

**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:** Many thanks for the reviews.

Special thanks to ebuzz for her detailed knowledge of WP ;) And as always to Marlou for being the best beta there is!

## **Chapter 12:**

Grissom put the phone down and leaned back in his chair, closing his eyes in the semi-darkness of his office. Brass hadn't sounded surprised, probably having drawn his own conclusions already, but that didn't mean the confirmation had any less of a numbing effect. Before the call, he had quickly checked in with Catherine to ask her to do the assignments for that night. Only one new case, and Nick was still working his old one.

Absently rubbing the ring finger of his right hand with his thumb, his thoughts returned to his and Sara's case and he went through their options. They would have to wait what Trace would make of the metal flecks they had collected. Brass was staking out the dealer right now - that was their best bet, but no telling how long it might take. Robbins... he checked his watch. He should be in since the beginning of shift a while ago, so they ought be getting the autopsy results soon. He'd let Sara...

Sara. He still saw the disappointment in her eyes after he had handed her the file. This case would be taxing to most anyone - he was feeling it himself. But she was always more involved and still somewhat idealistic about their work, so it probably hit her even harder. Grissom wondered again when he had gotten so jaded about their work. Not jaded enough to not feel anything despite what a lot of people thought, though he didn't often show it. But jaded enough to stop questioning why nothing what people could do to each other surprised him anymore, let alone question the reasons behind it.

Turning his hand, he looked at his bruised knuckles. At least he still cared enough for some things. The image of Sara in his townhouse, bandaging his hand, came unbidden, and her unwavering goodness despite all he had done. And then her eyes as she had looked at him just moments before. It hurt him to see her lose some of her idealism. He'd have to get out of his current state of self-defeating guilt in order to be there for her in that regard. He smiled softly when he realized that he actually could be there for her anytime he wanted now.

The small vibration against his hip brought him out of his reverie. Grissom got out the pager and read the message, at the same time seeing a familiar shadow block the light from the hallway. Looking up he saw Sara, her own pager in hand, standing in his doorway. She seemed to have used the time in much the same way as he had, collecting herself because she looked more energized and eager again.

Holding up her pager, she motioned toward the direction of the morgue. "You coming?"

Not able to suppress a small smile at the simple elation he felt at having her by his side, he got up and joined her on her way down the hall.

"Anything new from Brass?" She quickly waved to Greg as they passed the DNA lab then turned her attention on him.

Grissom saw Greg's open return smile and frowned a bit, but then turned to Sara. "He's still staking the dealer out. Soon as they get him, he'll call us so we can question him, too."

"Good." She fell silent for a moment as they continued walking. "Are you turning into a vampire?"

"I'm sorry?"

She smiled. "I know... Graveyard, Gruesome Grissom and such. I guess you have to uphold an image. But recently the light in your office is out most of the time. How come?"

"It is?"

She looked at him trying to gauge whether he was leading her on or truly not aware of it. "Yes, it is. You sit in there illuminated by your small desk lamp at the most. Quite dramatic, I might add, if that's the effect you wanted to achieve."

He shrugged at the same time wondering when he had gotten into that habit. Probably around the time he started knocking down lab walls. "It just helps me think."

"Oh? And what would you be thinking about?"

He smiled at her. "So many things..."

Unable to not smile back, Sara shook her head. "Okay. Let's hope Al found something. And that he'll be a bit more forthcoming than you are." When they had reached the doors to the morgue, she looked left and right surreptitiously. Seeing no one, Sara turned back to Grissom who was frowning slightly. Her eyes sadder again, she took hold of his hand and squeezed it quickly. "We'll get him."

Grissom wished he were as sure, but nodded nonetheless. His gaze dropped to their hands before she let go of his. He didn't know if she'd done it for his or her sake, but didn't really care. For once, Grissom let himself enjoy the moment without worrying, before pushing the door open. Still seeking the feel of her, he gently led her through the door with his hand now on the small of her back, enjoying the fact that he could do so without feeling guilty.

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Doc Robbins was just pulling the sheet up to cover the body on the slab when they stepped in. He saw Grissom's hand on Sara's back, also noting that Grissom held it there longer than necessary, almost as if it were the most natural thing between them. Smiling inwardly, he turned his attention back to the body before him.

"I heard this was your missing person, Gil?"

Grissom nodded grimly. His gaze dropped to Robert... the victim on the table. Although the blood had been washed off, the swelling and the now more pronounced bruises made the body still unrecognizable. He stole a quick glance at Sara, but she had her features carefully schooled, all business again. Regarding Robbins again, he looked at him questioningly. "COD?"

"Not surprisingly - blunt force trauma. Caused massive intracranial bleeding." He pointed to some of the larger bruises. "No telling which one was the killing blow, but he was literally beaten to death. I took some samples and sent them to DNA. Scraped under his nails - maybe he fought back." Checking his report, he nodded. "Yes. He did have some bruising on both his lower arms, as if trying to shield his head."

Sara nodded slowly. "You think more than one attacker?"

"Most likely, yes." Robbins lifted the sheet, uncovering the left arm. "I also found a cut on his lower left arm. But it's older than the rest of the injuries."

"Must be by several days. He was already hurt when he robbed the video rental." Grissom glanced at Sara again - it had told them all they had needed to know back in the alley.

"Okay." Robbins pulled the sheet back. "I cannot tell exactly what was used to cut him, but it was something with a jagged blade. Some kind of knife probably. Relatively big. " Shaking his head slowly, he looked at the body for a moment, eyes sad. "I'll page you if I find anything else."

"Thank you, Al." Grissom took the autopsy report from the coroner and was about to turn when his pager went off again.

Sara stopped and looked at him expectantly.

Expression grim and eyes set, he looked up at her. "Brass. He's on his way in."

TBC.