

## Chapter 13

When Eva could have visitors, it was only one at a time and Sophie and her siblings decided that it would be best for Mike to go in first. Presumably, he and Eva had a lot to talk about.

Sophie, however, managed to slip quietly past the nurses' station and she watched her mother and Mike through the glass windows of the Intensive Care Unit. He was seated close to her, holding her hand, and they were smiling into one another's eyes as they visited. It made Sophie smile to see them together. She went to the open door and politely knocked.

Eva looked up and smiled at her daughter. "Sophie, come here," she said.

Sophie obeyed and went to her mother's side beside Mike.

Mike put his free arm around Sophie's waist, then he smiled at Sophie and then at Eva and said, "This is the best day of my life."

Eva smiled at him and then at Sophie. "It's good that you both finally know. It's been a heavy burden all these years."

Sophie nodded. She couldn't imagine how difficult it must have been for her mother to keep that secret.

Sophie stayed out of the office and with her parents for the rest of the week. Benedict and Frank had their hands full with the summit, as well as Frank's extensive project in Elmwood Park, but Mort and Micah stepped up to the plate and handled emergencies like the professionals they were. What Mort couldn't figure out, Micah could, and vice versa. They made an excellent team. Besides taking care of their own work, they reworked last minute drawings that Sophie would have taken care of, and they visited sites to make sure everything was being handled in an expeditious manner.

The *Detroit Register* did another story on the summit that week, highlighting the sudden illness of Sophie Young's mother, and that there would be a prayer service for her on Friday. There was also an extensive sidebar on Micah and Mort and how they'd 'carried the summit in Ms. Young's absence.' They were surprised at the attention they received, but delighted none-the-less.

It was a clear, sunny day at in Hamtramck, and the congregation had filled the pews to overflowing for Eva Walker-Young. People were standing four and five deep in the back, some not even making it through the front door so they waited on the sidewalk. Sophie knew many people in Detroit, and apparently so did her mother.

When Sophie and her siblings arrived, Metro Police had to make a way for them into the building, escorting the family through the crowded sidewalk and into

the church. People on the sidewalk reached for Eva's children, patting them on their shoulders and offering encouragement as they made their way.

As Sophie and her siblings were taken to the open pew in the front row, she glanced around at the full church and she couldn't help but faintly smile. It was more like a celebration than a prayer service.

Benedict led a prayer and spoke with eloquence. Liana prayed for Eva as well, sharing her memories of a courageous young woman and her fight for equality. Micah had never been prouder to call Liana his mother—and he noticed his uncle Asher smiling with pride as he watched his sister speak.

Eva's children wept, but it was tears of joy. They were grateful beyond words.

After the prayer service had ended, the church put on a luncheon. The crowd of people went to the church fellowship hall, taking turns in lines directed by organized deaconesses. The congregation had provided sandwiches and a myriad of salads and desserts, and there was not a speck left over. One of the deaconesses was heard to say, "They came just like grasshoppers—ate us out of house and home!"

When most of the guests had left, and it was just the family and the deaconesses putting order back to their hall, Sophie managed to get Micah into a quiet corner.

"Hey, Benedict told me how you handled the summit this week while I was away. Thank you."

Micah appeared to blush as he turned his head away. "I really didn't do anything," he muttered.

“Yes, you did,” Sophie insisted. “Meredith kept me in the loop. She’s impressed. We’re all impressed.”

He brought his eyes back to hers, and blushed at her words. “Thanks, Sophie. That really means a lot.”

“I don’t know where I’d be without you this week,” she went on, smiling into his eyes.” She bit her lip for a second and then said, “I have a question for you...did you really want to date me in high school?”

“Yes,” he answered. He smiled at Sophie, his dark eyes shining. “You can even ask Mort...he always said that I was sweet on Sophie Young.”

Sophie nodded. “That’s really funny, because I wanted to date you too.”

Micah grinned. “I’m glad we finally connected—”

“Can I interrupt?” came a voice from behind them, and they turned to see Liana.

“Hi, Mom,” Micah said, putting his arm over her shoulders and giving her a short squeeze. “You did great today, Mom.”

“Thanks, Micah,” she replied, giving her son a smile.

“Yes, thank you, Liana,” Sophie added, reaching over to gently touch her shoulder. “We recorded the service and I think Mom will love your prayer and talk.”

