Bad Moon Rising

by Dawnwind

Summary

After the synagogue that Starsky attends is bombed, Starsky is assigned to guard the rabbi and Hutch goes undercover in white supremacy group. Fixed all the punctuation since the original posting elsewhere on the 'net.
"Barukh atah Hashem," [Blessed art Thou, Lord] the Rabbi intoned as the cantor began to sing the next prayer. The late evening sun's rays slanted through the windows to his right, casting long shadows across the Sabbath worshippers. The plaintive song spiraled up and around the congregation, summoning an ancient and holy atmosphere to the modern temple.

David Starsky's attention wandered as the reverent words echoed through him, contemplating a mosaic on the wall opposite, representing Moses' trek across the desert. Gold tiles sparkled amongst the paler brown and tan colored chips as the sun moved slowly across the synagogue.

On any other Friday night, Starsky might have been out with friends, in a bar or even with his girlfriend, dancing in a nightclub. Even six months ago, Starsky would never have imagined himself going to the services of his faith. He'd never been much of a practicing Jew. Oh, he gave Hanukkah and Passover a nod, but not much more than the one he gave to the Christian holidays Christmas and Easter. To him, any holiday was good for a get together with friends, no matter what faith they practiced. He certainly couldn't remember his parents ever keeping kosher, and he'd never been required to learn Hebrew or have a Bar Mitzvah.

So, why was he here at temple for the second month in a row on the most popular date night of the week? A hard question to answer, but that was what he was attempting to do.

Ever since he'd answered a dispatch call to Rabbi Micah Bachman's residence, and met the personable young teacher, he'd been trying to learn more about Judaism.

Born only a few years after World War II, Starsky could still remember his U.S. born parents telling him of the fear they had had for their incarcerated relatives during the war. Uncle David and Auntie Chava had even stayed in the Starsky home for over a year after they'd immigrated from Poland. Young David had, at first, been critical of their old country ways and thick accents, but had come to be fascinated by their stories. These only recounted life in some small Polish village, where they'd kept cows and chickens. Of their time in 'the camp', they said nothing, his Aunt always hiding the ugly numbers tattooed on her wrist with long sleeved blouses.

It had been dangerous to be a Jew. That was the impression he'd been given. Don't tell people you don't know well, and certainly don't wear overt signs such as yarmulkes and prayer shawls outside the home.

Starsky's Jewish education had been stunted even before allowed to begin. Thus, at the age of 33, he'd become curious. The meeting with Rabbi Micah, despite it's ominous reason, had seemed fortuitous.

The night had been a dark one, only the barest sliver of a moon riding in the sky near Venus. Unknown anti-Semites had used this cover to spray paint vicious slogans and swastikas across Bachman's home. To add insult to injury, they'd erected a cross on the lawn and set it alight. Called away from an argument between rival hookers, Starsky had been all too happy to go to a situation that had more meat.

He hadn't expected the well of emotions that had overtaken him, seeing those long hated words written one foot high, in pig's blood. Kike, Jesus Killer...Angry, ugly words only meant to incite more hate. The older detective Starsky'd been partnered with while Hutch was recovering from a
knifing had been nonchalant. Burned out from years on the force, he had acted as if he didn't understand Starsky's growing anger, and had been next to useless in defusing the situation.

Photographs of Starsky and the Rabbi pulling down the charred cross had appeared in all the morning newspapers. Religious groups of every denomination had come forth denouncing the horrible crime against the Bachmans. Amazingly, Micah Bachman had called for peace, saying that the hatred had to end and that he wanted to call a peace conference. A meeting between the white supremacists and the leaders of the various factions they abhorred. People said Micah Bachman was crazy, that he couldn't stop centuries of animosity with one summit. But they listened, and very slowly, even members of hate groups started to agree to the talk. Agreeing to sit down in a room with Jews and blacks was more than most had ever imagined. Negotiations were still in the works as to where and how this could be undertaken, but there was hope in the air. Already, whispers of Nobel Peace Prize were being connected with Bachman's name.

Pulling himself out of the reverie, Starsky directed his gaze up at Micah Bachman, concentrating on the Hebrew words he spoke. A prayer of peace. Ancient words spoken for centuries, calling up to God.

"Shabbat Shalom."

As the last words of the service died away, most of the worshipers began to gather their belongings, trailing from the large temple into the smaller community room, stopping to chat briefly with the rabbi.

Two long tables dominated the long narrow community room, both covered with plates of cookies and small cakes made by the female members of the temple. Chairs were piled around the periphery of the room in anticipation of a children's pageant being presented on Saturday night.

Micah Bachman's wife Miriam presided over a silver coffee urn set up near the main doors to the room. The rich, aromatic smell surrounded her like an exotic perfume. She dispensed cups of the fragrant brew with such a gracious smile and warm welcome that even non-coffee drinkers came over to schmooze with her, and the entire congregation adored her.

Micah stood against the open double doors to the community room, the coffee urn just behind him. He inhaled the aroma of ground coffee, enjoying the knowledge that Miriam was there, where he could turn his head and give her a smile and a wink. They'd been married over two years but he still felt like a newlywed.

She was a tall, elegant woman, with masses of blue-black hair, which she tried to keep secured with a banana clip, but never quite managed to. Micah and Miriam were of a height, which is what brought them together, in an odd sort of way. Her taller brothers and his shorter sisters had found it amusing that the two could stand shoulder to shoulder. And that is how their married life had been, shoulder to shoulder, together turning Temple Beth Sharon into a place where Jewish people felt safe and nurtured. A place to worship with pride despite a less than desirable address.

Even the anti-Semitic attacks on the Bachman house hadn't changed their resolve to talk openly and publicly about Judaism. They wanted to encourage lapsed Jews, like David Starsky, back into the temple.

With a seat approximately midway back in the temple, Starsky found himself crushed into the throng heading for the community room. He nodded hellos to the few faces he recognized, falling in line behind a large family of stair-step towheaded children, finally achieving Micah after nearly five minutes in the line.
"You went through that service like Mario Andretti." Starsky teased. "My Hebrew's not that good."

"Got to keep up, Dave." Micah laughed, "Or you fall behind. But, yeah, we were cookin' tonight. Got out sooner than usual. Miriam's annoyed 'cause the coffee urn hadn't warmed up yet."

"I'd love a lukewarm cup." Starsky moved aside for a large busted woman and her tiny, balding husband behind him. They shook the rabbi's hand with bored disinterest, bickering with one another the entire time.

Miriam was deep in conversation with a largely pregnant woman, so not wanting to interrupt, Starsky headed across the room to the cookie tables. Three boys, their yarmulkes decorated with Sesame Street characters and held on with bobby pins, darted in front of him, grabbing macaroons from a plate.

Little knots of parishioners chatted together, the Rabbi's recent press conference regarding the hoped-for peace talks the major topic of conversation. Starsky snagged two chocolate cookies, listening absently to the chatter around him.

There was no warning. No one had a sudden premonition. The temple members continued to wander into the community room, a small group still clustered around Micah at the double doors. No one raised an alarm or shouted out prophetic words. There was just a sudden ear shattering blast, the concrete under the community room floor rippling like water.

A bomb exploded in the temple, crashing through the street side stained glass windows, a ball of fire sending out waves of heat and destruction though the entire room. The shock waves funneled gale force winds across the hall and through the connecting doors to the community room, hurling most of the congregation to the floor as every window shattered. The double doors, propped open for the members to egress, slammed shut with a violent jerk, knocking flat the few people left standing, bodies piling upon bodies already prostrate.

Micah slammed into an older man, unable to stop his fall as the doors crashed closed. His first thought was to the Holy writings and books in the temple. They couldn't be lost! He tried to scramble to his feet, turning in time to see the paneled wall to his right crumble, whole sections dropping down onto the women gathered around the coffee urn.

"Miriam!" he shouted.

Screams rose as the dust began to settle. Primal wails of pain. Death was in the air.

His ears ringing, Starsky raised up to his knees. The room was in shambles, plaster and shards of glass littering the floor. Nearly every person near him was bleeding, most getting to their feet, looking around in dazed confusion. Starsky put his hand to the back of his head where he'd collided with one of the over turned cookie tables. He'd lost his yarmulke and his fingers came away slick with blood, but he found he could stand without swaying. Steadying himself on a table leg, he aided a tiny red headed woman and an older executive type man to their feet. All around them, panic was beginning to swell after the initial silent shock.

"The temple is on fire!" a tall bearded man shouted from across the room, eliciting renewed screams of fear from the panicked crowd.

A mass exodus started towards the back fire doors, people pressing frantically on the panic bar, trying to force the emergency doors open. Dozens of men and women surged forward, crushing those closest to the exit in their hurry. The door's failure to open only increasing the terror of the populace.
"We're trapped!" shrill voices wailed.

"Try the windows!" A man with blood dripping down his forehead pushed two chairs into position, climbing up to pull himself onto the sill. The windows were set high in the battered walls, probably six feet above the floor and now dangerously studded with shards of splintered glass.

A sensible woman ran to the temple's tiny kitchen, grabbing up the rubber mats from in front of the sink and passed them back to cover the wicked glass on the sill.

Immediately, the escape was launched, small children being hauled quickly out the window and dropped gently to waiting hands below.

As sirens could be heard in the distance, Starsky's police training kicked in. His head pounding with a possible concussion, he turned resolutely against the direction of the fleeing throng, searching the wounded for Micah and Miriam.

The red bearded Rabbi was digging single-mindedly through the rubble, his hands mangled and bloody, his hair covered with plaster dust. Beyond the impassable double door, screams could be heard. There were still people trapped in the devastated temple.

"Micah! Get out!" Starsky shouted above the anguished cries of terror. Heat from the fire was blistering the paint on the walls, the temperature of the room raising rapidly.

"Miriam's under there!" Micah gasped, covered in blood and plaster. "I have to get her out. Dave, go get the Torah. Save it...I'll get Miriam."

"It's an inferno in there." Starsky grabbed at his arm, coughing from the smoke seeping under the edge of the double doors.

Micah jerked away, attempting to lever a large piece of cracked paneling off the women. Against his better judgment, Starsky added his muscle, hoping emergency crews and firemen would arrive expeditiously. The panel splintered in half, one girl scrambling up, sobbing with relief as she ran to her waiting parents. The other two women lay ominously still, Miriam's black curls matted with gore, the back of her head caved in.

"Oh, God, Oh, God." Micah reached out a trembling hand, entwining his fingers in her hair. He began to pray in Hebrew, sobbing.

Bending over the pregnant woman, Starsky tentatively felt for a pulse. There was a steady beat at the base of her throat, but she lay unmoving. The smoke was getting thicker and without electric lights, it was becoming increasingly difficult to see.

Shouts and strong lights came bursting in, the exit finally unblocked from the outside. Emergency personnel swarmed through the room, assessing the wounded and helping those ambulatory to safety.

"Over here!" Starsky called, coughing as the acrid smoke invaded his respiratory system. Micah was cradling Miriam against his chest, her arms draped limply across his lap.

The firefighters all wore masks, obscuring their faces, so Starsky was never sure who swooped down on them, loading Miriam quickly onto a gurney and herding the men towards the open door.

Shuffling through the debris after the gurney, Starsky stumbled, twisting his ankle on something. Bending down, he pushed two halves of a blue platter aside, the cookies now just crumbs. Under one broken piece of crockery lay a tiny yarmulke embroidered with a bright yellow Big Bird.
stuffed it into his pocket, limping out of the super heated room and emerged into a crowded alley behind the synagogue. The cooler night air sent goose bumps up his arms, although the ambient temperature was still in the seventies.

Brilliant flashes of light blinded him as he paused on the sidewalk just behind Micah, photographers from every newspaper once again recording Starsky and the Rabbi backlit against an inferno.

He was shunted towards a weary group of people all being supplied with oxygen masks and bandages. There was a surreal quality to the scene. Enormous quantities of people seemed to have materialized in the avenues surrounding the burning synagogue, all fighting to save the building and it's people, united in a way they might never be again. Starsky breathed in the sustaining 100 percent pure oxygen, watching as the paramedics pulled a blanket over Miriam's face.

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"Just slide your hand back a little." Ken Hutchinson took the opportunity to snake his arm under Angela's, letting his hand skim along the slope of the warm, round underside of her breast, grasping the pool cue with a firm hand on her smaller one. "Like this. Line the cue up with the ball, give it some English..." He angled his knee between her legs, letting her shift her weight to rest her body against his

"English, Hutch?" The girl giggled, turning her head to peer through her teased overly bleached blond hair at him. "We are speaking English, aren't we?"

"It's an expression." He gave her a game smile, moving the cue to recapture her attention. "Take the shot."

Angela made an awkward stab with the stick, not even connecting with any of the balls. Reaching over to the table behind him for his beer, Hutch gave a shake of his head. Angela had legs for mile, curves better than a mountain road and a face that would stop traffic, but her I.Q. wouldn't reach 100 if she stood on a box. He swallowed most of the beer in two gulps, surveying the raucous Friday night crowd in The Pits. His old friend Huggy manned the bar, handing out drinks and wisecracks with equal ease.

"Hutch?" Angela sucked on her bottom lip, tongue just peeking out. "Maybe I need another lesson?"

Privately, Hutch thought she'd never learn pool if she majored the game in college, but that wasn't exactly the point of the lessons, after all.

He let his left hand rest on her bare back, just above the knot holding her halter-top together. "Grasp the cue easily and point it at the ball." He pulled her arm back, helping her to snick the cue ball with the tip of the cue. Solely by accident, that ball hit two more, the red one actually tipping into the corner pocket.

"Did I win?" she trilled, planting an enthusiastic kiss on his mouth. He responded in kind, leaning her against the pool table, cupping her buttocks in both hands.

Thus engaged, neither noticed Huggy behind the bar suddenly signal the closest patrons to silence as he turned up the radio.

Even with those huddled around the bar quiet, the room was noisy enough to obscure much of the radio broadcast, but the few words that Huggy heard clearly were enough to put fear in his heart.

"Hutch," Huggy interrupted the blond couple's oblivious clutch, his usual grinning face serious.
"Not now," Hutch hissed, nuzzling Angela's ear.

"Now," Huggy insisted, waiting until he could see the blond cop's eyes. "What was the name of that Jewish church Starsky went to?"

"Synagogue. Uh, Temple Beth Sharon." Hutch groped for the name.

"Hutch," Angela wheedled.

"It was bombed," Huggy told him.

"When? Tonight?" Hutch swallowed against the tightening in his throat, throwing back what was left of his beer in a single gulp.

"An hour ago, I guess, I dunno...There were casualties."

"Angela?" Hutch attempted to focus, not letting himself imagine the worst. "You need to take a cab home."

"What happened?" she asked plaintively. "I thought we were going back to your place."

"A friend--my partner may be in trouble." He prayed that wasn't something worse. "I have to go."


Hutch didn't need to be told twice. He dashed for his battered Ford. Debating whether to head over to the bombsite or to police headquarters, Hutch contacted dispatch for any information they had on Starsky's whereabouts.

Still without any actual word on Starsky, or for that matter, any other member of the congregation except that most had gone to neighboring hospitals, Hutch directed the car to the one closest to the synagogue.

The ER appeared in utter chaos, staff in full trauma mode to take care of the most badly wounded from the synagogue fire. Fighting his way through the crowd to the nurse's desk, Hutch's stomach flip-flopped at the sight of a badly burned man on a gurney being whisked onto an elevator.

After he'd flashed his detective badge, the admitting nurse was at least civil, curtly informing him that she hadn't gotten all the names of the wounded and dead, but she hadn't come across a David Starsky. The lack of any concrete information was raising his blood pressure, but Hutch was determined to remain calm. After all, at least with his police credentials, he had been able to get the harassed nurse to talk to him. There must be many families waiting somewhere with just as much worry, having to wait for that terrible phone call saying a loved one was dead. He wasn't going to get one of those phone calls. Starsky had escaped death so many times before; he was almost as invincible as a comic book super hero.

This vaguely humorous image cheered him slightly as he maneuvered the car through traffic. The radio was keeping up a morbid death count on the temple congregation, announcing that five--no wait, six, people were confirmed dead and nearly all the people there had sustained some injury. The Rabbi had been glimpsed by "this reporter" walking under his own power away from the blaze, but that was the only person any of the radio stations Hutch listened to identified by name.

The next hospital was five miles away, passing Temple Beth Sharon along the way. The entire area was barricaded for several blocks in every direction by all manner of emergency vehicles and personnel. The fire appeared to be under control, but even at night there was a visible pall of smoke.
hanging low over the ruined building. News media vans were parked haphazardly behind the
barricades, filming anything conceivably newsworthy, their lights illuminating the scene like a
bizarre movie set.

Hutch followed a departing ambulance to Cedar's Hospital, parking in one of the emergency short-
term slots before going into the ER to search for his missing partner.

He didn't have to look far. Starsky sat, pale, bedraggled and grimy in a crooked line of hastily
assembled chairs along with ten or so other unfortunate Jews from the temple.

"Starsk!" Hutch called from the ER entrance. It was noisy enough that he wasn't sure Starsky had
heard him. Hutch skirted another arriving gurney with one of the bombing victims aboard. He waited
until the ER doctor had gotten the injured man's vitals from the paramedics, finally catching Starsky's
dark blue gaze as the medical personnel moved by.

Starsky waved his hand, a tired smile curving his lips.

"Are you all right?" Hutch demanded, louder than he'd intended.

"I'll live." Starsky winced at Hutch's volume, his head pounding. "S'posed to get an X-ray for a
concussion."

"How bad is it?" He tipped Starsky's head forward to examine the wound hidden by his curly hair.

"Ow!" Starsky jerked away. "Don't poke at it." He coughed, his lungs still congested from the
smoke.

"Starsky, you're covered in blood-are you sure you're all right?" Hutch left his hand on his partner's
shoulder, as if to assure himself that he still breathed.

"It's not mine--at least, I don't think so." Starsky focused for the first time on the blood and dirt
splattered over his clothes. "It's Miriam's... Hutch, she's dead."

"Oh, Starsky. I'm sorry." Hutch rubbed the back of his friend's neck. "I drove past the...synagogue. It
looks like a..."

"Bomb site?" Starsky finished cynically.

"David Starsky?" A tall, black nurse read his name off her admissions checklist, scanning the group
of waiting wounded.

"Here." Starsky stood, still limping slightly from the bruised ankle.

"Time for your pictures." She indicated a wheelchair. "Free ride upstairs."

"Can I come?" Hutch asked.

"Sure." She shrugged amiably, amazingly even-tempered despite the chaotic ER.
"I'm Kayla. C'mon, Mr. Starsky, they're waiting for you."

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After his head and lung X-rays were read, his ankle taped, head wound bandaged and mild painkiller
prescribed, Starsky was finally released from the hospital.

"I wonder what happened to Micah?" Starsky worried, scanning the remaining congregation still in
the waiting room. "He must be devastated."

"Did you all come here together?" Hutch asked.

"Yah, Hutch. I can't leave him. He'll need somebody--with Miriam gone..."

"Starsky, does it have to be you?" Hutch knew he sounded insensitive, but he was worried about his partner. Starsky was literally swaying on his feet. "You look done in."

"I just want to know." He glimpsed Kayla coming out of a trauma room, and flagged her down.

"Have you seen the Rabbi? Micah Bachman?"

"Yes, I checked him out a few hours ago." She marked a few notes on the nurse's notes on her latest patient. "Poor man. He wasn't hurt badly, but his wife...Have you checked the morgue?"

"That's where he'll be." Starsky nodded, immediately regretting the movement. The headache which had been reduced to a dull roar came back with a vengeance. He started for the elevator, them looked back at his partner."

"I'm coming," Hutch groaned, knowing Starsky's soft heart and generous nature wouldn't let him abandon the Rabbi in his time of crisis.

They found the Rabbi sitting next to his wife's body, holding her pale hand in one of his bandaged ones, his face as still and gray as a statue's.

"Micah?" Starsky asked tentatively.

"Oh, Dave." Micah's face took on some animation, with an attempt at a smile.

"How're you doing?" Starsky resisted the urge to try to cheer the man up; it was definitely not the time.

"I have to stay with her," Micah spoke woodenly. "I know all the words to say, the prayers..." he trailed off, tears running down his face. "I don't want her to be dead."

"Hey, man. I can stay with her." Starsky put a gentle hand on his shoulder, "Maybe you need to get out of here--just for a few minutes, get something to eat? Coffee?"

"Oh, God, she was sitting there with the coffee urn. She was right behind me! Why her?" Micah's words were anguished, but his voice was pitched so softly he was almost whispering.

"You remember my buddy, Hutch?" Starsky tried for a different tactic, pointing out his tall, blond shadow to the nearly oblivious Bachman. "Maybe he could call some of your family for you?"

"Miriam's twin brother was at the synagogue, he made it to the community room even before you did." Micah collected himself together, focusing on the long elegant hand he still held in his own. "He wasn't hurt too bad--in fact, I think he helped get the children out the windows."

"Yeah, I saw him," Starsky agreed.

"He called every-one else in our families. I think Mother Reinhart is filling out some papers, so we can get Miriam out of here."

"That's good." Starsky smiled, barely able to keep his own voice steady at the sight of the man so full of grief. "I'll just wait here until somebody comes back for you." He glanced up at Hutch, "Is that okay?"
It wasn't a very long wait. Less than ten minutes later, a tall, black haired man with a bandage over his left eye came in, accompanied by an elderly woman who bore such a striking resemblance to Miriam that it took Starsky's breath away. Conversely, the twin brother, Moses, looked very little like his sister, aside from the black hair. The hall outside was crowded with more Bachman and Reinhart relatives. After hushed introductions were made, the two detectives made their departures to leave the family to their mourning.

Hutch watched his partner warily, concerned that he had been downplaying his injuries due to his worry for Bachman. Ever since Starsky had been shot three times in the chest by Gunther's henchmen and actually died for a few moments before being revived by the defibrillator, Hutch had lived in fear that any more damage would overtax Starsky's heart and kill him.

He'd questioned the cardiologist, and frankly, any other doctor he could find after the shooting, and they'd all assured him that Starsky's recovery had been complete, and he was fully competent to resume police work. It would be almost exactly a year since Starsky had come back to work in October, and in that time, Hutch had been the only one injured, the knifing that had kept him home for three weeks.

During that time, Starsky had been paired with the burned-out Watkins and met Micah Bachman. A more suspicious man might find that an ominous coincidence, but Hutch knew Starsky had needed some closure after his near death experience, and if discovering religion helped him cope with emotions he couldn't express, more power to him. He himself had felt Starsky's return to the living, and especially, back to police work, nothing short of miraculous.

"Stop looking at me like that." Starsky coughed, his throat still raw from the smoke. "I'm not gonna die, Hutch."

"I know." Hutch pulled him into a rough bear hug, eliciting a yelp of pain from Starsky when he teetered on his bruised ankle. "But it was close, again. You can't keep doin' this to me."

"Me?" Starsky steadied himself against the taller man's arm, before letting his weight back down on his left foot. "Who got stabbed in the belly four months ago?"

"Your foot bothering you?" Hutch asked, concerned. "I can get a wheelchair."

"Since I can see your sad excuse for a car from here, I guess I can walk." Starsky strode across the short Emergency vehicle parking lot with more energy than he actually felt. He didn't want Hutch mother henning him over a concussion. The vigorous pace exacerbated his coughing, though, and Hutch hurried to open the door for him and help him into the car.

"Did you tell the doctor you had lung surgery last year? That coughing can't be good for it," Hutch continued when he'd started the car.

"Will you stop?" Starsky sighed. "I told him. They took x-rays, remember?" He leaned back on the seat, closing his eyes. In truth, he felt like shit and wished he could just curl up in bed for about a hundred years. The old scar tissue on his chest felt ripped in half with every ragged breath he took. "What time is it?"

"About midnight. How bout I take you to my place? You can sleep in the bed." Hutch looked over at him when they'd stopped for a red light. Starsky looked exhausted, his skin still pale in contrast to his dark, curly hair.

"Then you'll make me eat wheat germ and rice flour." Starsky grimaced, the movement of the car already making him mildly nauseated. "No thanks. Take me home."
"Mind if I stay on the couch? I'm beat."

Starsky smiled, he'd fully counted on the other man staying over. He wouldn't have it any other way. All of a sudden, he was crying. Tears streaming down his face before he even realized what was happening. He hitched his breath, not wanting Hutch to notice, but a sob escaped, followed by an even louder one.

"Starsky?" Hutch nearly sideswiped another car, dividing his attention between driving safely and comforting his friend. "What's wrong?"

"I d-dunno." Starsky hiccupped, finally getting the unexpected shower of emotion under control, "I guess it was Miriam and Micah. They'd only been married two years, and..."

"She was too nice a person to die?" Hutch finished for him.

"Yeah. How'd you know?"

"Starsk, whenever a friend or someone we love dies, we think that." Hutch pulled up in front of Starsky's house, shutting off the engine. "God knows, I thought that when you were shot. But that's not how life-and-death works. We can't pick and choose who we want to die or there'd be a lot less people on Earth."

"How'd you get so smart?" Starsky wiped a trembling hand across his eyes, giving his partner a brief grin.

"Lots of practice being around you." Hutch snorted. "Now, let's get started up those stairs, cause I think this could take a while."

Starsky found the trek up the front steps arduous, having to stop half way up when his incipient nausea threatened to overwhelm him, and he had to wait until his stomach cooperated before finishing the journey. His head pounded until his eyesight throbbed and his ankle ached, just to join in the chorus.

Although happy that Starsky hadn't had to spend the night in hospital, Hutch wondered if it might not have been a good idea. The hospital had been so over loaded with patients from the bombing; they'd sent home anyone even vaguely alert and ambulatory. Starsky had proven that he knew the date, current president and his own name. He'd been able to bluff on how clear and steady his vision was, but Starsky had had concussions before and knew his own limits. The nurse had given Hutch a daunting list of signs and symptoms to watch for with a concussion and smoke inhalation. He wondered if Starsky knew Hutch's limits.

He got Starsky settled in bed with his pain pills and aerosol inhaler, then dumped the bloody, smoke-saturated clothes in the laundry, weary beyond belief. He needed to wake Starsky every two hours, which hardly seemed fair after the night he'd had, but important to assess for any possible brain damage after a concussion. It was going to be a long night.

Turning on the TV, Hutch stretched out on the couch to watch the almost continuous coverage the local news gave to the bombing. He sat bolt upright when the photo of Starsky and Micah flashed on the screen. It was so eerily similar to the original newspaper photo from four months ago; the news station ran both with a split screen. Starsky and Micah in front of the burning cross. Starsky and Micah, bloodied and weary, in front of the burning synagogue.

Hutch checked the time and got up to wake his partner.

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From the outside, 1412 South Main Ave. looked like an abandoned storefront. The plate glass windows facing the street had been covered with newspapers, the signage over the door outmoded, still declaring this to be Joe's Deli. There hadn't been any sliced lunchmeats or tuna salad on white served here in three years. The door was locked with a chain wrapped around the knob, so the beat cop patrolling at midnight didn't even give it a second look.

Appearances can be deceiving. In the back room of 1412 So. Main, three men were gathered around a scarred wooden table, toasting one another with Budweisers. It was a celebration. Across from the table, balanced on a bookshelf overflowing with printed pamphlets was a portable TV. Images of the bombed synagogue flashed in black and white, the sound turned off.

"To the Brotherhood!" John Adams raised his beer with a flourish, knocking the can with his other conspirators.

"Success!" Albert Sherman grinned, his pale blue eyes alight. "We've struck a blow for freedom, now."

"Those kikes didn't know what hit them." Peter van Geller knocked back his third beer of the party, flushed with excitement. It had taken his idea, Sherman's design and Adams' strong arm to accomplish their dream, the bombing of Temple Beth Sharon. It had succeeded beyond their wildest fantasies. All the newspapers, every news station and radio were reporting live from the scene. It was the talk of the hour, and all because of the three of them.

Van Geller had never felt such a rush of power. He was invincible. Nobody would ever consider him a loser, an under-achiever, now. He could hold his head up with pride, knowing he had made a difference. That was what his grandfather had taught him, to make your mark in the world, you have to be someone who can make a difference. He had made great strides in his goal to re-instill pride in the American people--white, protestant, hard working American people. Not some dark skinned, foreign born Jesus haters.

"Are you gonna make the call?" Adams asked eagerly, the beer giving his already florid face a hearty glow. "Gotta make the morning papers, man. We'll be famous."

"Can't tell 'em too much," Sherman cautioned, pushing his wire rims up his narrow nose. He was the worrier, but sometimes he thought van Geller could go too far overboard. He still was slightly queasy having realized that they'd actually killed people. Yeah, they were Jews--but there was the tiniest niggle of doubt in the back of his conscience. He pushed that back as far as he could manage, concentrating on the telephone call to the LA Times. This had to be done carefully, with style. "We need to get the city's attention, to make them take notice, but not enough so they sweep in here and arrest the lot of us."

"I got it all covered, Al, you think too much." van Geller laughed. "I want 'em to know we mean business." He smoothed out a crumbled sheet of paper covered with cramped handwriting. "I've written out a speech."

"You can't read all that!" Sherman countered, "They'll be able to trace the call."

"Newspapers don't trace call, the cops do," Adams scoffed, pulling up the pop-top on another can of brew.

"I'm not sayin' all of it--that's mostly for a letter in a coupla' days." van Geller shook his head, then paused when an image on the flickering TV caught his attention. "There he is…” He raised his finger like a pistol, aiming it at Micah Bachman, "Pow, Jew, you're dead."
"I can't believe we didn't get him!" Adams groaned.

"It makes a statement, man." van Geller pointed to the other man on the TV. "He's always with Bachman--that cop, Starsky."

"Don't mess with the cop, Peter," Sherman said, "And unfortunately, killing Bachman's wife makes him look tragic, which I don't think is to our benefit. It would have been better if he'd died."

"What are you complaining about?" Adams crushed his empty beer can, tossing it into a trashcan pushed up under the defunct deli's metal sink. "We killed us some Jew. There's less of 'em in the world tonight because of us."

"Call the newspaper." Sherman directed their attention back to the matter at hand, reading over the scribbled speech. "Just say this..." He pointed to one phrase. "And that." He circled both with a pen. "Just enough to take credit, not enough to let them know who we are, just yet."

Van Geller dialed with one finger, a wicked gleam in his eye as he held the receiver to his ear. It took a while to convince the newspaper's operator to let him speak to a reporter and he was put on hold. This only succeeded in fanning his righteous anger, so that by the time a new voice came on the line, he was on fire. "Who is this?" he demanded imperiously.

"I should ask you the same." The man spoke calmly, "but you asked for a reporter who was assigned to the temple bombing. My name is Andrew Cleary."

"Cleary? Is that an American name?"

"As far as I know," Cleary answered carefully, "If you have any information, I'd like to hear it, but otherwise, I'm extremely busy."

"You're gonna want to hear what I have to say," van Geller gloated. "We're taking credit for the bombing."

"Who is we?" Cleary asked, his heart rate accelerating. He had to be careful, this wasn't the first prank call of the night and he wanted to ascertain that this was the real thing.

"The Brotherhood. We're proud Americans ready to claim this land back as our own. We killed some Jews and we plan to kill more. We're bringing back the Holocaust." Grinning with triumph at Adams and Sherman, he cut off the connection.

*****

Coming awake, Starsky lay quietly with his eyes closed, wondering why he'd wakened on his own. Hutch had disturbed his sleep at least three times during the night, but now, even without opening his eyes, he could tell it was daylight. He didn't feel any less tired, just no longer able to sleep. Opening his eyes just slits, he let the room come slowly into focus--the ceiling and the floor remained in their respective, correct positions.

This was a definite improvement over the severe dizziness he'd had the last time Hutch had forced him to open his eyes. His head ached, but it wasn't threatening to fall off and, amazingly, he felt hungry.

Therein lay the reason he'd awakened. He could smell coffee--and possibly toast-- coming from the kitchen area. With infinite care, Starsky swung his legs over the side of the bed and slowly stood. There was a tiny bit of vertigo if he turned his head side to side, so he stopped doing it immediately, and his head hurt worse in an upright position, but it was bearable. He started out of the room in
"You're awake," Hutch declared from the kitchen.

"No thanks to you." Starsky accepted the glass of orange juice he handed him.

"Well, after you swore at me at six am, I gave it up. Your vocabulary showed an accurate grasp of the here and now, although anatomically, I think what you told me to do is impossible."

"You didn't hide anything in this, did you?" Starsky asked suspiciously, tasting the juice.

"Just oranges. Starsk." Hutch held up his hands in defense. "I just made toast and there are eggs ready to be scrambled."

"I could eat that," Starsky agreed. He followed his partner into the sunny kitchen, noting with surprise that it was nearly eleven am.

"You probably don't even want to read the paper," Hutch warned, scrambling up four eggs, two for each of them.

"That bad?" Starsky asked, sitting down at the table.

"You've taken a better picture."

"Hmm." Starsky pulled the LA Times over to peruse the front page. As warned, there was a half page sized picture of him, standing just behind Micah as they'd followed the gurney out of the burning building. A sharp ache centered in his chest when he realized the photographer had just missed getting Miriam in the photo. The headline were what really kicked him in the gut, ‘Hate Group Claims bombing.‘

"Somebody's proud of that?" he asked in a hollow voice.

"Starsky, don't even read it." Hutch folded the paper, setting a plate of eggs and toast in front of him. "It's just birdcage liner."

"It's the same guys who burned the cross on Micah's lawn." Starsky played with his fork, no longer hungry.

"I read the article. Some group called the paper late last night and claimed credit," Hutch explained. "There's no proof. Probably sickos calling just to get mentioned on the front page."

"We gotta get 'em, Hutch," Starsky said fiercely. "We gotta get 'em off the streets. They killed Miriam...for nothing. For being Jewish."

"Starsky." Hutch sighed. Starsky's pain sliced through him like a sword. Being blond, tall and Nordic looking, he'd never felt the sting of blind prejudice. He had been raised in a nearly all white neighborhood. Duluth, Minnesota had lots of Swedes, but not a single Jew that he'd ever been aware of. The blacks he'd met as a child he could count on one hand. Two housemaids, a cab driver, the porter on the train ride to his grandmother's and a gardener. He'd never been exposed to prejudice until his college days, when a classmate had been beaten for the color of his skin. Hutch had helped the injured man to the infirmary, the encounter leaving an uneasy anger inside him. Why hate a person you don't even know? What purpose did it serve, except to fill your own mind with hate and negativity?

Becoming a cop had opened his eyes to the entire spectrum of violence against persons just for their
color, gender or religion. There was an infinite maelstrom of hate in the world, centering first on one set of people, then another. History had shown that very little changed through out the centuries, especially prejudice.

Hutch had never really given Starsky's Judaism any thought, probably because until recently, neither had Starsky. The Star of David next to symbols of Christmas had just been Starsky's quirky stamp on the season; it hadn't seemed jarring to him at the time. The difference in their religious beliefs didn't concern him in the least, he knew Starsky as a person, and had never discriminated against others. It was that somewhere there was a group of anti-Semites who didn't agree with his liberal ideas. Now, he began to feel a tendril of fear for his best friend, Starsky was reclaiming his Jewish heritage at a very dangerous time.

"You don't know what it's like," Starsky countered tiredly. "Nasty looks, names called before you turn around, actin' like you're dirt."

"Your friends don't act like that," Hutch said softly, running a finger along the wood grain of the table. "I don't."

"I know, I'm sorry." Starsky caught his eyes, reading the empathy there. He sagged, weary. "How can anybody do that? Hutch, there were kids there. Little kids running around...where's my clothes?"

"I put 'em in the hamper. Why?"

"I found a yarmulke. I need to keep it till I can give it back." Starsky started to rise, wincing as the construction crew in his head renewed their hammering.

"I'll get it. Eat some food." Hutch dug through the dirty clothes in the wicker laundry hamper, feeling in Starsky's pockets until he found the forlorn little yarmulke with a once jaunty yellow bird embroidered on the top.

"Here." Hutch placed it on the table, pushing the newspaper even further away as if it could contaminate the unknown child's head covering.

"I didn't do anything." Starsky tore his toast into tiny bits, eating only a few bites. "I just stood there for the longest time. People were hurt, I saw this baby girl crying and her Mom was unconscious..."

"Starsky, don't do this to yourself." Hutch came up behind him, pressing his thumbs into the dark haired man's rigid neck tendons, massaging him.

"Micah wanted me to save the Torah, but it burned." Starsky leaned his head on his arms, letting Hutch's fingers loosen his muscles. "What kind of sense does that make? Huh? Burning up a place of God, just to prove you're better than they are?"

"It doesn't make any sense, Starsky, none at all."

"The funeral will probably be on Monday," Starsky said after a long pause. "But there's no...synagogue left."

"I'm sure they can hold it at a funeral home, or some other temple," Hutch suggested, wanting to have some other conversation, with some semblance of normalcy to it. "Did you ever call Meredith last night? She must be worried sick, it was all over the news."

"Uh--she's not here." Starsky sat up, rolling his head around to crack his vertebrae after the massage. "She's in Washington."
"Since when?"

"Since Monday." The dark haired man picked up the yarmulke, idly smoothing out the wrinkles over Big Bird's face. "She was invited to join a task force on teen-age drug use and went to D.C. for six weeks on a training seminar."

"Starsky, you didn't tell me." Hutch stared at his partner, wondering why the news of his girlfriend's departure was delivered with such a calm, almost dispassionate tone of voice. "Did you two have a fight?"

"No." Starsky gave him a sad half-grin, "She said she needed some space--and hey--this could be a big advancement for her career. Her family's just been giving her some grief lately."

"About the color thing?" Hutch questioned, "I thought everyone was past all that."

"She lets them get to her." Starsky shrugged, "But yeah, the black/white thing was pretty much talked to death, and then she let them have the double whammy. She told 'em I was Jewish." He snorted bitterly, "Sammy Davis Jr. I'm not. Pretty ironic, huh? Buncha wanna-be Nazis hate me for being Jewish, and then I can't be seen with my black girlfriend cause her family doesn't want a Jew in the family."

"Aw, Starsk." Hutch forced down the flash of irrational anger. "You know Meredith will come back. She loves you--no other girl has ever stuck around this long, not with the food you eat."

"Meredith likes burritos," Starsky defended, but there was no joy in his voice. "Hutch, I couldn't stand in the way. She could get a promotion, maybe...She could outrank me, huh?"

"You always did have a flair for flirting with insubordination," Hutch teased. "The sergeant and the Captain."

This brought a genuine smile to Starsky's face, "You think she'd make Captain?"

"I'm not talking about you, buddy." Hutch ruffled his dark hair, careful to avoid the bandage on the back of his head.

"I'll call her later," Starsky promised. "But I'm gonna go back to bed, first. My head's splittin'."

"You didn't eat anything." Hutch collected up the plates, he still had most of the eggs on his plate, too.

"You didn't make burritos." Starsky shuffled back to his room, "That's what I was hungry for."

Neither partner did much for the rest of the day, preferring to remain low-key to avoid the increasingly aggressive news media. The phone rang so many times Hutch finally left it off the hook, and about mid-afternoon a knock on the front door revealed reporters demanding interviews. Hutch's terse 'no comment' only whetted their appetites and insistence that he produce Starsky.

Starsky spent most of both days asleep, which worried Hutch almost as much as the head wound had. Since he was usually a perpetual motion machine, it was unnerving to see Starsky asleep and unmoving for long periods of time. The two unrelated occurrences, happening so close together--Meredith's departure and Miriam's death--were enough to send him into a tail spin of depression, and Hutch wanted to be sure he was there if Starsky started to free-fall.

The weekend passed slowly, and as Starsky had surmised, there was a funeral for Miriam Reinhart Bachman on Monday morning at one of the largest synagogues in the L.A. area. The larger space...
turned out to be necessary; not only was nearly every ambulatory member of Temple Beth Sharon in attendance, but so was the media, representatives from other religions in the city and even the Mayor crowded into the pews.

The Reinhart and Bachman families kept to themselves, in pews roped off with a blue ribbon. Starsky sat only a few rows behind, next to Hutch, but couldn't bring himself to intrude on their grief. The news media had already done enough of that, printing stories from every conceivable angle about the Micah and Miriam, the temple, their fight to establish peace talks between the current assortment of hate groups and those they professed to hate, and most intrusively, printing a picture of Miriam in her wedding dress. Only a block or so from the funeral, the newspaper box on the corner featured a beautiful black haired woman in a flowing white dress, serenely smiling at the camera. The cruel irony of it tore open the heart.

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"Them Jews bury their dead quick, huh?" van Geller had watched the procession cars following the hearse from his Buick parked on a side street. "Don't wanna let 'em smell too much."

"They smell bad enough before they're dead!" Adams crowed. He straightened his copy of the morning's paper. "She was kinda pretty huh, dressed in her wedding dress?"

"How can you say that? Probably was a..." van Geller pushed up his binoculars, scanning the crowd of people still filing from the house of worship. "Hey, there's that curly haired cop--Starsky. They let anybody on the force these days. My Granddad said he could smell a Jew from half a mile."

"Your Granddad would probably have shot any Jew he could smell." Adams laughed. "How is he?"

"Feeling better finally, the heart attack really shook him up." van Geller turned to train his binoculars on the hearse now turning onto Milton Ave. before it took the freeway off-ramp. "Looks like they're heading for the Jewish cemetery."

"Good guess, Einstein, where'd you think they were gonna put her?" Adams scoffed, starting the engine.

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Hutch had ducked out before the end of the funeral to join the parade of cars to the burial site. He inched the car up to the curb, stopping to let Starsky climb in before following the blue sedan in front of them around the corner to Milton Ave.

"How're you doing?" Hutch asked seriously, steering the Ford onto the freeway.

"It's not my wife we're puttin' in the ground," Starsky replied tartly, then softened. "I don't know how he's keeping' it together, Hutch. This has to be killin' him. All the reporters around, and he still says he wants to go forward with the peace talks." Starsky focused out the window, watching for the sign to Mt. Olive Cemetery. "I was glad he let Rabbi Stern do the funeral. Y'know he wanted to do the whole thing himself?"

Slowing the car to take the next exit, Hutch noted Starsky had never answered the original question. He had talked about how Micah was doing, not once mentioning his own feelings. Starsky's incredible generosity of spirit and deep empathy for others would get him in trouble some day it he didn't start thinking about himself. Hutch knew he had been depressed since the bombing, all the more so because of Meredith's absence.

In her defense, she had immediately volunteered to fly back to California to be with Starsky, after
seeing his picture printed in the D.C. newspapers, but he had talked her out of it. In Hutch's opinion, he shouldn't have.

"After the grave site, I need to go into Metro to talk to Dobey," Hutch spoke up. "He called this morning, said he'd been trying to get through all weekend."

"I knew there was a reason you weren't answering the phone," Starsky teased, but he looked as if his heart weren't really in it. "I guess I should get back to those McClusky files, I never did finish typing up all of his statement. That guy talked my ear off."

"Starsky, you don't need to come in to work. Take the day off. You had a concussion."

"And do what? Sleep? I already did that." Starsky closed his hand over the door handle, as the car rolled to a stop in the parking lot. "Don't keep protecting me, Hutch. I'm a big boy. Gunther's scars are all healed, and I hardly got a scratch from the bombing. I heal fast."

"That's what I'm afraid of," Hutch muttered as they walked up to the grave. Luckily, the cemetery had hired extra security, so only invited mourners were allowed onto the grass, the paparazzi kept away with large wrought iron gates.

