



Chapter Two

The dank earth swallowed Tanner as the winch lowered him into the murky depths. The whoosh of cold air enveloped his body as inky darkness stole his ability to see.

“Daniel, I’m coming. Kick your feet. Keep your head up.” Still, no answer. He turned on the helmet lamp and pointed it into the darkness, but he was too far away. *Dear God, don’t let him die.* Tanner gripped the hard cable with one hand as he guarded his body from the jagged walls with the other. The cable dug into his torso while the cold invaded his bones. Gooseflesh rose on his arms like pea gravel.

“Daniel, keep kicking. I’m almost there.” Scanning the water, he located Daniel’s body, unmoving, floating face down. “Don’t give up on me.” The cable lowered Tanner closer. He nudged Daniel with one foot, trying to get movement as he dropped into the cold water. No success. Easing closer, Tanner turned him over. He wasn’t breathing. Blood gushed from a cut over his left eyebrow.

Tanner was glad when his foot felt the base of the mine. “Daniel, breathe—this is not the day to die.” Tanner pressed

his fingers to Daniel's neck and located a faint pulse. He attempted chest compressions but hit his elbows on the jagged walls in the tight quarters. Not having Daniel on a solid surface made this attempt futile. Sweat slicked Tanner's forehead despite the cold temps.

He strapped Daniel in the body sling, allowing it to hold his weight, and compressed him around the middle to rid his lungs of water.

Daniel let out a quiet moan.

Tanner squeezed him again.

Daniel coughed, sputtered, and expelled more water.

"Come on, Daniel. Breathe, man, breathe."

Tanner pressed into his lung area again with force. Water gushed from Daniel's mouth again. Daniel coughed, then gasped. Grabbing Tanner's shirt, he opened his eyes and whispered, "Take. Care. My family." His eyes rolled back as his body went limp, his breathing shallow.

Sirens blared in the distance, screaming Tanner's failure. Stray dogs howled, echoing the sound. Tanner jerked on Daniel's cable. "Pull, Dylan, hurry."

The hasty ascent of the limp body left Tanner dangling in the heart of the mine. Defeat, like an ominous sign, flashed across his mind as Daniel's body eclipsed the sunlight. His Kenyan friend had taken Tanner's turn in the mine. *It should have been me.* The jagged walls pricked at his skin as bile rose in his throat. In his quest to prove himself capable, focusing on the paperwork instead of the mine, he'd lost a good man.

With a jerk, the winch began its ascension out of the depths. When the cable returned Tanner to sea level, he squinted against the bright rays of sunlight and mounted the ladder at the mine's entrance.

"Is he breathing?" Tanner asked Dylan.

Daniel's still body lay on the mining platform.

Emergency technicians administered CPR, and another pressed a bag, forcing oxygen into his lungs. A nurse held an IV bag above his body, allowing fluids to flow through a needle in his arm, while Dylan pulled the mining rope from Daniel's body.

"I think he's got too much water in his lungs," Dylan spoke in whispered tones, squatted beside the ladder, his knuckles white as he held onto the pulley.

"Don't say that. He has to make it." Tanner freed himself from the cable and moved closer to the emergency technicians. "I did CPR in the mine. He expelled a lot of water and talked to me before I sent him up."

Dylan handed Tanner his cell and a towel to wipe his hands.

Tanner stepped toward Daniel's body. The nurse changed a blood-soaked rag for a new one on his head wound. "Please back up and give us room."

Frozen and helpless, Tanner stood while the EMTs and the nurse worked to save Daniel. Bloody water dripped from Tanner's clothes, seeping into the weathered wood.

Sirens announced the arrival of the local police as they careened into the area, coating the scene in dust. Two officers joined the medical team on the mining platform.

The palms swayed overhead, signaling a storm approaching as time crept by. The nurse reported Daniel's vital signs every fifteen seconds, which declined with every report. After fifteen minutes of CPR, they hit Daniel's body with electric paddles. When he didn't respond, they hit him again. After the third attempt, the technician leaned back on his haunches, looked at his watch, and pronounced Daniel dead as the other tech covered his body with a clean cloth.

