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Jack London

WHITE FANG

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Part I

Chapter I. The Trail of the Meat

Dark forest was on both sides of the waterway. The trees had been damaged by a recent wind and seemed to lean on each other. Silence ruled over the land. The land itself was lifeless, so lonely and cold that it was not even sad. There was laughter in it, but laughter more terrible than any sadness. It was the masterful wisdom of eternity laughing at the uselessness of life. It was the frozen-hearted Northland Wild.

But there was life. Down the frozen waterway ran a string of dogs. Their fur was in frost. Their breath froze in the air. Leather harness was on the dogs, and leather traces attached them to a sled which dragged behind. On the sled there was a long and narrow oblong box. There were other things – blankets, an axe, a coffee-pot and a frying-pan; but the long and narrow oblong box occupied the most space.

Before the dogs, on wide snowshoes, walked a man. Behind the sled walked a second man. On the sled, in the box, lay a third man whose walk was over, – a man whom the Wild had conquered and beaten. Life is an offence to the Wild, because life is movement; and the Wild wants to destroy movement. It freezes the water; it drives the sap out of the trees; and most terribly of all it treats man – man who is the most active of life.

But before and after the dogs walked the two men who were not yet dead. Their bodies were covered with fur and leather; eyelashes, cheeks and lips were covered with the crystals from their frozen breath; so they looked like undertakers at the funeral of some ghost. But they were men, going through the land of silence, adventurers on colossal adventure.

They travelled on without speaking to save their breath. On every side was the pressing silence. It affected their minds as the many atmospheres of deep water affect the body of the diver. It pressed all the false self-values of the human soul out of them, like juices from the grape. They felt small, having little wisdom against the great blind elements.

An hour went by, and a second hour. The light of the short sunless day was beginning to fade, when a faint far cry sounded on the air and then slowly died away. There was anger and hunger in it. The front man turned his head and his eyes met the eyes of the man behind. And then, across the narrow oblong box, they nodded to each other.

There was a second cry, somewhere behind. A third and answering cry sounded in the air.

“They’re after us, Bill,” said the man at the front.

“There’s little meat,” answered his comrade. “I haven’t seen a rabbit for days.”

They spoke no more, but listened attentively.

When it became dark they took the dogs into a cluster of trees and made a camp. The coffin served for seat and table. The dogs clustered on the far side of the fire, snarled among themselves, but didn’t go into the darkness.

“Seems to me, they’re staying remarkably close to camp,” Bill said.

His companion nodded, then took his seat on the coffin and began to eat.

“Henry, did you notice how the dogs behaved when I was feeding them?”

“They played more than usual.”

“How many dogs have we got, Henry?”

“Six.”

“Well, Henry…” Bill stopped for a moment, in order to sound more significant. “As I was saying, I took six fish out of the bag. I gave one fish to each dog, and, Henry, I was one fish short.”

“You counted wrong.”

"We've got six dogs. I took out six fish. One Ear didn't get a fish. I came back to the bag afterward and got him his fish."

"We've only got six dogs," Henry said.

"Then there were seven of them that got fish."

Henry stopped eating to count the dogs.

"There's only six now," he said.

"I saw the other one run off. I saw seven."

Henry looked at him and said, "I'll be very glad when this trip is over."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that our load is getting on your nerves,[1] and you're beginning to see things.[2]"

"But I saw its tracks on the snow. I can show them to you."

Henry didn't reply at once. He had a final cup of coffee and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

"Then you think it was one of them?"

Bill nodded.

"I think you're mistaken," Henry said.

"Henry…" he paused. "Henry, I was thinking he was much luckier than you and me." He pointed at the box on which they sat, "When we die, we'll be lucky if we get enough stones over our bodies to keep the dogs off of us."

"But we don't have people, money and all the rest, like him. Long-distance funerals is something we can't afford."

"What worries me, Henry, is why a chap like this, who is a kind of lord in his own country, comes to the end of the earth."

"Yes, he might have lived to old age if he'd stayed at home."

Bill opened his mouth to speak, but changed his mind. Instead, he pointed towards the wall of darkness that pressed about them from every side. Nothing could be seen there but a pair of eyes gleaming like coals. Henry indicated with his head a second pair, and a third. A circle of the gleaming eyes was around their camp.

The unrest of the dogs was increasing. One of them came too close to the fire and yelped with pain and fright. The circle of eyes withdraw a bit, but it appeared again when the dogs became quiet.

"Henry, it's a misfortune to be out of ammunition."

Bill had finished his pipe and was helping his companion to spread the bed of fur and blanket.

"How many cartridges did you leave?" Henry asked.

"Three. And I wish it was three hundred!"

He shook his fist angrily at the gleaming eyes, and put his moccasins before the fire.

"And I wish it was not so cold" he went on. "It has been fifty below zero for two weeks now. And I wish I'd never started on this trip, Henry. I don't like it. And I wish the trip was over, and you and I were sitting by the fire in Fort McGurry and playing cards."

Henry grunted and crawled into bed. Then he was woken by his comrade's voice.

"Say, Henry, that other one that came in and got a fish – why didn't the dogs bite it? That's what's bothering me."

"You're bothering too much, Bill. Just shut up now, and go to sleep. You have a stomach ache, that's what's bothering you."

The men slept, breathing heavily, side by side, under the one covering. The fire died down, and the gleaming eyes drew closer. The dogs kept together in fear. Once their noise became so loud that Bill woke up. He got out of bed carefully and threw more wood on the fire. The circle of eyes

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[1] **to get on someone's nerves** – действовать на нервы

[2] **you see things** – тебе мерещится

drew back. He glanced at the dogs, then rubbed his eyes and looked at them again. Then he crawled back into the blankets.

