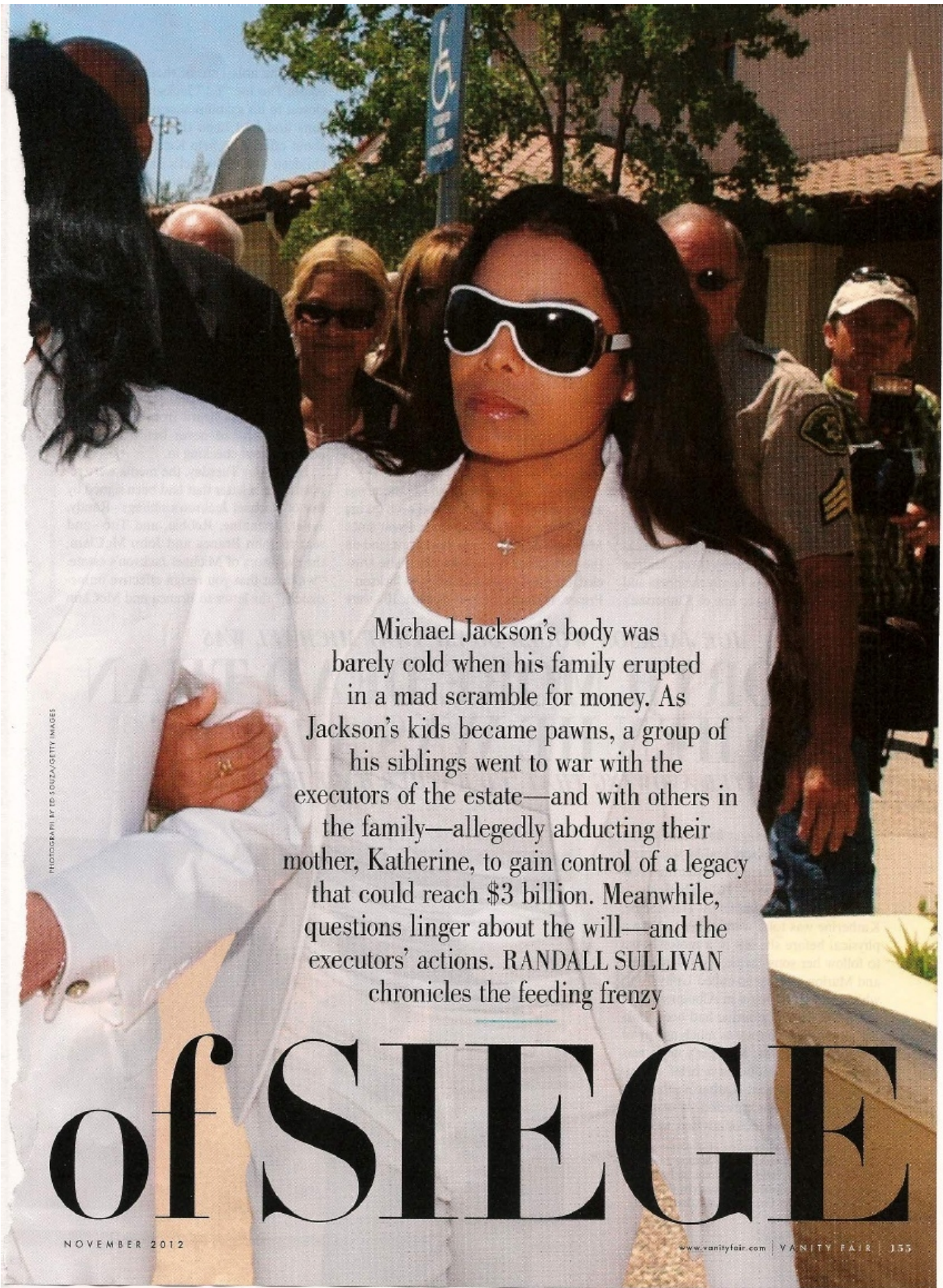


#### LAST WISHES

Michael Jackson, flanked by sisters La Toya and Janet, 2004. At his death, three years ago, Jackson left behind one of the largest and most complicated estates in California history.

# ESTATE



PHOTOGRAPH BY © SOUTHWEST IMAGES

Michael Jackson's body was barely cold when his family erupted in a mad scramble for money. As Jackson's kids became pawns, a group of his siblings went to war with the executors of the estate—and with others in the family—allegedly abducting their mother, Katherine, to gain control of a legacy that could reach \$3 billion. Meanwhile, questions linger about the will—and the executors' actions. RANDALL SULLIVAN chronicles the feeding frenzy

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## I. The Abduction

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he opening act of the most bizarre Jackson-family drama since the death of Michael Jackson himself began to unfold on Saturday, July 14, 2012, when Dr. Allan Metzger arrived at the mansion in Calabasas, in the hill country at the far-western edge of the San Fernando Valley, where Katherine Jackson lived with her late son's three children and a revolving cast of family members and retainers. According to one of Katherine's

the trip by road. To avoid placing strain on her heart, Metzger said, Mrs. Jackson should instead travel to Albuquerque by plane.

Katherine agreed to leave the next morning, accompanied by her daughter Rebbie, Rebbie's daughter Stacey Brown, and Mrs. Jackson's personal assistant, Janice Smith. Not until they were at the airport did Katherine realize they weren't headed to Albuquerque but rather to Tucson, where she had been booked into a room at the Miraval Resort & Spa. Janet Jackson was waiting at the resort in Arizona when her mother arrived. At Miraval, Katherine was checked into a room in which the telephone had been disconnected and the television was not working. Lots of sleep and no disturbances—that's what the doctor had ordered, Janet and Rebbie explained. Rebbie took her mother's cell phone from her "so you won't be bothered by calls."

Back at the Calabasas house, there was as yet no worry. Katherine had been taking a motor-home trip about once a year since Michael's death. During those trips, and on the rare other occasions when she traveled, the three children of Michael Jackson—Prince, 15; Paris, 14; and Blanket, 10—were

left in the able care of their 34-year-old cousin Tito Joe "T.J." Jackson. T.J. was the closest to his grandmother of any of Tito's sons and had been the most generous about offering to help Katherine with the children after Michael's death. (Debbie Rowe, the dermatologist's nurse who became Michael's second wife and the mother of the older two children, does not have custody.) Though still best known as the first serious boyfriend of fellow Buckley School student Kim Kardashian, T.J. had turned into a solid family man, raising three children with his wife, Frances. He was the closest thing to a father that Prince, Paris, and Blanket had in the world. On this occasion, as on others, they were fine with being left in T.J.'s care, but as time went on they became concerned by the fact that they hadn't heard from their grandmother. She had never before gone 24 hours without checking in.

