

Chasing
Tanzanite

Shirley Gould



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I dedicate this book to one of my dearest friends, Carol Adams. For over fifty years, she has shown up during my darkest hours. I'm forever grateful to call her my friend.



Prologue

Leaving Kenya behind schedule put Tanner arriving late in London. Scanning the departure board, he realized his flight to Dallas was already boarding. He couldn't miss this flight. He'd promised to see Angie receive her master's degree, and he wouldn't let her down. Again. The miles between them had put distance in their relationship that needed to be remedied right away. That was his plan.

"Paging Tanner Zarello. Paging Tanner Zarello for flight BA 572 to Dallas, Texas, now boarding at gate C33. The doors are closing in five minutes."

Hearing his name over the loudspeaker, Tanner panicked and sprinted the last hundred feet to the gate. He had to see Angie, the love of his life, and if he could make the flight, he'd be with her in fifteen hours. "I'm here. Don't shut the doors yet!" With a wrinkled pass in his hand, he rushed through the door and boarded the plane.

Yes! I made it! While trying to catch his breath, Tanner found his row in first class, stored his carry-on, and almost fell into his assigned seat.

"Close connection?" The guy in the next seat asked.

“Too close. My plane was late, and I have to get to Dallas for a graduation celebration of a dear friend, so I ran. Jumping over two carry-ons surprised their owners but helped me make it. I can’t wait to see her again. The next flight from London to Dallas isn’t for five hours, and I promised her I’d be there.”

“That’s a huge deal.” Jake put his hand out. “I’m Jake Stevens. Glad you made the flight.”

“Me too. Tanner Zarello.” He shook Jake’s hand. “Her name’s Angie. We’ve been friends since childhood, but I want to take our relationship to the next level. We need some FaceTime. Working in Kenya for the last few years has cost us.”

“And you are about to remedy that situation.” Jake fastened his seatbelt.

“That’s the plan. My job in Kenya has been successful. I’ve proven myself to the execs, but it’s ending soon, and I’m ready to take some definite steps toward our future. That’s my goal for this trip. So, where are you coming from, Jake?”

“I’ve been doing children’s ministry in Kenya. I’m on my way home.”

“It must pay well for you to be in first class.” Tanner fastened his seatbelt.

“My seat in coach was double-booked, so they bumped me up.” The flight attendant served sodas in stemware. “I hope you make it in time.”

“Thanks.” Tanner settled in as they took off from London Heathrow.

After a long nap, Tanner smiled as the British Airways flight landed in Texas. “It’s good to be home.” He gave Jake his business card. “Let me know when you’re in Kenya again, preferably in the Mombasa area. If I’m in the country, we can grab a meal together.”

“I will. Thanks.” Jake pocketed the business card and left the plane.

Tanner was right behind him. He had a schedule to keep and couldn't wait to see Angie.



Traffic hindered his trek to the university, but rushing inside, he arrived as they started calling the graduates. He got himself in a perfect position to video the moment, and it didn't disappoint.

“Angelica Joy Ward, Master in International Business.”

Applause filled the auditorium. Tanner stopped the video on his phone and joined in the celebration before slipping out the door to drive to the Windsor Mansion for the celebratory dinner in Angie's honor. Being there to greet her upon her arrival would be perfect. But parking his SUV in front of the building hadn't been his smartest move. He had to wait for the main lot to empty, where the graduates parked, before he could join the traffic flow.

He arrived at the mansion right after the reception had started. An attendant took his arrangement of red roses with daisies to put it on Angie's gift table. “Mr. Ward is presenting his granddaughter. Slip inside this side door so you can join the celebration.”

“Thank you.” He did as suggested and stood behind Harry Connick Jr., the evening's musical guest, and listened to Alexander Ward.

Tanner's mom, Olivia, joined him. She'd worked for the Ward's family for twenty years and was like family to Angie. “Hi, Mom.”

“I'm glad you made it,” she whispered. “You're just in time.”

Tanner put his arm around his mom, focused on Angie,

who was ravishing, and listened to Alexander Ward talk about his granddaughter.

“Angelica, you’re an amazing young woman, but first and foremost, you’re my granddaughter. Watching you mature has resembled the blossoming of a rare rose. It is my honor to present you to our guests.”

Well-deserved applause filled the large marble-tiled foyer, and the chandelier glistened over the momentous occasion. The place was regal, and Angie was stunning in her tanzanite blue gown, highlighting her blue eyes. Her grace was not unlike royalty. “I’ve missed her.”

“I know you have.” His mom put her hand on his elbow.

His eyes caught movement in the crowd as Mason Malone, the pompous brown-nosing VP at Ward Enterprises, plunged through the guests to reach Angie. She nodded and accepted the roses he presented before he knelt on one knee.

“No! Tanner, he’s proposing to Angie.” Olivia stared at him.

Tanner held his breath. His ringing ears made it hard to hear. He wanted to yell, to plow through the crowd and slug Mason.

“Mom, he’s just a suit.”

“I know. I thought things were good between you and Angie. What happened?”

“He’s not worthy of her.”

“I don’t understand.”

“This is a nightmare.” Heart pounding, wound crushing, he couldn’t stay another moment. “Mom, I can’t stay—forgive me.”

“Go, dear. I’m so sorry.”

Easing out of the crowd, he escaped using the door through which he’d entered. Rushing toward a bush, he lost his stomach’s contents. Using the small scarf from his front pocket, he wiped his mouth. Sliding into the seat of his black

Hummer, he turned the air-conditioning on high and leaned his head on the headrest. *Lord, help me. I can't think straight. I've lost her.*

The intro to Angie's favorite song played on the radio, and Tanner slammed the on/off button, cracking the knob. He scrubbed his hand down his face and cranked the SUV. It was time for a quiet exit. It was time to return to Kenya.