

Chapter 1  
Detroit Riverfront  
April

Micah Bloomfield rubbed his nearly bald head, yawned and climbed out of the comfortable bed. He gave his filled-in middle a couple of scratches as he sauntered to the windows of his condominium facing the Detroit Riverfront. The morning sun sparkled on the waters, lighting them with hope and promise. The early spring had brought greenery and color to the palatial grounds below. The few meager piles of leftover snow could almost be ignored. The city across the waters appeared clean and inviting. The expanse of clear sky was bluer than what he ever remembered the skies above Detroit to look like.

He rolled his eyes and let out a heavy sigh. The spectacular view was of Windsor, Canada. Looking out over the water he realized he had his back to downtown Detroit, and that made him smile, perhaps even smirk. He hated Detroit. Unfortunately, it was his home for the next six months—*six months in Paris*, his boss had joked. *Maybe you'll find yourself there!*

“Six months in Paris,” he muttered. “They haven’t called this place ‘Paris’ in a long time.” Which was true. Back in her glory days, Detroit was called *Paris of the West* because of her stunning architecture, the symphony, art galleries and more. Henry Ford’s auto industry, along with the city of Detroit and her people, helped win World War II.

*It's sure not like that anymore*, he thought.

He yawned again and made his way to the galley kitchen. He opened the refrigerator and retrieved a Mountain Dew, twisted off the top and glugged. He let go with a hearty belch and gave his surroundings a thoughtful perusal. *Pretty nice digs for a pit like Detroit.* Modern, up-to-date, yet comfortable furnishings, all done in tones of peaceful blue. Local artists' work, modern of course, hung on the spacious walls, and their sculptures and books were set in perfect rhythm on end tables, coffee tables, and the dining room table. The kitchen had been fully stocked before his arrival from a list he'd provided his employer when they requested that he serve the regrettable stint.

He lifted his bottle to his lips and took another gulp as his dark eyes went again to the riverfront. *It's really more like an incarceration than a career opportunity,* Micah thought. He wondered, again, as he had over the last twelve months, if he should just give up and end his life before it got any worse. Fifty-two years old and starting over was a terrible place to be.

Up until a year ago, Micah had been a senior partner in a flourishing architectural firm in Dallas until one of his partners had taken risks with lethal consequences. His firm went bankrupt – quickly. Certainly, Micah had reserves to lean into, but his wife took half of that when she left him—for Micah's partner. In the end Micah had to go to work at the bottom of the totem pole all over again, and nobody in Dallas wanted him. Thankfully he'd found Dallas Rebuild & Restore and they put him on staff amongst the interns. And perhaps if he didn't complain about his unfortunate incarceration in the city of Detroit, they'd consider a junior partner position and he could start the rebuilding of his life and career.

Detroit was in the midst of an architectural restoration boom, and, much to Micah's dismay, some woman had the bright idea to 'rebuild the city.' Dallas Rebuild & Restore, according to the senior partner, had been contacted at the last minute by the firm Design & Structure of Motor City. They needed additional assistance with engineering and structure safety, which was Micah's specialty. The first phase of the project was expected to take six months – from April until mid-October.

According to the senior partner at Dallas Rebuild & Restore, Micah was the best his firm had to offer in terms of engineering and structure safety. Therefore,

he was tapped to temporarily relocate to his “favorite” town – his *hometown* of Detroit, Michigan.

Micah fled Detroit for Texas A & M when he graduated high school in the early 1980’s. At that time, the city was a mess. The schools were falling apart, and so was the corrupt local government. The crime rate was soaring, along with drug and alcohol addiction.

But those weren’t the reasons he left.

Micah had been born and raised in the Boston Edison district of Detroit. His father and his grandfather were both physicians, and very active in their local Synagogue. They loved the Synagogue when they were younger, and even walked to Synagogue each Sabbath.

When Micah became a teenager, things changed drastically. Both Micah’s father and grandfather decided to open a private practice in one of the new Detroit suburbs, one that boasted a luxurious golf course and country club. They settled in Sterling Heights and built a successful practice, but never walked to the Synagogue again. In fact, their visits to the Synagogue became less and less as the years went by.

Shortly after Micah left for college, his grandfather passed away and his parents left Sterling Heights. They relocated to upscale Beverly Hills, a village in the township of Southfield, northwest of the city. Micah’s father continued to build his practice, opening another office in Beverly Hills. When he turned sixty-five, nearly fifteen years ago, he retired—and suddenly passed away.

*I suppose I’ll have to go over and see Mom and the new place more than just a few times while I’m here.* Another heavy sigh.

He downed the rest of his Mountain Dew and turned back to the kitchen. There were Pop-Tarts on the counter beside the toaster, and, surprisingly, a small box of doughnuts nearby. He smiled and reached for one.

An hour later, Micah was showered and shaved. He wore the navy Hugo Boss, because it helped to slim his growing middle, and his favorite Gucci loafers. Long meetings called for comfort, and Gucci couldn’t be beat. He straightened his

navy tie, the one with the crosshatch pattern, grabbed his brief case, and hurried out to the garage of the riverfront condo to find his car.

