

This is an extract from 'White Fang', a novel by Jack London, written in 1906. It is set in the wild regions of Canada and is about a young wolf cub who comes across a group of men.

White Fang

The cub came upon them suddenly. It was his own fault. He had been careless. He had left the cave and run down to the stream to drink. It might have been that he took no notice because he was heavy with sleep. And his carelessness might have been due to the familiarity of the trail to the pool. He had travelled it often, and nothing had ever happened before.

He went down past the blasted pine, crossed the open space, and trotted in amongst the trees. Then, at the same instant, he saw and smelt. Before him, sitting silently on their haunches, were five live things, the like of which he had never seen before. But at the sight of him the five men did not spring to their feet, nor show their teeth, nor snarl. They did not move, but sat there, silent and ominous.

Nor did the cub move. Every instinct of his nature would have impelled him to dash wildly away, had there not suddenly arisen in him another instinct. A great awe descended upon him. He was overwhelmed by his own sense of weakness and littleness. Here was mastery and power, something far and away beyond him.

The cub had never seen man, yet deep within him was the knowledge of his ancestors, the eyes that had circled in the darkness around countless winter camp-fires, and peered from safe distances at the strange, two-legged animal that was lord over living things. Had he been full-grown, he would have run away. As it was, he cowered down in a paralysis of fear, already half offering the surrender that his kind had made from the first time a wolf came in to sit by man's fire and be made warm.





One of the men arose and walked over to him and stooped above him. The cub cowered closer to the ground. It was the unknown, revealed at last, in flesh and blood, bending over him and reaching down to seize hold of him. His hair bristled involuntarily; his lips writhed back and his little fangs were bared. The hand, poised like doom above him, hesitated, and the man spoke laughing, “WABAM WABISCA IP PIT TAH.” (“Look! The white fangs!”)

The other men laughed loudly, and urged the man on to pick up the cub. As the hand descended closer and closer he experienced two great impulsions - to yield and to fight. The resulting action was a compromise. He did both. He yielded till the hand almost touched him. Then he fought, his teeth flashing in a snap that sank them into the hand. The next moment he received a clout alongside the head that knocked him over on his side. Then all fight fled out of him. His puppyhood and the instinct of submission took charge of him. He sat up on his haunches and howled.

The four men laughed more loudly, while even the man who had been bitten began to laugh. They surrounded the cub and laughed at him, while he wailed out his terror and his hurt. In the midst of it, he heard something. The men heard it too. But the cub knew what it was, and with a last, long wail that had in it more of triumph than grief, he ceased his noise and waited for the coming of his mother, of his ferocious mother who fought all things and was never afraid. She was snarling as she ran. She had heard the cry of her cub and was dashing to save him.