

# Love like this

SYDNEY  
LOGAN

## Chapter One

“You’re doing such a brave thing, Angelica.”

Angelica Roberts gazed at her little bakery, with its pink exterior and white shutters.

“Doesn’t feel brave,” she said, staring at the closed sign hanging in the window.

Nestled between a bookstore and flower shop, *Angelica’s Sweet Treats* offered everything from cookies to wedding cakes. Once upon a time, it was a thriving small business in the heart of downtown Nashville. Then the economy tanked, and she’d watched with sadness and dread as the surrounding businesses closed up shop.

*Angelica’s Sweet Treats* had somehow survived.

Until today.

She was heartbroken, knowing that with the turn of the closed sign, she was finally giving up and walking away from her dream. She’d been doing that a lot lately—walking away from dreams. All of which had been completely out of her control.

Now, not only was she divorced, she was unemployed.

“Well, I think it’s brave,” Naomi said. “When God closes a door, He opens a window.”

Angelica smiled sadly at her best friend. Naomi had been the owner of the failed flower shop next door, so she had experience with the grief of losing a business. Angelica was grateful to have her by her side today, but honestly, she just couldn’t find anything positive about the fact that her bakery was gone.

“I hope that’s true,” Angelica said, linking her arm with her friend’s. “I *need* a window. A great big window, because I’m going to be homeless if I don’t find another job soon.”

Angelica gave her bakery one last, wistful look before the two of them headed down the sidewalk. Despite her broken heart, it was a beautiful spring day in Music City.

“What about child support?” Naomi asked. “Won’t that cover your mortgage?”

“Yes, but you know how I feel about taking Ben’s money.”

“You’re raising his son, Ang. You *need* that money.”

She knew Naomi was right. She’d gotten the same speech from her attorney. Throughout the divorce proceedings, Angelica had been firm in her refusal of one red cent from her cheating ex who broke her heart and ripped it into a million pieces. But in the end, she was forced to accept that she needed it. Because her *son* needed it. And that was the only reason she agreed to accept child support.

It was a good thing, too. They’d definitely need it now.

“Let me buy you a late lunch,” Naomi offered.

Angelica shook her head. “Can’t. I need to run some errands and then pick up Zayne from school. Oh, he made me promise to ask if you were still coming to his party tonight.”

“Of course! It starts at five?”

“Five on the dot. I was told to emphasize *on the dot*.”

Naomi laughed. “I’ve been late once. Once! And he’s never gonna let me live that down.”

“You know my kid. He never forgets. And if we’re one minute off schedule he tends to have a mini-meltdown. We’re working on it.”

“You know, I’ve never been to a dog’s birthday party before. Will his dog friends show up?”

Angelica grinned. “No other dogs were invited. I promise.”

“Zayne’s a great kid. And you’re a great mom.” Naomi hugged her tight before hailing a cab. “Want to share?”

“Nah, I’ll get my own. I’m headed across town to the pet store. Gotta pick up a present, you know.”

“I bet you can’t wait until your car’s out of the shop,” Naomi said as she opened the taxi door. “See you at five. On the dot!”

Angelica waved as the taxi sped away. She felt a little guilty. She’d just lied to her friend. A white lie, but a lie, nonetheless.

She sat down on a nearby bench and waited.

Taxis could be expensive.

The bus . . . not so much.

She had zero income now. Sure, she had some savings—and the child support that she didn’t like to talk about—but still, cabs were a luxury. She needed to save her money for the mechanic that was holding her car for ransom until this month’s child support check hit the bank.

Until then, Angelica would be riding the bus.

While she waited, she gazed at the city around her. Normally, she loved to people watch, but not today. Everywhere she looked, all she saw were smiling faces as folks entered and exited little shops just like hers. Angelica couldn’t deny she was jealous—of both the happy faces and the bustling businesses.

Maybe her ex-husband had been right all along. Maybe she didn't have what it takes to run her own business.

Tears filled her eyes. She didn't even try to blink them back. Angelica let them fall, knowing she'd earned a good cry. Besides, she needed to get it out of her system before she faced her kid. Zayne was so finely tuned to his mom's emotions that her sadness quickly became his, and vice versa.

That's the last thing Angelica wanted tonight. They were hosting his dog's birthday party tonight, after all.

