

# To Know Peace

## *By The Blintz*

Two weeks before Christmas and David Starsky was a happy man. For once, Hutch had given up his 'bah-humbug' attitude and was happily planning the events of the holidays along with his partner. They planned to do some volunteer work at the children's center and, much to Starsky's amazement, Hutch had even agreed to dress up as Santa and pass out presents. When Hutch had made that announcement, Starsky had playfully reached up his hand and pretended to check the blond for fever. Hutch had dodged his hand, called him a mushbrain, and they had continued making arrangements for the party.

"Hey," Hutch's voice cut into Starsky's thoughts. "You got the file on the Caruso case?"

Starsky absently reached out and shuffled through the papers on his desk. "Here it is!" he exclaimed triumphantly, handing over the file. "You find something new?"

"Nah," the blond answered as he perused the file. "Just wanting to catch up on the latest evidence. My Christmas wish this year is to see this scumbag behind bars for good. I know there are a lot of parents out there with dead or missing children who feel the same way."

Juan Caruso was a big time drug dealer who had recently moved his entire operation from New York to the Bay City area. Rumor had it that it had gotten too hot for him back east. There were even whispers that one of the men in his organization had gotten disillusioned after the move west and had decided to turn state's evidence. According to the word on the street, the man was in hiding somewhere and Caruso had put a rather large price on his head.

In the six months since Caruso had come to Bay City, he had nearly doubled the size of his operation which was exclusively directed at the under eighteen crowd at the local high schools. He would lure teenagers into his service with promises of money and glamour, hook them on drugs, and farm them out as prostitutes and pushers to line his coffers. There had already been ten teenagers killed as a direct or indirect result of his activities, but, so far, nothing could be proved. The only people ever arrested were the teens, and they were either out on bail or put in Juvie for a few months before they were right back out on the streets to hustle another day.

Starsky looked up to see the frown on Hutch's face and watched as his partner tossed the file onto his desk, closed his eyes tightly and pinched the bridge of his nose between thumb and forefinger. "Tell ya what," Starsky said, his lip curling into a sympathetic grin. "Why don't we go to lunch at that deli you like so much and then hit the streets and

see what we can dig up? Ya never know. Maybe Santa will honor your Christmas wish today and we can turn that turkey.”

“Sounds great, buddy. Let’s do it!”

The two detectives rose from their chairs, grabbing their jackets, and had almost made it out the squad room doors when they heard an all-too-familiar bellow from behind them.

“Starsky! Hutchinson! In my office!”

They turned to look at each other, shrugging their shoulders in unison.

“All right, Starsk,” Hutch said, trying to read the expression on his partner’s face. “What did you do this time? Another toilet? Perhaps some glitter glue in the Captain’s coffee mug? I know, you decorated his desk in shaving cream and red confetti again, didn’t you? I keep tellin’ ya…”

“C’mon, Hutch,” Starsky interrupted as the two men made their way into the Captain’s office. “Give me some credit. You know I ain’t gonna pull the same old stunts this year I did in the past. Too predictable. I got somethin’ special in mind for this year!”

Hutch shook his head as they took their customary chairs in front of the Captain’s desk. “So honored that you gentlemen would join me!” Dobey said sarcastically. “Perhaps we can get started now.”

Hutch, ever the peacemaker, spoke up first. “Sure, Cap. What’s on your mind?”

“I have a little surprise for you. It’s about the Caruso case.” Both men nodded and the Captain continued. “Well, it seems that the rumors about the defector in his organization are true. The Feds have him in custody about sixty miles south of here in a remote location. He’s scheduled to testify in front of a Grand Jury in three days.”

“That’s great, Cap.” Starsky replied, eyeing Dobey suspiciously. “So where do we fit in?”

“I need a volunteer. The Feds are going to move him to a safe house in the city and I agreed to allow them the use of one of my men to help protect him. I need the best on this one, so I decided that one of you would be elected. I want the two of you to discuss it amongst yourselves and decide who the lucky one will be. The other will stay here, assigned to patrol with officer Schlenko for the duration.”

“Schlenko? The rookie?” Starsky asked, rolling his eyes. “The only cadet at the Academy ever to fail lunch? Have a heart, Cap!”

“Yes, Schlenko,” Captain Dobey replied, his tone stern. “The boy just needs a little guidance and I thought this would be a perfect opportunity for him to see one of the city’s

finest in action. Whichever one of you is going to guard our key witness, you'd better hurry. The Feds are due to arrive with him within the hour, so you don't have much time. I'll leave you alone for a minute so you can decide who will do what."

Captain Dobey walked out of the office and shut the door, leaving two very unhappy detectives behind. "Great!" Starsky said, bounding out of his chair and pacing around the room. "What a choice! No matter how ya look at it, we both get baby-sittin' duty!"

"Do you have a preference?" Hutch asked diplomatically. "It really doesn't matter to me."

"Nah, I don't care either."

"So, how do we decide?"

"Well," Starsky said, digging into the front pocket of his jeans. "I think we use the same careful, scientific method we always use. We discuss the pros and cons of each scenario, determine our individual strengths and weaknesses, carefully consider the possible ramifications..."

"Do you mind?" Hutch asked, rising to his feet to face his partner. "Just flip the stupid thing and get this over with. Heads you go with Caruso's man, tails I go. Agreed?"

