

# Out of the Mists

by The Blintz and Brit

The flashing red and blue lights from a dozen patrol cars added to the unworldliness of the moment. The storm that had drenched the crime scene hours before had fled, as if escaping arrest. Everything in the rain's wake was cast with a slick reflection of the police lights dancing off the pavement in alternating colors.

The street was crowded with the press of bodies—detectives, FBI, ATF agents, lab technicians, the chief of police, EMS with a host of ambulances—and darting in between them all were patrolmen escorting their arrestees toward squad cars. In the midst of the organized chaos Captain Dobey barked out orders, directing the flurry of activity as twenty-eight men were apprehended during a major syndicate sting, the likes of which the city hadn't seen in decades.

Inside the warehouse—the focal point of the investigation—Starsky shoved his arrestee against the wall and quickly patted him down. The expression on the detective's face was fierce, promising violence at any moment if one word was said out of line. Everyone else in the immediate area purposefully averted their eyes—some out of fear, others from disgust, and a few out of respect. None too gently, Starsky cuffed the man, though he felt a tightening in his gut at the accompanying *snick* of the bracelets locking in place. Grabbing the taller man by the arm, he jerked him through the dock doors toward the patrol car waiting to transport him in for booking.

Starsky glared at the red and blue lights dancing off the tarmac as he hustled his prisoner through the puddles. “You have the right to remain silent—”

“I know the drill,” the cuffed man growled.

Starsky spun his charge against the fender of the patrol car so he ended up facing the enraged detective. Dark blue eyes bore into his arrestee, while the activity around them fell silent.

Starsky's face seemed to grow angrier still. An internal war briefly darted across his face until he finally spat at his captive's feet, breaking a puddle's reflection. “You make me sick.”

With a vengeance, Starsky yanked open the back door of the patrol car. Those watching noted he seemed barely able to keep his rage in check. To his credit, Starsky used one hand to steer the criminal's head away from hitting the door jam as he shoved him into the car. The prisoner quickly leaned toward the open door. “Starsky, I—”

“Shut up!” Starsky slammed the door, forcing the other back. The detective’s fist pounding on top of the patrol car signaled the waiting officer to put the vehicle in motion.

Starsky watched as the car shot through the darkness, its red and blue lights casting a glow upon the drenched buildings. He gazed down the empty street well after the patrol car was out of sight; the image of Hutch’s face staring at him through the back window of the patrol car burned into his mind.



“You all right?” Starsky’s voice was hushed, his head bowed down as if reading the arrest data in front of him.

“Fine, though you had those cuffs on me a little tighter than necessary.” Hutch’s grouching would have made Starsky smile if it hadn’t been for the pressure the two of them had been under for the last four months. Still, he glanced up from his folder to see Hutch pacing the small room, playing his part to the letter.

A tap on the interrogation room door signaled that Dobby was moving into the adjoining room to watch Starsky question his partner. The fact that the captain, the chief of police, and half the IA staff sat behind the two-way mirror was laughable, since the busted detective knew the interrogation would be observed.

“Show time,” Starsky breathed, loud enough for Hutch’s ears alone. He hoped the men sitting on the other side of the glass couldn’t see the mischief in his partner’s eyes. For the audience, Starsky slapped the folder down on the table in front of him. “I thought I knew you! I realize things have been bad for you lately, that money was tight, but I never believed *you*, of all people, would give in like this! It’s bad cops like you—”

“Oh, stuff it, Starsky!” Hutch charged back over to his partner and swept the papers off the table. “You pious, self-righteous...” Hutch’s eyes darted past Starsky to his own reflection in the two-way glass. “And all of you in *there* can stuff it, too!”



“Look...” Starsky stood and crossed to the agitated blond. “The DA’s willing to cut you some slack if you’ll drop a few names—”

“Are you nuts?” Hutch grabbed Starsky by his collar, forcing him backward across the edge of the small table. “They’d kill me!”

Starsky grabbed his partner by the wrists to steady himself until he was “rescued” by the observers. Under his breath he murmured with some amusement, “*Easy there, Blintz.*”

“What’s the matter?” Hutch whispered back, obviously enjoying the moment, giving Starsky a shake. “You forget how to dip?”

As the officers spilled into the room, Starsky threw himself backward, making it appear as though Hutch had shoved him violently. Hutch swung at the retreating figure, purposefully missing, but by mere inches.

Two uniformed officers grappled with Hutch, forcing his arms behind his back to subdue him as he continued to rant. “Come on, buddy. *Pal*. Why couldn’t you have looked the other way, huh? Did you forget all the years of being *partners*, buddy? You forget the reason *why* I needed the money to begin with?”

For an instant, it was as if all the air had been sucked out of the small room as Starsky’s and Hutch’s eyes locked. It was, of course, a ruse—part of the dangerous game the two had been playing—but the pair had agreed to include for believability’s sake the fact that Hutch had taken a prolonged unpaid leave of absence during Starsky’s recuperation. Once Hutch had put the surviving hit man away for attempted murder and an assortment of other charges, he dedicated himself to his partner’s recovery, at no small financial sacrifice. While it wasn’t an issue between the two of them, Starsky still felt a genuine pang of guilt. The brief wounded flash in his eyes wasn’t an act as the two glared at each other.

Starsky picked himself up off the floor, waving away the proffered assistance from another detective. “Get him out of here.”

Hutch continued hollering all the way down the hall, until his voice was finally lost behind the door of the holding tank.

Captain Dobey lingered behind while the rest of the group filed out of the room, a select few heading up to the commissioner’s office. Starsky picked up the case file papers scattered about the floor and handed them back to his superior.

“You boys all right?” Dobey asked quietly.

Starsky nodded curtly, anger in his voice. “I’m ready for this to be over.”

“That makes three of us.”

Starsky’s eyes smoldered. “*Two*.”

“Two?”

The brunet’s gaze swung toward the hallway. “You know we didn’t get Monte. Hutch told me at the warehouse that we’d only gotten the second-level men, after all. The top dogs are still out there, safe, and he wants to bring them down. Them and Vic Monte.”

“So, we bust Hutch, too, keep his cover good. He makes bail and it buys him some time to dig a little deeper.” Dobey studied the remaining detective. “It’s risky—”

“*Too* risky.”

“But I trust Hutch’s instincts on this one.”

“Yeah, well, *my* instincts don’t like it. Not one damned bit.”

“So what are you going to do?”

Starsky grimaced and ran his hands through his unruly hair. When he finally answered, the resignation in his voice was tinged with fear. “Same as always—watch his back.”



The group of men milling about the commissioner’s office was subdued as they waited for the “prisoner” to be brought in. Starsky sat off to the side, brooding. Captain Dobey had already filled them in with as much information as he had to date: during the sting, twenty-eight arrests were made, including the staged bust of Hutch.

This was not the first clandestine meeting of the representatives from the four different divisions. The commissioner, DA, chief of detectives, and FBI had been looking for a chance to bring down Vic Monte for years, and a golden opportunity had literally been dumped in their laps.

The undercover assignment had started just over six months ago. Starsky had been sent home from the hospital after a week-and-a-half stay, courtesy of two bullets taken during a setup he and Hutch had inadvertently walked into. The mark had been Vic Monte, head of a local “famiglia,” in retaliation for mob hits he and his cartel had arranged. The partners were caught in the middle of a war, and Starsky had barely made it out with his life. In the process of saving his partner and the other innocent restaurant patrons caught in the setup, Hutch had turned the tables, killing one of the hit men and wounding the other. As Vic Monte’s limo had approached the Italian restaurant, the gunfire from within had tipped them off, and he and several of his upper-level men had sped away to safety.

Two days later, Hutch had received a phone call from none other than Vic Monte himself, thanking the detective for the interference that had saved the mobster from walking into sure death. Hutch had immediately seized the opportunity and played up his role in squelching the assassination attempt. Insinuations had been made that he’d heard about the hit and specifically went to the restaurant to interrupt it, hoping Monte would be enticed by a “cop on the edge,” looking for a little side action.

The head of the famiglia didn't get to be where he was by being reckless or stupid. Over the next few weeks, Monte had put his ears to the streets, hoping to find proof to back up Hutch's alleged indiscretions. By then, rumbles had been made of supposed past infractions by the detective, including his looking the other way in instances where it would serve his own purposes. There had even been a few suggestions of out-and-out graft, all courtesy of one Huggy Bear Brown and a few choice snitches.

The instant Hutch had hung up from his initial conversation with the mobster, he had laid out his plan to Dobey, and then, with his captain's cautious agreement, did the same to their superiors and the FBI. The police chief, commissioner, and Feds all but salivated at the opportunity and had quickly agreed to put Hutch undercover if Monte should contact him again.

The only person who had raised an objection was Starsky, who was adamantly opposed to his partner going undercover so deeply without him. After literally hours of discussion, some of which were heated, Starsky had finally conceded, though not happily and not without reservations. The final point of agreement was that Captain Dobey had the final say on when the assignment was over, whether or not both of them agreed.

A month after the initial call, Monte had contacted Hutch again and arranged a face-to-face meeting. The famiglia head spoke plainly, all the while understanding the ramifications of blatantly offering a bribe to a police officer. But any legal retaliation by Hutch, should he refuse, would cause minimal damage in the big picture—the gain far outweighed the risk.

Hutch had neither accepted nor rejected the offer, telling Monte he'd need some time. The mobster wasn't thrilled by the prospect, but knew better than to push. Within a few days, Hutch did accept, by tipping Monte off to an alleged raid scheduled on one of the felon's numbers' drops, and the fragile association was established.

Within the course of the next few months, while Starsky impatiently recuperated, Hutch "looked the other way" on more than one of Vic Monte's operations. The detective was paid handsomely, receiving several thousand dollars and the arrest of a few minor drug dealers sacrificed as a gesture of Monte's "good will."

This arrangement between felon and "dirty" cop cautiously continued to grow over a six-month period. While Hutch continued to gather evidence, building a substantial case against Monte, he was allowed access to more and more of the mobster's business. Meanwhile, Starsky was upgraded to "light duty," which put him at his desk, following his partner's paper trail.

As the covert operation approached its seventh month, it was finally decided that the Feds would go in for the kill. Hutch was quite sure he had enough on Monte and his upper level of support for multiple convictions of graft, money laundering, drug trafficking, and extortion. But the night the police moved in, neither Monte nor his top men had shown, and Hutch caught wind of two new names and a liaison for heroin shipments out of Asia.

When the FBI, ATF, and BCPD raided the main warehouse of Monte's drug transport, Starsky went straight for his "crooked" partner, looking for a signal as to how to play the moment. At Hutch's hostile reaction, the darker partner took his cue and "arrested" him.

Now, as the task force sat waiting in the commissioner's office, Dobey watched Starsky as he stared out the window at the skyline. Tension caused the muscles in the detective's jaw to dance, and the shadow of worry and sleeplessness darkened Starsky's eyes. Just as the captain was about to cross the room to talk to him, Starsky's head turned to the open doorway, though there was no one there. Within a moment, a shadow was cast down the hallway, followed by a police officer leading a handcuffed Hutch into the room.

The conversations in the office quickly fell away as Hutch was deposited in the middle of the room. As soon as the uniformed officer left and shut the door behind him, Starsky was up in an instant, removing the cuffs from his partner.

"Thanks." Hutch rubbed his wrists and sat in the chair Starsky had vacated, knowing his partner would find a perch on one of the arms.

Agent McMillian slammed his coffee cup down on top of the commissioner's desk. "Where was Vic Monte tonight, Hutchinson? You said getting him and the others was a sure thing."

Hutch cocked his eyebrow and glared at the aggressive agent. "And a good evening to you, too, McMillian. Always a pleasure."

"All right, knock it off," Dobey growled. "We're all tired. It's been a long night for everybody. Hutchinson, why don't you tell us what happened?"

Hutch exhaled heavily and rolled his head, trying to relieve some of the tension in his neck and shoulders. "Initially, the plan was for Monte, Ferarro, and VanMele to be there as well. This was the second of three major shipments of coke and heroin from Joe Randell and his famiglia, and good old Vic and his buddies didn't trust the second string with it."

As predicted, Starsky found a place on the chair's arm to Hutch's left. "ATF said the street value was around two-and-a-quarter million."

"Sounds right." Hutch nodded and continued, "I got a call earlier in the day that Monte wanted me there as well, just in case Randell tried to renegotiate the price, which is what happened during the first shipment. If he did, Monte would hand him over to me on a silver platter."

"And Big Vic stays in the game because, by not playing, he didn't break any laws," Starsky interjected. "So, no hits, no runs, no errors."

“We know all of this,” DA Richardson growled. “So, where was Monte and the other two tonight? Does that mean your cover’s blown?”

“Well, *sir...*” The tone in Hutch’s voice contradicted the respectful title he gave the DA. It was reassuring to feel Starsky tense next to him. “As I was saying, they *should* have been there, which made me wonder the same thing. Fortunately, the man Monte left in charge of the buy—Squires, the bruiser arrested tonight—he’s big on muscles and short on caution. While we were waiting for Randell’s men to bring the shipment, Squires thought he’d impress me with how much he knew about Monte’s operation. It turns out the reason Vic and his playmates weren’t there tonight was because of some new action offering a connection out of Singapore. They’re pretty big guns if Monte, Ferarro, and VanMele all went to meet with them and missed out on tonight’s big buy. From the sound of it, the Singapore connection would make everything we’ve got on Monte so far look like busting a high school kid for selling a nickel bag of grass.”

Police Commissioner Wilson placed his elbows on his desk and rested his chin in his hand. “That’d mean staying under for a considerable amount of time, Hutchinson.”

“Yes, sir. I...we realize that.” While Starsky didn’t move, Hutch could feel his partner’s internal battle: concern, anger, and fear. He was grateful Starsky hadn’t spoken out against his suggestion of remaining under—without him.

The commissioner nodded and turned his focus on the FBI agent who sat with one hip propped up on the desk. “What do you think, McMillian? Do you have what you need to take down Monte and call it quits? Get this Singapore deal from another direction?”

McMillian thought for a moment before answering, weighing the existing evidence against a potentially bigger bust. “As for Vic Monte and his crew, I think we’ve got all we need to take him down on several counts. Right, Ben?”

The DA nodded. “Ideally, we’d get him with his hand in the cookie jar, like we were supposed to tonight. I think we could get a conviction; what we do have against him at this point is solid. As long as we have Hutchinson’s testimony, that is.”

Chief of Police Carl Porter, who’d been silent up until then, looked around the room. “So the question is, do we risk losing Hutchinson and his testimony for him to go back in and investigate this new connection, or do we play it safe and take down Monte now on a few lesser charges? I’m pretty certain you could put him away for the rest of his slimy little life, but possibly lose some of his hired help, who’d pick up where Monte left off. If we take Monte now, we could go after the others and this Singapore connection by another route. I don’t know. Maybe we should just go with what we’ve got and take you into protective custody, Hutchinson.”

The DA shifted, shaking his head. “Still...we’re so blasted close to wiping out all of Vic Monte’s famiglia.”

Captain Dobby scrubbed his face with his hands. “What about your cover, Hutch? Is it still good?”

Hutch wasn’t surprised when Starsky stood abruptly. “Excuse us for a moment.” Starsky’s hand latched onto Hutch’s shirt and pulled him up from the chair and out into the hallway. Once they had shut the door behind them, Starsky first peered down the hallway to make sure they were alone, then turned back toward his partner with fire in his eyes.



“What are you doing?” Starsky and Hutch said simultaneously, anger on each of their faces as they squared off.

“Me?” Hutch asked, incredulous. “We’ve been given a golden opportunity here! I’m trying to take advantage of it.”

“Well, this ‘golden opportunity’ is liable to get you killed for no good reason.”

“‘No good reason?’ What are you talking about? You know what’s going to happen when that heroin from Singapore hits the streets! What are you thinking?”

“I’m thinking that there’re other ways to stop it from happening besides you staying under *alone*.”

“Look, Starsk, I’ve made contact with one of Monte’s hired guns—a guy by the name of Dixon. He may be the one who took out Theresa DeFusto’s brother. If I can prove it or get him to talk—”

“So, what...you’re staying in for revenge? You want to nail the guy who started the mess that got me shot?”

“You almost died, pal.”

“And so you’d risk your life to thank Theresa for helping us that night.”

“Oh, come on! If the tables were turned, *you’d* stay under in a heartbeat!”

“And if the tables were turned, *you’d* be standing right here, getting in *my* face!”

The hallway was silent for a moment, the two men’s eyes locked in an internal battle of wills. Hutch finally sighed. “Starsk, I’m already in. Neither one of us wants this crap on the streets.”

Starsky leaned back against the wall, his head tilted back so he could stare at the ceiling rather than succumb to the pleading in his partner’s eyes. “I know. It’s just...”

Hutch’s hand gripped Starsky’s arm. “*I know*. I’d feel better if you were in there watching my back, too. But, Starsk, how can we *not* do this?”

Starsky finally dropped his chin to look Hutch full in the face. “My gut’s telling me this is gonna go down bad.”

“Maybe. But my gut’s telling me I’ve got to do it anyway.”

“You’re in there alone. Richardson and McMillian are ready to pull you out, get you in protective custody. But if you push to stay in, they’ll go with it. You know they want this so badly they just might sacrifice you to get it. Who can you trust?”

“Same as always—me and thee.”

The silence that again followed was tense, though not fueled by anger. Starsky finally sighed heavily, dropping his head the rest of the way to his chest, then nodded once, knowing he had to let Hutch follow his convictions and that he would stand beside him, no matter what happened.

Hutch’s hand gripped the back of his partner’s neck, a gesture to bolster them both. The two returned to the room, and Hutch sat back down in his chair. Starsky stayed nearby, but instead of perching next to his partner as he had before, he leaned against the wall. The subtle change didn’t go unnoticed by Dobey. “We were discussing the case while you two were out having your private party in the hall. What use do you think Monte’s going to have for you, now that you’ve been arrested and thrown off the force, Hutch?”

“I’ve thought about that, too. I’m sure I can convince him that I still have enough connections to be of benefit to the organization.”

The DA nodded. “What about bail...have you got that covered?”

Captain Dobey spoke up. “We’d already worked that out with Hutch’s parents in Minnesota. They were briefed on the assignment and were told that a staged arrest was

possible as part of the sting. Hutch has already called them, and they're wiring the bail money, so that's taken care of."

Agent McMillian exhaled loudly. "Here's my take on this. As much as I want the Department to bring down Vic Monte *and* this new Singapore connection in one big sting, I don't want to blow what we've got. Hutchinson, you've done a good job, but I think going back under is too risky. You may have convinced Monte and a bunch of thugs that you've gone sour, but I think there's a whole lot of people, including several on this force, that won't believe it and will inadvertently blow your cover. You'll end up dead, and we'll lose Monte in the process."

"Gee, it's nice to know you care, McMillian," Hutch growled.

"I don't mean to be blunt, but it's a big risk to leave you out there. As a matter of fact, I'd like to take you into protective custody until we can arrest Monte and get him to trial."

"Don't pull the plug now!" Hutch bolted up out of the chair. "We can still get Monte 'with his hand in the cookie jar,' as was so aptly pointed out."

"We're so close, Mac. A few more days, that's all we need. If something doesn't happen by then, we nail him," Richardson urged.

Hutch and McMillian stared each other down until the FBI agent finally conceded. "All right, but if things get too heated—"

"I'll pull him out," Dobej interjected, then swung a parental finger in Hutch's direction. "Meanwhile, you be careful."

Hutch nodded, his satisfaction evident. While the commissioner called downstairs to the holding block, requesting an officer to return the "uncooperative prisoner" to his cell, Hutch turned to Starsky and extended his arms, offering his wrists.

Starsky pushed himself off the wall and retrieved the handcuffs from his jacket pocket. After securing his partner, he locked gazes with Hutch, his voice low. "Don't be a hero." He waited until Hutch nodded. "Don't make me regret this for the rest of my life."

Hutch was about to respond with a smart comeback, but was stopped by the intensity he saw in Starsky's eyes. Instead, he gripped his partner's arm and nodded. A knock at the door announced the escorting officer, and Hutch left the room without a backward glance.



Archibald Pierce stood on the steps of the Bay City Police Station and breathed deeply, allowing his lungs to fill with the first "free" air he'd breathed in seventy-two hours. His

unfortunate incarceration had occurred when he had parked in a yellow zone, and the conscientious officer who ticketed the vehicle found that Pierce had several outstanding parking tickets. It had taken Pierce the past three days to raise the money to pay the tickets and the fine, but finally, he was free.

He straightened his tie and tried to smooth some of the wrinkles out of his pinstriped suit as he delicately picked his way down the concrete steps, resigned to the fact that he was destined to stay there until the taxi he had called could arrive. He was ravenously hungry, having chosen not to eat the suspicious gray glop that had been served for breakfast. Luckily, a portable hot dog vendor was parked near a bench that actually boasted a bit of shade from a scraggly elm tree. The lunch rush had come and gone, so Pierce found to his delight that he was alone. Using what little money he had, he purchased one of the last frankfurters and, even though under normal circumstances he wouldn't consider eating such a thing, sat down on the bench and spread his napkin over his crossed legs.

Having purloined a used newspaper from one of the vacant chairs in the courthouse, he opened it to the society page and held it close to his face. His glasses had been broken the first night of his stay when his roommate, known to the regulars at the jail as "Ox," had accidentally knocked them off the shelf where Pierce had stashed them. Not known for his grace and agility, Ox had then proceeded to crush them under his massive weight while trying to help find them. Apologizing profusely, he had handed the mangled eyewear to Pierce, who had sighed resignedly. Being only 5'7" and tipping the scale at a scant 145 pounds, he had wisely chosen not to say anything to his drunken cellmate and would replace the glasses the first chance he got.

His perusal of the comings and goings of the Bay City elite was interrupted when two uniformed officers walked up to the hot dog vendor, deep in conversation. Peeking over the top of his paper, he saw the cops look his way, but continued speaking without even attempting to lower their voices. Pierce understood why: sitting on a bench in the middle of the day, eating a hot dog, reading the newspaper, and dressed in a respectable navy blue suit, he was sure he could pass as a lawyer or even an assistant DA. Smiling to himself, he appeared to bury his nose back in the paper, but listened intently to what the officers were saying. Being naturally curious had served him well on many occasions, and he had learned long ago that a wise man keeps his ears open and his mouth shut.

"...and I just can't believe it!" said the younger of the two cops. He was a short man with dark hair, and Pierce couldn't help notice his striking resemblance to Jerry Lewis. "I went through the Academy with that guy, and he was as straight-laced as they come. Seems sad that somebody like Hutch could get drawn in by the likes of Vic Monte. What chance do the rest of us have?" "Jerry" shook his head sadly and stared at a spot on the ground in front of him.

The two now had Pierce's undivided attention. Being a two-bit con man for most of his adult life, he had always dreamed of teaming up with someone like Vic Monte and had worked diligently in that direction. He had even given himself a nickname—"The

Archer”—because he claimed that he always got his mark. Unfortunately, several months ago he had run a scam on a small dry cleaners in Chinatown and had taken the business for close to a thousand dollars. It was only after his success that he discovered, to his horror, that particular shop was owned and operated by none other than Monte himself as a front for a numbers’ racket. The word on the street was that Monte had it in for Pierce and, while not wasting precious time and manpower by actually putting a hit out on him, it was made known that he would be very grateful if The Archer was the victim of an unfortunate accident.

Since then, Pierce had been on his toes, constantly watching his back. His latest stay in a Bay City holding tank had been very uncomfortable when a number of Monte’s men had been brought in. He had breathed a huge sigh of relief when they were all herded into a different cell and then either transferred or released. As far as he knew, none of them even knew he was there at the time, which suited him just fine. But now, listening to the officers’ conversation, he was on full alert, eager for anything he could pass along to get him into Monte’s good graces.

“Yeah, I know,” replied the other officer, whom The Archer now thought of as the “Dean Martin” of the pair. “It’s tough. But I guess it happens to the best of us—”

“Not to a cop like Hutchinson, it doesn’t!” Jerry replied vehemently. “Now, I don’t know what’s goin’ on around here, but I’m gonna find out.” With that, he turned and almost viciously slathered mustard on his hot dog, his jaw set with determination.

“Hold on just a minute,” Dean replied, reaching out to grab his partner by the arm. “You can’t just go off half-cocked like this. Maybe we should talk about this a little more.”

“About what? You know somethin’ I don’t?” When there was no reply from his partner, Jerry continued, “I didn’t think so. Now, let go of me so I can find Hutchinson and find out what the deal is.”

“What d’ya mean, find Hutchinson? He’s still in the holding tank, or have you forgotten?”

“No, he isn’t,” Jerry replied, taking a huge bite of his hotdog and chewing loudly. “He made bail a few hours ago and took off. I figure if I hurry, I might just catch him at his place or somethin’.”

“Wait,” Dean replied quietly, eyes scanning the area around them. Seeing only one man apparently engrossed in his paper, the officer continued, though lowering his voice. “Maybe I do know somethin’ you don’t.” He dragged his partner a little ways from the vendor’s cart.

Jerry looked at his partner expectantly. “Well, don’t leave me in the dark, man. What’s the scoop?”

“Hutch isn’t really working for Monte. He’s undercover.”

“What?” Jerry asked incredulously. “How did you know this and I didn’t?”

“Well,” Dean continued, leaning in toward his partner. “Last night I had to work late, what with all the commotion about Monte’s men being brought in. It just so happened that Sheila had invited her folks over for dinner, and I knew she’d be furious if I didn’t show. So, during a break in the action, I snuck into an empty office to call her.”

“And?” his partner prompted.

“And, before I could even pick up the phone, I heard another voice. Seems I had ducked into the DA’s secretary’s office, and there was someone in the inner room on the phone. Whoever it was never even knew I was there, but before I could sneak back out, I heard him mention Hutchinson’s name. I was a little curious what they were gonna do to him—him being dirty and all—and that’s when I heard him say that Hutch was undercover.”

“Are you sure?” Jerry asked skeptically, stuffing the last of his hot dog into his mouth. “Cause I’ll tell ya, those two put on quite a show when Starsky brought Hutch in last night. All that yellin’ and pushin’ and shovin’. I’ll tell you what, they sure had me convinced. Man! I can’t believe it. Undercover, huh? I gotta admit, it’s quite a relief.” He wiped his hands and face on a small paper napkin and threw it into a nearby trashcan.

“Has anyone ever told you that you’re eating habits are atrocious?” Dean asked as they headed back up the steps. “Didn’t your mother ever tell you not to talk with food in your mouth? And how in the world do you keep from getting sick? You never even chewed that hot dog, and I’ve seen what you do to a slice of pizza...”

As the officers walked out of earshot, The Archer hurriedly folded his newspaper. No longer interested in waiting for his cab, he practically ran down the sidewalk to a nearby pay phone. There was a worm in Monte’s apple, and a cop at that. There was no telling just how grateful the mob boss would be when he got that little tidbit of information. A feral grin spread across The Archer’s face as he entered the phone booth, dropped in a coin, and dialed. This was just the break he’d been waiting for all his life. He straightened his tie a little as he listened to the ringing on the other end of the line and waited impatiently for someone to pick up.



“Hutchinson! Delaney!”

Hutch slowly cracked open one eye and stretched luxuriously before turning to look at the officer disturbing his apparent slumber. He hadn’t really been sleeping, of course; there were far too many men in the holding cell for that luxury. There always seemed to be a pecking order of sorts, even though the occupants were only there for a few hours.

Hutch had seen the wisdom of letting it be known right off the bat that he was not to be messed with. So, in order to establish his supremacy early on, he had bodily removed the previous occupant of the cell's only cot. After a brief but violent struggle, Hutch had then spent the remainder of the long night pretending to be asleep. In truth, he was wide-awake and constantly on guard, lest one of his fellow inmates decided to try and establish a little supremacy of his own.



When his name was called, Hutch stood up slowly and, grabbing his jacket that had served as a makeshift pillow, strolled to the now open cell door. "I'm Hutchinson," he said to the guard, even though he knew the officer was well aware of who he was. "What do you want?"

"You're outta here," the guard explained. "And you, too, Delaney," he continued, shifting his gaze to a young dark haired man who had joined Hutch at the door.

The guard blandly continued his explanation. "The two of you made bail. You can go to Property and pick up your personal belongings. Just go to the end of this hallway, take a left, then go—"

"I know where Property is," Hutch snapped back. He turned to the man behind him. "Come on, Delaney. You can follow me."

The two men headed down the hallway in the direction the officer had indicated. "So, Hutchinson," Delaney began, trying to match his stride to that of the tall blond. "What happens to you now? They ain't gonna let you be a cop no more, are they? Now that they busted ya."

Hutch snorted out a short bitter laugh. "They've got to prove I did anything wrong besides being at the scene, first. Hell, I might even sue for false arrest. No, we stick to my story and I'll come out of this just fine, right? That I got a tip there was a big buy going down at the warehouse, and there was no time to call my partner for back-up...my *partner* who didn't hesitate to snap the cuffs on me himself. Ungrateful—" Hutch took a moment to swear and shake his head in anger before continuing. "Yeah, I went in, hoping to make a major bust on my own. When I realized that Monte wasn't there, I decided to try and bargain. Offer a reduced sentence to anybody who would give up Monte. But before I got anywhere, the cops arrived, and I got scooped up in the net with the rest of the fish."

"You think they'll buy it?"

“It’s not like I ever played by the rules one-hundred percent before. It’s not that far fetched that I’d go off on a hot tip on my own like that. Besides, I’ve got an arrest record they can’t argue with. They don’t have any reason to believe I’ve gone sour now.”

“But what if they don’t believe you? What if you’re kicked off the force?”

Hutch didn’t even slow down, his eyes glaring straight ahead as he continued down the hallway, ignoring the hostile looks from the officers and department personnel they passed. He did lower his voice, though. “Then to hell with them. I’ve still got enough information and contacts to be useful to Monte. Names, places, which other cops can be bought off. Even if I don’t lose my job, maybe I’ll just quit, you know? Get out of this deathtrap before I buy it from some hophead with a knife in a back alley some night. Helluva retirement plan they offer here, huh?”

There seemed to be no answering that, so Delaney chose to walk on in silence. So much of what the other had said made sense to him, but he was still leery of the detective’s apparent loyalty to Vic Monte and the whole organization. In spite of the fact that Hutch had just been arrested, booked, and locked up like the rest of them, Delaney thought it would still be a good idea to let Mr. Monte have the final say on what, if any, future he had in the organization.

There was no line at the Property window when they arrived and Hutch stepped up first, giving his name and receipt to the clerk. After a few minutes, the bored-looking officer returned to the front with a large manila envelope in his hands and dumped the contents on the counter.

“Hutchinson, Kenneth R. One brown leather wallet with seventy-one dollars in it, one set of three keys, sixty-two cents in change. Sign here, please.”

Hutch glared at the man and made no move to pick up the proffered pen. “Where’s the rest of it?”

The clerk made a big show of peering into the now empty envelope and sticking his hand inside, thrusting it into the corners. “That’s all there is, Hutchinson. Now pick up your stuff, sign the form, and move on. I got work to do.”

Hutch just stared at the clerk. “What about my gun?”

“What about it? It’s being held until the investigation is over. You’re a cop, you should know that by now.”

“But I haven’t officially been suspended yet. And until I am—”

“Yeah, well, Captain Dobeey wants to see you before you leave the building today. Said he wants to know where your badge is, too.” The clerk looked at Hutch suspiciously. “Why didn’t you have your badge on you, anyway?”

“Like I told them before, there wasn’t time—”

“You had enough time to grab your gun.”

“Look, you pencil-pushing moron, I don’t have to explain this to you.”

“Fine, tell it to Captain Dobey! Said he’d be in his office.”

“Well, you can tell Captain Dobey to stuff it, as far as I’m concerned.”

“I don’t think that’s wise, *Detective*,” the clerk sneered, as he took Delaney’s receipt and headed into the maze of shelves that housed the prisoners’ belongings. After a few moments, he returned with another manila envelope and allowed Delaney to check his property before signing. “I think you got enough trouble without adding to it by ignoring an order from your superior officer. Or at least, the officer who *was* your superior.”

“You don’t get paid to think,” Hutch snapped back, grabbing Delaney by the arm and steering him down the hallway.

“You really gonna blow off your boss like that?” Delaney asked. “Maybe you should just go see him for a minute, find out where his head is, if you know what I mean.”

“I’ve made bail. I still have my badge until Internal Affairs gets a hold of it.” Hutch just shrugged his shoulders. “Right now, I’m more concerned with where Monte’s head is at. I can deal with Dobey later. I need to let Monte know nothing’s changed, as far as I’m concerned.”

“I’ll tell you what,” Delaney replied as they made their way out the front doors of the station. “Why don’t we grab a cab over to Mr. Monte’s and see what’s up? That’s where I’m headed, and you might as well go with me.”

Hutch shook his head. “You’d better go on ahead. It’s not too wise for us to be seen together once we leave. I’ve got to make sure that they’re not tailing me, either. The last thing I need is for them to see me running straight to Monte.”

Delaney nodded. “Okay, sure. I’ll let Mr. Monte know that you’ll be in touch.”

“See you around,” Hutch replied as he started down the stairs. He had barely made it down the first two steps when a voice behind him literally stopped him in his tracks.

“Hutch.”

Hutch stood motionless and took a deep breath before turning around slowly to face his partner. “What?”

Starsky looked uncomfortable, shifting his weight from one foot to the other and refusing to look his friend directly in the eye. “Dobey wants to see you. Sent me to see if I could catch you before you left.”

Out of the corner of his eye, Hutch could see Delaney casually watching the exchange from the sidewalk. “And I told the Property clerk to tell Dobby to stuff it, and you can, too, for all I care, *partner*.”

Hutch turned to descend the remaining steps, but Starsky was quicker and grabbed his arm. “Hold on a minute, Hutch. Don’t you even want to know what this is about? He’s given you the benefit of doubt. He’s been holding IA off, but I don’t know how much longer he can—”

Hutch turned around again, his eyes burning with cold anger. “First, pal,” his voice dripping with sarcasm and hostility. “You can let go of me. Second, if you’re just dying to tell me what the captain wants, I suppose I can’t stop you.”

Starsky dropped his hand and finally looked Hutch in the eyes. “I don’t know how to make this any easier, so I’ll just come out and say it. You’ve been suspended, Hutch. Indefinitely, or at least until IA completes their investigation. I..I need you to give me your badge.”



“First, they take my gun, and now you want my badge, too?” Hutch’s voice was getting louder by the syllable, and several people coming and going from the station stopped to see what was causing the commotion. “Welcome to America. I’ve spent most of my adult life putting lowlife trash behind bars in this very building just to have them back walking the streets less than twenty-four hours later. And you know why? Because in



America, you’re innocent until proven guilty. Except when you’re a cop, that is. When you’re a cop, you’re guilty as charged until IA has a chance to drag your name through the mud and ruin your reputation and your life.” He was nearly shouting and approached Starsky slowly, backing the smaller man into one of the large columns supporting the overhang above the station doors.

“Take it easy, Hutch,” Starsky tried to calm his now furious partner.

In one fluid movement, Hutch pinned Starsky to the column behind him. “What do you want, buddy? *Partner?* My shield? Well, I’ll tell you what. You can have it, but not until the day they pry it from my cold, dead fingers!”

The two men stood motionless for several long seconds, and for just a moment, Hutch thought he had gone too far. Starsky’s expression was unreadable, but he had seen a dark shadow pass across the other man’s face and wished he had chosen his words more carefully. He stared into Starsky’s eyes, trying to reassure him that everything was under control, then roughly pushed him away.

Without so much as a backward glance, Hutch stormed down the stairs and crossed the street. Delaney watched him go before turning his focus on Starsky. The detective appeared to be genuinely shaken as he straightened his jacket before slowly retreating into the station house.



“Well?” Delaney asked, crossing to the desk to refill his glass with another shot of bourbon. Vic Monte remained silent, his face expressionless as he placed the handset back into the phone cradle. “He wants to meet with me.”

“I knew that, but what else did he say?”

“Patience, Delaney, patience.” Monte slowly swirled the ice cubes in the glass tumbler before continuing. “You know, as a boy in Italy, we used to grow grapes. My mother, father, brothers, and I would tend to the crop and show it the utmost care and respect. Then, when the grapes were just right, we’d harvest them carefully and take them to the presses where they would give up their sweet wine. Then we’d store it in barrels and wait for when it was ready to drink, and sell to the rest of the world. Heaven, Delaney. The Monte family wines were pure heaven.”

Delaney settled himself in an armchair opposite his boss. “So, what’s that got to do with Hutchinson, Mr. Monte?”

Monte looked at his impatient lieutenant and shook his head. “My point is this—no matter how careful we were and no matter how good the grapes, every once in a while, for whatever reason, we’d get a barrel that would go bad. And once it was bad, there was nothing to do but get rid of it. But, it took time, Delaney. Only time could tell us which barrels were destined to be served on the finest tables in Europe and which would end up being poured into the sewers. And that’s what it will take with our detective friend—time.”

“So, we just cut him loose and continue with business like nothing’s happened?”

“On the contrary. We pretend like nothing’s changed and we allow him to operate just as

before, but we watch him. Carefully. And we keep our eyes and ears open for any hint, any whisper of betrayal. Then, just like the wine of my childhood, with the first inkling that the grapes have gone sour, we get rid of him.”

“There’s still something that bothers me, Mr. Monte. Hutchinson’s badge. When we was released and went to get our stuff back from the cops, they didn’t have his badge there. Hutchinson’s partner stopped us when we left the station and asked for it, but Hutchinson didn’t have it on him.”

“How did Hutchinson explain that?”

“Said he didn’t have it when he went to the warehouse the night of the bust. Ain’t that kinda odd?”

Monte took a sip of his drink as he thought. “Odd, yes, but not improbable.”

“But do you think that means anything? Does that mean he’s really still a cop? Is he maybe undercover and trying to nail you?”

Monte’s brow creased in anger. “You think I haven’t thought of all this, Delaney? You think Vic Monte is a fool? No. No, you see, it’s like the proverb my grandfather used to tell me, Delaney—*conservare tuo amicos vicino, anche tuo nemico, avvicinarsi*. ‘Keep your friends close, also your enemies closer.’ Go, call Hutchinson. Set up a meeting. Let’s put him in the press and see what kind of wine he turns out to be.”



Huggy sighed heavily as he plucked yet another glass from the antiseptic rinse and dried it. The lunch crowd was pretty much gone, and the sole proprietor of Huggy Bear’s Restaurant had quite a few things to accomplish before the dinner bunch made their way in. Of course, the usual dinnertime crowd was more interested in liquid nourishment than food, but that was okay with Huggy. Generally, the drunker a patron became, the more money he or she spent, and the more profitable the whole transaction became. Still, sometimes Huggy wished he didn’t have to spend what seemed like every waking hour baby-sitting drunks and arguing with them over whether or not they needed a taxi to take them home.

Huggy stared morosely out the front windows of his restaurant, mindlessly wiping the top of the already spotless wooden bar. He missed the regular visits by his favorite detective team. Of course, he’d still seen them since Hutch had gone undercover, but instead of coming in together and entertaining Huggy with their unlikely stories and good-natured banter, they came in separately now, careful not to show up at the same time. Somehow, it just wasn’t the same, and Huggy was more than a little worried. Starsky had been using him as a combination sounding board/therapist, and his deep-seated fears and worries over his partner had even permeated Huggy’s carefully constructed nonchalance. It was hard not to worry after listening to Starsky for hours at a time; it was even harder

to look into those piercing blue eyes and not feel the tension and concern that radiated from their depths.

Huggy's reverie was interrupted when the front door of the restaurant opened and a short disheveled man came in, allowing the door to slam behind him. Huggy recognized him immediately and his upper lip curled in disgust.

"I thought you left town," Huggy said with more than a hint of disdain in his voice. "And if Starsky finds you here, you'll wish you had. That door swings in both directions, and I suggest you use it to—"

"Hold on, just a minute," the man replied, his entire body shaking in the beginning throes of what promised to be a bad bout of the DT's. "Where's Starsky? Have you seen him?"

