

MEGHAN: Way back in the fall of 1998, when I was a senior in high school, the word “diva” was having a moment. It may have had something to do with this...

[CLIP: DIVAS LIVE VH1 1998] “TONIGHT, LIVE FROM NEW YORK CITY, VH1 PRESENTS - DIVAS LIVE!”]

MEGHAN: Divas Live was a cultural touchstone. Performances from 5 *legends* of the music world, all sharing one stage for one night. There was Celine Dion. Aretha Franklin. Gloria Estefan. Shania Twain...and...Mariah Carey.

[CLIP: MARIAH CAREY: What’s up New York? How you feeling? I’m doing my best to be a diva this evening! Do you like the ensemble?]

MEGHAN: The diva of Divas Live was *talent*. She was *glamor*. She was *starpower*. She didn’t have any of the negative connotations we may hold today. I mean, my classmates and I were so into this version of divadom at the time, we even named our next high school dance – oh, gosh, it’s embarrassing to say it – yeah... we called it “Planet Diva.”

But my classmates and I, we weren’t alone in this diva worship.

AMANDA SEALES: Diva is Maria Callas, honey, you know, Diva is the grand dame. Diva was not a negative connotation. Like, that’s the aspiration. Diva is who they came to see. Okay.

MEGHAN: That voice belongs to actor and comedian, Amanda Seales, whom you may know from her work on shows like *Insecure*. Now, in high school, Amanda joined a performing group called “The Divas.” And she wore the word proudly – she carried it like a badge of honor into her college years...

AMANDA SEALES: When I did my first spoken word performance, I signed up on the sign up list, Amanda. And then I put Diva in parentheses because it felt dumb to just put diva was just like Amanda. Then I put Diva in parentheses, and then the woman introduced me as she was, like, “coming up to the stage. Coming to the stage, we have Amanda Diva.” And I was like, “oh, I like that.” And it stuck! And so I went by Amanda Diva for years.

MEGHAN: That is, until several years after college, when Amanda *Diva* started getting some pushback.

AMANDA SEALES: I mean I remember going to a job interview in, like, for a radio station and the program director telling me straight up, like, well you’re not going to be on the show, you’re not going to be on with this name. And I’m like, but I’m already like, on MTV, like, with this name. And he was like, Well it’s a dumb name.

MEGHAN: Amanda was experiencing, up close and personal, the evolution – or maybe I should say the *devolution* – of the word diva.

AMANDA SEALES: I remember a point where someone had told me that the word diva being attached to me was like an albatross around my neck that was preventing me from getting work. And it was like, before I was even showing up, just that word being attached to me was canceling me out of stuff and I was like, Okay, well, got to change that.

MEGHAN: I've been stuck on this one for a while, because somewhere along the way, and I can't quite place where, but this word "diva" – which actually means goddess in Latin! – the word just warped. It went from high class... to high maintenance. From fun – like, "yes, diva!" to "Ugh, she's *such* a diva." These days, it's so often used to tear a woman down. And it bothers me. But what if there was someone out there who might be able to change my mind about it?

<< INTRO THEME BEGINS >>

MEGHAN: I'm Meghan. And this is *Archetypes* – my podcast about the labels and tropes that try to hold women back.

Now, if anyone could help me see the diva in a new light... it would be the woman who wears this word *daily* – proudly, unabashedly. I think you might know who it is...

**MARIAH CAREY:** Hey, I'm M.C. You can call me Mimi, you can call me Mariah. Whatever you want.

The one and only, Ms. Mariah Carey! Ooo I'm excited.

It's coming up! Right after the break.

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**ACT 1**

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**MARIAH:** Hi darling, I don't think... Am I, am I supposed to be able to hear myself? Because I can't.

**MEGHAN:** You can't? That we can fix.

**MARIAH:** Hold on, oh my gosh... Hello. hello.

**MEGHAN:** Hi \*gasps\*

**MARIAH:** Hi, Meghan.

**MEGHAN:** Hi \*laughs\*

**MARIAH:** We are finally ready.

**MEGHAN:** We are ready. What are your two dogs' names? Mine are asleep right next to me.

**MARIAH:** This is Cha Cha. You can't see her. That's the one I held up before. And this is Mutley inspired by... mutts.

**MEGHAN:** His full name is Mutley P. Gore Jackson the Third, and he's adorable. You're gonna have to trust me on that one. And another thing you'll need to take my word on is Mariah's fabulous outfit. I mean, we're sitting here looking at each other over a screen, and she's wearing this silk, embroidered gown that's wrapped around her with gorgeous canary diamonds dripping down her neck... I mean, in other words: this is peak Mariah, just unapologetically glamorous.

