

# “Betrayal”

## A Sequel to “Starsky vs Hutch”

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### FORWARD

*This short story was written as a sequel to the episode, “Starsky vs. Hutch.” Fans have long been dissatisfied with the episode which pitted the two partners against one another for the attentions of a female, fellow detective. Their behavior in this episode was totally out of character. This is one writer's effort to offer a possible explanation of what may have gone on behind the scenes.*

#### *Chapter 1*

Starsky slammed the door of the red Torino and squealed away from the curb without even checking the rear view mirror. In all the time he had known Hutch, both as his friend and his partner, Starsky couldn't remember ever having been so angry with him.

Sure, there'd been disagreements, some even kind of serious; but he'd always been willing to forgive Hutch anything. But not this time. No—this was different. How could his best friend, his partner, the person who knew him best in the world, betray him like this?

Rather than the speed dissipating Starsky's anger, each passing block seemed to fuel it. He rolled down the car window and took several deep breaths. The scene that had just played out at Kira's seemed like a bad dream. Had he really seen Hutch come from her bedroom with a guilt-ridden expression on his face? It must have been true. Hutch wouldn't even look him in the eye or make any move to deny what had just occurred between them.

It was impossible that Hutch could've been so callous as to go to bed with a woman that Starsky had declared his love for only this morning! Did Hutch care for her too, or was he, for some inexplicable reason, doing this to hurt Starsky?

As always, Starsky thought with his heart, rather than his head—and in doing so, denied that Hutch could've wanted to hurt him. Not Hutch. Not after all they'd been through together. Not after surviving such tragedies together as losing Gillian and Terry. Hutch loved him like a brother—no, loved him even *more* than his real brother, Nicky did. Damn, it made no sense!



Hutch stood on the stoop, watching his best friend speed away, a red blur in the twilight of the evening. Kira had slammed the door behind them as she ordered both men from the house. Time stopped. Hutch felt numb. What had just happened? What was he *thinking*?

Something about Kira was irresistible. Hutch had gone to Kira's to confront her about her feelings for Starsky and her feelings for him. What she'd said about being able to love more than one person had made sense to him at the time. He really couldn't deny that he, himself had found it possible to be involved with more than one woman at a time.

One thing had led to another, and before he knew it, Starsky was forgotten. *I'm only human. Starsky is a big boy. All's fair in love and war...* Hutch knew these were only cliches, but he clung to them, perhaps out of confusion, more likely out of guilt.

Quietly, the door opened a crack. Lost in these thoughts, Hutch had no idea how long he'd been standing there. Kira opened the door a little further. "Hutch, I'm so glad you didn't go. Please come in. I don't want to be alone right now," she simpered. Hutch wanted to resist, to run after Starsky, but somehow, he was compelled to do as she asked.

Kira looped her arms around his neck and lightly touched her lips to his, drawing him into the room.

## *Chapter 2*

The following night at the Golden Lady Ballroom, the case Starsky, Hutch and Kira had been working on came to a climatic close. All three detectives were on hand to play their parts and capture the demented Viet Nam vet, when he finally snapped and tried to blow up the dance hall and everyone in it. In spite of what had transpired the evening before, Starsky and Hutch managed to disarm the man and get the hand grenade out of the building before it detonated. Still, they hadn't spoken a single word to one another except what was necessary to do the job.

As soon as Joey Webster was apprehended and in custody, Starsky disappeared from the scene and went back to the station to complete the paperwork. Hutch and Kira left and went back to her house, barely noticing Starsky's departure.



Eight-thirty the next morning, Hutch walked into the squad room. Starsky sat at the typewriter, slowly pecking away at yet another of the never-ending reports which were a part of their daily routine. He barely looked up as his partner entered the room.

"Morning," Hutch said, avoiding eye contact with the dark-haired detective. As a peace offering, he dropped a bag of warm, sticky donuts on the desk in front of his partner. He knew Starsk could never resist sweets, being the consummate junk food junkie.

Starsky ignored them, acknowledging Hutch with only a muffled, " 'Mornin."

Hutch flipped through the open file on the desk. “Any leads on the rape cases?” he asked, pretending not to notice Starsky’s refusal to accept his bribe.

“Just one,” Starsky replied without looking up. “Cap’n Dobey wants us to contact some stoolie named Tucker who says he heard on the street there’s a bad dude braggin’ about teach’n a lesson to the ‘sluts’ out there who think they’re too good for him.”

“Mmm. Might be something.” Hutch sipped his coffee and looked through photos of the perp’s latest victims. Six so far. Each more brutal than the previous. The last two had been raped and then pistol-whipped, even though, they told the police, they’d been too frightened to resist. No leads until this morning. Maybe things would get back to normal with this case finally opening up.

“Hit the street?” he suggested, looking up in time to see Starsky rip the completed form out of the typewriter.

“You got it,” was Starsky’s only reply.

Still no eye contact between the partners....



As the Torino thundered up the street, a cloud of tension lay between the two men. *I don't think I can take this, Hutch. Say somethin'—tell me it was a mistake—hell, tell me she held you at gunpoint!* Unbidden memories surfaced as Starsky recalled their last argument over a woman—Gillian.

Hutch really loved her, and it tore Starsky’s heart out to tell his partner the truth about his lady. Sure, Hutch didn’t want to believe it. He even accused Starsky of lying, of jealousy—anything to keep from admitting the truth to himself.

But Hutch knew, deep down inside, that his partner wasn’t making up wild accusations. He knew that he could always count on Starsky to be honest with him, no matter what. *Tell me, Hutch. Tell me anything to help me understand!*

Still, Hutch was quiet.

All the while, Hutch was lost in his own thoughts. The past two days with Kira had been indescribable. The only fly in the ointment had been his underlying sense of guilt that he’d betrayed his friend. *You know I don't want to hurt you, Starsk, but this woman makes me crazy! How can I explain it to you? Does she make you feel the same way?*

Several times during the short ride, Hutch tried to say the words aloud, but was afraid of opening the wound. Right now, they needed to concentrate on getting this sadistic bastard off the streets. There would be time later to mend fences. And they WOULD resolve this. Nothing could ever end their friendship—built on the mutual trust and respect they had for one another. Besides, he didn’t understand himself why he was acting this way, so how could he possibly explain it to Starsky?

