**CHAPTER TWO**

*The Beginning of Something Special*

**\*\*\* ARIA’S POINT OF VIEW\*\*\***

“OH MY GOD!” “You’re….you’re….do you know who you are?!” “Yes.” “I’m so glad you made it. But like always, you’re LATE!” Janet said. “I’m sorry. You know how it is when you have to be everywhere at once.” “Anyway, I’m glad you’re here now. I’d like you to meet the girl I’ve chosen for the lead. Arabella, this is my brother—“

**\*\*\* MY POINT OF VIEW\*\*\***

I was so mad. I couldn’t believe I lost my keys. I quickly ran back to the auditorium hoping to find out who had them. I walked through the doors and yelled “HEY! SOME FOOL JUST MADE ME LOSE MY —“and that was when I heard Janet say “Michael.” He turned around just as he was removing his sunglasses and made eye contact with me. At that moment, it seemed like time had suddenly stood still. Aria was surprised to see me and started shaking me. “Elle! ELLE! What are you still doing here?”

For some reason, Michael and I couldn’t stop staring at each other. “Oh my god…” He said under his breath. “I’m sorry, Miss Jackson.” Aria said. “I had no idea I was auditioning for your brother’s film!” “It’s my fault. I forgot to mention that when we first met.” “It’s not her fault either. I couldn’t be here because of a prior commitment so I asked Jan to fill in for me.” He then looked at me again and said “She knows EXACTLY what I like.”

“Girls, I’m sure you already know who my brother is.” Michael was so charming yet shy. Aria could not believe who she was standing in front of. She had always been a fan of his. I was too but not as much as her. Our first point of contact startled me but after a few minutes, I felt ok around him. I wished I could have said the same for Aria. She went ballistic. “I can’t believe I’m going to be in YOUR short film! This is so incredible. You are the reason I got into music and dance to begin in the first place. The very first move I ever learned was the moonwalk and I absolutely love you—“

“WILL YOU BE QUIET? Let the man speak!” I said as she rambled on and on. “It’s ok.” He said as he looked at us both. “I don’t mind. I get that all the time.” “Mike, you have to see her dance. She is incredible.” Janet said. “I bet she is. And you are?” “Her older sister.” “It’s nice to meet you.” We shook hands and immediately I felt sparks going off inside me. I knew this would be the beginning of something very interesting.

“Sis, don’t you have to go?” “YES! But I lost my keys. I had them in my hand and then lost them.” The recruiters called Janet and Aria back to the stage. “It’s ok. I’ll look for them.” I said as they left. “I’ll help you.” Michael said. “No, you can join them. I mean, it’s your short film.” “I’d rather be here with you.” I smiled as he helped me look for my keys.

We searched the main hallway and everywhere else I had been but my keys were nowhere to be found. “They have to be here somewhere.” I said as I kept looking. I noticed Michael was trying to remove his jacket but was having difficulty. “I think it’s stuck on you.” I said as I walked over to him. “Here, let me help you.” I stood behind him and slowly removed it for him. As I did, I could feel the shape of his body. His frame was so slender yet beautiful to touch and look at. I didn’t want him to get the wrong idea so I maintained my composure as I helped him. A single thread from his jacket was snagged onto his gold sash that he was wearing across his chest. I didn’t want to damage his clothing so I tried to unloop the piece of thread from below the surface but it wasn’t working.

“Your jacket has caught onto your sash, sir.” I said as I continued trying to remove it. “You make me feel old when you call me that.” “I do?” “Yes. Please call me Michael.” “No, I can’t. That wouldn’t be respectful.” “I don’t mind.” “I’ll call you MJ.” He laughed adorably as he said ok. After a bit of struggle, I managed to save his jacket without damaging it.

As he turned around, I noticed my keys were caught onto his belt. “Oh my god, there they are!” He looked down and laughed as if he were embarrassed. “I have no idea how they got there.” “I think they caught onto your belt from the little circle things you have around it.” Michael pulled and pulled but my keys were so badly tangled in between his belt.

