

The story of my life after four right knee surgeries and six left knee surgeries and battling mental health

Chapter 1: Introduction

Hello, I want to start off by saying this is very new to me and a different way to get what I have out to the world, which needs to know how to handle and battle life's unexpected changes, so let's begin. My name is Moriah, and I am a mother and also a wife. I had a promising career and life goals, making great money. I was always on the go, working nonstop and overtime, barely having any time for my family because I would basically come home and eat, shower, and rest, then do it all over again. So, to really understand how my life was changed within a blink of an eye, I have to take you to the beginning of my life, where I was most passionate about. When I was around eight years old, I started getting into basketball, and I was also playing softball, which was amazing, and I loved it. I started to get super busy with both, so I decided to just choose basketball because it was indoors and my parents were sending me more to basketball camps than softball camps. So that's pretty much what led to my career in basketball, where things kind of changed for me. I was a super tomboy and kind of kept to myself unless I had my basketball family, which was amazing. If you ever play sports, you know what that feeling is. When I got into middle school, you couldn't play basketball until eighth grade, so I was already on an AAU team playing basketball, which didn't really bother me because our coach didn't really want us to play middle school ball because he thought it was going to affect our skills. He has worked so hard to make sure nobody can run with us or beat us on the court. So, when I was in eighth grade, our school knew that we would get a championship because I had my best friend, who is also on my AAU team, who played great ball, and a couple other girls that I knew were really great ball players because we played against their teams, so we knew that it was going to be exciting and fun. And let me tell you, it was amazing because the whole school would be excited to come to our games and just watch us practice. We got our school a championship through hard work, teachers pushing our team to make sure our grades were up to par, and also helping our coach. We even showed our coaches different coaching styles. If you let us do it the way that we have been trying to do it and trust the process, the team will think it was our intention. We will get the job done. So, it was very exciting to bring back the championship trophy for the school and to put our school on the map so that they knew, "Okay, this is it. This is a good school, and this is cool before going into high school the following year. When high school started, that's when everything shifted and began to change in the summer of basketball camp.

Chapter 2: First Surgery

In the summer of 2006, I was at my high school's summer basketball practice or camp where we were doing drills, and I was dribbling up the court, and when I pulled back to see if I had a teammate open, that's when my knee dislocated. When that happened, I fell to the ground, and I had two of my friends there just watching me practice because we had our AAU practice afterwards, and I was in a shock-like panic. I wasn't in pain. I wasn't

screaming or yelling. I think I was just like, Do you see what I'm seeing? My coach immediately called 911, and my team sat on the ground with me and asked me questions like, Are you OK? Oh my gosh, and one of my friends called my mother because we live right next door to the school and told her to come over, and when the ambulance got there, the young man was like, Can you lay back and squeeze my hand because we have to pop it back in place? When I tell you I screamed in pain, it's because it was like you were expecting a countdown like 1 to 3, but instead, it was like, Lay back, take one breath, and bam. So that was very scary, and you are honestly kind of dizzy because of how everything is taking place. My mom got there while he was finishing popping it in place, and they loaded me up on the ambulance truck, and we were on our way to the hospital. The ambulance lady pulls into a gas station, and she turns to my mom, who's in the back with me and my dad, and she says, The hospital is crowded. They don't have room for us to drop your daughter off in the ER. It will be better if you take her because we can't sit there. So, my mom is extremely pissed at this point, just like I am, because now the pain is starting to hurt and I'm starting to feel lightheaded and irritated, and my mom just says, Screw it, fine, we're going to take her. We get in the car, and we're going to the hospital in the waiting room, which I know everybody who has waited in the emergency room waiting area stinks at. When we are called back into a room, they ask you the same basic questions, then they tell you that they will be putting the knee brace on you, which stinks. They give you crutches, which I hate, and tell you to follow up with an orthopedic surgeon and have a nice day. Send you home with some medicine, like Tylenol. If it gets worse, you know, come back. When we followed up with the doctor that they referred us to, he was really sweet, and his assistant was amazing; she always had good candy and would tell little jokes that didn't make sense but would still make you laugh. When the doctor came and grabbed me to come into his office, he told me that on the x-ray, when the ambulance popped my knee back in place, they chipped a bone, and he said I was going to have to have surgery to get it removed. So in my mind, I'm like, Okay, that's fine, but will I heal in time for basketball season? When that doctor looked me in the face and told me, You probably won't, I broke down in tears because I felt like my whole career was done before it even started. So, I did have surgery. I thought it went amazing because once you woke up, my doctor said he fixed everything, and now it's your healing process. I worked really hard, so when it was time to report to school because this happened in the summer, I wasn't on my crutches. I did have a knee brace that they gave you, and I was still working hard to get back to where I was before I dislocated my knee. When the season started and I was a freshman, I was on junior varsity just so I could get my feet back before going to varsity as a freshman, and it was a challenge. I did have my ups and downs because, at the same time, you're trying to make sure that you're not damaging your surgical leg. I know those feelings rush through your head. It consumes you and makes you paranoid, but I was able to succeed. But that wouldn't last for long, and I was struck with another tragedy that broke me again.

