

Chapter 4

Julienne's Secrets

Julienne Slayer was twenty-one but right now felt older ... and younger. So many things were told to you as you grew up, and so far her mother was right, which really pissed her off. She said as much to her best friend.

Vanessa Kylie was philosophical but envious about it. "At least you have a mother trying to help you. Even when it drives you nuts, you know Aunt Judy cares. I've got the monster stepmother who doesn't give a shit about anything except her next shopping trip. You know, the only time we held a conversation for over five minutes was the day I came home with those blue Jimmy Choo heels for the Summer Angels charity ball. She's totally vapid."

"I think that was the night ..." Julienne fell silent and Vanessa brought her attention back to her problems.

"I can't imagine what you're going through, Jules."

"Should I tell him, Bajita?" The nickname was Spanish for 'shorty'. Vanessa was not short, but she was shorter than Julienne. She stood at 5'5" without the high heels she always wore, and she was a curvy size 6 who enjoyed form-fitting clothes, but she had a 34DD chest, making it a challenge to shop. Julienne was 5'8", and at a size 4 looked willowy but strong, and she loved flowing dresses with sandals, floppy hats, and long earrings.

As different as they were physically, they were a perfectly matched pair psychologically, and a killer combination to attract men. If Vanessa didn't have it, Julienne did. Vanessa was sassy. Julienne was patient and sweet. Vanessa was a photographer who wandered on her own any place she wanted without feeling exposed. Julienne lived in an apartment on her own for the first time and all her mother's words of warning rattled in her head.

But they were friends to the core. When they weren't both in Dallas, they talked at least twice a week on video chats and supplemented with phone calls and texts on the off days. So Vanessa had been privy to Julienne's pain and constant dithering about what to do from the first moment her period was late. Vanessa didn't know the best thing for Julienne, so she spent two weeks talking her into telling her mother.

"You have to be here with me when I do. Please! I can't do it without you."

"I'm going to be home this weekend and then I'm going out on a shoot around Dell City to get some new desert shots. I have a contract with a new magazine for ten pictures."

"Okay. I'll ask Mom to come over for lunch at my apartment and you can stay with me."

"Now, should I tell him?"

Vanessa was harsh. "Jules- seriously! What for? He said he loved you and was in the process of a divorce and he wasn't. Do you really think carrying his baby would change that? And if it did, what would you be gaining? A husband who likes to cheat?"

You don't need financial help for ..." she paused.
"For what? Have you decided?"

A whisper that barely reached Vanessa over the phone. "I can't." Vanessa tried to be patient. This wasn't something to rush, even though her answer was already loaded and locked in case of disaster. But Julianne was not her and as much as they were alike, they were not.

Vanessa lived two blocks south of Julianne, they both played on the girls' soccer team, and they both sang in the church choir. The cement in their relationship was Vanessa's mother; Sam. Samantha was graceful and beautiful and Vanessa prayed to grow up looking like her mother. And she did. But losing her mother at age fifteen, and getting the step-monster made her grow up a lot faster than Julianne.

"I'll be there but you don't need me. Your mom is great. I'm coming because I love spending time with her."

"She thinks of you as one of the kids. All our mothers who grew up together think of us all like that. Your mom did too when she was alive."

"I remember picnics and whichever mother was nearest got us into someone's dry clothes and fed us."

"Yep. Aunt Maddy, Aunt Samantha, and Mom were the original trio, and then along came other 'Delta Nu Sisters' and their kids. You really missed something by not attending."

"Maybe if Mom was alive I would have. But going my own way seems right for me now."

“I’m sure it is. Just come over and be with me when I tell Mom I’m pregnant, please!”

That’s what they did, and the outcome of that conversation shocked both of them. Judy arrived looking regal as usual and tried not to show that her daughter’s obvious anxiety was making her nuts. Vanessa and Judy tried to talk like nothing was wrong, but finally Judy said, “Sit down and stop fidgeting Julianne, and tell me what’s up. I love the invitation and that you cooked for me, but you’re starting to scare me. I know it’s you, because Vanessa looks worried too and you look ready to jump out of your skin. What’s going on?”

