

A Law of Physics

By Linda B.

“All units in the vicinity of Patterson and Fifth, two-eleven in progress. Shoreline Bank.”

With an acknowledging nod to each other, Starsky tossed his half-empty styrofoam coffee cup out the open window and started the car, as Hutch reached for the mike. It had been a fairly quiet day, but the call for action needed no discussion.

“Zebra Three responding.”

Hutch flipped on the siren and slapped the flashing mars light onto the roof, as Starsky glanced to his left and peeled out of the drive-in’s crowded parking lot. Fifth Street would be only minutes away with the aid of the siren and light. Surging ahead as the traffic parted, the Torino passed cars scurrying to the right and left, trying to avoid the red bullet as Starsky weaved through the heavy traffic.

As the Torino approached the intersection, Starsky firmly gripped the steering wheel. He leaned forward, eyes rapidly scanning both sides of the street, searching for cars--for people--oblivious to their wailing siren. A third of the way through the intersection, the truck appeared, from nowhere, in the corner of his eye. It was headed directly at them, the squeal of its brakes signaling the driver’s frantic attempts to stop, already ringing in his ears. Time slowed, transporting him back...

Rounding the corner at high speed, despite his partner’s repeated protests--“You don’t have to do this, Starsky! Oh, come on! Will you slow down?”--in pursuit of the two escaping felons, Starsky sensed the truck that appeared suddenly on his right, seconds before he saw it. He swerved to the right, zooming toward the construction site looming directly in front of them, barely missing an innocent bystander. Workers scattered for safety...control gone...crashing through the barricades...watching helplessly as Hutch was tossed about like a rag doll, unable to protect himself...

Spinning the wheel to the right, Starsky struggled to control the car, barely missing a yellow taxi climbing up the curb to avoid him. Sucking in air as everything slowed to a snail’s pace, his heart raced, beating so loudly he was sure Hutch could hear it as well. The truck, brakes now locked, swerved toward the Torino, as the driver struggled to keep it upright.

Time seemed to stop.

Two objects...it was a law of physics...two objects cannot occupy the same space. I’m crazy, Starsky thought, as he hit the gas pedal, accelerating, swerving toward the vacant lot now on his right, his meager lunch a lead weight sinking to the bottom of his stomach.

Another lot...waking in a hospital bed, confused and aching...the bed next to him empty. "Hu-u-t-ch!"

"STARSK!" Hutch, grabbing for the dashboard to brace himself, shot a sideways glance at his partner. The color had drained from Starsky's face, and he was biting down so hard on his lip Hutch was convinced he'd bite clear through.

Miraculously, Starsky, maintained control of the car and barely missed by only a fraction of an inch the front of a blue Ford parked along the curb. And as the front tire bounced off the curb, the Torino headed back onto the road. Intently concentrating on the street ahead of him, Starsky avoided looking at Hutch, afraid to see condemnation in his friend's blue eyes.

A minute more--that's about all it took, just a minute more--and they were at the scene.

A minute that felt like a lifetime.

As Starsky pulled in behind the three black-and-whites already stationed at the bank, he was relieved that Hutch didn't say a word, didn't rant about his driving. Hutch had cut the lights and siren before their arrival, and Starsky had gratefully let the silence grow between them.

"His head sustained a rather severe blow at the moment of impact."

Pulling to a hard stop, Starsky turned off the car and dropped his hands into his lap. Shoulders slumped forward, he felt his heart beating erratically. He reached up with one hand, rubbing the back of it along his chin, wiping off the blood slowly dripping from a cut on his lip. He looked down in surprise, uncertain how it got there.

Hutch, looking at the trembling hands in Starsky's lap, reached over to squeeze his shoulder. "Nice save, buddy."

Silence was his only response. Hutch's fingers tightened again on his partner's shoulder. "C'mon, we've got a two-eleven to take care of."

Starsky looked up in surprise, finding only concerned eyes watching him. He nodded and breathed a sigh of relief. Reaching for the door handles, they exited at the same time.



