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Smile For The Camera

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Chapter 1

Starsky threw the Torino in gear and pulled out into the flow of traffic, his face grim with anger. Hutch dared a sideways glance at his partner, hoping Starsky wouldn't see the smile beginning to crinkle the corners of his eyes. Fortunately, Sam, whose canine face perpetually wore a look of amusement, chose that exact moment to pop his big head over the back seat, creating a diversion until Hutch could get his urge to laugh out loud under control.

"I don't wanna hear it," Starsky warned. Sam's eyes darted back and forth between the two men, reading their moods and body language. *Tense...*

"I wasn't going to say anything." The silence was uneasy, as Hutch bit back the words, 'I told you so.' Sam, unsure of the reason for Starsky's bad mood, sensed now might not be a good time to try and join them in the front seat. He backed off, instead, planting his butt on the back seat and quietly waited for the tension to pass.

"What ever happened to professional courtesy? Huh? I mean, we *are* both cops," Starsky complained.

Hutch considered his words carefully, realizing whatever he said wasn't going to set well with his partner. Perhaps honesty *was* the best policy. "If you hadn't been speeding, he wouldn't have stopped us."

"I was on police business."

"Oh, give me a break, Starsk. I don't see how you can call our going to pick up a pizza, 'police business'." Hutch peered over the top of his sunglasses, waiting for Starsky's predictable nonsensical response.

"Well, we have to eat, don't we? We'll be on duty in an hour. I don't think it's too much to ask that we should have some dinner before loggin' in."

Having recognized the word 'eat', the eager dog decided to rejoin the discussion. This time, he inched over closer to Hutch, though. At the moment, the blond seemed to be more approachable than Starsky.

A wry smile played upon Hutch's lips, as he reached up and leisurely scratched Sam under the chin. "That's a pretty big stretch, pal. Besides, the speeding ticket isn't the issue here. What you're really in trouble about is, driving without a license. Better hope Dobby doesn't hear about it."

"I've got a license. It's just expired a little," Starsky retorted.

"A little? How does a driver's license expire 'a little'? That makes about as much sense as saying a woman's 'a little pregnant.' Starsk, you were supposed to get it renewed last month—before your birthday!" No longer able to hold back, Hutch blurted out, "I told you to get your driver's license renewed, but you never did it. So you don't have anyone to blame but yourself."

Starsky whizzed in and out among the cars, skillfully dodging fenders and bumpers as he went. "I hate it when you say that."

"Say what?" Hutch feigned a look of innocence.

"You know what... 'I told you so.' You ain't exactly torn up about this, are ya?" Starsky cut his eyes toward Hutch and gave him an 'I dare you to deny it' look.

In an effort to disguise an impending smile, Hutch licked his lips. He failed miserably. "Not really," he confessed. Infinitely glad to see *someone* smile, Sam snaked out his big tongue and gave Hutch's left cheek a good washing.

"Okay, smart-guy. We'll go right now." Starsky did a 180 turn around, causing cars behind, and on either side, to screech on their brakes, in an attempt to get out of his way. Sam careened across the back seat, hanging on for dear life with both front paws. Despite this desperate endeavor, he still collided with Starsky's shoulder before losing his grip and sliding down onto the back floorboard.

"Starsky! Look out, will ya!" Hutch clung to the dashboard like a drowning man to a lifesaver. "If you have an accident while driving with an expired license, they'll throw your butt in jail!"

"Don't get your shorts in a wad, okay? I'm drivin', not you. My license may be expired, but that doesn't mean I can't still drive circles around you." Just then, he realized Sam's face had disappeared from his rear view mirror.

"Sam?" Starsky's eyes shot worriedly from left to right, covering the whole back seat via the rear view mirror. He'd become downright attached to the big lug. What if he'd flown out the back window when Starsky was doing that tricky maneuver? "Hutch, where's Sam?"

Hutch leaned over the back of the seat and made instant eye contact with Sam, who for reasons of self-preservation, was cowering in the floorboard. He decided it was as good a place as any to wait for whatever storm had Starsky riled up, to pass.

