

# TIPS, TRICKS, AND TRAUMA

## SHANDELL FLOWERS



# *Tips, Tricks, And Trauma*

By Shandell Flowers

## ***About the Author***

Shandell Flowers is a survivor, storyteller, and spiritual warrior who turned her pain into purpose and her past into power. Born and raised in the heart of the South, she navigated abuse, trauma, street life, and the high-stakes world of exotic dancing before reclaiming her identity and walking away from the game—on her own terms.

Her writing is raw, real, and unfiltered meant for the women who've been silenced, the girls still stuck in survival mode, and anyone who's ever been told they wouldn't make it. With faith as her foundation and truth as her weapon, Shandell speaks life into the darkness many are afraid to name.

“Tips, Tricks, and Trauma (Cache’s Story)” is her testimony—a memoir written in blood, tears, and triumph. She is living proof that no matter how broken your beginning, your ending can still be powerful.

She currently dedicates her life to spiritual growth, healing, and helping other women rise.

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## ***Chapter One; Edgewood Dreams and Street Smoke***

The day my mama sent me to Atlanta felt like both an ending and a beginning.

After years of tension, yelling, and walking on eggshells, she finally told me I needed to go stay with my sister.

I packed up my pain, my pride, and my baby girl – six months old, soft brown skin and big bright eyes – and boarded that bus straight to Atlanta, Georgia.

The air hit different when we got there.

Warm.

Thick.

Alive.

Edgewood, East Atlanta – Hutchinson Street.

The kind of block where something was always happening, day or night. We moved into a small apartment that stayed loud, smoky, and full of people who moved like the world owed them something.

My sister's baby daddy sold dope right out the house, and my sister stayed inside with my nephew, pretending not to see what was going on – even though we all knew.

They fought a lot – loud arguments that started over nothing and ended with doors slamming, glass breaking, and tears nobody wiped away.

Sometimes, I didn't know what to do.

Do I step in and fight with her, or do I call the police and risk her hating me for it?

Most times, I just froze.

Because deep down, I knew she'd be right back with him anyway.

But outside?

Outside was a whole different world.

Some days, the sun would shine so bright the whole street looked golden.

The air would blow soft and sweet, carrying the smell of fresh rain mixed with the smoke of blunts and fried food from somebody's porch. Kids laughed and played in the street, chasing each other barefoot while the older heads leaned on cars, talking loud over music that blasted from someone's speaker. That was Edgewood — wild, beautiful, and dangerous all at once.

I'd sit on the porch and smoke with my homeboy BG — may he rest in peace. We'd pass the blunt back and forth, talking about getting out the hood one day, making it big, doing something different.

We were dreamers, even when life didn't give us much to dream about. BG was my peace in the chaos — we understood each other without needing to say much. He'd look out for me, make sure nobody bothered me, always cracking jokes when he saw that sadness hiding behind my smile.

Music was my escape. I started making mixtapes — recording little songs, spitting my pain, my hope, my hustle into every beat.

Bo Pete would always play them when we were over at his house across the street. Bo stayed mixing up his famous "Sex on the Beach" drinks — strong enough to make your chest warm and your problems fade.

We'd be there laughing, drinking, and talking about nothing and everything, while my daughter and my nephew played together on the floor, two little babies who had no clue about the world they were born into.

Bo Pete was the uncle of my sister's baby daddy, and his whole family stayed around the block — the kind of folks everybody in Edgewood knew.

So once we moved there, it didn't take long to fit in.

That's the thing about the hood — if you real, they feel it.

And I was real from day one.

I'd be outside all day, running back and forth from Mason Ave, hanging with friends, catching the latest gossip, hearing about who fought who, who got locked up, who was throwing a party that weekend.

Edgewood had its own heartbeat — wild, unpredictable, but somehow comforting. Even with all the noise, the danger, the broken dreams floating through the air, it felt like home.

Sometimes at night, the sky would light up with flashing red and blue lights from police cars chasing somebody down.

Other nights, the streets would glow soft orange under the streetlights, the wind carrying laughter and music like a lullaby for the restless.

There was drama, there was love, there was pain — but there was also something else. A feeling that, maybe, just maybe, tomorrow could be better.

And so, I stayed — smoking, dreaming, writing, living — in that little corner of Edgewood where trauma met peace and pain met poetry. Because even in the middle of the madness, I still believed I could make it out.

## ***Edgewood Dreams: Part Two***

By the time we got settled in Atlanta, the block started feeling like its own little world. Jay and my sister's baby daddy were out front trapping all day long — sunup to sundown — like they had something to prove to the city. They were young, reckless, and already drowning in fast money. The porch stayed crowded with cousins, loud music, and the smell of smoke drifting through the humid air. You could hear laughter one minute and arguments the next — typical hood rhythm.

Jay's mom would pull up every now and then, always with her man, Rock, riding shotgun like her permanent sidekick. She had this energy that filled up the whole parking lot the moment she stepped out. Her voice, her laugh — she was full of life, the kind of woman who could turn a regular day into a block party. I used to love when she came around; it was never a dull moment with her. She made even the roughest corners of life feel lighter.

But for every good day, there was always a bad one waiting around the corner. My sister and her baby daddy couldn't stay out of it — they'd go from laughing to fighting like a switch flipped in their heads. I think they really did love each other, just too young and too broken to understand what love was supposed to be. The tension in that apartment could get so thick you could feel it pressing against your chest.

Then came that night — the one that changed everything. We were all in the house, just another loud night full of chaos, and out of nowhere, their voices started rising. I could hear my sister screaming, furniture scraping, glass breaking. My heart dropped. Before I knew it, the fight got ugly — real ugly. I ran outside to call the police, my hands shaking, my voice cracking. When I came back inside, everything was spinning — and then I saw my baby.

My nine-month-old daughter. Her tiny face bruised, her nose bleeding, one eye swollen shut.

It felt like my soul got ripped out of my chest. I remember falling to my knees, screaming her name, trying to understand how something so innocent could be caught in that madness. I rushed her to the hospital, tears blinding me the whole drive. The doctor's words hit me like a bullet: "She's been struck in the face."

I was livid – no, beyond livid. I wanted to destroy something, someone. My baby didn't deserve that. None of it made sense.

Not long after, my mom and stepdad drove down to Atlanta. They took one look at the situation, one look at me, and took my baby back with them. Just like that. I was left standing there, empty-armed and hollow-hearted. Alone in that apartment that suddenly felt colder than ever.

Then came the explosion between me and my sister.

We argued – loud, raw, and unfiltered – all that pain, guilt, and anger between us finally boiling over. My mom, my stepdad, and my brother were right there watching when we went at it. My mom tried to step in, and in the chaos, she got knocked down – crutches flying, her face twisting in pain. The sight of her on the floor stopped me cold. My chest burned with regret, but it was too late – the damage was done.

After that, I couldn't stay there anymore. I packed up what little pride I had left and walked out. Jay was long gone by then, our relationship already burnt out like the end of a blunt.

dangerous kind of education, but it paid, and I was learning fast.

That went on for a couple years before he came along — Chuck. Older, smoother, respected. They said he was the best dope cooker in the hood, and from what I saw, they weren't lying. Chuck had that presence — quiet but commanding. When he spoke, everybody listened. And when he wanted something, he got it.

He took me in quick, moved me out of the hood into his place like I was a prized possession. For a minute, I thought I had made it out — no more traps, no more chaos, no more sleeping with one eye open. But it didn't take long before I realized I had traded one kind of prison for another.

Chuck's place had burglary bars on the doors and windows, and when he left, he locked me in — literally. I'd stand by the window, staring out through those metal bars, feeling like a bird in a cage. That was Chuck's biggest flaw — trying to hide me, control me, like I was something he owned instead of someone he loved. I started to hate that feeling.

He was big time — everyone knew his name. Sometimes Mike, another heavy hitter, would stop by to do business. Chuck would make me stay in the back room, away from sight, like I didn't exist. But secrets don't stay hidden long in the streets.

Eventually, me and Chuck fell apart — just like everything else I thought was solid. The moment it ended, I didn't look back. I found myself right back in Edgewood, right back where the streets breathed chaos and comfort all at once. Back where everything started and where, somehow, I still felt most alive.

## ***Edgewood Dreams: Part Three***

When I came back to Edgewood, it was like stepping into a world that hadn't missed a beat — same faces, same corners, same streetlights that never seemed to shine bright enough. The block was still alive, still loud, still full of trouble. Only difference was me — I wasn't the same girl who had left. I had seen too much, lost too much, and loved the wrong man one too many times.

I walked through that hood like a ghost with memories that refused to die. The laughter, the music, the smell of weed in the air — it all felt familiar, but I was seeing it through new eyes now. The same boys who used to flirt with me were now looking at me with respect, maybe even fear. They knew Chuck, and they knew anyone who had been with him wasn't somebody to play with.

But the truth was, I wasn't trying to impress nobody. I was just trying to feel alive again. I started hanging back out on the block, blending in with the same crew that once taught me the game. Only now, I didn't need no teacher — I already knew how to move. I knew how to stack, how to serve, how to keep my face straight even when my heart was racing.

The nights were long, but they made me feel something again. The sound of cars pulling up, the quiet exchanges, the smell of fast food and gun oil lingering in the air — it became normal. I was numb, but in control. For once, I didn't feel weak. I felt powerful.

Still, there were nights I'd go home, close the door, and all that power disappeared. The silence would creep in, reminding me that my baby was gone — living with my mama. I'd picture her face, her little hands reaching for me, and my chest would tighten until I could barely breathe. I hated myself for not protecting her, for letting life turn out this way. But that pain... it's what kept me grinding. It's what made me colder.

The hood had a way of swallowing up your pain — dressing it up in laughter, liquor, and late-night runs. People only saw the outside: the clothes, the confidence, the cash. They didn't see the war going on inside me — the memories, the guilt, the loneliness that came with trying to survive without breaking.

There was a certain kind of peace in chaos though. It was strange. Like, the more things fell apart, the more I knew how to hold myself together.

Every time I hit that block, it was like therapy — twisted, but real. The same street that once broke me had somehow taught me how to rebuild. I wasn't afraid of nobody or nothing anymore. Not heartbreak, not pain, not loss.

That's what Edgewood does — it molds you. It takes that sweet part of your heart and hardens it, turns it into armor.

And even though I didn't know it yet, this was just the beginning of another chapter in my life — one that would test everything I thought I'd already survived.

## ***Edgewood Dreams: Part Four***

Once I got my footing back in Edgewood, it didn't take long for the streets to start whispering my name again. Word travels fast in the hood – faster than truth, faster than time. Everybody knew I was back, and that I wasn't the same girl who used to hang around the block for laughs. I had leveled up.

The first few nights, I kept my distance – just watching. The same corners I used to chill on were still booming. Same traps, same faces, same rules. But something about the way I carried myself now made people move different around me. I had been around the big dogs – Chuck, the real dealers – so I wasn't easily impressed.

I remember one night standing under that flickering streetlight on Edgewood, hoodie pulled tight, hands in my pocket, watching the boys make plays. One of them – a slick-talking dude named Rico – walked up grinning, flashing that gold-tooth smile.

“Damn, you back for real,” he said, lighting a blunt. “I thought you done left us for them rich niggas.”

I smirked, “Ain’t no such thing as rich niggas – just ones that ain’t been caught yet.”

He laughed, and from that night on, it was like I never left. I started moving product again, small at first – slow money, just to feel the game again. But slow turned into steady, and steady turned into power. Before long, I had my own little line running through Edgewood, and people started calling me boss lady.

I wasn't loud about my moves; I just stayed consistent. The hood respected that.

And once respect showed up, so did envy.

Some of the other chicks started side-eyeing me, whispering behind my back, saying I was only eating because of who I used to mess with. But deep down, they knew it wasn't about who I was with — it was about how I hustled. I had a heart like steel and a mind that never stopped calculating.

Still, the drama never stayed far. It seemed like every week, some fight or argument would break out — especially with my sister still being in the mix. She was dealing with her baby daddy on and off, and every time they clashed, the whole block felt it. I swear, half the girls in the neighborhood hated her because of that man. Fights broke out over him like clockwork — yelling, hair flying, somebody always running to grab a shoe or a broom.

There was one girl in particular who had it out for me. I didn't even know her like that — barely spoke to her — but she'd walk past our apartment slow, mean-mugging, every single day. I didn't think much of it at first until I found out the truth. Turns out, she was sleeping with my sister's baby daddy and thought I was the one messing with him. Whole time, she had her hate aimed at the wrong person.

Crazy part? My sister was the one who told me, laughing like it was a joke. "That's what you get for hanging with these girls' boyfriends," she said, smirking. But deep down, I could see it — she was embarrassed, mad, and hurt all at once.

And me? I was just tired of the drama.

Around that time, I started seeing Jay again — one of my sister's baby daddy's cousins. He wasn't perfect, but he had that hood charm, that confidence that made you feel like everything would be alright even when it wasn't. Being with him made me feel seen again — like I still had a soft spot buried under all that hardness life had built around me.

But love in the hood always comes with chaos. And I didn't know it yet, but what started as comfort would soon turn into another storm — one filled with passion, betrayal, and lessons I didn't even know I needed yet.

## ***Edgewood Dreams: Part Five***

Jay came back into my life like a familiar storm – the kind that doesn’t knock, just blows the door wide open. He was one of my sister’s baby daddy’s cousins, so he’d always been around, but this time, it felt different. He wasn’t just another face on the block anymore. He had grown up – still wild, still slick-talking – but sharper. His confidence had turned into swagger, and he carried himself like the streets owed him respect.

We started talking again – late-night calls, pull-ups after dark, slow rides around Edgewood with the windows down and the bass thumping. He had a way of making me laugh even when my heart was heavy, and I hadn’t laughed like that in a long time. Being with him felt like breathing after holding my breath for years.

But peace never stays long in the hood. Love here comes with conditions, and loyalty gets tested every other day.

At first, everything between us was smooth – the kind of connection that makes you forget your problems. Jay would trap during the day, then come find me at night. We’d sit in his car for hours, just talking about everything and nothing – the past, the money, the moves we wanted to make. He had dreams, but the streets had a stronger hold on him than ambition ever could.

