

Recovered Strength

Jane x Lisbon

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Kapitel 7: RS ~ Showdown

Chapter seven – Showdown

It had been laughing at them for three hours now. That damn bloody smiley face. In this fateful pub's backyard.

With her arms crossed in front of her chest Lisbon was standing slightly apart and watching.

When Cho appeared next to her, she gave him an expectantly look.

"So?"

"The good thing is," the agent stated, "There's no blood, it's just color."

"You're sure of it?"

"As sure as I can be without forensic analysis."

"Fine. And the bad thing?"

"It's difficult to figure out whether it is *in fact* Red John's or not. The painting itself fits the pattern. As far as I can tell, not even Jane seems to know."

Lisbon nodded with understanding and chewed on her lower lip. It was indeed a bad thing, since it made a huge difference if this had been Red John or just a copy-cat.

"Do you think, the chief will be able to help us?" Lisbon wanted to know and both of them gazed at said chief who was currently talking to Jim Alliston – with a bored expression on his face.

Cho snorted, "I doubt that."

"I thought so." Lisbon shook her head and groaned, when Chief Cornell strolled towards them.

"Agent Lisbon," he called, still obvious languid.

"Chief?"

"Is it really necessary, that your people are still investigating this...case?"

"Yes," she deadpanned and watched Cho suppressing his grin.

"You see, Agent," Cornell started again, "This is a small town. It won't be long until your doing will attract people. Hell, it is even a surprise that no one in the pub noticed yet. Besides, I'm not really sure if there actually is a case in the first place. The smearing may look like the stuff of that Red Jack person you told me about, but don't forget, Agent, California is hundreds of miles off. Isn't that a bit unlikely?"

Lisbon withstood the urge of rubbing the back of her nose irritably. She was too tired and not in the mood to tell him, why exactly that question was the *point* of this investigation.

She already regretted calling local police. It didn't make any difference after all. Chief Cornell was hardly enrichment to her team. Especially since there was no forensics far and wide.

Alliston stepped beside her and looked at her with sympathy.

"Don't mind him, he's a jerk," the old man murmured as Cornell turned away to face Jane, Grace and Rigsby, who just quit pub and joined them outside.

"Tell me about it..." she whispered in return, before she asked her team loudly if they had finished.

Grace nodded. "Yeah, we asked around inconspicuously but learned nothing. Most of them are drunk anyway."

"Of course they are. It's Friday night!" It was beyond Cornell why these Californian people he just met would make such a fuss about an ugly painting. Anyway, all he wanted was to be back with his beer, was that so hard to understand?

Lisbon ignored him and glanced at Jane. He also nodded slightly.

"Fine," Lisbon finally said, "we're done for now. We'll be back in the morning though, to look and ask around again by daylight."

"Very well," Cornell grumbled and was about to turn away.

"Chief Cornell," Lisbon called politely but firmly, "Please make sure that no one has access to this backyard until we're back again."

He looked at her like she was totally crazy, but gave in eventually.

"Of course, ma'am, I will tell Sammy. Good night, Agents." And with that he disappeared inside.

Lisbon's team exchanged looks until their boss shoed them to the truck.

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"So, any thoughts?" Lisbon asked on their way back.

It was quiet for a moment, before Grace blurted out, "Why here? How does he know where we are?"

"If it was Red John, it wouldn't have been difficult for him to learn where we are." Jane's voice was calm but obviously strained.

"How do we figure out whether it was him?" Rigsby was on the truck bed with Cho again, and both agents looked through the small back window of driver's cab.

"It seems pretty real, doesn't it?" Grace stated, but Cho remarked, "Yeah, but there was neither real blood nor a body. Wouldn't Red John rather use them to scare or warn us?"

"Probably," Jane answered. "I think Cho's right. Besides, Red John would not come the whole way down here to paint his smiley on a backyard's wall."

"Maybe it was one of his disciples?"

"It's possible, Lisbon, but even then it's hard to imagine that they would use simple color."

"Maybe it's just a coincidence," Rigsby said hopefully.

They fell silent. It was needless to voice that it would be a really huge coincidence. Red John's smiley face here of all places, where people didn't know him, where it was just a smearing on a wall and wouldn't spread fear and terror – except for the few people who knew it.

"Cho, how old do you think is it?" Lisbon wanted to know.

"I guess a couple of days or weeks tops. It was definitely dry but still fresh."

"Someone could have recognized us and played a trick on us," Grace mused.

