

Chapter 5

Lunch with Sophie on Thursday was just as amazing as it was on Wednesday. And not only did Meredith and LaKeisha notice, but they were starting to turn other heads in the office as well.

“So, is it a *thing*, or what?” Mort whispered to LaKeisha as they watched them stroll up the hallway, laughing and talking like they’d been friends for a lifetime.

“Oh, it’s definitely a *thing*,” she whispered in return. “Mr. Bad Attitude’s attitude has done a total one-eighty, and he told me to block off his lunches until further notice. And Meredith told me that Sophie hasn’t been packing her lunch these past few days.”

Mort raised his eyebrows with interest. Sophie was a die-hard sack-lunch girl. She’d packed her lunch for as long as he could remember. He smiled as he thought about that. *Well, Micah was always sweet on Sophie.*

Sophie left the office a little early that day in preparation for her time with her mother. She purchased the chocolates and flowers—yellow tulips, her mother’s favorites—and threw in some of her mother’s favorite tea for good measure.

At precisely 5:45 p.m., she met her mother in the community center at Grand Retirement. She was just being served her supper, and there was an empty chair beside her.

“Hi, Mom,” Sophie sweetly greeted, setting her gifts on the table.

Eva didn’t lift her head. “He’s in the dining room with us right now,” she whispered.

Sophie took a deep breath and carefully glanced in the direction that she knew Jean would be seated. Sure enough, there sat Jean with her nephew Fred. His eyes met with Sophies and she caught her breath. “He saw me.” She smiled and waved politely, then turned her attention back to her mother. “I brought you some of those chocolates you love. And how about them tulips? I love the vase.”

Eva glanced at the things that Sophie had placed before her. “The tulips look fresh. You are such a dear heart. They’re my favorites you know.”

“I went to Blossoms in Midtown. They’re the best.”

Silence.

Sophie took another deep breath. “Levi called. You promised not to tell anyone.”

Eva took a bite of her bun, chewed for quite a while, and then finally said, “I’m sorry. I was desperate. I knew you were busy and I really needed some help.”

“But they don’t take us seriously, Mom,” Sophie whispered. “They are good people, but they just don’t understand. We can figure this out on our own.”

Eva nodded and cast Sophie a glance with a sweet smile. “Thanks for the chocolates, Sophie.”

“You’re welcome.”

Eva glanced sideways at Sophie and whispered, “Jean came to the Widow’s Tea this morning. She’s weary, I can tell. But I think it will take some time to get her to trust me with any information about Fred.” She hesitated, then began again, “I can hardly wait for Saturday.”

Sophie glanced at Jean and her nephew and nodded. "Me too."



"I'm going to see my parents tonight," Micah informed grimly as they enjoyed Coney's at American Coney Island, not far from Design & Structure. He would have rather had supper with Sophie.

"And I have a lot to do tonight to get ready for tomorrow," she added.

"Do you cook everything the night before?" he asked, thinking perhaps he should volunteer to help, and put off his mom for a couple more days.

"I prepare some of it," she admitted, "but the barbeque will happen on-site. Also, I have a great caterer that helps me out with my events."

"It's only going to be fifty degrees tomorrow, Sophie. Are we really going to barbeque?"

Sophie chuckled and answered, "Yes. I have a friend who owns a barbeque pit in Sterling Heights and he's bringing his cooker and he'll serve from there. He makes the best barbequed chicken you've ever tasted. You'll love it."

"I'm bringing my parka," he said, and Sophie laughed.



Micah parked in the winding driveway and looked at the towering mansion before him. While his parents had traveled to see him frequently in Texas, Micah hadn't visited his parents' home in thirty-five years. He'd only seen photos of his parent's new place over the years, and it was as majestic as had been depicted. He hadn't even visited when his father died, electing instead to stay in a hotel overnight and then fly back to Dallas the day after the funeral. He suddenly felt guilty for that.

Two stories, covered in brick, white shutters on the windows, and solemn white columns flanking the double front door. The landscaping was already blooming, and the yard appeared freshly mowed.

