

A Velvet Paw's Cheeky Grasp

Jane x Lisbon

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Warning: Lime

December 9 – Sacramento in California, Art Crimes Unit of the CBI

"Gentlemen, I don't need to tell you that this is a political nightmare!"

CBI Director Bertram was not amused. In fact, he was furious. And it didn't help that he was facing Senior Special Agent in Charge Kimball Cho and his consultant Patrick Jane, as both of them were showing a completely unfazed expression. Cho, with his arms crossed in front of his chest, was being as stoic as ever, whereas Jane was wearing a lazy smile and yawning occasionally.

"You just did," Cho stated and Jane smirked, being proudly aware that his boss was taking revenge for getting yelled at in his own office.

"Excuse me?" Bertram, interrupted in his rant, looked almost comically confused.

"You just told us that this is a political nightmare," Jane jumped in helpfully.

They witnessed how the color of Bertram's face turned into a deep angry tomato red. "Is this all a joke for you people?" he scolded. "The Blue Orchid is worth several million dollars and it has been stolen right under our noses. This crook has been fooling the Bureau for years and we're no step closer to catching him."

"Or her."

*Bertram ignored Jane apart from sending him a glare and went on, "I'm deadly serious, Agent Cho! I need results and quickly! Catch the thief or at least bring back that damn diamond, give me **anything** that justifies this unit's right to exist. Or else I'll be forced to think about some restructuring measures!"*

With that he stormed out of the office, leaving Jane no chance to point out that ACU had the highest rate of closure in this city.

"Such a grouch," he sighed and Cho rolled his eyes, replying, "Yeah. Now come on."

They went into the bullpen where Agents Wayne Rigsby and Grace van Pelt looked at them expectantly.

"What did he say? He sounded pretty pissed," Rigsby wondered.

"That's because he is indeed very pissed."

"Not being professional, that's what he is," Cho corrected his consultant and stepped in front of the whiteboard. "Okay, people, let's see what we have so far. Van Pelt?"

*"Well, after Jane's suggestion I dug a bit deeper. And ... all indications are that **she** is actually back."*

"Wait, we already know who stole the diamond?" Rigsby blinked in surprise. "Who is she?"

Cho and Grace looked at Jane, who smiled and paused for effect before he answered with a cryptic voice.

"La Patte de Velours."

Rigsby furrowed his brows. "Patte what?"

"The Velvet Paw," Grace translated. "It's French. According to Interpol she'd been active in Paris for a while, and that's where she got her nickname."

"A misleading nickname if I've ever heard one, because this paw has some claws! I've always pictured her as a panther rather than a kitty cat."

Cho rolled his eyes at Jane again, but before he could intervene, Rigsby said, "Hey, I've heard about the Velvet Paw! It's the name of a clever and very careful art thief who has never been caught despite being responsible for several multi-million dollar thefts. However, as far as I know the gender has never been confirmed. How do you know that it's a woman?"

Finally stepping in, Cho explained, "The last time we heard from her was right before you joined our team, Rigsby, but we actually started working her case long before that. We collected every single piece of information and followed every hint we could find, as small or unimportant as it might have seemed. No other unit has ever come as close as ours to catch her. And," he glanced at Jane, "she is also the reason why Jane transferred from SCU to ACU in the first place."

"Really, why?" Rigsby turned to the consultant and even Grace pricked up her ears.

"Doesn't matter." Jane waved his hand and continued, "The point is, I know more about her than anybody else since I've studied her for years. I could name you every single piece of art she most likely has taken. She never showed her face, but I've memorized her silhouette in detail. I know how she moves, how she walks and runs. And I know what her voice sounds like." 'Even the way she smells is burned into my memory,' but he didn't dare to say that out loud.

"Wow, that doesn't sound obsessive-Ouch, what?!" Rigsby blinked at Grace who had boxed him in the arm mere seconds ago. Before she could give him a warning look though, he stopped short in realization. "Wait, you had a chat with her?"

"I wouldn't exactly call it a chat..."

*"As I said," Cho's look was almost accusatory. "Last time we were **really** close."
"Just not close enough." Grace sighed and when she added an afterthought, she nearly did it in awe. "We have so much on her and yet we always fail to get her. I wonder how she does that."*

"Isn't it obvious? There's a mole inside the CBI who is feeding her just the right amount of information." For the first time there was a hint of anger in Jane's voice. "But we've also never succeed in figuring that one out. No matter how hard we try and how close we play the cards to our chest."

