



# CHAPTER 1

## SHORTS IN THE SNOW

In the summer sun, the snow was a fierce white. Dev squinted, trying to make out the trail. The dogs forged ahead, and the slice of the sled's runners on the ice filled Dev's ears. He glanced over his shoulder at the other sleds. His teammates were only a few lengths behind him.

Working together, the dogs pulled Dev's sled almost effortlessly. Dev focused on the lead dog, on his right. She was a reliable husky, mostly white with a pale caramel-colored frosting on

her head and back. *Tucker*. He said her name to himself. He trusted her to be steady and find the path.

Out of the corner of his eye, he spotted a bald eagle. The bird rode an air current, soaring in the blue sky without a single flap of its wings. Dev took a deep breath. The cold air stunned his nostrils.

This scene was everything he had imagined when he sent in his application for *The Wild Life*, a once-in-a-lifetime chance to trek through extreme habitats, gathering animal facts in hopes of winning the entire race . . . and a million dollars.

Of course, that money would be split between the four members of the team, but Dev didn't have a problem with that. He wasn't in it for the money. He just wanted the chance to do something new,

something different, something challenging. Now, he was driving a team of huskies through the frosty wilderness in northern Alaska, heading toward the Arctic Circle. He was certain he had made the right choice.

On one side of the sled he saw a lanky moose with mighty antlers, on the other a polar bear, floating on a chunk of Arctic ice. Then his eyes focused in on something directly ahead, right in the dogs' path. It looked like a man—a man wearing plaid shorts and sandals. The dogs did not slow down, and the person did not move. Only when the lead dog was nearly on top of the man did Dev realize it was his dad . . .

A splash of water tickled Dev's face and swept his thoughts back to the waking world. Even though he had woken up hours ago, he couldn't

shake the dream. It had been the most vivid of his life, and now it was haunting him. It had seemed so real, right down to his dad's outfit. But why was his dad, who planned for absolutely everything, wearing shorts in the snow? Dev suspected it had something to do with the way he'd left things with his father before the race began. If it had been up to his dad, Dev would be wearing shorts right now, sitting in front of a computer at science camp.

Maybe that was why the dream was taking over his thoughts when there were far better things to think about, like the race. *The Wild Life* was not a dream. He was competing in it! He was on the third leg! And he was in the middle of a chilly, rushing Alaskan stream!

"Are we there yet?" he called out, trying to regain his focus. He had not known his three

teammates before the start of the race, but they had all earned his trust. The four members of Team Red—Sage, Russell, Mari, and Dev—had learned a lot in the race’s first two legs. After challenging courses in the Amazon rain forest and the Great Barrier Reef, they were currently in second place. At least they had been in second at the start of the day when the teams all began the trek into the Arctic.

“We’ll get there when we find what we’re looking for.” That was Sage, the self-appointed leader of Team Red. Her straight strawberry-blond hair swung with each sure-footed stride. She didn’t need to turn around for Dev to feel the intensity of her steely gaze. It was a good thing Sage took charge, because no one else wanted that responsibility. Not even Dev. Especially not

Dev. “You do remember that you’re the one with the GPS, don’t you?”

That was true. When they were selecting supplies, Dev always went for the gadgets. For this leg of the race, he chose the fancy GPS so he could help plan their routes. Alaska was a big place. They didn’t have time to get lost.

Dev glanced around, taking in the lush green of the leaves. There were key differences from his dream. It was summer, which meant that the snow had melted. They were near the coast in southern Alaska. Instead of dogsleds, they were on foot. And right now, both his feet were dry inside a pair of waist-high waders—the waterproof overalls that fishermen usually wear. The waders were way cooler than plaid shorts. That was for sure.

