CHAPTER FOUR

*Behind Closed Doors*

I had no words. I gently pushed his arm away and ran to the car with my things in my hand. I got in and drove right out of Havenhurst. My mind was racing. I kept hearing Michael’s words echoing in my head. I couldn’t believe what he just said. I wondered if he had heard me say those exact words in his studio when the power was out. I caught myself smiling knowing he felt the same way I did. But again, reality hit me and I knew there was no place for love in my life, especially with someone like him.

I picked up Aria’s veggie burger and gave it to her. “Elle! I’m so glad you’re here. Do you have time to see my routine?” As she was talking, I realized I’d have to keep putting my dreams aside for hers to come true. I was all she had and being the older one, I knew getting her established was more important than anything else. I promised myself at that point that I’d start thinking more about her and less about myself until the day she became successful and had a life of her own. For now, Aria was just a budding flower that needed my help to grow.

“Is it the one you’re going to tape in front of the Jacksons?” “Yes!!” “I’ll see it then.” “Wait! You won’t even come in? I haven’t seen you all day.” “I’m sorry. I’m exhausted. I’ve been on my feet all day and have a busy day tomorrow.” She then came and sat in the car with me. “So, tell me about your first day. How did it go? Your hair looks great by the way!” “Thanks. It was great. They really like me.” I remembered it was ok for me to tell her who I was working for. “I’m glad everything worked out.” She said.

“Aria, don’t freak out but I work for Katherine Jackson.” “YOU ARE MICHAEL JACKSON’S MOTHER’S HOME CARE WORKER?” “SHHH!!!! ARIA!” I put my hand over her mouth. She then shoved it away and started jumping around in her seat. “I can’t believe this. You work for one and I work for one. This is SO COOL.” “Aria, you have to SWEAR that you will not tell ANYONE. I mean it! Not your friends, not your dancing partners – NO ONE.” “I swear, I won’t.” “I wasn’t going to tell you but Mrs. Jackson said it was ok. She trusts us and I want to keep it that way!”

“No problem, sis. Can I meet her?” “She wanted me to invite you today to the house. They had a family get together but I knew you were busy rehearsing.” “I would have joined you but I’m glad you told them I was working. It makes me look professional.” I told Aria I met the entire Jackson family and she couldn’t have been happier. “I’m so glad you have another job now, sis. I know how worried you were when you said your other one didn’t give you a lot of hours.” “I’m just glad we can relax a little now. I don’t have to worry about our expenses anymore. ”

Aria thanked me for all the work I did to raise and help her become the person she was. “Just remember me when you get your Grammy award.” “I most certainly will. Right after God, mom, dad and Michael.” “And why does HE come before me?” “Because Michael is special.” “AND I’M NOT? You better thank me before him!” She laughed and promised she would. “Now get in the house and eat your burger before it gets cold.” “Did you get the whole wheat bun and no cheese or mayo?” “Yes, Aria. I know how you eat. You dancers are all the same.” “What do you mean?” “Michael also has a very strict diet.” “HE DOES?” I realized I had accidentally told Aria something that was probably very personal to him.

“Yes, he’s a fussy eater like you.” “I understand. Diet is very important for us entertainers.” “US entertainers?” “ Oh yeah. He’s going to make me a star, sis.” I shook my head. “Girl, get in the house and eat your food. I’ll talk to you tomorrow.” “I love you, Elle. You’re the best.” “Yeah I know. I love you too.” I watched as she went inside the house. Aria was my inspiration like Katherine was for Michael. I knew there was nothing I wouldn’t do for her, as long as she was happy. Her smile meant the world to me. As much as I didn’t want to admit it, so did Michael’s.

**\*\*\* FIVE DAYS LATER \*\*\***

Today is Aria’s screen test for Michael’s new short film. I have never seen her so excited. She has been rehearsing nonstop for days. I haven’t been at the Jackson house since their family get together because Katherine was out of town on business. I was scheduled to go back tomorrow which worked out perfectly since I really wanted to see Aria’s new routine. Of course, I was also looking forward to seeing Michael. As always, I knew I had to keep my guard up around him even though I knew it wouldn’t be easy.

