**CHAPTER NINTEEN**

*Reliving the Past with Another Secret*

Mac placed Bubbles in his cage and pulled a large cover over the top so that the chimp could quickly fall asleep. He then checked on the other animals that weren’t already asleep in the sanctuary then made his way back to the main house. He noticed Michael standing alone in the distance near the grand clock and wondered what his Pop star friend was doing by himself. Curious, Mac ran to the nearest golf cart and drove across the pathway to see him.

“Hey, Mike!” He yelled as he got out of the cart. “Why are you standing here alone?”
“I’m just thinking.”
“About?”
“Marie.”
“What about her?”
“She left, Mac.”
“Like she went home?”
“Yeah – to New York.”
“WHAT? WHEN? WHY?”

Michael showed Mac the letter his favorite fan wrote to him and the child star couldn’t believe what he read. He asked Michael why she felt the need to leave and he briefly explained what was going on. After hearing his friend pour his heart out and become overly emotional, Mac decided to step in and take action.

“Don’t worry.” He said nudging his friend’s arm playfully. “I’ll make sure she’s doing ok in New York.”
“She lives in Rochester.” Michael said. “You are in Manhattan.”
“It’s all good.” He replied. “She’ll only be five hours away. I can be there in no time.”
“I appreciate your help.” Michael said placing the letter in his pants pocket. “I just can’t believe she’s gone. I really like Marie. Diana and Jasmine always said she is my biggest fan.”
“She likes you a lot more.” Mac said trying to make his friend smile. “She didn’t leave your life, Mike, she left LA. Marie just needs some space. I’m sure she’ll be back sooner than you think.”
“I really hope so. I miss her so much already.”

Diana returned to Neverland from TSG and noticed all of the children running around the property. She was so happy to see her three favorite cutie pies sitting on the couch eating mouthfuls of candy and treats. Jasmine and the girls played patty cake and David was helping Javon outside with the patrols. Michael and Mac came into the house and the beautiful CEO was thrilled to see her fiancé’s best friend one more time.

“Well, look who’s back again?”
“Hey, Diana.” Mac said hugging her. “You look beautiful as always.”
“Thank you. When did you get here?”
“A while ago.”
“Staying for a week or two?”
“Nah, have to get back to New York in two days for a new project.”
“Did Marie get to see you?”
“She left before I got here.”

Michael politely excused himself and walked up the grand staircase. His distant attitude towards me was making me feel more and more unimportant. Mac explained that Michael was really upset about Marie leaving and advised me to give him some time to adjust to his new surroundings without his favorite fan being in his eye.

“He just found out about his son and lost his biggest fan and friend.” Mac explained. “We had a long talk outside. He just needs time to heal.”
“I know. Thank you.”
“Anytime. How have you been?”
“I’m hanging in there.”
“I’m here for you two. You know that.”
“I do. Thanks again.”

Michael went upstairs to check on his children. Prince was nowhere to be found downstairs and the Pop star thought he was in his room. He opened his bedroom door slightly and saw his son watching his legendary performance at the 1995 MTV Video Music Awards imitating each and every one of his father’s dance steps. The Gloved One giggled to himself as he continued spying on his firstborn and admired his determination to mimic and perfect his moves – a trait the young child definitely inherited from his daddy.

Diana went to Paris’s nursery to check on her daughter then noticed Michael was spying through Prince’s door on her way out. Wanting to know what he was looking at, she quietly walked down the hall and snooped over Michael’s shoulder seeing her little boy dance and slide across the floor exactly like his father.

“He is definitely your son.” I said trying to make conversation with my fiancé.

“I know that now.” Michael replied closing the door to his son’s room and walking away.

I grabbed his arm gently and pulled him towards me.

“Michael…”
“What is it, Diana?”
“You’ve been so distant from me. You don’t talk to me, you don’t look at me, you don’t even let me hold you anymore.”
“I’m sure you can guess why that is.”
“I know you need time to adjust to all this. But please, don’t push me away. I really miss you.”

“Diana, we have young children here. I don’t want to talk about this right now.”
“I understand. Just know that whenever you are ready to talk, I’ll be ready to listen.”