“He’s on the floorboard. You scared the crap out of him!” Hutch hoped this realization would shame Starsky into slowing down.

“Sam? Sam, come on up, boy,” Starsky coaxed, hanging his right arm over the back of the seat, groping for the big dog’s head to give it a pat.

Cautiously, the black and rust-brown noggin began to rise. First, only coal-black brows, then two huge, worried, chocolate-drop eyes. Soon, his whole head eased up and rested on Starsky’s shoulder, nuzzling against his cheek.

Despite his bad humor, Starsky couldn’t resist smiling. “Sorry ‘bout that, Big Dog.” He scratched the dog’s flopped-over ear with his right hand while continuing to maneuver the Torino with his left. Something about this enormous, innocent critter always got through to the tough cop, bringing out his soft side...the one that few living beings had witnessed, aside from Hutch—and now, Sam.

Starsky slowed the car down as they approached the driver’s license office, then whipped into the parking lot and took the first available slot. Deciding it was safe to surface all the way, Sam climbed out of his hiding place. The big dog reclaimed his throne on the back seat and eagerly waited to be told he could join them on whatever mission they had in mind.

“You comin’?” Starsky asked Hutch, as he opened the door and hopped out of the car.

“You can’t get your license in thirty minutes. We’ll be late for work. And we’ve got that briefing with Dobey and the Commissioner on the Connors case.”

“How long can it take to get my picture taken and fill out a little card, huh?” He rounded the front of the Ford, and opened Hutch’s door. “Come on, Blintz. You’re wasting valuable time whinin’. I’m tellin’ ya—piece ‘o cake. In and out. You’ll see.”

Reluctantly, Hutch stepped out of the car while Starsky rolled down the windows for Sam. When Starsky closed the door, Sam visibly drooped, disappointed this would be a ‘stay and wait’ stop. Then Starsky reached into his pocket and dug out a large milkbone, slipping it to Sam as a peace offering. He bent his head through the window and spoke softly to the dog.

“Be a good boy and wait here, okay? Somebody’s got’a keep an eye on the Tomato, and as I see it, you’re the best man for the job.” Sam licked him on the hand before accepting the biscuit, then settled down on the seat to enjoy his snack.

Hutch followed Starsky up the sidewalk to the State Department of Motor Vehicle Building. As soon as he opened the door, they were met by a long line of people, most wearing dour expressions, impatient from having stood in line too long.

“This is hopeless, Starsk. Let’s go. You can come back tomorrow, after our shift is over.”

“Now wait a minute, will ya? I can get up to the counter. You won’t have to wait long.”

“What are you—?”

Before Hutch could finish his question, Starsky had bypassed the line, and confidently swaggered up to the counter. Wearing what he perceived as his most appealing smile, he took out his badge and presented it to a perky little clerk with wide, expressive eyes, and a friendly smile that prominently featured a wide gap between her two front teeth. Never to be undone by such details, Starsky poured on the charm all the heavier. The clerk was overtly flattered by the attention of someone with Starsky’s dark, good looks.

“May I help you?” Her voice was soft, and more than a little nervous.

Starsky tried to inconspicuously read the plastic, engraved name badge pinned cockeyed on the pocket of her plain, brown uniform shirt. “Well...uh...Debbie, I’m sure you can,” he began. Leaning on the counter, his weight on one elbow, he looked down at the homely little face. “You see, I’ve got a little problem. I have to renew my license, and I’m gonna be late for an important meeting. Police business, you know.” He smiled again, dazzling the impressionable young woman even more.

“What’s the problem here?”

The clerk seemed to physically shrink before Starsky’s eyes, as a grim looking, granite-faced woman came up behind her. The broad-shouldered woman wore her drab, gray hair pulled back severely from her face, drawing attention to a dark, ‘larger than life’ mole in the crevices beside her left eye. Her uniform was starched stiff, every crease in place. The name badge, emblazoned with the moniker ‘Henrietta Bernstein, Supervisor’, was—unlike Debbie’s—straight enough to calibrate a carpenter’s level by.

“This...this...gentleman...I mean...officer...” Debbie stuttered, and teetered back and forth on first her right, then her left foot.

