

A Long Night

By Linda B.

“Thank you, Harold, for a lovely dinner. I can’t believe we stayed out this late on a weeknight. Why, it’s already midnight,” Edith said surprised, as her husband, Captain Dobey, drove the car into their driveway. Turning to face her husband, she added, obviously pleased, “I still don’t know how you managed to get away from the office for dinner and a movie in the middle of the week.”

“It’s your birthday. And I’m the boss.” What he didn’t tell his wife was how difficult it had been to get away. It had been a hectic afternoon: an emergency meeting with the Commissioner, the discovery of two murdered prostitutes, and the media down his throat wanting to know about the possibility of a serial killer. And while birthdays meant nothing to him, they were always important to Edith, so he’d taken great measures to keep the lid on long enough to leave for a few hours.

The static of the police radio alerted Dobey seconds before the message. “Eleven ninety-nine, Code Three...”

Instinctively reaching for the mike, Dobey cut off the message before it was complete. “Dobey here. What’s happening?” he demanded of the dispatcher, concern clearly in his voice. A radio code for an officer needing help meant assistance would be almost instantaneous, but that didn’t mean it would be in time.

“An officer’s down at Giovanni’s Restaurant. It’s at the corner...”

“I know where it is!” Dobey responded brusquely.

“Harold.” Knowing how much he hated hearing those fateful words, “officer down,” Edith touched her husband’s hand as it tightly gripped the steering wheel. Her soft touch had the desired effect, his already tensing body relaxing ever so slightly. “I know...you have to go.” Edith, reaching for her purse and umbrella, opened the car door. “I’ll kiss Rosie and Cal goodnight for you and say a prayer for the officer. Oh, and Harold...”

“Yes?” The reply was automatic. He was already lost in thought. Who was it this time? A rookie fresh out of the Academy? A veteran with years on the force?

“Thank you for a lovely birthday.”

At the sound of the door closing, Captain Dobey backed out of the driveway and sped away down the street.

Rounding the corner, Dobey scanned the street in front of the restaurant, relieved. It appeared that his officers had everything under control. He pulled to an abrupt stop next to one of the two

black-and-whites already on the scene. The ambulance, back door flung open, blocked the street, preventing him from getting closer. Its flashing red lights giving an eerie look of pooled blood to the puddles filling the streets.

Blinking away the image, his eyes automatically scanned the outside of the Italian restaurant. He was reassured at the sight of the red and white Torino parked at the curb. *Good, Starsky and Hutchinson are already here.*

Exiting the car, DobeY headed toward the officer standing at the front door. “Johnson, everything secure?”

“Yes, sir. The Coroner’s van is on its way.”

“How many dead?”

“Just one, sir.”

DobeY needed to put his fear to rest. “An officer?”

“No, sir.”

DobeY allowed himself the luxury of a sigh of relief. Relief—that he didn’t have to call an officer’s spouse or family to break the news. Relief—that he didn’t have to stand by watching another one of his officers buried. Relief—that his department’s morale wouldn’t again be devastated by the senseless murder of a comrade. “Starsky and Hutchinson inside?” he barked, not waiting around for the answer.

Entering the restaurant, his eyes roamed over the people sitting at the tables, customers who had unfortunately chosen the wrong night to visit the restaurant. Remembering the safe and enjoyable dinner he and Edith had just finished, he was reminded of how easily it could have been the two of them. Chance? Fate? Luck? Whatever you wanted to call it, it certainly hadn’t been here tonight.

Spotting Hutch talking quietly to Bill Flannery, Johnson’s partner, DobeY moved forward, stopping as the blond detective turned. But Hutch seemed oblivious to everyone in the room, as he headed toward a doorway at the end of the bar, anxiety and fatigue clearly written on his face and in the slope of his shoulders. DobeY watched as Hutch paused, Flannery apparently asking him a question, a question too soft for DobeY to hear. Pointing at the open doorway with his Magnum, Hutch’s reply was louder. “In there.”

