

Where Would You Be Without Me?

A missing scene from "Quadromania"

by Linda B.

"Hi, Lilly. How's it going?"

"Hey, Paula. Pretty quiet night?" Lillian Miller set her purse on a counter in the emergency room and shrugged out of her coat.

"When's it ever quiet around here on the nightshift? The weirdos come out at night, remember? Gunshot wounds, knifings, car accidents, sick kids, emergency appendectomy—you name it; it'll show up eventually. At least everything is under control for now. What's happening up on the fourth floor?"

"Usual stuff." Lilly scanned the emergency room entrance and lobby. "Compared to here, it's always quiet, but that's what I like about it. You get to know the patients better, see 'em get well. And in most cases, see them go home."

"Glad you changed shifts?"

"Of course. Emergency has a lot of action, but I kind of like the early morning when all the patients are just waking up. Besides, it gives me more time to spend with my daughter." Lilly watched as Paula signed off on a chart and glanced at her watch. "How's Bill?"

Paula ran a hand through her gray hair and laughed, a twinkle in her eye. "The old guy is doing just fine. He keeps asking when I'm gonna retire and stay home."

"Well, when are you?"

"Who knows? I was sick a few weeks back and stayed home a couple days. He drove me crazy. I couldn't wait to get back to work." Paula massaged her right knee. "Now, my legs...that's another story. They'd like to be home relaxing on the recliner. But I think I'll be disappointing them for a while yet."

Lilly laughed, then turned at the squeal of brakes coming to a sudden stop at the Emergency bay. "Looks like you have an arrival."

Paula looked up, surprised to see a yellow Metro cab pull up to the door instead of an ambulance. Lilly and Paula exchanged glances. Cabs occasionally brought patients to the hospital, but it was highly unusual to see the driver exit the cab, hustle around to the other side, grab a wheelchair, and then, gently ease the passenger into its seat.

The entrance doors slid open as the cab driver pushed the wheelchair toward the two nurses. “Where’s the doctor? We need a doctor.”

Lilly backed away from the counter as the men approached.

“Just a moment, sir. We need a little background information first. Then, I’ll take the patient from you, and you can be on your way,” said Paula, reaching for a pen.

Puzzled, Hutch blinked several times and shook his head. “On my way? I’m not going anywhere until I know Starsky’s okay.”

It was Paula’s turn to look confused. “But...but...I thought you were a cab—”

Immediately Hutch understood. Pointing first at himself and then at Starsky, he rushed to explain, “No, I’m not a cab driver. He is. Well...not really, he’s...I mean we’re cops. And my partner was injured—”

“Hutch...” Starsky’s hand reached up, slightly brushing his partner’s arm. The response was immediate.

Concerned, Hutch bent down. “Hang in there, buddy. You’ll see a doctor in just a minute. Right, nurse...” Hutch glanced at the nametag on Paula’s uniform. “...Miss, Mrs. Bentley?”

“All I wanna do is get some sleep. I told ya to take me home.” Starsky’s resistance had turned to whining.

“You took a pretty hard hit to the head, and I want it checked out.” Hutch quickly glanced around the near-empty emergency room. “It’s not busy in here so I’m sure you’ll be able to see a doc right away.”

While the tone stayed gentle, Paula couldn’t help noticing how the blue eyes turned icy when they looked up at her. It was an order, not a question.

“Let me get a little information first, and then I’ll wheel you into an exam room myself. Patient’s name?” Paula became all business.

“Dave Starsky, Detective David Starsky. And I’m his partner, Detective Hutchinson.” Hutch leaned across the counter. “If you check the records, you’ll see he’s been here before, and you’ll have all the information you need. Can we see the doctor now?”

Setting the pen down on top of the admitting form, Paula came around the counter. “Fine. I’ll take him into Exam Room Three, Detective. The doctor should be in momentarily.” Paula determinedly took the handles of the wheelchair from Hutch’s hands and pointed to the doors of the waiting room. “You can wait in there.”

“But—”

“No ‘buts’ about it. It’s my turn to look after Detective Starsky. You can go in there and grab a cup of coffee.” She looked closer at Hutch’s drawn features. “Looks like you could use some.”

