

Chapter 18

When the news ran out, and Fred McMasters didn't reappear in the Detroit area, the scrum of reporters and bloggers thinned away until no one was left. The newspaper printed a full, front-page retraction on their salacious story, and Sophie withdrew her lawsuit.

Just one week after the front-page news, Micah and Sophie became ordinary citizens again. They moved back to their own homes, Micah had his stitches removed, and Ben complimented himself on the 'beautiful' scar that remained, saying, "It will fade in time and no one will even know it's there."

Stan Romano was released from the hospital, and he showed his wound to anyone who would look at it. When Micah and Sophie went to visit him at his home, he flipped up the sleeve on his t-shirt and pointed to where he caught the bullet, which was still covered with a gauze dressing. "One more little millimeter," he said, "and I would have been a done deal."

Everyone picked up where they'd left off, even Micah and Sophie—though Micah still flinched if he saw an elderly man with bleached blond hair in the crowd.

Wherever Fred had gone was still a mystery to the Detroit Police Department, and also to the FBI who had gotten involved once it was learned that he'd crossed the border. Interpol was included in the manhunt as well, actively looking for Fred in Europe. Eva had made several calls to the detectives, insisting that he was still around and ready, willing, and able to continue making what trouble he could.

Micah was still carrying around Sophie's diamond in his front pocket, each day looking for the perfect opportunity to give it to her. He wanted it to be special for her, away from all of the stress and anxiety that they'd recently suffered—though he had been tempted to just cram it on her finger the first time he saw her after their separation. He finally made reservations at Cliff Ball's for Thursday night. *By that time, he reasoned, things will have been back to normal for almost a week. We can put this mess behind us, and get on with planning a wedding.*



Sophie left her townhouse early Tuesday morning, decked out in a light weight pair of Elie Tahari khaki slacks with drawstrings at the ankle. The weather was warm, now approaching mid-July, so instead of a jacket and blouse, she wore just a white, three-quarter sleeve, pleated blouse that fit her slight frame flawlessly. In her tote were cream colored Valentino Garavani sling-backs.

The sun was almost hot as it streamed down on her head and back. She raised her hand to the heavens and said, “Thank you, Jesus, for my freedom! It’s great to be back on track!”

Her phone suddenly rang, interrupting her praise, and she reached for her side pocket. It was a restricted number, and she quickly answered, “Sophie Young.”

“Ms. Young, this is Detective Michaels. I’ve got a question for you.”

“Sure, Detective,” she replied. “Did you find him yet?”

“No, but I got looking at the forged passport information and I just had a thought...have you ever heard the name Basil Ionides?”

“Yes,” Sophie answered as she continued her walk. “Ionides was a gifted British architect who published two really great books about interior decoration. He is probably best known for his interior design of the Savoy Theater in London.”

“Is he friends with McMasters by chance?”

Sophie laughed. “Heavens, no! Basil Ionides died I think sometime around 1950. Why do you ask?”

“That was the name on Fred’s phony passport,” Michaels answered. “And so far, we haven’t been able to locate that name on any property or bank accounts in Canada—so he may have already gone overseas, which means he probably used another passport.”

“I see,” Sophie replied, feeling the hair on the back of her neck prickle. “Or he may have come back to Detroit.”

“That’s always a possibility. Keep your eyes and ears open.”

“Of course,” she replied, and then she had a thought. “You know, if Fred is using architect’s names on phony passports, you might want to look for the names Charles Phipps, who was an English architect, and Sir William Whitfield, who is British. Phipps designed the original structure of the Savoy, and Whitfield led a restoration crew after a fire did major damage to the interior of the theater in the early nineties.”

“I’ll do that,” Michaels replied. “And I’ll let you guys know if I find anything. Thanks, Ms. Young.”

“No problem,” she replied, and the line went dead. She slipped her phone back into her pocket and continued on her way. She had to snicker a little as she thought about Fred naming himself after a famous architect. *Well, he was always pretty full of himself.*

She reached the entrance of Design & Structure just as Micah brought his car to a stop at the valet station. He hopped out, tossed his keys to the man in charge, and trotted over to Sophie. He took hold of her hand and smiled into her eyes.

“It’s great to be back,” he said.

Sophie nodded. She couldn’t have agreed more.

Sophie and Micah parted ways at their respective offices, followed closely by their personal assistants, to begin the job of clearing off their desks. It was going to be a busy morning, but one they were looking forward to.

