

Chapter 12

Sophie sat at her drafting table, trying to focus on the job at hand. She found herself periodically staring out the window, daydreaming of the past few days with Micah. First the tickets, then the amazing musical, and to top it all off he'd taken her to her favorite Italian restaurant afterwards.

She laughed as she remembered when he left his car with the young valet at the restaurant. The restaurant was small and tucked into what appeared to be a 'seedy' neighborhood. The valet looked to be no older than fifteen.

With a heavy Russian accent, the valet said to Micah, "For five dollar I park car."

Micah reluctantly turned over his keys and a five-dollar-bill. Later, when they were being seated in the restaurant, Micah confided, "Are you sure he was a valet?"

"Of course," Sophie replied. "What else would he be?"

Micah raised one eyebrow, leaned close and whispered, “I think I just gave a professional car jacker my Mercedes and five dollars for gas money.”

Sophie guffawed. “I know the neighborhood looks a little scary, but it’s legit. I bring principals here all of the time.”

She laughed again at the sweet memory, thinking, *and he was tapping his toe again at church yesterday. Oh, Jesus, thank You for bringing him back to Detroit. How much longer—?*

Her thoughts were interrupted when her cellphone rang. Amanda’s face and number came up on the screen and Sophie quickly reached for it. Her family never bothered her during the day unless it was important.

“Hey, Amanda. What’s up?” she asked.

“It’s Mom,” came her sister’s shaky reply. “She’s had a massive heart attack and she’s asking for you. Can you hurry?”

Sophie ordered that the company car be brought around immediately. On her way downstairs, she gave instructions to Meredith to let Micah know what had happened and that she probably wouldn’t make it to lunch. Then she drove as fast as she dared to the hospital near Ferndale.

Amanda met her at the entrance where she left her car with the valet. Amanda put her arms around her sister and said, “She’s conscience, but they’re getting ready take her to the cath lab for some stints, so let’s hurry.”

When they reached Eva's room, Levi and Luke were already there. Uncle Mike stood near to Eva, holding her hand. Eva was lying in the bed, while machines of various shapes and sizes made blips and soft buzzes next to her.

"Sophie," Eva rasped when she saw her in the doorway. Her eyes were half closed, but she reached for her daughter.

Sophie rushed to the bedside, knelt and took her mother's free hand into her own. "Mom," she said softly.

"Sophie, Eva said, swallowing hard and taking a jagged breath. "I have to tell you and Uncle Mike something just in case I don't make it through this."

"You're gonna make it, Mom," Sophie encouraged.

Eva began, "First of all, I'm so sorry that I kept this from everyone—"

"Don't worry about it, Mom. It's okay."

Eva took another labored breath and began again. "I did something really wicked about fifty-three years ago now, and it hurt someone really bad... I stayed single for a long time after my second husband died. But then, in 1963, I met a man I knew that I could love for the rest of my life. And though he had far different politics than I had, I decided to overlook it and continue the relationship."

Uncle Mike seemed to gasp, and everyone looked at him.

"Be quiet, Mike," Eva ordered with a frown. She continued, "Anyway, one thing led to another and I got pregnant. We decided that we'd get married, but before we could pull it off, he was drafted for the Vietnam War. I wanted him to run away to Canada with me—you know it's only just across the river—but he said

that was wrong. I told him that if he didn't run away, I'd have an abortion. He said that he couldn't betray his country, or some other garbage like that, so I let him leave for Vietnam thinking that I'd found someone to abort the baby. It was illegal back then...but I did find someone who would do it." She smiled into Sophie's bewildered expression and said, "But I couldn't go through with it, and I'm so glad that I didn't...Anyway, a few months later I married this guy's brother, Danny."

"Eva?" Uncle Mike whispered, leaning close to look into her eyes. "You didn't go through with it?"

Eva smiled into Mike's eyes, squeezed his hand and shook her head. "I couldn't. I loved you. I love you still."

