

## Chapter 6

Sophie was home from church at exactly noon, and Micah was waiting patiently. Thinking that she would just be coming from church, he dressed up for the event. He wore a sharp black Armani suit, a crisp white shirt, with an open collar, and black Paul Parkman loafers. He was stunning.

Sophie was wearing a Victoria Beckham plum and lavender, plaid wool dress, sleeveless, with a high V-neck, and it came mid-calf. It was only fifty degrees so she'd added a lavender wool jacket.

"You look fabulous," Micah said as he opened the passenger door of his new Mercedes.

"Thank you, Micah," she replied, sliding into the seat.

Micah closed the door and hurried around to the driver's side. "Where do you think I'd like to go today?" he asked, fastening his buckle.

"Have you tried The Hudson Café yet?"

"No," he answered. "But I bet I can find it if you give me the address."

“It’s downtown on Woodward, right between Grand River and Gratiot and State.”

“Downtown,” he murmured thoughtfully. “Is that near the old Hudson’s department store?”

“On the same block,” she answered. “And we’ll have to park in the ramp.”

Micah nodded in understanding and they were on their way.

There was a one-hour waiting list when they arrived so Sophie suggested they get lattes and wait outside on the wicker furniture that was set up on the sidewalk.

“It’s only fifty degrees out there, Sophie,” Micah reminded.

“The lattes will warm us up,” Sophie assured.

Micah had never had a latte in his life, but he decided to try one just for the sake of being with Sophie. He followed her out to the sidewalk with cup in hand.

As was becoming the usual, the time passed so quickly that Micah didn’t notice the chill in the air, and even found himself enjoying Sophie’s favorite drink.

Once they were seated, Micah had French toast, loaded with berries and whipped cream, and Sophie ordered an omelet. Micah decided that she was a devoted egg fan.

The time passed all too quickly as Micah shared even more stories of his life in Texas and how different it was to be back in Detroit—especially the weather.

And though the city had changed since he'd been gone, it was still very much the same.

Sophie finished off her second latte, set down the cup and smiled at Micah. “Micah, I could listen to your stories about Texas all day and all night, and then some. But we've been here for three hours—” She had to pause and laugh as Micah's eyes grew suddenly big and round. “I have to get a few things done before I start my week.”

Micah appeared to be aghast, and it made Sophie laugh again.

“I have to get some laundry done,” she continued with a smile. “And I need to get some groceries. I'm almost out of milk and eggs, and then I promised to Skype a cousin tonight.”

“Well, when will I see you again?” Micah asked, hoping he didn't sound as desperate to her as he did to himself.

“Tomorrow at work,” she replied, and then laughed.

Micah chuckled and shook his head. “No, you know what I mean. When can we have another...when can we go...” he sighed and rolled his eyes. He didn't want to say ‘date’ because, after all, they were in their fifties and ‘date’ seemed like an extremely immature word. He started again, “When can we do more of this?”

“Dates?” she whispered with a clever sparkle in her grey eyes.

Micah was certain that he blushed. He grinned and nodded. “Yes. When can we have more dates?”

“I have to see Mom on Mondays and Thursdays, and I teach on Wednesdays.”

“I promised to see my mom and uncle on Fridays,” he added.

“Well, how about if I make you dinner on Tuesday night? And we can have lunches during the week?”

“How about Saturdays and Sundays too?”

Sophie smiled again and replied, “I thought you’d never ask.”

It was late in the afternoon when Micah returned to his dark, empty condo. He tossed his keys on a close-by table and looked around at the mess he’d made during the week. Mountain Dew bottles, Pop-Tart wrappers and fast-food containers littered the impeccably designed room.

Rivka had always kept a housekeeper, and an amazing chef, on staff full-time. And then there was the gardener, a garage maintenance man, and the tennis instructor. They had lived a grand lifestyle, and could afford it...*until Leland went all hot-shot architect and sunk the boat*, he thought.

Micah was never a very good housekeeper, and living alone for the last year hadn’t helped. If anything, he was messier than ever. He could do laundry, and drop off dry cleaning, but that was about it. If there was anything else involved, he usually had it hired done. He never went to the grocery store; if it couldn’t be delivered he’d order from someplace else.

