Do Not Go Gentle

by DPPatrick

Summary

Starsky is missing. Several series characters become involved with Hutch, Dobey and Huggy in the search for him.

Notes

A/N: this story was spawned by one of the drabbles I wrote and posted in response to the Me_and_Thee 100’s Challenge 448 - The End.

DOBNEY

One of my two best detectives was deteriorating in front of my eyes. The other one was gone. Just… gone.

Dave Starsky vanished from his apartment twenty-one days ago, taking nothing with him - not his car, clothes, gun or badge. No note was left and no ransom demand had appeared.

His partner, Ken Hutchinson had been like a caged tiger ever since. When he wasn’t here, going through every case file from their storied career, he was out on the streets, questioning, threatening… pleading.

Could this be the end of the best team I’ve ever captained? Not if I have anything to say about it!

I met with the chief yesterday morning and he suggested something I never would have thought of. I didn’t put any faith in the idea that it might work but I initiated the meeting anyway. I really had
nothing to lose.

Hutch was pacing my office, going over everything we’d learned - which was basically nothing - not having a clue, I hoped, about who would be knocking on my door at any moment.

“Huggy hasn’t learned anything, either, Captain!” Hutchinson’s voice was so strained I wouldn’t have recognized it if I hadn’t seen him speak the words. “And it’s not as if his snitches aren’t trying. We both know they are! It’s just that there doesn’t seem to be a hint on the streets about what’s happened to Starsky. Nobody knows anything!”

“It’s been three weeks, Hutch.”

“Don’t you think I know that?”

I raised a placating hand. “Take it easy, son, I’m on your side. Remember?”

His shoulders drooped and his step slowed. “Sorry, Cap.”

I tried a small smile and changed the subject. “You’re staying at his place, right?”

He stopped, appearing wary of the question. “Yes, sir.”

“Good. He’ll figure it that way, too, and if he has a chance to call…”

He nodded. “My thinking exactly.” The pacing resumed.

“You don’t look like you’re getting much sleep,” I noted.

“I’ll sleep after he’s back!” Coming to my wall for the umpteenth time, he lashed out with a solid right-fisted punch.

I flinched, in sympathy for the possible damage to his knuckles, and my paneling. “Have you given any thought to what we talked about yesterday?”

He turned and glared at me. I hated being on the receiving end of that icy stare but I’d invited it.

“No, Captain, I haven’t. You’ll never convince me to take another partner. Never! Starsky’s the only one I want, the only one I need.”

“Department policy states that no detective works on the streets alone,” I pointed out. “You can’t be out there without backup any longer! It’s too dangerous. The chief thinks --”

“I don’t care what the chief thinks!” he interrupted. “Until I find Starsky, I am alone. But, I promise you this, I will find him!”


A woman I had hoped never to see again, purely because of the turmoil I was sure she’d caused, walked in.

Hutchinson paled and the look he sent toward the newcomer was positively glacial. “What are you doing here, Kira?”

She closed the door behind her and leaned against it. “I came to help.”

Hutch took one rigid step toward her. “Do you know where Starsky is?”
“No.”

“No, then you’re wasting our time.” Hutch began pacing again. “Go away.”

“Ken --”

“Get out.” He hadn’t raised his voice or bothered to glance at her.

“Hutchinson --” I began.

“Don’t start that again, Captain!” Hutch’s intensity made the air in the room practically vibrate. “I’ve said everything I have to say on the subject of a new, or temporary partner.” He turned toward the squad room door. “I need to make some more calls.”

I knew he was hurting but he was going to get himself killed if he didn’t have someone backing him up. I stood, putting as much steel in my voice as I could manage. “You have to have a partner, Hutch. That’s department policy.”

With his hand on the doorknob, he turned to me. “So… you brought Kira back, thinking I’d accept her in Starsky’s place?”

“Well, the chief thought,” I began, “since you’d worked with her before…”

“The chief was wrong!” He kept his eyes on me and waved a negligent hand at Kira. “Get out.”

She stepped toward him. “Hutch --”

He spun on her. “If you know anything, or have heard anything, you’d better tell me right now! Because if I ever find out you were part of this nightmare, there won’t be a place deep enough, dark enough, or far enough away that I won’t find you.”

“Ken --”

He cut her off. “All you ever wanted to do was break us up and, now that he’s missing, you come waltzing in here, assuming you can take up where you left off.”

I cleared my throat, bringing his attention back to me. “It was the chief’s idea, Hutchinson. You need someone.”

“I need Starsky!” he flared.

Kira reached toward him. “He’s not here, honey.”

Hutch backed away from her. “I’ll find him.”

“That’s just it,” I broke in. “The whole department’s looking and we haven’t found a trace.”

“Then we have to look harder!” Hutch sounded very nearly desperate. “He didn’t just vanish into thin air, Captain. And he wouldn’t simply leave. He wouldn’t!”

“Hutch,” I said, “you need to listen to me.”

“No, I don’t!” I’d never seen him so nearly out of control. “I know what some people are saying, and writing in the papers - that I’d be better off without him, that he’s an anchor around my neck, that he’s a screw-up, that he was responsible for everything that ever went wrong with one of our cases…. He was arrogant, pushy, disrespectful, anti-authority, crude, rude, and who knows what all
He strode toward Kira and she backed up. When he hit the wall next to her head with the flat of his hand, she cringed. “Everybody’s probably layering their own hang-ups and animosities - their own jealousies - onto Starsky’s and my relationship because they can’t possibly know what we mean to each other.”

“Sweetie…” Kira’s tone made me think of a dove cooing. “He was all of those things you mentioned.”

“Maybe…” Hutch swallowed hard and began pacing again. “Yeah, maybe. But when he was, it was called for! Every single damn time!” He stopped and turned his hard stare on me. “He’s my partner, Captain. I’d have been tossed off the force, quit, or died half a dozen times, without him! He’s the only reason I’m here, and I’ll never accept anyone but him beside me, or at my back. Let people fantasize all they want but it’ll never happen! And I won’t play their game by saying mean, ugly, untrue things about him. I won’t! Not now, not ever!”

I didn’t like it but I had to broach the subject. “What if he’s dead?”

“No!” Hutch pushed off my desk and paced again. “He’s not! If he was, I’d know it. I’d feel it in what’s left of my heart, my soul.” Hutch leaned on my desk, the look in his eyes more vulnerable than I’d ever seen it. “He’s my other half, Captain Dobey.”

Kira gasped, as if slapped. “Are you…? What are you…? Were you… together… when we…?”

“No.” Hutch pushed off my desk and paced again. “Neither of us was messing with your head, Kira. We realized, much later, that we were trying to figure out - for ourselves - what our true feelings were for each other, right about the time of our undercover assignment with you. After Starsky managed to live through Gunther’s assassination attempt, the pieces fell into place. We’ve been lovers since he got out of the hospital.”

I was shocked but only for a moment. “That explains… quite a lot.”

“Captain…” Hutch stopped and pierced me with another soul-deep silent appeal. “He’s not dead. I just know it. Somebody with a really nasty sense of humor, or diabolical need to take revenge on one or both of us, has him. And I’m going to find him!”

Kira laid a hand on his arm. “Ken, you can’t do it alone.”

“Thanks for the offer, Kira.” He shook her hand off. “But I don’t need the reminder you’d be, every time I looked at you, of what Starsky and I nearly did to each other. Please, just go away.”

She turned to me, disappointment or possibly failure on her face. “Tell the chief I tried.”

“I will,” I promised. “And I sincerely hope you’ll keep to yourself what you just heard.”

Her eyes turned cold. "Oh, you don't have to worry about that, Captain Dobey! Everyone in the department knows I was involved with both of them. What do you think it would do to my reputation if people found out they’d turned to each other, after sleeping with me? No, sir, I'll be keeping that information to myself!" With not even a glance at Hutchinson, she stalked out of my office.

I sat down. “Sorry, Hutch. The chief told me to call her. He hoped… well, you know.”

Hutch sat, too. “Yeah, Capt’n, I know. But I meant what I said. If my taking a new partner is a
requirement, you’ll have my badge, gun, and resignation on your desk in two minutes.”

“Please don’t do that. I’ll never find Starsky by myself.” I caught Hutch’s gaze and held it. “And I’m not going to stop looking, either.” He stared at me with such gratitude I was stunned. God! It had never occurred to me before how beautiful and expressive his eyes are! No wonder he and Starsky - oh, never mind! This was not the time to consider such things.