Julienne sat and faced her mother. “I was seeing this man. He’s older than me. Quite a lot older. I really thought ... I thought I loved him. I do, but I guess I don’t really know him. He ... it didn’t work out. I’ve been pretty sad about that.”

“Who is he?”

“I don’t want to go there. It doesn’t matter. He’s not available and he left me. I’ll get over it eventually. But ... well” She stopped and tears flowed.

Judy looked hard at her and sighed. “You’re pregnant!”

Julienne nodded miserably. “I don’t know what to do, Mom.” Judy wrapped her into a hug and patted her back until she stopped crying, and wiped her eyes.

“It will turn out okay. What choices are you considering? I assume he won’t likely change his mind and come support you and the child.”

Vanessa's scornful grunt said it all.

"Do you know him?" Judy asked.

"Yes. He's an asshole."

"Does he know you're pregnant?" she asked her daughter.

"No."

"Are you going to tell him? He has a right to know."

"Why?" Vanessa asked. "He's fucked Julianne around long enough. He'd be a terrible father."

Judy sat quietly for several minutes. "Julianne, Vanessa, I know you feel grown up, but there are so many days ahead of you that are going to present you with questions that will swamp you ... your life. Sometimes I think it's just luck if we get the answers right."

"Mom, what are you talking about?"

"Whatever you decide to do with this baby will stay with you forever, I promise it will. So it's about choices. We're Catholic, so we don't even have to talk about abortion. If you choose that, there are plenty of people who can tell you about that guilt. I think ... no one is going to tell you about giving up a baby. You create a life ... and then you never know what happened to it."

Vanessa and Julianne stared at her. "Mom, what are you saying?"

Judy looked at Vanessa. "Samantha and Maddy are the only two people I ever told. And now, with your mother dead, it's only Maddy." She turned to Julianne. "Not even your father knows. If I'm going to tell you, I guess I should tell him too."

Judy took her mother's hand. "Mom, whatever it is, don't tell Daddy unless you want to. We never will and I was going to ask you not to tell Daddy about any of this. I'm his princess and I'm just not ready to give up that perception he has. Tell us what happened to you."

She took a sip of water and sighed. "I was young and dumb. At least you are older. That will help. I was fourteen years old, and I was at a sleep-over at a friend's house. Her phone rang and it was my boyfriend calling. You know, there were no cell phones back then. If you wanted to speak with someone, you called a home phone. My boyfriend's name was Daniel. He was ... nice. He called me a lot and I saw him at dances, sporting events, house parties, and that kind of thing. Back then, 'dating' wasn't a reality for a girl my age. My friend, Milly, wouldn't give me the phone. She kept talking to Daniel and flirting with him. I got very angry with her. It was a silly thing, but it seemed like something horrible at the time. I left her house and started walking home."

Judy smiled sadly. "And then I made my next stupid decision. A car stopped, and two boys I knew were inside. They were older than me- both from good families- so I got in and they said they'd take me home. Of course, what happened, is just what you are thinking." Her voice got fierce. "It was rape, but I wasn't allowed to try to prove it. My daddy would have killed them, and maybe me too, if we'd reported it, and I had to testify about it. When I turned up pregnant, he was ... well, angry is not the word. I was

sent to Oklahoma, ostensibly to help my elderly aunt. That was true, but it was also where I delivered my son. He was taken from me without my consent, but I had not yet even turned fifteen, and I had no rights in the matter- certainly none I knew about. My aunt got 'better', I came home, and returned to my school in time for my sophomore year. The event was absolutely never discussed in the household, by anyone, ever."

"The thing is ... I never forgot him. I just wanted to know that he got a good home but they disclosed information about the birth mother to the adopting parents, but not much in reverse. And my parents told me nothing at all. When I turned eighteen, I tried to find him but I got stalled out at every turn by my daddy and his lawyer. But I got a name. Howard and Sally Connors, and they named him Jeremy."

There was silence as the two young women absorbed the story so far. Vanessa got up and got wine out for her and Judy and refilled Julianne's glass of orange juice. "Until you decide," she muttered.

