

Halves

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Halves

by [PoiPoiProse](#)

Notes

This fic is dedicated to damedarkhat on tumblr, as they were my Secret Santa in @askalfendilayton's August 2016 event. In celebration of the timing of it, I went with this.

Condensation on the window; masses of people milling around in their own little worlds; heavy air, thick with moisture and mingling with London's perpetual smog; the quiet but persistent squawks of the magpies nesting just outside; a quiet, cool office.

These things made up the atmosphere of Alfendi Layton's morning. He was reclined in his chair and, as only Placid would ever do, had his feet on the desk in front of him. Lucy was exceptionally late for work again, which actually surprised him; she'd been getting better lately. He smiled and sipped his tea tiredly. He'd been up at the office all night again, simply thinking. There hadn't been a case to finish up; he'd just lacked the will to go home. Recently, he couldn't help being slightly disappointed with the criminals of London. The Mystery Room hadn't had a challenging case in a good few weeks. Of course, this was good - less people were dying - but something in him (mainly in the side Lucy had labelled 'Potty') was bored with the regular open-shut homicides they'd been given to keep Alfendi at the very least active.

As the inspector mused over all this, he tuned himself out from the world around him; the sound of the birds faded out, and the sound of someone singing a cheesy pop song was hardly even noticed, even when it began to grow louder.

"Oh, I wish you a happy hollyday - without me! Have fun under the mistletoe - without me! 'Cause this hollyday you don't have a Hollerday to hold!" A Yorkshire twang tinged the song as it built dramatically, and the loud bang of the door swinging into the wall punctuated its end, "Mornin', Prof!"

Alfendi looked up, disturbed from his peace by his rambunctious coworker - recently promoted to Detective Sergeant - bouncing into the room. She was humming another cheesy Christmas song to herself; 'Macho Man (In A Santa Suit)', if he was right in thinking. How ridiculous.

"Morning, Lucy." A pause to pointedly check his watch, "Just about. Dare I ask why you're singing Christmas songs in June...?" His tone of voice indicated that this was merely another thing on a long list of 'Strange Things Lucy Baker Does'. Lucy laughed, throwing down her satchel, and grinned at her friend.

"Half-Christmas, Prof!" She said excitedly, "When I were a kid, I got so impatient for Christmas that my mam did a half-Christmas for me and my brothers. It were just like real Christmas, except we didn't get any big presents. Now I celebrate it every year!"

Ah, yes, yet another thing on the 'Strange Things Lucy Baker Does' list. Alfendi shook his head and chuckled, raising an eyebrow.

"Should I be expecting you to decorate the office, then?" He asked, an amused smile lighting his face.

"No," Lucy responded with a shrug, "I expect *us* to decorate the office!"

With a laugh, she took a small bag of decorations from her satchel and tossed them to Alfendi, who tried to protest, only to be smothered by Lucy's reprise of the pop song.

"It's not like we have a case, anyway. Is it, Prof?" She added with a laugh, pulling him out of his seat.

"Lucy, please-"

"Nope, I let you spend your birthday at home, 'with your own company' as you put it; I'm not having you duck out of this!"

And with that, the reluctant inspector and his excitable assistant spent what was left of the morning decorating the office with tinsel and baubles, as summer sun flooded in through the window and bounced around the room.

"Prof, pass me the bag, will you?" Lucy called a little while later, over the jazzy Christmas music playing from the office radio.

"No." Came the simple answer, spoken by a crimson haired man in the corner, "I'm sick to death of this childish 'half-Christmas' game. *He* might have humoured you, but it isn't going to fly with *me*."

"Oh, mornin', Potty!" Lucy chirped, unperturbed by the menacing tones of the man glowering at her. She waved shortly, bouncing over to pick up the bag of decorations from behind him. He cut off her path with an arm against the wall, to which Lucy simply sighed, folding her arms and tapping a foot.

"Baker, take these down and get to work." He ordered, using their vast height difference to glare down at her intimidatingly.

"Oh, don't be a half-Grinch, Prof. What's wrong with a little bit of fun, eh? Name summat specific." She challenged, matching his glare.

