

The Thorn:

Half a Heart

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THE THORN: HALF A HEART

The Thorn was written to tell a story, but also to have a message—a message of being selfless. The Thorn is about choices, and how certain choices may benefit yourself, but harm others. Lylon is given the ultimate choice: save someone he loves after losing everyone, or better humanity and the whole world.

We see what choice Lylon made at the end of The Thorn. And we see what happened with the world in the epilogue. But what would have happened if he had made a different choice? What if Lylon had been selfless?

For the one-year anniversary of The Thorn, I have written The Thorn: Half a Heart, an alternate ending to the question of selflessness. The Thorn: Half a Heart was written to show what the world would have looked like if Lylon had made this different choice. So...you decide. Which was the better choice? And which choice would you have had the courage to make?

The cold silk sheets feel nice against my bare skin as I wake in the morning. My eyes slowly open, crusted together by the tears that dried overnight. The curtains slightly move in the breeze that flows through the half open window, which also allows just enough light to pass through as it shines on the floor by the foot of the bed. A slight whistle can be heard by the wind that combines itself with the bird's morning songs.

I glance at the clock that's on my nightstand, which reads a quarter till ten. I should get moving soon, but I would much rather stay in bed. I hear water running from the bathroom, and the light can be seen from under the door. Megan is already up, probably getting ready to run some errands. I look back at the nightstand and at the photo that rests next to the clock. The photo shows me in a tuxedo and Megan in a long white dress holding a bouquet of flowers. Our wedding photo from two years ago.

I didn't think I would marry anyone after the invasion. I couldn't bring myself to get over any of it. The love of my life, the one with whom I had a future planned, gone with the rest of my family and friends. Each and every day since then I have wondered if I made the right choice. Sure, the world would still be broken, but I would be together with Valerie again. I guess that's the price I had to pay. My happiness, for the world's perfection.

The bathroom doorknob jiggles before the door opens with a squeak. Megan walks out with her head tilted to the side, drying her dirty blonde hair with a towel. She smiles at me, tosses the towel on the bed, and puts her bra on that was hanging from the bedpost.

"You know you have to be at the office at eleven, right?" Megan asks while sliding on her jeans.

“Yeah, I know. I don’t want to go though,” I say as I stretch and sit up.

“I know you don’t, but it’s your obligation. You only have to go once a year and it doesn’t take long. And just for that we don’t have to worry about housing or food or anything. All they ask is that you show up.”

I sigh, “I know... I just hate this day.”

Megan walks over to me and kisses me, her lips soft and warm, her breath smelling like mint.

“I know Lylon, and I’m sorry.”

Megan walks back to the bathroom to finish getting ready. It’s been fifteen years since the invasion. It was this day fifteen years ago that the Thorn left the planet and I had to start a new life. Every year on this day I have to go into the office to meet with the board who is running the states and talk to them about the world. Thankfully, they come down here from Washington D.C. so I don’t have to leave Dallas.

Every year the meeting is the same though. They ask how I am, then thank me for making the choice I made because the world is so perfect. They tell me the world is peaceful and all the nations are working together, and that there is no longer a global hunger crisis nor is there a homeless population. Everything is great and nothing is wrong. Everything just works.

I know they’re going to tell me the exact same thing this year, but I do have to go. Because of what I did they give me free housing, food, water, whatever I need for the rest of my life. I’ll never have to work a day in my life. All I have to do is go to this meeting every year.

I sigh. I would still rather just sleep all day, but I know I can’t. I finally build up enough motivation to get up. I’ll go to the stupid meeting, come back, and get back in bed. There’s not much else to do anyways...

The sun's rays reflect off the bald head of Mr. Dawson. The rest of the board, of which I do not care to remember their names, watches me intently as I sit halfway down the table. In the middle is a screen that shows several graphs and charts, all with various colors and names, about different things going on in the world. One is labeled population, next to one called crime. I don't pay much attention to them. I stare at Mr. Dawson who smiles before taking a sip of water. Taking his glasses off, he clears his throat, ready to begin his spiel.

"How have you been Mr. Porter?" Mr. Dawson croaks in his old voice.

"I'm doing fine, and you?" I ask.

"I am doing great. And your wife, Megan?"

