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The two rivals circle the ring, probing for any point of weakness. The duel has lasted longer than either competitor had anticipated. Weakened by fatigue, the challenger feints high and goes for a crippling blow. No, this is not a boxing title match in Las Vegas. This is a life-and-death struggle of one domestic dog for survival in the cold, icy, barren regions of the Alaskan plains. This is a clash between the civilized and the primordial. This is the conflict between domestication and liberation. This is the Call of the Wild.

Jack London centers his story on a dog by the name of Buck. Buck is a big, strong dog, his father being a St. Bernard and his mother being a Scottish shepherd dog. At one hundred and forty pounds, Buck was no mere house pet. Kept physically strong with a love of rigorous swimming and constant outdoor exercise, Buck was a lean, formidable dog. Undoubtedly, his great condition was part of the reason that the gardener's helper dog-napped and sold him to dog traders, who in turn sold him to Canadian government mail couriers. The gold rush in Alaska had created a huge demand for good dogs, which eventually led to the "disappearances" of many dogs on the West Coast. Buck was no exception. He was sold into a hostile environment, which was unforgiving and harsh. Although civilization domesticated him from birth, Buck soon begins almost involuntarily to rediscover himself, revealing a "primordial urge", a natural instinct, which London refers to as the Call of the Wild.

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