

***3 SECONDS OF JOY
AND THE AFTERMATH***

A SHORT STORY

**BY
CRIS COMBY**

3 Seconds of Joy and the Aftermath
Copyright © 2008 Cris Comby.
Some Rights Reserved.

This novel is released under the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License. This means you are free to share (copy, distribute, display, and perform) this book as long as you leave the attribution (author credit) intact, make no modifications, and do not profit from its distribution. For complete license information visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/us/>

They say that just before you die, your life flashes back before your eyes and you get to see all the happy moments one last time. For a second you wonder if it's true. You give it a quick thought and sighs, secretly hoping it's not because you can't really think of a happy moment now.

You blink and look at the bright blue sky above. There's no space for anything but joy among the clouds. Feathers of black fly by and time freezes. The crow is caught up in the air, magnificent bird of prey; master of the skies. It freezes in flight, like a paper figure hanging from a wire. Raindrops hang motionless in the air like the lost pearls of a priceless necklace. Time resumes its pacing and the moment's gone. You feel the rush of air on your cheeks and know there's no turning back now.

Your eyelids close and when they re-open, you see a small boy sitting on the gravel next to a discarded bike. The sounds of early morning drift through the streets of the small town. The kid has messy blond hair and a bleeding knee and you remember the fall like it happened yesterday. You remember the seconds of pain that ticked into minutes and stretched into something more. The tears that fell until your eyes ran out of water and the blood had stopped dripping. At some point - late in the morning - someone came and took you away. An old woman, with her greying hair neatly held in a tight and strict bun, who - though she had carried you in her wound - held no maternal instinct at all.

Angry words dance through your ears: long forgotten and dulled to a soft humming. You don't remember them clearly enough now but it seems there was a 'sorry' and an 'end' somewhere in there. Your gaze locks onto the broken-hearted boy's and the world around you blurs into something else without you really noticing.

It is mid-afternoon this time and the person who faces you now is no longer a kid. It's a tall man in his forties and he is holding a goodbye-letter in his right hand. You don't pay much attention to the surroundings, knowing the scene all too well. It's an old flat in an even older building. Candles have been carefully placed on the shelves, to provide light when the power goes off and - even though you don't see them - you know there are buckets piled in the cupboard, for when it rains.

What catches your attention is the glistening water that slowly trails down the stubble-covered cheeks. You know where the drops will end. Smudging the carefully blue handwritten feminine letters on the paper below. Splattering on the end of a 'sorry' and messing with the beginning of an 'end'. It doesn't really matter: the words aren't that important and you've heard them before anyway. You see yourself standing in the small dusty kitchen - alone once more - with haunted eyes, like swimming pools of blue.

The light brightens and reflects on the pristine walls around you. The round grey clock on the wall says it's close to midnight, but the old man – who's lying in the bed in front of you – is still wide awake, as he tries to remember his life. Tubes of red are going in and out of his arms to the soft blipping of a machine that you don't even register. He lies there, motionless; clenching his hands into fists to stop the tremors of fear from creeping in. His controlled breathing makes his chest rise and fall; it's the only movement in the room.

His veiled and glazed-over eyes are glued onto the door: waiting for something; anything to happen. He blinks several times, but the door remains closed. His fists tighten as a lonely tear falls from his left eye. The doctors have come and gone, barely sparing him a glance as they kept delivering their diagnosis. The medical babble echoes in your ears. Powerful and distant at the same time; full sentences well formed and eloquently spoken. Complicate and intriguing words that you forgot as soon as you heard them. It doesn't really matter for it all comes down to the same thing again. It's just another 'sorry' and another 'end'.

You blink and you're back to now but the blue sky is gone. The horizon has now turned grey and the ground rushes up. Hundreds of raindrops accompany you in your fall, shining pearls under the golden sun. The clock hand stretches into eternity: a final moment of freedom and relief and your lips turn into a smile. In your mind there's no room for regrets, or changes of plans. There's no turning back and no reason to even want to.

And suddenly the ground is there. It's sudden and sharp and things burst, tear and break. Blood spreads and the empty spaces inside of you are finally filled.

The thoughts, the pain and the loneliness slowly die and diminish. The lights are slowly fading as all comes to an end and your brain quietly gives out.

The rain keeps on falling and a young man rushes from the yellow cab to the old Victorian house's entrance. A child jumps in the puddles – his laughter filling the air – while his mother watches from under a coloured umbrella. Lovers walk with their hair soaking wet, not minding the weather at all.

A few feet away a strange man lies on the cold concrete floor in a pool of red. He has a smile on his face but no one cares and it'll be days before anyone starts to notice the smell.

For the last time, there's an 'end'.

For the first time, there's no 'sorry'.