Soon enough, we were inseparable. My sister didn’t like it at first – maybe because Jay was family to her baby daddy, or maybe because she knew how the streets could twist a love story into a tragedy. But I didn’t care. For once, I was doing something for me.

The nights we spent together were intense – passionate, but dangerous. Jay had a temper, and I had one too. We'd go from laughing and joking to arguing like we hated each other. I'd be ready to walk out, and he'd block the door, both of us breathing heavy, neither willing to back down. But the make-ups? They were fire. The kind that made you forget why you were mad in the first place.

Still, deep down, I knew it wasn't built to last.

The same streets that brought us together started tearing us apart. The money, the rumors, the jealousy – it all piled up. Girls were always around him, trying to get his attention. He swore up and down he wasn't entertaining them, but the streets always talk. And me? I wasn't the type to sit quiet when I felt played.

One night it all came to a head.

We were at his cousin's spot, everybody hanging out, the music loud, liquor flowing. I saw a girl whisper something in his ear, and he smiled – that smile. The same one he used on me. I snapped. Words started flying, and before I knew it, I had thrown a drink at him. He jumped up, eyes wild, voice booming over the music. The whole room went silent.

Next thing I knew, people were pulling us apart, yelling, trying to calm it down. I stormed out, tears burning my face, my pride cracked wide open.

The next morning, he came by my place like nothing happened. I opened the door ready to go off, but before I could even get a word out, he pulled me close and said, "You drive me crazy, but I can't let you go."

And the truth was... I couldn't let him go either.

That's what made it so toxic – we loved hard, we fought hard, and neither one of us knew how to walk away.

But that kind of love always comes with consequences.  
And as time went on, the drama around us only grew. The same streets  
that once connected us started testing our loyalty, pulling us into  
situations that could've taken everything we had — or worse, taken one  
of us away for good

## ***Edgewood Dreams: Part Six***

After that night with Jay, things were never quite the same. We stayed together – on and off, back and forth – like two magnets that couldn’t help but crash into each other, no matter how much damage it caused. Every time I swore I was done, somehow, he’d pull me back in.

The love was real, but so was the chaos.

Arguments became part of our routine. One minute we’d be laughing and cooking in the kitchen, the next minute pots were flying, words cutting deeper than knives. Sometimes I’d look at him and wonder how something that felt so good could also feel so heavy. He’d say I was too emotional, and I’d say he was too cold – truth was, we were both right. We were too much alike: stubborn, scarred, and used to surviving by fighting.

Jay was still trapping heavy; out front with the cousins and the same crew I’d grown up around. The money was fast, the nights long, and temptation was everywhere. Women loved a man with money and a name, and Jay had both. I’d hear the whispers, see the texts, catch that same smirk on his face when I’d ask questions.

The streets don’t lie – and neither did my intuition.

I remember one night he didn’t come home. No call, no text. Just silence. I sat on the edge of the bed, staring at my phone, anger slowly turning into hurt. When he finally showed up the next morning, eyes red, clothes smelling like liquor and perfume, I didn’t even ask. I didn’t have to. I already knew.

He tried to lie at first, but when he saw the look in my eyes, his voice dropped. “You act like I’m perfect,” he said, his tone cold. “You do dirt too.”

That's when something inside me snapped. I realized I was fighting for a man who wasn't fighting for me — just someone who didn't want to lose me because he knew my worth even if he couldn't honor it.

After that, my heart started changing. I stopped crying. I stopped arguing. I stopped caring where he was. Instead, I started focusing back on me.

I was still out there, moving my own weight, making my own money. I had learned from the best — from Chuck, from the streets — and I knew how to move in silence. I started stacking, saving, thinking about what came next. The streets gave me pain, but they also gave me power.

People started noticing the change in me. I wasn't the same soft-spoken girl anymore. I was colder, sharper — more in control. The dudes respected me, and the women envied me. I had built a name off grit, not off who I was dating.

Still, there were nights the silence got too loud. Nights when I'd lay in bed staring at the ceiling, thinking about everything I'd lost — my baby being gone with my mama, the family that felt more like enemies, the love that kept breaking me in half.

Sometimes I'd wonder if maybe I had turned too cold. If maybe all this toughness was just another way of hiding the hurt. But then I'd think about everything I'd been through, and I'd remind myself — this world doesn't reward softness.

Edgewood was survival, not peace. And if I was going to make it out, I had to be built for it. Jay and I drifted apart slowly after that. We still talked sometimes, still crossed paths, but the spark was gone – replaced by something dull and distant. I didn't hate him. I just didn't need him anymore. And that's when I knew I had grown.

Because for the first time in my life... I wasn't chasing love.  
I was chasing freedom.

## ***Edgewood Dreams: Part Seven***

Just when I thought I had seen it all, life threw me a curveball in the form of a loud, bold, beautiful girl named Marie.

She lived just a few buildings over — always outside, hair laid, nails shining, blasting old-school R&B like she owned the block. Marie had this wild energy that was contagious, the kind that could pull you out of your mood no matter how dark it was. The first time we talked, it was like we'd known each other forever — both of us tired of the same street life, both of us craving something different.

Before I knew it, I was at her house every other day. Her spot became my escape — a place where the air didn't feel so heavy. We'd sit on her living room floor, gossiping, smoking, talking about everything from men to money to dreams. But one topic always came back around: dancing.

Marie could move. I mean, really move.

She'd play a song and start dancing right there in her living room, her hips rolling to the beat, her confidence filling the space like perfume. She looked so free — like she had found her own way to survive without having to fight, argue, or trap. Watching her lit a spark inside me.

One night, she looked at me and said, "Girl, you could do this too. You got the look, the body, the attitude — you'd kill it on that stage."

I laughed at first, brushing it off. But deep down, her words stuck with me. Dancing wasn't just about the moves — it was power, independence, and money on your terms. I started imagining myself under those lights, moving like the music was my story.

That's when I decided to test the waters.

There was this dude in the hood – everybody called him Michael Jordan because he had money, status, and thought he was the MVP of the streets. If you wanted something to happen fast, you called Mike. He'd been around before, doing business with Chuck, so he knew my face and respected my grind.

One afternoon, I told Marie, “Let’s call Mike over. We’ll dance for him – show him what we got. Maybe he’ll sponsor us for a dance permit.”

Marie’s eyes lit up. “Girl, let’s do it!”

When Mike pulled up, he came through clean – fresh fit, gold chain shining, that cocky smirk like he owned every inch of Edgewood. He leaned back on the couch, arms crossed, that street king energy all over him.

The music came on – something slow but heavy – and me and Marie got up and started moving like the room belonged to us. I remember the way the air changed – how every beat hit like thunder in my chest. We danced our hearts out, giving it everything – sweat, confidence, attitude. For those few minutes, nothing else mattered. It was just us and the rhythm.

When the music stopped, the room went silent. Mike just sat there, unreadable, tapping his ring against his cup. Then he stood up, nodded slowly, and said, “Y’all got heart... but that ain’t my kind of business.”

My stomach dropped a little. I had really thought he’d say yes. Marie rolled her eyes and whispered, “His loss.”

I forced a smile and let it go – at least for the moment. But deep down, that performance had lit something inside me. I wasn't embarrassed – I was inspired.

Because when I was dancing, I felt alive. Like all the pain, the anger, the heartache – none of it could touch me when the music was on.

So even though Mike wasn't interested, I knew that moment was the start of something bigger. The hood might not have believed in me yet, but I could feel it in my bones – a change was coming.

And this time, it wasn't about love or survival.

It was about finding me.

## ***Chapter Two: Cache'***

Before I was Cache', I was just Moneak – seventeen, broke, and trying to survive in a city that didn't care if I made it or not. No guidance, no money, no real plan. Just hunger, heat and the sound of sirens at night.

Then I met her.

I don't even remember her real name now, but I remember how she looked: long weave down her back, stilettos clicking on concrete, nails like claws, and a purse so full of cash it barely closed. She smelled like money and freedom. She had her own car, her own place, and when she looked at me, she saw something I didn't see in myself yet.



“You wanna make some real money?” she asked, like it was nothing.

That’s how I ended up in a smoke-thick club in Alabama, bass shaking the floor and lights flashing like sirens. The air smelled like Hennessy and bad decisions. Girls moved like water, all hips and confidence. I was terrified — but more than that, I was hungry.

They called it a party, but it was business. The kind where everybody had a role: dancers, hustlers, security, and the men in the shadows counting bills. Pumps clicked, hoes whispered deals, and I watched from the edge, wide-eyed and ready.

That’s when I met Sir Charles. He was exactly what you think a pimp would be — slick-talking, heavy jewelry, that smooth cold stare — but he had charm. We talked. I told him I sold a little weed on the side, and he laughed, said I was “laid back, smooth with it.”

Then he looked me dead in the face and said:

“You ain’t no Moneak. You Cache’. That’s who you are now.”

And just like that, I was born into the game.



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## ***Edgewood Dreams: The Game***

Dinner that night felt like something out of a movie. The lights were low, soft jazz hummed in the background, and Mike sat across from me with that look—the one that made my heart slow down and my confidence rise all at once. The same man who'd had me screaming in South DeKalb Mall was now sitting their calm, composed, and fine as ever, like nothing in the world could shake him.

He leaned back in his chair, eyes locked on me, and said, “Baby, you gotta understand the game. You ain’t just dancing out there—you’re controlling it. Don’t ever let a man feel like he’s doing you a favor. You’re the reason they come, the reason they spend, the reason they stay.”

I listened, hanging onto every word. There was something about the way he talked—it wasn’t just street talk or hustle talk, it was belief. He saw something powerful in me, something I hadn’t fully seen in myself yet.

“It’s us against everybody,” he said, voice low and steady. “They might look, they might talk, but they ain’t us. You my baby, and you gon’ shine. I don’t care who’s watching.”

His words hit deep. It wasn’t just game; it felt like prophecy. For a moment, the noise of the restaurant disappeared. All I could hear was him. The way he looked at me—like I was more than a woman, like I was magic—made every wall inside me fall.

When we left that restaurant, I felt unstoppable.

That night at the club, I wasn't just dancing. I was performing. I was glowing from the inside out, fueled by every word he'd spoken into me. The crowd could feel it—the energy, the power, the heat. The men weren't just watching; they were hypnotized. Their eyes followed every move I made, like I had them under a spell.

The lights kissed my skin, the bass matched the rhythm of my heartbeat, and all I could think about was Mike's voice echoing in my head: "You run the room, baby."

And I did.

Every spin, every glance, every smile—I owned it. The bills started flying like rain, falling around me in waves. It wasn't just money that night; it was proof. Proof that I could turn pain into power, chaos into control.

By the end of the night, I had so much money it didn't fit in the usual bag. I had to dump it into a big black garbage bag, stuffed full until it could barely close.

Mike just stood there, looking at me with that same proud grin. "Okayyy, wow," he said, shaking his head. "I told you. You just had to believe it."

I laughed, breathing heavy, glowing from the night. "You were right," I said.

He stepped closer, brushed a strand of hair from my face, and whispered, "Told you, baby. You the star of the show."

And for the first time, I really believed it.

## ***Edgewood Dreams: The Turning Point***

That night changed everything for me.

Walking out of that club with a garbage bag full of money wasn't just about the cash — it was about the feeling. I could feel it in my chest, in my bones... that sense of power. For the first time, I wasn't just a girl trying to survive; I was a woman who knew her worth.

The lights from the club still flashed behind my eyes as we drove home, that garbage bag sitting on my lap like a trophy. I kept staring at it — the bills stacked high, the smell of sweat and perfume and money mixing together — and all I could think was, I did that.

Mike kept glancing at me, this proud little smirk on his face. "I told you, baby," he said, tapping the steering wheel. "You just needed to tap into that beast I see in you."

And he wasn't wrong. Something had awakened that night. It wasn't about just dancing anymore — it was about control. I had learned how to use my energy, my presence, my voice, and my beauty as tools, not weaknesses. Every look, every move, every word was strategy now.

When we got home, we dumped that money out on the bed. It covered everything — the sheets, the pillows, even the floor. It was like a green ocean of proof that I had stepped into another level. We just stood there for a second, staring at it, both of us laughing in disbelief.

Mike said, "This just the beginning, baby. You gon' be unstoppable if you keep moving like that."

I looked at him, feeling that fire in my stomach, and said, “Watch me.”

And from that moment on, I was different.

The hustle wasn’t just something I did — it became who I was. I learned how to walk into any room and make it mine. I learned the art of reading people — knowing who had money, who had motives, and who had a weakness for a smile like mine. I wasn’t just dancing for dollars; I was playing chess in a room full of checkers.

That night made me realize that power doesn’t come from who loves you or who hurts you — it comes from who believes in you and what you choose to believe about yourself. And Mike, for all his flaws and madness, saw something in me before I even saw it in myself.

Every night after that, I walked into the club like a storm. Heads turned, men froze, and the air shifted when I hit the floor. It wasn’t arrogance — it was awareness. I knew I was the energy in that building, and once you know that, the game changes forever.

That night was more than a hustle; it was my rebirth.

The girl who used to fight for attention was gone.

The woman who owned the room had arrived.

## ***Edgewood Dreams: The Elevation***

After that night, everything started moving fast — like the universe had finally opened the right door and dared me to walk through it.

The clubs got bigger. The money came faster. And the girl who once danced to survive started dancing to thrive. I had become a name in the city — when I walked in, DJs called my name over the mic, lights followed me like I was the main attraction.

The regulars knew what time it was when I stepped on that stage. The music would drop low, the crowd would hush, and then I'd take my first step — slow, confident, like I owned every inch of that floor. The air would thicken; you could feel it. Men leaned forward, women whispered, and all eyes belonged to me.

Money wasn't a problem no more. My outfits were new every night — glittering heels, silk robes, perfume that announced me before I even spoke. I started pulling up to the club in Mike's Cadillac, music loud, windows down, hair blowing like a movie scene. That car had been a witness to our fights, our love, and now, our success.

Mike and I were a team — Bonnie and Clyde in designer. We partied hard, laughed louder, and counted money until the sun came up. We'd dump it on the bed, the floor, even the kitchen table — piles of bills, a mess of blessings. Some nights, I'd just lay in it, thinking about how far I'd come.

He'd sit beside me, watching me smile, pride all over his face.  
“See?” he'd say. “I told you, baby. You got the juice now.”

