

Blue

*A post-“Black and Blue” story
by The Blintz*

Starsky fidgeted momentarily, rearranging the throw pillows on the sofa until he was as comfortable as he could get in the makeshift bed. He leaned back and sighed contentedly, allowing the long exhalation to release some of the pent-up tension of the past few days. He had worried almost constantly, from the moment he'd heard the single gunshot that nearly took his partner's life, down to those final seconds, days later, when he was sure the last sound he would ever hear would be the gunshot that would take his own life. But then, from out of nowhere, Hutch had come around the corner and rescued him and Meredith, his temporary partner. And for a split second, Starsky had let the relief wash over him in waves, consciously allowing the adrenaline in his system to burn itself out. But then, he had gotten a really good look at Hutch, and all the worries came back, doubling in force as he noticed the fresh bleeding at the site of the wound, the pale face drenched in sweat, and his normally strong partner leaning against a wall for support as his breath came in uneven ragged gasps.

After another evening at the hospital, a few more stitches, and another round of IV antibiotics, the ER doctor had declared Hutch fit to go home, but only if he agreed to stay in bed and take his medication exactly as prescribed. Starsky had assured the doctor he would see to it that Hutch behaved, and after loading his now exhausted partner into the front seat of the Torino, he had taken him home. Finally, things were back to normal, and Starsky was grateful. He had convinced Hutch to take his medicine, even the strong painkillers the doctor had given him, and to stop arguing with him and take the bed for the night, knowing he wouldn't be able to get comfortable on the couch. All was as it should be, and at long last, Starsky was able to lie back against the pillows with his arms propped behind his head and let down his guard for a short while. Within minutes, the stress and intensity of the last few days took their toll, and he drifted off into a restful slumber.

A short time later, Starsky awoke with a start, straining in the dark to hear what had awakened him so suddenly. Then he heard it again—a slight creaking from the direction of the bedroom, followed by a soft moan and a heavy sigh. Rolling off the sofa and onto his feet in one smooth motion, Starsky ran a hand through his tangled curls as he hurried toward the bedroom. Flipping on the overhead light, he stood framed in the doorway, concern etching deep lines in his face. Before him, Hutch sat in the bed, propped up against the headboard with a couple of sweat-soaked pillows, his teeth clenched as he hissed in a shallow breath.

“Why didn't you wake me?” Starsky asked.

“Looks like I did.” Hutch grinned weakly, trying unsuccessfully to shift into a more comfortable position.

“What can I do?”

“Not a whole lot,” Hutch replied, trying to rearrange his arm in its protective sling. “It's still a couple hours before I can take any more medicine, so I thought I'd just sit here and ponder the mysteries of

life. Go back to bed, Starsk. There's no sense in both of us being up all night."

Starsky crossed to the nightstand and picked up the small bottle of pain pills that sat there. He read the label carefully, shaking his head. "Here's a mystery for you, my dear Watson..."

"Watson?" Hutch interrupted. "I'm Sherlock, you're Watson. Remember?"

"Yeah, whatever," Starsky replied, his mouth twitching in a crooked grin. "Now, stop interrupting me and listen. The instructions on this bottle say you can have one *or* two of these things every four hours as needed."

"So?"

"So, how many did you take?"

"Just one. You should know—you practically shoved it down my throat."

"And how long ago was that?" Starsky continued, ignoring the barb.

Hutch squinted at the clock on the nightstand. "About thirty minutes ago, I guess."

"Good," Starsky replied, unscrewing the top of the bottle and shaking one of the round, white pills into his hand. "That means I can shove another one of these down your throat so both of us can get some rest." Smiling triumphantly, he pushed the pill into Hutch's mouth and, with a slight flourish, offered him the glass of water that sat on the nightstand.

"Are you sure about this?" Hutch asked, while still holding the medication between clenched teeth. "These pills are supposed to be pretty strong."

