

## Chapter 16



### Gotta Dance

**I have to dance. I have to dance, and let me tell you why. It's been a big part of my life. It's the music that keeps me. It takes me away. The rhythm sweeps me off my feet. It's as though the music just takes over my body and distracts my every thought. As I look at the men in the audience, not one face can I make out. It's as if they don't exist. I'm all alone on the stage. But when I'm not on stage, it's virtually impossible to escape the reality of what I'm doing. I see a motion of a hand. He's calling me to his table. "Okay, I'll dance for you, and it will be \$10 a song," I say, as I take off my clothes ever so slowly. "No, you can't touch me there, baby, only on my legs and my arms. But if you're good to me, you can rub my back later. Look, look between my legs; that's what you're paying for. Oh, I like it, like it, like that. ... Oh daddy, tens and twenties in my garter! Would you like another dance? No? Well, then help me off this table. Care to buy me champagne? It's only \$15 a glass, and you know how much I love champagne; the more I drink the better I feel. Please buy me a drink please ... so I can continue listening to your bullshit, you pervert!" The thoughts racing through my mind are relentless. No, I can't act like this; it's unprofessional. Stop thinking and concentrate on the music. Have I had too**

**much to drink already? Damn, he said he'd give me \$500 for an hour, just an hour. Shit I'm going to be dancing all night for only \$200. It's \$500 for one hour, just one hour! No, I'm up on stage already. I can't believe it. Are you sure this is me on stage? This isn't the music I requested. I can't believe this DJ! Not only do I have to tip him out 10 percent of whatever I make, but I tip him extra so the son of a bitch doesn't play me Perry Como for my next set. I can't dance to this song! And why is it that I'm not making any real money tonight? Do I look okay? Maybe the girls are jacking the customers off while no one is looking. I must admit, I ain't no angel. I'll be fine. I just need to freshen up my lipstick.**

**It's a crowded night, wall to wall with men, all of their eyes on the women. The women are dressed in alluring clothes, and a sweet aroma fills the dressing room, but in the bar the air is cluttered with smoke, the scent of alcohol of different flavors on each man's breath. Dollar bills draped on each girl's garter, and painted smiles on each of their faces. The faces are all different. Some faded, some not so mild, their hair teased, curled, set, long, short and sprayed. The costumes in different arrangements of colors and sizes. The scene looks like a painting, a collage if you will. The tables each have a candle, red glass surrounding the flame, as the waitress sets the champagne glass down on top of the table in front of me on a square, white napkin. The candle flame is vivid through the glass of colorless champagne. The man's drink has a stirring straw and is filled with colored alcohol and ice in a short glass. God, I want to stop dancing.  
--Christine Michelle**



**My favorite part of the workday is right before the club opens for business. The lights are turned on and there's this strange silence that fills the air, still the energy lingering from the night before. Everybody kindly greets each other as they walk through the front door. The girls talk as they get ready for the day, putting on their make-up and in some cases putting the make-up on each other, tweezing each other's eyebrows and commenting on each other's costumes. I hear them telling each other of the fun they had over the weekend, or the night before, and still others who had missed work ask, "were there a lot of girls?" wondering if they should have come in. "Did my regular come in? Did he dance another girl?" And of course, the most important question of all: "Was it good?" meaning, was it busy, and was there money to be made? Some girls exaggerate about how well they did, but for the most part most girls will give you a rough estimate as to how much money they made. "I made about**

a bill and a half." As soon as the girls have gotten ready and caught up on all the latest gossip, it's on to the floor they go.

The first set for some reason is the hardest, especially if you've taken a break from dancing for a while. It's almost like you have to get back into the swing of things.

But once the money starts trickling in the garter, it becomes old hat again. Most of the money surprisingly enough isn't made by looks. It's whether or not you have a good personality. The looks catch them, but the personality keeps them coming back for more.

~O~

There was this woman who one day walked right through the front door of a strip club where I was working at as a dancer. She glanced around in a daze. One of the girls walked up to her and asked her if she wanted to speak to the manager. But as the dancer approached the woman, it became more and more apparent that this woman had bruises on every visible part of her body. I saw the dancer take her into the dressing room. She motioned with a tilt of her head for us to follow her. We all went in to see what was of interest.

When we entered the room, we were astonished at how badly beaten this woman was. She was beaten from head to toe. She had taken off all her clothes and asked us if we thought it was possible for her to work, even though she had bruises all over her body.

