

Making a Difference

By The Blintz

Detectives David Starsky and Kenneth Hutchinson sat side by side in the large treatment area watching the activity around them. Frazzled nurses hurried to and fro, some carrying bandages and medication, others with their arms loaded with charts as they disappeared into various rooms caring for the throng of patients that had invaded the emergency room that night. Doctors rushed from room to room, the wrinkles in their white lab coats and the matching creases in their foreheads a silent witness to their workload. Phones rang constantly, babies cried, and an occasional scream or muffled curse from behind closed doors added to the overall din.

Starsky looked over at his blond partner and tried once again to start a conversation. “Have you ever seen so much activity in one place, Hutch? I think this is worse than the station during a blackout.”

Hutch’s only reply was to sigh loudly, not looking in Starsky’s direction.

“Look,” Starsky continued doggedly. “I don’t know what you’re grousin’ about. If it wasn’t for me, you might’ve been killed.”

Hutch took a deep steadying breath before finally turning to look at the persistent man seated next to him. “If it wasn’t for you, we’d be out with the twins instead of sitting here waiting for yet another tetanus shot.”

Starsky reached down and lightly touched the bandage that covered the neat row of stitches that now graced Hutch’s forearm. “That’s gratitude for you. I risk life and limb to push you outta the way of that speeding car—”

“Speeding car?” Hutch interrupted incredulously. “Starsky, that ‘speeding car’ was being driven by a little old lady who’s never gone over thirty-five miles an hour in her life, and she was nowhere *near* me.”

“Yeah, well, it was hard to tell how close she was from my angle. Besides, even if she was goin’ that slow she still coulda hurt you if she hit you.”

“Not half as much as that pile of broken glass I landed on when you came barreling out of nowhere and knocked me over. I swear, Starsky, you’re hazardous to my health.”

“You know what? You’re absolutely right. Next time, I’ll just let you get mowed down. At least that way I won’t have to listen to you gripe all the time.”

Hutch was just about to reply when a young boy came running past them at full speed, knocking over a linen cart and two nurses in the process. His eyes were wide with fright, and he kept glancing back over his shoulder as if he were being pursued by the hounds of Hell itself.

Starsky and Hutch exchanged a puzzled look before glancing down the hallway in the direction from which the boy had come. A young nurse appeared in their line of sight, her uniform smudged with dirt, and her hat sitting askew on her head. "Somebody stop him!" she yelled, pointing at the young boy that had just rushed by.

Without a second's hesitation, Starsky was on his feet, flying down the hallway in pursuit of the teenager, with Hutch a few steps behind him. Just before they reached the sliding glass doors that led to the outside and freedom, Starsky's superior speed won out, and, with a graceful tackle, he stopped the boy in mid flight.

Catching up with the pair, Hutch extended his hand to his partner who, in turn, dragged the teenager up by the front of his shirt. "What's your name, kid?" Starsky asked, breathing heavily from his recent exertion.

The kid in question stared at Starsky, eyes narrowed in fear and suspicion, before he spoke. "Billy," he replied, his voice shaking with emotion. "My name's Billy. Now let go of me."

With a hard shake of his arm, Billy broke Starsky's grip, but Hutch was a millisecond quicker. Before the teenager could even think to run, Hutch grabbed him by the arm and stuck a warning finger in his face.

"Oh, no you don't! You just stay right there until we find out where you're supposed to be." Hutch paused a moment to catch his breath. "Now, where *are* you supposed to be?"

"I'm *not* going back there," Billy scowled defiantly. "If they take me back, I swear I'll kill myself! And I'll make it real messy and someone'll have to scrape my brains off the walls and ceiling, and my blood will all run out and be so gross they'll never get the stains out of the carpets."

Starsky and Hutch exchanged a look, lips curled in distaste. "Back where, Billy?"

"Back to Juvie, that's where."

