

### Chapter 3

*I gave my notice to Sophie a few minutes ago, Benedict texted.*

*I don't know why you just don't tell her, came the reply.*

Benedict sighed and answered, *She just has too much on her plate and I don't want to put a damper on what we hope to be a new relationship for them.*

*Ok, well you do what you think is best. Are we still having breakfast tomorrow before your appointment?*

*Yes, Benedict texted in return.*

*I'll see you there.*

*Thanks, Liana. This means a lot to me.*

*I'll be with you the whole way, Benedict. No matter what.*

Benedict smiled as he looked at her text. Tears filled his eyes. "I think I still love you," he whispered aloud



There were seating assignments for the morning's meeting. As Micah surveyed the large conference room, he noted that there were four definite groups, three tables in each group, with room for about four people at each table. In the center of each table grouping was a sign that gave the location of each project:

Woodward, Lafayette, Brush, or Corktown. Micah's instruction folder had put him in the Woodward group, but no one had arrived in that area yet.

Coffee and rolls, and thankfully countertop beverage coolers with iced Mountain Dew and other soft drinks, were available near the doorway. Though Micah had had a donut and a Mountain Dew before he left his condo that morning, he decided that he'd try another. He chose a bear claw and another Mountain Dew, and took a seat at one of the Woodward tables.

He'd finally reviewed the material his secretary had sent with him and realized that it was, in fact, a very intricate project that was going to take a tremendous amount of brain power and ingenuity to pull together. There were four buildings involved, all listed with the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Each building required a lead architect with historical knowledge of the period and structure, and a lead engineer with a strong architectural background. Supporting architects and designers were included on each team. And while Micah had considerable experience in architecture and engineering, it wasn't of the type required in this particular scenario. At least he didn't think so.

He frowned as he considered that, but his thoughts were interrupted when the chair next to him was suddenly occupied.

"Oh, Mylanta, it's Micah Bloomfield," said a deep voice next to him.

Micah looked at the black man who'd just taken the chair nearest to him. Lanky, about his age, totally silvered hair, but familiar brown eyes.

"It's me!" he said with a smile, and an outstretched hand. "Mort Dawson! How the heck are you, Micah?"

Micah smiled as he took Mort's hand. He hadn't seen Mort since graduation night. And while he had certainly aged, the mischief in his expression had not. "Well, hey, Mortimer. How did you recognize me?"

"Name tag," Mort answered with a laugh in his voice. "I thought you were in Texas."

"I am," Micah answered. "This is just temporary. I thought you were going to be the next Ellery Queen. What are you doing here?"

Mort nodded and answered. “My folks didn’t think I could pay the bills on that plan. They talked me into going to Michigan, and then I went to work for Chrysler. I engineered all of their plants for HVAC for years. But when they went kaput in 2008, I had to start over. I wound up over here. I made junior partner just last year.”

“Do you like it?” Micah asked.

“I love it. It’s a great place to work.” He chuckled and added, “And it pays the bills. I had six kids to feed.” Micah’s mouth fell open in surprise, and Mort laughed again. “Well, we only have a couple left at home now and they’re just about ready for college. The first four nearly drove me to bankruptcy.” He took a breath and asked, “How ‘bout you? You married Rivka Demski if I recall.”

Micah nodded. “We divorced last year.”

Mort frowned. “I’m so sorry to hear that. How long were you married?”

“Twenty-five years.”

“Any kids?”

“No, Rivka didn’t want kids,” Micah answered, hoping that Mort wouldn’t continue his questioning. He quickly asked, “You were going with a girl named Wendy?”

“Wendy Potter,” Mort answered with a smile on his face. “We got married in college. Still married, thankfully.”

Micah saw Sophie enter the room, looking more fabulous than she had the day before, and he couldn’t help but smile.

“She’s still single,” Mort whispered.

Micah nodded, but played it cool. He just had to know a few things about her, and so he asked, “Did she ever marry?”

“Oh, she got close a time a two. She was engaged to a guy in Ithaca while they were in college, but he got a wild hair and left school for a mission in Africa. Decided never to come back. And Wendy tells me that there was another really nice guy when she first came back to Detroit, but he wanted to get out of the city

and she just never will leave the place. And there's been a couple of other high-profile characters, but I guess it just never worked out."

