

Heart Song
A Sequel to Heart Sight
by Brit

“NO!”

The shout came from his bedroom, and I knew instantly that the worst had happened. Okay, not *the* worst. *The* worst would have been that all of this was permanent and I refused to consider it as a possibility.

I rushed in from the bathroom where I’d just started shaving. Starsky was sitting on the edge of his bed, the palms of his hands crammed into his eyes.

I knelt in front of him and tried to pull his hands away. He’s as strong as he is stubborn and it took me a couple of tries. “C’mon, Starsk! Take it easy—the doctor said this would happen, remember? Easy, buddy, easy....”

He finally gave in, or perhaps gave up, and let me pull his hands down into his lap. He sat with his eyes screwed shut and refused to look at me. His jaw muscles were clenched so tight I wouldn’t have been surprised to hear his molars crack.

“So, what happened? Is your vision fuzzy or do you see spots? What is it?”

Last night we had celebrated the beginning of his sight returning. A few weeks ago we had assisted at an accident—a tanker illegally carrying LP gas had blown up, almost frying my partner. Starsky had taken a substantial blow to his head that had caused swelling and damage to the blood vessels supplying the optic nerves. As a result, small clots had formed, preventing his sight. Weeks of treatment had begun dissolving the clots, and last night as we sat at our favorite stretch of beach, I was describing the sunset to him. I was floored when Starsky began to make out shapes and colors.

We had interrupted the dinner of the specialist treating Starsky and met him at the hospital. The doctor was pleased at the progress, but cautioned us that complete healing would take more time, and told Starsk to continue with the steroids until the next scheduled exam. He also gently explained that as the clots dissolved, there would be periods of limited sight. It wasn’t uncommon during the healing stage for vision to be blurry or for “spots” to block portions of his sight, or, he finally told us, for sight to be eliminated completely, though only temporarily.

Apparently, this was one of *those* times.

Of course, all Starsky had absorbed from the doctor last night was that the medication was working and that his sight had returned, however blearily. I knew the reality of the situation and was prepared to be there for him when it came crashing in.

Starsky fell back onto the bed, and threw an arm up over his eyes.

“Come on, Starsk. Remember what the doctor said? This is to be expected and it won’t last, right?” When I got no response, I knew my initial guess was correct—great detective that I am. “You can’t see at all, can you?”

“No.” As quietly as he spoke, there was no disguising his frustration.

I sat on the bed next to him and wiped the shaving cream dripping off my jaw with a towel. Some of it had already fallen off my chin onto my jeans. “Well, it’s probably a good thing you can’t see that ugly mug of yours this morning, anyway. Does your hair always look like that when you first get up?”

I knew the pillow would be forthcoming, but I let him hit me anyway. “That was brilliant. Now you’ve got shaving cream on your pillowcase.”

Then I ducked.



While Starsky was in the shower I called the station. We had given Captain Dobe the good news last night from the hospital, so I figured I should update him on the latest.

Afterwards, I was frying Starsky an egg to slip between two pieces of buttered toast—which was easier for him to navigate than a plate of eggs—when I heard a *thump* coming from the other room followed by a curse.

“You okay?”

There was a moment of silence before a very disgusted “Yes!” was hollered back at me.

“You want some help?”

It didn’t take him as long to tell me what I could do with my offer. All the same, I turned the burner off and went back to the bedroom. Starsky was sitting on the floor, putting his jeans on. “What are you doing on the floor?”

Starsky glared in my general direction. *Man.* I’ll never get use to those eyes being sightless. Thank God, I won’t have to.

“What does it look like, Sherlock?”

I was about to offer a witty response when his head cocked to one side and he sniffed. “What are you burning in there?”

It’s true that when one sense is limited, the others make up for it. I sniffed as well, then made a beeline for the kitchen. “Toast!”

Well, I had remembered to turn off the burner under the eggs, but had forgotten that his lousy toaster sticks. By the time he finished dressing, the eggs were done and I was scraping the sides of the toast into the sink to get rid of the blackened part. Starsky made his way in cautiously and stood beside me. By the time I scraped away the burnt crumbs, there wasn’t much more left than the crust.

“*Cajun* breakfast again, Hutch?”

“I keep telling you it’s a very popular form of cuisine.”

“Mm-hm.”

