

# Standard Operating Procedure

*By Linda B.*

Starsky pulled the Torino up in front of Venice Place and impatiently honked the horn for his partner. They were late again. No. He was late again, and he knew how aggravated his partner was going to be with him. Glancing at his watch, Starsky thumped on the steering wheel and checked once more to see if his partner was coming. He raised his palm, ready to put his full weight into the next honk, when the front door opened and Hutch walked out. The fact that he was walking slowly and not hurrying to the car struck Starsky as a little odd.

Watching Hutch gingerly sit down in the passenger seat and then slowly reach across to close the door behind him increased Starsky's level of concern. "What's up, Hutch? You okay? You're movin' kinda slow."

"I'm fine. And what's the excuse today?" Without waiting for an answer, Hutch picked up the mike, reporting to the dispatcher that they were rolling on the streets.

*Sorry, Blondie, you're not changing the subject from you to me.* Starsky pulled out into traffic and threw a sideways glance at his partner. He wasn't surprised to find Hutch checking out his side of the street through the side window. *Not making eye contact either, hey, buddy?* "You sure you're feeling okay?"

"Drop it, Starsk." The warning was clear in Hutch's tired voice, as he continued looking out the window. "I said I was fine."

"Huh, take it easy." Starsky, noticing Hutch had been sitting stiffly ever since entering the car, decided it was best to lessen the growing tension in the air. He'd let it drop for now. Eventually Hutch would be ready to talk about what was bothering him—and he'd be ready. Sliding the Torino into the heavy morning freeway traffic, Starsky changed the subject. "Thanks for helping at my aunt's yesterday. It's been a little rough trying to find enough time to take care of her place while she's in New York visiting Ma, with all the stakeouts we've been assigned."

"Anytime. You know that." Hutch leaned back into the seat and stretched out his right leg, a little sigh of relief escaping. He hurriedly coughed and, quickly glancing at his observant partner, hoped he'd managed to cover up the sound. When Starsky didn't offer a comment or wisecrack, he knew he'd succeeded. "You know you can always count on me to help your aunt and uncle."

"Sorry we had to do everything at once. Didn't plan on puttin' it off until just before they return."

"Well, if you hadn't spent so much time with Nancy we might have gotten some of it done earlier."

“Ahhh, but it was time well spent.” Starsky winked as a grin spread across his face. Hutch shook his head in disbelief, grimacing at the pain the movement caused. Instantly alert to the shadow crossing Hutch’s face, Starsky recalled seeing the same look the previous evening in Hutch’s apartment. They’d finally finished working at Aunt Rosie’s, and Hutch had gratefully sunk onto the couch sipping on his beer. He’d lifted his leg to rest it on the coffee table and it was at that moment that Starsky had caught the same look. He hadn’t commented on it at the time, figuring Hutch was just tired. Maybe it was more than that.

*I’ve seen that look before, but when? I know...when his back hurts.* Starsky snapped his fingers, sure in his ability to read his partner. *That’s what happened. Hutch hurt his back yesterday and he doesn’t wanna tell me. He knows I’d call him in sick and Captain Dobby would be angry. Heck, Dobby would be mad at the messenger—me—not you, buddy. I could’ve sweet-talked him into givin’ ya the day off.*

“It’s your back, isn’t it?” *No point in beatin’ around the bush. He’s probably feeling guilty. He hates how it’ll slow ‘im down.*

Hutch caught Starsky’s eyes, reading only concern in the deep blue ones looking back at him. “It’s just a little stiff this morning. It’ll be fine.”

“Maybe you should go see the doctor...”

“I took one of the pain pills he gave me the last time it acted up, and I’ll be fine in a little bit.”

“You out dancin’ last night, Blintz? I know I told ya I’d teach you some of my moves, but did you have to try them without me?” Starsky teased. “You could’ve really injured yourself.”

“No, but dancing would have been a lot more fun.”

“So, what did ya do?”

“Starsk, it came from dancing with a lawnmower, moving furniture, and painting your aunt’s kitchen—all in one day.”

Starsky suddenly felt a lump forming in his stomach. “I did this to you?”

“No, doing too much at one time did it.”

“But, ya didn’t say anything...”

“Starsk, I’m not blaming you. It’s my own fault. I should have stopped when I felt a twinge...”

“Twinge? What twinge?” His concern growing, Starsky searched his memory for when the “twinge” might have occurred.