He went into his kitchen to grab a Mountain Dew and noticed that there were only a few left. He was going to have to find a grocer pretty soon. His Pop-

Tarts were gone, and there was only one extremely dry donut left. Fortunately, Design & Structure provided pastries in the mornings so he didn't have to worry about breakfast.

He went into his bedroom to change into something more comfortable and caught sight of himself in the full-length mirror.

“Whoa,” he said out loud. “Is that really me?” He'd thought his suit felt tight that morning. He lifted his chin and noticed the extra layers beneath it. “How could she possibly see anything in me?” He sighed with dismay. “No wonder Rivka left me.”

He went through his clothes until he found some old sweats, put them on and went looking for his sneakers. He had them around somewhere because he remembered packing them.

When he'd found them he laced them up, grabbed a bottle of Mountain Dew, and headed for the gymnasium downstairs, the one he passed by every day after work.

The gymnasium was empty, and for that Micah was thankful. He didn't want anyone looking at the fat, old man trying to figure out the upscale equipment. Whoever worked out in this gymnasium was obviously some kind of a pro.

“Where to even start?” he asked himself. He took a belt of his Mountain Dew, screwed the cap on and headed toward one of the treadmills.

Once he was on the thing he realized that there was more to just walking involved in order to operate the contrivance. A full panel of buttons was arrayed

before him. *Oh dear*, he thought, unscrewing the Mountain Dew once again. As he tipped the bottle for a good long drink, he heard the doors open behind him, and the voices of youth laughing and joking. He turned for a look and saw two young, very thin, African American teenagers. One boy and one girl. They appeared to be the same age.

“Hi, Mister,” the girl greeted with a smile. Her hair was as black as coal, except for the turquoise streaks placed evenly within her corkscrew, shoulder length curls. She was dressed in hot pink leggings and a simple white t-shirt. “So you’re trying out the new equipment?”

“S’up, Mister?” The boy greeted, sauntering over with his companion. His black hair was cut close to his head. He was smiling, his teeth as white as snow. He was dressed in lime green leggings and a matching t-shirt.

“Is it new?” Micah said, knowing that there was a nervous tone in his voice. He got off the treadmill and stood aside. “You can use it if you want to. I don’t even know what to do with it.”

The boy only smiled and said, “We heard they were getting some new equipment, but we hadn’t seen it yet.” He stretched out his hand, as if in greeting. “I’m Nate, and this is my sister, Nikki.”

Micah was pleasantly surprised with the friendly youth. He took Nate’s hand in a firm grasp. “How do you do? Micah Bloomfield.”

“You must be new here?” Nikki questioned with a friendly smile, reaching to shake his hand. “We’ve never seen you down here before.”

“Yes,” he answered. “But I’ll be here for about six months and I need to get into shape pretty fast.”

Nate gave him a knowing nod and wink. He leaned closer and whispered, “Is it a girl?”

Micah’s mouth fell open in surprise.

Nate chuckled. “Well, me and Nikki work out down here about three times a week. Dad says it keeps us out of trouble.”

“Have you ever exercised before?” Nikki asked.

Micah raised one eyebrow and replied, “What do you think?”

Nate laughed and nodded. “Okay, Mister. Well, we can help you figure it out. We know the machines, except for this one, but we’re quick learners. Also, we can give you some pointers on diet.”

Micah rolled his eyes and groaned. “I don’t want to diet.”

Nikki and Nate both laughed at him.

“What he means is that you’re probably not eating right,” Nikki explained. “Lots of business people who travel a lot and stay in different cities for lengthy periods of time tend to eat a lot of junk and processed foods. And I think you need to put down the Dew. Dad says that stuff will make you crazy.”

“But I need it to keep me awake,” Micah argued.

“Have extra water and a cup of coffee,” Nate suggested.

“Coffee is actually really good for you if you don’t overdo it,” Nikki added.

“You don’t say?” Micah replied.

Nikki nodded. “Yep. Even decaf.”

“I like espresso myself,” Nate offered. “But the closest decent coffee place is Starbucks Reserve and they’re swamped in the morning. So Dad bought us our own espresso machine. It’s awesome.”

“Yeah,” Nikki chimed in. “You should get one.”

“I’ll think about that,” Micah replied.

“By the way,” Nate went on, “where are you from?”

“Texas,” Micah answered.