"Henry," he said. "Oh, Henry."

Henry groaned, "What's wrong now?"

"Nothing, only there's seven of them again. I just counted."

Henry grunted again and fell asleep.

In the morning it was he who awoke first and woke up his companion. It was still dark, though it was already six o'clock; and Henry started preparing breakfast, while Bill rolled the blankets and made the sled ready.

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

"Six."

"Wrong," Bill said triumphantly.

"Seven again?"

"No, five; one's gone."

"The hell!" Henry cried in anger, left the cooking and went to count the dogs.

"You're right, Bill," he concluded. "Fatty's gone. They just swallowed him alive, damn them!"

"He always was a fool dog."

"But not fool enough to commit suicide. I bet none of the others would do it."

"Couldn't drive them away from the fire with a club," Bill agreed. "I always thought there was something wrong with Fatty anyway."

And this was the epitaph of a dead dog on the Northland trail, and it was longer than the epitaphs of many other dogs, many other men.

Chapter II. The She-Wolf

After breakfast the men set off again. Fiercely sad cries called through the darkness to one another and answered back. Daylight came at nine o'clock. At midday the sky to the south warmed to rose-colour, but it soon faded. After the grey light of day faded as well, the Arctic night descended upon the land.

As darkness came, the hunting-cries around them drew closer – so close that the dogs had occasional periods of panic. It was getting on men's nerves.

Henry was cooking supper when he heard the sound of a blow, an exclamation from Bill, and a cry of pain from dogs. He straightened up in time to see a dim silhouette running into the dark. Then he saw Bill, standing among the dogs, in one hand a club, in the other the tail and part of the body of a salmon.

"I got half of it," he announced; "but it got the other half. Did you hear it squeal?"

"What did it look like?"

"Couldn't see. But it had four legs and a mouth and hair and looked like any dog."

"Must be a tame wolf, I reckon."

"Damn! It must be tame, whatever it is, if it is coming here at feeding time."

That night, when supper was finished and they sat on the oblong box and smoked, the circle of gleaming eyes drew in even closer than before.

"I wish they'd go away and leave us alone,[3]" Bill said.

For a quarter of an hour they sat on in silence, Henry staring at the fire, and Bill at the circle of eyes that burned in the darkness.

"I wish we were going into McGurry right now," he began again.

"Shut up your wishing," Henry said angrily. "Your have a stomach ache. That's what's bothering you. Take a spoonful of sody, and you'll be a more pleasant company."

In the morning Henry was awakened by Bill's swearing. He saw his comrade standing among the dogs, his arms raised and his face angry.

"Hello!" Henry called. "What's up now?"

"Frog's gone."

"No."

"I tell you yes."

Henry came to the dogs, counted them with care, and then joined his partner in cursing the Wild that had robbed them of another dog.

"Frog was our strongest dog," Bill said finally.

"And he was no fool," Henry added.

And so it was the second epitaph in two days.

The next day was a repetition of the days that had gone before. All was silent in the world but[4] the cries of their pursuers.

"There, that'll fix you, fool creatures," Bill said with satisfaction that night. He tied the dogs, after the Indian method, with sticks. About the neck of each dog was a leather thong. To this he had tied a stick four or five feet[5] in length. The other end of the stick, in turn, was attached to a stake in the ground.

Henry nodded his head approvingly, "They all will be here in the morning."

"If one of them disappears, I'll go without my coffee," said Bill.

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[3] **leave smb. alone** – оставить кого-л. в покое

[4] **but** – (*зд.*) кроме, за исключением

[5] **foot** (*мн. feet*) – фут, английская мера длины, равная примерно 30 см

"They just know we have nothing to kill them with," Henry remarked at bed-time, indicating the circle of eyes that surrounded them. "If we could put a couple of shots into them, they'd be more respectful. They come closer every night," and then he suddenly whispered: "Look at that, Bill."

A doglike animal went stealthily in the firelight. Its attention was fixed on the dogs. One Ear strained the full length of the stick toward the intruder.

"That fool One Ear doesn't seem scared," Bill said in a low tone.

"It's a she-wolf. She's dangerous. She draws out the dog and eats him up."

"Henry, I'm thinking," Bill announced, "I'm thinking that is the one I hit with the club."

"It must be."

"And I want to remark," Bill went on, "that that animal's familiarity with campfires is suspicious and immoral."

"It knows more than a self-respecting wolf ought to know," Henry agreed. "A wolf that comes at the dogs' feeding time has had experience."

"If I get a chance, that wolf will be just meat. We can't afford to lose any more animals."

"But you've only got three cartridges," Henry objected.

"I'll wait for a dead shot."

In the morning Henry renewed the fire and cooked breakfast to the accompaniment of his partner's snoring.

"You were sleeping just so comfortably," Henry told him, as he called him out for breakfast. "I hadn't the heart[6] to wake you."

Bill began to eat sleepily. He noticed that his cup was empty, but the pot was beyond his arm's length and beside Henry.

"You don't get coffee," Henry announced.

"Has it run out?"

"Nope."

"Aren't you thinking it'll hurt my digestion?"

"Nope."

"Then explain yourself,[7]" Bill said angrily.

"Spanker's gone."

Bill slowly turned his head and counted the dogs.

"One Ear, the damned dog! Just because he couldn't free himself, he freed Spanker."

"Well, Spanker's troubles are over anyway; I guess he's digested by this time," was Henry's epitaph on this, the latest lost dog. "Have some coffee, Bill."

