

# By Mere Inches

## *By The Blintz*

It was one of those days when watching your fingernails grow seems like an exciting proposition. In fact, I was doing just that when Hutch finally looked up from his last report and fixed his tired eyes on mine.

“That’s it,” he said, rising to his feet and stretching the kinks out of his cramped muscles. “You ready to go?”

“Am I?” I replied eagerly, nearly knocking my chair over in my haste to leave. “Let’s get the heck outta here before Dobby finds somethin’ else for us to do.”

We hurried out of the squad room that had held us captive for the last twelve hours and headed for Hutch’s car. As we climbed in, I got a good look at my partner and saw just how tired he was. The skin around his eyes looked bruised against the distinctive pallor of his face. The crease between his eyebrows was deeper than usual, and I thought I saw his hands tremble slightly as he started the ignition. Even his hair, usually so impeccably combed and styled, was a mess, like he didn’t have the energy to do anything about it. In short, he looked like a man who needed about two days with nothing to do except lie in bed and sleep.

Truth is, I was exhausted myself. We’d been working a lot of overtime the past several weeks – so much so, in fact, it had taken us every minute of the last twelve hours to catch up on all the paperwork we had created. It was true that Hutch looked beat, but I knew he wasn’t the only one. Let’s just say that the face in the mirror looking back at me left a lot to be desired these days too.

That’s why I was a little surprised when Hutch decided to take that call on the way home. I had been aggravating him in the car, making him pick colors and numbers so I could test my ESP quotient, and he had protested, but played along. The squawk of the radio interrupted our game, indicating that there was a 2-11 in progress at 10543 Krueger. Hutch looked at me, said the address was only four blocks away, and punched the accelerator. Technically, the ball was in my court. We had already signed out for the day, and I could have easily told Hutch I didn’t want to go. But why should I? Someone needed our help, we were the closest unit, it was a routine 2-11, and we responded. Had I known what was about to happen, we never would have answered that call. So much for ESP.

Hutch pulled his land yacht of a car up to the house and used it to block the driveway. Just before we hopped out to approach the house, our eyes met. Though no words were spoken, I knew what he was trying to tell me. He was saying for me to be careful and that he’d cover my back. I knew my eyes were communicating the same thing.

We went into action silently, practicing a routine born of years of experience together – Hutch to the back door, me to the front. Strictly by the book...our book, that is. It was a simple, but effective, plan. I'd give Hutch a few minutes to get into position, then I'd knock on the door and yell "Police!" at the top of my lungs. The would-be burglars would automatically head for the back door where they'd find Hutch, gun drawn and ready. In the meantime, I'd enter through the front door and be ready to get them if they decided to run for it. Ridiculously simple, but amazingly effective.

I stood outside the front door of the house, making sure to stay out of sight, as I waited for Hutch to get ready. I was just about to make my move when I heard the gunshot. Instinctively flattening myself beside the front door, I felt my heart pounding, my adrenaline pumping as I held my breath. One shot...only one shot, and it wasn't from Hutch's gun. Where was he? Why wasn't he shooting back? I felt an ice cold fist clutch my heart as the hairs on the back of my neck stood straight up. My gut instincts are rarely wrong, and I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt what the answer to that question was. Hutch must be hurt, and hurt badly enough that he couldn't return fire.

In desperation I searched for a quick entrance into the house, and my frantic gaze fell upon a birdbath in the front yard, directly in front of a large, plate-glass window. Without hesitation, I discarded the top of the birdbath and, grabbing onto the base with both hands, I swung it around and heaved it through that window like a discus thrower. I launched myself through the broken glass head first, landing in a forward roll to break the impact and making it possible for me to quickly regain my feet.

Trying to get my bearings, my mind screaming at me to find my partner, I caught a movement out of the corner of my eye. I threw myself into a tall, black kid who was trying to run away. Now, I'm the first to admit that I'm no Hercules, but I'm no weakling either, and even Hutch has referred to me as the brawn of our partnership. But in spite of that, it took every ounce of strength I had to hold my own against the young perp. We scrapped for several minutes, each passing moment intensifying my fear for my partner. I was absolutely certain now that Hutch was injured or even worse; otherwise, he would have been right in the thick of things with me. I didn't dwell on the "or worse" thought that had popped into my head as I finally got the upper hand, threw the suspect to the floor, and handcuffed him securely.

