

## Nine

Julie missed her son Daniel that night. She looked at the clock, 1:00 AM, and decided it was way too late to call him. She sat at the edge of the bed rubbing her neck as her thoughts looped over the same issues that inflicted her with an unbearable longing for a baby.

Kevin and Modra had no more luck with sleep than Julie. They lay in their bed with their eyes wide open to the darkness that surrounded them.

“That was interesting,” Kevin said, breaking the silence.

“Isn’t it always with my family?” Modra replied assuming he meant Julie’s behavior. “And to think the day had started out so promising.”

They held hands as they lay in bed lost in thought again.

“I’m a little ashamed to admit it out loud, but Veloria’s pregnancy makes me both angry and depressed.” Kevin said pursing his lips in the darkness then adding, “Not exactly the reaction one should have to the news of a coming baby.” Modra didn’t respond, but he could hear her hair brushing against the pillow as she nodded her agreement. He continued, “What’s depressing is actually knowing that this can all go either way tomorrow.”

He thought about his initial reaction when Veloria had first told him the news and how it had made him feel as though someone had socked the wind out of him. He thought of the number of times during their conversation that he had wanted to plead with her not to have it. And how he wanted her to understand that having the baby at her age would make her life a harder struggle than it needed to be; but he had stopped himself time and again knowing that Bill and Christine might not feel the same way.

“Mod...” he said interrupting the silence once again, “we really have to make sure to listen to our own advice and remember that she is not our daughter. If Bill and Christine feel differently, we might not only confuse the poor girl, but maybe even give her more stress.” He was somber as he spoke and Modra knew that what he was saying, he was saying for her benefit as much as for his own.

Modra didn't utter a word, she knew he was right. She shifted her body towards him and tucked her head into his neck. He could feel her tears as they fell silently onto his neck. He held her tight and caressed her hair until she fell asleep.

They woke up to the sound of someone knocking on their front door. They looked over at the clock on the nightstand; it screamed 2:30 AM in glaring red lights. They jumped out of bed and quickly put on their slippers and robes as they ran down the stairs expecting to see Veloria standing on the other side. They panicked when they saw Christine instead. She was pacing back

and forth and when she looked up to see Modra running down the stairs, her eyes welled up and she started to cry. Modra's heart broke as she opened the door and let her friend in.

“Oh Mod, I think Veloria may be pregnant,” Christine said as soon as Modra opened the door.

Kevin and Modra paused to look at each other wondering why Christine had used the word *may* in her sentence. Veloria hadn't said she was *possibly* pregnant that afternoon, she had told Kevin that she *was* pregnant. He thought back to their discussion trying to figure out if he had made a mistake. It was possible that Veloria had meant to say that she thought she might be pregnant and because of the stress she was under made the situation worse by saying that she was certainly pregnant. But as he thought about it more he decided that her behavior indicated that she was definitely pregnant. Kevin gave Modra a shrug not knowing what to say. He was pretty darn sure he hadn't misunderstood Veloria.

“Oh Christine” Modra said as she gave her a big hug and her own eyes welled up. “Come in. I'll make some coffee and we can talk about it.”

Christine was crying on Modra's shoulder and it was obvious she had been crying way before she got there. Uncomfortable with the situation he found himself in, Kevin tried to look away from Christine's sad face when he noticed his sister-in-law standing at the top of the stairs. She looked at him with disappointment and shook her head before she turned and

quietly slipped back into her room. Smart girl, he thought, wishing he could do the same.

Kevin took the same tissue box Julie had used earlier off the coffee table and handed it to Christine. She let go of Modra and hugged the box as she continued to sob her way to the kitchen. Modra's mind was racing as she prepped a pot of coffee, hoping that Christine knew something more that allowed for the chance that Veloria wouldn't be pregnant. Sadly that little bit of hope was crushed as Christine explained how she came across the three positive pregnancy tests she had found in Veloria's room. *Three!* Her mind screamed. *Three positive tests!*

Deflated by the confirmation and not quite sure what she should or shouldn't say without Veloria present, she focused on the trivial and said, "Christine, she's going to think you were being nosy and going through her stuff." Veloria's situation helped explain why parents bother snooping around in their kids' bedrooms—because they actually find stuff.