Nikki shot him a suspicious look. “You don’t sound like a Texan.”

“I was born here,” Micah added. “I moved to Texas about thirty-five years ago.”

“Well, come on, friend,” Nate said. “Let’s get you up on this thing and see what you’re made of.”

“But we don’t know how to work it,” Micah protested, beginning to unscrew his bottle again.

Nikki gently took the pop from his hands and smiled. “We’ll help you. Now let’s get this show on the road.”

Micah hesitantly climbed on the treadmill. Nate took a good look at the many selections on the dashboard, while Nikki stood by holding the Mountain Dew.

“Okay, I think I get it,” Nate said. “Grab hold of those bars and hang on, Micah. We’re going to start you up.”



Every muscle in Micah's body ached when he went to bed that night. Not only had he tried out the brand new treadmill, but Nate and Nikki had talked him into trying an elliptical as well, and then he lifted a few weights after that.

When he thought of his new, very unusual friends, he couldn't help but smile. Nate had reminded him to have an egg for breakfast instead of the sweets to see if that would help him from getting so hungry during the morning before lunch. And Nikki said that she'd be more than happy to make him a latte in the morning until he could get his own espresso machine.

They were sweet and friendly, and full of life. Micah was drawn to them, but then he'd always loved children.

"They'd be about your age," he whispered in the dark of his room. He sighed heavily as he thought about the baby that Rivka hadn't wanted. They had been trying to reconcile, after one of her many affairs, and she became pregnant.

He thought he'd forgiven her, but as he looked back on the years he could see that he hadn't. He'd pulled away from her the day she told him that she'd terminated the pregnancy. He'd even grown to dislike her. When she announced her desire to divorce, he had been relieved. Always in the past he'd offer to go to counseling. But this time he didn't even want to try.

He took a deep breath and let it out. "Well, that's water under the bridge," he whispered...*and I'd best be forgetting about it.*



The next morning as Micah was getting into his car he heard hurried footsteps behind him. *Oh, no!* he thought. *This is the big one. This is where I get shanked...and everything was going so well...*

“Micah! Wait a sec!” called a friendly, familiar voice.

Micah swallowed with relief and turned to see Nikki, dressed in a school uniform, hurrying toward him with a tall paper cup. He smiled with a curious frown as he took the hot cup from her hand.

“Your latte,” she reminded with a grin. She shook her finger at him and ordered, “Don’t do the Dew!”

“Okay, thanks,” Micah replied with a chuckle. “I’ll try to be good.”

Nikki giggled, turned and dashed off to get into a black Lincoln Navigator with her brother. Whoever was driving them was already in the driver’s seat and Micah couldn’t see him or her.

“What a great kid,” he said to himself as he watched them drive away. He took a sip through the tiny hole in the lid and smiled. “She makes a pretty good latte, too.”

Sophie was amongst the cubicles, listening to a humorous story that Meredith was relating when Benedict walked into the office. Sophie politely listened to Meredith finish her story, then excused herself and headed for Benedict’s office. The door was open, so she walked in.

“Good morning,” she greeted with a friendly smile. “How are things going? I noticed that you weren’t in church yesterday.”

Benedict returned her smile, but he looked troubled. “I was really tied up this weekend.” And then he abruptly asked, “How was the game?”

“It was awesome,” Sophie answered, wondering why he was staying so mysterious about his ‘family emergency.’ “Tiger and his folks came over to the barbeque. They’re such great people.”

“They are.” He took a deep breath and questioned, “How’s Micah working out?”

The question caught Sophie off-guard and she accidentally gulped. *Why would he ask about Micah?* She felt her face and neck get hot. She sorted through the possibilities: *maybe somebody called him and told him that we’ve been inseparable for a solid week...I shouldn’t be dating someone from work, after all I’m one of the senior partners...Frank and Benedict have never done anything like this...but maybe he’s just asking about how Micah is doing on the job...She felt...guilty...or something...just being asked about Micah...How should I answer this—*

Benedict broke the silence with a chuckle. “Is everything okay, Sophie?”

“It’s great,” she answered quickly. “He’s great...I mean, he’s working out great.” She knew she was stammering so she swallowed and forced a smile. What else was there to say? Micah was working out great...in the office as well as out of the office.

