

**Title:** Inevitable

**Author:** Frumpy

**Rating:** T

**Spoilers:** Anything up to currently aired eps is fair game.

**A/N:** Sorry for the collective whu? moment about the last chapter. It'll be cleared up. And thanks again for the reviews!

### **Chapter 6:**

Sara stepped into the cool interior of the lab full of trepidation. The place felt almost alien during the day. Labtechs she didn't know were bustling around, as if they had no concerns in the world besides their immediate tasks. She almost wished she had taken Warrick up on his earlier offer to drive her here after the call came in that her hearing had been rescheduled for today. But she had wanted the time alone during the drive to sort her thoughts and feelings as much as possible. Still, she could have used a familiar face just now.

The familiar face that stepped into the hallway in front of her made her retract that wish just as fast as it had crossed her mind.

"Ah, Sara."

The way he said her name always awakened the irrational urge to take a shower in Sara . "Ecklie."

Ever since their little spat that had resulted in her getting nearly fired, their interaction had been dominated by a forced courtesy. Ecklie usually avoided any non-case related talk around her. They were cordial at best. Yeah, that hadn't been her greatest moment back then, but dammit if it hadn't felt good.

She had expected to be fired then - especially when Grissom showed up at her place. How differently things had gone instead. Though the comfort she once felt at the fact that she could share her past with him had given way to guilt over having burdened him with that load. Maybe things with Edwards would have gone differently had she not...

"I was surprised to learn your hearing had been rescheduled for today when the Sheriff told me personally this morning."

Sara returned her attention to Ecklie. The fact that he was seeking her out this openly only strengthened her feeling that things wouldn't turn out so well this time. She did deserve it after all. She had tried to make her peace with the inevitable outcome of her actions during her run earlier, steeling herself for it on the drive here. As well as possible at least.

Ecklie kept going as if oblivious to her silence. "Yeah, well - IA sure moves fast at times. But I can understand in this particular case." He had the gall to try and put on a sad face. "Well, it was nice working with you."

Sara was glad he didn't offer her his hand. She wasn't sure what she might have done with it, though not for lack of ideas. Surely he didn't expect her to answer though. As much as she had tried to prepare herself for what was to come, his words had cut deep, as intended, but she wouldn't give him the pleasure of acknowledging it. Cordial, remember.

"Thank you, Ecklie." She waited till the ensuing silence reached a whole new level of uncomfortable.

Ecklie looked almost disappointed that she didn't jump at his taunting. "Ahm, unfortunately I have some matters to attend to, so..." He slunked away, probably on the lookout for a new victim. One good thing about getting fired was that she wouldn't have to see him anymore.

Sara walked on heavily. It's just a job, not the end of the goddamn world. She could still get a job with other labs. And if she were honest with herself, it actually wouldn't be a bad thing to leave everything else behind.

Then why did she still feel like she was walking towards her own execution as she reached for the door to the interrogation room?

xxxxxxx

Grissom stood stock-still. He felt the muscles in his back tense up soon as Sara stepped into the room. She had put on a brave face, but he could see it was only a mask. She had gotten entirely too good at that recently and he asked himself again how much of that was because of him. Maybe it was knowing the difference from when she had opened up towards him that made him notice it more acutely.

His tense back was making his shoulder throb dully again, though the meds were keeping his headache at bay. Sheriff Burdick stepping next to him in front of the two-way mirror separating this room from the interrogation room beyond was another kind headache altogether.

"As we agreed, Grissom."

Grissom only saw Burdick's reflection in the glass on the edge of his vision, refusing to tear his gaze away from Sara sitting down in front of Adams. He nodded tersely as an answer, jaw muscles clenching, then focused on the proceedings in the interrogation room.

The voices were tinny through the small speaker, lending an almost surreal feel to it all, like watching a badly taped video, and Grissom almost lost sense of time as he watched the questioning quietly.

"Yes, I failed to call back-up. I got myself and my supervisor Grissom into a potentially lethal situation, forcing his hand that resulted in the death of another person."

Sara sounded almost matter-of-factly as she recalled the events, but Grissom sensed there was more. She was too accepting of the accusations brought against her, as if she had already given up. He had known she would blame herself for getting them into that room with Edwards, but surely not for Grissom having to shoot him. She shouldn't be shouldering that. He had always lived with guilt in a way, learned how to deal with it. Thou shalt not kill. He could probably even rationalize that away when he tried hard enough. Another thing he was good at. Surely it would have been the wrong course of action to do nothing, to have another person carry the burden of killing someone instead. But he had never meant for his actions to be a burden for Sara. Lose-lose situation, Grissom.

He only noticed he had stepped closer to the glass separating them when he felt his own warm breath fanning over his face. He had to fight the urge to step into the other room, but a deal was a deal.

"So, Ms. Sidle." Adams concluded the hearing and Grissom watched as Sara almost drew inwards, steeling herself for what was to come.

"You understand of course that we cannot let a transgression like this slide." Adams opened the report in front of him. "But considering your well above average record over the years... we wouldn't want to lose such a good CSI. You will be demoted to a CSI Level 2, with all accompanying pay and vacation cuts. Additionally to that, you are placed on a mandatory 2-weeks suspension. Without pay, I'm afraid."

Sara's head snapped up. She looked at the man opposite her intently, as if making sure she had heard correctly. Grissom saw surprise on her face, mixed with relief. And something almost like anger.

"Two weeks?"

"Yes, Ms. Sidle." Adams was putting his files away and stood up.

Grissom heard an approving grunt from Burdick next to him as Adams left the interrogation room. Sara was still sitting in her place, looking almost dazed. Turning hastily, Grissom was stopped short by the Sheriff regarding him with calculating eyes.

"It was the right decision, Grissom. Let Sidle take a bit of the fall, the rest as agreed."

"Tell that to Catherine."

"It's for her best, too. You know that." Burdick shrugged. "The changes will be implemented immediately. You should be happy, Gil. You're getting your team back."

Grissom only regarded him coldly until Burdick smiled and turned to go.

"Oh, one more thing." The Sheriff turned once more in the doorway. "Atwater was an incompetent fool, though he looked good on camera. You better not try keeping something like Willows cashing that check from me, understood? Who knows what kind of repercussions a move like that might have for you personally." He smiled thinly and nodded to Adams outside as he left.

Grissom clenched his jaw again and turned towards the two-way mirror, but could only watch Sara leaving the interrogation room.

TBC.