Starsky swerved into the curb in front of Huggy’s and turned off the ignition. “Supposed to meet Tucker here,” he told Hutch. First words spoken since they’d left the station. Hutch opened his door and got out without comment. Both detectives entered the dimly lit club and took a seat at the bar.

“What it is?” Huggy greeted them. Although both guys spoke, Huggy could tell that something wasn’t right. Everyone who knew the “dynamic duo” could attest to the chemistry between them as the reason for their uncanny success as L.A.’s finest. They worked like two parts of the same brain, soul mates, silent communicators. This morning, these two acted like they were from different planets.

Huggy pretended not to notice. Whatever it was, it would pass. “The man’s already here,” he said, looking around inconspicuously as he poured two cups of coffee. “Waiting in the corner booth—kind of jittery. I think this dude he’s talkin’ about must be one whacked-out cat. Never seen Tucker watchin’ the shadows like today.”

“Thanks, Huggy,” Hutch said, dropping a couple of bucks for the coffee on the counter and heading over to the booth. Starsky followed without a word.

Tucker was your typical snitch—greasy hair swept back from a sallow, puffy face which hadn’t seen a razor in at least three days. As Starsky and Hutch approached the booth, Tucker nervously searched the room with slightly bulging, obviously worried eyes. “You guys the cops lookin’ for the creep hurtin’ all the girls?”

“Heard you might have somethin’ for us,” Starsky said, as he slid into the booth. Hutch slid in from the other side, hemming in the snitch.

“Maybe, maybe not. What’s it worth to you?”

Hutch laid a twenty on the table, his expression barely suppressing the disgust he felt for this vermin who would cash in on the suffering of others.

“You gotta be kiddin’”, Tucker snarled. “You guys don’t know what you’re dealin’ with here. You think I’m gonna risk my life for a lousy twenty.”

Starsky reached into his back pocket and pulled out another fifty. Tucker reached for the bill, only to have it snatched back by Starsky. “Uh, uh. Tell me what you’ve got first.”

“Puchelli... Frank, I think they call him. Small time loser who gets his kicks beatin’ up the ladies. Just recently progressed to more, shall we say *active participation*? Seems this guy hates women and the only way he can get it off is to force ‘em, then beat the hell out of ‘em. If the word on the street is on the mark, each of the girls ends up a little worse off than the last.”

Tucker reached for the bill again. Starsky let him take it.

“Fifty more will get you the address,” he said, cutting his eyes to Hutch. With a grimace, Hutch dug deep into his jeans and brought out his last ten. “Okay. Okay. Stayin’ at a dump down on Madison. A flophouse, Sunset Hotel. Now you guys ain’t seen me and you never talked to me. You got it?”

“You’re a prince among thieves.” Starsky sneered, as he and Hutch stood up to leave.

“This one’s for free,” Tucker added. “You guys better watch each other’s backs. This lunatic is gonna kill somebody. If you push him, it’ll probably be you.”

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The red Torino rolled to a stop two blocks east of Sunset Hotel. The two detectives weren't taking any chances that they may scare off the suspect. Most of the street people recognized the Striped Tomato and knew that wherever it was, Starsky & Hutch weren't far away.

"So what do you think?" Hutch said, turning and actually looking Starsky in the eyes for the first time that day. "Want to take the direct approach, or split up and try flushing him out?"

"Your call."

"I say we march on in there, strong-arm the room number out of the desk clerk and move quick."

"The *Hutchinson subtle approach*, hmmm?" Starsky actually came close to smiling.

"You got it, Partner," Hutch said, feeling a fleeting moment of their friendship, as it once had been. Enough said, they headed into the flophouse.



"Police! Open up!" Hutch shouted. Not giving Puchelli time to escape through a window, he kicked the door open. Without needing to speak a word, he and Starsky quickly entered the room in their traditional fashion. With the precision born from years of working together, Hutch went high with the Magnum held rigidly in front of him, while Starsky went low with the Smith & Wesson, ready for action. The room was empty. The adrenaline still pumping, Starsky ran to check the fire escape while Hutch checked the bathroom.

No rapist, but plenty of evidence that the pervert had been there recently. Well-worn, dog-eared S&M magazines lay scattered around the room, as well as various paraphernalia used for bondage games. It looked like they were on the right track.

"Damn!" Starsky muttered his disappointment. "Within twenty minutes he'll hear we're lookin' for him. He's not gonna risk coming back here."

"I'm going to call Dobby and get a search warrant," Hutch said. "There's some pretty powerful circumstantial evidence here. May need it later."

### ***Chapter 3***

By the end of the day, both detectives were frustrated at their failure to locate Puchelli. They knew as nightfall approached, another woman would be in danger. The attacks were occurring more frequently and were more horrendous.

Starsky pulled into a fast food joint, not even bothering to engage in his usual good-natured ragging on Hutch. Nor did Hutch offer his predictable lecture about the 'non-existent nutritional value' of the food served at these greasy spoons.

The atmosphere in the Torino fairly crackled with the strain that had been building all day. *Hutch, what's the matter, buddy? Why can't you open up and tell me why you did it?* Starsky suspected Hutch was struggling with his conscience when he ordered a cheeseburger “all the way” AND a large order of fries. If he hadn't been so miserable, Starsk may have even laughed.

They ate in silence. Their only conversation throughout the day had been directly connected with the case. Nothing personal—nothing risky—nothing that they both knew needed to be said.

Finally, Starsky couldn't hold back any longer. As usual, his emotions took control, leaving him with no alternative than to meet the problem head-on. He gazed out the side window, not wanting to risk Hutch reading the pain in his face as he spoke.

“So, why'd you do it, Hutch? Huh? Will you just tell me?”

Hutch shifted in the seat, gazing out his side window. “Do what, Starsk? Fall for a woman that you imagined yourself in love with? For God's sake, Starsky, every time you get involved with a woman, you think you're in love with her. Don't you know that you can't go through life fooling yourself that the next woman you meet may be able to fill the void Terry's death left in your heart?”

