

Twenty Answers

By The Blintz

The atmosphere in the squad room was heavy and oppressive. The officers gathered there were diligently working at their desks. Those who weren't busy were studiously trying to look busy as nobody dared to raise his head and risk a glance at the cause of the uncomfortable silence.

Starsky and Hutch sat opposite each other at their respective desks, and it was evident that they were the source of the tension in the room. They had been seated that way ever since they returned from lunch, and neither man had spoken a word in almost forty-five minutes.

Starsky appeared to be the more uncomfortable of the two and he fidgeted restlessly – crossing and uncrossing his legs, transferring files from one side of the desk to the other, picking up a pencil and putting it back down just to pick it up again. He was reaching for the stapler for the tenth time when he couldn't stand the silence anymore.

“Hutch?”

There was no answer from the blond.

“Hutch?” A little louder this time with just a trace of pleading.

But the blond was stubbornly silent.

“You still mad at me?”

Finally, Starsky had Hutch's attention. He looked up at his dark-haired partner and stared him in the eye. “For what?”

“For that little stunt I pulled before lunch. Ya know I was only kiddin' around. Me and the guys thought it would be kinda funny...”

“You thought THAT would be funny?” Hutch interrupted with more than a trace of sarcasm in his tone.

“Well, yeah. I wish you could have seen yourself – I'll bet your blood pressure went off the charts!”

“And you find my hypertension amusing?”

“Ahh, c’mon Hutch. You gotta admit I had you goin’ there for a few minutes. And it WAS pretty funny once you think about it. Just a harmless little bet. And I won both times!” Starsky reached into his jeans pocket and pulled out a wad of cash.

Hutch sighed wearily, rubbing a hand over his eyes. “You did?”

“Yeah. You wanna see?” Starsky held out the money to his partner.

Hutch took the proffered bills and, after licking his thumb, slowly and carefully counted the money. “You would risk my health for fifty bucks?”

Starsky had the decency to look ashamed. “You know I’d never risk your health...”

“Isn’t that what you just said?” Hutch shot back, tossing the cash back.

“No. What I said was it was funny to watch your blood pressure rising...”

“Isn’t that the same thing?”

“No. It’s not. You’re insinuating that I did it just to hurt you when really the only reason I did it was ‘cause I thought it might liven the place up a bit. It was pretty boring in here this mornin’, in case you didn’t notice.”

“Oh, so now I’m not only unhealthy, I’m boring too?”

“I didn’t say you were boring, I said it was boring in here. You gotta look at the big picture, Hutch. Nobody was doin’ anything and everyone was gettin’ that ‘ho-hum’ attitude and I just had to do somethin’ about it. Of course, the thought of winnin’ a little extra cash did inspire me to greater heights..” Starsky wiggled his eyebrows in a failed attempt to get his partner to smile.

Hutch was not amused. “So this was all about the money?” he asked incredulously.

“Of course not!” Starsky denied. “You know me better than that.”

“I do?”

“Yes, you do!” Starsky got out of his chair and walked around to Hutch’s side of the desk, resting his weight on the corner of the desktop. “Look. How about I share my winnin’s with ya. Would that make you feel better?”

Hutch appeared to ponder that question for a moment. “How much are you willing to part with?”

“Let’s say fifty-fifty. That seems fair. After all, it was my idea to do the whole question thing, but it was your reaction that made it so much fun.”

Hutch stared at the ceiling for a few moments then lowered his gaze to meet that of his partner's. "So, you think twenty-five dollars will buy my forgiveness?"

Starsky swallowed nervously and glanced around the room, looking for some moral support from the other officers there. Finding no sympathizers, he turned back to Hutch. "I know it's not much, but it IS half of what I got. Whatta ya say, hmm? We could knock off here and go to Huggy's and grab a beer and shoot some pool or somethin'. How about it?"

"Twenty-five dollars sounds like a rather cheap price to put on our friendship, don't you think?"

Starsky sighed heavily and sat back down in his chair. "Look, Hutch. You're blowin' this thing way out of proportion. It was just a joke, no big deal. I don't understand why you're so bent outta shape."

"You don't?"

"No, I don't."

"Do you need me to explain it to you?"

By this time, Starsky was more than a little exasperated. "Yeah, Hutch, I do. Why don't you tell me just what's wrong with you today and explain what's got your nose so out of joint?"

Hutch leaned forward, his eyes boring into those of his partner. "Do I really need to explain why I'm upset because you publicly humiliated me for a lousy fifty bucks?"

Starsky looked down at his hands and shrugged. "Well, when you put it that way..."

"That IS what happened, isn't it?"

"Yeah, I guess so..."

"And now you want to insult me by offering me twenty-five dollars to forget the whole thing?"

Starsky stood abruptly, slamming a pencil down on the desk. "You make this whole thing sound so...sordid. Look, it was just a stupid joke, and a big mistake on my part, I guess. I thought it was funny and I thought my partner would too. Obviously I was wrong."

"Would you have thought it was funny if I had done it to you?"

“Yes!” Starsky answered quickly. “I would. Or at least I think I would...” Starsky’s voice trailed off and he appeared to struggle with himself for a moment or two. “Okay, Hutch. You win. Here,” he held out the wad of cash. “Just take the whole thing and we’ll forget this ever happened. Deal?”

Hutch took the proffered money and appeared to study it as he spoke. “And you’ll never do anything like this again?”

“Never!” Starsky readily agreed, hoping this meant an end to the long, uncomfortable afternoon.

“It’s good to hear you say that, buddy,” Hutch announced as he stood up and grabbed his jacket from the back of his chair. “And, unless I’ve miscounted, that makes twenty!” He then stopped at every desk on his way out of the room, taking a couple of dollars from each man that was seated there. Just as he was about to leave, he stopped and looked at his partner. “Gotcha!” he exclaimed, pointing his index finger at an open-mouthed Starsky. Hutch hurried out the squad room door, the other officers watching in amusement as the tall blond began running down the hallway.

Starsky’s reaction was nearly instantaneous. He snatched his own jacket off the back of his chair and went racing out of the room, his angry bellow echoing down the hallway. “Huuuuuuuuutch!”

The End