

## Chapter 8

Sophie hit the sidewalk at a fast past. She was running a little late this morning. The night before she'd kept her sister on the phone until well after midnight, talking and praying about Micah. And then, this morning, she texted her mother, filling her in many of the details of the blooming relationship, and Eva promised to pray.

It was another crystal-clear Monday morning in the greatest city on the planet. The rain and clouds from the weekend had cleared, and the new day promised to be sunny and warmer. Sophie raised her hand to the heavens with a smile and said out loud, "Thank You, Jesus, for my freedom!"

It was chilly, only in the fifties, but she didn't even notice as she walked her regular route to Design & Structure. Her mind and heart were filled with the memory of the most romantic weekend she'd ever experienced in her life. None of the other men in Sophie's life had ever connected with her the way that Micah did. The time with him at Belle Isle thrilled her, and their second brunch date at The Hudson Café gave her what she could only describe to Amanda as 'butterflies.' *He listens to me*, she told her sister, *I can tell by the way that he asks questions and*

*never changes the subject that he's really interested in what's inside of my head. He's so different from all the rest of them—I think he really gets me.* Amanda listened to everything, and then they prayed for a long time.

She took a deep breath as she approached the valet, giving them a smile and a wave as she strode through the glass doors.

Design & Structure was already whirring with business when she walked the hall to her office. Meredith was waiting in the doorway and she smiled as Sophie approached.

“Good news!” she said, and it appeared that she hopped a little.

Sophie chuckled as they entered her office together. “What’s going on Mere?”

“They caught ‘em, Sophie!” She exclaimed. “I just got a text from the detective working Corktown. He wants you to call him back.”

“Yes!” Sophie replied, thrusting her hand toward the skyline as she passed her windows. “Thank You, Jesus!”

Meredith laughed. “Yes, praise Him.” She clicked her smartphone and said, “I’m sending you his callback right now.” She clicked a few more times and added, “Penny Miller wants to meet for lunch today.” She looked at Sophie then, who was just slipping into her high heels. “But I told her I had to check with you first.”

Sophie smiled and let out a sigh. “I can meet with her for lunch. After all, I am the one who talked her into this thing...and I already have some drafts I might as well show her.”

Meredith nodded. “I’ll let her know.” She clicked a little more on her smartphone and said, “The Brush and Lafayette sites are ready for final approval. Demolition is finished and they expect to start reconstruction on Wednesday. They’re all pretty excited.”

“That’s awesome,” Sophie said with a smile. “Everybody’s right on schedule...except for Corktown, but they’ll catch up soon.”

Micah was just arriving in his office when LaKeisha appeared in his doorway.

“Good morning, LaKeisha,” he greeted. “Did you have a good weekend?”

“It was fine,” she answered, perhaps in a more serious tone than usual. “How was yours?”

“Wonderful,” he answered, opening his portfolio. “Are we still on for this morning in the big conference room downstairs.”

“Yes,” she answered simply. Her head appeared to be buried in her smartphone, but then Micah noticed that her foot was slowly easing his door closed.

Micah frowned but didn’t have time to respond. At that moment Mort burst into his office, almost knocking LaKeisha over.

“We’ve got a bogey in the hall with a dozen roses,” Mort murmured under his breath. He eased the door closed; leaving only a small crack where from he put himself as a sort of watchman.

LaKeisha backed further into the office and Micah got to his feet.

“What are you talking about?” he whispered as he strode to the doorway.

“It’s that old lecher, Fred McMasters,” Mort whispered. “He’s on his way—yep, there he goes, right into her office.”

Micah’s mouth went dry. “With roses?” he whispered.

Mort could only nod.

Sophie couldn’t have been more surprised to see Fred nonchalantly enter her office. She hadn’t seen, or heard from, him since the night in the hallway at her mother’s.

“Mr. McMasters,” Meredith greeted tersely. She stepped quickly in front of him, looking him in the eye. “Reception didn’t notify us that you were coming up.”

Fred smiled, “Hello, Meredith, it’s good to see you again, but I’m here to see Sophie.” He looked over Meredith’s head and smiled at Sophie. “Hi, Sophie.”

