

# **An Inhuman Mountie**

## **A Short Story in the Adventures of the First Woman Mountie**

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This book is a work of historical fiction, set in the 1970s. Although most of the historical references are accurate, a few are not, and names, characters, places, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead is entirely coincidental.

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### **Spoiler Alert**

This short story contains references to several other stories in the ***Adventures of the First Woman Mountie Series***, particularly Book 1 and Book 4.

If you hate spoilers then you should read those books first, or at least read Book 1 first.

You've been warned.



## **ADVENTURES OF THE FIRST WOMAN MOUNTIE**

*Book 1: An Inconvenient Mountie*

*Book 2: An Inconspicuous Mountie*

*Book 3: An Indestructible Mountie*

*Book 4: An International Mountie*

*Book 5: An Inseparable Mountie*

*Book 6: An Indispensable Mountie*

## Chapter 1. My Beginnings

It was cold where I grew up. Even the summers had chilly nights, especially when the wind was up. The winters, however, were what defined the true meaning of cold ...

When it was well beyond the point when water would freeze solid, you learned early not to put your tongue on bare metal. Not more than once, anyway. The pain of feeling a layer of skin tear off of your tongue is the kind of pain that you never, ever, forget.

Our immediate family: my father, mother, sister and I, were all close. Unnaturally close, some said. At first, I had no idea what that meant. Later, I took it to be a jealous response to how happy our little family was together. It was much later, as I began to grow in maturity as well as size, that it dawned on me that my family communicated with each other somewhat differently than we did with others. It was a subtle thing with my parents, but something much stronger with my sister.

From my very first memories as a youngster, I remember being able to gaze into my sister Goldie's eyes and get – not her actual thoughts – but an image in my mind of what she was thinking. The same thing seemed to work for her too, but in reverse. For example, I might gaze into her eyes and get a clear image of a field with a ball lying in the centre of it. *She wants to go play with the ball*, I would think. Then, if I thought about the field and the ball, she would know that I was agreeing and we'd both simply get up and go play.

I soon realized that when playing with others of my age, I couldn't understand them in the same way that I could my sister or parents. It's not that I couldn't communicate with others. It was more that our communications weren't as detailed, or as rich. Like the difference between looking out over a forested valley in the bluish illumination of twilight compared with looking at the same scene with the illumination of the late morning sun on a clear day. Like the difference between seeing a single colour compared with a rainbow. I didn't think much of it for the longest time.

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Home, when I was growing up, was a large, fenced-in area with a large house, a barn, and quite a few smaller houses. My parents were servants, basically, and we lived in one of the small houses. We had a master and a mistress, who lived in the big house. They were kind to us, and I think we all liked them.

One of the other servants was a very old man. I never quite figured out what his duties were supposed to be, but there was no question about his place in our social structure. He was the Elder. He wasn't in charge of anything, such was the province of the master and mistress, but everyone treated him with respect. Even the master and the mistress. Even my playmates, and my sister, and I instinctively deferred to him. At the time I didn't clearly understand why that should be so. He had no authority over us, and even if he had, we were an immature and disrespectful bunch of children. But not to the Elder.

Although my playmates treated the Elder with respect, their relationship went no further. The Elder spoke to us all, but my playmates were never interested in what he had to say. They did not understand him.

For some reason, it was different for my sister and I. We would listen to him and, at first, we did not understand him either, but as time went on we understood more and more and became ever more captivated. Just like between Goldie and I, we both found that we could understand more of the Elder's stories if we gazed directly into his eyes as he told them. As we came to understand what he was saying to us, we learned that he was descended from the very first peoples to have inhabited the area where I grew up. It hadn't occurred to me that there might have been a time before people.

There was something beyond our growing ability to understand him, however. Looking back, I think now that my sister and I sensed in him something special, something desirable, something that seemed elusive and unreachable. It was more than knowledge, although he certainly had that in abundance. I think we sensed wisdom.

It was his stories that called out to my sister and I. We would gather around him at every opportunity and when he was in the mood to tell us stories – which, to be fair, was most of the time. We would sit at his feet and listen as he told us stories. These were stories from the past, some from the very distant past, and they were filled with interesting characters and adventures. As time went on, I began to perceive that each of the Elder's stories also contained knowledge, and very often a moral or some kind of wisdom. As the last two were of no interest to us at that age, it was a testament to the Elder's storytelling ability that we were drawn into the stories despite our growing awareness that he wasn't entertaining us, he was teaching us. By the time I knew this to be true, it was nowhere near enough to keep me away. I loved to hear his stories, and to watch them unfold in my mind's eye as each story was told.

The 'knowledge stories' told us about the environment in which we lived, and often focused on the different kinds of animals that surrounded us: birds, fish, deer, bears, and so on. Our instincts already told us which we could ignore, which we could hunt, and which to fear. He taught us to look deeper than that. The Elder's favourite stories involved the raven, which he identified as the creator of all things, the one that taught humans and animals alike to hunt. Above all, the raven was the most adventurous of beings. Most of the Elder's stories took us into the relationships among the animals. In one story for example, the Elder described how wolves would hunt and kill the weaker members of a herd of deer. Without the weak to slow them down, the herd was then faster and more nimble, enabling the bulk of the herd to better avoid predators of all kinds and therefore survive and reproduce. In this way both species could not only co-exist but benefit from each other. I liked stories like that.

My favourite stories, in fact, involved the wolves.