"But," Rigsby was also pondering, "regardless of Red John or not, how could they be sure that we would find it eventually? It was indeed a coincidence that Boss and Jane stumbled upon it. I mean what were you doing there anyway?"

Lisbon felt herself blushing deeply. She was glad that she was driving and that Grace

was sitting between her and Jane. Until now she had been pretty capable of ignoring that sinful memory, and it wasn't either the right place or time to remember it.

"The question is," Grace interrupted, "What are we doing now? Aside from checking town again tomorrow, I mean. Maybe we should leave."

"No."

Everyone was looking at Lisbon after her firm statement, until she explained.

"There's only one week left, we'll cope with that. Besides, I want to be sure that nothing more has happened here. I want to keep a wary eye on the town for the last few days."

When they arrived at the farm Lisbon turned the engine off and faced her team.

"Listen, guys, from now on everywhere you go to will be in pairs at least. No more going it alone. That applies to everyone." She glanced at Jane just for seconds.

"And take your guns as well as your badges with you. I mean it, guys, I don't want everyone of you going alone to anywhere. I'm classifying this as a Red John related case, so this is an official order, are we clear?"

"Yes, Boss," it echoed three times.

"Jane?" Their looks met briefly, he was tantalizing her.

And then he nodded reluctantly. "Fine."

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Neither Lisbon nor her colleagues were much surprised that also their second research on the following day brought nothing new. No one knew or had seen anything. The smiley on the wall stayed a mystery.

They had no option but to record the scanty information and add it to the CBI Red John files later.

The incident brought even more tension and frustration, but Lisbon somehow managed to lighten her team's mood again by keeping them busy – so that they hardly had time to become grumpy.

The other tension, namely the one between her and Jane, wasn't as easily solved. Added to their former disagreement the unexpected but breathtaking kiss in the backyard had made it worse.

It seemed that even Jane was baffled by it.

And Lisbon? Well, her sleeping habits had been a smidge better since Jane's little

suggestion, but that first success just vanished. Again, she wasn't able to sleep properly as her mind tried to reconcile the whole heartbreaking disappearing-for-six-months-story and the unsettling kiss, which had been initiated by Jane of all people.

It really unnerved her. She wanted to tear her hair constantly.

At the same time, whenever she remembered the kiss and in particular the feeling of Jane's demanding lips on hers, all she wanted to do was to grab him, push him against the next wall and kiss him senseless.

What a dangerous combination.

Especially since she had no idea why he had kissed her in the first place. Had it been just an act in the heat of the moment – like an embrace followed by a breathless 'Love you'?

It better hadn't been! His 'love confession' – if it actually had been one – she could handle. It was no pleasure of course, but she was able to pretend it never had happened.

This kiss, however, was a different case. It was the forbidden fruit. Now, since she knew its sweet taste, she longed for more of it. Much more.

Damned Jane! It was his fault that she had another weakness.

And he was obviously aware of that. His lack of composure lasted for exact one day. Soon afterwards he was throwing this mischievous gaze and a knowing smile at her whenever their eyes met.

It made her both blushing and angry; and it gave her just another reason to avoid him stubbornly.

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It was only Thursday when they decided to visit town and its pub again – since they had played cards a hundred times and ran out of drinks, everyone agreed to Lisbon's suggestion of a change of scene without hesitation.

To Rigsby's regret not even Cho, who had claimed not to like horses some time ago, complained about Jane's request that all of them should actually *ride* to town. Grace on the other hand was very pleased with this proposal and since the thought – about seeing the men riding – alone made Lisbon smirk, it was a done deal.

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To the women's surprise Jane and Cho indeed cut a fine figure on their horses. Cho's advantage was his stoic keeping-cool-mentality which hardly could be shattered – no matter what his mare tried.

Jane's explanation, however, had something to do with a horse being easier ridden than an elephant – and nobody really wanted to question that.

So, poor Rigsby was the only one, who looked pretty unhappy during their trip to town. His horse, named Bunny, really loved the fresh green grass from the wayside and it followed its companions by *strolling* passionately. Needless to say, that it ignored the man on its back completely.

When they arrived at town's pub, Bunny had driven Rigsby to desperation and his colleagues to almost-crying because of suppressed laughter.

While he gladly dismounted Bunny, Lisbon threw a worried glance heavenwards, where the sky was laden with black clouds.

"Looks like we'll get another rainstorm tonight."

"Maybe Alliston could drive us back then," Rigsby implied hopefully.

"I wouldn't worry," Jane teased, "Your Bunny isn't afraid of rain, she can protect you."

