

Twelve: Norma

In the chapter titled "Norma," the narrative unfolds as a reflection of the protagonist's strained relationship with her mother following her father's death. Norma grapples with the expectations of being a "good daughter," recognizing her emotional distance from her mother, who is struggling with memory loss and loneliness. Instead of returning to her childhood home after her father's passing, she merely schedules weekly visits filled with grocery shopping and yard maintenance, refraining from deeper emotional engagement.

During a Christmas Eve visit that marks ten years since her father's death, the quiet of the house contrasts sharply with cherished childhood memories. While alone, Norma feels a wave of nostalgia but ultimately avoids confronting her feelings fully. A nighttime disturbance forces her into the cold where she finds her mother outside, vulnerably dressed and searching for a lost wedding ring from years ago. As Norma tries to bring her mother back inside, it becomes apparent that her mother's grasp on reality is fading, as she clings to delusions of her deceased husband still being present and harbor fears of being abandoned.

The narrative shifts to a poignant recollection of a recent funeral for her aunt Alice, revealing the tight-knit nature of their family, highlighted by moments of humor mingled with profound grief. At the memorial karaoke gathering, the mother's vitriol emerges unexpectedly, transforming celebration into chaos, exposing deeper familial tensions and her escalating decline. A call for help escalates into a hospital visit after a frightening episode, showing the gravity of her mother's condition.

Norma is torn between guilt and love as she navigates the complex landscape of familial duty versus personal freedom. Ultimately, the revelation of her mother's past and the seed of doubt around her own identity thrusts Norma into a whirlwind of emotions, complicating her feelings of loyalty and love. Caught between these pressures, she starts to grapple with her own identity and the life choices she has made, sensing a profound unraveling of her past as she begins to confront painful truths about her origins and family dynamics .