"No. I said I wouldn't drink it if any dog is missing, and I won't."

And he ate a dry breakfast with curses at One Ear for the trick he had played.

"I'll tie them up out of reach of each other tonight," Bill said, as they started off again.

They had travelled little more than a hundred yards, when Henry, who was in front, picked up something from the ground.

"Maybe you'll need that," he said.

It was all that was left of Spanker – the stick with which he had been tied.

"They ate him all," Bill announced. "They're damn hungry, Henry. I'm not feeling special enthusiastic."

"You're unwell, that's what's the matter with you," Henry dogmatised. "What you need is quinine."

Bill disagreed with the diagnosis, and didn't say anything.

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[6] **hadn't the heart to do smth.** – не хватило духу что-л. сделать

[7] **to explain oneself** – объясниться

The day was like all the days. It was just after the sun's attempt to appear, that Bill took the rifle and said:

"You go on, Henry, but I'm going to see what I can see."

"You'd better go after the sled. You've only got three cartridges, and nobody knows what might happen."

"Who's croaking now?"[8]

Henry said nothing, and toiled on alone, though often he looked back. An hour later, Bill arrived.

"I've seen some of them. They're very thin. They hadn't had food for weeks, I think, save the meat of Fatty and Frog and Spanker. They'll be going mad, yet, and then watch out."

[8] **Who's croaking now?** – Расквакался!

A few minutes later, Henry, who was now travelling behind the sled, gave a warning whistle. Bill turned and looked, then stopped the dogs. Behind them trotted a furry form. Its nose was to the trail. When they stopped, it stopped, too, and watched them.

"It's the she-wolf," Bill said.

The animal trotted forward a few steps, and then, after a pause, a few more steps, and then a few more. It looked at them in a strangely wistful way, like a dog; but there was none of the dog's affection. It was hungry and cruel.

It was large for a wolf and had a true wolf-coat. The main colour was grey, with a red– dish hue – a hue that appeared and disappeared, like an illusion of the vision, now grey, really grey, and then again showing some redness of colour.

"Looks like a big husky sled-dog," Bill commented. "Hello, you husky!" he shouted, "Come here, you whatever-your-name-is."

The animal showed no fear. For it they were meat, and it was hungry; and it would like to go in and eat them.

"Look here, Henry," Bill said, "We've got three cartridges. But it's a dead shot. Couldn't miss it. It's got away with three of our dogs, and we must put a stop to it. What do you say?"

Henry nodded. Bill cautiously took the gun. The gun was on the way to his shoulder, but it never got there. For in that instant the she-wolf jumped sidewise from the trail and disappeared.

The two men looked at each other. Henry whistled.

"I might have known it," Bill said as he replaced the gun. "Of course a wolf that knows enough to come with the dogs at feeding time, would know all about guns. I tell you, Henry, that creature's the cause of all our trouble. We would have six dogs instead of three, if it wasn't because of her. And, Henry, I'm going to get her. She's too smart to be shot in the open. But I'll get her as sure as my name is Bill."

They camped early that night. Three dogs could not go so fast nor for so long hours as could six, and they were showing unmistakable signs of weariness. And the men went early to bed, after Bill had made sure that the dogs were tied out of reach of one another.

But the wolves were growing bolder, and the men woke more than once from their sleep. So near did the wolves approach, that the dogs became mad with terror, and it was necessary to keep the fire burning.

"They're going to get us, Henry," Bill remarked.

"You're half eaten when you're saying such things, Bill, so shut up your croaking."

Henry rolled over angrily on his side, but Bill said nothing. Usually he was easily angered by sharp words. Henry thought long over it before he went to sleep: "There's no doubt Bill's not well. I'll have to cheer him up tomorrow."

Chapter III. The Hunger Cry

They had lost no dogs during the night, and Bill seemed to have forgotten his troubles when, at midday, they came to a bad piece of trail. It was an awkward mix-up. The sled was upside down and stuck between a tree-trunk and a huge rock, and they had to unharness the dogs. The two men were bent over the sled and trying to right it, when Henry observed One Ear going away.

"Here, you, One Ear!" he cried.

But One Ear was already running across the snow. And there, on their back track, was the she-wolf waiting for him.

At first One Ear was cautious and dubious. She seemed to smile at him, showing her teeth in a welcoming rather than a menacing way. She moved toward him a few steps and stopped. One Ear came nearer, his tail and ears in the air, his head high. He tried to sniff noses[9] with her, but she retreated playfully. Every advance on his part was accompanied by a corresponding retreat on her part. Step by step she was leading him away from the security of his human companionship. Once he turned his head and looked back at the sled, at his team-mates, and at the two men who were calling to him, but the she-wolf sniffed noses with him for an instant, and then continued her playful retreat.

In the meantime, Bill remembered of the rifle. But it was stuck beneath the overturned sled, and by the time Henry had helped him to right the load, One Ear and the she-wolf were too close together and the distance too great to risk a shot.

Too late One Ear realized his mistake. Suddenly, the two men saw him turn and start to run back toward them. Then they saw a dozen wolves around. The she-wolf's playfulness disappeared. With a snarl she sprang upon One Ear. His retreat was cut off, so he changed his course, trying to circle around. More wolves were appearing every moment and joining the chase. The she-wolf was one leap behind One Ear.

"Where are you going?" Henry asked Bill and tried to stop him.

"I won't stand it. They won't get any more of our dogs."

Henry remained behind after Bill had gone. He judged One Ear's case to be hopeless. He could not break the circle of his pursuers.