Sophie struggled to her feet, knowing that her mouth was hanging open. She closed it and said, “Hello, Fred.” She looked at Meredith and said, “It’s okay. We can finish later.”

Meredith threw Fred a sharp scowl, turned on her heel, and marched away.

As Fred watched her go, he said, “She’s her regular sweet self today.” He brought his eyes back to Sophie and grinned. “I guess I was always her favorite.”

“Well, how can I help you, Fred?” Sophie asked, trying to smile as pleasantly as possible, thinking, *is this about those roses you’re holding?*

“These are for you,” he said with a smile that spread from ear to ear. He set the large vase of multicolored roses on her desk, and then strode around to where she stood. He reached for her hand and said, “I’ve sure missed you, Sophie.”

Sophie swallowed hard as she worked her hand out of his. He was insincere; she could tell by the way he had roughly reached for her hand. It never felt like this when Micah reached for her hand.

“They’re lovely, thank you,” she replied, still trying to smile. “But this is unexpected. Why didn’t you call or something?”

Fred shrugged. “You stopped returning my calls, Sophie.”

Sophie let out a quiet sigh and nodded in agreement.

“I’d like to see you again,” he said.

“I’m seeing someone right now,” Sophie blurted, feeling a wave of delight at just the words...*I’m seeing someone...finally.*

Fred nodded. “I know that.”

Sophie was surprised. *What, are you stalking me now?*

“I saw you having lunch with the same man several times these past few weeks so I did some research on him. He’s just not a good fit for you, Sophie. I’m

really surprised at you. And it's not like you to date the help." Fred sounded like a condescending, disappointed parent.

Sophie's heart pounded in sudden anger. She wanted to slap Fred. That's why it never worked between the two of them. He was always trying to tell her what was *good* for her...*as if she couldn't take care of herself*. She regretted the day she said 'yes' to that first dinner. *If I could only take it back...*

"He's not really of our caliber, and he comes from a failed firm," Fred continued. "Didn't you do any research on him before you brought him aboard?"

"His 'failed firm,' is none of your business," she replied with a frown. "Now why are you really here?"

Fred sighed deeply and began again, "Listen, Sophie, I'm trying to contract for a restoration on a Daniel Burnham building Downtown—"

"The Murtock Building?" she interrupted.

Fred nodded. "And I was thinking that maybe we—you and me—could do it together and see what happens."

Sophie had been dying to get her hands on that restoration. The Sarahi Perez Group had recently announced their plans to restore the Murtock Building, and she had to admit that Fred's offer was tempting. But Fred was extremely difficult to work with. He cut critical labor, shaved quality, and took risks. She never wanted to work with him again. Not even on a Daniel Burnham.

She shook her head. "We don't work very well together, Fred. Have you forgotten?"

He smiled and reached over to stroke her upper arm as he said, “I’m sorry about all that transpired between us on the Bricktown project. Can’t we just let bygones be bygones.”

Sophie took a step back, watching Fred’s eyes as she asked, “Let me guess, Sarahi won’t give you the contract unless I sign on with you?”

Fred looked away for a second, then back at Sophie with that charming smile he always used when he was trying to talk her into something. “They like your work, Sophie. And they know you’ve restored Burnhams before.”

Sophie took a deep breath and shook her head. “I’m sorry, Fred. I’m not interested.”

At that moment, Micah blustered into the office with a huge smile and roll of blueprints. “Oh, I’m so sorry!” he exclaimed. “Am I interrupting?”

Fred rolled his eyes.

“No,” Sophie answered, feeling her face and neck grow hot. “You’re not interrupting at all. Micah Bloomfield, Fred McMasters.”

Micah beamed and charged across the office with an extended hand. “Pleasure to meet you,” he said. He dropped Fred’s hand and looked at Sophie. “I have a couple of questions about a foundation.”

For some reason it struck Sophie as very comical that Micah had popped into her office to ask about a ‘foundation.’ After all, he was the expert. She swallowed away a smile and professionally answered, “Of course.” She looked at Fred, who was still standing way too close to her, and said, “I’m sorry Fred. Can we visit another time?”

Fred frowned and started to back toward the door. "I'll call you."

"That's fine, Fred," she replied.