Their conversation was interrupted when the nurse who had sounded the alarm finally caught up with them, dragging an older portly police officer behind her. "Thank you very much, sir," she said, nodding curtly to Starsky. "I can take it from here." She latched onto Billy's ear and began forcing him up the hallway in front of her.

“Wait just a minute!” Hutch reached out and grabbed her by the arm, turning her in his direction. “You can’t manhandle the poor kid like that.”

The nurse drew herself up to her full height, eyes darting between Hutch’s hand on her arm and his eyes. “I can do whatever I like, sir, and, as I recall, *you* are supposed to be sitting in Treatment Room Twelve waiting on a tetanus shot. Now, if you know what’s good for you, you’ll get back down there and wait like you were told.” Without another word, she turned on her heel and headed back down the hallway, the hapless Billy being pulled along by his ear.

Hutch looked at Starsky who seemed to be having a difficult time refraining from smiling. Starsky cocked an eyebrow in amusement at his incensed partner, then turned to speak to the police officer who had witnessed the entire scene with a weary eye.

“What was that all about?” he asked, brushing the dirt off his pant legs.

“Aw, just some dumb kid. Caught him for petty theft a few hours ago, and then on the way to Juvie, he starts screamin’ about wantin’ to kill hisself. Kids are smart these days—they know if they start makin’ threats, they get to come here first and it keeps ’em free for a little while longer so they can waste everyone’s time and try to escape. Stupid kids.” He hitched his uniform pants up a little higher and raked a hand through his lank, greasy hair. “I’d like to wrap my hands around his scrawny neck myself and save him the trouble, all the grief he’s caused me.”

Looking at Hutch once again, Starsky saw the muscles in his jaw tighten dangerously. He felt a similar anger rising in himself, but choosing to ignore it, he placed a placating hand on Hutch’s arm before continuing. “What grief?”

“Baby-sitting duty, that’s what. My wife had dinner all ready and we was gonna settle down and watch a movie tonight, but now I’m stuck sittin’ with that kid ’til the hospital psychologist clears him to go to Juvie. Which, by the way, is exactly where he’s gonna end up. Just a big waste of time, if you ask me. Rotten kids.”

“How long you been workin’ Juvie?”

“Fourteen years next summer. *If* I can hang on a few more years, I’ll get to retire.”

“Why haven’t you put in for a transfer?” The three men started back up the hallway toward the treatment room where the nurse stood glaring at them, crooking her index finger at the police officer in a wasted attempt to get him to hurry back to his duty of guarding young Billy.

The officer looked surprised at the question. “Cause I love kids,” he answered as he shuffled off down the hallway and once again resumed his post outside the treatment

room door.

Hutch started down the hallway after him, but was stopped by a firm grip on his arm. “Let it go,” Starsky advised, steering his partner back into the hard plastic chairs they had vacated only moments before.

“Can you believe that guy?” Hutch asked, trying in vain to free himself from Starsky’s grasp. “They shouldn’t let someone like that anywhere *near* a kid.”

Their conversation was interrupted by the appearance of a different nurse—this one, carrying two wicked-looking syringes. “Detective Hutchinson?” she asked, her eyes darting back and forth between the two men.

Starsky spoke up quickly, jerking his thumb in Hutch’s direction. “That’s him!”

“Come with me then.” She approached a cubicle, holding the curtain back so Hutch could precede her.

Hutch swallowed audibly. “Uh, Miss? I, uh, couldn’t help notice you have two needles there.” He smiled and choked back a nervous chuckle.

“That’s right,” she answered brusquely, nearly pushing the detective into the cubicle ahead of her before allowing the curtain to drop back into place. “An antibiotic and a tetanus shot. Now get in here and drop ’em, Blondie. I haven’t got all day.”

Hutch could have sworn he heard the sounds of muffled laughter coming from the other side of the curtain as he gritted his teeth and slowly followed the nurse’s orders.