I glanced at my watch and realized I had to be at my interview in 20 minutes and the drive itself was 30 minutes away. “Great. Now I’m going to be late.” “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to keep you.” “It’s alright. I just really need my keys.” Michael kept tugging at his belt but my keys weren’t moving. “If you don’t mind, I’d like to try.” “Sure.” I went over and crouched down in front of him. My keys were stuck in his belt in such an odd way that it seemed impossible to remove them.

Michael was moving swiftly in different directions and giggling to himself as I kept pulling on him. “I’m sorry. I’m trying to do this quickly but it’s not working.” “It’s ok. We’ll do it together.” The two of us pulled on his belt with as much force as possible. After a few seconds, my keys finally came loose but the impact was so strong it threw me against the wall with Michael landing in front of me. “I’m sorry.” I said as he was right in front of my face.

He gazed into my eyes then ran his fingers down my cheek. “You are so lovely…” “I have to go, sir. I’m really late.” “What’s your name?” “Michelle.” He then smiled and looked down. “What?” “Your name is similar to mine. I think that’s cute.” I felt uncomfortable being so close to him. “Sir, I really have to go. I’m late for something important.” “I’d like to see you again. Where do you live?” “I don’t think that’s a good idea.” Not trying to sound rude, I asked him to move so I could leave but he refused.

“I’d really like to see you again. Please?” “I have to go.” “I don’t want to force you. It’s just….well….I like you.” His words weakened me but I knew I still had to leave. “I’m flattered, but I really have to go NOW.” “I hope I see you again.” “You will. I always go to Aria’s screen tests. I’m assuming you will be there?” “Of course.” I tried to move away from Michael just then and noticed his belt had come apart from where he and I pulled on it.

“Sir, I think your belt broke.” “It’s ok. I don’t think it’s broken, I just have to latch it again.” I saw where my keys had fallen and went to grab them. As I did, I saw Michael trying to fix his belt and couldn’t help but laugh at him. “What?” “You look funny doing that.” He kept fiddling with it making me laugh even harder. I walked over to him and helped him put it on. “First of all, you don’t have it on properly.” I removed his belt and looped it through his pants going in a circle around him. I then fastened it for him and straightened his sash that went from his belt all the way across his chest right up to his left shoulder. “THERE! That looks much better.”

“Are you a stylist?” “No. I’m a home care worker. I’ve been helping people get dressed since I was 19.”Michael’s face changed. “You’ve been working since you were that young?” “Yes.” “Why?” “Aria and I are orphans. I needed money to raise her so I went to college right after high school and started working while studying.” “I’m sorry you had to experience that. I’m not an orphan but I know how you feel. You’ve made the ultimate sacrifice for your family.”

Hearing him say those words made me very emotional. Something came over me just then and I ended up hugging him. He held me close to his body and gently put his hand on the back of my head. “It’s ok, Michelle. You’re not alone.” For a second, it felt like the world was ours. He reached over and grabbed my arm, holding my hand. Of course, reality hit me and I realized I was officially late for my interview. “OH MY GOD! I’M LATE! I have to go.” I tried to break free from his hand but he grabbed me as I was running away. “I have to see you again.” “Sir, I—“ “Please, call me Michael.” “I can’t. I have to go now. I might see you at Aria’s taping.”

“You promise you’ll be there?” “If I’m not working.” “I’ll be looking for you.” He then winked at me which made me blush. “It was really nice to meet you. I’m sorry for hugging you like that.” “Don’t apologize. It was beautiful, just like you.” I let go of his hand, grabbed my keys and ran for the door. As I was leaving, I noticed he was still looking at me from across the hall. Janet came out of the auditorium doors and asked him to join her since Aria was about to do another solo. This time, with him watching her.

