**Chapter Eighteen**

*Dreams, Departures & Delights*

Michael’s heart dropped in his chest. His voice had become lost and his entire body stiffened. He didn’t have the courage to turn around and face the young person who just addressed him as their parent. Knowing who it was, the Pop star just stood with his back towards the bedroom door hoping the young child would just close the door and walk away.

“Daddy?” The little one said again to no response.

Michael suddenly heard tiny footsteps approaching him. His heartbeat was rapid and his breathing accelerated. He looked down and noticed a small reflection of a boy with slightly shaggy hair walking towards him against the hardwood floor. The shadowy figure made Michael close his eyes and pray that what was happening was just a dream.

He then felt a small, gentle tug on his left pant leg.

“Daddy…”

Michael gasped lightly to himself. The voice he was hearing, the shadow he was seeing, the child clinging to him was none other than his own son. His eyes began to fill but he did not cry. He gathered himself together and turned around keeping his eyes closed for a brief moment. The young boy let go of his father and stood in front of him wondering why his daddy wasn’t responding to him.

Michael then slowly slid down to the hardwood floor on his knees and opened his eyes seeing the young child before him for the first time. The adorable little toddler jumped into his father’s arms and hugged his daddy as tightly as he could wrapping his little arms around his neck. Michael placed his right hand at the back of the young boy’s head and kissed his hair and ear. The two of them stayed that way for several minutes without saying a word to each other.

“Where could he be?” Jasmine asked meeting Diana and David in the foyer.

“I have NO idea.” I said sounding completely hysterical. “He couldn’t have opened the front door, he’s not big enough to reach the handle.”
“He must still be in here somewhere.” David explained. “Doesn’t Michael have a panic button if something happens in the main house?”
“Yes, but he’s just a child. I don’t want all of Michael’s security and staff to know he’s missing and cause a riot. On top of that, Michael will most likely have a heart attack if he discovers his child that he hasn’t even met yet is nowhere to be found.”
“Let’s check upstairs again.” Jasmine said running up the grand staircase.

David noticed the door to the master bedroom was slightly open. He peaked inside and saw both father and son locked in an embrace. He stood by the door and signaled the others to join him without saying a word. Diana’s face lit up and Jasmine couldn’t help but cry tears of happiness for her friend and fiancé.

“We should leave them alone.” David whispered as he and the others quietly went back downstairs.

“Don’t cry…” Michael whispered in his son’s ear trying to calm him down. “I love you.”
“I love you too, daddy.”

The young boy pulled away from his father and smiled brightly.

“You have a cute little face.” Michael said pinching the young boy’s cheek.
“So do you.”

“What’s your name?”
“Michael Joseph Jackson.”

The Pop star bit his bottom lip and smiled to himself. *She gave him my name*.

“That’s my name too.”
“I know.”

“You do?”
“Yes, mommy told me.”
“How old are you?”
“Six.”
“Can you show me with your fingers how many that is?”

The young boy lifted both hands in front of his daddy and showed him the correct answer.

“Very good. Are you in school?”

He shook his head yes.

“Can you spell your name?”
“Yes.”
“Will you please show me?”
“Okay…”

Michael grabbed his son’s cute little hand and lifted him in his arms. The child quickly grabbed onto him and wrapped his arms around his back hugging him forcing Michael to stop walking and hug his adorable son back.

“I love you daddy…”
“I love you more.”
“Please don’t leave me.”

Michael’s heart began to slowly melt. He lifted his child in the air above his head and rubbed his nose against his.

“I promise I will never do that.” He said pecking his tiny cherry lips. “I love you so much.”
“I love you too.”
“My handsome little prince.”
“Prince?”
“Yes. You’re my prince.”
“Thank you, daddy.”

“You’re welcome.”

Both Michael’s then left the bedroom and headed downstairs.

