CHAPTER 5

letting the guard down

“What about him?” “He won’t start filming until you get back.” “Aria! You called and made me pull over just to tell me that? You scared me to death!” “I’m sorry, but he wanted me to call and tell you that. Oh, and he also said don’t slip and fall on your way back whatever that means.” “He is such a brat!” “Is there something going on between you two?” “NO! You tell that man I’ll be there soon. I have to get back on the road now.”

I hung up and headed home as fast as I could. I wanted to make a special protein shake for Michael so that he would have something in his system to reduce his chances of getting sick again. In my work experience, I’ve seen many patients drink them and it worked wonders. I was hoping it would for Michael too. As stubborn as he was, I knew I’d have a hard time getting him to drink it but I was on a mission to help heal him.

Our conversation before I left his dressing room had me thinking. I wish he didn’t have such a strong effect on me. I thought I should tell him why nothing could ever happen between us but I was afraid he wouldn’t understand and would continue pursuing me. I also knew avoiding him altogether would just make things worse. Especially now that my sister was going to be working so closely with him and I would be too with his mother.

When I got to the house, I blended some fresh fruit, whey power and vitamin water in a blender and poured it into a large drinking glass with a lid and put in a picnic basket. I then remembered Janet saying Michael hadn’t eaten so I cut up some fruits and veggies and packed them too. I didn’t want to forget the others so I put a few extra snacks for Janet and Aria.

When I returned to the set, I noticed there were more dancers and crew members setting things up. Michael’s siblings had also arrived to watch their brother in action. They said hello to me as I walked by them. I saw Janet sitting in a chair with her name on the back and went over to her. “I’m back. Did I miss anything? Where is everyone?” “He’s been waiting for you to get back. He said he wouldn’t start without the star’s sister here.”

“I can’t believe he did that. I thought he was kidding.” “Mike never jokes about certain things. Especially when it comes to work. He really likes you.” I could felt my cheeks warming as I started to blush. “I really like him too. DON’T tell him I told you that!” She laughed. “You know, you both have the same laugh.” “He got it from me.” Janet said. “Really?” “No, I just take credit for it. It’s a cuter when he does it.” She was so right.

**“ALL ACTORS ON SET!”** The director yelled again. I noticed the stage looked completely different from before. A few girls wearing black dresses were standing in a huddle and there were also a few young men wearing casual clothing standing in a circle. “Did they change the set?” “Yes. Mike changed his mind about which short film he wanted to make. We have to wait until later this evening to actually start putting the pieces together.” “Where is Aria?” “She went to change. She’s still the lead but Mike’s idea needed a new wardrobe for both of them.”

“Does that mean we have to come back again?” “Of course not. The photographers will be taking promotional shots and stills for the film. When that’s done, everyone will take a break and then actual filming will start later tonight.” “I’m guessing it won’t be finished today?” “No. Is that a problem?” “No. I just need to know Aria’s schedule since I will be taking her everywhere. I’d also love to watch her and need to make sure I’m not working on those days.”

“Don’t worry about mother. She will understand. I gave her our filming schedule so she will know what days you can’t be at the house with her.” “Thank you. That was very kind.” “What do you have in there?” Janet asked looking at my basket. “I brought something for your brother and some snacks for you and Aria.” “That’s very sweet but food is provided for everyone here.” “Oops, I guess I didn’t have to do that.” “It’s the thought that counts. Thank you.”

“It’s just fruit and veggies. Nothing special.” “Anything from you is special, Michelle.” Janet was sweet. I had a feeling she and I would be good friends. “I need to give your brother something and it’s important he drinks it right away otherwise it’ll lose its effect. Do you know where I can find him?” “He should be in there.” Janet said pointing to a door across the room. “Is it ok for me to go in there?” “I’m sure he won’t mind.” “Do you mind coming with me? Just in case he’s busy? I don’t want to interrupt him.”

“You don’t have to be so formal around him.” “I know, but I don’t want to barge in. I’ll feel terrible if he is busy.” “Ok, but you’ll see Michael is very down to earth and when he likes someone, he’s very good at bringing them closer to him.” “Really?” “Yes, he’s always been that way. He’s special.” “I agree. He IS special to me.” “I’m sure he’ll be glad to know that.” “PLEASE don’t tell him I said that.” She laughed. “You’re cute. I won’t say a word.”

We walked across to the room and Janet knocked on the door. “I’ll go in and see if he’s free.” As I waited for her outside, I saw Aria in a tight black dress with boots and curly hair. “Oh my god Aria!” “You like it?” “Yes, I do! That dress is hot!” “Janet let me pick out the jewelry and shoes. Michael said this dress would look nice on me.” “You are going to shine on camera!” “I hope so. It’s just a screen test for now. The real deal comes after that.” “You’re going to do great!”