Benedict raised one of his silvered eyebrows and said, “That sounds *great*, Sophie.”

Sophie rolled her eyes. She turned toward the door but stopped to quickly to add over her shoulder, “I have a phone call this morning. I’ll talk to you later.”

“Okay, Sophie,” Benedict chuckled.

When Sophie was out of sight, Benedict picked up his phone and texted: *Just asked Sophie about Micah, lol, she literally stuttered. I think it’s going really well.*

In a few moments came the reply: *He acted strange on Friday as well. Ben thinks they’re seeing each other in more than an office setting.*

Benedict smiled and texted: *Are you free for lunch today? He waited anxiously for the reply.*

Soon his phone pinged and he opened the message: *Yes! Thought you’d never ask. By the way, how are you feeling this morning?*

Benedict replied: *I’m okay. Where do you want to go for lunch?*

In a few moments, the reply came: *I’d love to go over to Jacoby’s.*

Benedict nodded. He loved the old German restaurant himself. He replied: *See you there at high-noon.*

His phone pinged back almost instantly: *High-noon it is! Can’t wait!*

Benedict smiled, feeling his face grow warm and his heart beat increase. But, then again, she’d always made him feel that way. “I can’t wait either,” he whispered aloud.

Sophie hurried back to her office and quickly closed the door. *What came over me in there?* She couldn’t help but smile at herself as she recalled her immature actions. *I’m not sixteen anymore. What happened? Maybe I should have*

*just answered Benedict honestly and said, 'Well, I'm already praying that he comes to know Jesus and stays in Detroit.' So I'd say things are going better than great.* She smiled again at the imaginary conversation.

She took a deep breath as she looked at the cityscape. She'd always lived so in control. No one usually ruffled her feathers, and no one had been able to garner her affections. Certainly she'd been on many *dates*, and even enjoyed them. But none of those men made her feel like the day she felt when Micah walked up out of nowhere and gave her that sweet smile...*and whatever inhibitions I thought I had flew right out the window*, and she didn't want them back.

A knock on her office door made her jump and she turned to see Meredith. She wore somewhat of a scowl as she stood there, smartphone in hand.

"What is it, Mere?" Sophie asked.

Meredith huffed. "Trouble in Corktown again."

Great chunks of ceiling had been ripped asunder on the first floor, walls that could have been salvaged had been demolished, and one header on the second floor looked precariously close to giving way. It had been vandals this time. A direct attack on the site. A gang symbol had been left on the northern most corner of the outside of the building indicating their intentions of keeping the structure within their purview.

"They don't want you here, Ma'am," the police officer had said when he showed her the symbol outside.

Sophie sighed disgustedly as she positioned herself carefully on the wobbly ladder that Stan Romano held steady. She'd forgotten to change her high heels before she hurried over to see the damage, but Stan wanted a second opinion so up she went.

“What do you think?” Stan questioned as he held the flashlight into the questionable area. “I think we’ve gotta take it out and put a new one in there otherwise we’re gonna have trouble when we restore the stairway.”

Sophie nodded. “I think you’re right.” She squinted as she looked further into the damaged area. “How did they get into such a critical joint in the first place? That shouldn’t have been so easy to expose. They must have had some fairly specialized equipment.”

“I wondered that myself. And it’s gonna be a dangerous fix,” Stan muttered. “We’re gonna need a specialist.”

“Call your cousin,” Sophie replied, turning to take his hand for help down the ladder as she said, “He’s the best in the business and I had a few extra funds built into the Corktown budget.” She frowned and shook her head again. “I hope we don’t have to have a full-scale war on this.”

“It’s probably just kids,” Stan offered.

Sophie shrugged as if it was no big deal, but inwardly she had worried about the Corktown site from its inception. Meredith’s childhood neighborhood was rough, but the price on the building was a veritable ‘steal.’ As well, the area was full of kids being transported for hours in the morning in order to attend school. When they finally did reach the school, oftentimes the teachers didn’t show up. Sometimes the kids weren’t even issued books. In many cases bus drivers had

walked off the job, or didn't show at all, leaving kids stranded with no way home. After a while, the kids became discouraged and skipped school. Eventually they didn't return. The result was a neighborhood population of drop-outs, who turned to the gangs for a place in their hostile world. A charter school in the thick of it would turn things around—if they could overcome the gangs.



