Okay, let’s get one thing straight. I’m an ordinary, everyday kind of woman. I’m a mother of two with a demanding work schedule and an even more demanding home life. On any given day, I can be seen driving car pool, making marshmallow squares for the PTA, or zooming frantically from a film shoot to teaching to an audition—usually dressed in a scruffy T-shirt and a pair of jeans. If I’m lucky, I sneak in a shower before 9:00 p.m. In other words, I’m probably a lot like you.

Except for one thing. I have a stripper’s pole in my husband’s office.

I love to pole-dance and strip; I do it every day of the week (except Sundays—even the obsessed need a break). I don’t do it for money, and I don’t do it for strangers. I strip dance for myself, and—if he’s been very, very good—I strip for my husband. I do it because it makes me look and feel extraordinary. Because it lets me soar high above the world and its troubles. Because when I dance, layers of self-doubt and self-consciousness fall away to reveal my true, powerful self. I do it, in short, because it has changed my life and continues to change it.

Let me tell you the story of how a seemingly normal person like me discovered a secret in the unlikeliest corner of the world—a secret that has helped hundreds of women face down their greatest fears and achieve their greatest aspirations. It’s the story of the S Factor, a movement technique based on the athleticism and sexual expression of stripping and pole dancing, derived from the natural S-like curvature of the female body. It’s my story, but it’s also the beginning of yours: the first step on a journey that will take you to parts of yourself you may have lost touch with or perhaps never knew existed.
As the title suggests, this book will teach you how to move like a stripper, how to give a great lap dance, and how to perform pole tricks. It will provide you with a new workout routine that will reshape your body. It will add a healthy dose of excitement to your love life. But it will do more than that. For me and the women I teach, the S Factor is the best way we’ve found to gain confidence, self-knowledge, and physical awareness—all while having a ridiculously good time.

The Beginning

My fascination with stripping began fourteen years ago, when I was a young, hungry actress researching one of my first paying roles. I had been cast as a prostitute and stripper named Carrie in the film Breaking In, and in the interest of research I decided to visit a strip club. I didn’t relish the thought: I’d been raised a nice Irish Catholic girl, and I considered myself a staunch feminist. I believed strip clubs to be the province of the desperate and the depraved.

So I was skeptical and a little scared as I pulled up outside Star Strip, a club on the outskirts of Beverly Hills. It was 2:00 P.M. on a Wednesday, and despite the darkness of the club, I could see that the place was nearly empty. I grabbed a seat in the back, hunched my shoulders, and pulled my collar up around my neck. It took a while before I found the courage to look up at the stage.

A young, blond, shaggy-haired dancer stood—no, towered—above a middle-aged man sitting below her. She was almost completely naked, and in the yellow gleam of the stage lights her flesh gave off a hot glow, as if lit from within. The slow, undulating movements of her hips had a mesmerizing effect that seemed to emanate from somewhere deep inside her, a place of power and knowledge that transcended the sleaziness of her surroundings. Her gaze was fierce, triumphant. In that moment, she looked nothing like the victimized, objectified creature I’d expected to see. And there was something about the rapt expression of the man at her feet that made the moment even more intense. She was, in that moment, a goddess worthy of worship and adulation.

Then the song ended, the man threw two bucks at her, the spell was broken, and the power faded from her eyes.
I realized that it was time to return to the clubs, this time to be more than an observer.

Crazy Girls, a club in the heart of Los Angeles, became my classroom. Two strippers in particular, Symone and Devon, became my teachers. Both were extraordinary dancers, amazing athletes, and true artists. Symone, a dark and captivating loner, moved with long, sharp glides and quick turns. She could levitate her body out to the side of the pole like a Cirque du Soleil performer. Devon was sensuality personified, like Jessica Rabbit on opium, moving her body dreamily from one slow body undulation to the next.

As I watched and worked with them, I began to realize that stripping and pole work were not techniques that had ever been "taught"; the moves these women knew so well had been passed on through an unspoken osmosis, a watch-and-learn system. In other words, these chicks were great dancers but not the greatest instructors. If I wanted to learn, I'd have to study, analyze, and break down the movement myself.

And that's what I did. Over the next several months, I not only mastered the basic moves of stripping and pole dancing, but I also found that as I made these moves my own, my film character's persona emerged. She was dark, powerful, and mysterious, a force of nature, an explosive tempest with a
tranquil stillness at its core. I named her Stormy.

After a few weeks of practicing, I began to notice amazing changes in my body. I was thirty-four years old, but I was beginning to look the way I had when I was twenty-four. Dancing every day had melted away my post-pregnancy fat (my son was four) and defined the muscles in my arms, legs, and stomach. The lower back pain I’d had for years from a high-school injury disappeared. I dropped an entire jean size, and felt energetic and alive. For the first time in my life, I became confident in my body and stopped judging myself. When I looked in the mirror, I no longer saw the flaws, the wrinkles, and the cellulite. Instead, I saw a lithe, sensual creature. A woman who knew her own strength.

As I grew more confident, I started performing at L.A. clubs during the day before the crowds descended. Two weeks before filming, I danced at a few places at night. Then I gave myself the ultimate test: I invited my husband, Richard, to come as a patron.

