

Chapter 11

It was sunny and seventy-five degrees in Comerica Park on Memorial Day. Luke helped Eva to the company suite, and Sophie was there to greet her.

“Hi Mom,” she said with a wink. “Hungry?”

“Oh, funny girl,” Eva chided, she knew what Sophie was talking about. The food bill from the month of May had to be astronomical by now. “Can I help it that the food here is so fabulous?”

Sophie laughed at her mother, and then leaned close for a kiss. “I’m going to go and sit with Micah, but if you need anything besides fabulous food, shoot me a text.”

“Fine,” Eva replied. “And you tell Micah that your mother really likes him. Those things are important to a young man.”

Sophie swallowed the sudden lump in her throat. Micah would be ecstatic to hear that he’d been described as a ‘young man.’

Luke gave Sophie a wink and smile and said, “You’d better hurry out, Sophie. They’ll start soon.”

Sophie nodded, and left to sit with the rest of their family.

Micah was just taking his seat with the rest of the clan. He balanced two Vernors floats as he sat down, handing one to Sophie when he saw her approaching.

“Thanks,” she said, taking one of the floats and sitting down next to him. “What are these for?”

“Celebration,” he answered with a smile, mockingly toasting his cup against hers. He leaned close and whispered, “I’ve lost twenty-five pounds.”

“Micah that’s awesome!” she whispered with a smile. Why he wanted to keep it a secret she couldn’t imagine. She hadn’t really noticed that he was heavy until he disclosed his concerns about the size of his stomach, and his clothes started to bag off of him. “By the way,” she said, “Mom wants you know that she really likes you.” Sophie raised one eyebrow, “She says that’s important to a *young man*.”

Micah beamed. “This chicken and fish thing is really paying off,” he murmured.

The Tigers played the Royals, and the game was a terrible one. The pitcher was young and green, and lost his nerve quite easily. But that wasn’t their only problem. The first baseman couldn’t catch to save himself and the shortstop

allowed three errors in three innings. Tiger finally pulled him. Their silver sluggers were ice cold as well, giving the Royals an embarrassing lead.

“It was almost unbearable to watch,” Levi grumbled as they walked to Sophie’s townhouse for the barbeque.

“A real bloodbath,” Art affirmed.

“To bad the bats didn’t show up,” Sophie added.

“Well, win some, lose some,” Amanda said. “They still get paid and we’re still going to have a great barbeque.”

The rest of them murmured their half-hearted agreements as they made their way to Sophie’s place.

The office at Design & Structure had been invited; anyone that didn’t have plans for Memorial Day was welcome. The only requirement was to bring a side dish or a dessert that could be shared. Sophie’s neighbors, as always, were included. She thought that was the least she could do seeing as how they wouldn’t be able to come and go through their own alley for an entire afternoon. Metro Police had blocked off the alley once again, and the barbeque was billowing. Sophie also extended an invitation to Micah’s family, and they accepted.

Sophie’s kitchen island was set up the same way it had been for her barbeque in April. Micah had helped Sophie after church the day before, working late into the night on some of the appetizers she wanted to serve. Her catering friends took care of the rest of them.

Great tables were set up, overflowing with goodies prepared by the generous office staff. Comfortable, web lawn chairs were scattered about, some still folded against the garages waiting for someone to use them. And with the nicer temperatures and sunshine, umbrellas and canopies covered the alley. It looked more like a downtown market than a back-alley barbeque.

Sophie saw that Eva was already in a lawn chair, seated near Luke, and she was laughing. Undoubtedly, they were discussing the game. Sophie smiled. Luke's post-game narratives always made their mother laugh really hard.

At Micah's first opportunity, he went to check out the barbeque. Having done quite a bit of experimenting, he was curious as to how a bigger grill fared. He made his way across the alley, seeing that the pit master at the barbeque was already pulling off chicken wings.

The pit master looked up and smiled at Micah as he said, "Hey, looking for some wings?"

"Not yet," Micah answered and extended his hand. "Micah Bloomfield."

The pit master shook Micah's hand and said, "Gavin Reeves, Reeves Barbeque Pit."

"Oh, yeah," Micah started to nod. "Over in Hartland?"

"Yeah," he nodded with a smile. "Been there for years. My grandparents owned it, then my parents, and now I'm minding the pit."