"Eight fifty-two." He noted the time on a chart, then stood and faced Tanner. "I'm sorry, sir, we did everything we could."

The tech confirmed the time of death with the police investigator at the scene, having him sign the report.

For a long moment, all were silent except for storks calling overhead. Tanner couldn't believe this turn of events. *The buck stops here. I should have checked those ropes. It was my turn, so it should have been me in the mine.* Now, their mining permit would be under review and possibly revoked because of the death of a Kenyan. The cards were falling, but not in his favor.

"Who's in charge here?" The emergency tech pivoted, wiping perspiration from his brow with his sleeve.

Tanner stepped forward, still wet from his trek into the mine. He extended his hand. "I'm Tanner Zarello. This mine belongs to Ward Enterprises, a mining company based in Dallas, Texas. Daniel Mwangi has been our employee for three years. I have his work permit."

"We're taking his body to the city morgue. The police will make a complete report of the incident. I have a form for you to sign, and we need to see his papers."

"Sure." Tanner strode to the Land Cruiser, jerked the door open, and slid into the driver's seat. He shouldn't have put paperwork above getting his hands dirty. He could have been down there. Maybe with his experience, the situation would have turned out differently. Tanner's heart broke for Daniel's family, and he said a silent prayer for their comfort and for what was going to come next for the mine and the rest of his team. He took several deep breaths, trying to regain his composure.

Opening the glove compartment, he grabbed a stack of work permits and thumbed through them until he located Daniel's. Fanning himself with the laminated card only stirred the stagnant air. The buzzing of his cell snapped him out of it. He scrubbed his hand down his face and pressed Accept to a call from the States.

“Hello, it’s Tanner.” Could this day get any worse?

“Tanner, Alexander Ward here. How’s it going?”

Spared by the question, Tanner shook his head. “Not a good day. There’s been an accident at the mine, and I’m currently sorting out the details. Can I get back to you?”

A beat passed.

“Shoot me the bottom line.”

“Please trust me, sir. Give me a little more time.” Tanner hoped his voice sounded positive.

“Yes, call me.” He drew in a deep, raspy breath. “I’ll be waiting.”

“Sir, are you okay? You sound out of breath. Aren’t you supposed to be resting?”

“The doc has it under control.”

“Get some rest. I’ll call you in the morning with more details then.” Tanner waited.

“Okay, son.” With that, the phone went silent.

Tanner lay his head on the headrest and stared at the ceiling. *Lord, what do I do now?*

With the weight of responsibility on his shoulders, he climbed out of the truck and took Daniel’s permit to the EMT, who shared the information with the investigating officer.

“Could I speak to my team before you start your interrogation?” Not waiting for an answer, Tanner turned and surveyed his employees. Vickie wept openly, tears dripping off her chin. Paul, a quiet Kenyan on the team, hung his head and covered his eyes. Drew, their mining expert, stood silent next to Dylan, watching Daniel’s body being taken to the ambulance.

The scraping of metal upon metal grated on Tanner when the gurney hit the base of the ambulance as the techs loaded their deceased passenger. The final slamming of the doors rang out, marking the end of a life, the loss of a friend.

Tanner exhaled. “Hey, guys, come out of the sun.” They gathered in the shade of a jacaranda tree. “Paul, get everyone a bottle of water. I need you to hydrate and stay close. We’ve been through a trauma, and the police will want to question each of us. This could be a long day.” Tanner failed to sound reassuring, even to his ears.

He stepped toward the ambulance and signed the body over to the EMTs before they drove away, dust billowing behind them.

The police didn’t waste any time. Their litany of inquiries added to the barrage of soul-searching questions Tanner had churning in his heart.

The officer in charge handed Daniel’s work permit to Tanner. “I’m Karani. I will be the investigating officer on this case. Walk me through the morning, starting with Mwangi going into the mine.”

The officer took the steps of the mining platform two at a time. Tanner and Dylan followed, explaining moment by moment how the accident happened.

“Who put this rope on the pulley?” He bent to inspect it.

“I did. I loaded a new sixty-foot rope on the spool yesterday before we left for the evening.” Dylan squatted next to the officer and pulled a portion of rope still dangling in the mine. “I secured it through the loop attached to the ladder, checked the pulley, and threaded it perfectly. We change the ropes regularly to keep the team safe in the mine.”

