

**TOXIC: THE BRITNEY SPEARS STORY**  
**CHAPTER 1: TOXIC**

**Witness Docs**

**[SOUND EFFECT - CRICKETS CHIRPING]**

TESS BARKER, HOST: The mansions in the Hollywood Hills sit high above the rest of the city. At night, the lights from their balconies and infinity pools dot the landscape. The homes are literally something to look up to, an aspiration.

**[SOUND EFFECT - CAR DRIVING BY]**

BABS GRAY, HOST: If you drive up one of the winding canyon roads into the hills, you might pass a gated community called The Summit.

It's surrounded by tall trees. There's a guard house out front. It's one of those developments where rich people live when they want to keep others out.

TESS: Just past the front gate is a villa, with Spanish tile and a courtyard. Inside there's an airy entryway, sparkling chandeliers and six bedrooms. But on one night in January 2008, the house is empty. Except for one person. A man named Sam Lutfi. It's not Lutfi's house, though. The house belongs to *Britney Spears*.

**[MUSIC ENTERS]**

BABS: At this time, Sam Lutfi is by Britney's side *a lot*. He goes on errands with her. And meetings. He calls himself her manager. He's even moved into a room here at Britney's house.

**[SOUND EFFECT - PHONE RINGING]**

BABS: The landline rings and Lutfi answers. It's the front guard. Britney's mom Lynne has pulled up, and she wants to get past the gate.

TESS: Behind Lynne, in his pickup truck, is someone Britney doesn't speak to. He's not allowed in her home. It's her dad, Jamie Spears.

BABS: Jamie and Lynne are divorced, but they've come together tonight because they're worried about Britney. They've watched from afar as Britney has struggled. She's endured a custody battle over her two young sons. She's been ridiculed for her recently shaved head. And she's had her every move documented by the unrelenting paparazzi.

TESS: But one of Lynne and Jamie's top concerns is Sam Lutfi. The guy who's inside right now. Britney's parents don't trust Lutfi at all - they think he has a stranglehold over their daughter.

**[MUSIC ENTERS]**

BABS: Lutfi tells security he'll allow Lynne in but not Jamie. When Lutfi opens the door, though, they're both there. Jamie has managed to *sneak in*.

TESS: Once inside, Britney's parents realize their daughter isn't even home. Just Lutfi. Jamie is furious. He demands to know where Britney is.

BABS: This confrontation is months in the making. On one side, is Lynne and Jamie Spears, parents of one of the biggest stars in the world. On the other, Sam Lutfi. A man who's inserted himself into Britney's life. And *tonight* is the night they *all* finally come face to face.

**[SUSPENSEFUL THEME MUSIC ENTERS]**

TESS: The conflict continues for days. There are physical fights. Accusations of drugging. It's a tug of war. And the person being grabbed from both ends is Britney.

**[MUSIC]**

BABS: The week culminates with Britney strapped onto a gurney and sent to the hospital on an involuntary psychiatric hold. While she's stuck there, a flurry of people get to work in lawyer's offices, hotel rooms, and the hospital lobby.

TESS: Just five days after she's checked in, Britney's fate is sealed. Her dad Jamie Spears is granted control of her legal rights and her massive fortune.

BABS: Britney Spears has spent most of her life actively working as a world famous recording artist and performer. Since that night in 2008, she's released 4 albums, toured the world, and completed one of the most lucrative Vegas residencies of all time.

TESS: Yet she remains in an arrangement called a conservatorship. Someone else has power over all her life decisions and finances. She can't sign a work contract. She needs approval from her conservator to have visitors. To ride in her boyfriend's car. To go off birth control. These constraints are specific to Britney's conservatorship - but in general, conservatorships are extremely restrictive. They're intended as a last resort, to use when someone is so incapacitated that they can't meet their own needs for food or shelter.

BABS: Britney Spears herself has said in court that she's capable of taking care of her basic needs. That she believes this conservatorship is abusive - and she wants out. That her father finds joy in controlling her. So... how did we get here? Why is Britney's father *still* in charge? Why has he *been* in charge for so long? Who is profiting from this situation? And why have the insiders been so silent about it? I'm Babs Gray.

TESS: And I'm Tess Barker. And this is Toxic.

DANIEL MUSTO: We definitely all didn't have her number, one person had her number.