“Penny will call at nine o’clock,” Meredith informed Sophie as she reviewed her schedule. “And Ms. Perez would like a call-back sometime this morning as well. She’s already talked with the rest of her group and they’re ready to meet with you next Monday. Do you think you can swing it?”

“I can,” Sophie answered, slipping into her dressy shoes. “What’s the status on Corktown?”

“You’ll be pleased,” Meredith replied. “Even without Stan and Micah, Bijou has managed to get the thing under control. Mort helped her with the remaining HVAC, but she did everything else.” She raised her eyebrow and said, “I think she must have put in twenty-hour days.”

Sophie smiled and nodded. “She’s always loved her work. Now how about the other sites?”

“Everybody is on target,” Meredith answered. “I’ve got full narratives from all of them, and I forwarded them to your inbox this morning. You can pull them up at any time. Also, I scheduled a conference for early this afternoon with Aiden, Bijou, Nicollo, and Adolph, and if you have any questions, you can ask them at that time. They’re all out onsite this morning.” Her phone pinged suddenly, and she looked down at the screen. She wrinkled up her nose and looked at Sophie. “Hang onto your seat, Sophie...Braith Lewellen is on the line.”

Sophie felt like she might fall out of her chair. “Fred’s partner?” she whispered.

Meredith shrugged. “That’s the only Braith Lewellen I know.”

“Wonder what he wants,” Sophie murmured.

“Should I tell the girls to hang up on him?”

Sophie was quiet as she considered that. “No, I guess not,” she finally said. “Put him through. Let’s see what he wants.”

Meredith clicked her phone and soon the set on Sophie’s desk beeped. She pressed the flashing button and said, “Sophie Young.”

“Hi Ms. Young. This is Braith Lewellen.”

“What can I do for you today, Mr. Lewellen.”

“Well, first of all I’m very sorry about everything. I had no idea that Fred was scheming to merge the firms—”

“You’re not the one who called the newspaper last week are you?” she questioned, thinking *we might as well get all of our cards on the table right away*.

“No,” he answered. “I’m sorry about all of that. I have no idea who did that.”

“Well, why are you calling me?”

“Ms. Young, I think I have a problem with that skywalk. Is there any chance you can look at it?”

Sophie was floored. “Why would you call me about that?”

“Because I don’t know what to do with it,” he answered, and Sophie was surprised by his blatant honesty as he continued, “We’ve had a report of some whistling in the skywalk, and we can’t pin it down.”

“Whistling?” she questioned, her heart beginning to pound.

“Yes...it was reported to a maintenance supervisor little over a month ago, and the building’s owners contacted Fred at that time. Unfortunately, he deep sixed it. The owners called me this morning to see if I knew anything about it and if we could get rid of the noise. I’m concerned there’s something wrong with the structure and I don’t have enough experience to figure it out.”

Sophie listened with horror as she slowly got to her feet. There was only one reason that Fred’s walkway would be ‘whistling.’ “Get the old blueprints out,” she said. “And meet us at the site in Bricktown.”

Sophie took Micah with her, just in case she was wrong and there was something going on with the foundation.

Lewellen, along with the maintenance supervisor, met them at the main entrance of the now-famous walkway. It was, indeed, a beautiful structure to behold, stretching between the two buildings. It had been so meticulously designed that the steel and glass passageway appeared to float between the two buildings that tethered it.

They went to the fifteenth floor, via the elevator. When the doors opened, the skywalk came into view. As they approached, sliding glass doors opened automatically onto the walkway. At this time of the morning, the skywalk was empty. Just before reaching the threshold, Sophie suddenly stopped. Everyone with her stopped as well.

She turned and looked at the maintenance supervisor. “Have you adjusted the building’s pressure?” she asked.

“No,” he answered.

She stood still for a long time, finally turning to Micah and asking, “Do you feel anything?”

“There should be an air current here,” he replied.

Sophie nodded. “We should feel it by now.” She looked at the supervisor and said, “Show us where you heard the whistling.”

He nodded and led them into the walkway, where there was a fairly loud whistling noise, as if the wind was blowing in a draft. The further they ventured into the skywalk, the louder the noise became.

“It seems to be the loudest at the opposite end,” the supervisor said as they walked along.

Sure enough, just as they reached the other side of the walkway, the noise increased to a loud, whiney pitch.

“It’s right there,” Micah said suddenly, pointing to a corner joint. “If you stand right here, you can even see daylight.”

Sophie backed up and looked into the spot that Micah was indicating and caught her breath at what she saw. As clear as a bell the joint was coming apart. Just as she’d proffered during the design stage, the frame didn’t have enough support and had probably twisted in a high wind or a heavy snowfall. She bent over to get a better look and bit her lower lip.

