

**Summary:** The Fix missing scenes: Like Starsky said, detox is 48 hours of sweat and pain...and a partner.

**Notes:** Written in 1996. Originally published in the Starsky & Hutch gen zine, [Better Together](#), in 1997, produced by [K. Hanna Korossy](#).

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**Warnings:** No Warnings Needed

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## 48 Hours of Sweat and Pain

by **K. Hanna Korossy**

He could feel that he was outside, and some part of him rejoiced at it -- perhaps it would mean a change from the hell he had just spent forever in. It was over, wasn't it?

Over?

The light hurt his eyes. The house and outside muddled into two different forms of anguish, all the same, all hurt. The motion made him sick, and he was grateful when they stopped and let him rest against something, even though the hot metal he leaned on burned his cheek. Heat felt good; it was so cold...

Then he was pushed roughly into some place, trapped again. Except this place was moving, and it took a minute to figure out that it wasn't his imagination playing tricks on him. A moving place.

Car... red?

Leaving the pain? For a moment, that possibility loomed and his scattered mind tried to latch onto it. There wasn't anything worse than before. So maybe... they were going to something better.

The voices drifted around him, and he focused all his concentration on trying to make sense of them. He had tried some other time but had been scared of what he'd heard and didn't try anymore. Now it was important, however; maybe now it would be good.

"...like a baby..."

Baby... bottle? Food -- his stomach turned at the thought. *What do you want, you lousy creeps!*

"Where you figure, Monk?"

"...current oughta carry that body out..."

*Body. My body? Carry body out.... Oh, God. 187 -- dead body. Killing... me.*

*Gotta run.*

It was reflex -- he couldn't remember exactly how everything worked still, but his body did and his foot connected with something solid. For a brief second, things made sense: the car, the door handle, getting away from bad guys. *Open the door. Run!*

The world tilted again, and objects kept getting in his way, distracting, making him fall. The body was failing, but the will remained. *Run. Hide.*

*Please, help! Starsky? Help... me.*

He almost passed it, then grabbed something to stop himself. The alley was endless, but it looked empty. *Hide. No more.*

Except he didn't have the strength any longer. The world dwindled down to running, flee-ing blindly, trying to get as far away from the danger as possible, but the pain was almost unbearable, eating away at him inside, and he just couldn't keep going anymore. He didn't even realize he had ended up on his knees, until everything inside of him twisted up all at once, jackknifing him into the dirt and leaving him breathless, clutching his stomach. *Hurt... can't breathe... Need help, please...*

He was getting lost in it, some little, rational corner of his mind knew that, but there was nothing to hold on to, just terror and deep agony. *Always. Never ends.*

Dimly, sounds filtered in from around him -- pounding, a screech, and then more pound-ing. They were coming for him. It was over, but he couldn't do anything about it. *Please, God...*

Something grabbed at him and hauled him up by the arm despite his body's protests. It was here, there was nowhere left to run.

But this was different.

There was a touch on his face, but it was supporting, not demanding. He looked up, expecting the blinding white light, instead meeting a very familiar face. He knew the name that went with the touch and the bright eyes, he just couldn't think... but he knew. Safety. Hope. The gentleness of the touch made his emotions spin sickeningly out of control, but a spark of warmth rested in the middle of the storm now, and he concentrated on it. And on those brilliant eyes.

The touch left his face and was pulling at his arm again. He followed the bright gaze down to look at it and saw the marks on the white skin. His skin. His arm.

An unfamiliar voice, "...junkie..."

*Junkie. Me. Just a filthy junkie.*

The despair was overwhelming, crushing the hope. He wanted to explain, didn't want those caring eyes to dim, but all that came out was his misery. Gentleness wouldn't bother with a rotten junkie. With the hope went the last bit of control, and he began to slip down, trying to curl around a stomach that heaved and cramped, taking his breath away again.

But instead of leaving, the hands pulled him close, holding him tight and not letting the pain drag him away. Someone to hold on to, to lean against, was an unbelievable luxury. A familiar scent filled his head, again conjuring hazy images of long ago happiness and love.

*Starsky?*

He tried to breathe, but it was difficult, something inside was squeezing him hard. The arm holding him tightened as if to fight back, not releasing him to the battle inside, rubbing his back soothingly. Then, suddenly, it was pulling him up, making him dizzy and turning his stomach once more. His legs wouldn't hold him, but he was supported and gently moved forward. He was so tired, he didn't want to go anywhere else, but he trusted without reservation. *Safe...* He was safe now.

*Starsky.*

He rested his swimming head against the nearby shoulder and closed his eyes, letting go. He wasn't alone anymore, and that made all the difference.

Starsky helped his partner to his feet, mind in turmoil. He had to forcibly push away thoughts of what had to be going on in the tortured mind and body of the lean figure that was almost a dead weight against him, not to mention what he must have gone through in the previous few days. Crisis mode asserted itself and he concentrated on the most immediate problem. Hutch was crashing fast; Starsky had seen that look in others too many times before. His first instinct was to get to a hospital, but he rejected that almost immediately. No, no records, no questions, no IA. And no strangers and sterile white rooms. Me and thee at its most basic. Huggy's was the only place that he could think to do it.

