

Beach View

By Linda B.

Running his hand through his unruly curls, Starsky stood, watching his partner toss and turn in his sleep. He wondered when, or rather if, the horror of the last two weeks would ever be behind them. While Hutch's sleep was restless and often nightmare filled, his own was almost non-existent. In the two weeks since he'd found Hutch strung-out, beaten and scared out of his wits, he'd been constantly at his side—a virtual Siamese twin—attached in body and soul, if not in physical appearance. At first they'd hid out in the apartment above Huggy's bar, but now they were into the second week at Hutch's. Starsky had literally moved in—and planned on staying until the blond didn't need him anymore. Time, and patience, would tell them when they would be ready to live again as separate individuals. Physical healing wasn't all that Hutch needed; emotional healing would come, but apparently at a much slower pace.

Hutch had become more morose with each passing day—drawing inward, away from life, away from him—and it was hard for Starsky to watch. Guilt was eating away at Hutch, and now he was even refusing to leave the house, keeping the shades drawn. Each day he had Starsky call him in sick, telling Starsky he was “unfit” for work and their captain wouldn't want him out on the street. Starsky knew that Hutch believed anyone looking at him was seeing a strung-out addict, as if “guilty” was written across his forehead. As hard as he tried, Starsky had been unable to change Hutch's opinion.

Starsky started at a knock on the door. Grabbing his gun from its holster, he hurried to open it before the sound disturbed the blond. Even though Forest and his goons were behind bars, he was surprised to find that he wasn't quite ready to let go of his own fear. He opened the door, not more than an inch, and peered outside. Stepping aside, he swung it open entirely, letting in their friend.

“How's it goin', man?” Huggy whispered, heading to the kitchen counter, his arms filled with two large paper bags. He quickly set about emptying them, loading a carton of milk and several covered dishes into the refrigerator.

Starsky leaned back against the counter, relishing the support it provided. “Still sleeps most of the time, if you want to call it that. He keeps wakin' himself up.”

Huggy nodded in understanding, remembering the dreams that had haunted Hutch at his place, and then probed further, “And?”

“And what?” Starsky asked, as he looked in the bag Huggy had yet to empty. Seeing nothing that interested him, Starsky reached for the half-empty coffee pot and poured himself a cup. Holding the pot up, silently offering Huggy a cup, he replaced it when Huggy shook his head.

“And how’s it goin’ for you?”

Starsky shrugged and started adding sugar to his coffee.

Pretty soon you’ll be having a spoon of coffee with that sugar, my curly-haired friend, Huggy thought, shaking his head. “When’s the last time you had anythin’ real to eat?”

Starsky ignored the question and walked over to check on Hutch.

“You gettin’ any shut-eye?” Huggy kept at Starsky, knowing both his friends were exhausted from Hutch’s encounter with Forest, not just the one lying in the bed.

“A little here and there...”

“You aren’t doin’ yourself or Blondie any good wearin’ yourself down. He’s doin’ better, but you’re still lookin’ like somethin’ the cat dragged in.”

“Thanks for the vote of confidence.” Starsky frowned. “He might be lookin’ better on the outside, Hug, but on the inside...” He shook his head and sighed, “I just can’t stand havin’ him out of my sight.”

“Think he’s gonna go lookin’ for a hit?” The anger that flashed on Starsky’s face made Huggy regret asking the question. Some things were better left unspoken.

“No!” Starsky said emphatically. “I trust him with my life, and I trust him when he says he doesn’t plan on touching the stuff again. It wasn’t his choice. He was a victim, and Hutch doesn’t deal well with being a victim.”

As Starsky’s voice began to rise, Huggy put his hand on his friend’s shoulder. “Sorry, to have brought it up.” The tension in the brunet’s body was almost palpable. Starsky’s face was drawn and gaunt, his five o’clock shadow growing into a beard, his face pale against its darkness. “How about I heat you up some stew?”

Starsky shook his head. “I’m not hungry.”

“How long has it been since you and Blondie got some fresh air?”

Starsky looked at Huggy, amused. “Fresh air? What’s that? Didn’t ya hear? Hutch and me have decided to become hermits.”

“Well, then, how ‘bout I watch Blondie for a while so you can catch some?”

The thought of going outside and feeling the sun on his face was too inviting to pass up. It felt like weeks since he’d seen the blue sky and felt the heat of the day. Once the men responsible were behind bars, Captain Dobey had granted Starsky vacation time as Hutch recuperated. He hadn’t left his partner since. Hutch was screaming that he was driving

him nuts, and he threatened to throw him out. Now Dobey was pressuring him to return, but he didn't care—he needed to be by Hutch's side. Starsky looked at Huggy and quickly nodded his agreement, the urge to escape—but only for a moment—too strong. “Terrific. I won't be long.”

