

COMING SOON FROM
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Twenty-Six Eskimo Words

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Chapter One

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I opened my eyes to the same sense of surprise and wonder I've felt every morning for the past two months. I rolled over and there was Jack. Sound asleep, he lay on his back, his black hair mussed by the pillow, the covers kicked off because of the warmth of the bedroom—the whole beautiful length of him—the strong muscles of his chest and arms apparent even as he lay totally relaxed, his hands resting loosely on his belly.

His hands are short and broad and powerful. I used to imagine what he could do with those hands. My imagination wasn't nearly good enough.

And I love the golden tan color and smoothness of his skin. I've even learned to love those two terrible scars that run from his left shoulder to his right hip, left by the claws of a bear so long ago.

I inched toward him, but before I knew what had happened,

he'd turned over, grabbed me, and kissed me soundly. He lay back, laughing. "Anne, you're going to have to be a lot sneakier than that if you want to catch me."

I turned onto my stomach and pulled myself up on my elbows. "In case you haven't noticed, Dr. O'Malley, I've already caught you, and I didn't have to sneak. I just had to wait." I leaned over and kissed him. "Good morning. I love you."

"And I love you." He reached out, touched my face, and gently stroked my hair.

"Do you want to sleep a little longer?" I asked. "You could doze while I fix the tea."

"I have something better to do. Come here."

"You won't get any tea."

"Maybe I will . . . later."

I settled into his arms and welcomed him.

We'd arrived in San Diego late the previous night from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where we visited the graves of Jack's grandfather Brendan and great-grandparents John and Ida O'Malley. Visiting graves may seem like a strange thing to do on a honeymoon, but the search for information about Brendan had brought us together. We wanted to acknowledge that.

I picked up the pot, poured two cups of tea, added the milk and sugar, and handed one to Jack. "Come on. We'll walk around the rest of the house and yard."

I showed him the walk-in pantry off the kitchen, the living room, dining room, and another room—an informal sitting area—the two guest bedrooms, the den, and the laundry room.

The house was a classic Southern California Spanish style:

one-story white stucco walls, arched doorways, and a red clay tile roof. It had been built in the 1930s on the west side of a high peninsula called Point Loma. A huge, sloping back yard more than made up for the small front yard. A mature goldenrain tree, messy but beautiful, shaded the large tile patio. A detached workroom sat farther down the slope at the back of the yard. Now we relaxed on the redwood Adirondack chairs my first husband, Robby, had made in that workroom and enjoyed the sunny morning and panoramic view of the Pacific Ocean.

“It’s strange to think we’ve been married two months,” I said, “and there are so many practical things we haven’t talked about. I know your taste in music and books and about the rather strange foods I need to learn how to fix for you, but we’ve never talked about money or where we want to live or things like that.”

“Anne, would you like to keep this house? I’m committed to six months a year in Ottawa until I retire, but I could retire now. We could live here.”

Such a simple statement. Such a major gift of love. I knew how important Jack’s job was to him. There was no way I’d take advantage of that offer.

“It almost feels as if our honeymoon will be over if we talk about things like that,” I said.

“Not a chance.” Jack took my hand in his.

We sat quietly for a few minutes as an Anna’s hummingbird breakfasted on nectar from the scarlet flowers of the salvia bush next to the patio. As he flitted from blossom to blossom, his ruby head and emerald throat flashed in the sun.

“My life’s in Canada now, Jack. I know you don’t want to retire, although I do appreciate your offer. We should sell this house. If we want to keep a home in San Diego, it should be a condo so we can lock the door and leave when we want to. We’ll have to talk about whether we want even that much.”

“We don’t have to decide now,” he said. “Let’s talk about what we want to do today.”

“I have a few phone calls to make, and I have to do something about all the mail, but that’s it. How about a little sightseeing?”

“OK. I’ll call Bob Sumner too. I haven’t seen him since the last Archaeology Association convention. I’d like the three of us to get together for lunch.”

“Give him a call,” I said, “and then we’ll decide on what to do with the rest of the day.”

We rose and walked into the kitchen.

I’d called Carola to let her know we were on our way to San Diego, and she’d stocked the refrigerator for us. I mixed some water and egg and put bread to soak for French toast while Jack made his call.

