

# Selilge's Closet Confessions: Exploring My Identity Through My Style



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## Prologue

In this book, I explore how clothing and fabrics have always connected to my emotions. Through the growing demands for inclusivity and diversity within the fashion industry. Dress has become a platform for activism and resistance as it has a form of communicating and showing self-expression, as we learn to create our styles through the influence of culture, society, and music. In my book, *Selilge's Closet Confessions: Exploring My Identity Through My Style*, I explore the impact of dress in my life through the stories of fifteen special chapters of dress. Reminiscing on the first foundations of dress through my eyes as they represent different stages of me. I have embraced the beauty of accepting my journey and how much it has evolved over the years.

Dress has helped me find ways to express areas of myself that I find the curiosity to mix, match, and tell. I taught myself to confide in my vision, believe that you are capable, and that nothing matters but you. The elements and properties that are determined to create a dress have taught me to connect with others on a deeper level. Through dress, we can speak without snoring; as we teach ourselves to become valuable to who we are. Giving self-love to yourself through the motion of dress and the impact that it creates in our self-esteem. Unraveling the fires between dress and who one is; are products of the emotional connection and personal transformation.

In the following chapters, I will explore how dress and my personality have impacted my own life. From the rhythm of the streets of Harlem to my present-day life as a single mother. Through each chapter, stories are shared of transitioning moments as the path to healing is eternal. Each garment illustrates levels of what my eyes see as beauty. Fashion is a relationship of who we are now, who we wish to be, and who we think we are. Family, growth, identity, connection, and self-awareness are aligned with taking the time to get to know the real you. I have loved it so much that I thought I never could again. I have let go of myself throughout this process but with the hope and faith that it will all be worth it in the end.

Throughout the lens of my wardrobe memoir, I invite readers to reflect on their relationship with color and self-expression. Through the process of self-exploring, we must keep our knowledge on task as life expands and the rise of social media and e-commerce has revolutionized the fashion industry. Influencers and celebrities now have a significant influence on trends and consumer behavior, with platforms that serve as key channels for brand promotion and discovery. In the following chapters, as I look back on my journey, I am filled with gratitude for every obstacle I faced and every hurdle I overcame. As I continue to pursue my passions and

aspirations, I am committed to sharing my knowledge of trends through my experiences and wisdom.

*Giselle Leon*



## Foreword

My name is Luisa Colón, and I am Giselle's friend. Imparting information and evoking vivid memories and sincere emotions within the same body of text, is a difficult task for many (and impossible for some). In the 25+ years I've worked as a professional writer and editor, it is an approach that I rarely see executed successfully. Collecting data from classes, research, and studying; communicating that information in your own words; and then integrating personal recollections into the mix that are both relevant and revelatory make it an extremely complex undertaking. I have been informed, educated, and entranced reading Giselle Leon's *Selilge's Closet Confessions: Exploring My Identity Through My Style*. As a single mother myself, I know the difficulty of balancing work and family life, as well as the pressure of supporting my children while pursuing my professional goals. I am incredibly impressed by how Giselle has collected such a vast array of information and found a connection between her own experiences and her current education—and then beautifully described and shared the passion for style and fashion that began in her early childhood and how it aligns with what she is learning in school.

We all have our own experiences, of course, and it can be difficult to see past them. I don't always understand how other people approach clothing on an emotional and personal level, considering how my thoughts and opinions have developed throughout my life. Giselle illustrates her continuing knowledge and experiences so well and has enlightened me about her unique perspective and how it evolved. Using photos and sketches alongside her written work has been a creative and successful approach, too. Everything about her work inspires me with its courageousness: the action of embarking on adult education, the daunting task of collecting information and subsequently imparting it with so much clarity to an acolyte like myself; and most significantly (to me, at least) how willing she is to share her upbringing and experiences as a way to make this project come to life. I learned so much about aspects of the history of fashion and style, as well as how that history relates to Giselle's insights. It's so brave of her to take this approach and she pulled it off. I appreciate that so much and am grateful for the opportunity to have read this.

***Luisa Colon***

## Table of Content

Chapter 1: Tamboril Dominican Republic (1993).....	7
Chapter 2: Una Sala, Una Navidad (1994).....	10
Chapter 3: Kindergarten Picture Day (1996).....	13
Chapter 4: Birthday Princess (1997).....	16
Chapter 5: Melting on my SKIN (2007).....	18
Chapter 6: First Birthday Cake (2013).....	21
Chapter 7: Casual America (2013).....	24
Chapter 8: Carmen Sandiego (2016).....	26
Chapter 9: All Shades of Pink & Red (2016).....	28
Chapter 10: Coral Power Blazer (2017).....	30
Chapter 11: Pink Satin Shoulder Dress (2018).....	32
Chapter 12: One Time, No Time (2020).....	34
Chapter 13: You vs. You (2020).....	36
Chapter 14: The Clacking of My Shoes (2022).....	38
Chapter 15: Minutes before the Titanic (2023).....	41
Bibliography.....	43

## Chapter 1: Tamboril, Dominican Republic (1993)

It was the summer of '93, the first of many more summers in my beautiful motherland. I remember feeling the mosquitos flying all around me, smelling my sweet American blood. The sun wasn't shining too much that day, and my hair didn't frizz. All I can remember is traveling to the Dominican Republic every summer, especially spending time with both sides of my family in *Santiago* and *Tamboril*. I had the privilege of staying in the city of Santiago with my mom's side and the struggle of waking up in the suburbs of Tamboril. It was a day of new adventures and new opportunities—the first time I stepped foot into my dad Jose's childhood home, where I met my great-grandmother Tomacina and ate the most delicious Dominican food, best known as “comida criolla” that I had ever tasted. I heard the crying sounds of chickens, goats, ducks, a true farm lifestyle that I appreciate so much more now that I am older.

Dressing up has always been a huge part of who I am. I don't just wear a dress, I pose in it, I choose the *colors* carefully and style my garments with accessories. That summer, I wore a charming white-and-pink princess party dress with a lace Peter Pan collar and short bubble sleeves. The dress had a *color* block pattern and squared shoulders, a high waistline, and a layered hem that gave me a regular fit with a non-stretch fabric. It was composed of 100% polyester and it was very delicate to wash, as it was a machine wash dress. As I danced my way around “la galleria” in front of the house, I *snapped* my shoes into two buttons, one on each foot. It sounds like tapping shoes on the cold hard concrete as each step goes with the beat of the song. The thin layered cotton socks with the ruffled ribbed crew made my feet feel *secure* as the concrete felt slippery from the rain earlier that day. On that special day, I was wearing a faux leather white *crossbody* bag and white framed sunglasses. I *wrapped* my crossbody bag tighter as I swirled with the turns of the fast beat dancing to my favorite “tipico” song with Dad. My shoes remained spotless as the shoes of a princess dancing in the forest.

