

*Claddagh*  
*Musings from "The Shootout"*  
*~ for TibbieB ~*

If I speak of things most noble  
Of friendship, love, and loyalty  
Is the world so bitter, grown so cold  
That it simply refuses to see?

If I speak of things deemed sacred  
of honor, virtue, and answering justice  
Are their hearts so full of darkness  
to not recognize this bond of trust?

If I speak of the love of brothers  
by God's mercy lives entwine  
Why must they tear and taint it  
to fit their own design?

If I speak again of things that bind  
Of friendship, love, and loyalty  
Pity the fallen hearts that reject  
the bond of me and thee

The hospital room was dimly lit, the only source of light coming from the single bulb from over Starsky's bed. A saline drip stood like a sentinel to the side of the headboard, but it wasn't the only guardian that night.

The token uncomfortable hospital chair had been drawn close to the bedside, and Hutch sat forward in the seat, wearily leaning his elbows on his knees. It was 5 AM, and Starsky had just been wheeled into the room. The surgery to remove the bullet from his back had been without complications. Still, Hutch never left the hospital, not even to change out of the clothes stained with his partner's blood. Reports would be filed in the morning, now was the time for more important things.

A new nurse was on duty last night, one Hutch didn't recognize. The majority of the ER staff knew them by sight, if not by name. As the young woman checked on Starsky's IV, she had smiled at Hutch warmly, asking if he were Starsky's family. He simply looked at her numbly, the adrenaline rush finally over, leaving him drained, and answered "he's my partner." Apparently, this was not the response the nurse wanted to hear, and began a litany of "procedure" and "only family members," until Hutch's blue eyes turned to ice and he bit out "I'm *not* leaving."

The nurse left in a huff, grumbling under her breath about them “*just* being partners was not enough”. Finally left alone, Hutch turned his focus back to the still figure on the bed, reassured by the even rising and falling of Starsky’s chest as he slept. For some reason, the nurse’s response still angered him, though he knew he was probably reacting out of his overwhelming fatigue and the strain of the evening. *If she had any idea of what we’ve been through tonight—been through together—she’d understand what being partners really meant. Well, maybe, maybe not. I don’t care. We know, and that’s all that matters.*

~Brit  
2/11/01