

Chapter 1.

The next afternoon, I found myself at the Men's Wearhouse in Stroudsburg to return the tuxedo I wore to a wedding. The same kid with pink hair and piercings welcomed me, asking how everything went. I mumbled a polite response, still grappling with my thoughts from the previous night. After driving back from New Hampshire with Tammy and Abigail, I felt exhausted but couldn't sleep, anxiously waiting for updates from Maggie regarding the shocking incident that had unfolded. Even though she had reassured me, I couldn't shake off the worry. After a restless night, I checked my phone in the morning, only to find no messages.

In an attempt to distract myself, I started with some chores. I stripped the sheets from Maggie's childhood bedroom and tossed them in the washing machine—she had said she was never coming back, but I clung to the hope she might change her mind. After returning the tuxedo, I filled a grocery cart at ShopRite with her favorite foods, all while frequently checking my phone for any missed calls. It was late in the afternoon when I finally received a call. It was Vicky from Supercuts, and my stomach dropped as I answered, knowing this conversation was unavoidable.

Vicky expressed her condolences about what happened, having seen it all over the news and on social media. A wealthy tech tycoon's son dying in a firearms accident right before his wedding was bound to attract attention. When she asked about Maggie, I hesitated, unsure how to respond. I didn't want to lie, but I also couldn't reveal the truth. I described Maggie as very confused. Vicky offered to meet up for dinner to talk about everything, and, despite my desire for the emotional support, I felt the need to maintain my distance. I pointed out that she wasn't a professional therapist, which stung her.

Despite her insistence that she wasn't "just" a haircutter and her previous willingness to attend the wedding, I felt overwhelmed and abruptly ended the call. I took down her business cards from my refrigerator, ready to discard them to avoid falling back into the conversation. I told myself I could wait a month before needing another haircut, letting the distance build between us.