

## ***The Roars of Flames and Dames***

Sometimes  
The hardest thing  
And the right thing  
Are the same.

In the tranquil, dry wilderness, where the law of club and fang ruled,  
Buck's ending was only beginning.

It all started when Buck awoke in his den a few weeks after John Thornton  
had died and Buck had become pack leader.

A few of the timber wolves were already awake, panting their slim, rough  
tongues from the heat of the sweltering new summer.

The cave in which his clan was reclining in was a sculpt of cool, hard rock  
eroded over time by Mother Nature.

Aromas of crisp evergreens and dry, clawed earth filled Buck's nostrils.

**Home.**

***But... is this really...home?***

A quiet voice echoed in his mind, interrupting his thoughts.

Buck was startled; his breath hitched.

Buck did not feel calm even as he tried to console himself by listening to  
the relaxing rhythm of breathing from his sleeping tribe.

It was not the call of the wild whispering to him.

It was something stronger, something that he could not name.

Moments suddenly flashed from his past; the deep snow crushed  
beneath his paws, the adrenaline he felt pumping through his body in a snowstorm, and  
the yell of a human to **"MUSH!"**

Buck knew it was completely unlike the call of the wild.

It was harsh and steadfast. It nagged his heartstrings, more than the wild ever could.

He stood up hastily, wanting the adventure and game of prey to distract himself from these irritating thoughts.

The asleep wolves, woken up by the noise of their leader leaving, stood up in a flash in pursuit of their leader and their other intelligent pack mates.

Their golden eyes followed their leader in obedience and utter respect.

Outside, the warm embrace of the yellow Sun eagerly welcomed them as they trotted out into the open terrain.

However, Buck felt...empty.

Vibrant green grass shone brightly in the sunlight as insects crawled under the shades of trees.

Buck tried to feel the same connection to nature again as he once did previously, but he could not.

The environment appeared parched and dehydrated, with fierce winds blowing through the land.

Nevertheless, they all surged deeper into the forest, apprehension circulating in their veins.

The clan ran as one wolf, one soul, one being, but Buck felt oddly out of place.

Buck sprinted at the front of the pack, but he did not even notice the sprint at all.

A few minutes had gone by when the wolves came to a smooth pause.

They had discovered a group of deer, chomping down on grass leisurely in an open glade.

His pack was eager to ambush their awaited prey but faced their leader for his next move.

Buck, sensing this, crouched close to the earth; his soft paws inaudible in the brush.

With his nose to the ground, Buck started to prowl in the direction of the prey.

His clan, without a doubt, followed, sneakily advancing to their prey like a cat hunting a mouse.

They could almost feel the flesh of the deer on their teeth, saliva pooling in their mouths in response.

The innocent deer and fawns knew nothing of this.

They just stared lazily at the hazy horizon, as comfortable as a cat lounging in the sun.

***If only they heard the call of the hunt.***

Without hesitation, the wolves jumped in unison, ambushing the deer.

Stags grunted in surprise, instinctually rising to protect their families from the marauders.

The tribe growled and snarled with their teeth, pouncing to rip into the deer's muscles.

Fawn easily collapsed at the sheer force of the wolves.

The timbers yipped with excitement.

***The cycle of hunting.***

Buck felt weird as he crunched the hind of a stag with his canines, sending the animal wheezing in pain.

He almost felt shame for this action but chided himself in response.

It was survival, after all.

Why would anyone feel remorseful about the primordial cycle of survival?

When the stag finally died, Buck slowly ate the meat of the deer.

When he was full, he stopped and trotted from his prey to astutely observe that the entire group of deer had fallen to his tribe, which were now feasting with ravenous swallows.

In his earlier days, he would have hurriedly finished his food in seconds.

In his earlier days, he would have felt nothing about killing prey.

But as of right now, he was thirsty.

He fully padded away from his share, in which several of the timber wolves seized this new opportunity.

They darted toward the food, gnawing the almost untouched morsels of game like lions starved for days.

However, the wise pack mates barked at them, exasperated, and then trailed behind Buck. The minority ran to catch up.

As they walked, the sky had turned from blue to dusty orange.

Buck curiously wondered what was going on.

Buck had also noted that most of the birds had flown away.

Even so, Buck and his clan padded through the vast forest.

It was also difficult to find water these days.