**MARIAH:** Can I tell you, this is what I had on last night after the show thing... where I did a little cameo on the B-E-T Awards, which we love, B-E-T - Black Entertainment Television... This was... my number. And I just, like, woke up and I was like in it, and here I am...

**MEGHAN:** ...still in it.

**MARIAH:** We steamed it, we handled it, we washed and cleansed, but you know.

[laughter]

**MEGHAN:** But you see, I'm still in my same mom dress all day, covered in dog hair. I love that you're like, I just woke up like this, actually.

MEGHAN: Over the course of her decades-long career, Mariah Carey has released fifteen studio albums and sold more than 2-hundred-million records across the globe. She's won five Grammys, she was inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame in 2022 – only one of 33 women welcomed in since 1969 – compared to more than 400 men.

Standing out comes naturally for her: with her 5-octave range, even up into the highest registers of the human voice...

She's not *just* a singer and a songwriter; she's also a producer, an actress, a mother, a *worldwide icon*... and unapologetically: *a diva*.

And I have a feeling sometimes she plays into that. I mean, maybe you've heard about the way in which she apparently refuses to be seen in fluorescent lighting without sunglasses. Or maybe you read about the time that she supposedly requested twenty white kittens and one-hundred doves in London, I don't know. Maybe though, you're one of the millions who've watched her

shut down – in song, no less – one of her back-up singers for stealing her thunder on stage at Good Morning America...

**[CLIP: GOOD MORNING AMERICA**

**MARIAH: STOP SINGING MY PART NOW, BABY]**

MEGHAN: You get the point. But the name Mariah Carey, it hasn't always been synonymous with extravagance. She grew up poor, in a mixed race family... at a time when interracial marriages were pretty rare in the US. Her parents divorced when she was young. She moved around a lot. And our conversation begins with something that I can relate to: her constant struggle to find her place and to fit in...

**MARIAH:** I lived with my mom and we, we moved like 14 times. So I had nothing. No money, you know, nothing. I would see these people on TV and their hair was, like, flowing in the wind. And that's why I always have the wind. I'm like, I'm going to have that. I'll have that! But it was, you know, I didn't fit in. I didn't fit in. You know, it would be more of the Black area of town or then you could be where my mom chose to live, were the more, the white neighborhoods. And I didn't fit in anywhere at all.

**MEGHAN:** Yeah, I understand that.

**MARIAH:** I remember being in school in this predominantly white neighborhood where my mom felt comfortable and I tried my best to feel comfortable, you know. But this kid was in, in the hallway, and he said, "Mariah has three shirts and she wears them on rotation." And it was like, it was true. I mean, the fact that he noticed that, I'm like, *\*sings\** *Why you so obsessed with me?* But no, I was like, Why do you care? But, in a world where you're the mixed kid of a full on white neighborhood, that's what you get.

**MEGHAN:** Yeah. Look, and this is part of why when I was putting this conversation together, I had to talk to you. Of course I had to talk to you. You were so formative for me. Representation matters so much. But when you are a woman and you don't see a woman who looks like you somewhere in a position of power or influence, or even just on the screen – because we know how influential media is – you came onto the scene, I was like oh, my gosh. Someone... Someone kind of looks like me.

**MARIAH:** Did you feel like, I know that this person is, like I can tell she's Black and white?

**MEGHAN:** Yes, yeah. Yes. I could feel that. Yeah, even at that young age. And it's so funny because I remember when I was young, I can't put a number to it; I would imagine 12 or 13.

**MARIAH:** We don't want a number. Because they're going to try to do the calculations. We don't, we don't, I don't believe in numbers.

**MEGHAN:** No, no but when I was, I was...

**MARIAH:** Eternally 12.

**MEGHAN:** Eternally. You're looking great. When I was, I had read this article about Halle Berry, and they were asking her how she felt being treated as a mixed race woman in the world. And her response was her saying, "well, your experience through the world is how people view you." So she said because she was darker in color, she was being treated as a Black woman, not as a mixed woman.

**MARIAH:** Right.

**MEGHAN:** And I think for us, it's very different because we're light skinned. You're not treated as a Black woman. You're not treated as a white woman. You sort of fit in between. I mean, if there's any time in my life that it's been more focused on my race, it's only once I started dating my husband. Then I started to understand what it was like to be treated like a Black woman. Because up until then, I had been treated like a mixed woman. And things really shifted.

