

Memories Kept Alive

By Linda B.

*In every heart there is a vision of a simple life,
Another place, another time,
In each of us there are some memories that we keep alive.*

~ Alex Call
“A Simple Life”

Pulling up in front of the apartment, Hutch slowed his brown LTD to a stop. After turning off the ignition and pulling out the key, he let his hands fall to his lap, unsure he was doing the right thing. Studying the darkened window of his partner’s apartment, Hutch hesitated. Starsky was home—the Torino was parked in front—but he didn’t want company. He’d made that perfectly clear when they’d left the squad room.

“Wanna grab a beer at Huggy’s?” Hutch had inquired of his silent partner, as he’d placed the last of their case files in the cabinet. Receiving no response, he watched as Starsky repeatedly bounced his pencil top on the desk as he stared at the wall, seeing something, seeing nothing. Quietly shutting the cabinet, Hutch walked toward his desk and grabbed his jacket off the back of his chair. He stopped behind Starsky, placing his hand gently on his partner’s left shoulder, hoping not to surprise him.

It didn’t work. Starsky, startled out of his reverie, stood abruptly, shrugging off the hand and the contact. Tired, drawn eyes looked at Hutch, embarrassed. “You say somethin’?”

“I asked if you wanted to grab a beer at Huggy’s.” Hutch waited expectantly. For reasons all his own, Starsky had been shutting him out the last few days. His partner had become withdrawn and distant, his usual exuberance for life missing. As hard as Hutch tried, he’d been unable to figure out the cause. He’d constantly find Starsky staring off into space, lost in his own thoughts. And it was obvious from his haggard appearance that Starsky wasn’t sleeping well, either. He was becoming increasingly short-tempered, his good humor gone. All the usual joking and carrying on which irritated Hutch, but which he’d come to expect and love, had disappeared. Any time he’d tried to question Starsky, his partner conveniently changed the topic. It was obvious not only to him but to everyone in the squad room that something was bothering Starsky. Even Minnie’s teasing hadn’t brought a smile to the brunet’s face, let alone his usual flirting.

Earlier in the day, when they'd been on their way out of Captain Dobby's office after discussing evidence in an upcoming murder trial, Dobby had called him back on a pretext. "What's wrong with your partner?"

"Not sure, Cap'n. Musta got up on the wrong side of the bed."

"Well, find out," Dobby had ordered, tossing a case file down on his desk, "and see that he gets up on the right side tomorrow."

Hutch had smiled at the well-meaning order. But he still hadn't figured out how to do that and was hoping a stop at Huggy's would do the trick. It was Friday night and, if need be, he had all weekend to get to the bottom of the problem and help his partner resolve it.

"Nah. I'm tired." Starsky reached for his blue parka, avoiding Hutch's eyes.

"Let's get a bite to eat, then," Hutch pressed, hopeful, but he knew he was pushing and if there was one thing his partner hated, it was being pushed.

"I said no!" Angrily grabbing his coat, Starsky ignored the curious stares of the three detectives still working at their desks. He pulled the door to the hallway open and, holding it with his foot, turned back. Eyes briefly meeting, Starsky added softly, "I'll see ya tomorrow."

Through the glass, Hutch watched his partner storm down the hall away from him. The first real sign of life in two days and it had been anger. Maybe that was good. At least it was something he could deal with. Starsky wasn't angry with him; he'd told Hutch as much during one of his attempts to draw out what was wrong, and Hutch had no reason to doubt him. It was one of the few times Starsky had looked him in the eyes. No, Starsky was angry with himself and it was eating away at him. And at his sleep, his thoughts, and, eventually, his ability to do the job. Hutch sighed and slowly pulled the door open. Feeling uncharacteristically alone, he walked down the hall.

The drawn shades of Starsky's apartment reflected his sinking mood over the last several days. His own mood was beginning to match it, Hutch thought, recognizing that his frustration at not being able to get his partner to talk was starting to show. He was also getting short and irritated with everyone. Unable to figure out what was wrong, he had cajoled and teased to no avail. So far, his partner had succeeded in shutting him out. Not anymore...

Hutch reached for the six-pack lying on the seat next to him. Counting on beer to loosen Starsky's tongue, he'd stopped at the Fairway Liquor store on his way over, but now he wondered how much beer would do the trick. Turning the handle of the car door, he slowly opened it and stepped out.

Once on the porch, Hutch reached for his spare key. Starsky would undoubtedly ignore his knock. He slowly opened the door, uncertain what he'd find on the other side.

Darkness filled the room except for the TV screen flashing in the bedroom. Hutch waited for his eyes to adjust before moving further. Drawn to the flashing lights of the TV, Hutch headed for the bedroom, only to be stopped by Starsky's voice softly coming from the couch to his right.

