



***Passion is heating up those arctic Alaska nights!***

*It took nerve for Northern California socialite Teresa Drake to walk away from her family's famed wine empire. Flying off to Alaska is even riskier – especially when the budding journalist stumbles down a cavern while admiring the spectacular sights. But it's her gorgeous rescuer who makes Teresa truly reckless. The night she spends with mogul Atka Sinclair convinces her she's found her soulmate...until her charming lover becomes her worst enemy.*

*Atka has deep ties to his native land. So how can he trust the pampered beauty who just published a glowing article about the politician out to destroy his people's heritage? But as traitorous desire reignites, Atka realizes what he and Teresa share is too precious to lose. Will pride prevent him from building a future with the woman who could write them the most thrilling love story of all?*

**Chapter 1**

“Alaska?” With a Herculean effort, Teresa Drake's expression was one of positive interest when her mind was all sorts of WTH.

The editor in chief of the *Paradise Cove Chronicle* and Teresa's boss, Gloria Murray, smiled broadly, her bright green eyes twinkling with glee. “I know, right? Who wouldn't want this plum assignment?”

She was looking at her.

“The imminent arrival of our first grandchild is the only thing that could keep me from revisiting the last frontier. Jim and I have such wonderful memories from our fourteen-day cruise across the state to celebrate our twenty-fifth wedding anniversary.”

“Then why don't you plan the trip for after the baby arrives? A trip to Alaska sounds like quite the adventure, one I wouldn't want to deprive you and your husband of enjoying again.”

“If that were possible, trust me, we wouldn't be having this conversation. But this story will involve more than a rundown and description of landmarks and things to do. One of the owners of the paper has a son living in Anchorage and running for office. In a few weeks, he's doing a major fundraiser for him here in Paradise Cove and wants the story to precede this event.”

“Oh.”

“One more thing about the fundraiser. Did I say it's major? Benny is pulling out all of the stops. He wants everybody from the paper to be there.”

“Attendance is mandatory?”

“Pretty much.”

Teresa thought to put that date on her calendar later. Right now there were more pressing things on her mind. Like getting out of a date with an iceberg. “What about the more senior writers? Won’t they feel slighted at not being asked?”

“You let me worry about personnel while you concentrate on writing a series of articles that cast both Alaska and Paul Campbell, the young man you’ll be interviewing, in a positive light. His being elected mayor of Anchorage, Alaska, will put him on solid footing toward his goal to become governor of the state, and can mean good news for Paradise Cove through joint business ventures and other avenues. So you’re the lucky person who gets to write an article that makes him shine, and also pleases the man who signs your paycheck.”

“Lucky me!”

The effort to keep a smile pasted on her face was painful, but with the editor eyeing her keenly, Teresa managed it. When she’d finally convinced/ cajoled/begged her way into a leave of absence from the family business, and then signed on with the local newspaper to cover the travel section, a trip to the last frontier—or the first one, for that matter—wasn’t exactly what she had in mind. She’d envisioned turquoise water and white sandy beaches, the walk of stars in Hollywood, the neon lights of New York’s Time Square or, for a more rustic experience, perhaps the Grand Canyon. But Alaska? Um, no.

Tapping her iPad out of sleep mode, Teresa hid her indifference behind a professional veneer. “Since I’m going to Alaska primarily to interview a political candidate, from what perspective would you like the article written?”

Gloria leaned against the back of her chair and tapped a pen against the desk. “Good question, and I’d like your input. I’m thinking several consecutive stories will be nice, actually, perhaps a four-part series that begins with the story on Paul, whose roots are here in Paradise Cove, which would run in the main part of the paper. The remaining three pieces could be on the state and written either for the travel /lifestyle section. What do you think?”

I’m thinking someone else should do this assignment.

“I think that’s a good idea. That way, the article doesn’t come off as a blatant endorsement. If that happened, we might have to give equal space to the opponent. That’s something I’ll check into.”

