

More Questions Than Answers

by Linda B.

The blonde hurried passed the stewardess, grimly acknowledging the usual, “Have a nice day.” She didn’t have time to be polite. The plane was over an hour late and she was anxious to get on her way. She pushed past other passengers on the walkway, but slowed her pace as she neared the door leading into the terminal. It was filled with people, some stood around, most filled the seats, but all waited impatiently for the announcement of their flight. She nervously scanned the crowd but continued moving. The crowded terminal provided a sense of safety.

Joining the flow, she blended in. She followed the baggage claim signs, knowing the exit and waiting cabs would be there. Spotting the restroom, she searched for a phone. Past experience told her one would be nearby. Relief flowed through her when she spotted a pay phone on the left side of the hallway. It wasn’t easy to cut across the masses coming toward her, but she determinedly weaved between the people. At the phone booth, she yanked out the directory and frantically searched through it, all the while glancing anxiously at the crowd that passed in both directions. She recognized no one. Dropping some coins into the slots, she balanced the receiver between her ear and chin. Then she reached into her purse and pulled out a pencil and piece of paper. She hurriedly scribbled down a number. She slipped the paper and pencil into her pocket, shoved the phone book back onto its shelf, and with a quick glimpse around, blended back into the stream of people.

Riding the escalator down to the baggage claim area, she repeatedly ran her hand through her shoulder-length hair and took a deep breath. To any passerby she was an attractive blonde in her late twenties, wearing jeans, a pink cotton turtleneck and a black leather jacket. But closer scrutiny would reveal the gauntness of her cheeks, bloodshot and puffy eyes, and the nervous biting of her lower lip. Her eyes continually searched the crowd as she headed toward the exit. As the automatic doors opened, she began to wave her arms. The driver in the yellow cab at the front of the line pulled up to meet her.



“Frank?”

“Yes, boss.” Frank Simons sat up. He’d planned to lounge by the pool all afternoon, but knew his plans would be changed when he heard the voice at the other end.

“There’s something I need you to do for me.”

“What’s that?”

Victor Patella set the morning edition of *The Detroit Free Press* down on his mahogany desk and leaned back in his leather chair. He swiveled toward the window of his Grosse Point mansion,

the morning dew still visible. He could see his son, Anthony, riding around in the backyard on his new bike—his birthday bike. “I need you to track a young lady that’s headed to California. I caught her husband stealing from me. She left town suddenly and I believe she took some important documents with her. I need you to retrieve them. They belong to me, and I want them back—anyway you can get them.”



Hutch pushed on the squadroom door, holding it open for his partner. Starsky’s hands were filled with two cups of coffee and the bag containing his morning donut.

“I want a rematch tonight,” Starsky declared.

“Why? You lost fair and square.”

“I don’t call it fair and square when you arrange for some red-headed bombshell to come blow in my ear as I throw the winning dart.” Starsky set one coffee cup down and handed the other to his partner.

Hutch took the proffered cup and reached for the phone messages on his desk, while he struggled to hide the grin that threatened to break out at any moment.

“Huh, it’s not my fault you’re so easily distracted.”

Before Starsky could sputter a response, the office door opened and Captain DobeY approached them, cup in hand.

“I need to see you two in my office.”

“Cap’n, do you think it’s fair—?”

“Forget it, Starsky, you’re not dragging me into the middle of one of your arguments. You two are old enough to settle your own disputes.” DobeY filled his coffee cup from the half-empty pot and frowned as he took a sip.

“But, Cap’n—”

“Don’t ‘but Cap’n’ me, just get in here.” DobeY held the door open, waiting for his detectives to enter his office.

As Starsky and Hutch settled in the two seats directly in front of his desk, DobeY could hear Starsky mumbling while Hutch ignored his partner.

“How are you coming on the Anderson trial?”

“We meet with the DA tomorrow,” Hutch said. “He’s getting ready for the pre-trial motions.” They had finally managed to capture Leon Anderson in the commitment of a bank robbery, and he was currently sitting in the county jail. He was a suspect in not only two other bank robberies, but in the death of two bank tellers. Until now, they had been unable to place him at the scene. This time, there was no doubt who was responsible, and they were intent on seeing he remained behind bars.

“Good, let’s put him away this time.” Dobey nodded his approval and reached to pick up the ringing phone on his desk. “Captain Dobey here.”

Dobey listened intently and then grimly hung up the phone. He looked at the two detectives before ordering, “You two need to head over to the abandoned Powers Warehouse on Division. There’s been a fire.”

“A fire, Cap’n? We’re detectives not firemen,” Starsky pointed out.

“Don’t tell me the obvious, Starsky. They want help in identifying the dead body inside, and I’m assigning you two.”

Hutch, eyebrow raised, glanced at Starsky. “Homicide?”

Dobey shuffled the papers on his desk and patted his suit coat pocket. “Possibly. The victim was beaten and the fire looks suspicious, probably started to cover the fact there was a body inside. Unfortunately for the perpetrators, a security guard from the warehouse across the street smelled smoke and called the fire department before it was fully engulfed.”

“Whatcha looking for, Cap’n?” Starsky asked, leaning forward to aid in the search.

“A pen,” Dobey responded brusquely as he patted the papers on his desk.

Starsky reached for the black and gold pen stuck in the pen and pencil holder sitting on the corner of Dobey’s desk and asked, “Will this do?”

Dobey grabbed the pen from Starsky’s hand and, after mumbling a barely audible “Thank you,” ordered, “Get out of here. They’re waiting for you at the warehouse.”

Starsky winked at Hutch as the two rose from their chairs and exited through the door into the hallway. Dobey was already busy signing his name to the reports stacked high on his desk.



By the time Starsky and Hutch arrived behind the rusty metal security gate at the warehouse, the coroner’s van was already there. They stepped over the hoses spraying water on a reluctant, smoldering pile of crates at the back of the yard. Acknowledging several of the firemen as they worked, they turned toward a partially open door that led into an office. Starsky grabbed hold,

pulling it fully open to let Hutch pass through. Hanging on a little longer than he intended, he yelped at the heat the metal door still generated.

“You okay?” Hutch asked concerned.

“Sure. You’d think I’d’ve learned by now,” Starsky responded, blowing on his fingers.

“Good thing you became a cop and not a fireman.”

Starsky frowned as they entered the charred office and looked around. A fireman, still dressed in full gear, pointed them toward the center of the warehouse.

Inside, they spotted several men located at the far end. The group stood near a body lying on the cement floor, while someone shot photos of it and the surrounding area.

“Hey there, Starsky, Hutchinson.” George Taylor, the county coroner, waved them over. “I need to get the victim loaded up. I’ve got another pick-up to make. Looks like a busy day. Can you guys take a look at her so I can get on my way?”

“Her?” Hutch asked. “We assumed it was a male.”

Taylor shook his head. “Nope, blonde female, probably late twenties. Even with the beating she took, you can tell she was a pretty girl. Too bad.”

Starsky moved over to the body and knelt down. He gently brushed away some strands of blonde hair that had fallen across the victim’s face. His eyes moved up and down the prone body. Her right arm was bent in an unnatural position, her face bruised and swollen. She was dressed in jeans and wore a black leather jacket.

“Any ID?” Hutch turned to question the coroner.

Taylor shook his head. “I don’t think so, but ask Brown. He was the first to arrive on the scene, and he’s been searching the area.”

Hutch scanned the warehouse for Officer Joe Brown and saw him in the far left corner, talking to one of the fireman.

“Seen enough?” Taylor asked.

Hutch nodded. He walked toward Brown, leaving Starsky to finish his examination of the body.

“Joe?”

Officer Brown turned to see Hutch coming toward him, and took a few steps forward to meet him. “Detective Hutchinson, good to see you and Detective Starsky.”

“Any idea who the victim is? ID? A purse?”

Joe Brown shook his head and shrugged. “I haven’t found anything yet, but we haven’t had time to search the entire warehouse. Fire department still hasn’t given the go ahead, said it’s not safe enough; they want to confirm the fire is out first.”

Starsky walked over to join them, and Hutch asked, “You find out anything?”

Starsky looked back at the body being wheeled out of the building, and shook his head. “Doesn’t look like there are many leads. How about you?”

Hutch shook his head. “Nothin’ here.”

“The coroner’s going to examine the body and let us know time and cause of death. You ready to go?” Hutch nodded and Starsky turned toward Officer Brown. “Joe, can you finish the investigation here? We’re going to find out who owns this dump and start from that angle. Until we can identify Jane Doe, we’ve got more questions than answers.”

“Sure, not a problem.”

Starsky and Hutch started for the door of the office. They pulled up short when Brown called out, “Oh, I forgot to show you something.” Brown turned, evidence bag in hand. “We found this wadded up piece of paper and a pencil in her coat pocket. Thought you might be interested.”

Starsky reached for the clear bag and looked at the torn, crumpled piece of paper inside. He looked again, eyes widening in recognition.

“What is it, Starsk?” Hutch asked, moving next to his partner.

Starsky handed Hutch the bag and waited for his reaction.



Hutch hastily shoved the bag back into Brown’s hands and rushed through the office to the outside with Starsky close on his heels. They were too late; the coroner’s wagon was already pulling out of the lot.

“Where did Joe say he got that piece of paper from?” Hutch asked, pulling up short, breathing heavily as he watched the back of the wagon travel down the street away from them.

“Her coat pocket.”

“Why would a piece of paper with my phone number be in her pocket?” Hutch asked. “I didn’t recognize her. Did you?”

Starsky shook his head. “But she was beaten almost beyond recognition. Maybe we’ll know more after Taylor takes a look at her. We’ll visit the coroner later this afternoon, get another look, maybe by then they’ll have ID’d her.”



A search of the county records revealed that the warehouse was the property of Frederick Powers, and several years of property taxes remained outstanding. Starsky stopped the Torino in front of an old redbrick office building and looked up the façade. “Records said we’d find Powers’ office on the fifth floor.

They exited the car and, once inside, stopped briefly at the office directory displayed on the wall, and found Frederick Powers listed for room 520. Starsky moved toward the elevator, only to pull up short. “Can you believe it? It says it’s out of order. That means we’ve got to walk up,” Starsky griped.

