

Chapter 9

Stan Romano poked his head into Micah's open office door, finding him at his drafting table.

"Hey, Bloomfield," he said.

Micah looked up with a start, and then smiled. "Hey Stan. What's up?"

"We had a little trouble over at the Corktown site this morning and our safety specialist walked. I don't think he knew what he was doing anyway. He still hasn't finished prelims. Can you help us out?"

Micah hesitated. "What kind of trouble?" he asked.

Stan rolled his eyes and answered, "Just some rock-throwing...by a group of kids."

Micah raised an eyebrow. "Kids?"

Stan took a deep breath and let it out as he admitted, "Gang bangers. And I guess it was bricks."

Micah's eyes opened wide. "Was anybody hurt?"

"No."

Micah let out his breath and began to nod his head, and, against his better judgment, he answered, "Yeah. Did anybody call Sophie?"

"Benedict is already over there," Stan answered. "He told us that you'll be too busy to look at it today, so just give us a holler tomorrow."

Stan's answer struck Micah as odd because he really *wasn't* too busy to look at whatever was up in the air over at the Corktown site. He was only finishing a review for the Lafayette site. Before he could comment, his phone rang and his caller ID showed that it was Sophie. He'd texted her hours ago, but had gotten so engrossed in his work that he didn't realize how much time had passed. It was already the lunch hour.

"Catch me later," Stan said, turning and leaving Micah to answer his call.

"Hey, Sophie," he greeted with a smile. "Where have you been? Everything okay?"

"Not really," she answered. "I'm at home today."

"Oh no, are you sick?"

"Sort of. Can you come over for lunch?"

Micah heard something in her voice that he'd never heard before and his heart started to pound with anxiety. *This is it*, he thought, *I'm getting dumped. I knew it was too good to be true. And Benedict must already know or he wouldn't have told Stan that I was going to be busy today... I'll be busy alright. Leaving town.*

“Sure,” he answered quietly. “I’ll be right there.”

Micah parked his Mercedes in her driveway and sat for just a moment to collect his thoughts. *I should have never done this to myself*, he admonished. *She doesn’t want an old, fat slob when she’s got men like Fred McMasters chasing her—and whomever else is in the upper echelons of Detroit.* He sighed heavily, got out of his car and walked dejectedly to the front door.

Before he could knock, the door opened and Sophie greeted him with what appeared to be a genuine smile.

“Hey Sophie,” he said, unable to hide his forlorn tone.

“Hey, Micah,” she replied. She quickly turned and led him up the steps and into the dining room. “I ordered some sandwiches for us if you’re hungry.”

Micah noticed the flowers that he’d given her last week near the deliver bags on the dining room table. *It’s like my last meal...* It was then that he lifted his head and really looked at Sophie. He saw immediately the purple welt near her temple.

“Oh, Sophie!” He exclaimed. “Did you get mugged?”

Sophie gave him a small smile. “I really don’t know.”

Micah sighed heavily as he looked into her eyes and blurted, “Are we breaking it off? Is that what’s happening here?” *Might as well just get it over and done with.*

Sophie’s eyes opened wide with surprise. “No way,” she answered. “Why would you think that?”

Micah was so relieved at her words that he reached for a dining room chair, pulled it out, and took a seat. He caught his breath and then he smiled up at Sophie, who was looking extremely perplexed by now.

“Are you okay?” she asked.

He nodded, his smile spreading from ear to ear. “I am now.”

Sophie chuckled a little, pulled out a chair and sat down by him. She looked into his eyes and asked, “Did you think I called you over here for that?”

Micah only nodded again.

Sophie chuckled and put her hand on his forearm. “You’re making this so much easier for me.”

Micah looked into her beautiful face, and then down at the hand on his arm. He put his hand over it, taking it into his own, and then looked back into her eyes. “There’s nothing you can tell me at this point that will be worse than what I dreamed up on my way over.”

She laughed out loud at that and said, “I’m sorry that I did that to you.”

“It’s okay. I’ve been dumped before—a lot—so it’s probably just a reflex by now.” He looked at the discolored mark and found himself squinting with curiosity. “Now, where did that come from? Did they get you with a brick?”

She shook her head. “No, Micah, honestly, I don’t know where this came from...the last thing I remember is leaving the community room at my mom’s assisted living center. I don’t know what happened after that except that Mom and her neighbor found me in the hallway. I was out cold and my purse had been dumped out beside me. They took my wallet.”

