

Cursed

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Rating: R / P16

Contents: In certain times of the year, nothing is as it seems...

Disclaimer: Nothing mine; this absolutely fabulous show belongs to Bruno Heller and his team :)

A/N: I started this story in April 2009, when my favorite radio station played Michael Jackson's "Thriller" quite often (although it was still before his death, as we all know). I don't know why, but because of this, I had the idea for the following story. So - don't blame me! ;) (And don't blame me that it sounds how the promo for this week's episode looked. I nearly fell off my chair when I saw it a few days ago *grr*)

Prologue

No one would invade his home. His kingdom. No one was allowed to disturb the peace of this building. It was his! Only his! How dared those entities to break into his home and dishonor it? They weren't worth those honorable grounds and walls!

He needed to banish them from his land, and his mansion. It was his holy calling - and he was going to follow it. Come what may...

"Carla? Are you there?"

"Sure, right behind you." She giggled when he jumped and turned around, looking at her reproachfully.

"You scared me!" he whined and put his hands on his hips.

"Oh, poor Danny is scared. Help my memory - who wanted to spend the weekend in this old, haunted mansion?"

"I thought they were joking! I mean, come on... I had no idea that it would be such a ramshackle building."

"I doubt...", Carla started, but was interrupted by some horrible laughter. "What was that?" she whispered and looked around.

"A puck?" She rolled her eyes at her boyfriend.

"Great, Dan. Now we're back to sarcasm?"

"I was only naming the obvious facts."

"You jumped," she remarked and stuck out her tongue at him.

"I got it, thank you. Do you also want me to tell you that it was a bad idea to come here while we're not allowed to stay in this officially closed building?"

"Nah, that would be too easy."

Again, the laughter filled the old building, and the two young people now looked frightened.

"Let's leave, Dan," the red-haired woman said to her boyfriend and began to walk downstairs into the big hall.

A few seconds later the earlier laughter finally was answered - by a bloodcurdling scream Carla gave when Danny fell down the stairs, coming to lie at its foot with a gaping head wound and his dead eyes wide open.

Just when Carla managed to overcome her shock and disbelief to run to her boyfriend's side, the laughter echoed through the mansion again, even more bitter and jeering now, coming closer and closer, till she jumped up and run to the front door. She screamed again, this time in panic, when she discovered that the door was locked.

And then, she started to run - wherever her feet would carry her in this building...

Ghost Productions presents:

Cursed - or: Please don't touch the dust!

CBI Headquarters, Sacramento, CA

Sometimes fate really wasn't able to resist intervening.

At least that was what it seemed to be like with their newest case. Heavy rain had been soaking the outside world for hours now; it was nearly a monsoon that was afflicting them. Not to speak of the thunderstorm that made even the bravest people shudder. And if this wasn't enough, they had been asked for help with a case that was just the perfect addition to the weather - a murder in an old mansion that was rumored to be haunted.

This had to be fate. Or some joker of God with a preference for classic Hollywood movies.

But for whatever reason this happened, it didn't change the fact that there was a case that was waiting to be solved. So as soon as Agent Wayne Rigsby had brought his boss, Senior Agent Teresa Lisbon, the message that they had been asked for help, they were on their way to the old mansion that was standing on a small hill beyond an unnamed village somewhere in the nowhere of California.

Luckily, by the time of their arrival, the rain had nearly stopped. So they *only* had to deal with the muddy ground. Boots would have been a good choice today, but of course they all had chosen normal low shoes. And the chances of getting wet socks were really good.

Had the rain stopped, the thunderstorm remained, darkening the sky, making it look like it was about to fall down. And so, the impression of the old haunted house was still there, with it standing against the almost black sky that was only lightened by the bolts behind the building...

Somewhere in the nowhere of California

"Oh, and - the cells don't seem to work in there, so better not lose each other!"

They had arrived at the crime scene fifteen minutes ago; the officer on duty, Michael Caldon, had briefed them and agreed to let them take over the case. Now Lisbon's team was on their way into the mansion when the officer called after them; Lisbon acknowledged his hint with a wave of her hand.

As soon as they had entered the old building, she pulled out her cell phone.

"He's right. Doesn't work. Mine says, no service," she stated and then looked at her team. They, too, held their cells in their hands. And they all shook their heads, signaling their boss that neither of them had reception.

"Guess what. Such an old building can be a Faraday cage." Patrick Jane smiled like a child in a candy store. Sometimes Lisbon wondered if there were cases or places he didn't like - or didn't consider being a big adventure playground.

"Okay, Rigsby, you and Van Pelt follow the trace of our female victim; I want to know the exact way she had went or fled. Jane and I will take a look at her and her boyfriend's room; maybe we'll find something helpful. Cho - for I know how superstitious you are - talk to the coroner, and then help Officer Caldon examining the land around the mansion."

"Thank you, boss." Cho sounded so relieved that the others couldn't hold back a chuckle. Good old Kimball was one of those people who were perfect victims for Halloween pranks and the team really loved playing with it. Because who wouldn't like to see ever serious, stoic Cho freak out?

For now, they had work to do, and because Lisbon knew of her team's childish attitudes, it was just another good reason to let Cho work outside. Last thing she needed now was a scared agent.

Standing in the huge entrance hall - this building obviously somehow seemed to be bigger on the inside than on the outside - they all took out the flashlights they had been given. It was dark in there - with no electricity and barely any daylight coming through the windows, they mostly were dependant on the *mobile light bulbs*, as Rigsby described the objects when he looked critically at them. They indeed looked strange, like bowls with a handle, but who cared as long as they did their job?

"Alright... the victims' room is probably upstairs. Remember, stay together, I don't want anyone to get lost in here; this building, as old as is, might has trap doors or stuff like that, so be careful," Lisbon instructed; then both pairs turned to their part of the investigation.

While Rigsby and van Pelt vanished through one door across the entrance, Lisbon and Jane slowly walked up the big stairs that was dominating a great part of the hall. The wood was creaking and cracking beneath their feet, like it was complaining about the strangers who dared to walk on it. The CBI operatives were more than happy when they finally reached the top of the stairs. Not that the floor boards there were in a better state; they also made scary noises when the colleagues walked along the hall of the first floor and looked for the victims' room. But some irrational feeling told them that it was better to break through a board than the whole stairway...

