

## Chapter 7

Sophie was awake before her alarm and she smiled at the heavens above her skylight. “Thank you, Jesus, for another day.”

She left her bed, found her slippers and padded down the stairs and into her kitchen. Her faithful Breville was already preheated. She ground the beans, made her espresso, steamed the milk, and added it to the cup.

“He comes for supper tonight!” she whispered with a smile. She took a careful sip of her favorite beverage.

She had a quick breakfast of cereal so that she had time to start a roast beef in her crock-pot. And then she showered and got ready for work, choosing a Donna Vinci pale gold suit with a pencil skirt and matching Louis Vuitton sandals, praying that she didn't have to get up on a ladder today. She threw them into her tote, laced up her sneakers, and off she went.

Meredith was already waiting when Sophie came into her office.

“Hey, Mere,” she greeted with a smile.

“Good morning, Sophie,” she smiled in return. “No problems in Corktown today.”

“Oh, thank goodness!” Sophie exclaimed. “I took a chance and wore a skirt.”

Meredith chuckled. “Stan left a message for you. His cousin had an available crew and they’ll be able to start repairs this morning. In fact, they’re probably already there.”

“But you reminded them about security’s hours?” Sophie said as she unlaced her sneakers.”

“I did.” Meredith clicked her smartphone. “Also, Niccolo left a message. He’s wondering if he could use Micah for a safety consult if he promises not to pull him off of Woodward for too long.”

Sophie slipped into her sandals and looked up at Meredith. “Certainly. Remind me, Verdino’s on the Lafayette site?”

Meredith nodded. “And they’ve run into a bit of a snag with the existing add-on. Apparently, Aiden has been bragging like crazy about Micah’s abilities.”

Sophie smiled. “I heard about that.”

Meredith grinned and looked back at her phone. “And you have a—”

A knock on Sophie’s open door interrupted them. Micah’s smiling face peaked around the frame.

“I’m sorry to bother you guys,” he said.

“It’s no bother,” Sophie replied. “What’s up?”

He stepped into the office and began, “I’m going down for a meeting with the Lafayette team here in a couple of minutes. They’ve got a problem with an add-on, and I might have to run over to the site.” He lifted an eyebrow and added, “And then I have an interview with the *Detroit Register* this afternoon.”

Sophie’s smile gave her an almost dreamy expression as she looked at Micah and answered, “That’s great, Micah.”

His delighted expression faded slightly as he added, “But I’ll miss lunch.”

“That’s okay,” Sophie replied. “Just don’t forget about supper.”

“Never in one million years,” he assured with a grin.

Meredith’s black eyes were big and round, and she tried to hide her surprise at their private conversation by burying herself in her smartphone. *Don’t they see me? I’m right here.*

“It will be ready by six o’clock,” Sophie informed, a wistful tone in her voice.

“I’ll be there,” he promised, and then he was off.

“Oh,” Sophie sighed deeply and smiled at Meredith. “Where were we, Mere?”

Meredith looked at Sophie, seeing the content expression in her eyes. Sophie was changing more every day, and every bit of it suited her better than her million-dollar suits.

“We’re here at work, Sophie,” Meredith joked with a giggle.

Sophie laughed as well.

Six o’clock couldn’t come fast enough for Sophie. She was excited to hear all about Micah’s day. Just from what she’d gotten to know about him over the last week, his life was changing fast and in a very good way: two famous architects, fawning over his work, a popular city newspaper giving him interviews...and, perhaps, *a new girlfriend?* Sophie was nearly giddy at the thought. *I’m too old to be a girl*, she admonished herself as she set her good china and crystal on the table. But her stomach felt as if she was going over a hill, and she liked it...*maybe I’m still a girl on the inside*, she considered. Her doorbell rang and she caught her breath. *He’s here!*

She hurried down the stairs and flung open the door, perhaps with more zeal than necessary, to find Micah on her front step with an enormous bouquet in his arms.

“Oh, Micah!” she exclaimed. “You didn’t have to do that!”

“Oh yes I did,” he replied, stepping through the door. “This is our first official date and I wanted to celebrate.”

Sophie giggled...*he’s so awesome!* “Well, let’s get them in some water and we’ll put them on the table. I don’t have a centerpiece right now so this works perfectly.”

