

Title: Slipping

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

Disclaimer: Nope, still not mine for some reason.

A/N: One more chapter after this one. Thank you for the reviews, guys! We finish the case and then it's on to Grissom and Sara all the way, heh.

A thousand thank yous to Marlou for making this story so much better! Any remaining mistakes are mine, and mine alone!

Chapter 13:

Grissom and Sara stopped at the Trace lab on their way to the PD, but the Dayshift techs hadn't gotten around to the metal flecks they had found yet and Hodges was just starting. With Dayshift moving out and Nightshift taking over, things were going a bit slower, so they would have to wait some time for the results.

Brass was standing outside the interrogation room when they entered the police station, obviously waiting for them. "Just got in. We caught him red handed, though two of his buddies managed to escape." He pointed to the next interrogation room down the hall. "We got one other accomplice, so maybe we can play them against each other."

Grissom nodded then turned towards Sara who had walked into the observation room to get a look at their suspect. Dark hair slicked back, he had a somewhat greasy look to him, but nothing too out of the ordinary to attract any real attention. He didn't seem too ruffled as he was leaning back in his chair, sipping the provided coffee calmly.

Sara studied him quietly for a moment, trying to assess him. "So that's 'John'."

"Well," Brass waved his hand with a slight flourish. "John Smith, actually."

"You're kidding me, right?"

Brass grinned at her dumbfounded expression. "No, I'm not." Motioning to the officer outside in the hallway, he took a bag from him and held it out towards Grissom. "Also found this on the guy. Thought it might interest you."

Grissom took the bag and then looked at Sara, both eyebrows raised "Well, what do you know." He held out the see-through plastic bag and the big knife contained within. "Knife, tinted black, with the upper half of the blade serrated."

She grinned and took the bag from him, holding it against the light. "I can't see any blood, but looks like the blade is chipped in some places." She felt Grissom step closer to her to get a better look, feeling the kind of easy comfort in his proximity she had missed the last couple years.

"Get it to Greg, see if he can find any blood or traces of it."

She nodded and quickly went out of the room.

"Good work, Brass." Grissom looked at the dealer, then back at his friend. "How long can we hold him?"

"I can wait a bit with questioning, but I wouldn't give him too long to cook up a story. You can swoop in anytime then." He checked his watch. "Let's give Sara some time to get results, so we'll have something in our hands."

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"You got something about the flecks?" Sara stepped into the lab. She wasn't too hot about talking to Hodges, but he was good at what he did, she had to admit that. The only problem was that he knew it, too.

"Well, it's metal. Tinted."

She waited a beat before taking a deep breath. "That's very informative, thank you. You got anything else?"

"Of course. Ever been in the Marines?"

"Afraid not, but maybe that's a good thing for you. Give, Hodges!" Sara really wasn't in the mood for his pompous antics today.

Hodges looked almost hurt if that was possible for him before motioning towards the microscope. "It's a special mix, used mainly for K-Bar knives. Very popular with the Marine Corps."

"Can you match it to a knife?" She looked up at him.

"I can match it to a general type of knife, but not a specific one, no." He shrugged, and turned towards another sample.

Sara held up the evidence bag with the dealer's knife in it. "Would you say this is the general type of knife these flecks came from?"

Hodges turned and looked it over. "I would say so, yes. But nothing really conclusive in that - it's hardly a rare type."

"Thanks anyway."

Quickly walking over to the DNA Lab, she nodded at Greg. "Please tell me you got something!"

"Well," he rolled his chair over to the other side of the room, and picked up a print-out. "I ran the samples Doc Robbins gave me from your victim. Several DNA donors found from the epithelia on his clothes and skin. One hit on CODIS." He pulled out another sheet of paper. "One John Smith... and is that ever a fake name if I've seen one."

"Thank you." Sara looked over the print out and the picture, then handed him the knife. "Can you check this for blood? Put a rush on it, please, we got a certain John Smith waiting in interrogation." She smiled at him impishly, before snatching the DNA results out of his hands and leaving.