"Said I wanna be alone."

Wavering for a second, Hutch turned toward the voice. *Not if I have my way.* Barely making out Starsky sitting on the floor in front of the couch, Hutch held up his six-pack as a means of explanation. "Thought you might need some beer."

Starsky responded sarcastically, "Just couldn't stay away, could ya? We bought beer yesterday. Remember?"

Walking toward the shadowy figure, Hutch shrugged. "Thought you might need more."

Starsky chuckled humorlessly as he raised an almost empty bottle to his lips and shrugged back. "Could be."

So far, so good. He hasn't kicked me out. Walking into the kitchen and placing the six-pack in the refrigerator, Hutch squinted and turned away as the light momentarily blinded him. Shutting the door, he waited for his eyes to adjust before studying the slumped shoulders of his partner. It could be a long night, but it wouldn't be their first or their last. The bedroom TV's light reflected back into the room, eerily illuminating Starsky's face. Hutch walked softly toward the end of the couch and reached for the table lamp. Turning it one notch, he blinked as it dimly lit the room. Seeing Starsky turn away from the light's intrusion, he was relieved when he didn't hear a demand to turn it off. He needed to see Starsky—his body language, his eyes.

Starsky was leaning back against the couch, his right leg bent, his left extended, the floor surrounding him littered with photos. Too far away and in the dim light, Hutch couldn't see who was in the photos. Curious, he wondered if they were connected to what was bothering Starsky. "Helps to have some light if you want to look at pictures," he observed, inching his way closer to the couch, closer to Starsky.

"Done lookin'," came the tired reply. Taking another sip of beer, Starsky ran his right hand through his curls.

Seeing Starsky's body begin to tense, Hutch carefully sat down on the couch. Feigning nonchalance, he leaned back, resting his arm on the back of the sofa. It was impossible to see Starsky's face seated this way, but he didn't want to risk angering his partner. He'd take it one step at a time.

After several minutes of silence, Hutch watched Starsky raise the bottle to his lips for another swallow and asked, "Mind if I have one?"

Starsky shrugged and, leaning awkwardly across the floor, reached for a bottle. He held it out, still avoiding Hutch's eyes.

Well, he isn't drunk. There was only one empty on the floor nearby. Taking the beer, Hutch was surprised at the coldness of Starsky's fingers. Quickly glancing around, he noticed the open window, its curtains blowing in the cool night breeze. That was one thing he could take care of immediately. Rising cautiously, Hutch took the few steps over to the window and carefully pushed it closed. He felt like a tightrope walker, afraid any sudden noise or movement would upset the fragile balance. After glancing at Starsky, who hadn't moved, he wandered into the bedroom and flipped off the TV. Its irritating flicker gone, Hutch returned to the couch and sat down, a few inches closer. The intrusion into Starsky's space didn't seem to bother the other man this time. Eyes closed, Starsky sat with his head leaning back against the couch, the shadows under his eyes distinct despite the dim light.

Hutch looked down, trying to see the pictures scattered about, trying to find a clue to what was wrong. The one nearest his left foot was a picture of Terry and him. Starsky had taken it one day at the schoolyard after basketball practice. It had been a hot day and Starsky had caught the two of them standing near the picnic table. Terry had suddenly stepped up on the bench and poured a glass of water over Hutch's head, claiming it would cool him off. Starsky's camera had caught Terry's laughter—and his partner's shock—perfectly. A silly moment captured in time. Hutch chuckled, silently remembering. Starsky hadn't opened his eyes, and Hutch, certain he'd fallen asleep, reached for the picture.

"Terry loved you, ya know," Starsky said softly, almost too soft for Hutch to hear.

"I know. I loved her, too," Hutch replied gently. Looking around the floor, he realized every picture had Terry in it—Terry alone, Terry and the kids, Terry and Starsky, Terry and him, all three of them together. Starsky had captured Terry in every way possible—smiling, hugging, laughing and crying.

It had been almost a year since Prudholm had arranged for Terry's murder. Prudholm's intent had been to hurt Starsky, to get back at him for the loss of his own son. While Starsky had somehow managed to resist killing him, the one thing Prudholm desired, Prudholm had managed to almost destroy Starsky with Terry's death. It had been a long, hard year and it was only in the last several months that the Starsky Hutch remembered had finally returned. He'd finally begun to date again, reluctantly at first, but dating nonetheless. They hadn't expected anything to turn serious, but even a date was a giant step on Starsky's part.