Hutch walked down the hallway and, spotting the stairway, motioned for Starsky to follow him. Starsky reluctantly followed his partner, frowning all the way.

Hutch reached the fifth floor landing first. “Looks like the office is this way.” Hutch pointed to the left and headed down the hallway. He stopped at a doorway. Etched in the glass in cracked black and gold lettering was the number 520.

“Hey, Starsk, says here he’s an insurance salesman.”

Starsky moved closer. “What kind?”

“Auto.”

“Maybe he can save me some bucks on the Torino.”

“I wouldn’t bet on it. He takes one look at your record and you’ll be paying double.”

“Hey, those were all in the line of duty,” Starsky protested as he turned the doorknob.

A man in his late thirties, wearing a stained, wrinkled brown suit, sat behind the gray metal desk talking on the phone. He motioned the two men inside.

“Sure, Mabel, I’m gonna be home late, but I’ll pick up the sauerkraut for the hot dogs on the way. Gotta go; two clients just walked in the door.” He hung up the phone and pushed up his black-rimmed glasses. “What can I do for you, gentlemen? Car insurance? No...you two look more like the motorcycle type.”

Starsky reached into his pocket and pulled out his credentials. “Detective Starsky...and this is Detective Hutchinson. You Frederick Powers?”

“Fraid so. What can I do for you?”

“We need to ask you some questions.”

“Why? Am I behind on some parking tickets?” Powers chuckled nervously and fiddled with his pencil, bouncing it on his desk.

Starsky glanced around the tiny office, bookshelves and desk overflowing with open binders and loose papers. “Not that we know of. We want to know about the Powers Warehouse.”

“What about it?”

“You own it?” Hutch asked.

“I guess so.”

“What do you mean, you ‘guess so’? Don’t you know?”

“I inherited it a few years ago from my uncle. What about it?”

“Did you know there was a fire there today?”

The expression that crossed Powers’ face clearly indicated he was unaware of what had transpired. “Did it burn to the ground?”

“Nope.” Starsky sat down on one of the two chairs and placed his feet on the desk.

“Too bad. It’s worthless. I haven’t been able to rent or sell it, and all it does is drain more and more money out of me for taxes. So what do you want from me?” Powers sat back in his chair, nervously straightening his tie.

“Information.” Hutch walked around the room. He glanced at the pictures on the wall and stopped to straighten one. “Who’s been using the building?”

“No one. Like I told you, it’s been vacant for years.”

“Somebody’s been there. A dead body was found inside.”

“What?!” Powers half-rose from his chair. “Who was it?”

“Thought maybe you knew,” Starsky said.

“I have no idea. Have you identified him yet?”

“It was a her.” Starsky watched the man’s face for any subtle change, any indication he was lying.

“A woman?” Powers pulled out a handkerchief and wiped his forehead before sinking back into his chair. “I don’t know who it could be. I know nothing. Honest.”

Hutch glanced at his partner. Starsky removed his feet from the desk and stood up. “We’ll be back as soon as we complete the identification. Maybe then you’ll be able to tell us something.”

Powers nodded, but looked dazed as his two visitors headed to the door. He looked at Hutch and said, “Thank you, Detective Starsky, Detective Hutchinson.”

“I’m Hutchinson, he’s Starsky,” Hutch pointed out, but Powers had returned to shifting through papers on his desk.



Starsky and Hutch walked down the long corridor leading to the coroner’s office, both silently hoping the autopsy was finished and that George Taylor had been able to ID the body. As Hutch pushed open the door, Starsky touched Hutch on the back, offering support. “Maybe he’ll have some answers by now.”

Hutch nodded. The fact that Starsky had once again read his mind made him smile. “Let’s hope so.”

As many times as they visited the morgue in the course of their job, it still left them feeling unsettled. Long ago they had reached a mutual agreement to get whatever information they needed and leave as quickly as possible.

George Taylor looked up from his paperwork as they entered. “Howdy.”

“Hey, George,” Hutch acknowledged the coroner, thankful he was in his office. “So who’s our Jane Doe?”

“Sorry, Hutch.” George shook his head. “I haven’t been able to ID her yet. Doesn’t look like anyone local. We sent her prints to the FBI lab to see if they could find a match. Could take a few days.”

“What was the cause of death?”

“A broken neck. The body suffered multiple contusions and abrasions, particularly around the head.”

“So the fire isn’t what killed her?”

George shook his head. “No, there was smoke in her lungs, but not enough to have been the cause. Looks like she died at the warehouse, but not from the fire. I’ve got more to do, but I can have the autopsy report to you by morning. That okay?”

“Sure,” Hutch answered.

“We’d like to take a closer look at the body, if you don’t mind.” Starsky’s eyes sought confirmation. With a slight nod, Hutch agreed.

“Sure, follow me.” George stood up and headed to a side door leading directly into the morgue.



Starsky looked at Hutch as he took a sip of beer. His partner had been silent ever since they had left the morgue and stopped at Huggy’s. Any thought of lunch was unsettling after viewing the body, but he’d hoped a few beers might do the trick and loosen Hutch up enough to do some talking. “Still no idea, huh?”

Hutch sat back in the booth and sighed. “No. Yet there was something vaguely familiar about her. The bruising and swelling on her face distorted everything. I keep seeing her face.”

“It’ll come to you. Probably when you least expect it.”

“Well, look what the cat dragged in,” Huggy greeted his two friends. “You’re earlier than normal. What? No creeps roamin’ the streets today?”

“Where have you been?” Starsky asked and slid to the end of the booth to make room for their friend.

“Took a run to the bank. Can I get ya another beer?”

“We’re fine.”

“Huggy, you hear anything on the street about a girl, blonde, late twenties turning up dead?” Hutch asked.

“Can’t say that I have. But my ears’ll be open, and I’ll let you know anything that passes through ’em. Can I get you two some chow? Got a Starsky special hidden somewhere in the back.”

“Thanks, Hug, maybe later.” Hutch sipped the last of his beer and set the glass down. “Time to go.”

He slid out of the booth, and Starsky followed his lead.

“Next time, Hug. Thanks,” Starsky patted Huggy on the shoulder and followed Hutch to the door. “You know we’ll be back.”



Starsky had dropped him off at his apartment two hours earlier, but Hutch couldn't settle down. He'd watered his plants, picked at his guitar, even cleaned out the refrigerator, but he couldn't erase the picture of the girl in the morgue from his head. He didn't recognize her, yet there was something about her that unsettled him. As hard as he tried, he couldn't make a connection. He was sure it wasn't anyone he'd dated, but was it someone he'd met in passing? Someone who remembered him, but he had no reason to remember? Possibly interviewed for a case?

Finally, too exhausted to think, Hutch went to bed. But rest eluded him. He spent the night tossing and turning, as visions of the swollen, mutilated face drifted in and out of his dreams. Sweating and uneasy, he sat up in bed disoriented. It was ridiculous. He didn't know this girl, yet she haunted his dreams.

He reached for the phone, then pulled his hand back. There was no reason to call Starsky--other than wanting to hear his voice.

He sank back on the pillows, unwilling to wake his friend, then the ringing phone startled him.

"Hello?"

"How ya doin'?"

"Starsk, what are you doing awake at this hour?"

"You weren't asleep, were you?" Starsky remarked knowingly.

Hutch swallowed hard, remembering how close he'd come to calling, yet somewhat annoyed that Starsky knew him so well. "Get some sleep."

"I asked...how are you doing?"

"I have a feeling I should know her, yet I can't figure out from where. I keep wondering if she'd still be alive if she'd been able to make that call."

"I told you, we'll figure it out. It's only a matter of time. We don't have much to work with yet."

"I know, but it's driving me crazy."

"Well, you don't have far to go," Starsky teased. Then he added, "You want some company?"

Hutch was grateful for the offer, but just hearing Starsky's voice had made him feel better. "No, but thanks."

"Get some sleep. We'll work on it tomorrow."

"Won't be soon enough for me."

The line was silent for a moment, and then Starsky added softly, “Night.”

“Night.”

Hutch hung up the phone and settled back in bed, a light smile replacing his earlier frown. Sleep came quickly, his unsettling dreams quieted.



“Well, any more info on our Jane Doe, Minnie?” Hutch asked, as he sat down at his desk.

Minnie shook her head. “Sorry, Hutch. Nothing new the last time I checked. But if you want, I’ll check with the coroner again.”

“No, I’ll give him a call. Thanks.” Hutch reached for the full mug of coffee Starsky extended to him as he watched Minnie exit the squadroom, her hands filled with case files. “Ouch!” he exclaimed, as the coffee splashed over the side onto his hand.

“Careful,” Starsky warned, as he scanned the area for something for Hutch to dry his hand off on, “it’s hot.”

“Now you tell me,” Hutch complained good-naturedly. “I’m fine.” He wiped his hand on the glob of tissues Starsky handed him. “I should’ve been watching. Thanks.”

“So, what do you wanna do?”

“I’ll call Taylor and we’ll decide from there. If we have a name, we can start to put the pieces together. If not...”

Starsky nodded. “I’ll call the fire department and see what else they found out.”



They sat looking at each other, disheartened.

“Well?” Hutch asked.

“You go first.”

Hutch sighed. “Still no ID. He’s waiting on the reply from the FBI. Your turn.”

“Nothing new, really. Just confirmed what we suspected. The fire was intentionally set. There were three hot spots. We lucked out when someone alerted the fire department before it was fully engulfed, or all we’d’ve had was a body burnt to a crisp. Making an ID would’ve been next to impossible.”

“I don’t know that I’d call it ‘lucked’ out. Whoever she was, she certainly wasn’t lucky.”



Starsky nodded, sadness flashed momentarily across his face. “True, but at least when we find out her name, we’ll have a body to return to her family. Small consolation, but to them, probably everything.”

Hutch agreed, with a slight nod, then asked, “Something bothering you?”

For a moment Starsky was lost in thought, then he glanced back at Hutch. “I know the circumstances aren’t the same, but I remember how important it was to Ma, Nick, and me that we saw Pa before they buried him. I hope for her parents’ sake we find out who she is.”