An outfit is not an outfit without accessories, which gives the outfit a hint of spice to the emotions and feelings that are expressed. As I posed with just a mountain of dust in the background, I felt the drip of sweat falling down my face as I stared and smiled as hard as I could for the picture. Everything about myself and my energy is shared in this image. My mother had *blow-dried* my hair earlier that day as she *parted* my hair, giving me a half-a-ponytail. She *inserted* a white clip-on bow in the center of the hairstyle. My bracelets *wrapped* around my wrist as rings of glory. As wearing colorful spring bracelets in soft coral *colors* such as pink, yellow, blue, and green. My tiny arms weren't long enough, so my entire left arm was covered with them. I have always been a petite woman, so I have tended to lean towards knee-length dresses.

Throughout all of my childhood memories, this has been the only picture that has truly resonated with me. It was my first time feeling like a stylist at such a young age—as the dress

wasn't what was important that day, it was the way that I selected each item, and the time and dedication I took to choose my accessories. This moment in time allows me to understand how much passion one has always had for both fashion and accessories. A dress would not be styled or flow the same without accessories—they create a balance within the garment. It complimented the confidence and safety I felt. I was running the world that summer.



## Chapter 2: Una Sala, Una Navidad (1994)

My Uncle Alejandro's home was more than just a multi-family home located at 1405 Glover Street, Bronx, New York. He was my grandmother's Carmen's older brother, and he was also the heart of the family as the first of us to land in the U.S. His home was a space where we would gather together every weekend to party and play games. Most importantly, he would dedicate his weekends to teaching all the younger kids how to dance. He would teach us the different moves in merengue, bachata, and salsa. He would help us understand the beauty of Spanish songwriters, the songs' lyrics, and the Spanish language's value. All of my childhood memories are kept in his home, with the white walls and light brown couches covered with plastic, and the framed NYC landscape frame on one wall.

As I review photographs from my childhood, I notice how much I have always admired floral print garments. I remember vividly as I was dressed with a white pullover with a mock neck, and five flowers knitted in the top center of the dress. I *inserted* the dress from the top of my head as I had to ask my mom for help since it was my first time trying it on. On the top back of the dress, there was a button that *clasped* shut as you finished laying it on your body. The waistline of the dress was stitched with raspberry pink lines and underlining shorts, which securely *fastened* the visibility of the A-line-shaped dress. The maxi dress had a variation of *colors*. The skirt of the dress was *designed* with large round flowers with the *colors* of lime green, safety orange, and medium purple. The bottom half of the dress has a large floral pattern with a solid neon pink plaid print in the background.

As I stand in front of my grandmother, next to the Christmas tree, you can see how it seems like she was in the middle of a conversation as they were taking our picture. Her lips seem to have been trying to say something. Her hand held my forearm in position to stay still and capture the moment. Her *chin* leans a bit toward my huge neon orange bow holding my *hair* up in a half ponytail. My wispy hair was *fastened* back in a ponytail to give it structure and hold it in place, however, it was flighty coming out at the side of my ears and frizzing up at the top from laying on it for so long. The elegance of my lime green studded earrings that were *inserted* into my earlobes, made my ears sparkle in every room.

The attachment to my childhood memories has taken a toll on my mental state at times. I tend to find myself dazed when thinking of memories of when my life was simpler—the days in which I didn't have any worries, and all I wanted to do was win the family dancing competition. I miss the feeling of not questioning anyone's love, by just accepting life for what it is. I have accepted my mistakes. I don't understand why I don't have any pictures of my grandmother smiling with me. I know her love was pure, I just can't understand why I never seemed to feel joy in any of the pictures that we have together. It makes me question her love language and how

she never knew how to make me feel seen or loved. Tears run down my cheeks, as decades have passed and I can't seem to find the answer.







### Chapter 3: Kindergarten Picture Day (1996)

Picture day is known as a moment in time in which memories are captured and our growing personalities are shown through the style of choice and different looks. We reminisce on the good old days when our parents would choose our clothes and our voices were barely heard. Picture day at P.S. 84, located at 32 W 92nd Street, New York, NY 10025, was more than just picture day, it was a day where my mother Eridania always overdid it with styling my older sister Ghislaine and me, lasting more than five hours in the *hair* salon the night before. Every year; she would spend weeks shopping at the local stores in 34th Street Herald Square, New York City; where she would find mass clothing stores such as the Gap, Banana Republic, Macy's, Timberland, and Steve Madden. She wanted to make sure that our outfits were sharp, detailed, girly, and authentic—a cut above all the other students in the class. My family and friends have always been very particular about being clean, neat, and polished.

I believe my passion for assorted floral print began with my kindergarten portrait that was taken on picture day. I am still trying to figure out what it was about that moment that, so many years later, I still find myself sometimes wearing that same floral button-down. My mother would style us with straight jeans, and an easy-fitting floral button-down that hits at the hip. She would make us wear button-downs, as I always *inserted* all of the buttons until the top of the blouse only leaving the last top button open. The *braided* faux leather brown belt helped *secure* my waistline and the jeans were always bought a size bigger or two. On top of the jeans, it had a *suspended* zipper at the hips and *fastened* with a button closure.

My hair was freshly *washed* and *blow-dried* into waves from the night before and the smell of coconut lingered through my clothes as my scent of the day. The aroma of a fresh wash *filled* the aroma in the air as I walked my classmates and they complimented me. The easiest hairstyle for my mother to do to me was a half ponytail, with my thin straight *hair* and its soft edges. My mother accessorized my *hair* with big orange colored bows that she placed to the side, as I began to adorn it with the style of *volume* and a *smooth* texture that added a sense of character to my growth. In the photograph, I am seated to the side and both of my hands are lying on the top rail of the light wooden chair. I am smiling directly at the photographer, my *face* full of excitement. The dark brown faux leather *braided* belt that was also from the Gap is visible. I believe my socks were also probably from the same place; my mother was obsessed with the Gap's fabric sustainability and *color* duration.

It was a long-sleeved shirt with buttoned cuffs that made my fingers seem a lot smaller and with assorted *colors* such as midnight purple, international orange, pastel yellow, and pine green. I was also wearing pine green denim slim-fit jeans with a pair of black faux leather boots.