Marie sat at the kitchen table drinking a glass of milk sulking to herself. Her best friend betrayed her, she had no man in her life and the only job she had was working for Diana’s business. Knowing she had to make some major life changes, Marie came to a decision. One that she knew would probably hurt Michael and the others but it didn’t matter to her. She needed to take care of herself. Especially now that she was going to be completely on her own. She ran to the cottage house, pulled out a notepad and black pen from her backpack and sat at the small wooden desk near the bed. She then opened the pad of paper and started writing.

Diana, Jasmine and David heard giggling noises and ran to the foyer seeing Michael and his newly discovered son coming down the grand staircase together. David smiled brightly and Jasmine became teary eyed again.

“We’re going to my study for a minute.” Michael said. “He’s going to show me how to spell his name.”
“He has YOUR name, Michael.” I said trying to make him happy.

“I know that.” He spat back angrily. “He told me upstairs.”

“I’m glad you two are doing ok and getting along so well.” Jasmine said.
“We’re fine.” Michael replied as he and little Michael walked away heading towards his office.

The three adults stood in the foyer wondering if what they just witnessed was real or only in their minds.

“What the heck was that?” Jasmine asked. “He acted like he doesn’t even know us!”
“He’s with his son, Jas.” David explained. “They’re in their own world right now. Let them have their time together.”
“He totally blew me off.” I said feeling offended. “I can’t believe he just brushed me off like that.”

“I don’t blame him.” Marie replied. “He doesn’t like liars either.”

“Marie, knock it off.” Jasmine said. “We know you’re angry but don’t need to hear your negative attitude.”
“Well, you won’t for much longer.” She said getting everyone’s attention. “I’m going home tonight and moving back to New York as soon as possible.”

**LATER THAT EVENING**

Both Michael’s were enjoying their time together. The Pop star showed his son all of the famous attractions at his home including the theatre, animal sanctuary and amusement park. In an effort to make up for lost time, both father and son did everything they could together in a matter of hours. Jasmine and David watched from afar and smiled happily knowing Michael had another reason to be happy.

As for Diana – she was happy for her fiancé but hated the way he was treating her. She knew things would be difficult but couldn’t help but feel insulted for the way Michael and Marie were treating her. Being placed on the back burner wasn’t something the beautiful CEO of TSG was used to. After being the center of attention for so many years, having a child come between her and her soon to be husband wasn’t something she could easily accept. Even if it was her own child.

Not wanting to disturb Michael and affect his good mood, Marie left Neverland and went home without saying goodbye to anyone. Her news of moving back to New York came as a shock to everyone. Jasmine thought Marie’s decision was simply based on anger and nothing else. David’s theory was Marie was starting to feel more alone now than ever before due to the fact that everyone was moving forward with someone while she was still alone and lonely. Having her two best friends keep something so massive from her for so long was also a large contributing factor in her decision to move.

Kai and Bev were filled in on the entire situation and once again, Neverland was starting to come back into the light. Jasmine and David wanted to leave so that Diana, Michael and their son could have some private family time but Michael insisted the two stay over and join in his new found happiness.

Michael introduced his son to Paris and the young boy jumped up and down with happiness. He briefly held his baby sister in his little arms and kissed her forehead. Diana was feeling left out and knew Michael was just trying to spend time with his son but also couldn’t help but feel offended by her fiancé’s hurtful behavior. Ignoring her was definitely not a mature thing to do but Diana also had to keep in mind that her significant other wasn’t exactly the type of person to hate and ignore people intentionally. She decided to stay patient and take Jasmine’s advice to give him time.

“Jasmine? David? Can I please speak to you both in private?” Michael asked as he came into the living room with his son.

“Sure, Mike.” David said getting up from the couch.

“I’ll be right back.” The Pop star said to his little offspring kissing his button nose. “Stay here with mommy, ok?”
“Yes, daddy.”
“Good boy.”

“I love you.”
“I love you more.”

