

## Chapter 17

Amanda was deep in prayer. Her house was silent, except for the dull sound of Sophie's shower. Art had already left for the church. She sat at her kitchen table asking the Lord for His leading in many things, and for the blessing of His great salvation to be revealed to those who have yet to find Him.

It was Wednesday in the Motor City, two days after Micah's harrowing experience with Fred McMasters. And while Sophie had seemingly bounced back into a regular routine, Amanda was still on edge.

A sudden thud on her front door jolted her from her prayers, and she caught her breath.

"Okay, take it easy old girl," she whispered to herself, getting to her feet. "He probably won't use the front door again."

With great stealth, Amanda stole through the kitchen and into the living room for a peek out of one of the windows. She laughed at herself when she saw

the morning paper. She opened the door, retrieved the paper, and then slammed it closed, being sure to fasten all three of the deadbolts.

She returned to the kitchen, threw the paper on the table, and went back to her prayers.

A little while later Sophie appeared, the picture of perfect peace and serenity. She was dressed in a pale blue linen Giorgio Armani skirt and blouse and Nikes.

Amanda looked at the ensemble and chuckled. “Well, good morning, Sophie. I’ve got some eggs in the oven. Want a bite before you go?”

“I’d love some,” Sophie answered. She turned to the cupboard and got herself a plate, while Amanda retrieved the eggs.

“So, what’s on your agenda today,” Amanda asked, scooping some eggs onto Sophie’s plate.

“About a million and one things,” Sophie answered. “Thanks...” she reached for a fork and took a seat at the table. Amanda joined her. “First I have to finish some drawings for Penny Miller—”

“The home-for-wayward-children-lady?”

Sophie nodded. “And it’s going to be beautiful, *and* functional. And she wants me to find a way to configure a small chapel into the third-floor ballroom—and I think I can, but I’ll have to have Micah look at the lower supports first to see if we have enough for the extra weight on that side of the house.” She took a bite

of her eggs and glanced at the paper that was still lying rolled up on the table.  
“What’s that?”

“Oh,” Amanda chuckled and reached for the paper, unrolling it. “It scared the daylights out of me. I was at the table—” she stared at the front page of the morning paper.

Sophie noticed her sister’s long stare and asked, “What is it now?”

Amanda turned the front page toward Sophie so that she could see three photos above the fold. Fred was on the left, Sophie dead center, and Micah on the right. The headline read: *LOVERS’ TRIANGLE ROCKS RIVERFRONT*.

Sophie almost choked on her eggs. She scowled and declared, “I’m suing them to Kingdom come.”

The article was quite comprehensive. It gave details from within Design & Structure that had only been shared with the partners, such as Micah’s and Mort’s new senior partnerships and that Benedict Lawrence, recently diagnosed with cancer, was planning to retire in October. Details of Micah’s finances and recent gains in the stock market, as well as his offer from McGregor & Sons, were explained in very particular terms. It then went into Sophie’s and Micah’s history as classmates at Henry Ford High School, the loss of Micah’s firm in Dallas, and his ugly divorce, which was worse than Sophie had ever imagined. The article even provided bits and pieces of quotes attributed to Rivka, apparently taken from divorce proceeding documents.

“Man, I thought Rivka was mean in high school,” Sophie murmured. She quietly gasped. “And there’s a quote here from an unnamed source…” She looked

up at Amanda for a minute to add, “What a chicken...*unnamed source*.” She shook her head in disgust and read from the article, ““Sophie used her intimate relationship with Fred for his contact with Sarahi Perez and then stole the project out from under him. He was devastated.”” She looked at her sister and frowned. “Intimate relationship? What a joke. And I knew Sarahi long before Fred took up with her.” She began reading again, only to find something that made her gasp again.

“What now?” Amanda asked, eyes big and round.

“Listen to this...more *unnamed source* junk, ‘Fred pleaded with Sophie to remain faithful to their longtime relationship, warning her that Bloomfield only wanted her money. Each time she promised to end her liaisons with Bloomfield. But then he would see them together again. Fred told me that during his last altercation with Bloomfield he felt threatened, and that Benedict Lawrence had probably set that up as he has recently been very intimate with Bloomfield’s mother, Mrs. Liana Bloomfield.’” Sophie looked at Amanda and raised one eyebrow. “*Threatened?* This joker can’t be serious. Where on earth are they getting this stuff—”

At that moment Sophie’s cellphone rang. She checked the caller ID, saw that it was Mike, and answered immediately.

