

1

## A Caged<sup>15</sup> 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<sup>16</sup>, and his mother a shepherd dog<sup>17</sup>, so he too was a big dog. He was much-loved, and he was quietly very proud<sup>18</sup> 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<sup>19</sup> around Buck's neck. No one had ever put a rope around Buck's neck before, but Buck had learned to trust<sup>20</sup> 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<sup>21</sup> 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<sup>p</sup>, the rope was suddenly pulled tight around his neck, so he could not breathe<sup>22</sup>. 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 stranger's hand, and he bit<sup>23</sup> 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<sup>24</sup>, 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<sup>25</sup> 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<sup>26</sup> 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<sup>27</sup> 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<sup>28</sup>,” 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<sup>29</sup>, 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 François. Buck felt no love for François, but he was a good man, and he knew how to work with dogs. François 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



*"Now, you red-eyed devil," said the man in the red sweater.*

seemed different and exciting. Buck could feel that something had changed. François 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<sup>30</sup> 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<sup>31</sup>, but he did not know why. He had arrived in the Northland, and it was his first snow.



## 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<sup>32</sup> 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<sup>33</sup> 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<sup>34</sup>, 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. François 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