Micah's smile broadened as he recalled the familiar story. "You're not 'the' Gavin Reeves, the 'meanest goalie in town?'"

Gavin snickered and answered. “Well, that was a lot of years ago, but, yes, that would be me.”

“Oh, we hated playing you guys over at Hartland—I played for Henry Ford in Sterling Heights.”

Gavin squinted as he looked at Micah and finally grinned. “Micah Bloomfield, number eighty-nine with the wicked slap shot. We didn’t like you at all.”

Micah laughed; it was good to be remembered. He peered in for a look at Gavin’s grill and asked, “What are you cooking today?”

“Anything but pork,” he answered. “I guess there are a bunch of Jewish people coming and Sophie didn’t want to disappoint them.”

Micah’s mother and uncle, along with Ben and his wife, Josie, and their four teenagers, came together. Micah’s mother was all a flutter when she met Sophie, and Micah couldn’t help but wonder again at his mother’s odd fascination with her. Thirty-five years ago, the name of Sophie Young wasn’t even allowed to be spoken in Liana’s home—but now Liana treated her like a celebrity.

“You’re even more beautiful in person,” Liana declared, holding Sophie’s hand and looking up into her grey eyes.

“Oh, my, thank you, Mrs. Bloomfield,” Sophie said with a smile, her cheeks warming at the compliment.

“And I know my Micah thinks an awful lot of you,” Liana went on. “He talks about you all of the time.”

Micah's eyes about popped out of his head at that remark. Now his cheeks were the ones turning red. He didn't talk about Sophie *all of the time*, only when his mother asked about her, *which was all of the time*.

Ben laughed and slapped his brother on the back.

Micah frowned and intervened. "Okay, Mom, Sophie has other guests she needs to visit. Why don't you get something to drink?"

Asher knit his brows together and asked, "Is there any pork on that grill?"

Micah patted his uncle's shoulder, attempting to walk them toward the beverage table as he answered, "Not a drop. Checked it out myself. Pork-free."

Asher nodded in approval.

"It was so nice finally meeting you," Liana said. "Thank you for the invite."

"You're more than welcome," Sophie smiled. She looked at Micah who gave her a strained smile and then accompanied his family to the drinks. Sophie snickered at the sweet scene, and then went to greet her other guests.

As the afternoon progressed it became warm in the alley, and Eva decided to get herself another lemonade. She coaxed her walker to the drinks table, and there she ran into Liana Bloomfield, who had also decided to have another drink.

Eva studied the short Jewish woman next to her, watching her pour her drink, reaching for the napkin, and then smiling at Eva.

"Can I pour you one?" she asked.

"Please," Eva answered.

Liana smiled and reached for another cup while Eva continued to watch her movements.

Finally, recognizing her build and facial structure, Eva asked, “Is it you, Liana?”

“Yes,” she answered, giving Eva a polite smile.

“It’s me, Eva. Eva Walker.”

Liana gasped and almost dropped the lemonades. Instead she set them down and gathered Eva into her arms. “My goodness, Eva, what are you doing here?”

Eva cocked her head toward Sophie, who was standing with Micah and laughing at something so hard that she was wiping her eyes. “Sophie’s my daughter. She invited me.”

Poor Liana looked like someone had punched her in the stomach. Her knees bent but she quickly reached for the table and kept herself upright. “Sophie is your daughter?” she whispered.

“Yeah,” Eva beamed, her eyes adoring Sophie from afar. “I can’t believe it myself sometimes.” She looked at Liana and watched her complexion blanch as she wavered from side to side. She frowned and put her hand on Liana’s shoulder and asked, “Should I call for help?”

Liana shook her head, almost frantically. “Heavens, no. I’m fine. I just need to sit down for a minute.”

Eva turned in her walker and instructed, “Grab the drinks. You can sit with me.”

Liana grabbed the lemonades and followed Eva to some lawn chairs that were set up under an umbrella away from the rest of the crowd. They seated themselves, Eva watching Liana with concern. She took a sip of her lemonade and waited for Liana to get her bearings.

“Are you okay, Liana?” she asked.

Liana nodded and took a gulp of the cool drink. “I thought you left,” she whispered. “I had no idea you were still in Detroit.” She looked at Eva and asked, “All these years?”

Eva shrugged, completely mystified at Liana’s question. “Where else would I be, Liana?”

“I thought you and Luther were going home to his parents in Alabama?”

