

# Of Volleyball and Friendship

## *By The Blintz*

The first rays of the rising sun were peeking over the horizon when Starsky and Hutch pulled up to the parking lot closest to the site of the Annual Police Volleyball and Picnic Extravaganza. Hutch looked over at his partner and couldn't help but smile. Starsky was already staring at him, perhaps anticipating that Hutch would be looking his way at just that precise moment because they always knew what the other one was thinking and what he would be doing and when and where, or perhaps he was just admiring Hutch's hair and the way it caught every nuance of light offered by the rising sun, the complex colors dancing off each individual strand like tiny, independent prisms, each color more vibrant and beautiful than the next. But, whatever the reason, Starsky was looking at him and smiling and Hutch found that he was smiling too, even though after thinking all that stuff about his hair and that eerie telepathy that they shared that nobody else seemed to understand, he couldn't remember why he had smiled at Starsky in the first place.

"You really do like this outfit, don't you partner?" Starsky asked, his already huge smile getting impossibly bigger.

"I sure do," Hutch replied enthusiastically, his partner's comment reminding him of why he had originally started to smile. But Starsky probably realized that Hutch had forgotten and that's why he reminded him so gently of what he was thinking about. "That T-shirt brings out the blue in your eyes, and those tight blue jean shorts will have all the chicks flocking around you like there's no tomorrow."

Starsky chuckled and shook his head. "I don't know, Hutch. Those navy sweat pants with the stripe down the leg and the coordinating light blue shirt you're wearing will get the girls' attention too - I'm sure of that. I think you'll give me a run for my money in that outfit!"

Both men laughed good naturedly. They knew that both of them would have women swooning at their feet before the day was over, but it was still good to hear it from the other person too. Hutch looked down at his carefully coordinated outfit and smiled some more. Little did Starsky know that he had a pair of light blue shorts underneath his sweat pants that was the exact color of his T-shirt and precisely two shades darker than his amazing blue eyes. He had spent the better part of two weekends combing the clothing stores to find the perfect match, but the overall effect was so stunning that he knew it was worth the extra effort.

"Explain to me again why we had to be here an hour before the tournament starts," Starsky said, climbing out of the car and heading to the trunk where they had stowed their gear. "I could have slept an extra hour or maybe had time to eat breakfast if you weren't in such a hurry to get here," he complained, his lower lip poking out in an affected pout.

"We have to have time to warm up and get our strategy going," Hutch explained carefully, joining his partner and best friend at the back of the car and helping him unload their gear. He grabbed a huge

picnic basket and placed it carefully on the ground beside the car. “Plus, I wanted to get the volleyball net set up and everything ready for when everyone else gets here. You know, this will be the third year in a row that we’ve been partners in this thing, and I’d like to beat the eleventh precinct for a change. We’d have beat them last year if you hadn’t tripped over your shoelace and bruised your right knee.” The memory brought a huge lump to Hutch’s throat and he swallowed hard, trying to choke back the tears that threatened to overflow. He remembered the accident so vividly, how he stood by helplessly and watched his partner fall, landing heavily on his knee. As Starsky had lain motionless in the sand, Hutch had rushed to his side, tears streaming down his face as he knelt and gathered his wounded partner in his arms, convinced that Starsky’s pain was somehow his fault.

“Hey, partner,” Starsky said softly, putting his arms around Hutch and holding him close. “I keep telling you that it wasn’t your fault. You’ve got to stop beating yourself up over that. This year I’ll be more careful, I promise.” He felt the tears well up in his own eyes in response to his partner’s grief.

The two men held each other for seven and a half minutes until Hutch pulled away, wiping his eyes with the back of his hand because he had forgotten to wash his light blue handkerchief and didn’t want to carry one that didn’t precisely match the color of his eyes. “Hey, buddy,” he said, trying to achieve a light-hearted tone to his voice to change the mood some. “Take a look in this picnic basket. I have a surprise for you”

Starsky’s eye’s lit up like a little kid at Christmas as he enthusiastically threw back to lid of the basket and began to plunder through the contents. “Oh, boy!” he shouted, triumphantly holding up a bottle of root beer in one hand and two slices of cold pizza in the other. “What a treat, Hutch! I can’t believe it! You think of everything.”

