

## Chapter 10

With great trepidation Micah shaved his head—and was pleasantly surprised at how much younger it made him look and feel. He YouTubed the pencil beard, and purposed to avoid shaving his jawline.

When Sophie saw him the next day at work, he was pretty sure she blushed.

“What do you think?” he asked.

“Stunning,” she said with a smile. “I like it.”

Micah beamed.

Meredith and LaKeisha were waiting at the end of the hall so everyone hurried to their respective offices and began a new week—and a new month.

Terri’s Cakes had delivered small packages of their specialty cupcakes to each employee, including Micah.

“What are these for?” He asked LaKeisha, indicating the dainty treats that had been left on his desk.

“The best cupcakes in the world,” LaKeisha answered with a grin. “Sophie orders them for delivery on May Day—”

“It’s May first already?” he interrupted.

LaKeisha chuckled. “Time flies when you’re having fun.” She raised her brows and cocked her head as she said, “And you look like someone who’s having a lot of fun.”

Micah smiled and nodded. “I really am.”

LaKeisha nodded, clicked her smartphone and said, “You got a call this morning from a Max Doolittle. He needs you to call him back. I’m texting you his number right now.”

“I wonder why he didn’t call my cellphone,” he murmured.

“He said that he lost your number.”

Micah shook his head and let out a sigh. Max Doolittle was his ‘financial advisor’ and Micah had trusted him with the paltry amount of savings he had left over from his divorce. But if Max couldn’t keep track of a cellphone number, how in the world could he keep track of Micah’s finances?

“And Bijou has some drawings she wants you look at,” LaKeisha went on. “She’s pretty excited about them.”

Micah nodded, then asked, “How were things in Corktown over the weekend?”

“All quiet. Though Corktown’s project investor called. He saw your story in the *Register* yesterday and he’d like to meet you. He thinks he might know you—”

At that moment Mort popped his head into the office and whispered, “Fred’s back. On his way up at this moment.” He looked at LaKeisha and said, “I thought we got rid of this problem.”

LaKeisha shrugged.

Micah rolled his eyes and got to his feet. “He keeps bouncing back just like a bad check.”

LaKeisha laughed, then politely covered her mouth. Her phone pinged and she looked at it. “It’s Meredith,” she whispered. “She says he’s here to see Frank.”

“Who’s Frank?” Micah questioned.

“The other senior partner,” Mort informed. “He hasn’t been around too much because he’s got the other half of the office tied up on a big project in Elmwood Park.”

Micah straightened his tie and made sure that his shirt was well tucked in. “I’ll just step into the hall and give him a friendly greeting.”

LaKeisha nearly doubled over and the two older men looked at her with curiosity.

“What?” Mort asked, completely dumbfounded as to why she would find Micah’s tactics humorous.

“What are you doing?” she asked with a smile.

“Intimidating him,” Micah answered matter-of-factly, and Mort nodded his support.

“Sophie doesn’t even like him,” LaKeisha said. She laughed quietly and shook her head.

“But it’s good to keep him in his place,” Mort affirmed. He looked at Micah and said, “Get out there and do what has to be done.”

LaKeisha laughed again

Micah headed for the doorway, but Mort stopped him just short of leaving. He put his hand on his shoulder and whispered, “By the way, great haircut. You look like a thirty-year-old weight lifter.”

Micah straightened his posture and headed out the door.

He saw the old fox sauntering down the hallway, looking as if he were there to raid the henhouse. His phony blond locks gleamed beneath the florescent lighting. He must have recently oiled his leathery, baked-on tan because Micah could hardly see his widespread creases and rumples. And he couldn’t be certain, but he thought he caught the scent of coconuts the closer he came.

“Well, Fred,” he greeted with a broad smile, extending his hand. “It’s so good to see you again.”

Fred sighed with obvious disdain, but paused and accepted Micah’s outstretched hand. “Bloomfield,” was all that he said.

“What brings you up this morning?”

Fred sighed again, as if being terribly inconvenienced. “It’s really none of your business, Bloomfield.”

Judging from his terse reply, Micah knew he was irritating the older man and he decided to push a little. He smiled and winked as he said, “Oh, come on. You must know by now that whatever you bring up here is going to wind up on my desk.”

