

The Seventh Sense

By the Blintz

Something was going on with Hutch, and it was driving me crazy. It had been nearly three weeks since that scumbag Johnny Bagley had tried to turn me and Hutch into bar-b-que and I ended up with a hole in my leg. Of course, Dobby put me on desk duty for a couple of weeks until the doctor cleared me, and that was fine. What wasn't fine was that our fearless leader had assigned Hutch to a temporary partner in the interim. His name was Collins and he was some suit from IA who had come to Homicide to wait out his last two months until retirement. I didn't like the idea of Hutch hitting the streets without me there to cover his back, and Hutch didn't like working with "that guy who temporarily occupies the passenger seat of my car", as he put it. But, as usual, we really didn't have a choice in the matter. There had been a string of warehouse robberies in the past month or so, and the department was under a lot of pressure to get them solved. So, every morning, Hutch left the squad room with "that guy", and I was left to stare morosely at the mountain of paperwork on the desk in front of me.

I guess it was just a few days into it when I first noticed that there was something wrong with Hutch. To the casual observer I'm sure he seemed fine, but not to me. Hutch and I have kind of a reputation in the department for having a unique kind of bond. We can read each other like open books, and we can usually communicate without saying a word. Someone once laughingly accused me of having a 'sixth sense' where Hutch is concerned, but I told him he was wrong. I do get a lot of gut feelings about things, and usually my instincts are pretty good. That's what I call my sixth sense. But when it comes to Hutch, there's something more than just instinct involved. I can't quite put my finger on what it is, but I call it my 'seventh sense', the one reserved especially for Hutch.

Anyway, I'd been on desk duty for about three days when it finally hit me what was wrong. Hutch was avoiding me. Now, don't get me wrong here. When I was first wounded, Hutch was the one who got us out of that barn and saved my hide yet again. And, of course, while I was in the hospital I couldn't even get him to go home and take a shower. He stayed right with me and even stayed at my place for several days after I got home, waiting on me hand and foot. That's how he is whenever I'm hurt – always 'mother-henning' me to death. But when we went back to work, things changed. Oh sure, he was always friendly and courteous to a fault in the squad room, but, as soon as our shift was over he was out the door like his shoes were on fire. I tried to get him to come to my place to watch some TV or something, but he said he was busy. The first couple of nights I thought nothing of it – maybe he was busy. But when he turned me down for the third time in a row, I got a little curious. Hutch and I spend a lot of our free time together, and it bothered me a little that he didn't seem to want to do that anymore. Ok, maybe it bothered me more than just a little, but what could I do? I just kept plugging away at the files on my desk and kept asking him every night if he wanted to do

something. He'd just smile at me and say, "Maybe later, Starsk. I'm busy tonight. See you tomorrow!" And out the door he'd run.

Finally, on my thirteenth day of desk duty, I'd had all I could take. I was in a particularly foul mood and I was determined to find out what Hutch was up to. So, right before lunch, he and Collins came into the squad room and I confronted him.

"Hey, Hutch? Listen, buddy, there's a Lakers game on tonight and I thought maybe you could come over to my place. We'll order a pizza, pick up a six pack and just relax for a while. Whatta ya say?"

"Mmm, sounds great, partner, but I can't tonight. I've got something I've gotta do."

"What?"

The ever-present furrow between his eyebrows deepened. "What what?"

"What are you doin' that's so important that you can't come over and watch a simple basketball game with me, huh?"

Hutch finally looked up from the file he'd been studying. He had a strange look on his face, and I couldn't tell if he was angry or confused. "I told ya, Starsk, I'm busy. Can't we just leave it at that?"

"Not this time, Hutchinson. Not this time. You've been avoiding me for the past two weeks and I wanna know why! It's gettin' old Hutch. Real old, real fast!"

Hutch ran a weary hand through his hair before he spoke. "Look, Starsk. I promise I haven't been avoiding you. Not on purpose, anyhow. If you'll just bear with me a few more days..."

"Bear with you? BEAR WITH YOU?" I was shouting by this time and I knew it, but I couldn't seem to control my rising temper. "You never even have time to talk to me anymore. How the heck am I supposed to bear with that, huh? You don't talk to me, you don't come over...I might as well not even have a partner cause it sure feels like I don't have one right now!"