With Glassman's help, Starsky managed to get the Torino's door open and Hutch inside, lying down on the front seat. Common sense would have been putting him in the back where he could lie flat and not be in danger of interfering with Starsky's driving, but common sense had been scrapped as soon as Starsky had pulled into that alley. He wanted Hutch where he could see him, touch him, reassure both of them that it would be okay now, that this was something they could fight together. He closed the door gently, not wanting to rattle the blond any further. As Starsky turned around, he almost ran into Glassman, hovering uncertainly behind him.

"Oh, Bernie, uh... talk to Cap'n Dobey, okay? I'll clear it with him."

He didn't even wait for the hesitant nod of response, he was already hurrying around to the other side. As Starsky opened the door, he could see that Hutch was trying to sit up, anxiously looking for something. Starsky quickly slid in next to him and eased him gently back down again, settling the blond head in his lap.

"Shhh, partner, it's okay. It's all over; I've got you now. Let me getcha outta here, okay?"

There was a long pause and he was beginning to think he wasn't getting through, when Hutch gave a small nod and relaxed a tiny bit, as much as he was capable of, against his partner.

Starsky rested his hand on the sweat-soaked, dirty golden hair for a moment, then, with a heartsick sigh, set off for Huggy Bear's.

He was in a car again, but it was very different from last time; the terror wasn't out of control anymore, at least not at the moment, his hopes buoyed by the one ally he had to keep the darkness away. Starsky was here, he knew that now, though his fragmented mind couldn't piece together the details. It didn't matter -- Starsky would help him, maybe was taking him to some place where he could get something, some medicine to stop the hurt. And to let him rest -- he was very tired.... He tried to be good, to keep still like Starsky had asked him to, but it wasn't easy, he was so cold and the frighteningly vicious pain in his middle kept turning him inside out. When it was at its worst, though, and he was curled up so tight against it that he couldn't breathe, he could hear the soft voice talking to him, gentle hands occasionally rubbing his arm or his back, wiping away silent tears he didn't even know he was shedding. Something that didn't hurt, that was done out of love instead of cruelty. It was wonderful. Almost made him forget for a moment what was happening. If only it didn't hurt so bad...

The motion stopped, and the warm presence next to him abruptly disappeared. He waited for a moment but it didn't return. Alarmed, he tried to follow, but didn't have the strength to do more than raise his head a little. "St-Starsk!" *Please, not gone... scared, need help...*

Terrified and all alone, he buried his face in his knees and began to cry.

Starsky skidded in through the back door of Huggy's, nearly running Hymie over in the process. He was about to ask the young waiter where the bar's proprietor was when he caught sight of Huggy at the end of the bar, trying to get to know a particularly pretty patron. Starsky hurried over as inconspicuously as possible and grabbed Huggy's arm.

Huggy's protests at the rude interruption died on seeing Starsky's face. He immediately moved to join the detective in a secluded corner of the room.

"Huggy, I need your help," Starsky began without preamble. "I found Hutch, he's out in the car, but he's been strung out and he's just about to crash -- I gotta stash him somewhere where no one will find us for a while, till he kicks it."

Huggy was nothing if not sharp; the hows and whys could wait until later. "How 'bout upstairs?" he responded, matching Starsky's low tone. "We could put him in the room I keep here."

Starsky nodded gratefully, then hesitated. "Could you give me a hand?" he softly asked.

Huggy's eyes darkened a little at the implications of Hutch's state, but he only nodded.

Starsky flashed him a brief look of gratitude that he knew was completely unnecessary -- Huggy had long ago become much more than just an informant. Then Starsky led the way out the back door, the black man close on his heels.

He had only taken two steps into the alley before he could see the figure curled up on the front seat, shaking in misery. "Oh geez," he moaned, and ran around to the passenger side door. Opening it, he crawled inside next to the huddled figure. "Hutch?" he breathed softly, touching the bowed head. "Hey, I'm right here." His other hand moved to rub a shoulder soothingly.

"St-Starsk?" The wet, emaciated face rose to look at him, and Starsky could just barely hear Huggy's sharp intake of breath behind him. "Tho-thought... left..." Hutch's teeth were chattering.

It took a great deal of effort for Starsky to keep his own feelings in check as he gently brushed at the grimy, damp face. "It's okay, I didn't leave. I'm right here and we're gonna get ya inside here and take care of you, okay?"

"Yeah... yeah. H-help."

The soft voice and gentle strokes helped still the trembling a little, and, for a moment, Hutch, his Hutch, stared out at him through the dilated eyes, soul laid bare, terrified and con-fused but trusting, trusting him to help. Starsky squeezed his eyes shut tight and let out a long shuddering breath. This was only the beginning; he couldn't afford to fall apart now. They couldn't afford it. He opened his eyes and saw that the vagueness had returned to the washed out blue, Hutch's attention wandering again.

