

The Unread Letter

by the Blintz

Detective David Starsky sat in his darkened apartment staring sightlessly at the television. As the set projected its flickering blue images on the uncaring walls, he felt totally numb and disconnected from everything that was going on around him, and he wondered if he'd ever be able to participate in life with any kind of enthusiasm again. Heaving a weary sigh, he went to the refrigerator and opened the door. He hadn't eaten anything since...well, he couldn't remember the last time he'd eaten something, but nothing in the refrigerator looked even remotely interesting. So instead of food, he grabbed his fifth beer of the evening and went back to his chair to settle in and not watch whatever was on.

Something on the screen, however, caught his attention. It was one of those trashy talk shows favored by housewives everywhere and normally he wouldn't have given it the time of day. But something the host was saying caught his attention and he leaned in closer to the set to see what the topic was. Phil Donahue was staring earnestly into the camera, holding a microphone close to his face as he introduced his next guest, a young woman whose husband had cheated on her. It seemed that she had forgiven her spouse, but she was having a hard time dealing with the flood of emotions she was experiencing and had come to Phil seeking help.

Starsky snorted derisively, wondering what kind of people would actually air their problems on national TV like that. *It takes all kinds*, he thought as he wearily sipped his beer. He had almost lost interest in the show again as the woman hashed out all the gory details of her husband's infidelity when Phil began to speak once again. His suggestion to the lady was for her to write a letter to her husband detailing all of her hurt and anger. He told her to write it from her heart, sparing nobody's feelings and to be totally truthful. The letter could be any length as long as it contained everything she needed to unload concerning her emotional distress. Then Phil instructed her to burn the letter once she had finished writing it to symbolically free her of the strong emotions.

Starsky was intrigued in spite of himself. He had just been betrayed by his best friend and was at a loss as to how to get over it. Yes, he and Hutch had called a truce of sorts, but things between them were still strained and uncomfortable. He knew Hutch felt the pressure, too, and was beating himself up for causing such a rift in their relationship. Starsky also knew the ball was in his court. Hutch had apologized a hundred times over and was sincere in his remorse, and Starsky had forgiven him. But the feelings were still there, and he had no idea how to rid himself of the anger and bitterness.

He sat a while longer in his chair, once again ignoring the flickering images on the television screen. Feeling rather foolish, he went to the desk and pulled out a piece of

paper and a pen, thankful no one was there to witness what he was about to do. He crossed to the kitchen table, settled himself comfortably, and began to write.

“Hutch,

I’m not sure I know how to start this. I can’t say I’ve never been here before, but I was so sure I’d never be here with you. The problem is that I’m hurting inside - hurting so badly and needing someone to talk to. But the one person I trusted is the one that hurt me, and now there’s no one for me to go to. I’ve even picked up the phone several times and started to dial your number, just out of habit I guess. I want, no, I *need* so badly to talk this out with you. I need your insight, your wisdom, that way you have of making me feel better no matter what it is I’m facing. We’ve stared death in the face so many times, but I’ve never felt as hopeless as I do right now. Hopeless, alone, and scared.

I’m angry, Hutch. Angry, hurt, and so incredibly confused. I wonder if you’ve done anything else over the years that I don’t know about. I wonder if our friendship means anything at all to you or if the last seven years have been nothing but lies—just a working relationship and nothing more. No, dammit! We had more than that, Hutch, so much more.

I still can’t believe what you did to me. After all we’ve been through and the lessons we’ve learned over the years, I can’t believe you could turn your back on me and hurt me the way you did. Do you have any idea how badly it hurts? Can you possibly understand that what you did has rocked me to the core, made me question everything we have and everything I thought we had?

I trusted you. Period. And we both know how long it took for that to happen. After everything I’ve been through in my life, I finally found one person whom I trusted completely. Not just with my life, but with every part of who I am. You know me like no one else ever has. And then you hurt me. What am I supposed to do with that? Where do I go from here? I see you every day and I know you’re looking at me, but I can’t even bear to look you in the eye and I don’t know why. I want to rant and rave and throw things and scream and yell, but I don’t have the energy for that. Yeah, I hit you. In the heat of the moment, I did lash out, and I have to give you credit for not hitting me back. But that whole scene left me feeling so empty inside...God, it hurts.