Noting the absence of Hutch’s coat and holster, DobeY headed in the detective’s direction. “Hutchinson?”

Startled by the presence of the familiar voice, Hutch blinked in recognition, “Cap’n?”

“Everything under control?”

“It is, now,” Hutch responded, as though confused by the question.

Scanning the room, DobeY asked, “Where’s your partner?”

Resignedly, Hutch again pointed to the open doorway with his Magnum, his hand then falling to his side, as if the gun were suddenly too heavy to hold.

Increased activity through the doorway drew Hutch’s attention and, ignoring everything and everyone, he turned and started for it.

“Hutchinson!” DobeY barked after him, angry that his officer was ignoring him.

“I’m going to my partner,” Hutch said insistently.

DobeY looked over as two paramedics pushed a gurney through the door and out into the restaurant. Hutch hurried to meet them. “How’s he doing?”

“We’ve given him something for pain, but we have to be careful until the docs check him out, and we’ve started an IV, but…”

“Hutch.” At the sound, Hutch knelt down next to the gurney, reaching to grab his partner’s hand as it searched the air for his.

The word, barely audible but clearly recognizable, stunned DobeY. Stepping forward, he stopped at Hutch’s side and placed a hand reassuringly on his shoulder. Now he understood Hutch’s distraction with Flannery, with him, with everyone in the room.

“I’m right here, Starsk. Everything’s gonna be fine.” Whispering, Hutch encouraged, “They’re taking you to the hospital.”

Starsky struggled to stay conscious, struggled to talk. “You ‘kay?”

Swallowing hard, Hutch’s next words came out with difficulty. “Course, buddy. You will be, too.”

DobeY reached around Hutch, resting his hand on Starsky’s arm. “How you doin’, Starsky?”

“I’m…’ungry,” Starsky managed, weakly attempting a smile.

Patting his officer’s arm in comfort, DobeY turned to the paramedics, ordering brusquely, “Get him out of here.”

Hutch stood and moved alongside, unwilling to let go of Starsky’s hand.

“Hutchinson, how?” DobeY asked, matching his stride to the younger man’s.

“It’s been a long night, Cap’n. Can I fill you in tomorrow? Right now...” Exhausted, blue eyes pleaded with his superior to understand.

Sighing, Dobey nodded, knowing there was no way he could, or would, stop Hutch from going to the hospital with his partner. “Give me the Magnum, son. You won’t need it where you’re going.”

Relief obvious on his face, Hutch nodded his thanks. Passing the gun over, he moved with the gurney toward the doorway.

“I’ll catch up with you later...at the hospital,” Dobey called out, not sure Hutch even heard.

As they exited the entrance lobby, Dobey hurried to the restaurant’s window, watching the paramedics hustle the gurney through the pouring rain, Hutch using his body as a shield, protecting his partner from its onslaught. He watched Hutch and one of the paramedics climb into the back of the ambulance behind the wounded brunet, as the other hurried to the driver’s door and entered. The back door was pulled shut, blocking his view of his men. Dobey sighed in relief as he watched it speed away, its flashing red lights bouncing off the buildings, lighting the storm filled sky, its siren shattering the silence of the night.

Dobey turned from the window, surveying the crime scene, the people and police officers still there. Taking a deep breath, Dobey braced himself before ordering, “Johnson! Flannery! Get moving. I want to get these people out of here before morning.”

Moving over to the bar, Dobey reached for Hutch’s holster and carefully returned the Magnum to its home. Studying it for a moment, he reflected on how lucky they’d been tonight. The department, him, his boys—lucky indeed. Things could have turned out so badly, like they had too often in the past. An officer’s life lost; a department left to cope with death, while continuing to live and serve; himself, struggling to accept the senseless loss of yet another officer, having to put up a brave front. Yes, they had been lucky. Starsky had been wounded but he was going to be okay, his partner would see to that.

Taking a deep breath, Dobey prepared himself. There were victims to talk to, reports to file, officers to reassure, Edith to call, a hospital vigil to complete. It was going to be a long night. And it was time to get started...

The End
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