Chapter 3: Second Surgery

This second surgery came out of nowhere. I can explain what I mean by that. It literally came out of nowhere. I was playing basketball, like I said, in high school, and I went back to AAU for a little bit, and I started having leg pain in my knee, and I was telling my mom that a sharp, dull pain keeps coming and it hurts, so we went back to the same doctor that I was comfortable with just to make sure that the screws and everything were ok, and that's when I got another gut punch when he said it looked like there was a little damage, and I'm going to have to go back in and fix what's showing damage on the x-ray and MRI, but you know you'll be okay. So, that broke me because when you hear second surgery and you're an athlete, you literally think it's over, like I'm never going to pick up a basketball again, but I was determined to do what I did last time. I was focused, and I was like, Look, I'm going to do what I have to do. And that's exactly what I did. I did the physical therapy and conditioning I was trained to do, and this was also a time when my brother was going off to college and my mom moved us to Kansas so that I could have a better education and get a different scenery, which was not fun at all. So, anybody knows that when you're leaving your friends behind and going to a new school, you kind of shut down and don't want to talk to people because many people ask you questions, like, Did you just move here? What school did you go to? What are you doing for fun? You know the basics, and you tell them I play basketball; that's what I like to do, but I just had surgery, and I'm kind of healing from that. Their high school girls' basketball team wasn't as good as their boys' basketball team, football team, or even soccer team, along with the hockey team. So, when the basketball coach found out that I play AAU and also play high school

varsity basketball and you told them I might go out for the team, I was still healing from a recent surgery that I had unexpectedly. I'm just kind of playing it by ear, but I'll keep you posted. When the season comes around and you meet friends, people ask, Are you going to join the team? and you speak with the coach, you are coming up with a game plan of, I'll come to like some conditioning in the summer to see if I can handle it to make sure I'm not going to damage myself." I don't like to commit to something and not be able to accomplish it. When I went to conditioning in the summer, it was pretty relaxing and laid-back because we weren't really doing a lot of drills. So, in the summer when we're doing the conditioning, we had a camp in Oklahoma where we got to stay in the dorms and practice with other high schools doing more conditioning learning plays and also playing against different high schools. It was pretty good because we developed different relationships. We were playing against a team, and I was going up for a layup, and one of the girls on the other team came in the opposite direction and hit my knee, which is the one that I just had two surgeries on, and I went down. I was limping; I was hurt, but I didn't think anything of it. So, the next day, I woke up with my knees swollen. I go to our trainer, we do an ice bath, we wrap it, and I try to get on the court. Do you like a little bit of conditioning? But I was in pain and couldn't do anything, so they gave me crutches and told me, You know you have to sit this out. We left the next day because camp was over. The coach called my mom to tell her what happened while I was away so she could be aware of my condition. My mom was like, Let's go to the hospital when you get back and see what's going on. When we get to the hospital, we wait and wait for them to call our name. I'm anxious, nervous, and freaking out, and my mom tells me to just relax and keep calm. We don't know what you're going to say. The doctor comes in, and she says some bad news, which brought me to tears and made me completely numb.

Chapter 4: Third Surgery

When the doctor came in and told me that we see that you had two surgeries prior, it was done wrong, and your knee keeps dislocating as we're seeing on the x-rays and MRI, we're going to have to go in and fix it with the doctor who previously did it to correct the issue so that you don't keep experiencing the same problem. I was very angry because, again, I'm getting told as a teenager that you're not going to play basketball again and you're going to be laid up in bed in the summer, which sucks, and while your friends are out having fun, you can't. So, I was broken and hopeless. My mom and I decided to go ahead and go through with the surgery because I wanted to get the problem fixed, and let me tell you, my experience at this hospital was the worst that I have ever experienced in my life. When waking up and recovering, you're still kind of numb and still getting over the anesthesia that's in you. I had to end up spending the night in the hospital, which I thought was only going to be one night, but my luck changed, and I ended up spending a week and a half in the hospital due to getting nerve damage in this hospital. Experiencing nerve damage on top of having surgery at the same time and not feeling your right leg, and nobody has the answers for you, and you're 16 and your mom is already panicking and super pissed, can make you feel lost. You're panicking because this is new to you, and it broke me. I felt helpless, and I feel like the hospital didn't care. I felt like it was a blaming game because I didn't do it, so I don't know what happened. I did all the procedures right, but it wasn't me, and that can mess with a 16-year-old's head because it makes them literally feel like, Am I not feeling what I'm feeling? Am I crazy? When I was in the hospital, it just really broke me because I could imagine other families or kids who had experienced what I had to go through, and it just hurt. So, after bawling my eyes out and crying to the doctors, I did have to go through nerve damage treatment along with physical therapy, and I just wanted to get out of the hospital and never go back. I did complete my physical therapy and repair my nerve damage. I started school as a sophomore and acted like nothing ever happened. I was really torn. I would say to see if I was even going to play basketball because hearing that if you pick up a basketball game, you're going to hurt yourself or your leg is not going to be as strong as you want it to be because you just had three surgeries and balance nerve damage—that's a lot to deal with at 17 years old. I just didn't know if I was going to want to play again. I was losing my spark to get back on the court. I did meet with the basketball coaching staff and talk to them about my concerns to see if this is something that I could really do. I started redoing conditioning on my own, and I also conditioned with the team a little bit, which was great. When tryouts came about, I felt comfortable trying out, which was great. I made the team; we were our own little family, and it was pretty cool. I wasn't doing much in the summer before

my senior year. I was working a lot, but yet again, pain never stops me from playing basketball, so I was struck with a hard decision when hit with another life obstacle in my way.

