

Chapter 4

I can't believe I did that, Sophie thought as she started her Escalade. *He was just being nice, and now I've asked him out on a date that he offered to pay for.*

“So, why the Phoenix?” Micah inquired as he latched his buckle.

Sophie swallowed hard as she backed out of the driveway. She couldn't very well give him the honest answer...*or maybe I could just tell him a little bit*, she considered. After a moment she said, “Because I've never been there and I've always wanted to try it.”

“Not even in high school?”

“Nope. I stayed close to Mom and Dad.” She glanced at Micah in the passenger seat and then back at the road. “I think because Amanda and the boys had been such handfuls.”

Micah nodded as if in understanding.

“I'm sure you heard all the stories,” she went on as she drove along.

Micah nodded again, then blurted, “But I didn't believe 'em.”

Sophie smiled at his words. “Thanks for that. And just for the record, Amanda's awesome and so are the boys.”

“That's good,” he replied. “What are they up to these days?”

“Amanda is a pastor’s wife,” Sophie answered.

“Whoa...that *is* quite a turn around.”

Sophie nodded. “She just turned sixty and she’s as beautiful now as she was back then.”

“How did it go with her children?”

“Well, they all went to college, much to everyone’s surprise. Daisy is the oldest, forty-four if you can believe it, and she’s a nurse in the Army, stationed at Ft. Bragg right now. Dylan was second born, and her only son. He’s forty-two and works for an IT company in Dearborn. Then there was Darla, she’s the youngest and just turned forty. She was in the Marines for eight years, and then went to medical school. She specializes in pediatrics. She has a small practice in Sterling Heights.”

“When did Amanda get married?”

“They just celebrated their thirty-fifth,” Sophie answered.

“How are your brothers doing?”

Sophie chuckled. “Well, they took a little longer to straighten out, but it did finally happen. Luke is a machinist at MB Aerospace, and Levi works for Little Caesars Enterprises in their research and development department. She glanced at him and added with a soft smile, “They haven’t been in jail for many, many years.”

“That’s good news.”

“It was such a relief,” she confessed. “I used to worry and pray a lot about them. But now I don’t worry at all.” She took a breath and said, “Now tell me about yourself. What have you been up to? I heard you married Rivka...I forget her last name.”

Micah nodded. “Rivka Demski. We divorced just last year.”

“I’m sorry to hear that. Did you have any kids?”

“Rivka didn’t want kids.”

Sophie nodded. Rivka never seemed like the type to want anything but her own needs fulfilled. Internally Sophie slapped herself. *That was judgmental and pointless. I'm sure there's another side to the story...but I never liked her...and she always came in to tease me at the convenience store. She was so mean with all of her popular friends who didn't have to work ...*

“Yeah,” Micah signed heavily, breaking into Sophie’s thoughts. “She ran off with my ex-partner after he sent our firm into bankruptcy.”

“Oh, my goodness,” Sophie tried to sound surprised, but in reality, she wasn’t. *Rivka was always such a two-timer.*

“Leland Fitz,” Micah continued with disgust. “We started the firm after graduation, and it was stable for many years. But then Fitz started taking risks with materials. He was into some showmanship, and his designs won a couple of awards there in Dallas. But then there was a partial building collapse during construction and three men died.”

“Wow,” Sophie said as she drove along. “Is Rivka still with him?”

“Far as I know. I haven’t seen or heard from her since we sold the house, split the cash, and I went to work for Rebuild & Restore.”

“What an airhead,” Sophie muttered, but was suddenly horrified that she’d allowed it to slip. Quickly, she tried to cover what she’d said. “I mean...I mean...”

Micah laughed. “I know what you mean.”

She glanced at him and then back at the road. “Micah, I’m so sorry. I can’t believe I said that. That was horrible of me to say.”

Micah laughed again and shook his head. “It’s okay. She dragged me through the wringer and back for the last thirty-five years—the last twenty-five being the worst. I’m glad it’s over. And she *is* an airhead to take up with the likes of Leland Fitz. He’s got a terrible gambling problem. He’ll spend her into the poorhouse.”