I look at this picture of myself at least three or four times, trying to understand my attachment to this image. I remember the comfort and confidence of being a girl and wearing a button-down with jeans. All of my other friends were dressed more formally, such as wearing suits, and dresses, and some were even wearing makeup. I feel the power within my smile, the glaze in my eyes sharing the beauty of my vision. Throughout my life, I've found passion in different areas of myself, as the glow in my eyes in this picture shows me that I am still that young Giselle, who has dreams and goals. With the power of patience, abundance, and wisdom my fear of failure will never overpower the achievements aligned for me.



## Chapter 4: Birthday Princess (1997)

One was born in the mid-days of summer August of '89 in beautiful Harlem, New York City. Although I didn't have my room until Ghislaine left for college, I still never really felt accepted in my existence. One grew up with her grandmother as my parents couldn't afford a two-bedroom apartment at the time. I was raised in the west side of Harlem on 140th Street, three blocks away from the New York City College and a three-minute walk from Riverbank State Park. Birthdays were always celebrated at Riverbank State Park since it was the neighborhood park. We could run around the sprinklers all day. On this birthday, there were no sprinklers, just a Haagen-Dazs ribbon ice cream cake and a dress with *puffed* sleeves that made me feel like I could fly. I felt free.

I was more worried about not getting my dress dirty since it was my favorite. My mother and her Godmother Janet customized this special dress for my 8th birthday. My dress had a white Puritan collar, with a soft blue plaid background and blooming raspberry pink bouquets all around. The shoulders were the highlight of the dress for me, it had *puffed* balloon sleeves, and one had just cut her *hair* a little over my shoulder. The dress had soft baby blue plaid lines as a background giving the dress a sense of twist with two patterns. I *adorned* the *puffed* squared sleeves, as they *covered* my arm just before my elbow. It helped *embrace* the form of the dress and the cover necklace *tied* around my neck.

One must have been super nervous, holding my *breath* trying to hold still for the camera, in front of the middle room in grandma's apartment. I had freshly *painted* my nails with a color-changing nail polish that would change to mixtures of pink and whites, as the smell of acetone lingered around the dining room minutes before my mother surprised me with the cake. I was trying to make sure that I kept my body away from the cake as my nails were still a bit wet and the candles were melting my ice cream cake. My face, my smile, and my *skin* were glowing with excitement and innocence. One was wearing silver studded earrings that were *inserted* into my earlobe shined on either side of my smile and bloomed through my frizzy *hair*.

Attachments can become more than just a garment, they can be an attachment to a moment in time that you wish you could just hold still. The connection between Selilge and the still of the dress was more important than getting the dress dirty with cake or burning it with scandals. One sees the beauty that can be emphasized through different modifications in the body. Although one is stronger today, my biggest insecurities were not fitting the appearance of having a flat tummy and long black *hair*, as I was the total opposite. Confidence was given to me as I wore this customized dress. For once as a young child, I controlled my appearance by admiring the beauty within the collar, the patterns, and the designs of the dress. I will reclaim this moment one day, as I will always love those insecure areas of myself.





## Chapter 5: Melting on My Skin (2007)

I have come a long way since my high school days. From taking the time to get to know myself, to figuring out areas of life that I never understood, and forgiving myself for my poor decisions. Through the process of healing, I've come to realize how happy I was during those days and how I was able to design, create, and envision new styles in fashion. I graduated from Murry Bergtraum High School located at 411 Pearl Street, New York City. I graduated with a major in Finance, but my true "expertise" lay in my foolishness of those days. Cutting classes and running with the wrong crowd led to a combination of classes during the days and nights just to graduate with my designated class.

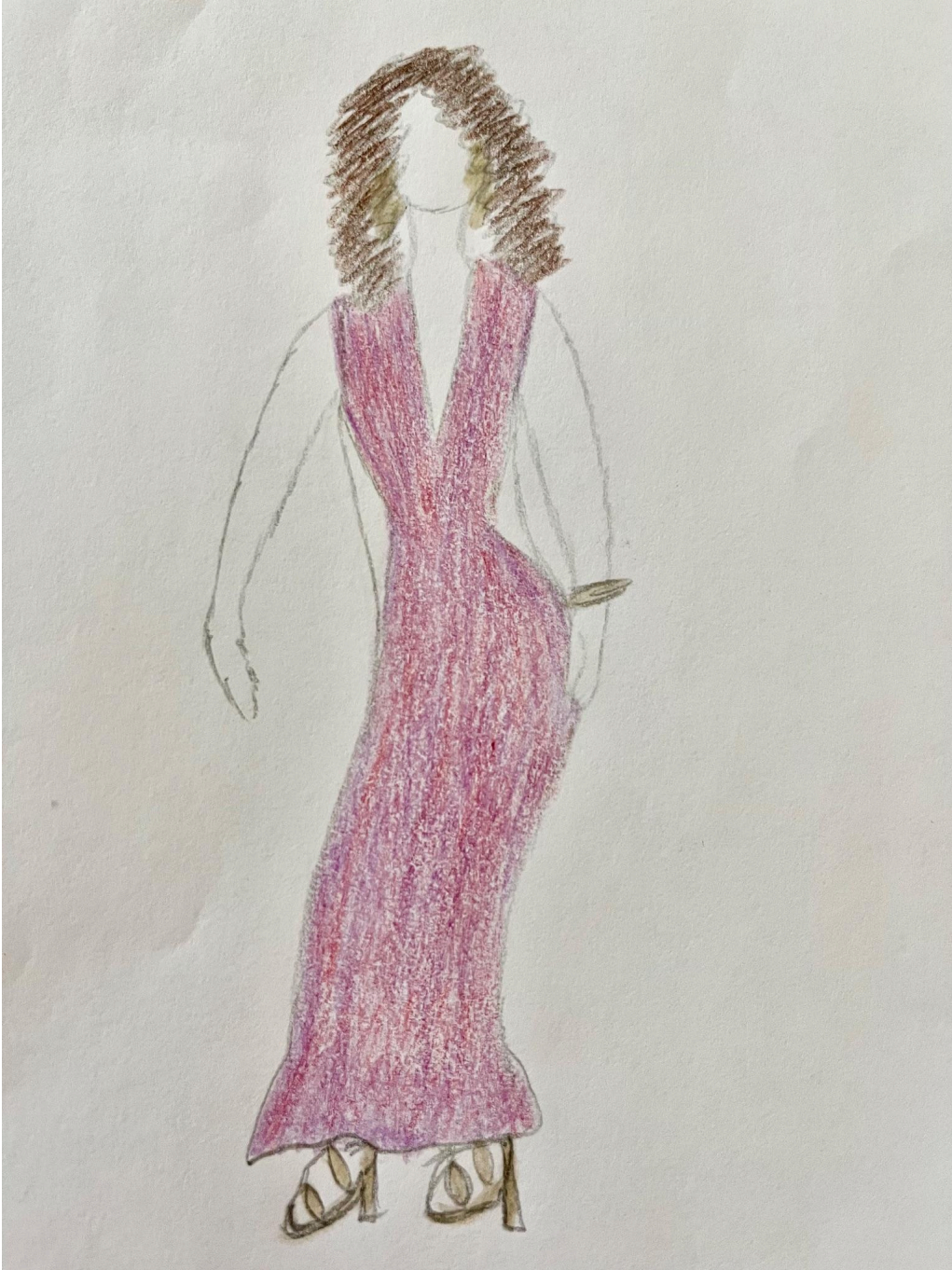
At a very young age, I remember my mother would let us play dress-up with her. She allowed Ghislaine and I to style her on the weekends. For my high school prom that year, I decided to customize my dress, as I was obsessed with wearing a backless dress. I wore a *silky-smooth* fuschia pink dress that wrapped around my back. A long-concealed zipper *closure* laid along the back and a button *closure* matching the fabric of the dress *secured* it in place. It was a maxi dress with a flared hem at the bottom, an underwired cross front; and silver diamonds all around the edges by the back of the torso.

