

Title: Inevitable

Author: Frumpy

Rating: T

Spoilers: None really, just general stuff up to currently aired eps.

A/N: As always, thank you so much for the reviews. Sorry for the long time it took me to update, but "Committed" has me way too excited just now.

Chapter 4:

The morning air felt crisp against her skin and her mind was blissfully blank as she only focused on the steady cadence of her feet hitting the pavement. Heart pounding, Sara let the slow burning spreading through her limbs take over. With each breath she sucked into her lungs, the world around her moved farther and farther away, until she was completely in the moment, to the exclusion of everything else.

The fresh air and anonymity of the city around her helped to soothe her mind. She had needed to get out and away from everything. Suffocating was not how she had ever considered her apartment before, but she had felt boxed-in. The usually cozy feel had turned into something unbearable, till she had to get away from it and Warrick sitting there, quietly overbearing in his presence. The run was doing it's work, overpowering everything else for a few moments of peaceful oblivion.

Warrick only meant well. Sara knew that. She had been on her fourth cup of tea before literally running away. Not because she particularly liked that brand of tea she kept brewing, but because it had been the most innocuous way of stalling. Okay, maybe not the most innocuous, but the least obvious. Which probably only made it all the more obvious to Warrick, who was sitting in her living room. He was an observant guy, even if he didn't let on to that very often, preferring to keep to himself most of the time. He probably had a ton of questions on the tip of his tongue, but once again he rather held them back instead of stating the obvious. Sara was grateful for that.

Seeing Warrick sit on her couch, she was struck by the similarity. Not too many weeks ago, someone else had been sitting in that same spot, stoically playing cards, waiting her out. Grissom had surprised her then. Yeah, she knew he was a patient man. Oh, was he ever patient. His patience probably was only matched by her own, though five years of it were beginning to wear her down. Same as Grissom's quiet and unwavering presence had worn her down that day. Warrick's more laid-back demeanor would not accomplish that, though. After all, what had her moment of weakness and her spilling her guts to Grissom accomplished? He hadn't pulled back as she had feared, but instead his newfound watchfulness around her had been mildly irritating. And her confession had probably only fuelled his need to take the responsibility away from her, ending in him shooting Sean. She never should have let her guard down like this, dammit.

At the same time, the differences between the situations were striking also. Despite all that had happened between her and Grissom in the past several years and the usual effect he had on her, that day she never felt as unsettled by his presence as she did by Warrick's. Grissom's steady air had actually felt soothing in that moment of raw desperation, once it had been clear that for once during their time in Vegas, he did not hide behind his usual veneer of professional interest.

Warrick's presence on the other hand, set her on edge. Maybe because the fact that he was there at all only served to stress the gravity of the situation. He would never be there otherwise. And if there was one thing Sara Sidle did not take well, it was pity. It had been written all over Warrick's face, making her cheeks burn as she opened the door for him.

Or maybe his inherent and easy coolness made her all the more aware of her own lacking calm right now. Even she couldn't find fault for that in herself, but no way in hell would she admit that. Usually Warrick quietened her down, but her nerves seemed to be too frayed for that just now, so it had the

opposite effect. She was dead tired, yet at the same time she had wanted to run or sleep or pace or do nothing at all. All at the same time.

And Warrick's goddamn calm had made want to scream.

But she couldn't. She was fine, as she had repeatedly told him, knowing full well neither of them bought it.

That overtly soothing voice of his and the way he managed to emphasize the two syllables of her name in his unique manner and apparent effort to not be overbearing only belied the calm and unfazed exterior he had tried to project. Something in his tone and probing gaze spoke of the unease he felt and that he had tried to hide so much. Seeing the cracks in Warrick's facade had only facilitated the awareness she had of herself cracking, until she couldn't take it anymore.

Physical exertion had always worked for her to take her overactive mind off things and find her calm center. That calmness was still there, only hiding better. But she was getting there. Slowly.

Warrick would probably still be sitting in her living room when she came back, quietly sipping the tea he couldn't stand and pretending to watch tv. But then she didn't plan on returning too soon anyway.

Deep breaths. In, out. Her feet's steady rhythm in her ears, Sara tried to center herself, quietly running into the early morning.

xxxxxxx

"I told you, she just went for a run."

Warrick was getting annoyed. Sara had left more than an hour ago, and now Catherine was calling him like he was incapable of looking after a friend who needed him. He knew damn well Sara was ill at ease with him at her place. She had never been comfortable with showing a weakness. But his concern had outweighed any other considerations at that moment.

"You let her out on her own, Warrick?"

"She just needed some time alone, Cath. This isn't easy."

"The last thing she needs is to be alone just now."

Catherine's motherly tone was grating on his nerves. "She is not alone in this, and she knows that." Knowing it was futile to try to argue with Catherine, he decided for a compromise. "If she's not back in half an hour, I'll go look for her." He could only imagine what would await him then, but he'd concern himself with that when the time came.

Apparently soothed by getting her way, Catherine sighed. "Okay. I didn't mean to criticize you. Things just... it's..."

"Things didn't go too well with Grissom, huh?"

"You need to ask?"

Warrick chuckled softly. "Yeah. Look, I'll keep you posted. If you need me for the shift tonight, you know where to reach me."

"Thanks War. Ecklie's gonna be all over this, like flies on shit." Catherine's tired yet confiding voice came over the line. That same strange intimacy she managed to create at work while still making sure people knew who was the boss, and that always made him unsure of where he stood. "Nick should cover what's coming in tonight."

"Okay. I'll see how things go here."

He disconnected the call and threw his cell on the sofa beside him in an annoyed gesture. What a start to the day. First learning about what had happened, and then an annoyed Sara, trying desperately to not let on how utterly devastated she was. He'd give her another 20 minutes.

Warrick checked his watch. Two more hours and Grissom would have to face the hearing committee investigating the shooting.

For the umpteenth time that day, Warrick asked himself when things had started to go so horribly wrong.

TBC