

Anniversary Date

by Linda B.

Starsky sipped his coffee as he reached out and touched the desk calendar sitting on his kitchen counter. Reluctantly, he touched the top sheet. If he tore it off, there would only be two days left—Friday and Saturday. If he could get through to Sunday, everything would be okay. He knew it was ridiculous to feel that way. Every day was the same, yet getting past these two days felt like a major milestone to him. He hated that Hutch and he had drawn weekend duty, because he'd have no way of avoiding Hutch and his inevitable questions. Angry, he used his shirtsleeve to wipe at a tear that appeared unexpectedly. Only it wasn't so unexpected, and that added to his frustration and anger. Ever since his recovery from Gunther's near-fatal attack, tears seemed to appear from nowhere any time his thoughts returned to Gunther and the events that followed. Even more frustrating was that it also happened when his thoughts turned to appreciation for the love and support he'd received from friends and co-workers. This had made it nearly impossible for him express his gratitude to everyone—including Hutch. The staff psychologist had warned him to expect this reaction, that it was normal. Only it wasn't normal to him. So, as to not embarrass himself, he'd become skilled at forcing his mind away from any thoughts of Gunther and all the pain he'd experienced—was still experiencing—at least when he was around anyone.



Alone at night, it wasn't as easy.

He had been back to work for six months now, having gotten his medical doctors' and the staff psychologist's clearance. Originally, he had started out at his desk doing paperwork and research for new cases, but for the last few months, he'd actually been back out in the field—once again at Hutch's side—though he recognized that Captain Dobey purposely had given them easy cases to work. He would have objected if he didn't love having some normalcy back in his life. But for now, being back out on the streets with Hutch was the most important thing in his life. Some days, he could almost pretend that all the horrible events of the past year—the shooting and his agonizing recovery—were just a dream.

Fingering the calendar, a half grin flashed momentarily as he remembered when Huggy had brought a similar one to him at the hospital while he was recuperating. Embarrassed, Huggy had presented it to him as an apology for setting off the water sprinklers, soaking him, Hutch, and their captain. Sheepishly, Huggy had explained, "This here calendar is to help ya remember to take it one day at a time," and, for a long time, he had literally done that. Being able to tear off the old day and bring on the new had brought brief

moments of pleasure in days filled with pain. It was a single sheet of paper that confirmed he'd beaten Gunther. He'd begun to look on each new day with pride—and growing strength. At Christmas, Hutch had replaced the calendar with a new one, and Starsky had continued to remove each sheet, happy that he was around to see the next day and the next—until now.

Two days. Just two days. How was he going to hide his fear from Hutch when his hands were trembling and he was constantly breaking out in a sweat? Hutch had always known how to read him, but while he was recuperating, Hutch's sixth sense seemed to quadruple. If he winced, Hutch was instantly at his side wanting to know what was wrong.

Starsky took another sip of coffee and, closing his eyes, tore off the top sheet.



Hutch pulled up in front of Starsky's place. Glancing at his watch, he knew they'd be late again, but he didn't care—not as long as he could walk through those precinct doors with his partner at his side. He waited a moment and then exited the car. Bounding up the porch steps, he opened the front door. “Hey, Starsk, you ready? We're going to be late, and you know Dobey's threatened to put us on traffic control if it happens again—”

Hutch stopped as he saw Starsky jerk back his hand from the calendar on the counter, stuff something in his jeans pocket, and turn away from him, trying to make it appear as though he was returning the bread to the refrigerator. Funny thing, though, Starsky never kept the bread in the refrigerator. He saw Starsky make a quick swipe at his eye with his shirtsleeve, an action Hutch had seen dozens of times before, but one he never commented on, sensing it would embarrass Starsky if he said anything. This past year had been filled with intense pain for Starsky, and despite all he'd come through physically, emotionally he was still fragile.

“You about ready?” asked Hutch.

Starsky turned around, but avoided looking directly at Hutch. “Sure. Just gimme a minute.” Starsky headed toward the bedroom. “Grab a cup of coffee; it's still hot.”

