

# Chapter 12: Norma

Chapter 12 explores the emotional complexity of Norma's relationship with her mother, a bond strained by years of emotional distance following her father's death. Despite feeling the pressure of being a "good daughter," Norma cannot seem to bridge the gap between her and her mother, who has been dealing with both memory loss and growing loneliness. Norma's visits, though regular, lack the depth needed to address the emotional distance between them. Instead of offering the emotional support her mother clearly needs, Norma focuses on more mundane tasks like grocery shopping and yard maintenance. This allows her to fulfill her familial obligations without delving into the harder emotional work of connecting with her mother, who has become a shell of the woman she once knew. The underlying tension between Norma's sense of duty and her reluctance to engage on a deeper level creates a quiet but palpable sense of guilt within her.

The turning point in the chapter comes during a Christmas Eve visit, marking ten years since her father's passing. Norma enters her childhood home, and the quiet, almost eerie stillness of the house starkly contrasts with the vibrant memories she carries from her younger years. The emptiness of the house mirrors the emotional void that she feels, and she cannot help but be overcome by nostalgia. However, instead of fully allowing herself to engage with these emotions, she resists, choosing to keep her distance. She avoids confronting her deeper feelings about her father's death, her mother's mental decline, and her own place in the family. But as the night progresses, a disturbing event forces Norma to step out of her emotional detachment. She finds her mother outside in the cold, vulnerably searching for a wedding ring that has long since disappeared. This scene is a stark reminder of her mother's fading reality and growing dependence on false memories of her late husband. Norma attempts to bring her mother back inside, but the encounter only reinforces the reality of her mother's

deteriorating mental state, leaving Norma to confront the undeniable truth: her mother's decline is irreversible.

In the following shift of narrative focus, the funeral of Norma's aunt Alice serves as a backdrop for exploring deeper family dynamics and unresolved tensions. While funerals typically evoke solemnity and reflection, Aunt Alice's memorial brings out a more complex range of emotions, from laughter and light-heartedness to grief and sorrow. This mix of emotions underscores the closeness of the family, but it also highlights some of the unresolved issues that linger beneath the surface. The memorial karaoke gathering, which was meant to be a lighthearted tribute, turns unexpectedly chaotic when Norma's mother erupts in anger and bitterness, revealing how her mental health has worsened. Her outburst, which turns a moment of celebration into a scene of discord, exposes the fracture lines that have always been present within the family. As the evening takes a darker turn, Norma is forced to step in to address the escalating situation. Her mother's emotional outbursts and erratic behavior eventually lead to a hospital visit after a frightening episode, signifying just how critical her condition has become. This episode further cements the emotional burden that Norma is carrying, as she faces not only the decline of her mother but also the unraveling of family structures she had long ignored.

At the heart of this chapter, Norma is caught in a storm of conflicting emotions. She feels a deep sense of guilt for not being more present for her mother, but at the same time, she yearns for personal freedom, to break free from the cycle of familial duty. As she navigates this internal conflict, the revelation of her mother's troubled past adds even more complexity to her feelings. She begins to question her own identity and whether her life choices were shaped by her sense of familial obligation or her desire for independence. Norma's exploration of her past and her mother's legacy forces her to confront painful truths about herself and the family dynamics that have shaped her. The weight of these realizations grows heavier, leading Norma into a process of self-discovery and introspection that she had long avoided. As the story progresses, Norma's emotional journey is defined by a growing sense of tension, torn between loyalty to her family and the need to establish her own sense of identity. The

unraveling of the family's history, combined with Norma's growing understanding of her own role within that history, adds significant depth to the narrative. This chapter effectively showcases the emotional and psychological toll of navigating complex family relationships, and the powerful effect that uncovering hidden truths can have on an individual's sense of self.