Their conversation continued to flow as they caught up on old acquaintances and events of their shared past. Math Club had been an especially fun time for both

of them, and they were laughing heartily at their old memories by the time they reached Phoenix Coney Island.

“So, you’ve never been here,” Micah said as they walked to the glass door; he swung it open and held it for her. “It used to be really good food,” he went on as she passed in front of him.

A long counter with several stools was to their left, like an old-fashioned diner, while booths lined the outer parameter. Black and white tiles checked the floor, clean stainless steel for the counter. Tan turn-style stools sat askew at the counter, begging for someone to be seated in them.

“They’ve updated the look,” Micah observed. “I like it.”

Sophie stood in the entryway for a moment, taking it all in. The aroma of cooking beef, garlic and onions was almost overpowering. She inhaled deeply, wanting to memorize every moment so that if this never happened again, she’d still have the memory. She’d wanted to visit this place so bad when all of her friends were coming here...*but I was always working, or sitting at home worrying with the folks...*She would have given anything to have had her first date take her to this very place... She looked at Micah and softly smiled...*you’re still as handsome as ever.*

“Where would you like to sit?” he asked, returning a smile of his own.

“The counter,” she answered definitively. That would have been her favorite place, she just knew it.

Micah led them to the counter and waited for her to take a seat.

A waitress appeared immediately and put two glasses of ice water in front of them. “What are you in the mood for?” she asked.

“This lovely lady has never been here before,” Micah began, and Sophie was surprised at his forthrightness. He smiled at her and then looked back at the waitress. “Give her the Detroit Coney and fries, with a Vernors Float.” He winked at Sophie and added, “You won’t regret it.”

“How bout you?” the waitress continued.

“The same,” Micah answered.

“Be right back,” the waitress said as she bustled off.

“We used to come her all the time after the hockey games,” Micah said. He chuckled and shook his head. “You’ve been all the way to Europe Sophie Young, but you’ve never been to the Phoenix Coney Island.”

She shrugged with a smile and said, “I guess I just never got around to it.”

Soon their food arrived, and Sophie was delighted with her first Detroit Coney.

“Come on,” Micah teased. “Seriously? You’ve lived here all your life and never had a Detroit Coney?”

“Nope,” she answered, taking a big bite. She chewed for a minute and began to nod. “This is delectable,” she said through a mouth full of chili dog. “Mom always said they’d make me sick and fat...and I can’t even begin to imagine the calorie count.”

“It’s enormous,” Micah admitted. “But you’ll walk it off tomorrow.”

Sophie giggled and took another bite.

The French fries were delicious as well, and the float was so good that they ordered a second. And throughout the meal their conversation came easily, as if it could never end. Sophie wished it would never end...*I want to get to know him*, she found herself thinking as he told her of his Texas adventures in architecture. He made her laugh, and it felt so good. *He’s still such a great guy*, she thought over and over again.

The sun set over Detroit, and they continued to visit until it was late.

“Micah,” she finally said, taking a breath, regretting what her next words had to be, “I have to get going. I teach at my church on Wednesday nights, which is tomorrow, and I haven’t prepared my lesson yet. I usually do that on Tuesday nights.”

Micah looked stricken, and it made her laugh again.

“Come on,” she coaxed. “We have to work in the morning.”

He nodded and stood from his stool, she stood as well.

“I guess I was just having such a good time that I forgot the time,” he admitted.

“Me too,” Sophie agreed. “Thanks, Micah.”

“You’re more than welcome, Sophie.”

Forty minutes later Sophie pulled up to the Riverfront and into the parking area nearest Micah’s condo.

“Will you need a ride in the morning?” she asked before he got out of the car.

“The agency said they’d drop the car here,” he answered.

“Thanks again, Micah. I had a great time.”

“We’ll have to do it again,” he offered.

“I can’t wait,” she admitted.

Micah got out of the car, closed the door and started to walk away. He turned for a moment, gave her a wave, and then he was on his way again.

Sophie sighed with a smile. “You’re still just amazing, Micah Bloomfield,” she whispered in the darkness.

It was nearly midnight before Sophie had finished with her lesson and had finally gotten into her pajamas.

She turned out her light and nestled into her comfortable bed, remembering the evening's events. She hadn't been able to stop smiling. She stared out of her skylight at the moon above and sighed with contentment.

