



WHITE FANG

By Jack London

THE STORY SO FAR: White Fang, wild son of a once-tame mother, abandons the wild and enters a covenant with the man animals. He finds himself at Fort Yukon with his master, Gray Beaver, at the height of the Klondike gold rush. His fate as a fighter spreads. "Beauty" Smith, a brute of a man, succeeds in buying the Indian dog. Beauty Smith capitalizes on Fang's fighting ability; there are bouts. White Fang, his savage nature intensified by a campaign of torment, beats every opponent and Beauty Smith prospers. White Fang becomes known as "The Fighting Wolf." At Dawson, White Fang is matched with a new, strange animal, a bull dog, and White Fang, victor of a thousand battles, at last finds the clinging death upon him.

INSTALLMENT 28. THE FRIEND IN NEED.

At last he fell, toppling backward, exhausted; and the building promptly shifted his grip, getting in closer, mauling more and more of the fur-mangled flesh, throttling White Fang more severely than ever. Shouts of applause went up for the victor, and there were many cries of "Cherokee!" "Cherokee!" To this Cherokee responded by vigorous wagging of the stump of his tail. But the clamor of approval did not distract him. There was no sympathetic relation between his tail and his massive jaws. The one might wag, but the others held their terrible grip on White Fang's throat.

It was at this time that a diversion came to the spectators. There was a jingle of bells. Dog mushers' cries were heard. Everybody save Beauty Smith, looking apprehensively, the fear of the police strong upon them. But they saw, up the trail, and not down, two men running with sled dogs. They were evidently coming down the creek from some prospecting trip. At sight of the crowd they stopped their dogs and came over and joined the muster to see the cause of the excitement. The dog musher wore a mustache, but the other, a taller and younger man, was smooth-shaven, his skin rosy from the pounding of his blood and the running in the frosty air.

White Fang had practically ceased struggling. Now and again he resisted spasmodically and to no purpose. He could get little air, and that grew less and less under the merciless grip that ever tightened. Despite of his armor of fur, the great vein of his throat would have long since been torn open, had not the first grip of the building been so low down as to be practically on the chest. It had taken Cherokee a long time to shift the grip upward, and this had also tended further to clog his jaws with fur and skin fold.

In the meantime, the abysmal brute in Beauty Smith had been rising into his brain and mauling his small bits of sanity that he possessed at best. When he saw White Fang's eyes beginning to glaze, he knew beyond doubt that the fight was lost. Then he broke loose. He sprang upon White Fang and began savagely to kick him. There were hisses from the crowd and cries of protest, but that was all. White this went on, and Beauty Smith continued to kick White Fang, there was a commotion in the crowd. The tall young newcomer was forcing his way through, shouldering men right and left with-out ceremony or gentleness. When he broke through into the ring, Beauty Smith was just in the act of delivering another kick. All his weight was on one foot, and he was in a state of unstable equilibrium. At that moment the newcomer's hat landed a smashing blow full in his face. Beauty Smith's remaining leg left the ground, and his whole body seemed to lift into the air as he turned over backward and struck the snow. The newcomer turned upon the crowd.

"You cowards!" he cried. "You beasts!" He was in a rage himself—a sane rage. His gray eyes seemed metallic and steel-like as they flashed upon the crowd. Beauty Smith regained his feet and came toward him, sniffling and cowardly. The newcomer did not understand. He did not know how abject a coward the other was, and though he was coming back intent on fighting, so with a "You beast!" he smashed Beauty Smith over backward with a second blow in the face. Beauty Smith decided that the snow was the safest place for him, and lay where he had fallen, making no effort to get up.

Come on, Matt, lend a hand," the newcomer called to the dog musher, who had followed him into the ring. Both men bent over the dogs. Matt took hold of White Fang, ready to pull when Cherokee's jaws should be loosened. This the young man endeavored to accomplish by clutching the bulldog's jaws and his hands and trying to spread them. It was a vain undertaking. As he pulled and tugged and wrenched, he kept exclaiming with every expulsion of breath, "Beasts!"

The crowd began to grow unruly, and some of the men were protesting about the spoiling of the sport; but they were silenced when the newcomer lifted his head from his work for a moment and glared at them. "You damn beasts!" he finally exploded, and went back to his task.

"It's no use, Mr. Scott, you can't break 'em apart that way," Matt said at last.

The pair paused and surveyed the locked dogs.

"Ain't bleedin' much," Matt announced. "Ain't got all the way in yet."

"But he's liable to any moment," Scott answered. "There, did you see that?" He shifted his grip in a bit.

The younger man's excitement and apprehension for White Fang was growing. He struck Cherokee about the head savagely again and again. But that did not loosen the jaws. Beauty Smith wagged the stump of his tail in advertisement that he understood the meaning of the blows, but that he knew he was himself in the right and only doing his duty by keeping his grip.

"Won't some of you help?" Scott cried desperately at the crowd.

But no help was offered. Instead, the crowd began sarcastically to cheer him and showered him with facetious advice.

"You'll have to get a pry," Matt counseled.

The other reached into the holster at his hip, drew his revolver, and tried to thrust its muzzle between the bulldog's jaws. He shoved, and shoved hard, till the grating of the steel against the lower teeth could be distinctly heard. Both men were on their knees, bending over the dogs.

Tim Keenan strode into the ring. He paused beside Scott and touched him on the shoulder, saying ominously: "Don't break them teeth, stranger."

"Then I'll break his neck," Scott retorted, continuing his shoving and wedging with the revolver muzzle. "I said don't break them teeth," the faro-dealer repeated more ominously than before.