Suddenly embarrassed, Hutch decided to switch the topic. “It’s gonna be another hot one today.”

“No way are you gonna change the subject. What did you do?”

“Look, I feel stupid enough, Starsk.”

“If you’re hurting, it ain’t stupid.”

“Okay, okay.” Hutch reluctantly gave in, knowing his partner wasn’t going to drop it until he had an answer.

“I dropped something.”

“Yeah? And?”

“I bent down wrong to pick it up.”

“You bent down wrong?” Starsky repeated incredulously.

“Sure, sometimes that’s all it takes to aggravate it. If I don’t move around too much it’ll get better.”

“And how do you propose to do that?”

“Do what?”

“Not move around too much? I hate to break it to ya, buddy, but we’re on duty and the bad guys don’t care what shape your back’s in.”

“It isn’t going to interfere with my ability to do the job,” Hutch said indignantly.

“Hey, I’m not worried,” Starsky, briefly raising his hands off the steering wheel, protested, “but Cap’n Dobey might not agree with ya.”

“Well, I don’t plan on telling him.” Hutch’s eyes caught Starsky’s in challenge.

“All units. Two-forty in progress at Division and Fifth.” The sound of the dispatcher’s voice broke the contact.

Hutch reached for the mike as the Torino turned onto Division. “Zebra three responding. We’re in the area. Is there a description of the assailant?”

“Caucasian, approximately six feet tall, wearing navy t-shirt and blue jeans...”

“I see ‘im, Hutch. Startin’ down the alley.” Starsky screeched the Torino to a halt five hundred feet down the street, and was out the door and headed toward the alley before the brakes could quit their angry protest. “Cover me,” he yelled over his shoulder.

Hutch swung open his door and, Magnum drawn and ready, started after his partner, only to find that the pain shooting up his leg took his breath away and uncharacteristically slowed his run. *Starsk, be careful, I'm not there to watch your back.* Fear and guilt increased his speed, but the awkward run was slowing him too much and Starsky was getting way too far ahead.

Starsky pulled up short as he reached the alley entrance. Drawing his Smith and Wesson out and in position, he leaned back against the abandoned brick building, catching his breath. He quickly glanced around the corner and down the alley, searching for the assailant. Pulling back, he breathed a sigh of relief at the lack of bullets coming in his direction. Maybe they were lucky this time and the assailant was unarmed. The immediate area of the alley was clear, but there wasn't much in the way of coverage offered. A few boxes and trash bins lined the back of the buildings. He'd rapidly counted the doors. There were at least six doors opening into the alley before it turned into a dead end. Six doors--and the assailant could be hiding behind any one.

Gun ready, Starsky raced to the first trash bin and crouched behind it. The alley remained silent and empty. He tried the door to his right. Locked. He moved forward to the cluster of boxes surrounding the next door. This one was padlocked. Across from him, the back door was open and the kitchen activity of the Chinese restaurant filled the alley. Deciding it was unlikely that the suspect had entered the restaurant while the chef was wielding a large knife, Starsky scanned the rest of the alley. Four doors remained. *Which one of them held the assailant?* There was nowhere else for him to go. Taking a deep breath, Starsky moved forward, hugging the wall, all possible protection gone. He reached for the next doorknob, at the last second, glancing up at the fire escape directly overhead.

Hutch turned the corner and stopped. He'd heard no shots and sensed his partner was safe. Starsky was halfway down the alley looking upward. Hutch's eyes searched above his partner, Magnum poised. Sensing the slightest movement in the door on his partner's right, Hutch yelled, "Starsky—behind you!"

Starsky instinctively turned, but was thrown off balance as the door slammed into him. The momentum threw him to the ground, hitting first his left shoulder and then his head. Momentarily stunned, Starsky felt the wind knocked out of him. The assailant rushed forward grabbing at Starsky's gun, clutching his shirt.

*No!* Every muscle and nerve alive, Hutch raced forward, his own pain totally forgotten. Anticipating that the suspect planned on grabbing his partner as a shield or shoot him with his own gun, Hutch threw the full weight of his body into the assailant. Two bodies rolled across the alley, arms and legs tangled. The Smith and Wesson skidding across the ground.

Hutch, rising to his knees, pushed the assailant face down into the ground and, yanking his arms behind him, reached into his back pocket for his handcuffs. "Starsk?" Hutch worriedly glanced at his partner who still appeared dazed. "Starsk, answer me." Receiving no response, Hutch angrily released the suspect and hurried over to his partner.