Fred turned and hurried out of the office.

Mort, along with LaKeisha and Meredith watched Fred McMasters hurry down the hall and toward the elevator.

"It worked," LaKeisha said with a smile of relief.

"I'll call reception and security and make sure they all know that we don't get spontaneous visitors anymore," Meredith said, making a note in her smartphone. "Everyone has to check in."

"Good idea," Mort agreed.

They all high-fived one another and went back to work.

Benedict was laughing so hard at the exchange that he could barely finish the text he was sending.

*Fred is so ridiculous. Does he honestly think he has a chance to win her away from Micah?* He hit send and waited. Her replies were usually instant.

Soon, his phone pinged and he laughed at her reply, *Not if we can help it!*

Sophie raised an eyebrow as she looked at Micah and asked, "A foundation?"

Micah laughed in spite of himself. “It was Mort’s idea.”

Sophie’s eyes opened wide. “Mort?”

Micah shrugged. “He doesn’t like Fred. Says he’s a cheapskate.”

Sophie laughed and shook her head. “Yeah, that sounds like Mort.”

Micah took a breath, seeming to hesitate, and then he asked, “How did such a nice lady like you connect with someone like Fred?”

Sophie blushed at his words. “Well,” she began with a sigh, “I was getting pretty desperate. I was just turning fifty. Literally becoming an old spinster. And here was Fred and he wanted to just have dinner. I thought it couldn’t hurt, so I said ‘yes,’ and the next thing I knew I’d been talked into this nightmare in Bricktown. We came to blows over the deal and he kicked me off the project. Thankfully I hadn’t signed anything. I think he took some big risks on a walkway he designed, and he conned not only his investors, but a building inspector as well into going along with it.”

“What does he want now?”

“He’s trying to get ahold of the Sarahi Perez Group’s restoration. It’s a Daniel Burnham, and I have quite a bit of experience with them. I get the impression that they won’t contract with him unless I sign, though he didn’t admit to that out-right.”

Micah looked at the roses on her desk. “Nice flowers.”

“They’re okay,” Sophie replied with a mischievous expression. “But I have way nicer ones at home on my dining room table.”

Micah smiled with satisfaction. “Listen, I have to get to a meeting downstairs,” he said, backing toward the door. “Lunch?”

“I’m sorry, I have to meet Penny Miller.”

Micah froze in his tracks, looking devastated, and it made Sophie chuckle.

“Let’s have a coffee later this afternoon,” she suggested with a smile. “Astro has been set up downstairs for two weeks now and I haven’t been down once. They’ve got these bear claws that I’ve been dying to try.”

“Okay, well then I guess I’ll just have to see you for coffee.”



Sophie hurried into the community room at 5:50 p.m., looked around for her mother, but couldn’t find her.

“She went upstairs already,” a server explained. “She said she wasn’t feeling well, so she took her dinner to go.”

Sophie frowned and headed for her mother’s apartment. Just as she passed Jean’s door, she heard raised voices from inside. She couldn’t resist pausing to listen. *Trying to shake down his aunt again*, she thought. *I should just bust right in there and confront him!*

Eva worried what was taking Sophie so long to get to her apartment. Thinking that maybe she had to work late, or had been delayed by Micah, she decided to call her cellphone. Much to her surprise she thought she heard the

cellphone ringing in the hallway. Eva smiled, ended the call, and hurried to open the door for her daughter.

When Eva opened the door, there was no Sophie standing where she should have been. Eva frowned and pushed her walker out into the hall for a better look. She was certain she'd heard Sophie's cellphone ringing. She gasped when she saw Sophie's crumpled body lying at the end of the hallway, her purse spilled beside her.

"Sophie!" Eva exclaimed, hurrying frantically toward her daughter. "Jean!" she called. "Help me, Jean!"

Jean's door flung open and she gasped when she saw Sophie unconscious not far from her doorway.

"I'll call 911," she said.

"No! I've pressed my life alert!" Eva said. "Press your life alert. It will be faster!"

The noisy commotion in the hallway brought a number of residents into the hallway. Those who could, stooped to see if they could be of any assistance. Sophie was out cold, and there was a purple bruise beginning to form near her temple.