The anger flared through Starsky with such intensity, he could barely control his voice to speak. “And I guess you think you got my whole life all figured out. I don't deserve a little happiness? You think that it's okay to hop in the sack with someone hours after I bare my soul to you and tell you I think I'm in love with her? Damn it, Hutch, how could you do this to me? Huh? All the women you know, all the women you could be with, and you got'a have Kira?”

“Look, I didn't plan it. Okay?” Hutch answered quietly. “I went over there to find out how she felt about both of us. It just...kind of happened. There's something—I don't know—something that I can't describe. I'm just drawn to her, Starsk, like a moth to a flame. Hell, I can't explain it to you! Why can't you just bow out gracefully and let things take their own course?”

Starsky's eyes hardened and seemed to turn a deeper shade of blue as he took a deep breath and tried to calm his voice before speaking. “Do you love her, Hutch? Huh? Can you really sit there and tell me you love her? Or are you lettin' your libido speak for you? I thought you were my partner—my buddy—my best friend.”

Starsky's voice was thick, as he struggled to keep his emotions in check. “Best friends don't do one another this way, Hutch. How can I trust you now? Huh? Our whole relationship's been based on trust.”

Suddenly, Starsky realized his feelings for Kira were no longer the issue. What he was really dealing with here was his fear that Hutch didn't value their friendship as much as he did. He had never before had reason to doubt Hutch's loyalty. Many times they'd risked their lives for one another, and they did it without a moment's hesitation. It just didn't seem possible that a woman they had known only a few weeks could shatter their friendship so easily.

Despite his intention to be adult about the situation, Hutch felt his own temper rising. From his perspective, his partner was blowing this way out of proportion.

“Why can’t you just grow up, Starsk?” he snapped. The moment the words were spoken, he knew that he’d give anything to take them back. *God, what’s happening here? Where did that come from? Why can’t I stop this whole ugly scene?*

The anger drained from Starsky, quickly replaced by hurt and disappointment. “What ever happened to ‘me and thee’?” he asked quietly.

Hutch reached out and laid his hand on Starsky’s arm, “Look, buddy, can’t we just forget all this? This thing with Kira may not work out anyway. Just give me a chance to see if it’s the real thing. Is that asking too much?”

Starsky shrugged off Hutch’s hand and turned to faced him. “Hutch, if you wanna be with her, knowin’ how I feel about her, I don’t think I wanna be your friend anymore. That may sound stupid to you, but to me, it’s a matter of trust and a matter of loyalty. Without that, partner, we got nothin’.”

Hutch’s eyes went wide with surprise. “You can’t be serious...Starsk,” Hutch reached out again toward his partner, but Starsky withdrew.

The engine of the Torino roared to life as Starsky put it in gear and headed home.

#### ***Chapter 4***

Kira opened the door wearing only a revealing robe and a seductive smile. “Hutch, I thought you would never get here.” She stood on tiptoe and planted a soft kiss on his lips. He could smell her perfume, faintly sweet against his cheek. *God, she’s beautiful.*

“Yeah, well, Starsky and I have been running our butts off all day trying to get a bead on the rape case Dobey has assigned us,” Hutch offered as the reason for being so late. It was only an excuse. He had actually been home the past three hours, lying in the dark, trying to figure out how to get his life back on track.

Starsky’s declaration to end their friendship had thrown his world into chaos. Life without his partner and friend was unimaginable. It was time to face up to the seriousness of the situation. What had started out as a harmless competition of male egos had become a speeding train that Hutch didn’t know how to stop.

Hutch realized what he really wanted was the old “have your cake and eat it too” scenario, but that didn’t seem likely. So, now, here he was. He wouldn’t leave tonight until he cleared the air with Kira and found out exactly what her intentions were.

Kira sensed Hutch’s withdrawal the moment he arrived. He was usually so responsive to her touch. One of the reasons she enjoyed being with him was his susceptibility to her charms. *But then, so is Starsky’, she thought.* Kira was accustomed to having her way with men. That’s why she’d never found it necessary to make a commitment, or limit herself to one lover. She was good at her job as an undercover policewoman, because she was good at playing roles.

She rather enjoyed seeing these two go at it. When Kira was assigned to work undercover with them to solve the dance hall murders, she had heard about their extraordinary relationship, their undying loyalty. What an irresistible challenge they presented!

“What’s wrong, darling?” she asked, moving closer.

Hutch swiped his hand over his face and turned toward her. “We need to talk.”

“Later,” she whispered against his lips as she reached her arms around his neck again. Hutch’s response was immediate. He pulled her close and kissed her—almost brutally, but only for a few fleeting seconds; then with strained reluctance, he pulled away.

“No, Kira, now.”

With no small amount of irritation, she asked, “What’s so important that we have to discuss it now?”

“It’s Starsky. It’s been a rough couple of days for us. I had no idea he was so serious about you. But since Terry died, well, he’s been a lot more vulnerable. I just don’t want to see him hurt. I...I’m having second thoughts about us...you and me.”

Hutch stepped back, putting a few inches between them. “I guess what I’m trying to say is, where is this going? Is this just a fling for you?” Without even realizing what he was doing, he reached out and gently stroked her cheek with the back of his hand. *So soft, so lovely...*

“When I’m with you I can’t seem to think straight; when we’re apart, I think of you constantly. Is it...is it like that for you?”

Kira saw the yearning in his eyes as he continued. “How do you really feel about me? How do you feel about Starsky? You said you love us both. But I’m not so sure I can understand that...and believe it.”

“Hutch, darling, why do we have to discuss this to death? Why can’t we just take things as they come? Besides, Starsky is an adult. You aren’t his keeper. And if he really cares so much for me, why haven’t I heard from him since that terrible scene here a couple of days ago?”

“He’s hurting, Kira. At first, I thought he was just mad at me, but it’s more than that—much more. Good God, he told me today we can’t be friends anymore! Do you have a clue what he must be going through to say something like that to me?”

“No, Hutch, I don’t.” Kira felt a tremor of excitement at the realization she was capable of putting a chink in the armor of these two men who were supposedly loyal to one another to a fault. “But I think you should worry about you and me and let Starsky sort things out for himself.”

“Come on now, let’s forget about Starsky for a few hours. If you promise not to talk about it anymore, I’ll give him a call myself tomorrow and try to make him understand about us.”

