



The *Note* II Taking a  
Chance on Love

ANGELA HUNT

*New York Times Best-selling Author*

BASED ON THE SCREENPLAY BY DOUGLAS BARR



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*The Note II: Taking a Chance on Love*

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*F*EAR CAN INFECT US EARLY  
IN LIFE UNTIL EVENTUALLY IT CUTS  
A DEEP GROOVE OF APPREHENSION  
IN ALL OUR THINKING.  
TO COUNTERACT IT, LET FAITH,  
HOPE, AND COURAGE  
ENTER YOUR THINKING.  
FEAR IS STRONG,  
BUT FAITH IS STRONGER YET.

—*NORMAN VINCENT PEALE*

# One

WITH ONE ELBOW propped on her desk, Peyton MacGruder chewed on the edge of a fingernail and glared at the clock on the wall. On days like this, when she was twenty minutes away from her deadline and far from finished with her column, she could swear that the minute hand swept over the clock face at double speed.

She transferred her gaze to the computer monitor and fluttered her fingers over the keyboard. Some days the magic worked and the words flowed. Other days she might as well be typing gibberish.

She skimmed the half-completed column on her screen and tried to focus her thoughts. Last week a reader had written that she was afraid to trust a brother-in-law who had stolen from her in the past. Peyton had answered that forgiveness was important, but experience could not be ignored. And when it came to matters of the heart, caution should always trump passion. Dozens of readers had e-mailed, filling her in-box with responses, most of them supportive.

Now she was working on a recap that included reader comments, but everything she'd written so far looked like extended self-congratulation. She needed a corroborating opinion . . . and *any* column could be improved with an appropriate quote, couldn't it? She reached for her dictionary of popular quotations, scanned the index, and jabbed her finger at an appropriate entry. Smiling with satisfaction, she propped her reading glasses on the end of her nose and worked the quote into her piece:

*And so, dear readers, when it comes to dealing with relationships, perhaps we should keep the words of Eumenides in mind. That venerable sage once wrote, "There are times when fear is good. It must keep its watchful place at the heart's controls. There is advantage in the wisdom won from pain."*

*Perhaps a happy heart is, at its core, a cautious heart.*

There. She leaned back and clicked the word count tool. Seven hundred words—not bad. The dragon lady shouldn't have to cut any of this column.

After a quick proofread, Peyton clicked Send and addressed the file to Nora Chilton, senior features editor. Another click and away it went.

She turned as something slapped the surface of her desk. Mandi Hillridge, an overenthusiastic intern from the University of North Carolina Wilmington, stood in the aisle, her arms filled with folders. Peyton picked up the envelope Mandi had tossed her way and studied the return address. "Am I supposed to know this Eve Miller?"

Mandi shifted her burden from one arm to the other. “I doubt it. I think she’s a reader.”

Peyton ran her fingertip across the ragged edge. “Why has this letter been opened?”

“Because Phil Brinker didn’t check the address before he tore into it. Our stellar mailroom staff mistakenly delivered it to him while he was in New York working on that story about the media covering the media. He just got back and told me to bring it to you.” Mandi stepped closer, her eyes gleaming. “You want me to go fuss at the guys in the mailroom? One of them’s kinda cute.”

Peyton glanced over the short walls of the reporters’ cubicles and saw Nora stepping out of the elevator. “No.” She propped both elbows up on her desk. “I want you to get me two Tylenol. Extra strength.”

“You have a headache?”

“Not yet.”

Mandi turned in time to see Nora approaching, a folded newspaper in hand. Even from her desk Peyton recognized the distinctive banner that contained her byline and staff photo. Had Nora come down to complain about a column that had already run? She wouldn’t, unless one of the higher-ups sent her to confront Peyton about some obscure point.

“About that headache—” Mandi lowered her voice—“I’ll bring the bottle.”

The young woman hurried away as Nora approached Peyton’s desk. The editor waved the paper before Peyton’s anxious gaze and nodded. “By the way, about this column last week? You were absolutely right.”

