

A HUNTER'S HEART



CHAPTER ONE ~ BY KAY HIVELY

Twelve-year-old Sam pulled his coat tighter around his neck. With a gloved hand, he managed to close the top button on his coat, hoping to keep out the cold morning air. Snow had fallen in the night. As far as Sam could see, the ground was white. Only tall weeds stood above the snow.

Taking long strides, Sam hurried to keep up with his father. Across the yard, past the sheep pen, through the old garden and into the woods, Mr. Pittman led the way. Once they passed the woodlot by their cabin, Sam and his father slowed down and searched the ground for tracks.

Each year, the first sign of snow signaled the start of many things. One thing that always came with the first snowfall was a rabbit hunt. As soon as breakfast was finished, Mr. Pittman put on his coat, gloves and hat, took his gun off the cabin wall and started out on his hunt. Last year was the first time Sam was allowed to hunt rabbits with his father. So this year, when Sam saw snow on the ground, he jumped out of bed and dug out his winter clothes.

He hurried into the kitchen where his breakfast was waiting. He didn't want to be left behind when his father went out to hunt.

Even though Mr. Pittman hunted rabbits at other times during the year, the best hunting was now. A light covering of snow was always quickly covered with animal tracks. Long before Sam and his father finished their chores and their breakfast, many wild animals began moving across the land, going about their usual routine. As the animals moved from their sleeping places to the areas where they fed and watered, they left their prints in the snow.

As soon as they moved out of the woodlot, Sam and his father found raccoon tracks. And, after walking a bit farther into the open field, they found rabbit tracks. Quietly, the father and son changed direction and began following the rabbit prints in the snow.

Sam enjoyed tracking and dreamed of becoming a real hunter one day. His father didn't let him carry a gun yet, but Sam did get a set of traps last Christmas. Trapping had not been good last year because the winter was too mild. But things looked better now.

Even though it was only October, the weather was cold, and last night's snow was earlier than usual. If cold weather continued, the animals would soon have their winter coats and Sam could set his traps.

Trapping was the only way Sam could make money. Last winter he only made seven dollars, but this year he hoped to do much better.

Sam had a dream, and he needed money to make it come true. As he walked along beside his father, he thought about that dream. But Sam's thoughts were suddenly interrupted by a haunting howl that suddenly pierced the cold air. An icy chill slithered down Sam's backbone.



Author Kay Hively and Illustrator Billie Gofourth-Stewart are both of Neosho, Missouri. Produced in partnership with this newspaper and the Missouri Press Foundation. Copyright 2005.

LEARNING EXTENSIONS

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT AND DO ~

A. Find pictures of animal tracks and make a poster by drawing a set of deer, rabbit, raccoon, bear and dog tracks. Clearly mark on the poster the identification of each set of tracks.

B. Sam remembered that trapping had not been good last year because the winter was mild. Write a short paper explaining why a mild winter makes for poor trapping.

Next Week: Chapter Two – Flushing the brush