

# *In A Heartbeat*

*by Brit*

It was over in a heartbeat. All that was left was to book 'em and watch the dust settle.

Okay, I know it's a cliché, but you really *could* watch the dust settle, and I was, well...stunned. Instead of *me* lying in the middle of the filthy alley, probably dead, there were three thugs sprawled across the garbage from the overflowing dumpsters, and a wild-eyed blond with his hair all mussed up.

The first thing Hutch did, once the dust settled, was to smooth back his hair, pick up his patrolman's cap and put it back on his head, adjusting it 'just so.' I must of been standing there with my mouth open, because he did a little double take and cocked an eyebrow at me.

"You okay?"

I remembered to shut my mouth and wipe away the blood starting to trickle into my left eye. "Never been better. You?"

He just nodded, then placed a knee in the middle of the nearest guy's back to bring his arms around and cuff him. I took a minute to regroup and brush off the dirt and garbage from my uniform.

Ten minutes ago I was routinely checking out the back doors of the businesses on either side of the alley. It's a boring part of the patrol routine, but the senior partner of the 'team' (if you could call us that) had decided checking the alley doors was a necessary part of my training as the junior officer, while he made time with the waitress in the coffee shop across the street.

What happened was that I was at the end of the alley, reaching for the last door, when these three whippos came bursting out, a significant wad of green in the middle guy's hand. I don't know who was more surprised, them or me, and while I got the first punch in after they rushed me, they didn't waste any time trying to add me to the nearest pile of garbage. I was actually doing a pretty good job of holding my own, considering the odds. When I was finally able to get clear enough to draw my service revolver, one of them beans me with chunk of brick or something and the thirty-eight goes skidding under a dumpster. I still manage to take one of them out, but the second gets me from behind while the third uses me as a punching bag. I'm starting to get worried at this point (not much, just a little), and wish my partner would show up.

In a heartbeat, this blond blur comes streaking in, nails the guy that'd been whompin' on me, then starts in on the guy I'd laid out but didn't stay down long. This gives me a chance to put a hard elbow into the gut of the guy who'd been holding me in place. A two-handed slam across his kisser lays him out for a nap.

The two of us stood there in this grubby alley for a second, watching the dust settle.

By the time I'm brushed off and had a second to catch my breath, Hutch had moved on to the next semi-conscious dirtbag and put a knee on him the same way. Realizing he needed my cuffs, he simply raised his hand up to me expectantly, without saying a word. I knew what he wanted and tossed him my pair, then used my belt to secure the hands of the last guy.

Blondie brushed himself off and crossed over to me. He explained that he and his training officer were responding to a tip about a numbers drop going down, and Hutch had been instructed to watch the alley. That's when he found me and my dance partners. I guess I was a little mussed up, judging from the look on Hutch's face as he studied mine. He reached up to brush back some of my hair from where the chunk of plaster had whacked me. I decided he reminded me of a Jewish yenta with a mean right hook. A right hook that saved my butt. I couldn't remember the last time someone had bothered.

"Hurt much?"

"I'll live." I guess I was still looking at him kinda funny, because his face got real serious.

"What is it?"

I didn't know how to explain it to him. Shoot, I didn't even really understand it myself. O'Ryan, the senior officer I was assigned to, told me from day one to watch my own back—it'd make me a better cop. He didn't have to tell me that. Ever since I'd left New York a lifetime ago, I'd always fought my own battles. It was the same jungle law that kept me alive in Southeast Asia and Bay City. It'd been an awful long time since anybody had helped me out like that. A lifetime since anybody ever fought beside me, not against me.

Something inside me I didn't even know was there just, I dunno, felt like it broke...and it wasn't a bad feeling at all. How could I explain *that*?

I couldn't. So instead I just gave him a grin and nodded toward the three thugs who were beginning to stir. "I...thanks. Thanks for, you know...being there."

He seemed satisfied with whatever it was he was trying to find in my eyes, and nodded. "You're welcome. Get used to it."

And I did. In a heartbeat.

*~Brit*  
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