Starsky slipped an arm under the blond's shoulders and heaved him up to a sitting position. But despite being as gentle as he could, Starsky could see his partner's face pale, then twist. He knew what was coming, and quickly turned Hutch around, leaning him out the car.

The sick spell went on and on, Hutch's empty stomach no deterrent to the continued retching that folded him in half and squeezed all the breath out of his lungs. Finally, he lay quiet, slumped against Starsky, panting.

Huggy took the cue and moved forward, grasping Hutch under one shoulder and helping Starsky get him up on his feet as much as possible. Slowly, they got him to the back door and inside, Starsky turning a little to shield his partner from the few bar patrons' curious eyes, then laboriously up the steps.

At the bedroom door, Starsky nodded at Huggy, "Okay, I got 'im. Can you get us some cof-fee? And sugar?"

"Right," Huggy said, moving Hutch's weight entirely onto his partner and heading back downstairs.

Shifting his position to handle most of Hutch's weight, Starsky took his now-badly shak-ing partner through the door. He could tell the withdrawal was starting to hit fast, and it wouldn't be long before they were in for the worst of it.

He had been lowered on something soft, but the momentary pleasure was forgotten as his stomach suddenly knotted again, worse than before, pulling him into a tight ball of pain. He tried to plead for help, but nothing came out -- *can't breathe!* Panic seized him, and, terrified, he clawed at his restraints. They wouldn't give, though, and, when a moment later the pain released him just as suddenly, he fell back against them and the restraints became supportive, cradling him close.

Awareness returned slowly, in pieces. He was lying on a bed, resting in a circle of gentle but firm arms. Starsky. He relaxed for a moment against his partner, then shame abruptly washed over him. Starsky couldn't see him like this -- what would he think? Hutch tried to pull himself together and draw away. "No," he groaned.

The arms wouldn't let him go. "Shhh," he heard, and tried to understand. "Hang on... I'm here..."

He forgot everything else in the next moment when the pain slammed into him once more, and this time he couldn't control it and he was heaving again, trying to breathe in between the spasms. Bitter liquid filled his throat and he gagged on it, but then he was leaned forward and throwing up long past there being anything left in him to purge.

Again, it went away, and he went limp, exhausted. He was drawn close once more, and he could feel Starsky rubbing his arm, talking to him, only he was too tired to make sense of it. He knew his mind and body weren't functioning properly, but there was nothing he could do. He had to trust, and he wanted help, comfort so badly, the need overcame the shame.

"Don't... go. Please... Starsk," he whispered. In response, he was only held tighter, almost fiercely. It felt good, soothing. His mind began to wander, and he thought of something else, a name that he knew was important but he didn't know why. Someone had asked him about it, promised the pain would go away if he told.... "J-Jeanie?" he asked, trying to get the word out between rattling teeth. So cold.... He wasn't aware that he was shivering hard, or that the arms around him were desperately trying to keep him still and warm. "Jeanie!" *Will it stop if I tell? Need help, need some medicine...*

Hands carefully shifted him and drew him up so that his head was pillowed against a warm body. *Starsky -- need help!* "Gimme some help, Starsk.... Gimme something!" he pleaded. *Won't....* He didn't understand why his friend wouldn't help. "Gimme some medicine. Gimme... gimme some medicine!" He pawed ineffectually at the hands holding him.

"...take this..."

*Help?* Hands gently molded his around something warm, wrapping around his shaking hands to keep them steady, then pressed the warmth to his mouth. He drank thirstily, desperate to relieve

the pain that was spreading out from his middle, into his limbs. It tasted good, but almost as soon as it went into him, he began to gag on it, his stomach rebelling at the warm, sweet liquid.

"Hold on to it..." The voice sounded far away, but the hand that cradled his head and rubbed his neck felt good, distracting him from his cramping stomach. He managed to keep most of the liquid down, the hand continuing to rub and ease the ache in his throat. *Oh please, yes, help me!*

The hand abruptly pulled away, then reappeared before his watering eyes, holding some-thing. Not medicine. He groaned. "No! Gimme some help!" he pleaded into the fuzzy face above him.

"...coffee...?"

*Not medicine. Not help.* They weren't helping him. Anger stirred through him, and he lashed out against the cup, knocking it away. "No..." *So cold.* He shivered, clinging more tightly to one of the arms that held him, trying to press closer to the warmth. "I'm so cold-d."

Something was draped around him and his arms were rubbed, but it wasn't warm enough. He was cold inside. Voices drifted above him, and he tried to drift with them. Only a few of the words made it through the haze. "...tied his wrists... pumped him... got away..." As the words sunk in, terror shot through him again. *Please, God, not again. Can't....* He turned agitatedly, trying somehow to get away from the danger.

His throat was massaged again, then his arms, calming and reassuring. "It's okay, boy." He recognized that voice -- *Starsky?* It didn't make sense, he was so confused and tired. Starsky would help him -- wouldn't he?

"Gimme.... Starsky, gimme some help. Just gimme some..." his voice faded out, lips moving soundlessly. He was afraid now of being rebuffed again. Memories of cruel laughter, of being pushed away and hurt, assailed his mind. *Scared.... Please, don't hurt....*

Starsky's voice was softly speaking to him again, and the gentle touch continued. Starsky was here, wouldn't hurt him. And Starsky would do what was best, he just had to trust. He tried to hang on to that thought.