"Why is it that it is always us who get the stupid cases? I mean, really, a murder in an old mansion... there's nothing that isn't obvious here," Rigsby mumbled, his brows furrowed. He wasn't pleased with their task; he was sure there were people out there who really needed their help, but they were in this old building he feared would collapse at every minute.

"Stop complaining. One man has died here, and a woman is missing. As long as we don't know exactly what has happened, there's nothing obvious to me. So let's just do our work and soon we'll be on our way back home," his colleague, Grace Van Pelt, replied calmly.

"Maybe you're right. But still, I don't have to like it. It's stupid," Rigsby repeated and grumbled a bit. "Look around, it's all so dusty and full of spider webs and really, I don't want to know what else we'll find here... maybe rats or other vermin that might carry unknown diseases." Van Pelt only chuckled.

"Wayne," she said and made him look up by her use of his first name, "there's nothing to be concerned about. IF here are rats around, they will be too afraid of us to come close. And no one has ever been infected with a disease by looking at a rat. Or the rat looking at him, for that matter."

"Still, we should be careful. I for one don't want to hope that such an animal is more afraid of me than..." He coughed slightly. "Yeah."

"They will be afraid. Otherwise the rat that just crossed our way wouldn't have run like it was followed by the devil," Grace explained with just the slightest hint of amusement in her voice; a hint Rigsby didn't hear.

"What?!"

"And here I always thought women were the ones who screamed and jumped when they saw rats or mice..."

"I don't jump or scream. And besides, this is only about the possible animals in this house."

Van Pelt didn't answer, but instead walked past him and through another door that led into a room that obviously had been a kitchen many years ago; now it was only a collection of dirt and debris.

"Rigsby? I've found something," she called for her colleague when she spotted a small piece of red cloth - it had the same color as the skirt of the missing woman, as Van Pelt remembered the picture she had seen on the digital camera they had found at the bottom of the stairs.

"Looks like we're on the right track." Rigsby grinned and took a photo of the piece of evidence. "Oh man, look how dusty everything is. My mum would get a heart attack if she saw this," he swept a finger through the dust on one part of what was left of the furniture, "She hates dirt and mess."

The last word had barely left his mouth, when a pain-filled howl was heard in the mansion, and a sudden wind of unknown origin blew the dust from Rigsby's finger - and only from his finger. And before they were able to react, the door that had led them into the kitchen fell shut.

It was drizzling.

Rain like spray wasn't his idea of a good working condition, but better work outside in this weather than being inside a spooky house. Kimball Cho had been examining the grounds the mansion was standing on for around half an hour now, and he hadn't found anything, not even the tiniest bit of evidence that would help them, give them a hint. There weren't even foot prints. They had been washed away by the rain, or there had never been any; in either way, it was starting to frustrate him a bit. Because while he was thankful that he hadn't been told off to investigate inside, he still had hoped for some work outside.

But there was simply nothing to do.

His colleagues and boss were probably somewhere in the mansion and for he didn't intend to search for them, all he could do was to wait. Most of local PD's officers had already left; with the CBI leading the investigation and the building too unstable to have it crowded with people, they had come to the conclusion that there were for sure more important things to do than to wait for the agents to come out of the old house and tell them what they had found - or not found.

Only Caldron and two of his colleagues had stayed, in case the agents needed backup.

For the umpteenth time Cho was wandering up and down the front of the mansion, sure that he must have missed something. There had to be something, anything.

Caldron had repeatedly called him, asked him to join them in their warm and dry car, but Cho didn't want to give up just yet.

And then he heard it.

A horrific laughter, coming from the inside of the old building.

"Did you hear that?" the CBI agent immediately turned to the police officers who had let one window a few centimeters down to be able to hear the Asian man.

"No, what do you mean?"

"The laughter. It was loud enough to scare half the town," Cho explained, his surprisingly, but typical calm voice belying the excitement - or was it fear? - he felt.

"Agent Cho, I assure you, there was no laughter," the other, unnamed police officer who sat behind the wheel answered frowning.

"But I did hear it! And it was very loud!" he insisted, and turned back to the mansion that was just illuminated by another thunderbolt.

"Listen, these grounds are said to be cursed and haunted. That makes some people hear ghosts. But trust us, we've been working here for years and this is just an old, empty mansion that will probably turn to dust within the next years."

Cho nodded his understanding, but decided for himself that this couldn't be the answer. He knew what he had heard. And some more investigating couldn't hurt...

When the frightening laughter echoed through the hollow halls of the mansion, Lisbon and Jane looked up and then at each other.

"Wow. Sounds like someone here's a big fan of Michael Jackson's *Thriller*," Jane commented dryly and his boss shook her head at him, turning back to take a closer look at the piece of evidence they'd just found - a chain with a small piece of cloth that looked like torn from a white sheet.

They weren't that calm and unimpressed anymore when they heard the laughter again - louder and closer this time. They knew that, besides Rigsby and Van Pelt, no one was allowed to enter the mansion. And considering that local police was taking care of that and that Rigsby and Van Pelt were in a complete other wing of the old house...

Lisbon suddenly thought drawing her gun would be a good idea.

"You aren't afraid, are you?" she heard Jane ask - as she heard the grin in his voice.

"I'm a federal agent - I'm just careful. The murder could be still here and he or she probably knows this place, while we can only walk around on the off-chance. It's not exactly what makes me feel safe. But no, I'm not afraid."

It sounded perfectly logical. But she knew that Jane wouldn't believe her. She was able to handle the living, *tangible* criminals, but she had ever since hated all kind of horror stories, and being in one was only worse. She told herself that she didn't believe in poltergeists and all the other spooky entities. But...

"We take this chain with us," she then said, turning around - only to see that Jane wasn't behind her anymore. "Jane? Jane!"

"I'm here!" she heard him call back; obviously he was in a room a few steps away from her.

"Didn't I say that you shouldn't walk around here as...," she started grumbling at him when she made her way to the door. She was just about to reach for the doorknob of the door that was standing ajar when she heard some strange clicking sound and then suddenly lost ground - in the true sense of the word.

It all happened so fast that she never got the chance to even think about screaming.

Patrick Jane listened attentively when he heard some noises, a rambling and rattling; like something had fallen down somewhere.