Liana bowed a little and smiled back at Sophie. She looked from Sophie to her son and then back again. “But there’s more I need to say—to just the two of you.” She looked at Micah. “Asher doesn’t even know this yet, but I’m going to tell him when we get home tonight.

Micah softly frowned. “Wow, Mom, what’s going on?”

Liana looked at her son and began again, “I’ve regretted our decision to have you marry Rivka since the day you said ‘I do.’” She shook her head, took a tissue from her sleeve, and wiped her eyes. “I knew it was bad idea, but she came from such a good family. And when she finally left you that last time, I prayed that you wouldn’t reconcile again.” Liana sniffed and shook her head again. “But then you lost the firm, and you were so depressed—I wanted you back home with us...and then I got saved, and I don’t know why but I started praying about what I’d done to you and Sophie all those years ago...and I went to see Benedict.”

Sophie and Micah softly gasped in unison.

“I didn’t even know about the Architecture Summit when I went in to see him that day,” she began again. “I just wanted to make it right between the two of you, and I wanted my son to come home.” She shrugged. “And I figured if I could just find a way for the two of you to get together again, you could decide for yourselves which way you wanted to go with it.”

Sophie was nodding...the ‘missing’ bio on Micah was starting to make sense now. Poor Micah’s mouth hung open in disbelief. Sophie couldn’t imagine what he must have been thinking. They’d been played like a couple of children...but she wasn’t angry in the slightest. In fact, she was thankful.

“And even if the two of you didn’t get together, I thought maybe it would be a way to get my son back...” She swallowed hard and dabbed at her tears. “I was so worried about you...Well, Benedict knew your boss in Dallas and he said he’d call him and find out if you were worth the risk.” She smiled and patted Micah’s shoulder. “But I knew you would be, and they cooked up the scheme to get you here for the summit. I was afraid you wouldn’t come, but then you did.”

She took a breath as she looked into their shocked expressions. “I still can’t believe Benedict agreed to the deal so easily.” She took a breath and finished, “Anyway, I wanted you to know everything so that it’s all a clean slate...and...” she hesitated. “...and I might as well tell you that Benedict and I have been seeing one another on a regular basis.”

Micah was frowning slightly, but then he started to smile. He gathered his small mother into his arms and held her tightly. “Thank you, Mom,” he whispered in her ear. “That’s the nicest thing that anyone has ever done for me. And I’m happy for you and Benedict too.”

When Micah let go of his mother, Liana reached for Sophie, who’s eyes were wide with Liana’s admissions.

Liana stood on her toes to embrace Sophie. Sophie put her arms around her, holding her for a moment and then letting her go. Liana beamed. “You’re even more beautiful than your mother.”

Sophie smiled and looked at her feet.

Micah took Sophie’s hand into his own, lifting it and giving it a soft kiss. “She’s really great, Mom.”

Sophie was embarrassed at his forwardness, especially in front of his mother. But, on the other hand, it felt right and good.

Liana tittered, “Well, I have to go. I’m sure Asher wants to get out of here as soon as possible. But, who knows, maybe we’ll win him over soon.”

“Maybe,” Micah replied. He looked at Sophie and then back at his mother, “We’ll keep praying for him.”

Liana nodded, gave them each one more embrace, and then left to find her brother.

Micah turned to Sophie and asked, “Did you have a clue about all that?”

Sophie shook her head. “Not in the slightest...though, it was strange that your bio never showed up in my paperwork...until after our first lunch together.” She looked at Micah and raised one eyebrow. “It’s kind of exciting and mysterious. Especially at our age, don’t you think?”

Micah quietly laughed and squeezed her hand.

Sophie glanced around the fellowship hall and saw her uncle—her *father*—milling around with her brothers. “I’d better give him some time,” she said.

“I understand,” Micah replied, giving her hand one more soft kiss. “Take all the time you need. I promised Art I’d visit with him about a baptism class.”

They parted then and Sophie went to where Mike and her brothers were standing. He immediately put his arm around her shoulders, giving her a tight squeeze.

“I don’t even want to let you out of my sight,” he joked, but Sophie saw the tears in his eyes. With all of the visits to the hospital, and then the prayer service, they really hadn’t had a chance to visit since receiving their big shock on Monday. “I keep thinking that there are so many things we have to catch up on,” he said, his voice faltering slightly. “I’m so sorry, Sophie. I know how hard it must have been for you. I wish I would have known.”

