

Chapter 1

Callie's mother Allyson yelled at her to turn down the stereo but Callie ignored her. *It's not loud, she thought. She's just mad. It's not my fault her boyfriend left her. Again.*

Callie didn't know why her mother's boyfriends left and didn't care. She had no idea what the point was in having boyfriends. What purpose did they serve? What were they good for? As near as she could tell, nothing. As a bashful, modest twelve-year-old, Callie had yet to develop an interest in boys, nor (fortunately) had they developed an interest in her. Callie did not have her mother's good looks, nor was she even interested in looking good.

Callie knew her mother would likely dress up, go out, and look for another man. She marveled at how easy it was for Allyson to find someone to bring home. She could usually get a new boyfriend soon after an old one left. When she dressed up, she wasn't merely attractive, she was gorgeous.

Although Allyson was in her late thirties, she looked younger. She was a petite brunette with an oval face, delicate features, a shapely figure, and a sweet voice. Men noticed her wherever she went, even when she dressed in frumpy clothes. No man could resist her when she looked her best. Sometimes the men Allyson attracted were older than she was. Sometimes they were younger. She always kept an open-mind. If a man seemed interested, she would give him a try.

A few nights later, Allyson did exactly what Callie expected. She dressed in a short, clingy red dress with a low collar and silver belt, high heels, dark pantyhose, and just the right amount of makeup that highlighted her soft facial features. Her dazzling appearance gave Allyson the self-confidence she rarely displayed when she wasn't on the prowl. She knew how to attract men. Keeping one was another story. She was ready to try again.

Allyson promenaded out the door, got into her car, and drove away. Callie turned up her music and began a familiar wait. Usually, it was only a matter of hours before her mother found a new man. Callie wondered if she ought to fall asleep when she felt tired or stay up to check out the new guy, and then realized it didn't matter. He would still be around in the morning and she could meet him then.

When Callie went down to breakfast the next morning, it wasn't a new boyfriend she found at the table. It wasn't one of her mother's old boyfriends, either. Chatting with her mother was a blonde woman Callie didn't recognize. She was wearing Allyson's new sheer dressing gown.

Callie wondered what was going on.

"Here she comes! Good morning, sleepyhead. Janine, this is my daughter, Callie."

Janine stood up to greet Callie. A dazzling smile lit her face. She was taller than Allyson and had a willowy figure. Callie thought the woman was naked underneath her mother's filmy new gown.

"Your mom's told me so much about you! It's a pleasure to meet you." The way Janine leaped up made Callie think she was about to hug her, but Janine didn't.

"Uh, thanks. Same here."

"I hope we'll get to be good friends."

"Uh, yeah, um, maybe. I mean so do I."

“Do you want eggs and bacon?” Allyson asked. She only cooked breakfast when she brought a new man home. Callie usually ate cereal and milk. *If Allyson remembered to buy the cereal, and if the milk hadn’t gone bad. What is happening here?* Callie wondered. Then she wondered if she was still asleep and if this was merely a dream.

“Your daughter looked a little freaked out,” Janine said later when they were alone again. “I hope I didn’t frighten her.”

“She’s almost a teenager. It’s normal for them to look a little freaked out. It’s nineteen-ninety-five but not much has changed in twenty-five years. Remember what it was like for us?”

“Yeah, I remember. I remember a lot *more*, too.”

Allyson almost blushed. “Stop it! You’re gonna embarrass me.”

“Okay, I won’t mention it. But you know what I meant.”

“Yeah, I know,” Allyson replied. She wondered why now, of all times in her adult life, her first lover had come back. True, it was an accident that they met in that club late last night. *Then, again, Allyson thought, was it an accident? Or, was it some kind of fate?*

Allyson’s classmates were all high school freshmen like her and she felt safe. The lunchroom was gigantic and crowded, however. Everyone looked older than she was. Allyson felt overwhelmed. She seriously considered returning her lunch to her locker and going without eating. Then she realized that might work for one day but not for the term. Sooner or later, she would have to find a place to fit in.

Students occupied the corners but she found a spot next to the wall where she could stand. People passed endlessly. Allyson feared that if she took out her sandwich and started to eat someone might bump her (accidentally or deliberately- she wasn’t sure) and she would drop it. She considered sneaking outside but the doors were marked Emergency and big signs warned about opening them. Allyson felt trapped. As she was about to give up, she heard a voice.

“Crazy, huh? Have you ever seen this many people in one place?”

