

Kaleidoscope

Von Jisbon

Inhaltsverzeichnis

Kapitel 1: Graze	2
Kapitel 2: White lies	8

Kapitel 1: Graze

Set: Somewhere in season 1, after 1/17 ("Let's do a trust fall.")

"Change came in disguise of revelation, set his soul on fire.

She says she always knew he'd come around.

And the decades disappear like sinking ships"

(The Killers/A dustland fairytale)

Graze

"You can go in now."

The Doctor whose name tag identified him as "Dr Cains", was ill shaven and slightly overweight. Just as obvious he was tired and frustrated and Jane couldn't help but ask himself whether the fact that the man had been ignored during the recent promotion or an encounter with his latest patient were to blame. Given the circumstances the latter seemed to be likely. But if he ever felt anything remotely like pity, that feeling withered the moment his wedding band was briefly glanced at and all the wrong assumptions were made.

"Maybe she'll listen to you."

The fool hadn't even read Lisbon's intake form properly nor had he ever looked at her right hand.

But Jane wasn't in the mood for explanation's of any kind, he had already smelled to much disinfectant and lost enough time.

"Oh, I doubt that."

Instead he smiled and shrugged, like they were having that kind of a relationship, where he was used to waiting for her on hospital corridors, because he told her to be careful all the time and she just never listened. It was a bad joke but the irony wasn't wasted on him and the moment his fingers touched the doorknob the grimace vanished.

Jane sneaked a quick peek before he entered the small room, took a moment to observe and to detect Lisbon's mood. They hadn't talked since the incident; there had been too many others around, too much fuss. Which is why he had no idea if they'd just talk or if he was about to enter a grumpy lion's den.

Not that it would have mattered much anyway.

What he saw was no unusual sight and therefore held no evidence: Lisbon sat on a

small desk and fought her way through a bunch of paper and she seemed completely absorbed by her dull task. The slightly stiff, banged left arm was the only detail to differ from the familiar picture—that and the fact that she wasn't sitting in her office but in a hospital room.

The coffee from the machine that accompanied Jane was probably a thin swill and lukewarm at most, but he carefully placed the cup on the table corner nevertheless. It was the best peace proposal he had to offer and apparently it was an unwanted one.

Lisbon didn't say anything like that—in fact she didn't say anything at all—and she didn't have to. The way she tensed a little when she heard him approach, the way she didn't look at him practically sang about her suppressed anger and her wish to be somewhere else. He took a few steps back and leaned his back against a wall.

This would take a while.

The first thing he said was: "Listen, I am sorry," because he really was and for once she didn't have to make him say these words.

"Don't beat yourself up. I'm okay, it's only a graze."

She answered absent mindedly, didn't even bother looking at him. Instead, she scribbled at the dismissal form like her life depended on it. Two hours ago her life had depended on something else, but he was not going to point out the obvious for her.

"Once I've filled these out, I'm outta here. Jones has probably already lawyered up and I don't want to waste any more time in here."

Cains had probably tried to persuade her to stay the night "for safety reasons, in case she was in a shock" something like that, and fled because he found that particular nut too hard to crack, but Jane wasn't going to give up that easily. Honesty had failed him so far, which is why he continued with half-jokes.

"I guess I owe you a free punch."

He smiled miserably, not only because he had seen her punch suspects before and was pretty sure that she had a terrible right hook, despite being so tiny.

"I'll keep that in mind."

Still nothing but the scratching of her pen to fill the small room.

"You should, it's probably your once in a lifetime chance to do what you've been thinking about for some time now. And don't say you didn't, because I know you did." He shifted uneasily from one foot to the other and became serious again. "The situation was under control until I crashed the party. I deserve it." Another variation of the truth—and an ugly little understatement as well.

"I know you didn't mean any of this to happen." Polite emptiness seemed to be all Lisbon was willing to offer him but he could not content himself with that "little" here. This was something they had to clarify.

This had happened: Last night the owner of a medium sized business was found in a puddle of his own blood. The first thing Lisbon wanted to do, in the morning, was to have a talk with his partner in business, Robert Jones. And she had brought him, her consultant, along for all the insight he could give. When they arrived at the house there had been a lot of screaming and waving of a gun, on Jones' side—a clear case of a man being unable to cope with what he had done. And a tale of too much alcohol, judging by the smell on his breath.

According to his own, slightly confusing statements Jones had been torn between shooting himself and shooting them. Lisbon had told him to stay behind and keep quiet, but like always, he had known so much better. Instead, he had been his usual self, playing his games asking all the wrong questions and drawing all the right

conclusions, being about ninety percent sure that the man wouldn't fire.

