CHAPTER 8

*What I Didn’t Know*

“*Beat it, beat it, no one wants to be defeated...*” I was dozing off and had no idea who it was. It sounded like someone was playing a CD and not actually singing. Then Aria screamed into the phone. “SIS!! Thank god you’re home. This place is COOL. I can’t believe I’m at the Jackson house!” “Aria, do you have any idea what time it is?” “I’m sorry for calling at this time. I’ve been trying you on your phone all night.” “I know. I was busy with Michael.” “More like GETTING busy with Michael!” “Aria, stop it.” “Sorry. I’m glad you’re home. What time will you be here?” “Around noon.” “Ok. I’ll see you then. Goodnight.” I was so tired I couldn’t even say goodbye to the girl. I hung up and closed my eyes drifted to sleep…

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

I woke up to the sound of my phone ringing. It was Aria telling me to get to Havenhurst. “What time is it?” I asked. “Around one in the afternoon.” “WHAT?!” I looked at my clock and sure enough, it was well after 1pm. “OH MY GOD ARIA! WHY DIDN’T YOU CALL ME EARLIER? I WAS SUPPOSED TO BE THERE OVER AN HOUR AGO!” “I’ve been calling since 10 but you never answered.” “Aria, do me a favor. Tell Mrs. Jackson I’ll be there by two.” “You don’t have to worry – your work is already done.” “BY WHO?” “Michael had some people come here today and take care of the chores. He knew how tired you were and how late you got home and said he wanted you to rest and not worry about anything.”

“He is such a sweetheart. Always saving me from trouble. By the way, how’s your foot?” “It’s ok. I’ve been getting massages and people are waiting on me like crazy. I don’t even go to the bathroom alone.” “That’s too much information.” She laughed. “So, you’ll be here in an hour?” “Yes. Please let them know.” “I will.” “Aria, is he there?” “Who?” “YOU KNOW WHO!” “Yeah, but I want you to tell me anyway.” “Aria, you need to cut that out.” “Oh come on, Elle. You love it when we tease you about him.” “Aria, is he there?” “Who?” “YOUR BOSS!” She then got the hint. “I haven’t seen him yet. He’s probably still at Neverland fast asleep dreaming of you.” “STOP. I mean it.” “Ok, ok. No, he’s not here yet.”

“I wonder if he got any sleep. I wish I could find out.” “You want me to ask Janet?” “She’s there?” “Yeah, she came this morning. I’ll give her the phone.” “No, don’t. I’ll just ask her when I get there. Don’t forget to tell them I’ll be there in an hour.” “See you then.” I got out of bed and quickly got dressed. I wanted to make another protein shake for Michael and packed some of the ingredients to take with me so he could have another one later in the evening.

I arrived at Havenhurst by 2. I felt bad for being late but knew I had a good reason. I hoped Katherine wouldn’t think any less of me especially since I told her how important the job was to me. I rang the doorbell and she answered. “I’m glad you’re here.” She said as I entered. She hugged me and said she was happy to see me again. I apologized for being late. “Don’t worry. Michael had some people come here early this morning to take care of everything. I didn’t even have to lift a finger. Everything was already done by the time I woke up.” “Really?” “Yes! Our chefs didn’t even have to cook. Their work was also taken done for them.” “I’m so glad things worked out. Where is Aria?”

“In the games room with my grandchildren. They are teaching her how to play video games. I’ll take you to her.” “I hope she wasn’t being too difficult.” “Not at all. She’s a lovely girl. You definitely raised her well.” “Thank you. I do my best. She can be a bit much for me at times. “Every child is. I raised 9 so I know.” We both laughed as she took me upstairs across a long corridor towards the other end of the house. “Mrs. Jackson, this house is HUGE!” “More than a dozen people come and go from here every day. We need as much room as we can get.”

She led me to the games room where I saw Aria sitting with her foot up on a table next to Janet. The kids were busy playing video games. I thanked Katherine as she took me inside. “Elle! I’m glad you’re here.” Janet came over and hugged me. “ “How are you?” She asked. “I’m good. Just tired. I’m sorry for being late. I over slept.” “It’s ok. Mike knew you’d be exhausted. He made sure the house work was done so you wouldn’t have to do any of it yourself.”

We sat down and spent time with the children when suddenly Janet’s phone rang. I had a feeling I knew who it was. “I’ll be right back.” She said as she left the room. “Aria, how are you really doing? Are you in pain?” “No. I just wish I could walk on my own.” “How did you get up here?” “They have an elevator and Janet’s been carrying me around everywhere.” “Did you sleep ok?” “YES! I slept in a bed that Michael once slept in!” “Really?” “YES! And it’s HUGE! Did you get any sleep?” “I passed out right after you called me this morning. I couldn’t even say bye to you.”

