



## Chapter Two

Getting cozy in her bed felt divine. Angie enjoyed the perks of her puffy ice-blue comforter and satin sheets as she reclined in her adjustable canopy bed. She breathed in the fragrance of a cinnamon candle and reached for her TV remote when her cell dinged.

“Hi, Angie. How many stitches did it take? Or did they use duct tape to put you back together?” Tanner sounded like he was walking.

Angie laughed. “Ha ha, you’re so funny. I have a splitting headache, and my wound throbs with each heartbeat. I have several dissolving stitches inside and seven on the outside. I’m glad my hair will cover it.”

“One second you were there—then you were gone. Don’t do that again. You scared me!”

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to. Thanks again for jumping in.”

“Sure. Anytime. I’ve got a class. Stay out of trouble. We’ll talk later.”

When he ended the call, Angie laid her phone aside and pulled a daisy out of her arrangement, twirling it in her fingers like Meg Ryan did in *You’ve Got Mail*. Just as Meg had

contemplated changes in Tom Hanks in the movie, Angie's thoughts focused on Tanner—her tall, tan, tough but tenderhearted, tried and true best friend. Sure he came from the workers' quarters at the other end of the estate, but she didn't care. Staring into his handsome face while he hovered above her body as lake water dripped from his hair, it seemed he didn't want to let her go. *Is this just wishful thinking? Am I reading too much into the moment? Maybe it was his response to having to save me.* She twirled the daisy as she considered the possibilities.

For years, she'd dreamed of a romantic ending with Tanner. He'd been Prince Charming to her Barbie, her partner when she took dance lessons and her cohort in crime during their teen years. But this near-death experience brought her future into focus. *Happily-ever-after with Tanner Zarello—that's my heart's desire.*

With time on her hands, she spoke into her remote, "*You've Got Mail.*" The movie fit her mood and would keep her still for the duration. A cold Coke and some cookies helped. As the credits on the screen rolled, she reached for her laptop and brought up the website for Southwestern University. It was time to put her plan in motion.

As she perused the course descriptions, her cell dinged. She put it to her ear.

"Hey Ang, about fall break. You want to take the jet skis out once more before they're stored for winter?" Getting straight to the point was Tanner's way.

"Sure, that's a good idea."

"My roommate may come with. You can show off your billiard skills."

"You want to bet on the game?" She smiled, knowing she could beat him any day.

"Nope. You cost me too much money."

Her laughter increased when he ended the call.

Angie had kept her answers short, not wanting to sound too eager, but she pulled up the calendar on her phone and started counting the days. Time with Tanner escalated her heart rate. She'd have a list of activities to keep them busy—to keep Tanner close.

“Miss Angie, your lunch is ready. You want it here on your bed tray, or do you want to sit at the table?” Sarah brought a bouquet of mixed flowers into her room and placed them on her dresser.

“I'll come to the table. Who sent the flowers?” Angie put her hair in a messy bun, being careful with the stitched area, as she slipped out of bed.

Sarah handed her the card on the pick.

“Hmm, Mason Malone from Ward Enterprises. Grand-Papa must have said something about my swim in the lake.” She slipped her feet into her slippers.

“He probably did. He was pretty upset. Mason is good-looking, and I'm sure he's loaded, but he doesn't hold a candle to Tanner. Your lunch smells good. Your grandfather wants to have dinner with you. I hope that's okay, because I already confirmed your 'yes.' I'm heading back to the office. See you later.” Sarah hid a smile.

“Sarah, you're not fooling me. I noticed how you slid that Tanner comment into your diatribe.” Angie eased into a chair at her glass-topped dinette table.

Sarah attempted to hide her smile. “Enjoy your lunch—then back to bed for you, Miss Ward. The doctor wants you to rest. Your meds are by your plate.”

“A nap does sound good. My head's throbbing. Be sure to check my email, Sarah.”

“You got it.” Sarah pivoted, her ponytail bouncing as she headed in the other direction.

Promptly at six o'clock, dinner was served in the dining room of Angie's suite. The formal setting of white wainscoting with burgundy walls created a rich atmosphere—perfect for Alexander Ward, who entered right on cue.

"You feeling better?" He made his way toward Angie.

"Yes, my headache has subsided a little."

After kissing her on each cheek, he pulled her chair out before taking his seat.

"Your limp is more pronounced tonight, Grand-Papa. You okay?"

"It's arthritis, Angelica. It acts up when the weather is changing. A cold front must be moving in to cool us down for July fourth weekend." He dismissed the subject as he shook out the folds of his cloth napkin.

