

# Chapter 4.

The summer came to an end, and although Tammy insisted my childcare duties were no longer necessary, I continued to assist her. I ensured Abigail attended her math club appointments, updated her vaccinations, and found a dentist to address her numerous cavities. The dentist referred us to an orthodontist who, astonished by Abigail's dental needs, declared, "She's going to need a lot of braces." It led to a week-long battle with Pennsylvania Medicaid, which preferred cheaper alternatives, while I insisted on quality, ultimately covering most costs myself.

By October, our daily routine had evolved seamlessly. One day, Tammy requested I pick up Abigail from school due to a work issue. I collected her in my Jeep and prepared tacos for dinner while she spread out her homework on the living room floor. After cleaning up, we watched a cooking show on Netflix, which featured humorous baking disasters, followed by sending her to bed after a half hour of reading her fantasy novel about Warrior Cats.

That evening, while saying goodnight, I spotted a map affixed above her dresser amid her room's playful decorations. It was a topographical map of Lake Wyndham near Osprey Cove, adorned with features sketched in pencil and marked with a bright red "X" at its deepest point. Curious, I inquired about its origin, and Abigail revealed it was a gift from Aidan, who had given it to her after their New Hampshire trip.

She suggested it was a treasure map, and her enthusiasm was unmistakable. "One day, I'm going back to Osprey Cove to look for the X. You should come." When I asked if she had shown it to Tammy, she replied no, citing Tammy's warning about discussing Osprey Cove due to potential repercussions.

Concerned, I carefully explained my belief that Abigail had mistakenly received the map, emphasizing Aidan's intention might have been to give her money instead. My suggestion about the \$1,000 hidden in my suitcase puzzled her, leading to an animated conversation about exchanging the map for cash. We agreed on a deal, resulting in her ecstasy over receiving eighty-four dollars, while I wrestled with my overwhelming emotions about the map in my hands.