

Picking Up The Pieces

By Tibbie B

Chapter Four

“Well, hello, Handsome Hutch,” Alice drawled. She stood in the doorway of the broken-down apartment she called both home and work. Wearing nothing but a transparent silky nightgown that clung to every curve and round of her body, she personified most men’s idea of seductive. Despite her sexuality, Sweet Alice had retained a sort of innocence that few men could resist. She looked up at Hutch coyly and asked in a breathy voice, “Change your mind about our spending a little time together?”

Hutch smiled at her. “Afraid not, Alice,” he said gently.

Starsky, who’d been standing right behind Hutch, poked his head around Hutch’s shoulder. “Hi, Alice.”

“Oh, Starsky, I didn’t see you back there, sugar.” Alice stepped aside, gesturing for them to come in. “You’re lookin’ mighty fine these days,” she cooed. “Maybe if your partner’s too busy, *you’d* like to stay awhile.”

Starsky smiled at her, taken aback. This was the first time she’d included him in her campaign to seduce Hutch. “I don’t think so. Wouldn’t wanna make my partner here look bad,” he answered humorously.

Hutch cut his eyes toward Starsky disapprovingly, but decided to ignore the jibe.

Familiar with the routine, Alice came right to the point, “Well, then...what brings you fellas here today? Lookin’ for somebody? You know I’ll help you if I can.”

Starsky dropped into a raggedy blue lounge chair, while Hutch sat down on the sofa, Alice close enough to reach out and touch him.

“You know us too well,” Hutch said, smiling down at the small figure beside him. “That’s why we’re here, all right,” he confessed. “We need your help to find the new player who’s beating up his girls.”

Alice’s face went deathly white. “Now, Hutch, darlin’, don’t ask me for that. I may not have the best life in the world, but it’s mine, and I’d like to keep right on breathin’. Who knows, maybe one of these days you’ll decide to make an honest woman of me.” She smiled sweetly, her voice teasing, but both cops knew she was dead serious.

“Alice.” Resting his elbows on his knees, Starsky leaned forward, his hands locked together before him. “Alice, did you know one of the girls died? She was sixteen. Sixteen. Don’t ya wanna help us put this creep away?”

Alice's eyes turned to meet Starsky's. He couldn't help but think they were the eyes of one twice Alice's tender years. "Well, of course I do, sugar." Her voice quivered slightly. "But I'm scared. I don't mind admitting it."

"We'll give you protection," he offered.

"How are you goin' to protect me, Starsky? I work the street, darlin'. You goin' to be there, by my side every night? Could be bad for business, don't you think?"

Hutch reached out and stroked her cheek with the back of his hand. "Alice, we'll see that he's locked up for keeps. He can't hurt you or anyone else if he's behind bars."

Alice considered his words for a moment, then smiled sadly. "Honey, you can put him behind bars, but that doesn't mean he'll stay there. How many of us do you think he'd kill before you pick him up a second time? You know the kind of justice folks like me get."

Hutch dropped his eyes, not knowing how to reply. After a moment's silence, Starsky piped up, "We'll keep you totally out of the picture. Just give us a location—we'll do the rest."

Alice looked up, turning her head toward the window, staring out at the black smoke billowing from the chimney of the tire factory no more than a hundred yards from the apartment building. When she turned back, her eyes, filled with unshed tears, met Hutch's and saw there the tenderness that always made her heart melt.

"He has a place on Clairmont and Fifty-sixth Street. Old abandoned boarding house. You can't miss it. Still has the sign out front, 'The Smith House.' I hear he bought it outright for back taxes. Has it fixed up real nice, too. Most of the girls are under twenty 'cause he specializes in the younger set. He goes by the name of Willie Green, but his girls call him Big Daddy."

She turned to Starsky. "Don't forget—you didn't talk to me. You found this out on your own, okay?"

"Sure," Starsky agreed. "You have our word."

When both men stood up to leave, Hutch dug his wallet out of his back pocket, took out a twenty and pressed it into her palm. Alice looked down, then sought his eyes again. "I don't want your money, Handsome Hutch. You keep it. Just get this creep out of town. He's bad for business."

"Keep it," Hutch told her. He reached down and gently brushed her cheek with his lips, before following Starsky to the door.

“Ya’ll come back when you can stay awhile,” she said, her voice soft and Southern as a plantation belle’s.

“We’ll be seein’ you. Thanks,” Starsky said, gently closing the door behind them.



Hutch gave Starsky a jab in the ribs to roust him from his nap. The evening had dragged on to the point that the dark-haired detective had been unable to keep his eyes open. Hutch had listened to the car radio and fought the urge to fall asleep himself. Just as he thought he’d have to ask Starsky to relieve him a little earlier than they’d agreed upon, a dark blue Lincoln Continental pulled up in front of the house.

“Starsk, wake up. I think that’s our guy,” Hutch told him.

Sitting up and shaking his head to clear it, Starsky looked in the direction of the car and strained his eyes, trying to focus on the figure as he disappeared through the front door of the house. “Too late, you missed him,” Hutch said. “He’s a big guy, black, two hundred pounds, maybe two-fifty. Had enough gold around his neck to stake half the casinos in Vegas.”

“Terrific. A big guy like that should be real proud of himself, beatin’ up women who’re probably a third his size,” Starsky mumbled, running a hand through his hair. “What now? We don’t have an excuse to bust him.”

“I don’t know...maybe just wait awhile, keep our ears open. Maybe catch him in the act of smacking another of his girls around. Hey, where’re those binoculars?” Hutch checked the back seat and then the glove compartment before Starsky could answer.

“In the Torino, dummy.”

Exasperated, Hutch snapped back, “Fat lot’a good they’re doing us there.”

“Hey—it was your idea to drive this traveling garbage disposal today,” Starsky reminded him.

“Like we could really hope to conduct surveillance in that striped tomato?” Hutch came back.

“Yeah, well in addition to it bein’ clean and more comfortable, that ‘tomato’ can run circles around this bomb any day!”

“Who the hell said anything about running circles? We’re supposed to be undercover here, Starsk!”

Starsky wasn't sure why, but he found comfort in their bickering. It was familiar, and harmless—a pastime they'd indulged in countless times during happier days. Smiling to himself, Starsky shot back. "Oh, really? Well, if that's the case, why aren't you out there 'surveilling' from those bushes under the window? Huh? You wouldn't need binoculars from there!"

"'Surveilling' isn't even a word, Starsky. This is getting ridiculous. I can't talk to you when you're like this."

"Whattaya mean 'when I'm like this?' What's *this*?"

"Cranky."

"Cranky?" Starsky drew back his head and looked at Hutch like he'd lost his mind.

"Cranky," Hutch said resolutely. "When you first wake up, you're mad at the world. You've always been like that."

"Have not."

"Have to."

"Have not!"

"That's it!" Hutch held up his hand, cutting short Starsky's next 'have not.' "We're staying here another hour. If nothing happens, we'll leave, then come back out here tomorrow. At least we've made the guy, and now we know what he looks like and where to find him."

"Sounds like a plan to me," Starsky agreed. "But tomorrow, I drive."



End of Chapter Four