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Chapter two: Day 1; Band- aids.

Sara couldn't bear the silence any longer. They'd been driving for more than an hour and neither of them had spoken a word. Although she normally wouldn't mind the silence, the tension in the small car was rather uncomfortable.

"Grissom, would you mind if I turn on the radio? Otherwise I can't promise not to start talking to myself anytime soon." She asked while trying to keep a light tone of voice. It didn't work.

He winced when she spoke, and his mind immediately snapped back to reality.

"Sorry Sara, I didn't mean to ignore you for so long. Go ahead. Choose anything you want to listen to."

She peered at him and decided to take a chance, before he fell back into his absent-minded state again.

"Tell me, how long is the drive to Stockton? It was Stockton, right?" She hoped that such a harmless question would get him to talk and relax.

"You're right. It's Stockton; in Utah, and it's a distance of approximately four hundred and thirty seven miles. The estimated driving time will be seven hours and seventeen minutes." He stated calmly, with an almost robotic voice.

"You always have to be the scientist, don't you? I would've been satisfied knowing that it'll be around seven hours." Her voice betrayed more frustration she felt than she wanted to reveal.

"Sorry, but I thought that when I knew the facts for sure, it would be a good idea to share them with you. Aren't scientists supposed to think and act both logically and exact?" His voice was cold, a sure evidence that he was angry.

'Uh oh, ok Side a snappy Grissom is the last thing you need. Well, all isn't lost, yet. He's only at stage two of three. Try and cheer him up.' She thought while silently counting to twenty.

Long ago Sara had recognized that his anger passed through three stages. First he'd become calm, almost petrified. Then, as a next step, he'd snap at the object of his anger. And the last stage, what she called 'burning rage', would consist of yelling and accusations.

"It's ok Grissom. I didn't mean to upset you. Just tell me where we're staying tonight, and what Stockton's like." She said trying to sound soothing.

"It's a little town in Utah, near Salt Lake City. I know next to nothing about it myself. I simply thought it would be good to rest somewhere before getting to Salt Lake City. I don't need the thrill of searching for an unknown destination in a city after so many long hours of driving. We'll stay at Betty Ann's Inn –a small bed and breakfast. I spoke with the owner, Betty Ann herself, and she seemed to be pretty nice." He was calmer now.

"It sounds kinda like Norma Jean's B&B, where we stayed during the seminar near San Francisco, don't you think?" Sara said chuckling. "I swear I'll never forget Norma Jean in my whole life. She had the breadth of a whale but the healthy self-confidence of a goddess."

She cleared her throat and spoke again with a high-pitched voice. "You know my parents could see my similarity to Marilyn right after my birth. They said they'd never seen something so beautiful before. But they were right; Marilyn should've kept her real name 'Norma Jean'. It's a good name, not like Marilyn which is an absolutely unnatural one."

She turned her head and watched Grissom laugh at the remembrance.

"Don't you miss the old days sometimes? Everything seemed to be so much easier."

He could hear the melancholy in her voice and wanted to say something to make her feel better, but couldn't find the right words. He wished he could turn back time, but he knew that wasn't possible. They had their chance eight years ago, but they missed it and there was no chance of turning back now.

"That's the thing with retrospection. I'm sure in ten years we'll be saying the same things we're saying now, but it still won't change the outcome."

He knew he sounded lame. Hadn't he promised himself to try to fix their relationship during this trip? A first step would be to change these old habits of his and open up a little more.

"Yes, I miss those days too. But we can't go back, as much as we might want to. Sara I know we need to talk, but let's do it some other time. I don't mean in five years, but maybe when we reach Stockton ok?" He spoke gently and as he faced her for a brief moment she could see a small smile that lightened his face.

Sara nodded her approval and turned on the radio. She found a channel that played eighties songs and decided to leave it there.

"So, didn't you want to tell me something about your friend Henry Wood?" she asked Grissom.

"Yes that's true." He conceded.

They lightly talked about Wood and their work in general for the next few hours.