He kissed his forehead gently then left to go to his study with his tea flower and her husband. Little Michael ran to his mommy and sat next to her on the couch clinging onto her arm.

“How’s my little man?”
“Good, mommy.”
“Are you having fun with daddy?”
“Yes!! He took me on the pony ride.”
“He did?”
“Yes and we had lots of ice cream.”
“I can see that.” I said pointing to a small stain on his white shirt.

“Oops! Sorry mommy.”
“That’s ok. I can get it cleaned.”

“I love daddy.”
“He loves you more.”
“I love you mommy.”
“I love you too, Michael.”
“Are you and daddy going to be together forever?”

My heart sank in my chest.

“I hope so, honey.”
“I hope so too.”

I playfully messed up his hair and hugged him tightly.

“Daddy gave me a name, mommy.”
“He did? What is it?”
“Prince.”
“Wow! Do you know what prince means?”

The young boy shook his head no.

“The son of a king.”
“Daddy is a king?”
“Yes, baby he is.” I explained. “You know how everyone calls daddy ‘the King of Pop?’ well, since you’re his son that makes you a prince.”
“WOW!”

“Isn’t that great?”
“Do you have a name, mommy?”
“I do. I’m his queen.”

“Qeen?”
“No, Michael. QUEEN.”
“Qeen?”

I kissed my son’s cheek. His innocence was a striking resemblance to his father’s.

“Q U E E N, Michael.”
“Qeen!”
“You little bugger.”

Diana tickled her son constantly until he almost fell over. It was apparent that she loved him and he loved her right back. She hoped it would only be a matter of time before the four of them could leave the past behind them and become one big happy family as a married couple.

“Have a seat.” Michael said as he, Jasmine and David entered his office.

“Is everything ok?” Jasmine asked.

“Yes. I just wanted to discuss a few things with you two.”
“What’s on your mind?” David asked.

“First, I want to say thank you.” Michael said smiling beautifully. “You two were there for my son when I wasn’t and I will always be grateful and indebted to you for it.”

“No need to thank us, Michael.” Jasmine said. “We’re all friends and soon to be family. It’s our job to be there for each other in good times and bad.”
“That’s very sweet.” Michael said. “I also wanted to tell you both that I hold no grudges against either of you. I love you both very much and you will always be welcome here in my home.”
“Thank you.” David said. “Anything else?”
“Yes, do you two want anything from me?”

“From YOU?” The Averson’s asked.

“Yes. You raised my child for six years. I know there is no gift that could ever express my gratitude but it’s only fair that I give you something in return.”
“We can never take money from you.” David said. “We just wanted little man to have a proper upbringing and fill his life with joy.”
“You certainly did that.” Michael said. “Are you sure I can’t give you anything?”
“Actually…” Jasmine said. “There IS one thing…”
“What would tea flower like to have?”
“To see you and Diana become husband and wife.”

“I second that.” David said.

“If it’s meant to happen then it will.” Michael said.

Jasmine and David looked at each other concerned about the Pop star’s vague response.

“Michael….are you having second thoughts?” David asked.

“Yes.”
“NO, Michael!” Jasmine yelled. “YOU CAN’T!”
“Why can’t I?”
“SERIOUSLY?”

“Yes, tell me.”
“Because you two belong together! You’ve both been to hell and back! Why would you throw all of that away now?”

“Why would you agree to keep my son a secret from me for so many years?”
“Michael, I didn’t want to at first. I told you what happened.”
“She’s telling the truth.” David explained. “We didn’t want to keep him away from you for this long. Jasmine was on Diana’s back for months about telling you since before you all left for Europe. I don’t want to point fingers or assign blame, but it was Diana whose chose to keep it a secret for such a long time.”

“I even told her that I would tell you myself if she didn’t.” Jasmine said. “David and I always thought of you and told your son stories about you every day. He has your albums, your posters, and your picture under his pillow. He’s dedicated his entire life to you so far.”