"Yes, of course you can! Our manager is a nice man. We'll talk to him for you."

As a group, we talked him into letting her work. The manager after seeing the severity of her situation was reluctant but the whimpering of ten girls persuaded him to help her.

We covered the woman's bruises with foundation, though they were still somewhat visible under the red lights on stage. The girls cheered the woman on as she made a feeble attempt at gaining the appreciation and applause of the customers. She made more money from the other dancers than from the customers. I have never seen a stronger example of brotherly love than at that moment. After the woman was finished dancing, she made her way around the stage asking the customers for tips, and when there was a dancer sitting with the customer, she would say, "Of course we loved your dance, didn't we?" Then she would add a dollar of her own or chatter supportively to the woman as she walked by.

When the woman was finished making her round, she went into the dressing room, obviously distraught. She asked, "What time is it? ... What time is it?"

"Nearly three," we replied. "I had better be getting home. He's gonna be home soon and wonder where I've been," she said. She started shaking a bit at the thought.

The girls were trying to persuade her to stay, offering up their own experiences with domestic violence, and their struggles to find their personal independence.

"Stay here! We will help you," one dancer said. Still another said, "Yes! You can stay with me, rent-free, till you get on your feet." "I want to, but he'll find me," she said as tears rolled down her face. She let her head drop as she shook it "no."

Everyone was anxious, including me. What was this woman living through,

and why would she wish to continue life this way? Here was an opportunity for freedom why wasn't she grasping it? "Be free! Be free!" I thought as I watched this woman change back into her clothes, grab her small, tattered purse and rush out the front door in a panic.

There was a strange murmuring among the dancers throughout the rest of the shift. In the dressing room there was one girl in particular who was obviously taken back by meeting this woman. She said as a tears welled up in her eyes, "He might kill her. He might kill her. ... I know because my ex-husband tried to kill me." I never forgot that afternoon, and to this day, I pray the woman is safe and still alive.

~O~

I was dancing at Club X there in the dressing room was A pretty little black girl named Strawberry sitting there crying. I asked her what was wrong she said she was so lonely and had no family. I told her that I understood she repeated I have no family, you don't understand I have no family. My parents don't love me, no one cares about me I am all alone in this world, she cried even harder, I looked into her eyes and said I understand I am all alone too. I never forgot that moment I finally found someone that shared my pain.

~O~

I remember a black girl was dancing on stage then she was moving her head around then all of the sudden her wig flew off and flew into a customers lap, he yelled and fell backwards in his chair. It was Hysterical.

~O~

I used to dance to don't fear the reaper over and over again, I would request it constantly tipping the DJ a little extra here and there to hear it, I am sure all of the people noticed me dancing to that song over and over again but I didn't care much I just wanted to hear it for comfort, I was a mess thinking about suicide all of the time. I would stare into the mirror constantly when ever I found myself in the dressing room alone. One night one of the girls saw me in the dressing room crying and she asked me why I was crying I told her I felt so all alone she, she held me even though I didn't know her and she said everything is going to be alright. I never forgot that hug though I never saw her again.

~O~

I was talking to a customer one night and all of the sudden at the front door I heard the door man say miss, miss you need an escort to be in this club, but she just walked right in and peered around the club, she couldn't have been more then 5 foot and the man I was talking to was about 6 foot, but that woman walked right p to us and started yelling at him in English and in Spanish, she said this is where you are instead of being with your family, what in the hell do you think your doing, you son of a bitch and then she hit him and continued screaming but this time in Spanish, she pushed him and hit him all the way out the front door. She was relentless, some of the men

were laughing but yet a few had a strange look on their face, what could they have been thinking?

~O~

**George**

One night, Greg, the manager at Follies, and I had a deep conversation.

George: You know what?

Me: What?

George: I'm going to kill myself when I turn 50.

Me: Well how old are you?

George: 46.

Me: You're joking right? Tell me you're kidding.

George: Nope. You wouldn't understand if I told you. You're too young.

Me: Try me.

George: All right. When I was a bit younger, I was in the Vietnam War, and I saw things that I can't forget. My friends were killed all around me, and I have a hard time sleeping at night, because I can still hear them screaming all around me. Have you ever seen that movie "Hamburger Hill"?

Me: No.

George: Rent it. It's the closest thing that describes what I went through. Living through that was hell on Earth. And once I'm gone, I won't have to live that hell in my mind anymore. They can burn me for all I care. I just want out of here.