ANDREW HAMPP: So you could tell there was a sadness that she was trying to communicate.

LORILEE CRAKER: To me, it was very much a rescue operation.

PEREZ HILTON: A lot of people are wanting villains from this, and I don't think it's as simple as that.

SARA LUTERMAN: Guardianship and conservatorship are really like a nuclear option. You press a button and just everything's gone.

RICK BLACK: Everybody in the system denies that the system is dysfunctional.

BABS (QUESTION): How do you know who to listen to or who to trust?

MARY THORNTON HOUSE: See, that's the thing. You never know.

BABS: In this podcast we'll delve into how Britney got into this situation, and why 13 years later, she's *still* in it. And we'll investigate the flawed system that's allowed this to happen... to Britney and *countless* others... right under our noses.

### **[THEME MUSIC FADES]**

PARKING ROBOT VOICE: Please press the button for entrance.

BABS: No, wrong button.

PARKING ROBOT VOICE: Please wait.

BABS: We know how to do this.

BABS: That's me, Babs. Pressing the wrong button. It's June 2021, and I'm entering a parking lot at the Stanley Mosk courthouse in downtown Los Angeles.

PARKING ROBOT VOICE: Welcome.

TESS: I just saw a girl with pink hair.

BABS: [laugh]

TESS: Assuming she's here for the same reason as us.

TESS: And that's me, Tess. Babs and I, along with, presumably, that girl with the pink hair, are Britney Spears fans. I've spent a lot of nights dancing to Britney. Many of them have been in Babs' living room.

BABS: Truly, there's nothing better than throwing an epic rager at your house, and just at the right moment you drop "Till the World Ends," and everyone just goes off.

TESS: Beyond house parties, Babs and I have listened to Britney on road trips. We've seen her live in concert. If I had to choose a favorite pop star it'd be Britney. She's probably the only person who loves coffee more than me. She's the reason I *still* wear Uggs.

BABS: But really, our love of Britney's boots, and bops, is not why we schlepped to the courthouse for her hearing today. We're here because for a while now, we've been consumed by questions about Britney's conservatorship. And we've *been* here many times searching for answers.

### [AMBIENT STREET SOUNDS]

TESS: The Stanley Mosk Courthouse is a dingy government building. The kind you don't notice until you have some reason to show up there. There's usually litter blowing around out front. Buses pulling their air brake. **[AIR BRAKE SOUND]** People waiting to get through the security line.

BABS: But today, it's more colorful than usual. There's shocks of pink on sunglasses, tank tops, posters. There's an electricity in the air. And a bigger crowd than we've ever seen here. Because today, Britney Jean Spears herself, has asked to address the court about her conservatorship. We really don't know what she's going to say or if we'll even be allowed to hear it at all.

TESS: We spot homemade signs that read "Attention Jamie Spears, Get Out of Britney's Life" and "Where's Britney's Money?" People dressed in pleather pants and old Britney concert tees circle up.

KEVIN WU: What do we want? Free Britney? When do we want it? NOW! What do we want? Free Britney! When do we want it? NOW! Thank you, everyone, for coming today. I am so proud of this movement. **[CHEERS]** Make some noise for Britney Spears.

Tess: This is Kevin Wu. An organizer of the Free Britney movement. Kevin holds a microphone and stands in front of a huge pink FreeBritney backdrop.

KEVIN: How much do we love Britney Spears?

CROWD: **[CHEERS]**

KEVIN: We're going to keep fighting until Britney is free. **[CHEERS]** We hope that Britney feels empowered to speak her truth.

Tess: This is Britney's first time addressing the court in two *years*, but there are hearings for her case pretty regularly. For a long time, they happened quietly and almost no one showed up to watch. But since 2019, there have been rallies like this one outside. These rallies feel kind of

like you're at a pride parade, but instead of rainbow flags there's blown up photos of legal documents. The organizers pass out water, fruit snacks, and homemade rose pins: a nod to Britney's love of roses and a way to show support for her. And there's usually press with their recorders and cameras.

GERMAN REPORTER: Yeah, I just recognize you. I'm from German public media, actually. It's like a German NPR basically. Would you be open to answer some questions?

BABS: Yeah, sure.

Tess: These reporters flag Babs and I down for questions, because well, we kinda helped kick this whole #FreeBritney thing off.