Okay, so he only believed me the first few times I fed him that line. I could only hope the rest of the day went better.



So much for hope—the day went from bad to worse.

Starsky’s eyesight did come back, but only partially. His vision was blocked by spots, which he described as ‘looking through a pair of sunglasses with a black blob painted in the middle of each lens’. He remained frustrated, and while he tried not to show it, his annoyance permeated into everything he did and said.

I stayed with him throughout the day, making calls from his apartment to help Logan and Roper. They were the team Dobey had assigned to follow up on the protection racket that almost got Starsky and me killed a few days ago. I had Huggy and every snitch I could come up with tracking down a joker named DiAngelo, who was threatening shop and restaurant owners from Venice to East LA for protection money. It was his goons that had torched a rather upscale restaurant, forcing Starsky and me to play Butch and Sundance and make a spectacular second-story jump out of an inferno. Oh, sorry. You’ve already heard that story, huh?

Anyway, I hadn’t gotten very far working off the phone and really needed to connect with a few people on the street. You typically get better results from a fink when you’re face to face. The presence of money—or muscle—just seems to get results a whole lot quicker. It was nearing happy hour, just about the time that all the good snitches come crawling out from under their rocks, and I needed to hit the streets.

I called Minnie, despite Starsky's heated protest that he didn't need a babysitter. I just couldn't stand to leave him on his own, limited sight or not. Besides, I figured once Minnie got there and the two started flirting like they do—Starsky pours it on and Minnie feigns innocence, though we all know she's eating it up—he'd lighten up a bit.

I was just heading to the door to let Minnie in when the phone rang. I changed directions to pick up the phone. "Starsky, can you get the door?"

He shot me a dirty look, but hauled himself off the sofa where he'd spent the day dozing with the stereo on. His steps were actually even more hesitant with his limited vision than when it was completely gone. After banging into his fan-back chair, he made it to the door.

I turned my back on him and grabbed up the phone. "Hutchinson."

"Hey, Hutch, this is Roper. Logan and I have a lead on where DiAngelo and his boys are going to be in a few hours. We just got the warrant and figured you'd want to be in on the collar."

"Terrific. When and where?"

Roper gave me the address, and since I didn't have any pens or paper within reach, I simply repeated it to myself a few times. I hung up and grabbed my jacket. Minnie and Starsky were already in the kitchen, throwing around innuendoes over Chinese takeout. Whatever trips your trigger, I guess.

Starsky cocked his head in my direction, trying to see me better out of his peripheral vision and failing. "Who was that?"

"Roper. He and Logan just invited me to an Extortionist Busting Party."

Starsky was excited by the possibilities of retaliation. "DiAngelo?"

"...is the guest of honor. We're going to go pick up him along with his muscle squad."

Starsky stood quickly. "Well then, what are we waiting for?"

Minnie stood and looked at me for confirmation while putting a restraining hand on Starsky's arm. "Hang on a minute, honey. You mean to tell me you invite a girl over for dinner, then you dump her for some blond?"

"Hey, it's nothing personal, sweetheart, but I'm going—"

"*Nowhere*. Come on, Starsk, you stay here with Minnie. I promise I won't stay at the party too late."

“Not without me, you aren’t!”

I put my hand on Starsky’s shoulder. “Look, Starsk, its no big deal-”

“If it’s no big deal, then there’s no need for me to have to stay-”

I knew I had to get going and was losing patience. “Starsky, *no*. Roper and Logan will back me up, all right? I don’t need you to...”

I stopped myself, but it was too late. What I *didn’t* say was heard as surely as if I’d shouted it across the room. “Starsk, I didn’t...you know what I mean.”

“Yeah. No problem.”

I could have kicked myself at that moment. Instead, I just turned and walked out the door.



It was a two-hour drive out of the city. I met Roper and Logan clear past the eastside, at a diner just off the highway. There wasn’t a whole heck of a lot out this way, just the occasional truck stop, strip club and rest area. The locals didn’t come this far out unless they were leaving the city, so it was mostly inhabited by Las Vegas tourists and truckers en route somewhere.

I parked my car next to theirs and climbed in their back seat. Logan handed me his field glasses and pointed toward the back of the diner. I focused them and could make out a dark-complexioned man in a three-piece suit seated in the back booth talking to two others across from him. “That DiAngelo?”