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Starsky had gone directly home after dropping Hutch off at the station. He tried to eat a TV dinner, but found he couldn't quite get the food to go down. Usually when he was this depressed, he would pick up the phone and call Hutch—regardless of the time. That's the way it was with friends; that's the way it was with partners.

Following Terry's death, there had been many sleepless nights Hutch sat up with him talking through the grief, the remorse. Starsky didn't like this feeling of desolation. It was frightening to be so miserable, not even be able to turn to the one person he had always been able to count on.

Maybe he should go right now and confront Kira. Tell her straight out he was in love with her and demand she tell him how she really felt. But when Starsky was honest with himself, he knew he was no longer sure he did love her. Maybe Hutch was right. Maybe he was just looking for another Terry in every woman he met.

Starsky cranked up the engine of the Torino and began driving, not to Kira's, but to Venice Place. *Hutch, maybe you're right, buddy. You were just telling me like it is. I'm not going to let a passing attraction for this woman ruin our friendship. I know we can talk this out and I'll figure out a way to deal with it.*

But when Starsky reached his destination, he found the apartment dark and no sign of the Hutchmobile. Now that he was willing to consider that this was only an infatuation he felt for Kira, the larger problem loomed before him --- his disappointment in how little Hutch valued their friendship.

Maybe it was time to cut his losses and leave the scene. It looked like Hutch had made the decision for him. And now it was too late to do anything else...

## ***Chapter 5***

Hutch entered the squad room and glanced around for Starsky, but saw no sign of his partner. Disappointed, Hutch picked up his coffee mug and was pouring a cup when Dobey opened his door and bellowed, "Hutchinson, my office—now!"

Hutch nodded, finished pouring his coffee and followed Dobey into his office. Accustomed to Dobey's blustering, Hutch figured he was going to get the third degree about Starsky's whereabouts. Although his partner routinely showed up late, the captain always felt the need to fuss about it to Hutch.

Hutch dropped into the closest chair and waited for the interrogation to begin. Dobey flicked a piece of paper across the desk at Hutch. "What the hell's the meaning of this?" Hutch picked up the form and started reading, but not fast enough to suit Dobey.

"I found this on my desk when I got here at 6:30 this morning. Starsky's asking to be reassigned to a different partner. And if that's not possible, a transfer to a different precinct. Now, do you want to tell me what's going on, or do I put out an APB on that hot-headed partner of yours, throw your butts in the slammer and let you settle your differences!"

Hutch was stunned. This was Starsky's idea of a joke! He slowly lifted his eyes to meet Dobey's but saw no gleam of mischief to add credence to the "joke" idea. "Look, Cap'n,

it's a long story. Starsk is just pissed right now. He'll get over it. You know he's not serious."

"Well, in case you haven't noticed, Hutchinson, we've got a rapist on the rampage here and you two are supposed to be solving this case before another woman is attacked. Now, I suggest you get out there and locate your partner and get your asses in gear and do it!"

"Right," Hutch said. "Uh, Cap'n. Since this letter was on your desk when you arrived, do you have any idea where he could be this early? You know, it's really not his style to start work before 9 or 10 in the morning."

"Last time I looked, Hutchinson, you were the detective. I'm sure you can at least track down your own partner." Dobey's acrid response left no doubt in Hutch's mind about his mood.

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The call came in while Hutch was on the telephone with Huggy. Another rape, but this time it had ended in murder. Hutch decided he'd have to postpone his search for Starsky. He needed to get to the crime scene pronto, before any of the evidence could be disturbed. Maybe Starsk would already be there, if he was in Zebra Three and overheard the call.

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Hutch steered the Hutchmobile, red bubble flashing, up as close as he could get to the crime scene. Apparently, the victim had been discovered by a sanitation worker who was collecting garbage from a dumpster behind a bar on Madison Street, only three blocks east of Sunset Hotel. Hutch flashed his badge and made his way through the crowd. The corpse was already loaded into the ambulance when he arrived, and the lab team was winding up.

Hutch located Jack Pierson, who had been the first cop on the scene, to get a run down of what they knew so far. As Hutch began the routine questioning, Jack gave him a strange look. "I already gave all this to your partner, Hutch. Do I have to go through it again, or can't you guys just use the report I gave to him?"

Somewhat surprised, but not wanting to let on that he was unaware of Starsky's whereabouts, nor that he had already been to the crime scene, Hutch replied, "Sure Jack. I just wondered if you remembered anything else after he left."

"Not really, but I think the guy reached some sort of turning point last night. The victim was not only raped, she was mutilated. He finished her off by putting the gun in her mouth. We'll probably have trouble identifying her."

Hutch felt his stomach churn at the description of what the victim had endured. He thanked the police officer and made his way back to the car, determined to find Starsky and get things straightened out. They needed to put their personal feelings aside and get this psycho off the street.

Starsky sat at the bar drinking a beer and talking to Huggy about the murdered rape victim. “Hug, we know who the creep is and can’t find him. He’s gone underground. I spent the whole damn day talkin’ to every snitch on the streets. No body knows nothin’ or else they just ain’t talkin’.”

“I hear you, man,” Huggy leaned closer, “He’s one scary dude. By the way, where’s the other half of the team?”

“No clue,” Starsky mumbled into his glass as he took another swig of beer.

“Yeah, well, he called here twice today looking for you. I mean, aren’t you two supposed to be partners, as in, ‘work together on the case until it’s solved’? Seems like a little team work might be cool about now.”

“Not anymore, my friend. I put in my request to Dobey for a new partner. Until it comes through, I’m gonna fly solo.” Huggy looked past the brooding face at the bar to see Hutch enter, his eyes sweeping the room before coming to rest on his partner.

Hutch made a beeline for the bar and pulled up a seat next to Starsky.

“Where’ve you been all day, partner?” Hutch asked, as he signaled Huggy to pour him a beer too. “We’ve got a case to solve, you know.”

Starsky didn’t bother to look up. “Been doin’ my job. Been lookin’ for Puchelli.”

“Starsk, why didn’t you wait for me at the crime scene?” Hutch leaned his head closer to Starsky’s. “I felt like a damn fool interrogating Pierce after he’d already given his report to you.”

