

I'd heard that you saw your life flash before your eyes, just before you die. Like watching it on film.

Apparently the person running my projector called in sick, because I didn't get that. I only got one day, not my whole life, and even that was more of an extremely intense memory than a vision.

I woke up around six and got out of bed. Laura turned over and grumbled sleepily, pulling the covers up around her chin, but my alarm hadn't woken her. That was good.

I grabbed clothes out of the closet and went to the bathroom. I brushed my teeth and showered, moving on autopilot. A little too much so, maybe; I accidentally used Laura's shampoo instead of mine, and walked out smelling like lilacs.

Although it could have been worse. I still remembered the time I'd used *Ginger's* shampoo. Although maybe that hadn't been such a bad idea. I hadn't had to worry about fleas for a while after that, for example.

I could be pretty silly before I got my coffee.

Once I'd dried off and gotten dressed, I went downstairs and poured a cup. The machine was set to start automatically just before I woke up, since the less time I was up before I got my caffeine fix, the happier I was. Although usually it wasn't this bad. I hadn't gotten much sleep. Too worried about today.

By the time I'd started on my second cup, I was feeling a little more awake. I rummaged through the cupboard, getting out the pans I would need, then went to the fridge.

I started frying the bacon first. The trick to a really good breakfast was to cook the bacon, then save the bacon grease to fry the eggs and potatoes in. It was a little more work, but it tasted so much better.

About the time the bacon was starting to sizzle, I heard the shower turn on upstairs. Laura was up, then. Good.

She came downstairs a few minutes later, wearing a terrycloth bathrobe. I pulled her close and kissed her. Her mouth tasted like toothpaste. "Good morning," I said a long breath later, letting her go.

"Good morning," she said, getting out another cup. She poured herself coffee and then got cream out of the fridge and sugar from the cupboard. Laura had never been able to stomach her coffee black, and expressed mild incredulity whenever I said that I preferred it that way.

I took the pan off the heat and started pulling the bacon out of the pan, setting each piece on a paper towel to drain. Laura got eggs from the fridge and hash browns from the freezer while I poured some of the grease into the other two pans.

I fried the eggs and potatoes, making sure to keep everything cooking evenly. Laura put bread in to toast and got out butter and a jar of raspberry jam her mother had given us for Easter.

While I got the food on the table, Laura went to wake Robbie. He came bounding out of his room a minute later, Ginger bouncing along next to him. No surprise there. The collie had been a part of our family about a year longer than the boy, but the two had been inseparable almost since he was born.

Breakfast was good. It was over too soon, but it was good. I cleaned up afterward, washing the pans and putting everything away. Laura helped Robbie get ready for school.

Once he was safely on the bus with the other first-graders, she came back inside and hugged me from behind, nuzzling against my neck. I finished washing the last pan and set it on a towel, turning to hug her back. She grabbed my hair and pulled me down to kiss me. That went on for a minute or so before Ginger started barking, reminding us that *she* hadn't had her breakfast yet.

Once that was tended to, Laura caught my hand again, rubbing her thumb over my wrist. She smiled wickedly, making her intention clear.

I hesitated, then sighed. "You have to get ready for work," I pointed out. So did I, but I didn't have to be there quite so early today as she did.

"We could be quick."

"Later," I said, more firmly this time.

She groaned, then leaned forward and gave me a peck on the cheek before letting go. "I love you, Tommy."

"I love you too, baby," I said, and meant it.

A lot of people had warned me, when I first proposed to her, that it wouldn't last. Feelings cooled, they said, and sooner or later I'd wind up feeling like she wasn't even the same person I'd fallen in love with.

I was glad that hadn't happened to Laura and me. Seven years later, and I loved her as much as ever.

I tugged my uniform awkwardly into place. I hated waiting, and I hated courtrooms. I'd been in them before, of course, part of the job, but still.

There were more people than I was used to today, though, and the hearing hadn't even started yet. The judge wanted enough armed guards here today to keep anyone from doing something stupid. It was volunteer-only, though.