Sophie and her siblings collectively gasped, but it was Luke who managed to ask, "Uncle Mike is Sophie's father? Is that what you're saying, Mom?"

Eva looked into Sophie's astonished eyes, "And he has grieved you ever since." She looked back at Mike and said, "Please forgive me, Mike.

"Of course, Eva," he replied.

"Did Dad know?" Sophie whispered.

Eva looked at Sophie and answered, "I'm sure he had his suspicions, but he never asked, and I never told him. He had the eyes for me while I was dating Mike, and his politics were exactly in line with mine, so it was easy to say 'yes' when he asked me to marry him. But he loved you, Sophie, like you were his own. I was so jealous of you..." her voice cracked and tears ran out of her eyes. "Every time I looked at you it reminded me of what I couldn't have...of what I would never have."

“Why didn’t you just wait for Uncle Mike to get home?” Sophie whispered through her tears.

“I couldn’t take that chance,” Eva answered. “It was a different time in the United States, Sophie. The government told us that they hadn’t sent soldiers into South Vietnam, yet they were dying there and the news showed caskets coming home all of the time. I couldn’t bear the thought of seeing Mike come home in one of those caskets.”

“Oh, Mom,” Sophie cried.

“There’s a lot more that I don’t have time to tell you—” she coughed lightly. Looking around at the rest of her children she said, “Go to Benedict. He’ll tell you everything. He didn’t know about Sophie, but he knows everything else...and I want you to know about us and all that we did back then.”

At that moment nurses and technicians came into the room announcing that they had to get Eva to the cath lab.

“I love you all so very much,” Eva said as they wheeled her from the room. “Please don’t ever forget that.”

Awkward silence filled the room until Levi spoke. “Well, that’s something,” he murmured just loud enough to be heard.

Amanda put her arm around Sophie and asked, “Are you okay, Sophie?”

Sophie shrugged and answered, “I just need a walk.”

“Right now?” Luke questioned.

She nodded, gave them all a faint smile, and said, “Yes, right now.” She started to back away from them and said, “Call me if something happens. I have to do some thinking.”

“You take whatever time you need, Sophe,” Amanda said.

“Thanks,” she stammered, and then she turned and hurried down the hall, leaving her siblings and Mike alone in Eva’s room.

As Mike watched her leave, he raised one silvered brow and smiled. “This has turned into one of the best days of my life.”

Levi and Luke both laughed nervously and slapped their uncle on the back.

“Let’s get some coffee, Uncle Mike,” Levi offered.

Mike only nodded as they all left Eva’s room, heading for the cafeteria downstairs.

Sophie texted Micah and told him that she’d call later. She ordered a latte in the hospital lobby and headed outside. What she really wanted was to go to Belle Isle. Ever since she was a little girl, she’d loved Belle Isle. A person could walk forever on Belle Isle without ever seeing anybody else. Her father had taken the family there often, sometimes with a picnic lunch and their fishing poles, and sometimes just for a good walk. But she didn’t want to go too far just in case her mother took a turn for the worse.

“This is a lot, Lord,” she said out loud as she walked the path around the hospital. She sighed heavily. “He wasn’t my dad? That’s funny, because he sure acted like a dad...he sure felt like my dad.”

She glanced at the small area of play equipment where a few men were with their children. The scene set of a cascade of memories. *He was so good to us*, she thought. *He took us everywhere. He'd put us all in that old van and take us to Buddy's for pizza, or over to the bowling alley.* She laughed through her tears. *I had the hamburger, no bun, with a salad on the side...she laughed again and shook her head. He never once teased me for my strange eating habits, nor did he ever force the issue—and Uncle Mike was there often, especially if Mom didn't come along.*