“Wow,” Micah quietly replied. “I don’t know what to say.”

“Well,” Sophie began again, her eyes hesitant and obviously anxious. She took a breath and slowly let it out as she continued, “I knew I couldn’t hide this from you, and now I’m concerned that you’ll see Detroit as more dangerous than ever—”

“You don’t need to worry about that,” he said quickly, giving her hand a soft squeeze.

“Well, I am,” she replied. “I know that it’s a major concern for you.”

Micah had to agree with that. He was nervous every day about one thing or another—especially that Corktown site.

“There’s never been a problem at Mom’s assisted living,” she continued. “I think it was just some random thug. I don’t think it will ever happen again.”

Micah looked into her pretty grey eyes, seeing that sweet sparkle of life that had him addicted. He gave her a smile, squeezed her hand again, and said, “Sophie, I have started to really like it here.” Her expression was one of surprise and it made him smile again. “I’m not willing to flee just because of one random idiot. It’s going to take a lot more than that to scare me away—especially when we’re having so much fun.” He gave her a sideways smile and raised one eyebrow.

Sophie smiled.

Micah softly touched her cheek, being careful not to get too close to her injury. “I really like you, Sophie.”

“I like you, too, Micah.”

He glanced at the bags on the table and then back into her eyes. “Now how about we try those sandwiches? I’m starved.”

“Me too,” she agreed.

“And then we’ll take a big walk,” he added. “If you’re up to it.”

“I’m up to it. Is it nice outside?”

“It’s a beautiful day in the Motor City,” he answered with a smile.



The Corktown site continued to be a problem all that week, so much so that Metro Police cordoned off the perimeter of the site and put squad cars and uniformed policemen on each side. Older model, dark colored sedans continued to slowly roll by, sometimes making vulgar gestures out of the windows, and sometimes hurling verbal assaults. But they weren’t throwing bricks and bombs, and for that everyone was grateful. Benedict spoke with the investor and together they made the decision to up their private security to around the clock.

Through all that, surprisingly, Bijou stayed true to her commitment. She did most of her work within the safe confines of Design & Structure, sending envoys to visit the site if need be. Beautiful renditions of what the new classrooms would look like flowed from her gifted hands. Her drawings were meticulous; she left nothing out of order.

Micah had his hands full. Now, not only working on the Woodward and Lafayette projects, he’d added Corktown to his already very full plate. He’d never been involved in industrial projects, and he decided that he loved the work. He’d

never worked a project that had experienced a bombing and as a result he spent a considerable amount of time with his head in either a ceiling or a wall. He shucked his Gucci loafers for the durable bull hide leather boots he'd brought with him from Texas. As he soon learned, damage was damage and he could easily tell whether or not a weight bearing wall or a header would have to be replaced. Bijou took his reports in stride and made revisions.

Sophie's head continued to pound for the rest of the week. They didn't make it to the pool hall on Tuesday because of her headache, but Micah promised that they'd do it just as soon as she was feeling better.

Sophie asked a trusted friend at her church to teach her class on Wednesday and emailed her the lesson she'd already prepared. Meredith rescheduled everything else for at least two weeks down the road, and texted Sophie with updates.

Sophie and her mother visited over the telephone each day, discussing whether or not Sophie may have been spying on Jean and Fred. Try as she might, Sophie could not remember seeing or hearing from Fred the night she visited her mother. Eva was convinced that Fred had done harm to Sophie, that there was no 'random thug' in her building that day. The only 'thug' was Fred, and he was still coming and going to Jean's place on a regular basis. Sophie was inclined to believe her mother's theory.

Benedict made the call to Sarahi Perez and talks were scheduled to begin just as soon as Sophie could return to work.

In the meantime, Micah brought her lunch every day. He dropped off her dry cleaning, since he was going there anyway, and brought her some fresh flowers for

her table. He said that Fred's roses had wilted already and couldn't be used, and that Meredith had to throw them away because of the stench. Sophie laughed.

By Thursday, the swelling near her temple had gone down considerably, but there was still a dark purple mark. She covered it with makeup, and when Micah came with their lunch, he told her that he couldn't even tell it was there.



Micah offered to make Sophie one of the simple dinners he'd learned to prepare on YouTube: broiled lemon-pepper chicken. He picked her up and brought her to his spic and span condominium. "Because," he said, "an active woman like you needs to get out."