"I have a brother?" Julianne asked.

"Somewhere. You do. I never found him. I was thirty-five when I tried again. This time, I hired a lawyer who didn't sit in my daddy's back pocket, and he engaged a detective. We were able to find the adoptive parents, though I use the term 'parents' loosely. They were *troubled*, I guess is the polite thing to say. Howard Connors was in state prison as a three-time drug dealer loser at the time. His wife had been in and out of county jails and rehabilitation

centers and the last anyone knew she was getting remarried. If she got remarried, it wasn't in Nebraska. Later, I search all the adjacent states and there's nothing there either. Not under Sally Connors at least. I never found out her new last name, or where she went. Worst of all, no one knew where the boy was."

"I can't believe that people like that could adopt!" Vanessa said with venom.

"I guess they seemed okay at the time. I don't know. And here's the positive part, Julianne. You are a grown up, and you have me to help you. No one helped me and I was too young to push back. You aren't."

"What's the negative part?"

Judy was slow to answer. Finally, she said, "I think that when you carry a baby inside you for nine months that experience is not one that goes away easily. Your appetite changes, your body changes, you feel the first flutter of the heartbeat, and you count the minutes it doesn't move. Then you go through the pain of delivery, which you forget as soon as they put him in your arms. They weren't supposed to do it, but a kind nurse let me see and hold him. It doesn't matter how long you see him, you know in every part of your body and mind that he was there. And then he isn't." Judy stopped talking, obviously choked up.

They were silent, and then Julianne shook her head. "I don't want to watch my baby be raised by someone else. Watching first steps, falls, and scrapes get treated by someone else the baby calls 'Mommy' ... I don't want that."

“I understand, dear, but that’s selfish. It makes you uncomfortable to have someone else raise him when you are right there, but at least you know he’s okay.”

“Why didn’t they know where the boy was?” Vanessa asked.

“They told me that he’d been in and out of foster homes since he was five and that the Connors moved a lot. They left him with friends, and neighbors too, and when they didn’t come home, whoever he was with, would eventually call the cops and he’d go off someplace else. The detective was able to track his movements until age twelve. He got into some trouble and was moved out of the foster home he was in, and the notes say that he was being held in a therapeutic group home pending his next foster home placement. And, here’s the cherry on the cake, his records have since been lost! Do you believe that kind of incompetence? Apparently, the Department of Children’s Affairs, or whatever they called it at the time, went through a transition in the late seventies. Headquarters moved to a new building, but the records and home visit workers were housed in the old building until the 2008, when the new building was expanded enough to make room for everyone. Somewhere along the line, records were lost. In some cases, the home workers carried them in their cars, and things happened to them. Who knows? I just know that they had a million excuses, but they never could tell me where he was. And sometimes it eats me alive. I see two children playing and think that you have a brother who doesn’t know

that. I read a story about an abused boy and wonder if it's him. It's just ... awful."

Judy wiped tears from her eyes. "I intended to tell your father, and you, and invite my son to visit if he wanted. Since I couldn't find him, it was just left a secret. I know I don't bear the responsibility for the choices made, because I wasn't allowed to make any- but you will, darling. Just be careful and think it through. You are making choices that affect two lives here."

Vanessa and Judy looked at each other after Judy left. They almost couldn't believe what they'd heard. "Was I hallucinating, or did that just really happen?" Vanessa asked.

"I know! My tucked-in mother ... who knew she was capable of hiding that kind of pain? It definitely got my attention."

"I hate to push you, but that willowy figure of yours, and those loose, lacy dresses you like might be fooling you. You just passed the two month mark, Julianne. You can't hold off much longer, or the decision to do nothing will be the decision to deliver this baby."

Julianne put her hand on her stomach. "I don't know if I can do that."

"I know."

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In the morning, Vanessa gave Julianne a hug and left in her jeep for Dell City on the other side of the state. Julianne knew what choice her friend would

make. Vanessa was independent and sassy. Nothing kept her down, and she wasn't ready to be tied down by a man or a baby. Julienne was physically the picture of her mother, but now she suspected she was not as mentally strong as her mother. Judy didn't get to make those choices but she sure as hell did afterwards. Her mother was a force.

