

Soliloquy

Based on "UFO" the science-fiction TV series created by
Gerry and Sylvia Anderson and Reg Hill (1969-1971)
and CSI, created by Anthony Zuiker
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Some adult content

Dedicated to my cousin Bonnie, another CSI fan, who prefers a happy ending.

PART ONE

Warrick Brown shook his head, "I've never seen anything like this, Gil. What the hell happened here?" He could see bloody bodies lying all over the ground, with CSI people checking them. A dozen morgue vehicles were parked and ready to receive the corpses.

Gil Grissom was directing Sarah Sidle and Nick Stokes from their CSI team, "Get the photos asap. The decomp rate on these bodies may be sped up because of their exposure. Catherine and Warrick and I will process the inside of the bus," he looked back at Warrick, as he snapped on his latex gloves, "It's a forensic nightmare. From the rigour on the DBs, I'd guesstimate they've been dead in the vicinity of 12 hours or so, but the amount of bodily damage may skew some of our findings."

Lt. Jim Brass walked towards Brown and Grissom, "It was called in by a pair of lovebirds looking for a remote place to do the horizontal mambo - one of them had a cell phone and called 911. It was already too late for these poor kids."

"Kids?" Warrick queried.

"Yeah," Brass replied, nodding towards the bus, "A group of high school athletes on their way to a sports conference in Vegas."

"And, they're all dead?"

Brass's expression was sombre, "All 32 of them, plus their driver. And, being dead isn't the worst thing that's happened to them."

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"We've had to store some of the DBs elsewhere. Just too many to process at once," Nick Stokes explained to Dr. Robbins, the Las Vegas Coroner, "Our morgue didn't have enough space."

"I've got lots to do right now with this group," Robbins told him, "I don't know what to say. I've never seen anything like this."

"That's what we're all saying. Geez. Who'd do such a thing - to all the vics?"

"There's no evidence of gunshot, stabbing, strangulation, or any other means of murder. And, here's a grisly piece of info for you - they were dissected while still alive. At least the ones I've seen so far."

Nick swallowed hard, "They're just kids, Doc. Just kids on their way to a fun time in Vegas. I don't get this one at all. Any chance this could be some sort of nutzo cult ritual? A Charlie Manson kind of thing?"

"Nope. The dissection was done with medical precision. No messy cutting here. Whoever did this knew what they were doing and what they were taking."

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"Yes, General Foster," Dr. Raychaudhuri answered her TV picture-cell phone.

"Congratulations on your last assignment," the General smiled, "I hear you cleaned up a very dicey case in New Mexico. You'll have to take a detour, though, I'm afraid. We've got an incident in Las Vegas that just popped up."

Lew Waterman, driving their rental SUV, looked over at the expression of concern on Mitali's face, "What's going on?"

"Thirty-three bodies. All carved in typical fashion. Bus load of teenagers on their way to some conference in Vegas. You know what this means. Any time they do that many in a group there has to be an alien nest in the area."

"Can you send us out an extraction crew for removing the bodies?" Mitali asked Foster.

"I've got Leslie, Little and Chacon about to board a plane for Vegas right now. They'll call you when they get in. I'm e-mailing you the details. It's an ugly one, Mitali. Let's get it taken care of with a minimum of hassle. Co-operate with the local authorities wherever possible, but keep them out of the loop. The main thing is to get those bodies and the bus they were in out of there. Do what you have to."

"What about the nest?"

"Once the bodies are on their way back here, Leslie and his team will lead an extermination strike. We're monitoring for signs of nest activity right now. You and Lew will have to go over the nest with a fine toothed comb when Leslie & Company have it neutralized."

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Gil Grissom was surprised. No insect activity. Ordinarily, given the amount of time the bodies had been exposed and the heat of the sun in the desert, there should have been plenty of bugs to look at. There was a strange scent on the bodies too. Something Gris couldn't put his finger on. It wasn't even the normal sickly-sweet scent of decomposing flesh. What was it? Was the unusual scent what kept the bugs from locating the bodies?

Catherine Willows came into the lab with some evidence bags, "There isn't much. At first glance it's all stuff from the kids themselves. No prints, fibres, nada. Whoever did this cleaned up after themselves pretty good."

"No insects either. There should be. Smell this," Gris motioned Catherine over.

"Doesn't smell like your normal DB."

"That's just it. We should be smelling decomp in action. We don't know yet how long those bodies were really out in the sun. Instead, they smell, almost...nice."

"Some sort of disinfectant maybe?" Catherine suggested, wrinkling her nose at the idea of a corpse smelling 'nice'.

Grissom stood back from the body he was examining, "This isn't the work of one person. This had to be done by a group. Nobody could kill and dissect 33 bodies under the conditions we found them."

"What if the vics were transported to some other area for killing and then the bodies were returned to the bus? The bus was on a remote road. Not the Interstate. There were plenty of tire tracks to indicate the bus turned off the Interstate onto that road, but the bus appears to have parked in that area and remained there. It had to be the vics who were moved."

"Ok, so the vics were moved. But why do it all? Why kill 32 healthy young teenagers and

their driver, hack out their internal organs and then throw the bodies back like garbage?"

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Looking over some of the trace evidence files was an exercise in frustration for Gris. His people were thorough, but it seemed as though traces of the killers were just not there to be processed. It was impossible. Nobody could kill that many people in a group and not leave something behind as evidence.

There was something odd. Dr. Robbins had noted on all his autopsy reports that the areas surrounding the thoracic cavities, where the organs had been removed, had been taken out with medical precision - in every case. And, there was peculiar burning or scarring on the bodies that didn't correspond to normal burning type implements. The closest approximation the coroner could arrive at was laser. Laser? Gris knew laser was utilized in some surgeries, but it was a precise art, with very precise instrumentation - and not the type of job or tool which could be used in the hot Nevada desert. And if the perps had taken their victims somewhere else to murder them, where were the tire tracks, the aircraft landing markings - something to prove they had indeed even been moved and then returned to the bus? There weren't even any footprints to collect - other than those which matched up with the vics.

Gris took his glasses off and pinched the bridge of his nose. He loved his job. He loved the chase - of finding the clues and evidence which led him to the criminal. But, did he want to meet up face to face with the kind of perps who could kill 33 innocent people, and just toss their bodies away like yesterday's trash? He flipped through the file folders of crime scene photos and his attitude hardened. All those young faces - all those young lives cut so tragically short.