As he started to walk, his eyes were still on me and he accidentally banged his head on the door which made me laugh. “Do you need me to open doors for you too?” “I think so.” He said as he put his hand over his face in embarrassment. He opened the door and started to go inside. As he did, I yelled out to him. “HEY!” He turned and faced me. “I think you’re beautiful too.” He then smiled and winked at me again. I did the same. “I’ll see you soon.”

I waved to him as he went inside. I then ran to my car and sped over to Havenhurst as fast as I could. While I was driving, I couldn’t get my hug with Michael out of my mind. I wasn’t sure why it happened but what I did know was being so close to him was an incredible feeling. One that I had never experienced before. I realized how lucky Aria was to be working with such a generous person.

I was more than 30 minutes late for my interview. When I arrived at the house, I was amazed at how big and beautiful it was. I felt embarrassed arriving late to such a fancy home and didn’t want to go at all but I knew I had to if I wanted to earn the extra money. I gathered my things, took a deep breath and knocked on the door. An older woman answered and greeted me. “You must be here for the interview.” She said. I couldn’t remember where I had seen her before, but she looked very familiar.

She asked me to come in and we both sat in a huge living room full of family pictures. It was then that I realized she was the matriarch of the Jackson family. “OH MY GOD!” I said out loud. “Is something wrong?” “No, ma’am. I just realized who you are. I’m so sorry for being late. I was held up at my sister’s audition. In fact, she was auditioning for your children.” She laughed. “It’s a very small world isn’t it?” “Yes, it really is!” “Don’t worry about being late. We had a few other candidates leave just a few minutes ago. We’ve had so many people apply for this job.”

She asked a few basic questions and wanted to know why I applied for the position. I told her about myself and Aria and her dreams of being a dancer. Mrs. Jackson was so amazed and touched by my story that she gave me the job right on the spot. “You seem like a very genuine person. “ She said as she gave me a stack of legal papers to read through. “These are just some contracts for you to look over and sign. They are mostly confidentiality agreements saying you will not disclose any of our information to the public and will not tell anyone that you work for us.” I understood and happily signed the papers.

“We do a lot of fun things here too.” Katherine said. “We have family picnics and fellowship days. I’d love for you and your sister to join us.” “Thank you for the offer but I’d like to keep this strictly professional. If it helps, I have ten years of cooking and serving experience so if you have any events, I’d love to come and help out.” Katherine was amazed. “You seem very dedicated to your work.” “I am. It’s all I have to help my sister become the person she wants to be one day. I’m sure you can understand that.”   
  
“Believe me, I do.” Katherine started telling me about her struggles in Indiana when she and her husband had to raise 9 kids in a 3 bedroom house and how her children were deprived of their childhood because of Mr. Jackson’s dream of becoming established and moving to California to have a better life for him and his family. I could only imagine how difficult it must have been for her but at the same time, women always do what they have to for the sake of their families.

“Thank you so much for sharing your story with me. I don’t want to take up your time as I’m sure you’re a busy woman.” “Well, not really but my grandchildren do know how to keep me on my toes.” She escorted me to the door. “When can you start?” “Whenever you’d like me to.” “We’re having a family get together next weekend.” “Ok. I can be here in the morning to help cook, clean and get things set up.” I gave her my card so she could call and tell me what time she needed me.

When I left the Jackson home, I sat in my car and noticed there were a few missed calls from Aria. I immediately called her back but didn’t mention anything about my new job. I figured with all the pressure she must have been feeling from her audition, the last thing she needed to know was that I got a job working for the same family she was going to be working with. She said she was finished auditioning and was ready to be picked up. I drove back to the auditorium to get her.

When I got there, I didn’t see her outside so I parked the car and went in to look for her. She was seated in the auditorium with Janet. They were laughing and having a great time together. “How did things go?” “Everything was perfect. Arabella really impressed Mike. We will start taping in a week.” “That’s great!” “How was your interview?” “It was great. I got the job.” “That’s great, congratulations! Where is it?” Even though Janet was Katherine’s daughter and it probably would’ve been ok to tell her, I knew I had a contractual obligation. “I can’t say, unfortunately. But you will both find out soon.” “I’m happy for you, sis.” I thanked her as she got up from her seat. “It was nice talking to you, Miss Jackson. I’ll see you next week?” “Yes. I’ll have my assistant contact you with the location, time and the rest of the details.” She stood up and hugged us both. I suddenly got curious as to where her brother was.

