

## **Play Ball**

*By Linda B*

### *Chapter 6*

It had been a long day. Dobeey had pulled them off the case to work on some old case files and this was his fifth and last stop before going home. About 5 p.m. Hutch walked in the door at Bon Ami Bar, one of the bars in the robbery area. His eyes quickly roved across the room. There were two men at the bar and customers filled three tables. Two waitresses and the bartender looked to be the only employees. He approached the bar as the bartender looked up.

“What can I get ya?” The bartender asked, wiping the bar in front of the stool where Hutch sat.

“Information. Where’s the owner?” Hutch asked, flipping open his police badge and ID.

“Not here at the moment. Went to the bank. Whatcha’ want?”

“Just looking for some info about the string of robberies happening in the area.”

“Yeah...heard about them, but I just started last week. One of the bars down the street was already hit. Mr. Steele, the owner, owns that one, too, but you probably know that already.”

Hutch twisted around on the stool and leaned his elbows on the bar. Glancing around the bar, he nodded. “Yeah, that’s why I wanted to see him. Have you been seeing anyone new hanging out around here?”

“No, but then I’m so new I’m still learning the regulars. Why don’t you talk to Betty and Carol,” he suggested, pointing at the two waitresses. “They’ve worked here longer.”

Hutch thanked him and took a seat at the table closest to the kitchen door. He watched the waitresses working for a while. Finally, one of the waitresses, a blond about 30, approached him. “What can I get for you?”

“Just some coffee and a little information.” Hutch showed her his badge as she placed a glass of water in front of him.

Returning with the coffee, she sat down briefly. “I can’t stay for long. I have tables to look after.”

“That’s okay. Your name?”

“Carol...Carol Taylor.”

“How long have you worked here?”

“About three months. I moved here about three months ago with my two boys.”

“Are you aware of the robberies taking place in the neighborhood?”

“Yeah, who isn’t. They’ve got everybody on edge.”

“Have you seen or heard anything that might be suspicious? Or might help us in this investigation?”

“No, but maybe Betty has. She worked over at the Amigo Bar where that guy was killed. She works here on a part-time basis.”

“I’ll talk to her, thanks.” Hutch reached into his pocket, pulling out a piece of paper and pen. “Here’s my phone number, in case you think of anything. Just give me a call.”

“Sure. I’ll go cover for Betty and send her over to talk to you.” Carol hesitated a second before leaving. “I hope you find them soon. I worry about my two boys. What if something happened to me...”

Hutch looked carefully at the pretty face in front of him. He reached over and patted her hand. “Don’t worry. We’ll get them soon.”

Carol couldn’t help smiling back at the blue eyes filled with concern. Reassured, she didn’t doubt what he said. She walked over to Betty and talked to her quietly, pointing at Hutch waiting in the corner.

Betty, a tall red head about 35, sauntered over, chewing her gum. “Carol said you wanted to talk to me.”

“Yeah.” Hutch held out his hand to shake hers. He noticed her hand trembling slightly, and he motioned for her to have a seat. Trying to put her at ease, he continued, “It’ll only be for a few minutes. I’m Sergeant Ken Hutchinson and I just wanted to find out what you might know about the robberies that have been occurring around here.”

Busily chewing on her gum, Betty answered, “I don’t know anything. I work here and at the Amigo Bar but I wasn’t working the night it got robbed.”

“Did you notice anyone strange? Anyone hanging around? Someone other than the regulars?”

“They’re all strange. Nope, I didn’t notice anyone.” Betty stood up, crossed her arms and stared at Hutch.

“You done askin’ questions? I got customers to go serve.”

“That’s all for now. Here’s my number. Call me if you remember anything.”

Betty glanced at the number and shoved it into her pocket. “Yeah, sure.”



It was late and Carol was tired. Tired of late nights, tired of being away from her boys. She washed off the tables as the bartender, Danny, washed the floor. Betty’s shift had ended two hours earlier and now she was stuck with cleaning up.

“You look tired, Carol.”

“I am. Can’t wait to put my feet up.”

“Well, I’ll let you out the front door and you can go home. I’ll just dump this bucket out in the alley and then, I’m outta here, too.”

“You sure?” Carol inquired gratefully.

Danny picked up her purse from the bar, took her right elbow and walked her to the door. “Where’s your car?”

“In the city lot next door.”

“Okay, I’ll see you tomorrow?”

“Sure. ‘Night Danny and thanks.”

Carol quickly walked out the front door and turned to her left. She crossed the alley entrance that ran next to the building and hurried to her car sitting in the lot next door. This wasn’t the best of neighborhoods and she disliked walking to her car alone. She always tried to find a spot under the parking lot light for safety purposes. Carol unlocked the door and tossed her purse inside on the passenger’s seat. As she slid into the driver’s seat, the sound of gunshots filled the night silence. Quickly slamming the car door and locking it, she inserted her key and started the car. Suddenly to her left she saw two men running from the alley. Both were dressed in dark clothes, and while she couldn’t see their faces, the streetlights reflected off the gun in the taller man’s hand. He glanced across toward the lot and she sat there like a deer caught in a car’s headlights. She saw him veer toward her car, but when the sound of a police siren filled the night he continued after his partner through the lot and to a black van parked at the very back. Their tires squealed as they flew out of the lot and down the street into the dark.

Carol watched the police car come to a sudden stop in front of the Bon Ami Bar and she realized the shots had come from there. Danny! She scrambled out the door and ran down the alley behind the police cruiser. The sight of Danny lying on the ground, blood

spreading across his shirt stopped her from going any further. She covered her mouth and turned away, afraid she was going to be sick.