There were moments when Gris wished he had someone to share his frustrations and feelings with, but being alone had been a personal choice. Getting involved with Sarah or Catherine wasn't a good idea - even though he liked them enormously. It just wasn't a good idea to date co-workers. Too delicate a situation to cope with if it turned out poorly. Gris was more expert in dealing with dead bodies than live ones. Dead bodies didn't ask for your heart - just your expertise. Justice. Vindication. But never your heart. He'd had a passing interest in a visiting forensic scientist some time ago but of course long distance romances are too hard to maintain. His fascination with Lady Heather, the madam of a dominatrix whorehouse, forced him to admit he had a dark side. Did he have a heretofore unknown fetish for strong women? For women who were not afraid to face their inner demons? Lady Heather had promised him that she would assist him in his own struggle, but in the end, the case became too weird, and getting involved with her would have been a professional and personal mistake. He didn't want to end up like Nick Stokes, who'd spent one night of passion with a hooker and then got blamed for her death. How many nights had he parked in front of her house and just sat there, unable to go inside or face her? Why did these dark thoughts come on him in the wee smas like this? He shook his head and returned to his files.

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He actually caught her scent before she rounded the corner into his office. What was it? Elusive, exotic, foreign. Then he heard Nick's voice speaking.

"Hey, Gris, I've got some visitors for you," he indicated the tall man and elegantly dressed woman as they entered the room. For once Big Mouth Billy Bass didn't herald the arrival of newcomers - Gris would have to check his batteries...

"Hello, I'm Agent Waterman and this is Dr. Raychaudhuri. Your bosses gave us a call about a messy situation you've got on your hands here. If you'll just turn over all your bodies

and evidence on the case, we'll take it from here."

Grissom looked them over. Waterman, with whom he'd shaken hands, was a handsome specimen, obviously a senior agent. With a faintly Australian accent. Odd for an FBI agent...But, it was the doctor who caught his attention. Delicately modelled and exotic, the doctor's liquid brown eyes made it hard for him to look away. He stared at her intently. For once, Gris was slow on the uptake, "Uh...I didn't know the feds were interested in this case."

"We're with the terrorist deterrent branch of the agency," the woman replied, speaking quietly in her soft and clipped Indian tones. That's when she noticed Grissom was watching her mouth.

"You think this was a terrorist act?" He was shocked. The idea of this case being an act of terrorism never occurred to him. It hadn't played out that way in his mind at all.

"We don't know that yet, but the case is unusual, to say the least. After Sept 11th we can't be too careful."

Grissom had continued watching Mitali's mouth as she spoke, "Well, I just can't hand everything over, this had to go through proper channels first," he said. Why were red flags going up in his head?

"If you'll just check these papers, I'm sure you'll see everything has been taken care of," Mitali smiled gently, handing him a sheaf of official looking papers (cleverly manufactured from her laptop and high grade printer), "We have a team waiting to remove the bodies as soon as it can be arranged."

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"They want to take everything?" Warrick asked in shock.

"If the feds want this case, it must be big," Nick added, sipping his coffee.

Sarah Sidle sat down next to Catherine, "Gris, can they do this? Can they just take everything with them? Take it right out of our hands?"

Grissom handed around the papers Mitali had given him, "I've put a call into Brass. I can't see him calling the FBI, but maybe he got heat from above to do so."

"Did the agents say why they wanted the case?"

"Something about terrorist involvement."

"Do you believe that?"

"After 9-11, who the hell knows what could happen? But, this case just doesn't smack of crazed terrorists to me."

"Maybe the feds are just paranoid. It is pretty ugly."

"It's an ugly case, alright. With 33 families to talk to. And, I don't think the feds want word of this to get into the press. They've already put a gag order on this office," Grissom indicated one of the pieces of paper.

Sarah smiled grimly, "I know you, Gris. You don't think this is some terrorist plot at all, or else you wouldn't be questioning turning it over to the feds."

"I want to check a few things out before I just roll over and play dead."

* * *

"I've got a refrigerated truck rented to take the bodies out in, and Omega's sendin' us a plane to take 'em back to New York," Allan Leslie told Mitali over her cell phone, "Rebeca's at the Vegas airport arrangin' for the flight to come in and for the bodies to be registered as frozen cargo. Pete's takin' care of some other details, but we're ready any time you are."

Mitali snapped the cell shut and looked up at Waterman, "Al's ready to bring the transportation for the bodies around."

Lew nodded, "Let's tell Mr. Grissom."

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Grissom came in with some files and sat down across from Waterman and Raychaudhuri, "I had a little talk with Lt. Brass. Despite what these papers say, nobody from the Las Vegas police called the FBI. We may not have your prints, but we ran your names through the system. You aren't FBI. You're not CSIS, not Interpol, not Scotland Yard, not CIA, not OSI, or any other worldwide policing network. So who are you and why do you want those bodies?"

Lew was about to speak when Mitali stood up, "Mr. Grissom, we're hardly surprised that you checked us out. In fact, we'd have been more shocked if you hadn't. But, the agency doesn't have time to play games. We have to take those bodies now - before anything about this case is leaked to the press - then it will no longer be your concern."

Grissom looked at her, watching her, "And just what 'agency' do you belong to?"

"We told you before - we're an anti-terrorist branch. We work under the radar. And in order for us to continue doing so, we need your co-operation."

"I'd like to know who I'm co-operating with."

"That information is classified and not necessary for your co-operation."

Grissom twigged to something in Mitali's tone of voice, "You know who did this, don't you?"

"Maybe. But, this case cannot be managed at the local police level. It requires...a more global involvement." Mitali hoped she was throwing out enough red herrings to satisfy Grissom's curiosity and yet tell him nothing vital. Waterman quickly and unobtrusively signed to Mitali in American Sign Language (ASL), "*Keep them away from the alien question.*"

"Look, this happened on my watch. In my town. I'm not in the habit of just throwing off my responsibilities."

"We respect that. However, the situation is not one in which you can take an active part. You'll have to leave it to the people with a longer reach."

"Gris!" Brass opened the door and stuck his head inside, "The bodies! They're gone!"

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"How the hell did you manage this?" Grissom was visibly angry.

"You'd be surprised how official-looking papers can convince others," Lew Waterman smiled mirthlessly.

