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Los Angeles Superior Court

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8
9 SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA
10 FOR THE COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES

BC406904

12 SAM LUTFI, an individual,)
13 Plaintiff,)
14 vs.)
15 LYNNE IRENE SPEARS, an individual;)
16 JAMES PARNELL SPEARS, an individual;)
17 BRITNEY JEAN SPEARS, an individual; and)
18 DOES 1 through 25, inclusive,)
19 Defendants.)
20)
21)

Case No:
COMPLAINT FOR:
(1) **LIBEL;**
(2) **DEFAMATION;**
(3) **BATTERY;**
(4) **INTENTIONAL INFLICTION OF
EMOTIONAL DISTRESS;**
(5) **BREACH OF CONTRACT; AND**
(6) **QUANTUM MERUIT**

22 Plaintiff Sam Lutfi, an individual, does hereby allege as follows:
23 1. Britney Jean Spears ("Britney") is one of the most recognizable and highest paid
24 celebrities in the world. Ever since she burst onto the scene as a pop superstar, every aspect of
25 her life and, more importantly, her fortune, has been controlled by her parents, James Parnell
26 Spears (a/k/a Jamie Spears) ("Jamie") and Lynne Irene Spears ("Lynne"). However, in late 2006
27 and early 2007, when Britney's life was, very publicly, spiraling out of control, Jamie and Lynne
28 failed to offer their fragile daughter the guidance or emotional support she desperately needed.

1 Rather, they saw her very personal and public struggles as an opportunity to gain even more
2 control over Britney and her fortune. Seeking to further distance herself from her parents,
3 Britney sought out Sam Lutfi ("Lutfi") and urged him to manage her business and personal
4 affairs. From October 2007 through February 2008, under Lutfi's management and guidance,
5 Britney began turning her life and career around. During this time, Lutfi also actively
6 encouraged Britney to reconcile with Jamie and Lynne. However, no good deed goes
7 unpunished. Seeing Lutfi's involvement with Britney as a threat to their lifestyle, Jamie and
8 Lynne launched a campaign of lies and intimidation designed to destroy Lutfi and drive him out
9 of Britney's life. This campaign also provided Jamie with the opportunity he needed to obtain an
10 appointment as Britney's conservator (for which he receives a reported \$16,000 per month in
11 compensation). Although, still deemed "incompetent", Britney has recently recorded a new
12 album, "*Circus*", embarked on a world tour and given numerous media interviews and continues
13 to earn the money that supports Jamie's and Lynne's lavish lifestyle. Despite seemingly
14 accomplishing their objectives, Jamie and Lynne have nevertheless continued their smear
15 campaign against Lutfi. Thus, having no other alternative, Lutfi brings this action to defend
16 himself against Jamie's and Lynne's persistent attacks.

17 GENERAL ALLEGATIONS

18 2. Plaintiff Sam Lutfi ("Lutfi") is an individual who, for all times relevant hereto,
19 was residing, and did reside, in the County of Los Angeles, State of California.

20 3. Lutfi is informed and believes, and thereon alleges, that defendant Lynne Irene
21 Spears ("Lynne") is an individual who, for all times relevant hereto, was residing, and did reside,
22 in Tangipahoa Parish, State of Louisiana.

23 4. Lutfi is informed and believes, and thereon alleges, that defendant James Parnell
24 Spears (a/k/a Jamie Spears) ("Jamie") is an individual who, for all times relevant hereto, was
25 residing, and did reside, in the County of Los Angeles, State of California.

26 5. Lutfi is informed and believes, and thereon alleges, that defendant Britney Jean
27 Spears ("Britney") is an individual who, for all times relevant hereto, was residing, and did
28 reside, in the County of Los Angeles, State of California. Britney is sued herein as a nominal

1 defendant since it is understood that she will appear by and through her conservators including,
2 without limitation, Jamie.

3 6. Lutfi is ignorant of the true names and capacity of the defendants sued herein as
4 DOES 1 through 25, inclusive, and, therefore sues these defendants by such fictitious names.
5 Lutfi is informed and believes, and thereon alleges, that each such DOE defendant is liable to
6 Lutfi for the actions hereinafter set forth. Lutfi will amend this Complaint to allege the true
7 names and capacities of each such DOE defendant when ascertained.

8 7. Lutfi is informed and believes, and thereon alleges, that at all times herein
9 mentioned, each defendant, including DOE defendants, was the agent, servant, employee and/or
10 representative of each of the other defendants and, that at all times herein mentioned, was acting
11 within the course and scope of and pursuant to said agency, service, employment and/or
12 representation.

13 8. Jurisdiction and venue for this action in the County of Los Angeles are proper
14 pursuant to California Code of Civil Procedure Sections 393 and 395.

15 **ALLEGATIONS COMMON TO ALL CAUSES OF ACTION**

16 9. From the time that Britney was a child with a promising musical career, her father,
17 Jamie and mother, Lynne managed and controlled every aspect of Britney's life and career.
18 When Britney's ship finally came in, Britney, as well as Jamie and Lynne, gained instant
19 celebrity as well as access to Britney's substantial fortune.

20 10. As Britney grew older and more independent and Jamie and Lynne's marriage
21 began to fall apart, Jamie's and Lynne's stranglehold on Britney's life and career began to loosen.
22 This posed a serious threat to Jamie and Lynne, who had become accustomed to the fame and
23 fortune afforded to them as the "parents of Britney Spears".

24 11. In order to ensure that they would not lose the lifestyle to which they had become
25 accustomed, Jamie and Lynne set out to destroy anyone and anything that came between them
26 and Britney; first by pressuring and cajoling Britney into annulling her marriage to long time
27 friend, Jason Alexander; and later by interfering with Britney's marriage to Kevin Federline
28 ("Federline").

1 12. As a result of Jamie's and Lynne's actions, Britney grew increasingly distant and
2 resentful of her parents. In fact, Britney was especially resentful of Lynne, whom she felt had
3 betrayed her by consorting with Federline at a time when Britney and Federline were in the midst
4 of a contentious divorce and custody battle.

5 13. By late 2006, Britney's career was at an absolute standstill. In addition, Britney
6 had become the subject of countless tabloid stories reporting incidents of bizarre behavior and
7 rumored drug abuse.

8 14. Neither Jamie nor Lynne offered Britney any support as she suffered the
9 embarrassment and humiliation of public ridicule. Rather, they saw the rumors and tabloid
10 reports as a means by which they could force their way back into Britney's life and regain control
11 of her fortune under the guise of concern for Britney's well being.

12 15. Resentful of Lynne and afraid of Jamie's controlling, violent and often
13 unpredictable behavior, Britney began inquiring about obtaining restraining orders against Jamie
14 and Lynne in order to prevent them from regaining any control over her or having any
15 involvement in her life.

