

# Michael and Me

*The Untold Story of*  
MICHAEL JACKSON'S  
*Secret Romance*

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Shana Mangatal



An A Cappella Book

To maintain the privacy of individuals, some names have been changed.

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# PROLOGUE

Dreams do come true. It could happen to you.

—Walt Disney

**I**t was March 5, 1988.

The city lights soared past me as the Yellow Cab wove in and out of busy traffic. The energy of New York City was an intoxicant, invigorating every moment. The city had a pulse so strong, it felt like it must be the epicenter of the universe.

As we pulled up to Madison Square Garden, the butterflies in my stomach flew faster. I felt that I was about to step into a piece of history. I was right: this night would set me on a course that would change my life.

We had arrived in New York just a few hours earlier after a four-and-a-half-hour drive from our hometown in Largo, Maryland, a suburb of Washington, DC. My aunt Vera had driven my friend Tracy and me in her brand-new silver Nissan Maxima. That car was all the rage that year because it talked, telling you important things like “Your lights are on.” I always got a kick out of riding in it. Sometimes we would purposely leave the lights on just so we could hear it talk.

We were here to see Michael Jackson in concert—he was on his Bad tour. I had been looking forward to this day for months. I was seventeen, and Michael was my idol.

We found our seats, which were behind the stage. At first I was upset that they were so bad. When I purchased the tickets, they hadn’t informed me that the seats would be in an obstructed view area. As the show went on, however, I grew to like them. It gave me

a different vantage point. From behind, you could catch a glimpse of how the magic was made, and I could see him walking off and on stage before the curtain was raised. I had always been obsessed with magicians like David Copperfield. I was the type who would watch a trick over and over so that I could figure out how the illusion was created. The creation of an illusion is what fascinated me about Michael. I always suspected his Peter Pan image was just a facade. And now I could glimpse the real Michael, behind the curtain.

After a couple songs, the charm of sitting behind the stage wore off, and we decided to walk around to see if we could snag some better seats. Since we were already behind the stage, we easily made our way onto the floor without anyone checking for tickets. We spotted an empty area in the front row, and blended in there as if we belonged. We managed to stay in our newfound front-row seats for the remainder of the concert. I couldn't believe how lucky we were.

This experience was completely different from sitting behind the stage. Michael was *right there*, as if he were performing in my living room. And he was overwhelmingly sexy. He wore black pants with silver buckles, which showcased his perfect body—especially his round backside. They were so tight; I could see *everything*. It was like he was dancing naked in front of me for two hours. It was so intense and exhilarating, inspiring feelings that I had never felt before.

During the song “I Just Can't Stop Loving You,” he and Sheryl Crow, who was his background singer back then, came together and started dancing closely. He started rubbing his crotch while he was singing to her, so much that he became noticeably excited. I could not believe my eyes. I felt like I was going to faint from shock. It was like I was seeing something I wasn't supposed to see. I was overwhelmed. I had read so many tabloid stories painting Michael as this asexual man-child that I was not expecting this at all.

He then launched into a beautiful rendition of his hit song “Human Nature.” “See that girl—she knows I'm watching. She likes the way I stare.” As his smooth voice effortlessly glided over the lyrics, he pointed right to me. I squealed so loud, he started smiling. I had been screaming the whole time, so there was no doubt he had noticed me before then. He kept glancing at me for the remainder of the concert and I was sure we had made a love connection.

I talked endlessly about that magical moment with my aunt Vera and Tracy during the entire cab ride back to the hotel. “Did you see him point to me when he said ‘See that girl’? We made eye contact! He was looking at me the whole concert. I know he saw me!”

“Yes, he did point at you. I saw it.” Tracy said, probably just hoping I would shut up.

We had left at the beginning of the last song, “Man in the Mirror,” to beat the traffic. We also wanted to arrive back at the hotel before Michael so that we could try to catch a glimpse of him returning from the show.

The Helmsley Palace on the corner of Fiftieth Street and Madison Avenue was a luxurious, majestic skyscraper fifty-five floors high, directly across the street from St. Patrick’s Cathedral. Stepping into the lobby made you feel like royalty—the decor was classic, literally like a palace. I had read in magazines that this was Michael’s favorite place to stay while in New York and I was hoping this time would be no different. When we had checked in earlier, we noticed a group of fans waiting across the street, and I knew that my research had paid off. Michael *was* staying there. I was so relieved.

As our cab pulled up to the entrance at around eleven, the group of about a hundred fans were still gathered across the street behind a barricade. A glimpse of Michael was all they wanted. Some held signs with Michael’s picture; others were decked out in Michael’s signature costume: high-water pants, a fedora, and one sparkly white glove. They were chanting, “Michael! Michael! Michael!” hoping to get his attention. New York City police manned the area, making sure the crowd didn’t get out of control. This scene would repeat itself in every city Michael traveled to. At this moment, he was truly the king of the world.