Minutes later, Janet came back to the room and joined us. “He’s on his way.” She said. “Did he sleep?” “A bit. He said something was on his mind all morning.” “More like someONE!” “Stop it Aria!” I said looking at her sharply. “He’ll be here within an hour or so. Mother told me she’s going out with Joseph so it’s just going to be us here the whole day. We can start editing the film once Michael arrives.”

“Sounds good to me. I’m excited to see what it looks like.” “Joe has the original reel. He’ll drop it off at Neverland then Michael will bring it here with him.” “I almost forgot! I brought another protein shake for him. It needs to be refrigerated until he can drink it. Is it ok if I go in the kitchen?” “Of course. Our home is your home. You can go wherever you want and do whatever you like.” I thanked her as I left the room and headed for the kitchen. The Jackson family fridge was the size of a deep freezer. When I opened it, I noticed everything was VERY well organized. Every single jar and can was labeled and alphabetized on one side and the produce was all pre washed and placed in plastic containers with labels and expiry dates. One thing that made me laugh was all the cartoon shaped glasses and plates. *I wonder who those belong to*. I thought to myself.

I put Michael’s shake in the fridge along with the extra ingredients and walked back towards the staircase. On my way up, I looked over and noticed a book sitting on the table in the living room with Michael’s picture on the front cover. As I walked over to get a closer look, it was his autobiography titled “*Moonwalk*.” *He never told me he wrote a book*! Feeling curious, I flipped through the pages and came across one specific paragraph that really caught my eye:

*“Many girls want to know what makes me tick — why I live the way I live or do the things I do — trying to get inside my head. They want to rescue me from loneliness, but they do it in such a way that they give me the impression they want to share my loneliness, which I wouldn’t wish on anybody, because I believe I’m one of the loneliest people in the world. … Success definitely brings on loneliness. It’s true. People think you’re lucky, that you have everything. They think you can go anywhere and do anything, but that’s not the point. One hungers for the basic stuff. I’ve learned to cope better with these things now and I don’t get nearly as depressed as I used to.”*

Reading his words brought tears to my eyes. I had no idea Michael felt this way. It was then that I knew I had to be the one to save him from the misery he called loneliness. I believed that I could do it and I wasn’t about to let anyone tell me I couldn’t. I was more determined than ever to make sure that man always had a smile on his face and not just from the outside. I wanted to make sure he was always happy from within. I suddenly heard Janet calling me from upstairs. I put the book down and went upstairs to see her.

“Did you find the kitchen?” “Yes. I was really amazed to see how organized your fridge is!” She laughed. “That’s Mike’s thing.” “Really?” “He is SO fussy. His food always has to be kept separate from everyone else’s, everything has to be labeled in clear black ink, must be dated when it was put in the fridge, when it will expire and nothing can be more than two days old otherwise he won’t go near it.” “WOW! Now I understand why he was so hesitant to drink my protein shake yesterday. I held his hand the entire time.” “I’m still surprised he actually did it. He NEVER eats or drinks anything from people he doesn’t know. I’m happy he trusts you with something that’s so very personal to him.”

“Thanks. Me too. I told him I’d never do anything to harm him. I think he sensed that.” Aria said she was feeling tired and wanted to rest before we started editing. Janet and I helped her to a nearby bedroom and tucked her in. “Arabella, if you wake up or need anything, just press this button.” Janet explained how the phones worked in the house to the both of us. It seemed complicated at first but I figured it out eventually. Once Aria was cozy, we left her to rest then Janet took me back to the main section of the house and we both sat in the living room while one of the chefs brought us some tea.

“I’m sorry the shoot took forever last night.” She said as she poured the tea for me. “We weren’t expecting it to take that long.” “I know and it’s ok. I’m just glad I could help. I was nervous and had no idea I would end up being in the film.” “Well, if you want we can keep your face in it.” “NO, THANK YOU!” She laughed. “Maybe when you see yourself on screen, you’ll change your mind.” “I couldn’t do that to Aria. She deserves to be the lead.” “We can definitely put you in something else. Maybe as an extra in the background?” “I don’t think so.” “You never know, you might think differently about it one day.”