With great effort Micah eased himself into the chair behind his desk. Every muscle in his body was stiff and sore. The drive to work hadn't been too bad, but the walk down that long hall was a killer.

“Good morning, Mr. Bloomfield,” LaKeisha greeted.

Micah looked up to see that his assistant had arrived, smartphone in hand. She was already plucking away at the screen, undoubtedly the windup for his day's scheduled events. He hoped that one of them didn't include walking to the Woodward site.

“Good morning, LaKeisha,” he replied. “Please call me Micah if it's okay with you—and do you have any Advil?”

“That's quite all right,” she answered. “And I do just happen to have some Advil in my desk. I can bring you a couple. Is everything okay?”

“Oh, fine,” he lied. “Just a little headache.”

She nodded and hurried out of his office but returned quickly with the Advil, placing them on his desk. He tossed them back, took the last swig of his latte to

wash them down, and then he smiled at LaKeisha. “Thank you so much. What do you have for me today?”

LaKeisha clicked her smartphone. “Mr. McMillian wants to see you as soon as you have a free moment. He’s in the conference room downstairs.”

“I’ll get right to it.”

“And there was a call from the *Register*. They’d like an interview with someone working on the Woodward site. Benedict thought you might be interested?”

Micah’s eyes were wide with surprise. “Why not Aiden? He’s the brains behind the thing.”

LaKeisha shrugged.

“But you’re our engineering and structure specialist,” said a deep voice, and Micah and LaKeisha looked to see that Benedict was in the doorway.

Micah’s first impulse was to stand and greet the older gentlemen, and he did so but it was slow and stiff. “Good morning, Benedict,” he said extending his hand, trying to keep his grimace hidden.

Benedict entered the office, accepting Micah’s greeting. “Good morning Micah,” he said. He looked at LaKeisha with a smile, “Good morning, LaKeisha. Please forgive my interruption.

“No problem,” she replied. Looking at Micah she said, “I don’t have anything else for you today thus far. If you want to do the interview, let me know so that I can get ahold of the *Register*. And don’t forget about Mr. McMillian.”

“Thank you, LaKeisha,” Micah replied.



She turned and left them alone.

Benedict surprised Micah by closing the door. “Have a seat, Micah,” he said with a serious expression. He strode to the seats before Micah’s desk and sat down.

Micah eased himself back into his chair. It almost felt as if he was in trouble for something...*I wonder if this has anything to do with Sophie...I suppose there’s a company policy against dating around the office...well I’m not really dating around the office, I’m only dating Sophie.* Inwardly he smiled about that...*I’m dating Sophie—*

“How is Detroit treating you?” Benedict asked with a faint smile.

“Great,” Micah answered, perhaps a little too quickly. “It’s great. I’m really enjoying it here.”

Benedict nodded and slowly let out his breath. “She loves Motown,” he stated simply, “almost as much as she loves the Tigers.”

Micah swallowed so hard that it sounded like a gulp.

Benedict grinned. “Her birthday is in June and there’s a musical she wants to see, but it’s already sold out.” He reached into the inner breast pocket of his jacket and pulled out two paper tickets that he laid on Micah’s desk. “*Motown the Musical*. But, please, don’t tell her where you got the tickets. And make it a surprise.” He rose from his seat.

Micah eased himself into a standing position. “Why?” he frowned at the older gentlemen.

“Just because,” Benedict answered with a wink. He made his way to the door, hesitating before he turned the knob. He turned and said with a smile, “Now don’t tell on me.”

“I won’t,” Micah promised, wondering why he’d agree to such strange terms.

Benedict nodded and left.

“How strange was that?” Micah muttered. He took the tickets from his desk and tucked them safely into his inner breast pocket. Then he gathered his new drawings on the Woodward project and headed downstairs.

Back in his office, Benedict quickly typed a text: *Gossip around the office is that they’ve started to see each other daily for lunch. I gave him the tickets just now. That was a great idea.* He hit send and waited anxiously for a reply.