“Hey, Sophe,” he said. “Have you seen the morning paper?”

Sophie rolled her eyes. “Unfortunately.”

“I’m getting a team together. Are you still at your sister’s?”

“Yes.”

“Well, stay put. We’ll be there around eight o’clock. Sound good?”

“Yes. Thank you,” she replied.

“I’m going to call Micah and tell him not to speak to anyone—”

“I’ll have to text you his new number. He lost his cellphone at the site last Friday.”

“Okay. Get that to me asap so we can get our show on the road. Did you call Vince?” Vince Campbell & Associates had been Design & Structure’s attorneys for many years.

“Not yet. Amanda and I were just reading the article.”

“No worries. We’ll take care of that from here. Who knows, maybe we can get an immediate retraction.”

“I’m still suing them,” Sophie vowed. “If it’s the last thing I do.”

Micah’s phone rang on his nightstand, shaking him from his deep sleep. He rolled over and looked at the clock. Seven fifteen. He should be up by now anyway.

“Mom’s tea got me again,” he mumbled as he reached for the phone and groggily answered, “This is Micah.”

“Hey, Micah, this is Mike Young, and we’ve got a problem.”

Micah was horrified when Mike explained what was going on. He promised not to speak to anyone, including Sophie, until they could configure a strategy to deal with the crisis. Then he hurried through the shower and got dressed.

By the time he made it downstairs, his mom and Asher were reading the morning paper at the kitchen table. They were clearly appalled.

Liana rose from the table and went to Micah, putting her arms around him. “I had no idea that things were so bad with Rivka.”

Micah only nodded. He was still reeling from his conversation with Mike and couldn’t formulate words with which to respond.

“I’m sorry, Micah,” Asher said in a course voice.

Micah looked at his uncle and saw the anguish on his face.

“I’m just so sorry that you’ve had to go through all of this,” Asher went on. “Why didn’t you tell us about her?”

Micah shrugged; he still didn’t know how to respond.

“Come on, son,” Liana encouraged. “Sit down with us and I’ll get you some coffee.”

Micah nodded and took a seat next to his uncle, who put his hand on Micah’s shoulder.

“I hope this doesn’t make you leave after all,” Asher said. “I just love having you here.”

Micah had to swallow hard at his uncle’s rare display of affection. He shook his head, forced a smile and replied, “I’m not going anywhere, Asher.”

Young Public Relations had been in business since 1975. Mike's firm was adept at not only managing public relations for someone who'd been 'smeared,' but they managed press and crowd control as well. They handled celebrities, government officials, and even high-profile candidates.

Amanda watched out her front window as three shiny, black Suburbans pulled up in front of her house and parked nearby. So far there wasn't any press, but it probably wouldn't be long before they located Sophie and swarmed the place like the buzzards they were.

"Mike's here," she called to her sister, who was in the kitchen making phone calls to the office, trying to juggle her schedule once again.

Mike, along with three African American men and two Caucasian women, all dressed in identical black suits, got out of one of the vehicles. They quickly made their way to the front door while the driver remained. The other vehicles didn't open, but Amanda could see that they were loaded with people. She hurried to open the door for them as Sophie came into the living room.

"Hey, Sophie," Mike greeted. He closed the distance between them and gave her a loving embrace. "So sorry about everything. Your mom is really mad. I had to intervene."

Sophie returned his affection. "Thanks," she replied. "What a nightmare. She looked up at him and whispered, "I'm not anyone's lover, least of all Fred's!"

Mike nodded. "I know. But that's the way this stuff goes." He released her and turned to indicate his team. "This is our best team, Sophie. The gentleman on the far left is Lewis. He's lead on this one." One of the African American men

nodded his head, and Mike continued, “He’s an expert in these types of situations. He’ll handle all of our legal questions, as well as what we release back into the press. He’ll handle your attorneys, and he’ll be the liaison between you and anyone that wants an interview...the guy next to him is Cameron. He leads our on-the-ground investigative team, which brings us to Tina and Sharon.” He indicated the two women standing next to Cameron, both blond haired and blue-eyed. “These three will follow up with interviews and attempt to reveal the identity of our unnamed source...And the man on the end is Jeremiah.” Mike indicated the African American man at the end of the line. “Jeremiah handles all of our online investigation, because there’s probably going to be a lot of that in this one.”