He then pulled his arm away from me and walked back downstairs joining his little angels on the couch with Mac and Jasmine.

“Mommy, you’re home!” Prince yelled as he came out of his room running towards me wearing a new set of clothing resembling his father’s military style jackets and black striped pants.
“Yes, baby. Did you change your clothes?”
“Yes. Daddy gave them to me. Do you like them?”
“I do. You look just like him.”
“I was trying to dance like him too.”

“Really?”
“Yes. I try every day!”
“That’s my boy.” I said kissing the top of his head. “One day you will be just as good as he is.”
“I hope so. Where is daddy?”
“Downstairs, honey.”
“I love you.”
“I love you too, Michael.”

I watched him skip his way down the grand staircase and jump right into his father’s arms. Seeing Michael so happy made me realize he truly was a simple soul who longed for nothing but love and to be loved. In that moment, I stood at the top of the grand staircase thinking how much of a fool I was to keep Michael away from his own child for six years. My reasons may have seemed valid at the time but I realized very quickly that protecting my own reputation was no excuse to keep a father away from his son.

“Diana…” Kai said coming upstairs with a small glass bottle in her hand. “Are you alright?”
“I’m fine. Is it time to feed Paris?”
“Yes. Would you like to do it?”
“Sure. I haven’t changed her diaper for a few days. Bev has always been beating me to it. I’ll take care of that too.”

Kai handed me the pureed baby food she made and left us alone in the nursery. Paris was growing so fast. Her smile was forming and it seemed like she recognized me as her mother. I scooped her into my arms and rocked her gently as I fed her little mouth with mashed carrots and peas. Michael came in the nursery a few minutes later and saw the two us bonding in the rocking chair. He made his way towards me and helped feed his daughter and kissed me gently on my forehead.

“I love you, baby.”
“I know you do.”
“You won’t say it back?”

“Do I really need to?”

“It would be nice to hear you say it.”
“I still love you too.”

“Do you forgive me?”
“I wouldn’t be here right now if I hadn’t already.”
“I’m sorry for everything, Michael.”
“Diana, I am willing to forget about everything that’s happened if you are.”

“Of course. I don’t expect you to just forget about all of the horrible things we went through. I want you to know that I am still yours and always will be. Please take all the time you need to heal and if there’s anything I can say or do to help you—“
“Diana?”
“Yes?”
“You talk too much.”

After what seemed like centuries, Michael finally made a joke and the two of us laughed together in harmony.

“You need to learn to shut up.”
“Hey! Don’t tell me to shut up.”
“What will you do about it?”
“No more cupcake for you, mister.”
“Diana, that’s not a punishment.”
“YOU JERK!”

He grabbed Paris from my arms and placed her on the nearby changing table. For the first time since she was born, Michael and I changed our daughter’s diaper together and he powered her adorable little behind. Surprisingly, Michael knew exactly what he was doing and tickled his daughter’s stomach making her squeal girlishly.

“I have an entire royal family of my own now.” He said holding his daughter over his head. “My queen, prince and princess.”
“And we love you very much.”
“I love you all too.”
“I love you too, daddy!” Prince said running into his baby sister’s nursery.
“I love you more.”

At that point in time, Michael and I realized how blessed we were to have each other and promised not to argue about the past and to try our best to move forward from all of the storms we had gone through. Nothing and no one could or would ever come between us again. We loved each other. We were a family. We were a unit. We were the Jacksons.

“Here come the lovebirds!” Mac said as the three of us returned to the living room.
“Paris is asleep?” Jasmine asked.
“She is.” Michael replied. “We just fed and changed her.”

Suddenly, loads of laughter and smacking noises were coming from the kitchen.

“What’s going on?” I asked looking at everyone in the room.
“I have no idea.” Jasmine replied.
“Where are my little girls?” Michael asked concerned.
“They went to the kitchen to get more treats.” David said.
“OH LORD, NO!” Mac replied standing up from the leather couch and running towards the kitchen with everyone following.

Michael and the others gasped loudly as they saw the girls in the kitchen having a massive food fight with each other.

“HEY!” Mac yelled. “Why didn’t anyone tell me about this?” He grabbed a slice of pie from the counter and threw it across the room smacking little Abby on the side of her face.