I remembered times I'd asked God, "Just get me through. Just one more day." So I guessed I could relate to some extent, though I can't imagine what he went through in Vietnam. Violence is so senseless. Isn't there another way? There has to be. We were born with a brain, which is able to reason. So for what reason did his friends have to die?

**Michie**

I went to Club X (a lesbian nightclub) to help out Michie, a former dancer friend of mine from Sexy Trix. She broke up with her lover and needed me to help her retrieve some of her stuff from her ex-lover's car.

After getting everything, Michie needed to go somewhere to relax.

Apparently she was still in love with this girl. So we stopped at a breakfast restaurant for a bite to eat, but as we were ordering, Michie took all of her frustrations out on the waitress who was serving us.

Michie: Excuse me, miss? Miss, we've been waiting here forever. Do you think we can get some service over here?

Waitress: I'll be there in a second.

Michie: Well, as big as you are, I can see why it's taking you so long.

Me: Michie, we're not the only ones here.

Michie: Excuse me, miss.

The waitress walked over to the table.

Waitress: Hi, ladies. What can I get you?

Michie: Finally.

Me: Michie, please.

Michie: I'll have a coke and cheese sticks.

**Waitress: And you?**

**She smiled at me.**

**Me: I'll have an orange juice, thanks.**

**Waitress: Anything else?**

**Me: No, that will be all.**

**The waitress then walked away. Michie resumed talking about her ex.**

**Michie: What the hell? I can't believe that bitch doesn't care about me and my baby. She said that she would be there for me.**

**Me: Well, it happens. What are you going to do? You just have to deal with it. Where is the baby's father in all this?**

**Michie: He left me after he found out that I was pregnant for the second time. That's when I met my ex. She was there for me through the entire pregnancy, and she's been helping me raise my daughter.**

**That's why I don't know why she changed on me. Now what am I supposed to tell my daughter? She loves Stephanie. I don't know if I can raise them alone.**

**Then she started crying. The waitress walked over with our order.**

**Waitress: Honey, whatever you're going through, this, too, shall pass.**

**Michie didn't say a thing. She just kept her head down. The waitress put both our orders and the check on the table.**

**Waitress: I hope you feel better, honey. Have a nice evening.**

**I couldn't believe how considerate she was, even though Michie treated her with no respect from the moment we walked in. As we were walking to the car, I told Michie I had forgotten something. I went back in and apologized to the waitress for Michie's behavior. I didn't believe sorry was enough. I dropped Michie off at her friend's house and wished her well, that was all I could do.**

**~O~**

**Raven**

**Raven was a girl I knew from work. She was obviously from the streets, not only because she was tough, but also because she had street smarts that you only gain by living there.**

**She was 21 and beautiful. She looked a little roughed up, but that was only because she was going through so much. She was being beaten by her boyfriend, repeatedly and relentlessly. The only time she was free from him was when she was at work, and even then, she was calling him from the dressing room, pleading with him not to hurt her anymore.**

**Raven: I know you're going to kill me. You need to get help. You're out of control. I'm afraid of you.**

**She would plead and plead day after day, sometimes for hours at a time.**

**Angelique, her best friend, tried her best to help her.**

**Raven: He's going to kill me. He's going to kill me, I know it. You've got to help me get out of there. We need to wait until he's not there, and then we'll grab my clothes, but then where am I going to go?**

**What if he finds out I'm trying to leave him? He'll kill me. Oh my God, I'm trapped.**

**Angelique: We'll get you out of there. Don't worry. We'll find you a place.**

**Raven was obviously in trouble, but everyone was afraid of what her boyfriend might do. Finally, they found someone who would take her in;**

they were just working out the details. Raven and Angelique were running out of time, and they knew it. This guy was a bomb ready to explode, capable of anything. Angelique had already met this monster. She knew he was serious.

Dancer: Call the police.

Raven: I did already, but the best they can do is keep him overnight, and when he gets out he's angrier than when he went in. He has to hurt me real bad before they do anything, but by that time, I'll be dead.

Angelique: Don't worry; as soon as my friend comes in to town this week, he'll

hook you up. Then we'll get you out of Miami. We'll get your stuff as soon as I talk to him.

Raven: Okay, okay.

Raven sighed.

I was supposed to go in the next night. I was scheduled to work.

Manager: Hello?

Me: Hey, it's Shannon. I'm running late.

Manager: Don't worry about it. We have lots of girls on schedule. If you don't show, no problem.

