

“Repercussions”

by TibbieB



Hutch turned off the hair dryer, wiped his hands on the dishtowel, and hurried to the door. He thought he heard someone knocking, but with the dryer noise, couldn't be certain. Not waiting to see if there was another rap, he swung the door open to find Starsky standing there, his hair disheveled, looking as though he'd just crawled out of bed. His wrinkled blue plaid shirt was buttoned unevenly, leaving an extra buttonhole at the bottom. With his left arm still in a sling, it was obvious Starsky had had more than a little difficulty getting dressed. He leaned wearily on the cane in his right hand, the strain of making his way up the stairs etched in his face.

“Hey, buddy, come on in,” Hutch said, opening the door wider and stepping aside. Realizing Starsky was alone, Hutch asked, “How'd you get here? I thought the doctor said you couldn't drive for another week.”

“I took a taxi,” Starsky said. His eyes took in the room, checking to see if anyone else was there. “I guess I should have called first. Am I interrupting anything?”

“Oh yeah—big time assignment underway. I'm in the middle of defrosting my freezer.” Hutch gestured toward the refrigerator, its freezer door standing open. Bundles of frozen food were stacked on the kitchen counter and a hair drier lay on the table. “Not exactly an exciting way to spend my day off, but the door wouldn't close anymore,” Hutch said with a smile.

Starsky chuckled half-heartedly, the seriousness never leaving his indigo eyes. The superficiality of his laugh did not escape Hutch.

“Actually, I was about to take a break,” Hutch added. “How about a cup of coffee?”

“Sounds good,” Starsky answered.

“Sit down, I'll bring it to you,” Hutch told him.

Starsky cleared the scattered newspaper from the sofa with his good hand and sat down, watching Hutch pour two mugs of steaming coffee and doctor Starsky's liberally with cream and sugar. Handing Starsky the cup, Hutch took a seat in the chair across from him.

“So, how’s the shoulder feeling?” Hutch asked, sipping his own scalding coffee gingerly. “Looks like you still don’t have much range of motion,” he added, biting back the temptation to tease Starsky about the haphazardly buttoned shirt.



“Better than a week ago,” Starsky answered. “But it’s still hard to find a comfortable sleeping position.”

“Well, partner, I guess you can’t take a bullet at close range and not expect it to do some major damage. I’m just glad you’re up and about after only three weeks. You lost a lot of blood, you know.”

“Yeah,” was all Starsky said. He looked up at Hutch, his gaze intense.

Hutch waited, but Starsky said nothing more. Five seconds passed, then ten; finally, Starsky looked down at the mug in his hand and took a sip.

“Something on your mind?” Hutch asked, uneasiness feathering the back of his neck.

“I, uh, it’s just...I’ve been doin’ a lot of thinking since the shooting,” Starsky began. “Too much time on my hands, I guess.”

Hutch waited, not wanting to break Starsky’s train of thought. Obviously, what he had to say wasn’t coming easily. But when he did not continue, Hutch said, “That’s only natural, Starsk. I’ve been doing a lot of thinking myself.”

Believing he knew where the conversation was headed, Hutch added, “I thought for awhile that there was no way we would both make it out of the back of that restaurant alive. But we did. We worked together, and like always, we found a way. Butch and Sundance, right?”

Starsky’s dark head bobbed up and down in agreement, but his eyes stayed focused on the coffee mug.

“Do you want to talk about it?” Hutch asked. “I mean, about what you’re feeling?”

Finally looking up, Starsky answered, “I don’t know that it will do any good to talk about it, Hutch.”

Hutch reached over and laid an encouraging hand on Starsky’s good shoulder. “Well, it can’t hurt. Anytime a person goes through something like this, the shrinks say it’s a good idea to get it out in the open and talk to someone you trust about how you feel.”

“You know I trust you,” Starsky said, “but I’m not so sure talking will change anything.”

Hutch leaned back, studying his partner’s face. Why hadn’t he noticed those deep lines around Starsky’s mouth before? Or the dark smudges beneath his eyes, betraying his inability to sleep? Why hadn’t it occurred to him that Starsky was dealing with more than just the *physical* pain of healing from a life-threatening wound? What about the emotional repercussions? Of course Hutch had been busy, hustling to keep up their caseload since Starsky had been out on sick leave, but now he felt a stab of guilt that he hadn’t paid more attention to what was going on in Starsky’s head. Hutch cringed inwardly at his own thoughtlessness.

“Try me,” he said gently. “You know that anything you say to me, stays between us.”

Starsky leaned back too now, wincing as the wound in his back came in contact with the sofa. Had it really been three weeks since the shootout at the Italian restaurant? Every time he closed his eyes, the scene replayed in his mind—coming out of the men’s room, seeing Hutch at gunpoint, Teresa in the line of fire. It all happened so fast. Then, he seemed to move in slow motion as he went for his gun. And in an instant, the searing, white-hot pain tearing through his body, slamming him against the wall. As he fell to the floor, stunned, unaware of the gravity of his injuries, his greatest fear had been Hutch’s reaction. That he’d do something stupid to get himself killed.

Starsky blinked, focusing on the here and now, pushing back the memory.

“Starsk?” Hutch said, sitting forward, resting his elbows on his knees. “You okay?”

