

# OUR FIGHT



'Incredibly honest'  
**Steven Bartlett**

'Gripping'  
**Guardian**

'One of the most  
significant sports  
personalities of  
the 21st century'  
**Telegraph**

'On the fight scene,  
there's never, ever,  
been anyone like her'  
**Rolling Stone**

# RONDA ROUSEY

## PENGUIN BOOKS

**Ronda Rousey** has completely transformed the world of martial arts, beginning with a historic bronze medal showing in judo in the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics and, most notably, a record-setting career as the UFC's first and most dominant female fighter and Bantamweight Champion. She was the first woman inducted into the UFC Hall of Fame, in 2018, the same year she exploded onto the WWE scene. The self-proclaimed 'Rowdy' Ronda Rousey, Baddest Woman on the Planet, returned to the WWE in January of 2022, four months after giving birth to her daughter, La'akea, to win the Royal Rumble. During her time in WWE, she held the Raw, Smackdown, and multiple Tag Team titles. Rousey is also a *New York Times* and *Sunday Times* bestselling author, the most-followed female athlete on social media, and an actress who has appeared in both *The Fast and the Furious* and *The Expendables* franchises. She is married to former UFC heavyweight contender Travis Browne. They live with their two sons and daughter on their small farm east of Los Angeles, California.

**Maria Burns Ortiz** is a *New York Times* bestselling author and award-winning sports journalist. Maria spent over a decade in sports media, including seven years as a writer and columnist for ESPN.com, and was the National Association of Hispanic Journalists' Emerging Journalist of the Year. She is a teaching artist on the topic of memoir writing at the Loft Literary Center in Minneapolis, where she lives with her husband and three kids. She is also Ronda Rousey's sister.

Copyrighted Material

**Copyrighted Material**

**OUR FIGHT**

**RONDA  
ROUSEY**

With Maria Burns Ortiz



PENGUIN BOOKS  
Copyrighted Material

PENGUIN BOOKS

UK | USA | Canada | Ireland | Australia  
India | New Zealand | South Africa

Penguin Books is part of the Penguin Random House group of companies  
whose addresses can be found at [global.penguinrandomhouse.com](http://global.penguinrandomhouse.com)

Penguin Random House UK, One Embassy Gardens,  
8 Viaduct Gardens, London SW11 7BW

[penguin.co.uk](http://penguin.co.uk)  
[global.penguinrandomhouse.com](http://global.penguinrandomhouse.com)



Penguin  
Random House  
UK

First published in the US by Grand Central Publishing 2024

First published in the UK by Century 2024

Published in Penguin Books 2025

001

Copyright © Ronda Rousey, 2024

The moral right of the author has been asserted

All photos by Eric Williams, with the exception of the image on page 209 (Credit: Cynthia Vance).

The author and publisher gratefully acknowledge the permission granted to reproduce the copyright material in this book. Every effort has been made to trace copyright holders and to obtain permission. The publisher apologises for any errors or omissions and, if notified of any corrections, will make suitable acknowledgement in future reprints or editions of this book.

Penguin Random House values and supports copyright. Copyright fuels creativity, encourages diverse voices, promotes freedom of expression and supports a vibrant culture. Thank you for purchasing an authorised edition of this book and for respecting intellectual property laws by not reproducing, scanning or distributing any part of it by any means without permission. You are supporting authors and enabling Penguin Random House to continue to publish books for everyone. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner for the purpose of training artificial intelligence technologies or systems. In accordance with Article 4(3) of the DSM Directive 2019/790, Penguin Random House expressly reserves this work from the text and data mining exception.

Typeset in 9.46/13.8pt Adobe Garamond Pro by Jouve (UK), Milton Keynes

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

The authorised representative in the EEA is Penguin Random House Ireland,  
Morrison Chambers, 32 Nassau Street, Dublin D02 YH68

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-804-94609-1

Penguin Random House is committed to a sustainable future  
for our business, our readers and our planet. This book is made  
from Forest Stewardship Council® certified paper.