They went to her kitchen where she pulled a large crystal vase off of one of the open shelves and filled it with water. She giggled again as she cut the plastic from around the stems. “I hope they fit. This is an enormous bouquet.”

“I ordered a few of everything,” Micah explained. “I wanted to make sure that there were some in there that you liked.”

She glanced at him, overcome with his sweetness, and then back at the extravagant bouquet. “I love them all,” she murmured. “It’s the most beautiful bouquet I’ve ever received.”

Micah stood a little straighter.

“There we go,” she said, fitting it all into the vase. Now why don’t you sit down in the dining room and I’ll bring you some supper.”

“Do you need any help?”

“No, I’ve got it,” she answered, hurrying to the dining table with her flowers. She placed them in the center, and then indicated where Micah should sit. He took his seat and she bustled back to the kitchen.

From the dining area, Micah heard her clanging around with the oven door, probably drawing out pots and pans of something delicious. If he wasn’t mistaken, she’d prepared a beef roast, and it smelled perfect.

Soon she appeared with a platter loaded with sliced beef, mashed potatoes, and green beans almondine.

“This looks fantastic,” he said, perusing the tantalizing display before him.

“Do you mind if I pray?” she asked.

“It’s fine with me.”

They bowed their heads and Sophie began, “Father, thank You for this time with Micah, and for his great day. Thank You for this food and for the joy I had preparing it. Please bless our conversation tonight. In Jesus’ name, Amen.” She glanced at Micah, her cheeks heating. “Woops...”

“But who else would you thank, Sophie?” Micah replied with a mischievous sparkle in his eye. “You’re a Christian. And I’m not offended.”

“Oh, good,” Sophie breathed a sigh of relief. “Okay, you go first.” And she handed him a set of tongs.

Micah was starving. He’d missed lunch, and the hardboiled eggs he’d eaten for breakfast that morning had faded hours ago. She didn’t have to ask him twice. He helped himself to a little of everything, spooning maybe a little extra of the mashed potatoes onto his plate. He was surprised when he tasted them. They weren’t mashed potatoes, but something very close. They were sweeter, and not as thick as regular potatoes, but very delicious. He made a mental note to ask her about them later.

They began their usual conversation, sharing their various stories of architectural adventure, and once again Micah had her laughing so hard that she claimed to nearly choke.

“You have such a way with a story, Micah,” she said, trying to calm her laughter.

“You’re just too easy to please,” he playfully argued, spooning himself up one last helping of the ‘mashed potatoes.’ “And these are the best potatoes I’ve ever tasted. I hope I can learn how to make these.”

Sophie looked away for a moment, and he noticed that she’d suddenly grown quiet and serious.

“What is it?” he questioned, casting his eyes around the room as if something was wrong.

“Micah,” she began, biting her lower lip. “There’s something I should tell you about those potatoes.”

Micah swallowed and set down his fork, his eyes filled with concern. “I took too many didn’t I?” he confessed.

Sophie guffawed, shaking her head. “No. But they’re not mashed potatoes.”

Micah looked into his plate, and then back at Sophie. “Well then what are they, Sophie?” he inquired.

“It’s mashed cauliflower.”

He looked back into his plate. He’d never eaten cauliflower without a healthy dose of ranch dressing.

“I just mash it up with some cream cheese and a couple of spices,” she went on. “It’s better for us than potatoes. Not that potatoes are bad, but cauliflower is better for us. Especially at our age. Plus, you can eat more of them without feeling so bloated and full.”

“Wow,” Micah breathed, deciding to take another bite. He smiled at her and gave her wink. “I knew there was something different about these things.”

When their meal had ended, and she had gotten up to clear the table, Micah arose as well, collecting his own plate.

“Oh, I can get that,” she said, “and I’ll bring you some dessert.”

“I need to help with this sort of thing,” Micah confessed, picking up his utensils and the glass at his place. “I’m really a slob, Sophie. I need the practice.”

Sophie giggled and replied, “Okay, whatever you say.” As they carried their dishes into the kitchen, she added, “Just put these in the sink for now. I don’t put my china in the dishwasher. But we can wash them later. By the way, do you want a latte with your dessert?”

“Isn’t it kind of late?”

“I have decaf,” she answered.