They reached Stockton around six o'clock. The town was smaller than either of them had expected. The town seemed to consist of only one main street with a few side streets.

"Are you sure you booked us overnights at *this* Stockton?" Sara asked incredulously.

"There's only one Stockton in Utah, so I think I'm sure." Grissom's sarcasm was an expression of his helplessness. "Let's see if we can find Betty Ann's."

After driving past the fifth identical house Sara sighed. "We're getting nowhere. All the houses look the same. Let's stop and ask the old ladies down there for directions. There is a shop over there where I can buy myself a toothbrush. I forgot mine in the rush this morning."

She sounded determined, so Grissom parked the car and together they walked towards the three old ladies, who were chatting loudly outside the store. The three of them could have been related; they seemed so similar from a distance. They wore tweed skirts in different autumn colors, high-necked white blouses and their white hair was neatly pinned up.

The ladies saw the strangers coming and eyed them curiously.

Sara leaned towards Grissom and whispered in his ear. "Do you feel like an insect under the microscope too? They're looking at us as if we'd just come from Mars by UFO."

"Maybe they haven't seen any one from out of town for years. I'll do the talking, ok?" he whispered back.

She shrugged her shoulders; she didn't like the feeling of being under those inquisitive glares.

As they reached them, Grissom showed them his best polite smile.

"Good evening ladies. We are searching for Betty Ann's Inn? Do you know where we can find it?"

The woman in the middle seemed to be the leader of the three. She looked at her two friends, raised an eyebrow and looked back at Grissom. "Of course we know where you can find Betty Ann's, young man. We've lived here for as long as we've been alive. My name is Dorothy Penwright, but you can call me Dottie. To my left is Sadie Marshall and to my right Paulette Barns. And you are?" She looked him in the eye without a blink.

Grissom kept his smile. "My name is Gil Grissom and this is Sara Sidle. It's a pleasure to meet you Dottie, Sadie and Paulette. We're from Las Vegas and we're on our way to a seminar. We booked an overnight stay at Betty Ann's."

Sara looked rather uncomfortable but managed a smile and a short hello.

"Nice to meet you too Gil, and Sara." Dottie nodded graciously. She eyed Sara suspiciously and turned back to Grissom.

"So, did I understand you correctly that you and your wife will only be staying for one night?" Dottie eyed him with clever eyes and waited in full expectation for his reply.

Grissom shifted uncomfortably. He didn't dare to look at Sara. What could he say without embarrassing both of them?

Sara blushed. She felt angry. Why did those nasty women have to bring up this topic? She looked at Dottie, then at her two friends and saw that Sadie and Paulette shared a knowing smile. She'd been so happy that Grissom opened up a bit during the afternoon and now he would most likely hide behind his wall again.

Grissom cleared his throat, when he answered his voice was astonishingly strong and friendly.

"I'm sorry Dottie, but I think you misunderstood me. Sara and I are *not* married. We are colleagues and good friends. We both work for the LVPD and are on our way to attend a seminar in Montana."

His eyes were glinting mischievously.

"We're both crime scene investigators, and we are hoping to learn more about new and interesting developments in fields such as entomology at the seminar. You know I'm a studied entomologist. That means I collect insects, and maggots on corpses, on and around their bodies and out of their natural openings, such as the mouth, nose, and ears. With those insects I can determine the time of death and..."

Sadie and Paulette went pale during his speech but Dottie simply looked disgusted and raised her hands. Her voice was icy.

"I am sure Mr. Grissom that you've an interesting job, but we don't want to steal more of your time. You will be able to find Betty Ann's down the third street on your right. It's the fourth house on your left. I wish you a nice evening. Good bye Mr. Grissom, Ms. Sidle."

Without another word she turned around, and walked off with Sadie and Paulette in tow.

"Good evening ladies," Grissom answered.

He winked at a stunned Sara, tugging gently on her arm and went with her to the little store to buy toothbrushes and other trivial items they would need for their stay.

"I can't believe how nosy people can be. It isn't their business what we're doing here. Thanks for dealing with them Grissom. I hate dealing with people like that."