Copyrighted Material



*For my husband and children,  
I hope you're proud of me.*

**Copyrighted Material**



Copyrighted Material

# INTRODUCTION

Dear Reader,

Nice to meet you. You seem cool. Obviously, you have excellent taste in books. Since you've only read three sentences, you're probably wondering what this book is about. This book is one I wish I would have had on the worst day of my life. I like to think someone would have given it to me when I felt completely destroyed, and said, "I know you're not ready, but when you are, you should really read this—and not just because it has valuable life lessons, but also because it's amusing as fuck." (I'm trying to limit my swearing, but heads up, I definitely say "fuck.") You don't have to hit rock bottom to read this book. Just saying, if you are there, I know what it feels like to be sitting there with you.

This book is *not* about how sometimes the greatest challenges are blessings in disguise. This book is about how sometimes in life everything you have worked for comes crashing down and the only way forward is to rebuild it into something better. This is my story on my terms. It's all the things I wanted to say over the last decade but didn't because I knew my words would be edited and dissected and ripped apart until they meant nothing.

From the moment I burst on the MMA scene seemingly overnight—"overnight" is what they call it when no one has been paying attention to the decades of time and effort you put into perfecting a craft—I was unbeatable. I was beyond unbeatable. I was all but untouchable. Some people might say

that's arrogant, but that's simply stating a fact, and whether people like it or not, or like me or not, doesn't change that fact. I walk out to my mantra "I don't give a damn 'bout my reputation" blasting, so I could not care less about what "some people" who don't know me think. I am known for being as brutally unfiltered in my words as I was for my style of fighting, and that's what you'll get in this book.

As the first female fighter in the UFC, I put together a back-to-back-to-back-to-the-fifteenth-power string of wins. Most were in mere seconds, racking up an impressive collection of records from fastest win, to fastest submission, to fastest title defense turnaround. I changed not only the face of a single sport, but transcended sports. I dominated both opponents and headlines. I appeared in two of the largest action franchises in history, *The Fast and the Furious* and *The Expendables*. I had a long list of endorsement deals—from Reebok to Pantene to Carl's Jr.—and an even longer list of companies that wanted me. I inspired. Whether it was inspiring love from my fans or vitriol from my haters, I inspired. That journey, that rise, that seeming invincibility, that was my story.

Then, on November 15, 2015, in Melbourne, Australia, it all came crashing down. The worst moment of the worst day of my life was broadcast worldwide.

And afterward, for days, it was replayed over and over, on an almost inescapable loop. Everywhere I looked there it was. On TV. On social media. In news headlines. On people's faces. I'm not sure which was worse: the looks of pity from people who care about me and didn't know what to say, or the looks of smug satisfaction from people who can't stand me, even when they've never met me. Imagine being asked about it, *endlessly* asked about it. By people who don't know you, but who feel like they have a right—no, more than a right, *a duty* to ask. That moment dissected and discussed by millions of people who have never met you. Your worst enemies brought out to weigh in on it. People cheering about it, celebrating it, laughing about it. People tagging you in pictures with trolling comments almost a decade later. How do you come back from that?

Copyrighted Material

## OUR FIGHT

For a long time, I felt like so much of my life had been me—just me—against the world. My story was literally and figuratively fighting to achieve what so many people had said was impossible, from learning how to speak as a small child to blazing a path for women in the UFC. I knew that others felt that same way, as though they had been counted out and underestimated their whole lives, as if they too were always fighting.

But I never stopped to ask myself, What comes next? What about after that? This is that story. It is about how there are things in life unquestionably worth fighting for, but there is also so much in life to just enjoy that doesn't require constant struggle. It's about letting down your guard; the one thing that is fatal to a fighter, but essential to building real relationships. It's about identifying *your* people, whether they come into your life or they've always been there. It's about replacing the unachievable pursuit of perfection with the pursuit of happiness. Finally, it's about reflecting on the decisions you've made and knowing that making different ones isn't giving up but growing up. And it's interwoven with body slams, bruises, baby-making, and the occasional anecdote of zombie apocalypse—prep farming.

There is some element of truth to failures being blessings in disguise, but anyone who says that in the moment of misfortune is opening themselves up to being deservedly throat punched. For me, “blessing” is too passive. Instead, I like to think they're opportunities in disguise.