Snapping the second cuff into place, I glanced to my left and saw a hallway. In it was the crumpled form of my partner lying half-propped against the wall.

"Hutch!" His name exploded past my lips as I ran to crouch beside him. Glancing at him, I could see a hole in the upper left side of his jacket. Relief flooded through me as my mind registered several things at once. First, it must be just a shoulder wound, judging by the location of the hole. Sure, there was a lot of blood, but it was just a shoulder wound and people don't die from those. Second, Hutch kept muttering something over and over. "She was just a kid, Starsk, just a kid. She was just a kid..." I had no idea what was going through his head right then, but at least he was conscious and

talking to me. That's when the third thing finally got my attention – the sound of a car starting in the driveway.

“Easy,” I said to Hutch as I leaped over him and ran out the back door to apprehend the other suspect. I chased the suspect's car to the end of the driveway, but it was no use. Whoever was driving had too much of a head start, and there were too many civilians on the street for me to even get off a couple of shots. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to get the license number either.

But I had other things to attend to. Racing back up the driveway and into the back door, I knelt beside my fallen partner. “Hutch!”

“Did you get her?” he asked weakly, not even opening his eyes to look at me.

“No,” I answered quickly as I gently lifted his shirt to check his wound.

Nothing could have prepared me for the sight of that hole high up on the left side of his chest. I thought it was a shoulder wound. A simple, uncomplicated, non life-threatening shoulder wound. But I was wrong. Instead, I was looking at a very serious, very frightening chest wound. And, as hard as I tried, I couldn't tear my eyes away from the sight of the blood pumping through that hole with every beat of his heart.

Even as the reality of the situation hit me full force, I realized Hutch was trying to talk to me. “Starsky. She was just a kid...” He appeared to be having trouble breathing, but he kept on talking, almost like what he had to say was so important that it couldn't wait. I placed my hand on the side of his face as he continued. “I couldn't pull the trigger. I couldn't pull the tr....”

And just like that, he was out. His head lolled limply against my hand as I tried to control the sense of panic welling up inside me. “Hutch?” I asked frantically, gently patting his cheek with my hand. “Hey, buddy, come on. Can ya hear me, huh? Hutch?” There was no response.

It was then that I realized that no help was on the way, and much as I hated it, I had to leave him briefly to call for back up and an ambulance. As gently as I could, I laid him full length on the floor and pulled my handkerchief from my pocket to place over his wound. I hurried to the living room, glaring at my prisoner, and picked up the phone. With trembling hands I dialed the emergency operator and waited impatiently while the phone rang.

Finally, a voice came through the phone line. “Operator.”

“This is Detective David Starsky. I need a black-and-white, a crime lab unit, and an ambulance at 10543 Krueger. We have an officer down at this location.”

“Confirm that address for me again, Detective.”

“10543 Krueger! And tell that ambulance to hurry! My partner’s been shot!” My need to get back to Hutch was so great that I threw the receiver down on the desk without waiting for her reply. I yanked my prisoner to his feet and dragged him into the hallway so I could stay with Hutch and keep an eye on him at the same time. He wasn’t too happy about the way I was handling him, but at that moment, he was just lucky to be alive so I could push him around a bit.

And so, we waited. I listened with increasing panic to the strained, uneven breathing of my unconscious partner as I applied gentle, but firm pressure to the hole in his chest. Shifting position so that my back was to the wall, I lifted his head and placed it in my lap. I stared down into his face, my hand brushing his hair off his forehead, as I tried once again to wake him up.

“Hutch? Hey, partner? Come on buddy, you’re scarin’ me here, huh? Can ya hear me?” I have never felt so alone in my entire life.

Finally, a soft moan escaped his lips as he struggled to open his eyes. “Starsk?”

“Shh...just rest, buddy. Help’s on the way, ya hear? You just stay with me, okay?”

“She was just a kid, Starsk, just a kid.” His breath was coming in short, uneven gasps as he repeated the words he had said earlier. “I couldn’t pull the trigger. I couldn’t shoot her, Starsk. She was just a kid...” His eyes finally opened and he looked up at me, panic and fear written all over his features.

“Hey. Take it easy, huh? It’s okay, Hutch. Just try to relax. The ambulance is comin’, you just hang on, ya hear me? You just hang on.”

“I *can’t* Starsk.... I’m sorry....” and his eyes closed again.