“Sis, let’s go! Today’s the day!” Aria said as she jumped into my car with her things. “Girl, I’m going to look so fine! I got my hair and nails done and my makeup artist is going to meet me there so she can make my face all pretty.” “I’m happy for you.” I said as we drove to the film location. It was a bit of a drive getting there, but I didn’t mind. I needed some time to think about how I was going to approach Michael about what happened between us.

“Sis? You’re very quiet today. Are you feeling ok?” “I’m fine. Just have a lot on my mind.” “Anything I can do to help?” “No. You concentrate on getting your act together. “After driving for about 25 minutes, we arrived at the set. Aria had a VIP pass for both of us that Janet gave her so we had no problem getting in. I parked the car near the entrance and saw a big sign that directed us to where Michael’s film was going to take place. “Oh my god! There it is! There’s the set!”

“I know Aria. I’m excited for you. You’re going to blow up on camera.” We went in the building where several tents and cameras were set up. Some of Michael’s dancers were already in their wardrobes and were getting their hair and makeup done. “I better go change and find out what’s happening.” Aria said as she ran into one of the rooms. I looked around trying to find someone I knew but didn’t see anyone so I decided to go outside and look around.

As soon as I got outside, several young men and women were rushing past me with lights, cameras, costumes and all kinds of stage props. *He is so fancy*. I thought. I had no idea what short film Michael was about to create, but whatever it was seemed like it was going to be a masterpiece. Luckily, I wasn’t alone for long. A limousine pulled up by the front door and I saw Janet coming out with a few security guards. She saw me and immediately came up to me. “I’m so glad you’re here.” I said as she hugged me. “I felt like a stranger walking around by myself.” “I’m sorry for taking so long. I had some last minute things to take care of. How is Arabella? Is she here?” “Yes, we came together. She’s fine, very excited to do the film.” “I can’t wait to see her screen test. Have you seen Mike?”

“No. He’s here already?” “He should be. He usually gets to his film locations early to make sure everything is organized and done to his specifications. I’ll find him. Would you like to come with me? I’m sure he’d love to see you.” “I don’t want to interfere.” “You won’t. Come on, you can stay with me that way you’re not alone.” She asked one of her security guards to give me a wrist band and told me not to remove it. “This is a special VIP band that the Jackson family uses for going backstage and inside controlled access areas. Since and Arabella are like family to us now, you can have one.”

I thanked her as the guard put it on my wrist. “Please keep it on the entire time you are here. Your sister should be getting one too.” I’ll make sure has it and won’t take mine off.” She walked me to a huge central location where dozens of fancy cameras and lights were set up. “Is this the stage?” “Part of it, yes. He always films on more than one stage. Each scene is on a different platform.” “This must cost a fortune.” Janet laughed. “Nothing is too expensive for my brother. His genius creativity doesn’t care about prices.” “I can see that.”

After a while, I saw Aria in her wardrobe sitting with her makeup artist. “You didn’t have to bring your own artist, Arabella.” Janet said. “We provide them for you.” “I didn’t know that until after I got here. I’ll be sure to remember that next time. I just wanted to look my absolute best.” She then got fitted for a wig and I couldn’t help but laugh as they put it on. “Wow. You look like someone else.” “Do I look pretty?” “Let’s just say you look like you’re in a music video.” “HEY! What does that mean?” “It means you look fabulous.”

I saw dozens of backup dancers and crew workers installing loud speakers on each stage. My eyes were searching for someone and I didn’t even know it. “Don’t worry. He’ll be here soon.” “Who?” “The person you are desperately looking for.” “Girl, stop it. I’m not looking for anyone.” “I see his driver.” Janet said. “I’ll be right back.” Suddenly, I felt nervous. “Aria, you’re in good hands. I’m leaving now.” “Elle! Where are you going?” “My work is done here. Have fun filming.”

“Sis! You can’t leave! You haven’t even seen my routine yet!” I was jittery. The thought of seeing Michael after what happened at Havenhurst made me panic. I was afraid he’d bring it up in front of Janet and Aria and my cover would be blown. I also knew how much this opportunity meant to my sister and promised her I’d stay and watch. I knew the right thing to do at that moment was to stay and not think about myself.