16 16. It was at or about this time in early 2007, that Britney met Lutfi at Los Angeles
17 area nightclub. Lutfi was relatively well known within certain circles as a businessman who
18 spent much of his time counseling and assisting homeless and wayward teens in the Hollywood
19 area.

20 17. Although they were never formally introduced, Britney approached Lutfi and
21 began discussing her family situation with him. In particular, Britney asked Lutfi whether he
22 knew of any lawyers who could help her get restraining orders issued against her family,
23 including, without limitation, Jamie and Lynne. Although Lutfi did not know of anyone at that
24 time, Lutfi offered to make inquiries and provide Britney with the names of lawyers who might
25 be able to assist her and offered Britney his telephone number in the event she wanted to contact
26 him again.

27 18. Over the next few weeks, Britney telephoned Lutfi on numerous occasions and
28 sent him hundreds of text messages. Throughout these communications, Britney constantly

1 sought advice from Lutfi as to how to prevent Jamie and Lynne from having any further
2 involvement in her life, including, without limitation, advice as to how she might obtain a
3 restraining order against Jamie and Lynne from the Court.

4 19. During the ensuing months, a friendship began to develop between Lutfi and
5 Britney. In fact, the relationship between Britney and Lutfi grew so strong that Britney sought
6 Lutfi's advice and counsel in connection with almost every important decision relating to her life
7 and career including, without limitation, the ongoing divorce proceedings and custody battle with
8 Federline, the feud between Britney and her family, as well as Britney's new album. Lutfi, for
9 his part, was always willing to listen to Britney and offer his advice and support, and would often
10 accompany her to important business meetings, such as a June 2007 meeting with high-level
11 talent agency executives.

12 20. In or about September 2007, at Britney's request, Lutfi accompanied Britney to a
13 meeting with record company executives to discuss production and release of Britney's new
14 album, "*Blackout*".

15 21. At this meeting, the record company executives were initially reluctant to discuss
16 details concerning "*Blackout*" in front of Lutfi, with whom they were not familiar. In order to
17 remedy this situation, Britney, without ever having discussed the matter with Lutfi, informed the
18 record company executives that Lutfi was her new "manager" and gave them authorization to
19 discuss "*Blackout*" with her in front of Lutfi.

20 22. Pleased with the idea of Lutfi being her manager, in the days that followed,
21 Britney repeatedly asked and urged Lutfi to take on that role. Ultimately, out of a concern for
22 Britney and her well being, Lutfi did, in fact, agree to become Britney's manager.

23 23. Beginning in or about October 2007, Lutfi performed a variety of business
24 management services for Britney. Among other things, Lutfi (a) facilitated booking, arranging
25 and coordinating every legal meeting, court hearing, doctor visit, child visitation and other
26 matters related to Britney's custody dispute and a then pending hit and run action; (b) scheduled
27 recording studio sessions and interfaced with music producers in connection with the album
28 "*Blackout*" including, without limitation, assisting in song selection for the album; (c) advised

1 and consulted on the artwork for the album "*Blackout*"; (d) arranged, coordinated and escorted
2 Britney to all photo shoots and promotional events related to her album, "*Blackout*"; (e)
3 coordinated, reviewed, and oversaw all details of the music videos for her album, "*Blackout*"; (f)
4 arranged and coordinated the production of Britney's music video for the song "*Piece of Me*";
5 (g) coordinated, produced and directed post-production and editing of Britney's music video for
6 the song "*Piece of Me*"; (h) interviewed and selected choreographers for Britney's tour in
7 support of her album, "*Blackout*"; (i) scheduled and escorted Britney to dance studio sessions in
8 preparation for tour in support of the album, "*Blackout*"; (j) scheduled and escorted Britney to
9 dance studio sessions in preparation for music videos related to the album, "*Blackout*"; (k)
10 selected and hired hair and makeup professionals and fashion stylists for Britney, for photo
11 shoots, music videos and public appearances; (l) sought and developed charity opportunities and
12 appearances for Britney; (m) scheduled and coordinated business meetings with various
13 businesses and agencies in connection with Britney's music, promotional, acting, entertainment
14 and endorsement deals; (n) participated and assisted in weekly accounting meetings with Britney
15 wherein Lutfi would review each and every bill and invoice delivered by Britney's business
16 manager and review checks drafted for Britney's signature; and (o) assisted Britney in
17 interviewing and hiring legal counsel.

18 24. In addition, Lutfi provided other personal services for Britney, including, without
19 limitation, (a) assisting Britney with the purchase of automobiles; (b) arranging birthday parties
20 for Britney's children; (c) arranging holiday events (i.e., Thanksgiving, Christmas and New
21 Years) for Britney and her children; (d) hiring decorators and lighting companies to install
22 holiday lights at Britney's home; (e) selecting and hiring a company to child-proof Britney's
23 residences; (f) selecting and hiring a professional photographer to photograph Britney and her
24 children; (g) selecting and hiring real estate brokers to assist Britney in selling and purchasing
25 residences; (h) escorting Britney to various open houses; (i) assisting Britney with the hiring and
26 firing of personal assistants, maids and nannies; (j) selecting and hiring a company to install new
27 carpet in Britney's residence; (k) selecting and hiring a lighting company to install new
28 chandeliers and lighting in Britney's residence; and (l) purchasing consumer goods for Britney's

1 residence (m) purchasing toys for Britney's children on birthdays, holidays and special events.

2 25. During the time Lutfi was acting as Britney's manager, Lynne and Jamie began
3 making attempts to re-establish contact with Britney and regain control of her life, career and
4 fortune.

5 26. Although Lutfi encouraged Britney to reconcile with her parents, Lutfi
6 represented a significant impediment to Lynne and Jamie's regaining complete control of
7 Britney's life and career. Thus, as they had done so many times before, Jamie and Lynne began a
8 campaign of slander, libel and defamation aimed at discrediting, destroying and physically and
9 emotionally intimidating Lutfi in order to drive him out of Britney's life. In fact, Lutfi is
10 informed and believes, and thereon alleges, that Lynne even went so far as to request that
11 Britney's then boyfriend, Adnan Ghalib, give a television interview, insinuating that Lutfi had
12 provided Britney with illegal drugs and blaming him for all of Britney's bizarre behavior.

13 **FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION - LIBEL**

14 (Against Lynne and Does 1 through 25)

15 27. Lutfi hereby incorporates by reference each and every allegation set forth in
16 paragraph numbers 1 through 26 as if set forth in full herein.

17 28. Lutfi is informed and believes, and thereon alleges, that in or about 2008, Lynne
18 authored a book entitled, "*Through the Storm, A Real Story of Fame and Family in a Tabloid*
19 *World*" (the "Book").