Eyeing the police standing next to the ornate entrance to Mt. Olive, John Adams drove on past without stopping. The offices of the United Aryan Brotherhood were only a mere five blocks away, he didn't even have to get back onto the freeway. As a parting gesture, van Geller pointed his finger gun, imagining he was picking off LA's finest like ducks at a carnival shooting range.

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"Hutchinson, get into my office," Captain Harold Dobey requested, after the two detectives had arrived into the squad room. "Starsky, I asked for those McClusky files about two weeks ago."

"Captain, you're exaggerating." Starsky rolled his eyes at Hutch, but set about finding the errant paperwork in the mess on his desk. "Good morning to you, too."

"How was the funeral?" the black man asked more soberly, taking in Starsky's still haggard appearance.

"About what any funeral is like." Starsky snagged the McClusky statement out from under a pile of papers from a completely different case. "Found 'em."

"He's not talking much about any of it," Hutch explained, once in Dobey's office. "I don't think he ever really thought that kind of prejudice would be directed at him."

"It's frightening," Dobey agreed, who had dealt with his own share of prejudice.

"I want to work on the bombing case, Captain, I know it's a different precinct, but..."

"Slow down, son, I already have a case for you, undercover." Dobey raised his hand to stop the onslaught of arguments he knew were coming. "It is related to the bombing."

"Undercover doing what?" Hutch asked suspiciously, "And why isn't Starsky in here to hear this, too?"

"Because this is an assignment he needs to stay as far away from as possible." Dobey frowned. "Did you hear about the group who claimed responsibility for the bombing?"
"I read it the paper. The Brotherhood? I think they called themselves," Hutch remembered.

"Right. There are three hate groups in the LA area that use the misnomer Brotherhood. One immediately spoke up to say they had nothing to do with the bombing--Brotherhood to promote the Superiority of the White Man." Dobey made a face at their grandiose title, "Weirdly, they were one of the first groups who originally had agreed to join the talks with Bachman, which put them to the front of everybody's suspect list."

"But?" Hutch put in, to prove he was listening.

"They really do want to talk peace, apparently, they consider Jews white people and only really dislike black people." The Captain laughed derisively. "This sentiment is at odds with most of the other groups around, who lump all the non-Caucasian races into the black category."

"What's that got to do with me?"

"Because your looks can get you places that your partner and I can't even get close to," Dobey said, opening the manila file on his desk. "The other two groups currently under suspicion are the Brotherhood of the SS and the United Aryan Brotherhood."

"Both sound like a return to the Nazi days."

"Exactly. An undercover officer is already in place to infiltrate the SS, and we want you to go undercover with the Aryans," Dobey explained.

Not knowing how to answer, Hutch sat very still, considering his options. On one hand, he'd like nothing better than to bring down a bunch of proto-Nazis from inside their own organization. If they turned out to actually be the ones responsible for the bombing, it was icing on the cake. On the other hand, it was not exactly an optimal time to leave Starsky on his own. "What about Starsky?"

"He'll have a temporary partner."

"Oh, that'll make him really happy." Hutch rubbed his forehead, there was too much to think about, too many decisions to make. "What do we know about these Aryans?"

"Very probably they're the ones who burned the cross on Bachman's lawn, as well," Dobey informed him. "They've been pretty low level for a few years, but seem to be showing up more on the radar lately."

"Starsky said he thought the two incidents were related," Hutch mused. "Again, if I agreed, what's he going to do? I don't like working without him."

"Since he's been linked with Bachman more than once now, the brass feel that we should keep him at the Rabbi's side," Dobey answered, "We're putting him in as Bachman's personal bodyguard."

"Captain, that just puts Starsky in even more danger!" Hutch objected.

"Ah, that's where his new partner comes in, and I think you'll be happy with my choice."

Starsky muddled along with his typing, trying to decipher his own handwriting. In the heat of an interview, he sometimes had to write too quickly to worry about spelling. Not that his spelling was letter perfect on the best of days, and this certainly wasn't it. Despite sleeping the weekend away, he still felt tired, out of sync with the rest of the world. He tried filtering out the noises of the squad room, but voices kept intruding.
Anderson was arguing with his wife on the phone, Myers was describing a particularly gruesome autopsy he'd viewed to his partner, complete with crunching sounds for the breaking of the ribs. Where was Hutch anyway? What did Dobey have to tell him? He hadn't sounded particularly angry, so Hutch probably wasn't in any trouble, but it was fairly unusual for Dobey to speak to one partner without the other. Deciding he needed to find out what Hutch was getting into, Starsky stood abruptly, colliding with an unmovable object in his path.

"Little Davey!" a basso voice growled, wrapping his arms around the detective and lifting him off the floor.

"Darryl," Starsky squeaked in a strangled voice. "I asked you not to call me that. An' put me down."

"Yessir." Darryl Washington placed him back on his feet, grinning widely. At six foot four, he towered over the dark haired detective. With his bald head, fierce, dark-skinned face and massive shoulders, he had once frightened a cornered assailant so completely, the perp had voluntarily surrendered his gun to Washington's partner rather than have the one time halfback come near him. In truth, Washington was more like a huge teddy bear, sweet natured and gentle, enjoying nothing more than flipping burgers on the barbecue with a group of friends.

"What're you doing here, Brick?" Starsky used his friend's football nickname, Darryl Washington, Georgia Tech's Ton of Bricks.

"Ah passed mah test."

"You made Detective?" Starsky crowed, "That's fantastic! Congratulations!" He slapped him on his molded bicep. "Wait'll Hutch hears this."

"Hears what?" Hutch emerged from Dobey's office, "Hey, Brick, good to see you."

"He's one of us, now," Starsky explained. "Got your gold shield, yet?"

"Nah, Ah'm waitin' for mah new Captain t'give it t'me," Washington said with a grin that said he knew more than he was letting on.

"You're changing precincts?" Starsky guessed.

"Washington, good, you finally got here." Dobey came through the door carrying a small leather box. "Starsky, Hutchinson, I want you to meet our newest detective, Sergeant Darryl Washington." He handed the young man his new gold Detective badge with a little flourish. Behind them, Anderson, Myers and Wong clapped and cheered their approval.

"You act like you knew all along!" Starsky accused his blond partner, who was busy shaking Washington's hand.

"Dobey told me, just now." Hutch laughed.

"Why keep me in the dark?" Starsky pouted.

"Cause we got a surprise for you, Little Davey," Washington answered, admiring his new badge before slipping it into the special wallet he'd just purchased.

"Darryl, you call me that again..."

"I kind of like it." Hutch looked down at him. "You look like a Little Davey."
"Don't you start." Starsky pulled himself up to his full height.

"What can we say, you are kinda small." Darryl patted him on his curly head.

"Next to you, everybody is."

"I can see over your head, Starst." Hutch enjoyed the teasing, especially after Starsky's moodiness of the last few days. The fact that Washington would be with Starsky as Bachman's bodyguard had swayed his decision to go undercover with the United Aryan Brotherhood. He felt safer knowing Starsky was with a partner as formidable as Darryl Washington. Besides, they were already good friends and would enjoy working together, lessening the sting of Hutch's departure.

Starsky grumped, eyeing the other detectives in the room. With the exception of Sam Wong, a Chinese-American who stood about 5'8", he was the shortest person in the room. It was disconcerting. Starsky had never really considered himself short, in fact, at just a smidge under 5'11", he was actually above the national average for American males, which he was proud of. He was the tallest man in his family, with both a brother and uncle he topped by an inch or so, but he felt suddenly vaguely inferior. He gave himself a mental shake; it was just all the emotions left over from the bombing getting to him. So he was short and Jewish--that had never been an issue in his police work before, and wouldn't be now.

"Starsk, we're just teasing," Hutch consoled, when Starsky hadn't given back any retorts of his own.

"I know." Starsky nodded, "Now, what was the mysterious meeting with Dobey all about?"

Both the captain and Hutch filled in the other two on the undercover operation and Starsky and Washington's new assignment. Starsky was appalled that the blond man would go into anything so dangerous without backup and objected strenuously. But in the end, even he could see that Hutch was the only man for the job and was tremendously impressed that his friend might be the one to bring the temple bombers to justice. He had absolutely no objections to Darryl's appointment as his temporary partner, since the grouchy Watkins had finally retired.

Dobey returned to his office to get the ball rolling on the undercover assignment, leaving the other three to plan their next moves.

"Ah'm dry as a bone," Washington remarked. "Anybody wanna coke?"

"I do." Starsky stood, nudging his blond friend, "What'd you want?"

"Whatever you guys get, I need to get a handle on this stuff. It's not gonna be easy." Hutch huddled over the file on the United Aryan Brotherhood to glean all the information he would need to infiltrate their group, simultaneously trying to come up with a plausible cover story.

"Hope you don' mind getting' stuck with me 'stead o' Hutch." Washington and Starsky made the trip to the soda machine to get refreshments for all while they planed out every aspect of Hutchinson's undercover investigation.

"Brick, frankly Hutch was startin' to get on my nerves," Starsky said honestly, dropping enough coins in the drink machine for three cokes. "It's nearly a year since I been back to work after getting shot by Gunther's goons, but Hutch still acts like the stitches will pop and my lungs are gonna hang out." He retrieved the ice cold cans, handing one to his friend. "After the bombing on Friday night, I thought he wanted to wrap me up in bubblewrap and put me on a shelf." He popped the top of his coke and took a swig. "He means well, don't tell him I said that."

"Ah swear," Darryl agreed, both amused and touched by their devotion to one another.
"And if you start anything like that, I'll..." Starsky regarded the larger man with as stern an expression as he could muster. "I'll punch you in the knee cap."

Washington chortled, slapping Starsky on the back hard enough to slosh the coke out of his can. "Well, it's only temporary, till Hutch finishes that undercover. Ah 'spect Ah'll get a different partner later."

"Hey, I wouldn't mind having a big guy like you around all the time." Starsky eyed his bulk with speculation, "How much can you press?"

"I picked you up easy 'nough."

"What's that s'posed to mean?" Starsky laughed good-naturedly, following him back into the squad room.

The rest of the day was spent going over background information on white supremacist groups, and flesh out Hutch's undercover persona. After much deliberation, several cokes and candy bars from the machine, and a pizza delivered into the squad room, it was decided that Hutch should be a disillusioned factory worker. Passed over for a promotion because a Jewish man was made floor manager, he would seek out the Brotherhood for vengeance. Arrangements were started to find an apartment near United Aryan's offices and a factory to use as a cover employer.

"C'mon, Hutch, I'm starving." Starsky groaned, "We've worked out everything--I know more about Ken Chambers than I do about you."

"It's after six," Washington agreed. "As mah Mama used t'say, there's always another day."

"Okay, okay." Hutch agreed reluctantly. He did feel vaguely guilty for keeping Starsky at work so long when he'd meant to send him home early, but he wanted his cover perfect. It was vitally important that he not screw up in anyway. It could be more dangerous that he wanted to think about. "How 'bout the Pits?"

"You been there?" Starsky asked Darryl. "You haven't lived 'till you've had one of Huggy's burgers. And if you survive the ptomaine poisoning, you're immune for life."

The bar was surprisingly crowded for a Monday night, most of the patrons watching a baseball game on the TV over the bar. A wild pitch caused an uproar amongst those watching, many pitching peanuts and pretzels at the screen.

"Welcome to the zoo!" Huggy hailed them, nodding when Hutch indicated beers for the three of them.

"Kinda wild." Washington laughed, dodging some flying snack foods. "That team ain't gonna make it to the series."

"Brick, how'd you know?" Starsky argued. "They won 'gainst the Braves. It's only September, the playoffs haven't even started."

"They haven't got a prayer," Darryl disagreed. All three stood watching the last pitch of the game, but despite a close score, the Oakland A's won, disappointing the other team's vocal fans. Huggy was kept busy pouring conciliatory drinks all around.

"You that good with a all sports or just baseball?" Hutch asked.

"Football's mah game, but Ah'll watch anythang with a ball." He shrugged, "Ceptin' Ah never got
"the hang o' cricket."

"Nobody understands cricket." Starsky pulled out a chair, flipping it around and straddling it backwards, his arms folded on the backrest. "Take a load off."

"I wanna check out the jukebox." Washington dug out some quarters from his pocket. "Anythang you like t'hear?"

"Any Temptations?" Hutch suggested, taking a chair next to Starsky at the table.

"Mah man." He slapped the blond man's hand in a high five, but before he could make it over to the neon accented machine, the opening strains of Credence Clearwater's 'Bad Moon Rising' filled the room.

"What'll it be, guys?" Huggy asked.

Starsky ordered, gesturing Washington back to the table while Hutch put in his own order. After Huggy brought over the beer, introductions were made between the skinny bar owner and the newly promoted detective. Huggy joined them for a drink while all four toasted their new and old friends, the three detectives knowing this was the last time they could be seen together for a few weeks.

Taking a long drink of beer, Starsky gave a shiver, a grimace on his face.

"Bad brew?" Hutch tasted his own, finding nothing out of the ordinary.

"No, I just hate this song." Starsky shook his head, "Gives me the creeps."

"There's a bad moon rising..." Hutch sang along, Darryl joining in, an octave lower. "$Hope you have got your things together, hope you are quite prepared to die...

"It's like somebody's walkin' over my grave." Starsky waved a dismissive hand at the jukebox. "I hope you picked something better, Brick."

"Mah Girl," Washington answered, digging into the burger Huggy had brought over.

"Now that's music," Starsky agreed.

"I wouldn't trust his taste," Hutch needled. "He likes disco."

"Starsky!" Huggy exclaimed, "Those BeeGees?"

"I don't listen to the BeeGees." Starsky applied a liberal dollop of ketchup on his hamburger before taking a large bite.

"He likes ABBA." Hutch swiped Starsky's pickle with a leer. His tuna melt hadn't included one, just an ice cream scoop of potato salad.

"Those Danish girls are pretty hot," Huggy said thoughtfully, picking up empty glasses from the neighboring table before taking them back to the bar sink.

"They're Swedish," Darryl supplied helpfully. When the other three gave him incredulous looks, he nodded vigorously. "From Sweden. In Scandinavia."

"We know where Sweden is, Brick," Hutch agreed, eating the pickle in sharp bites. "You like ABBA?"
"They're not happenin', Man." He picked up a French fry. "Ah don't know why we're talkin' 'bout them anyways."

"Because he..." Starsky frowned, unable to untangle the conversation. He rubbed his eyes tiredly, his head aching from the smoke and noise in the bar. The sensual tones of 'My Girl' were almost drowned out by the ambient background conversation. "You ready to become Ken Chambers, buddy?"

"I better be, think I'll start Wednesday or Thursday, if Dobey gets an OK from that factory on Wilber." Hutch swallowed the last of his beer, waving his mug towards Huggy at the bar.

"Why not tomorrow?" Darryl asked.

"Can't go in before his cover story has back up. The factory, his apartment's landlord all have to agree to be in on it." Starsky ate some of his burger, the ketchup dripping onto his French fries. "Can't be too careful, one wrong word and your cover's blown to hell." He picked up one of the red splattered fries, licking off the ketchup before eating it.

"Stark, that's disgusting." Hutch belied his own words by swiping a fry.

"You two are crazy." Darryl laughed, knowing he was going to enjoy working with both of them.

"He is." Starsky pointed to the blond man, "An' for the record, I like Jim Croce."

"Think I'm crazy?" Hutch countered. "Comes from working with you." He took another French fry. "Better watch yourself, Brick, Starsky's libel to drive you 'round the bend."

"Speak for yourself, you'll miss me inside of a week," Starsky grumbled. "And keep your hands off my fries."

"I didn't get any," Hutch pointed out.

"Is that my fault?"

********

All three parted company amiably, returning to their respective homes before ten. Hutch slept in his own bed for the first night since the temple bombing, but he was restless, unnamed worries disturbing his sleep.

In the odd way of dreams, he was desperately searching... first down one corridor, then another, finally peering down a deep cave, his heart pounding so loudly it sounded like jungle drums.

But he never found what he sought, awakening covered in sweat at 5:30 am. He had an overwhelming urge to call Starsky, but chided himself for the worry, going out for a morning run instead. He had to remind himself to keep his distance from Starsky from now on. Any contact between the two of them could be dangerous. He couldn't keep calling him whenever he felt like talking, and he certainly had to start orienting himself to a more prejudiced mindset.

With that in mind, he changed quickly after his run, driving down to So. Main, over thirty minutes away from his house, to have breakfast. After the laid back, bohemian atmosphere of Venice when he'd lived for several years, the community of Waverly was depressing, the nearby car parts factory dominating the whole neighborhood.

A diner was doing a fairly booming business for only 6:30 in the morning, and Hutch got the last
stool at the counter. He ordered an omelet, wheat toast and tea, idly watching the other patrons eating their own breakfasts.

The food was surprisingly good, since the diner had the look of a place that fried everything in a vat of bacon grease. The eggs were light and fluffy, with a hint of dill. He'd be happy to eat here everyday of his undercover, but then remembered that if he were supposed to be out of work, he wouldn't be able to afford it. He was just finishing his cup of tea when a tall, broad shouldered man with the white blond hair of a true Nordic walked in, took a seat two stools down the counter from Hutch and ordered pancakes and bacon.

"Sure thing, Peter." The waitress was definitely over forty, but she simpered in front of the blond man like a schoolgirl. Hutch was no judge of another man's looks, but Peter certainly could have been the captain of some high school football team perhaps ten years back with his thick neck, huge hands and swaggering style.

"You sure got a way with a pot of coffee," Peter teased the waitress. "You know I never go anywhere else." Studying the man's profile, Hutch realized with a jolt that this might be the elusive Peter van Geller. There'd been no photograph with the file on the United Aryan Brotherhood, but his gut told him that this was his assignment.

As Hutch got up to pay the waitress, whose nametag proclaimed her as Dotty, a second man walked in, joining Peter at the counter. Obviously friends, the blond accepted a sheaf of papers from the smaller, thin-faced man, frowning as he read the information.

"Your change?" Dotty asked when Hutch appeared not to be paying any attention to the transaction.

"Oh, keep it," Hutch said generously, it was only a couple of quarters. While a big tip for the breakfast, he thought it might get her into his good graces for the future.

"Thanks." She tucked the money into her pocket, smiling at him.

"Got to get to work." Hutch started planting his cover story. "Boss told me he had something important to tell me this morning, don't want to be late."

"You work over at the factory?" Dotty asked. "Haven't seen you around much."

"Just got off the night shift two months ago, hard to get up when I used to be going to bed." Hutch laughed. "Kept being late, but now I think good things are about to happen. Maybe a promotion."

"Well, good luck! Come in and tell me when you get that promotion."

"Sure thing." Hutch waved at her, giving a glance to the two men at the bar. He got the impression that something was going on between the two, and that he should keep his eyes on them.

Sitting in his parked car half a block down from the diner, Hutch watched the city of Waverly come to life as more businesses opened up, more people walking purposely to their respective jobs.

Peter and his friend stayed in the diner far longer than it would have taken both of them to eat two breakfasts, but finally emerged at nearly 7:45. They walked only a few hundred yards to an abandoned looking storefront with newspapered windows, unlocked the chain on the front door and entered. It was the address for the United Aryan Brotherhood.

Hutch congratulated himself on somehow recognizing the blond man as probably being Peter van Geller, the titular head of the organization, but wondered how he could get in their good graces. It didn't look as if they were advertising for any applicants. In fact, it looked like they had plenty to
hide. How would he explain how he'd heard of them?

He sat watching for a half-hour more, but nothing much of interest happened. A few more men entered the Brotherhood offices, all naturally white, but they were also noticeable for being tall and blond haired. Maybe the Aryans really took their German ancestors' precepts to heart and were looking for a few particular prejudiced men. At least that gave Hutch a leg up over some brown haired redneck. He still felt uncomfortable even pretending to ally himself with such bigots.

He drove away from So. Main, to a less busy street to use a public telephone to call Dobey. The Metro captain was pleased about Hutch's early morning foray, and gave him the go-ahead to contact the manager of the car parts factory. He ended the conversation by telling him that he would be expected to call into the precinct every day at 5:30 PM.

"You miss a call in and the department's on alert, you understand, Hutchinson?" Dobey warned in his usual blustery way.

"Got it, Captain." Hutch smiled to himself, glad he had friends behind him, "And you know if that happens, Starsky'll come after me."

"Take care of yourself, son," Dobey said more gently.

"Plan on it."

*****

Starsky ambled into the empty squad room, finishing the last of his morning jelly donut. Dropping into his usual chair, he swirled the dregs of his coffee in the Styrofoam cup, feeling unsettled. It wasn't just that there were no other detectives in at the moment, it was that there was no tall, blond partner sitting across from him.

It had been a long time since either he or Hutch had gone undercover without the other. Except for the three weeks Hutch had been off for his wound, it had been more than a year since Starsky had been on his own. Hutch had been so overly protective of him when he'd come back after his long medical leave following the shooting that it was literally months before anyone left him alone, period. Hutch, Huggy, Meredith and a barrage of friends had kept their eyes on him until he had actually rebelled, going off on a bender one weekend, just to get them off his back. Thinking back, that was probably why he'd started going to temple, for a bit of solitude. To be with his own thoughts--and God. Not the worst place to be.

Reminding himself that he wasn't actually alone in the physical sense, he did have a new partner--wherever he was at this moment--Starsky opened the top case file on his desk. He'd asked for the preliminary investigation reports on the temple bombing, wanting to get up to speed with the case before joining Micah Bachman on the front lines.

But the pictures. Very few of the official report's photos showed anything but the interior of the ruined building, but interspersed with the police photos were pictures gleaned from all the newspaper and television footage. The now famous image of he and Micah, action shots of the firemen and paramedics doing their jobs, gruesome prints of dead bodies, burned corpses...He flipped the pictures over with a snap, the donut in his stomach churning.

"What 'er ya lookin' at?" Washington came up behind him with his breakfast sandwich, to peer over Starsky's shoulder.

"Brick, nearly gave me a heart attack!" Starsky groused, gripping the edge of the desk to stop his
"Well then, stop lookin' at them pictures." Darryl grimaced at an overview of the entire destruction, synagogue still in flames.

"Y'know what the first people on the scene found?" Starsky asked rhetorically. "The emergency door to the community room was blocked from the outside. So nobody could escape."

"Starsky." Washington sighed, "What happened...happened. Nobody can deny it--but you can't let all that hate fester inside you."

"Can you blame me?" Starsky flared, pushing the chair back with a jerk. He sprang to his feet, agitated.

"No, man." Washington held up his hands defensively. "But you can't go out there and watch Bachman's back like this. All tense. You need to find it in your heart t' forgive."

"Forgive?" Starsky repeated in disbelief, prowling the room from the water cooler to the file cabinet. "They killed six people! And another old man who died of a heart attack after he got to the hospital!"

"D'you remember the four little girls in Birmingham?"

"What?"

"1963. My Granny Mae-Belle lived in Birmingham, Alabama. We used t'go there in the summer." He collected the pictures back into the file folder and closed it. "A bastard put a bomb in a church. Killed four little girls. Four sweet girls who were gonna go to Sunday school."

"Cause they were black," Starsky said almost inaudibly.

"Yeah."

"Damn." The anger was so tight in his chest he couldn't breathe for a moment. "I was a teenager. I remember."

"Th'only way anybody can get past that kinda pain is t'let yourself forgive." Darryl shook his head. "Or it'll eat you up inside."

"Like cancer," Starsky said obliquely.

"Starsky! Washington!" Dobey bellowed, despite the fact that they were less than ten feet away when he came through the connecting door from his office. "Where is everyone else?"

"Fightin' crime, Cap'n." Washington shrugged, watching Starsky until he sat down again.

"Bachman is having a press conference on Thursday afternoon," Dobey explained, "You two need to be in place by then."

"He's in mourning, Cap," Starsky objected. "We have to let him have private time with his family--nobody's leaving him alone."

"Paper's got somethin' nasty to add ever'day," Washington agreed. "Lots of the people that were there said that the service went faster'n usual that night. The bomb was probably meant to go off while they were still sittin' in the pews."

"I joked with Micah about goin' so fast..." Starsky's voice was choked. "Maybe that's the only thing
anyone can be grateful for, those bastards didn't kill the whole congregation."

"All the more reason you need to be at his side at the press conference, to protect him," Dobey instructed, but his tone was gentler. He could tell Starsky was still in mourning, too. "Don't let anyone get near him until those peace conferences are underway."

"There a definite date set now?" Washington asked, taking a bite from his forgotten ham sandwich.

"Bachman's statement this morning said he'd say more at the press conference on Thursday, but that he plans to start the talks right after Yom Kippur--at the beginning of October."

"Day of Atonement," Starsky said.

"Oh, and Starsky, I talked to Hutch just now."

"Yeah?"

"We're setting aside a secure line for him. You and I are the only ones whom he'll be in contact with." He smiled slightly, "That number is designated as his brother Frank's."

"That mean you two are kin?" Washington snickered, wagging a finger between his partner and captain. "Y'all look so much alike. Take after yer mama or daddy?"

"Quit kidding around, Washington," Dobey chided sternly. "Hutchinson will be calling around 5:30 every afternoon, so one of us has to be waiting."

"Sure, Captain," Starsky agreed, glad there'd be some regular communication from Hutch. "I'll be here."

"Then earn your pay and get out on the streets for the rest of the day." Dobey shooed them off. "Criminals aren't taking an off day just cause you're finishing your breakfast."

"Most important meal of the day." Washington finished his sandwich, taking a long swig from a bottle of orange juice. "Course, I'd worry about little Davey, eatin' donuts an' coffee."

"You're eating ham," Starsky pointed out, feeling like exerting his Jewishness, deliberately neglecting to mention he'd eaten ham plenty of times. He tossed his Styrofoam cup in the trash, heading for the door.

"Yeah, now what is it with these food laws ya'll have?" Washington asked, following.

*****

On Wednesday morning, The Brotherhood surprised everyone with their manifesto, printed 'exclusively' in the LA Times under the byline of Andrew Cleary. Stating their intentions to reclaim California, and the entire U.S for "God fearing White Christian People", they proclaimed they planned to stop Micah Bachman's talks and rekindle a "Third Reich regime to destroy all Jews." The story was immediately scooped up and reprinted in every other local newspaper by late afternoon, the national wire services speeding it across the country, each succeeding reprint adding ever more sensational details.

Immediately, hate groups of every stripe lined up along an invisible dividing line, some for the outspoken group, but a surprisingly large portion vocally against them. The Klan, seeking to appeal to a wider population, with forced busing of black children to previously segregated schools now widespread through the south, denounced the United Aryan Brotherhood for their Nazi-like tactics,
although they refused to politically ally themselves with Micah Bachman's minions. In the LA area, there were numerous calls to the Alliance for Peaceful Co-existence, the hastily coined name for Bachman's growing organization.

Hutch sat slumped at the counter of Dino's Diner, the afternoon edition of the paper spread out in front of him. He'd read several versions of the story through out the day, but this one included the comments from the Klan leader. He snorted in disgust, never having thought he might actually agree with anything that hate mongerer would say. "Nazi-like tactics," he repeated under his breath.

"Don't you just love it?" Dotty asked, her face alight with mischief, leaning over the counter.

"What?"

"All this." She swept her hand across the front-page article, the side bar comments and updates on the temple bombings.

"Pretty remarkable," Hutch said evasively.

"I know who wrote that," she whispered conspiratorially. Since there was one other patron in the diner, a little old woman who was eating in the farthest booth from them, Hutch wondered why she whispered.

"You do?" He took a calming breath, launching into his cover life for real. He'd contacted the factory, been 'hired' and 'fired' in less than twenty-four hours, and moved into a tiny studio apartment furnished with a few cheap pieces of furniture garnered from the department's warehouse of unclaimed stolen merchandise. Now was the moment of truth. Would Dotty believe he was sincerely interested in joining the Brotherhood? "I kinda agree with some of what's written here."

"Most folk do." She nodded, the pencil behind her ear threatening to fall. She rescued it with a long, brightly manicured nail. "Too many furriners around here. Wops, Kikes, nigras..."

"But you said you know who wrote this?" Hutch sounded as interested as he could muster.

"Well, yes, but y'know, they're keepin' a low profile, if you know what I mean."

"Understandable. I'd really like to meet them."

She crossed her arms, separating herself from him by leaning on the refrigeration unit behind the counter. "Now, I don't know you real well, seen you here the other day, but that don't mean you ain't some reporter tryin' to get on my good side."

"Just interested." Hutch backed off. "You said you knew them. I'm like minded. I can go elsewhere."

She switched topics by offering him coffee. He agreed to a cup and ordered a piece of gelatinous lemon meringue pie. The slice she slid in front of him had a bilious yellow color no real lemon ever achieved. He took a tentative bite, washing it down with a decent coffee. He reminded himself never to order dessert here again, even Starsky couldn't stomach this. The breakfast had been far superior to the pie. He toyed with his fork, reluctant to eat more possible nuclear waste.

"It's awful early in the afternoon for you t'be off work. You get that promotion you were talkin' about?" Dotty restarted the conversation.

"You've got a good memory."

"Useful in my profession." She tapped her order pad.
"I guess so." Hutch nodded. "How much do I owe you?"

"Two dollars."

He pulled a handful of cash out of his pocket, carefully counting the exact change and adding a ten percent tip.

"You didn't get any promotion, did you?" she asked sympathetically.

"Got fired," Hutch spat. "Boss said he was tired of me being late. He's the one who switched me from nights to days--never late a day in my life when I worked nights."

"Sorry." She tapped the keys of the cash register, dropping his money into the drawer, leaving out the last quarter. "Keep the tip, looks like you could use it."

"Y'know the worst part?" Hutch picked up the quarter, rolling it between his fingers, "A damned Jew got the floor manager position. I worked there two years, and they pass me over for him." He gave a silent apology to Starsky for talking like that.

"Listen...I don't know if I can help you in the money department, but maybe I could talk to a friend of mine." She gave him a full-length appraisal. "Nice tall, blond guy like yourself, that's exactly the kind of man he likes workin' for him."

"You're not talking about anything kinky, are you?"

This received a throaty chuckle, "Honey, you'd be good for that kinda work, too. Peter's...like-minded, as you said. You'll like him."

Sincerely doubting that, he folded the paper, letting only the Brotherhood's manifesto show. "You mean he wrote..."

"Whatever you say. Be here tomorrow, maybe noon?" He nodded, starting to leave. "Wait," Dotty called, "What's your name, blondie?"

"Ken Chambers," Hutch introduced himself. "And thank you for trusting me. I'll be here tomorrow, promise."

Elated, Hutch headed back to his spacious studio apartment. It was on the second story of a building so precarious looking, even a minor earthquake would probably tumble it like a house of cards. He stopped at the corner market for a few groceries, and indulged in a straggly looking fern, never quite able to resist a needy looking plant.

He had just over an hour before he needed to check in with the police department, and spent the time giving his place a lived in look. The empty beer cans, old magazines and pile of dirty laundry he'd brought from his Venice home really gave the apartment the authentic feel. The department had provided mail with the address printed on it, and even a realistic looking dunning notice from a defunct credit card service threatening him with repossession of his TV. Starsky would have teasingly pointed out that his usual beater of a Ford would have fit right in, but he'd started driving a gray Pinto with a rusty bumper.

The housekeeping took very little time and Hutch turned on the TV for company, trying to feel at home in his new apartment and new persona.

********
Picking up the secured line on the first ring, Starsky glanced at the clock, it was five twenty five. Hutch was right on time. "Starsky," he barked.

"You're supposed to be Frank," Hutch teased.

"How come Dobey an' me hafta be the same brother? Cancha have two?"

"He made these rules, not me." Hutch laughed, glad to be talking to someone whose company he enjoyed. Even second hand contact with the Aryans felt dirty.

"Well, they're kinda stupid," Starsky complained amiably, just as happy to be talking to his friend. "How're you doin'?"

Recounting his meetings with Dotty and the plan to meet with Van Geller on the morrow, Hutch tried to think of some way to continue the conversation. "What's the reaction to the shit printed in the paper this morning?"

"You mean the birdcage liner?" Starsky asked tightly, "All I need to do is get a bird."

"Starsk, don't let it get to you." Hutch sighed. "They're sick people, and we're gonna put them in prison."

"Yeah, that'll stop them—in an enclosed population where anger breeds," Starsky answered cynically. "That's the answer."

"Which is why what Micah is doing it so important."

"We'll be at his press conference tomorrow and the peace talks are set to start on October 9th, after Yom Kippur."

"Good. Not soon enough."

"Hutch...don't let 'em get to you."

"Couldn't happen, Buddy. I've known you too long."

"Huh?"

"If being paired with you in the academy didn't make me prejudiced, nothing could."

"Hanging up now."

"G'bye, Starsk," Hutch said into the empty apartment after the connection had been broken.

*****

Hutch arrived almost exactly at the appointed hour for his meeting with hate. Dino's was full of the lunch crowd, the counter crammed with bodies shoving burgers and the soup of the day into their mouths, but Dotty spotted him when he walked in and waved him over.

"I saved you the back booth." She motioned to the empty table by the kitchen door. "Peter should be here real soon."

Thanking her, Hutch slipped into the padded bench facing the door. He made a show of scanning the menu, keeping his eye on the patrons coming and going through the glass doors with the large script D on each side.
Peter van Geller came through at five after twelve and stood surveying the room as if coming to some sort of decision. Dressed in a blue polo shirt and khakis, he still gave off the aura of some past football captain, there was no obvious sign of a man who could cold-heartedly bomb a synagogue full of people. He gave a perfunctory nod when Dotty pointed him back to Hutch's booth.

"Ken Chambers?" van Geller asked. "Dotty says you're interested in The Brotherhood."

"If you mean do I want to join with others who think like I do, then yeah." Hutch held out a hopefully friendly hand, but van Geller chose to ignore it. "I read your article in the paper. I agree with you one hundred percent."

Sitting down, the head of the Aryan Brotherhood scrutinized Hutch's face for several unnerving moments. "You'd certainly fit right in. But how do I know you really believe in the truth?"

The truth? Hutch thought with disbelief. "I think this country's gone to the Jews. Good Americans need to reclaim our constitutional rights from these...hook noses." He had to grope for a derogatory tem, but van Geller didn't seem to notice his hesitation.

"Well, lots of people can spout the rhetoric, but what do you have to really contribute to the cause?"

"Time." Hutch related his now familiar story of having been passed over for a Jewish co-worker, and admitted that he had no job, but added that he didn't expect the Brotherhood to pay him. "I want to get back some self respect. When I read what you're planning to do, I said, there's someone who knows what he wants. That's the kind of person I want to get to know."

"We're not a big organization, but we have big plans." Peter leaned back in his seat, still suspicious of this blond haired man. "What we did last week was just the beginning."

"I could help out in any way," Hutch offered. "Pamphlets, driving, whatever you want, as long as it helps make a change."

"Well, Chambers, I like your enthusiasm." van Geller nodded. "Let's have some lunch and get to know each other. "If I still like what I see at the end of the meal, you'll be in on a probationary period. But I expect hard work, and a willingness to do what needs to be done."

Both ordered burgers and fries, Peter beginning to expound on his theories as he ate. Hutch was both repulsed and fascinated by the way the man's mind worked. He was one of the most normal looking sociopaths he had ever come across.

After the meal, van Geller walked Hutch down the sidewalk to the nearby storefront. "We're keeping a low profile." Peter waved a hand at the newspaper-covered windows.

Hutch nodded, then took a closer look, realizing that the papers were now all recent editions. Every inch was covered with different versions of the Brotherhood's manifesto, from newspapers across the country. One was even from the International Tribune, the journal read by English speaking people across the globe. For a small time anti-Semitic group, they had made ripples in a far bigger pond than expected.

"Right now, we need to block that asshole Bachman's peace talks." van Geller opened the door, showing Hutch into the small front room. Several other men and one or two women, all so blond and Aryan that Hitler could have used them for breeding stock, were industriously stuffing envelopes, working a small Xerox machine and talking on the phone. "You can start by helping Tobe here." He clapped a lean faced man on the shoulder. "He's getting out the word about who we are and what we believe in."
"Hey." Tober Daniels gave Hutch the once over and went back to sticking address labels onto envelopes.

"I thought that was why you went to the papers," Hutch said, confused. "Your manifesto reached across the world, man."

"But did it reach the right people? You may have noticed we didn't put in the full name of our organization." Van Geller smiled smugly. "Can't be too careful. There could be spies everywhere."

Knowing Peter was feeling him out, Hutch nodded in agreement. "You don't want the cops knowing what you plan in advance."

"Exactly, man." Van Geller handed him a pile of flyers, "Get to work, there's lots to be done."

*****

The Alliance for Peaceful Co-existence had been headquartered in an old Victorian donated by family of one of the bombing victims. Since they had scarcely had time to move in before the press conference, everything was in a state of organized chaos. People Starsky didn't recognize were rushing about with hastily xeroxed papers, while others tried to create a professional looking area where Bachman could deliver his statement in front of the invited cameras.

There was, unsurprisingly, security at the front door, checking identification. Both Starsky and Washington flashed their police badges and were ushered upstairs into Bachman's private 'office', which had obviously once been a child's bedroom. There was pink bunny wallpaper on the wall.

"Detective Starsky," Moses Reinhart greeted him. Like Starsky, he still bore marks from the bombing only seven days earlier. His left eye was still bruised, the gash across his eyebrow healing. "Glad to hear you're on the team."

After introducing Washington, Starsky went over to where Micah was hunched over a desk, correcting his written statement with a red pen. "Micah?"

"Dave!" The Rabbi stood to give his friend a hug. "Why didn't you come talk to me after the funeral?"

"Didn't want to intrude." Starsky perched on the edge of the desk.

"You wouldn't have." Micah tapped his pen on the papers. "I really need those about me who care. I couldn't do this otherwise."

"That's why I'm here." Starsky waved his arms around to include the room. "Nice house, but your wallpaper could use some work."

"Hey." A hint of Bachman's old sense of humor glinted in his green eyes. "I like bunnies."

"Just don't let the press up here then, cause pink rabbits lack a certain seriousness."

"Sometimes that's exactly what I want." Micah sighed, his heart still so full of grief he found it hard to form words. "Miriam would have loved this house. It's exactly the kind of place she always wanted." His voice broke and he bit back a sob. "She's with me every minute, I can't stop thinking about her." He reached over and touched Starsky's dark curls. "Hair. I...her hair was always there. In our bed, I'd feel it against my cheek...black curls escaping from her clip. And then it was covered with blood." He dropped heavily into the chair, tears on his cheeks. "How did this happen? I was only a few feet away from her. A few feet, I could have touched her if I'd reached out my arm...You
saw her, didn't you? At the coffee urn?

"Yeah, she was talking to some other women." Starsky tried to get the image of the three women laying under the rubble out of his head. He, too, could still picture Miriam with her gorgeous hair matted in blood.

"Did you talk to her?" Micah asked hopefully. "I din't say anything to her before she died. I hadn't really spoken to her all evening, just chatted about the coffee."

"No. I went to get a cookie." Starsky wanted to get Micah out of his memories. It was too close to the time of the press conference for him to be breaking down like this.

"I don't think I told her I loved her that day," Micah whispered.

"Micah, she knew. She always knew," Starsky assured him.

"'Scuse me, Starsky?" Darryl Washington stood in the threshold, his huge frame filling the doorframe. "It's nearly time for him to go downstairs. There's cameras and reporters ever'where."

"Give us a minute." Starsky waved Washington away, shielding the Rabbi's tears from him. "Are you gonna be able to do this?" he asked seriously, letting Micah dry his eyes and collect himself. "It can be postponed."

"No, I want it to be today." Bachman stood, taking a deep breath before retreating to the attached bathroom to splash water on his face. He finger combed his reddish beard, regarding his pale face in the mirror. "I need to show them I'm not down for the count."

"Then let's get this over with." Starsky grimaced, not looking forward to the next few minutes at all. He'd never liked dealing with the press. They had a way of changing what you said, so that your very meaning came out wrong. Oh, there were good reporters out there, who didn't let biases and innuendo cloud their stories, but by in large the press had already shown themselves to be after the sensation in the bombing. The human side kept getting lost in the shuffle.

As Washington had said, the front room was wall to wall reporters, TV cameras and arc lights looming over the smaller men and women of the print world. Moses Reinhart helped clear a path so that the Rabbi and Starsky could traverse the room to the small podium set up in front of the red brick fireplace.

Despite his tears only moments before, Micah Bachman was a man in charge when he stepped behind the podium. There was no hint of his overwhelming grief, just a sense of a man who had lost a great deal, but knew what needed to be done. He thanked the press for coming, introducing his 'team', mentioning Moses, Starsky, Washington and a few others by name. Then, after digging into his back pocket, he pulled out a small calendar, the sort given away in many stationary stores, and held it aloft.

"According to my calendar here, today is Citizenship day--September 17th, 1980. Now, I don't know if this was proclaimed by Congress or Hallmark's, but personally I plan to celebrate this new found holiday." He looked at the people in front of him intently, giving the impression he was speaking personally to each one. "How do I accomplish this? There are no parades or barbecues planned, as far as I know. But I will start by reaching out to my neighbor. In Jewish traditions the commandments say, "Love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord." Our Christian friends' philosophies say it just as simply "Love thy neighbor as thy self." For many people, none of these things are easy." He paused for a breath.
Watching from the sidelines, Starsky was impressed, if any one could bring opposites together, it was Micah Bachman. The press was listening avidly, their usual cynical faces wanting to hear the hope in his words.

"I have never felt hate before..." Bachman continued, "but my heart has been stabbed since my wife's death seven days before..." For the first time, there was a strain in his voice, but his next words were stronger, suppressing the emotion. "But can I hate these people? No, I truly say I cannot. I don't know them. To condemn them for what they have done without knowing the cause would truly be bearing false witness. On the other hand, can I love them? Not just the people who have hurt me, but the rest of my neighbors? I will try. Do they love me? Obviously some of them do not--and that is why we must continue to fight to change the way people think. Because we must love each other--but not only that--we must understand each other, support each other through the good and the bad. Some people did very bad things to me and mine, but I cannot--must not reciprocate. I want to get to know them, guide them and learn why they hate. In learning why they hate, maybe I can help them turn it around to love. Because if we don't love each other, how can we love ourselves?" He sighed, glancing down at the little calendar on the lectern. "And if that sounds like Hallmark's wrote it, so be it. Maybe Citizenship day is a greeting card holiday. But I say then, greet one another. Shake the hand of someone you wouldn't normally talk to. Black, white, Asian, American Indian, Jew and Gentile, we must all live here together. Despite the dreadful circumstances of last week, I plan to go forward with my plans for peace talks between hate groups and religious leaders. Anyone who is interested is welcomed to join. We will commence on October Ninth. I urge you all to support us. Communication is the key to universal understanding. Thank you."

Micah had barely finished his last words when the reporters pounced, most demanding to know about the investigation into the temple bombing. His standard response was that the LAPD was doing their utmost to solve the crime, but he had no new information to relate.

The press were not satisfied and surged closer, until both Bachman and Starsky couldn't have moved around them if they'd tried. Reinhart managed to squeeze around the side of the room and open the front door.

"Thank y'all fer comin'," Washington announced loudly, herding several reporters towards the door. "We look forward t'readin' all about it in your papers. G'bye."

This diversion was enough to let Micah escape up the stairs to his offices, but when Starsky joined his partner, the men and women of the media just found a new target.

"Detective Starsky, you were at the temple." A microphone was thrust in Starsky's face. "Do you support Rabbi Bachman's views?" Half a dozen reporters poised anxiously for their next quote.

"How do you feel about the people who did this?" another voice demanded when there was no answer forthcoming.