In all honesty, Sophie, too, wished he would have known. She replied, “Your brother did a great job with us, but you took care of the most important part of my upbringing.”

Mike frowned. “What was that?”

“You brought me to church,” she answered simply.

Mike nodded. “That I did.”

Sophie looked around at what was left of her church family helping to clean up the fellowship hall. She’d never noticed until today how many African American people went to her church “Why this church?” she murmured. “You and I are white.”

“Well,” Mike began, “I was so devastated about the abortion before I left that I took a lot of crazy chances in the war. I was never shot once. Never even hurt.” He grinned slightly. “I stayed for four years, and then I came home and saw that Eva and Danny had had a child together. I thought I’d seen some awful things in the war, but that nearly killed me on the spot. Anyway, one night I was in Greektown, doing some ‘sideways living’ as Art calls it, and the next thing I know I’m waking up in a pew in the back of this church. Art’s father was a deacon at the time, and he’s the one who found me that Sunday morning. I poured out my heart and soul to that poor man. He gave me a good talking to, and I decided that this is where I belonged.” He winked. “And I thought you might like it here too.”

“I love it here,” Sophie admitted. “It’s my home.”

Mike nodded. “Mine too.” He took her hand into his own, and as he smiled into her eyes, his gave way to many tears. “I’m so glad you’re home with me, Sophie.”



Sophie's eyes were brimming as she replied, "Me too."



Sophie was awake before her alarm sounded. She glanced at the clock and then looked at the grey clouds and rain through the skylight above her bed. Monday morning. A brand-new week...and it didn't look anything like the perfectly sunny weekend they'd just enjoyed.

Shortly after the prayer service had ended, Ava's doctors told her that she would be released from the hospital on Monday morning.

"Jesus," she whispered in the early morning, recalling that Mike had promised to get Ava home from the hospital that morning, "I cannot help but wonder what You will bring me this week...Thank You for last week...It was hard, but You were there the whole time. Thank You for healing my mother—and saving Micah." She smiled. "And thank You for letting me know about my father. I still miss my dad, but You know I've always loved Uncle Mike...and I think the whole revelation made him feel closer to the boys and Amanda as well. Your kindness has overwhelmed us."

She watched the giant raindrops fall on her skylight for a few minutes, and then she slipped from her soft sheets, found her slippers and went downstairs to her Breville. It was chilly in her townhouse this morning, especially for nearly the end of June. She ground the beans, made her espresso and added it to the steamed milk.

She took a careful sip as she seated herself at her dining room table. "Mmm...delicious. Thank You, Jesus."

She peered into her Bible, which was open from the day before and started to read from Philippians: *Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

She stopped reading and thought about that for a minute...*straining forward... I pray that you help Micah to strain forward as he walks with you now...and...and...and, Jesus...that Micah and I will have a future together—*

Her prayer was cut short then when a message pinged on her phone. She glanced over at it and saw that the message had come in from Micah:

*Flat tire. How 'bout you warm up that big Caddy and give me a lift? Unless you're walking today?*

Sophie could just hear him say the words, and for some reason it made her laugh out loud. Always joking, always dry. She loved that about him. She texted back,

*LOL. I'm not walking today. I'll see you around 7:30.*

*Can't wait 😊,* was his reply.

Sophie sighed with a smile, set her phone aside and folded her hands. “Now about that future, Jesus...”

When Sophie arrived at the riverfront condominiums, Micah was already waiting outside, under an awning and out of the rain, visiting with Lamont and his children. They waved their greetings, and Micah hurried to her car.

“Thanks a million, Sophie,” he said, latching his buckle.

“No problem,” she replied, pulling through the parking lot. “How are Lamont and the kids?”

“Interestingly, they have flats as well,” Micah said. “They’re waiting for a driver.”

“Flats?” Sophie questioned, for Micah had only said that he had a ‘flat tire.’

“All four tires on both cars,” Micah clarified.

“Obviously somebody messed with your tires,” she said, pulling into traffic.

“We were the only two vehicles that were bothered,” Micah went on. “We filed a report. You just missed the cops.”

“That’s weird.”

Micah shrugged. “Maybe. Lamont says that there’s hasn’t been any vandalism since he’s been staying there, and they came over in January when they started his home remodel.”