Michael’s eyes began to fill. He felt conflicted. What was he going to do? Marry the love of his life who deceived him? Or leave her and try to raise his two children completely on his own? What would he tell his mother? What would the media do? What would they say?

“You’ve both given me a lot to think about.” He said standing up from his chair. “I’ll keep all of this in mind when making my final decision.”
“Please, Michael. Don’t leave Diana.” Jasmine said. “I beg of you.”
“I know she’s your friend, Jasmine.” Michael said. “But this is my life. I already made the mistake of marrying the wrong person once. If I were to marry again, I have to make sure I won’t regret it this time.”

“You won’t if Diana Dean is your bride.” David said. “We’re not trying to force you into anything, but for the sake of your children, please give it some serious thought.”

“One more thing before I forget…” Jasmine said. “There’s a very important reason why Dr. Baler sent that medical questionnaire today.”
“I forgot about that.” Michael said.

“Talk to Diana about it. She will explain everything.”

Michael then shook David’s hand and hugged his tea flower before the three of them walked out of his study towards the living room. When the three of them saw Diana and little Prince kissing and hugging each other, Michael’s heart skipped a beat and his gorgeous smile beamed across his entire face. The people he loved most in the world were together at his home and in that moment, everything Diana had put him through suddenly didn’t matter anymore. He wanted to make things work no matter how difficult it would be. He loved Prince. He loved Paris. He loved Diana. It was obvious – Michael loved his new family.

**A WEEK LATER**

Jasmine and David moved little Michael’s things into the main house at Neverland. Diana spent the last few days decorating her son’s room to his liking and Marie was still not on talking terms with her two best friends. Jasmine tried calling her several times but Marie never returned her calls and submitted her letter of resignation to Diana at TSG Productions two days after leaving Michael’s home. The Pop star was devastated to know that his teddy bear would just leave the way she did and not say goodbye but he also understood her feelings and desire to be alone. He hoped that she would at least call him once before leaving the state so that he could at least say a proper goodbye and wish her the very best.

Michael and Diana’s relationship was civil for their children’s sake but no longer had the beautiful spark it once did. The King of Pop spent all of his free time with his children and took Prince to the studio with him on a few occasions. Diana still hadn’t talked to her fiancé about their son’s possible medical conditions but made a mental note to do so as soon as possible.

Several newspapers and reporters were calling and harassing Michael’s representatives trying to gain information and requested the Pop star to do an interview in order to clear his name and put an end to all of the unnecessary rumors that were circulating about him. Michael’s only concern was for his family and he released a public statement through John and Waleed saying that he was doing just fine and was enjoying his new gift of fatherhood. Diana was also asked to do a photo shoot promoting her new image as a mother as well as her upcoming marriage to Michael but she politely refused saying she did not want the world to gawk unnecessarily at her, especially now that she was a mother of two.

Katherine visited her son’s home the day after little Michael met his father and Diana told her future mother in law the entire story. Of course, Joseph still didn’t believe anything the beautiful CEO said and was still trying to come up with ways to prove that his grandchildren weren’t really his. Kai’s conscience was eating away at her for days and she finally confessed to her boss about his father’s phone call, his request for blood and urine samples from his daughter and to get rid of the recorded conversation leaving no trace of Joseph’s evil intention. It was then that the seventh child of the Jackson’s decided to take matters into his own hands and visit his father personally at Havenhurst hoping to finally put an end to his ridiculous demands and accusations about Diana not being pregnant with his children.

“It’s about time you came to visit us.” Joseph said coming into his living room with his wife. “Looks like becoming a father has made you forget your own.”
“I spend quality time with my children, Joseph.” Michael said. “Something you never used to do unless it was beneficial for you.”
“Let’s not get into all that again.” Katherine said sitting next to her baby boy. “How have you been son? How are Diana and the kids?”

“They’re all fine, mother. I came here to talk to Joseph.”