But if it was a bluff he intended, it did not work. Scott never farther from his efforts, though he looked up coolly and asked:

"Your dog?"

"Then get in here and break his grip," Tim Keenan continued standing over him, but Scott took no further notice of his presence. He had managed to get the muzzle in between the jaws on one side, and was trying to get it out between the jaws on the other side. This accomplished, he pried gently and carefully, loosening the jaws a bit at a time, while Matt, a bit at a time, extricated White Fang's mangled neck.

"Stand by to receive your dog," was Scott's peremptory order to Cherokee's owner.

The faro-dealer stooped down obediently and got a firm hold on Cherokee.

"Scott warned, giving the final pry.

The dogs were drawn apart, the building struggling vigorously. White Fang made several ineffectual efforts to get up. Once he gained his feet, but his legs were too weak to sustain him, and he slowly wilted and sank back into the snow. His eyes were half closed, and the surface of them was glassy. His jaws were apart, and through them the tongue protruded, dragged and limp. To all appearance he looked like a dog that had been strangled to death. Matt examined him.

"Just about all in," he announced; "but he's breathin' all right."

Beauty Smith had regained his feet and came over to look at White Fang.

"Matt, how much is a good sled dog worth?" Scott asked.

The dog-musher, still on his knees and stooped over White Fang, calculated for a moment.

"Three hundred dollars," he answered.

"And how much for one that's all chewed up like this one?" he asked, nudging White Fang with his foot.

"Half of that," was the dog-musher's judgment.

"Did you hear, Mr. Beast? I'm going to take your dog from you, and I'm going to give you a hundred and fifty for him."

He opened his pocketbook and counted out the bills.

Beauty Smith put his hands behind his back, refusing to touch the proffered money.

"I ain't a-sellin'," he said.

"Oh, yes you are," the other assured him. "Because I'm buying here's your money. The dog's mine."

Beauty Smith, his hands still behind him, began to back away.

Scott sprang toward him, drawing his fist back to strike. Beauty Smith cowered down in anticipation of the blow.

"I've got my rights," he whimpered.

"You've forfeited your rights to own," the other said, the rejoinder.

"Are you going to take the money? or do I have to hit you again?"

"All right," Beauty Smith spoke up with the alacrity of fear. "But I take the money under protest," he added. "The dog's a mint. I ain't a-goin' to be robbed. A man's got his rights."

"Correct," Scott answered, passing the money over to him. "A man's got his rights. But you're not a man. You're a beast."

"Wait till I get back to Dawson," Beauty Smith threatened. "I'll have the law on you."

"If you open your mouth when you get back to Dawson, I'll have you run out of town. Understand?"

Beauty Smith replied with a grunt. "Understand?" the other thundered with abrupt fierceness.

"Yes," Beauty Smith grunted, shrinking away.

"Yes what?"

"Look out!" He bit the dog-musher, and a guffaw of laughter went up.

Scott turned his back on him, and returned to help the dog-musher, who was working over White Fang. Some of the men were already departing; others stood in groups, looking on and talking. Tim Keenan joined one of the groups.

"Who's that mug?" he asked.

"Weedon Scott," some one answered.

"And who in hell is Weedon Scott?" the faro-dealer demanded.

"Oh, one of them crack-a-jack minn' experts. He's in with all the big bugs. If you want to keep out of trouble, you'll steer clear of him, that's my talk. He's all hunky with the officials. The gold commissioner's a special pal of his."

"I thought he must be somebody," was the faro-dealer's comment. "That why I kept my hands off him at the start."

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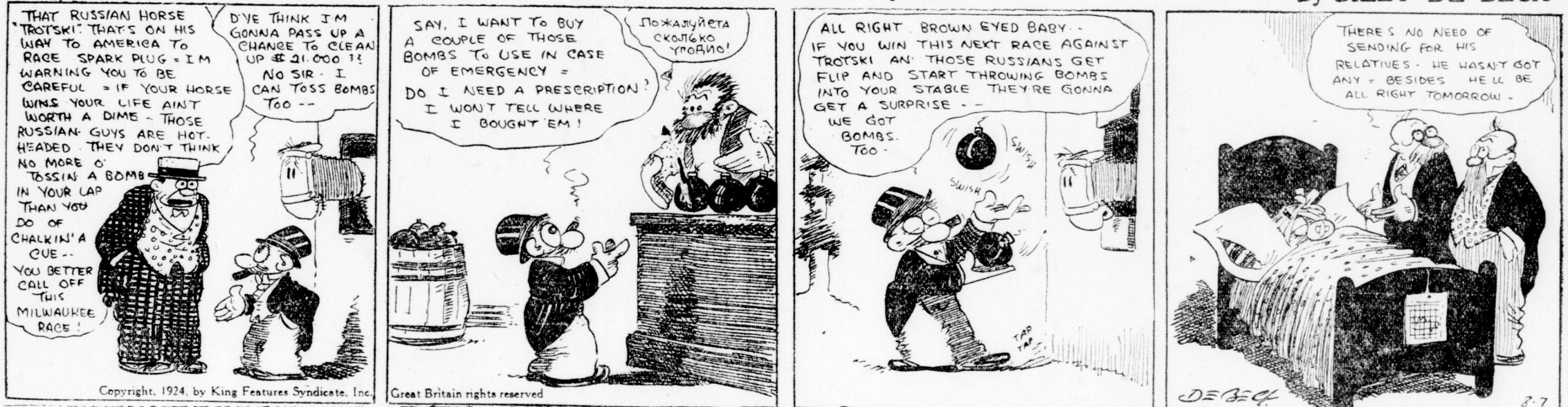
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