"Agreed." Starsky flipped the coin into the air, catching it expertly with his left hand and slapping it against his right wrist. Both men watched as he slowly peeled away his hand revealing the heads-up coin underneath.

"Well," Starsky said philosophically. "At least there's a forty-eight hour western movie marathon on TV in the next couple of days, so I know I'll be entertained. But *you*," he continued, poking his finger at Hutch's chest, "need to be careful! I don't think I like the idea of you bein' out on the street with that flunky, Schlenko."

"Well, I can't say I'm exactly thrilled with the idea of you guarding a witness with an unknown Federal agent either. I guess we both need to be on our guard, eh?" Hutch replied, tapping Starsky's stomach lightly with the back of his hand.

Captain Dobey stormed back into the office and flopped down in his chair. Starsky and Hutch immediately returned to their own seats and the three men faced each other over the desk.

"Well?" Captain Dobey asked impatiently.

"Well, Cap," Hutch began. "Starsky and I have come to a decision based on the pros and cons of each situation, taking into account our individual strengths and weaknesses and pondering the ramifications of our choice..."

“Cut the crap, Hutchinson!” Dobey interrupted. “Just tell me who won the coin toss.”

Starsky looked at his partner and grinned broadly. “That’s the problem, Cap. We know what the outcome of the toss is, but we have no idea who won. We kinda think we both lost on this one.”

“Starsky...” Captain Dobey said, warning his men that there were to be no more delays.

“I’ll be in the safe house, Cap, while Hutch here plays wet nurse to the rookie.”

“Good,” Dobey replied. “Now let me tell you the rest of it. Your assignment, Starsky, lasts 48 hours starting about thirty minutes from now. The safe house is located downtown in room 206 of the Westermeier hotel, and the Feds are going to smuggle the informant in by means of a laundry cart. What I didn’t tell you is that, while you are there, no one, and I mean NO ONE, will be allowed in or out of that room for any reason. No phone calls, no visitors, no pizza deliverymen. We want that room to look vacated, so stay away from the windows too. It is imperative that Caruso not have a clue that any of this is going down. Do you understand?”

“Do you mean to tell me that I’m gonna be cooped up in some stinkin’ hotel for 48 hours and not even be allowed a phone call now and then? Or a pizza?” Starsky looked at his Captain and saw the determination on the older man’s face. “Terrific.”

“Hey, don’t worry Starsk.” Hutch cast a sympathetic glance over at his partner. “This will give me a chance to get my Christmas shopping done without you lookin’ over my shoulder. Maybe this year I can finally surprise you.”

“I don’t know,” Starsky replied, shaking his head miserably. “It’ll be hard to top all the other thoughtful gifts you’ve given me over the years. What do ya give a man who already has everything, including his very own tree?”

Hutch chuckled in spite of himself. Five years later and Starsky was still going on about the tree. Ever since that Christmas, Hutch had gone out of his way to get Starsky the things he really wanted, especially since he had almost lost his partner to Gunther’s bullets. But Hutch was beginning to think another “thoughtful gift” was in order, even though he knew he’d have to go a ways to top that tree.

Dobey once again interrupted their conversation. “Let’s move it guys. Starsky, you’re to meet the Feds in a laundry truck on the corner of Maple and Eastlake Street. There’s a company uniform waiting for you in the squad room. From there, you’ll accompany the witness and the Feds to the Westermeier and remember - once you’re in there, you’re in there. Period. No excuses, no contact. You got that? Officer Delaney is waiting to take you to the rendezvous spot.”

“Got it, Cap.” Starsky rose from his chair, sighing loudly, and placed a hand on his partner’s shoulder. “See you in 48 hours, Blondie. Don’t do nothin’ I wouldn’t do.”

“Not to worry, Starsk. I wouldn’t do most of the things you *would* do.” All bantering aside, Hutch looked up at his partner. “You be careful, ya hear?”

Their eyes met briefly as Starsky smiled down at Hutch one more time before heading out the door. “You too, buddy. See ya around.”



Hutch entered the squad room several minutes after Starsky left and groaned inwardly. Officer Matthew Schlenko was sitting at Starsky’s desk, rifling through the files that had once been stacked neatly on the desktop.

“What are you doing?” Hutch asked, not even trying to conceal the irritation in his voice.

“Oh!” Startled, the rookie dropped the files he had been holding. Scores of papers fluttered gently downward as Schlenko made a manic attempt to catch them before they hit the floor. In his haste, he inadvertently tipped his chair a little too far and started to topple over. Now thoroughly panicked, he grabbed frantically for anything to break his fall. Unfortunately, his flailing hands made contact with a half-empty cup of coffee that Starsky had left there earlier. The cold coffee went one way and Schlenko went the other, ending up in an unsightly heap on the floor.

“Uh...sorry...,” the rookie stammered as he scrambled to his feet. He started to bend down to retrieve the scattered files and risked a quick glance at Hutch who had, as yet, not uttered a sound. What he saw stopped him in mid-motion. Hutch stood before him, his once impeccable clothing now liberally spattered with coffee. As Schlenko watched in perverse fascination, a drop of the dark liquid that was suspended from Hutch’s chin lost its tenuous hold and dropped to the floor.