"You're gonna make it. You big lummo!"

For a moment, his head cleared and he heard the laugh and the fear in those words. *Starsky's afraid, too!* But if he could joke about it, it had be all right. The bright blue eyes were on him now, and he tried to smile, too, for Starsky's sake. He thought he made it.

A minute later, his stomach twisted violently once more, first making him retch over and over, then tearing him apart. He bit his lip to keep from screaming, but there wasn't enough air in his lungs to scream and the world narrowed down to the fight to keep breathing. Dimly, he was aware of someone bracing him, telling him to hang on, hanging on to him, and he tried to use some of that other's strength. Together, they fought it, he holding on to the other, his only relief, with bone-crushing intensity.

The pain receded enough that he could breathe again, harshly, his heart pounding in his ears. "Can't... keep doing... can't..." He shook again, this time from the sobs that welled up in-side him. The hopelessness was almost worse than the excruciating pain. Why didn't they just let him die...

But as he sagged under the despair, a roughened hand began to gently stroke his head, consoling, loving. "Yes, you can, babe. We'll do it together," a voice breathed in his ear.

He cried harder then, pressing his face against the yielding warmth that he rested against. He so desperately wanted this to be over. The hand continued to stroke, and it almost sounded like someone else was crying, too. Then he was tenderly turned, and felt something wet brushing his face, wiping away the sweat and tears and nauseating mess his stomach had disgorged. Once done, he was carefully drawn back into the familiar embrace, and he finally calmed, taking strength from the other's care, bracing himself for the next onslaught.

All sense of time was gone. Pain had always been and, it seemed, would always be. The cramps continued to strike furiously, without warning, and he didn't know if he screamed out loud or only inside at their breathtaking intensity. The pain grew and spread throughout his body until it hurt to move at all, and yet the shudders and spasms wouldn't let him rest. In the few moments of peace in between, he collapsed, disoriented and half-conscious, against the soothing warmth, trying to relax as hands gently kneaded his sore, tense muscles, content to listen to the soft words that he didn't understand. The voice never stopped, and its tenderness took away a little of the exhausted terror, sustaining him. Nothing else existed anymore but the pain and his one ally against it, sometimes yelling at him, making him fight, sometimes just steadying and holding and caring, sponging his face or chafing his arms to try and keep him warm. Starsky was always there, even when Hutch knew in some small, shamed corner of his mind that he sometimes embarrassingly lost control over his own body or lashed out mindlessly. Starsky continued to clean up after him, take care of him, keep him going. And so Hutch continued to fight. With someone encouraging him so much, how could he not?

Finally, the cramps began to lessen some, as did his concentration. Reality blurred, becoming the hateful voice that continued to ask him questions, goading him for something he didn't even know if he had anymore. "I'll do it... I'll do anything," he slurred, trying to make the voice understand him. "J-just help me. Please! Please..."

The voice changed, became Starsky's, gently hushing him. Ashamed, he tried to explain, but the words wouldn't come. Instead, he just lay passively, wearily regarding the blue eyes, recognizing the intensity of feeling in them and accepting it, too tired to do anything else, needing the strength the love in them gave him. It was with the memory of those eyes that he finally managed to slip into a restive doze.

Starsky felt more tired than he could ever remember feeling before. Not in body, although his body had already reached its limits and then some, fueled by reserves of energy that only desperation and iron will could provide. But the worst fatigue he felt was much deeper. It came from trying hour after endless hour to be the emotional buffers of someone who had lost all of his own. Month-long hours of seeing Hutch go through his own personal hell, an anguish of

mind and body the likes of which Starsky had never experienced before, which opened every dark corner of his friend's soul. Ironically, the same loss of control that kept Hutch from coherent expression also made him achingly transparent. Every thought and emotion passing through the tattered mind was reflected in the naked, liquid eyes, unshielded from Starsky, and the depths of fear and need and trust he read there made his heart break. He knew he would never forget it. That was the hardest part of all: dealing with his own agony at seeing the person he loved more than life itself go through a torture that he was so powerless to help ease. He was dying inside but he couldn't let himself because Hutch needed him.

The blond finally fell into a fitful slumber, stirring often with the restlessness that followed him even there, breath shallow and labored. Huggy came into the room just as Starsky ended the mindless rambling he had kept up to occupy both his and Hutch's mind. Starsky eased himself out from under his burden and slowly stood, trying to rub the kinks out of his back.

"He won't stay like that for long, y'know," Huggy said reluctantly, attention divided between his two closest friends, both of whom were falling apart before his eyes.

"I know," Starsky admitted softly. He rubbed his eyes tiredly, then opened them when he felt Huggy's hand on his arm.

"Why don't you take a little nap, too? I can tell you if he starts gettin' restless."