20 29. In the Book, Lynne purports to tell the story of her life as the mother of pop-
21 superstar, Britney Spears, and how Britney's meteoric rise to fame and fortune affected her life
22 and the lives of her family members.

23 30. In Chapters 27, 28 and 29 of the Book, entitled "Jerked Around", "The General"
24 and "Breaking the Stranglehold", respectively, Lynne tells the story of how she first met Lutfi
25 and how he purportedly kept Britney under his control. A true and correct copy of Chapters 27,
26 28 and 29 of the Book are attached hereto as Exhibit "1" and incorporated herein by this
27 reference.

28 31. The following statements as set forth in Chapters 28 of the Book are false as they

1 apply to Lutfi:

2 (a) “[Sam] told us that he threw away all of Britney’s phone chargers and disabled the
3 house phones by cutting the wires.” (Chapter 28, p. 176).

4 (b) “[Sam] told [Jackie and Lynne] to tell Britney that Adnan is gay.” (Chapter 28, p.
5 176).

6 (c) “Sam told Jackie and me that he grinds up Britney’s pills, which were on the
7 counter and included Risperdol and Seroquel, and puts them in her food. He said that was the
8 reason she had been quiet for the last three days. She had been drugged and asleep. He said that
9 her doctor was trying to get her into a sleep-induced coma so that they could then give her other
10 drugs to treat her.” (Chapter 28, p. 176-77).

11 32. Lutfi is informed and believes, and thereon alleges, that the following statements
12 as set forth in Chapters 28 of the Book are also false as they apply to Lutfi:

13 (a) “Adnan [Ghalib] told me that Sam hid Britney’s cell phones and told her that he
14 lost them.” (Chapter 28, 176).

15 (b) “Adnan told me that Sam also would hide Britney’s dog, London. She would
16 look all over the house, crying, and then Sam would bring out the dog and act like some sort of
17 savior.” (Chapter 28, p. 176).

18 33. Lutfi is informed and believes, and thereon alleges, that the following statement as
19 set forth in Chapters 28 of the Book is false and was made by Lynne without personal knowledge
20 or regard for the truth; “[Sam] also disabled several of Britney’s cars so she couldn’t leave
21 unattended.” (Chapter 28, p. 176).

22 34. Since the publication of the Book, Lutfi has been subjected to unfathomable
23 amounts of ridicule and public scorn. Lutfi is constantly bombarded by magazine headlines,
24 television shows and internet gossip sites that have propagated Lynne’s lies and fabrications.
25 Lutfi can no longer find work as a counselor of at-risk teens. Lutfi has received numerous death
26 threats from overzealous fans and, as such, is no longer able to venture into the public without
27 being harassed and ridiculed.

28 35. The false statements within Chapter 28 of the Book are libelous on their face in

1 that they accuse Lutfi of conduct that is despicable, dishonest, improper, immoral and potentially
2 criminal, thereby exposing Lutfi to hatred, contempt, ridicule, and obloquy.

3 36. The aforementioned statements were published by Lynne with actual malice in
4 that they were published by Lynne with the knowledge that they were false and/or with reckless
5 disregard for their truth.

6 37. Lutfi is informed and believes, and thereon alleges, that, since its publication,
7 Lynne has sold tens of thousands of copies of the Book worldwide. In addition, the Book has
8 received a significant amount of media attention including, without limitation, on public
9 television and internet sites. As such, the number of persons who have read or viewed the Book
10 and in particular, the false statements within Chapter 28 of the Book are unquantifiable.

11 38. As a result of the foregoing, Lutfi has suffered loss of his reputation, shame,
12 mortification and hurt feelings, all to his general damage as well as special damages including,
13 without limitation, injury to Lutfi's business, medical expenses, attorneys' fees and costs.

14 39. In addition, as alleged above, the statements identified above were published
15 intentionally and with actual malice and for the purpose of depriving Lutfi of property or legal
16 rights or otherwise causing injury and, therefore, was despicable conduct that subjected Lutfi to a
17 cruel and unjust hardship in conscious disregard of Lutfi's rights, so as to justify an award of
18 exemplary and punitive damages.

19 **SECOND CAUSE OF ACTION - DEFAMATION**

20 (Against Lynne and Does 1 through 25)

21 40. Lutfi hereby incorporates by reference each and every allegation set forth in
22 paragraph numbers 1 through 33 as if set forth in full herein.

23 41. In Chapters 27, 28 and 29 of the Book, Lynne pejoratively refers to Lutfi as,
24 among other things, "fake", "Svengali", "a predator", "a gatekeeper" and "the General".

25 42. In Chapters 27, 28 and 29 of the Book, Lynne accuses Lutfi of using paparazzi as
26 his "foot soldiers" and "henchmen".

27 43. Throughout Chapters 27, 28 and 29 of the Book, Lynne indirectly accuses Lutfi of
28 conduct that is despicable, dishonest, improper, immoral and potentially criminal.

1 alleged above, Lutfi suffered, and continues to suffer, humiliation, mental anguish, and emotional
2 and physical distress, and injury to his nervous system and person, all of which have caused, and
3 continue to cause, Lutfi great mental, physical, and nervous pain and suffering.

4 58. In addition, as a further result of the acts of Jamie and Lynne, and each of them, as
5 alleged above, Lutfi has suffered loss of his reputation, shame, mortification and hurt feelings, all
6 to his general damage as well as special damages including, without limitation, injury to Lutfi's
7 business, medical expenses, attorneys' fees and costs.

8 59. The acts of Jamie and Lynne, and each of them, as alleged above, were willful and
9 malicious intentionally and done for the purpose of depriving Lutfi of property or legal rights or
10 otherwise causing injury, and, therefore, were despicable conduct that subjected Lutfi to a cruel
11 and unjust hardship in conscious disregard of Lutfi's rights, so as to justify an award of
12 exemplary and punitive damages.

13 **FIFTH CAUSE OF ACTION - BREACH OF CONTRACT**

14 (Against Britney and Does 1 through 25)

15 60. Lutfi hereby incorporates by reference each and every allegation set forth in
16 paragraph numbers 1 through 26 as if set forth in full herein.

17 61. In or about October 2007, Lutfi and Britney entered into an oral agreement (the
18 "Agreement") whereby Lutfi would act as Britney's manager for a term of four (4) years.
19 Pursuant to the terms of the Agreement, Lutfi was to be compensated at the rate of 15% of the
20 income generated by Britney during that period.

21 62. On October 13, 2007, the Agreement was confirmed by Britney by, among other
22 things, a text message sent to Lutfi that reads, in relevant part, "sam, so thats fine, i want you to
23 be my manager. you were right its 15 percent of my money but for 4 years not 5."

