

NERO

By Carole L. Cooney

Nero, a St. Bernard, was a large, intelligent dog that descended from the mastiff stock. Tall and large boned, the St. Bernard was trained by monks in the Swiss Alps to rescue travelers lost in the mountains. Because of their keen sense of smell they were able to locate people who were buried in the snow. They were also trained to guide travelers over dangerous trails.

Setting: Dawson City in the Klondike

Characters:

Narrator

Belinda Mulrooney

Nero

Gold-dust Louie

Narrator: The *Klondike News* reported the following in 1898 at the height of the gold rush: “Miss Mulrooney ...makes the 18-mile trip to Dawson in a basket sleigh drawn by her faithful dog Nero, a noble animal of the St. Bernard breed and the largest dog in the Northwest.” Belinda Mulrooney was the richest woman in the Klondike because she built the Grand Forks Hotel which was frequented by miners who paid their bills with gold dust and nuggets.

Belinda: What’ll be today, gentlemen? Eggs, ham, toast and coffee?

Nero: (bark) Why doesn’t she ask me what I want for breakfast? (bark) I just get the same old leftovers but I must say (bark) they’re mighty good. (bark)

Gold-dust: Yes’em! How much will that be?

Belinda: (taking her scale from under the counter) One ounce will do fine, Gold-Dust Louie.

Gold-dust: You’re mighty cheap in these here parts. Can you make a go of it?

Belinda: Oh, I do fine, yes, fine indeed! Let me get your coffee while I fix up those eggs, ham and toast.

Gold-dust: Thanks, m’am.

Nero: Look at poor little me, Belinda. I’d like a piece of ham, too. Can you just let a little piece of ham slide off the plate? (begging)

Narrator: Belinda Mulrooney made so much money that she wouldn't trust anyone to take it to the bank in Dawson City. That was a job for her and Nero. On one trip, she loaded Nero with two sacks of gold dust, and another sack on her own back.

Nero: Well, well, I'm fitted with sacks of gold. I'm a rich dog! (bark)

Belinda: No need to bark, Nero. We don't want to attract any undue attention. Just follow me like a good boy.

Narrator: It was the spring of 1898. The snows were melting and the streams were swollen and moving rapidly. Belinda carefully led the way over a rushing stream on a wet log. Nero bounded onto the log. Suddenly, his feet slipped and he landed in the creek with a big splash.

Nero: Oh no! I'm having trouble swimming. I love to swim. What's the matter with me? (bark) Belinda! I need your help. (bark)

Belinda: I'm coming Nero – just hold on. It's those sacks of gold that are weighing you down.

Narrator: Belinda climbed on a nearby willow tree which bent as she leaned over the water. She reached down and grabbed Nero's collar to lift his face out of the water. Now she realized if she let go of Nero's collar, he would drown. Just then up the bend, Gold-dust Louie yelled to Belinda.

Gold-dust: Belinda, let go of the dog. You'll hurt yourself!

Belinda: (yelling) Come over here, Gold-dust! Cut the sacks off Nero's back. Hurry!

Gold-dust: Not on your life will I do that, Belinda. I'm here to save you.

Narrator: When Gold-dust climbed the tree to rescue Belinda, there was a mighty crack! The tree broke and down went Belinda with a crash into the icy water. Rising to the surface, she grabbed Nero.

Belinda: Aw, hold on Nero. Let me get these heavy bags off of you. There! Whew! They were surely heavy weren't they?

Nero: I thought for sure I was a goner! (bark and licking Belinda's face) Thank you, Belinda. You saved my life.

Narrator: Lots of gold was lost that day, but Nero was saved and he was priceless.