“See, I knew you were the perfect fit for this piece. Having helped your brother during his successful mayoral bid gives you an insight into politics and the types of questions to answer that will make this a much more interesting story than one written by someone with no personal experience in that world. You’ll have instant camaraderie, which along with the education and skill you bring to the table will make for a winning article. Be sure and write it on Paul in a way that doesn’t warrant a rebuttal piece. The last thing Benny would want to do is give his son’s opponent a forum.”

Teresa nodded. “When do I leave for this assignment?”

“Tomorrow, if possible.”

Teresa’s WTH face came out of hiding.

“It’s the life of a journalist, darling, who instantly goes to where the story flows. Paul leaves for a tour across Alaska on Thursday and as I’ve said, we want this story to run next week. Which is why I’m giving you the rest

of the day off to prepare for the trip. Your flight is at one o'clock from Oakland, putting you into Anchorage tomorrow evening. A tentative appointment with Paul has been set up for Wednesday morning, but you'll need to confirm that with his assistant once you arrive. We're pulling together everything you need—confirmation numbers for flight and hotel, contact numbers and a suggested itinerary—which will be emailed to you this afternoon. This is a tricky time of year up there where rain, snow and dropping temps are all in the forecast, so pack accordingly. You may need to schedule a couple hours at an Anchorage mall after your meeting for your investigative travels, but hopefully you have the gear to get you through your arrival and first meeting, and by gear I mean boots, scarves, knit cap or hat, an umbrella or raincoat and gloves.”

“In April?”

Gloria nodded. “When reading the clothing recommendations for our May cruise, I had the same reaction. Turns out we used every piece of winter clothing we'd placed in the luggage. One of the recommendations in the itinerary requires an arrival by boat and believe me, when the wind kicks up among the sails, it can be something fierce. So I strongly encourage you to check the internet for more specifics on the weather and be more prepared to layer and stay warm rather than dress to impress, which I know will be hard for the woman voted Most Fashionable in last year's society section.”

“I'm sure I'll manage. But—” Teresa stood “—between researching the candidate and shopping for winter in spring, it's going to take every second up to and including my time during the flight. So I'd best get started.”

“My assistant helped out a bit by pulling some things off the internet and combining them with information Paul's dad has provided. All of this will be included in the email you receive. You can use the remaining days for the vacation-destination angle of your piece, returning on Friday or staying through the weekend, your choice. But I need at least a draft of the first article on my desk Friday morning and the finished version first thing Monday.”

“Got it. Thanks for giving me this opportunity, Gloria. I'll do my best.”

“I know how you operate, Teresa, with a standard of excellence. You'll do even better than that.”

That evening, Teresa entered the Drake estate burdened down with boxes and bags. The housekeeper met her at the door leading from the garage, with Jennifer, Teresa's mother, not far behind.

“I take for you.”

“Thanks, Sylvia.” Teresa handed over all but a couple of the bags. “Just place them in my suite. They won't be there long, so no need to hang them.” She turned to Jennifer. “Hi, Mom.”

“Hello, dear. Shopping usually puts a smile on your face. You don't look happy.”

“I don't like snow.” Teresa slunk down the hall, through the gallery and into the living room, where she plopped onto a couch.

Jennifer joined her for needed clarification. “Clearly, something happened today. Would you like to start at the beginning?”

“I'm going to Alaska.”

“Oh, how wonderful.”

“Not you, too.”

“What? I’ve heard the beauty there is magnificent. Just the other day your father and I were discussing a possible Alaskan cruise with the neighbors.”

“Great! Would you like to go there tomorrow, interview a politician and then travel to a couple places only accessible by boat?”

“Teresa, you’re sulking and that doesn’t become you. I’ll take part of the blame for this. You’re too much like your mother, a girlie-girl whose idea of roughing it means driving ourselves into San Francisco instead of hiring a driver.”

“Exactly, Mom. You understand!”

“I do. And I also recognize that the paper sending you on assignment after six short months of working there speaks highly of their belief in your ability to do the job.” She placed a hand on Teresa’s arm. “It’s why you gave your dad heartburn until he caved in to your request for a leave of absence, correct?”