But this time ninety percent hadn't been enough.

The catching remark that pushed Jones over the edge had been: "Go ahead, shoot yourself if you feel you have to. You'll ruin that nice, expensive looking suit with your brain muck, but at this rate you'll be very, very dead and won't care anymore. That's your choice."

In this very moment Jones had decided to shoot at them. Lisbon had been his first choice, because she was the armed one. She had thrown herself to the ground, but she had been a second too late, the second the bullet had needed to graze her shoulder. Seconds after that Sac PD had finally arrived and tackled down Jones.

Jane hadn't been of much benefit to anyone.

"You leave me hanging here, but I guess it's only fair." He tried to make it sound like an objective estimation, something to notice and cope with, but failed miserably. Because having earned such a treatment was dead certain nothing to pass over with levity—not even for him.

And he was used to passing over a lot of things.

"I'm not leaving you anywhere, Jane." Lisbon sounded a little tired, strained like she had been explaining the same matter to a stubborn child the whole day—a stubborn child named Patrick Jane to be precise. "You simply did what you always do and this time I wasn't fast enough to balance it. Now, can we please drop the matter?"

She meant what she had said, that much was obvious to him.

Justice was the romantic ideal she clung onto, he had known that much already. What he had only guessed till today was where she saw herself in the big picture. Now he knew for sure—and he wished he didn't.

And suddenly, he was so mad at her.

For meaning what she said, for not thinking about leaving him despite the fact that he nearly had gotten her killed today. For being who she was. For blaming herself instead of him, for acting like dying in the name of "justice" would be no big deal. For a whirlwind of reasons that surprised and alarmed him at the same time, but at the very moment they were just another thing to pass over.

Right now, he was just going to be angry, because that feeling demanded neither excuses nor explanation's of any kind.

"Oh, please, Lisbon! Stop being a saint, just once!" he growled, seemingly absorbed with brushing away an imaginary lint from his shoulder with a tense hand.

Lisbon stiffened before she put the pen aside and finally, for the first time during this whole mess, looked him in the eye. It was a cold and stern look and she was trying to hide something behind it. His always observing eyes noted this and a few other things, like how pale her face was and he was fairly certain that it was not only the effect of the neon light. The same applied for the dark circles around her eyes and the larger amount of make-up she had used today to hide those.

This was not about Jones, this was about something that she had been lugging around for longer.

"I never pretended to be a saint, I'm just being reasonable. Somebody has to." She clenched her right hand into a fist. "And besides you wouldn't know anyway, since you don't even believe in the existence of saints." She pointed out triumphant, her voice laboriously controlled.

No, of course he didn't—how could he? He wasn't even she sure Lisbon did, catholic school or not, but that was neither here nor there at the moment.

Seemingly, he had finally managed to get through to her, but he suddenly doubted if

it was a desirable place to go in her current state of mind; or in his for that matter.

But he should have thought about that earlier. Much earlier, because now it was now impossible to retreat to his fortress of fake smiles and smug remarks.

"I don't need to, and for what it's worth, I never accused you of pretending. I know you don't do that...at least not when it comes to important things."

He shook his head in awe, because she really was a puzzle. One he hadn't solved yet and maybe never would. It was not the first time that the thought of their limited time together grazed him, but it was the first time that the weight almost buried him. He'd find and kill Red John and then... *Yeah, what then?* He had never really thought about that time. It was an elusive thing, too far away and much too close at the same time. Maybe he'd die doing it, maybe there'd be the death penalty waiting for him or he'd have to live out the rest of his days in a federal prison, he didn't really care—at least that's what he preferred to tell himself. Something else he insisted on fooling himself with was that he had become incapable of caring about any living human being; that Lisbon, Cho, Rigsby and Van Pelt were just background actors, the supporting group preparing the stage for his grand, final entrance. (Someday and somehow, he would have to stop lying to himself.)

And Lisbon had known enough about his private madness and agreed to working with him nevertheless, despite her own doubts.

"You really are a saint." The words came out much more gentle than originally intended, affectionate and a little surprised.

He had always enjoyed solving puzzles and if things were different... But that was a dangerous game to play, because things *weren't* different. They couldn't be.

With his outlooks that would be an all too cruel joke.