Hutch thought how ironic it was that they both wanted to identify the girl, but apparently for two very different reasons.



The day passed with no new clues or any word on possible identification in the case. They drove the streets, handling the usual number of disturbances, muggings, and a purse snatching before being called on to assist in a robbery.

Starsky stopped the Torino next to the black-and-white already parked at the edge of the strip-mall parking lot. He and Hutch exited the car and joined two police officers crouched beside their car.

“What’s happening?” Hutch asked, pulling out his Magnum.

“Two-eleven going down inside the jewelry store. A shot was fired. We don’t know yet whether anyone inside is wounded or dead. So far, any attempt to communicate with the robber, or robbers, has been unsuccessful.”

“What do you want to do?” Hutch shot a glance at the front of the jewelry store before looking at his partner.

“Any idea if there’s a back entrance?” Starsky looked at the two officers beside them. He recognized the older one—Thompson was his name—but he didn’t know the younger blond officer. *Probably another rookie just out of the Academy*, he thought. Starsky glanced at his nametag. “Henderson, huh? You must be new.”

“I know the flower shop next door has a back entrance for deliveries,” the younger cop offered eagerly. “Makes sense the jewelry store should, too.”

Starsky nodded and looked at Hutch. With a quick nod, Hutch rose and then, crouching behind the cars for coverage, moved to the right and headed toward the back of the buildings.

“Where’s he going?” asked Henderson.

“Round back.”

“How’d you know that?” Henderson said puzzled. “He didn’t say anything.”

“Didn’t need to.” Starsky pulled off his watch and started to move away from the cars.

“Where you going, Starsky?” Thompson called out

“I’m going to get my watch fixed.”

Starsky used the cars and bushes lining the parking lot for coverage, crouching as he made his way to the sidewalk. He stopped long enough to nod at Thompson and Henderson, then stood and walked nonchalantly down the sidewalk. As he arrived at the front of the jewelry store, he stopped, shook his watch, and held it up to his ear. Looking at the front door of the store, Starsky pushed it open, holding his watch in his right hand.

He entered the shop and noticed a pale female clerk behind the counter. No one else was in sight. *Maybe they went out the back.* The thought that they might have escaped through the back exit unsettled him. Hutch was headed there, his back unprotected.

“I need a battery for my watch. It just stopped and I saw your jewelry store, so I figured you could help me,” Starsky explained. He leaned on the glass, trying to observe anyone hidden behind the counter.

When the salesclerk didn’t respond, Starsky leaned forward, “Well, can you help me, lady?”

The salesclerk licked her lips and nodded. Starsky knew the robber or robbers were hidden somewhere, but the store wasn’t very large. There weren’t a lot of choices. A small office at the end of the display counter contained several tall shelves and repair equipment. It was the most likely spot for someone to hide, assuming they were still inside. There was a door at the back of the office. The question was, did it lead to the outside, and if so, was it unlocked?

“Well, here’s the watch. While you put in a new battery, I’m going to take a look at what’s in your other counter. You’ve got some nice things. My girlfriend’s birthday is coming up, maybe I’ll find something to buy her.” Starsky handed the salesclerk his watch, then backed up and turned around to look inside the other display. As he turned, he caught site of a gun barrel—pointed at the clerk—reflected in the glass.

Whistling, Starsky leaned over and peered into the case. He studied it for several minutes, hoping Hutch had enough time to get in position. “Hey, Miss, you got some pretty nice stuff in here. You want to come over and show me this necklace? My girlfriend would really like it.”

“I-I’ll be there...in a second.” The salesclerk popped the back of the watch back on and walked uncertainly from the back of the counter and around to the other. Her eyes shifted toward the small office as she passed by. Now that she was successfully removed from the direct line of fire, Starsky turned his attention to figuring out where Hutch was.

“What can I show you?” Her voice trembled.

“I like this necklace.” Starsky pointed inside the case. “That heart. Right, the one with the diamond in the middle.”

Out of the corner of his eye, Starsky saw the back door begin to open. He whistled louder, then turned and leaned on the counter facing the office door, intent on keeping the robber’s attention in his direction and away from Hutch’s.

Starsky straightened up and walked toward the office door. “Hey, I like that clock you have on the wall over here. How much is it?”

The clerk stiffened as he neared the doorway. As he heard her sudden intake of breath, Starsky reached into his coat pocket, his hand on his gun.

“I wouldn’t do that,” Hutch said softly, his gun pushed into the man’s back. “I suggest you aim the gun down, hand it to me nice and easy, and you won’t get hurt.”

Starsky relaxed at the familiar voice.

Hutch pushed the perpetrator into the middle of the store. Starsky reached into his back pocket for his handcuffs, and walked to meet them.

“Yo-you’re a cop?” the clerk stammered.

Starsky nodded. “Yes, are you okay?”

The clerk nodded, still stunned and shaken. Starsky asked, “Can I have my watch back?”

The clerk stared at him, not fully comprehending what he’d said.

Starsky tried again. “My watch? You know, the one you replaced the battery in?”

“Oh...yes. I’ll get it for you.”

The clerk moved around the counter, headed back to the other side where she’d left the watch. Hutch pushed the thief out the front door toward Thompson and Henderson, who were headed in their direction.



Hutch called back, “Don’t forget that diamond necklace. You wouldn’t want to disappoint your girlfriend.” He laughed as Starsky rolled his eyes, and added, “And don’t forget the clock.”



“We were fortunate the salesclerk forgot to lock the back door when she dumped the trash,” Hutch said, as he added the final period to his report of the incident.

“Can you believe it? She actually made me pay for that battery,” Starsky sputtered.

Hutch took a sip of his coffee and chuckled. “But don’t forget, she gave you the clock for free.”

Starsky glared at him. “That’s only because nobody would ever buy it.”

Hutch laughed. “She was appreciative, Starsk.”

“It’s ugly. It has pieces of wood sticking out at odd angles, and it’s an ugly color. And what am I going to do with it?”

“It’s the latest color. I think they call it teal or something like that. And don’t worry, some occasion will come up for you to use it.” As a glint suddenly sparkled in Starsky’s eyes, Hutch hastened to add, “And I don’t want it showing up on my birthday, under my Christmas tree, or any other occasion you dream up. Comprene?”

Starsky slumped back in his seat, disheartened.



“Hey there, gorgeous.” Minnie entered the squadroom with an armload of case files and flirted with the brunet detective.

“Hi, Minnie.” Starsky frowned as he unconsciously rubbed his stomach. “What’s happening’?”

“Not much. Just trying to keep Captain DobeY happy. And that ain’t an easy job. What’s wrong, Starsky? Aren’t you feeling well?”

“He ate too much, Minnie,” Hutch piped in. “As usual.”

Starsky grinned and leaned back in his chair. “They don’t pay you enough, schweetheart. Keepin’ DobeY from roaring would keep five people busy.”

“Tell me about it.” Minnie headed toward DobeY’s door and then paused. “Oh, yeah, Hutch. I almost forgot.”

She shifted the files into one hand and then reached into her skirt pocket. She pulled out a yellow slip of paper and handed it to Hutch. "Took this for you, honey."

"Thanks." Hutch looked at the paper and headed to the phone. "It's from George Taylor. Maybe he has some information for us."

"Bout time."

Hutch dialed and then sat down, impatiently waiting for someone to pick up the phone. "George? Yeah, it's Ken Hutchinson. You got a name on our Jane Doe?" Hutch listened, nodding as he wrote on a piece of scrap paper. "Sure, thanks for the information."

"Well," Starsky asked impatiently. "Did he get an ID?"

"Yeah. Laura." Hutch leaned back in his chair and stared at the piece of paper. "Laura Jensen."

"So, who's Laura Jensen? And how do you know her?"

Hutch shrugged. "Beats me. The name doesn't mean a thing to me."

"He tell you anything else?" Starsky was beginning to feel like a dentist pulling teeth.

"Said she's from Detroit."

"You know anybody in Detroit I don't know?"

"You don't know anyone in Detroit."

"True. Do you?"

"George is sending over the full report as soon as he gets it, maybe there'll be something in that."

"She have a record?"

"No, apparently she was fingerprinted for her job. She worked at the post office."

"So, do we have anything?"

"Just more questions, without any answers." Hutch stood up and pushed his chair back. "Let's get out of here."



Starsky sipped his morning coffee, smiling to himself. He laid the comics he'd been reading down as Hutch entered the squadroom.

“What are you smiling about?” Hutch asked.

“Oh, nothing. How many fillings you need?”

“None. Don’t have to go back for another six months. Told you, clean living and a good diet will do it every time.”

“Since when did you start living clean?” Starsky asked as he handed Hutch a piece of paper.

“What’s this?”

“Phone number for the Detroit Post Office. I was going to make the call, but Dobby sent me over to see Compton in Robbery. I just got back.”

“Thanks.” Hutch sat down at his desk. “When I was sitting in the dentist’s chair, I kept thinking about Laura Jensen.”

“You remember something?”

“Not really, but I have a nagging feeling that I’ve heard the name before. I just can’t make a Detroit connection with anything.” Hutch picked up the phone and dialed.

A few minutes later, he hung up the phone, and Starsky leaned back in his chair expectantly.

“I talked with her manager. Laura hadn’t worked there all that long. In fact, they didn’t know she was in California, let alone, dead. She’d taken a couple days off, claiming a family emergency. According to him, she was a good worker and always at work on time. It’s odd...” Hutch stopped; he sat there bouncing his pencil on the desk.

“What’s odd?”

“The manager said her husband was found murdered a couple weeks ago.”

“Hmmm...coincidence? Or do you think that’s why she was looking for you?”

“Maybe, but it still doesn’t answer why *me*? There are cops in Detroit. She didn’t have to come to Bay City to find one.”



“Hutch, phone’s for you.”

Hutch turned from the file cabinet and nodded his thanks to the officer. He reached for the phone. “Hutchinson.”

“Hutch, George Taylor here.”

“George, you got something for us?”

“Yeah, the FBI report on Laura Jensen came in. Thought maybe you and Starsky would want to see it.”

“Sure.” Hutch was ready to move. “Let me round up my partner and we’ll be right there.”