Janet then came out of the room. “He’s ready. You can go see him.” She saw Aria and couldn’t believe her eyes. “You two are beautiful. You must have had great looking parents.” “Our mom was quite the beauty. Dad was more cute and simple but he looked good too.” “You are beautiful too Janet. So are your other siblings, right sis?” “Oh yeah, Michael’s gorgeous.”

“MICHAEL?” They both said looking at me. I face palmed myself in complete embarrassment. “I meant to say, Mr. Jackson is a very nice looking man. And so are you, Miss Jackson.” “Elle, cut the fancy stuff. We know you like him!” “I DO NOT.” “MMM HMM!!” “Michelle, you’re blushing.” Janet said as she touched my cheek. “I AM NOT!!” Then Aria decided to be a pest and make fun of me. “Michelle likes Michael, Michelle likes Michael.” “STOP IT!!”

“I can see you being my sister in law one day.” Janet said. “STOP!!! You two are so bad! I’m going to see him now and DON’T get any ideas, it’s strictly business.” “RIGGGHT!” They both said again. “You two love to gang up on me. I’m going to get you both!” “It’s all for love, Michelle.” “Yeah, yeah I know. But I’ll still get you!” “We have over an hour before the photo sessions begin. I’ll keep Arabella with me while you work my brother.” “EXCUSE ME?” “I mean work WITH my brother.”

Aria was laughing beyond control. “You two….I will get you both just wait and see!” They left and continued laughing at me like two school girls. I knew they were just teasing but I didn’t want Janet to know I had a crush on her brother. I was afraid it would ruin Aria’s chances to be in the film. I thought about telling her after filming was over but at the same time but I reminded myself again that I didn’t have room for love in my life. I went inside Michael’s dressing room hoping to forget the whole thing.

I knocked first then entered. I didn’t see him but there was a couch near the entrance. I closed the door and locked it so no one would get the wrong idea of me being in there alone with him. I sat on the couch with my basket next to me and waited for him. “Sir? It’s Michelle. I have something for you.” After a few minutes, he didn’t come to see me. I was afraid something might have happened to him again.

I got up and looked around the room hoping to find him. I noticed a chair with his name on the back similar to Janet’s. I wanted to sit on it but was afraid he would get mad. “Sir? Where are you?” I then heard footsteps from behind me. I turned and saw him looking so unbelievably cute. “I’m sorry. I didn’t hear you come in.” “It’s ok. I just got here. I brought you something.” I went to my basket and pulled out his drink. “What is it?” “It’s a protein shake. It will help your stomach.”

“Are you sure?” “Yes, a lot of my patients have tried this and it really helped them.” “Is it safe?” “Do you think I’d be stupid enough to try to poison you?” He laughed. “I didn’t mean it like that.” “I just don’t want to feel worse.” “I doubt you will, but there’s only one way to find out.” I could tell he was hesitating to try it. His hands were shaking as he took it from me. “Don’t worry. I’m here if you start to feel sick.”

He sat on the couch and I joined him. “I’m not allowed to eat or drink anything from people who aren’t my doctors or family members. But I trust you so I’ll do it.” I put my hands on top of his on the glass and thanked him. “I just want you to feel better. I would never do anything to hurt you. Please believe me.” “I do. No one has ever done anything like this for me before.” “That’s why I’m here – to fill that role in your life.” He was getting teary eyed. I quickly changed the subject.

“Sir, you have to drink it now otherwise it won’t work.” He was still hesitating. “Would it make you feel better if I took a sip first?” “No, it’s ok. I’m just concerned about what it might do to me.” “I promise you, there’s nothing in it that can harm you.” As he put it close to his mouth, I grabbed his hand and held it. He thanked me and kissed my cheek as I took the glass from him. “See? That wasn’t so hard.” “I just hope it wasn’t some kind of love potion.” He made me laugh. “I guess we’ll soon find out, won’t we?”

I asked him to lie down and rest for a few minutes just in case he were to feel uneasy. “Do you feel alright?” “Yeah, I’m ok.” “Janet told me you hadn’t eaten so I brought you some snacks too.” “You did?” I put my platter of fruits and veggies on the coffee table near him with some napkins. “Michelle, you are so very sweet.” “I try to be. Here, open up!” I fed him some grapes. “Do you prefer green or red?” “Red.” “Me too!” “We have something in common.”

I also fed him some broccoli, carrots, cucumbers and cherry tomatoes. “Are you allergic to anything?” “Not that I know of.” “I guess that’s another thing I will have to find out the hard way.” “Oh god, I hope not.” “I’m kidding. Do you like cheese?” “Yes. Love it.” “I’ll bring you some next time.” “You really don’t have to.” “I know, but I want to.” After having a few pieces of fruit, Michael told me he was full and didn’t want to over eat since he was going to be filming soon. Even though he barely ate, I was happy he had something in his system. I didn’t want to force him to eat more since I didn’t know the full extent of his condition.