"I wasn't snooping around her room," Christine said defensively as she wiped the tears from her eyes. "It all just seems that way. Bill and I had stayed up talking about our different days and when I asked him what Veloria had been up to today he admitted that he hadn't seen her at all. He also admitted that she hadn't returned any of his phone calls all day." Christine seemed so miserable inside that every word she said seemed to make her cringe. "As a mother, of course it worried me that he hadn't been able to reach her so I gave it a try and my

call went straight to voice mail.” Her shoulders began shaking as the tears started running again. “That’s when I decided to look in her room hoping to see if I could find a note or something that would tell us where she had gone.” She looked at Kevin and Modra for their understanding as she said, “This is just not typical behavior from her. She always tells us where she’s going, and if she’s going to be out with friends she always lets one of us know.”

“Did you try Diego’s cell?” Kevin asked wondering what he said to her.

Christine looked at him for a minute nodding her head to tell him she had then said, “I went straight to voice mail, so I called his mom and she said he was closing the restaurant tonight and wouldn’t be home until two.”

Both Kevin and Modra nodded as if they understood, but said nothing.

Running her hands over her tightly pulled-back hair Christine said, “All I want is to talk to her and ask her how she’s doing.” Christine’s words lingered as she straightened her dress with her shaking hands then pleaded. “Please, please don’t let her be pregnant.” She was pleading to some higher power above.

Modra placed both arms around her friend to comfort her and cursed at herself for not knowing what to say. She wished she could call a time out and have a sidebar with Kevin so they could agree on what she should or shouldn’t say. This was a very delicate situation and she didn’t know her boundaries. Would it

be appropriate for her to tell Christine anything that would confirm her suspicion without Veloria being present? On the other hand, this was her best friend, wasn't it her duty to tell her everything she knew? She looked over at Kevin for guidance but he shook his head and gave her none.

Unaware of her friend's internal conflict Christine continued with her recap. "I just wanted to talk to her but she wasn't home so I sat on her bed for a moment as I looked around. I couldn't help wondering where all the years had gone and then I found myself hoping she would be home so I could give her a hug..." the tears went from light to heavy again as she said, "and then... as I was sitting there I noticed a sneaker sticking out from under the bed so I went to tuck it in." A loud sob escaped her just before she said, "that's when I happened notice the pregnancy tests."

Modra took her friends hands and tried to comfort her by telling her it would all be ok. She had no idea how, but she was at a loss for words and that was all she could think to say.

In a flash and catching both Kevin and Modra by surprise, Christine got out of her funk and in a complete 360 she was in a happy place as she said, "You know, it feels as though it was just yesterday that she and I spent the entire day painting her walls a lilac color for her tenth birthday. I had thought it was the most atrocious color for walls and that she would grow out of it in a few years." Christine gave into a smile. "Eight years later, everything in that room is now a tone of lilac." She pulled back a

dining table chair and was about to sit when Kevin gently took her arm to stop her.

“Let’s take it to the couch where it’s more comfortable,” Kevin said, carefully guiding her towards the couch.

Modra stayed in the kitchen pretending to be busy getting everything ready for their coffee. She was actually in a panic trying to think of what she should say and how she should say it. It seemed inappropriate for her to be the one who tells Christine that those pregnancy tests are her daughters, but every minute that passed without her telling her friend what she knew made her feel as though she were betraying her. She really wanted to tell Christine everything because she felt that she should know, but the risk of having her hate her for telling her was a real one and it frightened her.

Modra had been twenty-one when she had gone back home for a visit as a favor to Julie and told their parents that her younger sister was pregnant. They were devastated. Modra had never seen her father cry and that night he cried for hours on end. Their mother was so angry with Modra for telling them that she had pretty much asked her to leave and not come back. Somehow, doing Julie the favor of breaking the news to their parents had backfired on Modra. It was as though their mother blamed her for her sister’s pregnancy as if it actually wouldn’t have happened if she hadn’t told them.

Modra stayed on safe ground as she said, “So the pregnancy tests were in her room, in one of her sneakers and under her bed,

but say you weren't snooping?" She spoke in a loud voice so Christine could hear her in the other room and unintentionally came off as condescending.

Christine couldn't understand Modra's lack of concern for her daughter's situation and asked her, "Why you are focusing on my snooping around in Veloria's room and not the fact that she may be pregnant? What am I missing here?" she was completely irritated. "I'm here because you are my best friend... I can't think straight and I need your opinion on what to do next. I'm certainly not here for you to reprimand me for behaving like a mother."