Starsky gave a ghost of a smile in deference to the concern reflected in the dark eyes. It was almost impossible to imagine, but he knew the preceding 18 hours would have been much harder without Huggy's help. Although Starsky had never relinquished his charge, or the more difficult, unpleasant tasks that needed doing, his friend's constant supply of coffee, sugar, and silent support had been a godsend. "Thanks, Hug, but I gotta call the cap'n and then get him," he glanced at the bed, "cleaned up a little before it starts again." He met Huggy's eyes. "Couldya get me a towel and some water?"

"Right," the black man responded, hurrying off.

Starsky took a last glance at the bed and, momentarily satisfied, grabbed the phone, stretching it as far away from the bed as the cord would allow, then sank down on the floor and dialed a phone number. "Cap'n Dobey, please."

There was a long pause, and Starsky realized with a start that it was near the middle of the night and that Dobey was probably home by now, in bed.

"Dobey."

"Whatcha doin' still in, Cap'n?" Starsky asked curiously.

"Starsky? Is that you? Where have you been? And where's Hutch? Glassman..." The voice rose in volume on each question.

"Cap'n," Starsky began placatingly, "I'm sorry, I know I shoulda called you earlier but I had my hands full."

Dobey must have caught something in his voice because there was a pause, then, more softly, "Is everything all right?"

Starsky almost lost it on that one. All right? Not hardly, not for a long time. "No, Cap'n," he said softly. "I found Hutch. He... someone got to him, tied him up and got him hooked on H. He's comin' down now, but he's fallin' hard." He rubbed his prickling eyes, out of words to say. None of them did justice to what was happening to his friend.

"Where are you?" The voice was compassionate now. If anyone could figure out all that Starsky wasn't saying, it was Dobey. He'd seen the two of them together enough.

"Huggy's. I... I couldn't let anyone else see..." Starsky tapered off helplessly again, got control of himself. "I told Bernie not to put it in his report. I said I'd clear it with you."

There was another long pause as Dobey thought. Normally, the rules were very clear, but this was hardly a normal situation. He knew as well as Starsky what would happen if they reported it. And he'd bent rules for those two for far less before. "Okay," he finally said, not as reluctantly as he would've thought. "I'll take care of it. Just keep me posted. Do you need anything?"

Starsky knew the invitation wasn't only for investigative resources. "No thanks, Cap'n, not right now. I'll let you know."

"All right, Dave. Hang in there."

Starsky almost smiled. He had made any choice on that matter several years before when he took an oath publicly to protect and serve, and privately to protect and look after one gangly, clumsy blond in particular.

"Thanks, Cap'n," was all he said, and hung up.

Huggy had come in for the tail end of the conversation and stood waiting while he finish-ed, a basin of water in one hand and two towels in the other with clean bedding slung over one shoulder.

Starsky nodded and they wordlessly got to work. Together, they stripped the blond and gently cleaned him up as much as possible. Starsky winced at the bruises and protruding ribs on the pale torso, vowing to make Hutch eat some of the high-caloric, filling food that he normally hated, as soon as he could keep it down. He also carefully checked for any more serious injuries and, satisfied there appeared to be none, they dressed Hutch again in his old clothes. "I'll get him some clean ones when the place closes," Huggy murmured softly. Starsky nodded silently again.

Hutch was becoming increasingly restless, no longer finding repose in any position, and was approaching consciousness, mumbling under his breath, fighting his demons even in his sleep. Huggy couldn't catch more than the odd word, but one glance at Starsky's face, jaw clenched almost painfully, and he knew that Starsky understood exactly what was going on in his partner's mind. And, not for the first time, Huggy felt more sorry for the darker member of the team than for the fairer. Hutch would remember very little of the ordeal after a while, but for Starsky it would probably remain burned in his memory for the rest of his life.

Their waking patient spurred them to quicker action, and they changed the soiled sheets as efficiently as possible. Then Huggy turned up some antibiotic cream and left to tend bar while Starsky took hold of the agitated blond's arms and gently applied the cream to the chafed wrists. He was just finishing up when he realized the pale blue eyes were watching him, the brow above them furrowed in concentration.

"Hey," he said softly.

"Starsk?" Hutch looked confused and Starsky wondered if he knew at all what was going on.

"Yeah, partner, 's me. How you feelin'?" He absently rubbed one of the trembling arms.

The query provoked another attempt at concentration and a muddled, "Dunno. Cold." Hutch licked his lips. "Thirsty."

Starsky reached over to the tray that sat on a nearby chair and poured some coffee. "Here. You wanna sit up?"

"Yeah."

Starsky eased his partner up to a sitting position, pretending not to notice the jerky, uncoordinated moves or the sweaty hand that held on hard to his arm. He helped Hutch drink the cup of coffee, once again wrapping his hand around the shaking one to help steady it. "Better?" he asked as Hutch lowered the cup.

"No... No." Hutch was looking around distractedly, not even having heard the question, his agitation increasing. Suddenly, his eyes flew to meet Starsky's, frantic.

Starsky knew that look and hauled him to his feet, half-dragging him to the bathroom. They made it just in time and, as Starsky sat behind the writhing blond, holding him up and rubbing his back while softly encouraging him, he leaned his head against the wall beside him and briefly said a silent prayer that they would both find the strength to deal with the next stage.

