

Title: Inevitable

Author: Frumpy

Rating: T

Spoilers: Everything including S5 is fair game, but no real spoilers in this one.

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 and have CM demoted too.

A/N: Thanks for pointing out my error with the centipede. The ones here aren't quite as nasty and I will delete the site I checked from my favorites as it apparently sucks...
And as always, thank you so much for the wonderful and thoughtful reviews!

Chapter 9:

Grissom walked into the breakroom, greeted by stony silence. He let his gaze sweep over the people there. Nick, Warrick and Greg were sitting together at the table. Catherine a little to the side, not meeting his eyes. Sofia was also a bit apart from the guys. The empty place across from her screamed at him, the absence of its usual occupant only reminding him that the team reunion wasn't like anything he'd ever pictured it to be.

Ecklie breaking up the team had cut deep. He had come to realize that it wasn't the fact that his work had been questioned, that his reputation might have been tarnished. He had been glad that Catherine had finally been promoted - despite her errors in judgement in the past, he thought she'd learned her lesson and would make a good supervisor. But he had come to realize that his team had grown dearer to him than he wanted them to. That they had insinuated their way into his heart and had been like a family indeed. And now he had them back, but under less than ideal circumstances.

Pursing his mouth, he placed the assignment slips on the table and sat down, all eyes turning to him expectantly. Any illusions of just playing this like they used to - handing out assignments, Nick and Warrick ribbing each other over who would get to work what case - quickly vanished.

"Here's the deal." He tried for a modicum of calm assurance under the circumstances. "As you've undoubtedly heard, Catherine has been demoted from Swingshift Supervisor and works for the Nightshift again. Warrick and Nick, you too." They didn't look surprised or showed any outward reaction really from which he could judge their state of mind, and it made him feel uneasy to see them so closed off. "Sofia will be promoted to supervisor of Swing, taking over some of that team and a few from Dayshift. That means the lab is still understaffed and we might have to work more than usual, but the Sheriff's taking applications."

Sofia nodded and shot an apologetic glance towards Catherine. "I'll make it work. I'm actually surprised Ecklie backed down on his decision."

"Ecklie had nothing to do with it. It was..." He struggled for words, "It was out of his hands."

Greg coughed. "What about Sara?"

The tension in the room was palpable, but Grissom had come to admire the young CSI for not shying away from uncomfortable questions at any time.

"She's been placed on a two week suspension and demoted to a CSI Level 2. She'll join us after she gets back to work." Grissom tried to sound unaffected, but shifted uncomfortably in his chair and cursed himself for it. He had never been one to fidget. "Look guys, I..."

"Why don't you just hand out assignments?" Catherine's voice cut through his attempt at an explanation.

Seeing it was too soon for mending fences just yet, he nodded softly. He picked up the assignment slips and for a moment a feeling of the old Nightshift overcame him, though tinged by sadness. "Warrick, Greg - trash call at the Thriftlodge Motel. Owner called it in." He extended the slip and Warrick took it with a soft nod of his own, leaving the room with Greg in tow.

"Catherine, do you want a case or time to get everything organized with your office?"

"I don't know. You're the boss."

Grissom saw that any attempts at trying to make this smooth for her were useless, his effort at making it clear that she still had an extra standing on the team seemed to be for naught. Fine. He was done playing the punching bag. He could be a hard-ass too. "Yes, I am. Get your office cleared so Sofia can take it over. She can help you."

Shooting daggers in his direction with her eyes, Catherine got up and stalked out of the room. Sofia looked none too happy, but chose not to comment and slowly walked after Catherine. She was a good CSI, but had never really been part of the team, so Grissom was fine with letting her go.

"Gris."

He looked up at Nick. The Texan had a gentle look in his eyes as he regarded him calmly. "Cath... you know her. This isn't easy for her and she'll make sure we all know that for a while to come. She'll get used to it."

Grissom had always appreciated it about Nick that he seemed to have an understanding for the underdog, even if it seemed strange to think of himself in such terms. But then he wasn't surprised he wasn't exactly popular right now. And while he couldn't stand pity, he didn't see any in Nick's gaze or words. Smiling softly, he handed Nick the last assignment slip. "Thank you, Nick. I got a drug deal gone bad for you. One dead."

"Just me?" Nick glanced over the sheet.

"My shoulder's still troubling me a bit, I'll stay at the lab. So it's all yours."

The soft tone and the admission itself astonished Nick, but Grissom seemed different lately. Nick didn't know the details of what had happened, but he trusted Grissom and he saw that a lot was weighing him down at the moment. He got up and walked around the table.

"That's cool. Look..." Tentatively putting his hand on Grissom's uninjured shoulder, he looked down at his supervisor. "I'm sorry for what happened, but I'm glad we're back together. We'll make it work." He quickly withdrew his hand and walked out, unsure of Grissom's reaction to the friendly gesture and if he had overstepped any bounds.

He didn't see Grissom look after him with astonished eyes and the grateful smile that he allowed himself for a moment before getting up to leave for his office.

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Sara couldn't sleep. Not surprising, as it was 1am and she usually would be at work at that time of night. She hadn't slept throughout the day, but she had always been able to function on little to no sleep. It wasn't the lack of sleep that was troubling her.

She had tried to look at everything in an objective and scientific manner. She didn't have many facts, but the ones she could list just didn't stack up.

She had messed up, but hadn't been fired. Under the circumstances, her suspension and demotion were a joke. Ecklie had seemed unaware, so he was out of the picture.

Catherine had been demoted for some reason and apparently she blamed Grissom from what Sara had overheard. But Sara failed to see the connection to herself. She didn't believe in coincidence, so Grissom must have had a hand in this. He had a selfish streak, she was the first who could attest to it, but there had to be something she didn't know about.

She wondered again if her personal feelings clouded her judgement. And she cursed herself for still being unable to shake the hold he apparently had on her. After all this time, after all he put her through, she wasn't ready to give up on him. Sara was awfully close to giving up on him being more than a boss to her, but she couldn't give up on him as a person.

Over the last couple of years she had seen a side of Grissom she had never suspected. In retrospect, she realized that she'd always had an idealized vision of him in her mind. It was easy to form a picture of a person when you didn't see them on a daily basis but kept living in the past, clinging to the good memories and the first impressions. And after she first came here, he seemed to live up to that picture. But then, no person could stay up on the pedestal someone else puts them on and she had been dearly disappointed in what she came to see in Grissom at times. Except that was only human and he probably didn't realize how much his fallacies told her about him. To truly know a person, you had to see them at their worst. But the blame wasn't solely on him, she had to shoulder some of it herself.

At times she thought she understood him, that she had gained the decisive piece in the puzzle that was Gil Grissom that would let her see the whole picture. But then the piece didn't fit and she ended up knowing him even less. Every time she thought she might have him figured out, he went and did something unexpected. She was losing patience, though.

The ringing of the phone caught her attention and she walked over to it slowly, still deep in thought. Recently he had gone out of his way to try and regain the friendship they once shared, actually creating a more solid basis for it than they've ever had. But she had gone and messed it up royally.

Sara picked up the phone, shaking herself out of her ruminations. "Sidle." Her eyes widened in surprise. Talk about unexpected.

TBC.