**MARIAH:** But, but that's an interesting thing. A mixed woman, because I always thought it should be okay to say I'm mixed. Like it should be okay to say that. But people want you to choose.

**MEGHAN:** Yes.

**MARIAH:** And so, like, my father's father's mother was Venezuelan, my great great grandmother. Right? But my father's family is Black. So everybody is like her father is Venezuelan and Black because they didn't know how to put me in that box. They want to put you in a box and categorize you. Right? My mother is Irish all the way to the, back to the Blarney Stone. You know, her whole family. Well, they disowned her when she married my father. Actually, they didn't know that she got married.

I was looking at some older interviews that I had done, um specifically one or two with Oprah earlier on when I first started. And one of them, my mother was on the, you know, she's in the interview and talking about it...

**[CLIP: OPRAH**

**OPRAH: Did you move into a Black neighborhood, a white neighborhood, mixed neighborhood?**

**PATRICIA CAREY: Initially, we moved into a white neighborhood, and I was the person who purchased the house, because we knew that if he came with me, we wouldn't get the house].**

FADE OUT

**MARIAH:** So my mom, who was an opera singer and the whole thing and put on the whole diva like, that was her thing, would go into the house and go, go to the broker or whatever it was. And “Oh, I'm buying this house,” you know, “for me and my family and, you know, my, my husband doesn't, can't be bothered,” you know, and my mom and my dad would walk in and everybody in the neighborhood, like the whole entire neighborhood. This is very racist. No offense to anyone on Long Island who is not racist, but at that time, it was very difficult. And so, you know, but my dad was this, to me, like this gorgeous kind of Harry Belafonte meets Nat King Cole, gorgeous man that could've been, you know... it was amazing. And my father was an aeronautical engineer and like my mom was this beautiful, you know, white woman that he was with. But that made everybody more angry. It, it was not acceptable. It really wasn't.

**MEGHAN:** But your mom was an opera singer, yeah.

**MARIAH:** Yeah, you know, she, she did make her debut at Lincoln Center and she sang with City Opera. She had gone to Juilliard, on a scholarship. She was actually an opera diva.

**[CLIP: PAT CAREY SINGS OPERA]**

**MARIAH:** If you look it up... the actual definition is a woman with, typically an opera singer, usually soprano in the coloratura range with a very high voice, very strong, powerful voice and, you know, a talented woman. Right? And the next definition, right next to it is like a difficult woman. You know, one who – I'm not reading, this is off the top of my head.

**MEGHAN:** No, I know you are. And I'm looking at my notes going, you're exactly right. Because I'm looking at this saying, in the 17th century, the term originally referred to the leading female voice in an opera, the prima donna. But by the 19th century, it was used to refer to leading Sopranos, who became so famous and celebrated that they almost became goddess-like in the eyes of their adoring public. But then it turned, and this is all in your, this is all in your brain.

**MARIAH:** This is in my brain because I grew up with a real diva. Does it, and what does it say when it turned?

**MEGHAN:** It says, by the mid 20th century, both terms prima donna and diva, although still used in operatic terms, had become more generalized and slightly derogatory remarks referring to any ambitious, demanding woman in show business.

**Mariah:** Right. So I grew up with that because my mother would be, like, so and so is very much the diva. People take it as a compliment now. Some people. And then some people take it as, “oh she's such a diva.”

**MEGHAN:** For you, is it a compliment or a criticism?

**MARIAH:** I think it's both. For me, I think it's both. I do. Because I mean, I know the origin of the word. But then I know, like, as I was growing up, like I said, my mom was going, talking about a friend or something, "well so and so is very much the diva." I didn't know if that was bad, good, that's how she spoke. Like it's very much the grandeur of it all is what I envisioned. I was like, Oh, you know...

**MEGHAN:** Glamorized...

**MARIAH:** ...glamorized and fabulous and whatever. And then like, as things evolved, like you know, the past, I guess whatever, 20 years, I don't know, numbers, but it became like... A diva for me, they mean you're a successful woman usually, but also, and I, forgive me if we're not allowed to say the B-word, but a B-I-T-C-H. Like it's not okay for you to be a boss. It's not okay for you to be a strong woman. You know what I mean? Like, you have to be, you should be diminutive and here you are. And, you know what I mean, like?

**MEGHAN:** Mm. Because if they were men, if they were men... 'Cause you know Divo is also a word which no one uses.

**MARIAH:** What is the equiv... What is the word?

**MEGHAN/MARIAH:** Divo. Oh Divo. Isn't that funny? But no, there was a group called Devo.. Whip it... whip. Whip it good.