“What?” Allyson asked as she turned. Her eyes fell on a slender torso and she had to look upward to see a face. The girl who looked at her seemed friendly. “Uh, no. Not only is there no place to sit, there’s no place to *stand*. I’m afraid to take my sandwich out. I might be lucky to get a bite or two before somebody knocks it out of my hand.”

“And keeps going as if you don’t exist. Don’t forget that part.”

“Yeah. Say, who are you anyway?”

“Janine Cooper.”

“Allyson with a ‘y’ Bradley.”

“Are you hungry, Allyson with a ‘y’ Bradley?”

“Yeah. Are you?”

“I have an idea. What if we face each other and try to eat? Maybe if there’s two of us instead of one, people won’t bump into us.”

“Good ideal. Let’s try it.”

Janine’s suggestion worked and the girls ate their sandwiches without incident.

“You still remember that?” Janine asked, feeling pleasantly surprised.

“Yeah. Changed my life.”

“Mine, too. Do you think we had any idea at the time?”

“I don’t know about you,” Allyson replied. “But, I didn’t. I just wanted to eat my lunch.”

“Yeah. But..., even if we knew what was coming, do you think we would have done anything different?”

“I wouldn’t have changed a thing. I only wished things would have stayed the same.”

“Yeah, now that you mention it, I feel the same way,” Janine replied, wistfully.

Although they had no classes together and rode different buses to and from school, the girls quickly became more than lunch partners. They exchanged phone numbers and chatted in the evenings or on weekends. There were occasional opportunities to get together. One of them morphed into a sleepover. That night, everything changed.

“Have you ever seen a *real* one?” Allyson asked, smirking.

“No, and I don’t want to.”

“Aren’t you curious?”

“No. They’re so ugly,” Janine replied. “Don’t you think so?”

“No! Well, yes. But, I’m still curious.”

“Don’t you think ours are prettier?”

“I don’t think mine is. It’s just *there*, you know?”

“It’s more than just *there*, Allyson. It’s *you*.”

“Sometimes- most of the time, really, I wish it wasn’t.”

“Oh, c’mon! I bet it’s lovely.”

“No, Janine. It’s not.”

“Let me see it.”

“What?”

“Let me see it,” Janine replied. Allyson hesitated. “Show it to me!” She had never shown it to anyone. “Do I have to pull your pants down?”

“Uh, no. Okay.” Allyson lowered her pajamas and panties.

“Oh, how sweet it looks,” Janine said. “Can I touch it?”

“What? Why?”

“To see if it feels like mine.”

“Why wouldn’t it?”

“Because it’s *yours*, Allyson.”

“But, you have your own.”

“Yeah, and I know what mine feels like.”

“Well, okay, I guess.”

“You can feel mine if you want to.” Before Allyson could stop Janine she, took down her panties and exposed herself. Well, that’s not exactly true. Allyson felt exposed but Janine didn’t feel the same way.

Allyson looked into Janine’s eyes. There was something there she never noticed before. While Allyson felt reluctant to be touched, Janine seemed eager for Allyson to touch her.

Mesmerized, Allyson reached toward Janine as she reached toward Allyson. They touched at the same moment. Suddenly they knew what to do. They cupped their hands on each other's crotches, pressed gently, and sighed. Then Allyson gasped as she felt Janine's finger slip inside her. Until now, the only way she had taken anything into her body was through her mouth. Eating felt natural. Surprisingly, so did what Janine was doing. However, Allyson wasn't ready to reciprocate. Janine didn't care. She did to Allyson what she had done to herself a few times, and liked very much. Janine rotated her finger inside Allyson's vagina. Allyson nearly swooned. Janine's face beamed. For the first time in her young life, she felt truly happy.

That first time happened almost twenty-five years earlier and Allyson had all but forgotten it. Then, last night, she entered a new club with some friends. They squeezed into a booth. When Allyson wasn't laughing, drinking, or checking out the men, her eyes fell on someone who walked in alone. A moment later, she realized who it was. Long lost feelings flooded her mind.

The girls' brief romance had lasted through the school year and then Janine's family moved away. Allyson's mother encouraged her to write to Janine. She composed a couple of letters but mailed only one. The others said things she didn't want to risk anyone else ever reading. The letter she did send had only three words. 'I miss you.' Allyson knew that was all she needed to write because Janine would know exactly what she meant to say. However, Janine never wrote back and Allyson never found out why.

Life went on.

