

# *Battle Scars*

by Brit

The Torino's tire squealed only slightly as it came to a halt in the parking lot beside the "The Harbor." The ocean-side restaurant's lot was packed full and it was only by luck that Starsky was able to find a parking space at all.

"I don't know, Starsk. It looks pretty full." Hutch's expectations of a quiet birthday dinner in such a reputable establishment were quickly waning. He had been pleasantly surprised when his partner suggested the new restaurant as their destination. Typically Starsky's idea of "fine cuisine" usually came with fries.

"Awh, c'mon partner. I know the hostess, maybe she can slide us through." Starsky bounded out of the car and jogged around the front of it to reach the passenger door. With a flourish, the brunet opened the door and bowed for Hutch to step out.

Rolling his eyes and sighing, Hutch climbed out and adjusted his jacket. After five years as friends and two and a half as partners, he had yet to curb his partner's antics, and if he examined himself honestly, he wasn't so sure he really wanted to.

The restaurant was everything Starsky had described it as and its reputation had proceeded itself. Starsky walked back from the hostess's station to where Hutch waited, admiring an original oil painting gracing the entryway.

"Marybeth says it's at least an hour wait, even with our 'connections'."

"Some connections. Well, do you want to wait? I mean, we could always go back downtown to The Pits."

"No way! This is your birthday, we're gonna do it up right. What do ya say we get a coupla them fancy imported beers from the bar and wander down the beach. The sun's starting to set. We can go girl watchin' and work up an appetite."

"Sure, why not. It's not like we're on tomorrow."



Twenty minutes later the two detectives were walking the shoreline, almost a mile from the restaurant, shoes and beers were firmly in hand and the cuffs of their slacks rolled up mid-calf. Loud music finally reached their ears from a party in full swing further up the beach.

"Looks like quite a bash. Hey! What do you say we crash it?"

“Right, Starsk. Most of those people are in their swimsuits. Gee, you think they won’t notice us in dress shirts?”

“Awh, c’mon. Where’s your sense of adventure?”

“Two steps behind my sense of survival. Remember what happened the last time you talked me into crashing a party?”

The darker man smiled sheepishly. “Yeah, but the bruises faded after a week or so. C’mon!” Hutch shook his head at his partner’s enthusiasm and altered his course to skirt the party. Starsky hid his smile and kept pace with the blond. As they got closer to the group, Hutch began recognizing some of the party-goers.

“Hey, Starsk, isn’t that McPherson from R&I? And I think that’s Mitchell and Donaldson from Forensics. Is that Minnie dancing with...*Huggy*? What are they...?”

Starsky’s grin finally broke free. Dark blue eyes fairly danced as he clinked his bottle against his partner’s in a toast. “Happy Birthday, buddy.”

Hutch shook his head in astonishment as his partner enthusiastically jogged up to the crowd. The blond smiled and took a large swig of his beer before launching into his own trot. Starsky swung around, jogging backwards to make sure his friend was following. A delighted laugh escaped him at the look of wonderment on Hutch’s face. The entire group totaled almost fifty of Hutch’s closest friends and co-workers. As Starsky broke into the crowd, the small mob turned in Hutch’s direction, instantaneously breaking in to a rather off-key rendition of “Happy Birthday.” Hutch’s jog slowed as he finished his approach, shaking his head with a broad grin.

“All right! All right! You’re all under arrest for disorderly conduct and first degree murder for slaughtering that song!”

Cheers and rounds of birthday wishes were issued with pats on Hutch’s back. The surprise party blew into full swing as friends gathered around the bonfire with plates of food, courtesy of Huggy’s grilling expertise. Davidson and Randolph from Narco had brought their guitars out and were beginning a jam session, prompting some dancing from some of the more inebriated guests. A plate of food was unceremoniously slapped into the guest of honor’s hands by his partner.

“Thanks, Starsk.”

“Did I surprise you?”

“Starsky, you always surprise me.”

“Happy Birthday, partner.”



By 1:00 A.M. the majority of the party guests had left, leaving the two partners to help Huggy and a couple of his lady friends to clean up the debris.