Mike took a breath and began again, “There are two teams in place outside, all former military and/or government service. And I sent two teams up to Micah’s parents’ place, and two teams over to Design & Structure. They’re going to run security from now on. For now, we think you should just hold up here at Amanda’s—”

“But I’ve got a lot of work to do. I really don’t have the time to—”

“Once the press locates you,” Mike interrupted, “you won’t be going anywhere anyway. You might as well cool your heels, young lady.”

The press was practically busting down the doors at Design & Structure, hoping for a glimpse of Sophie or Micah, or perhaps even both of them. The ladies stationed in the lobby were beyond thankful when the teams from Young Public Relations appeared. They were friendly, but firm about how far the press could encroach into the building. After all, the building that housed Design & Structure was privately owned. The press quickly relocated to the sidewalk out front.



On the twenty-fifth floor, in Benedict's office, what was left of the senior partner staff met to discuss the situation that had befallen them.

"So, who got all this information on Micah?" Frank questioned as he paced back and forth. "We haven't released any of that into the public yet. Not even our staff was aware of what was happening. Is there some kind of a spy among us?"

"Corporate espionage is a real thing," Mort said. "It could be that someone is monitoring our emails—maybe even our offices."

"No way," Benedict said, adamantly shaking his head. "Our firewalls are so tamper-proof that I can't even get in to check my email at times without Meredith's help—"

A knock sounded at the door and Benedict's assistant Linda let herself in. "Mike Young is here. He says he needs to have an extensive conversation with the three of you."

Benedict raised his eyebrows. "Well, heavens, show him in then."

After a lengthy question and answer session with Mike Young's team, Micah was told to 'stay put' until further notice. He grabbed himself a bottled water out of the refrigerator and wandered back through the house. He found his mother sitting in the solarium working on her knitting, as if she didn't have a care in the world. She looked up and smiled when she heard him.

"All done?" she asked.

Micah nodded. "For now. I guess we're going to be here for a little while."

"Did you talk to Sophie?"

“Not yet.” Micah let out a disappointed sigh. “They want to make sure our cellphones aren’t being monitored first.”

“Do they have any idea where the paper got their information about your divorce?” Liana asked.

“I guess it’s all a matter of public record in Texas,” Micah answered. “As long as the Court didn’t seal it, everything can be seen by anyone who’s even remotely curious as to why we divorced.” And while Rivka’s affairs had been revealed during court proceedings, the abortion had not, and he was so thankful that he’d kept it a secret. His mother would have been devastated.

Liana sweetly smiled at her son and said, “Do you want to pray with me, Micah. It helps me so much when I’m under a lot of stress.”

Micah sighed again and sat down with his mother. “You know, Mom,” he began, “I really don’t know how to pray.”

Liana smiled again, leaned over and patted his knee. “That’s okay, I don’t either. But I’ll show you how I do it, and then you can try it yourself. Okay?”

Micah faintly smiled and nodded his head. His mother reached for one of his hands and bowed her head.

Just a few hours into his work, Jeremiah, the tech genius on the team, notified Sophie that her phone was not being monitored by an outside source, and neither was Micah’s. It was safe to contact each other once again, and she immediately made an outgoing call.

“How are you feeling?” she asked. “I’ve been praying for you all day.”

“Pretty good,” he answered. “Mom has been giving me this tea at night that knocks me out and I sleep hard. I haven’t had to take any pain pills at all. I think I’m ready to come back to work.”

“Me too...I sure miss you.”

“You miss me?” he asked, pretending inordinate curiosity.

“Yes,” she said with a smile. “And I miss that fun life we’d carved out for ourselves. I can’t wait to get back to it.”

“Me too,” Micah agreed. “Now if we could just get the rest of the world to cooperate.”

“It won’t be long,” Sophie encouraged. “Before we know it, we’ll have this whole thing behind us and we’ll look back and have some good laughs.”

“You are so positive,” he replied. “How can you stay so positive through this nightmare?”