As she walked further, she remembered when Uncle Mike came around asking if he could start taking her and the boys to church. *I was really little...Amanda couldn't have been more than eleven or twelve...the boys must have been thirteen and fourteen...of course, none of them would go...that was long before we left Hamtramck...and even after we'd moved to Sterling Heights, he still made the trip every Wednesday and Sunday... No wonder. 'Uncle Mike' probably at least suspected.* She laughed as she remembered, *Mom protested mightily—at first. Then pretty soon, the whole family was going...until the boys started going to jail.*

She shook her head as she walked along, remembering when she'd received her scholarship. *Dad was the one who'd encouraged me to apply. He was the one who made the visit with me to Ithaca when Mom was so sick with the flu, and he was the one who helped me find that job in the bookstore while I was there...and he made sure to bring Mom for regular visits, even when the boys were in so much trouble...He was my dad...*

And then she remembered what her mother had said...*Go to Benedict... He'll tell you everything...*

Sophie huffed. *How cryptic, and how like Mom to be so strange...*

She was just beginning her third trip around the path when she saw a familiar man walking toward her. He was holding two white paper bags.

“Hey,” she said with a faint smile. “What are you doing here?”

“Well, it’s kind of a convoluted story,” Micah answered, “but Amanda told me that you were here so I thought I’d bring you some lunch.” He held up the bags and added, “I’ve got a couple of floats in the car, and I’m parked just right over there. They’re not too old yet. I think they’ll still be good.”

Sophie couldn’t help but give him a grin.

“And your mom is doing great,” Micah added with a smile. He chuckled and said, “And it sounds like she’s going to have a lot of explaining to do.” He handed her a bag and said, “Jump in the car. I got a story to tell you.”

Sophie agreed, thinking, *what could one more story hurt today?*

As they ate their Coney’s and drank their floats, Micah explained that Amanda had also shared with him about Sophie’s situation with the man she thought to be her father, and the man she called “Uncle Mike.”

“And I’m not even going to presume to know how to handle that,” he said. “But one thing I do know for certain is that if I were Uncle Mike, I’d have given anything to know about you.”

Sophie looked into his eyes, seeing the grief that he’d managed to hide from her before.

“Rivka and I had a lot of problems,” he went on. “I haven’t shared the bulk of it with you because I didn’t think it was necessary. But there is one story in particular that I want you to know because I think it will help you going forward.”

He took a deep breath and slowly let it out. “Sometimes Rivka would be unfaithful, but she always told me about it and we’d get right into counseling and things would get better. One time during counseling things got a lot better. I thought our marriage was reconciling in the best of ways, and Rivka became pregnant.”

He sighed heavily, shook his head and looked away. “But Rivka didn’t want children.” He swallowed hard and looked back into Sophie’s eyes. “I told her it would be okay, that we could take fine care of a baby. I wanted children so badly—my brother was just starting his own family...” He bit his lip and continued, “But without even telling me she had an abortion.”

Sophie caught her breath.

Micah nodded and went on, “She just came home one day and told me what she’d done. I was shocked, and really unprepared—maybe even unwilling—to continue with counseling. I did go, but it was never the same after that. I could never bring myself to forgive her.”

Sophie put her hand on Micah’s shoulder and said, “I’m so sorry that happened to you.”

Micah nodded. “Well, what I want you to know about that is that if an eighteen-year-old kid walked into my life and told me that Rivka had given birth after all, I’d be the happiest guy on the planet.” He touched her cheek with his hand and gave her a sad smile as he said, “Even if she was fifty-three years old,

and I was almost eighty, I'd be so happy to finally see my baby...I think, especially, if she turned out to be someone like you."

Sophie put her hand on his, gave it a gentle caress and looked into his eyes. "Thank you, Micah."

"You're welcome," he replied.

She stroked his hand again and said, "Micah, I believe that before God puts a baby into its mother's womb, He first holds that baby in His own hands...and if that baby doesn't make it into our world, for whatever reason, it goes back into His hands." She took a soft breath and tried to smile as she said, "There's a way for you to see your baby someday...Just ask Jesus to forgive you and follow Him. Then, when you get to heaven, you'll be there with your son or daughter."