For a long time, I envisioned myself walking away from fighting undefeated. A future that no longer exists. But now I realize that had that been the actual outcome, I would have also been unchanged and unchallenged. I don't know if that means I would have been unhappy, but I can tell you that I am happier now than I could have ever imagined I would be.

This book is about facing your fears, even when you don't want to. But it's also about sometimes taking a minute to do whatever it is that you need to do to put yourself first before you face those challenges, and how that's OK too. (And that can 100 percent mean lying on the couch, crying, and eating Cocoa Puffs if that's what you need.) It's a book about figuring out what you want, not what's expected of you.

Copyrighted Material

## **RONDA ROUSEY**

I don't think my story is that different from everyone else's. It's about resilience, the evolution of self, and coming not only to find but also to accept happiness. It's about chasing your dreams, facing failure, tackling transition, marriage, parenthood, and jumps off the top of the turnbuckle. OK, maybe that last part is slightly less relatable. But the not-as-relatable bits are what make things interesting.

Let's start with the worst day of my life...

**Copyrighted Material**



Copyrighted Material

**Copyrighted Material**

**T**his is the end. I will close my eyes. And then this will be all over.

I sat alone on the cold, gray concrete floor. Staring forward, blinking. Tears ran down my cheeks, but I was silent.

I couldn't even think about what had just happened. Thinking would make it real. I needed a minute. A minute to process. To try to put together the irreparably shattered pieces.

I walked out to the Octagon, the UFC's eight-sided cage. I had stomped out to Joan Jett's "Bad Reputation" blaring, the crowd at its feet, screaming. I hugged my coaches. I held out my arms to be patted down by cageside officials. I met my opponent in the middle. The official said, "Fight." I was hit. I tried to hide it, but the world swayed.

Then there was a bell. And my world ended.

A million lights burst before my eyes, but I couldn't discern which were real and which were visible only to me, the result of random electrical impulses caused by my brain being jolted inside my skull. I stood within a kaleidoscope of noise and light, a jumble of images and sounds that I hadn't figured out how to piece together.

Suddenly I was moving, as if caught in an invisible wake made by the large men in black shirts, ushering me through a human tunnel. I followed them, propelled forward only by muscle memory and an overpowering need to get away. It was as if I was drowning, breathless and kicking upward toward the surface that I wasn't sure was there.

## RONDA ROUSEY

At some point I must have passed through a black curtain into a cement, fluorescent-lit corridor lined by black cables. It was the only way I could have gotten to the small medical room, where my legs collapsed under me, as if they couldn't bear my weight.

I sat barefoot, covered in a layer of sweat and shivering. I could taste the blood in my mouth, my tongue against a gaping hole of flesh and muscle where my inside bottom lip had once been.

I could not yet comprehend the enormity of what had happened, but I felt it in every cell in my body. I had lost. But it wasn't just that I had lost. I was still in my body, stuck here in some kind of state between hell and living. Dying would have meant all of this was over. Dying would feel better than this.

I could hear noise in the hallway, laughter. I could hear an entire stadium of people cheering my defeat. Tens of thousands of people celebrating the worst moment of my life.

It was the most intense pain and misery and embarrassment and shame I had ever felt. I wanted to kill myself. I wanted to swallow a bottle of pain-killers, close my eyes, and end it.

Across the room, pressed against the opposite wall, as if trying to shrink themselves into the corner, stood the half-dozen athletic men who made up my team. Sadness hung in the silence. They stood, some blinking back tears, heads lowered as if attending a funeral. Their eyes darted around the room, glancing at me, concerned but afraid to linger too long. All of them except for one. The man who would become my husband locked his eyes on me and never looked away.

It wasn't a look of pity, disappointment, or sympathy. It was pure love.

He looked at me like he would do anything to take my pain away, even if it killed him.

Amidst overwhelming grief, as I looked back at him, my only thought became *You can't die, you have to live for me.*

And if he was living for me, I knew I had to live too. It would have been easy to end it that night. To escape the crushing pain I felt, and pass that pain to him and my family to bear instead.

Copyrighted Material

## OUR FIGHT

But with that look I knew I loved him so selflessly, so completely, that I would endure anything to spare him the suffering I felt.

I didn't grin. But I bore it.

That night, after I was rushed to the hospital to sew the muscles in my lip back together, Trav held me while I sobbed in his arms for hours. And he said something to me I will never forget: "You are so much more than just a fighter."