“Kay.”

Hanging up the phone, Hutch headed out the door into the hallway, almost smacking into Starsky.

“Hey, what’s the hurry?” Starsky asked, startled.

“George called. Wants us to come to the morgue.”

“Well, what are we waiting for?” Starsky turned around and headed for the stairwell. Hutch grinned and followed him.

At the morgue, Hutch entered the coroner’s office first. “Hey, George, whatcha got for us?”

George handed the FBI report to Hutch, who scanned it. He looked at Starsky, dropping the report to his side. “I should’ve known.”

Curious, Starsky asked, “Should’ve known what? So, you do know this Laura?”

Hutch shook his head. “I can’t believe I didn’t make the connection.”

“Hutch? Would you tell me something?”

“She was born in Minnesota. Her maiden name was Mitchell.”

“Mitchell?”

“Laura Mitchell. Jack’s sister.”



“How well did you know Jack’s sister?” Starsky asked, taking a bite from his pizza. He turned sideways on Hutch’s couch and relaxed into the corner.

“Not well. She was a good friend of my sister, but they were four years younger than Jack and I, and we didn’t bother with them, at least not in high school. Besides, Jack was always telling his sister to get lost. I haven’t seen her for years. I think the last time I saw her was at Jack’s funeral, and she’d changed a lot from high school. I almost didn’t recognize her.”

“So, why would she come looking for you now?”

“Beats me. I’m guessing it has something to do with her husband’s death.” Hutch took a sip of beer. “I still can’t believe I didn’t recognize her.”

“She was beaten up pretty badly, buddy. A face that swollen and black and blue probably wouldn’t match her yearbook photo.”

“True.” Hutch stood and picked up their trash. “I guess it’s time to call her parents.”

“Do you have to?” Starsky asked, knowing full well what the answer would be.

“I can’t put it off forever. It was hard enough the first time, with Jack. Now I’m calling to tell them their only remaining child is dead.” Hutch shook his head dejectedly. He picked up the phone and sank deep into the couch. He paused a moment and then dialed.

Starsky carried their plates into the kitchen and, knowing Hutch needed a few minutes of privacy, decided to wash the few remaining dishes in the sink. Then he picked up the watering can and went out to the porch. It felt better pretending to do something.

Several minutes later, Hutch asked, “What are you doing, Starsk?” as leaned against the doorframe.

Starsky held up the watering can, embarrassed. “I was going to water the plants.”

He leaned forward and took the can from Starsky’s hands. “I’m not sure I want to subject the plants to your care. Yours don’t seem to last too long.” He laughed. “Besides, I already watered them this morning.”

“How’d it go?”

Hutch shrugged. “They took it hard. They didn’t even know Laura had left Detroit.” Hutch picked several dead leaves off the nearest plant. “I told her mom I’d bring the body home.”

Starsky nodded in understanding. “When do we leave?”



“I don’t know about you, but I’m really looking forward to that bed, hotel or not.” Starsky yawned. “It’s almost midnight, and I don’t feel like I’ve gotten a decent night’s sleep in days, let alone having to deal with the time change from one end of the country to the other.”

“I agree. I could use a good night’s sleep, too. We’ll visit the police station early in the morning.”

Starsky breathed a sigh of relief. It had been another long day. The last two had given them an unexpected opportunity to visit Hutch's folks in Duluth, but it certainly wasn't under the best of circumstances. The funeral had been draining on everyone. Starsky glanced at his partner. He was pale, and the sunglasses he wore hid little of the circles under his eyes.

Now, they were finally on the ground in Detroit and pulling up to the Howard Johnson's Motor Lodge. Their flight had been delayed more than an hour, and when they finally took off, they'd both fallen asleep immediately. Starsky was looking forward to climbing into bed, but was afraid Hutch would want to head directly to the station. He'd made a promise to the Mitchells to find the people who had murdered their daughter, and Starsky knew they'd get little sleep until that promise was fulfilled.

Hutch pushed open the door to their room and let Starsky enter.

"Why don't you grab the shower first? I'll just watch TV 'til you're done." Starsky turned on the TV and fell backwards onto the bed, his legs dangling off the end.

Ten minutes later Hutch came out, shirtless, towel wrapped around his waist, drying his hair. "Okay, Starsk, your turn."

Receiving no reply, he looked at his partner who was now curled up on his side, arms wrapped tightly around a pillow. Hutch smiled and turned off the TV. He looked in the closet and found an extra blanket. Pulling off Starsky's shoes, he covered him with the blanket.



Hutch woke at the sound of the door closing. Instinctively, he reached for his gun that lay on the nightstand and sat up.

"Hey, it's just me. I got us some coffee." Starsky held up two cups and a paper bag. "I noticed there was a donut shop on the corner when we pulled in last night, so I thought I'd get us some breakfast."

Hutch relaxed. "Why didn't you wake me and let me know you were leaving? I could've shot you."

"No, you wouldn't've," Starsk said positively. "Besides, I thought you might enjoy a few extra minutes of shut-eye. It's a nice morning."

"Thanks for the weather report. You need to shower?"

"Nope. Been there, done that."

Hutch flung his legs over the side of the bed and pulled on his jeans. "I guess we both needed the rest. It's been a rough few days."

Starsky took a sip of his coffee. “You can say that again. At least when we talk to the Detroit cops, we might sound a little coherent.”

Hutch threw a pillow at him and, as Starsky ducked, said, “That’s coherent, Starsk. And are you trying something new? When was the last time you were coherent?”

Starsky picked up the pillow and aimed it at his partner. Hutch unsuccessfully ducked as it hit him in the shoulder. “Coherent, coherent, who cares? At least what I say makes sense.”

Hutch laughed and shook his head. *What would I do without you, buddy?* He headed to the bathroom, grabbing his shirt on the way. “Be ready in a minute.”

“Okay.” Starsky pulled up the desk chair in front of the TV and, turning it on, contentedly munched on his donut.

Hutch popped his head out of the bathroom door. “Oh, I forgot. I talked to Dobby last night after you were in dreamland.”

“Yeah?” Starsky stared intently at the cartoon, biting into his donut and sipping his coffee to wash it down. “Anything up?”

“He said they found Laura’s purse. The money and credit cards were missing, of course. Her license, post office ID, pictures were found inside.”

“Where’d they find it?”

“Some kids found it in the bushes on a school playground and turned it in to the office.” Hutch flipped off the light switch. “Ready? We’ve got a police department to visit.”



“Detective Hudson?” Hutch extended his hand. “I’m Detective Hutchinson and this is my partner, Detective Starsky. We’re from the Bay City Police Department. I believe you were expecting us.”

“Sure, your captain, uh...Captain Dobby, I believe, called to say you’d be in.” Hudson shook hands with Hutch and then Starsky. “First name’s Bill. Glad to meet you.”

“We’re looking for information regarding the murder of a Stewart Jensen.”

“Have a seat while I get the file. My partner, Benny Newton, and I are the investigating officers, but we haven’t made much headway. A few other more prominent cases have taken priority, if you get my drift.” Hudson stood up and headed to the file cabinet, talking all the way. “I understand his wife was found murdered in your city. Help yourself to some coffee. The pot and some cups are over there.”

Hutch sat down while Starsky headed to the coffee. “Want some, Hutch?”

Hutch shook his head and looked around the squadroom, noting it wasn’t much different from theirs. *Do they have a special school for police department decorators? The desks and chairs are a little newer, but the case files stacked all over make it feel like home.*

“Here it is; Stewart Jensen was found dead in an alley. He was pistol-whipped and shot. Robbery appears to be the motive. So far we have no suspects. Matches the description of a hundred other cases.”

“We understand he dealt in real estate,” Hutch said, “and had a reputation for being a smooth talker.”

Hudson glanced through the file. “He listed real estate as his profession on a bank loan not long ago, but he didn’t earn a lot of money at it. Appears he was quite the ladies’ man, up until he got married. Two years ago, he was picked up in a prostitution sting, had a couple petty theft charges as a teenager. Looks like he left the state about a year ago, and when he returned he had a wife.”

“You ever talk to his wife?”

“Sure, several times after the murder. Mrs. Jensen seemed like a nice lady. How’d she end up in Bay City?”

Hutch shook his head. “That’s what we’re trying to find out. It looks like she intended to contact me, but she never made it.”

“Why would she contact you?”

Hutch shrugged. “She’s an old family friend, but why she traveled all the way to California rather than just calling, I don’t know.”

“You got any objection to us looking over her apartment?” Starsky asked. “Hoped we might find some leads.”

“No, go ahead. Here’s the address. It’s off Eight Mile near Schaefer. You want a black-and-white to drive you?”

“No, we’ve got a rental and a map. If we find anything of interest we’ll let you know.”



Twenty minutes later, they pulled into the parking lot of the Crestview Apartments. The building was an older brick and wood building, ten stories high, each apartment adorned with two tiny terraces.

“Laura lived in apartment 210.” Hutch stopped and stared at the building, comparing it to the lifestyle she’d left behind. Her parents’ home had been on acres of rolling hills. She’d lived a privileged life, attending private schools, owning several horses, and spending lots of time traveling. Looking about, Hutch saw only miles of concrete and brick. Nothing like home.

“C’mon, buddy, let’s go. Maybe there are some answers inside.”

Hutch started across the lawn, and Starsky hurried to match his stride.

Hutch scanned the mailbox, stopping briefly at the one reading ‘Jensen.’ “Says here on the mailbox, the manager’s in apartment 105.”

They walked down the worn and frayed carpet, stopping to knock at the manager’s apartment.

“Just a minute,” a voice called out from inside.

Starsky impatiently knocked again.

“I’m coming.”

Starsky looked at Hutch and shook his head. He reached to knock again when the door opened.

Hutch pulled out his identification, showing it to the elderly lady standing at the door. “I’m Detective Hutchinson and this is Detective Starsky from the Bay City Police Department.”

“Garden City you said?”

“No, Bay City, ma’am. Bay City, California,” Starsky explained.

“What are two nice looking fellas like you doing this far from sunny California?”

“We’d like to see the apartment of one of your tenants. Police business.”