Modra shrunk back a little unsure of what to say.

Kevin jumped in to save his wife and said, "I think she's still shocked at the news and doesn't quite know what to say to you just yet." He went back to the kitchen to try and talk to his wife without Christine hearing, which was a difficult task because their living room and kitchen consisted of one large wide rectangle.

"If I confront her and the tests belong to one of her friends she'll be angry at me for snooping... and she's only here for such a short amount of time, I really don't want her to go off to college angry with me."

"Maybe you shouldn't worry about it. I'm sure Veloria will tell you on her own." Modra said already knowing that Veloria was planning on telling her sometime that morning.

“But if I don’t confront her and she is pregnant, I’m afraid she might do something stupid. Do you see my dilemma?”

Modra nodded her head understanding full well that if she could just muster up the courage to tell Christine that her daughter was pregnant, that she could then be free to move on to the next stage of coping. Modra’s brain felt like mush. To tell her best friend that her daughter was pregnant seemed impossible without explaining why it was that her daughter had come to them first and not her parents, not to mention the fact that Modra hadn’t called her immediately as a good friend should.

With Christine a safe distance away on the couch, Kevin turned to Modra and whispered for her to go into the pantry with him. When Modra hesitated and glanced over at Christine, he took the serving tray in one hand and said in a loud voice so Christine could hear, “honey, I can’t find the raw sugar. Can you please come show me where it is?” Then he reached back and took Modra by the shoulders, forcing her into the pantry.

“Ok. Forget what I said earlier, you need to tell her now.” he whispered.

Modra froze. She knew she was going to have to tell her sooner than later, but she was worried that Christine would hate her for not having told her the minute she knew, or worse, hate her for telling her and making it real.

“What do you mean *I need to tell her?*” she said, wanting to know why he couldn’t be the one to tell her, after all, Veloria

had gone to him for help not her. She poked her head out of the pantry. “Looking for sugar, I’ll be right out,” then she turned her attention back to her husband and said, “Wasn’t it you that Veloria came to for help? Shouldn’t you be the one to tell Christine, or at least the one who confirms that she is pregnant? Come on babe, it would be easier for you to tell her, she not your best friend... she wouldn’t have expected you to pick up the phone and tell her right away.”

Kevin furrowed his brow at her and said, “Listen,” he was whispering and hoping Christine wasn’t able to hear. “Veloria came here asking *us* for help, not me.” He shifted his weight to the other foot and crossed his arms as he said, “Besides, I would tell her, but it is because she is your best friend that it should come from you. I’m more Bill’s friend and if it were Bill standing here tonight, then I would be the one to tell him.”

Modra gave him a look that told him he was full of bologna and he knew it. But he ignored her. He realized that they were running out of time. Christine would come looking for them soon so he had to get Modra on board fast.

“Do I need to break it all down for you?” and then based on her blank stare, he realized he did. “Babe, this is perfect. You telling Christine now *is* the best way for us to help Veloria. This way, Christine can get all of the shock value out of the way and she can focus on the important stuff when she sees Veloria.” Kevin bent his knees to bring his eyes down to Modra’s eye level. “Christine already halfway knows, you’ll just be

confirming it.” Then he gave her a kiss on the forehead for good luck as he tried to push her out of the pantry, but she didn’t move.

She was still confused. “So you just want me to be blunt and tell my best friend that I know for certain that her daughter is pregnant because she told my husband that she was while we were enjoying a day in the city? And then when I found out, I chose not to call her and tell her and then when she walked into our home at three in the morning in tears I still chose not to tell her?” Modra’s brow furrowed. “Are you nuts? No! I want Veloria here now!”

Kevin nodded understanding his wife’s hesitation. He had felt the same way when he was tasked with telling her.

“I know I sound ridiculous right now but you weren’t here when Veloria was asking for our help.” His eyes pleaded for her to listen. “Trust me. This is way more helpful than having Veloria in the room when her parents learn she’s pregnant.”

Modra reached up and removed Kevin’s hands from her shoulders.

“Oh, sorry,” he said sheepishly when he realized he had been gripping them too tightly.

“I get it.” Modra said shocked at her husband’s protectiveness of Veloria. He was usually a huge advocate of kids paying for their mistakes and fixing them on their own so they learned their lesson. “You want us to shield her.”