The officer wrote the detail in his spiral notebook.

“Dylan, pull it up. I want to see the end of the rope.” Tanner’s brow furrowed as Dylan complied, laying it in a coiled pile that reminded Tanner of the circling of a drain. After about twenty-five feet of rope, the end appeared. Tanner grabbed it. “It’s been cut. Look, it’s severed at a slant.”

The officer checked the cut and called his partner. “Kimiri,

did the medical team leave the rope they extracted from the victim's body?"

"Give me a minute." Kimiri searched the area, moved some bloody clothes, and unearthed a thick piece of sisal twine.

Tanner put the ends together. "A perfect match." His stomach knotted.

The officer sighed and surveyed the property as he walked the platform. "Kimiri, cordon this entire area, then go toward the beach and search the perimeter for footprints."

Officer Karani pivoted. "And, Zarello, keep your team at a distance—away from the scene."

"Why?" Tanner rubbed his chin.

The officer's eyes locked with Tanner's gaze. "Your employee was murdered."

"Did you say murdered?" The word scorched Tanner's tongue.

"Murdered! Who'd want to hurt Daniel?" Dylan leaned forward.

"I don't know, Dylan, but we'll find out." Heat surged up Tanner's neck as pressure built in his chest. He wiped perspiration off his brow.

Officer Karani recorded something on his tablet, then faced Tanner. "Do you have night guards employed?"

"Yes, they left before we arrived this morning."

"I'll need their names and addresses. Did they leave before your day guards arrived? Was the mine left unattended at any point?"

"Henry would have those answers." Tanner pointed to their day guard.

Karani turned, dismounting the platform to question the current guard manning the gate.

Tanner retrieved the work permits from the glove compartment of the Land Cruiser and returned to the crime

scene. With the laminated cards in hand, Tanner paced the graying boards of the mining platform. News of a murder would put them under review and possibly cost them their work permit. Kenya was strict on such matters. Keeping the location of the mine under wraps was next to impossible, but incredibly essential due to the extreme value of tanzanite. Apparently, someone wanting to hurt him had found the mine's location and killed the wrong guy. Would more attacks come? Should he be watching his back? He sighed, not realizing he'd been holding his breath. It was a lot to take in.

The police officers walked the perimeter and stopped at the footsteps on the sand.

"Drink some H₂O." Dylan handed him a bottle. "One minute we're horsing around, the next he's gone."

"It should have been me." Tanner removed his hat and ran his fingers through his hair.

"Don't say that!" Dylan jerked his head in Tanner's direction.

"I mean—it was my turn to go down first today." He plopped his hat on his head and eyed the officers.

"Do you think someone was trying to kill you?" Dylan kept his voice subdued. "Why?"

"Don't know, but I hope these Keystone Cops know what they're doing. Can you investigate a murder using only pens and carbon paper?" Tanner downed the water in gulps.

"I know the law and have followed evidence many times, but their methods are antiquated. Look, he's pouring plaster of paris into a footprint in the sand." Dylan watched the officer work the beach.

The platform moved as the investigator mounted the steps. "Did any of your team see the night guards today?" The chief investigator flipped to a new page in his steno pad.

"You'll have to ask them. They will answer you truthfully."

Tanner gave the work permits to the officer. "One guard is currently in Tanzania. His name is Juma Wanjiri. The other guard is Wycliff Matua."

"Wycliff's absence makes me think he knows something. The gate guard said Wycliff left as soon as he arrived."

Tanner spoke loudly to his employees. "Did anybody see Wycliff this morning?" They shook their heads.

"He was here yesterday, when I put the new rope on the pulley and learned our work schedule. Tanner, you may be on to something." Dylan faced the officer. "Tanner was supposed to be in the mine today. He may have been the target."

Karani scribbled something on a new page and then looked up from his notebook. "We're calling in the DCI on this case since Americans are involved." He paused. "They're the FBI of Kenya."

"Can we keep this out of the news?" Tanner chucked his water bottle. "We don't need reporters swarming the mine." The mid-morning sun added extra heat to a fiery situation.