“Oh, sure. Just give me a minute to check on my muffins. I was checking to see if they needed to come out of the oven when you knocked. That’s what took me so long to answer the door. C’mon in and have a seat. I’ll be just a minute.”

“Thank you, ma’am.” Starsky smiled and entered the apartment. “I think I can smell them already.”

“Quit talking with your stomach,” Hutch whispered.

Starsky shot him a dirty look, as the woman disappeared into the kitchen and returned momentarily.

“I’m sorry, I never really introduced myself. I’m Lucille Kennedy. My husband and I manage this apartment building. Harold’s off fixing the water pipes in 802, I’m sorry he’s not here to meet two such nice young men.” Mrs. Kennedy wiped her hands on her apron. “Go ahead, have a seat.”

“Well, thank you, but we are in a little bit of a hurry. We’d really like to see Laura Jensen’s apartment,” Hutch said.

“Oh, such a lovely girl.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Do you know when she’s coming back? She left in such a hurry.”

Hutch looked at Starsky and stammered. “Uh, she’s...she’s not coming back. She’s...dead. I’m sorry, I thought you knew.”

“Oh, that’s horrible. And here she just lost her husband.” Mrs. Kennedy sank onto the couch.

“Are you okay?” Starsky touched her arm. “Would you like some water?”

“I was just thinking about her poor family.”

“Mrs. Kennedy, we really need to see her apartment,” Hutch reminded her. “Do you have a key we could use?”

“Oh, yes. It’s in the kitchen on a hook. Let me get it for you.” She stood up and headed into the kitchen, shaking her head in disbelief.

She returned and handed Hutch a key chain containing several keys. “Here it is. You can let yourself in. I better stay here. Don’t want my muffins to burn. They’re for our grandchildren. They’re coming over tonight.”

“That’s fine, Mrs. Kennedy.” Hutch gratefully took the keys from her. “We’ll return them as soon as we’re finished.”

Starsky and Hutch found the stairwell and took the stairs two at a time.

“Here we are.” Hutch started to slip the key into the lock and stopped. “Starsk,” he whispered drawing his partner’s attention.

The door was slightly ajar. Noises could be heard coming from inside the apartment. Both drew their guns and nodded to each other.

Starsky went low, Hutch high. Instantly scanning the living room and kitchen, they found them empty. They moved in cautiously. The sound of the sliding door opening in the bedroom sent them in that direction. Both drew up short, guns raised.

“Police!” Hutch called out. Hearing no response, he entered the room and saw a man exiting through the door. The detectives followed the man, dressed in jeans and a black t-shirt, as he jumped over the railing onto the balcony below. An elderly couple seated on the lower balcony screamed as the man directed several shots toward the detectives. Hutch ducked and Starsky pulled back. The tall, thin man leaped over the other side of the balcony and took off across the lawn.

In a few steps, Hutch was over the railing, across the balcony, and in hot pursuit. A garbage truck pulled into the parking lot, and when Hutch rounded the truck, the man was gone, having disappeared between some nearby buildings.

He pulled up short as Starsky reached his side. Starsky scanned the area. Hutch leaned forward, hands resting on his knees as he caught his breath.

“You okay?” Starsky rested his hand on Hutch’s back.

“Yeah, I didn’t get a good look at him. What about you?”

“About six-two, thin, brown wavy hair, that’s about it.” Starsky patted Hutch on the back, “C’mon, let’s go inside and call Hudson.”

They returned to the apartment and, as Hutch reached for the phone, Starsky walked back into the bedroom. Several dresser drawers were pulled out and their contents strewn across the floor.

Hutch joined him and scanned the room. “Hudson and his partner, Newton, are on their way. It looks like whoever was here checked out this room. Let’s have a look in the living room and kitchen.”

Starsky strolled around the living room, stopping to look at items here and there, as Hutch searched through the desk drawers. Starsky picked up a photo album lying on the glass coffee table. He flipped through the pages, stopping now and then to look closer at a few pictures. “When was this taken?”

“When was what taken?” Hutch asked, not bothering to look up.

“This picture of you, your sister, Jack and Laura.”

Curious, Hutch looked over Starsky’s shoulder. It was a picture taken on a tennis court. They were all laughing and their arms were draped across each other’s shoulders. “When Jack and I were seniors in high school, we were pretty competitive with each other. This was taken after a tennis match Jack and I had one day. Our sisters came to watch us; well, at least that’s what they told us. Turned out, they were really there to watch all the other male players.” Hutch chuckled

at the memory. “They were just entering high school and beginning to be seriously interested in the opposite sex. We threatened our teammates, warning them to keep their hands to themselves.” Hutch paused. “That was a long time ago.”



“Whoever broke in, obviously was interrupted by your arrival,” Detective Hudson said. “They missed some expensive pieces of jewelry, or they got left behind in his rush to escape.”

“It’s possible they were looking for something other than jewelry or money,” Hutch commented. “Maybe something to do with Stewart’s death.”

Hudson nodded, “Yeah, it’s possible.”

“I’ll contact Laura’s parents,” Hutch said, “I’m sure they’ll want to fly here and empty the apartment. They can give you an idea if anything else is missing.”

“Thanks. Tell them to contact me when they arrive.”

Starsky and Hutch left the apartment and headed toward the car.

“This break in is too coincidental,” Hutch said. He opened the car door and stopped. “My gut tells me we’re missing something.”

“Your gut must be talking to mine, because mine feels the same way.” Starsky looked at his partner over the roof of the car. “Give it time. Something will break. ”



“Mr. Patella? It’s Jake.”

Victor Patella leaned back in his leather chair. “Yeah, Jake. Did you find the papers? The money?”

“Nope.”

“What do you mean ‘nope’?!”

Jack winced as he pulled the phone away from his ear. “Well, I was searching the apartment when two cops showed up. I barely got out of there.”

Patella stood up and paced his office floor. “Hudson and Newton?”

“Nope. I’ve never seen these two before.”

“Well, find out who they are! And find out what they know!”



“Feels good to be home,” Starsky said as he pulled his luggage off the moving carousel.

“Yeah, but I feel badly that we don’t have anything concrete to offer the Mitchells.” It had been an unproductive two days in Detroit. They had returned to Laura’s apartment and searched through it. Then, they had visited Laura’s place of employment and gone through her personal effects. There was nothing to provide any clues. “Laura’s parents are flying to Detroit on Thursday to clean out their daughter’s apartment and go through her personal effects. If they find anything missing they’ll call Detective Hudson.”

“I think we need to take a closer look at Stu Jensen. He shows up suddenly in Duluth—wines and dines Laura, who just happens to have a sizable trust fund, and then suddenly, boom, both show up murdered.”

“I agree. Seems like the Detroit police have just written him off as another unsolved murder. There’s too much coincidence for me.”

“And me.”

Hutch patted his partner on the back. “C’mon, let’s hit Huggy’s for dinner. I don’t know about you, but I’ve got nothing edible in my refrigerator.”

“So what else is new?” Starsky muttered.

“What?”

“Nothing. Just said ‘after you’.”



“Frank?”

“Yes, Mr. Patella.”

“Ever hear of two detectives named Starsky and Hutchinson?”

“Sure. Everybody in Bay City knows them.”

“Well, I have another job for you. Starsky and Hutchinson were out here nosing around in Laura Jensen’s affairs. Turns out she and Hutchinson share the same hometown. If she flew out to Bay City, it may be more than a coincidence. She might have been in contact with them and passed on the documents. I want them back. If they get in the wrong hands—”

“Look, boss, word on the street is to steer clear of these cops. They can’t be bought. You mess with them—you end up in jail. Getting something from them won’t be easy.”

Victor Patella stood so fast his chair flipped backwards. “I don’t care if it’s easy! Do what you have to do but find those papers. I’m not going behind bars for some two bit huckster and his wife!”



Following dinner, Starsky dropped off Hutch at his apartment. “See you in the morning.”

“Sure. Seven-thirty?”

Starsky rolled his eyes. “Seven-thirty.”

“I’ll have coffee ready for you.”

“Make it a pot.”

Hutch grabbed his suitcase and entered his apartment, relieved to be home. Setting his suitcase down, he walked out onto the greenhouse balcony, greeting the plants like long lost friends.

It was midnight when Hutch heard a noise. He sat up and reached for his gun, remembering too late that it was in his holster hanging by the door. The screech of two cats fighting in the alley made him smile, and he sank back into the pillows, easily dosing off, but a movement near his head brought him instantly awake. He struggled to get out of bed, but strong arms held him down. Panic set in. *Not Forest again*, was his last conscious thought as a rag was placed over his nose, and he relaxed into the peaceful world the chloroform offered.



Starsky took the steps at Venice Place two at a time. He was ten minutes late and knew Hutch, in his usual fashion, would be watching the clock. Starsky imagined Hutch leaning against the kitchen counter sipping his coffee, ready with a wisecrack because he was late again.

“Hutch? Where’s the coffee you promised?”

Starsky stopped abruptly. There were no sounds. No shower running. No coffee brewing. And the apartment had been ransacked. His muscles tightened, his hearing attuned to every sound. He saw Hutch’s holster and gun hanging from the hook and instinctively drew his own gun. He began to cautiously move around the apartment.

Everything was in disarray. In Hutch’s bedroom, the pillows were on the floor, the table lamp overturned. Someone had searched the apartment and had done it in a hurry. Scanning the area, Starsky noted the absence of blood and breathed a sigh of relief. But that didn’t answer where his partner was.

He grabbed the phone and dialed. “This is Starsky. Get me Captain Dobey. Now!”



“Tell us where those papers are!”

“What...papers?” Hutch repeated. He licked at his dry, crusted lips and braced for the next blow. The only uncertainty was where it would land—his head, his chest, or somewhere else on his body. He was in a chair, blindfolded, arms tied in the back, legs bound to the chair legs. Through whispered conversation, he’d pieced together bits of information. The two men were after papers they apparently thought Laura had brought with her and passed on to him. But what the papers were and who wanted them remained a mystery in his foggy brain.

A slam against his cheek made his head twist painfully to the right before it lolled back to finally rest, chin touching his chest.

Hands grabbed his hair and yanked his head back. “Tell us where the damn papers are!”