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Grissom checked his watch again then turned back to watching Brass work the dealer. Brass was good, not letting on what they really wanted, but time was running out; they couldn't keep Smith in interrogation forever.

He felt her a moment before hearing her, and turned before she entered the little observation room, breathing hard from running the way from the lab to here.

"Hodges matched the flecks to the general type of knife Brass found on Smith," she started without any preamble. "He cannot match it to that particular knife, though, and it's hardly unique." Showing him the DNA results, she wiped her brow. "Greg found several DNA samples, one hit in CODIS. It's Smith."

Grissom nodded and pursed his mouth. "The knife?"

"Greg is checking it for blood as we speak. Griss..."

"I know." He looked at her gravely. Turning to look in on Brass again, he ran his hand over his mouth and thought for a moment. "Check the other guy they've got." He turned back to Sara. "See if you can get any DNA from his knuckles or nails, maybe a sample from him, too."

"Okay."

Watching her go, Grissom took a deep breath and shook his head. This was not going to be easy.

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Brass looked up when Grissom entered the room, and nodded at him slightly. He couldn't read the other man's face, but that wasn't unusual. John looked up when Grissom entered, but the CSI didn't offer any sort of introduction, instead only sat down at the table, looking calmly at Brass and then Smith.

"Who is he?" Smith motioned with his chin towards Grissom and looked back at Brass.

"I'm Gil Grissom. I work for the crime lab." He cocked his head slightly, and looked at Brass again.

"Go ahead, Gil." Brass sat down and leaned back.

"Just a couple more questions." Grissom shot Smith a quick humorless smile, and slowly put down the folder he was holding.

"I already talked with my man Brass, here."

"Well, I think I have some other questions." He slid a picture of Robert towards John. "Do you know him?"

Smith studied the picture for a while, shooting a quick glance at Brass and Grissom, obviously trying to decide how to play it. "Yeah. Kid comes around now and then. Why?"

Grissom didn't show that he wasn't too pleased with that answer. It would have been better to catch him lying, but the guy wasn't dumb. "When was the last time you saw him?"

"Couple days ago. He owed me money."

Shooting Brass a quick glance, Grissom looked back at Smith. "And what happened?"

"We argued. He didn't have the money he owed me. He broke his word." Smith looked at Brass again. "That why you took my knife? Kid ratted me out?"

Brass looked at Grissom gravely. He better have something up his sleeve, or this talk was not going the way they had hoped. "Did you cut him?"

Smith shrugged. "Kid got hysterical, he might have nicked himself unintentionally."

"Of course." Brass snorted. "He kill himself unintentionally, too?"

"Yo, yo, wait a sec!" Smith held up his right hand. "Kid was alive when he walked away."

With a sudden move, Grissom caught the dealer's hand in one of his and turned it. "Coincidence that your hand looks a bit roughed up and the kid was beaten to death?"

Smith snatched his hand back, and then smirked. "Coincidence that your hand looks a bit roughed up?"

Grissom flashed him an angry glance, and pulled his own hand back. "We got your DNA, John. On the victim. On his clothes, on his face, and not from when he 'accidentally' cut himself. Care to explain that?" Grissom's voice had grown quieter yet more pointed with each word.

"He came back. I had set an ultimatum." Smith leaned back, and spread his arms. "I got an image to lose, ya know? Can't let a kid play me like that."

"So you beat him to death?" Brass leaned forward.

"Who said anything about that?" He shrugged. "We roughed him up a bit, that was it." Looking at Grissom intently, he smirked with a self-satisfied air. "And that's all there is to it, so I guess that's how my D and N and A, " he drew out the letters, "got on the kid."

Grissom clenched his jaw and looked at Brass.

Getting up quietly, the detective pulled John to his feet and led him to the door. After he had handed him over to the officer outside, he turned back to Grissom who hadn't moved, staring at a spot somewhere on the wall.

"I take it that didn't go too well."

Grissom schooled his features before turning around. "We got nothing, Brass, and the guy knows it."