BABS: Yeah, we'll tell you how *that* all happened a little later. It's pretty wild. But for now, we want to check in with some of the supporters here at the rally today. People who have flown in from all over the country. People like Dustin, from Arizona.

BABS: Can you tell me about your outfit today?

DUSTIN: I have a little "Baby One More Time" wig going on. My "conservatorship equals slavery" shirt, and my sign, my Britney sign.

TESS: Dustin's been a regular at these rallies for a while now. He's known to show up with a gigantic, 20-foot-long banner that reads "End the Conservatorship." The first few rallies, Dustin hauled that banner to LA on a greyhound bus.

BABS: Can I ask you, what you're hoping to happen?

DUSTIN: I'm hoping Britney gets free, finally. I'm hoping we get some more info about, you know, when the conservatorship is finally going to end.

BABS: As you might expect, the Free Britney movement is full of superfans. And I mean superfans. I thought I was a big fan of Britney until I ran into this crew. These are the kind of fans who - they don't just know the choreography from the music video, no. They know the choreography from the tour. From *every single* tour.

TESS: But Free Britney supporters also include people who don't even necessarily listen to Britney's music. There's disability rights activists, who see Britney's situation as a civil liberties issue. Legislators who are interested in conservatorship reform. And lawyers like Lisa MacCarley. A probate attorney who we've spoken with quite a bit over the last couple years.

LISA: I done my hair today. I love you guys so much.

BABS: Aw we love you too.

LISA: I actually did my hair and makeup.

BABS: I know, yeah we're all getting ready to go to the Britney hearing. So how do you feel about today?

LISA: I'm excited and of course a little anxious. A lot rides [on] today. So if she says something like, I want to have an attorney of my own choice, it's a whole new world for Britney Spears.

**[SUSPICIOUS MUSIC ENTERS]**

TESS: Britney has not had an attorney of her own choice for the past 13 years. She was *assigned* one by the court. His name is Sam Ingham. And even though Britney didn't *hire* Ingham, she *is* the one who *pays* him.

BABS: According to court documents, Ingham routinely bills Britney's account 10 thousand dollars a week. And I gotta say, if I was paying 10K a week to an attorney, I wouldn't want it to be Sam Ingham. The law states that he's supposed to be Britney's zealous advocate - someone who vigorously champions their client's interests.

TESS: We know Britney has objected to the conservatorship for years. But Ingham — as Britney's representative in court — has never asked the judge to end it.

BABS: Today is a big deal, because Britney barely ever attends these court dates. And when she has, her testimony has been sealed. We haven't been able to see or hear what she's said.

TESS: We're worried that even if Britney speaks her truth today it will be again sealed from public view and swept under the rug.

**[MUSIC FADES DOWN, RALLY CHATTER FADES UP]**

BABS: It's 2:05 pm. 35 minutes past when Britney's hearing was scheduled to start. The court is having technical difficulties, like usual. A few FreeBritney people huddle around a phone, tapped into the public audio feed of the hearing. Britney and her lawyers are calling in remotely. Tess and a few other reporters are inside the courtroom to observe. I'm standing around outside with the rest of the crowd.

BABS: They did roll call. So usually it goes, they do roll call and then they'll decide if they're closing it. So they might still close it.

UNIDENTIFIED: They might close it and then we wouldn't be able to hear, or, yeah.

BABS: So we'll see. We'll know soon.

BABS: A FreeBritney supporter we're friendly with, Meg Radford, gets our attention.

MEG RADFORD: She's officially on the hearing.

BABS: So they're just starting it. They still could close it from here, but we know she's on the line

BABS: I make my way over to the people listening in. It's seriously one phone with at least 20 people crouching over it. Everyone's squished together, almost arm in arm.

Babs: OK, so everyone's like crowded around one phone trying to listen into the hearing right now. Let me see if I can get anything.

BABS: They're trying to close the hearing.

CROWD: [cheers]

BABS: Wait, what happened?

MEG: They were trying to close the courtroom. Britney herself spoke up and said she wanted it open.

CROWD: [CHEERS]

RICK: Good, yes!

BABS: Oh, my God. Oh, my God.

RICK: It's a big win.

MEGS: She said she has a lot to say.

BABS: Britney said she has a lot to say.

MEG: [crying] She said she doesn't think she's ever been heard before. She's doing it.