The double doors were thrown open and Micah's mother and her brother Asher stepped out onto the porch with welcoming smiles on their faces.

Micah's mother was a very small, slightly heavy woman. She wore her grey hair in a bun atop her head, and even from his car Micah could see that her black eyes still sparkled with life.

Micah's uncle was the opposite. He was very tall and thin, his grey hair cut close. He waved at Micah and smiled as well.

Micah sighed and got out of the car. He never thought he'd live to see the day he visited Detroit, and yet here he was. He ascended the steps and his mother and uncle took him into their embrace.

"Never thought I'd see the day," his mother Liana teased.

"So good to see you, Micah," Asher said as he held his nephew for a long moment. "So good to see you."

"You guys too," Micah replied.

"Well, come in, come in!" Liana coaxed excitedly. "I've made your favorite for supper tonight—brisket!"

Micah raised his eyebrows. "With apricots?"

"Yes!" she replied.

"And apple cake for dessert," Asher added. "Since we missed our new year's trip over to Dallas." After Micah's father had died, his Uncle Asher had taken Liana to Dallas several times, but always over the new year. After a few years, Uncle Asher moved in with his sister. Being a bachelor all his life, he had no family and thought it best to stay close to his sister.

Micah stepped into the house with them and was immediately engulfed with the aromas of his childhood. "It smells great in here."

"Hey, Micah," his brother Ben rounded the corner, wearing an apron. "When did you get here?"

He embraced his brother and replied, “Just now. I didn’t know you were going to be here.”

Ben was still a die-hard Detroiter, and a trauma physician. He worked endless shifts in the Emergency Room at Detroit Receiving Hospital. He and his wife and their four teenagers lived near the hospital within the Midtown boundaries. Ben had been to Texas many times to see his brother, yet Micah had never reciprocated the visits.

“I offered to come and help Mom with the apple cake.” Ben winked at his mother and teased, “I had to make sure she made it right.”

“Oh,” Liana scoffed, giving him a playful slap on the shoulder. “Josie had to work and he needed a meal.” Ben’s wife, Josie, was a doctor as well.

“How ‘bout the kids?” Micah asked.

“They’re all busy with a school carnival,” Ben answered. “And I felt bad missing it, but I wanted to see you.”

Micah smiled as he looked at his family and inhaled the tantalizing redolence of his favorite foods. It was unusually good to be home.

Around the table that night, Micah noticed a markedly different demeanor in his mother. Certainly, she had always been a cheerful person, but she was more than cheerful this evening. And so was Ben. Uncle Asher was happy, but he wasn’t ‘cheerful’ like his mother and brother. It was almost as if Liana and Ben were sharing a secret that they wanted to tell, but didn’t know how to go about it. And whatever the secret was, they were obviously thrilled with it.

“So, I hear you’re over at Design & Structure,” Asher stated. “What are you doing for them?”

Micah swallowed his bite of brisket and answered, “Right now I’m working on a foundation assessment for restoration.”

Asher frowned and looked thoughtful. “Isn’t that Sophie’s Young’s firm?”

Micah noticed that Ben and his mother suddenly looked into their plates, perhaps trying to hide their smiles. *What's that all about?* he thought.

“Yes,” he answered, unable to stop the smile that tugged at the corners of his mouth.

“So, you’ve seen her then,” Liana asked suddenly

Micah cast a glance at her, but she put her head down again. *What is she up to?* he wondered. “My office is just down the hall from hers,” he answered.

“What’s she like these days?” Asher went on, oblivious to whatever was going on with his sister and her youngest son.

“She’s wonderful,” Micah blurted, feeling his face instantly begin to burn. “I mean...she’s wonderfully *smart*. I am impressed with how she’s organized the summit.”

Asher didn’t seem to notice his slip. He only nodded with a thoughtful look in his eyes. “I saw the story in the *Register* the other day. I had no idea that Design & Structure was her firm. Do you remember that she was Danny Young’s daughter?”

Micah was stunned. *Doesn't Asher remember? They all hated that family.* “I didn’t realize it was her firm until this week,” he admitted.