"Lisbon? Did you hear that?" No answer. "Lisbon?!" Now even Jane felt nervousness and an unpleasant feeling crawl up his neck. And *he* didn't have a weapon or anything similar. *Well... if you don't count...* The corners of his mouth twitched when his searching eyes found a silver candelabra. It was quiet heavy, he realized when he picked it up, but it was better than walking around without anything to defend himself besides his hands. And his hands were definitely no weapons. Armed with the candelabra, he walked back to the door, opened it a bit and poked his head through the opening.

His partner and boss was nowhere to be seen. "Lisbon?" he tried again, but everything remained silent. And silence was not good. He trusted his knowledge of human nature - and of Teresa Lisbon - to know that she didn't was playing any pranks on him by hiding now, only to then jump out and scare him. To *try* to scare him.

No, she was gone. And wherever she was, she definitely hadn't left on purpose - judging from her gun that was lying on the floor.

Cho, Jane and Lisbon hadn't been the only ones who had heard the laughter. A laughter that didn't seem to become silent because it's echo still sounded through the halls.

"Don't worry, Grace. I'll protect you!" Rigsby exclaimed fiercely and shoved his colleague behind him; in one hand he held the flashlight, in the other his gun. He walked slowly, step by step, twitching at every creak of the old building's floor. It was pitch black in the kitchen, apart from the lights of their hand lamps, and after they had had to give up on the door through which they had come into the room, for it was tightly closed, they were searching for another way out.

"Rigsby!" Van Pelt said in a hushed voice, trying to get his attention, but he didn't react. So she tried it louder again - and made him jump. When he shot her a short look over his shoulder, she told him: "I can take care of myself very well, thank you."

If the situation hadn't been so awkward, she would have laughed out loud. Because the fearless hero Wayne Rigsby was shuddering with fear. It wasn't that she was so tough or brave - or stupid, for that matter - to not see any danger in the situation, but this was just too much to stand. Poor Rigsby really freaked out - who would have guessed that? Normally that would have been Cho's part - and normally it would have been Rigsby's part to scare him.

"I can't let you get hurt," he only muttered in response, and didn't make any attempt to let Van Pelt pass or step beside him; he just held her shielded by his body behind him. The red-haired agent sighed. As much as she liked Rigsby, this was ridiculous. She knew he liked her, and due to the situation, something must have clicked in his head, making him play her protector, more than he normally did. Though normally, he was also more open for arguments.

"Come on, Rigsby, everything's fine," she told him again, and carefully laid a hand on his shoulder. He flinched, but finally the tension left his body and he turned around.

"I'm sorry, you're right. I was just a bit..."

"Out of line?" she offered and smiled, a gesture he returned weakly.

"Yeah, something like that. Well then...," He supported himself for a moment on one of the tables - and before he could finish his sentence, an awful shrieking was heard. Immediately, Grace found herself in Wayne's tight embrace. Would she have been able to move her arms, she would have smitten her forehead. So, she only rolled her eyes.

Lisbon fell down through what seemed to be a big pipe and then landed very ruggedly on a dusty ground. She coughed and sneezed when the dust invaded her mouth and nose and waved her hand to chase the annoying particles away.

When her sight was clear again, she first checked her body and if anything was hurt. Fortunately, all her bones seemed to be okay, and everything obviously was in one piece; besides the fact that her butt hurt badly.

Carefully getting to her feet, she looked around. Or more, she tried. Because she didn't see much. The room - dungeon, she guessed - was dark, only a single beam of light from a yet unknown source illuminated a little spot on a nearby wall.

She didn't even begin and try to call for help; she probably was so far away from Jane that he wouldn't hear her anyways. Better concentrate on possible ways out, she told herself, and ignored the small voice in her head that told her that a dungeon normally wasn't designed to let people out. They existed to punish people - and to make them forgotten.

Considering her options, she suddenly remembered her mobile. She may not have reception in here, but at least it would make a great flashlight. The one she had had lay broken beside her feet.

The mobile helped a lot. She could see enough to check out the walls for any weak spots or secret doors - who knew what surprises and clichés this mansion still held. Slowly but surely she tended to believe far more than she had when she had entered the building earlier this day.

Everything that had happened so far was somehow suspicious. Or maybe she slowly turned into Cho and began to be superstitious like him. At least the laughter they had heard had really been frightening. And, as far as she was concerned, not from this world. Well, not from a human being. Of course there was still the possibility that...

Concentrate, Lisbon!

Right, getting out of the dungeon. There simply had to be a way. She didn't want to give up right now. Maybe the people were thrown into this oubliette through the pipe-like hole she had come through. But then, maybe this wasn't a dungeon - the entry point wasn't exactly usual. Maybe it had once been some kind of security or escape tunnel, a hiding place for the tenant or landlord in case there was any kind of threat.

Suddenly, she remembered what she had seen when she had "arrived" in this place a few minutes earlier. A lighted spot on the wall. Something that hopefully would lead her to the secret door she was looking and hoping for.

It had taken them a good amount of tries, but in the end, Van Pelt - having Rigsby finally convinced that nothing would happen to her if he let go of her - and her colleague had found a way out of the kitchen. Just when they had entered a room that once might have been a staff room, they had heard rumbling noises close to them.

Van Pelt had insisted on checking for the cause, and though Rigsby had argued that maybe a part of the old building had given in to time's work, the red-head had made him follow her. After a lecture that told him

clearly he should stop being such a coward. A lecture that had made the older and - after all - more experienced agent look like a kicked puppy.

Unfortunately they soon had to realize that it would have been better to listen to the *more experienced* agent when he had said that they should better stay where they were or return to the kitchen. At the moment, the latter seemed to be the most secure place, despite the whole "dust blown from the finger" incident. The staff room - or more the doors leading from it - obviously wasn't.

With some effort Rigsby had managed to open the door across the one they had come through before. They thought that it maybe led outside, to a courtyard or a barn or anything else. Instead they only found stairs behind the door, stairs that probably led down into a cellar.

"What do you think?"

"I think we should go back. It was too hard to open the door, our victim could have never opened it herself, and the blockings weren't new. It must have been in this state for some time."

"I agree. Let's try and go back to the main hall. We should look for Lisbon and Jane and-"

"The door." Van Pelt looked at Rigsby when he interrupted her, her face speaking of utter confusion. She hated it when he did this.

"What?"

"The door," he repeated and pointed at the named object. Well, the space where it had been shortly before. Because where the door had been now was only a wall.

The spot of light on the wall had indeed brought some success. Close to it, she had found a loose stone that could be turned and pushed, and that then opened a passageway.

