

Chapter 45

Chapter 45 marked a new beginning, one where I actively worked to reclaim my sense of identity. I turned to social media not for fame, but to remind people—and myself—that I was still human. Sharing pieces of my everyday life, especially fashion and music, became a healing process. Dressing up and taking photos felt empowering, not performative. It gave me back control in a world where so much had been taken from me. While some followers found it odd, I relished the freedom of finally choosing how I was seen.

Inspired by visual artists online, I began rediscovering my creative instincts. One video in particular—a pink tiger walking across a baby-pink background—unlocked something playful inside me. I started experimenting with music, even adding the sound of a baby laughing at the beginning of a track. Although I later removed it after a suggestion from Hesam, I still regretted it. When someone else posted something similar, jealousy tugged at me. That laugh could've been my signature. Artists can be quirky like that, and I realized there's a certain magic in trusting your strange ideas. It's not about being accepted—it's about being real.

Throughout this period, I realized just how misunderstood I had been by the public and even by people within the industry. Many assumed I was unstable simply because I chose to create in unconventional ways. But I'd much rather be seen as "odd" and be able to express myself than be polite and silenced. Instagram became my outlet not just for fashion, but for humor, ideas, and emotional release. People could finally see the me that existed beyond the headlines. There was strength in showing up authentically—even if it confused others.

Laughter became another tool I used to stay sane. Comedians like Jo Koy and Kevin Hart helped me laugh on days when everything else felt heavy. Humor reminded me

that pain doesn't have to consume everything. I admired how these performers used their voice and perspective to spark connection. They spoke boldly, and that inspired me to do the same—whether in a post caption or a dance clip. Their confidence helped me embrace my own.

People sometimes laugh at my posts for different reasons. Maybe they see innocence, or maybe they're surprised by how raw I can get. Either way, I'm okay with that now. This could even be my own version of a feminist awakening. There's power in refusing to be packaged or defined. I've come to see that the uncertainty surrounding who I truly am gives me a quiet kind of leverage. As long as they don't know everything, I get to keep something for myself.

My kids, of course, see through all of that. They laugh at me too sometimes, but their laughter is different—it's warm, familiar, and loving. Watching them grow into creative, intelligent young men has brought me endless joy. Sean Preston's brilliance in school amazes me, while Jayden's musical gift, especially on the piano, moves me deeply. They both have such strong characters and bright spirits. They've always seen the world from unique angles, and that has shaped how I see things, too.

Before the pandemic, they were regulars at our dinner table, bringing life and excitement into my home. Every visit was filled with laughter, thoughtful conversations, and little masterpieces they were eager to show me. They'd hold up a painting or a drawing and challenge me to view it differently. And I always did. Their creativity unlocked a kind of vision in me that I didn't know I needed. I loved hearing about what lit them up—their interests, their insights, their way of interpreting the world.

As the decade shifted, it finally felt like life was coming into focus again. I was reconnecting with myself, with my children, with my inner voice. Then COVID arrived and brought everything to a sudden pause. Lockdown was especially tough in the beginning. I found myself isolating even more than usual, sitting in my room for hours at a time. Some days, I made jewelry just to stay busy; other days, I let the silence

wrap around me like a fog.

I started leaning heavily into audiobooks, especially self-help ones, in a search for clarity and comfort. Once I had listened to dozens of those, I moved toward fiction and imagination-driven stories. British narrators became my favorite—there was something soothing in their cadence. Stories helped me drift out of the stillness, even when I felt stuck in place. Through books, I rediscovered how imagination could be a lifeline. It became a quiet companion during those long, uncertain days.

The isolation reminded me of earlier years when I wasn't allowed to express myself freely. But this time, I had tools—creativity, humor, motherhood—that kept me grounded. Even when the world shut down, a small part of me stayed lit from within. The quiet forced me to sit with myself, to reexamine what mattered. And what mattered, more than anything, was the freedom to be me—online, offline, everywhere in between.