Sophie giggled and said, “Art put the whole thing on the church prayer list. There are a lot of good saints praying for this to be resolved quickly, and I have no reason to doubt the power of our Savior.”



Micah awakened the next morning earlier than he had been during his stay with his mother and Asher. He felt unusually rested as he crawled out of bed and donned his slippers.

“Wonder what the news has to say this morning,” he murmured as he opened his bedroom door, the morning aroma of his mother’s coffee filling his nostrils. “Oh, that smells good.”

He made his way to the kitchen where he found Liana and Asher at the breakfast table.

“Good morning, Micah,” Asher greeted with a smile. “Nothing interesting in the paper this morning.”

“But the sidewalk is full of people,” Liana added. She frowned and asked, “Do you think I need to bring them anything?”

Asher scowled. “Don’t bring them anything. They’re the enemy.”

Micah chuckled, but nodded in agreement.

While the press hadn’t located Sophie and Micah the day before, they’d certainly found them now. Amanda and Art’s sidewalk was full of people as well. Mike’s teams were holding them at bay, and Amanda couldn’t help but take up a look-out just behind the long drapes in the living room.

“They look like hungry vultures,” she whispered to Sophie, who stayed in the kitchen entryway, awaiting Amanda’s reports.

Art let out a disgusted sigh and shook his head. “How in the world am I supposed to get to work? I have a flock that needs me.”

“Lewis will handle point on that,” Amanda answered, obviously having already mastered the lingo. “I’ll text him with our need and he’ll send in someone to extract you.”

Sophie nearly giggled.

Art cracked a small smile. “Well, I’m going to need an extraction pretty quick so you’d better fire up that order,” he pretended to grumble.

Amanda pulled her cellphone out of her pocket and quickly texted Lewis.

Sophie took a deep breath and slowly let it out, praying that someone would call with some kind of an update.

Micah found his uncle in what his mother told him had become his favorite room in the house. It was a comfortable billiard room, but Asher also had a cedar closet located there, in which he stored things.

Micah saw him sitting in a chair near the closet, going through a medium sized box. He seemed absorbed in his thoughts so not wanting to startle him, Micah knocked softly on the door jam.

Asher looked up and smiled warmly at his nephew. “Come over here, young man,” he said with a wave of his hand. “I want to show you something.”

Micah went to where his uncle sat and pulled up a nearby chair. “What are you up to?”

“I just needed to get away for a minute. It’s crazy out there,” he answered. He handed Micah a small, black and white photograph. “My parents and me.”

Micah looked at the photograph with interest. Two people, dressed in old fashioned traveling clothes, holding a baby between them. Near their feet were two tiny suitcases. “When was this taken?” Micah asked.

“1939,” Asher answered, taking the photo from Micah and gazing at it with affection. “It was the day we arrived in New York. They’d decided to leave Germany; Hitler was in power then but it hadn’t gotten bad yet.” He smiled at the photo and added, “I sure miss them.”

“Me too,” Micah replied as he remembered his grandparents. They’d passed away while he was living in Texas and he hadn’t even returned for their funeral. He suddenly had pang of regret about that. *Why was I so stubborn?* he asked himself.

Asher retrieved another photo and handed it to Micah. “That’s my Bar Mitzvah...1952.”

Micah took the old photo and looked at the image of his uncle as a young boy, standing in a crowd of other young boys, all dressed in stylish suits of the era.

“Most of us are still alive,” Asher informed. He pointed to two boys nearest him and said, “Your dad there...and that’s Jacob...he’s gone now too. He passed last winter.” He indicated another boy and said, “But Matthew Demski, Rivka’s father, he’s still around. He’s retired now too, and sometimes we play golf.” He smiled at Micah and said, “All these years we’ve all stayed in touch.” He took the photo from Micah, placed it back in the box, and then reached for another box. Pulling it towards him he said, “And I think you’re going to love what I have in this one. These belong to your dad.”

Micah watched his uncle carefully lift the lid of the old, leather box, surprised to see his high school year book lying on the top. Asher reached for the old book and grinned when he handed it to him. “Open the front cover,” he said.

Micah carefully opened the book to find dozens of old photos from his high school years. “Wow!” he quietly gasped. “I didn’t know these were even still around.”

Asher nodded. “Your mother and I decided that we’d better save everything just in case you came home someday.”