The wolves of the Elder's stories were mythological, of course. Even at a young age I understood that. Nevertheless, my imagination soared with the ebb and flow of the stories as the best of the wolves exhibited, not just great hunting abilities, but courage, strength, and loyalty. The Elder's stories also taught that wolves and humans are closely related to each other, and that humans and dogs actually descended from wolves long, long ago. In several of the very best stories, a wolf and a human were siblings and/or each other's best friend, and their adventures were strongly overlain by concepts like honour, wisdom, and destiny. These latter were new ideas for me, they sent my imagination racing.

When these stories were told, I always wanted to be the wolf, and as more and more of these stories were told they developed in me a yearning to have a destiny like the best of wolves. Like the best of wolves, I would be courageous, strong, loyal, wise, and honourable. The Elder surely intended something like this to happen, although I doubt that he'd have expected such concepts to so solidly take root in my developing mind. Regardless, he was surely effective.

To this day, after all these years, I still strive to be like the best of the wolves in the Elder's stories. Even so, it's aspirational rather than real. That's because I'm not actually a wolf.

I'm told that I look like a wolf though, so perhaps I'm not so far removed after all.

You wouldn't be able to pronounce the name my parents gave me. Our master named me Silver.

## Chapter 2. Communications

My sister Goldie and I spent so much time listening to the Elder's stories that, as time progressed, we eventually gained a better understanding of what our master and mistress (whose human names were Ross and Sally) were trying to communicate when they spoke to us. I don't mean their language, exactly, although we did learn quite a few of their words. It was more that we somehow understood more and more of the meaning of what they were trying to say to us.

If, for example, one of them were to say: "Silver, go get your toy," I could understand that as "*Silver ??? get ??? toy,*" because I understood those three words out of the five. This was not remarkable, as any of our other playmates would also have had the same understanding of this command.

If, on the other hand, one of them were to say to the other: "The barometer is falling and I think we're in for a storm. I'm worried about it because we might get caught in a fierce downpour. I think we should take our raincoats with us and keep an eye on the weather while we're out in the fields," I might only recognize the words "storm" and "fields," but I would also have felt the apprehension conveyed and somehow understand the warning to be watchful of the weather. Our playmates would have caught the same two words and some sense of the emotion involved, but they would not have gained the other nuances. Goldie and I didn't know what to make of this, but it must have made our lives richer, more colourful in a sense, and it seems to have accelerated our learning of more and more of our human's words.

I think I was just about fully grown when Goldie and I learned that we could convey much more than growls, whines, and barks back to our humans. This came about quite unexpectedly but at a very important time.

Our master and mistress had begun to train us to join with other dogs in pulling a heavy thing made mostly of wood from trees. They called it a sled, and it was supported on long strips of wood called skis. Each of us would wear a harness connected to a central lead that was, in turn, connected to the sled. Then, working together, we could pull the sled over the snow even if it had things loaded on it and a human standing on the back of it. Pulling our share of the load was work, but it was also exhilarating to be part of a team, to be able to run, and to be able to get out and away from our familiar surroundings and out into wilder country.

Anyway, one day we were out with the master, pulling the sled. Goldie and I were positioned side-by-side, and we had been promoted to the two positions immediately following the lead dog. This was a big step for us, but the lead dog was very experienced, demanding but even tempered, and all we had to do was watch him carefully and follow his lead. Our run had gone very well, I thought, and we had clearly reached its limit and had turned around, back towards home. When we were part of the way back, our master decided to try following a game trail through the forest.

It was late in the day, and the sky was cloudy, so the light was poor. Maybe that contributed to the problem, but for whatever reason, when we came to a fork in the trail our master signalled for us to turn towards the right and take that path. Our lead dog seemed fine with this and began to pull in that direction, but Goldie suddenly flashed an image into my mind: this was not the path that led towards home. We both remembered being there before, and knew that the path to the right led off in almost

exactly the wrong direction and would have led to an impassable ridge of rock that would have left us far from home, with darkness falling. Since my sense of direction, and of what lie ahead on each fork in the trail, matched Goldie's I sent a confirming image back to her.

Now what?

It was winter. It was cold. We both knew that we couldn't afford to take the wrong trail. Not knowing what else to do, we both dug our paws into the snow and refused to mush.

That wasn't fun. Our master started yelling at us, and the lead dog started barking and snapping at us, but we both had the strongest feeling that it was the left-hand path that would take us home. Caught between our senses and our duty to obey, we both stood there frozen, straining at our harnesses. This seemed to catch our master by surprise. He stopped yelling and stared at us, looking more puzzled than angry. It was as if he was trying to understand what was bothering us.

Not knowing what else to do, Goldie and I simply stood there and stared directly at our master, trying to see into his eyes and to communicate the sense of danger we sensed. We tried to use our minds to project a sense of what we would say to him, if we could, which would have been: "*Not this way!*"

Unbelievable as it may seem, he seemed to get the essence of what we were trying to communicate.

*What an amazing thing*, I thought.

To make a long story short, our master decided to try the fork that Goldie and I wanted to take, gave the appropriate instructions to our lead dog, and we made it home, safe and sound. Our master was good enough to recognize that we'd been right, and was very appreciative. Goldie and I were able to lounge in front of the big fireplace in the great house, and soak up the restoring warmth, water, food, and treats.