“You’re finally using your brain and leaving that tramp?” Joseph asked sitting across from his wife and child.
“No, I’m leaving this family.”
“WHAT?” Katherine yelled.
“I have finally found happiness with my new family that God has given me. My own has done nothing but let me down since the age of five. I moved out hoping to finally gain independence and freedom and I finally did. I no longer feel the need to associate myself with those who do nothing for me in return.”

“You can’t turn your back on family, Michael.” Katherine said holding the Pop star’s hand. “We are your parents and we love you very much.”
“Mother, you know you are always welcome in my home.”
“So, you’re going to turn your back on us for that gold digger who claims to have your kids?”
“She DOES have my kids, Joseph.” Michael said. “And I’m tired of you trying to prove her wrong. Kai told me about your ‘sample’ idea and if you weren’t my father I’d have you charged with conspiracy.”
“What sample idea?” Katherine asked.

“You keep your mouth shut, boy!”

“Don’t worry, mother.” Michael said kissing her forehead. “Joseph’s bad karma will catch up to him one day.”

“I don’t need you telling me about this karma crap!” Joseph said. “Go ahead and ruin your life with Diana. You’ll soon find out she’s not the one for you.”
“She’s been there for me more than you ever have, Joseph.”
“That’s because she loves the attention your name gives her.”
“Stop it you two!” Katherine said trying her hardest not to get upset. “There is no point in arguing about Diana anymore. She is a great woman and Michael loves her dearly. They have two children together and will be married in a matter of time. I do not wish to have illegitimate grandchildren.”
“Will you attend our wedding, mother?”
“Of course and so will the rest of the family.”

Joseph scoffed loudly and stood up from his cream colored sofa.

“Except me. I wasn’t there when you married Lisa and I sure as hell ain’t gonna be when you marry that floozy. Like always, you are just too damn stubborn to see the ruin in front of you.”
“I must really be your son then, Joseph.” Michael said as he stood in front of his father. “That is a trait I definitely inherited from you.”

“Get away from me boy.” Joseph said as he pushed past his son and left the room.

“Michael...” Katherine said standing up to hug her child. “You will always be a member of this family. Your brothers and sisters might not act like it but they love you very much. We all want what’s best for you.”
“I know that, mother. I will never distance myself from you. I just can’t deal with Joseph’s antics anymore. He needs to get used to the fact that Diana and I might get married in a matter of months and—“
“MIGHT?” Katherine asked shockingly interrupting her son.

Michael poured his heart out to his mother and told her all of the details of his shocking discovery of his firstborn. Katherine had heard Diana’s side of the story but had no idea her seventh child was feeling the way he was. Although he still loved Diana wholeheartedly and wanted to make things work, the Pop star’s perception of his fiancé had changed drastically to the point where he questioned if he could still call her his wife. To Katherine’s surprise, Michael brought a briefcase with him and opened it showing his mother his marriage certificate that he and Diana had both signed before she and the girls traveled to Europe.

“I want you to keep this for me.” Michael said handing Katherine the brown envelope. “Just in case I change my mind.”
“Michael, you can’t be serious.”
“I am VERY serious, mother.” He said placing the document in her lap as she and he both sat down. “Diana will try to find this at Neverland if I keep it there. I know I can trust you with this and she will never suspect to find it here.”

“Michael, Diana is the mother of your children.”
“She also lied to me for six years.”
“She had valid reasons, son.”
“I also have valid reasons for feeling the way I do, mother.”
“I won’t force your decision.” She said rubbing her son’s back. “Just know that I want nothing but the best for you. Even if it’s not with Diana.”
“I love you mother.”
“I love you too, my child.”

Diana went to TSG to take care of some important business matters while Jasmine and David spent time with Paris and little Prince at Neverland taking him on the rides. Marie returned to Michael’s home to grab a few of her things she had forgotten and Jasmine saw her best friend arriving through the main entrance gate. She quickly ran towards the cottage house hoping to convince her to stay and somehow make her snap out of her bad attitude.