“That’s a nice change.” Peyton managed a smile. “About what?”

“Passion. It should always be tempered with caution. Especially when it comes to affairs of the heart.”

Peyton straightened in her chair, not certain why the editor had felt compelled to personally deliver this bit of elaboration. “You speaking from conviction or firsthand experience?”

Nora managed a coy smile. “None of your business. Anyway, you’ve been doing really good work lately. I had my doubts at first, but you’ve grown into the job.”

“You came all the way down here to pat me on the back?”

“Actually, I came down here to tell you that in addition to writing the Heart Healer, I’m going to need you to handle a feature or two for the Lifestyles section. We got the call last night; Marlo Evans had a baby boy, so she’ll be out on maternity leave for the next several weeks.”

Peyton dropped her head to her hand and groaned. “Why not use freelancers?”

“Because I don’t have the patience or the finances to deal with neophytes. The budget cuts have made it necessary for all of us to pick up the slack now and then. Besides—” her mouth curved in a wry smile—“you’re fast and you’re good at researching. A feature or two shouldn’t be a problem for you.”

“But I’m swamped with—” Peyton swallowed the rest of her complaint as sports editor King Danville moved into her line of vision. A warm feeling settled in the pit of her stomach and brought a smile to her lips. Would she ever stop feeling all gushy and girly whenever King approached her desk?

King glanced at the features editor before returning Peyton's smile. "Hello, Nora."

Nora's chin dipped in a stiff nod. "Kingston."

Like a flower seeking the sun, Peyton shifted to face the man who had recently brought new joy to her life. "I was just telling Nora that these days I don't have time to keep up with my column *and* write a weekly feature, no matter how occasional it is."

Nora glanced from Peyton to King and then arched a brow. "Perhaps if you temper your newfound passion, you'll find the time."

King grinned as the editor smiled and moved toward the elevator; then he pulled a white bottle from his jacket pocket and shook it. Peyton placed the familiar rattle within seconds: Extra Strength Tylenol, as requested.

"Ran into Mandi in the coffee room," King explained. "She said you were going to need these."

"She was right." Peyton sighed. "Nora seems to think I can sit down and whip up a decent feature while I'm outlining my next column. I don't know where she got the idea that I'm some kind of writing machine."

"Maybe from the fact that you write so fast you make the rest of us look like we're moving backward."

Peyton shook her head, unwilling to accept praise she didn't deserve. She knew the truth—she could turn an assignment around quickly because outside the newspaper office she had no life. While other writers struggled to work amid the pressures of family schedules, children's homework, school events, sporting activities, and the needs of a spouse, Peyton only had to take care of herself and her two cats.



At least that's the way things were before King and Christine came into her life. The situation was a little different now, and she was feeling the pressure.

"I'm not that fast," she insisted. "And I'm not that versatile."

"Then don't cave so quickly, MacGruder. Just because Nora's your boss doesn't mean you have to let her push you around."

"I was ready to push back until she played the guilt card. When she mentioned the budget cuts, I realized how lucky I am to even be employed. How can I not agree to write whatever she wants?"

"That's what I like about you—you're a solid team player."

"I'm a pushover."

King smiled and stepped to the side of Peyton's desk. "In that case, I'd better prescribe two of these—" he held up the bottle of pain relievers—"or one of these." Before Peyton could point out that they were surrounded by coworkers in cubicles, he bent and pressed a kiss to her lips. She closed her eyes, ready to forget about an audience of staff reporters, clerks, and copy editors, but the kiss didn't last.

She looked up at him, unsatisfied.

"Do any good?" he asked.

"Not sure. Try again. Maybe increase the dosage."

He bent, his lips warming hers with more passion this time. When he finally pulled away, Peyton exhaled a long sigh of happiness . . . and the writers around her erupted into applause.

Peyton grinned as her cheeks warmed. "They approve."

"I don't give a fig about them. What did you think?"