Modra watched Kevin nod. He seemed thrilled to see that she finally understood. She finally agreed to tell Christine everything she knew, but she was going to need a few minutes to think about it and figure out the best way to do it. When she was finally ready to walk out of the pantry she was startled to find Christine standing there, glaring at them both.

“What are you two whispering about?” Christine asked suspiciously.

Kevin cleared his throat and squeezed passed them as he said, “You know, now that we found the sugar, I’m going to take that tray to the coffee table,” he got busy assembling the milk sugar and spoon on the tray. As he filled the carafe with the hot coffee he strategically turned his back toward the women to avoid Christine’s questions and Modra’s pleading eyes. “There.” He said placing the lid on the carafe. “I’ll just place this on the table for you and go to bed so that I can give you girls some privacy.” He braced for a reaction from Modra as he gave Christine a quick hug and told her it would all work itself out and then he practically sprinted out of the kitchen before Modra could grab hold of his sleeve. He quickly glanced back at Modra and felt sorry for her; she looked like a frightened puppy. He placed the tray down on the coffee table then bolted up the stairs.

He felt like a jerk for leaving Modra alone with such a heavy task and for telling Christine that it would all work itself out when he knew it was a lie. Veloria’s pregnancy was like a huge elephant smack in the middle of the room that needed to be

dealt with. He wanted to say that it would be there for an entire lifetime if you don't "fix it," but he could never be so blunt with Christine. Instead, he offered his pathetic, meaningless words of support. He had no idea what else to say to a mother who was about to be shocked with the confirmation of her unmarried teenage daughter's unplanned pregnancy. He felt sorry for her, and like when a friend loses a family member, all he knew to say was: I'm sorry for your loss. That's it . . . you're sorry for their loss . . . you feel obligated to say something and when you say it, it's worthless. He knew Modra would be angry with him for abandoning her, but he would rather take Modra's wrath tonight than to be there when she tells Christine everything.

The room was quiet. Modra looked at the clock on the wall which helped explain why she was so exhausted. Her brain actually hurt from trying to find a way around all of the mess. She suddenly had an eerie feeling that an old friend was tapping her on her shoulder, wanting her to look back and relive own fear of becoming pregnant. Her body shivered. She recalled all of the times she had begged for the test to come back negative and could only imagine what poor Veloria went through and the anxiety she must have felt when the strip turned blue—a positive result.

They were both lost in thought as they sipped on their coffee. Modra was seated on the couch next to Christine trying to work up the courage to say what she needed to say. She

began with, “Christine, I’m guessing you didn’t wake Bill to tell him about the tests you found.”

Christine shook her head to confirm she hadn’t. “No, he had been up waiting for me when I got home so he was really tired by the time he went to bed. I just didn’t see a reason to wake him and worry him unless I was sure they were hers.” Modra could see she was clinging to hope. “I mean, there is a good chance that the tests belong to a friend of hers, right?”

Christine looked aged. Modra was sure she knew that Veloria was pregnant; otherwise she wouldn’t be there at three in the morning. But, like the wife of a cheating husband, it wasn’t true until she saw the proof for herself. Modra’s gut turned into a knot. She never thought she would have to deliver the news of a coming grandchild with the fear of it causing devastation.

“I’m really sorry, Christine,” Modra said in a shaky voice, holding her coffee mug in both hands. She was gripping the mug so tightly that her brown knuckles had lost almost all of their color. “It’s not a mistake,” she spoke rapidly, wanting to get it all out. “The tests you found belong to Veloria.” She held her breath and kept her head and eyes focused down on the hardwood table. She couldn’t look at her friend. She didn’t want to see Christine crumble. “I know because Veloria came over while we were in the city and she told Kevin. Kevin said she was really scared and that she wanted our help telling you.” Christine said nothing to Modra. In fact, she looked at Modra with helpless gaze. “I’m sorry. When you came knocking this

morning, we thought you were Veloria. We were going to tell you first thing in the morning.”

Christine was still frozen. She wanted to throw her coffee at Modra for saying it. How dare she confirm it! How could *she* possibly know before *her*?

Modra glanced up at her and just as quickly looked away; there was anger and unspeakable disappointment in Christine’s eyes.

Christine leaned back with her watery eyes looking up to the ceiling, pleading to God that Modra was lying while digging her long nails into the palms of her hand. She wanted to feel that pain instead of her heart breaking. Her little bit of hope had now been dashed away by Modra.