Micah had to swallow a lump in his throat. “Thanks,” he whispered, looking at the collection of photos through tear-filled eyes.

Asher reached for one and handed it to him. “That’s the night you won the big trophy.”

Micah nodded as he looked at the photo of his younger self in his hockey uniform. He remembered the evening well. “We were behind during the whole game,” he reminisced.

“And then you hit that miraculous slap shot and tied it up.” Asher chuckled. “We were on our feet for the rest of the game.”

Micah quietly laughed and nodded. “Big John Jones made the final goal. I don’t know who was more shocked—us or the goalie.”

Asher laughed, reaching for another photo. Six teenagers, all wearing the typical prep clothing of the time, button down white oxford shirts and smart blazers...except for the lone girl in the photo. She was tall and thin, had long dark hair and wore a flowered dress. She held a plaque in front of her, eyes sparkling with obvious joy.

“Math Club,” Micah whispered, touching the image of the girl. “Sophie got an award from the Army Corp of Engineers. Her mom bought her the dress for the

event.” He swallowed hard and shook his head. “Mr. Feist took our picture and made sure that we all had a copy. He took us out for pizza that night, but Sophie couldn’t come because Amanda had the baby.” A million regrets filled his heart as he looked at the photo of the young girl. Her eyes had always been alight with life and joy. *How I wish I would have come home and sought you out*, he thought. *I could have avoided the last thirty-five years of torture if I’d only come home...*

“What are you thinking about, Micah?” Asher asked, his quiet voice piercing the silence that had fallen between them.

Micah looked at his uncle, the years on his face, the obvious passage of time. “I’m sorry,” he breathed, feeling warm tears hit his cheeks. “I should have come home.”

Asher nodded. “But you had your reasons, and I understand—”

“I was a spoiled brat,” Micah interrupted. “I was angry with Mom and Dad for not letting me date Sophie.”

“Well,” Asher scoffed, trying to smile, “They behaved badly.”

“Maybe,” Micah agreed. “But that was no excuse for me to never come home again.”

Asher looked curiously at his nephew and asked, “After all those years of dating, why did you marry Rivka? You must have known by then that she wasn’t going to be a good fit for you.”

Micah shrugged. He really had no good answer, but he gave his uncle the only one he had, “We’d been living together for about ten years and I thought it was time.”



Asher's eyes became huge and round. "You lived together? Without the bonds of marriage?" he asked.

Micah nodded. "And am I ever sorry about it. Rivka wanted to move in together as soon as we got to Texas." He shook his head in disgust. "I was such an idiot. If I had to do it all over again, I wouldn't just live with someone like that. I would have lived apart first, and just dated." He sighed heavily and added, "Like you and Mom and Dad thought I was, and see how we ended up after graduation... If I had followed the folks' advice, I probably would have never married Rivka, and I probably would have come home."

Asher averted his eyes, looking back at the photo in Micah's hands. "We were wrong, too, Micah," he whispered. "We, your dad and I, couldn't see past her activist father and her black siblings, and all the trouble they were always in." He looked at Micah. "But Matthew and your dad had been friends since practically the cradle—it seemed so natural that you should be with Rivka." He reached over for a touch of the girl in the photo and faintly smiled as he said, "They're the most generous and kind people that I've met in a long time."

Micah smiled, feeling more tears on his cheeks. He took a deep breath, reached into his front jeans' pocket, and pulled out a small leather box. "Can you keep a secret, Asher?"

Asher shrugged and answered, "Probably."

Micah flipped open the box to reveal a fairly large solitaire diamond ring.

"Oh my," Asher breathed. "When did you get that?"

"On Tuesday...when I had Ben give me a ride over to Gross Pointe."

Asher smiled and nodded his head. “I won’t tell. When are you going to give it to her?”

“As soon as we get out of this mess. Before one more thing hits the fan around here, I’m putting it on her finger.”

Asher laughed and put his hand on Micah’s shoulder. “She’ll love it.” He took a deep breath and said, “You know, Micah, we all made a lot of mistakes back then, but now you have the chance to make it right for all of us. You grab that pretty lady and make a life with her—make it right for all of us, Micah. You’ll never regret it.” And then he took his nephew into his arms and held him for a long time.