24 63. As alleged in paragraphs 23 and 24, above, beginning in October 2007, Lutfi
25 performed a variety of management and personal services for Britney. Lutfi timely and fully
26 performed all of his obligations pursuant to the terms of the Agreement, with the exception of
27 those obligations that have been excused, prevented or released by Britney as a matter of law.

28 64. In or about February 2008, after being appointed as conservator over Britney.

1 Since that time, Jamie has prevented Lutfi from performing his obligations under the Agreement.

2 65. Lutfi has made numerous demands on Jamie, as conservator for Britney, for
3 payment of management fees due for the period from approximately mid-October 2007 to early-
4 February 2008, as well as other amounts that would have been due under the Agreement but for
5 its premature termination. However, such demands have been, and continue to be, ignored. As
6 such, to date, Lutfi has not received payment for any of his management services as was required
7 under the terms of the Agreement.

8 66. The failure to pay management fees and premature termination of the Agreement,
9 as alleged above, constitute breaches of the Agreement.

10 67. Lutfi is informed and believes, and thereon alleges, that Britney's monthly income
11 during the calendar year 2007 was approximately \$800,000. Lutfi is further informed and
12 believes, and thereon alleges, that Britney's monthly income was the same, or greater, during the
13 calendar year 2008.

14 68. As a proximate and foreseeable consequence of the breach of the Agreement as
15 alleged herein, Lutfi has suffered, and will continue to suffer, damages in an amount in excess of
16 the minimum jurisdiction of the court, according to proof at trial.

17 **SIXTH CAUSE OF ACTION - QUANTUM MERUIT**

18 (Against Britney and Does 1 through 25)

19 69. Lutfi hereby incorporates by reference each and every allegation set forth in
20 paragraph numbers 1 through 26 as if set forth in full herein.

21 70. As alleged above, within the last four years, Lutfi performed a variety of
22 management and personal services for Britney.

23 71. Britney knew that the above-described management and personal services were
24 being provided by Lutfi for her and at her request and subsequently accepted, used, and enjoyed
25 the benefits the above-described management and personal services.

26 72. Lutfi has made numerous demands on Jamie, as conservator for Britney, for
27 payment of the fair and reasonable value of the management and personal services performed by
28 Lutfi for Britney. Nevertheless, Jamie has failed and refused to compensate Lutfi for the fair and

1 reasonable value of such services. As such, to date, Lutfi has not received any payment for the
2 management services provided by Lutfi to Britney.

3 73. Lutfi is informed and believes, and thereon alleges, that Britney's monthly income
4 during the calendar year 2007 was approximately \$800,000. Lutfi is further informed and
5 believes, and thereon alleges, that Britney's monthly income was the same, or greater, during the
6 calendar year 2008.

7 74. As a proximate and foreseeable consequence of the breach of the Agreement as
8 alleged herein, Lutfi has suffered, and will continue to suffer, damages equal to the fair and
9 reasonable value of the uncompensated management services provided by Lutfi to Britney, in an
10 amount in excess of the minimum jurisdiction of the court, according to proof at trial.

11 WHEREFORE, Lutfi prays judgment against Lynne, Jamie and Britney through Jamie
12 and Wallet and Does 1 through 25, and each of them, as follows:

13 On Lutfi's First Cause of Action for Libel:

- 14 1. For general damages in a sum in excess of the minimum jurisdiction of the court,
15 according to proof at trial;
- 16 2. For special damages in an a sum according to proof at trial;
- 17 3. For punitive damages in an amount appropriate to punish Lynne and Does 1
18 through 25, and each of them, and deter others from engaging in similar misconduct;

19 On Lutfi's Second Cause of Action for Defamation:

- 20 4. For general damages in a sum in excess of the minimum jurisdiction of the court,
21 according to proof at trial;
- 22 5. For special damages in an a sum according to proof at trial;
- 23 6. For punitive damages in an amount appropriate to punish Lynne and Does 1
24 through 25, and each of them, and deter others from engaging in similar misconduct;

25 On Lutfi's Third Cause of Action for Battery:

- 26 7. For general damages in a sum in excess of the minimum jurisdiction of the court,
27 according to proof at trial;
- 28 8. For punitive damages in an amount appropriate to punish Jamie and Does 1

1 through 25, and each of them, and deter others from engaging in similar misconduct;

2 On Lutfi's Fourth Cause of Action for Intentional Infliction of Emotional Distress:

3 9. For general damages in a sum in excess of the minimum jurisdiction of the court,
4 according to proof at trial;

5 10. For special damages in an a sum according to proof at trial;

6 11. For punitive damages in an amount appropriate to punish Jamie, Lynne and Does
7 1 through 25, and each of them, and deter others from engaging in similar misconduct;

8 On Lutfi's Fifth Cause of Breach of Contract:

9 12. For compensatory damages in a sum in excess of the minimum jurisdiction of the
10 court, according to proof at trial;

11 13. For consequential damages according to proof at trial;

12 On Plaintiff's Sixth Cause of Quantum Meruit:

13 14. For compensatory damages in a sum in excess of the minimum jurisdiction of the
14 court, according to proof at trial;

15 15. For consequential damages according to proof at trial;

16 On All Causes of Action:

17 16. For costs of suit incurred herein;

18 17. For pre-judgment interest in an amount according to proof at trial; and

19 18. For such other and further relief as the court may deem proper.
20

21 Dated: February 2, 2009

FREEDMAN & TAITELMAN, LLP

22
23 By: 

24 Bryan J. Freedman
25 Attorneys for Plaintiff Sam Lutfi
26
27
28

THROUGH *the* STORM

A REAL STORY *of* FAME AND FAMILY
in a TABLOID WORLD

LYNNE SPEARS

WITH

LORILEE CRAKER



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

NASHVILLE DALLAS MEXICO CITY RIO DE JANEIRO BEIJING

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JERKED AROUND



Right before Britney went into Promises, after she shaved her head, I got an anonymous call from a man while I was driving in Los Angeles. "There are drugs planted in Britney's Malibu house," he said, going on to tell me that there was a conspiracy with Kevin and Britney's assistants to make my daughter look like a bad mother. I was so unnerved by the call, I missed my exit—in more ways than one.

Immediately, I called the security guards at the Malibu house and asked them to check the house for drugs. While I knew Kevin would never hurt my daughter like that, and I highly doubted her assistants would either, things were so fragile with Britney at the time that I wasn't taking any chances. She had just lost custody of the boys to Kevin, and she was at a very low ebb. It was midnight, but I turned around and drove to Britney's house and met her assistant, Allie. Along with the guards, we combed through the house, and no drugs whatsoever were to be found. Nonetheless, Allie and I were scared to death.

I didn't hear from this mysterious person again until months later. Right away, I recognized his voice. "Are you the same guy who called me

THROUGH THE STORM

with a conspiracy theory about drugs being planted in Britney's house?" I asked him.