“Do you still feel ok?” “Yes. I think I have a bit more energy now.” “You see? I told you it would be okay.” He thanked me and pulled me down on the couch on top of him. I knew it wasn’t right, but I didn’t want to be rude after he put his trust in me to take care of him. “I just want to hold you.” He put one hand on my waist and the other on my shoulder and starting running his hands up and down. It felt so loving.

“Sir, I think your photo session will start soon.” “There’s still time before they get set up. I just want to be with you for now.” “Ok.” “You don’t mind, do you?” “Absolutely not. I like being with you.” “Really?” “Yes. You make me happy.” He then looked up at me and said he felt the same way. “I’m so glad you’re starting to feel comfortable around me.” “Why wouldn’t I be?” “Because you kept pushing me away. I was going crazy trying to get your attention, girl.”

Again, my heart was racing. The amount of control this man had over me was overwhelming. Keeping my guard up around him was definitely one of the biggest challenges I had ever faced in my life. As beautiful and as special as he was, I knew there was a line that I could not cross no matter what. “Sir, I told you we can’t do this.” “You’re doing it again. As soon as we get close to each other, you pull away from me.”

“I’m sorry. I don’t mean to its just—“ “Michelle, why do you keep resisting me?” “I told you, I have to.” “But you never told me why.” “I just can’t have a relationship with anyone and especially not you.” “So I’m not the one for you because I’m famous?” “You know that’s not what I meant.” “Then, what DO you mean?” I had a feeling this was going to be a heated conversation and there was no escaping it this time. “My life is very complicated. I’ve never lived for myself and I can’t until Aria becomes who she wants to be.”

“Why do you do that to yourself?” “I have to. You won’t understand.” “Michelle, look at me.” I knew if I did, his charm would start to weaken me again. He repeated himself and I still didn’t look at him. He then tilted my face towards his. “It’s ME you’re talking to. If anyone would understand you, it would be me and I know you understand me too.” “It’s true that our lives are very similar, but I’m not famous like you. I’m just a girl from LA trying to help her sister become what she wants to become. You don’t know how lucky you are. You’re achieving YOUR OWN dreams. You’re not living for someone else’s.”

“What makes you think that about me?” “You’re doing what you love, don’t you?” “Yes. But how do you know this is what I’ve always wanted to do?” “Wasn’t it?” “I don’t really know to be honest.” “Don’t you love to sing and dance?” “Yes, but that doesn’t mean I always wanted to do it.” Michael then told me it was his father’s dream to make his children rich and famous. But it wasn’t for their benefit, it was for his own. “Singing and dancing is all I do. I don’t know a thing about anything else. I went to school, I graduated and read tons of books about different subjects, but if music were to die tomorrow, I’d have nothing to fall back on.”

“I understand what you’re saying, but it’s not the same thing.” “Maybe not, but I know how it feels to be forced into living for someone else and then spend the rest of your life wondering if you’d ever have the courage to break free from it and choose something for else yourself.” I realized he had a valid point. Maybe he would understand. But I knew I didn’t want to discuss my personal life with him. After all, he was still Aria’s boss.

“Sir, I’m glad you’re feeling ok and that you’ve eaten. I’ll be outside.” When I got up from the couch, he pulled me back down. “Michelle, STOP doing that.” “Doing what?” “This. You keep throwing me away like I’m nothing.” Hearing him say that devastated me. Without thinking, I poured my heart out to him. “Sir, that’s not true! You mean the world to me, you really do. Do you really think I’d do all of this for you if you didn’t mean anything to me? You have no idea how much I think about you, especially when I’m not near you. I worry about you all the time and I’d give anything to be with you. You make me feel so happy and every time I see you smile I just—“

“Michelle, are you listening to yourself?” It suddenly hit me that I had revealed way too much information to him. I felt so embarrassed. “Sir, I’ll see you outside. Good luck with your film.” I ran to the door but he got to it before I did and stood in front of it. “I won’t let you get away from me this time.” “Sir, please. I’m sorry I shouldn’t have said all those things. I was just not in the right state of mind.”

“I think you were and you meant everything you said.” He was trying to move closer towards me. “Sir, I have to go.” I felt scared. My legs would not stop shaking. “Michelle, I just want you to think about yourself.” “I can’t do that—“ “Please, just listen to me. Don’t think about me, don’t think about Arabella and don’t think about your parents. For ONCE in your life, think about YOU. What does Michelle want? What does Michelle need?”

