An epilogue for Who Are You? I borrowed the incident from George Ead’s life to explain his reactions in this episode.

Nick stood, still facing the wall, oblivious to the activity behind him. His strained breathing was beginning to settle, his pounding heart taking on a more normal rhythm but sweat still beaded his brow and his entire body trembled. His legs seemed to be frozen in place, his knees locked. He was certain if he had to take a step right now, he’d fall flat on his face. Behind him, he could hear Grissom’s muted voice as he handed Amy Hendler over to the uniforms. A hand touched his shoulder a moment later and he flinched then relaxed when he recognized Grissom’s voice.

"Nick? You sure you’re okay?"

Nick nodded shakily and quickly swiped at his eyes. "Yeah, I’m all right." His trembling voice belied his words but he turned and gave Grissom a quick nod. The frown on Grissom’s face told Nick his boss wasn’t convinced. "Sorry," Nick said. "She took me by surprise."

Grissom nodded. "Me too." He sighed and scrubbed a hand over his face. "God, Nick, I’m the one who should be sorry. If I’d be a minute later…"

Nick shook his head. "It’s okay. You got her." He dropped his head and stared at his fisted hands, only now feeling the stinging pain where his nails dug into his palms. "I’m sorry," he said again softly, "for wimping out like I did."

Grissom took his arm and led him toward the front door. "You didn’t wimp out, Nick. You tried to talk her down –"

"I was terrified!" Nick whispered. "Scared to death she was going to shoot me."

Gil quirked an eyebrow. "And you think you’re the only one who’s ever felt like that? Trust me, if
you’d told me it hadn’t bothered you at all, I’d be more worried." He unlocked the door to the
passenger side of the van and motioned for Nick to get in. Walking around to the other side, he
climbed in and started the car. "I’ll drop you home," he said. "You can write up your report
tomorrow and I’ll come back, process the evidence, in a while."

Nick shook his head. "I can do that, Gris. The report at least."

"It’ll wait until tomorrow," Grissom insisted.

"I’d rather do it now," Nick replied. "Get it out of the way."

Grissom stared at him for a moment then nodded. "Okay."

~o0o~

What had he been thinking, wanting to come back to work and re-live the whole experience again?
Nick stared at the computer screen, the bland words not coming anywhere close to describing what
he’d felt when the gun had been pointed at his head. His cheeks heated when he remembered the
unintentional tears that had stung his eyes while he’d begged her not to shoot him, to talk to him,
knowing that nothing he said would change her mind.

He sent the report to his printer then saved it and logged off. He was exhausted but he knew sleep
would not come easily tonight. Glancing at the clock on the wall, he wondered if he might just stay
here, catch up on his paperwork and start fresh the following day. He could go for a run in the
morning, maybe head to the gym for a workout before coming back into work. He had no wish to
return to a cold, empty apartment with only nightmares in his head but knew too that nothing he did
tonight would erase the memories from his mind. He could still see her, see the fear mingled with
intent that twisted her face… and knew that if Grissom had not returned when he had, he’d be lying
dead now on the floor of that apartment. It didn’t matter that she had nowhere to run. She’d had
nothing to lose and her desperation and unbalanced mind gave her no other choices.

Pouring himself a cup of only marginally warm coffee, he walked over to the window and stared out
into the darkness. Not the first time he’d faced death. Probably not the last. He could leave it all,
walk away, never risk having to go through that again and knew even as he thought it, that he never
would. After so long drifting somewhat aimlessly through his life, he knew once he’d joined the
force, he was where he was meant to be. Or so he’d thought. Taking the final step to become a CSI
had been a tough decision but one he would never regret. He felt at home here. Grissom, Warrick,
Catherine and Sara were the family he’d always yearned for and he wouldn’t let that go now.

"Heading home?"

Nick forced himself not to jump at Grissom’s voice and turned, pasting a smile on his face. "Wish
you’d stop sneaking up on me."

Grissom shrugged. "Sorry." He nodded toward the desk. "You finished?"

"Yeah."

"Go home," Grissom ordered. "Get something to eat and some sleep."

Yeah, right, Nick thought. If only it was that easy. He walked over and set his coffee cup down on
the desk. "See you tomorrow."

Grissom waited until Nick brushed past him before he spoke again. "If you want to talk to someone
about what happened tonight, you can make an appointment with the Department psychologist."
"Nah, I’m fine, Gris, really. Some food, couple hours of sleep, I’ll be good as new."

Grisom didn’t look convinced. "The offer’s there if you feel the need."

Nick waved the concern away. "I’ll see you tomorrow."

~o0o~

The gun barrel filled his vision. The muzzle, black and shiny, promised only death. A voice spat words but his attention was so focused on the weapon that he barely heard them. He lifted his shaking hands in a mute plea for mercy but before he had time to complete the gesture, the weapon bucked in his assailant’s hands, the report so explosive, he was deafened. Red blossomed in his eyesight, blinding him and he felt himself falling backward. He landed hard, a scream lodged in his throat but the pain never came…

Nick surged up, his eyes wide, his breath coming in panicked gasps from lungs that seemed to have forgotten how to expand. Sweat dripped down his forehead and dribbled down the collar of his shirt, making him shiver. He looked around. He was home. With a groan that was half-embarrassment and half-pain, he levered himself off the floor and sat on the couch. He remembered now. He’d come home, too drained to do anything but sit and stare into the gathering darkness… and think. He’d fallen asleep and in the grip of a nightmare, had fallen off the couch.

