

## Chapter 14

Micah set down his phone and took in the floor-to-ceiling view, always zeroing in on that beautiful jewel that was Sophie. He wondered if he could actually leave her at this point, *but I don't want to compete with her either*, he reasoned, *so going to work for someone else in this town is out of the question. And I don't know how to do anything else besides this*. His head ached and he rubbed his brow as he thought, *would she ever consider relocating to Dallas? She's gotta be a multi-millionaire by now and could live off the residuals from Design & Structure for the rest of her life. She doesn't have to worry about retirement...like me...*

He studied the building that was unequal with anything else around it...*but she loves this place...*He closed his eyes and rubbed his face with his palms...*how can I even think of asking her to leave?*

His phone pinged with a text and he reached for it, surprised to see that it was from his brother Ben:

*Can you squeeze me into your busy schedule? I'm only a couple of blocks away.*

Micah smiled and replied,

*Sure. Meet me downstairs. They have paczki today.*

Over coffee and pastries, Micah spilled out his dilemma to his brother.

Ben finished off the last of his coffee and shook his head. “You’re in a mess, Micah.” He looked thoughtfully at his brother and asked, “What’s your gut tell you to do?”

“Ask her to marry me and go to Dallas,” he answered. He sighed heavily and added, “But it’s only been three months...I don’t know if we’re serious yet—”

“Excuse me,” Ben interrupted, raising one eyebrow. “You don’t know if you’re serious yet? Have you seen the way she looks at you?”

Micah shrugged and looked away as he muttered, “Rivka used to look at me that way.”

Ben rolled his eyes. “Rivka never looked at you that way...not unless you’re counting the time you signed the papers on your Highland Park estate.”

Micah couldn’t help but chuckle at Ben. His brother had never cared for his wife, especially toward the end. He shook away his humor and said, “Come on, Ben, I’m serious. What would a lady like Sophie Young want with an old, washed-up idiot like me?”

“A life?” Ben answered without hesitation.

Micah sat quiet as he thought about that.

“Have you prayed about this, Micah?”

Micah shook his head.

“Well, my best advice would be to ask the Lord what He wants you to do. And I’m not a betting man, but if I were I’d bet that He tells you to stay right where you are.”

“How will I know?” Micah asked.

“You’ll just know. You’ll know it to your toes, brother.”

Over a delicious lunch at a new Italian restaurant downtown, Sophie excitedly told Micah about their firm’s recent acquire with the Perez Group, and that she’d be visiting Boston next weekend to talk to the other investors about her preliminary ideas.

“I’ve wanted to tear into that building for years,” she said with enthusiasm. “I even have drawings.” She paused to twirl some spaghetti around her fork, chuckling as she said, “I just never thought I’d get the chance.”

“That’s great, Sophie,” Micah replied with a smile, but it looked forced, as if something was wrong.

Sophie noticed the gloom that just wasn’t typical of Micah. She frowned with concern. “Is everything okay, Micah?”

He seemed to swallow hard, and then he slowly shook his head.

“What is it?” she asked, her heart starting to pound.

“I need to be honest with you about something, Sophie,” he began. She waited quietly, then he continued, “I’ve gotten a really good offer from a firm in Dallas.”

She put down her fork and reached for the napkin in her lap. She patted at her lips, then set it beside her plate. She wasn’t hungry anymore. In fact, she thought she might lose what she’d just put down. *It’s not supposed to go this way, Father...I asked you to make him stay.* She quickly blinked at the burning that had started in her eyes, but it was too late. She felt the hot tears drop onto her cheeks. She grabbed for her napkin and dabbed them away.

Micah reached for her hand. “Sophie, I’m so sorry. I didn’t think you’d be this upset.”

Sophie could only nod, her words being trapped somewhere in her throat. She finally managed to whisper, “I understand.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll finish my work in Detroit.”

Sophie shook her head and quietly replied, “I’m not worried about that.” She carefully removed her hand from his and stood up. “Can you give me some time to think?”

Micah got to his feet as well. “Of course. Take all the time you need.”

She nodded and started to back away from him. “See you around,” she said, and then turned and left him standing there alone.