When he hung up, he said, “Bob has a class at eleven. He asked if we could meet him for lunch at 12:30. I said yes, but I can call back and change that if you’d like to do something else.”

“No, that’s fine.”

“You’ll like him, but watch out. He’s really smooth with women. I don’t want him luring you away.”

I laughed. “Not in a million years.”

“He said something interesting. He’s had an offer of a job doing an archaeological survey in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska. He doesn’t want to do it, and he said he’d recommend me if I did. It sounds like it might be fun.”

“How much time would it take?”

“Pretty much the whole summer.”

“Oh.”

“He’s going to give us the details at lunch.”

I couldn’t stand the idea of Jack going off for the whole summer so soon after our wedding. I knew how lonely I’d be, but I’d known he did field work when I married him. It was part of the package.

I changed the subject. “Shall we go to the cemetery after lunch?”

“OK. Want to take a shower with me after breakfast, since we have time to kill?”

We finished our breakfast and our shower, which took longer than I’d thought it would. Jack said he had to prove the honeymoon wasn’t over.

As we dressed, he said, “Why don’t you call a cab? We’ll go someplace and rent a car.”

“I have a car in the garage.”

“What kind?”

“It’s an ’02 Cadillac Eldorado.”

“Great,” he said, “but it’s been sitting for months. It might not start.”

“Ernesto drives it at least once a week to keep everything working. It should be OK. If there were a problem, he’d have taken care of it.” The words were out of my mouth before I realized.

“Who’s Ernesto?”

I hadn’t meant to tell him this way. I knew it would come out, but I didn’t know how he’d take it. I tried to sound casual. “My gardener.”

He sat on the bed to put on his socks. “Oh, you have a gardener?”

“Everyone here has one.”

“But does everyone let their gardener drive their car?”

I shrugged. “He’s not totally a gardener—I do a lot of things when I’m here—but he does maintenance and runs errands. There are always little things that need to be done.”

“I don’t understand. Does he work for you full time?”

“Not now.”

“But he used to?”

“He and Carola used to come in five days a week, but they’re semi-retired now.”

“Carola? I thought she was a friend.”

“She is. It’s complicated. Ernesto’s her husband.”

“You had a full-time gardener and a maid?” he said.

“Oh, don’t dare call her a maid to her face. She’ll skin you alive. She’s my housekeeper.”

“How long have they worked for you?”

“Since I married Robby.”

“Thirty-five years?” He sounded bemused.

I nodded. “A little more. Their oldest child was in my class. That’s how I found out they were looking for work. Robby traveled enough that he wanted me to be free to do things with him when he came home. He didn’t want me tied down with housework, and he didn’t want me alone all the time when he was gone.”

“I take it Robby had a bit of money?”

“Mmm . . . yes. He did . . .” I decided I might as well tell him all of it. “And when he retired and asked me to quit my job early, one of the hobbies I started was buying and selling stock. It turned out I’m pretty good at it.”

“And ‘pretty good at it’ means . . .?”

“Oh, I’ll show you the business stuff, but basically it means if you work for the money, you can retire today. But I don’t think you work for the money, do you? You’d pay them to be allowed to teach, if you had to.”

Jack sat quietly.

I knew what he was doing. He was controlling of his emotion, as his Inuit culture demanded that he do. I just didn’t know what emotion he was controlling. Was it anger? I waited.

“Why didn’t you tell me this before?”

“Because it’s not important. It’s only there to make us comfortable. I was afraid it might get in the way of you seeing who I am—that it would scare you off. Besides, I owed you one, *Doctor O’Malley*.”

Jack broke out laughing. “I guess we’re even.” He probably

remembered the look on my face when I found out he was an archaeologist and college professor, not a hunting guide, as I'd assumed.

Well, he took it better than I thought he might. At least, I think he did.

The car started on the first try. I drove.

"How long will it take to get to the university?" he asked.

"About a half-hour, depending on traffic, but parking's always a problem. If we're lucky and find a space quickly, we can walk around the campus for a while. The architecture's interesting, especially the library. People think it looks like a space ship."

We did find a parking space and had about a half-hour to walk the campus. The early March day was clear and fine with a temperature in the sixties, quite a change from Ungavaq, Ottawa, and Pittsburgh, where we'd been the last three months.