“Miss Jackson? Where’s your brother?” “Please call me Janet. He had to leave for a meeting after seeing Arabella’s performance.” I was sad. I was hoping I’d see him again. Aria and I both said goodbye to Janet and left the auditorium. While we were in the car, Aria told me about her experience dancing in front of Janet and Michael. Meanwhile, all I could do was think about my hug with Michael and getting the job working for his mother. “Elle? Elle? Are you listening to me?” “Yes, Aria.” “So, tell me about the job.”

“I can’t talk about it.” “Why not?” “Because the family doesn’t want the world to know they have a care aid worker in their house. It’s a very famous family.” “IT IS?” “Yes, but that’s ALL I’m telling you.” “Oh my god, sis! I have to know! Who is it? I promise I won’t say a word.” “Aria, I can’t tell you.” “BUT WHY?!” I told her I signed a confidentiality agreement but that didn’t stop her from asking.

Eventually, she stopped begging me to tell her and I dropped her off at her house. “I have to practice tonight so I won’t be able to hang out. Call me tomorrow?” “Sure. Good luck and don’t over work yourself.” “Yes, mom.” She left and I headed home. When I got there, I noticed a phone message for me. I checked it and sure enough, it was Mrs. Jackson asking me to come over and meet the rest of her family. I felt uncomfortable at first but didn’t want to be rude and say no either. I called her back and happily accepted her invitation.

I knew I still wasn’t able to tell Aria about it so I didn’t call her. She told me she’d be busy practicing anyway so I knew I had a good excuse. The thought of meeting the entire Jackson family gave me goose bumps. I knew I had to look presentable so I booked an appointment to get my hair and nails done in the morning. I also realized that Michael would probably be there. I wanted to make sure I looked my best in front of him so that he would be extra nice to Aria while creating his new short film. Of course, that wasn’t the only reason…

**\*\*\* THE NEXT DAY \*\*\***

It took almost 4 hours to get my hair done but it was worth it. I cut it slightly shorter, dyed it brown and had it flat ironed. I knew I’d get Michael’s attention for sure. I also had a manicure, pedicure and facial. I was convinced that my new look would certainly turn heads. My plan wasn’t to get the wrong attention but a little teasing and harmless flirting never hurt anyone.

I called Aria to check on her and she said she was too busy rehearsing the routine that Janet told her to memorize. I told her I’d be busy all day but she was so into her dancing she didn’t even care. At least this way she wouldn’t say I never told her about where I was going. After I hung up with her, I put on my new summer dress, a pair of sandals, touched up my makeup and left the house. I took my work uniform with me just in case I needed to take care of Katherine or help serve the guests.

I arrived at Havenhurst around 11am. I grabbed all my things from the car and rang the doorbell. Katherine’s oldest daughter Rebbie answered and greeted me as I entered the house. “Is Mrs. Jackson here?” “She is. I’ll get her for you.” She took my things and put them in a nearby closet. I waited for Katherine in the hallway. As I was standing there, a few other Jackson kids came by and said hello to me. I worked with some famous people before but nothing compared to being employed by the Jackson family. Of course, that also meant more pressure since I knew they’d be watching my every move. I also knew I had to work twice as hard for Aria’s sake. One mistake from my end and she could be removed from the lead in Michael’s new short film.

I saw Katherine walk down her grand staircase. I took her hand as she came down the final steps. She gave me a hug and thanked me for coming. “You look different and very beautiful.” “Thank you, but certainly not as beautiful as you.” A few seconds later, her husband walked through the door. Katherine introduced me to him and he shook my hand. “So, you’re the one my wife has been talking so much about. She told me about your situation. I’m sorry to hear about the loss of your parents and we are happy to have you here.” “Thank you, sir.” He left the room. I was surprised at how polite he was. Aria told me all kinds of horror stories about Joseph. I was relieved to know I was on his good side…for now anyway.

