

Information

Half A Life, Book 1
written by Benjamin Hamon

Draft for early readers

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Foreword

Dear reader,

This is a sample for the full book.

Half A Life is a work of fiction, depicting imaginary characters and imaginary events. It is a book series about women struggling with overcoming abuse and its traumas. The narrative focuses on life after the abuse and on mental health, on the hardships of finding help, avoiding self-hatred, believing and trusting.

Please be aware that the books can feel very depressing and discuss difficult topics. They include sexual content and adult themes, and more precisely: physical and sexual abuse, incest, prostitution, rape, and mental health issues.

Good reading,

Benjamin Hamon

Chapter 1

She was crying.

Somewhere, someone, perhaps something, felt surprise. Tears meant she'd been losing control. She couldn't be losing control.

All this time, she'd been fine. She bore the pain like it was nothing at all. She enjoyed it actually, or so she told herself. At a certain point, there was joy in simply being alive. And yes, perhaps she did enjoy the pain. And the shame. It didn't matter. She could survive it all. She had done so until now.

But she never cried. She knew better than to cry. The men didn't like it. Her father didn't like it. Crying only made things worse.

Stop. Think about something else, somewhere else. Think about what matters, about what you're accomplishing through this.

Think? She shouldn't have been able to in the first place. Her mind should have been elsewhere, contained behind windowless walls. She was a body. Flesh with no feelings, no importance. Flesh that did what it was told to do.

What happened to her, what happened to a body, was of little matter. Being hurt, it was just another happenstance, it was... enjoyable. Yes, pain and pleasure were the same. Lust and guilt were the same. And so were love and hate.

So what was this then? What was going on? And why was it happening now?

Only now? You think this is something new?

No. Things had been deteriorating for a while. How insane she'd been, believing she could engineer a balance, hold on to power, guarantee a semblance of peace. You couldn't build when there was no foundation. You couldn't stand when everything kept pulling you down. Her supposedly clever plan was crashing down on her, burying her.

There was this weight on her, a weight that wouldn't budge, no matter how fiercely she struggled, no matter how desperately she wailed. A body. Someone else's body. Heavy and strong. Too heavy, too strong.

There was no need to pin her down anyway. The pain itself was paralyzing her. So much pain.

There was always pain, but pleasure usually came along with it, or, at times, some matter of pride. She had hoped there could be love.

Today, there was no pleasure at all. As for love... That had probably never existed. Instead, there was rage and screams and madness.

The grip tightened on her throat, and as the hot knife started plunging into her more rapidly, she felt herself fall. The earth was both magma and ice around her. She burned, hot as the sun and cold as the void.

Her body and mind fused back together, and the whole of her shattered with a silent scream.

* * *

Lena wasn't sure how much time passed with her like this, stuck in darkness. It couldn't have been more than a few minutes.

She had to wake up.

The physical weight had gone, not that the change was perceptible. The

pain was always there. The darkness never left. Life was a torment, day and night. If only her monster had held her in its arms afterward, she might have come to believe in forgiveness. If only it had loved her the tiniest bit, she might have had hope.

She had to wake up.

The nightmare held her in its grasp. She was in the dark, alone. Her body had been scorched, her insides torn apart. When thoughts began drifting back, they weren't kind.

What are you feeling sorry for?

This is your fault to begin with.

Get up and get on with your life.

She tried to shake her head, and new tears formed in her eyes. What was this? How had things gone this bad? She wasn't in control anymore. Anything was allowed now. Anything. She couldn't stop him. What would he do next?

She had to wake up.

Breathe.

She couldn't. Nothing in her was functioning at all. Her body was dead, her mind lost.

Listen to me.

Who was that? Whose voice? It wasn't hers.

Just listen to me. Listen to me and breath. Inhale, exhale.

She tried. She wanted to try. It was so hard. Better she did die.

Lena, look at me. You're not going to die. I love you, you hear?

You do? It had to be a lie. *You do love me?* Everybody lied. And no one loved her.

I do. I love you. So breathe. Breathe for me. Please, breathe for me.

Finally, air entered her lungs. The fog began to dissipate, the pain began to recede. She was fine again.

She had suffered before. She had been wounded before. Scars meant nothing. She survived. If terror and agony refused to let her be, she had learned to push them to the back of her mind regardless.

She'd had help.

There was a sudden scream.

Lydie!

Lydie's voice. Lydie was hurting.

Angry shouts. A bang and glass breaking. More screaming.

Lena jumped from the bed. She almost crashed right back down. She stood up however she could, forced herself to move. It was so slow. She was being so slow. She was about to start crying again. Being able to ignore what happened to her body helped, but she couldn't change how the world worked.

She barely registered the push and slap as he walked by her. It was of no importance. She ran past him, ran to Lydie.

Lydie.

She was there. Was she all right? No, of course she wasn't. She was kneeling on the floor, dark blood staining the back of her tattered, white shirt. Lena knelt in front of her. There were tears in her eyes.

Don't cry, Lena almost said. Almost. She had no wish to be cruel.

Seeing her sister in pain cut more deeply than any flogging ever would. It was more brutal than any forceful invasion of her body could be. She had thought... She had made sure Lydie wouldn't be harmed, or hurt, that nothing at all would happen to her. Yet, there she was, bloody.

Lena carefully pressed her forehead against Lydie's, and felt her freeze up. Pulling back, Lena thought she might have hurt her somehow, but she only saw Lydie staring back. She saw her own terror staring back at her.

Lydie opened her mouth. Tears ran down Lena's face, despite her best efforts.

Be strong.

There was silence. Lydie closed her mouth and leaned forward, hugging Lena. Lena flinched, feeling herself waver. Lydie was the one trembling and crying, so why was it that Lena was the one being comforted?

They stayed like that for long minutes, until Lydie's sobs quieted down. Lena delicately broke their embrace and pulled up Lydie, before leading her to their bedroom.

She had Lydie sit on the bed and grabbed the first aid kit from the nightstand. Slowly, very slowly, Lena went over her sister's wounds. She removed her clothes delicately, then, even more delicately, removed the shards of glass that had penetrated her skin.

Lydie didn't make a sound. She didn't flinch from the alcohol nor from the tweezers. Sitting behind her, Lena didn't feel nearly as calm.

Still, she kept on working. After cleaning Lydie's back, she checked the rest of her upper body. She frowned at the gnarly scratches on her left wrist, she hadn't noticed those. She disinfected and bandaged them like

the rest, even when they shouldn't have been there, even when Lydie had way too many scars already.

