

Chapter 16

Bijou Beaufort was a beautiful woman, about Sophie's age. She wore her chin-length blond hair tucked behind her ears, with her bangs cut straight across her eyebrows. Her cheekbones were high, her round eyes emerald green, her lips full, and her accent exquisite. She was always impeccably dressed, whether working in the office or out on the site. And as she took her seat before Sophie's desk, Sophie thought to herself, *no wonder Fred was drawn to you.*

"Thanks for coming up on such short notice," Sophie began with a friendly smile. "I know you've got your hands full right now."

"We are doing well, Sophie," Bijou assured. "Now what can I help you with?"

"This is a matter of a personal nature," Sophie said, deciding to skip the 'beating around the bush' and get right to the bare bones of the issue. In her most

favorable and charming tone, she said, “I’m wondering about your involvement with a deal between Wade McGregor and Micah Bloomfield.”

Bijou chuckled. “Wade and I go way back.” She winked with a smile. “We met ten years ago at a conference in Paris, and what a time we had together.” She took on a wistful expression and was quiet for a few moments, perhaps recalling sweet memories. She sighed and gave Sophie another smile. “We have always stayed in touch and I knew that he was planning for retirement, so I told him about Micah.” She raised a pretty eyebrow and added, “He is a gifted architect, Sophie... I did not know about you and Micah or I would not have done it. I was only aware that he was from Texas and needed a fresh start.” She looked Sophie in the eye and said, “Forgive me if I hurt you.”

That wasn’t the answer Sophie had been expecting. She smiled and replied, “Oh, it’s okay, Bijou. I was just curious about how it went down...and how Fred McMasters found out about it.”

Bijou’s sweet expression faded and she rolled her eyes. “I still cannot believe that I said ‘yes’ to that first lunch.” She shook her head. “And even the second lunch...I am so disappointed in myself...*tsk, tsk, tsk.*” She took a soft breath and began again, “I was afraid that he had snooped through my things one day, and now my fears have been realized...I went to use the restroom during our second lunch and left my phone on the table. He must have found my texts with Wade.

Sophie was shocked. She tried to maintain a cool persona, but she couldn’t even speak. *Snooping someone else’s phone? What else has he been up to?* she found herself wondering.

“I know,” Bijou said, seeming to understand Sophie’s thoughts. “You cannot imagine how foolish I feel.”

“Don’t feel foolish, Bijou,” Sophie said quickly. “It’s not your fault.”

“Thank you for your grace,” Bijou replied, offering a faint smile. “I would not do anything to jeopardize our relationship, Sophie. I do so enjoy working with you.”

“Me too,” Sophie agreed with a smile. She thought for a moment, and then said, “Can we keep this conversation to ourselves? Just for a couple of days?”

“Certainly!” Bijou concurred immediately. “I would rather no one ever knew of my fatuous actions.”

As soon as Bijou left, Sophie sat quietly behind her desk and prayed, Father, what has he done? Is he really behind these events, or does it just look bad? I don’t want to misjudge him...on the other hand I can’t risk my people—and was it Fred who hit me with the pipe that day?

Her prayers were interrupted by the sudden ping of her cellphone. It was Micah.

Mom tucked me in and left. She said that she’s not coming back until this afternoon, so you don’t have to worry about extra sandwiches for lunch. I’ve got a huge headache. I’m going to take a nap. See you at lunch?

Sophie replied,

Of course I’m coming for lunch! See you then.

The phone didn't ping again, and Sophie went back to her prayers. *And, please, Jesus, put Your hand on Micah's head and heal him quickly.*

Micah lay down on his side and pulled the sheets up around his chin. Whatever Ben had prescribed was working to kill the pain, but it made him way to comfortably tired. *I'll just have a little nap before lunch*, he thought, and then he drifted off into a deep sleep.

The incessant pounding on his door awakened him. He glanced at the clock near his bed and saw that it was almost noon. He'd been asleep for close to two hours.