"What happened, Jean?" Eva started to cry.

"I have no idea," she replied. "I didn't hear anything out here."

Emergency help arrived within a few minutes and loaded Sophie onto a gurney. By then Eva had called Amanda and both of her sons.

“She’s still out,” Eva whimpered into the phone. “The EMT’s are taking her down to medical. Apparently, there’s an ambulance on the way.”

“Don’t worry, Mom,” Amanda tried to console her mother. “We’ll be there as soon as possible.”

“She was attacked,” Eva cried. “I just know it.”

Sophie awakened to a pinch on her eyelid and the flashing of a light. She spontaneously batted at it, but someone caught her arm and said, “It’s okay. You’re okay, Sophie.”

“Amanda?” Sophie heard herself ask.

“It’s me,” she answered.

Sophie tried to blink, but the light was still flashing in her eyes.

“Oh,” Sophie groaned. “What’s going on?”

“Don’t you remember?” a man’s voice asked, and Sophie was suddenly aware that there were more people in the room with her other than just Amanda. “Can you see me, Ms. Young?” he asked.

Sophie tried to focus on the blurry object before her and answered, “Sort of. Who are you?”

“Dr. Callahan,” he answered. “You’re at Henry Ford.”

“That’s really far away from Mom’s place,” she mumbled. “Why am I here?” The fog was slowly fading and she could see now that she was in a hospital emergency room. Not only were Amanda and the doctor there, but she saw Art

standing at the foot of the bed beside what she assumed to be a nurse—*no, that's Mom*. “My head is pounding.”

“The ambulance brought you,” Amanda answered. “You were knocked out.”

“Oh,” Sophie mumbled, reaching for her head. “I hope I don't have a mark.” She heard Amanda huff.

“Gimme a break,” Amanda said, obvious disgust in her voice.

“Can you sit up, Ms. Young?” the doctor asked, putting his hand near her shoulder.

Sophie took a mental inventory. Aside from the throbbing in her head, she thought she felt pretty good. She looked at Amanda, then down at Art and her mother, who was smiling so sweetly, realizing that her vision had cleared completely.

“I think I'm good,” she answered, attempting to bring herself into a seated position. She felt the doctor's hand behind her shoulder as she sat up on the gurney. She was instantly hit with a wave of nausea, but it dissipated quickly. “Maybe a little sick to my stomach,” she mumbled, glancing at Amanda. “Maybe a Vernors would straighten me out.”

There was a nurse near the doorway and she snapped her head in obvious agreement and bustled from the room.

“You were out for quite a while,” Dr. Callahan when on. “Probably close to an hour. The EMT's couldn't revive you.”

“EMT's?” Sophie questioned with a frown.

“The ambulance brought you, Sophie,” Amanda repeated. Looking at the doctor she said, “She’s probably got a concussion. Look at that bump.”

Sophie shook her head, frowning at Amanda as she argued, “I don’t have a concussion.” She looked at the doctor, trying her best to give him a charming smile as she said, “I’ll probably need some ice if there’s a bump.” She looked at Art at the foot of the bed, his expression so concerned and caring. She’d always liked Art, from the moment she met him she knew he was a great guy and perfect for Amanda. She gave him a sweet smile as well and said, “I need to get my car. Will you guys give me a ride over?”

Art swallowed, looking from sister to sister, and then he answered, “We called Levi. He and Luke went after it.”

“Ms. Young,” Dr. Callahan broke in.

“You can call me ‘Sophie.’”

“Very well,” he began again, “Sophie. We need to do a CT before you go anywhere to make sure we don’t have any injuries that we can’t see. Even though you took a fairly mild blow, it hit an area that’s extremely sensitive, which is what caused you to pass out. The repetitive blows caused the bruising and swelling. I’d like to keep you overnight—”

“Repetitive blows?” Sophie questioned.

“Don’t you remember anything, Sophie?” Eva inquired from the foot of the bed.

Sophie shook her head. “I only remember that I was on my way to your apartment. Everything is blank after that.” She looked at the doctor and added, “I

can't stay overnight. I'm in the middle of something." Her eyes suddenly filled with tears she couldn't control.

Dr. Callahan nodded. "Probably a slight concussion."

