

Title: Slipping

Author: Frumpy

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

Disclaimer: If I'd own CSI, we'd have it on HBO by now.

A/N: Thanks for the reviews! Greatly appreciated!

We delve further into the cases, and into what's up with Sara.

Again not beta read, so apologies for any mistakes.

Chapter 3:

Grissom turned the car into the dark street, and peered at the addresses, trying to find the one they were looking for. The fact that every other street lamp wasn't working didn't help much. And that the ramshackle houses looked very much alike in their desolation didn't either.

"I think this is it, Gil." Catherine pointed to a house on the left, slightly ahead of them. The lights were on, curtains drawn.

Grissom parked in front of the house, the driveway blocked by a beaten up Chevrolet, rusting around the tire rims.

"Where's Brass?" Grissom looked up and down the street.

"What, you scared?" Catherine asked teasingly, but only got a grave look in return. "Don't blame you." She was about to pull out her cell phone, when Brass' unmarked Taurus drove up from behind them.

Grissom got out and nodded to the detective, Catherine walking up behind him, smiling at the detective as he got out of his car. "Donut run?"

"Very funny." Brass ran a hand through his hair. "Had a domestic disturbance call five blocks away. I was closest. Let's check with the Walkers." He turned and led the CSIs to the front door, trying the bell, and then knocking when it didn't work.

One of the curtains moved slightly, and then they heard a shuffle from behind the door, dead bolt being unlocked. "Yes?" The man before them was in his late 30s, hair unkempt, wearing scruffy jeans and a formerly white wifebeater. His wife was in the background.

"Lance Walker?" The man nodded, and Brass pulled out his badge. "Detective Jim Brass. These are Catherine Willows and Gil Grissom from the Crime Lab."

"Crime Lab? What..."

"We're here about Robert. You reportet him missing."

"Yes, we called four hours ago! First it takes you ages to come here, and then you bring the Crime Lab...."

"Mr. Walker," Brass held out his hands. "The lab works the missing person's cases after the police cannot do anything."

"Oh..." Walker scratched his head. "Come in then."

Catherine followed Brass and then man to the living room, tv light flickering over the untidy room. Grissom hung a bit behind, taking the whole house in, seeing if anything caught his eye. "Do you mind if we looked at Robert's room?"

Mrs. Walker looked at her husband, who shrugged. "If you think it'll help."

Grissom smiled gently. "I do."

He motioned for Catherine to join him, while Brass questioned the parents.

"Would you like something to drink?" Mrs. Walker smiled nervously.

"No, thank you, ma'am. Just some questions." Brass pulled out his note pad. "You said Robert hasn't come home since roughly 3 days?"

"Yes. He left for school, didn't come back."

"Why didn't you alert the police earlier?"

"It's... it's not unusual that he stays a night at a friend's."

"Without telling you..." Brass looked up from his notes.

"Yes. Well, he's 17."

Brass cocked an eyebrow. "So he didn't call, nothing?"

"No..." Mrs. Walker sat down. "I called some of his friends after the second night he didn't come home. No one knew where he was. You think..."

"Mrs. Walker... we don't think anything right now. Just trying to establish a timeline." Brass smiled reassuringly at the diminutive woman. He heard Grissom and Catherine stepping back into the room. "Is there anything else you think we should know?"

Both Walkers shook their heads.

"He's a good kid." Mrs. Walker said softly.

"Of course, ma'am." Brass pocketed his note pad inside his jacket. "Thank you. We'll do everything we can. Ma'am, Sir."

Back outside he turned to the two CSIs. "Anything?"

"Not much." Catherine shook her head. "Some drug paraphernalia, so that might be an angle to look at."

Brass looked around the neighborhood and raised an unsurprised eyebrow. "I'll check the school first thing in the morning. See if someone knows something that they wouldn't tell the parents. Not much to work on."

Grissom shook his head. "We'll see if we can find something in the phone records. Kid didn't have a computer, so no lead there. See you back at the lab, Jim!"

"Yeah, let's get outta here."

"Did you say blood?"

Warrick gave Sara an annoyed look as she stepped behind the counter. "It's not much, but definitely out of place here."

She nodded and looked outside to the front of the store. "I'll ask the kid if he knows anything about it." She walked towards the door. "Swab it, so we can take it back to the lab."

Warrick furrowed his brow, and murmured "Yes, Grissom." When she was out of earshot.

Outside the lone police car that had responded to the call had turned off the flashing lights. The two officers leaning against the hood were sipping coffees, and talked quietly. Sara walked to the kid, who nervously waited a bit away from the prowler.

"Nathan?"

"Yes?" He turned towards her. He couldn't be older than 15, lanky nearly too skinny, the blue uniform of the video rental hanging slackly over his shoulders.

"Tell me what happened."

"Uh..." he bit his nail. "I already told the police over there."

"Tell me again."

"Well, " he looked to the side, as if having trouble to remember. "Guy comes in, gun drawn, this ski mask over his head. He asked for the money in the register. I, I was... so scared, I gave him all."

