

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. And Santa didn't listen to me yet again.

Spoilers: Small one for "Butterflied"

A/N: I apologize for taking so long, but real life is rather crazy right now, so I'm not getting as much writing done as I'd like. Thank you so much to everybody who has reviewed! It means a lot.

And Happy New Year!

Chapter 6:

Grissom was reading a report on Nathan Hawkes, and Sara was reviewing pictures taken from the video store's surveillance tape in Grissom's office.

"Robert must have spoken - even despite the ski mask, there's no way Nathan did not recognize him, if they are really friends," she said half to herself and half to Grissom.

"Hmm." Grissom nodded slowly, drawing a finger over his lips. "They went to the same school before Nathan moved out to Henderson. Several kids from Robert's class said they were close." He put the report down. "I told Brass to tell Nathan that you'd need him for some further questions. No need to rattle him early on, he might clam up. This way we take him by surprise."

"I can't believe he fooled me." Sara pushed the pictures away, and looked to the side. "He seemed so scared. I believed him."

"It happens, Sara. Don't berate yourself for it."

"Yeah, well, I seem to trust the wrong people." She looked at Grissom.

He saw no accusation in her gaze, but still felt like the comment was directed at him also. "You don't trust me."

Sara noted that Grissom said it as a statement, not a question. "I do, Grissom. I trust you implicitly. At work." She saw that it hurt him to hear it, though he tried not to show it.

"But not beyond that." His voice was so gentle, so accepting of the fact.

"Griss..."

He shook his head. "No. I..." He took off his glasses, sorting his thoughts. "I have no right to expect any trust from you."

"It's just... I never knew what to expect. One day you were nice and flirty, the next you ignored me. Or downright shot me down. Do you know how much that screws with a person? Let alone my feelings?" Grissom's openness encouraged her in finally saying some of the things she needed to say out loud. She was afraid to push him away with it, but if he had any thoughts of retreating, he didn't show it.

"I am sorry, Sara." His blue eyes were so gentle and warm, it nearly undid her. "I was fighting with myself constantly, and I ended up hurting you. But I always cared about you. From the start."

"I know, Grissom." Sara saw the slight surprise in his eyes. "I heard what you said."

Grissom frowned and cocked his head slightly.

"The case with Dr. Lurie." Understanding dawned behind his eyes. "I heard what you said in the interrogation room."

He opened his mouth to say something, but then just nodded slightly, leaning back in his chair. "I was wrong about one thing, though. I said I couldn't take the risk. That's in the past, Sara."

Sara smiled. "I think I know that now."

The ringing of the phone startled Grissom slightly. "Grissom." He listened for a moment, then nodded his head towards the door, and Sara got up, switching back into work mode effortlessly. "We're on our way."

Sara looked at Nathan through the two-way mirror, scowling slightly, as Brass walked in. Grissom was also looking in the same direction, but his gaze didn't go beyond the mirror and was trained on Sara's reflection instead.

Brass smiled slightly to himself before clearing his throat. "How do you guys want to play it?"

Grissom turned away from Sara. "Sara will question him first, lull him into thinking this is a follow-up to the robbery. I'll join after a while, and we'll hit him with his connection to Robert Walker."

"Gil, the kid's 15."

"And he's an accessory to a robbery, might know where Walker is right now, and lied to us." The last was said with a short glance towards Sara. "Has he requested an advocate?"

"Not yet, but he might incriminate himself, so I have advised him of his rights." Brass looked at Grissom pointedly.

"I know that, Brass. He's just the only one who can help us right now." He scratched his beard in thought.

"You're pretty convinced he was in on the robbery." When he didn't get a response from Grissom he sighed. "Fine. This is your show."

Grissom watched Brass and Sara leave the room, and enter the interrogation room. Nathan looked up, and judging from his smile recognized Sara. Grissom had to admire her acting abilities, for her return smile seemed nothing if not sincere. Only half-listening to the questioning, he turned his mind to Sara again.

To say her earlier words had hurt him was an understatement. But at the same time, they didn't frighten him as much as he thought they might, it was basically a confirmation of what he had expected. And he also realized that it was up to him to change things. He wouldn't pressure Sara, but he also wouldn't stand by passively. She had heard what he had said to Lurie. There had been a time when that would have made him panic, but it actually felt good to know that she understood in a way. It gave him a chance to prove that he truly was beyond that by now.

Catching Brass's look in his direction, he gathered his files, and walked to the interrogation room.

Nathan turned around as he entered the room, so Grissom smiled at him appeasingly. "Hi, I'm Gil Grissom. I just got some further questions."

"Okay." Nathan frowned slightly. "I already told everything."

Deciding that being direct would be the best tactic, Grissom walked to the head of the table at the right side of Nathan, not sitting down. He took out a picture of Robert Walker, and put it down in front of Nathan. "You know him?"

Since Grissom was standing, it forced Nathan to look up at him, before the kid dropped his gaze to the picture. Nathan's eyes only glanced at the photo very briefly, before he shook his head, and pushed the picture away.

Grissom tilted his head slightly and smirked, knowing the unnerving effect it had. Nathan swallowed visibly. "Are you sure? You looked at it awfully fast." He pushed the picture back. "Look again. Closely."

Without looking at the picture, Nathan shook his head emphatically. "No, I told you. Never seen the guy."

"Hmmm." Grissom seemed to think for a minute, then pulled out a file and looked it over. "Interesting. Since you two went to the same school."

Nathan blanched visibly, but didn't budge under Grissom's intense stare.

Grissom sighed, and put the file down. Hands on the table he leaned into Nathan, towering over him. "Listen kid, bullshit time is over. We know you know him. We know you recognized him last night. If you don't lawyer up, you'll have to face more than just accessory to robbery." He felt Brass's glance on him and sat down, gentler now. "We know you know him. We found his blood behind the counter." He waited a beat. "Were you in on it?"

Nathan slumped in his chair resigned, looking at Sara.

"The thing is, Nathan, Robert has been missing for the last couple of days, and we are trying to find him. If you know where he is, tell us now," Sara said gently. "He might be in trouble."

The kid shook his head. "I don't know where he is. We had agreed to meet afterwards to share the money, but he never showed up."

Grissom nodded. "Do you know what he needed the money for?"

"He just said he needed money to pay a debt. I told him I would be alone that night, and that it was the only night Mr. Preston, that's my boss, didn't empty the register in the evening. His kid has soccer practice, and he has to drive him there. Only he did come by that night."

Sara pursed her mouth. "That's why Robert was so angry. He had expected more money."

Nathan dropped his gaze and nodded slowly.

Sara looked at him intently. "Help us, Nathan. You're all we have to find Robert."

"I really don't know much."

"Anything can help." Grissom said gently. "When did you see him last before the robbery?"

"Couple hours before."

"Was he hurt already?"

Nathan touched his arm as if it helped him remember. "Yeah. He was holding his arm. He seemed scared. That's why we thought up the robbery. I think he got himself into trouble." Nathan shrugged. "He had told me something about getting rich soon, some sort of drug deal. But I don't know anything more than that."

"Okay, that's good." Grissom nodded encouragingly. "Do you have any idea with whom he might have gotten involved?"

Nathan seemed to think for a moment. "Maybe John."

"John?" Sara raised her eyebrows questioningly.

"That's who we, err, Robert got his grass from. He seemed to be pretty close with him."

Brass pulled out his notepad. "You got a last name for this 'John', kid?"

Another headshake. "Only John."

Closing the notepad, Brass smiled. "But you know where he deals."

TBC.