Schlenko was mortified. Abandoning his attempt at cleaning up the scattered files, he plucked a paper towel off Starsky’s desk and ineffectively dabbed at Hutch’s face and clothing, trying to blot out the worst of the stains. Oddly enough, every place the towel touched was now not only coffee stained, but was smudged a mysterious yellow color. Mystified, the hapless rookie examined the paper towel in his hand to find that it was smeared with mustard. He once again stopped his actions and looked at Hutch, smiling apologetically and nervously licking his lips.

The look on Hutch’s face was unreadable to Schlenko, but several of the other officers who had been watching the scene with open amusement now stopped their chuckling and actually moved away from the enraged officer. All noise and activity in the room ceased and all eyes were riveted on the tall blond as he glared into the eyes of the junior officer.

Finally, after a very long, uncomfortable silence, Hutch began to speak very, very quietly. “First of all, officer, that is my partner’s desk and I never, and I mean NEVER, want to see you sitting there again. You got that?” At the younger man’s effusive nodding,

Hutch continued, wagging the index finger of his right hand in the man's face for emphasis. "Second, you have exactly five minutes to clean up this mess you've made and meet me in the parking garage. Third, you will come in when we get off duty this afternoon and re-type every single report you just ruined. Do I make myself clear?" Hutch towered over the other man menacingly, his gaze never wavering.

Officer Schlenko licked his lips again and managed to croak out an unintelligible reply, his whole body shaking and his face bathed in a nervous sweat. "Good," Hutch continued, still keeping his voice low and level. "I'm going to my locker to change clothes and if you're not in the garage in five minutes, I will leave without you. From the look of things, that might just be my best chance of making it through this shift."

Hutch stalked out of the squad room, leaving the rookie to make a hurried job of cleaning up his mess. As he walked toward the locker room to change his clothes, Hutch was fervently hoping that Starsky was faring better than he was.



That was not the case. When Starsky climbed aboard the laundry truck, he discovered that there had been an attempt made on the witness at the first safe house. Just as the witness had been loaded into the transport vehicle, several of Caruso's men had opened fire. The federal agent assigned to protect him had been killed, leaving only the driver and the witness to evade Caruso's men on the trip into the city. Fortunately, there were no more signs of pursuit and the driver felt confident that they were not being followed. Unfortunately, this left Starsky to guard the witness by himself as there had not been time to get another agent involved. Losing an agent had not been part of the original plan and the Feds weren't exactly known for their flexibility.

The rest of the trip to the Westermeier was uneventful and Starsky managed to sneak the witness, a man by the unlikely name of Harold Higginbotham, into his room without anyone paying any attention. He got Higginbotham settled and comfortable and, after double checking the doors and windows, set about exploring the small space that would be his prison for the next 48 hours.

The room itself was actually a suite of rooms that someone, in years past, had ambitiously dubbed "The Presidential Suite". Starsky was fairly certain that no self-respecting president would ever have darkened the threshold of that room if he could have at all avoided it. The main sitting room was decorated in muted earth tones which gave the small space a grayish aura, and the furnishings consisted of a small, dusty sofa, an overstuffed armchair, and a tiny kitchenette, complete with a round table the top of which was no bigger than an average wooden barrel. Two small bedrooms and an even smaller bathroom, its fixtures stained brown from the rusty water which continually dripped from the faucets, opened off the main room. The overall impression was that of a flophouse in the ghetto and Starsky wondered idly whose idea it was to house the witness here. It was definitely not the location he would have chosen.

Perhaps the worst feature of the dank, dusty room was its ancient construction which made for very drafty conditions. Even though all of the windows were securely closed and locked, one could actually hear everything that went on down on the street – from the lackluster Santa on the corner, hopelessly ringing his bell in a futile attempt to solicit donations, to the overall hum of the daily traffic, complete with honking horns, squealing brakes and shouted curses. Starsky was convinced he could hear everything that happened on the street better from his vantage point in the hotel room than if he'd actually been standing on the street itself.

Never one to dwell on unpleasanties, Starsky hunched further down into the armchair and turned his attention back to the Gene Autry western that was just starting on the television. He had rearranged the furniture so that no blue flickering from the set would be visible from the street below, and he had even managed to smuggle in a large bag of potato chips, a bag of chocolate chip cookies and several bottles of root beer. He was just about to pop the top on the first bottle when a voice from behind stopped him.

“What are you doin?” Harold Higginbotham was nervously twisting a towel in his hands as his eyes darted compulsively around the room.

“I am watching television,” Starsky spoke slowly and clearly as if trying to explain something to a rather dull child. “What do you want?”

“Someone tried to kill me today! Shouldn't you be protecting me?” Higginbotham began pacing around the room, slapping the towel against every piece of furniture he passed. “Maybe this wasn't such a good idea after all. Maybe if I get out now I can go to Mexico or Bermuda or somethin' and Caruso won't even bother to try to find me. Or maybe I should just shoot myself and save him the time and trouble...”

Starsky jumped from his chair and grabbed the distraught witness before he could get to the front door. “Hold on just a minute there, Harry. Whatta ya talkin' about? Forget the whole thing? That's crazy! Even if you did back out at the last minute, Caruso would never believe that you didn't rat him out and he'd find you no matter where you were, just to make an example out of ya. If you do things our way, Caruso gets nailed and you get a new identity somewhere nice and safe so you can start over again. Doesn't that sound good?”