Whenever Michael came to any town, the place stood still. It was as if pixie dust had been sprinkled over it. Everything seemed more alive, more beautiful—more *magical*. I distinctly remember being excited simply because Michael was breathing the same air, feeling the same weather, and seeing the same sights as I was.

Back then, Michael mania was in full effect. When he came to town, vendors would set up on every block, selling buttons and T-shirts and anything else they could stick his image on. It seemed

like the entire world was under Michael's spell. New York City was no different on this balmy night.

We exited our cab and a surly hotel security guard stopped us at the revolving doors. "I'm sorry, but only guests of the hotel are allowed in the lobby." Aunt Vera proudly produced the card key to our room. That was the magic ticket. The guard's demeanor instantly changed to warmth and we were promptly escorted into the elegant lobby.

I felt so special as I looked back at the growing crowd of screaming fans being held at bay across the street. Some shouted, "La Toya!" mistaking me for Michael's beautiful older sister. I chuckled under my breath but felt honored to be mistaken for anyone in the Jackson family. I reveled in the moment and waved to the crowd. They screamed even louder.

We headed for the elevators to our room. Just then, I saw Michael getting out of a glass elevator from the parking garage. We had managed somehow to arrive at the hotel at the same time. He walked in with a black towel around his neck and a big brown coat. He spotted me and started staring. I waved. He waved back.

"Oh my God, Tracy! Did you see that? He recognized me! I know he did." I was so giddy, I was talking a mile a minute. "I know he saw me in the audience! I cannot believe this. Did you see him wave? We have got to meet him tonight, no matter what."

In my teenage mind, Michael's wave was all the proof I needed that we had made a love connection. There was no way I was going back to Maryland without at least *trying* to meet him. I had caught his attention. I couldn't turn back now.

With a cool swagger, Michael strolled onto one of the special elevators that were guarded by security. These private elevators only stopped on the top floors, where the penthouses were located. Through our investigations, Tracy and I had found out that Michael's suite was on the fifty-third floor. We started devising a plan. The elevators we had access to didn't go to those floors, of course. They could only be reached by those private elevators. We decided that the only way to reach his floor would be to bypass the elevator altogether and walk . . . up the stairs . . . fifty-three flights.

When you're young your brain thinks differently. You feel invincible and don't think about consequences. Yeah, we were young

and crazy, and clearly in good physical shape. We trudged up those stairs without a second thought. Our minds were focused on one thing and one thing only: getting to Michael.

When we finally reached the floor, I opened the door that led to the hallway. To our surprise, our plan had worked. As we turned the corner, I spotted Chuck, Michael's main bodyguard, with his trademark black top hat that I had seen him wearing in pictures with Michael. I thought that we would immediately be kicked off the floor, because he looked imposing. Michael's entire security staff was there.

I boldly approached Chuck and told him that I had seen him in Japan.

He said, "Oh, you were there?"

"No, on TV," I said.

Everyone laughed. I guess they were used to fans following Michael all over the world.

Tracy asked Chuck if he could get Michael's autograph for her. He said that would be no problem at all.

Just then, Emmanuel Lewis, famous for playing Webster on the sitcom of the same name, emerged from what appeared to be Michael's suite. He was shockingly tiny, only a little taller than my knee. I think we were close to the same age. Chuck asked Emmanuel if he could get Michael's autograph for Tracy. He said, "Sure." Then I decided I wanted one too.

"Get me one too, please," I said as I ran after him.

"Whose do you want? Mine or his?"

Not wanting to hurt Emmanuel's feelings, I said, "Both."

He said, "No, you probably want Michael's. I'll get it." Before walking back into the suite, he asked us to write our names on a sheet of paper so that Michael could personalize our autographs.

Back then, an autograph was equivalent to a selfie. We didn't have cell phones, so a camera wasn't always readily available; an autograph was the only proof you could show your friends that you actually met a celebrity. I hadn't even brought a camera on this trip. None of us had. Times were different then. Our memories and, in my case, my diaries, are all we now have.

Hilary, another member of Michael's security team, whispered to Chuck, "Janet just called. She'll be up in a few minutes."

Janet Jackson was at the height of her fame at this time, having recently released her chart-topping album *Control*. I had just performed the title track at my high school talent show with my best friend, Tirina, learning every move of the groundbreaking choreography from the music video and singing over Janet's breathy vocals. We received a standing ovation for our performance, and I won Most Talented of my senior class shortly thereafter. Needless to say, I was a fan.

Emmanuel came back with our autographs and handed them to us. My heart nearly stopped when I saw the ornate silver handwriting that was uniquely Michael's. He had *touched* this picture of him in his motorcycle jacket, which also meant Michael was actually in the room just a few feet away. A rush of excitement surged in my veins. He was *so close*.