"Sophie must be early," he said to himself as he struggled to a seated position on the bed and tried to shake the sleep out of his eyes. He slowly stood, got his bearings, and started for his entryway. The pounding continued. "Okay, Sophie," he said with a smile. "I'm hurrying. You must be starved."

He reached the entryway and flung open the door. To his surprise, it wasn't Sophie at all. There, in his hallway, stood Fred McMasters. He was decked out in a sharp navy suit, open collar, no tie, and no expression.

Micah felt himself frowning. "Fred...what are you doing here?"

Fred didn't say a word. Instead, he pulled a handgun from inside his jacket and aimed it at Micah.

Micah moved quicker than he thought he could. He reached for the door and slammed it shut, just in time to avoid the weapon's discharge.

“Are you kidding me?!” he shouted, flipping the deadbolt. He turned to flee the entryway as he heard another shot ring out on the other side of his door. “I don’t believe this!”

He scrambled back to his bedroom where he’d left his phone, praying that Fred couldn’t actually shoot the door open. As Micah reached for his phone, it rang and he looked at it quizzically. The number on the screen was restricted, but he answered it anyway.

“This is Micah,” he panted.

“Hi, Mr. Bloomfield, this is Detective Michaels—”

“There’s a lunatic shooting at me! Right now! Get over here!”

“Is it Fred McMasters?”

“Yes! He’s fired twice. He’s in the hallway outside my condo. I locked him out. I don’t have a weapon—”

“Metro is on the way,” Michaels replied, “and I’m nearby as well. Just stay on the line with me. Is he at your door?”

“Yes! Aren’t you listening to me?! And Sophie’s on her way!” Micah let out a wail. “Sophie is bringing my lunch! You’ve got to get here before he does something to Sophie!”

“We’re moving very quickly, Mr. Bloomfield,” Michaels said in a calm voice. “There’s been a report of shots fired in your complex. Metro was on their way before I even made this call...There are officers already in the area...Have there been any more shots?”

“No,” Micah answered.

“Is he inside your residence?”

“I don’t think so.”

“Where are you, Mr. Bloomfield?”

“In my bedroom.”

“Just stay there. It’s going to be a few minutes

It felt like more than ‘a few minutes’ by the time Detective Michaels finally announced that he was in the building and on his way up to Micah’s entrance.

“Can you let us in?” Michaels asked.

Micah took a deep breath and made his way to his entryway. He took a cautious peek through the peephole...*should have thought to do that earlier*, he considered. Sure enough, there was a hallway full of officers, and the familiar face of Detective Michaels. Micah unlocked his door and swung it open. He shuddered when he saw the two bullets embedded on the other side.

“Fire door,” Michaels observed as he glanced at the bullets. “It looks like oak, but it’s actually steel cored.” He looked at Micah. “You okay, buddy?”

Micah nodded. “Where’s Sophie?”

“She’s still out by the gate,” Michaels answered. “She drove up just as we were arriving.” He grinned and added, “She’s got a little bit of a temper too. She’s pretty steamed about not being able to come in with us.”

Micah was so relieved that he laughed nervously and said, “She’s got a lot on her plate.”

Detective Michaels took a breath and asked, “Can I come in and talk to you for a second.” He looked behind him and said, “Once the building is secure you can bring Ms. Young up.”

“Yes, sir,” someone answered.

Micah led Michaels from the entryway into his living room. He flopped himself into his favorite chair and rubbed his forehead.

Michaels sat down on the couch in the corner nearest Micah. He leaned toward Micah and said, “I was actually calling you with an update,” he began. “I heard about the call into dispatch while we were on the phone.”

Micah looked at Michaels with a puzzled expression. “What were you calling me about?”

“Believe it or not, I was calling to warn you,” Michaels explained. “We learned just this morning that someone hired a hit on you.”

Micah felt his mouth fall open.