In just a few minutes, he received the message: *Excellent!*

Just a few seconds later there was another ping, and Benedict read: *I forgot to tell you this morning, but I’m praying for you, Ben.*

Benedict’s eyes filled with tears of remembrance...*she always called me ‘Ben.’* He smiled and texted: *Thanks, Liana.*

The Lafayette and Brush sites were moving along as planned, without glitches or dilemmas. However, Micah had discovered a serious problem, as suspected, in the southwest corner of the foundation on the Woodward project. Aiden McMillian was impressed when Micah brought him the results, mystified as

to how he'd managed to see such an obscure risk. What's more, Micah had already designed a solid and safe plan for the problem that wouldn't break the budget.

"You have a tremendous eye, young lad," Aiden complimented as he scoured Micah's safety recommendations.

Micah hadn't been called 'young' in longer than he cared to remember, but the esteem Aiden had put upon him before the rest of their team did wonders for his self-confidence. Even the stiffness in his muscles was alleviated the moment Aiden spoke the words.

"He called me *young lad*," Micah bragged to Sophie over lunch at the Townhouse. Completely enclosed by an all-glass atrium dining room with retractable walls and ceiling, the Townhouse was exquisite and Micah had wanted to try it the first time he saw it. Trees and other impeccably cared for greenery made it unique to the busy downtown square around it.

Sophie saw the sparkle in his eye and again marveled at how much he'd changed in just the last week.

"And I have a question for you," he went on, changing the subject abruptly. "Where do you buy your groceries? I'm out of everything."

"You should have come with me last night," she said. "I went to Whole Foods. It's on Mack, just behind my place."

"Okay, that sounds good," he acknowledged. "Now, about the house cleaning. Do you do it yourself or you do hire someone?"

“I have a service,” she answered. “And I can give you their number. They’re very good, dependable, and reasonably priced. They clean my mom’s condo as well.”

“How about dry cleaning?”

Sophie chuckled. “I like Lafayette Laundry. They have a reasonably priced drop-off laundry, and dry cleaning.” She looked at him with mischief in her expression and asked, “Didn’t you research anything before you came here?”

“No,” Micah admitted with a smile. “I was really depressed...but I’m not anymore, and my condo is a pit.” He raised one eyebrow and stated, “I’m going to have to wash my unmentionables out in the sink pretty soon if I don’t find a Laundromat.”

Sophie couldn’t help it and she laughed again.

Later that evening Sophie arrived at Grand Retirement and hurried to her mother’s floor. She used her key to slip inside Eva’s apartment, quickly closed the door behind her, and waited at the peep-hole. Almost within moments, Fred’s blond locks passed by and Sophie inwardly gasped. *Mom was right! He’s up here again.* She waited until she heard the knock on Jean’s door down the hall and then she slipped out into the hall and inched closer to Jean’s apartment.

The closer she came she could hear their voices.

“But I don’t have a lot of money, Fred,” she heard Jean say, as clear as a bell, and Sophie gasped.

“I know Uncle Elmo left you with a good inheritance,” Fred scolded. He sighed heavily and made a ‘tsk’ noise. “Now, the only question is what have you done with the money?”

“Why must we argue about this every day?” Jean questioned.

“Because, by rights that money belongs to my family,” Fred countered. “You’re just an in-law, and I am Elmo’s blood relative. And I’m not saying I want all of it. Just keep back what you need for the next year or so and give me the rest.”

Sophie was horrified at what she heard.

“What if I live longer than a year?” Jean argued. “Then what?”

“You don’t have anything to worry about. I’ll pay the bill if that happens.”

“You don’t have any money, Fred.”

Sophie was startled when a nurse bustled past her, headed straight for Jean’s door, knocked and went inside. Sophie hurried back up the hallway and ducked into her mother’s apartment, unable to hear the next portion of the conversation. Whatever happened with the nurse sent Fred charging angrily down the hallway for she saw him when he passed by her mother’s peephole.

“You are so onto something, Mom,” she whispered. “Now, what is going on with you, Fred?”

A few minutes later, Sophie hurried her mother into her apartment and closed the door.

“He was begging her for money,” Sophie whispered as Eva made her way to the kitchen to start the Kuerig. “He says the money belongs to his family?”

