

## Katherine

We waited patiently, looking everywhere but each other's eyes. We didn't dare to make eye contact for we knew that if we did, it would only be a river of tears. I couldn't hold it in anymore, tears streamed down my face and the saltiness of them reached my lips. "Lauren?" my mom said. I looked up at her, feeling the stares of the rest of my family all upon me. "I just need some air." I replied. I got up and walked out of the family sitting room. My mind was full, I thought of everything as I made my way to the elevator. I couldn't keep my thoughts inside and before I knew it, they came rushing out of my mouth. "*Why is this happening to me? To us? To her? Where is this God that everyone speaks of that heals and delivers?*" The elevator came to a stop. I eased my way through the crowd of people, trying to get away from the faint smell of disinfectant and that awful stuff which they call food. I glanced around, some individuals and some families all looking frantic or either tired or both. They smelled as if they had been there for days. Ugh. I got to the entrance, and that's when the flashbacks hit me.

I was sitting front row of the pews, watching every person that passed. Elder women approached my siblings and I, repeating the same phrase as the person before them as if they recited it. "Everything is going to be okay, call me if you need anything. Or "She's in a better place, God is with her." I zoned out, only taking notice of the strong, nose wrenching perfume every other lady had on as they brushed passed me with their wide hats and their fascinators covering their faces. I drifted in and out of the service, the dirges the only thing sticking in my memory. The speaker of the service who appeared to be omniscient was discursive with his sermon, his words making me feel uneasy. I was hot, steaming felt like, as beads of sweat started to form on my forehead. The gloves I wore were sticking to my hands, becoming increasingly irritable. I glanced at my brother and my sister, both of them looking miserable. I looked down at my ruffled socks sticking out of from my "good church shoes" as my grandmother would say. At that moment, it all came crashing down on me. I was alone- we were alone. We had nobody, our mother was gone and all that existed of her now was a cold figure lying in a casket. My siblings and I were only kids, my brother and I not yet teenagers. How were we supposed to take care of ourselves? When the phone calls stop, and the people stop coming and the different dishes which everyone had brought were all devoured, what would happen? Surely my siblings hadn't thought of this, as I was considered to overthink too much and stress before there was even anything to stress about. Our mom was dead, and all we could do was cry the tears we couldn't stop from flowing, in hopes that they would bring her back to us.

My eyes drifted shut, and I was awakened by my brother pulling at my arm, announcing it was time to go...the funeral was over. We got into the funeral car, the silence and heavy breathing carrying us until we got to the cemetery. Moments passed and I'm not sure if I was in my right state of mind or not. Before I knew it, the casket was being lowered into the ground. My

heart sank. My breath quickened. The tears were endless. I had lost my everything, I had lost my heart. My mom was gone.

I came to, finding myself still standing at the entrance. "Excuse me, are you lost?" someone asked. I looked up and it was one of the clerks from the front desk. "No, I'm not." I replied. "I'm here for a family member." The clerk asked me for a name. "Katherine...Katherine Miles." The clerk looked up the name and handed me a sticker. "Room 301, east wing." I walked off, threw the sticker away and headed back to the room. I made my way back to the family room and saw my family sitting where I had left them. They looked up at me upon my arrival, all of in their faces portraying different emotions. I took my seat in a corner by myself. I didn't want to be bothered. I was tore down on the inside, my heart aching. But I feigned as if I was okay. We had been here a total of 9 hours. I remember it so well, something I don't think I'll ever forget. My grandmother had been in so much pain, I went to her bedroom hearing the faint cries she happened to make, only to find layers of her flesh spread over the bed sheet. I didn't know what to say or do, so I made my way to the front room and stayed there watching each of my family members make their way in. I made eye contact with my cousin, her eyes full of terror. I could tell she and I were thinking the same thing- our grandmother had been in stage four skin of skin cancer longer than we knew. We only found out recently, when our parents told us she didn't have much time to live. It was all new information, like a slap in the face. We didn't know how to take it. All I knew was that I had to be strong for my cousin, while trying to muster up strength for myself.

Now here we are. Our grandmother, mother, wife, sister...could be well of or could be taking her last breath. "*Another loss, another funeral.*" I thought to myself. I can't take it. I start to look around, my legs shaking frantically. My mouth is dry and my fingernails are only nubs now. I'm about to let the tears I've been trying to hold in out, when the doctor comes to the door.

"Family of Katherine Miles?" We all stood up at once. My mom looking directly at the doctor, my uncle staring at the floor. My aunt was playing with her rings on her fingers, my grandfather had his eyes closed and I knew that he was praying. My dad and I were the only ones making eye contact, for he knew what I had been thinking this whole time. Neither one of us took death well, and with all of the deaths in my father's side of the family he only attended one funeral. It seemed as if we were waiting for years, I could hear the ticking of the clock. I broke the stare between my father and I and looked at the doctor. "I'm very sorry, but she didn't make it." My thoughts went back to the days we would cook in the kitchen, the long hours we spent at church that my cousin and I would complain of. The late nights our grandmother would stay up with us and I....I thought about the times I saw her smile and the secrets we kept that we promised to take to our grave. It was all over. Those days were gone. As tears strolled down my face, I looked at my phone for the time. It was 12:23 am. February 14th. Valentine's Day. A day meant for love and happiness, and I had lost my most cherished loved one.