

## Alone in the dark By Sandy Benson

The pickup truck drove fast through the dusty roads. Past endless forest areas and huge mountain panoramas. Sarah stuck her head out the window, closed her eyes and took a deep breath of the air that hit her. It definitely smelled of freedom and adventure. It had always been a dream of hers to visit Canada. No, wrong! It was the dream. Untouched nature, endless land, unlimited possibilities. Far away from the mainstream and normal tourism she wanted to discover the original life in all its colorfulness and rawness. She wanted to find her center. She was German, just 45 years old, too young to experience anything special but for many of her friends too old to pursue such a childish dream. All the greater was the astonishment when she simply packed her bags and took the next flight to Canada.

Now she was enjoying the ride from Whitehorse to Dawson City, a small, pretty town in the Yukon. It was gold mining country she was visiting. Steeped in history, pristine and full of adventure, or so she hoped." Maybe I'll even find the love of my life here," she thought dreamily.

The ride ended in front of a cute hotel with white facade and historical look. She loved it right away. So this will be her "home" for the next 3 weeks. It was still early in the morning and after checking in and a satisfactory inspection of her room, Sarah grabbed her bag and left the hotel to explore the place.

The city seemed to be still asleep and only occasionally she met a few people here and there. A small souvenir store was just opening, a few women were doing their shopping there, and a little further away a couple of bearded men were standing by their pickup trucks, chatting animatedly. "How delightfully normal," Sarah thought. Of course she had seen a few pictures on the internet beforehand and of course the TV show Gold Rush made this area palatable to her. But to actually be here and be a part of it was just overwhelming.

Sarah has always been different from others. She tried out a lot, always reinvented herself and accordingly had an almost insatiable desire for adventures and new challenges. Of course, she had also made a list for Canada, what she wanted to do and see. She had even heard that you can get a drink there with a real toe. Probably an old tradition or test of courage. No matter. She had to try that out. She wanted to visit the Dawson City Museum and the log cabin of the famous writer Jack London. She also wanted to make an attempt to visit the active goldmines. He who dares wins. With this enthusiasm, she strolled curiously through the small streets, discovering something new around every corner. Full of curiosity, she explored the area and never tired. She had lunch in the much advertised schnitzel paradise, got into her rental car full and satisfied and drove on now unpaved roads towards the claims.

The view of the vast forested area was breathtaking. The river was close beside her. Was this the Yukon River or the Klondike River? "Never mind," she thought, "I'll ask!"

Her path led her further and further into the untouched nature. Past historic buildings, past the now numerous residents on the busy streets out of town to the hill she had marveled at on the Internet. She wanted the view into the valley and over all of Dawson City! That had to be breathtaking!

She could already picture this view when suddenly her car's fuel gauge lit up. "Crap!", Sarah cursed out loud. What the hell was that all about? After a few more meters, the engine sputtered and finally it stopped altogether. "Great job, Sarah!", she scolded herself. "Of course you check the fuel gauge before you go for a ride!!! " She pulled out her bag and reached for her cell phone. But no matter in which direction or how high she held it-no network! After countless expletives against herself, she got out and made her way further up the mountain on foot. After all, she wanted to see the sunset on the mountain. "I'll run into someone who will take me back to town," she said to herself and continued walking.

After another hour, she became painfully aware of two things. She definitely wasn't dressed for a hike and something to eat and drink was starting to be very nice too. Her feet were aching and her stomach was making itself known with increasing frequency. The way downhill seemed much faster than the ascent. That was obvious! The hunger let Sarah run faster and faster. She was already imagining her delicious dinner, but no longer paid attention to where she was going. Despite the still bright surroundings, the city seemed to have disappeared. No lights, which should be visible now in the evening hours. No sounds of cars, machines or people. Only forest. Dense and darkening forest. Sarah stopped. She listened into the forest for any clue as to where she was. Nothing. Just rustling, voices of birds she didn't know, the whisper of the wind making its way through the trees. Fear rose in her. Hastily, she reached for her cell phone again, hoping to get a signal. Without success. Even the emergency call did not work here. But it was also somehow clear. The 110 will probably not exist in Canada! She searched her bag for something edible. Unfortunately, she found nothing useful except a few old cough drops. Desperation slowly rose in her. "What if I don't find my way back? What if wild animals are lurking here?" Sarah thought fearfully. All sorts of scenarios suddenly flashed through her mind. Unfortunately, always with a fatal outcome for her. There were giant predators, living trees, zombies, ghosts, monsters....

"Stop it now!" she admonished herself. She had clearly seen too many horror movies. Encouraging herself, she hurriedly went on. She thought to herself, as long as I only go downhill, I'll get there somehow. Can not be so difficult. But suddenly she heard a disturbing noise. A humming or growling. Exactly she could not define it. She held her breath and listened. Nothing! Quickly she went on. Again a growl and now she heard exactly how something quite large moved through the undergrowth. "A bear!", it shot through her head." It must be a bear!"

Sarah started to run. She didn't know where to go, she didn't know how long but she ran. After what felt like endless minutes and completely out of breath, she stopped and listened. There was a loud crack behind her and a huge brown body made its way to her at a rapid pace. A thousand thoughts ran through Sarah's head. She was alternately boiling hot and then shivered with fear. The bear grew faster and faster and now the dimensions of its size slowly became visible in the dim light. He was a MONSTER!

Like a movie, Sarah's life played out before her eyes. "I'm going to die!" she thought even as the bear was almost directly in front of her. She could see his glowing eyes and his huge white teeth. She knew he would attack her and she knew she would not survive. Her thoughts circled faster and faster but she was unable to move. And when the bear was only an arm's length away and she could smell its foul breath, a loud bang ripped through the air and then another and another.

A hand's width from her feet, the huge bear was taking its last breaths. Sarah saw the light in its eyes fade and the life drain from its body.

She stood motionless. She could neither think nor feel anything and her knees slowly gave way. She dropped and landed directly in front of the bear's mighty skull. He was dead! That much she could comprehend. But why? Who? Relief spread through her and with it came a flood of tears. Sobbing, she sat in front of the huge animal and could not think clearly. She seemed to remain like this for what felt like an eternity until suddenly a couple of men approached her. They tried to pull her up and talked to her frantically. They put a blanket around her shoulders and gently pulled her to a pickup truck nearby. They asked her if everything was all right and gave her something to eat and drink.

Sarah was grateful but there was no way she could express that right now. She had survived!!! All she wanted to do was get back to her hotel.

As it turned out the men had become aware of her rental car and had started a search operation. The advantage of living in such a "small" town. Nobody gets lost so easily. The crowd in front of the sheriff's office was huge and everyone wanted to be told the story in detail. A strong, dark-haired woman finally took Sarah in her arms and said to the people: "Now let her come to her senses! Tomorrow she can tell the story in peace!" Sarah looked gratefully at the woman and let her take her to her room. She didn't even manage to take a shower and fell into her bed, dead tired. She fell into a very restless sleep and woke up a few times in a sweat. But when the morning dawned it was already almost just a bad memory and nothing more.

Sarah enjoyed the rest of her vacation and had the best time of her life in this wonderful town of Dawson City. All the people had asked her about the story and she had to tell it again and again. But the kindness with which she was received here and her rescue at the last second will probably always be in her heart.