Modra was silent, she knew what this was costing her friend so she put the desire to hug and console her aside and allowed her to absorb the news and react however she needed to.

“*This*,” Christine says, “is not supposed to happen to parents like us! We have been involved parents from day one.” Christine said feeling cheated. “I-I-It’s not supposed to happen t-t-t-o parents-who-do-everything-right! We have raised a wonderful daughter who was taught to respect life and a-a-a-spire for more.” Christine was sobbing so hard she had developed a stutter.

Modra nodded, agreeing with Christine wholeheartedly. But that was irrelevant because it did happen and it *was* happening, not just to Veloria, but to her entire family. Their lives would

now be unfairly derailed through ripple effects and long-term consequences from having a baby at her age.

“I know Christine, It’s going to be tough for a little while, but you are just going to have to be strong and figure out how best to fix this for Veloria’s sake... and everything that you’ve worked so hard for.”

Christine was motionless on the couch as her eyes concentrated on the beige enamel wood stove that sat in the red brick fireplace. Inside, her soul was clawing to get out and away from the misery that surrounded it. There was no one to tell her why this was happening to her, not even Modra. She drilled her memory over and over again wanting to know if she had missed any signs that would have warned her that this would happen. Where was it that she and Bill had taken the wrong turn and failed as parents?

“Why? Why? Why?” she asked herself out loud. “Why me?” she moaned. “Why did this have to happen to my daughter?”

Modra shook her head without saying a word. She knew the question wasn’t directed at her and for that she was grateful because she too had wondered the same thing.

“Is this some sort of a cruel joke?” One glance at Modra assured Christine it wasn’t. One minute she felt like she wanted to scream at someone and the next, she felt like she needed more room to breathe and then finally, all she wanted was to find Diego and rip his face off with her own two hands. The roller

coaster of anger and helplessness made her painfully aware of how demoralized and helpless she was.

“I thought I was home free,” Christine said, deflated. “I thought the hard part was over.” She took a deep breath and wondered what was next. Christine then fixed her eyes back on Modra. “She’s an adult now. She was supposed to go off to college,” she said this to Modra as though she didn’t already know. Christine fell back hard against the couch as if every muscle in her body suddenly gave out. Her head rolled toward Modra as tears fiercely rolled down her cheeks. “She has thrown it all away . . . everything we’ve worked for.”

“Oh . . .!” Modra closed her eyes, she wanted to take her friend by the shoulders and yell at her: *What do you mean? It’s not too late, you can still fix this! You have to encourage her not to have this baby! That’s the solution you need!* Instead, she took a deep breath and poured more coffee. She was so frustrated with Veloria, and now Christine, that her hands shook violently, causing her to spill as she poured.

“I’m being punished for something I did, I’m sure of it,” Christine surmised with her palms over her eyes and her elbows in midair. “This is my penance. This is my penance for the things I did when I was young and stupid.”

Modra bit on her lower lip becoming more frustrated with her friend. She had no tolerance for self-pity.

“What could I have done differently?” she shook her head, “I have failed as a mother.” she said it as though it were all

somehow her fault and as though she believed the battle was lost. “The only job I have had for eighteen years has been to raise Veloria and I have failed.” The anguish she felt was obvious in her fragile voice. “Why, why, why?” she asked over and over to no one but the heavens.

Modra watched her friend curiously as she tortured herself. She went from asking God why, to taking the blame for her daughter’s actions, and then eventually, she moved on to drowning herself in guilt for her daughter’s mistake. Incredible, Modra thought, this couldn’t be how Christine, Mrs. Super Mom, was going to handle the situation, could it? Perhaps this was exactly what Kevin meant when he said “they need to get over the initial shock in order to be productive.” Christine’s initial reaction was not only non-productive, it was full on counterproductive.

“It’s because you’re Catholic, isn’t it?” Modra asked bluntly. She wanted to know why Christine was automatically ruling out the possibility of her daughter having an abortion.

“What?” Christine demanded, shocked at the odd question from Modra. “Is what because I’m Catholic? You’re Catholic.” Christine said, breathing fire, warning Modra to tread lightly. “Are you somehow suggesting that my daughter is pregnant because we’re Catholic?” She had long since accepted Modra’s almost agnostic beliefs, but she would not allow the Church to be blamed for her daughter’s mistake. “This is just another example

of how a childless person, such as you, uses reason in these situations.”

