

Chapter 10.

After the sun set, the atmosphere at the Osprey Lodge shifted as candles were lit at the tables. Guests mingled in new pairs, sharing stories and laughter. Amidst the lively conversation, I discreetly slipped Aidan's phone, left unattended on the table, into my lap while excusing myself for a restroom break. However, my real intention was to seek out Catherine Gardner, Aidan's mother, as Gwendolyn had ominously hinted at her significance.

Navigating the lodge, I was greeted by a long line of women waiting for the restroom before making my way upstairs. I knocked on the door of the master suite, greeted by silence. With Aidan's phone, I unlocked the door and stepped into a dimly lit hallway that led to a room filled with clothes and an overwhelming garbage-like odor. The chaos of the room was startling, as dresses and blouses lay strewn about, creating an unsettling impression of neglect.

To my surprise, there sat Catherine Gardner, her appearance bearing little resemblance to the poised woman I had seen in photographs. Clad in a stained bathrobe and with unkempt makeup, she seemed detached from reality, engrossed in a game show. When she noticed me, her initial expression suggested confusion, but upon hearing my connection to Margaret, she attempted to muster her hospitality.

Despite the clutter around us, Catherine poured gin into glasses and commented on the challenges of online shopping. She quickly warmed up, sharing insights about Aidan and addressing troubling rumors, specifically mentioning Dawn Taggart. Her words became increasingly animated as she recounted the complexities surrounding Aidan's relationship with Dawn, her entitlement, and claims about their familial connection.

A disturbing revelation emerged about Catherine's husband Errol, who allegedly had a sordid history of affairs that complicated their family dynamics. The conversation swayed abruptly, oscillating between jest and a horrifying recollection of Catherine's own violent response to Dawn's demands, culminating in an unintended incident on the stairs.

As my thoughts raced with disbelief, the arrival of others disrupted our exchange. I tried to extract clarity about Margaret's involvement, only for Catherine's state to deteriorate further, leading to a hurried exit for me as I confronted unsettling truths regarding my daughter's relationship amidst a veil of lies.