"Now, why would I tell you, even if I had seen him? It was all I could do to convince him not to kill you after that little stunt you pulled. You ratted on his partner, man; you might as well have held a loaded pistol to your head and pulled the trigger. You're lucky Hutch was in such bad shape afterward." The bartender's jaw muscles hardened at the memory. "Otherwise, Starsky would've hunted you down like the lowlife scum you are."

"Look." Mickey extended his shaking hands, pleading. "I made a mistake. B-but I know somethin' now, and I know Starsky would wanna know. And I thought mebbe he'd be willin' to front me a little cash, you know, just 'til I get back on my feet—"

"Get outta here!" Huggy snarled menacingly. "I'm gonna do you a huge favor and not tell Starsky you was here. But I'm warnin' ya...you show that ugly mug of yours in here again and I'll personally see to it that Starsky has you to himself for as long as it takes. And I may just pull up a chair and watch."

Mickey swallowed nervously, the shaking in his limbs even more pronounced. "H-hold on. Just gimme a minute. I have news for him." He seemed to struggle with himself for a moment, but one look at Huggy's face told him he'd better start talking, and fast. "It's about Hutch..."

Huggy slammed the used towel down onto the bar and, placing his hands on the smooth wooden surface, leaned toward the other, his voice no more than a clenched whisper. "You have exactly five seconds to start talkin', Mickey, and after that, I'm gonna tie you to one of these bar stools, call Starsky, and let him come rip you to pieces. So if you know somethin', you better start talkin', and this better be good."

For several moments, there was no sound in the restaurant as the two men stared at each other over the bar. Finally, Mickey began to speak. "Hutch's been undercover, workin' for Vic Monte, ain't that right?"

He now had Huggy's undivided attention. "Assuming that was true, how would you know? I thought you left town."

“Yeah, well, I’m back. A-and an old friend of mine runs numbers for Monte and gave me the scoop. You know. Thought mebbe I’d be interested ’cause I narked on Hutch before. Only I figured Starsky’s been good to me, really good, and I thought if I told him this, mebbe he’d forget the past and we could go on like old times. I...I really need a drink.”

Huggy reached behind the bar and pulled out a clean glass. With a flourish, he tipped it under the tap and expertly filled it with beer, a long stream of foam sliding down the side of the glass to drip onto the floor. Holding the glass aloft, he took a long draw, his eyes locked onto Mickey’s.

“You want this beer?”

Mickey said nothing, licking his lips in anticipation. He nodded anxiously.

“Then tell me what ya got about Hutch, and I’ll decide whether or not to call Starsky.”

Nothing could have prepared Huggy for Mickey’s reply. “Hutch’s cover’s been blown. Monte knows.”

The glass shattered as it hit the floor.



“I understand your concern,” DobeY was practically shouting. “But Hutch and his partner are the best I have, and if they feel Hutch should still be under, then he stays under! End of discussion.”

“No, this is *not* the end of the discussion, *Captain!*” McMillian replied vehemently. “The Bureau’s reconsidered. We can map out another way to finish the job and go after Singapore. Keeping Hutchinson in now isn’t worth the risk. I’m telling you, Captain, if anything happens to him and we lose his testimony—”

“His *testimony*? Is that all you care about, his testimony?” DobeY walked from behind his desk and crossed to the windows, taking a deep breath. “I know what’s at stake and so do Starsky and Hutch. And believe me, they want Vic Monte as much as you do. All I’m asking is that you trust them to do the right thing. They’re not a couple of dumb rookies looking to go out in a blaze of glory. And I can promise you this...” DobeY turned and jabbed a finger in the FBI man’s face. “There’s not a person in this Department that will be more careful with Hutch’s safety than his partner. Not me, not you, and not him,” he said, jerking his thumb in the direction of Richardson, who was watching the interchange silently.

“I hope you’re right, Captain, because the Bureau cannot afford to start this over again should something happen. And I can promise *you* this,” he added, pointing his own

finger in Dobby's face, "if something does happen to ruin this investigation, we will hold you personally responsible. Do you understand?"

Dobby sighed deeply and returned to his chair, slumping into it. "I understand. And I also understand—" His reply was cut short by the ringing of the telephone.

He snatched the phone off the cradle and barked into it, "Dobby here. I thought I told you to hold my calls! I can't— Okay, put him through." He held his massive hand over the receiver and directed his next remarks to the two men seated opposite him. "It's a contact...a friend of Starsky and Hutch's. He says it's urgent and, knowing his track record, I'd say it probably is."

He turned his attention back to the telephone. "Dobby here," he said again, only this time much more subdued.

The two men looked on as they listened to the one-sided conversation, noting with alarm the captain's grip tightening on the telephone as his voice rose with every response.

"Go ahead, Huggy. *What?* Are you sure? Who told you this? Absolutely reliable? Does Hutch know? You can't—? Did you try him at—? You keep trying, I'll take care of Starsky." With that, he slammed down the phone, only to pick it up again immediately afterward and punch a different line. "Get me Detective Starsky, and I mean *now!*"

A long moment of silence followed, and the agent and DA stared at the captain, watching the play of emotions cross the man's face. He appeared to be listening to someone for a couple of seconds, then with a curt, "Well, keep trying, and let me know as soon as you reach him," hung up the phone.

McMillian and Richardson looked at Dobby expectantly as he finally raised his eyes to them. He spoke without preamble, allowing the content of his message to convey his concern.

"Hutchinson's cover has been blown and I don't think he knows it yet."



Starsky returned from the Mexican take-out counter, carrying a grease-stained bag, the contents of which would have given his partner heartburn for a week. His next stop was to follow up with Huggy to find out what, if anything, he'd heard on the street about Hutch's arrest and return to Vic Monte's fold.

Approaching the Torino, he heard the unmistakable squawk of the police radio. He had left the driver's side window rolled down just a crack, and Mildred's voice carried to him clearly in spite of the noise from the parking lot.

"Zebra Three. Come in, Zebra Three. Do you copy? Over."

Hurrying the last few steps to his vehicle, Starsky set the sack on the roof of the car. After unlocking and opening the door, he retrieved the microphone. “This is Zebra Three. Go ahead.”

“Starsky? Is that you?” Mildred’s voice seemed to have a slight catch in it, and Starsky wasn’t sure if he had imagined it or not.

“Yeah, Mildred, it’s me. You were expecting Cary Grant?”

“I have a patch from Captain Dobey on Tach Two.”

“Switching to Tach Two.” Starsky stood as he waited, and fished through the bags and drew out a taco. He had just taken a second bite when the radio crackled to life.

“Starsky?”

“Right here, Cap’n. What’s up?”

“Is Hutch with you?”

Alarm bells went off in Starsky’s head as soon as he heard the strain in his captain’s voice. Suddenly losing interest in the food, he tossed the remainder of it back in the bag and swallowed. “Of course, he’s not with me. What’s going on? What happened?”

There was a brief silence, and Starsky tried to prepare himself for the captain’s next words. “Starsky,” Dobey began, his voice unsteady. “We received a tip about twenty minutes ago that Hutch’s cover has been blown. I’ve been trying to get in touch with him, but there’s no answer at his place and no one’s heard from him. I think you’d better get over there.”



Starsky looked down at his watch. “He’s supposed to check in in fifteen minutes.”

“You want to wait that long?”

“I’m on my way.” Starsky threw the microphone toward the passenger seat and jumped into the car without another thought. As he peeled out of the parking lot, the bag of takeout food tumbled to the blacktop, forgotten.



Starsky could see the flashing red lights from the fire trucks as soon as he turned the corner. Fear ran through him, a tightening band of pressure wrapping around his chest.

He floored the Torino, the cars in his path a blur as he wove in and out of traffic until he finally screeched to a halt, bouncing the sedan against the curb before coming to a rest.

Starsky bolted down the canal side walkway, slowing only to push aside the gawkers gathered around the fire department's barricade. Slipping between the hastily erected sawhorses, Starsky flashed his badge at a young firefighter attempting crowd control, and watched as two more hauled the hose from their pumper truck through the open door.

"That's my partner's house—Detective Ken Hutchinson. Where is he? Was he in there?"

"I don't know, Detective." The young blond shook his head. "We just arrived on the scene a few minutes ago."

Starsky nodded and spun away, charging through the yard. Before he made it to the door, the firefighter was beside him, grabbing him by the arm in an attempt to pull him away.

"You can't go in there, sir! We don't know how much structural damage there is, or—"

Starsky's face contorted in rage and fear. "My partner may be in there!"

"Look, I'm sorry, but I can't allow you to—"

Starsky's Beretta was out in a second, leveled at the young man's chest. A collective cry went up from the gathering crowd behind the barricades. The firefighter stepped away, his arms upraised in a gesture of surrender.

Starsky holstered his weapon as he tore through the yard, pulling the collar of his jacket up to his face as a shield against the thick gray smoke pouring out of the house. He hit the doorway running and leapt over the fire hose.

"*Huuuutch?*" Starsky followed the hose through the living room to the kitchen, where firefighters were dousing the last of the flames within the charred ruins of the small room. He could hear them demanding that he leave, their voices muffled through their breathing apparatus. Ignoring their warnings, he raced to the bedroom and bathroom, keeping bent over and as low to the floor as he could, to avoid the suffocating smoke that hung like a cloud. Starsky began to feel its effects, burning his eyes and lungs, and causing him to cough and choke.

Through the thickening haze, Starsky recognized signs that Hutch had been in his house recently. The clothes he'd been wearing the night of his arrest were carelessly tossed on the bed, his boots kicked off nearby as well. Starsky dropped to the floor and quickly peered under the bed.

Staggering to his feet, Starsky coughed fiercely, his eyes tearing from the billowing smoke. Unable to draw sufficient breath, he lurched out of the room to the closet just inside the doorway. Jerking the door open, his fears were confirmed, as they had been once before, by the swinging holster containing Hutch's Python.

As the room began to spin, Starsky determined that the firefighters had successfully extinguished the fire in the kitchen, though more were charging in. When his face hit the carpet, he was still conscious enough to realize he had fallen into something wet and dark. Starsky's hand shook as he reached out to touch it, and the last thing he remembered before slipping into oblivion was that his fingertips were covered in blood.



After he was roused, Starsky was treated on the scene for smoke inhalation. An oxygen mask was clamped over his nose and mouth, and Captain Dobey placed a secure arm under his shoulders and helped him out into the yard, cradling the oxygen canister in the other. The senior officer wasn't surprised that Starsky had refused further treatment or to be sent to the hospital for examination.

Sitting the winded detective on the hood of a patrol car, Dobey demanded that Starsky "stay put" for a moment to get his breathing stabilized. Meanwhile, the captain ushered in the investigating officers once they were given the "all clear" by the fire department. Dobey returned fifteen minutes later to check on Starsky, and the two returned to Hutch's cottage to watch as the forensics team gathered evidence.

Still dazed from smoke inhalation and coughing furiously, Starsky wandered about the house, his tennis shoes occasionally sloshing through the residual water from the hoses. As he examined the condition of the cottage, his trained eye determined immediately that the disarray was not completely caused by the fire department's rescue efforts. Overturned plants and furniture in the living room, and books heaved from their case well out of the path of the firefighters and their equipment, spoke of a struggle, as did the telltale stains of blood leading to the door. The pounding of Starsky's heart had nothing to do with the smoke that seared his lungs.

"Starsky!" Captain Dobey stepped out of the charred remains of the kitchen and beckoned the detective. Starsky quickly crossed the room to get his first clear look at the fire damage. The blaze seemingly started at the stove; the blackened unit was singed, as were the surrounding walls and cabinets in large streaked sections. The linoleum around the oven was warped and buckled from the terrific heat. A pot lay off to one side of the room, a dark substance still clinging to the side.

"Starsky, this is Chief Dobson from Rampart. He's got some information that might be helpful."

Starsky nodded at the chief and tried to clear his aching throat. “So what do you think caused the fire? What about my partner?”

Dobson scanned the room again with an experienced eye. “While it might look like something on the stove caught fire, we don’t think that’s what happened. This was arson, and a sloppy job at that.”

Dobey raised an eyebrow. “How can you be sure?”

Dobson pointed to different areas around the room. “See how the scorch marks are generated in one place? Where the soot is more congested is where someone splashed an inflammatory material—probably a liquid agent—to expedite the combustion. There’s similar residue throughout the apartment that we’re getting samples of. Shouldn’t take the lab much effort to pinpoint it.”

Dobson crossed the room, then stooped to pick up the discarded pot by hooking his pencil through the open handle. “Now, this...this tells me that the occupant—”

“*My partner,*” Starsky rasped, his voice graveled by more than the smoke inhalation.

“Detective Hutchinson, right. See how there’s something—stew, or maybe soup—clinging to the sides? It’s still fairly moist.”

“So it didn’t burn up on the stove and start the fire,” Dobey interjected.

“Right.” Dobson pointed to a darkened spot on the floor near the stove; a blackened residue lay on some of the warped tiles. “It looks like the pot and whatever was in it got knocked off the stove and landed in this area, then caught fire. The pot was either kicked to the other side of the room, or rolled. Or maybe just got knocked over here when my men brought the hose in and sprayed. It’s hard to say, and may not be important, other than the fact that it wasn’t the cause of the fire.”

Starsky prowled the small room, then stopped, staring out into the living room where the forensics team was snipping carpet fiber samples from the bloodied area by the door.

When Starsky finally spoke, his voice was a whisper. “But where’s my partner?”



An APB was issued on Hutch, and Captain Dobey assigned a special task force to begin scouring the city for the missing detective. FBI Agent McMillian also put a half-dozen additional men on the case and began working diligently with the commissioner and DA to shore up the case against Vic Monte “just in case.”

Starsky immediately hit the streets, operating on sheer determination and desperate adrenaline. The first day revealed nothing from his and Hutch’s snitches and informants.

It was as if his partner had vanished into thin air. Huggy called in every favor owed him, and offered a few of his own, for any word on Hutch's disappearance.

Starsky personally interviewed every one of Hutch's neighbors, including the half-dozen homes lining the single road that led to the cottage. The results were all the same: no one saw or heard anything unusual that night until the closest neighbor smelled smoke when he went outside his house and went to investigate. Out of desperation, Starsky also followed up with the nearby marina, in the event that someone who'd been boating had seen or heard anything and mentioned it to the staff there.

The forensics lab's confirmations offered little hope. The accelerant used to fan the blaze in the apartment was simply kerosene, which could have been purchased at any gas station.

The bloodstain Starsky found on the carpet was reported as a positive match to Hutch. With every hour that sped by, the sense of desperation lingering in the back of Starsky's mind intensified, along with his fear.



By evening, exhaustion warred with the desperation to find his partner. Starsky went back to the squadroom to review the forensics report and check in with the other detectives assigned to what was now officially designated as an "officer missing" case. Word of Hutch's undercover assignment and staged arrest had quickly spread throughout the precinct, and his fellow officers responded instantly with their support and vows of doing whatever necessary to find him. Starsky found some small comfort in knowing the display of unity stemmed from far more than a need for absolution for some of their earlier feelings of outrage and disgust when they had thought Hutch was dirty. His partner had earned his coworkers' respect and admiration years ago, and was worthy of their support now.

Starsky could hear the furious exchange well before he even entered the squadroom, and was not surprised when he heard Captain Dobey's voice. As he entered, Starsky recognized McMillian's angry voice in the captain's office as well.

Without preamble, he joined the fray, his sudden appearance catching Dobey, McMillian, and another man Starsky didn't know off-guard. "Have you found out anything about Hutch?"

The new man snorted and looked at Starsky crossly. "We planned to ask you the same thing, Detective."

Dobey stabbed his finger in the agent's direction. "What do you think Starsky's been doing all day, waxing his car?" After a moment of tense silence, the captain threw his pencil onto the desk. "Starsky, this is Stuart Endicott, McMillian's partner." When he

saw the tension in the detective's face, he continued in a more reasonable tone. "You got anything?"

It took Starsky a moment to drag his gaze away from the agents to meet his superior's sympathetic one. "Nothing. It's like he disappeared off the face of the earth."

"You think it was Vic Monte?"

Starsky nodded marginally. "He's got the most to gain. It'd be a helluva coincidence if it was somebody else."

McMillian took a step in Starsky's direction. "Look, I don't think I need to tell you how important it is that Hutchinson is found. Without his testimony, our case against Monte is—"

Starsky's eyes blazed. "*You think I give a damn about your case right now?*"

"—circumstantial, and we won't have a leg to stand on in court. We need Hutchinson!"

"*You need Hutchinson? I..*" Starsky stood mere inches from the agent's face, every muscle in his body tensed, ready to strike. The air was electric as Starsky uncoiled and pulled himself away from McMillian, turned and stormed out of the office.

"Starsky!" The urgency in Dobey's voice was enough to stop him, but Starsky didn't turn or acknowledge him further. Dobey's voice softened. "We've been here before, Starsky. You'll find him."

The detective's shoulders sagged marginally before he burst open the squadroom doors, his rage barely in check.



Starsky found himself outside Vic Monte's home at 1:00 a.m., demanding admittance. He was mildly surprised when he was allowed passage through the guarded entrance, though he knew he could be walking right into a trap. The elaborately scrolled iron gate rolled open, and the Torino's tires squealed slightly as it roared through to the main entrance of the house.

A tuxedoed butler met Starsky at the door, where the detective stood

spinning his key ring on his index finger. As he was admitted into the luxurious entryway, a burly guard demanded the pistol from Starsky's shoulder holster before he was allowed in farther. Starsky relinquished his Beretta with a mock scowl, having tucked a .38 special into the back of his waistband before leaving the Torino.

When the bodyguard further attempted to pat Starsky down, the detective brought him to his knees by clamping the guard's earlobe between his thumb and the ignition key. "That's not necessary, Grumpy. Or are you Dopey? I can't tell...all you dwarves look alike," Starsky growled, pressing harder. "What do you say we go wake up Sleeping Beauty?"

"That won't be necessary, Detective Starsky," Vic Monte responded as he descended the open staircase, tying the sash of his silk dressing gown.

Starsky released his hold on the bodyguard's ear and stepped past the prone man. When the guard quickly rose and took a menacing step in Starsky's direction, the detective drew the second revolver and stuck it between the other's eyes, the safety clicking off loudly.

"Ah, Manuel, you are an idiot, aren't you?" Monte said with an exaggerated sigh.

"Good help is so hard to find," Starsky quipped as he relieved the bodyguard of his weapon and stuck it in his waistband, then retrieved his Beretta.

Taking a step back from his bead on the larger man, Starsky trained the second weapon on Monte.

The mobster spoke calmly as Starsky studied him. "You want to know where your partner is. You think I took him hostage or that I killed him in retaliation for his ruse."

"That's about the size of it." Starsky's nod was congenial, but his eyes promised violence.

"Well, I can honestly say that I was less than pleased to learn that Sergeant Hutchinson was playing me for a fool. I can also honestly say that it doesn't hurt my case at all that your partner is missing. But, I am not so stupid, Detective, as to snatch or burn a cop when it would be so very obvious that I would gain significantly from his disappearance."

"Your words mean nothing to me. *Where's my partner?*" Starsky's voice rose to a hoarse bellow. The .38 was raised higher until it pointed full in the face of the mobster. Manuel took a step forward, but a gesture from his employer stopped him.

"I don't know."

The .38 dipped marginally to the right before it fired, missing Monte by a breath. The mobster's hands went up to his ears as he flinched, the destroyed plaster beside him sending up a little cloud of dust.

Starsky's voice was deadly calm. "One more time, *where is my partner?*"

Monte straightened, composing himself. Several other men rushed into the room from various parts of the house with drawn guns. Monte simply raised a hand to stop them in their tracks. His voice was placid as he met Starsky's hardened gaze. "Detective, even if you had the chutzpah to shoot me in cold blood, my answer would have been the same. I don't know where your partner is. I did not order whatever has happened to him. I can't say I hope he's alive, or that you ever find him. But I can say that you'll never be able to pin this on me, because I had *nothing* to do with his disappearance."

"I don't believe you." Starsky's deadly whisper was followed by the *snick* of the gun's hammer being pulled back.

"Then prove it." Monte straightened his dressing gown, turned, and retreated up the stairs. Starsky's hand trembled as the site of the weapon followed the ascent. When Monte disappeared from his view, Starsky simply returned the hammer and clicked the safety back on, jamming the weapon into his shoulder holster. His mind was already racing ahead to figure out his next move, never acknowledging the fourteen weapons still drawn and pointed at him as he turned to leave. The clip from Manuel's gun was tossed into the bushes as he charged down the sidewalk to the Torino, and the gun flung onto the lawn as he peeled down the driveway.



The next days were a frantic blur of combing the streets and tracking down what turned out to be false leads regarding Hutch's disappearance. As he unraveled the meager clues he found, Starsky had managed to uncover evidence that supported the case against Vic Monte. The detective passed them on to the DA's office, almost annoyed as if the information ate up precious time that could have been used in his search for his partner. Dobey, Minnie, and

several co-workers and friends at the station were unsuccessful in convincing Starsky that he needed at least a few hours' sleep. On the brink of collapse, Starsky gave in, but was only able to sleep for about an hour and a half, slumped over in one of the leather chairs

in the captain's office. Huggy finally managed to get Starsky to eat a grilled cheese sandwich, washed down with several cups of coffee in the midst of the second day.

The fifth day of searching for Hutch yielded nothing by Starsky, Dobey's task force, or the FBI. Captain Dobey paused in the hallway, watching Starsky through the squadroom window as he frantically scanned case files, hoping to find one thread that would offer him a lead.

Starsky's movements became jerky, and he was stumbling into office furniture and dropping things. Dark circles ringed the detective's eyes, and his face was lined with what looked to be a constant anguish.

The captain prayed that something in the case would break soon, before he lost *both* of his detectives.



If Starsky had been in tune with his surroundings, he might have been surprised to note he was alone in the squadroom. Captain Dobey had left an hour ago to have a quick dinner with the family he'd seen very little of in the last week, and to change his clothes before returning to the station for another late night. The other shift detectives were out on the street, many of whom were searching for clues of Hutch's whereabouts, even though they weren't officially assigned to his case. The remaining detectives who had been in the office earlier had made their way down to the commissary to get a sandwich for a late dinner.

Anyone looking in at the room's sole occupant probably would have thought he was asleep, his elbows on the desk, hands cradling his forehead. Actually, Starsky was fervently reviewing the chart he had just scrawled out—a maze of names, places, times, and events that had led up to Hutch's disappearance, and those that came into play since.

He didn't startle when the phone shrilled in front of him, but blindly groped for the receiver and brought it to his ear as he continued to study the data laid out on the desk. "Starsky."

"I got something on your missing partner, if you're interested. What's it worth to you?"

*What's it worth to me? How do I answer that?* Starsky didn't recognize the voice, husky from a lifetime of chain-smoking. "Who is this?"

"Does it matter? Do you want the information or not?"

"Have you seen him? Do you know where he is?"

"Meet me."

“Where?” Starsky jotted down the address on the edge of one of the papers before him. “I’m on my way.”

The voice rasped once more before the connection was broken. “It’s gonna cost you.”

Starsky snatched up the notes and his jacket from the back of the chair as he raced out of the office. *It already has.*



The phone call had come from a snitch Starsky knew by name only. The junkie, a small man known only as “Cox,” occasionally sold information to DiMira in Vice, and he typically found it to be reliable. Starsky could feel sweat run down his back as he waited in the alley behind a seedy west-side bar. A noise alerted him to the snitch’s advance, and he turned to watch his arrival.

“You Starsky?”

“Cox.” He nodded once. “What do you know?”

The junkie lit a cigarette, his hands shaking, making the lighter’s flame dance. Starsky’s hand darted out and wrapped around Cox’s, steadying it.

“Thanks.” Cox took a long draw of smoke as he studied the detective. “Normally, I’d only deal with DiMira, you know? I figure I could make an exception, but it’s gonna cost ya.”

“That’s old news. Tell me something I don’t know, like where my partner is.”

Cox shook his head. “That I don’t know.”

Faster than the junkie’s eyes could follow, Starsky’s hands lashed out and grabbed Cox by the front of his shirt. “Don’t mess with me, dirtbag, ’cause you won’t live to regret it!”

The cigarette flew from Cox’s hands as he was thrust violently against the filthy brick wall. He was genuinely afraid of the mass of rage before him. “Easy, man! Take it easy! I said I don’t know where your partner is, but I *do* know where his car’s at!”

After a moment Starsky released him, and Cox retrieved his cigarette from the ground. The two men stood in the shadows trembling, one from fear and withdrawal, the other bristling with anger and frustration.

“Okay,” Starsky finally spoke. “Tell me.”

“A hundred.”

The detective's eyes narrowed, knowing Cox had inflated his price drastically. If he gave in too quickly, the snitch would most likely only tell him a fraction of what he needed to know, effectively holding him hostage for another payment for the remainder of the information. "Fifty."

The junkie snorted. "You've got to be kidding me, man. One hundred, in advance."

"Fifty. And you take me there."

"You're full of it. Seventy-five, and I ain't goin' nowhere."

Even knowing he had to barter with the snitch in order to get any useful information didn't stop Starsky from feeling nauseated. *If you only knew how much I'm willing to give in order to find Hutch...* "Seventy-five. Half now, half when we get there. Take it or shake it."

Cox tried to stare down the detective and not show his desperate need for a score. He was about to reel off a flippant response and walk away in hopes of upping the detective's offer when Starsky's low growl changed his mind. *"Tell me, now—or you won't have to worry about another fix ever again."*



It turned out that Cox had made a buy the day before and went to one of the abandoned tenements a few blocks from the bar. He went to the back of the building to slip in through a doorway. The door had long since fallen off, but a few boards nailed across the frame to keep intruders out still remained. As Cox had passed through the alley, he spotted the nose of a battered tan LTD poking out from behind a pile of trash discarded against the building. He first passed by the car casually to ensure there was no one in it to witness his coming and going, or to interrupt his "party."

Several hours later, after Cox had come down from his self-induced euphoria, the car was still there, and the snitch went to investigate it further. The back seat of the sedan was littered with trash, leading him to believe it had been abandoned, perhaps after being stolen. Even though he doubted he'd find anything of value to keep or hock, he searched the vehicle and was surprised to find the car's registration still in the glove box, as well as a police radio and logbook. Cox pulled the radio out and made a beeline to one of the local fences, which scored him five dollars.

A day later, Cox had seen a news bulletin about a missing officer on a TV that hung above the bar, and decided to see if he could benefit from his discovery behind the abandoned apartments. It didn't take long for him to find out who would be the most interested in—and thus, pay the most for—his tip.



After paying and releasing the snitch, Starsky got out of the car, drew his gun, and took in the familiar site of the LTD standing mutely in the moonlight. The Torino's strobe splashed its red light across the side of his face and the profile of Hutch's car, marking a bloody trail. Starsky scanned the dark alley before moving to the LTD and quickly going through its contents. Abandoned cars were nothing new in a town as large as Bay City, so it wasn't surprising that Hutch's car hadn't been noticed before this. Nothing out of the ordinary gave him any indication as to how the vehicle had gotten there or the whereabouts of its owner. Starsky noted the disappearance of the police radio and logbook, and with grim humor realized that no one else would know that the mound of trash in the back of the car had been there *before* it had been abandoned.

Returning to the Torino, Starsky called in his location and requested a crime lab and wrecker, as well as back-up units to search the surrounding buildings. A knot of fear tangled with the hopeful possibility that Hutch, or at least clues to his whereabouts, might be within one of the tenements. Retrieving a flashlight from the glove box, he refused to even consider the fact that they might find his partner's corpse inside and resolutely pushed away the unwelcome image that came to mind.

The now-familiar sense of desperation returned to wash over Starsky, and he rushed to the doorway near the LTD. He wondered if Hutch had passed through the narrow opening between the boards, or had been forced through, assuming that the boards had been there when and if his partner had. There was a possibility that, even though the boards were old and weathered, they had been placed there after Hutch had entered—*if he's even been here*, Starsky reminded himself—to give it the appearance that no one had passed that way in years.

It was obvious others had managed to slip through the opening, but in gauging the space, Starsky knew he wouldn't fit. Holstering his gun, he tugged on one of the boards. When it didn't give way, he stepped back and unleashed his frustration, kicking the wood until it cracked, then finally broke. Frantic hands ripped the remaining pieces away until he had created a space large enough, then forced himself through the passage, unmindful of the splinters that scraped his jaw and chin, drawing blood.

Starsky snapped on the flashlight and scanned the hallway. The sound of rats scurrying from his entry greeted him and he swallowed convulsively. The tenement smelled of human waste and was strewn with garbage, confirming that someone had been there recently. Steeling himself, Starsky cautiously made his way down the hall, entering each single-room apartment and scanning them for any signs of life or of Hutch. Most of the doors were missing or barely hanging on by a rusting hinge, and the rooms were barren except for garbage, empty boxes, and the occasional piece of dilapidated furniture.

Finishing his search of the first floor, Starsky raced up the stairs to the second, then the third. As he passed through each room, his anguish intensified until he was running through the abandoned building. After the third floor offered nothing, Starsky barreled

up the last set of stairs and burst through the stairwell doorway, only to find himself on the tarpaper rooftop.

As he stood in the darkness, breathing heavily, the flashlight slipped from his numb fingers and rolled a few feet away. After a moment, Starsky staggered to the edge of the rooftop and braced himself against the short wall lining the rim. Before him Bay City lay in a sea of lights, giving testimony to its vast size and the hundreds of thousands of people it harbored. Starsky felt a block of ice settle in his stomach with the realization that Hutch could be anywhere out there, waiting for his partner to help him, find him, save him—before it was too late.

Starsky closed his eyes and he threw back his head, releasing his desperation into the night. “*Hutch!*”



The morning light streamed into the district attorney’s office window, warming the room. DA Richardson didn’t look up from the report he’d been reading until he finished it, ignoring the federal agent seated in front of him.

“It appears that Detective Starsky’s kept busy. While he’s out searching for his partner, he’s actually managed to shore up the case against Vic Monte. It wouldn’t surprise me if he breaks the Singapore connection in the process as well.”

McMillian exhaled through his nose, partly in disgust for the headway a mere city detective was making beyond what he and his partner had made in the past week. “Yeah, well, we’ll see. He’s also ticking off a lot of people. It wouldn’t surprise me if he winds up dead.”

The DA raised an eyebrow. “Unfortunate, to be sure, but of no real consequence to the case. All I care about is putting Vic Monte away. The governor’s counting on me, and I’m counting on *you*, McMillian. You understand?”

McMillian nodded, a hard glint in his eye. “Oh, yes, sir. I understand perfectly.”



Starsky’s hands shook as he reached for the coffeepot. He turned at the sound of voices coming down the hall, recognizing the group as the four detectives heading up Hutch’s case. The group entered the squadroom engrossed in their heated discussion, their voices low and tense. As soon as they saw Starsky, their conversation abruptly stopped, their expressions fading from frustration to guilt.

Starsky’s eyes burned through them. “What?”

When no one spoke up, his face turned red with anger, instinctively knowing something was wrong. “What is it? Have you found something?”

Jacobson, the oldest of the four detectives, put his hands up in a placating gesture. “Nothing, Starsky. We got nothing. It’s just that...”

When he trailed off, one of the younger men—a new detective named Becker—pressed the point he’d been trying to make with them earlier. “That’s just it, you see? It’s almost as if Detective Hutchinson doesn’t *want* to be found. These kinds of things happen all—”

The throwing of the coffeepot from across the room was sudden and violent. While Starsky purposefully missed the junior officer, lukewarm coffee splashed near enough to stain Becker’s shirt and cause him to duck reflexively. When the pot struck the plate glass window, it shattered the pane, sending shards into the hallway.

Officers came running down the corridor, and Captain Dobey came out of his office in a rush. “What the—? What happened to the window?”

Becker opened his mouth to respond, but his partner spoke up first. “It was the damnedest thing, Captain. As we were coming in, one of us must have hit the doorframe pretty hard. All of a sudden, the window just...shattered. Isn’t that *right*, Becker?”

The junior partner swallowed hard, Jacobson’s intent clear. “Yeah. Yeah, that’s what must have happened.”

Dobey snorted. “Well, somebody call a janitor to get this mess cleaned up and take care of that window.” The captain glanced at Starsky, as the brunet’s glare continued to bore a hole into the youngest of the group. Knowing full well what had happened, but choosing to ignore it, he returned to his office and slammed the door.

Jacobson nudged his partner toward a phone, then turned his focus back to Starsky. “Listen, we haven’t come up with anything. None of the men arrested with Hutch know anything about his disappearance, or else they’re just too scared to talk. We’re in contact with everybody we know on the streets, Starsky. Just hang in there. Something’s bound to turn up.”

Starsky nodded mutely, pulling his jacket off the back of his chair. Without a backward glance, he stepped across the broken glass and out of the squadroom.



“This is Baker Four. We’re at the scenic view turnoff at mile marker twelve, and I don’t see anything. Where did they say it was?”

The dispatcher checked the call sheet. “The caller indicated that the body was in the Angeles National Forest, about forty feet down the embankment, south-southwest of mile marker twelve. Body was male, blond, approximately thirty years old.”

“Uh-huh,” the patrolman grunted. “And was this a legit call, or some whack-job?”

There was a grin in the dispatch operator’s voice. “Got me, Ace. I’m just the messenger.”

“Gee, thanks for the tip.” The patrolman looked sourly at his partner before returning his attention to the microphone. “All right, we’ll be out of the vehicle for a while. If you don’t hear back in thirty, call Smokey the Bear. Baker Four, out.”

The two CHP officers climbed out of their car and over the guardrail, cautiously picking the safest trail through the brush of the steep embankment. A quick glance above them at the squad car assured them they were indeed moving southwest of the mile marker. When they descended to what they estimated to be forty feet, they spread out, kicking up brush.

When the older of the two officers leaned against a tree to mop his brow, something caught his eye.

“Oh, good Lord...”



In desperation, Starsky drove to Hutch’s house again, having lost track of the number of times he’d been there over the course of the last several days. He had the constant feeling he was missing something, and, if he just looked close enough, thought hard enough, he would find it.

Much of the cottage looked just as it had after the forensics team had partitioned it off as a crime scene. Starsky was careful not to disturb anything as he wandered about the familiar space like a ghost, aimlessly moving from memory to memory.

The burning in his eyes had nothing to do with the lingering smell of smoke that permeated the cottage. Blindly, Starsky staggered into the bedroom and sank down onto the side of the bed. Without realizing he had moved, he found himself clutching a pillow tightly to his chest, his face buried in it as the tears finally came.

The release lasted only a moment, pushed aside by his refusal to give up or lose hope. Just as Starsky surged unsteadily to his feet, the bedside telephone rang, and he snatched up the receiver. “Yeah?”

“Starsky? I...when you didn’t answer on the radio...I...”

“What is it, Cap’n?” Starsky felt a chill in his stomach at Dobby’s stammering.

“Starsky...”

“Cap’n, what is it?” His voice rose further when no answer was forthcoming.  
“*Captain?*”

“Detective Starsky?” The new voice was McMillian’s. “We need you to come back downtown. There’s been a John Doe found by the CHP, and...well, we need you to come down to the morgue, Detective.”

Starsky sank back onto the bed when his knees could no longer support him. “*No...*”

“Why don’t you just wait there, Sergeant, and I’ll send a car to pick you up? Detective Starsky?”

The sound of the receiver dropping and Starsky’s feet running across the floor were the only replies to the agent’s questions.



Starsky’s heart threatened to leap out of his chest as he tore down the stairwell leading to the city morgue. The drive across town had a nightmarish quality he was never able to describe afterwards.

As he stumbled down the steps, he tried to draw breath to clear his head, but the tightness in his chest wouldn’t allow it. His thoughts were incoherent—a jumble of denial and fear warring against the numbness that tried to smother his panic.

As he hit the last step, he lost his balance out of fear and fatigue. He leaned against the wall, gripping the handrail to steady himself. It was then that he could hear fragments of conversation and the anguish in his captain’s voice.

“We have to stop him...he doesn’t need to see...I can verify...”

Faltering steps took Starsky to the open door of the morgue, and he slowly entered. Dobby and McMillian were talking to the coroner, Jameson, and the captain was signing a form on a clipboard. Starsky’s eyes traveled across the room to the rows of drawers containing the bodies of the dead.

One slab was pulled out, the still form covered by a protective sheet. The crown of the person’s head was exposed, blond hair dull in the fluorescent lights. Starsky began to tremble. “Cap’n?”

Dobby thrust the clipboard toward Jameson and quickly crossed to block the detective’s view. “Starsky...you don’t...” The larger man’s voice broke.

“Captain?” A whisper.

“Dave...son, it’s—”

“No.” Starsky’s voice was matter-of-fact, but the look in his eyes belied the fear ripping at his heart. “No.”

“You don’t have to do this.”

“It’s *not* him. It’s not Hutch. *I’d know it.* I’d know it if he were...” Starsky shook his head violently and stared past the larger man to the still body.

When Dobey reached out, Starsky stepped around him and walked purposefully to the corpse laid out before him. As he reached to draw back the sheet, he stopped, his hand trembling.

Starsky closed his eyes and swallowed, then steeled himself against the inevitable—he had to know. He would never forget the feel of that sheet under his quaking hand as he drew it back to reveal the victim’s face.

Hutch’s face.

“*Oh, God...*” was all Starsky could manage past the enormous pain ripping through him. Pulling the sheet back until his hand rested above his partner’s heart, Starsky could feel the coldness of Hutch’s skin, the absence of breath and heartbeat emitted from the once strong chest. His other hand came up to cradle his partner’s head, the flesh beneath his questing fingers chilled under his touch. The side of Hutch’s face had second-degree burns, most likely gained from the apartment fire, and his lips and eyelids had the bluish cast of death. His nose appeared to have taken a significant blow at some point, and Hutch’s torso was battered—a patchwork of faded bruises and bloodless scrapes.

“*Oh, Hutch...no...no...*” Starsky dropped his head to his partner’s chest and silently cried, voiceless tears shaking his frame.

Two strong hands pulled him up, and if he’d been less grief-stricken, Starsky would have been surprised to find it was McMillian, rather than Dobey, who led him away from Hutch’s body. The captain followed, then took Starsky by the arm and led him out of the room, intending to drive him home. But when they stepped out into the hallway, Starsky slumped against the wall and slowly slid to the floor. Drawing his knees up to his chest, he folded his arms over them and lowered his head. He began crying in earnest and without shame, his heartbreaking grief reverberating throughout the stairwell.

His own tears sliding down rough cheeks, Dobey lowered himself to the floor beside his friend and sat quietly next to him, an arm across Starsky’s shoulders to remind him he wasn’t alone.



Dobey had no idea how long he and Starsky sat in the hallway outside the morgue, the detective's anguish branding the captain's heart. Somehow, Starsky recovered enough to eventually raise his head. He stared at his captain for a long moment before he finally found his voice. "We have work to do."

His words caught Dobey by surprise. "Look, Dave, I really think you need to get some rest. Why don't we—?"

"No, there's something I have to do first. I need to call his parents." Starsky's voice broke and his eyes again filled.

"Why don't you let me call them? I am...his captain, and it's my responsibility to notify next of kin—"

"No," Starsky interrupted quietly, resolve mingling with grief. "This is my responsibility. He...was *my* partner, it was *my* job to protect him, and I think the least they deserve is to hear it from me."

Dobey sighed heavily and rose to his feet, pulling Starsky up with him. He was going to argue, but seeing the firm set of the detective's jaw made him change his mind. Starsky had a clear sense of duty and honor, and nothing the captain could say would ever change that.

"Come on, then," Dobey replied, steering Starsky back up the stairwell. "We'll use the phone in my office."



Dobey perched on a corner of his desk, watching in silence as Starsky reached out a trembling hand to dial the phone. There was a long pause, and Starsky quickly rubbed his eyes with his free hand. The captain had never seen Starsky so vulnerable, and the gesture made his own throat tighten.

After a few seconds, Starsky began to speak. "Mrs. Hutchinson? This...this is Dave Starsky."

Dobey could only hear one side of the conversation, but from Starsky's responses, he had a good idea what was being said on the other end of the line.

"Yes, ma'am...yes, I'm fine. Mrs. Hutchinson, is your husband there? I need to talk to you...to both of you." Dobey looked on wordlessly, hoping his mere presence could somehow lend strength. Starsky's face was pale and haggard, his features made even

more gaunt by the dim lighting in the room, and Dobby wondered once again what would happen to him once the dust had settled and reality set in.