“I didn’t know either!” Michael said also joining in on the fun.

“FOOD FIIIIGHTTTT!!!” David yelled grabbing a piece of everything he could find smothering his wife’s face with whipped cream, chocolate and smushed bananas.

The entire gang threw food at each other laughing and having a wonderful time. It was evident that the embers of Neverland were slowly starting to ignite once again.

“GOOD HEAVENS!” Kai and Bev yelled as they made their way into the kitchen. “What is going on in here?”
“FOOD FIGHT!” Little Paige yelled grabbing a handful of fruit and throwing it in their direction.

“Didn’t anyone teach you people any manners?” Bev asked.
“Oh, shut up!” Mac yelled throwing a piece of pie in her face.

“OOO BULLS EYE!” Jasmine yelled throwing a handful of whipped cream in Kai’s face.

“OH, IT’S ON NOW GIRLFRIEND!” She replied also hitting her with a handful of pie.

**LATER THAT NIGHT**

Several hours and snack items later, the Neverland food fight came to an end. Everyone plopped down on the dining room chairs dripping of pies, soft drinks, whipped cream and mushed fruits making food puddles everywhere they went.

“That was SO much fun!” Beth yelled. “Can we please do that again?”
“Oh god, no.” Mac said trying to catch his breath. “I don’t think I’ve ever seen that much food flying around in my entire life.”
“What about the pie fight you all had during Black or White?” Jasmine asked.

Michael and Mac looked at each other and burst out laughing.

“Remember that day, Mike?”
“Of course.” The Pop star replied with food dripping from the sides of his face and hair. “John didn’t even see it coming.”
“You two are something else.” I said bringing large towels in the room for everyone to wipe themselves off with.

“Well, that was definitely interesting.” David said wiping his face and neck.

Prince slowly walked into the dining room with two whole pies in his hands. I saw him from the corner of my eye and knew he wanted to get his daddy in the face.

“David and Jas, you two can use the bathroom in the guest cottage.” Michael explained. “Mac, you can use guest house two. Diana and I will be upstairs and the girls can use the master bathroom down the hall from us.”
“We don’t have clothes!” Abby said.

“No problem.” Kai explained with chunks of banana falling out of her hair. “Michael always keeps extra pairs of children’s clothing at Neverland for this reason. Bev and I will help clean you girls up. Follow us!”

Just then, Prince came around the corner and stood directly behind the chair his father was sitting in.

“Daddy?” He said in his innocent and most childlike voice.

“Yes, son?”

Michael turned around and ran smack dab into the pies that his son was holding making everyone in room fall over from laughing.

“GOTCHA!” Mac yelled as Michael got up and chased his little boy around the room dropping pie filling all over the dining room floor.

“I love children’s day!” Paige said as she, Abby and Beth went upstairs with Kai and Bev to clean up.

“I do too!” Jasmine said. “Too bad Marie missed out.”
“I know my Rie Rie…” Mac said proudly. “She’ll come around.”

“Well, that was refreshing!” David said as he and Jasmine made their way into the living room to join the others. “Thank god we had an extra pair of clothes in the car.”
“We need to be prepared for anything here at Neverland.” Jasmine said. “How are our favorite little girls doing?”
“GOOOOD!” They all said in unison.

“I’ve been keeping them company.” Mac said referring to the “Home Alone” movie playing on the TV.

“Sir?” Javon said entering the main house door. “It’s almost time to wrap things up for the evening.”
“Please gather all the children in the theatre so I can speak to them before they leave.”
“Yes, sir.”

Abby, Beth and Paige stood up and made their way into the foyer. Abby eyed the tray full of lollipops near the main entrance door and licked her adorable, hungry lips.

“Would you like to have one?” I asked.
“Yes, please.”
“Me too!” Beth and Paige yelled.

Mac picked up the large tray and gave the little angels two candies each. They happily accepted and thanked their favorite child star as everyone headed to Michael’s theatre. After the little ones left the magical estate, Jasmine and David said their goodbyes and headed home. Kai and Bev spent hours cleaning the kitchen and dining room area even after Michael insisted he would hire a team of professional cleaners to do it for them. Once everything was back to normal, he and I went upstairs with Prince to check on Paris and to tuck our firstborn into bed.