“It’s not foundational at all,” she said, her eyes round and wide. “This is probably days away from structure failure.” She looked at the supervisor. “Do you have a flashlight?”

The supervisor handed Sophie his flashlight and she shined it into the joint. “Yeah...this is bad.” She looked at Micah and repeated, “This is bad. I’m surprised it didn’t fail during this morning’s commute.”

Micah was alarmed. He looked at the supervisor and commanded, “Shut this down.” He waved an arm toward the skywalk. “Shut the whole thing down and don’t let anybody on it. Make sure it’s blocked off on both ends.”

The supervisor nodded and quickly stepped over the threshold into the other building. He took out his cellphone and started punching in numbers.

Lewellen quickly exited the skywalk as well.

Micah looked at Sophie, who was still giving the damaged joint a thorough inspection. He offered her his hand and said, “Mort’s got a drone we can get up here to photograph it. You don’t need to stare it down just to be sure.”

She glanced at him with a grin. “I think I can make the jump to the threshold if it collapses.”

Micah’s mouth fell open in surprise, and it made Sophie laugh.

“Just kidding,” she said, reaching for his hand, quickly exiting the skywalk with him.

When they were certain that the skywalk had been closed off on both ends, and that pedestrians could not sneak past the barricades, Lewellen took Micah and Sophie to his office and showed them to a conference room where his staff had already lain out the blueprints for the skywalk.

“I was concerned about these joints,” Sophie said, indicating the area where the frame was affixed and sealed onto the buildings. “I didn’t like the risk of a high wind or snow putting too much pressure on it and twisting it off the side of one or both the buildings.”

Micah nodded as he looked closely at the blueprints. “The problem can easily be solved by adding additional suspension.” He looked up at Sophie and added, “But it would add bulk to the structure—and it would take from the ethereal aesthetics of its intended design.”

“But can the foundations and building frames handle the extra stress?” Lewellen questioned. “These are old buildings.”

“I’d have to do a thorough review of both of the structures, and I’m up to my ears in the summit right now.” Micah answered.

Sophie was frowning thoughtfully as she looked at the blueprints. “So,” she began quietly, “you say that Fred knew about this a month ago?”

Lewellen nodded. “I wonder why he didn’t say anything.”

“Because it’s going to cost you guys big time to make it right,” Sophie replied. “Especially if the foundations can’t handle the extra suspension. This is probably why he was trying to get a merger through so quickly.”

“But Fred’s got lots of money. He doesn’t need a merger to fix this,” Lewellen argued.

Sophie shrugged. “Maybe Fred doesn’t have as much money as he lets on.”

Sophie advised Lewellen to get ahold of his insurance company and see if they could recoup any damages with a policy. Then she promised that she'd visit with her partners about what Design & Structure could do as far as helping the young architect with the repair project.

In the meantime, Micah called Detective Michaels and gave him the latest information, with a possible theory that Fred might be out of money—or had fled to a place where he did have money.

They finally got back to work at eleven o'clock that morning, committing to work straight through to the end of the day.

Sophie was so focused at her drawing table that she didn't hear Micah come into her office. He quietly cleared his throat, and she looked up. He was holding two of cups of coffee.

"It's almost four," he said, lifting a cup. "Want a little break?"

She smiled and stood, stretching her arms and then taking a cup. "I can't believe it's that late already. Man, the day went fast—and this is going to hit the spot. Thank you."

"Have you heard anything?" he asked, taking a sip from his cup.

"Not a word," she answered. "Did I tell you what I told Michaels?"

"About the Savoy connection?"

Sophie nodded, taking a sip from her own cup.

“Yes, which I thought was a genius theory,” he said with a smile. “And I repeated the theory to Mort, who said he couldn’t have come up with anything better.”

Sophie laughed quietly. “That’s a big compliment coming from Mort,” she said.

A soft knock came at the open door, and Micah and Sophie turned to see LaKeisha.

“What’s up?” Micah asked.

LaKeisha grinned. “There’s a Mrs. Bloomfield in the lobby. I hope it’s okay. I’ll told them to send her up.”

Micah nodded with a chuckle. “She’s probably just stopping by to check on me. It’s okay. Please help her find her find her way to my office.”

“No problem,” LaKeisha answered with a smile, and then she hurried away.

Micah looked back at Sophie and winked. “I made reservations for us on Thursday at Cliff Ball’s.”

Sophie smiled. “I can’t wait.”