Henry sat on the sled. And too quickly, far more quickly than he had expected, it happened. He heard a shot, then two more shots, and he knew that Bill's ammunition was gone. Then he heard a great outcry of snarls. He recognised One Ear's yell of pain and terror, and he heard a wolf-cry of an injured animal. And that was all. The snarls ceased. Silence fell down again on the lonely land.

He sat for a long while upon the sled. There was no need for him to go and see what had happened. He knew it as though it had taken place before his eyes. Once, he roused with a start[10] and quickly got the axe out from the sled. But for some time longer he sat and brooded, the two remaining dogs crouching and trembling at his feet.

At last he arose wearily, as though all the determination had gone out of his body, and fastened the dogs to the sled. He passed a rope over his shoulder, and pulled with the dogs. He did not go far. At the first hint of darkness he made a camp and prepared a generous supply of firewood. He fed the dogs, cooked and ate his supper, and made his bed close to the fire.

But he could not enjoy that bed. The wolves were around him and the fire, in a narrow circle, and he saw them plainly: lying down, sitting up, crawling forward on their bellies, or going around. They even slept. Here and there he could see one curled up in the snow like a dog, taking the sleep that he could not now afford.

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[9] **to sniff noses** – обнюхать

[10] **roused with a start** – вздрогнув, очнулся

He kept the fire blazing, because he knew that it alone was between the flesh of his body and their hungry fangs. His two dogs stayed close by him, one on either side, whimpering and snarling desperately. Bit by bit, an inch[11] at a time, with here a wolf bellying forward, and there a wolf bellying forward, the circle narrowed until the man started taking brands from the fire and throwing them into the brutes.

Morning found him tired and worn. He cooked breakfast in the darkness, and at nine o'clock, when the wolves drew back, he started doing what he had planned through the night. He made a wooden scaffold and fixed it high up to the trunks of trees. With the use of a rope, and with the aid of the dogs, he put the coffin to the top of the scaffold.

"They got Bill, and they may get me, but they'll never get you, young man," he said, addressing the dead body in the coffin.

Then he took the trail with the lightened sled. Dogs were willing to pull, for they, too, knew that safety was in Fort McGurry. The wolves were now more open in their pursuit. They were very lean – so lean that Henry wondered how they still kept their feet.

He did not dare travel after dark. In grey daylight and dim twilight he prepared an enormous supply of fire-wood.

With night came horror. Not only were the starving wolves growing bolder, but lack of sleep was telling upon Henry.[12] He dozed, crouching by the fire, the blankets about his shoulders, the axe between his knees, and on either side a dog pressing close against him. He awoke once and saw in front of him, not a dozen feet away, a big grey wolf, one of the largest of the pack. The brute deliberately stretched himself, like a lazy dog, looking upon him as if, in truth, he were just a delayed meal that was soon to be eaten.

The wolves reminded Henry of children gathered around a table and waiting for the permission to begin to eat. And he was the food they were to eat! He wondered how and when the meal would begin.

He grew suddenly fond of his body, of his flesh that worked so fine. Then he looked fearfully at the wolf-circle drawn around him: this wonderful body of his was no more than much meat, to be torn by their hungry fangs, like the moose or the rabbit.

He came out of a doze to see the red-hued she-wolf before him. The two dogs were whimpering and snarling at his feet, but she took no notice of them. She was looking at the man, and for some time he returned her look. There was nothing scary about her. She just looked at him with a great wistfulness of hunger. He was the food, and the sight of him excited her. Her mouth opened, the saliva dropped down in anticipation.

A spasm of fear went through him. He reached for a brand to throw at her, but before his fingers had closed on it, she sprang back into safety. He glanced at the hand that held the brand, and in the same instant he seemed to see a vision of those same fingers being crushed and torn by the white teeth of the she-wolf. Never before had he been so fond of his body.

All night, with burning brands, he fought off the hungry pack. Morning came, but for the first time the light of day did not frighten the wolves. The man waited in vain for them to go. They remained in a circle about him and his fire, showing an arrogance of possession that shook his courage.

He made one desperate attempt to go on the trail. But the moment he left the fire, the boldest wolf leaped for him. He saved himself by springing back, the jaws snapping together six inches from his leg.

The night was a repetition of the night before, save that the need for sleep was too great. The snarling of his dogs was losing its efficacy. Once he suddenly awoke to see the she-wolf was less than

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[11] **an inch** – дюйм *(английская мера длины, равная 2,5 см)*

[12] **to be telling upon sb.** – сказываться на ком-л.

a yard[13] from him. Mechanically, without letting go of it, he thrust a brand into her open mouth. She sprang away, yelling with pain.

Before he dozed again, he tied a burning pine-knot to his right hand. His eyes were closed only a few minutes when the flame on his flesh awakened him. Every time he was thus awakened he drove back the wolves with flying brands, checked the fire, and rearranged the pine-knot on his hand. All worked well, but once he tied the pine-knot badly. As his eyes closed it fell away from his hand.

He dreamed. It seemed to him that he was in Fort McGurry. It was warm and comfortable, and he was playing cards with the Factor. Also, it seemed to him that the fort was besieged by wolves. They were howling at the gates, and sometimes he and the Factor paused from the game to listen and laugh at them. And suddenly the door was burst open. He could see the wolves coming into the big living-room. They were leaping straight for him and the Factor. Their howling now followed him everywhere.

And then he awoke to find the howling real. The wolves were all about him and upon him. The teeth of one had closed upon his arm. Instinctively he leaped into the fire, and as he leaped, he felt the sharp teeth that tore through the flesh of his leg. Then there began a fire fight. His mittens temporarily protected his hands, and he threw burning coals into the air in all directions, until the campfire looked like a volcano. But it could not last long. The heat was becoming unbearable to his feet. With a burning brand in each hand, he sprang to the edge of the fire. The wolves had been driven back, and many of them stepped on the fallen coals, crying with pain.