“He’s in the room with you now? Good. Mrs. Hutchinson, there’s no easy way for me to say this, but...” Tears streamed down his face as he tried to find the right words to say. “I am so sorry. Hutch...we...we don’t know how, or...or who yet...I...”

Dobby felt his own eyes fill as he gently pried the telephone receiver from Starsky’s trembling grip. “Mrs. Hutchinson? This is Captain Dobby. It is my very sad duty to inform you that your son has been killed in the

line of duty.” He had delivered this same speech many times, but this was different. This was Hutch.

“Kenny is dead?” came the trembling reply. “Are you sure?”

Dobby could hear her sobbing as he tried to continue. “Yes, Mrs. Hutchinson, unfortunately we are sure. I am so very sorry.”

There was a long pause on the other end of the line, and for a moment, Dobby thought perhaps Mrs. Hutchinson had broken the connection. A strong male voice came over the wire, and Dobby recognized it as Hutch’s father’s. He had spoken with the man only days ago to arrange Hutch’s bail, but now the circumstances were greatly changed, and the voice he heard was filled with sorrow and rage.

“Captain Dobby?” Mr. Hutchinson bellowed into the receiver. “Would you mind explaining to me what the hell is going on here? We just bailed my son out of jail on some sort of assignment, and you assured me that he was safe. *Safe*, Captain. And now you’re telling me he’s *dead*? Didn’t you even realize my son was in danger? How do you explain this kind of negligence, Captain? *How could you have allowed this to happen?*”

Dobby sat stunned, at a loss. He swallowed a few times and attempted to reply, but had no idea what to say. The truth was, he was asking the same questions of himself and had no answers.

To his surprise, Dobby felt the receiver being pulled from his hand. It was obvious by the look on his face that Starsky had heard every word Hutch’s father had spoken and was willing to deal with the outburst.

“Mr. Hutchinson?” Starsky said quietly, respectfully. “This is Dave Starsky.”

Although he couldn't make out the individual words, DobeY heard the voice on the other end of the line raise even further in volume. Starsky sat stoically, his eyes squeezed tightly shut as he allowed the other man's anger and wrath to wash over him. Finally, after what seemed like a very long time, the noise quieted, and DobeY guessed the other man had simply run out of steam.

“Yes, sir,” Starsky again spoke quietly, never raising his voice. “I understand. We'll arrange for you and your wife to be picked up at the airport if you'll just call as soon as your travel arrangements have been made. We'll discuss the details of the...service when you get here.

“Yes, sir. And please tell Mrs. Hutchinson...tell her I loved him, too...” Starsky's voice trailed off as he slowly hung up the phone.

Silence filled the small office as both men stared into space, each lost in his own private turmoil. DobeY was the first to recover and he levered himself off the desk, gripping Starsky's shoulder as he moved toward the squadroom. “Stay here. I need to make another call.” There was no response.

DobeY sighed heavily and made his way to one of the vacant desks. He noticed his own hand was shaking as he picked up the phone and dialed his home number. He gripped the receiver tightly, wishing he could be there to comfort his family as he broke the news to them, but he knew Edith was strong. She would be able to handle her grief and that of the children as well. Right now, he would stay with Starsky, hoping his detective would accept his comfort, though it was a pale substitute for what he had lost.

“Hello?” Edith's soft voice came over the line, and DobeY felt his composure slipping.

“Edith. I...” Suddenly at a loss for words, DobeY sat heavily in a chair, tilting his head back in an attempt to blink the tears from his eyes.

“Harold? What is it?” Edith's voice was full of concern. Fifteen years of marriage had taught her every nuance of her husband's voice, and whatever the reason for his call, she knew it couldn't be good. “What's wrong? Harold, talk to me and tell me what's wrong.”

The tone of his wife's voice finally broke through DobeY's grief and, as gently as he could, he relayed the news of Hutch's death. After she regained her composure, Edith agreed to tell the children and to set up the guestroom so Starsky could stay with them as long as he needed to. They hoped the constant, loving support of their family could somehow help lessen his grief in the bleak days that lie ahead.

DobeY hung up the phone and walked back into his office. As far as he could tell, Starsky hadn't moved at all. He placed his hand on the detective's shoulder. “Starsky?”

Slowly, Starsky turned to look at his captain, his eyes reflecting a combination of grief, anger, and something that couldn't be named. He didn't say anything, but patiently waited until his captain spoke again.

"I just talked to Edith, and we think it would be best if you came to the house and stayed with us for a few days. She is talking to the children right now so they'll be prepared when we get there. We can stop by your place, pick up a few things—"

"No," Starsky interrupted quietly, getting up from his seat and pulling his jacket around him more tightly. "I have work to do."

"Look, Starsky," Dobby said wearily, trying to interject just the right amount of authority into his voice. "It's been a long day...long weeks. You're tired, and I really think you need to come with me. Don't force me to make this an order."

"No, Captain," Starsky replied quietly, his voice devoid of emotion. "I need to see Huggy. I need to tell him. He deserves to hear it from me first."

"Okay," Dobby conceded. "We'll go tell Huggy, then we'll come back to—"

"No, sir," Starsky said once again, steely determination replacing the haunted grief in his eyes. "After that, I'm gonna find the son-of-a-bitch who killed my partner."

The slamming of the squadroom's outer door echoed in the eerie silence of Dobby's office as he picked up his coat and hat and headed home.



Rather than driving straight to Huggy's, Starsky drove toward what Hutch had labeled "The Cove," a secluded inlet they had discovered during a rare weekend off. Few tourists traveled this far north in the Ventura Beach State Park, and the locals preferred the more sandy areas where they could see and be seen. "The Cove" had a fair stretch of pale sand that became rockier where the ocean could vent its fury against the large boulders.

By the time he got there, it was dusk, and, predictably, no one was in sight for miles in either direction. Starsky parked the Torino and began his weary trek to an outcropping of rocks. The tide was just turning, and the waves gently lapped against the monoliths. Starsky sat down on one just off the beach, not even bothering to take off his tennis shoes, or lift his legs out of the pull of the ocean.

The sunset colors washed across his face, the red and gold reflection staining his tears.



By midnight, the bar was in full swing and at capacity. Huggy danced from one end of the bar to the other, alternatively serving the people perched on the stools before him, and filling the orders his waitresses called out over the din.

As he turned, Huggy was surprised to find Starsky behind him, his pant legs and shoes still wet, grabbing a bottle of the bar's best whiskey and two glasses, then gesturing with his head to be followed.

"Starsky, are you nuts? Can't you see The Bear is else-wise occupado?" A new thought struck Huggy. "Unless..."

Starsky looked back and met Huggy's eyes. The expression on his face was all Huggy needed to convince him to follow Starsky up the stairs to the spare room.



If anyone had been able to watch the scenario as it played out, they wouldn't have needed to hear what was said to realize some unthinkable tragedy had struck the lives of the two friends. The grief and sorrow that drained the life out of Starsky was evident in every move, every gesture he made. He pulled two chairs to face each other, then sat down and offered the slim black man a glass. After Starsky poured whiskey in the glasses, he tipped his, indicating Huggy should drink as well. Leaning forward, his elbows propped up on his thighs as though he could no longer bear his own weight, Starsky spoke, his overwhelming loss etched on his face.

Huggy's face became a mask of rage as he hurled the glass across the room, shattering it against the wall. The slender man sprung up out of his chair and paced the room, ranting, demanding answers that his friend could not give. Finally, Huggy ended up near the wall, where he leaned against it with one hand, giving into his grief and tears.

Mechanically, Starsky poured himself another glass of whiskey, downing it in one drink. A second one followed, then he stood slowly and crossed to the bed. Setting the bottle on the floor next to it, Starsky lay down, moving as though his entire body ached.

After a moment, Huggy pulled a corner of the bedspread over the still, but not yet sleeping form. Starsky stared at the wall, engrossed in his own private hell. Huggy hesitated to speak, searching desperately for some small measure of comfort to offer his friend. So he just gave up, knowing there would never be anything he, or anyone else, could say that could ease the other's pain and rage.

Silently, Huggy left the room and closed the door behind him, leaving Starsky to grieve.



The next morning, Starsky met the Hutchinsons at the airport, wearing the same clothes he had worn the day before and, surprisingly, had slept in for a few hours at Huggy's. He was met with consuming grief by Hutch's mother, and stony, bitter silence from his father.

Starsky drove the two to their hotel, where Dobby met them. The captain briefed them on their son's "case" and again offered his condolences. He also assigned them a departmental clerk, who would later act as their chauffeur and assistant, as they made the necessary arrangements for their son's funeral.

Initially, Richard Hutchinson had demanded his son's body be taken back to Minnesota to be buried in the family plot. But a quiet plea from Starsky had swayed Hutch's mother that he remain in California at a gravesite reserved for officers killed in the line of duty. Muriel consented, understanding that her son had grown to love the West Coast and had come to call Bay City home.

Richard was angry enough to argue his point, but his bitterness won out—blaming his son for his own death by continuing in the profession the older man had abhorred—and he gave up the fight.

After Hutch's parents were registered, Starsky continued on to the station. Jameson had promised an expedient autopsy and gave his word that Starsky would also receive a copy of the report, even though two other detective teams were officially heading up the investigation. Dobby knew he could never justify to IA or the chief allowing Starsky to remain on Hutch's case, but he also knew that no amount of persuasion or threats would deter Starsky from looking for his partner's killer.

Again, Starsky slipped up the back stairwell of Metro, avoiding as many people and their condolences as possible. Once he reached his floor, he all but ran down the hallway, keeping his eyes forward, and not meeting the pitying gazes of his co-workers. Inside the squadroom, his fellow detectives immediately assailed him. But when they started to offer their sympathy, Starsky raised his hand to cut them off and nodded, acknowledging their kindness without letting it permeate his fragile control and focus.

Starsky slipped past them to the desks he and Hutch had shared. He paused for a moment, pulling a tight rein on his emotions, and lowered himself in his chair. Almost reverently, he rested his hands on the open cardboard box containing Hutch's personal effects that had been sent up from the morgue, and a copy of the coroner's report as promised. It was a testimony to Hutch's sacrifice that the information was already available, in that the coroner would have had to stay up the entire night to complete it so quickly.

Feeling his eyes beginning to burn, Starsky looked past the box, his gaze scanning the empty desk across from him. Someone had placed a framed picture of Hutch there, a black silk ribbon tied across it to honor their slain friend and fellow detective.

Starsky forced himself to swallow and look away. Dobby's office door was open, indicating that the captain was out. Starsky snatched up the box and quickly entered the small room, shutting the door behind him.

Shakily placing the box on the edge of the desk, he sat behind it. Somehow, he couldn't bring himself to sit in either of the leather chairs where he and Hutch had been so many times before, receiving an assignment—or a reprimand—from their captain and friend, brainstorming a case, or just killing time.

Desperate to touch a bit of Hutch's life rather than read the grim details of his death, the coroner's report was laid aside. Starsky scrubbed his eyes before he drew out Hutch's billfold, the worn leather smooth in his hand. He opened it, both in the event that there was any evidence or clues to be gleaned, and for his own sense of comfort. There was nothing unusual inside—twenty-two dollars, a credit card Hutch never used, his driver's license, a few pictures. At the very back of the photo sleeve was a picture of the two of them, taken the day they graduated from the Academy. They both wore huge pride-filled grins, ready to take on the world. Savoring the photograph, Starsky felt very old.

Laying aside the wallet, he reverently drew out Hutch's badge and opened it. The dull gleam of the shield made his heart catch in his throat. Quickly, he stuck the badge and wallet in his pocket.

More metal shone from within the box. Hutch's pocket watch—an heirloom from his grandfather—beckoned him next. Starsky opened the piece, amazed that it still ran after all the beatings it had taken over the years. He then hooked the chain to his belt loop and tucked the watch into his pants pocket.

Hutch's tiger-eye ring was slipped onto his index finger, too large for the fourth. The favorite mother-of-pearl moon and star necklace Starsky also hooked around his neck, where it intertwined with the leather cord of his Chinese coins. Hutch's shirt lay on top of his slacks, shorts, loafers, and socks, and Starsky pulled out the plaid oxford. The material of the collar was rough and stained. A crusted substance had been flaked away by the lab for sampling, and he guessed it was whatever Hutch had been cooking, and had perhaps been the cause of the second-degree burns on the side of his face and throat.

Some darker stains lay on the front of the shirt, which Starsky determined were most likely blood. It was no small comfort that the size of the stains didn't indicate a fatal wound. Nothing else appeared to be out of the ordinary with the rest of Hutch's clothes, and he returned them to the box.

Picking up the coroner's report, he tried to force himself to focus—compel himself to think like the detective he was—in order to absorb the information before him. The more he could learn about the circumstances of Hutch's murder, the better chance he had of catching the killers and exacting justice. Or vengeance. Right now, he was leaning toward the latter.

Starsky had to steady the paper with both hands as he read the cold matter-of-fact details of the state of his partner's *body*. He couldn't bring himself to think of it as a "corpse." He first turned his attention to the statement at the beginning of the document, listing the cause of death: suffocation. He shut his eyes and forced himself to draw a breath against the roaring in his head. It took a supreme effort to shove away the scenario his tired mind painted of Hutch's last struggle, desperately trying to breathe, being mercilessly overpowered, the final, inevitable realization that he was going to die—*alone*.

His vision began to tunnel as he continued to read the gruesome details: the percent of carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, and oxygen in Hutch's blood, the contents of Hutch's stomach, the remaining units of blood, the weight of his brain...

He fled the office, pounding down the hallway to the men's room where he threw up violently again and again, even after emptying his stomach. Exhausted, he climbed up from where he had fallen to his knees and made his way to the sink to rinse out his mouth.

Drying his face with a handful of paper towels, Starsky rubbed the grit out of his eyes and looked into the mirror. The haunted face that stared back at him was that of a stranger, and he knew nothing in his life was ever going to be the same again.

The bile had left an acrid taste in his mouth, and he dug through his pockets, searching for a mint. He finally came up with a half-empty roll of lifesavers and a note stuck to the candy at the end.

*Starsk—we need to talk. I'm pretty close to having all the evidence we need and can wrap this up. Hell of a way to make a living, huh? Maybe when this is all over, we should just call it quits and go rob banks in Bolivia—what do you think?*

There was no signature, but he knew the handwriting as well as his own. Thinking back, Starsky decided that Hutch must have gotten Huggy or someone to slip the note into his pocket a few days before the arrest, where it had stayed unnoticed until then. Starsky felt his rage returning, sweeping over him and burying his grief. But this time, his anger was directed at Hutch rather than his partner's killers or himself. His eyes locked with the reflection in the mirror.

"Why didn't you listen to me, Hutch?" His voice started low, then rose in volume and intensity as he unleashed the anger he shamefully harbored against his partner. "If you'd gotten out when I wanted you to...if you'd listened to me for a change, then maybe you'd still be here! *Maybe then I wouldn't have to go through the rest of my life hating myself for not being there when you needed me!*"

He had moved without thinking and his reflection in the mirror fragmented crazily as the glass spider-webbed. Starsky stared at the multiple images numbly until the pain in his hand intensified and he sensed the warm dampness of blood. He raised his hand as if

surprised to see the injury. Blood dripped onto the cement floor until Starsky shook himself out of his daze and rinsed off his hand in the sink, then wrapped a few paper towels around the wound.

As he moved toward the door, a uniformed officer entered, prompted by the sound of shouting and glass breaking. “What happened in here?”

“Don’t know. Somebody must’ve broke the mirror.” Starsky shook his head as he made his escape.



Officer Minnie Kaplan stood at the back door of Dobey’s office and peered inside, her heart breaking at the sight before her. Starsky had returned to the captain’s chair, the plain cardboard box on the desk before him. He was hunched over, his head resting in one hand while he stared sightlessly at the floor. His other hand was cradled carefully in his lap and was wrapped in a blood-spattered paper towel. To the slim female officer, he looked like a man who had just about reached his limit.

Unsure of how to approach the detective, Minnie decided her first concern should be the injury on his hand. She hurried to the nearest first-aid box and opened it briefly, searching through the contents for anything she might be able to use. Confused, she settled on closing the box and taking the whole thing with her. She could decide what she needed when she saw for herself what the paper towel was hiding.

Noisily clearing her throat, she swept into Dobey’s office and placed the first-aid box on the desk. Hands on hips, she turned to face the dejected man sitting before her. “So, Starsky,” she began nonchalantly, leaning her weight against the edge of the desk. “What have you done to yourself this time?”

Starsky slowly raised his head to look at her, his eyes reflecting pain and confusion. “What?” he asked softly.

“Your hand, darlin’. If it wasn’t for that paper towel, you’d probably be bleeding all over the floor right now. Why don’t you let me take a look at it?” She held out her hand expectantly, and Starsky raised his injured hand obediently. Minnie knelt on the floor and gently unwound the paper towels, careful not to cause her friend any undue pain. “What happened?”

Starsky looked at her blankly. “Just blowing off steam, I guess. Trying to get it to all make sense.”

Minnie felt the sting of hot tears prick the back of her eyes. She studied the injured hand before her, and pulling the first-aid kit off the desk, she laid it on the floor and opened the lid. “It doesn’t look too bad,” she said, trying to keep her mind focused on the task at hand and her voice light. “Got a few ugly cuts here, though. Let’s see if I can find

something to fix this up.” She rummaged around and finally came up with some antiseptic cream, a roll of gauze, a small bottle of peroxide, and several cotton balls. She tipped the bottle of peroxide to moisten the cotton balls, and gently began wiping the wound. In her heart, she knew Starsky needed a lot more than just a quick fix job on his injured hand. But she also realized no one could give him what he needed most—his partner.

As she worked, Minnie looked up at Starsky. His face was an unreadable mask, but his pain radiated off him in waves. His demeanor was quiet, almost to the point of meekness, but there was an underlying current of something far more volatile and frantic. His hand trembled under her touch, and she knew it had nothing to do with the sting of the antiseptic.

“Sorry, honey,” Minnie said gently, as she wrapped clean gauze around Starsky’s hand and fastened the end with a small piece of tape. “Hope I didn’t hurt you too bad.”

“It’s okay,” Starsky replied. “I didn’t really feel it.”

Minnie picked up the scattered packages around her and, getting up off her knees, crossed the room to throw them in the trashcan. She heard Starsky rise from his seat and, when she turned, saw he was standing at the windows, staring out at the afternoon sunshine. She closed the space between them in three hurried strides and touched him gently on the arm.

“Starsky?” No one more than three feet away could have possibly heard her strangled whisper.

Starsky turned to look at Minnie, his face beginning to crumple. “Not yet, Minnie,” he managed to choke out. “*Please.*”



As much as she wanted to honor her friend’s wishes, Minnie found it impossible to leave. Years of working with Starsky and Hutch had left her with fierce feelings of love and protectiveness toward them, and those feelings rose to the surface in waves as she watched the man in front of her slowly fall apart. So, instead, she walked over to the slightly open office door and shut it firmly.

“I can’t leave just yet, Starsky. I don’t think you should be alone right now.” She slowly approached the grieving man, her arms outstretched in invitation.

“I know you’re hurting, honey, we all are. And I know nobody can ever give back to you what you’ve lost. But, please, Starsky, please don’t shut me out. I couldn’t bear to lose both of you.”

Wordlessly, Starsky closed the small space between them and wrapped his arms around Millie, giving and receiving much-needed comfort and strength. Had anyone witnessed the scene, it would have been impossible to tell which of the friends was giving and which was receiving consolation.



A short time later, Dobe walked into his office and stopped abruptly. “Minnie,” he said, surprised. “What are you doing here? Did we have a meeting I forgot about?”

Minnie turned around, startled, and took another swipe at the traces of tears still lingering on her cheeks. “Oh, no, sir. I was just talking to Starsky. He left right before you walked in.”

“Did you see which way he went?” The captain ran a hand across his face. “I need to talk to him about...” His voice trailed off as he spotted the first-aid kit lying on his desk. “Are you hurt?”

“No, sir. Starsky needed some gauze, and I was helping him out. I’ll put it back right away.”

“The mirror in the men’s room.” He nodded knowingly. “Was he hurt?”

“Um...” Minnie debated how much to reveal. She couldn’t lie to her superior, but she also did not want to compromise the trust of her friend. “He had a few scratches on his hand.”

“I see,” Dobe replied, sitting heavily in his chair.

Minnie stared silently at the captain, waiting for him to continue. She couldn’t recall ever seeing him so tired and frustrated, his concern for Starsky and grief over Hutch’s death depleting his energy. She remembered a number of times when the detectives’ antics had caused him some consternation and a few bouts with high blood pressure, but this was different. This was permanent and nothing that could be remedied by medication.

Dobe sighed and looked up at Minnie, eyes full of compassion. “I don’t know what to do for him, Minnie.” His eyes took on a faraway look. “It’s broken, and I don’t know if it can ever be fixed.”

Minnie looked at him, not understanding. “The mirror’s no big deal—”

“I don’t mean the mirror.”



Standing on the corner of the sidewalk, Mickey appeared either terribly nervous, or up to something. The man’s perpetual shaking made him a lousy pickpocket—one of his former professions—but the tremors now gave him an air of harmlessness that aided him in hustling the occasional buck, or getting information to feed to the highest bidder. Peering down the street, watching for a minor numbers’ runner he’d planned to feed some information for a quick twenty, Mickey was completely taken by surprise when several tons of red and white steel drove up over the curb, missing him by mere inches. Mickey backpedaled until he was stopped by the wall of the liquor store behind him. He was further driven into the bricks by the fury in Starsky’s eyes.



“*Tell me something.*”

Mickey’s lungs constricted in fear, cutting off his air. “I don’t know nothin’, Starsky, honest! I haven’t heard a thing. There’s nothin’, I swear!”

Starsky leaned back away from the smaller man, but the rage in his eyes never diminished. “You mean to tell me that the cop who was responsible for getting more pieces of scum off the street than any other officer in the history of Bay City is killed, and *no one’s talking*? How stupid do you think I am, Mickey?”

“No! I don’t think...I mean, I didn’t say you were stupid, Starsky!”

“So, don’t jerk me around.” Starsky leaned toward him until his face was a mere inch away. “*Talk to me.*”

Mickey put up his hands defensively, feeling the unspoken threat as surely as if Starsky held a gun to his head. “Look, I...I may know somethin’, but I don’t know if it’s related or not, okay?”

When Starsky still didn’t say anything, or even blink, Mickey rushed on. “My friend—the one who blabbed to me about Hutch’s cover being blown—he told me somethin’.”

“What friend?”

“Aw, Starsky, c’mon. You know I can’t reveal my sources.”

Starsky open-hand slapped the bricks right next to Mickey's head, causing him to flinch away. He grabbed the smaller man and violently forced him back in front of him.

"Okay, okay. Rupert...Rupert Jones. He started working for Vic Monte about a year and a half ago. He told me he was supposed to do some work with these new guys out of Singapore. Something to do with a new horse connection."

"What else does this Rupert know?"

"I don't know, I swear! C'mon, Starsky, that's all I got, honest. Didn't I do good, telling Huggy Bear that Hutch's cover had been blown? Doesn't that tell you how sincere I am?"

Starsky's eyes narrowed as he growled his response. "Too little, too late. For all I know, *you* found out that Hutch was undercover and sold him out to Monte, then told me to cover your weasely little backside."

Mickey's eyes bulged as he began to tremble harder. "No, no, no! You got it all wrong, Starsky! I really did try to do you two a favor after I screwed up with that Forest thing! I swear on my mother's eyes, Starsky!"

Starsky studied the other man for a few tense moments, making Mickey shrink under the scrutiny. The set of Starsky's jaw danced under his gritted teeth. "I want Vic Monte."

"You think he had Hutch killed?"

"Probably. But even if he didn't, Hutch...Hutch died trying to bring him down. I'm gonna finish this, and you're gonna get me what I need."

"Whoa, wait a minute, Starsky, back up. What makes you think I've got anything on Vic Monte?"

Starsky took a step back and crossed his arms. "Maybe you don't. But I'll bet *your life* on the fact that your buddy, Rupert Jones, does."

Mickey's eyes bulged. "You're nuts! You think Rupert's gonna sell out Vic Monte?"

Starsky nodded once. "Yes. And you're gonna help him do it."

"No...no, no, no, no! There's no way I'd fink out Vic Monte. He'd kill me in a heartbeat!"

"Look, dirtbag, you're dead either way, because if you don't help me, I'm going to let Vic Monte know, in no uncertain terms, that *you* tipped off the cops that Hutch's cover was blown!"

“You wouldn’t!”

The expression on Starsky’s face assured Mickey he would, and with a great deal of satisfaction. Mickey didn’t think it was possible for him to tremble any harder. “Okay, all right. What do you want me to do?”



The rest of Starsky’s day was divided between tracking down some of his other contacts on the street and reviewing the case with the two teams working on Hutch’s case. He was grateful when it was suggested they meet somewhere other than the station. Starsky struggled between finding some comfort in the condolences from so many people that liked and respected Hutch, and his own raging grief that threatened to spill over whenever anyone reached out to him.

The four detectives went over the evidence and leads with Starsky in a respectful, matter-of-fact manner that made it easier for him to take it all in and process. Starsky again reviewed with them the details of the Vic Monte sting Hutch had been on.

When they parted, Starsky was told McMillian had been looking for him earlier, and to check in later that afternoon. Starsky thanked the men for their determination in tracking down Hutch’s killer as he left. If these men had known him better, they would have realized Starsky’s acceptance of letting them head up the investigation was an act, and that, in reality, he would do everything in his power to see that justice was served—Starsky style.

Starsky turned the Torino off the freeway, heading away from Metro. He would check in with McMillian later, but first, he had to meet with the Hutchinsons to plan his partner’s funeral.



Mickey splurged his last twenty bucks on a decent bottle of tequila, Rupert Jones’ drink of choice. Jones, an “odd job man” who was fairly new on Vic Monte’s payroll, had boasted to Mickey that he was one of the men assigned to take out Hutch when his cover was blown.

After the squirrely little man known as The Archer came wheedling back into Monte’s good graces and revealed Hutch’s deception, Vic had ordered the hit, personally instructing Jones and another flunky to kill the detective. He had also paired them up with two hit men imported from the new Singapore connection as a condition of forming the union with the foreign drug suppliers. Monte had figured their partnership in taking out the cop would be a sign of good faith from the Chinese mobsters. But before the orders could be carried out, Hutch went missing, and there was no word from the

underground as to who, why, or how. Rupert Jones was just glad he didn't have to add another murder one charge to his growing list of unprosecuted crimes.

Jones relayed all of this to Mickey about halfway through the bottle of tequila. While the snitch wasn't too bright, he was quick and picked up on Jones' admission of *another* murder one charge. Mickey poured Jones a shot and pretended to sip his own. It was taking all the willpower he possessed not to down the drink he held, needing to stay semi-sober in order to collect enough information to get him off the hook with Starsky.

"So, Rup, who else have you iced, man?" Mickey asked as casually as he could, trying to get his hands to stop shaking.

"Whass'at?" Jones unsteadily lit a cigarette, burning his finger in the process and swearing.

"You, uh...you said that you didn't want to have *another* murder one hanging over your head."

"Aw, they'd have to prove it was me, then they'd have to catch me!" The larger man chortled, enjoying Mickey's interest, which stoked his ego.

"Yeah? So what'd ya do, huh? Who'd you take out?"

"Some kid. Name was, uh...DeFusto. He was working his way up the ranks in one of the other families and stepped on Monte's toes one too many times, ya know? So Vic had me take him out."

"Tony DeFusto...yeah, yeah! I heard about that one. Boy, Rup, that was some job. I heard you hit him from something like three-hundred feet."

Jones waved his hand magnanimously at Mickey. "Nah, it was less'n that. But I'll tell you what, I sure as hell got him good!"

By the way Rupert was slurring his words, Mickey knew he was in the homestretch. "DeFusto...wasn't he the reason that the hit was put out on Vic Monte about a year ago? Wasn't that the one Hutchinson and Starsky interrupted?"

Jones scowled, his face becoming dark. "Yeah, stupid son-of-a...that's how Hutchinson pulled it off, getting under Monte like he did. See, Monte even checked it all out when the cop said he was on the take and wanted to get in on some action. Stupid, stupid..." Jones seemed to suddenly sober. "Hey, you and Hutchinson's partner—Starkley or Starskby or whatever—didn't you used to feed him?"

Monte paled, but kept his composure. "Yeah, but that's ancient history. Sure, I used to give him a little information every now and then, nothin' big. I'm not *that* stupid! Nope. Just enough to keep them off my backs, ya know? And that all ended with Forest—"

“Yeah, yeah! I heard about that!” Jones laughed, his drunken state increasing along with his volume. He slapped the smaller man on the shoulder. “You settin’ up Hutchinson with Forest? Yeah, you screwed them over good, Mick, real good!”

Mickey smiled nervously, glad he was able to deflect suspicion. He handed the other man the bottle and began backing away to the door. “Hey, look, Rupert, I gotta go.”

Jones was well on his way to oblivion and didn’t really care. “Where ya rushing off to? We still got a few snorts left.”

“You finish it. I gotta see a man about a horse.”



The next morning, Rupert Jones thought he was having one very bad tequila-induced nightmare. The pressure on his chest was uncomfortable to the point of pain, and he was feeling more and more like he might throw up.

Jones cracked one eye open, but when he realized the black thing in his line of sight was the barrel of a pistol pointed at his forehead, both eyes flew open as he tried to sit up. Unfortunately, the weight he’d felt on his chest earlier was attached to the gun in the form of one very angry-looking man.

“If you were trying to get some beauty rest, I’d suggest you sleep for another couple years, Jones.” The violence in the man’s voice made Jones sober immediately.

“What do you want?” Jones wheezed, unable to draw a sufficient breath.

“A little information.” The man shifted to make himself more comfortable, adding to Rupert’s discomfort. “And my partner’s killer.”

“Your partner?” Jones swallowed hard as the recognition struck him. “Starsky.”

“Close enough. Now that you’ve figured out who I am, you must know who I’m looking for.”

“I didn’t kill your partner!”

Even though the words cut through him—to hear someone else say it out loud—Starsky didn’t flinch. “Don’t get excited, I’m not saying you did. But I’ll bet you know *who* did.”

“I don’t, I swear!”

“Okay, let’s pretend for just a moment that I believe you. Then let’s pretend that I’m *not* going to blow your head off, just because I’m mad enough to.”

“Oh, come on! You wouldn’t—”

Starsky moved like a panther, spilling off Jones to stand at his bedside, one fist buried in the man’s t-shirt, drawing him out of the bed.

“What makes you think I won’t, Jones?” Starsky hissed, the barrel of the gun buried in the flesh under the quaking man’s chin. “Do you see this gun? Huh?” Starsky waited for Jones’ eyes to flicker down to the weapon. “This is my partner’s gun. It’s a Python, and it can blow a hole through a man the size of New Mexico. Just imagine what it’ll do to your head. Now, nobody knows I have Hutch’s gun. They all think it disappeared when he got snatched. So if I were to blow your greasy little head off right now, the cops would think that whoever killed Hutch used his gun on you, too.”

“Don’t...please, don’t...”

Something inside Starsky twisted at Jones’ begging, the disgust he felt toward himself rising like bile. But rage won out. “I want Vic Monte.”

“No!” Jones’ eyes widened further, and he started to quake in earnest. “I don’t have anything on Monte.”

“He ordered you to kill my partner!”

Jones sucked in a breath. “How’d you know...? Mickey! That little son-of-a—”

“How I found out is the least of your worries.”

“I didn’t kill Hutchinson. I swear on my mother’s grave!”

“You didn’t have a mother. They made you out of spare parts.” Starsky flicked off the weapon’s safety. “Okay, so you didn’t kill my partner. I still want Monte.”

“I got nothing else, man. Monte, he never leaves a trail. He just does the bossing around, you know? He tells his lieutenants, and they carry out his orders. That’s how I got my jobs. The only time I ever spoke to the guy was when he told me to take out Hutchinson.”

“What about payments?”

“No, never Monte. He has an accountant. He takes care of all that.”

Something in the back of Starsky’s mind danced around a memory. Hutch had told him early on in the case that no one ever mentioned the name of the accountant. Whoever

that person was knew every detail of Vic Monte's accounts and dealings, and would most likely be able to provide the police with a testimony strong enough to put the mobster away permanently. The accountant would know, too, all the hit payoffs that had happened, including Hutch's.

Starsky pushed Jones back on to the bed. "Rupert, this just may be your lucky day."



Starsky's mind was running at a furious rate, desperately trying to piece together all the names, dates, places, and events he'd been given over the last day and a half, along with the evidence Hutch had collected. The dispatcher's voice broke through his thoughts, and he scowled.



"This is Ze—. This is Starsky."

Static greeted him, indicating that the operator had the microphone depressed, but was saying nothing for that instant. "*Starsky*, stand by for a patch from a Mr. Bear."

"Roger." Starsky waited until he heard the familiar change in frequency, indicating a phone-line hookup. "Whatcha got, Hug?"

"Actually, I've got one big Huggy Bear Super Special over here with your name on it. I suggest you beat feet, before this burger lacks heat."

Starsky almost smiled. "Thanks, Hug, but I'm kinda busy right now. Did you hear anything more back from our friends, Jones or Mickey? Like where I can find Vic Monte's accountant?"

"No, man. Those two are layin' lower than the belly of a pregnant snake. I think they're waitin' to see how things turn out, and you can make good on your promise to relocate them, dig?"

"Got it, Hug. Thanks."

"Don't thank me yet. Wait 'til you get yourself over here and wrap yourself around this burger, then you can thank me."

"Some other time, okay? Thanks, Huggy. Starsky out." He returned the microphone to its hook, the thought of eating turning his stomach. As he turned toward the canal, the cottage came in sight.



The silence that greeted him was unnervingly familiar. Somehow, Starsky thought the small house should have felt devoid of life by now, bereft of the essence of his partner. He shouldn't have been surprised, he reasoned, since *he* never quite felt as though his partner was truly gone. But he also knew that part of Hutch still lived, if only deep inside the quiet place of his heart.



Starsky had insisted, demanded actually, Hutch's apartment be left as it had been found, arguing that it was still a crime scene, and until the investigation was closed, it would remain untouched. Prowling the familiar rooms, however, awakened an ache deep inside.

Questing hands caressed different items as he passed by—a statue, a plant, Hutch's artwork. Every item he touched seemed to have a special meaning to him. The angel statuette, tipped over from its place on the coffee table, brought a lump

to Starsky's throat, and his Adam's apple bobbed convulsively, trying to swallow back the flood that seemed to well up from the pit of his stomach.

As he looked around the small house, he was struck by a forgotten memory. Hutch had three places within his home where he would stash things. Starsky crossed to the overturned bookcase and sorted through the still-damp books until he found the volume he was looking for. He quickly thumbed through the pages of "All the President's Men," racking his brain to recall which page Hutch would have scribbled on or tucked a note into. Using the book as a place to leave information had started as a joke between them, and they had yet to actually use it. He hoped Hutch had remembered it as well.

Turning the paperback over, Starsky gave it a vicious shake and was rewarded by a scrap of newspaper falling out, darkened by the water that had saturated it days before. He quickly grabbed up the newsprint and scanned it. It was simply a corner piece out of the *LA Times*; the story on it was of no immediate importance. But in the margin, two words were hastily written, though they made no sense.

"Jaw June?" Starsky racked his brain, desperately trying to place the words in any kind of context, but came up empty. He stuffed the paper into his pocket, planning to enlist Minnie's help by running it through the Department's records.

The other two likely hiding places for Hutch to stash clues—a loose ceiling tile and the saucer of a planter—provided nothing further. He continued to prowl the cottage, fearing that he'd miss some small bit of helpful information.

Moonlight gleamed off the golden face of Hutch's guitar. Starsky shook off the image of his partner playing—the sure, strong hands confidently bringing the instrument to life, Hutch's clear tenor voice piercing him...

Starsky realized he had moved on into the bedroom without consciously making the decision to go there. In his exhaustion, he'd had more and more episodes like this, where he wouldn't remember how he'd gotten to a particular destination. Crossing to the closet, he rifled through his partner's wardrobe again, checking the pockets of clothing in the event that Hutch had left behind any information that could support the Monte case, or point him toward his killers.

At the back of the closet, he felt the familiar wool of Hutch's favorite casual coat—the black and white jacket Starsky had always thought looked like it was missing a Pittsburgh Steeler's emblem. A shiver ran through him, and he tried to convince himself that he was simply chilled. Starsky slipped on the jacket and finished looking through the closet.

After not finding any further information, he moved outside. Hutch's car had been towed back to the cottage from where it had been found abandoned in the inner city and sat silently in the driveway. Starsky gave a wave to the officers staked out in the house next door before climbing into the passenger seat. The two officers had been moved into the nearby cottage, temporarily displacing the older couple that lived there, in order to watch Hutch's place in the event the killers returned to the scene for whatever reason. Starsky began feeling around under the front seat, but found only trash ranging from styrofoam coffee cups to a partially used can of shaving cream.

Opening the glove compartment only revealed their logbook and trip sheets. There were no new entries since a stakeout several months ago. After throwing the books on the dashboard, he twisted and leaned back over the top of the seat to check the back. It wasn't long before he slid back down, disgusted by the assortment of debris littered there. Starsky shook his head fondly, never having quite figured out this one facet of his partner. His eyes fell upon the logbook and he drew it back into his lap, unraveling the memories of their last stakeout together. The evening had been uneventful, and they whiled away the hours with idle chatter between snatches of sleep.

Before he realized it, Starsky's body relaxed in the familiar seat, and his natural defenses took over. He slept, somehow comforted.



Rachel Starsky made her cautious way off the airplane into the concourse. Through the terminal's windows, the setting California sun streaked her hair with red and gold and, despite the lateness of the day, warmed her face. She was greeted by a throng of people anxiously awaiting their first glimpse of those they had come to meet. She sighed wearily, knowing the one face her heart ached to see wouldn't be there just yet.

She looked around, hoping to see the one waiting for her. Finally, she spotted him, standing at the edge of the crowd holding a large cardboard sign with the name “Mrs. Starsky” hand painted in bright purple letters across the face. Smiling in spite of the circumstances, she made her way over to the large man who held the sign.

“Hello,” Rachel said, reaching out to shake hands with Captain Dobe. “I’m Rachel, David’s mother.” Her voice evidenced having lived in the Jewish quarter of Brooklyn all her life. She looked with amusement at the sign the captain held, thinking she would have known him anyway by the way her son had described him over the years.

“Mrs. Starsky,” Dobe acknowledged, returning the handshake. He followed the petite woman’s gaze to the sign he still held. “My kids. They were afraid we might miss each other. It gave them something to do. Ever since...it happened, they’ve wanted to do something to help out. They’re very fond of your son...and Hutch.”

Rachel smiled back at the captain and followed him as he led the way to the baggage claim area. She pointed out her suitcases and Dobe retrieved them. “It’s so nice to finally meet you, Captain. Please, call me Rachel. And I think it’s very sweet that your children would do something like that.”

The captain had taken the liberty of parking his car in the airport’s loading area, an “Official Police Business” card hung from the rearview mirror, keeping the tow trucks at bay. He placed her bag in the sedan’s trunk, and the two settled in the front seat for the ride to the station. There was an uncomfortable silence that lasted several minutes until Rachel could stand it no longer. “How is he?”

Captain Dobe glanced her way briefly, then turned his attention back to the road ahead. “About like you’d expect, I guess. Exhausted one minute, driven the next.”

“He never did call me, you know. After I talked to you that night, I kept waiting for the phone to ring, but it never did. Does he know I’m here?”

He shook his head. “He knows I called to tell you about Hutch. Said he tried to call a few times, but kept missing you or something would come up. I was going to tell him you were coming this morning, but he was out the door before I could open my mouth. He’s with the Hutchinsons right now, finalizing the plans for the...uh...services tomorrow.”