"Where are they? Where did you take them?"

Waterman looked at his watch, "I'd say they're safely out of your jurisdiction by now. And, out of your jurisdiction means it's out of your hands."

Lt. Brass was grim as he said, "You realize I could place you two under arrest for obstruction of justice and illegally removing evidence."

Mitali stood up from her chair, "Your people handed over the bodies as per the paperwork. Lieutenant, I don't think you really want to go head to head with our organization over this. Why don't you call your bosses downtown. I'm sure they can clarify this for you."

Brass took out his cell phone and speed-dialed his own boss. He left the office for privacy. When he came back in, his face wore an expression of frustration. He threw the cell phone down on the table in disgust, "My captain says that we're to co-operate with these people and not make waves," Brass stared down Lew Waterman, "You got to my Captain? And his bosses? How?"

"Let's just say he understands the niceties of inter-departmental police work," Lew replied, silently thanking Pete Little's expertise in such 'details'.

"Now," smiled Mitali, "If you'll just prepare all the evidentiary materials, we'll get out of your hair, so to speak."

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On the face of it, Grissom had no choice. He'd been ordered by the higher ups to comply. That didn't mean he had to like it, and it didn't mean he had to do it fast. He decided that he'd stall the process as long as he could, to see if anything else would pop up to give him more information on his friends from the 'agency'.

He was startled to discover Dr. Raychaudhuri entering his lab, garbed in scrubs and latex gloves, "I thought perhaps you might require some assistance. It appears as though some of your co-workers have been conveniently deferred into handling other cases," she smiled at him innocently, "I can help pack everything for transport. We at the agency have specific formats for packing evidence."

Despite his frustration and distrust, Grissom found the doctor very compelling. He rarely noticed women, but this one appealed to his interest in the exotic, and she certainly was exotic, with her sloe eyes and cafe au lait skin tones. He saw that her blue-black hair had been tied back in a ponytail, and her elegant business suit had been well covered by the scrubs.

"You know, don't you, who's responsible for these crimes?" he had to ask the question again. It was gnawing at him - something just wasn't right.

"I'm not at liberty to divulge any such information, Mr. Grissom. Now, where are your sections and slides? We like to have them packed in low temp containers for protection."

"You seem to know something about forensics, Doctor," Gris commented, noting her placement of a large white container with a set of push button controls on the counter. It was unlike any he'd ever seen before in his business, and he wondered where it had been made.

"I'm a doctor. I've done autopsies before. I'll probably be working on these bodies when I get back."

"Back where?"

Mitali smiled, "Just start putting the specimens out, I can pack them myself."

"You'll want the evidence we took out of the bus?"

"No, actually. We don't need it. It won't tell us anything we don't already know. All I want are the specimens from the bodies."

Gris was curious. How would the case be solved without all the evidence? Why did they want only the evidence from the bodies? They had to know who was responsible already - why else would the doctor reject the samples taken off the bus? Even so, what if that evidence offered something up? Hair samples, carpet fibres, latent prints, et al? They hadn't found anything yet at CSI, but that didn't mean trace evidence wasn't there.

"You're...sure you don't want that bus evidence?" he asked again.

"Did you find any prints on that bus besides those of the victims and their driver?"

"No, we didn't....," Gris wondered how she knew that.

"And, you won't. Nor will you find any hair samples or other items for DNA typing. Our perps are more...careful than that," Mitali replied, as Grissom stacked samples on the lab table for her to pack in her odd white case.

"Who would kill 32 kids, their driver and hack out their internal organs like that?"

"You don't want to know."

"Is this some sort of conspiracy thing? Are we in an episode of the X-Files? Is this a government cover-up?"

Mitali carefully fitted each slide into a special thin plastic envelope as she spoke, "Mr.

Grissom, there are some things in this world we are better off not knowing. Just leave it at that."

"We can process that bus over and over again until we find something," Gris told her.

"Is that meant to be a threat? I can assure you that you won't find anything in that bus connected to the perps." And, privately, she thought *"You won't have the bus to process again after tonight either!"*

"How can you know that?"

Mitali snapped the lid on her white temperature container and pressed the digits for the locking mechanism, "We know how these perps work. We know their M.O., we know their methods for handling their victims."

Gris raised an eyebrow, "You mean you've seen this type of crime before?"

"Really, Mr. Grissom, you can't expect me to answer all your questions!"

Grissom reached out before he realized what he was doing, and grabbed Mitali's shoulder, "Are we going to see this sort of thing again? Tell me, because we've gotta be ready to handle it..."

Mitali's chocolate brown eyes looked up at him, "I sincerely hope you won't see this type of crime again."

"Can you be sure of that? What if they strike again?"

The Doctor brought up a hand and gently pried Grissom's fingers off her sleeve. She was surprised when he gripped her hand before letting go. Her voice was very soft, and she noted his need to watch her lips as she spoke. That's when she knew he had a hearing disability, "I have work to do, Mr. Grissom." and she walked to the door.

"What's the 'alien question' all about, Doc?"

PART TWO

Mitali wheeled about, her hand on the lab doorknob.

"That's right, I read ASL. That's what that Waterman fellow signed to you: 'keep them away from the alien question', wasn't it? I have a hunch you don't mean some errant Mexicans have come over the border." Gris said it as more of a statement than a question.

"You have a hearing disability, Mr. Grissom, you must have misheard something in our conversation."

"The fingers don't lie," Gris smiled at her, "I've been reading ASL since I was a kid growing up with my deaf mother. I know what I saw."

Mitali normally never had any problems using ASL. It was a language known only to a tiny minority of hearing impaired people in North America. Other areas of the globe had their own versions of sign language for the deaf. Both SHADO and Omega had been utilising it for years as a means of non-verbal communication. "Then, you are still mistaken."

"Aliens. Outer space. That kind of thing?"

"Obviously, you've been watching too much of the Sci-Fi Channel."

"Interesting how you manage to deflect all my questions with another question or a non sequitur. You're hiding something. Something big."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Anti-terrorist branch my ass. What are you people really doing? Covering up some alien incident? Getting rid of all the evidence, keeping it out of the press, getting co-operation from the higher authorities so we can't countermand your orders?"

Grissom was smart, and tenacious and he wasn't about to back down. What could she do? She's noticed the way he looked at her, the way he gripped her hand. Could she ruthlessly use that nominal attraction to put him off the track? "I think we need to have a little chat - in private," Mitali smiled enticingly.