“I’ll show you around the house.” Katherine said. Just as we were leaving, Janet came through the front door. “Hi!” We both said to each other. “I forgot you two knew each other.” Katherine said. “Yes, her sister Arabella is the lead for Michael’s new film. Where is he?” “You know where that boy is.” “Rehearsing again?” “You got it.” Janet came over and hugged me and said it was great to see me again. “I had no idea you were chosen as the home care worker for mother.” “I wasn’t allowed to tell anyone. I wanted to tell you but also didn’t want to violate my contract.” “I appreciate that.” Katherine said. “But my children are an exception. You can tell your sister if you’d like to.”

“Thank you. Now I don’t have to worry about her finding out some other way.” “Mother, has he eaten?” “I don’t think so.” “Where’s his food? I’ll take it to him.” I knew this would be a great chance for me to see Michael. “Actually, is it ok if I do it?” “You don’t have to, dear. You’re a guest today.” “I don’t mind. It’ll be good practice for me.” “Well, it’s ok with me.” Katherine said. “Me too. I’ll take you to the kitchen and show you around.” Janet said as she walked me to another section of the house.

“My brother is a very picky eater.” Janet said as she showed me the kitchen. “These are his chefs. Mike doesn’t eat like the rest of us.” She introduced me to three different cooks who were very hard at work. “Do these chefs make separate meals for him every day?” “Yes. Michael is sensitive to food. He can only eat certain types and specific portions. That’s why he’s so fussy about who gives him what.” “Do you think he’ll mind if I help? I have a medical background and can definitely assist with his health and meals.” “I think he might like that.”

Janet asked the chefs to give Michael’s tray to me. When I saw it, I couldn’t help but laugh. “THIS is your brother’s tray?” “Yes. I know it’s silly but he loves it.” Michael’s tray had Peter Pan on it with a picture of Captain Hook at Neverland in the background. “That’s my brother. I’ll walk you to the studio so you can give it to him.” “Are you sure we won’t disturb him?” “Not at all. He never gets mad when I interrupt him I’m sure he’ll be happy to see you too.”

I walked with Janet outside towards Michael’s studio. I was so nervous, my hands were shaking and the tray was rattling. “Are you ok?” “I’m fine. Just nervous.” “Don’t be. You’ve met him before. Just be yourself. Are you sure you don’t want me to carry that for you?” “No. It’s not heavy.” I felt my heart racing as I walked up to the studio door. Janet said it was soundproof inside so he would have no way of knowing if we tried to knock on the door.

She entered some kind of a password then unlocked the door with a key. “Michael is very private.” She explained. “Mother will give you your own passcode to get into his studio. We can’t tell anyone what our own codes are.” “I understand.” We walked down a hallway and came to a huge theatre type room with seats and glass doors. I could hear Michael’s music in the background. “You can leave his tray here.” She said as I stood in front of a table. “He’s in the rehearsal hall and the red light is on.” “Does that mean something?”

“When the red light is on, it means he is working on something important and can’t be bothered. Any other light is ok, but not the red one.” “So, if I have to clean something or bring something to him and that light is on I can leave it here?” “Exactly, unless he calls the house and says it’s ok for you to go in.” “Got it.” As I put the tray down, Janet said she’d go in anyway to let him know I was there. “I don’t want him getting angry.” “He won’t. Trust me. Wait here.” I shook my head yes.

Feeling anxious, I there waiting for Janet as she walked over to Michael and interrupted his work. I heard the music turn off and she came back to me saying it was ok to go inside. “I have to help mother but you can go see him now.” “Are you sure it’s ok?” “Yes, it was his idea.” “IT WAS?” “Why are you so surprised? He likes you, Michelle.” I gasped. “DID HE SAY THAT?” She laughed. “I’m sure he will have no problem telling you that himself.” She smiled and held the door open for me as I picked up the tray and went inside.