Hutch grinned broadly, secretly pleased at his partner’s praise. “You betcha. Why don’t you take the basket over to that picnic table and eat your breakfast while I go get something for me to eat? We can’t play a good game of volleyball on an empty stomach.”

Starsky obediently trotted off to the nearby picnic table and chose a spot out of the ever brightening rays of the sun so that he and Hutch wouldn’t be blinded by the light and therefore unable to play a decent game of volleyball. In the meantime, Hutch headed into the water, grateful for the storm the night before as it made it so much easier for him to harvest the seaweed that was floating in the shallow waves. He gathered up an armful and smiled a huge, toothy smile. There was nothing he liked better than fresh seaweed and it looked like today was going to be a red letter day. He took his prize catch back to the picnic area, stopping long enough to rinse his breakfast in the fresh water fountain so conveniently provided by the parks and recreation service.

The two detectives and best friends ate their respective breakfasts, complete with slices of tomato that Starsky had conveniently brought to surprise his partner, in companionable silence, each man concentrating on the day ahead and what it would take for them to win the volleyball trophy for the Ninth Precinct. After finishing their scrumptious meal, they cleaned the picnic area thoroughly, thus obeying the beach rules and insuring that they’d be welcome back the next year. Then they busily set about putting up the two volleyball nets and marking off the courts so that everything would be ready

when it was time for the tournament to begin.

Starsky stood silently and watched Hutch put the final touches on the second volleyball net. The day had warmed up quickly and Hutch had shed his sweat pants, revealing his matching shorts underneath to his delighted partner. The sun was climbing steadily in the sky, and Starsky was amazed at how even the blond hair on Hutch's legs caught the rays of the sun and glistened like freshly minted gold. For just a minute he was a little jealous; after all, the hair on his legs didn't reflect any sun at all, although it was a lovely shade of brown and did have a wonderful curl to it to match the hair on his head. But even with the curl, it still somehow managed to look masculine and didn't make him look like a poorly groomed poodle like some people did who had curly hair on their legs. Starsky smiled contentedly at the thought, realizing how ridiculous he would look if he had gleaming blond hair on his legs and curly brown hair on his head.

"Forget it, Starsk," Hutch interrupted Starsky's thoughts as he walked toward his partner. "You'd look stupid with blond hair on your legs with that mop of dark brown curls on your head." As if to emphasize his point, Hutch reached up and ran a hand through Starsky's hair, pretending to get his long, lean, muscular fingers caught in the tangled strands.

Starsky laughed and looked up at his partner, breathing a silent prayer of thanks for this man who was his best friend and his partner and the other half of his soul. "How's about a good hug before the tournament gets started, buddy?" he asked Hutch hopefully.

Hutch responded by pulling his partner into a bear hug, freeing his hand from his hair so he could hold him tightly with both hands. They stood this way for several long minutes, enjoying the comradery and the knowledge that they were confident enough in their manhood that they could hug each other and not be ashamed. Starsky was not surprised to find that he had tears welling up in his eyes and knew that Hutch would be experiencing the same thing as they stood and embraced.

The sound of car horns and people greeting each other brought the two friends out of their reverie and they separated reluctantly, swiping at their moist eyes with the backs of their hands. They were surprised to find that one volleyball game was already in progress and the other court was waiting for the two of them so they could get started. Grinning sheepishly, the two friends walked arm in arm toward the second court, mentally preparing themselves for the first game of the men's doubles tournament.

The day passed swiftly, and the two detectives were undefeated after four games. They had amassed quite a following during the tournament, as a lot of the local girls had decided to hang out at the beach that day and had been drawn to the volleyball courts by the beacon of light that was Hutch's hair. After discovering what the light source was, several of the ladies had stayed to watch Hutch in his adorable light blue outfit play ball, while others were drawn to the tight shorts and hairy chest of his partner. But, whatever lured and held them there, they were very enthusiastic and cheered loudly every time their favorite duo scored a point although, predictably, a good many of them couldn't figure out how to keep score and were very confused as to how to count above ten without constantly glancing at their feet. But there were a lot of girls there that were quite easy to look at, and the boys were sure that they could score a phone number or two before the day was through. Of course, meeting strange women like that meant

running the risk of running into some crazed psychopath whose only goal in life was to enslave and kill some poor schmuck who asked her out, but the guys knew they had each other to count on and, besides, they were the main characters in a prime time TV show and they weren't concerned about their imminent demise unless the ratings started to fall.