"Order the CT," Art said from the bottom of the bed. "And if you'd be so kind, can you give us just a minute with Sophe?"

Eva looked at the floor.

Dr. Callahan took a breath, looking from Art to his patient, assessing the situation. "Are you comfortable with that?" he asked her.

Sophie nodded as she wiped her tears away.

"Okay," he agreed with obvious hesitation. He gave Art a stern expression and said, "Five minutes. And I'm right outside this door."

Art nodded.

Dr. Callahan left, and Art came to the side of the bed near his wife.

"Listen, Sophe," Amanda began gently, "We don't know what the two of you are up to, but the cops are right outside that door waiting to interview you."

Sophie gasped.

"You were obviously attacked, Sophie," Art said, sounding as stern as only a preacher could be. "Are you willing to tell them what you were doing?"

"I only remember that I was headed for Mom's apartment," Sophie answered.

"Did you stop and listen at Jean's door?" Eva asked quietly.

Amanda looked at her mother and groaned. “I thought we agreed not to do that anymore.”

Eva shrugged her tiny shoulders, looking from Amanda to Art. “We did, but...”

“But?” Art questioned.

“Well,” Eva began. She swallowed hard and continued, “Fred’s trying to steal Jean’s money and we have to stop him.”

Sophie visibly cringed at her mother’s explanation.

Amanda took a deep breath and let it out slowly. “I know that the two of you are good women and that you care deeply for humanity, but we think you’ve got this all wrong. A common thug robbed Sophie tonight. We’re lucky to still have her with us.”

Art cleared his throat. “And when the cops come in to talk to Sophie we don’t want you defaming poor Fred McMasters all over the place. Just because it didn’t work out between him and Sophie doesn’t mean that he smacked her with a pipe.”

Sophie reached for the lump at her temple, sending more rivers of sadness down her cheeks as she said, “It’s really obvious, isn’t it?”

Amanda nodded. “It’s a giant, purple welt. You won’t be able to cover it.”

Sophie’s tears were unrestrained at the realization. “Oh, no,” she cried. “How will I ever explain all this to Micah? We just planned a date for tomorrow night. He was going to take me to the pool hall in Sterling Heights...remember the

one where everybody used to go, but you and the boys said I would get killed if I went there?”

Eva made her way to Sophie’s side and reached over her walker for her daughter. “It will be okay, Sophe,” she said, tenderly kissing Sophie’s forehead. He’ll understand. He’s a sweet man.” She held her daughter as best she could over the walker, stroking her soft, silvered hair. “And let’s stop all of this crazy spying, Sophe,” she whispered.



Benedict and Meredith hurried to the hospital the next morning, keeping the information of Sophie’s attack to themselves. Sophie had texted them both explaining that she needed an early start to her day and wasn’t sure when she’d be released.

By the time they’d reached Sophie’s room, they found her dressed in one of her stunning suits, makeup perfectly applied. Apparently, Amanda, who was still with her, had brought a few things from home to help her prepare for her day.

“Sophie, my friend,” Benedict greeted her warmly, taking her into his arms for a brief embrace.

“Hey, Sophie,” Meredith greeted, reaching for Sophie in the same way.

“Thanks,” Sophie gave them a charming smile, the one that got everything done. “I think I’ll be released today. I think everything checked out.” She looked at Meredith and said, “Mere, we need an update for the investors on the Woodward project. Will you please ask Aiden if he’s taken care of that?” She looked at

Benedict. “Sarahi Perez texted me this morning. She’d like a meeting with us. I’m sure it’s about the Murtock Building.”

Benedict squinted as he surveyed the disguised lump on the side of her head. “That’s quite a shiner you got there, young lady,” he said, an edge of rancor in his tone.

Amanda raised an eyebrow and said, “And she thinks she’s going to work today.”

“What does the doctor have to say?” Benedict inquired.

“He hasn’t come up to see us yet, but I’m sure he won’t release her to drive. She took multiple blows to the same area. She’ll be lucky if she doesn’t have a concussion.”

Benedict made a ‘tsk’ noise, shook his head and said, “We can make it without her for a few days, at least until that thing on the side of her head heals up. I can’t imagine any doctor in his right mind—”

“I’m right here, Benedict,” Sophie scolded, her smile faded. “And I can speak for myself.”