Rachel leaned back against the headrest and closed her eyes, her heart breaking from the thought of her son’s grief. She had been horrified when Dobe had called her with the news, and had immediately accepted his generous offer of plane fare when he suggested it. She naturally responded that she would repay him, but the captain didn’t seem too concerned. His entire focus was on her son and his well being, and for that, Rachel was grateful.

She opened her eyes once more and turned to look at the man seated beside her. “Thank you, Captain...for taking care of him and me. I’m glad he has someone like you to be there for him in times like this...” Her voice trailed off as the tears she could no longer contain spilled down her cheeks.

Dobey somehow managed to wrestle a clean handkerchief from his coat pocket and offered it to her with a gentle smile. “Here. Take this. We have about thirty minutes until we get to the station, so you go ahead and cry. You need to be strong for Dave, but not for me.”

The rest of the ride into town was silent except for Rachel’s tears as she prepared herself to face her son.



The radio in the Torino crackled to life, and Mildred’s voice came over the speaker. “Zebra Th—. Starsky. Come in, Starsky.”

Starsky glared at the radio and sighed heavily. He had just left the Hutchinsons, after choosing the casket and laying out the order of the service, and he was numb. Hutch’s parents had been understandably upset about not being able to see their son’s body one last time, but after the autopsy, the coroner adamantly discouraged it. The Hutchinsons reluctantly agreed to a closed casket, and Starsky found that handing over his partner’s favorite blue suit for burial had unnerved him in a way he’d never expected.

Now his goal was to put as much distance between himself and the polite, sterile sympathy that had surrounded him at the funeral home. With that ordeal over, searching out and dissecting information gave Starsky a reason to keep putting one foot in front of the other. The sound of Mildred’s voice a second time prompted Starsky to pick up the handset.

“Yeah, this is Starsky. Go ahead.”

“I have a patch-through for you from Captain Dobey. Stand by...”

Starsky waited impatiently for his captain to come on the air. “Starsky?”

“Go ahead, Cap’n.”

“I need you to stop by the station for a few minutes. There’s someone here that needs to see you.”

“About Hutch’s case?” The hope in Starsky’s voice stung the captain.

“No, but—”

“Aw, c’mon, Cap’n,” Starsky groused, cringing at the prospect of having to make nice with the Feds or worse, the IA boys. “I’m in the middle of something here. Can’t it wait?”

“Not this time, Starsky. Now get yourself in here and that’s an order. What’s your ETA?”

“I’ll be there in five, Cap’n. Starsky out.”

Starsky gritted his teeth and ran a hand through his thick curls. He was already on edge, his nerves strained to the breaking point. Heaving a weary sigh, he violently jerked the steering wheel to the left and headed resolutely to the station.

Within the promised five minutes, Starsky was parked in front of the station. His knuckles were white with tension as he pried his fingers from the steering wheel and, taking a deep breath, climbed from his car. Deciding to get the inevitable over with as soon as possible, he climbed the stairs to the squadroom with as much speed as his exhausted body could muster.

Without preamble, Starsky knocked on the door of Dobey’s office, and, hearing a muffled “come in” from somewhere inside, threw open the door and entered. He was surprised to see that Captain Dobey wasn’t in his office, but instead, standing at the windows in a floral print dress and sweater was the woman he would have recognized no matter where he saw her.

“Ma?” he whispered in disbelief.

Rachel smiled, her eyes glistening at the sight of her son.

Without another word, Starsky and his mother walked toward each other with outstretched arms and fell into a deep embrace. Outside the office, Dobey smiled to himself as he gently closed the door.



Starsky stood alone beside his small kitchen table, grateful that his mother had given in to his wishes to stay at a hotel rather than with him. He knew she had only wanted to comfort him, but her kindness would be wasted. Right now, there was nothing that could reach through his grief.

A match was struck and he held the tiny flame against the wick of the candle. He didn’t care that he wasn’t following tradition, in that Kaddish was to be said the day after the death of a loved one, but he believed God wouldn’t mind so much. Slowly, in broken Aramaic, Starsky prayed.

*“Y’hay shlomo rabbo min sh’mayo—May there be abundant peace from Heaven—v’chayim alaynu v’al kol Yisroel—and life upon us and upon all Israel—v’imru Omein—and say Amen—Oseh sholom bimromov—He who makes peace in his high holy places—hu ya’aseh sholom olaynu—may He bring peace upon us—v’al kol yisroel—and upon all Israel—vimru Omein—and say Amen.”*

The prayer finished, Starsky sat down at his kitchen table. The blank sheet of paper lay before him, and he stared at it, searching his mind as to how to begin the eulogy. *What could I possibly say? How do I put down on a piece of paper an entire lifetime?*

Memories came unbidden, glimpses of thoughts and feelings. Moments of sheer joy and exhilaration flooded him, as did the moments of heartrending grief and loss.

Starsky didn’t realize how long he’d sat staring at the paper, but the shadows around him had grown long. Exhausted, he pushed himself off the chair and tossed down the pen—the eulogy would have to wait. Nothing was captured on the page except a few drying tears.



By 3:30, it was standing room only, even though the funeral home had allotted its largest chapel for the service. Starsky sat rigid in his seat at the front of the room, eyes glued to the rich mahogany casket draped with an American flag. Numbness detached him from the proceedings, as if he’d found himself in the middle of a nightmare with no way to wake up. Although he knew it was morbid, Starsky tried to imagine what Hutch’s body looked like within its wooden confines. It didn’t seem right that Hutch’s family and friends wouldn’t even get a final glimpse of the man they all knew and loved. He, at least, had touched his partner one last time, even if the skin beneath his fingertips was already cold with death.

The service began promptly at 4:00 with the BCPD’s chaplain saying a short prayer and a few appropriate words. Mr. Hutchinson then got up and spoke, but for all Starsky knew, he could have been giving a weather report. He found it impossible to stay focused on anything that was being said, his attention completely absorbed by the coffin in front of him and the finality of the closed lid.

Captain Dobe also stood to speak, hesitant in his delivery, but proudly listing Hutch’s accommodations and citations throughout his tenure: *their outstanding arrest record, Hutch being cited twice for bravery, his receiving the mayor’s award for outstanding service in the line of duty...* The captain’s words began to filter into Starsky’s beleaguered mind, his heart rekindling with pride what his partner had been able to accomplish in so short a lifetime.

Finally, it was Starsky’s turn to deliver the eulogy. With his head bowed and taking careful, deliberate steps, he made his way to the front of the chapel. He retrieved several sheets of paper from the inner pocket of his suit and smoothed them on top of the podium

with shaking hands. For the first time, he allowed himself to look around at the assembled crowd, and he felt the band around his chest lessen a bit. It seemed that everyone he and Hutch had ever known was present—from the commissioner to several ladies of the evening, including a tearful Sweet Alice and a few homeless people who had been on the receiving end of Hutch's generosity. He thought, and not for the first time, only his partner could bring together such a diverse group of people.

Taking a deep breath, Starsky began to read his prepared speech. "We have come here today to...to celebrate Hutch's life...and...and to..." Starsky's voice trailed off, and he stared blankly at the pages in front of him. After a moment, he folded the sheets in half and stuffed them into his pocket.

Starsky gripped the sides of the podium as he lifted his head again to meet the eyes looking back at him—some full of pity, others with compassion, and a few reflecting the anger he knew was evident in his own. He cleared his throat and started over. "I had a speech prepared. I was up all night writing and rewriting it to try and say just the right thing." His voice tightened as his throat worked convulsively. "But there is no 'right thing' to say. I never...I...I never thought I would have to do this. We always thought we'd go in the line of duty, we knew that could happen. We accepted it. But I never thought I'd be the one to... I know we've come to celebrate Hutch's life, and that's good. That's...*right*. Hutch deserves that. But it *isn't* right that we have to come here to say good-bye."

Starsky's eyes gleamed as he struggled to maintain his composure. Unable to meet the pitying gazes before him, he looked at the top of the podium for a moment, blinking rapidly. "Hutch was the best damn cop I know. He was my partner; he was my best friend. I...I don't have to tell any of you what an incredible person he was. That's why you're here. Hutch would have given you the shirt off his back and the last buck in his wallet. And sometimes he did. He put everything he had, everything he *was* into the job. He'd work himself to death for a case. He—" Starsky stopped, realizing the gravity of what he just said.

Mrs. Hutchinson and a few others were openly crying now, giving in to their grief. Everyone looked expectantly at Starsky as he tried to continue. "I...loved him like a brother. But he was more than that. He stood by me when nobody else would. He was my friend when I didn't deserve one. He showed me what it meant to live your life for what you believe in, and then...and then he showed me how to die for it. Hutch was...the best. My life changed when I met him, and it'll never be the same now that he's gone." Starsky's rage swelled again, and his eyes burned as his gaze raked the crowd. "And I swear by everything I have and everything I am that I will find whoever is responsible for taking him away from us."

A heavy silence filled the room as Starsky stood lost in his own fury. The stillness was broken by a sob from Hutch's mother, her grief slicing through Starsky's tumultuous thoughts. He continued with a tenuous control on his emotions, his voice barely above a

whisper. "I'm sorry. We wanted this to be a time to remember Hutch...to celebrate his life. I...I don't think I know how do that just yet. Not yet."

Starsky left the podium and returned to his seat, his breath coming in one shuddering draw. He sat down heavily, and Huggy draped an arm across his shoulders.

After an awkward moment of silence, two uniformed officers strode up the center aisle, turning in unison to face the mourners. Starsky, Huggy, Dobey, Hutch's brother-in-law, Ted, and two fellow detectives rose and made their way to the front of the room, lining either side of the casket. Starsky felt his composure crumble and wanted nothing more than to run from the stifling room, but he knew he had to keep himself together a bit longer. Grasping the brass handle, he would carry his partner one last time.

On signal, the six men lifted the casket onto their shoulders, Starsky standing in front at Hutch's shoulder, just as he had throughout their partnership. From the back of the chapel, sounded the mournful wail of bagpipes, heralding the strains of "Amazing Grace." Swallowing hard, Starsky steeled himself and began the trek down the chapel's aisle to lay his partner's body to rest.

Inevitably, the time came for the procession to the gravesite. Starsky climbed into the limousine next to Hutch's parents, grateful for the invitation to ride with them, yet consumed with guilt and grief. The ride seemed interminable, and he heaved a sigh of relief when they finally arrived at the cemetery.

Once everyone was in place, Dobey stood to face the gathered assembly. Clearing his throat and casting a glance at Starsky's stricken face, he began to speak. "I don't know what else I can say about Hutch that hasn't already been said. He was a fine police officer, one of the best I've seen in all my years on the force. But more than that, he was a friend. Mr. and Mrs. Hutchinson, I want you to know Ken was like a son to me. He was part of my family and...we all miss him." His voice breaking, he swiped a hand across his eyes before continuing. "And, to honor your son, his life, and his dedication to the force, we will bury him today with full honors."

At a nod from Dobey, two officers in dress blues stood at rigid attention and approached the casket, as a lone bugler began the exquisite notes of "Taps." With respect and reverence, they removed the American flag draped over it and folded it with precision. When they had finished, they turned in unison and crossed to the Hutchinsons, offering the folded banner to Hutch's mother. Mrs. Hutchinson shook her head decisively and whispered something to the officers, a fresh torrent of tears cascading down her face. With a nod, the officers executed a perfect military turn and walked over to Starsky. The stunned detective wordlessly accepted the flag.

He hadn't thought it was possible to hurt more than he did, until he watched Hutch's casket begin its slow descent into the earth. His hollow gaze was finally torn away from the wounded ground as Edith led Cal and Rosie to a gentle slope just to the side of the burial pavilion. No explanation was needed as Cal reached into the cage his sister carried

and withdrew a single dove. The mourners watched as it gracefully rose to the freedom of the sky.

One by one, family and friends walked past the freshly turned earth, each dropping a single red rose onto the top of the coffin in silent tribute. Starsky hung back, waiting until everyone had filed past before he, too, approached the grave. He allowed his rose to join the others, but instead of stepping aside, he reached into his pocket. Those who were standing close by—Dobey, Huggy, the Hutchinsons, and a few others—could hear his strangled whisper.

“Hutch...these were not only what we did, but who we were. I promise I’ll keep going and try to do you proud, but I can’t carry this one while I do it. I’ll get another one, but this one belongs with yours. This was...this was us...this was *me and thee*.” Starsky gently released into the grave what he had clutched in his hand.

Nestled among the flowers on top of the casket, intertwined by their clasps, were two shields—a silent testimony to the partnership, shining gently as if by a power of their own. “I don’t know how to tell you good-bye, Hutch, so I guess I won’t. I miss you, partner...I...” Starsky stood at the edge of the grave, at a loss for what he could possibly say to express all that was within him. Hastily wiping his eyes, he found cold comfort in the knowledge that Hutch would know, as he always did, even if he couldn’t find the words. Starsky turned and walked away from the crowd, as the report of a twenty-one-gun salute reverberated through the air.



Starsky yanked at the knot in his tie for a third time, knowing the choking pressure in his throat had little to do with the offending material. He kept his sunglasses on in the hall where the reception was held, and, while they were distinctly out of place, those in attendance didn’t give it a second thought. No one had to see Starsky’s eyes as evidence of his pain and rage; the tense muscles of his jaw were visible enough.

He had become adept at skirting most people, and preferred to hover close to Edith Dobby’s side. The woman seemed to have a knack for intercepting those offering their condolences to the one left behind. Starsky’s mom stationed herself at the Hutchinsons’ side, gently stepping in when the grieving parents seemed to falter.

Starsky followed Edith into the small kitchen just off the banquet room. After retrieving a tray of sandwiches to replace the diminishing one, she paused and looked out the door at the crowd. “David, have you seen Rosie?”

Starsky drew closer to her and scanned the room. “No, not in the last couple of minutes.”

Edith moved toward the buffet tables. “She’s probably outside, and it’s getting dark. I’d better send Cal—”

“No!” Starsky’s response was immediate. “I’ll take a look around.”

Before Edith had a chance to refute the offer, Starsky made a beeline out one of the side doors and disappeared into the dimming light.



It hadn’t taken long to find her. The little girl had avoided the small rose garden lined with benches where the occasional couple wandered through, and had made her way to a gazebo nestled at the edge of the property. The small structure was constructed more for its scenic value than function, so no path led to it, and anyone wanting to see it closer would have to walk across the facility’s lawn to get to it. Even in the dimming light, Starsky could easily spot the white lace yoke of Rosie’s dress.

Hands tucked into the pockets of his slacks, Starsky slowly made his way to where Rosie sat on the plank floor, staring at her shoes. Once he reached his destination, he lowered himself onto the single step and leaned heavily against the building, staring at the fading colors of sunset. A few moments of silence lingered until Rosie finally spoke.

“Uncle Dave?”

Starsky swung his attention to the little girl, still staring at her shoes.

“Do you think he’s in Heaven?”

The opening of his arms was all the invitation Rosie needed to crawl onto Starsky’s lap, her face pressed against his chest. Starsky hugged the little girl to him, her head tucked under his chin.

Rosie’s parents found them there a half-hour later, drawing comfort from one another and discussing which star was now Hutch’s home.



Starsky had stayed at the reception as long as he could, but after coming in from the gazebo with the Dobeys, the feeling of being smothered grew so strong he quickly said his good-byes and fled under the pretense of wanting to follow some leads.

Starsky returned to the cottage, a bottle of scotch in one hand and a gallon of water in the other. He couldn’t bring himself to draw water out of the charred kitchen to care for the plants, so he brought it with him. The

burns on Hutch's pale, cold face haunted him still.

When he finished the task of watering the plants, Starsky wandered aimlessly through the rooms again, wondering what he was searching for. Still nestled in one corner of the living room was Hutch's Gibson, the guitar reflecting the soft light of the lamp. He smiled fondly at the instrument and gathered it up, reverently touching the strings as he perched on the wide lip of the window frame.

The strings rang out clean and pure, an echo of its owner's own voice. Starsky aimlessly picked out a tune, a bittersweet smile on his lips at the memory of his partner's unfathomable shyness when it came to singing in front of more than just his immediate friends. Starsky's fingerings soon fell into a familiar melody, and he stopped suddenly, realizing it was a song Hutch himself had written. One hand came up to cover his eyes, and Starsky did everything he could to withhold the tears again.

Drawing a steadying breath, he set the guitar aside and looked out at the multitude of stars gracing the velvet blackness. "Hutch, I wish—"

Movement outside the window distracted Starsky, and he peered through the glass. Perched on a nearby branch sat a mourning dove. Starsky stared at the small bird; not believing in anything as mystical as it being the same dove released at Hutch's funeral, but intrigued all the same. The two eyed each other for a moment before the bird pushed itself off the branch and flew away.

He sat alone in the darkness, long after he'd lost sight of the dove.



When Starsky arrived at the hotel the next morning, he was a little surprised to find his mother and Hutch's parents waiting together in the Hutchinsons' suite. Rachel rose from her seat on the sofa and greeted her son with a kiss on the cheek and a warm embrace.

"We're all packed and ready to go, honey," Rachel said, nodding toward the pile of suitcases at the door.

Starsky held his mother for an extra moment, relishing her touch. "I see that," he replied. "But I sure wish you could stay a little longer. I feel like I've hardly seen you and you came all this way—"

"Nonsense," Rachel said, extracting herself from her son's arms and picking up her purse and sweater from the sofa. "You've got a lot to do right now, and you don't need me in the way. Perhaps later, when it's over, you can come back to see me for a while, okay?"

"Yeah, that'd be great, Ma." Starsky turned his attention to the Hutchinsons who were watching the interaction between mother and son with a touch of sadness and envy. "Well, as long as everyone's ready, I guess we should be going."

“Wait a minute,” Richard Hutchinson interrupted, rising from his chair. “Before we leave, I think there’s something I need to say to you.”

Starsky held up a placating hand. “Please, Mr. Hutchinson. I know what you’re going to say, and you’re absolutely right. Believe me, nobody could blame me more than I blame myself for what happened, and if it’s any consolation at all—”

“Hold on just a minute,” Mr. Hutchinson interrupted again. “Let me say my piece. I just wanted you to know that we *don’t* blame you. My son died doing what he loved and doing what he did best.” The older man’s voice broke, but he continued on, determined to finish his thought. “And I want you to know that I’m grateful that my son had someone like you for a friend. He tried to tell me so many times how much you meant to him and everything you did for him, but I wasn’t always willing to listen. But I’ve seen enough and heard enough in these few short days to know he was right. I just wish I’d had the chance to tell him...”

Starsky nodded and grasped Mr. Hutchinson’s hand in both of his, trying to console him. A silent understanding passed between the two and no further words were necessary.

Finally, Starsky broke the silence. “Well, are we ready?”

The three older adults made one last pass through the room to make sure nothing had been left behind. Each one grabbed a suitcase or two and exited to the hallway toward the elevators. Starsky picked up the remaining luggage and followed them out the door, the click of the latch echoing after him.



Starsky had just stepped out of the shower, trying to revive himself, when the phone rang. A towel was hurriedly wrapped around his waist and another thrown around his shoulders. As he stumbled to the bedside phone, he tried to capture some of the dripping water from his hair.

“H’lo?” Starsky’s voice was muffled by the towel. When no one responded, he felt a fist of apprehension clench his gut. “Hello? Who’s there?”

The receiver clicked, and he was met with the familiar buzzing of a disconnected line. Starsky knew it was most likely a wrong number, but the hairs on his arms still stood up, a reaction of his self-preservation instincts. He also knew it could have been one of Vic Monte’s goons checking to see if he were home, or any number of the enemies he and Hutch had made over the years, ready to strike while the remaining detective was vulnerable.

Starsky reasoned that it was most likely a wrong number, but it didn’t stop him from taking his Beretta into the bathroom while he finished getting dressed.



At five-hundred dollars a plate, the governor's fund-raising dinner was everything one could hope for. A string quartet played Mendelssohn in one candle-lit corner, and tuxedoed waiters swept the room brandishing trays of delicacies. The governor's wife stepped up to the microphone, announcing the first course was to be served if everyone would take their seats. The guests moved quickly to their places, their chatter and laughter punctuating the concerto.

Once the guests were in place, dozens of wait-staff laid the first course before them and the governor stood and elegantly raised his glass. Clearing his throat, he began his toast. "Friends, we've come here on this glorious evening to—"

A commotion at the back of the dining hall escalated, cutting off the speech and turning the heads of the diners. Shouting and a loud thud were followed by the double doors bursting open and one of the doormen hurtling into the dining area. The governor's bodyguards immediately moved to his side. As the doorman rolled to his feet, an angry Starsky swiftly followed, gracefully dodging the lunge of a second attendant.

Starsky paused briefly when he realized all eyes were upon him. While he had manners enough to be mildly embarrassed, his discomfort didn't stop him from continuing into the room, his badge extended.

The governor's face turned crimson, and a flick of his wrist set his bodyguards forward. "What's the meaning of this?"

"I beg your pardon, sir, but it's important that I speak with Agent McMillian *immediately*. Your doormen refused to let me in." Starsky's eyes blazed when he spotted his quarry.

McMillian stood angrily, slapping his napkin beside his plate. "Detective, I don't know what you think you're doing here, but—"

Starsky was beside him in an instant, grabbing the agent by the lapels. "But *nothing*. What do you think you're doing, arresting Vic Monte? You know we don't have enough evidence to convict him of Hutch's murder yet! The judge'll dismiss the charges on a technicality, and it won't matter when I'm finally able to come up with a smoking gun with Monte's prints on it. It'll be thrown out of court as double jeopardy, and you know it!"

Gasps from around the table turned the agent's face to crimson. The governor's voice escalated. "Detective, you're out of line!"

"No, I'm out of patience!" Starsky bellowed without taking his eyes off McMillian.

The governor jabbed his finger toward Starsky. “Remove this man!”

The two bodyguards lunged at the detective, but not before McMillian was shoved onto his salad plate. Starsky grabbed the agent’s chair and used it to sweep the first bodyguard’s legs out from under him. When the second bodyguard swung a meaty fist at his head, Starsky ducked, then landed a combination of punches into the man’s solar plexus, crumpling him to the floor.

McMillian had gained his wits and scrambled off the table, but was stopped by a solid mass of fury. Starsky’s face was less than an inch from his own, his midnight blue eyes blazing. “*Drop the charges.*”

“You’re crazy!”

Starsky’s hand lashed out beside him and came back with a fistful of salad from a nearby plate. His face softened marginally. “Hutch always said these grass clippings were good for you. Yelled at me for never eating enough of them.” Starsky’s expression changed subtly. “I wonder if it’s still good for you if it’s stuffed up your nose?”

A nervous laugh was emitted from a few gray-haired women seated by the unfortunate agent. McMillian looked wildly about for any available help. “You’ve lost your mind, Starsky!”

Starsky’s eyes narrowed. “Don’t charge Monte with Hutch’s murder. Not yet.”

“It’s not up to me anymore. It’s out of my hands.”

Starsky’s voice became a hiss. “Fine. But when I *do* put all the pieces together to nail him, if he can’t pay for Hutch’s murder, *somebody else* is going to.”

The fistful of Romaine was flung into McMillian’s face as Starsky turned on his heel, blithely stepping over the prone and groaning bodyguards. With natural grace and dignity, Starsky straightened his jacket as he calmly walked out of the hall, slamming the doors behind him.



When Dobe returned to the squadroom after spending a frustrating morning with his superiors, he wasn’t surprised to see Starsky flipping through the forensics evidence taken from Hutch’s cottage for a fourth time. The detective’s gaunt features softened Dobe’s fury marginally as he stomped into his office to hang up his overcoat.

“Starsky, in here, now,” Dobe hollered through the open door as he returned to his desk. He snatched up the reprimand issued from Chief Porter’s office and read through it again.

Starsky stuck his head in the door. “Cap’n, can’t it wait? I was just heading down to the jail to question Vic Monte before some—”

“Do you know what this is?” Dobby waved the paper in Starsky’s general direction.

When Starsky didn’t answer but stood looking at him expectantly with barely concealed impatience, he continued. “This is a butt-chewing. *My* butt-chewing. From the chief. He got one, too—from the commissioner. And he got one, too—from the governor. The *governor*, Starsky! What in blazes were you thinking, going into the governor’s banquet half-cocked like that? That was stupid, you hear me? Stupid!”

“But, Cap’n—”

“Don’t you ‘but, Cap’n’ me, Starsky! You harassed a federal agent and assaulted the governor’s staff.” Dobby’s look was incredulous. “I know you’ve been under a lot of strain. I know what Hutch’s...what losing Hutch...” The larger man sighed, his expression softening at the flash of pain that flitted across the other’s features. “Did you really threaten McMillian?”



The slightest grin crept across Starsky’s mouth. “With lettuce, Cap’n. I threatened him with a salad.”

Starsky couldn’t read the changes crossing Dobby’s face. The superior officer lowered himself onto his chair and picked up his pen, scrawling his name along the bottom of the departmental reprimand, indicating he’d delivered it to the officer in question.

Starsky shifted impatiently from one leg to the other. “That it?”

Dobby scowled as he looked up. “No, that is not it. Part of this reprimand requires you to undergo departmental counseling.”

“Oh, come on!”

“You brought this on yourself, Starsky. And you’re lucky you don’t get worse than that. Your behavior over the last couple of weeks has been erratic. You’ve been angry—beyond angry. Things get broken. You won’t eat, you hardly sleep.” His tone softened. “I *know* what you’re going through, son. I lost Elmo, my partner. My best friend. But, Starsky...” Dobby shook his head. “If I hadn’t pled your case to the commissioner, you’d also be relieved of duty until you were evaluated by a shrink!”

Starsky began a biting response until he realized the weight of what had just been said. Dobey had gone to bat for him—again—and more than likely had to do some major kissing up to keep him on the streets. Playing mind games for a few hours with the Department headhunter was a light sentence considering the mayhem he'd wreaked the night before.

"Thanks, Cap'n," Starsky murmured, backing out of the doorway.

Dobey peered after him, trying to again envision the events at the governor's banquet. Wadding up the reprimand and throwing it in the garbage rather than inserting it into Starsky's permanent file, Dobey managed a chuckle. "He threatened him with lettuce?"



Vic Monte was unnerved, but desperately trying to conceal it with his typically aloof exterior. As he huddled in one corner of his jail cell, the noises and smells assailed him. The angry shouts of prisoners, the sarcastic rebuttals of the jailers, the smell of fear and sweat, vomit, and disinfectant caused his gut to tighten no matter how hard he tried to push aside his fear. He sat alone in his dim cell, his lawyer having pled that he would be an easy target for a retaliatory strike since the judge had ordered him held without bond. He'd already been harassed and pushed around by both the transporting officers and guards, but they did so without leaving any physical evidence that could be used against them. Still, at the moment, he was at least safe from the other prisoners.

The police, on the other hand, were another matter. Monte found himself again looking into midnight blue eyes burning with hatred, and he involuntarily shrank back farther on his bunk.

"What's the matter, Vic?" Starsky's voiced dripped with venom. "Don't like your accommodations? Maybe you'd like some company. I hear the boys in cell block three are always looking for new friends."

"Very amusing, Detective." Monte schooled his features. "To what do I owe the honor? It couldn't possibly be that you're here to gloat, since we both know the murder charges will never stick."

Starsky's hands gripped the cell's bars. "Not yet, anyway."

Monte stood smoothly and crossed to the barrier between the two of them, staying just out of Starsky's reach, all signs of his fear concealed. "And they never will, since I didn't do it. However, that doesn't mean I didn't dance at his funeral."

As predicted, Starsky's hand darted out, almost faster than Monte's eyes could follow. The detective's fingers grasped the air less than an inch from the felon's prison uniform, his face contorting in rage.

“Easy, Mr. Starsky, you’re going to hurt yourself. You certainly aren’t going to hurt me.” Monte clasped his hands in front of him and gracefully turned away, returning to his bunk. “No, I don’t think so. Not today. So, why are you here, Detective?”

Starsky reined in his anger and pulled down the hem of his jacket from where it had ridden up during his failed attempt to throttle the other man. “Singapore.”

Monte arched one slender eyebrow. “Really? Why does that not surprise me? You must think me a fool, Starsky.”

“Look, you’re already in here. You know the Feds have enough on you to lock you away for twenty lifetimes.”

“Perhaps, but my lawyer is something of a magician. You never know what he might pull out of his hat. So, what do I possibly have to gain by helping you?”

“You *really* think you’re going to buck these charges?”

“Without Hutchinson’s testimony? Who can say? Again, I ask—what could I possibly get out of helping you?”

Starsky looked around the cell. “How about different accommodations?”

Monte’s interest was immediately piqued. “Assuming that I’m convicted. What are you suggesting?”

“Phoenix.”

“O’Sage?”

Starsky could tell by the look in the man’s eye that he was on the right track. O’Sage was a federal prison in New Mexico known for its leniency and favorable climate. Among hard-core inmates it was known as the “Hotel Ritz” of penitentiaries. He nodded, although he had not even discussed any possible arrangements with the Feds. Right now, though, he’d make a deal with the devil if it meant tracking down the Singapore connection and Hutch’s murderer.

Monte began to quickly run through his options. The bottom line was he would do or say just about anything to ensure he didn’t spend the remainder of his days in San Quentin. But he also knew that any direct connection between him and the arrest of his newest dealers from Asia would mean a certain bloody and agonizing death wherever he spent his sentence.

“I want your word, Cop.”

“I’ll give you the keys to the city and a Papal blessing, if that’s what it takes.”

Monte's eyes bore into Starsky's. "Your word, Starsky. You could have blown me away any number of times before this and didn't. I want your word."

Starsky didn't blink. "I can't make any promises."

"But you'll talk to the judge?"

"I'll talk to the judge. I'll do everything I can, and then some, to get you transferred to O'Sage."

"All right, good. We have a deal then. But it would be suicide for me to give you names outright. Even going to O'Sage isn't worth the risk. The Feds couldn't keep your partner alive, and I know damned well they wouldn't shed a tear if I got iced." Monte thought for a minute as he stood and paced his cell, piecing together a trail to lead the detective to Singapore without it pointing back to him. Finally, he turned toward Starsky. "There's a fink who likes to call himself The Archer—big name for a little flake in a cheap suit. He's the one that blew your partner's cover to me."

When he saw Starsky's clenched fists turn his knuckles white, Monte raised his own hands in a gesture of defense. "Look, we both know I issued a hit, but Hutchinson disappeared before my men could get to him. This Archer character found out your partner was under and got word to me so I'd forget about his former indiscretions. I found the information useful, so I let him off the hook. You find The Archer, and you'll eventually find Singapore."

"Where am I gonna find this Archer?"

"You're the detective. Figure it out."

Starsky's eyes bore into Monte for a moment more before he turned on his heels and charged down the corridor. Left alone with the sounds and smells of the prison, Monte felt the now-familiar quake in his gut return.



"The Archer? What kind of jive handle is that?" Huggy placed a burger-and-fry platter in front of Starsky, hoping to entice him to eat. The waitress, who had just gone up to the counter to retrieve the meal huffed her annoyance at her boss for stealing her customer's food, then called back a duplicate order to fry cook, telling him to rush it.

Starsky watched in mild amusement as his friend liberally doused the fries in ketchup for him. When he didn't make a move toward the meal, Huggy glared at him until Starsky picked up the burger and took a bite.

Starsky sat the sandwich down, speaking around the mouthful. “I don’t know, but I got the name from Vic Monte himself. Said if I find this Archer guy, I’ll get what I need about the new suppliers from Singapore.”

“And you think these are the cats that...that killed Hutch?”

Starsky sighed and scrubbed his eyes with his hands. “I don’t know anything for sure, Hug. But Hutch was after these guys, and that’s enough for me to know that I’ve got to finish it.”

Huggy’s hand rested for a moment on his friend’s shoulder. Nodding toward the food, he moved to the phone. “Eat before that becomes a congealed mass of cardiovascular cloggage. I’m gonna make some calls.”

Starsky moved a few fries around on the plate before he gave up. A large yawn took over his face, and he blinked his burning eyes. Crossing his arms against the edge of the bar, he leaned forward and rested his head on them.

Ten minutes later Huggy returned, saddened to see the dozing figure. Pulling a takeout box from under the bar, he slid the meal in, hoping Starsky might try to eat again later. He was sure there was nothing edible in his friend’s refrigerator.

His waitress paused beside him. “What’s the matter? He drunk?”

“No,” came Starsky’s muffled reply. “He’s not.” He straightened and looked at Huggy. “What’d you get?”

Huggy gave the waitress a meaningful look, sending her back to work. Once she was out of earshot, he leaned in closer to Starsky and picked up the takeout box, offering it to the other. “Good help is so hard to find these days. I got a lead on this Archer dude. Ain’t much to know about him, which is why I didn’t hear of the likes of him before. But apparently he likes the ponies, and it’s not uncommon to find him hanging out at Cabrillo Downs this time of day. He fancies himself to be a sharp-dressed cat, though certainly not in the same league as yours truly. Dude’s about five-six or seven, thin, short gray hair, and one of those moustache and goatee jobs. Shouldn’t be hard to miss him among the other Cabrillo clientele.”

Starsky quickly stood up from his barstool and unexpectedly staggered backwards. One hand lashed out for the end of the bar to steady himself until the dizziness cleared.

“Starsky, I don’t think you—”

“Thanks, Hug, you’re the best.” Starsky spun and made his way out of the bar, leaving Huggy staring after him, the takeout forgotten in his hand.



The blare of the loudspeaker announcing the next race was deafening. Starsky stalked through the crowded room, easily slipping between frantic people trying to place their bets before the post of the next heat. As Huggy predicted, The Archer was easy to track down as he sat apart from the rest of the masses, looking for all the world like an out-of-place lawyer in the sweltering betting room.

Starsky slid onto the bench next to the smaller man. “Placed your bet?” he asked amiably.

“Oh, yes.” Pierce smiled politely, then returned his focus to the TV monitor above his head displaying the odds on the next race. “You?”

“Not yet, but I’ve got a tip on a sure thing.” Starsky smiled when the thin man glanced at him with interest before returning his attention to the screen. “I’ll *bet* that you’re going to spill your guts about everything you know about Vic Monte and some new players in town from Singapore.”

Pierce’s head whipped around in horror to face Starsky, his mouth opening and closing, as if trying to find his voice to call for help. Starsky already had his leather case out and flipped it to display his badge in Pierce’s face. Pierce pushed himself off the bench, foolishly intending to try and run away, but Starsky’s iron grip latched onto his lapel and dragged him back down onto the bench. “It’d be a shame if you tried to run and fell down and broke your leg. They shoot horses when they break their legs, don’t they?”

Pierce stared at Starsky’s icy features and nodded, trembling.

Starsky released his hold on the other man’s coat, then patted his face. “We wouldn’t want that now, would we? Hmm?” At Pierce’s nod, he continued. “Okay, then. What do you say you and me take a drive, and we’ll have a nice little talk? And, if you’re real good, maybe—just maybe—I won’t kill you outright for blowing my partner’s cover. And if you tell me everything I want to know, you might live long enough to find out who won the race.”



“Your captain tells me you’ve been having some trouble sleeping, Detective Starsky. Why do you think that is?”

“I’m not tired?”

Dr. O’Shea glanced up from her ledger, studying Starsky through her lowered lashes. The detective was obviously beyond exhaustion, but she had yet to get a straight answer from him. He was also obviously humoring her and enjoying the sport, since an almost bemused smirk tugged at the corner of his mouth. So far, half his time was spent looking about the room for something to pique his interest during what appeared to be a

monumental inconvenience and waste of his time, and the other half was spent staring at her legs. “Are you eating?”

“What?”

“I said, are you eating?”

“I heard you. I meant eating *what?*”

The psychologist took off her glasses and rubbed her eyes, the beginning of a migraine starting. “Look, Detective, I know you only kept your appointment because you were ordered to. So let’s cut through the bull, okay?”

Starsky dropped his amiable facade, but remained silent.

The doctor’s tone softened. “I can appreciate what losing your partner—”

“You can *appreciate?*”

“—but I’m not going to pretend I know what that feels like.” Dr. O’Shea sighed and looked into the haunted eyes across from her. “I know you’re in knots, Officer. You need to get out whatever it is you’re feeling, and the best way to start is to identify those emotions. So, what *are* you feeling, Detective Starsky? Rage? Bitterness? Sorrow? The need for vengeance? What would prompt you to threaten an FBI agent with...” The doctor quickly flipped through the case file. After scanning the document, she looked back up incredulously. “With a *salad?*”

“Lack of vitamins?”

Dr. O’Shea sighed again and laid the file back on her desk. “I think we’re done for the day, Detective. I won’t restrict you from active duty, but I will be seeing you again. *Soon*. Meanwhile, I want you to really examine how you’re feeling, because frankly, I think you’re in denial, which is causing you to lose your grip on reality.”

Starsky had already stood and moved toward the door, but was stopped by her last statement. “Denial? About what?”

The doctor’s expression was kind. “I don’t think you’ve accepted the fact that your partner is really gone.”

Starsky thought for a moment before answering, then touched his temple. “Here, I know he’s gone, I saw...his body. *I buried him*. But here...” His hand traveled to rest on his stomach. “My gut doesn’t know it.”

Without another word, Starsky left, quietly closing the door behind him.



After his persuasive conversation with Archibald Pierce, Starsky had amassed a significant trail of names, dates, and places—far more than he'd expected to get, or, he was sure, Monte most likely anticipated the small fink of having. Still, all the snitch had been able to provide of any real value regarding the opium smugglers was the location of the warehouse to be used for an upcoming delivery, and the names of two of the hit men from the Asian connection.

Starsky had more to go on than he'd had in days, but his exhausted brain was spent and he couldn't quite put the pieces together. His brief appointment with the Department psychologist was forgotten. He scrubbed his hand across his face for the third time in as many minutes, trying to keep his eyes focused on the road ahead of him. He was jolted awake when he ran a red light and was nearly broadsided by a delivery truck that had the right of way.

He gave an apologetic wave to the angry truck driver after righting the Torino. He knew he needed sleep, but past attempts had been nearly futile. He'd either be awakened by the reoccurring vision of lifting the sheet at the morgue to reveal Hutch's cold, still body on the slab, or by a terrifying feeling of suffocation.

He redirected the sedan toward Hutch's cottage, finally acknowledging his body's need for rest and hoping to find some comfort there.



"Huggy, one of your whacked-out friends is asking for you." Huggy followed the waitress's pointing finger toward the back entrance. It took him a minute to figure out who she was referring to, as the slight disheveled man stood in the shadows, almost as if he were uncomfortable among the lights and noisy crowd.

Huggy sighed, in no mood to deal with the old man right then. Still, he called into the kitchen for the fry cook to throw something together for him, then worked his way to the back of the restaurant. "Hey, Eddie, what's happenin'?"

"Hiya, Huggy. How's business?" Eddie Doyle grinned blearily, trying to get his aging eyes to focus in the darkened room.

"Doin' good, Eddie. I've got them bringing out something for ya, okay?" Huggy turned back toward the bar, thinking a meal was all the derelict wanted.

"Oh, okay. That'd be swell, Huggy." Eddie fiddled with his hat for a moment before he remembered why he had come to the restaurant. "Hey, Huggy?"

Huggy stopped just before reaching the bar and rolled his eyes before turning around. "Yeah, Eddie?"

When Huggy didn't walk back to him, Eddie cautiously made his way past the crowded tables. He thrust a torn and dirty note into Huggy's hand. "That's for Hup."

Huggy stared at the crumpled paper for a moment. When he found his voice, it was incredulous. "What?"

Eddie didn't understand Huggy's reaction. "It's a note. A note for Hup. He said it's important."

"Eddie, you know that Hutch is..." Huggy tore open the note and scanned the contents. The handwriting was an unfamiliar childish scrawl, probably Eddie's. "Who gave you this? Who said it was important? Eddie, who gave this to you?"

Eddie smiled, knowing he held a secret. "He told me not to tell. He just said give it to Huggy to give to Hup because it was important."

The fry cook emerged from the side door of the kitchen and wordlessly thrust a large brown paper bag into Eddie's arms.

"Thanks, thanks a lot, Huggy. Don't forget to give that message to Hup." Eddie tottered out of the back of the restaurant, the bag clutched tight against his chest.

When Huggy finally lifted his eyes up from the note, Eddie was gone. The cook cocked an eyebrow at his boss and took a long drag on his cigarette. "Whatcha got there, boss?"