Chapter 5: Fourth Surgery

How my fourth surgery came about was crazy, to say the least. My leg was going numb occasionally, and my knee was still shifting and dislocating, so my mom reached out to another facility to see if they could figure out what was going on—was it just arthritis coming? You know what's happening to my daughter? When we met this doctor, I was very skeptical because I knew it was going to be like the same old thing, like let's try to get another surgery out of her, which I was right because after doing an MRI and more x-rays, he told me the same thing that the prior hospital told me: they did everything wrong and I can fix it. I'm going to have to shave a bone in your leg to move it over to line your kneecap up, put more screws in, and clean up all the dead skin that is growing on the inside of your knee. When I told you that he told me that I was so done, I was over it. I mean, somebody could've come in there and told me we're going to have to operate on your ankle too, and I would've just been like, Sure, because at that point, I felt like every doctor that I let touch my right knee just wanted to go in there and just fix what another doctor was doing, and I was tired. So, my mom and I talked about our pros and cons—can I live with the pain because my knee is still dislocating?—and both agreed. I went through with the surgery in the middle of my senior year, which sucked. I did play basketball close to the end of it, but not a lot, so I had to do physical therapy like normal, let alone deal with another surgery, and I thought that was it. I will say I did not pick up another basketball; I was done as my senior year ended. This is where the story takes a big turn and would open me up to how seriously my life was going to change with one decision and choice I made as an adult at the age of 29 years old.

Chapter 6: Happy Life until It Goes Left"

I was working as a revenue account representative and enjoying my married life with my kids, and I was happy. I was working 40+ hours a week and had a steady income; life was pretty good. Me and my husband would do little dates because I work from home and our daughter is in daycare. My other daughter was in school, and I made a career change because I was offered a great position and opportunity and started working at a company as a pharmacy technician. I was also to work from home; it was the height of COVID-19, and it was amazing. I honestly couldn't complain. I was just happy that I had a job and was still working the hours that I was allowed to work. When I was working one day, I was sitting at my desk, I got up, and I was cooking my lunch because, again, I work from home, and I started having this bad pain on my left knee, and I, like a lot of you guys might say, Oh my gosh, I hope it's not going to be like the same thing that she had on her right knee. Well, boy, let me tell you. I thought the pain was just because I was sitting for a long time and I didn't like getting up to move around a lot, so I just brushed it off like I'm sure a lot of people do. So a month goes by, and now I can't even walk on my left knee. Putting pressure on my left knee was hurting to the point that it was like sending a sharp pain, and then my ankle started to hurt, so I was nervous and worried, like, did I damage it or did I hit my knee? People who know me understand that I hate going to the doctor because, from my experiences, there is always bad news or you need that, so let's put you on this type of medication. When I scheduled my doctor's appointment, I went in there just thinking, "Okay, you've just been on your feet too much; you'll be ok. I was wrong; the doctor ordered an x-ray just to get an outline of what was going on there. I was waiting in the doctor's office, trying to figure out what was going on. What are they reading? Is this bad? It starts to make my anxiety and panic attacks go crazy because it's taking so long. So when the doctor came back in, he had the

imaging pulled up on the computer, and he was telling me that I don't have any cartilage—literally slim to none—on my left knee, and there are procedures out there that can kind of help you improve it, but you're going to need surgery to go in and remove some of the cartilage that you still have left and send it off to a lab. The lab grows it, and we reconstruct your knee and put it back in. When I heard the word reconstruction, I panicked because the surgery alone is kind of like shaving my bone, moving it over the line in my knee, and adding some wires along with some tendon on top of the new cartilage. So, I agree, because that does make sense. I couldn't keep barely walking on my leg. It was very painful. I wasn't able to play with my kids. I was just in pain. And this is my life-changing experience that was different than what I experienced on my right knee.

Chapter 7: First left knee surgery

In July, when we did the cartilage surgery, I was already prepared because I'd already had knee surgery, so it was nothing new to me. Waking up was normal. I was in a brace for a little bit. I was back on crutches. Physical therapy was by far the best because I had a really great physical therapist. She was so patient, she was so gentle, and she explained everything to me, and I'm sure I was the most difficult one because I was nervous, like this was just to grow the cartridge, and you don't know how long the labs are going to take because the doctor tells you it should take just a month, but it could take up to two months. You just don't know, so when I'm in therapy, I'm bending my left knee, you know, getting it back to how it was before I had surgery. Amazing process! I really enjoyed the affirmation that my physical therapist provided me. It wasn't like the normal experience that I was dealing with, where you just come in and do what they see you do later. She really built a relationship with you, and she wanted you to feel comfortable and relaxed while you were there. If you had any concerns, questions, or problems, she was there to answer them and make you feel comfortable, and I enjoyed that. When the month was coming close to when I was going to have the cartilage discussion to get it put back into my knee, my physical therapist lady said, Let's stop physical therapy. I think you're good. Let's wait until the cartilage is ready, since you know your major surgery is coming up. My body and mind could not prepare me for the journey I was going to have on September 23, 2021.