Eva drew in a deep breath and nodded. “Well, we didn’t make it. I lost my Luther to cancer shortly after Luke was born and his parents didn’t want me around. You know, because I was white and all, and there were so many problems with the whites back then.”

“I remember,” Liana acknowledged.

“My folks were long dead by then and I didn’t have any other relatives, and I had two little boys to raise,” Eva went on. “So, I got a factory job. That’s where I met my oldest daughter’s father. He wanted to get married right away, and it was hard to find childcare for two little mixed boys, so I said ‘yes,’ and that’s how I wound up with Amanda. He was killed in an accident shortly after she was born.” Eva took a glug of her lemonade, wiped her mouth and said, “I went back to the factory and stayed single for a long time after that, just working and trying to take care of the kids, until I met Danny Young.” She paused there and raised her

eyebrows as she stated with pride, “I was married to Danny Young. Anyway, he adopted the kids, and, well, the rest is history.”

Liana’s eyes were quickly filling with tears she couldn’t seem to stop. “I’m so sorry, Eva, I had no idea.”

“Well, win some, lose some,” she answered, taking another glug. She looked at Liana and said, “Benedict is here. I hope you at least said ‘hi’ to him.”

“I did,” Liana replied.

“Still a handsome man. Boy, he’s fought quite a battle to get where he’s at, hasn’t he?”

Liana only swallowed hard and nodded.

“I felt so bad when your folks wouldn’t let you see him anymore,” Eva went on. “That wasn’t right.”

Liana looked into her lap, shaking her head.

Eva snickered softly and said, “You can’t imagine my surprise when my own daughter went to work for him.”

“Did you ever tell her?” Liana whispered.

“No,” Eva scoffed. “She’d never understand.”

Liana looked into Eva eyes, her own brimming with tears that suddenly slid down her cheeks. “Eva, I have to confess something.”

“Okay.” Eva took the last gulp of her lemonade set her glass on the ground beside her. She tenderly reached for Liana’s hand and waited.

“Many years ago, my oldest son, Micah wanted to date your Sophie.” Liana began.

Eva frowned in confusion.

“They went to Henry Ford together at the time,” Liana explained, tears trailing to her chin. “But my husband and I forbade it because she appeared to have come from a bad background, and she wasn’t Jewish.” Liana’s voice caught on a sob as she went on, “I knew a girl from Synagogue that I wanted him attached to.”

“But Liana, that’s what your own parents did to you,” Eva whispered. “Just because he was different.”

Liana nodded. “I know. I’m so sorry, Eva. Please forgive me. I was so wrong.” She hung her head and tried to hide her sobs, wiping her face in a napkin.

Eva felt as if the wind had been knocked out of her. She watched Liana cry and couldn’t help but feel a measure of pity for the poor woman. She put her hand tenderly on Liana’s shoulder and attempted to soothe her, “There, there, Liana. Now don’t cry. I forgive you.”

“You must be a real Christian by now, Eva,” Liana replied, lifting her head to meet Eva’s eyes.

Eva looked confused and replied, “I’ve always been a real Christian, Liana.”

“I didn’t understand back then,” Liana went on. She paused to blow her nose in her napkin. “But Ben and I changed our minds a few months ago.”

Eva couldn’t hide her surprise. “Why?” she whispered.

“Because I had a lot of sin, and I wanted forgiveness.”

Eva nodded. “Jesus changed our family.”

Liana smiled faintly. “Your children must love you a lot.”

Eva gazed at each of her children then, looking from one to the other, considering Liana’s comment. She found herself smiling and softly said, “Well, I know that I sure love them.”

Liana nodded. “Our Sunday school leader said it like this: we love others because God loves us...and I don’t understand all of it yet, but I know one thing, it changed me and my son, Ben. I’m hoping Sophie and your family can turn around my Micah and my brother Asher.”

Eva quietly nodded as she considered Liana’s words. She finally took a soft breath and said, “Tell me some more about what you’ve learned, Liana.”



LaKeisha was giving Micah his schedule when her phone pinged. She clicked on the message and announced, “There’s a man named Wade McGregor on line three.”

“Who’s that?” Micah asked. The name was familiar, but he’d met a lot of new people over the last two months.

“Beats me,” she answered. “Do you want me to handle it until we find out?”

“If you’re finished, I can take it.”