The master must have told the Elder about our adventure, because the next time we sat at his feet to listen, he told stories about the ancestry of dogs like Alaskan Malamutes, which was the humans' name for our family. The Elder taught us that we had a long heritage that spanned a multitude of generations, that we were descended from the Arctic Wolves, and that our ancestors were the original siblings and best friends of the very first humans. Those original wolves, the Elder taught, had the ability to communicate – or at least to be able to exchange understandings - with humans, as well as with other wolves.

I don't know about Goldie, but these stories inspired in me a desire to push the boundaries and see how far this communication thing with humans could be developed.



## Chapter 3. Water

There was another sled-pulling trip with our master that was to have a life-long effect on me.

Once again, we were out with the master and working together to pull the sled. As before, Goldie and I were positioned side-by side, and immediately following the lead dog. We'd had another good run and we had clearly reached its limit and had turned around, back towards home. When we were most of the way back there was a frozen river we had to cross. This we had done many times before, and I thought nothing of it beyond the fact that the pads on my paws didn't grip as well on ice as they did in snow. This caused a certain amount of slipping around, but I'd learned to keep my balance well enough to avoid running into any of my companions. What happened next was a complete surprise, however.

We were almost across the river. In fact, the lead dog, and Goldie and I had only just reached the shore when, all of a sudden, there was a tremendous cracking sound and we felt a massive pull from behind us. As I yelped and turned my head, I could see that the ice had broken open, the sled was twisted upwards in to the air, and some of it was already sinking into the water. Despite our best efforts to move forward, the pull on our harnesses was too great to overcome and we were all pulled back off the shore, back across the ice, and back to the hole. As our master jumped off the sled, it dropped right down into the water, dragging our whole dog team with it.

The three of us that had made it to shore struggled furiously to prevent being dragged backwards and into the water, but it was no use. The force pulling us back was just too great.

Once our master had jumped off the sled, he reached for the nearest dog with one hand, and his knife with the other hand. He didn't have time to try undoing the harnesses, so he just started cutting away at them. Even so, it seemed to take forever to cut them free, and in every case a terrified dog had been completely immersed for at least a moment.

One by one he kept cutting our team members free, furiously hacking away at the harness straps. By the time he got to Goldie and I, parts of our harnesses were still attached to the sunken sled and we were repeatedly getting pulled under the water and having to struggle to get our heads back up above water so we could breathe in some air. I think that he must also have been tiring rapidly, as it was taking longer and longer to cut each dog free. He worked on Goldie's harness before mine, and he was helping to keep her nose and mouth above water at the same time. I approved but, if anything, that made it worse for me, as I was repeatedly being either dragged or pushed under water for longer and longer periods of time.

I don't know how anyone can describe the feeling of drowning without actually experiencing it. My feelings were a combination of horror and panic. I had an overwhelming urge to open my mouth and take in air, but I knew that to open my mouth would only bring in water. My chest and throat would spasm in a desperate, instinctive attempt to get air. At the same time, I would have to clamp my mouth shut in a similarly desperate attempt from inhaling water. These roughly equal but opposite forces had me heaving back and forth at the same time as a sense of panic rose up in me. It ... was ... horrible.

I kept struggling, of course, and I'm sure my eyes were wild with fright, but I knew that our master was doing his best to save us, so I tried to avoid actually panicking long enough for him to get Goldie and I free.

Eventually, and just about when I'd been so starved for air that I was on the verge of blacking out, he got my harness cut and gave me a huge push up onto the ice.

All I could do, for a while, was sit there taking in huge gulps of air.

A few minutes after that, and it was all over.

By the time our master had released the lead dog and dragged himself up onto the shore, our team had mostly calmed down and shaken ourselves out. After that, we all just walked home - shivering all the way. When we got there, our master and mistress were sufficiently worried about us that they let us all into the great room of the main house, wet fur and all, so we could curl up in front of their roaring fireplace.

What a contrast that was to the icy water in which we'd all nearly drowned!

Most of my companions shrugged the experience off. Maybe none of them had spent as much time fully immersed as I had. I don't know. What I do know is that the experience left me with a perpetual fear of drowning. I never forgot, I never shed the horror, and as I re-live these memories again, I find myself shuddering.

Naturally, I never willingly went into the water again.

## Chapter 4. Norm and Alexandra

While growing up, I noticed that others of our pack were full grown and had learned to work as part of a team pulling sleds, then strangers would come and look them over. Sooner or later, one of the strangers would make some kind of arrangement with the master and mistress such that the stranger was to become their new master and they would go off with them, never to be seen again.

There was a day when this happened to me.

I'd been lounging on the roof of our family's small house when another stranger showed up to look over all of us that were young but full grown, of which we numbered five at that particular time. Our master didn't introduce him to me at first, only the other four, but the stranger didn't seem impressed with any of them for some reason and kept looking over at me and pointing. Initially, my master just shook his head, as if to say "no" but as they continued their discussion he eventually relented and brought him over to introduce us.

"Silver, this is Norm. Come down and say hello," my master said, by way of introduction.

I jumped down from my rooftop perch and padded over. The male named Norm held out his hand for inspection and I gave him a careful sniff and then looked deeply into his eyes. I didn't sense anything concerning in his scent, or his manner, or his mind, but I didn't find anything very interesting there either. As we stood there, Norm and my master continued what was obviously a prior conversation that had them both talking in animated fashion. I could tell that they were discussing sleds, sled-pulling, and sled racing, and I immediately sensed that they were kindred spirits – in sled racing at least.

