

Title: Slipping

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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!

More G/S fluff ;), and on with the case

Chapter 5:

The first ring of the phone hardly penetrated his sleep, but by the third ring he was throwing the cover away from his body, and padded to the living room, rubbing his eyes. He hadn't been able to go to sleep for a long time the previous night. Grissom was still too restless, one good night's sleep couldn't change that just like that. He hadn't been lying when he had told Catherine that he had worked through his issues, but he hadn't been entirely truthful either. Not even the admission that he could accept help from Sara made the plaguing thoughts and emotions go away that troubled him at night. Not yet, at least.

He had even tried reading the newspaper, something that was usually dull enough to put him to sleep right away. Finally he had made himself a cup of the tea Sara had made the night before. The smell of it brewing gave him some comfort and quietened him down a bit.

Grissom wasn't really sure where to go from last night on, but he knew he didn't want to go alone anymore, and that admission felt so much better than he would have ever thought.

He picked up the phone. "Gr..." He had to clear his throat. "Grissom."

A soft breath on the other end. "Griss? Sorry, did I wake you?"

He started to shake his head, but caught his normal automatic reply in time. "Yes, but it was time to get up anyway, don't worry." He smiled. It was nice to hear Sara first thing in the morning.

"So, breakfast?"

He had to suppress a chuckle at her nervous tone. It still surprised him somewhat that everything seemed so clear for him after finally admitting to himself that he was ready to let her into his life. He had always thought Sara would be the driving force in getting them into...dare he think a relationship? But he was comfortable to take things slowly now. "I plan on getting some, yes."

"Grissom... I meant..." he heard a soft groan from her side. "God, I feel like a stupid teenager here..." He could actually picture her, shaking her head, annoyed look at her own actions. "Let's meet in an hour. Ah, Dany's Diner? They make killer waffles. Can you make it?"

"Of course. I'll see you then." Grissom settled on his couch.

"See ya, Griss." Sara hung up.

Grissom tried not to feel too disappointed at the fact that she wanted to meet him at a diner, but neutral ground might be better for a talk. If she wanted to talk that is. Admitting him into her home, would be too much like admitting him fully into her life maybe. But he was a patient man. He had accepted for himself that she needed some time. He had hurt her too much in the past, he had realized that now. It had never been his intention, of course, but he understood that by being too focused on himself, and by working so hard on ignoring his own feelings, he had hurt her. He really couldn't blame her for not trusting him now, for when had he ever proving himself trustworthy when it came to their feelings for each other. He wouldn't push. He'd just try to show her that he meant what he had decided that night on his couch, for he was the kind of person who stood by his decisions once he'd made them.

Sara stepped into the diner to find Grissom already waiting in a booth at the window, cup of coffee in front of him. She had switched her mind at the last moment during her earlier phonecall, deciding that meeting in a public place was safer. For whom, she didn't know. Grissom had probably expected that she'd invite him to her home, but if he was disappointed he didn't show it.

He stood up as Sara walked to the booth, and sat down again only after she was seated first. It was the small gestures Grissom did without consciously thinking about them that Sara loved.

"Hey." He poured her a coffee from the pot he had ordered.

"Hey. Sorry I woke you. I'm always up too early."

Placing the sugar next to her cup he smiled. "I told you not to worry about it."

"You look tired." She noted the lines in his face and his somewhat drawn expression, although he tried to appear cheery.

Normally he would have come up with some excuse, something about work, but he didn't want to do that with Sara anymore. "I... it took some time to fall asleep last night, is all. I'm okay."

"Of course."

"What about us?"

She looked up from the menu that she had been hiding behind. She already knew what she'd order. "What?"

"Are we okay?"

She was glad when the waitress approached the table and took their orders at that moment. Where they okay? Sara thought they were doing much better than they had for a long time.

Just the fact that they were about to share their second breakfast in as many days showed they were more than just okay. What she didn't know was if she was okay really.

When the waitress left, Grissom took a sip of his coffee. "I'm sorry. I said I wouldn't push. It's just not easy not knowing where things are right now, not having answers."

"Payback's a bitch, huh?" She regretted the words as soon as they left her mouth. She hadn't wanted to say them, but there was so much from the past that pained her. The quick flash of pain in his eyes still hurt her though. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that."

"No. I guess I deserved it." He looked out of the window for a moment, the silence getting uncomfortable. Looking back at her, he leaned forward on the table. "I know I hurt you. And I know no apologies can take that back, though I never did it intentionally. I was selfish."

Sara had expected him to retreat after her comment, and was touched by the fact that he really did seem to try this time. She didn't want to be a hard ass, but she also wasn't ready to expose herself to more pain. "Yeah, you were."

His slight grin surprised her even more. "You really could make this a bit easier for me, you know?"

She couldn't help but smile in return, and that seemed to be enough for him for the moment.

