

Title: Slipping

Author: Frumpy

Rating: PG-13, to be on the safe side.

Disclaimer: I still don't own CSI for some reason. And it's still not on HBO.

A/N: On with the case. Four or five chapters to go after this one, and I promise to update more regularly after this week when I get my life back again.

Chapter 11:

Sara watched the Coroner's van pull out of the alley and disappear down the street. David had silently loaded the body up, promising to deliver the blood evidence to the lab for them and to notify Grissom of the results if they weren't back in time. Turning, she walked back to the dumpster where Grissom was kneeling in the shade, shining his flashlight across the asphalt. He had taken off his jacket in the afternoon heat and was dressed in a blue shirt and LVPD ballcap to shield his eyes from the sun's glare whenever they stepped out of the shadow of the dumpster. He held the flashlight close to the ground, beam pointing away at a sharp angle.

Sara saw something glimmer for a moment. "Hold it!"

Grissom held still and waited till she had grabbed a pair of tweezers and her camera, and knelt down next to him. Quickly snapping two pictures of it, she lifted the small object and held it up, waiting till Grissom shone the beam of the flashlight on it to get a better look.

"Looks like... some piece of metal. Just a fleck." She turned it slowly. "Tinted black on one side."

Putting it into a bindle, Sara looked up again and followed the direction of the flashlight to where Grissom was pointing it at the dumpster. The grey dumpster. She saw what he was getting at - a matching fleck of metal on the edge of the large container, close to the ground. She photographed and lifted it, too, regarding it for a moment. "You know, it could be totally unrelated. This IS a dumpster."

Grissom looked up for a moment and then continued with his search silently. He hadn't said a word since the body had been taken away, working quietly, taking in, not interpreting, not judging.

Sara shrugged and started searching the area in the opposite direction of where he was moving, concentrating on the work at hand.

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They had been working the scene for over two hours. Grissom ran a hand over his sweaty brow, cringing at the smell of trash he carried after looking through the dumpster earlier. His knees were starting to ache from the constant kneeling, and he was bone tired from lack of sleep and some sort of deeper weariness that had nothing to do with his body craving rest. Other than the fleck of metal they hadn't found anything. No fibres, no shoe prints, no nothing.

Brass had started questioning some of the spectators, but hadn't gotten anything useful. No one had seen anything. The alley was off a main street, so any noise would have been swallowed by the traffic, and it was between a dry cleaner that didn't see much business during the day and a closed bar. Halfway through the dumpster blocked the view of the rest of it, so no one had seen anything until the waste collector had found the body.

The body. Both him and Sara basically knew, though neither of them had said it out loud. But when Sara had lifted the victim's left arm and Grissom could see the cut, it was pretty much clear who they were dealing with. He told himself that he just didn't want to speculate and was waiting for an official confirmation, but the truth was that it was never easy to adjust from a missing person's to a murder case. They dealt with murder and the finality of it on a daily basis. But a missing person's always had

a certain glimmer of hope of not only being the victim's last voice but of actually helping them. Not this time.

He shook his head slightly to rid himself of the distracting thoughts and looked over the crime scene once again. The sun had begun setting, creating longer shadows in the alley and making the temperature more bearable.

Sara had collected all the evidence they had found, and was already walking to her car. Good thing they had arrived in separate vehicles, he wouldn't want to share a car with himself after his dumpster diving. He watched her talking to Brass for a moment before sweeping the scene with his eyes one last time, turning off the flashlight and walking towards them.

Brass was subdued himself and only crinkled his nose slightly when Grissom got to them. "Well, we still got the lead of Nathan's drug dealer to follow. We'll meet up with the kid in about two hours."

"Will you book the dealer when you find him?"

"We'll try to catch him in the act, Sara. That way you guys can question him." He rubbed his chin and for a moment the compassionate man that was beneath the tough and snarky cop exterior shone through. "When you get definite results, call me. Okay?"

Grissom nodded at his friend. "We will, Jim." He motioned for Sara to get to her car and get back to the lab.

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"Gil!"

Groaning inwardly, Grissom dropped his hand from the small of Sara's back and stopped. Sara turned, but he indicated she should keep walking to the Trace Lab. A knowing sigh escaped her and she shot him a quick glance of sympathy before she walked on. This was really the last thing he needed. Grissom turned and tried to put on a pleasant façade, not sure if he succeeded, but also not really caring.

"What can I do for you, Conrad?"

The smug smile he got in return got replaced by a wrinkled nose when Ecklie drew closer to Grissom. "Take a shower for starters, Gil."

"Some of us actually work in the field. And on that note..."

"Yes, on that note. I hear you had Brass go over my head and hand a Dayshift case to you?" Ecklie's face was bland, except for a dangerous sparkle in his eyes. It was like he lived for moments like these, feeding off of opportunities to find fault in others.

"It pertained to an ongoing investigation I'm working with Sara, so no, it was not your case. And if you don't have anything constructive to add..." Grissom was on the verge of losing his patience and letting his annoyance show. The case, the lack of sleep, and now Ecklie were all chipping away at his usually composed demeanor.

"Just wanted to remind you, Gil, that Nighshift's backlog is growing. And you know how much the sheriff cares about the solve rates." He smiled sweetly. "Just one supervisor looking out for the other, right Gil? We're friends here."

Grissom let that hang for a moment before flashing a fake smile. "Right Conrad." He let the silence grow until it was uncomfortable.

Ecklie nodded and swallowed. "Yeah, well. No hard feelings from my side anyway about the case."

Rolling his eyes, Grissom just turned and went straight for the locker room.

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Sara had dropped the flecks of metal they had collected with Trace, grateful for the fact that Hodges wasn't in yet. A run-in with Ecklie was enough to last for the rest of the shift, no need to deal with his twin, too.

Since no one else from the Nightshift was in yet, she checked the DNA lab to see if they had any results. Seeing Foster from days still working on their sample, she decided to do something useful while waiting for it and went to the evidence room. She got out the surveillance tape from the robbery and signed for it, taking it to one of the layout rooms to look at it in private.

Sara knew what was on the tape. She just needed a sort of confirmation for herself before getting the official results. Watching Robert storm into the video rental, she noted his jeans and sneakers, and watched again how he cradled his left arm after hitting the cash register. It all fit.

She heard a slight shuffle from the door and turned to find Grissom standing there. He had showered and changed, looking more refreshed. His eyes were wary though and his shoulders a bit slumped, showing his fatigue. Sara's gaze dropped to his hands and the folder in there. Grissom regarded her quietly for a moment then dropped his gaze and licked his lips.

"DNA checked the blood samples we collected." His voice was soft and rough at the same time. "They are a match to your sample from the video rental and the CODIS file." He closed the folder and walked to her quietly. Handing it to her, he held her eyes for a moment before withdrawing his hand again. "I'll call Brass and tell him that we found Robert Walker."

TBC.