I noticed many of the students stared at us. We'd received that same scrutiny in Ottawa and Pittsburgh. I guess we make an unusual couple. I look like a typical older woman—Carola and I like to say we're in late middle age—and Jack looks all the more exotic in contrast. Although he has tan skin and black hair, his face is clearly different from the Hispanic and Indian faces common in Southern California, and facial tattoos—two parallel lines—span ear to ear across the bridge of his nose. Some people incorrectly call him an Eskimo, but Eskimos live in Alaska. Jack is Canadian Inuit.

We met Bob in the lobby of the UC San Diego Faculty Club.

He hugged Jack. "Well, how's my little Inuit buddy?"

"I'm fine," Jack said, "and how's the weather up there?"

And I knew they'd been saying the same things to each other for forty years.

Jack is five eight and muscular, but he did look small next to Bob, who stood at least eight inches taller and weighed at least fifty pounds more. Bob looked solidly built. I guessed that he, like Jack, lived an outdoor life for much of the year. His work kept his body toned.

A good-looking man in a ruffled-scholar sort of way. He was slightly balding, but he didn't seem to care. He didn't do one of those awful comb-overs. His salt-and-pepper hair appeared to have originally been a much lighter brown than mine. He wore it and his dark brown beard neatly trimmed.

"And this must be Anne," he said, turning to me. "I can't believe I missed this beautiful woman, and she was here in San Diego the whole time. Jack, you're luckier than you deserve."

He seemed genuinely delighted that Jack had married me and at the prospect that Jack might spend time in San Diego.

Over lunch, they talked shop for a while. I followed most of what they said because I'd read Jack's textbook. Bob knew many archaeology jokes. I'm sure Jack had heard most of them, but they were new to me. We laughed all through the meal.

Classmates in graduate school at Columbia University, they had done their first fieldwork together at Altun Ha in Belize. They'd kept in close touch ever since.

Bob specialized in Indians of the Southwest. "We divided up the North American continent between us," he said. "Jack took the north and I took the south. I have the better part of the deal. No frostbite."

"Just sunstroke and scorpions. I'll take snow any day," Jack said. The waiter served our dessert.

While we lingered over our ice cream, Jack said, "Tell me about the survey in Alaska."

Bob nodded. "There's talk in Washington again about opening portions of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge for oil exploration.

The companies that plan to bid on the development must do environmental impact statements.

“Allied American Oil approached me to write the part of their EIS having to do with archaeological sites and native antiquities. I tentatively said I’d do it, but Eskimos and Alaskan Indians certainly aren’t my area of expertise, and I had an offer of three months at a dig in New Mexico, so I’m not really interested. You want it?”

“Why do you suppose they wanted to hire you? What do you know about Eskimos?”

“They probably wanted me because I know you.”

Jack laughed. “Sure, I’m typical.”

“They didn’t actually say. I asked, but the conversation moved on, and I never did get an answer.”

“I need to know more of the details, and Anne and I have to talk it over.”

I knew I was going to tell him to take it. A little bubble of sadness welled up in me.

“There’s a mystery hanging over the project,” Bob said. “The contract was let previously, but there was some kind of accident, and the archaeologist disappeared.”

“Disappeared as in ‘never found’?” I asked.

“Yes.”

“Last summer?” Jack asked.

“Yes. There was a mention of it in the papers at the time, but not much information.”

“His name was John MacNeil,” Jack said. “I knew him. I read his obituary in *The Journal of Arctic Archaeology* last fall. They never did find his body. It was really too bad. I met him at the annual meeting of the Archaeological Institute of America. He presented an interesting paper on Siberian lithic culture, and we had quite a good talk about it. That was two years ago.”

“It’s such an isolated area,” Bob said. “If you get in trouble, there’s no place to go for help. You’re on your own. I suppose he could’ve been taken by a bear.”

“Oh, no,” I said.

Jack took my hand under the table. He knew how much talk of bears upset me. A bear attacked me in Canada. Jack and his brother-in-law Quipac killed it. I was working on getting past my fear, but I wasn’t there yet.

“It’s possible,” Jack said, “Bears are usually hungry and they’re always curious. But they’d have found some sign. Bears make a mess tearing things apart. There wasn’t anything about that in the obituary.”

