

Erin Albus
With Eyes Unblinking

I was dying. There was no other way to put it, no way to sugar coat. I had two months to live. We all make jokes about wanting to die; I did the same. But when death's scythe is curved around you, the punchlines feel more like a punch in the face. Suddenly, life wasn't about how much school work I had, nor about getting into the best college. Suddenly it was about which doctor had some miracle treatment, which hospital gave the best end of life care.

I just wanted it all to stop. I wanted to freeze on the moments where my breath was short with laughter and my eyes watered from joy. I wanted to go back to the Christmas when I was five—the one where mom and dad forgot about the ham in the oven and we had to go out for dinner. It was a night defined by falling snow and laughing and hugging and *love*.

But now all mom and dad do is cry. They think I can't hear them. I can. I hear mom's shuddering breaths as dad soothes her. I hear dad's voice crack as he whispers out false promises about how I'm going to live.

I know he's wrong. She knows he's wrong. He knows he's wrong. But the words fill the air with a calmness that is often lost nowadays. It's something that we all need.

It only takes a second for everything to change. For everything to be taken and destroyed. I didn't see the car. The car didn't see me. It was over in the blink of an eye. But a blink of an eye lasts an eternity and the next second never comes. It's just *pain*, and pain slows everything to a crawl.

In those final seconds, seconds that last for years, I saw nothing but mistakes and regrets. All that I could have done but failed to do. All that I promised would be done the next day, but the next day never came because it was always the same excuse. I wish I could say

my family and friends showed up in my thoughts even once, but I'd be lying. I wish I could say I turned to God in those final seconds, but I'd be lying.

Because when seconds last for years and a blink is an eternity, pain is all you have and God, family, and love do not exist in pain.

In the seconds after you're shot, does your life really flash before your eyes? Does God really come in a white light to guide you home?

Science can explain it all away.

You see your life because your brain is dying and it can't figure out *why*. It searches through your memories for answers but finds none.

You see a bright light because of your brain rapidly firing to try and stop from shutting down.

You see comfort, God, because your brain is scared and is hallucinating.

I never believed in God, but now, as I lay in a pool of my own blood, I almost wish I did. It would be so much easier to imagine that I was going on to some better place, that I wasn't about to just cease to exist.

But then again, if I did believe, how could I be ok with an omnipotent and omnipresent God that lets such tragedy to occur? Not just my own untimely demise, but all the others that litter our scarred earth. So what if he gave humans free will. If he loved us, he wouldn't leave us to live in squalor and fear.

Would he?

I was doomed to die from the very beginning. At first, I was never meant to be born. Then I wasn't supposed to make it past a week. Now I am stuck in limbo, trapped between living and dying, yet never having really lived at all.

I could hear a woman. Her voice and heartbeat is comforting in the dark of night when nothing but pain radiates through me. She cooes and whispers and sometimes I think I hear crying, but my eyes won't open to see.

She is the reason I cry, the reason I stretch and reach for safety. She, despite it all, gives me hope that maybe I can open my eyes and *live*.

But the way she cries... I don't think it's meant to be. I think I'm supposed to stay here, nestled in her soft embrace for eternity.

I hope the woman can forgive me.

My life ended exactly the way it began. There was screaming, there was crying, there was blood. I think, at one moment, all three were coming from me. I'm not quite sure how it all came to be, but I suppose there's something poetic about the turn of events. I always did like poetry...

I always thought I'd be scared at the end, that the idea of death would strike fear down to my bones, but all I feel is a cool calmness. I knew that someone was going to die today; it was inevitable. The only question was who it would be. I guess it was my turn.

I remember looking at the stars, how they shone and twinkled in the sky like the necklace my mom always wore. I remember thinking about my mom and dad, how they would cry when they received the news. How they would break down as a flag was delivered. That itself caused a tear to make its way down my dirty face.

It was not a gun or car or illness that killed me. It was silence. It was the silence of those who spoke so highly of my will, yet did nothing when looking on at incredible sadness. It was the silence of those who took away the dignity of others and called it my will. It is those who believe and simply calling for my help thinking that it would fix everything.

It is not action that kills me, but inaction.

Love thy neighbor. Love is not quiet. It is loud and explosive. Even if it is not of close relations, it is helping when help is needed. It extends to those not direct neighbors, but neighbors in spiritual relations as humans.

If no one believed in me, I would still exist. Existence is not stamped out so easily. But it is in those believing and going against my teaching that now kills me. It poisons the water that I sip and rips apart the love I hold. You kill my children with inaction—or even sometimes violence action—and yet look to me for kindness and forgiveness.

Sometimes, silence is the sharpest knife.