After the silent ‘thanks,’ shadows clouded his features. “What about Starsky’s and my… relationship?”

“Internal Affairs will never hear about it from me.” I hadn’t had a chance to think about it, yet, but that was a vow I could easily make. They were my best team and I didn’t want to lose them. “When we get your partner back, you may have to be more careful and discreet than ever, but I want you both in my Zebra Unit until you’re ready to leave. You and Starsky, I hope, will make that decision. Nobody else.”

He let out the breath I suddenly realized he’d been holding. “We’ve talked about it a lot, sir, and that’s what we want, too.”

HUTCH

Starsky was gone, spirited away by persons unknown. I knew he’d have fought, if possible, so the operation had to have required more than one assailant.

It had been an ordinary evening at his place. We hadn’t had an argument, he hadn’t done anything to annoy me and I didn’t think I’d said anything to upset him. I’d cooked dinner and we’d bantered our way through the prep, eating, and clean-up. He’d been fine. I was pretty darn positive of that!

When he couldn’t find anything on television he wanted to watch, he’d gone out to his car to get the book he’d picked up at the library. But he didn’t come back. By the time I realized he’d been gone too long - maybe three minutes - I couldn’t find a trace of him. None of the neighbors was out walking a dog, no suspicious characters were lurking, no cars - other than those I knew belonged - were on the street, no engines growled while tires screamed a getaway. Nothing! As soon as I noticed Starsky’s keys hanging from the lock in the trunk of his car, I didn’t waste another second. I called Dobey.

While I waited for him, I questioned everyone on the block. No one had seen anything and none of their dogs had barked at unusual sounds. They were sympathetic but had no information to give me.

As I hurried back toward the Torino, Dobey’s car raced up the street and pulled in at the curb. “The crime scene team’s on its way,” he said, climbing out. He appeared rumpled and apprehensive but not yet angry. “Are you sure he’s been abducted?”

“Nothing else makes any sense, Cap’n.” I stuffed my hands in my pockets to keep him from seeing that I had the shakes. “He came out to get a library book. And now he’s gone.”

“You two have an argument?”

“No, sir. He was fine. I made stroganoff, sort of a celebration for closing the Bergstrom case. We were both pretty happy about that.”

“So was the D.A.” Dobey’s eyes narrowed a bit. “You stayed around after dinner?”
I shrugged. “We were both tired. I was going to sack out on the couch, like I do when I’m too wasted to drive home.”

Dobey looked like he wasn’t quite satisfied with that answer but, after a moment, he glanced around, instead. “Any of the neighbors --?”

I waved a hand to cut off the question. Fear crowded the aplomb I normally try to affect, which unintentionally raised my voice. “I’ve been up and down the whole street, Captain! Nobody saw or heard a damn thing!”

Instead of matching my ire and tone of voice, as he had every right to do, he stepped closer and spoke softly. “Take it easy, Hutch. We’ll figure this out, and get him back.”

I swallowed and ducked my head. “Sorry, Cap. Except for the fact that his name isn’t splashed on the Torino’s windshield in pig’s blood, this is just too close to Marcus’s stunt.” I looked him in the eyes. “I’m scared.”

He put a hand on my arm. “I know. But hang in there. We’ll find him.”

Thankfully, the crime scene techs showed up and all of us spent the next thirty minutes scouring the Torino and every square inch of ground for a hundred feet in all directions.

Starsky’s keys were in the trunk’s lock; he’d apparently been taken just before he popped the lid. One of the gloved techs opened it and I found the library book still inside. No need to enter it in evidence, but the tech bagged the keys. Then they proceeded to dust the entire outside of the car before the tow truck arrived.

Signs of at least two people hiding deep in the nearby shrubbery were found but, even though it appeared as if the surveillance had been long-term, no cigarette butts or individual footprints, no gum wrappers or coffee cups presented themselves. Whoever had been watching had been very careful.

Scuff marks at the edge of the sidewalk, between the stairs to Starsky’s apartment and the Torino - possibly from his Adidas - were photographed, but there were no corresponding footprints from any other shoes. It was as if he’d been ambushed, silently, picked up and taken away so quickly no one in the vicinity had seen a thing. I knew the kidnappers hadn’t sprouted wings and flown but not one of us, that night, came up with any information about how the snatch had been accomplished. Or why.

Over the next three weeks, Minnie, Dobey, even Babcock and Simmons - when they had time - helped me go over every case file Starsky and I had ever taken any part in, from our uniform days, right through Bergstrom. We verified the whereabouts of every perp we’d ever arrested, plus any family members or close friends who weren’t incarcerated themselves. Hundreds of man-hours were expended but we were no closer to finding my partner, or the people who’d taken him, than we were the night he… poofed.

When it was determined that only Starsky’s prints were on his keys, they were sent upstairs to me, and the Torino was released from impound. I gave it a bath that day, inside and out, when Dobey sent me home to get some sleep, so that Starsky wouldn’t have to see all the black powder.

Dobey discovered that an apartment directly across from Starsky’s had been rented to an out-of-town corporation six months earlier. A group of men, who were supposedly executives and employees of that company, had been inoffensive tenants but the paid-up apartment had been vacated, with no advance notice, the night Starsky disappeared. Unfortunately, the paper trail the renter had provided was bogus, and no information about the identify of those who had probably been keeping eyes on
Starsky and me for half a year - until the opportunity to grab Starsky arrived - was available. The license plate they’d listed for their black Mercedes was phony, too. Naturally, that vehicle was also gone.

Try as hard as everyone in the department did, nothing was found that a judge considered worthy of a warrant and Dobey was leery of harassment charges. I didn’t blame him but I chafed against the barriers that that lack of an official reason to roust people put in my path.

Huggy Bear, our most reliable source of information, came up dry. “I got nothin’, Hutch,” he whined late one afternoon, as we sat on opposite sides of the back booth at The Pits. “And I’ve threatened every source I know with bodily harm if they’re holding out on me.”

I met his sorrowful eyes with as much commiseration as I was capable of, since I was pretty close to being completely out of that commodity. “I know, Hug. And I don’t think they’re lying to you.” I gulped a mouthful of beer. “I’ve come to the conclusion that whoever’s behind this has been planning a long time - at least six months, if the coincidentally vacated apartment across from Starsky’s is any indication. And the guy’s paid, or otherwise intimidated his associates into keeping their mouths shut. We’re not going to find Starsky by the usual methods.”

Huggy’s normally open expression turned guarded “What, exactly, do you mean by that, m’ brother?”

“Do you remember Mary Polanski?”

The Bear thought hard before shaking his head. “No. Should I?”

I drank the rest of the my brew and stood up. “Starsky and I met her that day we were trying to foil the armored car heist.”

Huggy signaled Anita and Diane that we were leaving and joined me on my way to the door. “As I recall, I was in the midst of my dingle-dolly phase.”

I smiled at the memory and opened the door for him. Out on the sidewalk, he stopped in his tracks when he saw the Torino at the curb. “You drivin’ the tomato, Hutch?”

I unlocked the passenger door for him and sprinted around to the driver’s side. “It’s the only way I can be close to him.”

Huggy didn’t say a word as I drove to the Victorian-style home but I felt the silent understanding he offered and was grateful. When I pulled up in front, he stared at the sign next to the walkway. “Madame Yram?”

I hopped out and joined him at the steps. “She told us no one would ever consult someone named Mary Polanski.”

As we started up the walk, Huggy nodded. “She was probably right about that.”

I scanned the old house and it appeared to be in as good a condition as it was the time Starsky and I had been here. Every ground floor window showed bright, colorful illumination. Two women and a man were sitting in wicker chairs on the porch, smiling.

I ushered Huggy inside where we encountered Mary escorting an elderly couple from the parlor. Huggy and I stood aside.

“Now, remember what I said, Henry,” Mary urged, softly, “You both need to focus on happy
memories of your son. He’ll rest easier if he knows you’re taking care of each other.”

The woman kissed Mary’s cheek. “Thank you, Madame Yram.”

Henry clasped Mary’s hand in both of his. “We’ll come back if we need more help.”

Mary beamed and followed them out onto the porch. Glancing at me, she left the door open while she made sure the old people got down the steps safely before turning to her waiting clients. “The two gentlemen who just arrived are police officers. Please give me a few moments with them and I’ll be right with you.”

