

*Left Behind*  
*A missing scene from Murder Ward*  
*by Brit*

Miss Bycroft shook her head slightly. “I never thought Skyler capable of anything like this.”

“I’ll have to have a private session with him tomorrow.” Dr. Matwick couldn’t hide the perverse excitement in his eyes as he and the nurse walked from the room, leaving the partners alone.

“I’m sorry,” Hutch whispered as he watched Starsky finally succumb to the sedative Matwick had injected minutes before. The blond figure slowly retreated until he disappeared, shutting the door quietly behind him to leave Starsky bound and alone.



*Bound and alone.*

*Starsky could feel the blood from his skinned knees soaking through his fatigues. The ache caused by being slammed to the ground was nothing compared to the pain in his stomach and head where they’d beaten him with bamboo canes. And worse still was the burning in his muscles from having his arms tightly bound behind him, stretching the abused muscles in his chest, shoulders, and arms to an almost unbearable degree. A dirty rag covered his eyes, preventing him from seeing the crude reed cage they’d forced him into so that he sat kneeling, his head bowed in the cramped structure. He was utterly vulnerable and completely at his captors’ mercy.*

*He could hear the low moans and labored breathing from other prisoners, and the harsh broken English from his Vietnamese captors still rang in his ears. “You are going to die, dog! Tell us where the American troops are and we will kill you quickly. If you do not, you will beg us to end your pain....”*

*Starsky had kept silent, even through the beatings. When he had refused to give them any information, including his name, rank, and serial number as he had been trained to do, he had been struck repeatedly until he fell into a semi-conscious state. It was at that point, his tormentors began to detail what they would soon do to him to get him to talk.*

*A sliver of fear ran through Starsky’s gut as he struggled weakly against his bonds and wondered how long he had been captive, having lost all sense of time and space. Seconds seemed to blend into weeks and months, though he knew in all likelihood, he’d only been held for a few days.*

*He wondered what happened to the rest of his patrol—if he was the only one left. Not too long after he'd been caged, he'd learned through a brief exchange of urgent whispers that there were at least three other soldiers in similar states nearby. More men may have been caged in the same area, but they were unable to communicate at that point.*

*When his periods of wakefulness began to outlast those of unconsciousness, Starsky felt his hope and determination begin to wane. He had no way of knowing if and when rescue would come, or if he'd been written off as an expendable casualty of war and left behind. He was utterly and completely on his own.*

*The opening of a door echoed down the hallway, eliciting a terrified response of "They're coming!" from another soldier. Panic warred with rage as Starsky threw all of his energy into freeing his arms from the bonds that kept him captive.*



When it was finally safe enough for Hutch to return to Starsky's room later that evening, his partner was coming out from under the effects of the last injection. Starsky was pale and sweating, thrashing against his restraints in the throes of a horrific nightmare.

Hutch quickly rushed through the darkness, gently shaking Starsky to release him from whatever demons tormented him. When Starsky's eyes snapped open and darted around the dim room, Hutch could easily tell that his partner had lost track of time and space. One hand quickly moved to the side of Starsky's face, forcing him to meet Hutch's eyes, offering reassurance and an anchor to find his way back to the present. "Easy, Starsk. Easy."

Starsky exhaled shakily through his nostrils and tried to swallow, fighting the gag. Before he had the chance to signal his partner, Hutch was already reaching behind Starsky's head to untie the binding. "How do you feel?"

"Like an inmate in a state hospital."

The horror and rage Hutch had seen in Starsky's eyes moments before told him everything he'd needed to know. "Look, I'm getting off duty in about a half an hour. I'm gonna call Dobey and pull the plug on this whole case."

"No. Not yet."

The partners argued for a few minutes about solving the case, Starsky adamantly refusing to desert the hospital's inmates to probable death. Knowing his partner was right didn't diffuse Hutch's fear for Starsky's safety. "What am I gonna do with you?"

The look Starsky gave him said it all—*watch my back*. Hutch finally acquiesced. "I'll get hold of Jane. And you—be careful."

Hutch nodded once more, then broke eye contact and quietly slipped out the door, leaving Starsky behind.

Starsky drew a deep breath, trying to relax and push from his senses the suffocating feeling of the rough canvas straightjacket against his skin. His eyes narrowed as he stared into the darkness, processing the clues and facts of the case, desperate to bring the killer to justice and leave Cabrillo State behind. Knowing Hutch was fueled by the same determination gave Starsky encouragement and comfort as little else could at that moment. They would keep the other inmates safe, solve the murders, and go home. But in the meantime, they would play their roles, even if it meant being left behind and remaining at his captors' mercy.

He was still bound, still vulnerable—but Starsky knew he wasn't alone.

*Brit*