That done, Lena went to get a glass of water from the kitchen. Lydie had left it pristine. She did as she was told, and still it didn't stop their father's rage. Now the floor was stained with glass and blood, which the sisters would be expected to clean. Lena also glimpsed a knife abandoned on the table.

Back in the bedroom, Lydie hadn't moved. Her clear blue eyes stared into nothing, unbothered by the strands of long blonde hair fallen in front of them. Despite the heat, she'd been wearing jeans and a long-sleeved shirt. She didn't seem to care that her chest was now exposed. She looked like she wasn't there.

Lydie's skin looked fine, if perhaps too pale. You wouldn't notice anything from just a glance. Lena however, she knew every single scar on that skin. Even as they slowly faded with time, the marks of repeated abuse never went away.

Lena had been responsible for keeping Lydie safe. She had thought she had avoided the worst from happening. Yet today had happened. Today, Lena had been proved wrong.

And today was the last time Lydie would be hurt.

Lena sat down next to her sister and pulled her close. Feeling the heat in her twin's body, hearing her breath slowly, stroking her hair, it helped Lena relax. Slowly, very slowly, she felt every muscle in her body wind down, every ache fade. She was calm again.

She was in control.

"You're okay?" Lena whispered.

Lydie turned her head toward her. Lena wished she could make those tears stop. She wished she could get a tiny smile out. She liked it so much when those blue eyes smiled at her. Those were the moments Lena became alive.

Lydie leaned forward, and their lips connected. It was barely a kiss, their faces motionless as they savored the simple contact, the incredible softness. Warmth transferred from one flesh to the other, and Lena could feel herself heal into wholeness again.

Then, Lena's entire body suddenly came alive. She wanted more than a kiss, needed more. She needed love, passion and lovemaking. She needed to forget. Yet as soon as lust tried to take over her, the sharp pain in her core resurrected. She wimped.

Lydie instantly backed off, breaking the kiss. Lena tasted salty tears on her lips. She didn't even know why she cried anymore.

"I'm sorry," Lydie said, her eyes darting away.

Lena shook her head. "It's not your fault," she whispered. She pulled her sister into a hug. "It's not your fault," she repeated, half to herself.

"What... What are we going to do?"

Lena took a deep breath and her sister's smell filled her lungs. Lena's eyes became hard with determination. "We're leaving. Tonight."

Lena wouldn't break. No matter the sacrifices, whatever sins she would have to inflict upon herself, Lena would keep the fire inside her burning. She would get Lydie out. She would get her twin sister, the love of her life, safely out of this hell.

* * *

Lena checked the bags one more time, bags she had checked many times already. There would be no second chance with this.

The list of items was short regardless. A few clothes. Some food. Some water. Tampons. Painkillers. A bit of money. There wasn't much Lena wanted to take with her. There wasn't much to leave behind either.

Lydie was watching her, frozen in place except for one hand nervously scratching at the bandage on her wrist. With one quick step, Lena closed the distance between them and hugged her.

Lena herself was shaking. She was close this close to collapsing. She could not, and would not, let it happen.

From the corner of the room, darkness looked back at her. The next moment, Lydie was pulling her head into her neck, locking her sister's attention onto her.

Lena sighed, feeling the reassuring warmth of her sister against her, feeling her body and mind relax, feeling the tremors slowly calm down, feeling the horror fade away before the flame. The darkness would still be there, beyond the horizon, but she could ignore it. She could persuade herself the darkness was not inside her. Lydie gave her the courage she needed.

Lena took her sister's hands in hers, and dropped a kiss on them.

"Let's go," Lena said.

It was the middle of the night. They had waited for the house to be silent, taking what rest they could while their father drank and shouted in his room. Their mother wasn't around much, for all the good it did to them. Lena didn't know what it was that made her mother come back every time. Nothing could be worse than here, and Lena didn't plan on

coming back.

The two sisters did not make a noise as they went through the kitchen, avoiding the places where the latest splinters of glass had fallen. Their father would be much too wasted to wake up or to give chase, but they couldn't be too careful. A fleeting thought told Lena he would be angry at finding the glass still here in the morning.

Lena grabbed the car's keys and followed after her sister through the front door. There was no light beyond a pale moonlight, and the girls stumbled in their haste toward the dark shape of the car. It was a brand new sedan and their father's most prized possession. He would hate to see it gone.

They didn't care. They were leaving. His daughters were leaving and they weren't coming back. That would drive into rage, a very scary rage.

Or, perhaps, he might not notice for a while, and then wouldn't care. He'd find someone else to abuse and be pissed about. Lena and Lydie wouldn't care. The only thing they had ever cared about was each other.

They put their bags in the trunk and sat in the car, Lena taking the driver's seat. She was the only one who knew how to drive, if you could even call that knowing. Finding ways to learn and keeping it all a secret hadn't been easy. It hadn't been cheap either.

No point worrying about those things any longer. She only needed to focus on driving. Driving safely and keeping attention away from them. She could not afford getting them into an accident or having them get noticed, not before they were very, very far away from here.

Lena took a deep breath. Her body was calm, her mind focused. The balance was shaky, but it was there. She was ready to go. She was rearing to go really.

On her right, she glanced Lydie holding a kitchen knife and staring at it. Lena swallowed, then slowly moved in closer. She grabbed Lydie's free hand and pulled it to her.

"We'll be safe," Lena whispered.

"I'm scared."

"I'm scared too. But we'll be all right, you'll see. I'll make sure of it."

Lena grabbed Lydie's other hand and slowly removed her fingers from the handle.

"You won't need that." *I'll be the weapon and armor, just like I always was.* "I'll protect you. Trust me. Please trust me."

Lydie looked at her. "I do. I do trust you."

The knife fell in Lena's hand. She opened the window and threw it. Her gaze lingered for a second, looking for where the knife must have landed. The night's darkness had swallowed it.

Lena shook herself and looked back at her sister. They shared a small smile.

"Whatever happens after today," Lena said, "I love you and I will always love you. I won't let anything happen to you ever again."

Lena turned on the ignition, the engine coming alive with a wonderfully soft murmur. She put her hand on the handbrake and took a deep breath. Lydie put her hand on top of Lena's. They shared another look, another smile. Lena bent toward Lydie to drop a small kiss on her lips, then she grinned and, without another word between them, moved both their hands to disengage the handbrake. They were off.

