

## INTO THE PRIMITIVE

<sup>3</sup> Buck did not read the newspapers. So he did not know that there was trouble ahead<sup>•</sup>. Trouble for every dog with strong muscles and warm long hair, from Seattle to southern California. Some men had found a yellow metal in the Arctic darkness, and thousands of other men were rushing there. These men wanted dogs that were heavy, with strong muscles for working hard and furry coats to protect them from the cold.

Buck lived at a big house in a sunny valley in California which was owned by Judge Miller. And Buck ruled over it all. He was born there, and had lived there for the four years of his life. There were many other dogs, but they lived together in the kennels<sup>•</sup>, or inside the house. But Buck was neither a house dog nor a kennel dog. The whole of Judge Miller's land was his. Buck was king – king over all the creeping<sup>•</sup>, crawling<sup>•</sup>, flying things of Judge Miller's lands, humans included.

His father, Elmo, a huge St Bernard, had been the judge's inseparable<sup>•</sup> companion. And when he died, Buck took his father's place. He was not so large – he weighed only sixty kilograms – for his mother, Shep, had been a Scottish sheepdog. He had had a good life and he was proud of himself, for he had not become a house dog. Hunting and other outdoor activities had hardened<sup>•</sup> his muscles, and swimming had made him healthy.

### Glossary

- **crawling:** moving on all four legs, close to the ground
- **creeping:** moving close to the ground
- **hardened:** made hard
- **inseparable:** impossible to separate
- **kennels:** little houses for dogs to sleep in
- **trouble ahead:** problems in the near future



This was Buck in the autumn of 1897, when the discovery of gold in the Klondike brought men from everywhere to the frozen north. But Buck did not read the newspapers. And he did not know that Manuel, one of the gardener's helpers, was not a good man. Manuel gambled and wasted the little money he had. And one time when the judge was away on business, and his sons were busy with an athletics club, Manuel did something terrible. No one saw him and Buck go off on what Buck thought was a walk. No one saw them arrive at the railway station, where Manuel sold Buck to a man who was waiting for him.

Manuel put a rope round Buck's neck, under his collar. Buck accepted this because he knew Manuel, but when the rope was given to another man, he growled dangerously. And when the rope was tightened round his neck, he started to choke and jumped at the man in anger. The man fought him off and forced Buck to lie on his back, and tightened the rope even more. Buck had never been treated so badly in his life, and he had never been so angry. Then his strength drained away and he soon became unconscious. He was still unconscious when the train arrived and the two men threw him into the baggage car.

## TRUST

Buck goes with Manuel because he trusts him.

But Manuel betrays Buck's trust.

Who do you trust?

Has anyone ever betrayed your trust?