"She seems like a really nice girl," Micah said.

"She's the best," Mort agreed. "Wendy works with her a lot, and she's consistently impressed."

"What's Wendy do?"

"Investment banker," Mort answered. He winked and added, "And if I recall, you were always sweet on Sophie. Maybe we could double-date or something?"

"She never gave me the time of day."

"You never gave her the chance," Mort argued with a grin.

Their conversation was cut short then as the tables around them began to fill. On the other side of Micah, an elderly man in a smart tweed suit sat down next to him, smiled and offered his hand, first to Micah, then to Mort.

"Aiden McMillan," he said, his Irish accent evident. "I believe we're on the Woodward Avenue Project together?"

"A delight to meet you. Mortimer Dawson."

Others were quickly seated around them, and Sophie stepped to the podium.

"Good morning," she began. "You have all been divided into four separate teams. Each person has been chosen specifically for the nature of the restoration, and the strengths you bring. Meredith and LaKeisha are handing out all of the information you'll need to begin, including the building permits. Your team leaders and I provided preliminary drawings and plans associated with these restorations, and City Hall granted us an exemption and gave us temporary permits. That means that we'll have to produce finals quickly in order to maintain these permits." As Sophie spoke, Meredith and LaKeisha wheeled carts throughout the room, loaded with blueprints and folders.

"We will have fulltime security at the Corktown site," Sophie went on. "I'll be honest; the area is rough. Security will report at 6:00 a.m., and won't leave the site until 6:00 p.m."

Micah cast Mort a glance, raising one eyebrow.

“It’s okay,” Mort whispered. “We’ve never had a problem. There’s just been a little bit of gang violence over there recently. I don’t think it’s going to amount to much.”

Micah took a deep breath and returned his attention to Sophie.

“As you look through the material,” she continued, “please don’t be afraid to share your gut feelings. There are extensive modification requests within these restorations, and we don’t want to be just people pleasers. If you can’t see a safe way to make a modification, be up front and honest with your concerns. All of these buildings are more than one hundred years old. We want to make them beautiful and useful again, but not at the risk of injury.

“Also, keep in mind that we want to employ as much labor as possible, without breaking the budget. If you’re uncertain about cost and wage estimates, please call the financial liaison that’s listed in your information.”

Sophie took a breath and smiled. “And have a great time. I think you’ll find that the teams have been put together in such a way that you’ll stimulate one another’s minds. You have four conference rooms available, and I encourage you to use them as often as possible.

“I’ll be deeply involved in the planning stages, as well as visiting your sites on a regular basis. I love this town, and I can’t wait to see what you do for her.”

The audience in the conference room applauded.

“Thank you for everything,” she said with a smile, and then she left the podium.

Micah watched her walk into the audience, wondering which group she was going to first, wishing that she was on his team. *She’s so beautiful*, he thought.

Mort nudged him with his shoulder and whispered, “Try not to be so obvious.”

Micah willed himself back to the duties at hand, wondering what on earth had gotten into him. He had never been given to attractions, but he was definitely attracted to Sophie.

“Okay, that’s it, chaps. It’s all up to us now to pull this off,” Aiden said with a crooked smile and a wink.

Someone cleared their throat loudly and everyone turned to see that a lone woman was seated amongst eleven other men.

“Oh, pardon me, dear lady,” Aiden apologized. “We are so thankful to have you.”

Introductions were made on the twelve-person team and it was decided that they should have a physical look at the building that had been assigned to them.

The Woodward Avenue project was twenty-five minutes walking distance from Design & Structure, and Mort was pleased to announce that. He was a ‘walker’ as well and glad to take advantage of the short jaunt up the street to have a preliminary look at their project. Micah sighed with dismay as he put on his heavy overcoat and donned leather gloves. Compared to Dallas, Detroit was still frigid.

“It’s not even fifty above out here,” he lamented as the twelve of them trudged along. And to top it off, Micah was terribly out of shape. This wouldn’t be an easy walk for him.

“It’s good for us,” Mort encouraged. “It gets the blood flowing and the brain storming.”

Micah twisted off the top of his Mountain Dew, took a long gulp, and then tucked it into the pocket of his overcoat.