Fred glowered at Micah, anger and frustration boiled in his eyes. He lowered his voice and leaned in toward him as he said, “Don’t come swinging your purse at me, Tex.”

Micah’s fury rose quickly at the comment. He hadn’t lost his temper since he was a kid on the hockey team, yet he felt the same flame of outrage that he’d only experienced as a much younger man. He leaned toward Fred, locked his jaw and said, “Oh, I’m about to start swinging, pal, and it won’t be with a purse.”

“Hey, Fred!” Mort suddenly exclaimed with what sounded like delighted glee.

Micah and Fred both looked up to see that Mort had suddenly appeared on the scene.

“What are you doing up here?” Mort asked, extending his hand in his friendly way. “It’s sure good to see you!”

Fred ignored Mort’s friendly greeting and strode away from them.

When Fred was out of earshot, Mort laughed and slapped Micah on the back. “You were just supposed to intimidate him, not beat him up.” He laughed again and added, “I think I saw the old Micah there for a minute.”

Micah smiled faintly, realizing that he was drenched in sweat. “I don’t like that guy.”

Mort nodded. “None of us do.”

Meredith’s phone pinged and Sophie waited for the update. Meredith and LaKeisha had been exchanging texts during Micah and Fred’s altercation.

Meredith *tsk’d*, shook her head, and informed, “Too bad. Mort intervened.” She looked up at Sophie and said with a grin, “They’re fighting over you, Sophie.”

Sophie rolled her eyes and shook her head, as if disappointed in the two men, though in her heart she was flattered. If she was to believe what LaKeisha had texted, Micah wanted to ‘intimidate’ Fred. *Too keep him away from me?* she wondered. At the age of fifty-two it was hard to believe that a mature, educated man would behave in such a way, especially for an old spinster—but it felt good.

“Sophie?”

Sophie shook herself from her thoughts, realizing that Meredith was starting on their schedule again.

“You okay?” Meredith asked with a smile.

Sophie smiled and answered, “I’m great, Mere. Now what else do you have for me today?”



Micah had a busy morning that included a trip to the Corktown site. He became so engrossed with the team working there that he didn’t notice the morning passing by until everyone started to break for lunch.

“I can have drawings done on this by tomorrow,” he promised Stan as he got into his car.

“Great, see you tomorrow.” Stan waved good-bye, jumped in his own car and headed away.

As Micah glanced at his cellphone on the seat he saw his text indicator flashing. When he opened the text he remembered that LaKeisha sent him Max Doolittle’s number.

“I’ll just get you out of the way on my way back to the office,” he mumbled, setting up the call for Bluetooth, then starting his car.

“This is Max.”

“Hey, Max. Micah Bloomfield,” he said, pulling into traffic. “How’s it going?”

“Well, well,” Max said, pausing to give a hearty laugh, and Micah could imagine him leaning back in his black leather chair, chewing on the end of a cigar. He continued in his heavy, Texan drawl, “It’s the man of the hour.”

“What are you talking about, Max?”

“Remember that dough you gave me to invest for you?”

“Yes,” Micah answered, wondering if he’d lost it all by now.

“It turned a pretty penny for you, young man.”

Micah was pleasantly surprised. “Wow, that’s great news. How much?”

“Oh, you’re worth enough to start your own firm back up,” Max answered. “You’ve made everything back that your wife took and your partner lost, and then some.”

Micah almost drove off the road at the news. *Finally a break*, he thought. “What do you think I should do with it?” he asked.

“I’d leave it there for a little while. I think the market is going to go up just a little bit more and I’d like to see you sitting in a solid enough position to sell without having to worry about how high your capital gains will be. Then, when you’re good and secure, you can convert to cash and get your firm back in order. It would sure be great to have you back in town.”

*Back in town?* Micah swallowed hard. He hadn’t even thought about Dallas since he’d starting seeing Sophie daily—hadn’t even thought of his friends, or Rivka for that matter.

