

CHAPTER TWO

Ami

ANGELA's mother picked her up for church the next morning as arranged.

As soon as Angela and her mother walked into church, Angela saw Ami, sitting alongside her husband Bill.

Angela was surprised to see her. They had been friends since childhood, and even got married around the same time, but nine years ago Ami and her husband Bill had moved to a distant city.

Ami looked so pretty and slim that Angela felt like a frump in comparison. They were both the same age.

Angela was relieved that Ami had not seen her. So she avoided any eye contact with Ami and sat with her mother during the service.

At first Angela was self-conscious and felt that people were staring at her. But she enjoyed singing the lively hymns and by the time the service ended she felt relaxed and peaceful.

However, to avoid meeting Ami and having to answer awkward questions, Angela asked her mother for the car keys and then walked quickly out to the car park with her head down. She then sat and waited in her mother's car and soon became lost in her thoughts.

She was startled when the car door suddenly opened and there was Ami's pixie-like face beaming down at her.

"Angie! Here you are. How good to see you. I've been looking all over for you."

Angela smiled back, deeply embarrassed. She got out of the car and hugged Ami. How slim she felt. "Oh Ami, it's so good to see you too. And you look so well. What brings you back home?"

"We're living back here now. Bill's been transferred. We moved back last weekend. Oh I'm so happy. I love it here. How's Ted? Hey, we'll have to all get together again."

"Oh he's fine," said Angela, forcing a smile. "He's taken the children out all day today."

"How nice. Where to?" asked Ami.

"I'm ah, ... not sure," replied Angela, feeling uncomfortable.

“Well look Angie, I’d better not keep Bill and the children waiting any longer. I’ll pop round and visit you this afternoon and we’ll catch up on all the news.”

“Well, . . . um, . . . I . . . well, OK then Ami. That would be nice. See you then.”

When her mother dropped her off at home, Angela changed into her black slacks and put on her comfortable dark green pullover. The house was empty and quiet. Ted had obviously picked up the children OK.

While she stood in the kitchen preparing her lunch, Angela decided to tell Ami the truth about her separating from Ted. She would soon find out anyway.

Later that afternoon, Angela was sitting anxiously on the couch, smoking a cigarette and trying to read a magazine, when she heard Ami’s car come up the driveway.

Her heart beat faster and her hands felt clammy. She stubbed out the cigarette.

“Come in Ami,” she called, hearing her footsteps out on the patio.

Ami walked through the open door smiling. Angela thought she looked a picture of health and happiness. Her shiny black hair was flowing around her shoulders and she wore a pink dress.

Angela remained sitting on the couch, nervously rolling up the magazine. “Well here goes,” she thought.

“Ami, Ted and I have separated.” She said it quickly, avoiding Ami’s gaze.

Ami appeared stunned for a moment. Then she sat at Angela’s side and put her arm around her. “Oh Angie, no!”

Angela tried to hold back her tears, but could not. Her shoulders began to heave and she burst out in loud sobs. Ami held her tight and let her sob. She then took a tissue from her purse and gave it to Angela.

“You sit right there Angie. Let me make you a nice hot chocolate drink. Then you can tell me all about it. You seemed such a happy couple when you first got married.”

“I’ll come and help too,” said Angela sniffing and wiping her tears as she stood up.

They both went into the kitchen, and Angela turned on the stove to heat some milk then said to Ami, “Ted has his own business now. He still fixes cars. Just him and an apprentice. He seems to have lots of work, but he works long hours. I used to do the books for him. You know how useless he is at maths. He has to do it all himself now. He’s bound to muck it up.”

“How long has he been gone now Angie?”

“Over two months now. It was such a relief at first. No more tension. But now . . . I don’t know. I seem more tense than ever. He’s changed since you knew him Ami.”

“He won’t do anything around the house. He hardly ever speaks to me. And when he does it’s only to complain about



something.”

“Honestly, he criticises me all the time. I had my hair cut and permed and he said I looked awful. And it was really nice. All my friends said so.”

“He just doesn’t respect me any more Ami. He never discusses anything with me, just glares at me. He still does. He even beat me up.”

“Oh Angie. I can’t believe that. Tall, gentle Ted, beat you up? That man’s as gentle as a lamb.”

“Well he slapped me,” said Angela.

“Did he? What led up to him doing that?”

“Nothing. I just told him that he wouldn’t have a business if it wasn’t for me doing his books. Which is true.”

“Oh yes, and what else? I know what your tongue and temper can be like Angie.”

“Well, I did tear up some of his invoice books and throw them on the floor. The way he was treating me I wasn’t going to do anything more for him?”

Ami sighed, “That sounds like you Angie. But he shouldn’t have hit you. Where do you keep your cups?”

“Use those two mugs over there Ami.”

“And he didn’t want me to go back teaching. I can’t imagine why. All my friends are working. I told him he wasn’t bringing in enough money. He had to borrow a lot to start his business. And on top of that he goes out and buys a new van. Anyway, I did go back to work. I was tired of being stuck at home all day.”

They took their hot chocolate drinks into the living room and sat back on the couch. Angela lit another cigarette.

“I didn’t think you would start smoking again Angie. Remember how we both gave up together after that horrible cancer film at school?”