**MEGHAN:** But your relationship with that word, I think is more layered than a lot of people, because I remember so vividly, the Dreamlover video. Okay.

**[CLIP: DREAMLOVER BY: MARIAH CAREY]**

**MEGHAN:** I remember going, I need to get jean shorts. Oh, I need to get jean shorts. Need to have that little checkered, that checkered tied up shirt.

**MARIAH:** I bet you don't remember I had pumas on...

**MEGHAN:** I don't remember that you had pumas on but I remember your curly hair. I remember that. And you're running through a field of sunflowers. I remember that so well. And there is nothing in that visual that would make me go "diva."

**MARIAH:** Diva, no...

**MEGHAN:** So where did that? Nothing about that feels diva. So that's not how I, I remember you coming onto the scene. And I wonder if by design you ended up

becoming more of what the nineties idea of diva was? Like is it life imitating art or art imitating life, you know?

**MARIAH:** I mean, I understand why you're asking me that. The Dreamlover video... people were saying, "girl next door, da da da da da." Because there was also this ambiguity about me racially that fed into that and those curls. Here's the thing. They didn't know how to do my hair because if it was a, a, a white hairdresser that had never dealt with textured hair, they would tend to do a different thing. And my hair would be like, 'you're not doing that.' And then if somebody that had *only* dealt with ethnic hair, it would become too much product and too much, you know weight -

**MEGHAN:** Oh, yeah. Oh, no. Like shellacked. Yeah, I know so much... so much heavy hair grease. I know. Like, like Murray's. Murray's pomade.

**MARIAH:** Murray's! I can't even believe you just said Murray's. Meghan Markle said Murray's!

**MEGHAN:** Murray's and pink hair lotion. Forget it. It was like...

**MARIAH:** Oh, my gosh. No, it's just, it's just... You gotta use a tiny bit. A tiny bit. And that's it but, am I, am I digressing too much?

**MEGHAN:** Not at all. Let's talk.

**MARIAH:** If we're talking hair...

**MEGHAN:** We can talk hair.

**MARIAH:** Because no. Because when I was growing up, my mom didn't know how to, like, take the mats out of my hair. I feel like you have, like, a different texture.

**MEGHAN:** Different texture.

**MARIAH:** ...Than mine. Because when I was growing up, it was a lot of like, I had like baby hair that looked like this, you know. As I got like, you know, to be around 12 or whatever, nobody knew how to do my hair, like even as a, as a little girl. So my mom is white, my dad is Black. And, you know, I think sometimes when it's the other way around, you get the benefit of someone who's dealt with textured hair.

**MEGHAN:** Well, or, hold on a second though, no, because my hair is so curly and it's so, so thick. I just remember as a child because my mom's Black, and so my grandma Jeanette would do my hair. She'd go, "just hold on to the sink." And I would grip my little hands on both sides.

**MARIAH:** Your grandma is your mom's mom, Jeanette?



**MEGHAN:** My mom's mom's. So you have no luxury of being tender headed because she would take the brush and just whoosh, whoosh.

**MARIAH:** No, just go through it.

**MEGHAN:** And then tied it. You know, those little like...

**MARIAH:** They were like, what... is someone gonna.. Somebody's gotta fix this child's hair.

MEGHAN: Mariah and I could have talked about hair for much, much longer – but eventually, we did come back to the diva.

**MARIAH:** The Diva thing yeah, it's, it's interesting. I think everybody has a different thing, because to me, it's also so overused now that it's become like, she's the cupcake diva. Like I think they use it as just like a throwaway adjective that's just like whatever.

**MEGHAN:** You're right. It has definitely become more normalized. And I think in some ways I, when I think of the word diva outside of Divas Live and I remember that concert in the nineties and that had a whole different connotation. That was the glamor, that was the, you know, being over the top, and the indulgence.

**MARIAH:** I got to sing with Ms. Aretha Franklin.

**[CLIP: DIVA'S LIVE**

**MARIAH CAREY: All hail the queen of soul! Aretha Franklin.**

**ARETHA FRANKLIN: Ms. Carey! Mariah..]**

**MARIAH:** These were moments I couldn't have imagined as a child. But, you know, I believed in myself and then I would get there. But like, they're the true divas. Like those are, Miss Leontyne Price, who paved the way for so many people, the incredible...

**MEGHAN:** And you were with her at Legends Ball.

**MARIAH:** Legends ball, yeah that's where I met her...

MEGHAN: Oprah's Legends Ball is... legendary. A three-day celebration that was held in May 2005, which honored and celebrated twenty-five African American women in art, entertainment and civil rights.