Janine spotted Allyson as she looked around the club and then walked over to the booth. A delightful reunion followed. Allyson told her girlfriends about her high school friendship with Janine. (But she did not mention their romance. She didn't know if Janine would approve.) Later, when the women happened to meet in the Ladies' Room, Janine asked why Allyson hadn't told her friends the truth. "They don't seem like prudes," she commented.

"Oh, they're very open-minded. But none are..., well, you know. At least, not as far as I know."

"You mean like *we* were?"

"Yeah, but we didn't know it. I thought you might prefer that I not mention it,"

Allyson explained.

"Why?"

"I guess because I haven't seen you in twenty-five years and didn't know how you were now. Maybe you'd changed. Or maybe you forgot all about it."

"Allyson, I never forgot you. But, I thought you forgot me."

"You did? Why?"

"You never wrote me."

"But I *did*," Allyson protested. "It was only once. I didn't get a reply and thought you were done with me, so I threw my other letters away."

"Wait. You *sent* me a letter?" Janine asked. Allyson nodded. "I never got it."

"Oh, no! I'm so sorry."

“No, I’m sorry for hurting your feelings. I was too busy at first with school and a new town but I planned to write and tell you all about everything. Then when I didn’t hear from you, I decided I’d better not because you weren’t interested anymore.”

“Oh, but I *was*. I was heartbroken when you moved away. I actually thought of running away. I knew your new address but not much else, or I would have tried. Of course, I had no money, but I did start saving up for a bus ticket.”

“It’s better that you didn’t come.”

“Why?” Allyson asked.

“I don’t know how my mother would have reacted.”

“What do you mean?”

“Remember how religious she used to be?” Janine asked.

“Used to be? Is she gone now?”

“Oh, no. She’s very much alive but no longer religious. Not since what the pastor in that new church did to her. Anyway, I think I know why I never received your letter.”

“You mean?”

“Yeah. I think she suspected we weren’t *just* sleeping during our sleepovers.”

“Oh, God!” Allyson exclaimed.

“God had nothing to do with her religion. It was all about rules and punishment.”

“I remember. She *was* strict. She wouldn’t let you go out with boys. I thought we were safe, though.”

“So did I, but now I’m angry about what she did. And, I didn’t want to go out with boys, anyway. I just said that to annoy her.”

“You’re not gonna tell her about our meeting again, are you?”

“Oh, yeah,” Janine replied. “She’ll be happy to hear I saw you.”

“So, are you...? I’m not. I was married but he left. I have a daughter.”

“I have three kids and a husband.”

“Let’s go back, shall we?” Allyson said. She knew what she wanted to happen next.

That was all they said about themselves, even after Janine followed Allyson back to her house and then into her bedroom where they renewed their acquaintance after a long time apart. It almost felt as if they had never separated.

Chapter 2

Callie worried Janine would never leave. *Doesn't she have a home of her own?* She thought. *Why doesn't she go back there?* However, Allyson and Janine didn't seem eager to separate again. Perhaps they feared the same thing would happen this time as happened last time and they would remain apart for years. Neither lover wanted to risk that.

Callie didn't know her mother and Janine were lovers. They slept in the same bed, but that was because Allyson had a king-size bed and there was no guest room. During the three days and nights she and Janine spent together, Allyson recalled how simple and beautiful life could be when a person was with someone they genuinely loved. She never felt the same with any man she'd ever been with. Allyson realized she hadn't even tried. The reason was simple. It was not a man she wanted, but Janine. And now, Janine was back. All she wanted now was to find a way they could remain together.

They awoke on the third morning. Janine got up, went to the bathroom, came back, and started dressing. Allyson interrupted her.

"You don't need to get dressed yet," she said.

"I can't leave here naked. I might get arrested."

Allyson sat up. "You're leaving? Why?"

"I have to get home. My family thinks I'm on a business trip. I do the kind of work that demands sudden trips. That's why I had a packed travel bag in my trunk."

"But, you can stay. I was hoping you'd move right in." Allyson thought she was saying what Janine wanted to hear. Janine looked at Allyson, unsure she had heard her correctly. She hesitated to reply. Allyson understood what her hesitation implied, but refused to accept it. "It's what we wanted twenty-five years ago, wasn't it?" Allyson asked, meekly.

"Yes. But that was twenty-five years ago. Our lives are different now. We're different women."

"Maybe *you* are, but I'm not. I still want you as much now as I did back then. Maybe more."

"Oh, Allyson, sweetie..."