Two hours later, sitting at their desks in the squadroom, Hutch studied the brunet sitting across from him. Starsky was still pale and had been uncharacteristically quiet since returning from Shoreline Bank. It had been a bust--literally. With further investigation, the officers who had first arrived on the site discovered it had all been a false alarm. Seeing that Starsky needed more time to pull himself together, Hutch had taken charge at the scene. And now he wanted to find the person who had pulled the alarm. He wanted to wring the person's neck...to shove them up

against the wall and scream in their face about the stupidity of their action and how it had nearly cost people their lives. Most importantly, his partner's—his best friend's—life.

But for now, he would settle for making sure Starsky was handling everything okay. Sure, he teased his partner about how he drove, but Starsky was the best driver he knew—the only driver he'd trust his life with under those circumstances. But, he knew, even though they had miraculously missed a crash, his partner was hurting for some reason, and it was his job to look out for him. Tomorrow he'd rant about his driving again.

“You wanna grab a beer and a burger at Huggy's when we get off duty?” Hutch nonchalantly asked, reaching to pull out the finished report from his typewriter.

The only response he received was a shrug.

“I'm hungry now...” Hutch pressed. He wanted to know what was bugging Starsky, but he also knew his partner, and that meant he'd find out when Starsky was ready to tell him--and not a minute sooner. “We didn't get much lunch and I'm starving. Good thing we only have an hour more.”

“Don't wanna...” came the response from the brunet, now hunched over, doodling on the paper in front of him.

“Don't wanna what?” Hutch asked, fully aware of the answer to come.

“Don't wanna go. I'm beat. I just want to go home.”

“Kay, I'll pick up some beer and burgers and meet you at your place.” He wasn't going to let this drop so easily. “You've got to eat something.”

Another shrug. “Suit yourself.”

Those were the last words Starsky said before they called it quits.

It was obvious to Hutch that his partner wasn't willing to share what was bugging him. At least, not yet.



Starsky sank into the cushions of his couch and, after sipping his beer, breathed a sigh of relief. He was alone for a few minutes. Alone with his thoughts. Alone with his fears.

It felt like everything was jumbled in his head—the near accident of today, the near fatal one of the past. He needed to sort it out. Today Hutch had forgiven, but in the past...the agonizing memories of waking up in the hospital—unsure of what had happened, discovering his partner was suffering from amnesia and having to deal with the guilt—flooded his mind. Back then, he

had relived painful memories, hoping to bring his partner back to him, only to learn of Hutch's trick. Now, he was reliving it all over again. Of one thing he was certain. One day his stupid driving was going to cost them their lives. **I couldn't stand it, Hutch, if it was my fault. I couldn't live with killing you.**

At the sound of the doorknob turning, Starsky knew he'd run out of time. He ran his fingers through his hair and braced himself for the inevitable questions. Resignedly, he pushed himself up from the chair and headed to the door.

"Here." Hutch unceremoniously dumped the bag with burgers into Starsky's hands and headed to the refrigerator. "I'll put these in to chill. Can you believe they didn't have any cold?"

Starsky headed back to the couch, opening the bag to look inside. The smell of the burgers filled his nostrils, and he was surprised when his stomach growled in response.

"I grabbed you a double order of fries, though Cooks' fries are too greasy. That grease'll be sitting in your stomach all night; you'll get indigestion and then you'll have nightmares." Hutch shut the refrigerator and popped the bottle cap off his beer. "You need something healthier, like..."

"Forget it. I ain't eatin' that junk you call food." Starsky reached inside the bag. "Whatdya get on my burger?"

"The usual. I didn't even have to order. It's time we found someplace else to eat. We're there way too much when they see me walking in the door and start filling the bag without me placing an order." He was pleased when the corners of Starsky's mouth twitched in amusement.

Starsky sank back down into the cushions, unwrapping his burger. "Thanks for picking 'em up. I guess I'm hungrier than I thought."

"Well, we didn't get much lunch today." Hutch reached in the bag for his burger and settled next to Starsky.

The brunet took another bite and nodded in agreement. "Tastes good." Reaching in the bag, he came out with a handful of fries.

They sat for several minutes, eating in uneasy silence. Hutch, chewing slowly, waited for the proper moment to raise the subject.

As Starsky took a swig of beer after eating a handful of fries, Hutch took a stab at it. "So, when are you going to tell me what's bugging you?"

"Nothing's buggin' me," Starsky answered sullenly.

"Sure there is. You haven't said but ten words all afternoon."