“Well, you never know. It might just be a coincidence.”

Micah nodded, but he wasn’t so sure. It seemed odd that only he and Lamont had flattened tires out of the whole parking lot.



When Micah and Sophie walked into Design & Structure together that morning, Fred was conversing with the young ladies at the front desk.

“That old fox looks like he’s trying to sweet talk his way upstairs,” Micah murmured quietly in Sophie’s ear.

Sophie smiled and nodded. “I hope we can slip by without being noticed,” she whispered.

At that moment, Fred turned and saw them, having full eye contact with Sophie. He stretched out his hand and approached with a pretentious expression of concern.

Micah rolled his eyes as they paused for greetings.

Fred eluded Micah’s gaze as he took one of Sophie’s hands into his own, drawing her into an embrace as he said, “I’m so sorry about your mother. It was a lovely prayer service. And I hear she’s doing well.”

Micah was sickened, and instantly hot, by the maneuver, for he had yet to embrace Sophie in such a way. “Okay, back it off, big guy,” he grumbled, jutting his arm between them.

Fred did, indeed, back off, but he glared at Micah. “Do you mind?”

“Yes, I mind—a lot,” Micah declared, frowning horribly.

Sophie’s expression was surprised. She backed away from Fred slightly and managed a faint smile as she quickly replied, “Thank you, Fred. Thank you so much for coming.”

“Anything for you, Sophie,” he crooned.

Micah rolled his eyes again.

“Could we have lunch today?” Fred asked, his voice dripping with phony sincerity.

Micah’s fury was growing more by the second. He briefly admonished himself, after all he was fifty-three years old and should be able to control himself a little better—but Fred made him feel sixteen again, full of fire and strength. Before Sophie could answer, he leaned in toward Fred. “I’d love to have lunch, Fred,” he snarled.

Fred looked at Micah with disdain, leaned in toward Micah so that the two men were now toe-to-toe, and said, “Okay, Tex, you’re going to double down on stupid—”

“Morning, everyone!” It was Benedict’s cheerful greeting from behind Fred and Micah that seemed to bring down the heat. They moved apart for the older gentleman, giving him pleasant smiles as if they were merely having an ordinary conversation.

“Good morning, Benedict,” Sophie greeted.

Benedict flashed his broad, white smile at Fred. Reaching for his shoulder he said, “I understand you want to talk to me?” And he started to obviously usher him away from Sophie and Micah.

When the two were out of earshot, Sophie looked quizzically at Micah.

Micah huffed. “I suppose I should apologize, but there’s something about that guy that drives me crazy.”

Sophie grinned and took his hand into her own. “Come on. We’ve got a lot of work to catch up on this week.” And with that they made their way to their offices on the twenty-fifth floor.



Later that morning, during a scheduled meeting in one of the conference rooms downstairs, Bijou and Stan also reported that their tires had been flattened.

“You’re all connected to the Corktown site,” Mort pointed out. He was attending the meeting for some newly discovered problems with HVAC. “There’s some kind of a conspiracy at work here.”

Micah couldn’t hide his grin as he thought, *always the mystery solver*.

“The principals in that case were arrested weeks ago,” Bijou pointed out. “Since then, we have had no problems.”

“Well, it’s more than just coincidence,” Mort insisted. “I think you’d better call the detective that worked that case and give him this new information.”

They all agreed and Stan Ramono made the call.

After the meeting had cleared out, and Mort and Micah were walking back to the offices upstairs, Micah grumbled out the details of his encounter with Fred.

“I just can’t stand that guy. I feel as if he’s challenging me—like he wants me out of the picture.”

“He probably does,” Mort replied dryly.

Micah frowned. “Why would he care? He must know that Sophie doesn’t want him.”

“But what else is Sophie connected to besides you?” Mort asked, lifting one eyebrow in a quizzical way.

Micah chuckled. Mort could be so comical. “Okay,” he said as they walked along. “What else is she connected to...” He pondered the question for a moment, when suddenly the answer occurred to him. He snapped his fingers and said, “The firm. He wants to be in the firm.”

“Give the man a gold star,” Mort replied. He leaned closer to Micah and whispered, “Scuttlebutt downtown has it that he’s trying to sell out to his partner so that he can use the money to get into Design & Structure.”

