

# Need To Touch

*By Linda B.*

A finger twitched, the only sign of life, as I stared at Starsky's blood pooling on the cement beneath him. I clutched that hand, willing him with all my strength to hang on.

"Hutch, you have to let go now." Captain Dobe's hand firmly encircled both of ours. "The paramedics need to load him into the ambulance."

Instinctively, I knew Dobe's right—every second counted—but I couldn't bring myself to let go. My mind screamed that if I did, I might never feel his warmth, his life, again—that he would no longer protect my back, and I his.

"Hutch!" A command now, and Dobe's grip tightened around mine. "Let go."

I followed the order without question, as I'd been trained to do.

"C'mon, let's get out of the way." The voice had softened, but the authority in it continued to guide me. Suddenly I was helpless, unsure of what to do. I thought I'd never feel as deserted as I had the night I spent trapped under my car. But I was wrong. People were surrounding us—wanting to help, to be there for Starsky, for me—but I remained isolated in the crowd.

The pressure of Dobe's hand on my shoulder guided me toward the ambulance, but I moved in slow motion, numbness spreading throughout my muscles and joints. If Dobe hadn't been holding onto me, I probably would have run in the opposite direction, away from the blood, away from the pain, away from Starsky's dying.

He was dying. I felt it in every fiber of my being, and I knew I wouldn't be able to save him. No one could be shot that many times, lose that much blood, and still survive.

"Get in the ambulance, Hutch."

I stared at Captain Dobe as he nodded his approval. Reaching out to squeeze his shoulder in thanks, I found my throat too dry to speak. Not a sound would come out. His hands guided me in and shut the door.

The ambulance's siren cleared the way as we sped through the traffic. Sitting next to the paramedic who was desperately trying to keep my partner's life from draining away, I glanced out the window at the streets we'd spent our life protecting. Visions of us living and working together flashed through my mind—our first meeting, days at the Academy, becoming detectives, working the streets, caring for each other, sharing dreams—becoming brothers.

My eyes were drawn back to Starsky lying there helpless, dying. I wanted, needed, to touch him, needed to let Starsky know he wasn't alone. But I was afraid and kept my hands clasped together in my lap. It was then that I noticed it, and I stared in disbelief. Starsky's finger had moved again. I waited, afraid to breathe, afraid I was dreaming. It twitched again. Suddenly, I knew it wasn't just an involuntary movement, but that, despite all his pain, Starsky comprehended that I was there, and he was trying to reach out and communicate with me.

As we turned into the hospital's emergency entrance, I enveloped his hand with both of mine, willing him to understand that I would remain at his side and that everything would turn out okay. That he would somehow survive.

It was in that brief moment when I believed everything might not be lost.

*The End*