“I think it helps me relax Ami. You would probably start smoking again too if you were going through the hell I’m going through.”

“I don’t think so”, said Ami. “It’s not very feminine.”

“Well anyway Ami, you’ve heard enough about my problems. How’s everything with you and Bill?”

“Oh Angie, Bill and I have never been happier. He just spoils me rotten lately. I love him so much. We’ve got four lovely children now. One boy and three girls. You remember Becky, the eldest, who was born here, she’s twelve now.”

“Yes. Her and David are the same age,” said Angela.

“That’s right, it was so neat when we were both pregnant together,” said Ami smiling.

“Yes, it was,” said Angela.

“Actually Angie, to be honest with you, last year Bill and I had a few problems too. He got laid off work, and I didn’t handle it very well at the time. That’s when I took the Fascinating Womanhood course.”

“What do you mean, Fascinating Womanhood course?” said Angela.

“Oh, it’s the best thing I’ve ever done Angie,” said Ami, smiling widely. “I thought our marriage was pretty good, but now it’s wonderful. Honest. I’ve never been so happy in my whole life. Bill seems happy too. And he enjoys his new job.”

Angela felt a peaceful feeling come over her as Ami talked. Strangely she also seemed to sense the presence of her father in the room. She stubbed out her half smoked cigarette.

“It’s a course on how to bring out the best in our husbands. You learn ten secrets about men. Oh Angie, I think you need to go through it. I really do. From what you’ve told me, I think you’ve made some big mistakes with poor Ted.”

Angela’s peaceful feeling suddenly vanished and she felt her temper rise. “Poor Ted? Me made mistakes?” she said. “It’s him, not me. I’ve done nothing wrong. He won’t talk to me! He won’t take me out. I tried to make him go to a marriage counsellor. But would he? Oh no, not him!”

“I’ve done my best to change him for his own good, but all he thinks about is his stupid business. Puts it before me, and before the children. And he buys a new van. He can’t afford it. The business isn’t doing that well. He’s just acting the big shot. And he’s never home. Work! Work! Work! That’s all he thinks about. I’ve got feelings too. And if he ever smiled at me it would crack his face.”

“Oh Angie, come on now. Ted used to smile at you all the time when you were courting.”

“Well he doesn’t any more. I tell you Ami, he’s changed. He’s always grumpy, even with the children, except when he’s been on the booze. Anyway its over! I don’t want him any more. I told him that. I don’t love him. I’m going to find somebody who really cares about us.”

“Angie, you won’t find anyone better than Ted. Who else will love your children like he does? He’s their real father. You can’t change that. Do you really think your children will accept another father? And what if you do find another man, and he has children too? You’d be their step-mother you know. Could you love them like your own? Would they love you back?”

Angela felt depressed at Ami’s words. “Maybe you’re right Ami. I don’t know. Who would want me anyway? Look how fat I am.”

“You hold the key to all this Angie. We women hold the key to happiness in our marriage. You can bring back the old Ted. The one who loved you. The Ted who married you.”

“It’s too late Ami. It won’t work. Ted won’t change. I’ve tried and tried and tried.”

Ami smiled. “It’s not too late at all Angie. Look, I’ll find out if they hold a Fascinating Womanhood class here. If they do, will you take the course?”

“I don’t think so Ami. I’m so busy since Ted left.”

“I’ll come with you if you like.”



A woman can build or destroy a man.

“Well, . . . I might. . . . If you came too Ami.”

Ami’s eyes sparkled. “Good on you Angie. You’ll be so glad you did. Oh I do hope they hold them here.”

About an hour later, after chatting about old times, Ami said goodbye to Angela and left. She had just backed her car out onto the road when Ted drove up to the kerb in his van. David and Tiphony climbed out and ran excitedly inside to their mother Angela.

“Hi Ted” called out Ami, waving and smiling through her open window. Ted looked puzzled at first. Then he smiled broadly as he recognised her. He immediately got out of his van and walked over to her, still smiling broadly.

“Ami. Good to see you.”

“Nice to see you too Ted. It’s been a long time. Sorry to hear about you and Angie.”

“Yeah,” said Ted, suddenly looking serious and lowering his head.

“How’s Bill?” he asked.

“Fine, just fine. He’s been transferred back here. We moved last weekend.”

“Hey, that’s good news,” said Ted, smiling again. “You’re looking really well, Ami.”

“Thank you Ted,” smiled Ami. “Well I must be off.”

“Bye Ami. Say hello to Bill for me.”

Two weeks later, on Monday evening, Angela was serving the evening meal when the phone rang. She answered it curtly, annoyed at the interruption.

“Hi Angie, it’s me Ami. Hey guess what? The Fascinating Womanhood course is taught here. They hold it in a downstairs room in the Civic Playhouse. And we’ve timed it just right. A new course starts soon. They’re going to hold an introduction night this Wednesday at 7.30. Will you come with me? Please Angie. You did promise.”

Angela couldn’t help smiling at Ami’s enthusiasm.

“OK Ami. I’ve been thinking about it. Yes, I’ll come with you. And if it’s half as good as you say, I’ll take the course.”

“Oh great! Remember it starts at 7.30. I’ll meet you outside about ten minutes before, or do you want me to come and pick you up?”

“No, I’ll be there Ami.”

“All right. See you then. Bye Angie.”