Micah swallowed hard, obviously fighting his tears. "I don't know, Sophie. I've got a lot of sins."

"That doesn't matter," she sweetly replied. "God loves you so much, despite your sin."

Micah took her hand into his own. "I don't know what to do," he admitted.

"You don't need to know what to do," Sophie said, her voice soft and kind. "I know sometimes they make it look like you have to charge down a church aisle somewhere and make a great profession of faith, but you don't. You can settle things with your Savior right here in this car, and me and my family will help you figure out the rest. And if your brother and mother have already made that decision, I'm sure they'll be more than willing to teach you whatever they've already learned."

Micah looked into her lovely grey eyes, the eyes he knew he had fallen in love with, and whispered, “Help me, Sophie.”

Sophie nodded and asked, “Do you believe that you’re a sinner, Micah?”

“Yes...a big one.”

“Do you believe that Jesus died for the punishment of those sins?”

He was quiet for a long time, and finally, to Sophie’s great relief, he replied, “Yes. I’m going to choose to believe that.”

“Then ask Him to forgive you.”

Micah nodded and cleared his throat. “Please, Jesus, forgive me. I’m so sorry.”

Sophie beamed as she looked at him. “The Bible says that He cannot lie, and He promises to forgive when we ask. You’ve been forgiven, Micah. You have been sealed with the Holy Spirit from this moment forward and no one can snatch you from His hand.”

Micah was smiling but tears welled in his eyes, spilling onto his cheeks. He quickly wiped them away. “You’re a wonderful lady, Sophie Young.”

Sophie smiled back at him, her own eyes letting go of a million tears as she said, “You’re pretty special too, Micah Bloomfield.”

He took a deep breath, wiped his tears again, and then he said, “I promised Amanda that I’d call as soon as I caught up to you, so I’d better do that.”

Sophie nodded. “Yeah, she can be pretty bossy.”

“Yeah, but you’ve got a great family, Sophie.”

“I know,” she agreed. “Better than just regular anyway.”

As Sophie and Micah came into the waiting room, Amanda greeted her with an embrace. “My sweet Sophie,” she said. “Do you feel a little better?”

Sophie nodded, but her throat was suddenly stopped with tears. Amanda had been a wonderful big sister, and she knew in that moment that she hadn’t told her nearly enough how wonderful she’d been.

“How’s Mom?” Sophie asked.

“She’s doing very well,” Amanda answered with a smile, “but it will be a little bit before we can see her.”

“In the meantime,” Levi added, and Sophie looked up to see that Benedict was there, along with Micah’s mother. “We called Benedict and he and Mrs. Bloomfield have some great stories they want to tell us.

Mike came to Sophie then, smiled shyly and said, “I know this has to be strange for you, because it is for me as well. But I want you to know that this is the happiest day of my life.”

Sophie looked into Mike’s eyes and saw the identical image of the man she’d always called ‘Dad.’ She smiled and said, “We’ll get through this—”

“Okay,” Luke interjected, “Let’s try to get a handle on this thing.”

Everyone laughed nervously.

“I, for one, am excited to hear these stories,” Art said. There’s plenty of room in here so why doesn’t everybody just sit down.”

They all nodded and began to seat themselves.

Micah took a seat by his mother and said, “Hey, Mom, what are you doing here?”

Liana gave him a faint smile and answered, “I was Eva’s best friend at one time...” She glanced at Benedict and then back at her son. “Benedict thought I should come with.”

Sophie’s mouth fell open, but she quickly closed it.

“Come on, honey,” Amanda said, putting her arm around Sophie’s waist. “Why don’t you sit down over here.” She gently led Sophie to a nearby chair, while their brothers remained standing near the doorway.