“Sorry” Starsky replied, without a grain of remorse. He had had the entire day to think about his feelings toward Hutch. He knew he still loved the guy and would lay his life down for him, but right now, he needed distance—the more the better.

Just about everybody in Starsky’s life, up until Hutch came along, had been a disappointment. Now, his best friend had let him down too. Maybe they would get through this—maybe they wouldn’t. Right now, it was just too painful to talk about.

“We’ve got to put our heads together on this, Starsk. We’ve got to catch this son-of-a-bitch.”

“Fine,” Starsky said, not even glancing at Hutch. “I’ll give you a copy of my report when I get it typed up.”

“Not good enough,” Hutch said, his patience wearing thin, but struggling to keep his temper in check. He laid his hand on Starsky’s shoulder. “Starsk...” he began.

Starsky shrugged off his partner’s hand. “Hutch, didn’t Dobey tell you I’ve requested another partner? In the meantime, I’ll keep you posted on any progress I make.”

“Starsky, I want to talk—you know, talk about what’s going on with Kira and me,” Hutch lowered his voice, “Can we talk somewhere a little more private, buddy?”

“Nothin’ to talk about. You were right—I was wrong. Kira prefers you over me. I hope you’re both very happy.”

“Starsk, that’s what I’m trying to tell you. I mean, about Kira and me—”

Starsky turned and looked Hutch straight in the eyes. “Look, don’t you get it? Kira doesn’t matter to me. What matters to me is, I can’t trust you no more, Hutch. You know how that makes me feel? Huh?” The cerulean blue eyes mirrored the pain in his voice.

“I can’t be your partner, if I can’t trust you!” With that, Starsky slid from the stool, dropped some cash on the bar and quietly left, leaving a speechless Hutch in his wake.

Huggy looked on in amazement. He never would have believed anything could come between these two. But it looked like a woman finally had.

### *Chapter 6*

Hutch didn’t stay at Huggy’s long, but long enough to unload on his friend about the mess he had created between Starsky and himself. Looking back over the past few weeks, he realized he should have seen how deeply his partner was getting involved with Kira.

Starsky had been an emotional wreck after losing Terry and desperately needed someone in his life to love. Hutch had been as good a friend as he knew how—grieving with Starsky, sitting up with him during prolonged bouts of insomnia, letting him talk about Terry when the need came on him. So how had he managed to be so blind about this one area?

Huggy listened as Hutch spilled his guts and offered no words of repudiation. He knew how much these two guys cared about one another, so he was a little surprised things had gotten so bad, so fast. Once he was fairly certain Hutch had had his say, Huggy asked only one question, “Is she worth it, man? I mean, is she worth this pain? She is definitely one foxy chick,” he chuckled, “but I’ve seen you with better.”

“That’s just it, Hug, that’s what I was trying to tell Starsky. She isn’t worth it, not to me, and I don’t think to him either. The thing that keeps us alive on the streets, that keeps our sanity intact—the thing that makes us damn good cops is our friendship. ‘Me and Thee’—that’s always been our creed. Now he’s shut me out and won’t even listen.”

“He’ll come around, my brother. I just hope one of you doesn’t get himself killed in the meantime.”



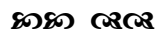
After leaving The Pits, Hutch decided to go back to the Sunset Hotel and see if Puchelli had made another appearance. Of course, the possibility of him being there was remote, but what better option did Hutch have? The APBs hadn’t turned up anything. Time was of the essence.

Hutch parked his bomb a block away. Although he was off duty, Hutch decided that without Starsky’s back up, it would only be sensible to call in and let the dispatcher know his location. He wasn’t crazy about going into a flophouse to look for the homicidal rapist on his own, but someone had to do something.

The stealthy detective made a quiet entrance, not bothering to wake the sleeping desk clerk to ask him if Puchelli was around. He would probably just tip off the slime-ball that Hutch was looking for him anyway.

As he approached the apartment door, Hutch heard noises coming from within. There really wasn't time to call for backup. This was the closest they had come to getting this guy, and Hutch wasn't about to blow it.

"Police, open up!" he shouted, simultaneously rapping the door with the barrel of the Magnum. The response from within was immediate. A shot rang out, as a slug blasted through the door, barely missing Hutch, who had had the good sense to step to the side before calling out to Puchelli. With that, Hutch kicked the door open just in time to see the murderer flee through the open window and climb the fire escape toward the roof of the building. Without giving a thought for his own safety, Hutch followed in hot pursuit.



Starsky had just left "Leila's Exotic Massage Salon" where he had been questioning a girl who called the police earlier in the day to say that she thought she could I.D. Puchelli's latest victim. He'd gotten her name when he checked in with Captain Dobey earlier in the evening. Although, like Hutch, his shift had ended a couple of hours ago, he was anxious to find out anything that may help solve this case.

As he cranked the engine of the Striped Tomato, Starsky heard Hutch's voice over the radio to the station dispatcher. He had missed most of the message, but was sure he heard Hutch say he was returning to the Sunset Hotel. Why hadn't he asked for back up?

"Dispatch, this is Zebra Three. Connie, did Detective Hutchinson ask for backup just now?"

"Negative, Zebra Three. Aren't you with him, Starsky?" the dispatcher asked.

"Not yet, but I will be in about five minutes." Starsky did a one-eight turn around in the middle of the street, slapped the red light on the roof and made tracks to the hotel.

*Damn it, Hutch. Why do you wanna do somethin' like this without back up? But I guess you wouldn't, if I hadn't acted like such an ass back there.*

The Torino just wasn't going fast enough to suit its driver. *Hang in there buddy, don't try to be a hero.* Just minutes before the car squealed around the last block before the hotel, the much dreaded words crackled through the dispatch radio.

"Zebra Three, Zebra Three, shots fired at 4480 Madison Street, possible officer in trouble. Starsky, did you hear me?" Connie added after the official statement.

"Ten-four, dispatch. I'm on it." The Torino skidded to an abrupt halt on the sidewalk in front of the grungy hotel. Starsky didn't even take time to close the car door as he vaulted into the lobby and took the stairs two at a time to the fourth floor. As he sprinted toward the apartment with gun in hand, Starsky heard two more shots ring out.

