

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



Mad Dogs And An Englishwoman

Polly Evans

About the Book

In the dead of winter, Polly Evans ventures to the remote Yukon Territory in Canada's far northwest, where temperatures plunge to minus forty and the sun rises for just a few hours each day. Her mission: to learn to drive sled dogs. But when she arrives, she finds there's more to this unspoilt wilderness than deathly cold.

In a pristine landscape patrolled by wolves and caribou, Polly takes her first bruising lessons in the art of mushing. But before the snows melt in spring, she hones her skills and becomes infatuated with this brutal, beautiful land where jagged gems of hoar frost glisten on the spruce boughs and the northern lights weave green and red across the skies. Above all, she discovers a deep affection for the loving, mischievous huskies who with such courage and enthusiasm escort her through the lone white trails of the unforgiving north.

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MAD DOGS AND AN ENGLISHWOMAN

*Travels with Sled Dogs in
Canada's Frozen North*

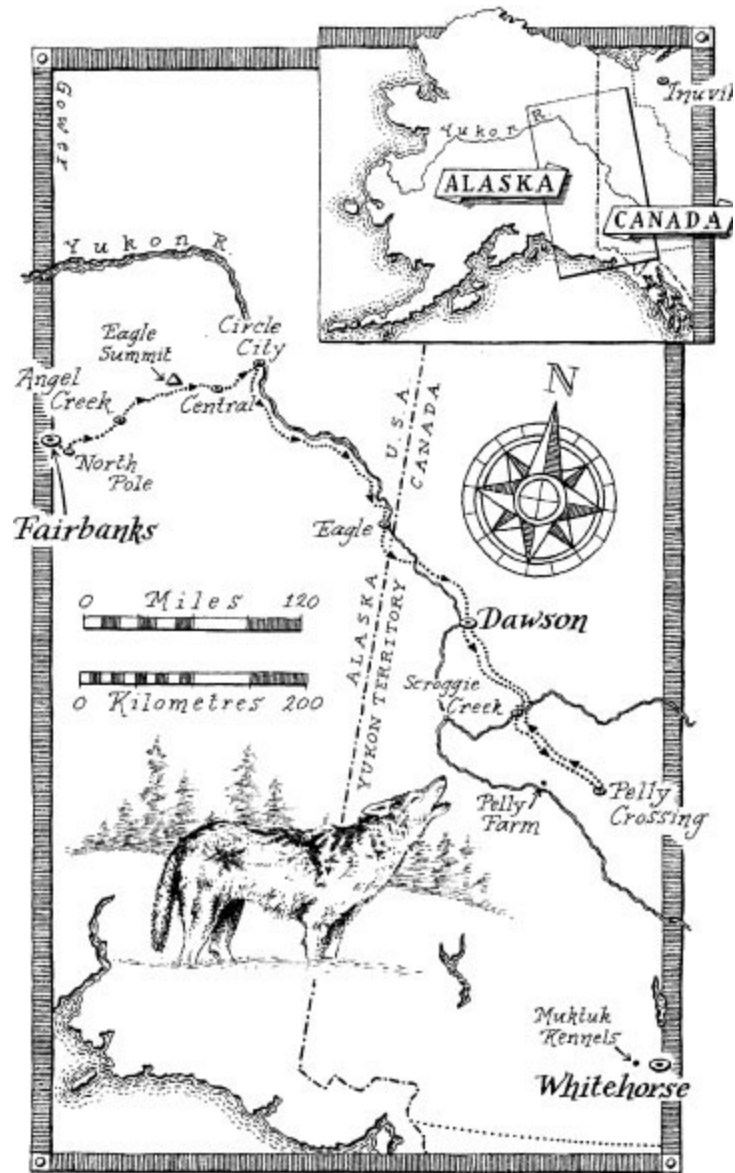
Polly Evans

For Thomas, Jake, Tilly and Gabriella

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miles across the frozen rivers and forests of the Yukon, and still wagged their tails at the end of it.



Some say God was tired when He made it;
Some say it's a fine land to shun;
Maybe; but there's some as would trade it
For no land on earth - and I'm one.