**[CLIP: OPRAH'S LEGENDS BALL**

**OPRAH: We are where we are because of these women, because of the work that they have given us, so I'm grateful to God that our legends are here and that you all are here to help me honor them].**

MEGHAN: It was held at Oprah's California home... and Mariah Carey was one of the attendees, alongside other iconic artists, like the woman Mariah just mentioned – Leontyne [Lee-uhn-teen] Price.

Now, I'd be remiss if I didn't give Madame Price the stage for at least a second here... after all, she is one of the world's grandest divas by its purest definition.

**[CLIP: LEONTYNE PRICE SINGING]**

**NARRATOR: Most of us would aspire to be like the voice of Leontyne Price. It's been called the voice of the century. It's reached into all the upper balconies of all the great opera houses of the world]**

MEGHAN: Born in 1927 in Laurel, Mississippi – Leontyne grew up in a very musical family. And despite the harsh grip of Jim Crow, Leontyne's immense talent and drive carried her to New York City, to the Juilliard School of Music...

**[CLIP: LEONTYNE PRICE**

**LEONTYNE: My parents also liked very much, I think the term now is called winners... they imbued in us as mu– as strongly as they could to be the very best at what you're going to do. Try as hard as possible never to settle for mediocrity on any form].**

MEGHAN: Sure enough, in her career, mediocrity was nowhere to be found. After finding international acclaim, she became one of the first Black women to be a leading performer at the Metropolitan Opera in New York City. She debuted at The Met in 1961...

**[CLIP: LEONTYNE PRICE SINGING]**

MEGHAN:...There on center-stage, stood glamor personified. Under her layered costuming and out of her rouged lips, Leontyne's Soprano aria soared over one of the most celebrated orchestras in the world. And when the curtain fell, the audience exploded into an ovation...

**[CLIP: LEONTYNE PRICE SINGING]**

MEGHAN: It lasted for 42-minutes. To this day one of the longest ovations in the history of the Metropolitan Opera.

**[CLIP: LEONTYNE PRICE SINGING]**

MEGHAN: Madame Price went on to perform for another 20-plus-years. She's still alive, by the way. And she's spent much of the last 30 years inspiring a new generation of divas – like Mariah Carey, whom, as we heard just a couple minutes ago, she met at Oprah's Legends Ball...

**MARIAH:** I mean, she's paved the way for, for, you know, opera singers of all shades and colors, but particularly as a woman of color, to have achieved what she has achieved. And by the way, I found out this bizarre fact that my mother had the same vocal coach as Leontyne Price.

**MEGHAN:** No. Wow...

**MARIAH:** And and that's why - Yes. So, at, at Oprah's I, I gravitated towards her. I didn't, you know, of course, because she's amazing. But then she was like, so, how's like, how's it going with your mom? Like, like a person that had insight. It was so interesting. That Legends Ball was something that nobody could ever forget, but just being there and having all these women that you grew up watching, like the Tina Turner's and the Diana Ross's and like, you know, and then me and Janet are sitting over there like, "hey." And it was just an amazing, amazing, amazing moment that I think everybody that was there will never forget. But it made you feel part of something. And I don't think I've ever felt part of anything.

MEGHAN: Coming up, Mariah gets a little bit closer to a feeling of belonging... by recognizing something she can no longer be a part of...

**MARIAH:** My first marriage, I was very much what's the word? I was kind of locked away and I was sort of, you know, given the rules and, and had to stick with them.

That's after the break. Stay with us.

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**ACT 2**

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MEGHAN: Mariah's own relationship with the *diva*... the nuances she sees... the *history* – both personal and cultural – that she carries... they, they just got me thinking even more deeply about my own complicated feelings towards the label.

So I just, I wanted some more history, some more context... to understand how the meaning of the word has fluctuated over time and in different communities.

So for this, we called up Dr. Mashinka Firunts Hakopian – a scholar of media studies, feminist studies, and contemporary visual culture.

**MASHINKA:** It's kind of a law of physics that if a woman or a femme or a minoritized person comes up in the public's imaginary, then of course, so too must they go down. And this is also the case with the diva. So we see the meaning of the word originally slowly shift away from virtuosity to instead connote a petulant, capricious, temperamental person suffering from fantasies of their own grandeur. So you know... when the term diva begins to acquire pejorative connotations is when women who are classified as divas begin acquiring power, including public visibility and wealth.

MEGHAN: Yes, so *that* description of the diva - as petulant, temperamental – that's the diva that I mean, I'm most familiar hearing about, and maybe you guys too. But it's interesting, isn't it? – this idea of power, of a person acquiring power... and then needing to be taken down. And how that corresponds to the usage of the word.

