

# Some Kind of Justice

## *Linda B.*

Hutch glanced at the clock on the wall for what felt like the hundredth time in the last fifteen minutes. Shaking his head and sighing, Hutch couldn't help hoping his notoriously late partner would walk through the door before their captain returned from his early morning briefing with the commissioner. Starsky had been late twice this week already, and Hutch didn't want to be anywhere near his partner when their captain discovered he was late again. Taking a sip of coffee, he looked up to see Captain Dobe standing at the squadroom door talking with a patrolman, Dobe's bulk effectively blocking the doorway and Starsky's entrance.

As the door was pushed open, Hutch grabbed one of the case files on his desk, trying to look busy. Sensing Dobe's approach, Hutch hurriedly began scribbling notes on the report.

"Your partner's late again, Hutchinson." Dobe's deep voice startled Hutch, even though he'd braced for it.

Without looking up, Hutch busily continued working. "He'll be here any sec, Cap'n."

"I told both of you yesterday that we had an eight o'clock meeting." Dobe, looking at his watch, continued impatiently, "It's eight-fifteen and he's late."

"He had to make a stop on the way..."

"He stops on his own time."

Grinning, Starsky nonchalantly sat on the desk, resting his left foot on the seat of his chair. He'd entered the room with his finger to his lips to ensure Hutch's silence, and then sat down unobserved by his captain. "Mornin', Cap'n."

"You're late again, Starsky!" Dobe barked, turning to glare at his curly-haired detective.

"I picked up something for you, Cap'n," Starsky offered in explanation, winking at his partner.

Looking at the bag Starsky had laid on the desk, Dobe's eyes widened suspiciously. "For me?"

"Yeah. I heard you lost five pounds, so I stopped to pick you up something to celebrate."

"What's that?"

“Some doughnuts.” Opening the bag and reaching inside, the glint in Starsky’s eyes belied his innocence. “I picked up your favorite—chocolate covered.”

“And yours,” Hutch mumbled, shaking his head at his partner warningly.  
“What?”

As Dobey’s attention shifted toward him, Hutch smiled innocently, avoiding his partner’s laughing eyes. “Nothin’, Cap’n. Aren’t you late for a meeting?”

Dobey straightened up, remembering his original purpose. “Both of you, my office. Now!”

Heading toward his office, Dobey turned back just as he neared the door. Taking the chocolate covered doughnut Starsky still extended toward him, he continued through the open doorway, adding, “It’s a good thing Lieutenant Jackson called to say he couldn’t get here until eight-thirty.” Neither detective saw the self-satisfied smirk on his face.

Standing up, Starsky followed Hutch toward Dobey’s office. As he reached the doorway, the brunet snapped his fingers and turned back. Grabbing the brown bag off the desk, Starsky reached in and pulled out a doughnut, biting into it as he pulled the door shut behind him with his foot.



Hearing a knock at the door, Dobey called out, “Come on in, Jackson.”

Hutch shifted in his chair, and Starsky tossed the crumpled-up bag into the trash. After looking around sheepishly, he wiped the chocolate still remaining on his fingers onto his well-worn pant leg, before turning toward the opening door. A tall, blond-haired detective about forty-five years old entered the office. Nodding in recognition, he extended his hand to shake Dobey’s. “Morning, Captain Dobey. I’m sorry I had to call and delay the meeting.”

“Not a problem, Jackson.” Dobey turned and glared at his two seated detectives. “Seems you weren’t the only one who had to make a stop this morning.”

Jackson nodded and smiled, acknowledging the two seated detectives. “Starsky. Hutchinson. Nice to see you again.” Walking up to them, Jackson placed one hand on Hutch’s shoulder, indicating he should stay seated, while shaking Hutch’s hand with his other. As Starsky half rose from his seat and leaned in front of Hutch, Jackson reached across to greet him. “Long time no see, Starsky. You keepin’ out of trouble? Or is your partner here responsible for that?”

“Always, Jackson. Always.” Starsky grinned warmly.

“So you men know each other?” Dobey asked, surprised.

Hutch nodded. “Yeah, Captain, we meet a few years back when Starsky and I helped out Robbery when they were short-handed. If I remember right, Edith had dragged you back East for a family wedding.”

Grimacing at the memory, Dobby indicated for Jackson to sit down. “What can we do for you, Bob?”

“Well, to be honest, I need your help again. We’ve been snowed under with a heavy load of robberies. They’ve been happening all over town: jewelry stores, warehouses, and the last couple nights some liquor stores have been hit.”

“You think they’re related?” Hutch asked.

“Didn’t think so, but after last night I’m not so sure.”

“What made you change your mind?”

“Some gut level feelings. A few similarities between the liquor store robberies led me to believe that they’re being done by the same people, but we’re working on linking the jewelry heists and the warehouses. We’re still cross-checking some fingerprints lifted at all the crime scenes.”

“What kind of help are you looking for?” asked Starsky, curious. “Anybody been murdered?”

“Until today, no. A security guard was injured at one of the jewelry stores and he’s recovering at home, but a night watchman at one of the warehouses wasn’t so lucky. He was shot twice and, unfortunately, died this morning. That’s why I was late. I stopped at the hospital on my way here,” Jackson added somberly.

Starsky sought Hutch’s eyes. “So what do you want from us?”

Jackson shifted his gaze between the two detectives before turning to face Dobby. “Captain Dobby, I’d like to specifically ask for Detectives Starsky and Hutchinson’s assistance on these cases. Their reputation for getting the job done quickly and efficiently is well known. In fact, the last time they helped us out, we successfully cracked the case in just a few days. I think with their help we’ll be able to do the same again, that we can do it before someone else gets killed.”

“Look, Lieutenant Jackson. I can appreciate your need and your desire to solve these cases, but my men are swamped with cases of their own. They have a couple trials coming up and three high-profile murders they’re working on already. I can give you—”

Jackson shook his head, a distant look in his eyes. “No, Captain, you don’t understand. I have to find these men as soon as possible.”

“It’s personal, isn’t it?” Hutch asked, shifting forward in his chair.

Lieutenant Jackson studied Hutch for a moment, then slowly walked to the window, staring at the sun’s rays dancing off the buildings. “Yeah, it’s personal. The night watchman that died this morning...he was retired. A retired officer who was trying to earn a few extra bucks, trying to stretch his policeman’s pension.”

Starsky looked at his partner, both sensing there was more, and then studied the back of the man standing at the window. “Jackson, this retired policeman, what was his name?”

“Name?” As though confused for a moment, Bob Jackson turned and stared at the three men watching him. “His name? Harold Jackson. My father.”



After agreeing to release Starsky and Hutchinson to help with the investigations, Dobeey dismissed his men and met privately with Bob Jackson. About thirty minutes later, Dobeey entered the squadroom.

“How’s Lieutenant Jackson doing, Cap’n?” Starsky asked, looking up from the report he’d been studying.

“He’ll be fine, Starsky. I talked him into taking a couple personal days to help his mother and see to the funeral, but I’m not sure he won’t be back sooner. He’s bound and determined to find whoever did this as quickly as possible.”

“Can you blame him?”

“Can’t say that I do.” Dobeey paused a moment. “I told him you two would join his team in a couple of days, right after the Samuelson trial.”

“I think we should start immediately,” Hutch suggested.

“There’s work to finish around here on that trial first. The commissioner expects a conviction and so do I. The newer cases, well...I’ll reassign those.”

“Cap’n, shouldn’t Jackson excuse himself from heading—?”

“No,” Starsky interrupted. “Bob needs to find whoever killed his father, and taking him off the case isn’t gonna stop him from lookin’.”

“You’re right,” Dobeey agreed. “For now, I won’t say anything to his superiors. If it jeopardizes his men, or either of you, I’ll get him yanked immediately.” Dobeey started for his office but stopped to add, “He’ll be in his office for a few minutes, if you want to stop by for the case files. I told him you’d want to review them.”

“Sure, Cap. We’re on our way.” Starsky stood and headed toward the door, Hutch close on his heels.

“And, Starsky?”

“Yeah, Cap?”

“I didn’t forget.”

“Forget what?”

“That’s three times so far this month, and it’s only half over. It happens again and you’re on report. Understood?”

Opening the door, Starsky winked at Hutch and turned to salute.



Knocking hesitantly on Jackson’s office door, Hutch opened it slowly. He’d heard a voice inside, but wasn’t sure if it was directed at him. Sticking his head around the door, he saw Jackson standing next to his desk talking on the phone, waving them in. Hutch, followed closely by Starsky, walked into the room.

“Thanks, I’ll be back in a couple days. Until then, you can get hold of Sergeant Erickson. He’ll be in charge in my absence.” Hanging up the phone, Bob Jackson turned to greet them. “Glad Dobey agreed to let you guys help out Robbery. Hope you don’t mind?”

Hutch smiled. “Of course not, Bob. We’re happy to help out any way we can. Dobey said you’d have the case files for us.”

“I’ve asked my clerk to gather them together. Should be ready in a couple of minutes.”

“We have an appointment with the DA on the Samuelson trial. We can always stop back after that.”

“Fine.” Jackson aimlessly shifted through the papers on his desk, as though searching for something.

“Go home, Bob.”

“I will, but—”

“No but’s, Lieutenant. We can’t solve anything immediately.” Hutch placed his hand on Jackson's forearm. “We’ll get whoever did this. I promise you.”

Jackson looked at the two detectives, as he obviously struggled with his need to be with his family and his desire to be on the streets finding his father's murderer. Seeing Starsky nod in agreement, he sighed and agreed. "Okay, I'll get outta here. My family is waiting for me at the funeral home."

"Good. We'll see you in a few days." Hutch intentionally guided Jackson toward the door.

Starsky watched Hutch and Jackson as they spoke briefly at the doorway. He was still staring at the door when his partner quietly approached him. "What's up, Starsk? Lost in thought?"

"Think we'll be like that someday?"

"Like what? Like Jackson? He's a good cop, respected..."

"No." Starsky's gaze sought out Hutch's. "Like Jackson's dad. To survive twenty-five years or more as a cop and end up dying 'cause you're workin' as a night watchman tryin' to make ends meet?"

Before he could formulate a response, Jackson's blonde clerk walked in and, to Hutch's relief, distracted his partner. *Who knows, Starsk? Some days I just hope we live long enough to find out.*



## ***Chapter Two***

Starsky tugged on his navy blue tie as he paced up and down the courthouse steps. It was already hot and he was anxious. Starsky watched as another television crew's van pulled up at the curb and began unloading. He wanted the trial to be over, and he wondered what was delaying his partner. Seeing Hutch's beat-up car pull up to the curb, Starsky took the steps two at a time.

"Where ya been?" he demanded.

"Running."

"Running?"

"Yeah," said Hutch, walking around the LTD to join his partner on the curb. "I decided to go a different route on my morning run because the city's blocked off a couple of the roads for repair, and it took me a little longer. What are you doin' here so early?"

"So early?" Starsky stared, mouth open.

Hutch chuckled as he hid his grin. “C’mon, we’d better get inside.” Hutch slowed his long stride, allowing Starsky to catch up. “Trial starts in five minutes.”

Once inside, the two detectives headed down the long hallway to the courtroom, making their way through the crowd. As they reached the door, Captain Dobey approached them. “Glad to see you could make it on time, Starsky.”

“On time, Cap’n? I’ve been here thirty minutes. I’ve been waiting outside for Hutch.”

Dobey cocked an eyebrow at him. “I’m supposed to believe that?”

Starsky turned to Hutch for support. “Tell ’im, Hutch.”

“Tell him what, Starsk? That you’re never late?” Hutch asked innocently, as he pushed the courtroom door open.

Starsky followed him down the aisle glaring at his back, promising to get even.



“Good job, Hutchinson,” Captain Dobey offered as the three walked down the hall on lunch recess. “Starsky, you’ll be up after lunch. Let’s nail this guy.”

“That’s the plan, Cap’n,” Hutch agreed. “He should end up behind bars for a long time.”

“Samuelson’s dirt,” Starsky added.

“Just give them the facts, Starsky. You’re not writing a report.”

Starsky pretended to be hurt. “That’s all I ever give, Cap’n.”

“Right.” Dobey searched his detective’s face before chuckling. He then added, “You two catch some lunch; I’m headed back to my office, but I’ll be back.”

“Kay, Cap’n,” Starsky said, as he took Hutch’s elbow and steered him in the opposite direction.

“What’s the hurry?” Hutch asked, following his partner out of the courthouse and across the pavement toward the Torino.

“I got something to show you, and I didn’t want Dobey around.” Starsky furtively glanced around before pulling an envelope out of his inside coat pocket. “You got here so late I didn’t have time to show you this before we had to meet Dobey.”

“Well, what is it? You act like it’s some kind of big secret.” Hutch pulled open the car door and sat down. “You gonna share or are you just gonna keep waving it in the air?”

Starsky again glanced through his side window and then the windshield, as if checking to make sure no one was around. He handed the envelope to the irritated blond sitting next to him. Hutch looked at the return address and opened the letter. “Huh, when did you get this?”

“It was in my mailbox when I got home yesterday. What do you think I should do about it, Hutch?”

“Keep the appointment.”

“But, Hutch...”

“Don’t ‘but Hutch’ me. Just keep the appointment.”

“But it’s with the IRS!”