“None other.” Roper took the last swallow of coffee and crumpled the paper cup. “We know who the two bruisers with him are, but we weren’t sure if they were part of the three who tried to take you and Starsky out at the restaurant.”

I looked again. The sizes and coloring were similar, but I couldn’t be sure until I saw their faces. “Could be. We’ll know for sure in a minute.” I handed Logan back his binoculars. “So what’s the plan?”

Logan turned in his seat to face me. “There’s a back door dead center, just off the kitchen. Roper’ll go around and take the back, and you can cover me while I go see if Mr. DiAngelo wants some dessert before I give him his check.” Logan waved the arrest warrant with a smile.

I liked the way he thought. “Lets hope he’s a big tipper.”

Before he got out of the driver's seat, Roper checked his weapon, then slapped his partner on the arm. There was an easy friendship between the two partners, and it naturally made me think of my own. I felt a twist of remorse in my gut and knew I'd have to make it up to Starsky when I got back.

Once Roper casually made his way around the back of the diner, Logan and I got out of the car and entered from the front door. There were booths on either side of the entrance, and only a few patrons within. As Logan went left and made a beeline for DiAngelo at the back booth, I hung back, watching the other patrons and diner staff. I didn't want them getting in the way if there was gunfire, and I couldn't be certain that any of them weren't on the bad guys' side.

Logan had his hand on his belt holster as he approached the table. "Vincent DiAngelo? Police. I have a warrant—"

He never got to finish—we'd been set up.

I think I saw the bullet tear through Logan's side before I heard the gun go off. The room exploded around me as the two men seated with DiAngelo turned in my direction, sawed-off shot guns pulled from under the table and cradled in each of their arms. The other patrons screamed as they opened fired in my general direction and I fell to the floor.

I popped up long enough to return fire, striking the first shooter high in the chest. I ducked back down and some movement to my right caught my eye. Behind the pickup counter, the short order cook had drawn a semi-automatic. As soon as Roper burst into the kitchen, the cook took him out with a shot to the chest. Above me, the back of the booth burst into splinters with another round from DiAngelo's man, and just as I was beginning to stand to return fire, the cook turned his gun on me.

The bullet tore into my right arm, searing me clear through. The pain rippled up into my chest, as the force of the blow threw me sideways, right out the front door and down the concrete steps. The Python dropped from my hand as I fell, my arm and hand numb from the elbow down. I snatched it back up with my left and did the only thing I could do at that point—I ran like the devil was on my tail.

I heard more gunfire behind me but kept on running. Roper's car offered me my only protection and I prayed he'd left the keys in the ignition. If he didn't, I could at least call for backup. Logan and Roper were down, probably dead.

I was on my own.



I fell when I reached the far side of the sedan. Blood was drenching my shirt, and I was beginning to feel dizzy. My stomach was rebelling against the pain, but I knew if I gave into the luxury of vomiting or passing out right then, it would cost me my life.

More shots struck Roper's Buick, deflating the tires and shattering the windows. If I didn't do something fast, they'd be on me in a heartbeat.

I managed to get to my knees, and while my intent was to stand and return fire, all I could do was throw my head back against the pain and grit my teeth. The blood soaking my shirt caused it to stick against my skin, all the way to my jeans. Standing was no longer an option, so I simply raised my gun and fired blindly through the obliterated windows of Roper's car. Before I could jerk open the passenger door to get to the radio, the world was starting to tip and spin, and I fell over onto the dirt parking lot, the dust lifting, then settling on my bloody shirt. I gave in to the need to vomit and simply lay there in a cold sweat.

It was going to be a helluva way to die.



The sound was familiar, but I couldn't quite place it at first. The buzzing in my ears was replaced by a roar, then a squeal, and I found myself face to face with my reflection in a mag rim.

Starsky's blue Adidas came into view next; then I heard the familiar bark of his Baretta. I know I heard his voice, but I couldn't tell you what he said. I felt him pull me upright, and saw the fear on his face, but then the darkness came.



I guess I wasn't out for very long. I think it was all the swerving Starsky was doing as we tore down the interstate that brought me around. How he managed to stuff me in the back seat and drive away without getting us both killed is beyond me. I was about to push myself into a less painful position when a bullet shattered the rear window, showering me with glass splinters and fragmenting the windshield just to Starsky's right.

