Excerpts from Life
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BRENN A AKASON

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For mom, dad, and Morgan, for helping me through all of the ups and downs that are written in this collection of poems, and for always encouraging me to chase my dreams. All the poems in the world can’t describe how much your love and support means to me.

For G, the first person to hear any of my poems consecutively. Reading them to you helped me learn to be comfortable sharing my soul with the world. Thanks for always being in my corner, XOXO.

For Julie Cutshall, for showing me that my words have the power to move people, and encouraging me to publish them...

And for every one of my family members and friends that have always loved me for exactly who I am.

You mean more than the world.
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Even the sky seemed wary of the plague
as the sun masked its face from the world
behind the clouds that raced through the atmosphere
in angry gray herds
fleeing the cities.

The wind threw brittle, brown leaves into the air
and sent them spinning into window panes.
It roared as though it was threatening
to breathe the plague into the peoples’ nostrils with its whipping might.

The people retreated to their houses
and cowered within their four walls
as the wind knocked its fist at the doorstep
and the clouds made their escape beyond the horizon.

With its mask torn away by the ominous wind,
the sun receded from view below the treetops.
And the people waited
in disgruntled silence
for it to reappear.

They sat in their tension-filled silence
as the vicious wind tore on,
threatening to keep blowing,
tearing, beating, spiraling.

Until all the people were gone.
Claustrophobia

Invisible walls grind in towards your body.
Walls you can't see,
but you feel them.

You can't see when they'll squeeze you,
but every distant cough propels them closer,
pushed inwards by the breeze of the disease.

Paranoia percolates
with each new breath that you take
as the oxygen evaporates.

You can't hold the walls apart.
No matter how strong your shield
or how forceful your shove,

the invisible enemy closes in.
Steady as rain,
ruthless as fire,

compressing you, body and soul.
Suffocating, virus raging,
your last breath its only goal.
Snowflakes

People come and go through your life
like snowflakes.

Some melt away once they touch ground,
gracing your heart for an instant,
their memory soft,
their impact fleeting.

Some hit the ground,
find an icicle to hold to
and latch to the blizzard of your life.
Their unique crystals make your own stronger.
Their structure displays
their purpose and passion.
Their sparkle can teach you to shine.

As life’s blizzard propels you
and your path starts to change,
heaping snow blurs and covers
the plans you had made.
And you fear that one snowflake
might melt in its wake.

Oh, to freeze up in time
the space that you shared,
the weather you weathered,
the hugs that you spared.

That small, glittering snowflake
that means so much.
If it flutters away,
will you lose touch?
Will you just be left with the memories
to make you smile
while warm tears
melt snow-filled reveries?

The snowflake once said;
If you’re comfortable where you lay,
in the eye of the blizzard,
then you’ve arrived at the day
when you’ll leave it.

And on that day,
I want to say...

Your steady voice has made mine stronger.
The sureness in your steps
has made my own more confident.
Your encouragement and trust
helped me become more dedicated.
The person I’ve become feels proud,
Accomplished.

And I know as my blizzard moves out
I’ll find more snowflakes to latch on to.

But I hope that you are one
that never melts.
For Owen

I know you can’t read
the cause of it all.
I wonder if you feel it,
the terminality of the fall?

Will you know when it happens?
Will I?
Will it be a grand gesture,
or one final sigh?

I can’t bear to be there
for that empty goodbye
to the ears that won’t hear
all the tears that I’ll cry.

So I’ll write your last moments,
the ones you deserve,
and I’ll know in my heart
that’s how your next life will start.

In the chocolate glass of your eyes
I would see
your soul drifting by
all your best memories.

Your soft ears,
they would flick,
touched by ghosts
of a kiss,

and your tail,
it would hammer
one final time
as you think of the things that excite you.
When you close your eyes,
may you see only love
in all of the years
we could give you.

I hope there's no pain
when you turn towards the sky.
You're a good boy, Owen.
With the angels you'll fly.
The Void In Between Past and Future

There's a hole in my heart
where my world was.

It's like looking at land
from under the water.
The noise of the celebration,
Dampened.
Dense like a soaked sponge.