Robert Service, from 'The Spell of the Yukon'

1

I FLEW OUT on Friday 13 January and returned home on 1 April. The dates had almost selected themselves but they seemed curiously appropriate, for I feared I was embarking on a fool's errand. I was going to spend eleven weeks, in the heart of winter, in one of the most inhospitable climates on earth.

The Yukon is a triangular-shaped territory in the far northwest of Canada. It borders Alaska to the west; at its northern tip lie the icy waters of the Beaufort Sea. Other people travel to the Yukon in the summer when they can enjoy the long, balmy days that blend one into another with little darkness between. In September, though, the tourists pack their bags and leave. The attractions close. The museums' doors are bolted and the buses are laid up until May. Even most Canadian people, who so proudly extol their pitiless winters when basking comfortably in the sun elsewhere, shiver at the thought of coming this far north during the frozen months. The average temperature in the Yukon in January is minus 26 degrees Celsius but the mercury can plunge much lower. Temperatures dip regularly into the minus forties; once, they dived to minus 63.

But there's another side to winter in this harsh land. As the nights grow longer, the milky jade and blood red of the northern lights weave across the skies. The snowshoe rabbits' coats turn spotless white and the Arctic foxes wear plush, dramatic furs. Winter has late blue dawns, and the warm buttery light of the low midday sun. It has the jagged gems of hoar frost, and soft, feathery snow. Winter is the

season of solitude and pure, glorious silence. And in winter, the sled dogs run.

It was the dogs that drew me. During my time in the north I'd be based at Muktuk Kennels, the operation of one of Canada's most famous mushers, Frank Turner, and his wife Anne. I'd scoop poop, help with feeding, and learn to drive a sled. From Muktuk, I'd make further trips around the region. I'd follow the Yukon Quest - a 1600-kilometre dogsled race that runs between Fairbanks in Alaska and Whitehorse, the capital of the Yukon Territory. I'd visit Dawson City, the town that sprang up in response to the frenzied Klondike gold rush. I'd fly to the very far north, to the Arctic Ocean itself. And through it all, I'd learn all I could about the howling, capering, tail-wagging world of sled dogs.

A short, stocky man with a salt-and-pepper beard and a well-worn red parka pushed through the swing doors of Whitehorse's airport, a tiny one-gate place where arrivals and departures were not just in the same building; they were in the same room. I recognized his face from his website photographs.

'Frank?' I asked.

'You're Polly?'

At this time, in January 2006, Frank Turner was the only person to have competed in each of the twenty-two Yukon Quest dogsledding races since the event's inception in 1984. Frank won the race in 1995 and still held the record for the fastest time. This year, Frank - who, in his late fifties, was wondering if he might be getting a little old for that kind of adventure - would not be entering the race, but his 25-year-old son Saul would be running a team.

There was no call for feats of cold-weather endurance on that first night, though: Frank had parked his truck conveniently close to the airport's door and we ventured just a few steps through the cold night air. In any case, the

evening was warm by the Yukon's standards, a mere minus thirteen according to the pilot on the plane. I'd been concerned about what I should wear on the journey: would I need my long woollen underwear to walk from the airport door to the car? But might I then overheat on the plane? In the end I'd put on ordinary jeans and trainers, the car was near, and I was fine.

We drove out of town and on to the Alaska Highway towards Muktuk.

'Saul's baby was born on Wednesday,' Frank announced as we sped through the darkness. 'She's called Myla. She's beautiful.'

Conversation moved on to the construction of the road.

'The Alaska Highway was originally built during the Second World War,' Frank explained. Alaska was considered by the US military to be vulnerable to Japanese invasion: the Japanese wanted to control the shipping lanes in the northern Pacific and the attack on Pearl Harbor had crippled the Navy's Pacific fleet. In response to this threat, the Americans set up a defensive line of airfields along the Alaskan coast, and this road, running 2,500 kilometres from British Columbia to Fairbanks, Alaska, was built to supply them.

'The Japanese wanted to bomb the highway as it was a major supply route, so they built it like this.' Frank took one hand from the steering wheel and snaked it into violent meanderings. 'That way they couldn't take out whole sections of the road at once. And then the war ended and they spent the next sixty years and goodness knows how many millions of dollars straightening it out.'

