



# *The Last Chapter*

A RAW, UNEDITED CHAPTER THAT  
DIDN'T MAKE THE CUT

Dear Universe,

Do you remember that pair of pants I had when I was a sophomore? They were wide-legged. Tweed? Polyester? They were striped – heathered gray, charcoal, white, powder blue. With a drawstring cotton ribbon at the waist.

I saw them at Urban Outfitter which was new to Vermont at the time. My mom bought them for me on a school shopping trip. She thought they were funky. Dad didn't understand them – I was used to that by then. Mom bought me a powdered blue short-sleeve top with a breast pocket. That blue made my eyes stand out and it matched the threads in the pants.

Those pants were comfy and different. There was something about them and that shirt that made me feel more like me. More than anytime I had found something at Sears or Barbara Moss. I hadn't yet discovered American Eagle (a whole phase of life from eighteen to twenty-two).

They screamed “writer” or maybe it was hipster. I'm not sure that “hipster” was a word that any of us used then. It was certainly not one I knew.

It may have been the first time I cared about my own clothing style and hadn't relied on my older sister to tell me what things went together and were flattering.

I was proud of those pants and all that I thought they stood for.

But it wasn't enough.



I only wore them twice to school.

Not because I ripped them or stained them. Not because they were stolen off my body or I lost them somewhere.

I wore them to school with my new shirt and everyone stopped and stared.

They were that different, that not-mainstream to what all the other girls were wearing that everyone seemed to take notice. And everyone wanted to comment.

“What are those?”

“What year is it?”

“Where did you find those ... Goodwill?”

I could go into a whole socio-economic commentary here about how classist that comment was, but I didn't know about any of that at the time. What I knew then was I was being told I looked poor and poor was a bad thing.)

“What dead body did you yank those from?”

(Okay that last one was for dramatic effect, but you get the point.)

And the one that beat all the others merely because of who said it:

“They look like you took your grandparents couch cushions apart.”

It was said with a sharp tongue and that one raised eyebrow and “resting-bitch-face” expression of a classmate that had been my best friend at five and turned into my rival enemy by the time we were thirteen.

She said it to me afterschool at a rehearsal for *Our Town* in front of the entire cast. Several laughed which gave enough satisfaction that you could detect the slightest upward curve of her lips.

The second time I wore them, I figured the fun was over. Everyone had gotten in their jabs and remarks.





But she was back. “I see you have your couch pants on. I’m sure your parents can afford to buy you other clothes.”

Double whammy. Not only could she not resist calling them Couch pants (for the entirety of the day, mind you) but she just had to make the dig about what my parents could afford.

Because everyone “knew” the Berthiaume’s “were rich.” This automatically meant we were snotty and entitled people who always had the best-of-the-best – clothes included.

As a result of others’ perceptions, we weren’t allowed to talk about the results of birthday or Christmas, vacations, newly leased family vehicles, or anything else that would feed the gossip wheel. Not that it mattered. Kids could tell if you showed up each school year in new digs.

None of that was relevant or mattered to my wardrobe.

All I felt was shame. Embarrassment. And the want to pull myself in, blend into the walls (or maybe the furniture... I was already halfway there.)