“I mean, isn’t it kind of late to go find a coffee place?” he explained.

“I have my own machine,” she replied. “And I usually have a decaf about this time of day.” She pointed to the stainless steel Breville on her counter. “I can do everything right here.”

Micah nodded with approval. “You know, I need one of those. Maybe you can tell me where to get one and show me how it works.”

“No problem,” she answered with a smile.

Sophie’s dessert was an incredible bittersweet chocolate mousse. She’d made it the night before, and had laughed at the memories of serving it to Amanda

and Arthur for the first time. Arthur had promised Sophie that her chocolate mousse recipe could easily win her a husband. She wondered if it really was that good, or if Art was just a really nice, albeit traditional, guy. She wasn't so sure men really cared about home cooking anymore they seemed so caught up in extracurricular activities. But Micah didn't seem to be that way, so she got out the recipe.

Making a latte wasn't as difficult as Micah imagined. After a few of them, he was starting to get the hang of steaming the milk.

They did the dishes together, continuing their conversation late into the evening. It was almost midnight before Sophie was bidding him farewell on her front step.

"I had a great time," he said, gently taking her hand.

Sophie had literal goose bumps.

"What would you like to do this weekend?" he asked.

"The Tigers are out of town. Have you been to Belle Isle in a while?" she asked.

He shook his head. "It's been years."

"I love to go out there this time of year," she replied. "I could pack us a picnic lunch and we could spend the day."

"Won't it be too cold?"

"I heard it was going to be in the sixties this weekend."

Micah only nodded and said, "I'll just bring my parka."

Sophie laughed, and he laughed in return. He squeezed her hand, smiling into her eyes. “Thanks again, Sophie. Dinner was fantastic.”

“You’re welcome.”

“See you tomorrow?”

“See you tomorrow, Micah.”

And with that, he let go of her hand and walked to his car, turning around to wave before he got in and drove away.

Sophie closed her door, set the locks and the security, and sighed with contentment. “He’s wonderful,” she whispered.



Aiden McMillian and Nicollo Verdino were so impressed with Micah’s skills they couldn’t stop boasting of their new found treasure in his abilities. Whenever there was an architectural safety question on one of their sites, they called Micah, and he was more than happy to help. Micah always scoffed it off, but Sophie could tell that he enjoyed it immensely, and for that she was grateful. She knew it was wrong, but she couldn’t help but wonder if Rivka had ever noticed Micah’s enthusiasm for his work, or had ever listened, *really listened*, to one of his stories.

Unbeknownst to Sophie, Aiden’s and Nicollo’s accolades gave Micah a surge of energy and desire as he headed for the gymnasium on the nights he couldn’t spend with her. He told all of his stories to Nikki and Nate, and they were

ruined with guffaws and uncontrollable laughter on a regular basis. Micah was starting to think perhaps he really was that funny.

When he wasn't working out with Nikki and Nate, Micah watched YouTube for cooking instructions. He thought it was the handiest invention to ever come along as it could be paused during the instruction and he could catch up with the cook's directions. On Wednesday evening he prepared the swordfish and was pleasantly surprised. He'd only set off the smoke alarm once, but that was because he'd used too much oil under the broiler. He wouldn't make that mistake again. The fish didn't burn, however, and he was thankful for that. The frozen mixed vegetables were easy enough to zap in the microwave, bag and all, and he enjoyed his first home cooked meal.

He called Sophie's cleaning service and scheduled them to come by on Thursday evening for an estimate. He made a quick peanut butter and jelly sandwich that night and picked up after himself before they arrived. They gave a reasonable estimate, and he hired them to clean his condominium every Friday.

By Friday he had two weeks' worth of dirty clothes and dry cleaning, and he dropped everything off at Lafayette Laundry on his way to work.

Though their evenings were busy, all lunches were expressly reserved for Sophie. They walked everywhere in Downtown, trying every eatery she suggested, and even a few that were off the beaten path. To Micah's surprise, Sophie had never eaten a paczki, a Polish treat of small donut pillows made with a splash of vodka, and filled with delectable jellies, cheeses and pureed fruits. They were normally purchased on the day before Lent began. It was far beyond Lent in Detroit, but Micah knew of a place that made them year-round. On Friday, he

decided to take her there. As they walked briskly in the warming Detroit atmosphere, Micah found it easier and easier to keep up with her.