Starsky darted in and out of the rush hour traffic, scattering the other vehicles off the road. Not only was he trying to elude whoever was chasing us, he was also trying to protect the other drivers from the gunfire, even if it meant sending them off the highway and into the desert.

"I hope you're driving like that on purpose."

The look he gave me was anger mixed with relief, until he was forced to duck again when another shot slammed through the car. "Sight came back just after you left."

"How'd you get past Minnie?"

He was about to answer when another bullet stuck the windshield, spider-webbing it further.

“How many?”

Starsky shrugged. “Three cars, I think. Couldn’t stay and fight at the diner, I didn’t have my gun and yours was empty. How you holding up?”

“I’ll live. How did you-?”

I was interrupted by the radio. “California Highway Patrol to Bay City Zebra Three. Backup units en route, ETA six minutes. State police have dispatched air patrol. Helicopter ETA in five. Do you copy?”

Starsky retrieved the microphone that he had left on the seat by his side. “This is Zebra Three. Tell them to shake a leg, it’s getting ugly out here! And make sure there’s an ambulance-”

Before he could finish, another shot flew into the Torino, this time obliterating the rear view mirror. Starsky cursed and swerved in reflex as it shattered, driving splinters of glass into his face and throat.

“Starsk! You okay?”

He only turned marginally in my direction, but I could see the rivulets of blood beginning to stream down from his forehead into his face. “Just quit bleeding all over my leather seats or I’ll make you pay to have Merle clean them.”

He turned his focus back to the traffic ahead of him, which was thickening considerably, slowing us down. We both cursed as bullets continued to slam into the back of the car.

“I hate to tell you this, Starsk, but they’re getting closer.”

He didn’t reply, but I could feel the tension roll off him. Starsky quickly looked right then left, and obviously made a decision, because the next thing I knew, we were bouncing off the interstate and onto the hard sand of the Mojave.

Starsky grabbed the mic again as he swerved to miss a ravine. “CHP control, this is Zebra 3. We have left Interstate 15, just northeast of Barstow and are now heading due north. We need assistance *now!*”

Starsky drove like a madman, dodging plants, rocks and gullies that would surely ground us. I pushed myself up marginally and peered out the back window. Two sedans were still hot on our tail. There was a moment of static before the dispatch operator responded. “Come again, Zebra 3? Did you say you were—?”

“I said we’re crossing the stinkin’ desert, Control! Get somebody out here before...” Starsky was silent for a moment before swearing again. His voice dropped low so suddenly, I had to strain to hear it. “Hutch...Hutch, *we got a problem.*”

“Tell me about it.” I sank back into the seat, cradling my right arm against the bumps that sent my head spinning. I didn’t know how much longer I could hang on before I passed out again.

“Hutch, I can’t—”

Starsky hit a good size rock, sending the Torino bucking to the right and nearly bouncing me off the seat onto the floorboards. Starsky over-steered and almost sent the car into a slide.

“Starsky, what the...?” Then it hit me. “*No!*”

He couldn’t see.

Starsky was pale, his sweat mixing with the blood still trailing down his face into his collar. I leaned forward, intending on taking the wheel somehow, I guess. A volley of gunfire slammed into the back of the passenger seat, forcing me back down. Starsky began swerving the Torino to either side to throw off their aim, though we both knew it was simply a matter of time before he hit something that would disable us. We only had one option, really: keep moving until help came. Stopping was a death sentence.

I drew my legs up under me, preparing to push myself up over the seat to the front. Starsky must have heard me shifting and felt my good arm pull at his seat. “Don’t think about coming up here, you idiot! You’re liable to get your butt shot off!”

I glared at the back of his head, then noticed how white his knuckles were, clenching the steering wheel. “I don’t think we have much of a...”

His white knuckles on the steering wheel....

“Starsky! Put your hands at ‘ten’ and ‘two’!”

“What?” He did it anyway, trusting me, though he didn’t understand.

I shifted in my seat to see out the cracked windshield better, but kept low. We hit something else, popping me right out of the seat, and it took me a minute to get the pain under control. I must have cried out, because Starsky sounded panicked.