The cramps weren't so bad now, and although his body ached all over, it was not the sharp pains he could still remember from sometime before. This was worse. The initial tickle of restlessness, of needing something, needing to get out of there, began to grow. Almost invis-ibly at first, and then more aggressively until it was impossible to ignore. Resistance gone, he was rapidly losing the ability to form and focus his thoughts or to restrain his emotions. Some-thing scared him here, he didn't know what but he had to get out before it got him. *Can't stay. Need... gotta get out of here.* "I gotta get outta here. I gotta...," he tried to plead with the door-keeper, the one who held the link to his sanity, but the dark curls only shook negatively. He was trapped. He turned desperately away from the door, seeking another way of escape before it was too late.

Tatters of conversation went through his head. "... like a baby to a bottle...," "... current oughta take that body..." It frightened him; he had no control over his thoughts and they were suffocating him. *Need. Need!*

He focused on the door again as it stood there, close. He made a break for it, but strong arms held him back and he almost struck out blindly, willing to break everything in his path to get out of there because he had to -- there was no why. Suddenly, his mind cleared for a minute and he recognized who it was he was attacking. *Starsky! Starsky...* Crushed and terrified at his own lack of control, at his behavior in front of his friend, he backed away. Starsky followed, hand outstretched invitingly. Hutch slowly began to reach out for it when the mocking voice began again. "*Tell us where...*"

A syringe appeared in the hand. With a strangled cry, Hutch scrambled back out of its reach, tripping over a chair behind him and falling against the wall. There was no place left to go, and he shut his eyes, extending his arm miserably, wanting the relief more than anything and hating himself for it.

The needle prick didn't come; instead, his arm was gently pushed down and a forehead rested against his while his shoulders were massaged, loosening up all the ache collected there. Just for a moment, he was able to think and restrain the terror, collecting his scattered mind. He looked up with tear-blurred vision into the soft blue eyes that had often been his only refuge in hell, mirroring his pain but not letting him give into it. He didn't know why, but he nodded.

The other nodded back, and he was carefully drawn to his feet, an arm around his waist until he steadied himself. Then he moved away again, the frustration already building. There was nowhere to go. The fear grew, and, frantically, trying to breathe, his hand curled into a fist and he struck out at the wall. Before he could connect, though, he was suddenly restrained from behind, gently but firmly as arms wrapped around him, pulling him away from the wall. Mindlessly, he fought the entrapment. The arms didn't yield, though, and when he finally sagged in them, spent, they eased down to the ground with him.

For several minutes, he lay there, soaking in the warmth and security. It felt so good to rest for a moment, to just be comforted.... But memories slowly intruded. Jeanie. Betrayal. His own worthlessness. A traitor and a junkie didn't deserve any love. Shame and self-loathing filled him and he pushed himself away from the solace of the embrace.

"Go away," he said softly, bleakly. Then, at the lack of response, his anger broke out again. "LEMME ALONE!"

Slowly, reluctantly, the other began to obey, getting up and moving toward the door. *Leaving? ... Starsky? Oh, God, no!* Hutch's blood ran cold at the thought of what he'd done. He began to crawl after the other in despair. "No, please, don't go. I didn't mean..."

Starsky was back at his side immediately, gathering him up, and Hutch held on desperately. "I'm sorry... Please, don't go. I'll be good... do anything..." he mumbled sincerely into a shoulder.

"Don't, babe, don't," whispered a broken voice in his ear. "I'm not goin' nowhere. I won't leave you."

Everything else faded away as need lost the battle to love for a few blissful minutes. He finally pulled back a little, looking into the other's eyes again and tried to put together what he felt. "I... I need..." He fought the urge that every cell in his body screamed for. "Need... candy." A very

small victory, but one nevertheless. He saw the other's face break into a smile, and the victory grew. Maybe he could beat this after all. He smiled a little, too.

The candy bar didn't want to stay down, either, and soon he found himself back in the bathroom, on the floor, Starsky still amazingly with him. He refused to give up, though, need-ing to win even a small battle, and he asked for another candy bar as soon as his body had rid itself of the first. *I won't give in.*

There was an almost unbearable pain in his back. He couldn't lie down, trying to control his fear as he realized that the terror and need were growing, wearing away his resistance. He could barely handle them now, and soon they would be out of control. And therein lay madness. He knew it, and the fear of that just made the terror grow. He was watching himself go insane and there was nothing he could do about it.

He needed a distraction, anything to make him stop thinking about the power taking over his mind. And, once again, Starsky somehow understood.

"C'mon, let's play some checkers."

*Checkers!* The idea seemed ridiculous, and yet he found himself grasping at the straw. Maybe it would help him forget, distract the fear that fed his rising terror. He eagerly nodded, and tried to help set up the board, but his clumsy fingers wouldn't cooperate. Starsky did it himself.

The game didn't last long. He tried to put his all into it, not leave any part of him to wonder about what was to come and to be afraid, but it didn't work. He couldn't concentrate enough to make much sense out of the game. A surge of anger at one more battle lost made him sweep the board viciously aside, then, unable to stay sitting any longer, he got up and began to pace again, trying to get away from something unknown.

