

HALF MEASURES

Season 3

by Anne Alden-France



Case files, medicine chest, drawers... Diana ran a mental list of things that needed to be packed up, as she did just that. She was less than halfway through the chore when a very long, very familiar shadow cast itself into her living room.

Toothbrush, toothpaste... I'll need to buy some aspirin at the airport. How did I let myself run out of aspirin? She knew she was ignoring him at the moment... survival instinct.

"Diana?" Vincent's deep voice inquired. He took in the scene. "You are... packing?"

"I got a call. I have a case," she answered off-handedly, tossing toiletries into a bag. She seemed matter-of-fact in her preparations.

Vincent eyed her lone suitcase. *Perhaps she won't be gone for very long.*

"I see," he replied, wondering if she would tell him more if he maintained his silence. He did. It worked.

"A friend I've worked with before asked for my help. In Seattle. It's time." She began sorting through a small stack of file folders.

“Seattle is... a long way away.” Vincent watched her rifle through papers. Her beautiful hands had a slight tremor to them, one anyone else probably would have missed. She shoved the paperwork into a valise.

“Yeah, well, that’s where the work is.” She was opening drawers, going through the contents of her desk, digging for something. After a moment, she tugged out an address book and added it to the pile.

“You will... search for someone?” Vincent asked. “Bring them home?” He knew she’d done that for Jacob, and for that matter, him.

She shook her head in quick denial. “The victim turned up last week. I’ll be looking for the killer.”

Ah... like you did for Catherine. I understand. So you will... immerse yourself in something unspeakably ugly, again. Because it’s time.

But that had taken weeks... months, even.

Did I think you would just... stay here? Just... keep coming down to see Jacob, because that’s what I needed you to do while I... what? He wondered.

Nodding toward the open doorway to her roof, she confirmed his worst fear. “I’ll send for the rest of my stuff. The rent is paid up until the end of the month. You can use the roof until then, if you want.”

She was going. Not just going... leaving.

It was a visceral kick to his midsection, one that shouldn’t have hurt as badly as it did. *No. Don’t. Don’t go*, he thought, not willing to examine the instinct any further than that. His heart felt sore.

He looked toward where she nodded, at the vast expanse of open space that was so much wider than Catherine’s balcony, and much... different than that precious place had been to him.

But those days were gone. And in no way did the fault for that lie with her. *Why would I return here, if you are not?* He thought, but didn’t say aloud.

She scooped up a sweater and tossed it into the open suitcase.

“Were you... going to tell me?” He tried to keep any accusation out of his voice. This beautiful, brilliant Amazon of a woman owed him nothing, and he was still trying to process the pain he felt at the thought of her imminent departure. *I need time. Time I no longer have.*

“The call just came an hour ago. I was going to leave you a note,” she said, indicating the writing tablet on top of her desk.

Oh? And what would it say? 'Dear Vincent, I helped you through the most agonizing, most devastating months of your life. I risked my life for yours, and for those you hold dear. I was in danger because of you. I kept your secret, even though it meant I violated an oath I gave. I saved your son. I saved you. I avenged Catherine's death, and I did all of it simply because it was the right thing to do. I have to go now. Farewell, Diana.' Is that what you would have written?

"I... have to catch an early morning flight." She defended her decision.

Vincent walked over to the desk and looked down at the paper. It had but two words on it. "Dear Vincent"

Well, I guessed that part right at least, he mused sadly. He realized she must have written it, then decided upon this flurry of packing instead.

Did you not want to finish it, Diana? He wondered. *Does it... pain you to say goodbye, just as it pains me to hear it?*

He had no bond with Diana, had no way to "know" what she was feeling. And right now, he wished he did.

He processed that thought, startled by its implications, even as understanding dawned. *No, it's not the same. But it is... real,* he thought.

"You should have come down and said goodbye to Jacob, at least." He tried to keep his tone light.

Diana shook her red-maned head. The soft waves in her hair caught the light from the lamp, as she continued to move. "No, I don't think so." She looked down and tossed in a hairbrush. "If I did that, I'd never be able to leave. I'm half in love with him already."

He reached a decision as she ran the zipper around the case and set it near the door. When she stood, two massive arms were on either side of her, effectively "trapping" her in the space.

What's this? She thought, still facing the wall.

"You must... confess something to me, then," the low voice intoned, very near her ear.

What? That I'm falling in love with you? That this is the hardest thing I've ever done, but probably the most necessary? That I know I can't compete with a dead woman, with what you used to have?

"What?" Diana hoped the monosyllable came out steadier than she felt. She turned her head in profile.

"What must be done so that your heart will love with its other half," he replied.