“Hutch? Hutch, answer me! *Hutch?*”

“I’m still here, just give me a sec.” The bleeding had started up again. Once my vision cleared, I focused on the road ahead. “Okay, Starsk, I can see your right hand. Just follow the numbers...”

I could make out another outcropping of rocks coming up before us. “Seven.”

He started to turn the wheel to the left. “Clockwise, Starsk! Clockwise!”

He compensated by hauling the steering wheel back to the right, stopping his right hand precisely at ‘seven o’clock’. “Okay, now back to where you were.”

His reactions were automatic and his trust in me unquestioning. We bounced along like that for miles—minutes actually, but it seemed like years, with my hollering out directions while gunfire ripped into the body of the Torino, miraculously missing us. Starsky’s reactions to my shouted instructions were flawless. Unfortunately, my guessing how far he should turn the wheel to avoid striking everything from cactus to an abandoned car was less than perfect. The first few turns I had him make almost spun us around ninety degrees and slowed us down considerably, giving the two sedans behind us a chance to catch up. But once we hit an even stretch of desert, Starsky made the Torino fly and we put a little distance between them and us.

We were coming up on an outcropping of rocks and I was just about to tell him to steer to “four” when Starsky’s head jerked to the side like he’d been stung. Before I had a chance to ask, he cranked the wheel hard to the right, away from the boulders.

“Sight back?” I was hopeful.

Starsky kept his head tilted to the side, apparently—I guessed—trying to see around the spots again. He nodded curtly and cursed. While we were both relieved, we knew we couldn’t rely on whatever vision he had. I strained to look out the cracked windshield and yell out directions as best I could. My own sight was fading fast in a red haze. We probably weren’t out there in the desert more than ten minutes now, but it seemed like an eternity. *Where were the CHP?* I was getting dizzy and prayed I wouldn’t black out.

I was almost ready to believe we might actually outrun the bad guys when one of the shooters finally found his mark and blew out the left rear tire of the Torino and sent us careening. Starsky lost control as we slid into a gully, the front right side of the car dropping into the ravine, stopping us dead in our tracks.

We were targets with nowhere to go.



If we had bailed out on the protected side of the car, we would have dropped three feet into the ravine. It would have been like shooting fish in a barrel, and Starsky and I would have been the mackerels.

“If you’ve got any brilliant ideas, now’s the time to share them!” Starsky hollered as DiAngelo and his men slid to a stop nearby. I could see the dust raised by their cars. Oddly enough, they didn’t pull their vehicles in too close to us, probably because they didn’t know that one of us was nearly blind, the other ready to pass out at any second, and only one weapon between us.

“I was hoping you’d—”

The sound was deafening, and the desert sand billowed from the ground like flames. *Thank God!* The highway patrol’s helicopter had found us and was putting itself in-between us and the bad guys. I watched as the men who had just climbed out of their cars to finish us off got back in and tore away. The helicopter stopped its descent and pursued them, its thrust pelting sand back at us through the broken windows hard enough to sting. I wasn’t complaining though—it was a small price to pay for not ending up as some vulture’s dinner.

I sighed—or rather, groaned—as I slumped back in the seat. “That was cl—”

More bullets sliced into the Torino. Apparently one or more of the cars had split away from the helicopter’s pursuit and came back for us. They drove by close enough that I could see their faces clearly before I had to duck to keep from taking a bullet in the face. It would only be a matter of seconds before they looped back for another strike, and this time, they knew that we weren’t shooting back. I frantically tucked the Python between my knees, grateful that my bullets were in my left pocket, because my right hand was in no shape to cooperate. I was shaking so hard I kept dropping the bullets and only managed to get three into the chamber. Starsky growled as he twisted in his seat toward me. “Shoot the bastards or give me your gun!”

Even left-handed, I should have been able to do some damage. But my eyesight was beginning to fade in and out, and knew I wasn’t going to last much longer.

“Here.” It was all I could do to lift the Python in his direction. He groped blindly until we connected; though we both knew there was no way he was going to be able to hit a moving target. The best we could hope for was that he’d keep them at bay until the helicopter returned or the CHP units arrived. With only three bullets, the odds weren’t good enough to even call it a long shot.