Chapter 8: Second Major Reconstruction Knee Surgery

On September 23, 2021, I changed my life forever. The reason why I say that is because of the journey that I went on after that surgery, because that started the battle of my life, and I will say that within that battle of my life, I had a great time. I had low times, and I had really bad times. Like I said, the surgery went well. Went great. I woke up and stayed the night in the hospital. I have the pain; it's normal. I have the same physical therapist, which was amazing. It was awesome. I had a machine at home that helps bend your knee, so how it worked was during the times that I had physical therapy, which was twice a week. We would set my machine by five or ten so that we could get it bending back to, like, at least 120. You knew you had the time to keep trying to bend your knee because you had to get it back. It just went through major surgery. So anybody who experiences knee surgery knows that you need your quad; you need every limb that was affected to get back moving and grooving, and this is why I said my battle began in my journey because my quad was on my right side when I had all those surgeries. I never had to worry about it because maybe because I was young it was

strong. When I had the surgery in September, I had just turned 30, and I wasn't active like I used to be—I'll say back in my teens—so my quad took a turn and didn't wake up. We were working my quads so much in therapy because I needed my quads to wake up. It kept my knees aligned because it had to pull when I needed it to. I couldn't do leg lifts. I was just in the worst pain, and I wouldn't wish it on anybody. It was just the worst pain. Again, my physical therapist lady loves her to death; nobody can say anything negative about her because she was amazing, and when I say amazing, I mean she was nice, like she went above and beyond. We worked hard, and she saw the pain I was in when I would cry to her, like, I don't know what's going on. What the heck is happening? This sucks. You know, there are just so many emotions because you just don't know what is going on. Why is this happening to me right now? So, you go to your checkup with your doctor to figure out what's going on with your quad, and you're nervous and panicking because your doctor has never experienced this, so the answers that you're wanting your doctor to tell you he can't really give you because this is still new for him as well. So, you go back to therapy; you're doing therapy; you're doing everything that you need to do, but it's still not getting better. Your therapist is concerned because you're still in pain. Your quad is still not doing what it needs to do, so are you going back to your doctor again, and your doctor suggests that we do an MRI? Let's see what's going on after the MRIs are done. It takes a while for your doctor to review it, and he says he will keep in touch with you once he is done looking it over. I was in physical therapy, and that's when you get the news: "Hey, are you in therapy? Can you come once you're done? We want to talk about what we say on the MRI". When you finish therapy, you go to your doctor's office, and right now, in your mind, you're at this point. I'm just used to the bad news and dealing with this quad and the pain and struggle that I went through. I wasn't thinking I was going to get any exciting news; I just thought we were just going to keep doing what we've been doing, which is physical therapy, and just working on it. We were just kind of hitting our heads together about what the heck is going on with this leg. When my doctor told me that on the MRI, it showed that I had overgrown cartilage, maybe that was preventing my quad from waking up. I knew the next thing he was going to say would be surgery, and I was okay with it.

Chapter 9: Third Surgery

When the third surgery came about, it was probably in March 2022, and it was the same. It wasn't going to be severe; I was just going in to clean it up and continue doing physical therapy, which was fine with me. Go back to therapy. We did what we've been doing. Nothing really changed at all, but at this time my life was shifted because now I was not working and I was sitting at home with my baby because there's no reason for her to go to daycare because I was home, I could watch her, and that's more money that we could save in our pockets, so anybody who knows me knows that I salute stay-at-home mothers' lives. More power to you. I have never been that type of woman to want to stay at home because I love working, and I'm sure they do too. It's just that convenient for their family, so sitting at home, I started to feel empty, like I wasn't contributing to my household and was just doing physical therapy, and my quad wasn't working, so it's a lot of emotions. I developed a popping sensation on my left knee that would not go away, and it was painful. If anybody has experienced it, you know exactly what I'm talking about. It pops when you move your leg. It pops, and it feels like your knee is pulling or dislocating. So, I tell my physical therapist lady that she started investigating, we do some exercise, and she puts her hand there. She feels the popping and pain that I'm experiencing, and she doesn't know why it's doing it. We sent our concerns back to the doctor. I have my follow-up with my doctor and tell him what's going on; he feels the popping, but he's not sure where it's coming from either. We do physical therapy, and we're trying to get the quad to wake up because we're thinking that's going to take some pressure off of my knee, so maybe I can stop that sensation that I'm feeling, but it doesn't, and my behavior, I think, changed to where I am stuck in the house more and the pain stinks. So, I do have a conversation again with my doctor to let them know my frustrations about the pain, how it hurts, and what we think is going on because I know you can't live like this forever. Moriah, and like the great doctor that he was and still is to this day, he still recommends that we get another MRI. Let's see what's going on, because I'm not sure why it's popping. And that's what I liked about him: he was honest, he was open, and if he didn't have the answer, I trusted and believed he was going to find it for me and probably for any of his patients. He didn't lie, he didn't lean on me, and he didn't make me feel like he was gaslighting me or anything. It was honest and pure. Let's figure this out together. So, we do the MRI and wait. I'm doing therapy and doing everything right, which is

fine. I got the call from my doctor. I'm at home. He tells me I reviewed it, and it might be a little bit of cartilage, but I can't tell what's going on, which is fine. Thank you. I appreciate that. I had a doctor's appointment with him coming up for my checkup. We're talking about other options and what we can do. He advised me that he can go back in if you want to see if there's something there, which is fine with me. I agree, and we set a date.