Angie shook her head. "You're impossible. You take care of everything and everyone but yourself." She laid her linen napkin across her lap. Having changed into the proper attire for dinner, she enjoyed her grandfather's smile of approval. "What's for dinner?"

"I don't know, but it smells spicy."

Edward, Ward's butler, placed tortilla chips, queso, guacamole, and salsa on the table. "Mexican fare. I hope it meets your approval."

"Thank you, Edward. It looks great." Ward reached for Angie's hand and prayed. When he said "amen," Angie grabbed a chip and dipped it into the guacamole.

"Edward, tell Maria this is really good." Angie reached for another chip. "So, Grand-Papa, what's up?"

"What do you mean, my dear?" He tried the queso.

She finished her bite. "You usually have something to discuss when you have dinner with me at my end of the estate."

"Can't I just want to spend time with you?" He smiled.

“Sure, but we do that at your end of the mansion.” She leaned back for Edward to serve their entrée. “Chicken enchiladas. Yum. Can you smell that perfect mix of spices?”

“I do.” He paused as Edward placed his entrée in front of him. “Well, you’re correct. I do want to talk to you. While I was discussing business with the vice president of Kenya, I ordered the kissing ball for you.”

“Thank you. It’s going to add the perfect touch to my Christmas decorations.”

“You’re welcome. I actually need to go to Kenya. Will you go with me? I’m purchasing a piece of land and must obtain a mining permit.” He picked up his knife to cut his food.

She sipped her water and returned the goblet to its coaster. “I’d love to go. What are you mining this time?”

“Tanzanite. It’s rare and quite valuable. They usually find it only in Tanzania—but a pocket of the gems has been located in Kenya along the coast, south of Mombasa.”

“So you’re going to snatch it up before someone else does. I don’t blame you. I love it there. When do we leave?” She lifted her fork and blew on a steaming bite before putting it in her mouth.

“I had my assistant check your school schedule, and we’ll be traveling during your fall break.” He took a bite of enchilada.

Angie started choking when panic stole her breath. She swallowed, then coughed a couple of times. Reaching for her water, she gulped a drink.

“You okay?” Ward leaned forward, took her water goblet from her shaky hand, and put it back on her coaster.

“It just went down the wrong way.” She took another sip of water and cleared her throat. *This is not good. I’m spending fall break with Tanner.* “I’m okay now.” But her head wound was throbbing again. *I need to go back to bed.*

“Your passport is up-to-date.” He finished his enchiladas. “I checked it.”

Since she had traveled with him on other fact-finding missions, he automatically assumed she was on board with the trip. She loved Kenya, but missing fall break with Tanner wasn’t ideal.

“I appreciate this, Angelica. You need to be acquainted with the vice president and his staff. Someday, I want you to lead our overseas acquisitions.”

“Sure, Grand-Papa. I would love that assignment.” She pasted on a smile.

During their dessert, he talked about her future possibilities in Ward Enterprises. The flan Edward served disappeared without her tasting it. Once her grand-papa bid her goodnight, she readied herself for bed in slow motion, keeping the lights dim to help with her mounting headache. Having to fake excitement about the trip pulled at her like a taffy being stretched. What was she going to tell Tanner? Would he care if she went? Since the EMTs had taken over, Tanner had kept his distance. Was she imagining his interest?



Tanner stretched out on his twin bed in his loft apartment and called Angie.

“Hi, Angie. What ya doing?”

“Just schoolwork. I’ve got stacks of books this semester.”

“Yeah, me too. I’m anxious for fall break. Campfire and s’mores must be on the agenda.”

“Well—about that. Grand-Papa planned a trip to Kenya during fall break and asked me to go. I’m sorry, but I won’t be here. I’ll miss the s’mores, our jet ski race, and beating you at billiards. Sorry, Tanner.”

“Bummer. Well, it’s okay. I have plenty of work I can do. I’ve got some reports due before Christmas break.”

“So you’ll work?” She paused. “I’ll miss our fun times.”

“Yeah, me too. We’ll talk before you leave. Have a good trip.”

“I’ll try.”

Tanner punched the off button on his cell and gazed out the window, watching raindrops trail down the pane.

“Hey, man. You look like you’ve lost your best friend. Don’t worry, I’m still here.” Dylan Calloway, Tanner’s roommate and best friend, dropped his backpack on his bed. “What’s up?”

Pocketing his cell, he turned. “Angie’s going to Kenya and won’t be there for fall break.”

“You care about her, don’t you? I can see it.” He took a soda out of their mini-fridge and popped the top. Their loft-style apartment was small but adequate for their college lifestyle. And it kept expenses down.