* * *

Mitali turned the wheel of her rented SUV and drove off down the main drag, past the casinos and theme hotels. Las Vegas seemed like one huge playground for adults. Sin City indeed. The on-board computer gave her directions to a local park and she gunned the vehicle up to the speed limit. She was playing this game by the seat of her pants.

"So, when are you going to start answering questions? Grissom asked, noting Mitali's expert driving, as she weaved in and out of traffic, "Who are you - really?"

"Fine. You've got me. I'm Lt. Uhura of the starship Enterprise."

"Not funny. I know what I saw. I also know that there were details about those DBs that are filling in the blanks for me. Things like the way the bodies smelled, the way the internal organs were removed, the weird burn marks around the thoracic openings. I knew there was something hinky about this whole mess."

"You seem to think you have the whole scenario down pat."

"Another non-sequitur. Do they teach you that in alien-catching school?"

Mitali swerved to pass a slower driver, "We all have our jobs, Mr. Grissom. Mine just happens to be dealing with...special incidents. Like this one."

"Space aliens did all this carnage? Why, for God's sake?"

"God has nothing to do with it. That's why it falls to us to take care of such cases."

"Who is 'us'?"

"That's not important right now. What is important is that I get your total and complete

co-operation. I don't need any loose ends, and I don't need anyone getting in my way. There may be a role in this for you, but I can't afford to have you discussing what is classified material with any of your CSI friends or Lt. Brass."

"Is that a threat, Doctor?"

"I don't need to make threats. If you're going to play in my league, you'll have to play by my rules and keep quiet about anything you see and hear."

"And, if this is too big to keep quiet about?"

"Don't make me go to those extremes. I don't do it personally, you realize, but I have...friends who do know how to take care of people who talk too much."

"I'm not afraid of getting fired."

"Being fired would be the least of your worries, Mr. Grissom, so listen up," Mitali had driven into the park entrance and cruised to a private tree-enclosed area, "The bodies are no longer your concern. They're history. But, we'd like for the bus to disappear. You can help us in this matter."

"Do you realize what you're asking me to do?"

"Of course, I do. I wouldn't ask otherwise. You wanted to be involved. You're involved. And, now you have to do us a favour."

"That bus is in a secure impound lock-up. There are police guards crawling all over that place. You can't get in or out without special papers and permission. I don't think they'll just let us waltz in and drive that bus out of there into oblivion."

"You underestimate me, Mr. Grissom. I didn't say I expected you to do this on your own."

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"What are we going to do with the bus once we get it out of the lock-up?" Grissom asked quietly. Mitali pressed some buttons on her strange laptop - Gris had never seen one like it - and watched as it extruded papers. Papers that looked remarkably like release documents for the bus - with a copy of his own signature in the appropriate places!

"Leave that to me. All I need you to do is drive the bus out of the impound to the parking lot around the corner and I'll manage it from there."

"Where did you get that laptop? I've never seen one like that before." He noted the odd symbol on the top of the screen. It resembled the Greek letter Omega.

"Too many questions, Mr. Grissom," Mitali said absently, as she folded the papers into an official-looking Las Vegas Police Dept envelope and handed them over to him, "Just take these into the officers on duty, get them to sign the bus over to you and we're in business."

"And, how do I know you won't leave me holding the bag for an illegal vehicle removal?"

"You don't. But, you don't have much choice right now. You're in too deep."

"I could tip the officers inside off to your scam."

"Yes, you could, but I'm banking on your intense curiosity about this case. I don't think you'll turn me in."

"Very sure of yourself, aren't you..." he muttered, and got out of the SUV.

* * *

Gris was amazed at how easily the officers on duty were fooled with the bogus papers. They handed him the keys and buzzed open the electrically operated barricades as he drove the bus out of the impound lot. He turned onto the next street and saw Mitali waiting for him beside her SUV. He pulled up and operated the lever to open the bus' folding door, "Taxi, lady?" he asked, with a ghost of a smile on his lips.

Mitali swung herself up inside the bus, a backpack slung over one shoulder, "OK, Mr.

Grissom, you've been a good little Boy Scout. I have to take things from here on in. Alone."

"I could help you."

"This is a one way trip. No passengers allowed."

"You're going into something too weird to be believed, aren't you?"

"I can't tell you anything, you know that."

"Hey, it's my name on those forged papers for the bus - my ass is on the line now, too."

"Don't worry. I've arranged for someone else to take the heat on this one. You won't lose your job over this," she gestured for him to vacate the driver's seat.

Grissom stood up and looked down at her, putting both his hands on her shoulders with an odd tenderness, and squeezing, "Take me with you," he said quietly.

Mitali sighed and pulled a small unusual-looking weapon from her jacket pocket, "Don't make me do this, Gil." He gauged her upset by the fact she'd dispensed with calling him 'Mr. Grissom'.

He backed off several inches, his hands up, "Ok, I get the message..." and then he backed down the stairs in the bus entrance.

The bus stuttered to life as Mitali prepared to leave. She turned the big vehicle in a half circle and sped out of the parking lot, leaving Grissom standing beside the rented SUV.

PART THREE

The keys were still in the SUV's ignition. Grissom jumped in as soon as the bus was out of sight and flipped open his cell phone. He identified himself as a CSI agent and said, "Patch me through to the State Highway Patrol, please."

A moment of static and a voice answered, "State Highway Patrol, how may I direct your call?"

"I need to speak to Andrew Fairmont right away. I need a vehicle tracked."

"Well, well, if it isn't Gil Grissom, the intrepid CSI guy! What can I do for you tonight?" Fairmont asked when he came on the line.

"Look, I need a vehicle traced. A school bus. I can give you the tags...", Grissom recited, from memory, the license plate numbers from the bus.

"Is that a Nevada plate?"

"Get a chopper in the air - I need to know where that bus is going!" Grissom's voice was urgent.

"Lost some kiddies, did you?" Fairmont's voice sounded jovial.

"This is a matter of vital importance, now get that chopper out there!"

"Cool your jets, Gris, I've got choppers out there cruising the highways all the time. I'll relay your bus info and they'll track it down right away. What's this all about?"

"I haven't got time to get into it, Andy, just tell me where that goddamn bus is headed!"