She gave him a weak smile. He smiled back, holding her gaze for several seconds.

The shop, although small, had a great stock and they found all they needed.

As they walked back to their car they could still feel the icy glares of the old ladies on their backs.

With the directions it was no problem for them to find Betty Ann's. The two-story house was old, the former white paint fading.

Sara eyed the house suspiciously.

"Griss, are you sure we should stay here? The house looks...somewhat...crooked, don't you think?"

He looked at the house, then at Sara and shrugged his shoulders. He was still in the same relaxed mood as before.

"Come on, let's go inside and take a look around. Sometimes those old houses can be very comfy."

She still wasn't so sure, but took her bag and followed anyway. They both waited while Grissom firmly knocked on the door.

A short, plump woman in her sixties opened the door. She wore blue jeans and a white sweater. Her face showed that she liked to laugh a lot. She had deep laugh lines around her hazel eyes, which gazed in a friendly and interested manner at her visitors. "I'm guessing that you are Gil Grissom and Sara Sidle, right? I am Betty Ann. I know it's a terrible name, but I try to bear that burden as best as I can."

She chuckled and offered Grissom and then Sara her hand.

"I know I babble too much. Come on inside, and I'll get you settled in." She turned around and walked back in while her stunned guests followed her.

She guided them through a small hall to the living room. It was tastefully furnished with bright wooden furniture, a glass table and a white leather couch, as well as bookshelves with loads of books that looked like they were actually read.

Betty Ann gestured for them to sit down. "Would you like some coffee or tea?" she asked them.

"Coffee please," Sara and Grissom replied at the same time. They smiled sheepishly and sat down next to each other but maintained a comfortable distance between them.

Betty Ann gave them a knowing look and went through a door to the kitchen, leaving an awkward silence behind.

Sara wrung her hands nervously and searched for something she could say. Grissom studied the paintings on the white painted walls and cleared his throat. He began wondering when silence had started to make him feel uncomfortable. That hadn't always been the case.

Sara followed Grissom's gaze and looked at the paintings herself. "French impressionist in the middle of nowhere. Amazing." She said a slightly impressed.

"You like the paintings?" Betty Ann asked. She had entered the room unnoticed. After putting down a tray with a coffee pot, cups, and a plate that seemed to be loaded with homemade chocolate chip cookies, she poured them the coffee.

"You know, I inherited this house from my parents ten years ago. As soon as we moved in my husband and I renovated the whole place. My parents loved flowered wallpaper and really dark furniture. We wanted to have a brighter house so we changed everything. We lived downstairs and kept the rooms upstairs for overnight guests. Since my husband died two years ago, I decided to keep the guest rooms just the same." She said, her eyes showing a twinge of sadness as she spoke of her husband.

She sighed and sat down opposite of them in a leather armchair. She smiled at Sara who ate her second cookie.

Sara smiled apologetically while catching an errant crumb. "These cookies are really good, and I haven't eaten a decent meal since this morning."

Betty Ann smiled nodding her understanding. "I think I can help you with that. I thought I would serve something to eat around eight o'clock. So you've time to relax a bit first and take a shower or a bath, whatever you like best. One room has a shower, the other a tub. You can decide who will take which one."

"I'll take the one with the shower. I seldom take a bath, but I know that Sara would love the opportunity." Grissom made the offer without hesitation.

Sara looked at him surprised with his thoughtfulness. "Thanks Grissom, that's nice of you. I would love to take a bath."

Twenty minutes later Betty Ann guided her guests to their rooms. As she'd said the rooms looked bright and fresh, both were furnished with king-size beds, night drawers and cupboards.

"I'll come get you in an hour." Grissom told Sara.

"Yeah, all right." She said, her voice uninterested. Hunger quickly forgotten, her body was already looking forward to the bath, after such a long drive.