“Goodnight, mommy and daddy.” The young boy said as Michael and I kissed his cheek and headed towards the bedroom door.
“I love you.”

“We love you more honey.” I said turning the light off in his room. “Night night.”

For the first time in what felt like years, Michael and I shared a room again. We changed into our nightwear and crawled into bed with our arms linked together. After a few moments of silence, Michael’s angelic voice permeated the room.

“Diana? I’ve been thinking….”

Not wanting to assume the worst, I took a deep breath and let him finish.

“About what, baby?”
“How do you feel about Liz and Mac being Prince and Paris’s godparents?”
“I know we talked about that before but I had no idea you were also considering Elizabeth.”
“Are you ok with it?”
“Of course. Whatever makes you happy.”
“I’m glad you agree.”
“I wanted Marie and Jasmine to be a part of it but given the circumstances—“
“Jasmine will always be their second mother.” Michael said. “That will never change. As for Marie, I don’t think she would have agreed to it.”
“I think you’re right. When should we tell them?”
“Before the wedding.”

My heart instantly skipped a beat before thumping into my chest.

“Michael…”

I slid my body closer towards him and ran my hand down his perfectly chiseled face.

“You still want to get married?”
“Well, DUH.”

We both laughed and kissed passionately turning our conversation into a love fest. Before things could go any further, our son’s medical questionnaire was still an outstanding subject matter that needed to be addressed. Reality hit me like a lightning bolt in that moment leaving me with no choice but to break our kiss and return to my senses.

“Michael, there’s something you need to know…”
“Not now, Diana. Can’t you see I’m busy?” He said leaving a trail of kisses on my neck.
“Michael, it’s important.”
“Yeah, yeah it can wait.”
“I’m serious!”

“Girl, why do you always do that during times like these?”

“Because I want to be honest with you from now on. There is a reason why Dr. Baler faxed those forms to us today.”
“I know. We can deal with it tomorrow.”
“But, Michael it’s—“
“DIANA!” He yelled gently pinning my arms down beneath him. “You are talking too much again. Will you please be quite and let me have you?”

Not wanting to upset him, I did as I was told.

“Your wish is my command, Moonwalker.”
“That’s more like it.” He said kissing my lips and moving his hands rapidly around my anxiously warm body.

**THE NEXT MORNING**

**6AM**

“MOMMY! DADDY!!” Prince said excitedly barging into our room.

“Michael!” I yelled. “What’s wrong, honey?”
“Nothing.” He said smiling with his black and white sparkly pajamas on. “It’s time to wake up.”
“No it isn’t.” Michael senior said mumbling in his ‘barely awake’ voice. “Go back to bed, son.”
“But daddy…” Prince said jumping onto our bed and bouncing up and down. “I want to see the aminals!”
“ANIMALS, Michael.” I said wanting him to speak correctly. “A N I M A L S.”
“Aminals!”
“Prince!” Michael said softly but sternly. “Daddy is still tired. I promise you can see the aminals when I wake up ok?”

“AHEM!” I said clearing my throat loudly. “ANIMALS.”
“Yeah, those things.” Michael replied turning his head and placing his pillow over it. “Now go to bed, son. Daddy loves you.”
“DADDY!”

“Michael!” I too said sternly but softly. “I know you’re excited to see the rest of daddy’s home and his zoo but it’s very early in the morning and his pets are still asleep. After he and the pets wake up, daddy will take you to see them.”
“Promise?” He asked with the most adorable looking puppy dog face.
“Yes, sweetie. I promise.”
“Can I please stay here?”
“Of course. Come here you little monkey!”

I grabbed my little boy and sandwiched him between me and his father. Little Michael placed one arm on top of mine and linked the other with his daddy’s. We all resembled three peas in a pod with our arms and legs curled up against each other. I realized that it would just be a matter of time before Paris would be old enough to join us and be the final touch to bring this entire family together as perfectly as it could ever be.

