**Title: Halves**

Somewhere down the road things went in a wrong direction. I am still trying to figure out what it is that changed. How is it that after three years I find myself so unbearably unhappy? I know, objectively that Max is a great man. I know that we have something absolutely special and unique. Why do I find myself wanting to walk away from it all?

I wasn’t always bad. Our story began like many other couples and I sincerely believe that we both took all the opportunities that would ensure intimacy and happiness. I find myself reliving over and over again our story, hoping to gain some insight that I had previously ignored.

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We met at a party. It was six-months after a bad breakup, one of those that make you swear off love forever and you mean it. I was urged by a good friend to go with her and I left my comfort zone, there was no one I knew there. The friend that got me to the venue promptly glued herself to her boyfriend. I sighed and gracefully made my peace with the fact that I was going to spend the evening in company of wine bottle, or so I thought.

I would never go as far as saying that I’m terrible with people. Once I feel safe I can be extremely charming, however, I was very out of my element; and to be honest, not in the best mental state to operate socially. I was staring miserably at my wine glass when a lone whisper of “*conversations with other women”,* reached my ears. I instantly perked up at the sound of the title of one of my favorite movies. A rather obscure one at! I scoped out the room and located the group that was animatedly discussing the film. I looked at my wine glass, took a sigh, squared my shoulders and walked in their direction.

“Hi! I have been summoned,” I said brightly, three different sets of puzzled eyes met my gaze, “I heard someone mention *Conversations with Other Women*, I love that film!” I was a bit distracted by two intense blue-eyes. To my surprise the other two men instantly stared at the blue-eyed man. I heard him release a chuckle that was two parts shy and one part impressed.

“The name’s Max, sure enough I was trying to culture these two oafs, nice to meet you, um-“, I instantly started feeling subconscious. I had forgotten to actually introduce myself, I was too focused being suave and smooth, oh boy. “O-h sorry, my bad!” I heard a traitorous giggle escape me, “I’m Gloria, I came with Rachel and her boyfriend, and well, I’m sure you can all see why I’m trying so hard to butt into your conversation.” Man I was really blushing, once more I was staring hard at my wine glass.

Just then I heard the richest, deepest, laugh in my whole existence. I raised my head and found myself staring into those cool blue eyes, they were filled with mirth. “Don’t worry, your presence has only vastly improved this party.” From his gaze I heard the unsaid, *Definitely for me at least.*

Soon we were deep in conversation; we monopolized each other for the rest of the night. I hadn’t laughed so hard in years. I was absolutely taken; I might have even fallen in love right then and there-no matter how much it pains me to admit this.

The party came to a rather abrupt end, somehow neither of us managed to ask each other’s number. I left that house heartbroken, thinking that we would never see each other again.

The next morning I woke up to a notification, *Max Hart wants to be friends with you on facebook.*

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You need to understand one thing about me. I love completely. I am one of those annoying girls that tries her hardest to be a “tough” girl, however, deep down, I long for someone to be my forever person. I have given my all to Max, I daresay I have lost myself a lot throughout this relationship. When I am in love, my partner rises above anything and anyone, even myself.

This means that to me it was perfectly reasonable to sacrifice myself. I thought that just burying my feelings whenever I disliked something was the best I could do to preserve everything.

I believe that it is abundantly clear how these sorts of thoughts could end with a ton of bitterness.

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We soon made plans to go for drinks at a trendy bar downtown. The rest is history, we started dating seriously and after three weeks Max introduced me as his official girlfriend to his family. Thus began our first year together. We were so hopelessly in love. Our interests meshed seamlessly, this led to many nights filled with movies, video games, music, fulfilling conversation and slow hip-melting sex. I had never felt as cherished as I felt in Max’s arms. I daresay that not even my own-mother’s arms compared to the safety I felt, buried in his chest, listening to his heartbeat.

Our first anniversary came by; it was beautiful and extremely ordinary at the same time: A trip to the beach. We listened to our favorite music and lost ourselves fully into each other.

At that time there was no way I could ever considering parting ways. We were twenty three, ripe with dreams and hopes for the future. Both of us were set to soon finish our undergraduate degree, after switching our majors. The road to success was so obviously paved, we felt invulnerable and powerful.

The thing with life is that there is very little that we can realistically control. The best-laid plans rarely are followed perfectly. I found this out the hard way, six months after our first anniversary I fell deeply ill.

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I’m still trying to figure out when and where all these toxic thoughts started brewing inside my head finally lodging themselves in my heart.

