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Title: A light in the dark

Rating: PG 13

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A/N: I want to thank you the wonderful i_read_your_email who beta-ed this chapter as fast as the wind and gave me some great advise.

Chapter five

She was awake for several minutes before she even considered opening her eyes. Her limbs felt heavy and her mind was still captured in the remnants of her dream, which slowly escaped her grasp as she became awake. It was unusual for Sara to linger in bed once she was awake. But today was one of those lazy days where she wished she could spend the whole day in bed. Yawning quietly, so that she wouldn't wake Gil, she slowly opened her eyes and took a look at their alarm clock.

Startled she sat up in bed. That couldn't be true. According to their clock it was ten in the morning. Although it was Saturday they never slept this long. Sam usually woke up around eight a.m. and that was when the night ended for them too. It was kind of family tradition that once Sam was awake she would crawl into her parents bed where they cuddled together, telling each other stories of what they had done throughout the week.

When it was so late, where was Sam? She couldn't still be asleep, could she? Slightly worried, she got out of bed. A side glance to Gil assured her that her husband was still soundly asleep, so she tip-toed out of the room. No need to wake him, because she was worried about nothing. At least that was what she hoped.

Sam's door was closed, a sure sign that she hadn't left her room since Sara had brought her to bed last night. After all, Sam was a child of barely six years and didn't care about her private sphere like an adult would. On the contrary, it was hard to get Sam to close a door, even when it was winter and every bit of extra warmth was appreciated. Sara was sure that as soon as her daughter insisted on having her door closed the childhood days of her only child would be irrevocably over.

She could feel a lump in her throat as she opened the door. She had every reason to believe that everything was ok, but she just couldn't help her feelings. It was the other side of what was generally called maternal instinct. In it was united the unconditional love for a child that had been carried and taken care of while it was still utterly helpless, as well as a natural parent's worry of its well-being. She had never been the type of mother that had been overly concerned about everything, but, after all, her daughter was one of the two most important people in her life.

Everything was quiet in Sam's room. The curtains were still closed, only some rays of sunshine coming through a gap in the middle lightened the room. She heaved a sigh of relief as she spotted the figure of her daughter lying in her bed. So Sam had simply overslept. No wonder after their trip to the Strip yesterday. They had spent almost four hours in the

Excalibur alone, where Sam couldn't get enough of the performances of people clad in mediaeval costumes; and of the donuts. She opened the curtains and daylight flooded the room. Turning to her daughter she intended to wake her up with a gentle peck on her cheek.

She jumped at the sight in the bed and cried out in shock. Sam lay on her back, her body rigid, her skin pale and lightly blue coloured. She had seen death in its various shapes more than once and knew when the game was lost. Although her brain refused to accept the information, she knew in her heart that her daughter wasn't alive anymore?

The most horrible thing for Sara was Sam's eyes though. They were open, and stared empty into the room. She kneeled down beside her daughter, again and again calling her name, tears streaming down her cheeks. She caressed her cool skin, wanting to give her back the warmth that had been taken away by death. Sam didn't react but Sara thought she see her lips move, hearing her voice talking to her.

'Why didn't you save me? Why did you let me die?'

She awoke by her own screaming.

Sara sat in the lab's break room, immobilised by some drugs she had never heard about before, prescribed to her by her doctor. Her hands lay folded in her lap and her gaze rested on some undefined spot on the ground. Beside her sat Gil, who was leafing through some magazine, without reading a word. They had been sitting here for two hours now, and neither one of them had moved or talked throughout that time.

They were waiting for Doc Robbins to tell them that he was finished, and that Sam was ready for them to see her one last time. As they had agreed, she would transported into the funeral home directly afterwards and made ready for burial. They didn't want her to be laid out. They wanted people to remember her as she had been in life, and they wanted to avoid the chance that some kids of Sam's class would come with their parents to see her. If it was possible they would spare those kids the sight of their dead classmate.

It wasn't customary that someone who was familiar with the relatives did the autopsy, but Doc Robbins had managed to convince the Sheriff that he would be the one doing the examination. Al Robbins considered himself a friend of the Grissoms' and he felt that he owed it to them. David had been with him in this case and together they had faced one of the most difficult tasks in their lives. Neither he nor David would ever tell it to Grissom or Sara, but both of them had a hard time holding back tears while carrying out what was an indispensable part in a criminal investigation.