“Hutch? *HUTCH?* Don’t you leave me, you hear me? Hang on, buddy. Please, just hang on.” Tears clouded my vision as I pulled him even further into my lap, hugging him closer to me, willing him to keep breathing for just a little longer. I wasn’t sure if he could feel my arms wrapped around him or if it was helping him at all, but the close contact and the reassuring warmth I felt through his jacket was definitely a comfort to me. No matter what happened, I couldn’t lose him and having a tighter hold on him convinced my desperate heart that we were hanging on together.

Struggling for control, I glanced over at my prisoner to find him staring at Hutch, his expression a mixture of resentment and jealousy. Everything in me wanted to be mad at the kid; after all, directly or indirectly, he was responsible for the state Hutch was in. But the look in his eyes was so haunted, so lost, that I inexplicably felt sorry for him. “What’s your name, kid?” I asked.

My question was met with silence.

“Okay,” I replied agreeably. “You don’t have to tell me that. I’ll find out sooner or later anyhow. Answer this for me instead: Why are you starin’ at my partner?”

Quickly he averted his gaze and began intently studying the tops of his tennis shoes. “He your partner?” He asked in a voice that was far from steady.

“Yeah. Didn’t I just say that?” I was beginning to get a little irritated.

Unfazed by the tone of my voice, the kid continued to speak. “He know how much you care about him?”

I was getting even more annoyed at him. “Yeah, I guess he does,” I replied shortly, thinking it was really none of his business.

“He care that much about you?”

I felt myself flinch as I considered that question, my mind involuntarily remembering all the ways Hutch had shown me how much he cared over the years. I wondered if he’d be around much longer and if I could ever live without that caring as I tried to swallow the growing lump in my throat. “Yeah, he sure does.” I had to blink my eyes repeatedly to clear my vision.

“Just ‘cause your partners?”

I had to control my raging thoughts and really think about that one for a minute, but I couldn’t quite grasp what he was asking. “I don’t follow you.”

He looked uncomfortable and refused to even glance in my direction as he continued. “I mean, I had a partner and she left me here to take a fall, man. And any of my other friends would’ve done the same thing. I bet you’d never leave him behind, not for nuthin’.”

I took a deep breath and let it out slowly. “Well, good partners are hard to come by. I just got lucky.”

“So, how come you care about *him* so much? What makes *him* so special? I ain’t ever seen a cop act the way you do, not even with their partner.” He looked at me then, and it finally dawned on me that this kid had never had anyone care for him at all. I couldn’t tell how old he was, and I had no idea what he had been through in his short lifetime, but I could see how puzzled he was. The poor kid was trying to figure out how to get someone to care about him like Hutch and I cared about each other.

I thought about his question for a few moments and found that I didn’t have an answer for him. What *did* make Hutch and I care so much? Why were we so close? I could’ve told him that we were friends because we worked together and had so much in common,

but Hutch and I really didn't have much in common. Different backgrounds, different likes and dislikes, distinctly different personalities – the more I thought about it, the more I realized how different we were. So, what made us care? What was the magic ingredient that made us friends?

I looked down at Hutch and studied his face for a moment as if I could find the answer written in his features. As if on cue, his eyelids fluttered open and he gave me a weak smile. “Hey.”

Overcome with relief, I smiled back. “Hey yourself. How ya doin’, huh?” I cupped his face in my hand and rubbed his jaw with my thumb.

“I couldn't shoot her, Starsk...” his voice trailed off as a jolt of pain cut through his body. “So young....”

I finally got the message. He was apologizing to me for getting shot. He couldn't shoot the kid because she was so young, so he naturally thought it was his fault that he had a bullet in his chest because he hadn't done anything to prevent it. “Have I ever told you what a Blintz you are? This is not your fault, Hutch. I don't blame ya for not shootin'. Fact is, I wouldn't expect anything else outta ya. It's okay, you're gonna be all right. Now please, stop worryin'?”

He looked up at me, his eyes full of gratitude and pain, and I saw the corner of his mouth twitch in the beginnings of another smile. “Thanks, ol' blue seven mystic.”

Our conversation was interrupted by the sound of sirens approaching the house. I held onto Hutch tightly for one last moment before the paramedics came in and took over. I knew we were going to be separated for a while, and I wanted to spend every minute I could with him before that happened. Looking up, I saw that the young black kid was still staring at me, waiting for an answer to his question. I didn't have an answer. But I was full of gratitude for whatever the magic was that had brought Hutch and I together and kept us there.