His words had a strange effect on her. For a moment, before she hastily turned away from him, he even hallucinated angry tears glittering in her eyes. Absurd, because he had never seen her on the verge of crying before. Preposterous, because he would have bet on the fact that they'd not be there, because the realization that she could have died today took two full hours to hit her.

"For somebody who claims to be so smart you're talking something that does sound remarkably like bullshit right now."

The boss was back—at least that was the impression she tried to make.

And she did her best and did acceptable, but her performance was not nearly good enough. He was the expert, he noticed the little creak in her voice, the clenched fist. Sarcasm had never suited her much and the fact that she took refuge there told him how much she wanted the upper hand over him, to remind him that she was his boss.

But for all that his expertise was worth nothing because he had no idea about what she was trying so hard *not* to think about.

"You are one to talk, Lisbon." A cruel smile distorted his lips.

And he knew then she'd be unable to leave things here. He was not only questioning her authority, he had somehow ended questioning her view on her job and the whole cop thing. Questioning who she was, that's what he had been doing. He hadn't planned on doing it, it had just happened. Sometimes, conversations just did that—even to him.

Lisbon cleared her throat and forced herself to withstand his gaze.

"I have no idea what you..." she hissed, reaching for the now certainly cold cup of coffee next to her in a hopeless attempt to steady her nerves.

"Really, Lisbon?"

Jane interrupted her impatiently while he took an impulsive step toward her. He

didn't even know what he wanted to do there, probably something pointless like grapping her arm and Lisbon breaking his because of that—fortunately enough they already were in a hospital, he thought humorlessly. But whatever it would have been his sudden movement startled her enough and she ended up sweeping the cup off the table instead.

For a laughably long moment they both watched his peace offer taking a short flight in his direction, and then land in the space between them. The brown liquid splashed over the floor and the plastic cup rolled out of sight, under the bed.

"Damn it, Jane!" Lisbon growled before she grabbed a stack of paper towels.

He didn't stir and he didn't say a word. He told himself that it was because he was a coward and couldn't tell her that apparently nervousness made her inept; after all she was the one with the gun in here. A soft spoken voice in his head, one which he wanted to silence so badly and which sounded remarkably like Charlotte's told him something else: That he was sorry, again for getting rough and driving her into a corner like this, that she deserved better.

And while she moved to clean up the mess, she muttered something. Something that was probably never meant for him to hear, something he didn't really understand. "Saint", "resources" and "matter" were the few words he was able to identify unambiguously.

It was at this moment that the door opened and a very young nurse stepped in and she immediately noticed the loaded atmosphere. "I...I'm sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt. I'll just come back in a few minutes." Something akin to panic stained her voice.

Lisbon shook her head and stopped her.

"That won't be necessary, we were done here anyway," she said with the full weight of her authority acting calm and completely ignoring him, "And I'm sorry for ...this," Lisbon added while she pointed at the floor and the soggy paper towels.

Jane considered himself dismissed then.

During his drive through Sacramento, his brain kept replaying the moment in the hospital room where Lisbon had muttered those words he hadn't understood. They held the last clue to explain her strange behavior; that was a safe assumption. It took him til he was halfway through Sacramento to solve the case nevertheless. He tested the words in various orders and a few gaps remained, but he finally got the tune.

"If I were I saint I wouldn't want to know...would it be the access to the CBI resources or me you'd mourn so eager. It wouldn't even matter."

And when he finally did, he was on the verge of turning over, right there on the freeway just to return to the hospital. Of returning there just to shake her til she came to her senses; of continuing a fight that couldn't be won today because some things just weren't rational—fear wasn't, fundamental's weren't... and trust wasn't as well.

He knew that probably better than anyone else.

And this is why he let the moment pass and still followed traffic, still was on his way to the CBI at the end of it. Because he had to admit something: It was an ugly question but maybe, perhaps well-earned.

And a part of him was irked again, because he had told her the truth, only a few weeks ago. Maybe she hadn't listened, or she had been too stubborn to search for the truth somewhere behind jokes and silly trust falls.

"Lisbon, I want you to know that you can trust me. No matter what happens, I'll be there

for you. I will. I need you to know that."

He couldn't help but smile at the memory then, because it was so typical of her, and of him to dance around the truth like that.

Jane fetched out his phone, flipped it open and dialed Lisbon's number.

And then he had to wait, because she didn't take his call. Maybe she couldn't because she was somewhere on the road as well, but it seemed much more likely that she just didn't want to. Either because she wasn't in the mood for struggling with him anymore or because she was embarrassed by her little outburst, the outcome was the same. It was no real surprise, the real surprise was how lost it made him feel. If he wasn't able to tell her now, he'd...

