

Faith, Hope and Love

By Linda B.

Faith

“Where are you, Hutch?” I say the words out loud knowing I’ll get no response. It’s been four days now. Where are you? I’ve asked that question a million times. Not only to myself, but also to Dobey, to Huggy, to everyone I encounter. I’ve been searching for you all over this city. Looking day and night, and I keep asking the same question over and over.

I got back Sunday night like I told you I would. And, of course, I hurried over to your place only to find the door ajar and your apartment destroyed. How many times has that happened, buddy? Now, I’m sitting here on your bed, exhausted, but I can’t stop. I have to keep looking for you. I know you’re alive. When I told Dobey that today, he asked me how I knew. I said I couldn’t explain it, but I know how I would feel deep in my heart if you were dead, and—in the absence of that feeling—I know you are still alive. I told him it was as simple as that. He raised his eyebrows like he always does and looked at me skeptically, but he didn’t say anything. He just told me to get back out on the street. Funny, how when I hit the street, it brought me here.

You said it would be a quiet weekend for you. What did you get yourself into? Dobey’s been pulling every case you’ve ever worked on. Everyone’s working extra hours trying to find you. But no one is searching harder than I am. I just don’t know where to go next. I’m getting so tired I can’t think clearly. Dobey ordered me to go home, to take a shower and get some sleep. I tried; I really did. But my place is too quiet. I need you there nagging me, I guess.

So I came here instead. Figured the plants need some watering. Your mail needs picking up. But who am I kidding? I need to be here because it’s the closest to you I can get, at least until I figure it all out. I want to think being here will help.

I hope you don’t mind, but I’m gonna lie down on your bed for a while. I don’t think I’ll sleep much. I really don’t think I’ll be able to sleep at all until I find you. Anytime I try, I wake myself up screaming from the nightmares that haunt me. So, being awake just makes more sense. Problem is, I’m moving a little slower now, and I’m afraid that means I’ll miss something—something important.

I’ve tried retracing your steps, Hutch, but they don’t seem to lead anywhere. Your mail from Saturday was still sitting on the kitchen table, just where you’d left it. Funny, how when almost everything else in your apartment is destroyed, your mail still sits there, as if it’s waiting for you. But you never opened it. Is that when it happened? Or did you just leave it there to open later?

I'm lying here staring at your ceiling. Did you know there's a spider building a web in the corner? Looks like he's been at it for a few days. There's a fly stuck in the middle of his web. Funny how that makes me think of you. You're a fly stuck in somebody's web. With the flick of a broom, I could wipe out the web on the ceiling. I could create a little havoc in that spider's life. I plan on creating havoc in the life of the spider that's holding you. Problem is, I have to find him first. No, I have to find *you* first. *Then*, I'll go after the spider.



What's that noise? Jerked awake by the sound, I reach for my gun, still in its holster, and roll onto the floor and move silently toward the door. Someone's outside. Have they returned to search for something else? Afraid to breathe, to make a sound, I wait, but no one's tried to enter yet, and I've heard no other sound. Ramrod straight against the wall, I place a hand on the doorknob and then jerk it open, going low, my gun aimed...

Dropping my gun to my side, I suck in some air, allowing my heart to beat once again, and straighten up. It's only a stray cat. Probably the stray you've told me about, the one you've been feeding. Leaving the door open, I head to the refrigerator knowing you'd want me to take care of him. I can't help but chuckle 'cause the black-and-white cat follows me in, meowing all the way. It's pretty obvious this is a familiar routine, buddy. Placing a bowl of milk on the floor, I lean back against the counter, watching the cat hungrily lap the milk, then I kneel down to reassure it. "Don't worry, kitty, Blondie will be back soon. Just need a little time and a little faith."

You're good at taking in strays, aren't you? Look at your history. First Jeannie, and then Gillian. Both of them were strays, both homeless of sorts, I guess. Both needing someone to care for them—to love them. But, heck, who am I kidding? I'm probably your biggest stray, aren't I? I certainly need you to watch my back, and you sure know how to care for me, regardless of the cost to you. You've spent a lot of sleepless nights taking care of me, and what have I done in return? Hung around. You can't seem to get rid of this stray, can you? I guess that's because you finally taught me to believe in myself, and I'm afraid if I leave, that old self-doubt will return. Oh, sure, I show the world the smart, street-wise Starsky, but you know the real me. And despite that, or maybe because of it, you always hang in there, relentlessly sticking by my side. I've probably never told you that you're the reason I believe in myself. You always told me to have faith, especially in those first days at the Academy. If it hadn't've been for your faith in me, I would've given up right from the start. You always had faith in me.

Faith. I'm the one who needs it now. I know I'll find you, buddy. Sometimes it all seems so hard. Just hang in there a little longer for me, will ya? Something will break. I know it, even if no one else does. I know the captain's giving up, even if he doesn't say it. I stopped by Huggy's yesterday. Went in to see if he had any news. He's been leaving no stone unturned, pulling in lots of favors. But we don't seem to be getting

anywhere. He's trying to keep up a brave front for me, but I think he's startin' to have some doubts, too. I can't lose faith, Hutch. I can't lose you.