That was the good news.

The bad news was that, as soon as she had stepped through the secret door, it fell shut. And on this side was no spot of light - and no loose stone. So if this was the real trap, she would probably die down here; she doubted she would hear anyone through the walls or vice versa.

Now there was only one thing to do - follow the passageway and see where it led to.

In general, it led through many spider webs. Most of them weren't inhabited anymore - lucky for Lisbon and her arachnophobia - but on some nevertheless waited arachnids, and she almost felt like they were watching her. And rejoicing that she was trapped in this underground place. They probably usually didn't get much company.

The passageway wasn't just a simple passageway, she noticed - because after a few minutes of walking and avoiding hitting the spider webs, at least the ones with spiders, she reached a crossing. Now she could choose - between walking on, turning left or turning right. If she caught the one who had made the three possibilities look all the same...

If she ever made it out alive of this dungeon and labyrinth, Lisbon resolved to recommend a course that would prepare agents for such a situation. She definitely would have needed some advice now, and if it only had been from her memory of agent training lessons.

In the end and after a good while of contemplating - and even talking to the spiders, whereas she did this mostly to ignore her fear and the tingling feeling that didn't want to leave her body - she decided to turn left.

She had never been a lucky person, but since she didn't have much of a choice - dark passageway one, two or three *didn't* qualify as "choice" - she just followed her gut. For whatever reason it told her to turn left. Turning left could change the whole history, she had heard. So she simply hoped it would be right and make any sense.

And lead her to an exit.

All Jane had been able to think of was looking for Lisbon. She couldn't simply vanish, just be gone without a sound or word or whatever. He never considered asking Cho for help, but tried to find her himself - what wasn't a good idea either.

Because as soon as he had turned back into the room he had been in, the door locked itself with a loud thud. Not that it was really surprising; he already suspected that there was something really fishy about this whole mansion.

Surprising was the hissing sound from the door - and that the lock was melting, as he recognized when he checked for the unexpected sound. Almost stumbling to the door, he wanted to reach for the doorknob, but held back just in time when the thought that the knob might be burning hot shot through his mind.

He was proved right when the door knob began to glow. *Really* glow. Patrick even had to shield his eyes from the brightness, wondering the whole time where such a blinding light was coming from. As far as he knew, only certain chemical reactions could produce such a light. Among a very few other things; but those didn't apply here all the more. So either some not exactly nonhazardous chemicals were lying around here or this mansion truly should be officially declared as 'haunted'.

'Haunted' was supported by the facts that not only the laughter could be heard again - although it was a lot quieter this time - but also by the sound of steps he heard, all around him. Or more, around this room. And below. And above. It was a whole army that obviously was moving into position at *every* side of this room. This room he was locked into.

It wasn't that he believed in all that supernatural stuff. Not at all. He had once pretended that it was real and fooled people with it. He, of all people, knew that it wasn't real.

Unfortunately, this knowledge didn't help his premonition that something bad was about to happen. Something that didn't have anything to do with a normal, average murder they had assumed had happened here.

If possible, it had even gotten darker in the chosen passageway. One reason probably was that the battery of her phone was slowly dying down - seven hours talk time, equaling the use as a flashlight, she had never believed it -; the other... she didn't know. But she was sure that something in this labyrinth was eating the light. Or... else.

When she had been a child, she had always feared the dark. Like most children she hadn't wanted to be alone in the darkness of her room; there had always been a small lamp, and even though it hadn't been much light it had been illuminating the room with, it had been enough to chase away the evil monsters of darkness.

Problem was, she had never stopped fearing the dark. Never entirely. Sure, she was an adult now and she knew there were no monsters in the darkness, nothing to be afraid of. But even rationality needed a break sometimes and hers seemed to need it now. Of all times and nights and places, it had to be here and now that she felt that old, but very familiar and unpleasant tingling in her stomach.

And so, she began to walk faster. Faster and faster, until she was running, barely paying attention to where she was stepping, and that the floor wasn't what one could call even and smooth. There were little stones, and there was earth without any stone or cement cover.

Later, she would consider herself as very lucky that she didn't trip and fall, and probably even break some bones. But for the moment, all that mattered was getting away from the tunnel. Or at least the feeling that she was followed. She could have sworn she heard steps behind her. She didn't know what could be in underground labyrinth; maybe someone of the others had also found a way down here - voluntarily or not - and was now searching for a way out just like her.

That was one possibility. The other... she rather didn't want to think about.

The only avail of walking so fast - or running, in that case - was that she covered the distance she had to walk, although she didn't know what distance exactly it was, in no time.

In the end, she was rewarded for it. She reached an old, narrow spiral staircase that was leading upwards. Up, at least, wherever it was going, she was for sure able to leave this dungeon and labyrinth.

"This isn't funny anymore."

"Hasn't been since the beginning."

"Yeah, that, too."

Agents Rigsby and Van Pelt were standing, side by side, in the staff room and stared at the wall. Maybe even tried to bring the door back with their intense and very unhappy looks that could almost be described as death glares. Of course it didn't help.

Van Pelt sighed. This reminded her of this game she had often been playing with her family when she had been younger. 'Labyrinth' or something like that. The game board had been divided into small squares, with fixed and moving pieces and each player had the chance to push a row or line so the pieces were moved and doors or passages effectively closed. Obviously someone had moved the row - or line - next to them. And for some reason she doubted that the one who had done this would give them the chance to take part in the game again soon.

To make it worse, she had with Rigsby a real bundle of nerves with her. She would never have expected him to be such a... well, coward. Cho, yeah, that would have been explainable, and she wouldn't have been half as surprised about this behavior Rigsby was showing. But the big, strong and normally fearless agent had just forgotten, how...

Van Pelt trailed off in her thoughts when she felt something she rather didn't want to feel in this situation. She probably wouldn't have minded it in any other situation. But here...

"Rigsby. Stop it. That's not the place and time, okay?" she hissed, looking sternly at him.

"What are you talking about?" he asked, looking genuinely confused.

"About your hand that's certainly in the wrong place right now!"

"I... I don't know what you mean, I...", he blushed slightly when realization about what Grace was talking about hit him, but managed to keep his thoughts from wandering and answered, "Both my hands are here." He held them in front of him, in one hand the flashlight, in the other still his gun. Even in the dim light he could see Van Pelt grow pale.