I really thought that my luck had finally run out. Meredith and I were securely tied to two chairs, a young kid with a huge chip on her shoulder was pointing a loaded gun at my face, and a master of manipulation was pushing her to pull the trigger. If Hutch had been with me, I wouldn't have been so worried. We work together in perfect sync in sticky situations and I would have known exactly what to do. But Hutch wasn't here; he was laid up in a hospital bed recuperating from a gunshot wound he got because he couldn't bring himself to shoot the very same kid who was getting herself psyched up to shoot me. The irony of the situation did not escape me as I thought about the lady who was in this with me. I had no idea how she would act or react to whatever I did, so I figured I was pretty much on my own.

I needed a plan, and fast, but I was fresh out of ideas so I did the one thing that comes most naturally to me...I started talking. Maybe, if I rambled on long enough I could hit on the solution that would get us out of this mess. After all, I figured that it would be kinda hard to shoot someone right in the middle of a sentence.

I had just started my spiel when I heard the most welcome sound in the world – Hutch’s voice. “Freeze!” Just that one word, but I knew who it was, and I knew that whatever I did from that point on that he would be there, backing me up with that unquestioning loyalty that he does so well. I jumped to my feet, chair and all, and charged headfirst into the kid and her guardian, knocking them both off balance. Hutch was right there behind me, covering the man who had stumbled against a pile of boxes in the corner. He stood there, leaning heavily against the wall with his cannon in his hand keeping a wary eye on his prisoner.

I shuffled over to the corner, still tied to my chair, and sat down in front of him. I cannot describe what a beautiful sight he was, but I tried to keep my tone light. “Who let you out?” I asked. Actually, I had several questions that needed answering. Why was he out of the hospital so soon? How did he get here? How did he know where to find us? How did he know I needed him to find me? There would time for all those and more, later. For the moment, I was just extremely grateful that he was here at all.

He looked at me with tired eyes, too drained to even stand up straight. “Well, we figured you might need some help,” he replied in a soft, gentle tone.

“Oh, we were doin’ all right,” I answered. Pretty tough talk for someone who was still trussed up to a chair.

Much to my surprise, Captain Dobby came charging into the room and lumbered over to our little corner. His face and voice were full of uncustomary concern as he looked at Hutch. “You okay?” he asked.

Personally, I thought it was a stupid question. Hutch was leaning for all he was worth against the wall, his breathing labored, and a fine sheen of sweat covered his face. I was pretty sure that, had the wall not been there, he would have been on the floor.

But, my mule-headed partner answered in the affirmative. “Yeah, I’m okay,” he lied fluently. Then he cast his concerned gaze over to me. “You okay?” he asked in that same soft voice, his breathing even more labored.

I couldn’t help but grin. “I’m okay.” I turned my head to look at Meredith. “You okay, partner?”

She smiled back at me. “I’m fine,” she replied.

I couldn't help myself. "Yeah, you are," and I smiled again. All seemed right with the world. The bad guys were captured, Hutch was out of the hospital, we were working together again, and I knew there were better days ahead.

Dobey's stern voice cut into my thoughts. "Alright, Hutchinson. Let's get these prisoners cuffed and untie our two fine officers here. Looks like we're going to need more back up and a van to cart all of this stuff to holding 'til we can figure out who it belongs to." He gestured to the boxes and loot that still cluttered the small room.

Responding to Dobby's call placed on the way over, two uniforms entered the room and proceeded to secure our prisoners. Dobby crossed over to where Meredith was still tied to the chair and began untying her while Hutch worked awkwardly on the ropes that had me bound. He wasn't making very much progress with only one hand, so one of the uniforms helped him out and I was finally free. I stood and stretched my aching muscles, casting a quick glance around the room to make sure that everything was under control. Then I turned back to Hutch.

He was sitting on the floor at my feet having landed there when he tried to get up from untying my ropes. I reached down a hand and helped him to his feet, not at all happy with the way he looked. His face was positively drenched in sweat now and his breathing was out of control. I put my hand on the side of his face and confirmed my suspicions. Fever. And pretty high too judging from the heat that was radiating from him. I grabbed the chair I had just occupied and helped him to sit down.

"Stay there," I commanded in the sternest tone I could muster. "I'm goin' to talk to Dobby for a few minutes and then I'm gettin' you outta here. I have a feelin' they may be lookin' for ya back at the hospital."