Eva rolled her eyes as she placed her cup into the machine. “The McMasters are part of what we used to call ‘Old Money’ here in Detroit, she tittered as she prepared her coffee. “But they never had much for children, and therefore not much for heirs...’cept for Fred. When his parents died—and Old Man McMasters, Fred’s father, who would be Jean’s brother-in-law, didn’t kick the bucket until just a few years ago. Lived till he was almost one hundred—he left everything to Fred. There was so much money, and a behemoth of a mansion and grounds. Fred sold the mansion and land right away. There’s an old financial advisor that lives here, and he claims that none of the cash was ever invested. Apparently, it went straight into Fred’s checking account. He’s probably spent it by now.”

Sophie was nodding. “He does live pretty well-off for just such a small firm.”

“Fred was a trust fund kid before there ever was such a thing,” Eva went on. Her coffee had finished and she set it on the counter. “Grab this for me, Sophie, would you?”

Sophie hurried to the counter to help her mother navigate her coffee back to her favorite chair.

“Jean tells me that Fred went through his trust fund like water through a sieve,” Eva went on as she seated herself. “She doesn’t think his firm is making ends meet anymore, that the trust and inheritance are probably depleted, and now he thinks he’s figured out a way to tap her for whatever cash he can get.”

Sophie nodded again.

Eva looked at Sophie with a hopeful expression. “There must be something we can do, Sophie. I just hate to see Jean be harassed this way.”

Sophie took a deep breath and bit her lower lip. “I’m sure we can think of something, Mom.”

Later that evening, Micah pushed his cart through the produce section in Whole Foods, wondering at what exactly to purchase. He knew that he wanted to eat better food, and the fruits and vegetables were beautiful and fragrant. But how exactly did one prepare these sorts of things? His chef knew how to do it, but Micah had never prepared a morsel in his life. He watched an elderly lady pick up a lemon, give it a squeeze and then a scratch. She held it to her nose and inhaled deeply. The lemon then went into her cart. *I wonder what she does with that?* he thought.

Another woman was hunting through green apples, holding each one and turning it around and around before it was put into her cart. A young man with a baby on his hip carefully chose the perfect stand of asparagus from a small tin of water.

*How hard can this be?* he thought as he reached for a few apples and a lemon. Then he went to the asparagus and put that in his cart as well. *I’ll just YouTube this stuff and see what I come up with.* He added some red peppers and a purple onion.

The fish counter was next, and did it ever have a strong odor. He’d always liked seafood, and he’d read somewhere that it was a ‘heart healthy’ choice. He perused the glass case and when the employee behind the counter asked if he

needed anything, he ordered a small fillet of swordfish, and a half a pound of shrimp.

It took Micah nearly two hours to traverse the entire store. He chose small portions of beef and chicken, as well as a few bags of frozen vegetables, noticing that they actually came with directions. He added eggs, turkey bacon, and tomato juice to his cart when he saw an advertisement in the dairy section suggesting that he do that. He threw in a bag of whole wheat bread, though he couldn't imagine why. He couldn't find any pop in the whole store, so he bought some espresso beans and milk, hoping to lay his hands on a machine sometime this week.

There were other staples he thought he should get, like butter and peanut butter, and preserves. If everything else failed, certainly he could put together a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. That had to be better than tacos and burgers every night of the week. He threw in some sliced Monterey Jack, a few sparkling waters, and a jar of olives

Lastly, he grabbed a ready-made meal from the deli and headed for the check-out.

As he watched the clerk ring his order he thought perhaps he'd be on YouTube all night long just trying to get his breakfast ready. But at least he could skip the pastries for a while.

When he arrived at home with his purchases he put everything away and wolfed down his meal. Then he donned his sweats and headed for the gym. To his utter delight his new young friends were hard at work. They waved him over when they saw him, and Micah quickly joined them near an elliptical machine.



“That latte was great this morning,” he complimented.

“Yeah,” Nate replied. “Nikki’s lattes are the best.” He climbed off the machine and reached for a towel to pat his face and neck.

“I’d take one more tomorrow if you don’t mind. I haven’t found a machine yet.”

“Sure thing,” she agreed with a smile, coming down off of her machine. “Did you stay off the Dew today?”

“I did,” Micah answered, realizing that he hadn’t even thought about it all day. “I guess I had such a busy day I forgot about it for once.”

Nate grinned and raised one eyebrow. “How’s the girl?”

Micah instantly returned his smile. “She’s terrific. We’re having dinner tomorrow night.”

“Then let’s get this show on the road,” Nikki encouraged, and they went to work.