Me: Well, I could use the money.

Manager: Knock yourself out. If you want to come in, come in.

I grabbed my bags and was heading out the door, when all of the sudden I got this sharp pain in the pit of my stomach. My girlfriend ran over.

Maritza: Christine, are you all right?

I hit the floor, unable to stand up straight. I felt faint, so I made my way to the bed and laid down in order to keep from falling over.

Me: Damn!

Martiza: What happened?

Me: I don't know. All of the sudden I don't feel well.

Maritza: You can't go to work like that. Another day, another dollar. You can work tomorrow.

Me: You're right.

The next day, Martiza had such a look on her face.

Maritza: Chris, you're not going to believe what happened last night. One of the girls from your job got shot by her boyfriend. She died.

Raven was the only girl who came to mind. He finally killed her. I was shocked that a person could go to such an extreme, but I wasn't shocked that it was Raven. The following week, she was the only topic of conversation in the club. The girls who were going through something similar took a good, hard look at what could soon be their fate. And Angelique ... she was so devastated that she quit without a word. She had nothing to say to anyone. This was her best friend, and now she was gone. killed by a monster. Angelique got her things, took one look around the club and left.

**Ayla**

Ayla, Ayla, Ayla ... Ayla! I would sing as I entered the dressing room, knowing she would be there, sitting at the table rummaging through her animal magazines. Through most of them, she donated to animal-related causes, then she left the magazines there for the girls to look at. When the club was slow, she would sort through her bills and sit there writing checks. She was one of the nicest people I ever met in this industry, or anywhere

else for that matter. There was nothing she wouldn't do for you. I would see her lend her costumes out, knowing quite well that she probably wouldn't get them back. She said hi to everybody all the time and did her best to cheer up those who were hurting. It was the biggest shock to hear of her death, so much so that I couldn't except it as fact.

Door Man: Hey, Shannon, did you hear about Ayla?

Me: No. What about her?

Door Man: She's dead.

Me: Yeah, right.

Door Man: I'm not kidding.

I turned to look at another dancer sitting in the room with me.

Me: Is it true, or is he pulling my leg?

Dancer: Yes, it's true.

Door Man: She died on her motor cycle last night when she left work. She was probably in another argument with her boyfriend, and had a little too much to drink, and "boom," hit the side of a semi.

They say she died instantly.

Me: Wow. I just can't believe this. Her of all people.

When I got dressed and went onto the floor there was a strange silence in the club that lingered for days to come. Her death moved hundreds of people, not only because she was so young, only 27, but because she was such a nice person and everyone knew it. Her life was such a loss to so many. Five hundred people attended her funeral, many of whom were people on Harley Davidson's. Long after her death, her name was spoken often, and whoever knew her would say, "What a nice woman she was. ... Ayla, what a nice woman she was."

### Silver Fox

I worked at Club X for about six years, on and off. It wasn't because I made money there. On the contrary, that is the place I made the least amount of money. In fact, there was a time when there were only about 20 girls working there on both shifts combined. Although on some nights, there were only three of us working, I didn't care. I didn't want to leave because of the owner. I looked up to him like a father figure.

I never told him that because he made it clear to me that he didn't like the girls to look up to him as a big brother or a father. I couldn't help it. He treated me special and stood up for me. Once in one of the meetings, he fired a girl on the spot for threatening me. No one had ever done that for me before or since. He would ask me what was going on in my life and what I was up to. He cared about me, and I knew it. When I would get tired of dancing he would let me waitress or promote his bar. He went so far as to put me on stage and have the girls dance for me! I can't help but love him for that, even though he is no longer in my life. It's moments that stand still while life ventures on that we never forget.

~O~

One time I was dared to dance in an all-black club. I knew the girls there would be hostile toward me, but I did it. I was scared, but I did it, anyway. Sometimes I do crazy shit because I have to in order to survive, but then there are those times when I do something just to test myself, just to see if I can do it.