Chapter 2

The house disappeared behind them. Lena headed out on an old road, leaving the town's lights far behind. Nobody would see them.

Lena wanted to rush, but by night on a bumpy road, she had to drive carefully, and thus slowly. Her knuckles soon turned white as she gripped the wheel with all her strength. At least she wouldn't fall asleep.

A couple of hours later, with sunlight already peaking over the horizon, they reached a larger and better maintained road. Lena hit the accelerator and relaxed the tiniest bit. She fully expected to see lights gain on them from behind, to have a car speed up and force them to stop.

The road turned into a highway of sorts, and they began eating kilometers quickly. Glancing to the side, Lena saw her sister gripping her knees. Her eyes were staring ahead, filled with a dread Lena knew all too well.

She seemed startled when Lena asked her how she was doing, and she curtly replied that she was okay. Lena herself was so terrified she felt new aches in her body, new hands grasping at her. She tried speaking, without much success. Lydie offered a weak smile, then forced herself to sing a lullaby. She should be sleeping, but she only shook her head when Lena said as much.

The minutes and hours went by, filled with nothing but ominous dread. Yet nothing happened. Nothing at all. They encountered a few trucks and that was it. No one sped up toward them. No one stopped them.

With little to rein in her restlessness, Lena came to notice the itch growing in her mind. An itch which was reaching deep into her body. An

itch which ran up and down her skin, paralyzing her.

It had been too easy. Perhaps they were still in bed, heads pushed together, trying to forget about the world so that they might fall into some kind of sleep.

Lena was always watching, always on guard, not that it did her or her sister any good. When Lydie managed to force herself into slumber, it remained so light she woke up from anything. When she actually fell asleep, she'd often wake up in cold sweat. Lena tried to reassure her, to hold her close. She loved her so much. She would love her forever. She only hoped Lydie could tell it was so. The scars didn't matter, Lena being insane and broken didn't matter, the nightmares haunting their days didn't matter; they had each other.

They loved each other. What else was there to care about? Would happen what would happen. Their own love might make them irredeemable to the world, but it was a world they hated regardless. It didn't matter. They would be caged no more. And her mind would no longer be trapped in darkness.

Lena's eyes snapped open. The car swirled to the left and there was a hiss as she regained control. She slowed down and took a deep breath.

Next to her, Lydie had finally fallen asleep. She would have died in a flash, without even the momentary realization of it. It would have happened just like that, with her sister falling unconscious at a moment she simply couldn't. Lena needed her eyes open.

Meanwhile, Lydie looked strangely peaceful, drooling with her mouth open. Lena smiled, finding a semblance of peace in how cute her sister remained despite it all. That was enough for her to return her focus on the road, to push all other thoughts out of her mind.

Once the sun was truly out, and once Lena felt they had covered some meaningful distance, she woke Lydie up and had them stop at a gas station. She needed a nap if she was going to keep them alive. Lydie would have to keep watch in the mean time.

“Don’t wander off,” Lena told her. “And wake me up in half an hour.”

Lena wasn’t sure she’d been unconscious for even a second when she felt a soft touch on her cheek and woke up with a shout halfway out. She heaved a sigh of relief when she realized it was Lydie. They were still in the car, just the two of them, which meant they were all right. No one had caught up to them yet.

The fear took a step away as Lena became aware of her body again. Her back and legs were killing her. Everything was killing her.

Lydie handed her a can of coffee and a pastry, which Lena accepted with a small smile. They ate and drank quickly and in silence, then Lena stepped out of the car. Lydie followed her, stepping out and standing by the car. She stared at Lena.

“We’re going in a minute,” Lena said. “I’m just stretching my legs.”

Lydie nodded. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah. As okay as can be.”

Lydie circled the car, stopping beside the driver’s door. She kept staring at Lena.

What is it? Lena wanted to ask.

You don’t even want to acknowledge it.

After another minute, Lena joined her sister.

“We should go,” Lena said.

Lydie didn't move.

"Lydie, come on."

"I... Is... Is it okay if we kiss?"

Lena's mouth went dry. She couldn't move, why was that? It wasn't like she hadn't kissed Lydie before. Her mind was blanking, and no voice came to save her.

"You don't want to?" Lydie asked, pushing her head slightly forward.

Lydie's lips were shining with the sunlight. Lena had always found her sister mesmerizing, in all sorts of ways. Physically, intellectually, emotionally. Yes, she wanted to kiss her. She couldn't say what was stopping her. Lydie's eyes were not fearful, they were worried and sympathizing.

Lydie grabbed Lena's hands and brought them to her waist, then she embraced Lena in turn and pulled her so that she was pushing Lydie against the car.

"Whatever you need," Lydie whispered, "it's okay."

Lena felt like she was falling rather than moving when she lunged forward and her lips met Lydie's. Their kiss was soft. At first. She didn't know who was responsible but it became needy, voracious.

Kissing Lydie always made her feel better. It made her feel like the rest of the world didn't exist. She wished it was more than that. She wished they kissed and the world ended. Wouldn't that be nice? Kissing your lover, feeling her warmth against you, and slowly vanishing into a peaceful nothingness together.

She wished the world would just leave them alone. But even now, alone with her sister and away from any possible punishment, she could

feel hooks nested deep in her flesh.

Lydie moved a leg between Lena's thighs. As their bodies ground against one another, Lena found it was becoming hard to breath.

"What do you want me to do?" Lydie whispered in her ear. "Tell me. Tell me what you need. I'll give it to you."

Lydie started pulling at Lena's jeans. Lena was shaking, feeling uncomfortably hot. When Lydie's hand touched her panties, it was like an electroshock, and she brutally pulled backward.

Lydie's eyes questioned her. Lena just stared back.

"What is it?" Lydie asked.

"We need to go. We're not safe yet."

"Yes, but are you sure you're all right?"

"I'm not. There's no point talking about it."

"You can ask me anything, Lena. You can tell me anything too."

Lena nodded. "I know."

Lydie got back in the car, not without throwing a last pained look at her sister. Lena waited a bit more. She could feel something was wrong. Something in her wanted to cry.

No point talking about it.

Lena surveyed the empty land around them, fully expecting some monster to leap out of the shadows. Even when there was nothing but the wind and endless nothing, she didn't feel alone. They needed to go, needed to pass the border. It was their hope. A new life. And, for Lena, it might mean the darkness would leave her alone.

We have to go.