At one point I just started feeling sad, all the time. I can’t pinpoint the moment when sadness started taking me over, the line has become way too blurred. These days it takes me a lot to just summon happy memories.

However there is another important piece of information that I’ve learned about myself. I cannot handle my emotions. In my endless pursuit of being the ideal woman for Max, I absolutely neglected my mental wellness.

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One morning I woke up with a deep sadness welling within me. I decided to just ignore it, there was no reason for me to feel this way, I honestly believed it would go away.

It didn’t.

I managed to go through the motions, keeping my professional commitments, eating and laughing with Max. After all, we lived separately; it was easy to prepare myself for him. It was so easy to come up with a happy mask, no matter how much it drained me.

But then, I started to decline. I would wake up and try to whip myself into productivity; this consisted in staring up at my computer screen blankly. I would forcefully wait for two hours every day willing every fiber of my being to advance in my projects. Doing things in this state took triple the time and soon enough, my work volume decreased.

After two weeks I started waking up to cry, or rather, woken up by sobs. I could not, for the life of me, comprehend what was going on with me. I was terrified. I started avoiding people and being quieter. I had managed to get panic attacks by just considering talking to Max about it.

Emotions are scary. I had never quite learned how to address them and express them well and owning up to the fact that there had been many times in the past that I hid them was just excruciatingly painful.

And then, Max started realizing. He started asking questions and I realized that I was compromised. Since being emotionally numb was the only thing I had left to keep me going on, I couldn’t handle his concern.

Two months before our two year anniversary, this trainwreck exploded. I had a seizure.

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I had spent way too much time being strong, yet nobody had ever enlightened me; suppressing uncomfortable emotions and focusing on someone else’s happiness is no way to be strong. Leaving things unsaid will only hurt you in the long-run and you won’t be able to hold anyone responsible for your sadness-even if they are a direct influence on it-only yourself.

I wonder how I managed to become a functioning adult when I have dedicated most of my life to running away from emotions and then facing the crippling guilt and frustration that came as a direct result of not communicating well.

The thing is that I’m not quiet by nature, I can be intimidatingly assertive. There is nothing worse than a hurt person that can and will carry out impulsive retaliation when feeling cornered. I have realized that all those time that I let Max decide the toppings on the pizza, every defect that I noticed and willfully let slide, every month that transpired with me craving a date nite, were just examples of me choosing to remain quiet. Choosing to be taken for granted. I somehow though that Max understood all of me, so if he wasn’t giving me everything I wanted, it was his fault! Right?

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 I was showering when I felt the tingling in my right calf. I barely felt anything these days, I figured it was just a side effect to being so miserable all the time and promptly went back to ignoring it. I dried myself and vacantly noticed that the tingling had now progressed all the way up to my thigh. I stubbornly dressed myself until I had to sit because the tingling gave way to numbness.

Horrified I saw that my right foot had morphed itself into a claw-like position and it was stuck. I had no feeling and the tingling kept progressing all the way up to my right arm. It was a Saturday, Max, somehow felt the need to check on me and he gasped when he saw my state.

I managed to tell him that I couldn’t move my leg and that I felt as if I was being poked by pins and needles all over my body. Around thirty minutes has passed and we both saw my right arm adopt the same unnatural position as mi right arm.

I soon felt that I could not breathe as well and that was when Max decided to rush me to the hospital. On our way there I started screaming, because I could not handle the feeling of not being able to breathe well. Eventually I had trouble speaking.

By the time we got to the hospital, Max had to carry me, because my body was folded into itself, I resembled a bean or a pretzel. The numbness had spread all over my body. The doctors game me oxygen and fluids and a neurologist came by to evaluate me.

He decided that an EEG was needed and after I regained the full use of my limbs I got hooked to the electrodes and just lay there not knowing what I hoped to see in the results.

After the exam was done the doctor went over the results with us. There were two different waves that were overlapping, that shouldn’t; there was also a sudden spike when I was exposed to light stimuli. While he couldn’t clearly explain the reason for my seizure he could definitely confirm that I had gone through one.

And so began my grueling recovery process.

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Max never fully understood just how sad and scared I was. After the seizure I thought that I would drop dead at any point during the following months. It didn’t help that I kept experiencing the tingling at random intervals.

He helped me pay for the hospital bills and I could tell he resented me a bit for this. As I said before, we were both almost out of college, but not yet. My situation was terrible because I didn’t have any support, I had no family anymore. My parents had passed away and I was an only daughter.