Modra realized she hadn't phrased her question properly and went to clarify. "I meant it as the reason for your arbitrary decision that she is going to have this baby rather than have an abortion." Modra wasn't sure if Christine was ok with the subject or not, and when she didn't protest she took it as an opportunity to continue her point, "I mean, it's only my opinion, but I think that an abortion would be appropriate. Veloria made a mistake and we both know she's not ready to be a mother." Modra realized that she was treading on very thin ice; she could see Christine's hackles standing straight up. "I think the most important thing is to keep Veloria focused on her future, don't you?"

Christine strongly disapproved of Modra's proposal and wasn't shy when letting her know exactly how she felt. She said in the sternest of tones, "Oh! Absolutely not! It's not even an option."

Modra let Christine's response linger for a few minutes while she thought of reasons, other than religion, that could be driving Christine to be so narrow-minded. How could she rule out abortion without an ounce of consideration if it were not for her religious beliefs? It infuriated Modra to listen to Christine concede her daughter's future because she refused to give the subject of abortion the proper consideration. Did she forget that she was literally conceding a future that led to UCSF medical

school, an experience that would open doors, give her independence, and assure her the ability to afford a family when she was ready for one?

Modra believed that it should be wrong and unacceptable for a parent to behave in a way that doesn't put the child's best interest first. Granted, her behavior could be a part of that initial shock value and, in all fairness, it might take Christine a little more time to process things logically than it would someone who wasn't a mother. Also, Kevin and Modra were fully aware of the fact that Veloria had become Christine's sole identity, which helped explain her reacting like a shattered mirror when the pieces fall one by one to the ground and all that is left is the empty frame. However, Veloria was her daughter and Christine was the one Veloria would count on for direction so she would have to get her act together soon.

"You're right," Modra said cautiously, "I know that things do seem a little more cut and dry on my side of the fence because Veloria is not my daughter, but please let me say this and hopefully some of what I say will make some sense to you." Modra was trying to use her calm voice as she spoke. "I've sat here and listened to you as you condemned yourself for Veloria's mistake and I've said nothing. But it's not your fault and it can be remedied." It was obvious that Christine did not want to have this conversation with Modra but she finished her sentence anyway, "for your daughter's sake, throw religion aside or

whatever it is that is stopping you from being logical and consider *all* the options available—for her sake.”

Christine was vehemently shaking her head as she said, “No Modra.”

“Fine, you win.” Modra said, not quite ready to let it go, “but you should know that it is ridiculous of you to blame yourself and credit past ‘sins’ you may or may not have committed as the reason for her becoming pregnant. Unless you took Diego’s sperm and miraculously fertilized Veloria’s egg in your kitchen before implanting it yourself into her uterus, you get a ZERO for responsibility.” Modra leaned forward, speaking her mind, knowing she had already crossed the line. However, she would not allow her best friend to beat herself up for facts of life that were out of her control. “You know . . . feeling guilty is not going to help you here. You did nothing wrong and this is not your fault. You need to get your shit together and talk to Bill, then Veloria, and figure out what’s best, Christine, what’s best for Veloria and her future, not what’s best for you or your conscience.”

Christine sat up, silently mulling over Modra’s last words. She had a point, though she still didn’t like it. What Modra didn’t know and would never know, if Christine could help it, was that she had traveled down this very road when she was in college. And even though it’s not a constant guilt that follows her, it’s those moments of weakness when she’s washing the dishes or looking at old photos that her mind wanders and makes

her think what if. Those are the shadows that darken her soul and keep her from true and complete happiness. She doesn't want her daughter to live with that phantom.

The room went silent for a few minutes.

Christine tried to wrap her mind around the immensity of the situation Veloria was in. *Oh . . . God*, Christine thought, *she's going to have this baby while she's still so young*. And one by one the residual ramifications flowed into her thoughts like sewage contaminating a pristine river. *Veloria might never complete her education; it would be next to impossible for her to accomplish a medical degree while raising a baby. Maybe, Christine thought, maybe she could go to a junior college or a trade school . . . and become what? What about a husband? Would she have to settle for whoever would accept her with another man's baby?* Christine cringed. *Would this man think less of her? Would he respect her? What about her career? Would she ever have one? At least one she could be proud of? Or would she have to settle?* All of the questions were killing Christine from the inside out. This was not what she had wanted for her daughter.