BRITNEY (SPEAKING TO COURT): OK so I have this written down. I have a lot to say, so bear with me. Basically, a lot has happened since two years ago, the last time - I wrote all this down - the last time I was in court. I will be honest with you, I haven't been back to court in a long time, because I don't think I was heard on any level when I came to court the last time. Ma'am, my dad and anyone involved in this conservatorship -- and my management, who played a huge role in punishing me when I said no -- ma'am, they should be in jail. FADE DOWN

### **[SUSPENSEFUL MUSIC ENTERS]**

TESS: On June 23, 2021, Britney publicly spoke out about her conservatorship for the first time. About how she saw it as abusive, controlling, and something akin to sex trafficking. This was a moment 13 years in the making. A moment, honestly, we didn't think we'd ever get to see.

BABS: Tess and I have been investigating Britney's story for over two years. On the day of this hearing, we were weeks away from publishing the first episode of this podcast, an episode in which we wondered, why has Britney been so silent? And then, she spoke. She answered that question. Her silence has been the result of years of intimidation. Gaslighting. Manipulation.

TESS: But even after hearing Britney's explosive testimony, we're still wondering: How has this gone on for so long? Why did it happen in the first place? These questions have been haunting us. This podcast has taken over our lives. And the thing is, we didn't choose this story, so much as it kind of chose us.

### **[MUSIC FADES]**

**[MIDROLL BREAK]**

BABS: Before we were neck deep in Britney's legal case, Tess and I were just a couple of young comedians. We actually met doing standup. When you first start doing comedy, you'll do it anywhere - dive bars that pay you in drink tickets, house shows that turn into house parties. Comedy can be kind of a boy's club, so Tess and I bonded quickly. We were in the trenches together.

TESS: They were really fun trenches, though. If you want to know anything about the specific time we actually met, the brain cells containing that information probably are somewhere off the 101 where they were burned on PBR and Doritos.

BABS: [LAUGHS]

TESS: As is custom when you commence a friendship in LA, we started a podcast, "Lady to Lady" with our other bestie Brandie Posey. Available wherever you get your podcasts!

BABS: C'mon, we had to do it.

TESS: [GIGGLES]

BABS: Tess and I kinda became each others' partners-in-crime. You know, like, if I was looking for someone to go all-in on a stupid idea, Tess was the first person I called.

TESS: Oh yeah. When I need someone who's not gonna tell me no, I call Babs.

BABS: Let me tell you what, I have not told Tess no many, many times. We just have a laundry list of shenanigans. We've gotten kicked out of the Chateau Marmont.

TESS: We've been banned from the mall for dancing in the fountain.

BABS: We've pulled all-nighters sewing sequins onto rip away sweatpants. We just find joy in committing to our most ridiculous ideas. It's kind of our style of comedy, and how we live our lives in general.

TESS: Which is why, in 2017, when Babs suggested to me that we start a podcast based solely on our favorite pop star's Instagram posts, uh, we were recording it the next week.

BABS (ARCHIVAL): Hello, welcome to Britneys, Gram.

BOTH (ARCHIVAL) The happiest place on the Internet!

TESS (ARCHIVAL): I'm Tess Barker.

BABS (ARCHIVAL) I am Barbara Gray. Thank you for joining us.

BABS: Every week on Britney's Gram we'd dissect Britney's iconic Instagram posts to the point of absurdity. Her fashion shows. Her skits. And her singing videos...

BABS (ARCHIVAL): Oh here we go. Let's hear it.

BRITNEY (ARCHIVAL): [sings the chorus of Aretha Franklin's "You Make Me Feel Like a Natural Woman" with a chipmunk voice filter]

BABS (ARCHIVAL): [LAUGHS]

TESS (ARCHIVAL): I mean.....

BABS (ARCHIVAL): So she's wearing a sports bra and the smallest pair of boxer shorts I've ever seen.

TESS (ARCHIVAL): Again, this is a trick that I loved when I was in junior high: wear a pair of boxers and roll down the bottom so that they're sluttier. I will say this is Britney at her most natural.

BABS (ARCHIVAL): Right!

TESS (ARCHIVAL): Britney's singing in boxers with the filter on, that is who she is to her core!

TESS: And that's what Britney's Gram was. A fun place for Babs and I to digest all of Britney's posts.

BABS: Our fans were just as devoted to deciphering her feed as we were. We even had a voicemail inbox where listeners could leave their most pressing opinions.