Of course, this power can also be transgressive and disruptive – it can be used to challenge certain aspects of the status quo. But according to Mashinka, that's part of why this word has been so attractive to groups operating *outside* of the status quo... the very groups who've tended to reclaim the term...

**MASHINKA** For queer communities and minoritized communities, the diva has represented someone who possesses a kind of disruptive force, someone who through the excess of their performance of certain gendered tropes, reveals the instability of gender and reveals the ways in which self-invention is possible within a set of otherwise normative gendered constructs.

And so here I think of a diva who has always been the most rarefied of diva figures for me growing up as an Armenian woman in Glendale. Cher, who was born Cherilyn Sarkisian and who famously said, 'All of us invent ourselves. Some of us just have more imagination than others.' And that element of self authorship has always been a kind of part of the mythos of the diva. The diva exercises a degree of agency that's typically withheld from women and femmes and minoritized people. And that degree of agency disrupts normative social constructs and normative social patterns and therefore produces a lot of social discomfort.

MEGHAN: I mean, isn't that all so interesting, it is so enlightening how power and agency and self-invention and the diva and her reputation, they, they all go hand in hand. And really – these aspects of the diva's story quote unquote – it brings us right back to Mariah...and a time period in which she both reinvented herself and came to be known, even more so, as a diva.

So let me bring you back to the late 90's. I remember really well, the song "Barbie Girl" had just been released... the Spice Girls are the biggest pop group in the world... and Tyra Banks has become the first Black woman to land a solo Sports Illustrated cover. Platform shoes are in – I had some of those – and butterfly clips are in – I had even more of those – and Mariah Carey has just released her sixth studio album, *Butterfly* – and with it, the music video for her song "Honey." Ugh, so good.

## [CLIP OF HONEY BY MARIAH CAREY]

In it... you see a young Mariah – playing a secret agent – held hostage in a mansion in San Juan, Puerto Rico. She makes her escape by jumping off the second floor and into a pool below... in Gucci heels, obviously. She manages to do a quick outfit change into this sleek black bodysuit before she escapes the island via jetski. And in the last minute of the video... a liberated Mariah dances freely on a beach shore – her curls moving in the wind as she’s frolics with this mystery man and of course, a cute dog.

Now, to most people, this was just a really fun video. Mariah shedding the girl-next-door image, in favor of something a little bit more... mature. But for Mariah, this was art imitating life. She had just divorced her first husband, Tommy Mottola, a man 20 years her senior who also happened to be the CEO of her label, Sony Music. In her memoir... Mariah talks about how the marriage “nearly smothered her to death” and has talked openly about it feeling “stifling.”

You could argue this was Mariah’s moment of transformation. With this music video, the message was crystal clear: she was breaking free...

**MARIAH:** With Dreamlover and that era, the vision of love, Dreamlover of that whole like prior everything prior to Butterfly, like my freedom, my emancipation. And of course there's the Emancipation of Mimi. But like, Butterfly was a pivotal moment in my life. The album Butterfly... you know, writing and producing and living in the studio and leaving the past life that I had with my first ex-husband behind was extremely difficult.

**MEGHAN:** Mm...

**MARIAH:** My first marriage, I was very much what's the word? I was kind of locked away and I was sort of, you know, given the rules and had to stick with them. And Butterfly wasn't like, Oh, I'm a butterfly. It was a song. The lyrics came to me like, like sometimes writing, in writing I will feel like, okay, lyric, melody just got that. Just got a full on gift, right? So I heard that as I was leaving the manor, it was called Storybook Manor, as I was leaving where we lived in this massive mansion. Right, that I paid for half of – people don't know that, that I and I wanted to because I didn't want to be like where my mom and we would live with this boyfriend and that boyfriend and whoever and wherever. And they always could say, like, get out of my house. I never wanted that for myself. I always wanted it to be like, 'You know what? I own this too,' like whatever. But people didn't look at it like that. They were like she's a kept woman. She's this, she's that. You know, it was all about that because the way of thinking at that time was very much like, of course, he's doing everything, of course - how. But I'm like, 'Hi, I'm a songwriter. That's what I do.'