"I got the best life, Jesus," she whispered. "Thank You so much."

Glancing at the clock beside her bed she wondered if it was too late to call Amanda. She hesitantly reached for the phone, scrolled to Amanda's number and pushed send. Hopefully they were still up. It started to ring.

A sleepy voice answered, "Sophie? Everything okay?"

Sophie couldn't help it. She giggled. "Everything is great, Amanda," she whispered. "I think I finally met someone."



Wednesday morning came quickly for Sophie. She'd spent an hour on the phone with her sister before finally putting her head on the pillow and attempting to fall asleep. And even after that, she'd lain awake for a long time.

She went through her morning ritual as quickly as she could, taking extra time only to visit with the Lord.

She dashed into Design & Structure, a little later than usual, outfitted in a pale grey Armani suit with a pink blouse. She carried grey Jimmy Choo pumps in her tote.

"Good morning, Sophie," Meredith greeted. She was waiting in Sophie's office, booting up her smartphone when Sophie arrived.

"Good morning, Mere," Sophie smiled, broader than usual Meredith noticed, catching the flush on her cheeks.

"Was it a chilly walk this morning?" she inquired.

"Not any chillier than usual," Sophie answered.

A knock on Sophie's open door turned their heads, and Micah looked inside. "I have to run up to my site so I'll be gone for a little while. Don't forget about lunch."

Sophie's cheeks flushed even more as she smiled and replied, "I won't."

Micah nodded with a grin and was gone.

Meredith looked at Sophie and raised one eyebrow. "Do I need to add Mr. Bloomfield to your calendar?"

Sophie actually giggled. "Yes, please," she replied. "We only planned it a few minutes ago so you won't find it on my desktop."

Meredith nodded. "I see." *Lunch with Mr. Bad Attitude? What's up with that?* She frowned and put the information into her smartphone. She took a deep breath, because it was time to wreck Sophie's great mood. *But I spose I better give her the 'good news.'* She looked up to see that Sophie was changing her shoes. "Your mother has called twice this morning. Apparently, you forgot to call her back yesterday."

Sophie dropped the shoe that she had just removed and gasped softly. "I forgot to call Mom," she whispered.

"Well, she says she's 'onto something,'" Meredith explained and sighed deeply. *What a surprise.* It was becoming well-known throughout the office that Sophie's mother was "investigating" some of the residents at her assisted living complex. And while Sophie had tried to keep it quiet, Eva had not. She loved to explain, in detail, all the facts to anyone who would listen, and that included Sophie's assistant. Meredith took a deep breath and continued, "She threatened not to come to the barbeque on Saturday because she's planning a stakeout."

Sophie grimaced. "Okay, I'll call her first thing." The very man she wanted to "stakeout" was actually invited to the barbeque.

I wouldn't put up with that static, Meredith thought. *No. Way. Not for a minute.* Meredith took another breath and began again, "And there's a problem over at the Corktown site already."

“What’s going on?”

“There was a shooting only about a block away and Ms. Beaufort can’t get her team on site yet. I guess the police have everything blocked off.” Meredith sighed heavily and added, “She’s pretty scared, Sophie.”

“I understand,” Sophie replied. “That’s why we hired a security team for that site.”

“But they need that school,” Meredith said. When the Corktown site was fully restored, it would be a charter school, which was near and dear to Meredith’s heart. It was being restored in her old neighborhood.”

Sophie nodded. “Where does she have the team right now?”

“They’re all holed up in a van at the Starbucks on Washington,” Meredith informed.

“Call her and tell her that I’m on my way. Maybe I can reassure her that everything will be okay.”

“I hope so,” Meredith said. Bijou Beaufort had been afraid since the beginning, but the site in Corktown required her knowledge of the 1920 French design. She was the best person on the globe for the job, and everyone knew it.

“And don’t forget that you’re scheduled to be on the Lafayette site this morning first thing. And your mom, Sophie. Please don’t forget your mom.”

“I’ll take care of Mom first,” Sophie said. She had slipped into her pumps and was reaching for her cellphone.

Meredith scurried out of Sophie’s office.

