

LISA JADE



*just a  
touch*

NYC MIDNIGHT

FFC 2017

'Just

**Title: Just a Touch**

**Synopsis: A new street drug is taking LA by storm. One Officer heads out to investigate why – and finds more than he expected.**

**Written using the following prompts:**

**Romance**

**Jazz Club**

**Name Badge**

If I didn't know better, I'd take it for an ordinary house. An 19th century mansion surrounded by ornate gardens, sure, but otherwise nothing special. My eyes flick to the light coming through the crack in the doorframe, and the white streamers tossed haphazardly across the nearest hedge.

I adjust my uniform and replace my hat on my head, checking that my police badge is visible. I don't want to be mistaken for one of the drug fiends here at Thistle House.

Jazz – that's what they call it. The latest hallucinogenic drug on the market in this ruddy town. It's taken the populace by storm, leading to these ridiculous get-togethers. For a long while they went undetected due to their deceptive name. 'Jazz Clubs'.

LA hadn't discovered a newfound love for Lester Young, though. The 'clubs' are little more than a dozen or so people getting high. And the woman who owns this place – Ethel Hetheridge – is suspected to be one of the worst for supplying it.

Even now, it seems bizarre that a little old lady might be a dealer. She'd been warned about it, back before Jazz was banned, but nothing stops her. I should feel angry. I should be furious at the woman who keeps sharing this crap.

But when I knock the door and a dishevelled-looking woman appears on the other side, I pause. Ethel is half my size with a blue rinse and a pair of gold frames perched on the end of a crooked nose. She looks me up and down with blanched eyes.

“Good evening, officer. Can I help you?”

I swallow hard.

“Yes. I'm Officer Neate with the LAPD. I've come to ask you a few questions about the increase in use of the street drug 'Jazz' in the area.”

She shuffles a little, those tiny eyes scouring the lines in my face. Like she sees something I don't.

“Officer Neate? Oh dear, are you the one who...”

I bite my lip. I had hoped she wouldn't mention that. It's been over a year since the shooting, but people still recognise my name. And what follows is always that same look – pity and sorrow, tinged with a little pride in themselves for being so nice. I bite my lip and look around, my eyes eventually settling on the glossy badge on her lapel.

“Miss, might I ask why you're wearing a name tag?”

“It's a must when entertaining friends, sweetie. Here, I have one for you too.”

She starts rummaging around in the small drawer in the hallway, and a moment later she presses something into my hand. I turn it over; it's a small gold badge, my name perfectly inscribed.

“Why do you have this?”

“I knew you would come sooner or later. People always do, after a loss. Here.”

She foists something else onto me, then moves to close the door. I stare. Did she just hand me a bag of Jazz?!

“M-miss!”

“Knock on the door in five minutes,” she says simply, “then tell me what you think.”

The door closes and I stand motionless, my eyes fixed on the bag in my hand. I've heard about it; a moment of skin contact with the crystals is all it takes. I could try it, then hand it over to my superiors. They'd never know. Sanity compels me to throw the bag aside, but something makes me cling to it, slipping my finger into the bag.

Why would she tell me to try it? And why, after being so resistant to officers in the past, would she trust me with it? Why was there no pride in her eyes when she looked at me?

I want to know why. I need to know.

Footsteps. I whip around, dropping the bag on the sidewalk – to see a ghostly figure step out onto the garden path. My stomach twists.

“Isabella?”

There she is. A glowing white beacon in the evening, casting gentle light on everything around her. Glossy chestnut hair falls around slender shoulders. Oversized frames magnify green eyes to cartoon proportions. When she looks at me, there’s the barest hint of a smile.

I can’t move. Not even as recognition glimmers in her eyes and she steps toward me, revealing more detail. Her nails are bitten to stubs. There’s a scar on her left hand. A tiny freckle near her lips.

And suddenly she’s so close that I can hear her gentle breathing. Lord, how I’ve missed the sound of her breathing. How could I have forgotten the way she smelled, the way she always smelled? Like sugar cookies and earl grey. Dew forms drops around her ankles as her exposed legs catch the grass. She’s barefoot. She was always barefoot.

This is a hallucination. It has to be; the Isabella whose body I identified was nearly unrecognisable. Her soft features had fallen away to reveal open wounds and exposed bone. But this Isabella – my Isabella – is perfect. Like the shooting never happened.

“I…”

My mouth is dry.

“I learned how to dance, you know. Before our wedding. I never did get to show you.”

She just smiles. I clear my throat.

“A-are you real?” I croak, “or have I finally lost my mind?”

Arms slip around my neck and she pulls me close – and for a moment, my head is filled with her. Her warmth, her scent, her measured breathing. Her soft lips on mine. When she pulls back, I can’t stand to look away from those glimmering eyes.

“I miss you,” I blurt. I don’t know what else to say. That I’m sorry? Sorry I didn’t say goodbye? Sorry I wasn’t there? Sorry that even now, all I have left is this agonising, wonderful dream.

And then she’s gone, and my face is wet with tears.

Ethel answers the door on first knock, an expectant look playing in her pale eyes.

“So?” she asks, “did you see her?”