CALLER 1: What's up Britney bitches, just listening to the latest episode on my way to work, and I have a wild conspiracy theory, and I have not researched this, which is exactly what Britney would do. Um, what if the emojis were like tags? I dunno, I think the emojis could be a secret shout out. It makes less sense the more I say it out loud. But I think it is a theory.

CALLER 2: Hey, guys, I love the podcast, Britney just posted an image, and I just have four words to say about this new Minions meme that she's posted: This is our Chernobyl. Bye guys.

## **[MUSIC ENTERS]**

TESS: When we started Britney's Gram, no one was really talking about Britney's conservatorship. As fans, we were aware it existed, but we didn't know the specifics. Sometimes we would wonder if her posts were trying to tell us something about the restrictions in her life.

BABS: For example, in late 2017, Britney posted a meme saying "Let me shop and no one gets hurt" with the caption "Story of my life... LITERALLY." Was this her inner soccer Mom? Or a statement about how she didn't control her own money? We started to get a little obsessed. Our text threads went from convos about Britney's emoji choices to screenshots of court documents.

TESS: I called the National Association to Stop Guardian Abuse. They told me that when someone is conserved, they legally become “unpersoned.” Honestly, I was floored that this level of control could happen to *anyone* in America. Much less my favorite artist. I mean, I’d seen Britney five times in concert, and each time she’d literally leapt through fire or repelled off some giant set piece. So you’re telling me that someone who could do those things couldn’t be trusted with her own personal life?

TESS: Oh yeah, by the way, in addition to slinging jokes, I’m also a writer and reporter. And I’ve done investigative pieces in the past. I got this feeling I had stumbled onto something big here.

**[MUSIC ENDS]**

BABS: About a year after our first Britney’s Gram episode, Tess took it to a whole other level. She went to her first Britney hearing, in November 2018. We recorded a Britney’s Gram episode later that day and Our friend Chris Farrah joined us.

BABS (ARCHIVAL): So, so basically there's been goings-on with the conservatorship, and Tess found out that there was a hearing today at the courthouse in Los Angeles and she showed up.

TESS (ARCHIVAL): Yes I did. It was at ten o'clock in the morning. I got to court at nine because I didn't wanna miss it.

CHRIS FARRAH (ARCHIVAL): Oh my god.

TESS (ARCHIVAL): I put on like a court outfit, and my husband was like, you're out of your fucking mind. I was like, “I'm in this weird Venn diagram where I'm a Britney obsessed, like, trained investigative reporter.” So I'm like, “I know how to get information out of a courthouse.”

CHRIS (ARCHIVAL): Mm-hmm.

TESS (ARCHIVAL): I go in and I just sit down. And like the bailiffs and the clerk, like, kind of look at me and they just keep working. [laughs]

BABS: No big deal but these days, we know the bailiff by his first name. What’s up Ceasar? But this was Tess’s first day in court. And she came face to face with the *other* guy who controlled all of Britney’s money: Andrew Wallet. He was co-conservator of Britney’s estate, along with her dad, Jamie. At this point, Andrew Wallet and Jamie Spears had controlled Britney’s wealth for over a decade.

TESS: And not just the big stuff, they monitored Britney’s little expenses too, down to Pottery Barn purchases and Starbucks runs.

BABS: And at this court hearing, Wallet asked the judge to be paid *even more*

TESS (ARCHIVAL): So he was granted his petition and he will be getting a raise. So this is him getting-

BABS (ARCHIVAL): Half a million dollars a year raise.

TESS (ARCHIVAL): Half a million dollars a year. This motherfucker has just been attached to Britney Spears. I mean, who knows how Jamie found him.

TESS: This guy's salary suddenly goes up from at least 85 thousand dollars to just over 420 thousand dollars.

BABS: Yeah. Wallet is *controlling* Britney's bank account AND he's paying himself from Britney's bank account.

TESS: And the whole hearing only takes about 15 minutes. It just feels *wrong*. Watching Wallet smugly saunter through the hallway after they're done, I'm pissed. And I think he can tell.

TESS (ARCHIVAL): The whole time this Andrew Wallet guy is just mad dogging me, he's just staring at me, and I'm staring right back at him. So, that was my morning. And I just want to say, somebody today asked me what outlet I wrote for, and I said I have an investigative podcast. I said that with a straight face. I said I have an investigative podcast.

