

Twenty Questions

by The Blintz

“What do you think you’re doing?” Hutch’s voice cut through the silence in the squad room as every head turned to look at Hutch’s partner. If Hutch was aggravated, it was a pretty safe bet that Starsky was the cause of it.

“Whatta ya mean?” Starsky’s face was a study in innocence.

“Th...that noise!” Hutch replied, eyes darting around the room to see what the source of the annoying sound could be.

“What noise?”

“That tapping noise. It sounds like someone’s beating a pencil against the desktop or something.” He looked over at Starsky suspiciously. “You have a pencil over there I don’t know about?”

”Now, why on earth would I hide a pencil from you?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” Hutch answered, leaning back in his chair and letting out a deep sigh. “So you can bang on the desk with it while I’m not looking and drive me crazy. That’s always been reason enough in the past...”

“But wouldn’t that be rather childish of me?” Starsky had his feet propped up on the desk, his expression of innocence not wavering.

“Maybe so, but that’s never stopped you before. Now, hand it over.”

“Hand what over?”

“The pencil, you moron!” Hutch’s patience was wearing thin and the other officers could almost see his blood pressure rising.

Starsky did his best to stifle a grin. “What pencil?”

“The one you’re pounding on the desktop!” Hutch’s face was turning red and his voice had risen several decibels.

“Are you okay?” Starsky asked, his face showing only genuine concern for his partner’s health.

Hutch rose to his feet and sighed, running a hand through his hair. “Okay. Okay. I get it. I know what you’re doing now, and you’re not going to get to me. Not this time, partner.”

“What are you talking about?”

Hutch whirled around and pointed an accusing finger at Starsky. “There!! You just did it again!”

Starsky’s brow was knit in confusion. “Did what again?”

“You’re answering every question I ask you with another question. And I know you’re doing it on purpose!”

“I am?”

“Yes, mushbrain, you are only I’m not going to fall for it this time.” Hutch had a triumphant smile on his face.

“You’re not?” Starsky’s face was still a study in innocence.

“No, I’m not. So you can cut the act and just answer my question.”

“What question?”

Hutch looked confused for a moment, his eyes looking skyward. “I don’t seem to remember what we were talking about. Now look what you’ve done! I swear, Starsky, two minutes talking to you and I lose all track of reality.”

Starsky grinned in spite of himself. “Since when have you had a grip on reality?”

“Not since I met you, that’s for sure! Now what were we talking about?”

“When?”

“Before you started this nonsense of answering everything I say with a question, that’s when. I’m sure it was something important...”

Starsky shifted in his chair, leaving one foot on the desk and the other across it. “How can you be so sure?”

Exasperation was engraved in every line of Hutch’s face and voice when he spoke. “Because I stopped working on this report to ask you about it. And if it wasn’t important, I wouldn’t have done that. That’s how I know.”

Starsky appeared to ponder that last statement for a moment. “That’s how you know what?”

“THAT IT WAS SOMETHING IMPORTANT!” Hutch had lost all control, and several officers in the squad room were rapidly losing the battle to keep a straight face. “Geez, Starsky, talking to you is like talking to a twelve year old! Only I’d probably get a straight answer from a twelve year old.”

“Why would you want to talk to a twelve year old?” Starsky asked, all innocence and undivided attention.

“I don’t want to talk to a twelve year old! I just said I could get more help from a twelve year....oh, never mind! I’m gonna finish this report. Just forget the whole thing, okay?” Hutch plopped himself back into his chair and began struggling to get a piece of paper in the typewriter.

“Forget what ‘whole thing’?”

“That whole thing about ...whatever it was we were talking about. Do you think you can lay off the questions until I’ve finished this stupid report? I would like to get a little work done today!”

“How long’s it gonna take ya to finish?”

“I don’t know, but I’ll tell you this. At the rate I’m going it might just be several hours or more. Or maybe I can just stay here all night and work on it. You’d like that, wouldn’t you?”

“Now why would I like that?”

“Who knows?! I gave up trying to figure you out a long time ago. Now would you please let me concentrate?” Hutch went back to his report, dutifully picking out the letters on the keyboard with his two index fingers.

Starsky looked around the squad room and smiled broadly. He had bet the other officers that he could answer every one of Hutch’s questions with a question of his own and he had done that successfully twenty times. Now it was time for double or nothing. He had made it twenty times, but could he do forty? There was only one way to find out.

Very slowly and carefully, so as not to arouse Hutch’s suspicions, Starsky began tapping on the underside of the desk with his pencil. In just a few minutes his patience was rewarded when Hutch’s head snapped up as his eyes began scanning the room.

“What’s that noise?” Hutch nearly bellowed.

Starsky looked over at his partner and once again put on his most innocent expression. “What noise?” One down, nineteen to go.

The End