By midday Tuesday, the media were reporting on a letter that had been signed by five of Michael Jackson's siblings—Randy, Janet, Jermaine, Rebbie, and Tito—and sent to John Branca and John McClain, the executors of Michael Jackson's estate. "We insist that you resign effective immediately," the letter to Branca and McClain

LARGE PHOTOGRAPH FROM FOTASTIC; INSET BY JUSTIN SULLIVAN/A.P. IMAGES

# JOE JACKSON WOULD BOAST THAT MICHAEL WAS "WORTH MORE DEAD THAN WHEN HE WAS ALIVE," LATER AVOWING THAT "I'D RATHER HAVE HIM ALIVE."

representatives, Metzger had come at the behest of Janet Jackson, and he was introduced as an associate of Katherine Jackson's longtime Beverly Hills physician, a woman she trusted implicitly. Her doctor, Katherine was told, wanted her to have a physical before she left in a motor home to follow her sons Jackie, Tito, Jermaine, and Marlon on their so-called Unity Tour, which was set to begin in Albuquerque in just a few days. Katherine had been looking forward to the tour as much as any of her sons had. Alas, Metzger's news was not good. He conducted a brief examination and then told Katherine that her blood pressure was elevated. It wouldn't be a wise idea, the doctor advised, to make

Adapted from *Untouchable: The Strange Life and Tragic Death of Michael Jackson*, by Randall Sullivan, to be published this month by Grove Press, an imprint of Grove/Atlantic, Inc.; © 2012 by the author.



**THEY WILL BE DONE**  
Jackson with his mother, Katherine, in 2005. Opposite, from left: Janet, Paris, Blanket, La Toya, Jackie, and Prince at Jackson's memorial service, July 7, 2009. According to Jackson's will, 40 percent of the estate is held in trust for his children.



began. The letter stated that Katherine had suffered a "mini-stroke"—something that certainly hadn't happened before she left. According to one of Katherine's representatives, her longtime doctor would reveal that she had no association with Dr. Metzger and had never sent him to see her patient. (Metzger could not be reached for comment.) More alarm bells went off when it became clear who Metzger was: the same Allan Metzger who had been called as a defense witness at the trial of Conrad Murray, the doctor convicted of providing the drugs that had killed Michael Jackson; the same doctor who had been reprimanded by the state medical board for writing prescriptions for Janet Jackson under false or fictitious names.

By then, T.J. and others at the Calabasas home, including his cousin Trent Jackson, Katherine's caregiver, and Sandra Ribera, a lawyer for Katherine, thought they knew what the "abduction," as the blogosphere and entertainment media soon would be calling it, was all about. As they saw it, the five siblings who had written the letter, and who now reportedly had Katherine Jackson in their custody, were, in the view of Katherine's

represented by a troupe of lawyers and business advisers, had been consuming itself with internecine warfare.

## II. Securing the Perimeter

**T**he battle over the estate began within hours of Michael Jackson's death. In the morgue at the Los Angeles County coroner's office, in Lincoln Heights, the chief medical examiner, Lakshmanan Sathyavagiswaran, and his staff were confronted by the corpse of a very thin but not quite emaciated middle-aged man who was nearly bald beneath a black wig that had been stitched into the fuzzy strands of his closely cropped white hair. The skin beneath was covered by what Dr. Christopher Rogers, who performed the autopsy, described as a "dark skin discoloration" that stretched from ear to ear, apparently a tattoo intended to camouflage the scars on the dead man's scalp—a legacy of burns suffered during the filming of a Pepsi commercial in 1984. There were also dark tattoos under the eyebrows and around the eyelids, and a pink tattoo near his lips, all of them clearly cosmetic. A bandage covered a nose so cut away that, without a prosthetic, it looked like little more than a pair of slightly ridged nostrils. Dr. Rog-

**W**hat Michael Jackson left behind, along with his three children and his body of work, was one of the largest and most complicated estates in California history. A crush of creditors and claimants recognized that the fortune they were after was growing at a rate no one could have foreseen. Within hours of Jackson's death, *Thriller* was the No. 1 album on iTunes, and Michael Jackson's albums occupied all 15 of the top spots on Amazon.com's list of best-selling albums. Overall, Jackson's album sales were up 80-fold by the end of that day.

The King of Pop, long financially troubled, was going to be worth a billion dollars again, maybe two billion, maybe three. Joe Jackson would boast that Michael was "worth more dead than when he was alive," catching himself a moment later and avowing that "I'd rather have him alive." Members of the Jackson family intended to make sure they held first position in the collection line. They had begun demonstrating this resolve within hours of Michael's death, when some of the women of the clan initiated what became a week-long occupation and search of the rented chateau at 100 North

# JACKSON WAS IN NEW YORK ON JULY 7, 2002,

*THE DATE ON WHICH, ACCORDING TO HIS WILL, HE SIGNED  
THE DOCUMENT IN LOS ANGELES.*

representatives, somehow hoping to gain a conservatorship over her, possibly by demonstrating her incompetence to serve as the guardian of Michael's children. Much of Michael Jackson's fortune, as everyone knew, would follow those three kids wherever they went.

No one in the family, not even Katherine, had so far gotten control of Michael Jackson's wealth. The estate, tied up by various legal complications, had yet to make its way through probate and was therefore not settled in any definitive way. For the time being, it was under the control of its executors—who, as court documents attest, have been receiving substantial fees, as is their legal right. Far from presenting a united front, the Jackson family—an indecisive and elderly mother; an estranged and erratic father; and eight siblings with varying agendas—supple-

ments and those who assisted him counted 13 puncture wounds on the body, spread from one side of the neck to both arms and both ankles, suggesting recent needle insertions. The only real signs of trauma were deep bruises covering the chest and abdomen, apparently inflicted during an attempt to resuscitate the man. Several ribs were cracked, either by chest compressions or by the balloon pump that had been inserted into the lungs. The cause of death would be given as "acute propofol intoxication" with "benzodiazepine effect," and would lead to Dr. Conrad Murray's indictment and conviction for involuntary manslaughter. Because Murray was employed by AEG Live, Katherine and Jackson's three children filed a "wrongful death" lawsuit against the entertainment company, alleging it put Jackson under unendurable pressure and failed to provide the medical oversight it promised. That case is still in the courts.

Carolwood Drive, in the Holmby Hills section of Los Angeles, where Jackson had been living at the time of his death.

The family, and La Toya in particular, would later accuse Tohme Tohme, Jackson's sometime adviser and business manager, often described as "shadowy" if only because he is a privacy-seeking Lebanese-American, of looting the house where Michael had died, but, according to the company charged with securing the Carolwood house, Tohme never set foot on the property. Rather, he placed a call to Ronald Williams, a former agent with the U.S. Secret Service who now operated a private security company, Talon Executive Services. Williams dispatched teams of operatives to the Carolwood chateau and to Hayvenhurst, the Jackson-family compound in Encino.