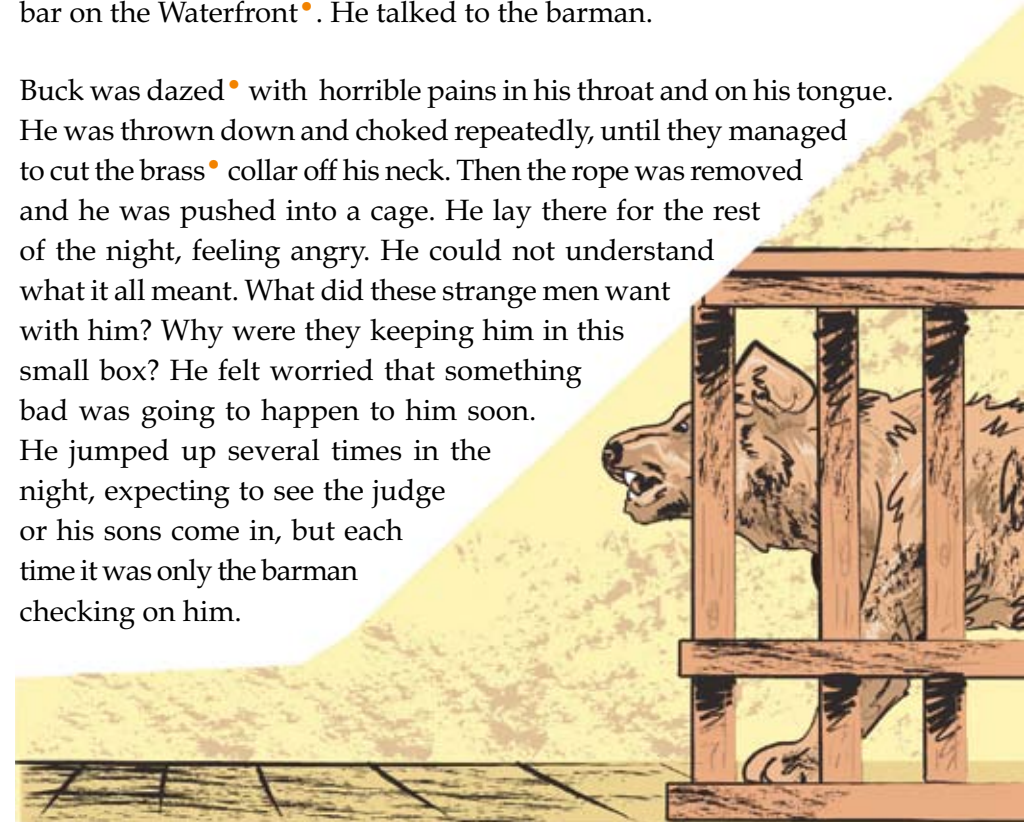
### Glossary


- **choke:** be unable to breathe
- **drained away:** slowly went away
- **gambled:** risked money on the result of a game or sport
- **growled:** made a low angry sound
- **rope:** thick cord
- **treated so badly:** subjected to bad behaviour from someone else
- **unconscious:** not awake or capable of reacting
- **wasted:** used badly; lost

When he woke up he heard a whistle blow, and he knew where he was because he had often travelled by train with the judge. He opened his eyes, and he was filled with the full anger of a kidnapped king. The man jumped for the rope, but Buck was too quick for him. He closed his teeth on the man's hand, and held on until he was choked unconscious again.

Later the man, his hand wrapped in a bloody handkerchief, and his right trouser leg torn from knee to ankle, went into a San Francisco bar on the Waterfront. He talked to the barman.

Buck was dazed with horrible pains in his throat and on his tongue. He was thrown down and choked repeatedly, until they managed to cut the brass collar off his neck. Then the rope was removed and he was pushed into a cage. He lay there for the rest of the night, feeling angry. He could not understand what it all meant. What did these strange men want with him? Why were they keeping him in this small box? He felt worried that something bad was going to happen to him soon. He jumped up several times in the night, expecting to see the judge or his sons come in, but each time it was only the barman checking on him.




- **brass:** a shiny yellow metal
- **dazed:** feeling confused and unable to think
- **kidnapped:** taken away by force
- **the Waterfront:** houses and shops near the river
- **whistle:** 
- **wrapped:** covered

Buck passed through many hands • in that cage. He travelled by wagon and ferry boat with other boxes to the railway station, where he was put on an express train. For two days and nights he travelled north, without food and drink. And all the time Buck grew more and more angry. He was desperate for a drink to ease • his swollen • throat and tongue. But he decided that nobody would ever put a rope around his neck again. His anger would be directed against the first person who tried to hurt him. His eyes became red, and he changed into a raging devil. He was so changed that the judge would not have recognised him.

After two days he was carried off the train in Seattle into a small, high-walled yard. There a fat man in a red sweater broke open the cage with a small axe •, while holding a club • in the other hand. When there was a big enough opening, Buck jumped out like a red-eyed devil, straight at the fat man. But in mid-air, just as his teeth were going to close on the man, he received a shock that he had never felt before. It turned him over and onto the ground. He had never been struck by a club in his life, and he did not understand. With a bark • that was more a scream he jumped at the man again, and again he was clubbed • to the ground. Although he now knew what was happening to him, his anger made him continue jumping. He was smashed down a dozen times.

### Glossary

- **axe:** 
- **bark:** sound a dog makes
- **club:** thick stick used to beat people
- **clubbed:** hit with a club
- **ease:** make better
- **passed through many hands:** was touched and moved by many different people
- **swollen:** larger than usual because of an injury



In the end he could jump no more. Blood was flowing from his nose, mouth and ears. The man came and deliberately hit him hard on the nose. It was agony • for Buck. With a roar like a lion, he jumped at the man again, but the man hit him under the jaw •. Buck rose into the air then crashed • to the ground on his head and chest. For the last time he rushed at the man but the man struck him with a clever blow • and Buck fell down unconscious.

‘He’s a great dog-breaker,’ said one of the men who’d carried Buck into the yard.

Buck’s senses came back to him, but not his strength. He lay where he had fallen, and watched the man in the red sweater.

‘ “Answers to the name of Buck,” ’ said the fat man, reading the barman’s letter. ‘Well, Buck, we’ve had our little fight, and the best thing we can do is stop there. You’ve learned your place. Be a good dog and it’ll go well for you. Be a bad dog, and I’ll beat you again. Understand?’

As he spoke he fearlessly patted the head he had recently beaten so hard. Although Buck’s hair stood up on end, he did not protest. When the man brought him water, he drank quickly, and later ate a generous meal of raw • meat, piece by piece from the man’s hand.



### Glossary

- **agony:** great pain
- **blow:** when you hit someone
- **crashed:** fell heavily to the ground
- **jaw:** lower part of face; chin
- **raw:** not cooked