When Grissom left to his own room, Sara closed her door behind her. She then went to examine the bathroom using the eyes of an experienced investigator. She immediately noticed that there were several bath oils to choose from on some small shelves hanging from the wall. Deciding to investigate the rest of the room later she chose the one that smelled of strawberries. After drawing her bath she let herself sink into the tub and enjoyed a luxurious half an hour of peace before she dressed for the evening.

As promised, Grissom knocked on her door at ten to eight. She opened almost immediately.

He opened his mouth to greet her but for some reason could not manage to shut it again. The sight of her overwhelmed him. She wore tight black jeans that fit her like a second skin and a sleeveless red top that ended short above her navel. All of her uncovered skin was covered with goose bumps. The tiny hairs on her arms stood upright.

She raised an eyebrow and smirked at his silent appraisal of her. "Do you see something you like?" She asked.

"Yes, you." He answered quickly without thought. He blushed when he realized he had spoken his thought out loud.

"You don't look so bad yourself." She said looking at the blue jeans and the black sweater he had on. The combination made him look both young and fashionable.

"Thanks Sara. Are you cold? You're covered with goose bumps." He had a concerned look that bordered on slightly amused.

"Yes I am, but it's my own fault. When I packed my bag, I only took light tops, and warm woolen sweaters with me. I thought it would be warm till Utah and then really cold in Montana. So I thought I would have the light tops for the warm weather and just be able to add the sweaters in Montana. I should've taken into consideration that the days here are warm, but not the evenings. But it isn't so cold that I want to wear really warm stuff."

She crossed her arms to preserve the little warmth she had left.

"I can give you one of my shirts. I have some really 'stylish' checkered ones with me. I thought they'd be good for the work outside." He said smirking. "They aren't too warm and you could wear them open. I'll get you one."

He turned around and went to fetch a shirt from his room before she had a chance to say no.

The shirt was at least five sizes too big for her, and she had to roll up the cuffs a little bit, but she gratefully put it on anyway. Grissom couldn't help notice that she looked even better than before. He could get used to the sight of her wearing his clothes. He frantically tried to think of something else to say instead of staring at her.

"Thanks, Griss. That's much better." She showed him her gap-toothed smile.

"Shall we go then?" He asked.

She nodded and they went downstairs where it already smelled delightful. Sara immediately remembered how hungry she was before her bath.

Betty Ann, who heard them, came out of the kitchen, and met them in the living room. "Ah, you're absolutely punctual. Dinner is ready. Would you please follow me into the dining room?"

She guided them into a room to the right. It was small and contained only a large wooden table with eight chairs and a sideboard. Nonetheless it was tasteful like the rest of the house. She had set the table for two and chose to let them sit opposite of each other

She lit two candles on the table and the room immediately filled with a soft glow.

"I brought the food inside and placed it on the sideboard. The bowls will keep the contents warm forever. I'm sorry, but I have to go now. I play bingo once a week at the parish hall, and that's today. I made a bet with Dottie; Dorothy Penwright, you don't know her, but I bet her that I'll beat her tonight and there are ten dollars at stake."

She looked curiously startled at Grissom and Sara when they laughed hysterically.

"So you do know Dottie? How interesting."

They told her about the incident that evening and Betty Ann shook her head and laughed at the same time.

"That's so typically her. I would love to stay and chat longer, but I've got to go. I wish you both a pleasant evening. And Sara, you don't have to look so distrustful at the dishes. Gil told me that you are a vegetarian, so I made vegetable soup, vegetable pasta with homemade bread and mousse au chocolate. I thought that some white wine would be a good choice too, so *bon appetite*." She said pointing at the sideboard.

"I have to hurry now. See you two later."

She turned around and left the room.

Sara looked after her and then at Grissom. Her face betrayed the emotions that she felt, amazed that he would remember, and pleasantly surprised that Grissom had acted so thoughtfully.

"Thanks Griss. That was sweet of you."

He gave her a small smile and tentatively reached out for her right hand. When she didn't appear to be pulling back he took hold of it. After a few moments he seemed to get braver and he started to gently stroke the back of her hand with his thumb.