“As you know I was raised in Hamtramck,” Sophie said as they hurried to a nearby bakery. “We had paczki all over the place. But Amanda said they would make me drunk and fat, so I never dared to touch one.”

Micah laughed. “I’m sure the alcohol fries right out of them. “I’ve never had a problem.”

They arrived at a small corner bakery and Micah opened the door for Sophie. She stepped in and was instantly immersed in the aroma of deep-frying pastries. She tipped her head back, closed her eyes, and inhaled deeply. She hadn’t experienced the tantalizing smell in longer than she cared to remember.

“Wow,” she breathed. “That’s amazing.”

“Just wait until you taste ‘em,” Micah said, putting his hand on the small of her back and escorting her to the counter.

“What’ll you have?” the clerk questioned.

“At least a dozen with raspberry.”

“Yes, sir.” And off she went to retrieve his order

“A dozen?” Sophie raised one eyebrow with concern. “What if we can’t work this afternoon?”

Micah laughed. “We’re not going to eat them all. I know some kids that would like to try these. They won’t go to waste.”

Though rich, the paczkis did not make Sophie drunk.

“I love these things,” she declared through a mouthful. “I can’t believe I never tried one.”

“We used to get them all the time for the hockey team,” Micah said, devouring another.

Sophie’s eyes sparkled at the memory. “That’s right, you were on the hockey team. I’d almost forgotten.”

“I even lettered,” Micah stated. “But you’d never know it now.” He gave his stomach a pat and said, “But this is going away. I learned how to make a swordfish the other night—”

He was interrupted by Sophie’s laughter once again. “What are you talking about, Micah?” she asked.

He laughed a little and answered, “I decided to eat healthier so I bought some fish and watched a guy on YouTube. I think I almost set my condo on fire—”

Sophie was upset with laughter again. “Oh, to be a fly on your wall.”

He laughed again and nodded his head. “It would probably scare you away.”

“No way,” she said, giving her head a shake, her silver strands glistening in the sun that came through the bakery window.

Micah looked at her shimmering hair flowing around her face and he couldn’t resist. He reached across the table and touched it, ever so lightly.

“Sophie...you’ve got great hair.”

She smiled back at him. “Thanks, Micah.”

They took longer than they should have for their lunches that day, unable to tear themselves away from their ever-deepening bond. For Sophie it was like a dream come true. For so many years she'd longed for someone in her life who could share her love for architecture and the city—someone she could share her dreams with and not have them scoffed at or made fun of. Micah took her seriously, she could tell. He listened intently to her hopes and plans, commenting tenderly as only a true friend could. And though it had only been a few weeks, Micah seemed to be falling in love with his old home town; and that gave her a hope in her heart that had never been there before.

When they knew they'd been gone way too long, they hurried back to Design & Structure, parted ways and entered their separate offices.

Sophie was surprised to find Meredith pacing near the windows in her office when she entered.

“What's up, Mere?” she asked, noticing Meredith's strained expression.

“There was trouble in Corktown over the lunch hour,” Meredith began.

Sophie was instantly slammed into reality. Her face fell as she asked, “What now?”

“Pipe bomb.”

Sophie rushed to the scene where Bijou and Stan waited within a group of detectives and police officers. Firefighters, their trucks, and squad cars encircled the entire work site. Yellow caution tape had been drawn around in an effort to border off onlookers.

“What happened?” she asked, pulling on the hard-hat Stan provided.

“Somebody drove by in a dark car and threw in a pipe bomb,” he answered. “One of our guys got a license plate.”

“Anybody hurt?”

“Two of my cousins’ crewmen,” Stan answered. “One of them pretty badly. He took shrapnel in his upper thigh and lost a lot of blood. He’s at Receiving Hospital.”

“I do not know about this, Sophie,” Bijou fretted, wringing her hands as she looked at the damaged building. “Perhaps we should forego this project. They do not want us here.”

Sophie put an arm over Bijou’s shoulder, attempting to comfort her. Design & Structure hadn’t experienced anything like this, even in the worst neighborhoods. She really didn’t know what to think about this latest event, but canceling seemed a little premature.