My hair was freshly *washed* and curled with the hot curly iron. I have always been small-chested, so the front of the dress fitted me a bit bigger around the bust. I had worn a pair of silver strap sandals, as I *inserted* my feet and felt the slippery sweat of the lotion making me slide across the floor. My silver drop earrings were *inserted* into the front layers of my hair as it was *straightened* long and flat with a hot iron and lightly sprayed to keep it tamed. My *nails and toes* were pre-shaped round with white French tips freshly painted with a shade of marshmallow white with a glittery silver design on my ring finger in each hand. They *securely* used white solid colors to match my dress since I felt as if the dress was loud enough. I was insecure about how the dress fitted me, but I was so in love with the *color* and how the fabric lay on my body. I think I lost a few inches from the last time I had tried it on, my waistline felt loose and not *secured*. I felt as if I was dancing with the lingering sweat that draped through my back or the *patted* blush that was removing its rosy tint with my sweat. I *applied* mascara to my eyelashes to elongate them and brushed up my eyebrows to keep them groomed but the humidity would melt it right off my face.

Building your confidence takes years of learning, patience, and disappointments. Growing up, I always had low self-esteem. I compared myself to other women with their combination of curves and flat stomachs. I would observe their behaviors, style, and grace but never understood how walking in confidence can help you create a new version of yourself. I designed my high school prom dress knowing full well that I would feel insecure in my *skin*, but

I wanted to fight the mentality that had hunted me down for years, and this was my first move towards change. I barely even took any of the pictures that night. My tight curls were loosening up with the humidity, and I couldn't hide the frustration through my fake smile. Even so, I decided from that night on to never fear what others think of me, and most importantly, I have learned to appreciate that chapter of my life and how far I have come. I am a different woman today who will always remind herself of that hungry feeling I felt for so long, not feeling enough for others.







## Chapter 6: First Birthday Cake (2013)

An important goal in life is to celebrate yourself and to give yourself the love and support that no one can ever truly give you. I got my first job at the age of seventeen and as I continued working, I felt a sense of appreciation for business. In 2013, I had the opportunity to change my perspective about myself, my surroundings, and what fulfills my soul for my birthday. During that time, I worked at Twin America as a Local Expedia Concierge based in New York City. Our office was located in the heart of Times Square, near the center of the main attractions in the city. I was a representative in the call center where I was able to improve my language skills and build my confidence as a New Yorker.

My dress must have been stored *wrapped* up in my closet for years; I am not big on animal prints or designs. I wore a one-shoulder, knee-length dress that had royal blue and white ocelot prints all around. The waistline of the dress was designed with a cowl skirt bottom that modified my waistline giving me a *secured* squeeze that made my hips look curvy and swollen. The dress was made of 95% polyester and 5% elastane serving a loose comfy look. The dress *elongated* my body and made me look tall. I wore it with a pair of high-heeled sandals with light gold and a pair of hoop earrings. The intertwined hammered hoop earrings *dangle* from my ears and a small blossom-red clutch. The clutch was a gusset envelope clutch bag with a front flap and snap closure. It had an exterior slip pocket, side gussets, and a pyramid hardware accent in the front, as well as a detachable chain crossbody strap.

I remember standing in the pantry room of the office holding my birthday cake in my hands with excitement and happiness. I have always loved how the shades of red always tend to compliment my *skin* tone. That year, I had painted my *nails* and feet a triple cherry red *color nail* polish as I was trying to stay away from acrylic *nails*. My *hair* was the healthiest it has ever been, dark brown *hair* cut with four different layers. My *hair* was parted in the middle with each side tucked behind my ears. I wore a pair of silver statement earrings that had a chunky shiny bold round metal. I *applied* my makeup lightly, *blending* a touch of foundation into my skin to give an even compaction. I *padded* setting powder all over my face to keep the oil at bay and give my face an airbrushed and mattified look. Around my wrist, I had on my two-tone Michael Kors Harlowe Pave round watch that blended perfectly with the red *color* of my *nails*.

I don't usually wear clothes with patterns or designs since I tend to get tired of them easily. I am a solid print woman who likes to combine *colors*, accessories, and my *hair* into the garment. This particular dress was more about the print and how it made my hips look bigger. I loved how the fabric *wrapped* around one of my shoulders as the other was exposed. The dress is very unique and cannot be styled with basic *colors*, as the dress only has two solid *colors*. I have worn this dress over a handful of times, and every time feels like the first time. I have received

so many compliments every time I wear it that I would never even consider giving it away even if it's not my usual style!



## Chapter 7: Casual America (2013)

Working in corporate America means, you are working in a position within a corporation and typically it is a large organization. Not only do you learn a lot about business ethics, but you become more aware of your appearance. You become the face of the company. A well-tailored suit, a classic white or blue button-down, and a pair of comfortable shoes are the tradition, but I was more of the “loud *colors* and high heels” type of woman. I worked as an Expedia Local Concierge in New York City for twenty-four months. Our office was located at the heart of Bryant Park, 42nd Street, where you felt the rush of the crowd as you were walking up the stairs from the train. The breeze rushes through your ears and you hear police sirens and honking cars.

I love to match my shoes and my bag with the *color* scheme of my outfits. I wore pants right above as they *wrapped* around my ankle cuffs with a high waist lavender rose pink *color* and a tonal-lined belt and front pleats. I loved the front pockets, they would be *structured* with a *pre-shape* curve in the hips which *modified* my waistline. Underneath, I have a *silky-smooth* black high-collar bodysuit with a rouge pink-colored cropped blazer with a round neck and long sleeves with shoulder pads. The front was *structured* with a metallic thread blazer that had front-flap detail and metallic thread.