"Then whose hand is just touching my... you know... *back*?" She whispered and, after weighing her options, stood perfectly still, since she didn't consider running to be good choice. One, because there wasn't much space to run anyways, and two because she didn't set great store by stirring up sleeping dogs. And trouble.

"May I have a look?" Rigsby carefully and quietly asked, moving his flashlight to shine behind Van Pelt. His eyes widened when he saw a half-transparent hand lying there where he... well... *there*, and when he followed the half-transparent arm upwards, his eyes met those of a... ghost. It had to be one, he didn't know how else to describe it. A see-through person in torn clothes and with cold eyes and an evil grin on his face... he couldn't think of any other term to describe the being.

"Well? What is it?" Van Pelt interrupted his thoughts - not quite, just a bit, since he was more busy with keeping his jaw in place as it tried to get in contact with the floor - and looked at him, only to then follow his gaze that went to her other side. She froze when she saw the... whatever was standing beside her.

And then she let out a deafening scream.

It was the good old horror movie cliché scene. Both standing with their back to the other, they walked soundlessly backwards and towards each other - till their bodies collided, followed by a horrified scream.

"Dammit, Jane!" Lisbon complained when she turned around and recognized the consultant.

"Don't blame me when you disappear so suddenly," he gave back, pouting a bit.

"I fell through a secret door. One to a labyrinth of secret passageways. Was a bit difficult to find a way out!" she explained, grumbling. She didn't feel like adding that she had been so afraid that she had let herself believe she was followed.

By *monsters*.

"Seems like you've unerringly found a dead end," he remarked, pointing at the door with the melted lock. "Is there any way to go back into the passageway?"

"Sure, shouldn't be a-" Just in this moment, the secret door in the wall slammed shut. "-problem." She groaned. "Of course."

Lisbon watched Jane go and try to open the door again, but it gave itself unimpressed by his actions.

"Okay, now it's making even me angry," Jane said, frowning.

"Don't tell me," Lisbon gave back and looked around. "So the window is no option since we are too high, but... maybe we'll get a signal for our mobiles when we hold them out of the window?"

"I wouldn't try it. As lucky as we are, something will happen that will make us let our mobiles fall down."

"Don't tell me you have..."

"Yep."

Lisbon shook her head in desperation, but nevertheless walked over to the window and looked out, even leaned out a bit, hoping to maybe spot Cho. To her surprise, they were much higher than she would have thought; and besides, where exactly had she come from? The house's outer wall was flat and the whole building seemed to have the shape of a cubicle anyways, so how could she have come from a secret

passageway, with a door that was in the same outer wall as the window? This building had to be much bigger on the inside than it seemed from the outside.

Sighing, the senior agent walked back to Jane who was standing in the middle of the room. She looked around for a moment, then shook her head and, rubbing her face with her hands, let herself fall onto the huge four-poster bed. A bed that, contrary to her expectations, wasn't dusty or dirty at all - no, it seemed like someone had just put clean sheets on it.

"Tell me... why is this here all in the state of never touched for centuries, but the bed is putting every high-class hotel to shame?" Lisbon wondered, somehow more to herself than Jane, but it didn't matter anyway.

"Good question...", he responded and let himself fall down beside her, making her bounce - and giggle - a bit, "but I think we should make a list of all the weird and strange things we've already encountered here. Maybe it helps?" He flung to his side and let his head rest in his hand of his arm popped up on his elbow. Frowning, he looked down at Lisbon who was still lying beside him.

"What?" she wanted to know when he gave her a real confused look.

"Um... Lisbon... why are you wearing this dress? And since... when?"

"I don't know, but..." she stood and turned around, looking down and inspecting the dress that looked very much like escaped from the 18th century. "Mh. Not exactly my style, but I like it. Fits at least the interior of this room." She fell back onto the bed where Jane was still sitting and just watching in confusion.

His confusion grew when Lisbon pushed him back down and came to lie half on top of him.

"What are you doing?" he asked carefully, a bit nervous since the distance between their faces closed rapidly.

"Something useful while being entrapped here, I hope," he heard and felt her answer, her lips already so close that he could almost feel their movement, before they landed on his.

While the two couples inside were busy finding a way out or sorting out what was happening in that weird old building, Kimball Cho finally succeeded in finding something useful. Or someone. He was almost happy and relieved to find the missing young woman safe and sound in a small shed behind the manor. She surely looked a bit frightened and probably needed a hot shower, a coffee, a proper meal and some counseling. But aside from that, she was okay, as far as he could tell.

Cho was always glad when they found missing persons alive and - even better - unhurt. He also believed in the abilities of a good counselor or psychologist. And, if possible, also in these victims' families.

The agent wasn't surprised when the woman backed away. The closer he got, the more she pressed into the small hole she hid in. She had seen her dead boyfriend, with a horrible head wound, and certainly still being where all that had happened didn't help much.

"Ma'am, I'm Agent Cho, I'm with the CBI. It's alright, I'll bring you out of here," he told the woman and approached her, wanting to help her. He hadn't counted on her reaction - and that she would pull out a knife.

"Don't you dare coming closer!" she shouted, pointing the sharp-edged weapon at Cho.

"Ma'am, please give me the knife, I want to help you."

"Go away, you horrible creature! I swear I'll kill you!" she yelled, leaving no doubt that she was serious. Her eyes showed fury, but also confusion. The Asian's hand wandered to his gun, ready to pull it out, but not yet acting.

"Whatever being you might be seeing right now, it isn't real. I'm human, I'm a federal agent and I just want to help you!" Cho explained again, this time his voice was harder; he hoped to reach her when his words were more empathically.

Finally, the woman got up, though she still held the knife in her hands, ready to attack, it was now easier for Cho to disarm her. They looked at each other for a few more moments before the disturbed woman was distracted by a sound, coming from her side, and she turned her head. Using this chance, the agent grabbed her hand, pressed just the right points at her wrist and made her let fall the knife. Then he quickly handcuffed her.

She struggled and screamed, clearly terribly panicked, obviously thinking Cho was some kind of monster, but somehow he managed to bring her to Caldon and his partner who should take care of her.

He never saw the glowing eyes following him when he left the shed.

The scream Van Pelt gave only lasted fractions of seconds, but was obviously enough to let the ghost beside her vanish. More or less. The moment the scream left her throat, the being literally turned to dust. Not that any of the two of them wondered how a non-existent being could turn into something existent and material, but there it was, exploding and covering the agents in dust.