Micah’s mouth fell open.

“You have got to be a huge thorn in his side,” Mort went on. “Before you came along, he had full access to Sophie. Now he has to resort to meetings with Frank and Benedict, and I can guarantee that they’re not as nice as Sophie.”

Micah smiled with satisfaction. “That old fox,” he murmured.

Mort chuckled. “Yeah, he’s an old fox alright...accent on the *old*.”

They were nearing Micah’s office by now and could see that Sophie was waiting near his doorway. Mort gave Micah a friendly slap on his back and said, “Don’t worry about Fred.” He looked at Sophie then and said, “Hey, Sophie. What are you up to?”

Sophie frowned with concern and answered, “I just heard from the detective on the Corktown case. Bijou and Stan also had flat tires this morning?”

Micah nodded and began to answer, but Mort excitedly interrupted.

“Here’s my theory on this,” he began.

Micah laughed, and Sophie couldn’t help but smile.



On Wednesday morning, as LaKeisha was going over a number of reminders for Micah, his cellphone rang. He saw that it was Wade McGregor.

“I’ll take this really quick,” he said. “Can you come back later?”

“No problem,” she replied, hurrying out of his office.

“Hi Mr. McGregor,” he greeted, getting up from his desk and quickly closing his office door.

“Hello Micah,” came the booming, Texan drawl. “Did you forget about us?”

“No, sir,” he answered, but in reality, he had. He’d been so busy with Sophie’s family and his resultant workload that he hadn’t had time to think about the generous offer McGregor had tossed his way.

“Well, what do you think? Come for a looksee? I have next weekend available if you’re still interested.”

Micah swallowed hard and thought as fast as he could. He didn’t want to wind up like Fred, looking for someone to take him in. Design & Structure was temporary. And while Rebuild & Restore was a great place to work, it probably wouldn’t give him a secure future, or retirement...and he was getting to the age where he worried about how his retirement would go.



Prayer wasn't a habit yet for Micah, so he didn't ask for Divine guidance before the answer tumbled from his mouth, "I'm still interested. I think I can make that work."

Benedict knocked on Sophie's partially opened office door and peeked inside. She was at her drafting table and looked up to give him a smile.

"Hey, Benedict," she said, getting to her feet and stretching for a moment. "Come on in. I was just getting ready to take a break."

"Super," he said, closing the door behind him.

"What's up?" she asked.

Benedict took a breath and slowly let it out. His voice was low as he said, "I just signed our firm to do the Murtock Building with Sarahi Perez."

Sophie's mouth fell open in surprise. "How in the world—?"

Benedict held up a hand and said, "And they'll need you to meet with their investors in Boston next weekend...I'll be honest, they don't want Fred unless you sign on with him. They don't trust him."

Sophie shook her head. "Well, I won't do another project with Fred."

"And they know that," Benedict went on. "And they also gave me a little tidbit that I wanted to talk to you about...maybe we could sit down?"

"Certainly," Sophie replied, indicating the comfortable chairs near her windows. "Can I have coffee brought up or anything?"

"No, this won't take too long," he answered, easing himself into his seat.

After Sophie was seated, Benedict began again, “Listen, Sophie, I’m going to retire—”

She caught her breath, placing her hand on her heart. “Why?” she whispered.

Benedict chuckled and answered, “Sophie, I’m almost eighty years old. How long did you expect me to work?”

She sat quiet, obviously speechless at his announcement.

“I’ll give you plenty of time to get things in order before I step down,” he went on. “But there’s one thing I want you to be wary of.” He took a breath and began again, “When I’m gone, Fred wants to be your new partner.”

“Are you kidding?” she asked with a frown. “Did he say that to you?”

Benedict shook his head. “No, but he said it to Sarahi. Apparently, he invited her for drinks one night, had one too many, and spilled the beans on his plans to merge with our firm.”

Sophie’s eyes were as big as saucers as she listened to Benedict.

“Now, we’re in a really good position with this,” he went on. “I don’t know what kind of a fantasy Fred’s having, but the only way he could merge is if one of our three senior partners—me or you or Frank—allowed a partnership with him. I’ve already talked with Frank, and he’s not willing to let Fred come on board. How do you feel about it?”

“No way,” Sophie answered with a definite shake of her head. “I can’t work with Fred.”