I couldn't understand everything they were saying, of course, but when Norm spoke I got an image of a sled racing through beautiful snow-covered country, a team of dogs, and- to my amazement – he clearly imagined me at the head of the team as lead dog.

That sounded interesting. I'd never been put in the lead position before, although I'd watched enough other lead dogs to have some understanding of the job.

Eventually the master, with some reluctance, seemed to reach an agreement with Norm. They shook hands, and then the master knelt-down by my head and said: "Silver, you're going to be going away with Norm here. He'll be your new master now."

And that was that.

We drove to a new home with Norm in the powered vehicle he referred to as a truck. The journey took many, many cycles of the sun and moon – more cycles than I have claws on my two front paws. Norm's home was not only far away but in a place of quite different geography. There were no mountains, for one thing, just hills. The water bodies were different, too. Instead of one huge body of undrinkable water – what my former masters had referred to as ocean – there were many, many smaller bodies of drinkable water. These, I learned were referred to as lakes. Some of them were quite large, but nothing on the scale of the ocean. Also, the forests were quite sparse compared with what I was used to.

Norm's place was similar to that of my previous master and mistress except that everything was smaller. There was a house, a kind of barn, and smaller houses for us dogs. There were quite a few dogs already

there, and I was given my own little house with a roof I could lounge on. I kind of liked having my own house, but it was lonely being away from my sister and parents. Not far away from Norm's place was a whole community of human houses. Norm and the other humans referred to it as Radium City.

As a master, Norm was fine. His voice and manner often sounded rough, but he treated his dogs well. The other dogs were fine too. There was no real pack leader when I arrived. I think there must have been one before, but I don't know what happened to him or her. The other dogs accepted me and I them. We had time to play, time to lounge, and then there was the sledding.

If there was one thing we had in common, it was the enjoyment of sledding. Norm dropped me into the leader's traces right from the start. None of the other dogs did more than grumble a bit, and I was somewhat surprised to find that leading worked out just fine. I had to be vigilant, and keep my teammates in line, but this didn't usually require more than sharp barks, the odd growl, and the occasional nip. I had no trouble at all in understanding Norm's commands as the musher. I didn't understand all of his words, of course, but I always seemed to be able to read the image in his mind, so the two of us were almost always in perfect alignment. Our sled runs, as a result, were amazing fun.

It was through Norm that I was introduced to a way to explore the larger bodies of water without getting wet. Norm called it a boat. In the warmer months, when the water was ice-free, Norm would take people out – one or two at a time – across the big lake to places where they could hunt for larger animals or fish. For some reason, he fell into the habit of bringing me along on such trips. Although I was initially nervous of the possibility of falling into the water, or of the boat sinking, my fears turned out to be groundless, and I learned to enjoy the experience. As the boat made its way over the water, I found that I could observe the changing scenery, smell the complex smells brought by the wind, and relish the freedom of being able to do it all from the comfort of the boat. That is, without having to do any work!

Sometimes when Norm went out, it was just the two of us. It was one such day when Norm's call interrupted my late-morning doze, as I was lying on the roof of my home. Hopping down and trotting over to him, he pointed to his truck and opened the side door for me. I could see from the gear he was carrying that he intended to go out in the boat, so I was looking forward to the trip. Weather permitting, Norm would always open the window of his side door for me, which I appreciated, as it allowed me to engage in one of my favourite past-times – that of sticking my head out of the window, pointing my nose up and into the breeze, and trying to take in and decipher the rich, yet ever changing, blend of aromas that was always available.

Having driven to where it was kept, I followed him onto the boat and watched while Norm loaded some things he had brought with us. It was a fine day, as far as weather was concerned, and the water wasn't overly rough, so I curled up in the empty seat and had quite a pleasant ride. After some time, we reached land and Norm pulled the boat up on shore. From there we went for a walk that brought us to a hill. As we approached the hill, I could see that we were heading for a cave.

When we entered the cave, it was obvious that it had been made by humans. The floor was smooth and flat, and the roof and walls looked un-natural. Norm had brought a light with him, and we walked deep inside.

It was cool and damp in the cave. From somewhere up ahead I could hear water dripping. Eventually, the floor changed to something like my master had in his house. Just beyond that, the cave widened and came

to an end. Norm took off his outer layer of clothing and hung it from a piece of rock that stuck out from one wall, then he sat down. He seemed to be thinking, so I sat down beside him and curled up to rest.

After a few minutes, my head instinctively popped up as I heard noises coming from the entrance to the cave. I smelled a familiar scent: it was the human named Jim. Jim lived in the same general area that we did, he also had a boat, and I had observed that he spent a lot of his time out on the lake taking other humans – mostly males – out on the big lake.

Jim I did not like. Until now, I've described relationships with humans that varied from the good, such as with Norm, to the great, such as with my former master and mistress, to the reverent, such as with my parents and the Elder. All of my senses and abilities that came together in my head to produce the welcome, colourful impressions of these people, turned against me with certain other humans. Jim is an example. From my very first meeting with him my senses were in conflict. My eyes provided information, but nothing negative or concerning. My ears heard a pleasant voice, and again, nothing in the parts of Jim's speech that I could understand caused me concern. If anything, his conversations with Norm seemed to be very amicable. All of my other senses, however, rebelled at the notion of any kind of contact with Jim. I sensed ... a brooding anger, resentment even. Against what, I have never known. I sensed ... a darkness in his mind, so dark as to possibly be quite evil.