Alfendi faltered. He still wasn't used to people standing up for themselves around him; usually they were too intimidated by him. Damn this woman. He almost growled, not ready to give in just yet, especially to Lucy.

"It's *ridiculous*, Baker; we should be researching, working, even doing paperwork, for god's sake." He snapped, "Now take these down and get to work."

"Hm, nah." Lucy said calmly, "That en't a valid enough reason, Prof. We don't even have any paperwork to do. Unless you've got a grudge against fun, I'm keepin' 'em up. Look, I'll keep it clear of your desk, eh?"

The inspector sighed deeply, "You'd better."

Lucy beamed and wrapped her arms around Alfendi's waist in a tight hug before he could protest.

“Thanks, Prof!” She grinned, releasing him and ducking under his still-outstretched arm to grab the rest of the decorations.

“... You’re welcome, Baker.” He muttered, returning to his desk and watching her pin up fake snow along the shelves. He shook his head in exasperation and tried to stop Placid taking over, wanting to front for at least a little longer.

The rest of the morning passed slowly, with Lucy humming Christmas songs, and Alfendi begrudgingly joining in, once Placid returned. Then, came the last decoration. Lucy fished it out of the bag and glanced to Alfendi, who was tiredly nursing a strong cup of coffee, despite her encouragement to get into the Half-Christmas spirit with hot chocolate. She smiled, acknowledging the fact it was actually Potty, being calm for once. It was nice to see him getting into the spirit of things.

“Ee, Prof, can you give us a hand with this one? It hangs off the ceiling and if I stand on a chair, I’ll probably fall off, knowing me.” She requested, a hidden, sly smile on her face.

“You’re lucky I like you, Baker.” He answered, standing and holding out a hand for the decoration.

“Eh? You like me? Nice t’ hear you say it.” Lucy teased, handing over the mistletoe and pointing to the doorway, “Hang it there, please, Prof!”

Not even looking at the plant in his hands, Alfendi silently pinned it up in the centre of the doorframe.

“Perfect.” Lucy affirmed, giggling a little at the fact he hadn’t even realised yet, “Have a proper gander, eh?”

Backing up to admire his addition to the room’s decorations, it suddenly occurred to him what it was. Even for someone as headstrong as Alfendi, even for someone with as strong feelings for Lucy as Alfendi’s, the tradition was a daunting prospect. Lucy grinned up at him, giggling as fearful realisation dawned across the usually serious man’s face.

“I... Uhm, Lucy...” He spat out, staring down at her like a deer in headlights.

“Aye, I finally know how to shake the grand an’ mighty Potty Prof!” Lucy teased, glancing between the mistletoe and her long-time crush and grinning. Alfendi’s hair dulled slightly and his posture shifted into a slouch. Placid appeared with a shy, but warm smile.

“Well, then, Lucy... We seem to be under mistletoe.” He said, raising an eyebrow at her, “And it also *seems* that this has been your plan all along. Would I be right?”

“Maybe, maybe not.” She giggled, winking at him.

Alfendi shook his head and chuckled, courteously taking her hand, “Well, may I?”

“Y’may.” Lucy laughed, standing on her tiptoes and offering her cheek, “Happy Christmas, eh?”

“Half Christmas.” He corrected with a small smile, pressing a shy, short kiss to her cheek.

Beaming up at the detective inspector, Lucy went to return the kiss, but a hand stopped her lips. She glanced up questioningly, wondering if she’d read the signals wrong. A now red-headed Alfendi grinned wickedly at her as he took down his hand.

“Half a Christmas, half a kiss, my dear Baker.” He said, shrugging as if he didn’t care at all.

Lucy knew better than to believe him now. She’d seen how the man - all bold bravado and cocky arrogance - had faltered into a confused, even slightly shy thirty year old. He always pretended to be unshakeable, without a crack in his armour, but now she’d found one of his weaknesses. Her. He trusted her enough to let down his guard around her, to show that he wasn’t all anger and hate. That wasn’t to say that wasn’t a part of him - there was certainly anger in him - but he was more than that; Lucy was allowed to see that now.

It had been half a Christmas, half a kiss, and - Lucy was sure now - half a mask.

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