*"Oh, God, please, please let him be okay!"* was the prayer which kept replaying in Starsky's head. As he reached the apartment, it became obvious that the shooting match was not there, but most likely taking place on the roof.

Starsky ran to the window and followed the same path the criminal and Hutch had taken. Peeking over the edge of the roof, he could see Hutch crouched behind a large ventilator fan which was running full blast, creating a good deal of noise. He was trying to coax Puchelli out of hiding, offering to take him in without any further gunplay—assuring him of a fair trial.

Starsky didn't see Puchelli anywhere and decided to make a run for it to Hutch's hiding place. Once Hutch knew he was there, they would work in tandem to rein in the bastard. As was common with the two detectives, there would be little need for verbal communication between them.

Maintaining a low profile, Starsky crouched down and started toward his partner. He was diagonal from Hutch and hoped his partner didn't turn and shoot him by mistake. He tried to call out softly to get Hutch's attention without alerting Puchelli that it was now two against one. But the fan was just too noisy, so Starsky knew he'd just have to take his chances.

Starsky was less than five feet from his goal when he tripped over a pipe protruding from the roof. Trying to keep from falling, he stumbled forward, dropping his gun. To his horror, it skidded out of reach. At precisely that same minute, he saw Puchelli rise from behind another vent and take aim at Hutch's back.

There was no time for Starsky to retrieve his gun. There was only time to react. "H U U U UUUTCH!" he shouted as loud as he could, running toward Hutch in hopes of tackling him to the graveled roof top.

Hutch turned just in time to see Starsky's body take the full impact of the bullet meant for him. His friend was vaulted forward into his arms from the force of the blow.

## *Chapter 7*

As Starsky fell forward against Hutch, his eyes registered shock and disbelief. His only words were, "Hutch—stop him." To Hutch, it seemed like an eternity passed those next few seconds, as he was faced with the decision to stay with his friend, or to stop the animal who was raping and murdering innocent women. Hutch realized in that instant he may just have also become the bastard who murdered Starsky. With that thought, the decision was easy. He gently lowered Starsky to the rooftop, careful to lay him on his side.

"Starsk, you gonna be okay, buddy? Can you hang in there a few minutes?"

Starsky seemed far removed from his surroundings, but nodded and reached over to squeeze Hutch's arm. "Just get the turkey, Partner. I ain't goin' anywhere."

By now, Puchelli had taken cover once more and was frantically trying to figure an escape route. He had just killed a cop, and was planning to make it two. But he sure as hell wasn't planning to get himself killed in the process. Puchelli had no way of knowing the wrath he had just incurred with his decision to shoot Starsky.

Hutch was blind with fury, but fought to bring it under control. He knew that the faster he got Puchelli, the faster he could get help for Starsky.

"Give it up, Puchelli! Back up is on the way right now."

No response.

“We’ll have this whole block cordoned off in 10 minutes. You just shot a cop. Your best chance is to give up now. Once word gets out what you did to my partner, your life isn’t going to be worth spit!”

Hutch’s entreaty was met with two shots in rapid succession. He was rattled, but not so much so that he didn’t realize that Puchelli had only one bullet left. This bolstered his courage even more. Running on a mixture of rage and adrenaline, Hutch charged forward and fired two shots in the area he last saw Puchelli.

Puchelli panicked as he saw Hutch speeding toward him, obviously without fear or reason. He waited until he thought there was a clear shot, then stepped from behind his shield and fired at Hutch.

Unfortunately for Puchelli, Hutch was faster. He fired two shots, one striking the criminal in the chest—near the heart—and one nailing him in the right shoulder. Puchelli collapsed, but was still conscious when Hutch reached him.

“You got me, pig, but not before I killed your partner.

Don’t you forget that, pig. Don’t forget the look on his face when I shot him. Almost as good as those whores I took care of.”

His final breath was cut short as his heart stopped beating. Hutch fought the urge to kick the dead man square in the face. Somehow, he felt cheated. It was as if Puchelli went too easy.

Hutch hurried back to where Starsky lay and was alarmed to see the widening pool of blood as it flowed from his partner’s back. He kneeled down and removed his jacket, wadded it into a large ball and pressed it against the wound in an effort to staunch the flow of blood.

“Starsk, can you hear me, buddy?” He asked, barely above a whisper. “Starsky, try to listen to me. I need to get us some help. Will you be okay for another minute?”

Starsky’s eyes fluttered open momentarily. “Hutch, don’t leave. Gotta talk...don’t have much time.”

“Shhhh...don’t try to talk, we’ll have plenty of time for that later.”

“No,” Starsky answered, clinging tightly to Hutch's arm.

“Now ... I don’t wanna die with you mad at me.”

Suddenly, the door leading to the rooftop flung open as three police officers and Captain Dobey rushed onto the scene. Dobey immediately assessed the situation and used his hand-held radio to call for an ambulance and paramedics.

Relieved to see the Calvary arrive, Hutch sat down on the graveled roof and lifted Starsky’s head onto his lap. As the injured man lay on his side, Hutch took a clean handkerchief from his back pocket and gently wiped away the glistening sweat which had accumulated on Starsky’s face. His breathing was more labored, but he still struggled to speak.

“Hutch...sorry, I do trust ya...never stopped...”

“It’s okay partner. I’m the one who’s sorry. I screwed up. We’ll work it all out,” he said soothingly, then shouted over his shoulder, “Where the hell is that ambulance? Cap’n, can’t you do something?”

Dobey had quickly gone over to check on Puchelli before returning to where Starsky & Hutch were huddled on the rooftop. “Hang in there, Dave, help’s on the way,” Dobey said, in a warm, caring voice that the two detectives weren’t accustomed to hearing from their boss.

Hutch held the make-shift bandage to the wound, his fear mounting as the jacket became warm and sticky with the freely flowing blood of his partner. *Please don’t die, Starsky. I’m so sorry. I’m so sorry. I can’t live with myself if you do...* While these thoughts screamed through Hutch’s mind, he struggled to conceal from Starsky the seriousness of the situation.

“Starsk, sometimes I think you’ll do anything to get out of work. Do you think for one minute Cap’n Dobey’s going give you extra time off because of this?” he said, hoping to come across light-hearted, but failing miserably.

Starsky’s grip on Hutch’s arm gradually weakened.

