

# The Nightmare

*By the Blintz*

Detective David Starsky sat at his desk, his normally handsome features puckered into a worried frown as he watched his partner lose the battle to stay awake. Hutch sat across from him, his head drooping over the reports he'd been working on for the last couple of hours. There was still about an hour to go before their shift was over, but when Starsky saw Hutch's head hit the desktop with a resounding 'thunk', the curly-haired detective decided that enough was enough. He rose quietly from his chair so as not to disturb his sleeping friend, and headed over to Captain Dobey's office.

“Cap?” he began hesitantly. “You got a minute?”

“Sure, Starsky. Come on in.” As Starsky settled himself into one of the vacant chairs across from the desk, Captain Dobey continued. “So. To what do I owe this honor? Is this a social call or is there something on your mind?”

“Well, Cap, I was kinda wonderin' if Hutch and me could knock off a little early today? After all, there's nothin' goin' on around here and we HAVE been workin' awfully hard...” Starsky's voice trailed off as he looked at his Captain expectantly.

“And just how can you be workin' hard when there's nothing going on around here?” Dobey snapped. “And where is that partner of yours, by the way?”

Starsky shifted nervously in his chair and stared at his hands. “Well, Cap, he's...uhm...he's at his desk working on some reports but...uhm...he's not feeling so hot right now. That's why I wanna leave early. I wanna get him outta here and home to bed where he belongs.”

“Well, what's wrong with him?”

“I don't know, Cap. I think he's just...worn out. Probably has a touch of the flu or somethin'.”

Dobey sighed heavily and looked into Starsky's concerned eyes. “Okay, Starsky. You can go. But I want both of you in here bright and early and ready to roll tomorrow morning. We're going to be doing some remodeling around here so it may take a little longer than usual for us to pass out assignments. You got it?”

“Yeah, Cap,” Starsky replied, flashing one of his trademark grins. “I got it!” He got up from his chair and turned to leave when Dobey stopped him.

“And Starsky?”

“Yeah Cap?”

“Take good care of that partner of yours. Let me know if you think he needs more time. Heaven knows HE wouldn't tell me!”

“Thanks Cap.”



Starsky pulled the red and white Torino into a parking space outside of Hutch's apartment and stopped the engine. He looked over at his partner who was sleeping peacefully in the passenger seat and wondered how on earth he was going to get him inside the building. Having no choice, he reached over and gently shook the sleeping man's shoulder.

“Hutch? Time to wake up, buddy. We need to get upstairs and get you to bed so you can get some rest. Hutch?”

“Mmmm...Starsk? What's going on? Where are we?”

“We're at your house, Blintz, and I need you to wake up so I can get you inside to bed. Think you can help me?”

“Yeah, yeah...I'm okay. Must have nodded off for a little while there.”

Starsky grinned to himself and headed to the passenger side of the car to help Hutch up to his apartment. Truth was, he was worried about his partner. It was totally out of character for Hutch to fall asleep on the job, and even more out of character for him to let Starsky help him up the steps and into his apartment. Something was definitely going on, and Starsky was not going to rest until he found out what it was. But, first things first. It was obvious that Hutch was exhausted, and Starsky was determined that the tall blond was going to get the sleep he obviously needed.

After a few minutes of arguing, Starsky finally convinced Hutch to lie down and take a nap. It was still early in the evening, so Starsky contented himself with fixing a sandwich and watching a little TV. He went to check on Hutch every hour or so and was pleased to find the blond resting peacefully. When it became apparent that Hutch was probably going to sleep through the night, Starsky made himself comfortable on the couch and allowed himself to slip off to sleep knowing that, first thing in the morning, he was going to find out what was wrong with his partner.



“STAAAAAAAARSKY!!!”

Hutch's nerve-shattering scream reverberated around the walls of the apartment waking Starsky from a sound sleep. Instinct took over and he was off the couch and halfway to

Hutch's side before he even realized he was awake. He skidded to a stop at his friend's bedside and grabbed him by the shoulders shaking him gently.

“Hutch! Hey, Hutch! C'mon, man...wake up! You're havin' a bad dream, buddy.”

Hutch's only response was to whimper loudly and rock back and forth on the rumped bed sheets. His face was too pale, his features twisted into a mask of anguish and pain as sweat beaded on his forehead and upper lip. Starsky grabbed him a little more firmly and began again to try to rouse him.

“Hutch! Wake up, buddy! C'mon now, open those eyes for me, huh? Hutch?”

After what seemed like a very long time, Hutch's eyes finally opened and settled onto the worried gaze of his partner. “Starsky? Is that really you, Starsk? You 're okay?” Hutch's hand tentatively reached out to touch the face of his friend and the mask of pain transformed itself into a mixture of happiness and relief. “Starsk! You're really okay!”