Set on a corner, beside another, rundown older building, the structure on Woodward was six stories and had at one time housed a thriving business machines manufacturer and retailer. Designed by Gordon Lloyd, it was completed in 1891, and had a cast iron frame. It was more of what could be considered Victorian style, all but for the odd corner turret that was drawn from the second floor to the fifth floor. It was covered in brick and carved brownstone trimmings. A fire escape had been added sometime in the sixties, and it looked garishly out of place on the historic building.

“A demolition crew starts tomorrow,” Aiden explained as they entered the abandoned structure. “So, don’t be nervous about what you see—now, our prelims show this first floor will be four small retailers and a sandwich shop. This is where we will ensure our structure is stable.” He looked at Micah, “I believe that this is where your expertise is needed Mr. Bloomfield. With five floors above this one, we want to make sure that the foundation isn’t buckling or sinking.”

Micah nodded as he surveyed their surroundings. It was cold, dark, and it smelled bad. There was probably a mold problem. A rat scurried to get out of the light that Aiden had switched on, and Micah was certain he’d seen roaches. The floor was nothing but a paper covering—*who knows what’s under this*, Micah observed. Had he known he was going to be visiting one of these sites, he would have brought along his boots. He looked woefully at his Guccis, hoping they wouldn’t be ruined on this expedition.

Broken tiles, cords and wires hung from the ceiling, and exposed studs lined the perimeter. A winding staircase was situated in the middle of the mayhem, but the top couldn’t be seen because of the darkness. It was like a scene from a horror movie.

“One of Detroit’s first elevators is situated in the southwest corner,” Aiden went on. “But according to Sophie, it’s not in working order. We will have to see what we can do about that.”

Aiden switched on his flashlight and headed for the staircase into nowhere. Micah quietly groaned. *Ireland can’t take us up there...I’m sure it’s full of transients and gang-bangers.*

“We’ll all be killed,” he whispered to Mort as they ascended the staircase behind everyone else.

Mort chuckled. “What are you talking about, Micah?”

“You know these places have been taken over by the intercity gangs and vagrants. I’m surprised we don’t have security on this site.”

Mort chuckled again. “You’ve been gone a long time, Micah. I’m sure Sophie had the cops chase everybody out before we got here.”

As they reached the landing on the second floor, Aiden said, “This was at one time a ballroom. It’s slated to be a gathering center for Christian youth groups.” He fumbled with an electrical box on the wall and the room was filled with light. It was musty, but not as damp and smelly as the lower level. The windows were covered with paper and old drapes.

“There will be a new sound system installed in this room, along with a new dance floor. The plumbing in the bar needs extensive work.” He looked at Sam Jones, “That will be your baby, Mr. Jones. The entire project requires updated plumbing and sewer.” Then he looked at Mort and said, “And the HVAC is a ‘living nightmare.’ That’s a quote from Sophie’s notes. She wants that to be your department.”

As they continued the tour, Aiden explained that the remaining floors had already been leased by pediatricians. Examination and procedure rooms would need to be wired and plumbed.

“And we don’t have a thing for heat on the fifth floor,” Aiden said to Mort. “That could be a problem.”

Mort only nodded and scratched his chin.

Micah found it interesting that Aiden was already so in-tune with the specialties of his team. As they toured the rest of the building, he spoke directly to each team member, elaborating on their specific strengths, and highlighting specialized problems.

“And we don’t want to replace the fascia when we install new windows,” Aiden said when they were finally out on the sidewalk once again.

Everyone looked at the beautiful old fascia framing the windows and nodded in agreement.

Aiden looked at Veronica and smiled, “But I’m quite certain that you will do a beautiful job of restoration.”





After lunch, Micah hunkered down with the materials he'd been provided that morning. Some of the blueprints were very old and difficult to read. As well, there had been several updates to the building over the years and he had to thoroughly examine those blueprints to see if any real structure changes had been made during reconstructions.

"I'll have to take another look at that foundation," he muttered to himself.

From his doorway, his new assistant, LaKeisha, watched him carefully. *Mr. Bad Attitude*, she thought, noting the horrible frown he'd worn for the last two days. *Complaining just because you had to take a short walk...what's the matter, don't you people walk in Texas?* She took a breath, cleared her throat and said, "Mr. Bloomfield?"

Micah startled at the sound of his name and looked up from his focus. "I'm sorry, LaKeisha. I didn't see you there. How can I help you?"