"Um . . . better."

“Only *better*? Well, you know what they say about practice making perfect . . .”

As the other reporters hooted and King leaned in for yet another kiss, Peyton pressed her palm against the center of his chest. “You know, it’s this kind of temptation that led to Marlo Evans’s maternity leave. And, in turn, to my impending headache. So maybe we should get back to work.”

With a roguish grin, King straightened and stepped away from her chair. “Yes, ma’am.”

“But after work—” Peyton squinted at him—“would you want to go for a jog with me and Christine? We wanted to run the paths down by the shoreline.”

King shook his head. “Enticing offer, but I’ve got to run out to the university after I finish up today. David needs to talk to me about something. He says it’s important.”

Peyton nodded, once again reminded that their relationship was not as simple as it would have been if they’d met in their twenties. She had Christine to consider, and King had David. Both children, hers and his, were nearly grown, and both had been forced to deal with the aftermath of their parents’ unwise decisions.

“MacGruder.” King’s voice, warm and insistent, drew her from her thoughts. “Maybe I’ll stop by your place later.”

“I’d like that.” Peyton offered him a forgiving smile. “I’ll be waiting.”

King took two steps toward his office, then halted. “Hey—” he turned, propping his arms on the cubicle wall—“I found an interesting e-mail in my in-box this morning. A friend in New

York said my name recently came up in a board meeting at the *Times*.”

Peyton felt a frigid finger touch the base of her spine. “The *New York Times*?”

He chuckled. “Hard to imagine, huh? Moving from the *Middleborough Times* to the Gray Lady?”

“Your name came up in a board meeting? What does that mean, exactly?”

He shrugged. “I don’t know, but I’ll keep you posted.”

As he walked away, exchanging gibes with other writers as he passed their desks, Peyton felt fear blow down the back of her neck. Any other journalist would be salivating at the thought of writing for the *Times*, but King never seemed to get ahead of himself. Contentment was one of his primary virtues, and Peyton hadn’t realized how much she’d been counting on his ability to remain satisfied with the status quo.

What would she do if she lost him?

The thought struck like a blow to the chest, stealing her breath. Until recently, she had managed to keep herself detached from complicated personal relationships. But then the tragedy of a horrific plane crash taught her about the brevity of life and the importance of connection. Now she was desperate to understand two precious people, but understanding took time, and time was something she no longer possessed in abundance.

She forced herself to take a deep breath and steady her pulse. No one was abandoning her; the world had not shifted on its axis.

Her imagination was simply working overtime, a tendency that nearly always resulted in needless worry and borrowed trouble.

With her gift for imagining disaster, maybe she should have been a novelist.

When she swiveled toward her computer, determined to set her fears aside and tackle her e-mail, her gaze fell again on the envelope from Eve Miller. The postmark was five days in the past, so by now the woman's comments were old news. And in an electronic society, old news was dead news.

Peyton tossed the envelope into a bin filled with unopened letters and turned her attention to her in-box.



Peyton slid behind the wheel of her car, tossed her purse into the empty passenger seat, and fumbled with the buckle of her seat belt. When she was certain the car's computer wouldn't scold her for forgetting some vital procedure, she turned the ignition switch and waited for the automatic seat to slide forward, tilt, rise, and whatever else it did to adjust to her frame.

King had talked her into buying this vehicle last weekend, insisting that her old car was only a few miles away from imploding. "Ninety-eight thousand miles?" he exclaimed after glimpsing her odometer. "Good grief, MacGruder, are you going for some kind of endurance record?"

She had to admit the new vehicle was nice, but its myriad bells and whistles bewildered her. She hadn't taken the time to read the manual, and she barely managed to sit through the salesman's demonstration. "I don't have time to fuss with fancy

gadgets,” she told the desperate young man who had greeted her and King at the auto dealership. “So just point me toward something safe and inexpensive. Something I won’t have to give up chocolate to afford.”