LaKeisha waited patiently by the elevator she knew would be bringing Mrs. Bloomfield to the tenth floor. The bell sounded, and the doors opened. At first LaKeisha was puzzled. *That’s not Mrs. Bloomfield*, she thought as she watched the woman exit the elevator with long, purposeful strides. *Micah said his mother was short...* This woman’s hair was excessively bleached and extraordinarily dry in

appearance. *I had a cousin who did that once*, LaKeisha remembered, frowning. *And way too much make-up...wonder who she is. She can't be Mrs. Bloomfield.*

She hastened to meet the visitor, stretching out her hand in greeting, offering a faint smile. "Mrs. Bloomfield?" she questioned.

"Yes, Rivka Bloomfield," the woman gushed, taking LaKeisha's hand. "You must be Micah's assistant, LaKeisha?"

"Yes, Ma'am," LaKeisha acknowledged, trying to maintain a friendly tone. "But I understood that he was divorced?"

"Oh," Rivka cackled, and several people looked over the tops of their cubicles. "It's still my name."

LaKeisha's frown deepened as she thought about that. *You tricked me. I would have never allowed you to get out of the lobby.*

"Well," LaKeisha took a breath attempting to maintain civility. Drawing an arm ever so gently about Rivka's waist she said, "You'll have to have a seat in our waiting area. Mr. Bloomfield is in a very important meeting."

Rivka flinched away from LaKeisha and looked scornfully on the younger woman. "He wasn't too busy to see me five minutes ago," she spat out.

"I thought you were his mother five minutes ago," LaKeisha answered honestly. *I've gotta find a way to get rid of this woman.* "Now, if you'll please just have a seat—"

At that moment Micah and Sophie walked out of her office, still in a discussion between themselves, probably expecting to see Micah's mother. They

started toward LaKeisha and Rivka with their eyes on each other, oblivious to what awaited them.

Rivka saw them right away. “There he is!” she exclaimed, waving wildly. “Micah!” she called. More heads appeared above their cubicles at the sudden commotion.

Micah and Sophie turned their eyes on the spectacle and it stopped them in their tracks.

LaKeisha wanted to crawl under a desk. She prayed for either the Rapture, or death as she watched Rivka hurry towards Micah and Sophie. *Oh, God*, she prayed, *spare Sophie any pain*.

As Rivka rushed toward them it all came together for Sophie. The page about Mrs. Bloomfield wanting to come up had been a hoax and the lunatic with the clown face rushing toward them was Rivka. She just knew it. She braced herself for Rivka’s ‘Big Nose Sophie’ salutation.

“Micah, it’s so good to finally see you!” Rivka exclaimed, throwing her arms around her ex-husband.

Micah gently pushed her away and took her hand, as if in greeting, but he was moving in slow motion. “What are you doing here?” he asked in what sounded like the voice of someone who’d just had the wind knocked out of him.

“It’s July. I was visiting my parents—like I always do, and, well, I was in the neighborhood and thought I should take you up on your offer.”

“My offer?” Micah questioned with a frown.

Rivka didn't respond, instead she lifted her nose slightly and gazed upon Sophie as she said, "Sophie Young I presume."

Sophie nodded, feeling the same thing she'd felt thirty-five years ago when Rivka was about to give her a dressing down: too thin, too tall, too white. Rivka was olive-toned, and voluptuous in all the right places, and Sophie couldn't help but notice that even at her age the woman's body was still indefectible.

Sophie had to swallow hard in order to respond, "Hey Rivka. How have you been?" But she was thinking, *please don't call me 'Big Nose Sophie' in front of my staff.*

"I'm well," Rivka replied with a catty smile. She winked and added, "And it seems that you're doing alright for yourself. Dad showed me the story in the paper."

The entire office was watching the debacle, and Sophie was humiliated. Her heart started to pound and she felt her forehead bead up with sweat.

"Rivka," Micah said, apparently having found his voice. "Let's go into my office for a minute."

"Sure thing," she replied.

Turning to Sophie he took her hand and said, "Sophie, I'm really sorry about all of this. I'll be right back."

Sophie gave his hand a tender squeeze of acknowledgement, then turned and went back into her office.

LaKeisha texted Meredith, telling her to bring a bottle of chilled water up to Sophie immediately and that she'd explain everything later.

By the time Meredith reached Sophie's office, she was sitting behind her desk, staring out the window. Meredith quickly closed the door behind her and brought Sophie the bottle.

"I'm so sorry that happened to you," Meredith began, setting the bottle before Sophie. "LaKeisha told me everything."