I stood up, to watch for his arrival.

After a while, Jim came into view and greeted Norm. They talked for a while. As nearly as I could judge, they were talking about searching for something valuable. The images in both of their minds seemed to be of a kind of shiny metal that could be broken out of a special kind of rock.

Although prudence advised caution and an outward display of indifference, if not polite companionship, I did not – and to some extent still do not – have enough control over my instincts to prevent my ears from flattening back and a low growl from emerging. This, of course, was promptly noticed by both Norm and Jim, with the former instructing me to back-off and the latter taking a step back and keeping his distance from me. For my part, I did my best to stay close to Norm and be alert for trouble.

When Norm and Jim's conversation concluded, they began walking out of the cave. When we emerged into the light, we walked down to the water. There, beside Norm's boat, was Jim's larger boat. Jim climbed into his boat and motions for Norm to join him. Then, some kind of argument began, in which they raised their voices and waved their hands, with Jim pointing at me. The core of it seemed to be that Jim wanted Norm to get into the boat without me.

Norm then knelt down beside me and said something like: "Silver ... boat ... stay." He looked directly into my eyes as he spoke, and the image I received in my mind was that he was trying to tell me that he would come back for me. Then, reminding me to "stay," he got into Jim's boat and they headed out on the lake.

As ordered, I curled up and waited for Norm to return, but I never saw Norm alive again.

It was a long wait, and the sun moved across a portion of the sky before Jim's boat finally returned, but with only him in it.

*Where was Norm?*, I wondered.

As Jim's boat approached the shore, I was barking at him. I must not have sounded or looked very friendly when Jim was about to get out of his boat, because he hesitated at the last moment and instead reached over to attach a rope to Norm's boat. Then he backed his own boat out into deeper water, pulled Norm's boat out after him, retied the rope to the front of Norm's boat and then left, towing Norm's boat behind his.

Not understanding what was happening, or why Norm hadn't returned with Jim, I watched the two boats move away, and even trotted up the big hill with the cave in it, so I could get a better view. From the top of the hill, I could watch the two boats moving away for quite a long time. Eventually, they were completely out of sight. From my vantage point on top of the hill, I could also see that the land I was on was surrounded on all sides by water.

I was trapped!

I know now that I could have tried swimming. I've seen other dogs and wolves swim in water, but at that age I didn't know whether I could swim or not. That, added to my horror of water, plus the fact that I couldn't actually see land anywhere - even from the top of the hill - made me think I should stay put.

I circled the island, but I didn't find much beyond another cave. This second cave looked and felt like the first cave, except that it had metal tracks along its floor, with wheeled sleds sitting on top of the tracks. I walked inside for a distance but came to a place where there was a big hole that stretched almost the full width of the cave. I didn't like the smell of the hole, so I turned around and walked back out of the cave.

For most of the rest of the day, I went back to the top of the hill and resumed my vigil, watching for Norm's return. Although there was no food, there was water, and I occasionally trotted down to the lake for a drink. By the time the sun was beginning to disappear into the distance it was becoming cool and windy, so I went back into the first cave and curled up near Norm's clothing.

When the sun rose into the sky again, I went out and back down to the water. There was still no sign of Norm. Once again, I went to the top of the hill to watch and wait for Norm. When the sun was high in the sky, I went back to the cave and curled up for a nap near Norm's clothing.

I was woken from my nap by the sounds of someone coming into the cave. There were flashes of light from a hand-held light, and I caught the scent of an unfamiliar human female. She had an interesting scent. Not sensing any danger, and curious about this stranger, I stayed curled-up where I was and waited.

As the woman came slowly forward, I began to sense fragments of her thought. She was being careful, she was searching for something, and I began to detect indications of compassion and a fine mind. As I remained curled up, with my ears up and pointing forward, and my nose doing the same, my sense gathering was interrupted by a loud "crack - snap" sound of wood breaking. At almost the same instant, the woman came into my sight and gave out a sharp "Eeek!" sound as the floor below her gave way and most of her dropped out of sight into a large hole that had opened-up in the floor.

As I blinked in surprise, I saw that she had not completely fallen into the hole. Her head and arms were visible at the top edge of the hole. The rest of her body must have been hanging straight down in to the hole because she was trying to use small movements of her arms to prevent herself from falling completely.

I'm sure she didn't see me yet, that came later, but I could see straight into her eyes. That combined with the intensity of her thoughts gave me startlingly clear impressions of her thoughts.

She was afraid, trying to avoid panic, and trying to control her breathing. At the same time, she was trying to figure out how to escape the hole. This reminded me so much of my experience when I was dragged into the water when my former master's sled fell through the ice, that I felt a strong surge of empathy for her.

Continuing to watch – and sense - the drama before me, I was fascinated by her attempts to stay in control of her emotions and think her way out of trouble. My eyes, ears, nose, and mental perceptions all combined to give me a deep understanding of her efforts. Although my eyes could only see a small amount of her, I could sense through her mind's eye her efforts to find supports for her feet or other parts of her body, trying to find something she could grab with her hands, and trying to shift her self to one side or the other, but nothing worked. It wasn't long before I detected new emotions from her: she was getting tired.

She called "Help!" several times, so there was apparently another human outside the cave somewhere, but whoever it was, they never came. I could tell that she was continuing to tire.