And while he was still trying to decide what to do, her voice suddenly filled the car.

"This is Senior Agent Teresa Lisbon. I can't take your call right now, but if you leave a message..."

He let his hand fall slowly and then completely stopped because he had just changed his mind: He would just follow the orders of that very distant Lisbon and leave her a message.

"...I'll call you back as soon as possible."

Jane cleared his throat. Speaking to machines had always made him feel stupid, but he had to do this. "Lisbon, for somebody so smart you seem to think something that does sound remarkably like bullshit."

He put effort into faking a cheerful voice and then he held off, again. Because he hadn't called to say something like that.

There were many things he could and should have said, things she probably wouldn't believe because sneaky remarks and disbelief were her way of protecting herself—but knowing that failed to legitimize his omission. Despite all this, was a unique possibility, because she wasn't there to brush him off.

"No, I'm sorry, that wasn't funny at all. And actually, that's not what I wanted to say."

He grimaced and found himself at a loss for words, again. It wasn't like him to stutter like this, but then again it wasn't like him to tape or to be this...real. His showman camouflage felt very far away and he felt so vulnerable, but he forced himself to continue speaking.

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry we argued and I'm sorry, I...You matter. Don't ever think otherwise." His voice sounded hoarse, throaty and he spoke way too quick. This was not a joke.

"So...take care of yourself, please. Let me..."

He quickly hung up then because he just couldn't say, *"Let me take care of you, you have no idea what you mean to me"*.

It was neither the time nor the place for these words.

If he ever had those psychic powers he had faked in another life, Jane would have known how wrong he was about many things, about the time when he would say this or "It's over, it's done", about Sheriff Hardy, Red John and a million other things but since there never was such a thing as psychics he had no idea then.

Kapitel 2: White lies

Set: Somewhere around 2/16, Code Red ("Because it's better to be happy than sad")

Confessions: Janes next to last line is a Byron quote. And I drink too much coffee.
White lies

Jane had been acting strange today and so had Lisbon.

During the team meeting, while the rest of them were doing their jobs, like catching a killer, Jane had barely said a word. Apparently he was fully occupied with lying on his couch and pretending to be asleep. Later, when Lisbon had told him to head out with Rigsby he had flatly refused to follow her order.

His exact words had been: "As much as I'd love to obey, I'm afraid I'll have to decline this inviting offer. My best laid plans force me to stay here." A challenging glance under half closed eyelids had accompanied his latest, muttered brazenness.

And Lisbon knew she should have accepted the challenge and insist, simply force him to go like she'd have done weeks or month ago. But not today. Today, her mind was engaged elsewhere and she just couldn't summon the energy to struggle with one of his silly moods. On this forenoon she simply settled for squinting her eyes a second too long and retorting with a half-assed snappy remark.

"Fine. Just stay here until you start to rot. Cho, you go."

Lisbon waved dismissively, turned on her heel and headed for her office where a probably long and definitely exhausting talk with the D.A.s office awaited her. She didn't miss the disbelieving looks the team tried to exchange behind her back, though, and they only confirmed what she already knew: She had just made a mistake. Cutting him slack like that made her look tattered, nonprofessional and Jane would take advantage of that, sooner or later. *Probably sooner than later*, she thought with a trace of humor, it wasn't like him to waste time when he could create confusion.

He always did.

"Morning, Lisbon." The lukewarm greeting of the passing agent Wiks from the gang unit snapped her out of her thoughts and she realized that she had been staring into space—and that she had nearly raced the other agent round in doing so. *Great, just great*. Any more of this and people would start to assume that she was losing it. And maybe, these people would hit close enough to home.

Next week you'll have to be a little more convincing, she silently reminded herself for the millionth time during the last few weeks.

Next week it had to be, because by then the new boss was supposed to arrive—and today and the ones following weren't supposed to be pleasant for anybody in the building least of all for her team or herself.

"New brooms sweep clean", that was how the proverb went. Unfortunately she had already seen two new bosses come and grow old to know that it was much more than a hackneyed old saying, especially in law enforcement.

Hightower would be bent on proving that she had earned her tough-as-nails reputation the hard way and she'd start with cleaning up the smaller sloppiness and greater squalidness that had crept in during her predecessor's regency. It was a current method, after all, Lisbon had tried the same when she made her way up in SAC PD. It sounded ludicrous today, but there had been a time when she used to make

secret lists of the things that needed close observation. Nothing fancy to that, really. But time was the factor here. Or in other words: "had been" was the ugly sticking point.