“Take your time, sweetheart,” one of the women said. “We were early anyway.”

“Thank you.” Mary showered them with a bright smile and came back inside. She looked at me for a moment, then Huggy, and led us into the room I remembered well. She didn’t sit; she turned and stared at me. “Your ticklish partner is missing.”

I couldn’t hide my surprise. “How… Uh… I didn’t think…”

She laughed, but it was a brittle sound. “Oh, I could pretend to have seen it in my crystal ball but, actually, I read about it in the paper.” She moved behind her table and gestured for Huggy and me to be seated. I sat across from her in the place Starsky had occupied.

“I’m not psychic, I’m only a minor sensitive.” She tilted her head toward the front of the house. “I can get enough of a feeling about most people to know what they want, what they need to hear.”

Mary reached for my right hand and, without thinking, I extended it. She held it, her eyes never leaving mine. “I could tell, when you and he were here that time, that your partnership was extremely close. I figured, if you ever came back, I wouldn’t see one of you without the other. Yet, here you are… alone, because you haven’t found him.” She cast an apologetic glance at Huggy. “No offence intended for the ‘alone’.”

Huggy brightened the room with one of his dazzling smiles. “None taken, dear lady.” He nodded toward me. “What can you tell my blond brother about our mutual friend?”

Mary’s gaze returned to me, more solemn than before. “Nothing, I’m afraid. Which is why I didn’t get in touch after I saw the article.” She stroked my palm gently. “All I feel is emptiness… loss… almost desperate uncertainty. Like you, I sense that he’s not dead. I’ll repeat, though, I’m not psychic, so that’s not much help.” She stopped caressing my hand and held it firmly. “But there is someone in town you could ask.”

I felt my heart leap and castigated myself for not thinking of him sooner. “Collandra?”

She gripped my hand tighter. “You know of him?”

I added my left hand to our clutch. “Starsky and I… consulted him on a case once.”

She appeared pleased and let go of my hands. “Then do so again. Joe might be able to help, where I can’t.”

I jumped to my feet, pulled out my wallet and placed a fifty on the table. She tried to push it away but I held her fingers down on top of it. “Please. When I find my partner, we’ll come back and you can give us a free reading.”

Her smile lifted my heart, a little. I hurried out with Huggy on my heels.
“Why didn’t I think of Joe?” Huggy piled into the passenger seat as soon as I’d opened the door.

I ran around to the driver’s side, fired up the motor and fishtailed away from the curb. I always forget how powerful the Torino’s engine is, compared to my car. Huggy slapped the Mars light on the roof while I hit the siren.

“We were both probably too focused on our snitches and case files, Hug. Is Collandra still in the same place?”

“Far as I know.” Huggy buckled his seatbelt.

I stifled a grin and made sure to get us safely across town. Huggy pulled the light inside and I switched off the siren when I slid to a stop in front of the café that had seen visits from Starsky and me a few years earlier. Huggy had the front door open by the time I locked the car and ran across the sidewalk.

Inside, customers were craning to look through the windows and see what the noise had been about. Part of me was glad the establishment seemed to have gained a following and wasn’t bereft of customers, as it had been. After a quick glance around, my attention snapped to the man behind the counter, holding the receiver of a phone.

Joe Collins - aka Collandra - was clean-shaven now - an improvement, I thought - and his apron was a dazzling white. When he saw me, his eyes showed no surprise, only great weariness. Not saying a word, he hung up and motioned Huggy and me to follow him.

As soon as he’d flicked on an overhead light in a small storage room and closed the door behind us, he turned to me. “I was just about to call you.”

“You know where Starsky is?” My voice sounded harsher than I intended.

Collandra shook his head. “No.” He unfolded three chairs and motioned for Huggy and me to sit when he did.

I tried to rein in my impatience by gripping my knees. “Then why were you calling?”

“His picture was in the paper the day after he disappeared and, as soon as I touched it, I nearly passed out from the vision.” Collandra’s own hands were trembling and he clasped them tightly. “All I got, though, was darkness. Muzziness, and I could tell he’d been drugged. I couldn’t see anything because he couldn’t see anything!” He gathered the skirt of his apron and began twisting it. “I waited to call you, hoping I’d see more. I didn’t want to get your hopes up without having something definitive to tell you.”

“If you weren’t sensing anything, Joe,” I asked, “why do you think you had such a strong reaction?”

He shrugged. “I really don’t know, but maybe it was because we all shared that time was so desperate, we formed some kind of connection.” He sent deep sadness my way. “You may not know this but I tried to reach you the morning of the assassination attempt. You and he had already left the squad room and… then it was too late.”

Visions of that morning sliced through my mind like knives. If he’d been able to warn us…?

Huggy laid a hand on Joe’s arm. “A connection sounds exactly like what my Aunt Celia would say.”

Joe patted Huggy’s hand. “Thanks, Huggy.” Huggy took his hand back and Joe looked at me. “The reason I was calling you today is because Starsky’s coming out from under whatever they’ve been
keeping him doped up with. He’s starting to see things. And hear things.” I opened my mouth but he cut me off. “I need something more personal of his to focus on. Something more than his picture in the newspaper.”

I dug Starsky’s car keys out of my pocket and handed them to him. “Tell me everything, Joe. Everything!”

STARSKY

What the fuck’s goin’ on? How long have I been here? Where the hell is here, anyway? I knew time, a lot of time, had passed but I had no idea how much. I couldn’t remember anything specific since the night Hutch and I closed the Bergstrom case.

I’d skipped down the stairs, my car keys in my hand, headed toward the Torino. With nothing I’d wanted to watch on TV, and my belly full of the best beef stroganoff I’d ever tasted, I was raring to get into the old Raymond Chandler I’d found at the library. Guess I wasn’t paying attention because I suddenly had a gag in my mouth, some kind of cloth bag over my head, my arm aching from a needle jabbed into it, a hairy forearm across my throat so tight I couldn’t make a sound, and a pair of hands holding my legs. I’d tried to kick and had gotten a fist in my groin. Owww.

What must have been the mate of the arm around my neck was binding my upper body. I was being carried and I couldn’t do a damn thing about it. Whatever they’d pumped into me took me down into that deep dark I hate so much.

Do not go gentle. What? Where did that come from? I had no idea but it was a good thought. No matter how bad I was hurting - and I was hurting - no matter how afraid I was - and I was afraid - I couldn’t give up. My partner wouldn’t. I knew he’d find me.

Another stab and the black smothered me again.

Hands. Big, rough hands stroking and pulling on my cock. They tore at me, ripped me out of the dark, pawed, slapped and squeezed so hard I’d have screamed if I could. But the gag in my mouth and sack over my head kept me muffled. My wrists and ankles were tied to corners of something - I couldn’t even fight!

“Easy there, big fella.” The tone was nasty. “Yank any harder and you’ll break it off.”

“What’s wrong with it?” a second, harsher voice whispered.

“The drugs, man,” First Voice answered. “You ain’t gonna get a rise outta that thing ‘til the boss backs off on those. Even then, it’ll take a day or two before his equipment’ll be able to respond to… stimulation.”

“What makes you so smart, dipstick?”

“Seen it before. I was a trustee in the infirmary.”

The hands slapped my cock a few more times. Finally, it was shoved inside my jeans and the zipper was closed. A cover that felt like a coarse blanket was pulled up over me and I was left alone, filing what I’d felt and heard in the part of my memory that was waking up. I needed to remember the two low, raspy voices and one pair of hands meanly, viciously abusing me.

I sank back into the dark, my privates aching, vowing to get some payback for that, if at all possible.
Awake again. How much time had passed? No idea. I dragged my mind into the dim light that was seeping under a door across the room. Realizing the bag was no longer on my head and the gag was gone, I searched the space for anything I could identify.

The side walls were huge horizontal logs, not very well caulked. Cold air, smelling of old smoke, was blowing over me. There was a window in the right-hand wall and, through it, I could see a nearly-full moon just over the tops of what appeared to be burned trees. Nothing but skeletons of trunks and limbs showed against the bright three-quarter-circle. Whether the moon was rising or setting, I couldn’t tell. Yet.

There was a window in the opposite wall, too, but nothing was visible through it; only nighttime. The wall containing the door appeared to be made of rough planks which meant I was in some sort of cabin. Instant anxiety caused my gut to clench but I immediately tried to relax because I knew this wasn’t Dobey’s place. This was somewhere else.