That evening Julienne went to her parents' home for dinner and couldn't help wondering what the presence of a son would have done to their family. It was beyond her imagining. Her life was set in a certain picture and she couldn't see it any differently.

Her mother was dressed for Sunday dinner and had put on a dress instead of her usual uniform of slim-fitting designer suits with chiffon blouses. Julienne wasn't nearly as stylish as Vanessa or Judy. She liked to go to thrift stores and find lacy dresses that looked vintage and pair them with tie up boots and floppy hats. But for tonight, she'd worn the blue Calvin Klein dress her mother bought her. They both wore their hair down, and Harold commented with a warm smile how beautiful they both looked.

They did. Julienne accepted that she was a beautiful girl, just like her mother. But she didn't want to suffer just like her mother. She made her decision that evening.

She told Vanessa over their Skype call, but with her out of town, she was taking another childhood friend, Carolyn Kraft with her.

"Lynnie will take good care of you."

"When will you be home?"

“I don’t know. I’m getting some great shots. Maybe next week.”

“I’m jealous. You’ve always known what you wanted to do. Here I just finished college and I have no idea. Being the fucked-over, pregnant, and abandoned mistress of a married man isn’t something I see in the wanted section very often.”

“You stop that! You’re smart and beautiful, and you have a great family who loves you. Just get on with it. Now, I’m going out to this little dance hall tonight, and then I’m going to be out and about for a couple of days. So I probably won’t call until Thursday, so tell Linnie she’s in charge of you until then.”

That was the last time Julianne ever heard from Vanessa.

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Julianne Slayer tried not to obviously look over her shoulder. Her father came up through the ranks and she remembered many of his teachings, plus her mother was a rape survivor, so she was more schooled than most women about using proper precautions. So instead, she stopped to admire some shoes in the window of Stellar Cellar, her favorite thrift store, and checked to see if the man behind her walked on past of found a place to stay and observe her.

She was a beautiful woman so having men gawk or turn around to take a look didn’t trip her safety wire. But those who were sneaky about it did.

This one was behind her for two blocks and she blamed herself for not moving the car when she left the Ulta two blocks over. But it was a nice day for a walk, and before she thought it over, she was halfway here.

The tall guy carrying the newspaper and a coffee cup, looked at her, and then kept walking without any detours. She relaxed her grip on the knife in her pocket, went in, and greeted Marie and Deborah, the women who owned the store. She wandered over to the 'new arrivals' section. It had been a couple of weeks since she was there. In fact, this was her first recreational trip outside her apartment in more than two weeks.

A plague had hit the city, and all dark-haired women looked as crazed as she did. She just had more reason than many.

Deborah joined her. "We have a few new long skirts that you might like," she said quietly as she pulled them out to show Julienne.

"They're nice." Julienne wasn't really paying attention. Deborah didn't take offense as she slid them back onto the rack.

Deborah started to leave but turned back. "I'm sorry about your friends."

"Thank you. I can hardly believe it."

"I'm glad you're out and trying to live normally, but aren't you worried?"

Julienne shook her head stoutly. "I can take care of myself."

Deborah nodded and left her. It didn't take longer than fifteen minutes for Julienne to leave

without buying anything. This time she took a cab the short distance to her car. She'd decided that she had something more important she had to do.

###

"Please excuse my questions, but the papers are vague, and I'm trying to understand the depth of your paranoia and if it's warranted."

Julienne was unfailingly polite, a lady, just as she'd been taught. Unlike Aunt Maddy or Aunt Samantha, who both had wild sides, her mother was always circumspect and proper. Now she knew why. The one time she'd made a risky decision she'd been raped by two boys and ended up with the traumatic loss of her baby. Judy raised her not to take chances. Carolyn and Vanessa were much more open to things. She walked home in the middle of the street and carried her keys pointing out like a weapon. They grabbed rides from people they just met. They always said it because he father was a cop. Now she knew it was more about her mother's influence.