There was no time to lose. Lydie had already extended the break to two hours. With how Lena slept like a log, it could have been six. How awful was it, that she could sleep so easily when her sister had regular night terrors? Lena couldn't remember having a single night terror in years.

Your monsters belong to the real world. They don't need for you to wait for you to fall asleep.

Lena steeled herself. She would only look ahead. She would only think of Lydie's safety, of to the possibility of a semblance of happiness for her. Sometime soon, Lena would break and disintegrate. But she would hold on until she got Lydie away. No matter what.

She had to continue.

Lena returned them to the road, after once again reassuring Lydie she was fine. A short nap and a full tank. She could drive for the whole day.

She had to continue.

* * *

Neither of them seemed particularly intent on talking. Lena tried to focus Lydie's mind on a bright future, on their new lives. Think of the delicacies they'd eat, the knowledge they'd acquire, the jewels they'd wear, the laughs they'd share. Perhaps they'd even make friends.

The spur of enthusiasm didn't last. It felt ill-advised to acknowledge a new reality so soon, before having actually reached it. It was like wishing for bad luck. For all they knew, the life ahead of them could turn out worse than the horrors they were leaving behind. For all they knew, the

life ahead had never existed at all.

The border appeared early on the second day of driving. Despite them shaking with anxiety, passing the controls was a formality. They'd been told as much, that the hardest part was to start running. It had been hard to believe, but the officers were more interested in their coffee and chatting among themselves than in being thorough.

They didn't seem overly moved by young-looking, pretty girls passing them by. Lena had told herself she was prepared for anything and could handle it, but she had to think about Lydie. What would happen to her if they ran into a situation where a man needed to be convinced? What would Lena have to do, and what would her sister think?

The man simply nodded at them after a quick look at their papers—fake ones. They moved past a gate. And that was it. They had made it into Latvia. They were free. Perhaps not safe just yet, but they were free. Lena stopped herself from crushing the accelerator as she caught up with the traffic. She breathed in, feeling like it was the first time in two days.

Lydie let out a laugh. After a second, the two of them were bursting into laughter. Lena didn't feel good just yet, not exactly, but as far as she would allow herself to dream, they were free.

A few minutes later, they drove into a town and stopped on the parking of a fast food restaurant. Lena switched off the engine and let out an inaudible sigh. The exhaustion came at her like a wall, compressing her into a lump of pain. She saw Lydie reach toward her and squeeze her thigh, but she didn't feel it. Then she thought Lydie said something, and yet she heard nothing.

Soon, she couldn't see anything anymore.

Lena woke up slowly, as if her body wasn't sure she should. And really, she didn't want to wake up.

Her pillow was warm and soft, and she smiled when she recognized Lydie's lap. She opened her eyes and saw her sister's eyes looking at her.

"You should sleep too," Lena said.

"I did."

Lena tried to sit up but her body didn't move.

"How long was I out?"

"Not that long. Five or six hours maybe?"

"Fuck. We need to go."

"Lena." Lydie caught her arm. "We're good for now. Remember where we are?"

Right. They had made it into relative safety. They had crossed into another country and were thousands of kilometers away from their father. Still, he might already be after them. Somebody ought to be. They couldn't stop, not yet.

Lena needed to relax, to free herself of the paralysis. Lydie keeping watch for hours while her sister was unable to flee? That was too dangerous.

Yet Lena did need the rest. She hadn't rested at all. She didn't remember what feeling rested even meant.

She closed her eyes.

It was still there. That wound inside her. She could feel it, pulsating, leaking poison into the rest of her body. She was feeling herself grow weak, cold biting deep into her and making her forget even how to breath.

And yet she felt hot too, scorching hot. Like she was about to start sweating, or like she was about to turn into sweat. Her body wasn't working. She couldn't move. The weight on her had returned. Its red eyes looked at her.

Look at you. You say it hurts but you're still so wet. You like it. You like being a whore. That's what you are, a fucking whore. Don't forget that.

"Lena." Lydie shook her awake, and Lena groaned weakly. "You're sweating. Are you all right?"

"I'm fine."

Lena sat up, and this time, her body complied. Sunlight still streamed into the car; it didn't seem like much time had passed at all. Everything was the same. Except Lena wasn't stopping again.

"Let's grab something to eat and get back on the road," she said.

A lot of people passed them as they went through the streets. Lena kept looking around while Lydie held her hand, but no one stopped them. No one even looked at them.

They exchanged their rubles for euros, bought sandwiches and went back to the car, all without a problem. Lena wondered if people would be this indifferent to them if they saw her kissing Lydie. Two girls kissing, two girls that looked very much alike for that matter, it was likely to catch attention, if not trouble.

Lydie suggested they find a nice spot to sit down but Lena shut her down. They sat in the car again, ready to leave on short notice. Lydie had

the door open and moved her legs back and forth while eating.

“You’re feeling okay?” Lena asked.

Lydie turned back and smiled. “Great, actually. That’s the best sandwich I’ve had in my life.”

Lena chuckled. It wasn’t too bad, that was for sure.

“Care to share?” Lydie asked.

Lena nodded and handed Lydie her sandwich, which was pushed to the side so that Lydie could reach out and kiss her. Lena was surprised at first, but she quickly answered, eagerly joining the loving kiss.

They only paused so that Lydie could climb on Lena’s lap, not without some struggle. Once closer together, they could kiss each other to their heart’s content.

Lena felt her body ignite. She felt both their bodies ignite.

There was no denying this attraction between them. Even battered and humiliated, she couldn’t help but crave the body of her sister. If she had her way, they would have been one from the start. But then she wouldn’t have had that other half next to her, she would have to look for it inside, and she knew all too well what was inside of her.

Inside her, heat and terror were intertwined like twin flames.

“Wait,” Lena managed to say, as the action was slipping beyond a simple kiss.

Lydie’s breasts were weighing on hers and her underwear was beginning to feel severely inadequate. She wanted this. She wanted to have sex with the beautiful girl sitting on her thighs. She wanted to bite at her neck and kiss her nipples. She wanted to bury her fingers in her and

feel her wetness drip on her. She wanted to taste her.

I never could have guessed you were that fucked up.

Lena froze. Not a second later, realizing her sister had gone cold, Lydie stopped in turn. She stared, waiting for an explanation Lena wasn't ready to give.

"I'm sorry—" Lena started.

"No. I'm sorry. I don't know what I'm doing. After you... I'm sorry."

