

ЛЕГКО ЧИТАЕМ ПО-АНГЛИЙСКИ

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*Адаптация текста,  
упражнения,  
комментарии и словарь  
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Москва  
Издательство АСТ

# PART I

## CHAPTER I. THE TRAIL OF THE MEAT

Dark forest was on both sides of the waterway. The trees had been damaged by a recent wind and seemed to lean on each other. Silence ruled over the land. The land itself was lifeless, so lonely and cold that it was not even sad. There was laughter in it, but laughter more terrible than any sadness. It was the masterful wisdom of eternity laughing at the uselessness of life. It was the frozen-hearted Northland Wild.

But there was life. Down the frozen waterway ran a string of dogs. Their fur was in frost. Their breath froze in the air. Leather harness was on the dogs, and leather traces attached them to a sled which dragged behind. On the sled there was a long and narrow oblong box. There were other things — blankets, an axe, a coffee-pot and a frying-pan; but the long and narrow oblong box occupied the most space.

Before the dogs, on wide snowshoes, walked a man. Behind the sled walked a second man. On the sled, in the box, lay a third man whose walk was over, — a man whom the Wild had conquered and beaten. Life is an offence to the Wild, because life is movement; and the Wild wants to destroy movement. It freezes the water; it drives the sap out of the trees; and most terribly of all it treats man — man who is the most active of life.

But before and after the dogs walked the two men who were not yet dead. Their bodies were covered with fur and leather; eyelashes, cheeks and lips were covered with the crystals from their frozen breath; so they looked like undertakers at the funeral of some ghost. But they were men, going through the land of silence, adventurers on colossal adventure.

They travelled on without speaking to save their breath. On every side was the pressing silence. It affected their minds as the many atmospheres of deep water affect the body of the diver. It pressed all the false self-values of the human soul out of them, like juices from the grape. They felt small, having little wisdom against the great blind elements.

An hour went by, and a second hour. The light of the short sunless day was beginning to fade, when a faint far cry sounded on the air and then slowly died away. There was anger and hunger in it. The front man turned his head and his eyes met the eyes of the man behind. And then, across the narrow oblong box, they nodded to each other.

There was a second cry, somewhere behind. A third and answering cry sounded in the air.

"They're after us, Bill," said the man at the front.

"There's little meat," answered his comrade. "I haven't seen a rabbit for days."

They spoke no more, but listened attentively.

When it became dark they took the dogs into a cluster of trees and made a camp. The coffin served for seat and table. The dogs clustered on

the far side of the fire, snarled among themselves, but didn't go into the darkness.

"Seems to me, they're staying remarkably close to camp," Bill said.

His companion nodded, then took his seat on the coffin and began to eat.

"Henry, did you notice how the dogs behaved when I was feeding them?"

"They played more than usual."

"How many dogs have we got, Henry?"

"Six."

"Well, Henry..." Bill stopped for a moment, in order to sound more significant. "As I was saying, I took six fish out of the bag. I gave one fish to each dog, and, Henry, I was one fish short."

"You counted wrong."

"We've got six dogs. I took out six fish. One Ear didn't get a fish. I came back to the bag afterward and got him his fish."

"We've only got six dogs," Henry said.

"Then there were seven of them that got fish."

Henry stopped eating to count the dogs.

"There's only six now," he said.

"I saw the other one run off. I saw seven."

Henry looked at him and said, "I'll be very glad when this trip is over."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that our load is getting on your nerves<sup>1</sup>, and you're beginning to see things<sup>2</sup>."

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<sup>1</sup> to get on someone's nerves — действовать на нервы

<sup>2</sup> you see things — тебе мерещится

“But I saw its tracks on the snow. I can show them to you.”

Henry didn't reply at once. He had a final cup of coffee and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

“Then you think it was one of them?”

Bill nodded.

“I think you're mistaken,” Henry said.

“Henry...” he paused. “Henry, I was thinking he was much luckier than you and me.” He pointed at the box on which they sat, “When we die, we'll be lucky if we get enough stones over our bodies to keep the dogs off of us.”

“But we don't have people, money and all the rest, like him. Long-distance funerals is something we can't afford.”

“What worries me, Henry, is why a chap like this, who is a kind of lord in his own country, comes to the end of the earth.”

“Yes, he might have lived to old age if he'd stayed at home.”

Bill opened his mouth to speak, but changed his mind. Instead, he pointed towards the wall of darkness that pressed about them from every side. Nothing could be seen there but a pair of eyes gleaming like coals. Henry indicated with his head a second pair, and a third. A circle of the gleaming eyes was around their camp.

The unrest of the dogs was increasing. One of them came too close to the fire and yelped with pain and fright. The circle of eyes withdraw a bit, but it appeared again when the dogs became quiet.