She wanted to discuss that part, but she couldn't. It was her mother's secret to share, not hers. So she answered carefully.

"I rarely read the papers because usually they get everything wrong. And I don't ask my father either because they won't tell him!"

His eyebrow raised a fraction, so she explained. "That Florida detective has everything on total lockdown. No information goes out to anyone for any reason. That's why I know the papers have

everything wrong. They are just speculating and churning for online and hard copy readers.”

“Well, then I think I can assume your paranoia begins with some very real concerns. Tell me why you came by today.”

“You have a reputation with the cops for being a guy you can see, who knows how to keep his mouth shut. And of course, I’ve met you several times at various functions, so I know you understand the social circles my family travels in. Both of those things are necessary. I feel comfortable speaking with you, and I want to thank you for taking me today as a walk-in. I assume paying cash will be okay? And may I ask for no record of my visit?”

Gerald Tyler PhD shrugged. He did indeed give service to people within both of those circles and whether it was true or not, they were all positive that they would be over-looked for promotions, skipped for the next party, or shunned more openly if their emotional issues were known. He said as much, and added, “Considering the losses you’ve experienced in the past few months, I can’t imagine there’s a fool on the planet who couldn’t grasp the advisability of getting some therapy.”

She smiled for the first time and he saw how pretty she really was. “I guess I’ve encountered more fools than you Dr. Tyler.”

“Don’t bet on it. But we’ll do this however you wish. Now, tell me what’s troubling you beyond the obvious.”

She gave a nervous giggle. “I guess losing my best friends is obvious trauma.”

“There’s more?”

She nodded. “I had an unhappy affair last year. I’m, I mean I was a virgin. But I fell hard for this man. He told me he loved me and he was so sweet.” Her voice trailed off as she said, “I would have done anything for him.”

“That surprised you.” He said it like a statement, not a question, and she realized it was true.

“I guess it did. My friends and I- we were raised by strong women who married tough men. None of us were raised to only say ‘no ma’m and no sir’. We were raised to say it, but from respect, not because we weren’t good enough to speak up. I’m probably the shyest of the four of us. And I’m the last one standing.” Her throat choked with tears as she delivered that statement.

He kept his face neutral. She didn’t want sympathy. He let her live with her emotions for a moment. “You are scared and you have good reason. What do you mean four? Who are you talking about?”

“Carolyn Kraft, Sharon Young, Vanessa Kylie and me. We all grew up tight.” She sniffed and touched her nose with a tissue.

“I read that the Kraft and Young girls were killed but who is Vanessa Ky- something.”

“Kylie. She’s my BFF from the group. I care about the rest of them, but Vanessa is special to me.”

“What happened to her?”

“I don’t know. She’s disappeared, but she has to be imprisoned or dead.”

“Why?”

“Because she’d contact me or her father even if you cut off an arm.”

“I see. So you have three friends who are more outgoing than you are, and they all met with harm. Does that make you feel more or less safe?”

“Doesn’t that depend on how it looks to that particular serial killer? Am I a stupid risk or a challenge?”

“I see what you mean.” He reached for the pitcher of water and poured them both a glass. “Maybe this should have whiskey in it,” he said to break the tension. “I think your paranoia about perhaps being followed by the man when you were shopping might be more than was needed, but doesn’t that depend on that particular serial killer? Maybe he has a job so you’re safe all day. Maybe he can come and go all day and you’re never safe. I don’t know Julienne. I think there’s not a thing wrong with you except that you probably do need therapy for grief management. Or I could recommend a group I run. You are going to need some new friends.”

Julienne sat back in her chair, stunned by the comment. He saw and quickly apologized. “I was trying to make you laugh. You seem to have a survivors’ sense of humor, which is usually pretty dark. And in all seriousness, sharing grief with others who are going through it works really well. Partly it’s because you are trying to cope with fellow travelers who understand how you are feeling. But part is because they bond and create a new social structure.”

Julienne relaxed. “I see. It’s not our way though.”