Silently behind him, watching and waiting, stood the key to stopping his suffering, he knew it. "You wanna help me -- help me! Come on, do something!" he goaded desperately. The other stood still, impassive. He rushed at the other, grabbed him by the jacket. "You know where the stuff is!" The answer to all his problems. One fix and it would all be okay again, otherwise he'd go crazy. And the immovable figure before him didn't care. *He does care. Starsky does care, he knows best, wouldn't hurt...* Confused, and angry at being confused, he struck out, but ... *can't hit Starsky.* He smacked the door instead, not even feeling the pain of the blow.

Starsky stood unflinching. Hutch stared into his eyes a moment, and, bothered by what he saw there, left him alone and strode away. *Can't get anything, won't give me anything! At least, "... get a candy bar?"*

Starsky finally moved, approaching him and reaching out a chocolate bar. He latched onto it desperately, hoping it would help the craving inside. But Starsky took his arms for a minute and made their eyes meet. "You're not gonna be able to keep it down."

He stared for a moment, seeing the compassion that cushioned the words, and then, eyes downcast, nodded in acknowledgment. They both knew that, and yet he had to keep trying or the madness would take over. He leaned tiredly against the doorjamb to work on the candy wrapper.

He missed the exchange going on at the other side of the room but looked up a moment later to see the door standing invitingly empty, Starsky's attention diverted by someone else. *Get out!* The command blanked out everything else and he lunged for the door.

His hopes were dashed when, a moment later, the door was blocked again, his arms restrained as he flailed, trying to get at the elusive goal. His tired mind tried to piece together why they wouldn't let him get to the door that he had to reach. "I just want some candy. I just want some candy!" he coaxed, but it didn't seem like the doorkeeper was listening and he was getting desperate. He just needed a little, just to make it go away. "I just want some candy. Just let me out!"

"I can remember a man who hated candy."

The calm reply made his anger rise again. He wasn't in the mood for teasing, and certainly not a reminder of what he had once been. Before. "Aw, shut up!" he yelled.

"Now that's the Hutch I know." The voice was soft, and rattled him badly. *Starsky. Starsky's hurting, too. Can't hurt him.* Defeated, unable to fight that kind of response, he slumped tiredly and felt himself be pulled into a half-embrace, one hand resting on his head, then rubbing his back. For a moment, he was able to relax and let go. But the restlessness was never far away, and he pushed himself off, finally lashing out at the dresser, sweeping everything off its surface. It felt good, but it also made him ashamed. He had to try and get himself under control or he'd never win this fight. He finally swung a chair around and plopped into it, willing himself to try and relax.

Starsky came over, sat down across from him. "Feel like talkin'?"

Unable to sit still, Hutch rubbed at his legs, heart pounding. Talking? All he felt like was running. "No."

"Good. Who were they?"

They. Bright lights and cruel voices that held no pity, that only made him hurt even when he begged for it to stop. "I don't know," he said wearily. He never wanted to know. It was a struggle to remain seated and he rubbed his sweaty palms harder, trying to use up the energy that made him want to run as far away from this place as fast as he could.

"What did they want?"

The endless questions reminded him of the voices that kept goading him, that kept hurting him to get something they wanted and it made him angry to think about it. Why was Starsky doing this? *Not my friend....* "I don't know!" he yelled, more angry at the betrayal than the question. *No different....* "You wanna help, b-be my friend, help me!"

-- *Who do we trust?*

-- *Same as always. Me & Thee.*

The memory came out of nowhere. *Trust. Starsky knows what he's doing... trust.*

"What did they want?" the voice asked calmly again.

*Trust...* He met the intent eyes and painfully remembered. "Jeanie. They wanted Jeanie." She had trusted him, too, but when they had asked, he had wanted to tell them. Trust -- he was the one who couldn't be trusted. Self-hatred overwhelmed him, drowning out even the terror. "And... I think I told them where she was." He was leaning now on Starsky, trying to make him understand. *I didn't want to, I couldn't help it. Trust.* "I don't know..." he managed, anguished at the loss. He struggled with the choking guilt.

Starsky spoke reassuringly even while laying a hand on his to calm him. "Okay." It didn't sink in through his despondency and his agitation increased. Starsky leaned toward him, soothing, regaining his attention. "It's okay. It's okay," he soothed. "It's okay."

He calmed a little, wanting to believe. Starsky waited until he quieted, then began again.

"Hey. How many different voices did you hear?"

He shook his head tiredly, not wanting to think about this anymore. "Three or four," he said with resignation.

"Names?"

He shook his head more strongly. So tired.... "I don't know."

"Names."

The questions were relentless and his fragile control snapped again. "I don't -- COME ON, STARSKY!" he snapped.

**"Names."**

The tone of voice made him pause like little else had done before. He looked at his part-ner again, seeing something he couldn't identify, but that made him want to try just once more. For Starsk.

"Monk." Softly.

"Who?"