Starsky, uncomfortable with the intense scrutiny backed up, bumping into the formidable bulk of his partner.

The first thought Starsky had was that he'd like to string them all up by their gonads or maybe put their heads on pikes, but he knew that didn't exactly jibe with Micah's love your neighbor spiel. "I'm not currently involved with the investigation, so I couldn't comment on what they've discovered," he commented blandly, mentally cringing.

This non-answer only spurred on the reporters, who leaned forward for another volley. Starsky was glad he could feel Washington's solid presence at his back.
"Detective, you spent the weekend after the bombing secluded in your home. Were you avoiding the press, and if so why?"

"I had a concussion," Starsky snapped with more heat than he'd meant to.

"I think ya'll need to make yer deadlines," Washington said diplomatically, moving purposely around his partner. "The door is behind you, this press conference is over."

When the room had been finally emptied of media, cameras and sound equipment, Micah ventured down the stairs, a smile on his face. "I think that went very well, all things considered." He held out a hand to Darryl, giving the detective's a shake. "I think you may get promoted to public relations, Detective Washington."

"Just Darryl, sir." Washington shrugged embarrassed. "Or you kin call me Brick like Davey does."

"Well, I think a solid Brick is exactly what we need around here."

*****

Working silently next to Tobe, Hutch watched as Peter van Geller disappeared into a small back room. For nearly an hour, Hutch and Tobe stuffed and addressed envelopes without speaking. It was boring, repetitive work, and the cop began to wonder if he was in danger of falling asleep on the job before he got any useful information.

"Where'd these lists of names come from?" Hutch asked casually. There were mostly British and Germanic last names in long columns. Daniels had more than ten pages of names, and by the look of it, several of the envelope stuffers in the room had approximately the same number by their piles.

"Van Geller just gets 'em." Tobe shrugged. "Don't ask too many questions."

"You agree with everything he says?" Hutch cracked his aching wrist. This was worse than writing out arrest reports.

"Be stupid not to, I expect," was the taciturn reply.

This was such an oddly worded answer, Hutch didn't know how to respond. He folded another twenty flyers before attempting to draw the other man out. "I can't stand to see those Jews taking all the jobs. Even my landlord sounds like a Jew--Klein, I'd move but I haven't got enough dough."

"You live over there on Mayflower?" A sandy haired man to Hutch's left looked up. "58 Mayflower?" When he nodded, the man continued, "I usta live there, that guy's a shyster, typical Kike--he'll raise the rent on you every month if he could."

"Lived there a few months since I broke up with my old lady, an' he's already tried it," Hutch improvised, getting sympathetic murmurs from everyone in the room.

This sparked a lively discussion between all the office workers that included every single cliché in the prejudiced person's handbook--that, take your pick, all Jews, blacks, sand niggers, were taking over jobs, good neighborhoods and schools. All Americans would be better off if these free loaders just went back to where they came from and killing was too good for most of them.

It literally made Hutch sick. He felt the bile rise in his throat and had to force himself to walk casually to the water cooler to get a drink. The water soothed his throat, but his stomach felt raw. Especially after the striking blonde woman at the Xerox machine voiced her opinion that 'colored bitches' should be sterilized so that they couldn't produce any more whelps. If Hutch had met the blonde at a
bar, he would have been instantly attracted by her high cheekbones and model's figure, but the garbage spewing from her mouth was so offensive he wondered if that was why she was stuffing envelopes here and not gracing the front office of some high priced attorney or businessman.

"Elsa's right. I work at the county hospital," the oldest man in the room spoke up. "You can't believe how many of them are having babies--ain't half as many white babies born. We ain't gonna be a majority for long."

"Something's got to be done," Tobe agreed, but gave no suggestion on what.

Trying to remember the names he'd learned so far, Hutch was otherwise disappointed. He hadn't been able to question anyone regarding first hand knowledge of the temple bombing, but all the workers were quite vocal in their support of it. It was quickly evident that none of them had any specific inside information. Van Geller must have some second lieutenants whom he kept as close confidantes.

Just as Hutch was speculating on their identities, van Geller and two others burst out of the back room, carrying a small portable television with them.

"Everybody's got to see this!" a thin man with wire rimmed glasses announced.

Hutch recognized him as the man he'd seen van Geller with at the diner for breakfast on Tuesday.

A beefy, red faced man with a marine style buzz cut which showed off his surprisingly tiny ears positioned the TV on a table amongst the stacks of envelopes and plugged it in. All the office workers gathered around, pushing their chairs into place so they could see the screen. When van Geller turned it on, there was just hiss and snow that slowly solidified into a still photo of Micah Bachman. An off camera voice was explaining that the press conference was just about to begin when the picture changed to a live shot of Bachman walking up to the podium.

Hutch sat up with interest when he recognized Starsky and Washington on either side of the Rabbi. He hadn't seen his friends in several days, and realized with a pang how much he missed them. He hated being separated from Starsky when they were undercover. It made him feel very alone.

"Fucker," van Geller said vehemently, flipping the bird at Bachman's televised image. "Fuckin' do gooder, thinks that he can change the world. Jews deserve only one thing..."

"Peter, don't you want to listen to what he's saying?" the bespeckled man asked reasonably.

"No." His laugh was such a weird sound that it sent shivers down Hutch's spine. "I'd rather kill him." Even some of the other office workers in the room looked askance at their leader, proving to Hutch that most were unaware of his suspected part in the bombing.

"Can I love them?" Micah Bachman said earnestly on the television, "Not just the people who have hurt me, but the rest of my neighbors. I will try. Do they love me? Obviously some of them do not..."

"He's got that right," the big man with the buzz cut sneered as the camera panned to include the men grouped around the Rabbi listening avidly, giving Hutch another glimpse of his friends. He began to fear for their lives.

"There's that cop again." van Geller tapped his finger on the glass screen, seeming to actually touch Starsky's dark curly hair. "And now he's got a big nigger with him. We need to find out when the head Jew is gonna have another one of these gab fests." Peter rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Can't let him have all the glory. John, that's your job. We need some insider info..."
"Peter, we need to take this in the other room," Wire rims warned, inclining his head at the group of office workers.

"The voice of reason as usual, Sherman." van Geller gave him a ghastly smile, refocusing on the TV screen. Bachman was announcing the date of the upcoming peace talks and thanking his audience. He switched the television off with a vicious jerk, but Hutch was later to see the reporters question Starsky on a late night news report. "C'mon, boys, we got things to plan." The phone began to ring as he urged the others to get back to their mailings, because they had to combat Bachman at every turn.

"Mr. van Geller?" Elsa had answered the phone, and looked terrified to be speaking directly to him.

"Yah, baby?" He smiled in an oily, lounge lizard way, his demeanor changing so rapidly, it was like watching a chameleon change colors.

"It's the hospital, I think your Grandfather..."

He grabbed the receiver from her, listening to the speaker on the other end with a pale face. Hutch had never seen a man switch emotions as quickly as van Geller could. It was startling and creepy. Everyone in the room was staring at their leader with apprehension.

When he finally put down the phone, van Geller looked drained. "My Grandfather's had another heart attack--it's bad."

"I'll drive you down there," John offered, taking his friend's arm. "C'mon, Sherman'll stay here with the troops."

"He's a fighter, Peter, he'll beat this," Sherman placated, pushing his glasses up him narrow nose. "Call us with the news."

"Yeah, yeah..." With that, van Geller and John left out the front door, leaving the office workers looking lost.

"Keep on going, we need to get those flyers out as fast as possible," Sherman instructed brusquely, "Elsa, take whatever's finished to the post office right now. Peter'll feel better if some are already out when he gets back."

"Yes, sir." She and the other woman began to pack the finished envelopes into a box and soon departed. Sherman returned to the back office, taking the television with him.

"Who were those two men with van Geller?" Hutch asked. "And what's with his Grandfather."

"I forgot how new you are." The man who'd said he used to live in Hutch's building introduced himself as Sam Metzger. "That's Albert Sherman and John Adams, they're his right hand men, the only ones who know much of anything around here."

Folding more flyers, Hutch smiled to himself, finally some names he could use. "And the old man?"

"Helmut van Geller--I heard he's really old SS."

"You mean he was a Nazi?" Hutch asked in true surprise.

"Born in Germany," Tobe Daniels supplied.

"I heard he actually met Hitler," another blond man put in with awe. He raised his arm in the Nazi
salute. "Heil!"

"He raised Peter," Metzger continued. "Taught him all he knows."

Well, that explained a lot. Aloud, Hutch asked, "He's had a second heart attack?"

"Sounds like it," Metzger agreed. "Too bad, I really liked him. Had a good heart, really salt of the earth kind of guy."

*****

Starsky dashed madly down the halls of the precinct, pushing past two patrolmen bringing in a string of prostitutes, and slammed through the detective squad room doors just as the private line was ringing for the second time. He snatched up the phone, answering breathlessly, "Frank here, that you, Ken?"

"You sound out of breath, Frank," Hutch stressed the name, knowing Starsky hated it.

"Naw, just had to run acoupla blocks to get here on time, is all." Starsky settled into his chair, a goofy grin on his face.

"Saw you on TV today--and all I can say is, don't quit your day job."

"Thanks a million. Don't know what I'd do without the support of friends like you," Starsky answered dryly. "Speaking of day jobs, how's your new one?"

"More productive than I expected for the first day."

"So you got in? Spoke to that guy van Geller?"

"Yeah, he's a dangerous man—spooky. One minute he's your best friend, the next he's talking about killing."

"I don't like you havin' to deal with him," Starsky said more seriously.

"Starsk, don't worry. I got the right camouflage. The place looks like a breeding group for Nazi central. Everyone who works there is blond haired and blue eyed-- or at most, light brown hair. I haven't seen so many blondes since the Hutchinson family reunion." Hutch related the names of the workers that he'd met. "But after van Geller, the next in charge are John Adams and Albert Sherman. Check for priors on them first. I wouldn't be surprised if the ones working up front are just a bunch of out of work folk with severe right wing leanings, but not involved with murder."

"Hutch, just take care of yourself."

Wanting to say the same thing in return, Hutch held his tongue. He knew Starsky would just bristle and claim he wasn't the one in the thick of things. "You okay, Starsk?"

"Me?" Starsky gave a little snort of laughter, but there was a tense edge to it. "Just dandy. Micah was a mess about five minutes before the telecast, then he just turned on the charm, and gave a hell of a speech. I couldn'a done it in his shoes."

"I liked what I heard," Hutch agreed. He finished giving his partner any information he could think of about the United Aryan Brotherhood and then with a regretful goodbye, hung up.

Starsky dropped the receiver back into the cradle, wondering if he had the strength to get up and drive home. Despite his cocky words to Hutch, he still felt like he was walking through molasses
most of the time, and would really like to curl up and sleep for about ten years. Calculating the time
difference between Los Angeles and Washington D.C., he dialed the number of the condo Meredith
was renting while she was on the East Coast.

"Hello?" she answered after two rings.

"Hello yourself." Starsky put a smile into his voice, imaging her face, the light in her large dark eyes,
touch of his hand on her brown cheek.

"Blue eyes!" she crowed. "I was just thinking about you, you must be psychic. I saw you on the
TV."

"Don't tell me they showed Micah's speech way out there!" he groused, but smiled just the same.
This time a real smile, happy that she'd been thinking of him when he was thinking of her. "Not
psychic, just linked to you."

"Oh, that's it, like a Vulcan mind meld." She was an avid trekkie, and had insisted they watch old
reruns of Capt. Kirk and Spock on many occasions. "But you looked thin on the TV."

"I doubt that, I heard the camera adds ten pounds," he joked, wishing they could talk about anything
else besides his work.

"What, are you vain?" she teased, hugging a velvet sofa cushion against her since she couldn't have
him.

"Maybe, alittle, with you." Starsky tucked the phone between his shoulder and ear, leaning against
the desk. "I mean, when I'm with you, everybody's lookin' at that beautiful chick with the short
cop..."

"The short cop? Who have you been talking to."

"Mer, I'm partnered with Brick while Hutch is undercover." He'd given her a brief overview of the
assignment in a phone call a few nights ago.

"Oh, well that explains it." She laughed. "Honey, Hutch looks short next to that man. Next to me,
you look just fine."

"You look fine anytime." Starsky doodled the outline of a woman on a discarded sheet of paper.
"What've you got on?"

"Your police academy T-shirt."

"No kiddin'?" He was thrilled. "I wondered where that was. What else?"

"Nuthin' much, honey." Meredith lingered on the last word with every ounce of Georgian drawl her
Southern Grandma had ever taught her.

"Boy, I wish I was there," he said longingly.

"Where are you?" she asked, suddenly aware of the drift their conversation had taken.

"In the squad room."

"David!" she squealed. "The operator, or anybody could be listening!"

"They're not. I swear. I'm alone." He looked around the empty room. "Nobody's here."
"Well, if you want to continue this...conversation." She emphasized the word. "I suggest you call me back when you get home. I'll give you thirty minutes."

"Not accounting for traffic, are you?" Starsky stood, ready to sprint out as soon as he hung up.

"Gives me just time to draw a bubble bath and light a few candles," Meredith teased, "Bye!" She blew an airy kiss.

The dark haired detective beat his own best record in the squad room to parking lot dash. The phone was ringing as soon as Starsky unlocked his front door, but it was just a telemarketer calling about a free subscription to the newspaper. He slammed the receiver down in frustration, only to have it ring immediately, tingling the palm of his hand.

"Meredith?" Starsky asked breathlessly.

"Wore you out, poor boy?" she purred.

"Just getting worked up." Starsky balanced the phone on his shoulder, unfastening his shoulder holster and dropping it to the floor. Just hearing her voice was arousing him, and he didn't want any encumbrances. "Did you start that bath?"

"Honey, the water's warm and full of bubbles." Meredith stirred the water with one hand, licking her lips. "You'd better take your clothes off and join me, the water's fine."

"Give me a minute!" He laughed, struggling to keep the phone to his ear and get his jacket off.

"I gave you thirty, already." She smiled, hearing the bumps and thumps as her lover stripped off his clothes.

"One more won't hurt." He groaned, picturing her long, lean body in the bath. "Did you use lots of that pink stiff-uh-stuff that makes all the bubbles?"

"There are bubbles everywhere."

"On your breasts?" Starsky felt his groin grow even harder at the thought, fumbling with the buttons on his fly. He finally slid his jeans off, falling back onto the couch.

"I've got a sponge and I'm rubbing it over my belly, and circling my breasts," she answered. "D'you want me to wash my nipples?"

"Yes." He pictured her pert, round breasts topped by dark little nubs, like black cherries, sweet and tart in the mouth. He sat with his legs spread wide, his penis standing at attention between his thighs as if waiting for some sort of signal.

"They're so hard when I rub my finger across the tops," Meredith continued, actions duplicating her words. "I feel all tingly and I want to wash between my legs."

"Sounds good." He was beginning to pant, gripping his manhood. "Rub hard down there."

"I am." She had never thought out the mechanics of phone sex before, and it was getting more and more difficult to hold the phone and finger herself. She desired her man to be there, squeezed in to the bathtub with her, his thicker fingers rubbing the throbbing nub between her thighs. Spreading her legs wider for better access, she increased the speed of her rubbing, her whole body responding with heightened urgency until she was vibrating like a violin string during a concert. "I'm...so close, Blue Eyes....Are you big?"
"Like a flag pole on the fourth of July." He stroked his length, needing release, but enjoying the verbal foreplay.

"I wish that were coming inside me instead of my fingers." Her whole being was moving in a rhythmic rocking, the water splashing on the sides of the tub echoing the waves of passion pounding through her body. "Push it in..."

"I need you, Meredith." Starsky squeezed his penis, the erection both painful and fantastic as the blood pounded in his groin. His head was buzzing, sparks shooting off behind his closed eyelids. "Come, baby."

"Yes." She gasped, arching her back until her head touched the back of the tub, every nerve ending exploding at the same time. She slid her fingers into her wet vagina, the muscle walls contracting tightly around them. "I love you, Dave."

"Me, too, Meredith." Starsky leaned against the couch cushions, his penis limp in his curled fingers. He was spent, but imagined there was a long legged woman curled up next to him, her fingers still wrapped around his member. "I miss you."

*****

Helmut van Geller died in the early hours of Friday morning, throwing his grandson into a twisted anger. He refused to mourn the old man's passing, deciding instead to prove that he was his grandfather's true successor. He vowed to kill as many Jews as he could, to validate the work Helmet had done in WWII. He'd worked in a concentration camp.

Peter van Geller had been raised on stories of the atrocities perpetrated in the name of eugenics and science by Hitler's death squads. He'd gone to sleep listening to tales of horror, rape and murder, and believed that everything his Grandfather had ever done had been in the noble pursuit of preserving the ancient Aryan race. That the majority of the world condoned Hitler's practices and had strived to punish the Nazi war criminals just made Peter's resolve stronger. His grandfather had survived so much, only to be felled by a damaged heart. Well, he would never be forgotten...not while there were still van Gellers in the world.

Pushing the office workers to get out as many flyers as possible, van Geller and his co-horts planned their next attack. Adams had begun romancing a young, pretty TV news intern to glean any inside information her station got on when and where Bachman might be. The Rabbi was big news and the media followed him constantly. The innocent college student easily gossiped about the stories she was helping with and supplied Adams with places and dates where there were to be press conferences and media events to promote the peace conference. All that was necessary was to select the perfect time to kill the Jew.

Hutch collated papers, folded flyers, Xeroxed articles and did anything else he could to keep busy, but he was growing frustrated as the days passed and he hadn't learned much more to tie van Geller to the temple bombing. There was never any time when he was alone in the offices, and he hadn't ever been allowed into the back room. He'd love to have one undisturbed hour to search the inner sanctum, as Metzger called it, but the opportunity never presented itself.

Van Geller wasn't around in the following week, due to his grandfather's funeral and family obligations. Albert Sherman was most in evidence, coming in early in the mornings and disappearing into the back office almost immediately. Hutch was immensely curious about the man, who seemed more like a scholarly professor type than the co-founder of a hate group. The few times he'd exchanged words with Hutch had shown him to be intelligent, well read and friendly--a vast difference from the mercurial and sinister van Geller. John Adams was easier to read. He was the
brawn. He'd obviously been taught who was good and who was bad in his little black and white world, and operated on those few instructions.

********************

Albert Sherman smiled to himself, settling into a chair in the back office. He liked having the place to himself. Peter could be such a maniac at times, unable to sit still, planning grandiose schemes one minute and sunk in depression over his grandfather's death the next. It wore Al out. He certainly sympathized with the man's grief, but it had begun to adversely affect his work at the Brotherhood. Frankly, some of Peter's plans scared him. Total global annihilation of an entire religious group was out of scope with the abilities of one local group, no matter how quickly membership was growing.

Raised to look down on what his parents had described as dirty people, Al still did not share van Geller's obsessive hatred of the Jews. Al cared less what so-called 'dirty ones' did than what he could do to make money. And amazingly, the Brotherhood was making money. Not only had Helmut van Geller established a hefty bank account for the group in his grandson's name, but some of the members who actually had jobs were donating funds to help the cause. Sherman had joined early on because of his friendship with van Geller, he'd never expected that there could be a satisfactory economic outcome. The bomb had sanctioned their work. There were members coming out of nowhere, many with cash in hand. Adams was in charge of membership, he conducted 'secret' meetings in a variety of locations and ferried the names, and more importantly, the money back to the main office. They had chosen the 1412 So. Main former deli precisely because it looked seedy and shabby. Peter wasn't into aesthetics, in fact he was a slob at heart, so renovations had never been instituted. That made 'volunteer' and below minimum wage earning staff believe they were working for the good of the cause, and not for a profit making enterprise.

Opening the bankbooks, Sherman allowed himself another satisfied smile. And there had been a profit. With Peter's mind on his late grandfather and Hitler fantasies, Al just carefully siphoned small amounts of money into different accounts nearly every day. It wasn't hard. He had no intention of sticking around when the police began to sniff more closely in their direction. With a nice cushion, he could disappear and find other work. His college fascination with bombs and how to rig detonating devices was paying off in a big way. There was every reason to believe that someone else would be even more willing to pay a successful explosive expert large amounts of money. The one thing that still twinged his conscience was Miriam Bachman's death. Her newspaper photos had shown her to be a beautiful, vibrant woman. He wasn't really sanguine about killing women. Apparently that was a flaw he was going to have to correct. Successful men didn't care who they stepped on. Or blew to bits.

With a physical shake, Al turned on the faucet to get a glass of water, not noticing the office door opening.

"Mr. Sherman?" Margaret, the gray haired 'office manager', stuck her head in. "I was looking for..." She glimpsed the bankbook on the paper strewn table. "Did Peter need some bank withdrawals? I can do that for him."

"No, no, Margaret," Sherman soothed, knowing the woman had never liked him. "He's so filled with grief lately, he needed some money for the funeral--I was going to take it to him personally."

"Why didn't he...?" She began to question, then stopped herself. "Poor Helmut--Peter adored him."

"He did," Al agreed. "Now I have to get over to First Savings before I see him, so I'd better be going."

"Certainly." She ducked her head, not wanting to be suspicious of one of Peter's best friends. "Tell
him I'm thinking of him."

Feeling the eyes of every office worker on him, Sherman pocketed the bankbooks, and walked out the front door.

********************

Hutch glanced up from his current job of counting stacks of pamphlets before distribution. He knew that workers came in daily to carry the pamphlets off to unknown locations to hand out. What he wouldn't give to follow Albert Sherman off to wherever he was going. It would probably provide a lot more information for his ongoing case than this.

"He's so dedicated," Elsa commented, "Goes to the bank nearly every day while Mr. Van Geller's not here."

Mentally filing that away, Hutch wondered if he could guess which bank it was. There were only four in the greater Waverly area. He'd get the detectives on that tonight.

In one of his nightly phone calls to the precinct, Dobey had filled Hutch in on what they'd learned about Albert Sherman. He had an engineering degree from MIT and had extensive knowledge of chemicals and explosives. This was the first useful bit of information they'd been able to uncover, leading a circumstantial trail of evidence to the Brotherhood, but they needed a lot more than that to prove the group's involvement in the bombing. So far, investigators had been unable to come up with any evidence that any of them had ever purchased the plastique used in the inferno, or to even link them with the dark sedan several witnesses had recalled speeding past the synagogue moments before the blast. There was a small checking account found in the name of Peter van Geller, but it in no way contained the amounts necessary to fund plastique purchases, or any other substantial crimes. Where the money was coming from was still a mystery.

Hutch did make sure that Starsky and Washington doubled the security around Micah on any outdoor personal appearances, having overheard more than once van Geller's vow to kill the Rabbi as soon as possible.

*****

The Alliance for Peaceful Co-existence found its numbers and therefore, the workload, growing exponentially as days passed. Not only had even more anti-Semitic groups agreed to participate in the Peace talks, but volunteer workers were practically coming out of the woodwork to help. In just over a week, the small Victorian house was bursting at the seams, when there had seemed to be space in abundance the first day Starsky had visited the headquarters.

"You ready to go?" Washington clumped down the front stairs, consulting a typed list of the Rabbi's day's activities. He'd virtually taken over the job of getting Micah where he needed to be when he needed to be there.

"I am," Starsky agreed, getting up from the window seat. "But where's your shadow? Or are you his shadow?"

"As dark as Ah am, Ah must be his." Darryl chuckled. "He's coming directly. We got a lunch meetin' with that reporter from the Times, a two o'clock with the Jewish Women's League and a cocktail pah'ty with Senator McCallum... then, we were supposed to go talk to the PTA at Lincoln School, but it's been changed t'next week."

"Geeze, Brick, it wears me out just hearin' about it," Starsky groused. "C'mon, Micah." He sighted
the man on the stairs, reading while he walked. "Read it in the car. You fall on the stairs and it'll be all over the news at five--Rabbi pushed down the stairs in his own Headquarters. Dissention in the Ranks."

"Dave, the only dissention around here is you." Bachman tucked the bound report under his arm. "I've heard you complaining about the schedule."

"I never thought I'd be undercover at an afternoon ladies' tea." Starsky laughed, referring to one of their venues from the day before. "D'you remember anything at the academy 'bout cuttin' crusts off a'sandwiches, Brick?"

"Musta skipped that class." Washington glanced around the neighborhood in a seemingly casual manner as they headed out of the house and over to the car they were using for the day. Starsky's darling, his bright red Torino with the white slash down the side was considered far too recognizable a car to be driving Bachman around in. Washington saw no suspicious people or activities as they piled into a non-descript Ford, but he was always on the alert. There had been nearly daily threats on the Rabbi's life and a letter bomb was intercepted only two days ago, luckily before it exploded.

"You check the car?" Starsky asked, his hand poised to insert the key into the ignition. Micah had stopped in the driveway to talk with Moses Reinhart, and was out of earshot.

"Went over all three cars this mornin', Little Davey." Washington leaned against the car door, his eyes on the Rabbi giving his brother-in-law last minute instructions before they left. "An' I even gave both yours and mine the once over, jus' t'be on the safe side."

"You're getting' as paranoid as the rest of us." Starsky started the engine, turning on the air conditioner. The late September weather was beginning to heat up, the sky blue and cloudless, when it wasn't brownish with smog.

"Ah think it's a contagious disease, mahself." Darryl waited until the Rabbi had settled himself in the back seat before pulling on his own seatbelt.

"I feel like a politician." Micah put his head back on the upholstery, scratching his chin under his red beard. "That was never my intention."

"I think you found a second calling, so to speak." Starsky drove carefully through midday traffic, turning the car to familiar streets. Huggy Bears' The Pits might not be a very upscale establishment, but it had the attraction of a trustworthy proprietor and decent food, at least in Starsky's opinion.

"You three look like the opening line to a joke," Huggy Bear greeted as they entered The Pits. "Y'heard the one where a Rabbi and two cops go into a bar?"

"What's the rest?" Washington laughed.

"I'll have to think on it."

"How 'bout the one about the giant skinny frog who owned a bar." Starsky flicked the lapels of Huggy's neon green suit. He wore a lemon yellow shirt underneath and matching yellow shoes.

"Starsky, my man, I'll have you know that this is the height of fashion."

"In another universe," Starsky agreed.

"Huggy, we're supposed to meet a reporter?" Micah broached.
"Looks like you're the first...can I offer any beers 'til he gets here?"

All ordered soft drinks and sat down to wait, idly watching a competitive game of pool between two older men in suspenders and Panama hats. The jukebox blared the Doobie Brothers, making conversation almost impossible.

"Hey. Starsk." Huggy's words were overly loud in the sudden silence as the song ended and he paused, self-conscious.

"Yeah, Hug?"

"Hutch's chick, Angela's been around asking for him. "Y'know he dropped her like a hot potato the night o' the bombing and I don't think he's called her since."

"Angela's a dingaling," Starsky proclaimed, taking a sip of the Coke Huggy handed him. "Tell her he's outta town."

"Will do." Huggy passed out the other drinks.

"That must be him." Darryl pointed out a tall, thin man with a shock of spiky jet black hair that contrasted sharply with his fair skin and blue eyes. A true Black Irishman. Washington went to intercept him and escort him to the table.

Andrew Cleary easily recognized Rabbi Bachman, and David Starsky, for that matter. Their pictures had accompanied several of his articles, even when he was writing about the opposition. Introductions were made all around, and chairs shuffled to make room for the reporter. He'd brought a cassette recorder and set it up in the middle of the table.

The interview didn't actually start until after lunch orders were made, pleasantries exchanged and the jukebox volume turned down. The questions Cleary asked were probing, but not all that different than a dozen reporters had already asked, and most of Micah's responses were heartfelt but rehearsed. He had his rhetoric down by now and expounded easily on his anti prejudice and pro-communication bandwagon. In fact, although no one had told Cleary ahead of time, one of the reasons he'd gotten an 'exclusive' interview with the man of the hour was because of the reporter's odd distinction. He'd been the first to speak to the Brotherhood.

"Thank you, Rabbi, I have to say I really support this your work--we need some sort of positive teaching right from the first grade. So that prejudice never starts up." Cleary turned off his cassette recorder with a click.

"I agreed. I'm hoping that if we're successful with these talks, some of these programs will fall in line." Micah nodded, munching on his dill pickle. "We need money, though."

"Doesn't every organization?" Cleary made a few last minute notes on his note pad.

"Speaking of other organizations," Starsky spoke up, "Off the record, what can you tell me about the Brotherhood? And impressions you got after talking to 'em?"

"I told those other detectives I only talked to him twice." Cleary frowned, annoyed that the subject had been brought up again, "The manifesto came in the mail."

"You'll have to admit we've got an interest in them," Micah said, trying to soothe ruffled feathers.

"Could you identify the voice if you heard it again?" Starsky persisted, "If we had a man in custody?"
"Do you?" Cleary asked with sharp interest.

"No."

The reporter hesitated, slipping his notepad into his pocket. "I don't think I can help you."

"I realize you want to protect your sources, but they..." Micah's voice broke, but he reined in his emotions.

"Killed his wife." Starsky bit off the stark words.

"I know this will come off sounding insensitive, but no matter how tragic was for you, the paper has a responsibility to print both sides of an issue," Cleary said wearily.

"Why print their damned ugly filth on the front of your paper? That Manifesto was a vile piece of shit," Starsky spat. "It's enough that they have a forum for their hate, d'you have to put 'em on the front page?"


"I don't make decisions on where the articles are placed." Cleary would rather not let the murders have their side heard either, but as a reporter he'd always tried to be fair, and he hadn't chosen to be the one the Brotherhood had called.

"No, you just put your name under 'em." Starsky pushed his plate away, the hamburger only half eaten. He'd lost his appetite.

"Detective, they aren't words I want to hear, either. I think the only reason I got the story is because I was there at the desk when the Brotherhood called in. I don't even know the guy's name. There are three Brotherhoods in the L.A area, none of 'em will agree to an interview." The reporter sighed. "If we don't acknowledge their words, how can the Rabbi fight them?"

Out of argument, Starsky slumped in his chair, listening to the jukebox while his partner ushered the reporter out of the bar. A tune by Earth, Wind and Fire ended and the next selection began, "There's a bad moon risin', trouble's on the way..." Starsky grimaced at the truth in the music, Cleary's words striking home. It was important to bring racism into the light where it could be examined and hopefully dissected, changed into understanding and reason. But, what else could be uncovered when that rock was turned over?

Starsky missed Hutch, especially here at Huggy's where they'd often had a few beers at the end of a long shift, hashing out the day's headaches and triumphs. Lately, he felt all out of triumphs. The next few weeks until October ninth seemed like a long dark tunnel to be crawled through like a prisoner escaping from a camp. Endless, emotionally draining and potentially dangerous. His phone calls to Meredith were becoming one of the few bright lights in his life, and even those weren't daily, since her schedule was as demanding as his.

Micah was unsettled by the disagreement between Starsky and Cleary, but on the whole, felt pleased by the interview itself. With any luck, the paper would run his story on the first page, at least partially balancing the scale with the Brotherhood.

After leaving the Pits, there as just enough time to drive the forty-five minutes on the freeway to reach the Jewish Women's league, read over the speech one more time and step behind the podium.

Having heard this particular speech at least twice already in the short time he'd been guarding Bachman, Starsky slipped out of the hall to telephone Dobey. With the Senator's cocktail party, there
was no way he could be at the precinct at five-thirty for Hutch's call and he regretted it deeply. There were days, such as this one, where he looked forward to that brief connection to his best friend all afternoon. A perfect day was one in which he got to speak with both Hutch and Meredith within a few hours of one another.

Washington was a good man. Starsky valued him as a partner and enjoyed his friendship, but nothing compared to his kinship to Hutch. They needed few words to communicate, which could be a little difficult on the telephone, but was essential to their survival when they were together.

He lingered outside the lecture hall until little blue haired ladies came tottering out, all remarking on their admiration of "that handsome young Rabbi."

"Bailed on me, huh?" Washington elbowed him out of his reverie with a smile. "Next time Ah get ta hang out in the lobby."

"It's a deal." Starsky stifled a yawn. "How much time we got before the Senator's wingding?"

"Long enough to change my clothes, I hope." Micah finally pulled himself away from the chattering women, stuffing the speech into his jacket pocket. "This thing is formal."

"Well, Little Davey'll have t'wait in th'car," Darryl quipped, tugging on the other man's disreputable leather bomber jacket.

"I'd be happy to." Starsky faced the Rabbi. "Why didn't you tell me that before?"

"Didn't I?" Micah asked innocently, "There's so many details. Anyway, Mother Reinhart is a friend of McCallum's. She's bought suits for everyone."

"Really?" Washington grinned, his dark face alight. "She know mah size? Ah'm hard to fit."

"I was told that everything was arranged," Bachman soothed, heading towards the parking lot.

"I wish I was told," Starsky grumbled.

Sure enough, back at the Victorian, there were three dark suits waiting for them, with good fits on all the different body types. Micah had a slender frame with long legs, but was no match for Brick's height and breadth. There was no difficulty telling which suit was for whom. While struggling to produce a decent Windsor knot on his tie, Starsky was struck again that everyone he worked with was taller than he was, even by just a bare inch in the Rabbi's case. Darryl was quite delighted with his new clothes and preened until the other two told him to shut up.

Moses Reinhart left to pick up his mother, promising to meet the others at the Senator's Topanga Canyon home. If all went as planned, the Senator's influence, both economic and political, could be a welcome asset to the peace conference.

Rush hour traffic, was, as usual, an oxymoron. The cars inched along the San Diego freeway across the L.A. basin to the canyons where the wealthy people resided. The late afternoon heat combined with the frustrating stop and go nature of the traffic made for an uncomfortable ride, despite the car's a.c. working on overtime.

Starsky could feel sweat trickling down between his shoulder blades under his new cotton shirt and lightweight wool jacket. He shifted his weight, trying to ease the itch in the middle of his back, finally catching sight of the green sign signaling the desired offramp. He inched the car over to the far right lane with a relieved sigh. He hadn't eaten much lunch and his belly was growling. There should be lots of goodies to snack on while watching Micah's back, and then he could get home
before nine or ten. Maybe he'd order a pizza.

The streets angling up the canyon walls were twisted, treacherous one-laned affairs, with cars parked haphazardly wherever there was wide space to spare. Washington read off the directions, peering through the tangle of eucalyptus trees at the houses set back off the road on stilts.

"Ah can't imagine why anybody'd live up here when you can get a nice little place in a flat suburb..." Brick shook his head. The sun was low in the sky, and here under the canopy of tall, aromatic trees, dusk was fast approaching.

"Micah, have you been here before?" Starsky downshifted, the car protesting the incline they were traveling.

"I didn't used to hobnob with the upper echelon, Dave," Micah answered. "Miriam's mother grew up with the man." He pursed his lips with the wave of emotion his wife's name still left.

A series of blind left hand turns demanded Starsky's attention and he drove with single-minded focus. The light was dim and he had a hard time seeing what was ahead, one time having to stop and back up into a shallow culvert to allow another car coming down the street to pass. The narrow lane angled sharply down to the right to a steep sided ravine, underbrush growing right up to the edge of the cement. There were no houses on that side of the car in this stretch of road. Above them, to the left, houses hung precariously to the edge of vertical cliff sides like prehistoric beasts lurking in the treetops. The only evidence of their existence were almost invisible driveways that snaked upwards into the woods.

With heart stopping suddenness, a half ton pickup truck roared out of the driveway Starsky had just passed, slamming into the rear of the car with a violent jerk.

"Son of a bitch..." Starsky was thrown back into the seat, his hands gripping the steering wheel reflexively. The truck renewed its assault, pushing the Ford ever nearer to the precipice with vengeance. "Micah, hold on, I don't think this guy I kidding." Starsky panted, fighting to keep the car on the road. "Brick, can you get the license? Who is it?"

Gravity won out, the car's weight working against their favor. The dark truck rammed them a last time, sending the Ford's front wheels off the safety of the road. There was a moment of sick inevitability for all just before the car began sliding through the tangle of scotch broom and poison oak. Starsky pressed frantically on the brakes to stop the car's momentum, but a grinding lurch threw him against the driver's side door, his shoulder hitting the window with a crack. Washington and Bachman grabbed onto whatever handholds they could find to survive the out of control hurtle down the canyon.

In the end, it was a tightly packed grove of eucalyptus trees that saved them. The fender and front end accordioned upon impact, the car jerking to a bone rattling halt.

His fingers still clamped painfully around the steering wheel, Starsky took a shuddery breath. "Anybody hurt?" he called. When there was no immediate answer, he turned his head, wincing at the pull on strained neck muscles. "Micah? Brick?"

"I'm okay." Micah opened his eyes, drawing air into his pleading lungs. "Just banged up."

"Ah'm good, too. Mah neck hurts, but it ain't nothing." Washington released his seat belt, twisting around to try and turn the door handle. Even this amount of movement rocked the car precariously.

"Careful." Starsky rubbed his bruised shoulder, but made no mention of it. "There's a tree on this
"We may be stuck here until help arrives." Micah sighed. He began to pray softly, thanking God for their deliverance.

*****

Switching on the television, Hutch warmed up some leek soup for a late supper in his tiny kitchen. He'd spent the early evening with a few of the Brotherhood's office workers, drinking beers at a neighborhood bar. It too seemed to be an enclave for white supremacists, and as usual, he had to hide his disgust at the rampant racist comments in the conversation. But he wanted their trust, encouraging his fellow office workers to confide in him.

Unfortunately, the only gossip around the place was that van Geller had inherited his Grandfather's house. Sam Metzger was curious as to what Nazi artifacts might be hidden in the place, and expounded on a theory of stolen Jewish fortunes and art masterpieces. As interesting as that was to speculate about, it didn't get Hutch any nearer to solving who had bombed Beth Sharon. He left after a few hours, picking up his car from the dingy back alley behind the Brotherhood storefront.

His nightly call to the police department had been somewhat more encouraging. Investigators had managed to track down where the plastique had come from, but were unable to obtain a name or address of the purchaser. A court order was being obtained to subpoena the company's records.

The baseball game between two East coast teams was a wash, and Hutch flipped to the ten p.m. news out of boredom.

"President Carter has vetoed the bill congres okayed in a dramatic turnaround," a perky brunette anchorwoman read the copy.

Hutch stepped back into the kitchen to rescue his boiling soup, the woman's words a buffer against the loneliness in the little studio apartment.

"In local news, Rabbi Micah Bachman, the proponent of a peace conference between religious leaders and hate groups, was involved in a car accident this evening on his way to a political fundraiser."

Hutch, his back to the TV, raced around the kitchen island to stare at the screen as Micah's picture popped above the woman's head like an absurd caption balloon in a comic strip.

"Initial reports say that neither Bachman, the driver or other passenger in the car were badly injured, but all were taken to hospital by paramedics for evaluation." Her image was replaced by footage of a mangled car being hauled out of the canyon on a wench. "And in related news, police in many communities around the L.A. area have reported a rise in racially motivated crimes, especially those against Jews."

His first instinct was to run to whatever hospital Micah, his driver and passenger had been taken, but common sense won out. He had no idea where they might be, and even if the Brotherhood had no reason to be watching or following him, there was every certainty that they were keeping tabs on Bachman. It could be incredibly dangerous for Hutch to be seen with his friends, and for all their sakes, he needed to keep away for now.

It didn't lessen the guilt he felt at not being able to help, however. He knew that Starsky and Washington had been in that vehicle with the Rabbi. Dobey had told him where they were going when they'd spoken at five thirty.
Feeling ineffectual and cut off from his friends when they needed him the most, Hutch checked each network's nightly news for any more information he could glean. Every anchorperson repeated essentially the same thing. After all, no one had been killed and there really wasn't much news potential to be gained from a car accident.

His soup forgotten, Hutch popped the top of a beer, waiting for some word that could ease the pain in his chest. He missed Starsky with a pang, hating this extended separation. They worked best together, when they could bounce ideas off each other, using each other's strengths to their advantage. He felt cut in half, not a whole person any longer. He tried once to phone the detective squadroom, but no one there had any more current information than he had gotten off the television. Leaving the telephone on the floor by the couch, he finally fell asleep as Johnny Carson started his monologue.

The jangling ringing brought him out of a dream, surfacing from frightening, unsettling dreamscapes of frantic searching through empty, burning buildings like a swimmer coming up out of a wave. "H'llo," he mumbled into the phone.

"It's me."

"Oh, God, Starsky." Hutch let out his pent up fears with a whoosh. He sat up straighter, rubbing the sleep out of his eyes. "What happened? Are you hurt?"

"We're all okay. I'm at home," Starsky assured, pressing an icepack on the back of his neck and left shoulder. "Some asshole forced us off the road up in the canyons."

"Damn," Hutch sent up a prayer to whatever guardian angel worked overtime to protect Starsky. It didn't matter that Jews probably didn't believe in guardian Angels, Starsky very obviously had one or he wouldn't have lived this long. "Did you see him? Get a license?"

"Brick said he was a blond, but I didn't see anything but trees coming at us," Starsky closed his eyes, the delayed reaction after his adrenaline rush leaving him exhausted and trembling. "It was close, Hutch. If we hadn't of hit a tree, the car would have just plowed down the canyon."

"This has to stop. You can't take much more of it, and my nerves sure can't," Hutch vowed, "We have to get together with Dobey. Something has to give."

"I'll set it up with the Cap. and get back to you tomorrow," Starsky agreed, "I'm just really tired right now."

"Get some rest. Did you eat?" Hutch asked, belatedly realizing he hadn't.

"No!" Starsky groused. "An' I was lookin' forward to all those little pigs in blankets and shrimps on toothpicks."

"Starsk, I don't think a catered party at a senator's would have pigs in blankets."

"Well, those little melon things wrapped in bacon," Starsky described hungrily.

"Presciutto with melon."

"Okay, Smarty, what'd you think they served?"

"How would I know, I wasn't there."
"Yeah, neither was I." Starsky sighed. "G'night, Hutch."

"Good night, Starsky. Go to bed."

"Yes, dad."

"Thanks for calling. I know it's against orders."

"Screw orders. I knew you'd be sittin' there stewing."

"I don't appreciate hearing that you're back in the hospital, on the news, for the second time."

"You and me both." Starsky gave a mirthless laugh, hanging up.

*****

Hutch felt groggy and out of sorts in the morning. After Starsky's phone call, the searching dreams had reclaimed him, so that he wakened sweaty, his heart racing. He recognized them for what they were: stress induced anxiety dreams, and he'd had them on and off for many years. The tension of police work often intensified them, but he'd now had them every few days for the last two weeks, and he was beginning to feel exhausted during the day. His sleep wasn't restful, which made it harder than ever to tolerate the extreme prejudice of his co-workers at United Aryan Brotherhood. He felt the urge to shout out that they were all stupid and deluded. This idea gave him a brief chuckle, thinking how quickly he'd be booted out on his keister after that.

Van Geller appeared in rare form, as well, ranting about trivial printing errors on a new pamphlet that proclaimed that 'America should be for Americans.'

Hutch kept his own council, wondering who exactly qualified as truly American. Indigenous Indians? He was well aware they didn't figure into van Geller's narrow little world view in the least.

"You want me to change the heading and reprint it?" Hutch asked as innocuously as possible.

"Yah. Who printed it this way in the first place?" van Geller growled, his murderous expression at odds with his usual preppy attire.

Sherman peered at the green pamphlet. "Tobe did that batch yesterday."

"Little turd." Van Geller threw the offending document on the table. "Chambers, yeah, change the heading and fix up that piece of crap. Tobe won't be in today." He stomped in to the back office with Sherman trailing behind.