Soon after Williams and his operatives arrived at Carolwood, La Toya Jackson and

her boyfriend, Jeffrey Phillips, showed up and demanded to be admitted. Tohne had told security that "no one" was to be allowed onto the property, Williams recalls, "but La Toya and her boyfriend said, 'We're family and we should have access to the house.'" According to Williams, Ron Boyd, the Los Angeles Port police chief, who was at the scene that night, acting as a liaison between the Jackson family and law enforcement, had given them tacit permission to come and go as they pleased.

Three hours after La Toya and Phillips were let in, Katherine Jackson arrived. She too went inside. Grace Rwaramba, the recently terminated longtime nanny to Michael's children, was in London with the "celebrity interviewer" Daphne Barak; it was midmorning when she received a call from Mrs. Jackson. According to Rwaramba, Katherine began the conversation this way: "Grace, the children are crying. They are asking about you. They can't believe that their father died. Grace, you remember Michael used to hide cash at the house? I'm here. Where can it be?" Rwaramba described Michael's standard practice of hiding his cash in black plastic garbage bags and under the carpets. Talon later described La Toya and her boyfriend loading black plastic garbage bags into duffel bags and placing them in the

could have access to Michael's wealth and property. Speaking to the media assembled outside the Shrine Auditorium for the BET Awards ceremony, on June 28, 2009, Joe Jackson asserted claims to Michael's children and to his fortune. When CNN's Don Lemon attempted to interview Joe Jackson, a publicist was summoned to read a prepared statement for Joe, saying that Michael's parents "have the personal and legal authority to act, and solely Katherine and I have authority for our son and his children." Not one to pass up a self-promotional opportunity, Joe then gestured to his business partner, Marshall Thompson, former lead singer of the Chi-Lites, to tell the CNN reporter about their new record company.

### III. "A Bit of a Rocky Start"

**O**n June 29, 2009, Los Angeles County Superior Court judge Mitchell Beckloff gave Katherine Jackson temporary custody of Michael Jackson's three children and limited access to some of his property. The Jackson family did not have long to celebrate. Two days later, a certified copy of a document titled "Last Will of Michael Joseph Jackson" was filed in the same court by

Jackson accountant who was the third executor named in the document, as well as by Trudy Green, who had briefly been Michael's manager. (Siegel resigned as an executor in 2003.) A handwritten annotation stated that the signing had taken place in Los Angeles at five p.m. on July 7, 2002. According to Branca, who produced the document, Michael's will had been in the files of his law firm ever since. For good measure, Branca also noted that he had been rehired as one of Jackson's attorneys on June 17, 2009, a week before Jackson's death.

By the time the will and a related trust agreement arrived at the courthouse, Branca had already retained the services of two powerful and highly paid allies. One was Howard Weitzman, who during the years since he had helped Johnnie Cochran persuade Michael Jackson to settle the Jordan Chandler pedophilia case, in 1993, had become one of the most formidable attorneys in Los Angeles. Branca's other top hire, Mike Sitrick—described by the Web site Gawker as the "Ninja Master of the Dark Art of Spin"—was a "crisis manager." Among other things, he had helped Exxon cope with the catastrophic *Valdez* oil spill, in Alaska's Prince William Sound. That Branca had put Weitzman and Sitrick on his pay-

## "YOU REMEMBER MICHAEL USED TO HIDE CASH

*AT THE HOUSE?" KATHERINE ASKED THE CHILDREN'S FORMER NANNY. "I'M HERE. WHERE CAN IT BE?"*

garage. (La Toya would insist that nearly all of Michael's money was gone by the time she arrived at the Carolwood house.)

The next morning, Janet Jackson was at the house. She demanded that the gate be opened to admit the moving van that was following behind her. A few hours later, the truck exited through the front gate with Jeffrey Phillips at the wheel. Katherine Jackson and her daughters made it clear that they wouldn't be leaving Carolwood Drive anytime soon. "They camped out for most of a week," Williams recalls, leaving and returning "whenever they felt like it."

It appeared at first that Michael Jackson had died intestate. In the absence of a will, his entire estate would belong to Prince, Paris, and Blanket, and would be placed into a court-administered trust until the three children came of age. This meant that custody would be the only way any adult

two of the three executors named in the document, John Branca and John McClain. Branca is a prominent entertainment lawyer who had worked closely with Jackson for years and is best known for helping negotiate the acquisition of the Beatles song catalogue for Jackson in 1985. The price paid at the time was \$47.5 million; today that catalogue is worth more than \$1 billion. Branca had been terminated by Jackson in early 2003, shortly after a private-investigation company delivered a report that accused Branca of irregularities. (The accusations were not documented and no charges were ever filed.) McClain is a record-company executive who also can claim a long history with the Jackson family; he is still best known as the executive producer of Janet Jackson's breakout album, *Control*. The signature on the will had been officially witnessed by McClain and by Barry Siegel, a former

roll indicated that he expected a public fight.

The will itself was striking for the way it addressed the subject of Debbie Rowe. The first two sentences of the document's Article I read, "I declare that I am not married. My marriage to DEBORAH JEAN ROWE has been dissolved." The last line of Article VI stated, "I have intentionally omitted to provide for my former wife, DEBORAH JEAN ROWE JACKSON." Clearly, the intention was to ensure that Debbie didn't get a dime—or custody of Michael's children. Katherine Jackson was emphatically designated as the children's guardian.

How the money, property, copyrights, and trademarks would be divided was detailed separately. According to the Michael Jackson Family Trust document submitted to the court by Branca and McClain, 40 percent of Michael Jackson's estate was to be held in the Michael Jackson Children's Trust for Prince, Paris, and Blanket; money would be released

## HEIR MEETS HEIRESS

as they reached the ages of 30, 35, and 40. Another 20 percent would be assigned to various charities; the trust agreement seemed to permit the executors to choose which charities those were. The remaining 40 percent would be held by an entity called the Katherine Jackson Trust. Funds from that trust were to be used to support Mrs. Jackson. There was no provision for Joe Jackson or for any of Michael's siblings. The most notable thing about the trust agreement was that it gave Branca and McClain absolute discretion to decide how the money from the Katherine Jackson Trust would be distributed. Because the estate would not begin disbursing funds to Michael Jackson's children for many years, and would not finish for decades, Branca and McClain, if they remained executors, would potentially be paid tens of millions of dollars to administer the estate.