The man thrust his brands at the nearest of his enemies, then thrust his mittens and legs into the snow to cool them. His two dogs were missing, and he well knew that they had served as a course in the meal which had begun days before with Fatty, and the last course of which would likely be himself in the days to follow.

“You haven’t got me yet!” he cried, shaking his fist at the hungry beasts; and at the sound of his voice the whole circle was agitated, and the she-wolf came close to him and watched him with hungry wistfulness.

Henry extended the fire into a large circle and crouched inside it. The whole pack came closer to see what had become of him. They could not cross the fire, and they now settled down in a close-drawn circle, like dogs, blinking and yawning and stretching their lean bodies in the warmth. Then the she-wolf sat down, pointed her nose at a star, and began to howl. One by one the wolves joined her, till the whole pack was howling.

Dawn came, and daylight. The fire was burning low. The fuel had run out, and there was need to get more. The man could not step out of the circle of fire or drive the wolves back. As he gave up and sat inside his circle, a wolf leaped for him, missed, and landed with all four feet in the coals. It cried out with terror, at the same time snarling, and jumped back to cool its paws in the snow.

The man sat down on his blankets. His shoulders relaxed and drooped, his head was on his knees: he had given up the struggle. Now and again he raised his head and watched the fire dying. The circle of flame and coals was breaking into segments with openings in between.

“I guess you can come and get me any time,” he said. “Anyway, I’m going to sleep.”

Once he awakened, and in an opening in the circle, he saw the she-wolf gazing at him.

Again he awakened, a little later, though it seemed hours to him. A mysterious change had taken place. He could not understand at first. Then he discovered it. The wolves were gone. Only the traces on the snow showed how closely they had come.

There were cries of men and sounds of sleds and harnesses, and the whimpering of dogs. Four sleds with half a dozen men approached the man who crouched in the centre of the dying fire. They were shaking him into consciousness. He looked at them like a drunken man and said sleepily:

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[13] **a yard** – ярд *(английская мера длины, равная ок. 99 см)*

“Red she-wolf… Come in with the dogs at feeding time… First she ate the dog-food… Then she ate the dogs… And after that she ate Bill…”

“Where’s Lord Alfred?” one of the men shouted in his ear, shaking him roughly.

He shook his head slowly. “No, she didn’t eat him… He’s in a tree at the last camp.”

“Dead?”

“And in a box,” Henry jerked his shoulder away from the grip of his questioner. “Leave alone… Good night, everybody.”

His eyes closed. And even as they put him down upon the blankets his snores sounded in the frosty air.

But there was another sound: a far and faint cry of the hungry wolf-pack as it took the trail of other meat.

Part II

Chapter I. The Battle of the Fangs

It was the she-wolf who had first caught the sound of men's voices and the whining of the sled-dogs; and it was the she-wolf who was first to spring away from the man in his circle of dying fire. The pack followed her.

A large grey wolf – one of the pack's several leaders – directed the wolves' course on the heels[14] of the she-wolf. She went near him, as though it were her appointed position. He did not snarl at her, nor show his teeth, although he snarled at the younger wolves. On the contrary, when he ran too near it was she who snarled and showed her teeth. She could even slash his shoulder sharply on occasion. He showed no anger.

On the other side of the she-wolf ran an old wolf, marked with the scars of many battles. He ran always on her right side – perhaps because he had only one eye, and that was the left eye. Sometimes he and the grey wolf on the left showed their teeth and snarled across at each other. They might have fought, but now they were too hungry.

Also there was a young three-year-old that ran on the right side of the one-eyed wolf. When he dared to run abreast, a snarl sent him back. Sometimes he even edged in between the old leader and the she-wolf, but was stopped by three sets of savage teeth (the leader's, the one-eyed wolf's, and the she-wolf's).

The situation of the pack was desperate. It was lean with hunger. It ran slower than usual. The weak members, the very young and the very old, ran behind. At the front were the strongest. Yet all were more like skeletons than wolves.

They ran night and day, over the surface of the frozen and dead world. They alone were alive there, and they looked for other things that were alive to eat them and continue living.

Finally they came upon a moose. It was a short and fierce fight. And after that there was plenty of food. The moose weighed over eight hundred pounds[15] – fully twenty pounds of meat per mouth for more than forty wolves of the pack.

There was now much resting and sleeping. The hunger was over. The wolves were in the country of game.[16]

There came a day when the pack divided and went in different directions. The she-wolf, the young leader on her left, and the one-eyed elder on her right, led their half of the pack down to the Mackenzie River and across into the lake country to the east. Each day this remnant of the pack became smaller. Two by two, male and female, the wolves were leaving.

In the end there remained only four: the she-wolf, the young leader, the one-eyed one, and the ambitious three-year-old. The she-wolf had by now developed a fierce temper. Her three suitors all had the marks of her teeth. But they never defended themselves against her.

The three-year-old grew too ambitious. He caught the one-eyed elder on his blind side and ripped his ear into ribbons.[17] The third wolf joined the elder, and together, old leader and young leader, they attacked the ambitious three-year-old and wanted to destroy him. Forgotten were the days when they had hunted together. The business of love was at hand – a crueller business than food-getting. And the three-year-old yielded up his life for it.

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[14] **on sb.'s heels** – следом за кем-л.