Benedict cleared his throat and everyone looked his way as he began, “I’ve known Eva for more than sixty years...” He looked around the room at the eyes on him. “When Amanda called, I thought it best if I explained Eva’s somewhat obscure message...” He seemed to swallow hard before he began again, “Things were hard for the black people in Detroit back then. But it was through that horribly tough time that I met two of the sweetest women I will ever know.” He gave Liana a tender smile and then looked at the rest of the crowd and continued, “I met a young man named Luther Washington when we were sixteen years old.” He smiled at Luke and Levi. “That was your daddy. His father had moved the family from south Alabama to Detroit so that he could work in the factories. They moved in to the same neighborhood as my family, and Luther and I hit it off instantly. He wanted to be what he called a ‘professional grounds keeper.’ He even had a little square of dirt where he grew vegetables and flowers. He’d talk all the time about learning how to take care of the big lawns we saw all over Detroit, and we dreamt of someday having big lawns of our own.

“Finally, right around graduation, he got hired on at the convent as their grounds’ keeper, and he loved his job...but what he loved even more than his job was a young lady who had been taken in at the convent. Her name was Eva Walker. Eva’s parents were immigrants—Scots—but Eva was born in Detroit when they arrived. They were killed in an automobile accident when she was only twelve years old. She was their only child, and had no other relation in this country. The nuns found out about it and brought her into the convent with them.

“I think Eva loved Luther from the moment she laid eyes on him. The nuns trusted Luther and allowed the two of them to really get to know one another, probably thinking that it was just a young-love thing that would eventually die down. And that’s when I met Liana...” He hesitated and looked at Micah’s mother.

Liana swallowed hard and began, “Eva was my very best friend...the nuns let her go to public school, and that’s where we met. We kept it a secret from the nuns, but my family was Jewish. Eva taught me how to behave like a good Catholic girl whenever I came to visit, and we fooled them all. Eva wanted me to be Catholic like she was. She thought the world and all of the nuns, but I was Jewish...” Liana looked at her son and added, “You know how that goes.”

Micah nodded and looked at the floor.

“Anyway,” Liana continued, “one day while I was visiting at the convent, Luther came to work with a partner and he introduced me to Benedict...” Liana’s voice trailed off.

Benedict quickly cleared his throat and continued the story, “Luther had saved and saved for this old jalopy that he could haul tools and supplies in, because he was always planning to have his own business. Anyway, the thing wouldn’t run half the time, that’s how it was in those days. But I could fix anything so he made

me come along with him one day, and it just happened to be the day that Liana was visiting the convent.” He took a soft breath and looked at Liana with a tender smile. “She was sweet and thoughtful, and so full of life and dreams.” He looked at the rest of the group. “We started to sneak around together, and boy did we ever have a good time.

“In the meantime, Luther and Eva decided they wanted to be married. The nuns advised against it—a white woman with a black man just wasn’t acceptable in those days. But in the end, they found a sweet old priest that would marry them.” He smiled as he recalled the treasured memory. “The nuns put on a beautiful little wedding, hidden of course, in the back of the convent, behind the fence, and made us promise that we’d tell no one. Liana stood up for Eva, and I was Luther’s best man.

“And like I said, times were tough for black people in Detroit back then—especially for a black man with a white wife. Eva didn’t seem to fit in anywhere she went. They couldn’t find decent housing, though they could afford it. Luther’s little business had really taken off, but banks wouldn’t give loans to black people, and even if they did, white neighborhoods didn’t want our kind.”

“That’s when Benedict and I stepped in,” Liana interjected. “With Eva and Luther, we formed an organization of whites and blacks that protested the racist conditions people like Luther and Eva were up against.” She paused and drew a breath before continuing, “When my parents found out what was going on, they forbid me to see Benedict and Eva.” Her eyes dropped to her lap. Micah put his hand on his mother’s shoulder.