LaKeisha nodded. “I’ll have them put it through.” She quickly texted a message to the switchboard, then looked back at him. “Are you drawing today?”

“All day,” he answered.

“Good, because Nicollo found something he doesn’t like and he wants to bring you some old prints to look at. Also, Frank called and he’s wondering if you can carve out a few minutes for him this afternoon. He also has some ancient prints that he’s not sure about.”

“That should be okay,” Micah replied with a smile. “I’ll have some time around three if that works for him.”

“I’ll let him know.” LaKeisha gave him her professional smile and turned and left.

Micah picked up the headset on his desk and clicked the flashing light. “Micah Bloomfield.”

“Micah, this is Wade McGregor from McGregor & Sons in Dallas, Texas,” he replied in a heavy, Southern drawl.

Micah almost dropped the phone. McGregor & Sons was the largest, and oldest, architectural firm in Dallas. Wade McGregor was their fearless leader, which was why Micah had recognized the name. He imagined the famous senior partner sitting behind an ornate marble desk, the rumored set of gilded longhorns affixed to the front, and a ten-gallon Stetson adorning his head.

“Hello, sir,” Micah greeted. “What can I do for you today?”

“Well, son,” McGregor began, “I’m acquainted with the fair lady, Bijou Beaufort, and she emailed me a few articles about you that were printed in the *Detroit Register*. She’s quite impressed with you.”

Micah was flattered and he smiled as he replied, “Well, that’s very gracious of her.”

McGregor laughed and said, “You see, son, she knows I’m always on the lookout for folks of your caliber. I like to add junior partners from time to time so that when I’m dead and gone, like my ole daddy, this firm will continue to operate.

Micah was speechless. Was this a job interview, or a flat out offer? “I’m pretty busy in Detroit right now,” he began.

“I understand your stint will be up sometime in October. In the meantime, why don’t you fly on over to Dallas one of these coming weekends and have a looksee around my firm and see if it might be something you’d be interested in?”

Micah didn’t know what to say. It was the opportunity he’d been craving only a few months ago and now he had the financing to pull it off. He wouldn’t have to go back to little ole Rebuild & Restore. He could walk right into a junior partnership. A senior position wasn’t a far stretch from there. But that would mean leaving Sophie and he knew he wasn’t ready to do that yet...*but just a little ‘looksee’ couldn’t hurt anything, could it?*

“What do you think, Bloomfield?” McGregor asked.

“Thank you for your gracious offer, but I’ll have to get back to you, Mr. McGregor,” he finally replied. “I’ve got a few irons in the fire here at the moment. Can I take a few weeks to think about this?”

“Certainly,” McGregor replied amicably. He gave Micah his personal cellphone number and they ended their call.

Micah sat back in his chair and let his gaze fall over the city. The offer was perfect. To wind up being a senior partner, eventually, in the biggest and best firm in Dallas would really show Rivka and Leland what a couple of first-class idiots they turned out to be.

His eyes traveled the cityscape, moving over buildings and lots, cranes, traffic, dump trucks, and clusters of workers below. One building in particular made him pause...*The Camden...Sophie's first restoration*, and it stood like a gem in the midst of ruffians. His stomach twisted into a knot as he thought about her and all of the hopes and dreams she had for Detroit. And while Dallas was certainly a beautiful city, it wasn't the place of Sophie's dreams. He doubted that she'd relocate.

From there, and quite unknowingly, Micah stumbled into his first prayer. *Jesus, Art says that we can ask You for wisdom. I need to know what to do. I don't want to be just an employee, especially not at my age. I at least want a partnership, but if I stay in Detroit that would mean going into competition with Sophie and I don't want that. He thought of Fred and rolled his eyes. And I don't want to wind up like that guy. He let out a heavy sigh. Please help me, Jesus.*

“Hey, Micah!” He suddenly heard Sophie's voice in his doorway and he looked up to see her literally charging into his office. Her face was merrier than he'd ever seen, her cheeks slightly pink with excitement.

He quickly sat up straighter in his chair and returned her jovial expression. “What's going on, Sophie?”

“They got the main guys!” she exclaimed, taking a seat in front of his desk. She gave it a hard slap and laughed out loud. “They picked up a creep over the weekend and he sang like a canary.”

Micah chuckled. “What are you talking about, Sophie?”

“Oh, my goodness,” she said, laughing a little at herself. “I’m so excited. Corktown! They finally figured out who was orchestrating all of the trouble over there.”