“Take your time, man. The sun, and me, ain't goin' nowhere.”

Starsky grabbed his jacket from the closet and headed for the door. He paused for a second and looked toward the bed where Hutch was sprawled; he then stiffened his shoulders and softly pulled the door closed behind him.



The bright sunlight forced him to shut his eyes and look away. Starsky sucked in a deep breath and shifted his face back toward the warm rays. It felt so good. Stepping off the porch, Starsky walked to his car, his knees feeling a little weak. He didn't know where he was headed. He just knew he needed some space, needed to move. Hutch's tiny bungalow was beginning to make him feel like a caged animal. He'd paced the room back and forth so frequently that he'd worn a path in the carpet.

Sliding into the Torino's seat, Starsky sank back into it, welcoming the feel of the leather—the feel of home. *Missed ya*, he thought, lovingly running his hand along its dash. He started it up and, after a quick look at the bungalow, backed out of the driveway.

Fifteen minutes later, barely stopping at a red light, he realized he'd been driving aimlessly, the buildings and people he passed, a blur. He was exhausted, and thinking was too difficult a task. Looking up at the street sign, he realized the beach was just ahead of him. He turned left and headed down Ocean, the water on his right. He'd made a large circle and was now only about four miles from where he'd begun. But he wasn't ready to complete the circle yet, and, seeing an open parking spot, he pulled in and turned off the car.

The shoreline was unusually empty. Only a few people were walking along the beach or sitting in the sand. The vendors' carts were standing quiet in the late afternoon sun. Starsky opened the car door and stepped out. Taking a deep breath, he hurried down the sand toward the water. Stopping to take another breath, he filled his lungs until they hurt, the sound of the water music to his ears, the taste of the salt already on his lips. He ran his fingers through his hair, welcoming the feel of the sand the wind had already blown there. *I know it won't be easy, Hutch, but you need to get past what Forest and Monk did to ya. You need to get out and feel the sun and the wind and the water again. You tell me you love the water and the beach, and that they make you feel alive. I need you to feel alive again, Hutch. I need you alive—and by my side.*

Too tired to walk any farther, Starsky sank to the ground. Pulling his knees up, he hugged them close to his chest, resting his forehead on the hard pillow they offered. It was only a moment before he started dozing.

“Hey, Officer Starsky, whatcha doin’ here?”

Hearing his name, Starsky roused himself. He looked up, blinking, at the body eclipsing the sun. “Hmmm?” Confused, he wasn’t quite ready to return to the living. “Hutch?”

“Officer Starsky, you okay?”

Rubbing the sleepiness out of his eyes, Starsky recognized the voice. “It’s you, Lanky. How are you?”

“I’m fine, Officer Starsky.”

“It’s *Detective* Starsky,” Starsky sighed, too tired to explain again. No matter how many times he told Lanky that he and Hutch were now detectives, Lanky always called them “Officer Starsky” and “Officer Hutchinson.” The first time he’d met Lanky was several years ago. He was on patrol at the time, responding to a robbery call. After chasing down the two teenagers who’d robbed Lanky of his day’s earnings at the hot dog stand he operated on the beach, Starsky had handcuffed the punks and headed back to his patrol car. Lanky had run up to him and was so thrilled to have his money back that he had grabbed Starsky’s hands and had shaken them so hard in gratitude that Starsky thought his arms were going to come out of their sockets. He soon learned that the tall, thin man who always stood with stooped shoulders, his too long arms hanging by his sides, was Martin Diamond, a Vietnam vet, who’d suffered a head injury in the war. Lanky, so nicknamed because of his frame, combed his hair forward to cover the scar. His family lived on a farm in Ohio, but Lanky stayed in LA taking advantage of his VA benefits and the doctors nearby. Later, when Starsky had introduced his best friend from the Police Academy, Lanky had gratefully shaken his hand and called him friend as well. Over the years, Starsky had made a point of stopping once a week to buy a hot dog from Lanky, chat a little and, whenever possible, stick a few bucks in his shirt pocket.

“Where’s Officer Hutchinson? He always comes with you.”

Starsky looked at the six-foot, four-inch man standing in front of him and patted the sand next to him. “You’re givin’ me a stiff neck, Lanky. Have a seat.”