“So, you don’t have anything to worry about.” Suddenly suspicious, Hutch added, “Or do you?”

“It’s an audit. Everyone worries about an audit.”

“Not if they’re honest. What year are they auditing?”

Starsky grabbed the letter from Hutch’s hands and frantically searched the letter. “Looks like two years ago. Let me see, nineteen seventy...”

Seeing the color leave Starsky’s face, Hutch asked worriedly, “What’s wrong, Starsk? Are you sick?”

“No.” Starsky swallowed hard before continuing. “Everything should be okay.”

“Good.” Hutch studied his partner momentarily, concerned at his pallor. “Starsky, did you do your taxes that year or did someone else?”

“Uh, someone else.”

“A professional?”

Indignant, Starsky responded, “Of course.”

Suspicious, Hutch couldn’t help probing further. “Who?”

“Huggy’s cousin.”

“You didn’t, Starsk!”

“Huggy said he needed some business, and besides he knew what he was doing. I got a big refund.” As he said those words, Starsky paled further.

“What did Huggy’s cousin know about taxes?”

“Huggy said he took a course.”

“What kind of course?”

Starsky looked at Hutch sheepishly. “Mail order, I think.”

Hutch rolled his eyes. “Good luck. I’ll visit you in San Quentin.”

“You don’t really think I could be in trouble, do you?”

“Let’s just say, I wouldn’t want to be in your shoes.” Hutch looked at his watch. “We’d better get to lunch. We’re due back in court soon.”

Starsky turned the key in the ignition and shifted into gear. “I’m not feeling too hungry. Maybe I’m coming down with something.”

Hutch looked at Starsky and, shaking his head, mumbled, “Maybe it’s tax-itis.”



It was late afternoon before Starsky was excused from the stand. Returning to his seat, he smiled in relief as Hutch winked at him and slid over to make room. It had been a long afternoon, and being inside on the stand for most of it, had been grueling. As Starsky sank back in the seat, Hutch patted his knee and whispered, “Nice job.” Looking past Hutch, Starsky returned Dobey’s nod, catching the pleased look on his superior’s face before it returned to its normal stoic expression. He was relieved when fifteen minutes later, the judge called a recess for the remainder of the afternoon. The defense would present their case in the morning.

Exiting the courtroom, Starsky instantaneously pulled the knot in his tie loose and reached up to unbutton his shirt collar. “Am I glad that’s done.”

“Good job, Starsky,” Dobey commented, following the partners out the door. “With your testimony as the arresting officer on the scene and your ID-ing Samuelson, the jury can only return one verdict.”

“Let’s hope so, Cap’n,” Hutch acknowledged. “But I’ll tell you, Samuelson sure made me feel uncomfortable up there. The man can look right through you.”

Starsky grimly added, “You might as well add his name to the list of goons who want to see us dead. If looks could kill, I wouldn’t be standin’ here right now.”

“Let’s hope the judge puts him behind bars for a long time.”

Starsky nodded his agreement. He just wished he felt as confident. It was his plan that, other than at the sentencing, he wouldn’t be looking Samuelson in the eyes ever again.

Knowing that the afternoon on the stand had been draining on his energetic partner, Hutch offered, “You want to join us for some dinner at The Pits, Cap’n?” He hoped the thought of food would distract Starsky from the afternoon trial, especially since he’d only picked at his lunch.

Dobey shook his head. “Thanks for the offer, but I promised Edith I’d be home at least one night this week to eat with her and the kids. It’d better be today. Can’t tell what the rest of the week will hold. You starting in Robbery tomorrow?”

“Yeah, we have a meeting scheduled with Erickson in the morning.” Hutch explained further at Dobby’s raised eyebrow, “Uh...he’s running the show until Jackson gets back.”

Dobey nodded, “Okay, well, check back with the DA to see how the trial’s progressing and whether you have to reappear.”

“Don’t worry, Cap’n, we’ll be around.” Seeing Starsky staring off into space, seemingly lost in thought, Hutch added, “Night Cap’n.” He gently grabbed his partner’s elbow and led him toward the curb and their parked cars. “Thinking about Samuelson, or are you still worrying about that audit?”

Starsky shook his head. “I was thinkin’ I wanted to skip dinner at Huggy’s. Lookin’ at Samuelson’s mug all afternoon kinda kills the mood for socializing. I guess I just wanna go home, get out of this monkey suit, and start readin’ those case files so we can get on with business.”

Hutch shrugged. “Sounds good to me. Why don’t you head home, and I’ll stop for a pizza on the way?”

Starsky nodded and reached out to pat Hutch on the stomach as they separated. “Thanks for understanding.”



Later that evening as they sat on the floor surrounded by files and paper plates filled with half-eaten slices of pizza, Starsky looked over at his partner. “So far, I don’t see any connection. How ’bout you?”

“Nope. I don’t see how Jackson thinks they’re all connected and that we’ll be able to prove it.”

“Stranger things have happened. If they are, then there’s got to be some mastermind behind them all. Right now, I’m just looking to find the ones pullin’ the warehouse heists,” Starsky said, shuffling through the files.

Hutch watched Starsky for a few minutes, and then decided it was time to ask the question that had been bothering him all evening. “Are you going to be able to handle this, Starsk?”

“What do ya mean?” Starsky asked, as he continued shuffling the papers and successfully avoiding the blue eyes watching him.

“Can you handle looking for the murderers of Jackson’s father?”

“Why shouldn’t I?” Starsky asked, the tone of his voice showing more injury than anger. “What makes you think I can’t do my job all of a sudden, pal?”

“You know what I mean,” Hutch said pointedly. He knew the fact that Jackson’s father had been a police officer would undoubtedly open up painful memories of Starsky’s own father’s murder, and he wanted to be sure his friend was ready for that. “And don’t answer a question with a question.”

The silence grew for a few minutes until Starsky finally answered. “Is it gonna be easy? No,” Starsky finally admitted softly, “but the day it starts getting easier, maybe I’d better start thinking about lookin’ for a new job. Somehow, being able to find the murderers of Jackson’s father, or the murderers of the father of some kid down the block, makes it easier to live with the fact that I’ll never know who killed mine. Nothing will ever bring him back, but it helps being able to do something, Hutch. The victims deserve some kind of justice and the families some kind of peace.” Starsky looked up at the blond, the corners of his mouth just beginning to turn up into a smile.

Hutch smiled back. Satisfied that his partner wouldn’t have a problem handling the case, he only wished he could erase the sadness in his eyes.



“I don’t like it, Hutch. I told Erickson that we specifically wanted to work on the warehouse robberies, and what does he go an’ do but stick us on the liquor stores. It ain’t fair.” Starsky slammed his hand on the dash in frustration.

“Take it easy. If Jackson is right, it’ll all end up the same in the end. Our job here is to catch the bad guys and, if they’ve moved over to robbing liquor stores, then that’s where we’re going. It makes sense to focus on the liquor stores. First, there were the jewelry break-ins; then, when they stopped, the warehouses were hit. Now those have stopped, and the liquor stores have started up. These guys seem to be testing out the waters all

over town. Putting some officers undercover inside a few of the liquor stores gives us a greater chance of catching them.”

“You know I hate it when you’re right.” Grinning at his partner, Starsky relaxed and watched as Hutch turned the corner onto Market Street. He slowed to a stop in front of Tony’s Party Store—Starsky’s undercover assignment. Thinking Starsky’s car would attract too much attention for a drifter, the plan was for Hutch to drop Starsky off each day, and then pick him up again at the end of the shift. As Hutch turned off the engine, Starsky studied the front of the store. “Looks like my home away from home.”

“You okay working here?”

“Sure, always wanted to make a career outta being a stock boy.”

“Well, you know why Erickson picked you over me to go undercover, don’t ya?”

Starsky looked at him curiously. “No, why?”

“He took one look at the clothes you’re wearing, buddy, and knew he’d found his man.”

Hutch ducked as Starsky moved to whack him on the back of the head. Starsky glared and then opened the car door and climbed out.

“I’ll be back to pick you up later,” Hutch called out, chuckling, as Starsky ignored him and entered the store.



### *Chapter Three*

“You finished yet, Davey?”

“No, ma’am. Got a couple more cases to open,” Starsky called through the open door of the cooler.

“Well, take it easy and save something for tomorrow.”

Starsky exited the cooler and shut the door. “Just doin’ what I’m paid for.”

“My husband, Tony, will be real happy with your work. Don’t find too many people these days that work as hard as you do.”

Sitting down on the cases of pop stacked in the corner, Starsky watched the elderly lady smile as she took some pennies from a little boy, who Starsky figured to be around eight years old, standing at the counter. “Looks like you’re short a few cents again, Billy.”

Starsky stood up, reached into his jean pocket, and tossed some change onto the counter. “That cover it?”

“Keep your money, Davey. Billy and me got an understanding. I keep a little tab of what he owes me, and he works it off later on by helping me out around here. Right, Billy?” At Billy’s solemn nod, Maria laughed and put the candy in a small bag. “Go on, get out of here. It’s dark and your grandma’s going to be looking for you.”

Billy grabbed the bag from the counter and, smiling at both Maria and Starsky, ran from the store.

“He’s a good boy. Doesn’t mean any harm. He lives just around the corner. His papa left him and his momma, so Billy’s grandma watches him while his mom works nights.” Glancing at her watch, Maria continued, “Grandma must have fallen asleep for him to be out this late. It’s almost closing. You about done?”

“Just gotta mop the floor. Your husband back tomorrow?”

“Yeah, you’ll get to meet him then. He usually works days, and I take the night shift after I’ve fed the kids.”

“Isn’t it pretty late for a woman working by herself? Aren’t you frightened, working alone?”

“Most of the time, no, but lately, with the robberies happening all over town, it makes me a little nervous,” Maria admitted. “Course, that’s changed now.”

“How’s that?”

“You walked in that door looking for a job.” Maria smiled at him, and Starsky couldn’t help but wish it were that easy. “Go on now, finish up.”



Sitting in the LTD waiting for Starsky, Hutch scanned the street. It was after midnight and the street was surprisingly quiet. He’d made the rounds, checking out liquor stores in the neighborhood several times during the evening. He’d found only one problem—the silence. He was actually missing Starsky’s incessant talking.

Hearing the car door open, Hutch turned to greet Starsky. “So, how’s the stocking business?”

“Just fine,” Starsky replied, watching Mrs. Viviano enter her beat-up station wagon and drive away.

Sensing Starsky’s contemplative mood, he proceeded cautiously, “Nice lady?”

“Yeah, too nice, I think. She reminds me of the lady that ran the corner store back home...”

“Starsk, everything reminds you of something from back home.”

“Well, let’s hope I’m wrong this time.”

“Why?”

“Mrs. Walters used to run the store, and I’d go in there almost every day to buy Nick and me some candy.”

“Sounds like some nice memories.”

“Yeah, only one problem. One night, two guys came into the store and shot it all up.”

“So she closed the store?”

“No, her family did after they buried her. She took two bullets in the heart.”

Hutch reached out and gripped Starsky’s shoulder in comfort. “Let’s go get something to eat. Huggy gave me a call earlier and wanted us to stop by.” Taking Starsky’s sigh as a sign of agreement, Hutch pulled away from the curb, but he had the strangest impression that he’d left his partner back at the store.



“Well, well, look what the cat dragged in.”

“Greetings to you, too, Hug.” Hutch nodded as he slid into the back booth and their friend approached. “Got a message you wanted to see us.”

“What? No shootin’ the breeze? And I thought you was showin’ up just to tease.”

“Cut the jive, Hug. Whatcha got for us?” Starsky said, running his fingers through his curls.

“My, my, if my curly-haired friend isn’t a bit restless tonight.”

“How about bringing us a couple of beers and some info?” Hutch suggested.

“Okay, okay. I can tell you got only one thing on your mind.” Huggy threw the towel he held over his shoulder and headed to the bar.

“Lighten up, Starsk. Huggy’s not the enemy.” Hutch watched as his partner sank back in his seat.

“I know. I know. It’s just that I don’t have a good feeling about this case and we’ve just started.”

“Here’s what the man ordered,” Huggy said, setting two glasses on the table. He then turned toward Starsky and placed a plate of french fries in front of him. “And just for you, my friend, I’ve brought over some munchies. Better you take a bite outta *them*, than my head.”

“Sorry, Hug,” Starsky apologized to his friend, as he squeezed ketchup all over the plate of fries Huggy had laid in front of him. He held out the plate, now a delightful shade of red, to Hutch who held up his hand, grimacing. He never could figure out how his partner could eat that stuff so late at night and not gain twenty pounds. Shaking his head in amazement, Hutch slid over to make room for Huggy.

“Well, rumor on the street is there’s a couple of heavy dudes from outta town tryin’ to score big.”

Curiosity aroused, Starsky stopped before shoving a couple of fries into his mouth to ask, “Score big on what?”

“That’s the question, my friend. Drugs, jewels, prostitution—no one seems to know on what or how much, yet.” Huggy shrugged before continuing, “Near as I can tell, they hit town a few months back and have played it pretty cool. Lately, they’ve been stretching their wings, so to speak, trying to gather some little birdies into the nest. Heard tell they’re trying to expand their operation and it appears they are making it hard to refuse.”

“How’s that?” Hutch asked.