[15] **a pound** – фунт *(английская единица измерения веса, равная ок. 450 г)*

[16] **game** – *(зд.)* дичь

[17] **to rip into ribbons** – порвать в лоскуты

In the meanwhile, the she-wolf, the cause of it all, sat down on her haunches[18] and watched. She was even pleased. This was her day.

The younger leader turned his head to lick a wound on his shoulder. With his one eye the elder saw the opportunity. He jumped low and closed his fangs on the other's neck. His teeth tore the great vein of the throat.

The young leader snarled terribly, but his snarl broke into a cough. Bleeding and coughing, he sprang at the elder and fought until life left him and the light of day dulled on his eyes.

And all the while the she-wolf sat on her haunches and smiled. This was the love-making of the Wild, the sex-tragedy of the natural world that was tragedy only to those that died. To those that survived it was not tragedy, but realization and achievement.

When the young leader lay in the snow and moved no more, One Eye went to the she-wolf. For the first time she met him kindly. She sniffed noses with him, and even leaped about and played with him in quite puppyish fashion. And he, for all his grey years and experience, behaved quite puppyishly and even a little foolishly. The fight was forgotten the moment as he sprang after the she-wolf, who was leading him a chase through the woods.

After that they ran side by side, like good friends who have come to an understanding. The days passed by, and they kept together, hunting their meat and killing and eating it in common. After a time the she-wolf became restless. She seemed to be searching for something that she could not find. The caves under fallen trees seemed to attract her. Old One Eye was not interested at all, but he followed her good-naturedly in her quest.

They did not stay in one place, but travelled across country until they came to the Mackenzie River. One moonlight night, running through the quiet forest, they heard the sounds of dogs, the cries of men, the sharper voices of women, and once a cry of a child. Little could be seen save the flames of the fire. But to their nostrils came the smells of an Indian camp, that was new to One Eye, but every detail of which the she-wolf knew.

She was strangely worried, and sniffed and sniffed with an increasing delight. But old One Eye was doubtful. A new wistfulness was in her face, but it was not the wistfulness of hunger. One Eye moved impatiently beside her; and she knew again her pressing need to find the thing for which she searched. She turned and trotted back into the forest, to the great relief of One Eye.

[18] **sit on someone's haunches –** сидеть на задних лапах *(о животном)*, сидеть на корточках *(о человеке)*

Chapter II. The Lair

For two days the she-wolf and One Eye hung about the Indian camp. He was worried, yet she didn't want to depart. But when, one morning, a bullet passed several inches from One Eye's head, they hesitated no more and left.

They did not go far – a couple of days' journey. The she-wolf's need to find the thing for which she searched had now become urgent. She was getting very heavy, and could run but slowly. Her temper was now shorter than ever; but he had become more patient.

And then she found the thing for which she looked. It was a few miles up a small stream that in the summer time flowed into the Mackenzie, but in winter it was frozen down to its rocky bottom – a dead stream of white from source to mouth. The she-wolf examined it and entered inside. For three feet she had to crouch, then the walls widened and rose higher in a little round chamber nearly six feet in diameter. It was dry and cosy. She inspected it with painstaking care, while One Eye stood in the entrance and patiently watched her. Then, with a tired sigh, she curled, relaxed her legs, and lay with her head toward the entrance. One Eye, with pointed, interested ears, laughed at her, and she could see his tail wagging good-naturedly. She was pleased and satisfied.

One Eye was hungry. He crawled over to his mate and tried to persuade her to get up. But she only snarled at him, and he walked out alone. He had found game, but he had not caught it, so he returned.

He paused at the mouth of the cave with a sudden shock of suspicion. Strange sounds came from within. They were sounds not made by his mate, and yet they were remotely familiar. He bellied carefully inside and was met by a warning snarl from the she-wolf. But he remained interested in the other sounds – faint and muffled.

His mate warned him away, and he curled up and slept in the entrance. When morning came, he again looked for the source of the sounds. There was a new note in his mate's warning snarl. It was a jealous note, and he was very careful in keeping a respectful distance. Nevertheless, he saw five strange little bundles of life, very helpless, making whimpering noises, with eyes that did not open to the light. He was surprised. It was not the first time in his long and successful life that this thing had happened. It had happened many times, yet each time it was as fresh a surprise as ever.

His mate looked at him anxiously. Of her own experience she had no memory of the thing happening; but in her instinct, which was the experience of all the mothers of wolves, there was a memory of fathers that had eaten their new-born and helpless children.

But there was no danger. Old One Eye was feeling an instinct that had come down to him from all the fathers of wolves. He knew he should turn his back on his new-born family and look out for food.

Half a mile from the stream he saw a porcupine. One Eye approached carefully but hopelessly. But he knew that there was such a thing as Chance, or Opportunity, and he continued to draw near.

The porcupine rolled itself into a ball with long, sharp quills. One Eye knew it could be dangerous, so he lied down and waited. But at the end of half an hour he arose, growled at the motionless ball, and trotted on.

His awakened instinct of fatherhood was strong. He must find meat. In the afternoon he managed to catch a ptarmigan. As his teeth crunched through its flesh, he began naturally to eat. Then he remembered, and, turning on the back-track, started for home,[19] carrying the ptarmigan in his mouth.

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[19] **to start for somewhere** – направиться куда-л.

Then he came upon large tracks and followed them, prepared to meet their maker at every turn of the stream. And he saw it. It was a large female lynx. She was crouching, as he had done before, in front the same ball of quills.

He lay down in the snow, put the ptarmigan beside him, and watched the waiting lynx and the waiting porcupine. Half an hour passed, an hour; and nothing happened.