I know that I was always ambitious from the time I was like... the first time I realized what I had, like my life and my um where we lived and how I was different for so many reasons. You know, and that's why when people were like, Oh, she's doing records with

rappers, oh, she's doing this and that, it's like, yeah, because maybe we have a lot more to connect with than what you think you see. Clearly I've worked hard, but it was also something like I started working hard at six years old, having to be the savior when like, you know, somebody would knock somebody else out and in my house and I would, I would have to remember the number and that's before the cell phones. And I was like, you know, calling my mom's friends to come help her out. She's like, been knocked out. And I watched that happen. Like, I watched her fall down on the floor. And I saw that and I said, that's what I'm not, here's what we're not going to do. So the ambition came from that.

**MEGHAN:** But also what you're, what you're describing makes in some ways complete sense, like the rawness that you're describing and the things that you witnessed when you were young. Look and this is your story to tell, certainly not mine. But I would imagine that becoming a diva then is aspirational from the world that you came from...

**MARIAH:** Absolutely

**MEGHAN:** ...that you described as a child, you then go, I want to be that. And then, then even when it's being used against you, it almost feels like there were moments where you played into it, because it does feel like it's a bit of a, like a defense mechanism and a coat of arms. You're like, I'm going to own this, but it's also a sign of success based on how you associated it from where you came from.

**MARIAH:** And I think on top... I agree with you. But I think on top of that, it's also for laughs as me and my fans say.

**MEGHAN:** Yes.

**MARIAH:** It's honestly half of, half of it is just for laughs.

**MEGHAN:** Well that's the thing. Even when, you know, like let's go back to your MTV Cribs moment, which was hysterical. And yet some people took it really seriously.

**MARIAH:** \*laughs\*

**[CLIP: MTV CRIBS**

**MARIAH:** This is the shoe room. The style that I favor would be a high stiletto and the brand that I favor would be whoever's going to stick to that motif.

**Now, I'm going to take you to the extended version of my closet. As you can see, it's not really a traditional closet but I worked hard for this mess. We have little gold leaf designs on the floor, that's a little M behind you, see that?]**

**MEGHAN:** Some people took it so seriously.

**MARIAH:** Oh, yeah, exactly

**MEGHAN:** In your like stilettos and getting in the bath, I mean, everything was all extra and super over-the-top, but...

**MARIAH:** So extra. But they didn't know how, like hi, I grew up in plenty shacks.

**MEGHAN:** And I think that's really important for people to remember that there might be this persona. And yes, the diva thing we can play into. I mean, it's not something that I connect to. But, it, for you it's been a huge part of your...

**MARIAH:** You give us diva moments sometimes Meghan.

**MEGHAN:** I do - what kind of diva moments do I give you?

**MARIAH:** Don't even act like - don't act like.

**MEGHAN:** Do you see me right now?

**MARIAH:** It's also the visual. It's the visual.

**MEGHAN:** Oh it's the look.

**MARIAH:** A lot it is the visual because let's say you didn't have the visual -

**MEGHAN:** See that's the thing, I associate it differently.

**MARIAH:** I know, but let's pretend that you didn't - weren't so beautiful and didn't have the whole thing and didn't often have gorgeous ensembles. You wouldn't get, maybe get as much diva stuff. I don't care. I'm like, when I can, I'm going to give you diva. But the thing is, you're like, we started out at Dreamlover with the curly hair, the plaid shirt, the thing. That was what they wanted for me. They wanted Girl Next Door. So I always admired the Marilyn Monroes, the Sophia Lorens. Of course, all the beautiful Black actresses that never got there...

**MEGHAN:** Yes. Yeah

**MARIAH:** And it's, it's like, of course, I wanted to be that glamorous because I felt like an ugly little girl because I did not fit in with anybody. And, you know, the diva thing evolved and it continues to evolve. And I play with it. It's for laughs. It's yes, some of it is very real because I am walking around like this right now in my house. I promise you. I'm barefoot, but...

**MEGHAN:** Actually.

**MARIAH:** But... I'm actually barefoot. But I'm still wearing this because I like how it looks and I don't care.

**MEGHAN:** And you're doing it. Look, you're doing it for yourself and you're doing it because it's how you like to show up. And I think there's something that people find really threatening about a woman who is so secure in who she is that you go, I don't care what you have to say about this. This is how I want to turn up. I don't, I don't even know if I'm in that place yet. Right? Like I still try to...

**MARIAH:** Well you know - I didn't mean I was, I was playing with you when I said that. But I think, I think all people that are "other: like, if they want to show up with green hair or this and that and like, maybe they were born one way and they ended up or here they are at another way, or they want to be fabulous and glamorous. That is up to them, like, you know what I mean?

**MEGHAN:** Of course

**MARIAH:** Like I've always felt like, other. And you know what? Maybe that's part of what what did make me say I want this hair and that. It was in everything I grew up looking at going, I'm not this but I'm going to like be this one day and have this one day...