The tournament progressed nicely throughout the morning until all the teams had been eliminated except for the ninth and eleventh precincts. But before the championship match began, everyone agreed it was time for a little lunch and some fun in the sun. Everyone raced to his or her car enthusiastically and brought out coolers and picnic baskets filled to the brim with ice cold sodas, lunch meat, fried chicken, potato salad, and sliced tomatoes. Starsky and Hutch were no exception, and within minutes they were seated at one of the picnic tables alongside some of their friends from the ninth precinct. One of their friends commented on the fact that Starsky had brought along his left over Mexican takeout from the night before, but the best friends just smiled. They knew that this was Starsky's idea of a good picnic and, for Hutch, that was all that mattered. A person sitting at the table next to them mentioned how clean the picnic area was and the blond and dark haired detectives felt their chests swelling with pride. It was certainly worth the extra effort they had made that morning to ensure that the eating area was clean. They looked at each other across the table and grinned broadly, Starsky's thousand watt smile somewhat marred by a piece of jalapeno pepper that was lodged in his front teeth but, as usual, Hutch didn't even have to mention it. Starsky read his thoughts and removed the offending piece of food and, if possible, smiled even more broadly.

After lunch, the two detectives stretched out in the sand on some old blankets they had brought along for just that purpose. They wanted to go swimming but knew they had to wait at least thirty minutes before they could go into the water because they had just eaten. So they contented themselves with rubbing sun screen onto each other's backs, arms, legs, and chests, and laying back to enjoy the scenery around them.

"Whatcha thinkin' about, Hutch?" Starsky's voice cut through Hutch's reverie like a knife, startling the blond detective.

"What do you mean, Starsky? You're my partner, my other half, the yin to my yang, my brother in everything but name, my best friend in the whole world. Do you mean to tell me that you don't know what I'm thinking? What's happened to us? Is this the end of a legend? What's wrong, Starsky? Speak to me!" Filled with concern, Hutch rose hastily from his prone position and threw himself to his knees beside his partner. He carefully lifted the head and shoulders of the brunet detective and held him to his chest, barely breathing as he watched the steady rise and fall of Starsky's chest. A million thoughts went through his mind - Should he call an ambulance? A priest? A rabbi? The Coast Guard? A Psychiatrist? Starsky's Aunt Rose? His Mama? Joe's Pizza Shack and Discount Shoe Warehouse? For the first time in a long time, Hutch was at a complete loss as to knowing what to do to help his partner, so he hung his head in shame and began to cry.

"Hey!" Starsky said gently. "What's this?"

"I d-don't know h-how to help you and I-I d-don't know what's wr-wr-wr-wr-bothering you. Why didn't you know what I was thinking?"

Starsky extricated himself from the vice grip that was his partner and turned the tables, gently pulling Hutch into his own embrace. Within moments, his tears were flowing freely also as he reassured his partner. "It's okay, Hutch. I'm right here," he crooned softly. "The only reason I asked what you were thinking is because I love the musical lilt to your voice and sometimes I like to hear you talk, simply because your voice is so soothing and comforting to me. That's all. I know you were just thinking about how lucky you were to be here with me, but sometimes, a guy likes to hear it, too. You know?"

Hutch nodded affirmatively, acknowledging the logic behind Starsky's request. "You're absolutely right, Starsk. And I am lucky to be here with you today and I am lucky to have you as a partner. Sometimes I guess I get a little self-centered and forget that we do need to speak from time to time, just to maintain a little normality and civility. Can you forgive me?" Hutch turned hopeful, tear-filled eyes toward his partner.

"Nothing to forgive, partner." Starsky's voice broke as his Adam's apple bobbed crazily up and down while he continued to hold onto Hutch. They stayed that way for quite a while, until the alarm went off on Starsky's watch, signifying that it was time to go swimming. The two men pulled away from one another, wiped their eyes on the backs of their hands, and ran hand in hand toward the ocean, laughing and screaming like two children just let out of school for summer break.