“You’re right.”

“Think of the trip as a blessing in disguise. You haven’t dated much since George showed his true colors. Perhaps you’ll meet someone and—”

“Mom. I’m not ready to get back into the dating game. I’d rather focus on work.”

“Then view it as a change of scenery and chance to clear your head.”

“I know that I should be grateful. But I had plans this weekend and they didn’t include being in a place where bears outnumber humans.”

Jennifer chuckled. “Tell me more about this wonderful opportunity.”

An hour later, Jennifer’s eternally optimistic perspective made Teresa feel better about leaving for Alaska. A little.

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Atka Sinclair sat back in his company’s Mercedes-Benz helicopter and surveyed part of the Aleknagik land that had been in his tribe’s generation for a thousand years. The dusting of snow reflecting against the sun gave the tableau an ethereal feel. The deep and varied hues of tall, green pines seemed to lift their branches in praise to the universe. Birds and clouds floated on serenity’s song against a backdrop of sparkling lakes. All this, uninterrupted by glass-and-concrete edifices, corporate offices or cookie-cutter houses, was more than four hundred miles away from his company’s corporate offices in Anchorage, and a hundred miles from Dillingham, where the highly profitable fisheries that drove the corporation were located. It was here that he felt one with the sky, the earth and all its creatures. Here, twenty thousand feet in the air, soaring on the wings of the wind—and aided by a turbo engine—Atka felt most at peace, and communed with Spirit God. Here, he recalled the stories of the ancients, those who’d traversed the land more than a thousand years ago, stories passed down to him from his *emaaq* and *apaaq*—his grandmother and grandfather. He’d grown up in Anchorage with his parents. But his

soul remained spiritually and emotionally connected to the land of his boyhood, the place where he learned to hunt, swam with the fish and shared with the trees his wistful dreams. So it was with a great sense of gratitude that he followed his partner's advice to get away for a few days and rejuvenate his spirit. With the storm brewing along the business and political fronts...he was going to need it.

He tapped the button that connected to his headset radio. "*Waqaa!*" Atka smiled as his longtime friend/brother, Frank, and responded in their native Yupik language before continuing in English.

"About time you quit playing big businessman and come home." He waved his hands. Totally unnecessary since Atka, a proficient pilot who'd flown helicopters for five years, could have landed just about anywhere with efficiency. The large, circled X on the concrete helipad made landing something Atka could almost do in his sleep. With one eye open, of course.

Atka exited the helicopter and greeted Frank's nephew, Xander, whom he paid to take care of the property between his infrequent visits. After handing Xander the helicopter keys, Atka and Frank walked into the station, so far the only shelter he'd had built on the five-acre property he'd purchased several years ago. Little more than an elaborate and well-made shed, this station housed his copter gear and other flight accessories. It also held a minikitchen, small bathroom and bedroom, and an office that doubled as the lad's living space.

Atka walked into the kitchen area and began opening cabinets.

Frank followed close behind. "The place is well stocked, Atka. I didn't know when you'd be back, and with the snow arriving...I thought it best to take care of that."

Atka nodded. "You were right. I appreciate it." He looked out the window, watched Xander performing a check on the helicopter. "How's he doing?"

Frank shrugged. "Hard to tell. He was always quiet but has become more so since his mother died. Much like you." Atka said nothing. "I know you loved her, friend, but it is time for both of you to start living again. It is what she would want."

Atka released a sigh. "I know. What about money? Is the account—"

"Atka, there's enough money in that account to last until he's an old man. Please stop worrying about Xander, and blaming yourself for what happened. You couldn't have saved his mother. No one could have. The cancer spread too quickly."

"His father dying when he was just a toddler and now his mom gone? I worry about him." Atka turned from the boy who looked so much like the woman he thought he'd marry, the woman who was snatched away almost as quickly as he'd found her. The last promise he'd made to Mary was that he'd take care of her son. It was a promise he intended to keep. He walked over to a wooden slab that held several keys. "Maybe moving him to Anchorage will help."