“I take it you approved of the festivities, oh Man of the Hour?” Huggy asked rhetorically.

“Huggy, you’re the best.”

“Of course, of course. But I usually only hear that from the ladies, if you catch my meaning.”

Starsky finished putting a small grill in the trunk of Huggy’s car. “I think that’s it, Hug.”

“No, wait. One more.” Hutch trotted over to one of the picnic tables to a large galvanized tub that had held the beer and ice. As he lifted, a sharp edge caught at the unprotected flesh of his right arm, causing him to gasp in pain and drop the container.

“Whatd’ya do?” Starsky was immediately at his side and extended the wounded limb in front of him to get a better look.

“There was a sharp edge on the tub, that’s all.”

“I don’t know, you’re bleeding pretty good.” Starsky swatted at Hutch’s hands as the blond tried to apply pressure to the cut with his open hand. “Stop that, you don’t know where that’s been. It might not be sanitary.”

“Starsk....”

“Here, man.” Huggy handed over a clean handkerchief for Starsky to wrap around the bleeding wound.

“There, all better. Unless... when’s the last time you had a tetanus shot?”

“Oh, for crying out loud Starsk, it’s not that bad. Thanks Hug. Here, I can get the tub.”

“No problema, amigo. I got it.” The black man hefted the offending tub, being careful of the rough edge. “You dudes want a ride back to your car?”

Starsky looked at his partner.

“Naw.” Hutch responded. “It’s a nice night. We can walk back. Thanks again, Hug. It was the best.”

“Anytime, man. What it is.”

“What it was.” Starsky intoned with a grin.

“What it will be.” Hutch followed up with a self-satisfied smile.

Huggy rolled his eyes. “You’re some weird cats. C’mon ladies. It’s time for a party of our own.”

Huggy shut the trunk of his car and opened the passenger door for his two companions. Starsky and Hutch watched appreciatively as the two woman poured into the front seat.

Hutch glanced at his partner. “It was a good party.”

Starsky stretched appreciatively. “Yeah, I think so, if I do say so myself. You ready to head back?”

“You in a hurry?”

“Nope. Got no deeds to do, no promises to keep....” Starsky finished the rest of the song’s line in a bit of a warble, having forgotten some of the words. The remainder came out in a ‘let the morning limes drop all it’s la la’s on meeeee, life I love you, all is groooooovy’ as he plopped down on the top of the picnic table. Starsky then spun himself around to face the seascape. The moonlight danced across the incoming tide, touching the crests of the waves with silver.

Hutch joined his partner, sitting on the bench next to the brunette’s feet. His right arm companionably rose up to rest on his partner’s knee. Starsky looked down to check on his bandaging. The bleeding had slowed almost to a stop, but had produced a considerable spot of blood on the white cloth.

“You sure that’s alright? If you don’t get it checked out, it might get infected.”

“I’m fine.”

“You’re gonna have a scar....”

“It’s not like it won’t be the first one. I’ll just add it to my collection.”

“Collection? And you say *I’m* weird?”

“Sure. See this one here?” Hutch extended his left forearm and pointed to a two-inch long pucker that ran across his forearm. “Barbed wire. Thought I had cleared the lower strand when I was cutting across my grandpa’s pasture.” The blond then lifted his right leg and clasped his calf. A rosette of skin gathered above his ankle. “Here I got spiked by another runner’s cleat during a track meet my Junior year. That one hurt.”

“Yuck. Did you deck him back?”

“Starsk, where’s your sense of sportsmanship?”

“Right behind my sense of justice, pal. What about the one on your back? The one you got at the academy.”

“Oh yeah, during tactics.”

“I told you to hide *behind* that dumpster—not *in it*.”

“Yeah, but my way made sure no one could see me.”

“Your way made sure everybody could smell you.”

“Ah, you just can’t live it down that I scored higher than you.” Starsky’s response was to simply grunt. The two men continued watching the ocean’s hypnotic dance to the shoreline. “What about you?”

“What about me what?”

Hutch sighed in eternal patience. “What about yours?”

“What about my what?”

“Starsky, what were we just talking about?”