**Me: Can I dance here tonight?**

**Manager: Have you tried some of the clubs in North Miami?**

**Me: Yes, but I thought I would try this one out, too.**

**Manager: Okay. Suit yourself. The locker room is right over there. Follow me.**

**He took me to the dressing room.**

**Manager: Have you ever danced before?**

**Me: Yes. I've danced in quit a few clubs.**

**Manager: So you know all the rules?**

**Me: Yes. Don't show pink, no masturbating on stage, no drugs, no prostitution. Did I miss anything?**

**Manager: Nope. You'll be following Ginger.**

**When the manager left the room, I could feel the girls glaring at me.**

**"Shit," I thought. "I'm going to get my ass kicked. I'd better get out of the dressing room as fast as I can." I saw that there wasn't a locker available, so I put my license in my boot and walked onto the floor. "What's that white bitch doin' on our stage?" a customer said as I took off my clothes. That was the beginning of my evening.**

**After my set, I walked into to bathroom to freshen up. Little did I know that I would be followed.**

**Dancer: Are you racist?**

**I turned to see one of the four dancers.**

**Me: Would I be here if I was? This isn't the only club in Miami.**

**Dancer: Why are you here?**

**Me: The same reason you are, to make money.**

**I turned around and walked out, with my heart beating right out of my chest.**

**"I must be crazy to be here. I'm the only white person." It was the first time in my life I had been subjected to racism. Even though I had gone there deliberately, knowing what the reaction might be, it still hurt. I sat by myself at a table in the corner of the room. I debated whether or not I should leave. I was just about ready to get up when a girl sat down next to me.**

**Dancer: Would you like a piece of gum?**

**Me: Sure. Thanks.**

**Dancer: Do you remember me?**

**Me: No. From where?**

**Dancer: I worked at Club X for about a week sometime last year.**

**Me: And you remember me?**

**Dancer: Yes. You were the only one who talked to me.**

**I was speechless.**

**Dancer: The girls are a little different here, huh?**

**Me: Yes. You can say that again.**

**Dancer: Well, I've got to get on stage. It was nice talking to you.**

**That conversation was enough to get me through the. We never know what a lasting impact a little kindness can bring.**

**Cricket**

**I danced with Cricket here and there. I would see her one year and then I would quit working for a few years, but when I would come back I would run into Cricket again it would be as if no time had passed. I loved her she was a nice woman. I saw her grow up, I remember the first time I met her she was lying there sprawled out over a row of lockers.**

**She was small and cute, with short hair and a few piercing.**

**Me: Did that hurt.**

**Cricket: Shucks no.**

**Me: Not even the one above your eye?**

**Cricket: I wanted it, I got it.**

**She was getting pierced all over the place before it was even popular. It seemed at her tender age of 17 she had a style all of her own. She was fantastic with an energy I hadn't seen before. It's like she glowed in the dark yet the lights were on. She also had this contagious laugh, even if I caught the tail end of what she was saying I would still**

**get the flavor of the conversation just by the way she expressed herself. I know she was going places fast, she had to she was Cricket. I was four year older then her yet she seemed to always be ten steps ahead of me in everything, She made more money, she was more beautiful, she was a better dancer, she was more popular, she had more courage, she was funnier, she was Cricket. I loved her yet I envied her in a way wishing I was as good, and why shouldn't I have been we were doing the same type of work, we were around the same age, but she was still a bit better and I couldn't catch up. I had to accept that she was Cricket and I was Shannon.**

**I came into work late like I always did.**

**Manager: You need to go on stage, Ozzy can't keep it together, and we have customers.**

**Me: What happened?**

**Manager: Cricket got into a Bike accident, she's dead.**

**I took a step back and gasped for air.**

**Me: Oh my God, oh my God What happened?**

**Manager: She had an accident on her bike on I-95 she hit debris and went down. She was alone. She wasn't wearing a helmet.**

**I got ready jumped on stage, but then cried throughout my set. All I kept thinking about was how gorgeous she was, how clever, how charming, how funny, what a magnificent dancer she was. She had the world by the balls, she was going places doing things, achieving her goals. Where did she go? Days after the accident the owner of the club told me he heard of Crickets passing, and that he remembered that I knew her for many years. The manager over heard the conversation knowing I was a writer and asked me to write her Eulogy. I told him I would start on it right away, and so I did tearfully. I sat there and just wrote all of the things I thought of her in a letter, and it came out in a beautiful array of love.**

**In Loving Memory**

**Susan Arnesen (Cricket)**

**July 18th 1971 - Nov 30, 2003**

**It's shocking to me how you of all people can be taken from us so soon, there is so much more of you to give. You surpassed all tangible limits forever changing and reinventing your self. Over the years we have seen you blossom from a lovely young lady into an electric vibrant woman. With a style all of your own, you have taken the ordinary and turned it into the extraordinary.**

**You are one of the most spectacular women of all time: such strength yet graceful, gorgeous yet with no conceit, professional yet personable. Your**

wit and intelligence are obvious to all who meet you. Just by the way you tell a story, you could turn a simple conversation into a life changing event. You have an amazing smile and incredible laugh. One which will linger with us always.