Wondering what had triggered Starsky's sudden backslide, Hutch searched his memory. Terry's birthday wasn't for two months—no, maybe six weeks at the most. Last year's birthday had been extremely difficult for Starsky since it had followed Terry's burial so closely. Starsky had been drunk for three days—the day before, the day of, and the day after—and he'd suffered for days afterwards, but he...they...had gotten through it. Hutch had hoped that this year's birthday would be easier on his partner. Maybe he'd been wrong.

“It’s Terry, isn’t it, Starsk?” Hutch probed carefully. Starsky’s continued silence confirmed his suspicions. Reaching down, he picked up several of the pictures strewn about. “Wanna talk about it, buddy?”

“Nothin’ to talk about,” came the tired reply. “She’s gone and I killed her.”

Hutch closed his eyes tightly and stifled a sigh. They’d been over that many times, particularly right after Terry’s death. Hutch had thought Starsky had finally come to terms with it, had finally let go of the guilt. Again, maybe he’d been wrong.

“Know what today is?” Starsky asked, watching Hutch through half-opened eyes.

“Thursday?” Hutch offered, trying to lighten the tension in the air.

Starsky chuckled softly and raised his beer in toast. “Got me there.” Looking away, he drank the last swallow and tossed the bottle on the floor, watching it roll away.

Even through the darkness, Hutch could read the misery in Starsky’s face, in his voice. “No. What’s special about today?”

Reaching for another bottle, Starsky swallowed hard several times before replying. “A year ago...today...she was shot. A year ago, our...my...world...” Starsky faltered, the words stopped by his torment.

Hutch reached out and gently squeezed Starsky’s right shoulder, urging him to continue, despite the sorrow.

Pulling up both his legs, Starsky wrapped his arms around his knees and buried his head in them. Voice filled with anguish, he continued, “I can’t stop thinkin’ about it. I keep seeing it over and over...” Hearing the smallest of sobs escape before Starsky started again, Hutch tightened his hold. “...Walkin’ in the liquor store and seeing Terry lyin’ there, a bullet in her head. I keep seein’ her in the hospital, in the coffin. Can’t get it out of my head, Hutch. I keep seein’ her dyin’ over and over. I see her in my dreams. I see her when I’m awake...”

Heart aching for his partner, Hutch sank down on the floor next to Starsky. Wrapping his arm around him, he pulled him close. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“Couldn’t. You wanted me to be okay...”

“Starsk,” Hutch interrupted sadly, his heart sinking as Starsky hit on the truth, “you’re never going to be ‘okay’ with what happened, but Terry would want you to go on living. Not drowning in ugly memories.”

“Room 612.”

Confused, Hutch stopped, searching his memory for a reference. Unable to make any connection, he finally asked, “What?”

“That was her room in the hospital. Can’t forget it. Ya know how long I stood there, my hand on the doorknob, staring at that number, afraid to go in....?”

“Starsk...”

“Every time you end up in the hospital, Hutch, I’m scared you’ll end up on the sixth floor...in that room.”

Eyes closed, Hutch leaned his head back. Swallowing hard, he took a breath and held it. Starsky had been right. He’d wanted Starsky to be strong enough to be able to put it all behind him and start living again. He’d thought—no, hoped—that Starsky had. How wrong he’d been about everything....

“I’m sorry.” Hutch didn’t know what else to say. Resting his head against Starsky’s, he could feel his partner relax a little in the embrace. As Starsky settled against him, Hutch suggested, “C’mon, buddy. You need to get some sleep.” Hearing no resistance, Hutch placed his arm around Starsky’s waist and helped him up from the floor. Once he was seated on the couch, Hutch headed toward the bedroom.

“Don’t wanna sleep, Hutch.” The pain and resignation in the quiet voice stopped Hutch as he reached the door. Hand resting against the doorframe, Hutch turned, seeing Starsky slumped on the couch, mumbling to himself. “Don’t wanna remember Terry that way anymore...when I’m sleepin’, it’s all I see.”

Sighing to himself, Hutch hurried into the bedroom. There had to be a way to help his friend. Grabbing the pillow and pulling the blanket off the bed, he quickly returned to Starsky’s side and offered soothingly, “It’s okay, buddy. Just rest.”

Placing the pillow at the end of the couch, Hutch patted the top of it and watched as Starsky curled up on his right side. After pulling Starsky’s shoes off, he tucked the blanket around him. Hutch sat down on the floor in front of Starsky and leaned sideways against the couch, his left elbow resting on the blanket. “How ‘bout I tell you what I remember about Terry?”