“What’s this? A pajama party?” Mac asked standing by the doorway seeing us all sprawled onto the bed together. “Can I join in?”
“DON’T EVEN THINK ABOUT IT!” Michael yelled peering his head out of the blanket. “You’re a grown boy now.”
“Oh, come on!” Mac said. “We used to have sleepovers all the time.”
“Yeah, when you were HIS age!” I said pointing to Prince. “You’re a teenager now, Mac.”
“Mike and I will always be kids at heart. What are you three doing up so early?”
“WE’RE NOT UP YET!” Michael yelled from under his pillow. “I’m trying to sleep for once in my life and everyone keeps bugging me.”
“Well, EXCUUUUSE MEE!” Mac said. “We should just change your name to cranky walker!”

Prince laughed at his future godfather’s joke and crawled onto his daddy’s back.

“Up, horsey! Up!” He said.

“Oh god…” Michael said. “Why are you all doing this to me?”
“Because it’s fun and we can!” Mac said.

“I love you all so much but I really need to sleep. Can you all please leave me alone for just a few hours?”
“WHAT WERE YOU TWO DOING ALL NIGHT? HUH? HUH?” Mac asked being nosy.

“NOTHING!” I yelled. “We were talking.”

“I don’t know about that, Diana.” Michael replied giggling to himself.
“Hey!” I yelled hitting him with my pillow. “Not in front of your son please!”
“Oh like he doesn’t know!” Mac said trying to be a brat. “Come on little man. Let’s go on the carousel and play bumper cars until daddy wakes up.”
“YAAAY!” The young boy said jumping into Mac’s arms.

“Thank you, Mac. You’re a lifesaver!” Michael said sounding half awake. “I owe you one.”
“Yeah, you do.” He said on his way out.

“Keep an eye on him please.” I explained. “He can get nauseous easily.”
“No worries.” Mac said. “We’ll get changed, have breakfast and take our time having fun!”

“Michael, you be a good boy and listen to everything Mac says ok?”
“Yes, mommy.”

“Love you.”
“Love you too.”

The two boys left the room closing the door behind them. Since I was already awake, I tried crawling out of bed when Michael suddenly grabbed my arm and pulled me back down on the bed near him.

“Where do you think you’re going?” He asked with his face still buried in his pillow.

“I’m awake now, Michael.” I explained. “I’ll go freshen up and check on Paris.”
“That’s Bev’s job.”
“Michael, she’s OUR daughter. I don’t want her growing up thinking you and I didn’t do anything to raise her and just depended on your staff to take care of her.”
“Diana, she was only born a few months ago.” Michael explained. “She’s not old enough to know the difference yet.”

“When I had Prince, I changed his diaper and fed him on my own every single day until Jasmine adopted him. I’d like to do the same for Paris with a little bit of help every now and then when you and I are working.”
“I understand that but I really want you to stay with me right now.”
“I thought you were sleeping!”
“I was but something suddenly woke up.”

His words confused me.

“Some THING?”

“Yes…”
“What are you referring to?”
“Space man.”
“OH MY GOD, MICHAEL!”

I laughed hysterically as he turned around and placed ‘himself’ against my most sensitive area.

“Do you know now?” He asked in a low tone kissing my cheek and earlobe.

“No, baby.” I said trying my hardest to resist. “We can’t do this now. We did this over a dozen times last night.”
“That was then…” He said biting my neck. “This is now.”

“Michael, you are extremely difficult to refuse.”
“I get that a lot.”

“From WHO?”

“Everyone.”

I giggled as he slowly made his way into my nightgown. Letting my guard down was always something Michael loved to test me on and I couldn’t have been happier to fail at something every single time.

“Baby, you are always so good to me.”
“You haven’t seen anything yet, Diana.” Michael said sitting me up against the bed and removing my nightgown from the top of my head.

“I missed being intimate with you…”

“We were intimate a million times last night.”
“I can never get enough of you, Liberian Girl.”
“It’s sweet how you still call me that after all this time.”
“I won’t ever stop.”
“I love you, Michael.”
“I love you more, Diana.”

**LATER THAT DAY**

The Averson’s returned to Neverland at Michael’s request to join us for brunch. As we ate Kai’s delicious buffet of croissants, devilled eggs, biscuits, sausages, waffles and grilled vegetables, Prince and Mac were slowly establishing a bond of their own making it easier for Michael and I to break the news of becoming a godfather to the child star.

