

In My Partner's Eyes

(follows *Sweet Revenge*)

By Linda B.

Starsky:

Here I sit, once again tucked in this corner of the couch, bundled in a blanket. This has become my favorite corner of the world. Strange, huh? But from this vantage point I can enjoy the sounds and smells of being home again, and—most importantly—I can watch you, instead of you watching me. If I'm really careful and stay perfectly still, you'll finally settle down and get some much-needed rest. Maybe then you won't jump up to ask me for the millionth time if I'm okay or if I need anything. What's that word they use? Mother...mother-henning...yeah, that's it. People would say you're "mother-henning me to death." Actually, it should be "mother-henning me to life." 'Cause as much pain as I've endured as a result of Gunther's assassination attempt, Hutch, it was you—you that gave me a reason to live, a reason to try to make it through each excruciating day.

When I lie here, I open my eyes a little—just a slit—'til I can barely see you through my eyelashes. Knowing you're nearby reassures me and lets me drift off to sleep, but it also makes me realize how much I'm putting you through. Did you know those worry lines on your forehead are getting deeper? And that you frown a lot more now? It breaks my heart, since I know I'm to blame. Your shoulders seem to slouch all the time, too, like the weight of the world sits on them. Even when you sleep, a shadow crosses your face and I can hear you wince and moan. I know it's 'cause your back's killing you again.

You haven't *really* slept in ages, but I doubt you even realize it. The only time you ever left my side was to arrest Gunther, and since then, you've taken on the fulltime job of caring for me. I hate to say it but you look terrible, buddy. And I don't know how to help, how to take back some of that burden—at least not yet. For me, it's a huge struggle to get through each day. But then, you already know that.

You know what else? It's when you think I'm asleep that you let your guard down and I get to watch the real you. The outside is what everyone else sees, but I get to look inside—deep inside—to the person who cares more about me than himself. To the person who's always there, helping me with food, clothes, meds; whatever it is, you'll think of it before I do. In so many small ways you ease my pain and make every day a little brighter, a little easier.

In the hospital, I overheard some nurses say I was a hero. If it wouldn't've hurt so much, I would've laughed. I'm no hero, Hutch, but *you* are. Always takin' care of me no matter how angry, frustrated, uncomfortable I am. I'll never tell you, though, 'cause it sounds too corny and you'd blush with embarrassment.

There were so many days in the hospital that I thought I'd had enough pain. So much I wanted to die. But then I realized I couldn't do that. For a second in the hospital, you let your guard down and I saw the terror in your eyes. You looked like I felt. But then it was replaced with the *look*—the one that dared anyone to get in your way. You pushed back your fears to take care of me. You're my strength, Hutch, and 'cause of you, I can see a tomorrow. I can see a future where I didn't think there'd ever be one.

Hutch:

When I see you lying there on the couch, I resist the urge to come over and throw a pillow at you and tell you that you aren't fooling me. I know you're awake. Truth is, you're probably in pain and too afraid to move. Why do you think you have to put up a front for me, buddy? I can't pretend to know how you feel, but know this—I'll help any way I can. You'll probably say I'm smothering you, but I'd say there's nothing too small for me to do. You haven't said a word yet, but I sense that one of these days Mt. Vesuvius will explode and I'll back off, hands in the air. Until then, maybe we'll both pretend a little longer. We both need the time to give—and to receive. Having you share the couch with me, even though you're huddled in a blanket in obvious pain, makes my heart soar. Gunther didn't win—you're still by my side.

You're a living miracle, Starsk, and brave, so very brave. I couldn't begin to explain how proud I am of you, of your struggle to live. Everyone—the newspaper, the commissioner, Captain Dobey—says you're a hero. You're my hero, not that I'd ever tell you because you hate soapy scenes. In the hospital, I didn't believe you could hang in there, and I was terrified that you wouldn't. Now you face every day full of pain, yet somehow, you remain unbelievably strong. Do you know *your* strength gives *me* the strength to face each new day? In reality, I'm scared to death, but I won't let you down. I promise.

Yesterday in the kitchen, for the briefest of seconds, you reached out—despite the pain—and wrapped your arm across my shoulder. And all seemed right with the world. I want it to feel like that all the time, not for only a second. But it's going to take a long while, a really long while. That's the reality that's so hard to accept—for you *and* for me.

You know, I've been having serious doubts about this job, about our partnership, and, after I messed up with Kira, even our friendship. I've worried about what it's done to us and how I was going to make it up to you. Now...well, now, I realize that nothing—not even Gunther—could break up our friendship. I value it above everything else, and I will do anything to make sure it survives. Taking care of you—watching you get better, little by little—is worth every minute. You're so fragile, and I'm scared to death something simple, something like a cold germ I bring into the house, could kill you. I feel helpless as I watch you, and honestly, I try sometimes not to reach out to help, but it hurts too much to just stand by and watch.

It feels like my heart aches all the time. In the hospital, it ached because I thought I was going to lose you, but now...now it aches because it's bursting with pride. You're not giving up—and neither am I.

I've found again what I thought I'd lost. Us.

In My Partner's Eyes

In my partner's eyes I am a hero
I am strong and wise and I know no fear
But the truth is plain to see
He was sent to rescue me
I see who I wanna be
In my partner's eyes.

In my partner's eyes everyone is equal
Darkness turns to light and the
world is at peace
This miracle God gave to me gives me
strength when I am weak
I find reason to believe
In my partner's eyes.

And when he wraps his arm
around my shoulder
Oh it puts a smile in my heart
Everything becomes a little clearer
I realize what life is all about

It's hangin' on when your heart
has had enough
It's giving more when you feel like giving up
I've seen the light
It's in my partner's eyes.

In my partner's eyes I can see the future
A reflection of who I am and what will be
Though he'll grow older and someday leave
Maybe raise a family
When I'm gone I hope you see how happy
he made me
For I'll be there
In my partner's eyes.

*(Adaptation of "In My Daughter's Eyes," lyrics by James Slater,
as sung by Martina McBride)*

The End