Not that Micah had a lot of friends. The social relationships he’d had in Texas came either through the Country Club or other high-society organizations and gatherings. Those things were always so important to Rivka. But they were merely acquaintances with people he worked and socialized. They weren’t anything like Mort or Stan, with whom he already shared encouragement and comradery. His ‘blue-blooded’ friends certainly hadn’t cared when his marriage fell apart and his partner stole his wife. In fact, they seemed to fade into the woodwork when the whole thing came crashing down on him. Max wasn’t even a friend; he was just a guy who helped Micah manage his money.

“You still there, Bloomfield?” Max asked.

Micah shook himself and answered, “Yes, I’m still here.”



“What do you want me to do?”

“Keep it in there for a little while, like you said, and let me know what happens.”

“Sounds good to me. I’ll call you again real soon.” And with that the call ended.

Micah rolled the conversation around in his head until he returned to the office, where Sophie was waiting patiently to go to lunch.

“How about a Coney?” she asked with a smile as they headed for the door. “I’ve got a terrible craving.”

Micah laughed and forgot about his conversation with Max. For now, he was in Detroit, and loving every minute of it.



When Sophie and Micah returned from lunch there was a tall, lanky black gentleman waiting near Micah’s door. His head was bald and shiny, his jaw set off in a sharp pencil beard. *Hope mine turns out that good*, Micah thought.

“Oh, it’s Lamont,” Sophie said with a smile, picking up the speed. “I didn’t know he was coming by today.”

As they got closer, Lamont’s black eyes shined with a smile for Sophie. “Sophie, my friend, I didn’t know you were in today.” He extended his hand in greeting.

“Lamont,” she said, and then turning to Micah, “this is my friend, Micah Bloomfield.” Micah extended his hand, seeing something very familiar in the black man’s face. He was about their age. Perhaps they’d gone to school together.

“Well Micah Bloomfield!” Lamont exclaimed. “I have heard so much about you.”

Micah was clearly puzzled and he asked, “How do we know one another?”

“You work out with my kids,” Lamont said, and in his gleaming white smile Micah saw the exact image of Nathan.

“Oh, I love your kids,” Micah said. He turned to Sophie and added, “They’re the best kids you’d ever meet.” He chuckled a little. “They turned me around when I needed it the most.”

“Now don’t go and tell ‘em that,” Lamont said with a smile. “It’ll go to their heads.”

Sophie giggled next to Micah and said, “I can’t believe you didn’t know that Lamont was their father.”

“Well, they like to play it low key until they get to know someone,” Lamont said.

Micah thought that was a strange comment, and it must have shown in his expression because Sophie giggled again and said, “Micah, this is Lamont Williams.”

Micah’s jaw dropped at the familiar name, and he again reached for Lamont’s hand. “Lightening Lamont?” he managed to choke out. “It’s so good to meet you, sir.”

‘Lightening’ Lamont Williams was just starting his Tigers career when they were graduating high school, and was a famous hometown boy at that time. Lamont was the youngest draft pick in many years. He spent only a short time playing on the Mud Hens, Detroit’s triple A affiliate. Lamont was famous for stealing bases. If he could just get on base, he was unstoppable, hence the nickname ‘Lightening.’ Since his retirement from baseball, Lamont worked with underprivileged teens in Detroit, teaching them the great game of baseball, along with the Gospel message.

Sophie looked at Micah with a playful frown and said, “I thought you must have met Lamont by now. You’re working on his building in Corktown.”

Poor Micah’s jaw fell again, and Sophie and Lamont laughed.

“We must have just crossed paths,” Lamont offered. “I tried to call you this morning, and I told your assistant that I thought I might know you.

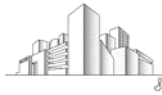
Micah recalled the brief conversation with LaKeisha and nodded. “Sorry I didn’t get back to you. I was interrupted with something.”

“No worries,” Lamont assured. “I just wanted to meet you and let you know that your team is doing a stellar job.”

“Thank you, sir,” was all that Micah could get out. All of the information that Nate and Nikki had given Micah over the last several weeks was all making sense now. *Dad works with youth...he’s restoring an old building that’s going to be a charter school...he loves to talk about the Gospel...we lost our mom a couple of years ago...*

“Well don’t forget about my Memorial Day barbeque,” Sophie said. “And you’d better bring the kids. I haven’t seen them in forever.”

“Oh, they’d love to see you, Sophie,” Lamont replied. “We’ll all be there.”