Lanky smiled and sank down next to his friend, pushing his black-framed glasses back up the bridge of his nose.

“Hutch is resting,” Starsky explained.

“You look like you’re restin’,” Lanky observed.

Starsky patted Lanky’s knee. “You’re right, Lanky. I am resting. Just enjoying the sun. Kinda quiet today.”

Lanky nodded, looking down the beach, “Not many people. It was raining. Sun came back out a little while ago.”

Starsky realized that he’d been so oblivious to everything and everybody, except Hutch, that he hadn’t even noticed that it had been raining, hadn’t noticed if it was day or night. The two had run in and out, blending into one.

Starsky watched a young couple walking along the beach when he noticed an elderly lady with a young girl approaching Lanky’s stand. “Looks like you got a payin’ customer.”

Lanky stood up. “Back in a flash,” he said, and smiled.

Starsky laughed and waved him on. “Sounds like you’ve been talking to Huggy again.”

Starsky ran his fingers through the sand, the warmth on top giving way to the coolness underneath. The contrast felt inviting, reminding him how he had become numb to everything the last few weeks. He was tired of feeling that way. He wanted to give in to the need to sleep, to relieve some of the tension filling his body and soul, even though he knew he needed to get back to Hutch. Lying back on the sand, head propped on his arm, he closed his eyes to the sun, letting its rays warm his face, the breeze blowing through his hair.

He felt his stiff shoulder and neck muscles relax slightly, as though the wind was blowing a little of his burden away. Keeping his eyes closed, he imagined time as it was before Forest had turned every day into a nightmare. He could see his partner, eager to meet each day, jogging in the cool morning air—not this thin, hurting man wrapped in an afghan, huddled on a couch or lying in his bed behind shade drawn windows. He could hear Hutch complaining about his food choices, while the blond reached into his pocket to find a dime for him to feed the candy machine—not this guy who was too disinterested to eat, let alone care what his partner ate. He could hear Hutch’s voice responding before he’d finished speaking, because finishing his own thought wasn’t necessary—not this guy who stared at him blankly, answering in monosyllables.

“Officer Starsky, you sleepin’ again?”

Lanky’s voice cut through Starsky’s thoughts. “Wish I was,” Starsky answered, tiredly. *I wish I could wake up and find out the last few weeks were a dream and not a living nightmare.*

“Here,” said Lanky. “Just the way you like ‘em.”

His body ached at the thought of having to get up, but Starsky pushed himself up to a sitting position. He looked at the two hot dogs Lanky shoved in his hands. Both were smothered with onions, cheese, relish, mustard and ketchup. “Thanks, Lanky. But I’m not hungry.”

“Ya look like you are.”

Starsky snickered, “Yeah, maybe I do.”

“I’ve got a root beer for you, too,” Lanky said eagerly, pulling the bottle from his coat pocket.

“Thanks, but…” Starsky juggled the hot dogs into one hand and reached into his back pocket to pull out his wallet. “I don’t have any money on me.”

“It’s on the house, or should I say beach,” Lanky chuckled at his own joke. “You look like you could use some food.”

Starsky smiled sadly. “Yeah, I guess so. Thanks, Lanky. I’ll pay you next time I see ya.”

Lanky shuffled his size fourteen feet and looked toward his hot dog stand. “I better go back to work.”

Starsky looked up at the tall, gentle man towering over him. “Thanks.”

“You gonna bring Officer Hutchinson next time?”

“If he’s feelin’ better.” Swallowing quickly several times, Starsky added, “He’s been sick.”

“Okay. Tell him I’ve got some of his favorite orange juice.”

“I’ll tell him. Maybe I’ll bring him next time I come.”

“Kay. ’Bye.” Waving slightly, Lanky walked away, then stopped to add, “Eat them hot dogs.”

“I will. I will,” Starsky said, and he held up one of the hot dogs indicating he was ready to take a bite. He didn’t have the heart to explain that the smell of the hot dogs was making his stomach do flip-flops; that he was too tired to eat.