The dishes that were available to him in his kitchen were simple stoneware, nothing like her fancy china and crystal. However, when he threw down a couple of placemats on a small table by the balcony, he had to admit that it didn't look half bad. He added a napkin and bottle of Voss sparkling water. It almost looked like a quaint European bistro, he thought.

As it turned out, the chicken was superb. Sophie couldn't believe that he'd learned the recipe just from watching YouTube. He'd even steamed asparagus and made a beautiful salad with homemade dressing. He hadn't mastered desserts yet, but he'd gotten a hold of a Breville espresso and latte machine, and he just happened to have decaf.

And, as was always the case when they got together, there was a lot of conversation, and a lot of good humor. But Sophie tired easily and had to be taken home sooner than she wanted. Micah saw her eyes drooping as she finished her latte that night, and regretted having to end it so quickly.

“The Tigers start a home stand tomorrow night,” she said as he drove her home. “But I think I’m going to skip it. I don’t know if I can stand the noise. I can just watch it at home on my TV.”

“Hey I got an idea,” Micah said. “I promised to have dinner with my family, but I can come over afterwards and we can watch the game together.”

She smiled and nodded. That sounded perfect.



That Saturday afternoon they went to the grocery store together, picked up their dry-cleaning, and then headed back to Sophie’s to make steaks. She had a small grill on her balcony and Micah said that he’d learned how to grill steaks on YouTube.

“This is the best steak I’ve ever had,” Sophie commented as they enjoyed their meal on the small table near her grill. It was a little chilly in Detroit, only sixty degrees, but they were dressed in warm sweaters and jeans.

“And this salad is fantastic,” Micah replied. “How did you do you dressing?”

“Fresh lemon juice, olive oil, minced garlic and black pepper.”

“I’ll have to keep that in mind.”

“It’s my favorite.”

Micah set down his fork, reached for his napkin and dabbed his mouth. He smiled at Sophie and asked, “How’s the head today?”

“Much better,” she replied. “I think I’m going to come back to work on Monday.”

“That’s great. It’s lonesome around there without you.”

Sophie smiled as she looked into Micah’s dark eyes, praying that he’d stay in Detroit forever.

“How are you getting to church tomorrow?” Micah asked.

Sophie shook herself out of her thoughts. “I’m sorry,” she apologized with a grin. “What was that?”

Micah chuckled and repeated, “How are you getting to church tomorrow?”

Sophie shrugged. “I hadn’t thought about it. I can probably drive by tomorrow.”

“I thought the doctor said a week?”

“He did,” Sophie admitted. “But I think it’s close enough.”

Micah nodded with a thoughtful frown, and it was intensely quiet between them until he finally said, “I could take you.”

Sophie was flabbergasted. “To church?” she blurted, trying to bring her emotions under control. She wanted to jump up and praise the Lord, but thought

perhaps she should be more casual about the offer...*don't scare him, Sophie*, she thought.

Micah laughed. "Yes, to church. Would you like me to take you?"

Sophie was nodding before the words came out of her mouth. "I'd love you to take me to church."

After they'd cleaned up their supper dishes, and after one more latte, Micah had to leave. He explained that he'd been working out with some teenagers and had promised to meet them on Saturday and Sunday nights this week. Sophie thought he'd been slimming down a little and made sure to mention it before he left.

As soon as she saw his car heading away from her townhouse, she sprang up the steps and found her phone, dialing Amanda's number.

"Hey, Sophie."

"Amanda," she said, breathing hard and giggling a little.

"What's up?"

"Guess who's coming to church tomorrow?"

Amanda let out a squeal, and Sophie laughed.

The next morning, shortly before the first service was scheduled, Micah's Mercedes pulled into Sophie's driveway. Amanda had thought it best not to begin

with Sunday school, that perhaps the Sunday service would be a good enough taste of what she knew would be a little bit of a culture shock for Micah.

Sophie was waiting by her front door, dressed in a stunning Calvin Klein yellow pencil skirt and matching jacket. She wore Fendi heels in the same color, her handbag a perfect coordinate. She carried with her a small Bible with a leather cover that had seen its better days.

He hurried to open her car door. “You look fantastic this morning,” he said as she slid into the passenger seat.”

