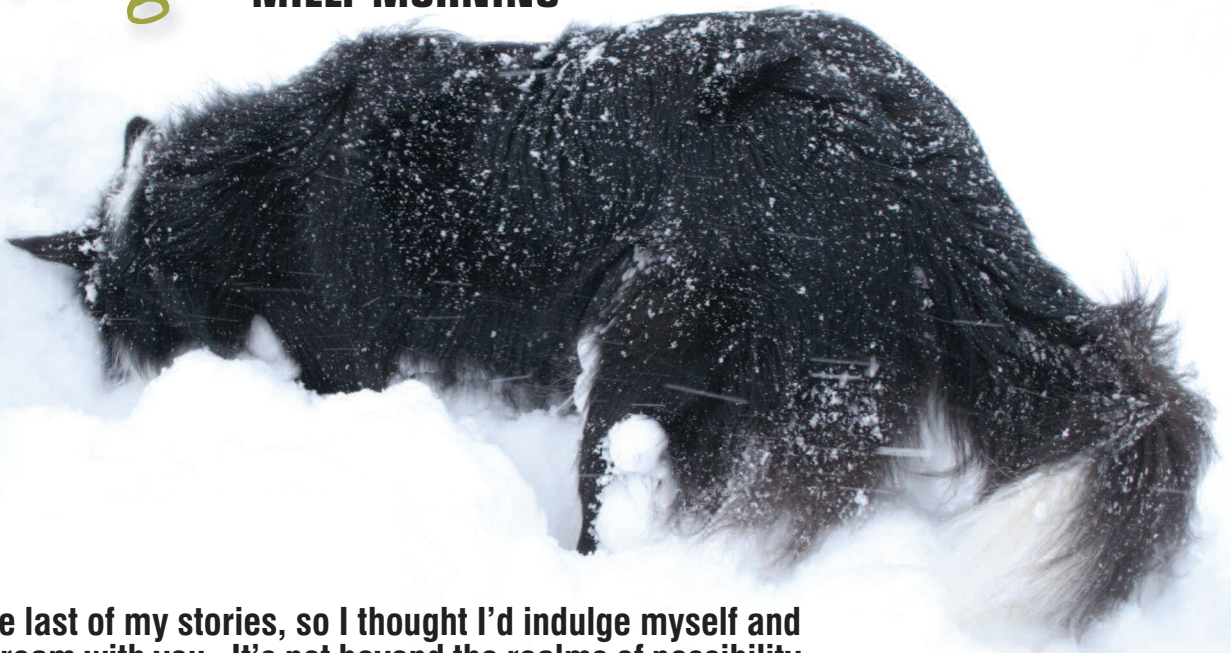




I HAD A DREAM... MILLY MORNING



This is the last of my stories, so I thought I'd indulge myself and share a dream with you. It's not beyond the realms of possibility that YOU might take a lead role in my dream... here goes.

It was mid-January, still dark and cold as I was woken from my deep, doggie sleep by the familiar morning sounds about the house. As Special Human opened the back door to let me out for my morning toileting, a pile of snow sloughed onto the kitchen floor. Cursing, as time was running short, she brushed it out and I noticed that overnight the already thick blanket of snow covering the garden had been added to by several more inches.

Getting across to the bottom of the garden was becoming more of a challenge by the day. I'd worn a groove through the snow, but overnight this had totally drifted over. With the help of the light shining through the doorway, the back garden looked magic, a true winter wonderland...

The day was forecast to be good – dry and sunny with a strengthening wind. There'd be lots of people enjoying the hills today! We'd had a fantastic winter so far. Snowy times are my favourite time of year – snowballs to run after, doggy 'snow-angels' to make and digging for things hidden in the snow by Special Human. Now that really was my favourite pastime! It's great fun practising – sometimes I'd find 'articles' buried and, if I was really lucky, one of those stupid humans would actually have been buried in the snow for me to find! Weird lot, eh?

It was way more fun than the boring summer stuff. Small air gaps in the snow would allow the human smell to percolate up to the surface of the snow pack. Wot a give away! I'd sniff 'em out, start digging and seconds later Special Human would be there with a shovel digging beside me (doesn't she know that's a doggie job?) Didn't care tho' cos I just

loved jumping and catching shovel loads of snow in my mouth.

The usual drive to work at Glenmore was a little more 'exciting' than normal. At the best of times my eyes were out on stalks as we whizzed along, trees flashing past. Today the trees were laden, heavy with snow. Unceremoniously chained to my kennel outside Glenmore Lodge, I lazily watched as the snowflakes became less frequent and, mid-morning, a weak winter sun broke through the thinning cloud.

Thump, Thump Thump... that all too familiar drone of a Sea King helicopter broke my peaceful world. Within seconds, Special Human was there putting on my coat and full body harness and running across to it. (Did I call this a dream? 'Nightmare' might be a more apt description!)

Within minutes we'd been dropped into Coire an't Sneachda, the weather clear now, with spindrift ripping across the Coire floor. We were at the base of the Goat Track, a popular route up and down to the plateau. I'd done it many times. Today it looked different. There'd been a massive slab avalanche. Debris was strewn in a wide area across the corrie floor. I instinctively knew this was my time... this was what all the training had been about... here I could make a real difference... humans were buried and my nose was the most important asset the rescuers had. I understand from Special Human that the chances of survival after burial for more than fifteen minutes are very slim. I had to work fast!

Glancing up towards the rim of the corrie, I could make out the Crown Wall extending approx 500m

wide just below the edge of the plateau. The avalanche debris was blocky, difficult terrain but blocks were good, they left air pockets for humans to survive in and for their smell to escape through to the surface of the snow. I wove in and out, over and through the massive blocks, some of them way bigger than me. Nose down, concentrating hard, I had it... I had a smell... no lost it... and got it again. This time it was strong, powerful, I could smell the fear, the trauma, and the blood. I started digging. Special human was there in seconds. Shovel out, she started digging too... Cautiously... far more cautiously than me! YES!! There it was, half a metre down. Was it a leg?... an arm?... a rucksack?... difficult to tell at this stage... Special Human was shouting... other humans ran over... a head was carefully cleared, the casualty was breathing... still alive ...moving... speaking... injured but alive.

Then I jerked awake. The familiar tones of the BBC Breakfast TV presenter filled the room... 'Search and rescue dog hailed a hero as she digs victim out of avalanche'... ■



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INSET: SPECIAL HUMAN HEATHER MORNING AND SEARCH DOG MILLY ON QUALIFYING