He turned away abruptly and walked towards one of the windows to stare outside, feeling his colleagues' eyes on his back. After a moment of silence the agents continued theorizing, but he hardly listened anymore. He had already mulled over every theory twice anyway.

Taking a deep breath, he felt the anger fading and being replaced by a familiar thrill of anticipation and excitement. Perhaps he started imagining things (or he went nuts after all), but he actually felt something similar like a prevision. Somehow he was sure that he would see her again and soon.

And this time he would get her no matter the cost.

December 24 – An old jazz bar in Sacramento

It's Christmas Eve. The music is low and soothing, but not as soothing as his Scotch. Absentmindedly Patrick Jane twirls the glass between his fingers, watching how the candlelight dances through the amber-colored liquid. He isn't necessarily depressed, but he certainly isn't happy either. It's been two weeks since they learned about the Paw's involvement in the recent diamond heist and yet they are none the wiser. It's frustrating, really. There should have been a development by now, *any news*, but there isn't. Nothing he's expected, and now his mind is filled with disappointment and doubt.

He picks up the glass and empties it in one swig. The alcohol is still burning in his throat when he signals the bartender again. It's an elder man with bright eyes and an old-fashioned suit, who doesn't ask many questions and fits the outdated ambience like the last piece of a vintage puzzle. It seems as if he barely acknowledges his guest, giving only a brief nod as he refills, but there's a glint in the old eyes that catches Jane's attention. He furrows his brows, confused by getting pulled out of his musing so unexpectedly and subtly.

The bartender has already turned away, but Jane still wonders and when he lifts his glass again, there is a sudden shift of tension in the atmosphere, freezing his

movement. The music is too loud all of a sudden and he hears his own heartbeat in his ears. Was it dimly lit before, the room now appears to brighten as if being stroked by sunrise, while the dusty air is interwoven with the crisp fragrance of winter.

He senses her the second she enters the bar – and when he turns his head towards the entrance, the glass still raised in front of him, he instantly knows who she is.

Her appearance is elegant and enticing. Her stature is rather small and slim but attractively feminine, whereas her posture tells a story about confidence and strength. The deep red dress, while surely being long enough, hugs her curves tightly in all the right places, turning some and not only gentlemen's heads in appreciation. White, velvet gloves add a touch of classic to her outfit. The color of her lips matches the dress and draws a little, playful smile, which would attract all the attention if it weren't for the brilliant shining emerald green eyes, framed by ebony waves of silky hair.

She seems oblivious to the awareness around her person and the spell that lies upon them all is eventually broken as soon as she starts moving through the crowd. Jane's look, however, is fastened on her figure, and even though she doesn't meet his gaze once, he knows she's noticed him too.

His heart beats fast and he feels heat welling up in his veins. He never saw her face, but he could paint a picture of her silhouette with all its details. He knows how she moves, walks and runs, and how her muscles flex beneath camouflaging fabric. Even her voice has he heard before, if only once.

Perhaps he's just about to hear it again, he hopes, as she constantly weaves her way through the people towards the bar – and towards him.

Tension sinks into every fiber of his body and he actually holds his breath when she reaches the empty stool right beside him, climbing it with a flourish.

"Staring not a very polite thing to do, Mr. Jane," she chides gently, her voice warm and soft, familiar. Jane releases his breath and along with it he loses all the strain, the frustration from the past weeks and his mind a load made of year-long suspense and wondering.

She finally turns towards him and he catches a whiff of her scent, fresh with orange and cinnamon, almost Christmassy, just like he remembers it. Then her eyes meet his and for safety reasons he considers it advisable to put his Scotch down on the wooden surface of the counter.

Despite her words he finds himself unable to stop staring. Her face is the last missing piece of her profile he has been illustrating in his memory palace – and he'll be damned if he ever forgets it.

"You know, I could arrest you right here and right now," he eventually manages to say. She smirks. "For what? Sitting on a barstool and ordering a martini?" After doing just that, she addresses Jane again. "Besides, aren't you just a consultant with the CBI? I seriously doubt you're permitted to make any arrests. And even if you were," she pauses and leans a bit closer, lowering her voice to a conspiratorial whisper. "We both know now that arresting me is the last thing you have in mind right now."

For a moment they're holding eye contact, both for daring the other and for the

simple reason that they couldn't stop even if they wanted to. She's close enough for Jane to taste her smell on his tongue and his mouth goes dry. Excitement over finally facing the thief he's been trying to catch for half a decade mixes with an unexpected thrill of pleasure and a completely different kind of excitement. It's confusing and terrifying.

