

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: Thank you so much to Marlou, who did an incredible job beta-ing this story, and helped me immensely! Thank you. And thanks for the reviews!

A little break from the case. This is a bit on the fluffy side...

Chapter 7:

The shift was long over by the time they released Nathan Hawkes. Brass had gotten everything there was about that mysterious "John", yet they would have to wait till the beginning of their new shift before attempting to find him.

Sara was standing at the counter of Dany's Diner. The employees had gotten used to her strange choice of meals for the time of day she went there. Dinner at 5 am no longer provided the amusement it once did, and she had long given up thinking about her unusual meal and snack schedule. She was glad no one was asking any questions - she was tired of figuring out how to answer or dodge them.

She really appreciated that Grissom didn't push her, but let her do things in her own time. She had forgotten how considerate he could be when he put his mind to it. And while she felt that he truly meant that he would wait for her, she still felt a twitch of guilt.

Not that he didn't deserve a little waiting himself, and get a small taste of what it was like to be uncertain about another person's motivations, but she still felt a little annoyed with herself for it. Here was everything she had wanted for so long sitting right in front of her, and she didn't embrace it, but shied away from it.

Grissom had said he wouldn't allow his fears to overrule him anymore. She really hadn't understood just how much of a risk she presented to him. And even though she had heard what he had said to Dr. Lurie in that interrogation room, she still hadn't really grasped how he felt. How he thought that she had it in her to hurt him as badly as Debbie had hurt Lurie. Only now was she discovering that she indeed had that capacity within herself. She had accused Grissom of oversimplifying things before, but perhaps she had been the one doing just that when it came to them.

It just showed how much things had changed between them. There had been a time when she would have jumped into the relationship without giving it a second thought, but too much had happened. Too much pain she still felt. From his rejection of her invitation to dinner for example. She allowed a small smile to slip through when she considered how much her

invitation to breakfast the other night had mirrored that very fateful other invitation. And he hadn't said no this time, had he?

If anything, he had been true to his word these past days. Yet she still couldn't find it in herself to trust him completely. And she didn't trust herself completely anymore, either.

"Ma'am?"

She clerk's slightly annoyed voice roused her from her musings. From the look on his face she had zoned out a bit.

Sensing his impatience she smiled sweetly, and took the proffered take-out bag. "Sorry, long night."

He rolled his eyes in response. "Don't I know about that." Giving Sara her change, he smiled. "Enjoy your meal, and see you again."

"Thank you."

Sara walked to her car slowly, the crisp night air helping her regain her focus. She was indeed tired, but didn't feel like sleeping yet. There was too much on her mind.

On the drive home she mulled over her options. She could say yes to everything Grissom offered, and see where things would lead. But she was afraid of ending up hurt again. Simple as that.

She could bide her time, and let their friendship become stronger again before she really committed to anything more. At least then they would have a more solid basis to build upon. But she was also afraid that if she waited too long, it might end in him retreating again. The things he had said to Lurie had shown her another side of Grissom. A very vulnerable and insecure side that she hadn't suspected before. How long till her stalling would feed his insecurities?

And then of course there was the option of saying no. But did she really want that? Aside from having wanted a relationship with him for years, she also cherished their friendship, as strained as it had been these past two years. Could they stay friends if they both knew that there was more to 'this', but didn't act on it?

And what was 'this' anyway? 'God, I'm beginning to sound like Grissom.' Gnashing her teeth in frustration, she resolved to make her decision soon. Just not tonight. No, she had a nice veggie burger waiting for her. It deserved her full attention, right?

Grissom threw his house keys on the sideboard, and placed the paper bag he was carrying on the kitchen counter. He had never really developed a taste for take-out, but during the recent weeks he hadn't felt like cooking much, so take-out it was. It was fast, effortless, and he hadn't felt much like indulging recently anyway.

He had been in a bit of a funk since his talk with Sara in his office earlier. The case was as far as he and Sara could take it right now. Everything else was up to Brass for the moment, so

that didn't provide him with a subject he could occupy his thoughts with. Unsurprisingly, his mind had turned to Sara.

Unpacking his meal of choice and placing it on a plate, he looked at the food in question. He had always wanted to try it, right? It just happened to be tonight that he finally did. Absolutely no other reason for it. It was not like... 'Oh, who are you kidding. It's a veggie burger, for God's sake!' Not even his dinner was immune to her anymore.

Shaking his head at himself, he took his burger with him to the couch. This was ridiculous really. He hadn't acted like this since... well, never. Gil Grissom had never been a man to pine after a woman.

And this burger really didn't taste like anything either.

The ringing phone interrupted Sara's own dinner preparations - which consisted of getting out a plate and settling down at her breakfast bar with a fresh orange juice. Groaning slightly, and hoping it wasn't work, she picked it up.

"Sidle."

"Hey."

Both of her eyebrows rose at the voice on the other end. That certainly was unexpected. "Grissom."

"I'm not interrupting anything, I hope."

"No,no, you're not. I was just ready to eat dinner before settling down for the night." She walked over to her kitchen slowly, and toyed with the glass of juice there.

"Dinner." He chuckled for some reason unknown to Sara. "Is there anything to make this veggie burger taste like, say, an actual burger?"

Sara's gaze dropped to her own burger dinner "I'm sorry?"

"You're so fond of them. There must be something to make them edible."

"Grissom, are you telling me you're eating a veggie burger, and called me to ask for eating advice?"

"No, not really." His voice was so casual, as if his topic of conversation was the most normal thing in the world between them. "I already ate it."

"Aahm... Try Tabasco sauce on it next time. Maybe." What in the world was he trying to achieve with this? "Grissom?"

"Yes?"

"Are you trying to put me at ease here?"

There was a pause at the other end before he answered. "I guess I am. Is it working?"

She had to laugh; a welcome sound. "Yes, it is. Are you really Gil Grissom or some long lost twin brother with no social hangups?"

"Why, is it really so hard to picture me as a friend, Sara?"

His tone was still cheery, but she felt there was more to the question than he let on. "Griss... It is a bit surprising."

Sara heard his soft assent in form of a 'Hmm' before he spoke again. "Look, I hate talking about this over the phone. Why don't you come over for breakfast tomorrow?" She was silent for a moment. "Sara?"

She heard his slight uncertainty, and decided to keep this light. "Hey, you call that not pushing?"

"No strings attached, Sara. Just breakfast between two friends. No more, no less. Scout's honor."

"You were a Boy Scout?"

He laughed, and it sounded wonderful to Sara. "No. Though it would have been a nice opportunity to study insects. All that camping."

She rolled her eyes. "Bugs. Figures."

The line was quiet for a moment. "Well, enjoy your dinner."

"I will, thank you." She waited a beat, grinning to herself for leading him on. "Oh, and Grissom?"

"Yes?"

"When did you want me to come by for breakfast?"

His relief was nearly palpable over the phone. "You are a tease, Sara Sidle. Is 4 pm okay?"

"I'll see you then. Night, Griss."

"Good Night."

She hung up first, and then smiled again. Whatever it was that he was doing, it certainly was working. She thought back to the choices she had mapped out in the car on her way home. Looks like they had both agreed on option number two.

TBC.