

## **Play Ball**

**By Linda B**

### ***Chapter 7***

The next morning Starsky buried his head in the pillow at the sound of the alarm. It couldn't be time to get up yet!

“Hey, sleepy head, rise and shine.”

The cheery yell from the other room only made Starsky bury his head deeper into the pillow. He didn't hear his partner enter the room but he felt the towel as it whacked the back of his legs. “I said get up. You can't sleep all day. Gotta face Dobey sooner or later.”

Hutch chuckled at the muffled response coming from beneath the pillows. He'd been up for awhile and, having reset the alarm for his partner, decided to take a short run by himself. He figured Starsky could use the extra sleep, besides Hutch didn't have the heart to wake him. Since their return at 3 a.m., Starsky had slept soundly. There had been no dreams, no nightmares to awaken him. And, while these were becoming more infrequent in the last month, one was too much for Hutch. It wasn't only his partner who suffered through them.

“The shower is waiting for you and I'll have your coffee ready for you when you get out.”

Starsky sat up, mumbled something and headed for the bathroom.

As soon as they entered the squad room, they could hear Dobey's voice through the closed office door. They quickly slid into their seats and started to look busy, when the door opened and Dobey barked, “Starsky! Hutchinson! My office! Now!”

Both stood and filed past their captain and into his office. Before they'd reached the chairs, Dobey bellowed, “There was another robbery!”

Hutch tried to slow the onset. “We know, Cap'n...”

“Another murder...”

“Yes, Cap'n...”

“And when do you plan on bringing these guys in?”

“We're doing our best...”

“That ain’t good enough! The media is all over the Commissioner.”

As Dobey stopped for a breath, Hutch managed to add, “This time there’s a possible witness.”

“What witness?”

“Well, she’s a waitress at the bar and she was sitting in her car when the robbery occurred. Officer Baker tried to get some information from her last night but she was still in shock. I plan on talking to her later today.”

Starsky sat quietly; afraid he’d direct Dobey’s attention at himself if he opened his mouth. He felt badly that his partner was taking Dobey’s wrath but right now he was into self-preservation. He knew Hutch would understand.

“...she did see a black van and was able to get two letters off the license plate...”

“Well, what are you waitin’ here for? Get on it!”

Both men stood, ready for a quick exit, Hutch adding, “We’re on it, Captain.”

They’d almost made it to the door when Dobey cleared his throat, “And Starsky...what were you doing at the crime scene last night? No one has cleared you for active duty yet.”

Starsky kept his hand on the doorknob and didn’t turn to look at his partner or his captain. “Would you believe, I was just out for a late night snack and happened on the scene. I just stopped in to see if I could be of any assistance.”

“*Would I believe!*” Dobey threw his pencil on his desk but he stopped yelling. Instead, he continued, in a voice tired and strained, “Both of you get out of here and find those murderers. The bartender was only 28, in LA for two months...and given that tomorrow will be his birthday, I now get to call his parents and tell them that their son is dead.”

Feeling his partner’s hand gently squeezing his shoulder, Starsky pushed open the door and they exited quietly, leaving Captain Dobey staring out his office window.

Hutch called the DMV to check on the license plate number while Starsky checked on whether any black vans had been reported stolen the night before.

Setting the phone down on its cradle, Starsky picked up the pencil he’d been playing with and began tapping it on his desk. “No black vans were reported stolen yesterday.”

“Well, that might help narrow the search. DMV should be getting back to us momentarily.”

“Hutch?”

“What?”

“You know that witness is probably in danger, if they think she can ID them.”

Hutch glanced over at his partner. “Could be. It’s possible they don’t have any idea who she is but if they’ve been casing out the joint they’ll recognize her as a waitress in the bar.”

“If they do, they’ll play hard ball and her life is on the line.”

“I’ll stop by and talk to her some more this afternoon. Maybe she’ll remember more now that the shock has worn off. I’ll stop at her place after I check out the info from the DMV. Before anything happens, we’ll get her protection.”

“She got any kids?”

“Yeah, two boys.”

The ring of the phone interrupted their conversation. Hutch grabbed for it and his pen and paper. After writing furiously for several minutes, he hung up the phone and said, “Well, DMV has 20 vans with a license plate number containing a two and a six. I’ll check ‘em out later, after we run them through R&I for any possibles. I’m going down to R&I now, wanna’ come?”

