Henry said.

“Nah. I saw the other one run off across the snow,” Bill said. His voice was cool and sure. “I saw seven.”

“Then you’re thinking it was one of them wolves?” said Henry.

Bill nodded.

Howl after howl turned the silence into a madhouse. The sounds came from every side of the camp. The dogs were frightened. They huddled so close to the fire their thick fur scorched in the heat.

A wall of darkness pressed about the men on every side. A circle of glittering eyes had drawn about their camp.

“How many cartridges did you say you had left?” Henry asked.

“Three,” Bill said. “And I wish it was three hundred. Then I’d show ’em what for!” He

shook his fist angrily. "I wish this trip was over and done with. I wish you and me was a-sittin' by the fire in Fort McGurry."

Henry grunted and crawled into bed. As he dozed off he was awakened by Bill's voice.

"Say, Henry," Bill said. "That one that came in and stole a fish—why didn't the dogs fight it? That's what's botherin' me."

"You're botherin' too much," Henry said.

Morning came. In the darkness just before dawn, Henry went about preparing breakfast. Bill got the sled ready.

"Say, Henry," Bill suddenly asked, "how many dogs did you say we had?"

"Six," said Henry.

"No, five—one's gone," Bill said.

Henry swore. He left the cooking to go out and count the dogs.

"You're right," Henry said. "Fatty's gone."

"He always was a fool dog," Bill said.

"But even a fool dog like Fatty wouldn't go off and commit suicide that way," Henry said. "I bet none of the others would do it."

After breakfast, the men turned their backs on the cheery fire and went out into the darkness.

At once the howls began, the wolves calling out to one another. Daylight came at nine o'clock. It lasted until three o'clock, when the Arctic night fell on the land. The men made camp.

Henry was bent over a bubbling pot of beans when he heard Bill yell. Then he heard a sharp cry of pain from among the dogs. He looked up just in time to see a dim form disappearing across the snow. Bill was standing by the dogs, holding part of a salmon.

"That dern wolf got half of it!" Bill said. "But I got a whack at it just the same. Did you hear it yelp?"

"What'd it look like?" Henry asked.

"Couldn't see," Bill said. "But it's tame, whatever it is. It's comin' here at feeding time to get its piece of fish like the other dogs."

That night, when supper was finished, the circle of gleaming eyes drew in even closer than before.

Bill was nervous. "I wish we was pulling into Fort McGurry right now," he said.

"Shut up your wishing," Henry burst out angrily.

Early the next morning, Henry was aroused

by Bill's loud swearing.

"What's up now?" Henry called out.

"Frog's gone," Bill said.

"No!" Henry cried out.

"I tell you *yes*," Bill said.

Henry leaped out of his blankets and counted the dogs. Then he cursed the powers of the Wild for robbing them of another dog.

After a gloomy breakfast, the four remaining dogs were harnessed to the sled. That day was a repetition of the days that had gone before. The two men toiled without speech across the face of the frozen world.

That night, Bill tied each dog to a stick with a short leather thong to keep them from running off.

Henry nodded with approval. "That's the only way to ever hold One Ear," he said. "He can gnaw through leather as clean as a knife. But now he can't even reach it to chew."

At bedtime, the men heard One Ear making quick, eager whines.

"Look at that, Bill!" Henry whispered.

They watched a doglike animal glide into the firelight! One Ear whined with eagerness and



strained his neck against the thong.

“It’s a she-wolf,” Henry whispered. “And that accounts for Fatty and Frog. She’s the decoy for the pack. She draws out a dog and then all the rest pitches in and eats him up.”

The fire crackled. A log fell apart with a loud spluttering noise. At the sound, the strange animal leaped back into the darkness.

“I’m a-thinkin’ that must be the one I lambasted with the club,” Bill said.

“I reckon you’re right, Bill. That wolf is really more of a dog. It’s eaten fish many a time

right from the hand of man.”

“I get a chance at it, that dog is *meat!*” Bill snorted angrily. “We can’t afford to lose no more animals!”

“But you’ve only got three cartridges left,” Henry reminded him.

“I’ll wait for a dead sure shot,” Bill said.

The next morning, Henry shook Bill awake. “Spanker’s gone,” he said.

“How’d it happen?” Bill groaned.

“Don’t know—unless One Ear gnawed him loose,” Henry said.

“That cuss!” Bill grumbled. “Just ’cause he couldn’t chew *himself* loose, he goes ahead and chews Spanker loose!”

“Tonight I’ll tie ’em up out of reach of each other,” he said as they took to the trail.

In the cold gray of the afternoon, Henry let out a low warning whistle. Behind them, in plain view, trotted a wolf.

“It’s the she-wolf,” Bill whispered. “She looks like a big old husky sled dog. Strange color. Looks almost cinnamon.”

“Ain’t a bit scared,” Henry said.

“We’ve got three cartridges,” Bill said. “But

it's a dead shot. What do you say?"

Henry nodded.

But as Bill lifted the rifle to his shoulder, the she-wolf ran off.

"I might have guessed it," Bill cried. "A wolf that knows enough to come in at feeding time would know about shootin' -irons. But I'm going to be laying for her."

"Well, don't stray off too far," Henry said. "If that pack ever starts to jump you, Bill, them three cartridges is worth *nothin'*! Them animals is half-starved."

They camped early that night. Three dogs couldn't drag the sled as far as six. The wolves were growing bolder. They were coming in so close now that the dogs were frantic.

"I've heard of sharks followin' a ship," Bill said. "Well, them wolves is like *land* sharks. They're going to get us, Henry!"

Henry scowled. "They've half got you already, with you talking like that!"

As he dozed off, Henry thought, "There's no mistakin' it—Bill's mighty blue. I'll have to cheer him up tomorrow."