Knowing that the provisions would send a shiver through the family, Branca met with the Jacksons at Jermaine's house the day after the will was filed. Nonetheless, according to Branca, his presentation was greeted with approval. "They applauded three times when they were told who got the property," he recalled. Katherine Jackson remembers the meeting differently. According to her, the atmosphere went from quiet to glum. She personally was offended that John Branca never once said how sorry he was for her loss. The man was cold, Mrs. Jackson thought, just as Michael had described him: "My son had told me and the kids that he never wanted Branca to be any part of his business ever again."

**I**n court, it was clear that, for the moment, there would be no real objection to the will itself. Although few at this time were voicing doubts about its authenticity, some were privately raising other questions. Branca had been fired as Michael Jackson's attorney in early 2003. Why hadn't he turned over the original copy of the will? That might have been well-advised, according to some attorneys. Moreover, Branca had chosen to remain an executor of the will even after he was dismissed as Michael's attorney—not the standard practice.

The "complete and unfettered discretion" that the trust document gave Branca and McClain also raised eyebrows. The attorneys Andrew and Danielle Mayoras are the authors of a serialized online analysis of the legal machinations involving Michael Jackson's fortune. "They have total power and control over Katherine Jackson," Andy Mayoras says of the executors. "This is unusual—because Michael Jackson's affection and trust and support of his mother was publicly displayed in

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NOVEMBER 2012

Dan Stevens, photographed in London.

STEVENS WEARS A SUIT BY CANALI; SHIRT BY SALVATORE FERRAGAMO; TIE BY HARDY AMIES.



**D**elightfully goony," wrote *The New York Times* of Dan Stevens's performance in his first professional play. It was 2005, and the young British actor, straight out of Cambridge University, was at Brooklyn Academy of Music, cast as Orlando in Peter Hall's touring production of Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. "A breezily confident professional debut," agreed *Variety*, calling Stevens's Orlando a "sweet, swooning lad." It's been seven years since that play, and now the world is swooning for Stevens. Playing the upstanding Edwardian heartthrob Matthew Crawley in the Masterpiece mega-hit *Downton Abbey*, he has acquired a global fan base and a high profile. This October he returns to the New York stage in the role of a more complicated heartthrob: Morris Townsend, the handsome bounder in *The Heiress*, the 1947 adaptation of the Henry James novel of 1880, *Washington Square*.

Stevens, who will star alongside Jessica Chastain and David Strathairn, says, "The three lead characters are quite morally ambiguous. And that's what makes it such a great play. It's actually my first time playing an American, and looking at the heritage of America and New York and that wonderful Jamesian obsession with wealth and its provenance. And," he adds, "I've never done the whole Times Square-Theater District-Broadway thing, which is very, very exciting."

—LAURA JACOBS

PHOTOGRAPH BY JASON BELL

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ing? That seems so 1950s now. Remember Schnabel and Fischl and Salle and all that bunch? They all seem so 1950s now, even though their 15 minutes came in the 1970s. The new artists, like Doggs, look at all those people like they're from another century, which they were, when you get right down to it. They were still using their hands to do little visual tricks on canvas that were either pretty and pleasant and pleased people or ugly and baffling and 'challenged' people. *Challenged*... Ohmygod—"She broke into a smile and shook her head, as if to say, "Can you believe the way it used to be!"

"Then how does Doggs do it?" said Fleischmann. "I guess I never really asked."

"It's actually fascinating," said A.A. "He got hold of, Doggs did, this call girl, Daphne Deauville, the one who cost the governor of New Jersey his job?—and on the strength of that she gets a job as a columnist for the *New York City Light*? I couldn't believe it! So, anyway, Doggs gets a photographer to take some pictures of him... well, *fucking*

her brains out"—lately it had become daringly chic for women to use *fucking* in conversation—"and doing this and that... and sent the photographs off to Dalique, and Dalique got their elves to reproduce the photographs in three dimensions in Dalique glass, but Doggs never touched the figurines—never. He had no hand at all in making them. And if he touched the photographs, it was just to put them in an envelope and FedEx them to Dalique, although I'm sure he has an assistant to do things like that. No Hands—that's an important concept now. It's not some artist using his so-called 'skills' to deceive people. It's not a sleight of hand. It's no hands at all. That makes it *conceptual*, of course. That way he turns what a manual artist would use to create... an *effect*... into something that compels you to think about it in a deeper way. It's almost as if he has invented a fourth dimension. And there you've got the very best, the most contemporary work of the whole rising generation. Most of Doggs's work in this show is iconic. Every-

one who sees one of yours, Maurice, will say, 'My god! That's Doggs at the outset of his classic period,' because I'm convinced that's what his work is. It's cutting-edge, and at the same time it's classic. That kind of work isn't available every day! Believe me!... Maurice... you have... really... *scored* this time."

Really *scored*... Fleischmann looked very pleased, but his smile was the baffled smile of someone who can't explain his own good fortune. □

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## Michael Jackson



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 161 the past, plus she has his kids. This is not normal for an adult beneficiary."

Branca professed to be astonished when Katherine Jackson's attorneys filed a motion asking the court to give Michael's mother control of her son's wealth, based on "conflicts of interest" and "other factors" that were said to compromise the ability of Branca and McClain to administer the estate. The business arrangements entered into on Michael's behalf with Sony and AEG, which remain matters of dispute, were specifically referenced.

After acknowledging that "we're getting off to a bit of a rocky start here," Judge Beckloff ruled in favor of the executors named in the will. "Someone needs to be at the helm of the ship," the judge stated. Under the circumstances, Beckloff's decision made sense. Weitzman and the other attorneys representing Branca and McClain had argued that a singular level of knowledge would be required to sort through the mountain of debt and scores of lawsuits that Michael Jackson had left behind, while at the

same time managing the assets of his enormous—and enormously complicated—estate. Regardless of what his enemies might say, few disputed that Branca was a superb lawyer and a masterly deal-maker.

### IV. Cracks in the Façade

Michael Jackson's interment in the Great Mausoleum at Forest Lawn took place on September 3, 2009—a date chosen not for any sentimental significance but because it was the one day when no members of the family had paying events to attend. The corpse had been prepared for its final public appearance by Karen Faye and Michael Bush, the makeup artist and costume designer who had been with him for years. The two spent nine hours blinking back tears and gagging on the reek of formaldehyde as they worked on the body, which lay on a mortuary table next to the gold-plated casket in which it would repose. Faye applied a thick coat of the Lancôme Dual Finish Powder that Michael had carried in a compact for years. Bush dressed his longtime client in a black tunic that was specially crafted for the occasion, draped with white pearls and accented by a gold belt.

By the time of the funeral, Randy Jackson was leading the opposition to Branca, in coordination with his father. Both men, and most of the Jackson family, for that matter, were increasingly suspicious of the will and the trust document.