“Of course I'm okay, Blintz!” Starsky said worriedly. “You're the one layin' in here hollerin' your fool head off! Question is, are you okay?”

Hutch ran a trembling hand down his face and nodded his head emphatically. “Yeah, I'm okay. Guess I must have had a bad dream, huh?”

“Yeah, must have. And from the noise you were makin', it must have been a doozy. You wanna talk about it?”

Hutch looked down and studied his hands intently for a few moments before answering. “No.”

“No?”

“NO.”

Starsky sighed deeply and sat down on the edge of the bed. He put a comforting hand on the blond man's shoulder and chose his words carefully. “Hutch, look. I know there's somethin' wrong here, and I think it's time you told me what's goin' on with you. I mean, just look at ya! You're all pale and you've got bags under your eyes...you're fallin' asleep at your desk, for cryin' out loud! I bet you haven't had a decent night's sleep in a week! Hutch, somethin's wrong. I know it and you know it. So, why don't ya let me help ya, huh?”

Hutch threw back the covers and climbed out of bed. “You can't help this time, Starsk. Nobody can.” He turned and headed toward the kitchen.

Starsky jumped up off the bed and doggedly followed his stubborn partner. “I'll tell ya what. Why don't you tell me what the problem is and let me decide if I can help or not?”

Hey, “ he said, grabbing Hutch by the arm and spinning him around to look at him. “Remember. We can handle anything, as long as we do it together, right? Isn't that what we've always said?” At Hutch's reluctant nod, he continued. “Then why should this be any different?”

Hutch shook his head and sighed in resignation. “You're not gonna give up on this, are ya?”

“Nope.”

“And, I suppose there's no chance of you going home tonight and forgetting the whole thing?”

“Nope.”

“And, would I be correct in assuming that I'm not going to get any more sleep tonight until we talk about this?”

“Nope...uh...I mean yep...or whatever! Stop tryin' to confuse me!”

Hutch heaved a deep sigh and pulled two beers out of the refrigerator. “Okay, Starsk. You win. Come on out to the greenhouse and I'll tell you a story.”



“It all started the night that Rigger was killed.” Hutch began, taking a sip of his beer and staring out the glass panels of the greenhouse. “At first I thought it was just the after effects of the explosion, you know, shell-shock or something. Now I'm not so sure.”

Starsky remembered that day all too well. He had stood in helpless terror and watched as Hutch had been catapulted through the air by the force of the exploding LTD. When Starsky had arrived at his side moments later, the blond had been lying in the middle of the street, unmoving and unconscious. While Starsky's attention was diverted, Rigger had been assassinated, his lifeless body hurtling out the second story window of the cheap hotel in which they had been hiding. Rigger's death had been a tragedy; Hutch's death would have been unbearable.

Starsky snapped out of his reverie and looked expectantly at his partner. “All what started?”

“The nightmares. At first I wasn't sure I was even having nightmares. I'd just wake up in the middle of the night with this vague 'feeling' that something bad was gonna happen and there was nothing I could do about it. As the days and weeks passed, the feeling got stronger and stronger until I was waking up four or five times a night in a cold sweat, terrified of my own shadow. Now I lie down every night with every light in the house on and try to stay awake, you know, keep the monsters at bay. Pretty silly, huh?”

Starsky's deep blue eyes locked onto those of his partner and he felt his heart break. Hutch looked like a lost little boy, desperately wanting someone to make it all okay again. "Hutch," he said softly. "Why didn't you tell me all this before? Why did you wait so long, huh? Don't you trust me?"

Hutch jumped to his feet and began pacing back and forth in the small room. "What was I supposed to tell you? That I was having bad dreams I couldn't remember? That I was afraid of...what? My own fear maybe? How was I supposed to tell you that I am convinced that something is going to happen to you..." Hutch stopped abruptly and quickly averted his gaze. "Sorry, Starsk...uh...I didn't..."

"Me?" Starsky asked incredulously. "Me? You're afraid something's gonna happen to me?" Suddenly, Starsky understood. "Now it all makes sense. Now I understand why you've been acting so strange."

"I haven't been acting strange." Hutch seemed offended.

"Oh yes you have! Remember that morning you brought your new car, and I use the term loosely, to my place and we argued over which one we were gonna drive?" At Hutch's nod, he continued. "You were positively paranoid that day, insisting that we check the car for wires and bombs and whatever. Remember? Shoot, you nearly choked yourself on your own scarf tryin' to keep me from unlockin' the door!"

"That was not paranoia, Starsky. I was only looking out for your well-being, doing my job as your partner."

