

Begging For The Needle
Musings from "A Coffin For Starsky"
by Brit

"Professor, I'm asking you, I'm begging you! Please, stop this before it's too late!"

"My boy is dead! He was a good boy. He's dead..."

"I'm asking you to save my partner's life."

I stood there, begging for the needle. Not because I was afraid he'd come after me with it, though I realized that had been his intent all along. First Starsky, then me. Even if he had tried to use the syringe as a weapon, the rage boiling over in me was more than enough to take him out—yes, even kill him if necessary—without a second thought. What I *was* afraid of was that he would destroy the contents and any chance I had left to save Starsky. Time was running out and we all knew it.

Déjà vu' happens in the damndest places, at the worst times. It wasn't a moment I would have chosen, but it was one of those crystal clear instances that grabbed me by my throat. Just as I glanced down at his hand clutching the poison, I saw my own reaching out desperately for the needle. I was trembling ever so slightly, though I don't think the professor or Cheryl could tell. The briefest of flashbacks struck me: I was in a small bedroom, pumped full of heroin, Ben Forrest watching me crawl along the floor, aching, guts wrenching, sweating, desperate, as the withdrawals stripped me of every ounce of dignity I had left.

I had begged then—begged for the needle. I would have given anything for the next fix. And I did. God help me, I gave them what they wanted. Sold my soul to the devil and gave up the woman I swore I'd protect. I begged. I thought I would die without it. Begged as if my life depended on it.

I don't know which hurt worse, the withdrawals or the fact that I had begged. I've never been more ashamed of myself than I was of those moments.

I willed my hand to stop trembling and forced myself to focus.

"Professor, give it to me. Give it to me."

He hesitated. I took the needle from him and ran, ran to my partner, ran for all I was worth. Because without him, I know I wasn't worth a whole helluva lot.

The sense of déjà vu' hit me again as I ran toward the Torino, stumbling in my urgency to get back to my partner at any cost. I had stumbled down an alleyway back then, delirious, knowing I had to get away, get to Starsky.

I remember I was never so relieved to see someone in my entire life. I wasn't thinking too clearly, my mind was mush by then. But I knew as soon as Starsky slid to stop next to me in that alley that somehow, *some way*, everything would be all right.

It was one of those moments that clings inside your head for your entire life. The look on his face when his worried eyes met mine: concern, fear, rage, disbelief. I still can't shake it. He just stared at me, trying to figure out what was wrong with me, where I was hurt, what had happened. But there was never one ounce of doubt or incrimination toward me, not even for a second, even when he saw the tracks. When Bernie said "my God, he's a junkie," it put me over the edge. Those five words twisted my insides worse than the withdrawals did. All I could do was reach out for my partner. I can't imagine what it would have done to me if Starsky had held me at arm's length or pushed me away, or....

But he didn't. I don't think he could have, no more than I could have if the tables had been turned. Even when I told him the ugly truth, what the horse had reduced me to, how I had begged for the needle. He never looked at me with anything other than respect. Pride. Gratitude. Because I fought back. Because I lived through it. Because I kicked it—though I couldn't have without him there, I know that as sure as I've known anything my entire life. Gratitude that he wasn't the one to find out that *it is* harder on the ones left behind.

I promised myself I would never again be in a position to beg for anything. What happened to me—to us—with Forrest is only a haunting memory now, though it occasionally slips into my nightmares. And anytime the old self-loathing toward the junkie who begged for the needle comes creeping back to taunt me, all it takes is a word, a touch, a glance, to reassure me that I have nothing to be ashamed of. In my partner's eyes, there is no begging junkie. No disgrace. No shame. There's just us.

I had vowed I would never beg again. But I did. I begged for the needle. And this time the begging held no shame.

~ Brit
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