The Mercedes he'd leased was waiting for him where he'd parked it when he arrived the night before. *Surprised to see you're still here*, he thought as he slid behind the wheel, making sure the doors were locked. He started the car and headed for the address his secretary had provided.

Although he hadn't driven in Detroit traffic for more than thirty-five years, he was confident he could find his way around. Sure enough, Detroit traffic, though noticeably thinner than the 1980's, was easy enough to navigate.

Detroit had hemorrhaged its population over the last thirty years. From a high of 1.85 million, to right around 700,000—nearly half of the people who'd once called the city home had fled.

There was construction everywhere, making it difficult to locate the entrance into Design & Structure of Motor City. He was irritated about that, but circled a few of the city blocks, getting lost on a one-way, and finally saw a small sign indicating the entrance and wheeled in. The commute should have taken fifteen minutes, but lasted just more than thirty.

"Unbelievable," he muttered as he pulled into the valet.

"Good morning, sir," the elderly black valet smiled and tipped his hat. "Here for the day?"

"Yes, sir," Micah answered, reaching for his briefcase, then exiting the vehicle.

The valet smiled again, handing him a ticket, and asked, "Are you here for the Architectural Summit?"

Micah raised one brow and asked, "Summit?"

"Yes, sir," the valet replied. "We're very excited. Thank you so much for coming."

Micah nodded, wondering at the valet's gracious demeanor as he hurried through the sliding glass doors, and into the building.

Another black gentleman was waiting at the bottom of the escalator just inside the doors, and he bowed. With a smile he asked, “Architectural Summit?”

Micah nodded.

“Straight up the escalator, then follow the signs to the elevator. Your first meeting is on the 25<sup>th</sup> floor. There will be signs to lead you the rest of the way.”

“Thank you,” Micah replied.

“No, thank *you*. We are delighted to have you.”

Micah stepped onto the escalator, and once at the top, he followed the signs pointing his way. He couldn’t help but slow his hurried pace when he entered the lobby. It was architectural opulence, even Micah had to admit that. It had high ceilings, which he was partial to, and they beautifully accentuated the undulating front desk. Blue mosaic tile arose behind oak wood, while clean, ivory Italian marble greeted his feet.

“Wow,” he whispered as he picked up his stride and headed for the elevators.

Once he stepped off at the 25<sup>th</sup> floor, he saw the busy conference area ahead. It suddenly dawned on him that he had yet to review the file his secretary had given him the Friday before. There was a small lounge area nearby, and he paused there. He quickly searched his brief case for the file. He should have read through it on the plane, but was too depressed at the time because of the assignment ahead of him.

When he had the file in his hand, he strode down the hall and to the long table in front of the open conference room. There was a short line there. The conference room appeared to be nearly full. He gave his name and was given a badge in return, which he tucked into his file, and went in to find a quiet seat somewhere by himself so that he could look at the file.

There was an empty table in the corner, near the back of the room, and Micah headed for it. He quickly seated himself, opened the file and started through it. Very soon he realized he was not among amateurs. Some of the most famous names in architecture from all over the world had been invited. He swallowed hard and looked up from his papers.

*It really is a summit*, he thought as he watched Adolph Von Topfer have a casual conversation with Nicollo Verdino. He'd only seen these people in architectural magazines and journals. He'd never met any of them. He swallowed again and looked around the room, seeing other men and women with skill and fame. *What on earth am I doing here?* he wondered.

He looked back into his papers and found the schedule of the morning's speakers. The introduction said that Ms. Sophie Young, senior partner in the famed architectural firm, Design & Structure of Motor City, was set to speak about different restorations she'd been a part of over the years. Micah recognized her name as he had read about much of her work. However, he was certain he'd never met the woman. The photograph on the schedule beneath her description was black and white, and he couldn't make out any of her features, but she did look familiar. He looked for her bio, but just as he found it a man went to the microphone and started to call the room to order. Micah looked up before he could read it.

"We'd like to get started as quickly as possible," he said. "First of all, thank you so much for coming to our city. It truly is our pleasure to host this first Architectural Summit. For many of you you've heard only the worst of the worst things about Detroit, but I've invited a speaker today who was born and raised in our fine city, and I think she'll change your mind. Please welcome, Ms. Sophie Young."

The room erupted in applause as a tall, trim woman stepped behind the podium. She smiled at the crowd, and Micah found himself smiling back. He squinted for a better look. She appeared to be about his age. She was dressed in a sharp black suit with a white blouse. Her shoulder length dark hair glistened with strands of silver, set off by the black suit she wore. He liked that. Too many women their age tried to bleach away their silver. His ex-wife had tried to do that and wound up with straw.

"Thank you," she said, her voice hauntingly familiar to Micah. "I have had the pleasure to work on many restoration projects here in the United States, and even several overseas. But I have to tell you, my favorites have been right here in Detroit..."

*That accent*, Micah thought as she continued to speak. *Pure Detroit*. He'd disciplined himself to speak more clearly, yet not take on the Texan drawl in Dallas. But even with that pronounced accent, her voice was lilting and smooth. *Wait a minute, what did she say? Something about Detroit or Europe?* He deliberately exited his own thoughts and focused on what she was saying.

