

CHAPTER 1



We're Going to Alaska! 1980

“What do you mean you put the house up for sale?”

Sam set down his briefcase. “I listed it with the realtors.” He turned to me with his brightest smile. “I handed in my resignation today.”

My mouth gaped open. I stared at my husband as if he'd grown a second head.

Before I could articulate a response, he grabbed me in his arms and twirled me around. “We're going to Alaska, Bonnie. We're going to Alaska!”

He finally set me down, but my head continued to whirl. “You mean, just like that, we're going to Alaska?” Maybe I hadn't heard

him right. “When did we decide all this?”

Sam removed his coat and hat and hung them on the coat rack by the front door. When he turned and faced me, his smile disappeared. The muscles in his face pulled taut and his eyes bored into mine. “We’ve talked about this, Bonnie—we’ve planned this for years.” He started toward the kitchen.

I ran after him. “But we haven’t even mentioned Alaska for at least a year.”

Sam removed a cup from the cupboard and poured in a little powdered creamer while the coffeemaker coughed out the last few drops of freshly brewed coffee.

Dread somersaulted in my stomach. “What about our life here? I thought you were happy.”

Sam poured coffee into his mug in stony silence, clenched his jaw and set the glass carafe back on the burner. Instead of turning around to answer me, he leaned over, planted both fists on the counter and took a long, slow breath.

I folded my arms in front of me and heaved a sigh, resisting the urge to tap my foot. The clock above the stove sounded like a metronome in a deserted cathedral.

He finally turned around and leaned against the counter, facing me. “You know we’ve dreamed of this for a long time—you still have that dream, don’t you?”

I took a deep breath. “We’re living a dream life now—or at least I thought we were.” I spread my palms in supplication and raised my voice an octave or two. “What about our jobs?”

I didn’t give him a chance to reply. I reminded him of everything we’d be giving up. We both had great jobs with good pay. Sam held a management position at MDT Corporation, and I worked as an inspector for an electronics company. We had moved to Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio, three years earlier and bought a house on a huge corner lot. After a remodel and addition, Sam and his dad put on cedar siding. Our house—our home—looked like a country cottage.

Two new vehicles plus a camper and a boat sat in the driveway, completing what I believed to be the perfect life.

“We have everything we could ever want right here, Sam. Would you really give it all up?”

The chicken casserole I had prepared earlier for supper filled the kitchen with tantalizing smells. It was ready to come out of the oven, and I was out of words.

“Bonnie?” Sam’s voice sounded softer now. “I know we haven’t talked about going to Alaska for a long time, but it’s never left my mind. I know how happy you are here, so maybe that’s why I haven’t brought it up before now.” He took a step closer. “The other day it took me three hours to get home because I got stuck in traffic. My job and this house own me. You talk about all that we have. We never get to use the boat and camper, because I work six or seven days a week. We both work long hours; I never see you anymore.”

I shrunk away from him, but said nothing.

“For what?” He held out his palms. “We’re indebted to the bank for our house, we have utility bills that get higher each month, and I’ve got a stomach full of ulcers.” Sam swept his arm dismissively and shook his head. “We don’t need all this, Bonnie. It’s not worth it. I can build us a home in the wilderness. We won’t have to answer to anybody but ourselves.”

Sam spoke with the same passion he had the night he proposed to me. He lowered his voice. “I’m not getting any younger. I know you’re only twenty-five years old, but I’m thirty-six, and if we’re going to do this, we need to do it now.” He stopped talking, walked over, put his hands gently on my shoulders and looked into my eyes.

I met his gorgeous blue eyes—eyes a woman could get lost in; eyes that still made me weak at the knees. They spoke to me now, desperately pleading for me to understand the way he felt, willing me to feel the way he did and to want the same thing he wanted.

“I want to go to Alaska. I want *us* to go to Alaska.” He waited for a reply, his eyes never wavering from mine, his hands pressed

gently on my shoulders.

I remembered the words he'd said years before—the words he'd said on the day he asked me to be his wife. "Someday, I want to go to Alaska, where a man can still live off the land. There's so much land and game up there, places man hasn't even seen. They call it the last frontier." He had paused to take a breath; passion flowered his words. "I could build a log cabin, and hunt and fish for my meat. I wouldn't need to go to work every day and punch a time clock just to get by, but could provide for all our needs with my own two hands."

I had promised I would go with him. As much as I loved my home and life, I loved my husband more. If Sam didn't go after his lifelong dream, he would always regret it. I would not stand in his way. I lifted my arms and wrapped them around his waist, pulling him closer to me. I knew he'd been unhappy for a long time. And, in honesty, we both had. We had every material thing imaginable, but it had cost us more than mere money—it had cost us our time together.

I tightened my grip on him, my ear pressed against his pounding heart. "I love you, Sam. As long as we're together, nothing else matters." As his arms tightened around me, I closed my eyes. "Of course I will go to Alaska with you."