

*The Lesson*  
*Musings from "The Fix"*  
by Brit

*On the road...*

Agitated.

It sounds like a word you'd use—*agitated*. That's how I feel. That's how I felt all stupid weekend. It's that same twist in the pit of my gut that I get when I know that something's going down. Or like when the hairs on the back of my neck stand up when I feel somebody creeping around that ain't supposed to be.

I knew there was something wrong. *I knew it*. But I wasn't about to try and track you down like three kinds of idiot so that you could laugh in my face and tell me—again—to knock off the mother hen routine. The last time you warned me to quit it I knew you were ticked, so I wasn't about to be on the receiving end of the famous Hutchinson wrath. *Again*.

Besides, you'd been so secretive lately about your latest and greatest. Not letting me or Huggy or anybody know who she was or where you'd taken her on dates or nothing. And sneaking off to take your phone calls...*sheesh!* I'm not *that* nosey, buddy. But you did make me curious. At first, I thought you were just afraid that'd she succumb to the Starsky charm and drop you like a hot rock. Then I figured maybe you were dumb enough to get yourself hooked up with a married woman or something like that. Anyway, I got the hint and finally quit trying to figure out who or what she was, and knew that you'd get around to introducing her when the time was right. If it meant that much to you to have her all to yourself, then the least I could do was leave you alone. For now.

But now...

Now I don't have a clue where you're at. I failed you, buddy. I failed you.

I should have listened to my gut. No matter how bad you would have squawked at me, I should have listened to my gut. Now, instead of you sitting here next to me, I'm cruising all over kingdom come with the elephant gun you never go anywhere without riding next to me.

*Where are you?*

*In the alley...*

Relief.

I don't know when I've ever been...well, so *drenched* with it as when I got the call that you'd been sighted. I couldn't make her fly fast enough through the streets to get to you. But when I saw you—what was left of you....

*Awh, Hutch.*

I wanted to bawl right there in the alley. What had they done to you? I'd seen that ravaged face before—the face of someone totally destroyed. You've seen those faces, too. Seen them on.... No, that can't be *that*.

There must be another explanation. I tore open your sleeve, raised it up past your bruised and mangled elbow to see the tracks that tattooed your flesh like a gory badge.

Heroin.

Addict.

Horse.

Junkie.

No. When I looked back into your face, into your eyes...the eyes that have always spoke volumes, always saw right into my soul, always reflected love, I saw a man ravaged.

Abused.

Violated.

Brutalized.

*Raped.*

I saw in your face the face of every rape victim we'd ever seen. Dominated, torn, forced against their will. No, it wasn't the same, but it was still your body that they dominated, you that they victimized.

It was the rape of your soul.

It was a victim's face. A face I had once seen in my own mirror. And now it was yours.

I can't explain what I felt. It was like a million things were going on inside me in a big jumble that I couldn't sort out. The need to protect you was stronger than everything

else. I had to get you out of that alley, away from prying eyes, away from eyes that cared but didn't understand.

First, we had to make you safe. Later we'd work on making you whole. I wasn't sure how or when or what I could do or say. But I knew we could make this right, somehow. I knew we could make the pain go away. As long as we did it together.

I won't fail you again.

### *At home. The aftermath...*

Anguish.

I look at you and it hurts. It just plain hurts.

Yeah, the bruises have faded. The circles under your eyes have lightened up a bit and turned gray. You don't shake as much as you used to. But I know you're not sleeping right. I've heard you thrashing around on my bed. My bed because you're afraid to be alone. Afraid to let me know you're still afraid.

I know how the nightmares wake you up in a cold sweat and won't let you rest. I know how memories haunt you, threaten to overwhelm you sometimes when you least expect it. I know how you don't feel safe anymore because they destroyed your peace of mind.

And maybe a piece of your mind.

I know how it feels like they've broken that thing inside your soul that makes you, well, *you*.

What I don't understand is why you won't let me help you. It's a two-way street, pal. Remember the night I finally broke down in front of you? Cried for the first time in front of you. The first time in I don't know how many years I even allowed myself to cry. Remember? If you'd stop and remember for just a second, buddy, you'd know that I know exactly what you're feeling right now.