Concerned, Hutch fought the urge to ask if everything was okay and, instead, watched Starsky leave the room before he reached inside the cupboard for a cup. As he filled it with coffee, he glanced at the calendar. It was hard to believe it had been almost a year since that fateful day in the police garage. Only two more days and it would be a year. Starsky—no, both of them—had come so far.

Their work had been pretty boring lately, but having Starsky next to him more than made up for it. He knew Starsky hated keeping him from the daily street action that had brought them both thrills and satisfaction in their jobs. But that was before Gunther. It seemed all the events in their lives were now divided into before and after Gunther. In

the beginning, Starsky was always apologizing for holding him back. After a couple of major arguments, they'd begrudgingly decided it was better not to bring it up. After all, being partners again, even if they didn't see a lot of action, had more significance. And it was all that Hutch wanted.

For days, Hutch had had a growing sense that something was upsetting his friend, but whenever he tried to ask Starsky about it, he would change the subject or avoid him. Starsky was becoming more remote, refusing to look at him, to even talk to him. It was as if he were struggling with some inner demon. So far, Starsky had refused to let him in to help. It was incomprehensible to him that Starsky chose to keep him at a distance after all they'd gone through in the last year.

Moments later, Starsky came out of the bedroom pulling on his jacket and glancing at his watch. "We better get goin'. Dobey's gonna yell again, and we wouldn't want that, would we?" asked Starsky. The quick grin on his face revealed that he really wasn't too concerned about what their captain would say. And neither was Hutch. They were both aware of how pleased Dobey was to have them back together as a team, even if he hadn't said a word.



"Hey, man, pick a seat." Huggy looked around his crowded bar, grinning. "That is, if you can find one."

Starsky slowly spun around, glancing in every corner of the bar. Everywhere he looked, the tables were full. "You givin' meals away free or somethin', Huggy?"

"Must be the word's finally spreadin' on the street—want something good to eat, Huggy's got everyone beat."

Hutch chuckled and patted Starsky on the back. "There's a pair of open stools at the bar. C'mon. Why don't you set us up with a couple beers, Huggy? That is if you can spare the time."

"For you two, there's always time."

Following them to the bar, Huggy bent down, pulled out two beers, and set them on the bar. "What you guys want for dinner? The usual?"

"Sounds good to me. What do you think, Starsk?"

There had been a knot in Starsky's stomach throughout the day, making him feel nauseous. At first, he thought he was coming down with the flu, until he glanced at the calendar at work and "FRIDAY" seemed to jump out at him in big, mocking letters. He had become more apprehensive as the day continued. It was crazy how a single date on the calendar could make him feel sick. He didn't want to make Hutch more suspicious,

but it would be even worse if he got sick to his stomach. He swallowed hard before answering, “Sure, gimme a burger, Huggy.”

“Two burgers, comin’ right up.”

Hutch twisted the beer bottle in his hands and studied the bottle intensely. “You’ve been quieter than usual today, Starsk. You feeling all right?”

“Of course,” Starsky replied, a little gruffer than he’d meant to. Self-conscious, he avoided looking at Hutch, surveying the other occupants instead. “I’m just a little tired.”

Huggy placed two burgers on the counter. “Weekend’s almost here; got any plans?” he asked.

“We drew weekend duty,” said Hutch. “After that, getting some rest and relaxation sounds like a good idea.” Hutch stole a glance at Starsky as he reached for the ketchup. “What do you think?”

Starsky kept his eyes down and reached for his burger. After taking a small bite, he mumbled, “Sounds good to me.” His stomach twisted. There was no way he could avoid Hutch all weekend, and it was going to be anything but relaxing for him. It would be a living nightmare. Tomorrow, Saturday, it would be one year to the day that Gunther had arranged to have him—rather, both of them—killed. How could just one day out of 365 hold such significance? Hold such fear for him? He felt like bolting off the stool, running out the door, and hiding out until Monday. He didn’t know how he was going to make it through the precinct doors tomorrow. He knew he should be proud that he’d made it this far, but pride was the last thing he was feeling. What was wrong with him? It seemed like everyone else looked forward to anniversary dates. All he wanted was to get past tomorrow. Alone.