"Trouble."



Starsky had rolled off the bed and landed in a sprawl, the sheet entangling his legs. He had reached the cottage around 7:00, and had fallen asleep within minutes of stretching out on Hutch's bed. He had slept soundly for three hours, until the ringing of the telephone sent him scrambling. It had taken him a moment to recognize where he was and get his bearings before he could find the receiver. "What?"

"Starsky?"

Starsky quickly focused, the tone of his friend's voice piercing his mind's fuzziness. "Yeah, Hug?"

"Listen, man, something weird just went down. Eddie just came in here—"

"Eddie? Eddie Doyle?"

"Yeah, he just came trippin' in here, gives me this note. Says...says it's for Hutch, man."

“What?” A chill ran down Starsky’s spine.

“Yeah, that’s what I thought, too. But I figured he meant the note was for you, seeing as how he was always getting your names versavica. Anyways, I read the note, and whoever wrote it said they’ve got some information on your partner’s murder and to meet them at two a.m. at some place called The Cove. I ain’t never heard of no place named that. You know where they’re talkin’ about?”

“Yeah, yeah, I do. Who’d Eddie say gave him the note?”

“He wouldn’t say. Said it was a secret but it was important.”

“Terrific.” Starsky’s mind raced. “Huggy, has anybody handled the note besides you and Eddie?”

“I don’t think so.”

“Look, do me a favor. Stick it in an envelope and I’ll swing by and pick it up. There might be prints, or—”

“Starsky, it looks like Eddie wrote it, not whoever gave it to him, so I don’t know if—”

Starsky cursed. “Yeah. Yeah, okay. It’s worth a shot. Did it say anything else?”

“Yeah. It also said to come alone—no other cops.”

Starsky snorted and pulled himself back onto the bed.

Huggy fidgeted with the phone cord. “You don’t need The Bear to tell you that it sounds like a trap, right?”

“Yeah.”

“Cause you been stirrin’ up an awful lot of hornets’ nests. Could be almost anybody.”

“Yeah, but if somebody knows what happened to Hutch, I’m not going to chance—”

“Are you nuts? Tell me you’re takin’ the cavalry with ya.”

“Look, Hug—”

“At least let me ride shotgun.”

“No, listen. I’ll show up there early and check it out. If you don’t hear back from me by three, then call Dobby at home and tell him everything, and to send a unit to the north end

of Ventura Beach State Park, got it? Thanks, Hug.” Starsky finished the instructions in a rush, not allowing his friend any time to try and stop him.



Starsky walked along the beach, just out of the waves’ pull. An hour before the appointed time, he was cruising the north end of town, desperately trying to find Eddie Doyle in all his usual haunts, including the missions and Salvation Army, but with no success.

The temperature dipped significantly as the clouds danced in front of the moon, hiding its brilliant reflection. He huddled within his jacket, seeking whatever warmth it could offer against the night’s chill. Occasionally, he stopped and turned toward the water, watching the brief stretches of moonlight try to burn through the fog and dance across the waves. As he continued down the beach, the mist caused by the falling temperatures thickened to the point that it grew harder to see the ground in front of him. Starsky rolled his head back, trying to release some of the tension in his neck and shoulders. Looking at his watch for what felt like the hundredth time, he decided he’d waited long enough for the requested contact. It was nearing 3:00 a.m., and he knew Huggy would be phoning the captain as soon as the minute hand struck twelve. With a sigh, he turned and wearily began his trek back to the parking lot and home.

Starsky had only taken a few steps when a voice behind him breathed his name, stopping him cold. He knew he was beyond exhaustion and that the mind could do incredible things under enormous stress and grief, but he was unprepared when the voice spoke again, closer and clearer.

Starsky’s rage returned, his anger directed both inwardly and toward anyone who would dare play him this way. With his heart racing, he drew his Beretta and spun, crouching, the weapon thrust forward. Before him was only the mist and the silence broken by the lapping waves. Starsky’s eyes darted into the thickening fog, his anger turning to nausea with the realization that he truly was losing his grip on reality. He shook his head, desperate to dispel his confusion.

And disappointment.

The second he began to relax his guard, the mist thickened further, obscuring the beach. Starsky’s eyes grew wide as a shadowed figure began to form out of the mist, hesitantly making its way toward him. The form stumbled, as if uncertain of the terrain. Starsky shook his head, his pistol again thrust before him in a one-armed draw as he backed away from the apparition.

The silhouette took on a more defined form as it approached him, a wavering arm outstretched in supplication. The nightmare advanced, a disembodied voice speaking his name out of the mist.

Starsky continued to back away until he stumbled against a piece of driftwood, toppling him to one knee, the Beretta still thrust before him. He watched in disbelief as the figure continued its hesitant advance. With only yards between Starsky and the shadow, the moonlight broke free of the clouds, burning through its hazy shroud. Starsky felt the world tip as the figure took shape, the moon finally revealing a shadowed face.

Starsky's hoarse whisper was half denial, half prayer. "*Hutch?*"

Both of his partner's hands were held before him in response to Starsky's trembling gun hand. "Easy, Starsk, easy. I know this is a shock, but it's okay. *I'm okay.*" Hutch's voice was raspy; his face was gaunt with pain and fatigue.

Starsky's own face paled further, and he shook his head vehemently. "*No, no! You're—*"

"Starsky, please. I know how this must seem, but it's going to be okay."

"*NO!*" Starsky surged to his feet; his extended gun now steady, fueled by his rage. "*I buried you!*"

The Hutch figure staggered. "Starsk, listen to me! The night we faked my arrest we went into the hall. No one could hear our conversation, right? We argued."

Something in Starsky's demeanor changed, hope warring with disbelief. Hutch pushed on. "Do you remember what you asked me? Do you?" He waited for Starsky's hesitant nod. "You asked me who I could trust, and I answered—"

"*Me and Thee,*" Starsky finished, his throat working convulsively against the flood that swept over him. The Beretta dropped from numb fingers. "*Hutch?*"

"*Starsk...*" Hutch reached out for his partner just as unconsciousness claimed him, his eyes rolling back as his legs collapsed. Starsky caught the limp body and eased it to the sand where he knelt, cradling his partner's warm, *living* body against his chest, and wept.



Starsky had wavered between deadly cohesiveness and exhausted ramblings since Hutch's funeral. Huggy wasn't surprised in the least to get the call from his friend only seconds before the 3:00 deadline, requesting to be met at the back door of his restaurant in half an hour. Starsky was cryptic and offered no further explanation. Yawning, Huggy unlocked the door to the alley and peered outside, the sight of the Torino instantly greeting him. Starsky was early and leaning over the folded down driver's seat into the back of the car, struggling to pull something out. Huggy's jaw dropped when Starsky straightened and turned with his burden to face him.

“That’s *not*—?” Huggy couldn’t finish the sentence, staring in disbelief at what appeared to be Hutch’s limp corpse. “Have you lost your mind?”

Starsky pushed past him. “I’ll explain later.”

Shocked, but not without his wits, Huggy peered in each direction of the alley for any uninvited guests, then secured the door behind him before racing up the steps in Starsky’s wake.



The small room was silent except for the ticking of the wall clock and the occasional moan from the figure on the bed. Starsky sat on the bedside, staring at his partner as he slept fitfully. He and Huggy had relieved Hutch of his damp clothes and dressed him in a pair of pajama bottoms. When Starsky took the opportunity to check his partner for injuries, an injection port imbedded behind Hutch’s knee was discovered. The second-degree burns on Hutch’s face were all but healed, looking more like faded sunburns. The bruises and scrapes Starsky had observed on his body at the morgue were now a faint gray-yellow-green.

Starsky wearily looked over to Huggy. The sense of *déjà vu* was not lost on either of them. Unshed tears burned in Starsky’s eyes. “He’s *alive*, Hug.”

Huggy nodded grimly, his joy tainted by the hell they had all been through, and a thousand unanswered questions.

Starsky’s gaze returned to his partner’s sleeping form, and he rested his hand on the blond’s wrist, relishing the warm pulse that danced beneath his fingertips. “I don’t understand any of this. I don’t know where he’s been or what he’s been through. But he found his way back, somehow.”

Starsky’s face turned hard with a new thought, and Huggy pitied whoever would be on the receiving end of the detective’s fury. “I don’t know who did this to us, or how they pulled this off, but I’ll find them. And I swear, Hug—they’re gonna regret that they ever took us on.”



Huggy had finally convinced Starsky to lie down for a few hours while Hutch slept. Initially, the two had been torn whether or not to rush Hutch to a hospital, or at the very least, call in a friend of Huggy’s—a retired physician, who volunteered his time at one of the city’s local clinics. Knowing Hutch had been coherent earlier and moving of his own volition, however unsteadily, Starsky decided to wait it out for a few more hours. Whoever had snatched Hutch had gone to an enormous amount of effort to fake his death, and Starsky didn’t want to give them the opportunity to make that illusion a reality.

At first, Starsky refused to relinquish the task of protecting the sleeping blond, until Huggy went to a small closet and drew out a baseball bat and a twelve-gauge shotgun, then positioned his chair to face the doorway. No one attempting to enter the room would pass without his permission.

Starsky climbed onto the bed beside his prone partner and lay facing Hutch. As much as he wanted to keep his gun in hand, he knew better and, after engaging the safety, tucked it back in his waistband. Starsky's hand reached out almost reverently and he gently rested it on Hutch's shoulder, causing a genuine smile to break across his face. The breath Starsky felt he had been holding for an eternity was finally exhaled as he closed his eyes, and within seconds, he was asleep.



When Hutch woke, he had an unnerving moment of disorientation, until he remembered the nightmare he'd been living, or rather, *almost* living. The blond groaned with the memory, which sent the sleeping figure next to him rolling off the mattress and into the small space between the bed and the wall. Huggy leapt up from his sentry position near the door, accidentally sending a round from his shotgun into the ceiling. Starsky's disheveled head popped out from behind the bed, along with his drawn weapon, eyes wildly searching for the threat.

"It's nice to know some things never change." Hutch's grin took the sting out of his sarcastic words. Nothing could take away the joy of finally being home and safe. After Starsky shook the cobwebs from his head, he crawled out from his cramped spot. Hutch swung his legs over the side of the bed, while Huggy's attention was divided between his friends and the damage to his ceiling.

Hutch pushed himself up to stand, but misjudged his weakened state and began to topple. Starsky was beside him in an instant, his hands latching on to Hutch's forearms to steady him. As Hutch gave him a grateful smile, the partners' eyes locked for a moment before the steadying grip gave way to a bone-crushing embrace.

When Starsky finally pulled away, he held Hutch at arm's length to study him critically, not liking at all his partner's condition.

Huggy finally broke in. "I don't know which one of you looks worse."

Hutch nodded his agreement. "You don't look so great, pal."

"Me? You look like—" Starsky shook his head, gratefulness tinged with an anger he didn't know what to do with. "I don't suppose you want to tell us what the hell's been going on?"

Hutch nodded, but looked away to meet Huggy's probing stare. "Hey, Hug."

“I don’t mind tellin’ ya, your disappearing act seemed like the real deal.” Huggy’s face tightened, guiltily wondering if Hutch had purposefully executed the charade.

Hutch chuckled without humor. “Yeah, well, they sure knew what they were doing.”

“Yeah? So, who’s *they*?” Starsky growled.

Hutch’s eyes flickered back to Huggy. “I’ll tell you everything, but, Huggy—I’m sorry. I think the less you know, the safer you’ll be.”

“What? You think I’d—?”

“*No*, no. It’s just that we’ve never been up against something this big before.”

Starsky broke in. “He deserves to know who.”

Hutch nodded, staring at the floor as the waves of memory washed over him again, sending a chill down his spine. When he looked up again, his eyes were hard. “The FBI. They did this.”

Starsky’s and Huggy’s reactions were swift and violent. Starsky tightened the grip on his partner’s arms. “You’re telling me that the Feds faked your death? Why?”

Hutch reached up to rest a hand on his partner’s shoulder. “Apparently, they made the decision for me that I should go into protective custody.”

Starsky’s hands dropped away. As he stared at the floor for a moment, the other two men could feel the rage within him rise up like a living thing. Finally, Starsky exploded, spinning away from Hutch and snatching up the chair Huggy had occupied moments before. It was smashed violently against the floor, splinters scattering across the carpet. The backboard that Starsky salvaged was then thrown across the room, shattering the mirror into dozens of shards. Hutch sagged back down onto the bed, too weary to stop his partner’s tirade, or join in.

A muffled call from the first floor of the restaurant stopped Starsky cold. Huggy raised a hand to reassure the others. “That’s the cook wonderin’ what kind of woman I got up here. I’m gonna go down and feed him some story, then get the kitchen prepped for the lunch crowd like I always do. Soon as I can, I’ll flash up here with some coffee and something to eat.”

“Good, I’m starving.” When Starsky’s demeanor changed at the mention of food Huggy grinned, knowing that, with the return of his friend’s appetite, everything would somehow be all right—at least, once the partners exacted their revenge. Huggy extended a hand toward Hutch, and the blond clasped the other’s wrist. “I’m glad you didn’t...I’m glad you’re back, man.”

Hutch squeezed the thin wrist and nodded his appreciation. His voice was low, his words meant only for Huggy. “Thanks for watching out for him.”

Huggy nodded once and left the room, leaving the shotgun beside the door.

Hutch pulled himself up farther on the bed, resting his back against the wall. Starsky finally sat, facing his partner.

Hutch sighed. “Where do I start?”



*Hutch was exhausted. Spending the night in the crowded holding cell afforded him no sleep, between the typical prison barrage and the occasional and often venomous visits from his fellow officers. Many of the uniformed patrolmen who checked in on him, mostly out of morbid curiosity, left without too much of a confrontation. The plain-clothes detectives, however, were scalding with their acid remarks. There were few things cops hated more than another going bad, and they reminded Hutch of that fact.*

*Late in the morning, Hutch “made bail” and after his release, touched base with Vic Monte. Monte was enraged over the sting operation that brought down many of his “best” men and accused Hutch of slipping up—leaving a trail that led the Feds straight to him, or worse, that Hutch had set him up. Hutch viciously reminded the hood that he, too, had not only been arrested and charged, but had also lost his career. The tenuous relationship got a little dicey when Monte suggested that Hutch was no longer useful, now that he was off the force. Hutch convinced him that he still had connections, and that his training and experience could still be of benefit to the organization. Monte finally and cautiously conceded.*

*Hutch returned home and immediately hit the shower, trying to wash away the stench of the holding cell from his skin and memory. Revived, but still exhausted, he opted to silence his growling stomach by warming up some left-over stew.*

*The talk radio station filling the small kitchen was enough to drown out the federal agents’ entrance. Hutch stirred the bubbling pot and turned away from the stove, jumping a bit when he realized he wasn’t alone. McMillian and Endicott stood by the table, their expressions urgent.*

*“Didn’t your mothers ever teach you to knock?” Hutch quipped, mild anger overriding his embarrassment from the surprise they had given him.*

*“We’ve got a problem. Your cover’s been blown, and Monte’s got a price on your head.” McMillian’s voice was hostile.*

*Endicott agreed. “We need to take you into protective custody—now.”*

*Hutch held up his hands. “Wait. Wait a minute, here. I just spoke to Monte a couple hours ago. Everything’s fine. I’m still in and he’s—”*

*McMillian shook his head. “No, it’s blown. We got word twenty minutes ago; someone snitched to Monte that you’re a plant. We don’t know when or how they found out. It could have even been last night when you were brought in, for all we know. Maybe the only reason he agreed to keep you around was so he could take you out without arousing as much suspicion to himself—pin it on some vigilantes that don’t like it when cops go bad. It’s hard to say. What we do know is that there’s a quarter-million price tag on your head.”*

*Hutch whistled as he turned back to the stove and lowered the flame. Pulling a dishtowel from where it had been tucked in his back pocket, he wiped his hands and laid it down on the counter. “A quarter-of-a-million bucks, just for me. Imagine that.”*

*Endicott shifted from one foot to the other, impatient. “Look, Hutchinson, we need to get you to a safe house **now**.” The agent reached past Hutch, intending to turn off the burner. “So go pack a bag and we’ll—”*

*Hutch’s grip on the agent’s wrist stopped him. “I don’t think so. My partner and I can take care of ourselves until the trial. We’ll be more use to you tying up loose ends and giving you the airtight case you need than being stuck in some hotel somewhere, sitting on our butts.”*

*Endicott snatched his hand back. “Not Starsky—just you, Hutchinson. And don’t be a fool! You’ll be wasted out on the streets for sure and screw up our case against Monte. We need your testimony.”*

*Hutch cocked an eyebrow. “Well, I’ve got to say that your concern for my safety is comforting, Endicott, but I’m not going underground.”*

*“But Monte wants you dead!”*

*“I understand that, but listen—remember what I told you about Dixon? He was the guy I initially thought performed the hit on Theresa DeFusto’s brother. Well, he wasn’t, but he’d done more than a few hits for the famiglia. More importantly, he’s pretty fed up with good old Mr. Monte, and I’m sure if I can just get another minute alone with him, I can get him to spill what he knows. That kind of evidence will make your case even stronger. He’s skittish and I don’t think it’s likely he’d talk to anybody else but me.”*

*McMillian mopped his upper lip with his sleeve. “Hutchinson, we don’t have that kind of time. I don’t think you realize the urgency, here. You need to disappear, now. Alone. We’ve got an idea that will keep you alive until the trial.”*

*Hutch grew more exasperated. “Look, I’m not going anywhere without talking to my partner and my captain first.”*

*Hutch turned away from the two agents toward the phone mounted on the kitchen wall. Endicott grabbed the blond by the arm and jerked him back. The contact was all the provocation Hutch needed to retaliate, and a solid right cross laid the agent flat. As he was recovering his balance, a strong arm looped around Hutch’s throat, and McMillian’s handkerchief was clamped over his nose and mouth. Hutch’s hands instinctively went up to the arm crushing his windpipe, clawing to pull it away, while what oxygen he could get was tainted by a sickly-sweet smell.*

*Hutch’s stomach lurched at the scent of the chloroform, and he desperately tried to shake his head away from the grip that clamped the drug to his face. Survival instincts kicked in, and Hutch stomped his heel on McMillian’s instep, causing the larger man to stumble. Hutch broke out of the agent’s stronghold, but the chloroform was already pushing him to the brink of unconsciousness. Hutch staggered forward into the stove, colliding with the saucepot, and bringing it down on top of him as he fell to the floor.*

*Hutch cried out as the stew scalded the side of his face. McMillian was over him in an instant, snatching up the discarded hand towel and wiping the mixture off his face. Before Hutch was able to try to get away, though, the handkerchief was again roughly pressed over his nose and mouth.*

*The last thing Hutch thought before blacking out was that he didn’t have to worry about the bad guys killing him off. The good guys were doing a fine job on their own.*



*Hutch groaned as he began to wake, his head and stomach spinning from the effects of the chloroform. Nausea rolled over him like a wave, and he turned on his side to retch. The instant his face came in contact with the surface beneath him, pain lanced through him and he racked his memory, trying to recall what had caused the injury. Fire? Was there a fire?*

*Unconsciousness tugged at him again and he fought it, trying to focus his eyes on the unfamiliar surroundings. He lay on an examining room table, covered only by a hospital gown. The room was white and chrome, devoid of any color or warmth. Hutch pushed himself up by one arm and twisted his legs up under him. When he did, a new pain ripped through his leg from behind his knee. Questing hands touched the back of his knee and felt something hard under the skin. He twisted to get a better view, but then had to spend a moment blinking rapidly to clear his sight. When he could finally focus, he was shocked to find a medical port imbedded in the back of his leg. He had seen such an*

*apparatus before, but only on patients needing constant medications and fluids, allowing easier access by needle.*

*A cold finger of fear raced down his spine, and he shuddered. In an instant, he was sliding off the table to escape, but his legs were unable to hold him, and he fell to the floor.*



*The unmistakable feel of latex-gloved hands rolled him onto his back. He was again on the examination table and a petite blonde nurse held an empty hypodermic needle in one hand as she disappeared from his view. The world grew dim.*



*“He should have listened to us to begin with!” The voice was heated and familiar. “If he had cooperated, we wouldn’t have had to take these extreme measures.”*

*It took Hutch a minute to recognize the voice as Endicott’s. He turned his head toward the conversation, and while he tried to concentrate on what was being said, it felt as if he were swimming against a current. Endicott stood nervously next to McMillian, along with a man Hutch hadn’t seen before. The third was dressed similarly to the agents and held a metal briefcase. The new man spoke. “Are you sure you want to proceed with this? Because once we start, we’re committed, and there’s no turning back. When Dennison gets wind of this—”*

*“By the time Dennison hears about it, it’ll be too late.” McMillian was speaking now, and fading in and out of Hutch’s focus. “Besides, by then we’ll have put away Vic Monte and handed Dennison the tightest conviction the West Coast Bureau’s ever had. How we got there will be a minor consequence. You let me worry about Dennison.”*

*The third man shrugged his shoulders and set the case on the exam table next to Hutch’s feet. Miraculously, the agents hadn’t noticed Hutch was semi-alert and watching them through hooded eyes.*

*Endicott nervously hugged his jacket tighter and crossed his arms in the chilling room. Hutch realized the temperature had dropped significantly and was getting colder by the minute. “So what exactly is that stuff, anyway?”*

*The unnamed man opened the case and withdrew a blood-pressure cuff. The briefcase was made up of a single compartment surrounded by protective foam. Within the padding lay a series of pre-measured hypodermics. The man moved up beside Hutch, noticing the half-veiled eyes watching him. “He’s awake.”*

*The man expertly placed the cuff on Hutch's forearm and pumped it. He released the ball and withdrew a stethoscope from his suit coat and placed the ends in his ears. Hutch ineffectively tried to remove the cuff and push the man's hands away as he slowly released the cuff's air. Anger coursed through Hutch at his inability to protect himself.*

*It only took him a moment to check Hutch's blood pressure and heart rate. "Ninety over sixty. Good." A small penlight was flashed into Hutch's eyes as the man peeled back one eyelid then the other. Apparently, he was satisfied with the results and returned the light, cuff, and stethoscope to the case, then focused his attention on Endicott who shifted nervously, waiting for an answer to his question.*

*A single hypodermic was withdrawn from the case and held to the light. The unfamiliar man peered into the glass and tapped a finger against it to dispel any air. "What this is, Endicott, is an opiate derivative."*

*"Like horse?"*

*The man briefly looked at the other with something akin to disdain before stepping closer to Hutch's knee. "Something like that. Roll him for me."*

*Hutch's heart began to race, and he put every ounce of willpower he had in trying to get his limbs to cooperate. If his desperation and fear had been able to overcome the effects of the previous injections, he would have been far from the cold, sterile room in an instant. But all he was able to accomplish was an uncontrolled kick at McMillian that had no effect, and a wild slap at Endicott that he easily avoided. Hutch was roughly rolled onto one side, his burned face buried against the side of Endicott's coat. He didn't feel the hypodermic needle plunging into the port behind his knee, but the warm rush that immediately followed swallowed him whole.*

*Caught somewhere between euphoria and terror, Hutch tried to beg them to stop, but what came out of his mouth were incoherent groans. McMillian and Endicott let him fall over onto his back. The suspended examination lights above him fragmented and blurred, and he futilely tried to shield his eyes. McMillian roughly grabbed either side of Hutch's face and drew himself close; his voice became the malicious hiss of a serpent. "This is **your** doing, Hutchinson. If you had listened to us earlier, we wouldn't have to do this. Just remember that later, Hutchinson—this is **your** fault!"*

*Hutch could barely discern the three leaving as he slid deeper into a stupor, the dropping temperature of the room chilling him to the bone. His thoughts began to muddle, but it still couldn't keep him from crying out, if only in his mind.*

*"STARSKY!"*



*Darkness and rough hands. Movement. Exhaust. Traveling? To where? Deep voices, but the words were jumbled. Cold, so cold. **Help me.***

*Fresh air. Grass. Still so cold. Tossed. Tumbling. Rough hands checking his pressure and pulse. Another injection behind the knee. Cold. **Breathe...help me breathe.***

*Alone.*



*He was in a different room now, but still colder than he could ever remember being. He couldn't have moved if he'd wanted to, and he felt suspended somehow, frozen in a moment of time. He couldn't open his eyes farther than slits, but it was enough.*

*Hutch couldn't turn his head to see his surroundings, but even with his hazy vision, the room looked somehow familiar. Were those drawers on the wall above him?*

*Another unfamiliar face stood over him, and Hutch saw rather than felt the man's hand come up to his face and lift each eyelid in turn, checking the dilation of his pupils. The man then moved to the edge of Hutch's wavering vision, down by his legs.*

*The warm rush from the injection began to course through him, but did nothing to dispel the chill that permeated his body. He felt his eyelids drift shut against the tide of the drug, but not before he saw a sheet pulled up over his head.*



*If he had felt like he was trying desperately to swim to the surface of consciousness before, now it was as if weights had been added, strapped to each of his limbs, pulling him farther into the black depths.*

*His eyes slit open, but refused to focus. All Hutch could discern was that he was lying on his back, unable to move. He felt restrained, like a band was tightened across his chest and thighs, tying him to the earth. The room was white, like before, but a small barred window sat high on the wall opposite him, letting in a meager amount of sunlight.*

*His mouth was parched and his lips cracked to the point of bleeding. The slightest sound to his left broke through the buzzing in his ears, and he turned toward it. A man he hadn't seen before sat reading a newspaper in a plastic chair similar to those found in waiting rooms. The stranger was dressed in a hospital attendant's jacket, his tie pulled away from his collar as if it had been strangling him.*

*When the stranger noticed Hutch was awake—if only marginally—he glanced at his watch and mumbled, “Close enough.”*

*The paper was folded and laid aside. A hypodermic was withdrawn from a stand and injected into the port attached to a bottle of saline hanging at Hutch's bedside. Hutch tried desperately to speak, but only succeeded in marginally opening and closing his mouth. The last thing he remembered was the metallic taste of blood from his cracked and bleeding lips.*



*When he woke again, he was trembling violently and sweating, and instantly recognized it as the onset of withdrawal from the heroin injections. He dimly realized that, at least, he was no longer quite as cold. Although he felt as if at any moment he would begin heaving, he tried to sit up. The pressure across his chest, thighs, ankles, and wrists prevented him, and he forced his eyes open, only to see the room spin. He took several deep breaths to settle his stomach before trying a second time.*

*Everything around him was still out of focus, but gradually becoming clearer. The unfamiliar man was still in the nearby chair, but sat in a sprawl, apparently drowsing. Trying to focus, Hutch determined that the man wasn't asleep, but rather in a stupor. The attendant's coat was hanging on the doorknob, and his left shirtsleeve was rolled up above his elbow. Lying on the floor was a rubber tube, which apparently had been used as a tourniquet. Next to it was an empty hypodermic.*

*Even in his haze, Hutch's thoughts began racing. Here, finally, was perhaps hope, if he could only get his thoughts straightened out.*

*Unconsciously, he cried out when his stomach cramped in the pain of withdrawal. Blinking back the tears forming in his eyes, he curled in on himself as much as he could and looked down. What frightened him more than the hospital gown were the leather restraints strapped across his chest and thighs and securing his wrists and ankles.*

*Hutch threw his weight against the straps, grimacing from the pain it caused and the hateful feel of anything touching him—a side effect from the heroin leaving his system. Desperation ran through him, and he pulled at the leather restraints over and over, only managing to rub his skin raw where they bit into him.*

*His actions were enough to rouse the other man, who blearily peered at him. The stranger again checked his watch, and his face displayed a flash of concern that his imbibing had apparently caused dereliction of his duties. Surging to his feet, the stranger*

*unsteadily withdrew another hypodermic from the stand and staggered over to Hutch's bedside, injecting the drug into the saline solution.*

*"No, please! God...please, **don't!**" Hutch begged, his voice little more than a delirious whisper. "My...partner, please—get my partner." He repeated the plea like a litany, falling back into unconsciousness well before there was a subtle change in the stranger's expression.*



*He woke in a cold sweat, the hospital gown clinging to him like a second skin. The nausea and dizziness immediately assailed him, as well as the cramping of his stomach muscles and an urgent need to retch.*

*Hutch's eyes darted about the room fearfully, willing his muscles to stop trembling and betray the fact that he was awake. The stranger stood leaning against the opposite wall, staring out the small barred window level with his chin. He glanced at Hutch. "You're awake."*

*Hutch swallowed hard and tried to lick his lips. "Please..."*

*The stranger turned away from the window, placing his back against the wall as he studied Hutch. "You want some water?"*

*Speaking was a supreme effort, so Hutch merely nodded. The man crossed the room and retrieved a cup, then placed its straw to Hutch's mouth. Hutch drew what he could, but then began coughing violently, sending waves of pain through his stomach and the rest of his body. He swallowed convulsively, willing the meager fluid to stay down.*

*The stranger set the cup aside and withdrew a hypodermic out of the drawer. Hutch quickly drew a breath and tugged as best he could against his restraints. "Please, don't...shoot me up...anymore. I'm obviously...not...going anywhere."*

*Whether it was something in Hutch's voice or something else, the man paused, though he didn't set the syringe down. He glanced at his watch, considering. "I guess a few more minutes won't kill you, though I'll bet you're hurting about now."*

*The face that met the stranger's gaze contained thin, dark circles accenting sunken eyes and cheekbones. Hutch's blond hair was plastered to his skull with sweat. A healing second-degree burn marred one side of his face.*

*Hutch shook his head. "I don't care...I...I can do it again."*

*"Again?" The stranger's expression was quizzical, but he was obviously interested. When Hutch didn't respond, he simply continued to stare at the detective.*

*“Where...am I, anyway?” Hutch panted through clenched teeth as another wave of pain tore through him.*

*The stranger chuckled without humor. “You’re currently a guest at the Cabrillo State Facility for the Terminally Insane. So, if you get it in your head to start hollering for help because you’re being held against your will, forget it. The staff hears that several times a day.”*

*Hutch nodded once, thinking furiously through the pain, desperate for a plan of action. The man stepping to his bedside and reaching for the saline bottle interrupted his thoughts.*

*“God—no! Please, you don’t...you don’t...have to do that!” The stranger’s hand didn’t hesitate as he pressed the plunger, sending the drugs into the tube leading to Hutch’s arm. “Look, I...I don’t know...who you are, or who...you work for, but my name...” The room began to spin in and out of focus. “My name is Detective...Ken Hutchinson. Call Starsky at Metro... Oh, God...please. The number...the number is... Starsky...I need... Starsky...”*

*The stranger continued to stare at Hutch long after he passed out.*



*The man was preparing to slide the syringe into his own arm when Hutch woke for the fourth time. He didn’t feel as horrible as he had during the earlier moments of consciousness, but the tremors and pain were not long in coming. He watched through half-closed eyes as the stranger injected himself, then released the rubber tubing from around his own bicep.*

*The man looked at Hutch blandly as the rush of the drugs coursed through him. “Who’s Starsky?”*

*Hutch looked at him blankly, struggling to moisten his lips.*

*“You called out for him a few times. And earlier, you said to call him.”*

*Hutch’s voice was raspy. “My partner.”*

*The man nodded, as if understanding some great truth. “Your partner.”*

*Hutch tried to focus past the pain raging through him and the desperate craving that snaked up from deep inside, demanding the release offered by the drugs. “Who...who are you?”*

*The stranger’s eyes were glazing over. “Name’s Emery. Nate Emery.”*

*“You...work here?”*

*The other man snorted and shook his head. “Hell, no, I don’t work here. I probably belong here, but I don’t work here.”*

*“You’re with...Endicott...and McMillian?”*

*Emery’s eyes narrowed with distaste. “Yeah, I’m an agent. Your tax dollars at work, Detective.”*

*Another lightning strike of pain ripped through Hutch’s guts, drawing him in on himself as much as the leather bonds would allow. The agony left him gasping and pale. Emery staggered to his feet, inadvertently crushing the empty hypodermic’s glass tubing. He continued to the bedside stand and clumsily jerked open the drawer.*

*Hutch thought frantically. “Wait, Emery—look. I’m not...I’m not...going to give you...any trouble, okay? And...there’s no way I...can get out...of this bed, right? So you don’t need...to do that. All right? Please...don’t.”*

*The agent peered at Hutch’s pale and shaking face. “You’ve got to be hurting, man. Don’t worry about this crap—it’s not H, it’s methadone. Bringing you down nice and easy.”*

*Emery reached up to the saline drip, fumbling with the hypodermic. Hutch struggled against his bonds. “I don’t...care! Come on...cut me some slack! I don’t...want it!”*

*The passion in Hutch’s voices stopped the agent. “You don’t know what you’re talking about, Hutchinson. In a few minutes, you’re going to be begging me for this.”*

*Hutch stared at the other defiantly. “No. Never.”*

*Emery looked at the detective for a moment, then shrugged his shoulders and put the syringe aside. “Sure. Whatever.”*

*After the agent slumped down into his chair, Hutch threw his head back against the pillow in relief and concentrated on breathing through the pain that continued to wrack his body. He tried to imagine himself again in Huggy’s upper room, Starsky at his side every second...*

*“You haven’t asked why.”*

*Hutch cracked his eyes open for a moment. “Why, what?”*

*“Why you’re being held here. Why the FBI did this to you.”*

*“Oh, I’ve got...a pretty...a pretty good...idea.”*

*“So, why don’t you share it with us, Hutchinson?” Hutch’s heart beat faster at the sound of McMillian’s despised voice. Trailing behind McMillian was Endicott as they entered the room, their expressions smug.*

*McMillian was livid when he turned to Emery. “Why is he awake? He’s not supposed to be brought out of it so soon!”*

*Emery’s dislike for the other agents was barely concealed in his nonchalance. “It happened.”*

*“That’s not your decision to make, Emery. What the—?” McMillian looked at Emery’s rolled-up shirtsleeve and the broken hypodermic on the floor. His expression changed instantly from fury to a cool disdain. “Never mind. Just load him up and keep him quiet.”*

*Endicott’s jaw dropped as his focus snapped from his partner to Emery’s rolled-up shirtsleeve and the broken hypodermic on the floor. “Don’t you see what’s going on here? **He** took the—”*

*“Shut up, En.” McMillian shook his head.*

*“But, he—”*

*“Leave it!” McMillian glared at his partner, shutting him up. Hutch tried to follow the sudden changes and why McMillian didn’t throw out the third agent for shooting up. He was pulled from his thoughts when McMillian turned his attention toward him. “So, Hutchinson, you were just about to share your theory about how you got here and why.”*

*“Oh, there’s something...I’d...like to share with you, McMillian, but I...don’t have...my gun with me.”*

*“Cute.” McMillian picked up the full hypodermic and reached for the saline bottle. “Time for a nap. You look dead.”*

*McMillian’s comment drew a hearty laugh from his partner. Endicott looked at Hutch and shook his head. “Your partner looks almost as wasted as you do.”*

*“What are you...talking about?” The waves of pain and craving continued to roll over Hutch. “When he...finds out what you’ve pulled...when he finds me...”*

*“Oh, he’s already found you.” McMillian’s voice held no small measure of malice. “Identified your body at the morgue and buried you.”*

*“What?!” Hutch strained to sit up. “What are you...what are you talking about?”*

*“What’s the matter? You don’t remember your trip to the morgue? Or how about when we rolled you down the embankment off Topanga Canyon Road?” McMillian leaned over Hutch’s prone body. “No, you probably wouldn’t remember any of that because you were too busy being ‘dead’ at the time.”*

*Hutch’s glare was murderous. “You’re crazy.”*

*“No, just smarter than you gave me credit for. I told you before, Hutchinson, you don’t mess with us. So, what **do** you remember?”*

*McMillian stood with one hand on the saline drip and the other casually toying with the syringe. Almost against his wishes, Hutch’s mind picked up a thread of memory. “The...the two of you came to...my house. Said my...my cover was blown.”*

*Endicott crossed his arms in front of his chest. “That’s right. And you refused to come with us. Obviously, that was a big mistake.”*

*Hutch strained to remember more, the pain and desire for the release promised by the methadone distracting him. “We fought. And I...I was burned somehow. And...a fire...there was a fire.”*

*The agent nodded. “Your kitchen burned.”*

*A new memory struck Hutch. “Chloroform! That’s...that’s how you...got me.”*

*A snicker from Emery turned the attention on him for a moment. “What’s the matter, McMillian, you and Endicott can’t take down one guy by yourselves, so you have to gas him?”*

*Hutch’s limbs began to tremble violently against the restraints as they cramped in withdrawal, although his mind began to clear. “You said I...was dead.”*

*McMillian’s smile was brittle. “Which is why you’re shaking like a broke junkie. There’s a special department in the Bureau that specializes in drug research, Hutchinson. They’ve come up with a combination of stuff that can slow down a man’s heart rate and respiration so low, it would take an ultrasound to detect it.”*

*The memory of the first injection crept back into Hutch’s mind. “An opiate derivative.”*

*Endicott nodded, mildly surprised. “You remembered. It worked, and fooled a lot of people, including Vic Monte, which saved your sorry—”*

*Hutch exploded, straining against the bonds hard enough to cause the raw spots on his wrists and ankles to begin bleeding again.*

*McMillian viciously pushed him down and pinned him to the bed. The weight of the agent's body crushing against his chest caused Hutch to writhe in pain as he gasped for breath. McMillian leaned in closer to the struggling detective. "Not just Vic Monte. Your partner, your captain, and your family. They all believe that you got wasted, Hutchinson. But it's for your own good. By making it look like you're dead, we're keeping you alive. Don't you forget that. And don't forget that this never would have happened if you'd just gone into protective custody when we told you to."*

*McMillian slowly straightened, taking the pressure off Hutch, and plunged the needle into the saline drip.*

*Hutch lay still on the bed, the mental anguish of what had happened warring with the physical pain. "Starsky..."*

*McMillian tossed aside the syringe. "Yeah, I won't lie and say it wasn't rough on him. He and Dobby ID'd your corpse at the morgue after we tipped off a couple of patrolmen where they could find you. Made this whole setup a lot more believable."*

*Guiltily, Hutch was almost grateful as the methadone coursed through him, relieving the horrible yearning caused by the withdrawal and stripping away his anguish. "So, the coroner...was...in on this, too?"*

*Endicott nodded. "He had to be. Faked your autopsy. He also dropped your body temperature from ninety-eight to ninety-one degrees. It may not sound like much, but when you raise somebody's temperature by seven degrees, it would boil their brains. Lowering your body temp that much made your respiration and heart rate drop even lower than the drugs alone could. Hell, your partner bawled all over you and never once guessed you were still in there. You were a cold and stiff 'stiff,' Hutchinson." Endicott chortled at his own joke.*

*McMillian grinned as well. "The cold stiffened your muscles, too, so Starsky really believed you were dead. Autopsy stated the cause of death was suffocation."*

*Hutch swore again, his words beginning to slur, as he realized Starsky would have had to read the grim details of the coroner's report.*

*"Don't take it too hard, Hutchinson," McMillian smirked. "You had a great funeral. Very touching. Let me tell you about it..."*

*Hutch did everything he could to block out McMillian's recitation detailing his funeral. The monologue took on a nightmarish quality as it filtered through Hutch's drug-hazed mind. He threw his head back into the pillow in agony, both physical and mental, trying to shut out the agent's voice. As he shook his head in denial, he caught a glimpse of Emery seated nearby, his eyes smoldering with fury as he looked at the spectacle before him.*



*When Hutch regained consciousness, the room was completely dark except for the dim light over his bed. He had long since lost track of how much time had lapsed since his abduction. As he became more alert, he could make out Emery's still body lying on a cot in front of the door.*

*Hutch coughed once and tried to clear his throat, not caring if it woke the agent across the room. Emery rolled over, facing Hutch's direction. "How are you feeling?"*

*When Hutch didn't answer, the agent sat up and swung his legs over the side of the bed. "If you're in pain, I can give you something."*

*"No." Hutch's answer was curt.*

*"Thirsty?"*

*"Yes."*

*Emery got up and crossed the floor, then offered Hutch a sip of water. The agent stood silently for a moment, then sat in the chair next to the bed rather than returning to his cot. Hutch noticed he didn't get the next dosage out either.*

