

Photographs and Memories

By Madison

I've been gone a lot longer than I'd planned and even though I know in my head that Starsky is fine, I can't help the anxious feeling that's settled in the pit of my stomach. My quick trip to the corner store to pick up a few things ended up taking over an hour. It would seem that a quick trip anywhere is all but impossible these days. Wherever I go—grocery store, pharmacy, laundromat, post office—someone stops me to ask about my partner. I really don't mind, though. It's nice to know so many people are concerned about him. He's worked so hard and come so far. I'm just so proud of him and more than happy to tell anyone who's willing to listen. Hell, I'd shout it from the rooftop of Venice Place, if given half a chance.

With two bags clutched in one hand and a six pack of root beer dangling from the other, I kick the car door shut and head for the stairs. It takes some fumbling before I finally get the key into the lock and swing the door open. And there, sitting right where I left him, is Starsky, hard at work on his latest project.

“Hey, Hutch.” His smile is blinding, and with it the tension I'd been feeling disappears. “Need some help?” He starts to stand but I wave him back down.

“It's okay. I've got it.” I know I'm grinning back like an idiot, but I don't care. God, it's good to see him like this after so many months of struggle and pain. “Be back in a sec.”

It only takes a minute or two before I have the bags emptied and everything put away. Grabbing a cold can of soda from the fridge for each of us, I wander back into the living room and settle on the floor next to Starsky. “So, what are you working on today?”

The progress he's made, especially in the past couple of weeks, is astounding. It was touch and go for a while there. Even after the doctors agreed he would survive the shooting, they couldn't predict his physical recovery. It was anybody's guess whether the massive damage his body had suffered could be overcome. Whether he'd be able to heal. In the beginning, I was just happy he was alive. I had no idea of the agony that was to come.

Starsky is a fighter. If he wasn't, I don't know where we'd be now. I tried to be there, to help him as much as I could, but in the end it was all up to him. And he never gave up. It didn't matter how bad the pain got or how tired and frustrated he was. It didn't matter how scared he was or how many setbacks he faced. Sure, there were days when he wanted to throw in the towel and say uncle. Days when he hurt so bad he could barely move and I held him while he cried. Days when the mountain loomed over him, seemingly insurmountable, and the light at the end of the tunnel seemed to moving

further and further away. But he just kept on pushing, attacking each day and every obstacle with a strength and courage that touched everyone around him. I'd heard the whispers of the hospital staff. A living, breathing miracle, they'd pronounced. Maybe he is. But to me, he's just Starsky. And that explains it all.

"I saved this one until you got back. So we could do it together." Starsky pulls a box marked "Us" in front of him and eagerly removes the lid.

As his health had improved, he'd become increasingly restless. It hadn't taken long before he was sick and tired of being cooped up with nothing better to do than sit on the couch and watch TV, or lie in bed and read. He'd needed something to do. It didn't matter what. Just something, anything, to occupy his mind. He was going stir crazy and taking me along for the ride. Finally, after yet another morning of watching him bounce off the walls, I'd had an idea.

"Hey." I'd caught his arm as he wandered past me on what had to be his hundredth circuit around the apartment. "I know. Why don't I haul all of your pictures out here and you can start sorting through them?"

For his ninth birthday, Starsky's dad had given him a Brownie 127 and he hasn't stopped taking pictures since. It's something that he loves and he's really good at. He has an eye for subject matter and an innate sense of composition and balance. Nothing makes him happier than spending the day at the park or on the beach, camera in hand. I might not be the most objective person when it comes to my partner, but I know a lot of other folks who'd agree with me. Over the years, he's become the department's unofficial photographer. Weddings, birthdays, retirement parties, the BCPD summer picnic, the Kops and Kids annual Christmas party. Name the occasion and he's been there to capture it on film. He's always making copies of his prints and sharing them with everyone at the precinct. And they appreciate his kindness in giving them a tangible memory to hold on to.

So, I'd dove into his bedroom closet and pulled out box after box of pictures he'd had stored inside. I'd dragged them into the living room and Starsky had happily jumped right in. It was something he'd been wanting to do for a while but never seemed to have the time for. He'd been at it ever since, organizing stack after stack into some semblance of order known only to him.

"Look at this!" He bumps my elbow as he hands me one. It's a photo of yours truly, in all of my youthful glory, taken while we were going through the police academy. I remember the day vividly. We'd had an afternoon off from classes and were supposed to be using the time to study. Instead, and against my better judgment, I'd let Starsky talk me into going to the beach. That little escapade ended with me in the emergency room after being stung by a jellyfish. You might think I'd have taken that lesson to heart, but no. That was just the tip of the iceberg, the first of many misadventures Starsky would drag me into.

“Hey! Is this a great shot or what? I wonder how ol’ Fitz is doin’ these days?” Another snapshot comes my way, this one from a department picnic. We’d been playing softball and Starsky and I, standing shoulder to shoulder, bats in hand, were waiting for our turn at the plate. Lt. Thomas Fitzgerald from Traffic, had come up behind us and made a comment about how hot it was outside. Instinctively, we’d turned toward him, only to be hit head on with a bucket of water. The game was temporarily suspended for the all out water fight that followed. No one escaped the assault that day, as men, women, and children raced back and forth from the ocean, carrying water in whatever they could find. I can still see the look on Captain Dobey’s face when he was blasted in a sneak attack from all sides. When the battle finally ended, Starsky had rescued his camera from a dry spot under a picnic table and gone about recording the carnage for posterity.

It isn’t until Starsky’s stomach growls loudly that I realize the afternoon has slipped away while we were passing snapshots back and forth, talking and reminiscing. Starsky is laying back against the couch, relaxed and flushed with laughter, surrounded by images of times gone by. He’s smiling down at a photograph of the two of us, each with an arm around the other, standing on top of the Torino. Starsky had been experimenting with a new camera that day, trying to figure out how to work the timer. I can remember him yelling at me, “Quit messin’ around Hutch, and get your can up here. Film don’t grow on trees, ya know!”

I should get up and start looking for something to make for dinner. It’ll be time for Starsky’s meds soon and he needs to have food in his stomach before he can take them. But I’m caught up in the thoughts of all that we’ve shared together and reluctant to move. I can’t help but think how close we came to losing this, how close I came to losing him. Without thinking, I drape my arm his shoulder and pull him to my side. We’ve been together for so long, he knows exactly what I’m thinking.

“It’s okay, Hutch. We’re okay.” He squeezes my leg in reassurance, then waves a hand over the photographs scattered on the floor around us, over the faces and places from our collective past.

“I wouldn’t change any of it, Hutch. Not one second.” As I turn toward him, his eyes fasten on mine before he continues. “It ain’t all been sunshine and roses, that’s for sure. Sometimes it’s been pretty damn hard. And sometimes it’s been pretty damn good, too. But that’s just the way life is, ya know?”

Smiling now, his thumb caresses the image of the two of us he’s still holding in his hand before he hands it over to me.

“Without all this,” he says, “I wouldn’t be me. And I’m pretty happy being me. And I’m pretty happy being here. With you.”

Dinner can wait a bit longer.

The End