“But you're not protecting me!” Higginbotham whined loudly making Starsky wince. “You're watching some stupid movie on TV when you should be...” his voice trailed off as a look of confusion flitted across his face.

“Exactly.” Starsky answered calmly, steering the man into one of the small bedrooms. “I am doing everything I can to protect you right now, and if someone comes after you, they're going to have to go through me to do it, and that ain't gonna happen. Why don't you just lie down and relax and let ol' Starsk do his job? Hmmm?”

Higginbotham sighed deeply and flopped down onto the bed. “You promise you’ll protect me?”

Starsky nodded his head. “Even if it means missing part of one of my movies, I’ll see to it that no one gets to ya. Okay?”

The witness looked skeptical. “You don’t even know me. Why should you care if I get my head blown off? In case you’ve forgotten, we’re on opposite sides of the law, ya know.”

Starsky leaned forward and looked intently into the other man’s eyes. “Look, Harry. All I care about is that Caruso gets put away for a very long time and I am willing to do whatever it takes to see that it happens. If that means I have to get my head blown off to keep you alive, then so be it.”

“Man! What a crummy job. How’d you get so lucky to be the one to look after me anyhow? You make somebody mad?”

“Nope,” Starsky answered cheerily, heading back toward the armchair and the movie marathon. “I lost the coin toss.”



Hutch looked at his watch for the thousandth time and sighed. Only one more hour to go on this miserable shift, and he could go home, have a cold beer and a hot shower and try to forget about this awful day. Luckily, there hadn’t been much action on the streets and their calls had been limited to one domestic disturbance and one complaint of disturbing the peace. Both calls had been handled without incident and Hutch considered himself fortunate, considering the lack of skill possessed by the man who was riding in the passenger seat of his car.

Feeling eyes boring into the side of his head, the tall blond detective turned to find his temporary ‘partner’ staring at him. “What?”

“Uhm...I was just wondering...uhm, sir...,” Schlenko began, nervously shifting his gaze from the side of Hutch’s head to the dashboard and back again. “You’re a really good cop. Really good. And I was just wondering why someone like you would agree to ride with someone like me.”

“Easy,” Hutch replied, smiling a little to take the sting out of his words. “I lost the coin toss.”

The squawk of the radio interrupted their conversation. “All units in the vicinity of 1400 Main Street. A 2-11 in progress at the First National Bank. Silent alarm sounded at that location. Proceed with caution.”

“That’s us!” Hutch expertly executed a U-turn and hit the siren. “Put the light on the roof, would ya?” He picked up the microphone and spoke into it. “This is Zebra three. We are responding to the 2-11 at 1400 Main Street.”

“Ten four, Zebra three. Copy that. Be advised that Zebra seven and Zebra eight are already on the scene.”

“Roger and out.” Hutch replaced the microphone on the radio and turned to look at his companion. Incredibly, Schlenko was still holding the mars light on his lap with a bewildered expression on his face. “What’s the problem, Schlenko? Get that light on the roof!”

Flustered, the rookie replied. “I...I don’t know how. How do you put it up there?”

“Just slap it up there! It’s not rocket science!” A very frustrated Hutch turned his attention back to the roadway as he increased his speed.

To his credit, Schlenko really tried to do as Hutch told him. He eagerly grabbed the light in his right hand and hung his arm out the window, ready to place the light where it belonged. Unfortunately, he was not prepared for Hutch’s sudden increase in speed and the doomed light flew out of his hand to go crashing onto the street, dragging beside the car like a dilapidated tail. Thoroughly embarrassed, the rookie began hauling in on the cord, attempting to bring it back into the car.

“Forget it!” Hutch snapped, shaking his head in consternation. “We’re here.”

He pulled the car to a stop in front of a large, modern bank building and pulling his weapon, jumped from the car and ran toward the other units on the scene. His mind registered the fact that somehow the press had already arrived and their cameras were rolling. A young, female reporter was delivering a narrative about the situation in front of a single cameraman. Both of them seemed to be in a safe position, so the detective quickly decided that there were other matters that needed his immediate attention.

Hutch glanced behind him to check on the progress of the rookie and was alarmed to see that he was not there. He had assumed that Schlenko would follow his lead, but instead, the young officer was still in the car trying to pull the mars light back in through the window. As Hutch hurried back toward his car, a movement in the bank caught his eye. There, on the second floor, the barrel of a rifle poked out of a window and was aimed straight for Schlenko who had, by this time, exited the car and was standing directly in the line of fire.

“Down!” Hutch screamed, instinctively launching himself at the rookie. The echo of a single gunshot roared across the street as Hutch’s body came into contact with that of Schlenko, knocking him safely to the ground.

Schlenko sat up slowly, shaking his head to clear the cobwebs. The force of the impact had slightly stunned him and in his confusion, he couldn't quite figure out what had just happened. He looked around for Hutch to get an explanation as the other officers on the scene ran over and dragged him to safety behind a nearby black and white cruiser.

"What happened?" Schlenko asked, running a hand through his hair. "Where's Detective Hutchinson?"

"Over there," a uniformed officer replied grimly, pointing in the general direction they had just come from. Schlenko looked over toward the bank and his face paled at what he saw.

There, lying in the street, was Hutch. Unmoving, his face covered in blood, the detective was void of any signs of life. The shot from the window had found its mark.