I would wake up bright and early as I would always try to arrive fifteen minutes before the starting time. I *washed* my face and *brushed* my teeth to wake myself up. I would get my nails naped in an almond form and *painted* in light shades of pastel and white swirled gel designs. I loved *pre-shaped* trousers as they highlighted my Dominican curves and tucked in my tummy. I would keep one hand inside my pocket and the other would swing across the city with my mini bag with interior pockets with a zip *closure*, rolled handles, an adjustable, removable crossbody strap, and a magnetic *closure*. One would swing her bag with the rhythm of my urban, Latin-mix music. Walking through the busy streets of New York City was all about walking in style, chin up, clean shoes, and *hair* done. My hair was *straightened* long and flat with a hot iron and lightly sprayed with hairspray.

It was a working environment where tailored tops and shiny shoes are all around, and shining, when you walk into the room. The moment I walked the train in Times Square, I felt that rush of a fly girl running through the city, knowing that no matter how uncertain my *colors* or style was, I was “the bomb” turning heads when I would step out in the morning or for my lunch breaks. The padded blazer made me feel as if I was a sophisticated educated woman. It brought a feeling of confidence. I miss those days.





## Chapter 8: Carmen Sandiego (2016)

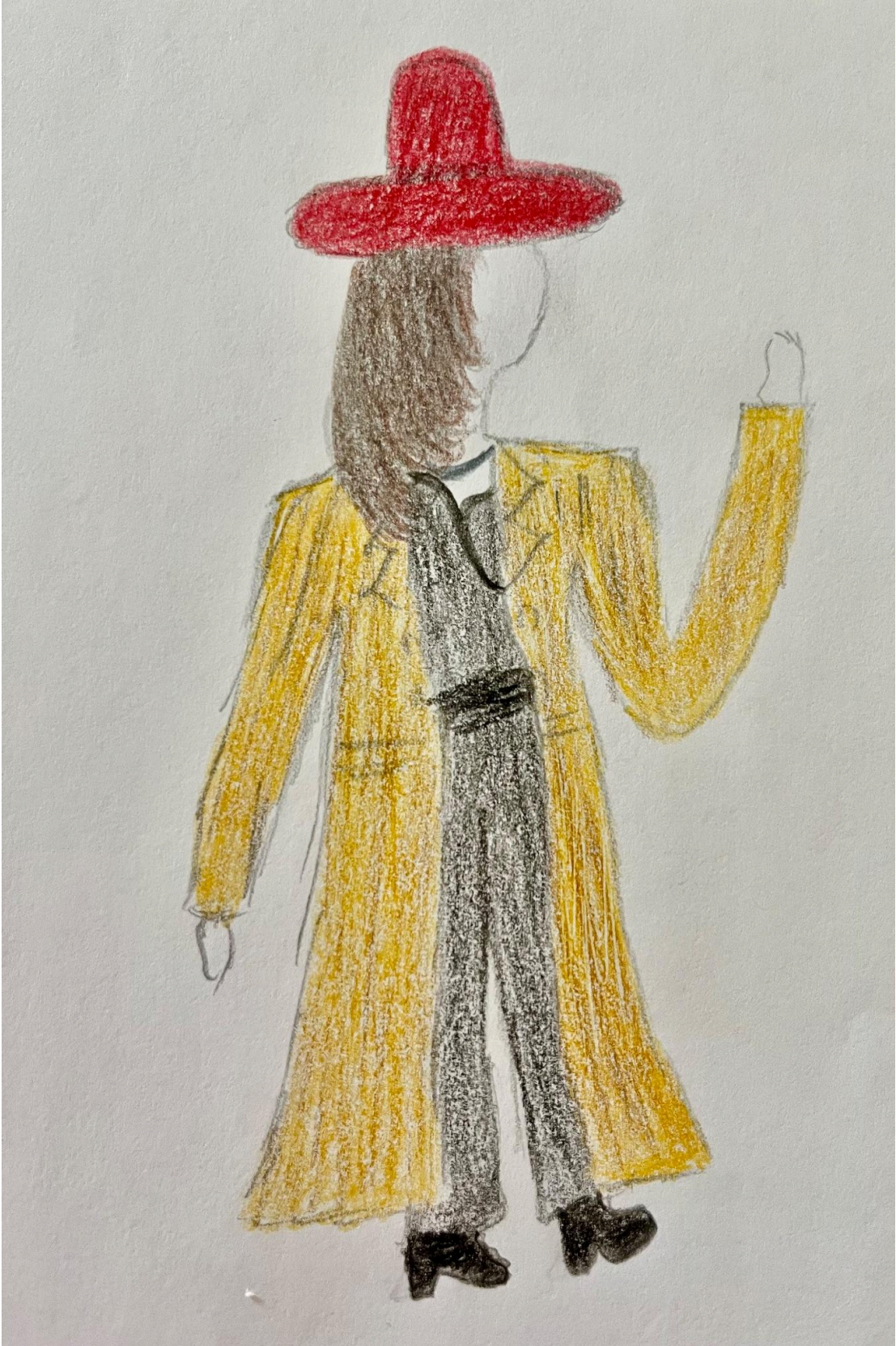
Museum dates have always been my thing, as it has helped me learn and expand my mind. Although I loved learning, I also loved exploring the small boutiques around New York City, especially around the tourist attractions. I remember this evening vividly, as one believes that it was love at first sight. I was with my boyfriend at the time Anthony, and we had gone on a date to the American Museum of Natural History located at West 79th Street, in the upper west side of Manhattan, across from Central Park. We would usually take long walks after exploring the museum as we would reflect on what we learned and we would shop around the boutiques as we shared more things that we found in common with each other.

Throughout those walks, I came across a red hat that I named “Carmen Sandiego” as every time I wear that hat, I receive the most compliments. I would wear it with a black-wrapped long-sleeve blouse around my waistline. Underneath, my spandex black bralette tightly embraced my form. An oversized nude trench jacket with *silky-smooth* inner lining *wrapped* my body and hung off my shoulders. The trousers were high-waisted cuffed in the ankles and *suspended* by a zipper and a button *closure* at the waist. A silver jade ring *dressed* my hands along with a faux leather silver watch on my felt hand.

My hair was *cut* in layers giving me a full look underneath the hat. It was freshly *washed* and *dried* with the warmth of hot iron and I *applied* moisturizing oil to my ends. My nails were *painted* with color-changing nail polish that would change the mood from light gray to dark gray. The aroma of Patane shampoo and conditioner lingered across my face as the roots of my hair would sweat inside the hat. I *adored* the style, the look, and the introduction that they had given, although it tended to make my hair sweat more than usual. I would lightly *apply* a soft blush on my cheeks to enhance my rosy complexion, which complimented the soft nude shade of my trench jacket.

