

Close Doesn't Count
Missing Scene from "A Coffin For Starsky"

Linda B.

"Shhh." Hutch held his finger to his lips as he let Huggy in the front door.

"So, how's my man doin'?" Huggy whispered as he glanced around Hutch's apartment, expecting to see his curly-haired friend.

"I finally got him in bed." Hutch shook his head. "He gave me a really hard time. Have a seat. I'll get some beers."



Hutch handed a bottle to Huggy and sat down. "He was impossible at first. Insisted on sitting on the couch and watching old movies on TV. Wouldn't admit he was tired and belonged in bed. He should've never left the hospital."

"Bed's probably the last place he wants to be." Huggy took a sip of beer. "Besides, watching TV is the first normal thing he's done in days. Give him a little space."

"I know." Hutch rubbed his face. "It's...well...Hug, we almost didn't make it this time. It was just too close for me."

Huggy nodded in understanding and added, "For all of us." He knew it had been close, but not *how* close until Captain Dobey had called to say they'd finally found an antidote. The tremor in his voice, when he admitted they'd been only minutes away from losing Starsky, said it all. It was still hard to understand and accept.

"He was in such pain. Couldn't keep anything down. He kept doubling over. And the sweat...it just poured off of him." Hutch leaned back and closed his eyes, as though shutting out the memory. "And at the end, he...he could barely talk."

"But he's okay now, right?" Huggy leaned forward, worried there was something Hutch wasn't telling him.

"Yeah, the doc said he'll be okay. He looks like death warmed over, but they assured us that all the poison was out of his system, and with time Starsky'll recover fully." Hutch

sipped his beer. “He didn’t have any strength left, Hug, and I couldn’t help him. He shot Bellamy—and killed him. Do you understand what that means? He cared more about my life than his own, and...I ...felt so useless. I couldn’t do anything to help him.” Hutch shook his head and repeated, “We were so close.”

“You gave him strength. Besides, you got him to the hospital and never gave up. You figured out who gave him the shot and, more importantly, who was behind it. If it wasn’t for you...”



Hutch stood up and began pacing. “I still can’t believe that the doctor released him. But once the antidote worked and they got some fluids in his body, they said all he needed was rest. That’s all Starsky needed to hear. He insisted on getting out of there. Said he could rest better at home.” Hutch stopped and looked in on Starsky before continuing. “But I couldn’t take him home. I was afraid he might have nightmares sleeping in his own bed. He isn’t strong enough to face those

demons yet. Maybe in a few days...after some sleep, some food...” His sentence faded away, interrupted with a yawn.

“Looks to me, you could use some sleep yourself. You probably ain’t feelin’ much better.”

After a second yawn, Hutch grinned sheepishly. “I’ll be fine. Just give me a day or two.”

“You two been hangin’ around each other way too long. You sound just like your partner.” Huggy stood up. “Look, I’m gonna take a peek at the patient, and then I’m heading home. You both need some shut-eye.”

Huggy returned a few minutes later. “You’re right, he looks terrible. Color’s bad, kind of hollow around the eyes, but it looks like he’s sleeping soundly.”

“Good.” Hutch walked Huggy to the door. “Thanks for stopping by.”

“I’ll be back in a few hours with some grub. Don’t need my friends wasting away. Bad for the reputation.”

Hutch smiled and squeezed Huggy’s shoulder. “Thanks. It’ll save me a trip to the store. I’ve been putting it off. I didn’t want to leave him alone—I didn’t want him waking to an empty apartment.”

“Not a problem. Get some rest, man.”

“Will do. See you later.”

Before settling down, Hutch checked on Starsky once more. Starsky was curled on his side, his arm hanging over the edge of the bed. Hutch walked over, slid the arm onto the bed and under the covers. “Night, buddy.”

In the living room, he took another sip of beer before reaching for the afghan hanging over the back of the chair. He lay down on the couch and covered himself. Wondering how he was ever going to fall asleep, his thoughts returned to his partner in the other room. With a prayer of thanks, he closed his eyes and slept.



“No...no...”

Hutch rolled off the couch onto his knee as he grabbed for the holster laying on the coffee table.

The muffled sound repeated itself in his bedroom. Hutch hurried to the bed where his partner was thrashing about, his legs tangled in the sheets and blanket. Hutch reached to free his partner, when Starsky’s arms began swinging.

He sat down on the bed, grasped the flailing arms, and pulled Starsky back against his chest, all the time talking calmly and softly so as not to frighten his partner. “It’s me, Starsk. You’re okay. You’re having a nightmare.”

Eventually, Starsky calmed down and opened his eyes. “Where am I?”

“My place.”

Starsky stiffened, his eyes searching the corners of the room. “Where is he?”

“No one’s here except you and me. You got tangled in the covers and it frightened you. You don’t need to worry. Bellamy’s dead and Professor Jennings is behind bars.”

Starsky scanned the room again and shuddered.

“It’s okay. I promise you.”

Starsky, eyes closed, breathed a sigh of relief. “A nightmare, huh? Hope I didn’t hit you.”

“Don’t worry, I ducked.” Hutch waited for the lines around Starsky’s mouth to relax and his breathing to return to normal before loosening his hold on Starsky’s arms. “You want a drink of water? Something to eat?”

“Water.”

“Can you move a little, so I can get off the bed?” Starsky leaned forward and Hutch detached himself. He returned a moment later with a glass filled with ice water.

Starsky shifted upward, but the attempt didn’t move him very far and the exertion was obviously draining.

Hutch set down the glass. “Wait a minute. Don’t move.” He darted to the couch and returned with several pillows and the afghan. He stuffed them behind Starsky. “That should do the job. At least you won’t dribble too much.”

Starsky took the glass and began gulping the water.

“Hey, slow down. Doc said you need fluids, but that doesn’t mean you have to float away.”

Starsky handed Hutch the empty glass. “Tasted good. Thanks. What time is it?”

Hutch looked at the clock on the nightstand. “Almost six o’clock. You slept about four hours.”

“You sleep?”

Hutch tried to recall when Huggy had stopped by. Surprised, he replied, “Almost three.”

“Hours or minutes?”

Hutch smiled. “Hours.”

“Good.” Starsky nodded his approval.

“You sure you’re not hungry?”

“What are you offering?”

“Huggy said he’d be back with food. He must be running late. I’ll give him a call.” Hutch reached for the phone, but stopped when he felt Starsky’s fingers encircle his arm. “Something wrong?”

“Before you call, I...I wanted to say thanks.”

“You’ve got it backwards. It’s me who should say thanks. Up there on the roof, when you shot—”

“That’s my job—watching your back. I wanna say thanks...thanks for sticking by me, helping me to keep going and not give up.”

“That’s *my* job. But I have to admit I was worried this time. Really worried, Starsk. Time was against us. It was awfully close.”

Starsky reclined against the pillows, eyes closed. “Not playin’ horseshoes, Hutch.”

Hutch reached out a hand and touched Starsky’s forehead. There was no fever. “Of course, we’re not playing horseshoes.”

Starsky struggled to open his eyes. “You don’t understand.”

“You’re right about that.”

“Close doesn’t count. Don’t you remember? Close only counts in horseshoes and hand grenades.”

“Starsk...” Hutch watched the steady rise and fall of Starsky’s chest and knew his friend had fallen asleep again. He rose to leave, amazed once again at Starsky’s ability to get to the heart of what was important. “You’re right. You—no, we—made it. Close doesn’t count. Not now. What counts is that you’ll be beside me again, that you’ll be watching my back—and I’ll be watching yours.”



The End