



VICTORIA SCOTT



HEAR  
THE  
WOLVES

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PART I

THE

STORM



# CHAPTER ONE

The circle of life isn't a circle at all. It's a straight line, with hunters on one end, and prey on the other. With my father's rifle in my hands, there's no question where I fall.

I butt the gun against my right shoulder, and squeeze my left eye shut. Snowshoe hares scurry along the newly plowed field, seeking some semblance of the home they lost.

It's the snow. It's unpredictable this time of year. Early October, so our land is merely dotted in white, as if a giant tipped a salt shaker, sprinkled some into the palm of his hand, and tossed it over his shoulder onto Rusic, Alaska, for superstition's sake.

The rabbits are a grayish-brown during the summer months, but turn white during winter. The change camouflages them during a time when predators are ravenous and desperate. When the snow is sparse though, it has the opposite effect. Like chalk strokes on a blackboard, the rabbits

can be seen from my bedroom window with ease. And through the scope of this .22 magnum rifle, they're as visible as the sun.

My father looms at the opposite end of the field, and every step he takes causes a flurry of fur in my direction. You can't hunt snowshoes like you can cottontails. They hear you coming, and they flee. If you want a belly full of rabbit stew, you have to sneak up on them, or drive them into the open.

I line up my shot, zero in on a rabbit that's larger than the rest. Take a deep breath and hold it. The blast rings through the dusk. I don't miss the shot. I rarely do. Maybe it's because I'm the daughter of a huntsman and butcher. But I think it's more than that. I can't cook well like my sister, and even Mr. Foster, our sole teacher in Rusic, admits I'm better at killing than I am arithmetic or writing longhand.

It's my father's likeness that steadies my hand while hunting. But it's my mother who reminds me there's an art to everything we do. Whispering in my ear that the rabbit's death gives life. This rabbit means dinner for my family. And his brothers and sisters mean Dad will have something to sell outside our house. He'll string skinned hares and red squirrels and Old World quail from the porch, and the people of Rusic will trade for them. Or, if we're lucky, offer actual cash.

“Sloan, did you hear me?” my father asks.

He sounds as if he's speaking from beneath the river thirty miles east, but when I turn, I find he's a mere step away. I tug on my left ear and stand, take the snowshoe from him. The rabbit's body is warm between my hands, even through insulated gloves. I thread a line through its back leg and add it to the others, avoiding the animal's unseeing gaze.

"I can't imagine we'd need more than this," I say. "It's double what we brought last year."

My father doesn't respond. His brown eyes study the horizon as he scratches at his heavy beard. He shifts his weight, and I notice his opposite hand twitching nervously at his side. But that can't be right. My father wouldn't understand the meaning of the word *nervous* if someone bathed him in honey and dropped him in black-bear territory.

I narrow my eyes and inspect the color that glows from my father's skin. Green. A serious, dark green like pine needles clinging stubbornly to winter branches. His color is a solid, steady shade. Not warm, but reliable. And that's what matters most.

He doesn't really glow. I know that. But assigning people a color helps to sort them. Helps to know what to expect of 'em. It takes me a little figuring to decide what color to give someone, but once it's done, it's done. The colors never change.

"Let's get back to the house," he responds gruffly. "I've got packing left to do."