“One of the guys that Stan Romano shot was released from the hospital this morning,” Michaels went on. “While he was being prepped to take in for booking, it was discovered that his clothing hadn’t been searched when he was first brought in. To make a long story short, we found a picture of you in his personal effects.”

“Me?” Micah whispered.

“Yep. And so far, the kid is talking. He says they were hired for two jobs. The first one was just for an old-fashioned beat down on the crew in Corktown. The second was a hit on you separately, and they were supposed to do that at your home. Well, anyway, the kid said that when they saw you drive up, they decided to

kill two birds with one stone—so to speak. My partner took him down to the precinct to look at a photo array to see if he could pick McMasters out of it. I dispatched a couple of squads to sit outside your place until we found out whether or not McMasters could be identified—so I’m guessing that officers were already here before McMasters entered your building.”

Micah was stunned, to say the least. He had so many questions for the detective, but didn’t even know where to start. “Well,” he whispered, giving his lower lip a swipe with his tongue. He was so thirsty all of the sudden. “Well,” he began again, “How did he get into my building? How did he get past the gate? Did you catch him yet?”

Michaels shook his head. “I don’t know yet. He doesn’t seem to be on the premises any longer. And as a precaution we’ve contacted border patrol, so if he tries to cross into Windsor, we’ll grab him.”

Micah nodded and was about to ask another question when Sophie burst into the condo, rushing to where he was seated. She knelt in front of him, threw her arms around him, and he wrapped his around her slender frame.

“Oh, Sophie,” he whispered into her hair. He deeply inhaled her scent and said, “You smell so good.”

She laughed quietly as she pulled back far enough to look him in the eye. She took his face tenderly in her hands and then leveled a passionate kiss on his lips. When she looked at him again, she was smiling, her grey eyes filled with tears. “I brought lunch.”

Sophie brought water to Micah, and Detective Michaels finished interviewing the both of them. Michaels was quite surprised when he learned that Fred had been to see Sophie that morning.

“Did you let him know that we were looking at him for the Corktown trouble?” he asked.

“No,” Sophie answered. “But Fred did say that he thought the trouble on the site would finalize Micah’s decision to go back to Texas.”

Michaels raised one eyebrow. “How did he know about that?”

“I found out later this morning that he may have looked through the texts of one of my associates—”

“Bijou,” Micah said. “Bijou recommended me for the opening in Texas.”

Michaels’ phone rang. He looked at the screen and stood up. “I’ll be right back,” he murmured as he stepped away.

Sophie looked at Micah. He looked pretty good for someone who’d been through the ordeal he’d just experienced. All her years in Detroit and no one had ever actually fired on her.

Micah gave her a faint smile and asked, “Is everything okay? You’re frowning.”

Sophie relaxed her expression and smiled. “Everything’s fine...I was just wondering how you’re doing.”

“Honestly...I’m starving to death. If they don’t get done with us pretty soon, I say we just eat in front of them.”

Sophie softly laughed. “I’m glad you still have your appetite.”

Micah pretended to leer her way. “And that was the best kiss I’ve ever had. I hope I can get another one of those.”

Sophie softly laughed again.

Michaels was taking his seat near Micah again. “Okay, that was my partner. As a precaution we’ve shut down the Corktown site—”

Sophie quietly gasped.

“Just for now,” Michaels finished. “The kid we brought in this morning identified McMasters from the photo array.”

“Well holy smokes,” Micah muttered.

Michaels nodded. “And we’d like the two of you to stay put for just a little bit here. We’ll leave a couple of squads, and continue to heavily patrol the neighborhood. My partner is on his way over to McMasters’ office to see if he can get anything out of a guy named Lewellen.”

“That’s the junior partner at McMasters & Lewellen,” Sophie said. “He’s a decent guy. He’ll probably help you all he can.”

Michaels nodded and stood up, and Sophie and Micah got to their feet as well.

“Please stay put,” Michaels reiterated. “I don’t want to have to go looking for one of you—those situations never end well. It’s not like the movies.”