“Miss, back away.” One of the police officers called out; then, as he came toward her, he asked, “Did you see anybody?”

Carol nodded but she couldn’t speak. *‘Only five minutes ago I was in the bar talking with Danny.’*

“Come with me, Miss.” The police officer steered her toward his police cruiser. Carol avoided looking at Danny and was startled to see the flashing lights of two more police cruisers pulling into the alley. She hadn’t heard their sirens. All she could hear was the pounding of her heart.



Hutch jerked awake at the sound of the phone ringing. He quickly grabbed it, wondering how many times it had rung and he hoped it hadn’t woken his partner.

“Hutchinson.”

“Hutch. This is Minnie. Sorry to wake you but there’s been another robbery...”

“Where? Anyone hurt?”

“At the Bon Ami Bar and one man was killed.”

*‘Damn,’* thought Hutch. *‘I was just there this afternoon.’*

“You said you wanted to be alerted immediately...”

“It’s okay, Minnie. Thanks. Tell dispatch I’ll be right there.”

Hutch ran his right hand through his hair and reached for the jeans he’d thrown over the chair last night.

“Who was it Hutch?”

The sight of his partner standing in the bedroom door answered Hutch’s question about the call waking him.

“That was Minnie.” Hutch replied, pulling on his tennis shoes. “Someone was shot and killed at the Bon Ami Bar...another robbery. I’m on my way over to check it out.”

“I’m coming with you.”

“Starsk...”

“I’ll be ready in a minute.”

Hutch shook his head and pulled on his other shoe. He didn’t have time for an argument with his partner even though he knew his partner didn’t need to be up in the middle of the night running around town. *‘Starsk, you’ll be exhausted tomorrow’* he thought, *‘and Dobe will have my head.’* But at the same time, he knew how great it would feel to have his partner by his side.

“I’m coming, don’t leave without me!”

Hutch smiled at the frantic yell from the other room. “Well, move it then. I’ll go start the car.”

Two minutes later they were racing down the road, siren blaring, lights flashing. Hutch filled Starsky in with the little information Minnie had given him and as they pulled to a stop in front of the bar they watched the coroner’s van pull away from the scene. Exiting the car, Starsky walked into the alley, while Hutch, noticing one of the women he’d talked to earlier sitting in the back of the cruiser, walked over to her.

“Carol?”

Carol finally looked up and found she staring into blue eyes. The same soft, blue eyes she’d looked into in the afternoon.

“Carol, are you okay? Are you hurt?” Hutch asked gently, remembering their conversation. He thought about her two boys and her fear that they might end up motherless. At the sight of a slight smile, Hutch was relieved.

“They shot Danny,” she whispered.

“Did you see anything?”

Carol shook her head. “I was in my car, ready to leave.”

“Sergeant Hutchinson…”

Hutch turned to see James Baker, a young black officer, at his right elbow. “She’s been pretty shook up since we got here. I was gonna’ take her to precinct for her statement.”

Hutch nodded and touched Carol’s hand. “Go with Officer Baker. He’ll take care of you.”

Straightening up, Hutch patted Baker on the back and whispered, “Take care of her, will you?”

Hutch started for the alley, searching for his partner. Not seeing him, he entered the bar through the back door. Despite the gravity of the situation, Hutch had to smile at the sight of his partner leaning against the bar, busily jotting down notes as he talked to one of the uniformed officers. Regardless of what anyone else thought, his Starsky was back.

“What’s up?” The voice came from behind him and Hutch turned to see Johnson entering the bar. *‘Oh, great, just what we need.’*

At the sound, Starsky turned and started toward his partner. Johnson came up next to them and asked, “What are you doing here Starsky? Dobby let you out from behind the desk?”

Hutch was about to lunge at Johnson when he felt Starsky’s hand on his right elbow restraining him. “It isn’t worth it, buddy,” came his whispered voice. To Johnson, Starsky retorted. “Well, it’s about time you crawled out of bed and showed up. Though I don’t know why you bothered; we’ve already done your job.”

Johnson sent Starsky a withering look as Starsky sauntered past him and back into the alley. Hutch decided to follow his partner’s example and followed him out the doorway. When he found him leaning against the brick wall just outside the door, Hutch touched Starsky’s shoulder and gave it a quick squeeze. “Come on, let’s go to headquarters. Baker’s got a possible witness. Let’s see what he’s found out.”

At headquarters, Hutch went to find Baker and Carol, while Starsky searched for coffee. Fifteen minutes later, Hutch found Starsky sitting at his desk, feet up, looking through some files. Starsky looked up, “She know anything?”

Hutch shook his head. “She didn’t really see the shooting,” he said, as he filled his cup from the coffeepot, “though she saw two men running from the alley, cross the parking lot and get into a black van.”

“They see her?”

“Looks like one might of...at least, she says he looked directly at her sitting in her car. Seems to be in shock at the moment, maybe she’ll remember more tomorrow.”

“Do you think she’s in any danger?”

Hutch shrugged. “It’s a possibility; if he thinks she can recognize him.” Hutch looked at his partner and could see the rings starting to form around his eyes. “C’mon buddy, let’s go home and get a few more hours of sleep before we have to report in...”

“Yeah, let’s go...coffee’s rancid anyway.” Starsky threw the Styrofoam cup in the trashcan and pushed the door open. “Dobby’ll have my head in the morning but it sure felt good bein’ back on the street together.”

Hutch grinned and slapped his partner on the back as they exited. “You bet.”

*End of Chapter 6*