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opening extract from

Snow Dogs

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Chapter 1

The Iditarod

A cold, wet nose pressed Zeb's cheek.

"Get off, Nukka!" said Zeb.

Nukka wagged her tail. She was happy. She was Zeb's best husky dog and she knew it. She could get away with a lot.

Zeb got Nukka when she was a puppy. She liked to poke her nose into everything. She liked to boss the other dogs. Nukka means "little sister". She made Zeb think of a cheeky little sister who chased him around all day. She never got tired.

Zeb was 15. He lived in Anchorage, a small town in Alaska. Alaska is the part of the USA that sticks out, next to Canada – it's a cold place. There are two main sports in Alaska, ice hockey and dog sledding. Zeb didn't like hockey but he loved dog sledding. When the sky was blue and the air was cold, going sledding was the best thing in the world.

Zeb had eight dogs to pull his sled and he rode behind them. He stood on the sled. Nukka was the lead dog out in front.

Years ago, in the days before they had cars and snow-mobiles, dog sledding was not just a sport. It was the only way of getting round on snow and ice. There are still times when you need to use sleds. In 1925, hundreds

of people in the town of Nome got sick. They needed medicine fast, but no car could drive over the snow and frozen ice, so they had to use sleds. Men and dogs had to bring medicine 674 miles by sled back to Nome. They saved hundreds of lives.

Zeb had been told that story since he was a baby.

"We could do that easy, Nukka," said Zeb. Nukka wagged her tail. "We could do more than that."

Zeb's dream was to race his dogs on the Iditarod trail, the hardest dog race in the world. It was 1,149 miles across snow and ice. It was you and your dogs against the cold and ice. Alone.

The race was run to remember how the people of Nome were saved in 1925. The man who won the Iditarod was a hero.

"The prize money could buy Mum and Dad a nice house," said Zeb to Nukka.

He was fed up with just dreaming.