“You remember Whiskey? Fellow about forty-five, always wearin’ old army clothes, always carrying around a bottle of his namesake in his pocket? Been picked up for some penny-ante stuff in the past?” At Starsky’s nod, Huggy continued, “Rumor has it that he got approached a few weeks back, and yesterday he showed up in the morgue.”

“Sounds like somebody pushed him out of the nest,” Starsky said sarcastically.

At Huggy’s solemn nod, Hutch asked, “What makes you think it’s these two fellows that did it?”

“The fellow that found ’im said there was a whiskey bottle with a broken neck lying next to Whiskey with a note on it.”

“Go on,” Starsky urged, irked at Huggy’s need for dramatics.

“Note said—‘Don’t refuse or this could happen to you’.”

“It might not be the same two characters,” Hutch warned.

Huggy shook his head. “Gotta be. Whiskey was harmless; nobody from around here is gonna wring his neck.”

“You got any description of these two fellows?” Hutch asked.

“Nope, though I heard one’s tall and ugly.”

“Geez, that fits half the stiffs in this town—the other half being short and ugly,” Starsky quipped. “Thanks, Hug. We’ll keep an eye out for ’em, maybe they’re tied to the string of robberies we’re investigating.”

Huggy shrugged, “Could be.”

“C’mon, Starsk. Let’s clear outta here,” Hutch urged, as he started sliding out of the booth. “It’s getting late and it’ll be a long day tomorrow. We’ve got a couple meetings in the morning, and it’s back to the liquor store for the afternoon and evening.”

Starsky sighed in acknowledgment and laid a few bucks on the table. “That cover it?” At Huggy’s nod, Starsky patted him on the arm. “Thanks for the info; we’ll see what we can find out.”

As he headed toward the door, Starsky stopped, snapped his fingers and turned back to Huggy. “Where’s Lester?”

“Lester who?”

“Your cousin, Lester,” Starsky explained, exasperation clearly in his voice.

Huggy contemplated Starsky and his answer. “Whatcha need Lester for?”

“I gotta a notice from the IRS.”

“Ouch, that hurts, man.”

Starsky nodded. “Yeah, well, I need his help on this audit.”

“Sorry, man, Cousin Lester’s outta that business.”

“What do ya mean?” A worried expression crossed Starsky’s face.

“Yep, decided he didn’t like messing with the Feds. Thought it might land him in jail one day.”

Swallowing repeatedly, eyes widening in fear, Starsky asked, “Well, how can I get a hold of ’im?”

“Beats me,” Huggy shrugged. “I heard he’s left for Reno. Left no forwarding address.”

Hutch walked back from the door where he’d been standing and pulled on Starsky’s arm. “C’mon, buddy. Let’s go.”

Starsky nodded and silently followed his partner out.

Once seated in the Ford, Hutch asked, “You okay? You’re looking a little pale.”

Starsky looked straight ahead. “I’m fine. Just contemplatin’ my future, which is lookin’ a little bleak at the moment.”



## *Chapter Four*

“Hello, you must be Davey.”

Starsky shook the hand of the man standing behind the cash register. He was slightly shorter than Starsky, but had the same dark hair, though more wavy than curly. A few streaks of gray were visible. Starsky couldn’t help thinking that the years had been kinder to Tony than to his wife, Maria. Tony was stockier than the detective, long ago unable to shed the pounds his favorite foods, pasta and bread, added to his frame. “Dave, really. But for some reason, Maria always calls me Davey.”

“We have a nephew named Davey, and he lived with us for a while. I guess old habits die hard.”

“You gotta be Tony,” Starsky said, extending his hand in greeting.

“My wife told me she hired you, and she’s real impressed with your work.”

“She’s a nice lady.”

“What brings you to this part of town?”

“Just passin’ through. Kinda like seeing the country while I got no ties. Stayin’ with an old friend for now.”

Looking a little envious, Tony added, “Well, hope to keep you for a while—good help is hard to come by.”

“Anything special you want me to do today?”

“Got a delivery coming in about an hour. I’ll need your help then. For now, why don’t you check the cooler. I haven’t had much of a chance to re-stock today.”

Starsky nodded and headed for the cooler, grabbing the blue windbreaker hanging on the hook just outside the door.



The afternoon dragged for Starsky, since there was only so much restocking he could do. No one had showed him how to use the cash register, so he found a few odd jobs that needed to be done and invented a few others. He hated being confined to the store, when he knew Hutch was out with Erickson interviewing people regarding the latest liquor store heist. About six o’clock, he was filling the cooler when a group of boys, ages thirteen to fifteen, entered the store. At first he didn’t pay much attention to them, but found that being inside the cooler gave him a great advantage—he could watch the kids and they didn’t know he was doing it. *Kinda like the interrogation rooms with one-way mirrors*, he thought, chuckling. When he saw one of the larger boys start hassling two boys about seven or eight years old, he decided to make his presence known. Exiting the cooler, he came to a halt at the end of the candy aisle. He nonchalantly leaned against the potato chip display at the end of the aisle and cleared his throat.

The three older boys glanced up and moved away from the younger ones, feeling a pair of deep blue eyes trained on them in warning.

“Guess, I’ll grab me a candy bar,” the tall blond said, and added with bravado, “and a pack of cigarettes.”

“Don’t you know smoking’s bad for your health?” Starsky threw out casually. “Besides, you’re too young to be buyin’ cigarettes.”

The blond stared at Starsky and, finally breaking eye contact, walked to the counter to pay.

“Pack of Camels,” he ordered, knowing that his two friends were right behind him.

“Sorry, not today,” Maria said. “You heard Davey. You’re too young to be buying cigarettes.”

“They’re for my mother,” he laughed, winking at his buddies.

“Gotta note?”

Embarrassed and angry, the boy answered sarcastically, “No, I don’t got a note.” Then, seeing Starsky’s movement toward him, he threw down some money. “That should

cover the candy bar,” he growled. With a searing stare at Starsky, he exited the store, his two friends on his heels.

“Who’s that mouthy kid?”

“That’s Paulie, been coming here a long time. I’ve watched him grow up.”

“He’s got rotten manners.”

Maria shrugged it off. “Aw, he don’t mean nothin’ by it. Just showin’ off for his friends.”

“Sure.” Starsky moved behind the counter, closer to Maria. “How come you asked him if he had a note? What’s a note gotta do with it?”

Looking embarrassed, Maria answered, “Sometimes parents are too busy to come in, so they send their kid in with some money and a note. Then, I sell the kid the cigarettes. Figure he’s just carrying it for his folks.”

“I never heard of anything in the law that says ‘if you have a note’ it doesn’t matter what age you are. Seems to me you’re still breakin’ the law.”

Blushing, Maria answered, “Guess there’s not.”

Starsky winked at her before moving back toward the cooler. “You might wanna rethink that policy, or one of these days your kind heart’s gonna get you in trouble with the police.”

“Oh, go on,” Maria dismissed him with a wave of her hand. “Those police have bigger fish to fry than me.”

Starsky grinned and walked over to the two young boys still standing in the candy aisle.

“Thanks, Mister,” one said, as Starsky neared.

“My pleasure. I think those boys are long gone now. What did he want anyway?”

“He was trying to get us to give him our money. Paulie lives down the block from us,” the smallest boy remembered to add, as though that excused the behavior.

“That’s no reason to take money from you. Go on, pick out what you want, and then pay Mrs. Viviano.”

The two boys picked out some candy and hurried to the counter. “You workin’ here now, Mister?”

“Yeah, I’m helpin’ Mrs. Viviano. You’d better spread the word.”

The boys nodded solemnly and, after picking up their change, rushed from the store.

“The kids will be mindin’ their p’s and q’s with you bein’ around here,” Maria said, impressed.

“What’s wrong with kids these days?” Starsky wondered out loud, shaking his head, remembering the days when he and Nicky would practically live in the corner candy store. There was never a thought of stealing candy or money from other neighborhood kids. *’Course, who knows what Nicky did after I left the city*, Starsky couldn’t help wonder.

“They’re neighborhood boys. They don’t mean no harm.”

“I hope you’re right.”



“Can you believe it, Hutch? A fifteen-year-old trying to extort money from an eight-year-old?”

Hutch chuckled at the exasperation in his partner’s voice. “Starsky, it happens every day. It’s just kids being kids.”

“Well, I think it’s terrible. Where are their parents?”

The conversation had continued in this vein for over thirty minutes, and Hutch was growing tired of it. “Look, Starsky, let’s drop it. You aren’t going to change the kids roaming the streets. You want to play social worker, then you’d better switch to Juvie.”

Starsky stared in disgust at his partner. “Terrific.”

“You want to know how my evening went?” Hutch asked, taking another swig of beer and trying to change the conversation for the third time.

“It’s gotta be better ’n mine.”

“Don’t count on it. I traveled between five liquor stores in a twenty-block radius and saw absolutely nothing. My butt’s going numb from sitting in the car all night.” Seeing a grin spread across Starsky’s face, Hutch continued, “Got nowhere interviewing people. No one knows anything. No one’s seen anything, though one person recalls seeing a tall, dark-haired stranger in the neighborhood the day before the last robbery. Can’t identify him any more than that, and I can’t find anyone to collaborate his story. We’re getting nowhere—fast.”

“At least there haven’t been any more robberies.”



The ringing phone woke Starsky, and he glanced at the clock—4:30 a.m. He had fallen asleep only two hours earlier, having decided to stay up and watch an old movie.

“Yeah?” he managed to mumble into the receiver.

“You spoke too soon.”

“Huh? It’s four in the morning, Hutch, make sense.”

“Remember how you said there weren’t any more robberies? Well, don’t look now, but I just got a call from Erickson. There was a robbery at the all-night store over on Arnold. He wants us over there.”

“You gotta sound so cheery about it? I just went to sleep.”

“Pick you up in ten minutes.”

“Terrific,” Starsky replied automatically, but he knew it was into a dead phone line, having heard the click of Hutch’s receiver as soon as he’d finished.



“You’re late,” Starsky quipped, looking at his watch—twelve minutes had passed.

“You on time study now?”

“Nah, just practicing for Dobby.” Grinning at his partner, Starsky needed details. “So what did Erickson say?”

“Not much. Just that it went down and the store clerk was shot.”

“Looks like they’re getting their thrills now by shooting people. How’s the clerk?”

“Hanging in there. He was shot in the belly and is probably in surgery already. Too soon to know if he’ll make it.”

“Just our luck.”

Hutch pulled up behind one of the back-and-whites already on the scene. The two men hurriedly exited the car and headed inside, searching for Erickson.

“Starsky. Hutchinson. Glad to see you.” Erickson acknowledged their presence immediately. “Looks like the same two guys, though it will take some time to run the bullets through ballistics and prove the match for sure.”

Starsky left Hutch standing next to Erickson and wandered about the small store, hands clasped behind his back, noting details. “They enter through the front door?” Starsky stopped to ask one of the patrolmen.

“Looks like the back door, sir. They’re checking for fingerprints now.”

Starsky nodded and moved toward the small back room. Glancing around at the men at work, he nodded at the patrolmen standing nearby and then walked back toward his partner, catching the tail end of the lieutenant’s conversation. “...a little different MO this time. This store is just outside their usual area and they came in through the back.”

“Maybe they picked up on the fact that we’ve staked out stores around town, and they’re better hidden entering from the back.”

“Could be,” Erickson agreed. “Well, it looks like we may have to expand the area we’re staking out.”

“We can’t go undercover and stake out every store. And the patrols will keep getting thinner and thinner, making it easier for them to strike...” Starsky pointed out.

“You don’t have to tell me that, Detective Starsky. I’m well aware of the number of liquor stores in this town,” Erickson said angrily.

“Yeah, too damn many,” Starsky couldn’t resist adding.

Hutch reached out and held Starsky’s forearm, warning him to cool it as Erickson moved closer into Starsky’s space. Starsky glanced at Hutch, and then backed off. “Sorry, Sergeant, I guess I’m tired.”

“We all are. See you guys later this morning. You are planning on attending Lieutenant Jackson’s father’s funeral, aren’t you?”

Starsky grimly nodded in agreement before he and Hutch exited the building.

“Let’s hope the clerk makes it. Maybe we’ll get lucky for once and can get a positive ID,” Hutch suggested hopefully.

Starsky stopped as he opened the car door and looked at his partner across the roof of the car. “That’s not the way our luck’s been running.”

Shrugging, Hutch said, “It could change, you know.”

Starsky nodded before they climbed into the car.



“You didn’t get much more sleep, did you?” Hutch asked, looking at the drawn face of his partner reflected in the bathroom mirror.

Starsky finished straightening his tie before answering. “Nah, I kept dreaming about the liquor store all shot up, the glass all over, and I’d see Mrs. Walters lying on the floor, blood covering her, and then, suddenly, it would turn into Mrs. Viviano.” Feeling Hutch’s hand on his shoulder, he smiled grimly.

“Not a pretty picture, buddy. Try to forget it. Unfortunately, going to a funeral isn’t going to help.”

“Just how I wanted to spend my morning off.” Looking around the bedroom one last time, Starsky nodded to Hutch. “Let’s go. It ain’t gonna get any easier.”



