

Kaleidoscope

Jisbon

Von Jisbon

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 its 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 Hensch," 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.