About twenty minutes later, we turned off the main road and wound down a steep, snowy back road that had known little attention beyond the ministry of Frank's snow plough.

'This is all First Nations land.' Frank gestured towards the woods that surrounded us. Frank and Anne's hundred-acre ranch lay just below where we were now, on the banks

of the Takhini River. They had bought the plot just six years previously.

‘We were really lucky to get this place so close to town,’ Frank remarked as we rounded one last bend in the road. And then, seeing a light in an upstairs window of the large log house that stood on the far side of the clearing, ‘Oh dear, Anne’s still up.’ He paused before adding, ‘She never sleeps.’

In front of the house a wide, flat yard was dotted with neat rows of small wooden boxes. These were the dogs’ houses; it was now past midnight and most of them were asleep in their straw. One sole incumbent stood to attention outside his hut, a dark silhouette in the night. Then, as the headlights picked up his form, we could see him more clearly: a large, dark-coated, tufty-haired husky. He gave three sharp barks in recognition.

‘That’s Tank,’ said Frank. ‘All our dogs are friendly.’

We unloaded my bags and carried them up the steps to the main door. A narrow annexe gave on to the main room where Anne greeted us. She was a short, pale-skinned woman in her mid-fifties wearing a baggy sweatshirt and wide-rimmed glasses. Her long, straight, greying hair was tied back into a ponytail. A smallish black and white dog with vivid blue eyes and a slightly waddling gait trotted up alongside her.

‘This is Angel,’ said Frank. ‘She’s deaf.’ Angel was now an elderly lady, but her ears had been useless since birth. Frank had given her years ago to Anne as a present.

‘Talk about bringing coals to Newcastle!’ Anne roared with laughter as she told the story. ‘Frank’s only ever given me two presents. One was the bone from a whale’s penis, and the other was a *deaf dog!*’

(I later discovered this wasn’t entirely true. There was also a rather beautiful painting by a First Nations artist depicting a spirit grandmother watching over the

subsequent generations of her family that hung on the living-room wall.)

Frank's tale about the acquisition of Angel was slightly different: he had gone to a breeder and paid a lot of money for two sled dogs. Worried about how he was going to explain this expenditure to his wife, he found his thoughts settling upon a small deaf puppy with pretty blue eyes that the breeder was giving away. 'Maybe that will calm her down,' he thought.

It later transpired that in her younger days Angel had been a useful lead dog when harnessed next to a reliable partner. The lead dogs are the front pair, and the rest of the team - usually harnessed two by two - follows their example.

'If her partner followed the commands, she was great,' Frank said.

Of course if the partner ignored the musher's orders, poor Angel was no help at all.

On the floor of the living room lay a thick-coated, grey and white female. She thumped her tail with arthritic enthusiasm and struggled to rise to her feet.

'This is Louise,' Frank went on. 'She's fifteen.' He walked into the annexe and opened the door so that this benign geriatric could go outside one last time before bed.

'Come on, Louise! Come on, Louise!' he called emphatically.

Louise tried her best but her back legs were weak and her feet slipped on the painted wooden floor. Anne tried to haul her upwards.

'No, she can do it. Let her get up on her own,' Frank insisted until Louise finally dragged herself to her feet and creaked out of the door.

'We keep this closed at night,' said Frank, shutting a child gate between the main room and the annexe once Louise had returned indoors. 'Sometimes Louise has accidents.'

He showed me upstairs to my room.

'We've put you in the house for now,' he explained. The majority of Frank and Anne's tourism operation guests, and their staff, lived in a handful of cabins which lay among the trees to the side of the driveway. I'd move to one a few weeks later, when I'd returned from following the Yukon Quest.

'The washroom's next door,' said Frank. On its door was pinned an A4 sheet of paper instructing users in bold black capitals to keep the door CLOSED. 'We always keep the door shut because the cats might get in,' Frank said, then hesitated a little before adding, 'I'm just afraid they might fall in the toilet and not be able to get out.'