She said goodbye and I was alone in Michael’s gigantic studio hall. I put the tray down and started looking at the walls. Michael’s pictures were everywhere with him posing in different styles. It was beautiful. I heard a door open at the far end of the room and the next thing I knew, he was walking towards me.

“It’s nice to see you again. I didn’t know you were coming to the house for an interview that day we met. I’m glad mother hired you. How are you?” “I’m well, thanks. I wanted to bring you your tray since I heard you hadn’t eaten yet.” “That’s sweet, thank you.” “I’m sorry to interrupt your work.” He laughed. “It’s ok. I had to stop anyway. Did you meet everyone?” “Not yet. But I met your sister Rebbie and your father.”

Suddenly, Michael’s face went blank. “You met HIM?” “Yeah, why?” “Did he say anything to you?” “A few words, but he seemed really nice.” Michael was quiet. “Do you know if he’s still at the house?” “I think so. Why do you ask?” “Just wanted to know.” I sensed something wasn’t right about Michael and Joseph’s relationship. He became very distant and looked uneasy when hearing about his father. I knew that was something I’d have to look into at a later time. He asked me to sit next to him. “You look beautiful. I love your hair.” He said as he gently ran his hands through it. “Thanks.” “I’m so happy to see you again.” “Me too. You should eat now, sir.” “Please don’t call me that.” “I’m sorry, I mean MJ.”

“You can call me Michael.” “No, I can’t.” “Please?” “It’s not polite.” “I want you to.” “Maybe I will if I ever get comfortable with it.” He smiled as he looked at his tray of food. “I really don’t feel like eating.” “Why?” “I have a hard time with food.” I didn’t want him to know I already knew that. “How about if I feed you? Will that help?” Michael looked at me as if he had just seen a ghost. “What did you say?” “I asked if I could feed you.” He then took my hand in his. “No one has ever asked to do that before.” “I’ll do anything I can to help you.”

He then cupped his hand against my face. “You are so special. Just know that.” “Thanks. So are you.” We then stared in each other’s eyes again. Michael was very enchanting. Every second with him felt like hours whenever we would look at each other. He suddenly started to move closer towards me. I did the same. Luckily, his tray was in between us and my hand accidentally hit it, knocking over an empty glass.

“I’m sorry.” I said as I picked it up. “I didn’t mean to do that.” “It’s ok.” He said as he helped me. “Thankfully, it didn’t break. I wouldn’t want you to get hurt.” I felt butterflies in my stomach. I didn’t want him to notice how much of a nervous wreck I was so I acted like everything was normal. “I’ll feed you now if that’s ok.” “I’d love that.” I opened his tray and noticed there were all kinds of fruits, vegetables and a blended drink. I fed him everything that was on the tray and then gave him his juice.

“If you don’t mind me asking, why you are sensitive to food?” “I’ve always been that way.” He explained. “I get really sick if I eat too much. If I don’t eat enough or at all, I get sick then too.” “How?” “I get fatigued and can faint at times.” I was shocked. “Have you tried to do something about it?” “Many times. It’s just the way my system works.” “I’m sorry. I’m going to change that.” “Really?” “Yes. I’ll see what I can do. I’m in the medical field. Helping people feel better is a big part of my job.”

“Your sister is very lucky to have you.” “I can easily say the same about your family.” “I don’t know about that.” “I do. You’re amazing.” He giggled as he finished his juice. “Are you full now?” “Yes, thank you.” “Good. I’ll take this tray back to the house. Will you be joining the rest of us?” “In a while. I have to practice one more routine first.” I would have loved to stay and watch Michael dance but I didn’t want to invade his privacy.

I stood up with the tray in my hand and walked towards the door when suddenly all of the lights went out and the entire studio was black. I screamed and froze. I had no idea what to do. I couldn’t see a thing. I then felt something touch me gently from behind….