

Chapter 17

Chapter 17 reflects a time when my career reached a new level of success, but my personal life began to spiral. *In the Zone*, my new album, was a significant milestone in my career, with singles like “Me Against the Music,” which featured Madonna, and “Toxic,” which became one of my biggest hits. “Toxic” was not only a commercial success but also a creative triumph, earning me a Grammy Award. The innovative sound of “Toxic” still excites me when I perform it live, and I’m proud of how it has endured as one of my most beloved tracks. To promote the album, I participated in a special called *In the Zone & Out All Night*, where I drove around New York City visiting nightclubs. Seeing large crowds dancing to my music reminded me why I had worked so hard to reach that point. My fans’ energy was infectious, and I felt grateful to be able to share my music with them. However, despite these professional highs, my personal life was becoming more complicated, and I began to feel an increasing distance between myself and the people closest to me, especially my brother Bryan.

The turning point came when I was confronted in my own home by a group of men, three of whom I didn’t recognize, and one being my father. They entered my space uninvited and began interrogating me, which left me feeling helpless and emotionally drained. I felt completely overwhelmed, with no space to process what was happening. It was the following day when I received a call from my team informing me that I was scheduled for an interview with Diane Sawyer. This was to take place in my living room, at a time when I was at my lowest. The interview itself felt like an invasion—questions about my breakup with Justin and the hurt I allegedly caused were both intrusive and painful. I was unprepared for this type of exposure, and it left me feeling exploited. Diane’s probing questions about my past relationship with Justin, including accusations about how I allegedly broke his heart, felt like a violation of my privacy. I wasn’t in a place where I could share such intimate details, and I resented

being forced to open up to a national audience. It was a moment that marked a significant emotional breaking point for me. I was not ready for that kind of vulnerability, especially not in front of millions of viewers.

In the wake of the interview, I retreated to Louisiana to regroup and seek some kind of solace. At that time, I realized that I had earned the financial freedom to take control of my life. My career had been incredibly demanding, and I was beginning to crave something different—a break from the pressures that had been placed on me. On a whim, I booked a trip to Las Vegas for New Year's Eve with a few close friends, hoping to have a much-needed escape. At the Palms Casino Resort, we indulged in the freedom that came with having no obligations. For the first time in a long while, I felt like I could truly let go. The alcohol flowed, and I found myself acting completely out of character. Paris Hilton joined us at the casino, and we ended up on tables, having fun like a pair of carefree teenagers. We ran through the club, laughing and acting silly, and I didn't care who was watching. It was innocent fun—something that was desperately needed after years of being scrutinized by the media. Looking back, it seems absurd that such a moment of freedom could be judged so harshly, but at the time, it felt like a release from the constant pressure I had been under.

However, the night took an unexpected turn when, after a few too many drinks, I ended up getting married to a childhood friend in a Las Vegas chapel. I didn't do it out of love; it was more about the impulsiveness of the moment, and in hindsight, I knew it wasn't the right thing to do. It was a drunk, spontaneous decision that was meant to be a joke, but it ended up being taken much more seriously by everyone else. The next morning, my family arrived in Las Vegas, furious with me. They were appalled by what I had done and insisted on getting the marriage annulled as quickly as possible. I didn't understand why they were so upset. To me, it was nothing more than a silly mistake, a moment of fun, but they saw it as something much more significant. I felt the weight of their anger, and it left me in tears for the rest of my time in Vegas. My family's reaction made me feel isolated, and I was left questioning why my actions were being scrutinized so harshly. I agreed to sign the annulment papers, not because I felt it was the right thing to do, but because my family had made such a big deal out

of it. The marriage lasted only fifty-five hours, but the experience showed me how quickly things could spiral out of control, even when they seemed like innocent fun. It was a lesson in how public perception could twist even the most trivial moments into something much larger.