“Yeah, we’re close friends.” Tanner took his laptop out of his book bag and powered it up. He tossed his pillow against the headboard and found a comfortable position on his bed.

Dylan took a long drink of his Coke. “You going to finish your thesis during break?”

“That’s my new plan.”

“I think I’ll visit my family, then. Can I go with you another time?”

“Sure, but you’ve got to see this place. And I wanted you to get to know Angie.”

“Aren’t you taking a chance?” Dylan crushed his Coke can and tossed it into the trash.

“A chance? What do you mean?”

Dylan grinned. “One look at me, and you’ll be history.”

“I told you we’re just friends.” Tanner threw a pillow at Dylan, hitting his target.

“And I don’t believe you.” Dylan laughed.



Using a pushpin, Marco put another eight-by-ten glossy of Angie on the wall of his two-bedroom house in a seedy, run-down suburb of Dallas. He stepped back and smiled. *Perfect*. He kissed his fingers and put them on her lips in the photo. His cell vibrated in his pocket.

“Hello,” he answered, keeping his eyes on the latest trophy he’d added to his collection.

“Got a tip for you. Ward and his granddaughter are flying out this afternoon. British Air, flight BA 194, leaving around four.” Joe hacked into the phone. “So get there and use the crowd as camouflage to take your shots. Let’s put something in Sunday’s paper. International travel peaks interest from our readers.”

“You got it, Joe. I can slay it. Expect the pics tonight.” Ending the call, he grabbed his keys, slammed the door behind him, and headed to the airport. *Where are you going, pretty girl? Better yet, when are you coming back?*



Traffic was relatively light from the Ward Estate to DFW International Airport. Angie relaxed in the limo and watched the landscape rush past their window. “October is in the air. Look at the leaves, Grand-Papa. They’ve changed color in the last few days,” Angie said.

“The last cold spell painted the landscape earlier this year.” He checked the flight number on his itinerary. “James, we’re flying British Air.”



“Yes, sir,” James spoke as he changed lanes to take them to the right departure gate.

After arriving in their limo, a photographer snapped their photo several times as they were ushered to the first-class line. With special treatment, their wait was expedited. Angie and Alexander Ward relaxed in the British Air club in short order. Alexander sent a couple emails to his assistant while Angie perused the available refreshments.

“Grand-Papa, I got you some snacks. Would you like some tea?”

“Yes, please.” His eyes didn’t leave his phone.

After serving him, she sat in one of the comfy chairs and propped her feet on an ottoman. “You okay?” Angie tasted her cheese and crackers as she watched him.

“I’m good.” He patted her hand.

She looked at his profile. “Your laugh lines haven’t shown in a while.”

“Sorry, my dear. Losing your grandmother has taken a toll.”

“I understand. She left a void nothing could fill. Grand-Papa, we don’t talk about this much, but in my psychology class, we’re studying the five stages of grief. I think you’re stuck.” Angie stirred her ice water, allowing the lime to flavor her drink.

“Stuck? You’re going to have to explain.” He pocketed his phone.

“Sure. But first, I’ll ask again. How are you doing?”

“I have tough moments, lonely times. Sometimes, I think I hear her voice. Then I have to face the fact that she’s gone. It’s then I get alone and weep. Pretty sad, huh?”

“It’s normal, Grand-Papa. They say it’s like having congestive heart failure, where the fluid builds up around the heart, and it has to be drained. Crying helps. It makes you feel

better. Grief builds up in the same way, and you have to cry it out. Then you feel better for a while. Sometimes you feel guilty for feeling better, but then you start the process over again.”

“What you’re saying makes sense. That’s where I am.” His smile didn’t reach his eyes.

Angie laid her head on his shoulder. “Well, you’re not alone. I’m here.”

“That does give me comfort, my dear.”

Angie watched people come and go as flights were called. She tried to be excited about the Kenya trip, but her heart still longed to spend time with Tanner.

Ward checked his watch. “It’s time, Angelica. They should allow us to board when we get to the gate.”

“Africa, here we come.” Angie grabbed her carry-on and patiently followed her grandfather, who walked slowly with his trusty cane.



After enjoying first-class comforts as they flew over the ocean, Angie put her leg rest down and gathered her things. “We’re making our approach. I hope this is a profitable venture, Grand-Papa. Ten thousand miles is a long way from home.”

“Don’t stop trusting me now. Have I ever led you astray?” Ward smiled and put his seat in the upright position.

