



SECRET GARDEN

SINGLE MOTHERHOOD WASN'T ON CIARA'S TO-DO LIST. BUT WHEN BABY FUTURE CAME INTO HER LIFE, SO DID A NEW FOCUS ON WHAT MATTERS MOST: HER SON AND HER FAITH. AND NOW THAT SHE'S FOUND A NEW LOVE, EVERYTHING'S COMING UP ROSES

BY JEANNINE AMBER



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All she wanted was to be onstage, singing and dancing with all eyes on her. She dreamed it, then she told her friends, all of them sitting around a lunch table in the cafeteria of North Clayton High School in College Park, Georgia. She even wrote it down on a piece of blue-lined notebook paper that she still has tucked away in a box at her mama's house. "I made a Goal Sheet," Ciara says, recalling the list of three impossible-sounding things she'd set out to accomplish. "Number one," she'd written, "get discovered. Number two, sell 3 to 4 million records. Number three, have longevity." At the time Ciara Princess Harris was a 14-year-old tenth-grader with no real training as a singer or dancer or contacts in the music industry. All she had was determination. "I remember watching Michael in his shiny suit singing 'Rock With You' and thinking, *I know I can do that one day!*" she says now. "So I just made up my mind."

Two weeks after creating her Goal Sheet, Ciara auditioned for a spot in Hearsay, a local girl group. It didn't last, but Ciara got her foot in the door. By 16, she'd signed her first deal, with Atlanta producer Jazze Pha. The next year her debut single, "Goodies," soared up the *Billboard* charts, and held the No. 1 single spot for seven weeks.

"Words are so powerful," says Ciara, her eyes flashing. It's a chilly February afternoon, and the 30-year-old singer is sitting in Manhattan's Nobu. Her honey-colored hair cascades over her shoulders as she leans toward her plate of miso-glazed black cod. "When you have a goal, you have to dream it, believe it, say it out loud and write it down. As long as you're realistic, I believe you have the power to tell your life story. You can walk yourself into your dream or away from it. Back then I wanted to be an entertainer. I wasn't super-experienced, but I spoke my dream. I felt it in my soul."

Ciara's debut album, also titled *Goodies*, was released when she was only 18. It went on to become certified triple platinum and Ciara received four Grammy nominations. "I surpassed my goals," she says. "And here I am still living my dreams."

These days the vision Ciara has for herself is bigger and more colorful, encompassing not only music (her fifth album, *Jackie*, came out last year) but also fashion, both high-end and budget-friendly. In 2015 designer Roberto Cavalli chose the singer as the face of his fall/winter line. Last February, the iconic sneaker company Keds announced that Ciara would be collaborating with its team on a signature shoe.

In person, Ciara is a study in dueling energies—she is both preternaturally serene and surprisingly intense. Leaning for-

ward with a steady gaze, she smiles as she describes how she imagined, and then spoke into reality, the life she had wanted for herself. First, she says, she envisioned her career, and then, when the timing was right, she saw herself as a mother.

Her son, Future Zahir, was born a plump nine pounds, ten ounces, on May 19, 2014. "I'd always wanted to have my own family," she says. "And my pregnancy was planned when I was at a point in my life when I was finally ready to take on the responsibility." Just three months after her baby arrived, however, Ciara and her child's father, Atlanta-based rapper Future, called off their engagement. "That wasn't necessarily part of my vision," she adds with a laugh. "But the moment I realized I was going to be a single mother, I had to reflect and reorganize my thoughts. I decided to trust that God had a plan for me, and move forward one day at a time. Once I did that, I was like, *Okay, let's go.* I put all my love and focus on my son. And he's made me become even more fearless, even more strong."

Ciara's closest friend, makeup artist Yolonda Frederick-Thompson, marvels at the way Ciara embraced motherhood, even before Baby Future was born. "She was the most connected and conscientious pregnant woman I'd ever seen," recalls Frederick-Thompson, 52. "She talked and sang to her son as if he were already here like, 'Hello, baby. How are you today, my sweet angel?' When the relationship ended, I said to her, 'We all go through trials and tribulations.' I was divorced when my child was an infant, and I told Ciara, 'I wish I could have been as strong as you.' She is an inspiration to me and I'm almost twice her age."

Future, the little boy Ciara calls her "Angel Baby" or "Juicy Man," has a cherubic face and long, curly lashes. She introduces him before she sits down to lunch, then he is whisked away to go sit with Ciara's people, waiting for her at a table across the room. A well-built man walks over to introduce himself. "I don't want to interrupt," says Russell Wilson, Ciara's boyfriend and quarterback for the Seattle Seahawks, while politely shaking my hand.

"He's awesome," Ciara says when he's gone. "He's the kind of man who would give his jacket to a stranger." Later, when I ask the waitress for the bill, she waves in Wilson's direction and says he's already picked up the tab.