"And you're in a lot of pain. So just swallow the pill; I'll tuck you in, read you a story, and we can both go nighty-night." Grabbing Hutch's hand, he placed the glass of water in it and watched as Hutch obediently took the medicine. "Good boy," he encouraged as Hutch drained the last of the water out of the glass. "Now, try to get some sleep, huh?"

"Yes, Mother," Hutch replied, shifting positions once again as he waited for the pain medicine to take effect. "Now get outta here and leave me alone, would ya?"

"That's gratitude for you," Starsky groused as he turned off the light and headed back to the living room in an affected huff. "A man does everything he can to make his friend feel better, and what does he get? Grief!"

Having completed his mission, Starsky once again settled on the sofa and made himself comfortable. He closed his eyes and sighed contentedly, certain that this would mean the beginning of a very good night's sleep.



Hutch moved his shoulder tentatively, relieved to find that the second pain pill seemed to be working

already. He looked at the clock. Only thirty minutes since Starsky had given him the additional medicine. He turned to roll onto his good side, but moved too quickly and the room spun around him, throwing him off balance. He tried to grab the headboard but missed, tumbling out of bed and onto the carpeted floor. Predictably, it was only a matter of seconds before his disheveled partner appeared at his side.

“Are you okay?” Starsky asked as he knelt beside Hutch, helping him to a sitting position. “What happened?”

Hutch looked up at him, eyebrows knitted together in confusion. “I don’t really know. One minute, I was trying to roll over, and the next thing I knew, I was on the floor. I guess these pain pills are stronger than we thought.”

“Did you hurt yourself?” Starsky asked, pulling Hutch’s t-shirt away from the bandage to look for fresh bleeding.

“I’m okay,” Hutch replied, batting Starsky’s hands away as he struggled to get up. “Just a little woozy and really, really tired.”

Starsky put his arms around the blond’s waist and gently lifted, depositing him back on the bed in one smooth motion. “Upsy-daisy,” he sing-songed cheerfully, smiling broadly at the annoyed look on his partner’s face. “Now, if I tuck you in, do you think both of us could get some shut-eye? I’m getting a little tired, here.”

“You?” Hutch asked incredulously. “I’m the one who ran all over town trying to rescue your ungrateful hide...” His voice trailed away in a woozy slur as he lost the fight to keep his eyelids open.

“Yeah, you did,” Starsky whispered in reply, the gratitude in his voice evident as he turned off the light and headed back to the sofa for another attempt at sleep.



“Starsky!”

The urgency in Hutch’s voice brought Starsky immediately to consciousness. He sat up quickly and took in the situation. Hutch was kneeling on the floor in front of the couch, his hands on Starsky’s shoulders. The pain mask that had marred his face all evening was gone, and in its place was a look of wide-eyed bewilderment. His blue eyes were earnestly staring into Starsky’s, though his normally clear visage was more than slightly glassy, and his pupils were pinpoint.

“What’s the matter Hutch? Are you hurtin’? Do you need something?”

“Starsky,” Hutch said, ignoring his questions. “They’re here.”

“Who’s here?” Starsky asked, joining Hutch on the floor and peering into the darkness of the hallway apprehensively. He reached under the sofa and pulled out his Beretta, silently clicking off the safety.

“Shhh!” Hutch hissed, pulling him down impatiently. The unexpected move caught Starsky off balance

and he sprawled facedown on the carpet, his flailing right arm knocking the phone off the hook with a loud jangle. “I said, Shhh!” Hutch scolded. “You’ll scare them away.”

Starsky pulled together the shreds of his dignity and righted himself into a sitting position. “Scare who away?” He looked at Hutch questioningly, but Hutch was captivated by something in the distance, something Starsky couldn’t see, no matter how hard he tried to focus. “Need I remind you, partner, that usually, when someone is in your house in the middle of the night, uninvited, the goal *is* to scare them away.”

“Aren’t they beautiful?” Hutch asked, ignoring Starsky’s question. “I wonder why they chose us?”

“Who’s beautiful? And *who* chose us? For what? What in the heck are you talkin’ about?”