Before the agent was able to defend his honor, Grace grabbed his arm und dragged him into the almost empty pub. Cho followed with a grin.

Jane waited for Lisbon, keeping the door open for her, to let her in before him. His hand slipped to the small of her back to guide her, but she jerked away immediately.

They looked at each other and Lisbon couldn't help glancing at his lips. When a blush crept over her cheeks, she quickly turned away and fled inside.

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It was a little while, some drinks and dances later when Lisbon's team met again at their table. They were chatting about random subjects when Grace suddenly got serious and dared to bring up Wainwright's dead for the first time since they had left California.

"Uhm, Boss? Why do you think had Red John chosen to kill Wainwright?"

When Lisbon hesitated, Lisbon interjected, "Maybe it was a warning?"

"Or he wanted to punish us since we tried to trap him," Cho added.

"Isn't it obvious?" Everyone faced Jane who sipped composed from his water.

"Jane..." Lisbon said with a warning voice but he didn't seem to hear it, so he continued.

"Undoubtedly he was one of Red John's disciples."

"Jane!" Lisbon hissed angrily and glared at him while Cho, Rigsby and Grace exchanged looks.

With an uneasy glance to her boss Grace admitted, "That thought had already crossed my mind, too, but how can you be so sure about it, Jane?"

"Think about it. Why would Red John kill him otherwise? He wasn't high enough to be important and not close enough to us to harm us."

"Stop it, Jane!"

His gaze met her glare. A sudden insight flashed in his eyes.

"Why, Lisbon? We have to consider every opportunity." His voice was challenging, his look direct and without a flicker.

"You're condemning him without any solid evidence! You know, they say 'innocent until proven guilty' and not the other way round."

"Lisbon, you're being naïve. This is Red John, we're talking about."

"Oh yeah, how could I forget about *that* fact? How could I forget that it's always about Red John?" Before he could answer her rhetorical questions, she added, "I tell you something, Jane, I don't care what you think – not this time! As long as I don't hold any proof in my own hands, I will believe in Wainwright's innocence."

Grace already regretted bringing up this subject and she, Cho and Rigsby were watching this discussion with worry.

It was insane to push their boss further, but of course Jane did it nevertheless.

"Think about it, Lisbon, why should he take the risk to kill a CBI agent? He had already proven that he was capable of doing so."

Lisbon flinched. She hated to remember the massacre of Bosco and his colleagues.

Jane didn't hesitate and continued though, "Red John planned to entice me so he needed someone near us to have an eye on me – and on you when I disappeared."

She knew he was right. However, just because it was indeed a possibility, it didn't mean that she would give up believing in Wainwright.

"Bite me," she hissed in defeat and stood up. "I'm going home."

"Boss-" Grace was about to follow and accompany her, but Lisbon shook her head firmly.

"No, you stay here! I'm fine."

With an insecure "Okay" the redhead sank back to her chair, while her boss stormed out of the pub – and once again away from Jane.

"Was that really necessary?" Cho frowned at Jane, who chewed absentminded on his lower lip.

"Yes, it was." Lisbon's team looked baffled at her consultant as he suddenly jumped to his feet, grabbed his jacket and also disappeared outside.

"I've a really bad feeling," Rigsby stated.

"You're just hungry."

"Not funny, Cho!"

"Jeez, boys!" Grace rolled her eyes, "Come on, I buy a round. This is going to be a long night."

"Ask for a carrot, too, maybe it motivates Bunny for our way back home." When the read head chuckled because of his words, Cho smirked slightly.

Rigsby tried to stare at them with an angry expression, but even he couldn't hide a small smile. "You two are enjoying this way too much, you know that?"

xxx

Lisbon wished she could goad her horse, but the path in front of her was pitch dark and huge rain drops whipped against her face so that she could barely see anything. Great, the heavy rainstorm had already started. Just what she needed.

"Lisbon!"

Correction; *that* was the last thing she needed right now.

She had just left town behind when Jane appeared next to her side, a bit out of breath. With satisfaction she noticed that he wasn't sitting as graceful as earlier on his horse.

"What do you want?" she asked coldly, not averting her gaze from the muddy trail.

"Well...we aren't allowed to go out alone, remember? That includes you, too."

"Seriously, bite me! As if you would be able to protect me."

"I would if I have to."

"Yeah right."

"You should have more trust in me, Lisbon."

"Trust? In you? Don't make me laugh!" She wasn't in laughing mood after all. Angrily she tightened her grip around the reins. Her mare snorted nervously.