You have an energy about you that only God could have put there, and a limit

only God could have known. Eagles soar high into the Sky my friend, but as sparrows must eventually fall to the ground. Now you're free to ride through the gates of heaven, as you have on earth. Cutting through the clouds, the wind blowing through your hair, you screaming.....

"Watch out Heaven

I've got hell to raise.

watch out Angels, because

here comes BLAZE!!"

AKA CRICKET

### **Channel Jaguar**

I once knew a girl named Chanel Jaguar. She danced with me at Club X. This girl's strength amazed me. She had more courage than I could ever hope for within myself. She had to deal with every single prejudice on a daily basis. It was if she had the weight of the world on her shoulders.

She was a woman with black features yet born with white skin. As a child, neither black nor white children would accept her within their circle of friends. She told me of how she was picked on relentlessly, and to make matters worse she was also legally blind.

With her astigmatism, her eyes were constantly moving around in different directions. I wasn't sure which eye to look at when I spoke to her. I wasn't sure if she could see me, anyway.

She told me of how she wore coke-bottle glasses in school, but they didn't do her much good. As she got older, her eyesight slowly deteriorated. So she gave up on wearing glasses and has since tried to work with whatever sight she has left.

Whenever a customer tipped her for her table dances, or she was asked to make change, she would have to hold the dollar bill a fraction of an inch from her face to make out the number on it.

My personal problems seemed so trivial when I worked with her. It was tough for her. All of these things I took for granted, she had to struggle with every day.

She couldn't drive for lack of vision, so she had to rely on her boyfriend, for his sight, and he would deliberately let everyone know that he was using her for drugs and money. It was apparent that she wasn't going anywhere, because she needed him so much.

Sure, it angered everyone, this travesty, but no one lifted a finger to help her, so she was left at the mercies of her lover.

This wasn't the first boyfriend that she had enabled. This was her cycle. She would present herself as a bird with a broken wing. Once the trap was set and a man came along to save her from her cruel and uncaring lover, he, too, would take the role of caretaker, and then when he grew resentful, it was on to the next.

### **SunShine**

She went by the name of sunshine, but she was anything but sunshine for one customer she had met. She was a pretty latin girl, not gorgeous, not

beautiful, but pretty. She got involved with a customer at first he was her regular and then it became intimate, well at least for him, it was completely fanatical for her. He owned his own construction company, and was very successful and had his business for years. At first she was dancing full time then only on the weekends and then she was working for him. As a secretary and then she learned to do some light book keeping. After they had been seeing each other for awhile she started demanding that he put something in her name so she would know that he loved her, and of course. He bought her a car, then as time went on he started putting more things in her name because he wanted to marry her after one year of going steady, he popped the question and they tied the knot. And he then made her a business partner and then added her name to his home. They stayed together another two years and then she took him to court, she came into the club and sat in the dressing room talking about it to us, Boasting of her accomplishment.

Sunshine: What a sucker. He put a Ferrari in my name , the house, his business. Now I am taking him to court. I put a restraining order on his ass. Saying he was assaulting me.

Bartender: Why?

Sunshine: So he doesn't come after me. I am leaving town with my new boyfriend once I get my share.

Me: Aren't you afraid he's going to come after you?

Sunshine: He won't find me we are going to Maryland.

Me: Then if you have a man then why are you going to take you X husband to court?

Sunshine: For the money silly, I had to sleep with that fat man for three years, I

Want my share.

I could see she was getting agitated so I dropped the conversation, but I never forgot what she did to that unsuspecting customer.

You're so beautiful

It's your turn to be beautiful.

Looking at you brings me back to the days  
when I dazzled the millions who placed their eyes on me  
but it's your turn to be the spectacle of surprise.

The splendor of wonder, oh, but it was good remembering me  
once again in the shadow of your grace.

-- Christine Michelle

The new, young girls are so happy when they see the money they can make in this industry. They now have money in their pockets and can buy all of the things they have been wanting. It's almost like Christmas; every day brings a new customer with more money and empty promises, but it's no big deal, because our promises are empty as well.

The older girls watching this reminisce about the good old days when they, too, made that same money, because they were all so young, beautiful and filled with that endless energy of youth. They made so much money and spent all of it, all of that free money.