Starsky, looking dejected, shook his head, “Nah, I’ve still got this stack of reports Dobey gave me yesterday. I better get them done or he’ll really be all over me.”

✎

After another loud, unsuccessful meeting with Johnson and Barnes, the morning finished up quietly. Johnson and Barnes had left to investigate a tip on another robbery case and Hutch had agreed to check out the vans and the owners in the afternoon. Watching a tired, dejected Starsky drive away after lunch, Hutch walked to the police garage for his car and made a mental note to talk to Carol again before the day was over.

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Contrary to his usual afternoon plans with David, Starsky decided to head home first for a short nap and then over to his young friend’s house to play ball. He was still feeling pretty tired from the previous night’s interrupted sleep but he certainly wasn’t going to tell Hutch. *‘Probably don’t need to tell ‘im. He reads me like a book anyways.’*

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After lunch Dobey called Hutch into the office to review several case files with him and Hutch hit the streets much later than he'd intended. He'd only made three stops so far on his list of 20. None looked like a possible suspect--a mother of four, an elderly Hispanic man and a church van. He decided to make one more stop before heading over to Carol's house to question her further.



Starsky pulled up in front of the small frame house. Spotting David's bike resting against the tree trunk, he knew David was home. Exiting the car, Starsky, hesitated a moment, smelling smoke. Eyes quickly inspecting the neighborhood, he walked across the front lawn. The smell grew stronger. Running to the front door, he noticed smoke coming from the crack at the bottom of the door. Pounding furiously on the door, he yelled, "DAVID!" When there was no response, he kicked in the door but turned back coughing as smoke engulfed him. "DAVID!"

Starsky ran to the side of the house; feverishly trying windows but found none open. He pounded on David's bedroom window but heard no response. Peering into the window, he saw no one. Spotting David's black baseball bat beneath the tree, he grabbed it and swung at the window, praying that the spraying glass wouldn't hurt David or his brother.

Throwing the bat down, Starsky climbed through the window, ignoring the pain shooting from his right leg as he caught it on a jagged piece of glass protruding from the windowframe. Covering his mouth with his sleeve, Starsky frantically searched for any sign of David or Billy. Seeing Billy slumped in the corner coughing, Starsky hurriedly picked him up and, using a fireman's carry, headed for the window, now almost impossible to see through the thick smoke. Carrying Billy out the window was difficult. The pain was increasing in his leg and Starsky felt his energy diminishing with each passing second. He lay Billy down on the grass away from the house and they both frantically sucked in the fresh air.

"Wait...here...for...help," Starsky managed between breaths. "I've got...to get...David. Is your Mom at home?" Waiting only long enough for Billy to shake his head negatively, Starsky stood shakily, patted Billy on the shoulder and headed back to the burning house with only one purpose—to find David

Taking as deep a breath as possible, while trying to ignore the searing pain in his chest and his burning throat, Starsky hurried through the window in search of David. The dark smoke billowed throughout the room making it impossible to see. Starsky felt himself tripping over something lying on the floor and out of sheer instinct raised his left arm to protect his face as he fell. As his arm hit the floor he could feel pieces of glass cut through his shirt and into his arm.



Hutch drove down Columbia Drive. He'd made four stops and he'd turned up nothing of significance. There was only one last stop for the day—Carol Taylor's house. As he

turned onto Fulton Street he was shocked to see his partner's Torino parked in front of the small wooden house. *'What's he doing here?'*



Starsky, wind knocked out of him, hesitantly rose on shaky legs. His arm stung and he could feel the sticky spread of the blood as it ran down his arm.

“DAVID!!!” He called out vainly. Running to the far wall, he pulled open a door hoping it led to the hallway but instead it opened into the closet. He started to turn away when a blue-jeaned leg caught his eye. He frantically reached for David and scooped him up in his aching arms, wincing at the pain. He turned toward his only escape--the window. All sense of direction lost, he couldn't see through the thick, black smoke now engulfing the entire room.

He blindly moved forward. Hearing the sound of glass crunching beneath his feet, he guessed he was at least headed in the right direction. Finally, he found the windowsill. Using the window frame for support, he lifted his leg to climb out, his burden growing heavier.

*End of Chapter 7*