As I concentrated, bits and pieces of fuzzy memories floated to the surface and, completely involuntarily, I shivered. There had been needles, lots of them - shit! I hate needles. After the first one, I’d been driven a long distance in what I was pretty sure was the trunk of a car. It smelled new. Then I was lying on a hard bed with my hands and feet chained to the corners. I was cold! Every time I woke up, I woke up cold.

Helicopters! I’d heard helicopters - coming from far away, passing almost overhead, and going far away. The first time, I’d had the wonderful thought that Hutch had found me and I’d be seeing his blue eyes in nothin’ flat! That hadn’t happened, though, and each time I’d heard the damn things after that, I’d wanted to scream, “I’m here! Here I am!” But they always kept going. I finally realized we were under some sort of flight path. Not a very heavily-traveled one, and when none of their comings and goings resulted in my liberation, I began to get irritated when I’d hear one. If ya ain’t gonna help, go away! I’m tryin’ t’ sleep down here!

The bag was always over my head except when I was given a stale sandwich and glass of water, which was probably once every twenty-four hours or so, always at night. There was never artificial light, only however much the moon put into the room through the two windows, plus the glow of a fire coming through the open doorway.

The guy who fed me - big guy - stayed in the corner after he’d unlocked one of my cuffs. All I could tell was that he was well over six feet tall and huge. He probably weighed over three hundred pounds. If he was one of the ones who’d carried me, it was all muscle. And if he was the one who’d tried to get a rise out of my cock, he was a pervert, too.

Every so often, I was dragged to a bucket in the corner so that I could keep from dirtying the bed. Afterward, there was another needle.

Nobody ever said a word. The few times my brain worked, I forced what I thought were reasonable questions past the dryness in my mouth but no one answered.

Once, when I was being allowed to use the pail, I glanced out the window on that side and saw what looked like a small lake about a hundred yards down the hill. I could only tell it was water because it reflected billions of stars. At least I think it was a reflection - don’t think the stars were below me. Could have been wrong, though, the drugs had me so woozy I had no clear idea of what was up or down.

I was pretty sure lots of days had passed. Hutch would be going crazy. I knew he was looking for me, and hated what I was positive he’d be going through. I’m so sorry, Hutch. I’ll get outta here, if I can, but whoever ‘they’ are, they haven’t given me a chance yet.
The door opened and a blurred figure stood silhouetted by the firelight from the other room. “Awake, are you?”

“If you’d quit shootin’ me fulla… whatever it is you’ve been usin,’ I could stay that way, you motherfucker!” I don’t think my voice came out as strong as I wanted but at least I’d mouthed off, which made me feel better.

Instead of rushing over and smacking me upside the head, as I expected, he laughed and leaned against the door jamb. “Oh, good. I’d hoped you’d hold onto the attitude I’d been told you have, at least for a while.”

I rattled my chains. “Kidnappin’ a cop is never a very good idea. Just what is it you hope to accomplish?”

The man flicked a switch on the wall and a bare bulb came on in the middle of the ceiling. As soon as that happened, I knew the low hum I’d heard when I was awake was a generator somewhere outside.

Tall and gaunt, dressed in worn coveralls over a flannel shirt, the man’s gray hair hung to his shoulders. His cheeks were hollow and it looked as if he hadn’t shaved in days. The eyes were sunken under scowling brows and I couldn’t tell what color they were.

He reached into the other room and dragged a ladder-back chair inside the door. With every appearance of nonchalance, he sat and crossed his knees. “I’ve waited almost thirty years for this Starsky, and I plan to enjoy it. I believe I’ve kept you unconscious long enough for any trail we might have left to have dissipated, so, go ahead, ask your questions.”

I lifted my head as much as I could and stared at him. “You know who I am. Who the fuck are you?”

“The name is Warren Westfield, but I don’t expect it to mean anything to you.”

I wracked my addled brain - why did I have the feeling that someone was eavesdropping on my struggling thoughts? - as I glanced around. The moon was higher above the trees, so that window faced east, for whatever good that information would do me. I dropped my head back down and shook the restraints again. “You wanna uncuff me so we can have this conversation face to face?”

“No, I don’t think so.” He moved the chair closer and I could see him by turning my head now. “I’ve studied you for a long time, Davy Boy, and I think I know what you’re capable of. I won’t ever make the mistake of underestimating you.”

“Terrific.” I shifted a little, trying to appear uncomfortable. “Listen, if this is gonna be a long, drawn-out conversation, ya mind if I take a leak first? My bladder’s tellin’ me it’s been a while.”

Westfield called into the other room. “Bo? Come in and release our guest so that he can relieve himself.”

The guy I suspected had been the one pawing me walked in. He unlocked the shackles at the foot of the bed, then the handcuff on my right wrist. When he moved around and undid the one on my left, he relocked it around his own thick wrist. None-too-gently, he hauled me to my feet and led me to the corner. Out the window, moonlight cast dead-tree shadows onto the surface of the lake.

One-handed, I unzipped and, not allowing my attacker to know how badly my parts still ached, drained myself. I did wince a little when the liquid splattered onto my sneakers. *Into the hot water wash with you two just as soon as I get home.*
Bo hardly gave me time to get myself back into my jeans and zipped up before he hustled me to what I could now see was an old army cot. He threw me onto it and secured me to all four corners. “Anything else, Boss?”

Westfield shook his head and Bo left the room, leaving the door open. I could hear snickering and whispers from at least two men, in addition to Bo. Not very good odds. I settled as comfortably as the bed and chains allowed and glared at my captor. “You were saying?”

Westfield casually re-crossed his legs before scorching me with one of the most hate-filled looks I’d ever seen. “Your father was responsible for my spending half my life in Attica.”

I didn’t even try to hide my smile. “Way t’ go, Pop!”

This time, he did lunge toward the bed. Some inner caution checked him, though, and he stopped at the foot. Straightening up, he returned to the chair and sat down. “You will not succeed in causing me to kill you yet. I have this… detestation bottled up inside and want to savor spreading it all over you before I end your life.”

I’ve got a pretty good sneer, if I do say so myself, and I used it. “Oh, goody. I can hardly wait.”

I could tell I’d pissed him off again but he stayed seated. An ugly smile creased his thin-lipped mouth. “I will not lose my cool a second time, I assure you, so you may as well curtail the sarcasm and simply listen.”

I shrugged, even though it hurt my shoulders. “I’m all ears.”

HUTCH

Collandra had been muttering for some time, his words only verifying what Huggy and I already knew, or suspected, so neither of us interrupted. He was drawn in on himself, his eyes scrunched closed, his voice rasping out of his throat. His fingers were clenched around Starsky’s keys so tightly I was worried a bone would shatter or a key would snap.

Almost as if turning over a new, fresh page, Joe’s voice became firm and focused. “A room… bare bulb in the ceiling… a window… night outside… nearly full moon… rising…” He opened his eyes and caught mine. “Christ, I really am in his mind. These aren’t memories, this is what he’s seeing right now.”

“Go on,” I breathed.

He closed his eyes again and I could physically feel his concentration. “Not here… away somewhere… burned trees below the moon… still smell the smoke… wrists… ankles… privates… hurt… shackles… a man… on a chair… Westfield… hatred…”

Huggy got up and opened the door silently. “I’ll call Dobey,” he said, sotto voce.

STARSKY

I’d been in some pretty tight places before but this was beginning to feel like it might rival Bellamy’s twenty-four-hour fracas. I knew Hutch was doing everything possible to find me and I needed to keep Westfield talking so that I’d have that much more ammunition when it came time to put him
away again, hopefully for the rest of his miserable life!

He’d fallen silent and, even though I wanted to sleep myself, I made as much noise as possible with my chains. ‘I’m listening, Westfield, but you ain’t talkin’. Tell me what my pop did that was so bad you’d kidnap a Bay City cop, thirty years later.”

Westfield brought himself out of whatever fugue state he’d been in and shrugged. “I offered to pay him. I’d moved from Chicago and figured it was probably expected. He didn’t really have anything on me at the time, but I made the usual offer. He said he’d consider it. Assuming he’d be amenable, as all the other cops I’d ever come across were, I went about my business.”

“And what business was that?”

