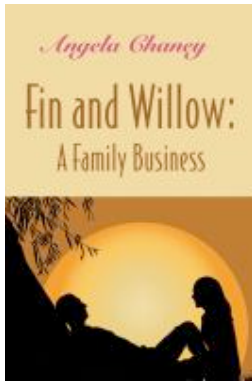


Angela Chaney

Fin and Willow:

A Family Business





Fin and Willow have been friends for over twenty years. It is a friendship that has endured cancer, a failed marriage, and a stalker who threatened both Willow and her daughter, Katie. As a result, Fin wastes no time in proposing. Will accepts, moves back to Austin to be with Fin, and is ready to start the rest of their lives together. Now, they will live happily ever after...or will they?

Fin and Willow: A Family Business

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Angela Chaney

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First Edition

Prologue

Fin never did marry me in San Antonio. In fact, at least a month went by before we even talked about it again. I have to say, I was getting a little nervous.

I'm Willow Ann Fairchild, Will to all my friends. At forty years old, I feel like I've been through hell and back but I'm finally in a good place. Well, at least I hope so.

Finlay Pennington and I have been best friends since college. We're going on twenty years now. We've survived life together. Fin helped me through breast cancer and a horrible marriage. He also helped me through an attempted murder. That last thing was partially his fault, though. Fin always had a slew of leggy blonds following him around. He attracts women like flies. This last one got a little too attached to him and found me to be a nuisance so she tried to "off" me.

Fin is drop dead gorgeous. Think Robert Redford gorgeous. He had the sexiest accent I've ever heard. It was very southern, like from the Deep South even though he was a native of Texas. His accent reminded me of Scarlett O'Hara and Dennis Quaid from *The Big Easy* all rolled into one. I could have listened to him read the phone book and it would have put me "in the mood" if you know what I mean.

After twenty years of being friends, Fin and I took that last step and became lovers. He proposed to me after I had just survived the attempted murder. I said yes and Fin insisted we get married the next day. Ha!

Instead of getting married that same day as originally intended, Fin called his parents to tell them we were okay (the attempted murder made the news) and his mother asked that we wait until we moved back to Austin. I'd moved down to San Antonio the year before after a rather large misunderstanding with Fin. Once we got back to Austin, life got in the way. Fin had emergencies with his business that he had to take care of. Who knows? Maybe he forgot.

In Fin's defense, he *had* been really busy at work. He owns a property management company, Pennington Properties. It's a business I actually helped him build. We started it together right out of college with one little property. Now the company owns and/or manages over twenty-five residential properties throughout Texas. It is currently in a bit of a mess because of a few bad hiring decisions Fin made after I left.

Did I mention that I have a daughter? Her name is Katie and she's six months old. I know I'm a little old to have such a young daughter. She's

what you'd call a "pleasant surprise." And before you ask, no, Fin isn't her biological father. That's a story for another time. Fin is, however, her adoptive father (he was there when my sweet girl was born). He started the adoption proceedings the day we were supposed to get married. The adoption is complete and my daughter's last name is now Pennington. At least that makes one of us...

Chapter 4

Saturday, Will was getting dressed. It was her wedding day...again. This time, she was marrying the *right* guy.

Will was wearing a lavender dress that went to mid-calf. It had a satin bodice, and a layer of soft lace that went over the skirt. It also had a matching long sleeve top that went over the bodice. She'd pulled her dark hair up and had braided in lavender ribbon. She had curls hanging around her face. Her heels matched her dress.

She was staring at herself in the mirror when she heard a knock at the door.

"Come in," she called.

The visitor was her future mother-in-law. Greta Finlay Pennington was a beautiful woman with a regal bearing. She didn't look anywhere near her sixty years. Her hair was blond, her eyes the same twinkling blue as Fin's and her face was smooth. She was the epitome of a genteel Southern woman.

"Willow, you look absolutely beautiful."

"Thanks, mom. You really think Fin will be pleased?"

"Sweetheart, I think you could show up in gym shorts and a ratty t-shirt and my son would be pleased," said Greta smiling. "We are so glad that you both decided to wait until we could join you."

"Me too."

"Well, are you ready? The boys are waiting."

Will took a deep breath. Then she clasped hands with her mother-in-law and the two of them joined the rest of the family.

Fin was meeting Will at the courthouse. He and Will had decided that they would stick with tradition and that he wouldn't see her the day before the wedding. Will and Katie were staying with his parents.

Fin saw a familiar car pull into the parking lot. He held his breath and then exhaled in disappointment when he saw that it was his sister, Chelsea, and her boyfriend, Jeff. They got out of the car and met Fin on the steps.

Chelsea kissed her brother on the cheek. Fin reached over and shook Jeff's hand.

"You ready?" asked Chelsea.

"Yeah," said Fin distractedly. "Where's Nic?"

Nic was Nicole, Fin's youngest sister.

"She was right behind me. You okay?"