The two detectives stood at the ER’s checkout desk and patiently waited their turn. Starsky’s attention was centered on the antics of a toddler who was pushing all the buttons on the soda machine and then sticking her arm up the chute where the drinks came out, hoping to find something there. Starsky smiled at the little girl and was about to intervene and buy her something to drink when Hutch grabbed his arm.

“Hey, Starsk. Isn’t that Dr. Carpenter, the hospital psychologist?”

Starsky looked in the direction Hutch was pointing. “I believe you’re right, Ollie. That’s him in the flesh.”

“Say, Starsk,” Hutch replied, shoving his papers into Starsky’s hands. “Stand here and keep our place, will you? I want to go talk to him.”

“*Our* place? Don’t you mean *your* place? And what am I supposed to do if I get to the desk before you get back? Pretend I’m you?” But Starsky’s protests were fruitless as Hutch was already halfway down the hallway.

By the time Hutch returned, Starsky was trying in vain to explain to the clerk that no, he was not the patient, and yes, he was sure the patient had been discharged, but no, the patient wasn’t exactly ready to leave yet. Hutch smiled at the older woman, signed the necessary forms, and grabbed his partner by the arm, steering him into a relatively quiet corner.

“I just had an interesting conversation with Dr. Carpenter about our young friend,” Hutch began. He had Starsky’s undivided attention as he continued. “About six months ago, Billy was brought here by ambulance, out cold and half dead. Seems he took a handful of his mother’s sleeping pills and washed it down with half a bottle of vodka. The doc says they got to him in the nick of time—any later and Billy wouldn’t have made it.”

Starsky looked back up the hallway toward the treatment room where the bored-looking officer stood guard. “So what happened? Couldn’t they do anything to help him?”

Hutch sighed heavily. “Unfortunately, there are very few programs in place for kids like Billy. Dr. Carpenter worked with him for the three days he was in the hospital here and set up some outpatient counseling for him, but Billy never showed up. When the doctor called Billy’s mother, he was told that she knew how to handle her son and he didn’t need any fancy doctoring. He tried getting to Billy and his family through Social Services, but they’re so overwhelmed with cases, they couldn’t spare the manpower to be persistent enough to have any luck. So, our young friend just sort of fell through the cracks, and that was the last time Dr. Carpenter had any contact with Billy or his family until today.”

“So what about tonight? Does he think Billy’s serious about wantin’ to kill himself? What’s gonna happen to him?”

“Yeah, the doctor thinks he’s serious, all right. He also said there’s a new place north of the city where they take in kids that have problems, and let them stay there for as long as it takes to get themselves together. Since Billy has a history, he qualifies for the program and they have space available for him.”

“Well, that’s terrific.” Starsky smiled at his partner. “Guess that means you and me can go catch up with Mindy and Mandy and see if we can make up for lost time, if you know what I mean.” Starsky wiggled his eyebrows suggestively.

“Hold on a minute, Romeo. Not so fast. Yes, they have a program for Billy, and yes, they have room for him, but Deputy Dog down there says he’s not going to ruin the rest of his evening by driving some ‘stupid kid’ all over creation. And, since he’s technically off duty, he doesn’t have to. Which means Billy will go to Juvie tonight and will stay

there until someone can make the time to give him a ride. Unless somebody else volunteers..." Hutch's voice trailed off as he looked pleadingly at his partner.

Now it was Starsky's turn to sigh heavily. "You didn't."

Hutch didn't say a word, just kept looking at his partner.

Starsky shook his head. "You did. My partner, the champion of lost causes and underdogs. How come you gotta drag me into these crazy schemes of yours, huh?"

Hutch smiled, once more grabbing Starsky by the arm and pulling him down the hallway toward Billy. "Because every champion needs a sidekick. Besides, you were my first lost cause."



Starsky steered effortlessly through the darkened streets, humming along with the radio as he drove. They were well north of the city but still an hour from their destination. A movement in the seat next to him caught his attention.

"Your arm hurtin'?" he asked his partner, who was staring out the passenger-side window and absently rubbing his wounded appendage, careful not to touch the bandage.