There was something compelling about this person, I sensed intelligence, persistence, a spirit of adventure, and a spirit of purpose about her. I was suddenly reminded of the Elder's stories of the first human and the first wolf and I realized with a start that I could not just lie there and let her fall, possibly to her death.

At the same time as I sensed that she was bracing herself to try something desperate, I lept to my paws. In two bounds, I was right in front of her, and I called out: "Grruph, Grruph, Grruph."

That got her attention! She was so startled, she nearly lost her balance on the edge of the hole. She recovered herself quickly, however, and I could sense that I had unintentionally frightened her.

I stared straight onto her eyes, and gave a couple of neutral barks, trying to get her attention. When I could see her examining me with a puzzled, but wary, look on her face I lowered my shoulders and put my head down on the rock floor, between my front legs and paws, in the universal sign – among dogs and wolves at least – of non-aggression.

Although this behaviour continued to mystify her, she did get the message that she needn't be afraid of me. She also looked straight into my eyes. That was the opportunity I wanted, and I tried to send her an image of grabbing the loose fur at the back of my neck, so I could try to help pull her out.

"You ??? ??? me," she said out loud. I don't know all the words she said, but I got the message of amazement and almost amused disbelief.

As we continued to share our gaze, I kept trying to send an image of her grabbing my fur so I could help her get up and over the edge of the hole. At the same time, I received clearer impressions from her mind that I have ever received from any human. It was amazing!

Although I knew that she was having trouble believing what was happening to her, she was tiring rapidly now and I could feel the exact moment when she decided that she had no other options, and nothing to lose by taking the risk of grabbing me. And that's exactly what she did. She slowly moved one arm over to

me and lifted her hand up and on top of my neck. At this, I gave a sniff and kept staring at her, so she grabbed my fur and moved her other arm slightly in preparation for a push upward. At this, I gave a snort, meaning “*about time*,” braced myself, and lifted my head and shoulders. She held on tight, so I next started to shift my body back a bit.

I could sense that she was fully with me now, and the two of us alternately shifted this way and that so she could use her free arm to rise up a bit. That allowed me to lower my head again and use my jaws to grab her clothing. Now that we each had a solid grip on the other, I did my best to back up while she worked at levering more and more of her body up and over the edge of the hole. It wasn’t long before we got her upper body over the edge, and after that she was able to swing the lower part of her body up and over the edge.

I could feel waves of relief coming from her, as she let go of my fur, rolled onto her back, and lay there taking in large breaths. After a moment she rolled over onto her side, looked straight into my eyes and said, “Thank you. I ??? know ??? came from ??? thank you!” I only got some of the words, but it was very clear what she was thinking.

When she got her breath back, and her heart rate had slowed, it was interesting to watch what she did next. Rather than quickly leave, she carefully stepped around the big hole and examined our surroundings. She found, and seemed to be very interested, in Norm’s clothing. She even smelled it and I could sense her identify the scent as belonging to someone she knew. It reminded her of a home she had been in. Her mental image of that home, and the home’s smells, was so clear that I knew without doubt that she had identified the clothing’s owner as Norm.

This was amazing. Not only was this the first human I’d ever encountered that used all of her senses, but she had identified the clothing’s scent as belonging to Norm! A woman with wolf-like qualities!

Next, she recovered her light and used it to carefully examine the hole. Again, I was able to follow the gist of her thoughts. These ranged from curious, as she investigated, to surprise and anger, as she realized that she had fallen into a trap. This produced so many questions in her mind that I could no longer isolate and identify any of them, but one thing came through clearly: she was determined to find out more. Accordingly, she started walking back out of the cave. Curious, and strangely attracted, I followed along.

Exiting the cave, the woman walked around the hill until she came across a man sitting near the second cave. It was Jim!

Jim seemed surprised to see the woman, and as they talked to each other I sensed frustration and suspicion in her. At some point their conversation came around to me, and I heard my name mentioned.

“Him ??? Silver ??? Norm ??? sled dogs,” I heard Jim say.

The woman and Jim continued to talk, and I eventually heard Jim say her human name: Alex. Then they went around everywhere, as if searching for something. I heard Norm’s name mentioned so often that I decided they must be searching for him. I thought that was strange, since Norm had gone away with Jim to begin with. My suspicions of Jim deepened.

As they searched around, I more or less followed along, keeping an eye on them. When they reached Jim’s boat, it was clear that they were planning to leave. I sensed that Alex wanted to bring me with them. I would have stayed and hoped for Norm’s return, but I was reluctant to leave Alex, partly because she



fascinated me, and partly because I felt the need to protect her from Jim. The final thing was my sense that she was actually intent on finding Norm. This gave us a common cause, so when she turned to me and said: "Come Silver, ??? boat!" I simply, walked down to the shore, gave Jim a glance, and jumped into the boat.

As Jim directed the boat out across the big lake, Alex offered me some of her food. Feeling starved, I didn't hesitate, and the food quickly vanished. I took the fact that she was willing to share her food with me as another good sign. The rapid infusion of food made me sleepy and, not sensing any immediate action or threat, I curled up on the seat behind Alex and dropped-off to sleep.

When it was time to leave the boat, Alex signaled for me to join her in a truck like Norm's, but which was clearly hers. I hopped in. She drove me home, but there was no one there. Not Norm, and not even any of the other dogs. I thought that was strange, and so did Alex: I could sense that she felt suspicious. I stayed with her as she drove to where other humans often collected, and to where Norm's boat was tied, and finally to where Alex lived. She let me explore her house, and as I sniffed around I realized that I found her scent strike some kind of chord in me. Something about being with her felt right and, since we were both looking for Norm, I decided that I would continue to stay with her if I could.