At that moment Dr. Callahan walked in. “Good morning, Sophie,” he greeted, glancing around the room. “Family?”

“You met my sister last night,” Sophie began cordially. “This is my partner, Benedict Lawrence, and my assistant, Meredith Howland.”

Benedict and Meredith offered their hands in greeting.

“We’re working together on the Architectural Summit,” she added.

“Nice to meet you,” the doctor replied, shaking their hands. He turned to Sophie and said, “According to our scans, you have a slight concussion. Everything else looks okay. You’re in very good health. I’m going to release you. I see that you’re ready to go to work, but I’d really like you to take the rest of the week at home. You know, put your feet up, no power meetings or anything like that. He took a breath and added one more thing, “And whatever you do, don’t drive for at least the rest of this week. You were out for almost an hour, Sophie. It’s better to be safe than sorry.”

Sophie’s expression was beyond disappointed; she was speechless.

Meredith grinned and said, “She doesn’t take it easy, Doc.”

Dr. Callahan smiled in understanding. He was familiar with Sophie Young because of the stories about her in the city newspapers. “I know you’re a real go-getter. But a few days off won’t hurt anything. Studies have shown that if you rest your brain, you’ll recover a whole lot quicker than if you don’t. You took a respectable blow to your temple area, and that can be quite sensitive.” He looked at Benedict and Meredith and added, “They look more than capable to me. I bet they’d love to handle things while you’re gone.”

“And I owe her one,” Benedict said. “She filled in for me about a week ago.”

“You don’t owe me for that,” Sophie grumbled.

Amanda tenderly reached for Sophie’s shoulder, gave her a soft squeeze and said, “Come on, Sophie. I’ll make you that Italian chicken dish you love.”

Sophie sighed in defeat and nodded her head in agreement.

Amanda drove Sophie home and went into the house with her.

“I might as well change into some jeans,” Sophie mumbled, setting her keys on the island in her kitchen. “I’ve got a horrible headache. I think I need a latte. Want one?”

“I’d love one. Why don’t you change your clothes and I’ll get it together for us?”

Sophie nodded and Amanda watched her head for her upstairs. She shook her head as she went into the kitchen and began to prepare the coffees. As she worked, she wondered why Sophie pushed herself so hard. Even when she was a kid, she never stopped going. And that bump near Sophie’s temple couldn’t be hidden—it was going to alarm Micah as well as Bijou Beaufort. From their conversations about Micah and Bijou, Amanda was confident that they were uncomfortable in Detroit because of the crime, and this incident wasn’t going to relieve anyone’s worries. Amanda sighed as she thought about Micah and his misgivings about being in Detroit. *I suppose he’ll bolt the first time he gets sight of her and finds out what happened, she thought. But then maybe not. We’ve been praying constantly for the man since we learned of his existence. Perhaps he’ll take it all in stride and move forward with Sophie—wherever forward might be.*

Sophie returned a short while later dressed in casual jeans, a yellow spring sweater, and her favorite tan loafers.

“Great sweater,” Amanda remarked with a smile, handing Sophie her favorite drink. “Is it new?”

“I picked it up when I was in New York last month working with the Midland Group.” She took a sip and gave her sister a tired smile. “It’s perfect. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome,” Amanda replied. “Let’s sit on that awesome white couch of yours and have a quick visit before I have to go get that chicken dish together.”

“Oh, you don’t have to do that,” Sophie protested as they sat down.

“I said I would. I’ll bring it over. You know you love it.”

Sophie gave Amanda another very small smile, and Amanda was certain she saw a sparkle in her eye when she replied, “You know I have a date tonight.”

“Oh, that’s right,” Amanda said, slowly nodding her head. “I suppose you guys will eat at the pool hall.”

“I hope they have Coneys and Vernors floats,” Sophie said quietly, taking another sip.

Amanda chuckled. “You’ve never eaten Coneys—or had a float for that matter.”

“Well I have them now...and paczki too.”

“Hmmm,” Amanda said with a sideways smile. “That’s interesting.”