Sophie waited for her mother to answer the phone. It seemed to be taking a fairly long time.

“Sophie?” Eva gasped as she picked up the phone.

“Hi, Mom,” Sophie greeted. “I’m so sorry. I had such a busy day yesterday. I just forgot—”

“Listen, Sophie...I’m sure I heard him ask for money this morning, and he said he’s coming back on Saturday. I can’t possibly make it to the barbeque!”

“Mom, he’s coming to the barbeque,” Sophie quickly interjected. “Can’t you do a shakedown there?”

Eva chuckled. “I guess that would work.”

“And why aren’t you calling my cellphone, Mom. It’s way easier to get ahold of me on my cell.”

“Because I’m afraid it’s tapped,” Eva whispered.

Sophie laughed. “It’s not tapped, Mom. We’re totally safe.” Sophie took a breath and began again, “Mom, I really have an emergency. I have to go but I promise we’ll figure this out—”

“I invited Jean to the Widow’s Tea tomorrow. She seems more the quiet type to me.”

“That sounds like a great idea, Mom. Now, I really gotta go.”

“Okay, love you, Sophie.”

“Love you, too.”

And with that they ended their call and Sophie hurried out of the office.



There was a company car that Sophie used for unexpected situations, and also if she had to make short visits onsite. She had it brought around and went to visit Bijou and the Corktown team. By the time she reached the Starbucks, which was not far from the site, Bijou’s team had gotten coffee and appeared to already be working. Several sets of blueprints were laid out on tables that had been pushed together in a corner. The team was in deep discussion, and Bijou appeared to be engaged as well. But she looked relieved when Sophie walked in.

“Sophie, my dear,” she began in her exquisite French accent. “Thank you for coming. Have you heard anything from your security team?”

“Yes, I have,” Sophie answered, looking from Bijou to her team. “Apparently there was just a domestic disturbance in the neighborhood last night and it escalated. There was a shooting but they have the suspect in custody, and the victim is expected to live. The incident was not crime or gang related at all.”

Collective sighs of relief could be heard around the tables.

“Security is in place now and everything looks well in order,” she continued. “You can visit the site as soon as you’re ready.”

Ten people immediately rose from their seats, apparently the hometown members, and started putting on their jackets. The other two hesitantly arose, looking to Bijou for direction.

“I’m sure everything will be fine,” Stan Romano assured with a smile. He’d been born and raised in Detroit, and had been a police officer for many years. After being injured and unable to qualify for further service, he’d gone to school for architecture. If anyone knew the lay of the land better than Sophie, it was Stan.

Bijou sighed and nodded her head. “Alright then,” she said. “Let us get to work.”

On her way to the Lafayette site, Sophie’s phone rang. She was surprised to see her brother, Levi’s, number. It was unusual for him to call her during the workday.

“Hey, Levi, everything okay?”

“Hey, Sophie. Mom called. Are you guys spying on another neighbor?”

“Sophie sighed heavily. “Well, sort of—”

“Sophie, why are you guys doing that again? Don’t you remember what happened the last time?”

Sophie rolled her eyes. Of course, she remembered, but she didn't want her mom getting into something that might possibly be dangerous. Plus, her gut told her that her mother was definitely "onto something" this time, especially when it came to Jean's nephew.

"What did Mom say, Levi?"

"That she needs me to come late for dinner tonight and meet her in the hallway so that I can listen for her. Apparently, Jean's nephew promised to visit this evening after dinner." Levi explained.

Sophie's eyes opened wide. "He's coming back tonight?! He was just there this morning!"

"Sophie!" Levi exclaimed. "I'm not about to creep the halls of that retirement center and I suggest you stop encouraging her."

"I'm not encouraging her," Sophie defended. "Besides, what if she really were onto something? Then what?"

"Then let's call the cops," Levi suggested.

"Okay, okay," Sophie replied quickly. "I'll talk to her when I see her on Thursday."

Levi sighed with relief. "That's the sweet sister that I know and love. And I promise, if I see or hear anything weird, I won't ignore it. I just don't think it's anything to worry about."

"Ok, Levi."

"Now...just don't forget to pray for me." It was how Levi always ended his calls with her.