Both of them had known Sam since her birth, and had loved the lively and intelligent child. It was always hard to work with a child. But it was even harder knowing how the child had been in life. Sam surely would have grown into a smart and beautiful adult if some criminal hadn't come along to steal away her life. Where was the fairness in that?

Brass, Catherine, Warrick and Nick all headed for the parking lot together. For the last few hours, they had been waiting impatiently for the results of some DNA tests done with some

hairs Ecklie's team had found at the crime scene. Some few minutes ago Greg had finally paged them.

The team had found fingerprints as well, but by now they knew that they had all belonged to Sam and the last owners of the flat. It was a matter of minutes to find out that the previous owners had moved to Florida some years ago. So they were sure that the murderer must have worn gloves, a sure sign that it had been a planned and organized crime.

The hairs seemed to be more promising though. There had been some dark brown ones, which they supposed to be Sam's, as well as two shorter blond ones, probably from the murderer. Although officially Ecklie had to be first to be informed, Greg had promised the nightshift to tell them about the results as soon as he had them. To protect Greg, they had agreed to meet outside of the building.

Apart from Brass, none of them would have the slightest influence on the investigation. But they wanted to be there for Grissom and Sara in any possible way. And if this meant gathering information about the case to help them understand what couldn't be understood, then they would do that.

Brass walked briskly in front of the others and they had problems keeping pace with him. He had been reserved; his expression grave and closed for the last few days, and more than once Catherine, Warrick and Nick had shared worried glances. They were all deeply shaken by what had happened, but they hadn't been there when they found Sam, like he had been, and now something in him seemed to be broken. When he usually covered his feelings, it was with his dripping sarcasm. Now every time he spoke it was in dead earnest. Most of the time he didn't speak at all.

They didn't know that Brass was well aware of their worry. He could feel their eyes on his back as they walked out to Greg. But as much as he wanted to, he couldn't talk to them. He couldn't tell them that what he had witnessed in that flat haunted him day and night. It was his pain to bear, and it wouldn't make anything better to burden the others too. Even if he were to do so, there were no words to describe this painful hour.

How to describe his thoughts and feelings as he saw Sam's fragile body? Laying flat on the ground, the once so beautiful brown eyes empty. Ugly blue bruises surrounding her delicate neck like a collar.

How to explain what he felt when he saw Sara collapsing on the ground? How her eyes pierced into his minutes later, begging him to tell her that everything had been a dream, that her baby was ok?

How to explain the tightening of his stomach at the sight of Grissom sitting on the ground holding the hands of his woman, tears streaming down his cheeks?

How to make his colleagues understand the panic he felt when Grissom, with Sara in tow, shoved him and the transfixed officers apart and walked into the living room where Sam still lay on the ground?

How to give the others an idea about the sadness and anger that crept into his heart when he and Gil had to keep Sara from touching her daughter?

He could still see Sara's defeated look and how she backed away from them, hugging herself in an attempt to protect herself.

He could still see Sara's fists coming down on Gil's chest as he tried to embrace her and how her anger turned into despair, flowing in her tears soaking through the fabric of Gil's shirt.

He could still see the light in his best friend's eyes dying.

As they left the building they could see Greg nervously pacing up and down in front of his car. As he saw them approaching fast his face betrayed the relief he felt and he gave them a grim smile.

"Let's hurry. Ecklie was on my heels for almost the whole day. I told him he would have the results in half an hour, and that I had something urgent to settle with my bank. I think you can imagine what I had to listen to."

"Ok, let's make it fast then. What did you find out?" Catherine asked without further ado, laying a comforting hand on his shoulder.

"Well, the DNA test had been a full success and we got a result almost at once. It's someone we know. It...It was a crime of vengeance. Can you believe that he wanted Grissom and Sara to pay and that he took Sam for that reason?" Sadly he shook his head.

"Someone we know? Who?" Warrick's sharp voice made Greg looking up at him.

"It's Ben Weston. The lawyer."

The CSI's, except Warrick, changed shocked glances. They all remembered Weston vividly, although it had been Brass, Sara and Grissom's case.

"Ben Weston? I don't think I've ever heard about that case before. What was it about?" Warrick looked around inquiringly.

