

Mail Call

By Linda B.

“Mail Call!”

Twenty or so police cadets rose from their seats and moved to the front of the lunchroom, surrounding the unfortunate fellow holding the mailbag.

“Back off. Everyone will get theirs.” The gray-haired, spectacled officer shifted through the items in his hand and started calling out names.

“Wilson.”

“Sanchez.”

“Thompson.”

“Starsky.”

As each name was called, the cadet moved forward, took his envelope or package, and quickly scanned it. A few opened them immediately, while others hung onto theirs, waiting in case their name was called again.

David Starsky took his letter, mumbled a quick, “Thanks,” and headed back to the table.

He laid it down, sat in his chair, and took a bite from his burger.

Curious, the blond sitting next to him asked, “Aren’t you going to open it?”

“Sure.” David picked up the letter, tapped it on the table several times, and scanned the front. “I like to savor it for a while first. Why?”

Ken Hutchinson shrugged and took a sip of coffee. “I guess if I ever got some mail I’d open it right away.”

The two were fellow cadets at the Bay City Police Academy. Their rooms were in the same hallway, just down from each other; they were in two classes together, and they were part of a small group of cadets who occasionally got together to play cards.

One thing they’d discovered was that they were opposites—not just in hair color, but in lifestyles and background. In most cases this would have driven cadets apart—they had nothing on which to build a friendship--yet something kept drawing them together. It was an easy friendship, neither demanding

much of the other, yet both, finding over time, they took as much pride in the accomplishments of the other as they did their own.

Starsky pondered his neighbor's statement. "I don't see you rushing up for mail call. Don't you ever get any mail?"

Hutchinson shrugged. "Who's going to write me? My wife? She lives in an apartment north of here." "What about your family?"

"Not likely. If my mother wants to tell me anything she calls; she says she's doesn't have time. Besides, it would take too long to get here and she gets impatient. My father...well, he's too busy."

"Didn't they ever write you at camp? You did go to summer camp, didn't you?" David eyed the blond. He knew enough about him to know he'd had a privileged life.

"Sure, I went to camp every year. When I was in high school, I went to tennis camp. Didn't you?"

David laughed. "Sure, it was called 'street camp.' Except, it consisted of concrete streets not trees."

Starsky prodded. "So did you get mail at camp?"

"No. I told you my parents didn't have time to write." Ken tried to act indifferent, but his eyes told a different story.

Starsky pictured a little boy sitting on his bunk waiting for the letter that would never arrive. "Oh-h-h." He nodded as though he understood, but he didn't. To not receive mail was inconceivable to him. He received letters from his mom no matter where he was. If they were a day late in arriving, he was disappointed. In Vietnam, they were his lifeline to home.

"Who's that from? Your mother?" Ken asked.

"My usual Friday letter. I think as soon as Ma sends a letter she starts writing another."

"Why doesn't she call?"

"Stamp's cheaper, besides, if I got her on the phone she'd never get off." He laughed and leaned back in his chair, balancing on only two legs. He took the letter out of the envelope and silently read.

A grin broke out on his face as he finished, and Ken felt a twinge of jealousy.

"Ma says to say hi," David said, putting the letter back in its envelope.

Ken almost spit out his coffee. "She said hi? She doesn't even know me."

"Sure she does. I tell her about you all the time in my letters. I gotta tell her about something."

Ken looked at the man leaning back in his chair. Unsure how to react, he finally said, “Next time you write, tell her I said hi.”

“Sure.” David grinned and finished eating.



Two weeks later, at mail call, Ken was finishing his lunch when he heard, “Hutchinson!” His head jerked up and, in his hurry to get up, overturned his chair. Blushing, he picked it up and went to collect his mail. He found himself standing next to Dave Starsky who had just been handed a letter. They headed back together.

They sat down and he examined his letter. The letter was postmarked New York. “Starsky? You know something about this?”

Dave Starsky shrugged and grinned. “Got me. I told Ma ‘hi’ like you said. Must be she decided to write you. Probably wants to tell you to keep an eye on her wayward son.”

Ken laid the letter down on the table and took a drink of water.

“Ain’t you gonna open it?”

“In a little bit.” Ken touched the letter. “For now, I just want to savor it.”

The End