

The flickering glow of Payton's television shone out through her bedroom window and rippled the monotony of the white picket fences and lampposts that lined the street below, in which her father happened to be nervously pacing. She dreamily gazed at the dresses that the clients on Kleinfeld's *Say Yes to the Dress* were trying on-- fit and flare, ball gown, A-line-- and fantasized about her wedding day.

*BRRZZZZZZ!* Payton's phone vibrated, and she picked it up to hear the voice of her fiancée.

After catching up for a little bit, she joked, "I'm deeply sorry, honey, but I've fallen in love with a simply *gorgeous* Vera Wang. It hugs me in all the right places, makes me feel like I'm beautiful, and is something that I've had my eye on since forever."

"Well in that case, I hope it'll do the renovations on our apartment too! And pay for your flight with Stephanie to that conference in Paris!"

"Ha-ha. But I'm serious. I know I told Mom I'd wear her gown, but my wedding day is something I've imagined ever since I was 7 and watched *The Wedding Planner*. I've been so busy that I haven't spoken to Dad in a long time, but I'm pretty sure his business is picking up, and I wanna pull out all the stops."

Right outside her door, her father had his hand on Payton's door handle, prepared to enter his daughter's room and perch at the end of her bed. It was Payton's last night visiting home after a few years, and he had decided she was old enough to handle the news. His days spent 'in the office' dealing with 'hundreds' of clients were really him sorting through stacks of overhead bills, lottery scratch-offs, bank-issued warnings of foreclosure, and angry customer reviews.

Moments after he heard Payton click off the phone and place the receiver in its cradle, he made up his mind, boldly turning the handle and striding towards her bed. Even though playbills, music scores, college plane tickets, and other tokens of her childhood crowded every inch of space on her walls and flooded his sight, all he could remember were nights spent tinkering around in the basement to develop new formulations for his product.

"Hi honey," he simpered. "I know that the wedding is putting a lot of stress on you. I just thought I'd remind you that I'll do *anything* to make your special day everything you've ever dreamed of."

Without a moment's hesitation, Payton replied, "Oh my god Daddy, YES! That would be amazing. I love you." She threw her arms around him.

Her father's shoulders fell, along with that popped bubble of hope that she might question the feasibility of his offer.

Payton pulled away and continued, "So until the wedding, I will be presenting my work in Paris with Stephanie. I can only communicate limitedly over phone, text, or email due to my data plan, but I'll definitely send you photos of anything on the Champs Elysées that is just *to die for*."

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At Kennedy Airport, Payton and Stephanie stood in front of the monitor, checking their flight status.

"Right on time!", Stephanie cheered. She turned around and noticed a crowd of people huddled in front of a blaring television at the closest gate, murmuring in hushed tones. Curious, she made her way through.

"Bomb explosion of American camp site in Damascus. 40 American soldiers injured, 3 dead, including the Sergeant Major of the group," Anderson Cooper reported.

Stephanie tore her eyes away from the screen and returned to Payton, who was scrolling through fashion blogs and bopping her head to the music from her headphones. Stephanie pointed to the time, and mid-fist bump to her music, Payton quickly nodded and they boarded their flight.

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The next thing they knew, Payton and Stephanie were rolling up their glossy posters on internet commerce in the conference room of their high-rise hotel and strolling the avenues of Paris on Fashion Week, arms linked. They window-shopped, noting names of designers and snapping photos of

mannequins to send to Payton's father and also relatives back in Moscow, where the dresses could be tailored at a lower price. After placing her phone in her bag to buy a baguette from a street corner stand, its screen kept on lighting with her father's name and a photo of his grinning, weathered face. Payton had forgotten to switch her phone off of Do Not Disturb in order to receive incoming calls.

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Back at home, it was 5 AM. Payton's father's phone kept *bling-ing* with photos of jewelry, centerpieces, bridesmaid gowns. He kept jabbing the "Call Again" key on his phone in a sincere, but now inane, attempt to connect with his daughter. Sighing and removing his glasses, he downed his fifth glass of wine.

Suddenly, he felt as if a claw was slowly, torturously gripping and releasing his heart. He jerked upright. His back straightened as a sharp pain shot through the area between his shoulder blades. A numbness radiated up his left arm from its wrist.

The front door opened. "Honey, I'm home!!" His wife mustered a song-song, crossing the threshold of the house. She was returning from a double shift as a cardiothoracic nurse at the hospital.

*He's probably in the office*, she thought, and locked the front door before turning around and walking to the office. She sprang back as she saw her husband lying prostrate on the ground, mouth foaming, tongue lolling, and only the whites of his eyes visible. Her vision clouded, and her head became too heavy for her to bear.

*THUD*, echoed the floor as Payton's mother's body fell limp to the ground.

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Looking into the chapel's basement's vanity mirror, Payton adjusted the bodice of her wedding gown and her windswept hair with the help of her wedding planner. Inclement weather had delayed her flight, and so Payton had ended up returning from Paris on her wedding day. Her plane had landed not more than two hours ago.

"Argghh! The garlands on the doors were supposed to be roses! Not marigolds!" Payton exclaimed.

"Relax, sweetie, you look beautiful. Just smile and work the aisle."

Bouquet in hand, smile plastered, and veil pushed out of her eyes, Payton took a deep breath and was finally ready to trek up the stairs to the chapel's main floor. The wedding planner was smoothing Payton's train when her pager buzzed.

She shot Payton an apologetic look and answered her pager. She listened, her brow furrowing, and then slowly passed her pager to Payton without meeting her gaze. Looking at her wedding planner questioningly, Payton accepted the pager.

"Hi, is this Payton? It's Dr. Xavier from Memorial. Both of your parents just flatlined from stress cardiomyopathies-- heart attacks. Your closest family members are already here at the hospital. I think you should come over right now."

Payton dropped her bouquet and ran up to and out of the double mahogany doors of the church. She ran down its steps, her Vera Wang dress ripping, Louboutin heels breaking, and makeup running every step of the way.