Hearing no resistance, Hutch took a sip of his beer and reached for one of the many pictures on the floor. It was of Terry and her 'kids' in the classroom. Hutch studied it for a moment before beginning. “The Terry I remember was a beautiful person on the outside...and on the inside. She was gentle, loving, caring. Someone who accepted everyone at face value. Someone who could find the beauty in everyone.” Seeing a hint of a smile in Starsky’s eyes, Hutch reminisced, “I remember her leading Sally and the other cheerleaders.” His right fist raised in the air, demonstrating, he called out, “Hold that ball. Hold that ball.”

Encouraged by the shadow of a smile crossing Starsky's face, Hutch picked up more photos and began scanning them. "I remember she loved life. She had a big heart. She loved 'her kids' and was committed to them, always puttin' them first." Hutch paused before continuing. "She wasn't afraid of anything. Heck, I remember her even admitting she wanted to skate in a roller derby."

"She wanted me to take her on the giant slide."

"Huh?" Hutch asked, again confused. He was finding it difficult to follow Starsky's train of thought.

"Member that day you and Christine and Terry and me went to the amusement park to play miniature golf? You and Christine rode the Bumper Cars?"

"Sure. I beat you at golf as usual."

"Terry asked me to take her on the giant slide."

"Did ya?" Hutch asked in amazement, knowing that the trip to the park occurred after the shooting and that Terry would have been in no shape to go down the slide.

Starsky shook his head, remembering, and said softly, "Nah, she needed me to show her that I loved her enough to take her on that slide. But when I agreed to take her, she said I didn't need to anymore...said *she* loved *me* that much. I wanted her to live, Hutch...but I was willin' to let her die...God, it hurt so much." Wincing, Starsky squeezed his eyes shut.

Oh, buddy, that won't shut out the images, erase the memories. Unsure of how to help, Hutch reached for a new photo—a new memory. It was a photo of the two of them playing basketball. He smiled and offered hopefully. "She loved the Blond Blintz's Buffalos, and we never even won a game."

"Don't know why...had the best team," Starsky whispered.

Hutch chuckled. "No thanks to you." Seeing Starsky's closed eyes, Hutch sat silently, observing the worn out face. Bending over, he started gathering up the pictures. Starsky's voice surprised him.

"Ya know why I was sittin' in the dark?"

"You don't wanna see my ugly mug?" Hutch's attempt at a joke was lost on Starsky, who'd opened his eyes and was once again staring into space, like he had so many times in the preceding days. Trying to pull his friend back to him and away from his haunting memories, Hutch again touched Starsky's left shoulder. "Starsk?"

Starsky blinked twice before explaining. “Terry said that she’d always be here. That on some dark night when I was all alone...that I could close my eyes and she’d be there. I tried it, Hutch. I turned out the lights...”

“Starsk...”

“...but she was wrong, Hutch.” Starsky turned toward Hutch and the look of utter despair on his face turned Hutch’s heart inside out. “I couldn’t see her. Not the way I wanted to. Not the way she promised. I tried, but I couldn’t see *her*. All I could see...”

Hutch ran his hand through Starsky’s hair trying to calm the terror-stricken face. “Shhh, Starsk. Try to get some sleep or you’ll be walkin’ around like a zombie.”

Eyes widening in disbelief, Starsky stared at Hutch. “You said that then, too.”

Baffled, Hutch asked, “What are you’re talkin’ about?”

Insistent, Starsky recalled, “In the car, after Terry was taken to the hospital and you wanted me to go home and get some sleep. You said I’d be ‘walkin’ around like a zombie’.”

“Starsk, you can’t remember that.”

“I remember everything. Every minute, every detail. I’ll think I’ve forgotten...and something little, a word, brings it all back.”

Seeing the anguish on his partner’s face, Hutch was at a loss for words. No wonder Starsky’s sleep was filled with nightmares. Why hadn’t he seen it before? How had Starsky hidden it so well up until then?

“Tell me more, Hutch. Tell me more things you remember,” Starsky pleaded.

Picking up more pictures, Hutch shuffled through them, handing one to Starsky. Hutch remembered taking the picture. The four of them had been at the beach and he’d snapped the photo as Terry and Starsky walked on the beach, hand in hand, toward him. They were oblivious to everyone but themselves. “I remember she loved going to the beach. She loved the sand and the water, the wind blowing through her hair...” Pausing, Hutch searched his memory, finding it painful. “I remember she always beat you in Monopoly.”

“Hey,” Starsky protested meekly, “I’ve been studyin’ the book she gave me.”

The book. Hutch’s thoughts returned to the night two weeks after Terry’s death. The night they’d opened Terry’s gifts...her simple gifts of love. Two gifts...no, three gifts. *The book for Starsky. Ollie and Dave for me. I haven’t been doin’ too good a job watchin’ out for you, have I, Starsk?* “Prove it. I’ll play ya tomorrow.”