Starsky swallowed hard, his Adam’s apple bobbing with the effort. “Yeah. Yeah, I’m fine.”

“Are you still having a lot of pain?” Hutch asked.

“Nothin’ I can’t handle,” Starsky answered. “I just hate being cooped up in that apartment, not being able to drive. Staring at the same four walls.”

“Must be hard,” Hutch empathized. “I’ve sure missed you at work. Dobby yells at me twice as much without you around to take half the blame for everything that goes wrong.” This solicited the first genuine smile from Starsky since his arrival.

“Cap’n came by to see me yesterday,” he told Hutch. “Said he was just making sure I wasn’t goofing off. But he brought over a casserole that Edith had made, and hung around long enough to watch three innings of the Redskins game with me.”

The two men laughed, both amused by their boss’s covert concern for Starsky. “Has to keep up the tough guy image,” Hutch said.

“Yeah, I guess he does,” Starsky agreed. Starsky’s smile faded slowly as an uncomfortable silence descended over them again.

Searching for something to say, Hutch asked, “Coffee okay?”

“Hmmm?” Starsky said, his thoughts having wandered again.

“The coffee?”

“Oh, yeah. Terrific,” he said, then self-consciously sipped the now warm liquid. Starsky looked up and saw from Hutch’s expression that he was waiting for him to say more.

“Look, Hutch, I wanna ask you something.”

“Sure. Ask away,” Hutch said.

“Does it ever get to you?”

“Does what get to me?”

“You know,” Starsky said, tipping his head, watching Hutch’s reaction. “The way we live. Everything we do is tied to our being cops. Every day we face the possibility that we could be blown away.”

Hutch leaned back now and studied his friend’s face. He knew he had to choose his words carefully. “I guess I try not to think about it,” he said honestly. “If I did, I’m afraid I might hesitate. And to hesitate could cost one, or both of us our lives.”

Starsky leaned forward now, a glimmer of hope in his eyes. “That’s exactly what I’m talkin’ about. Should a person go through life thinking every day may be his last? I mean, do *normal* people live like this? Or are we some sort of ‘adrenaline junkies’?”

“I don’t know, Starsk. I guess that could have something to do with it. But there are a lot of people in the world who put their lives on the line everyday. I suppose to be good at it, you have to love what you do. Are you trying to say you don’t want to be a cop anymore? That this isn’t the job for you?”

Starsky sighed, then set the cup down on the coffee table. “I don’t know what I’m sayin’. I’m just trying to work it all out in my head, that’s all.”

“That’s understandable,” Hutch conceded. “You could have died. That’s the kind of reality that makes a man stop and think. To be completely honest, I wasn’t very optimistic that we’d get out there without someone dying. But I knew we couldn’t just sit there and wait for you to bleed to death while that psycho, Joey, and his partner murdered Vic Monty in cold blood either.”

Starsky looked at him for a long moment. “You’re right. We’re both too stubborn to give up—regardless of the odds. And just because the mark was Monty doesn’t make murder okay.” Then his expression changed to one of frustration. “But all I wanted was a nice, quiet, Italian dinner after a long day of bustin’ bad guys. Is that asking for too much?”

“I don’t think so,” Hutch said. “All I wanted was to come back here and make a couple of omelets. But, I guess maybe it was fate that you and I were at that place when we were. Otherwise, a lot of innocent people would have died that night, Starsk. You and I both know that once Vic Monty was dead, they would’ve killed the others.”

“Yeah, I know. They couldn’t afford any witnesses,” Starsky conceded. He leaned back and was quiet for a moment, mulling over what Hutch had said.

“Can you honestly say you don’t love this job, Starsk?” Hutch asked.

“I admit, I do feel a sense of purpose in what we do,” he conceded. “And I know that I wouldn’t want to try to face it everyday with anyone but you as my partner.”

Hutch smiled at this, but said nothing.

“There are days when I feel like we’re making a real difference, Hutch. But then, sometimes, like when they turn the same creeps back out on the street to do it all over again, I feel like we’re laying our lives on the line for nothin’.”

“I agree,” Hutch said. “But we both know that’s the system, buddy. And who’s to say that maybe someday, cops like us can’t change even that?”

Starsky snorted, implying he did not find that likely to happen. “You’re right about one thing. I love this job. I can’t see myself doing anything else. But I suppose what it all boils down to is, I’d just like to have a normal life once in awhile. Ya know, go out on dates with beautiful ladies and not worry about being called in to work; be able to spend time with friends and not worry about being recognized by some punk we busted who thinks he has a score to settle.”

A hint of a smile played on Hutch’s lips as he offered, “And have a nice Italian dinner without getting shot up?”

Starsky laughed. “Exactly!” Hutch laughed too, seeing the amusement now twinkling in Starsky’s eyes.

Hutch stood up. “Tell you what. Give me ten minutes to clean up, and I’ll take you out for that Italian dinner. My treat. We’ll go anywhere you like. And I promise, if there’s any shooting—I’ll take the bullet this time.”

“That’s nice of you, partner,” Starsky said, tongue in cheek. “But I think what I’d really enjoy is hanging out here. But I *am* hungry. Do you think you could stir up a couple of those terrific homemade omelets of yours?” he asked with a grin.

The End
July 2006