When the sun went down, she went for a long walk around the area of the human's houses and stayed close. I enjoyed being with her and I sensed that she felt appreciative of my company. After that, she tried to leave me outside for the night, but I made it clear that I was unhappy with that idea. I wanted to be inside with her, and I had a feeling that I should be protecting her, so I definitely didn't want to be left outside. Fortunately, she relented and let me in, and I lost no time in establishing myself at the foot of her bed for the night.

When the sun next rose, Alex went around the area again, but running this time. That was more fun!

I found that I could run off on my own from time to time, to investigate interesting smells, then run back to catch-up with her, accompany her for a while, and then head off again to other interesting spots. I enjoyed being with her, and I sensed that she enjoyed my company as well. Later, I followed her to various places where she talked to other people, and I sensed that she was still on the hunt for Norm. One of the humans we encountered was Ruby. All of the other dogs and I liked Ruby because she was nice to us and often fed us. I could tell that she was worried about Norm.

For more rising and settings of the sun I followed Alex as she talked to more and more humans in her search for information about Norm. As she did, I found that I could usually stay with her, even as she entered other structures, as long as I quietly slipped in behind her and remained mostly unnoticed. When she went for longer walks or runs, I continued my practice of roaming fairly broadly but never very far away from her. I could tell that she had begun to suspect me of being protective of her, but I could also tell that she approved.

At one point, she looked at me and said: "??? Silver, ??? go visit ??? more ???" In her mind I sensed a trip over waters and more caves: she was planning to search further away for Norm.

"Grruph," I said.

"Yes, we ??? be careful ..." she said. I agreed.

Before we left, Alex went to visit a human called Mike, who seemed to live in a large house with funny smells. They seemed to discuss the search for Norm, and before we left Mike started to talk about me. The image in his mind was of my staying close to her, ... guarding her, I realized.

“Right Silver?” he said to me at one point.

“Grruph,” I replied, emphatically. I increasingly felt a need to protect Alex. It wasn’t that I thought she was weak, in fact I perceived her to have great inner strength. I think it was more that she sensed danger and, through her, so did I.

We took one more boat trip out on the big lake to see caves again. This time a different human called Horace took us out on a different boat, but as I watched the land pass by I could tell we were going back to the same land of the caves. It was a rough trip this time. The wind was strong and the water rose up over and over again, making the boat move sharply in in many directions. The human guiding the boat seemed unconcerned, but I could sense that it was making Alex uncomfortable. For my part, I had learned from boat trips with Norm that when the water got rough the calmest place to be was in the lowest part of the boat, at the centre, so that’s where I went to curl up and wait for the journey to end. Alex had observed me doing this, and I sensed recognition and approval in her mind.

It ended eventually, as do all journeys, and it was a relief for all of us to get out of the boat and on to solid land. After a brief rest, we walked inland over a very old path that had clearly been made by humans but not used for many, many seasons. Plants and trees were starting to grow through the path, but we had no trouble following it. I was wondering where we were going and searching out ahead of us with all my senses when I suddenly caught a familiar scent.

I knew that scent: it was Norm!

Pausing only long enough to send Alex a sharp “Bark,” I took off at nearly top speed, moderated only enough to make sure that I did not lose the trail of the scent in my eagerness. The scent rail followed the human path exactly, so I made rapid progress.

As I followed along, I began to pick up other scents. These were very different scents: I detected the scent of death. Worried now, I accelerated to full speed and ran to the end of the path. There, I was held up by a metal fence that was too strong for me to bend or break. All I could do was wait for Alex and Horace to arrive and hope that they could open the fence. As I waited, I continued to bark so they would know to hurry.

Finally, they emerged from the trees and saw me and the fence.

“OK Silver. Stay! Calm ??? we’ll ??? look together,” said Alex.

*Finally*, I thought, and I sat down to watch and wait while they figured out the fence thing.

In the end, they took a long metal stick and used it to pull one side of the fence away from the rock. It must have come away more easily than they expected, as both of them were thrown to the ground as the fence came away and they both began to laugh. I sensed relief mingled with embarrassment, but thought it was a poor time for laughter. Then I realized that they must not be able to smell the scent of death like I did.

Picking themselves up, Alex and Horace pushed at the fence, and with much scraping and metal noises it slowly opened.

I was ready to dash into the cave, but Alex called out to me so urgently that I paused, sat, and looked at her expectantly.

“We’ll go ??? together ??? slowly ??? OK?” she said, and I could tell that she sensed the danger, not in the same way that I did, but in some fashion of her own. Although she was not old, by human standards, I’d sensed practicality and even wisdom in her since we’d first met, and I decided to heed her request as long as we went in together.

Alex and Horace had brought lights with them. Alex put a hand into the fur of my neck to remind me not to leap ahead, and I had the sense that it was also her way of dealing with entering another dark cave. I could tell that she was remembering her fall into the hole of the other cave, and that holding on to me was her way of helping herself as much as me. I was content with that and divided my focus between following Norm’s scent and being on the watch for more holes.

In we went.

The three of us proceeded cautiously into the cave. Like the other caves, this one was dark and damp, and I could feel a current of cold air coming from somewhere ahead. The air brought scents from ahead. I could sense Norm’s scent, the scent of death, and ... Jim’s scent. Jim again! I felt the hair stand up on the back of my head. Jim would bear watching at all times in future.