All I had ever known was being a fighter. It was my entire identity. I had been fighting since the moment I was born.

I fought to live. I came out of the womb blue, listless, and not breathing. My umbilical cord had been wrapped around my neck, cutting off air for no one knew how long. The doctors worked quickly, but no one knew the impact those first breathless moments might have.

I fought to speak. As a result of my traumatic birth, I struggled to talk as I grew older. I knew what words I wanted to say. I knew what they meant and what they should sound like, but there was a disconnect between the words in my head and being able to get them out in a way that people could understand. I spent years in speech therapy to be able to find my voice.

I fought to overcome tragedy. The same year I learned to speak, my dad had a sledding accident. Sledding was the kind of thing that people have done millions of times for fun and been totally fine. But he broke his back and because he had a rare blood disorder, his diagnosis was terminal. Facing a slow, painful death, he took his life when I was eight. He was my hero and the greatest man I'd ever known, and he was gone.

I fought for sport. I started judo when I was eleven years old. My mom had been the first American to win the world judo championships, and I followed in her footsteps. Judo translates into "the gentle way," but it is often anything but. Ways to win include throwing your opponent to the ground as forcefully as possible, choking them unconscious, and breaking their arms (technically, you're *just* dislocating their elbows). I made my first Olympic team as a teenage underdog and my second as a serious gold medal contender. But both times, I went home without standing on the top spot of the medal

## RONDA ROUSEY

podium. My soul ached as I listened to a national anthem that wasn't mine as they raised another nation's flag. I quit judo after my second Olympics, leaving behind a sport that I had loved because loving it wasn't enough.

I fought as a career. I hadn't set out to become a professional fighter, but in the gym I found solace and purpose after walking away from the sport that had defined my entire life. MMA presented another chance to chase greatness. A way to use my skills to prove that I was capable of being the best in the world. It was a place to channel my drive, energy, and hope. And in less than two years of training, I had taken not only myself to the sport's highest level, but elevated women to a level that no one had ever believed possible. No one but me, that is. Within four years of me first stepping into an MMA cage, I had changed the face of the entire sport. I ran up an undefeated win streak of fifteen fights, many of which were over in a matter of seconds. Until the moment I stepped into that cage in Melbourne, headlines everywhere asked, "Is Ronda Rousey the greatest fighter we've ever seen?" Now, with a single defeat, I had lost everything.

Fighting was all I had ever known.

"You are so much more than a fighter."

The words echoed in my mind.

**Copyrighted Material**



Copyrighted Material

## 2

I had just turned seven years old and was learning the backstroke. You're supposed to count the number of strokes from the flags to gauge distance, so you don't run into the pool wall, but I hadn't yet mastered that. I was going as fast as I could, racing an older teammate in the lane next to me who didn't even know we were in competition. I was mid-stroke when I slammed my head full speed into the tiled wall. When I didn't come home after practice—our house was literally across the street from the pool—my mom sent my dad out as a one-man search party. He found me, wandering our small-town North Dakota neighborhood in my snowsuit, hair still wet, disoriented and trying to find my way home. That was my first concussion. It wasn't the last time I'd headbutt the wall swimming or crack heads with another kid going the opposite direction, but you always remember your first.

Five years later, I was a twelve-year-old orange belt competing at a tournament in San Diego. I hadn't been in judo long but was already one of the best local competitors. I was fighting in the boys' division, which added extra pressure. I had more to prove, and no boy ever wanted to get beat by a girl. In one of my first matches of the day, I hit my head landing on the mat after a throw. I got photo vision, like someone just took a picture of you with the flash. I blinked my eyes a couple times and kept fighting. I won the match, but not the tournament. I fought at least four more times that day, but I couldn't blink away the spots. The light in the room hurt to look at. I told my

## OUR FIGHT

mom I had a headache. She said to tough it out and stay focused. On the way back to the car, I threw up in the parking lot. I remember feeling my mom was upset with me, disappointed. I silently vowed to tough it out if it ever happened again. Many years later, I can recognize the concussion symptoms all too well, but I was just a kid. I didn't say anything. I didn't want anyone to think I was weak.