Over the next weeks Fred’s visits to Jean diminished. Sophie and her mother thought this was strange, and they wondered at his sudden absence.

“He’s probably got another trick up his sleeve,” Eva proffered over coffee one Monday evening. She narrowed her eyes and warned, “You watch out for him, Sophie. He’s no good.”

“Don’t I know it, Mom.” Sophie sighed and shook her head with regret. “I can’t believe I actually dated him.”

“Well, that wasn’t your fault,” Eva excused. “He seemed okay at the time, and Jean practically encouraged it.”

Sophie nodded. At any rate, she wouldn’t make that kind of a mistake again, especially now that she’d connected with someone like Micah.

Though it was extremely busy at Design & Structure, and Micah had been loaded with work, he and Sophie spent every moment they could together. The Tigers had several home stands, and Sophie didn’t miss a single one. There was always an empty seat next to her, Micah noticed, and he wondered if someone in her family gave up their seat each game in order that he could attend.

If the Tigers weren’t playing, they found something else to do on Saturday.

Micah had a penchant for jazz music and Mort told him about a place that he and Wendy visited often. They were also fans of jazz and thought that Sophie would love the place because of its history. Mort filled him in on the specifics, and Micah set a date with Sophie.

“It’s probably not as classy as the pool hall that we still haven’t visited,” he said as he walked her toward Cliff Bell’s, which was just around the corner from Comerica Park. “But Mort guarantees that they play some great jazz. And the feature tonight is a trio that Wendy told me reminds her of Beegie Adair, who’s my absolute favorite.”

It was still daylight as they arrived, and Sophie was instantly intrigued by the building. “I’ve been by here...It reminds me of Albert Kahn’s work,” she remarked.

Micah took a gentle hold of her hand as they walked along, a first in their relationship, and Sophie felt her heart thump as it had when she was a whole lot younger. She prayed that her hand didn’t sweat, and that he couldn’t feel her shaking.

Micah continued with casual conversation. “Mort tells me that it was built by the Campeau Family, one of the earliest French families to settle in Detroit. But the building itself was, indeed, designed by Albert Kahn.”

They came to a stop just outside the entrance. It was covered with a circular awning and marquee that read ‘Cliff Ball’s.’ It was alight with large bulbs fashioned from days gone by, giving it the nuances of the class and grace that had distinguished Detroit in another era. It made Sophie feel as if she was getting ready to go back in time as Micah held the door and she stepped over the threshold.

Inside was just as striking. High, rich mahogany ceilings arched above them, dropping gracefully along the sides to meet with dark leather seating along the perimeter. Antique art and murals descended in perfect measure throughout. Small tables were crowded from the entrance to the stage, where a baby grand piano was set at center.

“Wow,” Sophie breathed as she looked around. “I feel like Dean Martin could come walking out about now. This place is beautiful.”

“Reservations for Bloomfield,” Micah said to the hostess.

She nodded, pulled two leather clad menus from beneath her stand, and said, “Please follow me.”

Micah took Sophie’s hand again and they followed the hostess to a table down front.

“Mort says they have great food,” he said, sliding out her chair.

Sophie took her seat and tried to catch her breath. She looked into Micah’s dark eyes as he took his seat across from her. She wondered if he had any idea the affection that she had for him. It was far more than just a friendship with someone she used to know. Every day with him was sweeter than the day before.

“The guy that this place is named after was actually from Cincinnati,” Micah began. “His family relocated to Detroit when he was in his early teens, which would have been right around 1900. His dad was an Irishman—a barkeep—and also the local labor agitator.” He raised one eyebrow in a comical way. “Sound familiar?”

Sophie laughed and nodded.

“Anyway, he put Cliff to work in his pub,” Micah continued. “But in 1919, Detroit had to close its liquor establishments due to prohibition. This upset Cliff to no end, and in retaliation he opened several speakeasies over the next fourteen years. He did a number of things that were fairly successful for the time, but it was his idea to open the Commodore Club that really set this place in motion. Prohibition was coming to an end and he saw that he’d need to compete with all the bars that would be springing up around town. So, he started hiring acts from Hollywood and New York. People loved it.