I know, Hutch. I know. God, how I wish I didn't, but I do. And it's time.

It's time to let me help. It's time to heal.

I walk over to you quietly, almost like I'm approaching someone to apprehend. I've been treading pretty cautiously around you lately, and for good reason. You've been wound so tight I've been waiting for you to snap.

“Hutch?” You turn quickly to face me completely, even though I know you saw me coming out of the corner of your eye. Defensive move. The look on your face only lasts a second, but it makes me want to cry, it hurts so much. “Sit down, will you?”

You stumble on over to my couch, so tired you can hardly keep upright. I know it’s more than lack of sleep. I plop down beside you, but not too close.

“Look buddy, I know what you’re going—”

“No! You don’t know, nobody knows....” You never let me finish, but you didn’t finish either. You just clam up and study the floor. *You’re wrong.*

“Hutch...” I reach over and take you by the wrist. You try to pull away, but you’re so stupid weak right now. Normally, you would have flung me over the couch already. Without a lot of effort I force your arm to bend so that your fist is over your chest. With my other hand I open up your hand and place them both, your hand and mine, over your heart.

“What do you feel?”

You look at me like I’m out of my mind. Maybe I am. But I think you’ll get it in a minute. You always have been the brains of this partnership.

“What do you feel?”

You stare at me for a minute, then look away. I think I detected a few tears welling up. That’s good. That’s progress. “What do you feel?”

“What do you think I feel? Nothing. I don’t...I don’t feel anything! There’s...there’s nothing.”

Anger. More progress. “Try again. What do you feel?”

I can tell you’re getting ticked at me, but that’s okay. You’re still too weak to break my grip. Finally, you turn back to face me, your face is getting all red like you’re ready to slug me or explode or something.

“Starsky, stop it...”

It’s more of a plea than anything. Almost wrenched my heart right out of my throat. But I couldn’t fail you. Not again. You’ve never failed me. “I’ll tell you. I’ll tell you what you feel, Hutch. You feel hurt and angry and betrayed and sickened by the fact that these bastards controlled you, forced themselves and their heroin on you and there wasn’t a damn thing you could do about it.” My voice is rising, but I couldn’t stop myself. “And you hate the world and you hate Jeannie for getting you into this mess, and you hate yourself because you couldn’t fight back, and you hate me because I didn’t find you

sooner, because I failed you when you needed me the most. But most of all you hate them because you feel like they stole a piece of you and you can never get it back and you'll never be the same again!"

That got your attention. I could tell by the look on your face that I'd hit the nail on the head. I know, Hutch, I know. But I was wrong then, and you're wrong now. Your face softens up a bit when you notice I've got tears streaming down mine.

I pull our hands away from your heart and place them over my own.

"Now what do you feel?" I know you can feel my heart beating, racing really. It's pounding so hard right now I can feel it in my throat.

"It's right here, Hutch. Don't you see? That piece of you that you thought they took was right here all along. I was keeping it safe right here." I leave your hand on my heart and cover your chest with my free hand. "Nobody can take that away from me, Hutch, from us. Nobody." I look you square in the eye. "I'd die first."

*Finally.*

Finally, you get it. Finally the tears come, and with it, a release, I guess. I pull you close, wrap my arms around you so you know you're safe and can let it go. You know I'll stand watch, stand guard while you recover what you thought was stolen from you. Cry for what you thought was lost forever. Cry for what you've found again.

And finally, after the tears, comes sleep. Without a second thought, you stretch out on the couch. I get another lump in my throat that you would be so vulnerable, so unguarded with me. I throw the comforter over you and leave my hand resting on your shoulder, occasionally rubbing at the loosening muscles that had stayed bunched up on your back and shoulders for weeks.

Rest, partner. *Heal.* Life taught you a bitter lesson. But you also learned a more important one. It was a hard lesson, one that I learned too. Learned it from my partner: *love never fails.*

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