BABS (ARCHIVAL): Well to be fair, you do... [FADES DOWN]

[MUSIC ENTERS]

BABS: To be clear, we had no clue that our silly comedy podcast would turn into...this. "Toxic." An actual investigative podcast.

TESS: But in a weird way, it seems like forces did collide to bring us this story. Right around this time, after the Wallet hearing, when we're already watching everything like a hawk, mysterious stuff keeps happening to Britney.

BABS: The beginning of 2019 was just thing after thing. Her Instagram posts are randomly getting deleted. Out of nowhere, Britney cancels her new upcoming Las Vegas residency, and announces she's taking an indefinite work hiatus. And then, two days later, she disappears ENTIRELY from public sight. No Instagram posts, no paparazzi sightings. Nothing.

[MUSIC ENDS]

TESS (ARCHIVAL): We are coming up on the month anniversary of when we last spotted Britney.

BABS (ARCHIVAL): Oh, my God.

TESS (ARCHIVAL): The last time we saw her at In-N-Out was on January 7th. We've not seen the bitch for a month.

BABS (ARCHIVAL): Where is she?

TESS (ARCHIVAL): Never in my life has she been this off the radar.

BABS: Then, Andrew Wallet abruptly resigns as co- conservator of Britney’s estate. Tess had watched Wallet get a giant raise only six months ago, and now he’s out? His resignation letter to the judge is ominous, too. It says that harm could come to Britney if he doesn’t leave right away.

TESS: At this point, we are on edge. And so are the rest of Britney’s fans. A “Missing Person” poster with Britney’s face makes the rounds on Twitter. It reads: Last seen January 6, near In-N-Out, driving a white Mercedes Benz.

BABS: In April 2019, nearly three months after there’s been any sign of her, the news breaks: Britney is in a mental health facility. Reports say she’s been there for a week, and she checked *herself* in. This sets off alarm bells, for multiple reasons. Obviously, we’re worried about Britney and want her to be getting help if she needs it, but *is* that what’s happening? Something just feels off. She’s supposedly been there for a *week*? But nobody has seen her for *months*.

TESS: The following Thursday, I am up late editing Britney’s Gram. I check our inbox for listener voicemails to use, and I notice one that is longer than the others.

PARALEGAL (ARCHIVAL): Hi there. Um, I cannot disclose who I am. I just heard the latest episode, you guys are onto something. Um, I used to be a paralegal for an attorney that worked, um, with Britney’s conservatorship. I am no longer with them. And what is happening is disturbing to say the least. Britney has been in the mental facility since mid-January. Um, of course, the statement yesterday said she entered last week, that is not true. She has been there since mid-January. Uh, she did not want to go. From what I understand, this was not a decision she made. At all.

BABS: So, according to this paralegal in an office connected to Britney’s case, she had been in the mental health facility for *months... against her will*. This voicemail validated our fears. Britney was in a scary situation, and she didn’t have a choice in it. This was the first time someone with insider knowledge contacted us and told us we were onto something... but it wouldn’t be the last.

### **[SUSPENSEFUL MUSIC]**

TESS: We needed to figure out what to do with this bomb that had suddenly been dropped in our laps. We wanted to play the voicemail on “Britney’s Gram,” but we were terrified. What if Britney’s team denied it? What if they sued us?

BABS: We asked the paralegal for proof of where he worked. He sent us documentation and we continued having follow up conversations with him, asking more details about him and what he knew. We felt confident he was telling the truth, and we wanted the world to hear what he had to say.

TESS: So we sat down to record episode #75 of “Britney’s Gram.”

TESS (ARCHIVAL): Uh this is a big deal guys, I hope that wherever you are, you're somewhere that you're able to receive some big information, and feel a lot of things, and have your mind blown.

BABS: We titled it "#FreeBritney" and released it in the middle of the night. We figured that way, it would reach enough corners of the internet by dawn, and then there would be no stopping it. We posted a pink graphic with white text that said "FREEBRITNEY," hoping other people would share.

TESS: I hardly slept. By morning, the episode link and pink graphic tile were virtually plastered everywhere. What really took it to the next level was when Lynne Spears showed her support. Entertainment Tonight made a segment about it.