Starsky stared at the clock and buried his face in his hands. It was 4:00 a.m. Saturday morning and he hadn’t slept a wink. The phone had rung once, about 2:00 a.m. He knew it had to be Hutch and he didn’t want to pick it up, but if he didn’t answer it, Hutch would have been at his place instantaneously.

He’d picked up the receiver and spoke to Hutch briefly, pretending that the phone had woken him up. Hutch had made up some excuse, saying he couldn’t sleep and that he thought Starsky might be having the same problem and would want some company. For a second, Starsky almost told him the truth—that facing today was terrifying. With a lump in his throat, Starsky repeated that he’d been sound asleep, and then figured he’d been convincing enough when Hutch had said good night, saying he’d pick him up later in the morning.

Hutch wouldn't understand. He was the bravest person Starsky knew. How could he ever explain to Hutch how frightened he was when he didn't understand it himself? He still had no real memories of what had transpired a year ago. He vaguely remembered a ping-pong game, heading out to his car, reaching for his car keys; but then nothing, nothing until the pain. Others had filled in for him what had occurred in between. Sure, people had told him about the shooting, his massive blood loss, his cardiac arrest, his dying and miraculous recovery. He didn't know if he really needed to hear the gruesome details, but then again, he hated the void.

Feeling totally exhausted and drained, Starsky considered calling Captain Dobby to tell him he was sick. That way, he could escape Bay City before Hutch picked him up for their shift. By then he'd be long out of town. He had reached for the phone when there was a knock at the door. *It's almost five a.m.; who could...?*

Starsky opened the front door. "What are you doin' here so early?"

Hutch stepped into the apartment and, in one quick glance around, observed the room's disarray, confirming his suspicions. "I thought you'd be having a hard time sleeping. I've always told you you're a terrible liar unless you're undercover. Did you really think you could convince me that you were sleeping?"

Starsky shrugged and stared at the floor. He was too tired to even argue.

"I'm going to straighten this place up a little, while you pack a bag."

Instantly, Starsky's eyes met Hutch's. "What do ya mean 'pack a bag'?"

"Didn't I tell you? We're going away for the weekend, and you're going to need a change of clothes and your toothbrush."

Starsky continued to stand at the door, his mouth agape.

"You're going to catch flies standing there like that. Come on, get going. We want to beat the traffic out of town." Hutch hid his grin as he moved toward the kitchen. He didn't surprise his partner very often, and it felt so good.

Moving slowly toward the bedroom, Starsky looked back over his shoulder at Hutch hurriedly stacking dirty dishes from the counter into the sink.

In a few minutes, Starsky came out of the bedroom dressed in a clean pair of jeans and a t-shirt and holding a gym bag. Still speechless, he stood watching Hutch move quickly about the apartment, straightening magazines and pillows as he went.

Hutch looked up. "You ready to go?"

Starsky nodded. “I still don’t understand. We’re supposed to report for work. What’ll Dobey say?”

“Have a good time.” Unable to string Starsky along any longer, Hutch smiled softly. His reply came out in a whisper. “A couple days ago, I realized how difficult it would be going into the office today. I didn’t want to step foot in that parking lot because it would bring back all kinds of memories I’d rather forget. I called Dobey late last night and told him we wouldn’t...couldn’t...be in. He understood and rearranged the schedule. Said we don’t have to report back for duty until Monday morning.”

It was as if a load had been lifted. Starsky didn’t know how to respond. Unconsciously, he raised his arm to swipe at a tear forming in the corner of his eye. “Where we goin’?”

“We’ll just head up Highway 1 and see where we end up. As long as it’s away from here, I don’t care. Sound okay?”

Starsky nodded.

Hutch slid an arm across his partner’s shoulder. “Go put your bag in the car. I’ll be right out. I’ve got to turn off the kitchen light.”

Unable to express his gratitude, Starsky gripped Hutch’s arm briefly and nodded.

As soon as Starsky walked out the door, Hutch headed into the kitchen. Reaching for the light switch, he noticed the desk calendar on the counter and stopped. He fingered the top page and angrily tore it and the next page off. Shoving them into his jacket pocket, he headed out the door.



Please send comments to [Linda B.](#)