“Booze and broads, Davy Boy. Booze and broads. Two things men can never do without. The liquor and women I imported - illegally, of course - from Canada were of a much higher quality than anything available in gambling dens at that time. The bosses were very pleased with my efforts.” He smoothed a crease out of the cloth over his knee before he went on, sort of lecturing now. “A spot in the Brooklyn section of New York’s criminal empire had opened up and I’d been invited to fill it. I never dreamed your father would be someone I couldn’t… work with.”

I smirked, wanting Westfield to see it. “Pop never was a man to take a bribe. I’ll bet he strung you along, though. Didn’t take a dime, always put off the payments you offered, but let you believe he’d stay off your back.”

“You were only a child, how could you have known --?”

“It’s what I’d have done.” I let out a good, hearty laugh. “And I learned from the best!”

“Yes, well… that’s exactly what he did,” Westfield admitted. “I was careless, I suppose, but I believed he was bought and paid for.”

“He wasn’t.” I reveled in the satisfaction of pointing that out. “He gathered the evidence and turned it over to… who? Vice? Customs? Who brought you down?”

“Vice.” Anger turned Westfield’s face red. “And Homicide. I’d lost my temper with a young woman in my stable. Your father found out about it and I was visited the following day by detectives from both divisions. Customs got in line but, after I’d spent seven years in prison, their relatively minor charges went away.”

“And Pop testified at your trial.” I should have hidden my smugness but, God, it felt good to know my father had brought this sonavabitch down.

Westfield nodded. “His testimony was the most damning.”

I smiled. “Really hate to repeat myself, Westfield but, ‘way to go, Pop!’”

Tight control kept him in place. “I had hoped to get out in time to take care of your father myself.” His cold stare turned even harder. “When I heard, through the prison grapevine, that he’d been killed, I wasn’t happy that someone had beaten me to it, but I was… satisfied… I suppose you’d say.”

“Pop put you away and ‘satisfied’ is the best you could do after you heard he’d been gunned down?” I shook my head. “That’s lame, Westfield.”

After a few deep breaths, got to his feet. “I believe our conversation is over for the moment.” He
called over his shoulder. “Bring the next dose, Bo.”

Inadvertently, I shuddered. “Aw, listen, Westfield, why don’t you quit that?” I rattled my chains again. “I ain’t goin’ nowhere.”

He stood at his chair and studied me. “Would you rather feel Bo’s hands again, perhaps getting your manhood to perform?” He saw my grimace. “No? I thought not.” He crossed his arms over his sunken chest. “Oh, I know he’s been in here, when he assumed I was asleep. If I stop the injections, you will - at some point - respond to his… persuasion.” His smile was pure evil. “Which would you prefer?”

I closed my eyes. “Drugs.”

I sensed his smile turn to a smirk. “As I thought.” When he stepped close, he sputtered and coughed. “My God, you stink!”

I snapped my eyes open and mentally drilled holes in his offended face. “So would you if you hadn’t had a shower in… how long’s it been, anyway?”

Bo came into the room, holding a syringe. “What’s wrong, Boss?”

Westfield turned and picked up the chair. “Slight change in plans. Drag his ass down to the lake and throw him in!” He left, carrying the ladder-back.

Bo’s grin could only be termed malicious as he handed the needle to one of the accomplices who’d moved into the doorway. The dim light didn’t give me a good look at him but he could have been Bo’s double. This was most likely the owner of the other voice I’d heard.

Bo was digging in his pocket for the key when Westfield, without the chair, came back in the room. Bo unlocked the final piece of my restraints and, this time, he didn’t snap it onto his own arm.

“Give him this.” Westfield laid an object in Bo’s free hand. “He can wash his clothes, too.”

“Been meaning to suggest this,” Bo said. “He’s gettin’ smelly, ain’t he?”

“Wouldn’t happen to have a razor, would ya?” I asked, as Bo dragged me to my feet. “I need a shave. What about a toothbrush? Shampoo?” Westfield’s expression never changed and I shook my head. “Didn’t think so.”

Bo dragged me through a bigger room - where I got a glimpse of his pal and another goon, plus the fireplace and sparse furniture - and outside. The near-twin came behind, chortling. “This should be fun.”

“Shut up, Ray,” Bo muttered.

There was plenty of moonlight and I managed not to trip over any of the charred limbs and tree trunks that littered the yard as I was hurried past the ruins of what had almost certainly been an outhouse.

Bo saw where I was looking and chuckled. ‘The boss was thinkin’ about cuttin’ a hole in the floor in the corner of your room but I guess he figured that’d cause too much of a smell. Eventually. I’ll make you bring the pail next time we come out. The ditch under what’s left of the privy ain’t full.”

He gestured to where two snazzy motor homes were parked at the edge of the burned area. A fancy, black car sat behind them. “Westfield has one of those beauties to himself, but me and the boys have
the other one. Running water, showers, a galley - all the comforts of home you’re never gonna see again, Starsky.”

“Enjoy it while you can, sucker,” I muttered.

He jammed his elbow into my ribs. “What was that?”

I let him think he’d caught me off guard and stumbled a few steps. “Just commenting on the primitive conditions you guys are havin’ to put up with, way out here in the middle of nowhere.” I glanced at the scowling Bo and his smirking buddy. “What do you do for entertainment, fellas? Ya know, TV? Girls? Music? Dancing?”

“Never you mind, hotshot!” Ray snarled. “We’ll have plenty of those things, soon as Westfield gets tired of playin’ with you.”

“And, until then…” I deliberately missed another step and heard Ray laugh. “You’ll have…” I looked back at the RVs. “All the comforts. My heart bleeds for ya.”

Bo smacked me on the back of the head. “It will, cop. You can count on that.”

When we reached the shore of the lake, Bo pushed me. Having expected it, and not wanting to give him the satisfaction of falling, I dove, shallowly. The water wasn’t deep, allowing me to stand up and turn to face my two antagonists. “It’s rather… bracing. Care to join me?”

Bo drew a gun that looked exactly like Hutch’s Python out of the waistband of his sweat pants. “Get on with it!”

“Westfield said something about soap,” I reminded him. “Where is it?”

Bo threw the object Westfield had given him at me and I managed to catch it before it sailed over my head. Smiling, I stripped a very old wrapper from a bar of Lifebuoy - nice, a brand name from my childhood - and submerged. My teeth already beginning to chatter, I lathered as much of my body and clothes as possible - I wasn’t about to take them off. My beard felt like it had been growing for weeks and my wet hair hung almost to my collar. Despair tried to swamp me but I mentally dug in my heels. Not goin’ gentle, Hutch, I promise.

When I’d gotten myself and my clothes as soapy as possible, I tossed the bar at Bo’s feet. “Hold onto that for me, will ya? I’ll want to use it again sometime.” I swam around for a while, rinsing. When I knew my lips must be turning blue and could no longer feel my toes, I stood up at the edge of the bank and shook myself like a dog. Bo and Ray didn’t step back quickly enough.

Ray cursed and Bo punched me, hard, in the face. I fell back into the lake and had to drag myself out again, but it was worth it. When I shook myself again, they’d retreated far enough to avoid getting splattered a second time. I ran my tongue over my bleeding lower lip and gave Bo my best insolent tone. “A towel or two, if you please.”

He grabbed my wrist and snapped the cuff on. “You’ll dry.”

Ray picked up the soap and they each took one of my elbows, practically carrying me back up the slope. That was okay, not having to make the climb didn’t bother me at all. However, I couldn’t wait to get back under that ratty blanket.

HUTCH
“Gotta remember everything…” Collandra physically trembled as he gave voice to Starsky’s thoughts and my fingernails dug crescents into my palms. “Can’t forget…” he continued. “Outhouse burned… cabin didn’t… metal roof… maybe green… can’t be sure in the moonlight… log walls… pair of Airstreams… black sedan… looks like a Mercedes…”

Dobey had crowded into the room and was listening intently to every word out of Joe’s mouth. Huggy was taking notes. I was trying to breathe around the boulder in my throat but it was getting more difficult as Joe’s vision told us what Starsky was enduring.

“Bastard’s gonna push me when we get there…” Collandra said, sounding almost exactly like Starsky. “I just know it… mean… he’s the one’s been pawin’ me… better watch were I’m goin’… don’t want to trip and fall… they’d just laugh… kick me the rest of the way down the hill… lots of good charcoal here… Hutch and I should come back sometime… invite Dobey and Edith… Minnie… guys from the squad… have a barbecue…”

Tears threatened and I shut my eyes tightly, holding them in. That Starsky could think about such a thing at a time like this made me love him more than ever.