So, now all I have are questions without answers. Can I ever trust you again? How much was a convenient lie? Was it easier for us

to pretend to care so we could keep our sanity out there? We've got seven years behind us, buddy. Seven years of friendship and loyalty and trust...There's that word again. Trust. I can't trust you anymore. And it's killing me.

There's no one for me to go to now, no one who could possibly understand where I'm coming from or care enough to ask. I didn't hedge my bets this time, and it looks like I lost it all. The biggest problem with that, is me. I still care. I don't know how or why or what sense it makes, but for some reason there's a part of me that's so wrapped up in you it refuses to let go. Maybe it's that part that was the only real thing all along. Maybe our entire friendship, partnership, has always hinged on that one thing, whatever it is.

I feel like I'm digging a pit, only I'm standing inside the hole I'm making and there's no one at the top to help me out. Just me and my shovel, trying to make sense of something so right that suddenly went so very wrong. I'm so confused, and tired, and sick. That's it. I just feel sick. Like I'm at the fair and ate too much cotton candy and the guy running the place refuses to stop the Ferris wheel so I can get off. And so I keep spinning. Round and round in circles inside my own head and there's no way out.

Did you ever feel like you were trapped inside your own skin? Like you'd pay money just to be able to be someone else for a few days or even a few hours? Maybe if I could get away from myself for a little while, get some space, I could make some sort of order out of all of this chaos that's driving me insane. But I can't run away. There's nowhere to go and even if I did, I'd still be there with me. So what do I do?

I love you, Hutch—you're like a brother to me. But I hate you, too, all at the same time. I've always heard there's a fine line between love and hate, and now I know what that means.

That's all I can say right now. I think I've run out of steam.

Starsky”

Starsky sat back in his chair and flipped through the pages of his letter. He was a little surprised to find that he did feel better and decided to go through the whole ritual to see if it helped. Rummaging through the kitchen cabinets, he found the stainless steel pot he normally used to whip up a batch of his famous chili. Without ceremony, he placed the pot in the center of his kitchen table, wadded up the letter he had just written, and stuffed it down inside. He took a match from the pack he kept beside the stove and struck it on

the side of the box, tossing it into the mass of crumpled paper. He watched it burn for a few seconds and thought of how all his feelings were now going up in smoke.

Just as the letter started burning in earnest, there was a knock at the door. When Starsky didn't answer immediately, he heard the doorknob turn and his partner's voice call his name.

"Starsk?" Hutch called tentatively, sticking his head into the apartment.

"In here," Starsky called from the kitchen, wondering how he would explain the pile of smoldering ashes that now graced the pot in the center of the table.

Hutch sniffed the air as he walked to stand beside his partner. "Burn dinner again, Starsk?" He looked down to see what Starsky was watching so closely. "What in the world is that? Or should I ask what in the world *was* that?" Hutch hurriedly crossed to the sink and, filling a glass with water, made to dump it on the burning paper.

With a quick movement, Starsky stilled his hand. "Let it burn, Hutch."

The crease between Hutch's eyebrows deepened as he stared at Starsky, concern and confusion mingled in his eyes. "Hey. You okay? What was in the pan?"

Starsky stared down into the pot until the last of the smoke and flames had disappeared. "That's nothin', Hutch. A whole lotta nothin'." Sighing contentedly, he picked up his jacket and turned to look into his partner's eyes. "What d'ya say we go to The Pits and grab something to eat? My treat."

Starsky looked up at his partner and saw the surprised grin that spread across the blond's face. He was a little surprised himself; after all, just a few minutes ago he had been depressed and almost despondent, wondering if there was any way things could be good between the two of them again. But now, even though the memory of Kira was still strong, he really felt he was ready to move on, the bad feelings of the past nothing more than a small pile of useless ashes.

"Let's go, buddy," Starsky said, clapping his partner on the back and ushering him out the front door. "I think it's time for us to move on."

The End