And I did.

We started traveling more — Atlanta, Miami, Charlotte — everywhere the money was flowing. I was meeting club owners, promoters, celebrities, and hustlers who'd only heard about "that light-skinned girl from Edgewood who shut the whole room down."

I was shining, and I loved it. The lights, the luxury, the stares — it was intoxicating. Every dollar felt like validation, every compliment a reminder that I had turned pain into power.

But with that rise came more eyes — envy, temptation, and whispers behind my back. Some of the girls started side-eyeing me in the dressing rooms. Some of Mike's friends started acting funny, too — saying things like, "Man, she is running the show now."

And maybe I was. Because my confidence had shifted.

I loved Mike, but deep down, I knew the balance had changed. I wasn't the same girl he pulled out that car years ago — scared, unsure, trying to find her way. I was a woman now, standing tall in stilettos, counting stacks, calling shots.

But at that time, I didn't care about control or balance — I just wanted to keep flying. We were living fast, dressing flashy, and eating good. Every night felt like a movie. Every dollar was a scene.

We were young, wild, and unstoppable — or at least that's what we thought.

## ***Edgewood Dreams: Mall Madness***

By that time, me and Mike had been together for years — six long, wild, unforgettable years filled with every flavor of love and war you could imagine. We were the definition of toxic soulmates — couldn't live with each other, couldn't breathe without each other. Our life was like a movie: one minute we were arguing like enemies, the next we were laughing, making money, and loving like the world might end tomorrow.

We had built a life together out of chaos and chemistry — still hitting clubs, still hustling, still dressing fly. And though we had our share of storms, every time we got through one, our love felt stronger, like fire that refused to burn out.

But baby, that day at South DeKalb Mall? That was one for the record books.

Mike had this friend — I never liked him. Something about his face just irritated my spirit. He always had this slick mouth, always throwing little side comments when I was around. And I could tell he didn't like me either, so it was mutual. He didn't fool me. I knew fake smiles when I saw them.

So, there we were, walking through the mall — me, Mike, and Mr. I-Can't-Mind-My-Business. The vibe was already off. I was trying to keep my cool, but he kept saying little slick things, and Mike wasn't checking him. He was just trying to keep the peace, telling me, "Bae, chill, don't start nothin'. We out here tryna shop, not scrap."

But oh no, my mouth had other plans.

I walked ahead, my heels clicking hard against the tile, mad as hell. I could feel the heat rising in my chest, that familiar mix of pride and pain bubbling up. Then I turned around and let it fly.

“Y’all must be gay or somethin’!” I yelled, loud enough for the whole damn food court to hear. “He must be your man since you don’t ever check him!” Lawd... the looks people gave us. You could hear the record scratch in real life. Folks turned their heads, employees peeked over racks, and somebody’s baby even stopped crying to see what was happening.

Mike’s friend just stood there wide-eyed, looking guilty even though I knew he wasn’t — but that made it funnier. Mike’s face turned red, his jaw tight, and before I could say another word, he came storming toward me like a bull seeing red.

Next thing I knew, boom! — he grabbed me, and we went down together. He slammed me to the floor, but not before I got a handful of his shirt and pulled him halfway down with me. We were rolling like we were in a WWE match — shoppers stepping back, security trying to decide if they should break it up or get popcorn.

I was mad but also halfway laughing because the whole thing was just crazy. I’m yelling, “Get off me, Mike! Let me go!”

And he’s yelling, “Girl, stop embarrassing me in this mall!”

And I’m like, “You should’ve checked your lil boyfriend then!”

By the time we finally got up, clothes wrinkled, pride bruised, and eyes glaring, people were staring like we were the afternoon entertainment. But the funniest part? Five minutes later, we were both calm again — fixing our hair, straightening our clothes, and walking right into Macy’s like nothing ever happened.

That was just us.

He looked over at me, shaking his head with that half-smile.

“Girl, you gon’ be the death of me,” he said.

And I said, “Maybe, but I’ll look good at your funeral.”

We finished shopping like a normal couple, then he took me out to dinner that same night. Sitting across the table from each other, sipping wine, we couldn’t even stay mad. We just kept laughing about the looks on people’s faces at the mall.

Mike reached across the table, took my hand, and said softly, “You know I love your crazy ass, right?”

I smiled, shaking my head. “I know you do. You wouldn’t survive a day without it.”

And that was our love — wild, messy, passionate, and unstoppable. No matter how hard we fought, we always found our way back. Because when it came to me and Mike, peace was too quiet, and we were addicted to the noise.

## ***Edgewood Dreams: The Cadillac Fight (P.1)***

The next morning, I woke up like I'd been hit by a tornado wearing high heels – sore, confused, and somehow still half in love. My wig was lopsided, my heel was in the kitchen, and Mike was laid across the bed snoring like he had fought a bear instead of his woman.

I just laid there for a minute staring at the ceiling, thinking, Damn... I really beat this man with my shoe last night.

Then I started laughing.

That ugly, silent laugh where you can't even breathe for a second. Because deep down, I knew we were toxic as hell – but Lord, we were something else together.

When he finally woke up, he rolled over with that guilty puppy-dog face, like he already knew what was coming.

He reached out, rubbed my thigh, and said in that soft voice he only used when he was trying to calm the storm,  
“Baby, I’m sorry for last night... you know I just get crazy when it comes to you.”

I gave him the side-eye, pretending to still be mad, but inside I was melting faster than butter on hot cornbread. He pulled me close, kissed my forehead, and whispered, “Come on, let’s get out the house today. I’mma make it up to you.”

Now, Mike had a way of saying things that made you forget every bad word he ever said, every fight, every thrown bag. So next thing I know, I’m in his blue Cadillac again – only this time, we riding through the city with the windows down, Luther playing, and my hair blowing like I was in a 90s R&B video.

We hit the mall, and baby, he showed out. He was pulling out cash like a magician. “Get what you want,” he said — and you know I did. I had bags on both arms: shoes, dresses, a new perfume that smelled like “forgiveness and poor decisions.”

By the time we left, I wasn’t even thinking about last night. I was back smiling, giggling, swinging my bags like I was the happiest woman alive. That’s how it always went — the fight, the tears, the makeup gifts, the love. It was our crazy little dance.

Later that night, I was back in the mirror getting ready for the club, humming to myself while curling my hair. My body still ached a little, but my spirit. Back on go. I looked in that mirror and told myself, “Girl, you better get out there and make that money. You done survived worse than a man with a big mouth.”

Mike was in the living room, watching me walk out in my heels — the same kind that nearly took him out last night — and he just shook his head, laughing.

“You somethin’ else,” he said.

I winked and said, “That’s why you love me.”

And off I went — perfume lingering, money on my mind, heels clicking like nothing ever happened. That’s how it was back then: I could go from heartbreak to hustle in less than twenty-four hours.

Some folks would call it crazy, but me?  
I called it survival — Edgewood style.

## ***Edgewood Dreams: The Cadillac Fight (P.2.)***

That night, the air felt different — thick, like it was holding secrets. The city lights blinked against the pavement, cars honking, bass thumping from passing rides. I strutted into the club like nothing had happened the night before, chin high, fresh outfit, new perfume gliding through the air like confidence in a bottle.

Inside, the club was alive — music pulsing like a heartbeat, lights flashing red and blue across sweat-slick faces, dollar bills floating through the air like confetti. The smell of money and liquor was heavy, and I swear it mixed with the scent of redemption.

I headed straight to the dressing room, dropped my bags, and took a deep breath in front of the mirror. The other girls were talking loudly, laughing, gossiping, and I slid right into that energy — my laugh louder, my jokes wilder. Nobody would've guessed I had just been in a full-blown battlefield with Mike the night before. That's the thing about women like me — we could cry in the morning and still shine like diamonds by nightfall.

When it was my turn on stage, the DJ already knew what time it was. My song dropped — something smooth and dirty, with a bassline that made your bones move — and I stepped out there like a goddess reclaiming her throne. The lights hit me just right, the crowd leaned in, and my body took over. Every move was a release — of anger, of love, of every time I'd been hurt and still showed up anyway. I twirled, dipped, flipped my hair, and smiled like I wasn't carrying a world of chaos in my heart.

Then, halfway through my set, I saw him. Mike.

Standing by the bar, hands in his pockets, watching me with that mix of pride and possessiveness that made my stomach flip.

He had that same damn look — like he loved me, but also wanted to lock me in the car forever.

Our eyes met, and for a second, the world went quiet. Then the beat dropped again, and I smiled — a slow, knowing smile — and kept dancing. If he thought last night's fight was something, wait till he saw this performance.

He stayed there, watching me like I was his favorite sin. Every time I spun around the pole, I could feel his stare crawling up my skin. Every clap, every dollar thrown, I imagined him getting just a little madder — but also a little more hooked.

When the song ended, I scooped up my money, winked his way, and walked off like a queen who knew her power.

Later, in the dressing room, the girls were teasing me.  
“Girl, your man out there looks like he wanna marry you or kill you!”  
I laughed, fanning myself with a stack of bills.  
“Maybe both,” I said. “Long as he don’t mess up my money.”

When I came out, Mike was waiting by the door — calm, smiling, that dangerous kind of calm that made me nervous and excited all at once. He grabbed my hand, kissed it, and whispered,  
“You showed out tonight, baby. You mine, for real.”

And just like that, I was back in his spell.  
We walked out together, me counting my cash, him holding me close like we hadn’t just nearly killed each other a day before.

That was us — chaos and comfort rolled into one.  
We fought hard, loved harder, and lived like tomorrow didn’t exist.  
And as that blue Cadillac pulled away from the club lights, I remember thinking, If this ain’t love, it’s the closest damn thing to it.

## ***Edgewood Dreams: Cracks in the Crown***

It's funny how success feels like a dream until the cracks start showing.

At first, everything felt perfect — the money, the attention, the late-night laughter with Mike while we counted stacks and made plans for the future. But when you start shining too bright, people either want your light or want to dim it. And in my world, jealousy was always lurking in the dark corners.

The clubs that used to feel like home started feeling like war zones. The girls I once laughed with in the dressing room now looked at me like I was the enemy.

Whispers followed me everywhere I went — “She only makin’ that kind of money ‘cause of Mike.”

Or, “She think she better than everybody now.”

But what really lit the fuse was Mike himself.

See, he was proud of me — no doubt about that — but the same success that once made him smile started making him insecure. I could see it in the way his jaw tightened when men threw too much money my way, or when he caught them staring too long. He’d try to play it cool, but I knew him too well.

And to make it worse, some of the girls in the club started getting bold — flirting with him, laughing too loud around him, pretending they were just being friendly. I saw it all, every fake smile, every brush of the hand, every “Hey Mike!” that lingered too long.

One night, it all came to a head.

The club was packed – lights flashing, money flying, the energy high. I was in the dressing room getting ready when I heard a group of girls talking, loud enough for me to hear. “Mike said he might come see me after work,” one of them said, her voice dripping with fake confidence.

Before I could stop myself, I was on my feet. I stepped out of that dressing room like a storm on heels. “Oh really?” I said, smiling that kind of smile that lets you know trouble’s coming. “Well, he better take you out to eat first, ‘cause he not eating at home if he do.”

The room went silent. Then the yelling started – hers, mine, everybody’s. Next thing I know, drinks are spilling, wigs are shifting, security’s running in – and Mike’s standing there in the middle of it all, trying to pull me back while I’m ready to tear the whole building down.

He dragged me outside, his hand tight around my wrist.

“Why you gotta act like that?” he shouted. “Act like what?” I fired back. “Like I see what’s in front of me?” The tension between us was thicker than the smoke in the air.

We stood there, breathing heavy, the noise of the club echoing behind us. And in that moment, it hit me – the same passion that made us unstoppable was also the same fire burning everything around us.

After that night, things were never quite the same. We still loved hard, but the fights came more often. Jealousy snuck in between every dollar bill, every late-night whisper, every side glance.

We were still making money, still showing up like the power couple everyone envied – but behind closed doors, the silence between us was starting to get loud. I could feel it – something was shifting.

The hustle that once brought us together was slowly pulling us apart.

## ***Edgewood Dreams: When Love Walked Away***

The end didn't happen all at once.

It came in pieces — like glass cracking slow before it finally shatters.

Me and Mike had been through everything — the highs, the chaos, the money, the fights that left us both breathless — but the love was hanging by a thread. We tried to hold on, but it felt like we were both pulling in opposite directions. What used to feel passionate started to feel poisonous.

One night, after another argument that turned into a cold silence, I knew it was over. I could see it in his eyes — that tired look, like he'd already let go.

He wasn't my Mike anymore.

He was distant, cold, and quiet in a way that hurt worse than any yell ever could.

When he finally packed his things and left, it felt like the air left with him. I stood in the doorway watching him walk away, my arms crossed like I didn't care — but inside, I was breaking.

The apartment felt too big that night. Too quiet.

I sat on the couch staring at the TV without hearing a word of it, tears slipping down my face before I even realized I was crying.

The worst part wasn't losing him.

It was knowing he went and found somebody his own age.

Some woman, who didn't have to fight for attention, who didn't live in clubs or count money on motel beds, who didn't love too loud or burn too hot.

That stung.

It felt like a slap – like he'd outgrown the chaos we built together and left me behind with the ashes.

I wasn't just heartbroken; I was pissed off.

Pissed that he could move on so easily. Pissed that I had to start from scratch. Pissed that the man who once swore he'd die for me was now probably helping someone else pay her rent.

Mike had handled everything – bills, groceries, the lights, the car. He made sure I didn't want for nothing.

So when he left, it wasn't just my heart that broke – it was my whole foundation. Suddenly I was standing there, alone, realizing how much I'd depended on him. And that's a different kind of pain – the kind that makes you feel naked to the world.

For weeks, I was lost. I'd walk around like I was fine, hair done, heels on, face beat – but inside, I was empty.

Then one night, as I sat in the club trying to fake a smile, I saw him.

Money.

That's what everybody called him – and it fit him too perfectly. He had that kind of confidence that filled a room before he even said a word. Tall, smooth, dressed in sharp suits that smelled like expensive cologne and danger. He had a smile that could talk you into sin and a voice that made promises sound like poetry.