"What?" Hutch replied, breaking out of his reverie.

"I said, is your arm hurtin'?"

"Oh, that," Hutch answered, looking down at his arm as if he'd never seen it before. "I guess so. Maybe a little. I think that numbing stuff is wearing off."

"Look. Why don't you take one of those pain pills the doctor gave you, and I'll chauffeur you and young Billy to the ranch? You could get a little shut-eye, and after we get there maybe we could find a motel or somethin'."

"Is that a proposition?" Hutch asked, already returning to his vacant stare out the window.

The corner of Starsky's mouth twitched up in a crooked smile. "You should be so lucky."

Silence fell over the vehicle once again, as Hutch went back to his staring and Starsky drove on, alert for any sign of a gas station or convenience store that might be open. His vigilance was rewarded when the neon sign for a mom-and-pop diner caught his eye. Without a second thought, he jerked the steering wheel to the left, expertly turning into the parking lot and gliding into a vacant space.

"What are we doing?" Hutch asked, shifting his gaze from the window to Starsky.

“I’m gonna get you somethin’ to drink so you can take your medicine. I have no idea what you’re doing.” He started out of the car, then turned back as an afterthought. “You want somethin’ to eat?”

“Starsky,” Hutch said, bringing his left arm up to eye level to squint at his watch. “It’s past midnight, for Pete’s sake. Nobody in their right mind would eat this late at night.”

“Yeah. Well, I am. And if you weren’t so proper, you’d find there are a lot of advantages to eating this late at night. Besides, if I remember correctly, I was busy savin’ your life at dinnertime and didn’t get to eat.” Starsky paused for a moment while Hutch rolled his eyes. “Come to think of it, neither did you. I’ll see if I can find you a nice seaweed sandwich or somethin’.”

“What about him?” Hutch jerked a thumb toward the back seat of the car.

“Hey, Billy,” Starsky said a little louder, reaching into the back seat to shake the sleeping boy. “You want some grub?”

Billy awoke with a violent start, hands balled into fists as he jerked upright in his seat. “Leave me alone!” he shouted vehemently, haunted eyes darting back and forth between the two detectives.

“Hey, man. Take it easy,” Starsky said soothingly, hands held palm-out at shoulder height to reassure Billy that he meant him no harm. “I just wanted to see if you’d like somethin’ to eat. How about a burger and some fries?”

Billy shoved his balled up fists into the pockets of his well-worn jeans. “I ain’t got no money,” he said sullenly, refusing to make eye contact with the detective.

“That’s okay,” Starsky replied, plucking Hutch’s wallet off the front seat. “It’s on Hutch.” He smiled broadly at his partner before heading into the diner.

“You gonna let him take your money like that?” Billy asked incredulously.

Hutch turned slightly in his seat so he could talk to his young charge. “Yeah.” He chuckled softly. “You see, Starsky bought lunch yesterday, and I bought breakfast the day before that, and he bought...never mind. Let’s just say it all works out somehow.”

Billy leaned back in his seat and sighed heavily. “You got a smoke?”

“Nope. We don’t smoke, and neither should you. It’ll stunt your growth.”

“Yeah? Who cares?!” Billy fell silent, staring out the window at the diner.

The silence was broken several minutes later when Starsky came strolling out of the diner, his arms loaded with food and drinks. As he approached the car, Hutch reached across the front seat to open the driver's-side door for him, but Billy was a little quicker. Timing his move perfectly, he pushed up on the seat in front of him, effectively knocking Hutch out of the way, then viciously pulled on the handle. The door swung open violently, catching Starsky on his left hipbone, throwing him off balance. Starsky made a valiant effort to stay on his feet and save the food, but his right foot got caught between two parking curbs and he fell to the ground, food and drinks flying in every direction. Billy hopped out of the car and took off across the parking lot, certain that he had gained his freedom.