"Let's go inside, before Ecklie catches us. We can talk later." Catherine threw in as she saw that Nick was about to start explaining.

Together they headed inside and went in Grissom's office, avoiding the break room where Grissom and Sara were still waiting. Greg, who wanted to search for Ecklie, parted with them. They huddled together in the small room as Brass told them the story of the cold-blooded young man that now obviously had destroyed Grissom's and Sara's lives.

Ben Weston had been an ambitious young lawyer who had just started his first job when he hit a passer by with his brand new, \$80,000 Mercedes. To make things worse for him he had drunk alcohol not long before that. In this situation, instead of calling the incident in, he committed absconding. The fact that made this hit and run more gruesome than all they had seen before, was that the victim wasn't lying hurt or dead on the street, but instead was hanging with its upper body in Weston's windshield.

The young man, who had grown up and studied in Nevada instead at one of those respected New England universities like he would have liked to, a fact that somehow gnawed on his self confidence, now decided, cold-bloodedly, that he wouldn't let such a minor occurrence destroy his dreams. In his opinion, he had worked hard to become successful and rich. He wasn't going to allow one moment of inattention to shatter his dreams.

Only seconds after the accident he drove on, as if nothing happened, parked the car in his garage and went inside the house to change clothes and to decide what to do with the corpse in his car. However it wasn't a corpse bleeding into his car and his garage, but a badly hurt man who awakened some time later, unable to move, his quiet calls for help unheard.

Weston, who was unaware of this fact, reported his car missing and went into the garage hours later. To his dismay, he had to notice that the man he thought dead was still living and begging him for help. Weston's only reaction was to turn around and switch off the light.

The next time he came back the man was finally dead, and he took the corpse and buried it in some park. Back at home he bleached the floor where the man's blood had left a large stain. For him this chapter of his life was now closed. It was about time that he concentrated on what really counted for him, his career.

The corpse had been found days later and even in an early stage of the investigation the CSI's suspected Weston. As they found out that one of his shirts was ruined by bleach and that he had an ugly burning on the top of his left shoulder their suspicion hardened but Weston denied everything.

In the end they were lucky and got hold on evidence the young lawyer couldn't deny. It was a tape of a 911 call made from the victim with Weston's car phone. Even as they listened to the tape the young man's face hardly showed any reaction.

What made the case even bitterer was that the victim had left his ex-wife a farewell letter. He had wanted to commit suicide. Had Weston reported the accident at once he would have been off the hook, but now he had to answer to a first degree murder charge.

"But how can Weston have done it then? Isn't he rotting in prison right now?" Nick looked enquiringly at Brass.

"I don't know. But I'll go back to my office, and wait to be officially informed of Weston by Ecklie. Then I'll see that I get my hands on some information." Without any further comment, Brass left the office.

The other CSI's stayed together for a short while, each of them lost in his own thoughts. But as no one knew what to say, they soon separated to get back to work. Although Sam's murder was gruesome, the world hadn't stopped turning, and, as it was, they were two people short.

Al Robbins stood in the break room's doorframe and cleared his throat quietly. Sara and Gil, who hadn't seen him coming, looked up at him, their faces betraying a mixture of silent questions and anxiety.

"Sam's ready. Do you want to see her now?"

Sara nodded firmly and, after exchanging a gaze with Gil, they both got up and followed Robbins.

“She had been strangled, hadn’t she?” Grissom asked Robbins while they still were on their way.

The doctor stopped in his tracks and faced Grissom and Sara.

“Yes, she has. I’m sorry. I really am.”

He had been afraid of this moment and was relieved to see that neither of them collapsed or erupted in anger, although he would have understood both of those reactions. Instead, they only looked at him, sad but composed.

They went on. But at the door of the examination room, Robbins halted again.

“I’ll be back later. Take your time.” With a last compassionate glance he turned around and walked away.

After taking a deep breath, Gil opened the door and entered the dimly lit room, followed by Sara. They saw Sam at once. She was lying on one of the tables, her body covered with a sheet. It almost looked as if she was asleep, and without realising it, they approached their daughter as quietly as possible, as if not to wake her.

Later on, neither Gil nor Sara would be able to tell how much time they spent in there, whispering to their daughter, trying to put off the final goodbye. But they would never forget how peaceful Sam had looked, like a pale and innocent angel.

TBC