“On another note, there is something I need to discuss with you.” She said. “Sure.” “I haven’t told anyone about this yet, not even your sister. My family doesn’t know either. Things were finalized this morning and I wanted to talk to you about it first.” “I appreciate that. What is it?” “I’m going on tour and I want Arabella to join me as my lead back up dancer.” “ARE YOU SERIOUS?” “Yes. I love her as a person and as a performer. I want to work more closely with her so I can help build her career in this business. I see so much talent in her that I haven’t seen in anyone else. I know she’d be the perfect addition to my team.”

“I don’t know what to say. Where will you be going?” “All across the globe. We start here in the US, then work our way through Europe, Asia, and Australia.” “How long is the tour going to be?” “About 6 months.” “That’s a really long time. Aria has never been out of my sight longer than a few days ever since she was born.” “I understand. I know it’s a really big decision. If you prefer, she can go on tour with me here in America and then I’ll make arrangements for her to come back to LA before I travel overseas and will have someone replace her.”

“That might be better, but it’s still a huge deal. I know she’d be all for it but I’d worry about her every day. She’s still really young and very naïve. I don’t want her getting into something she can’t handle.” “I’d never let that happen. I’d keep her under my radar at all times. She’s like the baby sister I never had. As the youngest member of my family, if anyone could keep an eye on her, it would be me. My brothers have always looked out for me just like you have for her because we’re both the youngest. I have no doubt in my mind that I could take care of her the way my brothers took care of me.”

As comforting as Janet’s words were, I knew leaving Aria with her was a huge risk. If I said no, Aria would never forgive me. But I also knew if I said yes, I’d spend the next 6 months of my life worrying constantly about her. “You’ve really given me a lot to think about.” “I know. Do you want me tell Arabella? Or would you like to talk to her first?” “I won’t tell her what you told me but I will bring up the subject vaguely and see how she reacts then let you know.” “Sounds good. I know it’s a shock, but I really think Arabella would be great with me.” “I don’t doubt that but I feel it’s a bit too soon and extreme for her. She’s never even traveled outside the state.”

We talked a bit more about the tour then Joseph and Katherine walked in the door. I ran over to them and apologized for being late. Katherine said it was alright and said she wouldn’t need my help anytime soon but would still pay me as a courtesy. I didn’t want to take her money without earning it but she insisted and there was no way I could say no. After all, she was Michael’s mother.

From what I could tell, Joseph was a very stern man. He only spoke when he thought he had something important to say. I could see why Michael was so afraid of him. After a while, he left the house saying goodbye very subtly. “He’s really straightforward.” Katherine said as she sat with me and Janet in the living room. “He doesn’t talk a lot and prefers to get right to the point.” “I noticed that.” Janet was very quiet and didn’t say a word about her father. I couldn’t imagine living with a parent that instilled so much fear and sadness in his own children. I started thinking maybe that was why Michael was the way he was. But I was glad I could help get through to him a little.

“Is Michael here?” “Katherine asked. “No, mother. We’re waiting for him so we can start editing the film.” “I wonder what’s taking him so long.” “I have a feeling he’s rehearing.” Janet said. “I know it’ll be impossible to get a hold of him now if I try and call him. If he’s still not here in an hour, I’ll drive over there. Michelle, you can join me.” As excited as that sounded, I didn’t want to look desperate in front of his family. “I’ll stay here and keep an eye on Aria.”

30 minutes went by and Michael still hadn’t arrived. The thought of him falling sick ran through my mind. I remembered him saying no one knew about his condition which worried me even more. “I think you should check to see if he’s ok.” I told Janet. “I think you’re right.” As she was leaving, I ran upstairs to check on Aria. When I got to the top of the staircase, I heard the front door open. “FINALLY!” Janet said. “I was just about to go to your house!” “I’m sorry.” He said as he entered. “I was caught up in rehearsal.” He then looked up and I quickly hid behind a wall. I wasn’t sure if he saw me or not.

He went to the living room and gave his mother a hug and a kiss. “Where are the girls?” I heard him ask. “Upstairs.” Janet said. He asked how Aria was doing and she told him she was ok and slowly recovering. I glanced below at the living room and noticed he wasn’t there anymore. As I turned my back, he was standing directly in front of me which made me scream and him laugh uncontrollably. “Did I scare you?” “YES! Don’t you EVER do that to me again!” He pulled me towards him and hugged me. “How are you?” “I’m well. Did you get to sleep?” “Not really.” “Why not?” “Someone was on my mind all morning.” “Oh? Who might that be?” “Someone very special to me…” “And who is this lucky person?” “Your sister.” He said as he ran away from me.

