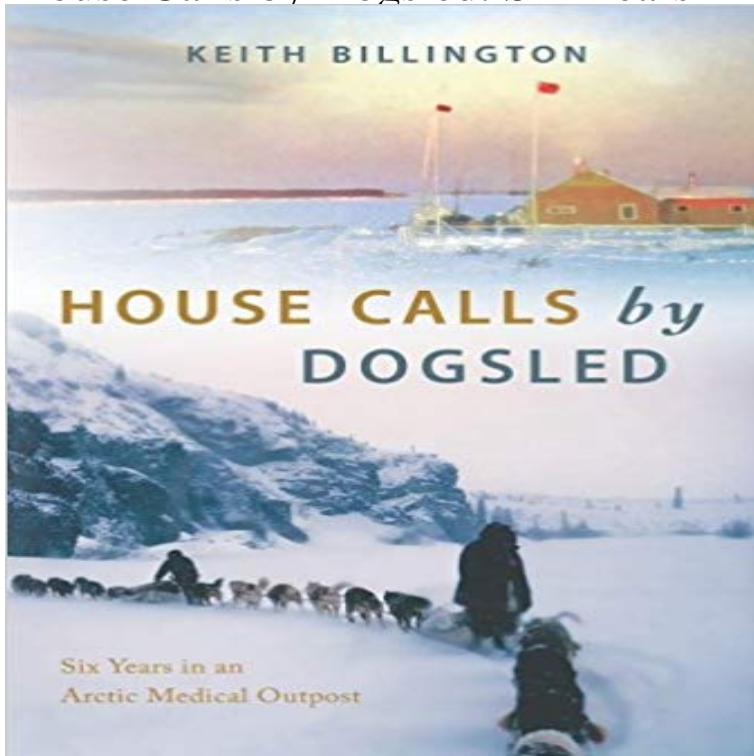


House Calls by Dogsled: Six Years in an Arctic Medical Outpost



People go north for a variety of reasons, some stay for a lifetime, while others can't wait to leave at the end of whatever term they have signed on for. The north tends to be either loved or hated with equal passion. These are the words of Keith Billington, who with his wife Muriel, arrived in the Northwest Territories outpost of Fort McPherson, 1,700 miles north of Edmonton, in mid-September 1964. They were among those who loved the North and stayed for six years. Keith, a nurse, and Muriel, a midwife, were barely into their twenties and fresh from England when they arrived, eager to put their brand new skills to work. Their clients were the Gwich'in people, who taught them how to snowshoe, choose a dog team and live off the land. These two young professionals were all the medical help available at the births of babies and the tragic deaths of other children, they were the first to tend gun-shot victims and deal with illnesses made worse by the isolation. Their story also tells of caribou hunts, fishing in summer lakes and travelling in winter by dog team, of sun-returning parties, and drum-dancing and New Year feasts. The book concludes with Keith leading a group who retrace the route of the tragic RCMP Lost Patrol. This is a delightfully warm celebration of the north in the days just before skidoos and cell phones took the edge off the isolation.

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