Lanky was still watching him, so Starsky took a bite, surprised that he actually managed to keep the first bite down. Starsky took a second bite, chewing it slowly, savoring the flavors as they dissolved in his mouth. He took a third bite and finished it with the fourth. Swigging down some root beer, Starsky thought about how good it tasted and felt going down. *You know, Hutch, life is still good. You just have to find the little things that make you happy.*

He gobbled down the second hot dog and finished the root beer, watching the growing crowd walking along the beach. *That’s it, Hutch, you need to start finding those little things that make you happy—that give meaning to your life.* Starsky stood up and,

brushing off the sand on his pants, walked purposefully back to the Torino. *And I know just where those are.*



“You’re looking better today. How’d you sleep?” Starsky studied his partner in the morning light. The question really wasn’t necessary, because he knew exactly how well Hutch had slept, but it was his usual morning question and he didn’t want to break the routine. His friend stood before him, his shoulders stooped, face pale as usual, but there was something that felt different this morning, and Starsky was encouraged by it.

“Kay.”

“Hey, buddy. I’ve got a new plan for today.” Starsky, ignoring the silence that followed his comment, watched his partner rubbing his hands together. “I’m tired of sitting indoors and I figured we’d go out for a little while.”

Still no response.

“You like jogging...” Seeing tension tightening Hutch’s stance, Starsky rushed to finish, “...but I know you’re not feeling up to it right now. How about we go out and sit on the beach and get a little fresh air?”

The blond visibly relaxed.

Taking the lack of a negative response as a positive sign, Starsky continued. “The sun’s out...” Starsky hesitated as he watched Hutch walk to the window and move the curtain back, blinking at the light. *Come on, Hutch, stay with me.* “We’ve been inside for days, and a little fresh air will do us both good. You’ve got to go out sooner or later...” Hutch looked at the brunet, and, for the first time in what felt like forever, Starsky felt Hutch’s eyes making contact with him. “...hiding in here won’t help.”

“I’m not hiding!” The anger in Hutch’s voice made Starsky want to smile. *C’mon, buddy. Let it out. Get angry at what happened, get angry with Forest, and get angry enough to care again.*

“Well, let’s go then.” Starsky headed to the closet and, grabbing Hutch’s jacket, shoved it at him. “We don’t have to go for long, but the air is getting a little stale in here.”

Seeing the blond hesitate, Starsky slowly, but purposely, took Hutch by the arm and led him toward the door. As they approached it, Hutch pulled his arm away. “I can’t.”

“Sure you can.”

Stopping, Hutch shook his head. “Everyone w-will...they’ll know.” Hutch’s stutter reflected his anxiety.

“Nobody knows anything, unless you, Dobey or me tell ‘em. Bernie’s sworn to secrecy. I, for one, don’t plan on saying a word and you know Dobey won’t, so that only leaves you. Besides, it’s early in the morning and the beach will be pretty much deserted. There will only be a few people around and they won’t care about two beach bums sitting in the sand.” Raising his eyebrow expectantly, Starsky leaned closer to nod encouragingly.

Hutch’s eyes met his and, for a few seconds, the two connected again.

Encouraged, Starsky opened the door and held his breath, wondering what his next step would be if Hutch refused. He closed his eyes in a silent prayer of thanks as he followed Hutch out the door.



“How about here?” Starsky pulled the Torino to a stop along Ocean and, looking out the passenger window past Hutch, he surveyed the beach. Other than a jogger running along the surf, it was quiet. It was perfect in his mind, but he wasn’t sure how Hutch felt.

Hutch had been sitting silently, his sunglasses blocking the sunlight, and his partner’s furtive glances.

“C’mon, buddy. Let’s go.” Starsky opened his door and, with a sigh, headed toward the beach. He didn’t look back to see if Hutch was following, but when he heard the car door close he realized he’d been holding his breath. He slowed his pace, allowing Hutch time to catch up. When they were halfway to the water’s edge, Starsky sank down in the sand, pleased to have his partner once again at his side.

They sat, soaking in the heat and the smells, relishing the quiet.

“Feels good,” Starsky finally said, breaking the silence. “Told ya we needed some fresh air.”

Starsky, feeling the blond’s body relax next to him, saw Hutch running the sand repeatedly through his fingers.

“I’m sorry.” The words were so quiet Starsky almost missed them.

“You’ve got nothing to be sorry about.” Starsky stared straight ahead, afraid if he looked at him, Hutch would turn off the torrent of words that suddenly poured forth.

“Sorry for not telling you where I was going. Sorry for letting Forest kidnap me. Sorry for telling them where Jeannie was. Sorry for giving in to the drugs. Sorry for...”

“None of those things were your fault,” Starsky interrupted angrily. “Well, except maybe not telling me where you were going. You’re supposed to tell me ‘where you are at all times’ to quote Dobey, but...” Starsky grinned to soften his words, “if I was going away

for the weekend with a beautiful girl, I would understand why you wouldn't want to tell me, too." He was pleased to see a weak grin creep across Hutch's face.