Starsky, although stunned by the impact, had enough of his wits about him to reach out a hand, and at the last possible second, he grabbed a fistful of Billy's pants leg, stopping him in mid-flight. The young boy hit the ground hard and was immediately pinned down by a very angry Hutch.

"What's wrong with you?!" Hutch shouted, pulling Billy's hands behind him and cuffing them with a loud click. "Where did you think you were going?"

As soon as the teenager was effectively subdued, Hutch turned his attention to his partner who lay on the pavement breathing heavily. Hutch knelt beside him and quickly looked him over, searching for any signs of injury in the reddish glow of the neon sign from the diner. "You okay?" he asked, his eyebrows knit together in concern.

"Yeah," Starsky replied, sitting up slowly with Hutch's help. "Just knocked the wind out of me, that's all." He looked at the mangled styrofoam containers and spilled drinks that littered the ground around him. "I'm afraid our dinner didn't make it, though."

Hutch got to his feet, then reached a hand down and helped Starsky stand. He steadied his partner against the hood of the car. "As soon as you catch your breath, I think you, me, and Billy need to have a little chat. What d'ya say we head into the diner and try again?"

"Terrific," Starsky replied as he brushed the dirt off his clothing while Hutch helped Billy to his feet. "Just gimme a minute to remove our dinner from my jeans, and I'm right behind you."



The diner was practically empty, and the two detectives chose a corner booth where they could keep Billy between them and still have plenty of room to eat. The waitress, eyeing Starsky's stained clothing with distaste, quickly took their orders and trotted off to the kitchen. A long silence ensued while Starsky and Hutch stared at Billy with questioning eyes, and Billy stared at the napkin holder sitting on the table in front of him.

Heaving a heavy sigh, Starsky finally broke the silence. “You wanna tell us what’s goin’ on, Billy?”

There was no reply from the dark-haired teenager.

“Look,” Starsky began again. “I don’t know what your problem has been up ’til now, but I can give you a good idea of what your problem is gonna be if you don’t talk to us. So far, as I understand it, you’re supposed to be on your way to Juvie for petty theft. Right?”

Billy didn’t move a muscle and made no attempt to answer him.

“Okay. You don’t wanna talk.” Starsky nodded agreeably and folded his hands on the table in front of him. “Then I’ll talk. My partner and I have gone out of our way to help you. However, you don’t seem to want our help. So, as soon as we get done eating, you and me and him are going back to the car and back to Juvie where we can add assaulting two police officers to your list of crimes and guarantee you a few extra months or maybe even years in lock-up.”

“You can’t do that!” Billy shouted angrily, trying to free his hands from the cuffs. “I have to get home.”

“Then talk to us, Billy,” Hutch said gently, his tone even and quiet. “Tell us what’s going on.”

Billy fell silent once more, his conflicting emotions evident in the play of the muscles along his jaw line. The two detectives sat quietly, patiently waiting for Billy to make the next move. Finally, the teenager began talking once again.

“I have to go home,” Billy said, a slight quiver in his voice. “I got things to take care of.”

“What things?” Hutch asked, reaching into his pocket to retrieve his handcuff key. He reached behind the youth and unlocked the cuffs, gently extricating Billy’s hands from the cold metal. Billy pulled his newly freed hands in front of him and rubbed his wrists.

He studied Hutch’s face a few moments and seemed to relax a little. “Thanks. That’s a lot better.”

“Go on, Billy,” Starsky encouraged. “Tell us about those things you need to take care of.”

Billy looked back and forth between the two detectives one more time, then took a deep breath. “It’s my sister. Jenny. If I’m not there to take care of her, there’s no tellin’ what’ll happen to her.”

Starsky made eye contact with Hutch before he spoke again. “What are you afraid of?”

Billy hesitated for only a second longer then, squaring his shoulders determinedly, he began to speak. “It’s my stepdad, Rodney. He bothers my sister sometimes...” Billy’s voice trailed off and he lowered his eyes, his resolve already weakening.