“Oh, yeah, well, I’ve got a few...” Starsky hedged.

“So come on, cough up the stories. What’s the matter, got a few caused by the irate husbands of some of your dates?”

“Funny, very funny. Did anyone ever tell you you should become a comic if you’re ever canned from the force?”

“Come on, what about the one on your back?”

“Which one?”

“You mean you’ve got more than one?”

“Yeah, one’s a bit....uh....lower.”

Hutch’s eyebrows raised up. “Oh?”

“Get your mind out of the gutter, it’s not from a lady or her husband. That....” Starsky sighed and forced his gaze back to water. “That one came from my dad’s belt.”

Hutch's grin quickly fell away at the revelation. The hand that had been dangling across his partner's leg reached over to grip the brunet's forearm.

"Starsk!"

"Hey, no—it's okay. I don't want you to get the wrong idea. My dad was a great guy, really. It's not like he beat me a lot or anything. I had just gotten into some trouble with some of the guys on my block and my dad needed to set me straight. He...he had just had a really rough day and came home to the mess I was in and it....set him off. He just...he just got carried away. When it was all over he cried like...like I don't know what. I'd never seen him cry before. That scared me more than anything else. He never hit again, no matter how bad I was." Starsky turned a small smile at his partner and rested his hand on top of the one that clenched his arm. With a sigh and a self-deprecating grin, he continued. "The one on my right shoulder is from when I was too stupid to get out of the way of some ground fire."

"That's right. You told me about that day. It must of been hell."

"Nam was certainly no picnic." Starsky glanced down at his partner with a grin that immediately vanished when he realized the melancholy that was overtaking Hutch. The joy that the surprise party had brought was quickly being reduced to something else. "Hey, c'mon. I've got some 'good' scars, too."

"*Good* scars? Starsk, that's bizarre."

"Hey, you started this conversation. Here, look." Starsky unbuttoned his right shirt sleeve and drew it up to reveal a one-inch line on his wrist.

"So what's that from?"

"That is when Dan Goldschmidting and I became blood brothers back in the fourth grade."

"Really? You had a blood brother?"

"Yep, me and Danno were tight back then."

"So, what ever happened to good old Danno?"

"They moved away during Junior High. We used to write a bit, but then we just kinda lost touch. He was a great buddy. Got into all sorts of messes hanging around him. I wonder what ever happened to him."

"Sounds like you were good friends."

“Sure, we were. Everybody needs to have somebody like that growing up, ya know? Somebody to get in trouble with, hang out with, chase girls with. What about you? Jack Mitchell was probably your blood brother.”

“Naw. I never had one.”

“Really? You didn’t have a blood brother as a kid?” Starsky looked incredulous. “I mean, it definitely sounds like something you yahoos in Minnesota would of done.”

Hutch’s gaze traveled over the rolling ocean, seeing past time and space into a cold and sterile childhood.

“Things were different for me growing up, Starsk. I know you and Nicky were once close, not like now. I mean, I can’t imagine the things you went through losing your father, then being sent away. But when you talk about some of the friends and family you had growing up, how close you all were, well...I almost get a little jealous.”

Starsky’s eyebrows shot up, but he didn’t speak. Hutch rarely went down this road and he didn’t want to break the moment.

“You know how I’ve told you that my parents both came from money and my father had a position with lots of prestige. They had a certain social status to uphold and that kept them very busy, but didn’t leave a lot of time for Katherine and me. And Kathy, well, we’re about as different as two people can be. My mother dressed her up like a porcelain doll every chance she got. So growing up, we weren’t exactly encouraged to play with each other and she wasn’t quite the type to build a snow fort or go exploring the creek behind my grandfather’s farm. It was like...it was like four completely separate and total strangers growing up in the same house. Occupying the same space. I guess I was pretty lonely as a kid. It was such a weird thing—feeling like you were a stranger in your own home. It didn’t even seem like we were a family, not really. Not in the sense of really being a part of each other’s lives.