“Thank you,” she smiled. “You look great too.” And he did. Micah was dressed in his navy Hugo Boss, which seemed to be fitting him a little better these days.

Sophie’s church was located about twenty-five minutes from her townhouse, near her old neighborhood in Hamtramck.

“I’ve gone to church here since I was a little girl,” Sophie explained as they walked from the parking lot toward the older brick building. “It’s on the historical register. The original structure was destroyed by fire, so the church decided to build this one. It went up in 1925, and as we get closer, you’ll notice the Gothic Revival features in the limestone. The architect was Wirt Rowland. He loved Gothic architecture, and you’ll see that this design is in keeping with that type. Rowland preferred deeply inset windows and doorways and stepped anchors or pillars along the long aisle inside of the church, which is cruciform.”

Micah only nodded, hoping she didn’t notice that he didn’t have the slightest idea of what she was talking about.

“I did the restoration five years ago,” she added, smiling at the building. “And I only allowed Stan to help with the drawings. This has been a pretty special place for me, and he’s meticulous when it comes to churches.”

As they walked through the front doors, they were greeted by an older African American couple, who were obviously well acquainted with Sophie. Once those introductions were made, there were plenty more people to get through before they could be seated in the sanctuary—and Micah immediately noticed that the majority of the congregants were African American.

Luke and Levi rushed to greet them before they could sit down.

“So good to see you here, Micah,” Luke said, taking Micah’s hand in an enthusiastic shake.

“Happy you could come,” Levi added, reaching for Micah’s hand. “Thanks so much for bringing Sophie this morning.”

“It was no problem,” Micah said, his smile unrestrained. It felt right and good to be there, as if he was *meant* to be there.

Sophie embraced her brothers, and then her uncle happened on the scene.

“Well, hey, Uncle Mike,” Luke said, giving him a friendly slap on the back. “I thought you were in the choir this morning.”

“Sore throat.” Mike smiled, reaching for Micah’s hand. “How are you, Micah?”

“I am well,” he answered, giving Mike’s hand a shake.

“Saw you in the *Register* this morning,” Mike said, raising an eyebrow. “You sound busy.”

“This morning?” Micah had known about the article the week before, but wasn’t familiar with anything else.

Mike nodded and continued, “It was a follow up to the story they did about you last week. This week’s feature had to do with the Corktown site and how much trouble it’s been. Thankfully, you were there to save to the day.”

“Way to go, Micah!” Levi exclaimed, giving him a pat on the back, and Luke did the same.

Micah’s face turned beet red all the way down his neck as he smiled and said, “I really didn’t do anything.”

Mike laughed. “Humble guy.” He looked at Sophie. “I like that.”

Sophie smiled and nodded. She liked it too.

The choir was extraordinary that morning as they opened *with How Great Thou Art*. Sophie couldn’t stop praising in her heart what God had done for her that morning. She prayed and raised her hands in praise, with much of the rest of the congregation, but her prayer was for God to awaken Micah’s heart to the love of Jesus.

As Micah listened closely to the old hymn, he felt tears burn in his eyes, though he wasn’t sure why. He was happy to be there with Sophie, not uncomfortable in the slightest even though he was suddenly the minority, so why would he be so emotional?

When the choir was finished, Art took to the podium and began a sermon that he explained had been gleaned from the gospel of Luke, chapter fifteen. It was

about a shepherd who'd lost track of one sheep, but had left his other ninety-nine in order to find the one he'd lost.

Art was a fiery preacher. His words and delivery evoked many out-loud "Amens!" and "That's right!" even while he was still speaking. More than once during the sermon Micah couldn't help but be reminded of the words to an old Neil Diamond song...*And when he lifts his face, every ear in the place is on him...starting soft and slow, like a small earthquake, and when he lets go, half of the valley shakes...* Micah smiled and thought, *well, at least half of Hamtramck anyway...Funny, I thought Neil Diamond was Jewish, but he knows this particular preacher pretty well...*

And there were other things in the sermon that caught Micah's attention as well. At first, as he listened to the story of the shepherd leaving his flock to find the one missing wanderer, he thought it was just going to be about bad business practices. But then, as he listened a little longer, and more than once he was certain Art had looked directly at him, he started to think that perhaps he was the missing sheep. After all, his mother and his brother had recently made the change to Christianity and were quite happy with their decision. Also, this congregation made him feel right at home—as if he'd been away for a long time and had finally returned.