Starsky smiled at the formidable looking woman, redirecting his charm. “I was just tellin’ the young lady here, I have a police emergency, and I need to get my license renewed.” He tossed a smug look over his shoulder at his partner before continuing.

Hutch’s eyes rolled back in his head as he watched Starsky embark on “The Impossible Dream”—friendly, red-tape free, service from a civil servant.

Snatching Starsky's badge from his hands, the imposing woman squinted through the thick bifocals perched on the end of her nose, and examined it with the scrutiny one might give a rare artifact. Then, unexpectedly, she slapped it down on the counter and shoved it back toward him.

"You'll have to wait your turn, Officer...Starsky," she announced with an authoritative tone, loud enough for the rest of the customers to hear.

His smile diminished only slightly, as he decided to try another approach. "Starsky...*Detective* Starsky," he corrected. "I don't think you understand. Ya see, I've got this important meeting with the Police Commissioner and my Cap'n in thirty minutes; and my license," he held the laminated card up before her as he talked, "is a little expired." Starsky leaned forward and lowered his voice, conspiratorially. "And...well...I got a ticket on my way to work, and I can't report in 'til I take care of it." He hoped to appeal to her more understanding side, as he offered his most engaging smile. After all, they *both* worked in law enforcement.

"No, I don't think YOU understand. You shouldn't have let it expire in the first place. Pretty irresponsible for a hotshot detective, if you ask me." With that, she yanked the driver's license from his hand. "I'll have to keep this, for now."

Starsky's mouth dropped open, speechless for once, as he stared in horror at the indomitable woman who now had possession of his driver's license.

"Now get in line with everybody else, buster! We don't play favorites around here."

Once he recovered his voice, Starsky blurted out, "Hey! Wait a minute! What do think you're doin'?"

"This license is no longer valid. I'm impounding it." She glared back at him defiantly.

Realizing his error, the dark-haired detective said a little more kindly, "Look, let's be reasonable, hmmm? How am I supposed to get to work? You wouldn't really wanna get me into trouble with my Cap'n, would ya?"

"That's not my problem, Officer Starky. I suggest you get in line now, and maybe, *just maybe*, you'll still have time to make it." With that, she marched back to her own station.

Starsky pointed his finger at her and fumed, "Come back here! Give my license back!"

Ignoring his outburst, she loudly announced, "NEXT!"

The timid little clerk looked up at him meekly. "Sorry..."

Defeated for the moment, Starsky left the counter and headed toward the end of the line, where Hutch had so wisely held his place. However, he walked right past his partner, signaling with the jerk of his head for Hutch to follow.

Hutch was silent until they neared the Torino. He looked over at his partner's sullen, red face. Not sure if Starsky was angry, or just embarrassed, Hutch reluctantly asked, "So, are we leaving? What's the deal? And what was all the shouting about?"

"That...that...oversized, army tank, took my license! She just took it!"

"What?" Hutch had watched the exchange from a distance, but hadn't realized she'd actually *taken* Starsky's license.

"I'm tellin' ya, she just *took it and kept it!*"

Spotting them from the car window, Sam began his seat dance, hoping to speed up their journey back to where he faithfully stood guard over the Striped Tomato.

"So, what next?" Hutch picked up his pace to keep in step with Starsky, whose agitated gate widened with each stride.

"I guess I come back after our shift. Hopefully, *Herr Commandant* won't be here!" They reached the car and came to a halt beside the window where the dog stood wagging his tail deliriously, and contemplating a headstand, if necessary, to get their attention.

Hutch's lips twitched, as he extended his hand to Starsky, palm up.

The other's brow arched quizzically. "What?"

"Give me the keys."

"No way," came the adamant refusal.

"Be reasonable, Starsk. We have ten minutes to make a twenty minute drive, if we have any chance at all of getting to our meeting on time."

"I don't see how you can get us there any faster than I can. I mean, what's the difference who's drivin'?"

"The difference, my friend, is that if I get stopped for speeding, I get a ticket. You get stopped for speeding—twice in the same day, *and* without a driver's license, they'll haul you off to jail."