Ending their two long flights, the plane made a bumpy landing in Nairobi. After passing through customs and retrieving their luggage, one of Vice President Saitoti’s men approached, took care of their luggage, and ushered them forward.

“Welcome to Kenya, Bwana Ward. I trust your journey was pleasant.”

“It was long but comfortable. Thank you for asking.” Alexander Ward stuffed his passport into his suitcoat pocket.

“I’ve taken the liberty of having your hired van waiting at the door. It is parked by the curb just ahead. The vice president is expecting you in his office at ten o’clock tomorrow. Does that fit your itinerary, Bwana Ward?” He opened the door of their van.

“Yes, we can make that appointment time. Thank you for such a warm welcome to your fine country.”

“My pleasure, sir.” He closed the door, assisted with loading their luggage, and stepped back, statuesque, until they pulled away.

“Bwana, my name is Martin,” the driver said. “Your destination is not far. I will get you there with much haste.”

“Thank you. Our journey has been long.”

Angie pulled her blouse away from her skin. “It’s hot and humid in Nairobi, Bwana,” she said to Martin.

“Yes, Dada, it is rainy season in Kenya. I trust you brought an umbrella.”

“I did, but I hope I won’t have to use it.”

Within fifteen minutes, their luggage was unloaded at a five-star hotel, and their rooms were assigned.

“A great hotel choice, Grand-Papa. I love African art blended into modern comfort. Who would expect plush carpets in Kenya?” Angie moved toward her room next to his. “I hope you rest well.”

“You too. See you in the morning.”

Ole Serena Hotel, a five-star establishment, was constructed on the edge of the Nairobi game park, ten kilometers from the international airport. Cape buffalo grazed near the outdoor restaurant, where Angie enjoyed an amazing breakfast buffet next to a birdbath extending the length of the

restaurant. An awning of clay tiles kept the morning sun at bay.

“Grand-Papa, there are giraffes in the distance.”

Ward sipped his coffee. “You love it here, don’t you?”

“Yes, I do. Nana Joy said there was a certain magic about this country. I agree.” She took another bite. “So, what are we doing first?”

“We’re purchasing a piece of land with a tanzanite mine on it. The process has been shortened since we bought the property in Kenya when we acquired Paradise Inn, our resort on the coast.” He motioned for the waiter to refresh his coffee.

“Don’t we need the deed before you request a mining permit?”

“That’s correct, but Vice President Saitoti is helping expedite the process for us because the mine will eventually fill with water. We’re in a race against time.” He sipped his brew.

“Then we better get this show on the road.” Angie pushed away from the table.

He held his hand up to stop her. “I need to make a call to the States. I’m calling in some reinforcements. Another set of eyes on this project might be a good idea. Have some fruit and finish your tea. Meet me in the lobby and request our luggage to be loaded.”

“Sounds great. I’ll get more of their juicy pineapple and meet you there.”

“Dole grows their pineapples in Kenya in an area called Thika not far from Nairobi.” He signed the bill to their room. “Some of the Tarzan movies were filmed around a waterfall in Thika.”

“How do you know so much about this country?” She stood.

“Just trivia acquired on my frequent trips.” He finished his java and left to make his phone call.

Angie watched some impala grazing in the game park as she finished breakfast and drank a steaming cup of Kenyan chai. As a pair of lovebirds played in the birdbath, her mind returned to her handsome best friend. Tanner would love this place. *Maybe ... someday.*



Dressed in a jacketed sundress, Angie put her hand in the crook of her grandfather's arm, covered with a suit coat. Dressing for success was appropriate worldwide. Their footsteps echoed down the long hallway of painted concrete floors and shiplap walls. Despite an early morning rain shower, a dusty smell hung stagnant in the air. They stopped at a carved wooden door. A uniformed guard checked their visitor passes and then knocked on the door, opening it when summoned.

The vice president's office appeared stoic, with its tall ceilings, low-hanging fan, mahogany desk, and straight chairs. Tea had been prepared for them in a traditional Kenyan tea set displayed on a wooden coffee table.

Alexander stepped aside and allowed his granddaughter to enter.

The vice president ended a phone call, stood, and circled his desk. "*Karibou, Rafiki yangu.* Welcome, my friend. I'm so glad to see you."

Vice President Saitoti embraced Alexander Ward.

"It has been a while," Ward said. "I'm glad to see you are in good health. You remember my granddaughter Angelica? She was quite young on her last trip to your country." He turned, allowing Angie to greet the vice president.

"Please be seated and enjoy some tea." Saitoti sat across from Ward as his aide prepared the brew on the small table between them. "Help yourself, and tell me how you have been.