From the minute he laid eyes on me, I could tell – he was coming for me. He didn't even ask for my name right away. He just leaned in close, his voice low and lazy, and said,

"Damn, lil mama, somebody must've made God mad, letting you walk around lookin' like that."

I laughed — a real laugh, the first one in a long time — but it was half nerves, half thrill. There was something about him that made me feel seen again. Dangerous, but alive.

He wasn't like Mike.

Mike was stability and history — Money was mystery and temptation. He had a way of making me forget my pain, just by how he looked at me. Every time his eyes met mine, it was like he was reading every broken piece of me and saying, Don't worry, baby. I can fix that.

But deep down, I knew better.

Men like Money didn't fix — they claimed.

Still, I couldn't resist the pull. I was vulnerable, hurting, craving to feel wanted again. And he made me feel like I was the center of the universe. He started showing up more, whispering in my ear, asking questions, studying me like a puzzle he wanted to solve.

It started with a drink, then a conversation, then long nights in the parking lot where the air felt thick with something I couldn't name — part lust, part danger, part need.

And before I knew it, I was caught in his orbit.

The way he spoke, the way he carried himself, the way his hand rested on my thigh when he talked — it all made me forget Mike, forget the pain, forget myself for a while.

I told myself it was harmless, just fun. But somewhere deep down, I knew — I was stepping into another storm.

Different man.

Same fire.

## ***Edgewood Dreams: When Love Turned Heavy***

After that night, things between me and Mike were never quite the same. We still rode around looking like money — matching fits, designer shades, the type of couple that made people whisper when we walked into a room. But behind the flash, something in us was unraveling.

The love was still there, but it had changed.

It wasn't soft anymore — it was heavy. It pressed down on us like the weight of all the nights we'd argued, all the eyes watching, all the money that came with too much attention.

Mike was still my man, my best friend, my protector. But somewhere in that fast life, we both got lost.

He'd get jealous easy — not over another man, but over my power. The way people looked at me, how I controlled a room, how my name started ringing louder than his.

Some nights he'd show up at the club just to watch me dance — not out of love, but out of possession.

He'd sit in the corner, eyes locked on me the whole time, daring anyone to throw too much money my way. The crowd didn't know, but I could feel it — that storm brewing under his cool smile.

And I won't lie — I played with that fire sometimes.

I'd move my hips a little slower, make the men shout louder, just to prove I could. It wasn't even about the money at that point — it was about control.

The club had become my stage, my battlefield, my escape.

But when I came home, it was a different story. The silence after the music stopped was deafening. We'd sit there counting money that couldn't buy us peace. He'd say, "I made you," and I'd say, "We made each other." He'd accuse, I'd defend, we'd yell, then fall right back into each other like the world outside didn't exist.

Our love was passion and poison mixed together — sweet and deadly. We fought hard, but we loved harder.

Some nights we'd argue till the sun came up, then crawl into bed like none of it happened, holding each other like we were afraid to let go.

But deep down, I knew the truth — love shouldn't hurt that much.

Still, I stayed. Because no matter how bad it got, he made me feel like I was unstoppable. He believed in me before I believed in myself. He taught me the game — how to walk, talk, hustle, and shine.

But somewhere along the way, I outgrew the lessons.

And that scared him.

The other girls could feel the tension too. They started using it — whispering things, trying to get under my skin, flirting with him just to see if I'd snap. And sometimes, I did.

Fights broke out left and right — in dressing rooms, parking lots, even on stage once. I wasn't proud of it, but back then, everything felt like war. You had to defend your spot, your name, your man.

And I was defending everything.

The same night I made the most money I'd ever made, I also cried the hardest I'd ever cried. I remember standing in front of the mirror in the dressing room — glitter still on my skin, cash all around me — and feeling empty. Like all the noise, all the lights, all the eyes on me couldn't fill what was missing inside.

And though I didn't know it yet, that love — the same one that once built me — was about to break me down piece by piece. *Tip, Tricks and Trauma 46.*

## ***Chapter Three: Cousins and Cold Games***

Mike was fine. Light skin, curly hair, always dressed clean — grown-man sexy. Not loud or flashy like the boys my age, but smooth. His style said confidence without trying too hard.

He was twenty-eight.

I was eighteen.

But when we talked, it felt natural. Like he saw me. Like he got me. No judgment. No fake sympathy. Just real.

Back at Foxy Lady, it was a different story. The girls didn't like me. Said I thought I was better than everybody. Called me a bitch behind my back, sometimes to my face. But I wasn't trying to make friends — I was there to get money. Still, one girl stood out: Hennessy.

Short, brown-skinned, soft-spoken with a sweet face and a big heart. She was real, not fake like the others. We clicked.

She looked out for me in small ways, helped me get used to the rhythm of the club. But then came the problem — she liked Mike. She didn't know he was my man. I never told her.

And instead of being honest, me and Mike came up with a plan.

We told her we were cousins. Played it off so smooth.

I let her fall for him, knowing the whole time it was a setup.

His idea? Get close, get her to trust him, then see what he could get from her. Money. Gifts. Whatever.

It was messy. But back then, that's how I thought the game worked. One night, he took her home. I didn't even blink. Next day, she came into the club all smiles — until I pulled her to the side.

"Listen," I said, "Mike can't take you home no more."

"Why not?"

"Because... he's my man."

Her face cracked.

"What?" she whispered. "Y'all tricked me?"

I nodded. Didn't even sugarcoat it. She just stared at me, hurt written all over her face. I'd never seen her look so small.

She was upset. Felt played. Lied to. And she had every right. But she didn't blow up. She didn't fight me.

She just said:

"Damn. I can't believe y'all."

It hurt her. But she got over it. And somehow, after all that, we stayed friends. For a long time. Because in that world, forgiveness came quicker than trust —And sometimes, you forgave people just so you didn't have to lose one more person in a life already full of losses.

## ***Fast Life, Slow Pain***

Money was coming in fast. Mike had his hands in the streets — flipping packs, counting stacks, always making moves.

And me? I was holding it down in the club, dancing every night like it was my stage and no one else's. We made a good team.

At least, that's what I told myself.

I started giving Mike money for his product — thousands at a time. No questions asked. I trusted him.

Believed in his hustle like it was mine too. And when the money came back double? It felt like we were unstoppable. We rode around the city in luxury cars — Benzes, Beamers, whatever he picked up that month.

We ate good, lived good, looked like royalty. People knew our names. In the club, outside the club — everywhere. It was me and him. Against the world. But the more money we made, the more Mike started changing.

He got slicker. Colder.

Started moving like he didn't need to answer to anybody.

He was always on the phone, always stepping outside when certain calls came in. And then the worst part — He started messing with the same girls I worked with. Girls I danced beside. Girls I split dressing rooms with. Girls who smiled in my face, then went and fucked my man behind my back.

I'd see the way they looked at him.

The little whispers.

The way they suddenly got “rides home” after work. It pissed me off. Completely. He was bold with it, too. Like I wouldn’t find out. Like I wouldn’t care. But I did. Because no matter how much money we made. No matter how good we looked on the outside – That shit still hurt.

I started feeling like I was investing in a man who was investing in everyone but me.

And deep down, I knew: If I didn’t start looking out for myself – for real this time – This fast life was gonna crash. And I’d be the one left picking up the pieces.

## ***Stripper Fame***

Being a stripper in Atlanta was like being a local celebrity. Everybody knew you. Everywhere you went — restaurants, malls, gas stations — someone would recognize you.

“Hey, ain’t you Cache’ from Foxy Lady?”  
“Girl, you killed it last week!”  
“Lemme hold a dance real quick.”

In this city, strip clubs weren’t a secret. They were the culture. Regular people went. Celebrities. Hustlers. Ball players. Even your baby daddy’s pastor might pull up on a Thursday night. Atlanta loved its dancers. And I was one of them — in the mix, in the light, in the money. There was power in it.

I could walk into a room and heads would turn. I wasn’t invisible like I used to be. I mattered now. But that attention came with weight. People didn’t just see you — they watched you. Judged you. Assumed they knew your whole story because they saw you on stage one night.

Some men treated me like a goddess. Others, like property. Some girls wanted to be me. Others wanted to fight me. And through it all, I still had to perform. Smile. Hustle. Stack. Survive. Because fame in this world didn’t come with security. No bodyguards. No contracts. No guaranteed future.

Just lights, music, and the pressure to keep shining —  
Even when you felt like breaking.



*Tip, Tricks and Trauma 52.*

## ***The GOAT***

Me and Mike were falling apart. I could feel it every time he looked at me like a stranger. Every time he disappeared for hours without a word. The trust was gone. So, I started scouting other clubs —Magic, Peaches, Onyx —Anywhere that felt like a fresh start.

I wanted to see what else was out there. Who else I could be outside of Foxy Lady and a man who stopped choosing me. Then one night, while I was on stage, my neighbor called. “Mike packed all his shit in a rush. Said he was done. Left and went back to his baby mama.” Just like that. No goodbye. No talk. Just vanished — like I never gave him money, loyalty, or love.

I was devastated. But I didn’t fold. Because by then, I was a hustler. My heart hurt, but my spirit didn’t break. I danced six nights a week, barely sleeping, but always stacking. Pain became part of the grind. And that’s when Money showed up. A pimp — smooth talker, sharp dresser, eyes that studied every move I made.

He’d been watching me for a while, waiting.

Said he could fix everything. Said he could “make my life easier overnight.” At first, I brushed him off. I wasn’t trying to be anybody’s bottom bitch. But when life started pressing me — Rent due, car issues, bills stacking — His words started sounding different. One night, I gave in. He got me an apartment. Took me shopping. Changed my whole look — new hair, new clothes, new image.

“I know what men want,” he said. And he was right. He brought me to Dream Girls in Hapeville. Small spot, low ceilings, but it stayed packed. The money flowed, and the men didn’t say no.

Not to me. That club changed everything. It was there that I found my rhythm. My power. My presence.

I wasn’t just a dancer anymore.

I was a brand.

I was Cache’.

And in that club, I became the GOAT.

The greatest of all time.

And everyone knew it.

## ***Foxy Lady***

When we got back to Atlanta, I finally had money in my pocket. Real money. Not “stretch-a-dollar” money. I could buy my own food, grab some clothes, take care of myself without asking anyone for a damn thing. It felt good.

But the club still wasn’t mine yet. There was just one problem: I wasn’t old enough.

Didn’t matter, though. In this game, rules bend if you know the right people. And the right person found me — a pimp, slick with words and connections. He wasn’t my pimp. Not yet. But he got me in.

Foxy Lady. That’s where I really started.

Everything about it felt like a dream dipped in danger — the music, the lights, the way the room watched you when you stepped on stage. I was underage, but no one asked questions. I moved like I belonged, even when I wasn’t sure I did.

That’s also when I met him.

He said all the right things, made me feel protected. Sat in the club through my whole shift like he was proud, watching me like I was his star. But once we got home, it changed.

“You was in his lap too long.”

“You think I don’t see how you look at them tricks?”

The yelling started. Then the fists.

Every time I came home from work, it was another interrogation, another fight. It didn't matter how much money I made or how loyal I was. He didn't trust me — but he expected me to trust him.

Then came her.

We met her at the club one night. She was bold, beautiful, and clearly into me. I wasn't into girls, but he was into her. And to keep the peace — to stop the next fight before it started — I agreed to let her come over.

I thought it would be quick. Simple. A distraction.

He didn't waste time. He was on her like he'd been waiting for the green light. I sat in the living room, alone, hearing it all. Her moans, his grunts, the bed creaking like it might break.

I felt numb. I kept telling myself it didn't matter. That I was keeping him happy, keeping the peace.

But peace never lasts in situations like that.

Eventually, I got tired of the fights. Tired of the jealousy. Tired of giving everything and still being the enemy. Because while he accused me of cheating — he was the one fucking other women. Not me.

## ***Survival Ain't Pretty***

I started seeing the game for what it really was.

Foxy Lady wasn't just a club – it was a jungle. Lights, liquor, lies. Men with too much money and too little respect. Girls with faces beat and hearts broken. Some were there by choice. Some by force. All of us chasing something.

Money.

Freedom.

Validation.

A way out.

Every night, I became Cache'. She was bold. She smiled on command. She walked like she owned the floor, even when her feet hurt and her heart was heavy.

But Moneak?

She was tired.

Tired of faking it.

Tired of dodging jealous rage at home.

Tired of trying to survive when it felt like everyone just wanted to use her.

He was getting worse. The fights weren't just yelling anymore. They got physical. Controlling. He'd go through my phone. Accuse me of shit that never happened. Then he'd turn around and do dirt in the open – like I was supposed to swallow it with a smile.

I'm the man," he'd say. "You wouldn't have shit without me."

Maybe. But I was starting to realize he needed me more than I needed him. The club was teaching me something.

How to read people.

How to flip pain into profit.

How to survive on my own terms — even if those terms were rough. I watched the older girls. Learned how they moved. How they stacked money. How they stayed sharp and soft at the same time.

That's when I started building my stash.

Little by little, I hid money in places he'd never think to look.

Started working extra shifts when he thought I was off.

My body was tired, but my mind was waking up.

I didn't want to live like this forever.

But I sure as hell wasn't going to die in it either.

And the moment I saw a chance to break free, I promised myself I'd take it.

Because being Cache' might've saved me...

But being Moneak again? That would set me free.



*Tip, Tricks and Trauma 58.*

## ***Mason Ave***

The night I left him; I didn't even pack a bag.  
He dropped me off at work like usual, and the second his car pulled off, I was gone. I waved down a cab, climbed in, and told the driver:

“Take me to Edgewood. Mason Avenue.”

I was done.  
No more black eyes.  
No more screaming matches at 3 a.m.  
No more begging him to believe I wasn't cheating while he had women in my bed.

I was only eighteen, but I'd had enough.

When the cab pulled up on Mason, it was like stepping back into my roots. The same corner boys posted up, the same dope talk flying through the air.

I rolled down the window and yelled: “Anybody seen Michael Jordan?” Yeah — that was really his name. Or at least, that's what we called him. Someone pointed at the store.

“He just went in.”

I didn’t wait. I jumped out the cab and ran.

When Mike came out, I rushed him, words spilling out fast.

“He’s been hitting me. Threatening me. Said he’d kill me if I tried to leave.” Mike didn’t flinch. Just nodded slow.