Sophie and Micah nodded and Michaels started for the entryway. He turned around and added, “Have a great lunch. Sorry we had to make you wait.”

As Michaels entered the hallway, which was still busy with police activity, a CSI wearing rubber gloves handed him a baggie with two shell casings.

“Looks like a nine mil,” she said.

Michaels looked at Micah and asked, “Is that what he pulled on you?”

Micah shrugged and answered, “I don’t know. It was big and black. That’s all I saw.”

Michaels frowned. “I thought you were from Texas?”

“I’m actually from Detroit—Boston Edison and Sterling Heights,” Micah answered.

Michaels’ frown deepened, but he nodded and said, “Well, you two have a nice lunch.” He pulled the door shut, and Micah and Sophie were finally alone.

Micah turned to Sophie, who looked as unruffled as ever in a pale pink suit and her Nikes.

“How’s your headache,” she asked, reaching for his hand.

For the first time all day he noticed that he didn’t have any pain in his head. “It doesn’t hurt at all,” he answered. “Thanks to the recent adrenalin rush coursing through the veins in my head, I probably won’t feel anything for a while.”

Sophie laughed and shook her head. “How about lunch?” she asked.

Micah raised one eyebrow and asked, “How about another kiss?”

Sophie laughed again and eased into his arms.

An hour after Detective Michaels departed, and Sophie and Micah were just finishing their sandwiches, the squad units downstairs texted Micah a photo of his mother and Uncle Asher, each holding two bags of groceries. An officer's phone call followed shortly.

"These your relatives?" the officer asked.

Micah chuckled and answered, "Yes, they're mine."

"They'll be up in a minute," came the reply, and the line went dead.

Micah showed Sophie the sweet photo and she giggled. "Why do they have so many groceries?" she asked.

Micah shrugged. "Beats me. I just told them that I had to stay put for a little while—they must be under the impression that I'm holed up here for days." They had both called their families so that if they saw something on the news they wouldn't be alarmed.

Soon a knock came at the door, and Sophie hurried to let them in.

"Hello, Sophie!" Liana exclaimed, thrusting her bags out before her. "We brought you some supplies!"

"Thank you, Liana," Sophie replied, taking the bags.

Liana put her arms around Sophie's neck. "You look beautiful today."

"Thanks, Liana." She looked at Micah's uncle and said, "Hello Mr. Bloomfield...I can show you where the kitchen is."

"Hello, Sophie," he greeted in his regular stern tone, and perhaps he was even frowning. "You can call me 'Doc.' All my friends do."

“Okay, Doc,” she said with a smile, leading the way to the kitchen while Liana trotted in the direction of the living room.

“Everything is kosher,” Asher informed as he followed Sophie into the kitchen. “Thought I should at least be on the safe side in case I get stuck here and have to eat something...Micah probably doesn’t keep kosher anymore.”

“Oh, I don’t think we’ll be stuck here too long,” Sophie replied. “At least I hope not.” She set her bags on the counter and indicated that he should do the same. He put his bags down as well. “I can take care of these if you want to visit Micah.”

Asher nodded and turned to go, but then he turned around and looked at Sophie. Frowning deeply, he asked, “Do you play euchre?”

Sophie grinned. It had been Danny’s favorite card game, and they’d played it often with Levi and Luke when they’d visited them in the local jail. Suddenly it was one of her favorite memories. “Doesn’t everybody?” she replied.

Asher’s frown relaxed a touch, and he allowed a faint smile. “That’s good, because I brought the cards.” He turned and shuffled out of the kitchen.

Micah was up for playing cards for a little while, and they sat down at his dining room table with afternoon lattes—and some delectable pastries Liana had brought.

Asher, who was always quiet and serious, came alive during the game. His frown dissipated quite quickly, and he even laughed out loud several times.