Starsky pulled the Torino into the funeral home parking lot. Following the direction of a tall, solemn-looking man in a black suit, he parked the car in the last space in the row. Almost immediately, a second man walked over and placed a flag on the car indicating they would be members of the funeral procession. Starsky, staring at the flag for a moment, felt his partner squeeze his shoulder. He turned to wink at Hutch, and then the two exited the car. Just inside the entrance, they spotted Captain Dobey and headed toward him.



## *Chapter Five*

“Nice funeral, wasn’t it?” Hutch offered, trying to draw his partner out. The brunet had been unusually quiet most of the afternoon.

“I ever tell you I hate funerals?”

“Lots of times, besides, nobody enjoys them,” Hutch replied, sipping his beer. The lunch crowd had left The Pits and it was too early for the evening revelers. Hutch was glad for the peace and quiet it offered—a little time to unwind before the evening shift.

“Erickson said the clerk that was shot is still alive, but on life support. So far, he’s not offering us much hope in locating these guys.”

“Figures.” Hutch took another sip and resumed his intention to get Starsky to discuss the morning’s events. “Jackson looked like he was holding up pretty well.”

Starsky nodded in reply.

“He looks like his father, don’t you think?”

Realizing Hutch wasn’t going to leave him alone, Starsky reluctantly let himself be drawn into the conversation. “Yeah, he does. Bob’s got some nice looking kids, too. A daughter and a son, wasn’t it?”

“Two sons and a daughter. His oldest son was just accepted to the Police Academy,” Hutch said, gauging Starsky’s reaction.

“Like father, like son.”

“Looks like it turns out some pretty good cops. Must be in the genes.” Watching Starsky continue to uncharacteristically nudge the food on his plate with his fork rather than eat it, Hutch's concern increased. He knew Starsky was having a hard time shaking the memory of the funeral. “You okay, buddy?”

Starsky looked up at his friend and managed a weak smile. “Sure, Blondie. Funerals just seem to bring back lots of unwanted memories.”

Hutch reached across the table to briefly touch his partner’s hand. “Be sure to remember the good times, not just the bad.”

Knowing Hutch was concerned about him didn’t make it any easier for Starsky to shake the bad feeling he’d had all day. He blamed it on the dreams and the funeral, but it wasn’t easy trying to break out of the melancholy. In some ways, it felt better to wallow in it.



Leaning down to pick up a six-pack of beer, Starsky noticed Billy glancing around, as though checking to see if anyone was nearby. Curious, he placed the six-pack on the cooler rack and watched Billy’s movements. In disbelief, he watched Billy shove something in his pocket and then, trying to appear nonchalant, glance around once more.

Starsky immediately headed out of the cooler and into the store. Angry that Billy would try to steal something when Maria was so kind and understanding to the boy infuriated him. But until the kid walked out of the store with it still in his pocket, unpaid for, no crime was committed. If he had anything to say in the matter, it certainly wasn’t going to go that far. Billy didn’t need to hurt those around him by stealing, and he wasn’t about to let Billy destroy the trust his mother, his grandmother, and most of all, Maria had in him.

“Hey there, Billy. How ya doin’?” Starsky asked, as he met the young boy at the end of the aisle.

Unwilling to look the man standing before him in the eyes, Billy studied the pattern of the tiles on the floor. “Fine.”

“Coming back for more candy? Didn’t your momma teach you that all that candy is bad for your teeth?”

“It ain’t all for me. I buy it and then sell or give it to my friends.”

“That so?” Starsky, finally catching Billy’s eye, looked down the row of glass doors running along the back of the store and then back at Billy. “Funny thing about workin’ inside a cooler. It gives you a whole new perspective on things...”

Starsky watched Billy’s eyes run down the front of the cooler, and then he blushed as he understood the meaning of Starsky’s words. “Must be awfully cold workin’ in there.”

Starsky nodded solemnly. “It is, but I spend a good part of day in there lookin’ out.”

“How’s your grandma, Billy?” Maria called out, having finished with her last customer and spotting the two talking.

“Doin’ fine, Mrs. Viviano. She sent me in for some soup.” Reaching on the shelf next to him, Billy picked up a can of chicken noodle soup and walked to the counter, glancing surreptitiously at Starsky, who’d remained standing at the end of the aisle.

Setting the soup can and candy on the counter, Billy reached into his pocket and pulled out a dollar bill and some change. He then reached into the other pocket and set the candy bar he’d stuck in his pocket next to it, all the time avoiding Starsky’s eyes.

“Hope your grandma’s not getting sick?” Maria asked, concerned.

“Nah, she just likes soup.”

Maria bagged the can and candy and handed Billy his change. “Tell her I said hi.”

“I will, ma’am.”

Starsky watched Billy leave the store, and then, shaking his head in wonderment, entered the cooler again.



“Got some cold Buds in there?”

At the sound of the familiar voice, Starsky’s face broke into a big grin.

“Hey, partner, what're you doin' in here?”

“Stretching my legs, and besides, I needed a little conversation with someone other than the dispatcher.”

Starsky chuckled. “So you're talkin' to a cooler instead?”

Hutch shook his head. “Get out here, Gordo.”

Starsky walked out of the cooler with a six-pack of Coke. “Here. You're on duty. You shouldn't be havin' a beer.”

“Since when did you become my mother? Those were supposed to be for later tonight when you get off.”

“Well, in that case, I'll pick some up when I leave.”

“Simmons, the clerk shot during the last robbery, is improving. He's still on a respirator, but the doc says he should be coming around soon.”

“Well, maybe we'll get a break.”

“I'll stop by the hospital later and check him on him.” Hutch started to walk away and then turned back toward Starsky. “Oh...I almost forgot, Jackson's back in the office.”

“Not a surprise. I knew he couldn't stay away long.”

“Yeah, well, I'm going back to Metro for a briefing with him, Erickson, and a couple other officers from Robbery. You gonna be okay?”

Starsky grinned. “Now who's being the mother? Here, don't forget these.” He tossed Hutch the six-pack. “I've got another thrilling evening filling shelves and spying on thieves.”

“Thieves?”

“Long story. I'll tell you when I get home, over some beers.” Starsky smiled and patted his partner on the shoulder. “See ya.”



Hutch pulled to a stop in front of Tony's Party Store. It was after 10:00 p.m., and the streets had been quiet. After stopping at the hospital and attending the meeting to update Jackson, Hutch had decided to stop and pick up a bite to eat. After that, he'd checked out the liquor stores in his assigned area. Thankfully, nothing had been happening. Unfortunately, that also meant they weren't any closer to catching the men committing

the crimes. Night after night of this was driving him crazy. *At least Starsky has some activity. I'm just getting fat sitting here.*"

"Zebra Three, come in."

"Zebra Three here."

"We've got a report of a possible two-eleven in progress at the Waterfront Liquor Store, 465 Waters Street."

"Zebra Three responding."

Hutch started the car and headed down the street, thankful that they were finally getting a break.



"Almost time to close up, Davey."

"I know. I've only got to mop the floor," Starsky called from the stockroom where he was filling the bucket with water and soap.

He pulled the bucket and mop into the store and then headed to the far end. From there, he'd work his way around the outside, ending with the center aisle. He was getting tired of all the manual labor, and had decided this morning that the next time there was an undercover assignment, it was going to be Hutch's.

Checking the clock, Starsky locked the front door and glanced out the window to see if his partner was out there waiting for him yet. Seeing no sign of Hutch's car, he began mopping the center aisle. Maybe he'd be done before his partner showed up for once. Starting at the door, he worked his way back to the stockroom. Starsky glanced at Maria counting the money in the cash register and called out, "I'll be done in a few. Just gotta dump the water out the back door."

Starsky backed up to the alley door, mopping as he went. Once there, he turned the key to unlock the door. Opening it a quarter of the way, he pulled out the bucket and proceeded to dump the water into the alley.

He cried out involuntarily as a sudden stabbing pain hit his right shoulder—his muddled mind registering the pain of a knife being yanked out. Before he could even turn to defend himself, his head exploded as something hard was brought down on the back of it. The ground rose up to meet him, but he was unconscious before he could say "hello."



## *Chapter Six*

Hutch pulled up in front of the store and checked his watch. *Good, Starsk's about done.* He sat there, arm slung across the back of the seat. The call at Waters Street had turned out to be a false alarm. While he was disappointed, it at least meant he was back in time to pick up his partner. Ten minutes had passed when he realized that even though the lights were on, he hadn't seen either Maria or Starsky. *Isn't it about time you started mopping, buddy?* he wondered, having already become familiar with Starsky's routine. Leaning forward in his seat, Hutch stared at the building. Still seeing no movement, his anxiety increased and he exited the car, hurrying across the dark, lonely street to the door. "Damn, it's locked."

He moved to the left, staring through the glass. It was then that he saw Maria lying on the floor covered in blood. Growing increasingly frantic, Hutch returned to the door mumbling, "Where are you, Starsk?"

He glanced down the street and realized it was a long way to the side street that led back to the alley. He hadn't seen or heard anything coming from inside the store. Maria was lying injured on the floor. Where did that put his partner? Injured, dead? Had the robbers made him as a cop and taken him as a hostage? There wasn't time and his anxiety was growing. Trusting his sixth sense that the robbers were gone, he looked around for something to break the door with. It would let him gain entry and set off a silent alarm, ensuring a black-and-white would be there in minutes. Spotting a portion of a brick lying along the curb's edge, Hutch grabbed it and threw it through the front door. Wrapping his hand in his jacket, Hutch shattered the glass near the lock and then reached in and turned the key.

Pulling his Magnum, he entered the store cautiously. He crouched behind the checkout counter and quickly moved to Maria's side. Feeling alongside her neck, he sighed thankfully when he felt a pulse.

There was no noise coming from the back, and the strategically placed mirrors hanging in the corner ceilings indicated no one was hiding down any of the aisles. Hutch straightened up and, moving slowly toward the stockroom, kept the Magnum poised and ready. Slowly entering the stockroom, Hutch quickly scanned from left to right, but it was empty. Empty except for the body lying on the floor, its two legs preventing the alley door from shutting.

Rushing to his partner's side, Hutch pushed open the door and knelt next to Starsky, using his back to prop it open. Gently touching him, he felt for a pulse. *Thank God.* His partner was alive—his right shoulder and the back of his head covered in blood—but alive. As Starsky began to moan, Hutch cautioned him, "Easy, buddy. Lie still. I've got to get an ambulance." Quickly glancing around, Hutch saw the blue windbreaker on the hook next to the cooler. He shoved a heavy box against the door, and then grabbed the windbreaker and tucked it around his partner. Brushing at the wayward curls on Starsky's head, he whispered, "Don't move. I'll be right back."

Hutch ran inside and, spotting the payphone hanging on the wall, dialed the operator and ordered an ambulance. He could hear the scream of the black-and-white's siren already on its way.



“How’s your partner?” Captain Dobey asked, worry obvious in his voice as he approached his blond detective standing at the waiting room window.

“I’m waiting for the doctor right now. He regained consciousness in the ambulance, but he lost quite a bit of blood. I was worried about him going into shock,” Hutch said as he turned to face his captain, his eyes stopping only briefly on him before continuing on down the hall to the emergency room door.

Dobey nodded, his eyes following Hutch’s. “Good, he’s regained consciousness. How’s Mrs. Viviano?”

Hutch shook his head. “I don’t know yet. They took her up to surgery. I was hoping to hear something soon, so I can tell Starsky when they let me see him.”

Seeing the door of the emergency room open and a doctor, writing on a chart, exit, Hutch approached him. The doctor, sensing his approach, looked up and asked, “You’re here for Detective Starsky?”

“How is he, Doc?” Hutch asked anxiously. “Can I see him now?”

“He’s doing fine. And you can see him shortly. I’m Dr. Philip Ryan.” Dr. Ryan extended his hand to both Hutch and Captain Dobey. “You must be Hutch. Your partner said I should look for a tall blond with a scowl on his face and a furrowed brow.”

Dobey chuckled and extended his hand. “This is Detective Hutchinson, and I’m their captain, Harold Dobey.”

“Nice to meet you both. Just to let you know, we’ve given him some pain pills and he’s a little groggy from the blow to the head.” Stopping briefly to smile, hoping to lessen Hutch’s obvious anxiety, the doctor continued, “But he’s a lucky fellow. The knife wound wasn’t too deep and it didn’t do any serious damage. We did give him a pint of blood and took x-rays of his skull. Looks like only a mild concussion. He’ll have a headache for a few days, but for the most part, he’s doing just fine.”

“Can I see him?” Hutch repeated.

“In a minute. He asked me to check...” Glancing down to look at his own scribbles, Dr. Ryan finished, “...on a Mrs. Viviano. Detective Starsky became quite agitated when I didn’t have any information on her. I promised to find out something if he’d calm down and let me finish stitching him up.”

“She’s up in surgery,” Hutch explained. “Apparently, after stabbing my partner and knocking him out, the thieves entered the store and stabbed her several times before taking off with the money. I’ve been worried about her myself, but the nurses haven’t been able to tell me anything.”