They coughed and frantically tried to get rid of the particles, even freed the other of them, when they finally woke from their paralyzed state.

"Is it... he... it... gone?"

"Yeah, I think so." Rigsby was as shaken as Van Pelt, and even his voice wasn't very steady when he spoke, though he tried his best to hide his shock

"What-"

"I've no idea what this was," Rigsby said dismissingly, earning himself an annoyed look from Van Pelt. "Sorry. I just... I want to get out of here."

"You're not the only one," she murmured irritated. It certainly didn't help to forget now that they had to work together and that they weren't enemies.

"Maybe we should try the windows. They may be secured by boards, but hopefully they'll be brittle and weatherworn enough to give in easily to a bit of force." Van Pelt nodded; she had already optioned out the door that didn't seem to bring luck anyways, and the window would be a direct way out of the building. And there's nothing she wanted more right now than leave this damn mansion...

"Patrick..." she whispered with a soft voice, "Open your eyes..."

But he didn't want to. The feeling of her soft lips was still lingering on his and he feared falling back to reality and losing the feeling as soon as he opened his eyes.

"Jane... come on, Jane!" Lisbon said, her voice now louder and not so seducing anymore, but... panicked? Unwillingly, he opened his eyes, only to realize that Lisbon was kneeling next to him on the bed, shaking his shoulder - and definitely not wearing the dress he had seen only minutes before.

"What is it? Where's the dress?"

"What? What dress? Did you inhale too much of the dust? You suddenly passed out, without any reason. It's not funny; I can't get any help here."

"I'm sorry... I... I don't know what happened," the blond man said, puzzled himself; he couldn't explain his sudden losing of consciousness either. Because the last few minutes had felt far too real. But since when did he experience dreams or visions when loosing conscience temporarily? Unconsciousness meant always blackness, at least from his experience. This had to be something else. A drug maybe. Or...

"How are you feeling?"

"Better, I think. Didn't feel bad to start with. I give the question back. How about you? Any weird pictures on your mind?"

"What? No. What do you mean? What have you seen?"

"Long story," he simply turned her down and sat up. "My guess - the candles. There has to be something in them, some psychedelic substance." He got up and walked over to their only source of light, as it was nearly dark outside and the dirty windows didn't let much light through anyways, and sniffed them.

"Jane... are you sure you're alright?" Lisbon was used to a lot of strange behavior when it came to Patrick Jane and normally she didn't question it at all. He had his theories and those theories helped putting bad guys behind bars. But this time, there was no bad guy, not at the moment, and considering that the consultant had passed out for no reason only minutes ago, she was a little suspicious. And worried.

"I'm fine, Lisbon, but hallucinations like the one I just had don't come from my head."

"I don't know what hallucination you had, but I believe your head is capable of many things. And pictures," she murmured, raising an eyebrow when he took one candle, blew it out and broke it in the middle. "If there's something in those candles, it will probably be mixed with the wax and you won't see it." Her reasoning seemed to stop him and she was almost relieved when he put the candle aside and looked at her. But then, he frowned deeply.

"How come the candles are lit?"

"Uh... you lit them?"

"Haven't got a lighter. And here are no lighters or matches. I remember searching for them, and that I didn't found any."

"You're sure?"

"Lisbon, I haven't hit my head, I just passed out, for whatever reason. Still, it doesn't answer the question who lit the candles." Scanning the room with his eyes questioningly, he didn't see the panic in Teresa's eyes when she answered - and he almost jumped when she ran over to him suddenly, with a blanket she had grabbed from the bed in her hands.

"Not who - what!" she yelled and threw the blanket over the candle Patrick had examined and then put down on a small sideboard before, and that had - under the senior agent's disbelieving stare - lit itself without any recognizable reason and set the sideboard on fire...

What the dim light of their flashlights hadn't been able to tell or show them - there weren't boards in front of the window. No. Someone had bricked up the former window holes; and they'd only realized it after they'd gotten rid of the boards covering the window from the inside. Van Pelt and Rigsby felt like they'd been thrown into a very bad joke. And they waited for someone to come out with a camera, telling them that they were part

of some candid camera show. Hell, they even expected to hear Cho's laughter at any minute and him opening an invisible door because the mansion was an adventure house and no one had told them before.

But nothing happened. All they heard was their own breathing and the occasional creaking and cracking they by now had almost gotten used to. And, when they were absolutely quite, some giggling that didn't sound amusing or friendly at all would reach their ears while echoing through the walls.

"You know, that only leaves us with two possibilities. Waiting or stairs." Rigsby rubbed his neck with one hand and groaned. Somehow he didn't like what this was leading to.

"I guess you prefer moving on instead of standing still?"

"I don't see how standing still would help us."

"Apart from the fact that we would hopefully stay alive and not run into a death trap?" Van Pelt opened her mouth to answer, but shut it after only a second when she thought about Rigsby's words. In some way, he was right. If this whole mansion was somehow prepared with traps, which wasn't so unlikely, then a basement could hold a secret escape passage with even more of those traps to prevent followers from passing the tunnels; only the builder or developer or house owner would know how to avoid them.

"I don't know. But I don't think we should just sit - or stand - here and wait. The door is gone, so we can't go back to the main hall. The window is bricked up. That leaves us only with the other door. We could at least try it; we'll take every step very carefully. And maybe we're lucky and it leads us outside."

The older agent looked at his colleague. He wanted to get out of this building, and he knew Grace wanted the same. But he also wanted them both to survive. He couldn't believe he was actually concerned about their safety because of some Halloween pranks played in an old, spooky mansion, but then, they had seen a ghost, they had heard... *whatever* laughing evilly, and there had been doors falling shut or even vanishing. Who wouldn't fear for his life by now?

He had a responsibility, as he was the senior agent, while she was still a junior. In the end, it was his decision to make. Neither of the two decisions was perfect, but after... hours? - he didn't even know how long they'd been in here, his wristwatch had stopped working at some point - his expectations were rather low.

"Okay," he finally said and straightened up, "we'll try the cellar, but I go first. We have to be very careful."

"Wayne?"

"Huh?" She smiled.

"Don't worry. Everything will be fine." Her assurance somehow made him calmer, although he was aware that she didn't know more about what was expecting them than him.

Nodding once, he approached the door and opened it again. It creaked awfully and Grace grimaced at the sound. Some splinters of the wooden door fell down, as well as a bit of rust from the hinges.