“Let’s not panic, Bijou,” Stan said with gruff, masculine matter-of-factness. He was a man who had made his home in Detroit all his life. Had even fought criminals and thugs up close and personal. There was no way he could comprehend the fear and sensibilities of this woman’s point of view. To him it was just a minor setback.

To Bijou it was already life or death. “Someone could have been killed!” she barked at him. “And one man may yet die. How much further do we go before you would call a halt to the violence?”

Stan frowned and set his jaw. “It’s just the one incident—” he began.

“It is the second,” she reminded.

“We don’t know if it’s the same group,” Stan insisted.

Bijou moved away from Sophie, taking an aggressive step toward him. She pointed her finger under his nose and scolded, “Americans take too many risks!”

Stan’s frown deepened as he leaned forward to reply. “And thank goodness we do or you’d all be speaking German,” he retaliated.

Sophie was alarmed at the rapid escalation. She quickly stepped between the two of them, keeping a tender arm on Bijou’s shoulders. “Come on, Bijou. Let’s get some tea and get away from here for a bit.” She looked at Stan and asked, “Can you handle it from here? With the police and everything?”

Stan nodded.

Sophie coaxed Bijou into the company car and drove her back to Design & Structure. When they arrived in Sophie’s office, Meredith had already prepared two steaming cups of tea, and there were familiar pastries waiting for them as well. Sophie frowned as she looked at the treats on her desk.

“Is it Paczki?” Bijou breathed, taking a seat in one of the chairs in front of Sophie’s desk, immediately reaching for one.

“I believe it is,” Sophie acknowledged, completely stymied as to how they’d gotten there. She remembered Micah saying that he was taking the rest of the treats for some kids he knew.

Meredith peeked around the door, and Sophie caught her eye. She walked over to Meredith, leaned close and whispered, “Thank you for the tea.” She

glanced over at Bijou, watching her take a delighted bite out of the Paczki. “Where did those come from?”

“Micah thought they might help soften the blow,” Meredith whispered. “He said that they’re Bijou’s favorites.”

Sophie smiled faintly. “Wow, he’s the best.”

Meredith nodded. “He really is, Sophie. He really is.”

Micah joined his family for dinner again that evening, and, again, noticed how strange his mother and brother were behaving. They could barely look him in the eye during conversation, yet they didn’t appear to be filled with guilt or anything like that. However, they definitely had a secret of some sort.

“How’s the job going, Micah?” Asher questioned. “I’ve seen some reports in the paper about trouble on one of the worksites.”

Micah nodded. “Two men were hurt pretty badly this afternoon, one of them critically. But the last update I received said that they were both doing much better.”

“And do you like what you’re doing here in Detroit?” Asher continued.

Micah smiled at his elderly uncle and answered, “So much better than I had expected.”

“That’s good,” his mother chimed from the other end of the table, pretending to focus on her food. “What’s Sophie like to work with?”

Micah's smile grew broader, and he was suddenly the one looking into his plate. "She's the smartest architect I've ever met."

"Saw your interview in the *Register* this morning," Asher added. "You sound like a Detroit pro already."

"Thanks, Asher."

"So, how often do you see Sophie?" his mother asked.

The question surprised Micah. *Why is she so interested in Sophie?* "Every day," he answered. "Why?"

Liana shrugged her shoulders, continuing to stir around in her plate. "She just seems like an interesting person. She's still such a pretty lady."

"One of my friends saw the two of you at lunch the other day," Ben broke in, stirring his plate in much the same way his mother was, attempting to ask the question in a nonchalant way.

Micah felt his face grow warm. He took a breath and looked at his brother, who wasn't looking back at him, and he couldn't help but smile as he answered, "We go to lunch together every day."

Liana dropped her fork, and then laughed nervously, perhaps to cover her surprise.

"Okay," Micah said, taking a deep breath and placing his napkin beside his plate. "What's going on around here?"

Asher rolled his eyes and took a drink of his water before he looked at Micah and answered. "It's been like this for weeks, Micah. They go to church

now.” He frowned at his sister and her son, and then looked back at Micah. “It’s making them act like a couple of yahoos.”

Ben and Liana swallowed so hard at that moment that Micah heard them. He looked their way, trying to find his voice. He finally managed to say, “We’re Jewish.”