During the next hour, all the participants in the tournament played in the ocean, laughing and splashing one another, having chicken fights, and doing cannonballs off each other's shoulders. At one point, Starsky let it slip, on purpose of course, that Hutch had brought his guitar along and, when everyone tired of swimming, they all clamored for Hutch to play and sing them a song. Pulling all their blankets into a crude circle in the sand, they looked at Hutch expectantly as his long, lean, well muscled fingers strummed the strings with skill and finesse. In a few moments, he began to sing a song he had written just for this special occasion:

"We spend so much time cruising the streets  
Looking for whippos and scum,  
That sometimes we forget to look around us  
And see how far we've come.

We forget about the ocean and the sun that shines,  
We forget about the moon and stars,  
We forget about the flowers along the way  
And just how lucky we are.

So today while we play and frolic on the beach  
Let's remember the blessings we share,  
Let's remember the beauty of the earth around us,  
And the wonder of a partner who really, really cares.

My partner cares, for he is my best friend

He stands by me night and day,  
He's in my thoughts every hour I'm awake,  
And he's by my side all the way."

A hush filled the crowd as every officer in the place turned to look at his or her partner and think of how blessed they truly were. Several people were openly crying, tears running unashamedly down their faces as they reached to pull their partner into an embrace. In the meantime, Starsky sat, stunned by the song Hutch had written. Finally, though, he regained enough presence of mind to walk over to his partner and pull him into a fierce bear hug. "Thanks, buddy," Starsky whispered into Hutch's ear. No other words were needed.

After several long, gratitude-filled moments of silence, a person with a whistle blew on it signifying that it was time for the last game of the tournament to begin. Excitement crackled through the air like high voltage electricity as Starsky and Hutch and their opponents, Smith and Jones from the eleventh precinct, took their places on the court and began stretching to warm up. Finally, at a signal from the referee, the opposing teams shook hands, wished each other a good game, and Hutch took the ball for the first serve.

The action was fast and furious from the start. The ninth precinct, who had been nicknamed 'the tomatoes' after Starsky's red and white Torino, would get a point or two ahead only to have their lead squelched by the eleventh precinct who began calling themselves 'the tomato slicers', hoping to get a psychological advantage over their formidable opponent. Then, after the tomato slicers managed to get ahead by a few points, the tomatoes, not at all discouraged by their opponents mind games, would come back from behind, led by Hutch's scorching serve which was backed up by Starsky's skillful returns and lightning quick reflexes.

At long last, after 20 minutes of hard play, the score was 20 to 19, in favor of the tomatoes. Hutch was behind the serve line and took a long, steadying breath. Searching for and finding the deep, violet blue eyes of his partner, Hutch allowed himself the tiniest of grins. Both men knew which strategy they would use on this last point and felt that the game was already won. Hutch reared back and hit the ball almost viciously, sending it spinning it over the net with a force and velocity the tomato slicers had not seen in a long time. By a stroke of luck, Smith was able to return the serve when his left arm came up in an almost defensive gesture and quite incidentally made contact with the ball and sent it lobbing lazily back over the net.

That was all the opportunity Starsky needed. Quick as a cat, and with the yells and cheers of hundreds of people ringing in his ears (even though there were only about 50 people there, it sounded like hundreds to Starsky and he knew it would make a better story later on if he exaggerated it), he pounced on the ball with a feral grin and spiked it savagely over the net, making it impossible for the tomato slicers to even think of returning it. A rousing cheer went up from the crowd as the referee called the game, declaring the ninth precinct to be the winners. Starsky and Hutch ran up to each other and embraced, clapping each other soundly on the back. Then, in an unspoken moment of understanding, they turned to congratulate the officers of the eleventh precinct for a game well played.

No one afterward could quite recount what happened next. Starsky headed under the net to shake hands with the opposing team but Hutch, whether in confusion, thinking he had just finished a tennis match, or perhaps a bit of heat exhaustion, decided, fatefully, to jump over the net to shake hands with Smith and Jones. Unfortunately for Hutch, white men really can't jump and he didn't come close to clearing the top of the net. Instead, he ran for all he was worth and jumped as high as he could, his forward momentum bringing the front of his throat in direct contact with the top of the net. A strangled hush fell over the crowd as Hutch landed heavily in the sand on his back, his hands clutched desperately to his throat.