Starsky snorted disgustedly and slapped the keys into Hutch's palm. He rounded the front of the Torino and went to the passenger's side. Never one to be choosy when it came time to greet one of his humans, Sam bounded to that side of the car and juttied his

oversized forepaws out the window, his tail beating a tattoo on the seat while he waited. *First come, first served*, was his motto.

Even in his present, sorry mood, Starsky didn't have the heart to scold the affectionate beast. "Hey, boy. Jump in back." Starsky patted the Rottie's head, then waited for Sam to evacuate the seat before opening the car door.

Hutch slid in behind the steering wheel, dropped his shades over his eyes, and started the ignition. He chanced a glance at Starsky's profile and, as expected, saw he was none too pleased about relinquishing his keys. Hutch knew he was just asking for it, but couldn't resist razzing Starsky a little. He stomped the gas pedal, revving the engine, watching the tach shoot up into the red zone.

"Hey, watch it, will ya!" Starsky scowled.

"Oh, sorry..." Hutch said, with little conviction, as he floored it again.

"Knock it off! This is a delicate piece of machinery here. Ya got'a show a little respect."

Sam's head popped over the back seat just in time to give Starsky a big, juicy, unwelcome, kiss. Hutch laughed at the serious frown on Starsky's face as he tried to fend off the dog's affectionate overtures.

"Sorry, Starsk. I was just having a little fun with you, buddy." He put the car in reverse and carefully backed out of the parking place.

"Well, your idea of fun and mine apparently ain't the same, Blintz. Cause I fail to see anything funny about abusin' a fine automobile like this." Like a pouting child, Starsky sat with arms crossed defiantly across his chest, and tried to ignore the oversized dog's head resting affectionately on his shoulder.

Chapter 2

Early the next morning, Starsky was already waiting on the doorstep of his front porch when Hutch arrived. Sam sat stoically by his side, a picture postcard of 'man's best friend'. Hutch's beat-up old Ford, that Starsky found so repulsive, would have to serve as transportation until he could get his new driver's license. Parked in the driveway was the Striped Tomato, grounded for the moment. If there was one thing Starsky hated worse than riding in Hutch's car, it was Hutch driving the Torino.

Starsky and Sam jogged out to the curb and jumped into the car as soon as it rolled to a stop. Having resolved not to pick on his partner this morning, Hutch smiled broadly as they got in. He fervently hoped the *Matron of Misery* wasn't on duty at the driver's license office when they arrived.

“Morning.”

“Mornin’,” Starsky answered cordially. His mood seemed greatly improved from the previous night.

Sam jumped into the back seat, scattering paper bags, smelly socks, and tin cans, making room for himself, with little regard for the litter and dirty clothes that resided there. Once situated, the dog plopped both paws over the back of Hutch’s seat and waited for his own personal greeting.

Hutch reached up and chuffed the big dog under the chin. “Hiya, fella.” Apparently satisfied with this, Sam sat back down and waited for the vehicle to roll.

The blond reached into a brown paper take-out bag on the seat between them, and pulled out two cups of coffee, handing one over to Starsky. Feeling a little bad about giving his partner a hard time the day before, he offered the coffee as an unspoken apology. “Donuts in the other bag,” he said.

Starsky accepted the coffee with a smile. He lifted the plastic lid, and the rich aroma of the brew filled the small confines of the car. “Thanks. Didn’t have time for breakfast.” Starsky recognized the truce offering. And though it really hadn’t been necessary, it was appreciated. He and Hutch had this understanding. They didn’t actually say, ‘I’m sorry,’ when one of them went a little too far. But there were subtle gestures they both accepted as an apology. “Wanna donut?”

“Sure,” Hutch answered. “Picked up a plain one for Sam. Don’t let him have one of the glazed.”

“Aw, Hutch, ya know he loves the glazed,” Starsky whined. “Ya take all the enjoyment out of it for him.”

Having heard his name, Sam moved forward, and looked back and forth between the two men, trying to figure out if anything was expected of him.

“Starsk, don’t argue with me, okay? The dog shouldn’t even be eating donuts. But since you insist on giving them to him, the least we can do is not feed him the additional sugar.”

