

Prologue

Some people say that your life flashes before your eyes when you die. What really happens is that you see all of the things you *didn't* do in your life. All of the words unspoken, the actions not taken, and finally the biggest and darkest regrets flash like lightning. How do I know this? Because when I was seven years old I saw my dad die, and I died with him.

I had been playing dolls in our bedroom with my twin sister, Christina, when suddenly I was hit with a fear so strong and terrible that I ripped off Barbie's head. A voice whispered, "Casey?" as I blacked out.

My mind was flung into the passenger's seat of my father's car. "Daddy?" I gasped, but he didn't hear me. I wondered where my body had gone and where Christina was. I watched my father's hands tighten on the steering wheel as the car slammed through the metal railing and into the river. *Stop!* I screamed in my head. He didn't die on impact. No, he had continued to sit at the bottom of the river while watching death approach, and he was unable to do anything to stop it. Desperately, he had flung himself against the windows of the car. The jammed door mocked him as he struggled. When the car had hit the bottom of the river and filled up with water, that's when the memories came.

My father faded away and in his wake, I experienced his first kiss. I watched as he met my mom for the first time. She was so pretty as she smiled at him and shook his hand. He seemed so happy from merely meeting her. The rest of his happy memories flooded me: marriage, Christina and I being born, the last birthday we made our own cards for him.

Then other memories surfaced. A girl's tears rolled off her cheeks as I watched my father kiss another girl in front of her. His regret at not telling another girl he loved her flashed before me, and then a boy, his best friend, was being beaten up by a couple of bullies, but he didn't help. Finally, the biggest regret surfaced. Resentment filled me in horror as I watched him leave some woman's house before driving home to us. That was when the light left his eyes and he died.

When I finally came to, my mom was shaking me, and Christina peeked from behind her looking terrified. I burst into hysterical tears. "It's okay, baby. I'm here for you," my mom whispered in my hair, holding me close. But I knew it wasn't okay. What I had just seen was so real, like I was actually there.

I screamed repeatedly, "Daddy's dead!" Momma shushed me and laid me down to sleep. Christina looked at me, but remained silent. She crawled into the bed and wrapped her arms around me. Momma tucked us in and left. I whispered all the things I saw to her and I felt her arms stiffen. She placed her head against my hair until silent tears put me to sleep and Christina's soft snoring faded from my ears. Later, Mom came back in. I can still hear my mother whispering through tears, "How did you know?" I didn't know what to tell her.

I experienced death when I was seven years old. Ten years later, I found myself wondering if I would ever stop.