So, right there on that bench, she let herself cry. For her failed marriage. Her failed business. Her failed life.

Then, she wiped her eyes and pulled her phone out of her bag, scrolling for Zayne's picture. Well, one of them. She probably had over a thousand on her phone. As Angelica gazed at her ten-year-old's face, she reminded herself that—while she'd made a mess of almost everything in her life—the one thing she was good at would be home soon.

Zayne needed her to be strong. And so, she would be.

Because, at the end of the day, Angelica Roberts wasn't just a baker.

She was a mom.

And nothing was more important than that.



“Happy Birthday, dear Charlie. Happy birthday to you!”

Everyone clapped as Zayne offered Charlie, the boy's golden retriever, a giant rubber ball. The grateful dog barked happily before taking the ball and racing around the backyard. Before Zayne ran off to join him, he wrapped his arm around his mom's shoulder.

“Thanks for Charlie's present, Mom. You know he can't have cake.”

“I know, buddy. You're welcome. Let's thank our guests before you go play, okay?”

With a nod, Zayne cleared his throat and turned to the guests.

“Thank you all for coming today. Charlie can't have cake because the ingredients can make him sick. But Mom stayed up late last night making a strawberry cake with vanilla buttercream icing for all of you. It's in the shape of a bone. You guys can eat now.”

Angelica beamed with pride as their family and friends thanked Zayne before heading to the dessert table. Only six people showed up, but that was plenty. Those people—including Naomi, Angelica's mom, Zayne's teacher, and three friends from his school—loved her son almost as much as she did, and they knew how important this day was to him.

Charlie, her son's service dog, had been such a godsend, and today was his birthday. He deserved to be celebrated.

While everyone ate, Angelica gazed at her son and his dog as they played in the backyard. Charlie had been with Zayne for almost three months now, and the change in the young boy was remarkable.

Right after his seventh birthday, Zayne's doctor had confirmed what Angelica already knew—that her son was autistic. From that moment on, Angelica began to educate herself on what that really meant, and what that meant for her son's development and well-being. Her ex-husband, on the other hand, who'd never really bonded with his son, became even more distant after the diagnosis. That distance, along with their already rocky marriage, led to their divorce, which became final just six months ago.

Naturally, Ben didn't show today. Her ex was nothing if not predictable.

"This cake is delicious."

Angelica glanced over to find Sandi, her mother, standing by her side.

"Sorry," her mom smiled. "Penny for your thoughts?"

"They aren't worth much. I was just thinking about Ben. I can't believe he's missing this."

"Really? I'm not surprised at all."

Her mom had never been a fan. These days, Sandi rarely missed the chance to remind her daughter that she'd told her so. That she'd always known that Ben Roberts was a selfish deadbeat who wouldn't be a good provider. But Angelica had been in love.

*Love makes you blind. And stupid.*

"Zayne's so happy," Sandi said, gazing at her grandson as he and his friends played with Charlie in the grass. "His tantrums are better. He doesn't get as overwhelmed in public or at the doctor's office. His teacher even says he concentrates better in class with Charlie by his side. That dog was worth every penny."

"I know. I'm so thankful we found him."

"And thankful you could afford him. Lucky that you bought him *before* you lost your bakery."

Angelica sighed tiredly. Her mom, who loved her grandson more than life, had a bad habit of saying whatever she was thinking before really considering the weight of her words. Angelica was used to it, but it still hurt sometimes.

"Yes, Mom. Very lucky."

"Angelica, you know if you need help, just until you get back on your feet—"

"Thanks. But we're okay. I have savings, and Ben's been paying his child support on time."

"That won't last, you know. You can't rely on Ben. You must find a job, Angelica. Something that works around Zayne's schedule. You won't be able to set your own hours like you did at the bakery."

"I know that," she said with a sigh. "But I can only focus on one thing at a time. It's the only way I'll stay sane. And right now, I'm choosing to focus on my son and his dog's birthday party. Excuse me."

After checking on Zayne and his friends, Angelica headed into the kitchen to find Naomi pouring a glass of wine.

"How did you know?" she asked.

"You're throwing a birthday party for a dog. Call it a hunch."

Angelica laughed and gratefully took a sip.

"Where's yours? You know I hate drinking alone."

Naomi grinned sheepishly. “I’m afraid you’re going to have to get used to it, at least for the next nine months.”