Because today she could barely remember the person that used to make these silly lists. She had changed a lot since then, *she had been changed* a lot since then, and now the new boss would find enough rule violations to clean up under her own supervision.

A dragging pain in her neck made her pause. It was the kind of sting that would grow into a real, steady cramp too soon—she knew that first hand. In addition she felt a little queasy because she had skipped breakfast to get to the crime scene in time and if she wanted to survive this day without falling asleep standing she'd need a painkiller and a cup of coffee. At least.

Lisbon stopped at the kitchenette and she was unreasonably relieved to find it empty. While she waited for the machine to perform it's magic, she choked down a couple of tablets and then something bubbled up inside her mind: She could make a list of her flaws too—to keep her mind focused, to kill the waiting time. For old time's sake, for that younger Officer Lisbon that was lost beyond recall already. Naturally, no pen or paper would be involved. Writing down something like that would make her feel completely unprofessional and it bore the risk that the one person who'd dare to snoop around her office would find it.

It was easy enough to set out her Senior Agent sins anyway.

The first: One safety hazard in form of a consultant, who was out to commit a capital crime himself and owned a club of enemies that included both half of the state of California and a dangerous serial killer? Check.

The second: Two agents involved in a romantic and strictly-against-office-policies relationship? Double Check.

The third and her favorite point: Herself, the head of the unit. The one who let them all do what they did because she didn't want to lose anybody for whom she had come to care far too much. The representative of the law that didn't play by the books anymore; the one that went along with breaking the rules, lying and blackmailing when necessary, the one with the many blind spots. The one that closed more cases and caught more bad guys, the one that did more good. The one who juggled with complaints and lawsuits, *the better one*.

Triple check. Guilty as charged.

The consoling smell of hot coffee finally surrounded her and with a small smile, she pressed her damp fingers against the cup, before she puffed repeatedly and took it to her lips. She would probably burn her mouth, but that wasn't the point. It was like being six-years-old again, years before her world had crashed for the first time and playing "I dare you" all by herself. If she drank his now, she'd immediately feel better—as if coffee was a magic potion. It would make her feel strong and full of energy, professional and...undamaged. Fine, maybe she overdid it, but she craved, so much, to feel better, to feel like the person she had been one year ago.

A sudden loud smack against the doorframe broke the spell and startled her enough to make a few drops spill over and burn her fingers.

Lisbon didn't need to turn around and look at the intruder. Maybe it was because of her innate trouble radar or maybe it was the way her hackles raised and her empty stomach made itself known again, but either way she just knew.

"Jane. What do you want?" she hissed, while she hastily set down the mug and waved her hands in an attempted to cool them.

"What a wide question," he answered soulful, whereas he stepped next to her and casually reached for his boiler. She watched him pour in the water and light the gas flame and for a split second she thought about slapping him. She was in no mood for this kind of crap. All she wanted was to be left alone and drink this damned coffee and because Jane was Jane he knew. He always knew more than he was ought to, after all that was why the CBI had hired him in the first place.

It also made him dangerous to be around.

"I'll tell you, but only because it's you," he went on—pestilent, blithesome, "In the long term that would be what we all want, but in the short term..." Jane winked and presented his empty cyan cup and saucer "I'll have to content myself with a cup of tea."

Lisbon clenched her teeth and snatched the sugar caster. Out of the corner of her eye she watched her consultant open the cupboard and wave between the different kinds of tea while he quietly hummed to himself. She squinted. Maybe if she ignored him, he would grow tired of messing with her and just vanish. Otherwise...she had no idea what to do in this case; maybe she had to shoot him. All she knew for sure was that the more vivid he appeared the heavier she felt her own exhaustion.

"Eureka." Apparently pleased, he took out a box and fetched a tea bag out of it. Lisbon stared stolidly ahead and kept adding sugar. As if he were completely unsuspecting, as if he had all the time of the world he poured the boiling water into his cup, still humming while doing so.

And then he paused and Lisbon found herself piping down because she finally saw through this little siege. So much for chitchat about "best laid plans," his couch and tea, he was getting at something. And she even had a pretty accurate foreboding regarding that something. It would be right on the mark, it would be outrageous, not case-related, *and* she did not want to hear it. Not for the world.

Because maybe, just *maybe*, she was a tad afraid of it.

And conveniently she didn't have to stay here and listen to him. She even had a professional sounding excuse for backing off again: her urgent call with the D.A.s office. And really, she should have been on the phone by now anyway instead of wasting her time here with him. She reached for her coffee but Jane got the drop on her.