I take a deep breath and put on my hat of disguise every time that I am in the mood. I feel a sense of excitement as I move into different chapters of my life wearing this same hat. Throughout these years, it has given me a sense of strength, direction, and control of where my life is heading. I have learned to appreciate the style that enhances the woman that I am gradually becoming through time. Not fear the judgment of others, as my energy is not made to entertain and engage with those who do not feed love and power into my cup of life. The color enriches the light that others are unable to see within myself. I would not be the woman that I am today, without her!





## Chapter 9: All Shades of Pink & Red (2016)

I never saw myself as an artist although I have taken time throughout these last couple of months to do tapestry as I learned areas of myself that have taken me time to accept. I have embraced the beauty of art in all eras but I have also learned to connect with different visual artists in New York City which has opened my eyes to technology, understanding the visions of color, patterns, and shapes. Throughout words of reflections that connect with inner child traumas of myself that I have attempted to let go of for years. Sue Tai is one of her ultimate favorite artists and designers as she was born and raised in New York she has a lifelong dedication to her passion for painting and aesthetic “divine feminine energy.”

Summer of that year, Sue Tai was having an art exhibition in Soho and you would have the opportunity to meet the artists one-on-one. I wore the most color-shaded dress that I found in my closet that day. It was a mini dress that had *structured* vertical shades of red and pink. The front of the dress was a halter top with an empire waist that *pre-shaped* my waist and *puffed* my hips. The dress was sleeveless as the zipper *enclosing* the dress as it was constructed was placed on the left side of the dress underneath my arm. Pink bow and ribbons *tied* and *hung* from the neck to the waist.

My hair was *washed, conditioned,* and *air dried,* hanging down my back in soft, *voluminous* waves. My hair was centrally parted as I had parted the front layers of my hair behind my ears. My lips tingle and blood rushes them as I *coat* them with my Laneige Lip Sleeping Mask Masque De Nuit Pour Les Levre Berry flavor. My nails were almond-shaped, triple *coated* with marshmallow gel polish and my hands slipped with sweat as I walked around the gallery without showing any sense of nervousness. Previously that day, I had *dipped* my nails in a glossy soft polish, as they were manicured, and painted with a clear topcoat to make them shine.

As I stood in front of every one of her pieces, I felt a sense of release as each painting represented a different stage of my life. I allowed myself to open my eyes to the possibility of life and how many more there are from what I have seen. I’ve learned to admire beauty in silence and I grow the vessels within myself to find the moment to accept and know that not all may understand life through my eyes. The dress represented the different episodes or I may say, shades of the individuality to whom my cycle of life has surrendered. Being an artist is life and knowing that my time will come as I continue to have the faith and courage to fight the battle called “life.” Her art became a symbol of my pain and although I am not into painting, I did find my passion through the arts of fruits, and silky-smooth fabric!





## Chapter 10: Coral Power Blazer (2017)

It was 2017, the year that changed my life and until the current day; I still think about it. It was a year of revolution, growth, and knockdowns. I got my first media job at NBC Universal, Inc., as an audio vision coordinator and it was one of the best experiences of my life. I managed and supported a team of 13 audio and visual staff members as I coordinated their daily assignments. My role was to drive decision-making across simultaneous projects through business groups, as the dress code was always to dress the part, no ripped jeans, business casual, and always fresh and neat. I was proud to be an employee of such a prestigious media platform.

I would wake up early in the morning as I would set my blazer aside and I would get my son ready as well. My outfits for the day were carefully chosen. I would wear an oversized casual business blazer that was fitted shoulder padded as it *wrapped* around my waist with a black faux leather belt. The padded blazer *puffed* out at my shoulders and *tightened* as it got on my biceps, and ruffled draped down. I would combine the blazer with a pair of chocolate-tone mid-rise tapered pants with a black elastic waistband and the bottom of the pants cuffed to my ankles. My black nylon socks pulled up to my shins and chunky green platform boots *laced* to my ankles *securing* my feet.

Every night, I would lay out my clothes on my bed as I laid each layer and color one on each other. I would *lather* my hair with shampoo and conditioner to help keep it silky smooth, and not-free. I had recently done a big chop, and *cut* my hair into a pixie haircut. Rushes spreading foundation evenly across my face felt an eternity as I would time myself every morning. I would *apply* soft gold eyeshadow that covered my eyelids and a soft pink lipstick filled the shape of my lips. My hair draped down my shoulders as I smiled all the time, not demonstrating the frustration that my mind experienced. My nails and toes were *painted* in Sally Hansen blueberry purple gel nail polish and *sealed* dry by UV light.

Blazers, trousers, and chunky heels were my go-to at the time when life seemed as if things were beginning to make sense. I grew as a person throughout the miscommunication, lack of leaders, and for my own mistakes that I hold myself accountable for. The position allowed me to enter areas of myself that forced me to go back to school. My lack of confidence was reflected in my vocabulary, my actions, and my lack of awareness. I let go of myself, as I decided to focus on financially providing a better life, ignoring the insecure me that lingered within my mind every moment I would make a sound. I must admit, it was one of the hardest years in my career as my mirror was pointed directly at me.





## Chapter 11: Pink Satin Shoulder Dress (2018)

Here we are again, in another wedding wearing the same dress with the same date but with a much more mature and physically stronger version of ourselves. Ghislaine and I headed to the Dominican Republic to celebrate Mom Eridania's wedding as she impatiently waited for us with Eden, Grandma Carmen, and her fiance Aneudy. I was more excited to see my son, Eden, as we had spent the last four weeks vacationing with my mom and my grandmother. I felt a deep relief as I wrapped my arms around him and I saw him running towards me in the airport. I was looking forward to hearing all of his adventures and the new music he had been listening to.

Eden and I woke up extremely early to a full house of energetic laughter as we began getting ready for the exciting day ahead. My mother had asked my sister and I to wear a shade of pink as our grandmother was wearing a soft pink chiffon knee-length ruffled sleeve pleated dress. I chose to wear a raspberry *silky-smooth* one-shoulder dress as the sleeve was *tightened* as it got to my biceps, a ruffle *draped* down to the left side, and a concealed zipper enclosure in the back. I had paired the dress with silver drop earrings that I *inserted* into my earlobe. I completed the look with a pair of silver criss-cross studded sandals that *wrapped* around my ankles.