Leaning to the left side of the wheelchair, Starsky propped his head up as his eyelids threatened to close. He slouched down deeper into the seat. “Hutch, it’s okay. Go get some coffee. I’ll be fine. Let’s just get this over with so I can go home.”

Hutch reluctantly watched Paula push Starsky through the double doors into the examination room.



Lilly rounded the corner and headed into the small office, hoping to grab a fresh cup of coffee before the morning got away from her. Reentering the hallway, she saw the back of an orderly pushing a patient in a wheelchair toward the desk. *I guess it’s starting. There’s already a new patient to get settled in.*

Walking behind the desk, she reached for the patient records George extended, scanning them quickly. “Hi, George. Who do we have here?”

“Detective Starsky. He’s assigned to Room 414.”

Lilly looked up, recognizing the man who had arrived at the hospital earlier in a cab. “Well, Detective Starsky, we’ll get you settled in right away. Doesn’t look like you’re going home like you wanted to, but you do look like you could use some sleep. Luckily, you’ll be in a room by yourself for now, so it should be pretty quiet.”

Starsky slowly opened one eye and immediately shut it.

Lilly looked beyond George and Starsky. “Where’s your partner? I expected he’d be with you.”

“Don’t worry, he’ll be coming,” George said, exasperation creeping into his voice. He had already experienced an encounter with Detective Hutchinson before getting on the elevator. He hoped to be long gone before the detective made it upstairs. “He’s making a phone call while we get his partner settled in.”

“Okay then, Detective Starsky, let’s see if we can get you tucked in before he arrives. I have a feeling he’d only be underfoot, anyway.”



Lilly heard the ring of the elevator, and the door opened. She glanced up to see Detective Starsky’s partner approaching her.

“Where’s Room 414?”

“Just down the hall to the right. Detective Starsky is already in bed and resting comfortably,” she reassured him.

He flashed her a relieved smile and headed down the hallway. She continued watching until he pushed the door open and slowly entered.

Lilly followed a few minutes later, meds in hand. Her patient was already asleep, as she expected he would be, while his partner sat in a chair next to the bed, hunched forward, intently watching him. “He’s going to be sleeping most of the day, you know. He took a nasty blow to the head.”

Hutch stood as she approached the bed. “I know, and he was up most of yesterday and worked all night. He wanted to call it a night and go home, when…” Hutch’s voice trailed away before he added softly, “He has a concussion, and the nurse said he didn’t even argue when the doc said he had to spend the night.”

“Don’t worry. I’m sure it’s just precautionary. He’ll be fine. If he was as tired as you say, I’m sure all he wanted was some sleep. This was the path of least resistance.”

“You don’t understand. Starsky hates hospitals.”

“Well, maybe the thought of a warm bed immediately available changed his mind.” Lilly paused, watching Starsky for a few minutes. “It is a shame to wake him when he’s just fallen asleep, though.”

“Can’t you wait a little while?”

“Sorry, I’ve got to give him the meds now and take his vitals. Unfortunately, I’ll be waking him every hour or two to make sure he remains conscious and that there are no complications.”

“We know the routine. This isn’t the first time this has happened. He always jokes about what a hard head he’s got.”

Lilly smiled as she set the cup containing the medicine on the nightstand and reached to take Starsky’s pulse. “Looks that way. Why don’t you go home and get some sleep yourself? You look almost as bad as he does.”

“I’ll stay for a while. I told him I’d be here when he wakes up.”

Lilly leaned across the bed and gently shook Starsky on the shoulder. “Detective? Detective, you need to wake up for a few minutes.”

Starsky showed no movement, and Hutch felt his stomach knot up. “He okay?”

“I’m sure he’s fine. He’ll come around in a minute.” Lilly shook a little harder. “Detective, you need to wake up and talk to us.”

Starsky moaned. “Go away...wanna sleep.”

Hutch smiled in relief. “You can go back to sleep in a minute, buddy. The nurse has some meds for you.”

Starsky turned toward Hutch’s voice and groaned. Hutch grimaced at the red blotches visible on Starsky’s neck—evidence that Lionel had almost succeeded.