Hutch gave me the strangest look before he jerked his jacket off the back of his chair and walked out of the squad room without saying a word.

I stood there for a few minutes, still fuming, when I noticed that my little outburst had gained the attention of everyone there, including Collins. He just kept staring at me and shaking his head, until I couldn't take it any longer. "What are you lookin' at, Collins? Can I help you with somethin'?" I asked in the most sarcastic tone I could muster.

He seemed to struggle with himself for a few minutes before he decided to answer me. “You’re a real piece of work, you know that? Do you have any idea why Hutch hasn’t been able to baby-sit you the past couple of weeks? Do you even care, or are you just concerned about poor little Starsky?”

His words hit me like a slap in the face, but I would never let HIM know that. “No, as a matter of fact I don’t know why Hutch hasn’t been able to ‘baby-sit’ me, but perhaps you’d be kind enough to fill me in,” I replied in the same sarcastic tone. I was already in a foul mood, and this man was going to push me over the edge.

“I can’t. I promised you partner I wouldn’t tell. But I’m surprised you haven’t figured it out yet. I thought you two had some kind of ‘connection’ – at least that’s the legend that goes around this precinct. Tell you what. The next time you see Hutch take a good look at him. A really good look. And see if some of the pieces don’t start falling into place.”

By this time I was furious, and more than a little puzzled. Who was this IA reject to tell me about MY partner? I said something unprintable to him as he stalked out the squad room door, and I returned to my paper mountain to while away the afternoon.



The afternoon droned on endlessly and I felt worse with every minute that passed. I had been a little rough on Hutch, and I really hadn’t taken the time to even consider that he must have something pretty important to do if he didn’t have time to relax a little. After all, he wasn’t angry or depressed or anything. Just busy.

By the time quitting time rolled around, I had decided that Collins was right. I needed to find Hutch and apologize to him for my behavior. I heard through dispatch that he was calling it a night, so I finished up my paperwork and headed straight for Hutch’s place. One way or another I was going to find out what was up with him and make everything right between us again. Just thinking about that lifted my spirits some, and I looked forward to the evening ahead.

I got to Hutch’s apartment about an hour later and was vaguely surprised to find that he wasn’t home yet. I let myself in and settled down on the couch to wait. Granted, I’ve never been very good at waiting for anything, but it wasn’t long before I started getting ‘that’ feeling in my gut – the one that tells me Hutch is in trouble. I really can’t describe it, but it starts deep in my stomach and just seems to grow, reaching out to engulf the rest of my body until it settles in my heart. And that’s where it stays until I see for myself that Blondie’s really okay.

The longer I sat there, the more worried I got. Hutch had left a lot sooner than I had and he should have already been home. I tried to convince myself that everything was okay; after all, Hutch did say he was busy and had something to do. But my ‘seventh sense’ was working overtime, and I knew that Hutch was in trouble. I had to find out where he was, and there was only one person who might know. I quickly left the apartment,

jumped into the Torino, and headed across town to get the information I needed. I only hoped I wasn't too late.



Collins was not very receptive when I barged into his house and began interrogating him, but I was almost glad that he wasn't. It gave me an excuse to work out a little of the frustration I had been feeling the last couple of weeks, and I have to admit that it felt good to be back in action. But Hutch's life was at stake; I was convinced of that now. And I surely didn't have time to fool around with this sorry excuse for a police officer.

"Alright, Collins. I'm givin' you one more shot at this. Where is Hutch?" I had him pinned against the wall, my arm at his throat as I glared at him. I realize it may have seemed a bit heavy-handed, but I just couldn't make this guy understand that Hutch was in trouble.

"Starsky...I promised Hutch I wouldn't tell you. You don't want me to go back on a promise, do you? Hutch would kill me!" The poor guy was literally shaking at this point, but I really didn't care. How could someone so stupid be on the force for as long as this guy had?

"And I'm gonna kill you now if you don't tell! So, what's it gonna be, Collins? Certain death now or possible death later? Hmmm?"

