

The Toast
Musings from "Sweet Revenge"
by Brit

The handwritten sign on the front of The Pits' door simply read "CLOSED FOR PRIVATE PARTY." Anyone who really knew Huggy would be surprised, for New Year's Eve was a time of significant business and to close for a private party meant the loss of substantial income for the bar owner.

Tables were pushed together to form one continuous row, seating almost two dozen people. It was an odd mix of characters, including more than one police officer, and a handful of those on the 'other side of the fence,' but the mood was friendly and somewhat boisterous. Captain and Edith Dobey were engaged in close conversation with Diane, Huggy's favorite waitress, and Minnie from R&I was successfully flirting with one of Huggy's cousins.

An old TV set balanced on top of the bar with the volume muted, playing a delayed broadcast of Dick Clark's coverage of Times Square. Colored Christmas lights blinked throughout the room, adding to the cheerful atmosphere. Holiday music poured from the jukebox, adding to the noisy din of several voices talking at once.

As the minute hand on the wall clock passed the "11," marking the time as just prior to midnight, Huggy stood up from the table and raised his slender hands to gain the riotous crowd's attention. "Ladies and Gentleman, the New Year is almost upon us. One of our favorite fuzzy friends, and one of my best customers, would like to propose a toast."

Calls of "*Here! Here!*" and "*Speech!*" were called out as Starsky pushed himself up from the table. The detective's movements were slow and somewhat stiff, his abdominal muscles still in the process of recovery. The detective had not regained all of his weight from his prolonged hospital stay, and still had an air of frailness about him. But considering the "massive damage" his body had withstood, his friends were proud of the progress he had made. It was simply a matter of time before he was back to his old self.

Starsky paused a moment as he stared down into the beer glass that he held. Only his partner, seated to his right, could make out the slight tremor in his hand. Finally, Starsky cleared his throat and looked up at the crowd, a broad grin disguising the dampness that had sprung unbidden to his eyes.

"I...uh, just wanted to say how glad I am to be here tonight. Seven months ago we weren't too sure...well, about anything. And I realize that each day is something to be thankful for."

The unexpected tightening of his throat caused him to pause a moment. The room around him was completely silent except for the soft strains of jazz drifting from the jukebox. With a deep breath the detective looked at each of the guests and continued. "I can't begin tell you how much you've all meant to me since the shooting. All the cards and calls, stopping by...I...I don't know how we could have made it without all of you..."

Starsky's voice took on an unmistakable huskiness as he faltered to a stop. He looked down to where Hutch sat next to him and the blond could easily read the pleading in those blue eyes for rescue.

Hutch quickly stood and placed his hand on Starsky's shoulder. "I think what my partner's trying to say is *'thank you.'* We have another year ahead of us, and good friends to see us through, no matter what." Hutch raised his glass to the crowd. "To life."

The crowd at the table raised their glasses in salute, and echoed the sentiment "to life!" Glass clinking against glass was quickly drowned out by someone's excited cry of "they're dropping the ball!" Many eyes turned to the TV set as Dick Clark began the final countdown. As "Happy New Year" flashed at the bottom of the screen, the crowd at The Pits joined in to sing "Auld Lang Syne."

Hutch noticed the tears brimming in his partner's eyes in joyous balance to the infamous Starsky grin. "Happy New Year, Buddy." The blond tapped his glass against the other's. "*To life.*"

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