"Oh well, here we have once again two friends recognizing the boundaries of their relationship."

"Really, Jane, quoting yourself? You don't expect me to do a trust fall again, do you?"

"No...I don't think a trust fall will do it this time."

Her grumble got lost in the sudden thunder. When the rain became much heavier Lisbon had to protect her eyes with her arm.

Choosing now of all times to ride back obviously had been a stupid idea. On the other hand it was easier to avoid Jane during this storm.

"Lisbon..." Jane whined. Okay, she was wrong again.

"We need to talk."

Lisbon glanced at him with disbelief. "Now? Are you crazy?"

"Probably."

"It can wait!"

"No, Lisbon, because I won't let you escape me any longer."

The agent tore her damp hair and huffed in frustration. "Why?"

"Otherwise you'll explode rather sooner than later with much more caused damage. You have to blow off your steam, to let go your exasperation. You'll feel better afterwards."

"I'm not exasperated!"

"Well, you should be."

"Excuse me?"

"You heard me. Just let it out."

"And what exactly would 'it' be?"

"You could probably start with why you stubbornly believe in Wainwright's innocence. Okay, it's obvious that he reminded you of your brothers, so that brings your motherly instinct into the arena. But what's with your inner cop? Doesn't she have anything to say in this case?"

"How do you know...?" She was speechless.

"Come on, it wasn't hard to tell. You liked him. That's why you can't consider him as a suspect."

"He isn't a suspect!"

"See?"

It was too easy. They were just simple words but they cut in deeply.

Yes, she had liked Wainwright. Not in a romantic but sisterly way.

He had been a nice guy, sweet sometimes, almost gawky now and then. When Jane had been 'missing', Wainwright had cared. Sometimes, when she had been the last one in the office, alone with the sorrows for her consultant, he had been there, had talked to her (just small talk but still), even brought her a cup of coffee from time to time (when no one was there watching). She had assumed that he had felt guilty (even if she had never blamed him) and that he had been worried about her.

The gestures had been small but she had been thankful for them nevertheless.

So no, she didn't consider him as a suspect, simply because she didn't want to. Not without proof anyway.

However, it hurt that Jane implied her to be an unprofessional cop.

She bit her lip.

"I told you, it's because there's no evidence," she murmured contritely.

"Meh, evidence. Whatever comfort he might have given to you, it was just a piece of Red John's plan. You're credulous, Lisbon, you should learn not to trust everybody, who's nice to you."

"Well, that's true!" she snarled, "That's why I don't trust you."

"Oh, but you can do that. I told you can trust me, Lisbon."

"Yeah, right! That worked well with your stupid plan you hadn't told me about!"

He knew he was getting to her. It wasn't funny at all but it had to be done. And now of all times was his best chance, he could tell.

He knew she was way too furious and hurt by now to back down. So he wound up for a final blow.

"If you had trusted me completely, my dear, there wouldn't have been any reason to

worry in the first place. You should have settled back, relaxed and waited for me to solve the Red John case."

Lisbon jerked around and hissed with fury, "What?!"

And then it happened. Since it was very aware of the rider's mood Lisbon's horse had been uneasy and nervous since they had started their way back. Her sharp move mixed with a sudden thunder frightened it tremendously and made it jump – literally! The mare lunged forward and Lisbon, just as startled, fell off her horse with a surprised yell.

With a thud she impacted on the path and moaned painfully, while the mare bucked a few times but stopped eventually, trembling all over the body.

"Lisbon! You're okay?" Immediately Jane dismounted from his own horse and kneeled down beside her.

She grimaced with pain when she sat up and wiped her wet bangs out of her face.

"I'm fine," she muttered as her gaze met his honestly concerned eyes.

"I guess that doesn't count as a trust fall, huh?" he tried to joke lamely and earned a glare.

Lisbon slapped his helping hand away and stood up by herself. Wordlessly she knocked off some soaked sand from her butt and started to walk towards her horse.

"I'm sorry, Lisbon, I didn't mean that to happen," he called after her – he had to call against the rainy storm – and after grabbing his reins he followed her quickly.

"Of course not." Her voice was dripping with sarcasm, though it became softer and warm when she reached her mare and whispered soothing words. The animal calmed down a bit and pressed its head against her palms. Lisbon smiled briefly and caught the reins.

By foot she continued the way back.

"Lisbon," breathlessly and also by foot Jane caught up.

"Shut up, Jane. Just...stop, okay?!"