“She’s made a beautiful life for herself,” Liana said with a sweetness in her tone that surprised Micah, and he looked at his mother. She quickly looked back into her plate.

Micah found himself smiling as his family continued to bestow accolades on Sophie Young, her work, and her purpose for the city. This was a far different conversation than the one that had haunted him for the last thirty-five years. And as he listened to them, his resentment started to melt away.

“Hey, what’s up with you and Mom,” Micah asked his brother as he dried the dishes Ben had washed. They’d offered to clean up while their mother and uncle went to the living room. It was how they’d done it when they were young

and still at home. It seemed only natural to do it now even though they were both in their fifties.

“What do you mean?” Ben asked, scrubbing aggressively on the pan that had roasted the brisket.

Micah shrugged. “I don’t know. You acted sort of like you have a secret.”

Ben shook his head. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.” But even as he answered, Micah saw him try to hide a smile.

“Okay, what’s going on?”

“Nothing’s going on,” he defended with a grin. “How ’bout you just tell me what she’s like.”

Micah sighed with a smile. “She’s wonderful, Ben.”

Ben chuckled. “So, you’ve talked to her?”

“Oh, yeah.” Micah couldn’t keep the silly grin off his face as he answered, “We went to the Phoenix Coney Island on Tuesday, and we’ve had lunch together every day this week...and I think we would have gone to supper on Wednesday and Thursday but she teaches at her church on Wednesdays, and had to visit her mother on Thursday. I had to come here tonight, but she was busy anyway getting ready for a barbeque tomorrow.”

“Are you going to that?”

“I wouldn’t miss it. We’re going to the Tigers’ game first.”

“Wow. You guys sound as if you’ve already hit it off.”

Micah frowned thoughtfully as he answered, “You know it’s strange, Ben, it’s almost as if we picked up where we left off—except better. I can talk this time.” He chuckled. “I couldn’t even talk to her thirty-five years ago, and now all I want to do is talk to her. She listens so intently, as if she’s really interested. And she laughs at all of my stories.” He paused only to sigh. “I think she likes me, Ben.”

Ben saw the shine in his brother's eyes and he smiled. "I thought she always kinda liked you, Micah."



Whoever wanted to see the Tigers game before the barbeque, met at the valet station at Design & Structure. Their cars were parked and they were loaded onto a bus for a short ride to Comerica Park. Those who didn't want to sit outside during the game were welcome to use the company suite, which was warm and comfortable.

Micah donned his parka when he learned that Sophie rarely utilized the suite. No, she had to have seats near the dugout.

Sophie couldn't help but laugh at him when she realized that he'd made good on his threat to buy the parka. Though she was bundled in a heavily lined denim jacket, an orange scarf emblazoned with the Old English 'D', a matching stocking cap and leather gloves. It was only forty-three degrees in Comerica Park for the noon game. A slight wind made it quite chilly.

Sophie introduced Micah to Amanda, whom Micah found hard to believe was sixty years of age. Amanda was tall, like Sophie, and her frame slight. Her skin was smooth and light brown, her eyes dark. She wore her silver hair cut close to her head, which was the only sign that she might be older than Sophie. When she smiled and shook Micah's hand, he saw the same sweet expression in her countenance that he saw in Sophie's. He easily recognized the family resemblance.

Sophie's brothers, Luke and Levi, were nearly identical, though Levi wore his silvered beard trimmed to perfection and Luke was clean shaven. Their skin was very black, and barely a wrinkle between the two of them. They were tall as well, but not narrow like their sisters. For men of their age, Luke and Levi were tone and muscular. When they shook Micah's hand and he looked into their expressions, he was amazed to see the strong family resemblance there as well. All four of these siblings, whom he knew came from different fathers, shared the same open smile and spark of life in their eyes. What surprised Micah the most was that

Luke and Levi shared Sophie's last name. She hadn't said anything about an adoption, but Danny Young must have adopted them at some point.

Amanda's husband, Arthur, who asked to be called 'Art,' was a mountain of a man. Easily six and half feet tall, and burley as well. His close-cut silver hair gleamed against the blackness of his skin. His smile was broad and jovial, and his dark eyes full of life and joy.