Hutch finally turned to face his partner. “I don’t know who they are, Starsk. But don’t you get it? Of all the places and all the people in the world, they picked this apartment and the two of us to finally make contact. Kinda makes you think, doesn’t it?”

Starsky sighed in frustration, his right hand absently tugging at his hair. “Yeah, it makes me think,” Starsky readily agreed. “Makes me think you’re crazy.”

“Look!” Hutch exclaimed, pointing to a spot in the hallway. “There goes another one! And he wants me to go with him.”

Starsky stared down the empty hallway, perplexed. Nothing he said seemed to be getting through to his partner, and he still had no idea what Hutch was talking about. He decided to play along, hoping to figure out exactly who or what had invaded his home that night. “Are you sure that’s a good idea, Hutch? I mean, they might be...uh...violent or something.” He peered over the couch again and brought his gun up carefully, pointing it down the hallway in the general direction of the unseen intruder.

Hutch grabbed Starsky’s arm and yanked it down, staring at him in horror. “You can’t shoot them, Starsk! Are you nuts?”

“I’m sorry, Hutch. Uh...you’re absolutely right. That would be wrong. Even though they’re in my house. In the middle of the night. Keeping me awake. And keeping you awake. Who’s keeping me awake.” He looked at Hutch again, his face a study in perplexity. “And why would that be wrong?”

Hutch sighed heavily, staring at the floor for several seconds as if to pray for patience. “We don’t know who they are, or where they come from. What if you only wounded one? How would we help them? For all we know, their bodies are nothing like ours, and their blood must be different from ours or they wouldn’t be blue. Medical science just isn’t equipped to deal with something like this—”

“*Blue?*” Starsky interrupted incredulously, his eyebrows shooting up his forehead. “They’re *blue?*”

Now it was Hutch’s turn to look confused. “Yes. You mean you don’t see them? There’s at least four of them here, and you haven’t seen them?” Hutch placed his hands on Starsky’s shoulders, his glassy eyes probing his partner’s face. “Are you okay?”

“Of course, I’ve seen ’em,” Starsky replied with dignity, squaring his shoulders and raising his chin

defiantly. “I’d have to be blind to not see the blue people....”

“Men,” Hutch corrected.

“Men,” Starsky continued. He smiled at Hutch reassuringly, his voice taking on the tone one uses with a befuddled toddler. “The little blue men walking around my house....”

“Flying,” Hutch corrected again.

“Flying?”

“Flying.”

Starsky leaned his back against the front of the sofa for support, no longer interested in the spot in the hallway he’d been studying for the last fifteen minutes. “Let me get this straight. There are little blue men flying through my house.”

“Yes!” Hutch nodded affirmatively, glad he’d finally gotten through to his friend.

“And you think they’re here to contact us for some unknown reason.” Starsky nodded, mirroring Hutch’s movements.

“Yes!” Hutch said happily, still nodding his head.

“No,” Starsky said softly, changing his gentle nodding into a firmer shake. “No, Hutch. There are no little blue men, no one is here to contact us, and you need to go back to bed.” He got up slowly, stretching out his kinked muscles before reaching down to help his wounded partner to his feet.

“But, Starsk....”

“No buts, Hutch. I think that medicine was a lot stronger than we thought, and it’s made you loopy.” He steered his resistant partner down the hallway toward the bedroom. “I think a good night’s sleep would do both of us some good, huh?”

Hutch sat on the edge of the bed and looked up at Starsky pleadingly. “You mean there’s no little blue men here?”

“No, Hutch.”

“And there never was?”

“No, Hutch.”

“Not even one small one?”

Starsky allowed himself a tired smile. “No, partner. Not even a small one. Now, why don’t you lay down and try to sleep?”

Hutch started to lie down but stopped in mid motion. “I have to use the bathroom.”

“Good grief!” Starsky replied, sitting heavily on the bed in frustration. “You’re worse than a two-year-old! You want a drink of water, too?”