“But how can someone disappear with no sign of what happened?” I asked.

“They can when they’re out in the wilderness,” Bob said.

Jack nodded. “But it’s a little more difficult on the tundra. Maybe he drowned—swept out to sea or something. It’s still odd.”

We walked with Bob to his office, and he ran off copies of the information for us.

As he studied the paperwork, Jack said, “It’s unusual Allied American hasn’t farmed this out to a company specializing in environmental impact studies.”

“They’re so big they do almost everything in-house,” Bob said. “They’re a huge corporation, and they’re worldwide, so they have access to people with every skill you can imagine. Let me know in the next few days if you’re interested. I’ll send your name to Allied American with a recommendation.”

“Thanks and thanks for lunch. I’ll give you a call.”

As we walked to the car, Jack leafed through the papers Bob had given him. “I want you to look at these when we get home, and we can talk about whether it’s something we’d like to do.”

“We?”

“As I remember, our deal is that we’re partners in this marriage. Did you think I’d go to Alaska without you?”

“I assumed you would.”

“Well, I wouldn’t,” he said.

“I guess we have a lot to talk about tonight.”

We stopped at the house for a few minutes to pick up the flowers we’d cut and then drove south on Catalina Boulevard to Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery. I parked the car on one of the narrow side roads, and we walked across the neatly trimmed grass to the stark white headstone on Robby’s grave. The rows and columns of uniform headstones seemed to march on forever down the hillside that opened out to a panoramic view of San Diego Bay, Coronado, and the communities to the south. The cemetery included people who’d served as far back as the 1850s and as recently as the present conflict. Robby was in good company.

His stone read:

Robert John O’Malley, Pennsylvania
Sgt. – World War II
September 24, 1922 – January 15, 2003
Beloved Husband

We’d stopped and picked up a green cone-shaped metal vase from a storage area when we entered the cemetery. I pressed it into the grass near the headstone and placed the bouquet of flowers in it. Spring always seemed to arrive in San Diego in early March, and so we’d managed to find enough gold-and-white daffodils and blue anemones to make a nice arrangement.

Robby had helped me plant those bulbs.

I started to tell Jack, but my tears made it too hard to talk.

He put his arm around me.

I'd had a difficult time coming to terms with Robby's death. Now, two years later, although I've passed that dark time and moved forward in this new marriage, I still grieve for him. I suppose I'll never get over missing him, his voice, his touch, his love.

We stood awhile, then walked back to the car. This time, Jack drove. As he parked in our driveway, he said, "I'll make the tea."

"Oh, I'll do it."

"If we going to stay here awhile, I'd better get used to the kitchen."

"You'd better not get too used to it because on the two days a week Carola's here, the kitchen belongs strictly to her. She can be quite the tyrant if you get in her way. Don't say you weren't warned."

He laughed.

After dinner, we spent the evening sitting at the oak table in the kitchen and going over the financial aspects of my life. I'd sorted the business mail out of the stack waiting to be opened. Jack reminded me that balancing a checkbook was about the extent of his mathematical knowledge, but he didn't seem to have any problem following the intricacies of the most recent stock reports. When we finished, he put down the paperwork and looked at me.

"What?" I asked.

"This is even more than you led me to believe this morning. I'm truly amazed. You're right. We've never talked about how to handle money in this marriage. I never thought about your having money. I assumed I'd take care of you. This will take a little getting used to."

"Of course, if we sell this house, there'll be even more."

"How much more?"

"Prices have gone up and up in San Diego. Homes in this neighborhood are selling for over a million dollars now, and every month they go up more."

"Are you joking?"

I shook my head. "No. Is this money going to be a problem between

us? I've tried for the longest time to think how to tell you about it."

"... No, I don't think so."

His little hesitation before he answered made me uneasy.

"I've been worried you might think I'd been deceptive and be upset about it," I said.

"I'm not upset. I'm surprised. We need to figure out things like this. Meanwhile, we should leave things as they are. You go on doing what you've obviously been doing so well, and we'll make decisions as they come up."

I felt my tension begin to unwind.

He continued, "What do you say? Let's go to bed early. We're pretty tired. We can look at Bob's stuff tomorrow."

"I like that idea."

He turned off the lights, and we went hand in hand to the bedroom.