They were still for a minute, their gazes dodging each other.

"We should probably get back on the road," Lena said. "It's still a fair way off."

Lydie nodded. She hadn't climbed off halfway before she leaned back in and grabbed Lena into a hug.

"I'm sorry!" she cried. "I'm so very sorry. I know how hard things have been. I know how much of a burden I've been and I know how much you've suffered. There's no way I can ever make it up to you, but I'll try, Lena, I swear. From now on, I'll do my best. I'll take care of you and make sure you have everything you need."

Lena was dumbstruck. What was she talking about? She shook her head and made a tiny smile.

"There's no need to make promises."

The night had fallen. Lena made Lydie lie down in the back and set her up with a blanket. She wasn't sure how much Lydie had slept but it couldn't be much.

"Is it okay?" Lena asked. "Are you comfortable?"

Lydie chuckled. "It's almost perfect. I just need a good night kiss."

Lena gave it to her. It wasn't anything like before, but still. She would drive with the memory of her sister's lips in her mind.

They started back up the road, with Lena driving slowly and checking on Lydie regularly.

Still far off, but their destination was also closer than ever. Their plan was working so far. Even if calling it a plan was a stretch. They were going to Berlin to find some kind of asylum, with someone for which they only had a name. It was a slim hope, finding any help at all. For all Lena knew, this Ralph was a human trafficker and they were moving from one hell into another.

She might have to fight again. She wouldn't hesitate. Whatever happened, Lena would never give her sister up.

Chapter 3

The first days in Berlin were rough, stressful and draining. But most of all, they were uneventful. Boring, if Lena was being honest. It should have made her happy.

Lena and Lydie spent the entire day and the longer night in the car, under torrential rain. They cuddled and sometimes slept, wrapped up in an old blanket. They ate cheap sandwiches and drank cheap coffee.

Lena had them move around each day, parking in one shady street after the next. They killed time with books and German practice, although it was mostly Lydie reading out loud while Lena kept watch and listened with half an ear. When Lydie sighed and paused, Lena turned to her and apologized. There wasn't anything to watch for, Lydie would tell her. Lena would reply she couldn't possibly know that.

They managed a couple of driving lessons for Lydie, and Lena had to insist.

"I'm never leaving without you," Lydie said. Lena forced out a smile and accepted her sister's hug.

Lydie was always so incredibly caring toward her. It wasn't right. Lena didn't deserve any of it. They were so different. Twins, lovers, yet they lived in separate worlds, like the two sides of a mirror. Lydie's best course of action should have been to leave Lena behind, and Lena liked to believe she actually wished Lydie to do so.

Lydie was the smart one. She was gentle, sweet, kindhearted. She was courageous. All those things Lena wasn't. Lena was the impetuous one. She was reckless, crazy, manipulative. She was shameless. Lydie could

easily enter the best of schools. Lena... Lena belonged in jail, no, in a whorehouse.

It was what she did, whoring, sinning. She hung out around men, enjoyed their company and used them to her advantage. Every single one loved two things: alcohol and women. Every single one hated two things: work and women.

She hadn't been surprised when a total stranger had approached her at the bar, nor when he had left a paper in her pocket, nor when that paper asked her to meet him in his car. She had been surprised that he had only wanted to talk, and that it had been what had happened. No man had ever just wanted to talk. They wanted her mouth, sometimes her body, nothing else.

He had been nice, which was exceedingly rare. She had told him she hadn't been looking for a boyfriend. He had found it funny. "That's not it," he had said, then, very seriously, "I can help you." She had shrugged. She was doing fine.

They had met again, several times. He had given her pills and cigarettes, even a little money, and without being prompted. She hadn't done anything. She had kept silent, for a while at least. Then, for whatever reason, she had started talking, as if to herself, recounting her days, telling what she did with men, explaining how she managed. She had told him she enjoyed it, enjoyed her life, and that there was no reason to feel sorry for her. She should have laughed when he had asked if she was even an adult, instead she had kept quiet.

He had left. She knew only his name, Nikolai. She couldn't remember anything else he told her. He had told her he was leaving, she hadn't heard. She had provided him with what he asked, and then he was gone. She hadn't missed him, only the idea of him.

When Nikolai had come back, six months later, she'd been eighteen for a week. When he had produced passports for Lydie and her, she hadn't understood. "You can leave," he had said. She had shook her head and laughed, and cried. "You can. All you need is courage, and a little help." He had given her an address in Berlin, wished her good luck and left without another look at her. She often wondered what price she would possibly end up paying, or if it was a trap of some sort.

It hadn't mattered. Staying over there had been too horrible not to jump on the first real possibility to flee. Anything else would be better, anywhere better than middle of nowhere, Russia. Population: assholes and rapists, and their victims. Cold, dark, hope-deprived nowhere. The forsaken land where the smallest kindness was something you had to buy, where laws were things cops laughed about at the bar. The house where the monster didn't hide under the bed.

She could remember everything still. The way he whispered in her ear only to yell at her in the next moment. The way he brushed past her when she cooked for him, and how he bent down over her, trailing his hand over her back and lower. The way he asked her into his room and pushed her face against the wall. The way he pulled her hair, the way he twisted her nipples, the way he grabbed her throat, the way he—

"Let's just go in," Lydie said. "I'm not spending another night in a car."

Lena blinked, the present reality reasserting itself. Lydie was lying down on the backseat, a book forgotten on her belly. A book she would know by heart now, yet Lena could make the argument for reading it again over watching an empty street and staying with your own thoughts, nourishing your fears and remembering the past. She thanked Lydie quietly. She'd been sleeping awake in the driver's seat, living through nightmares with her eyes open.

“You’re right. No point waiting any longer.”

The place she’d been watching was a large, decrepit building, something that looked just right in a street which hadn’t seen any repair of any kind for decades. Many shutters were missing, and the windows were so dirty it was hard to see through them, when they weren’t broken.

Despite the late hour, only a couple of lights were on. Few people had gone in and out, and those had walked away quickly, gaze fixed on the ground. She didn’t know what she was looking for. Nondescript vans? Thugs? Rich guy cars? Policemen? She couldn’t know what was inside. But she could imagine. And her imagination had been well nourished. She couldn’t just walk in there, especially not with Lydie, but their father’s car was the worst place to hide.

“Lena?”

“Right, right.”

She hadn’t moved. She suppressed a shiver, opened the door... and didn’t step outside. She quickly turned to the backseat when she heard Lydie exit the car.