Sophie had walked to work that day, but she didn’t want to go home for her car—and she definitely didn’t want to go back to the office for the company car.

She wanted to call her mom, but knew that she and Mike were getting reacquainted and didn't want to throw cold water on that. Instead, she texted Meredith and told her she'd be out the rest of the day, and then she called a taxi to take her to her sister's house.

She cried every step of the way, going through what was left of a package of tissue in her purse. By the time she was pounding up Amanda's wooden front steps, she'd gotten black Chanel mascara all over the sleeves of her chic sage linen suit, despite the fact that it was advertised *smudge-proof*.

Amanda's front door opened, and the moment she saw that the clamoring was Sophie she opened her arms, gathering her little sister in a tight embrace.

"Sophie!" she exclaimed. "What happened?"

"He's going back to Texas," Sophie sobbed. "Just like I knew he would."

"Oh, honey," Amanda breathed. "Come inside. I'll make us a cup."

Amanda made a whole pot of her soothing raspberry tea—a recipe she'd perfected since Art had been appointed to senior pastor twenty years ago. Since then, Amanda's tea and her sweet nature had helped to comfort many in their grief. She poured Sophie a cup and brought it to her in the living room, where she was still sobbing, filling tissue after tissue.

"Why don't you take off your jacket, Sophie, and I'll get something on those stains on your sleeves," Amanda offered.

"It's dry clean only...I'll just throw it away tonight," Sophie cried, clutching the mug of tea in both hands. "Who even cares?" She searched Amanda's eyes.

“Why did I let myself get into something like this? I know better. Especially at my age.”

Amanda’s expression was dumbfounded. “Maybe you just really misunderstand this, Sophie.”

Sophie shook her head in argument. “No, he hates Detroit. I was probably just a good time to help him get through his work here until he could find a way back to his stupid sauna.”

Amanda shook her head, even more adamantly than her sister. “No way, I don’t buy that for a second. He loves you, Sophie, there’s no doubt in my mind.”

“Well, he’s never said so.” Sophie huffed. “In fact, we’ve never even kissed.”

Amanda looked a little surprised, but tenderly offered, “I think he’s just a very polite and careful man. Don’t forget, he just got divorced a year ago. He’s probably more afraid of you than you are of him.”

Sophie took a careful sip of the tea, but said nothing.

“This isn’t like you to lose it like this,” Amanda consoled, reaching over to stroke Sophie’s hair. “But you’ve had a lot on your plate in the last few weeks—”

“Benedict has cancer,” Sophie blurted.

Amanda gasped.

“He just told me this morning. And he told me to keep it to myself.”

Amanda was stunned. The man was the perfect picture of health, and there hadn’t been anything on the church’s prayer list about it. She knew that Sophie and

Benedict were quite close, and had been for many years. No wonder Sophie was so upset. She felt tears burning in her own eyes, but forced them away. She took a deep breath to calm herself and asked, “When will he start treatment?”

“He’s been in treatment since March.” Sophie stared into her cup. “I sort of suspected that something was wrong when he almost passed out in his office one day, and then announced that he a ‘family emergency’ the first week of the summit. But ten minutes after that I practically forgot about him because I was so distracted with Micah.”

Amanda watched her sister stare into her cup, wondering if Sophie had told Micah that she loved him and perhaps Micah hadn’t said the same in return. *That seems highly unlikely, Amanda thought. Micah is definitely in love with Sophie. But then why on earth would he want to go back to Dallas?*

“Did you tell him?” Amanda blurted.

“Tell who what?”

“Did you tell Micah that you love him?”

Sophie sat in stunned silence, looking into her sister’s eyes. “No,” she finally answered.

“Why not?”

Sophie shrugged. “I was afraid.”

Amanda wrinkled up her nose. “Seriously?”

“Yes, seriously.” Sophie glared at Amanda and said, “What’s so weird about that?”

Amanda shook her head and *tsk'd*. “I’ve never seen two people more suited for each other than you and Micah. I’m stymied as to why you haven’t told each other yet.” She sighed heavily and went on, “It’s not like any of us are getting any younger around here, Sophie.”