Sophie could tell that Micah and his mother were enjoying themselves as well. They obviously hadn't done something like this in a very long time, and Sophie thanked Jesus for the opportunity.

Before they realized it, almost two hours had passed. The ringing of Micah's phone jarred them out of their impromptu party mood.

"This is Micah," he answered.

"Detective Michaels here."

"Hi Detective," he replied, looking around the table at his family. They fell silent.

"I'm afraid I have a bit of bad news," Michaels began. "It looks like McMasters made into Windsor on a fake passport—"

"You've got to be kidding me," Micah said with a frown.

"We have a picture of him at the border crossing in a rental car. The good news is that we have good extradition with Canadian authorities."

"Well, you have to find him first—and if he's got one fake passport, he probably has more," Micah pointed out.

"We'll find him," Michaels assured. "On a brighter note, we picked up three more of the gang members involved in Friday's beat-down, including the one who hit you. Stan Romano identified him a few minutes ago. I'm going to bet that this guy can lead us to whomever provided McMasters with his phony passport and we might be able to get names on any other identifications he forged."

"Okay," Micah replied, rolling his eyes.

“We talked to Benedict Lawrence a few minutes ago as well and told him that your Corktown site could commence work again tomorrow morning. I think everything’s going to be just fine over there now.” Michaels took a breath and added, “And we figured out how McMasters got into your building. First, he charmed the ladies at the gate—even set up a date with one of them—and then we pulled the security codes. He used an old contractor’s code to get into the main building.”

“A contractor’s code?”

“It’s a code that’s given to contractors who are involved in construction and things like that,” Michaels answered. “It helps them access job sites. It should have been deactivated when construction finished, but it wasn’t and Fred just got lucky with it.”

Micah shook his head and rolled his eyes again as he looked at everyone around the table. “Well, what do I do from here? Seeing as how the old fox is on the loose—he might just slip back into Detroit on another fake passport and maybe take another shot at me.”

“I don’t think so,” Michaels argued calmly. “I think his impromptu hit on you this morning was born strictly out of anger and frustration. It’s doubtful that he planned it. Ms. Young had just made it clear to him that he wasn’t going to be part of her firm. He couldn’t handle that and that’s why he showed up at your door. And I think there’s still a lot more to this story than that, but we’re still trying to figure it out. We’re going to leave a couple of squads outside of your place, and Ms. Young’s place, for the next couple of days just to be on the safe side. And we had a visit with his elderly aunt. She says that he has considerable overseas

financial resources, so considering that, I'd say that we've seen the last of McMasters for a little while."

Micah ended the call and set down his phone. He relayed everything the detective had told him, and everyone was quite surprised.

Asher looked at Micah and said, "Well, you don't have to stay here like a sitting duck. Maybe you should take a few days and come and stay at our place. Just to be on the safe side."

"And what about you, Sophie?" Liana asked. "Do you have a place you could stay for a few days?"

"Any one of my siblings, or even my mom, would take me in," she said. "And I think I will stay with one of them, just so that I can sleep at night, but I do agree with the detective on this one. Fred used to brag about how the United States would never be able to trace his overseas bank accounts."

Liana raised one eyebrow and asked, "Then why was he begging for money from his aunt?"

"That's a good question," Sophie replied.



Liana and Asher, much to the humor of Sophie and Micah, packed up their grocery supplies, along with Micah and a few of his things, and headed for their home in Beverly Hills. Sophie promised to visit as soon as she settled in with her sister and checked on things at the office. Then, along with a police escort, she

went to her home in The District, packed up a few of her things, and moved into Amanda's guest bedroom.

"I can't imagine your day," Amanda said. She was seated on the edge of the bed watching Sophie hang a few of her suits in the guestroom closet.

"It was wild," Sophie said, giving Amanda a sideways grin. "But it happened so fast I've hardly had the time to think about it. I suppose I'll have screwy dreams."

Amanda nodded in agreement. "I was sure worried when you called. Mom and Mike were pretty worried too. They'd like a call as soon as you get the chance."