Sophie grabbed for the water, unscrewed the lid, and took several big gulps. "Thanks, Mere," she said. "That woman is still as loud and ugly as she was in high school. I don't know what Micah ever saw in her." She looked up at Meredith and asked, "Is she still in there with him?"

Meredith nodded.

"I can't believe you'd just show up like this," Micah said as Rivka seated herself in his desk chair. He remained standing by the windows.

"Great view," Rivka observed, casting her eyes on Micah's trim physique. "And I don't mean the cityscape. And I like your new hair-cut. It's very sexy."

Micah rolled his eyes and asked, "What are you doing here, Rivka?"

She looked perplexed as she answered, "Well after all of our texts I thought maybe we should visit in person—like I said, it's just not working out with Leland."

"All of our texts?" Micah questioned, raising one eyebrow as if completely puzzled.

Rivka huffed in frustration and snapped, “Yes. All of the texting you’ve been doing for the last week and a half—how you’re not sure it’s going to work out with Sophie and that you want to come back to Texas. Blah, blah, blah.”

Micah’s dark complexion paled. “I haven’t been sending you any texts, Rivka.”

Rivka laughed out loud. “Knock it off, Micah,” she scoffed. “She can’t hear us in here.”

Micah shook his head. “Everything’s working out great with Sophie.”

Rivka reared back and guffawed like a horse. “Big Nose Sophie?” she questioned incredulously. She cackled again and said, “That’s sweet, Micah.”

Micah swallowed hard and answered, “She’s the best thing that’s ever happened to me, Rivka.”

Stone silence engulfed the room.

Rivka looked as if she’d been punched in the stomach, and her playful expression faded at once. She sat up a little straighter in the chair and looked into Micah’s eyes. “You can’t be serious, Micah,” she whispered. “Then why all of the texts?”

“I haven’t been texting you—” he stopped abruptly as a bell went off. “When did you start getting texts from me?”

Rivka thought for a minute and answered, “A week ago last Friday night. Why?”

Micah slowly nodded as it all came together for him. “Rivka,” he began, “I lost my phone that day—that was the day we had all of the trouble on the site. I

had my phone replaced immediately, but I think I forgot to cancel service on my old number. I'm sorry, but you haven't been getting those texts from me."

It was quiet in Sophie's office as she and Meredith sat alone. Meredith didn't want to leave Sophie by herself, and had even offered to call Amanda or Sophie's mom. But Sophie said that she could handle this on her own and asked Meredith to just sit there for a minute. Neither could think of a thing to say, so they just watched the city below in silence.

A soft knock was heard on Sophie's door, and Meredith sprang to her feet.

"Let me check," she said, hurrying to the door. She cracked it opened and smiled into Micah's concerned eyes. She allowed the door to open just far enough to let him in, and then she stepped into the hallway, quickly closing it behind her.

"Sophie, I'm so sorry," he said, hastening to where she sat behind her desk. He knelt on one knee before her, taking one of her hands into his own.

Sophie smiled into his eyes and breathed a sigh of relief. "It's okay, Micah. Is she gone?"

"No," he answered with a grim expression.

Sophie's eyes filled with tears she couldn't stop.

"No, don't cry," Micah said, reaching for the tears on her cheeks. "It's not what you think. I don't want that woman anymore. She's still here because I think Fred has been texting her on my old phone—everything's been so up in the air over the last week and a half that I forgot to cancel my old service. I thought

maybe we should call the cops and keep her texting. Maybe they can use it to track him somehow.”

Sophie seemed to sigh with relief. She nodded and wiped her tears away, giving him a faint smile. “Whew!” she pretended an exclamation. “That was a close one.”

Micah laughed nervously. “No way, Sophie. Not even close. Nothing—and no one—is going to screw this up for us. We’re having too much fun.”

Sophie nodded with a sweet smile. “Yeah, too much fun. Just what I always needed.”

Micah suddenly reached for the front right pocket of his suit jacket, extracting a small leather box. “I was going to give you this on Thursday, but I can’t wait any longer.” He flipped open the box, grasping the sparkling ring inside, allowing the box to drop to the floor. “Sophie, please marry me.”

Sophie quietly gasped, but quickly offered him the ring finger on her left hand. “When?” she asked as he slipped it on.

“Whenever we can get a plan together,” he answered, leaning forward to softly kiss her lips.

She smiled into his eyes, laughed quietly, and kissed him back. “I love you, Micah.”

“I love you, too, Sophie. Now let’s get these monkeys off our back so that we can get on with having too much fun.”