“Well, I guess I was just too caught up in playing the part of a young fool,” Sophie spat. “But, unfortunately, I’m just an *old* fool instead.” She took a sip of her tea and added, “I’m just a foolish old spinster.”

It was the middle of the afternoon when Art heard a knock on his office door, and then his secretary opened it and gave him a serious look. She stepped inside, quickly closed the door and hurried to his desk.

“I know you don’t want to be bothered when you’re studying, Pastor,” she whispered. “But he said it was an emergency.”

Art raised an eyebrow. “Who is it, Miss Betty?”

“That Jewish man you’re supposed to baptize next month.”

Art quickly got to his feet. “An emergency?”

She nodded. “That’s what he said, and he looks pretty upset.”

Art was alarmed to say the least. “Well, you’d better show him in.”

Miss Betty hurried to the door and opened it for Micah, who was waiting anxiously on the other side.

“Art,” he said, taking several strides through the door, extending his hand. “I’m sorry to bother you without notice.”



“It’s quite all right,” Art replied, taking his hand. “Have a seat,” and he gestured toward one of the chairs before his desk. “Would you like coffee?”

Micah took a seat and replied, “No, thanks.”

Art gave Miss Betty a single nod, and she slowly backed out the door, closing it quietly as she left.

Art took his seat and looked at Micah, noticing that he, indeed, did look quite upset. “What’s wrong, Micah? Miss Betty said it was an emergency.”

Micah swallowed hard and answered, “I’ve made a big mess of things, Art, and I don’t know how to fix it.”

Art’s silver eyebrows knit themselves tightly against his black forehead. “Is this about Sophie?”

Micah’s eyes opened wide with surprise. “Has she already been here?”

Art quickly shook his head. “I haven’t heard from Sophie, I just guessed that that’s the only thing that would make you this upset.”

Micah looked at Art with surprise.

“Well,” Art said, giving Micah a faint smile, “Anyone can tell what she means to you. Now, why don’t you just tell me what’s going on and let’s see if we can’t sort this thing out?”

It was nearly suppertime when Amanda and Sophie heard the sound of men’s shoes on the wooden porch.

“There’s Art,” Amanda whispered, giving Sophie’s knee a tender stroke. By now they’d finished off the tea and Amanda had Sophie’s favorite meal in the oven. “He’ll say something profound and we’ll figure this out.”

Sophie nodded. “Thanks, Amanda, I feel so much better.”

The front door opened, and Micah passed through first. Art immediately followed, smiling in a cunning way.

Sophie and Micah stared at one another, both obviously stunned that the other was there. Amanda appeared just as baffled.

Art looked at Sophie and said with a clever shine in his eyes, “I just had the sneaking suspicion that you’d be here.”

Dead silence engulfed the room until Art inhaled deeply and said, “Mmm...I smell Italian chicken. That means that someone in this room has had a very bad day. I’m going to guess that it was Sophie.”

She looked at the floor.

“Well,” Art said, pausing to reach for his wife’s hand. “I’m here to take my wife out for supper.” He winked at Micah. “I’ll trust you two to lock up when you leave.” He tugged on Amanda’s hand. “Come along, dear. They have much to talk about.”

As Sophie watched her brother-in-law escort her sister out the front door, she had to fight the urge to bolt from the house behind them. She didn’t want to listen to Micah’s reasons for leaving.

“Sophie,” Micah was the first to speak, and he took several quick steps across the room to take a seat next to her on the couch. “I’m so sorry. Please forgive me for this afternoon.”

Sophie looked into Micah’s dark eyes. She saw the stress and how unsure he was in that moment. “It’s okay, Micah,” she whispered. “I understand. I truly do.”

“I don’t think you do,” he began again. “I don’t even know where to begin with this.” He reached for her hand; thankfully she didn’t jerk it away from him. “I’m sorry—”

“No, it’s okay...it’s just that, you’ll be leaving pretty soon...and I’ve grown very fond of you, Micah—”

“But I want to stay.”

She looked into his eyes with surprise and whispered in return, “Are you sincerely considering staying in Detroit?” Because if he wasn’t, she wanted to end this friendly little conversation right here and now. She’d just get on with her heartbreak and pray for a quick mending.