The man they all called 'Uncle Mike' was the spit and image of his brother, Danny Young. Micah guessed that Mike Young was his own parents' age, nearly or early eighties. He was tall, though slightly stooped by now, had a thick shock of silver hair, and piercing grey eyes. What was most remarkable about Uncle Mike is that he and Sophie shared nearly identical features. They had the same nose and mouth, and when they smiled their steely eyes sweetly crinkled. There was no doubt that these two people were related when he looked at them side by side.

Amanda's son Dylan was with them as well, but her daughter, Darla, took her grandmother to the company suite and had agreed to stay with her for the remainder of the game. Everyone else headed for their seats near the Tigers' dugout.

"We have season tickets," Sophie explained. "And we sit together for every game we can make it to." She indicated the seat nearest hers. "Sit here. It's Darla's seat." Micah willingly took the seat beside her.

"So, Mom decided to come?" Luke commented. "I thought she backed out last night."

"Darla talked her into it this morning," Amanda interjected. "Besides, Mom needs to get out and this is a good, safe place for her to be."

Levi chuckled and rubbed his silver beard. "Yeah, we're all in one place at the same time. She has the entire litter to choose from."

His siblings laughed and nodded

Some of the other architects and designers were seated directly behind them, while others had opted for the warmth of the suite. Mort seated himself directly behind Sophie and Micah and tapped him on the shoulder.

Micah turned and saw that Mort was with a very tall red-head. His mouth fell open in recognition...she looked just like she did in high school. He hurriedly got to his feet and stretched out his hand. "Well Wendy Porter, how are you?" he greeted.

Wendy took his hand with a smile and replied, "I am well, Micah. I was thrilled to hear that you're back in Detroit."

Micah nodded. "I have enjoyed it very much."

Mort winked and whispered to his wife, "I'm thinking he's going to love this place so much that he decides to stay."

"What did you say, Mort?" Micah inquired with a curious smile.

"Nothing," Mort replied.

But Sophie had heard the comment as clear as bell and she hid her smile in her scarf. After only a week with Micah Bloomfield, she'd been praying that the Lord keep him in Detroit...at least for the rest of her life.

Tiger Hansen having pitched for the Tigers for all twelve years of his professional career, now managed the team. He had managed for six seasons, announcing just this year that this one would be his last. He was retiring and going home to South Dakota.

The Tigers allowed the New York Yankees only three hits and one run. The Tigers, on the other hand, had a dozen hits, and scored seven times. The Yankees' young pitcher loaded the bases during the fifth inning, resulting in an unfortunate grand slam, which gave way to the lopsided score. The Yankees couldn't catch up after that.

Micah enjoyed watching Sophie watch the game. She was a fan's fan, cheering and hollering like a much younger woman. She yelled instructions to the players, shouted at the umpires, and even tore into the Yankees' manager once. In her antics he saw delight and life. Her siblings laughed uproariously and so did he.

But when the game was over, she returned to the regular, reserved woman he had been spending time with.

“You’re the best fan the Tigers have,” Luke declared as they walked from Comerica Park to Sophie’s townhouse. Some of the other attendees had gotten back on the bus, but Sophie and her siblings wanted to just walk over.

More walkers, Micah thought as he trudged along, this town is full of them. That’s all I’ve done this week is walk...no wonder everybody is so thin.

“It’s your true nature leaking out,” Levi teased.

“Maybe,” she conceded with a smile for Micah. She leaned closer and whispered, “Hope I didn’t scare you.”

Micah smiled in return and shook his head. He didn’t think anything at this point could scare him away from Sophie Young.

When they reached Sophie’s townhouse, Micah saw that the cobblestone alley behind her home was roped off and guarded on either end by Metro Police cars. Micah was alarmed, but then he saw the barbeque equipment billowing and he let out a sigh of relief. Upon further examination he saw several long tables set with all sorts of foods and drinks. Webbed lawn chairs and tables for eating were scattered throughout. Already the narrow alley was packed with people.