Chapter 10: Fourth Surgery

The fourth surgery was in September 2022, and it was basic. He went and cleaned up nothing differently than usual, like he did in March. I woke up, went on about physical therapy, and kept doing what I'd been doing. My quad did wake up a little bit, but not all the way. It was waking up for like a second, and then it would go away, so we did the shocking stem treatment. We're just doing everything, which is fine. I saw the same physical therapy lady; she was amazing, and I was fine, but the popping was still there. It was getting worse. It was hurting because I felt like I wasn't able to do a lot of my physical therapy activities at therapy because of the popping, which everybody is probably like, Oh my gosh, I would just give up. I wish it was that simple. I wish I could be like, Yeah, I'm done, because I have kids around this time. All this is going on, and I had to apply for Social Security disability because I am now unable to work. I was lucky to get approved for that, but for anybody who is on Social Security disability, it's a once-a-month payment, and I've worked ever since I was 14, so I was getting like \$1100 to \$1300 every two weeks, and now I'm only making \$1300 per month with Social Security disability, but it doesn't cover the income that I used to get, which sucks and sends you into a deeper hole. So that began another dark phase in my life where I felt lost and hopeless, and I was so stuck in the house that I couldn't play with my four-year-old daughter. I couldn't do anything that used to be fun to me anymore because all I was consumed with was twice-a-week physical therapy, pain, and doctor's appointments. I noticed a big change in me. I was going to therapy, and I wasn't really happy. How are you doing today? I'm here, or it's okay, but I knew my therapist could feel something was off with me because I constantly kept telling her. I don't feel like I'm progressing. The pain won't stop. I don't know what else to do to make it stop, and I was tired. This came around the same time that I was having my checkup with my doctor. We were talking about the options because my quad still wasn't doing what it needed to do, which was exhausting. I told him to just approve me for a cane for the rest of my life. I'm just done; I'm tired, but he, being an amazing doctor, said let me refer you to somebody who I think can help because we've tried everything, and I just don't know why your leg is doing this. Which I was fine with. I guess I will wait for them to call me, get me scheduled for the consultation, and talk to this new doctor. Maybe a new set of eyes will help. I will take anything at this point. Which was amazing because when a doctor can tell you I have tried at all, I don't know why this is happening, but I want to help you and provide you with a doctor to help you kind of put your mind a little bit at ease, like they're not just doing it for the money, like they really do care. Some doctors, I will say, really do care about their patients.

Chapter 11: Mental Health

Like I've said, being stuck in the house can take a big toll on somebody, especially being stuck in the house for 2 1/2 years, battling knee surgeries back-to-back, and receiving physical therapy. I started to lose focus on who I was as an individual and what I could bring to the table, so when I say that, I feel trapped in my house. I didn't want to leave my bed because I couldn't. I could move around, but with the pain that comes along with moving around, you just feel comfortable and stuck. I started watching the same shows as Modern Family, Psych, and NCIS. When I would go to therapy, I just wasn't myself, and I was happy that my therapist was able to

recognize that. Is this the Moriah we know? When it comes to mental health, there are so many bad judgments out there, including mine, because I was like, I don't want to sit on the couch and tell the stranger who's going to ask me how you feel and do you want to hurt yourself, like just basic weird questions. I didn't want to put myself through that. But watching the news and seeing how many people are affected by mental health issues ever since COVID hit has led to people losing their jobs. You're stuck in the house, trying to figure out how you're going to feed your family and pay your bills—everything would shift anybody's state of mind. And I held that in and didn't feel like I was ready to talk to somebody about it. I feel like you've got to be strong and push through. You have kids, you've got a husband, and you've got to make sure you're doing everything that your kids and husband need you to do. Which I wouldn't recommend because I'm a Virgo and I hold in a lot of my anger. I'm not saying a lot of Virgos do this, but when I can't take it anymore, I explode, and I just let loose of all my emotions that I've been holding on to in my mind for probably a year or so. So it was coming close to me meeting this new doctor, and I am now noticing that I am having a semi-mini panic attack because I'm just not myself, and I don't know how to express it to anybody, especially my husband, not saying he's not supportive, but just expressing to him that I don't feel myself, so I wasn't expecting any emotions because I didn't have that in me anymore, if that makes sense.