“So, in 1935, he decided to build this place,” Micah looked around and then back at Sophie. “People close to him thought it was a bad idea, but he went ahead with it, installing new refrigeration and state of the art HVAC. It was so impressive that the *Free Press* photographed and published the new technology.

“Cliff left the business in 1958 in order to retire with his wife, but the club kept going, under different names, until 1985, when it closed. It remained empty until 2005 when it was restored and reopened.”

“Fascinating,” Sophie said, looking around at the beautiful fixtures and woodwork. “I can’t believe I’ve never been here.”

Micah softly laughed. “Well, I can’t imagine you get around to many bars.”

Sophie laughed and shook her head.

“Plus, you really prefer skyscrapers.”

She nodded again.

He reached across the table and took her hand, looking into her eyes as he said, “I hope this is okay?”

Her stomach did flip-flops as she looked back at him. “The bar?” she asked.

Micah chuckled. “No, I figured you were okay with that. My handholding. Is it okay? Or is it too much?”

“I like it a lot,” she answered, giving his hand a soft squeeze.

They ordered the Dover sole, and it was delicious. They were just finishing their Spumoni dessert and coffee when the trio took the stage. They’re first piece was a rendition of *Isn’t it Romantic*, and Sophie wondered if she could take it. Micah was holding her hand again, and she hoped she didn’t faint. *How can this be happening to me*, she thought as she listened to the classy music, *especially at my age. I’ve never felt this way in my entire life*. She looked into Micah’s eyes and thought, *if you don’t stay in Detroit I don’t know what I’ll do*.

The trio did, in fact, sound so much like Beegie Adair that it could have been her trio. They were skilled and smooth, and Micah could tell that Sophie enjoyed every song. He watched her watch the trio, seeing the obvious enjoyment in her expression. *I think she likes jazz as much as I do*, he thought...*maybe Detroit isn’t such a bad place to live anymore, especially if they have bands like this... There’s really no reason to go back to Texas anymore. I even let my apartment go before I left... What could possibly send me back there now?*





During the week, Micah handled his heavy workload with ease, becoming more alive and confident with every passing day. Between Sophie and his newfound ‘fame,’ Micah was on top of the world, quite easily having the time of his life.

Often, he became so engrossed in his work that he lost track of the time, nearly missing scheduled events. Getting immersed in his work was a tendency that had plagued him for his entire career. LaKeisha helped him set alarms on his desktop and cellphone, along with her verbal morning reminders of the day’s events ahead.

“This is how Meredith and Sophie do it,” LaKeisha informed. “Because when Sophie gets her head into something, she forgets about everything else—kind of like you—but you don’t want to miss something important.”

Micah agreed, especially not something important with Sophie.

In his spare time Micah continued to study YouTube for cooking pointers, and he met with his young friends in the gymnasium downstairs. They were delighted to learn that Sophie Young was ‘Micah’s girl.’ Nikki had long admired Sophie, having set her heart on going to school for architecture and maybe working for Sophie when she was finished.

With the month of May came warmer weather to the Motor City, and Micah declared that he could retire his parka for the season. Sophie laughed, as was the usual. Micah was the most comical person she’d ever met. He’d brought a humor to her life that she’d never experienced, and didn’t even realize was missing. Always joking, always dry. She loved it. She loved him.

They went to the musical *The King and I* at the Fox Theater, and Sophie had laid her head on his shoulder when the king died. He softly stroked her hair and handed her his handkerchief. It was the most tender moment of her life and she left the theater that night wondering if she'd cried tears of sorrow, or absolute joy.

They took romantic strolls along the Detroit Riverwalk, and through the Whitcomb Conservatory. Micah always held her hand as they walked along, and she smiled into his eyes.

And always, Micah picked up Sophie for church on Sunday mornings. He didn't say much about the sermons, but he seemed to listen intently. He never appeared bored or offended, perhaps content. Sophie even caught him tapping his foot to the music during worship.

Afterward, they joined her family for brunch. As the weeks went by, he meshed with them more and more, especially her uncle Mike. But then, everyone got along with Uncle Mike.

May was already ending, yet the time they spent together went by with a speediness neither had ever experienced. It seemed to them that Micah had barely arrived in Detroit, when in actuality he'd been there nearly two months.