Starsky could not ever remember being so bored. The star witness was asleep and had not awakened since he had stumbled into the bedroom five hours earlier. There had been absolutely no suspicious activity inside or outside the hotel and Starsky was pretty sure that Caruso did not have a clue as to where they were. For the moment, at least, they were safe.

Starsky looked over at his dwindling stash of snacks and decided he'd better ration the remaining goodies so they would last for the duration. The Feds had seen to it that the refrigerator was stocked with sandwiches, fruit and milk, but none of that could compare to a delectable chocolate chip cookie washed down with a mouthful of root beer.

Turning his attention back to the television set, Starsky once again thanked whatever cosmic forces had arranged for the western marathon to be televised the same 48 hours he was imprisoned in that room. A Clint Eastwood movie was just about to begin, so he settled in and made himself comfortable.

"We interrupt our regularly scheduled program to bring you this special news bulletin." The announcement came over the airwaves just as the movie started. Starsky sighed in frustration and decided that it would be an opportune time for him to check out the plumbing.

"This just in. An armed robbery is in progress at the First National Bank on Main Street and our cameras are there. We now take you live to the scene. Amanda, can you tell us what's happening?"

"Well, Bob, it looks as if a couple of armed men have forced their way into the bank. Several police units are already here and ...oh! Here comes another one." The unmistakable whine of a siren could be heard as Hutch's battered brown LTD came into view on the screen.

Starsky stopped in mid-stride at the sight of his partner's car. He quickly resumed his seat, noting with amusement the mars light trailing behind the vehicle. He nearly laughed out loud at the sight and couldn't wait to see Hutch again to hear what had happened.

The reporter continued her monologue, but Starsky tuned her out as he watched his partner's actions on the screen. The whole thing was just so bizarre – Hutch on TV, just like Clint Eastwood had been moments earlier. The scene unfolding before him had a surreal quality to it, almost like it wasn't happening at all.

Strangely bemused, Starsky noticed that Hutch had exited the car alone. Although the camera was focused on the reporter, enough of the background was showing that Starsky could see that Schlenko, for one reason or another was slow to leave the vehicle. He decided not to ponder on the reasoning behind the rookie's moves and focused his attention on Hutch.

Suddenly, all hell broke loose. He watched, horrified as Hutch threw himself into Schlenko to the sound of a single gunshot. Both the cameraman and the anchorwoman ducked as the shot was fired and for several seconds all that was visible on the television was the sidewalk.

Starsky rose to his feet and moved closer to the set, intently studying the images before him. He held his breath and waited impatiently for the camera to focus in on what was going on.

“As you heard, Bob, shots were just fired on the scene and it looks like an officer has been wounded. Can you get a shot of that, Teddy?”

Obediently, the camera left the woman and focused in on the lone figure lying in the street. Hutch's face was covered with blood and as Starsky watched, horrified, a couple of uniformed officers left the shelter of the cars they hid behind and pulled him to safety.

“Oh my God!” Starsky exclaimed as all the strength drained out of his legs and he dropped into a kneeling position in front of the set. “Hutch!”



During his initial examination of the hotel room, Starsky had found a small chink in the otherwise unbroken blinds and he stood there now, staring bleakly at the vista before him. A silvery sliver of moon hung suspended from a star-studded sky as the muted tones of a far off church bell pealed lazily by. It was almost like something out of a Norman Rockwell painting, but Starsky was too preoccupied to notice. His thoughts were centered entirely on the well being of a certain blond-haired detective and whether or not he was still alive.

Six hours had passed since Starsky had seen Hutch get shot – six hours of pacing and praying and sitting glued to the television hoping to hear an update of the story previously aired. Unfortunately, some depressed businessman had chosen to climb up on the Golden Gate Bridge and jump off. Only he hadn't jumped yet and every minute of the news coverage was taken up with on-the-scene footage of the attempted suicide. Starsky had watched it for a while until he realized that he was actually praying that the guy would hurry up and jump so they could go back to the story of the bank robbery. Feeling selfish and foolish, he had finally turned off the set to begin a regimen of pacing and bargaining with God.

Starsky's first impulse had been to run out of that miserable hotel room and head straight for the hospital to find out what was going on. He caught himself just as he reached for the doorknob, angrily flinging his jacket back onto the sofa. He tried to reason with himself and justify leaving the witness alone, but he knew that was out of the question. Higginbotham, Dobey, and the parents of thousands of kids whom Caruso hadn't managed to corrupt yet were counting on him to keep the witness alive for another 37 hours when he would be escorted to the courthouse. All he had to do was find a way to convince his anxious heart that he was doing the right thing.

His mind drifted back to a similar situation a few years back. He and Hutch had taken on the responsibility of guarding their own witness, a man named Rigger. Starsky had been alone in the hotel room when, to his horror, he saw Hutch's car explode, flinging Hutch through the air like a rag doll. Instinctively, Starsky had bolted from the hotel room, rushing to be by his partner's side. Unfortunately, an assassin had created that opportunity and had killed Rigger while the two detectives were otherwise occupied. On that very night, Starsky and Hutch had vowed to each other never to let that happen again. Starsky planned on keeping that promise to his partner, but it would be the hardest thing he ever had to do.

