

Chapter 36

Chapter 36 reflects a period of growth and reflection as I navigated the complexity of my career, personal life, and the ongoing control of the conservatorship. One of the things that gave me solace during my time in Vegas was teaching dance to children. Once a month, I would teach a group of forty kids, and in LA, I would teach every couple of months. The simplicity and joy of being around kids who were full of energy and had no judgment was healing. Their pure energy and eagerness to learn felt like a breath of fresh air, especially in a time when everything in my life was controlled and judged. Being in their presence reminded me of what it felt like to be truly free, to express myself without fear of criticism or restriction. It was one of the few things I felt I could control and enjoy during a time when most of my life was dictated by others.

However, despite the healing I felt teaching the kids, my personal life continued to be fraught with difficulties. My desire for autonomy clashed with the reality of the conservatorship, and I began to feel more and more trapped. I tried to assert myself, making small pushes to regain control, like asking for a lawyer or speaking out about my father's behavior. In 2014, I even went to court, bringing up my father's alcoholism and erratic actions, and asking for a drug test. But despite my efforts, nothing changed. The judge ignored my plea, and the system that controlled me remained intact. My attempts to speak up and regain control seemed to be met with resistance at every turn, leaving me feeling helpless and unheard.

Around this time, my personal life also suffered. After a fight with my then-partner Charlie, we stopped speaking, both too prideful to make the first move toward reconciliation. It was a silly argument, but the emotional toll of the conservatorship affected every aspect of my life. This personal turmoil led me to work closely with two

songwriters, Julia Michaels and Justin Tranter. Writing music became my escape, my way of reconnecting with myself. It was the one thing in the past thirteen years that truly reignited my passion. Writing songs, especially for the *Glory* album, gave me confidence. I felt a sense of pride in the work I was creating, something I hadn't felt in years. The process reminded me of my talent, and when the album was done, I was eager to share it with my kids. Their reaction to the album, especially Sean Preston's suggestion to name it *Glory*, was one of the few moments during this time that made me feel truly proud.



The release of *Glory* marked a turning point, as I started to feel more in control of my music and image. I performed for the first time in years at the 2016 VMAs, and the experience was exhilarating. The chemistry with Hesam Asghari, whom I met on the set of my "Slumber Party" video, also began to bring a spark back into my life. Despite the tabloid rumors, we grew close, and for the first time in a long while, I felt like I was beginning to find something real again. But even as things in my personal life began to feel more positive, my father's influence remained a constant barrier. When I began taking over-the-counter energy supplements, my father decided to send me to treatment again, believing that I had a problem. This decision further cemented my feeling that I had no control over my life, even when I was trying to make positive changes.

The treatment plan he set for me was rigid and oppressive. While I attended Alcoholics Anonymous meetings as part of my outpatient treatment, I found inspiration in the women I met there. Their stories were profound, and the connections I made with them were some of the most meaningful I had experienced. But even in AA, my autonomy was limited. The other women could pick and choose which meetings to attend, but I was stuck with the same meetings at the same time every week. This lack of flexibility mirrored the control my family and the conservatorship had over every aspect of my life. Even when I wanted to stay home with my kids after a long series of

shows, my father insisted that I attend my meeting. The feeling of being controlled by him grew stronger, and I began to see him as the leader of a cult, with me as his captive. Despite everything, I had performed to the best of my ability, and I knew that I had exceeded expectations. Yet, it seemed like no matter how great I was, it was never enough to break free.

This constant struggle for freedom, both in my personal and professional life, left me feeling exhausted and isolated. I worked hard to please everyone around me, but the reality was that my own needs were always overlooked. I began to realize how unfair it was that, despite my talent and efforts, I remained trapped. The system that was meant to protect me had only served to control me, leaving me feeling helpless. But even in the midst of this, the release of *Glory* and the support from those who truly cared about me gave me a glimpse of hope. The path to freedom was still unclear, but the spark of my true self was starting to re-emerge.