“What are you doing?”

“Do you not see me packing?”
“Are you really leaving LA?”
“Yes.”
“Why?”
“Because I can – why do you care?”
“You know the answer to that, Marie.”
“I thought I did.”

“You need to stop acting like this, M. I know you’re angry but you can’t just—“
“I can do whatever the hell I want!” She yelled. “I’m not a child. You and Diana seem to have the hardest time getting that through your minds. I may be younger than the two of you but I am not some stupid, ignorant baby who needs their diaper changed every five minutes like that son of yours. Oops! I forgot. He’s Diana’s son now.”
“Marie, you are not angry. You are being hateful and really immature.”
“Yeah, so?”

“You need to stop being so bitter about the fact that Michael fell in love with Diana and not you. You also need to accept that it just wasn’t meant to be for you and you are so oblivious as to why it never happened. Look at all the bullshit those two have had to go through during the past six years. Would you rather be in Diana’s position? Losing your parents, your baby, your mind and your privacy all for the sake of love? You need to let it go, Marie. Michael will always have a very special place in his heart for you but the reality of it is, he chose Diana and you should be grateful that it wasn’t you because there is no way in hell you would have survived the storms that she has. She met him first, they fell in love, had two kids and are getting married now. GET OVER IT.”

“Believe me, Jasmine. I AM over it!!

“No, you’re not. You just act like you are. I can see right through that phony mask of yours. You think I can’t see your grumpy face every time they walk into a room holding hands? You think David and I never noticed the way you would always leave the room every time Michael and Diana would kiss or say something romantic to each other? Why do you think Diana kept you in the dark for so long? She knew you weren’t over Michael and you never will be. When it comes to you, ignorance is always bliss, Marie. Michael has adjusted to Diana’s secret and it’s only taken him a week. Why can’t you do the same and just be happy for them?”

“Of course Michael can adjust to it!” Marie spat back. “IT’S HIS OWN CHILD! He got a kid out of this whole thing. What did I get? Nothing but two liars for best friends.”

Jasmine tried her hardest to make her best friend see reason. However, Marie was stubborn and adamant about leaving Neverland and Los Angeles for good. Knowing she couldn’t force her to stay, Jasmine no longer felt the need to push things and allowed Marie to fulfill her wish to leave her friends and Michael behind.

“You won’t even say goodbye before leaving?”
“I left Michael a letter in his room. He’s the only one worthy enough to say goodbye to around here. Kai and Bev aren’t home and I’m sure Michael won’t mind telling them for me.”
“I’m assuming you haven’t said goodbye to Diana?”
“Nope and I’m not planning on it.”
“Fine. I wish you the best, Marie. I hope that you will come to your senses one day and at least come back for the wedding.”
“HA! Like there will be one.”
“THERE WILL BE!” Jasmine said proudly. “Michael and Diana WILL become husband and wife and I am going to plan their special day with or without you!”

**LATER THAT DAY**

After spending his entire morning with his mother, the gang arranged for Michael to have another children’s day at his enchanted home filled with kids from local orphanages and hospitals again. Now that he was a father, Michael had gained a new found appreciation for children and how important it was to love and care for them at all times. Javon’s daughter Britney was also invited as well as all three of Michael’s favorite guests from Halloween.

“MICHAEL!” The girls yelled in unison running towards the main house entrance.

“My little angels!”

Abby, Beth and Paige returned to their favorite singer’s home and ran into his arms at the same time. Michael kissed their little foreheads and Bubbles came running towards them hopping and hollering at the same time.

“BUBBLES!” Abby yelled hugging the loveable, hairy pet. “I missed you!”
“I’m so happy to see you girls again.” Michael said taking them into the living room. “I want you to meet my children.”

Jasmine and David entered the living room with Prince and Paris. Beth hugged Prince and Abby kissed Paris’s cheek. Paige seemed a bit reserved around Michael’s children which quickly caught his attention making him question the adorable young lady.