Wisely avoiding the perils of the sewerage system, a cat had taken up residence on my bed. She was an elderly, skinny tortoiseshell - I later learned she had thyroid problems for which medication was administered twice a day. Her name was Kato. She had come to the Turner family many years ago from an animal rescue shelter and she still bore frostbite scars on her nose and ears as testament to her difficult youth. In her more boisterous days she used to ambush Scrapper, Frank and Anne's male Siamese, and so she was named after Inspector Clouseau's martial-arts-crazy manservant. She looked far from violent now.

I pushed Kato out on to the landing and soon fell into an exhausted sleep. It was eight a.m. now in England and I'd left home more than twenty hours before. During the night, I woke to the sound of dogs' howling. It was a strangely beautiful noise, like a plaintive singing. Some voices performed in a clear, treble tone while others took the lower ranges. I was almost certain that, if I listened carefully, I could detect the lusty miaows of Kato trying to join in. Then, suddenly, as though led by a conductor wielding a concert baton, in unison they stopped.

2

MUKTUK MEANS 'WHALE blubber' in Inuit; apparently it tastes like hazelnuts. Fortunately for the jet-lagged urban tourist, however, the kennel's name has no influence on the breakfast menu. 'I just liked the sound of it,' Frank explained.

The time difference had woken me early the following morning and when I'd heard clattering sounds in the kitchen downstairs I'd emerged from my room. Frank was preparing coffee.

'We run a help-yourself system here,' he told me. 'There's fruit and cheese and salami arid so on in the fridge.' He yanked open the door of the hulking white refrigerator to display its copious contents crammed precariously into every cranny. 'There are apples and bananas there,' he went on, pointing to a chrome and mesh container that hung above the counter upon which outsized Thermoses dispensed coffee and hot water. In a nearby box teas of all creeds were bundled: alongside the everyday Earl Grey and camomile were green tea with peppermint infusion, ginger peach, and various takes on the theme of chai.

I'd been so tired the night before that I hadn't taken in much about the house so now I was looking at it as if for the first time. This floor, raised from ground level, was open plan and had a relaxed, lived-in feel. In front of the kitchen counter the dining and sitting area was dominated by a long table covered by a blue cloth. Behind the table a pine staircase led to the first floor and a door gave on to the ground-level garage. The opposite wall of the living room

was taken by a long, comfy grey sofa; to one side sat a pink-upholstered rocking chair. Central heating kept the building warm. A bathroom with a shower lay off the living room; outside its door a large pantry cupboard contained bumper boxes of granola bars and oatmeal, enormous tubs of powdered stock, and all manner of other dry ingredients.

The walls were covered with photographs, paintings, drawings and sketches of dogs past and present. Some were portraits in pencil or pastel. Others were huge framed photographs: Frank and his Quest team silhouetted against a spectacular tangerine sunset; the dogs of a Japanese friend who undertook an arduous mushing journey through the Arctic; a smaller photograph of a much younger Frank with a dog and Saul as a very small child. Some paintings were large and painstakingly executed. Others were simple posters in frames recalling Yukon Quests of years gone by. There were wobbly children's drawings of mushers and sled dogs executed in pencil and felt-tip pen. On the fridge door was stuck a cartoon that had been sent via email. A man was holding up a dog, its underside to his face. The caption, in a balloon from his wife's mouth, read, 'Frank! Let him lick his own balls! I swear you spoil that dog rotten!'

Strangely, for a place so governed by the comfort of its canine inhabitants, the house didn't smell strongly of dogs. Neither did the furnishings appear to be excessively coated in their hair. It was curious: at home in London, I tended to sneeze in houses where dogs resided but here at Muktuk my nose didn't so much as tickle. Maybe it was because here both dogs and humans spent so much time in the healthy outdoor air.

The kitchen window looked out over the dog yard. It was still dark outside; I asked what time it would turn light. At nine o'clock or so, Frank said, then darkness would fall again at four thirty or five. The hours of daylight, then,

weren't very different from those in England at that time of year.

We were silent for a few moments. The morning news murmured from a radio on the kitchen counter. From the garage below emanated light thumping noises followed by the sound of spraying water.