Attorneys who specialized in probate law agreed almost unanimously on how badly drawn both the will and the trust appeared to be. Each document was much shorter, much simpler, and much less detailed than one

would have expected for the disposition of such a large personal fortune. The absence of provisions that would have protected the estate from tax burdens was perplexing. An observation that resonated powerfully among Michael's family was that his children had not been listed by their proper legal names. In the will the older boy's name is listed as "Prince Michael Jackson Jr." when in fact his name is "Michael Joseph Jackson Jr.," the girl's name omits the hyphen between Paris and Michael, and the younger boy is identified as "Prince Michael Joseph Jackson II" when it is actually "Prince Michael Jackson II."

The biggest questions of all continued to be how and why Branca had remained in possession of the will and trust agreements until July 2009. Brian Oxman, a onetime Jackson lawyer, had secured a copy of the letter by which Michael had dismissed Branca as his attorney in February 2003. In it, Branca had been "commanded" to deliver the originals of "all of my files, records, documents, and accounts" to a new attorney, David LeGrand. He did in fact deliver several boxes of papers to LeGrand. In 2004, after LeGrand was dismissed, Oxman took possession of the documents. "I had access to every file and I had to go through them," he recalls. "And I did. There was no will. There was no trust. It just showed up after he died." (Branca, through his attorney, declined to comment.)

Oxman suggested hiring a team of private investigators. In October 2009, Janet Jackson hosted a family meeting at which the contents of their report were disclosed. Among the revelations: Michael Jackson had been in New York City on July 7, 2002, the date on which,

## Michael Jackson

according to the handwritten annotation on the signature page of the will, he had executed that document in Los Angeles. He had in fact been in the hard-to-miss company of the Reverend Al Sharpton. On Branca's behalf, Weitzman has insisted that the signature on the will is genuine and that all three witnesses were present when Jackson signed his name. Weitzman himself, though, has offered no details about when or where the will was signed.

Armed with the results of the investigation, it looked as if Katherine Jackson and her children might be poised to try to push John Branca aside and seize at least partial control of the estate. The family's façade of a united front, though, was cracking into pieces. The competing schemes, hidden agendas, and factional conflicts that churned beneath the surface provided points of vulnerability.

The weak points were several, and were located mainly in the characters of the Jackson brothers. Randy was the one pressing hardest, but the rest of the family was concerned that Randy would seek to take Branca's place as a trustee. Branca and his attorneys were continually telling people what a problematic fellow Randy was. The Jacksons themselves viewed Randy as the most selfish and conniving among them. He was a chip off the old block, visitors to the family compound said, far more like Joe than any of his brothers were. No one intended that as a compliment.

Jermaine, as always, could be gotten to. The estate could help clean up his child-support arrears and help him relaunch his career. Branca also sent a message that the estate could find a place for Jermaine in the Cirque du Soleil show deal they were negotiating, performing live with Janet and collecting fat checks, but only if he was on board with the men in charge. We should try to work with Branca, Jermaine began telling Katherine.

Jackie was the son who visited Hayvenhurst most often and was in some sense the estate's inside man. He had been friends with John McClain since high school and had introduced McClain to the family. It was McClain who helped Jackie win the right to make a profit from his failing clothing business by selling Michael Jackson designer T-shirts. Jackie is also being paid by the estate as a consultant.

McClain was also talking regularly to Katherine Jackson, calling her just about every morning to chat for a few minutes. He still called Katherine "Mother," just as he had done decades earlier, and promised that he was looking out for her interests. "I'm on your side, Mother," John McClain told her. "I'm there for you."

In November 2009, to the surprise of

observers, Adam Streisand, Katherine's attorney of the moment, arrived in Judge Beckloff's courtroom to announce that Mrs. Jackson was withdrawing any objections to Branca and McClain's continuing to serve as the estate's administrators. His client felt that it was "high time that the fighting end," Streisand told the judge. For the time being, Katherine would begin to receive a monthly stipend. Provisions were made to cover the cost of housing and expenses for the children. The executors would get on with the business of settling the estate.

### V. A Brick to the Head

To an outsider, the dynamics inside the Jackson family can be hard to imagine. Michael's siblings squabbled regularly and loudly over everything having to do with the estate, but in particular about what it had cost to make peace with John Branca. All of Katherine Jackson's children, Randy most aggressively, complained that she had accepted a deal that cut them out entirely—as she had. Katherine herself was increasingly unhappy with the stingy allowance she received. While Branca and co-counsels were responding generously to any request that directly benefited Michael's three children—by its accounting, the estate had shelled out \$115,000 for a "family vacation" during the summer of 2010—they were providing Katherine Jackson with a monthly cash allowance of just \$3,000 (eventually raised to \$8,000). Almost nothing was left for Katherine's children. That was as intended, according to Branca: Michael Jackson had made it clear that he did not mean to provide for his siblings.

The clamor for action increased after the estate trustees submitted to Judge Beckloff's court their preliminary accounting of disbursements during the 16 months between Michael's death and October 31, 2010. The three-page document showed that, whereas Katherine had received modest sums enumerated in the thousands, nearly \$29 million had been paid out to people working for the estate. Under the heading "Co-executive and Creative Director Compensation," payments totaling almost \$18 million were listed between February 2, 2010, and October 8, 2010, indicating that Branca and McClain had each received nearly \$9 million over a period of eight months.

The anger among Michael's siblings, nieces, and nephews was matched by a mood of apprehension as they came to understand that Katherine Jackson would be able to collect her stipend only for as long as the 80-year-old woman remained healthy enough to serve as the three children's guardian. Rebbie and Janet were the only two Jackson siblings considered fit to replace their mother in the event of her death or serious illness, but Janet had no real inter-

est in the kids beyond "arranging photo opportunities with them," according to one of Katherine's advisers, while Prince and Paris were outspoken about rejecting Rebbie's religious fervor. (Like her mother, she is a devout member of the Jehovah's Witnesses.) The brothers and La Toya were certain to be shut out if Katherine died, a fact that only intensified the fractious nature of family relations. And of course there was still the question of Joe, constantly circling the compound, sneaking in at every opportunity to look for whatever levers he thought might turn things his way.

In the end, Katherine Jackson came to believe she needed an attorney who might offer an alternative to simply accepting Branca's control of the estate and being grateful for whatever generosity he chose to extend. In April 2011 she found such a person in Perry Sanders Jr.—a "big time litigator," as TMZ put it in the first report of his appearance on the scene. Sanders had filed the wrongful-death lawsuit against the city of Los Angeles that accused L.A.P.D. officers of involvement in the murder of rapper Christopher Wallace, also known as Notorious B.I.G. and Biggie Smalls. Sanders had also played the pivotal role in securing song-publishing rights worth hundreds of millions of dollars in an action against Master P and the No Limit Records catalogue.

