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Title: A light in the dark

Disclaimer: As always I do own nothing but my own weird thoughts.

A/N: Thanks to my beta reader KmNO4. You rock !!! Thanks for all the nice reviews, they really meant a lot to me.

All remaining mistakes are mine.

Chapter 2

Twelve days earlier

Sara waited for Sam. It was her turn to fetch her from school, and she scanned the mass of children pouring out of the building looking for her daughter. She didn't worry when she wasn't among the initial wave of little children running into the freedom of another sunny afternoon. Sam had always been a daydreamer, lost in her own fantasy world, but when there still was no trace of her ten minutes later Sara got nervous.

She decided to go and search for her.

Sara walked up the stairs to the entrance, passing some of the last pupils leaving the building. As she entered the hallway her eyes had to accommodate to the dimly lighting; removing her sun glasses, she put them into her bag. Sara looked up and glimpsed her daughter standing at the end of the corridor. She was smiling happily and waving at her, but before Sara could respond, Sam had turned and disappeared around the corner.

She attempted to call out for her but no sound escaped her lips. Sara felt an intense panic and she suddenly got the feeling that if she didn't reach Samantha soon- it would be too late. She started to run towards the spot on which she had last seen her, but the more Sara tried to hurry, the more she seemed to slow down.

It was like wading through water and her legs became heavier with every step.

Once she had finally turned the corner she found herself at the beginning of another corridor, which was even longer than the last. But it was almost pitch black and Sam's voice cried out to her from within the abyss.

"Mommy, help me. I'm scared."

Those words created a surge of adrenalin. Sara felt a unique mixture of energy and fear coursing through her veins. She wanted to use this power to comfort her daughter and keep her from the darkness but it was not enough, and Samantha's tiny whimper was soon engulfed by the void.

Sara awoke to the sound of her own screaming.

Her heart was hammering inside of her chest and she was drenched in sweat. The telephone still lay in her hand from where she had fallen asleep on the couch waiting for news of her daughter.

Sara sat up and rubbed her eyes. She had finally slept for the first time in two days and fear for Samantha had been her only companion, crushing her heart with its iron grip.

She let out a groan out of frustration, wishing that Grissom could be there with her. Sara hated staying home while her husband was out trying to find their daughter, but she had agreed to take a rest.

He would soon return to do the same, and Sara would take over the search.

There were two hours until Grissom was due back, but she couldn't bear to wait. She dialled his cell phone and he answered after the very first ring, his taunt voice testifying the tension he felt.

"Grissom."

"Honey, it's me," Sara sighed.

"Did you get some sleep?" Her husband questioned.

"Hardly, but that's okay."

"Sara..." he began, but she quickly silenced him.

"This is more important than catching up on my nightmares. Is there anything new?"

"Nothing," Grissom conceded quietly. "Please, try and rest. I'll be there soon."

Sara felt like crying. Samantha was missing and Grissom was absent. They had scarcely spent time in the same room as each other, since the morning they got the call from their daughter's school. It was all so overwhelming.

For a while she sat motionless on the couch, unsure of what to do next. Her gaze was fixed on their clock, but the figures had long ago jumbled into a meaningless blur. All of her usual resoluteness seemed to have evaporated into thin air.

Finally Sara decided to take a quick shower and make a few calls to hear how things were going with the rest of the team. As she passed Sam's room the open door seemed to invite her inside. It was surreal to see everything looking so normal.

Perhaps the chests of Barbies, the dinosaur books and the jigsaw puzzles would be the only things that remained untouched by this. Sara knew that she would certainly never be the same again.

Her gaze fell onto the bundle of soft toys against the wall. Sam's favourite one lived on her pillow, it was a soft, brown teddy bear clad in a pair of denim dungarees. She called him 'Wanick' as he had been a gift from her two favourite uncles.

Some kids needed a comfort blanket to get to sleep, but all Samantha needed was little Wanick.