It was at a club called Spice Lady. Nobody there knew I was an actress preparing for a role. And, man, was I a nervous wreck. I’ve performed to live audiences as large as 1,400 and as small as twelve, but never in my life have I felt as terrified as I did that night when I handed my music to the DJ. My breath was short, my hands were sweaty (which is catastrophic for pole work), and my heart was pounding. Richard walked through the door and took a seat in front of the stage. Our eyes met and we smiled. And then the DJ called for Stormy.

As Led Zeppelin’s “When the Levy Breaks” started, I took one last breath and let the heavy drumbeat pick me up like a wave, and before I knew it, I was up and down the pole, twirling, suspended, aloft. My body took over and, with an innate physical wisdom I’d never experienced before, moved with total freedom and integrity. I crawled over to Richard like a lioness stalking her prey, stopped in front of him and slowly circled my hips. Richard sat transfixed. He gazed at me, breathed me...
in, his face full of awe. As we locked into each other’s eyes, we transcended the seediness of the club. It was a perfect moment—a moment that went on and on, and one that has become a milestone in a beautiful and remarkable marriage. Richard then hired me to do a lap dance. And may I say he got the best damn lap dance of his life.

And then I did what no stripper should do: I went home with my “customer.”

**My Own Perfect Moment**

Nine months later, and after we finished filming *Dancing at the Blue Iguana*, I gave birth to a baby girl. (I told you it was the best lap dance ever.) And for a while, my sexual identity disappeared inside a big Mother Earth goddess. I was carrying around extra fat from nursing, and I felt like a fleshy, sluggish milk cow, totally disconnected from my sexual self. Motherhood was wonderful, but I started thinking about how great I’d felt when I’d been stripping—how solid and strong my body had been, how much energy and vitality had coursed through my veins. I wanted that body back. I wanted that feeling back.

One day, I started fantasizing about putting a pole up in Richard’s office out back. At first I tried to talk myself out of it. “Sheila, that was a role. This is real life. You’re a wife and mother, for God’s sake.” But it was no use. Somewhere inside, I had already made up my mind.

I installed the pole the next day. Dancing felt different this time. I started dancing an hour a day, and after several weeks of hard work, bruised knees, and pole burns, I felt my body and sexuality returning. It was making me more confident, more self-knowing, and more fulfilled. But this time I wasn’t
doing it for Richard. I wasn’t doing it for a role. I was doing it for myself.

One afternoon in March, I had an experience that brought this revelation home. I had put on one of my favorite Clash songs. I began moving, and in that instant something switched on in me. I was moving without a moment’s forethought or self-consciousness; my body became like a river of sinew and muscle and raw energy. There was no one there but me. Leaning back against the wall with my hips jutting out unapologetically, I slid languorously to the floor like slow molasses. Once on the floor, I allowed the music to curve and shape me with its wave. Then I was up, swinging around the pole, flying, untethered and free. I moved with complete physical and sensual intuition, and for the first time, totally for myself. There was no audience, no camera crew, no man. My body felt solid and strong, yet at the same time fluid, lithe, molten. I felt like a bad ass and an angel all at once. This wasn’t the same high I’d had the night I danced for Richard. It was sharper, fiercer, more vivid. This was about me. I felt luminous.

The S Factor Is Born

I started joking with my friends that I was going to teach them how to strip. “Forget yoga. Forget weight training. Forget therapy,” I said. “Stripping brings you inner peace, erotic power, and a great body.” They thought I was kidding. I wasn’t.

I gave my first class on April 18, 2001, to just four students: a businesswoman, a screenwriter, a personal trainer, and a nutritionist. Having analyzed and broken down the movements into steps during my own learning process, I found that teaching it came easily. I refined the class into a
workout that went beyond stripping and pole tricks (though they remain key elements in the S Factor workout) and distilled the principles of natural, circular, female movement into a unique system that empowers and strengthens the whole woman, inside and out. I dubbed it the S Factor, after the innate female S shape that forms the basis for the movements and the technique.

In just six classes, I saw my students transformed. Faces that had been set and tense became soft and relaxed. Women who walked into class with the baggage of life on their shoulders walked out as though they could conquer the world. Over time, their bodies became firmer and leaner. I heard about improvements in their relationships with their lovers, husbands, and friends. I witnessed students celebrating their bodies and their classmates’ bodies. They stopped judging themselves, and they stopped judging other women.

My classes grew and grew. Today I teach more than a hundred women each week. In June of 2003, I opened a new S Factor studio in Los Angeles and have trained six teachers, who also have full schedules. I get e-mails from women all over the world who want to learn how to strip and pole dance. I realized that I wanted to spread the word even further, and decided to write a book that gave women the techniques (and the permission!) to do what I had done. In your hands is the key and an invitation to join the growing community of women who have discovered the secret of sensual movement and erotic dance.

My students are a lot like you. They are young and old, from myriad backgrounds, and their bodies come in all shapes and sizes. They are maverick explorers, brave women entering uncharted territory within themselves and the world. They are my heroes. And they remind me every day of why I do what I do. I invite you to join their ranks.