I don't think I fit there,
out on their loud land,
when my tears water down
the sound of my voice.
I don't understand their choice.

I'm crying for those
who know how to move on.
I don't know what to move to
when my world is gone.

And I sit next to them
and I watch there glee
and I wish I were happy.

But what's left in the walls
were those pieces of me.

The day my life built to
is suddenly gone,
along with the path
I had been standing on.
And the next road ahead
is not blank,
it’s barren.

There may be endless opportunity,
but there is no place to just be.

When I look at tomorrow
I don't know what it holds,
and what should be exciting
just scares me.
Shadows of You

Shadows of you;
the bowl stand empty,
just two holes,
a blue, plastic skeleton.

I lift my chair
over a rug that isn’t there.
The fur already vacuumed
from the floor.

When I sit at the bottom
of the stairs
I can tuck my legs in close,
stick my feet into your aura
that surrounds them.

Where the balls of my feet
rest on the floor
I expect to feel the warmth
that you left there.
The essence of you
that soaked into the boards.

I can’t look at my suitcase
propped by the door.
I know that you should be there,
your nose in my blanket,
your anxious panting
filling the air,
laying by the bags,
telling us to pack you, too.
My duffel bag is a magnet
for your fur
in the trunk of the car.
When I pick it up again
you'll stick there,
your creamy locks weaved
into the fabric of my bag.

Shadows of you
in the last place I said goodbye.
The fibers of you
following me on my next adventure.
The only thing you ever wanted—
to never be too far away.
The Fine Line Into Overthinking

Engaging with thoughts trickling through my head is like balancing a thumb tack on a finger tip—Impossible.

The fine line into overthinking is not a line at all. It’s the jagged edge of a precipice over which I quickly Fall.

I spiral myself in and out of my personal truths and familiar lies. The heart of my soul is stuck somewhere Inside.
The Head and the Heart

Hello from a heart
that won't let go.

I just want you to know
that I'm storing your sorrow
in case you forget
what made you frown.

I'm harboring hot anger;
tending to your fire.
It will burn down into smolders
if I don't stoke it.

I'm gardening your grief;
making sure to pack it tight.
The best blooms come
from constant attention.

I'm fostering your fears
so you're prepared for everything
that won't go right.
But your chest is getting tight...

My condolences from a mind
that refuses to hold.

I apologize for leaking
all of the sadness
you are seeping
into my veins.

And expelling the anger
that's welling, unchecked,
for it lingers
if allowed to stay.

I am sorry for plucking
the grasses of grief
you've been sowing;
they just can't keep growing.

And the stress that will fester
is shredding the sleeves
I am not used
to wearing you on...
First Impressions

Although you’re here with me
you don’t feel like mine.
I want to know what you are thinking
and to tell you you’ll be fine.

But your animal instincts likely
detect my uncertainty.

I know your old owner
is feeling a pain
I am still getting over.

It doesn’t feel fair
to be happy when I know
I put the pain there.

Plunging her into sorrow
took part of me down.
Where I should be excited
I’m hiding a frown.

I have only two weeks
to learn how to love you.
I don’t know if I want to.

I have only two weeks
before I leave you.
I tell myself it’s for your sake
that I want to hold you at arm’s length

but it isn’t.
When you look at me
are you asking for company?
I avoid eye contact,
too afraid to become attached.

And too bruised to love you back.
The Night Before My Life Ended

In the light breeze
of a perfect summer day
even the trees wave
their goodbyes.

It's too bright outside.
I walk the halls of my house
with the lights off.
The better to match how I feel inside.

Packing my life into two-by-six boxes
makes me question the significance
of the structure I have built.
How could something that felt so big
pack up so small?

The devil of time ushers me away.
I can sense every ounce of light
lost in the day.
Everyone says I will be okay.

Their words never fix me.
A Clam by the Shore

Clamshell mouth clamped shut—
choking on a pearl
no one else can see.

Crusted outsides disregarded—
there is no shine externally.

Passerby don’t pick me up
and pry me open
or beg me to reveal surprises
from deep inside my shell.