"I'm not goin' back there, Starsk," he replied between breaths. "Just take me home, okay?"

Normally, I can't deny him anything when he gets that pleading look on his face, but this time I was too worried about him to give in. Instead of answering, I gently lifted his jacket and shirt to examine his wound and was even more alarmed to see the bandage there soaked with fresh blood.

About that time, Dobby came over and saw for himself the shape Hutch was in. "Alright, Starsky. You get Hutch back to that hospital, and that's an order," he said sternly when he saw Hutch open his mouth to protest. "Meredith and I will finish up here and file the reports. If we need anything from the two of you, we'll be in touch."

I flashed a grateful smile at him and, with his help, managed to get Hutch into Dobby's car for the ride back to the hospital. I had thought about calling an ambulance, but I knew I could get him there faster than they could. Fear is a pretty good motivator, and I have a reputation for driving a little fast sometimes. Put the two together, and, well, let's just say we made it back to that emergency room in record time.





After what seemed like hours, they finally took Hutch back up to his room. I followed behind, stopping at the pay phone in the lobby to let Captain Dobey know what was going on. They had re-stitched his wound and were starting him on some intravenous antibiotics to fight the infection that was causing the fever. They seemed pretty upset that he had left the hospital without his doctor's knowledge, but no one really said much about it.

I made it up to Hutch's room about ten minutes after he got there and found that his doctor was with him. I eased quietly through the door so as not to interrupt, and I listened intently as he addressed my partner.

"Now, officer," he was saying in a tone I have to admit I didn't like much. "Let me make one thing perfectly clear. I am in charge here, and I really don't care much for patients who have a death wish. Quite frankly, if I had it my way, you wouldn't be allowed back in the hospital. What were you thinking? Running around town fresh out of surgery when you were supposed to be here recuperating? That was a *very* irresponsible thing you did, and if I hear of any more trouble out of you, I will call security and have you restrained. Do I make myself clear? These nurses work hard enough without having to baby-sit you twenty-four hours a day to make sure you don't take another unauthorized leave of absence. I hope you understand the seriousness of this situation. Do something like this again, and I refuse to be responsible for the consequences. Do you understand me?" Shaking an accusing finger in Hutch's face, the doctor leaned over the head of the bed to intimidate him even further.

Something inside of me snapped. Maybe it was his tone of voice or his superior attitude or just the fact that he was threatening my partner who had just risked his life to save mine, but I lost control. I stalked into the room, grabbed the doctor by the front of his scrubs, and slammed him against the wall. "Now...you...listen...to...me!" I ground out between clenched teeth, shaking him on each syllable for emphasis. "You see that man in that bed over there?" I grabbed him by the back of the neck and forced him to look at Hutch. "He's here because he didn't have the heart to shoot a kid. And he left this place against your orders because *I* was in trouble." I slammed him back against the wall, my hands once again tangled in the front of his uniform. "Now you listen to me, *doctor*. That man is my partner, and we wouldn't even be havin' this conversation if it wasn't for his "irresponsible" actions today. So don't you *ever*, and I mean *ever*, talk to him like that again. Do *you* understand *me*?"

I stood there for several seconds glaring at him in my rage, our faces just inches apart. Suddenly, I heard a small sound from the direction of the bed. Hutch was rather delicately clearing his throat. "Uhm, Starsk?"

I wasn't ready to relinquish my hold on the doctor just yet, so I pretended like I didn't hear him and maintained my angry stare into the doctor's eyes.

He cleared his throat a little louder this time. “Starsk?”

“What?” I finally answered, still not letting up on my grip.

“Let it go, buddy. It’s okay.”

I couldn’t let go that easily, so instead I pushed the doctor toward the door. “Go on, get outta here. And don’t you *ever* show your face in this room again. I’ll get him another doctor, one who actually cares about his patients.” I had the satisfaction of watching the man slink out of the room. I swear that if he had a tail it would’ve been tucked between his legs.

Taking a deep breath and straightening my shirt, I turned around and walked over to Hutch, sinking into the ever-present chair at the bedside. I looked up at him rather sheepishly to find him staring at me in amusement. “You’re mighty scary when you’re angry partner. And your eyes take on the most delightful shade of indigo.” By this time he was smiling broadly and I could tell he was trying hard not to laugh.