Dobey leaned over my shoulder, keeping his voice down. “Minnie’s searching the name Westfield, but it occurs to me there was a fire in the San Bernardino mountains not very long ago. Could that be where they are?”

I opened my eyes and tried not to let him see how close to the edge I was. “You got me, Captain. I remember reading about it but that’s all.”

Dobey held his hand out to Huggy. “Let me have what you’re written down, so far.” After Huggy tore off the pages and handed them to him, Dobey turned back to me. “I’ll call the sheriff’s department out there, see if what Joe’s saying makes any sense to them.”

I fastened my attention back on Joe. “If we get anything specific, I’ll let you know.”

He nodded. “Do that.”

“Water’s cold… fuckin’ cold!” Joe’s voice had risen a full octave on the last word, obviously with the shock of Starsky’s immersion, and I couldn’t help but shiver in empathy. “Soap smells good… guess I was gettin’ rank… need a shave bad…”

DOBEBY

The visions finally let go of Collandra because Starsky must have fallen asleep. He’d been fed a sandwich with a glass of water, secured to the bed again, and given the next injection.

Collins would have dropped right out of his chair if Hutch hadn’t steadied him. Joe revived enough to turn his restaurant over to his cook and waitress for closing, insisting on coming downtown with us and looking through mug books. He’d gotten a good enough look, through Starsky’s eyes, he thought me might be able to identify Bo. Maybe even Ray. I was more than happy to let him try.

Huggy wouldn’t be brushed off, either, and he, Hutch, and I assembled in my office, while Collandra drank black coffee at Hutch’s desk, surrounded by volumes of faces.

Hutch nudged the door closed. “What did the sheriff’s department say, Captain?”

I went to my bookcase and grabbed a map of southern California. Opening it on my desk, Hutch and
Huggy crowded around. I got a magnifying glass out of a drawer and leaned over. “Sheriff Daniels knows the name, Westfield, because two men - possibly his sons - have a significant, but slippery criminal presence in his county. Right now, he’s gathering all the info he can quickly put his hands on regarding them.”

I pointed to a spot on the map. “He also told me there was, indeed, a bad fire out there three months ago. Burned more than half a million acres.” I gave Hutch the glass and sat down. I was tired but what we’d heard from Collandra had given all of us more hope than we’d had in three weeks.

“The sheriff said he’d contact every deputy who has any knowledge of the area and find out if they know of a tin-roofed log cabin, with at least two rooms, that survived the fire. One with an outhouse that was destroyed and a small lake at the bottom of a hill on the west side.” I finished my cup of coffee. “I got the feeling he was keeping something from me but hope it’s because he didn’t want us charging out there half-cocked until he’s had time to check with his guys and gather his resources.”

Hutch nodded. “That’s exactly what you’d have done, Captain.”

“Yes,” I agreed. “It is.”

Hutch dropped into one of the chairs. “Did you mention the two RVs and the black car?”

“Yes. But he and I believe they’ve almost certainly been driven up there since the fire.” Huggy fell into the other guest chair and I could tell they were near the ends of their ropes. “Look, guys, it’s late. I suggest you both go home and try to get some sleep.” When he and Hutch just looked at me, I shrugged. “Never mind.”

I gestured toward the hallway door. “Go crash upstairs in the dorm. I don’t expect to hear back from the sheriff right away. He’s got a huge county out there and hundreds of deputies. It might take all day tomorrow for him to get back to us with the information we need.” I put up a hand to forestall Hutch’s objection. “It’s his jurisdiction, we can’t go smokin’ out there without his cooperation.”

Hutch visibly deflated. “I know. It’s just…”

“Think how much closer we are tonight than we were this morning, Hutch,” I said. “Sleep on that.”

Huggy put a comforting hand on Hutch’s shoulder and cocked an eyebrow at me. “Easier said than done, mon Capitan.”

“I know. But, just as soon as I hear from Daniels - if he verifies what we’re thinking - we’ll grab a chopper and get out there. Until then, there’s nothing we can do, Hutch, and you know it. We can’t afford to go tearing around without facts.” Hutch subsided but was unmistakably unhappy. “You know I’m right. And you’re both out on your feet. Get some sleep.” I gestured to the squad room door. “Take Joe with you.” I pushed my chair back and stood up. “I’m going home. Daniels has all my numbers and I’m sure he’ll call as soon as he has anything to tell us.”

Not bothering to complain - which told me, more than anything else, how tired he was - Huggy dragged Hutch to his feet and shoved him out the door.

*Please God, I prayed silently, help us find Starsky. I promise I won’t ask anything else of you… at least not right away.*

**STARSKY**
After my so-called bath, I was offered a plastic-wrapped sandwich that was days past its supposed shelf life but I didn’t turn it down. I also drank every drop of the glass of water I was given. If I refused whatever was provided, I wouldn’t be able to keep my strength up. Whether or not Hutch found me before I made my escape, I was going to need all the energy I could find.

As soon as I’d swallowed the last crumb, I was fastened to my cot. Westfield stood at the foot, a folded blanket in his arms, while Bo administered the injection. After the thug left, Westfield spread the new covering over the one already there. “Don’t want you catching a chill, Detective. That would put a terrible crimp in my plans.”

“No, of course not, Westfield.” I closed my eyes, the drug already taking me down. “Wouldn’t want anything to short circuit your enjoyment of my predicament.”

With a laugh, he turned the light off, shut the door, and left me alone. Eventually, my shivers stopped and I slept. Sometime during the night I had to pee so bad it woke me up. I hollered loud and long before Bo finally came in, uncuffed me, and hauled me to the pail. I made a big deal out of laying the piece of wood I used whenever I had to take a dump across the opening, then nearly fell off when I sat down. Bo caught my arm and wrenched me back onto it. When I was finished, he threw me on the bed and chained me up again, more roughly than usual.

“No another peep outta you for the rest of the night, ya hear?” he growled.

He seemed to be near the end of whatever patience he usually maintained. I just might be able to use that.

I woke up as the eastern horizon was beginning to lose its inky blackness. Half an hour more and the sun would come up. I was still cold but at least my clothes felt dry. Maybe I was getting accustomed to whatever Westfield was using because I don’t think I was out as long that time. My mind was clear and I needed to think!

My father had been largely responsible for putting Westfield away and he wanted revenge. Okay, maybe I would have, too, if our positions had been reversed. Pretty sure he didn’t escape - we’d have heard. Prison-break information’s sent to all law enforcement personnel, everywhere. Probably served his time. Thirty years. Yeah, that’d be about right. Came looking for me. Staked out my apartment, possibly for quite a while. I don’t care how meticulous and methodical he thinks he’s been, though, Hutch’ll figure out where we are. He’ll come. I know he will. I just have to stay alive until he gets here.

But I couldn’t depend on rescue - that wasn’t fair to Hutch - so I’d grab any chance to escape first. I needed more sleep. Maybe Westfield and the others would leave me alone for a while so I could get it. Mentally, I crossed my fingers and drifted off.

I slept for what felt like hours and woke up to the sound and vibrations of a chopper. I shuddered as the words hit me: *Saigon!* *Shit!* *I’m still in Saigon.* Reality crashed back immediately and I knew I wasn’t in ‘Nam, but Martin Sheen’s voice reverberated. The beginning of that film hit too close to home and I remember it every time I hear rotor blades.

A chuckle from beyond my feet made me crack an eyelid open. It was still daylight outside and Westfield was sitting in his usual place. A sadistic smile covered his face and we listened to the diminishing thrum of rotors. “Don’t get your hopes up, Davy Boy. Those are Forest Service, CHP, Search and Rescue, maybe even San Bernardino County Sheriffs. We’re right under their flight path from the valley up into these mountains. They’re back and forth over us quite regularly. I know you’ve heard them.” He crossed his knees, his smile turning smug. “You were probably hoping one of them would land, and take you away from me, so it does my heart good to say that is never going
I hated that he knew what I was thinking but I guess it was pretty obvious. I pretended not to care. “Whadd’r’ya gonna do wi’ me?” I slurred my speech, wanting Westfield to believe I wasn’t as alert as I really was. I could hear whispers from Bo, Ray, and another man in the main room.

Westfield was silent for so long, I thought he wasn’t going to answer my question. However, he’d waited for me to wake up so he must’ve wanted to chat. I forced myself to be patient.

