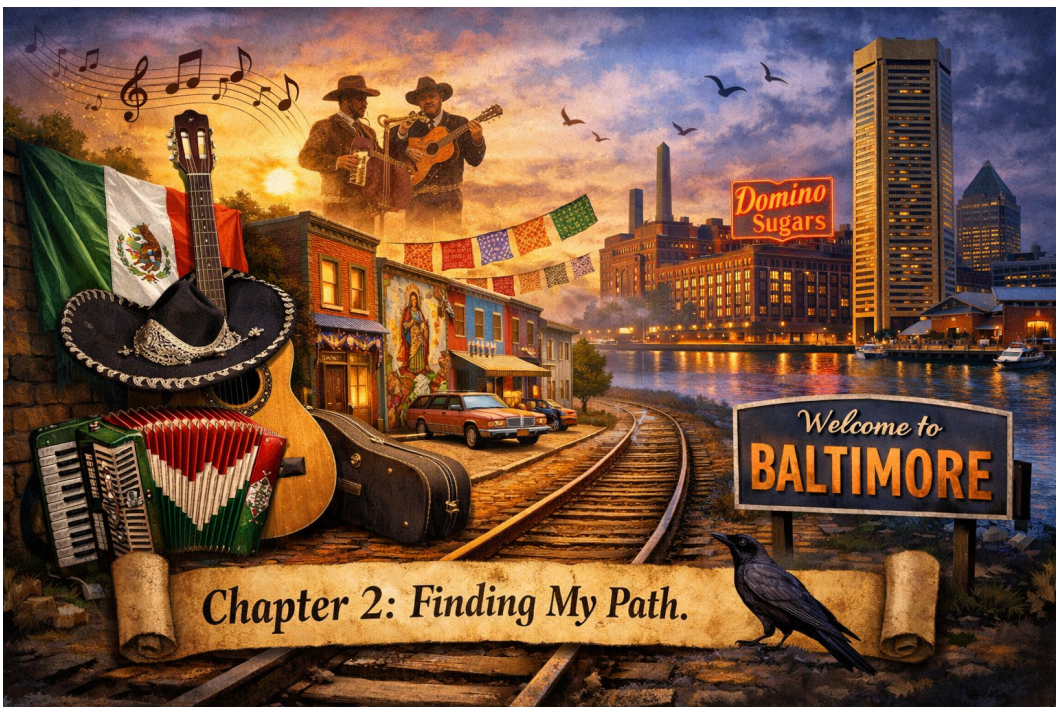


FROM THE BARRIO TO THE BELTWAY

CHAPTER 2 PASSAGE



I was pregnant with my youngest—my last son—and the world was spinning faster than I could keep up with. Everything was changing at once. MySpace. Google. YouTube. Apple. An online free-for-all exploded overnight, and I could feel it in my bones. The rules were dissolving. Power was shifting. Growing up, I always knew the Blue side wasn't built for us in the hood. We weren't constituents—we were numbers. Statistics. Bodies to manage. My Uncle Sam explained that to me when I was still a child. He didn't just talk politics—he showed me the difference. Old money versus new money. Responsibility versus entitlement. Ownership versus dependency.

Uncle Sam wasn't just an uncle. He was my mentor. The father I didn't have. The father I wished I had. He taught me how to ski. How to ice skate. How to make real Italian pizza. He taught me dining etiquette, how to tip based on service—not appearances or obligation. He drilled one lesson into me over and over: *you are responsible for your actions*. He had patience. He showed me what love from a parent is supposed to look like.

He was a Republican.

By then, every drug dealer I knew, every addict, every predator, every corrupt official I'd encountered wore Blue like a badge. Even the hood was shifting—slowly being overtaken. One guy gets out of prison and immediately tries to turn the neighborhood into his personal cash cow. Taxing businesses. Eating for free. Partying on other people's labor.

Not on my watch.

The hood might've leaned Blue, but I wasn't about to stand down and let anyone live off my hard work. It became a David versus Goliath situation. I had a small crew—but more backbone than all of them combined. There's an article about it in *Los Angeles Magazine*. What I did was microscopic compared to Trump, but the principle was the same:
No more shaking down businesses.
No more luxury funded by other people's sweat.
No more parasites calling it power.
For that, I was hated. Shunned. The leeches who lived off taxing wanted me gone—wanted me dead.

So I left.

That's how I ended up in Baltimore. Blue Baltimore. People romanticize struggle, but nothing prepared me for it. South Central and Watts look almost civilized compared to parts of Baltimore City. The rats are the size of cats. It's not just rough—it's heartbreaking. A city drowning under the weight of its own policies. And once again, I found myself standing in the middle of it, watching history repeat itself.