

Reflections

By The Blintz

The last rays of the waning sun sent red and gold reflections skittering across the crystal smooth surface of the lake. A cool breeze blew softly, gently ruffling the leaves of a small copse of trees that stood silent vigil at the water's edge. In the background, a chorus of crickets, frogs and small birds sang a tribute to the beauty of their surroundings. Several small, rustic cabins dotted the shoreline, most of them unoccupied at this time of year as their owners had shut them down for the long winter months ahead. The overall mood was one of peace and tranquility, a place where the stress and worries of everyday life magically vanished, if only for a brief period of time.

A lone man sat on a wooden dock that jutted slightly away from the shore, his long legs dangling several inches above the water's surface. He inhaled deeply, as if he could somehow purge his soul of all of the trouble that plagued him simply by breathing in the atmosphere. He was exhausted – physically, mentally, and emotionally. He couldn't remember the last time he had slept through the night or eaten a decent meal or even sat down for a few minutes just to unwind. His friends and co-workers had been watching him closely and had not failed to notice the pallor of his face, the permanent dark circles under his eyes, and the slight tremble in his hands as he went through the motions of doing his job. His boss had finally suggested, or rather demanded, that he take a weekend off and had graciously offered the use of his cabin as a place for him to relax and refresh himself.

The man himself was a study in contrasts. On one hand he was strong as steel, giving everything he had to defend those who couldn't defend themselves, never wavering in his quest to protect and serve. On the other hand, he was gentle and sensitive, almost too vulnerable for the degradation and savagery that he witnessed every day as an officer of the law. But it was this same sensitivity and empathy that made him the best of the best. He felt deeply for the victims of the violent crimes he tried to solve as well as for those whose circumstances led them to believe that violence and murder were the only answer.

Hutch reached down and picked a smooth pebble off the wooden planks next to him and tossed it into the water, watching as the resulting ripples trailed off in ever widening concentric circles. He thought about how life was like that, how one action by one person could create so many resulting waves that ultimately touched the lives of countless people, however far removed they were from the center of the disturbance. He thought about his own life, about how many people he may have touched, for good or for bad, and wondered if the world was a better place for the ripples he had created in the

He sighed deeply, allowing the peacefulness of his surroundings to seep into him gradually, temporarily pushing aside the living hell he'd been through in the past months. It had started with a small splash; he had met a beautiful blond one night at an all night diner. She was pleading with the owner of the greasy spoon to give her a job, any job, so

she could start supporting herself. She looked flushed and breathless, vulnerable and scared, and the white knight in him was automatically compelled to go to her rescue. He bought her dinner and promised to get her a job with a good friend of his that owned his own restaurant. After several weeks, during which she got the promised job and proved herself to be a good worker, she finally opened up to her rescuer, telling a horrific tale of organized crime and her enforced prostitution at the hands of a power crazed drug kingpin. She related to him how she'd finally broken free, escaping from her high dollar penthouse prison in the middle of the night by bribing the cleaning lady. She'd ended up in Bay City with little more than the clothes on her back and had just about given up when Hutch came to her rescue, getting her a job with Huggy and helping her change her luck for the better. It was a classic Cinderella story that promised a fairy tale ending.

That's when the ripples started growing.

One night, in the middle of a shift, a ghost from her past entered the restaurant while she was working. She grabbed Hutch and they raced out the back door, jumping into his car and heading for a house on the beach that he had rented for her. She always felt safe in that little hideaway, figuring there was no way her tormentor would ever find her there and, if he did, she knew that Hutch would protect her.

The ripples got wider and faster. Her former nemesis kidnapped Hutch and had him beaten and brutalized. He stood strong, until they strung him out on heroin and manipulated him into telling them where she was hidden. They tried to kill him, but Hutch escaped, running for his life until his broken, exhausted body could go no further and he collapsed into a pitiful heap in a filthy alley. Then came the longest forty-eight hours of his life, a two-day trip into the very bowels of hell itself. He had sweated, screamed and vomited his way through the withdrawals, emerging a mere shadow of his former self on the other side, but still determined to finish his quest of rescuing the beautiful blonde woman whose demand for secrecy had unwittingly caused a great deal of his suffering.

In the end, as the ripples had reached so far that they had dissipated into minute, barely noticed disturbances, she had left him. Guilt and a haunted past proved too big a hurdle for the ill-fated pair and she left him without ceremony, as he stood there feeling a lot older and a lot wiser with a knowledge he never wanted.

For him, the only answer was to throw himself into his work. A heavy caseload became his dearest friend and he worked hard, often into the wee hours of the morning. It was the only way he could assure himself that the nightmares wouldn't come. By the time he fell into bed at night he was so exhausted that he was way too tired to dream.

Hutch tossed another pebble into the lake and, as he again watched the resulting ripples spread and dissipate, he thought about his partner. Through it all, Starsky had been by his side, constantly supporting and encouraging him to pick up the pieces of his life and move on. He knew that without Starsky's rock solid presence he would never have made it through those long hours of withdrawal. His friend could have left him alone there at

any time, walked away and never looked back, but Starsky chose to stay, investing all of his time, patience and energy into Hutch's recovery. To Hutch, Starsky's friendship was nothing less than a miracle.

Hutch broke his reverie long enough to drink in the beauty of the world around him. When Dobey had offered him the use of the cabin he had jumped at the chance to get away and be alone for a couple of days. He had finally convinced Starsky that he would be okay by himself; after all, Starsky had been with him nearly every hour of every day since he found Hutch in the alley and was not in much better shape than Hutch was. Hutch told Starsky it would do them both good to spend some time apart, to recharge their batteries and get some much needed rest so they could come back better and stronger. But, as he sat on the lonely dock, he wondered exactly what it would take for him to ever regain the strength he needed to really recover.

He tossed another pebble and, just a fraction of a second after it broke the surface of the water, another pebble came from out of nowhere and landed within a foot of the one he had just thrown. He looked around him quickly and was not surprised to see his partner standing on the shore. Acknowledging his friend's presence with a quick nod, he went back to watching the ripples in the lake. The circles created by the two pebbles intertwined, creating an intricate geometric pattern that was somehow predictable and steady yet delicate and fragile, ready to adapt to the slightest change in the surface of the water. On a whim, Hutch tossed another pebble close to the first two and, although these new ripples were fresher and more defined, the underlying pattern of the old ripples was sure and steady. He threw another pebble and another but, no matter how great the disturbance on the surface of the water, the ordained pattern of the first two pebbles continued onward.

Hutch stood slowly, stretching the kinks out of his muscles as he took one last look at the water. Watching the dissipating ripples finally disappear, he smiled to himself, somehow understanding that the days ahead would bring about the healing and solace he needed. He turned around, his eyes locking with those of his partner, and he headed back onto dry land. When he reached the dark haired man, he stopped long enough to place a reassuring hand on Starsky's arm. Without a need for words, the two men walked slowly toward the cabin, each man confident in the constant presence of his friend.

The End