He swallowed hard and replied, “Yes. Yes, I am. I’ve grown very fond... of...the old place.” He swallowed again and quietly added, “But mostly of you.”

“Then why are you looking so closely at a position in Dallas?”

“I was worried about retirement...and Art thinks position and revenge as well...but that’s another story for another day. I thought about asking you to relocate, but every day I look out my office windows and I can see the Camden and I think, ‘there’s no way I can ask her to go.’ And I wasn’t sure about how you felt

about me until this afternoon at lunch..." his voice trailed off and he looked at his shoes.

Sophie was floored. "Wow," she whispered. "...I don't know what to say."

He looked up and offered her a faint smile. "Well, you could start with: 'Micah, I've got a loft I want to restore that I think you'd be interested in.'"

She fought her smile and replied, "Well, actually, I've just accepted a restoration project in The District, and I think you'll love the view."

"As long as you're in it, I'll love it."

She gave him a small smile.

"Sophie," he said, smiling into her eyes, "I've fallen in love with you. I've never felt this way in my life. And I don't think I can go back to Texas and be happy there without you, and I can't ask you to leave what you love so much. I'm going to have to stay."

She nodded because she knew she'd fallen in love with Micah, and had known since the day he showed up at the Architecture Summit. As she looked into his eyes, she saw the reminiscent sparkle of that young boy she'd gone to school with, the one with the complicated formulas, and the sweetest of all smiles.

He smiled into her eyes and then surprised her with a tender kiss on her lips. It instantly quelled Sophie's terrified heart.

"You've shown me what a great place Detroit is," he said, "How can I possibly leave now?"

Sophie looked back at him, finding herself without words. She allowed another small smile and said, "I love you too, Micah."

“Whew,” he whispered with pretended relief. “Then I think we can make this work.”

“Me too,” she quickly agreed.

“Well, that wasn’t too hard to suggest,” he joked.

Sophie smiled, and Micah softly kissed her again.

“I don’t know what I’ll do for a living in this town, but I’ll try to come up with something so that I don’t have to sponge off you.”

Sophie couldn’t help herself; she chuckled nervously.

“Why is that funny?” he asked with a grin.

“I have an idea of what *exactly* you can do in Detroit.”

Sophie went on to explain that Benedict would be retiring soon and that she and Frank would like to choose two new senior partners. Mortimer Dawson was the obvious first choice. There were two other junior partners, but they were still very young and probably wouldn’t have the finances for a senior partnership until Frank retired. Micah was floored to learn that Benedict had suggested he would perhaps be interested in a partnership as well—senior or junior, whichever he could afford.

“We’ve kicked around the idea of having four senior partners for years, but you’ll have to meet with Benedict and Frank, without me there,” Sophie said. She smiled bashfully and added, “Because Benedict and Frank and I go way back, and I know how to play those two like ten cent fiddles. I’d definitely sway the conversation in your favor and I don’t want to do that to you. You can have either

of these positions on your own merit. You don't need me there to drag you over the finish line."

Micah nodded in understanding, but sat quiet for a long time. "I don't know what to say," he finally managed.

Sophie's grey eyes flickered with mirth as she said, "Well you could start with: 'Sophie, I'm flattered at the offer—'"

Micah laughed out loud and impulsively gathered her in his arms. "Sophie, I'm more than flattered. I'm happier than I think I've ever been in my life." He laughed again and added, "I never thought it would feel this good to come home."

Sophie couldn't believe how it felt to be this close to another human being, not only physically but emotionally. Certainly, she had embraced her family members, and close friends, and she loved them all dearly, but she'd never felt the sheer contentment she felt at that moment in Micah's arms. She wound her arms around his trim middle and looked into his eyes. It was hard to believe that they'd come this far in such a short period of time, but then, like Amanda reminded her, *'It's not like any of us are getting any younger around here...'*

*It's best not to waste any time at all...especially at my age.*

"I think we need to celebrate," Micah said with a grin.

Sophie nodded. "But Amanda has dinner in the oven."

"We can refrigerate that...unless you just have to have some."

Sophie giggled and shook her head. "I'd rather go somewhere with you."

"Coney's and floats?"

Sophie giggled again. “That’s exactly what I want.”