"Okay, just doin' your job. So what about when we met up with Soldier and I was gonna trade places with Allison as his hostage? You can say whatever you want, pal, but I could feel your eyes riveted onto the back of my head; I knew you were goin' crazy. And when it was all over you barely gave Allison a second glance, but you were right there beside me, touching me like you had to make sure I was real."

Now it was Starsky's turn to pace as his mind put all the pieces of the puzzle in place. "And then again at the airport. Clayburn was wounded, but you left him layin' there while you took off after me. Back then I thought you did it to help me apprehend the shooter; now I'm not so sure." Starsky walked over to his best friend and ruffled the blond hair. "Let's go back into the living room, Blondie. Now I have a story I wanna tell you."



Hutch followed Starsky into the living room and flopped down on the sofa. Starsky perched on the edge of the coffee table and held onto Hutch's shoulders, forcing their eyes to stay connected. "Okay, Hutch. Let me see if I got this straight. You think something bad's gonna happen to me, right?"

"Right."

“And you think it's gonna be your fault because you won't be able to stop it, right?”

“Right.”

“Wrong. I want you to listen to me, Hutch, and listen good. First, no matter what happens in the future, I know that I owe my life to you several times over. We wouldn't even be havin' this conversation if you hadn't been there for me time and time again. That's why I wouldn't have anyone else at my back on the streets. I trust you, Hutch.”

“Starsky...don't...”

“Just hear me out, okay? Second, even if somethin' did happen to me, and I'm not sayin' that it will, but if somethin' did happen to me, I would know beyond a shadow of a doubt that you did everything in your power to protect me. That's all you can do, Hutch. The rest is up to a Power greater than ours.”

“And third, you've got to stop eatin' your guts out over somethin' like this. Nothin's happened yet and you're gonna worry yourself into an early grave if you don't start gettin' some sleep. I trust you, Hutch. Now you've got to trust yourself.”

Hutch rested his head on the back of the couch and stared at the ceiling. “All right, Starsk,” he said bringing his gaze down from the ceiling to stare into his partner's eyes. “Maybe I do worry a little too much. But what am I supposed to do with this feeling that refuses to go away? How do I get rid of it?”

“Don't get rid of it, Hutch, trust it. Use it to keep your reflexes sharp and your senses alert. How many times have our gut feelin's kept us alive out there? Trust that feeling, Hutch, just don't let it run your life for ya, huh?” Starsky continued to look at Hutch, one eyebrow slightly raised.

Finally, Hutch was able to relax a little and gave Starsky a small smile. “Thanks, partner. I guess I've been acting kinda dumb, huh? I just didn't want to worry you, that's all.” Hutch used the back of his hand to stifle a yawn. “And, Starsky?”

“Yeah?”

“Everything you said about me, about how you owe your life to me and you'd rather have me at your back than anyone else?”

“Yeah?”

“That goes for me too, buddy. You've always been there for me and I couldn't do this job without ya, ya know? So...uhm...thanks for being there.”

Hutch reached out a hand and rested it on Starsky's shoulder as their eyes and hearts communicated what their mouths couldn't say. Hutch broke the spell with another huge yawn and Starsky smiled.

“Yo, Blintz. What say we get you back to bed? Dobey's expecting us to be there early tomorrow – something about remodeling the precinct. If we hurry, we can still get five or six good hours before we have to get up.”

“Sounds good, Gordo. Hey! I saw the painters setting up in the squad room this afternoon. I think I may have an old ping-pong set laying around here somewhere and it would be just perfect for that long table I saw them bring in...Whatta ya say? You up for a little trivia ping-pong in the morning? Guaranteed to drive Dobey crazy!” Hutch replied with a big smile, a mischievous glint in his eye.

“Why, Officer Hutchinson! I believe I have finally corrupted you!”

“Yes, Gordo,” Hutch replied as he headed back toward the bedroom. “I believe you have!”



Hutch awoke the next morning feeling rested and refreshed for the first time in weeks. He walked out into the living room and paused for a moment to watch his still sleeping partner. Hutch smiled to himself as he made his way into the kitchen and started the morning coffee. He knew how lucky he was. The sun was shining, the birds were singing, it was a beautiful day, and his best friend in the whole world was safe and sound right here in his own living room. The peaceful scene dispelled a lot of the foreboding that had haunted him for the past several weeks. Life didn't get much better than this, and it looked like the nightmares might just be a thing of the past.

Several hours later, Hutch flew around the front end of the Torino and came to an abrupt halt at the sight of his partner's bullet-ridden body lying slumped against the rear wheel of the car. For just a moment he stood rooted to the spot as his shattered heart tried to tell him what his horrified mind was incapable of comprehending. Just when he thought they might have ended, his nightmare had really just begun...



*The Blintz*