Predictably, it was Starsky who reacted first. He ran to his partner's side and fell to his knees, looking down at the open, fear filled eyes of his partner. He reached down and gently pried Hutch's hands away from his throat, gasping at what he saw. Hutch's throat was almost completely crushed and, as Starsky looked on in horrified fascination he realized that his partner couldn't breathe. Completely terrified now, Starsky cradled his partner's head in his lap and cried, shaking so hard he almost dropped Hutch back into the sand.

"Hutch!" Starsky cried loudly, rocking the blond back and forth as his mind searched desperately for answers. "Speak to me buddy!"

"Hmmp euaio," came the only reply the blond could manage.

"What shall I do?" Starsky cried even louder. "How can I help you so you can breathe again?" He looked down into Hutch's face and was surprised to see that Hutch had calmed down and, even though he couldn't breathe or talk, he was trying to communicate something to Starsky with his eyes. Wriggling an arm free from Starsky's crushing embrace, he made a slashing motion against his throat, hoping against hope that Starsky would understand.

Starsky understood perfectly. With a hasty "Be right back", he dropped Hutch unceremoniously into the sand and sped off toward the Torino. Within minutes he was back, mentally cursing himself for not parking closer to the beach. According to his calculations, Hutch had been without air for almost 10 minutes and Starsky knew the blond couldn't last much longer.

Reaching into his discarded Mexican take out bag, Starsky pulled out the plastic knife he had used to eat his lunch just a few minutes earlier. Thinking quickly, he licked the knife clean, silently cursing the fact that he couldn't even pass it through a flame to sterilize it. Then he looked down at his partner lying in the sand, noting with curiosity how the cyanotic lips and facial skin was exactly two shades darker than his own violet blue eyes, and he smiled.

"Hutch?" he asked tentatively, noting with surprised relief that Hutch somehow managed a weak smile in return. "I know this is gonna hurt, buddy, but I have to do it for you to breathe. I know I've never done anything like this before, but I saw someone do it on an episode of Mod Squad just the other night and I'm pretty sure I remember what they did. And, buddy?" he continued, shifting his weight to make himself more comfortable in the sand. "You gotta trust me, okay? I know this is gonna hurt some, but I'm right here with ya and I won't leave ya, no matter what. Okay?"

Starsky looked into Hutch's eyes and was completely taken off guard by the trust and hope he saw shining from their depths. There wasn't even the slightest trace of fear that Starsky could see, and, even though he would have loved to hear it from Hutch's lips, he was grateful for the complete, implicit trust he saw there. It gave him all the courage he needed, even though he knew less about medicine and medical procedures than he did about rocket science. All that mattered was that Hutch trusted him and he knew he would never betray that trust.

Licking the last of the taco sauce off the plastic knife, he slowly and carefully used it to make a small incision in Hutch's throat. It took some time and some effort on his part, but in a short while he had what he considered to be an acceptable incision. He tried not to look at Hutch, tried not to see the pain in his eyes and in the way he was kicking and thrashing around on the ground, but he couldn't help but notice it and it broke his heart. Before he changed his mind, he continued to cut with the plastic knife until he found just the right place. Once again thinking quickly, he pulled his used straw out of its former home in his soda cup and punched it through Hutch's trachea, effectively providing another avenue for Hutch to breathe. He was immediately rewarded with the sound of air whooshing in and out of the straw and, in a matter of minutes, Hutch's color had returned to a nice, healthy shade of sunburn red.

Starsky leaned back on his heels on the sand and released the breath he didn't realize he'd been holding. Actually, he had turned the same shade of blue that Hutch had been just moments before, but he didn't care. He and Hutch were a team, and what was good enough for Hutch was good enough for him even if it was just a simple case of hypoxia. Looking down at his partner's crushed throat with the straw sticking out of it, he had another idea.

"Hutch?" Starsky began, once again kneeling by his partner's side. "We're gonna see if we can't fix the rest of your throat. I know the ambulance will be here shortly, but I think this just might work." He leaned down and rested his hands on Hutch's chest, placing enough pressure on his rib cage to make sure his lungs wouldn't expand. Then, taking a deep breath, he wrapped his lips around the straw, making sure to form an airtight seal around the rim, and blew a strong, steady breath. Much to his relief, he saw the crushed part of Hutch's throat begin to expand and, with a final, audible pop, Hutch's trachea returned to its original shape, good as new.