“I’m going alone,” Lena said. “If I don’t come back, you—”

“No. We’re going together. Or we’re not going at all. We don’t split up.”

“It’s dangerous.”

“And what about it? You want me to stay alone in the car? I can’t drive. Do you want me to just run? To leave on my own and somehow survive all alone? No. No matter what, we stick together. We live together, we hurt together, we die together. Let’s go.”

Where was this sudden courage coming from? From being locked in a car for close to a week? Or on the contrary from having finally found

freedom? Lena was the older sister, whether it made sense or not. She had taken up that role and bore it without hesitation. She was the one that acted in whatever manner was needed to ensure the both of them lived, to ensure Lydie lived. Was Lydie really okay?

Everybody lies. You most of all.

She felt so worthless, so weak. All those years, her resolve had hung by a thread. Lately, it'd been more like she watched her own body move than anything else. She endured, endured, and endured again. Now that she was entering a new, unknown world, she felt more terrified than ever.

At least, she had Lydie by her side. As long as Lydie was there, as long as Lydie needed her, she would find a way to be brave. She gathered that courage and got out of the car.

"Let's go," Lena said.

She led the way up to the building's door. There wasn't anything written, no indication at all. Whatever it was they had been looking forward to, it either was or wasn't. They weren't ready. The plan had been to grab money, steal the car and drive away as fast as possible, as far as possible. It had barely been a plan at all.

A dog barked a little distance away. Lena jumped. Who could even believe she had ever had the slightest bit of courage? She was scared, frightened, terrified. They had to go back. They needed to go back.

"Let's—" Lena began.

"It's going to be fine. Let's have faith for once, all right? We got this far."

Lydie pushed the door and stepped inside. *There isn't anything to go back to*, Lena told herself. She followed her sister.

There was a small hall, empty of any furniture and decoration, and a

window protecting a tiny reception office. A man was sitting inside. Lena swallowed. He didn't look like much. Twenty years old, if that. Fat. Short blonde hair. Glasses. Just a man. Not an intimidating one. He was writing down quickly in a notebook, while scratching at what little facial hair he had. He didn't look up.

Lydie cleared her throat, prompting Lena to grip her arm in fright. Surprisingly, the man jumped just as she did. They appeared to be equally shocked. Their eyes met. He moved them aside even before she did.

"Sorry," he said in German. "Hmm, good evening. Is there something you need?"

Lena opened her mouth to speak. No sound came out. Fortunately, Lydie pre-empted her.

"We're looking for a place to stay," Lydie answered. It was hard to understand. Lena tried to focus. Having something to focus on was good. "Someone gave us this address, told us you could help. We were told to ask for Ralph. He handles things around here, right?" They didn't know what Ralph did, nor who Ralph was.

The man didn't look convinced. That or he didn't know what he was supposed to do. That was somewhat reassuring, for some reason.

"Ralph, yes. You have an appointment?"

Lena frowned. They hadn't booked an appointment, no. Had she understood that right? Why would they need an appointment? She was lost already, her lack of preparation and her stupidity piling on her. Someone laughed at her.

"No. No, we don't," Lydie replied. Thank God for Lydie.

You're just going to let her down.

“Of course you don’t.” He laughed, a big joyful laugh that surprised her. “No one takes appointments. Lucky for you, Ralph is around. He’s always around.” He seemed to find that funny. “Why do you want to see Ralph?”

“We’re looking for a place to stay, like I said. Someplace cheap. Someplace people are not required to answer questions, if that’s in any way possible.”

The man nodded. “It’s cheap all right. Follow me.”

He led them down the hallway. It was quiet, too quiet for Lena, eerily quiet. Dead, almost.

Haunted? You’d fit right in.

Lydie grabbed Lena’s hand and gave her a reassuring smile. They stopped in front of a door left slightly open. Their guide knocked once, then waited.

A loud grunt of a voice called from inside. There was an exchange in German, the details of which Lena didn’t catch. Their guide motioned them in, then disappeared quickly back into the hallway.

They entered, Lena dragging her feet behind Lydie. It was an office. A simple office. Four brown walls covered with pictures and, to Lena’s shock, kids’ drawings. It was the first hint of color in the building, and it was overwhelming. People smiling, people running, people flying, people drawn with a thousand colors.

A grunt grabbed her attention.

“Hello,” Lydie hazarded.

“Who are you, and what do you want?”

The man had a voice that felt all too familiar to Lena. A grumpy, loud

voice that hissed half the time. A mountain from which harsh winds came down to snap at you. It was the voice of a man who either spent every day of his life smoking or who had worked in mines for years. Her father had had a voice like that. Just about every man in their hometown had had a voice like that. Lena shivered.

He was short and beefy. Bald too, and menacing. He stood behind a large desk, leaning forward with his fists down. He had tattoos on his arms and on the top of his head, a ring through the nose and another one through the lower lip. His face looked like he had had his mouth and nose broken, several times. He could have been thirty or sixty, it was hard to tell. When his gaze landed on her, Lena hastily looked down.

Lydie had been talking.

“You sound Russian,” Ralph said. There was silence.

“What if we are?” Lydie asked.

He shrugged, then continued in Russian. “It’s been a while since I’ve seen anybody from Russia. You had a good trip?” He laughed loudly. Lena didn’t like the sound. Nor his tone as he sat and resumed speaking with a softer tone. “I didn’t mean to sound rude. I don’t meet a lot of people speaking my native language, not that it means we’ll get along. For now, welcome. I’m Ralph.” He paused. “Maybe you can start with giving me names?”

“I’m Lydie, this is Lena.”

He frowned, as if already doubting them, then sighed and looked down onto his desk. There were heaps of paper, as well as more kids’ drawings. Where had he found those? Her eyes met the man’s and she looked away again. She hadn’t realized her gaze had moved up from the floor.

“It’s our real names,” Lydie added.

“Yeah, figured. Not the best thing to do, giving away actual information about you. If anybody cared about it at least.”

He eyed a cigarette pack on his desk. Lena could use a cigarette. Her gaze kept going back to the man. How much would the cigarette cost? How much would surviving cost?

“Please, sit.” He didn’t pick a cigarette, nor did he offer one. “You’re twins, uh? You look awfully young. How old are you supposed to be?”

The chairs were old wobbly things that had seen better days. At least, Lena guessed they’d seen better days. Maybe they had come out of a factory for broken items. She sat down slowly. The chair had the decency not to break. Not from a frail girl like her.