“When I mentioned to your partner the idea of spending the rest of the night in the hospital, he wasn’t too receptive.” Observing a ghost of a smile play across Hutch’s face, Dr. Ryan continued, “The blood transfusion wasn’t administered that long ago, but according to his medical history he’s never had a problem or reaction after receiving blood.” Hutch nodded encouragingly. Knowing his partner’s aversion to hospitals, he knew Starsky would heal faster at home than in this place. “I think it will be safe to release him, assuming there will be someone around to keep an eye on him? I don’t expect any complications, but even with a mild concussion it’s a good idea for someone to watch—”

“I’ll take him home and keep an eye on him, Doc,” Hutch finally interrupted. “We’ve done this before.”

“Somehow, I had that feeling,” Dr. Ryan sighed. “Okay, then, why don’t you go in and see him, while I check on Mrs. Viviano’s progress? I think he’ll be able to rest easier knowing if she’s okay. I’ll send the nurse in with a prescription for some pain pills in case he needs it for his shoulder, but see that he takes them sparingly in the beginning; you’re going to need to wake him every few hours and the pills might zonk him out. He’s going to need to check back with his regular physician to take care of those stitches and arrange any physical therapy. Can you handle that?” Seeing Hutch smile in relief, Dr. Ryan patted him on the shoulder. “Go ahead. He’s in treatment room B.”

As Hutch hurried down the hall and pushed the door open, Dobby asked, “Dr. Ryan, I’ve got a question for you, if you have a moment...”



“Hey, buddy,” Hutch said, pleased to see Starsky sitting up, his right arm in a sling. “How ya doin’?”

Starsky looked up and smiled at the sound of his partner’s voice. “‘Bout time they let you in. I’ve been asking for you.”

“So I’ve heard.” Seeing Starsky’s smile widen, Hutch said a silent prayer of thanks that it hadn’t turned out any more serious than it had, and he patted his partner on the knee. “Doc says you can go home with me. Let’s get you ready to get outta here.”

“Fine by me,” Starsky said, as he started to slide off the examining table.

As his feet hit the floor, his legs suddenly seemed to turn to jello, and he was glad for Hutch’s firm grip on his elbow. “Whoa, buddy. The nurse will be coming in just a

minute with a prescription, and probably a wheelchair. I don't think you're quite up to making it on your own yet," Hutch warned.

Finding himself agreeing with Hutch, Starsky unhappily sat back up on the table, his pulse racing. "I just want outta here before they start jabbing me with needles again."

"I know. But if you pass out, or hit your head again, they aren't going to let you out at all," Hutch admonished.

Starsky's signaled his agreement, and Hutch was pleased when he remained seated.

Dr. Ryan pushed open the door and, tucking his pen in his pocket, chuckled, "It appears we'll be releasing you into the custody of your partner, Detective Starsky." He winked at Hutch and added, "I've always wanted to say those words." But then, he continued on a more serious note. "I checked on Mrs. Viviano for you. She's come through surgery fine and she's in recovery. Though she's lost quite a bit of blood, she suffered no damage to any major organs. I'd say you were both extremely lucky tonight."

Starsky would have nodded in agreement, but he knew from prior experience any movement was going to cause pain. "Thanks, Doc. Now can I get outta here?"

"Sure, the nurse will be in momentarily." Turning toward Hutch, he added, "I don't anticipate any problems, but if anything does happen, like he gets disoriented, then get him back here right away. If he's no longer responsive, call an ambulance immediately."

Hutch nodded in reply as a young redheaded nurse pushed the door open with a wheelchair. "Okay, Sergeant Starsky, time for a ride."

Starsky moved off the table more slowly this time, knowing Hutch was stationed nearby in case he needed any assistance. "Sounds good to me, schweetheart."



Hutch pulled to a stop in front of Starsky's apartment. "Okay, Gordo, now we get you up the stairs and into bed." Though his partner had been quiet most of the trip—leaning back against the seat, eyes closed—he knew Starsky hadn't fallen asleep. There had been a series of stifled moans coming from that direction, as they seemed to find every bump and rut in the road between the hospital and Starsky's apartment, despite Hutch's best effort to avoid them.

"Just stay seated and I'll come around..." Seeing a scowl cross his partner's face, Hutch's voice faded away, but not his intent. He knew Starsky would need help for the next few days, but his partner's stubborn streak was bound to get in the way. Reaching across in front of Starsky, Hutch pushed on the door handle and gave the door a slight shove. "Take it slow," he warned, before exiting on his side. Taking just a few long strides, he was beside his partner before the brunet even made it to the steps. Hovering

near Starsky's left elbow, he found it difficult not to offer support, but he knew Starsky had a highly independent streak and wouldn't appreciate the effort.

At the top, Starsky reached into his jean's pocket for his keys and started to insert the door key, but then stopped. He turned to hand Hutch the key. "Here, you do it. It'll make you feel better."

Hutch took the key without argument. Smiling at his exhausted partner, he pushed open the door for him to enter. Seeing Starsky head toward the couch, Hutch protested, "Hey, I said to bed."

As Starsky gratefully sank into the couch, he lifted his feet onto the coffee table. "Look, Hutch, I've been thinkin'. You plan on wakin' me every few hours, for a while, right?" At Hutch's confirming nod, he continued, "Then, there's no point in getting too comfortable. I might as well watch some TV." Starsky patted the cushion next to him. "Turn on the TV, Hutch, grab us a coupl'a beers, and have a seat."

Hutch stared at his stubborn partner before going over to the TV. After hitting the power button, he headed into the kitchen and toward the refrigerator. He knew Starsky was feeling drowsy, but apparently the adrenaline was still racing through his body. They'd been up the entire night, and the concussion had to be making him sleepy. If Starsky would just allow himself to unwind a little, Hutch was sure he'd quickly fall asleep, but, for some reason, he appeared to be fighting the message his own body was sending. Rather than argue with him, and choosing to ignore the request for beer, Hutch decided on a different tactic. "What do you want to eat?"

"I'm not hungry."

Hutch moved from the refrigerator to the cupboard. "Well, there's a can of soup. I'll..."

"Hutch, it's six o'clock in the morning. Who wants soup?"

"What do you want, then?" Hutch, well aware of his partner's deplorable eating habits, anticipated the reply.

"Should be some cold pizza in there."

"Starsk, you're going to rot your gut."

Hutch, searching the refrigerator further, heard Starsky call out. "There's chili in the refrigerator. Mrs. Swanson, my neighbor, gave it to me before she left on vacation."

"Chili, at six in the morning?" Hutch asked in disbelief.

"Restaurants list chili as soup on their menus," Starsky said smugly.

Shaking his head to the inevitable, Hutch found the chili and an empty pot. After putting it on to heat, he joined his partner on the couch.



“How’s the arm feeling?”

“If I don’t move around too much, it’s just a dull throb. Sling helps. My head hurts more.”

“Finish your chili, then go back and rest, and I’ll clean up.” Hutch watched as his partner pushed the unfinished bowl away, declaring he’d had enough, and then slowly stood. Starsky had assured him that ‘he wasn’t an invalid’ and was up to eating at the table, so before he sat down, Hutch had insisted he’d be more comfortable if he changed out of his bloody shirt and jeans and put on some sweats. Now, as Starsky wobbled a little as he walked back to the couch, Hutch tried again, “The bed would be more comfortable.”

Ignoring the suggestion, Starsky returned to sit on the couch as Hutch cleaned up the table and did the dishes.

Finished putting the dishes away, Hutch dried his hands on the dishtowel and slung it over his shoulder. Starsky was no longer sitting in front of the TV, and Hutch was pleased that he’d finally headed to bed. Hutch glanced at his watch, noting when he’d have to wake his partner, and headed to the front door. He’d noticed yesterday’s newspaper still on the stoop when they’d come home. Now that Starsky was in bed, maybe he’d have a few minutes to look at it. Opening it to read the headlines, he wandered over to lay it on the coffee table. Surprised to hear a moan, Hutch turned to see Starsky curled on his side on the couch, head propped up on a pillow against the armrest. *Just couldn’t do what I asked, could you, buddy?* he thought, chuckling.

Hutch headed for the closet and pulled out the blue blanket that he’d used on numerous occasions when he’d spent the night, either too tired or too drunk to drive home safely. Walking back to the couch, he covered Starsky. He then sat down in the chair intending to keep an eye on his partner, but it was only a matter of minutes before he, too, was asleep—a rerun of “The Andy Griffith Show” playing softly in the background.



## ***Chapter Seven***

Grabbing the phone on the second ring, Hutch whispered, “Hutchinson.”

“Hutch, it’s Bob Jackson. How’s Starsky doing?”

“Not bad, considering. He’s got a headache and his arm and shoulder are sore, but he’s been resting most of the day. What’s up with the investigation?”

“Well, I hate to tell you this, but it doesn’t look like this robbery’s related to the others.”  
“What do you mean?” Hutch’s voice rose in disbelief, but he instantly lowered it when he saw Starsky begin to stir. “It’s the same MO as the last one, except they used knives instead of guns.”

“Looks that way, but besides using knives, it’s too amateurish. We’ve lifted some fingerprints, and at the other robbery sites they were too smart to leave prints. Of course, we’ll check them out, but I don’t think they’ll lead us anywhere. Robberies occur every day, Hutch, and they aren’t all related.”

“I know that!” Hutch said angrily. “You mean to tell me that Starsky and Mrs. Viviano were knifed as part of a random act, while half the police force was out there on the streets watching?”

“Fraid so. How long do you think your partner will be laid up?”

Hutch looked at the sleeping figure on the couch and predicted, “Not nearly long enough. I’m sure he’ll want to jump right back in. He wants the men who hurt Maria.”

Lieutenant Jackson sighed. “I understand. I’m going to stop by the hospital this evening and see if I can get a statement. Did you get one from Starsky yet?”

“Sorry, he can’t help. He was jumped from behind and knocked unconscious.”

“Okay. Well, I’ll get back with you tomorrow. Both of you get some rest.”

“Thanks, Bob.”

As Hutch hung up the phone, he saw Starsky starting to sit up. “Hey, there, sleepyhead. Feeling better?”

Running his fingers through his unruly hair, Starsky asked, “Who was that?”

“Bob Jackson. Checking on how you were doing.”

“Nice of him.” Starsky stretched his left arm carefully and then turned toward his partner. “Go home and get some sleep. I’m fine.”

“I’ll go as soon as you’re in bed,” Hutch said pointedly.

“Anyone ever tell you you’ve got a one-track mind?”

“Look who’s talking.”

“Okay, okay, you win. I’m going to bed. Besides, I’m getting a stiff neck from the arm of the couch. Make you happy?” Starsky headed into the bedroom and pulled back the covers of the bed.

As he slid under them, Hutch asked, “Aren’t you going to get out of your clothes?”

Pulling the covers up to his shoulders, Starsky replied, “No. Go home, Mother.”  
“I will.” Seeing that his partner was now comfortably in bed and almost instantly dozing, Hutch returned to the living room and sat down on the couch. Pulling the blanket over him, he settled in the warm spot Starsky had vacated. “Tomorrow.”



The smell of bacon cooking woke Starsky and he sat up. A glass of water and his pain pills were lying on the nightstand next to him. Smiling at Hutch being Hutch, he took them and then headed into the bathroom.

As he came out the door, he saw Hutch standing at the entrance to the bedroom, spatula in hand. “Good, you’re up. I was going to come in and wake you in a minute. Breakfast is ready.”

“I can smell it.”

“Take your pills.”

“I already did.”

Hutch smiled. “Okay, then, come and get it.”

As Starsky sat down at the table, he asked, “You gotta be this cheery so early in the morning?”

“Sure, buddy. Why not? It’s a great day.” *It is a great day*, Hutch couldn’t help thinking. *You’re sitting here eating, a little bruised and sore maybe, but here, nevertheless.* “While you shower, I’m going to head over to Metro and see what they turned up on the robbery and find out how Mrs. Viviano’s doing.” A shadow crossed Starsky’s face, and Hutch offered, “Unless you’d rather I’d wait until you’re done.”

Starsky started to shake his head, and then thought better of it. “No, go. I’ll be fine.” He took a few bites of egg and set his spoon down.

“You’ve got to eat more than that.” Hutch, suddenly suspicious, asked, “You feeling okay?”

“Stomach ain’t feelin’ so good.”

“Well, the doc said you might have some nausea. Though, yesterday’s chili sure didn’t seem to bother you.” Hutch watched the emotions play across his partner’s face. “It’s more than that.” As Starsky sat there silently playing with his food, Hutch prodded, “Talk to me.”

“My fault,” Starsky mumbled into his plate.

“What’s your fault?”

“I acted like a rookie and let those guys jump me. Because of that, Mrs. Viviano’s lyin’ in a hospital bed. She could’ve been killed.” Angry with himself, Starsky stood up and started pacing.

“You could have been killed, too, buddy,” Hutch added softly. “Look, I don’t know what to say, except it’s not your fault. You never saw it coming—”

“But I should have, and that’s the point. I should’ve double checked behind that door first.”

“And they probably would have jumped you anyway, and, instead of taking it in the shoulder, it would have been in your gut. It’s a good thing you didn’t try taking ’em on. It was two against one. I couldn’t have helped. I was responding to a two-eleven call that turned out to be a false alarm.”

Starsky looked at Hutch in surprise. “You think it could’ve been a set-up?”

Hutch shook his head, “Nah, I don’t think so. Bob says this robbery isn’t even related to the others.”

“Oh, great, now we have two sets of creeps to find.”

