

**Title:** Inevitable

**Author:** Frumpy

**Rating:** T - again for language in this one.

**Spoilers:** None really, just general stuff up to currently aired eps. Mention of King Baby.

Disclaimer: I don't own CSI - but if I did, I'd give it to Tarantino and have him direct every single ep from now on.

**A/N:** Sorry if the story is confusing to some, but I didn't want to have everything revealed up front. Thank you so much for the reviews everyone. I'd be lying if I didn't say they make my day!

## **Chapter: 8**

For the second time that day Sara walked into the lab. She had driven there straight from the desert, not wanting to give herself the time to change her mind. In a way this was more Grissom's turf than her own and she would have preferred a more neutral setting. But she didn't want to give him the time to back out or bullshit himself into thinking he could come up with a safe response that would say all and nothing at the same time. She had made her decision and would stand by it - whether they'd work through it or it would end up being the one unsurmountable obstacle on the madly winding path they'd travelled so far.

Rounding the corner to his office, she saw the light was on. Good, so he was in. Sara gathered herself and was about to announce her presence, when a voice from his office made her stop short.

"Grissom, I... I just can't believe what you did."

Catherine. Sara stayed rooted to the spot. She didn't want to eavesdrop - it was so cheap and low, but couldn't help herself from listening on. Grissom hadn't even bothered with closing his office door fully. It was ajar, which was strange in itself as the argument seemed to have been going on for a while.

"Catherine, it had to be done. It wasn't really up to me to..."

"Stop it, Grissom. We both know why you did it and considerations for me didn't even enter your mind." Catherine sounded more hurt than angry underneath her sharp tone and Sara wondered what exactly had happened. It seemed like these past few days everything just went down the tubes suddenly. She felt the pang of guilt again, thinking how her actions had ended up touching so many others.

"On the contrary, Catherine. I did it just as much for you."

"How exactly is getting me demoted good for me?"

Demoted? Sara drew closer to the wall.

"Because the alternative would have been worse, believe me." Grissom's voice sounded strained, as if he was trying to communicate more than he could say with words. Sara had seen that often enough, yet never heard him speak with as much underlying regret and tiredness.

"Oh, don't tell me you didn't do it for HER. Don't try to bullshit me into thinking you did this for anyone but you and your selfish little concerns."

"Catherine..." Grissom sounded almost pleading, which was uncharacteristic for him. What was going on?

"No. Forget it, Grissom. I think I finally see you for who you are." Catherine's cold voice drifted through the door. Sara looked around, but no one seemed to have noticed the argument just yet. It

was the lull between shifts and people were either getting their workstations ready or were about to leave. But she felt punched in the gut by what she had heard. Catherine demoted? And what she had insinuated, could it be true? Was Grissom doing this for her? Because of her to be precise?

Sara inched away slowly. Her mind was reeling with the new info and it didn't make any sense. Why would Catherine be demoted because of her fuck up? And what did Grissom have to do with it? But it surely explained why Sara wasn't out of a job now. She felt anger well up in herself. That was so Grissom, going over her head with something like this, not even considering into what position it would put her.

The push and pull game he seemed to be so fond of had just entered a whole new level. Sara could deal with it as long as it was about herself only. She didn't like it and lately she'd grown disgusted by it. But let it draw other people in and Grissom surely had crossed a line Sara was not willing to cross with him. Still, she could not see it in Grissom to do something like that. A last flicker of believe in his basic decency remained, despite all the pain and mindfucks he'd put her through. Maybe it was that last shred of the Grissom she firmly believed in that lay behind his stone walls that had made her stay despite everything in her screaming to get as far away from him as possible. There was more to this, there had to be.

She turned silently and went back outside, deciding to bid her time for the moment. She wasn't running, but she knew she couldn't talk with Grissom just now.

xxxxxxx

Grissom leaned back in his chair wearily, the argument having aggravated his headache again. He pushed it aside to give Catherine his full attention. He understood her anger and he could accept it to a degree, though it was misdirected. For the umpteenth time that day he cursed god and the world for seemingly conspiring against him. But he was sick and tired of covering for her and getting nothing but accusations in return.

Catherine had quietened down, her anger replaced by a sadness. Underlying his own anger brought on by the argument was the question if Catherine was partly right. Was he doing this more for himself than anyone else? If he'd had his own needs in mind, why did it feel like it was ripping him apart?