"Yeah," he said. "It's me." When I told him his theory had proved wrong, he protested: "There *were* drugs; you just didn't find them," he said, earnestly.

I should have hung up the phone right then and there.

I didn't, and the man plunged into a proposal he had for me, to be the spokesperson for a company he represented that wanted to sell high-quality cubic zirconia jewelry on a home shopping network. Again, it sounded dubious at best, but the call had come during a time when I had been thinking and praying for a job, my own thing, where I could go to work every day and regain some of the structure I lost when I gave up teaching. Talking about jewelry on TV? That sounded like fun! I actually have quite a zest for cheap jewelry, or, I should say, beautiful jewelry that looks as if it cost a mint but is really affordable. If you ever look at a photo of me and think I am dripping in diamonds, don't be deceived: it's really a mixture of the real stuff and three-dollar zirconium dioxide, bought from a Los Angeles street vendor! I was intrigued, and I figured I had nothing to lose but a few hours if I did meet with this guy.

I said I would meet with him, but only with an attorney present. I called up my friend Jackie, and we decided to check it out together.

And so we met the anonymous caller, a swarthy man in his late twenties or early thirties who appeared to be of Middle Eastern heritage. That's the first time I laid eyes on Sam Lutfi.

Fake in More Ways Than One

He had two attorneys with him, but I could tell instantly this was not a legitimate meeting. The man, wearing a ratty baseball hat, T-shirt, and

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jeans, was sweating profusely and looked extremely nervous. It was the strangest meeting I have ever had! No one seemed to have any pitch whatsoever, including the caller, Sam, who hemmed and hawed and talked in circles, at one point pulling out some crummy-looking boxes with so-so costume jewelry inside. Finally, we just left. Obviously, nothing was going to come of this. Interestingly, during the meeting, Sam wanted to have his picture taken with me, which struck me as strange at the time, and I can't even remember if I consented. Now I know what he was up to, all right.

Awhile later, Sam called and invited Jamie Lynn, Jackie, and me to a taping of the finale of *Dancing with the Stars* with our old friend Joey Fatone, whom we knew from the days of Justin and *NSYNC, hoofing it in the finale. He excitedly told me he had an endorsement deal cooking with a shoe company, possibly for Jamie Lynn or Jackie's son, who also starred on *Zoey 101*.

"What about the jewelry deal?" I asked suspiciously.

"Oh, well, Britney put out a negative thing about you and her relationship with you online, and that kind of blew the jewelry deal out of the water."

My suspicions didn't totally subside, but he made it all sound somehow credible, reasonable. Even when the shoe deal "fell through," and we were this close to pulling the plug on this guy, he rallied just in the nick of time, inviting us to a meeting with the head of one of the top talent agencies in Hollywood. Jackie and I thought this agent would be an excellent contact for her son, Paul, a budding musician.

Jackie and I had our doubts, all right. But Sam had one more chance. If this agency executive indeed showed, then it meant Sam was legitimate. If this once again fell through, we would wash our hands of him.

The day of the meeting arrived, and, lo and behold, we got a phone call from Sam half an hour before we were set to meet. "I have a broken tooth," he explained.

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Jackie was dubious, and firm: "Listen, buddy, you better just take some pain pills and come anyway," she said. "We are really going to doubt your story if this meeting doesn't happen." He balked, and we stopped answering his texts, hoping this would be the end of our association with this shifty man.

What we didn't know then was that Sam had also met Britney's then assistant, Allie, at a club, and she in turn introduced him to Britney. The two of them hit it off with Sam, and they all began to hang out together. So it was really just the beginning. He was looking for a back door, and it appeared he found one.

Svengali

Sam came into my daughter's life at a time when she was at her most vulnerable. Brokenhearted about losing custody of her precious boys, she was sad, floundering, ripe (if you ask me) for a predator to come along. If you're bleeding by the side of the road, and someone drove up and offered

you a ride to the hospital, wouldn't you accept? This is the picture I have of my child during that time: defenseless and exposed, she was much more open than she ever would have been to this man, who rode in on a white horse, personable, charming, and with an air of authority, promising her he would help her get her kids back, that he would get her life back on track.

Why didn't I ride in on my own horse to help my own child? If only I could have. I felt so helpless, yearning

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with every cell in my body to be with her, help her, and hold her, but I wasn't able to do that. Our estrangement was so complete at that time that I couldn't even get her phone number.

Within a month or so of meeting, Sam was in complete control of her life, labeling himself her friend, her manager, her life coach. Everyone deferred to him—Britney's business manager, her record company, her lawyers—they had no choice.

He appointed himself as her gatekeeper, and there was no one he wanted to keep the gate closed to more than Britney's family. While he shut Jamie out completely, he would crack open the door a bit for me, texting me with updates on my daughter, lording over me the fact that he had complete access while I had no right of entry to my own child. But he also seemed to sense the exact moment when I was most susceptible, and he would drop his voice to a soothing, kind modulation—as if we were confidants. "I know you want to see Britney, and trust me, I am working on her. She'll let you back into her life soon." That man jerked me around like a master puppeteer.

In October of that year, I got a call I had been praying for: It was Allie. "Brit's ready to reconcile," she said. I dropped everything and caught the next flight to LA, arriving at 9 p.m., California time. As per my instructions, I met Bret, another of Brit's assistants, at the Starbucks in Malibu. Several paparazzi met us there as well, and they ended up taking us to her house, where Sam, the figurative gatekeeper, ordered the physical gatekeeper to let us in. Everyone treated him by now like a general.

Britney and I just held on to each other for the longest time. I was so happy to see her and hold her in my arms again. But in the midst of my joy, part of me wondered: was this reunion orchestrated by Sam, to help Britney get her boys back? You see, the courts looked at me as a stabilizing factor, and Sam knew that a reconciliation between Britney and me could only be a step in the right direction as far as her hopes of

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regaining custody. Was this a true reunion, or just another pawn in Sam's game?

Three Months Later

I had just come home with Jamie Lynn, after we went to Connecticut for a couple of weeks during Christmas to hide from the media fallout of her pregnancy. I was exhausted, physically and emotionally, and it was soothing to be back home with my dogs, sleeping in my bed, and getting my clothes out of my drawers instead of a suitcase.

One night the phone rang, and it was Sam. He was crying.

He told me Britney had been visiting with the boys, but when it was time for them to go home to Kevin's with Lonnie, their bodyguard, she locked herself and little Jayden in the bathroom. Later, I found out Sam had told Britney that Kevin had called and told her she could keep the boys longer.