He looked at me for a moment longer and finally shook his head. "Okay, Starsky, you win." I eased off his neck a little to let the man catch his breath and he continued. "Hutch has been working nights as a watchman at a warehouse down by the docks. He didn't want me to tell you. The only reason he told me is because he wanted me to be able to reach him in case we got a lead in our robbery case."

A million questions screamed into my head all at once until my anxious brain settled on the most important one. "Which warehouse, Collins? Where is he?"

"The corner of Ridgecrest and Seaview Drive," he said defeatedly. "You won't tell how you found out, will you? Hutch will kill me!"

"You'd better hope that Hutch is still alive to kill you, cause if he's not, I'm gonna hold you personally responsible. You understand?" I gave him one last shake before releasing him and heading out the door.

I jumped into the driver's seat of the Torino and gunned the engine into life. Slapping the mars light on the roof, I squealed out of the driveway and headed down the street, siren blaring. I picked up the radio and called dispatch, anxiety crawling up and down my spine like a living creature.

“Control, this is Zebra three. Patch me through to Captain Dobey. Tell him it’s an emergency.”

Several long moments of silence followed until I heard that familiar voice barking a reply. “Dobey here. Go ahead Zebra three.”

“Cap, it’s Starsky. I don’t have time to explain right now, but I need some back up at the warehouse on the corner of Ridgecrest and Seaview. I’m about five minutes out.”

There was another silence before Dobey answered me. “Starsky?” came his puzzled reply. “How did you know? If you’re five minutes away, how did you know?”

“Know what, Cap?”

“We just had a report of shots fired at that location and I’ve already dispatched a couple of black and whites. But how did you know, and what in blazes are you doing out on the streets anyhow? I thought you were still on desk duty...”

At the mention of gunshots, I swear my heart stopped beating. I threw the receiver on the floorboard and pushed the car to its limit. I could hear Dobey still trying to reach me on the radio; he kept screaming something about me backing off and letting the uniforms handle it, but I didn’t care. Hutch was in trouble, and we had unfinished business to attend to. No way was I gonna back off. Not a chance!

Slamming the Torino into park, I jumped out of the car and ran over to one of the uniforms already on the scene. “What’s goin’ on? Tell me everything you know.”

The officer, whose name was totally unimportant to me at that point, began to speak. “Well, sir, from what we can deduce, there are two, maybe three gunmen in there along with the night watchman. He appears to be holed up behind a stack of crates along the far wall. If you take these binoculars, you can just make out a foot sticking out into the aisle...”

Snatching the glasses out of his hands, I trained them on the stack of crates he had indicated. He was right; there was a foot sticking out into the aisle. A foot wearing Hutch’s shoe. And, I realized with a growing sense of urgency, the foot wasn’t moving.

“Have you had any contact with the watchman?” I asked nervously.

“No sir. There were still some shots being fired when we first arrived, but they stopped a few minutes ago and everything’s been really quiet since then.”

“Then what in the world are you doin’ out here? WHY HASN’T SOMEONE GONE IN THERE TO HELP HIM???” I was screaming at the top of my lungs and the junior officer shrank away from me, plastering himself to the side of his car.

“We’re waiting on back-up, Sergeant. Just following orders, sir,” came his pathetic reply.

I wanted to hit him. And, in that moment in the parking lot, I almost did. But the thought of Hutch lying in the warehouse alone and possibly hurt brought me back to reality. “Sorry, Jansen is it?” At his brief nod, I continued, anxious to convey my mission to him as quickly as possible so I could get to Hutch. “Look, I know what your orders were, but they’ve just changed. I’m goin’ in there, and you and your partner can stand out here and wait for back up. At my signal, I want ya to give me a little cover fire, just enough so I can get across the parking lot and into the back door. Think ya can handle it?”

“B..but, Sergeant,” Jansen stammered, nervously shifting his weight from one foot to the other. “We have our orders, sir. I think it would be better if you were to wait...”

Cutting him off in mid-sentence, I grabbed him by the shirtfront and brought his face to within inches of mine. Since the reasonable senior officer approach didn’t work, maybe this would. “I’m only gonna say this one time, ya hear? That’s my partner in there, and I’m goin’ in. Now. With or without your help; it really doesn’t matter to me. I’ll let YOU explain to Captain Dobey why you let me go in without cover.” Holding his gaze with the most intimidating stare I could muster, I released the front of his shirt and dared him to question me again.