I wanted so much to feel like I belonged somewhere, was a part of something. I just didn’t feel that connection with my family. So, I tried getting that kind of connection with my friends. But they didn’t need me the same way that I seemed to need them, so I always got disappointed and hurt. After awhile I learned just to keep my feelings to myself and keep my distance.” Hutch laughed a little, mocking his own childhood wistfulness. “That’s why I always thought if my parents would just have another kid—a brother—I’d have somebody to...well, belong to.”

Starsky hated to hear the remnants on pain and longing in his partner’s voice. As the moonlight glinted off his pale, blond hair, it was easy to imagine Hutch twenty years ago as a lonely, isolated child. “But that wasn’t in their plans, huh?”

“Nope. They had the ideal two children, one dog, two cars, and a house on the hill. They had set up the perfect image of an upper-middle class family. But a brother...” Hutch

tossed a flat stone across the moonlit waves. "I figured a brother would be that friend that I was always searching for. He would have been someone I could do stuff with, you know, show him around my grandfather's farm, teach him to ride, and fish. And since I was the older brother he'd have to do what I said. He would have stood by me when the older kids pushed me around. He would...he would simply be a part of me and I wouldn't be able to imagine my life without him in it." Another stone joined the first in the ocean's tide. "When it was clear that my parents had no intention of giving me a brother, I figured I would find a friend that could be the next best thing. I tried to fill that void that need for love and acceptance and belonging with friends. But I never really knew how. So eventually I just quit trying."

A silence lingered between the two men as Hutch's words brought images to each of their minds. Finally Starsky spoke quietly.

"That's a heck of a lonely life for a kid to live."

Hutch merely shrugged his shoulders, a bit embarrassed by his revelation. "I got by. I mean, sure I had friends. On the surface, I was the picture of contentment and confidence. But I just kind of closed down. After a while you're tired of being disappointed. Sometimes though.... sometimes I thought I would die from the loneliness of it all. What was so rotten about me that no one wanted to be my best friend? I thought it would be so neat to have a blood brother. To have that bond with someone that was more than friendship. The few friends I managed to get close enough to thought it was weird, so that just kinda reinforced my feelings of isolation. Even Jack Mitchell thought it was a stupid idea and he was a pretty good friend." Hutch seemed to come back to the present. "So, no. All that to say, I never had a blood brother growing up."

There was such an underlying ache of loneliness in Hutch's voice that made Starsky's heart wrench. Here next to him was probably the finest man he had ever known and it hurt him to think that there was still this hidden void in his life. Hutch was everything a best friend should be: kind, loyal, caring, brave, steady, honest, considerate. Everything a brother should be. And everything his own brother was not. Starsky knew he would have been honored as a kid to have had Hutch declare himself a blood brother. He would be honored....

Starsky was quiet so long that Hutch turned his wandering gaze toward his partner. He was surprised to see the azure eyes burning with a fire that had nothing to do with the smoldering coals of the bonfire nearby. Starsky reached down into his pocket, his gaze never wavering from his partner's. A flash of light reflected from the jackknife as it appeared. The light distracted Hutch's gaze and he watched in quiet fascination at the blade expertly lowered itself onto his partner's right arm, nicking the flesh of his wrist. A tight lump formed in Hutch's throat as scarlet blood pooled on Starsky's wrist, his flesh washed pale in the moonlight. No sound trespassed on their vigil except for the crashing waves.

Gently, Starsky unwrapped the still damp bandage from Hutch's wrist and laid his own freshly nicked arm against it. The blood that pulsated through a once-confused and hurting kid from Brooklyn joined and blended with the blood from a once-lonely and empty child from the Midwest. No two upbringings could have been more different, but the need for love and acceptance—the need for a brother—bonded them as nothing else could.

Starsky wound the soiled cloth around both wrists, binding them together as he recited a childhood pledge in a hushed and solemn voice:

*“By blood we have been bonded  
I vow to you, my friend  
I choose you as my brother  
until this life shall end.”*

As Starsky's hand gripped his partner's arm, his voice softened further. “Of all the scars I have, there'll be one I treasure.”

Hutch returned friendship's grip, his eyes filling. *“Me and Thee, Brother.”*



*~Brit  
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