For the next decade of my judo career, I endured several concussions a year. Sometimes, it happened in tournaments. Other times, in practice. I would go round after round at training camps against the best in the world, then return to my room, nauseous as I tried to force food down with my face, tongue, and fingers tingling and numb. All common signs of head trauma that I ignored. I would never rest or recover. I just trained through them. Any hit to the head would exacerbate the symptoms, extending the healing process. For ten years, I was experiencing concussion symptoms more often than not.

All my many judo-related concussions sort of blend together. One, however, stands out. The worst was at the 2006 Pan American Games in Buenos Aires. While fighting a girl from Cuba in the final, I got caught and thrown on the back of my head so hard, it knocked me out.

Sometimes, when your brain suffers a significant-enough trauma, one where it can't effectively process the information it is receiving, it creates a story so that the information makes sense. In judo, you don't knock people out the way you do in boxing or MMA, so I had never experienced that knock-out sensation. But you can choke someone until they lose consciousness.

I knew what it felt like to be losing and regaining consciousness. As I lay on the mat coming back to consciousness that day in Argentina, the only thing that made sense to me was that I had been choked and was breaking out of it. When the referee called the match for my opponent, I was convinced he'd thought I had tapped out from a choke. I would have died on the mat before I tapped out. I got up and tried to argue, "I didn't tap!" I didn't remember that I got thrown. Then I don't remember anything until waking up the next morning.

**Copyrighted Material**

My weight cut for that tournament had been especially hard, and I later learned that dehydration is believed to play a factor in making you more susceptible to neurological injury. When you're dehydrated—like when you're making weight—you lose some of that fluid cushion in your brain.

A few years later, I left judo, but the thing about neurological injuries is you can never leave them behind. Your brain is not supposed to bounce around in your skull; it doesn't develop calluses, it accumulates damage. With every brain trauma you incur, the next one comes easier.

No one was talking about brain injuries in athletes yet. The studies and awareness around CTE (chronic traumatic encephalopathy, the degenerative brain disease that can be brought on by repeated head trauma, most commonly found in athletes who suffer multiple concussions) had not become mainstream. In a sport defined by toughness, a blow to the head was met with "Don't be a pussy!" not "Are you OK?"

When I started doing MMA, I had a lot to prove as a woman in the gym. I'd spar with world-champion strikers, but all too often, even with the smallest hits, I'd end up seeing stars. I endured photo vision and headaches for days afterward but said nothing. MMA is a sport where one of the things you are scored on is who lands more blows. I knew I couldn't take many hits. Instead of going out in the cage and banging it out like a Diaz brother, I needed to be so perfect I wouldn't be touched. The style of fighting I cultivated required me to be so dominant in my fights that my opponents hardly had a chance to blink, let alone swing at me.

I was well aware that concussions weren't the kind of thing most people counted in the dozens. The more I pushed my body, the more it started to push back. The more that I fought, the worse it was getting. Even when I was at my most dominant, if the other person touched me at all, it could be enough to give me spotted vision. I would get barely grazed and feel like I'd had my bell rung. My fingertips would tingle. My teeth would buzz. Just push through it, I told myself. I was embarrassed to admit the impact the tiniest taps were having. No one could know I was vulnerable. My seeming invincibility did a lot of the work for me, keeping my opponents on their

## OUR FIGHT

toes. If they knew I was one solid strike away from hitting the canvas, it would make my job a million times harder.

In fighting, people talk about your “chin” with such reverence. They don’t mean your physical chin, but your ability to take punches without it seeming to have an impact. They act as if the ability to withstand blows is simply a matter of will. That if you just want it badly enough, if you’re mentally tough enough, you can withstand anything. If that was the case, I would still be undefeated.

Going from one fight straight into the next, I didn’t have any time to rest, let alone reflect. But more than that, I think I was too scared to address the reality of my brain being pushed to the brink. I couldn’t speak up and say, “Hey, I’m dealing with some neurological issues and need to rest” because that would mean admitting to myself I had a limit. And to do what I did, I had to believe I was limitless.

I was so ashamed that I couldn’t merely will my way out of the evident physical deterioration that I didn’t talk about it. As a fighter you never want to admit weakness, but you can’t toughen up your brain. There’s no callus that will form. No break that will heal back stronger. There’s just an acceleration of the inevitable decline.