“Don’t trip. I got you now.”

I felt it — safety, for the first time in a long time.

But the problem wasn’t over yet.

“He’s still in my apartment,” I told him.

Mike didn’t blink. He made a call.

“Buddy on the way.” That night, we rolled deep to my spot — me, Mike, and Buddy. We climbed the stairs together, hearts thudding. The bedroom door was locked. Mike didn’t waste time.

Boom — kicked it in like he’d done it a hundred times before.

A man sat up in bed, dazed.

Not the man I was with.

“He got a gun!” I screamed.

Next thing I knew, Buddy – the one who was supposed to handle the situation – jumped down the whole damn staircase like his name was Spider-Man and bolted out the front door.

Me and Mike just stood there.

“How the fuck you leave us,” Mike shouted, “when you was the one we paid to handle this shit?”

We handled it ourselves.

Turns out, the man I’d been with had already moved someone else into my place. Didn’t even have the guts to stay and face me. We kicked the new guy out. I never saw either of them again.

That night, something changed.

I had the club.

I had Mike.

And I had a little peace.

It wasn’t perfect.

But for the first time in a long time, I felt safe.

## ***Boss Moves***

Once he was out of my life, everything changed.

I still had the club, but now I didn't have to look over my shoulder when I left. I didn't have to answer to anyone. I could breathe.

And I had Mike.

He didn't try to control me. He didn't ask who I danced for or how much I made. He just made sure I was straight. If somebody looked at me wrong in the club, Mike stepped in. If I needed a ride, he showed up.

Not perfect – but solid.

With him around, I started moving differently.

I started paying attention – really paying attention – to how the game worked. Not just dancing. The business behind it. The top girls weren't just pretty.

They were smart.

They knew how to upsell, how to pull a man in without giving him anything. They had regulars, routines, and rules.

They didn't move for \$5. They moved for stacks.

So, I studied them. And then I started making moves of my own.



*Tip, Tricks and Trauma 64.*

First, I upgraded my look. No more corner-store outfits.

I started hitting the boutiques, getting custom pieces, learning how to style my body like a brand.

My nails stayed done, my weave stayed laid, and I learned the difference between sexy and cheap.

Then I changed how I worked the floor. I stopped dancing for every man who waved a dollar. I learned to spot the real spenders — the ones who came in quiet and left with pockets empty. I got sharper with my words. Softer with my touch.

And the money? It started pouring in.

I was pulling in rent in a night. Dropping bills like they were light work. I had a stash, a safe spot, and a plan.

But with every dollar came another lesson.

The fake friends.

The backstabbing girls.

The men who didn't take "no" for an answer.

The ones who thought money bought them anything — including me. I had to stay sharp. Always.

Because while I might've been Cache' in the club...

Out there? I was still Moneak. And the world outside didn't care how cute you danced or how much you made. You either played the game or got played. And I was done being played.

## ***Chapter Four More Money, More Pressure***

The money was different now. I was clearing stacks every night. I didn't chase customers — they chased me. From the moment I stepped into Dream Girls, it was game on. My walk? Untouchable. My hustle? Relentless. My name? Heavy.

Every girl in the dressing room watched me. Some admired me. Most hated. I didn't care. I wasn't there to make friends. I was there to win. And I was winning. But with the money came the pressure.

More to lose.

More to maintain.

More people in my pockets.

Money — the man, not the cash — expected more too. He wanted control over everything. What I wore. How I danced. Who I talked to. He'd say it like he was helping:  
“Men don't pay for basic. You gotta stay elite.”  
“Look at you now. You weren't doing all this before me.”  
And maybe he was right. But every time I made a move, I had to wonder: Was it me choosing this life... Or was it him shaping it for me?

The nights got longer. The smiles got faker. The champagne got cheaper the more they poured it on me. Every man wanted me.

Every girl wanted my spot. And every dollar felt heavier than the last. Because when you're at the top, You're the target. I was the GOAT. But I was tired.

Not of dancing – Of being owned by everything that came with it. More money. More pressure. And sooner or later, something had to give.



## ***Circles and Stages***

The bigger my name got, the more doors opened — Or were kicked open. I started adding more clubs to my rotation. Mike was gone, long out the picture. Now it was me, my bag, and my pimp, Money, calling the plays. He said I had the body and look for Strokers. At the time, it was mostly white dancers.

A different vibe — slick, clean, more gentleman's club than hood strip club. To get in, you had to win their amateur contest. No exceptions.

The night I walked into Strokers, it was packed wall to wall. The lights were low, but the stage was lit bright, like a spotlight on judgment.

Men lined the edge of the stage, quiet, money in hand.  
Not loud or wild like other spots.  
These men watched. Calculated.  
They didn't throw unless you earned it.

I knew I had to bring it.

So, I did. I owned that stage. Every move hit. Every spin caught the light just right. I didn't just dance — I performed. By the time the music stopped, I knew. I had the crowd. And sure enough — I won. Hired on the spot.



*Tip, Tricks and Trauma 69.*

Strokers became another piece of my circuit. Monday might be Dream Girls. Tuesday, Peaches. Wednesday at Strokers. Thursday night wherever the money was hottest. Day shift, night shift — I worked both when I had to. But let's be real: The bad ones, the real money-makers, came out at night.

That's when the streets watched.

That's when the bosses showed up.

And I was becoming one of them — Not a boss by title, but by presence. People talked about me. Good? Bad? Depends on who you asked. But they knew my name: Cache'. Money was strategic.

He had five or six girls at a time, each working a different club, handpicked by look and body type. Sometimes two of us would overlap, but mostly, we were spread out —Covering territory like a business.

Three of us got close: Me, Vanilla, and Chronic. Vanilla was cool, real laid back. Chronic had an edge, but she kept it real. We clicked, and Money noticed. So, he moved us in together — Gave us an apartment, three rooms, one roof. We weren't just coworkers. We were becoming sisters. Late nights, we'd come home from different clubs,

Count money on the floor, trade stories about tricks, Laugh, eat, fall asleep mid-conversation. For once, it felt stable. Structured.

But no matter how good it seemed, I knew the game too well to think it'd last forever. Because in this world, everything has a price. Even loyalty. Even friendship. Even peace.

## ***Falling Down***

Sundays were for Jazzy T's. It was the only day my usual clubs were closed, and Money said that crowd would love me. He was right. Jazzy T's stayed packed — the energy was wild, the money was real, and I worked those Sundays like I owned them. I shared that club with Vanilla. It was her main spot, but on Sundays, we doubled up. Money had it all planned out, like always. He was strategic — organized to the bone.

He ran us like a schedule, like a machine. He'd take us out on private dates, one by one. One day it was me, the next day Vanilla. Shopping trips, dinners, hotel rooms. He kept it separate but steady. And we both slept with him. Not at the same time. Never together. Just like everything else, he kept it in rotation.

Looking back, I was young. I didn't know any better. I thought that was normal — just part of how the game went. But the tension? That was building. Vanilla and I were cool for a while. Living together, working side by side, being part of the same "family." But nothing stays sweet when love, sex, and money start crossing wires. That night at Jazzy T's, something snapped.

We were in the dressing room behind the stage, getting ready. I kept running my mouth. Picking at her. I don't even remember why. Maybe I was mad about the night before. Maybe I felt played. Maybe I just wanted her to feel what I felt. I turned to walk down the stairs toward the stage when I heard her voice behind me: "I'm tired of this shit."

Next thing I knew — crack! — she hit me in the back of the head. Everything went black for half a second. Then instinct took over. I turned around, grabbed her, and we went flying down the stairs, fists swinging. We busted through the door mid-fight, right into the main room. Hair pulling. Punches. Screaming. Nails flying.

And who was standing right there, chalk in hand, at the pool table?

Money.

His face said everything — shocked, embarrassed, caught. Two of his girls. Fighting each other in front of a full club. For once, he didn't have a plan. Didn't say a word. Just watched, frozen.

That night? Everything shifted. Because after that, none of us could pretend it was just business anymore.

## ***City to City***

After the fight, me and Vanilla weren't enemies. We were closer. That's how it goes sometimes – You throw hands, then pass the blunt. We were back at the house, chillin'. She looked over and said: "You tryna smoke a blunt, shawty?" I paused.  
"Ummmm... yeah."

We kicked it in her bed, her naked, me in my panties. Smokin', laughing, clownin'. Whatever tension we had? Gone. That fight didn't break us – It bonded us. Soon after, we started traveling. Money had connections everywhere. He started sending us to clubs in different states – New Orleans, the Carolinas, Florida, Memphis.

Wherever the bag was, we were there. One time in Memphis though – man, that shit was a joke. We got booked at this one spot. As soon as we walked in, the manager handed us a Ziploc bag with baby wipes and condoms. Me and Vanilla looked at each other like: "What the hell kinda club is this?" It was a strip club in name – But really? It was a brothel in neon lights.

We tried to work, kept it cute. But after a while we were like: "Shawty, fuck this." We made what little money we could, got drunk off cheap liquor, and when Money came to pick us up asking for the bag – We told him we spent it.

"Don't ever bring us to no spot like that again."

And just like that, we were back on the road. Headed to Atlanta.

Back where we belonged. But we kept moving. State to state. City to city. Club to club. And when we weren't out of town, we were doing private parties back home. Some of the biggest? BMF parties. Platinum 21. Hotel suites. Doesn't matter the spot — the energy was crazy.

Money on the floor like carpet. Weed in the air thick as fog.  
Women everywhere. Men everywhere.

Power in every corner. That's where I saw my first real make it rain moment. Not just a few bills — I'm talking thousands flying through the air, covering the floor wall to wall. We left with bags.

And every time, the money went to our pimp. By then, selling pussy had become as normal as breathing. I was young, pretty, petite, light-skinned — I knew what I was working with.

The dancing made money, but the extra. That doubled it. Some nights, I'd leave the club with bands, then link with a customer after and make even more. I dealt with celebrities, too. Some you'd recognize right away — athletes, rappers, actors. I won't say names. But just know, they paid like everybody else. I danced for Jagged Edge once.

That was just one night in a long list of wild nights that made up my career. I was deep in it now. The clubs, the streets, the parties, the game. And there was no turning back.

## **Burnout**

I had everything – Money, reputation, connections. I could walk into any club in Atlanta, and the DJ would shout my name: “Cache’ in the building!” And the crowd would go crazy. I was in too deep to be regular. But too tired to keep pretending I was good.

Because under the lights, behind the makeup, past the money – I was drained. Night after night. Club after club. City after city. Wake up, get dressed, hit the stage, make them want you. Leave, sell a little more of yourself. Then start all over again. I’d sit in the backseat of whatever car Money picked us up in, looking out the window, wondering how I got here.

Eighteen turned into nineteen, nineteen into twenty... Time was flying, And I was stuck on repeat. The same clubs. The same men. The same fake laughs, forced smiles, and heavy secrets.

I didn’t talk about it much, not even to Vanilla. She had her own ways of coping. So, did I. Sometimes we’d still laugh and smoke and act like we were good.

But deep down? I was tired. Tired of giving so much and still feeling empty. Tired of walking into rooms that loved Cache’ but didn’t know Moneak. Tired of pretending like this was all I ever wanted. One night, I was sitting in the dressing room – Money in my bag, lashes halfway off, feet swollen – And I looked in the mirror and didn’t even recognize myself. I asked the mirror, quietly:

“Is this it?  
Is this all I’ll ever be?”  
I didn’t have an answer.

But for the first time... I wanted one. Because I wasn’t just tired –  
I was starting to dream about something else. Something more.  
I didn’t know what that “more” looked like yet. But I knew I wouldn’t find it in  
the club.

Not like this.

Not forever.

## ***Edgewood Dreams: Forced Choices***

After Money, after the chaos, after the nights of lust, danger, and adrenaline, I thought I knew what I wanted. But life... life had other plans.

I met a new man — calmer, softer, easier in some ways, but I didn't love him. Not the way you think of love, the kind that makes your heartbeat faster, the kind that makes you forget the world. I loved what he could do for me. He offered stability, a roof, some sense of security I'd been craving ever since Mike left, and Money had almost taken me apart.

We ended up in drug court in Cobb County; a place I never thought would dictate my future. And that's when it happened — the kind of moment that stays with you forever, even when you try to erase it.

I didn't get proposed to. I didn't get the fairy tale. The judge handed it down like law, like punishment, like it was my only choice: marry him or go to jail. The word "marriage" had never felt so heavy. It wasn't a promise. It wasn't a love story. It was a sentence.

I remember sitting there, trembling in that courthouse chair, trying to process it. My heart was screaming no, my brain was screaming yes — because I had no choice. The air smelled like old paper and fear, the walls echoing with the cold authority of someone else controlling my life.

I married him, but in my mind, I didn't.

I didn't honor it, not truly. The ring on my finger wasn't a symbol of love — it was a reminder of what life had forced me to do. Every time I looked down at it, I felt the sting of injustice, the shame of being trapped, and the bittersweet realization that sometimes survival means bending your heart in ways that break it.

Yet, even in all that confusion, all that pain, life gave me a gift.  
My beautiful daughter.

Holding her for the first time, looking into her tiny eyes, hearing her cry, I knew that some good had come from the worst. She was mine, my own blood, my own heartbeat outside of me. In that moment, nothing else mattered — not the jail, not the forced vows, not the emotional turmoil. She was my reason, my redemption.

Even though the marriage was forced, I carried on. I played the part — because survival doesn't always come with a choice. But inside, I remained myself. Untamed. Unbroken. Not in love with him, but fierce enough to claim my daughter and make her my world.

It was horrible — emotionally devastating, humiliating, confusing — but somehow, it was worth it. I had been beaten down by men, by life, by circumstance, but I had walked out with something precious. Something that belonged to me no one could ever take.

And in that storm of forced love, chaos, and obligation, I learned something crucial: You can survive the worst, bend when you must, and still emerge whole when you have a reason to fight.

Holding my daughter in my arms, I whispered to her, soft and steady, “You’re my everything. And I’ll make sure your life is better than mine.”

Even in pain, even in compromise, even in heartbreak — that was my power. That was me.

## ***Marietta Dreams***

The moment I got my first daughter back from my mom, something inside me shifted.

I had fought, cried, and survived to get her — and now, she was mine again. Her little hands gripping mine, her eyes searching mine for the comfort she'd been missing, I felt a kind of love I didn't even know I could feel.