A sharp rapping sounded at the door, startling him and he stared at it for a moment, attempting to will his visitor away. As much as he had no wish to be alone tonight, he didn’t want anyone seeing him in his present emotional state.

Whoever was on the other side of the door was not going to give up easily, it seemed. The knocking continued until Nick finally hauled himself up from the couch and walked slowly over to answer it. "I’m coming," he called out. "Give me a minute."

Opening the door, he wasn’t surprised to find Warrick standing there. The two men had become good friends over the past few months.

Warrick grinned at him and held out a beer. "Grisom said you had a rough night."

Nick hesitated for a moment then accepted the bottle with a nod of thanks. "You could say that." He held the door open wide in invitation for Warrick to enter.

Warrick stopped just inside the door. "I wake you up?"

"Nah," Nick replied. "Had a headache, that’s all."

"You sure?"

Nick nodded, feeling his somber mood lift a little with his friend’s presence. "Yeah." He flipped on the light and gestured Warrick over to the sofa. "Take a load off, man. I hear you cleared the cop."

"We did." Warrick seated himself with a sigh. "Damndest thing I’ve ever seen with that bullet –" He stopped abruptly. "Sorry, probably the last thing you want to hear."

"It’s okay," Nick assured him. He sat down beside Warrick and twisted the cap off his bottle then took a deep drink. "Now that hits the spot," he said gratefully.
"You, ah, want to talk?"

Nick started to shake his head then stopped and stared at Warrick. "You ever had a gun aimed at your head?" When Warrick simply shrugged, he went on. "When I was in college, I worked in a convenience store. Gave me some pocket money, kept my car on the road." he began softly. "One night I was working late. Business had been slow and I was just about to close up." He stood and walked over to the window, staring out for a moment before he turned to face Warrick. "Two guys came in. They didn’t raise any suspicions." He smiled a little. "Besides I was just a fresh-faced college kid back then. They were down the back of the store getting booze and one of them called out to me. As soon as I rounded the corner of the aisle next to the coolers, I knew. Both of them had guns aimed at me. While one of them helped himself to the beer, the other took me back to the checkout. I remember glancing at the front door, hoping no one else would come in…" He trailed off for a moment, lost in the memory of that night.

"And…?" Warrick prompted.

Nick shrugged. "I did everything he asked me to do. Opened the till, put the cash in a bag… All the while I couldn’t take my eyes off that gun. He had the barrel shoved in my face, right between my eyes. I handed the bag over and he smiled and I knew…” He realized he was beginning to shake again.

Warrick stood and came over to him, pressing another beer into his hand. "Look, it’s okay if you don’t want to talk about it right now," he said.

Nick looked at the bottle then raised it to his lips and drank deeply. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand then nodded. "I think I need to. I never mentioned it again after I spoke to the cops, not even to my folks."

"What did you know?" Warrick asked. "When he smiled?"

Nick sighed. "That he was going to shoot me anyway. See, if I’d known then what I know now, I would have realized it from the beginning. No masks, no disguises. They weren’t planning on leaving a witness. I could see his finger tightening on the trigger. I begged him to let me go. Promised I wouldn’t tell anyone but he just kept smiling that damn cold, evil smile. I closed my eyes, waiting for the gunshot and nothing happened. When I opened them, they were gone."

"What happened?"

Nick shrugged. "Sirens. They got spooked and ran. Turned out it was a cop car responding to a car accident a few blocks away but they didn’t know that." Nick felt suddenly weak, his stomach rebelled against the beer and he thought for a moment he was going to throw up. He felt Warrick’s hand beneath his arm, supporting him.

"Easy," Warrick soothed. "You’re as white as a sheet, man. Let’s get you sitting down."

Dizzy and nauseated, he allowed Warrick to lead him over to the couch. He leaned his head forward and rested it in his hands. "Shouldn’t have had that beer on an empty stomach," he muttered. Already the sick feeling was passing to be replaced with an overwhelming lassitude.

"Shock, more likely," Warrick mused. "Tell you what, why don’t you let me help you get into bed. You’ll be more comfortable there."

Nick stalled for a moment. As tired as he was, he didn’t want to go to sleep, only to be ambushed by more nightmares. "I’m fine," he said, straightening up with an effort. "Might stay here, catch a game
on the TV."

"Where am I gonna sleep?" Warrick asked.

"You?" Nick’s brow creased in confusion.

"I’ve had a couple of beers myself and it’s been a long day. Thought I could stay here tonight. Head into work from here tomorrow.” He said it casually enough but Nick caught the meaning behind the words in the warm green eyes and for a moment, gratitude and relief overwhelmed him.

He swallowed past the lump in his throat, determined the tears that had never been too far away tonight would not fall. He smiled. "Sure, why not?" He leaned forward and picked up the remote from the coffee table. "Still early though. How about we call in a pizza to soak up a couple more beers, catch a game?"

Warrick grinned back, then settled comfortably back on the couch, lifting his feet to rest them on the coffee table. "Sounds like a good way to spend the night, partner. I brought the beer. You’re springing for the pizza, right?"

END

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