Knowing he couldn’t win this familiar argument, Starsky conceded the point, and dug to the bottom of the bag for Sam’s plain donut. Getting a whiff of the fresh pastry, Sam’s tail began its windshield wiper routine, thudding heavily against the seat while saliva dripped from his big jaws.

“Take it to the back seat, ya big lug,” Starsky told him. “I don’t want ya slobberin’ in my coffee.”

Happy to oblige, Sam grabbed the warm donut from Starsky's hand and retired to the back seat for a private feast. Hutch pulled away from the curb, and drove along quietly as both men enjoyed their coffee. When they approached the State Offices, Hutch decided to offer a little friendly advice.

"Listen, Starsk, do yourself a favor and try not to incite that woman if she's there today. Make her mad, and she'll just find some way to make it more difficult."

"Yeah, I know her type—really gets off on authority. But I figure, I'll just turn on the old Starsky charm, and I'll have her eatin' outta the palm of my hand." Starsky waggled his eyebrows mischievously.

Hutch shook his head. "You'll make a big mistake if you try that number on her," he warned.

"We'll see." Starsky rolled down the windows before getting out of the car. "You comin'?"

"Yeah, why not?" Hutch sighed. He may as well be there to pick up the pieces when the 'female buzz saw' was finished with Starsky.

Chapter 3

The line was only slightly shorter this morning, and the two detectives took their places at the back. The toothy little clerk, from the day before spotted Starsky and smiled congenially at him, then sneaked a little wave, after checking to make sure her boss wasn't watching. Starsky smiled back magnanimously, figuring it wouldn't hurt to have her in his corner. If he was lucky, she'd be the one available when his turn came. He wasn't expecting any problems today, though. For once, he'd follow Hutch's suggestion and abide by the rules. That should keep him out of trouble.

The line moved quickly, despite having only the clerk, and the officious supervisor from the day before on duty to service the customers. When his turn finally came, Starsky sauntered up to the counter and smiled at Debbie. "Good mornin'," he greeted her. Debbie smiled shyly and giggled self-consciously.

"Good morning."

"I'll take *you* over here!" Supervisor Bernstein's voice announced loud enough for anyone within a two block radius to hear. "Miss Whaley, you take my customer. I'll deal with Officer Starky."

Standing to one side, Hutch's hand went to his brow, rubbing at the worry lines, as he averted his eyes to the floor. He knew the fur was about to fly, and was hoping not to get

caught in the crossfire. Even so, he was prepared to intercede before Starsky got himself into *real* hot water.

Surprisingly, the dark-haired man remained calm, and stepped down to the next station, still wearing a friendly smile. “Let me see your application,” she barked.

Starsky nodded agreeably and passed the form he’d completed the day before across the counter to her. “This is all wrong. You put your zip code in the wrong space.” She picked up a large, black magic marker and wrote, “VOID” across the form. “Please step aside and fill out a new application.”

Starsky admirably struggled to keep his temper in check, but couldn’t refrain from asking, “Why’d ya do that? You coulda just let me fix it, couldn’t ya?” he challenged.

“I don’t accept messy applications on my watch,” she snapped, raising her chin belligerently.

Hutch watched the vein on Starsky’s neck pop out, signaling the volcano was about to blow. He could barely believe it was his partner who calmly spoke the next words.

“Okay... May I *please* have a new form?” Starsky looked back over his shoulder at Hutch, giving a little nod, as if asking for Hutch’s approval of his behavior. Hutch smiled encouragingly and nodded back.

“Forms are on the table in the back of the room. You’ll have to get one, fill it out, and bring it back to the counter.” Her mouth compressed into a hard, straight line at the conclusion of her little speech.

Hutch watched Starsky’s jaw clench tightly.

“I told you yesterday, Officer Starky, I *do not* show favoritism in my department. I don’t care if you’re some hotshot detective!”

“Yeah, you’ve made that perfectly clear...” Starsky’s voice was strained as he bit back an angry retort. With dignity, he left the counter and walked to the back of the room where a glass top table held stacks of the ‘red tape’ forms, generated by every imaginable bureaucratic arm of the State government. After a few moments searching, he located the correct application and commenced completing it, carefully printing the words out, with the precision of a diligent student trying to appease his penmanship instructor.