I was terrified of what would happen next. I frantically called Jamie and Bryan, begging them to go see what was going on, but they had a much more blasé attitude than me, saying that Sam was blowing things out of proportion. Neither one of them would ever have anything to do with Sam, and the only reason I did was because he was the only link to my daughter, and I just *couldn't* sever it. They reminded me that Britney did not want to see any of us. "But what if she calls out for me in the crowd? I just want to be there if she needs me!" I pleaded. But the two of them were firm with a "wait and see" attitude. I can't blame them, but the whole thing was driving me frantic.

Thank God for Lonnie, the little boys' bodyguard, who called me repeatedly and assured me that Preston was just fine, asleep in the back of the SUV, and that he would not leave the premises without Jayden in his arms. Do you know how comforting that was for this mother and grand-

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mother? Still, I was a wreck, worrying myself sick many miles from my confused, hurting daughter. If it weren't for the fact that I had to be with Jamie Lynn at that time, I would have flown to Los Angeles on the next flight.

It felt as if I were being split in two pieces as I was pulled, on one hand by the needs of my pregnant sixteen-year-old, and on the other by my twenty-six-year-old daughter, who was obviously in deep crisis; both girls seemed to need me with the same intensity. I honestly didn't know where I was supposed to be.

Things happened so quickly. The next thing I knew, Britney was being taken by ambulance to Cedars-Sinai Medical Center and placed under a 5150 hold, which is an involuntary psychiatric hold, for seventy-two hours. At least it was supposed to be seventy-two hours; she was actually released in twenty-four hours, at her own request. I stayed up late into the night, following my daughter's ordeal on TV and the Internet and via phone updates from Jamie and Bryan. I was horrified to see all those helicopters and fire trucks and ambulances surrounding my child's house. Why were they there? To contain one small woman, who was by then completely subdued? When I saw the photo of her in the ambulance, her beautiful brown eyes pained and haunted, something inside me broke.

What on earth was going on with my beloved child?

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JAYDEN IN HIS ARMS.

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I spent the next three weeks on my knees, in a fog of worry and confusion. All I could do was offer up prayer after prayer for Britney, wondering all the while if I should go to her, even though there was a good chance I wouldn't be allowed in the gate.

I was feeling as if my arms might as well be pulled out of their sockets. All of me longed to go be with Britney, to see if she would let me in her life and help her, but the problem was, that all of me also knew I was in the right place, right there at home with Jamie Lynn. I have never felt so cruelly divided in all of my life.

When it seemed as if Jamie Lynn had stabilized and that I could leave her in the care of a close friend, I did. I flew to Los Angeles for a four-day weekend to see my grandchildren, whom I hadn't seen in a couple of months. Of course, I hoped to see Britney with all my heart, but I wasn't really expecting to. But on the night of January 28, everything changed. I was at Kevin's, just having put the babies to bed, when I got a text from Lou: GO OVER THERE. THEY HAD A FIGHT.

Was this the breakthrough we were looking for? Sam and Britney had gotten into a terrible argument. I later learned that he called her,

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among other things, a "piece of trash." He said she cared more about Adnan, her current boyfriend, than her children, and that she didn't deserve to get her kids back.

We didn't know it at the time but Lou, Jamie, and I had been hoping for the very same thing: we all believed the only way to loosen Sam's stranglehold on Britney was for them to turn on each other.

And we all had been praying for it. I was so very tired of playing games with Sam. *Please God, let this be the end.*

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LET THIS BE THE END.

Going Inside

I jumped in the backseat of Jackie's car, and we drove as fast as we could to Britney's house. On the way, I phoned my friend Joy at home in Kentwood, asking her to pray. "You might see my tail end on TV, crawling over the fence," I said, only half-joking. I was willing to do anything to rescue my daughter.

The paparazzi were teeming outside Britney's house in Beverly Hills, but they didn't even look twice at us. They knew all the makes and models of all our family's cars, but they didn't recognize Jackie's car, and I was crouched down in the backseat. Even when a paparazzo came to the car and spoke to Jackie, between her tinted windows and the fact that I was ducking down as far as I could, with my hood pulled over my head, he couldn't see a speck of me.

"There's been a fight," Jackie told Britney's gatekeeper quietly. "I have Lynne here with me, and she wants to see how her daughter is doing."

"They are not answering right now," he said, referring, of course, to Sam, the general.

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So we waited a little while.

Meanwhile, Jamie drove from the opposite end of town and arrived right at the perfect moment. "If I get in," I whispered to him, still hunkered down, on my cell phone, "you just come in after me." There were probably twenty paparazzi, swarming Jamie's truck, jumping on the car, and screaming, while there I was, hiding in plain sight, just a few feet away.

Knowing the paparazzi, they would have given up eating for a week to have known I was hiding in Jackie's car! It was so obvious to me that God was in the details, in the perfect timing of Jamie's arrival,

and in concealing me so flawlessly from paparazzi eyes and cameras. It reminded me of that verse from the Psalms: "Hide me from the conspiracy of the wicked, from that noisy crowd of evildoers."

"HIDE ME FROM THE
CONSPIRACY OF THE WICKED,
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OF EVILDOERS."

Sam okayed the gatekeeper to let me in, though he never in a million years would have let Jamie in. When the gate finally swung open, there was a delay of about a minute or so, and Jamie zoomed in right after me.

Sam met Jackie, Jamie, and me at the door.

He said that Britney only wanted to see me, that she was afraid to see her dad. More like Sam was afraid. He was visibly upset to see Jamie and, believe me, the feeling was mutual.

"Her *family* is here," Jamie said, glowering. "You have to go now."

Jamie was stomping, spitting mad, but I could tell he was keeping a tight rein on his emotions. He didn't want to lose control and give Sam the chance to bring charges against him. At one point, he stalked Sam around and around the bar. "You better not be hurting my daughter," he said, over and over again, in a low, menacing voice. "Where is my daughter?"

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Britney was gone, and Sam kept saying he didn't know where she was. None of us bought it for a second.

"Sam, c'mon," Jackie said, in her reasonable way. "I know you. You can track her. You can get her back here."

After about an hour, a security guard came and asked Jamie to leave. "I'm sorry," he said. "I know you're her dad, and I'm a dad too. I'm just carrying out orders."

Jamie really had no choice, leaving Jackie and me to deal with Sam and his subordinates. *We need to outsmart this guy*, I remember thinking. *We have to pretend we are not a threat*. It seemed to work: I believe Sam thought we were swallowing the idea that he was really helping Britney. Though I was afraid of him, of his hostility, cruelty, and lies, a new kind of courage kicked in that night, a God-given boldness that hadn't emerged in me until I was standing face-to-face with what I feared most: that harm would come to my child.

The General at Work

After Jamie left, two or three paparazzi came inside and made their way to the kitchen. They greeted Sam and reported Britney's whereabouts to the general. It was clear to me from the conversation that Sam had given a paparazzo one of Britney's cars to get her out of the house when he heard that Jamie and I were on our way to see Britney. Sam apparently told her that Jamie and I were coming to do an intervention.

