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**Title:** A light in the dark

**Disclaimer:** I don't own CSI. I only borrow.

**AN:** Thanks for all the encouraging reviews. They meant the world to me. Thank you so much to my wonderful beta reader and friend KmNO4. As always she made this chapter a better one.

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## Chapter four

Sara had just set the table when the noisy egg timer announced that dinner was ready. She took a cautionary glance at the vegetarian pizza she had prepared before grabbing her oven gloves to gently lift it out. Usually her family arrived in the dining room as soon as the enticing scent filled the air, but today they were late.

“Gil!”

“Sam!”

“Come and get it while it's hot!”

Sara waited for an answer which often arrived in the form of their hasty footsteps down the staircase. A few minutes passed and the silence was electrifying, causing the tiny hairs on her arms to prickle and stand on end.

“Guys, where are you?”

The temperature dropped a few degrees and the room around her faded. She was suddenly very afraid; something was wrong. Sara made her way up to the bathroom door and gave a sharp knock. Gil had wanted to take a quick shower before they ate, but as the door swung open it became obvious that he was not in there.

“This is not the time to play hide and seek.”

Sara checked their bedroom without any success and finally arrived in front of Samantha's door. She went inside and was shocked to find that it lay bare; no furniture, no wallpaper, no carpet and definitely no Sam. There was dust covering every surface, which seemed to suggest it had been uninhabited for years.

How could that be?

She stood frozen, letting time pass her by, numb with shock until a familiarly distorted voice spoke from behind her.

“You're too late, Sara. They're gone.”

It took almost two hours to free herself from this dream, but eventually Sara Grissom found the strength to get out of bed. Samantha had been missing for four days now and she felt like an eternity had passed. The concept of time had been thrown out of its natural frame.

It wasn't a measurable constant anymore, but rather a vivid variable changing with her mood. Every passing minute meant that the chances of finding Sam alive dwindled. Sara was sick of being told to 'think positively'.

Why would a blackmailer kill his most valuable asset?

Brass and Catherine repeatedly offered this pearl of wisdom and it was a mantra that the whole team knew well. Still there was no denying the tiny pieces that didn't fit in to the usual kidnapping jigsaw puzzle.

Why did they wait two days to call?

The statistics indicated that ransom demands were usually expressed within the first twenty-four hours. Sara began to realise how well thought out their faceless culprit's plan was. They knew exactly which school Sam attended and what her timetable looked like.

This was all proved by the only piece of evidence they had left behind.

If it had been a crime that was committed in the heat of the moment there wouldn't have been time to write a letter and sign it with Grissom's name, which led to the most disturbing point of all... the kidnapper knew who she and Gil were.

That left only two possibilities and they both nauseated her immensely. The first was that this person worked at their daughter's school, had access to their files and confidential details. The second was that they were somehow involved in their line of work.

After interviews with all of the school's employees they found them to possess perfect alibis; ranging from teaching their classes to illness. The possibility that one of them had hired someone else to do it for them was slim to none and motive was thin on the ground.

So, if it truly was an old suspect or convicted criminal out for revenge, Sara prayed that they were just looking for some money to break even, not blood.

She quickly dressed and cast a glance over to Grissom's side of the bed, he hadn't come home. In all the years they'd been married, they had never spent a night -or a day in their case- apart. Sara couldn't sleep without him, but yesterday a couple of pills helped to change that.

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Sara tried to work as usual but found she was unable to concentrate on the simplest of tasks. Furthermore the surreptitious glances of her colleagues made her want to scream; eventually she gave up the pretence of 'business as usual' and went off in search of Ecklie who promptly refused to discuss the case.

"If something new comes up, you'll be the first to know," he weakly offered.

Despondent and steadily losing hope, Sara headed towards Grissom's office. She found him with Brass checking files of recent parole orders for perpetrators they'd dealt with over their many years as CSIs. Sara sat down silently and watched the evidence pile up around them.

"This is my baby," she cried suddenly, causing both men to look up in surprise.

"It's not a faceless body on Doc's slab. I gave birth to her! I loved her!" Sara sobbed.

The tears told the tale of her utter exhaustion.

Grissom spoke to Brass in a low voice before moving to softly embrace his weeping wife. An hour later and she was being chauffeured home by a solemn-faced Jim. Then came the sleeping tablets and afterwards a gentle nothingness claimed Sara at long last.