Like a village matchmaker, the salesman grinned and fixed her up with this sleek blue machine, which he kept calling a crossover—a cross between a sedan and an SUV. She had a feeling the vehicle was too big to be economical or politically correct, but since an entire row of similar vehicles waited behind a fence at the dealership, the manager was probably eager to move his inventory. Regardless, the car earned good crash ratings, it used less gasoline than a tank, *and* it had the one accessory she couldn’t live without: a CD player.

Before putting the car in gear, Peyton punched the button of the stereo system and relaxed when the professional reader’s voice poured through the surround sound speakers. She’d bought this audiobook about mothers and daughters shortly after telling Christine the truth about their relationship—yes, they were reporter and reader, but they were also biological mother and daughter. Eighteen years and difficult circumstances had kept them apart, but a series of newspaper columns had brought them back together.

Now Peyton wanted nothing more than to be the mother she would have been if tragedy hadn’t intervened. A heaven-sent miracle had restored the child she’d been forced to surrender for adoption, and Peyton didn’t want to forfeit this second chance to love. And parent. And occasionally nag.

She and Christine were still in the midst of that awkward

getting-to-know-you phase, but Peyton felt they'd made great strides in their relationship. They tried to talk every day, even if only briefly, and though Christine still lived in the house she'd inherited from her adoptive parents, she felt free enough to drop into Peyton's home unannounced, as any daughter naturally would.

Still, Christine rarely called Peyton "Mom." When necessary, she called Peyton by name . . . or she didn't call her anything at all.

"By late adolescence," a confident voice intoned as Peyton put the car in gear and backed out of the parking space, "most daughters can be placed in one of three categories—distant, dissatisfied, or dependent. Do any of these words remind you of the young woman in your life?"

Peyton shook her head and shifted into drive. The author needed a fourth category for Christine—maybe *delightful*. They were still in the honeymoon phase, each of them unbearably grateful to have found the other. They might have disagreements later—in fact, they probably would—but for now Peyton was thrilled to be able to know and love the young woman who had never been far from her thoughts and prayers.

"Outstanding mothers devote most of their time to their children, instilling healthy values into daughters who will become outstanding mothers themselves," the reader continued, "but unsuitable mothers abandon and abuse."

Peyton winced at the author's use of the word *abandon*.

"Bottom line, if you provide your child with what she needs—clothing, shelter, food, affection—you, concerned mother, are

off the hook if your daughter makes unwise decisions. After you have taught your child right from wrong, your daughter has the freedom to choose . . . right *or* wrong. Do not blame yourself if she chooses to learn life's lessons through negative experiences.”

Peyton frowned as she pulled out of the parking lot and into traffic. Over the years, she'd covered dozens of stories involving teenage delinquents—wayward boys who got mixed up with guns and drugs, runaway girls who ended up on the street or in the hospital because they went looking for love in all the wrong faces. Behind every sad teenager's story, Peyton found a distraught mother who couldn't seem to understand how her child ended up in such a deplorable state.

She hated to admit it, but every time she interviewed one of those mothers, she'd walked away feeling resentful and slightly smug, convinced that she would have managed better if only given a chance. But now that she *was* being given an opportunity to mother a teen, she had no idea what she was supposed to do.

To make matters worse, her time of greatest influence would be limited. After the plane crash in which her father died, Christine had taken time off to grieve, but soon she'd go back to school and get busy with her studies. She'd probably meet a young man on campus and want to settle down. Then she'd center her world on her husband and her children, and she'd expect Peyton to focus on being a doting grandmother, not a mom. So this precious opportunity to parent her daughter would be relatively short-lived.

Peyton pulled up to the red light at an intersection and

snapped off the CD player. The bookstores were loaded with books about how to parent newborns, toddlers, middle schoolers, and teens, but no one had much advice for brand-new parents of young adults.

No one even seemed to be able to answer Peyton's most basic question—at eighteen, which did Christine need most: an authority figure or a friend?