"She's also fine."

"That's good. Real good," he says as he adjusts the collar of his white shirt.

"Well Mr. Porter, we just wanted to give you the yearly update of the world. Those graphs show all the statistics of different things going on in the world, the most notable ones being the rise in population, the crime rate, homelessness. All of which is impressive."

"I'm sure it is," I mumble with my arms crossed.

"First off, the population is rising at an exponential rate. We should be on track to reach four billion by 2040. Another thing is we went another year without crime. Can you believe that? Fifteen years crime free. It's extraordinary," he says proudly.

"It is."

"Our foreign relations have also never been better, and we've been tackling issues that have never been handled before. Our carbon emissions

are lower than ever, and we have cleared the streets by providing shelter to all the homeless and jobless.”

“What are you trying to tell me, Mr. Dawson?” I ask annoyed.

He leans back in his chair taken aback, “Well Mr. Porter... thanks to your wish, everything is perfect. It’s as simple as that.”

I know he wants me to agree. He wants me to say that everything is fine in the world and there are no issues. He wants me to believe I made the right choice. But I can’t say that. Not after what I went through.

“I lost everything, Mr. Dawson. Don’t sit there and tell me everything is alright,” I say as a single tear steams down my cheek.

“What do you need? We can give you more money. Just tell us what you want.”

I chuckle, “I don’t want your stupid money, Mr. Dawson. I want my family back. Nothing will ever be perfect unless all the people that died were back. But that’s impossible... and so is perfection,” I say, then get up and walk out of the room.

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“Tag! You’re it!” a kid yells as I walk down a windy path. Many kids run in the park playing tag, and another group plays kickball a bit further down. Parents watch from the benches that line the path, and some even join their kids in the fun. It is a Saturday, and Saturdays always make the park busy.

I walk past a tall brick structure with a clock on all four sides at the top and a wooden door at the bottom. The old clocktower. The one that holds many memories for me. The one where Valerie and I used to meet for dates. The one where I thought I would find an orb during the invasion. The one I

woke up in after I lost the orb, all bloody and beaten. I feel the hole in my mouth with my tongue where a tooth should be—the reminder I have of losing my mom. Memories I will never forget. I come here every year on this day.

I walk past the clocktower and stroll off the path. Walking through the taller grass, I walk up a short hill where I can view the whole park. Something else is up here though. Something that I got approved by asking the board years and years ago.

At the top of the hill, I walk over to a black quartz block in the ground that has flowers resting in front of it. The flowers, which were once beautiful living roses, are long shriveled and dead. The quartz block has a plaque in it that reads: *In loving memory of Valerie Ray.*

Sitting down, I take a deep breath and close my eyes. I listen to the breeze and the way the birds chirp and flap their wings. I listen to the leaves rustling on the trees and bushes and the kids yelling in the distance. Dogs bark and even the sound of squirrels chasing each other finds my ears as I try to find peace.

“Hey Val... it’s been a while,” I say as I open my eyes. “How are you?”

I wait a second, almost like I’m expecting a response, but I know I won’t get one.

“I’m doing fine, I guess. Another year of doing nothing. And another year of the world supposedly being perfect. I haven’t noticed much difference if I’m being honest, but I don’t get out much anymore. I also think Megan is starting to realize that I still miss you. Although it’s more than miss you.”

I feel my eyes start to well up, and I have to wipe the tears from them.

“I really miss you, Valerie. I feel like I’ve had half a heart since you left, like you took half of it with you. I wish I could go back and do it over again. I

wish I could wish for you to come back! But I can't. And I have to live with that.”

I stand and brush off my pants.

“I can't wait till I see you again Valerie. I love you so much, and I will never stop loving you. Goodbye my love. My sweet, sweet Valerie.”

I wipe another tear away as I walk back down the hill. I get back on the path and walk the way I came, toward the entrance of the park. I'm not sure what I'll do with the rest of my day. There isn't much to do after all. I guess I actually will just go back to bed. Yes. More sleep seems just fine.

Leaving the park, I turn and give one more look. It will be a while until I return. A whole year to be exact. A year of sorrow. A year of grief. A year of regret. Every year is like that, and every year will be like that. Nothing can change that. And nothing ever will...