“If you don’t mind,” Hutch tossed back over his shoulder as he made his way to the bathroom.

Starsky blew out his breath in one loud exhalation before summoning his flagging strength to heave himself once more into a standing position. He went to the kitchen, mumbling loudly about little blue men, tall blond partners, and overgrown two-year-olds, even as he took a glass out of the cupboard and filled it with fresh ice water from the refrigerator. A slice of leftover pizza and an unopened bottle of root beer caught his eye, and he felt his stomach rumble in response. Peeking around the corner, he could see that the bathroom door was still closed. He extracted the pizza from its cardboard home and ate it quickly, washing it down with several large swallows of the ice-cold root beer. Smacking his lips in delight, he quickly closed the refrigerator door, feeling a little guilty for leaving Hutch alone so long.

“Can’t expect me to take care of him if I don’t take care of myself,” he said to himself, justifying his absence as he picked up the glass of water and headed back down the hallway. “Have to keep up my strength.” He was surprised to see that the bedroom was still empty and Hutch was nowhere in sight.

Hastily setting the glass on the nightstand, Starsky headed back to the still-closed bathroom door and knocked impatiently. “Hutch? You in there?”

There was no response.

“Hutch?” He attempted to open the door but found it locked from the inside. “Hutch? Can you hear me?” His repeated calls and insistent knocking went unanswered.

Thoroughly alarmed by this time, Starsky hesitated only briefly before rearing back and kicking in the obstructing door. Panicked, he rushed into the room, terrified that he would find Hutch passed out on the floor, his wound reopened and blood coating the tile floor.

What he found instead stopped him dead in his tracks. Hutch was sitting fully clothed on the closed toilet seat, legs crossed as he leaned forward intently, his full attention focused on the loofah sponge and toilet brush that were lined up on the edge of the bathtub. Every once in a while, he would nod in understanding, his expression grave.

“Whatcha doin’, Hutch?” Starsky asked gently, almost afraid of the answer.

“I’m trying to run an interrogation here, Starsk. Do you mind?”

“An interrogation.”

Hutch excused himself quietly and looked up at his partner. “Yes, an interrogation.” He stood up and exited the bathroom, pulling a bemused Starsky along with him. “They think they’re here to get information from us, but I thought that if I could get information from them...” Hutch’s voice trailed off as he looked at Starsky knowingly, tapping his own head with his index finger. “Pretty smart, huh?”

Starsky looked at his partner long and hard, his need for sleep outweighed by his need to ensure Hutch’s safety. Finally admitting defeat, he threw his hands up in the air in surrender. “Yeah, that’s

real good thinkin', Hutch. You always were the brains of this outfit."

Smiling broadly, Hutch patted Starsky on the cheek before heading back into the bathroom. Starsky took a deep breath and went into the living room, rummaging through the end table drawer until he came up with a small notebook and a pencil. He grabbed a chair from the kitchen table and, opening the bathroom door, placed it in the doorway to not only prop open the door, but also block the entrance. Seating himself comfortably, he licked his thumb and flipped to the first empty page in the book, poising his pencil in readiness.

"What are you doing?" Hutch asked.

"Takin' notes. Ready to record this exciting conversation between you and..." He looked at the strange lineup on the side of the tub, which now included a bottle of shampoo and a bar of soap. "...them," he concluded.

"Really?"

"Really. I figure you can use all the help you can get. And besides, if I don't keep a record of this, no one will ever believe it." He watched as Hutch went happily back to interviewing the "intruders" and smiled to himself.

"One long night for me," he thought to himself, "equals one notebook full of ammunition for the next time he calls me crazy." He smiled as his pencil went to work, recording for posterity the bizarre question-and-answer period Hutch was having with his "prisoners." True, he was going to miss out on some sleep, but it was so going to be worth it.



Author's note: The preceding story is loosely based on an incident that happened to me when someone near and dear to me took a little too much narcotic cough medicine. Of course, the names have been changed to protect the guilty! <bg>