Starsky rested the barrel on the doorframe, the angle of the shot instinctively even with where the oncoming car’s body would be in seconds. I could see him listening intently, sweat running down his face to mix with the dried blood. I turned to get a better look as the sedan approached, a shotgun drawn up to the passenger’s face to sight us. They were coming in close for the kill, and this would be our only chance.

Closer...closer....

“Now!” Just as the sedan began the turn that placed it parallel to us, Starsky shot. I don’t think either of us expected him to make a critical hit, but he did—the bullet found a deadly mark on their gas tank.

The heat was incredible, and the force of the blow rocked the Torino as the flaming wreckage barreled toward us. Starsky scrambled out of the passenger side door, dropping on his face in the ravine. He recovered quickly and got up to jerk the passenger door open to get me out. Flaming debris rained down on us as the burning sedan nestled up against the back of the Torino. While we were safe for the moment, there was no telling if Starsky’s car would go at any second.

He didn’t waste any time allowing me to move at my own pace. Starsky grabbed my extended left arm and hauled me out of the car. At least he kept me from dropping to the desert floor. I saw him grimace when I cried out in pain, but he kept the momentum going, and pulled me over his shoulder.

I must have blacked out when he began staggering away from the vehicles, so I don’t know how long it took him to carry me out of harm’s way. The last thing I remembered, I was laying on the ground, Starsky standing above me, his legs straddling my chest. My Python was again thrust in front of him at an unseen foe with the sound of cars approaching us at a high speed.



I think I groaned. The pain in my arm and shoulder were gone, replaced by numbness. I wasn’t sure that was a good sign, unless the loss of feeling was caused by heavy medication, not damage. I cracked an eye open and looked around the room.

Room?

It was the unmistakable early American drab that most hospitals decorate in. Sunlight streamed in from the room’s single window and under it sat my partner, reading a magazine.

Reading!

“Starsk?”

“Hey!” Starsky’s smile lit up his face, all the way to *his eyes*. Did that mean...? He glanced at his watch. “It’s about time you woke up.”

I tried to sit up and failed miserably. He was at the foot of my bed instantly, turning the crank to raise me up. Someday, somebody ought to invent a way to raise a bed without jerking that thing around like they’re trying to start a Model T.

The change in position made me a bit dizzy, but I smiled at the hopeful expression on his face anyway. There were small, healing cuts on his cheek and forehead, and one had to be closed with a few stitches. He held a magazine in his right hand, since the index finger on his left was obviously broken, evidenced by a splint and tape. “So, what are you reading?”

“National Geographic, 1968.”

“Checking out the natives again? Didn’t that get you kicked out of the fourth grade once?”

“Twice.” Starsky sat on the side of my bed facing me. “How you doing?”

I had no clue. I felt lousy, but at least I was alive enough to know that I felt lousy. “Like I got shot in the arm and dragged around the desert. How long have you been reading?”

“Since I was five.”

I wasn’t amused and I’m sure the expression on my face relayed that. He sighed and shifted to a more comfortable position, which meant I had to move over and make room for his big caboose.

“Just after you passed out, I could start to make out shapes and light and stuff again. The spots were back, but at least I could see something. Lucky thing that Chippie turned on his siren though,” Starsky chuckled dryly, “Otherwise, I would have put a few holes in him.”

“So what happened after I took my nap?”

“The guys that came back to finish us off didn’t have a chance. The helicopter unit forced the other two cars right into a net of CHP, and they arrested everybody, including DiAngelo.”

“Yeah? That’s great.” My arm was beginning to throb, and I hugged it a bit closer to me.

“Hurtin’?”

I shrugged my left shoulder.

“The nurse came in just before you woke up and put something in your IV. She said that it’d kick in after a few minutes.”

I nodded, but I guess the little tendril of fear I felt showed. Starsky gripped my leg.

“She said it wasn’t a narcotic, if that’s what you’re thinking.”

It was. I was also thinking how lucky I was to have Starsky for a partner, looking out for me. The nurse was right; the throbbing was already starting to fade, making me sleepy. I stretched my good arm up behind my head and regarded Starsky. “You never did tell me how you got past Minnie.”

His expression was the devious little-boy grin Minnie finds so endearing. I wouldn’t have trusted him with my spinster Aunt Ethel who swore off men forty years ago.

“Well, my sight came back right after you left, so I figured out a way to bail out on Minnie and follow you. I played it up big and told her that my sight was gone again.”

