

THE SPERLING FAMILY – ANJULI’S FIRST DATE WITH MICAH

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SHE PARKED THE car under the bridge across the street from the restaurant and sat there. It was an old habit she couldn't break, arriving early. Looking at her watch, she had arrived almost a half hour earlier than when they were supposed to meet. She adjusted the mirror and checked her makeup; she needed to freshen up her lipstick. All of it must have been on the bottle of water she sipped through traffic.

Anjuli watched her cars come and go, along with their passengers entering in and out of cars. A young couple parked facing her and stole a kiss before they exited their respective doors. Then she watched them giddily lock hands as they headed toward the sidewalk to cross the street in the glow of the streetlamps. Why hadn't she let him pick her up, she admonished herself. But, she knew why. She was ashamed of her neighborhood and her modest little house. Plus, she didn't want her neighbors that seemed to spend more time outside than in, judging her for the expensive car he was sure to pull up in. He was a Sperling after all. Everybody in Philly knew that the Sperlings were loaded.

Checking her watch again, she decided to go in to Warmdaddy's and wait. From the number of people coming and going, it would be embarrassing not to get a table. After all, she had recommended the place. She had overheard a few co-workers talking about it and thought it would be a good idea to try. At least, she could have a conversation with them about something. Rarely did she contribute

to their conversations, though she didn't think that they minded. They gave her the impression that she was invisible anyway.

"Do you have a reservation?" the young lady asked Anjali at the door.

"I'm not sure," she answered, taken aback by the question. She hadn't thought of that. Reservations were made by her for only special occasions. Was this special, she thought as she looked around toward the dining area and the bandstand. It didn't look special.

"Yes, we have a reservation," Micah said over her head, startling her that he was there behind her. "It's under Micah Sperling."

"Yes," the woman looked down at a list and checked it off. "We have you down for a party of two."

"That's correct," Micah said, letting his arm slide into Anjali's leading her behind the hostess to a table.

"Is this too close to the band? Or would you prefer to be by the window?" The young woman asked.

"This is fine," Micah said, holding a chair for Anjali. "You are early," Micah said, taking the seat on her right.

"You are, too," Anjali said as she smiled from ear to ear uncontrollably and hoping she wasn't looking too silly as a result. But, she just couldn't help it. It was official. She was on a date with Micah Sperling. Slap me, she wanted to yell. Wake me up.

"You are looking very...businesslike," Micah said, wiping the smile off of Anjali's face.

She looked down at her outfit, a pantsuit and button down silk blouse.

“Just kidding,” Micah said, touching her hand. “I was just expecting you to be a little softer tonight. Why don’t you come out of that jacket? Or, are you cold?”

“No, no. I am not cold,” Anjali peeled quickly out of her jacket so fast, she shocked herself.

“Feel better?” Micah asked. “I want you to feel comfortable. I didn’t ask you out to discuss work, if that’s what you thought.”

“No, no, no,” Anjali said, not knowing what else to say. She in extremely unfamiliar territory not having had many dates in her entire life. Not that she wasn’t enough attractive enough to garner attention, but she was always busy with other things like school and then work and more school and more work. As the cycle of her life occurred to her, she sighed.

“It’s okay,” he said, touching her hand and then her cheek with a hand softer than her own. It smelled good, too.

“Why did you ask me out?” Anjali asked as she stared into his deep, dark eyes that looked even sexier in the lowlight of the restaurant than they did across the conference tables at work. That question had been on her tongue for two days since he had first asked her out. There had to be a good reason why a man who appeared to be as comfortable on the cover of Ebony or Black Enterprise as he was walking past her in the mornings getting on the elevator. A few times, she had quickened her step to try to make the same elevator to ride up with him. He intrigued her. Always had. The shocking revelation that he had noticed her floated off his lips with a casual, can I take you out Saturday? Are you available? At least a deer wouldn’t have tripped over its feet in his set of headlights and that’s exactly what she had done. He had reached out and balanced her before she awkwardly said yes and then recommended this place. She wondered if her co-workers had

heard the exchange. Was she going to Instant Message gossip topic by Monday morning? She could only hope her life would be that exciting.

“Curious,” Micah answered. “You have this big brain under all of those braids. I like women with brains.”

“And braids,” Anjuli touched hers. He had better like them. She had in the chair at her girlfriend’s salon getting a new set since early this morning. This set was so fresh, her head still ached slightly from all of the pulling and tugging done to get them into the rest of her hair.

“Braids are nice,” Micah said, but Anjuli could tell his eyes were lying. After all, he was much more used to all of that naturally curly, wild hair that his sister-in-law, Kali, was always flinging around.

“So you asked me out to pick my brains?” Anjuli moved her hand from under his. “Then this is about work.” She had the urge to put her jacket back on. There was a noticeable drop in the temperature in the room.

“Touchy, aren’t we?” Micah waved at the waitress. “Let’s get some drinks and relax a little.”

As the waitress placed their glasses of wine in front of them, the band started setting up.

“You do like music, don’t you?” Micah finally said.

“Yes,” Anjuli said toying with the wine. This was something else she wasn’t accustomed to. She didn’t drink at all. Never acquired the taste for alcohol, but she took a sip and immediately wanted to spit it out.

Micah started laughing, tilting his bald head back and then shook his head.

“How old are you again?”

“Really,” Anjuli answered testily.

“At least in your 30’s, right?” Micah asked.

“34.”

“You have led a very sheltered life, haven’t you?” Micah asked again.

“Not that sheltered. If you have forgotten, I am a forensic psychologist. I was on the Philadelphia police force for three years, went through all of their training before your company convinced me to come work for you. I have seen a lot and I have done a lot. I have been to nine countries already. Can you say that?” She asked wanting to reach into the air and pull the words back into her mouth. She wasn’t talking to the charmingly, disgusting drug addict down the block whose level of travel was to Camden or New York.

Micah laughed even harder than the first time. “I like a woman with spunk, too. I need to get you out more, away from all that pathological and psychological data.”

“I like my data,” Anjuli took another sip of wine and the second sip didn’t taste as bad.

“You remind me of someone,” Micah leaned over and brought his face close to hers. “You reminded me of how much I miss that someone. Damn, you are a lot like her.”

“I’m sorry. Am I a replacement date?” Anjuli asked and Micah leaned his head against hers.

“No one. No one. Not in this lifetime could ever replace her,” Micah sat back into his chair and drained his glass of wine. He signaled for another from the waitress. “I think we need to remind her to take our orders before the band gets too loud in here. Don’t you agree?”

Anjuli nodded her head and wondered if he already knew who she was and was just toying with her.