

PROLOGUE

Graceland, August 16, 1977

We all refused to give up hope.

It was after 3 P.M. on Tuesday, August 16, 1977. I was sitting inside Dodger Presley's bedroom at Graceland with members of Elvis's family, including Vernon, his father; Dodger, Vernon's mother; Elvis's daughter, Lisa; and my niece Amber, who had become friendly with Lisa. As the minutes ticked away, I felt my anxiety mounting and was finding it difficult to breathe.

We had been sitting vigil for what seemed like an eternity, silently praying for good news. The tension was unbearable. I suddenly felt like I had to leave the room, as if by doing so, my mind could escape to that precious time a short while ago before I'd made the shocking discovery in the upstairs bathroom.

Of course, I knew that was impossible. The imprint of what I had seen would be forever burned into my memory.

I slowly walked out of Dodger's bedroom door, wishing more than anything that I'd be greeted by Elvis walking downstairs toward me

right then, laughing and telling everyone it was all a joke, even as I knew in my heart that this moment, as bad as it was, was very real. Pausing in the foyer, I noticed a few other people praying in the dining room and living room. I said my prayers again as well, feverishly in denial, still wanting to believe that the doctors at the hospital could save Elvis by some miracle, and that he would always be here by my side.

Elvis's aunt Nash saw me standing there. She approached me and gave me a hug. "Everything is going to be all right, Ginger," she said. "He has so much left to do."

I don't know whether it was the fact that she was a relative or an older woman who seemed wise, but I felt a comforting feeling wash over me. I wanted so badly to believe her.

Some of the dark fears haunting me slowly began to ease as I convinced myself that surely Aunt Nash had to be right. It was true! Elvis did have a lot left to do, and so many of his dreams would remain unfilled if he left us now!

I returned to Dodger's bedroom after a few minutes, feeling a little more hopeful than when I had left and continued to keep vigil with the others. Lisa was playing by the bed with Amber; as the two of them whispered together, everything seemed almost normal.

The phones throughout the house buzzed intermittently. Somewhere, someone answered them. Each time, with still no word from the hospital, I grew increasingly frightened.

Suddenly a movement in the doorway caught my attention. My breath caught in my throat as I saw Elvis's personal physician, Dr. George Nichopoulos, standing there.

My last flicker of hope faded as I watched Dr. Nichopoulos slowly enter the room, holding a large yellow envelope. Shaking his head at us, he walked over to Vernon and handed him the envelope. "I'm sorry," he said.

I felt like I'd stopped breathing altogether and felt light-headed, my

pulse suddenly pounding in my ears. I stared at the envelope. I was unable to look at the doctor's face, much less Vernon's, as I realized that the envelope must contain the jewelry Elvis had been wearing when he was rushed away from Graceland by ambulance. One of those pieces would be a necklace Elvis had purchased while we were together, a gold chain with the Hebrew letter *chai* meaning *life* or *to live*.

I went completely numb, feeling as if not just Elvis but everything around Graceland and within me had died. I felt empty, hollowed out.

Everyone around me was devastated. We cried and hugged one another, searching for comfort in embraces and tears. It was impossible for any of us to grasp that Elvis, a man who seemed larger than life, could be gone from this world.

My head was pounding. I needed to walk a bit. I decided to leave the room, as I experienced an overwhelming need to know if the outside world was aware of what had happened, of what we were suffering.

I left Dodger's room and went to one of the windows in the front living room, where I peeked out through the side of a closed curtain. It immediately became clear that the news of Elvis's passing was spreading fast. Cars were slowing down as they drove past Graceland. Some vehicles had stopped completely, their passengers getting out and standing in the middle of Elvis Presley Boulevard. People had begun gathering by the front gates, too, and along Graceland's stone fence—a fence that had never really been able to separate Elvis from his loyal fans.

This day had begun with excitement and hope for Elvis and me, but ended in heartache and disbelief. At the age of forty-two, my fiancé, Elvis Aaron Presley, was dead. The world around me had crumbled and my heart was broken.