Kneeling, Hutch reached out and carefully touched the brunet who was beginning to moan. "Take it easy. Let me check you out first."

"I'll...be...okay. Just outta...breath."

"Careful." Hutch helped Starsky sit up against the brick wall. "Looks like you hit that hard head of yours against the cement. There's a nice bump forming..." Starsky flinched as Hutch reached toward his head. "Don't worry, I won't touch. You hurt anywhere else?"

Starsky started to shake his head and then, grimacing, thought better of it. Hearing the sirens of an approaching black-and-white, Starsky pushed up, trying to stand, only to gasp and fall back against the ground.

"What's wrong?" Hutch asked concerned.

"My arm." Wincing, Starsky used his right hand to cradle his other arm against his body.

Hearing footsteps, Hutch looked up to see two officers enter the alley. "Down here, Roberts! Valdez! Call for an ambulance."

"No!" Starsky's cry of protest drew Hutch up short. "No ambulance, Hutch. I'll be okay."

Searching Starsky's face, Hutch called out, "Forget the ambulance. I'll take Starsky myself. Just take care of the suspect. Book 'im and I'll be in later to fill out the paperwork."

Officers Roberts and Valdez hurried past Hutch. Roberts reached down to pull the assailant to his feet, as Valdez picked up Starsky's Smith and Wesson, returning it to Hutch.

"Thanks." Hutch slipped the gun into his waistband. "Okay, buddy, time to get you up and to the car."

Reaching down to grip Starsky's right elbow, Hutch's own body screamed at him in pain. He ignored it and, shifting his weight to his left leg, helped Starsky shakily stand. Waiting for him to catch his breath, Hutch asked, "It's just a short walk to the Torino. Can you make it?"

Starsky nodded and moved forward.

"Good. We'll take it slow." The two made their way to the end of the alley, reaching the street as Roberts loaded the suspect into the back of the squad car.

Hutch opened the passenger door and as Starsky sank gratefully onto the seat, he warned, "Easy." Placing the Mars light on the roof, he added, "I'll have you at the hospital in a minute."



Hutch stood at the emergency room door, continuing to watch as the doctor and nurse checked out his partner. Running his hand through his hair, he bit his lip as the nurse walked toward the door. They'd kicked him out as soon as the doctor had entered. Another nurse had suggested he have a seat in the waiting room, but when he shook his head in refusal she, thankfully, hadn't insisted and left him standing there. He knew Starsky wasn't hurt seriously, but that didn't lessen his concern.

"Detective Hutchinson?" the nurse inquired, as she opened the door a few inches. He eagerly nodded in anticipation and seeing the door open farther as she waved him in, Hutch grabbed the door and brusquely entered before she could finish. "Dr...."

In three steps he was at his partner's side. "Starsk?"

Two pain filled eyes turned toward him, brightening in relief. "You're still here?"

"Where else would I be?"

Before Starsky could answer, Dr. Crandall turned toward Hutch and extended his hand. "Morning, Detective Hutchinson. Sorry to keep you hovering at the door for so long, but we wanted to check your partner out thoroughly."

Hutch nodded his head at what was to him an obvious statement. "And how is he?"

"Oh, I've assured him he'll live." A smile spread across Dr. Crandall's face as he wrote on the chart.

Relieved, Hutch smiled back weakly and reached out to rest his hand on Starsky's shoulder in comfort, but stopped when Starsky flinched.

"He has a nasty bump on his head, but no concussion," Crandall explained. "His left shoulder's badly bruised and he's torn some ligaments. But it's nothing that won't heal with a little time. We'll put it in a sling..."

A blonde nurse stuck her head in the door announcing, "Detective Hutchinson, there's a Captain Dobey on the phone for you."

"Be right back, buddy." Hutch moved toward the door, favoring his right leg.

Starsky frowned.

Dr. Crandall shut the chart and looked at his patient. "I'll sign the release papers, and the nurse should bring them into you in a few minutes. You can go home, but take it easy for a few days. Contact this number to arrange for physical therapy on that arm."

As the doctor handed him the slip of paper, Starsky grabbed his wrist to stop him. "Doc, I need you to do something for me...."



“Hutchinson. No, Cap’n, nothing serious. Starsky’ll be fine, but he’ll need to rest for a few days. I plan on coming in to do the paper work after I take him home. Sure, I’ll tell him.” Hutch replaced the phone in its cradle. Their captain had been obviously relieved with the news that the injuries Starsky had suffered were minor.