Taking up the original 'American for Americans', Hutch made a few corrections to the wording on the cover and went across the room to the word processor to set up a new prototype to show van Geller. Behind him, there were only a few office workers in this morning working quietly on their own projects. No one had made more than a peep when van Geller was in full rant, indicating to Hutch that they were uncomfortable, but used to the man's mercurial moods. Elsa and the older woman, Margaret sat close together, conferring on their work, while Bob Richman fielded phone calls.

Satisfied with the changes he'd made on the pamphlet, Hutch began to Xerox a few copies. He realized that even above the sound of the copy machine, he could hear voices coming from the back office and was amazed to see that the door was ajar. Sherman must not have shut it completely when he'd followed van Geller inside.
"I can't believe that damn turd didn't kill the Jew," Van Geller was still shouting. "It was easy enough up on those twisty roads."

His breath catching painfully behind his sternum, Hutch realized he was getting the first real proof that the Brotherhood was trying to kill Bachman. It had to have been Daniels driving the truck that forced Starsky and the others off the road! Glad he still had his back to the office workers, he stilled his face to avoid showing any outward anger.

"That was only one chance," Sherman soothed in a much quieter voice.

Hutch was glad he'd finished copying and was now folding the pamphlets as slowly as possible.

"There'll be others. Peter, you get too worked up about this. Got to have a clear head to plan out an execution."

"Papers didn't help much!" van Geller continued, "Look, they're all over the front page! We didn't get a mention anywhere." He rustled the Times with fury, reading, "the Rabbi is a personable, charismatic young man with a vision. Despite the tragic death of his beloved wife, he still forges ahead with his dreams of a less prejudiced world." He grunted in disgust. "What absolute shit. Don't know why we sent the Manifesto to that hack. Cleary gets no more of our proclamations."

"Well, it was just bad luck that the accident happened the same day he'd given an interview," Sherman placated. "But next time, maybe we can use some of that kind of publicity to our advantage."

"How?"

"I have to think about it." Sherman stood, his voice coming nearer to the door.

Hutch finished his folding in a hurry, carrying the pamphlets back to the table where the women worked.

The front door swung open to admit Adams, Metzger and another man Hutch had never been introduced to just as Sherman and van Geller came out of the back.

"Chambers, you finish that work?" Peter asked abruptly. Hutch wordlessly handed over the papers, trying to act as obsequious as he knew how.

"Now, that's more like it." The smile on van Geller's face would have made Dotty the waitress swoon. "I'm really impressed with the way you've been working out, Chambers. John, he's getting to be a really good man to have around here. Find him more things to do."

"Sure thing, Peter," Adams agreed amiably, reaching out to shake Hutch's hand in congratulations.

"Long time no see, Fredricks," Sherman greeted the newcomer.

"Hey, van Geller, look what John's done." Fredricks folded back the sleeve of his chambray shirt to reveal a swastika tattooed on his forearm.

"You did that?" van Geller admired the design, "I had no idea you were so talented, Johnnyboy. Where'd you learn?"

"My brother's been making some good money at this. Gets all kinds, like Hell's Angels, into his shop. He's been training me as an assistant," Adams answered with pride. "I can only do black for now, but he'll be teaching me colors soon."
"I'm gonna get one, too, this weekend," Metzger announced.

Hutch joined the others examining the man's tattoo, but he wished he could walk away. What kind of person would want such a hated Nazi sign indelibly inked into their skin?

"I think that's a real useful thing to know," Peter rubbed his finger over the symbol. "C'mon in the back, tell me more about it." He turned to the back door, then stopped. "Oh, Sam, get those pamphlets Chambers fixed printed out and start distributing them. And throw out this newspaper." He retrieved the day's paper from his office and tossed it ceremoniously into the trash can. "Keep up the good work, Chambers."

"Thanks, Mr. Van Geller." Hutch almost touched his finger to his forelock, but felt that would be going too far. "I'll take out the trash," he said to Metzger. "Need to stretch my legs."

"I'll finish up this printing," Sam agreed, "Throw that lot in the dumpster to the right of our cars out back."

Glad he needed no excuse to go out and check out the bumpers of the Brotherhood's cars, Hutch took his time dumping the trash into the receptacle as he scrutinized the five cars. None looked new, although van Geller's large black sedan did fit the whispered joke around the office of 'Nazi staff car'. The others were not as battered as his own loaner, but none of the other three had obvious signs of a recent accident. Undoubtedly, if Daniels had been involved in the crash, he'd have gotten rid of the car by now.

Wishing the rest of the day could move as fast as the morning had, Hutch helped with the never-ending mailings and then accompanied Adams, Metzger and Fredricks to Dino's for a late lunch.

"You like working with the Brotherhood?" Adams asked seemingly casually after Dotty had brought over four sandwiches and soft drinks.

"Still not used to all that paperwork," Hutch admitted ruefully. "But the people, everyone sharing the same philosophies and ideas, that's what I like."

"Yeah, s'not often you find a group of people who can join for a common goal and achieve it," Metzger stressed excitedly. "I really feel like van Geller knows where he's going and I'm following him every step of the way."

Right into prison. Hutch thought privately, biting into his grilled cheese on wheat.

"On Saturday afternoon we're havin' a barbecue at my place," Adams liberally sprinkled salt over his french fries. "Come on over, Chambers, let's get better acquainted over a couple beers."

"Sure," Hutch agreed with what he hoped was enthusiasm. At the very least, it would give him a chance to search Adams' home for incriminating evidence.

"John's gonna do a swastika on my bicep," Metzger said proudly. "Like he did for Fredricks."

"Didn't hurt at all," the burly man proclaimed. "Now, the battleship on my belly hurt like a son-of-a-bitch."

Tattoo talk continued until the end of the meal, and even on the walk back to the to the Brotherhood offices. Hutch had always been mystified why anyone would want a permanent record of their drunken foolishness on their body and had resisted the urge to get a tattoo in his college days when his frat brothers had adorned themselves with Greek letters. He sincerely hoped that Adams wouldn't offer to practice his new skills on Hutchinson flesh. He amused himself for the rest of the afternoon
by thinking up different ways to politely refuse without making it sound like he found the Nazi symbols particularly repellent.

By five thirty, he was at home and excited to be able to give Starsky some really relevant information, even if it didn't directly pertain to the temple bombing. Both partners were pleased that there was finally some sort of break in the case. Starsky promised to get Tobe Daniels' home, and more importantly, his car, under police scrutiny as soon as possible.

Needing to get to the temporary Temple Beth Sharon set up in the gym of a Jewish high school by sunset, Starsky was in a hurry, but did tell Hutch that there was a meeting set up with Dobey at an out of the way restaurant on the Pacific Coast Highway. Once directions were imparted, he hung up, promising to talk more on the morrow.

***** *

Early morning tendrils of fog still clung to the coast line as Hutch drove down the curving highway to meet Dobey, Starsky and Washington by seven a.m. He'd already jogged this morning, wanting to be clear headed and logical in his effort to explain to his boss why he felt this undercover wasn't working out. Sure, he'd finally gotten a juicy clue, but the titular leaders of the Brotherhood were too paranoid to reveal their secrets to a relative newcomer in their organization. He was beginning to feel he'd be more useful in another capacity. And to be truthful, he'd far rather spend the afternoon quaffing beers in Darryl Washington's backyard than John Adams'.

The restaurant was one of the many franchises that line highways across the United States, luring patrons into a sense of familiarity, since each place was a clone of the last one twenty miles down the road. However, there was the added benefit that few people here were regulars, and the employees would take no notice of the four detectives.

Spotting Dobey sitting in a back booth, Hutch told the restaurant's hostess he was meeting the portly black man, and walked past the counter crowded with folks eating breakfast.

"Captain," Hutch greeted.

"Sit down," Dobey invited. "Starsky and Washington will meet us soon. Hungry?"

"I'll wait." Hutch shook his head. "Listen, I just don't think this is working out like we'd hoped. I'm cooling my heels, addressing envelopes when Starsky and Washington are in danger. That accident was too close. I want..."

"If you're trying to get out of this undercover, it isn't the right time."

"How would you know?" Hutch snapped in consternation. Looking up, he saw a huge black man and shorter man with dark curly hair crossing the parking lot, deep in conversation. Knowing Starsky's body language as well as he did, he could see that his best friend was moving stiffly, favoring his left arm. As the two came through the entrance, Starsky immediately caught his eye, their peripheral awareness of each other still instantaneous after nearly two weeks apart.

Despite this, Hutch still felt out of the loop, Starsky and Washington looked comfortable with each other, having shared experiences, and he realized he had an odd sense of jealousy. It wasn't that he hadn't encouraged the two to work together while he was undercover; it was that he was alone while they had the other for back-up.

"Hey, Blintz, long time no see," Starsky hailed lightly. "What's on the menu? I'm starved."

"Ah'm for pancakes." Darryl had snagged one of the huge plastic volumes as he'd passed the
waitress, and was already scanning the brightly colored pictures of the fare.

"Sit down, you two," Dobey said gruffly. "I'll get a carafe of coffee."


"How are you doing?" Hutch asked Starsky, again noting his wince when he sat down in the booth.

"Fine," Starsky stressed, indigo blue eyes locking onto sky blue ones. "Nobody got hurt in the accident, and that's the way I like it. What 'bout you?"

"I'll be a lot happier when I'm out of the Brotherhood," Hutch answered, then stopped as the waitress came over with the coffee. Breakfasts were ordered all around and coffee poured.

"You're gettin' out?" Starsky asked with interest.

"Not if I have anything to say about it," Dobey negated. "He's valuable on the inside..."

"I'm licking stamps and working a Xerox," Hutch complained, knowing he sounded peevish. "If I'd wanted to be a secretary, I sure as hell wouldn't have gone to the police academy."

"Probably get better pay, too," Starsky said out of the side of his mouth.

"I heard that." Dobey pointed a stubby finger at the younger man. "Hutchinson, quit griping, and get back to the point. That tip you gave us last night panned out..."

"But Daniels'd already reported his four by four stolen the day before the accident," Washington finished. "So's we can't find the truck, so far."

"Did you question Daniels?" Hutch asked, taking a sip of the scalding coffee.

"Not much of a talker."

"Don't think he was real partial to bein' questioned bah a Negro and a Jew." Washington grinned nastily. "He seemed a mite uncomförble in our presence. Ah couldn't rightly figure out why."

"Daniels isn't much of a talker under the best of circumstances," Hutch said, still amused picturing the interrogation. "Did you recognize him?"

"The whole thing happened so fast." Washington rubbed his neck, still experiencing a twinge of whiplash. "Ah saw a flash o' blond hair for a second, then we was off the road, bouncin' down the hill, headin' for the trees. Car hit those trees so hard Ah thought we'd had an earthquake." He frowned, an expression that would have certainly put the fear of God in a lot of people. "Couldn't been Daniels, but Ah ain't sure 'nough for court."

Hutch inwardly cringed at the vivid description Brick had given. He remembered back to the first time he'd ever met the man. Washington's patrol car partner had been murdered. His description of the crime had been so real it had burned an indelible image in Hutch's brain, and he could still picture Cutler falling dead from a bullet wound in the chest. And he'd never even met the man. Starsky was shot by the same sniper only a few days later, which had only cemented the image in his memory.

The waitress returned with large plates filled with steaming food and distributed them to the correct placemats. Starsky began to butter and jelly his toast with great energy, but Hutch could see the expression on his face was stony, and he wasn't enjoying the topic of conversation in the least.
"This is why I want you to stay with the Brotherhood." Dobey's voice dropped to a dramatic whisper with the last word, "so we can nail these bastards."

"But I'm not getting anywhere," Hutch argued. "They don't trust me."

"But they will, son," Dobey assured. "Soon."

"Do you know something I don't? Adams invited me to his house for a barbecue."

"Well, Ah think that's real neighborly." Washington's words and his sarcastic tone at odds with one another.

"If Hutch thinks he's not getting anywhere, maybe he's right," Starsky put in, uncharacteristically reasonable. "After all, he's the one on the inside."

"Thanks," Hutch said, glad that someone was taking his side. Unfortunately, Dobey had the last say. Hutch played with his scrambled eggs, finally taking a bite.

"We need to give it more time." Dobey wolfed down his sausage links. "There's still two more weeks until the talks, and we certainly can't let down our guard now."

"Can I go on record saying that ain't nobody happy with this arrangement?" Starsky bit savagely into a piece of toast, echoing Hutch's thoughts exactly.

*****

The barbecue proved quite edible, in fact, Hutch was impressed with Adams' skill over a grill. His skills at tattooing proved less deft, although Metzger was pleased enough and two others stepped forward to get their own Nazi insignia. No one pushed Hutch into joining the 'initiated' in ritual tattooing or any such nonsense, and his brief search through the small house while on his way to the john revealed nothing. In fact, had the conversation centered more on the upcoming baseball playoffs and less on the annihilation of the Jewish race, it would have been like a dozen other backyard get togethers Hutch had attended in his life.

Van Geller never made an appearance, but there was quite a large group of men eating hamburgers and downing beers. All to a man were blond, or at least light haired brunets, and Hutch was surprised to note how many he had never met. Obviously, the office workers only represented a small portion of the Brotherhood's membership. They must be holding meetings he was unaware of, unless most of the get togethers were nothing more than barbecues like this one. Perhaps he had been brought into the inner circle without even knowing it.

Circulating amongst the groups, he tried to learn as many names as he could, but it was a daunting task. Hard enough under usual circumstances to learn a large number of names quickly, his usual method of linking a name with a physical appearance didn't work as well in this instance, since most were fair, blond, between 18 and 45, and all had the same ugly attitudes regarding racial differences.

He was finishing off a beer and going back for seconds on his burger when he overheard Albert Sherman talking to two men with the overly defined muscles of professional body builders. He slowed his preparations of the burger, spreading too much mustard and ketchup on the bun to listen to the exchange, appalled by what he heard.

"We did two shops in one night," the first man boasted, his shoulders and upper body so over developed that the lettering on his Gold's Gym T-shirt was stretched until it was illegible. "Busted in the windows, dumped pig's blood all over the walls..."
"Were the owners there?" Sherman asked.

"Nah, it was one in the morning. But I know they was Jews 'cause the one place sold bagels and those candle holders they use at Christmas."

"You're a dunce, Camden." The second man, pecs and triceps well defined but slightly less muscle bound, slugged him in the bicep hard enough to fell a lesser man, but Camden hardly took notice of the blow. "They don't have Christmas."

"What'd they do? Don't they give out presents?"

"It's called Hanukkah for their kind," Sherman explained in a condescending tone that was evidently lost on his two companions. "It's not the same at all. Are you going out again?"

"The game's on!" came a shout from the house, and in the general stampede to get in to see the Giants play the Dodgers, Hutch wasn't able to hear the rest of the conversation.

Swallowing against the raw burning at the back of his throat, Hutch dumped his hamburger in the trash. He recalled hearing reports on the news about the increase in crimes against the Jewish community, and now could identify two of the perpetrators. He endeavored to learn the names of both men before the baseball game was over and he could leave without looking suspicious. Whether the group was still wary of a newcomer or no one actually knew the body builders well, all simply referred to them as Jake and Camden.

"Like the Yard," one joker laughed.

"Don't like baseball?" Sherman asked, seeing Hutch standing at the back of the room.

"Sure, doesn't everyone?" Hutch laughed. "The American past time."

"You just have an odd look on your face, something not to your liking?" Sherman asked shrewdly.

Schooling his face to a more bland expression, Hutch shook his head. "Don't know what you mean, unless it's that umpire. He's called two bad ones in a row."

"I don't think you were paying the least attention to the game." Sherman's round glasses glinted from the early evening sun pouring through the side windows. "You're scanning the crowd, like you're checking out my friends."

"Trying to get to know people." Hutch shrugged innocently. "There's a lot of men here I've never seen in Waverly."

"That's our main office, but not the only one," Sherman said carefully, eyeing the tall blond man as if he too were checking him out.

"I'd just like to get in on the action. This paperwork is getting old."

"What kind of action are you referring to?"

"I've heard a few things today." Hutch didn't turn away from the other's scrutiny, hoping his face betrayed nothing. "Getting out in the community. Maybe striking a blow for our side."

"All in good time. When Adams feels you're ready," Sherman answered.

John strode up at that moment, handing out more German beers. "Having a good time, Chambers?"
"It's been great." Hutch toasted his long neck, clinking it with Adams'. "Thanks for inviting me."

"We do this nearly every Saturday." Adams took a long drink from the bottle. "Helps relieve the tension, especially if we have any night work to do."

"Night work?" Hutch asked calmly.

"Chambers wants to get in on some action," Sherman told his partner.

"I'll see what turns up." John gave Hutch a broad smile. "You're shown what you can do in the office..."

"You know where I'll be." Hutch laughed. "Anything special coming up?"

"Bachman's gonna do a speech at the museum, but we got that covered," Adams answered, although Sherman looked annoyed at this revelation. Hutch was uncertain whether Sherman was angry that Adams had told Hutch, or because he'd implied that someone else was involved.

Once the baseball game ended, it was easy to slip out with most of the departing crowd, and Hutch drove home with an uneasy feeling in the pit of his stomach. There was a lot more to the Brotherhood than he'd realized. How had they gotten so powerful and stayed under the police department's radar for so long? The vaguely nasty feeling he got speaking with any of the Brotherhood members always made him want to go home and wash off their residue. Luckily, because of the early morning meeting with Dobey, he hadn't needed to check in at five thirty, since the game had gone long past that hour. Sundays were the one day he wasn't required to call in unless he needed to, and this was one Sunday he did. He only hoped he'd get Starsky instead of their irascible boss.

"Hey," Starsky answered after one ring.

"Waiting up for me, Frank?" Hutch smiled to himself.

"S'not late, but I got other stuff I could be doin' on my day off." Starsky smirked. "There's a double feature on at the Rialto, an' I hear my old partner's girlfriend Angela's been lonely lately."

"Oh, God." Hutch groaned. "I never called her."

"I had Huggy tell her you went out of town for an extended stay," Starsky told him dryly. "So, what's goin' on? Get any good barbecue yesterday?"

"Pretty decent burgers, and a lot of gossip." Hutch filled him in on the conversation he'd overhead and every name he could remember from the guest list.

"Damn," Starsky whispered, copying down the information. His head was pounding, a headache appearing out of nowhere, echoing the pain and tension he still held in his neck from the accident. "How're we gonna stop this, Hutch?"

"By doing as much as we can and getting as much help as we possibly can," he answered honestly. "Rome wasn't built in a day, Starsk."

"Not exactly the best choice of words, they didn't like the Jews either."

"Sorry. How's your shoulder? Still hurting?"

"I'll live. How'd you know?"
"Cause I know you." Hutch sighed, "You're not eating well, you don't sleep, except in cat naps, and you're letting all this get to you, but won't let anybody else do the work."

"Gee, I could say the same about you, but I don't want to be accused of bein' a mother hen." Starsky shook out two aspirin from a bottle next to his piggy bank.

"Point taken." Hutch chuffed a laugh. "Good to see you, buddy."

"Don't stay away so long the next time." Starsky reluctantly cut off the connection. He wouldn't be enjoying the rest of his day off, not armed with the information Hutch had given him. He called up records to see if any of those named had jackets in the department's files. Enlisting the unit secretary's help, he had her research where the break-in to a bagel shop might have occurred, and as a last thought, called a pizza to be delivered into the squadroom. It was going to be a long night.

*****

Monday was so monotonous Hutch almost fell asleep folding more of the ubiquitous pamphlets until Margaret graciously changed places with him and gave him phone duty. This proved little better, although it kept him awake. The vile nature of most of the callers' rants were enough to fuel his nightmares for months to come. More of the same—kill that Rabbi. Kill Niggers. Kill anyone who violates their cozy little white bread world in any way, because God forbid they should go out of their way to change their way of thinking about the rest of mankind.

Van Geller, Adams and Sherman were excited about the public appearance Bachman was to make on Wednesday. A showing of paintings and drawings done during the forties by concentration camp survivors was opening at the Pacific Coast Art museum. There were even a few pages of Anne Frank's diary on display. The Rabbi was expected to make a short speech in front of the building and cut a ribbon to open the exhibit.

This would be the first time Bachman would be so out in the open and accessible. There were sure to be dozens of police in attendance, but that hadn't stopped the notorious assassins of the past. Jack Ruby shot Lee Harvey Oswald in front of cameras, and Sirhan Sirhan downed Robert Kennedy in front of his Democratic Party supporters. It made the killing all the more real, and in the public eye. In van Geller's mind, it was the perfect vehicle to announce their deadly intent.

As Monday was also the Jewish High Holiday of Rosh Hashanah, Starsky and Bachman were in the synagogue most of the day, and Hutch talked to Dobey at the early evening phone call. This heightened his frustration, because he felt too far removed from the action to affect the eventual fearful outcome of van Geller's actions. Fearing the worst, Hutch insisted that Dobey try to get Starsky and Washington to cancel the appearance, but the Captain admitted they'd already tried. All felt it was too dangerous to be so out in the open, but Micah had insisted he couldn't be hidden away forever. If he was going to get his message across, he had to show he was unafraid and willing to talk to the general public.

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After getting Hutch's message, Starsky resolved to talk to Bachman again, and try to knock some sense into his head. As they were now less than twenty four hours away from the event, he had serious doubts about his ability to change the Rabbi's mind. He followed Washington into the Victorian, still surprised at the constant crowd of people in the little house.

Although Micah Bachman was the most famous member of the clergy on the board of the Alliance for Peaceful co-existence, he was by no means the only one. There were Catholic priests deep in conversation with Methodist ministers, Rabbis discoursing with Baptists and nuns chatting with bald
headed black detectives.

*Wait, that was Brick.*

Starsky caught his eye and motioned that he was going upstairs. He skirted a small group of fierce looking boys with nearly bald heads and chains hanging from their leather jackets. Skin heads, who had shown their bravery by coming forth and renouncing their former racist ways, incurring the wrath of their comrades. They had proven to be valuable allies, publicly announcing their goal of peace and bringing in more members of hate groups.

"Micah," Starsky called out, seeing that the man was hunched over his desk, writing some speech, as usual.

"Dave, I know what you're going to say." Bachman put down his pen, rubbing his tired eyes. "But we've done half a dozen appearances lately and whether or not the car accident was provoked, nothing else has happened."

"We know the car was pushed off the road," Starsky said tightly. "And Hutch has heard van Geller say he's gonna try an' kill you tomorrow."

"Dave, This one is important to me." Micah took a deep breath, "It was set up a long time ago, before...all of this. Miriam was on the committee that set up this exhibit. Her great-uncle is--was one of the artists they're featuring."

"I'm just worried about you," Starsky said lamely.

"And you do it so well." Micah smiled at him. "But you're getting tired."

"Aren't we all?"

"Yeah. I think this week, maybe we could take some time out to relax. I will cancel a couple of things on Thursday or Friday morning, it's Rosh Hashanah, after all. Then, only one more week till the talks."

"Thanks for small favors, those ain't the ones that could get you killed."

"I never thought going to temple could get my wife killed, either." Micah looked down at the gold wedding band he wore on his left hand.

"Why did your wife die then, and we survived the bomb and a car accident?" Starsky asked sharply. "What kind of God does that? How do you accept that?"

"Dave, we can't secondguess God. His ways are not for us to understand." Micah shrugged, touching his yarmulke, the outward sign of his faith. "I don't know why or how some are chosen to live and others to die...We can only accept God in our lives and try to live according to his teachings."

"But why?" Starsky straddled a chair backwards, gripping the back as if he wanted to wrestle with it. "If Jews are the chosen people as it always says in the Holy writings then why is all this crap continually dumped on them? Huh? Can you tell me why?"

"You're asking the questions of the ages, Dave. How can anyone answer them?" Micah sighed, "Scholars study the Talmud for decades without ever coming to a consensus on any of it."

"So now I rank up there with rabbinical scholars," Starsky said cynically. "Then, if they're like me,
they're damned angry."

"Starsky!" the Rabbi spoke sharply. "Anger turns so easily into hate."

"And you don't hate them?" Starsky said obliquely, although both knew whom he meant.

"I can't."

"Yeah, I've heard your speech." Starsky closed his eyes, drawing in a tight breath. "I hear that thump of air against my ear drums and then feel the blast, over and over again, like a needle caught in a grove. If I could just put that needle back at the beginning of the record and start it over..."

"But we can't." Micah scratched his chin under his gingery beard, "We can only move forward, honoring our dead by preserving their memories and not defiling their names with thoughts of anger and hatred."

"Harder than it sounds."

"Much." He nodded. "Now, I will ask you a question." Micah looked at his friend as if memorizing his face. "Why do you think you were spared?"

"Which time?" Starsky laughed bitterly. "I've cheated death so many times I sometimes wonder when I actually will go."

"Then you obviously are precious in God's sight, and are meant to do a special job."

"I think I'm just too tough to die." Starsky rubbed his eyes with the palms of his hands. "I still don't understand why she had to die then."

"Neither do I," Micah said slowly. "It was meant to be."

"It's not fair." Starsky checked his watch, mentally calculating the time on the East Coast. "We got time before that PTA thing?"

"Yes, since that's not til late this afternoon," Micah reminded, going back to his speech writing, "The Lion's Club thing is first."

"I'm gonna call Washington." Starsky laughed suddenly aware of his unintentional pun. "D.C. not Darryl."

"Send her my love." Micah smiled, knowing who Starsky wanted to talk to and glad that he was able to do so. "And tell Brick I love him, too."

"I wouldn't touch that with a ten foot pole," Starsky wisecracked, "And I'm only a six foot Pole."

"You wish." Bachman groaned. "Now get out of here."

Finding a free phone in an empty room down the hall, Starsky dialed the correct combination of numbers to connect him with a woman an entire continent away. Luck was with him for the first time in days, Joan Meredith was in her condo working on a presentation.

"Hey," Starsky greeted, a smile in his voice.

"Hey, yourself." Meredith grinned in return, pushing her paperwork onto the chrome and glass coffee table.
"I really needed to hear your voice right now. Actually, I wouldn't mind seeing all of you."

"I miss you too, but I've seen more of you than I like on my TV."

"What can I say? I'm famous."

"You're infamous, and that's not such a good thing." She sobered, "David, it's scary. I was so sorry I missed your call after that car accident. What is going on?"

Giving her a condensed version of the ongoing case, he related the recent revelations Hutch had uncovered about the Brotherhood. "Nearly half the names he gave me came up with records--assault, B. and E., vandalism...I don't know what to think, but they may really be carrying out their plans of a second Holocaust."

"Oh, God, how can that be happening?"

"Every day there are more and more crimes with Jews as the victims. Hutch says van Geller has a lot more followers than we first realized. We didn't think they were that big, or powerful." He clenched his teeth, the flashback of the bombing coming back strongly again. "It was like they got lucky." He shook himself free of the image, surprised at his own choice of words. "With the bombing, but now I think it's way more complicated than that."

"Even the D.C. papers said there'd been some big breakthroughs in that case."

"The company that bought the C5 plastique turned out to be a dummy corporation and the paper trail ends there. Another witness came forward with a partial plate number on the car, which matched and added to the fragment we already had but the computer hasn't found any match with a car. The plate was a phony."

"And what about your accident?"

"Every indication points to Tobe Daniels being involved, except again, no car. He claims that it was stolen. Personally, I think it's already flat as a pancake in some scrap metal yard. And Brick didn't get a good enough look to make a positive I.D."

"All this is really scaring me."

"Hey, I'm not havin' a great time either, but we got less'n two weeks left. Micah thinks once the talks start, a lot of this'll stop."

"I don't believe that."

"Neither do I, but I try. Faith, y'know."

"It's powerful, but this is like an evil force. The violence feeds on itself until it's unstoppable." She shuddered. "It sucks you in."

"Sounds like we should call in Luke Skywalker and a coupla Jedi knights to fight the dark side," he teased, trying for a lighter vein. "Honey, I don't know what'll happen, there could be rioting in the streets or maybe Micah really is the messiah come to bring peace..."

"Don't joke, it's...disrespectful," she cut him off, hurt and angry.

"Meredith, I'm bein' as careful as I know how to be. My job is to keep Micah safe, and so far, between Brick and me, we've been successful. Ain't gonna stop the winning team now."
"I don't want anything to happen to you--any of you." She gulped, tears in her voice.

"Don't cry."

"I'm not crying. I want to, but I won't. What I'd really like to do is get on a plane and fly back there right now." Meredith wiped a shaking hand across her eyes.

"No," Starsky insisted. "I like you right where you are, thousands of miles away where it's safe."

"Oh, you have an odd idea of safety, Blue eyes. D.C. has one of the highest murder and drug related crime rates in the country." She gave a cross between a laugh and a sob, getting her emotions under control.

"Yeah, but you know how to handle yourself there. Isn't that what you're takin' the classes for?"

"And getting straight A's," she boasted.

"They don't give out letter grades in those kind of seminars."

"Hmm, well, then I wonder why that professor asked me 'round for a little afternoon tutorial then." Meredith dripped a dollop of honey into her voice.

"You didn't," he countered, sitting up straighter.

"It's later today--I guess he must want to discuss my performance in class."

"What kind of performance?"

"Maybe he thinks I was bad."

"How bad?" Starsky warmed to the game.

"I...wore a really short skirt and when I dropped my pencil, I had to lean over really far to pick it up." Meredith grinned, she was actually wearing old, ragged sweats and gym socks, but the fantasy was much better.

"Were you wearing panties?" He questioned, beginning to really enjoy himself.

"I was in such a hurry, I forgot them." She reached up under her sweatshirt, she wasn't wearing a bra and her nipples were beginning to harden with the word play.

"You'd better be alone this time, mister."

"I am! It's Micah's private line, keep going." He could feel his groin growing uncomfortable against his jeans and shifted in the chair.

"Well, I'm just afraid that the professor might want to punish me." She gave a dramatic sigh. "When I leaned over, everyone could see right up my skirt."

"What you do?"

"I put my hand between my legs, but my fingers just slipped right in." She pushed the waistband of her pants down to bare her clitoris, breathing harder.

"Were you tight?" His penis was swelling, he wanted so badly to release it from his pants, but there were limits to how far he was willing to go when someone could walk in at any moment. He wished
he'd had the foresight to lock the bedroom door.

"Oh, yeah. Maybe you should punish me, instead," she cooed, as if it were a novel idea. "I need a firm rod."

"Grandpa always said spare the rod and spoil the girl," Starsky agreed. "I have the perfect thing, all prepared."

"I can't wait." She pouted, "I want it now."

"You'll have to take a rain check." Starsky rubbed the crouch of his pants longingly.

"But I'm all ready wet." Meredith swirled a finger between her moist lower lips, her whole abdomen tingling.

"Get protection." He began to laugh, the tension from the earlier part of the conversation relieved, "Maybe you need some rubbers."

"Maybe you do, Mr. Policeman," she drawled. "I do so miss you."

"I'm counting the days til you come home." Starsky sighed. He could hear someone walking down the hall and was glad the X-rated part of the phone call had concluded. "I think they're looking for me. Gotta go."

"Stay safe," she prayed.

"I will," he vowed.

Out in the hallway, Washington was calling his name and he hung up the phone. He was always having to hang up on the people he wanted to talk to most, and it rankled.

"I'm here." Starsky poked his head out of the room, nearly smacking his partner in the face with the door.

"Time's awastin', Loverboy." Darryl smirked, "We got a luncheon with those Lions."

"Gee, I hope it's not more than rubber chicken and limp green beans," Starsky groused, hoping he'd get a little limper very soon, because his jeans were still uncomfortably tight in the front.

*****

It was the kind of day that made visitors from out of state believe in the myth of constant California sunshine. Though it was the last day of September, the temperature was close to 80, wind mild, sky deep blue where it wasn't covered in a haze of smog. Just perfect for a gala museum opening.

The walled courtyard of the Pacific Coast Art Museum was decked with fluttering banners and a garland of balloons arched over a small stage set to one side of the main entrance doors. Caterers were setting up buffet tables with kosher foods, especially those popular in the Jewish New Year, such as honey for dipping bread and apples.

Security was already heavy, uniformed guards and police checking the I.D.'s of every one who even claimed to be working on the premises. Unfortunately, once the event started, there was much more chance for slip-ups. Formal invitations had not been sent out, and while mostly patrons and members of the museum were expected, the general public could also attend, as the Rabbi's appearance had been heralded in newspaper and local magazine articles.
To circumvent the onslaught of the media, Bachman and his entourage arrived early to tour the exhibit before it was officially open, slipping in through the freight dock.

Micah and Moses Reinhart were effusively greeted by the museum staff and whisked off to discuss the morning's schedule, leaving Starsky and Washington in the marble floored rotunda.

"Y'think we should tag along?" Darryl asked, crossing his arms over his chest. "Or are we lurkin' in the lobby again?"

"There's enough uniforms around this place to warrant a President's visit," Starsky observed, "Keep your eyes open, but I don't think we have to worry inside the building. Out there is another thing—one this shindig gets started, that's when the shit could hit the fan."

"Jest a cock eyed opt'mist, now ain't ya?" Darryl asked dryly, still looking back down the hall where the Rabbi had gone. "Ah'll jest wait here for 'em."

"I'll check out the layout of the exhibit hall." Starsky wandered down the wide corridor, mentally checking out security measures and reasonably satisfied with the museum's efforts.

Over a curved entry hung a wide blue banner proclaiming *Images of our Past. Memories of the time of the Holocaust*. Not sure he wanted to see the paintings, Starsky hung back, memories of his own parents' tight, pinched faces when they had told him how his grandfather and several relatives had died flooding in. He'd been twelve years old, and they had died before his birth, but the frightening words his parents had spoken still crowded his brain.

*Bergen-Belsen. Auschwitz*. Just places, but terrifying, their names burned into the minds of all who'd ever heard the horrible stories of Nazi atrocities. He really didn't want to see death and anguish right now. There'd been far too much of it in the present, thank you very much.

Peering into the gallery, he could see a large mounted photograph of Anne Frank, her face glowing with inner joy, dark hair flipping at the ends as if she'd been caught in mid skip. A picture so familiar that even those who had never read her diary thought of her as an old friend. The words she'd written nearly forty years before were emblazoned on the wall, a reminder of eternal hope in a world gone wrong. "*Because in spite of everything, I still believe that people are really good at heart. July 15, 1944.*"

Small overhead spot lights drew the visitor into the room where they illuminated printed commentary on the walls. Not just Anne's words, but snatches of carefully preserved letters and documents describing life in the ghettos, and on the farms, of Jews who hid in cramped attics and others who changed their names and religions to hide in plain sight. Stories of the fortunate who had immigrated to America, and those who had perished. Interspersed between the writings was artwork; paintings, sketches, collages and photographs depicting the era.

At first, the artwork was quiet scenes of regular life. Starsky especially liked a shadowy portrait of a sad eyed woman with her hands poised above the Shabbat candle, her dark cloud of hair and black lace head covering like wings on either side of her face. Hung nearby, a tiny ink sketch caught two children sitting side by side on a stoop, their clothes showing utter poverty, but their faces alight with joy to be cuddling a wiggling puppy.

As the hard years of war progressed, so did the paintings, their images increasingly haunting. One was a chiaroscuro of blacks, and grays; a long dark tunnel with endless lines of hunched people trudging inside. Monochromatic photographs froze the faces of Krakow, Berlin, and Paris. None of Hitler, or any of the Gestapo. Just simple shots illustrating life during the German occupation, with the Jewish population all wearing six pointed stars on their clothes. Others captured clandestine
Jewish services, women with old fashioned wigs and long skirts praying with their children, and small groups of men crowded together, phylacteries tied to their arms.

A large upright box was simply littered with broken glass, a twisted doll and a ripped yarmulke, reminding the viewer of the horrible Kristalnacht. Starsky felt his throat tighten at the sight of the little scrap of fabric. He'd never remembered to get the Big Bird yarmulke back to its rightful owner.

More and more of the writings mentioned the concentration camps, the artwork following suit. A deep purple silk flower was planted resolutely in barren dirt, the stem intertwined with real barbed wire. An unframed oil on canvas of a woman, her face turned away, but the numbers on her arm stark against her gaunt wasted flesh.

Starsky reached out a hesitant hand to the canvas, the look of shame and sadness in the woman's posture distinctly reminding him of his Aunt Chava. She had been a lovely woman, with a lively wit and deep blue eyes like his own, full of mischief. But what had happened in the concentration camps had marked her soul. She'd never let anyone see the numbers imprinted on her, although Dave could remember seeing his uncle's whenever he'd rolled up his sleeves in the summer.

The exhibit was a vivid reminder of the anguish and pain these people had endured although there were no actual images of physical torture or violence. Instead, there was an overall evocative sense that hope had somehow survived in these death camps. Despite the gas chambers, cruel experiments and senseless murder of nearly an entire generation of people, a handful had kept hope alive. Like Pandora and her box, hope had been nurtured, kept close until the time when it was possible to hold it up again in the light, free once more. The last paintings portrayed the liberation of the camps, people caught between joy and fear, uncertain of their future. A stark, grainy photograph of skeletal bodies standing near the open camp gates grabbed the eye. Starvation and desolation had stripped away their gender, leaving just bare humanity. People forged of steel, strong with determination to persevere against adversity and triumph over the evil that had imprisoned them.

Anne Frank's words once again greeted the visitor, "The time will come when we'll be people again and not just Jews. April 11, 1944."

"How do you like it?" Micah's words startled Starsky.

"It's amazing. I didn't know...It's sad, but not depressing. Some of it's almost happy." Starsky shook himself to dispel the lingering dreamlike state he'd entered while in the exhibit rooms. "Which one did your...in-law? Miriam's uncle do?"

"Her great-uncle Mordecai Steinberg painted the very first one and two over there." Micah pointed back to the beginning of the display.

"Mordecai?" Starsky grimaced at the name, identifying the pictures. The one with the veiled woman over the candle that he'd liked, and two companion pieces of a family celebrating Passover, one in a comfortable home with the proper dishes for the holiday and food for all, the second showing the same family celebrating their own pass over in some hovel, with a sprig of parsley and a cup of salt water all they had to eat. The family resemblance was there, in the faces of the women in every picture. Surprised he hadn't noticed it the first time, Starsky nodded, "I see Miriam's face."

"I see her face everywhere," Micah said simply. "When I'm awake, when I'm asleep. She would have been so proud of this. It's all she wanted, and more..."

"Micah, how do you get up in the morning?" Starsky sat on one of the viewing benches, looking up at the tall, bearded man. "What keeps you going? This has to be tearing you apart, but you keep on going, making all this happen."
"Because I have her spirit to keep me strong. She encourages me, helps me see the finish line, and I know we're going to attain our goal."

"Or die trying," Starsky sotto-voced.

"O ye of little faith, I believe the Protestants say."

"Don't look at me."

"Ah thought Ah'd find you all here." Washington walked over, stopping to examine a few paintings along the way. "Nice, in a really sad kinda way. This one's got the impressionist style, an' he's..." He pointed to Great-uncle Mordecai's work, "influenced bah the Dutch school."

Both Bachman and Starsky stared at him with their mouths open.

"What?" Darryl countered.

"Been holdin' out on us, Brick?" Starsky pointed an accusing finger. "Read the exhibit guide while you were waiting for the Rabbi?"

"Nah." He grinned. "You didn't think Ah jest played football in college, didja?"

"It crossed my mind." Starsky shrugged. "You did have a scholarship, after all."

"I think that's pretty impressive," Micah agreed. "But you obviously took a few art history courses."

"Heck, Ah majored in it. Did a year in Italy." Washington let out a belly laugh at their amazement. "Cum laude. There ain't much call for it, though..."

"Okay, just supposing you're actually tellin' the truth." Starsky tried to wrap his mind around the huge detective touring the great art museums of Europe. "Don't tell me you can paint, too."

"Can't hold a brush with both hands," Washington admitted. "S'why I like t'look at 'em."

"Tell me," Micah asked. "Did you go to the Uffizi? I've always wanted to see that. And the Roman ruins."

"Mah favorite is Pompeii," Darryl said, "The mosaic work and the frescos are amazin', the colors still beautiful after all these centuries."

"And are there really pornographic scenes?" Micah prompted, caught up in the travelogue.

"What the heck are you two talkin' about?" Starsky groaned. "We got to start this ribbon cuttin' ceremony soon."

"You have t'go there, Rabbi," Darryl encouraged. "There's one room that has a border with naked bodies and it don't take no imagination to guess what they're doin'."

"Travel is always so broadening," Micah stated, leading Washington down the corridor towards the front hall. "So, do you have any books on this?"

Starsky threw up his hands in utter confusion, following behind, like the fifth wheel on a Cadillac.

*****

By mid morning, the museum garden was crowded with people waiting for the ceremonial opening.
Many of the visitors, although by no means all, wore yarmulkes and as Hutch scanned the crowd, he was amused by the sour expression on Albert Sherman's face. It was the only thing about the day that was amusing, by his reckoning. If the Brotherhood had it's way, Bachman would be shot in less than an hour, and that action would quite possibly ignite a racial war the likes of which Los Angeles hadn't seen since the Watts Riots in the mid sixties.

Hutch had no clear plan of how he could stop what was happening without stepping out of his undercover role, and he knew Captain Dobey didn't want that. Except that, if any of his friends were in danger he was going to help them, no matter what the cost. It was a dilemma that was gnawing in his belly, threatening to expel the bowl of shredded wheat and yogurt he'd eaten for breakfast.

His assignment, according to Sherman, was simply to remain anonymous, circulating through the crowd, keeping his eye out for any cops or officials who could disrupt their assassination plans. Hutch was very aware of his lowly status in the hierarchy. No one had told him who the gunman was, so he didn't know which of the Brotherhood members to shadow. He knew for certain it wouldn't be Sherman. He was too valuable to be pulling the trigger. Thus, Hutch stood to one side of the buffet table, the smell of the food doing nothing for his queasy stomach, and watched for faces he recognized. It was a daunting task, there were potentially far more of the Brotherhood he didn't know than those he did.

The temperature was rising, and the crush of people in the walled in courtyard only added to the humidity. Hutch could feel his chambray shirt sticking to his body as sweat dripped down his armpits. In this heat, even normal, sensible human beings might start to riot, and with the dry month of October only one day away, grass fires were definite possibilities, as well. The day just kept getting better and better.

The trumpeting sound of a ram's horn heralded the guest of honor to the small stage erected near the front of the building. The shofar, a traditional instrument of Jewish lore, sounded for several long seconds before anyone spoke, the tone haunting and eerie. When a balding museum official finally tried to start the program, his first words were drowned out by applause as Bachman attained the stage, followed closely by Starsky and Washington. Hutch recognized Moses Reinhart and his mother already sitting in the V.I.P. chairs set up to the left of the stage.

Glad to see his friends, if only from a distance, Hutch kept his attention focused on the stage, but sweeping the surrounding crowd with his eyes for any glimpse of a rifle.

Both Starsky and Washington looked less stiff than they had on Saturday, and while most of the others on the stage were dressed in business type suits, Starsky remained true to form, wearing jeans and a red plaid cotton shirt jacket style over a blue t-shirt. Hutch recognized the plaid shirt as one of his own.

"L'Shanah Tovah," Micah Bachman called out. "That means for a good year, a greeting used during this New Year holiday in the Jewish calendar."

"Can't even stick to English," Albert Sherman muttered, standing just behind Hutch's right arm.