Starsky and Hutch exchanged glances, each reading the anger in the other’s eyes. Hutch placed his good arm around Billy’s shoulders. “Go on, Billy,” he said quietly. “You can trust us.”

Billy’s eyes took on a faraway look as he began to speak, his words tumbling out as if he could no longer contain them. “It all started three years ago when my real dad died.” His lower lip trembled briefly, then he continued. “Me and my mom and my sister didn’t have anything—there was no money and my mom didn’t have a job, so we got kicked out of our house and had to go live with my grandma. Mom got a job waiting tables, and that’s when she started to drink.” Billy took a sip of his Coke, stalling for time while he got his emotions under control.

“Grandma told Mom that no one was gonna drink in her house, so we had to leave. She tried to get Mom to leave us there, but she wouldn’t. So we packed our stuff again and moved out to this old stinkin’ trailer outside the diner where Mom worked. It belonged to her boss, Rodney, and eventually he moved in with us. That’s when it got really bad. Mom would go to work in the afternoon, then come home and drink until she fell asleep. Me and Jenny did all the cookin’ and cleanin’ and washed our own clothes and stuff.”

Billy hesitated once again, his jaw muscles tensing in anger. “Sometimes, we didn’t have no food to eat, so I’d go down to the store and...” He looked uncertainly at the men seated beside him. Seeing nothing but compassion in their eyes, he continued. “Well, I’d take whatever we needed. Then Mom and Rodney got married and I thought things might get better, but they didn’t. Mom still stayed drunk, only now Rodney started sayin’ we had to call him ‘Dad’ and do as he said, or he’d show us what ‘Dad’ meant.”

“Then, last March, Jenny turned fourteen, and that’s when he started...bothering her. He’d wait until Mom was passed out, then he’d go into her room.” Billy’s eyes were filled with tears, and his voice was far from steady as he continued. “I tried to stop him, honest I did! But he would...hit me with his fists, or his belt, or whatever he could find, and he’d lock me in my room or the closet. One time, he just hit me until he knocked me out, and when I woke up, I was layin’ in the front yard in a big mud puddle.”

Billy looked up at them, his eyes huge in his pale face. “Do you know what it’s like to hear your sister cryin’ and screaming, and not be able to do anything about it? I tried to tell my Mom one day, and she just smacked me and called me a liar. Rodney told me he’d kill me and my sister if I ever told anyone else, then he did this.” Billy pulled up the

back of his shirt to reveal several thin scars that stretched along his lower back. He turned in his seat so they could both get a good look before lowering his shirt again.

Billy was shaking now, his voice trembling with pent-up anger and fear. “That’s why I gotta go home. Who’s gonna take care of my sister, huh? She needs me!” Billy made a half-hearted attempt to push past Starsky, but Starsky stopped him.

There was silence at the table for a few moments as they digested what Billy had just told them. Having come to a decision, and knowing his partner would agree, Hutch glanced briefly at Starsky before he committed himself. The violet-blue eyes of his partner communicated all Hutch needed to know.

“Look, Billy,” Hutch began in a clear, calm voice that gave no hint as to the anger and revulsion he was feeling. “Starsky and I are going to take you up to the ranch where you can get the help you need—”

“You can’t do that!” Billy interrupted loudly, banging his fists on the table. “Didn’t you hear what I just said? My sister needs me!”

“Hold on just a minute there,” Starsky answered, placing a placating hand on Billy’s forearm. “Let him finish.” He nodded at Hutch to continue.

“After we drop you off, we’ll head back to the city and see if we can take care of Rodney for you. If you’re willing to testify against him, I think we have a pretty good chance of putting him away for a while and getting your mom and sister some help, too. But you’ve got to trust us, Billy. It’s the only way.”

Billy looked back and forth between them, the first vestiges of hope piercing through the doubt and hopelessness in his eyes. “You mean it?”

Starsky grinned slightly. “Yeah, we mean it. And if I’m not mistaken, that’s our waitress coming with our dinner. So, while we’re eating, why don’t you tell us where we can find this Rodney character, and we’ll take it from there.”