“Oh Lord. There he goes again making that poor girl chase him around everywhere.” Katherine said as she saw us running. Janet was watching and couldn’t help but laugh at us. “YOU TWO NEED TO GROW UP!” She said. “It’s his fault!!” “She loves to run after me! I’m irresistible to her!” He said as he ran out the door. I wasn’t going to let him get away with being a pain again so I continued running after him. He stopped at the fountain where we shared our first kiss. “This place will always have a place in my heart.” He said as he sat on the nearby bench. I saw him reach into his pocket and take out a coin.

“I wish that every time I come here to this fountain, you will be here with me.” He said as he threw the coin in the water while looking at me. I watched it land right in the middle of the fountain. “Michael, that’s very sweet.” “I missed you, girl.” “Me too. I ended up sleeping in and couldn’t get here on time.” “I know. I made sure everything was done and mother knows you’ll be busy with me for a while.” “Thank you again for bringing Aria here. I can tell she really enjoys spending time with your family.” “We’re all here for each other. There’s so much love in this family and we love giving it to others.”

“I only need it from you.” I said as I held his hand. “Really?” “Well, your mother and Janet too with just a little extra from you.” He laughed. “You’re so cute.” “Have you eaten?” “No, I was sick this morning.” “Again? I knew that happened! That’s why I told Janet to check on you.” “You didn’t tell her, did you?” “No, of course not.” “Good.” “I won’t tell anyone, I promise. I brought you another protein shake. It’s in the fridge. I’ll get it for you.” “Michelle, you are very sweet.” I kissed his cheek then ran inside the house to get his drink. When I went back outside, I noticed Michael was no longer sitting by the fountain. I called his name several times but he didn’t respond.

I thought he was being silly again so I started looking for him. After searching outside for over an hour, he was nowhere to be found. I ran back to the house and told Janet. “Where did you see him last?” “Outside by the fountain. I told him I’d be right back. I just went to grab his protein shake.” “He’s always playing around, I’ve told him so many times to stop doing that. He never listens.” Katherine said. “It’s ok. Let’s just hope he really is playing around.” Janet said as she came outside with me.

“I’ll keep looking in this area. Why don’t you go around the back? He might be there somewhere.” We then split up and started wandering around looking for him. After scouring the area for another half an hour, Janet and I met at the front entrance and still didn’t find Michael anywhere. “This place is so big, he could literally be anywhere. But it’s not like him to play a joke like this for such a long time. I have a feeling something happened.” “I was only gone for a minute. How far could he have gone in such a short time? It’s my fault, I never should have left him alone.” I went to the bench near the fountain and sat down trying to calm myself down.

Janet sat next to me as I started to cry. “I’m sure he’s just being a kid like always.” “But this is serious. It’s been almost 2 hours. What if he needs me? What if he’s feeling sick again?” “Michael feeling sick?” I made the mistake of saying too much again. I had to quickly think of a way to turn the conversation around. “He told me he has a hard time relaxing and falling sleeping at night. That’s why I make these shakes for him so he can continue with his work during the day and also have something in his system. “Michelle, NO ONE has ever done so much or thought about him the way you do.” “I really care about him. He means the world to me.” “I can definitely see that.” “Janet, I’m worried. Where could he be?”

**\*\*\* MICHAEL’S POINT OF VIEW\*\*\***

**FRONT ENTRANCE GATE OF HAVENHURST AWAY FROM THE HOUSE VIEW**

*“What are you doing here?”*

*“I had to see you.”
“You’re not welcome here and you know it.”*

*“Did I really deserve what you did?”
“You were given simple instructions and didn’t follow them.”*

*“You instigated the whole thing.”
“I had nothing to do with it.”
“How can you say that? We both felt something that night!”
“I felt nothing then and feel less than nothing now. Get away from me and off my property.”*

*“I’m not giving up on you. I know we are meant for each other.”*

*“Leave. NOW. I don’t want to see you here again.”*

*“I deserve to know why.”
“I’m not into you. I never was. I’m into someone else.”*

*“What does she have that I don’t?”
“My heart.”*

*“Who is she?”
“It’s not your business. I’m telling you for the last time LEAVE or I will have security escort you out.”*

*“Michael, I’m not letting you get away.”*

*“You are not the one for me. You never were. Go NOW.”*

*“Or what?”
“You know exactly what I’m capable of doing.”*

*“I’m going to have you one way or another.”*

*“LEAVE ME ALONE.”*

*“Michael, I love you.*

*“I don’t.”*

*“Whoever she is, I will destroy her.”*

*“You won’t get near her. I will make sure of it.”*

*“We’ll see about that, Michael. We’ll see…”*