*"What...day is it?" Hutch asked.*

*"Does it matter?"*

*"I suppose not."*

*"Don't worry," Emery sighed. "They'll have you off this crap in time to testify at the Monte trial. Probably in a week or so."*

*"Emery, look. Let me...just kick it, okay? No more...junk...no more methadone. Just...let me sweat it out." Even as he said it, a cramp struck Hutch's stomach, and the now-familiar ache began to run through his limbs.*

*"Why? Why would you put yourself through that kind of hell?"*

*"I...have my reasons."*

*"You don't know what you're asking, Hutchinson."*

*Hutch's vision was clear as he peered through the darkness and met the agent's questioning eyes. "Yeah, I do. Not that long ago I...was kidnapped by a local dealer...Ben Forest."*

*“Heard of him. You take him down?”*

*Hutch nodded. “Me and my partner.”*

*“Starsky.”*

*“Yeah. I’d been...protecting Forest’s girlfriend...he wanted her back. They jumped me, and...when I wouldn’t tell them where I...I was hiding her, they strung me out.”*

*Emery swore, and Hutch was surprised by the agent’s show of compassion. “That’s a helluva bad wrap. Did that go on your record?”*

*Hutch shook his head and felt his body tremble. “No, nobody...in the Department knew about it besides my captain...a uniformed officer who swore he’d...never mention it, and my partner. Starsky...found me after I managed to get away from them, and he...took me somewhere safe and...and we got through it.”*

*“Must’ve been rough.”*

*Hutch clenched his teeth against another wave. “Yeah. I wouldn’t...have been able to kick it without him. He’s the best...friend I got in the world.”*

*A stabbing pain caused Hutch to retch, but there was little in his stomach to get rid of. He lay in the dark panting, trying to remember the last time he had fought the addiction, what Starsky had done, what he had said to ease the pain.*

*Emery stood and crossed to the drawer.*

*“No!” Hutch shouted. “Please! I can do this.”*

*Emery stood with the hypodermic in his hand, undecided as he watched Hutch’s agony. After a moment, a decision was made and the agent sat, then rolled up his own sleeve.*

*A few minutes passed while the drug took its effect on him. Hutch rocked against the mattress as much as he could within the restraints, trying to dredge up what memories he could, his partner’s arms wrapped tightly around him, the steady stream of encouragement whispered from a tear-choked voice...*

*“This is what you’d call irony.” Emery’s voice cut through the increasing fuzziness of Hutch’s thoughts.*

*“What?”*

*“Irony. I’m supposed to be keeping you strung out and you want to kick it cold, and all I want to be is...” Emery trailed off, not able to find a word that could possibly encompass what he was feeling.*

*Hutch focused on the older man slumped nearby. The agent was most likely only in his early fifties, but the lines and creases at his eyes and along his forehead spoke of things that aged a man. A few scars also marred the firm features, and the once brown hair was more gray than brunet. Even in the dim light, Hutch could see the haunted depths of the agent's eyes.*

*"So how'd you...get the babysitting assignment, Emery?" Hutch disciplined his voice to remain as steady as he could.*

*The question garnered a barking laugh from the agent. "Babysitting? Yeah, that's about right. That's about all the Bureau thinks I'm good for. Yeah. See, they're just keeping me busy until they can ease me into retirement. Keep me around until I can collect my pension, then they'll show me the door."*

*Hutch shook his head, trying to follow the other's train of thought. He wasn't sure if it was the agent's drug-induced rambling, or the effects of his own withdrawal that was muddying the waters. "Why...why would they do that?"*

*"Guilt, maybe. Cover their proverbial backsides. Probably both."*

*Hutch shook against the withdrawal, but pushed himself to focus. "You've...lost me."*

*Emery seemed to sober for a moment. "You said you and your partner—this Starsky—you're close?"*

*Hutch nodded. "I can't even imagine what...all of this has done to him."*

*Emery's eyes took on a light of their own. "I'll tell ya what it did to him. It ripped his heart right out of his chest. It'll burn away at his guts until he'll do anything to make the pain go away...make the guilt go away."*

*"Guilt?"*

*"For not being there to stop it. Not being there to keep you from getting shot. Knowing he shoulda taken the bullet, not you."*

*Hutch shook his head, confused. "I wasn't—"*

*"And there won't be a day that he won't remember, won't see the blood on his hands."*

*"Emery, who...who are you talking about?"*

*The agent jerked back to the present. "My partner, Dan. Dan Phillips. He was **my** best friend, Hutchinson. Closer to me than my family or wife. Ex-wife, now. Dan and me worked covert ops. Do you know what that means?"*

*Hutch shook his head, causing the sweat from his brow to sting his eyes.*

*“That means you do whatever you’re told, and you don’t ask questions. Dan was a sharpshooter. He could pick the wing off a fly in mid-flight. The last assignment we got, Dan and I were supposed to take out a military general. One of **ours**, Hutchinson. One of our own. This general had some dirt he was going to make public, and the government didn’t want it out. Besides the embarrassment, it might have jeopardized national security. Might have. So, the only way to shut him up was to shut him down.”*

*Emery looked over at Hutch’s stricken face. “Does that surprise you? It happens more than you know. Well, it was all set up and everything was going just as planned, but at the last minute, something went wrong. We had a leak in the Department, and the general got tipped off. His people set up an ambush for us. Dan got caught in the middle of it—trapped. When the shooting started, I got nailed in the leg, shattered it in four places. I couldn’t help him, though God knows I tried, including dragging myself as far as I could. I knew he was gonna be dead unless we got a miracle. I broke the cardinal rule and called the Bureau to bail us out, get Dan out. But they said—are you ready for this? They couldn’t do it, because it would expose the operation and the Bureau. Make them look bad. They told me we were on our own. Dan took two bullets, here and here...” Emery laid a hand on his forehead and the other over his heart. “And it was covered up. The official report said Agent Dan Phillips never existed. The papers said Dan was some anti-government whack-job named Frederico Mendoza, who freaked out and tried to kill the general and was taken out when he wouldn’t give up his weapon.”*

*The agent ignored the tear that ran down the length of his face as the methadone took over. “Dan had served the Bureau for almost twenty-five years, and instead of burying him with honors in Arlington where he belonged—purple heart in Korea, three service medals—he gets labeled as some nut and is buried by the county with all the other unclaimed bodies.”*

*Hutch’s voice was soft. He now understood the agent’s need for the escape the drugs provided. “What about his family?”*

*“Dan didn’t have any family. I was his family.”*

*“Why...why’d you stay with the Bureau? Why didn’t you speak up...tell the truth?”*

*Emery’s laugh was damp. “I could’ve spoken up, but I knew what I was getting into when I took the assignment. Right or wrong, I serve at the pleasure of the President of the United States. But I hated them, Hutchinson. God, how I hate them. And what better revenge for me than to stick around and remind them every chance I can of how they screwed up?”*

*“Why didn’t they...get rid of you?”*

*“Guilt, I suppose. My boss has a soft spot that he doesn’t want anybody to know about. Plus, they knew I could blow the lid off the botched assassination attempt. Then again, they could just kill me, too. Sometimes, I wish they would.”*

*The two men lapsed into silence, both struggling through agony of their own.*



*The next morning, Hutch knew he was over the worst of the withdrawal. He had hardly slept the night before, and the times he did doze, he woke up with his heart pounding in fear. The old memories of his abduction by Ben Forest and his men were now intermingled with the faces of McMillian and Endicott.*

*A groan from Emery brought his attention to the other man waking. The agent scrubbed his face with his hands and stretched, obviously uncomfortable from the position he had passed out in.*

*“Rough night?” Hutch quipped.*

*The agent rolled his eyes, then groaned again as he stood and stretched out his back.*

*“Look, Emery. I don’t suppose you’d consider letting me get up for a minute. You’ve had me strapped down in this bed for I don’t know how many days now, and among other things, I’ve got to use the john.”*

*The agent’s expression was somewhere between mild amusement and suspicion. Hutch almost managed a smile. “I don’t even want to think about how that was dealt with while I was drugged out of my head.”*

*Emery’s expression told Hutch he’d rather not revisit those memories either. The agent reached for the restraint at Hutch’s right ankle and paused, obviously torn.*

*“What do you think I’m going to do? Overpower you and make a run for it?” Hutch quipped.*

*The agent rolled his eyes and released Hutch’s restraints, then even offered a hand to steady him when he stood for the first time. Hutch thanked Emery and took a tottering step toward the small bathroom adjacent to the room’s single outgoing door.*

*When Hutch took a second step, he listed to his left and grabbed the back of the room’s sole chair to steady himself. As soon as Emery moved forward to help him, Hutch suddenly gripped the chair with both hands and swung it up in a wide arc, striking the unsuspecting agent across his back and head. Emery went down in a pile and remained motionless.*

*Hutch put his arms out to balance himself when the room began to spin. When he felt stable enough, he tore off his hospital gown and quickly stripped the agent of his pants, shirt, attendant's coat, and shoes. It took him longer than he would have liked with his hands trembling violently.*

*After he was dressed, Hutch made his way to the door and peered out. Deciding it was clear, he paused only long enough to nod his thanks to the unconscious agent before he slipped out the door.*

*If Hutch had taken a moment to look closer, he would have seen the slightest smile gracing Emery's mouth.*



Hutch would never forget the look on Starsky's face when he finished relaying the events as best he could remember them.

"I'm sorry, Hutch," Starsky whispered. "I am so sorry."

"For what, buddy?" Hutch shook his head. "Don't tell me... Starsk, you can't possibly blame yourself."

"I should've been there for you. I should've—"

Hutch stopped his partner's self-incrimination by calmly placing his hand on Starsky's arm. "Starsk, stop it. There's no way you could have prevented this, okay? And there's no way you could have known I wasn't dead. They knew what they were doing."

"They could have killed you."

"Yeah, well..." Hutch chuckled without humor. "That was a risk they were willing to take."

"*Damn them!*" Starsky uncoiled from the spot where he had sat, motionless, during Hutch's explanation, and began pacing the room. "Who do they think they are, Hutch? Huh? What right do they have to mess with our lives...to...to shoot you up—?"

Starsky stopped suddenly and brought his hands up to cover his eyes, as if to block his sight from some horrific memory. "I hoped you'd never have to face that kind of hell again."

Hutch swallowed hard, realizing this past week would haunt him for some time to come. "I know. Everything I went through with Forest came right back to me."

"That wasn't your fault."

Hutch nodded, though Starsky knew he was never convinced of the fact, thinking that somehow he could have fought off the addiction.

“*Hutch...*” Starsky sighed and rubbed his eyes, then looked at his partner sitting quietly on the bed. There remained a frailness and vulnerability from the ordeal. He had lost a considerable amount of weight and looked drawn and haggard, but Starsky’s heart kindled with pride. “You kicked it, Hutch. *Again*. And all on your own.”

Hutch’s voice was quiet. “Not alone, Starsk.” The blond met his partner’s eyes with a smile, and Starsky understood what didn’t have to be said.

Starsky returned to the bed, sitting on the edge and facing Hutch. “So how’d you get away?”

“Just as I slipped out of the room, I realized a problem with my plan.”

“Guards?”

“Cameras. There’d been a camera on my room the entire time. As soon as I bonked Emery on the head, the big guns were on their way.”

“So how the heck did you get out of there?”

Hutch’s grin held some malice. “As soon as I made it out into the hall and saw attendants coming for me, I pulled the fire alarm and all hell broke loose. No one else noticed me during the commotion, and I made it down to the loading dock. I lucked out—there was a laundry truck just pulling in, and I flashed Emery’s badge and commandeered it. A guard and some agents were hot on my tail, but I plowed through the gates and made it out to I-5.”

“You outran them in a laundry truck?”

“Not quite. There was an accident on the freeway, and traffic was jammed up. The agents were only about ten cars behind me. They got out and were running my way. I don’t mind telling you, the crap was scared out of me at that point. But there was a kid on a motorcycle not too far ahead. I flashed Emery’s badge again and persuaded him to give me a lift. He drove on the shoulder and got us out of there. That’s how I lost the guard and the other agents. I had the kid drop me off on the north side of town—”

“Where you found Eddie.”

Hutch gave his partner a gentle smile. “I actually called you, but then I realized it’d either freak you out, or you wouldn’t believe it was me. I also figured they might tap your phone or tail you. Eddie was the only way I could think of connecting without giving myself away.”

“I thought you were a ghost. I thought Dobe was right and that I’d really flipped out, after all.” Starsky almost grinned at Hutch’s inquiring look. “They sent me to the Department shrink, Hutch. They thought I was losing it.”

“Starsk...”

“You always said you thought I was a little nuts. Apparently, so did the governor when I crashed a state dinner and threatened to stuff salad up McMillian’s nose.”

“You did what?”

Starsky’s smile was genuine. “At least, I didn’t use the wrong fork for a change. Forgot to wear a black tie, though.”



Starsky stood at the window, silently staring at the streets below. Traffic came and went as people hurried about their business, but he saw none of it. He was still lost in his own thoughts, seething with rage over what the FBI had done to Hutch, supposedly in the name of justice. He ran a hand through his curls, his mind a maelstrom of plans and possibilities as he tried to figure out what to do next.

Dobe was first on the list. There was no doubt he had to be notified as soon as possible that Hutch was alive. Then, there were Hutch’s parents to consider. They, too, needed to know as soon as possible that their only son hadn’t died, but the question was *how* would he tell them? Could he risk making it public knowledge that Hutch wasn’t dead, after all? By now, he was fairly certain that the Feds had discovered Hutch was missing and would no doubt be looking for him. Vic Monte was another factor. Once he found out Hutch was still around, the price on his head would be reinstated, and every lowlife on Monte’s payroll would be out for glory. One thing was certain, Hutch wasn’t safe where he was. Anyone who knew the two detectives would look for them at Huggy’s place, and Starsky’s car parked in the alley was like a beacon leading the way.

Still unsure of what course to take, Starsky turned to ask Hutch his take on the situation, grateful to have his friend’s input after so many countless days without him. “So, partner,” he began, relishing the sound of that word coming from his lips. “Where do we go from here?”

“We do what we set out to do,” Hutch replied. “We’ve got Monte, now we go for the Singapore connection.”

“What about the Feds?” Starsky’s lingering anger was evidenced by the tremor in his voice.

“What about them? They’ll still be around, and after this whole Monte thing is over for good, we’ll have more time to decide exactly what we’re going to do to them.”

“Okay. Singapore it is. So, how do we let Dobey know? I’m not real crazy about putting you on the streets right now. You’ll be a target for sure. Not to mention the fact that you look like somethin’ the cat *wouldn’t* drag in. Maybe there’s a safe house we can go to for a while, just until you’re feeling better and we can get some kind of game plan going.”

“No safe house,” Hutch said emphatically. “Look, I know you’re worried, so am I, but the last safe house I was in nearly killed me. Besides, I’m safer on the streets with you than I’ll ever be in some prison of the Feds.”

Starsky nearly smiled in spite of himself, knowing what Hutch had said was true. “Okay. We’ll do it your way.” Picking his jacket off the back of the chair, Starsky patted his pockets, trying to determine where he’d left his car keys. “You ready to go?”

“Sure thing.” Hutch swung his legs over the side of the bed, preparing to stand up. “Just let me brush my teeth and change into the clothes Huggy brought, and we’ll get started. But maybe we should at least call Dobey first. If I just walk into the squadroom, we may give him a heart attack.”

Starsky chuckled at the mental image of Dobey clutching his chest, his mouth working convulsively while no words came out. “Yeah, I guess you’re right. I’d hate to be the cause of the captain’s untimely death. Besides, it’d be a real shame to deprive him of the stroke he’s gonna have when he sees what we do to the Feds.”

Starsky circled to the other side of the bed and picked up the telephone. Just as he was about to dial, Hutch stood up precariously and made his way to the small bathroom, steadying himself on the scattered furniture as he went. Starsky watched him, a small frown drawing his eyebrows together, and wondered if perhaps he should have taken Huggy up on his offer of calling his cousin to give Hutch a thorough check-up before they left. He stopped in mid-dial as he thought, his frown becoming more and more prominent.

He was just about to hang up and find Huggy when the decision was made for him. With only two steps separating him and the bathroom doorway, Hutch’s legs gave out and he fell to the floor, his head striking the doorframe as he went down. With a strangled cry of “Hutch!” Starsky bounded across the top of the bed and dropped to his knees beside his partner.

“Hutch?” Starsky patted Hutch’s face gently, but there was no response from the other. Panic rising in his chest, Starsky crossed hurriedly back to the phone and called for an ambulance.

He then returned to his partner and sat cross-legged on the floor. Very carefully, he pulled Hutch into his arms as gently as he could, grateful for the reassuring rise and fall

of his partner's chest and the steady beat of the pulse in his throat. His arms locked tightly around his partner, Starsky settled in to wait for the paramedics.



Captain Dobey stormed down the hallway, muttering to himself. He'd been in the middle of another aggravating conference call with the commissioner when Starsky had called him and insisted he come to the hospital. To make matters worse, Starsky had refused to give him any more information over the phone, just telling him it was life or death, and he would understand when he got there.

He finally located Huggy in a small waiting room, shaking a vending machine as he tried vainly to coax a stuck candy bar from inside it. "Captain Dobey," Huggy said, stopping only long enough to greet the obviously unhappy man. "To what do I owe this honor?"

"Cut the crap," Dobey growled, giving the offending knob on the machine a single, vicious tug. An avalanche of candy bars came pouring from the bottom slot, and the captain grabbed up one, unwrapping it with a flourish to take a large bite. "Where's Starsky? And what's with all this nonsense about my making sure I wasn't followed?" he asked around a mouthful of candy.

"Um, he's in Room 311," Huggy replied, staring in amazement at the pile of candy around his feet. "But I wouldn't go in there right now if I was you. There's something you need to know first... Cap'n?" He'd been so fascinated by the ease with which Dobey had acquired the candy that he didn't even notice that the captain was no longer beside him. Dobey was already out the door and halfway down the hall.

Dobey burst through the closed door of Room 311 and stopped dead in his tracks at the foot of the hospital bed, as a Beretta was drawn and leveled at his chest. Starsky had literally thrown his upper body across the person lying in the bed, effectively protecting and shielding the identity of the patient from the captain. An empty chair stood to the left of the bed and, judging from the cushion that rested half off of the seat, it was the same chair Starsky had occupied only seconds earlier.

Dobey's patience was at its limit and his eyebrows shot to his forehead. "What in blazes is going on here, Starsky? And stop waving that pistol in my face before I take it away from you!" Dobey took another bite of his candy bar and glared at his detective.

"Sorry, Cap'n." Starsky grinned apologetically, lowering his gun and clicking the safety back into place. "I didn't know it was you."

"So, tell me what this is all about. Or are you going to lie on top of that poor patient forever? You have some serious explaining to do..."

His voice trailed off as, without preamble, Starsky raised up off the bed, allowing Dobey to have full view of his partner lying battered and bruised, but very much alive in the bed.

Dobey stood in shocked disbelief and stared at the man before him, as the rest of his candy bar dropped from his suddenly nerveless fingers to the floor. For several seconds no one moved, until very cautiously, Dobey crossed to the bed and laid a hesitant hand on Hutch's chest as if to reassure himself of the steady heartbeat beneath. Hutch covered the rough, callused hand with one of his own and gave it a gentle squeeze.

Unable to stand any longer on his suddenly weakened legs, Dobey collapsed onto the end of the bed and dropped his head into his massive hands as tears slid silently down his cheeks.



Dr. Heflin was more than a little reluctant to release Hutch the next morning. Hutch had slept through the long night, knowing he was finally safe now that Starsky was within arm's reach and two police officers were stationed outside his door. Dobey had called the patrolmen in personally, without telling them who it was that they were guarding inside the room. What they were told was that in the event of an emergency, such as a fire or bomb threat, the only way they were to let the occupant out of the room was if Sergeant Starsky were upright and conscious, and personally escorting the patient.

Hutch had been admitted under a false name and examined by Heflin, the ER physician on duty. Starsky refused to give the doctor any information regarding what had happened over the last several weeks, and fed him the story that Hutch was a suspect in an upcoming trial, and his prisoner. When blood tests showed traces of the morphine derivative in Hutch's bloodstream, Starsky refused to let the doctor prescribe anything for it, insisting he be treated for any other problems but that. The doctor told Starsky in no uncertain terms what he thought of that decision, but couldn't get the detective to back down. Starsky was actually pleased at the prognosis, and Hutch was treated for dehydration and low hemoglobin, then left to sleep as a remedy for exhaustion, the cause of his fainting earlier in the day.

The partners left the hospital by 10:00 a.m., and Hutch insisted they return to the cottage so he could review the damage and get a few changes of clothes. Starsky knew their appearance would tip off agents staking out the cottage, but with the decision to confront McMillian and Endicott made, he almost welcomed the opportunity.

There would be hell to pay when the time finally came.



Dobey was surprised when his secretary buzzed him on the intercom, telling him that Agents McMillian and Endicott were there to see him. Rubbing the grit out of his eyes, Dobey fairly growled in anticipation of nailing the two agents to the wall any way he could. He knew there would be a battle before him when they made charges against the two agents, and possibly the entire local FBI agency, in the days ahead, but neither

Dobey, nor Starsky and Hutch, were going to let the matter of the “protective custody” drop.

Dobey stabbed the intercom button and barked for the two agents to be admitted. He slowly stood, shaking off the effects of a tense and sleepless night.

McMillian and Endicott entered and shook Dobby’s hand, and he gestured for them to sit. “What can I do for you?”

“Well, Captain,” McMillian began, uneasily shifting in his seat. “This entire operation of taking down Vic Monte has always been considered classified by the Bureau, and basically, we’ve kept you involved and informed on a need-to-know basis. Well, there’s been an unexpected turn of events, and—”

“And there’s something I need to know.”

Endicott cleared his throat. “Yes, sir. As I’m sure you can appreciate, there were events that caused the agency to engage in a covert operation in order to secure for the prosecution—”

Dobey had already had enough and cut off the agent with a vicious swipe of his hand. “You can take your textbook explanation and stuff it, Endicott! Covert operation, my...” The captain reined in his anger, knowing there was a need for caution, though his rage boiled just below the surface. “You’re here because you *lost* something.”

McMillian pushed himself to his feet. “What do you know, Captain?”

“Everything. And if you think for one second I’m going to tell you where—”

“Captain, let me remind you who you’re dealing with!” Endicott stood to join his partner.

“Let me tell you who *you’re* dealing with. You’ve got *me* to answer to, and if that’s not enough to make you shake in your overpriced shoes, just wait until my boys get hold of you. That’s right—my *boys*. As in plural.” Dobby actually smiled, though it was far from pleasant. “Besides I don’t know how many laws you two have broken, you ripped apart the cardinal rule, and there’s no way you’re going to get away with *that*.”

McMillian drew himself up, refusing to show the trickle of concern that ran to his gut. “And what might that be?”

Dobby’s grin became feral. “You messed with a man’s partner.”



Starsky and Hutch were only a few blocks away from the cottage when the radio crackled to life, waking Hutch from his doze in the back seat of the Torino.

“Control to Starsky; come in, Starsky.”

Hutch slid up farther in the seat, but not high enough that he’d be visible to any passers-by. “What happened to Zebra Three?”

Starsky didn’t answer, but met his partner’s eyes in the rearview mirror. The realization came quickly to Hutch, and he reached up to grip the other’s shoulder. Starsky’s hand briefly squeezed Hutch’s before reaching for the microphone.

“This is Starsky, Mildred. Whatcha got?”

“Switch to Tach Two for Captain Dobey.”

“Ten-four.” Starsky flipped the lever and glanced again in the rearview mirror.

“Aw, he misses me already,” Hutch quipped.

The radio crackled again. “Starsky? This is Dobey.”

“Go ahead, Cap’n.”

“I just had a visit from our favorite Feds. Turns out they lost something and they know we found...it.”

“*It?*” Hutch grunted indignantly.

“Shut up.” Starsky depressed the microphone with a grin and watched Hutch in the mirror. “I suppose they want it back?”

“Exactly. They think you might know where it is.”

Hutch leaned forward. “Well, *it* would like about five minutes alone with those SOBs.”

Starsky smiled broadly, agreeing with his partner. “Capital idea, Ollie.” Again he depressed the mic. “Cap’n, why don’t you give me an hour, then call our dedicated federal servants. Tell them to head over to Huggy’s, and that for a quick twenty, Huggy’d sell out his own mother.”

“Starsky, do you know what you’re doing here? This isn’t a game.”

“No, Cap’n, it sure as hell isn’t.”

Starsky tossed aside the microphone and spun the Torino, sending it back into the heart of the city.



Dobey hung up his phone, a satisfied smile gracing his features. He put his arms behind his head and leaned back in his chair, delighting in the thought of what the two were going to do when they got their moment alone with the agents.



McMillian and Endicott squinted, trying to adjust their eyes to the sudden plunge into darkness as they entered the crowded restaurant. The lunch crowd was in full swing, and the two agents had to maneuver through patrons and waitresses. When they finally made it to the bar, Huggy immediately set glasses down in front of them and liberally poured two fingers of whiskey in each.

“Hey, we didn’t order these.” Endicott moved his hand away from the bar, but not quickly enough to keep the liquor from sloshing onto his coat sleeve.

“Gentlemen, Huggy has a discerning eye, and I could tell from the minute you entered my fine establishment that you were men of distinct pleasures.”

McMillian’s expression changed from annoyance to interest. “You’re Huggy Bear?”

A flash of distaste ran across Huggy’s features, but it was gone before the two picked up on it. “You ought to be a detective.”

Endicott palmed his badge, showing his ID to Huggy. “Actually, we’re FBI.”

“Really?” Huggy’s facetiousness was lost on them. “And here I thought you was Jehovah Witnesses.”

McMillian cleared his throat. “We understand you might be able to tell us something we need to know.”

Huggy nodded sagely. “Possibly possible. I have been known to hear things of interest a time or two. It...uh...helps pay the mortgage when my other business endeavor is less than, shall we say, *profitable*.”

Huggy stared purposefully at the two whiskey glasses before the agents. Both smiled knowingly and downed the shots.

McMillian laid a ten-dollar bill on the counter. “That should cover it. So, maybe you can tell us where we can find a certain detective we hear you’re friends with.”

“Hmm...” Huggy poured two more doubles, shaking his head sadly. “Now, who might that be? I’ve got a lot of fuzzy friends.” He pushed the ten back toward McMillian. “When the price is right.”

The agents took the hint and downed the glasses a second time. Endicott wheezed a bit as he laid a second ten on top of the first. “I think you know who we’re talking about.”

Huggy pushed the two tens back at the agents and crossed his arms in front of him. “I’m talkin’ about my friend Franklin.”

“*Who?* Don’t jerk us around. You know exactly who we mean.”

“And I mean *Franklin*. As in *Ben*.”

“What?” Endicott gasped. “You want a hundred—?”

“Here.” McMillian jerked out his wallet and pulled out a handful of bills. “Will five Jacksons do?”

Huggy smiled sweetly and reached to scoop up the money. “Indubitably.”

Endicott’s hand lashed out before Huggy was able to collect. His grip numbed the smaller man’s hand. “Where is he?”

“Easy, man, easy. He’s upstairs, sleeping it off. No need to bruise The Bear!”

Endicott released his grip and followed McMillian up the stairs. Huggy smiled as he pocketed the money and placed the two glasses in the tub under the bar. Forking over a hundred dollars was the least of their worries. They’d be paying a lot more in a matter of minutes.



After clearing the landing, McMillian slowly pushed the apartment door open, the light from the hallway casting into the dim room. When he tried the light switch, nothing happened, so he left the door open as the two entered. In the darkness, they could make out a still form lying huddled under the covers of the bed that dominated the room. The agents stepped forward, reaching to draw their guns.

The sound of another gun’s safety snicking off made them pause, and a deadly voice froze them in their tracks. “I wouldn’t do that if I were you.”

The men slowly lifted their hands away from their sides. McMillian peered into the darkness, his eyes adjusting enough to make out a seated figure across the room. “We’re not looking for any trouble.”

“That’s too bad.” Starsky switched on a tableside lamp with his free hand. The light revealed his Beretta aimed straight at McMillian’s chest. “Because you just found it.”

Endicott’s eyes darted between Starsky and the door. “We weren’t tracking you down, Starsky. We were looking for—”

“My dead partner?”

McMillian’s face grew hard. “Who told you Hutchinson was alive?”

“I did.”

The overhead light flicked on from the switch across the room, revealing Hutch coming from the darkened bathroom, his Python trained on Endicott. The blond quickly crossed the room and shut the door, then relieved the two agents of their weapons. Starsky stood and picked up a nearby Louisville Slugger. Two quick raps against the radiator brought Huggy up, and Hutch loaded him down with the agents’ guns as well as his own and Starsky’s.

As Huggy left the room, he tipped his head to the two agents. “I hope you have as nice a funeral as Hutch had.”

Hutch threw the deadbolt, then slid the chain in place. When Endicott moved toward him, he was stopped by the business end of Starsky’s bat, poking him in the chest. Stepping away from the menace, Endicott bumped into McMillian. “Now, wait a minute. You can’t seriously be thinking that you’re going to—”

“Oh, but we are.” Hutch turned toward them.

“And we will,” Starsky finished.

McMillian squared his shoulders, but inwardly cringed at the fire in the eyes that bore into him. “I know the last month was no picnic, but you have to understand that we were only doing our jobs. As a matter of fact...” The agent drew his handcuffs out of his back pocket. “We’re here to take you back into protective custody, Hutchinson.”

“You’re *what*?” Starsky barked.

Hutch simply crossed his arms and leaned against the wall. “Over my dead body. No, wait!” He snapped his fingers. “That’s already been done.”

Endicott and McMillian simultaneously moved toward Hutch, but Starsky was faster. Fueled by the rage that had sustained him for weeks on end, his attack was swift and furious. A tap from the end of the baseball bat caught Endicott in the solar plexus, doubling him over. Starsky used one hand against the agent’s forehead to thrust him

backward onto the mattress, where he landed with such force that he bounced into the space between the bed and the wall.

Starsky didn't waste any time observing the agent's topple. Hutch, on the other hand, hadn't moved from his casual position leaning against the wall, watching the whirlwind that was his partner.

Just as McMillian was within inches of Hutch, Starsky grasped the agent by the arm and spun him. McMillian swung wildly and Starsky ducked and stepped away, ending up behind him. The Louisville Slugger was woven between McMillian's arms and the back of his neck, where he was then guided by the bat to end up facing Hutch.

Hutch casually reached out and patted the agent on the cheek. "Now, what was that about taking *me* into custody?"

"I was only doing the work of the federal government, Hutchinson. You've got no recourse but to—"

"Recourse?" Hutch hissed. "Let me tell you about *recourse*."

A right cross threw McMillian's head against the bat holding him captive in Starsky's grip. "*That* is for making my partner, my family, and my friends think I was dead!"

A left hook snapped the agent's head in the other direction. "*That* is for pumping me full of garbage!"

Another punch drew blood from McMillian's nose. "*That* is for trying to burn down my house!"

The next blow drove McMillian's head back to the left. When his partner didn't speak, Starsky chimed in. "What was that one for?"

"Just because I felt like it."

A noise from behind alerted Starsky. Slipping the bat out from under McMillian's arms, Starsky tucked the wood in between the agent's legs and moved sideways, tripping McMillian and sending him face down in front of Hutch. Starsky turned just in time to see Endicott stepping up onto the bed to launch himself in their direction. Starsky grasped the bat from both ends and held it before him, knowing Endicott would instinctively latch onto it. When he did, Starsky rolled backwards with Endicott falling after him. Bringing his feet up before the agent landed on him, Starsky made contact with his midriff, then thrust his feet as hard as he could, sending the larger man flying over his head and crashing into the chair and end table.

Starsky popped up and stationed himself next to his partner. Tapping both feet in turn, he assumed a batter's stance and swung, eyeing an imaginary opponent and waiting for the

next pitch. “Number three, Dave Starsky, steps up to the plate at the top of the eighth. The home team’s having a great game, with two batted in during the seventh inning alone.”

“And they said we’d never make it to the playoffs.” Hutch grinned, admiring his partner’s handiwork.

“If we keep this up, maybe they’ll give us our own trading cards.”

McMillian staggered to his feet, and when there was no immediate threat from the detectives, he pulled his partner up from the floor as well. “Very amusing. I don’t think you two jokers realize what kind of trouble you’re in.”

“Really?” Hutch resumed his post, leaning against the wall. “And just what kind of trouble is that?”

Starsky looked at him quizzically. “You mean there’s more than one kind?”

“Well, sure, Starsk. You see, there’s *big* trouble, and then there’s *little* trouble.”

“What’s the difference?”

“Well, *big* trouble’s the kind you get when you give Captain Dobby a toilet for Christmas. *Little* trouble is when—”

“You two won’t be laughing quite so hard when we bring you up on charges for impeding a federal investigation.” Endicott straightened his suit coat and attempted to smooth back his hair. “And assaulting federal agents.”

Starsky’s and Hutch’s eyes blazed as they focused on the two agents. Hutch’s jaw clenched. “When you *what*?”

“Look, you got your licks in.” McMillian pointed his finger in Hutch’s face. “We did what we did to protect you, Hutchinson. You should be grateful.”

“*What*?”

“And if anybody got their nose out of joint over our actions, well, that’s unfortunate, but it kept you alive.” McMillian mistook the deadly calm of the room for acquiescence. “All right. Now that you two have gotten that out of your system—”

Huggy had been staring at the ceiling the last few seconds, wondering what had happened to cause the end of the clash above him. Just as he was about to go upstairs to check, a series of loud impacts and shattering glass greeted him. With a smile, he went back to busing the booths.

After a few minutes and substantially more noise, the upper room grew quiet again, and Starsky and Hutch came triumphantly down the stairs. The only evidence of the confrontation was their mussed up hair, disheveled clothes, and Starsky's fat lip.

Huggy scooped up his tray and returned to his spot behind the bar. "I take it the good guys won?"

Starsky smiled around his bruised mouth and gave Huggy the bat, accepting his gun back. "I had two home runs in the seventh, and Hutch here had a grand slam in the eighth."

Huggy examined the bat. "Really? But there ain't no blood on Louise here."

Starsky's lip curled. "I didn't want to taint her with the likes of them."

"Thanks, Hug." Hutch holstered his own gun then removed the ammo clips from the agents' weapons.

Starsky handed Huggy a handcuff key. "Give us an hour, then turn 'em loose."

Huggy nodded, pleased with the turn of events, and clapped Hutch on the arm. "Good to see you back in action, Lazarus."

"Him?" Starsky croaked indignantly. "*I'm* the one who did all the damage up there!"

"Fine, then I know who to send the bill to."

Before Starsky could retort, Hutch had him by the collar and was steering him out of the restaurant.



Huggy allowed the hour to slip by and went upstairs. Throughout the lunch rush, the shouts and pounding from the upper room were barely discernable from the chatter of patrons and blaring jukebox. But now that the restaurant was emptying, the occasional muffled curse or thumping from above was more obvious.

After crossing the room in the dark, Huggy flipped the switch to reveal the two agents sitting on the floor, both hands cuffed to each other around the base of the radiator. Huggy wasn't the least disturbed by their curses or threats as he casually strolled over and released them. Pulling a bar towel out of his back pocket, Huggy wiped both sets of cuffs, then the key, effectively removing his fingerprints, and offered them back to the agents who snatched them out of the towel. Likewise, Huggy pulled the agents' guns out from under his apron with his towel.

"Where'd they go?" McMillian growled, stuffing the pistol back into the holster attached to his belt.

“And who might that be?” Huggy asked, sounding surprised.

“Don’t mess with us.” Endicott glowered. “Hutchinson and Starsky.”

Huggy looked stricken. “Hutch? What are you talking about? Hutch is dead!”

Endicott’s arm lashed out and caught a fistful of Huggy’s shirt, jerking him closer. “We don’t have time for games! Where’d they go?”

“Hoo!” Huggy waved his hand in front of his nose. “You dudes musta really tied one on up here, you smell like the bottom of a barrel of Jim Beam!”

Endicott paused, realizing the whiskey that had soaked into his sleeve when they had first arrived at the bar was still pungent.

“Come to think of it,” Huggy continued, “I seem to recall that you both tipped back a couple of doubles before you started brawling up here.”

“You know damn well Starsky and Hutchinson were up here, waiting for us. *You* set us up!”

“Moi?” Huggy placed a hand on his chest and plastered on his most innocent smile. “I have no idea what you’re talkin’ about.”

“Come on.” McMillian tore his partner’s grip away from the restaurateur, and the two stormed out of the room.

Huggy stood smiling in their wake. “And the home team takes the pennant.”



Starsky turned off the ignition, but remained motionless.

Hutch paused with his hand on the door handle. “What’s wrong?”

Starsky looked toward the seat next to him, no longer empty, and grinned. “Nothing. Not a damn thing.”

Hutch returned the smile, instantly understanding, and clapped his partner on the arm. “Well, let’s get this over with.”

“Wait a minute. Stay put.” Starsky hopped out of the sedan and trotted to the house next to Hutch’s cottage, vaulting up the steps to pound on the door. Within seconds, the surveillance agent found himself staring into the barrel of Starsky’s gun pressed tightly against the glass of the storm door.

“Hiya, Andy.” Starsky’s voice was amiable as he jerked open the door and entered the house steps behind the retreating agent. “I just wanted to let you know we—my *partner* and I—are going in next door for a few minutes, and if I see so much as your nose come out of this house, I’m going to blow it off, okay?” Never taking his eyes or his gun off Agent Miller, Starsky ripped the phone off the wall.

At the agent’s startled nod, Starsky smiled and crossed to him. Miller’s walkie-talkie was pulled off his belt clip, thrown to the floor, and ground under Starsky’s heel. The agent was also relieved of his weapon, which Starsky tucked in his waistband. Starsky smiled again and patted the bewildered Miller on the cheek. “Terrific. Nice talkin’ to ya.”

Starsky sheathed his gun and trotted back down the porch to the waiting Torino.



Hutch stood dumbfounded in the ruins of his kitchen. “Look at this mess!”

“What?” Starsky hollered back from the bedroom where he was hastily stuffing some of his partner’s clothes in a gym bag.

“My kitchen! They destroyed my kitchen!”

Starsky came striding back into the living room. “I didn’t notice. It looks pretty much like it always did.”

“Cute.” Hutch wandered back into the living room, taking in the overturned furniture and what was left of his destroyed possessions. A few things were grossly out of place in the midst of the destruction. Hutch surveyed his plants, healthy and thriving despite the chaos. “You took care of them.”

Starsky looked away from his partner’s grateful eyes. “I couldn’t let them die, you know. Come on, we’d better get going. There’s no telling what the Bobbsey Twins will try next.”

“Just a second.” Hutch kicked around a few of the damaged books, looking for a particular title.

“What are you looking for?”

“I took notes of some names I heard that last day before I did the Rip Van Winkle routine.”

“You mean this?”

When Hutch looked toward his partner, Starsky waved a crumpled note. Hutch took it from him and unfolded it. “You remembered.”

“I know where all your hiding places are.”

“Oh, really?”

“If you stashed any information, it was going to be either in that book, under that big, hairy plant you’re always talking to—”

“Sheila. She’s an asparagus fern.”

“Whatever. Or above the third ceiling tile from the left in the kitchen.”

Hutch looked at him incredulously. “And yet you still can’t figure out where I hide your birthday presents.”

“I’m working on it. Anyway, I found that not too long after you disappeared, but it didn’t mean a whole heck of a lot to me. You want to fill me in?”

Hutch nodded. “Yeah, but we’d better get moving.”

The two left the cottage and got into the Torino. “So, where are you hiding me?”

Starsky smiled as he threw the car in gear. “Right under their noses.”



Edith stood waiting at the window, the lace curtain drawn back so her view wasn’t obscured. Her husband had told her the night before the incredible news that Hutch was alive, and had given a brief recitation of the past month’s events. That morning she told the children, though didn’t go into great detail, other than to say it had all been a horrible mistake, and that some criminals had made it seem like they had lost their friend. Later, she had given Cal more information, since she knew the teenager had not accepted the explanation at face value, but had wisely held off his questions until he could speak with his mother alone. Rosie, on the other hand, became quiet, trying to process the change as best she could.