"You shouldn't drink this, Lisbon."

Lisbon blinked. Once, twice—but that didn't make him disappear or his statement less irritating.

"Why not?" She asked grumpily as she eyed him suspiciously.

"Ah." Jane grinned triumphantly, but his eyes remained searching and unfazed. "For two reasons. Number one: because during your understandable, but *childish* attempts to ignore me you've already put in way too much sugar. And number two..." He leaned forward and snatched the cup away while he spoke "...it's not healthy."

Lisbon frowned. "Jane? Are you sick?" She got on her tiptoes and pretended to check if he had a temperature, her hand hovering inches away from his forehead, (because touching him would have been too much, wouldn't it?) If he was going to play silly games so would she—at least for the moment. "It's just coffee. I drink it all the time, maybe you remember that?" She emphasized each word carefully, acted as if she really was dealing with a mentally troubled patient.

"Oh. Thanks for the enlightenment, I didn't know that." Jane rolled his eyes to let her know that he just had to endure incredible stupidity on her part and hadn't already fled out of pure generosity.

"We both know it's more than just coffee." And there it was—the suggestion she had been afraid off.

Of course he was right, it wasn't just coffee. For weeks her body had been running on coffee and cheap imitations of real sleep, ever since her world had crashed for the second time not so long ago. And ever since she had been feeling tattered and out of whack and at the same time anxious to hide that from everyone around her.

Because Sam Bosco was dead and they were alive.

She cleared her throat and averted her gaze. "I have no idea what you're talking about."

"Liar." The tone appeared to be cheerful, but she knew him well enough to notice the little edge in his voice, the one she couldn't quite place. Impatient, regretful, wistful, something in between. Or maybe she didn't know him at all and it was only in her head, because she wanted him to feel that way. Everything was possible with Patrick Jane—always.

"But I'll humor you. What time is it, eleven? And it's your fifth..." She shook her head fiercely and made an attempt to cut in on him but he just grimaced and carried on "...No, your sixth one. Really, Lisbon? That can't be healthy."

Sometimes, sometimes she *almost* hated him.

"So now you are watching over my caffeine intake? I'm fine, thanks a lot." She folded her arms and smiled drily.

So maybe she was not just yet fine, but he was the last person on earth she was willing to admit that to. Well, actually there wasn't anyone she'd confess something like that to, but still...She was the boss, she was the one fixing things, and she couldn't appear weak. Least of all to him.

Besides, she was feeling better already. Really, thanks also to him, even if it seemed farfetched at this particular moment. There was no need to put up a fuss. She had it all under control. As always.

Jane watched her closely. Something like a smile crinkled his lips and for another moment, Lisbon was afraid he'd just say it. But then he shook his head, hardly noticeable and made do with saying, "Somebody has to."

"I'm not lying!" she claimed, hell bent on ignoring his last statement and everything that could possibly have followed in the wake of it.

Jane caused her trouble, he was sometimes bothersome, and nearly always useful because he kept the solve rates high, and one fine day he'd get her fired. That was the deal and she better kept in mind what she had signed for.

"Besides, I haven't even had that many!" Lisbon hastily added, hoping to get away with it and already suspecting that she was fighting a losing battle here.

"Meh. Sixth is exactly the number," he said in a singsong voice, before he set down her mug on the fridge, leaned back and started listing her coffee crimes.

"The first and the second were in your office, you worked past midnight again because you were so sure you wouldn't be able to sleep anyway and because sleeping pills are not an option for you. Wise call, by the way." Jane dipped his tea bag twice before he threw it into the trash can. "You drank the third at home after you were called in for the case, stopped for the fourth on the way to the crime scene. How am I doing so far?"

"Crappy. Trust me, you are not even close." Lisbon clenched her teeth. She had seen him play the same cat-and-mouse game with suspects many times before and she was sure that she'd never grow tired of it, when it was useful and case related, but this was an entirely different story.

It was too easy to misunderstand things. This, all this, meant nothing. Not to him and not to her—if she was wise.

"That good? You flatter me. So—where was I?" He smiled in false modesty and then looked down at his leg and carefully flattened the fabric. This time, she didn't have to search for undertones in his voice. "Ah, yes. The fifth was offered to you by that guy from Sac PD who has had his eyes on you for weeks. What's his name again? Wench? Trench?"