Chapter 12: The New Doctor

When I met my new doctor, it was different, and I didn't know how to handle it. I can explain it. This doctor was not like my old one, who would explain stuff in layman's terms and connect with me like a patient. emotional-level kind of thing. But this doctor went over my old records from the last doctor that I had because it was in the same hospital, and he ordered an MRI and also ordered an x-ray, which we did in-house so that he could see what our options were when getting the MRI and x-ray. I knew I was probably going to hear it, but I can't see anything on it. I don't understand why you're having the popping, but hopefully we can figure it out. When we went over the MRI and also the x-ray, he informed me that he was going to reach out to my old doctor and kind of come up with a game. Plan of what they think is best: would it be another surgery to remove a wire that was keeping my knee from being loose that my old doctor put in, which I agreed I respect that please talk to my old doctor and see if maybe that will help because this pain sucks and he advised just keep doing physical therapy and her schedule and reach out to you if we lean toward surgery? So, like everybody expected, I did get the call. I'll say two to three weeks later, let's do surgery to go in and remove that wire. So hopefully it will stop popping, and I was okay with that. That made me sadder, but I was fine. I went to therapy. I let my therapist know that we're going to do another surgery, and I broke down in tears again because I wasn't getting the answers that I was asking this doctor, and that's when she handed me a card and told me that I should be open to talking to a sports psychiatrist about how I'm feeling. We completed therapy, and she said their office should call you. I really think you should consider it. Moriah, and I'll see you next week. The office did call, and I did schedule it. I wanted to start off with a telehealth appointment because it was kind of new to me. When I met with the doctor, it wasn't like what I had in mind; it wasn't that. In this kind of conversation, he made me feel like I was talking to my best friend about my feelings, and I was being heard and listened to. He made me feel safe; he made me feel like whatever I told him was between me and him, unless he needed to reach out to somebody. It was just very respectful. He developed a plan for me based on everything that I spoke with him about, especially being stuck in the house, not working, feeling like I'm a stay-at-home mom, and just feeling like my whole world was just turned upside down with a blink of an eye. This is why mental health is something I take very seriously now because somebody who has had surgery has taken shit for their mental state. Anything can shift your mental state, and it's not a problem to talk to somebody. You can talk to close friends; you can talk to family; but just talk to somebody because you don't want to battle it by yourself. I felt a sense of relief when speaking to him, and I scheduled another appointment because I wanted to keep it going. When I scheduled my second appointment, yes, you know, you can bring anybody you want with you to your appointment so I can learn more about you and we can grow. I brought my mom to the second appointment, talked like a normal person, did a lot of motions, and felt like I was going to be okay. It's ok to ask for help; it's ok to talk to somebody when you're feeling helpless. You don't have to carry everything by yourself because I want you to learn more. What are your triggers now that I never thought of? I learned within my private sessions with him from further scheduling that I've started to develop a thinking of rewriting the same response in

engaging with my overthinking and worry of stuff I can't really change, and I can explain that when I got the call that another surgery was probably going to have to take place, my mind was racing of what we were going to expect; it's going to be like the same surgeries. How long is the recovery time? So writing on paper is my new outlet, along with the overthinking of stuff I can't control.

Chapter 13: Day of the Fifth Surgery

When the surgery came up in March 2023, it was different because I wasn't prepared for the struggles that I was going to have. What I mean by that is that I woke up for my surgery, and the doctor advised me that I had some overgrown cartilage in my knee, and we didn't need to do what we agreed upon in his office for the purpose of the surgery. He just cleaned the cartilage, and that was it. So, like all surgeries, when you go to physical therapy, you're literally all over the place and emotionally drained and tired. I started doing what I normally do, and we got on the bike. I paddled a little bit on the bike, and the popping came back, and it was more aggressive, and my quad was still not strong, and I was getting frustrated. My therapist could see the frustration that I had on my face because it felt like every deck of cards that were underneath me were falling apart, and on top of that, I don't have the light that I want to have because it was all taken from me when I started the surgery back in July 2021, so it's set in my mind. I felt like I wasn't going to be able to run and play with my daughter, who was turning five years old. That's a good age because kindergarten comes. So, you're going through your doctor or expressing the same fear in a why me? kind of way, and you were just tired. So, I had my appointment with my doctor to explain where we're at and that nothing has really changed. I still hurt. His response was, Let's keep at it in therapy and take it one day at a time, which is fine because I was only four weeks out of seeing him, so I was ok with that. I was still seeing my sports psychiatrist, which was great because we were coming up with our game plans for recognizing my triggers and making sure that I, you know, wasn't allowing those to take over and feed them to me, and I needed that because I had already given up hope that I was going to have my life back. I was having to cope with my new life being on Social Security and probably having to deal with this pain forever. I knew that on my eight-week appointment, there would be a big discussion of them all, which was in June 2023, because nothing was getting better. It was getting worse, and I still wasn't able to do a lot of my physical therapy stuff that I needed to do leading up to that appointment. I would say I had a lot of appointments with my sports psychiatrist because my mind was racing so badly and trying to keep me level and not going crazy and fighting to get my life back like I was doing. I needed those appointments. So, the great thing about him was that we were talking about my main focus for that appointment and how my mind was feeling leading up to that appointment. And honestly, it's the whatever, which people don't talk about a lot of the word S. What do you think is going to happen? How are you going to deal with learning that you're already mine? And don't get me wrong. I had to do a lot of self-reflection on myself, especially on my family, especially on them telling me you shouldn't go through with the surgery, or I'll say how people have family in their lives to tell them don't do something because it's bad and you're not going to experience a good experience, so you have that pressure on top of it. And that's why it's great to have a good support system in your life so that you can take those steps back and just regather yourself because you know it comes in good faith, but when battling my mental health, my mind was just trying to flip everything into a negative. You're the one going through with the surgery; if this is what you want to do, we're going to do it. That was the thing I had to keep telling myself because I needed to get this fixed and corrected for better well-being in life.