The elevator door opened. It was Janet with her boyfriend at the time, Rene. I smiled with anxious anticipation as she approached. Dressed in a silk black blazer and black slacks, she looked as gorgeous in person as she did in pictures. I greeted her with a warm "Hi!"

She stared coldly, not saying a word, as she sauntered by.

I was so disappointed.

Jimmy Jam, Quincy Jones, Sugar Ray Leonard, and a parade of other celebrities I had only dreamed of meeting started exiting the elevator after Janet's arrival. At this point, I could no longer contain myself. I said to Chuck, "Can we please go in to the party?"

He said, "You really want to go in?"

"Yes, please."

"What would you do if you went in?"

"We'd mingle. We'd be nice." I was practically begging at this point.

Then one of Michael's other bodyguards said, "Why is it that pretty girls always get their way?"

With no other choice at this point, Chuck reluctantly said, "OK. Go ahead in."

Chuck, wherever you are today, *thank you*.

As we opened the door and walked into the room, the bright lights hit me. Everyone was staring. We were probably the only non-A-list people in the room. They must have wondered who we were and thought we were important too. I was wearing a black



leather jacket, black leather pants, black high heel boots with silver buckles, and toy handcuffs hung from my belt. Of course, I hadn't even kissed a boy yet, so my "bad girl" look was all for show.

I stopped and stood in the foyer of this immaculate suite and took everything in. Here I was, in Michael Jackson's penthouse at the top of New York City. Even in my wildest dreams, I hadn't imagined this. I scoped the place out, wanting to soak up every detail of this room that only royalty and very special people had inhabited. It was an elegant suite, with a massive window that encompassed the entire side of one wall and displayed a breathtaking view of Manhattan's sparkling skyline. To the right of the foyer was a winding staircase that led to an upstairs bedroom—obviously Michael's room. In front of me was a beautiful black baby grand piano.

I looked behind me and Janet and Rene were sitting on a sofa, keeping to themselves, people-watching. I was now slightly afraid to even cross Janet's path again. Her cold stare was enough to ward me away for life.

Next to the piano, Michael's personal photographer, Sam Emerson, was standing taking pictures. I knew that Sam only took pictures of Michael, so I figured he couldn't be too far away. I walked closer and *there he was*, leaning against the piano; guests surrounded him, getting their pictures taken. I walked and stood next to Sam. I didn't dare ask for a picture, fearing he would discover that I was a mere mortal. I wanted to just blend in with the scenery, in fact. Surely everyone must have known we didn't belong.

But then Michael spotted me. A big smile spread across his famous face and his eyes widened through his Ray-Ban sunglasses. He vigorously waved like a schoolboy spotting a familiar face in the crowd. I slightly smiled and looked over my shoulder to see whom he was waving at. Surely, it couldn't be me.

But it *was* . . .

I waved back.

Suddenly, not only did I belong at the party, but the host himself had welcomed me. I started to relax as I felt a million eyes staring even harder. Michael's welcome had inducted me into this crowd of A-listers and transformed me into one of them. Everybody was suddenly extremely nice. Even Janet's attitude softened a bit.

Too afraid to actually speak words, I walked closer and stood behind Michael. He was acting as the perfect host, chatting with his guests and making sure everyone was happy, taking pictures with anyone who asked. *Boy, I wish I had brought my camera.* He was gracious, humble, and friendly. He was the Michael I had always dreamed he would be. He had been famous for almost twenty years at this point, but fame still hadn't quite taken complete hold of him. He was just a normal, extremely nice guy entertaining guests in a hotel room. No one would have ever guessed that this dude had just finished performing in front of twenty thousand screaming fans at Madison Square Garden.

His skin was perfectly smooth and a lovely chocolate color. He wasn't wearing any makeup and was simply beautiful. Onstage, his skin had seemed much lighter, even white, but I was happy to see that he still had his original beautiful brown complexion just like when he was a little boy. His lighter-looking skin was all a result of stage makeup, I surmised.

Even back then there were rumors that he was bleaching his skin and nasty tabloid stories about it. I was so happy to see that that couldn't be further from the truth. His hair was nice and freshly washed, with a wavy ponytail—a short one. *He must wear a fake one sometimes,* I thought, because it was longer in concert just an hour earlier. He had on black Ray-Ban sunglasses and a red corduroy button-down shirt that was tucked into his black slacks; his belt was silver and glittery. His amazingly cool black lace-up shoes had silver plates on the tips. His right arm was adorned with two bracelets, one silver, the other black. He had a noticeable dent on the side of his nose, but nothing looked fake. In fact, he was more handsome in person, with no makeup on, than I had ever seen him in pictures and videos. He was small, though. His waist must have been smaller than mine, and I only weighed ninety-eight pounds. I had on high heels, which made me about five foot six. He wasn't much taller than I was—maybe five foot nine.