He nodded once, briefly, and reached into his car. Handing me a two-way radio, his eyes met mine once again. “Sergeant?” he asked tentatively.

“What is it?”

“Go get your partner. We’ve got you covered.”

Smiling briefly, I ran to the vehicle nearest the door and crouched behind it, stretching my leg to ease the ache in the muscles. I waited long minutes for the two uniforms to get into position, then radioed them to be sure everything was in place. Looking back over my shoulder, I raised my hand to Jansen and darted into the open toward the back door.



Jansen was as good as his word. I had barely taken three steps toward my goal when the sound of gunfire exploded around me. Weaving and zigzagging across the open space, I covered the distance with a final burst of desperate speed and dove headfirst through the doorway.

Rolling to a stop on the dirty floor, I looked around quickly and got my bearings. The crates Hutch was behind were about fifty feet to my right, and, from what I could tell, the gunmen were about seventy-five feet to my left, hidden behind some temporary shelving. Moving quickly, I ducked behind the first stack of boxes I saw and crept silently toward

Hutch. Luckily, there was a pretty much unbroken row of crates and pallets for me to crawl behind, and I made it to his side without drawing any more of their fire.

My heart was thudding in my chest as I rounded the last stack of boxes. Taking a deep breath to steady my nerves, I rolled into Hutch's nook and found myself staring down the barrel of his magnum. Relief flooded into me as my eyes followed the line of the gun upward into his eyes. I have never seen such a beautiful sight.

Time stood still as we stared at each other. I wallowed in my relief for several seconds as the cold fist of fear gradually released my heart. Finally finding my voice, I was able to speak. "Hey, partner. How ya doin'?" Not exactly stimulating conversation, but it was all I could come up with at the time.

"Starsky," he replied with the ghost of a smile. His eyes rolled heavenward, and for a split second I thought he was going to laugh. "I should have known it was you. What in the world are you doing here? I thought you were on desk duty."

"Now that's gratitude for ya." I quickly rechecked the chamber of my gun, and raising up on my knees, peeked over the top of the crates to see what was happening in the warehouse. Nothing was moving, so I turned my attention back to Hutch. "Some mess you've got yourself into, buddy. Good thing I happened by."

"Collins." It wasn't a question, just a resigned statement of the facts. "I knew I should never have trusted that little weasel. Just wait 'til I get my hands on him."

"Hey, relax, would ya? It's a good thing he is a weasel or else I might never have found ya. Let's just say he succumbed to the ol' Starsky charm." I grinned down at my partner, anxiously giving him a quick once over. "You sure you're okay?"

"Well, except for my right leg. There seems to be a bullet in it."

"Terrific. Why don't you keep an eye on your friends over there and let me take a look at it for ya, 'kay?" Hutch shifted around and dutifully watched the warehouse floor as I gingerly cut open his pants leg. Removing the handkerchief that he had pressed into the wound, I saw a neat, round hole about halfway up his thigh. I've seen a lot of gunshot wounds in my lifetime, and this one didn't look too bad, but it was bleeding pretty steadily and needed attention. Quickly stripping off my jacket and shoulder holster, I removed my shirt and wrapped it tightly around his leg, tying it off with the sleeves. Looking into his pinched face, I reached up and laid a reassuring hand on his arm. "Hey, buddy. You okay?"

"Yeah. How's it look?"

"Well, I've seen worse, but I don't see ya winnin' any dance contests in the near future. How's it feel?"

“Feels like I have a hole in my leg.” He turned his attention back to the gunmen. “What are we gonna do, Starsk? Any ideas?”

“Well,” I replied, scooting over to sit beside him and peering through the chink in the boxes. “We gotta get you outta here. Don’t want ya bleeding to death all over my favorite shirt. First, though, I guess we’re gonna have to take care of the bad guys. How many are there? Did ya get a good look at them?”

“It all happened so fast. One minute I was making my regular rounds, the next thing I know I’m in the middle of a shootout. Far as I could tell, there were three of them, all wearing ski masks. No heavy gun power, just .38’s and maybe a .45. They must have come in here earlier in the day and laid low until everyone had left but me. Then they made their move.”