My entire MMA career felt like I was on borrowed time. How long could I be perfect? How long could I keep anyone from touching me? I had to believe it was forever. I had to believe I was capable of anything. I had to believe that no matter how hard things got or how heavy the demands, I could not only do it all but do it perfectly. I had to believe it because the only other alternative was if people found out I was already dozens of concussions deep, they’d know I was vulnerable. Then I’d be forced to face the music and leave the sport before I was ready to walk away.

I swore to myself never to be one of those athletes who should have retired sooner, the fighter that’s hard to watch age. I owed that not just to myself, but to all the women in MMA. Having its greatest champion linger past her prime wouldn’t be a good look for the sport. Being too proud to admit my brain had taken too much abuse wouldn’t be a good look for the fight.

## RONDA ROUSEY

Some days, after training, I would sit on the edge of the ring, unwanted sparkles dancing before my eyes, and ask myself: How many fights can you get away with not getting hit once? For me, it turned out to be fifteen.

Heading into the Holm fight, I was running on the fumes of my dreams and into problems I couldn't train my way around. The harder I worked, the more my body and brain deteriorated. The more I physically broke down, the more insecure I became, and the harder I worked to overcompensate. It went on and on until everything just gave out all at once.

After my loss, people went around saying, "Ronda got exposed for having no chin."

That's bullshit.

I did everything that nobody else could, and I did it without even being touched.

I created the most effective and efficient fighting style that ever existed. I was perfect. Until I wasn't.

**Copyrighted Material**



Copyrighted Material



Copyrighted Material

### 3

**A**s all true love stories begin, mine with Travis Browne started when my best friend Marina tweeted at him.

Travis was a top UFC heavyweight, so I had known that he existed before this moment, but this was the first time I actually *thought* about him. It was sometime in the fall of 2013, two years before we would find ourselves halfway around the world in a cold, concrete room in the depths of a Melbourne stadium. He had—and still has—a very large beard. Marina sent him a photo of birds living in Peter Griffin’s beard, and that is how I first became aware of the man who would eventually become my husband. Of course, that was the furthest thing on my mind then. I was dating a guy who doesn’t even deserve to be named, and Marina had a boyfriend who was one of the biggest losers ever. I fucking hated that guy and was on a mission to find her anyone else. I told her this Travis Browne seemed like a catch.

He was tall, standing six foot seven, had a shaved head and dark beard. His look was not uncommon in the sport, especially for heavyweights, but he had probably the longest and most glorious beard in the UFC at that point. What really made him stand out were large traditional Hawaiian tattoos running down one arm and up a leg. I thought they were cool. But that was it.

A few months later, he and I were both on the UFC’s annual New Year’s card in Vegas as 2013 rolled over to 2014. I was having a rematch with Miesha

Tate, my MMA archnemesis whose arm I had mangled in our previous meeting. I ran into Travis in the warm-up room before the weigh-in.

“I just wanted to say thank you for being so nice to Marina on Twitter,” I said. “You guys are so funny.”

And then I went into my zone. I made weight and again submitted Miesha. My professional record improved to 8-0. That night, at the post-fight press conference, I was seated between him and another of the night’s winners, Uriah Hall, making jokes about balls as UFC president Dana White stood at the podium telling the media that I’d be going straight back into training camp to prepare for the fastest title defense in UFC history. Before I even had a chance to catch my breath, it was right back into fight mode.

Fifty-six days later, I knocked out Sara McMann in the first round.

In the fight, McMann and I came out swinging. She tagged me a few times in the first fifteen seconds as I was backing her up against the cage to close the distance. Taps like that should have been nothing, the kind of hits that as a fighter you just shake off, but not for me. I dropped her with a knee to the liver less than a minute later in what was declared the “performance of the night.”

Afterward, the cageside doctor looked me over as is standard for every fighter after every fight.

“Great job, Ronda,” he said.

“Thanks!” I said.

“I’ve just got to check you out real quick.”

“Of course,” I said, smiling. I knew the drill.