“Of course, we’re Jewish,” Asher barked. “I just hope they can get this out of their system so that we can go back to being a regular Jewish family.”

Liana and Ben only politely smiled, but said no more.

It was silence around the dinner table after that. All that could be heard were the clanks of forks and knives as they finished their meal.

“What does Asher mean about you and Mom going to church?” Micah whispered as he dried the dishes for his brother.

Ben took a deep breath, let it out, and began, “We’ve converted to Christianity.”

Micah was aghast. “What?” he whispered.

“It’s hard to explain,” Ben went on. “It just all makes so much sense.”

“So, you believe that Jesus was our foretold Messiah? Is that what you’re telling me, Ben?”

Ben slowly nodded. He looked at Micah with a smile and said, “I’ve been working in the ER for a long time and I’ve seen some things I can’t explain. This past January three guys from a car accident were brought in. One was in really

tough shape. I almost didn't even call the trauma team. I thought he was as good as DOA. But these people who'd seen the crash had followed them all in and asked if they could pray over the injured. I said 'yes' because I didn't think it would hurt anything. And wouldn't you know it, the guy's vitals rallied? I immediately called a trauma team. In the end, he made a miraculous recovery." Ben paused to shake his head and smile. "Those people came to the hospital every day to pray, and one day I asked them why they did what they did. They weren't shy about their answer, that's for sure, and the next thing I knew I had decided that I wanted to ask Jesus to forgive me. I told Josie first, and she jumped on board right along with me. The kids have never been to Synagogue so it was easy to tell them about Jesus. They believed right away. Then I told Mom and Asher, and Mom decided almost immediately. Asher is still on the fence."

Micah was speechless. Certainly, he knew the Salvation message, but they were Jewish. Though they hadn't attended Synagogue for many years, they were still Jewish, weren't they? They didn't need to worry about a Savior.

"I was planning on telling you," Ben went on. "But the time never seemed right...until now."

"Wow," Micah breathed. "Well, how do you like it?"

"I love it," Ben answered.

Micah was quiet as he considered his brother's story, and then he thought of Sophie, such a dedicated, sweet woman. "Sophie's a Christian," he said quietly.

Ben nodded, and then they said no more.



It was only fifty-four degrees in Detroit when Micah picked up Sophie for their date to Belle Isle. He was wearing a heavy sweater and blue jeans, but his parka waited for him in the backseat, just in case.

“Just in case of what?” Sophie asked with a grin.

“We’re going to get rain later today.”

Sophie chuckled. She’d worn a heavy sweater, blue jeans and rain boots, just in case. But she thought the parka was perhaps a bit over the top.

“How is Bijou?” he asked as he pulled into traffic.

“She’s better,” Sophie answered. She gave him a sweet smile and added, “Thank you for the Paczki. She loved it, and I think it helped to calm her down.”

“Oh, that’s no problem.”

“How did you know?”

“I saw her with some on that first day.” He changed lanes and asked, “So is she going to leave the project? Mort thinks she’s leaving. So does Stan.”

“I don’t know yet,” Sophie answered. “She was pretty shook up.”

“I’d be nervous,” Micah admitted, glancing at Sophie.

Sophie nodded. “It’s definitely a worry. Hopefully the police can get these hoodlums locked up before they cause any more trouble.”

“Do they have any leads?”

“They have a license plate and a fingerprint. They’ll let us know as soon as they find out something.”

“You know,” Micah said as he parked the car. “I’ve never visited the Belle Isle Aquarium.”

Sophie’s head snapped around to look at him. “You were born and raised in Detroit and you’ve never been to the aquarium?”

Micah nodded. “We used to come down to the park to throw the Frisbee, but I never took the time to visit the aquarium.”

“Well, you’re going to love this,” she promised with a smile. “Come on.” They got out of the car and started for the front door.

“I haven’t been here since they hung the new lighting,” Sophie said as they walked in. “I’ve been curious as to how that turned out.”

The entrance to the aquarium was quite stunning. The arched, vaulted ceiling was covered with green opalite glass tiles, creating a peaceful hue that enveloped the entire room. The floor was mosaic tile and it reflected the color of the ceiling. Large aquariums lined the walls, as well as stood singular in the center of the building.

“Wow,” Micah breathed. “This is beautiful.”