"I am truly proud to be a part of this special exhibit, which was one of my wife's special causes. Much of the artwork hung in the gallery has never been publically displayed before, and most of the artists are now dead. But we honor their work, and the special dedication of their families who kept these pieces hidden until it was safe to show works by Jewish artists. I know that none of you would ever even think to ask the religion of the artist when viewing a painting or sculpture but many pieces were destroyed during the war because the artists were Jewish. So, we must all hold these few examples precious, knowing what an arduous journey they had to get here. Welcome to Images of our past, memories of the time of the Holocaust." Micah turned away for a moment, listening to
something Starsky whispered to him as the president of the museum came forward with an oversized pair of shears.

The shot seemed to come out of nowhere, punctuating the end of Bachman's sentence like a deadly exclamation point. Had he not inclined his head to Starsky's seated level, the bullet would have drilled him right between the eyes.

A second shot came closely on the heels of the first one, but Washington was already in motion, slamming his body into the Rabbi, and in turn, into Starsky with the same moves that had earned him MVP at Georgia Tech. Bachman tumbled over Starsky's knees, the Brick's body check propelling both of them over the side of the stage, onto the lawn behind. The museum's president ducked behind the podium, still waving the enormous scissors in the air. A third shot cut the shears neatly in two.

His heart pounding in his chest, Hutch spun around, frantically searching for the gunman. Already uniformed cops were converging on a blond haired man, and when the seething masses of terrified people parted briefly, Hutch recognized the shooter as Sam Metzger. There was no way for him to escape, Swat team members had sprung out of no where, bristling with deadly weaponry.

"Let's get a move on. Now." Sherman grabbed Hutchinson's arm, pushing him through the churning tide of humanity running for the exit. "We don't want to be questioned, do we?"

Skirting the Museum by going around to the back side, they somehow managed to escape notice by the police who were concentrating on what they considered a lone gunman, and so Hutch and Sherman were able to get to their car without incident.

"Did you know that was going to happen? That he was essentially going on a suicide mission?" Hutch demanded, his nerves screaming inside to know how Starsky and Bachman had fared.

"Metzger's a crack shot. He served his country in 'Nam, and he knew the risks," Sherman explained, keeping a wary eye out for police as he started the car. "He volunteered for this mission."

"He'll be held without bail!" Hutch protested. Unfortunately, he'd actually kind of liked Sam. "Did he hit the Ra... Jew, do you think?"

"I saw that big Nigger run like a rabbit, and everyone else fell, we can only hope we bagged a few Kikes," Sherman boasted.

Luckily for Micah, Metzger's prowess with a rifle was not as spectacular as advertised. And thanks to Washington's phenomenal reflexes, no one was shot.

Crawling on his knees, Starsky stared over the edge of the stage at the activity across the lawn. People were still running everywhere but it was easy to spot the center of the turmoil. Black flak jacketed swat teams were searching a blond haired man who lay prostrate on the grass.

"Davey, you okay?" Darryl asked anxiously, patting his limbs for injury.

"Lemme go, Brick." Starsky protested irritably. "You just about dislocated my shoulder but I guess thanks would be in order. How's Micah?"

"Feel like I've been hit with a Brick," the Rabbi punned weakly. "But it's better than a bullet any day." He waved away his hovering mother and brother-in-law, standing up to view the gunman's arrest.

"Any one recognize him?" Moses Reinhart asked, his arms around his visibly shaken mother.
"I don't." Micah shook his head, brushing grass off his suit.

"Hopefully, I may know someone who does," Starsky muttered, glancing up at his partner. "We'd better go call Dobey."

"Gentlemen, please..." A blue uniformed officer with a military bearing gestured to them. "You'll be safer inside the building. We're shutting down the exhibit for today."

"Damn," Micah groused. "I wish this hadn't happened."

"Micah," Esther Reinhart snapped. "Listen to the man. Do you want to be laid out next to your wife?"

"Yes," he said so softly that only Starsky who was standing nearby heard. "Sometimes I want to be laying right next to her."

*****

Snapping on the car radio as he drove, Albert Sherman adjusted the dial to an all news radio show. After only a few moments of uninteresting weather and traffic news, a report about the museum shooting came on.

"This just in, there has been a shooting at the Pacific Coast Art Museum this morning. Details are sketchy at this time, but the intended victim appears to have been celebrated Rabbi Micah Bachman, whose peace talks between religious leaders and hate groups are set to begin on October ninth. No one was shot, but police did apprehend a suspect in the shooting. His name has not been disclosed."

"Damn." Sherman slapped the steering wheel in an uncharacteristic show of anger. "I was sure Metzger hit somebody. They were rolling around on the stage like bowling pins. It was kind of funny."

Privately, Hutch was considerably relieved that his friends had once more escaped serious harm, wondering how long they could keep this up. There had to be a breaking point sometime. "What's your next move?" he asked cautiously, giving half an ear to the radio in case they gave any more pertinent details, but the newsreader had shifted to a rape of a young Jewish girl from the valley.

"I have to think." The man took one hand off the wheel to push his glasses more securely up his nose. Hutch had to say one thing for Sherman, he was an extremely conscientious driver. After riding with madman Starsky for all these years, it was somewhat novel to drive within the speed limit and obey all traffic laws. "Obviously we are approaching the problem all wrong. Going after the Rabbi hasn't worked. He's still alive and the damned talks are still progressing."

"Maybe you won't be able to stop him," Hutch suggested meekly.

"I'm beginning to agree with you, Chambers." Sherman pulled into a familiar driveway. He had barely turned the key in the ignition when John Adams came running out of his house, nearly dancing with frustration.

"Why the hell did you let that asshole do the shooting?" he demanded.

"Take it in the house, John," Sherman directed. "Where's Peter?"

"He ain't very happy, that's all I can say," Adams spat.

"Is he inside?" Sherman asked calmly, any sign of temper gone under a cool façade.
"He called, he'll be here soon." The burly man turned his attention to Hutch, acknowledging him. "What did you see?"

"Take it in the house, John," Sherman commanded, more sharply this time. "No need for the neighbors to know all our business.

Once seated on the leather couch, with beers for Adams and Hutch, the morning's events were described and dissected by all three. When van Geller arrived ten minutes later, his anger was so palpable that it filled the room like the smell of ozone after a violent thunderstorm.

"This was not what I expected. Can you explain what went wrong before I start blowing away a few Jews by myself? And I'll have just enough ammo to waltz through the doors of that police department and drill Metzger an extra hole to shit through, since that's about all he seems to be good for," Van Geller seethed. "What happens if he starts to talk, huh?"

"You and I both went over that with him. He's now a prisoner of war. Name, rank and serial number."

"They've questioned Tobe three times, did you know that? What if the two of 'em start spilling their guts about our operation? Our whole plan will be dead in the water. That god-damned Shylock better be in a coffin before those fuckin' talks, or..."

"Peter." Sherman's voice cut through the rant like a sword. "I may have a plan."

"What?"

"Later. Now, there was a lot of security around that museum. I think one of our mistakes has been to go after Bachman when he's scheduled to do a public appearance. After all this time, the police--and more importantly his personal bodyguards are beginning to suspect that something may occur. I really don't know why the place was surrounded by enough uniforms to guard Fort Knox, but it was."

"This was going to be the coup!" Van Geller yelled. "An old fashioned execution, to show the world that we aren't all talk. That manifesto meant something to me. What have we done so far? Some petty-ass vandalism, terrorizing old kike biddies. This is not a war, it's a kiddy amusement park!"

"He wasn't vulnerable enough," Sherman said quietly, steepling his fingers.

Drinking his beer in small sips to make one last longer, Hutch made no noise. He didn't want his presence noticed for as long as possible. Foreknowledge had prevented disaster at the museum. If he could learn more intimate details about the Brotherhood's organization, maybe he could shut them down.

"Well, what would make him more vulnerable, Genius man?" Peter's face was contorted with anger, his usually handsome features twisted and red.

Hutch wondered what Dotty the waitress would think of her Prince Charming now.

"C'mon, let's get some sandwiches in the kitchen, I'll tell you what I have in mind."

"I don't want a sandwich." Van Geller turned away, looking surly.

"I got bratwurst," Adams cajoled.

"John, monitor the TV, see if you can find out where they're holding Sam, or when he'll be
arraigned," Sherman said. "I'll bring out sandwiches for you two. C'mon, Peter."

"You think you're in charge, all of a sudden?" Peter snapped. "Whose money pays you, huh?"

"Have something to drink." Albert handed his friend a coke. With van Geller's unstable moods, he didn't want the man drunk so early in the day. It was getting harder and harder to keep Peter under control. When Helmut had been alive, the old man's presence had been a calming influence, but more often now Peter was like a raving lunatic, ready to explode at any moment. Earlier in the year, his ideas had been constructive, even inventive, but he hadn't been able to get the Brotherhood beyond the storefront nickel and dime level. Sherman knew it was his bomb that had turned things around, and he was planning to assert more control at the helm.

Fiddling around in the kitchen, Albert heated some bratwurst, getting out condiments and chips while van Geller perched on the edge of the counter and drained his coke.

"What's your plan, Al?"

"Who's always with Bachman?"

"That little, curly-haired Jewboy, the cop. And that big, dumb-ass spearchucker."

"Exactly. That cop has been there every time since we fired up the cross on the Rabbi's lawn. He's our stumbling block."

Smiling broadly, the former football captain nodded. "You wanna kill him?"

"Possibly, but I think we may get even more leverage if we use him as a bargaining tool," Albert mused. "If they want talks, we'll give them negotiation of an unpeaceful kind, and let the chaos begin."

"I like the sound of that--like we hold the keys to power over the whole city." Peter laughed. "But I thought you said we shouldn't mess with the cops."

"I did," He agreed. "There's a time and place for everything, and we need to deal with the problem now or we can't move forward."

"And the big Nigger?"

"He's a newcomer, mostly back-up for Starsky. Once we get the Jew cop out of the way, the he'll probably just scurry back to headquarters for more orders, leaving Bachman on his own." Sherman placed the lunch items on a tray, carrying it out into the living room where Adams was watching a game show.

"Any more news?" Sherman queried, handing out plates of Bratwurst sandwiches.

"Naw, we missed the earlier news. It was ending when I turned on the TV."

"The afternoon paper comes out in about two hours," Hutch put in, taking a tentative bite of his sausage. He had never liked much German food, and this was one of his least favorites. He couldn't think of a graceful way to get away from Adams' house without looking suspicious. There was no reason for him to want to go back to Waverly any time soon. There were more than enough office workers to distribute pamphlets and field phone calls. He hadn't been able to casually stroll past the kitchen to hear what Sherman and van Geller were discussing because Adams kept talking to him.

At first he'd tried not listening, straining his ears for what might be going on in the other room. Then,
Adams dropped a present in his lap and he wasn't even paying attention. Disgusted with his two partners' inability to kill the Rabbi, John had begun to expound on his ideas on the subject. Most of them involved large amounts of explosives and fire. Very proud of his part in the bombing, Adams was describing his part in driving the car to heave the deadly package through the street side windows of the synagogue.

Catching his breath, Hutch had stared at the man in beside him on the leather couch when the other two returned to the room. He'd missed his opportunity! How could he bring the subject up now?

"After this morning's fiasco, I think we need to be extra cautious in our approach," Sherman said, taking a hearty bite of his own sandwich and washing it down with beer. "I have a few plans in the early stages, but nothing that can be discussed with the group."

"But, Sherman, why was that place crawlin' with the fuzz?" Adams put in. "It looks like they knew we were comin'."

"As I said before, I think they're just become aware of the threat we pose, and in a funny way, that's a good thing. The cops are taking us seriously."

"It was my manifesto," Van Geller said proudly.

"Chambers, you didn't get to do much today, but what were your impressions?" Sherman directed his gaze at Hutch, his narrow face serious. "Any suggestions? Even criticism? I think you can consider yourself a valued member, now."

"Thanks," Hutch managed, considering what to say. That he thought they were all vicious, bigoted assholes wouldn't be politically correct under the circumstances. Nor safe, either. "I haven't had....any experience with this kind of operation, I only know how to use my fists. But can I ask a...potentially dangerous question?"

"About what?" Peter asked suspiciously.

"You three were involved in the temple bombing, weren't you??"

"Why do you want to know?" Sherman put down his plate, his actions controlled and tight.

"Because that one worked." Hutch thought fast. "What did you do differently there? What exactly didn't work today?"

"Good point." Sherman nodded, his body relaxing. "This should be something we all think about. It may be that a certain amount of spontaneity is what works best."

Wondering how he could use the word spontaneous with a planned bombing, Hutch just shrugged, taking another bite of the bratwurst.

"I've got a meeting," van Geller said by way of good-byes. "You need a ride, Chambers?"

"You going past the office in Waverly? That's where I left my car." Hutch wasn't thrilled about riding in the same car with a man he considered a sociopath, but it gave him some time to learn more facts about any of the crimes he'd been involved with. It was beginning to look like the Brotherhood was responsible for everything from vandalism to murder. He vowed that he'd see van Geller and his co-horts behind bars if he had to pursue them for the rest of the year.

Unfortunately, van Geller just ranted for the entire ride, going off on his usual paranoid delusions, imagining a dire conspiracy of Jewish citizens who were planning to kill him before he could assume
his role as General in a white crusading army. The man was clearly not in possession of all his brain
cells, and worse, he was as volatile as nitroglycerin.

Glad to get away from van Geller, Hutch sketched a wave as the black Mercedes drove away. It was
only one thirty in the afternoon, hours before he was supposed to call in to the department. He craved
information on Starsky's whereabouts like an alcoholic needing his next bottle of muscatel. Their
separation was wearing him down, gnawing at his sanity. His sleep was so disturbed lately he hardly
wanted to go to bed at night, afraid to confront more of the terrible lonely corridors, empty and
endless. What was he searching for in his dreams?

The thought of a short nap was appealing. He'd probably be less apt to dream if he lay down in front
of the TV and just fell sleep for an hour in the afternoon. Climbing into the battered Pinto, Hutch
headed for his crummy apartment.

*****

"No more meetings in hospitals," Captain Harold Dobey groused, trying to ignore a nurse carrying a
bag of blood down the hall. He maintained his composure by crossing his arms across the vast
expanse of his belly, before giving a furtive tug at his too small checkered vest.

"Hey, do I ever plan this?" Starsky complained plaintively, wincing as he rotated his left shoulder.
His arm was black and blue down to the elbow from when Washington had tossed him over the edge
of the stage. "Nobody got shot, you have to admit that's pretty terrific. And it's all due to the big man,
Darryl Washington."

"Heard mah name?" Washington walked up bearing two cups of vending machine coffee and
several candy bars.

"Good work, Detective," Dobey complimented.

"Couldn't let Little Davey get hit bah a bullet."

"How could I have been shot?" Starsky countered, grabbing one of the Snickers. "They were aimin'
at Micah."

"Cause you're a magnet." Washington towered over him, looking down sternly. "Since the first year
Ah've known you, you've been shot probably half a dozen times."

"Not true." Starsky ate the candy bar in two bites, he was so hungry. "That was a bad coupla years,
an' the Italian restaurant shooting was before we ever met."

"I was sure around when that asshole Brenner shot you," Washington reminded.

"And you got it in the leg in that shoot out at the barn, didn't you?" Dobey added helpfully.

"You had to throw that one in!" Starsky unconsciously rubbed his right leg. He'd been shot in the
calf approximately two years ago.

"And some of those times, ya got more'n one bullet at a time," Darryl said to prove his argument.
"And then we come to last year..."

"I think everybody here knows what happened last year," Starsky grumped, never having lumped all
his shootings together. It was an impressive and scary list.

"So, admit it, you're a bullet magnet."
"None of that was my fault."

"Have I left any out?"

"Well, as a matter of fact..." Dobey began.

"Boys, are we arguing again?" Micah asked mildly, coming out from behind a curtained exam room. He'd been witness to many of Starsky and Washington's mock arguments and knew it was more to blow off steam and pass the time than anything else.

"All checked out?" Washington asked, handing him the remaining cup of coffee and a candy bar.

"No concussion, no internal injuries. I know my name, the date and time and this is all getting very old."

"Tell me about it," Starsky agreed. "Three times in three weeks, my insurance is gonna pitch a fit." He dropped the candy wrapper in a nearby trash bin.

"So what are you going to do about this Brotherhood?" Dobey questioned, back in his Captain of the Detective squad mode. "To keep Micah safe from ANY harm until next week?"

"We have to come up with somethin' different than we've been doin' so far," Washington said, leading the way out of the ER.

"I think I know somebody who might have some answers," Starsky said mysteriously, "Guess who I saw in the audience at the museum before the Brick started tossin' people around."

"Ungrateful," Washington muttered, but both detectives and the Rabbi looked at Starsky in anticipation.

"Hutch."

"Was he with the Brotherhood?" Dobey asked.

"Hard to tell, but at a guess I'd say yeah. I saw a guy in glasses nearby but there were a lot of people around him..."

"Glasses—uh, that's Albert Sherman," Washington remembered the descriptions Hutch had passed along.

"I think we should haul brother Ken in for questioning, don't you, Brother Frank?" Starsky grinned impishly at his Captain.

Dobey nodded, considering the implications. "Not into our precinct. Use one that's closer to Waverly."

*****

The sound of the incessantly ringing doorbell roused Hutch from a sound sleep and he sat up abruptly, staring dumbly at the front door. He had no idea what time it was, but the sun was still shining.

"Ken Chambers? This is the police, open this door!"

"Coming!" Hutch caught his breath, running for the door before the cops burst in. "What's this about?" he asked the two blue uniformed patrol cops standing on the ratty welcome mat. He didn't
recognize either one, which was probably a good thing.

"You're wanted for questioning at the station. Come with us," the older of the two responded. He had the rounded belly of a beat cop who spent too much time at the diners and donut shops on his route.

"Lemme get some shoes on." Hutch held up a bare foot.

The officer nodded, waiting until Hutch had laced up his running shoes and grabbed his keys before escorting him out the door.

The ride in the patrol car was mercifully short, Waverly wasn't all that big a city. Only five minutes after they'd left his apartment on Mayflower Street, they were pulling up in front of a small stuccoed building with a red tiled roof.

The desk sergeant had obviously been alerted that he was coming, because Hutch was quickly whisked past the main room where two under-aged boys were being questioned about a stolen car and into an acoustically tiled interrogation room. Dobey, Washington, Bachman and Starsky were already sitting around the table in the midst of eating a belated lunch.

"Looks like a hardened criminal t'me," Starsky deadpanned. "How many priors?"

"You won't be able to pin anything on me," Hutch retorted by way of greeting until the beat cops had left, shutting the door behind them. Hutch was more than relieved to see Starsky and Bachman all in one piece and looking remarkably healthy. The Rabbi did have a bruise on his left temple, and probably a few other places, but Metzger hadn't shot him, which was the most important thing.

"Let's get down to business here," Dobey said gruffly. "No need to have you hanging around the police department longer than necessary. Starsky says he saw you at the museum, what was going on?"

Impressed that his partner had picked him out of an estimated crowd of three hundred or more people, Hutch just nodded in Starsky's direction. "van Geller wanted to use this as his entry into the big times. It was going to be like Kennedy's assassination or something. All on TV, in front of the world. I didn't know in advance who was supposed to be the shooter. They're beginning to trust me, but not that much. I went with Sherman, as an extra pair of eyes, I guess."

"So, you didn't see this guy..." Starsky consulted the preliminary arrest records he'd gotten. "Samuel Metzger? He didn't come with you?"

"I'd have tried to get the word to you guys if he had," Hutch answered. "All I know about him is that he was in 'Nam, and reportedly a good shot. I've worked with him in the office, and gotten to know him, but they're all too paranoid there to tell more than a handful of people what's going to happen at any given time."

"When did you know he was the shooter?" Dobey asked.

"Probably about the same time as everyone else did, when he fired the shot," Hutch explained, "He was quite a ways behind me."

"How th'hell did he get on the grounds with that elephant gun?" Washington growled, "Ah thought there was security checkin' that kinda thing."

"That's the big mystery of the day," Starsky agreed. "Who else was with you?"
"Albert Sherman." Hutch reached over and filched a handful of corn chips from Starsky's bag. Washington chuckled to himself, some things never changed. "And, I'm getting a bad feeling about him. I used to think van Geller was in charge of the roost, but he's unstable, roaring one minute, paranoid the next. Sherman has the brains, the organizational skills and the know-how to be running everything, using van Geller as a front."

"And he has a degree in chemical engineering, and knows explosives," Washington added, remembering the background check they'd done on him.

"Speaking of which," Hutch sighed. "I didn't get absolute confessions from any of them, but Adams told me he drove the car and tossed the bomb into Beth Sharon, and implicated the other two."

"Damn," Washington swore.

"Then why can't you just bring them in right now?" Bachman spoke up for the first time, preferring to let the police discuss their business undisturbed. "If you know all this? Doesn't that prove they were involved?"

"We can't prove anything." Starsky gritted his teeth. They were so close. "Hutch's testimony counts for a lot because he's a cop, but it's hearsay. He heard Adams say he was involved. Did the others say anything at all?"

"I asked Sherman directly if they'd bombed the synagogue. His body language spoke volumes, but he only tacitly implied that they'd been in on it. van Geller did claim ownership of the manifesto."

"So, we've got nothing?" Micah asked incredulously.

"It's all circumstantial," Dobey said. "We know how the plastique was paid for, but can't trace it back to the Brotherhood. And it's disgusting, but no actual crime to get that sort of bigoted raving printed in the paper."

"But if you did arrest all three of them, could you charge them with anything?" Micah persisted.

"Very little." Hutch shook his head. "And I'm sure van Geller has a really good lawyer. He's got money from somewhere. He'd slide out from under us so quick he wouldn't spend a night in jail. They've been very careful to delegate the crimes out to others--except for that bombing."

"We can hold Metzger for a long time," Dobey agreed. "And police were able arrest those two bodybuilders you told us about, but they're already out on bail."

"We need solid ev'dence linkin' those bastards conclusively to the bombin'." Darryl took a last suck on his watery coke, the ice having long since melted.

"First degree murder, for all three. That's the only charge I want to hear," Starsky said vehemently.

"Six counts," Micah said softly. "But doesn't Metzger link us back to the Brotherhood?"

"Claims he was doin' it on his own," Starsky answered, still reading the arrest reports. "It's also unfortunately not a crime to belong to a hate group."

"Sherman said they consider him a prisoner of war." Hutch stressed the last word. "van Geller was worried that he'd talk, but Metzger considers himself one of the good guys caught by the enemy. He'll clam up."

"What 'bout usin' Daniels 'gainst him?" Washington asked, a speculative look on his fierce dark face.
"Why, Brick, I didn't know you had a streak of deviousness!" Starsky gave him a genuine grin. "I like it. Hutch, give us every bit of inside dirt you can think of to con these two into thinkin' that the other's squealed."

"That's the kind of good solid police work I like to see." Dobey leaned back, tugging on his vest. He'd eaten too many chips.

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Whether it was the relief of seeing his friends and being able to coordinate their efforts to bring down the Brotherhood, or just having caught a cat nap in the afternoon, Hutch had one of the best night's sleep he'd had in a long time. He was beginning to feel part of the team again, and not just a cog pulled out of the essential machinery and gerry-rigged to fit into another engine. He even celebrated by stopping by Dino's for breakfast and ordering a Spanish omelet. Breakfast was by far the best meal they served.

"Getting' to be a regular around here, Ken," Dotty greeted, placing the plate of steaming eggs in front of him.

"Yeah, I like working with van Geller and the others." Hutch took a tentative sip of his hot tea. "But, it's getting' harder to pay the bills, I gotta get a job."

"Not much around here if you don't work for the factory, huh?" Dotty asked sympathetically, filling out the bill for him.

"And they're certainly not going to hire ME back," Hutch agreed. "But I've put out a couple o' feelers to other places, and I think I've got some interviews next week."

"Good for you." Dotty grinned, primping just a little in front of the handsome man.

"Did you do something to your hair?"

"Colored it, it's a different shade for me." She patted her overly permed, very bright red hair.

Frankly, it would be different shade on a punk rocker. "Very becoming," Hutch complemented, concentrating on his eggs. Luckily, the loquacious waitress was called away to another table.

"Chambers." The very way Adams said the name sounded like a challenge. He slid onto the stool next to Hutch at the counter, his body language aggressive. "You were spotted at the police department yesterday."

"They hauled me in," Hutch protested. "Can't exactly say no."

"What was that about?" Adams demanded.

"My brother Frank...he's out on parole for shootin' a guy, and when one of the cops recognized me at the museum shooting, they thought maybe he was somehow involved."

"Where's your brother?" Adams asked, interested in the story despite himself.

"Now, that's the sixty four thousand question." Hutch said with a disgusted growl, eating his omelet sullenly. Starsky's tale of Frank's exploits was actually convincing Adams! He'd have to remember never to admit this to Starsky. It would give him delusions of grandeur.

"So, the cops haul you in for your brother's stuff?" Adams reiterated, still angry.
"All the time. I guess I'm easier to find than he is." Hutch washed the last of the eggs down with his cooling tea. "I learned a long time ago how to bullshit the cops. They never get anything out of me, even if I did know where that good-for-nothing was."

"van Geller's shootin' sparks after hearing that you were talking to the police. You'd better go over there and talk to him yourself."

"Sure," Hutch agreed evenly. His stomach was flip-flopping the omelet around inside, but he'd never let Adams know how nervous he was.

The little office was in an uproar, van Geller shouting obscenities and throwing pamphlets at anyone in his sight line. Elsa and Margaret were crouched against the wall, hugging the ringing phone without answering it, while Fredricks hovered around the crazed man's periphery as if planning an attack but not quite sure how to go about it.

The minute Hutchinson and Adams walked in, the whole room froze like a wax works tableau. Fredricks was the first to move, as if freed from a spell. He smiled welcome at Adams, both of them looking warily at their leader.

"Chambers," Van Geller sneered. "I didn't think you'd ever show your traitorous face in here ever again!"

"What exactly is it that you think I've done?" Hutch asked calmly. The phone was still ringing, the noise grating on the nerves. "Elsa?" he said without breaking his eye contact with van Geller. "Can you get the phone?"

Immediately, there was almost silence as she whispered to the caller.

"Let's take this in the back," Van Geller hissed, jerking open the door with his right hand and grabbing Hutch's arm with his left. He pulled him into the cramped little back room, shoving him into a chair. "You think you can talk to the police without anybody knowing?"

Without saying a word, Hutch produced the faked arrest reports Starsky had prepared for Frank Chambers and handed them over to van Geller. "My brother's wanted for shooting a guy at a fair. He was standing up on a podium, talkin' about compassion and racial equality and Frank shot him in the arm. The police recognized me there at the museum, and figured Frank was in on it. I convinced them he wasn't."

Holding the arrest report as if it were a poisonous snake, Peter stared menacingly at Hutch. "How do I know you're telling the truth?"

"If I'd said you were behind this shooting, don't you think the police would have gotten here before I did?" Hutch asked reasonably. It was his first time in the 'inner sanctum' and he tried to get a good look around while talking. The place was nothing more than a hybrid kitchen/office, strewn with the usual papers, pencils and files that any office might have. No huge pictures of Hitler or red and black Nazi banners gracing the walls. "For that matter, they've still got Metzger, how do you know he isn't singing like a bird?"

"Cause I know him better than I know you. You could be some infiltrator spying on us." van Geller accused, not realizing how correct he was.

"If that's how you feel about it, then I can just go now." Hutch stood, heading for the door. "I can get paid money for stuffing envelopes at some business, I don't have to stay here and be insulted for nothing."
"What's your brother do?" Peter studied the arrest report more closely, changing his tactics completely. Hutch took a slow breath, knowing the worst was over. Whenever van Geller shifted moods, he seemed to completely forget whatever he was going on about before. "He sounds like our kind of people."

"He does very little, worthless little shit," Hutch swore. "I've gotten in more trouble because of him. The police hound me whenever they think he's involved in anything. He's not good at much except hiding."

"I'd like to talk to him." The blond ex-football captain brought forth the smile that had gotten half of the cheerleading squad into his bed. "I might have a job for him."

"If he ever calls me back, I'll tell him, right after I blast him for getting me picked up again."

"He younger'n you?"

"Yeah."

"Typical. Better to be an only I think." van Geller lapsed into silence, then waved Hutch off. "Go get that last load of mailers done. There's lots to be done before next week."

"Sure." Hutch paused, taking a last look around the room. It was a mess. If he ever got a chance to search the place, he wouldn't begin to know where to look for bombing evidence. Probably buried under copies of the onerous manifesto.

His heart still pounding faster than his usual resting rate, Hutch was more than happy to get back to his mundane printing, collating and folding that comprised his day of late. Elsa kept giving him amazed glances out of the corner of her eye, as if she had expected him to be dead after an interview with van Geller.

"It's okay, Elsa," he soothed. "Nothing happened. I get picked up by the police all the time, it's nothing new."

"Mr. van Geller just really scares me," she confessed. "When I first came here I thought he was so good looking, but now, he screams and shouts..."

"Has he changed a lot? In the last year?"

"It's been hard for him--what with his Grandfather's death." Margaret stole a look at the door, speaking in a whisper. "He's gotten worse. He always did have an irrational temper--even as a child, but now..."

"You've known him a long time?" Hutch asked.

"I've known Helmut, his grandfather, for many years, since he came over from Germany just about. We were..." Margaret colored, her cheeks a pretty pink. "He was an older man and I was very taken with him. I really liked to hear him talk about the Third Reich, and the glorious promises that Hitler made."

Another sociopath heard from. Hutch thought. He began to make corrections on a half-finished pamphlet before setting up the printer.

"But then he had to care for his grandson, Peter. And that boy was such a handful." She sighed. "Sometimes he scares me, too. Nobody ever thought that Peter would amount to anything, until Helmut funded this place, and Peter seemed to find his place in the world."
"And he's really going places now." Fredricks nodded. He'd been fielding a barrage of phone calls and finally the ringing bell was momentarily silenced. "van Geller might have a quick temper, but he's got his head in the right place. He understands the needs of the working man. A good job without some spick or spade looking over your shoulder."

"'Bout time somebody shows the im'grants where to go, and that's back where they came from," Margaret agreed.

*Not counting immigrants from Germany, apparently.* Hutch thought ironically pretending to be more interested in getting the margins straight on the copies he was printing, listening without looking at her.

"He's still grieving, poor thing." Margaret paused, pouring a cup of coffee from the pot plugged in next to the Xerox machine. "I'm sure things will settle down soon. He was so excited after that temple was bombed, but now, I think his plans don't seem to be working as well."

"You know he planed the bombing?" Hutch hit the copy button and fifty copies of a blue treatise on Sterilization of Unwanted Racial Minorities began to spit out.

"It was his idea. That Albert Sherman always hogs the spot light, but Peter knows what he's doing."

"He still scares me," Elsa said in a soft voice. "If there really is going to be a war, I don't know what I'll do. I can't kill people."

"van Geller will know what to do. Some people will have to die to get the country back on track," Fredricks remarked before answering another phone call.

That said, the two women turned their backs on Hutch, going back to their work. He was left with dozens of questions. Had the man radically changed recently? He'd known Peter van Geller so briefly before the death of his grandfather, he couldn't begin to compare his behavior before and after. But if what Margaret said were true, van Geller had been unstable since childhood. Being raised by a man who praised the work of that monster Adolph Hitler would crack even the most stable person.

In the next few days, van Geller seemed to get a second wind. His eyes shone with excitement whenever he ushered his two top lieutenants into the back room. Sherman and Adams would only stay a few moments before leaving again. There was a charge of electricity in the air, some plan was afoot, but no one was telling the office workers yet. Hutch wondered if his police interview had pushed him back down the ladder of hierarchy, or whether van Geller was just too paranoid to share his ideas until the last possible moment.

Because Starsky was busy with Bachman, Hutch spoke with Dobey in his nightly call-ins and had very little to report. The most amusing part of his day was thinking up excuses why brother Frank had still not called van Geller requesting a job. The Brotherhood leader was vastly interested in the black sheep of the Chambers family and pestered Hutch several times a day for an introduction to meet with the fictitious man.

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True to his word, Micah cancelled nearly all of his obligations on the first two days of October, concentrating mostly on Rosh Hashanah services and matters of his congregation. There was one dinner meeting on Thursday that he felt compelled to attend, with several mayors of cities known to have high concentrations of hate groups.
His speech was one of the 'canned' ones he could now recite in his sleep, but the mayors all were very complementary and pledged their support to help end the racial violence in their areas. Starsky and Washington stayed extra close to the Rabbi that night, but nothing unusual happened, except perhaps that the meal was one of the most palatable in a long time. Al dente pasta with a red sauce and fresh spinach salad made the dry chicken and tasteless vegetables of previous dinners a dim memory.

The museum show did open the day after the shooting, and whether because of high interest in the holocaust or the vast amount of newspaper and TV news coverage, it had a boffo first day.

Since Washington didn't attend worship at the synagogue with Starsky and Bachman, he got the onerous job of interviewing the suspects. Neither Daniels or Metzger had been very inclined to talk to him the first time he questioned them, but using the details provided by Hutch, the next few interrogations went much more smoothly.

Although technically not a suspect since there was no vehicle found to connect him with the car accident in the canyon, Daniels still proved much easier to crack than Metzger. He'd been questioned twice earlier on, and complained mightily when he was brought back into the police department for a third session. This time, Washington let it slip that Metzger had implicated Daniels.

Tobe, never one for casual chatter, lost his usual reserve and spilled. Finally, there was some corroborative testimony that the three leaders of the Brotherhood were directly involved in the bombing. It still wasn't concrete proof, but it was a start. Daniels also supplied information on several of the unsolved robberies, assault crimes and vandalisms that had plagued local police. When finally assured of a vastly diminished sentence due to his testimony, Tobe Daniels finally even admitted to driving the truck that had forced Starsky off the road. Of course, he insisted the brakes were faulty and he hadn't realized that the Rabbi was in the car, that he was visiting a friend in the area and had been lost, but he freely admitted that Peter van Geller had vowed to kill the Jewish teacher.

Metzger, showing the toughness that had served him well in two tours in 'Nam, only admitted to being a member of the Brotherhood, and only that when directly asked. He steadfastly maintained his hatred of Micah Bachman had led him to pick up a rifle on the morning of the museum opening and attempt to shoot at him. No premeditation. No assassination plan. The D.A. had him booked for attempted murder anyway.

Friday night was spent in the Temple Emmanuel. Beth Sharon's congregation squeezed in with Emmanuel's, and for once Micah just sat with the others of his faith, letting Rabbi Sarah Hoffman preside over the service.

Starsky sat next to him, the cantor's words transporting him into a calmer state. He was beginning to feel a more positive attitude. They had survived numerous attempts on their lives and come through with flying colors. The talks were only one week away, and all involved were in a high state of anxiety and excitement. This was really going to happen! Perhaps, just perhaps, the Rabbi's hopes and prayers were not just naïve. There could be a change in the hatred and bigotry of hundreds of years. Already, political cartoonists and editorial writers were pushing to have him try his hand at the rift between Israel and Palestine. Somehow, that one seemed even more a pie in the sky sort of dream.

Starsky was more than a little surprised when the service had ended and he realized he'd been daydreaming through much of it. He'd been trying so hard to be a good and faithful Jew of late and felt awful to have tuned out great potions of the service. Micah grinned at him as they shuffled with the rest of the crowd towards the door.

"She's a very good Rabbi. That sermon was excellent." He gave his friend's shoulder a friendly
shake. "You looked the more relaxed I've seen in a long time, Dave."

"She's very...soothing." Starsky nodded, not wanting him to know he hadn't been paying much attention.

"L'shanah tovah tikatev v'taihatem." {May you be inscribed and sealed for a good year.} was the common greeting heard over and over again. Everywhere there were people pushing past Starsky to meet Rabbi Bachman, the newest celebrity.

Deciding that this was probably the safest place Micah could be, unless the Brotherhood tried another bomb, God forbid, Starsky let down his guard and tried to have a good time. There was a boisterous hour with the home congregation welcoming their new friends over coffee and gossip. The women of Emmanuel had outdone themselves with mouthwatering treats and flaky pastries, which Starsky sampled with gusto.

Recognizing a trio of small boys who shamelessly grabbed handfuls of chocolate cookies right out from under his nose, Starsky was finally able to return the Big Bird yarmulke to its six year old owner. The child was delighted, and ripped off his plain black one to place the yellow embroidered one in its rightful place. His mother thanked Starsky profusely, leaving him embarrassed to have kept the little head covering for so long, since she said the child had complained constantly about having to wear a plain one when his brothers had Ernie and Bert on theirs. Nonetheless, he was left with the satisfied feeling that his whole life was turning around and there were better days were ahead.

Micah spent much of his time with Myra Gold, one of the survivors of the temple bombing. Her husband had been one of the unfortunates caught by the wall of flames before the community doors had slammed shut. Burned over eighty percent of his body, he'd stubbornly clung to life for three weeks, but was steadily failing.

"I'm sorry I haven't been able to visit as much as I'd liked, but my schedule has been so full," he apologized, amazed that the old woman had come to Shabbat Shuvah at all. Falling during the holiday of Rosh Hashanah, it was considered one of the most special shabbats of the year, but he knew most everyone would have understood if the woman had remained at her husband's bedside.

"Rabbi." Myra held his hand gratefully. "You've visited every week. So has Rabbi Hoffman and many others. Jacob knew. We're all so proud of what you've accomplished and I just had to come to give my thanks to God."

Thanking her, Micah promised to get over to the hospital on Saturday for a visit. He was scheduled to preside over noonday services at Emmanuel and planned to see Gold after that.

"Rabbi!" A young man with thick horn-rimmed glasses was the next to grab his hand and launch into his praises of the man's accomplishments, so Micah was never quite able to get over to the table for a few treats.

"Hungry?" Starsky teased as they were leaving, nearly two hours after the Shabbat service had ended. Bachman's stomach was growling audibly.

"My 'fans' needed sustaining, too." Micah laughed, "but I wouldn't mind a snack."

"I've got you one better." Starsky handed him a brown sack he was carrying before fishing out his car keys. "The ladies felt sorry for you and packed a bag. Try the little donuts first. I had three."

"I must thank them tomorrow," Micah murmured appreciably, taking a big bite of the greasy delight with happiness. Starsky drove him to his home, the same one he'd lived in for two years with
Miriam. The same one that still had a blackened area on the front lawn where a cross had burned. It was always bittersweet to come back to the little white house. He still expected to see a long legged woman come flying out, her blue black hair dancing around her beautiful face. Instead, a tall, barrel chested plainclothes cop got out of his car when they drove up and waited silently until they'd gotten out of the car.

"Rabbi," he greeted politely. Dave Murphy had requested the assignment when he'd heard that Bachman needed a nighttime guard, and he was quite honored to be able to be the man for the job. Jewish on his mother's side, and Irish Catholic on his father's, he knew the value of peace talks to defuse a volatile situation. It had been standard operating procedure for any discussion when he was a child. "Starsky."

"Hey, Murphy." Starsky grinned. "Maybe if you're nice, Micah will give you the last donut. It'll go great with that two a.m. cup of coffee you need to keep you awake."

"What about the four a.m. cup?" Murphy laughed.

Briefly touching the mezuzah outside his door, and mentally reciting a prayer of blessing, Micah smiled at the banter between the two police. "There's some freshly made bread in the cupboard, unless I miss my guess. The housekeeper makes it every Friday."

"Then you're covered." Starsky held up his hands with a flourish. He kept Micah at the door while Murphy gave the small cottage a quick, but thorough check for intruders or signs of break-ins.

"All clear," Murphy called, as the others walked in.

"Oh, Dave." Micah pointed to Starsky to distinguish between the two. "I promised Mrs. Gold I would go over to Mercy Community Hospital to visit with her husband. He may be dying."

"I didn't realize he was still alive!" Starsky replied, feeling like a schmuck for having wallowed in his own self pities for so long when there were still people having to deal with the tragedies of the bombing. He knew the man had been badly burned and had just assumed he'd died weeks ago.

"Luckily, I don't have any speaking engagements until Sunday evening," Micah continued. "I'll see you tomorrow."

"Be here around nine thirty or ten." Starsky waved as he left the Rabbi under the capable guard of Dave Murphy.

He climbed into the candy apple red Ford Torino with the slash of white on the sides and revved the engine just once. He'd left it in Bachman's garage when he'd come by to pick him up for the Shabbat services and driven them both over to Emmanuel in the sedate brown sedan they'd acquired after the car accident. It felt really good to be back in his favorite vehicle and he backed the car out of the driveway with a little thrill of happiness. No more disasters. With only one more week to go and only a few more personal appearances to escort Micah to, the end was in sight.

Starsky was more than ready to go back to a steady diet of arresting drug dealers and pimps, driving around making jokes with Hutch. That was normal life. Dealing with the hate mongers and bigots hit a little too close for comfort. It was too easy to let some of this get under the skin. He knew his depression of late had been because he'd personalized the case too much. Well, now that was in the past.

Only one more week. Just had to take it one day at a time, wasn't that the saying?

Putting his foot on the accelerator, Starsky roared down Wisteria Ave. and made a right onto
Saturday turned out to be one long rant from Peter van Geller at the No. Main offices of the Waverly chapter of the United Aryan Brotherhood. Beer bottles were thrown, curses hurled and the newspaper continually ripped until the entire place was covered with confetti. It might have made for a jolly decoration if it hadn't been for the frightened faces of the office workers and the shards of broken glass glittering amongst the bits of paper.

It wasn't until Albert Sherman showed up and managed to calm his friend down that any work was done, and most of that was just cleaning up the mess. Whatever Sherman said to van Geller in the little back room, it cleared the air considerably. Shortly after noon, he announced that the place would be closing for the day so that whoever was planning to could attend Adams' usual barbecue.

The reason for van Geller's mood was the headline news that police were now focusing their investigations on particular suspects, who were not named at this time. Under Andrew Cleary's byline was a story implying that a certain suspect had been supplying important information in return for immunity and witness protection. It did not take a rocket scientist for the workers at the Brotherhood to figure out who had to be talking. Peter van Geller planned to kill Tobe Daniels and string him up next to Micah Bachman as an example of what happens to traitors.

Sincerely glad that he'd been of such use to the ongoing case, Hutch went along to Adams' house with hopes of overhearing more evidence of criminal activity. If he could just find some plastic explosives or wires, something to prove a bomb had been made. That would go so much farther to convict the murderers.

The party was in full swing by the time Hutch arrived, and for whatever reason, there were lots more women present this week. In fact, due to the rising temperatures, Adams had erected a medium sized kiddie pool on the brown lawn and filled it with water. Two blond haired women in bikinis were dabling in the tepid water to the obvious delight of many of the beer drinkers stationed in chaise lounges nearby.

Several men waved friendly hands as the blond detective walked in, calling out hellos and salutations.

"Hot enough for ya?" John Adams greeted Hutch with a beer so cold it numbed his hand when he took the bottle.

"October heat waves are always a surprise." Hutch took a swallow of the German brew. "Even when they come every year."

"Hey, Chambers! The game's about to begin. Could be the one that clinches 'em for the World Series." Fredricks beckoned him from the darkened den.

Like the previous weekend, Hutch would have enjoyed himself a great deal more had there been a great deal less discussion of crude ways to dispose of ethnic minorities. In fact, because of his now familiarity with most of the men around him, he found it even more disturbing to listen to their casual talk of beatings, rapes and cruelty. He actually liked some of these people, but their mindsets were so disturbing he felt contaminated. After getting enough gossip about recent illegal acts against Jews to put half the barbecue guests in jail, Hutch made his excuses and left.