But making a commitment to believe that someone had died to take away his sins—and Micah felt that he had a lot of sins—seemed like a leap of foolishness rather than faith.

Soon the sermon ended and the congregation was dismissed. Art collected Amanda from the front pew and they hurried to greet Sophie and Micah. The rest of their family was still gathered together where they'd been seated.

“So good to see you this morning,” Art said with a broad smile, reaching for Micah’s hand. “Are you coming out to brunch with us?”

Micah looked to Sophie for an answer as they usually had brunch just the two of them.

“Yeah, we usually all go together on Sundays,” Luke offered, and Micah saw Sophie’s cheeks heating up.

Sophie gave Micah a shy smile and asked, “Want to?”

“I’d love to.”

Art’s favorite place was a small, corner café in Greektown that he jokingly called ‘The Greasy Spoon,’ and apparently, they went there often. Amanda’s youngest daughter met them there with Eva. They went to an earlier service in Ferndale, but tried to always make it for brunch with the rest of their family.

They pushed a few tables together and talked and laughed while they ate their meal. Micah listened to them tell of their weekly adventures, each taking the time to listen closely to what the other had to say. Whether it was something serious, or a humorous mishap, the siblings, their brother-in-law, and Sophie’s uncle and mother would closely heed what they considered newsworthy events. It was a unique dynamic and he thoroughly enjoyed it.

By the time Micah was bringing Sophie home it was late in the afternoon.

“I like your family, Sophie,” he said as he walked her to the door.

“Amanda says we’re a flipping bunch of jaw dropping miracles.”

Micah laughed out loud, and so did Sophie.

“Did you like the sermon?” she asked, working the keys in her door.

“It was good,” he answered, following her inside. “Brother Love is a fantastic preacher.”

The remark caught Sophie off guard and she guffawed. “Yeah,” she agreed, “he can get pretty excited. But he loves the Lord, and my sister, and that’s what counts for me.” She turned off her security system and looked at Micah. “Do you have time for a latte? Or do you need to get going for Nikki and Nathan?”

“I have time for a quick one.”

He followed her up the steps and into her kitchen.

“By the way,” she said, “I can tell that you’re losing weight. How are you doing it? Just working out?”

Micah was thrilled that she mentioned it, *again*. She had mentioned it last night as well and he could hardly sleep. Putting on the most casual tone he could muster, he answered, “I just started working out with these kids, and watching recipes on YouTube. And I try not to eat so much junk and take-out. And no more Mountain Dew. I used to be hooked on that stuff.”

“Well, you look great,” she complimented, smiling into his eyes.

“Thanks.” He looked back at her and thought his heart might burst. If she thought he looked *great*, he was certain that he could do anything.

That night Micah made a startling discovery just before he hurried to the exercise room. He quickly changed his clothes and ran all of the way downstairs. He flung open the glass doors and peered inside.

There they are! He thought as he made his way to the weight machine on the far end of the room. Nate was lifting, and Nikki was spotting him.

“Guys!” He called out, waving to them. “You’re never going to believe it!”

Nate and Nikki looked up and smiled.

“S’up Micah?” Nate asked.

“Fifteen pounds and three belt notches,” Micah breathed when he reached them. “I think I need new pants!” He took a couple of breaths and added, “And she noticed. She says I look *great*.”

“That’s awesome, Micah!” Nikki gave him a high-five.

Nikki helped her brother bring the weights to rest above him so that he could sit up and high-five Micah as well.

“That’s awesome, Micah,” Nate added.

Nikki frowned thoughtfully as she looked at Micah, and then she said, “You know...I was thinking. Since you’ve started to get more trim in the face, you should grow some whiskers.”

Micah wrinkled his nose. “I just like to be clean-shaven.”

Nikki shook her head. “You have this gorgeous jawline that’s starting to emerge. You should accent it with something a little glamorous—”

“Yeah!” Nate broke in, snapping his fingers. “You need a pencil beard. They’re super-fast to grow, and you look like you have enough dark features to pull it off.”

“And shave the head,” Nikki added. “Dad shaves his head, and I overheard my soccer coach say he’s hot.”

Micah chuckled, but slowly shook his head. “I don’t know guys—I’m not African American.”

“You can still pull off class, no matter what your color. Shave the head,” Nate said. “What have you got to lose? You really don’t have much hair on it anyway.”