

*Life in Normal*  
(a post-*"Sweet Revenge"* story)  
by Madison

It was crazy, really.

Everything was fine. Better than fine, actually. It was wonderful. Perfect, in fact, even if he did say so himself.

Everything was pretty much back to normal.

Normal. That was a place he hadn't seen in a very long time. And a place he didn't seem to recognize anymore.

Hands clenched tight around the steering wheel, he lowered his heavy head to rest against them and closed his eyes.



It was one thing to know, in the abstract, that life can turn on a dime. To know that from one breath to the next the foundation your world is built upon can be ripped away, sending you free-falling straight into Hell.

It was quite another when it was happening to you.

To get through those first hours, he had fallen back on what knew and what he did best—being a cop. Once the immediate threat had been eliminated, he'd turned that same determination, discipline, and focus onto his partner. The life they'd known was gone and the future was impossible to predict. There was only one thing he'd been sure of. They were in for the fight of their lives, and he would do whatever it took, anything, everything, to help his friend heal. Together, he'd vowed, they would make it through this.

And they had.

It had been a long, hard road, but they'd just kept going, taking one tentative step, then another and another, their eyes never wavering from their goal. Side by side, they'd met every challenge head-on and celebrated every milestone. Sure, sometimes it had seemed as though for every step forward, they had taken two back. And, yeah, there had been moments when they'd been nearly overwhelmed by the obstacles in their path and the odds they had faced. Defeat, though, was not an admission they were willing to make. They would not give up. They would not give in.

In the end, they were blessed with a miracle. Although the scars they both carried, emotional and physical, would be life-long reminders of their ordeal, they had finally reached the end of a very long and dark tunnel. As one, they'd stepped out into the blinding light, turning their faces instinctively toward the welcoming warmth of the sun.



Hitting the door with a bang, Hutch flew out into the heavy afternoon heat and loped across the parking lot toward his car. God, he'd thought the day would never end! Being chained to a desk, sorting through a mountain of paperwork had never been his idea of fun. At one point, he'd been positive that time itself had ground to a halt, and he'd be trapped in the airless squadroom for all eternity. He'd wanted to shout with joy when five o'clock finally rolled around. He hadn't wasted any time getting out of there, that was for sure.

With the windows down and the radio on, Hutch deftly navigated the heavy rush-hour traffic and merged onto the freeway. All he wanted was a nice cold beer, a hot meal, and a quiet night at home. Maybe he'd make chicken stir-fry for dinner. It would be quick and easy, and he'd have plenty of time to relax afterward.

It wouldn't be long until these evenings spent with Starsky would be a thing of the past. A week, in fact. Starsky had been cleared for duty, and Hutch couldn't wait to have his partner return to his side. It was what they'd been working so hard for all these months, and the dream was about to become reality. It wouldn't be long before they were back on the streets and back in the groove. As he pulled into the driveway, he couldn't contain the huge smile that crossed his face. Life was good. Life was good, indeed.

He climbed out of the car, his walk light as he bounced up the front steps. Throwing open the door, he called out a greeting to the man inside. "Honey, I'm ho—" The words died on his lips as he took in the scene before him.

An assortment of pots bubbled merrily on the stove top, their fragrant steam rising slowly into the air. He was peripherally aware of the table that had been set for two, complete with a vase of wildflowers and an ice bucket holding a bottle of chilling wine in the center. It was Starsky himself that captured Hutch's attention. Wearing an old BCPD t-shirt and cutoffs, he was covered to his knees by a white apron decorated with large, bright red lips that read: "Kiss the Cook." The radio on top of the refrigerator was blasting, the sounds of the Bee Gees bouncing off the walls of the small kitchen. His back toward Hutch, Starsky was stirring the contents of a large black stockpot and swaying to the beat of the music. After a quick taste, followed by a satisfied "Mmmmm...that's good," Starsky raised the wooden spoon in his hand back to his lips. Hutch was riveted as Starsky began singing along in a warbling, off-key falsetto, using the spoon as a stand-in microphone.

*Feel the city breakin'  
And everybody shakin'  
And we're stayin' alive  
Stayin' alive  
Ah, ah, ah, ah  
Stayin' alive  
Stayin' alive  
Ah, ah, ah, ah  
Stayin' alive....*

Starsky danced away from the stove, the spoon now waving wildly in the air, first up then across and down, mimicking a popular disco move. With a smooth thrust of his hips, Starsky spun around sharply, abruptly coming face to face with his friend and dropping the spoon with a clatter. “Oh,” he said, with a sheepish grin. “Hi’ya, Hutch.”

Hutch stood rooted to the floor, unable to move. His throat tightened, choking off any reply he might have made. He would swear later that in that moment, gravity increased ten-fold. He was slammed by a force so great, it was all he could do to remain standing. His pulse was pounding inside his head and he blinked away the sudden moisture gathering in his eyes.

“I just...I don’t...I...I can’t...” he whispered.

“Hutch—” Starsky reached out just as Hutch bolted for the door.



Seeing is believing, or so the saying goes, but he realized he’d been too busy moving to stop and look. Too busy to slow down and take it all in, to realize, accept, and appreciate. Until the moment he’d walked in the door that evening and was blindsided by reality, he hadn’t truly believed it was possible. But the Starsky he’d left inside, a healthy, happy, and healed Starsky was undeniable proof.

Starsky was alive. Unbelievably and amazingly alive.

The war was over. Against incredible odds, they’d won.

They were going to be okay.

A wave of deep relief and profound gratitude swept through him, and he sagged forward weakly as the tears he’d been struggling to hold back began to fall.



The car shifted, then stilled as the weight beside him settled. A warm hand rested on his thigh with a gentle squeeze, but no words were spoken. Minutes passed as they sat together, each man occupied with his own thoughts. It was Starsky who finally broke the silence.

“Hey.” Hutch’s head came up slowly, his red-rimmed eyes finally meeting those of his partner.

“I—” he began, before shrugging and looking away. He wasn't sure he could find the words to express himself and what he was feeling.

“Hey.” A soft touch to his cheek caused Hutch to turn toward his partner once again.

And he knew, in that instant, that there was no need for explanation. They had never needed words before, and they didn’t now.

Starsky already knew. Knew and understood.

“So,” Starsky began again, with a mischievous grin. “It couldn’ta been my cookin’. You didn’t hang around long enough to even try it.” His blue eyes sparkled with humor as he ribbed the blond.

Hutch’s eyes narrowed. “I’m not sure I want to,” he played along. “What’s on the menu?”

“All your favorites, buddy boy. Fresh seaweed salad, desiccated liver and wheat germ casserole, boiled tree bark, and for dessert, homemade goat’s milk ice cream with a crunchy butterfly-bone topping,” Starsky answered with a waggle of his eyebrows, reaching for the door handle.

“Aw, gee, Starsk. All that just for me? I’m touched,” Hutch replied, with an exaggerated roll of his eyes.

“Yeah, you’re touched, all right,” Starsky threw over his shoulder, as he climbed out of the car. Turning back, he stuck his head in through the open passenger window. “Will you come on, already? I’m starvin’ here!”

Shaking his head, Hutch watched his partner disappear into the house. Imagine that. A starving Starsky.

Welcome back to normal.



“Stayin’ Alive,” words and music written by Barry, Robin, and Maurice Gibb—1977.