“When we worked on the Bergtheater in Austria, I had to learn how to say ‘Ringstrasse’ properly.” She paused to laugh at herself, and the audience joined in with her. She must have been talking about her own accent. The audience seemed as captivated as Micah found himself.

But there was something sweetly familiar about that musical laugh just then. *I've heard that before*, he thought, forcing himself to look away and read her bio:

‘Sophie Young was born and raised in Hamtramck...She later attended Henry Ford II High School...’ Micah paused and looked at the speaker, swallowing the lump that had suddenly lodged in his throat. *It can't be*, he thought. *She's too young...too thin...too pretty*. She laughed again at something she said, and he nearly choked. That sweetness in her voice and smile was too familiar. He forced himself to continue to read: ‘She graduated high school with honors, securing an architectural scholarship at Cornell University, where she majored in mathematics and architecture...has her masters...and received her MBA...’ Micah's mouth went dry as he looked back at the speaker who had the room eating out of her hand...*I remember when you were president of the math club...and you always made the new kids laugh, even when they were really scared*.

A million memories flashed before him. They were in the same math class together, and the teacher suggested they both get into the math club. They were juniors, well advanced in math and needed an outlet. But she was the classic bookworm. Not shy, but not interested in anything going on outside of class. He was always afraid to talk to her, other than “hello” and “good-bye,” so he didn't get to know her very well. He'd see her in the halls between classes, and sometimes she'd wave, but most of the time her head was down in a book.

Finally, about half way through their senior year, Micah worked up the courage to ask her to one of his hockey games. He told his brother Ben what he'd

planned to do, and even let his parents in on the plan. His parents' response to his exciting scheme was devastating.

*"Sophie is Danny Young's daughter," his father explained, remorse in his eyes.*

Danny Young had been a famous Detroit rabble rouser who excelled at stirring up trouble on behalf of the Teamsters. It was rumored that he was quite close with Jimmy Hoffa before his imprisonment, and that their relationship continued after he was released, even up until he went missing. But that was the light stuff. If there was disorder in Detroit, Danny Young was tied to it. Vandalism, picket-lines, gang violence, and even murder.

And Danny had had a lot of trouble with his blended family as well, according to Micah's father. Having been born and raised in Hamtramck, Danny decided to move his family to Sterling Heights, where the schools were better and there was less of a bad influence. When his parents passed away, he used their inheritance to build a bigger home for his ever-growing family.

*"And that family is nothing but trouble," Micah's father went on. "Sophie has two older brothers from her mother's first marriage to a black man. They can't stay out of jail. Her older sister—and who fathered that one is anybody's guess—is black as well. She already has three children out of wedlock, which is why Danny had to build that big house. Mrs. Young is a fierce drinker, and everyone in Sterling Heights knows that she lets her brother-in-law drag those kids to that black church in Hamtramck every single Sunday, and most Wednesdays. That girl isn't like us, son, she's just white trash and she'll get you into a lot of trouble. I forbid you to have any kind of a relationship with her."*

*"But she's a really sweet girl," Micah's brother Ben had defended. "And she's super smart. I don't think she's like them at all."*

*"She's not Jewish," Micah's mother pointed out. "And that could cause some real problems further down the road."*

A horrible argument had ensued that night around the Bloomfield table. Micah's mother had a *"nice girl from Synagogue, and I know her*



*mother from the country club*” that she wanted him to meet, and who already had plans for college—someone, or so it would seem, with a solid future.

Micah hadn’t been convinced of Sophie’s hopeless character as he listened to his parents talk about her, nor was he interested in the “*nice girl from Synagogue.*” However, their attitude cemented his decision about which university to choose, and Texas was the furthest away from them...*and the nice girl from Synagogue turned out to be not that nice...*

The room suddenly erupted in applause, and he realized that Sophie had finished speaking. He clapped as the announcer came back to the podium and said, “Take a ten-minute break and then we’ll hear from Adolph Von Topfer.”

Everyone arose from their seats, including Micah. He looked to the speakers’ table near the front and saw her visiting with another woman who was taking notes on her smartphone. *Probably Sophie’s secretary*, he thought. He walked the distance to the front of the room, and as luck would have it, the secretary was just leaving.

Sophie picked up some papers from the table and began to look through them as Micah approached.

“Sophie,” he said, extending his hand. She’d probably never recognize him after all these years. At the age of fifty-two, Micah had some lines on his face, soft crinkles near his eyes, and whatever hair was left on his head had turned grey. On top of that, there was the issue of his weight. In high school, when he was still a young stud on the hockey team, he was lithe and svelte. Now he sported a pudgy middle and consciously tried not to waddle. *But, who knows, maybe she’ll remember my name.*

“Yes,” she replied, looking up at him, taking his outstretched hand.

He smiled into her steel gray eyes as he started to introduce himself, but couldn’t speak when he saw the spark of recollection in her sweet countenance. She’d done it to him again, just like the old days.

“Micah?” she said, her face lighting up. “Micah Bloomfield?”