* * *

Mitali settled herself into the driver's seat of the bus for a lengthy drive. She had the co-ordinates fed into her special issue Omega laptop for meeting up with the extermination team. From that location, they'd close in on the alien nest and clean it out. She'd gone through dozens of alien nests before, both on earth and on Mars, and she was always shocked at the level of cruelty the aliens could deal out to their hapless victims. This time it had been 32 innocent school kids out to enjoy a sports convention in Vegas. At least she didn't have to face their families.

She heard a sound over the brum-brum of the bus' engine and peered out the windshield. Relief poured over her as she realized the sound was not an alien spacecraft hovering over head, but a helicopter. What would a chopper be doing out here, so far off the beaten track? She'd left the Interstate at least fifteen minutes ago to travel into the more remote desert area where the bus had originally been discovered...

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"That bus you're looking for? It left the Interstate about a quarter of an hour ago - it's headed due west on an old mining road," Fairmont filled in the location.

"Geez," Gil exclaimed, "That's where we found the bus in the first place!"

"What was that, Gil, I didn't copy that," Fairmont replied, "You owe me big time for this one!"

Grissom didn't hear the rest of Fairmont's comments - he was too busy throwing his cell phone onto the seat beside him and gunning the SUV around to hit the main road out to the Interstate.

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By the time Mitali was just about to her co-ordinates, she could see the rest of the extermination team and their equipment. Seven special Omega-SHADO mobiles, tank-like vehicles, sat waiting beside a huge cargo plane on the desert floor. She quickly called Allan

Leslie's cell phone and got the ok to drive the bus aboard the cargo aircraft. They'd be removing it along with the evidence of the alien nest if that night's strike went well.

Lew Waterman met her as she was jumping out of the bus. He handed her a thick flak jacket and helmet, and a sidearm in a holster, "Have any trouble getting rid of Mr. Grissom?"

"I got the bus, didn't I?" Mitali grinned up at him.

"That's not exactly what I meant." The two of them walked back down the cargo ramp to the outside, "We're just about ready. Al and Pete have been reconning forward. The nest is located in an old abandoned mine shaft. We figure the aliens took the kids down there, carved them up, and put the bodies back with the bus."

"That still doesn't answer how the bus ended up out here in the first place, Lew," Mitali frowned, watching other SHADO operatives getting gear ready for the attack.

"Jackson thinks it was a Psycho-Bombs sort of thing - maybe the driver was overcome by alien mind control."

"Well, we've definitely seen that sort of thing before - too often. Is the nest a big one?"

"Al thinks it's a subsidiary nest - a smaller group of aliens posted here to divert human bodies for organ harvesting. The mine, according to our research, was played out long ago - there's nothing of mineral value there. They were just using it to hide in. We've been canvassing the police department Internet sites within the state of Nevada and the states surrounding Nevada. A lot of missing persons reports - unsolved. And the missing persons were said to be travelling through this area."

"Doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure those missing persons cases out. Any cars found?"

"A few, abandoned. All within a hundred mile radius of the nest. Lucky for us our friends at the Las Vegas Police Department didn't connect all the dots."

"When do we pull out? I've got to get changed."

Waterman looked down at his watch, "Another 30 minutes and we'll roll."

* * *

The first thing he noticed was the aura of soft light ahead. It reminded him vaguely of low-lying fog. But, as he drove closer, he realized he was seeing something more solid than fog. The light was coming from some tank-like vehicles, making it possible for him to spot a huge cargo plane, and some other smaller trucks and personnel carriers. A group of military-looking men, armed to the teeth, stopped his SUV.

"Sorry, sir, but you can't come in here. Military war games tonight," the officer said, leaning in through the driver's side window.

Grissom didn't see any kind of identification on the man's gear - no US Army tags, shoulder flashings or badges. Nothing.

"I'll have to ask you to leave this location, sir," the officer told him.

On a hunch, Grissom replied, "I'm here to see Mitali Raychaudhuri."

The officer didn't miss a beat, "Nobody by that name here. I'll have someone escort you out..."

"No, no, that won't be necessary...", Gris decided there had to be another way to reach his objective than to go toe to toe with the burly officer and his gun. He backed the SUV up, turned and drove back the way he'd come in.

Half a mile back down the road, Grissom decided to get out and hoof it back to the military camp. That's what it looked like. And, the officer had said they were going to be involved in military games. Except Grissom didn't believe it was the American military

engaged in those 'games'.

Gris was not a military man, and not up on the latest surveillance and monitoring equipment, so it never occurred to him that just because he couldn't see any guards on the perimeter of the camp, that they would not know he was approaching. He shimmied over the embankment, and slid down quietly, crawling along with the lights as his guide. He didn't get much further when a battery of flashlights crowded into his face, "What are you doing here? Identify yourself!" a harsh voice shouted out of the darkness behind the lights.

From the silence that followed, a familiar voice spoke, "Gil, I told you I had nasty friends!"

PART FOUR

With an ingenuous grin, Grissom bantered lightly, "I was just worried about you...but I see you're well...protected here after all..."

From the blinding light, a figure coalesced. Grissom saw Mitali as he'd never expected to see her - clad in black fatigues, a heavy flak jacket, helmet, headset and loaded down with an assortment of weapons, gadgets and other paraphernalia he couldn't possibly have identified.

"Friend o' yours, Doc?" Allan Leslie asked, but didn't lower his weapon.

"Don't kill him, Al," Mitali turned again to Grissom, "You see, I told you I had friends who could make life difficult for you." Her smile was a mixture of apology and irritation.

"What'dya want us to do with him?" Pete Little asked.

"We have an operation going on here," Mitali indicated the tanks, the plane, the other vehicles set up at their base camp, "I don't have time to make nice or explain anything. In fact, the less you see, the better off you'll be," she motioned to Pete Little, "Take him to the plane and get him out of sight."

* * *

Grissom was seated in the passenger section of the cargo plane. It was immense inside, and cram-packed with equipment, sensors, and electronic gear. Operatives were testing headsets and making contact with other groups in the area. The technical jargon was too strange for Grissom to understand. The only word which made sense was 'nest'. A 'nest' had to be neutralized - whatever that meant.

"We're about to move out. Thought I'd check on you. Make sure you're comfortable," Mitali smiled at him, but he could see she was preoccupied.

"You're going after the bad guys?" he asked.