“Come on, let’s go through the front,” Sophie said as she headed up her sidewalk. “It’s easier than fighting the police to cross their line.”

Micah and her siblings followed and soon they were all in Sophie’s great room, which was bursting with people. Her magnificent island was filled with assorted vegetables, cheeses, olives and meats, and bottled water and drinks of every kind. Micah smiled as he watched the people he’d been working with all week long enjoy this fairly informal gathering. *This is going to be fun, he thought. And certainly, I’ve walked off a few of these calories this week.*

“Who took care of all of this?” Micah asked with wonder. They’d been at the game all afternoon, but this kind of a presentation took planning and effort.

“I have a couple of friends who own a catering business,” Sophie answered. “They always help me out for these types of events...and their hors d’oeuvres are fantastic. Make sure you have some.”

You don’t have to ask me twice, Micah thought as he headed for the paper plates on the end of the island and decided to sample a few of the delectables.

“Where’s Mom?” Sophie inquired as she looked around. “I can’t imagine she’d be sitting outside. We have plenty of room in here. I don’t want her getting too cold.”

“I’ll track her down,” Amanda offered, and she left the group.

On Micah’s way through the kitchen and dining area, he noticed an older couple visiting with one of the ball players in the living room. He couldn’t see the players’ face, but he was well over six feet tall, and had red hair. It wasn’t a player after all. It was Tiger Hansen.

“I’ll introduce you,” Sophie whispered beside him.

She led the way into the living room and Micah followed.

“Tiger!” she greeted extending her hand. She turned to face the couple visiting him. “Mr. and Mrs. Hansen, how have you been?”

“Just Noah will do,” the older man replied with a smile, taking her hand. He was probably in his late sixties, but still a handsome man. He had friendly blue eyes, and silvered hair. He was wearing a Detroit jersey with Tiger Hansen’s playing number and name on the back of it. But instead of athletic shoes, like most everyone else, Noah Hansen wore cowboy boots. “And you remember Angel,” he went on.

“It’s so good to see you again.” Sophie greeted.

Angel had incredible black eyes, and Micah found himself thinking *what a beautiful woman for her age...I think she’s older than us*. She had to be at least sixty; her curly black hair was heavily streaked with silver, but she had very few creases on her delicate face.

Sophie looked to Micah then and said, “This is my colleague, Micah Bloomfield. Micah, this is Tiger Hansen.”

Micah stuck out his hand, his face beaming. “Great job today, Tiger. Are you sure you want to retire?”

“Thank you, Mr. Bloomfield,” Tiger answered with a grin. “But I’m ready to go home for a while.”

“And we can’t wait to get him there,” Noah said, giving his tall son a loving pat on the back.

“How long have you played for the Tigers now?” Micah asked.

Tiger grinned and replied, “Since my twenty-second birthday.

“Tiger’s almost forty-two,” Noah interjected, giving him another pat on the back. “And he’s ready to come home.”

Sophie’s attention was back on the Hansens as she said, “I recently read the books your niece published. Wow, what stories!”

“And most of it’s true,” Noah said with a wink and a grin.

Sophie smiled. “I just finished *The Ponerello Chronicles*. Have either of you read it yet?”

“I don’t need to read it,” Noah declared. “I lived through it and that was enough.”

Angel nodded and chuckled beside him.

Sophie said to Micah, “Their niece is Gabby Goldstein. I can loan you her book if you’re interested. It’s really good.”

“That would be great,” he answered, wondering what Hansen meant when he said *I lived through it*.

The lower level of Sophie’s townhouse opened into a small, grassy yard-like area, bordered by a tall privacy fence closing out the alley behind it. Today Sophie’s fence was open and Micah followed her out into the alley.

“I have to check on a few things,” Sophie said with a twinkle in her eye. “Please don’t leave yet.”

“I won’t,” he promised.

She scurried off to greet other guests and that’s when Micah noticed that a limousine had pulled up to the alley and two men were getting out. He caught his breath as he recognized two recent hall-of-fame inductees, and they were joining the party. He smiled as he remembered that Sophie had told him Tiger had a surprise for his father. *They must be the surprise*, he thought as he watched Sophie escort them through the crowds and back into the townhouse.