Sanders is an athletically built man in his late 50s, with chiseled features, a shaved head, and barely any eyebrows; he suggests an actor hired to play Lex Luthor. According to one of her advisers, Sanders had explained to Katherine that his main tactic in a situation like the one they faced was simple: he approached his adversaries with a fair deal in one hand and a brick in the other. He offered the deal first. If they didn't take it, he hit them in the head with the brick, then asked if they'd like to reconsider.

Sanders realized he had the makings of a very solid brick the moment he read a copy of a filing—"Joseph Jackson's Objection to the Appointment of John Branca and John McClain as Executors of the Estate of Michael Jackson"—that Brian Oxman had made in Judge Beckloff's court 17 months earlier. The lengthy document, filed on behalf of Michael Jackson's father, contained detailed allegations of fraud and possible forgery by Branca.

Oxman had been shrewd enough to recognize that the smart move was not to try to invalidate the will and trust agreement. Rather, Sanders saw, the right play was to challenge Branca's decision to retain the originals of those two documents after he was fired and to attack his failure to resign from his position as executor. On the one hand, Oxman charged, "Branca never accounted to Michael Jackson regarding his conduct, nor disclosed his books and rec-

ords to Michael Jackson." On the other hand, Oxman went on, Branca's failure to inform Judge Beckloff that he had been fired as Jackson's attorney because Michael believed Branca was guilty of "embezzlement" was a fraud upon the court. Sanders had heard that Oxman was a bit of a publicity hound (and earlier this year he was disbarred for mismanagement of another client's funds), but he was impressed by the largely technical accusations of fraud, conflict of interest, self-dealing, and failure of fiduciary duty that made up most of the court filing.

The merits of the case had never been heard. Joe Jackson was not a named beneficiary of Michael's will and therefore, Judge Beckloff ruled, he "doesn't have any interest in the estate." But Sanders's client, Katherine Jackson, was indeed a named beneficiary: the judge would be compelled to hear any claim Sanders brought on her behalf.

Sanders seemed to think he had enough to encourage a deal. Some members of the Jackson family—Joe and Randy in particular—complained that this new lawyer looked like yet another guy who wanted to get in bed with Branca. They weren't pleased by Sanders's first public statement as Katherine's attorney: "Bottom line—I am going to do anything in my power to tone down the rhetoric that has happened to date to the extent possible." At a lunch meeting in Beverly Hills the next day, Sanders assured Howard Weitzman that he would much rather work with the estate than fight against it. Within the week, he had proved this by settling a long-simmering lawsuit involving Jackson's Heal the World Foundation, orchestrating an arrangement that guaranteed Melissa Johnson, who ran the foundation, and Katherine Jackson seats on the charity's board of directors, but still gave John Branca ultimate control.

When Joe and Randy renewed their complaints, Sanders assured Katherine that he was ready to go to war with Branca, if he had to, but that an amicable settlement was clearly preferable. He would be meeting with Howard Weitzman again soon, he told her, this time for dinner, to determine if that was possible.

Sanders refused to say afterward exactly what had transpired during his dinner with Weitzman, but it was obvious in the days that followed that a deal had been struck. In effect, the executors agreed to initiate the process of paying out a portion of the estate into Katherine's hands—\$30 million into the trust, according to some reports. There was much to be worked out, and the money had not been released, but the contours seemed agreeable. Katherine Jackson would soon describe Branca as "a very able man." Perry Sanders, for his part, would

say that he admired Weitzman and respected Branca. "Katherine is being taken care of," he maintained.

#### VI. Missing Person

But the estate was still not formally settled and the money kept not materializing. Several of Katherine's children were convinced that the estate intended to delay the funding of the Family Trust in the hope that Katherine, now 82, would die before collecting her 40 percent of the estate, leaving her children nothing to inherit. Perry Sanders himself was growing impatient, more inclined by the week to suspect that the executors were in fact stalling.

One thing was hard to argue with, though: Branca had, as he promised Judge Beckloff he would, maximized the value of the Michael Jackson estate. Documents filed with Beckloff showed that the estate had generated gross earnings in excess of \$475 million through May of 2012 and that nearly all of Michael's debts had been paid off. What Michael's brothers and sisters wanted to know was how much of that money Branca and McClain and their attorneys were paying themselves. Only a truly exhaustive audit, Sanders believed, could provide that information.

Katherine's children, Randy and Janet in particular, wanted more than an audit—they wanted Branca removed. Randy had never ceased scheming with Joe on ways to seize control, and Janet felt herself under mounting pressure in her role as the Jacksons' new Michael. Though her wealth was at least in the tens of millions, Janet had grown increasingly frugal—even stingy, some of her siblings thought—in the aftermath of her 2000 divorce. (Ex-husband René Elizondo had reportedly walked away with \$15 million, a five-bedroom beach house in Malibu, and a piece of his ex-wife's song royalties.) Michael's burial had been delayed by wrangling between Janet and the estate, on the one hand, and between Janet and her family, on the other. As the only living Jackson with money of her own, Janet had put up the \$40,000 deposit at Forest Lawn to secure the burial spot for Michael in the marble Sanctuary of Ascension. She had refused to let the funeral take place until the money was repaid. Three years later, Janet was increasingly put out by family members asking for handouts—the same pattern that had led Michael to distance himself from the family as much as possible. Janet wanted the other Jacksons to have their own money.

Randy remained the driving force of the campaign against Branca. The atmosphere enveloping the Calabasas estate was increasingly murky as the third anniversary of Michael Jackson's death approached. What happened next, and the motivation behind it, is difficult to untangle. In part it was an

attempt by five of the Jackson siblings to create a platform for maximum exposure of allegations against the executors. As noted, it may also have been intended to cast doubt on Katherine Jackson's competence as guardian.

The episode began with the famous letter. Addressed to the executors, it promised to reveal "in the coming weeks" the reasons why Branca and McClain should resign, but then proceeded to state the main one anyway: that the will naming them as executors was "Fake, Flawed and Fraudulent." The letter noted: "Michael was absolutely not in Los Angeles, California on the date of his signature reflected in the Will at-hand."

The next paragraph expressed what had always been the bedrock feeling within the family about why Branca and McClain should not be the executors: "Our brother told us, in no uncertain terms and without hesitation in the months prior to his death, that he despised both of you and that he did not want either of you to have anything to do with his life or estate for that matter."

The letter went on to imply that the executors were deliberately dragging things out in the hope that Katherine Jackson would die before they had to pay her any money she could leave to her children: "You keep lying to her, you manipulate her, and you make promises that you know will never happen.... She's an eighty-two year old woman." The letter added that "we've just found out she recently had a mini-stroke" (which, as noted, was news to everyone).