"Henry, it's a misfortune to be out of ammunition."

Bill had finished his pipe and was helping his companion to spread the bed of fur and blanket.

"How many cartridges did you leave?" Henry asked.

"Three. And I wish it was three hundred!"

He shook his fist angrily at the gleaming eyes, and put his moccasins before the fire.

"And I wish it was not so cold" he went on. "It has been fifty below zero for two weeks now. And I wish I'd never started on this trip, Henry. I don't like it. And I wish the trip was over, and you and I were sitting by the fire in Fort McGurry and playing cards."

Henry grunted and crawled into bed. Then he was woken by his comrade's voice.

"Say, Henry, that other one that came in and got a fish—why didn't the dogs bite it? That's what's bothering me."

"You're bothering too much, Bill. Just shut up now, and go to sleep. You have a stomach ache, that's what's bothering you."

The men slept, breathing heavily, side by side, under the one covering. The fire died down, and the gleaming eyes drew closer. The dogs kept together in fear. Once their noise became so loud that Bill woke up. He got out of bed carefully and threw more wood on the fire. The circle of eyes drew back. He glanced at the dogs, then rubbed his eyes and looked at them again. Then he crawled back into the blankets.

"Henry," he said. "Oh, Henry."

Henry groaned, "What's wrong now?"

“Nothing, only there’s seven of them again. I just counted.”

Henry grunted again and fell asleep.

In the morning it was he who awoke first and woke up his companion. It was still dark, though it was already six o’clock; and Henry started preparing breakfast, while Bill rolled the blankets and made the sled ready.

“Say, Henry,” he asked suddenly, “how many dogs did you say we had?”

“Six.”

“Wrong,” Bill said triumphantly.

“Seven again?”

“No, five; one’s gone.”

“The hell!” Henry cried in anger, left the cooking and went to count the dogs.

“You’re right, Bill,” he concluded. “Fatty’s gone. They just swallowed him alive, damn them!”

“He always was a fool dog.”

“But not fool enough to commit suicide. I bet none of the others would do it.”

“Couldn’t drive them away from the fire with a club,” Bill agreed. “I always thought there was something wrong with Fatty anyway.”

And this was the epitaph of a dead dog on the Northland trail, and it was longer than the epitaphs of many other dogs, many other men.

## CHAPTER II. THE SHE-WOLF

After breakfast the men set off again. Fiercely sad cries called through the darkness to one another and answered back. Daylight came at nine

o'clock. At midday the sky to the south warmed to rose-colour, but it soon faded. After the grey light of day faded as well, the Arctic night descended upon the land.

As darkness came, the hunting-cries around them drew closer—so close that the dogs had occasional periods of panic. It was getting on men's nerves.

Henry was cooking supper when he heard the sound of a blow, an exclamation from Bill, and a cry of pain from dogs. He straightened up in time to see a dim silhouette running into the dark. Then he saw Bill, standing among the dogs, in one hand a club, in the other the tail and part of the body of a salmon.

"I got half of it," he announced; "but it got the other half. Did you hear it squeal?"

"What did it look like?"

"Couldn't see. But it had four legs and a mouth and hair and looked like any dog."

"Must be a tame wolf, I reckon."

"Damn! It must be tame, whatever it is, if it is coming here at feeding time."

That night, when supper was finished and they sat on the oblong box and smoked, the circle of gleaming eyes drew in even closer than before.

"I wish they'd go away and leave us alone<sup>1</sup>," Bill said.

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<sup>1</sup> **leave smb. alone** — ОСТАВИТЬ КОГО-Л. В ПОКОЕ



For a quarter of an hour they sat on in silence, Henry staring at the fire, and Bill at the circle of eyes that burned in the darkness.

"I wish we were going into McGurry right now," he began again.

"Shut up your wishing," Henry said angrily. "You have a stomach ache. That's what's bothering you. Take a spoonful of sody, and you'll be a more pleasant company."

In the morning Henry was awakened by Bill's swearing. He saw his comrade standing among the dogs, his arms raised and his face angry.

"Hello!" Henry called. "What's up now?"

"Frog's gone."

"No."

"I tell you yes."

Henry came to the dogs, counted them with care, and then joined his partner in cursing the Wild that had robbed them of another dog.

"Frog was our strongest dog," Bill said finally.

"And he was no fool," Henry added.

And so it was the second epitaph in two days.

The next day was a repetition of the days that had gone before. All was silent in the world but<sup>1</sup> the cries of their pursuers.

"There, that'll fix you, fool creatures," Bill said with satisfaction that night. He tied the dogs, after the Indian method, with sticks. About the neck of each dog was a leather thong. To

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<sup>1</sup> but — (зд.) кроме, за исключением

this he had tied a stick four or five feet<sup>1</sup> in length. The other end of the stick, in turn, was attached to a stake in the ground.