The late afternoon party was the most fun that Micah had had in a very long time. He’d spent the better part of the last year brooding and resentful, but today those feelings had cleared and he was anxious to meet more of his new co-workers, and the other architects and engineers that were attending the summit.

He made his way through the crowd, stopping to visit here and there, and sampling the delicious foods whenever he could. The ribs were very good so, he went back for seconds. Traditional coleslaw and potato salad were available, and he sampled those dishes as well. In the midst of the tables laden with foods, there was one table that finally caught his eye—it was filled with pastries, desserts, cookies and cakes. He headed in that direction, looking for a clean plate to fill. Thankfully there were empty plates near the sweets, and he loaded one up with a few. There was a Mountain Dew in the top of a cooler and he grabbed that to wash it down on his way to one of the webbed chairs set up around the perimeter.

Mort grabbed himself a pop and took a seat next to Micah. “Great barbeque,” he said, twisting off the top of his drink and taking a long glug. “I love Sophie’s barbeques.”

Micah didn't look at Mort, instead he frowned a little as he replied, "It's more like a back-alley get together. I keep expecting someone to put the Hi-Fi into a window above and start blasting Smokey and The Miracles."

Mort laughed. "You're funny, Micah. Did you have any of the ribs?"

Micah rolled his eyes, but still didn't look at his old friend.

"What?" Mort teased, "Not up to your Texas standards?"

"They were good," Micah stated simply.

It was then that Mort realized where Micah's eyes were and he followed his gaze. Sophie was having a conversation with a tall, athletic-looking gentleman, perhaps ten years her senior. His hair was golden, and his skin deeply tanned. He was wearing a Tigers jersey with a blue thermal shirt under it, and stylish blue jeans. On his feet were blue Stephano Ricci loafers. He attempted to put his hand on the small of her back, but she gracefully avoided it.

Mort nodded as he watched the scene. He leaned over to whisper to Micah, "Don't worry about that. That's just Fred McMasters. They used to date."

"Used to?"

"McMasters is 'the' senior partner—they only have one—over at McMasters & Lewellen. Braith Lewellen is the junior, and he's fresh out of grad school. He's probably the only one in town who'd do a partnership with Fred. Anyway, Fred chased Sophie for years, unabashedly. Finally, she agreed to a couple of dates, and they were soon quite the item in the upper echelons of Detroit."

Micah looked at Mort and raised an eyebrow. "Seriously?"

Mort laughed and nodded. "Anyway, they got into it most heinously during a restoration they worked on together in Bricktown. Apparently, according to what was leaked to the *Detroit Register*, Fred designed a suspended walk-way fifteen stories high, right over a thoroughfare, between two old contraptions they were turning into condos and office space. It was a magnificent walk-way, all glass with what Fred called an 'invisible frame.' The Register said he was going to get a design award for it when they saw the plans. But Sophie didn't like it. She said it

wasn't structurally sound and ran the risk of collapse under excess weight...said that fancy frame would twist under pressure.

“Well, Fred got a building inspector, along with his investors, to sign off on the thing. Sophie backed out right after that, refusing to have anything further to do with the project. Fred got mad and kicked her off the project—which was totally scandalous, because nobody, *ever*, has kicked Sophie Young off a project.” He paused to take a breath, and then he added, “Shortly after that, it was rumored that Fred actually dumped her, but as far as I can see he’s been trying to get her back ever since.” Mort chuckled and added as he watched Fred and Sophie, “That old fox is full of Botox and hair color. Not to mention what he spends at the tanning booth.”

“How about the walk-way? Did it hold?”

“So far so good. But it’s only been a couple of years. I took a peek at the plans myself, and I wouldn’t walk across that thing on a bet. Sophie’s a genius, she just doesn’t know it. It’s going to collapse, it’s just a matter of time, and so will McMasters & Lewellen when they get sued.”