There was more. The letter laid much of the blame for the failure to go after Branca and McClain at the feet of three people who had Katherine's ear: Perry Sanders, Trent Jackson, and Lowell Henry (a financial adviser). These three were telling Katherine "to disregard what she knows as fact," the letter stated. "Instead, her so called advisors are convincing her to let them negotiate 'deals' with Branca and McClain on her behalf, or is it on the behalf of all of you?"

AEG was the letter's final target. The estate had declined—inexplicably, in the family's view—to join the wrongful-death suit, or to launch one on its own, and the Jacksons remained mired in the proceedings. "AEG has been very vocal about how they are going to destroy [Katherine] and her family publicly and blame her for Michael's death," the letter said. "Since then, they've wasted no time harassing each and every family member, including Michael's children in a barrage of depositions, where they are asking personal, inappropriate and disrespectful questions that, to say the least, have nothing to do with his passing."

All in all, thought Sanders, it was the kind of letter that couldn't possibly have been written by a competent attorney. He was not happy to see Michael's brothers and sisters highlight

## Michael Jackson

ing a point he himself knew to be of supreme significance. As the letter stated, Branca and McClain had written to Judge Yvette Palazuelos, the presiding judge in the wrongful-death lawsuit, asking her "to keep ALL documents handed over by AEG for discovery under court seal, clearly protecting AEG, but not protecting our mother nor our niece and nephews Paris, Prince and Blanket. Who are you working for? What is it that you don't want to be known?" Sanders had already told Katherine privately that he would go at Branca and McClain through their relationship with AEG. He had found evidence of conflict of interest in the relationship between the executors and the entertainment company, Sanders said, and was looking for proof of actual collusion. It wasn't something he had wanted to reveal in advance, however.

Sanders's associate Sandra Ribera was dispatched to the Calabasas estate on the afternoon the letter became public, not long after Trent Jackson left for Albuquerque, where he was supposed to meet Katherine prior to that night's Unity Tour concert at the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino. It was almost dark when Trent phoned to say that Katherine had never shown up.

The episode immediately went viral, accusations and allegations by members of the family surfacing on social networks. Even Michael's children took part. Urging some of his siblings and other onlookers to back off, Randy tweeted, "We ask that everyone respects that this is a serious matter that will be handled by the proper authorities." Fourteen-year-old Paris, countering reports of Katherine's mini-stroke, tweeted, "i am going to clarify right now that what has been said about my grandmother is a rumor and nothing has happened, she is completely fine. I'd like to know who made up the rumor... I will defend my beloved family member with all i have, even if it means from other family members." She also aimed a tweet directly at Randy: "hello dear FAMILY member I don't appreciate you telling everyone things that aren't true thank you very much."

### VII. Guerrilla War

Katherine was incommunicado for more than a week as online recriminations flew back and forth for all to see. Speculation about Katherine's whereabouts raged in outlets such as TMZ and *The Hollywood Reporter*. Matters came to a head on July 23. Shortly after one p.m., an S.U.V. carrying Prince and Paris was passing through the double gates that defend the Calabasas house when another S.U.V., loaded with passengers, pulled up to its rear bumper and followed it in. Randy Jackson was at the wheel. The sec-

ond S.U.V. braked to a stop in the driveway, and out spilled Randy, Janet, and Jermaine, along with several of the cousins, including Randy's daughter Genevieve and Jermaine's sons Jaafar and Jermajesty. It was friendly at first, hugs and handshakes all around. The one odd element was that Randy, Janet, Jermaine, and the other new arrivals were all filming the scene with their phone cameras.

Rebbie's son Austin, who had come to visit a little earlier, joined the others in the driveway. "They had actually planted cousins in the house to sort of spy and report," Ribera would say later, "to manipulate the kids and try to get them to leave the property without security. That hadn't worked, so they came in themselves."

The timing of this guerrilla action was not propitious. Only two security guards were supposed to be on duty at the Calabasas house, but the guards had called a meeting for that day and eight of them were on the premises. None of the guards was eager to get into a physical altercation with Katherine Jackson's children and initially just stood by, waiting for someone to tell them what to do.

Janet Jackson went for Paris. Randy went for Prince. When Janet and Randy told the teenagers to come along, the children flatly refused. Trent and T.J. were concerned that the other Jacksons had come to take Prince and Paris off the property—and then to Arizona—and ordered the security guards to step in. When the guards blocked his way, Randy began to snarl warnings about not interfering in a family matter. One of the guards suggested that perhaps he should leave the property, and Randy became enraged. Trent grabbed him, and the two grappled for a moment until Trent put Randy in a headlock and subdued him. Jermaine, cursing, came briefly to his brother's aid and would claim later that Trent had grabbed him by the throat and punched him in the face.

While most of the security force squared off against the intruders, two other guards and Trent Jackson led Prince and Paris out the back door of the house and into a secluded gully that ran along the rear of the property. At that moment, a sheriff's car answering a 911 call arrived at the front gate. After noting various accusations of battery and trespassing, the deputies persuaded Randy, Janet, Jermaine, and the rest of their group to leave the property. Shortly after they left, Paris tweeted to her followers, "gotta love fam." Following the events at the Calabasas house, a representative for Janet, Randy, and Rebbie released a statement complaining about the "preposterous reports—all now proven to be false—of a purported kidnapping" of their mother.

At Miraval, in Tucson, Katherine Jackson's condition by now was one of advanced confusion. That afternoon, her television's sound had suddenly come on. There was

still no picture, but the first words she said she heard were people talking about her being missing and possibly having been "abducted." When she asked what was going on, her children blamed it all on media sensationalism and an attempt by Trent Jackson to get even with Randy by filing a missing-persons report. Meanwhile, as word of the confrontation at Calabasas began to spread, Janet and her handlers arranged for ABC's *Nightline* to tape a statement from Mrs. Jackson that she read off a teleprompter, with Rebbie, Janet, Jermaine, and others seated or standing around her. That the statement had been written for her was obvious. "Hello, I'm Katherine Jackson," she began, "and there are rumors going around about me that I have been kidnapped and held against my will. I am here today to let everybody know that I am fine and I am here with my children, and my children would never do a thing like that, holding me against my will. It's very stupid for people to think that."

The statement was a public-relations disaster. Katherine "reminded me not just a little bit of a hostage reading her kidnapper's message to the press," Roger Friedman wrote in a column posted on his Showbiz 411 site shortly before midnight. Marlon Jackson tweeted, "I'm tired of not knowing where my mom is. I did speak with her last night, but she didn't sound like herself. I was told by Janet, Randy and Jermaine that I could not see my mom. Doctor's order." Paris Jackson tweeted, "they promised my grandmother would be home YESTERDAY. why isn't she home?"