I was happy for my mother as her smile gleaned the room and the night just felt like a movie. I felt like a princess, as I had *cut, washed, and blow-dried* my hair earlier that way as I had *applied* a hot iron to my ends. My skin was *tanned* from the strong summer sun. I tried not to wear much makeup, as I applied mascara to my eyelashes and blushed up my eyebrows to keep them groomed. I *patted the* setting powder all over to give myself a modified look. My nails were neatly *painted* with a light pink gel polish to keep them clean and shiny.

Every time I think about that summer, all that comes to my mind is the elegance of how my son looked wearing a suit for the first time. It made me feel proud of the young man that I am raising and how much he understands the importance of dressing and appearance. This was not our first wedding together, but it was the first one that I saw my son walking in the faith of confidence and a mother proud of her prince. We danced and held hands for the night as he hugged me with such love and admiration of a loving son. I gaze into the moments, as I reflect I still feel the elegance I felt that day as I carry this image as a portrait in my wallet. I felt confident with my natural makeup and my radiant smile!





## Chapter 12: One Time, No Time (2020)

My childhood friend Laura has always been a big food lover as she would always invite me out to eat. I love trying different cuisines and I always consider the Yelp reviews of other customers' experiences. Throughout the past fifteen years, a lot of the family-owned restaurants in my old neighborhood in Harlem, New York have been slowly falling out of business with the national financial crisis. One night in March of that year, Laura had invited Jackie and me to a new Thai restaurant that had just opened up two blocks away from my mom's place near 137th Street, City College. And boy, I must admit; I barely eat Thai food now because of how awful my body reacted to the experience.

Raspberry has been a color for years that I feel as if at times has become my favorite color, as it falls in between shades of pink and red. It was a local casual restaurant, so I threw on *pre-shaped* high-waisted skinny black jeans that would highlight my hips. A one-sleeve velvet one-piece bodysuit with a V-neckline as the button *closures* come down along the middle of the back of the top as it *snapped* back in place. I topped the look with a pair of sleeve Zara booties with buckle detail in front and a side *zip closure*. I had used the linen roller before leaving my place, but it seems as if Laura's white blouse continues to shed cotton and it keeps sticking to my clothes!

My hair was freshly washed and blow-dried with a hot curly wave iron. The left side of my hair seemed more *straightened* than wavy. *Spreading* foundation evenly across my face and my neck and blending it in. Soft silver eyeshadow *covered* my eyelids as I *filled* my lips with clear lip gloss. My nails and toes were *painted* with a French manicure and baby pink tips. It was my first time shaping my nails around, so I felt a bit insecure about what to wear to place my hand in the picture. I sealed the candid picture with me acting as if I was adjusting the top of my bodysuit, as you can highlight my silhouette.

My girls and I were vibing with the beat of the DJ, as we enjoyed our dinner. We had decided to share a large order of egg-fried noodles with steamed vegetable dumplings. I was very delighted by the service but as I was leaving the restaurant, I felt a huge flare in my stomach and I whined up vomiting in the bathroom of the restaurant. I felt weak and lightheaded as I walked back to my mother's place. I wish I knew what caused the discomfortness, but all I do know is that I had a great time catching up with my friends, Laura and Jackie; as we were all thrilled to have a girl's night out! Although I vomited on myself and created a huge mess at the end of the night, that night for the first time in a long time, I began feeling like myself as I felt confident throwing on a pair of curvy jeans and not feeling the pressure to wear an oversize top or a blazer to cover my gains.





## Chapter 13: You vs. You (2020)

Have you ever experienced a full year of healing, growth, and disappointments that continue to cycle in your life? It was a year of truth for me; when I truth, I mean letting go of a long-term relationship, setting boundaries between friends and even losing a few throughout the process. A year filled with questions and answers as the universe was giving me the signs and I was no longer ignoring the “red flag” in people. I allowed the wings to fall beneath those who I thought genuinely loved my energy and my space. I decided at the last minute to take a solo birthday trip for my 31st birthday to Tulum, Mexico.

Here I am in a deserted country by myself after twelve years without taking a trip alone. I had made reservations for the evening off, at the restaurant Azulik Tulum. I had envisioned myself taking a picture with a bandeau ruffle detail maxi dress in red that swayed as I walked the bridge that was made out of wood which is featured as one of the highlights of the restaurant. I had been practicing my poses for months as I knew that I wanted to begin a new year with a professional picture during my vacation. The dress was tightly fitted in the bust as it gave me a *pre-shaped* and relaxed lower half that hung at my waist and flowed with the wind. It had a *secured* zipper on the side of the bust. My feet were *secured* by clear three inches high high-heeled vinyl sandals with a back elastic strap that was *fastened* at the ankle.

To prepare for the big day, I jumped into the hotel shower and began lathering my hair in shampoo and conditioner to help keep it silky smooth, but I decided to add a gold-plated maang tika, a Pakistani jewelry *adhered* to my hair; as it was gifted to me by an old friend years ago. My hair was *fastened* tightly in a bun, with a hair tie to keep me from melting during my photoshoot. I added several clips to position the jewelry to the center of my head as the Indian forehead jewelry *draped* down my forehead.

I had saved the Indian jewelry piece that was gifted to me during my time working as Regional Facilities Manager for the Indian Embassy. Through time, I have learned to appreciate culture and the values that are important to us as we become adults and with life experiences. I had recently broken off my friendship with my lifetime friends Laura and Jackie. It was my second year celebrating my birthday as a single woman! Removed all ties from anyone that I felt was not uplifting my spirit and was not giving me the influence that I wanted for myself and for my son. I welcomed my 31st birthday, free of insecurities, and focused on my next set of goals. Through my photoshoot, I continued to repeat to myself “I am enough!” Loneliness came upon me at times during my night in Tulum, as I reminisced about the good times and what could have been if I had never set boundaries with people.





## Chapter 14: The Clacking of My Shoes (2022)

There are people in our lives that we do not seem to want to let go even after admitting it to ourselves. My ex-boyfriend, Anthony, and I were together for about eight years and we remained close friends for the first two years after our huge breakup. We were both born in August as we shared the same zodiac sign, we were both Leo's. As we would religiously have dinner every year on our birthday month to celebrate each other. I am a woman who is very strong about appearance and dressing for the event and never embarrasses me. That year, we had chosen to dine at Electric Lemon located at 33 Hudson Yards, 24th floor, New York. The ambiance was very quiet and relaxing as we had gone for an evening during the week.

I wore an English fern green shade of a *silky-heavy* sleeveless waist cut-out jumpsuit with a pre-shaped upper half. The bottom half of the jumpsuit *hung* at my waist and fluttered with my movements. It was *secured* in place by an enclosed zipper on the side of my hip. The jumpsuit was multiway and I was able to style the top of the jumpsuit three different turns. I had tailored the jumpsuit a few days ago, as they were wide-legged, and the bottom cuffs of the dress *dragged* on the ground. I threw on a pair of Steve Madden champagne point-toe stiletto sandals with a top strap and ankle strap with buckle *closures*.

