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The Radioactive Half-Life of Love

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The Radioactive Half-Life of Love

Alena Willbur

1st place

Thump thump, thump thump.

I grew within a body within a womb, wrapped in the warmth of fluids and other organs. After nine months, Momma Heart decided I was ready to beat on my own.

Brain tried to rationalize my actions, but it did not know the uplifting pleasure of *feeling*. It was a blessing that made me pity Brain.

Until radioactive Love came.

I think I was sixteen.

Although Momma and I were long separated by then, I heard her nagging from Brain's ears and the annoyance made me pound in frustration or tremble with tears. And though I relished in the freedom I felt when I dipped to Stomach while falling on those roller coasters, I hated it when Brain sent me stings of acid through veins that connected me to every organ—that's Pain.

Pain sucked.

But one day, I felt something I had never felt before. It came from a kiss and touch—kiss, touch, then more kisses.

Brain sent a shocking jolt, making me leap in unexplainable happiness. Sparks danced around me and elevated my body higher than I have ever been before and all of a sudden I felt another beat against me. . .

Faint, at first. But warmth radiated from this beat, making me swell and swirl against the walls that separated us so I could be closer to that music. *Thump thump, thump thump.* It sounded just like me. Together, we wrote a symphony. Brain said this was called Love. And Love radiated such warmth that it melted Pain away.

We composed a sweeping waltz with every finger that swept across our bodies, every kiss on the lips, and every word whispered in the ears. I

flew in clouds and swam in the colors of auroras and sunsets. Love felt so ethereal, yet I believed in it with all I had. I gave Love my all—my oxygen, my music—*me*.

Then Love got sick. It began to decay, like radioactive isotopes: in half-lives. The first blow of radiation is always the most powerful, and we made music that generations will make Love to—that's how beautiful it was. Until half of Love left.

Brain told me to fight—yell, scream, let anger and jealousy poison our music green and bitter like weeds on fire. The shocks no longer sent me leaping in a happy dance—they made me whimper.

Pain came back, stronger than ever. Kicking, thrashing, slashing Love away from me with its stone, cold hand.

I tried to reconcile any remnants of Love by tugging my veins, urging Brain to feel that we could not let Love die. But Brain ignored Pain's abuse. So the gaps left by Love's decay were filled with Pain. Parts of me cracked—ice. I could no longer pump life into the other organs as fast as before. I thought I was dying. Though I still felt Love, a mere flicker of candlelight inside me, Pain made icicles.

I cried for Love to get better, to come back and save me from Pain. But radioactive Love decays. And I felt Love decay, half by half, crumbling, withering, like the pages of a thick novel burning in the smolders of fire, no longer warm enough to melt Pain.

Then our music faltered into decrescendo. The songs in my chambers became solo performances—the harmony too distant for my own ears to hear. Music that once swelled my soul left me to shrivel as notes escaped from me in the form of tears. Maybe Momma was wrong—I was not ready to beat on my own. I no longer wanted to feel.

Thump. . . thump . . .

thump.

Half by half, Love decayed until it was a stable, microscopic isotope, barely even there.

This is the radioactive half-life of Love. Upon the first hit of radiation, its atomic cloud begins to fall back to the ground, for none can reach heaven as long as gravity pulls us to earth.

Yet, for some reason, I still beat on, waiting for Love to vanquish Pain again.

Waiting. Hoping.

Beating.

Thump thump, thump thump.