“Yeah. Just waiting for Will.”

Chelsea smiled at her brother. She’d never seen him so nervous.

“Don’t worry, Fin. She’ll be here.”

Fin glanced over at the parking lot when another car pulled in. He muttered a curse. It was Nicole. Where was Will?!?

Nicole joined her brother and sister on the steps of the courthouse. She kissed Fin’s cheek and looked over at Chelsea, surprised. Chelsea just shook her head and grinned. Chelsea patted her brother on the back and then went with Jeff and Nicole to wait inside.

Fin continued to pace on the steps of the courthouse waiting. He was a nervous wreck. What if Will changed her mind? What if something happened to them on the way over here? Dammit! He should have picked her up.

Fin thought back to when he’d first met Will. It was in a freshman English class at UT. She’d been a little mouse with her permed hair, bright smile and big brown eyes. They’d been assigned to a group project together and had been friends ever since. Fin couldn’t imagine his life without her. Why it took twenty years for them to get married was beyond him, especially since he’d loved her from the day he met her. He shook his head. He just thanked his lucky stars he hadn’t lost her permanently.

Fin looked at his watch. Where was she?

Fin stilled as he saw his mother’s car pull into the parking lot and park. His parents climbed out of the front seat and his mother opened the back door. She lifted Katie out of her infant seat. Will had dressed Katie in a little white dress with purple trim.

Fin could feel his heartbeat quicken. His hands began to sweat.

His father opened the back seat door on the driver’s side and he saw Will’s slender ankle step out. Lawrence Pennington offered his hand to his future daughter-in-law and assisted her out of the back seat. Fin inhaled sharply and then let out a sigh of relief. Lawrence leaned down to kiss Will’s cheek and Fin saw her smile.

Will stood perfectly still and then slowly turned around. Fin saw a slow smile spread across her face as she met his eyes. He thought his heart would explode in his chest. Fin smiled at Will and winked at her. He started to walk down to meet Will and his family when he ran into Steven and Georges, two of his very good friends who were standing up with him and Will during the ceremony.

“Not so fast, lover boy,” said Steven. “You don’t get to meet up with her until she meets you in front of the judge.”

Fin looked back at Will in a panic. Smiling, Will made a little shooing motion with her hand. Disappointed, Fin allowed himself to be led into the courthouse.

Inside the courthouse, Fin waited patiently until it was their turn to meet the judge.

During the ceremony, Fin held Will's hand and when it was time, put a thin gold band on her finger. The judge said he could kiss the bride and he did, very softly. Then the judge introduced them as Mr. and Mrs. Finlay Pennington. Not one time during the entire ceremony did Fin take his eyes off of his beautiful bride.

The entire wedding party went back to Georges and Steven's for the reception. This time, the party lasted longer than an hour. (Georges and Steven had hosted Will's last wedding reception as well. Rich, her husband at the time, was uncomfortable around her friends and had cut the party short after an hour). There was drinking and dancing and lots of toasts to the happy couple.

Will couldn't believe all the people that were there. She hugged Dave and Courtney. Dave had been one of Fin's fraternity brothers in college. He'd dated Courtney all through college and married her as soon as they graduated. John and his wife, Audrey, were there as well. John was another of Fin's fraternity brothers. Will hadn't met Audrey before. When Will saw Jason, she threw her arms around his neck and hugged him. Jason, another of Fin's fraternity brothers, had been instrumental in helping her through her bout with cancer.

"Jason," she said. "Thank you so much for coming." Jason kissed Will's cheek.

"I wouldn't miss this epic event for all the money in the world. I'm glad he didn't let you get away a second time, honey."

Fin and Will visited with their friends, catching up with those they hadn't seen in a while. Fin looked over at Will. She was glowing. Dave came up and clapped Fin on the back.

"She looks the same as she did in college," said Dave shaking his head. "You're one lucky son of a bitch."

"I most certainly am," agreed Fin.

After a couple of hours, Lawrence and Greta said their goodbyes.

“Finlay, we need to get Katie home and put her down. She’s getting fussy,” said Greta.

Fin took the baby from his mother’s arms and held her.

“Hey, baby girl,” he said. Katie cooed and grabbed his hair. “You go home with your grandma and grandpa and you be good, okay?” Fin hugged her and gave her a kiss and then handed Katie over to Will.

Will hugged and kissed the baby and gave Katie back to her mother-in-law.

“Are you guys sure? This is two nights in a row,” said Will.

“She’s a peach, Willow. We are having a wonderful time with our granddaughter. You kids have fun. Congratulations,” said Lawrence.

“We love you both so much,” said Greta. “Thank you for waiting so that we could be included.”

Greta and Lawrence kissed both Will and Fin and then took off with the baby.

Shortly after, Fin’s sisters stopped by and hugged both Will and Fin. They said their goodbyes and left. The party continued.

Later in the evening, Will stepped outside to get some air.