With the scorching summer and dry land, animals needed more water than ever before.

***Surely something is happening. I just have to put it all together.***

Buck moved faster, searching attentively for water. His pack speeded up behind him.

Some timbers were getting distracted though, staring at white rabbits scrambling to their nests, which were camouflaged in green undergrowth.

The wise wolves turned and growled, flashing their canines in annoyance.

The minority perked up, falling in line with the rest.

Luckily, after some time, Buck spotted a small pond that was very well concealed.

They lapped up the cool water with their coarse tongues, obviously enjoying their day.

But now there was a change in the atmosphere.

As his pack was slurping up water, Buck instantly realized this.

He put his snout to the sky and cautiously sniffed the air, which smelled like faint burning in the distance.

There has never been a scent like this before, he acknowledged.

In dread, he barked thunderously to his clan, and they understood instantly.

***“We must go.”***

Picking up one of the pups who might slow the pack down, he ran, his paws thundering against the parched soil.

His pack followed suit, tearing through the wilderness.

Fear prickled Buck’s body, causing him to shiver.

Not of coldness, but fear.

*I must be brave.*

*I will be brave.*

A few hours later, at midnight, the fire began to draw close.

The fire started so easily—twigs there one moment and the next, consumed by crackling flames. The blaze erupted like a domino effect, consuming everything in its sight.

Grass, bushes, wood, you name it.

Ash and soot filled the air, making it difficult for animals to breathe.

Various species of the forest rushed out of the area, running for their lives.

Most of the tribe was oblivious to what was happening just a few miles away.

Licking the old, crusted blood off their pelts, they sat down, muscle aching.

However, Buck was slowly figuring out what was happening.

It all started when the stench of smog became clearer as the flames

came closer. When Buck was alert, his nose was like a fox's.

Buck got up and walked to the entrance of the den, his tail and ears straight down.

Something was wrong.

No birds, animals hiding, dry land, no water...

**Fire.**

Buck jumped in alarm as he saw the embers.

He barked like a mad man.

Or... mad dog.

In surprise, the wolves' heads snapped up.

Buck ran, his body only a flash of brown as he bolted out of the cave.

Dozens of his clan poured out of the den, scrambling for their lives.

They ran in the opposite direction, away from the hissing flames.

Many younglings of the pack were afraid; they had never seen a fire before.

Buck intelligently went to the back of the pack to help the pups move.

**“Bark, bark, BARK!”**

He bayed.

**“Go, go, GOOO!”**

As they drew closer to human civilization, they could see the settlers frantically grabbing all their goods. Bells rung, dames screamed in terror, and flames.

**The roars of flames and dames echoed.**

In all the years of his life, Buck could remember some of the humans that were friendly to him.

Judge Miller, John Thornton, Perrault, and Francois.

**He *had* to help the humans, just like how his friends would help him!**

In the chaos, Buck could see many men and their families who did not know where to go.

They did not know the path, but he **did**.

Barking, Buck led the people away from the camp and to safety in absolute bravery.

The settlers were flabbergasted at the sight of Buck.

**“Well, I’ll be, isn’t that Buck?”**

**“It might be!”**

**“Oh goodness, bless his soul!”**

In the hours that followed, Buck fearlessly saved tons of people.

They all could have perished.

Buck and his tribe led them miles away from the fire, and it eventually died out due to lack of oxygen.

A few days later, Buck and his clan were padding around near the human’s new camp. All of a sudden, a sled came around to reveal a few dogs and a man.

*Perrault.*

Perrault scanned the tribe, his observant, warm gaze finally resting on Buck.

**“Eh, dawgs! I come back for dat Buck—Hear of him from miles away!”**

Perrault guffawed.

Meanwhile, his dogs eyed Buck with plain curiosity.

Buck looked back at his group, only to see his wise clan crouched on the ground; their tails tucked.

He realized—his pack did not seem to need him anymore.

He had shaped his tribe to become wise timbers.

They had learned.

They had matured.

Importantly, they knew how to live without him!

The wild called, sure. It was instinct.

However, Buck had finally figured out what these series of irritating thoughts were.

The call of man.

And it called Buck **louder and louder** than ever before.

Buck stepped toward Perrault, whose grin was growing.

And in that moment, he chose man.

And for the first time in a long while, he felt...

**Whole.**