Sophie smiled and replied, "I won't. You pray for me too."

"I got you covered."

They ended their call and Sophie continued to the Lafayette site, thinking about her brother's comment. It always made her smile to think about how her brothers and sister had changed over the years.

Even though Amanda and the boys had come from a different father, Sophie was very close to all three of them and had witnessed firsthand how Jesus had changed them all.

Because of their mixed family situation, and biracial roots, Eva's children had been teased, degraded and segregated. The old neighborhood in Hamtramck was tough, but Eva's children vowed to be tougher. Amanda liked boys, from the very beginning, and sought love and acceptance in the arms of several of them, while Levi and Luke pursued what they perceived to be power and control. They joined gangs at an early age, dreaming of fame and money.

Sophie hid in her room, drawing her days away, dreaming of traveling over the ocean and maybe never coming home. Uncle Mike had taken her to church since she was little. She met Jesus there in Sunday school, and started asking Him to rescue her and her siblings. Her scholarship to Cornell came as quite a shock, but she took it and never looked back.

It wasn't long after that that Amanda met Arthur. He was patient and kind, and told her about Jesus and what He could do for her life and the lives of her children. She told their brothers and Luke found his freedom in Jesus in a prison cell. Levi followed soon after.

"I'll always pray for you," she whispered as she pulled onto the Lafayette site.

She was a little late arriving, and, sure enough, there stood Niccolo Verdino—waiting—when she parked. He was decked out in trim, straight-leg jeans, an untucked, flowing white shirt, and Giuseppe Zanotti leather sneakers, the left one tapping impatiently. A floral Ralph Lauren scarf billowed under his chin, while a black beret sat perfectly cocked over his left eyebrow. He looked at Sophie and tapped his wristwatch.

Sophie nearly laughed at the scene before her, but thought better of it and pulled herself together before she got out of the car. She reached into the backseat and retrieved the additional drawings the team had requested. *Thank you, Jesus,* she silently prayed. *I needed to see this today.*

By the time Sophie got back to the office it was almost lunchtime. She'd kept Micah's offer in the back of her mind all morning and the thought of getting together with him gave her an old-fashioned case of butterflies—possibly for the first time in her life.

Meredith came into her office with smartphone in hand. “Sophie,” she began, “I wanted to remind you of your luncheon meeting with Mr. Bloomfield. He just called and is on his way at this moment.”

Sophie grinned from ear to ear. “Great. And you should know that I turned my personal phone off. I'll take the company pager if you need to reach me during the lunch hour for an emergency.”

Meredith raised her eyebrows. That was brand new protocol. “How long will you be out?” she asked in a professional tone.

“I'm not sure, but I'll be back in time to take Penny's scheduled phone call.”

Meredith gave Sophie a curious smile. “You have the best time today, okay Sophie?”

Sophie smiled and nodded with a blush. “Okay, Mere.”

There was a new luncheon place within walking distance of Design & Structure, and Sophie heard they had great omelets. Micah thought it sounded good, except for another walk, but he kept that to himself. Since his arrival in Detroit, he'd walked more than he'd walked in the last year in Dallas. *No wonder she wears sneakers all of the time*, he thought as they headed up the street once again.

Soon they were enjoying another meal together, Micah disclosing even more hilarious stories of his perils in Texas. He wound through account after account of abandoned ranch properties, filled with snakes and other vermin surprising them during preliminaries, and even during reconstruction.

Sophie laughed, and she laughed hard, at every single tale. Her sweet response delighted him to his toes, which prompted him to continue. By the time they were on their way back to the offices, Sophie was begging for mercy.

“You’re the funniest man I’ve ever met,” Meredith heard Sophie say as they walked down the hall together. She was waiting for Sophie in her office.

“Oh, you just like to laugh,” Micah said with a chuckle.

Meredith raised one eyebrow as she listened from inside Sophie’s office. *No. No, she doesn’t. Sophie is a very serious person. And there’s no way that Mr. Bad Attitude is that funny...*

“I probably won’t see you this afternoon,” Micah said as they neared her doorway, and Meredith was certain that she heard Sophie groan with dismay. Her mouth fell open in surprise. *Why on earth would someone like Sophie be attracted to a pudgy, bald guy with a bad attitude?*

“I have a huge meeting with the team this afternoon, so we’ll be downstairs,” he further explained.