The porcupine had at last decided that its enemy had gone away. Slowly, cautiously, it was unrolling its ball. Not quite entirely had it unrolled when it discovered the lynx. The lynx struck. The blow was like a flash of light. The paw with sharp claws went under the tender belly and came back with a quick movement.

Everything had happened at once – the blow, the counter-blow, the cry from the porcupine, the big cat's cry of sudden hurt and astonishment. One Eye half arose in his excitement, his ears up, his tail straight out behind him. The lynx sprang at the thing that had hurt her, but squealed again. In her nose there were quills, like in a monstrous pin-cushion. She brushed it with her paws, put it into the snow, and rubbed it against twigs and branches, and all the time leaping about, ahead, sidewise, up and down, in pain and fright. Then she sprang away, up the trail, squalling with every leap she made.

When One Eye approached, the porcupine managed to roll up in a ball again, but it was not quite the old compact ball; its muscles were too much torn for that. It had been ripped almost in half, and was still bleeding.

One Eye saw the bloody snow, and chewed it. Then he lied down and waited. In a little while, One Eye noticed that all the quills drooped down, and the body relaxed and moved no more. It was surely dead.

One Eye took it carefully with his teeth, then recollected something, dropped the burden, and trotted back to where he had left the ptarmigan. He did not hesitate a moment. He knew clearly what was to be done, and this he did by immediately eating the ptarmigan. Then he returned and took up his burden.

When he brought the result of his day's hunt into the cave, the she-wolf inspected it and lightly licked him on the neck. But the next instant she was warning him away from the cubs with a snarl that was less sharp than usual and that was more apologetic than menacing. He was behaving as a wolf-father should.

Chapter III. The Grey Cub

He was different from his brothers and sisters. Their hair already betrayed the reddish hue inherited from their mother; while he alone took after his father.[20] He was the only grey cub of the litter. He was a real wolf – in fact, he was like One Eye himself.

The grey cub's eyes had not been open long, yet already he could see clearly. And while his eyes were still closed, he had felt, tasted, and smelled. He knew his two brothers and his two sisters very well. And long before his eyes had opened he had learned by touch, taste, and smell to know his mother. She had a soft, caressing tongue that calmed him when it passed over his soft little body, and that made him sleepy.

Always, in the beginning, before his conscious life began, he had crawled toward the mouth of the cave. And his brothers and sisters did the same. The chemistry of the life that created them demanded the light.

Later the grey cub discovered that his mother also had a nose and a paw and could push and hit. Thus he learned hurt; and he learned to avoid hurt, first, by not risking; and second, when he had risked, by retreating. These were conscious actions, and were the results of his first generalisations upon the world.

He was a fierce little cub. So were his brothers and sisters. It was to be expected. He was a carnivorous animal and came of a breed of meat-killers and meat-eaters. His father and mother lived wholly upon meat. The milk he drank was transformed directly from meat.

But he was the fiercest of the litter. He could make a louder growl than any of them, and it was he who first learned many things. He was always going to the mouth of the cave – and was always stopped by his mother. To him the entrance of the cave was a wall – a wall of light; it attracted him as a candle attracts a moth. The life that was within him knew that it was the one way out, the way he must choose.

Though never allowed by his mother to approach that wall, he had approached the other walls, and felt a hard obstacle on the end of his tender nose. This hurt. And after several such adventures, he left the walls alone.

In fact, the grey cub did not think – at least, not like men. Yet his conclusions were as sharp as those of men. He had a method of accepting things, without questioning 'why'. In reality, this was the act of classification. He never asked why a thing happened. How it happened was enough for him. Thus, when he had touched back-wall a few times with his nose, he accepted that he would not disappear into walls. In the same way he accepted that his father could disappear into the wall of light. Logic and physics were no part of his mental make-up.

Like most creatures of the Wild, he early experienced hunger. Hunger came unexpectedly. At first, the cubs cried, but for the most part they slept. It was not long before they were in a coma of hunger. The cubs slept, while the life that was in them was dying down.

One Eye was desperate. He ranged far and wide, and slept but little. The she-wolf, too, left her litter and went out in search of meat.

When the grey cub came back to life and again took interest in the far white wall, he found that only one sister remained to him. The rest were gone. And soon she was gone, too.

Then there came a time when the grey cub no longer saw his father appearing and disappearing in the wall or lying down asleep in the entrance. The she-wolf knew why One Eye never came back, but there was no way by which she could tell what she had seen to the grey cub. Hunting herself for meat, she had followed a day-old trail of One Eye. And she had found him, or what remained of him. There were many signs of the battle, and of the lynx that came back to her lair after having

[20] **take after smb.** – быть на кого-л. похожим

won the victory. The she-wolf found this lair, but the signs told her that the lynx was inside, and she did not dare to come in.

After that, the she-wolf avoided hunting there. She knew that in the lynx's lair there was a litter of kittens. It was quite a different matter for a lone wolf to fight a lynx – especially when the lynx had a litter of hungry kittens.

But the Wild is the Wild, and motherhood is motherhood, and the time was to come when the she-wolf, for her grey cub's sake,[21] would dare to go there.

[21] **for smb.'s sake** – ради кого-либо

Chapter IV. The Wall of the World

By the time his mother began leaving the cave on hunting expeditions, the cub had learned well the law that forbade him to approach the entrance. Not only had this law been impressed on him by his mother's nose and paw, but in him the instinct of fear was developing. Fear! – that legacy of the Wild which no animal may escape.

In fact, the cub merely classified the things that hurt and the things that did not hurt. And after such classification he avoided the things that hurt in order to enjoy the satisfactions and the remunerations of life.

