

## CHAPTER THREE • GRACE

*38°F*

I saw him again after that, always in the cold. He stood at the edge of the woods in our backyard, his yellow eyes steady on me as I filled the bird feeder or took out the trash, but he never came close. In between day and night, a time that lasted forever in the long Minnesota winter, I would cling to the frozen tire swing until I felt his gaze. Or, later, when I'd outgrown the swing, I'd step off the back deck and quietly approach him, hand forward, palm up, eyes lowered. No threat. I was trying to speak his language.

But no matter how long I waited, no matter how hard I tried to reach him, he would always melt into the undergrowth before I could cross the distance between us.

I was never afraid of him. He was large enough to tear me from my swing, strong enough to knock me down and drag me into the woods. But the ferocity of his body wasn't in his eyes. I remembered his gaze, every hue of yellow, and I couldn't be afraid. I knew he wouldn't hurt me.

I wanted him to know I wouldn't hurt him.

I waited. And waited.

And he waited, too, though I didn't know what he was waiting for. It felt like I was the only one reaching out.

But he was always there. Watching me watching him. Never any closer to me, but never any farther away, either.

And so it was an unbroken pattern for six years: the wolves' haunting presence in the winter and their even more haunting absence in the summer. I didn't really think about the timing. I thought they were wolves. Only wolves.