“I haven’t decided yet,” he said, at last. Crossing his knees, he re-settled himself on the rigid chair. “I’ve been dreaming about this, you see, for thirty years. And I have so many options.” The smile that bloomed on his sallow face increased my suspicion that he wasn’t sane.

“But one thing I know for certain,” he went on in a placid tone, “is that you will never leave here.”

I shifted position, figuring this might be the longest conversation we’d had, so far, and I needed to be as comfortable as possible. “Where’s here, anyway?”

He waved a hand. “Never you mind. It’s a place none of your friends will ever find. My sons own it and it’s perfectly secure. We’re in the middle of five thousand acres of a burned-over mountainside, fenced and gated with a heavy duty lock. Only one road in or out.”

“Yer… uh, your…” I stammered. “Your sons? Geez, mister, why involve your chil’ren in a crazy scheme like this? They’re accessories, now.”

“You think I’m crazy?” He sounded shocked. Thinking about it for at least a minute, he shrugged at last. “Well, I’ve heard it said that, if you think you’re insane, you’re really not.” He re-crossed his legs. “Anyway, you asked a question and I’ll try to give you an answer.”

Long minutes passed, with yet another leg re-crossing, before he continued, which demonstrated to me that he wasn’t nearly as calm and collected as he wanted me to believe.

“I’ll toy with you for as long as it amuses me.” His tone was conversational. “After that, I’ll rotate a few of my sons’ henchmen every month, so that someone will be here at all times to watch you, make sure you don’t get into any trouble. They’ll feed you, take you down to the lake when you smell too bad.” He stared into my unblinking eyes. “In short, David Starsky, you will, for all intents and purposes, be in prison.”

“Sound awful sure o’ yourself, Wes’field. Wha’ if your sons’ thugs don’ wanna babysit?”

“They will have no choice. My boys control the criminal activities in this part of the state. Bo and his friends work for them and they tolerate no refusal to obey orders. Theirs or mine.”

“Oh…” I let my head droop to the side. “Li’ father, li’ sons, I ‘spose.” Oh, Lord, I hope I’ll get to use all this to help put these clowns away. “What abou’ you, Wes’field? You plan t’ live forever while I rot here?”

“Exactly.” He did look quite pleased. “I’ll come up every so often, just to check and make sure you’re suffering. Of course, living forever is an unobtainable dream and, after I cash in, my boys will simply send someone to kill and bury you.”

“Tha’s a good plan,” I acknowledged. Hope Hutch and I can make sure it doesn’t happen.
Late that afternoon, I went upstairs and woke Hutch, Huggy and Collandra. They all shook off sleep quickly. Without a word - even though I knew they were dying to ask questions - they filed into the men’s room, then followed me down to my office.

Hutch dragged an extra chair in from the squad room and they sat down opposite my desk as I dropped into my own chair and faced them. “Sheriff Daniels called me at home to tell me he’s reasonably confident he knows where Starsky’s being held.”

Hutch nearly bolted but I held up my hand. “The helicopter is warming up right now, Hutch. Let me tell you exactly what I’ve learned.”

Hutch forced himself to sit back. “Sorry, Cap, go on.”

“I checked with Minnie and it turns out she was about to call me. Once I told her what Daniels said, she corroborated most of it. Warren Westfield’s sons, Walter and William, are known to the sheriff’s department out there. They apparently came to California after their father was sentenced in New York. They are suspected of having their fingers in every criminal pie in San Bernardino County but they’ve been so circumspect and careful, no local or federal agency has been able to charge either of them with anything.”

“They have a place up in the mountains?” Hutch asked.

I nodded. “They do. Daniels apologized for not having told me everything yesterday, asking me to understand why he hadn’t - he was double-checking and verifying. I told him I’d have done the same.” I smiled a little. “I think he appreciated that.”

“Can we cut to the chase, here, Captain?” Hutch was obviously holding onto his patience by his fingernails. “You’re wasting aviation fuel.”

I almost smiled. “After the fire was out, three months ago, Daniels went up there with a couple of deputies. They cut the chain on the gate with the excuse - agreed among themselves - that they had to make sure no one had been injured. The place was deserted and the sheriff’s department hasn’t received a bill for a replacement chain.” I shared a knowing look with each of the men across from me and our consensus was unanimous: this must be where Starsky was being held by people who didn’t want to draw attention to themselves by filing a claim for something as simple as a chain.

“Daniels told me the cabin was spared.” I continued, “because of the pre-treated thick log walls and metal roof, but that the outhouse had burned. There was no evidence of motor homes at the time and he suspects they’ve been driven up there recently.”

Hutch nodded. “What do we do now, Captain? Is Daniels willing to help?”

My phone rang and I snatched it up. “I said no calls!”

The voice on the other end was apologetic but determined. “Sheriff Daniels on three, sir. He says you’ll want to talk to him.”


“One of my boys hitched a ride with a Forest Service flight up to a new fire, hoping he’d be able to spot the vehicles we’re looking for.” Daniels’ voice was taut. “He just radioed in saying he can see two Airstream trailers and a black sedan parked near the suspect cabin. I’m willing to bet we found your man.”
I jumped to my feet. “We’re on our way!”

“I’ll be in touch again once you’re in the air and guide your pilot to a clearing half way up the mountain,” the sheriff said. “That’s where my deputies and I, along with rescue personnel, and a second helicopter will meet you.”

Hutch leaned over the desk. “Sir, this is Hutchinson. Won’t they hear us coming? They could kill my partner before we get there!”

“Lucky for us,” Daniels replied, “the cabin is almost directly under the flight path all helicopters in that part of my county follow. I’d guess they hear choppers three or four times a day. Every day. It should be white noise to them by now.”

“That’s good news, Sheriff.” I took a deep breath. “Thank you.”

“Don’t thank me yet, Captain!” Daniels chuckled. “But I’ll let you guys buy us all a beer, once we’ve got Detective Starsky back safe.”

“Done!” I shut the speaker off and disconnected the call.

Hutch glanced at his watch. “It’ll be full dark by the time we get there. That should be in our favor, don’t you think?”

“I do.” I put a stern expression on my face and sent as officious a look at Huggy and Collandra as I could. “You two will remain here. We’ll be in touch...”

Huggy slung an arm around Collandra’s shoulders. “No way! If you think we’re gonna sit this one out, you’re crazier than Westfield!”

Hutch put a soothing hand on Huggy’s other arm and gave me a defiant look. “I’m with them, Captain. They’ll stay in the chopper, but they deserve to be there.”

Realizing I was beating a dead horse, I nodded and headed for the hallway door. “If either one of you does anything to screw this up, I’ll personally have your head!”

Huggy’s and Collandra’s expressions were constrained as they followed Hutch and me out the door.

HUTCH

The moment the helicopter lifted off, with the four of us belted inside, a lightning-bolt-thought surged through me. “Joe,” I hollered, trying to be heard over the ambient noise, “can your gift work the other way around?”

He clearly had no idea what I meant. “What are you talking about?”

“You’re in Starsky’s mind, right?”

He blinked but nodded. “Yeah. Pretty sure.”

“Can he hear you? Can you contact him? Let him know we’re on our way?” I hardly dared to breathe, while he thought about it.

“I have no idea,” he said. “I’ve never tried that.”
I gave him my best persuasive smile and could see that Dobey and Huggy understood what I wanted. “Try, Joe. Now.”

Collandra closed his eyes.

STARSKY

I jolted awake, deathly afraid to believe a voice - familiar somehow - had spoken to me in my head. We know where you are, Starsky. We’re on our way, and bringing the cavalry. Hang on!

I glanced out the window and saw it was nearly dark. Closing my eyes, I settled myself. I didn’t know if it was true or not but I couldn’t afford to have Westfield sense anything from me except the usual anger and scorn. “Hey, Westfield!”

He came into the room, flicked on the overhead light, and stood at the foot of my cot, his face impassive.

I made my voice sound whiny. “Any chance I could have another bath before my ration of bread and water? Both these blankets are infested with critters and I’m itchin’ somethin’ awful!”

His disinterested expression hardened. “Get used to it, Detective.”

“No, seriously, Warren…” That stopped Westfield from turning away. “If you don’t want me squirming all over the place the next time you start tellin’ me what you’re gonna do to me, why not let me take this lousy bedding - like my wording? It is lousy, you know - down to the lake and wash it? Bo an’ Ray can keep a close eye on me. Where am I gonna go anyway?”