'There's Sebastian,' said Frank. 'If you really want to get involved in what we do around here, he's the person you need to talk to.'

He opened the door that led from the living room down a short staircase to the ground-level garage. Sebastian looked up from his task hosing down white, cylindrical buckets. The noise had been their gentle clattering. He was tall and lean. He was wearing bright-red dungarees emblazoned with the logo of an Austrian beer company he had worked for the previous summer and a red-and-grey patterned woollen hat with earflaps.

Frank introduced us. I explained my earnest desire to shovel frozen dog poop at every opportunity; Sebastian didn't think there would be a problem.

The garage was a large, functional room. The corner where Sebastian was hosing his buckets was taken up by a concrete-rimmed, rectangular drainage area with taps on the wall above, like a very large, grey, floor-level sink. Beside it, a small porcelain basin was installed, with a bar of soap and a towel for the washing of hands.

ABSOLUTELY NO
SOLID ANYTHING
(DOG FOOD, STRAW ETC.)
SHOULD EVER
BE PUT
IN THIS SINK!

pronounced a laminated pink sheet above the taps. After the 'EVER' some enraged soul had added in black felt tip

'EVER, EV' but then the paper had run out, leaving the pen and its infuriated wielder impotent to scrawl any more.

On closer inspection, I found there were notices everywhere in this garage. Whiteboards listed jobs to be done, feeding routines, and details of medication to be administered to ailing animals. More general notices advised the incumbents of the garage on how to live a harmonious and stress-free life, Muktuk-style.

'Path to Happiness' declared one whiteboard before going on to detail in blue marker pen:

1. Do not leave a mess for someone else to clean up.
2. Always return everything to its proper place.
3. If you have a better way to organize things [there followed some blotchy rubbings out before the instruction finished clearly with] just do it!
4. All work areas need to be kept clean and organized. Don't wait for someone else to do it.

And then the final point: 'Always remember to say, "Good morning, boss! Have a nice day!"'

Across the floor to the left of the stairs, a door gave on to the dog yard. On one side of the door, by the sinks, a large cabinet contained every conceivable canine medicine. Frank was one of the first mushers to use homoeopathic remedies on his dogs, and the cupboard stored arnica rub and a paw cream made from poplar buds, yarrow and chickweed (a miracle cure for human chapped lips as well, it turned out) alongside more conventional balms and bandages.

On the other side of the door, bunches of harnesses hung from hooks, each harness marked in black pen with the name of a dog. The middle of the room was taken up by a large wooden table; on its other side were rails of parkas and snow pants, boxes of hats, mitts and neck warmers, and racks of great, bulbous, white rubber boots that looked

as though they'd come from the pen of a cartoonist. These were bunny boots, the extreme cold weather footwear created for the US military in the 1950s and still favoured by Arctic enthusiasts today. Apparently they are not so called because they make you look like a nimble-toed bunny (on the contrary, they make you look like a lumbering Godzilla) but named after the snowshoe rabbit whose fur is white in winter.

'When you're in a room of ten people, are you among the five who find the room too warm, or among the five who think it's cold?' Frank asked me an hour or so later.

We were back among the clothing racks in the garage because on this first morning we were getting straight down to business. A journalist named Bob had stayed at the kennels last night; he was writing a story for the *New York Times* about how to spend thirty-six hours in Whitehorse. A very quick mushing adventure had been squeezed into his tight schedule and Frank had invited me to come along too. Bob was in a rush - he had only a few hours in which to conquer the Takhini; drill through the ice to indulge in a spot of ice fishing; educate himself in the museums in town; check out the leisure centre; eat, drink and be hurried.

I told Frank I was firmly among the five that think the room's too cold. I didn't like to add that, where nine of those people were politely perspiring and commenting that it was humid for the time of year, I'd be the one who was blue and shivering and wishing I'd brought an extra sweater. Had I told him the whole truth, I feared, his eyes might have gaped behind his round, metal-rimmed glasses and he'd have asked me with horrified incredulity what in heaven's name I was doing there.

'The most important thing is that you're not too hot,' Frank went on. He seemed in no way perturbed by my confession about feeling the cold. 'The perfect way to feel

is a little bit cool. If you get hot, you sweat – and then when you cool down you freeze. You should never sweat!’