The post-fight exam is required, but not thorough. The goal is to triage major injuries and catch serious complications. They’re not diagnostic check-ups. “Medical” is typically a small curtained-off area that you stop by on your way back to your locker room. The extent of the exams varies based on the fight and whether you win or lose. Because I won in such dominant fashion, my exams were usually as quick as my fights. A quick check of my hands, flash a light in front of my eyes, look at any bruises that might be forming.

“Any concerns?” the doctor asked as always.

“Nope,” I said. “All good.”

Copyrighted Material

## OUR FIGHT

“OK, well, I don’t see anything that gives me any cause for concern, but obviously, you know the drill, look for signs of concussions, anything starts hurting later, anything changes, let us know or get it checked out.”

I nodded.

I headed back to my locker room. Contrary to what the name might evoke, it was just a smallish dressing room with a workout mat on the floor and some waiting room–type furniture, a couple chairs, a couch, and a coffee table pushed up against various walls. I flipped off the lights that hurt to look at. My head was pounding. I lay down on the mat on the floor. Photo vision danced before my eyes. I knew I should be celebrating, but I didn’t want to get up. I’d had so many concussions at this point that I’d lost count. This was just one more to add to that tally.

I certainly wasn’t going to tell a doctor. It’s not like I’d never fought injured. Hell, I don’t know if I’ve ever fought *uninjured*. I’d had multiple knee surgeries. I’d broken my thumb. I’d exploded a cyst under my knuckle. I never pulled out of a fight because of an injury because pushing through the pain was part of the job. The last thing I needed was to not be cleared to fight. The concussions were just one more thing to push through. I refused to think about what could have happened if the fight went longer.

After the McMann fight, I was running into people, and they would say, “I loved your last fight with Miesha.” I’d correct them and say, “Well, actually I’ve already had another title defense since then.” Now a decade has passed, and I’ve come to understand that no one’s ever going to realize how active they kept me as champion. How fucking difficult that blink-and-you-miss-it turnaround was. Or how unbelievable what I achieved was.

Later that spring, around the time I went back into camp for my third title defense in six months, Travis came to check out our gym. He was coming off a loss and looking for a change. Glendale Fight Club, or GFC, was located along a generic stretch of road amidst LA’s massive urban sprawl. It inhabited a small commercial space that was easy to miss if you didn’t know to look for it, buried between a half-dozen car dealerships and the occasional small storefront. The gym had a front wall of windows that could just as easily have

made it a nondescript second-hand boutique or tire shop. Inside was a row of boxing heavy bags, a floor covered in green and red grappling mats, a full boxing ring, a small-scale MMA cage, and some dated cardio equipment. It wasn't fancy or state-of-the-art, but it had everything you needed to train. The wall behind the ring featured a brightly colored larger-than-life mural bearing the words "Nothing is Impossible" and depictions of boxing legend Muhammad Ali on one side and GFC's Edmond Tarverdyan on the other as if they were watching over the room. Lanky with thick eyebrows and an even thicker Armenian accent, Edmond was one of those people who even when he was in his twenties looked middle-aged. He, like my mother, had a piercing gaze that could make you feel like either the center of the universe or an insect on the floor.

In addition to being the subject of the gym's artistic centerpiece, Edmond was its owner and my head coach. I had been training with him since I began a mission to do the impossible: tear down MMA's chain-link ceiling and create a place for women in the UFC. Back then, MMA trainers wouldn't give women time of day. There was no real money in women's MMA. Without the potential to make money off female fighters, few coaches saw any value training them. But Edmond at least let me occupy a corner of his gym to train for free. I busted my ass harder than any of the guys in the gym until he was forced to take notice. Since then, I had gone 11-0 in my professional fight career, ushered women into the UFC, and established myself as one of the greatest female athletes ever.

For the longest time, it had just been me and a bunch of Armenian guys at GFC. Then after I served as a coach on the UFC's *The Ultimate Fighter* reality show, it was me, a bunch of Armenian guys, two of the show's contestants—women's MMA pioneer Shayna Baszler and up-and-comer Jessamyn Duke, who had since moved to LA—and occasionally Marina.

Travis liked the way we ran things. Edmond had once been an amateur fighter but made the transition to coaching when he was still young and now had a small but growing stable of fighters and boxers. Travis had been training at one of those super camps, what we call big-name trainer's gym that