Hutch joined Starsky at the table, and laid a calming hand on his shoulder. “I’ve got to say, I’m proud of you, Starsk. You just showed a remarkable amount of control up there. Just keep it up. You’ll get out of here a lot faster.”

Starsky applied more pressure to the pen with each word he wrote. “Talk about a witch,” he mumbled, only loud enough for Hutch’s ears. “Don’t worry, I know what’s she’s up

to.” He completed the form and passed it over to Hutch for approval. Scanning through the answers, he passed it back.

“Perfect.”

Starsky took the completed form and walked back up to the counter, Hutch only a couple of steps behind him. As he stepped up to the counter and laid his application down, Hutch took up residence against the wall nearest the counter and watched with interest, wondering what Supervisor Bernstein would say about the application now. When she failed to acknowledge him, Starsky cleared his throat. The stern looking woman looked over the top of her bifocals at him for only a second, before continuing her work. “Get back in line, and wait your turn,” she snapped.

Starsky’s mouth dropped open. At first speechless, his jaw seemed unhinged, gaping like the Grand Canyon. Finally, he recovered enough to find his voice. “But...but I already stood in line thirty minutes. Ya didn’t say anything about gettin’ back in line.”

“I’m not going to put up with your insolence, mister,” she chastised. “Now take your place in line and wait your turn.”

Starsky held up one finger, as though he wanted to make a point. His face turning a darker shade of red by the second, he called on his last reserve to keep from grabbing the old harpy by the collar and dragging her across the counter.

Hutch had played along up until this point, but now he was getting downright annoyed by this old battle ax. In his opinion, Starsky had received his comeuppance, ten fold over, and it was time to put a stop to the nonsense. Instead of throttling Bernstein, Starsky turned pleading eyes to Hutch, silently asking for support, guidance, anything! Supervisor Bernstein had resumed stamping the stack of applications on the counter before her, having, in her opinion, properly dismissed Starsky.

Before Starsky could think of a clever comeback—or any comeback, for that matter—Hutch strode up to the counter and was by his side.

“Excuse me,” he began politely. Supervisor Bernstein looked up, lips pursed, glasses perched on the end of her nose.

“Yes?” Her voice left no doubt she considered him a nuisance, one she would dispatch quickly.

“Look, I realize you are doing your job here, but don’t you think you’ve carried this far enough?” Hutch smiled pleasantly, attempting to soften the criticism just a tad.

“Not that it’s any of your business,” she replied indignantly, “but Officer Starky must follow the rules, just like everyone else.” She resumed stamping the forms with renewed vigor.

Hutch looked at his partner, who appeared to have nothing more to offer in his own defense. Determined to intercede, Hutch tried again “I...uh...excuse me, I’m speaking to you.”

The perturbed woman looked up again, obviously resentful of another interruption.

Hutch forged on, patience wearing thinner by the moment. “My partner here has tried to comply with everything you asked him to do. In fact, I think he’s been pretty darn agreeable, despite your obvious attempts to humiliate him, and require him to jump through more hoops than anyone else who’s been trying to renew their license since we’ve been here.”

Hutch hoped he wouldn’t come across too accusatory, but the obstinate woman and her condescending attitude were rapidly eroding his resolve. “I believe you know, deep down inside, you aren’t exactly treating him fairly. So why not go ahead and take his application without making him stand in that ridiculous line again?”

Supervisor Bernstein held his stare for a full ten seconds, then looked out across the room. “NEXT!”

Feeling like a bull seeing the red flag wave before his face, it was all Hutch could do to resist leaping over the counter and shaking the silly woman until her dentures flew out! Instead, he leaned across the counter, pointing a finger in her close-minded, big face, and gritted out between clenched teeth, one last effort.

“Lady, I don’t know who you think you are, but I think we’ve all seen about enough of this foolishness. Now, will you accept my partner’s application, make his photo, and issue his license, or do we have to go to the State Office, and file a grievance with your boss? ‘Cause I’m ready to go that route if you want to play it that way.” Hutch’s voice was controlled and firm—lecturing, but not threatening. For a moment, she was too shocked to respond. Even STARSKY was too amazed to react.