“How about one more for the road, Sophe?” Mike lifted the French press in the air, offering his daughter one last cup. He and Eva and Sophie had gotten together for a quick coffee after supper at Eva’s place. Sophie had told them everything about her and Micha’s discussion, and that he had decided to stay in Detroit after all.

“Yes, one last cup, Sophe,” Eva suggested. “And you can have the last cupcake, you know, for a celebration.”

Sophie smiled. “I’ll take the coffee, but I’m full of cupcakes, Mom.”

Eva nodded with a smile and reached for the last treat. “Don’t mind if I do, then.”

Mike poured the coffee, giving his daughter and her mother a contented smile.

Eva smiled in return as she put the cupcake on her saucer and licked her finger. She looked Sophie’s way and said, “By the way, I talked to Liana the other day. She says that she and Benedict have been seeing one another on a more than steady basis. Did you know about that, Sophe?”

Sophie finished her sip and nodded. “I just found out a couple of days ago. They seem pretty serious.”

Mike raised his eyebrow and replied, “Well, none of us are getting any younger.”

Sophie chuckled as she remembered what Amanda had said the other day. And she was about to comment about that, when a door slammed loudly in the hallway, and heavy footsteps stormed past Eva's door.

"What in the world?" Eva said, reaching for her walker.

Mike put his hand on Eva's forearm and offered, "It's okay, I'll go." And he got up from his place at the table and went for the door. He poked his head into the hallway for a look at who had caused the commotion, but saw only a tall man with blond hair rounding the corner at the end of the hallway. "Just a tall, blond guy," he murmured as he closed the door and came back to the table.

Sophie and her mother raised their eyebrows and looked at one another. "Fred," they said simultaneously.

"Fred?" Mike asked, picking up his cup for a sip.

"He begs his old aunt for money on the daily," Eva answered, disgust evident in her voice. She looked at Sophie again and added, "We'd better fill him in."



There were no other problems on the Corktown site that week, nor were anyone's cars tampered with. The threat seemed to have stabilized just as quickly as it had appeared, and for that the Corktown crew was thankful.

A meeting was scheduled with Frank and Benedict on the following Monday, and Micah agreed to the terms of a senior partnership. He had the funds to pull it off, with even a little left over to pay his taxes and penalties. There was



also a small portion left for savings, which made him a lot more comfortable with the situation.

Mort was ecstatic at the turn of events. He'd been saving for this opportunity for many years, but claimed he thought Benedict and Frank would just work happily-ever-after.

The following week was just as quiet as the week before. It seemed as if everything in Corktown was going to move along at a quicker pace now, and that all danger had truly dissipated.

Late Friday afternoon, Sophie popped her head into Micah's office, finding him at his drafting table.

"Hey, you didn't answer my text," she said with a smile.

Micah startled at her voice. "Hey, Sophie," he said with a chuckle. "You scared the daylights out of me." He stood up and stretched.

Sophie giggled and came into his office. "Since your mom and Asher are out of town this weekend, why don't you come to the game with us? Do you want to go?"

Micah raised his eyebrows and said, "I'd love to go."

"Great! I'm running home to change my clothes, but I can meet you by the 'D' Shop. Do you know where that is?"

He nodded. "Northwest corner of Comerica Park, just across the street from the Fox and Hockeytown." He glanced around on his drafting table, looking perplexed. "You said you texted me?"

“About two hours ago.”

“I can’t find my phone,” he said, pushing some of his materials out of the way.

“Is it on your desk?”

He went to his desk and gave it a thorough search. His expression suddenly held the look of recollection and he said, “I had it with me over at Corktown this morning. And I think I left it there.”

Sophie looked at her watch and said, “It’s getting pretty late and they’ve been pulling security off the site at six o’clock again. Maybe you should just get it in the morning.”

Micah pulled his jacket from the back of his chair. He walked to where she stood and smiled into her eyes as he said, “I think I can make it.” He reached for her hand and added, “I’ll meet you by the ‘D’ shop at about six-thirty. Sound okay?”

Sophie squeezed his hand. “Sounds great, but you be careful.”

“I will,” he promised. He gave her a soft kiss, and then he was on his way.