Starsky sat delicately on the edge of the armchair, staring pensively at an imaginary spot on the wall. Images of Hutch came unbidden into his mind – good times, bad times, even times when they weren't sure they'd ever live to see another sunrise. He could even see Hutch earlier that day and could almost hear his voice. "My Christmas wish this year is to see this scumbag behind bars for good." Starsky knew he would do everything within his power to help ensure that Hutch got his wish. What Starsky didn't know was if Hutch would be around to appreciate it.

Starsky leaned back in his chair, propping his head against the back so that he was looking at the ceiling. He tried to relax and ease some of the tension out of his protesting muscles, but every time he closed his eyes all he could see was Hutch, covered in blood, lying lifeless in the street. For a brief moment he allowed himself the luxury of giving in to his fears. What if Hutch was dead? How could Starsky make it without his friend? Who would be there to share his triumphs and sorrows the way Hutch always had? Who else would Starsky be able to turn to when the terrors of the job threatened to overwhelm him? Who else would be so accepting and understanding? Would he ever be able to trust anyone again?

That thought floored him. Trusting anybody was nearly impossible for the dark haired detective, a side effect of growing up in a world where anyone you loved could be taken away from you in a heartbeat. And he really hadn't meant to, but trusting Hutch had come to him as naturally as breathing. Ever since their first meeting at the Academy, Starsky had instinctively known that he had found someone whom he could trust completely without reservation. They depended on each other for their very lives and Starsky wondered if perhaps he had taken that too much for granted. The possibility that Hutch was no longer in the picture shook him to his very core. Life without Hutch? Not a very appealing proposition.

Starsky once again rose from the chair and crossed to the window to peer out the chink in the blinds. From somewhere in the distance he could hear the faint sounds of Christmas carols playing and the soft melody of Silent Night nearly did him in. He turned his gaze heavenward, eyes blinking rapidly as he struggled to maintain control and he prayed for the heavenly peace that he knew would not be his on that night. He tried to focus his thoughts on the birth of a child who would bring life and hope to a dying world, but his tortured mind could not concentrate on a single thought. The long night stretched bleakly ahead of him as he left his post by the window to once again resume his pacing.



Hutch awoke with a groan, his trembling hand reaching for the source of the throbbing ache in his head. All he found was a large bandage wrapped turban style at his hairline. His eyes wandered around the brightly lit room and finally focused on a thin black man sitting on a chair close by.

“Huggy?” Hutch asked softly, trying not to aggravate his headache.

“Well, well, well,” Huggy replied, turning his attention to his wounded friend. “Lazarus arises from the dead. It ain't just for Sunday school anymore.”

“What happened? The last thing I remember is that rookie Schlenko trying to play fish with my mars light.” Hutch pushed himself up on his elbows and looked out the window. His eyebrows knitted together in confusion and he looked to Huggy for clarification. “What time is it?”

“It is three o'clock in the afternoon. You've been doin' the Rip Van Winkle thing for the last twenty-one hours, my man. Had some of the folks around here a little worried. Not me, of course, but some of the folks.”

Hutch looked at his surroundings again and tried to make some sense of his scrambled thoughts. He knew he was in a hospital room, but he had no memory of how he got there or why he was there. He again turned to Huggy for the answers. “So, tell me what happened, Hug. I seem to have a few holes in my memory.”

“Well, it seems that a certain bank robber was tryin’ to make Swiss cheese of your temporary partner and you got yourself shot pushin’ him out of the way. Doc says it was just a crease, but it was enough to make you look like you’d bought the farm right there on the street. Man, I wish you could have seen yourself.”

“You were there? What were you doing there?”

“Nah, I wasn’t there. I had to catch the scene like the rest of your fans – on the tube. It was just like watchin’ Adam-12 with all the sirens and the gunshots and...”

“Wait a minute, Hug. What are you talking about? Slow down a little, will ya?” Hutch once again raised his hand to his aching head as bit by bit his memory returned. “You saw me on the TV?”

“Yeah, that’s right. They were just startin’ one of them Clint Eastwood westerns. You know the ones; I think they call ‘em the Lasagna westerns, or somethin’ like that.”

“Spaghetti.”

“What’s that?”

“Spaghetti. They’re called the Spaghetti westerns.”

“Oh. Well, whatever. Anyhow, they interrupted the movie marathon for a news bulletin and there you were. Laid out in the street lookin’ like you’d breathed your last. I came right over here to see for myself – couldn’t quite believe that my blond brother could buy it so easily, you know? I kept waitin’ for your other half to show up, but Captain Dobey informed me that Starsky was otherwise detained, so I made myself comfortable and here I am.”

Hutch leaned back in the bed and rested against the pillows, staring thoughtfully at the ceiling. “I think I remember now. Someone was aiming a gun at Schlenko...” Hutch’s gaze shifted back to Huggy. “Is he okay? He wasn’t hurt, was he?”

“Take it easy, bro. Your young charge is just fine. A little shook up, maybe, but just fine. Fact is, he’s singin’ your praises to anyone that’ll listen. You are quite the ce-le-brit-ee! Hey, when you get rich and famous, can I be part of your entourage?”