We moved into a beautiful house in Marietta, Georgia — the kind of home that made you feel like life had finally caught up with you. White picket fences weren't necessary, but they had a charm all their own. The floors gleamed under the warm lights, the backyard was perfect for a child, and the kitchen smelled faintly of fresh coffee and ambition.

My husband, the man I never loved but who had given me a life I couldn't have imagined on my own, spoiled me. Everything I wanted — from new clothes to fancy dinners to cars with engines that purred — was at my fingertips. The kind of luxury I had only dreamed of in those rough club nights, and chaotic streets was now my reality.

But still, I kept a wall around myself.

I am a Scorpio — my feelings are deep, hidden, and sharp. I rarely let anyone see them, and emotions for me are a currency I guard carefully. He was emotional — more than I could handle. He wanted love and warmth in ways I didn't know how to give. He wanted softness, affection, daily reminders that I "cared." And I... I wasn't built that way.

So, I watched, observed, and lived life on my terms. I smiled, laughed, and enjoyed the luxury, but I never let him touch the real me. He didn't get to see the nights when I stayed up with my daughter, staring at her tiny fingers, imagining the future I would carve for her. He didn't see the part of me that still remembered the chaos, the struggle, and the hustle that had brought me here.

Even so, life was... good.

Better than good – it was calm. The kind of calm I had longed for after years of fire and storms. My daughter and I built a little world together inside that house. We had breakfasts on the back porch, laughter echoing through the kitchen, and evenings cuddled on the couch, her small hand in mine. She was my anchor, my heartbeat outside of me.

I dressed in my finest clothes, walked the streets with confidence, and even in luxury, I remembered the streets that built me. I knew how far I had come – from Edgewood nights filled with chaos to Marietta mornings filled with comfort.

And for a while, I let myself believe I was happy.

## ***Luxury and Loneliness***

Life in Marietta felt like a dream — except dreams have shadows.

My husband continued to shower me with gifts, attention, and everything I could ask for. He made sure my daughter had everything she could need. We had dinners that tasted like decadence, trips that made Instagram jealous, and evenings where I could just sit back and watch life move around me.

And yet, there was a distance I could feel.

He was always trying to touch me emotionally, to break through the armor I had built over years of survival. But I couldn't. I had learned to live with my feelings tightly sealed, to compartmentalize pain and desire alike. Scorpio instincts, sharpened by years of fighting for survival, told me to keep my heart under lock and key.

I would smile at his declarations, nod at his passionate words, and let him think he had my full attention — but inside, I was somewhere else. Somewhere quiet, somewhere calm, somewhere untouchable.

Even so, I allowed myself small pleasures: the feel of new silk on my skin, the thrill of driving a car I didn't have to earn the hard way, the joy of seeing my daughter play in the yard without fear. I learned to savor life in its quiet abundance, the kind of abundance that comes after struggle.

Some nights, I would sit on the balcony, watching the city lights, and feel the tension between comfort and emptiness. I had everything I wanted materially, but I didn't have the fire — the chaos — that had once defined me. That part of me still longed for the thrill, the unpredictability, the passion that had built me.

But I told myself it didn't matter.

I had survived, I had my daughter, I had a home. Life was good — better than good. And for someone like me, someone who had lived in the storm, that was more than enough.

Still, even in the luxury, I stayed sharp, aware, always measuring, always planning. Because I knew: calm today doesn't guarantee calm tomorrow. And in my life, the storm was never far away.

## ***The Calm Before the Storm***

For months, life in Marietta felt like a dream carefully constructed around comfort and routine. My daughter laughed again, filling the house with life and light, and I smiled more than I had in years. I could walk into any store, drive any car, wear any outfit — the world was literally at my fingertips.

And yet... there was a restlessness inside me I couldn't shake. Luxury had a way of making you see yourself clearly — and what I saw wasn't just a mother, a wife, or a woman with comfort. I saw a fighter who had survived chaos, betrayal, and heartbreak. I saw a girl from Edgewood who had learned to hustle and command attention. I saw a woman who craved more than silk sheets and dinners.

My husband's love was genuine, but it was suffocating in its tenderness. He wanted to hold my heart like a fragile thing, but I didn't allow my heart to be held. My emotions were trained, armored, and disciplined. The Scorpio in me thrived on control, mystery, and power — and he couldn't give me the kind of freedom I needed to feel alive.

So I adapted. I played my part. I smiled, I laughed, I let him believe he had me. But the truth was, a storm was building inside me — quiet at first, almost imperceptible, until one night it whispered loudly in my ear.

## ***Fire Beneath the Luxury***

It started small. A night out in Marietta, a glance at myself in the club mirror, a memory of the thrill I once lived for. I felt the pull — the old Edgewood fire that had never truly left me.

I began testing boundaries, small things at first: a late-night walk alone, a trip to a store without telling him, feeling the city outside the walls of my comfortable home. I watched people, studied interactions, remembered the hustle that had once defined me. I realized I was craving more than luxury — I wanted freedom, control, and power over my own life.

The tension grew every day. My husband wanted me close; I wanted to feel alive. My daughter needed me; I needed space to breathe. I loved my life materially, but emotionally, I was suffocating.

One night, I stood on the balcony, staring at the Marietta skyline, feeling the wind whip through my hair. The house was quiet, my daughter asleep, my husband watching TV inside, oblivious to the fire building in me. I could feel it in my veins: desire for life, for challenge, for passion beyond the walls of comfort.

That fire — the one that had driven me through Edgewood nights, through heartbreak, through chaos — it wasn't gone. It was waiting. And I knew, deep down, that sooner or later, I would have to follow it.

Because no amount of silk sheets, luxury cars, or dinners could replace the power I felt when I owned my own destiny.

The calm of Marietta had been beautiful — it had given me my daughter, comfort, and safety.

But storms have a way of returning. And I was ready to meet mine head-on.

## ***Love in Marietta***

The first time I met him, it didn't feel like love. It felt like comfort – something I hadn't felt in a long time. He had that presence about him: quiet power, money in his walk, a certain confidence that told me he was used to being in control. At that point in my life, control was something I had been chasing without realizing it – someone who could make me stop fighting the world for a second and just breathe.

He was heavy in the game, but you'd never know it by the way he carried himself. Clean cars, crisp clothes, and that kind of charm that made you forget to ask questions. When we got together, it was like life finally exhaled. He spoiled me and my daughter like we were royalty – anything I wanted, he made sure I had. Designer bags, trips, jewelry that caught sunlight when I moved. We lived in a beautiful house in Marietta, Georgia – big front yard, two-car garage, rooms that echoed when you laughed too loud.

For the first time, I felt like I had made it. I got my first daughter back from my mom, and the three of us looked like the picture of happiness – like the world finally gave me a little grace after all the hell I'd been through.

But sometimes peace comes with its own kind of noise. He was sweet, but too emotional. Sensitive in a way that rubbed against every wall I had built to survive. He wanted to talk through everything, feel through everything. And me? I was a Scorpio – cool on the outside, fire in the core, but only when provoked. My heart was a vault that didn't open easily, not even to people who said they loved me.

His sensitivity made me impatient. I couldn't handle all the "why do you act like this?" or "talk to me, babe." I had spent too many years learning how not to feel — how to keep it together when everything fell apart. So, when he cried, I froze. When he got mad, I went cold. He thought I was heartless; I thought he was too soft.

Still, he gave us everything. My daughter had a room full of toys, a pink bed with twinkling lights, and I could finally cook in a kitchen that smelled like peace instead of survival. But deep down, I felt disconnected — like I was living someone else's dream.

I would look at him sometimes and wonder what love was supposed to feel like. Because I had the house, the cars, the clothes, the family — everything I thought I wanted — and still, something in me was missing. Something I couldn't name.

Life was good, but my soul was restless. And whenever that feeling creeps in, you already know — something's about to shift.

## ***When It All Fell Apart***

The shift came fast. One minute, he was on top of the world — running money through the streets, making power moves — and the next, he was gone.

He got locked up on some gambling charges, nothing like the game he was really in, but enough to make everything crumble. I remember the day I found out like it was yesterday — that sharp, hollow ache in my stomach, the silence in the house so loud I could hear my own heartbeat. The man who had made sure we had everything was suddenly behind bars, and I was standing in that big, empty house wondering what the hell I was supposed to do next.

I stayed for a while, trying to hold things together, pretending the walls weren't closing in. But when love turns cold and money slows up, reality hits different. We drifted apart, the phone calls stopped, and that once-perfect life faded like smoke.

I packed up everything — the furniture, the clothes, the pieces of the dream we built — and put it all in storage. I even put his safe in there, not knowing what was really inside. It was just one more thing to tuck away, like another closed chapter I didn't want to think about.

Then life started moving fast again. I was out of town for a bit, trying to figure out my next move, trying to breathe. Somewhere in between the chaos and forgetting to pay the damn bill, I lost the storage. Everything.

When I found out, I felt numb. I thought about all those things — my daughter's toys, my memories, that safe. Later, someone told me it had been full of money. A lot of money. I just sat there, staring at the wall, not even crying. Just... still. Because by then, I had already lost so much in life that losing more didn't shock me anymore. It just reminded me that nothing was ever really mine to keep.

Time passed. Seasons changed. My heart hardened a little more. I learned how to survive without leaning on anyone, without expecting anything to last. But life, as always, has a way of surprising you when you least expect it.

Because not long after, I found out I was pregnant again – with my third daughter.

And even though my world was a mess, when I felt her kick for the first time, I realized I still had something left inside me that couldn't die: hope.

She became my light in that dark season – proof that even after loss, after chaos, after love gone wrong, life still found ways to create something beautiful.

## ***The Quiet After the Storm***

Pregnancy has a way of making you sit still with yourself — no matter how fast the world around you moves.

When I found out I was pregnant again, it was like time froze. I remember holding that test in my hand, staring at those two pink lines, my heart caught somewhere between shock and silence.

I had just lost everything — the house, the man, the storage, the life that once looked so perfect from the outside. And now here I was, carrying another child into a world that had already shown me too much pain.

At first, I didn't know how to feel. I didn't cry. I didn't smile. I just sat there on the edge of the bed, my hand resting over my stomach, wondering how I was going to do it again — how I was going to love again when I barely had anything left to give.

Nights were the hardest. The house I stayed in then was quiet — too quiet. The kind of quiet that makes you start remembering every sound from your past. The laughter that used to fill your kitchen. The slam of a door after an argument. The hum of a man's voice you'd gotten used to hearing. And suddenly, silence felt like punishment.

Some nights I'd lay awake, watching the ceiling fan spin slow circles above me, replaying every decision that led me here. I thought about the man I once loved — how we went from luxury to letters from prison. I thought about the safe I lost, not just because of the money, but because it felt like the last piece of that chapter. And I thought about how maybe that loss was God's way of clearing my path for something new — something real.

Pregnancy changes your heart in strange ways. As my belly grew, I started to feel emotions I hadn't allowed myself to feel in years. I would talk to her — my unborn daughter — like she could hear me.

"I don't know what's next," I'd whisper, "but you gon' be loved. You gon' be safe."

There were moments I'd break down out of nowhere. Driving, cooking, folding clothes — it didn't matter. Tears would just fall, quiet but steady. Not from weakness, but from release. For so long, I had been surviving — fighting, hustling, keeping a straight face when everything inside me was breaking. But now, with her growing inside me, I couldn't hide from my own heart anymore.

I started seeing life differently. The pain, the losses, the betrayals — they didn't destroy me. They carved me. They stripped me down to who I really was, so I could rebuild on truth instead of illusion.

There were still hard days, of course. I didn't have all the answers. I was still learning how to be soft again, how to trust again, how to believe that life could still give me something worth keeping. But there was peace in the smallest things — morning light through the blinds, the sound of my daughters laughing, the feeling of my unborn child rolling beneath my ribs.

One night, I remember stepping outside, barefoot on the porch, the Georgia night air warm and still. The moon was full, hanging heavy above the trees. I placed my hand over my stomach and whispered, "Maybe this time, I'll get it right."

And for the first time in a long time, I meant it.

That baby — my third daughter — came into my life like sunlight breaking through the storm clouds. She didn't fix everything, but she reminded me that I could start over. That even broken women can still bloom.

I realized then that strength isn't about never falling apart. It's about falling a thousand times and still getting up, even if your legs shake while you do it.

And that's what I did. I got up.

Because no matter how many times life stripped me bare, I refused to stay down.

I had too much fight left in me — and too many little eyes watching to see what survival really looked like.

## ***Rebirth of a Woman***

When my third daughter was born, something inside me changed – not just as a mother, but as a woman.

Holding her in my arms, I felt a peace I hadn't known in years. She was so small, yet she carried a strength that mirrored my own – as if God Himself placed her in my life to remind me that beauty can still rise from brokenness.

Her tiny fingers curled around mine, and in that moment, I realized how much I had been carrying alone. All the pain, all the disappointment, all the nights I went to bed angry at the world for taking so much from me – it started to melt away. Not because life suddenly got easier, but because I had something new to live for.

This time was different. I wasn't living for survival anymore – I was living for purpose.

The days weren't glamorous. There were mornings when I woke up exhausted, with bills piling on the table, no man by my side, and no one to lean on but God. But even in that struggle, I felt something powerful: peace. The kind that doesn't come from money or comfort, but from finally knowing who you are.

I had been through it all – abuse, betrayal, heartbreak, loss – yet here I was, still standing, with a baby on my hip and fire in my eyes. I started moving different. I no longer begged people to stay. I stopped explaining my worth. I learned how to be okay with silence.

Some nights, when the house was quiet and my girls were asleep, I'd sit at the kitchen table with a glass of wine and just stare at the flicker of a candle. That's when the memories would come — the house in Marietta, the cars, the laughter, the man I once loved, the safe full of money I'd never see again. But instead of crying, I'd smile a little. Because now, I understood that all of it — the love, the loss, the pain — had prepared me for this version of myself.

I was softer but stronger. Wiser but still wild enough to dream. Every day, I worked on building something new — a home filled with peace, not tension. A heart that loved without fear. A life that didn't depend on anyone else's validation.

Motherhood looked different now. My daughters became my reflection — each one holding a piece of my story, each one reminding me that my legacy wasn't about where I came from, but how far I had come.