“Well, he’s going to be getting pretty desperate,” Benedict went on. “Rumor is that he needs contracts.”

“He needed the deal with the Perez Group.”

Benedict nodded. “And he didn’t get it...you know, I’ve known Fred since he was a young man. He wanted to work here before you came along, and I did consider it briefly.” He paused to chuckle and then he went on, “You remember how we used to get by? Just the three of us, drawing like crazy, morning, noon and night, just to get a few contracts. If we could put together a hotel or a restaurant, we thought we were the bomb.”

Sophie smiled and nodded.

“Well, Fred didn’t want that. His parents had left him a trust fund and he was somewhat of a playboy. He wanted to be famous, and he definitely had the talent. But he was always looking for shortcuts. He didn’t have the future in view at all, and that bothered me. I was in my fifties before Frank and I got this firm really off the ground. By that time, I’d seen a lot of changes in this town. I was in Tiger Stadium that Sunday when they set the fires in 1967, and had to get back to my apartment on West Chicago—just less than a mile from the fires. I’m still thankful that I made it out alive. I watched my home burn nearly to the ground, fought a lot of prejudices—and so did poor Frank just by being associated with me. So, in the end, I wasn’t willing to take on a hotshot architect who thought he was ready for the big time. Frank and I decided to just keep our heads down in our work, we kept drawing, and we pounded the streets looking for anybody that would sign on with us.

“And then one day, like a ray of sunshine, you walked in looking for an internship. You had that vision for the future that we needed. You could see that we needed to build relationships with highly skilled folks, no matter how long it took...” He swallowed hard and added, “And you wanted to rebuild our town. I

listened to you that day you came in and I thought to myself, ‘she’s got the talent to make it happen.’”

Sophie smiled. “I’m so glad you gave me the chance...I had an ugly, very public past that you had to overlook.”

Benedict nodded. “I was a little nervous at first—thought maybe Danny might come down and unionize everybody—”

They both laughed at that, and Benedict continued, “But then I started seeing your work and I just knew in my heart that things were going to turn around for our little firm.”

Sophie smiled again and reached for Benedict’s hand. “I understand that nobody can work forever, but you still seem so young to me.”

“It’s my black skin...we age very well, as you know,” he stated matter-of-factly.

Sophie giggled and nodded. “You do. But you still have so much talent and good sense. I don’t see how we can operate without you. Why leave now?”

Benedict sighed heavily, looked away for a moment, then back at Sophie. “I have stage three malignant melanoma, Sophie—and I’d like you to keep that to yourself. I’m in treatment and it’s going well, but just in case it doesn’t I don’t want to waste these last days drawing anymore. I want to spend these last days with Liana.”

Sophie gasped. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I didn’t want you to worry. You’ve dreamed of this summit for the last twenty-five years and I didn’t want to wreck it for you.”

She shook her head. “You wouldn’t have wrecked it...Just take as much time off as you need. We can handle it around here.”

“No,” Benedict argued. “It’s been a good ride, but I think it’s time to call it quits. Just promise me that when you go to choose a new senior partner it won’t be Fred McMasters.”

“Not on a bet,” she answered.

“I like Mort,” Benedict went on. “And your Micah is really tops in his field.”

Sophie chuckled. “My Micah?” Realization flickered in her expression and Sophie let out a soft gasp. “That’s why you agreed to bring him here.”

Benedict pretended to frown. “What are you talking about, Sophie?”

“Liana told us everything...but she couldn’t figure out why you agreed to it in the first place. It was because you knew about the cancer then, didn’t you?”

Benedict nodded. “And you might as well know, Frank was in on it too. But what we didn’t know is how well he was going to work out for this firm. You’d be foolish not to bring him on permanently, Sophie, at the very least as a junior partner.”

Sophie took a deep breath and slowly let it out. She bit her lip as she answered, “I’d love to do that, but he hasn’t said anything about staying in Detroit. I think he still wants to go back to Dallas.”

Benedict rolled his eyes. “Why anyone would want to live in that hot, humid bath is beyond me.”

Sophie gave him a sideways smile. “Well, we’re praying for him.”

“I’ll pray too...and you pray about all these things I’ve shared with you, Sophie. You’re a really smart lady, and I’ve been so proud to call you partner all these years. I know that you’ll do whatever the good Lord tells you to do.”