“You didn’t! Starsk, that was a lousy stunt to pull!” I scolded him, figuring he’d laugh it off, but his eyes turned dark.

“I had a gut feeling you were walking into trouble. I was right, wasn’t I?”

He sighed and his expression lightened. “Well, I planned on ‘accidentally’ dumping a carton of Moo Goo Gi Pan down the front of her, so she’d have to take a shower, or at least change into a pair of my sweats while we threw her clothes in the wash.”

“So, what’d you do? You know that she would have eventually figured out where you’d gone and called me on the radio.”

“Yeah, but by then it would have been too late to stop me, and you, Roper and Logan wouldn’t wait or else you’d miss DiAngelo.”

I called him something unpleasant as I yawned. Whatever it was that the nurse put in my IV was relaxing me nicely.

“Well, I was all set to nail Minnie with the Moo Goo when the phone rang. That new computer in R&I crashed, and she was the only one who knew how to fix it. I convinced her that I was really tired, and since I couldn’t see anyway, I was going to take a nap. That way, she could go to the station and do whatever, then come back later and check on me. She bought it, and I took off.”

“How’d you know where to find me?”

He gave me a look. “That was easy. You kept repeating the address—out loud, no less—since you didn’t have anything to write it down with.”

“Oh.” Something else he said tickled the back of my brain, which was quickly fogging up. What did he say...? *Oh, man!* “Roper and Logan?”

He put up a calming hand. “Two doors down. They’re both going to be fine. I guess it was a little iffy with Logan taking one in the gut, but he was lucky. The Captain said they’ll be okay—nothing permanent.”

I yawned again. “That’s great.”

Starsky smiled at me the way he sometimes does when he thinks I don’t notice, kind of fondly, though he’d blow it off if I ever confronted him. Instead, I just appreciated the warmth behind his eyes.

“The doctor said you’ll be fine, too. The bullet went clean through, and with some of those exercises, there won’t be any residual effects.”

“Residual.” Another yawn. “So what about—”

“*Starsky!*” It was whispered, or rather hissed, but enough to cut me off as Captain Dobey came storming into my room.

“Oh, Hutchinson. You’re awake. That’s good. Doctor says you’re going to be fine.” His gaze swung over to my partner. “*You*, on the other hand—”

“Me?” It’s not often I hear Starsky squeak. “What did I do?”

“It’s not what you did, well, yes, it *is* what you did, running off half-cocked while you were still recuperating! What were you thinking?”

“I—”

“Never mind. What you *haven’t done* is authorize for that striped tomato of yours to be totaled!” The captain waved a stack of papers in Starsky’s face. “Have you seen this estimate to fix that thing? The bodywork alone would wipe out the department’s repair budget for the rest of the year! And who is this ‘Earl’ person?”

“It’s Merle, Captain. Merle the Earle, the—”

“I don’t care! The department is *not*—”

Starsky’s face dropped dramatically—or shall I say *over*-dramatically—and he quickly bounced off my bed, thrusting his hands in front of him like a bad B movie actor. “My eyes! My eyes! I can’t see again. Captain? Captain, where did you go? The room’s turned black....”

He staggered forward, running into the bed, then right into Dobey. Starsky’s hands traveled up the Captain’s stomach and chest, then groped around his face as if to identify him by feel.

“Starsky, get your hands off my nose! You’re not going to fake me out by…”

I would have loved to have found out how Starsky got out of this one, but sleep was calling and I couldn’t say no.



The sunset washed the ocean waves in shades of red, orange and amber—endless fire on an endless sea. It wasn’t that long ago that I had described the colors to Starsky when he couldn’t see them himself, except inside his head.

But now, we both took it all in and he pointed out every nuance, taking such joy in trying to capture the colors, just as he would with his camera.

After a while, we sat there in silence; content with simply watching the last of the sunset’s colors gently fade away into twilight. I looked over at the man sitting at my side, thinking about everything we’d been through, and knowing that there was no one else I’d rather have along for the ride.

Sometimes, I feel something so strongly that my heart just kind of wells up, and something inside me just has to sing. Sitting there in the last of the sunset with my best friend my heart was full. And though I didn’t sing out loud, I knew he heard and sang it back to me.

It had ended like any other day.

~Brit
3/26/03