Sophie nodded. “It was designed by Albert Kahn, one of Detroit’s foremost architects back in the day.” She looked at Micah and raised one eyebrow as she said, “The Corktown site was designed by him.”

“No kidding,” Micah replied.

“His brother was an architect as well,” she went on. “In the late 1800’s they came up with this method to swap out the wood in factory walls, supports and roofing, with reinforced concrete. They were geniuses for their time.”

“I can’t believe I was never interested in this place,” Micah murmured, stopping to admire one of the aquariums near them.”

“Albert Kahn also designed the Fischer Building, which I *love*,” Sophie continued. “His father was a rabbi, but his mother loved art. I suppose that’s where the beauty in his work comes from.”

They spent quite a bit of time in the aquarium, admiring the architecture, and the fish it encased. Kahn was one of Sophie’s favored architects, and she shared quite a bit of what she’d learned about him as they went through what she called his ‘work of art.’

Micah found himself thinking, *why didn’t I learn this when I was in college?*

As the clock rolled toward noon, Sophie suggested that they get their picnic basket out of the car and find a place to have lunch.

It was still chilly in the park and only a few visitors could be seen here and there.

“It’s still kind of cold for a picnic,” Micah commented as he helped Sophie spread the blanket on the ground.

“I brought some hot coffee,” she said, setting the basket on the blanket. “It will be fun. Besides,” she pointed at two teenagers not far from them sitting on a blanket with a basket between them. The boy wore a school letter jacket, and the

girl was in a heavy sweater. “Other people seem to be okay.” She took a seat on the blanket and patted the space across from her.

Micah playfully frowned as he sat down where she’d indicated and said, “They’re young. They’re stronger than we are.”

Sophie laughed. She was already going through her basket. “Here,” and she handed him a sandwich wrapped in wax paper, “have a bite and tell me what you think while I get you some coffee.”

Micah unwrapped the sandwich and took a generous bite. Of course, it was delicious—probably not as awesome as the ‘mashed potatoes’ she’d served him earlier in the week—yet easily the best sandwich he’d ever been served.

“Are you some kind of a gourmet?” he asked through a mouthful.

“No,” she answered with a smile. “I just like to experiment with leftovers.”

“This is a leftover?”

“Yes,” she replied, handing him a cup of coffee. “It’s from the roast we had the other night. Try a big bite and then a sip of coffee. You’ll love it.”

Micah took another bite, and then a small sip of coffee. “Incredible,” he admitted. “What else do you have on this thing?”

“Green onions and red peppers,” she answered. “Oh, and I threw on some tomatoes and banana peppers. But I was out of lettuce.”

“I don’t even miss it.” He took another huge bite and a sip of coffee. The flavors suited one another perfectly.

The top of Sophie's picnic basket slid off to provide them with a table-top on their blanket. She set their coffees there and retrieved some strawberries.

"These are from California," she said, popping one into her mouth. "I was in Oxnard one spring and I saw the workers picking strawberries and loading them up into trucks. It was so fragrant I almost had to leave my worksite and get a strawberry for myself." She laughed at her memory, ate another one and added, "I always think of that every time I have strawberries."

Micah saw her sweet smile as she enjoyed the memory, wishing that he had shared it with her.

"Oh, look at that," she suddenly whispered, nodding her head in the direction of the teenagers.

Micah looked at them to see that the boy had gotten up off of the blanket and was putting his letter jacket on the girl's shoulders.

"That is so sweet," she whispered. "What a good boy."

Micah looked at Sophie, watching her gaze upon the tender scene, wondering what she was thinking. He knew that she hadn't experienced anything like that in high school. Did she regret that? Was she thinking about that? Was she sad about that? She didn't seem to be. She appeared happy as a lark about a trip to an old aquarium and lunch in the park. She had something within her that was different, and he could feel it—like he'd felt with his brother and mother...

"I have left over mousse for dessert," she said, jarring him out of his thoughts. She refilled his cup and smiled. "Did you warm up?"

He nodded for he hadn't even noticed the temperature since they sat down.

“Good. Because I need to go for a huge walk next.”

Micah jokingly rolled his eyes in order to make her laugh, which she did. Her grey eyes and the silver strands in hair sparkled in the sunshine, and he knew in that moment that he wanted to spend the rest of his life making her laugh.