“Listen, Partner...at least this time...you’re gonna get stuck...with the paperwork. You did get ‘em, didn’t you, Hutch? I mean, I sure as hell would hate to die...and you still not get ‘em.” The words grew weaker as Starsky faded into oblivion.

Hutch was completely undone by Starsky’s feeble attempt at humor. He tried to swallow the rising sob his throat. He hugged Starsky to him and quietly wept.

Hutch knew that his partner and friend was bleeding to death. In the distance he could hear the wail of the fast approaching ambulance. He only hoped they weren’t too late.

## ***Chapter 8***

The ambulance ride seemed to last for hours, though it was really only a matter of minutes. Hutch had insisted on going along, though Starsky was barely conscious of his presence.

Hutch continued a litany of encouragement, “Hang in there, Starsk. We’re almost there; don’t leave me now, buddy.” He wasn’t sure if his partner could hear him or not, but hoped he was getting through at some level.

The medical staff whisked the gurney into the emergency room and slammed the door in Hutch’s face. “Sorry, sir, no one allowed beyond this point,” the polite, but stern nurse told him. Within minutes, Captain Dobey arrived and began the tortuous waiting with Hutch.

Hutch rubbed his forehead, trying to stave off the tension headache that was mounting quickly. He knew it could be a long night and dreaded the waiting. Maybe he should call someone...Starsky’s mother, Huggy, Kira...

With the thought of Kira, Hutch stopped short. God, if he could only take back the last few days! The wave of guilt was overwhelming. He knew now the brief excitement of his involvement with the woman hadn't been worth the pain he'd caused his friend.

What if Starsky didn't make it? What if he died without Hutch having a chance to make it up to him? The thought was more than he could endure. Hutch jumped up from his seat and began pacing, no longer able to hold in the anxiety.

"Hutchinson—Ken, relax son," Dobey said soothingly. "It could be a long wait. Try not to get too worked up. You know he's strong and as stubborn as a mule."

"Cap'n, you don't understand," Hutch said. He felt an overpowering need to unburden himself of the guilt. "We kind of had a falling out and I've acted like a real jerk. I, well...I uh, haven't had a chance to make things right." Hutch looked down as he spoke.

"I know you two have been at odds for several days now. I know it's affected your work and I hoped you'd had a chance to resolve your differences. In all the time you two have been working for me, neither of you ever asked to be reassigned." Dobey shook his head in disbelief. "It must have been a doozy of a fight."

"It was," Hutch said quietly. "And I could've prevented it, but I didn't." Hutch rubbed his eyes, trying to discreetly brush away the tears lurking behind the lids.

"Well, he'll pull through, and you'll have a chance to clear it up." Captain Dobey awkwardly laid his hand on Hutch's shoulder. "You know Starsky's never stayed mad with you for any length of time. This time will be no different."

"Cap'n, the blood..." Hutch closed his eyes, remembering the dark pool staining the rooftop where Starsky had lain. "Did you see how much blood he lost? I think he went into shock."

Dobey didn't answer. He also believed that Starsky had gone into shock. The deathly white pallor of the detective's face as he was lifted into the ambulance had been a frightening sight for the veteran cop. He had seen his own partner bleed to death many years earlier, shortly after he had joined the force.

The next hour and a half passed in silence, as neither man could offer the other further encouragement. Hutch continued the incessant pacing and Dobey simply sat staring at the floor. Finally, the doctor appeared in the doorway and asked who was there with Detective Starsky.

"Right here," Hutch said anxiously. "How is he? Can I see him?"

"I'm Dr. Riser," he said. "And you are..."

"Detective Hutchinson. He's my partner. This is Captain Dobey. We're the closest thing to family he has here in LA."

The doctor nodded his understanding. "Well, he's a very lucky man. We've stopped the bleeding for now. It wasn't easy, as the bullet nicked a lung. We've given him two units of blood and I've ordered four more. We'll wait and see if that's enough. He was in shock when he arrived here, but I believe we've stabilized him for now."

Dobey and Hutch simultaneously let out a sigh of relief. The doctor noted this and hurried on, "However, he's not out of the woods yet. If we can prevent further internal bleeding, I think he stands a good chance of recovery. The next few hours will be critical."

"Can I see him?" Hutch asked again.

"He's unconscious, Detective," Dr. Riser answered. "But if it'll make you feel better to see him, I don't think it could do any harm. We'll be moving him to ICU in a few minutes. Once he's settled, you can go in and sit awhile. I can't honestly tell you when or if he'll regain consciousness this early in the game."

After what seemed a lifetime passed, a nurse escorted Hutch to ICU. Starsky presented a stark vision, his ghostly white face contrasted by the curly, midnight black hair. He lay motionless, his breathing shallow, but even. Hutch was encouraged that Starsky wasn't hooked up to any breathing apparatus, just the transfusion IV and several monitors which were recording his heartbeat, blood pressure and other vital statistics.

Hutch pulled a chair close to the bed and sat where he would be within Starsky's line of vision, should he unexpectedly open his eyes. "Starsk, I'm here," he said quietly, as he reached over and took his partner's hand. "I'm gonna stay with you, buddy."

There was no acknowledgment from the man who lay quietly clinging to life. But Hutch expected none. It just made him feel better, being able to say the words.

The allotted visiting time came and went, but Hutch made no effort to leave. The nurse came in, touched him lightly on the arm and told him he should leave now. "I need to be here," he told her simply. The nurse decided not to press the issue, and quietly left the room. It had been her experience that even with unconscious patients, having a loved one near by could be beneficial.

Eventually overcome by fatigue, Hutch laid his head against the bed railing and fell asleep. He woke when another nurse came in to hook up the sixth unit of blood. She encouraged Hutch to go home and rest, but he still refused to leave.

"He's doing much better," she offered. "The last lab report shows his blood count is coming back up. That indicates the internal bleeding has stopped. So perhaps he'll regain consciousness soon."

Hutch rubbed his eyes and rose to stretch his legs, "I can't leave yet," he said. "I have something important to tell him."

The nurse didn't argue. She and the others assigned to the ICU that night had decided Detective Hutchinson would be allowed to stay.