"Yes, I'll make sure the investigation is kept mum, or under wraps, as you say in the States. Let's let them think they got their man. We will follow the evidence while the trail is warm." He joined his partner on the beach looking for clues.

"Dylan, tell Vickie and Paul to package yesterday's tanzanite for shipping." Tanner looked at his clipboard. "Have Drew turn off the generator and load the equipment. As soon as the officers have finished questioning the team, we're calling it a day. Everyone's too upset to work. Losing Daniel ... And we've got to buy another rope." Tanner gave instructions to his team.

"Sure, what are you going to do?" Dylan asked.

"Gather some clues of my own. Then, I'm going hunting. Whoever's responsible is going down." Tanner grabbed his cell

phone to take pictures and a pen to make notes. No one would take the life of their friend and get away with it.



After a long night in the waiting room, Angie stood at the end of her grandfather's hospital bed, taking in the seriousness of the situation. Reading him like a book, Angie knew he hated it when he couldn't purchase what he wanted. Good health couldn't be bought. Sensing his frustration, Angie moved closer. "Grand-Papa, relax and let them do their jobs. We need to know what's going on."

"You sound like your mother." He reached for her hand.

"I'll take that as a compliment." She rubbed his weathered skin.

Doc Ellis opened the door. "Good morning. How is our patient?"

"Hi, Doc. When I arrived, he was on his cell phone." Angie frowned at Grand-Papa.

"His work ethic is his biggest enemy." He pulled a stethoscope out of his jacket pocket. After listening to Ward's heart, he read his medical chart.

"Angie, would you ask Joseph to join us?"

"Sure. He's in the hall with Mason."

"I want to speak to you both." He checked Ward's pulse and watched the heart monitor.

Angie returned with Joseph, leaving a miffed Mason hovering in the hall where she'd asked him to remain.

"You wanted to see me, Doc?" Joseph motioned for Angie to take the seat beside her grandfather's bed.

"Yes, I'm glad you both are here." He turned to face their patient. "Alexander, I spoke with your cardiologist. You have pericarditis, an infection of the lining of your heart.

Though your heart is strong, stress and overexertion for an extended period have made it susceptible to this infection. Rest and relaxation are mandatory, as well as strong antibiotics.”

“So, he’s going to be okay?” Angie was hopeful.

“Well, we have another health issue we need to address.” He faced the patient. “I’ve been your physician for more than thirty years, that is—when you allowed me to be. You haven’t taken your health seriously. Ignoring your symptoms has led us to today.”

“This sounds serious, Doc, give it to me straight.”

“We’ve run a battery of tests, at your request, regarding the aches and pains in your right lower leg. They’ve brought us to the diagnosis—it’s cancer, and it’s metastasized.”

Ward froze. Didn’t blink an eye.

“Cancer!” Angie was on her feet. “Are you sure?”

“Yes. The aching in his bones, which he’s called arthritis, is bone cancer.”

He showed no emotion. *Grand-Papa must be in shock.*

“How bad is it?” Alexander put a shaky voice to the question that hung in the air.

The doctor sighed, paused, and let his gaze land on Joseph, then Angie, and finally Grand-Papa head-on. “Alexander, I’m sorry, but it’s terminal.”

“Can’t you operate, do chemo, or radiation? He can’t die!” Tears pooled in Angie’s eyes.

“Terminal.” Joseph stood, talking at the same time as Angie.

“I know you both have questions. This is a shock for all of you. The cancer started in his bones, spread to his lymph nodes, and is now in his blood.” Doc Ellis hung his head.

Grand-Papa’s shoulders slumped as he sighed. “How long do I have?”

The physician met his gaze. “Probably six to eight months. I’d advise you to get your affairs in order.”

Tears streamed unabated down Angie’s cheeks. She sat beside her grandfather’s hospital bed and slipped her hand into his.

“Does he need surgery or treatment? What do we do next?” Joseph searched for answers.

“The cancer is of an aggressive nature. It started in his right leg. If it had been diagnosed immediately, we could have amputated to keep it contained. Chemotherapy and radiation might give him another three months, but the formula he would need will make him very sick.”

Joseph turned to his friend. “Alexander, do you want to try chemo?” Joseph spoke with a strained voice.

