

“The Way He Folded Towels”

After Peter died, Ellen couldn't sleep.

Not because of grief—though grief was there, constant and steady like background music—but because the linen closet no longer made sense.

Every towel was folded differently. Peter had always folded them: three neat squares, edges aligned like soldiers. She used to tease him for it. “What are you, a hotel maid?”

He'd grin and say, “No. I just think towels should feel loved too.”

Back then, she'd roll her eyes, kiss his cheek, and secretly refold the towels her way. Sloppier. Quicker.

Now she stood in front of the closet with all the towels folded wrong.

Too neat. Too perfect. Too him.

She touched one. Pressed her face to it.

It didn't smell like him anymore. Just detergent.

She sat down on the floor and unfolded every towel. One by one.

She tried to remember how she used to do it—how she folded them before he started. But her hands hesitated, confused. Her body only remembered his way.

Funny, she thought. Love rewrites your muscles, even after the heart breaks.

She folded them all his way, tears dripping silently onto the cotton.

Later, her daughter called. “Mom, you need to eat.”

“I had toast.”

“With what?”

“Loneliness,” she meant to say, but said, “Butter.”

Days passed. Weeks. The house settled into a quiet rhythm of absence. Mail piled up. The sink filled. The chair he used to sit in stayed perfectly untouched, like a shrine to ordinary life.

One morning, Ellen woke up with an ache behind her ribs—not sadness, exactly, but an urge to do something. Anything.

She opened the linen closet.

One towel.

She unfolded it. Folded it again. His way. Then unfolded it. Folded it her way.

It looked wrong. She laughed. The first sound in the house in days that wasn't a kettle or a clock ticking.

That afternoon, she walked to the park with one of Peter's old flannel shirts in her bag. Sat on the bench they used to sit on. Placed the shirt beside her.

She didn't cry.

Instead, she told him about the towels.

About the neighbor's cat who kept getting into their garden.

About the dream she had where they were young again, dancing in the kitchen.

She talked until the wind picked up.

Before she left, she folded the flannel shirt. His way.

And tucked it back in her bag, warm with sunlight.

She would never stop missing him.

But some days, missing him looked like toast with butter.

Some days, it looked like towels folded just so.

And some days—on the best days—it looked like love, still breathing between cotton and memory, quietly teaching her how to stay.