“Okay then,” Sophie replied. “And I have church tonight so I’ll have to leave early.”

“But tomorrow lunch for sure?” he asked.

“Definitely,” she answered.

Meredith rolled her eyes. *You’ve got to be kidding.*

Sophie came through her door, and Meredith saw the smile and blush. She pretended to study her smartphone.

“Good afternoon, Sophie,” she greeted professionally. “How was lunch?”

“Fantastic,” Sophie breathed with a smile. She sat down behind her desk and started to unlace her sneakers. “What do you have for me, Mere?”

Meredith tapped her screen and listed off several messages that had come in for Sophie while she was out, waiting until the very last one to give her the bad news.

“And your mom called...three times.”

“Really?” Sophie sounded surprised, but Meredith wondered if she really was.

“She’s pretty upset,” Meredith continued. “At one point she threatened to call a cab and come down here.”

Sophie guffawed, and Meredith was shocked. Normally Sophie was more reserved when it came to news like that about her mother.

“Oh, I’m sorry,” she quickly apologized. “It’s just that...well, can you imagine it? Here comes Mom, down the hall, yelling my name, her investigation notes in hand?”

Meredith had to admit that Sophie’s vision was quite humorous and she allowed a small, guarded smile.

“Mom will understand once I explain,” Sophie murmured as she finished with her shoes.

I don’t even understand, Meredith thought. But she took a breath and remained professional. “It should be a quiet afternoon for you, Sophie. I only have Penny on the schedule, but please don’t forget your mom.”

“I won’t,” Sophie promised.

“Then that’s all I have for you.”

“Thanks, Mere.”

“Quite welcome,” she replied. As she left Sophie’s office, heading back to her desk, she ran into LaKeisha.

“Hey, what’s going on around here?” LaKeisha whispered. “My new boss has done a total one-eighty in attitude. It’s like he’s *enjoying* himself all of the sudden.”

Meredith smiled and shook her head. “I don’t know, but it sure looks good on Sophie.”

Sophie turned on her phone and cringed when she saw all of the text messages popping into her inbox. “Wow, Mom, you’ve been busy,” she whispered as she read the texts. She laughed quietly, and then stopped at the last one, sitting up straighter in her chair. “You’re totally onto something, Mom,” she whispered. “And we’ll see what we can get out of him on Saturday.” She quickly returned her mother’s texts, affirming her mother’s suspicions.

Sophie set the phone on the corner of her desk, leaned back in her chair and gazed out the windows. *I’ll see her tomorrow night, and I’ll tell her about Micah,* she thought. *I’ll bring her some of that chocolate she loves, and some fresh flowers...Mom loves fresh flowers.* Sophie smiled and sighed as she rehearsed her plan in her head. Soon thoughts of her mother were pushed aside with thoughts of Micah. She laughed quietly as she remembered their lunch together, and his promise to buy himself a parka if he had to continue to walk to the worksite day after day.

“He’s so great, Jesus,” she whispered. “Thank You.”

That night at church, Sophie tracked down a copy of the congregational prayer list. She read through it before her class started, and could find no mention of Benedict. He was a regular in the Wednesday night prayer meeting so it surprised her that his ‘family emergency’ wasn’t listed.

“Hey, Sophie,” came a voice in her doorway.

She looked up and smiled when she saw his tall, lanky frame. He had the same steely eyes of her father, and how she missed him when she looked into them.

“Hey, Uncle Mike,” she greeted. “How are you on this awesome spring day.” He taught a men’s class just down the hall from her on Wednesday nights.

Mike Young saw the sparkle in her eye and returned her smile as he answered, “Better than I deserve.” He cocked his head as he looked at her and asked, “Did you change your hair?”

“No.”

“Different make-up?”

“Same old, same old,” she answered. “Why?”

“You look different...but in a good way.”

“That’s good...I’d hate to look different in a bad way.” She took a breath and asked, “Hey, are you coming to the game and my barbeque on Saturday?”

“Wouldn’t miss it for the world.”

“Good. Because there’s someone I want you to meet.”