Jane takes a deep, calming breath and straightens, bringing a bit of distance between them. Feeling so vulnerable and transparent is very unusual for him and he desperately needs his composure back. When she mirrors his movement, leaning back, and reaches for her martini, his trademark smile is firmly back in its place.

"So, if I don't want to arrest you, what do I want instead?"

She takes a sip while throwing a thoughtful glance at him. "Answers," she says with a solemn expression. His own hardens slightly, but before he can reply anything, she continues.

"There are rules for tonight, Mr. Jane. Follow them and we can talk. If you don't, I'll be gone in the blink of an eye – and for good."

He raises his brow, but gestures her to go on.

"No tricks. No contact to your CBI friends or any other friend for that matter. No questions which require concrete information about my business. When I decline to answer, you have to accept that. Everything else stays between us – and after tonight I'm going to refuse admitting that I've ever met you or even talked to you. You okay with that?"

Jane shrugs nonchalantly and says, "Works for me," while his mind is racing a mile a minute.

"And we're not doing this here. I have a place just down the block where we can go." Now his brows jump to his hairline. "Why, isn't that an interesting development."

She actually blushes slightly and glares at him over the rim of her martini glass. "Get your head out of the gutter, there will be no funny stuff!"

He's sneering as it's his turn to lean in. "Too bad," he whispers in her ear and when she sucks in a sharp breath, he simply clinks his glass to hers. "Cheers!"

As soon as she realizes that he's been teasing her, she blushes even more and with an annoyed, "Oh, shut up!" she shoves her elbow into his side.

Chuckling he drains his drink again and waits for her to do the same. She, however, gives him a defiant look and demonstratively takes one slow sip of her martini after another.

"I see, this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship," Jane states dryly.

But when she laughs quietly, a sound so sweet like music in his ears, there is warmth spreading from his belly to every cell in his body – leaving him out of breath and terrified once again.

xxx

Outside he helps her into her coat, gentleman that he is. After she turns around, she stands right in front of him, closely, looking up with sparkling green eyes. They are distracting, so that he notices her delicate fingers not until they're already slipped inside his jacket.

"Before we go..." she murmurs, her palms bringing heat he's able to feel through his clothes.

"What?" he all but gasps, while her hands trail along his chest.

"I'm keeping *this* for the time being."

He blinks in confusion and then all he can do is watching how his cellphone disappears into her purse.

"Hey!"

Grinning she pats his vest and steps back to actually start walking.

"You know, I'm disappointed," he says with a pout as he follows her.

"How so?"

"A professional thief like you – I shouldn't perceive anything when you pick my pockets."

She falls into step beside him and links her arm through his, smiling sweetly. "You feel only what I want you to feel, Mr. Jane."

The implication isn't lost on him and something deep inside him, something long forgotten, stirs and makes him shiver. He manages to keep his mask in place, but it takes more willpower than he cares to admit. To get on safer territory he changes the subject.

"So, I've always wondered, that stunt in Paris two years ago ... how did you do it?"

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"Here we are."

"What is this place?" he wants to know, immediately hooked, and walks past her. He's standing in an attic flat with wooden adornments, large windows, and ancient furnishings, all of them lit by a small, shiny Christmas tree and a fireplace with glass doors. There's a cozy old wing chair next to a commode with a record player and a historic globe on it. In the background stand bookshelves to the rafters and the creaking floorboards are covered in rag rugs.

"Don't bother, nothing in here can be connected to me," she diverts and Jane notices how she takes off her coat, throwing it on the chair, but not the gloves. He doesn't say anything, but strolls towards the commode instead.

"Does it work?" Nodding to the record player he reaches for some dusty covers, and when she just shrugs, he pushes Elvis and The Beatles aside to pick up good old Frankie Boy.

Soon Sinatra's voice fills the air and Jane smiles satisfied, before he turns around.

He finds her sitting on the armrest and watching him. She looks beautiful in the fiery glow, like a femme fatale from a film noir, and it costs him his entire strength not to ogle her openly.

Casually he takes one step after another, approaching her, until he comes to a halt where her tiptoes are touching the floor. Capturing one small, velvet hand in his, he gently pulls her to her feet.

"I'm not going to dance with you." She frowns at him with fire in her eyes, but then, perhaps it's just a reflection. There's hardly any air between them, but neither the hunter nor the hunted draws away.

