

# Missing Scene: Fatal Charm

*By The Blintz*

“It’s too late. He’ll be dead before you get here!”

For one terrifying instant my heart stopped as I tried to comprehend what Diana had just said. Too late? No...I couldn’t accept that. I’d never be able to accept that, not where Hutch was concerned.

I looked up at Captain Dobey. “Cap’n,” I said in a voice that was way too calm. “Get the closest black-and-white to Hutch’s as soon as you can.” I snatched my jacket off the back of the chair and ran out the door.

My voice may have been under control, but I sure didn’t feel calm as I threw myself down the stairwell and jumped into the Torino. It was times like this that I was glad I drove this car. It had the speed and agility to get me where I wanted to go almost as fast as I wanted to go there. Almost. Tonight, no vehicle known to man could get me to Hutch’s place as fast as I wanted to go there.

“It’s too late.” Those words repeated themselves over and over in my tortured mind as my body automatically went through the motions of navigating the Torino recklessly through the darkened streets. I couldn’t be too late. Hutch had to be all right. There were still so many things he had to do, things we had to do. So many things I wanted to tell him if I got another chance...

Funny, but even after all these years, I had never said ‘those’ words to him. Never told him what he meant to me, how I couldn’t face this world without him. I’d never told him how his friendship enriched my life or how his gentleness and caring brought me through some of the worst times I’ve ever known. How could I have wasted so much time raggin’ him about the car he drove and the clothes he wore and that stuff he ate, but never really get down to the basics? Why hadn’t I ever just sat him down, looked him in the eye and said, “Hutch, I love ya, man. You’re the best!” How hard would that be?

As the Torino screeched around yet another curve, my mind kept taunting me, telling me that now I would never have the chance. When Hutch walked out of the station a few hours ago, that was it. That was my last chance, and I had blown it.

A tidal wave of guilt washed over me as I thought back to the events of the past couple of days. Why hadn’t I seen this coming? How many times had Hutch come to me and tried to tell me that something was wrong with Diana? I cringed when I thought back to how I had brushed him off.

*It's that old fatal charm of yours. Gets 'em every time...Fatal.* That one word slammed into my heart with the force of a sledgehammer. And to think I had actually laughed after I said it like it was some kind of a joke!

*Count on me!...*Now that was sound advice. I told him to count on me. For what? To brush off his concerns? To ignore his pleas for help? To give him bad advice? To trivialize his problems when he needed me the most? Of all the cocky, self-assured words of wisdom I magnanimously bestowed upon my partner, those had to be the most incriminating. I told him to count on me, but I had let him down. And now he may have paid for it with his life.

*Look, I am no shrink, but I think it's a possibility that she might have worked out her aggression on your place tonight...Brilliant, Dr. Starsky, just brilliant.*

I slammed my hand against the steering wheel in frustration and forced myself to concentrate on the task at hand. I might have let Hutch down, but I was more than ready to make up for it, if I got the chance.

Finally, I squealed around the last turn and careened to a stop in front of Hutch's building. My heart stuck in my throat as I realized I was the first one there and that all the patrol cars were behind me. Sheer terror and rage lent strength to my legs as they propelled me up the steps to his apartment. And I cannot describe the relief that flooded through me when I saw Hutch on the landing, very much alive and struggling with Diana.

I threw myself into the melee, pulling the enraged woman off my partner and thrusting her into the waiting arms of one of the uniforms behind me. I turned my attention back to Hutch and grabbed him by the arm. "You okay?" I asked optimistically.

My relief of just a few moments earlier left as quickly as it had come when I saw the blood. There was lots of it. Everywhere. Soaking the sleeve of his robe, running in rivulets down his arm to drip relentlessly into little puddles in the carpet at his feet. Fear clutched at my insides as I looked up to see his pasty-white, sweat-soaked face. His eyes were rolling up into his head as his knees started giving out. As he slowly slid down the wall, he kept mumbling "I'm sorry" over and over again.

I got a better grip on his arms to keep him from hitting the floor, and this time I couldn't hide the tremor in my voice. "Where ya goin'?" I asked, trying to stop his descent. I was almost afraid to ask that question, afraid of what the answer would be.

Hutch seemed to gather every remaining ounce of strength he had and looked up at me. "I think I'll sit down."

"Not here. C'mon." I put my arms around his waist and heaved him to a standing position. It took a little effort, but I finally managed to half-drag, half-carry him into his apartment as I hollered down the steps for someone to call an ambulance.



Absolution. That's what I was looking for...absolution. After I got Hutch seated on the couch, I looked around for some task, no matter how menial or trivial, to assuage my guilt. Almost immediately, Hutch provided me with just the right diversion.

"Starsky," he said through pursed lips, lurching off the couch and heading for the bathroom in a stumbling run. "I think I'm gonna be sick." He pushed past me, but before he had taken two more steps, his knees buckled. This time I wasn't close enough or fast enough to catch him before he hit the floor.