I started praying more. Not those desperate, please-God-fix-it prayers, but quiet conversations with Him — the kind that come from gratitude. "Thank you for not letting me die in my brokenness," I'd whisper. "Thank you for giving me another chance to get it right."

There were still storms, of course. There always are. But I had learned how to stand in the rain without falling apart. I had learned how to smile through the pain and keep moving forward, even when I didn't know what was waiting on the other side.

I wasn't the same woman I had been in that big house in Marietta. Back then, I had money and comfort but no peace. Now, I had peace, even if I had to fight for it every single day.

And that's the kind of wealth money can't buy.

As the years went by, my daughters grew, and so did I. The things that once broke me became the foundation I stood on. The woman who once lost everything now had everything that truly mattered – love, faith, and freedom.

Sometimes I look in the mirror and barely recognize the woman staring back. Not because she's unrecognizable, but because she's finally whole. I still carry my scars, but I wear them like diamonds now – proof that I survived what was meant to destroy me.

And if you asked me today who I am, I'd say this:

"I'm a woman who's been through hell and came back shining.  
I'm a mother who turned pain into purpose.  
And I'm still learning how to love myself in all the ways I once begged others to."

This was my rebirth – quiet, powerful, and real.

Because sometimes, the biggest glow-up isn't about money, looks, or success.

It's about peace.

It's about healing.

It's about finally being able to say – I made it through.

## ***Reinvention***

After my third daughter, I needed a break — not just from love, but from the life that had started to wear me down. The lights, the late nights, the noise — all of it had begun to blur together until I couldn't tell who I really was anymore. So, I packed up, left it all behind, and headed back to Memphis.

Coming home was bittersweet. The streets felt familiar, but I wasn't the same woman who had once walked them. I had seen too much, lived too fast, and felt the kind of pain that either breaks you or builds you. For me, it did both.

I decided it was time to do something different — something stable, something that didn't depend on fast money or fake smiles. So, I enrolled in school for medical billing and coding. At first, it felt strange sitting in a classroom again, surrounded by women who looked like they had it all together. But as the days went by, I started finding my rhythm.

I'd show up, take notes, and push through, even when life tried to knock me off track. My nights were long, my mornings came too early, but the determination in me was stronger than the exhaustion. I wanted to prove to myself that I could do it — that I could rise in a different way this time.

Graduation day came, and I remember sitting there in my cap and gown, my name echoing through the room as they called me up. My daughters were watching, and that alone made the tears fall. I did it for them. I did it for the woman I used to be — the one who never thought she'd make it this far.

But life has a funny way of throwing curveballs right when you start to breathe easy.

Not long after graduating, I found out I was pregnant again – this time with my son. And like always, drama followed. It was never simple with me. Every pregnancy came with its own storm, and this one was no different.

The relationship was rocky, full of tension, misunderstandings, and those long nights where love turned to silence. I wanted to be happy – to build something solid – but chaos always seemed to find its way to my doorstep. Still, when my son was born, it felt like a piece of my heart had been returned to me. He was my calm in the madness – strong, sweet, and protective even as a baby.

But life didn't stop there. A little while later, I had my youngest daughter – my last baby, my final chapter in motherhood. Each child taught me something different about myself, about love, and about survival. But by the time she came, I knew it was time to move different.

After having her, I made a decision: I was going back to the game – but not the same way. This time, I wasn't desperate, I wasn't naive, and I damn sure wasn't dancing for attention. I was dancing for me.

When I stepped back into that world, it was like the lights recognized me. The energy shifted. I had experience now – not just in dancing, but in life. I knew how to read people, how to move with confidence, how to command the room without saying a word.

The money came fast, but this time I handled it smarter. I invested, saved, moved strategic. I wasn't chasing validation — I was building stability. The same stage that once drained me became my platform for power.

And then, I decided to take it to another level.

I went to Miami and got my breasts done — not for anyone else, but for myself. For the first time, I wanted to look in the mirror and see the woman I felt inside: bold, confident, unstoppable. That trip was more than a cosmetic change — it was a statement. A declaration that I was stepping into my prime.

When I came back, I lit the scene on fire all over again. The clubs, the lights, the money — I dominated every night. My name carried weight. My presence turned heads. I had leveled up in every way — mentally, emotionally, financially.

But this time, I wasn't doing it to escape. I was doing it to elevate.

Because I finally understood something: power doesn't come from what you have — it comes from knowing who you are.

And I knew exactly who I was now — a survivor, a mother, a hustler, and a woman who refused to be defined by her past.

This was my era of reinvention.

I had gone from trauma to triumph, from broken to beautiful, and I wasn't done yet.

Because the same woman who once lost it all... had just learned how to win smarter.

## ***Chapter Five On My Own Terms***

I outgrew the game —Or at least the way I was playing it.

The pimp.

The chaos.

The control.

The crumbs.

I didn't want any of it anymore. I woke up one day and realized: I was the prize. The goose with the golden eggs. I didn't need a pimp. I was the business. So, I cut ties. No goodbyes. No breakdowns. Just gone. I started dancing on my own terms. No cuts. No middlemen. No “give me your bag” after a long night.

Every dollar I made was mine. And the freedom? It felt like breathing for the first time. I picked up at Club Wax — Gritty, loud, money-heavy, and raw. That place had a heartbeat. And it was there I met Special.

At first, we didn't speak. Just side-eye glances as we passed each other on the floor. Both of us moved like we had something to prove. But energy recognizes energy. She was sharp. I was sharp. Real know real.

Then one night, I called my homeboy Bugoloo to pick me up from the club. He was from New Orleans – I used to love hearing him talk.

When he pulled up, Special was in the car.

Small world. She asked: “Can I use your bathroom real quick?”

I looked at her and said: “Girl, no – they be trippin’ in there.”

She laughed. “Bet. I get it.” And just like that, we clicked. From that night on, it was Cache’ and Special. A unit. A tag team. A movement. We worked the floor like it was a stage built for two. Our energy fed off each other. We had chemistry – smooth and sharp, sexy and ruthless.

Our clientele grew. The money doubled. People knew: If you weren’t talking money, we weren’t listening. We weren’t there for love. We weren’t there for attention. We were there to run it up. And we did. The club knew our names. The city did too.

And for the first time, I wasn’t following anyone else’s plan. I was living mine.

## ***Club Wax Queens***

Special wasn't just my best friend—she was my other half. The yin to my yang, the mirror to my soul. We were two of the same. We thought alike, moved alike, even breathed in rhythm when the bass dropped in the club. If I had the hustle, she had the finesse. We didn't compete—we completed. It was like God had split one savage-hearted stripper into two bodies and dropped us both on the same stage at Club Wax.

When we stepped into the club together, it was game over for every other dancer in the room. Tricks didn't stand a chance. They'd lock eyes on us—Special with her sly, seductive smile, me with my dangerous curves and hungry eyes—and before they could blink, they'd be reaching for their wallets. Tag team champions. That's how we moved. Smooth. Ruthless. Beautiful. Unstoppable.

We made Club Wax ours. Our house. Me, Special, Aspen, and Silky—we called ourselves the squad. But really, it was me and Special who ran that damn place.

After hours, we took the show on the road. Dirty Rats. Hole-in-the-wall clubs where anything went and nothing was off limits. That was our playground. We'd slide in like we owned the joint, sit right up on the bar with our feet in the chairs, puffing on Backwoods like we were born with smoke in our lungs.

Drinks in one hand, molly melting under our tongues. We'd climb up on the bar like goddesses, fresh J's on our feet, pants halfway down, shirts lifted just enough to tease. Hair always laid, bodies glistening from the club lights. And the men? They were done for. Caught in a haze of lust and greed and fantasy. We'd pull 'em in with a look and have them at the ATM before they even knew what hit 'em. Sometimes they'd throw stacks at us still wrapped in money bands. That was power.

We weren't just dancers. We were legends.

Special was more than my best friend—she became my soul sister. Her mama became like a second mama to me. We did everything together—private parties, road trips, wild nights that turned into even wilder mornings. I never had a bond with anyone like I had with her—and I still don't. Her name said it all. She was Special in every way.

But life wasn't always glitter and cash.

She lost her son a year before I lost my daughter. We shared a pain that few could ever understand. The kind that never leaves you. The kind that settles into your bones and reshapes your soul. I loved her boys like they were mine. And when Beady passed, a piece of all of us went with him. Heaven took him too soon and left us broken and gasping for peace.





*Tip, Tricks and Trauma 102.*

Oh—and I can't forget Re. Re was another one I got close to, tight like family. But Lord, Special couldn't stand her. They fought like wildcats more times than I could count. One night, in the middle of another one of their brawls, a bottle came flying—and guess who got hit? Me! Damn bottle cracked me right in the side of my head and guess what? It was Special who threw it—by mistake, of course. But I couldn't even stay mad. That was just us. Always into something. Always riding that wild line between chaos and loyalty.

Special didn't like me having other friends. She was territorial like that. If she had her way, I would've been hers and hers alone. But that was love—the messy, loud, fight-for-you, ride-for-you kind of love. The kind that doesn't die, even when everything else does.



## ***Glamour and Gunfire***

I became a beast on stage. When I danced, money didn't just rain – It poured. I owned that spotlight. My presence hit before I even touched the pole. I wasn't just a dancer anymore. I was an entertainer. A performer. A name they couldn't forget.

Cops, lawyers, bail bondsmen – I had them all. High rollers, hood stars, even men in suits with nine-to-fives. I moved through every circle. I had it all – or so I thought. But the nightlife? It's not just glitz and glam. It's glitter on a loaded gun.

Behind the lights and the love was danger – real danger.

I had a pimp try to kidnap me. A customer once tried to drag me into the woods, planned to rape and kill me. But I made it out. I survived. And that's when it hit me – No matter how good the money was, it wasn't worth dying for. One night, it almost happened for real.

My pimp tried to pull a girl from the club into the life, And her baby daddy found out. After the club let out, we got in the car like normal, thinking the night was over. We hit the expressway. Quiet ride. Then a car pulled up beside us – fast. It was him.

He pointed a gun out the window. My pimp saw it and yelled:

“Get down!”

He shoved my head just as the shots rang out.

Pop. Pop. Pop.

One of the bullets tore through my headrest.

If I hadn't ducked, I'd be dead. That bullet had my name on it.  
When we pulled over, the car was riddled with holes. I sat there  
shaking – not crying, just stunned. Shock. Disbelief. Survival.  
All I could think was I'm still here. That night could've been my last.  
But it wasn't. And after that, something in me changed.  
Because I loved the money, sure. But I loved my life more.

## ***Too Close to Death***

The danger didn't just live in the club. It followed me home.  
Back when I was living with Hennessy, we thought we were good.  
Two dancers sharing rent, raising kids, making money. But safety? That was  
an illusion. There was a man — a Peeping Tom.  
He'd been watching me. I didn't know how long.

One night, I was in the living room with my baby girl, my second born — just  
eight months old at the time. I heard the front door creak open. But nobody  
walked down the hallway. I got up, thinking maybe it was Hennessy. Maybe I  
could grab a cigar while I was up. That's when I saw it. A figure, pressed  
against the hallway wall. My heart stopped.

Before I could scream, his hands were around my neck. We fought — hard.  
From the back of the house to the front. His grip tight. His body heavy. I was  
thinking: Not like this, God. Not in front of my baby. I screamed for Hennessy,  
over and over, but she didn't wake up. He slammed my face into the carpet,  
grinding it down, saying: "Shut the fuck up!"

But I kept fighting. He couldn't hold me. I was fighting for my life. Finally,  
Hennessy burst out of her room. As soon as he saw her, he jumped off me  
and bolted. Ran down the hallway and climbed out my bedroom window —  
The same window he came in through. We called the police. They came. But  
there wasn't much they could do. He was gone.

And to this day... I still get nervous being home alone. Because that night? That was supposed to be it. That was supposed to be my ending. But I survived. Just like I survived the night I got shot at on the expressway. It was after the club. Me, Money, and one of the other girls were riding out. Everything felt normal — quiet, smooth.

Until a car pulled up next to us. It was the baby daddy of a girl Money had tried to pull into the game. He'd found out. And he was ready to handle it his way. I saw the gun. "Get down!" Money yelled, pushing my head down.

Then — pop pop pop!

Gunshots filled the car. One of the bullets went right through my headrest. If I hadn't ducked when I did, that bullet would've ripped through my skull. The car was full of holes. I was full of shock. And once again, I was alive when I shouldn't have been.

People glamorize this life — the lights, the money, the fame.

But the truth? The truth is, I almost died more than once. And every time, it left a scar that didn't show up on my skin... But never left my soul.

## ***Chapter Six: Cold Turkey***

After everything I'd seen, everything I'd survived, I couldn't fake it anymore. The game had taken enough from me. The money was still coming in. The men were still drooling. The DJs were still calling my name... But I was done. One night at the club, everything felt different.

The atmosphere.

The vibe.

My vibe.

And my patience.

I wasn't mentally there anymore. I finished the night out, forced the smiles, faked the grind. Then I went home. Laid down like any other night. But when I woke up... I was a different person.

I felt different.

Like something had been downloaded into my brain while I slept. It was spiritual. It was real. It was unexplainable. I suddenly knew the Bible. Like, knew it. Before that night, I didn't understand scripture. I didn't even try to. But suddenly, it was like the words had been carved into my bones. The stories, the parables, the truth of it all – it made sense.

It scared me at first. But it also gave me a clarity I had never had. A calmness. A calling. I got up, walked into the bathroom, and looked at myself. Cache' was tired. Moneak was awakening. So I cut my hair off. Just took the scissors and chopped it – all of it. No stylist. No plan. Just freedom. Then I started deleting numbers. Cutting people off. Cold turkey.

No more clubs.

No more pimp.

No more sex for survival.

No more selling my soul.

I couldn't even explain it to the people around me – Because truthfully, I barely understood it myself. All I knew was: God was real. And He was pulling me out of the fire. I walked away from everything. Not because I was forced to – But because I was finally free enough to choose myself. And when I closed that chapter, I didn't look back.

## ***A New Kind of Hustle***

Walking away from the club didn't mean life got easy. It just meant I wasn't selling myself to survive anymore. I had to find another way. A new hustle. A new identity. Because even though Cache' was retired, Moneak still had bills. And just because I left the club, didn't mean I magically had peace.