Hutch groaned loudly and went back to studying the ceiling. Something Huggy had said was nagging at his brain, but he couldn’t quite pinpoint it. He looked out the window, not really focusing on anything, then allowed his gaze to fix on the television set that hung from the ceiling in the corner of the room. Obviously, Huggy had returned to watching the western marathon as Hutch had slept and a John Wayne movie was just reaching its climax. Hutch found himself smiling. ‘He’s just as bad as Starsky,’ he thought, shaking his head.

Suddenly, the nagging little thought that had been bothering Hutch came into sharp focus. If Huggy had seen what happened while he was watching old westerns and if Starsky had planned to watch the marathon while guarding the witness, that could only mean...

“Oh my God!” Hutch exclaimed, throwing back the covers and sitting up in one fluid motion. He swung his legs over the side of the bed and was almost standing when Huggy’s strong arms stalled his progress.

“Whoa, amigo! Hold on just a minute there. Where do you think you’re goin’?”

“Starsky!” Hutch tried unsuccessfully to push his way past his friend. “He’s probably worried sick right now. I’ve gotta get to him.”

Huggy finally won the battle and eased Hutch back on the pillows. “Take it easy, compadre. I’m sure if your other half is worried he’ll call downtown and find out for himself that you’re okay. You’re not going anywhere, at least not ‘til the doctor says so. Besides, what makes you think Starsk even knows about this?”

“You saw me on the news during that western marathon, right?” At Huggy’s nod, Hutch continued. “Starsk told me he was going to watch that same channel for the full 48 hours he was on assignment. If you saw what happened, then he must have too. Now, you gotta help me get to him!” Hutch pushed himself back into a sitting position on the side of the bed, struggling against Huggy’s restraining hands.

“Hold on a minute, Hutch. Now you know and I know that if Starsky had seen you on the tube like you seem to think he did he’d be here in a heartbeat drivin’ the doctors and nurses crazy. Assignment or no assignment, he’d be here.”

“Not this time, Hug.”

“What’s so special about this time? He guardin’ the Queen of England or somethin’?”

Hutch began studying his hands, still ashamed to look Huggy in the eye when it came to the subject of Rigger. Starsky and Hutch had lost a witness that day, but Huggy had lost one of his best friends and the two detectives still felt responsible, even though Huggy had long ago forgiven them. “We made a promise, Hug. After Rigger was killed we agreed we would never leave an assignment and endanger another person, no matter what. And you know Starsky would never go back on his word. No, he’s stuck in that hotel room and I have to find a way to let him know I’m okay. If I were in his shoes right now, I’d be going crazy and knowing Starsky, he’s probably found a way to blame himself for the whole thing. Now, are you going to help me or not?”

“How about I just take myself down to the pay phones in the lobby and give ol’ Starsk a call? That way he’ll know, you can stay here and behave and everyone will be happy. Whatta ya say?”

Hutch glanced up at Huggy and shook his head. "Sorry Hug, not possible. He's not able to make or receive any phone calls or have any visitors..." Hutch's voice trailed off as a thought occurred to him. How was he supposed to let Starsky know he was okay if he couldn't call him or go to see him? He knew that if he went rushing over there in a panic he would be jeopardizing not only the witness, but also the entire case against Caruso. He would have to think of another way.

"So where is our curly-haired brother? Probably sitting in some swanky hotel room enjoying the good life while I'm stuck here trying to wrestle the White Knight on a mission." Huggy's face was a study in martyrdom.

Knowing they were alone and that he could trust Huggy completely, Hutch decided to answer the question. "He's at the Westermeier, but that's just between you and me, you got that?"

"The Westermeier?" Huggy asked, shocked. "That dump? Shoot, they'll have to fix that place up before it can be condemned! I'll bet Starsk is just lovin' that drafty slum! I used to go there when I was a kid 'cause you could hide in an empty room and hear people's conversations on the street below your window. We used to spy on our friends that way. The Westermeier? Man!"

Hutch was intrigued. "You know the Westermeier, Hug?"

"Does a cat have a climbin' gear? Of course I do."

"Then, do you know where room 206 is?"

"Sure. It's on the street side of the hotel about half way down the second floor hallway." Huggy studied Hutch carefully and had the distinct feeling he wasn't going to like what was coming next.

"Huggy," Hutch began, snapping his fingers. "I've got an idea. You know that Santa suit I rented for the children's party next weekend? I want you to go get it and wear it back to the hospital tonight around 5:00. That's when the next visiting hours are and you won't have to force your way past the nurse's station. Think you can do that? In the meantime, I'll stay here and rest and follow orders like a good little patient. Deal?"

"I have a feeling I'm going to regret this," Huggy answered despondently. "But you know I can't say no. Could you please give me a little hint as to why I have to wear the suit though? Couldn't I just carry it in?"

"No," Hutch answered quickly. "I want you to wear the suit and when you get here, we're going to trade places. You're going to stay here in the bed while I wear the Santa suit out of here. That way no one will find out I'm gone until after I've done what I need to do."

“We ain’t exactly twins, Blondie, if you catch my drift. The only person we’re gonna fool is a blind man!”

Hutch grinned at Huggy. “I know that. But people have a tendency to see what they think they see and I think it’ll be enough to fool a few folks for at least long enough for me to get out the front doors. After that, I’m home free.”

Huggy sighed dramatically as he picked up his hat and headed for the door. “Mama Brown’s only boy child masqueradin’ as a white man. The things I do for these turkeys!”