Chapter 13: The big doctor's appointment

When my big appointment came about, I was walking in very anxious and nervous because I didn't know the outcome. I mean, when talking to my sports psychiatrist, we went over multiple outcomes of what I expected was going to happen, but you still have whatever is in the back of your head: is he just going to say keep doing therapy, or is he going to say there's nothing we can do? I was having mini-panic attacks because they started with the student who wanted to get your background, and on top of that, when you're in a doctor's office, you're sitting there for your doctor's appointment, so you're already anxious and starting to get upset. When my doctor came into the room, he took a deep breath and just stated that we are going to move forward with another surgery, and this one is going to be different than the other ones that I've ever had before because he was going to have to break my femur in time to reconstruct everything that my original doctor did. And in that moment, that was a gut-crushing moment because we talked about it multiple times, but hearing it come out of his mouth was different. When I walked back to the car, I was in tears. My emotions were definitely unstable, and that was okay. So again, this is why I now understand mental depression, mental anxiety, and mental frustration because I am the walk-in truth of it, and I knew that this was a challenge that I was willing to accept, and I knew that I had a powerful team on my side that was going to get me through this. I am scheduling an appointment with my sports psychiatrist, and I cried on his couch, just releasing the emotions that had built up because I was lost. And I know everybody's looking at this like, Wow, you had a lot going on. You suppressed everything in every obstacle like this. I'm sure you're not nervous about me. I would say you're wrong. With this surgery, there were a lot of outcomes because I wasn't going to be able to walk for at least 3 to 4 months. I was going to have to use crutches for probably a year. I am back on bedrest, re-learning how to bend my leg, and also trying to make my quads stay alive. So, speaking to him, releasing all my emotions, and trying to figure out how physical therapy will probably come into play was definitely a big challenge in itself. So, because we have surgery scheduled for July 25, 2023, I literally have a month to get everything together in my life.

Chapter 14: Family Time

I knew that July was going to come up quick, and trying to prepare my mental state for that is definitely hard because, like I said, in the beginning I had a four-year-old daughter and a preteen daughter who is 11 and was trying to balance a four-year-old who is so used to being all over Mommy and wanting to lay on Mommy before going to sleep. Having Mommy give her baths is challenging. But this was a big year because she was starting kindergarten for the first time, so I wanted to try to train her how to be independent and not rely on Mommy or Daddy as much because I was going to be bedbound once the end of July hit. So, we kind of started to prepare her by getting her own food, having her pick out her own clothes, and getting her dress so that she knew this was going to be her everyday routine, which was amazing. Me and my husband started doing little dates that we could sneak in because we knew that at the end of July our world was going to be turned upside down, so we just wanted to reconnect with each other, stay strong, and come up with our game plan that we needed to insert for our family. When me and my husband started our game plan, it was kind of him outlining how he was going to take me to my surgery in the morning. I had to spend the night at the hospital, so I was like, I'll be there to pick you up the next day, making sure we had a babysitter for our daughter while he was picking me up from the hospital, where I was going to be comfortable, and making sure we had ice for the ice machine. So, we kind of had our plan down pat, and I was letting the recipe go so that we could cook for at least seven days in advance and freeze them so that when he came home, we could just keep the food out and have dinner, and you wouldn't have to overwork because dealing with your wife out of surgery can take a toll. He was amazing. He arranged with physical therapy to go off of the times that he was working from home, which were Tuesdays and Fridays, so I was very blessed to have that. We were also preparing our daughter for kindergarten, so we were making sure we had her enrolled and a school list so we could maintain getting everything that she needed and wouldn't have to panic at the last minute. I was also making the calls that I made in my sports psychiatrist appointment, making sure that I wasn't going around places that would cause me to have triggers, and still maintaining my happiness by just staying focused on my true self. Trust me, it was extremely hard. It was my own challenge within a challenge because every day seemed to be getting closer and closer to my surgery, and I was feeling like every day was running out.

Chapter 15: The final and most significant surgery

On July 25th, 2023, I went in for major surgery to get my left knee fixed from popping and catching for no reason whatsoever. While sitting in the hospital bed waiting to be called back into the room so we could begin, I was just nervous and kind of scared because I didn't know honestly how I was going to feel when waking up from this. The surgery, I would say, probably took an hour and a half, and when I woke up, I was in my room waiting for the nurse to provide me with her details and give me my medication before the pain really started. That experience was pretty good because all my nurses were great and helped me move around since I had to relearn how to kind of walk on my tippy toes with a walker, which isn't much fun. The next day I got to leave the hospital and start my new journey at home with a toddler who is five and wants to lay up under her mom 24/7, so retraining her to understand that mommy is going to need a little space and be in pain was very hard on me. She was always getting prepared for kindergarten, which is a big deal, and I wanted to be there so bad just to see her walking down the hall to her classroom and meeting her teacher, so it was a big shot to my heart because I wanted her to know that regardless of what mommy is going through, I am going to make an effort, fight through it, and be there, which I did, pain and all. I started physical therapy just like the other surgeries with the same cool lady that I was blessed with and wouldn't change for anything. I would say this was hard because relearning to bend your knee, getting back into leg lifts, and seeing if your quad was going to bounce back were my biggest struggles. When I showed up to my appointment, I was nervous because regardless of the pain medication you take, you're still going to feel everything, and you have to try to find a happy place where your mind goes so you can't really think about it and move forward, but it's hard and it's mental, and trust me, I still fall short of that happy place. I had a doctor's appointment checkup on August 7th, 2023. I went for my four-week appointment, and it pretty much was just looking over images, talking about what he was able to do, and him reminding me to keep pushing forward with the physical therapy and not walking on my leg and waking up my quad. Walking out of the appointment, I was still at a standstill because it wasn't really anything special. We talked about besides him saying on your six-week appointment you're going to get X-rays and see where your leg is at, and then on your eight-week appointment we will talk about maybe you're walking, but we will just see.