When I left Huggy's yesterday, he said something to me. Something I keep trying to remember. He told me to "keep the faith." And that's what I'm trying to do, Hutch. I'm keepin' the faith, buddy. You always had faith in me, and you taught me to believe in myself. Believe me when I say, regardless of how long it takes, I will find you.

I will....



Hope

"Oh-h-h-" The groan came out involuntarily as I opened my eyes and tried to move. *Not a good idea*, I thought, as the pounding in my head increased and my stomach turned over and over like I was seated in the front car of a rushing roller coaster. I shut my eyes, hoping to bring the world back to a standstill.

How long have I been here? How'd I get here? Who? Why? The never-ending questions racing through my head make the room spin. Opening my eyes, I keep trying to figure out where *here* is. The cold dampness of the cement floor offers little comfort to my aching muscles, since I'm lying on my side shivering. The small room I'm in appears to be some kind of shed, with junk filling half the space. It's obvious they don't consider me a threat, because they certainly don't seem worried about me finding something in the stack of leftover rusted tools that might help me escape or overpower them. Of course, it would be extremely hard to even stand up, let alone find something useful in that stack of junk. Not when they have my arms tied tightly behind my back and my legs securely bound. Tightly wound muscles keep sending pain shooting through my shoulder blades, protesting angrily the lengthy hours they've been frozen in time. I can't imagine trying to stand.

Shifting my body a little, I'm hoping I can get a better view of my prison, but the resulting agony takes my breath away, painfully reminding me I need to take it slower. Momentarily closing my eyes, I hold my breath and I listen—listen for clues that can help me figure out what's happening, where I am and why.

I hear nothing but silence.

I remember nothing.

Needing to figure out where, if not how badly, I'm injured, I figure it's best to start at the bottom and work my way up. Wiggling my toes and then rotating my ankles, despite the rope chaffing against my raw skin, it appears my legs have suffered minimal damage. Moving my legs carefully, I again hold my breath, anticipating pain—surprised when none comes. Feeling a little more optimistic, I continue upward. Tightening my stomach muscles, they scream back in protest. I quickly suck in some air. A bigger mistake! Fighting to hang on to consciousness, the pain in my mid-section is spreading into my

burning lungs. I roll forward, suddenly welcoming the feel of the cold cement, sucking in air slowly, trying for small amounts, but obviously unsuccessful, since the room is once again beginning to spin. *Concentrate, Hutchinson, concentrate. You have to stay conscious. You'll never get out, if you don't...*

Slowly, the room is coming back into view. Lying still, commanding my muscles to relax, I can feel and hear the pounding in my head. My right eye's swollen almost shut, and it's here that the throbbing is the most intense. When I squeeze my eyes closed, trying to ease the pain, I can feel something dry and crusty pulling on my skin. I can't help but wonder if it's blood, and just how severe was the blow I took to the head. My left shoulder keeps protesting my weight. How badly am I injured? Is there internal bleeding? I can't help wondering again where *here* is? And more importantly—why?

And where is Starsky?

Suddenly afraid, I frantically struggle to sit up. Is Starsky here as well? Is he injured? And if I'm in this bad of shape, how is he?

“Starsky? Are you here? You okay?” Frantic questions are answered with silence. Forcing myself halfway up, I search the room, the onset of dusk making it hard to see as long shadows begin to appear in the shed. There's one tiny window. Shortly I'll be in darkness. How many times has the sun risen and set while I lay unconscious on this floor? How long have I been here? Twenty-four hours? Forty-eight? Longer?

I'm alone and I have to admit feeling a little afraid. I'm alone and hurting, yet at the same time, I can't help feeling thankful that you're not here, Starsk—injured—me unable to help—only able to watch you suffer, possibly die.

But if you aren't here, buddy, where are you? Safe, I hope.

No—I pray.

Running my tongue across my lips, I can feel the cracks. A tall, ice-cold glass of water would sure taste good.... *Stop it, Hutchinson! You're going to drive yourself crazy!*

How long have I been here? Without water, without food? My stomach's still churning, and even the thought of food makes it flip faster, but water...I want...need water....

It's getting dark, Starsk. Where are you? Do you even know I'm gone? I'm lying here shivering, and all I can do is curl into as tight a ball as the pain will allow. If I close my eyes really tight, I can imagine you here, Starsk—deep blue eyes wrinkled in concern, voice soft and comforting, hands gently massaging my shoulders—removing the pain.



At the sound of the door closing, I'm suddenly awake and struggling to open my eyes. My right eye feels like it's almost entirely closed now. From my perspective on the floor,

I can vaguely make out what looks like a plate and cup sitting on the floor directly across from me. Fifteen feet—more like a million. Water. Have they finally brought me water? Licking my lips, I send up a silent prayer of thanks. Sitting up is going to be no easy task, considering every muscle, every bone and every cell protests the slightest movement I make. But I have to get up. I have to get to that water.