The couple's relationship went public in April 2015, when the pair was photographed attending a state dinner at the White House. It turns out Ciara had envisioned dating Wilson, too. "I was very clear about what I wanted," she says. "Every part of my being as a woman, and as a mother, set in my mind what I was hoping for with love. I remember telling my friend the kind of guy I wanted: a God-fearing man with a very fun spirit who loves kids and would really, truly care for me. I was very specific because I do believe you can have it all." More than anything, Ciara dreamed of the kind of love her grandparents had shared. "They were married for 55 years," she says, her eyes filling with tears. "We lost my grandfather five years ago, and they were in love until his very last day. He was literally in her arms. That's the kind of love I want. A true love that can outlast and withstand anything." ▸

This page: Ciara wears a **Dennis Basso** satin organza gown.

Opening page: On Ciara: a **Fendi** silk chiffon dress and her own earrings.





Ciara wears a **Zimmermann** billow dress. Shoes, stylist's own. Baby Future's clothing, stylist's own.

For clothing details, see **Where to Buy**.



Hair, Cesar Ramirez for Mizani/crowdMGMT. **Makeup**, Yolonda Frederick-Thompson/Goldfinger Creative Agency. **Manicure**, Tina Gault. **Prop stylist**, Carl Hopgood/Opus Beauty.

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For years the details of Ciara's love life have been splashed across gossip sites. "It comes with the territory," she says with a shrug. "Being an entertainer is a public thing. Of course, there are moments when I wish that weren't the case." The day before our interview, the Internet had lit up with reports that Ciara was suing her ex for \$15 million for defamation and slander in connection with a series of tweets in which he'd complained about the singer's parenting skills. "She can't talk about it," her publicist warned, "for legal reasons." But Ciara doesn't have to talk: Everything is a Google search away, the details no more interesting than the detritus of any failed relationship.

What's infinitely more intriguing is Ciara's bounce back from the breakup. In the annals of celeb splits, Ciara's may be remembered most for the unfortunate timing of this taking place the same month the singer was featured on a *Brides* magazine cover gushing about her fiancé. That had to hurt. So how did she shake it off and move on?

Ciara thinks for a second before she answers. She is steady and calm when she says finally: "You have to ask yourself, *How do I want my life to be?* Even if something has gone wrong, you have to see not only what the other person may have done but also the wrong decisions you've made. Then you have to figure out where you're going next and stay focused on the plan you have for yourself. That's what helps you respond to a moment of adversity.

"The Bible says you can find joy in going through trials and tribulations," she continues. "Russell and I have talked about it. But you have to know and believe you have the power to turn it around. You can't focus on the bad thing. You have to focus on getting through it. That's what I do, because I want to live happy."

Ciara and Wilson, who met through a mutual friend, are famous for a lot of things: their careers, their faith, their cuddle pics. But nothing has captured people's attention as much as their sex life.

Last July Wilson, a devout Christian, sat down with Pastor Miles McPherson at the Rock Church in San Diego and recounted for the congregation the moment God spoke to him about Ciara. Wilson

was sitting in Ciara's dressing room, 15 minutes before she was about to go onstage. "And God spoke to me," he recalls. "He said, 'I need you to lead her.' So I told her, 'What if we took all that extra stuff off the table and did [things] Jesus' way?'" When pressed by the pastor to clarify, Wilson said, "Yeah, we're talking about sex." The news went viral. Even *Entertainment Tonight* reported the story, breathlessly proclaiming the couple's abstinence. "A bombshell!"

Ciara laughs when she recalls learning that this intimate detail of her life had gone public. "I was in London and out of the loop," she says. "But Russell told me he and the pastor had an organic, real conversation. It was all good though, because I know

there are people like us trying to figure out love and find a new approach."



"When I look at my love, I think he's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen," says Ciara about Wilson.



In March Ciara's love life lit up the Internet yet again. She and Wilson got engaged, sharing the news via his Instagram account. They were vacationing in the Seychelles Islands, off the coast of East Africa, and the video shows the couple on the beach with a bottle of champagne and Russell announcing gleefully, "She said yes!"

"Marriage is something I look forward to," says Ciara. Her parents—her father served in the Army and her mother is a former secretary—have been married for 33 years. "I believe in family, and the beauty of two people committing to spend their lives together. We talk about everything. To me, to both of us, that's the foundation you need for love to flourish and reach its highest place."

"I want to live with as much lightness as possible," she adds. "So I can stay focused on my love of God, and being the best mom, and the best person, I can be." She has a child to raise and music to create. She's in the studio these days, making what she describes as the best music of her career.

Then it's time for her to leave. She's greeted by Wilson and her giggling Angel Baby, who flings himself into her arms. They beam at each other with love and happiness. For Ciara, it's another dream come true. □



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