"Yes," Sophie agreed. "And I think the police have everything well in hand," she said confidently. "I honestly don't think that Fred has the courage to come around again. Think about it." She sat down on the bed by Amanda and went on, "He went to all this trouble to hire people to do his dirty work—and now most of them have been caught. I don't think he has the bravado or the know-how to get the job done himself."

"I hope you're right, Sophie."

"Well, I'll definitely keep praying." She smiled then, her grey eyes shining. "And this has been such a great opportunity for Micah and his mom and Asher. I was so happy when he decided to go home with them for a few days. They brought over all these groceries and cards, and we had the best time playing euchre this afternoon." She laughed quietly. "Doc has another side to that gruff personality, and I saw a little bit of it today."

Amanda smiled and nodded. “That’s a blessing...how long do you think it will be before Asher decides to convert?”

Sophie shrugged. “I don’t know, but I can’t help but hope he’s softening to the idea.”

“That’s a big step for a faithful orthodox Jewish man to make,” Amanda pointed out.

“I know...but I’m praying for him.”

“We are too,” Amanda added.



Micah slept like a log in his mom’s guestroom. When he awakened the next morning, he was surprised to see how late it was. He hadn’t been able to sleep-in since arriving in Detroit. He wondered how in the world he’d ever sleep again after everything that happened yesterday. But his mother had prepared some kind of tea before they went to bed, and that seemed to have done the trick. There was no pain in his head, and he felt great.

“Mama’s special recipe,” he murmured as he slipped into some jogging pants and a baggy t-shirt. He reached for his phone on the nightstand beside his bed and texted Sophie,

I feel awesome this morning! How did you do?

She had driven over as promised the night before and they’d visited for a long time about the day’s events, both wondering if they’d have nightmares for the rest of their lives.

I didn't have to beg Amanda and Art to let me sleep with them, so I guess I did okay.

Micah chuckled and texted back,

Am I still seeing you for lunch today?

Yes.

He smiled.

Can't wait. And don't forget, Mom's making lunch so you don't have to worry about bringing anything.

Ok. Sounds good.

Micah sighed with contentment and found his way downstairs.

The strong aroma of his mother's freshly brewed coffee led him straight to the kitchen. To his surprise his brother Ben was having coffee with her and Asher.

"Good morning, son," Liana said with a smile. "How did you sleep?"

"Great," he answered. "I feel like a million bucks this morning."

"I came to take a look at that wound," Ben said, getting to his feet. "Hope you don't mind the house call."

Micah tenderly patted the dressing on the back of his head. "Why does it need to be checked?" he asked with a frown, not sure he wanted to let anyone touch it.

“Just want to make sure none of the stitches tore in the excitement yesterday,” Ben answered, stepping closer to Micah.

“My head feels great this morning,” Micah said.

“Just let me have a peek.” Ben stepped behind Micah and reached for the dressing.

“Ow!” Micah exclaimed, and Ben jumped. Micah laughed out loud. “No, it’s okay. I was just kidding.”

Ben rolled his eyes and reached for the dressing again. “Try to act your age, Micah,” he said, with perhaps a note of disgust in his tone.

Micah laughed again. “Okay, I’m sorry.” As Ben commenced removing the dressing, Micah asked, “Can you give me a ride somewhere this afternoon?”

“Sure, I can swing it,” Ben answered. “And you’ve had a little bleeding back here, but nothing that I’m too concerned with. We’ll clean it and get a fresh dressing on it.” He reached for the supplies on the counter, which Micah hadn’t noticed before, retrieving some gauze and a bottle of Wound Cleanser. “Where do you need to go?” He asked as he dabbed at the wound.

“I have an errand to run in Grosse Pointe.”

“Sure,” Ben answered, tossing the bloody dressing into the kitchen trash, and then reaching for more gauze. “I can pick you up after lunch. How does that sound?”

“Perfect.”