"I'm sorry, but I can't let go of what happened...and get back to doing my job—our job. My concentration..."

By the way the "I'm sorry's" continued, Starsky knew Hutch had let the guilt eat away at him for far too long. "Hutch, it'll take time to recover. You couldn't go to the doctor; you couldn't get any kind of help. You're doing it all on your own, buddy. Give it time..."

"You're tired of waiting..."

The words were said softly, but took Starsky's breath away. How could he explain what he was feeling—how the suffering his partner had gone through had affected them both, how painful it was to watch the way Hutch was letting the guilt consume him, how the needless victimization had almost taken his best friend's life? "No. I'm never tired of waiting for you to feel better. But, I will tell you what I'm tired of—I'm tired of you beating yourself over the head for something you had no control over."

Starsky lay back on the sand, suddenly feeling very tired. Until now, he hadn't realized how difficult it had been being the strength for both of them. And now he felt that tiredness in every pore, in every bone, in every ounce of his body. Tired both physically and emotionally.

"Thank you," Hutch said softly.

"You'd have done the same for me."

Hutch's silence acknowledged his agreement. The two sat contentedly, soaking in the sun, sand and smells, each to their own need.

"The sun feels good," Hutch finally commented, breaking the silence.

"Yeah."

"Wanna go jogging tomorrow?"

Starsky opened one eye and studied his partner. He didn't want to look too eager. He had to let Hutch take it one step at a time. "Do you?" At Hutch's nod, Starsky felt as though a little of the weight he'd been carrying around had been lifted—maybe there was hope.

"Officer Starsky! Officer Hutchinson!"

Starsky sat up as Lanky's voice interrupted them. "Mornin', Lanky."

Starsky grinned as Lanky eagerly shook Hutch's hand. "Officer Starsky said you've been sick."

"I was sick." Hutch glanced at his partner and caught his eye. "But I think I'm getting better now." The touch of Starsky's arm as he laid it across his shoulders confirmed for Hutch the truth in the statement.

"Good. Good. I saved some orange juice for you. You want some?"

"Sure." Hutch didn't want to disappoint Lanky, even though the thought of orange juice didn't sit real well with his stomach.

They watched as Lanky hurried back to his stand. Hutch surveyed the area beyond Lanky on Ocean; he glanced at the water and then up and down the beach. "You know, this is a nice place—the quiet of the beach, the sound of the water, the fresh air."

"Yeah," Starsky said, nodding in agreement, as his eye scanned the beach. "Nice place. Sand, water, fresh air, bikinis..."

Hutch laughed half-heartedly, and gently shoved Starsky's arm. "I think the bikinis would'a been tops on your list."

Starsky grinned, his heart quickening its beat at Hutch's unexpected banter. "Probably."

"I definitely like the view," Hutch observed, looking over his sunglasses to catch a better glimpse of two bikini-clad blondes walking by. "My lease is about up, and I've been thinking about looking for a new place. What do you think about somewhere along Venice Beach?"

Surprised, Starsky stared at his partner, trying to determine if he was serious. Maybe Hutch was beginning to look forward, to make a new start. "Sounds like a good idea to me. With this kind of view, I may move in."

The two were laughing when Lanky showed up, arms full. "Here's your orange juice," he said handing a carton to Hutch. "And, Officer Starsky, here's a hot dog just the way you like it."

Starsky reached for the smothered hot dog. "Terrific."

"How can you eat that at this time of the morning, Starsk?" Hutch asked in disgust.

"It's easy, Blondie." And in one bite he finished a third of the hot dog, chewing joyously.

While the two friends jokingly argued over what constituted a decent breakfast, Lanky hurried back to his stand.



After watching his friends return to their flashy car and drive off, Lanky took a dime from his cash box and hurried to the phone booth across the street.

“They was here,” he said, as soon as he recognized the voice on the other end. “They looked sad at first, but before they left they were laughing...yeah, I did what you said...I gave ‘em what they liked...hot dogs and orange juice...okay, you pay me tomorrow.”

Lanky was silent a moment, listening to orders coming from the other end.

“Yep, if they come tomorrow, I’ll give them more...okay, ‘bye.” Lanky hung up the phone and walked back to his stand.

Pleased that both his friends finally looked like they were beginning on the road to recovery, Huggy Bear hung up the phone and grinned like a Cheshire cat. Slinging the dishtowel over his shoulder, he sauntered back to the bar. He loved it when a plan came together.

The End