Somehow I've managed to make it across the room, buddy. I kept hearing you in my head, Starsk. Telling me I could do it. Urging me to go on. It's taken forever, and I think I might have passed out a couple of times, but somehow I've managed to inch my way across the floor. It's right in front of me and I can't even begin to describe how good it looks; now I just have to figure out how to drink it with my arms tied behind my back. Are you looking for me yet? I sure hope so, 'cause I don't know how much longer I can last. The pain in my gut is getting worse, and I'm guessing that means I'm bleeding inside. Not a good thing. Takin' a breath takes all the concentration I can muster...and, as if I can't remember on my own, my ribs take great joy in reminding me that they are either cracked or broken. I know this is a stupid request, because I know you'd move heaven and earth to find me, but...can you make it quick, pal? I need to see that silly grin of yours. Right now, I think you're the only hope I have.



Sunlight is streaming through the tiny window. Morning. There's a bird outside; I can hear him. Beyond him, there is only silence. Flashes of memory are beginning to come back. I can vaguely remember entering my apartment...a sound behind me...spinning, as I instinctively reached inside my jacket for my gun...a useless lump of metal when it's impossible to reach in time, when faceless arms and hands are used as weapons against you.

It's the beginning of another day, Starsky. I'm feeling dizzy all the time now, and I keep fading in and out. I keep hoping—hoping that you'll be coming through that door any minute. It's hard to stay focused when you're hurting, but you know that already. I've never seen anyone hurting as badly as when Vic Bellamy poisoned you, but somehow you managed to stay focused. Focused enough to help me find Bellamy—focused enough to think of me, instead of the life seeping out of you minute by minute. I have to stay focused now—focused on you and hope that you'll get here. Hope that it will be in time. You are hope, Starsk. My hope. Do you know that? The way you live life, despite what it throws at you, astounds me. You taught me how to hope again.

I'm hoping now....



Love

You're safe and your partner won't leave your side. How typical is that? You've proven it time and time again. When one of you is in danger or hurt, the other doesn't sleep, won't—or is it can't—give up. You live and breathe the one who is missing. Willing the life from your body to flow into theirs.

I've never said this to either of you before, but there are some days it's terrible being your captain. It's terrible having to deal with the pain and uncertainty I watch you go through. This was just another incident to add to the long list. Hutchinson, you disappear for days. Kidnapped, beaten, left for dead, while your partner searches and slowly dies on the inside. Certain he will find you—scared to death he won't.

You two certainly don't make my life easy. Being a police captain is difficult enough, but feeling like I'm your father is near impossible. I worry about you like I do Rosie and Cal. You are like sons to me. I know I haven't told you, but I hope in some small ways I've demonstrated it.

Now, I watch you through the glass window of your hospital room, and I say a prayer of thanks. Thanks, that you will bounce back, Hutchinson. Thanks, that once again you were able to find him, Starsky. Huggy somehow managed to come through at the last minute, didn't he? He finally tapped enough people and pulled in enough favors that something eventually turned.

When Starsky got the word you might be held at an abandoned farm forty miles out of town, there was no controlling him. But, then, he was hell bent on finding you—the only one who has an ounce of control over him. I tried to beat him there because I didn't know what condition you were in, and I guess I was afraid of what he—I—would find. But I didn't make it. I arrived in time to see the paramedics wheel you out. You looked dead, Hutchinson. And your partner looked like he'd seen a ghost.

Five days you were missing. And, I have to admit, for five days I feared you were dead. But Starsky didn't. His inner faith was strong, even if there were some cracks showing on the outside. He believed. With all his heart, he believed. And you are here....

Hutch, I don't know what kept you alive. Hope, I guess. A hope that Starsky would once again be there in time. The doc said if you'd been there another twenty-four hours, they wouldn't have been able to save you. The dehydration, the internal bleeding, the fever would have been too much for your body to survive. But somewhere in there, you kept a spark of hope. And that spark never went out.

Faith and hope got the two of you through this latest crisis. But you know, from a father's perspective, I have to believe it was more than that. Faith and hope aren't always enough. You two share far more than that. You share a soul—a soul that binds you in love. A love that carries each of you through the pain that life continually throws at you. A love that allows one to always be there for the other—whatever the need, whatever the loss. A love that forces both of you to go on living—despite the risks—even when the physical pain and the heartache would be too deep for most to bear.

So, for another night, another day, you are there for each other, and I thank God for that. You are both survivors. And I am proud to be able to call you both “son,” even if I don’t say it. Oh, the world knows I’m not physically your father, but my heart doesn’t know that boundary. So I stand here, looking in, not wanting to intrude. But, know that I am here and that I care. Starsky, your father died when you were much too young. Hutchinson, your father hasn’t learned to appreciate the son God so graciously gave him.

Maybe one day I will tell you of the pride I feel. A father’s pride.

A father’s love.

The End