**END ORR**

Hutch woke again when his shoulder was gently prodded by Captain Dobey. "Ken, go get some coffee. You look like hell. I'll sit with him awhile."

Hutch fought his way up from the restless sleep in which he had been submersed. He stretched his stiff back and neck before standing to face his boss.

“Besides,” Dobby went on, “there’s a young lady in the waiting room who wants to see you. Kira heard about the shooting this morning when she arrived at work and insisted on coming right down.”

This was not welcome news to Hutch. He wasn’t sure yet what he wanted to say to Kira, but he was sure of one thing. He intended to end his relationship with her, whether Starsky pulled through this crisis or not. Even if she was sincere, but confused about her feelings for the two of them, Hutch would not let her destroy their friendship.

“Before you talk with her, I’d like to see you outside for a minute,” Dobby whispered. The two men stepped into the hallway.

“Hutch, after our talk last night, I realized that the problems between you and Starsky started about the same time Kira Clark was assigned to our department to work on the dance hall murders. I hadn’t requested her. Dan Parker, the Captain of her precinct, called me and said he would consider it a favor if I’d give her a chance to do some undercover work with us.” Dobby paused and cleared his throat before continuing.

“Well, I called him this morning and asked him if there was anything he’d failed to tell me about Detective Clark. It seems that she has a history of causing problems among her male co-workers. She apparently gets her kicks by playing one man against another. Parker sent her to us while he tried to straighten things out in his own department.”

Dobby looked Hutch in the eyes. “Look, I don’t know if something like that happened with you and Starsky, but if it did, don’t be too hard on yourself. You’re not the first.”

Hutch felt a surge of emotions, a combination of anger and disbelief, as he digested what Captain Dobby was telling him. He had been such a fool! Kira didn’t care about either of them. It was all a game to her. The conniving bitch! Well, he’d put an end to it here and now.

“Hutch, calm down before you talk with her,” Dobby suggested. Hutch held up his hand to stop him from saying more.

“I’ll handle it, Cap’n.” he said as he strode forcefully toward the waiting room.

## ***Chapter 9***

When Hutch entered the waiting room, Kira rushed toward him and threw her arms around his waist, “Oh, Hutch, I came as soon as I got the news. Why didn’t you call me?” She looked up at him, posing her lips in a pouting expression. Hutch reached down and peeled her arms from around his waist. His face was contorted with a look of utter disgust.

“Listen, lady, I don’t know what kind of sick game you’re playing, but it’s over. You don’t give a *damn* about me *or* about Starsky. You never did. How could you? You don’t even know the meaning of love, much less, *how* to love.”

Hutch looked past Kira, then shook his head in disbelief, “I just can’t believe I was stupid enough to buy into the line of crap you’ve been feeding me.”

Kira took a step back, intimidated by the deadly quiet in Hutch’s voice.

“Just be glad that my partner wasn’t killed on that rooftop before I came to my senses and saw you for what you really are.”

Only the fire in Hutch’s hardened blue eyes hinted at the depth of his anger. He was deceptively calm as he said, “Now, I suggest to find someone else to play your mind games on. Because,” he pointed his finger at Kira as he spoke “I’ve got your number now, and you will never, I repeat, *never* have another opportunity to come between my partner and me.”

With that final word, he turned and walked down the hall toward the cafeteria to have that much needed cup of coffee Captain Dobby had suggested. Huggy stepped from the shadows where he had silently witnessed the encounter, and followed Hutch down the hall, leaving Kira reeling with the realization that she had finally been exposed for what she truly was.

Huggy clapped his hand on Hutch’s shoulder, “You are one bad dude, my man. One bad dude.”

**END ORC**

“Detective Hutchinson, your friend is awake. He’s asking for you,” the nurse said, as she approached Hutch and Huggy in the cafeteria. Hutch leapt from his chair and practically sprinted down the hallway to the ICU.

As he neared Starsky’s bed he saw his partner’s eyes were open, though still a bit glazed from the medication. “Hey, buddy, how’re you doing?” Hutch asked as he reached over and took Starsky’s hand.

“Better than you, Blondie. Ya look like somethin’ the cat dragged in,” Starsky came back. His voice was still weak and the words slurred, but the spunk was there. Hutch felt as though a great weight had been lifted from his shoulders.

“Listen, Hutch,” Starsky said in a much more serious tone, “I wanna apologize for the way I been actin’. I mean, if you’re happy with Kira, I wanna—like you said, ‘bow out gracefully’.”

Hutch tried to interrupt, but his partner ran on, not allowing him to speak. “And all that stuff about not wantin’ to be your partner no more, well, it was bull.”

“Starsk, would you just listen a minute?” Hutch finally got a word in edgewise. “I’m the one who’s been acting like the village idiot. The woman was bad news. I’m ashamed that I let things get out of hand.” Hutch smiled at the expression on Starsky’s face.

“I was really worried for awhile there, buddy, that I wasn’t going to have a chance to set the record straight. I was afraid I wasn’t even gonna have a chance to thank you for backing me up, for saving my life back there.”

Starsky wrinkled his brow, confused by this turn of events, but mumbled, “Piece a cake,” then flashed one of those killer smiles Hutch knew so well.

“You know—when the chips are down, like we’ve always said, ‘me and thee’.”

Starsky wanted to ask more questions, wanted to understand what had happened to cause Hutch's change of heart about Kira, but he was exhausted now and didn't have the strength to pursue it further.

Hutch saw he was drifting to sleep again. "All you need to know right now, Starsk, is that you're my partner, and we're gonna stick together. And next time, we'll talk it through, okay?" Starsky's only reply was a smile.

As Starsky's eyes slowly closed, Dr. Riser entered the room with the medical chart. "Your friend is doing fine now," he told Hutch. "His vitals look good and I don't think he'll need further transfusions. We'll keep him a few days and monitor him closely, in case the bleeding starts again. But frankly, I don't expect that to happen."

Suddenly, Hutch felt very, very tired. He smiled at the doctor and thanked him for the good news. Hutch sat down beside the bed and watched Starsky's even breathing for a few minutes, to assure himself that the doctor was right.

He could go home now. He needed the rest. In a few days, Starsky would be honking the horn on the Striped Tomato, complaining at Hutch to hurry up—they had another case to solve...

***The End***