“What’s wrong, sweetie?” He asked approaching the little girl.

“I’m scared he might pick on me.”
“Who? My son?”

The little girl shook her head yes.

Michael suddenly remembered Paige’s horrible experience at Neverland on Halloween when she was bullied and had her ice cream stolen. Knowing that wouldn’t ever happen to her at his home again, The King of Pop introduced the precious girl with beautiful eyes and smile to his firstborn hoping to make her feel comfortable around boys again.

“Hi…” Prince said smiling. “I’m Michael.”
“I’m Paige.”
“I like your name.”
“I like yours too.”

Michael giggled in the background seeing his son ‘flirt’ with the opposite gender.

“Wanna be friends?”
“Okay!”

“Aww, that’s so cute!” David said. “He’s already getting his mack on.”

“You rang?” Mac said entering the main house.

“MAC!” Michael yelled running towards his friend. “How are you? What a surprise!”
“Javon called and told me about children’s day and I was on the next flight. Where are those kids of yours?”

“Prince…”

The young boy immediately ran to his father’s side.

“This is your uncle Mac.”
“Hey little man…”
“That’s what buddy calls me!” Prince said looking at Jasmine’s husband whose eyes were starting to mist.

“He’ll always be your little man.” Jasmine whispered wiping the tears from her husband’s eyes.

“I know. It’s just going to be really tough learning to live without him every day.”
“He’ll still be in our lives, Dave. Just not in our home.”
“I know. I’m really going to miss him.”
“Me too. But we can always start making one of our own.”
“Sounds good to me!”

“Pervs!” Mac said under his breath as he walked behind the two lovebirds.

“Don’t hate because you can’t have what I have.” David said jokingly.

“Speaking of what I can’t have, where is Rie Rie?” He asked.

“I haven’t seen her yet either.” Michael said. “Javon told me she was here earlier getting the rest of her things. Is she still in the cottage house?”

Everyone suddenly became silent.

“What’s wrong? Where is she?”

“Check your room, Michael.” Jasmine said.

“Why? Is she sleeping in there?”
“Not exactly.” David replied.

Bubbles ran towards his owner and grabbed onto Michael’s leg pointing his finger towards the main entrance door.

“What’s he doing?” Jasmine asked.

“He’s telling me to go check something outside.” Michael replied. “I’ll be right back.”

“I’ll go put Paris in her crib upstairs.” Jasmine said heading towards the grand staircase with the little girl in her arms.
“I love you daddy!” Prince yelled as he and his three new friends sat on the couch watching cartoons on the big screen TV.

“I love you more. Stay here with everyone son.”

Bubbles made a noise signaling Michael to wait for him. He then returned to the living room for a split second and joined the little ones on the couch. Surprisingly, the adorable little scamp checked Abby’s forehead making sure she was feeling ok and gave her and the others a smile and a big hug before running back to Michael and signaling him again to follow him outside towards the cottage house.

After seeing his guest house fully cleaned and all of Marie’s belongings gone, Michael quickly ran back to the main house and told Bubbles to join the others in the living room before running upstairs to his bedroom. On his bed was a small gold envelope with his name written beautifully in cursive letters. He tore it open and pulled out the smooth white paper folded inside with the words “*From the desk of Marie Ann Harper*” written at the top:

*Michael,*

*I’m sorry for not saying goodbye to you but I have to leave Los Angeles for a while. I need some time to focus on myself and think about my future before I can continue being friends with the girls. Please understand that this has nothing to do with you and I will always love you no matter what. I wish you and Diana the best and please don’t ever forget me.*

*Your Teddy Bear,*

*Marie.*

Michael broke down as he sat on the edge of his bed. He understood Marie’s feelings and her need to find herself but couldn’t help but feel devastated at the thought of her leaving and not saying goodbye in person. He contemplated calling her but knew she was either on a plane or not going to answer him. Before he could think any further, Prince knocked on his bedroom door and opened it seeing his father in tears.