He hadn't forgotten the name, it was just another variation of the same game—she'd have bet her badge on that. He was trying to embarrass her and it worked splendidly.

"The name is Officer Hench," Lisbon interrupted him, already blushing without reason. With a little effort she managed to recall a man with brown hair and a bright smile who had lifted the police line a few times for her and who had asked her if she'd take care of an abandoned coffee at the crime scene this morning. "And has not been eying me, he was just being decent by offering me a spare cup!" She folded her arms and gave him a triumphant smile, not so sure why she made such a big point out of this.

"Please, Lisbon?" He grimaced at her sorrowfully, the rhetorical question, *Don't you know that I'm always right?* practically flashing over his head. "You'd really think he'd miscount the people in his unit? Don't make the poor guy dumber than he already is." In this moment, the most ridiculous thought flickered into her mind: Jane not liking the idea of other men paying attention to her...because he was somewhat jealous. The very idea was absurd. Absurd enough to tell him, to share a laugh or two about it together but she didn't. She was well aware of the fact that she was into that particular thought just a tiny bit too much.

And Teresa Lisbon wasn't one for self-delusion.

"Whatever," she concluded, trying to wipe the slate clean—under this silly conversation as well as her own ascending confusion. Even if he stopped this nonsense now and gave her coffee back, it was probably cold by now.

She rubbed the root of her nose and then looked at her phone with ostentation. The D.A.'s Office was still waiting and all she had done in the past few minutes was wasting time here with him. Great job, really.

"If you have no other information to share, I..." She pushed past him.

Jane cut her off. "Oh, I do have new information. Plenty, actually." He didn't smile and for the kind of talk they had, his voice suddenly held too much steel. "Such as the fact that the poet Balzac drank himself to death with coffee."

And that...explained it all, didn't it?

Lisbon turned back. This time, she didn't need to pretend how much he confounded her or how little she had seen that one coming.

"Nice. Fortunately, I'm not a poet." She cracked a sneer. "Really Jane, you read too much."

He lifted his cup to his mouth and enjoyed a sip, eyes closed and apparently too absorbed to answer.

Lisbon knew she should simply consider their talk finished and leave, but curiosity got the better of her. "Is that really possible? I mean—how did he do it? How much did he drink?"

"About eighty cups a day—at his worst," Jane answered dismissively, before he put away his cup with a chinking sound, "and if you keep this up, you'll be catching up with him soon." He approached her, his eyes never leaving her face. "But that's not the point."

"And what *is* the point?" she retorted, impatient and just a little breathless. All she

could think of was that he was standing too close now. She could faintly smell his aftershave and heard his clothes rustle when he moved. It made her heart flutter just a little. She tried to suppress the rising panic. It was the duet of painkillers and coffee in her empty stomach, nothing more but still...This was not good.

In spite of that, she forced herself not to flinch. If she did, she'd give herself away more than she'd already done and this was exactly what she couldn't have. Not with Jane being Jane.

"Ah, Lisbon." He lowered his eyes and smiled bashfully. "Just one last thing before we forget this conversation, you know..."

And suddenly there was no more foolishness.

"I want you to be well, always. Nothing can happen to you, it would be..."

"Oh, shut up already!" Lisbon exclaimed and the moment the words were out she knew that she had slipped up. What she had attempted had been a tone of easy mockery and weariness and what she had managed had been a dangerous mixture of a laugh and a sob. She couldn't miss the sharp creak in her own voice and she didn't need to look at him to confirm that he hadn't missed it either.

It was just...Nobody had warned her that looking after herself would become this exhausting or confusing. Not at the academy and not afterwards. She was pretty sure it was never meant to be that way.

"Just don't say those things. I know better, I'm not..." Her voice trailed off. '*I'm not dumb*', that was what she had thought of and what she didn't say.

Because sometimes he said things, like, "You can trust me", "I'll be there for you, no matter what happens," like "you matter," or "It's gonna be all right, it's gonna be fine, I promise", but he didn't mean them.

He didn't. He just said them because they seemed useful to him, because deep down he was still a conman trying to sell his product. The words weren't real. None of them. Never.

Jane needed this job to do the one thing he really cared about—taking vengeance on Red John. She had known that from the start. He'd been honest about *that*, always. He'd use everything, them, her, anything to get there. That was a fact and she could live with it—as long as the boundaries were clear.

But the boundaries became blurred every time he actually *did* those things. Like shooting his best lead to save her life or like believing in her innocence when the rest of the world including herself had at least had second thoughts. It made her think stupid things and sometimes she thought she couldn't live with that.