Hutch chuckled at Starsky’s choice of words. “And you’re going to need some muscle power if you want to take them on. So eat your breakfast.”

“Think my cover’s been blown?”

Hutch shrugged, “I don’t think so. We’ll see, but you certainly aren’t going back undercover until the doc gives the all clear.” Hutch shook his finger in warning at his partner. “Which reminds me, when you’ve finished your shower, you’d better call your doctor to set up an appointment.”

“Yes, Mom.” Starsky grinned at the blond before taking a bite out of a strip of bacon.



Hutch entered Metro and, lost in thought, automatically headed toward the squadroom.

Captain Dobey spotted him coming down the hall and hurried toward the blond detective. “How’s Starsky doing?”

“Fine, Captain. Hurting a little, but he’ll bounce back.”

“What are you doing here?”

“Checkin’ in with Jackson.”

“Any leads yet?”

Hutch shook his head.

“Tell Starsky I said to take care of himself,” Dobey advised, and then quickly cleared his throat, embarrassed at letting his concern show.

“Will do, Captain. Say hi to Edith and the kids for us.”

At Dobey’s nod, Hutch continued down the hall and then turned to take the flight of stairs up to Robbery. Captain Dobey stood there a minute, watching him walk away, and then spotting Sergeant Tomlinson, yelled down the hall, “Tomlinson, my office. Now.”



“Detective Hutchinson. There’s a phone call for you.” Lieutenant Jackson’s secretary poked her head in the door, trying to get Hutch’s attention.

Hutch stood and indicated to Jackson that he’d take the call in the outer office. At Jackson’s nod, Hutch left the room, leaving the remaining four men to continue their discussion.

“Who is it?” Hutch asked.

“Detective Starsky.”

“Starsky?” Concerned, Hutch grabbed the receiver. “What’s wrong?”

“What day is it?”

Confused, Hutch repeated, “What day is it? You pull me out of a meeting to ask me what day it is? Maybe I’d better take you back to the hospital to have that head of yours examined again.”

Plaintively, Starsky said, “Just tell me what day it is.”

“It’s the twelfth. Why?”

“I was afraid of that,” Starsky said, clearly distressed.

“Why do you care what day it is?”

“Because, Hutch...” Starsky continued, as though stating the obvious, “...because, I forgot all about it.”

“Forgot all about what, Starsk? You aren’t making any sense.”

“On the eleventh, yesterday,” he added with emphasis, “I was supposed to go to the IRS for the audit, and I missed it. They’re going to throw me in jail,” he whined.

“Starsk, calm down. Nothing’s going to happen. You had a valid reason—”

“No reason’s good enough for the IRS. I’m in big trouble. What’s Dobe going—”

“Starsky, you were in the hospital getting stitched up. I think they’ll accept that.”

“You think so?” Starsky asked, his voice brightening at the possibility.

“Is there a phone number on that letter? Just give them a call and explain.”

“You think that will work?”

“Well, it’s worth a shot.” Hutch rolled his eyes at the secretary, before continuing, “And when you find out something, don’t pull me out of the meeting. I’ll call you when I get done. Understood?”



Humming on the way home, Hutch was pleased that he’d be able to tell his partner that Mrs. Viviano was doing much better. The fact that she was going to be released from the hospital in a few days was good news, but the fact that she couldn’t identify either of the men that had stabbed and robbed them was not good. Both men had worn masks on their faces, and, while she thought one of the voices was familiar, she hadn’t been able to positively identify it.

Pulling to a stop behind the Torino, Hutch hurried inside. When he’d tried calling Starsky back earlier, there’d been no answer. Assuming he had been in the shower, Hutch decided to head to Starsky’s place as soon as the meeting was finished, to tell him in person about Maria and to check on how his friend was doing.

Hutch opened the door and was surprised to see Starsky sitting on the floor in front of the coffee table, papers and receipts all over the floor and table. “What are you doing, Starsk?”

“I’m going back through my records. Trying to find the tax information,” Starsky replied, intent on the contents of a torn grocery bag.

“What’s in that bag?”

Starsky looked up. “Huh...my receipts,” he said, as though stating the obvious.

“I take it the phone call went all right?”

Starsky’s face lit up. “That was a great idea, Hutch. I explained what happened, even told them I’d bring in the hospital bills to prove it, and they just let me reschedule.”

“What date? You don’t want to miss another one,” Hutch said, bending down to look in a bag stuffed with papers.

Starsky grabbed the bag back. “Three weeks. The lady said it’s a good thing I called; otherwise, they were going to send me a big bill.”

“Those were her words? ‘Big bill’?”

Starsky grinned, “Well, I added the word ‘big,’ but it still would’ve been a bill.”

“Starsk, you do realize, don’t you, that you could still end up with a very big bill? Who knows what Lester put on your return?”

Looking a little green, Starsky hastened to add, “I told him only to put down legit stuff. Not to make anything up.”

“Let’s hope that’s all he did,” Hutch cautioned. “And that he didn’t use any creative accounting.”



“You going on surveillance tonight?” Starsky asked, as he ate the last bite of his spaghetti.

“Course. You’re the one laid up, not me.”

“But I thought it was ‘me and thee’; you can’t go out without the ‘me’.”

Hutch laughed at the disappointed little boy look on his partner’s face. “I’ve been riding around without you for the past week while you were busy filling coolers.”

Starsky shrugged. “What am I gonna do?”

“Watch TV and get some rest.”

Clearly unhappy, Starsky said, “I’m tired of resting. See I can even move my arm a little.”

Willing to demonstrate, Starsky moved his right arm slowly, but when a few beads of sweat broke out on his forehead, Hutch cautioned, “Tear those stitches, and you’ll have to go back for more.”

Starsky frowned, not only out of frustration at his limited mobility, but because he knew his partner was right. Picking up his empty dishes, he walked into the kitchen and put them in the sink.

Hutch followed him in, placed his hand on Starsky’s shoulder and said sympathetically, “Look, it’s only a few more days before you see your doctor. Don’t push it.” The location of Starsky’s injury had dredged up memories Hutch had thought were long buried. Memories—unwanted memories—of the night at Giovanni’s when Starsky had been shot by two hired killers. The night he’d been scared—scared that he wouldn’t be able to save his partner’s life.

“It’ll be fine, Hutch,” Starsky said softly, as though sharing the same memories. He looked at his partner and smiled. “You’d better get going or someone’s going to issue an APB on you.”

Hutch patted him on the back, offering instead, “Leave the dishes; I’ll do them when I get back.”

Starsky nodded, but as soon as Hutch left, he started filling the sink with hot water. Wincing, as he removed the sling so that it wouldn’t get wet, Starsky realized even completing this simple task was going to be more tiring than he thought.



Hutch unlocked the front door and opened it slowly. He was surprised to find Starsky already in bed and not asleep in front of the TV with some old horror flick playing. Going over to the sink to set a bag of groceries down and grab a glass of water, he smiled when he noticed the dishes washed and put away. His partner never ceased to amaze him. He might whine and complain about the silliest of things, but he could always find a subtle way to show his thanks. Hutch walked to the bedroom and, glancing in, saw Starsky sprawled across the bed, the covers lying askew. Reaching down to pull them up, he was pleased to finally see a peaceful and pain-free expression on the brunet’s face.

Hutch went to the couch and gratefully sank down. He didn’t want to admit to his partner how much he missed having him by his side. It would only mean he’d be in for hours of pleading and whining. Tonight had been a long, boring night. One that got them no closer to identifying and locating the suspects. It was beginning to look like the case was really going to drag on. Something none of them wanted. Dobey was already asking when they’d be returning to Homicide. Luckily, they hadn’t been pulled back in on the

Samuelson case. The DA had called to say that the attorneys were presenting their closing arguments tomorrow, and then it was up to the jury. *Maybe one thing will go our way, Starsk, maybe one thing.*



## ***Chapter Eight***

Two nights later, Hutch was getting ready to leave when he noticed Starsky putting on his navy blue parka. “Where you going?” he asked, curious.

“With you.”

“No, you’re not.”

“Yes, I am,” Starsky stated.

“You don’t have an okay from the doctor to go back to work. You don’t even see him for a couple more days.”

Starsky shrugged and headed to the door. “You’ve been saying that nothing’s happenin’, so there shouldn’t be any problem with me riding around in the car with you. I know some new word games,” he offered eagerly.

“Starsk, I don’t need any word games. Jackson will have my hide if I let you ride along.”

“I’ll duck if he shows up.”

Aware that he wasn’t going to change his stubborn partner’s mind, Hutch gave in reluctantly, hoping to extract a promise from Starsky in return. “If anything happens, you promise to stay in the car?”

“Scout’s honor,” Starsky said.

“You weren’t in the Scouts,” Hutch pointed out.

“You were in the Sea Scouts, and we’re practically living together, so that’s close enough,” Starsky reasoned, shrugging his shoulders. Hoping to prove that he didn’t intend to get into any possible action, he’d purposely left his gun and holster locked up in his bedroom. “Look, I won’t even take my gun.” He opened his jacket for Hutch to see the missing holster. “Nothing’s going to happen, besides, I just wanna get outta here for a little while.” Starsky looked at Hutch, pleading, the tone of his voice instinctively changing to the little boy he knew Hutch couldn’t resist.

“Get going,” Hutch said, pushing his partner toward the door. He hit the light switch and pulled the door closed behind them.



“I’m getting bored, Hutch. Is this really all you’ve been doing every night?”

“You know this is all I’ve been doing,” Hutch replied, dousing the lights and pulling to a stop across the street from Garfield Liquors. It was the second time that night they’d made their rounds. Garfield’s was on the edge of the warehouse and light industrial district and was primarily frequented by second and third shift workers. The employees were now either on their way home or working, and the streets were quiet.

Starsky sat in his seat rubbing his arm, sorry that he’d forgotten to grab the sling before he’d left. He was occupying his time by watching the moon’s shadows play against the building. “Hutch,” he whispered suddenly. “I think I see some movement down that alley.” Starsky pointed ahead and to the right. “I could have sworn I saw a person’s shadow.”

Having learned long ago to trust his partner’s instincts, Hutch reached for the door handle. “You stay here.”

“Hutch—”

“I don’t have time for this, Starsk. You promised. Besides, I don’t need to worry about you—”

“Go,” Starsky said. “But, if you’re not back in ten minutes, I’m coming after you.”

“If I’m not back, you call for back-up and stay put.”

Hutch exited the car and stealthily moved toward the building to his right. Gun drawn, he headed toward the alley.

Starsky blinked repeatedly, his eyes tired and strained from staring into the dark. The moonlight was playing games with him, sending shadows in every direction. Unable to read his watch, Starsky calculated that at least eight minutes had passed. He reached for the radio and called for back-up. Then, without a moment’s hesitation, he opened the car door and headed toward the alley.



Hutch entered the alley using only the moonlight to guide his way. It was a long, narrow alley filled with litter, broken bottles, boxes, and trash bins. *Plenty of places to hide*, Hutch thought. He moved slowly down the alley, body taut against the brick walls. Seeing nothing unusual, Hutch increased his pace. He was certain Starsky had seen someone, the only question was whether it was one of the suspects, or just a bum heading for the protective doorway of a building. Crouching slightly, gun drawn and ready, he

moved from trash bin to box and back again, providing himself as much coverage as possible. He stopped to catch his breath and let his eyes adjust to the darkening alley, the moon now hidden by clouds. He froze as he heard the scuffling of feet farther ahead. He stepped out from behind the overflowing trash bin and moved past the back door of an abandoned warehouse. It was in that instant he felt a hard blow to the back of his head and, losing consciousness, fell to the dirty ground.

A tall, dark-haired man stepped out of the shadows and, pocketing Hutch's gun, grabbed him under the arms and dragged him into the building. He returned to the door and glancing down the alley, smirked when he saw no one coming. He shut the door and locked it.



Starsky stopped at the entrance to the alley. He couldn't hear anything. He moved ahead slowly, apprehension growing in the pit of his stomach. He was waiting for Hutch to call or the sound of his returning footsteps. *Hutch knows I'd never stay in that car, even if I did promise. If he's in trouble, promises don't count.* Starsky thought as he waited, his vision and hearing attuned to the deafening silence of the alley. Deciding he couldn't wait any longer, he moved between the darkening shadows.

Hearing a noise, he reached for his gun. *Damn! I left it behind.* He had done so to persuade his partner into letting him come, and now he regretted it. Moving stealthily, he slid into the dark shadows of a doorway and strained to see what was ahead. He continued forward and stopped suddenly at the sound of someone humming softly. *Hutch?*

Starsky continued moving forward cautiously, not willing to scare away whoever was there. The clouds covering the moon drifted on, leaving the moon's light to once again shine on the alley. Ahead, Starsky saw the leg of a man sticking out into the alley, the man resting on the bottom step of a stoop leading into one of the abandoned buildings. Starsky moved forward slowly, careful not to scare the man.

As Starsky neared, the man called out, "I ain't got nothin', so robbin' me ain't gonna get you anythin'."

Starsky straightened up and approached slowly, his hands clearly at his side, in full view. Without his gun, and with a throbbing arm, he was at the guy's mercy. The last thing he wanted to do was spook him. "I don't want anything, except some info. You see a blond man, little taller'n me, go past here, probably in a hurry?"

The man, his face full of sweat and dirt, studied Starsky before answering. "I ain't seen nobody."

