

# Chapter 38

Chapter 38 marks a pivotal moment in my journey toward reclaiming my strength and sense of self. During my third year in Vegas, I felt a resurgence of something I hadn't experienced in a long time—true strength. It was a sense of power that came from within, a recognition that I could no longer endure the constraints of the conservatorship. For so long, my parents had convinced me I was the problem, the “crazy” one, and that narrative worked in their favor. This constant undermining of my sense of self led to a deep emotional wound, and the frustration I felt began to fuel my desire for change. I was tired of being controlled and undervalued. I had spent too long suppressing my voice, but now, it was time to reclaim it. The anger and helplessness I had experienced for so many years started to transform into determination.

As my strength grew, I began to look for examples of women who successfully wielded power in a positive way. Reese Witherspoon stood out to me as a role model. She had a reputation for being both kind and strong, and I admired that balance. Watching her confidently navigate her career and personal life made me realize that I didn't have to choose between being sweet and being assertive—I could be both. This revelation changed how I saw myself. I wasn't just here to make others happy, I deserved to express my desires and assert my boundaries. With this shift in mindset, I felt a surge of power and confidence that I hadn't felt in years. The more I embraced this newfound strength, the more I felt like the person I used to be before the conservatorship took control of my life.

However, as I began to assert myself, those around me were taken aback. When you've been quiet and compliant for so long, asserting yourself can be seen as a threat, and that's exactly what happened. My team and family seemed to fear the person I was becoming. I felt like a queen reclaiming her throne, and I imagined them bowing down to me. The more I spoke up, the more my power surged, and I knew that

I could no longer be manipulated into silence. But with that newfound strength came a hard truth: I had been forced to live under an incredibly tight and controlling schedule. Vegas had become a grind—performing the same show every week, with no opportunity for creativity or change. I had been asking for a remix, a new number, anything to break the monotony, but my requests were ignored. It felt like I was losing the joy I had once felt for performing.

Performing became more of a chore than a passion. I no longer had the pure love for singing that I had in my younger years. The creativity that once defined me was being stifled, and I was being told what to sing and when, with no room for my input. The lack of autonomy over my own performance was frustrating, especially when my team was unwilling to make changes. I had years of experience and a deep passion for my craft, yet I was being treated like a cog in a machine. The refusal to let me change the show, to add new elements for my fans, made me feel like my artistry was being disregarded. I wanted to give my fans something fresh and exciting, but the response I got was always “no.” The whole situation felt lazy and disheartening, and I worried about how my fans would perceive me. I longed to bring something new to the table, but I was constantly met with resistance.

This tension reached its peak when I realized that even the simple act of remixing my own songs was being blocked. I would spend hours in studios creating new versions, but my team always found a reason not to include them. It became clear that they weren't interested in making the show better for my fans, they just wanted to stick to the status quo. Even when I asked for small changes, like playing a new song during a quick costume change, I was told it wasn't possible. I knew this was a lie, and the more they denied me, the more I felt like my creativity and voice were being stifled. The lack of flexibility in my performances made me feel old and disconnected from my art. I was a performer, but I wasn't allowed to express myself creatively anymore, and it was breaking my spirit.

The turning point came when I was given the opportunity to create new material for the Glory album. The freedom to perform new material brought back a sense of

lightness and creativity I hadn't felt in years. Glory reminded me of the excitement of making music that was fresh and authentic. However, even when I was honored with the Radio Disney Icon Award the following year, the overwhelming feelings of being trapped and overlooked resurfaced. As I watched the show and saw a medley of my old songs, I couldn't help but feel the contrast between the young, creative person I had once been and the performer I had become. Watching Jamie Lynn surprise me with a performance of "Till the World Ends" and hand me the award was an emotional experience. It reminded me of a time when my artistry felt truly celebrated and not just a product of someone else's control.



This reflection on the past made me realize how far I had come and how much I had lost. The Glory album had reignited my passion for music, but it was difficult to reconcile that with the rigid structure I was still living under. Despite the external accolades, I couldn't ignore the deep sense of dissatisfaction I felt with my career and the way it was being managed. The contrast between my inner desire to break free and the constraints placed upon me was stark. It became clear that I needed to take action, to assert control over my own life and career. I had to find a way to reclaim my power and break free from the system that had kept me in check for so long.