I know your heart is heavy with the loss of Mama Joy.” He blew his tea before taking a sip. “You have been in my prayers.”

Angie added sugar to her cup and stirred without clanging her spoon on the ceramic mug. The mixture of warm milk, lots of sugar, and a little tea reminded her of the chocolate-flavored milk she enjoyed as a child. “Mama Joy loved Kenya. Her trips to your country gave her many wonderful memories. Our hearts are saddened. She’s greatly missed,” Angie said.

“Joy traveled to Kenya with me in the past, but I’m happy to have Angelica on this trip. I’ve asked her to listen and learn the details of these transactions so she can do business for Ward Enterprises in the future. She’s being groomed to take an executive role in my company.”

“Following in your footsteps, she will change the world.” Saitoti reached for a folder on his desk. “I’m glad to assist you in this land matter. I have the forms you need. I’ve informed the Mombasa office of your visit and asked them to have the survey ready when you arrive and not delay your progress. The land purchase needs to be completed while you are in Mombasa, and the mining permit can be filed here in Nairobi upon your return.” Saitoti handed the file to Ward.

“Your work has expedited this process. It has saved us weeks of labor.” Ward perused the forms before handing them to Angie. He leaned forward, placing his elbows on his knees. “We are bringing people from the States to lead the project, but we’ll be hiring Kenyans as miners and guards. We want to help your economy by offering jobs.”

Saitoti finished his tea and placed his cup on the wooden table. “We appreciate this good news, but I would expect nothing less. You have employed Kenyans at your resort on the coast for years. Please let me know if you need more assistance with these land matters.”

Alexander Ward sat forward, rubbing his aching knee.

“Thank you for seeing us today.” When Saitoti stood, he and Angie did the same, signaling the end of their meeting.

“I have a special request before you leave,” the vice president said. “I’m hosting a reception next Sunday evening at the Nairobi Hilton for my daughter. She has just accepted a marriage proposal to a fine young doctor she met in the States. I would be honored if you could attend.”

Ward looked at Angie, and she nodded in affirmation.

“We have a late flight to the States, but it would be our joy to attend the reception before we go to the airport,” Ward said.

“It’s a semi-formal dinner at seven in the ballroom at the Nairobi Hilton Hotel. *Asante, Rafiki yangu*. Thank you, my friend.” He put his hand in Alexander Ward’s open palm, a sign of friendship in Kenyan culture. “I will anticipate our time together.”

Ward released his hand and slapped his back in an American old-boy fashion. “It will be a good time.”

Angie shook hands with the vice president. “Thank you for your time. I know your schedule is full.”

Saitoti’s cell phone rang. He retrieved it from his suit coat pocket.

“See you next Sunday,” Ward said as he closed the vice president’s door, giving him privacy for his phone conversation. He led Angie down the long hall and out of the presidential building to their waiting van. “Take us to Wilson Airport, please,” he instructed Martin, their driver.

“To Mombasa now?” Angie said.

“Yes, to Paradise Inn.” Ward made some notes as they drove through Nairobi.

Since the air conditioner couldn’t keep up with the exhaust fumes, motion sickness threatened Angie. She downed a Dramamine and watched the road to ease her stomach. Sights

of dirty children begging from passengers stalled in the traffic tugged at her heart.

“They’re starving, Grand-Papa. Look how many there are. So sad. What a contrast—beautiful high-rise buildings surrounded by hungry beggars.”

“It’s the plight of third-world countries, my dear.”

Angie hung on as they hit one pothole after another, passing scrawny dogs chasing dirty orphans. Driving on the opposite side of the road with the steering wheel on the wrong side of the vehicle added angst to the traffic experience.

Old buses, brightly painted vans, and way too many cars filled the streets. Vendors moved from car to car selling their wares—everything from sunglasses, bananas, photos of the president, which were required in every business, and bright-colored steering wheel covers.

“I wish I had my camera.” Angie stretched her neck to watch the begging children.

“You’ll have many more opportunities to photograph this country.” Ward didn’t look up from his writing.

“But every road is different. Every corner brings more street children, more hungry orphans. The only constant is the desperate look in their eyes. I had that feeling when my parents died. I understand it.”

“I know, my dear. Sadly, you’ll see this scene duplicated in Mombasa.” He squeezed her hand. “Let’s catch our plane, enjoy our one-hour flight, take care of our business, and keep moving. The money we pour into this country helps the economy. It makes a difference.”

Angie watched people scrounging for food as they passed a garbage dump. “But is it enough?”