

Breathing Comes in Pairs, Except for Twice: One Begins and One's Goodbye

by Sarah Ghaya

Today was supposed to be the best day of my life. She was supposed to be mine and me hers. My name is Stephen Salvatore, I used to be the happiest man alive. I had a beautiful fiancé and a coming unborn baby girl. Today was supposed to be our wedding day. Today is the worst day of my life: I lost the love of my life and my baby girl in a split second. A car accident and she was gone. A drunken guy driving killed her and he gets to stay alive. Tomorrow is her funeral, I don't want to go and hear everybody telling me that they're sorry. I didn't realize that my cell phone was ringing.

"Hello... Stephen?" the person said unsure.

"Yeah, it's me ... but who's this?" I asked knowing who it was.

"Man, It's Damon , where are you? The guests are coming. I know it's hard but you got to come..." he said sadly.

But what was he talking about? The funeral was the following day.

"Stephen ! Where are you? Wake up!" he yelled

"Man, what are you talking about?" I said confused.

"It's Katherine's funeral" he said with a soft voice. It then hit me. I stayed here all night thinking. I didn't realize that tomorrow was today.

"Stephen, tell me where you are I'm going to come pick you up. Okay?" he asked.

"Alright. I'm still at the beach."

"Dude, you slept there?"

"I guess...anyways come pick me up" I said, not really wanting to go to the funeral.

On our way to the church, Damon was the only one talking, trying to keep the conversation casual but it was far from casual. We arrived at the church and everybody was there: friends, family, colleagues and even the other members of the jury. Oh yeah I forgot to mention she was chosen to be part of the jury on the case of a serial killer. That explains all those journalists waiting to harass me with questions.

"Mr. Salvatore, do you think that your fiancé's death has something to do with the case she was on?" "Could you clarify the rumors leading to her death?" The NBC reporter caught me by surprise.

"What rumors?" I murmured confused to Damon.

"Keep walking" he answered. I kept walking towards the church. I stopped at the door and took a deep breath as I entered inside.

"Stephen there are still 30 minutes before the ceremony begins, so do you want to come with me I will go say my last word to Katherine?" he said almost crying.

"No, it's okay. I'll do it after...I'm not ready...Actually I don't know if I'll ever be ready."

"Okay, then see you bro" he murmured walking to her coffin. I stayed in front of the door, next to her mother, the only family she had.

Thirty minutes passed by, and people began to arrive stopping at the door and telling us the same things. "She was a good woman" or "we loved her and we're going to miss her" or "it must be hard, but don't forget if you need anything we are here." Everybody sat down and waited for her mother's speech and mine. Well mine wasn't long: "Katherine, my love, I miss you. Rest in peace." That's all I could say.

Now that the priest was done and all the other speeches too, I was walking through the church listening to everybody's little conversation when I heard Miss Patty

saying: "did you see her? Oh poor lady! She was so beautiful. Now you can barely recognize her. Such a shame went like that!"

It hit me. I did not see her after the accident. I didn't know if she was disfigured. I had to see her, even if I wasn't ready to let her go. I just needed to see the damages of the accident, so I began to walk to her coffin. As I walked I felt like my heart was going to pop out from my chest, I stopped two steps away from her coffin, I closed my eyes letting the tears drops on my cheeks and took a deep breath, then opened my eyes. It's not her! It can't be her! The face that I was seeing wasn't the face of the girl that I loved. Katherine was beautiful.

"This is not her..." I murmured "No, no, no it can't!" I murmured a little bit louder putting my hands on my head.

"Man, what's up?" Damon asked me confused.

"This is not my Katherine, Damon."

"What are you talking about?" he asked concerned

"It's not her! She doesn't look like her!" I said raising my voice.

"Look Stephen it's normal to not look like before the accident" he said trying to calm me.

"I know but her mouth wasn't that big and her nose was perfect. Her whole face changed. It's not her! Where is my Katherine, Damon?" Now I was yelling

"Stephen! You need to calm down, she had a car accident. The other car was pretty fast. She died right away when the car hit her. Dude it's normal. You need to understand that it is Katherine there is nothing to worry about. It is her Stephen, just calm down please" he said trying to convince me. "It is Katherine ... she is dead."