"Good luck with that. He loves this land as much as his mother and grandparents ever did. Being here keeps him close to her."

“But going to college would open up a whole new world, one that would allow him to both honor his mother’s memory and forge his own life.”

Frank walked up and put a hand on Atka’s shoulder. “Give him time. Perhaps his mind will change. He is not the only one who needs to move ahead and forge a life. Burying yourself in work is not the answer.”

Atka looked at Frank with glistening eyes. “Yes, but it helps the pain.”

Later that evening, Atka sat in a wooden rocking chair made by his *apaaq*’s hand, covered by a deerskin that had been lovingly tanned and softened by his *emaaq*. His body was warm, his belly was full and the angst that had earlier creased his brow was gone. His grandparents had never understood the need for modern contraptions—or per his *emaaq*, distractions—such as TVs, radios or the like. They vaguely knew of video games, though only through conversations with their many grandchildren. When he’d purchased cell phones for both of them, the devices had gathered more dust than talk time.

So they sat chatting in the cozy, quiet living room of a rambling three-bedroom home, their intermittent conversation, spoken in the Yupik language, punctuated only by crackling logs in the fireplace and varied sounds of wildlife just outside their door.

His grandmother eyed him over her cup of tea. He braced himself for the question he knew would come before evening’s end.

“Children soon come?”

“Emaa, you already have more great-grandchildren than can be counted on fingers and toes!”

“Yes, but not from our guardian angel.”

Atka smiled at the use of his name’s meaning. As the youngest of ten grandchildren, he’d often wondered why this magnificent woman before him, the one who’d named him, had believed him to be the clan’s protector, preserver and champion. Yet words like these had often been used to describe him.

“To have a child, I need a wife, right?”

“Don’t ask silly questions,” she retorted, her tone brusque but eyes twinkling.

“You’re the one who asked about children when I’m not even married. With business booming, I have no time for a social life. Women take time, and work, right, Apaaq?”

Atka’s grandfather thoughtfully removed his pipe, and blew a perfect circle of smoke into the air. “A closed mouth always provides a correct answer.”

He smiled, replaced his pipe and stared into the fire.

“Apaaq! I remember you telling me that marriage was around a point of land and not to take a shortcut to get there.” Silence. Another blue circle of smoke floated toward the ceiling. “Help me out!”

“In this, you need no help. Your road to matrimony is too long already.” Emaa’s voice was low yet firm. “We are old. Mary is gone. I know you loved her, sweet boy, but it has been three years since she journeyed to the Great Spirit. The time is long past for you to find your *ukurraq*, begin a family and continue the traditions you

were taught in more than a few *qasgi* meetings. Will you deny me the joy of holding your precious *panik* before your *apaaq* and I fly to the sky land so that she will know me upon my return?"

"He," the grandfather corrected, sure that Atka's first would be a son.

"No pressure, right?" Atka rose from the rocking chair, went over to sit cross-legged in front of his grandmother and took her hand in his. "Emaa, I could never deny you anything. When I marry, I want the woman to be smart, kind, loving and beautiful...just like you. To find someone so special will not be an easy task."

"Perhaps. But I will ask the spirit guides to help you." Just then, the shrill sound of a feathered creature calling for his mate sounded through the window. His grandmother chuckled lightly. "Children soon come."

"All right, Emaa." After a bit more conversation he kissed his grandparents and retired to the room he'd slept in since childhood. Early tomorrow, he'd walk with his *apaaq* to the sacred space where his great-grandfather and others were buried, perform *aviukaryaraq*, an offering to them and the land, and hunt. Then he'd fly to Dillingham for a casual walk-through of his fisheries at Bristol Bay and a couple nights of solitude in his one-room cabin. Smiling, he drifted off to sleep, knowing that the chance of his meeting a suitable woman/wife at either location was slim to none. So his thoughts on dear *emaa* conspiring with the spirits to bring him a wife could be summed up in four words.

Good luck with that.