“Okay. I have an idea. I’m gonna get on the horn and ask Jansen and his partner to create a little diversion. Then I’ll sneak around all these boxes and crates and try to get behind ‘em and flush ‘em out. Soon as they’re in the open, you’ll have the drop on ‘em and we’ll gift wrap ‘em and turn them over to Robbery. Whatta ya think?”

“That stinks, Starsk,” he replied emphatically. “No way I’m gonna let you go over there by yourself. It’d be three against one and quite frankly, I don’t like the odds.”

I took a deep breath and grabbed him by the shoulder. I’d feel the same way if I was in his shoes, but somehow I had to convince him that this was a good plan. From where I was sitting, it was the only chance we had. “Look Hutch. I know it sounds a little iffy at best, but we’ll have the advantage – no way they’d expect us to be on the offensive here. And with a little cover fire from Jansen and the cavalry out there, it’ll be a piece o’ cake. Hey,” I said, lowering my voice a little and looking him squarely in the eyes.

His frightened gaze met mine and for just a few seconds, he and I were the only two people in the world. I could read him so well, and, at that moment, I relied heavily on our legendary ‘connection’ to let my eyes tell him in just a few seconds what it would take my mouth far too long to say. I saw his fear, motivated by his concern for my safety, be gradually replaced with trust and a resignation of sorts. I raised my eyebrow marginally and was relieved to see him nod in return.

I grabbed the radio out of my pocket and quickly asked Jansen to send for an ambulance and then I outlined my plan to him. He was really a very sharp young officer, and I felt confident that he not only understood what I was planning to do but also would back me up sufficiently to allow me to do it. Having everything in place, I turned my attention once again to my partner. “All set?” I asked optimistically.

“Yeah,” came his unenthusiastic reply. “But there is one more thing before you go.” He awkwardly maneuvered himself around and reached into the pocket of his jacket, pulling out a small package. “This is for you,” he said, thrusting it into my hands.

As impatient as I was to get out of there and get Hutch to a doctor, something inside of me told me to take a couple of seconds and see what it was that was so important to him that it couldn't wait until after the showdown. I hurriedly tore open the bag and then stood stunned, absolutely motionless and speechless as I stared at what fell into my hand.

It was a watch.

A Yamamoto Reflex.

Just like the one that had been destroyed the day Hutch had saved my life. I absentmindedly rubbed my right leg while all the pieces of the puzzle fell into place. He had taken this job at the warehouse so he could replace my watch. That's why he wouldn't tell me what was taking up all his spare time. That's why he couldn't come 'baby-sit' me (as Collins had so succinctly put it) after work these past several weeks. And, the thought slammed into my shocked brain, that's why he was sitting on the floor of this filthy warehouse with a bullet hole in his leg.

"Turn it over." His voice came to me, breaking me out of my reverie. I did as he asked, and it was then that I saw the inscription on the back.

'Partners'

One simple word that carried more meaning for me than all the books in every library in the world. 'Partners.' It summed up everything Hutch was to me and I was to him. I looked down at him and found myself trying repeatedly to swallow the lump that had suddenly formed in my throat. "Hutch," I began with a catch in my voice. "I don't know what to say. It's beautiful..."

He rewarded me with a gentle smile. "I picked it up on my way to work tonight. I was going to invite you over for dinner tomorrow and give it to you then, but...just in case...I want you to have it. Just my way of saying thanks, buddy. Your watch saved my life that day, you know. So I thought I'd better get you another one just in case we get into a similar situation. I mean, you never know..."

I just stared at him, shaking my head in stunned surprise. Ever so carefully I knelt down beside him and, wrapping my hand around the back of his neck, I brought our foreheads together. It's our own special hug, started that night so long ago in the back of an Italian restaurant. I felt his hand grasp my forearm in return, and then I reluctantly broke the contact and stood to my feet.

"Tell ya what, Blintz. While you're recuperatin' the next couple o' weeks, I'll teach ya how to use this thing properly. And, if you're a good boy and don't give the doctors too much trouble, I may even teach ya how to tell time. Deal?"