Suddenly, all seventeen people in the room began applauding and cheering. Surprised by this turn of events, Henrietta Bernstein looked around the room, and realized that everyone present agreed with Hutch. Starsky turned to the roomful of allies and smiled.

Realizing she was outnumbered, and in all likelihood, would be reprimanded if this got back to her boss, the stubborn woman glared at the roomful of people unflinchingly. Still, it was pretty scary to discover that she didn’t see a single sympathetic face in the crowd. Not even Debbie offered an encouraging smile.

Starsky held his silence, his sapphire blue eyes dancing with amusement. Watching the Blintz in action when he was pissed was quite a spectacle!

Miss Bernstein's eyes narrowed, trying to think of a way to save face. She'd really backed herself into a corner. Probably better to relent, she realized, than be 'ordered' by her boss to give Detective Starsky special attention. *Yes, she knew his name and rank, but damned if she'd give him that satisfaction! Nor did she have to make it easy for him.*

"I suppose he did stand in line already..." she hedged. One more look around the room confirmed she was on shaky ground. "Give me your application."

Starsky laid the paper upon the counter and slid it toward her. The surly woman snatched it up and perused it quickly. "Hmmm...pretty messy handwriting," she muttered, "but it seems complete."

The breath whooshed from Starsky as he sighed with relief. Finally, they were getting somewhere! He looked at Hutch, gave him a grateful smile, then waited for further instructions from the supervisor.

"Step over here for your photograph," she ordered. Starsky followed her to the far end of the counter. "Place your toes on the red line."

Starsky looked down to find the line. **FLASH!** He looked up, "Wait, I was lookin' down."

"Pay attention," she scolded.

Starsky looked up toward the camera (running his fingers through his unruly locks). **FLASH!**

"I wasn't read—" (hand up before his face) **FLASH!**

"Officer Starky, you're not cooperating."

"Okay...okay...I'm read—" (mouth wide open) **FLASH!**

"That's it. Step aside and I'll call you when your license is ready." Starsky started to protest, but Hutch gave him a sharp look, warning him to quit while he was ahead.

Epilogue

Starsky opened the door to Hutch's Ford and got in on the passenger side. Sam wagged his tail wildly, and nuzzled the back of his neck until the dark-haired man reached up a restraining hand. "Yeah, I'm glad to see you too, Big Dog," he said sincerely.

Hutch smiled and started the engine of the car.

“What’re you grinnin’ about, Blintz?” Starsky asked suspiciously.

“Oh, nothing. I was just wondering if you’ll forget to renew your license again.”

Starsky shot him an “if looks could kill” expression.

“Okay. Subject closed,” Hutch conceded. “I think you’ve suffered enough for that little lapse of memory. But maybe you’ll listen to me next time,” he lectured.

“I don’t wanna hear it, Hutch. Okay? Right now, all I want is to get behind the wheel of my Torino and go for a nice, long drive.”

Sam barked from the back seat. “See,” Starsky motioned toward the Rottweiler. “Sam’s been miserable ridin’ back there in that garbage pit. When ya gonna clean this mess up?”

“Now who’s lecturing?”

“Well, it’s true. This car’s a disgrace. How can ya live like this? Hutch, ya really ought’a let Merle, the Pearl, have a go at it. He could fix up the interior—give it a little class, ya know? Course, right now I’d settle for a quick rinse and vacuum at the ‘Wash & Wax’ do it yourself.”

Hutch let out a long-suffering sigh, preparing for Starsky’s monologue on the sanctity of a good set of wheels. Sam’s big paws hung over the back of the seat while he watched Starsky’s face with something akin to awe, as the dark-haired member of the duo continued his efforts to convince Hutch to renovate the traveling junk pile he called a car.

“And another thing...this bomb ain’t doin’ much for your image with the ladies...”

Sam lay his head on Hutch’s shoulder, and whined sympathetically. He too recognized Starsky’s ‘lecture’ voice and knew they were in for a *long* ride.

All was well.

The End