“Sorry,” I smiled back at him. “But that man had no right to talk to you like that. Even though, “ I added hastily, “he did have a point. You had no business leaving this hospital like you did and runnin’ all over town chasin’ me down like that. What *were* you thinkin’? You do realize that you were shot in the chest and the bullet missed your heart by a matter of mere inches, don’t ya? You could have really hurt yourself.”

He had given up the battle and was laughing outright now, wincing with pain as he tried to draw in a deep breath.

“What’s so funny?” I demanded, even though I found his laughter contagious.

“You.” He chuckled again and shook his head. “You just read that doctor the riot act for lecturing me and then you go and do the same thing. Hardly seems fair.”

“Well, I’m allowed to talk to you like that. I have to put up with you on a daily basis. That gives me the right to talk to you however I want to. But nobody else can.” I felt the beginnings of a grin tugging at the corners of my mouth.

He chuckled again. “Starsky, if I live to be a hundred I’ll never understand you. But, thanks anyhow.” His eyes met mine. “You okay?”

“Yeah.” I answered with a huge smile. “I’m okay.”

“Good. Why don’t you go home and get some rest? You look terrible and a shower wouldn’t kill ya.”

“You sure you’ll be alright if I leave ya here?”

“I’ll be fine. Fact is, these painkillers they gave me are making me pretty drowsy so I think I’ll get some sleep. Go home, hothead.” As if to emphasize his point, he yawned broadly.

I stood up and took his hand in mine. “Get some rest, Blondie. I’ll see about getting ya another doctor and I’ll come back later this afternoon to check on ya. In the meantime, try to behave, huh?”

“Like you?”

I grinned in spite of myself. “You’d better do better than that or they’ll kick ya outta here for sure!”

I squeezed his hand and headed out the door.



Several hours and a good, hot shower later, I found myself once again walking down the hallway to his room. I had tried to sleep, but my thoughts were in a turmoil. Every time I closed my eyes I saw that hole in his chest and heard the doctor telling me the bullet missed his heart by a matter of inches. What if he’d been standing a little more to his left? What if her aim had been a little better? What if he’d been an inch or two taller? Since the bad guys were behind bars, my mind had a chance to try to process everything that had happened, and I couldn’t seem to conquer the fear that I felt when I thought about it. So, I came back to the hospital in the hopes that seeing him alive and breathing would help dispel my concerns.

The lights were off when I got to his door and I entered quietly to find him sleeping. I crossed silently to the bed and sat down in the chair, studying his face. Even in sleep the pain was still evident in the deepened lines around his eyes and mouth. I knew that he had increased his discomfort by coming to rescue me, and I was humbled by the clear evidence of how much he cared.

My thoughts drifted back to the hallway in that house where he was shot, and I thought of the young black kid and his questions. Why *did* Hutch care so much? What would make him risk his life to save mine? Why would he endure so much pain and put my welfare ahead of his own? I knew, if the tables were turned, I’d have done the same thing. Hutch and I had a long history of taking care of each other no matter what the cost, but I couldn’t quite figure out why. What made us care? What made us friends? Could it just be fate? If Hutch and I hadn’t met at the academy and I’d have been partnered with someone else, would it have been the same? Could I have cared about another human being as much as I cared about him?

I threw that idea away instantly. There had to be more to it than just fate and circumstance. I’m not generally a religious man, but I had to think that God had brought

us together and in doing so, had enriched both our lives. Our friendship was too precious to chalk it up to a stroke of fate or circumstance.

And that's when the answer came. Love was the key ingredient. Hutch and I loved each other with a unique kind of love that could only have been put there by the Author of Love Himself. There could be no other answer. Whatever His reason, God had seen to it that we were together and that our love for one another defied any rational explanation except for divine intervention.

I looked down at Hutch once more and breathed a prayer of thanks that we were both still on this earth together. I thought about what the doctor had said, and how that shot could have killed him had it been a couple of inches lower. Yeah, that bullet had missed his heart by mere inches, but somehow I hadn't. By the grace of God, I had landed right in the middle of Hutch's heart and I found that it was a very good place to be. I smiled to myself and laid my head down on top of my folded arms on the edge of his mattress. In his sleep, he reached out a hand and grabbed my forearm, somehow knowing he would find it there. I closed my eyes and rested peacefully for the first time in days. We would live to fight again, together. I couldn't ask for any more than that.



### ***The Blintz***

*October 8, 2001*