"What about the knife?"

"Inconclusive."

Both men turned towards her when Sara entered the room.

She looked at Grissom and shrugged pointing at the two-way mirror. "I saw it." Looking back at Brass, she handed him the knife. "He admitted to cutting the victim, and we cannot match the metal flecks to it, so it's useless." Shrugging, she moved towards Grissom.

"You got a DNA sample from the other suspect?"

"Yes, but..." she shrugged, sitting down next to him.

Brass huffed out a breath. "So this was for naught?"

Closing the folder and leaning back, Grissom regarded Brass calmly. "We get him for dealing and assault with great bodily harm. We cannot prove murder, though, as there is no telling who delivered the killing blow with multiple DNA samples on the victim. So, no. Not for naught. Just not what we had wanted."

Brass regarded Grissom and Sara for a while, seeing their slumped shoulders and tired demeanor, Sara rubbing her eyes slowly. "Go home, guys. You did all you could."

"Brass, you're not my..."

"I'm asking as a friend, Gil." He subtly motioned to Sara, before turning and leaving them to themselves.

Grissom was grateful for what Brass was trying to do, though puzzled by the little look towards Sara. Before he could mull it over, he was startled by Sara's fist hitting the metal table next to him.

"Dammit!" She hit it again. "Damn that guy!"

"Sara..."

"He's guilty. And he knows we know." She got up and paced back and forth in the room. "Damn."

Grissom sighed and got up. "Yeah. But there's no use in getting angry over it, Sara."

"Don't tell me how to feel, Grissom!" She looked at him angrily, but caught the pained look in his eyes. Moving towards him, she took his hand in hers. "I'm just..."

"It's okay." He squeezed her hand quickly. "Let's go home Sara. We both need a break."

She hung her head for a moment, and then nodded slightly. "Okay." Looking up, she smiled. "Got any of that peach cobbler left?"

Grissom raised a surprised eyebrow and smiled. "Of course."

"Come on then." She left the room, and Grissom could only walk after her.

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"What would you usually do?" Sara put her fork down after her last bite, and took another sip of the coffee.

Grissom shrugged. Sara's sudden change of demeanor back in the interrogation room had surprised him, but he had thought that she was probably putting on a brave face. Not anymore. "Ride a rollercoaster, maybe."

"Oh that helps!" She started to toy with her coffee cup.

"It used to." He got up and took their plates to the kitchen. Sara was still turning her cup slowly when he came back.

"But not anymore." She looked up at him, catching that weary look again as he nodded. "It's a good thing we have each other then, as I don't think a rollercoaster would do me much good, either." She looked back down. "It just makes me so angry." Sara felt him standing there, apparently not really knowing what to do. "Tell me."

"Tell you what?"

"How do you do it? How do you deal with this?"

"Sara..."

His voice was so soft, she nearly lost it. "I'm just..." Sara set her jaw and pushed the cup away. Shaking her head, she tried to shake off the emotions when she felt his gentle touch on her arm.

Grissom had knelt down next to her, and turned her slightly till she faced him again. "I know." His blue eyes looked at her intently.

"Maybe, if we go back to the dumpster we can find..."

"Sara..." He shook his head slightly and laid his hands on her knees. "It's no use. You know that."

She slumped in the chair, and rubbed her eyes tiredly. "I know." They stayed like that for a moment, neither one moving. She waited, but after a while she looked up again and smiled. "Time to get going for me then."

Sara was about to get up, when she saw him look to the side and open his mouth slowly as if to say something, but then he caught her eyes and shook his head slightly.

"Say it."

"Well," he moistened his lips. "We're both tired. You could stay." He shrugged. "I don't mean to be pushing, but you shouldn't drive. And I'll take the couch, I mean..." Grissom closed his eyes at his own inane rambling and then looked up at her calmly. "Neither of us should be alone tonight."

Sara smiled at him softly. "Thank you. But no."

Grissom looked surprised and was about to get up, when she took his hand.

"No. You're not sleeping on the couch."

TBC.