She nodded, "You'll be safe here."

"But not you. You're going into harm's way."

"Just part of the job. I'm not the first wave, anyway. I'm part of the clean-up crew."

"Is this all for real? It just seems so...impossible..." he had never seen a woman dressed like a SWAT team member before. In his world, women were police officers carrying weapons, but they didn't act as military commandos. An odd thrill of excitement coursed down his spine as he looked at her.

"Hang tight. I'll see you later," Mitali turned to go.

Grissom grabbed her hand. His blue eyes looked up at her earnestly, "Make that a promise, will you?"

Mitali squeezed his hand back, "I'll do my best."

* * *

It was a messy strike. Three of their own were injured in the initial action, and the aliens were either killed in the raid or committed suicide, which was SOP for them.

Mitali and Lew Waterman were doing the walk-through when the nest had been secured.

"Looks pretty standard," Lew commented, surveying the alien bodies and blasted alien equipment.

"There's a lab on the lower level," Al Leslie reported as he joined them, "Could be where they dissected their victims."

"I'll get down there right away," Mitali nodded.

* * *

The lab was pretty much intact, including it's power source. Leslie and Little discovered

that the aliens had managed to tap into underground electricity lines and then modify it with their own equipment to boost its capacity. Ingenious though they were, the aliens had oddly no compunctions about suicide. To a man, they all died, taking their infernal secrets with them every time. It was frustrating to the SHADO and Omega personnel who worked to decode the aliens' captured science and technology.

Mitali set up her special laptop and began inventorying the contents of the lab. She took the time to call General Foster, "Paul, I'll be e-mailing some documentation back soon to the labs in New York. I'll be passing it on to SHADO HQ as well."

"Find anything unusual?"

"It's just a small nest - less than 30 aliens were found in here. No bodies in storage, but plenty of harvested organs are ready for transport."

"The bodies arrived here a bit ago. We'll have the prelim processing done before you get back. Any problems with the Las Vegas Police?"

"Not really," Mitali replied, figuring she'd handle the matter of Grissom herself.

"General Straker will want to know if you found any links to the Orion case."

"Nothing so far, but I'll update you if anything materializes."

"When do you and Lew expect to be back in the Big Apple?"

"We've got to get everything packaged - should take another 12 hours anyway to clean out the site and remove all the nest evidence."

"Fine. We'll do a debriefing on your arrival."

* * *

Gris was wide awake. He'd sat through the entire strike on the nest, listening to the communications operatives, wondering what all the odd terminology meant. He heard them report on three injured agents and felt a sharp pang of worry - was Mitali among those who'd been hurt? But the rest of it sounded like quasi-military jargon. To whom or what were they referring when they mentioned "dead greenies"? Little green men? Other soldiers wearing green fatigues? And what did remediation mean? The only time he'd ever heard that word was in connection to the cleaning up environmental messes.

He began to wonder too, as the hours ticked by interminably, if he'd ever see Mitali again. Whatever work she was engaged in, it was obvious she was as dedicated to it as he was to his forensic science. But, she had left him there in custody, and now, as almost 18 hours had passed, he began to face some unpleasant realities.

What if the reason Mitali had not come back to check on him was because her people were planning to eliminate him? He knew he'd gotten himself into this - he'd questioned her - followed her - when he could have stayed in Vegas and taken the heat for whatever was coming down the pike on the bus business. He knew it was way more than that. He had to know what was going on. The mysterious Mitali, her mysterious 'agency', and the need to remove the bodies and the evidence perplexed him and drove him to pursue the matter - even at the risk of his own safety. And then there was the woman herself. Never had he met a woman before who was so...dangerous...

He started to think how his own people would handle his disappearance. The last anyone in Vegas had seen of him was at the impound, taking the bus out. That in itself, when he and the bus failed to turn up, would send Sarah, Catherine, Nick and Warrick into a frenzy of checking. They'd find out he called the State Patrol. But he doubted they'd ever find the bus itself, or the SUV he'd driven out to the site. That big cargo plane would fly out of the Nevada desert carrying any and all evidence that Gil Grissom had ever been there.

PART FIVE

"OK," Catherine asked her CSI teammates, "What do we know for sure about Grissom's disappearance?"

Nick spoke up, "His SUV is still in the parking lot - hasn't been touched, and the parking lot attendant says it's never turned a wheel since Gris checked in on shift."

"I went to his home and there's been nothing disturbed or touched there. I dusted for prints but all I found were his own," Warrick reported, "I asked for a 24 hour watch on Gris' place but we don't have the manpower right now."

"The only people who've seen him lately were the uniforms at the impound lot. They said he flashed some official papers and he took the bus out and both he and the bus seem to have disappeared into thin air," Sarah added.

Catherine considered things for a moment, "We were all busy last night when that woman came to take away the crime scene evidence from the bus massacre. Did anyone see her leave the building?"

"We can check the closed circuit TV cameras on the building entrances just in case," suggested Nick, "If they went out together, maybe they didn't go out the main entrance."

"Why would Gris go with her anyway?" Sarah asked, a little indignantly.

"I don't know," Catherine said, "But, it's all we've got for now. I know he didn't like the idea that the case was being taken out of our hands."

* * *

"Get anything?" Catherine asked as she walked into Nick's lab.

He looked up, "I'm just going over the CCTV - and I think we lucked out." He hit some buttons and rewound the videotape, "Look at this."

The time count on the bottom of the videotape read 3:23 am. Catherine and Nick watched the tape play forward. Sure enough, they saw Grissom and the doctor going out one of the back entrances.

"Well, that answers that question," Catherine commented, "But, if he went with her, where did he go? Did they split up after exiting the building or did they go somewhere together?"

"That's the \$64,000 question," Nick replied, "The guys at the impound lot said they saw Gris alone. He took the bus out himself. Said he was bringing it back here for further evidence gathering. They didn't question him. He's done that before on other cases."

"Except we didn't need to bring the bus back here. There was never any discussion about going over it again with Gris. Not that I know of, anyway."

"Maybe we should have a look at those papers."

* * *

"Here they are," the officer on duty handed the papers for the bus' release over to Catherine, "But, we need 'em back."

"I'll take them over to the lab and bring them back shortly. We just want to check their authenticity."

"Well, Grissom signed them himself," the officer indicated Gris' signature in the appropriate place, "If those release papers aren't genuine, the shit's gonna hit the fan, you know!"