I also noticed he was chewing gum. I had never seen Michael chew gum before and it made him seem so *normal*. Up until now, I had only seen him on TV and in pictures, so in my mind he was this perfect dream guy who didn't do normal stuff like chew gum

or go to the bathroom. He was a *star* and stars didn't do normal stuff like us regular folks.

I overheard Sean Lennon, who was twelve years old, begging his mother, Yoko Ono, to let him spend the night. He begged and begged until finally she agreed . . . just a regular mother and son having a typical conversation.

It appeared that Michael was going to have a slumber party with Sean Lennon, Emmanuel Lewis, and a couple of other kids I saw running around. Although Michael was in his late twenties and in the prime of his superstardom, no sexy female groupie types were roaming around like one would expect at a concert after-party like this. Michael was different: he preferred the company of kids. This made him even more endearing to me. His Peter Pan persona appealed to those of us not ready for actual relationships. He was safe.

Jimmy Jam sat at the baby grand and started playing a few songs, his fingers gliding seamlessly over the ivory keys. I walked over to the window, gazed upon the sparkling lights, and thought, *Is this really happening?* It all felt like a dream. There was Michael, *staring at me*. Nights like this just didn't occur in my world.

I strolled over to the bar, where an array of minibottles lined the marble counter. Too young to drink alcohol, I poured myself a 7Up. I wanted to seem cool, with a drink in my hand. Even the 7Up tasted better than it ever had before. To this day, when I drink a 7Up, I am transported back to Michael's hotel suite on that spring night when I was seventeen.

All of New York's elite seemed to be in the room. I spotted New York artist Keith Haring, who had spread a bunch of buttons with his political sketches on them on Michael's coffee table. Keith would pass away two years later from complications of the AIDS virus. I still have some of those buttons and cherish them.

Tracy and I found an empty sofa and relaxed, hoping to blend in. I glanced up and spotted Quincy Jones walking over. He asked if anyone was sitting in the spot next to me. I managed to nervously mutter that the seat was empty. He plopped onto the sofa and placed his icy brown cocktail, which he had mixed himself at the bar, on the coffee table. I tried to remain calm as I watched him coolly sip his beverage and chat with other nearby guests. After all,

I didn't want to blow my cover. No one needed to know that I was still in high school and dying inside, sitting next to the man who had produced *Thriller*. I felt like Cinderella, worried that the clock would strike midnight at any minute and I would have to return to normal life. Surrounded by legends, I could only think about how out of place I was. These people had accomplished so much. I had watched them win Grammys, perform concerts, and create masterpieces. And here I was, just a girl from Largo, Maryland. My life had only just begun.

I then saw Michael spot Janet and Rene. Determined to at least shake Michael's hand, I walked back over to him. I overheard Rene say, "Great show, man!" Michael shook his hand and said, "Thank you." Then Michael leaned over to Janet and whispered something in her ear. As if Michael had just shared the most amazing secret ever heard, she widened her already big eyes and said, "Really? Get out of here!" Michael smiled and said, "I'll call you." They seemed like typical siblings, Janet looking up to her big brother.

Then Michael turned around. He was just a few inches away. He was so close I could smell his perfume. He looked at me, smiled the biggest smile, with the whitest teeth I had ever seen, reached out his hand, and said, "Hi. I'm Michael."

It felt like the entire world stopped. The man I had dreamed about since I was a child was standing in front of me, reaching for my hand. It was the moment I had been waiting for.

I silently composed myself and took his hand in mine. "Hi. I'm Shana."

His hand was so soft. It felt like a warm, billowy cloud. It was the softest hand I had ever felt. I was so nervous. I was afraid to hold it too tight. So I delicately held it as if it were a porcelain doll, not wanting to disrespect the hand that wore that famous white glove.

But Michael took me by surprise and grabbed my hand tighter. I opened my hand to let go of his tight grip, but he *kept holding on*. I was stunned. He then slid his large thin hand down my entire hand, lingering on every finger and sliding down to the tips of my fingernails. The whole while he was smiling that big beautiful smile and nervously biting his bottom lip.

*Michael Jackson was flirting with me.*

It was one of those rare moments that will be flashed before my eyes when my life is at its end. This moment was *everything*.

Then other guests started closing in on him, vying for his attention. He was the man of the hour and everyone wanted their moment with him too. We looked at each other and smiled as I slinked back to the sofa where I had been sitting. Michael stayed a little longer, mingling with his guests, before heading up the spiral staircase, saying good night to everyone as he disappeared into his room. Sean Lennon and Emmanuel Lewis ran up the stairs behind him.

I thought that this would be one of those stories I would tell my future grandkids over and over until they were sick of hearing it, when I was old and gray: my one memory of meeting the most famous man in the world.

But it was only the beginning.