

## CHAPTER TWELVE

## THE IMPOSSIBLE JOURNEY

It took Charles and Hal a long time to pack the sled again. Mercedes was angry and didn't help, but sometimes she gave the men orders. When they were ready to leave for the second time, Buck led the long team up the street. This was going to be his fifth journey of 1,000 kilometres between Skaguay and Dawson and he didn't want to do it.

"The Americans don't know how to travel properly and this journey isn't going to be successful," he thought.

As the days passed, Charles, Hal and Mercedes continued to make mistakes. They got up late in the morning and sometimes they woke up so late that they didn't start at all. They packed the sled badly and had to stop several times during the day to repack the sled, so they travelled very slowly. They never travelled more than half the distance planned by the men, and soon understood that they didn't have enough food.

"The dog food is half-finished, but we've only done a quarter of the journey," Hal said one day. "There's nowhere to find more food, so we'll have to give the dogs less to eat."

The dogs began to die of hunger. The new dogs from the South weren't strong enough for this hard life and they were the first to die. The other seven dogs were very weak and tired and they couldn't pull the sled very fast, even though the men shouted and whipped them. Mercedes didn't walk with the men, but sat on the sled. She weighed 60 kilos, and after a few days, Hal and Charles understood that the tired dogs couldn't pull the extra weight.

"Mercedes, get off the sled and walk now," said Hal.

"No," Mercedes said. "I'm hungry and tired and I can't walk in the snow any more."

"We're all hungry and tired and the dogs are too," said Charles. "You'll have to walk."

"No, I won't," she repeated. "I'm not going to move."

Charles and Hal took Mercedes from the sled and put her in

the snow. Then they started to walk along the trail with the sled and the dogs.

"Now she'll get up and walk. She'll have to," Charles said to Hal. But Mercedes didn't get up. She sat in the snow and cried. After two kilometres, the men had no option. They unpacked the sled and walked back along the trail. Then they put Mercedes on the empty sled. She didn't say 'thank you'. She just cried and shouted at them angrily. They never took her off the sled again.

Buck and the other seven dogs walked along the trail slowly. They were very thin and their fur was dirty and covered in blood because Charles and Hal whipped them a lot. Often they were so tired that they fell down and lay in the snow. When that happened, Charles and Hal whipped them more or hit them with clubs until they stood up again. The dogs were so weak and miserable that they stopped reacting to the pain, so the men hit them more and more.



*Charles and Hal whipped the dogs or hit them with clubs.*