Starsky looked back and forth down the alley. "Could he have gotten past you without you seeing him?"

“Possible. But I doubt it.”

“Anybody else come down this alley tonight?” Starsky was growing impatient, but he wanted information, anything that might help.

The man took a drink from the whiskey bottle on the ground next to him and then looked up. “You a cop or somethin’?”

Starsky reached into his back pocket and pulled out his badge, flashing it at the guy, knowing that in the darkness he wouldn’t be able to read it. “Yeah, I’m a cop. And I’m trying to find my partner.”

The man shrugged, “Like I said, I didn’t see no one. Least whys a tall blond.” He took a drink from the almost empty whiskey bottle and added, “Few hours ago, Curly came back.”

Grabbing onto anything, Starsky asked, “Who’s Curly? Friend of yours?”

“Curly ain’t no friend of mine. I stay clear of him. He’s a mean one.” Taking another sip, the drunk nodded in confirmation. “Yep, he’s a mean one.”

“What does he look like, and where do I find this Curly?”

“He’s a tall man, with dark curly hair. He’s been coming down here the last few months. Goes into one of the abandoned warehouses, back there.” Starsky turned to look in the direction he’d come from. That meant that Curly, one of the possible suspects, was somewhere down this alley and Hutch was missing, possibly hurt. He didn’t like the odds facing him.

Reaching into his wallet and pulling out a twenty, Starsky held it out. “Thanks for your help.” He handed the money to the man and then, replacing the wallet, hurried back down the alley.

Starsky started trying every door leading out into the alley, but most were locked and those that weren’t looked like they hadn’t been entered in years. He could hear footsteps coming down the alley and figured it to be the back-up he’d radioed in for. Hurrying toward the two officers, and knowing that they couldn’t clearly see him, he called out, “It’s Detective Starsky. Don’t shoot.”

He slowed his pace as they approached, leaving his hands in plain view. “Spread out, we need to search for Detective Hutchinson. He went down this alley a little while ago and hasn’t come out. Begin at the front of the alley and go into every building and search carefully, he may be injured. But be careful, the suspects he’s looking for are armed and dangerous.”

As the two officers ran back toward the entrance to the alley, Starsky rushed back to where he'd left off. As he reached the end of the alley, he was not at all surprised to find the drunk gone. And then he realized how dumb he'd been. *Damn it, Hutch, I better go have my head examined again. I was in such a hurry to find you I forgot to grab a gun from one of the officers.*

Trying every door, he soon became frustrated when he found no clues to Hutch's disappearance. He started searching the ground for anything that might lead him to finding Hutch. The moon and clouds no longer wanted to cooperate, offering Starsky little light to see by. He knelt down to look closer at the ground near an overfilled trash bin. It looked like something, or someone, had been dragged. He looked up at the back door, and then up the five-story brick wall. It was an abandoned warehouse where someone could easily stay hidden. Straightening up, he rubbed his right arm, now fully aware of how much it was aching. Clenching his jaw, he shrugged it off and headed to the door, a brick in his hand.



## *Chapter Nine*

Hutch, slowly regaining consciousness, moved cautiously. His head ached, but he wanted to make sure everything else was functioning. He was lying on the ground on his side, with his hands tied behind his back. The view from the floor led him to believe he was in a small office. He could see the corner of what looked like an old metal army desk and a rollaway chair. Using his hands and shoulder for leverage, he pushed himself to a sitting position and then slid back to lean against the wall behind him. From there he could view the entire room. It was an old office that offered no clues to where he was or how he'd gotten there. He leaned his head back against the wall, and then winced as he rested it on the spot where he'd been hit. He listened for any voices or footsteps. At first he didn't hear anything, but found if he concentrated he could make out voices—voices that were too far away to distinguish what was being said.

Hutch shifted to his knees and stood, using the wall for support. Sweat broke out on his forehead and he felt dizzy, but he knew that couldn't deter him. Moving closer to the door, he hoped the voices would be clearer.

“Curly, why'd you bring him here?” a raspy voice, clearly worried, asked.

“Cause he was nosin' around,” Curly answered.

“But he's a cop.”

“Willie, quit whining. I know he's a cop. He didn't fool me. He's been sitting in that old piece of junk so we won't think he's a cop, but he's been watching Garfield's and the other liquor stores in the area for over two weeks now. He's interfering with our

business, so when he pokes his nose where it ain't supposed to be, I'm takin' care of him."

"But what are we going to do with him when he comes 'round?"

"We'll take him and drop him in the river. They'll be looking for him for a long time and in the wrong place."

"What about his partner?"

"I've been watching this guy for the last two weeks, and he don't got no partner riding with him; seems he's always alone, which makes it a lot easier for us."

*Starsky!* At the word "partner," Hutch remembered Starsky sitting in the car waiting for him. He'd told his partner to stay put, but he knew if he hadn't returned within the agreed upon time period Starsky would have ignored his warning and come looking for him instead. He knew his partner would never sit and wait if he thought Hutch was in any danger. There was no doubt in his mind that Starsky'd be looking for him. Starsky wasn't in any shape to help him, and he could be walking into a trap. What a fool he'd been, letting his partner talk him into coming along. Now, he'd put both their lives in jeopardy.

Hearing the voices move toward him, Hutch quickly returned to the spot where he'd been when he first regained consciousness and awkwardly laid back down. Hearing the door open, he closed his eyes until they were tiny slits. He wanted to be able to identify Curly and Willie when this was all over.

"He's still out, Curly. Why don't we just take him in the car and dump him in the desert? He'll never remember what happened to him."

"Now that he knows where we've been holed up for two months, he'll be back. And next time, it won't be alone. That means we've gotta move this operation somewhere else. Samuelson ain't gonna like that."

*Samuelson! How's he involved?* Listening to Curly expound on what Samuelson might do once he found out that the operation had to be moved, Hutch was positive that if Curly didn't report directly to Samuelson, then it was to one of the men high in his organization. Despite the fact that Samuelson was headed behind bars, he was still expanding his operations. Only now he was bringing in outsiders. *At least they don't seem to know that I was one of the arresting officers and just testified against Samuelson. They'd probably hand him my head on a silver platter. Samuelson would be positively thrilled to know that you're holding me and plan on killing me. He'd love nothing more than to see both Starsky and me dead. And he just may have his wish, if Starsky walks in here.*

Curly walked toward Hutch and, when he got close enough, kicked Hutch in the side, "Wake up there, copper. You've had enough beauty rest." After two other kicks of

increasing intensity, Hutch decided it might be in his own best interest to appear to wake up, so he began moaning.

Opening his eyes, Hutch looked directly into Curly's face, and he understood why there weren't many people who would dare mess with him. His dark eyes bore a hole in Hutch's, and the scar on his right cheek added to his gaunt look. He was tall and thin, hunching over as if to discourage his true height, his black hair more wavy than curly.

"Okay, copper, it's time to rise and shine." Curly reached down and yanked Hutch to his feet. "We're going to leave this place in a few minutes, and I ain't carryin' you."

Hutch leaned back against the wall, watching Curly and Willie. It was obvious that Curly ran the show and Willie took the orders. In fact, Willie stayed a respectful distance from Curly, which led him to believe Willie had already had one too many encounters with his supposed partner.

"Let's go, Willie. We'll take him down the back stairs to the loading docks. Samuelson had his men store a car in there for our disposal. Nice of him, wasn't it?" Turning toward Hutch he moved the gun, indicating he should move forward into the hall. Hutch moved forward slowly, trying to think of a way out of his situation. He was trying to stall for time—time for Starsky or the back-up he was supposed to order, to show up. But Curly wasn't allowing it, and he brought the gun barrel down hard on Hutch's shoulder, causing Hutch to trip and bang into the doorframe. If it hadn't been there, he would have fallen hard onto the floor.

"Not a good idea, Blondie. I suggest you choose to keep moving, or I'll just bring the butt of this gun down on the back of that head of yours again and drag you down them two flights of stairs."

Balancing himself, Hutch exited into the hallway a few feet behind Willie, fully aware that Curly was close on his heels.



Starsky slowly climbed the back stairs, following the drag marks up the stairs. The dust that had accumulated after the building had been abandoned left a clear trail. Again, he reached for his gun and angrily withdrew his hand when he remembered he didn't have it with him. *Damn, why didn't I ask the patrolmen for one of their guns? Hutch is only going to say I rushed off again without thinking. Truth is, buddy, you were the only thing on my mind. Let's hope we can come up with some brilliant idea other than guns when the time comes. I'll be pretty useless in a shootout, especially when I can pretty much bet that the only people carrying any guns will be the bad guys.*

Starsky had reached the second floor and was ready to enter the door, when he heard a noise coming from above. Hesitating, he looked up the stairs toward the third floor, pausing to see if anyone was coming near. When no one came, he decided to go up. He

slowly and cautiously climbed the stairs. His body was feeling heavier by the minute, his right arm hanging almost useless at his side. It had been hours since he'd last taken his pain medication, and his body was angrily reminding him. Using the railing for leverage he headed up the stairs, uncertain what he'd do when he reached the top. He only knew that if there were noises, then chances were good that Hutch was part of that noise, whether it was willingly or not.

Pulling himself to the top step, he paused to catch his breath, and then slightly cracked open the hallway door in order to hear better. He heard voices, but didn't recognize any of them. "We'll take him down the back stairs to the loading dock."

Starsky knew they'd be coming in his direction, and he looked around for a place to hide, but being at the top of a flight of stairs offered little protection and no place to go. He backtracked down the steps to the second floor and tried to figure out where the loading docks would be located. Afraid that they'd enter the steps at any moment and spot him, he entered the second floor hallway, praying he could find another set of stairs that would take him to the docks and that he could get there before they did.



Hutch followed Willie onto the landing and then started down the stairs. Stopping suddenly, he felt the gun Curly held in his hand hit him in the back. He braced for something to happen, but Curly yelled instead. "What's the matter? You want me to send you down these steps head first?"

"I can't walk too close to Willie, or we'll both be going down head first. With my hands behind my back, I can't hang onto the railings and I'm feeling dizzy. We've got a lot of steps to go, and looking down makes me dizzier. Uncuff me and I'll be able to hang on."

Curly studied Hutch, and then reached into his pocket for the key. "I'll unlock these only because I don't want to have to carry you again. Try anything and you'll be givin' me the perfect excuse to try out this Magnum of yours. I've been admiring it ever since I picked it up off the floor."

Hutch rubbed his wrists, trying to regain some circulation. He grabbed hold of the railing before continuing down the stairs, not only because he'd told Curly that was the reason he needed his hands free, but because he was, in fact, feeling nauseous and dizzy. He hoped it would pass before they reached the loading dock. It was there he knew he had to make his move, if he was going to make any at all.



Starsky hurried, as silently as possible, down the second floor hall. The building was dark, the silence eerie, and he could hear the movement of tiny feet scurrying away as he intruded on the rats' domain. There were several large offices, which he ignored and hurried toward the center of the hall, hoping to find another stairway. He gasped and

nearly fell when he hit his right arm on a large filing cabinet standing in the middle of the hallway. *Damn! Why'd they put you here?* He held onto his arm, waiting for the throbbing to stop and to regain his bearings, when he realized he was standing next to what used to be a freight elevator. Betting that stairs had to be nearby and that the elevator would open near the loading docks, Starsky started opening every door nearby, but they all opened into blackness. Starsky turned the corner and stopped. Above his head, he could faintly make out the white letters I and T—the only portion remaining of a broken, plastic sign. He opened the door and exhaled in relief when he stepped out onto the stairway landing and saw the moonlight breaking through the broken window directly ahead. Racing down the steps, he prayed he would get there in time.



Hutch followed Willie down the long hallway. Willie carried a flashlight, and it was obvious he knew exactly where he was headed. Hutch felt tingling in his fingers as the circulation came back. He flexed his fingers and made fists, trying to help the blood flow faster. Willie turned right down a corridor, and Hutch glanced back to see Curly's location. Curly was about three feet behind him, the Magnum in his hand but not aimed directly at him. Hutch tried to search ahead for a location where he could make a break. But the darkness of the building prevented him from seeing far enough ahead. The flashlight threw shadows in every direction. It reminded Hutch of walking in the woods with a flashlight. You could only see immediately around you, everything beyond was a black abyss.

As they turned to go down the next corridor, Hutch could finally see light at the end. Two large doors indicated they'd reached the docks, an area used long ago for loading and unloading cargo. Two smaller doors—one leading into an office, the other outside—were on the right wall. Sitting inside at one of the docks was a tan cargo van.

Curly pushed the Magnum into Hutch's side and urged him to move. He moved forward, searching around for anything to use as a weapon. A shadow behind the door of the office gave him hope. Starsky was nearby. He sensed it. Turning so that his back and Curly's were away from the door, Hutch knew he had to get closer. The distance between them and the door would make Starsky a sitting duck. There was nothing to provide him coverage.

Hutch walked toward the right. Willie had moved ahead, but only a few feet away. Hutch walked past the office door, his body tense, waiting. *Now, Starsky, now.*

But as he passed the door to the office, with Curly right on his heels, Starsky didn't rush out. And for a moment, Hutch thought he'd been wrong, that the moonlight had played tricks on him and he was truly alone.