"Sara, I forgot it once and you nearly left us... left me. I don't want to risk losing you." He spoke quietly but with feeling. "As I said this morning I do want to talk with you. I know, even if it doesn't always seem that way, but we can't continue like this. I don't know how much I am ready to give you at the moment, or what'll be the best for both of us. But I want to find a solution with you, for the sake of us both."

They sat silent for several minutes, holding hands and looking in each other's eyes. They were searching for the truth they knew that was there, but that they couldn't voice at that moment.

As they heard the door close signaling Betty Ann's departure they separated.

"Shall we taste the food?" he asked her, his voice hoarse.

"Good idea." She answered and got up to serve them some soup.

It was indeed very good, and they both acknowledged it moments later.

While they were eating the soup she told him some stories about catastrophes she experienced during her time at her parents' B&B.

They both felt relaxed as they started with the pasta, which also looked delicious. Grissom opened the wine and they both sat down again.

"Grissom, what's happened to us these past four years? When we met ten years ago we became friends fast. Let's be honest, it was more than being friends, even if we didn't act on it. We were still friends when I moved to Vegas. And now? We are... well I wouldn't call it friends. I know *you* can feel the tension increasing. I sure can, and I'm sure everyone else in the lab can too."

She looked into his blue eyes, which closed when he sighed at the mention of the stress between them. He wished he could run and hide, as was his MO when she mentioned something personal to him, but he'd promised her to be honest. He owed her that much.

He reached for the knife to butter his bread roll. He hoped to buy himself a few more seconds to formulate an honest answer. But what was the truth?

He felt a sharp pain at his left hand and as he looked down he saw a long cut at his forefinger that filled fast with blood. 'Wow, that butter knife was sharp.' He thought.

Sara who heard his sharp intake of air looked down and jumped off her chair.

"Wait here a moment. I have a disinfectant and band-aids in my room."

A minute later she was down again. Grissom had his finger covered in a handkerchief and looked slightly pale.

She kneeled down before him. "Let's see." She grabbed for the handkerchief, laid it on the table and concentrated on his finger. She cleaned the small cut, disinfected it carefully and put a band-aid around his finger.

When she was done she noticed that he hadn't said a word during the entire procedure. She looked up at him and found that his eyes rested on her. His gaze was intent and he seemed to have completely forgotten about his finger.

"Griss, is everything ok?" she asked him concerned.

He nodded slightly but his gaze never left her. "Do you know how beautiful you are Sara?"

Sara could hear the awe and the desire in his voice. She sat frozen in front of him still clutching his wounded hand, and still didn't know what do when he slowly started leaning forward. She could feel her heart start to beat faster, and felt his warm breath on her face. The smell was a mixture of the food they had eaten along with the wine. She was surprised to find that there was still a hint of toothpaste to the sent, and she now knew that he used the spearmint flavored kind.

His manly scent was intoxicating, and she wished she could bury herself in his arms. Sara closed her eyes when Grissom got so close that his eyes were beginning to blur. When he rubbed his cheek against hers she was surprised to find that his beard was rough yet soft at the same time. He moved back slowly and before she had a chance to react she could feel his lips on hers. Sara moaned as she felt a shiver running down her spine.

Finally as if something clicked inside, Sara was able to move. She slowly pulled away and looked at him almost apologetically. "Griss, I would love to kiss you for hours, but we shouldn't do this now, not until we know what we want. Let's not do anything that we'll regret tomorrow."

She sounded sad, so tossing caution to the wind he wrapped his arms around her and held her tight. He leaned down and whispered in her ear. "Sara you're right. Thank you for preventing me from acting hastily. Come on, there's still some good looking pasta and mousse au chocolate to eat." His voice at first sad, was now light and playful.

Once he released her, Sara nodded, got up off the floor and sat down again.

For the rest of the evening they enjoyed their meal and a light conversation about work in general. They talked about recent cases, and they bantered lightly about the memories they both acquired in the first two years after she arrived in Vegas. There were quite a few.

When they went to bed hours later, they were pleased about the day in general, and were full of hope that it would indeed be possible to solve their problems for a better future.

TBC