There were nights I laid awake wondering if I made the right choice. If I could really live without the fast money. If I'd ever feel powerful without stilettos and stage lights. But the truth is — I'd already proven I could survive the darkness. Now it was time to learn how to walk in the light. So, I started small. Odd jobs. Side gigs. Cutting hair. Doing nails. Babysitting. Anything honest that put a dollar in my pocket.

I hustled the way I always had — But this time, without the shame. Without the chains. I kept to myself. Stayed low. Prayed often. My Bible became my weapon. My mirror. My map. The same way I used to memorize stage routines, I started memorizing scripture. Not just reading — understanding.

I had to unlearn everything the streets taught me. That I was only valuable if I looked a certain way. That I had to use my body to get ahead. That pain was a price you paid for protection. No more. I started healing. Really healing. Not the pretty kind. The ugly kind. Where you cry for hours and don't know why.

Where your hands shake just trying to cook dinner. Where forgiveness feels like swallowing glass. But I kept pushing. Because every time I felt like quitting, God reminded me:

“You didn’t come this far to go back.” I wasn’t perfect. But I was growing. And for once in my life, that was enough.



## ***Chapter Seven: The Day Everything Changed***

When tragedy struck, it didn't knock on the door—it kicked it in. It was May 13, 2023, a date I'll never forget. The kind that tattoos itself on your heart, that splits your life into before and after. That morning, I was on FaceTime with my oldest daughter. She had just had a baby, and I was still glowing in that new grandma happiness. I remember smiling so hard, looking at my beautiful granddaughter—so perfect, so fresh into this world. I was so proud of my daughter. She didn't become a teen mom like I did. She waited. She did it differently. She did it right.

And then... the call clicked. "I got another call, Mama. Hold on," she said. It was nothing at first—just a pause in conversation, a normal click-over. But when she came back to the line, her voice was different. The sound of it didn't sit right in my chest. Her tone dropped, like her soul was shaking. "Mama..." That's all it took. My heart knew.

She told me my mama had just called her and said she couldn't find my 16-year-old daughter. And then—she heard police sirens on my child's voicemail. My baby was missing. And something was wrong.

Everything in me went cold. My hands started shaking, my heart was pounding so loud I couldn't hear anything else. I could barely breathe. Not my child. Not again. Not now. It was as if the world paused—but not in peace. In panic.

## ***The Day After Goodbye***

After the funeral, I wasn't even human anymore. Just a heartbeat with a hole in the middle. The ache in my chest—that constant throb with every beat—was more than pain. It was emptiness. A scream trapped inside my ribs. Every breath I took felt like it wasn't mine. Like I didn't deserve it. India should've been the one breathing. Laughing. Living.

I couldn't stay in that funeral. I just couldn't.

The moment I walked in and saw her name on that damn program, the room started spinning. My ears rang. My knees buckled. My soul said run, and I did.

I ran outside and collapsed to the ground in front of the funeral home. Right there on the concrete, gasping for air like I was the one who died. Laying there, face to the sky, begging God to tell me it wasn't real. Begging Him to let me trade places. That was my child. My baby. And I couldn't even bring myself to sit through the last moment I'd ever have with her.

I stayed at Suave's house the whole time I was in Memphis. I couldn't be around my family. I didn't feel safe. Not emotionally. Not spiritually. Not even a little. I saw them maybe twice during the whole time I was there. That was enough. I had already learned how to grieve alone long before India passed. Truth is that most people don't come to funerals out of love. They come to be nosy. To whisper. To stare. To say, "Damn, she going through it." And I wasn't going to be anybody's entertainment while I was shattered.

A few days after the funeral, my sister and I fell out again. Tensions were high. Everybody was hurt. But nobody knew how to say it. So, we blamed. We snapped. We threw words like daggers. But beneath all that was the same truth—we were all drowning and didn't know how to save each other.

I blamed myself more than I ever let on. For letting India go. For not fighting harder to make her stay in Atlanta. For not protecting her from something I couldn't even see coming. I knew what kind of power my mama had. I knew how India looked up to her, even when that love came wrapped in manipulation. And I should've known it would backfire. I should've known that sending her back would cost me everything.

I stopped sleeping.

Stopped eating.

My mind shut down. My body just went through the motions. All I could see, all I could hear, was the crash. The sirens. The voicemail. The silence that followed. I kept thinking about how scared she must've been. About how she must've cried out for me in those final moments. Because when we're terrified, when we're hurting, when we feel death wrapping around us—we call out for our mama.

And I wasn't there.

I'll never forgive myself for that.

A part of me died with her. And the part that stayed? It's just a shell now. A mother walking around with a heart too heavy to carry. And I'm not the only one who's broken.

My other kids—they're shattered too. Every one of us is walking through life trying to make sense of something that never will. Trying to smile through grief. Trying to function with a wound that won't close. Nothing will ever be the same. Not for me. Not for them. Not for us.

## ***Still I Rise***

They tried to break me. The streets. The clubs. The men who used me. The women who envied me. The demons I danced with every night. But I'm still here. Stronger. Wiser. More dangerous with peace than I ever was with pain. Because I didn't just survive – I transformed.

I took the bruises, the betrayals, the bullets that missed – And I built a new woman from the ashes. Every scar became a scripture. Every loss became a lesson. Every night I wanted to die turned into fuel to live. I'm not ashamed of who I was. Cache' taught me how to fight. She taught me how to survive. But Moneak? She learned how to heal. And healing is the most rebellious thing a broken girl can do.

Now, I walk in rooms with my head high, not because I'm perfect – But because I know what it took to be whole. I don't owe my story to anyone. But I share it because I know there's another girl out there – Seventeen. Scared. Hungry for more than just food. I want her to know: You're not alone. You're not used up. You're not too far gone to begin again.

If I could rise out of strip clubs, gunfire, abuse, and spiritual death – Then you can rise too. I'm not just a statistic. I'm not just a survivor. I'm a walking testimony. And the next time they whisper about me, let them say this loud and clear: "She made it out. And she never looked back."

## ***The Rise After the Fall***

The pain shaped me, but it never broke me. Life gave me a war I didn't ask for—and I fought it. Every single day. I've been the girl nobody believed in. I've been the woman they talked down on, threw away, left behind. But somehow, I'm still standing. And not just standing—I'm rising.

Right now, I'm enrolled at Atlanta Technical College to become a dental hygienist. I want more than just a job—I want to build something that's mine. My own teeth whitening business.

A brand. A future. A legacy.

I want to build a life my kids can be proud of. I want to show them it's never too late to start over. I had to go back and get my GED—a moment that felt bigger than graduation. It was me telling the world: I'm still here. I'm not done. I lost my Mercedes. Lost my home. Grief stripped me down to nothing—but God said, “Not yet.”

So here I am, back in an old Camry, pushing toward a new beginning. Every start line looks different, but the destination is still the same: Peace. Freedom. Love. And love— Whew, I never thought I'd find it. But then there's Shaun.

He's calm where I'm fire. He sees my scars and doesn't flinch. He's not scared of my past. He embraces it. He's the first man I've ever truly loved.

Shaun reminds me I'm worthy. That I'm still soft underneath the armor. That I'm not too broken to be loved—and that love is scary, yes, but so worth the risk. We dream out loud now. About a home. Not just any home—but one with a lake in the back, peace in the walls, and love in every room.

I don't have it all figured out. But for the first time in a long time, I feel like I'm finally becoming the woman I was always meant to be. My journey hasn't been pretty—but it's mine. It's a story of survival. Of strength. Of redemption. And if you've made it this far with me, I hope you see a little bit of yourself in these pages too.

To the woman who thinks she won't make it— You will. To the man fighting demons in silence— You're not alone. Never give up. No matter who tries to tear you down, no matter what you've lost, no matter how many times you fall— get back up. Because this life? It isn't about the destination. It's about the journey. And every scar, every tear, every battle—  
was preparing you for the version of you that rises.

The end.

## ***In Loving Memory***

Beady & India

Two Angels, Forever Connected Though your time on Earth was brief, your presence was powerful. You left behind laughter, memories, and a love that stretches beyond this life. You were light in a world that often felt too dark. Now you shine from above, guiding us, holding us, reminding us to keep living, keep loving, and never forget.



# ***Scripture***

You live in every beat of our hearts, every whispered prayer,  
every silent moment when we look to the sky and see the doves flying free.  
Rest in heaven, sweet souls. Forever missed. Forever loved.

“He will cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you will find  
refuge.”

— Psalm 91:4



# Tips, Trick, and Trauma

## A Poem of Courage and Strength

I have walked through fire barefoot, with secrets stitched into my skin. Each scar a silent testimony of where the pain has been.

They called me broken, called me lost, but broken things still glow. I learned to dance through every storm and bloom where I shouldn't grow.

I've turned my wounds to wisdom, my shame to sharpened steel, I've learned that strength is not the roar, it's the whisper: I will heal.

The nights I cried into my palms and begged the hurt to end, became the soil where courage bloomed and taught my soul to mend.

In sweat, in blood, in tears, yet every page I've ever turned has conquered all my fears.

For strength is not about being tough or never losing ground. It's choosing you when darkness calls and rising when you're down.

I am the storm that learned to rest, the warrior who still prays. The woman who turned all her pain into power that never decays.

So here I stand unbroken flame, a soul  
that will not fall. I am every lesson,  
every scar and I survived it all.

# Tips, Trick, and Trauma

## Poem of Courage and Strength pt Two

I rose from the ashes of every “not enough,” built wings from pieces that once cut me deep. I carried the weight of a thousand tomorrows while learning the strength that’s born when you weep.

I walked through shadows that tried to define me, but light still lived quietly under my skin. Each scar became scripture, each heartbreak a teacher, reminding me healing begins from within.

They thought I’d be shattered, but I became fire, burning through doubt, through the lies, through the pain.

I've learned that true courage is more than surviving, it's choosing to rise and to try once again.

I've been the silence, the scream, and the prayer, the storm that still softens, the wound that still heals. And through every chapter of tips, tricks and trauma, I discovered the power of all that I feel.

So here I stand, not broken, but reborn, not ruined, but ready, not weak, but awake. For every mistake was a step toward becoming the woman no trial could ever unmake.

# For My Sweet India

My darling girl, my angel bright, the stars  
still whisper your name at night. Sixteen  
years of precious grace, now only tears fall  
on your face.

I ache for laughter I can't hear. For  
footsteps gone, yet still so near. The house  
is silent, cold and still a space you filled, no  
one else will.

Your stubborn ways your fiery light the way  
you'd argue but still hold tight. Your gentle  
heart, so big, so kind, forever carved into  
my mind.

I miss the way you'd call for me, with soft  
voice like melody. I'd give my soul, my final  
breath, to feel your hug and cheat this  
death.

No sunrise blooms without the ache, no dream appears I do not wake. I search for you in skies of blue, in every dawn, I look for you.

My sweet India, my precious love, now watching me from high above. I hope you know, through endless pain, my heart still beats in your sweet name.

So, wait for me where angels roam, and one day, love, I'll bring you home. Til then, I'll carry you inside.

My baby girl, my joy, my pride.

# A Letter to My Beautiful India!

My Sweet Girl

Not a single day passes without me reaching for you in a memory, in a whisper, in the empty space where your laughter once lived. The world keeps spinning, but mine stopped the moment you took your last breath. My heart still calls your name every morning and every night... India.

I miss you so much that it aches in places I never knew could hurt. I miss hearing that soft, sweet voice calling out, “Mama.” I miss the sound of your laugh.

That contagious, beautiful laugh that could light up even my darkest days. I even miss your stubborn little ways. How you'd cross your arms, roll your eyes and stand your ground until I gave in. You always had a way of doing things your way, and God, I loved that about you.

Your heart was the biggest thing about you! Full of love, full of light, full of everything good. You gave so much of yourself to everyone around you and you made me so proud every single day.

Sixteen years with you was a gift, a blessing I'd give anything to have again. I wish I could hold you just once more, run my fingers through your hair, kiss your forehead, and tell you how deeply I love you.

The silence without you is deafening. The emptiness is heavy. Sometimes I still catch myself listening for the sound of your footsteps of turning to say something before I remember you're not her. But I feel you, in the gentle breeze that brushes my cheek, in the warmth of the sun, in every beat of my heart. And I hold onto the hope that one day, we'll be together again and I'll never have to let you go.

Until that day, I'll carry you with me, in my soul, in my breath, in every tear that falls. You are my forever baby, my reason, my heartbeat. I love you beyond words, beyond life, beyond death.

Always and forever, Mama

# Unbroken

The world tried to shatter me,  
but the cracks became windows.  
Through them, I saw God's light,  
reminding me—  
I am not broken,  
I am becoming.

# The Fight to Breathe

I learned that survival  
isn't always loud—  
sometimes it's the whisper  
of breath in the dark,  
the steady choice  
to open my eyes  
one more day.  
God carried me  
when my legs gave out,  
and in His arms,  
I remembered—  
life is still worth fighting for.

# The Road Ahead

Every scar on my soul  
marks a road I've traveled.

I cannot go back,  
but I can walk forward,  
carrying the wisdom  
pain gave me for free.

And when I falter,  
I know the Shepherd  
will guide me home.



# TIPS, TRICKS, AND TRAUMA

SHANDELL FLOWERS



"They only saw the stilettos. Not the scars."

Seventeen and starving, Moneak was just a girl trying to survive the streets of Atlanta. No father. No protection. No plan. But when she met a woman who smelled like freedom and cash, a new name was born: Cache'.

What followed was a whirlwind of lights, lust, fast money, betrayal, and survival inside the dark, glittering world of strip clubs, pimps, power, and pain. From VIP rooms to near-death encounters, Cache' rose to fame in a city that chews up girls like her and spits them out—but never broke.

"*Tips, Tricks, and Trauma (Cache's Story)*" is a raw, unfiltered memoir that peels back the lashes, lipstick, and stage names to expose the real cost of the hustle. It's not just about stripping—it's about searching. Searching for love. For safety. For self-worth. For God.

This is not a victim's story. It's a survivor's anthem.

If you've ever been underestimated, overlooked, or told you weren't enough—this book is for you. Because she made it out. And so can you.