"No, you are not," Jane affirmed, passing over the fact that she hadn't said another word. "You're far from that. You're authoritarian, have a violent temper, are sometimes way too stubborn and distressingly political but no...never dull."

"I suppose that was meant to be a compliment...But don't you think it's kinda cheesy?" It was a bad joke and her voice sounded hollow in her own ears.

He passed over that. Instead, he reached out slowly, left her enough time to avoid his touch, and then ever so slightly patted her shoulder. "But you still haven't figured it all out. That's a shame, Teresa."

Absent-minded she touched her cross pendant and then wearily nodded her head.

And even if she did make concessions to that more honest part of herself and admitted that having him around actually felt nice and even if she did let him wreak havoc with her mind, and believe that he meant it when he said those words, that still didn't mean that...

That she was going to keep him.

Steps, laughter voices. A group of four agents from Missing Persons Unit entered the kitchenette and the all-too-familiar mixture of ease and disappointment washed over Lisbon.

"We are not interrupting anything, are we?" One of them asked.

"No, of course not." She shook her head and tried to make it sound like the most ridiculous idea on earth.

Jane turned back to his tea and she got on her tiptoes and finally got hold of her mug. Just as she had expected it was less than lukewarm so she poured it away and made herself, maybe being a tiny bit childish, a new one. Out of the corner of her eye she felt Jane's smile and forced herself to focus on the words buzzing around her. Apparently, rumor had it that Senior Agent Brown, (married, Narcotics,) and Agent Wade, (filing for divorce, Gang Unit,) were having a hot and forbidden affair. Apparently they were seen spending too much time together, standing too close, backing off when others arrived—the kind of things that nearly always got the rumor mill in motion.

And maybe Jane had been right and she had too much coffee already but judging by the prying looks and the subject of conversation she couldn't help but ask herself whether the same kind of rumor was in the air about her and Jane.

If they really were thinking something like that, they were way off. Way, way off.

And judging by the mischievous glint in his eyes, he was well aware of these possible rumors, and definitely had been for much longer than she had been.

No wonder, but still... *That son of a bitch.*

It was so much easier to be mad at him and those who talked than at herself. She had been a cop long enough to know that most rumors had a petty true core, and she did not want to know where this one had come from. All she could do now was to smother this ludicrous stuff. Fast.

She cleared her throat to call the attention of her annoying colleagues. "If you think..."

Jane broke in on her, still smiling his damned smile. "Oh, please Lisbon! Don't deny it, they won't believe you. Where there's smoke there's fire, that's what they'll say."

The conversation of their colleagues abruptly died down. One head after another turned towards them.

Nothing was wrong with his words, if she faced facts he was probably right—squashing rumors was virtually impossible, in most cases you had to wait till people found out that they were not true or till they grew tired of them. But everything was wrong with the way he said the words. His voice was too soft, too intimate and because he only looked at her, she was the only one who saw him wink.

"You should pass on the coffee. Just let me make you a nice, healthy cup of tea, will you?" He asked hypocritically and Lisbon clenched her teeth. Before she could cut in on him, he did more harm and proceeded, "Would you prefer chamomile or peppermint? Both of them have a very calming effect, just what you need right now." Slack-jawed, she stared at him, feeling the rise of blood to her face already. Oh. *That. Son. Of. A. Bitch.* If there hadn't been rumors before, they were now. And on top of everything people would probably wonder if she was pregnant and start to congratulate her, but that was okay as long as Mister Jane was enjoying himself—and because she would be the one to pay the consequences. The prying eyes and bloody stupid questions to last a month, included.

Lisbon squinted and closed her mouth. By now, all eyes rested on her or her belly and no matter what she said or did now, the damage had already been done.

On some days, she really did hate him.

She did the only thing she felt she could do: She turned on her heel and stormed off. No sixth coffee, then.

About half an hour later, in the midst of her call with the D.A.'s office, which had turned out exactly the way she had expected it to, her office door slowly opened and Jane's head appeared.

She gestured for him to get lost, that she was still mad at him, but he ignored it. Instead, he entered on mock tiptoes, carrying a dinner tray with a cup of tea and a paper bag on it. A delicious smelling paper bag from Maries, to be precise.

"Tis strange," he declaimed in a low voice while he set it down on the table before her, "but true; for truth is always strange; Stranger than fiction."

He winked and then he was already at the door where he turned one last time:

"More poets, less caffeine."

And all Lisbon could do was stare. Artilles had to call her name three times before she answered him.