“Harold! Cal, Rosie—they’re here!” Edith’s call was met with the sound of rushing feet. The family crowded out the front door to watch as an unmarked sedan pulled into the driveway and its occupants climbed out.

While the captain stood by watching, Edith and Cal rushed to Hutch and embraced him. Rosie hung back, taking it all in with wide eyes. After releasing the two, Hutch focused on the little girl and recognized her apprehension. He dropped to one knee and smiled gently. “Hi, Rosie. I sure missed you.”

Rosie stared at Hutch, cocking her head a bit to one side. “Are you an angel?”

Hutch chuckled gently and shook his head. “No, sweetheart. It’s just me.”

Rosie nodded, her expression turning a bit angry. “Are you going away again?”

Starsky moved up behind him and laid a hand on his partner's shoulder. “Not if I can help it.”

Rosie looked at Starsky accusingly. “You said he was in Heaven.”

Hutch glanced up at Starsky. He couldn’t imagine what that discussion must have cost his partner. There was a catch in his voice when he answered. “I was just visiting.”

Hutch’s gentle smile finally broke through Rosie’s apprehension, and she threw herself into his waiting arms. Hutch stood, Rosie cradled in his arm. Although Rosie whispered in Hutch’s ear, it was still loud enough for Starsky to catch. “*Next time you go to visit, leave us a note, okay?*”



A battle of wills ensued over dinner. The initial arrangement was for Starsky and Hutch to stay in Cal’s room, which hosted a set of bunk beds, but Rosie was insistent that her Uncle Hutch sleep in her room that night, and that she would sleep with her parents. The adults finally conceded, with Starsky volunteering to take the couch and not keep Cal up with his snoring.

The plan had been for the detectives to hash out and combine what information they had with Dobby, but after the large meal, neither could resist the pull of the quiet healing offered by simply absorbing the family’s normalcy. Starsky had suggested they wait to talk at least until after the kids went to bed, but by 8:00, Hutch was paling and having a hard time staying awake. Starsky insisted his partner get some sleep, and they would regroup in the morning.

Rosie took charge of getting Hutch settled in, taking him by the hand and leading him upstairs. When Rosie hadn’t returned fifteen minutes later, the remaining adults also went up to rescue Hutch from Rosie’s mothering, letting him finally get some rest, and getting the little girl ready for bed as well.

Edith quietly opened the door, then beckoned her husband and Starsky inside. Nestled atop the comforter sound asleep were Hutch and Rosie, the little girl curled up against his chest. Edith gently moved Hutch’s arm from across her daughter’s shoulder, then scooped up Rosie and handed her to her father. Dobby carried her out of the room, her tiny head cradled against his shoulder.

Edith followed, but paused to whisper to Starsky. "I'll make the couch up for you."

Starsky smiled his gratitude, then kissed Edith on the cheek. She quietly left the room, shutting the door behind her.

Starsky eased himself down onto the beanbag chair sitting under the room's sole window. He wasn't prepared when the chair's stuffing shifted under his weight, unbalancing him into the nightstand.

Even though the sudden movement barely rattled the lamp, Hutch's eyes cracked open. "About time."

Starsky smiled at his partner's sleepy complaint. "G'night, Blintz."

"You going anywhere?"

"Nope. Go back to sleep."



Cal and Rosie had already left for school by the time Starsky and Hutch made their way downstairs. Hutch looked better than he had in days, finally having had two full nights' rest. Starsky, on the other hand, walked stiffly, and the bags under his eyes showed no sign of leaving.

Starsky groaned and stretched his back as he entered the kitchen.

"What's the matter, Starsk? Didn't sleep so good?"

"You try sleeping on that beanbag thing. Probably why they call it that; I'm twisted up like a zucchini."

"A zucchini isn't twisted. And it's not a bean, Starsk, it's a squash."

"Yeah, well, I feel squashed."

"Gripe, gripe, gripe."

Dobey looked up from the papers strewn over the kitchen table. "Well, it's about time you two graced us with your presence."

"Morning, Captain. 'Morning, Edith." Hutch kissed his hostess on the cheek as she handed him a cup of coffee.

"Now, you boys sit down while I whip you up some breakfast. You both look as though you could stand some fattening up."

Starsky looked pointedly at his captain, but Dobby's raised eyebrows stopped him from making any smart remarks.

Without thought, Hutch handed Starsky his coffee cup. "Be sure to tell Rosie how much I appreciated her giving up her room last night, Cap'n."

Dobby nodded. "You know you two are welcome to stay here as long as necessary."

Starsky drained the cup and handed it back to Hutch. "Thanks, Cap'n. It depends on what we come up with today."

"What's your plan?"

Hutch returned to the coffeepot. "Well, we're not sure. Starsky got the location of the warehouse that's supposed to be used for the next shipment, but all we know is the drop is set for sometime—what? This week?"

Starsky nodded. "This weekend, most likely."

Dobby looked to the darker detective. "Who's your source? Huggy?"

"Nope. Would you believe it's the slimy little creep who told Vic Monte that Hutch was a mole?"

"And you trust him?"

Starsky grunted. "Like I'd trust a rabid pit bull. But I'm pretty sure the information's accurate."

"How can you be so sure?" Hutch sat down, and Starsky took the coffee cup out of his hands.

Starsky drained the cup before responding. "Let's just say lying wasn't an option for him at the time he was giving up the information." He handed the cup back to Hutch. "I thought you were getting more coffee."

When Hutch gave his partner a dirty look, Edith swept by, laying two heaping plates of eggs, bacon, and toast in front of the houseguests. With a pat on Hutch's shoulder, she took his cup and returned with two full mugs.

"Thanks, Edith."

Starsky paused from shoveling the food into his mouth. "Edith, if you weren't attached, I'd marry ya."

Edith smiled as she left the room. “David, you say that every time I put food in front of you.”

“Actually, he says it to *everybody* who puts food in front of him,” Hutch quipped into his coffee cup.

“That’s not true!”

“Oh, really? Name *one*.”

Starsky thought for a moment. “Hairy Eddie down at the Hot Dog Pound.”

“Only because Hairy Eddie’s girlfriend is the jealous type. And bigger and hairier than he is.”

Before Starsky could respond, Dobe cut in. “If you two would shut up long enough to eat my wife’s cooking, we could figure this thing out.”

Hutch smirked and peppered his eggs. “It’s like we’ve got every piece of the puzzle but the last two or three, and we can’t figure out what the picture is until we do.”

“What have you got?”

Hutch chewed thoughtfully. “With my testimony, the prosecution’s got enough evidence to put Vic Monte and the majority of his upper-level people away on a number of felonies—drugs, racketeering, money laundering, extortion. If he’s found guilty on all counts, he’ll never see the outside of a jail cell again. We know he’s connected to these new players out of Singapore because he put Starsky on their trail.”

Dobe looked at Starsky skeptically. “What’d you have to offer him, the moon?”

“I told him I could get him into O’Sage.”

Dobe groaned. “You can’t make those kinds of promises!”

Starsky smirked. “Yeah, but Monte doesn’t know that.”

Dobe scrubbed his face with his hands. “What else do you have?”

“I’ll tell you what we need.” Hutch set down his fork, having only been able to eat half of what Edith had given him. “What we need is to know what the name of the ship is and exactly when that next heroin shipment is coming. And who heads up the Singapore connection.”

Dobe’s voice was sarcastic. “Is *that* all?”

“I’ve got the names of two hit men that were ‘loaned’ to Monte as a sign of goodwill from his new Asian partners. But so far, I got nothing to link them to,” Starsky added around a mouthful of bacon. He swallowed and sought out his partner’s eyes. “And I know who killed Tony DeFusto.”

Hutch met Starsky’s stare. Dobey spoke up. “Who’s DeFusto?”

Starsky broke the connection. “Tony DeFusto was Theresa’s brother. Remember Theresa from the restaurant where Monte was supposed to get hit? DeFusto was family, and part of how the whole mess started. It was my fink Mickey’s friend who killed him, guy by the name of Rupert Jones. Rupert was contracted to take you out, too, Hutch, before the Feds made you disappear. Rupert cued me to Monte’s accountant—he’s the one who makes all the payoffs. We get to the accountant, we’ve got Monte dead on *and* probably the Singapore connection.”

Dobey nodded his agreement, but Hutch’s face flushed with anger. “That’s terrific,” Hutch spat. “And I suppose you offered him immunity for this information?”

Starsky cocked his eyebrow at his friend’s resentment. “I would’ve offered him my kidneys if that’s what it took to get the information I needed to find out who killed you. I know you wanted to bring down Tony DeFusto’s killer, Hutch. I know you wanted to thank Theresa that way. So, no, I didn’t offer him immunity, just protection from Monte. And I never said I wouldn’t bust him when this was all over.”

Hutch released the breath he’d been tensely holding and squeezed Starsky’s shoulder as a way of apologizing.

Dobey began gathering up the reports he’d laid out and put them in his briefcase. “Is that it for now?”

“No, wait.” Starsky dug a crumpled note out of his pant’s pocket. “Here’s the note you made in that book, Hutch.”

“I’m not even sure if it’s anything.” Hutch took the proffered paper. “After I got bailed out of jail, I stopped by Monte’s. Things were in an uproar at his office, so it was pretty easy to simply hang around without too much suspicion. I overheard some of one of his phone conversations and he kept saying this.”

Dobey took the note from Hutch and read it. “*Jaw June?* What the heck does that mean?”

“I don’t know. It’s not Spanish, and it didn’t sound Italian, which Monte speaks fluently. I was checking it out with a few people before my big disappearing act.”

“And I already had Minnie run it through R&I. Nothing. No names or businesses, no plates, no ships.”

“But, if Monte kept saying it, it must have meant something.” Dobby looked the two men over. “What else?”

Starsky reached over and took Hutch’s plate, placing it on top of his own, and began eating what his partner couldn’t finish. “Do you remember anything about Vic Monte’s accountant, Hutch? A name? If the accountant’s able to dole out all the facts and figures about Monte, then he could be the last piece of the puzzle.”

Hutch thought for a minute and set down his empty coffee cup before picking up Starsky’s. “No. Nobody ever said his name, they always just referred to him as The Accountant.”

“So, who would know who this person is? Do you think Monte would talk?” Dobby asked.

Starsky shook his head as he emptied Hutch’s plate. “I tried that. He’s not gonna budge; he wouldn’t even tell me how to find...”

“Who, Starsk?”

“Pierce. Archibald Pierce. Calls himself The Archer. He’s the one who ratted you out, Hutch. He unloaded on me, but I never asked him about the accountant.”

“How’s he fit in to all of this?”

“He scammed about a thousand bucks out of a dry cleaners that was actually a front for one of Monte’s little side businesses. Monte had an unofficial hit out on this Archer guy.”

“A thousand bucks is chump change to somebody like Monte. Why would it make him mad enough to go after Pierce—officially or not?”

Dobby tapped a folder on the table as he thought. “Make an example of him?”

Hutch shook his head. “Possible, but not likely. Monte’s already too big a fish to worry about somebody taking him for a grand.”

Starsky took his empty coffee cup back from Hutch. “Maybe it’s not Pierce that’s the big deal. Maybe it was the dry cleaners itself.”

“Right! Maybe it was even more than a numbers’ drop. So all we gotta do is talk to this Pierce.”

“You think he’ll lay it out for you two?” Dobby leaned forward with interest.

Starsky looked from his captain to his partner with excitement. “Oh, I think he’ll wet himself when he comes face to face with the cop he ratted out to Vic Monte.”



“I’ll tell you what, Starsk,” Hutch took the last wet plate out of the drainer and began drying it. The quiet morning had been a balm to both partners. “I’ll be glad when this whole thing is over. I’ve about had it with Monte, the Feds, the DA, and the rest of the zoo crew.”

Starsky finished wiping the countertop before folding the wet dishcloth neatly and hanging it over the kitchen faucet. “Yeah, I know. But not until we get this wrapped up. That’s the only thing that’ll make this all worth it.”

“Yeah. That and another hour or so alone with the Feds,” Hutch replied bitterly. He sat down heavily in one of the chairs at the now vacant kitchen table and ran a tired hand down his face.

Starsky watched his partner with concern and sympathy. He took a seat opposite Hutch and tried to meet his eyes. “Hey,” he said softly.

Hutch looked up expectantly and matched Starsky’s gaze.

“You’ve been through the mill, buddy, but you’re back. And you’re safe. I...I won’t pretend to know what you’ve been through, but I’m right here. If you need to talk or vent or just need a cheering section, I’m here for you. And if I can’t help you, I’ll find someone who can. Just hang in there with me, okay? Just a little while longer and all this’ll be behind us. Got it?”

“Yeah, I got it.” Hutch smiled softly, but it vanished as he continued. “They took part of my life away, Starsk. There’s nothing in the world that can ever bring that back. And when I think of what it did to everyone I care about—you and Dobey, and all our friends and my family...*my family!* Dammit, Starsk, I’ve been so busy trying to figure out how we’re going to bust these clowns, my family still thinks I’m dead.” Hutch pushed his chair away from the table in one fierce movement. “I have to call home.”

Starsky left his seat just as quickly and grabbed his partner by the upper arms, effectively stopping his progress toward the phone. He was a little taken aback by how thin Hutch’s arms felt in his grasp and how easily he could physically restrain his partner. “Hold up a minute, Hutch. Yeah, you need to call home and talk to your folks, but don’t you think it would be better if someone else called them first and broke the news? They pick up the phone and hear your voice on the other end, they’re liable to think they’ve cracked up.” A huge, knowing smile lit up his face. “Especially your dad. I mean, from everything you’ve told me, he’s halfway there already, and this might just put him over the edge.”

Hutch chuckled softly, grateful for his partner's insight. "Do you have any suggestions as to who should make this call?"

"Well," Starsky said, cocking his head to the side in feigned modesty. "I *do* have a way with people..."

The two men were so engrossed in their conversation that neither one noticed Dobeey had entered the room and picked up the extension phone on the wall. With a whispered, "Just a moment, please," he clamped his hand over the receiver and noisily cleared his throat. "Excuse me."

"Captain," Starsky started, releasing Hutch's shoulders and turning to face his superior. "Hutch and I were just cleanin' up a little. Thought we'd surprise Edith."

"And prove once and for all we're not total slobs," Hutch added.

Dobeey cast a critical eye at the now spotless kitchen and grunted. "Well, I'll have to admit the kitchen's clean, but that doesn't prove anything to me. Besides, Hutchinson, there's someone on the phone here who wants to talk to you."

Hutch cast a questioning glance at his partner who shrugged his shoulders. No one besides the Dobeys, Huggy, the FBI agents, and his partner knew he was alive at that point. "Must be my fan club." Trusting his captain, he cautiously took the proffered receiver. "Hutchinson."

There was a long silence while Starsky watched his partner's face soften and a suspicious brightness touch his eyes. He took a step in the blond's direction, instinctively moving toward him, but Dobeey interceded and steered him toward the door to the living room instead. Starsky looked at him quizzically as the larger man placed one of the kitchen chairs directly behind Hutch. As Dobeey gently pushed him out of the room, Starsky understood when he heard Hutch's response.

"Mom?" He slid down onto the chair, the phone clutched like a lifeline in his hand.



"I demand that you release me immediately!" Archibald Pierce blustered pitifully, the bravado in his tone completely overshadowed by the fear in his eyes. He reached for the car's door handle, but Starsky's grip on his lapel jerked him back into the seat.

"Oh, pipe down, will ya?" Starsky responded, pulling out of the parking lot to merge smoothly with the traffic. "I thought you and me could go for a little ride, maybe head toward the beach. What do you say to that?"

At Pierce's silence, Starsky continued. "Besides, there's someone I want you to get to know. I hope you don't mind, but he's been dyin' to meet you, and since it's such a nice day, I thought it would be a perfect time for me to make the introductions. Hutch?"

On cue, Hutch threw aside the blanket he'd been hiding under in the back seat and leaned casually over the front. "Yeah, like he said, I've been *dying* to meet you."

Pierce leaned as far as he could toward the dashboard, scrunching himself into a small a bundle against the door. "Wh-who are you?"

"Oh, you know me," Hutch replied, a broad, mirthless grin spreading across his face. "My name's Hutchinson, *Detective* Hutchinson. You remember? The cop you squealed on to Vic Monte? I have a few things I'd like to discuss with you."

"N-now, wait just a minute." Pierce held up his hands in what he hoped was a placating gesture. "That was nothing personal. It was strictly a business move on my part."

"Nothing personal?" Hutch's voice had gone up several decibels, and Pierce winced at the onslaught. "Well, it sure as hell *felt* personal. And now I have a few *personal* things I'd like to do to you. Are we there yet, Starsk?"

"At your request," Starsky replied happily, steering the car behind what appeared to be a deserted warehouse. The vehicle pulled to a smooth stop, and Starsky cut the engine. He reached under his seat and brought out a magazine and a thermos, then opened the pages to read. "I'll be here when you're finished."

"Good," Hutch said, pulling his Magnum from its holster and pressing it against Pierce's head. "Get out of the car, scum. We have some business to discuss."

Pierce swallowed noisily and cast pleading eyes in Starsky's direction. "You...you're not gonna let him take me in there by himself, are you? You...you're coming with us, right?"

Starsky set his magazine on the dashboard and unscrewed the cap from the thermos, a puzzled frown between his eyebrows. "Me? Nah. I'm kinda tired, so I'll just sit here and read 'til you're done with your meeting. Besides, Hutch is quite capable of handling things by himself. Right, Hutch?"

"Right. Now, get out of the car. We have an appointment with destiny."

"Please," Pierce begged. "Please, don't make me go in there with him. I'll do anything—anything you want. Hey, I cooperated last time, didn't I? Didn't I?"

Starsky sipped his coffee and turned his attention to Hutch. "He did cooperate, Hutch. He has a point."

“Well, so do I,” Hutch replied, pulling the hammer back on his gun with a resounding click. “I just didn’t want to make *my* point out here in your car. You’d probably make me clean it up.”

“Okay.” Starsky sighed wearily, placing the cap back on the thermos and stuffing his magazine under the seat. “I’ll go with you. But only as long as you keep cooperating. You start playing games with us, and I’m leaving you in there. Alone. With him. Got it?”

Pierce’s head bobbed up and down enthusiastically.

“Good.” Starsky climbed out of the car and walked around to the passenger side to open the door. “Let’s go.”

Very hesitantly, Pierce climbed out of the vehicle with Hutch not far behind. The three men made their way across the lot and entered the warehouse, closing the door securely behind them.



Starsky watched silently as his still too-pale partner played briefly with a french fry before dropping it back onto his plate. Shaking his head, he picked up Hutch’s half-eaten sandwich and began to munch on it thoughtfully. “You need to eat more, Hutch. You look terrible.”

“And you need to get some rest before you fall over,” Hutch answered back, draining the last of his iced tea from the glass. “So what’s your point?”

“Nothin’,” Starsky replied, wiping his mouth with a napkin. “What do we got?”

“Well, we have the name of the dry cleaners that Pierce scammed, the name of the manager—Pat Lee—and this ‘Jaw June’ thing, whatever that means. Too bad Pierce didn’t know,” Hutch replied, scribbling the points down on a napkin in front of him. He stared at them for a few minutes before he stretched out in the booth. “How do you think he’s making out?”

“I’m sure he’s quite comfortable,” Starsky replied, a smile on his face. “He’s so grateful to be alive right now, I doubt he even realizes he’s handcuffed to a post in the middle of an abandoned warehouse.”

Hutch smiled in return. “Think we should cut him some slack and let the uniforms pick him up now?”

“Sure, why not? We’ll let them keep him in the holding tank for a while ’til we decide how many charges we wanna file against him. In the meantime, he’ll be where we can find him in case we need any more info.”

Hutch turned around in his seat and caught Huggy's eye, signaling for him to come to the table. Spotting Hutch's empty glass, he grabbed a pitcher of tea before crossing the room to their table.

"Sorry, man," Huggy apologized, moving Hutch's scribbled-on napkin out of the way and filling his glass with a flourish. "Let it never be said that The Bear let a customer run dry."

"Forget it, Hug. The reason I asked you over here was to see if you'd do us a small favor."

"Well, I ain't gonna do it," Huggy replied, setting the pitcher back on the table with a loud *thunk*. "You two already eat me out of house and establishment, and I ain't gonna run and get you some Chinese food and pick up your dry cleaning in the middle of this crowd. If you want it, you can get it yourselves."

Starsky looked at Hutch quizzically then switched his gaze back to Huggy. "Dry cleaning?"

Hutch shook his head. "Chinese food?"

"Chinese food. Four blocks down."

"Huggy." Hutch ran a hand down his face. "What in the world are you talking about?"

"I ain't blind, my friend, and I can see you already have your order written down there on that napkin. Only you forgot the *Gi*."

"The 'G'?" Starsky asked, still in the dark.

"For chicken."

"Chicken?" Hutch sighed. "Huggy, *what* chicken?"

"This napkin," Huggy replied, reaching down to pluck the napkin off the table. "Here it says 'dry cleaners,' 'Pat Lee.' So, I'm deductualizing that it's a *Chinese* laundry, and then you got 'Jaw June'—*General Tsao*. And I just naturally assumed that you meant General Tsao chicken, knowing your partner's propensity for the spicier things in life. Only I don't serve General Tsao chicken, so I figured you wanted me to procure you some from some digs in Chinatown, then pick up your dry cleaning while I was out and about. Only I ain't gonna do it." Seeing the two haggard detectives staring at him speechlessly, Huggy continued. "Unless you really want me to, that is."

When there was no response, Huggy finally sighed and began taking off his apron. "Fine. You want egg rolls with that?"

“Huggy.” Starsky grabbed the napkin back. “You mean to tell us that this ‘Jaw June’ is Chinese for General Tsao?”

“I thought you knew that.”

“We do now. *Damn!* Why didn’t I think to show this to you before?” Starsky replied as he and Hutch stood up. “Thanks, Hug. You’re beautiful.”

Hutch followed Starsky toward the exit when a new thought struck him and he placed a hand on his partner’s arm, stopping them both. “Huggy, we didn’t know you spoke Chinese.”

“How long have you two known me, and you still haven’t realized that yours truly is a treasure trove of titillating tidbits?” When his friends simply stared at him, unimpressed, Huggy shrugged. “Okay, so I only speak enough Mandarin to order take out and get my face slapped.”

Hutch shook his head. “Do us a favor—call Dobey and ask him to send a black-and-white unit to pick up a man in the warehouse on the northeast corner of Sycamore and Hastings Streets. Tell him we’ll be in later to file charges. We’d call ourselves, but he’s liable to start asking a few questions, and my partner and I are rather busy right now.” He started after Starsky again, but stopped suddenly and snapped his fingers. “Oh, and in case somebody asks, tell them he got those bruises when he tripped over something in the warehouse. Somehow he landed on the floor and accidentally cuffed himself to the pole. Strangest thing I ever saw...”

Huggy shook his head dramatically as he began to bus the now empty table. “The things I do for those two.”



Hutch had forgotten that none of his colleagues had seen him since his miraculous “resurrection.” Captain Dobey had made the announcement earlier in the morning to a resounding ovation and more than a few tears from Minnie. The other officers were full of questions, but Dobey had sternly explained that he wasn’t at liberty to discuss the particulars at that point, and explanations would have to wait until after the Monte trial.

As the pair walked down the hallway toward R&I, they were bombarded by coworkers excited to see them, and by more than a few questions, which they politely skirted. When they finally shook themselves free of the crowd, Hutch glanced over at his partner with a self-satisfied grin, overwhelmed by the response. “Boy, I’ll have to die more often!”

Starsky’s expression soured, and after a heartbeat, he cuffed his partner on the back of his head.

Hutch merely continued grinning and rubbed the offended spot as they entered Minnie's office. The small woman's squeals were heard throughout the first floor of the station, and enough to draw more than a few officers to the large picture window to see what crime was being committed within. What they found instead was Minnie clinging so tightly to Hutch that it would have taken a crowbar to separate them.



“Captain, we've got—” Starsky's buoyant entrance to his superior's office was stilled when he realized they weren't alone. Hutch came to a grinding halt after him, his smile quickly erased.

McMillian glared at the two detectives through his blackened eye. “*What* do you two have?”

Starsky's flippant response held an overtone of malice. “Rhythm.”

“Who could ask for anything more?” Hutch quipped, smirking at the sight of tape holding Endicott's broken nose in place.

“What happened to you two, anyway?” Starsky asked innocently, one finger extended as if to touch the bandages. “*Lover's* spat? You never could hold your liquor.”

“Maybe they were attacked by killer salads!” Hutch grinned. “I hear a lot of that's going around.”

Endicott knocked Starsky's unresisting hand away. “If you two think you're going to get away with—”

“With *what*, Endicott?” Hutch growled pointedly. “I think your mussed up face is the least of your worries right now.”

“Enough, already!” Dobe looked pointedly at the two FBI agents. “You were just leaving.”

“Captain...” McMillian drew himself up. “The Bureau is still of the mindset that Sergeant Hutchinson is at risk and should *voluntarily* place himself in federal custody until he has testified before the grand jury.”

Starsky's hands flashed, gathering up McMillian's lapels and drawing him close. “And I'm of the *mindset* that if you so much as get within a foot of my partner again, I'll—”

“Starsky! Stand down!” Dobe roared. For a tense second, Starsky's eyes burned into McMillian before he pushed him stumbling away.

McMillian straightened his suit coat. “If they have information about this case—”

“Then I’ll call you,” Dobby snapped. The two agents glared at the officers for a moment, then snatched up their briefcases. After they stomped out of the office, Dobby turned his attention on the detectives. The reprimand creasing his face wasn’t wasted on the partners, but there was no missing the satisfied grin that threatened to break free as well. “What are you two up to besides harassing federal employees?”

Starsky pulled the crumpled piece of paper out of his pocket. “Cap’n, we found another piece of the puzzle. It turns out that ‘Jaw June’ is Mandarin, not Italian.”

“What Hutch overheard Monte saying?”

Hutch nodded. “It’s a name—General Tsao.”

“Chicken?”

“Yeah, but it’s also the name of a ship. Minnie ran it through R&I and didn’t come up with anything, so we checked back again with the Port Authority. It turns out the freighter *General Tsao* is scheduled to dock here tomorrow morning out of Singapore. Shipping manifests say it’s carrying mostly dry goods and textiles.”

Starsky’s eyes narrowed. “And we’ll bet there’s a few more goodies along for the ride.”

Dobby nodded with anticipation. “I’ll get a warrant issued for both the ship and the warehouse.”

“Captain.” Hutch’s brow creased in thought. “We also need a warrant for a dry cleaners over in Chinatown. We found Monte’s accountant, Pat Lee. Minnie ran a check and came up empty. No priors and nothing registered in California or the US, for that matter. He’s probably an illegal alien. She’s been checking with immigration, but hasn’t come up with anything yet.”

Starsky shook his head. “And the Chinese authorities aren’t going to waste their time trying to help us track him down.”

“Wait a minute,” Dobby said, shuffling through the case files on his desk. “Lee...I just saw...here! A *Daniel Lee*, seventeen. Will probably be tried as an adult. He was busted right along side you, Hutch.”

Hutch cursed under his breath and took the proffered file. “I’d never seen him before that night and didn’t even consider his name might be Lee.”

Starsky’s brows furrowed when he looked up from where he’d been reading over Hutch’s shoulder. “I went over those case files a dozen times—why didn’t I ever see it?”

“Because when he got busted, his ID listed him as Daniel Leeson, not Lee,” Dobe said. “Apparently, he tried to Americanize his name. I just got this update a minute ago from your buddies at the Bureau—awful nice of them to start cooperating with us now. Lee’s here in the States illegally, which is why we couldn’t get any information on him or out of him—no citizenship papers, green card, or birth certificate. Nothing from the DMV or the state. But, when we ran his prints, it turns out he has a juvenile record.”

Hutch’s eyebrow hiked up. “So, if he’s not a citizen, how come he wasn’t deported when he got picked up as a juvenile? Didn’t immigration get involved?”

“They did, but claim that Lee ‘fell through the cracks’.” Dobe looked from one detective to the other, then punched a phone line and began dialing. “All right, you two run upstairs to the DA’s office. I’ll have a warrant for the dry cleaners waiting for you. The other two for the ship and the warehouse, I’ll hand deliver myself. I want you to call me before this goes down. In the meantime, you two be—”

When Dobe glanced up to give his two detectives a stern look, he was looking at an empty office.



Chinatown lay tucked away in the city, between the predominantly Caucasian lower socio-economic group, and what was affectionately called “Spanish Harlem,” home to “Los Angelinos.” The appearance of Starsky’s vibrant Torino earned more than a few stares as he slid to a halt in front of the dry cleaners. Lining the streets on either side of the small building were other Asian-owned-and-operated businesses, many retaining the style and services of their heritage.

A bell rang as Starsky and Hutch entered the dry cleaners. The store was small and nondescript, the signs outlining their services written in an odd combination of English, Spanish, and Chinese. They stepped aside as a Puerto Rican woman turned away from the counter, her dry cleaned items slung over her shoulder. Starsky’s hand snaked out and relieved one of the garments of its red claim tag.

They approached the counter with a smile, and Starsky waved his newly acquired ticket at the young Chinese girl behind the counter. “Hi, there. I was in earlier in the week to get my dry cleaning, and it turns out that there was a scorch mark on one of my dress shirts.”

“Oh, I am so sorry, sir!” The girl’s voice held a faint accent, though her English was perfect.

“No problem. I was told to stop in and ask for Pat Lee.”

“Of course. Just a moment.” The girl nodded as if it was a natural request, and left through curtains hung over a doorway that led to the cleaning and press rooms. The

partners could hear her calling out in Mandarin and a faint response coming from deeper within the building.

They were taken off-guard when a tiny Chinese woman about sixty stepped back through the curtains and spoke, her accent thick. “Yes, gentlemen, how can I help you?”

Starsky looked at her quizzically. “Pat Lee?”

“Yes, I am Pat Lee. How—?” The woman stopped speaking when her gaze swung from Starsky to Hutch. Her polite countenance quickly changed to fear, then disheartened acceptance. “Yes. Please, follow me.”



The small office beyond the press room was barely large enough for a desk, file cabinet and second chair. The desk was encompassed by a huge ledger with several others stacked neatly beside it, and an adding machine, its paper tape flowing over the side to the floor.

Pat Lee slowly made her way into the room, arthritis making her movements laborious, then offered the detectives the two chairs. Hutch gestured for her to take her place at the desk, then nodded for Starsky to take the other. Starsky looked pointedly at his partner, then the chair. With a roll of his eyes, Hutch sat as well. Starsky crossed his arms and leaned against the closed door, looking about the Spartan room. The only decorations were the paper lantern hung over the single-bulb ceiling fixture, a calendar written in Chinese, and faded portraits of JFK and Martin Luther King gracing one wall.

Mrs. Lee followed the their gazes. “Great men, they were. They spoke of freedom for all people.”

Hutch leaned forward. “Mrs. Lee, you know who I am.”

The dark eyes that turned back toward him were sorrowful. “You are Detective Hutchinson.”

“Yes,” Hutch’s response was gentle, even in the midst of his urgency. “And this is my partner, Detective Starsky. How do you know me, Mrs. Lee?”

“You were arrested with my grandson, only you were not a criminal.”

Starsky’s voice was also low. “Your grandson is Daniel Lee?”

“Yes.”

Hutch shifted in his chair. “Mrs. Lee, we have evidence that says you’re Vic Monte’s accountant.”

“That is true.”

Slightly perplexed at her immediate admission, Hutch glanced at Starsky before continuing. “And this store is also a numbers’ drop for his operations.”

“Yes.”

Hutch looked at his partner again, throwing him the ball. The frail old woman didn’t fit with their expectations of the accountant for one of the biggest players in town. Still, they had been surprised by people before.

Starsky thought for a moment before speaking. “Mrs. Lee, why are you here?”

The older woman straightened slightly as she looked at Starsky, and opened her mouth to respond. After a few seconds, she simply dropped her head, staring at the ledger before her.

Starsky’s voice remained soft. “Mrs. Lee, *why are you here?* Why are you working for Vic Monte?”

When the woman finally looked up, a single tear spilled over, following the crevices around her eyes. “I love this country.”

Hutch wasn’t sure he heard her correctly. “How’s that?”

“I love this country.” Mrs. Lee drew herself up, unashamed of her display of emotion. “America. Sixteen years ago, we live in China. My husband. Our son, his wife. Their baby. Life is hard there, but I am happy. My son, though, he is not happy. He wants to make life better for China. Others, too. They meet in secret places. Talk. But one day, soldiers come to our house. There...there is fighting. My son won’t tell them where the others who meet in secret are. The soldiers...”

When her voice broke, Mrs. Lee wiped at her eyes, composing herself. “My family is gone. Only the baby and I escape. I take all our money and find men who will bring me here to America.”

Hutch broke in when she paused again. “That’s why immigration has no record of you.”

“If I went to Chinese government, I would have been arrested or killed like my family, so I have to find another way. I had Daniel to protect.” There was fire in her eyes when she looked from one detective to the other. “We go on a ship with others. Many die. They throw their bodies over the side of the boat. There was no one to miss them. But Daniel and I, we make it. We come to America. When I get here, I sign papers to stay, to be American. I tell them I don’t want handout. I want to work. Make a home for Daniel. But is too much...too much...”

“Red tape?” Starsky offered.

“Yes. They say no papers from China, they cannot give me American papers. They send a man to ask me questions, maybe send me back.” Mrs. Lee’s eyes softened, realizing the very thing she feared the most was becoming a reality. “I would not go back there. The government would arrest me as a traitor. I would die. They would kill Daniel or make him a ‘state baby’ and go to People’s Army when he is a man. I could not let this happen. So I hid.”

Hutch shook his head. “That must have been very frightening for you.”

“I could not get work and take care of Daniel. I find some work, but not enough to pay for rent and food. Then I come here.”

“To this dry cleaners?” Starsky asked.

“Yes. I come here and beg for work. I tell them I will do anything.”

“And that’s when you met Vic Monte,” Hutch interjected.

“Yes. Mr. Monte, he ask me what I can do. I tell him I clean and cook. I can learn to press clothes. And I am smart with numbers.”

Starsky nodded. “Which is how you got the job keeping Monte’s books.”

Mrs. Lee’s eyes darted to the ledgers. “Yes. When I start, I do not know what his business means. The money. I think he is a wealthy man. But later, I learn. I want to leave.”

Hutch shook his head in anger. “But you couldn’t.”

“I tried. I quit and find job at restaurant. But police come in and arrest all with no American papers. They take Daniel from me. I had no one to help me.”

“But Vic Monte,” Starsky finished.

“Yes.” There was shame in the woman’s eyes as she continued. “He uses ‘favors’ to get me released. Get Daniel back to me. Hides us. Mr. Monte says I owe him and must work for him to pay for his kindness. That was many years ago. After a while, I give up and stay for Mr. Monte.”

Hutch’s eyes looked past her for a moment. “And then Daniel got tied up with Monte’s other business.”

“Mr. Monte has papers made for Daniel so he can go to public school. Daniel thinks Mr. Monte is a big man. When he is old enough, he works for Mr. Monte. I did not want this, but Daniel is...how do you say...thick head? He does what he wants. When he is still a boy, he helps Mr. Monte by speaking for him with Chinese.”

“The drug shipments out of Singapore?” Starsky shifted from his spot against the wall and moved behind Hutch’s chair.

Mrs. Lee looked mildly surprised that they were aware of Monte’s latest supplier. “Yes. I tell him this is no good. But Daniel will not listen. He is a man now. I could not change him.”

Hutch looked pointedly at his partner. “So, Daniel knows the Singapore dealers as well.”

A plan began to form in Starsky’s mind. “Mrs. Lee, do you know the names of the Singapore dealers?”

A fire kindled in the old woman’s eyes. “They are dogs. They poison our children.”

“Mrs. Lee,” Hutch’s voice was full of passion. “We want to stop them before any more of their poison hits the streets.”

Mrs. Lee’s anger outweighed her fear. “Chen, and the other is Wong. They are the men who poison my grandson’s mind.” Her voice became quiet. “You will arrest me now. You will send me back to China.”

The partners looked at each other knowingly. Starsky looked away first, expectation dancing in his eyes. “Mrs. Lee, is there a phone I can use?”

She nodded, expecting the worst. “There is one in the press room, by dryers.”

After Starsky left the room, Hutch stood. “Mrs. Lee, will you show me Vic Monte’s books?”

The woman’s eyes grew large, having lived under the threat of secrecy for so many years. Knowing that it no longer mattered, she reached for a ledger from the stack to her left and thumbed through it. Hutch maneuvered around the desk and leaned forward to get a better look at the neatly drafted numbers. “What are these columns? Here—‘alterations’...fifteen-hundred dollars, twenty-two-hundred dollars...”

Mrs. Lee pointed to sporadic dates. “‘Alterations’—that is Mr. Monte’s word. Those money are from gambling that the runners bring to me. This ‘starch’—it is his word for money from drug dealers.”

Hutch whistled. “Fifty, seventy-five grand. What’s this big one for a hundred thousand—‘pressing’?”

Mrs. Lee shook her head bitterly. “That means someone is dead.”



By the time Starsky re-entered the room, Hutch had pulled his chair around to the opposite side of the desk and was hunched over several ledgers. Starsky leaned one hip on the edge of the desk and folded his arms. “Mrs. Lee, have you ever heard of the Witness Protection Program?”

The woman looked confused. “That is where the government hides people?”

Starsky nodded and threw a knowing and bitter glance at his partner. “Somethin’ like that.”

Hutch nodded slightly, then turned intently toward the accountant. “You’ve helped us make our case against Vic Monte even stronger.”

“And,” Starsky continued, “if you would be willing to testify in court what you’ve documented here, and tell them everything you know about Vic Monte, the government will relocate you—give you a whole new identity. A new name, a new job, a new *life*.”

“A new life?”

Starsky’s smile was genuine. “As a United States’ citizen.”

Mrs. Lee’s hand came up to cover her mouth, tentative hope filling her eyes. “They will do this thing? They will do this to protect me? But I have broken many laws.”

Hutch’s hand gently covered hers. “Yes, but there are certain circumstances that might be overlooked.” He glanced at his partner. “We’ve done it before for others with a lot less good reason to.”

The partners watched as she thought rapidly, hope warring with fear. A realization struck her, and she looked to them with pleading eyes. “Daniel...”

Hutch’s gaze swung to his partner. Starsky nodded. “We’ve got the district attorney to agree to try him as a juvenile. If you can convince Daniel to testify against Vic Monte and work with us to arrest the players out of Singapore, then he’ll receive a reduced sentence—probably time served—and also be placed in the Witness Protection Program with you and relocated.”

Overwhelmed, Mrs. Lee shook her head. “I’m sorry, I do not know what this means...”

Hutch smiled and squeezed her hand. “It means if Daniel will also tell us what he knows about Vic Monte, then he will go with you to start over.”

Tears brimmed in Mrs. Lee's eyes. "We will be free?"

Starsky smiled as he nodded. "You will be *Americans*."



Starsky and Hutch waited until the patrolmen arrived to gather up the evidence within the dry cleaners. An undercover policewoman would be filling in for the young woman who worked the counter, so additional arrests could be made as runners dropped off their marks.

The partners were glad to see Detective Linda Patrillo show up with an interpreter from the DA's office to take Mrs. Lee into protective custody. The interpreter was a young Chinese man who spoke fluent Mandarin and Cantonese and quickly put the older woman at ease. While Patrillo was a bit rough around the edges, she surprised Starsky and Hutch by taking an instant liking to the Mrs. Lee and stood by her protectively while the interpreter explained the upcoming events to her.

It was growing dark by the time they left the dry cleaners, and Starsky and Hutch said their good-byes with a promise to check in on Mrs. Lee before the trial. Starsky gunned the Torino's engine before pulling away from the curb, reveling in the hunt, and knowing their prey was in sight.



A quick call to the DA set in motion the plan to question Daniel Lee and extend the offer made to his grandmother. Just as Hutch hung up the microphone, they were called again with an urgent patch-through from Dobey.