“I...told...you...” His hair was released and his head angrily pushed forward. Hutch grimaced at the pain.

“Let’s get out of here and grab something to eat. He’s not gonna tell us anything.”

His two captors remained only voices. One had a trace of an East Coast accent that had begun to fade over the years, only to be resurrected in a word or phrase.

“Sure, let’s go. Maybe if we let him sit here by himself for a while he’ll reconsider.”

Hutch heard the door closing and took a deep breath. His ribcage protested the movement. His arms and legs tingled, and he wanted nothing more than to stretch them. He tried tuning into the sounds around him, hoping to determine if it was day or night. He had no sense of time—how long he’d been there, how long Starsky had been looking for him. He wasn’t certain of anything—except the fact that his partner *would* be looking for him.

But the concentration that required was too much, and he finally gave into the relief of knowing his tormentors were gone and he was alone. He let his head fall forward. Feeling too tired, too bruised, he relinquished his body to the sleep that called to him, promising relief, however momentary.



Starsky paced the length of Dobey’s office, driving his superior to distraction. While Dobey understood Starsky’s need to keep moving and his feeling of uselessness, he’d about had enough of his detective’s pent-up nerves. It had already been twenty-four hours and there still was no news on Hutch. He’d issued an APB, and everyone on the force was looking. Starsky kept asking

him to do more, but there was nothing more they could do, but wait—wait for the one bit of information that would lead them to Hutch.

“There has to be something I’m missing!” Starsky slammed his hand on the desk, and Dobey jumped.

“Starsky! Sit down!”

Starsky slumped in the chair, legs sprawled. “But Cap’n—”

“Calm down. Hutch needs you to think clearly.”

Starsky acknowledged his superior’s words, but it didn’t stop his frustration. “It’s all got to be tied to this Laura. We weren’t on any big cases. Grabbing Hutch wouldn’t help keep someone out of prison. He isn’t even scheduled to testify in a case in the next month. The Jensen case is the only thing it could be.”

“So start at the beginning.”

Starsky stared at Dobey.

His captain nodded. “That’s right...start at the beginning.”

Starsky rose from his chair and headed toward the squadroom door, mumbling, “The beginning...” He snapped his fingers and took off for the evidence room.

“Hey, Molly.” Starsky leaned on the counter as he called out to the clerk working in the back.

“Hi, Starsky.” Molly’s expression turned serious. “How are you doing? I understand half the force is out looking for Hutch. Any luck?”

Starsky shook his head. “That’s why I’m here. I wanna look over the evidence found at the Laura Jensen murder site.”

“Sure. Hold on, I’ll go get the stuff.”

Molly returned with a large envelope and pointed Starsky to a conference room. “You can go in there.”

Starsky nodded and walked into the small room. He dumped the contents on the table. The note with Hutch’s phone number written on it fell out along with a few other items. The number was scrawled across the paper, obviously written in a hurry. There was nothing else of value and nothing to offer any clues. He shook his head and loaded the items back in. He had a nagging feeling he was missing something.

“Thanks, Molly.” Starsky handed her the envelope and started for the door. As he reached for the knob, he stopped. “Wait a minute.” He turned back. “Molly...”



A cold spray of water hit Hutch in the face, jerking him awake. He frantically licked his lips.

“Thought you’d want a drink,” the voice laughed. “So? You remember anything yet?”

His tormentors were back and his muscles screamed, as Hutch braced himself for the hit that would inevitably come.

“I’ll ask you one last time. Where did you put the papers?”

Hutch struggled to swallow. The sides of his throat felt like sandpaper sticking together. “I told you. I don’t know...about any...papers.”

The lights blurred and flashes of red appeared, as his head swung side to side from successive blows.



“Molly...”

“Yes?”

“I think there’s more than this.”

“I gave you everything I have.” Molly sounded a little miffed and Starsky hurried to reassure her.

“I know. It’s just that I think some evidence was found later. Her purse, I think. Can you check for me?” He flashed her his widest grin.

Unable to resist, Molly smiled back. “Sure, I’ll check the records and see if there is anything else.”

Starsky leaned on the counter, drumming his fingers while he waited. Time was running out. He needed a clue, anything to help him find Hutch.

“Here, you go. I did miss it. Sorry.”

Starsky grabbed the purse and dumped the contents on the table. A wallet, compact, lipstick, and tissues fell out. Starsky grabbed the wallet and searched through it, finding Laura’s license, work ID, a few pictures, and charge receipts. The money and credit cards were missing. He felt around inside the purse, but it was empty. He looked inside and, seeing a zippered pocket, unzipped it

and took out its contents. There were only a few scraps of paper and several business cards. That was it.

Disappointed and at a dead end, he held the purse upside down and angrily shook it.

“Starsky, it’s empty,” Molly said

A penny dropped out and rolled across the floor.

“Where did that come from? I didn’t feel anything inside.”

“Maybe there’s a hole in the lining...”

“What?” Starsky rubbed his hand around the bottom of the purse but didn’t find a hole. He shook his head.

“Try the pockets. The lining ripped in mine and all my extra change would fall inside.”

Starsky reached his hand in the small side pocket. He hesitated and poked the corner again. He felt the material and thread give a little. He reached his finger through the corner hole and felt around. He found nothing. Wait—

He pushed harder and his finger touched the edge of metal. He wiggled his finger deeper into the hole in the corner of the pocket, widening its size. He pulled out a key and stared at it. What did it belong to? It wasn’t a normal house key; it was attached to a blue numbered tag. He stared at it...he’d seen a key like it before. But where? He searched his brain trying to make a connection. A locker! That was it...an airport locker!

“Molly, add this to the evidence log and check it out to me.” He held up the key, and Molly quickly noted its description. He turned to leave and then rushed back. Starsky leaned across the counter and planted a kiss on Molly’s cheek. “Thanks, Molly. You’re a life saver.”

With not a minute to lose, he raced out the door.



“Captain Dobby, a Detective Hudson from the Detroit PD is asking to speak with you.”

“Put him through, Minnie.”

“He’s on line three.”

Dobby picked up the receiver and hit the lit button. He leaned back in his chair. “Captain Dobby here. What can I do for you, Detective Hudson?”

“Two of your Detectives, Starsky and Hutchinson, were out here not too long ago on the Laura Jensen murder.”

“Yes?”

“Well, I was trying to reach them with some important information, but was told they were out of the office. I didn’t think this could wait.”

Dobey leaned forward. “Maybe not. Detective Hutchinson is missing. What do you have?”



Starsky halted the Torino in a no-parking zone in front of the airport terminal. He flashed his badge as a security guard came toward him. He jumped out of the car and raced to the doors. Inside, he scanned the lobby. The far wall held a bank of lockers and he hurried toward them. The number on the key he held in his hand was 2530. The bank of lockers ran from 1200-1240. Starsky turned around and scanned the lobby again. There weren’t any other lockers.

Spotting a security guard, he rushed over. “I’m Detective Starsky, BCPD,” he said, holding out his badge. “Are there any more lockers in the airport?”

The guard laughed. “You gotta be kidding, Detective. There are hundreds, maybe thousands, spread throughout the airport.”

“Look, I’ve got to find locker 2530. It’s important. My partner’s life might depend on it.”

“Well, I don’t know...”

“Isn’t there a master list somewhere? In the main office? Security?” Starsky’s voice rose. He resisted grabbing the guard’s coat and shaking him.

“Wait, wait. Let me think.” The guard paused. “I think there’s one in the main office. Let me call over there.”

Starsky, impatient, urged the man to move. “C’mon, let’s check it out.”

The guard headed to the wall and picked up the security phone. After speaking into it for a few minutes, he turned to Starsky. “There’s a master list, all right. We need to go to the main office. They’re pulling it.”

“Let’s go.”

The two men hastily rushed through the crowds entering the terminal and headed to the office. It took several minutes, but when they entered they found two men, heads bent over the table, pouring over a blueprint.

“Detective Starsky.” The older man held out his hand. “It’s nice to meet you. I’m the airport manager. Don Kelly’s my name. This is my assistant manager, Bill Wyant. We’ve been reviewing the location of the lockers, and it looks like the locker you’re looking for is down here,” Kelly pointed at the blueprint, “between gates thirteen and fifteen.”

Starsky peered over the man’s shoulder. “Where are those gates located?”

“Terminal A and we’re in Terminal D. I’ve ordered a transport cart to drive you there.”

Starsky held out his hand. “Thank you, sir. I really appreciate all your assistance.”

“Any time, Officer.”

Starsky exited the office and climbed into the golf cart waiting for him. The security officer driving the cart rushed through the center of the airport and turned at Terminal A—the beeping of the cart clearing a path for them.

As soon as the security officer stopped the cart, Starsky jumped off and headed to the bank of lockers. He scanned the numbers. Finally, he found 2530 in black on a locker in the third row. He sighed and shoved the key into the lock.

“Did you find anything, sir?” asked Tom, his driver.

“We’ll see if it’s anything important.” Starsky turned the key and opened the door. Inside he found an interoffice envelope. He undid the clasp and reached inside. He pulled out several pieces of paper and an envelope. He shifted through the papers, glancing at their contents, and then looked inside the envelope. He whistled. The envelope contained a stack of bills—one-hundred dollar bills.



Hutch groaned and tried to open his eyes. The left eye felt weighted down and wouldn’t cooperate, but he managed to partially open the right. He slowly raised his head and looked through the slit his eye offered. He was alone in the room again, but there was no telling when the two goons would return. He had no idea how long he’d been there. He still didn’t know what they were looking for. They kept ranting about papers, but he had no idea what papers they were talking about. He thought one had mentioned “Laura,” but then he wasn’t sure they’d really said it, or that he remembered the name from a dream. *Laura, Laura who?*



Starsky shoved the money back in the envelope and examined the papers more closely. There were copies of several real estate contracts, and correspondence on company letterhead. He scanned them frantically, trying to find a connection between them and where Hutch was being kept. He read the names on the letterhead. They meant nothing to him. It carried a Detroit

address. All of the names listed at the top were individuals, except one. That one was a corporation. The Victory Corporation.