The radio weatherman was predicting the heat to increase for the next week, with warnings about fire danger in the dry brush of the hillsides. It was no surprise that his little studio apartment felt like
the inside of a sauna when he let himself in. After opening all the windows, he took a cool shower, and ate a Popsicle standing nude in front of the open refrigerator. Dressing in jogging shorts and a t-shirt, he picked up the phone to call the department.

"H'llo?" Starsky answered. Hutch was glad it was Starsky on the line. He hadn't talked to him in several days because of his duties with Bachman.

"Frank." Hutch hated that he was still playing the silly Frank Chambers charade after all this time. There had been so many times in other phone calls when he'd gotten caught up in emotion and used the other person's proper name, that had there really been a tap on the line, the listener couldn't possibly be fooled. "van Geller is getting really ansty. He just about ripped the Waverly office to shreds this morning."

"Sounds like you're having loads of fun on the job."

"I haven't heard exactly what his plans are, but after what he did to Beth Sharon, I wouldn't rule out another bomb."

"You have any proof of that?" Starsky asked.

"No, but I've come to think that's his style. No subtlety. Just mass destruction."

"God, I hate this." Starsky leaned his forehead against a fist, slumping over the desk. His head hurt, his stomach churned like lava from an active volcano and he had the overpowering urge to get blindly drunk. "I wish you hadn't gone undercover with them... I wish we could all just walk away."

Wondering what had brought this mood on, Hutch wished he could talk more freely to his friend. "Starsk..." He stopped, knowing he should be using the undercover name, but to hell with it. "How can you say that? We need this peace treaty. The violence is getting worse every day. Somebody's gotta end this kind of hatred. And I think Micah just could be the man to do that. What those guys at the Brotherhood talk about repulses me. I can't stand reading their vitriolic rhetoric, but I'm glad I'll be part of putting them out of business."

"But it won't end," Starsky said softly. "It never does. People die, and then somebody else gets up and knocks another person down."

"What happened?" Hutch questioned, really surprised Starsky had let him ramble on as long as he had.

"Nothing at all." Starsky pulled out a pen and paper, "What have you got to give me?"

Relating the facts he'd learned at the barbecue, Hutch was still certain that something big was bothering his partner. Starsky sounded subdued, an adjective very few people would ever have applied to the curly haired detective. In fact, Starsky ended the phone call almost abruptly, with only the sketchiest of good-byes. There had been no jokes, or teasing what so ever. Totally unlike Starsky's norm.

Sitting in his stifling little studio, Hutch resolved to take a drive as twilight seeped in to darken the smoggy skies. It was still weeks before day light savings time ended and true darkness didn't hit until nearly seven thirty. After stopping at a vegetarian restaurant nearer to his old neighborhood than to Waverly, Hutch found himself cruising through more and more familiar streets. Just two blocks over and one to the left was Starsky's house. So close. He knew it wasn't entirely safe, nor prudent to visit his friend, but he was positively certain what Starsky needed right now was a friend.

Luckily, he knew the neighborhood well. If there was someone watching the house, he knew ways
to avoid them and never be seen. The street behind Starsky's house had one of those alleys where tenants left their cars and garbage cans in lieu of garages. Parking two blocks away beside the local park, Hutch strolled past teenaged couples necking in the semi-privacy of the darkened playground, heading towards the alley. It was now past nine o'clock, and the air was cooling off, the weather perfect for walking.

He took his time ambling up the roadway, keeping an eye out for anything out of the ordinary. He didn't notice any unusual cars, or persons lurking in the shadows, and he gained the back stairs to Starsky's house without incidence.

They were rickety stairs, which had been so seldom used, he wasn't sure they'd bear his weight. Starsky's street put their garbage out front, and parked their cars in their driveways. The only reason Starsky might ever have to use the back stairs was for a fire escape and the need had never arisen. Thus, the disrepair. They also creaked. Loudly, which alerted the house's occupant.

"What the hell..." Starsky stood at the back door leading from the kitchen, wearing ragged jeans cut offs and a UCLA t-shirt, his Beretta in hand. Hutch obligingly froze in mid step until his partner recognized his blond hair in the dark. "Shit, Hutch, I coulda shot you, " he slurred, sucking in a frightened breath. He stepped back into the kitchen, holding the pistol limply, the barrel drooping towards the floor.

"Yeah, in your condition you could have." Hutch plucked the gun from his friend's hand, following him into the house. "If the clip was in. What'er you doing with a gun?"

Starsky looked around blankly, as if he'd forgotten. The remains of the weapon's working parts were strewn across the kitchen table along with a large number of empty beer cans. "Cleaning it."

"Drunk?" Hutch gathered up the clip, holster and cleaning rags and deposited them in the front closet. "Not the smartest idea. How much have you had?"

"Like you should talk." Starsky retorted, taking a long swallow from his latest beer. He'd bought a six-pack on his way home and had made plans to kill the entire thing before he went to sleep. Or perhaps it was to let him sleep.

Willing to concede that he'd been drunk on more than one occasion, probably more often than Starsky, in fact, Hutch didn't say anything, but collected the empty cans and dropped them into the kitchen trash. He started a pot of coffee and rummaged around until he found some cheese and bread. Dropping a liberal dollop of butter into a small frying pan, he added the bread and cheese when the butter started to sizzle.

"What'er you doin?" Starsky asked the more obvious, not even wanting to go into why Hutch had disregarded orders and come over to his house. He was way too tired and drunk to think that one through. And he was frankly glad to have his friend there.

"Making grilled cheese. You haven't been grocery shopping much lately, have you?" Hutch tossed limp lettuce and rotten fruit on top of the beer cans before flipping the sandwich over to let the cheese melt evenly on the stove.

"Jus' havin' dinner out every night with Micah," Starsky muttered. "The Shriners...The Ladies' Aid whatever...lotsa chicken n' rice. N' ya can' have dairy n' meat together...or, uh...no shellfish, y'know...it's tref."

"Yeah, I've heard that," Hutch said dryly. He slid the grilled cheese onto a plate, added a dill pickle and placed it in front of his partner. "Eat." He poured a cup of coffee for each of them, watching
Starsky start in on the food. "What brought on this binge?"

"I felt like havin' a beer," Starsky said defensively, but his eyes betrayed him. They were twin pools of pain, the blue so muddied they appeared the color of night sky.

"More like five, and that's not like you."

"The bombing claimed another victim." Starsky broke the pickle in half, having eaten a portion of his sandwich, but he made no move to eat either half. "Micah spent the afternoon at the hospital with him. Uh, Jacob Gold....I really didn' think anybody burned all over their body would last so...long."

Hutch realized with a jolt that he had probably seen Gold being wheeled into Mercy hospital on that horrible night. "I'm sorry."

"It's not like I knew him or anything..." Starsky took a tentative bite of the pickle in his hand, then put the rest on the plate. "But, God, Hutch...he was burned over his entire body..."

"And it nearly was you."

"No." He shook his head. "I was too far away from the main blast."

"Starsk, you were in the building. Everyone in that place could have burned except for quick thinking, and the emergency crews arriving." Hutch felt his stomach lurch with the horrible images crowding in. "It's perfectly all right to feel...frightened."

"That's not what I feel." Starsky jumped up, restless, pent up energy erupting. "Anger. I'm so angry it burns inside of me all the time. I want to kill those bastards you sit next to every day. I want to do something...more than follow Micah around like a lap dog, keeping him out of danger. And none of it has done a damn bit of good. Have we stopped anything? Huh?"

"Nobody was seriously hurt in the car accident, no one was shot at the museum."

"Dumb luck.s" Starsky sneered, but there were tears in his eyes. "Today there were protesters in front of Emmanuel Synagogue, yelling at Micah when we went in. They threw things at the car."

"I'm sor..."

"Don't waste your breath! How would you feel if you went to your church, any church, and people were tryin' to prevent you from goin' in? It's like the Nazis really did set up camp in the good ol' land of the free and home of the brave." He dropped heavily onto the couch, covering his face with a hand. He didn't want Hutch to see the tears on his cheeks.

"Starsky, obviously nothing I can say could make you feel any better," Hutch said softly, sitting down beside him.

"Thanks for coming over." Starsky managed to get the crying under control after a few moments. "I really thought things were turning around yesterday, and then they all came crashing down today."

"We're all tired." Hutch rubbed his back. He was sitting to Starsky's left and could see the heavy bruising on his arm. "Brick really did a number on you, didn't he?"

"Don' know his own strength," Starsky said shakily, but his fury was spent and all he was now was exhausted.

"Have you seen anyone watching the house?" Hutch asked, glancing at the front windows.
"My house? Naw. Sometimes I know people watch us at the Victorian, n' not just news people. But I haven't been followed."

"That's good." Hutch nodded, reluctant to leave, but knowing he should. "You gonna get some sleep?"

"Soon. Oh, I got something to show you." Starsky padded across the room in his bare feet to pick up a small packet of photographs. "I finally got these developed." It was almost as if he'd forgotten what was on the roll of film when he'd dropped it off a week ago, but the seeing the first photo had unleashed a powerful surge of emotions he'd thought were buried. Even now, showing them to Hutch, he could feel the grief twisting inside, worming itself around his organs and spine, imbedding itself in his very core.

It had been such a glorious day, Labor Day weekend, 1980. Bright blue skies, warm breezes. Starsky, Meredith, the Bachmans, Hutch and Angela had spent the day on the beach. Starsky had taken an entire roll of photos: Meredith, her hair in tiny braids decorated with beads, running along the beach, large dark eyes alight with happiness. Micah and Miriam sitting contentedly under a brightly colored umbrella, looking up at the camera with joy on their faces. Hutch, his head back, laughing at some joke Starsky had made. A series of action shots of a wild sand volleyball game. Then, a group shot, all six crouching in the sand waiting for the camera's automatic timer to go off.

"It was a great day. Nice group of people," Hutch remarked, his throat tight. These were probably the last photos ever taken of Miriam Bachman. She'd died five days later. And Meredith had gone to Washington D.C. only one day after the Sunday picnic, and he'd never even been told she was leaving. No wonder Starsky was drunk. He had a yearning for a couple of beers himself.

"I should give some of these to Micah," Starsky said, separating the duplicates into piles. "He says we should forgive...them, try to understand them. But Hutch, I don't know if I have it in me."

"Starsky, you are one of the most generous and fair minded people I know." Hutch gazed at a beautiful photo of Miriam, her hair blowing back in the wind, holding aloft just grilled hot dogs. She had a teasing, mischievous look in her eye, and he remembered that she'd playfully stuffed the kosher dog into her husband's open mouth a moment later. "But it takes time."

"How much?"

"That I don't know."

Hutch stayed the night. He wasn't exactly sure when he'd fallen asleep on the couch, because he certainly hadn't planned on staying, but when he woke up, it was morning. Starsky was sprawled across his velvet bedspread, still wearing denim cut offs, snoring loudly.

"Starsk," Hutch called, "Get up." They'd talked far into the night, about the case and about everything else. Just the little discussions that pop up at midnight and seem so important until morning when it's hard to quite remember what the point was, exactly. There were the remains of the pizza Hutch had ordered on the coffee table and he absently closed the box, disliking the look of a cold pizza in the morning.

"Ooh." Starsky rubbed his forehead, sitting on the edge of the bed.

"Hangover?" Hutch asked unsympathetically. "I'm going to take a shower and get out of here."

"Boy, you're just a ray of sunshine in the morning." Starsky wandered into the living room and ate a slice of cold pizza. He flipped on the TV just as the weather girl announced that temperatures were
already breaking records across the state and were projected to do so for two to three days more. It was hot.

Washington called while Hutch was still in the bathroom to inform Starsky that the leaders of the Brotherhood were being rounded up for preliminary questioning and he was needed down at police headquarters ASAP. No rest for the weary. Starsky downed two aspirin, and took an abbreviated shower after Hutch let himself out the back door.

With no real plans for the day, Hutch wished he were able to sit in on the interrogations of van Geller, Adams and Sherman, but that would really be treading on dangerous ground. Since he'd already potentially damaged his cover by going over to Starsky's house, he vowed to stay as far away from all his friends as possible for the duration of the assignment. Starsky had come out of his funk by the time they'd eaten half a pizza and watched part of Creature Features at midnight, so Hutch was a lot less concerned with his friend's state of mind when he left in the morning.

Starsky arrived at headquarters just in time to witness van Geller's arrival, with his lawyer trailing in his wake. The tall, good looking leader of one of the most notorious hate groups in the LA area was decidedly angered by his summons and let anyone in earshot know it. Dobey came out to escort him to an interrogation room, receiving a cold shoulder from van Geller, who hadn't spoken directly to an African-American since his high school days, when he'd been forced to have a black quarterback on his team.

"Don't think he's real thrilled to be here." Washington inclined his head at the trio disappearing into an unmarked door.

"No more than I am," Starsky grunted. "You wanna be bad cop, or should I?"

"Aw, Little Davey, now who would evah think you're the bad one?"

"Hey! Hutch always plays good cop. I've been known to scare a statement outta a perp in under ten minutes," Starsky said indignantly, putting on his fiercest face for Washington.

"No bet here. Between you, me an' the Cap'n, Ah'm disinclined to think he'll talk to any one of us at all," Washington stated the unfortunate truth.

"Let's see, that probably lets out Sam Wong, too, huh?" Starsky walked down the hall to peer through the one way glass at van Geller talking furtively to his lawyer as Dobey came out of the room.

"Won't talk to you?" Starsky asked.

"He's requesting a white cop, to use his words." Dobey looked disgusted, crossing his arms angrily.

"That leaves Anderson and Myers." Starsky sighed, rubbing his still aching forehead. He was beginning to regret downing nearly an entire six pack of beer.

"Ah'll see who's free." Washington turned to go back into the squadroom.

"This ain't right." Starsky determinedly yanked the interrogation room door open. "He'll get questioned by one of us, whether he likes it or not."

Recognizing David Starsky, van Geller did not like it at all. Starsky's skin color might have been correct in van Geller's opinion, but his religion was not, and the police were unable to get any useable information out of him.
Albert Sherman came across as much more cooperative and polite than his associate, but he also volunteered absolutely no information and both Washington and Starsky were aware of the understated power hinted in the mild mannered man's eyes. He was a force to be reckoned with, just as Hutch had thought. John Adams acted as if he were completely unaware of anything they were talking about, except to interject that he'd like to meet the person who had bombed the temple. When told they had two statements saying that he was one of the perpetrators, he laughed, just as van Geller had.

All in all, the entire day's work was for naught, not that Starsky had expected otherwise. The members of the Brotherhood had to be good at keeping secrets or there would have been a lot more street talk about the identities of the bombers. There had been almost no word from the usual snitches, according to Huggy Bear. Nobody on the street seemed to know who had bombed the temple. Unless investigators could find a link between the Brotherhood and the plastique, there was the distinct possibility that the van Geller and friends could remain uncharged for the bombing and that disturbed Starsky greatly.

At home, at last, late Sunday night, Starsky stared moodily at his phone, knowing it was far too late in Washington D.C. to be calling Meredith. She should be tucked up in her bed, hopefully wearing his police academy t-shirt, dreaming sweet dreams of romantic suppers with him. At least he certainly hoped so.

Unable to call her, he searched through the photos still strewn across the coffee table, selecting his favorite of her. She was sitting cross-legged in the sand, the high cut of her bikini showing a lot of hip, leaning into the curve of his arm. He was looking at her with an expression of awe, not believing his own good fortune, one arm around her waist, the other playing with one of her tiny braids. Starsky knew Hutch had taken the picture and was very grateful that he had. He was just tracing a gentle finger down the photograph to touch Meredith's face when the phone jangled, startling him.

"Dave Starsky here."

"Well. I'm certainly glad, cause honey, that's who I wanted to be there."

"Meredith!" he exclaimed. "I was just looking at your picture."

"My good side?" she teased.

"All your sides are good." He grinned, cradling the phone against his cheek as if he could pull her closer to him that way. "Inside and out."

"I don't think we should be going there at this time of night."

"No?" He pouted, disappointed. He propped her photo up with his knee so he could look at her. "Why are you awake? It must be two a.m. there."

"Nearly," she agreed. "I had a bad dream about you. You were...I don't know, in danger. Something bad was going to happen."

"Darlin', I'm a cop, that's a given."

"No, I'm serious, David."

He knew when she used his full name that she was upset. "Mer, I'm fine. It's a nasty case, but my part of it will be over soon. And if we could just get something on van Geller, he'd be behind bars in a New York minute."
"You're in Los Angeles," Meredith corrected, her heart still pounding harder than usual from the disturbing images of her dream. She couldn't reconstruct any one thing that had frightened her so or even remember the exact nature of the dream, just that Starsky had been in grave danger. "The minutes aren't any different there."

"Just hotter. It's seventy five degrees at eleven o'clock at night." Starsky sighed, "I think I'm melting."

"Not on my account, I hope." Meredith couldn't help the sexual nature that was always creeping into their phone calls. They caught each other so seldom there was a tremendous amount of unfulfilled desire on her part. "I could cool you down. Maybe some ice cubes?"

"Ice cream," Starsky said. "Chocolate."

"With a cherry on top?"

"Right in the middle." He licked his lips, knowing exactly what little dark cherry he wanted. "Lots of chocolate, I could just lick it up with my tongue."

"Myself, I want some vanilla." She smirked, "With some hard sauce poured over the top."

"You don't put hard sauce on ice cream," he protested, laughing. "That's for English desserts, like plum puddings."

"How would you know?" she argued good-naturedly.

"English neighbors. They always invited me over for Christmas Eve supper. I know hard sauce."

"Well, are you melted now?" Meredith sucked on her lower lip, grinning into the phone.

"Far from it," he admitted, his erection jutting up in front of his khakis. "How'm I gonna get to sleep now?"

"By dreaming of me."

"That'll just keep me awake." Starsky blew a kiss into the receiver, "Thanks for calling. I hope your dreams get better."

"After this, they're bound to." She returned the air kiss, still thinking about her dream.

*****

Hutch heard every about every minute of van Geller's police interrogation, including extremely biased and derisive descriptions of Starsky and Washington. It made his skin crawl, and it took every ounce of strength he had to remain in the room after Sherman and Adams joined in the conversation. There were repeated threats of violence against the police, Jews in general and Starsky, Washington and Bachman specifically.

Even after the demonic trio had retreated to their lair to hatch more plans, thumping and bumping could be heard as van Geller threw things, shouting angrily about their lack of success with killing the Rabbi.

"He's going off the deep end," Elsa observed. "I don't want to work here anymore, we could get caught up in his delusions."

"Honey, we already are." Hutch's inner self cried out to go call Starsky, to warn him. He knew
Starsky could take care of himself. Between he and Washington, they'd done a very good job up until now, but with only four days until the peace talks were about to start, van Geller could dispense with any sort of subtlety in exchange for full frontal attack. "I've got two job interviews lined up this week. Even if they don't pan out, I'm bailing out of here."

"I bought a paper this morning to look at the want ads." Elsa looked down at her hands, they were shaking. "I'm so afraid these days...I can't sleep. What if I try to leave and he won't let me?"

"He's not that kind of man!" Margaret protested, pressing a cup of water into the girl's hand. All three paused as a particularly violent bump hit the office door, and moments later, Sherman and Adams left abruptly.

"Is there anything we ought to know about?" Hutch confronted the two men, sensing Elsa, Margaret and Tom, the silent envelope stuffer of the day, standing behind him.

"Nothing that should concern any of you." Sherman pushed up his glasses, looking them over imperiously. "We're in a hurry."

"Well, with all of you getting hauled down to police headquarters, I'm wondering what's going on," Hutch continued with murmured assents from the women.

"Chambers, you started here knowing there'd been a little illegal activity," Adams retorted. "Nothing has changed."

"You call bombing a temple a little?" Hutch reined in his anger, not wanting to blow his case now. "I'd call it a lot. No, that didn't bother me as much as wondering if I'm going to get implicated in something I had nothing to do with. If they charge van Geller, what happens to the rest of us?"

"Those were only preliminary questions, they didn't have any solid facts and nothing they could pin on us," Sherman explained, as if to a two year old. "The day to day work of the Brotherhood will go on, in fact, we will prevail."

"If you have major plans, we want to know about them," Hutch insisted,

"We don't operate like that," Sherman sneered.

"Only the people involved know what's going on," Adams added. "C'mon, Al, there's a lot to do."

"Are you going to be able to stop the peace talks or not?" Hutch stepped aside, still facing the hate mongerers.

"We haven't been successful in bringing down Bachman, that's true," Sherman conceded. "So, we're trying a few different tactics, that's all you need to know. Good bye." He followed Adams out, letting the door bang shut with a loud slam.

"The day to day work won't get done if there's no one left to do it," Elsa whispered. "They can't treat us like this."

"Margaret, I won't be in on Tuesday until noon." Hutch gave his prearranged excuse for his 'job interview'. He'd planned on saying he'd gotten a job to explain why he would no longer be working at the Brotherhood after Friday. "Tell 'em I can stay late if necessary." He handed the silent Tom a pile of addressed envelopes with a sincere desire to bolt the United Aryan Brotherhood and never return.

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Standing in direct sunlight was stupefying, the heat like a giant hand squeezing whatever intelligent thought he might have right out of his brain. Starsky wiped a weary hand across his dripping neck, glancing around to keep Bachman and Washington in his sight. He was glad the bomb squad had responded in record time. He didn't think he had the presence of mind to defuse a cartoon style bomb with an alarm clock timer and two pieces of Acme dynamite like Wyle Coyote used to leave.

Micah had spent Tuesday morning inspecting the convention center where the peace talks were to be held. There were two meeting rooms, a main hall for the entire group to convene and a smaller room for office work. It was perfect. Moses Reinhart had done most of the coordinating with the convention center staff and was proudly conducting the little tour for Micah, and two other protestant ministers. Starsky and Washington had tagged along behind, as they usually did, but Starsky could hardly keep his eyes open. The heat had affected his sleep, he'd hardly gotten three hours all together. Washington looked worn out too, but he pointed out that he'd grown up in the deep south where sleeping naked in the heat without even a sheet was perfectly normal.

"I wasn't naked," Starsky protested.

"Ah didn't say you were, Ah said Ah was," Washington teased. "But Ah kin imagine you were, too."

"I don't want you imaging me naked."

"Oh, Little Davey, Ah do it all the time," He teased, leering down at the shorter man.

"Pervert."

"Officer! Sergeant!" A harried looking convention center official came running up to them, his red face bathed in sweat. When he had gotten their attention, he blathered, "a call just came in saying there was a bomb! In my convention center."

"Micah! Moses!" Starsky grabbed their arms, while Washington went for the two ministers. "Outta here, now." He walked them towards the door, with the bespeckled man following behind, wringing his hands like a girl in a melodrama. "There's a bomb threat."

After they'd exited the modernistic granite sided building, Starsky found the closest patrol car. These days, there were always a few wherever Micah was. He made a calm call to dispatch for the bomb squad. Before they arrived, he and Washington made a quick sweep of the rooms they had visited, but found no suspicious boxes or packages, so left the harder work to the professionals.

That was where he stood now. Waiting, bareheaded, in the direct sunlight of 90-degree heat.
Whatever professionalism he'd maintained before the squad's arrival was evaporating, his overactive imagination recalling the temple bombing with vivid clarity.

After ten agonizing minutes, an apparition in full bomb squad regalia, his face shield disguising his identity and huge gloved hands holding a lead box, walked carefully from the building. His brethren in bomb disposal escorted him to the specially prepared truck and the box containing the defused bomb was placed inside. A successful end to the threat. Starsky felt as if he had stood on the edge of the Grand Canyon and looked down, his insides quaking like jello. But he couldn't let the others see that, and managed a completely coherent discussion with the bomb squad captain before he left to make his report.

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Ken Hutchinson had known it was dangerous in the extreme to be anywhere near there, but he really didn't have a job interview, and Dobey had told him where the peace talks would be, so he'd driven by the convention center. Just to get the lay of the land, so to speak. He truly hadn't expected to be able to see his friends, but naturally had driven by just as the bomb squad was exiting the lobby unmistakably carrying a bomb disposal box. Had he not been able to catch a glimpse of Starsky, Washington and Bachman talking near the parking lot, he would have stopped the car in the middle of traffic and jumped out. As it was, he allowed himself a second trip around the block, past the park-like grounds and around past the parking lot once more to watch Starsky and the other two men confer with some uniformed patrolmen. All appeared safe, unharmed, and if the gesturing was any indication, Starsky was in rare form.

"Who the fuck checked security around here this morning?" Starsky shouted, mostly to hide the terror still coursing through his veins.

"We had the building searched just after Mr. Mulvaney opened." The officer pointed to the little man who was describing the bomb threat phone call to another policeman.

"Not very thorough, were they?" Starsky roared.

"Starsky," Washington said insistently.

"What?" He turned his attention to his partner, still in a temper.

"Since th' bomb squad found th' bomb in the wirin' behind the wall paneling, an' you an' me didn't see it either, Ah don't think yellin' at this fine off'cer jist doin' his job is helpin' any," Washington said calmly.

"It's helping me," Starsky said tersely, taking a deep breath to compose himself. "Sorry, Cortez...Is there anything else you can tell me that might be of some importance?"

"There were only two deliveries before you all arrived," Cortez began carefully, still uncertain of the change in Starsky's questioning. "One was the usual drop off of paper goods the center uses--toilet paper, paper towels, the like. Mulvaney knew the guy who off loaded the stuff, and they chatted. The other was a plant service."

"A plant service?" Starsky repeated, not quite following.

"You know, the people who take care of potted plants in buildings, water 'em, fertilize 'em, replace the dead ferns. A plant service." Cortez shrugged, "Except they didn't stay very long, and the plants didn't look like they'd been watered or anything."

"Very good, Cortez," Starsky crowed, "Now we're getting somewhere!"
Leaving his partner to get the names of the two companies who had visited that morning, Washington located the Rabbi sitting by himself on a bench.

"Ready to go?"

"I'm having a few doubts this morning, Brick." Micah rubbed his hands together. "I know that education and dialogue between the hate groups and their so-called enemies is a positive step, but I'm beginning to wonder am I just inciting more hatred? None of this...the bomb threat, any one of the other threats we've received would have occurred if I hadn't have started this."

"But if you stop even one of the people who've agreed to talk with you from doin' somethin' to another human bein', isn't that enough?" The big detective folded himself nearly in half to sit down on the little green park bench beside Bachman.

"I've said it before, Brick, you could have a career in public relations." Micah laughed. "You're right, of course. I'm just feeling frightened of the responsibility, I suppose. Perhaps it's like cold feet before a wedding."

"Well, Ah wouldn't know anything 'bout that, but, Rabbi, you've been chosen--it's obvious to all of us, an' if you didn' have doubts, then Ah'd be worried." Washington clapped a large hand on the other man's shoulder, nearly shoving him off the end of the bench. "Why, even Jesus had to pray a lot those last few days. Oh, sorry, shouldn' a' mentioned him, huh?"

"Perhaps not kosher." Micah laughed. "But I know what you meant. And prayer is always a good answer. Especially since tomorrow is Yom Kippur, and there's a big service at the synagogue tonight."

Starsky headed across the tarmac to his friends, flipping closed the little notebook he'd taken down names in with a snap. He looked pissed off.

"Little Davey, we should get back to the Victorian. The Rabbi's gettin' a sunburn standin' around like this," Washington pointed out, actually somewhat fascinated at the red color the fair skinned man was turning.

"Did you check the car?" Starsky asked seriously.

"The bomb squad did before they left." Washington nodded, having watched the experts check the vehicle over for explosive devices with interest. He opening the car doors to let in the cooler air before they got in.

"This was a big, fat warning," Starsky growled. "I'd be very interested if it turns out to be a real bomb. 'S like van Geller's tauntin' us. He coulda killed us, but he's just teasing it out, provin' he could get to us anytime."

"Apparently he's right, too," Micah said in a soft voice. "Even with all the precautions you take, he's broken through many times."

"Micah, never go anywhere alone," Starsky stated firmly. "You can't let 'em stop you when the end is this close."

"Jist three more days," Washington agreed. "We stick together like the three Musketeers."

"Can I be D'Artagnan?" Micah made a swashbuckling stab in the air to lighten the mood.

"Michael York's part?" Starsky looked at him critically. "I guess so, cause you're not exactly the
"Naw, he was a priest, after all," Washington agreed, climbing into the passenger seat while Starsky started up the engine to get the a/c working. "Ah guess that makes me Oliver Reed--Porthos."

"Suits you," Micah agreed from the back seat. "Fierce but gentle."

Washington grinned appreciatively at this description. "And Davey's Athos."

"Which one was he?" Starsky asked absently, concentrating on driving around the ever-present camera vans, all currently broadcasting live coverage of the Rabbi's recent brush with death.

"Frank Findlay. Lotsa curly hair." Washington had seen the movie and its sequel numerous times. And if he was Athos, that meant he got to fantasize about Faye Dunaway. Not bad.

"That'd be me." Starsky nodded. "But my Ma always said I was more the Paul Muni type."


These days, Hutch felt like he got all his knowledge about Starsky's life off the news. Driving back on the freeway towards Waverly, he listened to the all news station report the recent bomb threat at the convention center. No casualties, but it had been a real bomb. The latest information released from the detective in charge of the case said it was the same plastique that had been found at the Beth Sharon Temple bombing. Police were investigating both cases with renewed vigor.

Not really wanting to go back to that cramped little storefront and print out endless scatological pamphlets, with his friends in real danger, Hutch had to constantly remind himself that it was only for a few more days. Then he'd never have to listen to 'solutions' to the overpopulation of wetbacks, sand niggers and cursed Jews ever again.

He'd had the reoccurring dream the night before, and it nagged at his brain. What was it about? Once more he'd been frantically searching, terrified that he wouldn't be able to find whatever it was he was looking for. Even in his dreams the heat was oppressive, like a physical weight on his chest. He'd awakened achy and hot, like he was coming down with the flu. It made it all the harder to face the Brotherhood again.

To get his mind on something else, Hutch turned his attention to the gorgeous, foul-minded Elsa. Maybe he could take something else away? She was in a confused state of mind presently. What if he could start her thinking in a different way? His own personal peace talk? What made Elsa so prejudiced, and could she be persuaded to consider another ideology? It gave him something positive to think about for the afternoon.

"How was the job interview?" Margaret asked when Hutch had settled in to join them at their current enterprise: a short, two-paged newsletter to hand out at the rally planned on the morning of the peace talks. None of the 'news' was unbiased, or even factually correct, but what else would one expect from the Brotherhood?

"Good. Won't know until next week if I get hired." Hutch was handed a pile of photographs to sort for the articles.

Margaret was editing the already written editorials, while Elsa and Fredricks were attempting to fit the copy and photographs into a pleasing arrangement that looked both professional and interesting to the eye. Hutch added his two cents worth, all the while examining the photographs. Polaroids, most of them, they would certainly copy badly, but now they were a virtual chronology of the past few weeks. The first one showed the synagogue burning, with few people around, most of whom...
seemed intent on the back windows. Taken before emergency personnel had gotten there? Who had taken this?

There were several shots of the Rabbi at various appearances, and a few that showed other 'inferiors' such as a prominent black lawyer, an Asian doctor and one of Starsky and Washington. On the back, someone had written, the police department will hire anyone. There was no way Hutch was going to let that one get printed. He couldn't prevent them from putting Bachman on the front of their travesty of a newspaper but he wasn't going to let them subject all his friends to ridicule and hatred. He slipped the picture into his pocket for safekeeping.

There was lots of work to fill the hours, especially after Sherman came in with several changes on the newsletter and a completely new flyer he wanted printed for the protest rally. As five o'clock approached, Hutch began to get concerned, he usually left by five to get home in time for his nightly phone call to the precinct, but this didn't look possible tonight.

"Hey, John," Fredricks called. "We gotta get somethin' t'eat if we're all gonna work late. How 'bout people goin' out a few at a time for dinner?"

"That's okay with me." Adams shrugged, he was beginning to feel hungry himself. Both Sherman and van Geller had gone off to who knows where, leaving him in charge. It seemed like a reasonable plan of action, in fact he didn't care if everyone went off to dinner together.

This proved to be the most popular idea, and nearly everyone trouped over to Dino's diner for an early meal. Margaret stayed behind to put the finishing touches on the newsletter so she could walk it over to the printer's before six o'clock. Hutch was vastly relieved. If he ordered quickly, he could slip into the back where there was a bank of payphones by the restrooms. Just a brief message to 'brother Frank' was all that was needed.

By happenstance, there weren't enough tables together to seat the entire group, so Adams, Sherman and Fredricks claimed one table. Silent Tom and Bob Richman took booths at the counter, leaving Elsa and Hutch with the couples' table in the middle of the room.

"Mind eating with me?" Hutch gallantly pulled out a chair for the lovely woman, admiring the way her blond hair caught the overhead lights, shimmering like the hair of an actress in a shampoo commercial. Only, hers wasn't augmented, or dyed, it just was naturally slivery blond.

"Not at all, kind sir." She dimpled. Ken Chambers was incredibly handsome, but he had an aloof, almost impersonal air about him that had put her off. Suddenly, he seemed much more assessable and friendly.

When Dotty arrived, both ordered without much more than a glance at the menu. After all, they ate at the tiny establishment several times a week and were more than familiar with the bill of fare. Hutch then excused himself to slip back to the bank of phones.

He was vaguely disappointed that it was Dobey and not Starsky who answered at police headquarters, but just exchanged a few words since he had little real information to impart. Dobey told him Starsky had temple obligations that night, and Hutch rang off quickly, relieved to know where his friend was, at least.

"Sorry about that," Hutch apologized to Elsa. "I'm still trying to get a third interview with a really nice place--but didn't want to do it at the Brotherhood."

"I understand." She smiled at him, forking up lettuce and tomatoes from her little house salad. "I got an interview myself, but when I got there...I did it at lunch time today...the receptionist was...black."
"And you couldn't go through with it?" he questioned carefully, inwardly appalled.

"My old boyfriend told me never to talk to black people," she confessed.

"Why?"

Elsa waited until Dotty had delivered plates of chicken to both of them. "Are you making fun of me?" she responded, stung.

"No, honestly." Hutch was glad that there was enough ambient noise that the other Brotherhood members couldn't hear them talking softly. "I just wouldn't want prejudice to stop you from getting a good job. Did you want to work there?"

"I think so." She ate some more of the salad, considering his words. "You think that's why I can't get a job?"

"Elsa, why do you...distrust people with darker skin...or Jews, say?"

"Ken! How can you say that?" She stared at him, appalled. "I don't understand you at all. They're bad."

"But why?" he insisted. Then, so it wouldn't seem like he was pushing, he made an effort to concentrate on his food.

"They just are." She shook her head. "You're confusing me. Jews are...evil, everyone knows it. And blacks are ignorant, base..."

"If blacks can be lawyers, judges and doctors, how can they be ignorant?" Hutch proposed, "And that cop that van Geller hates so much, Starsky, he's Jewish? Why would the police hire someone who was evil?"

"I don't know." Elsa ducked her head, the glorious silvery hair falling around her face like a veil. "I've just always been told that."

"By whom?"

"By everybody...mostly boyfriends. You've said you hate your landlord, and somebody else...both Jews, how can you accuse me like this?"

Wanting to tell her it was all an act, Hutch considered carefully what to say next. He wanted her to start thinking about her biased words, but couldn't completely step out of his own undercover persona. "I dislike a few people, who are Jewish, yes, but...I try to look past some of that to see that we are all just people underneath. We're not that different, if you get to know others."

"You sound like that...Bachman." She pushed back from the table, but made no move to leave. "I don't think we should be talking like this. You're being a traitor to the white race."

"I'm sorry if I offended you," Hutch answered sincerely. "I just want you to be able to succeed--get a job you want. But to do that, you may have to change a little."

"Thank you, Ken, for thinking about me," she replied frostily, avoiding his gaze, picking at the salad again. "But I don't need your kind of help."

When the group rejoined to head back to the Brotherhood, Elsa Hottstedder begged off, saying she wasn't feeling well. Hutch was sorry to see her go, and was stunned when Fredricks and Richman
made crude and offensive remarks about her so called 'headache'. He trailed behind to distance himself as much as possible from their comments.

Margaret had stayed long enough to tell them that the newsletter would be finished at the printers in an hour and she was heading home to her cats. The head lieutenant had also returned from his mysterious afternoon's business, but didn't stay long. After overseeing that a few more projects were completed, Sherman announced that he and Adams had to be somewhere before seven. But he wanted one of the others to stay behind to pick up the newsletter, bring it back to the storefront and lock up. Richman proposed that he go get the printing while Fredricks locked up, but the other man vetoed that notion, saying he had other matters to attend to. In the end, Chambers was left in charge of the office after the rest left.

Amazed at his good luck, Hutch waited until he heard cars roar away from behind the building before carefully easing open the door to the back room. He had to find evidence to the bombing or three weeks of undercover work was for naught. And to be truthful, he didn't ever want to set foot inside the Waverly storefront ever again, no matter what Dobey said or did. This was his last night. Hutch was disgusted with the lot of them. How Bachman thought he could get through their shuttered, narrow little minds was beyond his scope of imagination.

The little room was a pigsty. The television was perched so precariously on top of a pile of old, cut up newspaper, Hutch was afraid to come near it, in case it fell on him. There was paper everywhere, the chaos no doubt reflecting the true nature of van Geller's unfocused thought patterns. Margaret had said he was growing more and more unstable. If he couldn't even keep his thoughts under control, who could trust the man?

Approaching the main table, with its monumental pile of paper, Hutch tread cautiously, still expecting one of the other men to return unexpectedly. He stepped on a small photograph, the color catching his eye.

Stooping to pick up the picture from under the table, Hutch realized it was a photo of Micah and Starsky. His heart pounding in his ears, he recognized the clothes they were wearing and the location of the picture. It had been taken that morning, while Starsky and Micah stood waiting for the bomb squad to search the convention center. Starsky was half turned away from the camera, adjusting his sunglasses, obviously listening to something Bachman was saying.

Forcing himself to be calm, Hutch picked carefully though the litter of paper on the round table. After all, he'd known the Brotherhood was watching his friends. He'd even seen other clandestine pictures of them. So why did this one set his internal alarm bells off? For heaven's sake, even he'd been watching Starsky and the others while they were unawares.

Still sifting through the clutter, he uncovered half-written speeches, discarded versions of pamphlets he himself had corrected and any print article mentioning either the Brotherhood or Bachman. van Geller must sit back here with his scissors, like the old time newspaper morgue guys, snipping out articles relevant only to himself.

Hutch finally discovered an unmarked manila envelope under an early draft of van Geller's manifesto. Shaking out the contents, he felt the chicken and dumplings he'd had for dinner try to make a reappearance. Swallowing forcefully, Hutch examined the documents and photos he'd found. The first picture had been taken only seconds after the one he'd picked up off the floor, but Starsky and the Rabbi were both turned towards Washington, who had his hands on his hips. The other three images were shots of each man alone, taken on different days and times. Bachman with his head bowed, standing behind a podium. Washington staring back over his shoulder at something off camera, his face in a scowl. Starsky looking tired and tense, standing next to the striped tomato. The
list of addresses that accompanied the photos made his blood run cold. At the top was the address to
the Alliance Victorian, then Bachman's house, and the convention center. It came as no surprise that
van Geller knew Bachman's house number, since he'd once burned a cross on the lawn there. But the
fourth notation was Starsky's home, the house number and street as familiar as Hutch's own. That
address had a big red circle around it, and doodled six pointed stars around that.

Debating whether to take the paper with him, he realized that he still had no evidence about the
temple bombing. In order for a competent judge to issue a search warrant, he had to provide the court
with sufficient evidence of a crime. He didn't have anything. Shoving the list and photos back in the
envelope, Hutch secreted it back under the pile on the table, visually searching the room for anything
he could use to hang van Geller. His gut was telling him that Starsky was in danger, though, and he
couldn't concentrate on the matter at hand.

The noise of a car pulling up behind the building solved his dilemma, and he just had time to sit
down in the front office before Richman returned, carrying several boxes.

"Chambers, there's ten more in the car, can you give me a hand?"

*****

Leaning his head back on the vinyl upholstery of Washington's Mustang, Starsky let the air
conditioner blast ice cold air straight into his face. He just wanted to melt into the seat and not move
for about a month. At least until after the peace talks were over.

"That's it. I'm taking a vacation to someplace really cold this year," Starsky complained.

"Heat waves, bomb threats and religious holidays all in th'same day too much for ya, Starsky?"
Washington teased. He fiddled with the car radio before starting up the car, the mustang filling with
the sound of the Blondie's 'Call Me', which improved spirits and set heads to nodding along with the
music.

"You buy that VCR you were talkin' about?" Starsky asked with his eyes closed against the late
afternoon sun.

"Yep, figured out how t'program it an' ever'thang, then Ah got home t'other day an' Ah'd taped a
chick movie stead of the game. Set it on the wrong channel." Washington shrugged, driving onto the
405.

"I saw it, real slow." Starsky enjoyed the Blondie song in silence, then grimaced as the DJ
announced a "golden oldie" as 'Bad Moon Rising' started up. "Man, this song is everywhere." He
shuddered. "Change the station."

"Earthquakes and lightening..." Washington sang along, "Yes, sir, Sergeant Starsky, anythang you
say, Sergeant." He kind of liked the Creedance Clearwater song, but obliged his partner and changed
to an all news station in time to hear that there was a brush fire burning out of control in the San
Vicente Lake area, above San Diego. "Sounds like the song was right."

"Who'd write a song about disasters anyway?" Starsky spotted the turn off to his neighborhood and
pointed it out, despite the fact that it wasn't the first time Washington had driven him home. He was
supposed to attend services at Emmanuel Synagogue for Yom Kippur, but for once didn't have to go
in a bodyguard capacity. Dave Murphy had expressed an interest in attending with Micah, since he
hadn't gone to temple in many years, leaving Starsky relatively free for the evening. Since the Rabbi
was officiating the worship service, he usually arrived early, taking Starsky with him. Thus, today
Starsky didn't have to be anywhere until six thirty.
"Thanks, Darryl." Starsky jumped out of the car, when it pulled up in front of his house.

"Watch your back, Little Davey," Washington called. "Make sure you keep yer eyes open."

"And my mouth shut?" Starsky smirked, but he heard the warning in Brick's tone loud and clear.

"Sounds 'bout right. You pickin' me up tomorrow?"

"At eight." Starsky headed up the front steps as the sleek black Mustang roared off.

Opening his front door was like sticking his head into a preheated oven. After having been shut up all day in 95 degree heat, the potted plants were drooping, ferns lying limply along the bookshelf. Feeling like a bad plant daddy, Starsky took a few moments to water the greenery. Hefting the watering can, he shifted his muscles under his shoulder holster. It was glued to his back with sweat, his Hawaiian shirt soaking wet anywhere the holster touched him. Stripping off the heavy leather, he dropped it to the floor and pulled off his shirt as well.

He debated taking a quick shower, but his stomach won the fight. It was traditional to fast for Yom Kippur, meaning he had less than an hour to get something to eat before driving to the synagogue. He splashed water onto his face and chest until his dark curls were dripping, then found a light cotton Henley shirt in the bureau drawer and pulled it over his head. Slipping the shoulder holster back on with a sigh, he buckled the strap to his belt and selected a blue and white striped long sleeved shirt to wear over the gun. Maybe it smacked of paranoia, but he didn't feel safe going out without his weapon, even if it meant wearing too many clothes in this heat.

There was just enough time to stop at his favorite dive of the month, Burrito Barn, for a quick dinner before going over to the synagogue. He wanted something to fill him up if he had to fast for 24 hours. He planned to wolf down a bean and beef burrito, hold the cheese, and a large Coke while navigating the Tuesday evening traffic.