“But the rest of us fought the good fight until my parents decided that it was time for me to go to college,” Benedict went on. “My father had worked in the

factory all my life and he was a good saver. He was determined that I would have a college education. He saw me drawing and planning, and fixing everything under the sun and decided that I would make a good architect.” Benedict chuckled. “And I was so against the idea, but I obeyed him, because that’s what we did in those days, and I sent out applications to colleges that would accept black students. The University of Texas was the first to reply, and that’s where they shipped me off to. I got a job cleaning the grocery store just off campus, and they let me have a room above it for free. The heat was unbearable.” He glanced at Micah and said, “I don’t know how you stand it.” He looked back at his captivated audience and continued, “I couldn’t wait to get home to Detroit. I thought that perhaps Liana’s parents would have a change of heart if I had a college education. But by the time I got home, Liana had married Dr. Bloomfield’s son, as she should have, and Micah was just a newborn. Eva was married to Danny Young by then, which seemed fitting because of their politics, and she had a newborn of her own...” He gave Sophie a sweet little smile and said, “...the prettiest little white baby girl I’d ever seen.

“I went to see Eva as soon as I got back into town and learned that Luther had died with cancer. His parents had left Detroit by that time and had gone back to Alabama, and they didn’t want Eva and her mixed babies. She was devastated, and soon after Luther’s death she married a man she met working in the factory, that was Amanda’s father, but he was killed in an accident. She told me that she had planned on never marrying again, but that Danny came along. By the time Sophie was born, Levi and Luke were eight and seven, and Amanda was six.” He smiled at Sophie’s siblings and went on, “Danny adopted all three of you so that he could give you his name. Danny Young was a good man with a good heart.” He took a breath and continued, “Eva seemed worn out by that time, but Danny continued the fight for racial equality in housing, even when Eva didn’t want any

part of it anymore.” He looked at Liana, and then back at Eva’s children and said, “Your mother may have made some mistakes, but she’s an awful good woman.”

Liana looked at everyone and said, “The last I heard from Eva was that she and Luther were going back to Alabama with his parents. I had no idea that she’d stayed in Detroit or I would have looked her up sooner.” She looked at Sophie. “You can’t imagine how surprised I was to find out that you were her daughter.” Tears suddenly spilled from Liana’s eyes. She looked from Sophie to Micah, and then back at Sophie and said, “Micah wanted to date you in high school, Sophie, but his father and I wouldn’t allow it—because of what appeared to be a really bad background, and because you weren’t Jewish.” She swallowed a sob and whispered, “Please forgive me, Sophie.” She dropped her head into her hands, crying quietly.

Micah put his arm around his mother’s shoulders and held her against him. “It’s okay, Mom,” he whispered.

“But I did the same thing they did to me,” she wept. She looked into his eyes and said, “Please forgive me, Micah.”

“It’s okay, Mom,” he repeated.

Sophie couldn’t hide her shock, but she quickly nodded her head and said in a quiet voice, “It’s okay, Liana. Please don’t worry about it.”

Amanda’s eyes were huge and round, but she grabbed a nearby box of tissue and went to Liana. She put her hand on her shoulder and handed her a tissue.

Sophie quietly cleared her throat and looked at Benedict. “Is that why you hired me?”

Benedict shook his head. “I hired you because of your vision—and your grades.” He gave her small smile. “But mostly your vision.”

Sophie took a breath and slowly let it out. She looked at her uncle and smiled tenderly into his eyes.

“Oh,” Mike breathed, staggering to where Sophie was seated. He knelt before her, reaching for her face. “You’re mine.” he whispered.

Sophie nodded and put her arms around him.

“Thank you, Jesus,” he whispered, taking her into his arms. “Thank you so much.” He pulled away to look her in the eye. “I think I always knew...at least I hoped.”

Sophie wanted to say more, but her throat was as full as her eyes. She looked upon the man that she’d called ‘uncle’ all of her life, realizing that she still had a father. *What a crazy day, she thought as she looked at him with a smile. First Micah gets saved, and now I’m given a second chance with an earthly father... This God did for me!*