"Valet just called," she answered. "Your car won't start. They are unable to bring it around for you."

Micah frowned as he asked, "What are they doing starting my car in the middle of the day?"

LaKeisha feigned a smile and raised one eyebrow. "Mr. Bloomfield, you asked them to bring it around at 5:30. It's almost that time."

Micah's mouth fell open. "Okay," he finally responded. "Tell them that I'll call the rental agency and make arrangements to have it towed."

"Sure thing," LaKeisha said. "Have a great night. See you tomorrow." And with that she turned and left.

Micah called the rental agency, explained the problem, and requested a new car. After a lengthy runaround, the agency agreed to tow his Mercedes, but couldn't provide him with another vehicle until the next day. By the time he was off the phone it was nearly 6:00. He left his office, heading down the hall into the

outer office area, hoping to find at least Mort or someone else on his team and beg them for a ride.

When he saw the darkened office area, he sighed in defeat. Design and Structure had all but emptied of his coworkers. Most of the lights were out, save for only a few here and there. He pulled out his phone and searched for his Lyft app.

“Hi Micah,” came a friendly voice from behind him.

Jumping with surprise, he turned to find Sophie standing with her tote bag, Nikes already laced.

“Hey, Sophie,” he smiled. “I didn’t hear you back there. I thought everybody was gone.”

“They usually bug out by 5:30 around here,” she answered. “What are you still doing here?”

“I’m trying to find a Lyft,” he sighed. “Valet called and said my car won’t start and the agency can’t get another car to me until tomorrow morning.”

“I see...well...I could give you a ride...if you think it would be okay with your wife.”

“You walk to work, Sophie,” Micah pointed out. “And I’m divorced.”

Sophie nodded. “I’m sorry to hear that. And, yes, we have to take a short walk to my place to get my car. But at least you’d have a ride. You can’t walk all the way down to the Riverfront. Come on.” She turned and started down the hallway.

Micah felt himself pulled in her direction and he picked up his pace.

It wasn’t as chilly that evening as it had been that morning, and for that Micah was relieved. He’d practically frozen.

“The weather is great today,” Sophie said, inhaling deeply. “I love to walk home after a busy day.”

Micah only nodded, thankful that he'd worn his Gucci loafers again. They were quite comfortable for walking.

"How do you like your site?" she asked. "Aiden says that his team has already been over to inspect."

"I liked it a lot," Micah answered honestly, though he knew he'd like it a lot more after cleanup. "I have to get up there again tomorrow for a closer look at the southwest foundation. There's a differential between all three sets of blueprints. It makes me suspect they've done a little structure modification."

Sophie nodded. "I thought so too when I first saw them. I'll be curious to see what you come up with."

Sophie was a fast walker, and Micah found himself trying to find a way to disguise his panting as he struggled to keep up with her. Thankfully there was the loud city traffic bustling around them. She could even talk at this pace, pointing out different eateries nearby that he might be interested in while working downtown. Micah mostly nodded, and threw in a few "okay's", and "sure's."

"And this building," she said, slowing down briefly as they passed a stunning Gothic structure of at least thirty floors, bearing the name: Camstead. "It was designed by Wirt Rowland in 1925, and the first restoration I ever worked on. There's a really cute dress shop and a small grocer on the first floor, medical offices take up five or six floors. There are executive apartments as well. And at the very top there's an old movie theater. The investors decided to keep it intact, with a major overhaul of course." She sighed with contentment. "It's still my favorite project because the movie theater was redesigned to be multipurpose. All of the shades on the top floor windows can be completely removed, along with the seating, and, *voila!* It's a ballroom. You can see a lot of the city from up there, even the Ambassador Bridge."

"It sounds beautiful."

"It is," she replied, glancing at him with a smile. "And you'll get to see it if you attend the Children's Benefit in September. Benedict and I always sponsor the benefit, and I talked him into having it at the Camstead this year."

Within fifteen minutes, they'd made their way out of the downtown area and Micah could see Comerica Park coming up just past a church. The Fox Theater was just across the street, and his heart sank. He knew that she lived close by and the walk would soon be coming to an end. He was enjoying her so much that even the hardship of the exercise had become less of a burden. She was so interesting, and there were so many questions he longed to ask. But as was always the usual for Micah, he couldn't open his mouth to begin a decent conversation with her to save himself.