Then he handed me thick bibbed pants, a down parka, a pair of mitts, and a pair of gloriously inelegant white rubber boots. He told me to put on long underwear – on Anne’s instructions I’d bought merino wool long johns before leaving home – and an extra fleece on top of the two woollen jumpers and thin fleece I was already wearing. And instructing me that, come what may, I was not to wet my socks – and thereby risk freezing my feet – by treading in wet patches on the floor, he handed me two carbon hand warmers to put inside my mitts.

In any case it was warm today, Frank declared a few minutes later when, appropriately clad, we marched through the garage door and out into the terrifying, sub-zero world beyond. A large, circular, black and white thermometer hung from a pillar just outside the garage door. It recorded a balmy minus fifteen.

‘Bob doesn’t have much time,’ said Frank, ‘so I’ll just tell you the basics quickly. I’ll explain everything else another time.’ He hauled a sled from the shed that ran to the side of the house. Surprisingly, the cold didn’t feel too biting. In fact, beneath all that clothing and my fleece hat, I felt so unexpectedly comfortable that I didn’t yet need to put on my parka.

‘Never put your clothing on the ground!’ Frank told me as I dumped it on the snow. ‘If you need to put it down, you should put it in the sled to keep it dry. And never leave your mitts with the opening facing upwards. If snow gets in them and they get wet, they’ll freeze – and then your hands will be in big trouble.’

Clothing safely stowed, Frank introduced me to the sled. It was around two metres long, its wooden frame based upon two flat runners about hip-width apart that curved up at the front like skis. Towards the back of the runners, two vertical posts were topped with a horizontal handlebar at

about waist height. The runners stuck out half a metre or so behind the handlebar: this was where the musher stood. Strapped to the handlebar posts and the long base of the frame was a canvas sled bag in the shape of a three-dimensional right-angled triangle, which was used to carry supplies for longer trips.

Frank showed me the sled's braking system. From my position standing on the runners, I could unhook a black rubber pad with eight bolts through its bottom and stand on it, thereby using some or all of my weight to slow or stop the sled. Secondly, I could press my foot on a metal bar held in position by elastic cord from which two, more ferocious, spikes descended. When leaving the yard, Frank said, the dogs would be very excited and I should stand fully on the black pad.

The gangline, the central rope that connected all the dogs to the front tip of the sled, should always be taut. If the line was not tight but loosely flapping around the dogs' feet, they could easily become tangled. If I needed to leave the sled to disentangle them, I should tip it over on to its side as the dogs could pull it less easily when it wasn't upright on its runners.

'This is not bungee jumping,' Frank pronounced gravely. 'It's all about control.'

I nodded nervously. Control sounded quite lovely, but I wasn't confident that I would be able to achieve it. Even these basic instructions seemed a lot to remember for the uninitiated. And the dogs, now that they had seen that an outing was on the agenda, were whipping themselves into a frenzy of joyful excitement that tied my stomach in knots.

Frank, on the other hand, didn't look remotely concerned. He had done this thousands of times before. He tied two sleds - one for Bob and one for me - to two posts in the yard, parked a skidoo (a snow machine like a motorbike on skis) for himself out front, and hooked up two four-dog teams. Bob and I put on our parkas and mitts,

which kept one's hands warm on the sled where one didn't have much need for individual fingers. Frank climbed on to the skidoo and gave a thumbs-up signal from in front. We raised our own thumbs to indicate that we were as ready as we ever would be. And with that we tugged free our ropes from the posts - and we were off.

Most people remember clearly the first time they leave the Muktuk dog yard. It's the kind of experience that recurs in the night-time subconscious of those professional types who are disconcertingly competent in all other areas of life: the cacophony of crazed barking as the dogs, seeing the sleds being prepared, run round in frantic circles at the ends of their chains, then jump on to their houses and leap back down again; the crescendo of excitement as the chosen few are harnessed and hooked up; the ebullient yapping, leaping and tugging as the desperately eager team tries to pull the anchored sled from its post - and then, as the rope is pulled, the silence ... and the horrible realization that all semblance of control has plummeted into a bottomless abyss.