When his mother was absent, he slept most of the time, while during the intervals that he was awake he kept very quiet. Once, lying awake, he heard a strange sound in the white wall. He did not know that it was a wolverine, standing outside. The cub knew only that it was something unclassified, therefore unknown and terrible. The cub was terrified; he lay without movement or sound. His mother, coming home, growled as she smelt the wolverine's track, and licked and caressed him more than ever. And the cub felt that somehow he had escaped a great hurt.

Another power within him was growth. Instinct and law demanded of him obedience. But growth demanded disobedience. His mother and fear made him keep away from the white wall. Growth is life, and life is always reaching for light.

So once he entered into the wall.

It was astonishing. He was going through solidity. Fear called him to go back, but growth drove him on. Suddenly he found himself at the mouth of the cave. The light had become painfully bright.

A great fear came upon him. He crouched down in the entrance and looked out on the world. He was very much afraid. Because it was unknown, it was hostile to him. Therefore the hair stood up on end along his back and his lips wrinkled in an attempt at a snarl. Out of his fright he challenged and menaced the whole wide world.

Nothing happened. He continued to look, and in his interest he forgot to snarl. Also, he forgot to be afraid. For the time, fear had been driven away by growth.

Now the grey cub had lived all his days on a level floor. He had never experienced the hurt of a fall. He did not know what a fall was. So he stepped boldly out upon the air. His hind-legs still were on the cave-lip, so he fell head downward. Then he began rolling down the slope, over and over. He was in a panic of terror. The unknown had caught him at last, and he gave a loud 'ki-yi' cry. And then he ki-yi'd again and again.

When at last he came to a stop, he gave one last 'ki-yi'. Also, as though in his life he had already made a thousand toilets, he licked himself well.

Now that the terrible unknown had let go of him,[22] he forgot that the unknown had any terrors. He was aware only of curiosity in all the things about him. He inspected the grass, the plants around, and the dead trunk. A squirrel, running around the trunk, gave him a great fright. He cowered down and snarled. But the squirrel was scared as well, so it ran up a tree.

This helped the cub's courage. He met a woodpecker, and then a moose-bird. It pecked him on the end of his nose.

But the cub was learning. His little mind had already made an unconscious classification. There were live things and things not alive. Also, he must watch out for the live things. The things not alive remained always in one place, but the live things moved about, and there was no telling what they might do. He must be prepared.

He travelled very awkwardly. Sometimes he overstepped and stubbed his nose. Quite as often he understepped and stubbed his feet. Then there were the stones that turned under him when he

[22] **to let go of smth.** – отпустить

stepped upon them; and from them he learnt that the things not alive were not all in the same state of stability. But with every mistake he was learning. The longer he walked, the better he walked.

He had the beginner's luck.[23] Born to be a hunter (though he did not know it), he found meat just outside his own cave-door. It was a ptarmigan nest. He fell into it, in the midst of seven ptarmigan chicks.

They made noises, and at first he was frightened. Then he understood that they were very little, and he became bolder. They moved. He placed his paw on one, and its movements were slowered. This was a source of enjoyment to him. He smelled it. He picked it up in his mouth. It struggled and tickled his tongue. At the same time he felt hunger. His jaws closed together. There was a crunching of small bones, and warm blood ran in his mouth. The taste of it was good. This was meat, the same as his mother gave him, only it was alive between his teeth and therefore better. So he ate all the ptarmigan. Then he licked his chops[24] in quite the same way his mother did, and began to crawl out of the bush.

There, the mother ptarmigan was in a fury and tried to hit him. He became angry. He no longer was afraid of anything. He was fighting. He had just destroyed little live things. He would now destroy a big live thing. He was too busy and happy to know that he was happy.

But he lost the battle with ptarmigan. She pecked on his nose, again and again. A rain of pecks fell on his ill-used nose. So he released his prey, turned tail and made an inglorious retreat. But, while he was lying in the bush, he saw a terrible hawk that caught the mother-ptarmigan and carried it away.

Live things were meat. They were good to eat. Also, live things when they were large enough, could give hurt. It was better to eat small live things like ptarmigan chicks, and to let alone large live things like ptarmigan hens.

He came down a bank to the stream. He had never seen water before. The surface looked good. He stepped boldly out on it; and went down, crying with fear, into the embrace of the unknown. It was cold, and he gasped, breathing quickly. The water rushed into his lungs instead of the air. Like every animal of the Wild, he had the instinct of death. To him it was the greatest of hurts.

He came to the surface, and the sweet air rushed into his open mouth. He did not go down again. He fought frantically, going under water from time to time, but finally he reached the bank. He crawled from the water and lied down. He had learned some more about the world. Water was not alive. Yet it moved. Also, it looked as stable as the earth, but was without any stability at all. His conclusion was that things were not always what they seemed to be.

One other adventure was destined for him that day. He had remembered that there was such a thing in the world as his mother. And then there came to him a feeling that he wanted her more than all the rest of the things in the world. Not only his body and brain were tired with the adventure. So he started out to look for the cave and his mother, feeling lonely and helpless.

He was going through some bushes, when he heard a sharp cry. He saw a weasel leaping away from him. It was a small live thing, and he had no fear. Then, before him, at his feet, he saw an extremely small live thing, only several inches long, a young weasel, that, like himself, had disobediently gone out on an adventure. He turned it over with his paw. It made a strange noise. The next moment he received a sharp blow on the side of the neck and felt the sharp teeth of the mother-weasel cut into his flesh.

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[23] **beginner's luck** – новичкам везёт

[24] **to lick chops** – облизнуться *(о животных)*

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