Modra observed her friend at the actual moment the meaning of her daughter's situation slammed into her; she felt sorry for her. There was a lot to consider. Modra considered the idea of counseling her own daughter to either have an abortion for the sake of her future or to have the baby for the sake of her conscience and privately admitted that she didn't think she

would have the courage to do it, then she gave a silent thank you to the powers that prevented her from having children.

Christine was not blind to the fact that she was trapped in what felt like a tiny box with limited scenarios and possibilities and an abundant amount of consequences. It truly scared her that the only room left in the box was room for more error. Everything was settling in and as she sobered up to the situation she was becoming more afraid. Modra, on the other hand, was a spectator. She had the privilege of being an observer from a safe vantage point with no *real* personal investment on the line. Though admittedly, her being removed from the situation certainly allowed for a more open-minded perspective and Christine knew she had to take that into consideration—she just wasn't ready to do that just now and wasn't sure if she would be able to at any point.

Christine couldn't help but look at Modra with resentment. Her friend had the luxury of an opinion without the cost of the consequences, making her wonder whether Modra would still opt for an abortion if Veloria were hers. Grudgingly, Christine agreed that ultimately it was Veloria's future that must be considered, but she was unable to convince herself that an abortion would alleviate the burden instead of complicating it further. Christine could not allow Veloria to forever carry a cloud of guilt that could crush her soul and take away her beautiful smile. Of course Christine believed that Modra could never and would never understand how she felt about the subject

of abortions because she's never gone through it. *Abortions don't haunt teenage girls when they have them. Abortions haunt teenage girls when they're older, happily married, with children . . . other children.*

Christine took a deep breath and released it slowly as she said, "Ok, I get what you're saying Mod, and I know that you have a point," conceding to Modra and hating it completely. "But I cannot and will not recommend to my daughter that she get an abortion." Christine's glare warned Modra as she shook her head with determination, making it very clear that the option was not on the table for discussion. "I do have to acknowledge that Veloria is no longer a child and I have to allow her to make her own decision. So" Christine let out a heavy breath and shrunk into the couch as she said, "the decision will be hers and only hers to make."

Modra obviously appreciated what she heard, but what Christine hadn't said to her was that she would make sure Veloria understood *exactly* what she would be doing if she chose to have an abortion. She had strong beliefs about the subject, and she would make sure Veloria became familiar with them.

Modra nodded gratefully and backed off. "Okay, that's fair. I only wanted you to be open to it," she said relieved that Christine would not forbid it. Veloria might be eighteen but she did still lean on her parents for all of her major decisions, especially ones that would change her life forever. *God*, Modra thought, *of all the people . . . Veloria . . . I never thought she'd*

*screw up*. The disappointment Modra was feeling was indescribable and she admitted to herself that she couldn't begin to imagine how Christine must be feeling.

"I'm not open to it," Christine said, her tone so curt it caught Modra's attention. "It's just not my decision."

Had she just strong-armed her friend into agreeing with her? Modra hoped not, especially since she had just spent the earlier part of the evening scolding Julie and demanding that she keep her opinions to herself. She reasoned with herself that she brought an alternative to the table that was just as important as the traditional perspective and that at the end of the day, Bill and Christine would ultimately do whatever it was they felt was the right thing for their daughter.

"Christine . . . I'm sorry if I've shoved my opinions down your throat . . . that was not my intention. I have no doubt that I've come off as heartless—please forgive me. I am more than positive that whatever Veloria chooses to do with this baby will be the right choice. I just want to make sure that every decision and its ramifications are considered. You know I love her and only want the best for her and her future, w-whatever that is." That was as honest as she could and needed to be, for Veloria's sake.

Christine looked at Modra with steel-blue eyes. "Don't...don't be sorry," she said in a brusque tone. "I may not like the thought of an abortion, but I have to be realistic since I may be the only opponent to Veloria having one." she said, sure

that Bill would most certainly favor an abortion above adoption and especially above keeping the baby. “I’m glad you brought it up and I’m glad I came here and we talked through it. The shock value is gone, now I need to talk to Bill and Veloria and figure out what we’re going to do.”

Modra nodded gratefully for being let off the hook then leaned over and gave her friend a huge hug.

“It will all work out somehow, it has to.” Christine said and both women really wanted to believe it.