

*Safe*  
*Musings from A Coffin For Starsky*  
*A companion piece to "The Words That I Can't Say"*  
*by Brit*

*The only thing I can call it is panic. I can feel my heart beating a mile a minute in my chest. My breath is coming in rapid gasps that sound incredibly loud in my ears and all but drown out the sound of my gurney being pushed down the hallway. Shoot, I half expect for them to push me straight to the morgue rather than ICU. God, I am so scared...I'm...I'm...*

*I'm dying.*

*I'm dying and there's not a stupid thing I can do about it. I can't even scream which is all I want to do. I can't even swallow. OhmyGodohmyGodohmyGod...*

*I can't control my fear. I'm going to explode. I can't take this. Can't stand it. Hutch! Where are you? Please, oh God, don't leave me. I can't do this! I can't die alone like this... Hutch!*

*The two attendants can't even tell what's going on, what I'm thinking. They just wheel me into the room and hook me up to a heart monitor. Stick an oxygen tube under my nose. God, don't go! Don't leave me here like this! Please....*

*My vision...what the...? That's going now, too. Please God, take me quickly. Please take me now because I can't stand being this afraid...this alone. I'm alone. Hutch, please...I know I thought that I wouldn't want for you to see me this way, for you to remember me this way, but I need you. I need to know that you're here with me, please. Oh God, please! Don't let me die alone this way. I can't...I can't feel anything. My head...I can't move it at all now. There's black spots blurring my vision. I can't see the ceiling. Is this it? Is this the coma they warned us about? Oh God, please...please let me see him one more time, please. Let him know somehow to come back. I can't do this alone. I can't... Oh, God forgive me. Forgive me...please...please don't let me....*



Hutch had followed the gurney as they wheeled his partner from the lab to a private room. All tests had shown that the antidote had successfully neutralized the poison before it reached the final stages of destroying Starsky's body. A CAT scan had been taken for good measure along with a battery of other tests, and all signs pointed to there not being any permanent damage to the vital organs. All that was left was for him to wake up. Hutch wouldn't be convinced of their success until he saw the sapphire eyes, heard the voice, felt his partner's hand respond in his.

The night had been long. He estimated he hadn't slept in over 34 hours. Grimly, Hutch knew he would go another hundred if that was what it would take to save his partner. The detective shifted again in the hard hospital chair. Fatigue and tension were at war with his emotions and he felt himself drawn tighter than a bow string. Stiffly, Hutch pulled himself up and placed his hands on his lower back, arching in some semblance of a stretch. The morning light from the window added to the burning sensation in his eyes. After wasting a few moments staring outside at the awakening city, Hutch turned back to the silent bedside.

Starsky's face had regained some of its color—its normal tone finally overcoming the gray mask of death that had settled there hours before. Breathing seemed far less labored and his features had relaxed from their rigamortis-like state.

*So close...so close.* Hutch felt his knees again grow weak from the realization and he lowered himself on to Starsky's bedside before he collapsed. The tremor in his hand was evident as he reached out to lay it on the side of his friend's head. The reassuring warmth of his living partner was more than he could bear. The tears that he had been holding back for more than a day finally streamed into a day's worth of stubble.

“..’utch?”

“Starsk? Thank God.”

Bleary eyes opened further and darted disorientedly around the hospital room. “What are you...*are you...?*”

Hutch's smile flooded with overwhelming joy and relief. All the words that he wanted to tell his partner were pushed aside by the intensity of the emotions closing off his throat.

A single tear trickled from Starsky's eye. In his weakened state he was unable to reach up to brush it away, so it silently trailed into his dark curls.

*“I...I thought I was dead.”*

Hutch forced himself to draw a calming breath. His short laugh sounded slightly water-logged. “Then I'm probably the ugliest angel you've ever seen. Welcome back, partner.”

“Hutch...” Swallowing was still difficult, making Starsky's voice raspy. “I...I was scared. I was really, *really* scared this time.”

“I know, buddy. I was too. This one was too close for comfort.”

“I'm...sorry.” Starsky's energy was quickly becoming depleted. “Hutch I'm so sorry....”

“Hey, hey...c’mon Starsk.” Hutch quickly stood and laid his hand back against his partner’s face, his thumb reaching out to gently brush away the tears that began to come in earnest. “What have you got to be sorry about?”

“I lost...I thought that it...was all over. I should of...I should of known better.” Starsky took a steadying breath. His eyes were bright as he met Hutch’s worried gaze. “I never got to tell you... how much you mean...to me. How much I loved you. I didn’t...I didn’t want to die without you knowing—”

“Awh, Starsk. I knew. I always knew.”

“You saved me.” Midnight eyes closed as Starsky’s fatigue overtook him. “I’m safe now....”

Gently, as not to disturb his sleeping partner, Hutch lowered himself back onto the bedside, his partner’s hand clasped firmly in his grip. “Yeah, Buddy. We’re safe now.”

*9/12/00*