Micah nodded in understanding for that’s what had happened to him. He let his gaze fall back on Sophie, who was leaving Fred with a polite smile. She went to one of the silver coffee urns, poured a steaming mug, and brought it to an old woman seated in a web lawn chair with an afghan draped over her shoulders. The old woman’s blue eyes danced with curiosity as Sophie leaned close, obviously whispering. She took longer than she needed to handing over the coffee as they continued their whispered conversation, looking all around.

“Who’s that?” Micah asked.

“That’s Sophie’s mother,” Mort answered.

“Sophie doesn’t want her outside.”

“Well, she can’t very well do surveillance from inside now can she,” Mort replied. Micah raised an eyebrow, so Mort continued, “Mrs. Young comes to most of these events, and she’s always spying on someone. I guarantee there’s someone here they’re watching, but they’ve started to keep it secret. Last time it wound up

being a paper boy they thought was dealing drugs up at the assisted living center. Turned out he just got his papers early in the morning. Terrible misunderstanding. Her sister and her brothers, along with the good reverend, made them promise they wouldn't do it anymore." Mort grinned. "But I know they're still doing it because Mrs. Young tells Meredith everything when she can't get ahold of Sophie."

Micah smiled as he watched Sophie move on and greet her other guests. "She mentioned that her father is gone," he said.

Mort nodded. "He died a couple of years ago."

"That's too bad."

"Danny was good for that family, and I think they really miss him."

They turned their eyes back to Sophie, who had moved on to her uncle and brother-in-law.

"What does her uncle do?" Micah inquired, figuring Mort was the guy to ask if you wanted inside information.

"Danny Young's little brother. I think he's about eighty now, but he still works every day. I'm surprised he hasn't retired yet. He's a Vietnam vet, never married. He owns Young Public Relations, which is the biggest PR firm outside of New York. He handles high-profile type stuff like presidential candidates, crowd control and transport. He's also the guy you want to call if you're getting a bad reputation. And he's really good at what he does. I've seen that guy take a wharf rat and make him look like a prince."

Just then Sophie strode to where they were seated. They straightened in their chairs and smiled at their hostess.

"Do you have everything you need, gentlemen?" she asked with a smile.

"It's great, Sophie," Mort replied. "Best one yet."

"Thanks, Mort." She glanced at Micah. "How about you? How do we compare to your big Texas barbeques?"

Mort laughed out loud and slapped Micah on the back as he replied, “He loves it! In fact, he can’t wait to get home and try one of these in intercity Dallas.”

As the day began to unwind, Sophie quickly gathered with her siblings in a small circle by themselves.

“Okay, what do you think?” she asked. By now they’d all had the opportunity to visit with Micah.

“I like him a lot,” Luke was the first to answer. “He’s a good man, Sophie.”

“Smart, yet down to earth,” Levi answered. “I like him a lot too.”

Sophie looked to her sister. Amanda grinned and glanced over at Micah who was still visiting with Arthur. “He’s wonderful, Sophie, just like you said. I can see why you’re head over heels.”

“I’m not head over heels,” she argued.

“Oh yes you are,” Levi agreed.

“Head. Over. Heels.” Luke added.

“There are only two little problems I see with this situation, but they could really turn into big problems,” Amanda pointed out.

Sophie nodded in agreement for she was worried about those two ‘little’ problems as well.

“He’s Jewish and he lives in Texas,” Luke stated the obvious.

“And what can we do about that?” Amanda asked, looking at her siblings.

Levi reached for Sophie’s hand, and then Amanda’s. Luke closed the circle as he answered, “We’re going to pray for him. A lot.”

“Everyday?” Luke questioned.

“Everyday.” Levi confirmed.

“I think Jesus brought him here,” Amanda blurted, and her siblings looked at her with surprise. She smiled faintly, glancing again at Micah and Arthur as they visited. “I’ve got a really good feeling about this, Sophe.”

A little way away Arthur was enjoying his conversation with Micah. He found him to be forthright and honest, and there was something in his spirit that was intensely good. Arthur happened to glance at his wife, noticing that she was holding hands with her siblings, and he knew they’d formed their prayer circle. It was something they’d done for years, anywhere and at any time they felt that prayer was a necessity. They didn’t care if anyone noticed, and they’d let you join if you asked.