"I can't...we have to move on, past that, Lisbon."

"Move on?" Anger, no, blind fury burned through her body. All the frustration, sadness and hurt became overwhelming all of a sudden and exploded in fiery rage. "Move on? We can't move on, Jane! Can't you see that we're stuck? No matter what we do, nothing will ever change! Despite your great plan we failed again. Face it, Jane, we can't catch Red John and we won't move on!"

"No...no! Lisbon, you must not think that way. Otherwise he will destroy you...us!"

"He already *did!*"

The storm was blowing and howling around them, but they suddenly lapsed into heavy silence.

For a while they walked next to each other without a single word exchanged until Lisbon started again.

"Look, Jane, we're miles away from Sacramento. We were supposed to be out of Red John's fire, but instead of that and instead of us hunting him, he's still hunting us! We found a smiley face, here of all places! There's nothing left for us to do. Whatever we try he will see through it either way. Just like he did before." Naturally she wasn't that pessimistic, but it was her frustration speaking now.

"You honestly don't believe that. We can do it."

"Yeah right, so, then, what now?"

"We'll go on, move on, we'll catch him, Lisbon. Together."

"Oh yeah, like what?" Okay, she was officially insane now for bringing that up, but too upset to care anymore.

He looked a bit startled as he answered, "As a team, as partners, as friends!"

"Friends? So why did you kiss me then?" she blurted out.

"Because I wanted to!" It had been unintentional, she could tell by his caught expression. Lisbon opened her mouth but didn't know what to say.

"Anyway," Jane shook his head to clear his mind and to come back to the point, "I need you to have faith in me, Lisbon. We can do it."

"Oh, that's rich! You expect me to trust you, but it doesn't work the other way round! Otherwise you would have told me about that silly plan of yours."

"I told you before that I trust you! With my life, Lisbon! However, that hadn't anything to do with my plan. I couldn't tell you about it, because I had to be sure that you were safe. I needed to protect you, from Red John, his disciples and myself."

"That's bullshit..." Her voice broke and she wasn't able to identify the flooding water on her cheeks as rain or tears anymore. Hoarsely she continued, "I didn't need your protection, Jane. All I wanted was to know that you were okay, that you were alive! You scared me to death! I thought I lost you!"

They were standing still now, closely together, just like their uneasy horses.

Jane swallowed hard. Only now he could see how heartbroken she really had been – and still was.

"No...You will never lose me, Lisbon." Carefully he put his free hand on her wet cheek.

Lisbon closed her eyes as if his touch would cause her physical pain, and yet she allowed it.

"You know, that isn't true. Someday I will lose you, because of him," she whispered so that he nearly missed it.

Jane stayed silent. There barely was anything he could say against it, except, "I'm sorry...I'm sorry I always cause you so much pain, Lisbon."

His hand was in the back of her neck now and he pulled her closer to press his lips to her forehead.

"I'm so sorry! I never meant to hurt you in the first place but if I have to accept this to keep you safe I must do it. I can't let you become his new target. Red John already made it clear, that he wants your death. I can't lose you to him. I can't lose *another* woman to him." He almost pleaded now.

Carefully Lisbon pulled away.

"You just said that he already targets me, so it's either way too late," she replied softly when she started walking again. "I *want* to be at your side, Jane, no matter what. I don't know if I'm strong enough now, but I will be when the time comes, I promise."

Driven on by their hurrying horses they neared the old farm house quickly now, when Jane entwined his fingers with hers.

"Believe me, Lisbon, you are indeed strong enough, even now. I meant it when I said I trust you with my life – not only because you're great with guns."

A small smile ghosted over her lips.

"I've faith in your strength, Lisbon. Even though the thought of losing you is killing me – and I'm going to do everything necessary to prevent that scenario – I want you by my side, because I know you're strong enough to handle it."

"Besides, you are lost without me." Her sulky words made it his turn to smile.

"Indeed, my dear."

He became serious all over again. "I *do* need you, Lisbon. During past six months I learned, that you're my weak point. I don't say I'm weaker without out you, but I *am* stronger with you."

Jane hesitated only a few seconds until he leaned down to her ear and whispered, "And I missed you badly."

Despite the coldness of rain and wind Lisbon felt a burning red spreading over her face.

Hasty she let go of his hand and tramped past him.

"For your information, I didn't miss you at all!"

It was an insult for every ever spoken lie. And of course he knew that. He knew that she knew that he knew.

And she knew without hearing that he chuckled when he followed her towards the stable.

TBC