"It's okay, you did the right thing." Sara reassured him.

"He was mad, 'cause it was so little. Maybe 200 bucks. He flipped, man. I mean really flipped." Nathan drew a shaking hand over his forehead. "He pushed me aside, hit the register. Then he started pulling out the tapes like we had anything hidden there. Went through the rows like mad, just sweeping everything off the shelves, throwing stuff around, yelling."

"You called the police when he left?"

"Yeah... I, I waited till I was sure he was gone then called. Didn't touch anything. I seen these crime shows on tv, ya know?" He smiled proudly.

"Good." Sara smiled softly. "Was the guy hurt?"

"No... I don't, wait!" He looked up triumphantly. "He was holding his left arm after he hit the register, like it hurt him."

"Thank you, Nathan, you've been a great help. It'll be a while, why don't you call your boss so you can go home?"

He nodded and looked at the chaos inside. "Yeah... it's gonna take me forever to put everything back..."

Sara went back in. "Hey Warrick?" His head popped up from behind the counter. "Kid says the guy had a hurt arm, so good chance the blood is his. Also print the register, he definitely touched that."

"Okay... I've lifted so many prints, man. No point in checking all the video cases." He looked over the hundreds of empty cases on the floor.

"Yeah. I'll get the surveillance tape, and then we'll go and make Jaqui's night hell. It's going to take her a while."

"Good." At Sara's raised eyebrow he smiled. "Time for you to get me my lunch."

Sara went to drop off the swabs with Greg, while Warrick was the unlucky one to bring the prints to Jaqui.

Greg's head was bobbing to his own rhythm, which was a bit comical to watch, but he hadn't really dared to put on any music with Grissom's sour mood during the recent weeks.

"Hey, Greg!"

"Sara." He looked at the brown paper bag in her hand. "Oooh, you brought me something?"

"Yeah." She smiled sweetly, then pulled out the three swabs with blood. "Work."

Greg's smile faded slightly. "You guys really should be nicer to me. I'm the one who breaks the cases for you, you know that."

Sara grinned. "Break this one, Greggo."

Warrick stopped in the doorway, his own paper bag in hand. "You comin'?"

Greg pouted when he watched Sara and Warrick walk towards the breakroom then pushed Ecklie's stuff aside, and took Sara's swabs.

Catherine looked over the phone lists from the Walker home number. Robert Walker didn't have a cellphone, so this was all they had for now. She looked up when the other two CSIs walked into the breakroom. Picking up one page, she waved it at Sara. "Here, see, you're not the only one Grissom has a grudge against."

Sara sat down and frowned. "What makes you think he has a grudge against me?"

Warrick placed two plates on the table. "That's a good one, Sar." He opened his bag.

Catherine sniffed, and looked at him. "Ooh, that smells good."

"Yeah, and it's mine. You work a burglary with Sara next time, and you might deserve it."

"Hey," Sara turned to him. "You make it sound like it's a bad thing."

"I've had better evenings." He winked and took out his steak sandwich. "But you're a good cook."

"Flatterer..." She looked back at Catherine. "Is Grissom in?"

"In his office. Why?"

Sara got up and pushed her egg salad sandwich towards Catherine.

"Ah, never mind then."

Grissom was reading through Nick's preliminary report, when he sensed someone at his door. He looked up to see Sara with a bag in her hand.

"Can I come in?"

He closed the file, and took off his glasses. "Of course."

She smiled slightly, and nodded to the door. "Open. Nice."

Grissom watched her as she sat down, a slight smile playing around his lips. "Well, you were right last night. I really can't go on like I was recently." His eyes held hers, a slight challenge in them.

She avoided his gaze. "About earlier today..." He nodded slightly, telling her he wouldn't push about the night before. "I'm sorry, I didn't come back."

"It's okay. Brass drove me here."

Sara placed the bag on his table. "The bandages."

"Thank you." He took the bag and looked inside.

"I needed some space. I'm sorry. I..." She shrugged her shoulders slightly.

"Sara. It's okay. I understand." Grissom's eyes held no reproach.

"Do you?"

He cocked his head to the side, and blinked a couple of times. "You needed time to think. I do understand that."

"I ran." She locked her gaze with his, trying to look strong, but her voice was betraying her. "I did, I did what I was afraid you would do."

She looked away, but not before Grissom caught the hint of pain and vulnerability in her eyes, and it made his heart clench. He hadn't realized how deeply his behavior had affected her, how it had shattered the trust they once shared. He dropped his gaze to his hands. "Sara, I..."

"Sara!"

Grissom looked up startled, and a bit angry at the intrusion as Greg came to a sliding stop in front of the office.

"Sara... the... I..."

"Greg, calm down." Grissom frowned at the labtech.

Sara turned to him, having regained her composure. "Greg?"

"The blood. The swabs you gave me?" He walked into the office.

"I do remember, Greg." She smiled at him.

He looked at Grissom. "I got a hit from CODIS. It belongs to a Robert Walker."

TBC.