The Torino's air conditioning was no match for the greenhouse effect. Even after turning it on full blast, the car's interior was searingly hot, the steering wheel too hot to be touched. Directing the frigid air onto the driver's side, Starsky drove with his fingers barely gripping the wheel until the leather covering had cooled enough for him to grasp it without burning his hands. The car's powerful engine roared down the streets, arriving at the destination only two miles away in just a short time. He could have almost driven the route in his sleep, having come regularly every few days during the last three weeks. Without Hutch to complain about his diet as much, Starsky had indulged in favorites with pleasure. The parking lot at the pseudo Mexican hacienda was crammed with cars, but Starsky managed to nose the Torino into the last empty spot behind a green VW bus.

Burrito Barn was packed with customers trying to stay out of their own kitchens and beat the heat, but that just made the restaurant unbearably hot. The outside temp was hovering around 95. It had to be ten degrees higher inside the building with all the people waiting for their dinners. A small baby started to wail, his cries strident and hungry.

Joining the lengthy line, Starsky shifted restlessly from foot to foot, sweat dripping uncomfortably down his back. He didn't need to study the menu printed on the back wall, he knew it by heart and it was way too hot to be standing here for half an hour waiting for his turn. Having just about decided to leave and try the drive-thru McDonalds, Starsky turned, nearly running into a massively muscled blond haired man to his left.

"'Scuse me, just leaving," Starsky muttered, but froze when a second man to his right clamped a hand tightly around his upper arm.
"That's right, you were. My boss'd like to meet with you," Jake said into the shorter man's ear. "Too bad you gotta miss your dinner, the burritos here are great."

Not wanting to make a scene in the crowded restaurant, Starsky ignored the lump of fear filling his throat. He'd never thought the Brotherhood would go after him. "Hey, guys..." He plastered on a fake grin. "This is nothing that can't be talked out, huh? Doncha want to get one of these burritos and have a peaceful meal?" He slid his left hand under the edge of his striped shirt, going for the Beretta holstered under his right arm.

"Pull that piece an' you get my pigsticker between two ribs." The man on his left was so close no one else could probably see the knife, but Starsky could feel the point touch his skin even though his clothes. "C'mon, Cop, it's time to take a ride."

Camden almost lifted Starsky off his feet, propelling him towards the exit, with Jake directly behind them. As the trio reached the door, an enthusiastic teenaged boy blasted through the entrance, slamming the door into Jake's arm. Starsky sucked in a lungful of air against the pain as the knife broke the skin just at waist level. Jake jerked his hand back quickly, but the slight wound had been enough to draw blood.

This isn't happening, Starsky thought, trying to pull free as they stepped off the front walk.

The immensely strong Camden just picked Starsky up bodily, shoving him violently against a black undistinguished sedan parked at the curb. His knees buckled, the wind knocked out of him, which gave one of his captors enough time to shove him into the back seat and use his own handcuffs to secure his hands. This was all done in the space of five or ten seconds, far too quickly for anyone in the parking lot to possibly have seen anything. Once the car was moving, a pillowcase was slipped over his head and tape wound around his neck to secure it. A foot on his back kept Starsky sprawled on the carpeted floor, the car's sudden motion causing nausea to well up.

Starsky's mind skittered away from what was happening to him, trying to come up with some sort of escape plan. But his mouth was dry, partly from fear and partly with the intrusive thought that he really wanted a jug of water or one of those Big Gulps of Coke from Seven/eleven, and it kept interfering with his ability to effectively work out a plan. This much was clear: he was trussed up, being driven God knows where, nobody yet would be missing him and there was blood slowly dripping down his side from the knife wound. Just terrific.

*****

Unable to shake the conviction that something awful was about to happen, possibly/probably to David Starsky, Ken Hutchinson drove immediately over to his house once he'd been able to get away from Waverly. If Bob Richman had noticed his distracted manner while they were unloading the boxes from the printers, he hadn't made any mention of it, and Hutch had waited impatiently until he'd locked up the building to depart.

Hutch even risked calling both the squadroom and Starsky's home as the uneasy feeling persisted, but Sergeant Myers had assured him that Starsky was gone for the day according to the duty roster. There was no answer on Starsky's phone, not surprising, since he never remembered to turn on his answering machine. Hutch tried to reassure himself. After all, Dobey had told him that Starsky was attending Yom Kippur services with Micah. So, really, there couldn't possibly be anything to worry about. Except that little voice inside him kept telling him there was. The photographs, and more importantly the red circled address, were ominous warnings.

Parking his battered Pinto nearly a block away, Hutch approached the house carefully, taking the front steps. Since he'd scared the dark haired man by coming up the back steps on Saturday, he didn't
want to risk getting shot in the head this time. Using his own key, Hutch let himself in and surveyed his friend's house. Starsky's eclectic decorating sense always amused him. The room was bright with primary colors, a profusion of potted plants tucked up on shelves and hanging from the ceiling. The wild assortment of knick-knacks that cluttered the bookshelves, including a ship in a bottle, a gumball machine and a stoplight that actually worked, showed Starsky's love of the unusual and absurd. Nothing was out of place, and if Hutch's detective skills were still in working order, Starsky had only recently left. A quick search of the house revealed the discarded Hawaiian shirt and the water spatters not yet dry in the bathroom sink. Vastly relieved, Hutch sagged down onto the couch, idly noting the packet of photos scattered across the coffee table. He glanced over his shoulder into the kitchen. The pizza box was still on the kitchen counter, Starsky had hardly cleaned up since he'd visited two days before.

Leaning back on the sofa cushions he let himself relax, the exhaustion from weeks of bad dreams catching up with him. He'd just wait here until Starsky returned. That little niggling dread that something really bad had happened persisted, but he firmly told himself that he was imagining things.

*****

It was a long drive from Waverly, but the scenery was enough to warrant the trip. The rolling hills were golden brown after the long dry season, the live oak and eucalyptus the only visible green. It was no wonder that October was a prime brush fire month, the ground parched and grass brittle in the arid heat. Heat shimmered across the blacktop frontage road, even thought it was after six p.m. Albert Sherman had lived in California long enough to appreciate the natural beauty, but he still much preferred the more colorful abundance of an East Coast Autumn. John Adams dozed in the passenger seat, his head hanging back with his mouth wide open.

Taking the second driveway off of the main road, Cutting Ave, Sherman drove carefully down the gravel road towards a metal gate. He located the remote control Peter had given him and activated the on button, watching with amusement as the gate magically slid open to let the car pass.

"Cool," Adams murmured, wiping sleep out of his eyes.

Van Geller had been spending nearly all his time out at his Grandfather's house to ready the property for the next phase of his plan, and the improvements were evident. An eight-foot storm fence enclosed the entire property, with curls of barbed wire decorating the top. As the car neared the house, it was easy to see several unfinished sheds beyond, in what used to be the large back yard. Two or three dumpsters were placed strategically around the construction site for easy disposal of debris.

"Looks like he's really serious about this," Adams remarked, his blue eyes bright imagining the possibilities.

"He's delusional if he thinks the local authorities will sanction this," Sherman muttered to himself.

"What?" John asked, climbing out of the car to admire the view.

"The first time the police come out here, they're gonna shut him down." Sherman pursed his lips. He'd hoped he had at least a few days to finish what they'd started. He hated to leave a project half-assed but there was no way he was going to be arrested or even questioned by the police again. The money was nearly all transferred to private accounts that only he was privy to. It looked like he might have to be ready jump ship at any moment.

"What'd you think?" van Geller greeted them as they started to the front door.
"Doesn't look like any of those cabins are livable yet," Sherman grumbled, "What happened?"

Peter laughed. It was a reversal of their usual roles; he was calm and Al was grumpy. "The builders had some problems, but it just delays the inevitable. But the garbage was carted away this morning, so it looks real neat now."

"But we have a delivery tonight," Albert stressed, "Where are you going to put it?"

"Al, Al...don't wig out about it."

"What did you tell the builders you were constructing?" John had gone out the back door to inspect one of the little dwellings. They were basically large garden sheds, five in all.

"A hotel--bungalows. I'm starting small, but once real, right thinking Americans understand what I'm doing, I know more people will join us," Van Geller spoke passionately, a fire in his blue eyes. "This camp will be the first of it's kind in the U.S., modeled after those famous institutions in Europe."

A ringing phone could be heard from inside the house, and Peter dashed back inside to grab up the hand set. "Great! We're waiting," he said before hanging up. "They're on their way already." He rubbed his hands together with excitement. "Johnny-boy, did you bring what I asked for?"

Sure thing. Peter." John grinned, the anticipation showing on his ruddy face. "It's in the trunk."

"Great, I want it set up in the garage."

*****

"And the whole congregation of the people of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness."

Listening to the familiar words from Exodus, Micah Bachman felt a certain kinship with his ancestor. People were always talking about him, too. Right or wrong, no one group could quite decide whether his dreams would come to fruition. He'd had a case of nerves after the bomb threat that morning, but now felt much more confident. Communication between disparate groups was vital if there was ever to be a common goal to teach the younger generation to love and support one another.

Shaking himself out of his reverie, he began the next prayer as the reading ended, hearing the murmured voices of the congregation with contentment. Temple Emmanuel had a far more modern architecture than Beth Sharon had had, but he was beginning to feel more comfortable here. A high vaulted ceiling with glass skylight inserts let in all available light, giving the whole room a glow even at near dark. Micah enjoyed a rare moment of true happiness. Glancing out at the assembled crowd, he caught the eye of Dave Murphy in the front row. Other friendly faces reflected his smile back at him, but he didn't see the face he'd been expecting to see. Where was Dave Starsky? Before the service had begun, he'd given half a thought that the detective must be running late, but here it was nearly through and he still wasn't here.

Suddenly impatient for worship to be over, Micah felt a wave of cold sweep through his body. Where could Starsky be?

Excusing himself from the departing congregation, Micah ran back to the office he was sharing with Rabbi Hoffman, Dave Murphy right on his heels.

"What's wrong?" Murphy asked concerned, shutting the door to give them some privacy.

"Starsky never got here," Micah explained grimly. He dialed Darryl Washington's home number on
the off chance that he’d know where Starsky was. The resulting answer frightened him, and terrified Washington.

"Ah’ll check his house an’ talk t’headquarters," Washington assured, visions he’d rather not be having already dancing in the back of his brain. "Jist sit tight, Rabbi, Ah’ll get back t’you as soon as I can."

Dialing Starsky’s number, Washington gave a fervent prayer that his friend had just fallen asleep, or maybe there was a huge traffic jam on some freeway that had prevented him from making it to the synagogue on time. Except that Darryl had left Starsky off at his house at shortly after five and it was now seven thirty five. Only a major logjam would have kept Starsky on the freeway that long, and he could have found a phone in that case. No, something bad had happened.

The telephone was on its third ring by the time Hutch had awakened, realized where he was and located the phone on the wall near the kitchen. "Hello," he answered breathlessly, hoping it was Starsky.

"Hutch?"

"Washington?" He recognized the voice instantly.

"Where’s Starsky?"

"I just missed him, I guess," Hutch replied, but the alarm bells were sounding again. "He went to temple."

"Except he didn’t get there," Washington explained quietly, but his terror had just kicked up a notch.

"Oh, God," Hutch whispered. "I’ll meet you at headquarters."

*****

The car’s motion finally ceased, but crouched in the space behind the front seats, David Starsky had no idea where he was or what his captor’s plans were. The car door opened and a rough hand jerked Starsky out, dropping him into the bare dirt. Riding curled up on the floor had put his feet to sleep, and he struggled to his knees, trying to ignore the painful pins and needles as blood rushed back into his lower extremities.

"Kinda scrawny, ain’t he?” Camden laughed.

"Makes ya wonder about LA’s finest,” Jake commented derisively.

"Took you two long enough to get here.” Peter van Geller strode from the house with Sherman and Adams in his wake. He grinned, looking down at the man kneeling before him. It gave him such a heady rush to have such power over another human being. He felt god-like, like his guru Hitler. The weight of this man’s life rested in his hands and he could do anything he wanted to sway the balance one way or the other.

"Traffic, y’know.” Jake yanked the prisoner up by the handcuffs that bound his hands.

The action stretched Starsky’s cramped muscles, sending pain shooting up and down his chest from the knife wound. Starsky blinked in the glare of early evening sunlight when the pillowcase was removed, recognizing the men standing around him. Van Geller, Sherman and Adams.

"Larry, Curly and Moe—the three stooges do the Klan,” he muttered, as usual smart mouthing when he should have kept silent.
Adams' backhand sent Starsky reeling into the hulking figure behind him, his original kidnapper. Camden just righted the man without a change of expression.

"You don't talk to him that way, Jew," Adams sneered, now anxious to get another couple shots at the dark haired cop.

Tasting blood in his mouth, Starsky licked his split lip, glaring at his captors. "What'd you want with me?"

"Set an example." Van Geller grinned even more malevolently, "T'show that dumb Kike you work for that he doesn't mess with us. Jews are nothing, and his so-called peace talks are gonna stop, or there'll be vengeance like he never imagined. The streets will run red and he'll think the Devil's come back from hell."

"Ain't gonna happen," Starsky retorted, knowing that he wasn't going to like the consequences if he spoke, but when had that ever stopped him before? "You think you're the devil reborn? You're nothing but a two bit Hitler wanna-be..."

Whatever else he was about the say was cut off by a hand around his throat, his breath gurgling in his lungs as he began to panic from lack of fresh oxygen.

Taking a step back from the group, Sherman turned his eyes away from the view of Starsky's bluish, astonished face. This was going further than he was willing to condone. He tried to put a finger on when they'd crossed the line from printing salacious pamphlets and become torturers and murderers. Yes, the bomb had been his idea and his design, but a bomb was so much more impersonal. He could get away with saying he didn't realize there would be anyone around when the bomb was deployed, or delude himself that he hadn't actually seen any of the people killed by his explosion, so it didn't matter. But it did matter. The murders still rankled inside his soul. They might be Jews, but they looked and talked a lot like he and his friends. And he had killed Miriam Bachman. A beautiful woman who'd worn a wedding gown nearly identical to his younger sister's.

"Stop him, Peter, goddammit!" he shouted, slapping at Camden's hand around Starsky's neck.

"Let him go," Peter ordered the body builder, watching impassionately as the prisoner once again sprawled limply on the sunbaked ground. "We need to keep him around for a while, at least."

Taking great heaving breaths of air to resupply his starved cells, Starsky began to be really afraid. The few glimpses he gotten of the surrounding area showed him they were far from central Los Angeles, in the foothills somewhere. If and when Hutch and the others realized he was gone and started looking for him, it would take them a long time to find this place. Would he still be alive when they arrived?

"Stand up," Van Geller demanded, waiting until Starsky had managed to regain his feet without the use of his hands to balance. "You're prisoner number one at the new and improved American Auschwitz. I'm the head commandant, and you will give me absolute respect or the punishment will be swift, as you've just witnessed."

_Makes it sound like I was just an innocent bystander, not the one assaulted_, Starsky thought cynically. Surveying the five men ringed around him with distaste, he had the sudden impression he was in a deep valley surrounded by five towering mountain peaks and there was no way to escape. It seemed like eons ago when Hutch and Washington had been teasing him about his height, or lack there of. But he would have given anything to have them right next to him about now, if only because they were taller.
"Do you understand?" Adams inserted, giving him a shove that nearly threatened his precarious equilibrium.

"Yes, sir," he hissed through gritted teeth.

"Don't you have some...administrative work to do?" Sherman suggested, somewhat timidly. This was not the time to piss van Geller off. "Since he is prisoner number one?"

"Yes, yes...how could I forget?" Peter trilled gaily. "Bring him along to the garage."

Camden and Jake each took one of Starsky's arms, propelling him forward. He could hear Adams asking about the living accommodations, since the huts weren't finished yet, but wasn't close enough to hear van Geller's reply.

There was a brief photo session, with a battered looking Polaroid, and a discussion about whether to shave his head, in case of lice. Adams pointed out that this was standard procedure in Poland and Germany, but the argument was shelved when it was discovered no one had an electric razor.

Starsky was just as happy to keep his long hair, thank you very much, and scowled in the photo. Much ceremony was made of printing his name in a large ledger and filling in personal details such as height and weight.

Up until then, his hands had still been bound behind him with his own handcuffs, but finally Adams unfastened his left hand, securing the empty cuff to a water pipe along the garage wall. Starsky jerked his right arm in vain, knowing how sturdy the police issue cuffs were. He wasn't going anywhere unless he could pull the water pipe off the wall. That would probably cause a flood, as a potential side benefit. This train of thought kept him occupied for the few minutes he was left alone while the others busied themselves across the room with some sort of equipment.

The garage was littered with the usual assortment of tools and cast off garden furniture most garages contained. Starsky calmed himself by mentally choosing the hammer and saw as weapons. He'd been relieved of his gun after Camden and Jake had shoved him into the car, but the shoulder holster was still heavy across his shoulders, his Henley shirt now as sweaty as the Hawaiian shirt had been. Despite the setting sun, it had to be eighty or more degrees inside the garage, the dusty air thick when he tried to breathe in deeply with his raw throat.

"I'm ready," Adams announced. "Camden, get a good grip on his arm."

Starsky was ready this time and lashed out with his right leg, kicking a small pile of firewood logs at the bodybuilder, but this didn't improve his situation at all, since he was bound to the water pipe and couldn't move fast enough to escape the resulting blow to the ribs. His chest aching, he was captured and held fast in Camden's unrelenting grip.

Jake took a tight hold of Starsky's left arm, pinning it down on the workbench. Because of the angle of Camden's body, Starsky couldn't see what they were planning to do to him as a loud buzzing noise filled the garage, a lot like a dentist's drill. He yelled loudly when he felt the first sharp pricks of the tattoo needle into his forearm. They were imprinting a number on his arm, like his Aunt Chava's!

"Nooo!" he yelled, using every ounce of strength to jerk away, the tattoo needle skittering across the sensitive skin of his wrist.

"Hold him down, I can't work if he's wiggling around like that!" John protested sourly. He'd been trying to ink in a simple number one, but the movement had jostled his hand so it had a slight curve more like a number six.
"You can't do this to me!" Starsky protested, but Camden had regained his hold and he could hardly move. The machine's whine deepened as the tattoo needle once again bit into his skin, leaving an indelible mark. "This isn't Germany! Hutch'll come after you, I swear!"

"Shut him up," Van Geller said impatiently. "This is taking too long and I'm hungry."

The upper cut to his jaw silenced him, and he slumped bonelessly in his massive captor's arms to allow John Adams finish inking in the hideous numerals.

*****

The next few hours were ones Hutch would rather have forgotten. No one had seen Starsky since Washington had left him at his house, and no one knew where he'd gone.

Micah had been instructed to return to his home with Dave Murphy and additional manpower was sent over to cover all approaches to his street. With the multitude of freeways in the greater Los Angeles area, there was no one particular logical route from Starsky's home to the Temple Emmanuel, so squad cars were sent out to search a variety of routes to and from both destinations. But there were too many variables--if he had stopped, if he had been forced off the road. It would take all night to adequately search every mile. Hutch even covered the streets he knew Starsky frequented most often, but found nothing. The darkness only hampered their search, and he returned to police headquarters very discouraged.

Hutch couldn't sit still. He was a restless bundle of nerves, edgy and tense with a single purpose: to find Starsky before those bastards did something too terrible to contemplate. He knew all too well the kind of threats van Geller had made regarding his plans for Micah Bachman.

Washington watched with a combination of understanding for what Hutch was going through and an overwhelming guilt that he should never have let David Starsky out of his sight.

"Did you see anyone? Anything?" Hutch questioned for the hundredth time.

"No, Hutch, nothin'," He said miserably. "We thought it was the Rabbi they were after. We...Ah did worry about Davey bein' alone, but...Hutch, he was gonna change clothes an' drive to the temple."

"We know he did that much." Hutch took a breath, his head pounding with tension. "Why were you worried?"

"The same reason you were--are. He jumps off cliffs without a net. An' he's been..."

"Depressed," Hutch stated flatly, his eyes focused on the ugly pink and red piggy bank Starsky kept on their communal desk. "He's so fragile right now I'm afraid he'll break into little pieces."

"He tol' me you worried about him." Washington gave a little smile, "I just keep thinkin' I shoulda gone in the house with him, or somethin'."

"That wouldn't have done any good," Hutch pointed out, "Whatever happened happened after he left."

"Yeah." Washington settled himself into a chair, rubbing the palms of his large hands together. "Right before he got out of the car, we was listenin' to the radio and 'Bad Moon Rising' came on."

"He hates that song."

"Remember that night we went to Huggy's? He said it felt like someone was walkin' over his grave.
"My Granny Mae-Belle woulda called that a premonition."

"He's not dead, Brick," Hutch said fiercely.

Dobey came bursting through the door connecting his office with the squadroom, talking loudly. "We got a search warrant for the Brotherhood offices."

"I'm going," Hutch announced, finally some positive action.

"I don't think that's such a wise idea, son." Dobey frowned at his best detective, aware how hard the inactivity was on him. "You're undercover..."

"Fuck that," Hutch growled. "It's blown to kingdom come. I've been in that room. I know where the secrets are hidden. They did this to Starsky, Captain..."

"You know he'll jist follow you if y'don't let him come," Washington observed wryly.

"If any of the Brotherhood are there and recognize you...don't start anything," Dobey warned, shaking a stubby finger under the blond detective's nose.

"Not a chance." Hutch started for the door, with Washington and Stu Myers behind him. "I want it all legal, tied with a big red bow that will hang that bastard van Geller and his cohorts up by their necks. They should rot in hell forever."

A thorough search at 1412 So. Main storefront turned up the pictures and addresses Hutch had already known were there, showing prior intent to kidnap Starsky. The detectives spent a long time bagging nearly every piece of paper in the building, taking away books on white supremacy, Hitler youth and every pamphlet Hutch had ever worked on. There were some of the mailing lists he'd used for addressing envelopes, but not all of them, by far. Unfortunately, nothing of any real consequence was found that in any way linked van Geller, Sherman and Adams to the bombing. Also, Hutch realized belatedly that he hadn't seen any records of bank accounts or bankbooks. And he knew perfectly well they existed.

"We need to search their houses," Hutch said quietly to Washington. "I know where Adams' place is, and we've got the addresses for Sherman and van Geller's. There's due cause, since they could be holding Starsky there."

"So we don't even need a warrant," Washington agreed.

"At this point, I couldn't care less if we do need one. C'mon." Hutch led the way, only to be blocked as Dobey came in the front door.

"Hutchinson, Starsky's car was found."

Any last ray of hope Hutch was harboring in his soul dried up at the news. "W-where was it?"

"Parked at a burrito place about two miles from Starsky's house," Dobey supplied, "And the counter crew know him personally. They say he comes in all the time, but nobody saw him tonight."

"How kin that be if his car is parked there? And why didn't they notice that big red parade float in the lot all night long?" Washington pressed.

"Apparently the place was jammed with customers at about 5:30, roughly when he would have been there, from what you say, Washington, and nobody saw the car because it was parked at the back of the lot behind the cook's VW bus."
"Which hid it from the street until the cook left," Hutch said in almost a whisper, "It was Burrito Barn?" Dobey nodded his assent. "I passed right by there when I was driving around looking for him."

Spurred by the discovery of Starsky's car, Hutch and Washington headed for van Geller's home. It was the most logical place to find any clues to Starsky's whereabouts and any incriminating evidence against van Geller himself. Other units were dispatched to Sherman and Adams' home, but nothing was found. No Starsky, but also no van Geller, Sherman or Adams. They returned to police headquarters drained and weary just before dawn.

"Where could they all be?" Washington asked perplexed. "Kinda suspicious that all three of 'em's gone."

"It's more than suspicious, they have him for sure, but where?"

The locations of several meeting places and the addresses of members had been found and were currently being searched, but Hutch didn't hold out much hope that anyone but van Geller, Adams and Sherman knew where Starsky was. He knew how they worked, the need to know was on a day to day basis. As far as those three were concerned, very few people needed to know much of anything.

Curving his hands around his umpteenth cup of overly strong coffee, Hutch could feel his nerves screaming under his skin. He was so exhausted that he was afraid if he just closed his eyes for a minute, he'd fall asleep standing up. There had been little progress in the search for David Starsky, but he refused to let himself think the worst. Starsky was a survivor, he'd proven that more than once recently.

"Hutch, man, you're gonna fall over. Go home, get some sleep," Sam Wong said sympathetically.

"I can't. Not now." Hutch focused on the shorter man, wishing he could focus his thoughts as easily. "There's something I'm missing. It's like I know something important, but I can't remember what it is."

The jangling phone interrupted his train of thought, banishing even the smallest fragment of memory he'd been pursuing. "Brick? Can you answer that?" he called a trifle too loudly.

"Sure thang." Washington was just glad to silence the noise. "Detective squadroom."

"I need to speak with a Detective Washington," a familiar voice said.

"Well, that's me. What'd you need?"

"My name is Andrew Cleary. We met...?"

"Y'sir, Ah remember. Ah'm sorry, Mistah Cleary, but we're not releasin' any statements to the press right now."

"No, I have something you and Rabbi Bachman need to see," the reporter said urgently. "It was delivered to my office before I arrived this morning."

"Yes?" Washington asked cautiously, beckoning to Hutch.

"It's a picture of Detective Starsky and a note addressed to the Rabbi." Cleary held the disquieting photo in his hand. "And since there isn't word one about an officer missing in the morning edition, I suspect you don't want this information all over the place."
"We'll be ovah directly," the big black man said urgently. "Have you shown those to anyone else?"

"No, I called you the minute I found them."

"Good. Sit tight, we're comin'." He hung up the phone, seeing Detective Wong. "Sammy, call Rabbi Bachman an' tell him t'have Murphy drive him ovah t' the LA Times buildin', and meet us in Cleary's office. It's important."

"What?" Hutch asked when the other man had gone off to make the call. "What did Cleary tell you?"

"He's had a message from the bastards who grabbed Starsky."

If they broke speed limit laws driving across town, no squad car took notice, and none of the other cops would have blamed them. A missing partner was a fear all police held. Their job was dangerous enough having to deal with drug dealers, crazed people holding guns and domestic disputes without having to worry about someone kidnapping one of their own.

Bachman and Murphy had the luxury of having been a lot closer to the Times building, so all four arrived at almost the same time, and went into the building together.

"Micah," Hutch greeted solemnly. "Sorry to call you out on your holiday."

"Hutch, Starsky's safety is paramount, wild horses wouldn't have kept me away," Micah vowed, just glad there was something he could do to aid in the search.

Once ensconced in a private meeting room, Andrew Cleary brought out the items he'd only told one other person about--his editor. Only he had handled the photo, and he had resisted the urge to open the note. Hutch did that first thing, using tweezers to extract the folded paper from the envelope and slide it into a plastic baggie. That way the Rabbi could read the missive and still preserve any fingerprints the writer might have left.

"We have David Starsky," Micah read in an unsteady voice. "He is prisoner number one. There will obviously be more, one a day until the unpeaceful talks cease to exist. Striking a blow for power of the righteous, and believers in a white, Christian America."

"Well, I can tell you van Geller wrote that." Hutch tried to ignore the pounding of his heart against his ribs going twice as fast as usual. "I recognize his verbose style."

"What about the Polaroid?" Washington had followed Hutch's example and placed the picture in a baggie, but Starsky's scowl was still easily seen.

Frankly, looking at it made his heart ache, but Hutch picked up the evidence bag and examined the photo carefully.

"Looks like they roughed him up some," Cleary observed, having already had nearly an hour with the picture. "Some bruises on his face and he's got his hands behind him like he's tied up."

"Yeah," Hutch agreed. "He's in some kind of garage or warehouse. There's pipes behind him and a cinderblock type wall." He wanted to hold onto the proof that Starsky was still alive, or at least had been when the photo was taken, until he was found, but let the others all take a good look at the image to see if it sparked any clues to his whereabouts.

"Listen," Cleary said in the silence while the rest were digesting the recent onslaught of information. "I promise I won't use this until your investigation is successful in finding him. The last thing I want
to do is endanger Starsky's life, but I need some quid pro quo here--an exclusive once it's over?"

"Don't worry, Cleary." Hutch stared down the black haired reporter, having the same reaction to the
man's slightly bristly personality that his partner had had. "You'll get your exclusive, but I swear, you
let any of this slip ahead of time and I'll throw your ass in jail for obstructing justice and any other
offense I can think of."


*****

It was hot.

Like fire. Like an oven.

Why was he in an oven?

Oven? Where did that come from? Hansel and Gretel. Oh, yeah, the witch put Hansel in the oven to
cook him. Satisfied with the explanation, Starsky rested for awhile longer, but eventually the
uncomfortable position he was lying in roused him again.

It was so damned hot, and his hands were pinned behind him, painfully tight.

How could he possibly have slept like this? Damned air conditioner must have died in the night.

Shifting his weight didn't help. Trying to move his hands into a less painful proved impossible. They
were caught--bound together?

Taking in a swift lungful of searing air, Starsky came all the way to consciousness, remembering the
night before's events. Van Geller's goons had grabbed him at the Burrito Barn. They'd handcuffed
his hands and....he didn't want to think about some of the other things right now. Instead he opened
his eyes to take a first look at his prison.

Blue metal walls, sour, bitter smell. About six feet long and three or so feet wide, maybe three and a
half feet high. The blue metal was blisteringly hot when he brushed an arm against the wall.

Registering that he was no longer wearing his over shirt or holster, but still at least decently dressed
in a torn Henley shirt and jeans, Starsky looked up at the ceiling of his cell. Blue metal above him as
well.

A dumpster. He'd been thrown in a dumpster. In some trivial recess of his still addled brain, Starsky
recalled a British flight attendant Hutch had once dated telling him they called them 'skips' in
England. Now, why had they been discussing dumpsters in the first place? Skip, skip, skipping...like
Dorothy and the Tinman on the yellow brick road.

Random thoughts skipped around his brain, disconnected non-sequitors that kept him from focusing
on the gravity of his current situation. It was Yom Kippur--well, that explained why he was so
hungry. It was traditional to fast on Yom Kippur. Except, he didn't think that God would mind if he
just had some water. Maybe fruit juice? A daiquiri with a little yellow umbrella like the one Angela
had when they'd gone to that dreadful Luau place--he'd brought Cynthia along, and Hutch had been
with Angela. Or had that been the Angela he'd dated two years ago? Redhead with big breasts? And
Hutch had been with Kathy McGrath. Yeah, McGrath-like the crime fighting dog. Or was it
McGrath?

Who was Dorothy? He didn't remember Hutch ever dating a Dorothy? But he was the cowardly
lion. He was scared. Van Geller had put him in this blue metal oven to roast until he was dead. And he didn't want to die.

Dorothy, Dotty... Hutch had told him about the waitress at Dino's. She could serve him up a big plate of pancakes and bacon--no make that hash browns and lots of ice cold orange juice. He swallowed in anticipation, his throat raw and bone dry. It was hard to bring up enough saliva to moisten his tongue.

A Popsicle. He wanted a Rocket Popsicle with cherry, grape and garish blue concentric rings of icy fruity flavor. No, not blue.... Yellow brick, the van Geller garage had been constructed of yellow brick, not blue metal. He flinched when he tried to sit up, again pressing his bare forearm against the heated metal walls. Flashing pain shot up his arm to the elbow, causing him to cry out. The skin was burning, like a hot iron had been placed on his arm.

Don't think about it. Sherman or Adams will come back to get him. They couldn't leave him here to die, handcuffed inside a Dumpster in 99 degree heat.

Dorothy! Dorothy was the weather girl on channel 8 news. She had predicted 99 degree heat today--on Wednesday. Today was Yom Kippur, Wednesday, October 7th. He was supposed to go to temple with Micah. Boy, he'd wonder what happened, huh?

But Steroid Camden and Muscles Jake had picked him up instead, and he'd never gotten a burrito. He'd die for a burrito right now. No, that wasn't right, not die...but his stomach growled for one. Keep focusing on the facts, so he could tell Hutch when he was found. Focus on being found. They'd driven him here. Where was here? A dusty, dry patch of dirt in front of a gray house, with lots of cars parked in front. Steroid Camden's dark blue sedan, a green Falcon and a black Mercedes. Mercedes. Mer, mermaids floating in cool ocean waves, black braids tipped with little colored beads . . .Mermaid Meredith.

Oh, God, Meredith. What was she going to think? He'd deserted her. He couldn't call to tell her where he was. She'd come back and find his house empty. Maybe, if he could write her a note? No, he had to call her. "Meredith!" he cried in a hoarse voice.

Nobody would hear him. Nobody would come. He wanted a beer or a coke...yeah, a really big coke, with a scoop of ice cream in it, like his mother used to make in summer time. Now, it was really hot in a New York summer. Humid, smelly, unbearable heat. Everyone knew California had a dry heat. Easier to bear, dry heat. He was so dry, there was hardly any moisture left in his body. What happened when there was no sweat to cool off the body and no water to drink?

Don't think about that. Focus on the facts. But the heat was unrelenting, burning holes in his thinking, unraveling his thoughts. It was too hot. How long had he been here and how long before Hutch found him?

*****

"I don't know what to do." Micah Bachman sat in Captain Dobey's office. "There's two more days. If I continue with the talks then he--van Geller..." It felt good to positively know who was causing the grief and suffering. "Will grab more people and possibly kill them. How can I let that happen?"

"Rabbi." Washington had long come to admire this gentle man, and realized how hard his decision was. "You stop the talks an' van Geller does win. You can't let that happen either."

"Brick, you want me to go forward with the talks?" Micah worried his chin under the beard, the grief over Miriam's death full blown that morning with Starsky's life so tenuous. "That would be as good
"as telling them I don't care what happens to the people who get hurt."

"It will be telling the Brotherhood you don't bow to their threats," Hutch said wearily. "We'll find Starsky before Friday."

"How can you be so sure?" the Rabbi demanded.

"I'm sure we'll find him," Hutch replied. "There's no other answer to give. Keep on with your work, Rabbi, that's what Starsky wanted."

"I'm not so sure that's true." Micah smiled sadly. "He was a bit pessimistic about the whole affair."

"Then, don't listen to him." Washington smiled at his memories of Starsky's complaints. "Listen to us. An' when he's back, he'll tell you we was right."

Sam Wong stuck his head in the room. "Hutch, fingerprints on the letter were ID'd as probably van Geller's. They matched ones we found at the office and his house."

"Good."

"An' the picture?" Washington asked.

"Adams', I think. We didn't have any of them on file, so we just had to match all three of 'em with the most common prints we found at their respective houses."

"Did the office workers get rounded up?" Hutch asked, both dreading and curious to face his former co-workers. They'd be angered by his deception, and disinclined to talk to him, but he desperately needed to know if they had any tiny fact that might be useful to him.

"Two women and three men are here for questioning."

"You're going to tell them you infiltrated their ranks?" Micah asked incredulously. "What if gets back to their leader?"

"It's a chance we need to take." His insides were quaking, but he couldn't let anyone else see how frightened he was. "Maybe we can force van Geller out into the open, where he'll make a mistake. Rabbi. Go back to your work, keep preparations going forward so you're ready on Friday morning."

"The press...how long are you going to keep this from them?"

"As long as pos'ble," Washington declared. "It ain't none of their business."

A quiet knock on the door heralded Dave Murphy's arrival, and Bachman left with his bodyguard, to tell the members of the Alliance for Peaceable Co-existence about the disappearance of one of their own.

Walking back to the squadroom, Hutch sat down at Starsky's desk, surveying the assortment of files piled to one side, wishing they could give him the answer to solve the whole case. Find Starsky and solve the bombing all in one swoop.

"Hutch?" Washington interrupted the other's ruminations. Hutch was still sure he'd forgotten some vital piece of the puzzle. "We should call Meredith b'fore she hears it from somebody else."

"Oh, Lord," Hutch groaned, not wanting to make that particular phone call in the least. "I don't know where she's staying in D.C.."
"Little Davey kept her numbers right there." Washington opened the desk drawer, pulling out a sheet of paper covered with doodles and hastily written phone numbers. There was the outline of a curvy woman next to a series of numbers with Washington D.C. area codes. It felt intrusive to be going through Starsky’s private papers, especially something so intimately connected with his girlfriend.

"I'll talk to her." Hutch nodded reluctantly. "Start questioning the office workers, but leave Elsa Hottstedder and Margaret Larsen for me."

"Sure thang. Ah'll be jist as nice as peach pie, they'll talk their heads off to me."

"Oh, yeah, I'll believe that when I see it." Hutch snorted, already dialing the first combination of numbers on the sheet. What would he tell Meredith? How could he tell her that van Geller could kill Starsky, because he was a Jew, as easily as anyone else would swat a fly?

There was no answer at what he assumed was her condominium, so he dialed the second number. A switch board operator answered, promising to locate Sergeant Joan Meredith in her seminar after Hutch had explained the urgency of the message. There was the usual annoying muzak playing for several minutes before a breathless voice came on the line. "Hello? Hutch? What happened?"

"Meredith, I'm sorry for interrupting your class, but Starsky's missing." He wished there were a less abrupt way to say the frightening words.

"Nooo." Meredith moaned, her heart contracting. "How long?"

"Since last night, around six."

"It's...." She struggled to add the time difference onto the hours he'd been missing, but couldn't quite make the math work in her terrified state, "More than eighteen hours. Hutch, why didn't you call me sooner?"

"We've been looking, but we know now who took him..."

"That bastard you were undercover with..."

"Yes," he admitted.

"I'm leaving for the airport now, I'll get the first west bound plane. I don't know when there's a flight-I won't even stop to get my clothes, I just need to get there. I can..." Her voice broke, the tears so close to the edge she couldn't speak for a moment. "Hutch, find him. Tell him I'm coming."

"Meredith, is there anyone else there? Can you get another officer to drive you?" Hutch stayed on the line long enough to help her arrange transport to the airport and someone to stay with her until then. Hanging up, he felt like he'd ripped her heart out. If so, it lay next to his, somewhere with Starsky. Someplace dark and terrible, where demons lurked. "Where are you, Starsk?" He said aloud.

Margaret Larsen. She was waiting to be interrogated. She'd known Peter van Geller since his childhood. Surely she would know some small detail they'd overlooked. Maybe know a special place? A private place where he could imprison a man. And if his note were to be believed, more than one person. It made him sick to imagine such a place.

If Margaret Larsen knew of such a place, she wasn't about to tell a man she now considered a traitor. Her astonishment at Hutch's real identity hardened her sweet face.

He didn't want to hammer a woman he considered deluded but kind, but his overwhelming fear for
his partner's life caused him to bombard her with questions until her blue eyes were hostile and filled
with tears. "How could you do this to Peter?" she demanded over and over. "You misused his trust
in you."

"He never had any trust in me. Or in you, Margaret," Hutch countered, "If he did, wouldn't he have
told you more details of the operation. You ran the Goddamned office. You printed out those
hateful pamphlets--what did you think was his objective?"

"Education," she spat. "To get out the word."

"With bombs, death threats and guns? We found enough weapons at his house to stock a small
arsenal. What kind of education is that?"

"Protection. The Jews hate us. They could rise up anytime and kill us in our beds." She turned her
back to him, the wooden chair scraping against the linoleum. "If Tobe and Sam Metzger really did
what you've accused them of, which I doubt, then more power to them. But Peter didn't direct them,
or order them, it was their own initiative. They think for themselves."

"The same way you do. Parroting propaganda Hitler wrote over forty-five years ago." Hutch knew
he'd never get any useful information out of her. She'd been indoctrinated for too long, her mind
couldn't be changed. "If you thought for yourself, you'd see past the blinders to the fact that Peter van
Geller is insane. Margaret, you even told me that yourself, in not so many words."

"I never said any such thing. And if you continue to badger me, I want Mr. Klineschmit, Peter's
lawyer here." She straightened her flower-sprigged skirt. "Am I being arrested or may I go?"

"You may go." He signaled the silent female officer guarding the door to let her leave, "An' bring in
Miss Hottstedder."

"She was beginning to really like you." Margaret gave a parting shot, "She'll spit in your face."

After a day like this one, that wouldn't surprise Hutch in the least. Steeling himself for another angry
encounter, he turned to watch as Elsa hesitantly entered the interrogation room. Standing just inside
the door, staring intently at him, she took his breath away. The high cheekbones, sultry blue eyes and
long slivery blond hair should have gotten her jobs gracing the cover of fashion magazines. How sad
that prejudice had so stunted her life that she was reduced to stuffing envelopes in a storefront office.

"What are you doing here?" she spoke finally, rubbing her palms against her full green skirt.

"My name is Detective Sergeant Ken Hutchinson of the LA police department," Hutch said
carefully, introducing himself as he'd done to Margaret. "I was undercover with your organization to
find out about the bombing of Temple Beth Sharon."

"And you think Mr. Van Geller did it?" she asked astutely.

"What do you think?"

"Well, this explains a lot." She waved her hand to include the whole department.

"Why you were feeling out my politics at dinner."

"Will you sit down?" he asked politely, "You're not under arrest. We just want to ask you about the
activities at 1412 So. Main."

"You were there." She said bluntly, her face angry, but also confused.
"Did you ever overhear any conversations that led you to believe there was more going on than just propaganda? That illegal activities were being sanctioned?"

"Of course, everyone knew that," she answered after a moment. "You did, too."

"That was why I was undercover," he reminded her. "What activities were you aware of?"

"Ummm...do I have to answer that?" She shook her head, "Mr. Sherman said we should always call Mr. Klineschmit."

"If you want your lawyer, you may call him, but you are not under arrest and nothing you say will be used against you in a court of law."

"I've heard the police would force it out of me," she raised her chin in defiance, "maybe rape..."

"Do you think I would do that to you? There's a female office in the room at all times," Hutch indicated the silent, steely eyed Officer Peterson standing by the door.

"I used to think I trusted you. That you were one of the good guys." Elsa pushed the long pale hair off her face. "Now I don't know good from bad."

"I was always one of the good guys," Hutch nodded encouragingly. He'd always hoped he could persuade Elsa to see the other side, "You were right. Peter van Geller may be insane and I have reason to believe he may have kidnapped a friend of mine."

"Who? A Jew?" she asked incredulously.

"Yes, I have friends who are Jewish, and friends who are black." Hutch realized he wasn't conducting this interrogation very professionally, but it seemed to be keeping Elsa's interest and maybe the more casual atmosphere would cause her to talk more freely.

"When I was a little girl, I knew a Jew," she said softly. "Nanette. How was I supposed to know she was bad? That wasn't a Jew name. I played with her at school, and I liked her. My Papa beat me black and blue..."

"So, you were more careful to find out about people after that?" Hutch said slowly.

"I tried, but it didn't work very well with you, did it?" She stared at him suddenly, realization on her face. "You know that cop-Starsky and the Peace talks guy. That's who you work for, huh?"

"Yes."

"Mr. Van Geller was willing to give little bonuses to any one who could prove they'd...helped the cause, he said. Vandalism, stealing...saying bad things about people to the press. I couldn't do it, but I know T..." She hesitated to name names.

"Tobe Daniels?"

Elsa nodded, ducking her head so her hair hid her expression. "He was going to use his truck to force the...Rabbi off the road. Just to cause a little accident. And...there were lots of other things." Once she started talking, Elsa was determined to finish. She'd worked at the Brotherhood for over six months. She'd heard and witnessed many of the petty felonies and misdemeanors but seemed to have no more knowledge of the bombing than any of the other peons. van Geller's truly amazing feat wasn't that he'd bombed the temple but that he'd managed to keep it a relative secret from the others in his organization.
"Thank you, Elsa," Hutch said sincerely, when she'd indicated she was done. "Is there anything else you'd like to add? Officer Peterson will have your statement typed up and you can sign it."