Alexander didn’t hesitate. “No, I want to be as well as possible for whatever time I have. I need to keep a clear head as I transfer my assets and train the ones who will lead Ward Enterprises after I’m gone.” He was adamant. Left no room for discussion. He turned to Doc Ellis. “Thanks, Doc, for not mincing words.”

Angie stood, leaned closer, and hugged him. A sob escaped as she pressed her cheek to her grandfather’s.

“Everything is going to be fine, my dear. Trust me.” He cupped her cheek and dried her tears with his thumb. “The Lord and I have spoken frequently about your future.” When she pulled back, he managed a small smile. “We may question His timing, but He can be trusted with the details of our lives.”

She wiped her face. “I do trust Him, Grand-Papa, but I don’t want to lose you. I love you so much. Everyone I love dies.”

“I taught you to believe in miracles. We’re people of faith, so let’s pray for a miracle. Healing me is His choice. However or whenever my life ends, the Lord won’t leave you, my dear.

Always remember that.” He released her hand and looked at Joseph.

“Joseph, will you discuss this further with the doc? Get the details concerning the disease’s trajectory. I don’t want to hear anymore.”

“Absolutely.” Joseph followed the doctor as he left the room.

Angie’s grandfather’s heart monitor levels rose. “You okay, Grand-Papa?”

“Tough news. A hard pill to swallow.”

“I know.”

The head nurse hurried in with a cup of water and a tablet. “You need to rest now, Mr. Ward. Your heart rate is elevated. Try to sleep. You’ve had a rough night. You’ll be released sometime tomorrow with new meds.” She wrote something on his chart and dimmed the lights.

“You think you can sleep for a while?” Angie kissed his cheek and gathered her things.

“I will try.”



Mason hated it when the door closed, leaving him on the outside. But it didn’t latch. He could hear the doctor talking. As Angelica’s fiancé and Ward’s VP, he should have been invited in. *I’m practically family.*

Thumbing the screen of his cell, he acted as if waiting in the hall was his choice, but he gleaned bits and pieces of the conversation coming from Ward’s bedside as he leaned against the door frame.

He noted Ward’s impatience. Hearing the heart doctor’s diagnosis—Cancer! He didn’t see that one coming.

Mason walked the length of the hall. This put a new spin

on things. He needed to be made head of the company sooner rather than later. His marriage to Angelica needed to happen quickly so Ward could walk her down the aisle. They must set a wedding date. It was a lot to think about.

Returning to the door, he caught Ward's silence, Joseph's groping for treatment answers, and Angie's crying. That was to be expected.

Now, he could be a hero and help her through the grief process.

But when she said, everyone she loves leaves—what about him? He was still here. Or did she mean Zarello?

This was a wonderful turn of events.

He grabbed his phone, scrolled through the directory, dialed an overseas number, stepped outside the ICU unit for privacy, and waited for it to ring through.

"Wycliff—yes, I'm fine." Mason held his phone away from his ear, impatient with the litany of greetings the Kenyan used to start conversations. "How did it go?" Mason waited.

"The plan worked as we discussed. I paid the other night guard. He was helpful and is now hiding in Tanzania."

Mason paced the halls. "So, Wycliff, you did a good job for me? That's great news."

A stunning blonde strode in his direction. The nurse noticed him, and he winked.

"When I went back to see what was happening, there was a covered body, an ambulance, and the police investigators."

"Did you make sure it was Zarello?" Mason stopped short.

"I couldn't get close. They would see me and take me to jail. They hang people who kill in my country."

"I have to be certain it was him. Go find out and call me as soon as you know. This is critical. More benefits are coming your way if you don't fail me, Wycliff."

Mason pressed the Off button on his cell with force, then

strode back to the intensive care unit, frustrated by the incompetence of others, of things out of his control. But traveling to Kenya would be too risky. He had to trust the man he'd hired.

Clean hands spelled innocence.



Angie strutted into Ward Enterprises sporting a designer suit as if she owned the place. She arrived early, determined to relieve her grandfather's workload. Greeting secretaries along the way, she proceeded to the fifteenth floor and met Joseph in the hall.

"You're taking him home soon, I hope."