Step by step, they descended the stairs into what looked like a black abyss, but was hopefully only a harmless cellar.

"Someone wanted to burn us alive," Jane remarked when they had managed to put out the fire - which had been quite persistently - and in addition brought enough distance between the remaining candles and all inflammable materials. They had even considered throwing them out of the window, but they feared that they would need them as soon as they did this.

"Oh, really, you think so?" Lisbon certainly could have done without his comments at the moment. She just wanted to leave this damn building. Just for once she didn't want to care about the case, but simply go home and forget all those things that had happened that day. They were too unreal anyways and she hoped that she would wake up soon, realizing that it was all just a bad dream. But then had her dreams never been so real and alive.

Sighing, Lisbon turned away from him and looked at one of the pictures that looked somehow familiar.

"Lisbon, something unexplainable is going on here, and even though I'd rather not admit it, I have to tell you - it's frightening me."

"I thought you didn't believe in all those supernatural things?" she couldn't resist to tease a bit, and without the need to look at him, she nevertheless could see him rolling his eyes.

"Well, I don't, but look around, and resume what we've already seen here. What has happened we would never have considered being possible, and yet it is real. Either a very committed group of people has taken a lot of effort to play pranks on us, or this house really is what it is said to be."

"And what do we do now?" He didn't answer. Instead, a long silence stretched. And at some point, she realized that it was almost too quiet. She was still thoroughly examining the painting, feeling the need to keep her mind busy, but when she didn't even hear him breathing anymore, she turned her head. She almost immediately wished she hadn't. The dark look in his eyes made her more than a bit nervous.

"I could think of something," he suddenly responded to her question. In a seducing voice. And while he was slowly walking towards her.

Cho had taken another round, checking every side of the mansion thoroughly again, but he hadn't found anything else that would have been help- or useful. The young woman he had found had already been picked up when he returned to the locals. This time, he got into the car and even allowed himself an exhausted sigh.

"So, how is she? Have you heard anything from her?"

"Doctors say she's either psychotic - and then has probably killed her boyfriend - or she's just stressed due to what she's seen. You know, the dead body and all."

"If she's heard the laughter, too, that could have been another reason for her behavior," Cho thought aloud, but the other two men only laughed.

"Come on, you don't really believe this old house is haunted, do you? I mean, laughter? This isn't some horror movie, this is a real case. And the real world," Caldor scoffed and shook his head.

"Who says that the laughter came from a ghost? Could also have been a person. But we'll know more when the team comes back out." Cho ignored the mocking laughter from then two police officers. He was sure there was more to this house than anyone knew. Though he was willing to listen to good arguments that would prove the contrary.

"Why don't you go in and help them?"

"I'm sure they've everything under control and Lisbon told me to stay outside in case they needed me here for backup. We've been working together for some time and I understand certain signs better than others who haven't yet worked with us. No offense."

"None taken. So you think they're alright in there?" Cho ignored the sarcastic undertone in the voice of Caldor's partner when he asked his question.

"Yes," the CBI agent answered. Although his gut told him something else.

Some things just shouldn't be. Like bodiless laughter from an old mansion that had been uninhabited for ages. Like a woman going completely mad, even if it was after she had seen her boyfriend falling to death.

Like his mother *always* calling in the wrong moments.

Or like a cat with glowing eyes.

However, the cat walking towards the car definitely was such an impossible specimen.

"What the...!" he heard Caldon swear. Ah, so he had spotted the animal, too. "What is *that*?!"

"A cat?" Cho offered, feeling, among all the concern and hints of fear, also a bit of malicious glee.

"That has eaten a Goa'uld?" Caldon's colleague, Evanns, as he had introduced himself some time before, remarked, earning himself confused looks. "Never mind," he added and turned his attention back to the animal that was still coming closer.

"Just leave the doors closed," Cho told the police officers while drawing his weapon.

"Don't worry, I wasn't planning on cuddling this... creature."

The *creature* also didn't exactly look like it would honor being cuddled. The glowing eyes looked cruel and evil, the black fur not soft and fluffy, but like straw, and the claws - more talons - unnaturally sharp. As did the teeth.

For a while, the cat-like thing only walked around the car. The men inside the vehicle could hear it meow and sometimes hiss and snarl. But suddenly, they noticed a change. First with their ears, as the sounds from the cat became louder. And then... with their eyes. Because the animal grew. With every round, it appeared to increase its size. When it almost had the height of a sheep dog, Evanns startled the others when he gave a cry of annoyance.

"That's enough. I won't wait till this thing is bigger than the car. I certainly don't want to end as cat food," he exclaimed and fumbled for the car keys. He turned them. But other than cough helplessly, the car did nothing. "Oh, you've got to be kidding me...!" He tried again, but without any success. Not willing to give up, he turned the key repeatedly, until Caldon stopped him.

"Evanns, that's enough! This won't help us! Pull yourself together and concentrate on the task at hand. We should think about how we can defend ourselves or if there is any chance to flee."

Right in this moment, the cat-monster meowed again, so loud the windows of the car cracked.

"I... don't think so," Cho noted, readying himself for a fight. Dying at the hands... talons of a gigantic cat. He felt like he was part of a very bad horror movie, with a black monster-cat walking around the car, passing his sight more than once from left to right; so much for his superstition. There was no way out, and only their weapons gave them the vain feeling of a chance for self-defense.

Meanwhile, the cat had become almost bigger than the car, and was still constantly growing. Another few rounds and it would be huge enough to crush them with only one step.

They never guessed that simply stepping onto them was far too boring for the monster-like animal.

The moment it had reached the size that made the car and its passengers look like toys, the monster opened its mouth and fell down onto the car.

It was more a reflex as Cho took a deep breath when everything around him went black.

The feeling of being followed had for Lisbon only been in her imagination. Agents Van Pelt and Rigsby, on the other side, weren't so lucky to say there was nothing threatening them. Because there was. Or more, there *were*. And if they guessed right, it were some relatives or friends of the ghost Van Pelt had... killed? - with her scream. And those relatives weren't all too happy about their loss, obviously.

At least the couple could now say they knew where the laughter was coming from. Or so they thought; the laughter the ghosts in front of them gave was very similar. Perhaps there was somewhere a patron ghost who entertained the whole building with his laughter, and these few were his students?