Starsky shoved the papers into the envelope and climbed back in the cart. "Let's go. I've got work to do."



"Thanks, for the info, Detective Hudson. I'll get hold of Starsky immediately." Dobby hung up the phone and dialed Starsky. Despite repeated attempts, Starsky failed to respond.

"Minnie! Get in here!" Dobby roared.

Minnie scurried into the captain's office. "Yes, sir. What can I do for you?"

"Keep trying to contact Starsky. The minute you reach him, let me know."

"Yes, sir." Minnie returned to the squadroom and sat down at Starsky's desk. "Hope you don't mind, honey," she said to the absent Starsky. "Captain Dobby wants me to find you and what better place to connect but from your desk."

Minnie almost hung up after the third attempt when she pleaded, "C'mon, Starsky, pick up. Captain Dobby will have my head if you don't answer soon." She sighed in relief when Starsky finally responded. "What is it Minnie? They find Hutch?"

"No, Sugar. Captain Dobby is roaring around here. He wants to talk to you. Yesterday."

"Well, what are you waiting for?"

Starsky waited impatiently, fingers drumming on the steering wheel.

"Starsky, where the hell have you been?" Dobby snarled.

"The airport."

"What for?"

"I found a locker where Laura Jensen apparently put some papers for safekeeping. I thought they might lead me to Hutch, but so far it looks like a dead end. Whatcha got, Cap'n?"

"Detective Hudson from the Detroit PD called. He wanted me to pass on some information to you and Hutch."

"What's that?"

“Jensen was a an independent real estate salesman who recently hooked up with the wrong real estate corporation. Trouble is, he was always trying to find a way to make a quick buck and he wasn’t totally honest with them. He’d stiff his boss. He dealt in cash only, lowered the sales price, and skimmed the money off the top. What he didn’t count on was the CEO of the real estate firm was nobody to mess with.”

“What do you mean?”

“The firm is a front for the mob. Victor Patella, a major mobster in the Midwest, owns the business. Hudson thinks Patella found out what Stu Jensen was doing and had him killed as an example to others.”

“What about Laura? Did she have anything to do with it?”

“They don’t think so. But apparently when she disappeared, the mob figured she took the money and ran.”

“That explains it.”

“Explains what, Starsky?”

“The envelope I found in the locker at the airport contained copies of several contracts and a smaller envelope filled with cash.”

“Are you bringing it in?”

“Yeah. Cap’n, answer me this. Was the name of the real estate corporation the Victory Corporation?”

“Yes.”

Starsky sighed. “Have Research check if the Victory Corporation owns any property in the Bay City area.”



Hutch jerked awake as cold water hit his face again. Hutch shook off the water, his hair flinging it back into his captor’s face.

“You jerk!” The redheaded man grabbed Hutch’s shirt and yanked him up, chair and all.

“Let ’im be!” The order came from the back of the room.

Hutch slumped down as the chair was dropped.

The voice continued, “You have one last chance to tell us where the documents and money are located. And if you don’t want to tell us willingly, we’ll find a way to make you talk. You may not care what happens to you—but maybe you’ll care what happens to that partner of yours.”

“Let me at ’im, boss. I’ll get it out of him.”

Go ahead. Hutch raised his head defiantly.

“No.” The voice was directly behind him now. “Let him think about it until we find Detective Starsky. Rumor has it they’re really tight.”

As the door closed, Hutch fought the ties. He had to free himself. Had to warn Starsky...



“Starsky. Come in.”

Starsky reached for the mic. “Starsky. Whatcha got, Cap’n?”

“Research found three warehouses where the Victory Corporation is listed as the owner.”

“Location?”

“One’s on Eighty-fourth Street and appears to be a legitimate business. The second is on Greenfield, but that burned to the ground last month, and the third is an abandoned warehouse at the pier.”

“That’s it. Gotta be. I’m on my way—ETA three minutes.”

“Starsky! Don’t do anything stupid. I’m heading there, too, and I’ve already sent a black-and-white to meet you. Wait until it gets there.”

“Sure, Cap’n.” He’d said it, but he didn’t mean it, not when Hutch’s life was on the line—and he knew Dobe understood that as well.

Starsky slammed on the brakes and the front of the Torino spun to the right. Facing the other direction, he gunned it and sped down the boulevard.



Starsky pulled into the alley and stopped the car. The black-and-white was nowhere to be seen. He left the Torino and headed toward the alley next to the warehouse.

Locating a broken window, Starsky reached in and unlocked the window. He slowly raised it and carefully climbed through. The moonlight lit the room enough to help him locate the door

without banging into something and announcing his presence. He stopped to listen. There was only silence.

He entered the hallway and, as he neared the large storage room, he stopped again to listen. He could make out shadows, his eyes now adjusted to the darkness. There were cartons and crates sitting around, but no sign of Hutch, or that Hutch had ever been there. Maybe he and Dobey were wrong.

At a sudden sound, Starsky ducked behind a pile of boxes, aiming his gun; then, he let out a sigh of relief. It was only a rat scurrying across the floor.

He stood up and proceeded cautiously. He stopped again. There was another sound. He looked up and saw several offices located on the second floor balcony. They were accessible by a spiral staircase on the other side of the large room. Cautiously crossing the open space, he climbed up the stairs, gun drawn and ready. He was out in the open and vulnerable, but no one else appeared to be in the building.

Drawing himself up against the wall outside the first office, Starsky listened. There were no sounds. He reached out to try the knob and found it locked. He moved to the second door and tried that one as well. It, too, was locked. He stepped back, ready to move on to the third door, when a moan coming from behind the second door drew him up short. *Hutch!*

Starsky kicked in the door and went low.

He stood instantaneously. In two strides, he was beside Hutch. A flinch crossed Hutch's face, as though he was preparing himself for a strike. Starsky whispered, "It's me, Hutch. You okay?" Starsky holstered his gun and reached down to untie the ropes binding Hutch to the chair and take off the blindfold. *Now, that's a pretty stupid question. One look at him and you can tell he's far from okay.*

"Star-s-s-k?" Hutch barely managed to get the word out through dry, cracked lips.

"Yeah, it's gonna be okay. Let's get you out of here." Starsky pulled the last of the ropes loose and knelt next to his partner. "Can you walk?"

Hutch nodded, but when he stood his legs wavered and he sank back down.

"C'mon, slip your arm around my shoulder. I'll help." Hutch stood and wearily placed his arm across Starsky's shoulder, as Starsky reached a supportive arm around his back. "I've got you. Let's go."

They headed toward the door.

Two men blocked the exit. "Now, ain't that touching?"

Hutch raised his head and defiantly stared at the voice. The voice from the shadows. The voice that said they would go after Starsky. Well, Starsky was here and they'd get out of this together. Somehow.

Starsky's arm tightened around Hutch's waist. Hutch straightened and moved to stand under his own power. Starsky required freedom of movement.

"You two can go right back where you came from." The voice belonged to a medium-built, balding man who pointed a revolver at them.

Starsky stepped in front of Hutch. "Put it away. Killing a police officer is a federal offense."

The voice laughed. "And that's supposed to scare me? Give me your weapon, Detective Starsky. Reach in slow and careful. This gun is trained on Hutchinson. One false move and he gets it. You do what you're told—he'll live. Simple, isn't it?"

Starsky reached beneath his jacket and carefully pulled out his revolver. He extended it, watching for an opening—any opening. But none was forthcoming.

The balding man took the revolver and stuck it in his waistband. "Okay, get going."

"Let him go. I'll stay."

"So touching, Detective Starsky. You're willing to negotiate—let your partner go and you remain with us. How very noble."

"Starsk..." Hutch managed a whisper. He was finding it hard to focus, but he fully understood what Starsky was offering to do. He swayed on his feet.

Starsky, eyes forward, assessed the situation. Captain Dobey and the black-and-whites should be there by now. If he got Hutch outside, Dobey would see Hutch got to the hospital. "Let him go, and I'll do whatever you want."

"Unfortunately, he has information we want. You are useless to us, except as a means to an end. I want that information, and it appears Detective Hutchinson here is unwilling to give it up. You might be able to change his mind."

"Not likely." Starsky, stalling for time, turned to Hutch. "Isn't that right? You can be so stubborn, never wanting to do what I want to. Remember the time...?"

"Shut up." The balding man was getting more agitated. "Karl, pull the van around to the side door. We'll take Detectives Starsky and Hutchinson up on their proposition. They want to leave. We'll accommodate them. Only they'll come with us."

"Sure, Frank. I'll get the van." Karl disappeared.

The room was beginning to spin. Hutch stepped backwards and bumped into something. He was grateful to feel the chair behind him and he sank down into it.

Starsky moved next to him and squeezed Hutch's shoulder.

"Let's go. Get your partner to his feet."

Starsky hesitated. If luck were on their side for once, Karl would be in custody by now. The officers would have grabbed him the minute he exited the building. Now, all he had to do was figure out how to get Hutch out—alive.

"I said get going," Frank repeated. "Or there'll only be one of you walking out of this joint."

Starsky lifted Hutch to his feet. "C'mon, buddy. I'll help you."

Hutch leaned on Starsky. His partner was losing strength, and Starsky knew he needed to do something quick. As they walked out, his eyes strained to see through the darkness. *Where was Dobby?*

Hutch tripped as they neared the spiral staircase and fell down on one knee. Starsky tried to catch him and went down as well. He whispered, "Hang in there, Hutch. We'll figure something out."

"Get up and keep moving," Frank ordered. "We ain't got all night."

Starsky lifted Hutch to an upright position. Blue eyes searched for his.

"Okay?" Starsky whispered. Hutch blinked and nodded, indicating his approval. Their eyes held momentarily, before Hutch's closed again.

Starsky reached the first step. Hutch's body went limp, and, as Starsky released him, he grabbed the hand railing to keep from toppling down the steps. Starsky turned and dove at the man behind them. He slammed into him, then forced his arm up as he fired the gun. The two men continued to struggle on the walkway, first banging against the wall and then the railing. Starsky grappled with him, trying to control the arm and gun swinging in the air. A second shot was fired.