“That’s great news,” he replied with a smile.

She nodded and laughed again. “It should be fairly smooth sailing now. No new damages—which is good news for you.”

He grinned and raised an eyebrow. “Why is that?”

“Didn’t you know?” she teased. “Bijou and Nicollo are fighting over you. Now he’ll have you all to himself.”

Micah chuckled. *Life was never this fun in Dallas.*



June was upon them, and the paper tickets that Micah carried around with him for the past two months were wearing thin. Her birthday was just a few days away, and Benedict had specifically instructed, “make it a surprise.” It was Mort who suggested that he take Sophie out of the city to one of his and Wendy’s favorite restaurants. Located in what some might consider “out in the middle of nowhere,” Karl’s Cabin was just a thirty-minute drive from Midtown. According to Mort, the atmosphere was romantic and the food outstanding. There was even an outside patio for dining. Now that the weather had warmed sufficiently, Micah decided on an outdoor dining experience.

Sophie, as always, was enthusiastic about trying something new. She hurried home after work to change into something summery and fun. When Micah picked her up, she was wearing a sleeveless white linen dress with blue leaves and floral designs. On her feet were simple white sandals. She had swept her silver trusses in a most elegant up-do, with only the smallest wisp of bangs left above her brow. From her lobes dangled diamond earrings, and on her wrist a bracelet that matched.

“You look more fantastic than ever,” he said as he held her car door and she slipped inside.

“Well, thank you, Micah,” she replied with a smile. “I love your new jacket.”

She noticed! he thought as he closed her door. Micah had lost so much weight by now that he had started to add new, smaller sizes, to his wardrobe. This latest purchase was a deep grey, summer weight blazer from Brooks Brothers. He added the white linen shirt, and bought himself the first pair of kakis in his life. He splurged and ordered the dark brown leather boat shoes, which arrived only that afternoon.

“Thanks, Sophie,” he acknowledged her compliment. He closed her car door and trotted to the driver’s side, holding his head with a confidence he’d not felt in longer than he cared to remember. Why on earth he would ever consider going back to Dallas to was beyond him.

A perfect log cabin structure, with a stone paver walkway greeted them. The landscaping around the building was simple, yet trimmed as perfectly as the cabin itself.

“Neat place,” Sophie commented.

Micah nodded, and they got out of the car.

Inside the restaurant was just as stunning. Authentic log beams and rich woodwork created a golden hue. Beautiful slate covered the floor. A stone fireplace along one wall glowed with a small fire.

“This is beautiful,” Sophie admired as they approached the hostess stand.

“Do you have something on the patio tonight?” Micah said.

The hostess nodded and said, “Please follow me.” And she led them out of the restaurant and onto the patio outside.

Stone pavers covered the patio as well. There was a low fence surrounding the patio, giving the small area a private feel. The hostess led them to a table near a cut stone fireplace.

Micah slid Sophie’s chair out for her and she seated herself. He sat down, the hostess handed them their menus and bustled off.

As they looked at their menus, Micah casually remarked, “I heard your birthday is coming up. This Saturday?”

Sophie didn’t look up from her menu but replied, “So it is. For whatever reason I find myself having one of those every year.” She snickered at her own joke.

Micah smiled and nodded. “Me too.” He took a breath and asked, “I suppose we’ll go to the game?”

Sophie nodded, continuing to peruse her menu.

Micah took another breath. He couldn't stand it another minute. He reached inside his jacket and pulled out the tickets. "I was going to wait until after dinner, but I can't stand it anymore. I want you to know."

Sophie looked up, took the tickets into her hand with a puzzled expression, and began to study the fuzzy print. Suddenly her eyes flew open and she gasped. She looked up at Micah and grabbed an excited hold of his arm. "How did you get these?!" she exclaimed.

"It's a secret," he admitted with a smile. "And you can't ask where I got them because I entered into terms wherein, I'm not allowed to disclose the origin of these tickets."

She laughed and stomped her feet. "This is a great birthday present! Thank you so much."

Micah touched her hand on his arm, took it into his own and slowly drew it up to his lips, giving it the softest of kisses. He looked into her pretty grey eyes and smiled. "Happy birthday, Sophie."

Her cheeks showed the faintest of blush and she replied, "Thank you, Micah. Thank you so much."