"Hutch!" I called out to him as I flung myself beside his still form. "Hutch?" I gently patted his pale gray cheeks a few times and was finally rewarded with a low moan. "Stay right here, buddy. I'll be right back."

Running into the bathroom, I grabbed an armload of clean towels, stopping only long enough to soak one of them with cool water. I carried them back to Hutch's side and sank to my knees, sickened by the sight of the ever-widening pool of blood under his left arm.

"Ya still with me, buddy?" I asked, bathing his face with the damp cloth. He was still way too pale, so I took several of the bath towels and wedged them under his feet to help elevate his legs a little.

"Hey, Hutch?" I began again, smoothing his hair back from his forehead. "I need to get a look at that arm, buddy, and I'm afraid it's not gonna be too pleasant for ya. Think you're up for it?"

"Piece o' cake," came his weak, shaky reply.

"Okay, pal, but I'm gonna need you to help me get this robe off. We'll take it nice and easy." I undid the belt around his waist and eased the robe off his good arm first. Having done that much, I looked down at Hutch to gauge his reaction and was pleased to find that his eyes were open and focused on me. Greatly encouraged, I began to gently pull the sleeve off his left arm. Hutch tried to help, but every movement brought a visible flinch and a sharp intake of air through his tightly clenched teeth.

"There." I announced triumphantly. "The hard part's over now. You okay?"

"Terrific. How's it look?"

"Not great," I admitted. Using one of the towels to clean some of the blood off his arm, I carefully inspected the wound. He had a gash about six inches long along his upper arm, and as I moved in a little closer to get a better look, I was horrified to see white bone

glistening along the entire length of the cut. Swallowing back the bile that had suddenly risen in my throat, I pressed a folded hand towel onto the wound and wrapped a clean bath towel around it to hold my makeshift bandage in place. Mopping at the sweat that had appeared on my forehead, I turned my attention back to my partner.

“Starsky?” he asked with a strange, pleading tone to his voice. “I just want you to know that I’m sorry. I’m sorry for Diana, I’m sorry for screwing up again, and I’m sorry that you have to keep bailing me out of these impossible predicaments that I seem determined to get myself into on a regular basis. I’m gonna get it together, I promise. Just don’t give up on me, okay?”

I was totally speechless. Here he was, lying on the floor of his utterly destroyed apartment in a puddle of his own blood and he was apologizing...to me! “Take it easy, buddy. You didn’t do anything wrong, Hutch. In case you’ve forgotten, you were the victim here. If anyone needs to apologize, it’s me.”

Cradling his face in my hand, I forced his eyes to meet mine. Once I started my confession I couldn’t seem to talk fast enough – the words spilled over one another in their haste to be heard. “I’m sorry Hutch. I let ya down, partner, and I swear I’ll never do it again. I would trade places with you in a heartbeat ‘cause I can’t stand to see you hurtin’ this way, knowing I could have done something to prevent it. Can you ever forgive me?”

A puzzled look came into his eyes. “What in the world are you talking about, Starsk?”

“I should have listened to you. How many times did you try to tell me there was something terribly wrong with Diana, but I just blew it off? I should have done something, Hutch. I’m a cop, for Pete’s sake. I should have seen the signs, especially after what she did to your apartment. Anyone with half a brain should have known...”

“Whoa! Hold on there for just a sec!” Hutch interrupted me. “Starsky, think for just a minute. I’m a cop too, you know, and I knew Diana a lot better than you did. If I didn’t see this coming, how in the world were you going to?”

Hanging my head, I shrugged helplessly. “I don’t know, Hutch. I just...”

“Starsky,” he replied, reaching up with his good hand to turn my face back toward him. “You saved my life. I don’t know how you knew, or why you came here, I just know that you saved me...again. So stop kickin’ yourself. You didn’t do anything wrong.”

I decided to let the matter drop when I saw a fresh layer of sweat pop out on his forehead. The towels I had wrapped around his arm were already turning red with his blood, and I silently prayed for the ambulance to hurry. As if in answer to my prayers, there was a knock on the door and two paramedics entered with a stretcher. Abandoning my post to let them work, I hovered nearby in case he needed me again.

From out of nowhere Captain Dobey appeared, looking worried and grim. His eyes widened when he saw Hutch lying on the floor and the pool of blood surrounding his arm. He glanced at me nervously and agreed to drive the Torino to the hospital if I wanted to ride in the ambulance with Hutch. I gratefully accepted his offer, and within minutes we were on our way.



“Hutch?” I began hesitantly. It had been almost twenty-four hours since they had wheeled Hutch into the operating room, leaving me to pace and worry and drink cup after cup of lukewarm vending-machine coffee. The surgery had been successful and tomorrow I would take him home to Venice Place and life would return to its normal routine. But tonight, while he was awake and alert, I needed to make good on the promise I had made when I thought I would find him dead. “I need to talk to ya, buddy.”