The two detectives took advantage of the ride back from the ranch to call Captain Dobey and secure an arrest warrant for one Rodney Sullens, and to find a women’s shelter where Billy’s mom and sister could relocate. Hutch declined to take his pain medicine, so he and Starsky could take turns driving back into town, while the other one caught a little sleep curled up in the back seat. They’d made it back in record time, and a little after

sunrise, they pulled into the parking lot of the R&M Diner.

“Hutch,” Starsky said tersely, shaking his partner gently to wake him. “We’re here.”

Hutch sat up groggily and rubbed his tired eyes. “Okay. Let’s get this over with. Did you call for back-up?”

As if on cue, a black-and-white pulled into the parking lot and slid into the vacant spot next to the Torino. “How’s that for service?” Starsky quipped, stepping out of the car and holding the door open so Hutch could extricate his lanky frame from the back seat. Starsky trotted off to the patrol car to speak to the two officers, while Hutch stretched the kinks out of his cramped muscles.

When Starsky returned to the Torino, there was a worried frown on his face.

“What’s up?” Hutch asked, concerned.

Starsky took a deep breath and leaned against the car next to his partner. “It seems the warrant hasn’t come through yet and won’t be ready for another hour or so. Judge Harris had to go to some emergency meeting or somethin’ and didn’t get a chance to sign it before he left.”

Hutch ran a weary hand down his face. “So, how do we want to play this? Should we wait for the warrant, or go on in there and see if we can make ol’ Rodney resist arrest?”

“Well, I am kinda hungry,” Starsky grinned in reply, nudging Hutch toward the diner. “And I’ve always liked a good roust with my mornin’ coffee.”

Hutch nodded. “You know, I’m in the mood for some good old-fashioned health food. What do you think?”

They ambled off toward the diner. “That’s an excellent choice, Ollie,” Starsky replied. “Excellent choice.”

The first thing they noticed upon entering the building was a young girl seated alone in one of the booths that bordered a large plate-glass window. She appeared to be in her early teens, and in spite of her pale face and downcast eyes, she bore a remarkable resemblance to Billy. She didn’t even look up as they took a seat in the booth directly across from her.

Starsky grabbed a menu off the table and studied it closely. Within a few moments, a tired-looking waitress with bloodshot eyes came to their table and stood patiently, waiting for them to order.

“I’ll have the big breakfast special, please, with scrambled eggs, sausage, oatmeal, pancakes, and hash browns.” Starsky replaced the menu in its rack. “Oh. And a bottle of ketchup.” He sat back in the booth contentedly with a wistful look on his face.

The waitress turned expectantly toward Hutch. “And I’ll have an egg white omelet with organic goat’s cheese and fresh watercress with a side of whole wheat toast and plain yogurt.” He looked at the waitress. “And herbal tea to drink...um...chamomile, I think.”

The waitress looked at Hutch uncertainly. “I’m sorry, sir, but we don’t serve all that stuff; just what’s on the menu. Perhaps you’d like to take another look and select something else?”

Hutch pretended to be angry. “Look, lady. I’ve seen your menu, and there’s nothing on there that’s fit for human consumption. Who runs this greasy spoon, anyhow?”

The waitress flushed deeply. “My husband does.”

“Then get him out here. I’d like to have a few words with him.” Hutch broke eye contact with the waitress, signaling that their conversation was over.

The waitress scurried to the kitchen, and a few moments later, a large muscular man came storming out of the tiny room. He approached their table, his face set in an angry scowl. “What seems to be the trouble?”

“The trouble is that this diner serves nothing but crap. How’s a guy supposed to get a decent meal in this dump?” Hutch looked the man up and down and snorted derisively. “Of course, judging by the caliber of people who run the place, I’m not surprised.” He shifted his gaze to make eye contact with Starsky, each one waiting for Rodney to make his move.