He smiled at me again and gave a half-hearted chuckle. “In your dreams, mushbrain. Chances are I’m gonna have to sit down and study the manual to teach YOU how to operate it. I know how you are with mechanical things.”

I returned his smile and nodded my head in agreement. I looked into his eyes one more time and saw there the constant reminder for me to be careful. I nodded again, signaled to Jansen that I was ready, and headed out to face the bad guys, the weight of the watch in my pocket a gentle reminder of the friendship and love of the most incredible partner a guy could ask for.

As silently as possible I made my way to the other side of the warehouse and circled in behind the shelving that was concealing the gunmen. In one fluid motion, I jumped from my hiding place, gun drawn and ready. “Police! Freeze!”

The two men in front of me had the good sense to do as I had ordered. “Put your guns on the floor and kick them over to me.” Obediently, they kicked their weapons to me, and I crouched down to scoop them up into my hand.

“Okay, now. Turn around, put your hands on your head, and don’t even think about moving, or I’ll blow you into next week. Ya got that?” They must have believed every word I said because they did exactly as I asked without hesitation. I quickly reached into my rear pocket and pulled out my handcuffs and the spare pair I had gotten from Hutch. I maneuvered each man to a position next to one of the columns that supported the roof, and handcuffed each man around a post.

That’s when it hit me. There were only two men here. Hutch had said there’d be three. I briefly allowed myself the luxury of thinking that maybe Hutch had been mistaken. After all, he’d been running for his life, and he was wounded, so maybe he had just miscounted.

And I almost believed that. Until I felt the hairs on the back of my neck standing at attention and those ice-cold tendrils wrapping themselves around my stomach. My ‘seventh sense’ was in full cry and that could mean only one thing. Hutch was in trouble.

I chose one of my two prisoners at random and grabbed a fistful of his shirt. “Where’s the other one?” I demanded.

He just rolled his eyes and looked away from me.

“I said,” I repeated myself, raising my voice a notch. “Where’s the other one?”

My second request was met again with stony silence. I decided to try one more time.

“Look, punk. You have exactly five seconds to tell me where your buddy went, and after that I will no longer be responsible for my actions. So you’d better tell me quick. WHERE IS THE OTHER ONE?”

This time he not only ignored my question, he actually closed his eyes and leaned his head against the post he was restrained against, completely ignoring me.

I had had enough. An overdose of adrenaline added to three weeks of very little action mixed with the fact that my partner was in trouble, and something inside of me snapped. My first reaction was to blow the guy's head off; if I did that, I was sure his buddy would be more than willing to cooperate. But the weight in my pocket held me back. There was no way I could betray the love, friendship, and trust that had prompted Hutch to go the extra mile to get that watch for me. So instead, I took a deep, steady breath as I reached into my back pocket, pulling out the keys to the handcuffs.

I reached behind the prisoner and made a big show of trying to unlock the cuffs that were holding him in place. Finally, I had his attention.

“Hey man,” he said in a voice that was none too steady. “Whatta ya think you're doin'?”

“I'm unlocking your handcuffs,” I replied, smiling up at him reassuringly.

“Uh, yeah...but why you lettin' me go? I thought you were a cop.”

“I am a cop. A cop who has nothing to lose,” I said in that same, even tone. “So, you see, I'm gonna turn you loose. Then I'm gonna shoot me a nice, big hole right through that thick skull of yours for tryin' to escape. Gimme just a minute here and we'll have this show on the road.”

I looked up at him and saw the various emotions warring on his face. He obviously thought I was kidding at first, but as I stood there and held his gaze unblinkingly, the conviction in my eyes finally got through to him and he began sweating profusely. Smug overconfidence was replaced by abject fear, and I continued to smile at him while I cocked my baretta and held it snugly under his chin.

“Wait just a minute, cop. You can't do that. That's murder! Are you crazy?”

“That's right,” I replied conversationally. “I'm crazy. Just ask anyone in the department and they'll tell you just how crazy I really am. Oh, sorry. I forgot. As soon as I get these blasted cuffs undone, I guess you really won't be in any kind of shape to ask anyone anything, will ya?”