Starsky's dull eyes sparkled momentarily at the challenge.

Sipping from his beer, Hutch decided it was time to turn the tables. "It's your turn, Starsk."

"Whaddaya mean?"

"Well, I've been telling you things I remember about Terry. It's your turn. You tell me something that you remember about Terry, something good."

Lying back against the pillow, his left arm resting above his head, Starsky thought silently for a few minutes. "Did I ever tell you that I asked her to marry me?"

"When?"

"In the hospital. Just before we brought her home."

"I'm not surprised."

"She said no, Hutch. Said she didn't want to get married that way."

The memories just seem to keep getting harder, don't they? Feeling helpless once again, Hutch searched for a way to turn things around. "Tell me something before...before she was in the hospital."

Starsky thought a moment. "She loved to dance."

"And she'd out-dance and out-last you on the dance floor, Gordo."

"Hey," Starsky protested, faking annoyance as he searched for something else. "I ever tell you how we met?"

"Sure. In the park."

"But where in the park?"

Hutch thought back to the days when Starsky had first excitedly told him about meeting Terry. "You said you met jogging."

"Nah, I just told you that." Eyes briefly meeting Hutch's, Starsky looked embarrassed. "We really met at the carousel. I was taking photos that day and I stopped to snap the kids while they rode."

Watching Starsky's face relax, Hutch knew he was finally reminiscing about a time long before Terry's shooting—a time filled with happy memories.

“Terry was there with Sally and some of her other students. A couple had difficulty hangin’ on and looked like they might fall off. Terry had her hands full, so I jumped on to help.” Starsky smiled wistfully at the memory. “We met over dirty, sticky hands clingin’ to horses’ manes and poles.”

“How come you lied and told me you were jogging?”

Starsky weakly grinned and shrugged. “You were always naggin’ me to exercise.”

“Did you jog at all?” Hutch asked curiously. Finishing his beer, he placed the bottle on the floor and reached for another.

“I jogged to the carousel ‘cause I saw Terry on it,” Starsky offered, turning to face him. Hutch was pleased to see the first real smile he’d seen in days. Starsky was remembering the love and not the pain. “We used to go back and ride that carousel all the time...sometimes with her students, sometimes just us late at night. Terry loved all the lights and ridin’ it over and over, ‘til I thought we’d get dizzy.” Staring into the past, Starsky saw the carousel, turning round and round, heard its Wurlitzer organ playing as they were spinning. “Terry’d always pick the palomino horse with the long white mane and golden reins to ride. Said...it was the tallest horse. Said...that way she could be taller than me.”

“What’d you pick?” Hutch teased, knowing Starsky’s aversion for real horses. “The wooden bench?”

“Horse right next to her. No idea what color it was.” Starsky grinned and shook his head. “I was too busy watchin’ the beautiful girl next to me.”

Hutch laughed. “So, when you try to tell me you have experience riding a horse, that’s where you got it?” Seeing Starsky’s smiling face turn wistful again, he chose his next words carefully. “Know why you two were so good for each other?”

Starsky shook his head, staring up at the darkened ceiling.

“You and Terry are...were...still kids at heart.” Watching Starsky’s chest rise and fall with each shaky breath, Hutch suggested, “That’s the kind of memory you want to keep alive, buddy. Put the pain behind you. Don’t dwell on it. Don’t let it suck you in.” Receiving no response, Hutch urged, “Close your eyes, Starsk, and remember the fun. Remember the love. Terry’s love will always be there. She promised, remember?”

Closing his eyes, Starsky listened to his partner’s soft voice, relaxed...and slowly felt the carousel begin to move...the horses gently ascending in the air...Terry’s rising above him, the sound of her laughter filling the air...his horse rising to meet hers...her smile...her hand gently reaching out to touch his cheek.

Starsky, barely opening his eyes, afraid to lose the image, whispered in awe, “I can see her again.” His eyes sought Hutch’s, but Starsky didn’t need light to see his friend’s face. He could see it even in the dark—the soft blond hair, the light blue eyes fixed on him expectantly, the concern and the love mirrored in every corner of his face. Terry had been right in entrusting Ollie and him to Hutch. She knew a best friend when she saw one.

Suddenly feeling overwhelmingly tired, Starsky yawned and turned on his side, burrowing into the pillow and covers. Hutch reached over to ruffle Starsky’s curls. If he hadn’t been leaning over, he would have missed the barely whispered words, “Thank you.”

Straightening up, Hutch watched Starsky fall asleep, and smiled. “It’s okay, buddy. That’s what best friends are for.”

The End