I saw Michael and Janet walking towards us. I started to sweat. I kept telling myself to relax but it wasn’t working. His presence always seemed to make me tremble. As strong as my feelings were, I knew I had to keep my head on straight and not give into him. Suddenly, Michael told Janet something and walked away from her. I was glad he didn’t approach us yet. My nervousness was slowly starting to fade away.

“He fell behind schedule because of something that needed his attention. He’s going to change and get ready for the shoot.” Aria was excited but nervous again. “I need some alone time. I need to practice and get myself into dance mode.” Aria said as she left Janet and me alone together. “She’s so into her work, isn’t she?” “She wants to be as talented as you and your brother.” “We don’t consider ourselves talented. It’s all God’s work and he chose us to share it with the world.” I couldn’t believe her humility. For someone so beautiful, Janet really a good heart and, of course, so did her brother.

**“ALL ACTORS ON SET!”** A voice yelled. “That’s Arabella’s cue. She has to get on center stage now. Where’s Mike?” “Don’t ask me. I haven’t seen him.” “I have to find him. He needs to be here. I’ll be back.” She sped away to find Michael. I went and stood behind the cameras so I could get a perfect view of all the action. I also didn’t want to be in the way of the performers. I thought keeping out of the public eye was best.

Ten minutes went by and everyone was ready to start shooting. There was just one big problem – no one could find Michael. Poor Janet was running around like crazy trying to find him. “I don’t know where he went.” “I’m sure he’ll be here any minute. He might just be rehearsing somewhere or getting changed.” “I’m worried about him. He hasn’t eaten all day and I don’t think he slept last night.” She hurried off again looking for him.

What Janet said sent chills down my spine. The thought of Michael not eating or sleeping made me just as worried about him as everyone else. I wanted to help look for him. I searched everywhere I could but didn’t see him. As a last resort, I saw a closed door at the far end of one of the stages. I ran to it and knocked on the door to see if he was there. To my surprise, the door was unlocked but I didn’t see or hear anyone. I went inside what seemed like a private dressing room.

I saw several of Michael’s sparkly clothes, gloves and a picture of him with his mother on a desk. I didn’t want to be nosy so I continued to look for him. I gazed across the room and noticed him sitting alone in a corner on the floor holding his onto his stomach. I ran and tried to help him. “Sir, are you ok? What’s wrong?” “I’m in pain, Michelle.” “What’s wrong? Is it your stomach?” He shook his head yes.

I could tell he was very uncomfortable. “Janet is looking for you. I’ll tell her I found you.” “No! Just stay here with me, please!” “Of course.” He grabbed his stomach again and closed his eyes. I felt terrible for him. “I can help. I have experience with this from working with ill patients. I have some medical supplies in my car. I’ll be right back.” “No, you can’t leave. People will see you and will come in here looking for me.” “Let me at least go lock the door so no one sees us.” I ran and did that then hurried back to him.

I didn’t know what Michael’s condition was, but knew I had to help him. The thought of him being in such agonizing pain broke my heart. Seeing him in that state made me more determined than ever to make sure he could get better. I gave him my hand and he held it. “I’m here for you.” I whispered as he closed his eyes and held onto himself. I closed my eyes and prayed for him hoping that all of his pain would disappear. After a while, he told me the pain had left him. “Are you sure you’re ok? “I’m fine. Thank you so much for being here with me.” “Has this happened to you before?” “Several times.” “Have you told anyone?” “No, and I don’t want to.” “Why not?” “Because it’s no one’s business.” “Sir, it could be something serious.” “I’ve told doctors about it. They said it’s something in my stomach, like an enzyme problem I’ve had since I was little. That’s why it’s difficult for me to eat.” “I’m going to help you get better and make sure this doesn’t happen to you again.”