“We’re nineteen,” Lena heard herself say.

“Is that so?”

She nodded, even though she didn’t feel like aging had done her any good. If anything, more boundaries had been stripped away from her.

“You could probably grow a bit and put on ten kilos, you’d still look like little girls,” Ralph said. “Anyway, you have nothing to be afraid of. We don’t hurt people around here, little girls or otherwise. As for helping, I can at least get you something to eat.”

“Thanks.” Her voice was distant, cold. Her eyes drifted to her lap, where her hands fidgeted. She was like a middle school girl being called to the principal’s office. She shivered at the thought.

Lydie grabbed her hand. Lena smiled and pulled free. No need to accentuate their fragility. Lena was no little girl anymore.

“If you don’t mind me asking, how did you end up here?” Ralph asked, looking at Lydie.

“We... We ran away from home,” Lydie replied. Ralph nodded slowly. “We had to! It wasn’t on impulse or anything... We had to.” Her voice ended a whisper.

“I understand. Whatever home is supposed to be, sometimes it means little good and a whole lot of awful.”

There was silence.

“I don’t think you understand,” Lena said. “I don’t believe you can understand.” The man turned his gaze to her, this time she held it. “We didn’t run away from home. We ran away from hell.” She stopped. There was nothing she wanted to say.

“I—”

“Would you like to see?” Lena interrupted. She stood up and began lifting her shirt.

“Lena!” Lydie had jumped out of her chair to stop her. There were tears in her eyes.

The man was looking down at his desk. He had gone back to fidgeting with the pack of cigarettes. Lena could really use a cigarette right about now. And a strong drink. Anything that would keep her mind quiet.

“I’m sorry,” the man finally said. “I do believe you, whether I can understand or not. I’ve heard too many horror stories already, each one worst than the last. And you... Never mind. I’m not a good listener anyway.”

The words didn’t reach Lena. She stood frozen. What was she doing? She dropped down on the chair, her shirt falling back in place. Had her

scars been visible? Even if they had, men before him hadn't done anything about it, why would he be different? Men seemed to think she should like being harmed, that it was normal.

Maybe she did. Maybe it was. Maybe she was already seeing herself with this man, looking forward to what torture he would unleash on her. Her body didn't bother shivering.

Next to her, Lydie took over again. She explained the situation while skipping over the gory details. There wasn't much to say. They had run away from home. They needed a safe place to stay. A man named Nikolai had directed them to this place and to Ralph. They had some money. They could work.

Lydie was holding Lena's hand, slowly stroking her fingers in a loving way. Lena almost burst into tears. *Why do you still care for me?* she wanted to ask. *Everything is my fault. Everything I do turns into disaster.*

The guilt, the shame, it was all there was in her. The pain couldn't begin to cover it up. She couldn't step out of the car, couldn't bear people's gaze on her. They would see her for the monster she was.

Lena's gaze moved up Lydie's arm, and down the other, where the sleeve covered a bandage. Yet another injury Lena should have avoided. Or taken upon herself.

She had liked to believe she was the one thing that kept Lydie alive, kept her safe. She believed she was Lydie's shield. What a great job she had done at that. She had done nothing.

No. She had taken part in creating their hell. Willingly. Lena committed sins, and Lydie ended up wounded. They were twins but Lena was the bad half. The dark side.

Why didn't Lena cry? Why didn't she have nightmares? Why did she take joy in sin? Why did she have such dark thoughts? Why did she do the things she did?

It's who you are.

She wasn't haunted by the darkness. She was part of it.

"Will you help us?" Lydie asked.

Lena shook her head. *Stop bringing yourself down. Take her and run.* They needed to run. Run away and not look back. Run away, run away, run away! Run away again. Run away to the end of the Earth if they had to. Somewhere where they would find a forest to hide, a nest to lie in, a world for just the two of them.

It was a selfish dream. An impossible dream.

Have faith, a voice said.

Ralph stood up.

"I'll help, of course. However I can. Come on."

Lena reacted only when Lydie pulled her up. Where were they going? *Run!* Her mind kept yelling. *Grab Lydie and run!*

The man would rat them out. He would ask for money, gently at first, only to force them into a corner, before giving them to the wolves, to be sold as slaves. She wouldn't be able to stop them, no matter how much she struggled. They would take Lydie.

She could bear being used. She couldn't bear it happening to Lydie.

What will you do?

She would do anything.

Ralph locked his office's door behind them. He gave them a suspicious glare before putting the keys in his pocket. They went upstairs then down a long corridor. Lena noticed Ralph walking carefully, in an obvious attempt at concealing a limp.

You can outrun him, a voice said with a chuckle.

“Some people will already be sleeping,” Ralph said. “Let’s keep quiet.” Lena and Lydie hadn’t been particularly talkative so far, had they? Would he prefer them screaming? “If for whatever reason you need to make noise, you use the common room, during the day, or better, you go outside. People freak out easily, and their room is the one place where they can feel safe no matter what.” Lena grunted internally.

They turned into a long hallway and walked past a number of closed doors. The floor was clean but the whole thing felt ancient and ready to collapse. Lena refused to look, yet she could feel the rot and the violence. The signs were there.

They’re leading me into the madhouse.

Don’t do it.

They’ll leave me here.

Don’t do it, Lydie. Please.

Then her eyes saw the drawings on the walls, sometimes framed, sometimes directly on the drywall. They were beautiful, full of smiles and happiness.

I’m scared. Who was speaking? Was it her? Or was it yet another voice?

Ralph stopped in front of the last door, opened it and handed them a key.

“Here. That’s yours,” he said. “The room is nothing fancy I’m afraid, and you’ll have to share the bed until I get a mattress. Please settle in, make yourself comfortable, rest. I’ll have someone bring you food. We can talk tomorrow.”

He gave them a goodbye nod and walked away. Lena watched him until he turned past the corner. Then she stepped into the room, closing the door behind them.

First thing she did was check the key. The lock worked, but that door wouldn’t hold off anything for long. Then she quickly went to the window, a small opening high on the wall. It was not impossible to get through it, but it would take precious time.

As for the room itself, it barely deserved the name. It fit a one-person bed and a tiny chest of drawers. Even if they got another mattress, it would have to be squeezed next to the door. Lena and Lydie having always slept in the same bed, that wouldn’t be a problem. The only times they hadn’t were when Lena spent the night out.

And when Lena had started spending the night out, Lydie had been punished.