“Daddy!” He yelled running towards his beloved father. “What happened?”
“I’m fine.” Michael said.

“Why are you crying?”
“Because I love you so much.”
“I love you too.”

The two boys tickled each other for the longest time. Prince immediately replaced his father’s tears with pride and joy and Michael never wanted to live a second without his new found family even if it meant distancing himself from the rest of the world forever.

“Look daddy!” Prince said getting up from the bed. “I can dance like you!”
“You CAN?”

“Yes!”

The young boy saw one of his daddy’s black fedoras sitting on a nearby dresser and placed it on his head. Michael laughed adorably watching his son imitate his work of art. Prince then placed one hand in front of him and the other at his side thrusting his hips imitating his daddy’s intro to “Billie Jean”.

“Oh my god.” Michael said giggling to himself.

The young boy then started grabbing his crotch making his father gasp in worry.

“PRINCE! NO!” Michael yelled hugging his little boy. “No, no, no. Don’t do that please!”
“Why, daddy?”
“It’s bad.”
“I’M BAD! I’M BAD!” He yelled singing his father’s iconic song.

“No, silly!” Michael said tickling him again. “I mean it’s really bad.”
“But you do that on TV, daddy.”
“I know, but you can’t until you’re older ok?”
“Why?”

Michael realized in that moment he was about to have his first father son talk. He giggled at the fact that his very first form of guidance to his child would be about crotch grabbing. Something he never thought he’d actually have to do.

“It’s something that grownups do, son.” He said trying not to hurt the child’s feelings. “It’s not nice for little boys to do it. When you get a little older, you can imitate daddy that way ok?”
“Ok.”
“Good boy.”

“Daddy?”
“Yes?”
“Will you teach me how to sing and dance like you?”
“Of course.”

“Yaaay!”

“I love you, Prince.”
“I love you too.”

**LATER THAT EVENING**

The entire gang at Neverland was enjoying children’s day. Javon was constantly patrolling the grounds making sure all of the kids were ok and unharmed. Paris was asleep in her nursery and Bev checked on her often making sure she was comfortable and not disturbed by the commotion in the house. Prince, Abby, Beth, Paige and Britney were in the living room with Bubbles watching ‘Pocahontas’ while Mac, Jasmine and David kept an eye on them while Michael spent his time alternating between them and the other children having fun at his home. Kai entered the living room with a huge tray full of candy, cookies and hot chocolate with marshmallows.

“I love children’s day!” Beth said reaching for a cookie.
“Me too!” Abby said clapping her hands together before stuffing her mouth with gummy worms.
“Me three!” Paige and Prince both said together.

“Can we come here again?” Britney asked.

“Of course you can.” Jasmine said. “I’ll make sure of it!”

The children laughed and continued watching the Disney Princess film enjoying every minute of it. Jasmine and David admired the little ones and hoped that they too would become parents one day with a little Averson junior to call their own.

“It’ll happen, Jas.” David said holding his wife’s hand.

“I hope so.”
“When the time is right.”

They both kissed briefly and the children ‘ooohed’ in harmony.

“AJ and buddy sitting in a tree…” Prince sang.

“K I S S I N G….” The young girls added.

“Ok, that’s enough.” Mac said coming in the room to take Bubbles away. “It’s time for bed, Bubbles. Let’s go to your cage.”

The young chimp hugged his little friends and shook the Averson’s hands before latching onto Mac’s leg. The two of them left the main house and Michael came in to check on his little prince and princesses making sure they were still enjoying themselves. He noticed the huge tray full of sweets and laughed at the kids seeing them play tag and hitting each other with the couch throw pillows. It was clear to him that his life was finally starting to come together. All he had to do now was mend his torn relationship with his fiancé. Assuming that she still wanted to….

Michael “Prince” Joseph Jackson