

Chapter 27

Chapter 27 describes a time in my life when I felt like I was standing on the edge of a cliff, looking into an abyss. After shaving my head, I went to Bryan's apartment in Los Angeles, where I was greeted by his two ex-girlfriends and my mother. My mother barely acknowledged me, and I felt invisible to her, like my appearance was all that mattered. It was an extremely painful reminder that the world often cares more about physical appearance than the inner struggles someone is going through. I had been going through so much emotionally and mentally, but all that mattered to those around me was how I looked. It was a harsh reality check about the superficiality of how people, including my family, were viewing me during one of the most difficult times of my life.

In that winter, I was advised to enter rehab to help regain custody of my children, even though I felt like my emotional and grief issues were the real problems. I knew deep down that I wasn't struggling with substance abuse, but I followed the advice and entered rehab anyway. Upon arrival, my father was there, sitting across from me, telling me I was a "disgrace." Looking back, I wish I had reached out for support, but I was so overwhelmed with shame and embarrassment. His words stung, especially since he had been such a critical part of the environment that led to my breakdown. I had no one to turn to, and I felt completely isolated. Still, rehab marked the beginning of the healing process, and while it was a dark time, I was determined to make the best of it.

Once I was out of rehab, I managed to gain temporary joint custody of my children, thanks to a dedicated lawyer who fought for me. However, the ongoing custody battle with Kevin continued to eat away at me. During this period, my album *Blackout*, which I was incredibly proud of, was released in late 2007. I had hoped that it would be a turning point in my career, but I was pressured to perform "Gimme More" at the VMAs

to help promote the album. The only problem was that I wasn't okay, despite what everyone else thought. Backstage at the VMAs, everything was going wrong, from issues with my costume to problems with my hair extensions. I hadn't slept the night before, and I felt dizzy. The pressure to look perfect, especially after just having my second baby, was overwhelming. I was expected to look flawless onstage, but I didn't feel that way at all. I could feel the panic setting in, and I was not prepared for what was coming.

When I ran into Justin backstage, I couldn't help but compare myself to him. He was doing great—on top of the world, confident, and at ease. I, on the other hand, was battling panic attacks and self-doubt. I was fully aware of how much I had struggled, and it was painful to see someone who seemed to have everything together while I was fighting to just make it through the night. When I finally performed, it was clear that I was nowhere near my best. The performance was not my finest moment, but as a performer, everyone has off nights. Unfortunately, mine was on one of the biggest stages, in front of millions of viewers, and the consequences were harsh. After the show, the media wasted no time in tearing me apart. They ridiculed my performance, criticized my body, and even called my public breakdown a "train wreck." I didn't hear Sarah Silverman's roast at the time, but I later learned she mocked me for everything I had worked so hard for. At that moment, I felt completely defeated. It was a tough blow, and the media's response only intensified the feelings of inadequacy that I was already battling.