“Then we will have 1:1 sessions. It’s your choice. That puts you in charge and that’s on purpose to help you feel empowered again. You feel like a target through no fault of your own. Even if you think you’ve made bad choices or had bad luck, it’s not because you’re incompetent. Life just has a way of kicking the snot out of you, and you have to find a way to feel that or you run the risk of stamping ‘victim’ on your forehead and never getting it off.”

“I agree. Part of me says to just run home to Mommy, and the other part says to get on with my life.”

“Understandable, but have the police talked to you about your actual risk level?”

“No. Any brunette associated with famous people in Dallas might be at risk. Though I guess those associated with the police might be at higher risk.” She looked away. “But you see, these girls are my friends. We were in diapers together. Two of four are dead and the third I know is dead even if I can’t prove it.” She took a deep breath. “I feel like there’s a target on my back,” she admitted.

“Maybe there is,” Tyler answered. “I wouldn’t dare say not. There’s definitely a pattern here. Any idea why?”

Julienne cocked her head and thought for a moment. “I wish I knew more about the investigation, but what I get from all this is a giant ‘fuck you’ to the powerful men in this state. It’s like the killer is saying, ‘I can take your women and you can’t stop me’.” Julienne sat back in her chair and tried to relax. “Maybe I’m no more at risk than anyone and my

relationship with the women is coincidental. The two we know are dead are the governor's daughter, and the daughter of the wealthiest contractor in the state. I think you'd have to live here to know how really connected we are. A stranger would have no reason to know that. My missing friend is the daughter of the man who owns the biggest bank in Texas. Banking, contracting, and governor don't spell a pattern. Especially since Vanessa disappeared almost a year ago and she was on the other side of the state and nowhere near Texas."

"You have a very logical mind."

"Thank you. Mom always says that when the world goes nuts, sit down, shut up, and think."

"She's a wise woman."

"There's an entire task force out there who know more than I do about solving these crimes. I should just leave it for them."

"If you do that, are there more things troubling you that you should discuss?"

She shook her head. "I don't think so, Dr. Tyler. You and Mom make a lot of sense. Nothing but time will heal my wounds over my friends. My unhappy love affair and the aftermath is something I have to live with too. I hope it makes me smarter. As for the paranoia that scared me and drove me here, I think I *should* be paranoid and I'm better off keeping an eye on my back."

"Should we set up another session?"

"I don't think so. What do I owe you?"

Tyler considered it. "Are you sure you don't want to see me professionally again?"

“Yes. No offense. But I’m sure.”

“Then you owe me \$300 to close out that chapter of our lives and I have a question.”

She wrote out the check and handed it to him.

“What’s the question?”

“Are you interested in having lunch with me?”

She honestly wasn’t surprised. She seemed to attract older men, and he was attractive. In fact, she remembered dancing with him at the Shriner’s Charity Ball last year and enjoying his company.

“Did I shock you?” He asked anxiously. “I didn’t want to let you get away without asking while I was feeling lucky. I wanted to ask you out at the Shriners Ball but I chickened out. I’m not one to do that usually, but pampered Texas ladies make me tongue-tied. My upbringing was more pedestrian.”

“I remember dancing with you. You were quite good as I recall.”

“I’m surprised you remember.”

Julienne nodded. “I’d just broken up with my lover before that dance or I’d have paid more attention, I’m sure. In fact, I *would* like to have lunch with you, but can you ask me again when things settle down? I do have a lot of grief to manage, and I’d like to have my next date with a man to be when my heart isn’t so heavy.”

She took the check back from him, wrote her phone number on the back of her check, and handed it back again. “Try me in a month, okay?”

“Deal.”

###

Julienne's Diary-
Tuesday

Yesterday was crazy. It only took me a day to decide that I am done with all this nonsense. I'm sick of being afraid and sad, and drawing my strength and direction from others. My twenty-third birthday is coming this month and I don't want to be wallowing in any of this any longer.

Carolyn and Sharon will be in my heart forever, but truth be told, they were heading off into their own lives. Carolyn was going to help special needs children as a social worker. Sharon worked at the Community Day Care Center and really wanted to get married and have a bunch of kids. We were headed to the reality of people who sent emails and saw each other on Facebook and charity events a couple times a year.