Trying to walk backwards and away from the translucent beings without stumbling and falling, Grace and Wayne held their eyes trained on their threats and hoped that they would reach any point in this tunnel that would allow them to leave it and this nightmare. They would have tried the stairs they had come from hadn't the path been blocked by the ghosts. Not that it surprised them. It also didn't surprise them that one of their flashlights had already failed, and the other was on the best way to let them down, too, while they desperately waited for any passage that would allow them an escape to show up, or at least for somewhere with more light, as they were convinced ghosts weren't exactly fond of light.

The path seemed endless, twisting and turning as they walked backwards; they'd lost all sense of time, their feet began to hurt, their hearts were obviously on a competition for beating faster than any heart before, and their hands were knotted so tightly that they already felt the cold of blood lack in their fingers - not that they would have cared at all. All they saw were those impossible beings that followed them, and all they felt was the icy air around them, much colder than it was outside and they would ever have expected to experience in California.

They didn't know what their ghostly threats wanted, or what made them wait, for an attack, for retreat, for anything. They just followed, the gap between them always staying the same, even when the agents stopped for a few calm breaths. Had Rigsby and Van Pelt at least seen a bit of the tunnels they were walking through, they would simply have turned and run, trying their luck and hoping not to find a dead end, but running definitely was no option.

There weren't many options anyways, and the constant backing away while straining their senses to miss nothing that would help - or endanger - them tired them more and more; more than they thought of as normal.

And when Rigsby couldn't stifle his yawn anymore, they finally knew what the ghosts had been waiting for.

Hearing the laughter again, they froze mid-step when they recognized a change in their ghostly persecutors - suddenly, their until now almost expressionless faces became nasty masks of scorn and pure evil. Surrounding them, enclosing them, the ghosts tore Grace and Wayne apart; as tightly as they even grabbed the other's hand, in the end, they weren't strong enough.

Pulled into the blackness, their cries of panic and agony soon were only a mere echo...

Lisbon and Jane had some problems of their own. Or more, Lisbon had one - and actually it was Jane.

She had ever since tried not to feel as small as she was, and not to be intimidated by everyone who was bigger than her. Patrick Jane was definitely the last person she would have expected to be intimidated by. But here she was, backing away, because he was towering over her, his face dark, his features hard, his eyes cold. He

was taking step by step forwards, pushing her back with only his demeanor that somehow made her shiver with fear. How could she be afraid of Patrick Jane?

He came closer and though she wanted to step aside to get away from him, she just couldn't. She felt paralyzed, the only motion her body would allow her was moving her legs to walk backwards. But then she hit a chair and, losing her balance due to the sudden obstacle, she fell into it. Jane followed immediately, trapping her with his hands on the armrests.

She looked up at him and as much as she tried, she couldn't hide the hints of fear in her eyes. He couldn't be himself, that she knew. But that wasn't what made her so nervous. No, the fact that she didn't know why he acted like that was scaring her. Because there was no obvious reason; she doubted that sniffing candles would have such an effect. She knew he could be like this, like a predator, a man who was ready to defend and kill - but only when it was about Red John. Only, Red John has never been mentioned, hadn't been for weeks, and for sure he didn't have anything to do with the incidents and the murder here.

"Jane, what's the matter with you?" Lisbon demanded to know, and tried to let her voice sound as strong as possible; to show that she tolerated no half-answers or even no answer at all. Not that he would have been impressed by it.

Suddenly, he leaned close, his lips nearly touching her ear when he whispered: "I can smell your fear." Lisbon winced when he moved a bit and licked over her pulse point. "And I can taste your adrenaline. It's like a drug. And I'm an addict." He opened his mouth, scraping the sensitive skin of her neck slightly with his teeth.

Only her shock stopped her from screaming when she opened her eyes she hadn't realized she had closed. The man in front of her wasn't Patrick Jane anymore. It was some stranger, someone she had never seen before, dressed completely in black and even wearing a black cape. He was, she had to admit, incredibly attractive and his eyes were hypnotizing. So she didn't pull away when he claimed her lips and kissed her like she was his source of life.

She didn't predict she actually was. Because when he pulled back and she looked at him, breathless and with a wildly beating heart, he opened his mouth wide and revealed four sharp-edged teeth. Teeth she knew from movies. Movies with vampires. Those creatures who...

Oh no!

Epilogue

With a lot effort Lisbon managed to stop the stranger from biting her. He was in the much better position, and he was a lot stronger than her. All she could think of was saving her neck, in the true sense of the word. The picture blurred and turned to black when she struggled and tried to free herself from the vampire's grip. And when she opened her eyes the next time, the scenery had changed.

"What... where am I?" Lisbon asked, utterly confused, when she woke up and realized that she wasn't in the old mansion with a vampire as her company.

"You're in a hospital. Everything's alright now; you've just been dreaming," Jane, who was sitting at her bedside, told her, and gently caressed her face.

"Why am I in a hospital?" she asked the most obvious question and sat up, causing Jane to return to the chair that stood beside her bed.

"We all are; most of the people who attended the Halloween party last night. Obviously the punch had been... enriched with some psychedelic substance. I don't know about you, but my dreams this night had been rather lively," the consultant explained, and Lisbon needed some moments to let his words sink in. So this whole

spooky mansion adventure had only been a product of her mind and fantasy? She didn't know she even had such fantasies.

"I... I've dreamt about a case of a murder in a spooky mansion. It was quite confusing and... a bit frightening. Seems like my mind just found the right hallucination for this time of the year." She smiled helplessly, but only looked at Jane when she had finished her short description. She was met by wide eyes with a shocked expression in them.

"An old mansion with a dungeon, frightening laughter from an unknown source, ghosts and vampires?"

"Yes... how do you...?"

"I've dreamt the same. As have Van Pelt, Rigsby and Cho. Well, kind of, they've been there, too, although their stories are slightly different; while Rigsby and Van Pelt had been teamed up and experienced their own story in the lower level of the mansion, Cho tells another completely different story from outside. But they've all been where you've told them to go to in the beginning. Just like us..." He trailed off and blushed when the realization of what she must have seen and experienced sank in. After all they had been together in this dream. And they had done... things.

A look at Lisbon told him that she also knew and understood.

And suddenly, they heard a well-known, horrific laughter.

This isn't over yet!

The END

In memory of Michael Jackson. I don't know what kind of person he was, but I know for sure that he was a great musician.