REPORTER (ARCHIVAL): Someone wrote on her Instagram post, quote, "I really hope your ailing ex-husband isn't keeping your daughter against her will." Well, Lynne actually liked the comment. She also liked several others that included the hashtag #FREEBRITNEY.

BABS: The daytime talkshow "The Talk" also talked about it. One of the hosts, Eve, wore a shirt with that same graphic I had made myself that said "FREEBRITNEY."

THE TALK (HOST): What's good about this, this FreeBritney Campaign that's out, and I love that shirt, Eve's got that shirt! What I love about this is that if something shady is happening, something not right, then... [fades down]

### **[SUSPENSEFUL MUSIC]**

TESS: We felt this incredible momentum. Like, we weren't alone. The world cared about what was going on with Britney Spears. A fan organized a rally outside of City Hall in West Hollywood, L.A.'s biggest gay neighborhood.

BABS: We were interviewed at the rally by an Entertainment Tonight reporter covering it.

ENTERTAINMENT TONIGHT REPORTER (ARCHIVAL): Guys, we have a very large group back here, they're very passionate. Barbara, if you could say one thing to Britney Spears right now, what would you say?

BABS (ARCHIVAL): I would say we love you, and we believe you.

### **[SLOW PIANO MUSIC]**

BABS: The whole reason we decided to put out that Britney's Gram episode was we hoped that the public pressure would shake things up. And it seemed to work. The day after that first rally, a new hearing was set in Britney's case. And then, Britney's mom Lynne asked to be an interested

party<sup>1</sup> on the case. That means she'd get to add her input in court. This had never happened in the history of the conservatorship. It had always been just Jamie calling the shots. Change seemed to be brewing.

TESS: And less than a month after we dropped that podcast episode, Britney showed up in court. In a closed hearing, she confirmed what the paralegal said about her stay in the mental health facility - that she had been sent there against her will.

BABS: Observers weren't allowed inside the hearing that day, but I *did* see Britney after it was over. She was being ushered onto an escalator by security. She was wearing a black turtleneck and a red skirt<sup>2</sup>. She looked anxious. Like the rest of the people in and out of the courthouse on any day of the week. But she was *Britney Spears*. And this was the closest I'd ever been to her. All of a sudden things felt very real. And way bigger than me and Tess, bigger than "Britney's Gram."

TESS: In the last *two years* since we published that voicemail, We've learned a lot about Britney and the super complicated legal situation she's in. One that a lot of people are in. One that *you* could be in.

BABS: We've talked to people who've been there through some of the most public moments of Britney's life, and some who've been there for the quiet ones too.

TESS: Reporting on this story has changed the way we view the legal system. Mental healthcare. The entertainment industry. There is no one "villain." No convenient scapegoat.

BABS: This isn't just a story about a girl named Britney. It's a story about the people on the ends of the rope. The people tugging on her. Who've *been* tugging on her. And seem to be holding on for dear life. We're here to shine a light on those people. We want to tell this story so that everyone can finally know what we know. And what we don't know.

**[PIANO MUSIC ENDS]**

**[SUSPENSEFUL MUSIC STARTS]**

TESS: This Season on TOXIC:

LISA MCCARLEY: The Britney Spears conservatorship is one of those things that when lawyers get together, we all go, "what the frick?" Like, whaaat?

DR. IMANI WALKER: Now with probate conservatorship, that can last for a lifetime.

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<sup>1</sup> [A second source on this](#)

<sup>2</sup> TMZ footage of her outfit Tess:

<https://www.tzm.com/2019/05/10/britney-spears-parents-conservatorship-court-jamie-lynnne/&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1620670378374000&usg=AOvVaw3w6Kv5cVm8lmgghCZrrwGo>

BABS: [crying] I think the problem with this is that it's like never -- I mean personally, this is something I never wanted to do. [laughs]

DAVE HOLMES: For all of the times that she came to the studio and for all the people that came along with her, I don't remember seeing her dad. I don't think I've ever met her dad.

WESTON ANSON: How do you know that Jamie is acting in Britney Spears' best interests? You don't. You don't.

DAISY EAGAN: We had a classmate who would sit in the school bus and sing songs from the show she was understudying in at the top of her lungs...

TESS: Next time... we journey back to the era of cucumber melon body splash and dial-up internet. And we talk to someone who knew Britney before she was Miss American Dream.

DAISY: ...and I realized many years later that that was actually Britney Spears.