He asked me the simplest question then held me in his arms. It was then that I knew letting my guard down was the best thing. “I want you.” “Are you serious?” “Yes. You’re the only one who understands what I’m going through and you’ve made the same sacrifices. If anyone can be there for me, it’s you.” “I’ll tell you what, we’ll both be there for each other, ok?” “I’d love that. But what about Aria?” “You leave her to me, Janet and mother. We’ll make sure she’s ok. I promise, you won’t have to take care of her alone anymore.” I took a deep breath and held him as tight as I could. “I love you, Michelle.” “I love you too, Michael.” He giggled cutely to himself. “Why are you laughing?” “I told you I’d get you to say my name.” “Ok, you win.” He then held me tighter. I hoped and prayed to God that I made the right choice. Not having the support I needed my entire life took a toll on me. I felt relieved knowing I didn’t have to go through the rest of my journey alone.

For once in my life, I finally did something for me. If it wasn’t for Michael, I never would have been able to take that step. I felt like I owed him more than just my love. I made a promise to myself that I would stay loyal and by his side forever and take care of him to the best of my ability. “I should go. People will get suspicious about why I’m in here alone with you for so long.” “Ok, you’ll stay and watch?” “Of course. But how are we going to do this? I mean, I work for your mother—“ “Don’t worry. Just keep it to yourself for now, ok?”

“I will.” “Trust me, it’ll all work out just fine. I promise.” “I believe you.” He kissed my cheek and smiled to himself. “Someone is happy.” I said. “I really am. You have no idea.” “I’m glad I make you smile. Good luck out there.” I grabbed his glass and the rest of my things and headed for the door. He called out to me as I was leaving. “I knew I’d catch you again, girl.” He said as he winked at me. “That’s only because I let you.” He ran towards me but I closed the door before he could get near me.

I saw Janet and Aria in the distance. I went over and told them Michael was ready for his photo shoot. “Did he eat?” Janet asked. “Yes. He drank the protein shake I made for him too.” “I’m surprised. I usually have to hold him down before he’ll eat anything from me.” “I’m good at my job.” “She worked him.” Aria said under her breath. I was about to smack her upside her head but I couldn’t get over how beautiful she looked.

Eventually, the photographers and their cameras were all set up. Aria was scheduled to do a few solo pictures followed by group photos with the other dancers and crew members and then a final session with Michael. “I’ve never done anything like this before. I can’t believe I’m going to be in MJ’s video and will be taking pictures with him.” “I know, Aria. I’m happy for you.” “I never could have done it without you.” “Just don’t forget me on the red carpet.” “I won’t. You, Janet and Michael will be right there beside me.” She then hugged me and left to start her photo session. I was glad to know my hard work was starting to pay off.

I thought about what Michael said and realized he was right. With Aria’s career finally taking off, I could spread my wings and start doing things that made me happy, like being with him. But for now, I knew it was show time for my baby sister. Janet and Aria took some photos together for fun. Janet was being silly, making funny faces and rabbit ears behind Aria’s head. Seeing them together made me believe that Aria really was in good hands and her career was on its way.

After a while, I noticed Michael didn’t come out of his dressing room. I was afraid my protein shake made him feel sick. I ran to check on him. I opened the door and saw he was getting his hair and face touched up. “Thank goodness! I thought something bad happened to you.” “No, I’m ok. Are they taking photos now?” “Yes. Janet and Aria are taking pictures. I think yours and Aria’s session is right after the group photos.” Once his stylist was finished, Michael and I were alone again. “I’ll tell them you’re ready. You look amazing.” “Thank you.” He got up from his chair and kissed my forehead. “What was that for?” “Just because.” “You are so cute.” “You’re cuter.” We then kissed each other on the lips. He held onto me and my hands fell onto his waist. Being intimate with him always felt amazing.

I suddenly remembered where we were and stopped. “We can’t do this here.” “No one will know.” “What if someone walks in here and sees us?” “Come with me.” He took my hand and we both ran inside a small, slightly darker room. “Michael, what is this?” “It’s a spare room. No one will see us here.” “Michael, NO. You have to take your pictures now.” “Just come here, girl.” He started kissing me. I was melting like wax. His touch felt like water trickling down my body. It felt so good.

“We can’t. I mean, I can’t.” He ignored me and started sweet talking. “You’re so beautiful. I love you so much…” “Michael, stop. Not here. Not now. Please?” “Ok, I’ll stop. But not before I do this.” He gave me a huge kiss on my lips and then hugged me. “I wasn’t really going to do anything. I just wanted to make you laugh.” “Really?” Seeing Michael dressed up with his beautiful hair and smile suddenly made me want him. I looked in his dreamy eyes and lost my sensed completely. “Michael…what if I want you?” I asked, winking at him.

His face changed. It seemed like he had just seen a ghost. “Will you do it?” “Do what?” “You know what I’m talking about.” “No, I don’t.” “Boy, don’t you play dumb with me!” He laughed. I knew he wanted me to tell him what was on my mind. “What do you want me to do?” “You’re really going to make me say it” “Will you, please?” “Michael, will you make love to me?”