Westfield appeared to consider all the angles before accepting the request. He moved aside as Bo and his friend came into the room, undoubtedly having heard me. “Take him and his… lousy bedding… down to the lake. He’s unhappy sharing with small creatures.”

Bo laughed more than I felt the situation merited, unlocked all four points of my restraints and threw the key to his friend. As I had hoped, they were dressed as they had been every time I was awake, in loose-fitting sweatshirts and pants.

I gathered everything I’d been lying on and under, stumbled outside and headed down the hill. Moonlight allowed me to make the trip without a misstep. I walked into the water and dropped the covers, turning to Bo. “Did you bring the soap?”

Again, Bo threw it at me and I caught it, not even attempting to hide my grin. “You’re too predictable, pal.”

He snorted, took a spread-footed stance, drew the Magnum and crossed his arms over his massive chest.

I began scrubbing the blankets. “I know you won’t risk giving me a blade razor, but is there an electric one in either of those classy motor homes? I really do need a shave.”

“You need a haircut, too, scumbag, but you ain’t gettin’ either one.” Bo stepped closer. “Guess you’ll just have to get used to havin’ a beard and really long locks. I’m picturing the Count of Monte Cristo.”

“Shit, Bo, you can read?” I snickered. “I never woulda guessed.”
“Movies on TV, asshole.” He kicked wet dirt at me. “Richard Chamberlain was great! He was mighty pretty, too. You’re gonna look just plain scruffy, compared to him.”

I concentrated on doing my laundry.

“I can see you schemin’ right now, fuzz…” The look in Bo’s eyes had gone from mocking to hard and calculating. “But I’m warnin’ ya. No matter how long you think you can hold your breath, you won’t get far enough under water that I won’t take your head off the second you come up. The moonlight’d show your wake and there’s no possibility that you’d make it all the way across even this little bitty body o’ water without havin’ t’ breathe at least once.”

Part of my mind thought it heard a helicopter approaching but I couldn’t allow that kind of distraction. Instead, I began to rub soap into my shirt while edging closer to the bank. “Westfield wouldn’t like that, Bo. He’s got plans for my captivity and an early death ain’t part of ‘em.”

“Maybe I’ll just wing ya, instead,” he offered as a snide alternative. “Then you can lie on your cot, bleedin’. Maybe you’d die a nice, slow death from infection.”

“You’re too kind.” I’m pretty sure my sarcasm was lost on him.

“Yeah, ain’t I?”

I figured he practiced that lip-curl in a mirror and I sorted through a few jibes that would keep him from paying any attention to the chopper I now knew wasn’t part of my imagination. I needed him to discount it as a normal fly-over. “Listen, knucklehead, why don’t you stuff that cannon o’ yours in the back o’ your pants and help me with these blankets?”

Bo’s lip curled up even further. “This was your idea, cop! You’re on your own. Ray an’ me only came to watch.”

Suddenly, the voice was in my head again.

“We’re here, Starsky. If you’ve got a move to make, get ready.”

My feet were cold and, hoping I hadn’t stayed in the water too long, I gathered the bedding in my arms. Bo didn’t offer to help but he didn’t move away, either. I could see that Ray wasn’t close enough to interfere as I threw wet stuff at Bo’s feet. When he jumped, I flung myself at him, grabbing his genitals through the cotton pants.

Bo screamed - the girly sound was very satisfying - dropped the gun, and clawed at my fingers. Ray started toward us but shots suddenly disrupted the peace at the top of the hill. He turned and sprinted toward the gunfire and shouting. A helicopter thundered to a position overheard and its searchlight lit up the cabin and hillside.

I added my other hand to my death grip on Bo’s organs, squeezing and pulling as if my life depended on it. Well, it probably did. In the middle of one of his howls, with his fingernails digging into the backs of my hands, I threw myself into the lake, dragging him with me. I rolled and pinned him underneath.

Still trying to scream, Bo inhaled water and began to choke. I sucked in a breath, straddled his thighs, and leaned over my hands, taking both of us to the shallow bottom. As I tightened my grip, Bo thrashed harder but was unable to dislodge my stranglehold on his family jewels.

After long moments, his struggles tapered off. I waited until my own breath was gone before lifting my head above water. I let go and got off him. He floated to the surface next to me, face-up. I didn’t
know if he was dead or not and didn’t much care.

As I turned toward the bank, a hand reached for me. “I’m here, Starsk. Grab hold!”

The voice went straight to my heart and warmed my frigid body. I did as he asked, and was drawn from the water and wrapped in strong arms. Out of the corner of my eye, I watched a uniformed sheriff’s deputy pull Bo out of the lake. “Is he alive?” I croaked.

The deputy put fingers against Bo’s throat and leaned his ear against the chest. “Barely.” The uniform rolled Bo onto his side just before he vomited. “Yeah, he’s alive.”

“Too bad,” I muttered. My partner laughed and pulled me onto his lap. “I was waitin’ for ya, Hutch. Knew you’d come.”

I felt his lips in my hair. “Starsk, I can’t tell you how glad I am that you didn’t give up on me. Lots of others would have. It’s been weeks.”

I leaned back and stared into his baby blue eyes. “Do not go gentle, Hutch. I don’t know where I remember that from, but I thought about it a lot.” As I began to shiver, he helped me to my feet and we started up the hill, his arm firmly around my waist. “Collandra, was he involved?” I asked. “I thought I heard his voice, telling me to hold on. Telling me you were coming.”

“Yeah, Starsk. He’s up at the cabin. Along with Huggy, Dobey, and half the San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Department. Joe’s about drained but he wanted to be here when we found you. It’s purely because of him that we did.”

“Guess I had Joanna’s role this time, huh?”

“Something like that.” Apparently not caring that we were visible to cops and rescue personnel, Hutch caught my right hand in his, the chopper’s million-watt candlepower showing a myriad of gouges. “I’m glad there are medics with us. What happened?”

I had to think about it for only a second. “Payback.”

Hutch smiled. “I look forward to hearing every detail, once we get you home.”

EPILOG - DOBEY

Collandra’s café was jumping. Edith and I sat at a rear table watching Joe - looking, if not happy, at least content - scurry around taking orders, sending them to the kitchen and delivering the meals when they were ready.

His regular clientele was sandwiched in with Minnie, Babcock, Simmons, Sheriff Daniels and a few of the deputies who’d had a hand in Starsky’s rescue, the helicopter crews, off-duty BCPD cops, and anyone else we all thought might like to attend the celebration.

Westfield and his sons, plus as many employees as could be rounded up, were in jail in San Bernardino, awaiting the arrival of representatives from the various law enforcement agencies who wanted a piece of the judicial actions that were about to be instigated against them.

Our D.A. was content to wait and see what Bay City would be allowed to pick up, the original abduction having taken place here. The feds were, of course, playing their ‘our charges are more important than yours’ card but Starsky and Hutch seemed to be satisfied, which was all I really cared
Mary Polanski was holding court at a central table and I guess everyone she’d given a reading to was pleased because I didn’t hear anyone ask for their money back.

Starsky, his lost weight gained back and almost fully recovered from his weeks of captivity - the backs of his hands still sported a few Band-Aids, but those were the only visible signs - leaned against Hutch’s shoulder in a nearby booth, with Huggy on the other side.

My two best detectives didn’t look any different but I was seeing them differently. Not knowing exactly why I did it, I lowered my voice, so that only Edith could hear me over the hubbub, and told her about Hutch’s revelation.

She didn’t even blink and her smile turned radiant. “When you think about what they’ve been through all these years, Harold,” she whispered, “doesn’t it make sense that they’d turn to each other for that last level of commitment?”

“But…” I’d been thinking about it a lot, was unsure of my feelings, and needed her input. “The Bible says it’s wrong.”

“Harold…” she touched my cheek and I caught her hand, holding it there. “We go to church, we try to be good Christians and are raising our children to be the same, but I hope neither one of us believes something is wrong simply because we’re told it is. We know in our hearts, and can see for ourselves…” She gestured toward Starsky and Hutch, “… what good men they are. And great cops! They’re good to, and for each other. They make each other happy. How can that be wrong?”

I hadn’t thought about it that way and, once she’d pointed it out, I certainly couldn’t, and wouldn’t argue with it. I kissed her hand and nodded.

“I just hope no one makes trouble for them,” she added.

She was right. If word got around, it would be the end of my best team. “That won’t happen,” I told her. “Not if I have anything to say about it!

END