“Promise me you won’t say anything about this?” “I won’t tell anyone that doesn’t need to know. I may need some help or advice from doctors or nurses who specialize in these types of conditions. I also know some great doctors that handle celebrities and keep everything confidential. But first, I want to try a few natural home remedies on you to see if they help.” “You’re very sweet. I wish I had met you before.” “Me too.” “I’ve had this problem for so long. Sometimes it happens when I’m on stage. I have to fight it so my fans don’t notice. I don’t want them to worry about me.” “I can’t imagine how difficult that must be.” “I’m just glad that someone else knows and can help me with it. Going through this alone has always been very difficult.”

I gave him a hug and told him he didn’t have to worry now that I knew. “I think we were meant to meet each other.” “I agree, sir.” “Please, stop calling me that.” “Sorry, I mean MJ.” “You can call me by my name.” “It’s not respectful.” “I will make you say it one day.” “Is that a challenge?” “Are you going to cure me?” “I guess that’s a yes.” We both laughed.

I helped him to his feet. He said he felt lightheaded. “Should I tell Janet you need a few minutes?” “If you don’t mind.” “Not at all.” I headed for the door when he grabbed me and whispered in my ear. “By the way, I’m still not finished with you.” He kissed my cheek and pulled all of my hair to the side of my shoulder. “Sir, we can’t do this.” He wrapped his arms around my waist and pulled me towards him. “No one has to know.” “I would know.” “Do I really make you that uncomfortable?” “No. I told you, I work for your mother and Aria now works for you.”

“I know that. But whatever happens between me and you will always stay between me and you.” Hearing Michael talk that way really intrigued me. I turned around and faced him. “Do you say these things to every girl you meet?” He laughed. “Of course not. I’m so shy.” “But you’re not around me.” “That’s because I like you. There’s a difference.” His charm was starting to work on me again. Without thinking, I pulled him towards me. “I really like you too.” His face lit up. “You do?” “Yes. In fact, there’s something I want to tell you…” I took his face in my hands and pulled him closer.

“You can try and charm me as much as you want, but it’s NOT going to work!” I let go of him and ran for the door. He chased after me pulling my arm as I was about to leave. “I’m going to make you mine someday.” “You’ll have to try a lot harder.” “I don’t have to try, I’m Michael.” “Do you really think that’s enough to make me fall for you?” “My job isn’t to make you fall, my job is to catch you like I did before.” He then winked at me. I couldn’t believe how smooth he was being with me.

“Ok, you got me there. I’ll let you get ready now. I have to make a stop at my house. “Don’t leave, please.” “I’ll be back. I want to bring you something that I think will help your pain.” “Promise me you will come back?” “Of course. My sister’s filming with you. I wouldn’t miss it for the world.” “I won’t start without you.” “It will take me about an hour to get back. Please don’t stall your work because of me.” “You’re worth the wait.” Michael was being way too sweet. “Sir, I think you’re getting too attached to me.” “I can’t help it. You’re lovely.” “I’m flattered, but this just can’t happen.”

He grabbed my waist again and looked me in my eyes. “Michelle, if what I feel for you is wrong, I don’t want to be right.” My body shifted slightly. His words were weakening me but I knew I had to keep fighting him. “I’ll be back.” “Why do you pull away from me so much?” “Because I have to. I’d really like to help you get better. I’ll be back soon.” I could tell he was starting to get irritated. “Michelle, why won’t you admit it?” “Admit what?” “That you like me.” I felt a single tear fall from my eye. I didn’t want him to notice so I put my head down and ran out of the room.

I saw Janet and Aria standing together by one of the stages. “I found him. He’s in that room.” “Is he ready?” Janet asked. “I’m not sure. I have to run home for something but I’ll be back.” Aria looked like a princess. “You look so beautiful, little sister. I barely recognize you.” “Why do you have to go home?” “I need to bring him something. I’ll be back in about an hour.” I went to my car and drove home. While I was driving, I kept trying to convince myself to be strong and not let my guard down.

As difficult as it was, I knew it had to be this way for Aria’s sake. Halfway into my drive, my cell phone rang. I pulled over to the side of the road and saw Aria was calling. “SIS, you have to come back NOW!” “What’s wrong?” “It’s Michael…”