"Catherine. You think I chose Sara over you due to... personal feelings." He managed to wrench that admission out of himself.

Catherine laughed a short bitter laugh. "At least you're not trying to bullshit either of us. I guess that's a step forward for you. Congratulation. Though I kinda wish you had done it without screwing my career over."

Her sarcastic tone grated on him and he wondered again how she could think that of him after all these years. "You think I wanted you demoted?"

"Gil." She was silent for a while. "I'm not sure what to think anymore."

"Look... this goes beyond what has happened the past few days. It's not about me. And it's not about me wanting to keep Sara." His lack of sleep and the persisting headache were catching up with him. He was beyond swallowing all she dished out to him.

"I'm sorry Grissom, but what message am I to get from you being ready to have me demoted in order to have Sara not lose her job?" Catherine felt the anger rise again, pushing the hurt aside.

"Is that what Burdick told you?"

"Don't try to talk this away. Don't try to rationalize this so you can go to sleep in peace every night, because Gil Grissom is above things. Gil Grissom can do no wrong. You're full of shit, Gil."

"I never said that!" Grissom snapped. "I fuck up just like everyone else. I'm not the one who can't face the repercussions for it or accept responsibility for my actions!"

Catherine was surprised by his outburst, not remembering Grissom ever having spoken like that before, but it triggered an anger in her she wasn't willing to swallow. "Don't try to shift the blame, Grissom."

"You are one to speak Catherine." His laugh was bitter. Truth is, he was just tired of it all. "Okay, straight up. No beating around the bush." He leaned forward, eyes hard. "You are the one who brought this unto yourself. I am tired of your accusations when I've always had your back."

"Up until this time you mean."

"Especially this time, Catherine." Grissom hated that he had to break it to her like that, but she needed to know the full story. He pulled a file out from his topmost drawer. "I'm doing this because I am your friend and I don't want to lose you. But I have to be honest with you - if you're looking for someone to blame, look at yourself." He extended the file towards her. "This file was recovered from a secret compartment in Bruce Eiger's toy box, I'm sure you remember the case."

Catherine took the file and frowned. "What does that have to do with me?"

"Everything, Catherine. Eiger was a powerful man. And he had powerful enemies he felt the need to protect himself from. Apparently he chose the well proven method of blackmail, which is what you're holding."

She scanned the cover and drew in a startled breath. Sam Braun. The file was a good two inches thick and Catherine felt a cold dread settle over herself.

Grissom saw the realization in her eyes. "I'm sorry it had to come to this. But you need to understand that had I not struck this deal with the Sheriff, you would be out of this job and the lab would face a public relations disaster. Apparently Eiger also had a file on Atwater and you know how that ended. Thank the fact that the Sheriff's more concerned with public appearance of the lab than anything else."

"The check?"

"For one thing, yes." Grissom pinched the bridge of his nose. "I'm sorry Catherine, I let the argument go too far."

"It wasn't a bribe."

Grissom looked at her. "I believe you. Or I wouldn't have covered for you. It's what it can be made to look like that is the problem. You knew that."

She handed him the file back. "I don't think I want to read it."

"Okay." He put it back in the drawer and sighed.

"I guess you got the best deal out of this, huh?"

"You think I wanted it to come to this?" Catherine's ability to shift blame instantly never ceased to amaze him.

"No. I guess not." She got up and walked to the door. "I guess I'll see you tonight then. I need to tell Nick and Warrick."

He watched her go wordlessly, not entirely sure where they were standing just now. Grissom tried to be rational about this. The alternative would have been losing both Catherine and Sara, as Burdick would have fired Catherine over the check and using evidence to determine paternity, and Sara over

breaking the rules. By standing up for Sara, he had forced Burdick to choose between losing all three of them or striking a deal that didn't sit all that well with anyone involved. He understood Burdick's motivation, but Catherine's words made him question his own. Was he blinding himself into thinking he was doing it for others, or was he doing it out of guilt and needing to assuage it?

The guilt wasn't over the Eiger file and Catherine. He had used that to distract himself from the real issue at hand. And that wasn't about the Sheriff or politics and tough decisions regarding the lab that involved other people. The one person he needed to talk to, to see that she didn't blame him, was the one person he had never found the strength in himself to talk things over openly. It was tearing him apart on the inside to want to so much but being unable to just yet. But if he couldn't do it for himself, he had to do it for her.

**TBC.**