* * *

"I checked his cell phone records," Sarah told Catherine, "He placed a call to the State

Highway patrol around 3:45 am. That's the last call registered. It only lasted about 2 minutes."

"Let's find out who he talked to there," Catherine looked at Greg, their resident weird lab guy, "Anything on the documents Gris took into the impound lot?"

"They're the very best forgeries I've ever seen. Even Gris' signature looks like real ink to the naked eye, but it's not - it's a computer print out of some sort. Pretty sophisticated."

"Why would Gris forge papers to get the bus out of the impound?" Nick asked, "That just doesn't make sense - let alone disappearing with the bus."

"I think the key is that Dr. Raychaudhuri," Sarah said, "I think she's the reason Gris has disappeared. I mean look at the tape - she's likely the last person to see him, except for the impound guys."

"That still doesn't explain why Gris would use fake papers to remove the bus," Warrick observed.

"No, but both Gris and the bus are missing, and so is that doctor. Maybe she's the reason they're both gone," Sarah contended.

"Even if she is responsible in some way for all this, why would she kidnap Gris and take the bus?" Catherine asked.

"She and that agent she was with were pretty adamant about removing all the evidence in this case," Sarah said, "They took the bodies, the lab work, and now the bus too is gone. It adds up."

"OK, so we go on the premise that this Dr. Raychaudhuri is involved in Gris' disappearance - and the removal of bus - that still doesn't get us anywhere. Gris ran the doctor and the other agent through the gamut of police agencies worldwide. Their names didn't turn up anywhere."

"And, we have no photos or prints to run either," Warrick reminded them.

"We do have the videotape of Gris leaving the building with the doctor. We can get some screen captures maybe to show around," Sarah posited, "E-mail them to the various international and national agencies."

Nick shook his head, "The videotape doesn't show her full face on. The best we get is a profile. It's not really good enough for stills."

"So we take what we can," Sarah insisted, "Someone has got to have seen her. Nobody can come in and out of a police installation like ours and not get noticed."

* * *

"What are we going to do about our little friend in the plane?" Lew asked Mitali over a cup of coffee and a nutrient-rich SHADO bar.

"I don't want him killed, Lew."

"Has this become personal?"

"Look, I know what SOP is. I know there are times when witnesses have to be eliminated. But, I don't think this is the time. I can handle this myself."

"What did you have in mind?"

"I think a little draught of the amnesia drug might be in order..."

* * *

"How have they been treating you?" Mitali asked, sitting down beside Grissom.

"I'm fine," he replied, "I see you kept your promise," his blue eyes were looking at her gratefully, "I was afraid when I heard the comm operatives talking about injuries..."

Mitali waved that off, "Have you had anything to eat yet?"

"Oh, they gave me some of the worst coffee I've ever had, and some sort of nutri-bar

things. They're really packed with vitamins or something. I feel wide awake."

Mitali smiled at his reference to the SHADO-Omega fabricated food items. They were specially formulated to restore a person's energy levels and help them to replace vital nutrients in their system, "Well, our coffee here in the field isn't always the best."

"You look tired. Are you ok?" Gris asked her, reaching out a hand to take hers, and squeezing it.

"I've had a busy time of it, but things are winding down now and the plane will be loading for take off. Which means we have to get you home."

"Aren't you afraid I'll talk about everything I've seen here?" Gris asked.

"Let's talk about that on the way back to Vegas," Mitali smiled.

PART SIX

"Still no word from the FBI, or any of those other agencies we contacted," Catherine said.

"I checked to see if any of the car rental places here had given a vehicle to anyone named Raychaudhuri or Waterman, but I didn't come up with any hits. We even faxed them some of the screen captures from the videotape but nobody recognized her," Warrick told Catherine, "Maybe they rented their vehicle in some other city before coming to Vegas."

"That's possible. If they didn't want to be traced, it would make sense to rent somewhere else rather than here in town."

"I also checked all the airports, bus stations and the train - nobody's seen her and nobody has purchased a ticket under the names Grissom, Raychaudhuri or Waterman."

"Even if they did leave the city any of those ways, I suppose Waterman or Raychaudhuri wouldn't use the same names they gave us - if those are their real names - which I doubt."

"I swung by Gris' place again, but nothing has changed there."

"Well," Nick said as he entered, "Gris is officially missing - it's been 24 hours since anyone's seen him."

"I've talked to Brass about it - he's doing what he can from his end, but there are just no leads except those which are taking us down dead ends," Catherine sighed.

Sarah stuck her head in the door, "We went over Gris' office and the lab again - no prints, no hairs, no fibres. How can a person not drop any hairs?"

Nick spoke up, "You know, we're all going at this from the standpoint that Gris didn't disappear voluntarily, but what if he went along with this woman of his own free will?"

"Why would he do that?" Sarah demanded.

"Just think about it for a minute," Nick responded, "Gris was pissed because this case was being taken away from us. His best source of information had to be the doctor. What if...he went along with her to help sort it out or to provide his expertise?"

"And not tell us?" Sarah wasn't convinced.

"Hey. those two agents came in here veiled in secrecy - maybe he *couldn't* tell us what he was up to."

"So, what do we do? Just sit here and wait for Gris to come back on his own?" Sarah wasn't convinced by Nick's theory.

"We follow every lead we can find and hope to God Gris either turns up or we can find him ...alive," Catherine said.

* * *

Mitali walked Grissom out of the cargo plane. The SUV he'd left parked down the road leading into the site was sitting several hundred feet away, gassed up and ready.

"Are they leaving?" Gris squinting in the harsh glare of the lights illuminating the temporary camp. The tank like vehicles he'd seen the night before were moving slowly towards the ramp of the plane, and operatives were busily packing equipment to be loaded on board before departure.

"Another hour or so. Hop in. It's time for you to go back to the real world," Mitali indicated the SUV.

They got in and buckled up. Gris looked out the back window as they pulled away from the camp, as if burning the image of the cargo plane into his memory, "If my 'world' is the real one, what's yours?"

"It's a shadow world, Gil. Sometimes I do so much at night I feel like a vampire," Mitali

sped the SUV down the deserted mine road and back out onto the Interstate.

"Then, why not leave it behind and come into my world?"

"I can't. I'm committed to what I do."

"And, what ever it is you do takes precedence - even over the 'real world'?"