"What I'm trying to say is," he tilted his head to the side, voice growing lower and softer, creating a very intimate atmosphere. "I do understand you not trusting me right now. You warned me I might be too late one day. I hope I'm not. But I'm really willing to try. I can't promise you roses, and tell you everything will be perfect. I'm a difficult man to be with, I know that. This is...", he drew a shaky breath. "I am scared. No point of denying that. But I won't let my fears rule me anymore."

"Grissom... I..." she was at a loss for words at his openness. He really did follow through once he made a decision. She knew that from work, but it was nearly too much now.

"You don't need to say anything. Just know I'm there when you need me, as you were there for me." He leaned back again, and picked up his coffee.

Sara watched his hands as he held the cup delicately, noting the slight curve of his fingers. "Have you ever smoked?"

"What?" He frowned.

"Just, the way you hold the cup."

Accepting her change of topic he looked at his own hand. "I did. Long time ago. Old habits die hard, hm?"

"Indeed." She smiled.

Grissom settled into his chair at his office. The lack of progress in their case was beginning to frustrate him, so he tried to not let it sour his mood, and let his mind wander to more pleasant thoughts. After their breakfast they had sat in the diner for a long time. Just talking about inconsequential stuff, but learning more about each other in the process than in the last for years of working together nearly every day. It was surprisingly easy to open up to Sara, though he had to be careful not to broach any subject that might have made the moment awkward. He was beginning to get a sense of what the last four years had been like for her.

A knock at his doorframe made him get back to reality. Catherine walked in and sat down.

"Well, I seperated all the calls that the parents made, and concentrated on the ones that where the missing kid's. Or robber's. Whatever. No names where in the database. Probably friends, none with a record. Nothing unusual really."

"Thanks, Cath."

"You got any other leads?" She brushed a strand of hair from her face.

"Not really. Brass didn't learn anything useful from the highschool crowd." He rifled through some papers. "Look, Vartann just called. Possible trick role at the Bellagio, why don't you take that?"

She took the slip but never shifted her gaze from him. "You working this alone?"

"Sara's helping me. Why?"

"Aaaah..."

He looked up and frowned at her smile. "What? The robbery was her case in the first place."

"Nothing, Gil. "She smiled coyly, then got up, walking to the door slowly. "It's just nice to not having to ignore your ignoring Sara for once."

"I'm not even sure your sentence made any grammatical sense really, aside from any actual point hiding in there." He shook his head as she left. He appreciated her wanting to help. If only she could be less smug about it now and then.

Sara closed yet another browser window on the monitor and sighed. Brass had asked the parents, and they were fairly sure Robert didn't own a mask. As sure as these two could be about anything relating to their son apparently. But even if he had bought it before the robbery, there were way too many places he could have gotten it at. And she hadn't even started on the casino shops, yet.

Tox hadn't found anything suspicious in the blood, either. And Brass's questioning at the school hadn't turned up any real info, either, from what he had told Grissom earlier. They had nothing. She knew it, but that didn't mean she had to like it. She thought about checking the surveillance tape again. They might have missed something. But even as she thought about it she knew there was nothing on there they hadn't already seen.

Great. Just when she needed work to occupy her thoughts, they hit a dead end. There had to be something, she knew it.

She saw Brass walking by the lab, obviously on his way to Grissom's office, and got up in a hurry. She caught up to him just outside of the breakroom. "Hey, Brass, wait."

He stopped and turned, smiling. "Ah, I dreamed of this last night."

Sara stopped and shot him an exasperated look. "Excuse me?"

"Aw, way to destroy my dreams, Sara." He put on a mock pout.

"Brass, I'm really not in the mood."

"Dead end?" He took in her annoyed look. "I can always tell with you." Brass chuckled lightly at her threatening glare. "No progress on the ski mask?"

"You're so encouraging, Brass." She walked with him to Grissom's office.

Grissom looked up when he heard them in the hallway. Suppressing the desire to smile at Sara, he focused on Brass. "Tell me you got something."

The detective huffed as he said down, and shook his head. "Sorry. I questioned half the school. No one could tell me anything really. They weren't surprised he was missing, but nobody saw him the past four days."

Grissom nearly growled with frustration. "Catherine couldn't turn anything up with the phone records either. Mostly friends. Nothing useful."

"The ski mask is no help, too." Sara had leaned against one of the shelves in the office, careful not to knock any of Grissom's various jars off it. "He could have gotten it anywhere. Amazing how many places sell ski stuff in the middle of the desert."

"Yeah, well, this is Vegas!" Brass exclaimed brightly.

"Thanks for reminding me, Brass."

He shot her a smile. Getting out his note pad, he looked over his scrawled writing. "Several kids mentioned a friend of his outside of school. I'll check up on him, see if he knows something." He flipped another page. "Ah, yes. Nathan..."

"Hawkes?" Sara interrupted him.

Two sets of eyes settled on her.

"How did you know?" Brass got up.

"That's the kid who works at the video rental that got robbed."

TBC