"Maybe not," he says, while his free hand takes a feathery walk along her side to sneak around her waist. "But you're going to tell me why we are here."

"And here I thought you were the one with the good memory." She's teasing him, her eyes definitively sparkling now. "At least that's what I've heard. I already told you why we're here, remember?"

A faint smile on his lips and the tightening of his grasp make her place her own free hand on his chest. Whether to stop him or to brace herself against her weak knees, she doesn't know.

"Come on, *little Paw*, we both know that you won't give me anything useful. So, why have you brought me here?"

"Don't call me *little*!" Hissing she stiffens in his hold and pushes him backwards, but since he wouldn't dream of letting her go, he pulls her with him and they end up closer than before. "Besides, it's not that you've had anything better to do."

"Oh?" Raising his brows, he entwines his fingers with hers, her hand still his hostage. Despite the glove he can feel her pulse fast and erratic beneath her skin.

"You were sitting alone in a bar on Christmas Eve. It was a safe bet." Stunning green eyes are daring him, burning him, accompanied by warm and rosy cheeks, and her breath that's martini-sweet and hot against his lips.

He inhales deeply and almost loses his sanity.

"Fine." His voice is raspy and hoarse, but he is too enwrapped to try for control. "I'll agree if you tell me the truth." He lets his gaze flicker to her mouth and then his heart skips a beat as her pupils dilate with ardor.

"A wise man once said," she whispers in reply. "Keep your friends close but your enemies closer."

"Ah, wise words indeed."

Her expression becomes serious, but her chest moves unevenly against his, distracting him for a second – because she feels so soft and strong, and wonderful.

"For so long," she confesses and he can tell without doubt that she's being honest. "I've been watching you from afar. At first, knowing about you was a necessary precaution, but somewhere along the way I started desiring to *know* you." She merely looks at him in wonder, her fingertips trailing upwards, and then she's tracing his cheekbone. "Until watching just wasn't enough anymore."

Jane swallows and when she tilts her head unconsciously, his lips ghost over hers.

"It's been driving me crazy not know you, too," is all he can say, which is also the truth.

Her pretty face suddenly is all about smiles, dimples and flushed cheeks, and Jane simply can't restrain himself any longer. With a heavy gasp he presses his mouth to hers, leaving both of them breathless and dizzy with longing.

After a decade of being desperate and lonely, her lips feel like home, and the intensity of his emotions pull the rug out from under his feet. He kisses her with hunger, his body feeling hot with desire, and she answers with a passion that's both pure and sinful.

His fingers clutch the smooth fabric of her dress and she arches against him.

"If you rip that dress, I will-humpf!" He gives her no time to finish her panted words – because who is she that she denies him those perfect full and red lips – and kisses her again. Over and over again.

Until she moans sensually and nearly swoons over his wicked teasing.

His talented tongue is doing even more dangerous things to her mouth while she guides him towards a hidden niche with a bed. They almost stumble over their feet on the way, because being distracted by someone pulling off someone else's clothes does this to a person, but eventually they make it there safely. More or less. Their garments certainly aren't so lucky. Piece after piece gets lost on the floor until there's nothing left but his black shorts and her white gloves.

Even with his mind fogged with lust he needs to pause for a moment to fully appreciate it. She is lying before him, nude and sexy, her eyes dark but glowing impishly, like the fairest piece of art she could possibly steal.

As a hint of insecurity sneaks into his expression, even though he tries to hide it, her look softens and she reaches for his hand.

"Come here," she invites, directing him on top of her. "I promise to be gentle."

And with this sweet mocking in his ears he starts kissing her again, getting rid of the remaining fabrics and forgetting any coherent train of thoughts or any idea about how he should ever be able to function without her again.

xxx

"Jane?" The word is spoken quietly and with a tender yet deep satisfaction. He's just *Jane* now. The *Mr.* went out of the window when he joined their trembling bodies for the very first time.

He hums in acknowledgement and keeps stroking lazily over her naked shoulder since she's draped across him.

"It might look that way, but I really didn't intend for us to end up in bed together."

"So you had a different place in mind then?"

"What-no!" She slaps him, blushing prettily, and he laughs.

"No, I'm serious. I've learned so much about you that it feels like I've known you for ages. Yet it wasn't enough. I wanted to meet you in person – which is probably the

silliest idea, considering my profession and our history."

"Probably," he agrees and earns himself a pout. Smirking he places a peck on her nose to make everything better. Successfully so, given that she can't suppress a chuckle.