The static that followed signaled Dobey wasn't in his office. "This is Hutch, Cap'n, where are you?"

"En route to the Port of Los Angeles. We just got a call from Dickerson at Port Authority. It turns out one of his clerks found a discrepancy in the shipping manifests regarding the *General Tsao*."

"What'd they find?"

"Somebody changed the date on the ship's arrival. A seven was originally typed in, but then somebody did a good job with a pen and changed it to a nine. No one would have noticed it except the clerk spilled coffee and, while trying to blot it dry, the ink smeared."

Starsky and Hutch looked at each other, the realization dawning. Hutch depressed the mic. "So you're saying—?"

“I’m saying that the *General Tsao* docked yesterday and is being unloaded as we speak!” Dobby barked. “I’ve got the Feds, the county, the Port Authority, and half the Department en route, and I thought you boys would want to be in on it.”

“Yes!” Starsky slapped the dashboard with his open hand, then tripped the siren. Hutch shouted over the din as he gathered up the Mars light and placed it on the roof. “We’re on our way!”

The speaker crackled again with Dobby shouting into the microphone. “I want you two to report in to me when you get there, and we’ll all move in together, understood? Don’t do anything stupid, you hear me?”

“Who, us? Zebra Three, out.” Hutch’s grin turned predatory as he replaced the microphone.

Starsky whipped the Torino onto a side street, dancing the vehicle through traffic. “Can’t report in if we get there first!”



San Pedro’s Port of Los Angeles was a catacomb of channels and basins. With its twenty-seven cargo terminals, nailing all of the remnants of Monte’s Singapore connection would be next to impossible. Tonight, they were simply hoping to reel in the big fish and anyone else caught in their nets.



Starsky and Hutch moved through the warehouse like wraiths, their years as partners keeping them in tandem like one another’s shadow. The dimly lit building consisted of rows of racks, each stacked four-high of skids and crates in the process of being unloaded from the *General Tsao*. The materials would soon be redistributed and shipped on semis to their final destinations, including several million dollars’ worth of uncut heroin.

As they neared the warehouse dock doors, where a half-dozen forklifts zipped in and out with their burdens, Starsky scurried across an open aisle to his partner. “I don’t think any of those guys in coveralls are Wong and Chen.”

Hutch snorted. “Not according to the names on the coveralls. Probably local hired help, or maybe some of Monte’s men. Wong and Chen may not even still be here, since the boat docked yesterday.”

“Yeah, but five will get you ten they’re not going to trust the locals with a couple mil of heroin. I’ll bet they’re either outside, making sure nobody runs off with any souvenirs, or else on the ship.”

“Speaking of which, did you get a load of the guys with hardware on either side of the dock doors?”

Starsky snorted. “Must be some pretty fancy textiles if it has to be guarded with submachine guns.”

“No kidding. So how do we get onto the ship without being noticed?” Hutch did a quick check of the rounds in his gun. “Wait for an invitation for the dinner cruise?”

“Elementary, my dear Watson. We’ll just drive right in.”



“Hey, Bob! Can you give me a hand with this?”

Bob Ferguson grunted in response and threw the butt of his cigarette on the floor as he started his forklift back up. When he turned the corner toward where he had heard his name being called, he came face to face with the business end of a Magnum and a very angry pair of blue eyes.



David Ming yawned and scrubbed his face with his free hand, then adjusted his grip on the M-16 lazily resting on his hip. He looked around at the flurry of activity surrounding him, failing to notice that the men wearing the coveralls marked “Bob” and “Larry” driving out of the warehouse were not the same men who had worn them driving in.



Several gangplanks ran from the edge of the pier into the side of the *General Tsao*, with fork trucks running back and forth to withdraw the ship’s cargo. Once inside the bowels of the ship, Starsky and Hutch abandoned their forklifts and slipped between the crates until they were well hidden. Hutch produced the crowbar he had retrieved from the fork truck and scanned the crates until he found one whose stenciled identification was upside down, next to the arrow indicating which end was up for the container.

“Good thing Bob was a talker,” Hutch remarked, jamming the crowbar between the crate and its lid. “Otherwise, we would have been here all night.”

“Good thing he had a roll of duct tape with him. Otherwise, we would’ve had to use our cuffs on him and Larry.” Starsky grinned. “And I’m saving mine for Weng and Chon.”

“Chen and Wong,” Hutch corrected with a grunt as he pried open the crate. The two quickly lifted the lid and began digging through tied bundles of fabric. “Good thing those two didn’t mind being trussed up like chickens and stuffed in a crate.”

“As if they had a choice. Uh...which bay did we leave them in?”

“Y-37?”

“I thought it was X-73.” Starsky’s voice was muffled, his torso almost completely disappearing into the piles of fabric deep in the crate.

“Bingo.” Hutch straightened himself, withdrawing a smaller bundle of silk. He tore off the protective plastic wrap and unfolded the fabric. A one-pound sealed bag tumbled to the floor.

Starsky whistled under his breath as he retrieved the heroin. “And to think that’s just the tip of the iceberg.”

“Yeah, well, we’d better get up to the cabin and finish this before the Titanic here sinks.”



“Dobey here. Go ahead, Baker Twelve.” After responding into the microphone, he spun the wheel hard, sending his patrol car sliding toward the Consolidated Slip Marinas and the awaiting *General Tsao*.

“Captain, we are approaching Warehouse Eighty-two and caught a glimpse of Detective Starsky’s car. No sign of him or Detective Hutchinson, though.”

“What the hell kind of operation are you running here, Dobby?” McMillian barked into his radio, his sedan right on Dobby’s heels. “Those two were supposed to wait for our arrival and report to you! If anything happens to Hutchinson—”

“You just worry about your own hide, McMillian! Starsky’ll take care of his partner.”

“Well, don’t think that the governor won’t hear about this, Captain!” When McMillian continued to rant, Dobby almost broke in to tell him what he could do with his threats. Instead, he rolled his eyes toward Heaven, reminding the Lord that he had never prayed for patience, so couldn’t The Almighty quit sending him things to be patient about?



Starsky and Hutch had made their way up a darkened stairwell to the ship's deck. So far, all of the information gleaned from Bob, the frightened but cooperative longshoreman, had been accurate. Now, they only had to make their way across the massive deck to the ship's bridge, where the adjoining captain's stateroom had housed the illusive drug lords during the voyage from Singapore. The partners peered out of the door from the stairwell, now level with the deck.

"So how do you want to play this?" Starsky whispered, taking in the sparse deck and calculating the risk of making their way unseen across the expanse. There were limited pieces of equipment offering shelter, and even in the dark they would be easy targets from the higher elevation of the bridge. He looked pointedly at Hutch's gray coveralls. "The longshoremen go on strike, and the union sends Larry and Bob to negotiate with the bosses, or try and make a run for it and hope they don't splatter our brains all over the boat?"

Hutch gave Starsky a sour look. "You have such a colorful way with words."

"Thank you."

"It wasn't a compliment." Hutch sighed. "Okay, what if—?"

Hutch's thought was cut off by the tinny blare of a loudspeaker attached to the top of a squad car. White spotlights cut through the night from around the warehouse and farther out from the Coast Guard vessels approaching the pier. "Ahoy, *General Tsao*! This is the FBI. You are completely surrounded. Surrender and come out with your hands in the air. I repeat, this is the FBI. You are under arrest; you must cooperate, or—"

McMillian's speech was cut off by gunfire from a dozen weapons. What happened next was chaos, as unsuspecting dock workers fled in terror, and the police officers and government agents returned fire.

Starsky met his partner's glance. "I guess they didn't want to cooperate."

Movement across the deck caught Hutch's eye. "Look there!" Scurrying down from the upper level of the bridge were four Asian men, two men with machine guns flanking the others. The two older men in the middle wore suits, the first loaded down with a duffel bag and pistol, and the second desperately clutching a briefcase to his chest as if his life depended on it.

As the foursome trotted toward a hatch midpoint on the deck, the detectives burst out of the stairwell, running full tilt, their guns thrust before them.

"Freeze, Police!" Starsky bellowed as they came along side one of the ship's ventilation pipes, his two-handed grip training the Beretta on the first bodyguard.

The machine guns were turned on them as anticipated, but they each managed to get off a shot before being forced behind the man-high structures for protection. The first guard was struck in the shoulder, sending the machine gun spinning out of his hands as he fell to the deck. Hutch's shot struck Wong in the bicep, sending the duffel bag to the ground. Chen instantly dropped his briefcase and threw his arms in the air, surrendering. They moved in unison, leaning out from the cover of the air vent to take their next shots. Just as the second bodyguard splayed the air around them with bullets, they could see the injured Wong snatch up Chen's dropped briefcase and stuff it in the quaking man's arms, grab the fallen machine gun, then bodily drag his partner down the hatch after him. The detectives continued to return fire as the heroin dealers scrambled down the stairs, the bodyguard shooting off another round that chipped the metal of the vent at their backs before following them.

"Terrific," Starsky bit off, slapping another clip into his gun. "Now what?"

The sound of gunfire from the pier below rang up to them as they made their way to the injured bodyguard struggling to his feet. Hutch snapped his handcuffs on the wrist of the man's uninjured arm, then attached it to the boat rail.

Hutch looked over the side of the ship. "Well, unless you sprout wings, we're going to have to take the stairs."



The descent after the felons was uneventful and slowed by their need for caution. As much as Starsky and Hutch wanted to be the ones to make the final arrests that would end the nightmare they'd been living, rushing headlong down the unfamiliar stairs after two men armed with M-16s would have been suicidal.

When they reached the bottom of the stairwell, they were on the same level as they had first entered the ship, but in a different storage compartment toward the stern. When it was determined they were alone in the cavernous room, they trotted between crates and skids to the gangplank. The pier was empty at that end of the ship, except for a few patrolmen standing ready, their squad cars blocking the docks from escape.

Hutch looked at his partner. "Well, Bob, I don't know about you, but I don't want to have come this far to be blown away by mistake by some overeager rookie."

Starsky looked at Hutch like he'd lost his mind. "Bob?" When Hutch rolled his eyes and unzipped his coveralls, Starsky made a face and stripped out of his own. Hutch whistled to get the patrolmen's attention as he stepped onto the gangplank, his badge held open before him, Starsky a step behind.

One of the uniformed officers raised a hand in acknowledgement after shining his spotlight on the two. “Some bust, huh? There was some commotion up there just a minute ago. Busted up a squad car, but I guess they’ve got it almost wrapped up now.”

The younger man looked at the two more closely. “You two aren’t Hutchinson and Starsky, by any chance?”

Starsky nodded as they continued down the ramp. “That’s us.”

The older officer spoke up. “Captain Dobby’s looking for you. Said it’s important.”

When the partners turned and ran toward the center of the chaos, the officer called out, “Be careful! They ain’t got everybody yet!”

Starsky glanced over at his partner as they ran, guns drawn. “‘Ain’t got’? Even *I* speak more better than that!”

Hutch did a double take, unable to see in the darkness if his partner was kidding or not. As they approached the next unloading bay door, they slowed as Dobby stepped out, the warehouse light casting a silhouette behind him. As they approached, he turned toward them with a scowl. “Where have you two been?”

Starsky nodded back toward the *General Tsao*. “We went to see if they have a dinner cruise. What’s going on here?”

The captain huffed. “We got Ferarro and VanMele in custody. But while you two were playing hide and seek, your friends from Singapore tried to make a break for it in a patrol car just a minute ago. One of our guys took out the driver. The two in suits made it into the warehouse, but not before they shot three patrolman and Lieutenant Dickerson from the Port Authority. McMillian, Endicott, and another agent wanted to make the big play and took after them.”

Hutch and Starsky perked up, catching the scent of the hunt. Dobby almost smiled as he pointed toward the back of the warehouse. “Back through those doors, there’s a stairwell that leads to the roof. I was just about to assign some men to head up there from the adjacent building and double back, but if you hurry...”

They weren’t even within earshot by the time Dobby trailed off, watching as they pounded out the door toward Warehouse Eighty-three.



The climb up the four-story fire escape would have been taxing under the best conditions. Starsky occasionally glanced back at his partner, wishing he could get a better look at his face as they raced through the darkness. Hutch was keeping up with his partner’s pace, even though Starsky could hear his friend’s labored breathing as they ascended the stairs.

As much as he tried to hide it, Hutch still hadn't recovered from the ordeal. "We don't have to do this, you know."

Hutch looked up at the worried face before him. "Move your butt before I run you over."

When they finally reached the top of the stairs, Starsky cautiously peered over the warehouse roof, trying to make out the shadows. Four skylights lay near each corner of the roof, as well as a small structure at the far end that housed the stairwell. Six large ventilation shafts jutted five feet above the roof's surface. Starsky could detect movement by the farthest skylight, the vent shaft next to it, then, closer to him, by another shaft in the middle of the building. Pulling his head back down, he turned to Hutch with a curse.

"What's wrong?"

"It's so dark, I can't make out who's who. We're gonna have to get closer, but we won't know if they're the bad guys until we're right on top of them."

Hutch snorted. "If it's McMillian and Endicott, I'm not so sure there are *any* good guys up there."

"Good point," Starsky agreed. "Look, there're ventilation shafts just a few yards on either side of us. I'll pop up, holler, give you some cover. Get to the shaft, cover me. Whoever shoots at us—they're the bad guys."

"Brilliant deduction, Holmes. But how come I have to run first?"

Starsky rolled his eyes. "Fine. I'll pop up, and you run instead."



Hutch nodded, satisfied. "That's better."

Starsky put his foot on the final rung, ready to make himself a target. "Ready? On three."

Hutch pulled himself up to stand at his partner's back, ready to propel himself over the top of the roof. The inconsistency of their conversation finally struck him. "Wait a minute—"

"Onetwothreego!" Starsky rushed and scrambled onto the roof. As soon as he saw Hutch clear the ladder and begin running for the safety of the shaft, he bellowed "Freeze! Police!"

The shadows at the nearest shaft turned, and gunfire swept past Starsky as Wong and Chen scrambled to the other side of the shaft. He dove and rolled over and over until he crashed into the ventilation unit. The familiar bark of Hutch's gun answered, giving him enough time to right himself.

As the partners returned fire, they could make out the shapes of the three agents running in crouches toward the shaft protecting Wong and Chen.

"What are they doing?" Starsky hissed. "Don't they know he's got an M-16?"

McMillian led the pack, his service revolver thrust out in front of him. "You're surrounded! Throw down—"

As soon as the words were out of his mouth, the machine gun was turned on them, striking Endicott in the thigh and the third agent in the chest, knocking them off their feet. In his effort to twist out of harm's way, McMillian stumbled and fell backwards, crashing through the skylight. By reflex, he managed to latch onto the framework and dangle by one hand, fifty feet above the warehouse floor.

Wong stepped out of the protection of the ventilation shaft and opened fire on Starsky and Hutch, keeping them crouched behind their cover. The shooting continued as Chen made a frantic dash for the fire escape the detectives had used only moments earlier. Once he was cleared, Wong backed up to it as well then rapidly descended.

As soon as the firing stopped, Starsky leaned around the shaft to cover his partner as Hutch sprinted for the skylight. He then crossed to the roof's edge and determined that the drug lords had disappeared into the darkness, the faint clattering of their retreating steps echoing back up to him. Starsky returned to Endicott and the other agent to check the severity of their wounds.

Hutch dropped to his knees at the side of the skylight and peered through the broken glass and framework. For a split second, his rage and hatred for the man dangling below washed over him, tempting him with the thought of just letting McMillian fend for himself, or even assist him in plunging to certain death. The fantasy only lasted for a heartbeat before Hutch latched onto McMillian's wrist. The agent looked up, the light from the warehouse casting an eerie glow on the exhausted detective above him. McMillian tried to grab the skylight's frame with his free hand when the metal structure he was clinging to gave way. The only thing keeping him from certain death was his former victim's vice-like grip.

Hutch tried desperately to pull him up, but his strength was quickly failing him and he began to shake. "*Starsky!*"

The urgency in Hutch's voice was enough to send Starsky scrambling back to his partner. He dropped to one knee and leaned over, extending his hand to the agent. "Come on!"

McMillian swung blindly, missing Starsky's reach. The effort was enough to throw Hutch off balance, and his grip slipped marginally. McMillian cried out in fear as he swung then looked up at Hutch's strained face. "What are you trying to do, kill me?"

The partners answered in unison. "Don't tempt me!"

Starsky threw himself flat on the rooftop and leaned over the edge as far as he could without losing his balance.

"Hurry it up, Starsk!" Hutch ground out, sweat running down his cheeks.

McMillian swung his arm up as high as he could, this time far enough that Starsky could grasp his wrist.

Starsky managed to draw his knees up under him. "Okay, Hutch, just roll back with him. Ready? Go!"

The partners pushed themselves backwards, hauling McMillian through the wreckage of the skylight and on to the rooftop. Although not without banging his head against the structure in the process.



Starsky staggered to his feet, panting, then offered his hand to Hutch. The blond lay on his back for a moment, his sides heaving from the exertion. When he finally took the proffered hand, Starsky pulled him into a quick embrace, thumping him on the back.

McMillian finally managed to pull himself up into a seated position. "Well, don't just stand there—go find them!"

Starsky shook his head, then scooped up his and Hutch's guns from where they had been dropped in order to rescue McMillian. Hutch took the Magnum back and followed Starsky over the edge of the roof. Just before he disappeared down the ladder, Hutch paused and looked back at the agent. "You're welcome."



Starsky and Hutch pounded back into the warehouse, searching for Dobby. When their superior saw them, he rushed to them, anger and concern on his face. "What happened up there? We heard some shots and glass breaking, and when I sent some uniforms to the next warehouse to investigate, they said they saw you two pull McMillian up out of a skylight."

Starsky nodded, giving Hutch a chance to catch his breath. “They need an ambulance up there; two of them got shot.”

Hutch looked around at the remaining patrolmen interviewing dock workers and escorting the arrests made on the *General Tsao* to their squad cars. “What about Chen and Wong? Did you get them?”

Dobey cursed. “No! We haven’t seen them since they went up on the roof!”

The detectives scrambled outside, running away from the activity in a desperate search for any signs of the two felons. They reached the end of the pier where the Port Authority boat had been moored earlier, nestled against a wooden dock jutting out into the channel. The only other signs that anyone had been there that day was a large crate and two oil drums stacked at the end of the pier. After checking the containers to make sure the felons weren’t hiding by or in them, they stood panting in the darkness, intently listening and watching for any indication that they were on the right track.

Finally, Starsky swung his fist through the air and swore. “Where the—?”

Just as the words were out of his mouth, the Port Authority boat roared to life, its lights illuminating the surrounding pier. The partners raced down the dock, but the craft was quickly backing away into open waters. Both men knew they’d never reach the boat in time, so they ground to a stop and began firing toward the cabin. They were met again with machine gun fire and instinctively dropped flat on the dock.

“Go!” Starsky hollered, lifting his head to return fire. Hutch scrambled to his feet and fled. When he reached the relative safety of the crate, he turned and began shooting at the retreating boat. When Starsky heard the familiar roar of Hutch’s gun, he pushed himself up and began sprinting back to his partner.

As the schooner was thrown forward full throttle, the machine gun’s bullets kicked up splinters at Starsky’s feet. Hutch continued to fire as he watched in horror while the tracers ate up the distance to his partner. A few more inches and they would find their mark.

“*Starsky!*” Hutch bellowed an instant before his partner tumbled from the dock and was swallowed by the water’s inky blackness.



Hutch fired even as the schooner pulled out of range. Out the corner of his eye he could see the Coast Guard vessel steaming ahead in pursuit as the smaller boat turned northwest out of the channel. Hutch quickly ran to the spot he had last seen Starsky and, after dropping his gun onto the pier, began tearing off his boots.

“*Starsky?*” Hutch called out, preparing to dive in.

“*What?*” The voice was not a happy one, but mercifully the one Hutch wanted to hear.

Hutch exhaled heavily, then bent at the waist with his hands on his thighs, exhausted. “I thought you’d been hit!”

“Is that what you were hollering about?” the disembodied voice groused from below. The sound of treading water reached Hutch’s ears. “I thought you were warning me that I was *about* to be hit.”

“Whatever. You were. It worked—you’re safe.”

“Yeah, and I’m also *wet*. And freezing.”

Hutch leaned over the edge of the dock and peered down at his partner. “You pick the most idiotic things to complain about. You’re also *alive*.”

“Are you going to stand there philosophizing at me, or you gonna get me out of here so we can finish catching the bad guys?”

Hutch walked back to where the dock met the pier. “Here—here’s a ladder.”

Splashing followed as Starsky swam to the spot then began his ascent. “Yuck! What is this crap?”

Hutch tried to see what his partner was talking about. “What?”

“This green slimy crap on the ladder.”

“That’s algae. Hurry it up, Starsk.”

“You mean that crap you put in your glop?” Starsky’s voice sounded louder as he drew closer.

“My *what?* Oh, for crying out loud! If you mean my breakfast shakes, then yes. It’s something like that. Come on!”

“Oh.” Starsky took his partner’s extended hand as he came up over the top wrung. His free hand deposited a large handful of dripping algae in Hutch’s shirt pocket, then patted it. “Just in case you get hungry later.”



Hutch radioed back to Dobby as the Torino sped away from the pier.

“Captain, we are in pursuit of the Port Authority boat heading north. They’ve left the East Basin where it narrows into the Domineguez Channel. Two Coast Guard units are also in pursuit, but they’re too big. I’m not sure how much farther they’re going to be able to follow.”

“Hutch, where are you?”

He looked over at his partner. “Northbound Channelview Drive and...”

“Thirty-eighth,” Starsky responded.

“Thirty-eighth, Cap’n. We still have a visual on the boat.”

“And tell him that the Department’s gonna pay to have my upholstery cleaned and reconditioned,” Starsky grumped.

The radio crackled again. “What’s the plan, Hutch?”

Starsky was undaunted. “And *somebody’s* starting to smell like rotten algae.”

Hutch ignored the whining. “When the channel narrows and they lose the Coast Guard—”

“This is gonna ruin the leather!” Starsky continued.

Hutch took his finger off the mic. “Shut up, Starsk.” He then continued into the radio. “They’re going to be free and clear. They could dock at any of the marinas and bail out, so we’d better get some units in place.”

“What are you and Starsky going to do?”

The partners looked at each other for a heartbeat before Hutch finally answered. “Head ’em off at the pass.”



“You’ve *got* to be kidding!” Starsky gripped the handrail he sat on tighter, and adjusted his weight so he wasn’t leaning so far forward over the water below him.

“You got any better ideas?” Hutch stepped down off the center rail so his feet were planted on the edge of the bridge, his hands outstretched on either side to hold himself firmly against the scaffolding.

“Plenty, and none of them include me jumping off a bridge onto a boat and getting shot up into little pieces by a machine gun. Maybe we should wait for the Coast Guard.”

“Where’s your sense of adventure?”

“Two steps behind my sense of survival. Now, I think—”

“Get ready, here they come!”

They watched in silence as the Port Authority boat slipped through the channel, its lights off to mask its flight.

Hutch’s voice was hushed. “You ready?”

“What do you think?” Starsky hissed back through clenched teeth.

“Good. On three...”

“What if I miss the boat?”

“You’re already wet, what’s the difference? One...”

“Yeah, but I’m wet and *alive*.”

“If you miss, you won’t have to worry about being wet. Two...”



Starsky cursed under his breath and scrambled down onto the lip of the bridge. Both men drew their guns, watching below their feet as the vessel’s deck slid into view. Their eyes met briefly.

“Three!” Hutch released his hold on the rail and stepped away, Starsky a heartbeat behind him. The two fell the fifteen feet from the bridge to the deck and rolled on impact.

They continued the rolling motion into a crouch and quickly found their targets through the window of the cabin. As soon as Hutch saw the machine gun raised in his direction, he dove and rolled again, the bullets marking where he had been a second before. At the first sight of the gun’s tracers, Starsky sighted and shot, catching their assailant high in the shoulder. Wong dropped the gun and fell away, grasping his bleeding wound. Chen, who’d been piloting the boat, lifted his hands in fear and began rapidly speaking in Mandarin, surrendering.

The detectives scrambled to their feet and charged the cabin. Hutch grabbed Chen by the wrist and thrust him into a prone position against the control panel, while Starsky snatched up the machine gun and checked Wong for additional weapons.

Hutch retrieved a handgun from his captive, then took a handful of shirt to lead Chen out onto the deck where he handcuffed the two together, the cuff's chain wrapped around the boat rail.

Hutch looked at the two captives. "Well, I know you're not going to understand a word of this, but here goes. You have the right to remain silent. You have the right—"

A flood of light accompanied the whirling of helicopter blades overhead, drowning out Hutch's voice and blinding the group on the boat. The forced wind tore at their clothes as a booming voice resounded from a bullhorn. "This is the police! Throw down your weapons, you are under arrest!"

They shielded their eyes as they stared up into the light. Starsky finally shouted in disgust. "They couldn't have shown up *before* you made me jump off the bridge?"



Hutch sat in a chair in front of Dobe's desk and thought about his last statement. "Yeah, Cap'n," he said after a long silence. "I think that about wraps it up."

"Good." Dobe looked at the court stenographer seated to his right. "Did you get all that?"

She nodded.

"Do you think you can keep going for a while?"

Another nod.

"What about you, Hutchinson? I'd like to start on your statement about what McMillian and Endicott did to you after the kidnapping. I think we have everything we need on the Monte case, so it's up to you whether you want to do this today or wait until tomorrow."

Hutch looked over at his partner. Starsky was in his customary place at Hutch's left, silently supporting his partner. It was his opinion that Hutch wasn't ready for any of this, but since Monte's trial was due to begin in a matter of just a few weeks, there was really no other choice. And, with Hutch's statement duly typed, signed, and notarized, he hoped it would take some of the heat off the still healing detective.

Starsky shrugged his shoulders in answer to Hutch's unspoken question. "It's your call."

“Let’s just do it then. The more we get done today, the less we’ll have to do tomorrow. Then, just maybe, I can get out of this crummy building and back on the streets.” Hutch glanced at his partner again. “Where should I start?”

Dobey leaned back in his chair and steeled himself for the grim details of what the Feds had done to Hutch. “Just start at the beginning, son, and try to remember as much as you can.”

In a faltering voice, Hutch started talking. He spoke of how the agents had come to his apartment, about the fight and being overpowered by the two men who had come to “protect” him. As he spoke, he became more and more aggravated—fidgeting in his chair, fingers plucking at a loose thread on his shirt, and even getting up from his seat to pace the floor from time to time, only to throw himself back down into the chair.

Starsky watched his partner closely, a worried frown accentuating the exhaustion in his face and the dark circles under his eyes. He knew this was hard on Hutch; after all, there were large patches of time that Hutch couldn’t even remember. And, to Starsky’s growing consternation, the more Hutch talked, the more agitated he became.

“I really don’t remember anything more until McMillian and Endicott came to see me one afternoon,” Hutch continued, his jaw muscles tense as he stared sightlessly ahead of him. “They told me about the funeral. Guess they thought I’d cooperate more if I knew that everyone had already written me off as dead. So, they sat there in their self-righteous three-piece suits and told me in vivid detail everything that happened on the day you buried me.”

Starsky looked up in alarm as Hutch exploded out of his seat and began pacing the room like a caged tiger. Dobey was about to put a stop to the session for the day when Hutch cut him off. “They told me everything, *everything*. From who said what, to the way my mother broke down—” Hutch stopped speaking abruptly, rage boiling right below his carefully constructed veneer of calm. Before anyone could stop him, he flung open the door and charged out of the office.

Starsky was the first to react. With a hasty, “Stay put. I’ll find him,” to Captain Dobey, he followed his fleeing partner down the crowded hallway.

The pursuit ended in a small rarely used interrogation room. Years ago, when the station was first built, that same room had boasted a very high success rate when it came to questioning criminals. Its small size and single naked light bulb suspended from the ceiling made most people want to spend as little time there as possible. But



progress had demoted it to little more than a glorified closet, although it was still used from time to time to question material witnesses and debrief undercover officers. Its lack of a two-way mirror made it the perfect place to have a private conversation.

Starsky took a deep steadying breath and entered the small room, shutting the door firmly behind him. He sat down in a nearby chair, worried eyes trained on Hutch who was leaning against the far wall for support.

“Not now, Starsk,” Hutch said tightly, his voice betraying his overwhelmed emotions. “I want to be alone.”

“Good,” Starsky replied, making no move to leave the room. “You be alone over there, and I’ll stay over here and stand guard. Make sure no one interrupts you being alone.”

After a sour look from Hutch, a heavy silence filled the room as he attempted to rein in his raging anger. He stood staring at the wall in front of him, his hands balled into tight fists and his eyes screwed shut. For an instant, he was the perfect picture of self-control until his body betrayed him, its need for an outlet overriding his mind’s determination. Without a word, he turned on his heel and, with an icy detachment, picked up the nearest chair and savagely broke it over the small table sitting in the middle of the room. Unsatisfied, he picked up another chair and threw it against the wall, only to pick it up again and throw it when it didn’t splinter the first time.

Starsky sat quietly, watching his partner, yet careful not to interfere. After the second chair broke, he stood and picked up the chair he had been occupying, silently offering it to his partner as well. Hutch stopped and stared at Starsky, chest heaving and sweat glistening on his brow. Finally, his energy spent, he leaned against the far wall and slid to the floor, hugging his knees tightly to his chest.

“You finished?” Starsky asked without incrimination.

At Hutch’s slight nod, Starsky continued. “You wanna talk about it?”

Hutch shook his head furiously, burying his face in his crossed arms.

His own jaw muscles tight with tension and fatigue, Starsky crossed over to his partner. He slid to the floor beside Hutch, his arms resting casually on his bent knees as he rested his head against the wall behind him.

“Talk to me, Hutch,” he began, turning his head slightly to look at him. “I know this is eating you up, and I know there’s a whole lotta stuff you need to deal with right now, but you don’t have to do it alone. I’m right here, and I’m not going anywhere, so let me help, huh? Maybe between the two of us we can work through this.”

Hutch raised his head, careful not to look into the probing compassionate eyes. “I don’t know how I feel, Starsk. Sometimes I’m just plain mad. If McMillian were here right

now, I'd wrap my hands around his scrawny little neck and choke the life out of him. The FBI is supposed to serve and protect, just like us, Starsky. *Protect*. Not screw you over and put your family and friends through hell. When I think about what they did and what it did to you—" He stopped abruptly and jumped back to his feet, pacing the small room in an effort to burn off the anger that again threatened to overwhelm him.

Starsky rose as well, allowing his partner maximum room to pace, and continued to watch him carefully.

"They took part of my life away. And...and there's no way I can get those days back. They hurt me and everybody I care about, and I can't undo that either." Hutch faced the opposite wall and braced himself against it with an unsteady hand. "They're untouchable, Starsk, and the more I think about it, the madder I get."

"It ain't right, Hutch. What they did was criminal and we'll file charges. We're gonna do whatever's humanly possible to make them pay for what they did."

Hutch smiled briefly, although it had nothing to do with amusement. "Yeah, you and me against the world, huh, Starsk?"

"And Dobe, and the entire precinct, and anyone else we can recruit to help us out."

"C'mon, Starsk. You and I both know that it's next to impossible to pin anything on the Feds. We're not that naïve." Hutch turned away from the wall and finally looked at his partner.

"Hey." Starsky moved to stand in front of him. He grabbed Hutch by the arms and met his stare, hoping he could somehow ease the pain he saw in the depths of his partner's eyes. "It may be tough, but we'll give it our best shot. And if we can't get satisfaction from the Bureau, we'll do something else."

"That's just it, Starsk. There *is* nothing else. And, in the meantime, here we are. Used, then just cast aside and left to deal with whatever they choose to throw at us." Hutch looked up at the ceiling and took a deep steadying breath before returning his attention to Starsky. "I've never felt so helpless. And tired...God, I'm tired. And there's not a damn thing I can do about it."

There was a long silence while Hutch searched his partner's face, shaking his head in resignation. When he finally spoke again, his voice was whisper soft. "So, how do we fix that, partner?"

Starsky pulled Hutch in close, willing his voice not to betray him. "I don't know that right now, Hutch, but we'll find a way." It finally broke as he hugged Hutch even more tightly. "I promise you, though—we will find a way."



By the time the partners left interrogation and made their way back up to the squadroom, the day shift had left, leaving the hallways unnaturally still. They stopped briefly in the squadroom to retrieve their jackets. As Starsky was slipping his on, he looked out the now-repaired plate glass window at the woman standing frozen in the hallway, slack-jawed.

As they left, Starsky paused long enough to whisper to the astonished departmental psychologist, Dr. O'Shea, who stood staring at his very much alive partner. "My gut was right after all."



The meeting had been called for 3:00 p.m. Captain Dobey had hand delivered Hutch's full statement and allegations at noon, giving the FBI time to review the document prior to their appointment.

At exactly 3:00, Starsky, Hutch, Dobey, and Police Commissioner Wilson were ushered into a large dark conference room adjacent to the Bureau Director's private office. The space was imposing, with a highly polished walnut conference table that ran the length of the room, easily seating thirty people. The Bureau Director, Frank Dennison, entered immediately afterward, accompanied by a second man. Dennison took his seat at the head of the table, a six-foot diameter FBI icon looming behind him.

Dennison took off his glasses and placed them in his breast pocket, then folded his hands in front of him. As he looked over the four men seated midway at the table, his non-sense expression remained unreadable.

"Gentlemen, I'd like to thank you for coming." He nodded to the man on his right. "This is Captain Fitzwallace, head of the California Bureau, and, as you've surmised, I am Lieutenant Dennison, Bureau Director from Washington. Gentlemen, I'll be direct and brief. Captain Dobey, Commissioner Wilson, what has transpired over the past months regarding the investigation of Vic Monte has been unfortunate. The Bureau 'unofficially' regrets the events described in your submitted statement, especially those involving you, Detective Hutchinson."

"Unofficially?" Hutch's voice was tense.

Dennison nodded, but remained expressionless. "Officially, we'd like to commend you, Detective Starsky and Captain Dobey, for your work and the work of your department. Because of your investigation, not only was Vic Monte arrested and his multiple operations effectively put out of commission, but in the process, you also cracked open a major drug trafficking cartel out of Asia. The Bureau and the people of California thank you."

Dennison and Fitzwallace stood as the Bureau Director continued. “In two weeks, Detectives Hutchinson and Starsky will submit their testimonies in court to support the prosecution in the trial of The People versus Victor L. Monte, and those also so charged. Any criminal indictments against Mr. Wong and Mr. Chen will be handled by the home office of the Bureau, as they are classified as international incidents. Again, gentlemen, thank you for your work in these matters and for your time.”

The two Bureau agents had almost made it to the door before Starsky broke the stunned silence, surging out of his chair, toppling it over onto its back.

“What the—? Wait just one bleeding minute! That’s *it*? ‘Good job. Don’t let the door hit you in the can on your way out?’ *What is this garbage?*” Dobey and the commissioner were also on their feet in outrage by the time Starsky finished. Oddly, Hutch remained seated, his hands gripping the arms of his chair as he stared at the agents in cold fury.

Captain Dobey slammed his open hand on the table. “Did you even read Hutchinson’s statement? What about what your men did to him? What about McMillian, Endicott, and Emery? Are you telling us that you’re letting them go scott-free in all of this?”

There was a subtle change in Dennison’s expression as he glanced over at Captain Fitzwallace. “Gentlemen, the statement by Detective Hutchinson is now deemed classified information and property of the Bureau. I can assure you it has been duly noted and reviewed by the necessary Bureau personnel.”

Starsky thrust his finger at Dennison, his rage boiling over. “That’s a load of crap, and you know it! What about the agents that did this to Hutch? McMillian and Endicott—what’s going to happen to them?”

Dennison’s face hardened almost imperceptibly. “Gentlemen, the Bureau has no record of any agents operating out of this or any FBI agencies by the names of McMillian or Endicott. Agent Emery, a one-time stellar field agent, has sought an early retirement and has relocated out of the country.”

“Wait a minute,” the police commissioner interjected. “You’re saying that Agents McMillian and Endicott don’t exist?”

“Or *no longer* exist,” Dobey added.

“I’m saying that the Bureau has no record of their existence. Good day, gentlemen.” Dennison’s face was stony as he and Fitzwallace swept from the room, leaving the others behind in stunned silence.



“I didn’t think this could get any weirder.” Starsky sighed, slouching farther in his chair and propping his feet on Dobey’s desk. For once, his superior didn’t reprimand him or simply shove his detective’s feet off.

Hutch scrubbed his eyes with the heels of his hands. “Any more twists and turns and you can lock me up at Cabrillo. I already feel like I’ve lost my mind.”

Starsky instinctively flopped his right hand over onto Hutch’s, which was resting on the arm of his own chair. Dobey folded his hands and looked across the desk at the exhausted men before him. He had never seen the two detectives look more world-weary than they did at that moment. Both had lost weight, their faces drawn and haggard. Starsky had still been recovering from being shot when the whole episode started, then suffered the apparent loss of his partner and the taxing investigation that followed. Hutch’s undercover work and eventual abduction and drugging had taken a significant toll on him as well, coupled with the pair’s determination to finish what they had started. Underneath his own sorrow and rage over the chaotic events, Dobey felt the familiar stirring of pride for his boys.

He pushed himself back in his chair, then withdrew two sets of papers out of his center desk drawer.

“Here.” He extended one of the sheaves to each detective.

“What’s this?” Starsky sat up in his chair.

“Vouchers. I want you two out of here until the Monte trial. Take some time off, rest up.”

Hutch withdrew his hand as if he’d been offered a snake. “Oh, come on! Is that some sort of payoff from the Feds?”

“No!” Dobey growled. “As if I would have accepted that for you! No, I requisitioned these and the commissioner agreed.” His voice thickened. “Look, Hutch. I thought I’d lost you once. I wasn’t so sure that your partner wasn’t too far behind.”

Hutch looked over at his partner, even though Starsky wouldn’t lift his eyes from staring at his hands.

Dobey continued, his voice deepening further. “I just want you two to go away for a while—relax, get some sleep. The Department has all the information it needs from the two of you until you testify at the trial.” He cleared his throat. “Starsky’s always grouching about wanting to go to Mexico.”

The detective in question brightened. “Baja? Tijuana? We can go anywhere we want?”

Hutch's face relaxed marginally, warming up to the idea. "How about the mountains? Spend a few days camping?"

"Actually, you two might think about going to Minnesota," Dobey interjected as he stood and crossed to the front of his desk. "And take the long way back through New York."

Hutch smiled as he stood. "Captain, that's a great idea."

"Yeah," Starsky added. "Even if the temperature in Duluth's thirty below this time of year."

"Forty," Hutch corrected. He met his captain's eyes again, his respect and affection for the man closing off his throat as he extended his hand. "Thank you, Captain."

Dobey took the offered hand, but then pulled the detective into a hug, thumping him on the back. When Dobey released him, Starsky, taken up in the moment, opened his arms, expecting an embrace.

Dobey scowled severely as he waved him away. "What do you think you're doing? You didn't die. Go on, get moving. Go make your reservations, then get home and pack. Edith's expecting you two for dinner at seven, so get a move on."

Starsky looked indignant as he straightened his jacket, then turned on his heel. "Fine, we will."

Hutch merely rolled his eyes as he exited through the door Starsky held open for him. As Starsky followed his partner out into the squadroom, he paused and leaned back into the office. "Thanks, Cap'n."

Dobey managed a smile, his voice low. "You take care of him, son, and yourself."

"Yes, sir." Starsky smiled as he saluted with the voucher, then shut the door. Hutch was already seated at his desk, the phone book opened to the travel agents' listings. Starsky poured a cup of coffee, grinning slightly at the new glass pot.

"Hey, Starsk?"

Starsky raised his eyebrows as he took a sip, then passed Hutch the mug. "Yeah?"

Hutch set the mug down and ran his finger down the telephone listings. "If you really want to go to Mexico, you can, you know. There's no reason I can't go to Minnesota on my own."

Starsky sat down on the edge of his partner's desk and took back the mug. "After everything we've been through? I'm not letting you out of my sight."

Hutch looked up, his eyes locking with his partner's. "That's what I'm counting on."