Vanessa is the one who hurt my insides. I don't know what happened to her, and it can't be connected with the other two girls, but I still know she is dead. Nothing else would keep us apart and for her, I will mourn the rest of my life. So I might as well accept that and move on. I tried to think of ways to honor her and keep her close to my heart and I think I have a couple.

She came with her bag, but when she packed up for her trip to Dell City, she took her backpack instead. I got it from the closet. It's a black Coach tote and seeing it brought tears to my eyes. Mom carries one almost the same, and it was the subject of

conversation more than once. I tried several times to give my mother new bags. She carried each one for special events on the weekend, but come Monday, the black tote was back. Vanessa thought it was hilarious.

I told her she was just the same. She has tons of purses but she either carries this tote or the backpack. Just like Mom. Vanessa took that well because she admires Mom. The last weekend Vanessa was here we had lunch together with Mom, and I told Mom about my pregnancy. It seems impossible it was almost a year since I'd seen my Bajita. That's when I decided. I'm gonna carry that damn bag until it falls apart, and I'm going to get a necklace with Bajita on it. Something in gold with a pendant where I can put a picture of us.

Putting my things into the Coach tote made me cry, but it was kind of a cleansing cry. I called Mom and told her about the bag and the necklace. She liked the idea.

Wednesday

I called Mom and said I was bummed that I was the only one of the group who didn't have a direction for my life. I said I was living on my own because I'm doing the same job I had in college- and was that because I like it, I'm undecided, or I'm lazy? I really don't know.

Mom made sense as usual but she said something that I'm going to try to write down exactly. "Soliciting funds for charity events is a good occupation and as shy as you are I never thought

you'd be good at it, but you are. I think maybe you aren't shy as much as over-shadowed. That's something for you to consider."

Isn't that a wild statement to make. It has a ring of truth in it. I am shy but never as much when I'm alone as when I'm with my gang.

I told her what a good mom she was and she gave me a lot of love. And then she said something else- she said I had skills she never had and I shouldn't pattern myself after her so much. I asked what skills but she wouldn't answer. She said that the purpose of life was to discover those things for myself.

Thursday

I'm inspired to take a broom through my life. I went through every closet and drawer last night and I have two bags of stuff for Stellar Cellar- after the hairdresser and Ulta for a makeover. Everything I've ever read about women changing how they look in response to stress is absolutely true. I feel wonderful. I decided I to like soliciting for donors and sponsors. But to get into the big time events, I need to look the part. So I just cut my hair to just touch my shoulders and I put streaks of cinnamon highlights in it. I love it. The cut lets my hair move and fall right back into place and the highlights warm my complexion. Which led to the makeover.

I'm still me. I went to the thrift store to donate items, but I went in a 'classic Julienne outfit' of lacy blouse, long denim skirt, black boots, and a black

leather jacket. Even the clerk at the Stanley Korshak store in Crescent Court loved the outfit. Her name was Selma, and I told her I was finally going to buy the clothing Mom has harped about for years.

Damn if she didn't know exactly what that meant! They all say the same things so it must be true. "You must have a black suit with pants and a skirt. Get a style that's elegant and suits your body type. Make sure you feel great in it. Then you need black pumps with two-inch heels that feel like slippers. And then we can't forget the black dresses- one for business, and one little black dress that shows off some of your assets. Until you have those things in your wardrobe, you may as well have nothing. And once you have them, you can go anywhere and do anything. The rest of the things you buy are just accessories. Is that what you're ready for?"

I wrote that down as best I could so I can remember it to tell my own daughter someday. And maybe she'll be as cooperative because my years of resistance were done. I held my arms out and said, "I'm all yours."

Selma took pictures of me that I texted to Mom. As soon as I hit 'send' I felt a wave of nostalgia. Vanessa would be so excited at what I've been doing the past two days. I didn't cry, though. I just looked around the store and with her in mind, I ended up getting a really cool red dress.

I got all my purchases delivered and invited Mom over for a fashion show and wine. We had a great time.