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Sara was worried that Gil seemed AWOL. She decided to check the house for him before calling his cell, and the eerie silence reminded her of the icy dream from which she had recently awoken.

But this time her search was successful.

She found Grissom lying on the living room couch sound asleep. Sara approached her husband cautiously not wanting to wake him. His face was lined with worry that made her heart ache.

She decided to let him rest and went into the kitchen to make some coffee. Still tired, she sat down on one of the stools facing the percolator and it was not long before the aroma of freshly made coffee unintentionally roused Grissom.

He entered the room rubbing the sleep out of his eyes and asked, "How are you feeling, honey?"

"Dead," Sara sighed. "But it doesn't matter."

Grissom gave her a concerned look and grasped her hand, caressing the palm with his thumb.

"It does to me," he said earnestly.

She shrugged and left his side, busying herself with the preparation of two strong, black coffees.

"Why didn't you come to bed?" Sara enquired with her back turned, spooning sugar into their mugs. She tried to act casual, but her voice emerged in a tempered stutter.

"I didn't want to disturb you," Grissom admitted sheepishly.

Sara sighed and handed him a steaming drink.

"When you sleep, you look so beautiful," he whispered, looking straight into her wide, brown eyes.

She smiled sadly and replied, "Ditto."

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Sara had just resolved to take a quick shower before heading back to work with Grissom to look over more files and search numerous databases for some semblance of a clue, but that was before the telephone began to ring.

Her heart began to beat faster and she shuddered on hearing the electronic voice on the other end of the line.

"Mrs Grissom, how nice to speak to you again."

The tracer on their phone line began unscrambling the signal; Sara had to keep him talking so that they could pinpoint his exact location. Gil saw her frantic hand movements and came to listen.

"Where's Samantha?" she asked quietly.

"Safe, for now," the kidnapper began. "But that's not what I want to talk about."

Grissom dragged the receiver out of her hands.

"What do you want from us?" he demanded.

"Bingo," came the reply. "That's the million dollar question. In fact it's worth a little less. I want 400,000 dollars in unmarked bills. You have eighteen hours to get the funds together and I will contact you later, with details concerning the drop."

"Let us speak to our daughter," Grissom said sternly. "Or there's no deal."

A cold laugh chilled their bones.

"Stupid man, I make the rules. No money. No Sam."

The line went dead, and for a moment they stood as though paralyzed. Sara spoke first.

"Why wouldn't he let us speak to her?" she whispered. "Something's wrong, Gil."

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Grissom dialled Brass' number and held his breath. He blew it back out sharply on hearing his old friend proclaim, "We've got an address." Sara looked at him and a tiny sparkle of hope shone through her darkened eyes.

"Get in the car," Gil said softly.

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They entered a dilapidated industrial estate south of Ridgewood Heights. Affluence and all signs of human life had long ago deserted the area. Sara cringed at the thought of Samantha coming to a place like this with only a perilous stranger for company.

“Brass said he’d meet us out front,” Grissom divulged.

She nodded, unable to form words.

Twenty years ago the place had been a hotbed for drug related crime, a world seldom seen before nightfall. Over the last decade the LVPD had conducted regular sweeps and finally arrested the majority of known offenders, leaving a ghost town behind.

“You know the procedure, we go in first,” Brass said with a gun in one hand and his badge in the other. He appeared to have broken the state speed limit in order to arrive before the anxious couple; O’Reilly and two uniforms flanking his sides.

They made their way into the building and up a flight on stone steps to a flat on the second floor. Jim knocked hard on the already partially cracked door, “Las Vegas Police Department, open up!”

No answer; so the rotten wood was swiftly demolished with little more than a kick.

A stale odour laced the air around them and fused into the fabric of their clothes, so that in days to come, Sara would still be scrubbing her favourite lilac shirt clean, but to no avail. The first room they entered held a small couch, a coffee table and a state of the art telephone with voice modifying attached.

They definitely were in the right place.

An open plan kitchen lay to the left, but straight ahead of them were two closed doors. Brass and O’Reilly took what turned out to be a bedroom while the rookie’s handled the bathroom.

What came next happened fast enough to make their head’s spin.

“Oh, God!” Jim cried.

Sara and Grissom stood in the poor excuse for a living room, clutching each other’s hands sore, “What is it?” they questioned simultaneously moving towards his shouts.

“It’s Samantha, she’s here.”

Sara collapsed onto the floor before Brass even had the chance to say, “I’m so sorry.”

TBC