

STEPPING STONES™

a chapter book

Fiction

SILVER

BY GLORIA WHELAN



1.

In Alaska, where I live, there isn't much daylight in the winter. It's dark when the school bus picks me up in the morning and it's dark when the school bus brings me home in the afternoon. In the middle of the morning, when it finally gets light, we all look out of our classroom window to see if the mountain is out.

The mountain is Denali, the biggest one

in North America. Although it's nearly a hundred miles away from us, when the sky is perfectly clear, there it is. The sun makes the white snow-covered peaks shine. There is snow on top of Denali all year round. In summer, when you are outside without even a sweater on, picking nagoonberries while the mosquitoes are biting and the shooting stars and poppies and wild roses are blooming, there is still snow on Denali, so that you can never really forget winter.

My name is Rachel. I'm nine years old. I live halfway between Anchorage and Fairbanks. In summer my father is a carpenter. In the winter he travels all over Alaska competing in dog-sled races. My mother has a beauty parlor right in our house. She cuts the hair of everyone within fifty miles of us, even Mr. Rafer. He has so little hair, Mom says she hates to take his money.

When I get home from school I like to go into the room my mother uses for a beauty parlor. After all the cold and snow and darkness outside, the room is brightly lit

and warm from the hair dryer. It smells good, too. Mom makes me cocoa when I come in, and I drink it while her ladies have their coffee and tell Mom all their secrets. Mom says she could write a book. Dad says he hears more news from Mom's ladies in one afternoon than he reads in the newspaper all year long.

After I've warmed up, I go outside and play with the sled dogs. That's because I don't get to play with my friends much. In our part of Alaska there aren't many houses. The nearest girl my age lives fifteen miles away. Her name is Mary Sue. Sometimes she spends the night with me and sometimes I stay with her. Mary Sue's dad plays guitar in a country music band. Her mother sings with the band. Mary Sue can tap-dance and twirl a baton, and she says she might be famous one day. I like Mary Sue all right, but she won't play outside if it's raining or damp or there's a wind blowing, because it takes the curl out of her hair. And in Alaska

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Rachel dreams of racing huskies, just like her father. So when she gets a tiny puppy for her birthday, she names him Silver for his shiny coat and vows that he will be the fastest lead dog in Alaska. But one day Silver disappears. Rachel sets out to find him, following the tracks of a large animal into the forest. Snow begins to fall. An eerie howling breaks the silence. Then Rachel realizes she is tracking a wolf . . . that she is alone . . . and that night is falling. . . .



“Whelan’s vivid words of a child’s view of an Alaskan winter are complemented by Marchesi’s affectionate illustrations. Though an easy chapter book, Whelan’s mature tone will also appeal to older, and perhaps reluctant, readers.” —*Booklist*

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