Janine liked reconnecting with Allyson and recalling their wonderful love when they were mere teenage girls. However, she was an adult now with a husband, teenage daughter, and younger sons of her own. *It's easier for Allyson, Janine thought. She's not married, and I think her daughter could accept us. I'm not sure my kids could. I'd have to leave Mike and I don't know what that would do to him. He's been a devoted husband for all these years. Telling him I'm leaving because I met the love of my life again would hurt him deeply.*

Janine wondered how to explain why she couldn't stay. She knew she still loved Allyson, but what difference did that make? Love wasn't the most important thing in the world anymore. There were other things...

"Okay," Allyson said. Then she flopped down, turned over, and buried her head beneath the pillow. Janine finished dressing and left without saying another word. She had been thinking of suggesting they could start an affair, but now wondered if Allyson could accept that. *Would it be enough for her?* Janine wondered. *Could it make her happy? Maybe not.*

Later, Callie found her mother sitting in the recliner. The TV was on but Allyson had muted the sound. Her head was down and Callie thought she heard sobs. “Mom? Mom! What’s wrong? Are you okay?”

Allyson raised her head and looked at her daughter. She wondered how she could explain how she felt without revealing too much about the relationship she and Janine started when they were not much older than Callie was. Allyson still wanted that relationship. It seemed that Janine didn’t. Allyson wondered if her life was worth continuing.

“No, sweetie. I’m not okay.”

“What happened?”

“Um, Janine left.”

Yay! Callie thought but then tried not to show it on her face. “Why are you sad?” she asked.

“I didn’t want her to leave,” Allyson replied, not looking at her daughter. She paused, wondered how much she ought to reveal, and then went on. “In fact, I asked her to move in.”

Callie tried not to show her surprise. “Move in? You mean *live* with us? Why?”

“Because we’re best friends, Callie.”

“So, is she coming back?”

“No, Callie. She refused.”

“Why, Mom?”

“Because she can’t leave her family,” Allyson replied, but then paused. She wondered again if she ought to continue, then decided to be honest. “But, we’re still best friends.”

If they had been best friends, Callie wondered why her mother never mentioned Janine. Callie didn’t even know the woman existed until she saw her wearing her mother’s dressing gown. Now, Allyson seemed obsessed with her. Callie looked at her mother and wondered why she changed so dramatically in the past few days.

“I don’t understand, Mom.”

“I know you’re too young to understand this, but I’ve loved Janine since we were not much older than you.” Callie looked at her, unable to grasp what she heard. Allyson saw the bewildered expression on her daughter’s face and felt she ought to say more. “You can’t predict who you’ll fall in love with,” she said, gloomily. Then she realized she had probably confused Callie even more.

“Love? What’s love got to do with it? Love stinks.”

“Don’t say that, Callie! Love is the most beautiful feeling you can have. I’m happier than I’ve been in many years.”

“Yeah, right,” Callie replied. “That’s why you look like you want to slit your wrists.”

“Slit my wrists? How do you know about that kind of stuff?”

“Kids talk in school.”

“Oh, right,” Allyson said.

But they don’t talk about weird stuff like this, Callie thought. They don’t talk about what you’re supposed to do when your mom starts acting crazy.

Chapter 3

Callie's best friend Virginia was a chubby, gawky, blonde-haired girl who liked wearing pig tails. She had a round face, a nose that was slightly too big, wore thick glasses, and often squinted. Virginia was also the smartest student at Springfield Middle School.

Naturally, the other kids made fun of her. Not because she looked funny, wore thick glasses, or was smarter than everyone else, but because she refused to dress like a girl her age. Most girls had already transitioned from child to teenage clothing. They traded frilly dresses, dressy shoes, and tops that covered most of their upper body for outfits that became increasingly revealing as they developed. The reason Virginia didn't dress the same way was not that she was clueless. It was because clothes were unimportant to her.

Callie liked Virginia because she was different. She didn't necessarily want to be like Virginia, but she didn't want to be like the other girls at school, either. Callie wasn't sure what her particular differences were yet but felt safe exploring herself with Virginia. She thought other girls had already given up on being unique. They had already chosen the safety that sameness conferred. Callie hated cliques, clubs, and conformity, although she didn't know all those words. She also didn't care that other kids made fun of her and Virginia.

"My little cousin made me watch *The Little Mermaid* tape again last night," Virginia said. "I had to babysit her when my parents went out with her parents. I should have known that she would want to watch it again, but I didn't think of it ahead of time. But, I got her back for making me watch it."