Micah saw Arthur glance their way and he followed his gaze. The siblings were holding hands, heads down. “What are they doing?” he asked.

“They’re praying,” Arthur answered quietly. “Someone must be in need.” He looked back at Micah, who was frowning with curiosity.

“They were really broken people until they started to pray for each other...notice that limp that Luke has?”

“I saw it.”

“His femur was broken as a youngster. It never healed quite right.”

Micah only nodded.

“And did you notice that scar Amanda tries to hide on her forehead?” Arthur went on.

“I saw it.”

“A jealous girlfriend threw a knife at her when she was sixteen years old. Twenty-five stitches, and it led to the premature birth of her daughter, Daisy.”

Again, Micah didn’t know what to say.

Arthur went on, “And did you notice how Levi rubs his beard every time he laughs?”

“I did.”

“Broken jaw when he was a young man. It hurts when he laughs, so he rubs it.”

Micah took a deep breath and slowly let it out. “How about Sophie?”

“You can’t see her scars,” Arthur answered. “But she’s lonely. She hid in her room until she went to college, and then she hid in her books. Sometimes she still hides in her work, but she’s started to come out more and more. In fact,” he grinned and looked into Micah’s eyes, “I’ve never seen her so at ease with herself until today.” He chuckled softly and looked at the siblings again. “You know, I’ve seen miracles come out of that prayer circle. I can’t help but wonder who they’re praying for.”

Micah bit his lower lip and looked back at the siblings

“It’s amazing what God can do with a family’s broken past when they knit the thing together with Jesus.” Arthur added.

Micah nodded and let out the breath he didn’t realize he was holding. It was something he’d never considered—Christianity. He was born Jewish and would have to stay Jewish.

It was well after eight-o’clock in the evening when the last of Sophie’s guests finally left.

“Now, we’ll talk more tomorrow,” Eva whispered to Sophie. Amanda had announced that it was time to take her home.

Sophie nodded. “He told me that he needs to see Jean every day for a while. Is that true?”

“Absolutely not,” Eva scoffed. “I don’t think she even wants him there. We’ve got to find a way to get rid of him, Sophie.”

Sophie agreed. “But how?”

“Can’t you put him to work on one of your projects? I think he has idle hands.”

“No way,” Sophie said. “I can’t work with the guy. You know what happened last time.”

Eva nodded. She drew in a sharp breath when she saw that Amanda was coming toward them.

Sophie leaned close to kiss her mother. She whispered, “I’ll be up at 5:45 tomorrow, waiting by your door as if I’ve lost my key and have to wait for you to return. Maybe I’ll hear something then.”

Eva nodded and smiled, gave Sophie a peck on the cheek just as Amanda joined them.

“Ready, Mom?” she asked.

“I’m ready,” Eva declared. She glanced at Sophie with a sly grin, “Great party, Sophie. Best one yet.”

“Thanks, Mom.”

“See ya later, kiddo,” Amanda said. She gave Sophie a quick peck on the cheek and then assisted Eva from the house.

Luke and Levi offered to help with the clean-up. Micah lagged behind, offering to help with clean-up as well.

“It was a great barbeque,” he said as he and Sophie washed dishes. They’d filled the dishwasher countless times, yet there were still a few things that just didn’t fit.

“Thanks, Micah,” she replied. “Did you get to know some more people?”

“I did. You work with a very talented staff.”

“I’m so thankful for them,” she replied.

It was quiet for a few minutes until Micah asked, “What are you doing tomorrow?”

“I have church in the morning, but I’m free after that.”

“Do you want to go to lunch...or brunch? Whatever you like.”

Sophie looked into his dark eyes and smiled. “I’d love to go to brunch.”

“Great. I can pick you up around noon? Will you be home by then?”

“I will.”

It was very quiet then until Micah said, “I saw you and your sister and brothers...Art told me you guys were praying. Who were you praying for?”

Sophie chuckled. “I’ll tell you...someday.”