The paparazzi seemed like his foot soldiers, his henchmen. They reported to Sam and addressed him with great respect. He instructed them to get her back to the house.

Britney came back with Adnan, who is also a paparazzo. Sam told Jackie that we needed to do whatever he tells us to do. I objected. "I'm the one who spends 24/7 with your daughter," he shot back. "I sleep in

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cars outside her house so she can't leave." He then said, "You people throw everyone under the bus; if you don't listen to me I'm going to make your name s—t in the papers."

The level of control he exerted was bewildering. Adnan told me that Sam hid Britney's cell phones and told her that he lost them. I believe it wholeheartedly. As I looked around the kitchen, I noticed that in the middle of the kitchen table, there was a large car battery. It was for Sam to charge his cell phone. The general told us that he threw away all of Britney's phone chargers and disabled the house phones by cutting the wires. He also disabled several of Britney's cars so she couldn't leave unattended. And how's this? Adnan told me that Sam also would hide Britney's dog, London. She would look all over the house, crying, and then Sam would bring out the dog and act like some sort of savior.

The whole scene was surreal.

Sam was visibly jealous of Adnan. He told Jackie and me to tell Adnan to leave Britney alone and to "get the f—k out of the house." Jackie refused. He then told us to tell Britney that Adnan is gay. Sam finally spoke to Adnan himself, and Adnan left.

It wasn't long before Britney came looking for Adnan. Sam told her that he was in the bathroom. "Is Adnan gay?" she asked me. Clearly Sam was playing up this angle however he could. While Britney was out of earshot, Sam told Jackie and me that we should pretend that Adnan was in the bathroom so Britney wouldn't leave.

Britney was so agitated she couldn't stop moving. She cleaned the house. She changed her clothes, many times. She also changed her three dogs' clothes several times. We talked, but it was as if she wasn't really there. She spoke in a tone and with the level of understanding of a little girl.

Britney then picked up a bottle of pills and read part of the label. "What does insomnia mean?" she asked. Sam told her that the pills will help her stay awake. Sam told Jackie and me that he grinds up Britney's pills, which were on the counter and included Risperdol and Seroquel,

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and puts them in her food. He said that was the reason she had been quiet for the last three days. She had been drugged and asleep. He said that her doctor was trying to get her into a sleep-induced coma so that they could then give her other drugs to treat her. I was breaking inside at every syllable he uttered about my daughter.

The Waking Nightmare

Maybe Sam could see I was distressed. He encouraged us to relax and “do tequila shots.” Jackie and I protested. Britney seemed to follow our lead, but Sam kept pushing. He got out some wine and suggested that we “all do toasts.” He offered us tumblers. We took the wine and went into another room, but Britney objected and said that she wanted a nicer glass with a long stem. She had caught on to the fact that if she drank something from his hand, she could sleep for days, so she was actually stalling. Sam found a proper wine glass and poured one for Britney while our backs were turned. They then joined us in the other room, but Britney refused to drink her wine and asked to drink mine.

Shortly afterward, Sam went back into the kitchen. He stood behind a raised bar so that we could not see what his hands were doing on the counter. By then Britney had calmed down some, and Sam suggested they both go upstairs.

When they came back down a little while later, Britney was agitated again. She said she wanted to go to Rite-Aid to get lipstick. It was now past midnight, but maybe this was our chance to get her out of this madness. Jackie and I seized the chance. We would take her, we said. Sam jumped in and said he wanted to follow in his car. We told him that he shouldn't because the paparazzi were in front and would harass us. He seemed to relent, but as we were about to drive off, Sam jumped into the backseat with me. He said that when they were upstairs together, he gave

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Britney something to pick up her mood. The paparazzi followed us to the store.

When we got to Rite-Aid, we all went inside, and Britney chose her lipstick. She drifted in and out of British accent the whole time. When we got to the register, Britney's card didn't work. I paid for the lipstick, and the manager told us we could leave through the side door so no one could see us. That wasn't to Sam's liking. He insisted we leave through the front door, and he wrapped his arms around Britney and me for the paparazzi to take photos. My skin crawled.

~~“You'd better learn that I control everything,”~~ he said. “I control Howard Grossman, Britney's business manager. I control her attorneys and the security guards at the gate. They don't listen to Britney; they listen to me.” *That's why Jamie was gone tonight.* Back at the house he told me that if he weren't in the house to give Britney her medicine, she would kill herself. “If you try to get rid of me, she'll be dead, and I'll piss on her grave.”

He then boasted that he had been in our family for a year and that he had done nothing but good for Britney. At one point he screamed at me.

“Sam treats me like that,” Britney said, as if it were the most normal thing in the world.

It was about two or three in the morning, and Britney was meandering aimlessly around the house. She would let me hug her, but she was completely out of it. She asked about Preston and Jayden.

“When do I get to see my babies?”

“Wednesday,” Sam answered.

“What do I have to do to see them?”

“Take the pills I tell you to take.”

“I don't like the pills, and I don't like the psychiatrist,” she protested.

“Can't I see another psychiatrist so I can see my babies?”

“If I told you to take ten pills a day, you should do what I tell you to see your babies.”

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I was frozen by the exchange, but Jackie jumped in: "Britney, your parents can help you find a psychiatrist. The psychiatrist needs to get to know you to give you the right medicine."

Sam couldn't stand losing control of the conversation. He butted in with his voice raised. "Why don't you get back with Kevin?" he said.

"I'll do anything to get them back."

Another opportunity came around for us to steer things away from Sam.

Britney said she wanted her daddy. "I want my daddy up here. I want to talk to my daddy."

I reached Jamie on the phone and gave the phone to Britney. I heard her say that she wanted to see him.

"Right now, baby?" She said no. "Ten in the morning?"

"No, noon."

It was something.

I spent the rest of the night at Britney's house and finally got to sleep about four in the morning. For the longest time I couldn't sleep. I was so worked up, so agitated by the situation. I don't think Britney ever went to bed that night. All night long, I went through the motions of pretending I believed Sam's lies, while inside I was revolted and full of questions. How could this possibly have a good ending? It was a sense of deep shock that things had spiraled downward so fast, yet I had to control myself and not let anyone sense what I was really feeling, that my head was spinning.

The Thank-You Note

Jamie came to pick me up the next morning. Jamie gave Britney a big hug and said to her, "Baby, you're OK?"

Britney said, "I'm fine," then burst into tears.

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Later the next day, on January 29, Jackie showed me a text message she had received from Sam: "Thanks for telling Jamie all your bulls—t. He just hit me. Now you guys did your deed. Much accomplished. Good job."