A few seconds passed, and I swear I could literally hear the man's heart pounding in his chest. Finally, he seemed to come to some sort of a decision and he started talking. “He went to the other side of the warehouse to finish off the night watchman so we could get outta of here.”

His words spurred me into action. Hastily shoving my keys back into my pocket, I quickly renegotiated the space between where I was and where I had left Hutch. This

surely hadn't been part of my plan, and I kicked myself for leaving Hutch alone. Fear and anger twisted into a solid knot in my stomach while the sweat rolled off my forehead and down the sides of my neck. My Hutch sense was in full swing, making all my senses keenly alert. I felt like a predator stalking its prey, approaching my destination with a fierce, calculating intensity. As silently as possible, I crept over the remaining distance and peered over the stack of boxes that was hiding my partner.

"Why hello, officer. Glad you could join us. Would you please be so kind as to drop your weapon and keep your hands where I can see them? Otherwise, I'm afraid your friend here is going to suffer the consequences." The third gunman was standing pressed against the back wall, holding Hutch in front of him as a shield. He had one arm wrapped firmly around Hutch's throat; the other held the barrel of his gun to Hutch's temple.

I hesitated briefly, weighing the situation in my mind, but it was a mistake. In one swift movement, the gunman brought his hand down in a vicious arc, smacking Hutch's wounded leg with the barrel of the gun. Hutch bit his lip to keep from crying out, but he couldn't hold back the low moan that escaped from between his tightly clenched teeth.

"Okay," I said, trying to sound reasonable and cooperative. "You win. Look. I'm putting the gun down." I carefully laid the gun on the floor at my feet, my eyes locked onto the fresh blood that was soaking through the makeshift bandage on Hutch's leg. "What's your name?"

"None of your business, pig. All you need to know is that I'm calling the shots here and you'd better behave yourself or your buddy here won't live to tell about it. You understand?"

"I understand. I won't give you any trouble; I mean it. Just don't hurt him any more, okay?"

My eyes locked into the pain-filled eyes of my partner. His gaze was intense, boring through me like a laser, and I knew he had a plan. Silently he pleaded with me to follow his lead, and I gladly agreed. I knew exactly what he had in mind, and I was only too happy to play along.

He finally looked away and allowed his eyes to roll upward into his head. Loud, pitiful moans came pouring from his mouth, and I could see him start to tremble.

"Hey, Hutch?" I asked worriedly. "You gonna be okay man? Try to hang on, buddy."

I took a tentative step forward, my attention focused fully on my injured partner. The gunman didn't seem to notice as he, too, was drawn in by Hutch's apparent suffering. Hutch was swaying slightly now, rocking back and forth as his moans became louder and his eyes rolled even further up into his head. I seized the opportunity and moved forward several more steps until I was within arm's reach of both of them.

Suddenly, Hutch made his move. In a performance that any Oscar winning actor would have been proud to emulate, he gave one, last gurgling cry and allowed his whole body to go limp, bonelessly crumpling out of his captor's grasp. I pounced on the gunman, wrestling him to the floor, both of us grappling for the gun he still held in his hand. But he was no match for my adrenaline-fueled strength. Within seconds I had him on his stomach, pinned beneath me as I sat triumphantly on his back. I snatched the radio out of my hip pocket and invited Jansen and his friends to come clean up the garbage.

As soon as the other officers cuffed the man beneath me, I scuttled over to where Hutch was still lying on the floor. He was clutching his leg in pain, his face pale and drenched with sweat. I eased him up into a semi upright position, supporting his upper body against my chest. "How ya doin' buddy? That was some actin' job ya did there. Even Clint Eastwood couldn't have done any better."

"You weren't so bad yourself, Gordo," he replied. "Couldn't have done it without you..." His voiced trailed off weakly, and I felt him stiffen against me as another spasm wracked his injured leg.

"Take it easy, Hutch. An ambulance is on its way. Just try to relax, okay? You'll be outta here and chasin' pretty nurses in no time. And don't forget; if you're a good boy I'm gonna let you play with my new watch. Won't that be fun?"

I couldn't see his expression right then, but, judging from the loud groan he let out, I was pretty sure he was rolling his eyes at me. I just hugged him a little closer to me, grateful that once again we had somehow beaten the odds.



The End