Starsky started to roll toward Hutch’s voice, his hand creeping up to touch the bandage on the side of his head. Suddenly, his face visibly paled, and he pressed his arms against his stomach. “Don’t think I shoulda done that. I don’t...feel...so good.”

Lilly grabbed the basin inside the nightstand and laid it next to Starsky. “That’s not unusual with a concussion, Detective. If you’re going to get sick, you can use this.”

Starsky, fingers gripping the edge of the basin, brought it to rest against his chest. A few minutes passed, uneventful.

“You okay?” Hutch edged closer to the bed.

Starsky remained motionless, keeping his eyes closed. “I think...so.”

“Do you think you can keep the meds down?” Lilly asked.

“Yeah.” Though he responded, Starsky’s eyes remained closed. It made the room spin less.

“Just lie still. I’ll slip the pills on your tongue, and your partner will hold the water so you can take a sip through the straw.”

Hutch reached for the glass of ice water and brought it up to Starsky’s mouth. Starsky took a few quick swallows from the straw, and, at Lilly’s nod, Hutch removed it.

Lilly patted Starsky’s forearm. “Give it a few minutes and you can go back to sleep.”

Starsky, afraid to move, whispered, “Hurts to swallow.”

“There’s some tenderness and swelling around the trachea. That’ll ease up. Just relax and get some rest.” Lilly gently stroked Starsky’s arm. As he relaxed, Lilly added, “For the record, Detective, can you tell me your name?”

The reply was mumbled into the pillow, but still clear. “Dave, Dave Starsky.”

Lilly smiled at Hutch as she squeezed Starsky’s hand. “Right answer.” After entering Starsky’s vitals on the chart, she turned to leave. At the door, she looked back and paused to watch as Hutch gently pulled the covers up to Starsky’s shoulders before tucking them in on the side. He then reached up and brushed back a few wayward curls. She was too far away to hear what he whispered.



As Hutch maintained his vigil, his thoughts drifted back to their conversation earlier that morning at the taxicab stop. He had caught Starsky dozing off behind the wheel of the checkered cab. What had Starsky said? That he was “heading for a nervous breakdown, if he didn’t get some shut-eye.”

Starsky had wanted nothing more than to go home, and Hutch had made sure it didn’t happen. “It’s my fault you’re in this mess,” he whispered. “What did I say? ‘Where would you be without me?’ Well, you’d be home right now, safely tucked beneath the covers of your own bed, not here in the hospital, hurt again. But, no...I had to open my big mouth.”

Starsky stirred momentarily. Hutch anxiously waited for him to come around, but Starsky remained asleep. “I couldn’t let you call it a night. No. Oh, no. I had to offer your services to an old lady. ‘I’m sure he’d be very happy to take you anywhere you’d like to go, ma’am’.”

Irritated with his thoughts, Hutch stood and wandered over to the window. For several minutes, he watched visitors and staff entering and leaving the hospital, his agitation growing as the words repeated themselves, even though he tried to push them aside. *Where would you be without me?*

Wiping at the perspiration on his forehead, Hutch muttered, “Who am I kidding? I’m not planning on going anywhere.” He slid out of his black-and-white leather coat and hung it up in the tiny closet next to Starsky’s leather one, his fingers momentarily lingering on Starsky’s. *Where would you be without me?* It had become a mantra, something playing over and over in his head. An answer would weave its way into his thoughts, and he’d try to push it away. Just the thought set his stomach churning and his heart racing.

Hutch returned to sit by Starsky’s bedside, his heart aching. It hurt to say the words. “Starsky, maybe you’d be safer without me.”



Her shift was nearing its end, and Lilly headed in to check one last time on Detective Starsky. She’d looked in on him throughout the day, waking him every few hours, but,

finding him readily returning to consciousness and growing increasingly grumpy, she let him immediately return to sleep. It was the best medicine and exactly what he needed.

Detective Hutchinson had continued to sit by the bed, despite her repeated attempts to convince him to go home. Eventually, she'd given up. Occasionally, she had brought him a cup of coffee, and each time he would gratefully encircle it with both hands. He rarely spoke, other than to ask how Starsky was doing. Maybe this time, she could convince him to at least leave for a few minutes to grab something to eat.