They struggled over the gun. Starsky hit Frank's hand repeatedly against the railing until Frank let go. Starsky strained to catch a glimpse of where it had landed. Seconds later, he heard it hitting the floor.

Hutch clung to the railing, sliding down a step to stay out of way of the men fighting behind him. He watched, helpless, as Starsky scuffled with Frank.

Starsky averted Frank's punches and finally managed to maneuver him toward the edge of the railing. But Frank fought hard, twisting frantically. He grabbed Starsky and shoved him toward the parapet. Hands wrapped around Starsky's throat, tightening their grip. Struggling to maintain his balance, Starsky seized Frank's chin and, with a powerful shove, threw him against the wall.

Starsky bent forward forcing air into his lungs. He opened his eyes in time to see Hutch throw himself on top of Frank. Starsky joined in the melee, and in seconds they had the man under control. Starsky pulled his cuffs from his pocket and slapped them on Frank, as he watched Hutch lean back against the wall and slide to the floor.

Starsky retrieved his gun and sank to the floor by Hutch's side. "It's over, buddy. You okay?"

Hutch opened his eyes and nodded.

"Starsky! Hutchinson!" The voice announced Dobey's arrival. As he finally reached the top of the staircase, Dobey stopped to recover his breath.

"Everything's under control, Cap'n," Starsky said, then glanced at Hutch. "But you better order an ambulance."

"I don't need one," Hutch protested, struggling to stand up.

"You don't have a say in the matter." Starsky gently pushed him back down. "Just stay put 'til they get here."

One of the officers pulled Frank to his feet, and Starsky rose to meet them. He grabbed Frank's shirt. "You know, Frank, all along you were trying to get information from Hutch, and he didn't know what you were talkin' about. He tried to tell you, but did you listen?" Starsky loosened his grip in disgust. "You went after the wrong partner. The information you were looking for has been under your nose all along. Just outside the door—sitting in *my* car."



"Take the pain medicine. You'll feel better."

"Starsky, I'm doing fine without it."

"You could'a fooled me." Starsky watched Hutch struggle to find a comfortable position on the couch.

Hutch had been examined at the hospital, and the doctor had reluctantly agreed to release him, but only after Hutch convinced him that being under Starsky's care was better medicine than staying in the hospital. While Starsky fully understood why Hutch didn't want to stay, he almost wished he had. His partner had several broken ribs. A laceration above his eye required ten stitches—four on the inside and six out. His upper torso and back were covered with bruises, as well as half his face. His right eye was swollen almost closed, and his lower lip was about twice its normal side. And he had one hell of a headache.

"Here." Starsky shoved the pills into the blond's hands and followed it with a glass of water. "Doctor's orders." As soon as Hutch had swallowed the pills, Starsky reached for Hutch's right

arm and started to remove the gauze bandage from around the wrist, the lacerations there an example of the struggle Hutch had put up.

Hutch pulled it back, wincing.

“Sorry, the bandage is probably sticking. Orders were to keep the wounds on your wrists and ankles clean. Besides, the antiseptic will dull the pain and keep infection away.” Starsky waited.

Hutch reluctantly returned his arm.

Starsky gently washed off the tender area, watching Hutch’s expression for any indication he was causing pain. The bleeding had stopped, but it would be several days before the rawness would disappear. That done; he applied the cream and then rewrapped the wrist with gauze. When the right wrist was done, Starsky reached out for the left. Hutch extended it silently, leaning his head on the back of the couch, eyes closed.

Starsky worked as quickly as possible, relieved to have Hutch’s participation, silent though it was. Starsky was almost certain Hutch was asleep, but as he finished wrapping the wrist, Hutch placed one leg on the coffee table, making it easier for Starsky to work on his ankle. Finished with the second leg, Starsky picked up the bowl of water, washrag, and towel and stood.

“Thanks,” he whispered.

Starsky patted Hutch’s left leg. “Any time.”

After cleaning up, Starsky settled into the couch and swung his legs onto the coffee table next to his partner’s. The strain of the day was evident. His muscles ached, and he was ready for sleep. Starsky prayed Hutch’s medicine was fast-acting. He planned to grab a quick snooze as soon as he got Hutch tucked into bed. It wouldn’t be a long one—he knew he’d be up every few hours to check on his partner. The doctor had said there was no concussion, but he planned to wake Hutch periodically just to be sure he received a lucid response.

“So tell me, where did you find Laura’s papers?”

The question startled Starsky. He thought Hutch had fallen asleep, and he’d been trying to work up the required energy to wake him and move him to the bedroom. “I started at the beginning, like Dobey suggested. I went through her effects, and at the last minute I remembered they’d found Laura’s purse at a later date. So I searched through that. I almost missed the key.”

“The key?”

“Laura apparently shoved the info into the airport locker when she arrived, and then hid the key in the lining of her purse. Apparently, Frank Simons was the Detroit mob’s point man on the West Coast. After finding out that Stu Jensen was skimming the mob’s money off the top of the real estate sales, they killed him. When Laura discovered the documents and money, she grew suspicious and headed out here to see you—the only cop she knew—someone she could trust.

The only one she knew would help her. When the mob discovered Laura was headed out to Bay City, a call was made and Frank was ordered to get the documents and money back. Didn't matter how he accomplished it."

Starsky took a sip of beer. He squeezed Hutch's knee. "C'mon, let's tuck you in. It's been a long day." Starsky studied his partner's bruised and swollen face. "Besides, you aren't looking your best at the moment." He stood up and extended his hand.

Hutch took hold of it and stood. He paused a moment to catch his breath before walking sluggishly toward the bedroom.

At the door, Starsky moved a few steps ahead and pulled the covers back. Hutch sank gratefully onto the bed and slid his feet in.

Starsky reached over and turned off the light. "You'll feel worse in the morning, you know."

"Thanks for reminding me." But Hutch knew Starsky was right. They'd both been through these kinds of injuries too many times for him not to recognize the truth in the statement.

"Night, buddy."

"Night." Hutch winced as he leaned back in search of comfort. The bandage wrapped around his chest didn't offer much support for the broken ribs. An unintentional groan escaped as he settled back.

"You okay?" Starsky was instantly at his side.

"Yeah. It's just the muscles that've been holding me up for so long are protesting. It feels good to be in bed. Just give me a minute, I'll be fine."

"Well, call if you need anything. And thanks."

"Thanks? For what?" Hutch asked groggily.

"For taking Frank down at the warehouse. For a minute there, I thought I was a goner."

Hutch replied, his voice a whisper in the pillows, "You...you would have done the same."

Starsky watched his partner's face relax and give into the relief of sleep. He walked over and pulled up the covers. "That's what partners are for."



“Hurry up, Starsk. We’re going to be late for the Dobeys’.”

“Hey, it’s not my fault. I got to your place on time, but I couldn’t do anything about that traffic jam.”

“You need to learn to plan ahead. There are always traffic jams in Bay City.”

Starsky turned the corner and pulled to a stop in front of Dobeys’ house. They could hear music and laughter coming from the backyard.

“See, I told you the party would already be started.”

Starsky scowled. “I’m just surprised that the captain agreed to a birthday party.”

“Edith said it’s a barbecue, not a birthday party.”

“Right, and we aren’t supposed to bring presents. That way, the captain won’t know we know, right?”

“Right.”

Starsky shook his head. “Who wants a birthday without presents, anyway?”

Hutch grinned. “Not everyone’s like you, Starsk. C’mon, let’s go.”

They were halfway across the front lawn when Starsky snapped his fingers and turned back.

“What’s wrong, Starsk?”

“Go ahead. I forgot something.”

At that moment, Rosie opened the front door. “Uncle Ken!” She ran out and threw her arms around Hutch’s neck as he knelt down to hug her. “C’mon in. Everyone was wondering where you were.”

Hutch straightened stiffly, the remnants of his run-in with Frank and Karl still limiting his mobility.

“I’m coming!” Starsky called from the car, his head buried in the trunk.

Hutch and Rosie walked into the backyard, where Edith immediately met him with a cold beer and a hug.

Starsky walked in a few minutes later, his hands behind his back.

Rosie ran over and, as he knelt down, threw her arms around his neck. “Uncle Dave!”

“Hey, sweetie. How ya doin’? Are you being a good girl?”

“Of course.” Her smile lit up her face.

“Do you think you could do something for me?” Starsky asked.

Rosie’s grin widened. “What do you want me to do?”

Starsky whispered in her ear and Rosie nodded.

Starsky left her by the gate and went over to greet everyone. Huggy met him with a beer, and Starsky slipped an arm around Edith and kissed her on the cheek.

“Daddy! Daddy! I’ve got a present for you.” Rosie skipped over, her face beaming. She placed a large box in her dad’s lap. The box was wrapped in red paper with a white bow on top. The tag read: To Daddy, From Rosie.

Captain Dobe looked embarrassed and then kissed his daughter. “Why, thank you, sweetheart. But you didn’t have to get Daddy anything.”

“C’mon, Daddy, open it.”

Dobe took the bow off and slowly unwrapped the paper. He opened the box and looked inside. His eyes grew larger and he swallowed.

“Show us, Harold,” Edith said, curious. She hadn’t taken Rosie to the store to purchase anything, and she planned on sharing the family presents tonight after everyone was gone.

“It’s an ug—lovely clock, Rosie.” Dobe pulled out the clock and held it up. It was made out of wood, but had several pieces of curved wood sticking out at odd angles and was painted teal.

Hutch turned to stare at his partner. Starsky grinned. “Aren’t you glad Dobby’s birthday comes before yours?”

“Rosie?” Dobby turned to his daughter. “Who helped you pick out this...lovely clock?”

Rosie looked confused for a minute. “Pick it out? Oh, that was Uncle Dave.”

Dobby rose from his chair and walked toward Starsky.

“Starsky?” The voice was pleasant, but somehow threatening.

“Yes, sir?”

Hutch and Huggy moved aside as Starsky took two steps backwards.

“Is it true that I have you to thank for this lovely gift?”

“Well, sir...” Starsky stopped as he sensed the edge of the pool.

“I just want to thank you.” And with a slight shove, Dobby pushed his detective.

Starsky’s arms flailed as he teetered on the edge before he hit the water.



The End