"Yes, after our budget meeting. I've convinced him to take a couple of days off." Joseph opened the office door for Angie.

"Thank you, Joseph."

Grand-Papa's private office suite exuded the power he carried. He smiled when she entered and held up one finger, then pointed to his computer, letting her know he was on a video conference call. She moved quietly on the plush carpet to join him.

"It's good to hear from you, Tanner. How are things?" Alexander Ward smiled at the computer screen.

Angie hesitated. *Tanner*. Hearing his voice sent her emotions reeling. Wouldn't Tanner be better at helping them through this? Which was unfair because Mason was doing his best. It wasn't his fault he excelled in business, but he was still learning the ropes of a serious romance. Would the news about Grand-Papa bring Tanner home for a visit? Probably not. She just had to get it through her thick skull, Tanner's plans didn't include her anymore. Even still, it hurt to believe it. She had to

suck it up. The tables had turned, and Grand-Papa needed her now.

Inching closer to her grandfather, she stayed away from the camera. Since their conversation in the parking lot, she didn't want him to read the pain in her eyes.

"Not so good, sir. That's why I'm calling. As I mentioned yesterday, there's been an accident at the mine. We have lost a good man, Daniel Mwangi, and our equipment was sabotaged during the night. After looking at the evidence, the police determined it was murder. What's worse is they killed the wrong man, because I was scheduled and their intended target."

Angie covered her mouth to smother a gasp, placed her hand on Grand-Papa's shoulder, and entered Tanner's field of vision.

"Why do you think you're their target?" The force of Ward's words betrayed his grave concern.

"I was next in line to work below the surface. Daniel took my place." Regret tinged his words.

"Who would be targeting you? Were they after the tanzanite? Are the police investigating this?" Questions tumbled out of Angie faster than Tanner could answer.

"Hello, Angie." He paused. "Don't know anyone who would want to hurt me. If they were after the jewels, they would have attacked during the day, when we were bringing them out of the mine. The police are conducting an investigation, and I've started a search of my own. They've hurt one of ours. Now, it's personal."

"Is it safe to work at the mine after today?" Ward leaned forward.

"I've hired extra guards. We'll resume mining tomorrow. But the Kenyan government is investigating the incident, threatening to revoke our work permit. I know you have

friends in high places, sir. Do you know someone in power we can appeal to?"

Angie read desperation in Tanner's deep mocha eyes, shadowed by furrowed brows.

"I have some acquaintances still in office from my last visit to Parliament. Let me make some contacts." Ward made a note on his iPad. "Since this has transpired, I want to hear from you more frequently."

"Yes, sir. It's my mess. I'll clean it up." Tanner sounded convincing.

"Be careful, son. And watch your back." Ward cautioned.

"Tanner, accidents happen in mines. This isn't your fault. Don't beat yourself up and don't try to be a hero, Tanner. Just finish the job—"

"Are you the boss now since you have a master's degree? Watch out, Mr. Ward, she will take over if you let her." Tanner teased.

"You're so funny. Don't quit your day job." She drew near the screen. "I was going to say, 'finish the job and come home safely.'" Without a goodbye, she stepped away and moved to the huge window overlooking Dallas, not seeing past the glass.

He'd let their relationship dwindle, allowing her to slip out of his life without explanation. After their brief encounter at her gala, she didn't know what to say or do when it came to Tanner Zarello.

Alexander Ward completed the call and faced Angie. "You okay, my dear?"

"I will be in a minute. Seeing Tanner again took me by surprise." She fanned herself with a piece of linen stationery. "I miss him, Grand-Papa."

"You two were pretty close at one time."

"*Were*, is the operative word. I don't know what happened. But trust me, it won't be a problem concerning me working at

Ward Enterprises.” She closed the conversation, tucking the turmoil deep within.

“He’s doing a stellar job running the mine for this company. It’s a great position for him at this point in his career. He’s a man of integrity, Angelica. I’m proud of him.” Ward pressed the intercom. “Carol, bring me my international phone list.”

“How long are you working today, Grand-Papa?”

“Only a couple of hours. Joseph is bringing lunch in, and we have a budget meeting. Then I’m going home.”