Sophie took another sip of her latte and looked at her sister; a worried expression replacing the brief sparkle in her eyes. “I know he’s wondering where I am this morning.” She bit her lip and added, “He texted me on the way over here.”

“Did you answer?”

“Not yet. But I’m going to.”

Amanda took a sip of her coffee and then she looked at Sophie and asked, “Remember that job you were working in Italy—where was it? Milan?”

Sophie frowned. “I’ve done three projects in Milan.”

“It was the one where that Italian architect insisted you visit Bellagio and you eyeballed that monastery just above Como Lake, and Marquette Caselli was involved somehow?”

Sophie nodded. “Marquette was on vacation. A visit to his old place, and we happened to see him in town.”

Amanda smiled and continued, “Well, you just had to see that old monastery, so Caselli found you the little four-seat prop job so that you could get up there.” Sophie nodded. Amanda continued, “I remember the day you called me and told me what you were planning.” She paused to roll her eyes, and then she said, “Just so you could have a look at the thing.” Sophie smiled a little as her sister went on, “I was terrified. I told Art to call the church prayer chain, but he only laughed at me—same as you.”

“It looked dependable,” Sophie said. “And besides, the photography I brought home was amazing.”

Amanda nodded. “And remember that time you had to take that rickety tramway in Switzerland just so that you could see that old castle?”

“That structure was unbelievable.”

“Well, I was afraid,” Amanda went on. “I asked Jesus to protect my cute little sister from falling to her death from an ancient and unmaintained piece of junk.”

“Oh, it was perfectly safe,” Sophie scoffed.

Amanda looked very serious then and said, “And remember that time you were on that mission trip in Honduras and had to hide those little kids from the drug lords?” Amanda continued.

Sophie nodded, but remained quiet.

Amanda’s eyes filled with tears as she recalled the tender memory, “I took my Scriptures to the Throne that day and begged Him to save you and those kids.” Drops slipped down Amanda’s cheeks as she finished, “But you believed that Jesus wanted you to do what you had to do and you were never afraid.”

Sophie only nodded.

“You’re a brave soul, Sophie,” Amanda said, wiping her tears away. “You always have been. You weren’t even eighteen years old, but you didn’t think twice about leaving for Ithaca when you won your scholarship.”

“I knew it was what God wanted me to do,” Sophie replied, her voice quiet, her eyes filling with tears. “Where are you going with this, Amanda?”

“Does God want you to push yourself to the limit continually, Sophie? Do you know?” she asked quietly.

Sophie shook her head.

“Then why? Why are you so afraid to slow down this hard charging life of yours?”

Sophie looked away and whispered, “I just want us to be a regular family now—with no drama.” She brought her eyes back to her sister, tears beginning to travel down her cheeks as she said, “A regular family—and we were finally there,

but then Dad died. But Mom is doing so good now. And I'm afraid that if I upset the applecart too much, we'll be broken like we were before...before..." she looked away again.

Amanda swallowed hard, feeling her own tears escape. She reached for Sophie's hand and held it tight. "Before me and the boys settled down?"

Sophie looked at her sister and nodded quietly.

Amanda's tears flowed, but she managed to give Sophie a small smile as she said, "That's been many years ago and I don't believe we'll ever be broken like that again, Sophie. And we don't expect you to hold it together for us. We're just as responsible for the family as you are...but we'll never be a *regular* family." Sophie was clearly surprised at the remark, and it made Amanda smile again. "We had a lot of tough breaks as kids, but it made us better than just regular. Think about it. We used to pray for lighter sentences and decent parole officers, and now we're praying to convert a Jewish Texan into a Christian Detroiter."

Sophie chuckled through her tears and nodded.

"We're a flipping bunch of jaw-dropping miracles," Amanda went on with a smile. "Or would you rather have regular?"

Sophie shook her head and chuckled again. "No, I guess I don't."

"Now," Amanda went on, "I'm going home to get that chicken ready and you're going to get ahold of your boyfriend and explain what's happened. Me and Art are gonna pray like crazy that he doesn't have an anxiety attack and skip town."

Sophie nodded. "I am a little worried about that."

Amanda arose from the couch. “We’re not done with him yet, that I know for sure.”