It shouldn't be like that, of course. As Frank had explained, dogsledding isn't supposed to give you an adrenalin rush. Many weeks later, when my abilities had been honed, I couldn't understand how I'd ever been so hopeless. Once I'd come to know and love the individual dogs, once I'd fed them goodness knows how many kilograms of kibble and shovelled away the corresponding weight in poop, I couldn't see how there might have been a problem. But this was day one, the dogs were huge and noisy and foreign, and I was scared.

Frank went first on his skidoo. He doesn't much like riding motorized snow machines - they're noisy and smelly and they don't have paws - but the vehicle gives him the chance to respond to the crises of beginners more quickly than he could if he drove a dog team of his own. Then Bob took off, and I followed in the rear.

For the first few seconds all was well. The dogs attempted to rocket out of the yard, I stood on my mat as instructed, and we chugged in a not-too-terrifying manner towards the river. And then we came to a pile-up of confusion.

The problem was that there's a ninety-degree bend between the Muktuk dog yard and the river. The trail has been laid so that the novice musher can take it in an easy, gentle curve. Instead of turning sharp left, the dogs should veer first to the right, then take a soft swoop to the left so that they travel in the shape of a question mark. Barriers of sticks have been set up across the shorter route to encourage the dogs and drivers to steer correctly. Even without the musher's commands, though, the dogs know the way. They have been there hundreds of times before.

But the dogs can scent a novice at a thousand paces. Perhaps it's the death grip on the handlebar. Maybe it's the putrid stench of terrified perspiration as beginners, despite their best efforts, break the no-sweating rule. It could be the exaggerated breathing and wobbly commands. Whatever the dogs' powers of perception, when they know they have a rookie in tow, they like to play. And on this first day they were like a small class of hyperactive children with a brand new, fabulously incompetent teacher.

Unable to convince his dogs to take the correct path, Bob had stopped just to the side of the stick barrier. Frank had turned round to help him.

I attempted to brake so as not to run into them, but to no effect. The snow was too shallow for the bolts to anchor, and the dogs were fresh, wildly excited and determined to join in the fun. From the front Frank shouted, 'Whoa! Whoa!' but the dogs took no notice of him, either. I had about a second to take some form of action. Frank had said in his very brief briefing that, in order to stop the dogs taking off, one could turn the sled on its side. So, not realizing that this was only an option if the sled was at a

standstill, I made the instant but very poor decision to give it a go. I jumped off the runners, threw the sled on its side, and watched in horror as the dogs galloped off regardless.

'Never let go of the sled!' Frank shrieked as he grabbed the leaders of my team and disentangled my dogs from Bob's. The calm demeanour I'd seen in Frank as he'd helped me with my clothing and shown me around the sled seemed to be vanishing fast. His face now echoed the red of his parka, his eyes were wide and exasperated. There were no two ways about it: Bob and I were not making a good show of things.

Frank, on his knees now, bit the ear of Jojo, one of my leaders, to discipline her. Jojo yelped. I winced, feeling embarrassed by my own uselessness and guilty that Jojo should take the blame. I suspected that, in a fair and just world, my ear should have been the one to be nipped. And then, the teams gratifyingly separate once more, we continued on our way to the river.

It had snowed a little overnight and the river's icy surface was covered by a layer of virgin white that cut through the cliffs of butterscotch clay. Soon the dogs settled to a steady trot. Above the white of the river, the sky gleamed a pale oyster grey. Tiny specks of snow floated down. They were hardly flakes; they were more like a light flurry of whiter-than-white laundry detergent that spattered from the sky as some cleanliness-obsessed deity emptied the dregs from the celestial washing-powder box. The trees sparkled with hoar frost which defined each branch and twig with glittering clarity.

Whenever we stopped, the dogs rolled on their backs or lay on their tummies with their legs splayed as they licked and ate the cold, fluffy snow. Their thirst satisfied, my leaders doubled back to cavort with the two behind. Such social behaviour was strictly forbidden: the line was meant to stay tight at all times. Two months later, the dogs would rarely even try such a trick with me; they'd just take a roll