Hutch was stunned. Sure it had hurt, and yes he had bitten completely through his bottom lip several times, but he knew now that he would be okay. He just couldn't believe how his partner had come through for him once again and, to top it all off, they even had the championship trophy to look forward to. Communicating the only way he knew how, he used his fingers in the sand around his body to write out a message. "Thanks, Starsky!"

Starsky's eyes immediately flooded with tears as he saw what his partner had done. Even through his pain, Hutch had managed to communicate to Starsky his undying gratitude and devotion. Starsky carefully picked up his partner's head and shoulders and cradled him against his chest. He rocked him back and forth for several minutes, softly humming a gentle lullaby to ease his partner into a peaceful rest.

Suddenly, the sound of someone clearing his throat broke through the serenity. “Uhm, excuse me?”

Starsky looked up through tear filled eyes to see a rather bored paramedic and his partner looking down at him. “Yes?”

“Sir, we got a call about a man that couldn’t breathe and came rushing down here only to stand around for the last 45 minutes listening to you hum ‘Rock-A-Bye-Baby’. Do you mind if we take a look at your friend there and see if we can do anything to help?”

Starsky dropped Hutch to the ground and guiltily slid a small distance away. “Sure.” He smiled briefly and licked his lips nervously.

“What happened here?” asked the paramedic.

Briefly, Starsky recounted the events of the day, beginning with the seaweed and cold pizza breakfast and ending with the remarkable play he had made that had won the volleyball game. He even showed them the trophy he and Hutch had won. Hutch, even though he couldn’t speak, did nod his head enthusiastically from time to time, lending credence to Starsky’s story.

The paramedics were extremely caught up in Starsky’s tale and it made them sad that they had missed the game. But, they knew they had a job to do and with a minimum of wasted effort they loaded Hutch onto a stretcher and put him in the back of an ambulance. The first paramedic turned to look at Starsky and grinned. “I can tell just by listening to you how close you are to your partner so I think you ought to ride with him to the hospital. And I’ll tell you this, too. His injury looks pretty severe, but I think he’s fixed now, even though you never did get around to telling me how he was hurt or who put this straw in his neck. But we’ll take him to the hospital just as a precaution and let the doc check him out, okay?”

Starsky was speechless, grateful for the paramedic’s understanding and sympathy. He grabbed the paramedic in a fierce bear hug before climbing obediently into the back of the ambulance with his partner.



Hutch sat at the kitchen table in his orange bathrobe with the blood stain on the arm from where Diana had stabbed him and watched his partner pour orange juice over a bowl of Cocoa Puffs. “That’s really gross, Starsky. You know that?”

Starsky just grinned and placed a huge spoonful of the concoction into his mouth, chewing it slowly and deliberately just to gross Hutch out. “Manna from Heaven,” he finally managed to mumble around a mouthful of food.

Hutch chose to ignore his partner and, instead, stared off into space. “You know, Starsk, that doctor was really singing your praises yesterday when he saw how you fixed my neck. He even told me he offered you a job as his surgical assistant.”

“Yeah, and he also said you were lucky that there was still some hot sauce on that knife that killed all the bacteria and germs so you didn’t get a bad infection.”

Hutch looked at his partner and grinned, his eyes misting over with tears. “Mostly I’m lucky to have a partner like you who’s willing to try anything to save my life. How can I ever thank you?”

Starsky finished his cereal so that it wouldn’t get soggy because there’s nothing worse than soggy Cocoa Puffs, even if they are soggy with orange juice instead of milk. When he had finished, he looked at Hutch and the partners simultaneously got up from their chairs and met in the middle of Hutch’s kitchen in a firm, but gentle embrace. They were so grateful to be together and to have the bright, shiny trophy to adorn their desk, that they never, ever wanted to let each other go.

Finally, after a long, therapeutic hug, the partners went about fixing supper because it was almost bedtime and, of course, they both bedded down in Hutch’s apartment for the night, ready to face whatever might come their way when they hit the streets in the striped tomato the very next day.



*The End*