Most of the people who'd signed up did so for the hazard pay—silly, if you asked me, but there it was. I wouldn't have done it for that. Money wasn't that important.

But I'd seen some of how this guy was treated in prison. And that just wasn't right. He hadn't even been found guilty yet, and even if he had it wouldn't have been right. I couldn't do a whole lot to help him then, and I probably couldn't do a whole lot to help him now, but I figured he at least deserved to have one person in the room who was willing to give him the benefit of the doubt.

The chief knew how I felt about it, and it had been almost three weeks since I'd even seen him. I was shocked at the difference. He looked terrible, fifty pounds too thin and haggard. More than that, though, was the way he carried himself. He moved like a man in a daze, shuffling his feet. His head hung to one side like he couldn't muster up the strength to straighten it. When he sat down it seemed like he went away entirely, not even seeing the room in front of him. He stayed that way throughout the hearing. Even when someone asked him a direct question he was slow to respond, and when he spoke his voice was sluggish, almost slurred.

I felt a spark of anger stir inside me at that. They'd broken the man in there. This was beyond wrong. It was a betrayal of everything I stood for.

I tried not to pay too much attention to this travesty of justice, and as a result I was maybe the only person in the room who was watching when the doors slammed open. The guy that walked in was big, almost a giant, and he didn't look happy.

I watched as he gave his little speech about cameras. For a second I was thinking I'd have to deal with him, but then the judge told the bailiff to take care of it. I was just as glad for that. I'd often had to deal with crazy people in my life, but it hadn't gotten any more pleasant.

Then the bailiff hit the ground. I hadn't seen what happened, but I'd seen people die before, in the hospital, and twice on the street.

And now once in a courtroom, as well.

I wasn't sure what to do, but around me the other cops were drawing guns, and he *had* just murdered someone right in front of a judge, so I grabbed my gun as well. I lifted it, my hands shaking just a little, and then I pulled the trigger.

I'd practiced at the range almost every day for several years. But I'd never fired a gun in anger. I'd never shot at another human being. I'd certainly never killed anyone.

I wasn't sure how to feel, now that I was doing it for the first time.

Except that he wasn't dying. He wasn't even falling down. I shot, and shot again, and I *knew* I hit him, and other people were shooting him too, but he didn't seem to care.

I lowered my weapon, and I saw other people doing the same. This was just...not right. What was going on?

"Thank you for your courtesy," he said. "The next person to try something like that gets turned into something."

I took a deep breath, looking from my gun to him and back again. I didn't understand it, didn't understand any of it, but now that I could think about what had happened, I was ashamed of myself. That had been wrong. Shouldn't we have tried to *arrest* him first? Why had they gone straight to lethal force? Why had I gone along with it?

Hadn't I just been thinking that everything that this hearing was a travesty of justice? If anything I should *thank* him for interrupting this.

I took a step forward and lifted the gun, intending to say something along those lines and then cast the weapon aside. Dramatic, but hell, I was on camera, wasn't I? And it was a way to send a message, if nothing else.

I didn't get the chance. Before I could even open my mouth, the man who had burst into the room twitched, and suddenly I hit the ground.

There was no pain. That was the strangest thing about it. I could still see, and when I looked at myself I could see what had happened to me. I was broken, twisted. There were bits of me exposed to the air that shouldn't have been. By all rights, I should have been in agony.

But there was no pain, none at all. All I felt was a sort of calm, peaceful lethargy. I found myself drifting, looking back on what had happened.

It had been a good life, I thought to myself. If I could do it over I'd do it the same, and in the end that was all you could ask for.

I would miss my family. Watching my son grow up. Growing old with my wife. We used to joke about how we'd make Robbie get a good job so he could support us in our old age. She'd wanted to go to France, where her family was from. See the Louvre, the Eiffel Tower. I'd talked about raising horses after I retired. My sister and I had made plans to visit Australia.

I felt a nagging sense of regret as I drifted off. So many dreams left unfulfilled.

I wished I could have had just a little more time.