

Title: Inevitable

Author: Frumpy

Rating: T

Spoilers: Anything up to currently aired eps is fair game. Mention of "King Baby" and the new sheriff from "Hollywood Brass" (and there I liked Atwater...).

A/N: Again thank you for the great reviews!
It's getting political... but bear with me, it'll pay off.

Chapter 5:

"You heard the safety being clicked off?"

Grissom was dead tired. The lack of sleep was catching up with him and he still felt the faint pounding of a migraine that refused to go away. The fact that Cole and his partner from IA were currently going over this particular part of his story for the third time didn't really help much either.

"Mr. Grissom, just to be clear on this. When you fired the shots, Sean Edwards had the safety of his gun off?"

It seemed like the two IA officers sitting in front of him were trying their damndest to make him feel guilty. Grissom doubted anyone was as good at it as he himself. He sure didn't need any help in that department, thank you very much.

"Yes."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, I am sure. I would not say so if I weren't." Grissom mentally shook off any irritation and tried to present an unaffected exterior. Common sense seemed to be a foreign concept to these two anyway. "Look, the gun has been collected as evidence. I'm sure it would speak loud and clear had you taken the time to look at it."

"Do you think Ms. Sidle could attest to the safety being clicked off, too?"

For some reason the way Cole pronounced Sara's name grated on Grissom's nerves and he had to suppress a flash of anger. "If she heard it, yes. I am sure."

His day had started bad enough with Catherine's visit. And the fact that he had reached for his phone no less than five times, but never managed to make the call hadn't improved his mood either. She probably didn't want to talk to him anyway. Plus, Warrick was there.

The final straw had been the newspaper on his front steps though. His gaze had caught the front page as he was following the police officer who was to bring him to this hearing. Grissom didn't even know where the press had dug up that picture of him, but it was the headline in bold print that stopped him short. The press was touting him as a hero now.

If taking a life made one into a hero, he'd met quite a few in his life. And he sure didn't feel like one right now. He had saved his life - and Sara's - but he couldn't really feel satisfaction in that fact. As if the act of saving it had simultaneously ruined it. On so many levels.

"Speaking of Ms. Sidle..."

A sharp pang of pain behind his right eye made Grissom snap out of his musings and focus on the bland-faced man before him, irritation building at Cole's smug tone.

"We understand she didn't call back-up."

"No."

"She will face the consequences of that, of course, but do you..."

"Sara cannot be held accountable for that." Grissom interrupted rudely, holding the astonished gaze of Cole. His shoulder began to throb like a faint tooth-ache.

"Ah, Mr. Grissom, I'm sure you are aware of the fact that an investigation about just that..."

"I don't care about that investigation. I want this on the record. You're looking for the person to blame for the shooting - he's sitting right here."

The young IA officer looked somewhat helplessly at his partner and then back at Grissom, clearly unsure about the fact that he was losing the upper hand in the hearing. "Sir, that's not part of this..."

"Then do not make allegations you cannot back up." The pounding in his skull was increasing proportionally to his aggravation and his shoulder hurt with every little move he made. He'd had enough. "I think this hearing is over."

"With all due respect..." Cole tried to get the situation back under his control, but was interrupted by the door of the interrogation room opening. Sheriff Ben Burdick stepped into the room and nodded at the two IA officers.

"Cole, Adams. Turn it off." He motioned towards the tape recorder on the table between them and Grissom.

"But, Sir."

"Turn it off. And leave." Burdick looked at Grissom as he waited for Cole and Adams to leave.

Adams regarded his partner for a moment, but then just shrugged. He got up and opened his briefcase to put everything away.

"Leave it."

Adams looked at the tape recorder in his hand. "Sir, it's against..."

"I'm taking over, my responsibility. Now leave."

Grissom felt almost sorry for them as he watched them walk out, whipped puppy-dog expressions on their faces. But in the end he couldn't really get himself to care. His increasing physical discomfort was getting to him, though he tried not to show it as he cocked his head to the side and guardedly watched the Sheriff sit down opposite him.

"I think you might want to retract that last statement, Gil."

Grissom stayed silent as he watched Burdick play with the tape recorder, an almost pained expression crossing his face. He had taken over from Sheriff Atwater some weeks ago, circumstances of it all rather shady, though no one seemed to know anything definitive.

"Look, Gil. There's no question this was a good shooting. A week or two and things will be back to normal for you."

The Sheriff couldn't have been farther from the truth, but Grissom wasn't sure what Burdick was trying to achieve with his little power play, so he continued to say nothing. It wasn't like Grissom was not able to play the political game. It was more a choice of not playing it most of the times. So let's wait him out.

"Don't make this any harder on you than necessary, Gil." Burdick's voice held a tinge of impatience by now.

"This isn't about me."

"Why are you making this about Sidle?"

No going back now. "I'm the one who has to be blamed for this mess. This didn't start with a forgotten phone call for back-up. It started long ago and would have been up to me to prevent. Obviously I didn't."

This time Grissom was sure he didn't just imagine the pained expression on the Sheriff's face.

"So you are saying Sidle's been a liability for a long time now?"

"Don't twist my words around." The pain in his shoulder was rivalling the one in his skull by now. "I'm saying I've been a bad..."

"Grissom!"

He fell silent at the almost warning tone and just looked at the Sheriff blankly. There was something more going on here, but he couldn't pinpoint it yet.

"Gil, I think there is no question about whose fault this really is."

Last-ditch effort by the Sheriff, but Grissom had made up his mind. "You fire Sara, you might as well fire me." Echoes of a similar situation came back to him. His decision had been the right one then, and it was the right one now.

Grissom could almost see the groan building up in Burdick, but nothing came out. "You have no idea in what kind of a position you are bringing me here."

"Obviously not."

Burdick looked at him for a moment. "You have a bad track record when it comes to politics. I think Conrad was wrong, though."

The mention of Ecklie's name did nothing to brighten Grissom's day, and his shoulder and increasing headache were beginning to get distracting. "What does Ecklie have to do with this?"

"Nothing." Burdick was apparently struggling with a decision, then leaned back in his chair. "Ever wonder why Atwater had to leave so suddenly?"

"Not particularly."

"You should." He played with the tape recorder again. "I'm sure the name Bruce Eiger rings a bell?" He didn't wait for confirmation, he knew the answer. "Let's just say the reasons for Atwater's departure touch you too, albeit tangentially."

Grissom frowned, his pain-addled brain refusing to work properly by now. "I don't know what you are driving at."

"I cannot have you leave. For various reasons."

"I'm open for suggestions."

Burdick pressed the rewind button on the tape recorder and let the tape rewind for a moment. The loud click of the stop button was the only sound in the room for a while until the Sheriff looked up at Grissom again.

"How about a compromise?"

TBC.