Starsky stood suddenly, tossing the bag of fries onto the table, and started pacing the room. “Hutch, there’s nothing wrong.”

“That so? Then, why are you pacing?”

“I’m not,” Starsky replied, and then stopped as he realized his partner was right. He moved back to the couch and slumped down again.

“Starsk, something has bothered you since we responded to that two-eleven. Is it what almost happened at the intersection? You did a great job avoiding an accident. I couldn’t—”

You know me too well, buddy. I don’t know how you do it, but you always seem to zero in on what’s wrong. “Look, Hutch, I’m just tired. I’ll get some sleep and everything—”

“Won’t be okay. You’re not dealing with it. You’re shoving it aside, hoping it will go away.” Softening his tone, Hutch added, “Talk to me.”

Two sets of eyes met. One set looked down, brows furrowed in uncertainty.

“You ever have a flashback?”

“A flashback? You mean like reliving something?”

“Yeah. Today, when we were responding to the call, I had one of those.”

Hutch nodded in encouragement. His partner was talking and he didn’t want to lose him. “What did you remember?”

“When we were going through the intersection and that truck swerved at us...” Starsky closed his eyes, remembering. “...all I could see was us headed toward a construction site, me unable to stop the car from hitting...you thrown around...”

Unbeknownst to the brunet, his partner had risen from the couch. He walked over and lightly touched Starsky’s arm. Startled, Starsky looked at the ground, avoiding eye contact. “That day, when I looked at that empty hospital bed, I thought you were dead.”

“I wasn’t.”

“I thought I killed you.”

“Starsky, the accident couldn’t have been avoided. You tried everything. You missed cars and several pedestrians. People could have been killed, but they weren’t.”

“But you wanted me to slow down.”

“Yeah, I did and you didn’t listen. I didn’t think catching those two felons was important enough for us to lose our lives, that’s why I faked the amnesia.” Hutch had the graciousness to look embarrassed. He hadn’t meant for his trick to go on as long as it had, but once he’d gotten started it was harder to stop than he’d thought it would be. He’d only wanted to teach Starsky a lesson. “What’s brought this up?”

“I told ya. When that truck was coming at us today, it was like I was living it all over again, only in slow motion. I saw you hitting the windshield, then, at the hospital when you came in, your head bandaged, your neck in a brace, arm in a sling, no memory...all because of me.”

“Starsky, I’m sorry. I’m really sorry I pulled that trick on you. But everything turned out all right. I didn’t know it was still bothering you. It’s been almost a year.”

Starsky shook his head and returned to the couch. “I haven’t thought about it until today.”

Hutch stopped behind him and pressed Starsky’s shoulder. “Flashbacks aren’t unusual, buddy. They’re just a matter of everything coming together at the right time to remind you of something that happened in the past. They can be scary, but they’re not the real thing.”

Starsky rested his head on the back of the couch, relaxed by Hutch’s touch. “I thought I was going to kill you today.” Swallowing hard, Starsky added, “And I was scared.”

Knowing how hard it was for Starsky to admit that, Hutch massaged his partner’s shoulder, loosening the knot he felt there. “I never thought that. In fact, it was pretty amazing how you managed to control that piece of junk today.”

Starsky straightened up and turned to look at him, protesting, “Piece of junk?!”

A smile crossed Hutch’s face. “Yeah, piece of junk.” Then, moving to sit down on the table in front of his partner, he added seriously, “The flashback happened and there may be more; you can’t control that. But you did what you had to today, just like you did a year ago. Don’t let it stop you from doing the job you have to do.”

Starsky sighed, a little of the tension leaving his body. “Thanks. I just couldn’t stand the thought of you being hurt, possibly killed.”

Hutch acknowledged his response with a warm grin, and then, frowning, reached beneath him and pulled out the greasy bag of fries he suddenly realized he was sitting on. Holding them up, he glowered at his partner. “Starsk?”

Starsky’s face lit up, and he raised his hands in protest. “Hey, it ain’t my fault, you sat down without looking. You ever hear of that law of physics, Hutch?”

Hutch’s scowl deepened. “What law of physics?”

“The one that says two objects can’t occupy the same space.” Laughing, Starsky ducked, as the bag flew over his head, scattering fries across the floor.

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