He looked away, knowing it wasn't much, but it was all he had. "Monk. Monk," he re-peated, finally looking up again.

Their eyes locked, and they lost the key.

Determination warred in the deep blue eyes with fatigue. And fear, a lot of fear, but compassionate, born out of love. For him. That was mostly what had kept him going thus far. But he saw something else, now, something that he hadn't been able to see before. A sharing

beyond what he expected or thought, a commitment to go through it all with him, feeling everything he felt. He knew it shouldn't be a surprise, but for his fragmented mind it was an epiphany. Starsky would be there with him no matter what. It was beyond any conception of friendship or partnership he had ever known, and it made him dizzy with the knowledge. The terror receded.

The next moment he slumped, almost sliding off the chair as his last bit of energy seemed to drain away. Someone caught him, though, and he vaguely felt himself being carried over to the bed. All earlier thoughts were gone, he was too tired to hold on to them. But something was different. The driving fear had faded to manageability. Alone, he could be beaten, but he wasn't alone, he had someone who would fight with him until the end. And that weapon, the unity of friendship, took away most of the power of the fear.

He still couldn't get comfortable, even on the soft bed, and sleep only came in snatches despite his total exhaustion. The chills and trembling were still there, too. But, for the first time, he didn't mind. It would be over soon. He had won. They had won.

Starsky woke up in a rush, breathing hard, slowly remembering where and when he was.

Four days. Four days since the nightmare of realizing that Hutch was gone had begun. Starsky lay on the couch in the dark house, trying to calm himself, thinking about the years he had aged since then. Hutch had slept most of the time away since they had left Huggy's -- dozing in the car on the way to take Forest in, sound asleep every time Starsky had been in to check on him since. He had had nightmares, but they were the remnants of a mind still trying to comprehend what had happened, to make sense of all of it, and Starsky knew they would fade away, as would most of the memories, the mind protecting itself by forgetting.

It wasn't that easy for Starsky.

He had finally admitted the problem to Hutch that evening, and the blond had insisted he stay the night. And, in some ways, it had helped. He had fallen asleep hearing the quiet, even breathing from the other room, a calmate, relaxing him as nothing else had been able to. But sleep was a different matter. In sleep lurked dreams, and he was defenseless against those. He had nothing to fight them with.

"You wanna talk about it?"

The quiet voice behind him almost made him fall off the couch in surprise. He caught himself, almost answering with the glib denial that came to his tongue. But Hutch knew better and deserved more. "I don't think it would help," he answered honestly, surprised at how shaky his own voice sounded.

There were soft footsteps, then the bathroom light came on, throwing just enough light into the living room to see by. Hutch came over to the couch, barefoot and in pajama bottoms, still looking sleepy but attention fixed on his partner. He sat on the back edge of the couch. "You might be surprised."

Starsky squirmed uncomfortably. He gave all of himself, unconditionally, when his partner needed, but otherwise he wasn't comfortable opening up, even to Hutch. Emotionalism and deep discussions just weren't Starsky's thing. "S'okay, Hutch, it was just a bad dream. Go back to sleep."

He could feel the blond frowning at him even though he didn't look to confirm it. There was a long silence that discomfited him. Then, even more softly than before, Hutch began again.

"I don't know if I would've made it through the last few days without you, Starsk..."

That was the last thing Starsky wanted to hear. "Hutch..."

"Let me finish!" Hutch's voice rose, interrupting him. "I was gonna say, I don't know if I would've made it through withdrawal without you. Probably, especially if I would have ended up in a hospital and kicked it with the help of drugs. It might have meant the end of my career, but I would have survived." He turned his gaze back to Starsky, who had by now pushed himself up and was staring at Hutch, pale. Hutch's eyes claimed his and wouldn't let go, *déjà vu* for them both. The blond's voice fell to a whisper. "But you saved me."

Starsky just stared at him, speechless, expressionless.

"You never let it beat me. And you gave me the one thing I could never get from anyone else -- hope. I knew you'd be with me through the whole thing, and that made it bearable. I could fight it 'cause I was never really alone."

Starsky finally found his voice, matched it with Hutch's whispered, earnest tone. "You never were."

Hutch nodded solemnly. "I know. But it goes both ways, y'know."

Starsky nodded back, still not taking his eyes off the other. "I know."

Hutch smiled. "Good." He got up and moved off for a moment before reappearing with a blanket and circling around the couch to settle himself in the easy chair an arm's length away.

Starsky's eyes followed him. "What're you doing?" he asked suspiciously.

"I'm resting, dummy, what does it look like? I'm so tired, I could sleep anywhere. Now go to sleep. I'll be right here."

For a split-second, Starsky almost argued with him. It had been over twenty years since he needed someone to stay in the room with him at night to keep the monsters away. But then, monsters came in all different shapes and sizes, and everyone needed a little help with theirs once in a while. He allowed a small, warm grin, letting his eyes convey his true feelings. Enough soul-baring talk for one night. "Goodnight, Mom," he said, suddenly feeling very tired. He pulled the covers up over his head.

That way Hutch couldn't see his brimming eyes.