“Please don’t overdo it. You’ve only been out of the hospital for a couple of hours.”

“I’m pacing myself.” He took his phone list from Carol, his assistant.

Angie paced the office, thinking of the most effective strategy for the Kenyan situation. She understood their relationship was over, but her heart still wanted Tanner to be in this world ... he made it better by being her partner in mischief when they were young, by being her dance partner when she had to take lessons, by doctoring her skinned knees, and by rescuing her when she fell in the lake unconscious. “Are you going to call the vice president’s office? I’m sure Saitoti will help us.”

“It would be best to see him personally, but I’m not up for the trip.”

“I can go. He’ll remember me, and you can glean some benefit from the college bills you paid. I studied international business, so let me negotiate to keep the mine open until all the tanzanite has been harvested. They are close to the end of the project. I can do this, and you can save your strength, Grand-Papa. I want you around for a long time.”

A challenge of this magnitude would help her shake off the wounds Tanner’s loss inflicted. A trip was just the ticket. She

could put distance between herself and Mason and spend some time alone searching her heart.

“I don’t know. Africa is a dangerous place.”

Reading worry on his countenance, she cut off his pondering before he could say no. “I can handle myself in foreign countries. Give me two weeks, and I’ll get the job done and return safe and sound.” She leaned over and brushed a kiss on his cheek.

Her cell vibrated in her pocket. “My phone is buzzing, and I need to take this. Let’s talk later.” Before he could stop her, she hurried out the door with her phone to her ear.

Tanner may think he’s Tarzan. But Jane was the one with the brains.



Seeing Angie stunned Tanner. He’d dreaded making the call but didn’t expect Angie to be present. She looked amazing, perfect, except for the disappointment he read in her eyes when he saw her face. No matter how far away he was, she remained embedded in the recesses of his heart.

“You okay, man?” Dylan slid into the Land Cruiser as he ended the call.

“Yeah. Ward has some friends in power here in Kenya. He’s going to appeal for our permit to stay in effect until we complete the job.” Tanner ran his fingers through his hair.

“Was he upset?”

“No, just matter-of-fact like usual. Angie was there. I guess she’s working at the company now.” Tanner started the truck.

“By the look on your face, I assume it didn’t go well.”

“Nope, seeing her feels like dancing with a porcupine. But it hurts to lose her.” He gunned it and wove them into the

traffic flow. Chaotic Mombasa traffic would get his mind off the lovely Miss Ward.



“Sarah, will you get my luggage for me? It’s the three-piece set I use when I travel overseas.”

“Yes, Miss Angie.”

Angie retrieved her passport, checked the expiration date, and put it in her cross-body purse along with her money, hiding each in different compartments. As she entered her walk-in closet, her cell vibrated.

“Hello, Betty.” Angie listened as she selected some sandals. “That will be perfect. Thank you for getting this done so quickly. I have urgent business in Kenya for Ward Enterprises. Please send the itinerary to my email address and charge these tickets to the company account.”

“I’m glad there was a vacant seat for you in first class. Am I understanding right, you want the return open-ended?” The travel agent double-checked her facts.

“Yes, I’m hoping to get this done within two weeks, but it could take a couple more days. I’ll book my return after securing the mining permit for Ward Enterprises.” Angie surveyed her closet while talking to the travel agent.

“Your itinerary will be in your inbox momentarily. Have a safe trip and call me again when I can be of service.”

Angie ended the call and packed her suitcases. Two business suits, some casual outfits, three sundresses, jeans, tennis shoes, and a bathing suit, in case she could relax around a hotel pool for an afternoon. With sunscreen added to her toiletry collection, a set of international plugs and adapters, and a 220-volt hair dryer, she closed the first bag. Her

excitement built as she put in the last pair of shoes and some reading material for the long flights.

Her phone dinged, signaling a text.

Hello, my fiancé ... thinking of you ... going into a meeting ... will call you tonight. Mason

But Angie would be flying across the ocean tonight. She'd inform him of this overseas trip by text once she got past security. Mason was a lot of things, but especially protective—there was no way he would approve.

She texted back a smiley face. He would think she was driving or really busy and couldn't talk.

And she was busy preparing for an African adventure.