Chapter 16: The Physical Therapy Process

In physical therapy, I thought my knee was doing well, but when I started back on this bike ride, my knee started popping, and my anxiety started rushing back because this is what the surgery was supposed to stop, and now my back hurt. When we would bend my leg off the edge of the table or lift my leg up, it would get stuck and catch, and it was the worst pain, and even trying to brush the pain and catch off just wouldn't stop. I would grab my therapist and be like, Sorry, it just hurts, but let's keep going, because I just didn't want to stop anything or have to reset anything. I know I told myself and my therapist I wasn't having any more surgeries, so this pain is just going to have to be dealt with because we are done if it can't be fixed now. I know that there is only so much physical therapy that can be done, and I get it. I just don't want to be a pain in the neck kind of patient because, to me, it's not getting better. It's kind of like where I was before the surgery, but then my therapy lady will say, "Moriah, I see your quad a little bit", or look at you lift it without me doing a lot to help you, and I will forget everything. I know sometimes in therapy we get lost in wanting to see results fast without

knowing it's going to take your body some time to get to where you were before. This is why having a great team by your side is important because they keep you going and keep you focused on your journey or goal that you want to accomplish. She noticed that I needed to reach out to my doctor to speak to him because she saw my face kind of get disappointed and concerned and wanted me to move my sports psychologist appointment up because she didn't want me to fall.

Chapter 17: A six-week checkup appointment

On September 6th, 2023, it was my follow-up appointment, and I went in thinking positively because I just wanted to make sure I was doing everything right, but I also kind of wanted to get answers on why my knee was catching and why I had the popping back again, which was supposed to be fixed. I did have to get X-rays because everyone knows that's a process so they can see how everything is healing and moving along, and that came back great, which I knew it would, but when we started to talk about my concerns, I kind of felt like they weren't answered or understood. I expressed my concern about the popping and catching, and it was referred back to: Well, your quad isn't strong still, and that's the main focus, so maybe that will change once we get it back to moving. That was a big hit to my stomach because, in my mind, I thought this was the whole purpose of this surgery to stop the popping and catching, and nothing has really changed. He did give me the okay to put weight on my leg as tolerated, but just don't overdo it, which was okay because it gave me the chance to kind of move around a little bit. I know a lot of people who are reading this are probably like, Girl, can you be surprised? But honestly, I really just had hope that I wasn't going to feel this pain anymore, and it was bringing back so many horrible experiences and definitely making me start to feel depressed and lost. See, this is the effect of your life kind of getting shifted into a million pieces, and when you get a little victory, regardless of what it might be, your body isn't going to see that, just as it can pray on the negative and get you sad and feeling hopeless. It did take me a minute to almost an hour to kind of get back out of the funk so that I can just focus harder on physical therapy since it determines honestly if I'll be doing this for six months or another two years, and trust me, I'm not trying to do that. The next day I got to talk to my psychiatrist about our monthly checkup and was able to talk about my frustrations and concerns and what I kind of want to accomplish within this short time frame because, honestly, setting little goals kind of helps me stay on track and focus so that I don't let my mental state take back full control. That was a big relief for me because, again, it's like talking to my best friend and expressing myself and then getting little feedback on how I cannot focus on so much the negative and hardship but focus on my little victory of what my X-ray showed and how I'm able to bend my knee on a table. The negative stuff will always be there, but we can't control things that are out of our control. I know that's hard for me because I'm always about planning, and if I don't know what's going to happen or have a game plan, I guess that's the problem. It's like I'm walking blind into a situation, and I can't really control my mindset. I get the understanding that you're doing therapy until something changes, but when is that going to happen, and how long do I have to keep struggling to make it happen? I honestly just want my regular life back before this all starts. Regardless, I came to understand that this is my new normal, and this is the change that I have to adapt to in my life. It might not be pretty or comfortable to someone else, but trust me, it works for me, and if that means that I have to do therapy for another year, then sign me up because I honestly wouldn't go back and change anything that happened. I know my next appointments and physical therapy will focus on the same thing: making my quad stronger and probably getting rid of my knee brace and crutches. I'll be extremely happy about that eight-week appointment on October 23, 2023, and I am 100% ready for it.

Chapter 18: Conclusion

From the first time I had my surgery on my right knee, I was never honestly taught that I would still be having surgery and struggling just to get back to the normal life that I had before growing up. I know that everything happens for a reason, and God places certain challenges in your life to see what you can handle. If I am able to share my story with at least one sports player or even a person who feels like their life just came crashing down, then I am happy because that's what my goal for myself is. I know physical therapy and my mental state are the focus, and making sure I don't let them consume me is the focus. I am not fighting every day to take my life back, but as a world and community, we have to be open to expressing ourselves and not letting others control

what we define as our happiness. It takes time and hard work, and trust me, I'm there every day fighting with you, and I'll never give up because I have so much to give and so much to live for to just give up. I will say don't let your doctor or anybody else control what you want to do, and if they tell you that you won't play a sport again, say watch and see me, and if someone comes in your ear talking negatively, prove them wrong and fall back for a little bit while they see your victory. Always get the help you need to stay positive, because once you start going negative, it can affect your daily mood and lifestyle.

Moriah Tate

September 7th, 2023, at 10:13 p.m.