Henry nodded his head approvingly, "They all will be here in the morning."

"If one of them disappears, I'll go without my coffee," said Bill.

"They just know we have nothing to kill them with," Henry remarked at bed-time, indicating the circle of eyes that surrounded them. "If we could put a couple of shots into them, they'd be more respectful. They come closer every night," and then he suddenly whispered: "Look at that, Bill."

A doglike animal went stealthily in the fire-light. Its attention was fixed on the dogs. One Ear strained the full length of the stick toward the intruder.

"That fool One Ear doesn't seem scared," Bill said in a low tone.

"It's a she-wolf. She's dangerous. She draws out the dog and eats him up."

"Henry, I'm thinking," Bill announced, "I'm thinking that is the one I hit with the club."

"It must be."

"And I want to remark," Bill went on, "that that animal's familiarity with campfires is suspicious and immoral."

"It knows more than a self-respecting wolf ought to know," Henry agreed. "A wolf that

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<sup>1</sup> **foot** (*мн. feet*) — фут, английская мера длины, равная примерно 30 см

comes at the dogs' feeding time has had experience."

"If I get a chance, that wolf will be just meat. We can't afford to lose any more animals."

"But you've only got three cartridges," Henry objected.

"I'll wait for a dead shot."

In the morning Henry renewed the fire and cooked breakfast to the accompaniment of his partner's snoring.

"You were sleeping just so comfortably," Henry told him, as he called him out for breakfast. "I hadn't the heart<sup>1</sup> to wake you."

Bill began to eat sleepily. He noticed that his cup was empty, but the pot was beyond his arm's length and beside Henry.

"You don't get coffee," Henry announced.

"Has it run out?"

"Nope."

"Aren't you thinking it'll hurt my digestion?"

"Nope."

"Then explain yourself<sup>2</sup>," Bill said angrily.

"Spanker's gone."

Bill slowly turned his head and counted the dogs.

"One Ear, the damned dog! Just because he couldn't free himself, he freed Spanker."

"Well, Spanker's troubles are over anyway; I guess he's digested by this time," was Henry's

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<sup>1</sup> **hadn't the heart to do smth.** — не хватило духу что-л. сделать

<sup>2</sup> **to explain oneself** — объясниться

epitaph on this, the latest lost dog. "Have some coffee, Bill."

"No. I said I wouldn't drink it if any dog is missing, and I won't."

And he ate a dry breakfast with curses at One Ear for the trick he had played.

"I'll tie them up out of reach of each other tonight," Bill said, as they started off again.

They had travelled little more than a hundred yards, when Henry, who was in front, picked up something from the ground.

"Maybe you'll need that," he said.

It was all that was left of Spanker—the stick with which he had been tied.

"They ate him all," Bill announced. "They're damn hungry, Henry. I'm not feeling special enthusiastic."

"You're unwell, that's what's the matter with you," Henry dogmatised. "What you need is quinine."

Bill disagreed with the diagnosis, and didn't say anything.

The day was like all the days. It was just after the sun's attempt to appear, that Bill took the rifle and said:

"You go on, Henry, but I'm going to see what I can see."

"You'd better go after the sled. You've only got three cartridges, and nobody knows what might happen."

"Who's croaking now?"<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> **Who's croaking now?** — Расквакался!



Henry said nothing, and toiled on alone, though often he looked back. An hour later, Bill arrived.

"I've seen some of them. They're very thin. They hadn't had food for weeks, I think, save the meat of Fatty and Frog and Spanker. They'll be going mad, yet, and then watch out."

A few minutes later, Henry, who was now travelling behind the sled, gave a warning whistle. Bill turned and looked, then stopped the dogs. Behind them trotted a furry form. Its nose was to the trail. When they stopped, it stopped, too, and watched them.

"It's the she-wolf," Bill said.

The animal trotted forward a few steps, and then, after a pause, a few more steps, and then a few more. It looked at them in a strangely wistful way, like a dog; but there was none of the dog's affection. It was hungry and cruel.

It was large for a wolf and had a true wolf-coat. The main colour was grey, with a reddish hue—a hue that appeared and disappeared, like an illusion of the vision, now grey, really grey, and then again showing some redness of colour.

"Looks like a big husky sled-dog," Bill commented. "Hello, you husky!" he shouted, "Come here, you whatever-your-name-is."

The animal showed no fear. For it they were meat, and it was hungry; and it would like to go in and eat them.

"Look here, Henry," Bill said, "We've got three cartridges. But it's a dead shot. Couldn't miss it. It's got away with three of our dogs, and we must put a stop to it. What do you say?"