Overwhelmed by this tiny symbol of innocence, Sara's knees hit the rug and she started to pray. It was an activity she had shunned for years, after all science and religion don't often mix, but now she found herself so empty and so hopeless.

Putting her destiny into the hands of a higher entity suddenly seemed like the only logical thing to do.

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Grissom wished that Sara would stop calling, every time he heard her voice it was a harsh reminder that their daughter was missing, and that they had no leads as to where she'd gone or who had taken her.

He entered Brass' office without passing to knock. Grissom sat down on the chair in front of his desk and waited for him to finish his current phone conversation. The events of the past few days occupied his every thought and left no room for the consideration of anything else.

Brass and the team had arrived at the school following Grissom's vague call. They were wide awake inspite of the time of day, and raring to go, even Greg was onboard. There were no sympathetic words because everyone still expected Sam's safe return.

Nobody was willing to accept the possibility that anything bad could ever happen to one of their own. So, all memories of Holly Gribbs were naturally pushed aside. They worked quickly, compiling evidence before the case was passed over to dayshift and the PD.

Nick took the note back to the lab for fingerprint analysis, Warrick and Greg worked the perimeter, while Catherine questioned members of staff and pint-sized students. Brass took Grissom into an empty classroom.

"Jim, I don't have time for this. I need to be out there searching for my daughter."

Brass placed a hand on his shoulder, holding him down.

"I appreciate that, but this is important too. The others have it under control, they're good CSIs, and I know you trust them not to miss anything out."

Grissom nodded wearily, as Brass continued.

"I want you to tell me about the clothes that Sam was wearing this morning, the time you dropped her off at school, and if anything unusual has occurred lately. Can you do that?"

Grissom sighed his concession.

They went over to the Police Department and filled out a missing person's report, Gil's hand shaking as he filled in Samantha's name and date of birth. Once it was over, Brass asked one final question that struck a nerve and gave Grissom nightmares of his own.

"Do you know anyone who would want to hurt you, or Sara, or Samantha?"

He shook his head and then on second thought replied,

"Every criminal we ever convicted."

The only prints on the letter turned out to be Grissom's, Samantha's teacher and the office secretary. The interviews had taken all day and by the end of school it became obvious that they were getting nowhere.

Ecklie soon arrived with his team and dismissed them.

"I think you should go home to your wife, Gil," he said quietly.

Grissom had never taken advice from Conrad Ecklie and he wasn't about to start now. Besides that, looking into Sara's eyes and seeing his own pain mirrored so vividly inside of them, was the last thing that he wanted to do.

When he called her later, she was nervous and anxious. Brass had been over to the house to interview her too. Sara wanted to come over and join in the search, but Grissom had told her for the first of many times to come, just to rest and they would switch places later.

He spent the rest of that day and most of the one following, sitting in his office, looking over the evidence, and waiting for something to happen and eventually it did, but not to him.

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Sara was still kneeling by Samantha's bed when the telephone began to ring.

"Grissom?" She asked, breathlessly arriving at the living room.

The voice on the other end was electronically distorted, but when it spoke she could still hear the anger and hate vibrating within it.

"Hello, Mrs. Grissom. This is not your husband, but I do have another beloved family member of yours right here. If you'd like to see this darling little thing again, I suggest you draw out your life savings because you will need money and a lot of it, to satisfy my demands."

Sara was speechless.

"Two rules: Don't try to find me, and don't involve the police. I'll be in touch; Samantha wants to say a few words."

She sprang back to life, "Honey, are you there? It's me, mom."

"Mommy, where are you? Come get me, please! Come get me, mommy! Come get—"

The line went dead.

Brass concluded his call, and surveyed Grissom sitting in his office for the second time that week.

"No leads," he muttered.

"None," Gil replied.

But then his cell was illuminated by the flashing alert of his home number calling through.

"Sara?" He asked, and then fell silent as her racking sobs filled the room.

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