

Faith

By Joseph Laguerre

Katerina opens the door before he can knock twice.

Anthony steps inside, carrying with him the faint scent of cologne and city air—steel, glass, distance. His suit is immaculate, Armani pressed into clean, deliberate lines that don't belong in a room like this.

“Mom... what are you doing here?”

Katerina steps aside. “This is where we went on our last vacation, honey.”

Anthony glances around at the two double beds. Striped comforters pulled tight. Curtains half-drawn against a brightness that feels out of place.

“He isn't dead, Mom.”

“Sit down, Anthony.”

They sit on the edge of the nearest bed. The mattress barely gives, holding its shape the way Anthony holds his posture—controlled, precise.

He slips off his blazer and drapes it over the chair. Katerina's fingers move to the cross at her throat, thumb brushing the tiny diamonds as if counting them.

“The situation has changed,” she says.

Anthony's jaw tightens. “What do you mean, changed?”

“He had another stroke. At the hospital.” A pause. “He's in a coma.”

The word settles between them, heavy and clinical.

“Jesus, Mom—what—”

“Anthony Michael Douglas!”

The full name lands sharp, familiar.

“I’m sorry.”

“Your father is in a coma, and you use His name in vain.”

Anthony stands, movement cutting through the stillness. He begins pacing, one measured line across the carpet, then back again.

“What is it, eighty degrees in here?” He loosens his tie. “Let’s go outside.”

He slides the door open. Ocean air rushes in—cool, damp, alive.

They step onto the patio. For a moment, neither of them speaks.

“When?” he asks.

“Last night. When I called you.”

Anthony exhales. “You said he was resting. I asked to talk to him—you said he was asleep.”

“I know,” she says. “You’d just made partner. I didn’t want that moment to become this.”

“You don’t get to choose that.”

“No,” she replies. “But I can choose not to take joy away from my son.”

The breeze stirs between them.

“You should’ve told me,” Anthony says. “Paula and I would’ve come right away.”

“That’s exactly why I didn’t.”

Anthony studies her. “Who else knows?”

“Father Carmichael.”

“What did Dr. Parish say?”

Katerina looks toward the horizon. “He said he doesn’t know if your father will wake up.”

Anthony leans forward. “Did he say there’s no chance?”

“Anthony…”

“You know why I have to ask.”

She doesn’t answer.

“Dad made it clear,” he says. “If there was no hope—he didn’t want to live like that.”

Katerina stands abruptly, clutching her cross, and walks back inside.

Anthony follows.

She sits on the edge of the bed, her face in her hands.

He kneels in front of her, gently pulling them away. From his pocket, he produces a white handkerchief embroidered with **AMD** in gold.

She wipes her tears.

“We gave this to you when you turned ten,” she says.

Anthony nods, a faint smile flickering. “Dad said I was going to be a heartbreaker.”

The memory softens the room.

Anthony pulls a chair closer and sits. He unbuttons the top of his shirt, then another, revealing a gold chain. The cross rests against his chest.

“Mom?”

“Yes, honey?”

“If Dr. Shapiro says there’s no hope…” He hesitates. “You know what I have to do.”

Her head lifts. “You will do no such thing.”

“But Dad told me—”

“Do you remember the basketball team?” she interrupts. “You were afraid you wouldn’t make it. Your father told you to work hard, pray, and trust God’s will.”

“This isn’t the same.”

“It is exactly the same. You are trying to decide the ending before it has been written.”

Anthony exhales. “This isn’t about faith. It’s about dignity.”

“It is always about faith,” she says.

She leans forward and unbuttons another button on his shirt, exposing the cross fully.

“You’ve been away from home too long, Anthony.”

She stands, gathering her purse and straw hat.

“Let’s go see your father.”

Anthony rises more slowly. “We’ll get Paula and head over.”

They move toward the door.

Anthony steps out first.

Katerina lingers, her hand resting briefly on the frame.

“It’s in God’s hands now, honey.”

She closes the door.

The hospital smells like antiseptic and something faintly metallic.

Anthony pushes through the glass doors, holding them open for Katerina and Paula.

Paula’s hand brushes his arm—light, grounding—but he keeps moving.

White floors. White walls. White light humming overhead.

“Douglas,” Katerina says at the desk. “Richard Douglas.”

“Room 417,” the nurse replies. “He’s stable.”

Stable.

Anthony says nothing.

They walk the corridor in uneven rhythm. Doors pass on either side, each one holding its own version of waiting.

At 417, Katerina hesitates.

Anthony opens the door.

The machines come first.

A steady beep. A measured rise and fall that mimics breath without belonging to it.

Then his father.

Richard Douglas lies beneath a thin blanket, his body threaded with tubes, reduced to function.

Anthony stops.

This isn't him.

This isn't the man who taught him how to stand, how to speak, how to decide.

Paula steps beside him. "Anthony..."

Katerina moves forward, taking Richard's hand.

"Hi, my love," she says softly. "We're here."

"He can't hear you," Anthony says.

"You don't know that."

A knock.

"Mrs. Douglas. I'm Dr. Shapiro."

They exchange introductions.

Anthony remains standing.

“We want to know if there’s any chance he wakes up,” he says.

Dr. Shapiro folds his hands. “The likelihood of meaningful recovery is very low.”

“Not zero,” Anthony says.

“No.”

Katerina closes her eyes briefly.

Anthony nods.

“And if he doesn’t recover?”

“He will remain dependent on life-sustaining measures.”

The machines answer.

Beep.

Breathe.

Beep.

“And if those measures are withdrawn?”

“Anthony—” Katerina begins.

“It would involve transitioning to comfort care,” the doctor says.

Anthony steps closer to the bed.

He takes his father’s hand.

It’s warm.

“You told me,” he says quietly. “You said you didn’t want this.”

Katerina stands. “You don’t get to decide that.”

“He already did.”

“You have to have faith.”

“Faith in what?”

“In God. In time.”

“In denial,” he says.

Silence.

“You think this is easy for me?” she asks. “Every second I am here, I know what this looks like. But he is not a decision.”

Anthony looks at his father.

At the rise and fall.

At the pause between beeps.

Paula’s hand finds his.

He squeezes it.

Then he turns to Dr. Shapiro.

“If we were to consider withdrawing support... what’s the process?”

The doctor explains.

Steps. Timing. Procedure.

Anthony listens.

Control.

When it’s over, he nods.

“Okay,” he says.

Katerina stares at him.

Anthony looks at his father again.

At the cross resting against his chest.

At the hand in his.

He closes his eyes.

Then opens them.

“Not today.”

The words settle.

Not surrender.

Not victory.

Time.

Katerina exhales.

Anthony remains where he is, holding his father’s hand.

The machines continue.

Beep.

Breathe.

Beep.

And for the first time, he allows himself to do nothing at all.