"How?"

"I told her the ending of the movie wasn't like the ending of the original story."

"How did you find out?" Callie asked.

"I looked it up in the library one day. It's in Hans Christian Anderson's book."

"So, what's the real ending?"

"Well, the movie has a happy ending," Virginia explained. "The little mermaid gets the prince. But, the fairy tale has a sad ending because she doesn't get the prince. In fact, she dies."

"Yeah, so?"

"Well, I told my cousin that."

"You told her the mermaid *dies*?" Callie asked, surprised.

"Yeah."

"What did she do?"

"She asked what death was," Virginia said.

"Did you explain it?"

"How could I? I don't know."

"So then what happened?" Callie asked.

"She told her parents when she went home, and now I'm in trouble."

There was a long silence. Finally, Callie looked away from Virginia's face and began to speak. "I think I'm in trouble, too."

"What happened? What did you do?"

"I didn't do *anything*. It was my mom."

"Okay. What did *she* do?" Virginia asked.

“She has a new girlfriend.”

“So? You and I are girls and we’re friends. Doesn’t she have girlfriends, too?”

“She’s only had boyfriends,” Callie explained. Until that moment, Callie hadn’t admitted to herself that the way her mother talked about Janine was the same way she sometimes talked about the men she dated.

“I don’t get what you mean.”

“My mom told me she’s in love.”

“So?” Virginia asked.

“With this girlfriend.”

“Oh. What’s wrong with that?”

“I don’t think that’s the way it’s supposed to be.”

“Why?”

“That’s just the way it is, Virginia. Don’t you know anything?”

“If you say so, Callie. I gotta go. Gym class. See you on the bus later.”

Callie wasn’t sure she wanted to see Virginia or anyone else later. She wasn’t even certain she wanted to go home again. What if Janine had come back and what if she wanted to stay this time? Callie tried not to think about it but found she couldn’t think about anything else.

Luckily, Janine wasn’t there when she got home after school. Her mother was still at work, too. Callie breathed a sigh of relief. *Maybe everything’s gone back to normal*, she thought. *Maybe she’ll even come home with a guy tonight.*

Callie hadn’t felt comfortable with the men her mother brought home although they had always been nice to her. She’d always hoped the latest man would be her mother’s last one, but there was always another. Callie knew one of them could become her stepfather, but that seemed unlikely. The men never stayed around long enough for them to become a family.

Chapter 4

It hadn't occurred to Allyson that Janine might not feel the same way she did. She thought connecting with her long, lost love would bring the permanent happiness they had been denied twenty-five years earlier. They were adults now. They could do anything they wanted. Only, they couldn't, really. Or, maybe Janine just didn't want to. Allyson wasn't certain which possibility hurt the least. Then she decided that she was wrong and Janine *did* want to be with her and it was only a matter of time before she came back, permanently. Since that was the only acceptable outcome, Allyson went with it.

Callie watched her mother change. Allyson started in her bedroom. She cleared out half the clothes and other junk in her closet so Janine would have room for her stuff when she moved in. Then she went through the closet in Callie's room. To make room for the stuff she cleared out of her bedroom closet, Allyson threw out many of the toys Callie saved from when she was little. When Callie complained, Allyson told her, "You're not a child anymore. You've got to take more responsibility for the things in your life."

Yeah, but what about you, Callie thought. *You're not a child anymore, either, yet you're not taking responsibility for your life. You're acting crazy.* If she had said aloud what she was thinking, Allyson would have sighed, nodded, and replied, "Yeah, crazy with love."

The biggest and most unexpected change was that Allyson no longer brought men home with her. Unexpectedly, Callie wished that her mother *would* bring a man home. That was the normal she was used to. She hadn't liked it but she accepted it. Callie didn't know where this new crazy would end up. *If I tell her she's acting crazy, will she even want me around anymore?* Callie asked herself. She had no idea what the answer would be and kept her fear to herself.

Allyson didn't keep her thoughts to herself. All she talked about was how wonderful it was going to be when Janine moved in. "You'll like her when you get to know her. I'm sure of it. And she'll like you. You guys are going to be great friends. We'll be a real family, finally. It will be so wonderful." *Will it?* Callie wondered. *Or, will I never see you because you're with Janine all the time?*

Several weeks passed without any word from Janine. Allyson tried not to worry. She assumed Janine wanted to surprise her and that she would just show up one day with suitcases and move in. Allyson stopped going out, except for work, so she could be certain to be home when Janine arrived. She sent Callie shopping. "Here's the credit card. Don't buy anything that's not on the list, Callie. We don't have much money and we have to save it for when Janine moves in."