Had we known better, we would have saved it. Now it's a struggle to make \$150. We all thought that our beauty was carved in stone. How could time be so cruel? The fear of losing one's beauty has sent some girls over the edge into a life of drugs and alcohol. They cling to their vices to avoid

thinking of their own fate. "What am I going to do now?" they ask themselves, while others try to buy time through liposuction, face lifts, and anything else that might work to retain their youth. Sometimes it works for a while, but everything has its season. We scatter looking for places that will still hire us. Are we wanted at the inn? The first question asked: How old are you? and the response, "I'm sorry we don't hire anyone over 30." So all of us are asking where we can make more money, as if there were some magical club that had been hiding from us all this time. The girls over 30 know there are only so many clubs that would still hire someone at that age.

I talked to the house mother one night (the woman who sits in the dressing room and helps the dancers get ready to go on stage). Found out that she used to be a burlesque dancer, unlike me. I'm considered a stripper. She was famous and oh so beautiful at one time in her life. I never did believe her when she told me, but then she showed me pictures of her when she was much younger, in her early 20s. She gave me a poster of her dating back to 1960. My God, now she's close to 50 years old. Unreal.

I wish I could explain how I felt seeing her looking so old and worn out. She had no energy and fell asleep in the dressing room all the time. One time I drove her home, and there, in a beat up old trailer, she lived, with her six cats and her alcoholic husband whom she supported. I had to ask myself what happened to that beautiful, exotic, wealthy woman? I hope her destiny doesn't become mine.

#### **The Pain Of Regret**

Lord, the pain of regret. Lord, please save me from my own doing. The dreams I had for myself. Yet here I sit alone, too late for me to be all that I ought to be. Had I only listened to myself while I had so much time before me ... Yet I spent it foolishly thinking that time only for me would stand still, and that I would never fall victim to its merciless end. Now is when I need God the most, to forgive me of all my shortcomings and give me peace for my soul. Will He watch over me still though I have failed Him, or is my only refuge the bed I have made?

--Christine Michelle

I talked to a dancer who has been in the business for 14 years. She told me that she had to have sex with her former employer in order to keep her job. She then said to me, "I don't have to tell you anymore, do I?" God, that got me. I felt so bad for her and for myself. Was that going to be my fate? No one is an exception to the rule.

The only way girls get out of this business, is either marry someone wealthy, apply for another job and stick to it, or go to school to learn another career. Oh God, how am I going to get out of here? What am I going to do? What am I going to do?

~O~

Customers who are regulars usually are normal guys who have made friends with some of the dancers. Sure, there's some teasing that takes place, but for the most part the customers talk about their day-to-day life and their lack of intimacy with their wife or girlfriend. I had a customer who would dance me, and the whole time he would tell me that his wife wouldn't let

him see or play with her boobs, yet he would brag about how big they were. Sure, there are some sick customers, like I knew a customer who was a gym teacher, and he told me that some of his 13-year-old female students had a crush on him, and he would entertain the idea of having sex with them. The only thing that stopped him, so he said, was the fear of getting caught and going to jail. You meet all kinds everywhere, especially in strip clubs. There was one time I was doing a table dance for a big, strong guy. He was getting a little handsy, but you learn to work around it. By the second song, I could see his mood change, and he started mumbling words like bitch and slut just loudly enough that I could hear it. So I started putting my clothes back on, but he grabbed my arms.

Customer: Where do you think you're going? The song isn't over yet.

Me: It's over for me. You're getting too aggressive, and if you don't get your hands off me, I'm calling the bouncer.

Customer: Bitch. You just danced for free.

And at that point, there was really nothing I could do. Sure, the manager or bouncer can try to collect the money for me, but if the customer is set on not handing over the money, there's nothing they can do. I've lost money from time to time, but then again, I've danced for generous customers who have poured on the cash and gifts.

This job is like bingo. It only takes one customer to make your night.

For the most part, the customers are just normal guys trying to get their groove on, or just there for conversation because they've developed a friendship with a dancer.

There are actually regular customers whom the girls call in who are almost like employees because they frequent so often that they're like kin to the club. Those are the ones who make this job easier to stomach. But then again some customers are sons of bitches, the jerks who try to put their dirty hands all over us and only have filthy things to say. They'll do and say whatever it takes to get their penis between our legs. I hate those kind of guys, because they're not talking to me; they're talking to my vagina.