Within another ten minutes, they crossed Fisher Freeway and made a right hand turn into a residential neighborhood. They approached a long row of two-story townhomes and she said, "This is where I live."

"These look new," Micah observed as they started up the sidewalk to her door.

"About fifteen years old," she replied. "I moved over here to be closer to Comerica Park. I used to live over in Boston Edison. I had an amazing restoration over there—1887 Victorian. You would have loved it."

Micah nodded, delighted that she was familiar with his specialty.

"I grew up in Boston Edison," he said quietly. "We left when —" He stopped himself. He didn't want to tell her why his father had decided to move them to Sterling Heights but it had been because of the growing black population in their neighborhood.

"Left when?" she glanced at him for the rest of his answer.

He shrugged. "I guess I don't really remember why we left."

"Well, I've lived all over the city since college," she went on as she worked her keys in the lock. "When I restored those condos that Tiger Hansen bought, I decided to buy one for myself." She let them into her entryway, punched in the code on her security system, and chuckled again. "We lived just down the street from the bail bondsman's office. Boy, we could tell you some stories about that."

Micah smiled at her humorous memory and said, "I'll bet." And then he mentally admonished himself. *Can't you ask her some questions? Can't you talk? You're not sixteen anymore. Can't you act like a man who's fifty-two years old?*

Sophie flicked on the lights to reveal an impeccable domicile. The entryway opened into a great room with vaulted ceilings. The kitchen was obviously designed for professional cooking, yet conveniently opened to the rest of the interior. The countertops and island were ivory quartz, the cabinets cherry wood, and appliances stainless steel. The living area and dining room were decked-out with comfortable furniture, tables, tasteful art, and an abundance of excellent photography.

And the photography was something to behold.

Skyscrapers, all photographed in black and white, framed in deep grey were beautifully balanced amongst color photos of baseball players and natural settings within Detroit. He recognized Belle Isle Park, the Penobscot Building and the Fischer Building. A panoramic photo of the Detroit Riverfront from a Windsor point of view hung above a white couch. It was stunning.

Everything in Sophie's home was done in hues of grey and white, evoking a peace he hadn't felt in a long time. It made him want to sit down and stay for a while.

There was a deck just off the living area, and on the opposite side of the room near the kitchen were stairs; one leading upward, the other down. Apparently, there were two other floors that he couldn't see from this vantage point.

"This is beautiful, Sophie," Micah said as she led him to the kitchen area, and straight for the stairs going down.

"Thanks," she replied. "My car is in the garage below."

"Where did you get all this great photography?"

She stopped before they reached the stairs and looked back into her home. "I took them," she answered glancing at the photos. "Do you like them?"

"They're so good," he replied. "I didn't know you were into photography."

Sophie shrugged. "It's something I started after college, with my first restorations. I enjoyed taking photos of the before and after of each of my projects. Pretty soon I was taking photos of everything.

They stood there for a moment while he admired her work, simultaneously trying to dream up a reason to make this night last a little bit longer.

“I like the peaceful feel of the place,” he stammered. “The grey I mean.”

Sophie nodded. “Sometimes my life is really hectic so I try to make my time at home as peaceful as possible.”

Micah pretended to gaze further at the photography, but was just buying time to think of something else to say.

“I could buy you dinner,” he suddenly blurted, looking at his shoes. He nervously cleared his throat and tried again, this time attempting to maintain eye-contact. “You know, for the ride. Anywhere you want to go.”

Sophie smiled and nodded. “That would be great, Micah.”

“Okay, what do you have in mind?”

Sophie’s eyes seemed to flicker with a memory and then she said, “Remember that new place that went in on Van Dyke, just before graduation?”

“In Sterling Heights?”

“Yeah...you know, the Phoenix or something?”

“Phoenix Coney Island?” Micah couldn’t hide his surprise. “Is that place still around? And isn’t that quite a drive from here.”

“Less than thirty minutes this time of day. And I’ve always wanted to go there.”

*Thirty minutes out, Thirty minutes back, Micah thought, plus Coney’s. Maybe I could think of something to say by then.*

“I’d love to go there again,” he agreed.

“Great,” she said, turning and leading him to the garage below.