“Look, buddy,” the man continued, taking another menacing step toward the table. “Either order what’s on the menu and like it, or go find someplace else to eat. I ain’t got time for this.”

Hutch looked the man over once again. “And just who am I talking to?”

“Whom,” Starsky corrected.

“Whom,” Hutch repeated dutifully.

“Who wants to know?” the man sneered.

Hutch stood slowly, stepping out of the booth so he could stand toe to toe with his antagonist. “I do.”

“The name’s Rodney. Rodney Sullens. And if you know what’s good for you, you’ll sit down, shut up, and stop tryin’ to cause trouble.” Rodney stood his ground, drawing himself to his full height, which was a couple of inches taller than Hutch.

“Are you threatening me?” Hutch asked incredulously. “You have got to be kidding!”

“Oh, yeah?” Rodney said, taking a step back from the detective. “We’ll see who’s kidding!” With that, Rodney grabbed the front of Hutch’s shirt and, with very little effort, hurled him over the back of the booth’s bench seat.

Starsky was immediately on his feet and landed a right cross to the larger man’s chin, knocking him into some extra chairs piled against the wall. Rodney hit the chairs with a loud crash and crumpled to the floor, apparently unconscious. Starsky immediately turned to help his partner who was slowly climbing back over the bench seat, his bandaged arm cradled in his good hand.

Meanwhile, Rodney recovered his senses, and, seeing that Starsky’s back was turned, he quietly picked up a vacant chair and swung it in a wide arc toward Starsky’s head. Starsky, whose attention was still focused on his partner, didn’t see it coming. Hutch, however, caught a flash of movement out of the corner of his eye and, seeing the danger, threw himself into Starsky, knocking him out of the way of the chair. Unable to stop his momentum, Starsky crashed through the plate glass window and landed in a heap in the parking lot outside.

Seeing Starsky fly through the window, the two officers outside hurriedly exited their vehicle and ran into the diner. Within minutes, they had helped Hutch subdue a very angry Rodney, loaded him into the back of the squad car, and were headed downtown.

Hutch poked his head out the door of the diner. “You okay?” he asked his partner who was sitting on the curb, his elbows resting loosely on his knees.

“Yeah,” came the breathless reply. “You?”

“Good as gold, partner,” Hutch replied, smiling broadly as he headed back into the diner to tie things up. “Good as gold.”



“Doesn’t it feel great, Starsk? Rodney’s behind bars where he belongs, Jenny and her mom are safe, and Billy’s getting the help he needs. Makes you feel like it’s worth your while to get out of bed in the morning, huh?”

Starsky’s only reply was to sigh loudly, not looking at his partner.

“Oh, come on, Starsk. You’re not still upset over those few stitches, are you?”

“Few stitches?” Starsky asked incredulously, finally turning to look his partner in the eye. “I’ll have you know my arm was half cut off! Why don’t you warn me the next time you’re gonna shove me through a window?”

“Oh, right, Starsk. I guess I should have just stood by and watched Rodney bash your head in with that chair. But no. I risk life and limb to save your sorry hide, and all I get is grief. You know, Starsk, you should be thanking me—”

“Thanking you?” Starsky interrupted. “For what? *You* should be thanking *me*. After all, if I wasn’t there to intervene when Rodney started tossin’ you around like a rag doll, who knows what might’ve happened.”

“Oh, yeah. You were a great help, lying there on the sidewalk. Don’t know what I would have done without you.”

“And whose fault was that? I swear, Hutchinson, you’re gonna drive me to an early grave—”

Their conversation was interrupted by the appearance of a portly nurse carrying two loaded syringes. “Detective Starsky? If you’ll just follow me, I have your medication.”

Starsky rose slowly and reluctantly to his feet and followed the nurse, turning to glare at his partner before he preceded her into the curtained cubicle. As he obediently unfastened his jeans, he could hear the unmistakable sounds of his partner’s laughter drifting through the curtain. Sighing heavily, he leaned over the exam table and waited for the inevitable, promising himself he would get his revenge.