"While we're on it," he continues lightly as on an afterthought. "It is the perfect opportunity to actually talk about our history." Immediately he realizes that it's been the wrong thing to say, that she's picked up his exact thought. She's grown stiff in his embrace and when she answers, her voice is hard and cold.

"No."

"Come on," he urges, all smiles and facades forgotten. "You know that I need-"

"No!" Lifting her head from his chest she glowers at him in anger. "I told you the rules. I'm not going to talk about *that*."

"Forget about the rules!" As his own anger and frustration are breaking through, he pushes himself upwards, forcing her to move off him. (He's too irritated to realize how he promptly misses her closeness.) "You said it yourself, I'm here for answers!" Without really noticing it, snapping, he grabs her wrist. "And I'm not going to let you go before I get any!"

She has him overpowered and immobilized within seconds. From on top of him she pins him down with unexpected strength, holding his hands above his head and pressing one forearm against his throat.

"You don't get to threaten me, Jane," she declares, low and dangerous, while he gasps with surprise.

"I should have known that this is your only reason to be here. Silly me." Her words are bitter, betraying how much he's hurt her, but he only glares at her, blind with rage, and wriggles beneath her slim figure to get free. Without much success. (Maybe he's not really trying.)

She lets him fight, both with his gaze and physically, but eventually, when minute after minute has ticked away, he starts calming down.

"Please," he whispers, almost broken now. "Whatever it is that you saw or heard ... I need to know! You are the only lead I have left to find the murderer of my wife and daughter."

She closes her eyes as if being in pain and loosens her grip. "I can't", she replies barely audible and for the first time he finds true fear in her posture. "It's not that I don't want to help you, I can't. Not yet. There's too much at stake." She opens her honest eyes and they seem to be begging him to understand. "It's too dangerous. Leave it alone for now, please, Jane."

He is looking at her for a long time, and all the while no word is being spoken. There's just Frank Sinatra singing about love and femmes fatales in the background.

In the end, however, Jane exhales slowly and agrees, "For now."

She relaxes visibly and releases him, bracing herself on his chest, emotionally exhausted.

"It's not."

"Hum?" She blinks tiredly.

He's almost shy, as he explains, "It's not the only reason why I'm here." And with that a smile blossoms on her lips whereas goose bumps dance over her skin, caused by his

warm hands on her hips.

"Good," she says emphatically, and while still straddling him, she moves a bit to find a more comfortable position.

"Uhm..."

"What?" She glances down at him in concern after he's uttered a pressed moan.

"Er... you know, this," he points at her and her current resting place (himself). "This is actually kind of... enticing."

"Oh? *-Oh!*" Her face reddens, but it also turns mischievous. "Is that so?" Her body language becomes feline and seductive.

"Yeah, well, I don't have attractive women sitting on me every day."

"You better don't." She bents down, her perfect breasts brushing his chest in the process. "Who else would try and catch me then?"

Their lips meet for a new dance and the air around them begins to hum with vibrating heat. His hands wander upwards along her spine until they teasingly slip to her sides, his thumbs caressing the sensitive skin right below her curves. She shudders on top of him, which he feels in every single fiber himself.

When they're both in need for air, they break apart, gasping, before she starts leaving kisses along his jaw line down to his neck. He answers with pleasurable touching of his own, finally bringing his sneaky fingers to her rosy peaks. First he brushes them playfully, then he rolls them gently between his fingertips, causing her to groan fervidly against his collar bone and to press herself yearningly against the central part of his body.

It's his turn to moan at the intimate contact, but he leaves the obviously needed control to her this time. There's desperation in her frantic movements, which in combination with their shared lust is like pouring fuel into a fire. It's the mix of emotions that is coursing through his veins as well.

They take their time to explore each other, to exchange touches and kisses, although not too much time passes, since the sensual pleasure pools quickly and rises until it's almost impossible to bear any longer. The air is filled with soft gasping and helpless moans, and when in the end she lowers herself to him, his hands never leave her, caressing, bracing and giving her comfort.

Her lips find his once more, kissing him with all her need, while she brings her arms tightly around his shoulders. With his returning the embrace she begins a gentle rocking of her hips against him, which soon becomes faster and demanding and even more desperate. He loses himself in her, the mind blissfully empty, and as soon as she reaches her climax with a small erotic cry, he follows her there mere seconds later.

