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During my husband’s long illness, clothes were not important, and I got out of the habit of caring. I relied on a pair of black wool trousers that got dry-cleaned and pressed to a rat-like luster.  
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total of three pieces.

Even so, I wasn’t ready to chuck my old clothes. They held memories. She said, “Think instead about the future, about having clothes that fit and that you will feel awesome in.”

Then she measured me and said we could shop together, or she could shop on her own and in about five days return to my house with her purchases. I could try on and buy any I liked, or none; she’d do the returns.

Ecstatic, I appointed her my personal shopper. In two days she emailed a photographic sneak preview of some selected items. I saw yellow. I saw aqua. Excitement was building.

**A**t my house she set up in the living room her own rolling clothes rack and carried in from her hatchback big bags from department stores.

“You were so easy to buy for,” she said.

Instantly I fell in love with myself in a clingy, nicely-draped magenta dress. I looked so sultry that I bought two, the second one in navy blue. She’d brought a white Calvin Klein suit in two sizes. One was too small but the other just right. I almost wept.

I’d asked her to bring a red sheath. Of the three she’d brought, one very pretty one wouldn’t do because raising my arms hauled the hemline up to the oh-no zone. The next had funny shoulders. The third was a gorgeous, form-fitting eye-popper.

I selected the white suit and a navy one; a fun textured jacket in navy and white; and five dresses, loving a floral print with a narrow patent leather belt

she showed me how to wear. “This is your real waistline,” she said, fitting it an inch higher. Who knew?

And she’d brought a load of handbags. I’d complained to her about bags, showing her the only ideal bag I’d ever owned, a Hello Kitty tote, more subdued and sophisticated than you’d think. In Europe, cries of “Hello Kitty!” greeted me everywhere it went. But I understood how Hello Kitty might be a minus in the business world.

Now for the bill. This was the kind of event one saves for, and I’d expected to take a major hit. She checked the price tags against the receipts and tallied. The total for the clothing and two great bags plus tax was \$676. She emailed me

the invoice that included her shopping hours.

After she’d gone off with the leftovers, I sat among my colorful clothes, marveling and wondering. It had been like a visit by a fairy godmother. The tags showed where she’d worked her magic: Marshall’s. Macy’s. Stein’s. The future held bold business meetings and knockout dinner dates.

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Before the free consultation, I answered her one-page questionnaire.

“What are your favorite colors?”

I wrote, “White and red.” “Who are your style icons?” “Coco Chanel.”

“How do you feel wearing your current wardrobe?”

“Mousy. Owl-ish.”

People do change; I explained that I actually enjoyed myself and my life now. I confessed to not knowing where to shop, that price tags scared me, that separates confused me, and I wished to downplay a figure flaw (I have only one).

She was the only person in the world able to use such information.

“Tell me about yourself,” she said when we sat down at my place. That’s everyone’s favorite invitation. I shared historic photos of myself and explained that I did not follow fashion. I said, “I always thought fashion was for people without brains or talent.”

She said, “It’s not about fashion. It’s about style.”

She had brought stylebooks. “Page through,” she said, “and show me any style or color you like, whether you think you can wear it or not.” So I did.

Then she said, “Do you mind if I look in your closet?”

I’d edited and aired the closet, throwing the dingy low-heeled pumps and orthotic oxfords into another room, and said, “Be my guest.” She merely looked, saying nothing; incredibly smart of her.

“This I can still wear,” I said, showing a long-sleeved black number. “And this. And this.” A