My instinct of hiding negative feelings had served me well, while I was healthy. In this situation I had just sabotaged myself.

The fights began.

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We spent a good part of our saving in my health. Max had no idea about my inability to work. I decided that I had to tell him no matter how much it would hurt. I calmed myself thinking, this is Max he knows me. He will understand.

I was not prepared for what followed. The cat got out of the bag, he read some of my emails to employers, were I expressed that I would not be able to finish the task because of my health. Max investigated further and so the many other projects that I had not been able to work on.

“You have been lying to me, after everything I have done for you!” he yelled, “I have given up on so many things to be able to support you,” he spat, “this is unacceptable, you are an adult, did you think you could just marry me and everything would be fine?”

I was looking at the floor, trying and failing to stop the tears from coming. “I-I honestly couldn’t tell you.” I whispered, I chanced a look at his face. I felt my heart break when I saw hatred welling in those beautiful blue eyes.

“Why couldn’t you tell me? All you needed was to open up that sorry mouth! You have been telling me a whole bunch of useless shit with a smile on, well then, go on, tell me all the nasty shit you’ve done!” I flinched, I felt like a knife was stabbing me.

Then I felt a different emotion. Anger, so much anger. I couldn’t see straight. I lost my head completely all I remember from that moment was that I opened with: “Listen here you bastard.”

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“Listen, here, you bastard. You think you feel bad? Really? Well, take whatever you are feeling and multiply by 10,000, maybe that way you’ll be able to grasp, slightly, the magnitude of my self-hatred.” His eyes widened.

“I have been dead inside for months. You have been absolutely useless, you never realized I was in complete pain. I neglected everything about me for you. Because I literally have no one else to call family! It must be really nice, to know that no matter what there are people who will back you up and help you out if you fail. I DO NOT HAVE THAT PRIVILEGE.”

“I hate that you take me for granted. I hate that knowing you, you’ll tell me that my feelings are not valid because you never knew. But that’s the thing, you never made an effort. Why am I even still with you? You obviously hate me!”

“G-Glori--”

“SHUT UP! There is nothing else I can do! You’d be much better off with a healthy girl, with economic stability and that treats you like shit! I think it might be for the best if we broke up.”

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Max refused to tell me what I had said afterwards. “It was painful, but most of it was true. That is all you need to know.” He said noncommittally.

Nothing was the same after this. I was no longer trying my best to be quiet, I was trying my best to let my anger control me.

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We fought over anything and everything. I could not get jobs so easily anymore, my reputation as a dependable professional marred by my period of emotional and health instability.

I felt so cheated, I realized that I should have prioritized myself more all this time, taken advantage of everything I had in favor, not Max’s happiness. He clearly didn’t care for mine, he was just infatuated, not in love.

Another whole year went by in this fashion and now we are here.

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Our three year anniversary is coming up, all this time I have been considering ending it all. I have even mentioned it several times to him, even going as far as telling him, “You are free to walk away, to end it. I won’t hold you responsible.”

Why am I crying now? I came home to a bouquet with an invitation marked. It had today’s date.

I realize that today, is in fact our three year anniversary. The note says to meet him at our favorite park, for a picnic.

How can he still be trying?

Maybe all this time he had also been trying. Had I been so deeply submerged into depression to realize that his hand had actually been there all along? I clearly had not even remembered the date.

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“The one thing I value above everything is the truth. No matter what, if you always tell me the truth I’ll be able to help you.” Max whispered into my ear. “I will love you no matter what. Please, I just need communication”.

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I had forgotten. He had been continuously trying to break through the fog of misery. My self-hatred made me believe I was worthless.

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“I want to be with you forever. I have honestly never met anyone better than you,” he kissed my hand. “Please I want us to keep going towards our future.”

“Please wake up.” He kissed my forehead, I saw his eyes bright with tears.

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I smiled it was time to make my way to the park. I was completely awake at last. I could not make Max wait more.

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“You know about the Greek myth about soul mates?” I asked, Max looked at me blankly, “The gods created humans with two sets of eyes, noses, mouths, heart, legs, arms---”, I saw him blink a bit, “Anyways, imagine two humans as one unit. Zeus was scared of them; he thought they would be able to become supreme beings, so he decided to cut them in half.” Max was now very interested. I smiled.

“These halves were cursed; they were set free in the mortal world, roaming it with the only purpose of finding their other half, which had been ripped away from them.”

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I ran to him. Hugged him and kissed him. He would not understand still, but I knew I had stopped roaming.

Just as he had.