My skin was *tanned* from the strong summer sun that month. My body glistened as I *smear*ed my Fenty Beauty by Rihanna Diamond Bomb All-Over Diamond Veil. It gave my skin highlights and 3D-like glittering sheen to my skin. My skin felt smooth as I had shaved my legs and my arms earlier that evening. My hair was *fastened* tightly in a messy bun, and I left two wavy pieces of the front layers of my hair to *hang* down on each side. The elegance of my evening was the earrings inserted into my earlobes, making a bodycon mini tank short dress that *tightly* hugged my body. I had to ask Eden to help me with the concealed zipper *enclosure* in the back, as my arms were not long enough to reach. I combined the dress with a pair of black suede Sam Edelman under-the-knee high platforms *laced* all the way up underneath the knee as it *secured* my feet. My hair was parted and *combed* down to one side and the back of my hair was in a semi-ponytail. I did not have time to wash and blow-dry my hair earlier that day as I took the morning to study. I *applied* black eyeliner to enhance my eye shape, and mascara to elongate my eyelashes for the night. I *shaved* my arms and legs, leaving my skin extra soft. My nails were *painted* and shaped around, but this time I wanted my ears to sparkle with teardrop pink shade diamonds. I swung my raspberry pink *silky-smooth* pink-studded clutch that shined across the streets of New York City.

The food wasn't as good as we expected as the restaurant had changed a few of its art exhibitions in the venue. My disappointment of the night was not the food but the attire that my date had appeared at the restaurant. He wore a white V-neck t-shirt with a Nike cameo sportswear tech fleece men's shorts and a pair of fresh white Nike Air Force One sneakers with a Supreme waist bag. I still do not know which part of the outfit bothered me the most as Anthony

knows how important appearance is to me as well as not dressing loudly in a prestigious restaurant. I felt so embarrassed at what he was wearing as he did not even attempt to color contour with the outfit that I had. Although I will forever be grateful for having him in my life, that dinner allowed me to see transparently how much we were both heading in our direction, our ambitions, and goals will never be the same. It was the second time around that I felt the same feeling of shame about who was walking in the room with me. Even by now, years after our breakup; you would think that he knows the type of woman that I am.







## Chapter 15: Minutes before the Titanic (2023)

Growing up I never met my middle sister Nayira until after I gave birth to my son Eden. The opportunity never crossed as our family's trauma created a burden for both of us to finally meet and connect. Nayira and I were born the same year, both with only seventeen days apart. She grew up in Miami as she recently married her husband, Mike this past November 2023. Nayira and Mike came to visit us during the mid-winter break as we took the time to catch up, Mike and Eden got to meet one another and for the first time, we had our first family dinner with Dad, and all his daughters. Ghislaine had made reservations for us all to meet at Sophie's Bistro, located in Somerset, New Jersey.

We were seated at a rectangular table that seated a party of six guests. I was seated in the far left corner of the table across from my brother-in-law. I wore a long-sleeved mock turtleneck with tips to be *painted* in different heart shapes such as red, pink, purple, pink, blue, and ivory. On my left wrist, I wore my gold round Marc Jacobs watch *wrapped* tightly around my hand. High nylon socks *pulled* up to my shins and my black chunky leather platform boots under the knee laced up to my ankles *secured* my feet.

My excitement had me up very early that morning, as I finished up my assignments and did have time to do a wash and set. I *applied* my Moroccanoil Hydrating Styling Cream as I *parted* my hair to the side and slicked the front layers behind my ear. My nails were dipped in a glossy Valentine Fuchsia and *painted* clear with a topcoat. I applied black eyeliner to enhance my eye shape, and mascara to elongate my eyelashes for the night. I *adorned* the length of the dress, as it fit perfectly for the cold weather in February.

Although I may not speak or see my sisters often, I have learned to accept them for who they are. I have had my bruises in our relationships as I continue healing and just focusing on what matters and the example that I need to teach my son about family. Losing our grandmother Carmen in 2022, changed our lives but I believe that the issues that came before her death were part of the journey to a new beginning in our family. My Dad means the word to me and being his youngest and giving him his only grandchild is a dynamic that my sisters admire as they dance, laugh, and sing with their relationship. The moments shared that night remain vivid in my mind, as life changes, we reflect and begin to see the abundance of growth that we establish within ourselves by establishing self-boundaries. Saying to yourself that "you are enough," as we embark on a new journey.



## Biography



Giselle Leon is a loving thirty-four-year-old single mother living in the Bronx, New York. She was born and raised in the heart of Harlem, surrounded by the rhythm of the streets and the vibrant culture of the community. Growing up, she saw the first struggles and resilience of the people around her. From a very young age, Giselle found an interest in vintage crochet tablecloths that were lace doilies handmade, as her great-grandmother would spend her days sewing around the house. By following her great-grandmother's steps, she was able to identify the importance of details, patience, and

the beauty of creativity.

She graduated from Murry Bergtraum High School in Manhattan, New York in 2007. She studied criminal psychology at John Jay College of Criminal Justice for a year as she did not find a passion and decided to take a break from school. In 2010, Giselle gave birth to her son Eden. Becoming a mother at a young age was not part of the plan, but life had its twists and turns. Balancing motherhood, work, and school has not been easy but she refuses to let the weight of the responsibilities crush her spirit. She is determined to create a better future for herself and her child. Despite obstacles, having a child instilled in her the value of education and the importance of never giving up on your dreams.

As her son grew older, she wanted her son to see that no matter what obstacles we face, education is the key to unlocking endless possibilities. Returning to college as a single mom came with its own set of challenges for finding childcare to manage her schedule, as every step felt like a new obstacle. In 2018, she graduated from the Borough of Manhattan Community College, where she was able to obtain her Associate's degree in Business Management: Finance and Banking. Through her time studying, she worked in various industries not finding the best industry and role that resonated with her.

In 2022, Giselle enrolled into the New York City College of Technology where she is in the Business and Technology of Fashion program where she is pursuing her passion for business development in fashion. Giselle's love for fashion is evident in everything that she does, as her original self has been around for ages, but I still seem to underestimate its value. She has always seen the texture and color and how it reflects a person's identity. The experiences that have made her the woman she is still becoming have brought her both joy and pain. She has made poor



choices, without measuring the risk or the uncertainty of the outcome, but she has learned to let go of the “old her” to fully experience and share the wonders of the “new her.” She hopes to be able to pursue her love for fashion in her future career after graduating from the New York City College of Technology.