Lilly entered the darkened room. Apparently, Hutch, as he'd asked her to call him, had decided to pull the blinds closed. It took her eyes a moment to adjust.

On his side now, Starsky slept comfortably. She glanced around, noticing the empty chair. *Where'd Hutch go? Maybe he'd finally decided to leave.* It was then that she noticed him, curled up on his side, asleep on the other bed. It was against hospital policy, and she knew she should wake him. But he finally looked contented, and she couldn't bring herself to do it. Until another patient was assigned to the room, she would let him sleep.

After taking Starsky's pulse and receiving a grunted response, Lilly went to the closet and pulled an extra blanket off the shelf. She spread it across Hutch and left.



“Dr. Markman, you are wanted in surgery—stat.”

As the announcement came across the PA, Hutch stiffened and immediately opened his eyes, suddenly remembering where he was. A pair of blue eyes stared back at him. “You finally decide to wake up, Blondie?” a raspy voice asked.

Hutch sat up. “Starsk, you're awake?”

“Anyone ever tell you you'd make a great detective someday?”

Hutch cast aside the blanket covering him and was next to Starsky in two strides. “How are you feeling?”

“I've felt better, but I'll live.” Starsky yawned as he gave Hutch a once over. “You okay? I saw you in the bed and—”

“I couldn't keep my eyes open any longer. I thought if I caught a couple minutes of shut-eye, but...” Hutch glanced down at his watch and ran his fingers through his hair. “...I guess it's been a couple hours. I'm surprised Lilly didn't wake me.”

“Maybe she took pity on ya. Someone has to.”

Hutch pulled a chair up to the bed and sank into it. “It’s after seven. Her shift must have ended hours ago.”

As if on cue, a long-haired brunette nurse entered. “Well, I see you’re both finally awake. I’m Sue, your nurse this evening. Are you feeling hungry, Detective Starsky? You slept through dinner, but I’ve got some Jell-o and ice cream in the fridge. What about you, Detective Hutchinson? Lilly said I should look after you both ’til she got back on duty. I’m sure I could scrounge up enough ice cream for both of you.”

His words crept in. “*We stopped for ice cream.*” Wasn’t that what he said when Starsky had asked him why it took so long to find him in the alley? It was his way of joking, to keep the situation light, but Hutch had recognized the relief in his partner’s eyes when they had arrived. *He was scared. Scared that I wouldn’t get there in time.* The mantra had returned. *Where would you be without me?*

As Starsky pushed himself up farther on the pillows, Hutch’s eyes were again drawn to the marks, now a deep purple, on his neck. They served as a constant reminder of this morning’s events and how close they’d come. *Where would you be without me?*

“Can I have strawberry?” Starsky whispered, his throat still obviously hurting.

“Sure. I’ll be back in a minute. Do you need any medication, Detective?”

“No, I only have half an elephant herd racing around in my head right now, but I’ll survive.”

As Sue left, Starsky brought his arm up behind his head, carefully regarding Hutch through half-closed eyelids. Seeing the pinched look around his eyes, as well as the frown, Starsky said, “You got quiet all of a sudden. Somethin’ bothering you?”

Embarrassed that Starsky could read him so well and that he’d forgotten to hide the feelings underlying his thoughts, Hutch stood and walked to the window. “I’m just glad you’re feeling better.”

“Rough day?”

“It’s always rough when you’re hurt. Actually, I spent a lot of time thinking about Lionel, his life, and how much he lost.” He couldn’t bring himself to add “and what he almost cost me.” “I was scared to death when I couldn’t reach you on the radio—couldn’t tell you... What possessed you to turn it off?” Hutch’s pitch rose. He’d spent most of the day trying to rationalize what had happened, but it always came back to one thing—him not doing his job, not covering his partner’s back.

Starsky watched as Hutch began to pace the length of the room. Guilt. Hutch always did guilt so well, and he’d had all day to wallow in it. Starsky knew he had to give Hutch a chance to vent, to let off some steam. “I wasn’t worried. I knew you’d cover my back.”

“If it hadn’t been for K.C. barreling down the alley and frightening Lionel...”

“I’m fine, Hutch, and everything turned out okay. Lionel will finally get the help he needs.”