Callie briefly thought about packing a bag, taking the credit card, and running away. But, where could she go? Virginia was her only friend. She might take Callie in, but her mother was weird, and Callie wasn't sure Virginia's mother even liked her.

Debbie (Virginia's mother) had always seemed a little weird but was looking more normal now that Allyson had changed. Before, Allyson had been the stable mom. Now, Debbie seemed that way. Virginia never talked about her mother, but Callie knew she embarrassed Virginia. She also felt Virginia worried that anything she complained about when her mother was nowhere around would somehow get back to her. It was as if she had

ears that could hear no matter how far away she was. Sometimes, Callie wondered if Virginia was afraid of her mother but never asked.

Are all moms weird? Callie wondered. She didn't know any other mothers because she had no friends other than Virginia. She also didn't yet know that there was no such thing as normalcy. Everybody was weird in some way. Some people were just weirder than others. Few were downright crazy or dangerous. So far, Allyson was acting crazy but had not yet seemed dangerous. Callie didn't want to think about what would happen to her if her mom got worse. Maybe she would have no choice but to run away to live with Virginia and again wondered if her mother would notice she was gone.

What did happen was almost worse. Allyson stopped noticing Callie even when she was at home. She no longer sent Callie to buy food, made meals for her, or did her laundry. Callie felt like a ghost in her own house. That was when she got scared.

I'm right here but she doesn't even see me, Callie thought. *I might as well be invisible. Or dead.* Allyson rarely spoke to Callie. She grunted if she passed Callie in the hallway, saw her in the kitchen, or came into the bathroom when Callie was on the toilet. Callie ignored her mother and Allyson didn't even notice. She went around the house humming or singing as if she was happy all the time. Callie felt pretty sure her mother had lost it. She even began wondering if Allyson was paying the bills.

One night, Callie crept downstairs when Allyson was already asleep, looked at the desk, and found her mother's mail and checkbook. There were no recent bills, and Callie found check stubs that showed that rent, electricity, and cable were paid up. She also found a few letters in envelopes with no addresses on the front.

Callie opened one and read it. It was a letter to Janine. Callie blushed at Allyson's recollection of when they were young girls just starting out. Allyson wrote words that described things Callie wouldn't have imagined were real. That was when Callie finally understood her mother was possessed by something Callie never knew existed. Love between two women. She didn't know if it had a name and refused to think about it. She did, however, feel afraid her mother was drowning. Then she wondered if she might go down with her.

Callie went back to her room but couldn't sleep.

A few days later, Callie came home from school and found her mother waiting. "You're home early," Callie said. Allyson smiled but didn't say anything. "Um, is everything okay?"

"Everything *is* okay, Callie. More than okay." *She remembered my name!* Callie thought. She had started to wonder if her mother still knew who she was. Callie didn't know what else to say. She poured a glass of milk, grabbed a cookie, and started out of the kitchen doorway.

"Janine called me at work today," Allyson said. Her voice was so quiet that Callie wondered if she was addressing her or talking to herself. Callie made the quick decision not to ask any questions just to see what her mother might say next and kept walking.

"She asked me how I was doing." Callie heard her mother but ignored her. "I was honest with her." Callie kept moving. "I told her I was a mess." Callie stopped, took a bite of her cookie, chewed, savored the chocolate chip sweetness, swallowed, took a sip of milk, and waited. "I am, aren't I, Callie?" *Is she really asking me?* Callie thought. *Or, is she just thinking out loud?* Callie didn't know how to respond and didn't say anything.

“I know I’ve changed. I know you probably don’t understand why. Maybe someday you will. Maybe someday it’ll happen to you and then you’ll know.” *I hope not*, Callie thought. *I never want to be like you. Ever!*

Callie took her milk and cookie to her room and finished her snack there. She didn’t see her mother again until dinner and Allyson didn’t say anything more. All she asked was whether Callie wanted any more spaghetti and meatballs before she put the leftovers away. Callie shook her head and that was the end of their meal together.

Back in the safety of her bedroom, Callie thought about her mother. *Will I get like her someday? Will I bring men home? If that’s what it means to grow up, I don’t think I want to. I refuse to waste my life on meaningless crap.*