“Detective Hutchinson.”

Hutch turned toward the nurse standing next to him. It was the same nurse that had let him enter the emergency room to see Starsky. If she was searching for him... “Is Starsky okay?”

“Of course, I just need you to come with me for a moment.”

Confused, Hutch followed her as she started down the hallway and pushed open the doors to another trauma room. He followed her in, surprised to see Dr. Crandall standing inside.

“Ah, Detective Hutchinson, I’m glad Nurse Cherie found you.”

“Is something wrong...?”

“Your partner is fine and resting just down the hall while they type up his release papers. What I need you to do is have a seat on the table.”

“On the table? I’m fine. It was Starsky who was hurt...” Confused, Hutch offered no resistance as the nurse steered him to the table.

“Well, according to your partner, you might have injured your leg or back when you saved his life. And since I noticed you limping around here, I want to take a few x-rays and check it out for myself. Captain Dobey would be all over me if I released one of his men without checking him out. So...up on the table.”

Hutch sat down on the table and then turned to lie down. *Starsk, so help me, I’ll get you for this.*



Pushing the door open, Hutch found Starsky, his eyes closed, still on the table. “They release you from this place yet?”

Eyes instantly open, Starsky looked sheepishly at Hutch. “Sure, ready anytime you are.” He sat up, swinging his legs over the edge.

“Don’t move too fast. The nurse said she’d be here in a minute with a wheelchair.”

Starsky sat still, studying his hands, avoiding his partner’s eyes.

“Well?” asked Hutch.

“Well what?”

“Don’t you want to know what the doctor said about my back?”

The brunet, blushing, determinedly met his partner’s eyes. “Course.”

“He checked to make sure I hadn’t slipped a disk in my back. Nothing was wrong. He said I irritated the sciatic nerve that runs down my hip and into my leg.”

Starsky, relief obvious on his face, asked, “Is it serious?”

“Not if I’m careful. He told me I need to stay off work for a few days and gave me some pain pills and some exercises to do.” Hutch grinned. “Seems we’ll both be fit to return to duty about the same time.”

Starsky’s face lit up. “Terrific.”

“Why?”

“Why terrific?” Starsky asked, confused.

“Why’d you make up some story and tell the doctor that I injured it saving you, when you know I did it yesterday at your aunt’s?”

“Well, the fight in the alley probably aggravated it. The way you tackled that guy you could have ended up in traction...” Starsky said indignantly. “Besides it’s S.O.P.”

“What is?”

Starsky shrugged, looking sheepish. “You were looking out for me; I was looking out for you.”

Hutch grinned, any anger he felt rapidly dissipating, “Yeah, S.O.P.” As the nurse pushed the door open with the wheelchair, Hutch added, “C’mon, let’s go home.”



“Doc, said you needed to rest, Starsky.”

“Me? Wada ‘bout you? You can barely move.”

“Neither one of us is in the best of shape. And, besides, the pain pills are starting to work. I’ll be fine.”



“You take the bed then. You aren’t in any shape to drive home.”

Hutch sighed, “Starsk...”

“You know you won’t leave until you see me sleeping, so you might as well skip the middle man and stay here. The couch will kill your back, so don’t argue.” Starsky threw a blanket and pillow on the couch. “I’ll rest here. Besides, that way I can watch some TV. I couldn’t fall asleep right away anyway and those pain pills should be knocking you out any minute.”

Hutch reluctantly gave in, feeling stubborn blue eyes boring into him. “I’ll go lie down for a little while, but first I’ll call Dobey and let him know we’ll both be off a couple of days.” Hutch grinned. “Doctor’s orders.”

After seeing Hutch settled in the bed and the tension and pain beginning to disappear from his face, Starsky returned to the living room. He flipped on the TV and then slumped down on the couch. Punching the pillow into a ball, he lay down on his side and pulled the blanket over him. Unable to fully relax he replayed the morning through his mind, thinking about how Hutch had risked his health—possibly his life—to save him.

Finally feeling relaxed and comfortable, Starsky smiled wistfully as he closed his eyes, knowing that if the roles had been reversed he wouldn’t have hesitated to do the same thing. *“It was “me and thee” time again, wasn’t it, buddy? Despite being in pain, you ignored it to save my life—me and thee—standard operating procedure, as always. No one could ever write that in a rulebook. But I bet they sure would like to try.”*

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