Georges and Steven had an amazing backyard. They had a gazebo and a beautiful fountain. Everything was meticulously landscaped.

Will wandered over to the gazebo and sat down to stare at the fountain.

“Hey muffin, whatcha doing out here all by yourself?” asked Fin as he sat down beside her.

“Nothing,” said Will smiling. “Are you happy?”

“Ridiculously so. You?” asked Fin as he took Will’s hand and kissed it.

“Yes.”

“God almighty, Will, I was afraid this day would never come. I was dying until I saw you all pull up to the courthouse. I was so nervous. I was thinking you might change your mind at the last minute.”

“Really? Me too! Fin, I hope I don’t disappoint you. I keep thinking about all the girls that you went out with and how they all bored you after a short time. I so don’t want to be one of those girls.”

“Will, don’t ever think that, sweetheart. Don’t you get it? It’s always been you. You could never disappoint me.” Fin kissed Will deeply. “What a pair we are, huh?” Fin put his arms around Will and the two of them sat there staring at the fountain and enjoying a comfortable silence.

Back inside, Fin and Will said their goodbyes. Fin drove them to the Driskill Hotel where they planned to spend their wedding night.

"Reservations for Mr. and Mrs. Finlay Pennington," said Fin proudly as he held Will's hand. Will had a silly grin on her face.

"Here we go," said the clerk. "We have you booked in our honeymoon suite for one night. Is that correct?"

"Yes," said Fin.

"Congratulations," said the clerk. "If there's anything we can do to make your stay more comfortable, please let us know. Here's your key."

"Thanks," said Fin. He took the key and handed it to Will. Then he grabbed their suitcase, took Will's hand and led her to their room.

Will gasped when Fin opened the door. The room was sumptuous. She started to walk in when Fin stopped her.

"Hey, hey, hey! Do not deprive me of my God-given right," he said. Will stared at him like he'd lost his mind.

"What are you talking about?" she asked.

"The husband is required by law to carry his bride over the threshold," said Fin with a very serious expression as he shoved their suitcase through the door.

Will burst out laughing.

"Don't you dare make fun of me, Willow Ann. I've been waiting for this moment for twenty years." Fin walked over and scooped Will up in his arms. He kissed her nose and carried her into the honeymoon suite. He shut the door behind them pushing it closed with his foot.

"Now what?" asked Will as Fin stood there holding her.

"I can think of several things."

"Does one of them include putting me down?" she grinned.

"I guess," he said dramatically as he placed Will on her feet. Will snaked her arms around Fin's neck and kissed him.

"Fin Pennington, I think that's the most romantic thing anyone's ever done for me." Fin scooped her up again and Will shrieked with laughter. Fin loved to hear her laugh.

"Put me down!"

"I will not. I think I could get used to this. Can you see us in the grocery store?"

"You idiot," laughed Will. "If you're carrying me around, you goose, who's going to put things in the basket? And, more importantly, who's going to be carrying Katie?"

“Fine,” groaned Fin as he put her back down. “But you have to admit, the idea had possibilities.” Will shook her head and walked around the room.

“Fin, this room is beautiful. I don’t think I’ve ever stayed in a hotel this nice.”

“You like it, baby?” asked Fin as he put his arms around Will’s waist.

“I do,” she said.

“I’m sorry we couldn’t go on a real honeymoon. Once we get the company upright and headed in the right direction, I promise I’ll take you anywhere you want to go.”

“It’s okay, Finney. I’m quite content right here.”

“Content? That won’t do, cupcake. But I have an idea,” he grinned.

Later that evening there was a knock on the door. I looked over at Fin and he shrugged. I ran into the bathroom while Fin pulled on a robe to see who it was.

“Who is it?” yelled Fin.

“Room service,” was the reply. Fin opened the door.

“We didn’t order anything,” he said.

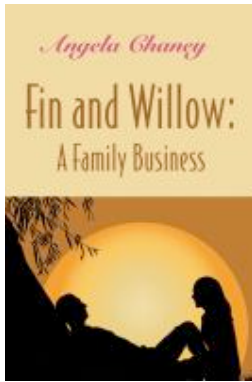
“Compliments of the manager, sir. Champagne and strawberries.”

“Oh, how nice.” Fin stepped back so the man could bring the tray in. He popped the cork and poured the champagne. Then he left.

I was peeking out the bathroom door. When I saw the coast was clear, I came out in a bathrobe.

“What’s all this then?”

“Compliments of the manager.” Fin handed me a glass of champagne and toasted. “Here’s to us, baby. Twenty years in the making.”



Fin and Willow have been friends for over twenty years. It is a friendship that has endured cancer, a failed marriage, and a stalker who threatened both Willow and her daughter, Katie. As a result, Fin wastes no time in proposing. Will accepts, moves back to Austin to be with Fin, and is ready to start the rest of their lives together. Now, they will live happily ever after...or will they?

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