Angelica’s eyes widened. “You’re pregnant?!”

“I know!”

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

Naomi shrugged. “It’s Charlie’s night.”

Angelica hugged her best friend tightly. Naomi and her husband had been trying to have a baby for years.

“The timing couldn’t be more perfect, really,” Naomi said, smiling brightly. “My web design business is finally taking off, and Mike was just promoted at the bank. We’re so, so blessed.”

“I’m so happy for you! You’re going to be an amazing mother, Naomi.”

“Well, if I am, it’s because I learned from the best. *You*. Just look at him, Ang. Look how happy he is.”

They peered out the kitchen window. Zayne was laughing in the grass, with his trusty service dog right by his side. The smile on his face stretched from ear-to-ear.

“I can’t let him down, Naomi.”

“You won’t. This bakery thing? It’s just a speed bump. Good things are coming, Ang. For me, for you, and for Zayne and Charlie. I can feel it.”

As Angelica gazed at her beautiful boy, she prayed her best friend was right.



“Mom,” Zayne asked as he laid in bed with his tablet. “Did you know that Steph Curry played thirty-two minutes per game during the 2017 and 2018 basketball season?”

It was eight o’clock—on the dot—and that was bedtime. Zayne thrived on a consistent schedule, so at eight each night, he was in bed, always with his tablet, and always with Charlie by his side. They had a crate for the dog, but Charlie had slept with Zayne since his very first night in the house.

“Nope, I didn’t know that,” Angelica said as she finished hanging his clothes in the closet. Zayne had chores, and he was great at sorting his laundry and putting it away in the dresser, but they both preferred she deal with the closet.

“And that was just during the regular season. During the playoffs, he played 35.3 minutes per game.”

Zayne’s schedule allowed for thirty minutes of screen time before lights out. While the doctor had cautioned against screens right before bed, Angelica had found that his tablet actually calmed him. Every kid was different—whether they were autistic or not—and screen time before bed worked for them. It may not work forever, but it worked for now, and *for now* was good enough for them.

“I think they can win the championship this year,” Zayne said. “*If* the team can avoid more injuries.”

Angelica smiled. Her son's fascination with NBA basketball—and the Golden State Warriors—was a relatively new hobby and one she couldn't relate to at all. Zayne could rattle off basketball stats as easily as Angelica could recite wedding cake recipes. She was constantly amazed by the knowledge he could retain and interpret with ease, while also struggling with basic tasks that came so easily to other kids his age.

Autism was a wild, wonderful puzzle.

"When's their next game?" Angelica asked, making her way over to the bed.

"Tomorrow night on ESPN. But it is a West Coast game, which means it doesn't start until 9:30 Central Time, which is past my bedtime. But I can watch highlights on my tablet the next day. I really don't like time zones, Mom."

Angelica chuckled. "Yeah, those time zones can be a pain. Maybe they'll play on the East Coast soon."

"They play Memphis next Friday in Memphis. And Memphis is just 212 miles from here. We can't get tickets. They're sold out. But maybe next time."

"Maybe so." Angelica smiled and tousled his hair. "Do you need anything before light's out?"

Zayne shook his head and turned off his tablet.

"Thank you for Charlie's party, Mom."

"You're very welcome."

"I guess Dad didn't want to come."

"I guess not. I'm sorry, buddy."

"You don't have to be sorry. You were here."

"I know, but I'm sorry, anyway." Angelica sighed softly. "Alarm set?"

Zayne pushed a button on his watch. "Alarm set."

"I love you, buddy. Good night."

"Love you, too. Good night."



For Angelica, nights were the hardest. The house was quiet, and she didn't have Zayne or Charlie to distract her from the negative thoughts that filled her with loneliness, anxiety, and dread.

And now, she didn't even have her bakery to keep her mind occupied.

Unable to sleep, she made herself some tea and grabbed her laptop. As she sat at the kitchen table, she searched online, looking for any local restaurants or bakeries that might need a professional baker or pastry chef. But like every other night, she came up empty, and a disheartened Angelica put the laptop away before heading to her pantry.

For the next two hours, she baked cupcakes, decorating them with all the creativity and care she could muster. After boxing them up, she took the one treat she'd set aside—a lemon cupcake with white chocolate buttercream frosting—and took a huge, delicious bite.

And, at that moment, she was happy.