He was right, she is dead and it's her and I have to let her go. "You're right, Damon. She is really dead and I have to let her go..." I said as I began to cry in my big brother's arms.

After the funeral I went home and took a shower. I went to our room and sat on the bed with a picture of us in my hands. Her face today at the funeral scared me. Miss Patty was right, such a shame for a beautiful girl to go like that. I kept looking at the picture and something was wrong but I did not quite know what was wrong, maybe it's nothing, maybe it's just in my head. I was exhausted, today was a pretty long day, so I put the picture back to its place and went to bed.

Dring!!! Dring!!! The sound of the phone woke me up.

"Hello Mr. Salvatore" a gentle woman's voice said.

"Humm yeah it's me. Who are you?"

"I'm Miss McKinney from the NBC news I wou..."

"What do you want? I don't want to answer your questions" I said wanting to hang up but I didn't do it because I wanted to hear what she had to say.

"Mr. Salvatore don't you think that people have the right to know the truth about one of the jury's death?"

"What the hell are you talking about? Katherine died in a car accident! That's it!" I yelled on the phone.

"Okay then how about we meet this afternoon to talk about her death. This way we can clarify how she really died and stop all the rumors."

"What rumors?" I said annoyed. "Okay, whatever. This afternoon at 2 pm at your office" I said brutally and hung up.

I was waiting for her in her office, if we could call this an office. There were papers everywhere. On her desk there was a file and it was written on top of it: Katherine Gilbert. I took it and opened it. The first thing that I saw was the picture of her face after the accident and then I realized: what was I doing here? I couldn't talk about her death with a complete stranger, so I took the file with me and left.

When I arrived home, I looked at the documents. Pictures after pictures all disgusting one after the other, but one caught my attention. It was the one of her back, the tattoo that we did together was gone, and I knew it. It's not Katherine. I picked up the phone and called Damon.

"Hey man! Damon, I told you it's not Katherine, I knew it. Damon it's not her, I'm sure she..." Damon interrupted me and said

"Man, you got to let her go. She is dead, there's nothing you can do about it" he said sadly.

"The tattoo on her back is not in the picture! The girl in the picture doesn't have a tattoo on her back!" Damon didn't answer. He just hanged up on me. I don't care what he thinks. Katherine is not dead and I must find her.

Days, weeks, months, years passed, but I never stopped searching for her. At first, I thought that it had something to do with the case she was on, but it didn't make sense. Then I thought that she wasn't ready to marry me, but again she wouldn't do that to her mother. I stopped searching for theories instead I reconstituted the day of her disappearance a hundred times, but every single time the day had the same ending : Katherine dies. Therefore, after 20 years I stopped and I decided to prove that the women that we buried on the 11th of November 1990 was not my dear Katherine, and the only way to do that was to find the guy that tattooed us.

I had been looking for him for months and now I found him. I went to his house that day.

“Hi, Mr. Finley, you might not recognize me but 25 years ago you tattooed my girlfriend and I. We both had the same tattoo, look!” I said showing him the tattoo of a heart written inside: ‘two is better than one.’

“Oh yeah man I remember you. You and the girl came to get a tattoo at 2 in the morning. You guys were pretty drunk. Your girlfriend came back 3 weeks later. I think she wanted to have it removed. Dude, she was begging me and I told her that I couldn’t do that. You got to go see a surgeon, and I gave her the name of a good surgeon, but I don’t know if she did it”

Oh my god, I couldn’t believe it “Could you give me his address and phone number please” I pleaded.

“Yeah of course” he answered and gave me the surgeon’s number. I called the surgeon and then I called my brother.

“Hello Damon?”

“Wait up, daddy it’s for you”

“Hello”

“Hi Damon”

“Stephen...?”

“Yeah it’s me. I checked with the surgeon and he said that Katherine went to see him to have the tattoo removed. She is dead and so am I.”

“Stephen! Stephen! Noooo!!!”