When we came to a three-way junction, Alex and Horace paused to consider whether to proceed straight ahead or take one of the side tunnels.

“Which way ??? you want ??? go?” asked Horace.

I knew which way to go, and I made whining sounds to get Alex’s attention while straining against her had in the direction of the right-hand tunnel.

“Silver smells ???,” she replied, “??? he wants us ??? go this way – let’s ??? try,” she said.

We had only gone a short distance into the side tunnel, when the lights showed us two lines on the floor, leading ahead. Further ahead were two boots. I knew immediately that it was Norm.

Alex released her hand and I immediately went up to Norm’s face and gave him a good sniff and a couple of licks. He was dead. A huge sadness descended on me, and I sat down with a low whine. *Poor Norm*, I thought.

“I’ ??? sorry Silver,” Alex said, as she did her own checks to verify that Norm was dead. Then she sat back on her heels and gave me a hug, saying “I’ ??? afraid Norm ??? gone.”

With Horace’s help, Alex turned Norm’s body over and continued to check him over as if looking for something. I sensed that she was trying to discover the cause of his death. When she showed Horace the large wound at the back of Norm’s head I could tell that she had found out what she wanted. *Anger*, radiated from her mind. She clearly believed that some other human had killed Norm. She spoke in a low voice to Horace about what she had found. I didn’t understand what she was saying, but I knew what was in her mind: on top of the sadness were feelings of anger and an overwhelming desire to find the killer.

What surprised me was that, although she was angry, she wasn't thinking about vengeance – she was thinking about justice.

*Justice !* That was the word I'd been looking for. The Elder had told us stories to illustrate the human concept of justice, and the special class of ancient warriors that were seekers of justice. These special warriors were often aided by their wolf siblings. Now I began to perceive Alex's destiny ... and maybe mine too. *We could be seekers of justice and protectors of the weak, like the special warrior-wolf teams of the long past. We could be ... noble.*

Their conversation concluded, Alex and Horace wanted to search the other passageways in the cave, but none of us sensed or found anything interesting or useful. Then Alex and Horace carried Norm's body back to the boat, where they covered him with a blanket. I assumed that there was some kind of human custom related to his death and, sure enough, when we got back home they took Norm's body to the place where sick humans went. The same place that Mike was.

On the next rising of the sun, I went with Alex as she met with various humans in different structures. Along the way, we stopped at Norm's home, which was previously mine as well. Alex spent quite a bit of time searching around Norm's home and seemed to find several things that interested her. I could tell that she still had a lot of questions in her mind, but she was also thinking about possibilities. I couldn't detect what those possibilities were, just that they existed in her mind.

Some of the other sled-pulling dogs had returned, and I visited with them while Alex was busy in Morm's home. When she emerged, carrying some things that she had found, she stood by her truck with the door open and looked directly at me. I knew what she was thinking: did I want to stay with the other dogs or to continue along with her. That was an interesting question. My former master was dead and I had not been given a new master yet. Did that mean I was free? Did I want to be?

I searched my feelings. I wanted to be with her. I didn't know where it would lead, but there was no doubt in my mind. I felt that my place was with her. I raced over and jumped right in. She didn't say anything, but her mind radiated surprise and pleasure.

We visited more humans that day. Sometimes I was able to go into their structures with her, while other times I had to wait outside. As a result, Alex seemed to learn new things, but I didn't. Except for one thing. Other humans seemed to refer to Alex as a "*Mountie*." I didn't know what that was although, when the word was used, people seemed to be thinking about justice, and Alex seemed to be thinking about helping others. This matched my impressions of the previous cycle of the sun.

On the next rising of the sun we visited more humans, the most interesting of which was Ruby. This was the Ruby that had been a friend of Norm's and of our entire pack of sled-pulling dogs. I wasn't ever allowed into Ruby's place, but by staying near the entrance I was able to follow bits and pieces of their meeting. I had no trouble reading what was foremost in Ruby's mind: it was sorrow. As Alex and Ruby spoke to each other, I heard Norm's name mentioned often and it seemed that Ruby was talking about her friendship with Norm. Alex seemed mostly to be sympathetic.

Then I heard my name being mentioned several times, and Ruby seemed to be explaining something about Norm and me. Something Ruby said made Alex's mind jump with a start of excitement and pleasure, and the two of them seemed to reach an agreement about something.

When Alex came out of Ruby's home, her mind was racing so much that I had trouble identifying her thoughts. There was surprise, relief, pleasure, and she was thinking about the future. Then I had it! She was imagining her future, and all of her mental images of her future had me in them with her.

I wondered whether she had just become my new master, but that's not what was in her mind. In her mind she saw me more as a ... *friend*.

I've already explained that my knowledge of human words was improving with every cycle of the sun, but still very limited, so when a human spoke to me – even a human that I'd come to know fairly well – I would only get fragments of their speech. I would hear them as understandable words separated by a kind of mumbling. It was only by adding the understandable words to the human's mental images that I was able to understand the thoughts that were behind them. So, what I'm going to tell you next contains words that I understand now but did not at the time they were spoken to me. Even then, however, there was no mistaking Alex's meaning.

As she stepped out of Ruby's place she stopped, adopted a serious body position and tone of voice and said:

“Silver, I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship!”



... Alex and Silver will return.