Hutch looked up at me from his hospital bed. He was still pale; in fact, it was hard to tell where the white sheet ended and he began. But he had the sparkle back in his eyes, and I knew he would be okay. “What is it Starsk? You know, you really ought to go home and get some sleep. You look terrible!”

I couldn’t help but grin and shake my head. “Look who’s talkin’, Mr. Casper the Friendly Ghost! We’re supposed to be worrying about you right now, remember?”

“As if I could forget! What’s on your mind?”

I had taken full advantage of the time Hutch was out of it by rehearsing what I wanted to say to him. I had a nice little speech all prepared and I was confident of my ability to deliver it to him with just the right touch of humor, pathos, and emotion. ‘Hutch’, I would begin, looking him directly in the eye. ‘We’ve been partners for a lotta years now, buddy, and I think it’s high time I told you how much you mean to me. I know I’m not very good at words, but when I thought that Diana had killed you, I vowed to myself that I would tell you everything I feel about you if I got the chance. Well, partner, the chance is here, so you just sit back and listen to what I have to say.’

From that point, I would tell him how much I loved him, how much his friendship strengthened me and how I couldn’t be a cop without him. I’d tell him that I was closer to him than to any other human being on the face of the earth and that I was privileged to call him my friend. I’d finally let him know how much I appreciated all the love, the comfort, and the strength I got from him. By the time I was finished, he would know how I felt and how important he was to me.

Rising from my perch on the side of his bed, I crossed over to the window and stared outside for a moment as I gathered my courage. Taking a deep breath and squaring my shoulders, I turned to look at him and stopped dead in my tracks. He was looking up at

me with those crystal blue eyes of his, all innocence and expectation, and I couldn't go on. Looking at him lying in that bed, suddenly I didn't see Hutch anymore. I saw my father, Helen, Terri, even my mother – all the people in my life to whom I had said 'I love you'. All of them were gone – either dead or far away from me. And as much as I hated myself for it, I couldn't take that chance with Hutch. I couldn't say those words to him for fear that he would leave me like everyone else. I had learned to live with the loss of those other people, but I didn't want to learn to live without Hutch. I honestly didn't think I could.

Hanging my head, I ran nervous fingers through my hair and sat heavily in one of the visitor's chairs, carefully avoiding his gaze. Moments later, I felt his hand on my chin. Tilting my face upward, he captured my eyes with his, and, as time seemed to stand still, he probed the very depths of my soul. I saw his eyebrow arch upward, almost imperceptibly, and I gave a small nod in response.

"It's okay, Starsk," he said quietly, moving his hand from my face to my shoulder. "You don't ever have to say it, buddy. I already know."

The weight of the world lifted from my shoulders as I once again breathed a silent prayer of thanks for the uncomplicated, unprecedented friendship that I had with this man. Our eyes remained locked for a few more moments until I was sure that Hutch really understood what I was trying to tell him. Then, because I still hate soapy scenes, I stood up and broke the spell.

"Well, Blondie," I said, stretching tired, aching muscles and stifling a yawn. "I guess I'd better get home and get some sleep. I'm takin' ya home tomorrow, ya know, and we got a lotta work to do."

"Work? What work?"

"In case you've forgotten, your apartment is a mess, and if I'm gonna stay there with ya, it has to be clean. Then, of course, you and I are going to sit down and have a nice long talk about your future social life. The way I see it, pal, you need help."

"Starsky," Hutch said suspiciously. "What do you mean, I need help?"

"Well, I've decided that because you are my friend, and you are a little down on your luck lately when it comes to women, I'm gonna share my little black book with ya. There's lots of girls in there that I'm finished with so we'll see if we can't pick you out a couple o' prospects. I have them all categorized and indexed by hair color, eye color..." My train of thought was interrupted by the appearance of the famous Hutchinson temper.

"Hold on just a minute there, pal! First of all, I don't need your charity and I certainly don't need your leftovers! Second, even though I may have had a few bad dates recently, at least all of them could count to fifteen without removing their shoes! I've seen your

dates, Starsky, and I can assure you that I am not interested!” He leaned back against the pillows and glared at me.

“Have it your way, Hutch,” I replied, shrugging my shoulders nonchalantly. “I guess I’ll just have to tell Samantha not to come tomorrow night after all.”

“That’s right! Tell her it was all a big mistake and..... Wait a minute! Did you say Samantha? As in Samantha the masseuse? As in Samantha with the magic hands?”

“Don’t worry, Hutch. I wouldn’t want to insult your machismo by settin’ you up with her, so I’ll make sure to tell her it’s off.” Grinning broadly, I headed for the door to make my weary way home. “See ya tomorrow!”

Entering the hospital corridor, I could hear Hutch’s frustrated shouts following me. “Hey, Starsk? Buddy? Come back, huh? Maybe I should reconsider...? STARSKY!?”

Chuckling loudly, I continued my journey down the hallway. I’d call Hutch when I got home to let him know that I wasn’t really gonna cancel his date. After all, I didn’t want to leave him hanging—well, not too long, anyhow!

***The End***