But he still had my daughter in his clutches. We didn't accomplish enough.

twenty-nine

BREAKING THE STRANGLEHOLD



I didn't see Britney again for two and a half days, until Wednesday night, when Sam called me and asked me to come over to the house. Since I had seen her last, I had been in a state of anguish. Clearly, this was a life-or-death situation, and I prayed without stopping for another opening. Quiet plans had been underway for six weeks for Jamie to petition the court for temporary conservatorship of Britney, but it seemed like an impossible dream at that point, with Sam still so entrenched in her life. In fact, Jamie was going to file for the conservatorship on January 22, eight days beforehand, but he and his business manager, Lou, felt God leading them to wait, fast, and pray, despite the frustration of a phalanx of lawyers.

Something drastic would have to happen for Sam to lose control and for Jamie to gain control of his daughter, who was, after all, an adult woman; I shuddered to think of what depths of desperation we would have to plumb to regain charge of our child.

When Sam called, he said he had been tipped off that somebody was coming to try to commit Britney again. "What are you talking about?" I said. "They can't take her like that!"

"Yes they can," he said, acting as if it was out of his hands. But when

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I got to the house, Sam was nowhere to be found, something I thought was very odd at the time. In a flash of panic, I knew who was really behind this.

"Britney, get out of here now!" I shouted to her. "Sam wants you to be committed again! He says there are people coming to get you!" Sam showed up then and looked at me as if I had lost my mind. Poor Britney didn't know who to believe. "Come with me right now!" I begged.

Before we could act, there was a pounding knock on the door; within seconds, at least twenty police officers stormed into the house. One of them announced that they were there to apprehend Britney and take her to the UCLA Medical Center, on another 5150 hold.

"On what grounds are you taking my daughter?" I said as firmly as I could, though I was trembling.

"We have our orders," the officer practically barked at me. I was afraid to move a muscle. *Why are all these huge guys here to take my one-hundred-twenty-pound daughter?*

Britney in no way resisted them. She was polite and subdued, even as they strapped her into a gurney.

"Why do you have to strap her down like that?" I demanded. "She's not resisting you!" One of the cops glared at me. "We'll restrain *you* if you cause any problems," he said. "Just sit over there and be quiet." At this point, they had us all standing in different parts of the room, separated as if we were common criminals. I had called Jamie to let him know what was happening to Britney, and both of us were crying. How could this be happening to our daughter? She started crying for me, "Mama, Mama!" I was in agony.

"I'm here. I'm here, baby," I said, tears streaming down my face. "Please let me ride with her!" I pleaded. But they wouldn't budge. I was more afraid than when they had airlifted my comatose little boy, all those years ago.

The admittance slip of the psychiatric ward of UCLA Medical

BREAKING THE STRANGLEHOLD

Center said she had been driving recklessly, not taking her medicine as directed, and wasn't sleeping properly. *Aha*, I thought. *No one could know that except for Sam*. Later, I found out that he had been working in conjunction with the Smart Team, a branch of the police force that watches for DUI and reckless drivers.

Jackie; Adnan, Britney's paparazzi boyfriend; and I raced out the door after Britney as she was put into an ambulance. I could hear the whirring of helicopters circling the sky overhead, and I could see police on motorcycles and in cars, and all kinds of emergency vehicles. Afterward, I would wonder how many thousands of dollars were spent capturing one hurting, vulnerable young woman and bringing her to the hospital. It was ludicrous! We jumped in Jackie's car and followed the caravan of vehicles all the way to UCLA Medical Center, where Britney was admitted, at 4 a.m., for the second time in one month, into the psych ward of a hospital.

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God's Plan Trumps Sam's

Hours passed before we were allowed to see Britney. None of the doctors would speak to any of the family members, including me—they would only talk to Sam. We knew he was there, because some of the paparazzi were texting Jackie and me, telling us that Sam had been texting them, feeding them details of Britney's condition and her surroundings in the hospital.

When we were finally allowed to visit Britney in a room, I was incensed to find Sam sitting on her bed, laughing. "What are *you* doing

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here?" I railed at him. "You put her in here!" He had a look on his face like the cat who got the cream.

"You're the one who always causes drama," he said, grinning. "They should put *you* in here."

He calmly paged a nurse, and when she got to the room, he said, gesturing to me, "Nurse, she's causing a disturbance." It was absolutely maddening. I was tearing my hair out, trying to think of a way to get this man out of my daughter's hospital room, and out of her life for good. "Just calm down, Mama," Britney said, looking at Sam for his approval.

But God had answered our prayers, and he planted a seed of doubt in the doctor's mind about Britney's gatekeeper while Sam ran out to get some food for her. Jamie and I went to the team of doctors caring for Britney and pleaded our case, telling them all I had observed at Britney's house a few nights before. The main doctor suddenly decided that he didn't have an adequate grasp on Britney's condition, or the situation as a whole; he decreed that there would be no more visitors until he could ascertain more information. When Sam sailed in about an hour later, smiling at photographers and clutching a bag of food from In-N-Out Burger, he was denied entry to Britney's room. We weren't allowed in either, but it was no small victory to have Sam barred from her side.

For three more days, Britney underwent tests and evaluation to determine what exactly was going on with

her. We spent much of our time in the hospital, waiting, worrying, praying. To see my child like that—at the lowest ebb of her life—almost killed me. I was overcome with a feeling of sadness and helplessness. Britney was under the impression we had put her in there, and we told her over and over again we hadn't. I must admit, I probably never

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BREAKING THE STRANGLEHOLD

would have had the courage to commit her to a psych ward, but it ended up being the turning point for her, and for all of us.

Not only would Britney finally receive the medical care and counseling she needed, but her second committal ended up being the catalyst for driving Sam out of her life. He pulled the trigger, so to speak, setting up the whole scenario so she would be committed again, based on the belief that this would drive Adnan out of Britney's life. Sam was bitterly jealous of Adnan and knew he couldn't control him. But his plan backfired, and he was the one who ended up being driven out of her life. I kept thinking of that verse from the final chapter in Genesis: "You planned evil against me but God used those same plans for my good." That verse certainly jumps off the page for me now.

Because of all the horrible things Jackie and I saw and heard that night at Britney's house, we had the ammunition to file for a restraining order against Sam. Before my daughter was released from the hospital, a lawyer came to Jamie's apartment, where Jackie and I were asked to give an account of the events of that night. First thing Monday morning, we were in court, presenting our deposition and petitioning the judge for a restraining order against Sam and for a temporary conservatorship for Jamie. After a long day of sitting and waiting, the judge granted us both the restraining order and the conservatorship. Tears of relief and joy filled my eyes. *Thank you. Thank you. Thank you, God.* Sam was out. I could be Britney's mother again, and Jamie could be her daddy. As we walked out of the courtroom, we were taking our first steps on the road to healing our family.