To everyone’s surprise, Michael announced that he received a phone call from Nelson Mandela reminding him of his granddaughter’s upcoming birthday party and to attend the event. The Pop star humbly accepted the former South African President’s invitation and informed us all that he would be leaving in a matter of days and asked if anyone would like to accompany him.

“I’m out.” Mac said. “I have way too much going on and I don’t think I can re-schedule. I’d also like to return to New York and watch over Marie.”
“We’re out too.” Jasmine said. “David is going to Europe on a duty tour in a few weeks and I need to help Diana with TSG.”
“Diana won’t be joining you?” Mac asked.

“Unfortunately not.” I explained. “I need to watch over the business and the kids. Michael will only be gone for a few days since he too has a lot of take care of and is really pressed for time.”
“Not to mention we need to plan the wedding.” Jasmine added. “While he’s away, Diana and I can work out all the details and maybe get a few dress fittings in.”

“Now that that’s settled…”Michael added. “There are a few other things I need to mention that I feel are very important.”

Knowing that this would be an adult conversation, Bev entered the dining area and noticed Prince had finished eating. She asked to take him into the kitchen to get cleaned up and Michael kissed his son’s head and told him to stay in the living room until we were finished our meal. Being Michael’s son, he wowed us all by moonwalking into the kitchen without falling or missing a single step.

“He’s definitely your son.” David said.
“I think he does that better than you do.” Jasmine said.
“Hey!” Michael said. “No one does the moonwalk better than me.”
“AMEN TO THAT.” Mac said clinking his glass with mine. “Now, what else is happening in the headlines of Neverland?”

Michael laughed at his child friend’s remark and stood up from his seat at the head of the dining table clearing his throat before speaking again.

“I also wanted to say that I never had a chance to give Jasmine and David my condolences. I’m sorry for the loss you two experienced. I hope God blesses you both with a child of your own one day.”
“Thank you.” David said squeezing his wife’s hand. “We both look at it as a blessing in disguise.” He explained. “We weren’t meant to have our own at that time because it was our job to raise Michael junior until you were able to.”
“That’s a great way to look at it.” I said trying to comfort the two. “I believe that too. You two did a fabulous job raising Prince. Michael and I will always be indebted to you both. ”

“I’m sorry as well.” Mac added. “I don’t know what losing a child feels like but I can imagine how difficult it must be.”

“It is but it’s a wound that heals with time.” Jasmine said smiling. “Especially when you have great family and friends to share your grief with.”

“OK, enough with the sappy stuff…” Mac said. “NEXT?”

The last part of Michael’s conversation was a hint that he and I were looking into having godparents for our children. Not wanting to give away the surprise or exclude the Averson’s, Michael and I made sure Jasmine and David would always play an active role in Prince and Paris’s lives and be invited to every single event we celebrated for them as they continued to grow up. Mac raised his brow at the two of us wondering who the lucky people would be.

“Who do you have in mind?” Mac asked while stuffing his face with a croissant.

“That’s all for now.” I said wanting to change the subject. “When the time comes, we’ll definitely inform everyone.”
“Let’s finish eating now shall we?” Michael said as he sat down and drank a glass of freshly squeezed orange juice. “I have a meeting this afternoon with Teddy Riley and Mac is leaving in a few hours.”

After Kai’s meal was devoured, Jasmine and David said they had to leave to take care of important errands before David’s trip overseas. Michael thanked the two as he escorted them to the main entrance door. Prince jumped into his father’s arms and hugged him tightly as he watched his daddy leave the main house and walk towards his studio for his meeting with Teddy.

“Prince honey?” I said entering the foyer with soapy hands.

“Yes mommy?”
“There are a few papers sitting on mommy and daddy’s bed upstairs. Can you please go up and bring them down here for me while I help Kai with the dishes?”
“Okay!”

The little boy headed upstairs and opened the door to the master bedroom. He noticed the small stack of papers in the middle of the bed and gathered them all neatly in his hands. As he turned around to leave, he noticed the bottom drawer from one of the nightstands was slightly open. Being the good little boy he was, Prince went over to close the drawer and saw a large yellow bottle open and full of white pills...