My appearance is acknowledged and ignored—
the barnacled façade too fierce to approach—
and I hide the pearl beneath
for fear it will shatter from reproach.

Unpracticed muscles are too weak
to lift the windowpane of salt.
Beneath the weight of hidden,
shining pride

I have sunk.
New Friendship

In the beginning you find
you don’t mind
sharing space.

Pretty soon
you will also share smiles.

For every old memory you swapped
you make new ones together.

Through sickness and stumbles,
through tears and through pain,
you add one more token
to the trust that you’ve gained.

And one day you’ll look back
on your time,
how you shared it,
and you’ll realize what grew,

though you never declared it.
Your separate souls had intertwined
into one friendship.
Moving in Slow Motion

Mind is spinning,
Spiraling.
Trying to find the source

of the sagging weight
that's tied around
the heart.

Reaching sorrow's core
it fogs,
moving in slow motion.

Blurry eyes stop seeing outward.
Looking in—
in on the darkness,

finding what was buried there
camouflaged in life's distractions.

Weary ears hear only silence
outside of the solemn hole—
deafening is the mind's disquiet.

A mind that ventured
now stuck inside,
Naked,
with no place to hide,

waiting for the return
of fallen tide.
High Dive

Toes peeking over the edge
of a puddled concrete slab.
Wide eyes peering out
at the crystalline water far below.

Apprehension lurches
in your chest.

Close your eyes,
take a breath,
one step back,
and one leap forward.

The split second of floating
before gravity takes its hold
makes you wonder why
you ever hesitated.

But you hit the water wrong
and what was up is west.

Panic lurches
in your chest.

Upside down and backward,
four limbs thrashing
without pattern
or control.

Reaching out to find the surface
you don't find air.
Instead you find a hand
that steadies you and shows you
how upside down and backward
gives the surface
a better view.

Slowing shaking breaths,
clinging to the tiled wall,
you reflect on how
you survived the fall.

It wasn't clean,
nor was it pretty,
but while searching for help,
you discovered clarity.

You discovered strength
you had never seen.
A blur of complications
became pristine.

As you pull yourself out
of the water that trapped you,
you see it in a way
that somehow looks brand new.

The platform that you leaped off
now looks so small
as if you should barely have felt the fall
at all.

And you stride on past
with your chin to the sky.
Maybe the next jump
will make you fly.

You climb up the steps
of the next highest tower
feeling something akin
to power.
However you land
you will do your best.

Excitement lurches
in your chest.

Close your eyes,
take a breath,
one step back,

and one leap forward.
Hollow Night

The sensation of observing someone else's glimpse of joy is not always joyous.

Blindsided by your own emotions, jealousy creeps in and resentment lingers.

One shuddering breath the only signal, then come the tears followed by pain.

Streaking scars burned into cheeks by your nostalgia crust over like a freeze after the rain;

leaving evidence of the war within even though the will to feel has left your brain.
Ant Farm

Tired muscles shuttle ants away from their plight.
Wandering in the freedom of not having a place to call home for the night.

The stars are all masked by the brilliant light that blinds them from bigger hills outside their fight.

Heavy eyes that can't sleep—even with ears clamped tight, they can still hear the thud of ant feet to their right.

Tossing and turning with all of their might, the red hue of stress in the first streak of dawn is nearly in sight.
Sing Out

Sing out—
Your voice holds depth to warm
the whole world over.

Sing out—
Your voice holds light to glow
against all darkness.

Sing out—
Your voice holds truth to melt
away iron lies.

Sing out—
Your voice holds love to lift
souls from solitude.

Sing out—
Your voice holds peace to ground
fears into new calm.

Sing out—
Your voice holds hope to guide
silence into song.
Brenna Akason is a first-year student at Iowa State University studying Industrial Design. Brenna has been writing short stories since she could read them and discovered her love of writing poetry in February of 2020. Her poetry is inspired by her own life experiences and the emotions they provoke. Some of her other passions are music, tinkering, and spending time outdoors. Her favorite place to relax is on a playground swing.