It wasn’t your fault.

It was. She had chosen to go out. She had chosen to meet with those men. She had chosen to befriend that woman and to replicate what she did. Lena hadn’t understood, but it was still her fault. She had thought she was smart. She kept learning she wasn’t.

“Lena.”

Lydie caught her arm, stopping her feverish investigation of the room. At the moment, Lena was looking under the bed. Why?

That's where little girls hide.

"Come. Sit with me."

Lydie patted the spot on the bed next to her. Lena watched her, feeling a shiver run through her. These last few days, Lydie had been smiling more easily, as if growing into her freedom, becoming carefree. Lena should have felt happy for it. Instead she wondered how fast this new reality would crush her. She wondered how she would be hurt next.

She doesn't even love you.

She does.

Lena sat next to Lydie but kept her eyes away. Lydie passed an arm behind her back and pulled her near. Lydie kissed her head and a shiver ran through her.

"You're okay?" Lydie asked. Lena sat up and nodded. "I'm not blind, you know. I see you shutting down." Lydie sighed. "You must be exhausted."

Lena shrugged. "I think it's safe to stay here," she said. "For tonight at least."

"Yes, probably. You—"

"I don't trust that guy, but he doesn't seem particularly scary. He has a limp and he's probably a junkie, easy enough to take on."

"Yes. Still, he—"

"I was surprised he spoke Russian. That's scary. He might listen in on us."

"I guess."

"Can you get through the window if you need to?"

“I think so but...”

Lydie was a tiny thing. A beautiful thing.

Lena shuffled, putting herself slightly further away.

“Lena?”

She didn’t answer. Focus. She needed to focus on keeping them safe.

“Look at me?” Lydie asked. “Please?”

Slowly, she turned her head toward Lydie. She expected fear, or perhaps anger, but it was a smile she found. One of love.

She doesn’t love you.

Lena ignored the voice, and her quivering slowed down. Despite all the horrors in her life, she had Lydie. She was so grateful for that. She would be eternally grateful for that.

Lena took a breath and kissed the corner of Lydie’s mouth. Lydie grinned and put their foreheads together. Lena kissed her again, softly.

“I need you,” Lena whispered.

“And I, you.”

There was a moment of silence, true silence. Lena closed her eyes and savored it. The void and nothing else.

Her eyes still closed, she felt Lydie’s hand play with her hair. Then it was her lips she felt on hers. They fell down on the bed together, the roughness of the bed barely registering next to the softness of a lover’s touch.

They shared slow kisses and caresses, and Lena could feel her disarray melting. She could still feel angles and shapes that didn’t make sense,

inside her mind, but a new, warm calmness was coming over her. Letting her hand drift on Lydie's body, Lena recalled happier moments, shared by them and only them. A bubble of peace, tiny and fragile, but real.

It had been a while.

We haven't had real sex for... I don't know. What stopped us? What changed?

Lena's hand explored farther and she felt Lydie move up to encourage her. Heat was pooling down in her belly, and wetness between her legs.

A knock on the door interrupted them. With an audible grunt, Lena abandoned Lydie's lips to get up and answer it. The man behind the door seemed surprised to see her. He stood there, shock visible in his eyes. He was big and built sturdily, his strength concealed under an apron and meek looking glasses. He carried a large tray with one arm, with two plates of food, some bread and a bottle of water, plus glasses and cutlery.

"What?" Lena growled.

"Um, sorry, good evening." He spoke in German. "Ralph asked me to get you this."

Lena grabbed the tray and thanked him, expecting him to leave. Instead, he put his hands in his pockets and stayed there, on the doorstep.

"Is that all?" Lena asked.

"Right, yeah. I'll leave you to it... I mean in peace. Enjoy the food."

Lena closed the door harshly behind him, shrugging as she turned back to Lydie. She came face to face with the sight of her sister's naked body, and her trying to cover it up however she could. Lena realized she herself was stark naked and hadn't bothered to hide that fact as she opened the door.

There was a shiver in her as she put the tray down on the chest of drawers. It almost slip out of her hands and onto the ground.

Convulsions took over her. Her body felt all kinds of wrong. It looked wrong too. Her legs were slipping into the floor; clear liquids were pouring out of her; slashes appeared on her breasts; blood covered her, spilling from her nose and eyes.

Arms tried to grab her and she fought them off. She stood up, frenetically looking for a way out. She saw the window, ran to it, reached for the escape. She found nothing but air and cold, unmoving glass. She collapsed on the floor.

The arms were back. She tried to fight them off but was too weak. Immensely too weak.

“I love you,” someone said.

No!

“I got you. Just listen to my voice.”

Your voice? Your... Lydie?

The world flickered back to normal. The arms hugging her were Lydie's. The words were Lydie's. It was only ever Lydie who had loved her. All the others had lied. Every word. They had only ever manipulated her. Everyone but Lydie.

Lena began crying in earnest.

“I'm sorry.” Lena's voice was barely a whisper. She wasn't sure even Lydie could hear her. “I'm sorry, Lydie.” She spoke slowly, apologizing over and over. She had so much to apologize for. “I'm sorry, Dad.”

“Shh.”

“I’m sorry I haven’t been a good girl. I’ll be good now.”

“Lena. It’s okay, I’m here.”

“No!” She half-screamed. This too-common sound of desperation which refused to leave her throat. “Dad. Stop. I... I’ll be good. I swear. Don’t.”

“Dad isn’t here.”

“No, he is. He’s there.”

“Dad is very, very far away.”

“No. He’s inside me. He won’t go away. He’s not going away.”

She sobbed, a pathetic and shivering mess. She pushed the woman’s arm away. One time, two times, three times. She kept coming back. Lena didn’t want it. She didn’t want to be touched, didn’t want to feel anything. When would they finally leave her alone?

Reality was crumbling once again. She felt darkness gaining on her, her whole body being forcefully constrained. In the last moments, one single thought took hold of her. A thought forbidden to her.

I want to die.

Afterword

Thank you for reading this sample for Half A Life. Hopefully, you liked it, and perhaps you might find the full book worth your time and money.

You're welcome to reach out to me by email to give your feedback, ask questions, report issues, invite me to a discussion, or simply chat.

Thank you!

Benjamin Hamon

Credits

*Thank you to every contributor,
the artists, editors, proofreaders...
everyone who helped make this book a reality.*

*Thank you to my family and friends,
for their love and support.*

And thank you to every single reader!

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