

Healing

by Madison

I haven't seen my partner since yesterday afternoon when we went our separate ways after spending a long day in court. We wrapped up the Marconi case weeks ago and had finally been called to testify for the prosecution. It was about time that slime ball got what was coming to him. Antonio Marconi had blown into town like a hurricane, and his attempt to muscle in on the established drug trade here in Bay City had resulted in an all-out turf war that had left eight dead, including a young woman and her four-year-old son who'd been caught in the crossfire. Two innocent people, in the wrong place at the wrong time. What a waste. The case against Marconi is tight, and hopefully, he'll be spending the remainder of his pathetic life enjoying all the amenities the state pen has to offer.

As luck would have it, I was the last witness to take the stand yesterday. By the time I finished my testimony, it was almost five o'clock. Court was adjourned for the day, leaving Starsky as the first witness up this morning. We said our good-byes on the steps of the courthouse and agreed to touch base whenever he finished up in court today. Then Starsky rushed off to have dinner with Suzanne, a voluptuous blonde court stenographer he'd met the first day of the trial. I, on the other hand, went home to a solitary apartment and a refrigerator full of leftovers.

Starsky called the station at lunchtime to let me know he was still stuck in court. The defense attorneys had spent the morning bombarding the judge with a slew of motions in a last-ditch effort to free their client. It had been a waste of time, though, since the judge had ruled against them each and every time. I haven't heard anything from him since, which is odd because he should've been out of court hours ago. Oh, well; there's no telling where he is or what's sidetracked him this time. As I try to make some sense out of the mound of files that covers my desk before I call it a day, I decide to pick up a pizza and swing by Starsky's place before I head home. Hopefully, he'll be there and can fill me in on how things went today.

Forty minutes later, I pull up behind the Tomato, grab the pizza and a six-pack of Coors off the seat next to me, and head for his door. Before I can even raise my hand to knock, I hear him call, "C'mon in; it's open!" I can hardly see when I walk in, the difference between the bright afternoon sunlight and the dim interior of the apartment temporarily blinding me. On autopilot, I head toward the kitchen, dropping our supper on the table and my jacket on the back of a chair. Walking back into the living room, I find Starsky sitting cross-legged on the floor between the sofa and coffee table, digging through a shoe box overflowing with photographs. The table is covered with them, as are his legs and the floor around him. I stand for a moment, watching, but he doesn't acknowledge me in any way. He just continues sorting through the contents of the box and laying out the photos in an ever-widening circle. I'm not sure what's going on, but I'm damn sure going to find out. Right now.

“Hey, Starsk,” I venture, bending closer to look at the picture he’s holding in his left hand. Before I can get a good look, he places it back in the box, facedown. He still hasn’t looked up and is just sitting there staring at his now-folded hands. He’s silent, as if waiting for my next move. I decide I’d better make one. “Hey, buddy, what are you doing? What’s going on?”

He answers my question with a question. “Hutch, what was yesterday?”

That wasn’t what I expected to hear, and I have to stop and think for a minute.

“Um...Tuesday. It was Tuesday.”

“No. I mean the date. What was yesterday’s date?”

Okay, that one I know. “It was November fourth.”

Starsky nods in silent agreement, then buries his face in his hands.

It hits me then—like a hard punch to the gut, knocking the breath from my lungs. Oh, God. November fourth. It’s been three years since the day we lost Terry.

“Oh, Starsk.”



He looks up at me then and can tell instantly from the look on my face that I hadn’t remembered. Abruptly, he jumps to his feet, the photos in his lap gently fluttering to the floor. One of them lands next to my right foot, and I look down only to find Terry beaming back at me. I try to find my voice, to find something to say, but the path from my brain to my mouth seems to have short-circuited. The words just won’t come.

How could I have been so thoughtless? Why hadn’t he said anything? He’d gone through the entire day yesterday, hurting and handling it all alone, while I’d been totally oblivious. What kind of friend am I to have forgotten something like that? He moves to the window, shoulders squared, back ramrod straight. As he turns away from me to stare down onto the street below, I try to swallow the lump that’s lodged itself in my throat, and quickly swipe a hand over my eyes to clear my suddenly blurred vision. Now is not the time for me to fall apart. My partner needs me, and I will not—cannot—fail him.

“I’m so sorry. I didn’t remem—”

“I know. Me either.” His whispered admission cuts through the air with the power of a foghorn, stopping my apology mid-sentence. There is a depth of pain in his voice I don’t think I’ve ever heard before. Shoulders slumping, Starsky sags against the window frame, his head resting against the glass. I can hear the hitches in his breathing, and I know he’s close to losing control. I move to stand behind him, wanting to be closer, not yet daring to touch. I take a deep breath, and while my head may be spinning, my heart is ready and willing to jump into the void.



“Starsk, you loved Terry with all your heart, and she loved you back just as much. Nobody in his right mind would question that. It was obvious, to anyone who bothered to look, how much you cared about each other. For two people to find that kind of connection, to share a love so deep and so strong is such a gift. A true blessing.”

Starsky remains statue-still. I don’t know whether or not he’s listening to what I’m saying. I plunge ahead.

“I know how you feel. I do. I’ve been where you are. And no matter how many years you had together or how many good times you shared, it’s never enough. Losing someone you love hurts. But you never lose the love you felt for that person or the treasured memories of the time you had together. You carry them with you every minute of every day, in a special place in your heart. What you lose is the pain. With time and a little distance, we heal, and that’s how it should be. Making that connection with other people and sharing our hopes, our dreams, our needs, our desires, our feelings—ourselves... That’s what makes us who we are, what makes us human. Sure, grief and loss are a part of that. It takes a lot of strength and courage to open yourself up to the risk of that kind of pain, but loving is what life—no, what *living*—is all about.”

I’m not sure if what I said is helping or hurting. Hell, I’m not even sure what I said made any sense at all.

Suddenly, Starsky turns to face me. Head raised, his eyes meet mine, and it feels like he’s looking straight into my soul. I hold his gaze, and my breath, as he contemplates whatever it is he sees there. “I know that here,” he says finally, tapping a finger against the side of his head. Then, closing his fingers into a fist, he thumps his chest lightly and continues. “But in here...” His voice trails off, and, as I open my arms wide in welcome, he moves in close against me.

“It’s still so hard, Hutch,” he cries against my shoulder. The emotions he’s tried so hard to hold back can no longer be denied.

I hold him tighter with one arm and start to gently rub his back with the other. “I know, babe,” I whisper back. “I know. Love’s not an easy thing sometimes. But for what we get in return, it’s worth it.”

We stand there together, holding onto each other until Starsky’s tears slow, then stop all together. His stomach rumbles loudly and he pulls back, offering me a trembling grin. I answer with a warm smile of my own, and, after one last pat on the back, I move away from him and toward the kitchen. “You think you can eat?” I ask, as I throw a couple cans of beer into the freezer to chill, and turn on the oven to reheat the pizza.

“Yeah, I’m starvin’. All of that philosophizin’ really takes it out of a guy.” When he presses the back of a hand to his forehead and pretends to swoon, I know he’s going to be okay.

“Oh, yeah?” I roll my eyes and shake my head. Oh, brother. That’s my partner for you.

“Yeah,” he agrees. He plops down at the table as I slide the pizza into the oven. Even though my back is turned, I can still hear his murmured, “Thanks, Hutch.”

Anytime, partner. Anytime.



Please send comments to [Madison](#)