Starsky watched the three men enter the dock area, the flashlight signaling their approach. They would soon reach the van sitting at the dock, and Starsky knew he couldn't let them put Hutch inside. Taking both men on by himself was an impossibility. He moved behind a skid piled high with crates and boxes, long forgotten when the business was abandoned. He crouched there waiting for Hutch and the men to move closer. They had to pass him to get to the van.

He let the first man go past, and then Hutch. As the third man moved past, Starsky grabbed the nearest crate and hurled it at the man's back. The weight of it was more than he had expected, and he gasped as pain shot through his shoulder and arm. Ignoring it, Starsky threw himself off the skid and onto the black-haired man momentarily stunned on the floor, wrestling with him for the gun.

A second before Starsky had actually thrown the crate, Hutch had sensed his partner's presence. Throwing himself forward, he tackled Willie from behind. Surprised, Willie went down hard, the flashlight rolling away. Hutch was bigger and stronger than Willie, and his weight had the momentum to throw Willie against the van, where he hit his head and went down to the ground. Finding Willie unconscious, Hutch turned toward the two men wrestling on the ground. In the darkness it was difficult to make out who was who. Hutch grabbed the flashlight from the floor and shone it on the two bodies rolling across the floor—two hands clasping the gun, aiming it in the air.

Hutch looked around frantically, searching for anything that could serve as a weapon, anything to help Starsky in his fight with Curly. Spotting a two-by-four leaning against the wall, Hutch rushed over to grab it. It was something he could swing; something that he might be able to use to distract Curly. Now, it was a matter of sorting out the arms, legs and bodies rolling and twisting on the floor—and waiting for the opportune time. Hutch waited for what seemed like hours, but he knew in reality it was only seconds. In the dim light of the flashlight, Hutch could make out Starsky on the bottom, with Curly rising above him, both their hands gripping the gun, waving it in the air. Suddenly, Starsky's arms seemed to weaken as Curly pinned him to the floor. Desperate, Hutch grabbed the board and swung as hard as he could at the man positioned above his partner. The gun blasted at the moment of impact.



## *Chapter Ten*

Hutch rushed to his partner's side, panic in his voice. "Starsk! Starsk! Are you okay?"

"Get this idiot off me."

Relieved to hear his voice, Hutch rolled Curly off of Starsky, ready to cuff him, but the bullet had entered Curly's forehead and he'd been dead before he hit the ground.

Starsky started to sit up, but finding his right arm wracked with pain, he rolled onto his left side, hoping to use it as leverage. Hutch turned back and reached to help him sit up, but stopped suddenly when he felt blood on his hand. "Lie still," he ordered, his concern evident. "You're bleeding." He gently rolled Starsky onto his side to get a better look. "Looks like you probably tore some or all of the stitches."

At that instant, two uniformed officers entered the room, guns drawn.

"Detective Starsky?"

Hutch stood up and ordered, "I'm Detective Hutchinson. We need a coroner's unit and an ambulance."

As one of the officers hurried off to call, Starsky tugged on his partner's pant leg, his voice almost a whisper. "Hutch?"

"What is it, buddy?" Hutch turned and knelt down next to his partner

"I don't want an ambulance."

"I ordered it for Willie. Though, I think you'll be going along for the ride."

As Hutch started to rise, Starsky said, "Then you'd better make it two." And he pointed to the blood on the back of Hutch's head.

Hutch reached up and winced as he touched the tender spot. "Looks like we'll both be having headaches for a while. How about I drive the walking wounded to the hospital?"



Hutch pulled up in front of Tony's Party Store, and he and Starsky got out. It had been a busy day, and Hutch could tell from the lines starting to appear around Starsky's mouth and eyes that he was rapidly tiring. But he'd promised his friend that they would make this stop. That morning, they'd been to the doctor's office to have Starsky's stitches finally removed, and from there they had celebrated with lunch at The Pits. It was the first time in a week that Starsky had been out of the apartment.

After being released from the hospital a week earlier, Starsky and he had been met in the hallway by a livid Captain Dobey and an angry Lieutenant Jackson. Dobey had borrowed the doctor's office, and, once all four were inside, Dobey and Jackson had proceeded to ream them for the "lame brain stunt they'd pulled this time." Dobey had put Starsky on report for going out on surveillance with Hutch when he hadn't been medically cleared. Then, Jackson let Hutch have it for taking Starsky along, despite Starsky's protests that if he hadn't been there, Hutch probably would have ended up at the end of some pier. Dobey had ordered Starsky to stay home, "and I mean home," until his doctor had given him the okay to report back to duty. As their conversation ended,

Jackson finally relaxed his stance and turned to the three men, sincerely thanking them for their assistance in finding the men who had murdered his father.

This morning, the doctor had released Starsky for desk duty and, at Starsky's insistence, had even called Dobey to tell him he'd received the all-clear. Apparently properly chastised and unwilling to challenge Dobey's orders, Starsky had given Hutch little trouble, and surprisingly few complaints, about staying indoors for the week. He did, however, extract a promise from his partner that on the day the doctor gave him the all-clear, they could stop by the party store to see how Maria was doing.

Starsky and Hutch exited the car and walked into the corner store. Tony was behind the counter, and they were both surprised to see Maria sitting behind him on a stool.

"What are you doing here?" Starsky asked in amazement. "We were coming to check with Tony on how you were doing, but I guess I've got my answer." He walked over and gave Maria a kiss on the cheek and took both her hands in his.

She blushed and said, "I'm doing good, Davey. I can't work yet 'cause I get worn out too fast, but I was tired of being home and I came to sit with Tony for a while."

Hutch laughed and said, "Don't let Captain Dobey hear you say that."

"Huh?" she asked, confused.

"Just ignore him." Starsky grinned and stepped back to look Maria over, holding her hands in his. "I just wanna make sure you're okay."

"I'm fine."

"Did they ever find out who robbed us?" Tony asked Hutch.

"Not yet. But we will." The last was added emphatically.

"I was so surprised to find out you were a cop," Maria exclaimed to Starsky. "Imagine, a policeman washing my floors." She shook her head in amazement.

"They call it going undercover," Starsky explained. "But in this case, it didn't work out too well."

"I don't agree. We still caught the two felons we were after," Hutch said, shaking his head. "And Samuelson will never see the light of day outside a prison, now that we can add to those charges murder, robbery, assault on a police officer and attempted murder. The jury put Samuelson behind bars once; it'll be a real pleasure extending his time there. Willie is singing long and sweet about the robberies, not only at the liquor stores but also at the warehouses and jewelry stores. We'll even be able to pin Jackson's murder on Samuelson."

At the sound of the door opening, all heads turned.

“Billy,” Maria called out in pleasant surprise. “How’s your grandmother?”

“She’s fine.” Billy looked at Starsky and Hutch, and then stared at the tiles on the floor.

“What do you need today? More candy?” Maria teased.

“No. More soup.” Billy rolled his eyes and walked over to the soup aisle. He stood there studying the cans.

As the others continued talking, Starsky wandered over to stand next to Billy. “How ya doin’?”

Billy kept his eyes on the ground, but he answered, “Okay.”

“That’s good.” Starsky reached into his pocket and pulled out a couple dollars and handed them to Billy. “Here. Buy yourself some candy.”

Billy looked at the money longingly, his fingers closing tightly around the bills when Starsky shoved them into his hands. As Starsky walked away, Billy called out, “Are you really a cop?”

“Yep.”

“How come you was working in this place?”

Starsky returned and knelt down, looking at the young boy. “I was undercover trying to catch some thieves.”

“Did you find them?”

“Yeah.”

“Were they the ones that hurt you and Mrs. Viviano?”

Starsky shook his head. “No, there are lots of bad guys out there, and we don’t catch them all. But Hutch and me, we’ll keep trying.”

As Starsky patted him on the head and stood to leave, Billy said softly, “I know who done it.”

Starsky stopped and returned to Billy’s side. “What do you mean?”

Billy looked Starsky in the eye and pulled him down to whisper in his ear, “Paulie done it.”

Starsky grabbed Billy's arms. "Are you sure?"

Billy nodded. "I heard him bragging to some neighbor boys. He said he stabbed two people and took some money. He was laughing about it. At first, I didn't know it was you..."

Starsky straightened up. "Thanks for the information, Billy. You don't know how much that helps. And don't worry about Paulie; he isn't going to know it was you who told me."

Billy straightened up, chest out. "I ain't afraid of him. I'm just sorry he hurt you and Mrs. Viviano."

Starsky ruffled Billy's hair and headed to the counter. "Maria, where does Paulie live?"

"Around the corner in the King Apartments. Apartment 305, I think."

"Thanks." Starsky headed out the door with Hutch close on his heels.

"What's up?" Hutch asked, knowing something had set his partner in motion. He could see the determined look in Starsky's eyes—the look that dared anyone, including himself, to try and stop him.

Starsky practically ran around the corner, explaining as they went, "Billy just told me he overheard Paulie bragging to his friends that he'd stabbed two people and stole some money. Paulie's the punk that was in here giving Maria a hard time and extorting money from the little kids."

Hutch grabbed Starsky's sleeve trying to slow him down. "Wait a minute, you're not even on active duty yet; Dobey will have both our hides if you arrest him."

Starsky paused for a moment, then yanked his arm away, letting his anger win out. "I don't care. I can't believe he would stab Maria, leave her for dead, and then steal her money. She's been kind to him all his life..."

"Starsk, wait. You're forgetting that he also stabbed you. You can't go storming over there. You can't even make an arrest right now; Dobey still has your gun and badge."

Frustrated, Starsky started pacing back and forth. "What are we gonna do? I wanna get my hands on that kid."

Hutch grabbed Starsky by the arm to slow him down. "That's what I'm afraid of. Now, go back and call for a black-and-white; tell them to meet me here, and I'll go arrest this Paulie. It'll be my pleasure. Okay?" Hutch knew Starsky wasn't happy with the idea, but he waited until he saw Starsky's nod of approval. "You stay either in the car or

inside the store. I don't want you blowing this arrest or your career. You won't like directing traffic, and that's what Dobby threatened if you didn't follow his orders."

Starsky looked at Hutch, weighing his options. He finally nodded in agreement and raced back to the car. Impatiently sitting, anxiously waiting and listening to the sound of the siren announcing the approach of the black-and-white, Starsky stewed in his anger. He wanted to be there making the arrest, but he knew it was probably better that Hutch was doing it. Suddenly, a smile spread across his face as he imagined the scene in the apartment. He was glad he wasn't Paulie and on the receiving end of Hutch's wrath. Paulie had made a mistake, robbing and hurting Maria, but he'd made a bigger one when he'd hurt the blond's partner.



Hutch was diligently working on an arrest report when he saw Starsky coming through the door, his usual smile and carefree swagger missing. He walked slow and dejected.

Hutch stood up and quickly approached Starsky as he reached his desk. He pulled out his partner's chair for him to sit down. "What's up? You don't look so good."

Starsky plopped into the chair disgustedly and looked down at his desk. "Can you get me a cup of coffee?"

"Sure," Hutch said, and turned to the coffee pot to fill Starsky's cup. "So tell me what happened..."

"Huh...it was horrible, Hutch. I saw this lady crying as she left, and I was really scared. I didn't know what they were going to do to me." He stopped to take a sip of coffee.

"So, tell me about it. How much do you owe the IRS?"

Starsky reached in his pocket and pulled out a stack of papers stapled together. He waved them in the air and said, "It was really terrible. I don't know how I'm ever going to pay it back. I asked if I can have them take some out of my paycheck each week, but they said that's only going to cost me more in penalties and interest."

"Don't worry about it, partner. I'll lend you the money if that'll keep them off your back. Sure you don't wanna go home, you don't look so good?"

"Nah, I'll be fine." When the phone rang, Starsky set the papers down on the desk and grabbed it. Hutch leaned over, picked up the papers, and quickly glanced through them. As Starsky hung up, Hutch stood, his face flushed. "You had me worried sick, and you were lyin' to me, Starsk. This doesn't say you owe. It says you're getting a refund."

Starsky stood up and warily smiled. He backed toward the door. "Now, Hutch, I am getting a refund, but it's only a little one."

“A little one?”

“Yeah, only a dollar.”

“A dollar?”

“Well, a dollar sixty-seven to be exact. Nancy asked if I still wanted it, and I said yes.”

“You convinced the IRS to give you a dollar refund?”

Starsky nodded, swallowing quickly. “Said as long as it was more than a dollar it was okay with them.”

“How’d you manage to get a refund?”

“Lester forgot to include some medical bills. She had to, uh... ‘disallow,’ yeah, that was the word she used, disallow some of the things Lester put on the return. But when she found the other bills, Nancy was really nice and let me add them.”

“Nancy?”

“Yeah, the auditor. Nancy. Nancy Cooper.” Starsky felt himself being backed into the filing cabinets as Hutch’s voice rose.

“You’re on a first-name basis with the auditor?”

Starsky smiled weakly. “Yeah, she’s a real pretty lady—long, dark hair, lovely smile.”

“Starsk...”

“Guess what, Hutch?” Starsky patted the front pocket of his jacket. “I got her phone number, and I even asked if she had a friend...” As Hutch bore down on him, Starsky pushed open the squadroom door. “Now, Hutch...I’ll even share the refund with ya...”

***The End***