In fact, Katherine at that moment was on her way, riding in a car in the dead of night with Rebbie, Janice Smith, and two of her grandchildren. The attempted coup had been abandoned. Media coverage and the electronic swirl of online chatter had gone from mystified to horrified. Tito had already renounced his signature on the joint letter, and Jermaine soon would also. Shortly after the car crossed into California, Katherine woke Sanders with a phone call and asked if she could meet him at the Calabasas house the next day. She arrived back at Calabasas just before 3:30 a.m. "grandma's here! #thankyougod <33," Paris tweeted.

### VIII. Together at Last

So, one chaotic chapter was closed. Another would undoubtedly open soon enough. Sanders hoped he could survive long enough to show even the likes of Joe and Randy that he was preparing not just a well-made brick but a suitcase-size nuclear bomb. The executors and their attorneys had been given far greater reason for concern by the request Sanders had made for "all supporting documents" of the "Second Account Current" the estate had filed with Judge Beckloff, covering the period between November 1, 2010, and December 31, 2011, with a particular empha-

sis on its dealings connected to AEG and on third-party payments. Branca and Weitzman certainly were smart enough to see where this was heading. In its submission to Judge Beckloff, the estate's accounting was extensive but opaque, divided into broad categories of "disbursements" such as "Payroll," "Public Relations," "Attorney Fees," "Legal Fees," and, of course, "Co-Executive and Creative Director Compensation." There were some startling figures that indicated the scope of Michael Jackson's properties; the automobiles he had kept in Las Vegas alone were valued at more than \$675,000, while the bills for the moving and storage of his possessions alone had come to more than \$1.5 million in a 19-month period.

Sanders had hired the best forensic accountant he could find to go through the estate's documents piece by piece, looking for evidence of conflict of interest, self-dealing, and failure of fiduciary responsibility. Katherine's attorney was clearly targeting anything that might suggest collusion between the estate and AEG. He already possessed perhaps enough ammunition, Sanders believed, to file a claim based on conflict of interest that targeted Bran-

ca and Weitzman personally for the estate's failure to either file its own lawsuit against AEG or to join in the case filed by Katherine Jackson, and was prepared to make this known at the August 10 hearing before Judge Beckloff.

In apparent anticipation of such a move, the estate in early August requested and received a postponement of the Second Account Current hearing before Judge Beckloff, putting it off until September 20. He had no problem with that, Sanders said; it would give him time to complete his audit of the estate's dealings, once the "supporting documents" were turned over. On August 20, however, the estate filed nine separate objections to Sanders's request for documents, characterizing it as "vague and ambiguous" and "unduly burdensome." The estate's lawyers also claimed that some of the information sought by Katherine Jackson was "highly confidential" or was protected by attorney-client privilege and as attorney work product. The demand Sanders had made on Katherine Jackson's behalf clearly infringed upon Branca and McClain's "rights to privacy," argued the estate's attorneys, who also

objected to the demand for documents in the "control of third parties" and assumed "the existence of certain documents" without proof that they did in fact exist.

Given the nature of the Jackson family, the outcome, whatever it is, will not bring happiness or satisfaction. And, symbolically at any rate, the strife has been locked in for eternity. Michael Jackson's body lies today in the Sanctuary of Ascension at Forest Lawn. The Jackson family has purchased 10 burial spots nearby—for the two parents and the eight siblings. Michael will be surrounded forever by the very people he spent much of his adult life trying to keep at a distance. To quote Paris Jackson, "gotta love fam." □

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## Jamie Dimon



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 179 Bammann, Jim Boshart, and Mike Welborn. As one Citigroup executive after another decided to join Dimon in Chicago to try to turn around the distressed bank, Weill became incensed. Dimon had a non-compete agreement with Citigroup as part of his severance package—"which I followed to the letter," Dimon volunteers—but Weill called Dimon and threatened him with a lawsuit. In typical fashion, Dimon says, he told his former mentor, "Sandy, you should be asking yourself, 'If all these people are taking smaller jobs for less pay—you should be thinking about why they're leaving, not why they're coming.'"

But very few of the Dimon loyalists are still at his side at JPMorgan Chase. "Those who thought that the relationship was more than transactional were the ones who then became the most shocked when they found out that it wasn't," explains a former Dimon loyalist. "All of this talk about these loyal lieutenants and all of that, how many

really are there? How many are left now?"

Charlie Scharf started working for Dimon right out of Johns Hopkins University and then spent the next 25 years at his side, rising to become the head of JPMorgan Chase's mortgage and retail-banking operation and a member of the operating committee. There was even talk of Scharf's being a possible successor to Dimon. But in June 2011, with mortgage losses at the bank mounting, Dimon fired him. (He now works at One Equity Partners, the private-equity arm of JPMorgan Chase.) "It's not what you think," Scharf says. "It's not about the money. I don't have the ego. For some people, it's all about the next job; it's all about being a C.E.O. I could be very comfortable doing what I'm doing for the rest of my life."

Steve Black and Bill Winters, the co-heads of investment banking at JPMorgan Chase until Dimon summarily fired Winters and relieved Black of his operating duties in 2009, declined comment. Dimon named Jes Staley, a JPMorgan & Co. veteran, to replace them. The business press then saw Staley as a likely heir apparent, but Dimon replaced him in July 2012 with two of the latest up-and-comers, Mike Cavanaugh and Daniel Pinto.

As in everything, Dimon is unapologetic about what may seem like his ruthless excising of those closest to him. It's not personal; it's just business. "If you're blindly loyal to me, then you're just acting like a crony of mine," he explains. "If you say you admire me because of the principles for

which I stand, I understand that, but then you also have the right to call me to the carpet when you think I'm falling short. I get that here every now and then. I get people saying, 'Jamie, you always say "X." You ain't doing it, not in this case,' and sometimes I have good reason for not doing X. Sometimes I was unaware I wasn't doing X, and sometimes I'm just dithering, dithering, like everybody else."

But with Dimon, loyalty is not a formula for job security. "It isn't," he admits, "because then you're being disloyal to the company. If you aren't performing anymore, it's time to make a change. Sometimes it's just time. People get tired in these jobs."

Nor is Dimon a boss prone to using gentle encouragement. One former JPMorgan Chase executive, who calls Dimon the "best chief executive I ever dealt with," nonetheless could not quite get over his willingness to dress down high-level executives in public. "I have a very vivid memory of sitting in a meeting with the controller, the internal auditor, the external auditor, and a few more junior people sitting in the room," the former executive says, "and Jamie ranted and raved and said that nobody was doing their job right and everybody was being paid more than they should be paid."

Was Dimon right? "No," the ex-banker continues. "Absolutely not.... I went into his office, and I said, 'For God's sake, this is totally unacceptable behavior'—kind of regurgitating what he said and how he said it—moving him to pick up the phone and apologize. He did the same, in some instance, to