“Starsky, I had a lot of time to think today—”

Starsky noticed that Hutch avoided looking directly at him. “When you get too much time to think, that means trouble for me.”

“Listen.” Hutch finally looked directly at him, the pain obvious in his eyes. “It’s my fault—”

“You’re crazy, Hutch. That’s your lack of sleep talking.”

“Wait, Starsk, hear me out. It’s my fault you’re in here. If I hadn’t insisted you take Lionel for a ride—”

“Hutch, it’s not your fault. If I hadn’t driven Lionel to the park, someone else would be dead today, and we’d still be out there trying to figure it all out. You did us a favor.”

“Favor?” Starsky had the strangest way of looking at things. “I set you up.”

“Not knowingly, buddy. Everything worked out fine. Sure, I’ve got a headache, well, maybe a big headache...” Starsky smiled, but instantly regretted his attempt at humor as the pain spread across Hutch’s face. “...but that’ll disappear. It’s not your fault, and I don’t wanna hear any more about it.” Starsky stretched and added, “Now, all you have to do is get me outta this place so I can sleep in my own bed.”

“We’ve got to wait for daybreak. The doc said twenty-four hours’ observation, remember?”

Starsky leaned back against the pillow and sighed. “Oh, yeah.” He studied Hutch a minute longer. “Can you stop pacing long enough to do me another favor?”

“What favor?”

“Hand me some water? Throat’s dry.”

“Sorry.” Hutch immediately stopped and reached for the glass of ice water. “Quit talking so much, then. Don’t you know it’s not good for you?”

Starsky grabbed one of the pillows from behind his head and threw it.



“Aren’t you lucky? Dr. Thomas was in early and signed your release forms. You’re free to go home and sleep in your own bed now, Detective Starsky,” Sue said as she pushed a wheelchair into the room. “And your partner can go home and sleep in his.”

Starsky slipped off the edge of the bed, eager to be on his way. He gave Sue a quick kiss on the cheek. “C’mon, Hutch. Take me home.”

“Have a seat, Detective.” Sue patted the wheelchair. “A volunteer will be here in a minute to wheel you out.”

“Thanks, but no thanks. I can walk out on my own.” Starsky grabbed his jacket and headed toward the door.

“It’s not up for discussion. Hospital rules.” Sue patted the seat again. “Your chariot awaits.”

Sighing, Starsky slumped down in the chair. “How long before we’re outta here?”

“Just a couple minutes.”

Hutch grabbed the handles of the wheelchair. He was just as anxious as Starsky to get out of there and leave the memories behind. “I’ll push you myself.”

Starsky slid into the seat and grinned in delight as Hutch wheeled him out the door and down the hall.

On the main floor, they passed Lilly coming into work. “Well, I’m glad to see you’re awake, but it’s obvious that you’re way too happy to get out of here, Detective.” She looked at Hutch’s rumpled clothes and smiled. “I suspect you spent the entire night, Hutch?”

Hutch blushed. “Yeah.”

“Well, take care of yourselves, and I hope we don’t get to see you anytime soon.”

Hutch laughed. “That’s the plan. Thanks for taking such good care of both of us.”

After a few hurried good-byes, Hutch wheeled Starsky out the automatic doors. He paused, unsure of which direction to head.

Starsky impatiently rose from the chair. “What are we waitin’ for? Can’t remember where you parked your car?”

“Obviously that blow to the head affected you more than I thought. I brought you here in K.C.’s cab yesterday morning, and I’ve been here since, remember? I don’t have a car.”

“So how are we getting home?”

“Never fear, K.C. McBride is here.” K.C. had approached them from behind, and as they turned, she wrapped her arms around Starsky. “You’re lookin’ good, big guy. How ya feelin’?”

“Good enough to party.”

“Don’t believe him,” Hutch interjected. “The only place he’s going is home to bed.”

“Well, let’s go then.” K.C. slipped her arm around Starsky’s waist, singing, “Nobody loves you like I do...”

Starsky slung one arm around K.C.’s shoulders and the other across Hutch’s. Pulling Hutch close, he whispered, “Where would I be without ya, buddy? Huh? Where would I be?”



Please send comments to [Linda B.](#)