“Oh, and Huggy?” Hutch’s voice stopped Huggy’s progress toward the door. “Bring my guitar, too, would ya?”

With an exaggerated bow and a wave of his hand, Huggy went on his way to fulfill his mission.



Starsky sighed deeply and, stretching, rose from the sofa where he had been trying unsuccessfully to take a nap. Higginbotham had slept through the night and most of the day, waking only long enough to eat a couple of times and use the facilities. He had made a few snide comments about Starsky’s appearance, pointing out the circles under his eyes and the fact that he had aged about ten years in twelve hours. Starsky had merely glared at him and Higginbotham had gone back to his room without another word. The rest of the day had been quiet, the silence of the hotel room broken only by the continuous drone of the television.

There had been very little word on the bank robbery or on Hutch’s condition. They had mentioned the fact that the bank robbers had been captured and that no one else had been injured. Amanda, the on-the-scene reporter, had done a five minute spot speculating on the condition of the wounded officer. As Starsky recalled, her exact words were, “Due to the sensitive nature of the work that the wounded officer is involved in, neither the police spokesman nor the hospital would release any information regarding his condition. However, having been there myself, I am sad to say that it is my feeling there will be one less officer coming home for Christmas.” This had only added to the burden of grief that Starsky was already carrying and served to dim the slight glimmer of hope he still held in his heart.

Other than that and a replay of the shooting, there had been nothing else. The world forgets so quickly and once the depressed businessman had been safely rescued from the bridge, the local stations had moved on to bigger and better stories in-between the westerns. During one particularly long break, they had televised a small choir singing traditional Christmas songs. Normally, Starsky would have turned up the volume and lustily sang along; instead, he stood morosely at the window and stared down the street allowing the music to feed his melancholy. Funny how he never noticed before how

depressing some Christmas music was, but a heartfelt rendition of “I’ll Be Home For Christmas” brought the weight of despair crashing down onto his shoulders.

He looked at his watch. 5:00. Another nineteen hours before he would know. On the one hand, uncertainty could be a good thing. At least he had the slim hope that Hutch was somehow still alive, that he hadn’t died alone on that filthy street while saving the life of another officer. But Starsky knew that hope would only carry him so far and he had to know, one way or another. He hadn’t slept in nearly 35 hours and his leftover snacks lay untouched on the end table. At noon tomorrow the Feds would come and take Higginbotham to the courthouse and Starsky would have his answer, good or bad. He sighed deeply and prayed for good news.

Starsky left his vigil by the window and sat in front of the TV, hoping to be distracted for even a few minutes. A Jimmy Stewart movie was just starting and Starsky tried valiantly to get into the plot and follow the action, but it was no use. Try as he might, his heart just wasn’t in it. Exhaustion began tugging at the corners of his mind and he knew he had to get some sleep.

Resolving to at least get a few hours of rest, Starsky turned off the TV set and settled down on the couch, his head resting on a pillow he had purloined from the unoccupied bedroom. He closed his eyes and willed himself not to think about his fallen partner, concentrating instead on the Christmas season and trying to picture what it must have been like on that night so long ago. His tired mind dredged up images of angels singing on a hillside and he could almost hear the beautiful music as they sang.

Starsky sat straight up on the couch as he suddenly realized that he was, indeed, hearing music. He reflexively glanced at the television but it was still off and was definitely not the source of the song he was hearing. He eased off the couch and crossed over to the window, alert for any sign of danger.

The sun was just beginning to sink toward the horizon as Starsky peered through the chink in the blinds. The source of the music revealed itself as the street corner Santa continued picking out a melody on his guitar. Starsky studied the Santa closely, noting with suspicion that it was definitely not the same person who had been there earlier. This Santa was much taller and thinner and, by careful scrutiny, Starsky could see that this man had blond hair and what appeared to be some sort of white cloth peeking out from under his Santa hat.

Sudden recognition dawned on Starsky and relief washed through his entire being. He leaned heavily against the wall, his eyes still glued to the chink in the blinds, as all of the tension and uncertainty of the past 24 hours drained from him. He had his Christmas miracle, for the mysterious Santa on the corner was none other than his partner. Starsky stood unmoving and unblinking as his exhausted mind processed the scene before him. No matter what else happened, Hutch was alive and well and was standing outside his hotel room. His clear tenor voice floated up to him, surrounding him like a balm and filling him with the peace he’d been praying for. Starsky stayed where he was,

mesmerized by the beautiful voice that slowly healed his wounded heart and despairing soul. He listened as his partner sang, immersing himself in the joy that seemed so elusive just moments ago.

Pushing himself away from the support of the wall, Starsky drank in the sight of his partner before the sun completed its journey over the horizon. Hutch made a move as if he was going to pack up his guitar but then changed his mind and began softly strumming once again. Even the traffic and the pedestrians sauntering down the grimy sidewalk seemed to stop and take notice as the words and melody touched the hearts of everyone who heard them. But no one was as moved as the curly-haired detective peeking out the window and basking in the peace and joy depicted in the simple words the Santa had chosen to sing.

*Silent night. Holy night.*

*All is calm. All is bright.*

*Round yon virgin mother and child.*

*Holy infant so tender and mild.*

*Sleep in heavenly peace.*

*Sleep in heavenly peace.*



***The Blintz***  
*11/11/01*