"It's a matter of global security."

"I know those weren't terrorists you were taking on out there in the desert. Whoever they were, you and your people were armed to the teeth."

"Gil, I can't talk about it. I'm taking you home because I'm the one who got you into this mess."

"I got me into this mess, remember? I didn't have to follow you."

"I still feel responsible."

"You saved my life back there. Those so-called friends of yours were going to kill me, weren't they?"

"They're not monsters. They're just doing their jobs. Sometimes that job means having to do nasty things to preserve the peace."

"So, how did you convince them otherwise? Or are you going to..." he let his thoughts trail off.

"I'm not going to kill you, Gil."

"But, you'd condone it if it was necessary?"

"It isn't necessary this time."

"How do you know that? How do you know I won't go straight to the newspapers with everything I've seen and heard over the last 24 hours?"

"Because you're a professional like me. You know what you've seen, the murdered kids, the organ harvesting, the strike on the nest. You won't go public with this because you know that this is not something the public needs to hear. It won't do anybody any good, and it'll just create panic. It's hard to carry out our work when people can't trust."

"Trust you? They don't even know you and your people exist!"

"Exactly. And that's the way it has to stay."

"What or who did you take on out there? What's so awful about them that you can't tell the world?"

"The less I tell you, the better it is for your piece of mind. If I *was* to explain it all, you'd never sleep again."

"I'm an adult, I'm not afraid of the bogeyman, you know."

"This isn't the bogeyman. It's worse."

"There are going to be questions, Mitali, and I'm not going to be able to answer them. They'll be looking for me by now. I've been gone more than 24 hours."

"If by 'they' you mean your CSI friends, you're probably right. But, you're going to have a story to tell them. A story that sounds plausible and fits in with all the details. But, that story isn't going to be the one you've lived tonight, Gil."

Up ahead the neon light of a small motel flicked off and on. Mitali pulled into the parking lot and up to one of the motel doors.

"I thought you were taking me home," Gris asked, surprised.

Mitali looked at him, "I am taking you home. But just for this moment, we're going to have what we've both wanted since the moment we met."

Gris felt a hot wave pouring over his body. What did she mean? Was she bringing him here to kill him...or what?

They got out of the SUV. Gris didn't ask why she already had the key that opened the motel room door - he'd learned that she could do things that didn't have any explanation. The blinds were drawn inside and the lamplight was dim. Probably a 40 watt bulb, Gris mused to himself.

The bed was a queen sized, with a soft teal-colored duvet, which matched the wallpaper and the drapes. There were prints of Georgia O'Keefe's desert paintings on the walls.

Gris watched as Mitali shed her jacket and took down her hair. It fell in blue-black waves down her back. She undid the top buttons on her blouse. He could see she wasn't wearing a bra, and her breasts stood up invitingly under the thin white fabric.

Without a word, Mitali put her arms around his neck. Her mouth was warm and tasted of vanilla. He could make out her scent and it tantalised him. Exotic, foreign, sensual. Not the same scent she'd worn into his office that fateful day. Something different, musky. Almost...feral.

He traced her scent down her throat with his lips and pulled her blouse out of her skirt waistband, so he could caress her breasts. How he wanted her! Wanted her with every cell of his body. He half sobbed as she unbuttoned his shirt and spread kisses down his chest. Deftly, she undid his pants, and they dropped to the floor with a jingle of pocket change. She had the power to kill him and he still wanted her!

They landed on the bed, a tangle of arms and legs. Gris couldn't deny the passion. He gasped as she climbed on top of him...

* * *

He was drowsy. He'd never made love to any woman like that before. He'd never wanted any woman with that kind of intensity. Gris looked down at the cafe au lait woman in his arms. He traced the features of her face with one finger. He was trying to commit her face to memory. It was certain he'd never see her again. He knew that. He had to remember what he could of their one night together.

Mitali shifted in his arms and smiled lazily up at him. Her hair was an ebony shawl around her head, "A dollar for your thoughts," she said quietly.

"I thought it used to be a penny for your thoughts," Gris smiled back at her.

"Inflation, you know," she bantered, and leaned up to kiss the end of his nose, ruffling his curly hair with one hand.

"What happens now?" he asked quietly, seriously.

Mitali cuddled into his body even closer, "To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub;/ For in that sleep of death what dreams may come, / When we have shuffled off this mortal coil, / Must give us pause."

Gris nodded, "Shakespeare. Hamlet's soliloquy," he kissed her forehead, "Are you going to kill me, love?"

"Sleep and be refreshed," she said softly to him, just as she had been trained by Dr. Jackson, "It'll all seem so much clearer in the morning...," he didn't even feel the tiny prick of the needle inside her ring as it pressed against his neck.

* * *

"That call I just got was from Brass!" Catherine announced excitedly, "They found Gris!"

"Where is he?" Warrick asked, and the other CSI people crowded around Catherine to hear her news.

"He's at the Hospital, but Brass says he's fine, just a bit dazed, that's all."

* * *

Brass was outside Grissom's hospital room when the CSI team arrived.

"Is he ok?" Sarah blurted out as she was the first one to reach Brass' side.

"Yeah, he's ok. The doctors just went over him a few minutes ago."

"Where did you find him?" Warrick wanted to know.

"Strangest thing that was. A patrol car found him sitting, apparently asleep, on a bench right outside the hospital here."

"How did he get here?" Catherine inquired.

"Damned if I know," Brass replied.

"Where the hell has he been? Has he said anything?" Nick demanded.

"Nothing yet. I tried to talk to him, but he's sort of out of it. He keeps talking about Hamlet. Keeps repeating 'To sleep: perchance to dream'. Isn't Hamlet a Shakespearean play?"

EPILOGUE

"Yes, I'd like to check the status of one of your patients registered there. A Mr. Gil Grissom," the clipped Indian tones spoke over the phone to the Hospital's switchboard operator.

"One moment please, I'll put you through to the nurses' station on his floor."

"Trauma center," the next voice said.

"I'm just checking in on one of your patients - Gil Grissom."

"Are you family?"

"No...I work with Gil at the CSI lab," Mitali lied.

"Oh, one of his work friends. He's doing fine. He should be released tomorrow."

"Thank you," Mitali said and snapped her cell phone shut. She swung her backpack up on her shoulder and headed for the flight that would take her back to her SHADO world.

THE END