## About the Author

CHRISTY AWARD WINNER Angela Hunt writes books for readers who have learned to expect the unexpected. With over three million copies of her books sold worldwide, she is the best-selling author of *The Tale of Three Trees*, *The Note*, *Magdalene*, and more than 100 other titles.

She and her youth pastor husband make their home in Florida with mastiffs. One of their dogs was featured on *Live with Regis and Kelly* as the second-largest canine in America.

Readers may visit her Web site at [www.angelahuntbooks.com](http://www.angelahuntbooks.com).

## Discussion Questions

1. John wrote, “God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them. And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect. So we will not be afraid on the day of judgment, but we can face him with confidence because we live like Jesus here in this world. Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear” (1 John 4:16-18).

How does this passage, which refers to our love for God, translate into our love relationships with each other? How did fear prevent Peyton from fully trusting and completely loving King? How did fear come between Ben and Eve? What must happen before fear can be expelled?

2. “Man is only truly great when he acts from the passions.”

—Benjamin Disraeli

“Serving one’s own passions is the greatest slavery.”

—Thomas Fuller

How are both of these opinions true? How can they both be true if they seem to contradict each other?

3. Eve disagreed with Peyton's statement that "caution should trump passion." At the beginning of the story, did you side with Eve or Peyton? Did you change your position as the story progressed?
4. If you were a newspaper columnist, what would be your greatest challenge? What is Peyton's greatest difficulty? What are her strengths?
5. If you've seen the movie or read the novel *The Note*, how has Peyton changed in the time between that story and this one?
6. Do you agree with Peyton's decision to tell Christine that she is the girl's biological mother?
7. Do you think King will break Peyton's heart like Gil did? Why or why not?
8. Is there a character in the novel with whom you identify? What is it about this person that strikes you as familiar?
9. One of Peyton's chief weaknesses is fear. In *The Note*, she experienced panic attacks. She seems to have those under control in this story, but anxiety still causes trouble for her. Do you fear? If so, what are you afraid of?
10. In Psalm 27, David wrote, "The Lord is my light and my salvation—so why should I be afraid? The Lord is my fortress, protecting me from danger, so why should I tremble?"  
What practical help can we discover in this verse when we feel ourselves becoming anxious and afraid? Is there anything on earth that can truly harm us?
11. What can you gain from a novel that you can't find in a film? What advantages does film hold over the printed page?

## Author's Note

READERS WHO ARE familiar with my book *The Note* may notice a few differences between that book and this sequel. (I'm explaining this now so you won't have to write me later.) The reason for the differences is simple: *Taking a Chance on Love* is actually a sequel to the movie version of *The Note*, in which certain details from my book were changed. As a novelist, I had no choice but to contradict either the movie or the first novel. Fortunately, those details are minor and do not affect the plot or deep characterization. The characters remain unchanged—except that Lila, Peyton's daughter in *The Note* the novel, is now Christine, and a few other names have been changed. Like me, you may wonder why names change in the transfer process from page to film. The producers explained that this is due to a legal process whereby they must ensure the fictitious nature of the characters.

Another significant difference is the location. *The Note* the novel is set in Tampa Bay, my home, but the setting for *The Note* the movie was the fictional Middleborough, North Carolina.

*Taking a Chance on Love* is also set in Middleborough. Why that change? In another behind-the-scenes explanation, the producers shared that this decision was based on economics and the need to keep to a very tight production schedule. Most of the filming occurred in Toronto. North Carolina proved to be a location that matched both the geographical requirements for the story and the budget and time-frame needs. Its coastal landscapes are crucial to this story.

If you've seen the movie *Taking a Chance on Love*, you may notice a few additional minor differences between the film and this novelization. These are due to my enjoying the opportunity to enlarge the story world, escape film's time constraints, and delve a little deeper into the character's personalities. I had more freedom to depict the environment and job details of a working newspaper columnist.

I hope that the few differences will enhance your enjoyment of the story.

Blessings to you and yours!

Angela Hunt

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