

# EVERLASTING MEMORIES

PIERINO GATTEI



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Simone shivered. Her goosebumps pricked. She took a deep breath. The clinic smelled of bleach. Her spotted hands, lined with the map of her life, rested gently on the bed. The sheets were hygienic white, her gnarled fingers a stained yellow.

The nurse prepared the concoction at a counter.

I am not ready, she thought. She took another deep breath, coughed, and closed her eyes.

The tinkering stopped. Simone opened her eyes.

“Whoa! You scared me!” Like an assassin, syringe ready, the nurse was beside her.

“Sorry about that. Are you ready?” Slowly, she moved the syringe towards Simone’s arm.

“You might feel a tiny scratch.”

Simone’s breathing quickened. I am not ready. I don’t deserve this.

“Stop! Stop! Stop!”

The syringe was poised like a dart in freeze frame.

Her feet tingled; a numbing coldness rose through her legs, as her heart thumped in her tightening chest. Her vision blurred and faded to black.

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“Time for bed, my love!”

She rocked him gently. Paddy smelt clean and toasty following his bath. He looked up and smiled. Her heart melted.

Simone had found her purpose.

## PIERINO GATTEI

Smiling, she carried him to his room smoothly, like a boat sailing through still waters. She lay him down in shadow, tucking the blanket under him. The moisture of his eyes glistened with reflected moonlight. His breathing was calm. Her hand gently stroked his chest, and she sang until the glistening vanished.

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Her eyes flicked open: the baby monitor silent, her stomach queasy.

She leapt out of bed and stampeded into his room. She swept the door aside and clutched the rail of the cot. His eyes were open, fixed on emptiness, lips blue.

“John!” she screamed. “Call an ambulance.”

She picked him up, tensing at his coldness. She struggled to bring him close. Blowing into his mouth, she massaged his chest. Her tears flowed onto his cheeks.

“What is it?” he said as he stumbled into the bedroom.

She turned from the cot to her husband, alert in the doorway.

John’s eyes widened. He ran to get his phone.

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The coldness of the court was Paddy.

The stillness in the air was Paddy.

The blueness of uniforms was Paddy.

The babble spoken around her was Paddy.

Thump! Thump!

Simone startled. A heartbeat. “The court is now adjourned.”

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She glanced at John. “Sudden Infant Death Syndrome,” he said, his voice failing, tears welling in his eyes, his grip tightening round her hand. She looked away and squeezed him back.

I don’t deserve him. I killed his son.

Simone was glass: transparent and on the verge of brittle collapse. Everyone knows this is my fault. Paddy is dead because of me. I selfishly slept when he needed me the most.

She wriggled her hand free and cried into her palms in relief that no one could see her shame.

What is my purpose now?

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“I’m leaving you, Simone.”

About time.

“I can’t live like this anymore.”

You shouldn’t, but I must.

“I thought we could get past what happened.”

And how do we do that?

“But you won’t let us.”

I killed your son.

“I love you, but it is not enough.”

I despise you. I want you to go. Now get lost.

## PIERINO GATTEI

“Have you nothing to say?”

Shaking her head, Simone walked to the kitchen to get her cigarettes. I despise myself.

John was gone when she returned to the living room.

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“You abandoned me.” Simone sucked on her cigarette as she walked into the living room. John followed. His face had creased since the last time she saw him half a century ago. He was skinny and upright, still handsome, and masculine.

“I didn’t – you had already abandoned me. Look, I’ve not come here for an argument.”

“Whatever. What do you want?”

“I want to be young again. I want the life I had back then. And I can now. I am considering taking Rejuvenation.”

“You came here to tell me this – why?”

“Because I want you to undertake it with me. Even after all this time, after all the pain and silence, we can start again.”

Tight-lipped, Simone breathed in deeply. “And why would I want to do that? Even after all this time, there is not a day that goes by where I don’t think of Paddy. My death will be my only release from the pain. I barely hang on, but I do because I still smell his toastiness in my arms, and see the love in his eyes, and for as long as I do, he is still with me.”

John stepped forward and placed his hand on Simone’s left cheek, stroking the side of her neck with his fingers. “Oh, Simone, you will never forget Paddy. I will never him forget too.”

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Simone made to move away. John put his left hand on her right shoulder.

“I cannot complain about the life I had since we split all those years ago. But It has always been you and Paddy that have been my true loves. I want to spend my life with you.”

Simone lowered her chin, shaking her head. “No, John...” she spluttered.

“After all this time, Simone, you must forgive yourself. If you Rejuvenate, Paddy will live in you forever,” he whispered.

“I am tired, John, so tired.”

John wrapped his arms around her and hugged her tight. Simone slowly relaxed into the embrace, reciprocating as she cried into his shoulder.

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Simone’s eyes slowly opened.

“Hey, there you are! Welcome back.” The nurse sat on a stool beside her, holding her hand and stroking her brow.

“I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be silly, you have nothing to apologise for. This happens. Many people of your age have this response.” Simone nodded. “Do you want to try again?”

“Yes, but please can I have five more minutes?”

“Of course.” The nurse rose and left the room.

Simone began the interrogation she had been suffering for months.

## PIERINO GATTEI

What if Paddy is in Heaven? Why would I not want to join him?

Of course, but what if I am destined for Hell?

It's what I deserve.

And what if Heaven and Hell do not exist?

Then Paddy would only exist in my memories, and should I die, then the world loses Paddy forever.

If I Rejuvenate, then I stay alive, and Paddy would live forever in my thoughts, and in my hell.

Maybe there is the possibility one day where technology may allow us to bring him back.

I must live with that hope – this is my purpose!

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A sharp intake of breath as the needle enters the vein.

Slight pressure as the liquid flows into her arm.

Simone begins to undie.

In this fleeting moment, her future becomes forever.