**MEGHAN:** Aspire to be this thing. Yeah.

**MARIAH:** Yeah. It's all about stealing the show...People, people strive for divadom. Revel in it!

#### BEAT/MUSIC NOTE

MEGHAN: Ah, man I love it! She is sooo Mariah. And, of course, I couldn't let Mariah go without asking her for her 3 Words...

**MEGHAN:** Well one thing that I'm saying to everybody that I'm talking to, what are the three words, if you could use to describe yourself in three words as a young girl, what three words would those be?

**MARIAH:** Hmm. I don't have just three words. That's why people have to buy my memoir and watch the adaptation because -

**MEGHAN:** You can have as many words as you want.

**MARIAH:** ... Sad, lonely and aspirational, there you go.

**MEGHAN:** Mmm.

**MARIAH:** You know, we'll go with sad, lonely and eventually triumphant.



**MEGHAN:** And then, today, three words to describe you today.

**MARIAH:** Exhausted, angry, yet hopeful.

**MEGHAN:** Okay.

**MARIAH:** But if I have to describe the whole thing, it's faith.

**MEGHAN:** Yeah.

**MARIAH:** Honestly.

**MEGHAN:** Yeah.

**MARIAH:** The whole thing is faith.

**MEGHAN:** Hmm. I've said often through, especially the last few years of my life, my faith is greater than my fear, whether that's faith in yourself or faith in God or faith in something bigger, whatever it is. It has to be bigger than your fear.

**MARIAH:** I have a lyric from this song called Outside that.. whoever feels other, this one line, I'll just say it if you use it, you use it. If you don't, you don't. Yes. I've been bruised, umm, been destitute. Don't let me mess up my own lyrics. I've seen life on many sides, been stigmatized, been black and white, felt inferior inside until my saving grace shined on me, until my saving grace set me free. And that is also swirling us back to faith. There's many, many ways of, you know, expectation of things that are hoped for and yet unseen. And I always had to go back to that. You know, they can call you whatever they want. But whatever, I'm me, I don't want to be a person that's a one note, one person. Like that's no, festive, that's not fun.

**MEGHAN:** It's not festive. Being basic is not festive is the, is my takeaway.

**MARIAH:** I'm not looking for pedestrian. It's basic. Why, why like, you know, whatever. I know I go a little over the top, but I think that's allowed. I think in this era, like, it's okay, we'll all be fine.

**MEGHAN:** We'll all be fine.

MEGHAN: Well. ah, I didn't see that coming. My adolescent Mariah Carey obsessed, sweet, sweet fantasy had come true. And yes, that pun is very much intended, because when I was a young teenager, I wanted to dress, look, be, sing, do everything like Mariah Carey. She was so glamorous and fabulous and talented. She was successful. And she was mixed, like me. She was an aspirational figure I could see and you have to see it to believe it, they say. Well, I could see her. And it made me feel like I was also seen.

So though my fangirling was tempered today, I um, I kind of think she could tell... But that aside, it was all going swimmingly, I mean really well. Until that moment happened, which I don't know about you, but it stopped me in my tracks... when she called me a diva! You couldn't see me, obviously, but I, I started to sweat a little bit. I started squirming in my chair in this quiet revolt, like, wait, wait, no, what? How? But? How could you? That's not true, that's not... Why would you say that? My mind genuinely was just spinning with what nonsense she must have read or clicked on to make her say that. I just kept thinking, in that moment, was my girl crush coming to a quick demise? Does she actually not see me? So she must have felt my nervous laughter, and you all would've heard it too. And she jumped right in to make sure I was crystal clear. When she said diva, she was talking about the way that I dress, the posture, the clothing, the quote unquote, fabulousness as she sees it. She meant diva as a compliment. But I heard it as a dig. I heard it as the word diva, as I think of it. But, in that moment, as she explained to me, she meant it as chic, as aspirational. And how one very charged word can mean something different for each of us, it's mind blowing to me. And it actually made me realize that in these episodes, as I've opened the door for conversation surrounding the archetypes that try to hold us back. What I hadn't considered was that for some, reclaiming the words is what they feel will propel us forward. We're going to keep digging into this next week when I talk to Mindy Kaling...

**MINDY KALING:** Well, everything you're saying that you're mentioning, which has these pejorative connotations, I was like, yep, I'm that thing too. I was like, oh I've been called that. I've been called that.

MEGHAN: As ever, I'm Meghan, and I can't wait to be with you again next week. Thanks for being here.

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**CREDITS**  
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