They sink into the pillows together, skin on skin, their limbs tangled, heavy and shivering with delightful exhaustion. And sleep, no surprise there, comes over them like a warm, soothing blanket, while the tunes of *Somethin' Stupid* accompany them into a dreamless slumber.

xxx

It's very early in the morning when Jane awakes due to a sudden loss of warmth. He needs a moment to focus in the dim light, but then he witnesses how his little thief scurries around, picking up some red lace out of a pile of clothing. Smirking he leans back and enjoys the show, and his grin becomes even brighter as she rummages through her purse, cursing under her breath.

"Looking for this?" he asks and raises his fists. She flinches and spins round, fueling his amusement by staring at him with wide eyes. He opens his hand slowly and on his palm he reveals the *Blue Orchid*.

"When did you...? How did you know-?" she stammers, completely caught off guard.

"I saw it in your purse when you took my phone." He pillows his head on one arm and lets the soft light dance over the precious gem. "Care to explain what it was doing there?"

Ignoring his question she plants herself in front of him, hands on her hips, still only being clad in her undergarments. "You picked my pocket!"

Chuckling he nods. "Right before I pulled you off that chair. The only question left now is: Why did you have it on you to begin with? You see, I have a theory. You want to hear it? Great." He sits up while she keeps glaring at him with her chest heaving and lowering unevenly, and gorgeously flushed cheeks. (There's no point in denying that he truly wants her again.)

"There is no way that a thief so successful, professional and careful like you would carry around something so valuable, especially while intending to meet the foe. A foe you're fairly well informed about. It was to be expected that I would come across it sooner or later.

"But then, why heisting it in the first place? The answer to that is simple. You've never planned on keeping it. The only reason why you took it was to give it back eventually. To give it back, but not to get caught in the process, hence the whosever-it-is apartment and the gloves. You didn't touch anything with the bare talented fingers of yours, well," he laughs quietly. "Except for me of course."

She tries to conceal it, but the smile sneaks onto her lips nevertheless. "And?"

"And that leaves me with only one conclusion. It's an open secret that my boss is all about success. You're so sure of yourself that you've feared we could get removed from your case if we belied the expectations. So you've basically handed the success to us on a silver platter. Now, you don't expect me to say *thank you*, do you?"

She bents down, obviously amused now too, supporting her weight with the hands on the mattress.

"Why would I want to protect you?" she teases and allows him to kiss her sweetly on the lips.

"For my wits, charm and the good looks?"

She snorts. "Nah, my life would be so much easier without you."

"But also not nearly as much fun."

With a smirk she joins their mouths together again, before she breathes against his

lips regretfully, "I have to go."

Not quite ready to let her go yet, he presses a few more heated kisses on her lips and the corner of her mouth, enjoying how one of her hand is buried in his hair and makes him tremble.

"One day," he whispers when they finally part. "I'm going to catch you."

The promise coaxes her to smile softly and with a last fond caress along his cheek, she turns away.

"I'm looking forward to it."

December 25 – In the early hours somewhere in Sacramento

She walks through the streets, feeling light and oh so satisfied. Smiling slightly she closes her eyes, breathing in the cool air and enjoying the peaceful quiet of Christmas morning.

A sudden noise makes her jump and she spins around with her heart racing wildly. A silhouette moves into the lamplight and stops in front of her, causing her to release some air in relief.

"Jesus Christ, you scared the hell out of me."

He furrows his eyebrows and scrutinizes her. "You should be more careful."

"I'm careful enough," she argues.

"No, you're taking unnecessary risks." He sounds reproachful, but she knows that he's concerned. Yet she can't help being a little defensive as she replies.

"What, you mean Jane? I know what I'm doing."

"You sure? You shouldn't have shown him your face. I told you about his flawless memory."

"Well, I had to do something, and you damn well know it." She throws him a glare and crosses her arms in front of her chest. "I don't regret it." Raising her chin she holds his gaze until he eventually sighs and resigns.

"Fine. Just be careful, okay?"

Her look softens and she places one palm against his cheek. "I promise." Standing up on tiptoes, she replaces her hand with a chaste peck and adds, "See you later?"

He nods simply, allowing the short moment of friendly intimacy, before they part.

"Don't get your fingers burned," he warns once more while disappearing back into the shadows.

"Merry Christmas to you too, Cho." She tries for nonchalance, but in private she wonders whether it is too late already. Remembering Jane's eyes – tender, mischievous and sexy – the fervent passion returns to her veins, filling her stomach with liquid fire anew.

Maybe she's burned her velvet paws by now, but when she continues her way, she still can't bring herself to regret it.

Even if the burning is irrevocable, wild and extremely addictive.

The End