"Can I ask you a question?" She again rubbed her hands on the silky material of her sleeves, leaving damp palm prints. "Am I prejudiced?"

"Yes, I would say so," Hutch agreed. "Everyone has some degree of prejudice, but you've let it take over your life. You can't get a job where there are black people—or talk to people who are different than you are. How can you get ahead that way?"

"Is there a way to undo that?" she asked obliquely. "If I wanted to, I mean?"

"Just make up your mind to," Hutch said simply, feeling a ray of optimism for the first time in this miserable day. "Go out of your way to talk to someone you would have avoided before."

"Or attend those peace talks," she said softly.

"That would work too." He stood to escort her out. "If you ever need to talk, you have my number here—and I'm in the book, under Hutchinson."

"I thought Chambers was a nice name." She straightened her shoulders, shrugging off his light touch on her arm. "I guess everything I thought was wrong." Almost out the door, she turned back. "What happened to your friend? Starsky?"

"He's missing, and no one knows where. van Geller took him, and plans to kill him. If you know anything about that, please tell me."

"I was just an office worker." She shook her head. "But, John Adams would know. He did all the real dirty work. I once heard he found...."

"Yes?"

"He found girls for Mr. van Geller—and he didn't treat them nicely."

"van Geller, or Adams?" Hutch closed the door, holding his breath for more revelations.

"van Geller hurt women. Lots of them."

*****

It was so quiet Sherman could hear the birds in the oak trees ringing van Geller's property chirping in the late afternoon air. A wind had come up, not dissipating the heat any at all, making it somehow hotter, unsettling and stifling. He stared up into the blue sky where there were grayish dark clouds piling on the horizon. A hawk banked lazily in the thermal upstreams, soaring aloft like a kite let loose from its string.

If he hadn't known better, Sherman would haven imagined himself alone, far from any other humanity. Camden and Jake had departed the night before and then, both van Geller and Adams had left some hours ago, trolling, as van Geller called it, for women. So, there was no one else in the house, but Albert Sherman wasn't alone and the knowledge unnerved him. David Starsky was imprisoned not fifty feet from where he stood just outside the sliding glass door to the house.

This was more than he'd bargained for. He was no longer willing to condone torture and rape. Oh, yes, capturing the cop had been his idea, but as Peter had done with all Sherman's ideas, he'd somehow twisted and perverted it into another thing all together. Sherman had wanted to use the Jew
cop as a bargaining chip.

Although why it had ever mattered to him now seemed unclear. He'd never really cared what Micah Bachman did. Jews had their own agenda, as did blacks and other ethnic inferiors. They were really no concern of his. Helmut van Geller had left his grandson a huge, almost obscene amount of money, and now most of it was Albert Sherman's. Peter was going to hang himself with his increasingly insane schemes, that much was obvious. And Sherman wasn't about to stick around one more night. He was rich now, and this was one idea he wasn't about to have subverted from under him. He had a degree from MIT, for God's sake. There were places to go, things he could do.

The path ahead was clear. He had to disappear and become someone else before van Geller's whole operation exploded in his face. Already, loyal members of the Brotherhood were calling them to report the wholesale round up of dozens of van Geller's followers and the midnight raids on most of their properties. He could no longer go back to his home near Waverly.

Thank God they'd had the sense to keep this one a secret. It was their gold mine in more ways than one. All the most important plans had been hatched in the little gray house on the golden hillside. All the most incriminating papers were stored here. Helmut had been so proud to have his grandson follow in his bigoted steps he'd never asked what exactly they were doing with his money. Sherman wondered if the news of the bombing was what had killed the old man. The fact that his grandson was now a murderer. On the other hand, Helmut himself had buried a few bodies in his time, too.

There was one last thing to do before he departed. The cop. He would surely die in that dumpster without food or water. An explosives expert, Sherman was proud to be. He was no torturer. He took a resolute step into the yard, past the little shed Adams had spent the afternoon finishing. At least one place was livable and Starsky could stay there until he was released.

Just as Sherman put his hand on the hot metal of the dumpster, van Geller's sleek black Mercedes pulled into the drive. Jerking his fingers away before they burned, Sherman thought that he hadn't heard a sound from the man inside the metal prison in many hours.

Adams bounded from the car, grinning maliciously as van Geller pulled the dark haired beauty from the back. van Geller always went for dark, ethnic looking girls. The ones with swarthy skin and mysterious eyes that flashed when they were scared. He said they were the only kind he was attracted to. Unsuitable girls, those too low for marriage or bearing proper blond haired children. Only good enough for rough, nasty sex.

"Hey, Al!" John greeted his friend, " Took us a little longer 'cause there's a fire about ten miles away. We had to take the frontage road part of the way."

"Is it coming this way?" Sherman asked with concern, looking the pretty girl over indifferently. He never understood van Geller's lust for such gypsy girls. He had to get away before the fire prevented him from leaving the area. Or worse, brought firefighters and police nosing around.

"Nah. The wind'll blow it away from here." Peter held onto the girl with a proprietary grip, drawing her away from the car.

"Where is here?" The girl asked curiously, still not quite sure whether she should be scared or not. He'd said he'd give her a place for the night, food and money. But this was a long way from LA, even if the man was as blond as a God and hung like nobody she'd ever seen. He'd been aggressive in the car, demanding a blowjob, but it was no more so than others she'd met, and she didn't have any place else to go that night.

"Bring her in the house, Peter." Adams laughed. "I'm ready for a party."
"Sandrine is such a pretty name." Peter hung his heavy arm around her neck, preventing her from walking unassisted. "I really want to get better acquainted."

"Listen, you said there was someplace I could crash?" She pulled as far away from his arm as possible, but he still forced her into the house.

"In due time," van Geller murmured, closing the door.

In due time, Sherman thought, it was past time. He abandoned his original plan to free the cop. He couldn't do it now, with the others back home. If either of them had an inkling of his treachery, they'd kill him. It was high time he was away. Before they discovered the huge withdrawals he'd made. Before they discovered that the payments for this monstrosity of a prison camp would in all probability bounce. Way past time he was gone. With only a backward glance at the house to make sure he had no witnesses, Albert Sherman slid into his car and drove away.

*****

Starsky stirred inside his stifling metal prison, hearing voices and car sounds. Someone was there! He raised his head, but it was so heavy, and the pain resounded through his brain whenever he moved.

"Hey!" he called, his voice too weak to be heard. No one would come anyway. It had been hours since the last time he'd heard sound of people, but they never came over to open the lid on his prison. He'd tried, earlier in the day, to push against the metal roof with his head, but it was tightly secured, and only succeeded in causing more pain to his already battered skull.

He settled forward again, head resting on his bent knees, bound hands limp behind him. If he didn't move, no part of his bare-skinned arms touched the heated metal of the dumpster. If he didn't move, just let his mind drift, he didn't feel the jarring pain in his cramped muscles and mangled wrists. The numbness was better.

Back when he'd tried fighting Camden off in the garage, before they'd...he'd wrenched his right, handcuffed wrist hard enough to break the skin. Ever since, the steel cuffs had bit further into his tendons and ligaments, blood leaking down onto his hand. Now, when he tried to turn his palm to relieve the pressure on his wrist, it felt like the metal scraped against bone. Clenching his jaw with the pain, he closed his eyes.

*Drift away.* Don't think about what was happening. Escape into empty numbness.

_Hutch, I'm sorry things turned out this way._

_Meredith... what could he say to her? I love you._

He thought he heard sounds of crying, of a girl screaming, then abruptly, there was no more sounds. Starsky's heart pounded, someone was there, but they were no better off than he. Was it Meredith? Where was she?

Where was he?

*****

Parking his car at the curb outside of the baggage claim area, Hutch scanned the crowds of weary looking airplane travelers, looking for Joan Meredith. The D.C. officer who'd helped her get to Dulles had phoned with her arrival time, and Hutch felt it was his duty to meet her. The flight had to have been devastating enough, knowing she was flying home to learn of her lover's kidnapping. There was no reason she had to take a cab home from the airport, too. She needed to be among
friends, and to be truthful, Hutch did too.

He finally spotted her coming down the terminal escalator, her pretty face tight and pinched. At some point in the weeks since he'd seen her last she'd lost the tiny bead tipped braids and now had her curly black hair pulled into a tight chignon at the top of her head. It gave her a much less playful appearance, suitable for someone in her rank and the current circumstances.

"Meredith!" he hailed her.

"Hutch, has there been any word? Anything at all?" she demanded immediately, her voice full of unnamed fears.

"No." He hated to have to admit it. Starsky had been missing for more than 24 hours and they were no closer to finding him than they had been yesterday evening. "I'll drive you home."

"No, I want to go to headquarters." Meredith headed towards the exit doors. "I want to be in on the investigation."

Since she'd left so abruptly, she hadn't packed her suitcases and had no reason to wait for any baggage. Against his better judgment, Hutch agreed to drive her back to the police department. He was glad to be back in his familiar beat-up Ford, with all its memories of cruising the streets with Starsky. It might not be any fancier than the Pinto, but it had one redeeming quality. A police band radio.

Checking in with dispatch, he was surprised to hear Washington had been trying to get a hold of him.

"Hutchinson," he identified himself. "Go ahead, Brick."

"Hutch, we got something." Washington shook the paper he was holding for emphasis. "The plant business--Naturally Select--'planted' the bomb at the convention center. Tobe Daniels and Edward Fredricks are listed as employees."

"Any direct link to van Geller?" Hutch pressed, frustrated that he was still twenty minutes from headquarters. Luckily, traffic on the freeway was moving relatively quickly now that it was past rush hour. "Who is listed as owner?"

"Another corporation. Helmut Peter Inc."

"Oh, shit." Hutch had to stomp hard on the brakes to avoid slamming into the car in front of him and got a terrified squeak from Meredith in the passenger seat. The puzzle piece had just dropped into place. It was taking too much concentration to drive and listen at the same time. He pulled over into the emergency lane, ignoring the annoyed horn honking from other drivers.

"Hutch?" Washington asked, his voice anxious.

"I had to pull over." Hutch explained. "Did you say Helmut Peter Inc?"

"Yeah, does that have significance?"

"Helmut van Geller was Peter van Geller's grandfather."

"Damn."

"Hutch, let me drive," Meredith said urgently. "We'll get there faster."
"Washington! Check out that building company that bought the plastique-find out the owners, subsidiaries, whatever...we'll be there soon."

By the time they swung through the doors of the squadroom, Washington had a grim, satisfied expression on his dark, fierce face. "Joanie," he greeted Meredith. He was the only one outside her family who ever used her first name, and even Starsky wouldn't have dared to call her by a diminutive.

Washington and Meredith worked out of the same precinct since she'd transferred across town to work in a special drug undercover unit. It had also helped her relationship with David Starsky that they weren't working colleagues. Their growing attraction had started when Hutch had been shot in the arm by an underage black burglar and Meredith had infiltrated the gang, but they'd both been careful to avoid having much notice paid to their blossoming friendship until they'd returned to their usual assignments.

Only Hutch and Dobey had known how close the two had grown in such a short time. Then, there had been a period of time where the relationship had become strained and they'd parted. Meredith knew a lot of the problems had been her family's uneasiness with the 'color thing' as Starsky had termed it. She'd transferred to the Sutter precinct, where Washington worked out of, and lost touch with David Starsky for a time. But her heart wouldn't let her forget him, and then she'd heard he'd been shot and was lying comatose in the hospital, not expected to make it. She'd been afraid to go see him. What if her presence made him worse? Their argument had been so hurtful--both lashing out at each other, targeting the most vulnerable places. She didn't want to be seen on the street with a white man, he was afraid of commitments...

In the end she had gone to his bedside. Hutch had been there, and his eyes told her how disappointed he was with her. She'd cried. Starsky had been napping, and her tears had woken him up. He'd been in the hospital for three weeks by then, and was beginning to heal. He'd sat up, reaching for her hand. She'd rested her weight gingerly on the bed, afraid of hurting him, but he'd pulled her closer, both of them crying by then. Neither of them had noticed when Hutch left them alone. But now Starsky was missing and she was really alone.

"Brick." She bit down on her lip, not willing to let the men see her cry.

He pulled her into a bear hug, enveloping her grief with his broad chest and strong arms. "Everybody'll get through this," he whispered to the top of her head.

"Meredith, you need to go home," Hutch said gently, "It'll be hours..."

"No." She disengaged from the big man's hug, absentmindedly petting his hand like a puppy, "You both look even more exhausted than I do...I need to stay, help find him." She searched Hutch's face for understanding, speaking to his soul. "I need to."

"Well." Washington took a deep breath, "Reich Construction..."

"Reich?" Meredith repeated with a gasp.

"We knew Reich Construction bought the plastique," he continued, "Nobody ever thought much 'bout the name--there are people with that last name, Ah guess."

"So who owns Reich? Helmut Peter Inc?" Hutch resisted the urge to insist that Brick speed up. His slow Southern accent was as grating as fingers on a chalkboard.

"No, there's two or three subsidiaries and off shoot corporations between Reich, Helmut Peter and
"Okay." Hutch tried to concentrate past the roaring in his ears. How could he have missed this link? Why hadn't he paid more attention to what the office workers were saying about Helmut van Geller? Why hadn't he ever thought to pass along something as simple as Helmut's name? Because the man was dead? His influence was reaching far beyond the grave. "We...we need addresses for every business associated with them. Search every place."

"No addresses, well, not many." Washington consulted the papers he held. "Ah think a lot o' em are just dummy corporations--and some share the same address. Naturally Select is Fredrick's house address."

"What about this Helmut?" Meredith interrupted, feeling very much at a loss. Starsky had told her about much of the investigation, but she didn't recognize the name.

"Dammit," Hutch swore. "He died the first day I was at the Brotherhood. I never thought that he could be...involved. He guided every damn thing van Geller had ever done, I was blind not to think he still was very much in the picture." He paced restlessly, feeling the hours that had gone by since Starsky had disappeared. If he felt rotten, what did Starsky feel? Was he even still alive? Where could they be holding him?

Sifting through the preliminary reports of the searches done thus far, Meredith struggled to bring herself up to speed on the investigation. "What about Helmut's home?" she asked. "I don't find it here."

"His lawyer," Hutch breathed, reaching for the telephone.

"What? Hutch, it's nearly nine p.m. Who're you callin'?" Washington asked.

"When Helmut died, I overhead that van Geller was inheriting his house. His lawyer would have the address."

"That Klineschmit? He was here earlier when we were questioning everybody. Tough bastard. He won't tell you diddly without a warrant."

"Then get one," Meredith said even before Hutch could say a word.

Eventually, enough arms were twisted, phone calls made and threatening words exchanged that information on van Geller's estate was pried from Hugh Klineschmit and an address procured. Hutch's hand shook as he copied the Temecula location down. This had to be it. Nearly thirty hours had passed since Starsky was taken. Every hour increased his fear, until he was weighted so heavily he wasn't sure he could put one foot in front of the other. Adrenaline kept him moving forward, but icicles stabbed his guts, making breathing a chore.

Dobey had located a small portable television from the snack lounge and mounted it on a filing cabinet for the late working detectives. The eleven o'clock news carried two lead stories. The first showed footage filmed earlier in the evening when Micah Bachman had given a short media statement from his now familiar podium at the Alliance Victorian. The filmed segment didn't last long, but Hutch, Washington and Meredith watched with interest.

"It was revealed to me today that the identities of the people responsible for the bombing of Temple Beth Sharon have been uncovered. I am not at liberty to reveal them at this time due to the sensitive nature of the ongoing investigation, but want to assure the public that my interests are certainly that justice be served and these people be judged for what they have done. I am not part of the legal
system. My focus now must be on the upcoming peace talks and I am determined, despite death threats and rumors of protests that have been intercepted by my offices, to remain true to this important conference.”

“Detectives Starsky and Washington, who were working with me, have had to change their focus to aid their fellow officers in other aspects of the investigation. I wish them success and will miss their steady presence. I hope to have everyone join us on Friday morning for the commencement of the peace talks. Communication is the key to understanding. Thank you." His yarmulke topped red head bowed, not responding to any of the questions thrown at him. His image faded, going back to the channel 7 newsroom.

"We have live feed to show you now." The earnest dark haired newscaster faced the camera with a serious expression on his face. "The fires are still burning in the San Vicente area above San Diego and firefighters say they believe that they may be getting the upper hand on this blaze. However..." The picture changed to show the flickering orange flames of a different fire consuming grassland and trees, a row of endangered houses on a ridge just about the fire line. Shadowy figures dressed in heavy firefighter gear including full-face masks hacked back the brush with axes and hoes. "A fast moving fire has swept up from the west, threatening homes in Murrieta. Authorities are waiting to give an evacuation order to homeowners in the Temecula area, but the winds have been blowing the flames in the opposite direction..."

"That's where Helmut's house is?" Meredith whispered softly, pushing her fingers against her mouth to stop the trembling.

*****

Scratching his naked chest, Peter van Geller smiled smugly at the frightened girl sobbing in the corner of the bed. It was so easy. Every girl always opened her thighs for him eventually. Some bitches took more persuasion than others did, and Sandrine had played hard to get. He liked that, in a perverse way. It made the conquest all the sweeter.

He was on top of the world, with all his goals lined up so perfectly. When he was a child, Grandpa Helmut had told him to visualize what he wanted, then go out and get it. He had done just that, and was now reaping his rewards. Everything was coming together now like the fates had smiled their benediction upon him and he was receiving a grace from God. Those dark years when everything had seemed confused and alien were gone.

His blond hair shone in the overhead lights like a halo of gold. Crowned by his Aryan ancestors to lead the chosen ones into a world of tall, blond pure bloodlines. No foreigners. No Jews. No imperfections... no mental illnesses. Nobody could label him any longer. He'd show those doctors with their bug-eyed stares and scribbly little notes labeling him as paranoid, delusional...Everyone knew that true Aryans didn't have any of those imperfections. They'd been bred out. He was a van Geller. Hitler himself had acknowledged their Aryan line for generations back through the centuries.

Sandrine pulled futilely on her torn blouse, sneaking peaks at the golden monster through her ragged black hair. He still looked so gorgeous, even with long scratches down his chest from her fingernails. His voice had caressed her name, all the while he was hurting her. How could that face, that beauty be covering such as vile soul?

"Peter!" Adams called from the living room.

"Stay where you are, Little raven." Peter took a last look at her before locking the bedroom door. He'd had special locks put on all the doors and windows the first day the carpenters had started their labors. Important to be safe in dangerous times like these.
He arrived in the blue carpeted room in time to hear Bachman explain his detective friends' absences. "Damn fucking kike asshole!" Van Geller exploded, sending a lamp crashing to the ground with a swipe of his hand. "He didn't even blink an eye when he lied! Jews have no loyalty."

"They're not gonna stop the talks just cause you took the cop." Adams tried unsuccessfully to keep the sneer out of his voice. Van Geller had been putting on airs all afternoon, a self proclaimed commandant of a camp with only two prisoners.

"You think you have a brain in that thick head?" Peter growled, his handsome face a mask of fury. "Who asked you to express an opinion, huh? Couldn't even have made it through high school if I didn't do your homework for you, huh, John? You'd better watch your step, I know what you want, and it's never going to happen."

Stung, Adams saw any chance of a tangle with the luscious Sandrine going down in flames. "What're you gonna do?" He asked with the right amount of submission.

"Got to think. Make some food--there's bacon in the kitchen."

John scuttled out to the stove without a word, knowing van Geller had no compunctions about hurting anyone he perceived being in his way. Once Peter had taken the corkscrew on John's own Swiss army knife and driven the point into Adams' forearm without a change of expression on his tanned, strong jawed face.

And to this day John wasn't at all sure why, except maybe--probably--to test his loyalty as a friend. Adams obviously had passed the test; he'd been van Geller's right hand man since sophomore year of high school. The little wound on his left forearm had left a jagged scar, similar to the stylized S on the collar of Hitler's SS guards. It had always been John Adams' badge of honor.

Bacon was already sizzling in the pan on the counter top stove when the phone rang. As it was close to midnight, Adams paused before picking up the handset. Who would be calling here? Must be Sherman. The weasel had snuck off in the dark while they were dealing with Sandrine's first little escape attempt. Had to be Sherman. Who else knew the number?

"Answer the Goddamned phone!" Peter shouted, pulling on a gray t-shirt bearing Hitler's image in black and white.

"Yeah?" Adams said into the receiver.

"It's Margaret Larsen," a quivery voice said. She'd obviously been crying. "Is Peter there?"

"Oh, Margaret." John was vastly relieved, there was no threat from her. He summoned the boss and went back to preparing the midnight snack of bacon, lettuce and tomato sandwiches.

"Why'd you call here? How'd you know where I was?" van Geller demanded.

"I've been calling everywhere, Peter. I...the police were questioning everyone all afternoon."

"We've been told," he replied curtly, "What d'you know that I don't?"

His tone was so accusatory the older woman faltered for a moment. "I didn't say anything to betray you, but...Ken Chambers...he's with the police. His name is Hutchinson."

"Chambers is a cop?" van Geller roared.

"He questioned me," she added timidly. "But I didn't tell him anything. I just wanted to tell you, but
no one knew where you were. I called everywhere. I thought you were going to sell this house...to make a camp?"

"Stop yammering, Margaret, you've told me what you wanted. Get off the phone, I've got important things to do." He flung the phone at the wall-mounted cradle, nearly missing the receiver hook, but at the last possible second the handset settled into its proper place.

"Chambers was a cop?" John repeated dumbly.

"Hutchinson is a spy," van Geller corrected. "And in times of war, y'know what we do to spies?"

"Execution," Adams supplied, proud to know he would get that answer correct.

"Very good, Johnny-boy." van Geller awarded him with his most charming smile, taking a large bite from the finished sandwich. "Eat up, it'll be a long night. I'm leaving you in charge of the camp."

"Where are you going?"

"To find a traitor, and start a war. You are on the precipice of a new era, my friend. It's time we took control-time to come out of the shadows and proclaim our dominance. This is a nation of good, white Americans. Everybody else better leave, or we'll squash them where they live."

"Hallelujah." John saluted him with a beer, filled with an awe he couldn't even describe.

"By the way," van Geller finally noticed the absence of his other lieutenant, "where's Al?"

"Dunno." Adams shrugged his bulky shoulders, "Been gone a long time. Y'know he doesn't like it when you're with a girl.

"Always did think he was strange. He'd better get back soon. Tell him make sure everything is finished on that big bomb. Those peace talks are going to blow everyone away."

*****

"What do you mean we can't go there?" Hutch roared, talking loudly to hear himself above the thunderous pounding in his head.

"Fire authorities aren't allowing any traffic in or out of that area until the fire is under control," Dobey growled, just as angry. He'd just been on the phone with the Fire Marshall for Riverside County. Temecula had never been evacuated but emergency crews were encouraging homeowners to find safer locations. No one could predict the path of a fire and it had already burned thousands of acres. Firefighters from all over the state had been brought in the battle the two southern California blazes and were finally getting the upper hand, but it was a dark, windy night. Any extraneous traffic was being expressly forbidden. Since they couldn't absolutely prove that David Starsky was being held on Cutting Ave. they weren't going to be allowed through.

"What about the people who live beyond the fire line?" Meredith whispered, her body so cold she was shivering, and it wasn't from faltering air conditioner.

"They aren't evacuating the area where van Geller's house is, but only limited access is being allowed."

"Captain!" Hutch protested. "This is a life or death situation!"

"At first light they'll let us take a helicopter past their barriers, for emergency purposes," the captain
explained more gently, as frightened as the rest of them were for Starsky's safety. "It's past two in the morning, only four hours until it's light."

"Four hours is too long for Starsky." Washington swallowed tightly. "How d'we even know..."

"Don't say it, Brick," Hutch warned.

"All of you go home, change clothes, get food and rest and be at the heliport at six."

"I can't sleep," Meredith said.

"He's right." Washington rubbed her slender shoulders gently, "Need to be strong when we find Little Davey."

"Does he really let you call him that?" She smiled sadly, tears in her eyes.

"No, that's just why Ah do," he admitted.

Since Meredith still had no transportation, Hutch walked with her back to his car. By unspoken agreement, he drove them both back to Starsky's little white house. The interior of the house was stuffy, the hot air stale, and Meredith opened a window in the bedroom to let the night cooled wind air out the room.

"There's a harvest moon." She pointed at the orange globe riding in the eastern sky, looking like an enormous pumpkin.

"It's a bad moon." Hutch dismissed it. "Eerie color, it's not normal."

"It's looking down on us and on Starsky." She reached up her fingers as if she could touch the distant hunk of celestial rock. "I hope he can see it, too."

Hutch gave Meredith first chance at the hot water, wandering around his friend's kitchen, restless and exhausted at the same time. He didn't want to eat, could no longer think coherent thoughts and craved sleep like a drug. Even if he did succumb to slumber, he'd only get two hours before he had to be up again. It hardly seemed worth it.

Meredith found her favorite t-shirt emblazoned with the phrase *I got leid in Hawaii* and a pair of jeans she'd left after the Labor Day picnic. Starsky had laundered them and left everything folded neatly in the drawer he'd designated hers. The t-shirt boasted the truth. She and Starsky had taken their only real vacation together on Maui, and been roundly teased when they'd returned without deep tans. They'd spent an inordinate amount of the time in the hotel room, dressed in little more than flower necklaces.

Hutch had obviously discovered some of his own clothes from Starsky's stores, since there was a red plaid shirt and clean khakis draped over a chair next to the bathroom. She could hear the shower starting up again and walked into the living room, feeling both comforted and fearful to be in her lover's home without him. Hutch had put out a plate of apple slices and cookies on the coffee table. It wasn't until she'd reached down to take an Oreo that she noticed the photos still scattered across the table's surface.

Her hand moving without actual thought, Meredith selected the uppermost picture, breaking into sobs at the sight of Miriam's beautiful face. It wasn't as if she'd known Miriam Bachman that well, but the two couples had gotten together a handful of times for dinner or fun conversation. Naturally, the two women had befriended each other, and discovered a common interest in teaching children. Miriam actually had a teaching credential, which she'd planned to use once Bachman got around to
establishing a Hebrew school at their synagogue. Meredith wanted to start a drug prevention program that would be used across the state and even the country. Both women had even indulged in some fantasy family planning, going so far as to teasingly choose names for each other's children.

If Miriam's picture had been hard to see, David's was worse. She could barely make out the images on the little square of photo paper, because of the tears streaming down her face. Hugging a photo of Starsky leaping over the sand for the volleyball to her chest, she gave into grief, sobbing into the back of the sofa. When Hutch emerged, freshly dressed and wet headed, from the bedroom, he sank down beside her, pulling the terrified woman into a comforting hug.

Sleep overcame them both and they slumbered, each huddled on a separate end of the couch. Meredith had the lion's share, her long legs taking up half the cushions, so that Hutch was sprawled awkwardly half on the floor, with one foot propped up on the coffee table.

In his dreams, he again desperately searched, only this time he knew who he was looking for. Starsky. But he was still no nearer to finding his best friend, and he prowled endless corridors, plunging down dark, fetid smelling tunnels with a thudding heartbeat that drummed steadily in his ears, echoing the sound of his foot falls.

There was glimpses of fire and overwhelming heat burning the soles of his feet when he finally saw a small crumpled body up ahead. The hands were tied behind the back, and he could see his own hands reach down to touch the man. The pounding heartbeat he'd been hearing had stopped, leaving a dread, unnatural silence. His fingers touched the body, who's face he still hadn't seen. With a terrible jolt, Hutch realized the body was cold. He was dead. Noooo....!

Jerking upright, Hutch slid off the couch, his breath coming in shuddering sobs. It was just a dream. There was no proof that Starsky was dead.

"Hutch?" Meredith's still sleepy voice had a terrified edge. "What happened?"

"A dream." He tried to rid himself of the dreadful images. They weren't true. Couldn't be.

"Starsky in danger?" She carefully straightened the crumpled corners of the photograph she still clutched. "I've had it too."

*****

Y'hay shlomo rabbo min sh'mayo. (May there be abundant peace from Heaven)

The Hebrew words tumbled around Starsky's fevered brain, but he couldn't remember the rest of the prayer. All the lessons Micah had tried to cram into his head, and he couldn't remember the Kaddish. One of the most important prayers.

Oh, God, Jehovah, Lord.... Whatever you are called, help me now and in the hour of my death.

There was no doubt he was going to die. He had been locked in this prison for too long. The unceasing heat had leeched every drop of fluid from his body, and he could feel the urge to rest overwhelming him, Just give up. Just let go. Except it wasn't his nature. It was so hard to quit.

In the first hours, he'd been embarrassed when he'd had to give into nature's needs and wet himself, unable to even to move a few feet away to relieve himself in a corner of the dumpster. But now he would have welcomed the feel of warm liquid down his leg.

There was nothing left. He couldn't remember the last time he'd even felt the need. Dry. Evaporated. Gone to dust. Dust to dust, ashes to ashes.
Even though I walk through the shadow of death,
I fear no evil, for thou art with me.

But there was so much evil here. Peter van Geller came from hell.

Was it still the Day of Atonement? Oh, God, I'm sorry for what I've done....

Starsky struggled to even swallow, his body on fire. It was so hard to think. He was paying for his sins, now wasn't he? The mixture of Christian and Jewish doctrine confused him. How did he start? Surely St. Peter didn't greet the Jewish seeking heaven?

What was it Catholics said? Bless me Father, for I have sinned...?

Well, that certainly wasn't correct. Concentrate. Get it right in the end.

He'd shot and killed people in the course of his job. He'd lied, broken the law to help others, sworn, lusted and stolen...never to harm others, never to cruelly cause pain or suffering, did that count for anything? He didn't have time to reconcile with the persons he'd wronged, but the faces of his friends and family swam before him. He'd never see any of them again. Mom, Nicky...Hutch, more like a brother to him than Nick had ever been. Brick, Micah and even Huggy and Dobey. Were they safe? And Meredith, please God, keep Meredith safe and far away from this hell.

Kapparah. Atonement...Please God, don't judge me harshly, I tried to be a good cop. I tried to help. In the end, it was all I could do. He could almost see God's hand writing his name in the big book, on the death column.

Was it still Yom Kippur? He'd fasted long enough, hadn't he? Because he was really hungry right now. So very hungry. And thirsty. Had he mentioned that, God?

Starsky accepted his fate, accepted what God had for him. If it was death, he was ready, in this stinking, metal garbage bin. Van Geller had thrown him away like so much refuse. He would go peacefully into death, but did he have to forgive that bastard van Geller, too? That was almost too much to ask.

Ha ya'aseh sholam alaymu. (May he bring peace upon us)

Vimru Omein (And say amen)

The last words of the prayer came to him in the dark.

*****

The rosy first rays of the rising sun gilded the small golden helicopter squatting on the helipad like a giant prehistoric bug poised for flight. There was a heavy mugginess in the already hot air, unnatural for such an early hour. The humidity promised rain for later in the afternoon or evening. That would come as a welcome relief, but for now there was an oppressive quality as if even nature felt the coming of evil.

Dobey stopped the department issue Ford in the parking lot, pointing out the waiting chopper to his detectives. He hated flying, and this particular helicopter didn't look big enough to carry two people, much less four. Getting out of the car, he wiped his glistening brown face with a big handkerchief, It was like stepping out into a blast furnace--no, make that a Swedish sauna. It was hot, damp and miserable.
"Now this is down home weather." Washington laughed, his teeth white in his dark face, but even he was sweating heavily.

Just walking across the tarmac raised beads of sweat under Meredith's bra straps, and she shifted her shoulders to relieve the irritation.

Hutch’s fair skinned face was already red with heat and glistening with perspiration. It struck him as ironic that he was going after a white supremacist with a team of black cops. That should raise the short hairs on the back of van Geller's neck.

"You Hutchinson?" The pilot stuck out a hand, shaking Hutch's with a firm grasp.
"Fergus McShane." His face bespoke of a wild mixture of ethnically diverse ancestors. Intelligent almond shaped eyes looked out from a face the color of warm honey tea above a wide nose and thick lips. His nappy golden brown hair was corn rowed close to the scalp and gathered in the back into a thick braid the size of a small child's arm. This was a tall, handsome light-haired man that would never fit into Peter van Geller's narrow definition of good white, Aryan Americans.

For the millionth time that month, Hutch thought how fundamentally wrong van Geller's ideas were. America's future wasn't in the segregation of separate ethnic types, but in the melting pot mixture. There shouldn't be a culture clash, but a culture embracing. There was strength in the mix, beauty in the diversity that made up true real Americans. Besides himself, Ken Hutchinson knew of virtually no one he was truly friends with who was a blond, blue eyed Aryan Christian. For that matter, he really didn't care what their racial heritage was. It was the soul and heart of a person that mattered most, and most Americans were good, trustworthy people. Peter van Geller was a tumor that needed to be surgically removed from the population. Then, his influence could be systematically cleansed from the LA area in hopes that the more positive ideas coming from Rabbi Bachman's talks could heal the sickened citizens.

Introducing Washington, Meredith and Dobey, Hutch inquired how soon they could be up in the air. Every moment left Starsky in greater danger.

"There's still a lot of smoke in the air, and the high winds are going to make keeping my princess steady a chore," McShane answered, patting the swelling golden sides of his chopper. "Zebra, the co-pilot and me've been flying since 'Nam, we can get you there safe. He's inside checking this tricky weather."

"She's your princess?" Washington asked, amused despite their dangerous mission.

"Princess Cloud Dancer." Fergus pushed on mirrored sunglasses. "She can only take two passengers up. An' if we find your friend and the ground vehicles still can't get through, we may have to leave somebody behind to get him out of there first..."

"I thought that might be the case," Dobey agreed, not wanting to go up in the little helicopter in the least. "Hutchinson and Washington will go. I'll take Meredith back to headquarters."

"Don't I have a say in this?" the woman demanded, "I've been up many times."

"Mer, it's dangerous." Hutch took her hands, giving them a squeeze. "Starsk'd kill me if you fell out." He tried for teasing, but it fell flat.

"It's dangerous for me but not for you?" she countered, tight lipped, determined not to cry again this morning. All she wanted to do was cry, and it certainly wasn't helping matters in the slightest.

"No one said that."
"Joanie, go up the main road, wait for th' all clear from the fire Marshall and ride in with the 'mergency crews," Washington suggested. "We really need the back up."

Searching the Brick's face for some sort of ulterior motive, Meredith finally conceded. This argument was just wasting precious moments. She nodded her head, stepping back from the helicopter's rotor blades. McShane had already started the little craft's motor and the red blades began a lazy rotation, stirring up a breeze in the damp air.

"Ever'body in." A long, lean man with wind chiseled leathery tanned skin loped out of the air hanger's offices, jamming a black baseball cap on his gray hair. "I'm Zebra. Put on those ear phones or you'll be deaf as a post before we get there," he directed to Hutch and Washington as they settled into the back seats and donned the indicated headgear.

As he buckled his seat belt, Hutch watched the pilots flipping the various switches that prepared the Princess for her dance in the clouds. With almost no warning, the chopper rose straight up into the air, dipping to the right as it swung in a tight circle around the landing pad. Hutch clutched a bar to his right, watching Meredith and Dobey shrink to miniature until Meredith's waving hand was a dim smudge on the landscape. His stomach lurched as the chopper sped up, zipping though the air like the bug it resembled.

A nudge from Washington returned his attention to the land in front of them. Dark gray billows of smoke still floated above a now barren land. Miles of acreage around Murrieta Hot Springs, extending towards Temecula, lay blackened and burned. Skeletal trees reached up into the ashy sky, denuded of foliage. An entire street of houses was now just a row of hollow burned out shells, the red brick fireplaces the only thing standing on each lot. Flying further, they saw pockets of brilliant orange flames battled by tiny figures in fire gear. Then finally, the land turned normal once more, golden brown grasses waving in the strong Southern winds. The air was dark with smoke though, making visibility tenuous at times. The swift maneuverability of the agile craft made the ride like a roller coaster at the county fair. Up above the clouds, then swooping down to check landmarks, then rocketing up once more to avoid aerials and power lines.

Finally Zebra pointed downwards, consulting a flight map. He made a circling motion to the passengers in the back, indicating their plan to reconnoiter the area before landing.

As the helicopter flew a wide circle around the property below, Hutch leaned out as far as he dared to inspect the tiny buildings. A large piece of land with a main house and much smaller dwellings behind it all enclosed by a sturdy looking fence. So this was Helmut van Geller's place. Was Starsky really down there? And if so, where?

*****

John Adams was getting nervous. van Geller had never come back, never called and reports on the radio kept putting the fire nearer and nearer to the camp. What would he do if emergency crews came busting in? How to explain a beat up woman and the cop? Adams hadn't checked on him in a long time, but he assumed Starsky was dead. There'd been no sound, no movement from the dumpster since the day before.

A helicopter whirred through the morning sky above the house, the loud thockity-thocks of the rotor blades drowning out the voice of the DJ on the rock and roll station he was currently listening to. The morning play list had included every song using the word heat or fire known to musciodom. Martha and the Vandellas belted out "Like a heatwave..." as the chopper's drone died away and then returned much more quickly than Adams had been expecting.

There had been constant airplane and helicopter noise all night due to the near by fires. Every news
station on the west coast had some chopper or fixed wing craft up in the Southern skies to cover the blaze. This was the first time one had continued to circle this particular area, prompting John to walk out the front door and peer anxiously up at the noisy gold bug.

A tornado swirled up dirt, leaves and small twigs, blinding Adams as the helicopter descended straight down from the heavens like an avenging angel. Landing on the flat land just past where his lone car was still parked, the chopper's runners had barely settled before Hutchinson and Washington erupted from the cabin, their guns drawn.

Knowing nothing was going to go well from this point on, John Adams nevertheless bolted, running through the house to the sheds beyond. He zigzagged through the unfinished building, searching for a place to hide.

"That's Adams," Hutch identified the fleeing figure, giving chase. He could hear a radio blaring from somewhere inside the house, instructing local inhabitants that the fires were under control but there was still a distinct danger and not to go outside unnecessarily. "Where'd he go?" Hutch panted, when Washington had pulled up behind him.

The yard was eerily quiet, now that the helicopter noise had died down, leaving the overly loud radio the most prominent sound. Mick Jagger slurred the words to Jumping Jack Flash, shouting, "He was born in a crossfire hurricane...."

"What is this place?" Washington asked in wonder. "It looks like a...."

"Concentration camp," Hutch surmised, taking in the barbed wire and unfinished guard tower on the northern corner. The acid churning in his stomach was like molten lava burning holes in his gut. "Spread out, check every building, Adams can't have gone far, that fence is too high to climb."

McShane and Zebra Conway joined them, poking into the empty dwellings on the edges of the yard.

"Hutch!" Washington called urgently, discovering the locked door on the only shed with a real roof and windows. Using one size thirteen shoe like a battering ram, he slammed his foot through the cheaply made door, splintering the wood. A bruised and battered woman was huddled on the floor, her hands bound behind her. "Police, ma'am, we're here to help you." Darryl Washington lowered his gun at the sight of her.

"Thank God!" Sandrine gasped when Hutch had carefully helped her to her feet, attempting to untie the knots binding her hands. "They're animals, they... he..."

"Have you seen any more prisoners?" Hutch asked hating to use that word to describe Starsky. He finally freed her hands and gently massaged her lacerated wrists. "A man with curly dark hair?"

"N-no," Sandrine stammered, shaking her head, her knees trembling. "Just P-peter, and the other guy...I forget his name. Look what he did." She held out her left arm, Just above the wrist joint was tattooed a crooked line of numbers. Sandrine had been roughed over by men in her unfortunate life, brutalized and raped, but none had ever forcibly tattooed her.

"Damn." Zebra spat, pale. This was nothing like he'd been expecting.

"Take her into the house, McShane," Hutch ordered, "Call backup, police, paramedics, the Goddammned Sheriff, whoever can get up here the fastest." The pilot complied, leading Sandrine towards the relatively cooler living room. On the radio, Barry McGuire musically warned that we were on the "Eve of Destruction."

Thinking the girl's rescuers were preoccupied with her, Adams took a chance and dashed from his
hiding place in the furthest shed, running for his car. Where the hell was van Geller, anyway?

Out of the corner of his eye, Washington caught sight of the attempted escape and went long, covering the length of the yard faster than he'd done in the game winning touchdown where he'd earned MVP. He tackled Adams in a tangle of arms and legs, grabbing for the racist's wrists to try and snap the handcuffs around them. By the time Hutch bounded up, Darryl had jerked Adams to his feet as roughly as possible, shouting his Miranda rights like a drill Sergeant. "D'you un'nerstand, asshole?" he growled, "You're under arrest for the rest of your sorry life."

Hutch cocked his Magnum pistol, resting the cold steel on the tender skin just above Adams' tiny ear. "Where's Starsky? What did you do to him, you piece of shit?"

"I don't know what you're talking about!" Adams blustered, unnerved by the change behavior from the man he'd known as Chambers.

"My partner, David Starsky." Hutch enunciated each word carefully, wanting to pull the trigger and watch the bullet rip through Adam's pea brain. "Where is he? And if you say you don't know, I'll put one between your legs." He lowered the gun's long barrel until it was inches away from the other man's groin. "So, talk now. You've got about five seconds."

"It wasn't my idea...Peter planned it all. Wasn't my idea..."

"We don't much care." Washington's already deep voice had dropped an octave, sounding like a rumble from the bowels of the earth. "Where's Starsky?"

"The dumpster," Adams managed, knowing if Hutchinson didn't kill him, van Geller surely would. He was doomed one way or the other, and van Geller always remembered his betrayers.

"Which one?" Hutch spun, running to inspect the trash receptacles. But even as he said it, he knew which one. Two of the blue bins were open, their lids hanging down the back, ready to be filled. Only one was closed, the heavy lid chained securely. It was already full. Oh, God, no...please don't let this be true.

He jerked on the chain, but a steel lock was intertwined in the links, preventing an easy opening. "Bolt cutters," he ordered, his mind reeling. He forced the bile rising in his throat to behave. He couldn't afford to vomit now. Had to think clearly.

"There's a pair in the Princess's tool box." Zebra ran to retrieve them.

He was only gone a few moments but it was like an eternity to the two detectives waiting in the barren yard. Above them, in the rapidly clouding sky, heat lightening flashed a jagged tear in the atmosphere, heralding the approaching thunderstorms.

The wickedly sharp blades made short work of the steel chain, and Hutch pulled the links away with trembling hands. He felt sick, too afraid to even open the dumpster's lid. Washington pushed back the heavy metal, letting it slam against the side with a deafening clang.

Looking in, Hutch was instantly light-headed, his guts rising without warning so that he had to turn away to avoid being sick over the body of his best friend. It was just like his dream. The ground hot even through the soles of his shoes. The vile, fetid smell. Starsky was turned away from him, legs curled under his body, hands bound behind his back, unmoving. Oh, God, he was dead.

With a curse he sprang at Adams, his hands going for the frightened man's throat. "What did you do to him, you piece of shit?"
"It wasn't my fault! I didn't do..." Adams insisted wildly.

"Hutchinson!" McShane ran out of the house to interrupt the fight. "Not here! The Sheriff's coming, the roads are open!" He grabbed at the crazed detective, yanking on his arms to disengage him from the prisoner. Hutch howled, his mind short-circuited by anger and pain, trying to go after Adams again.

Piling some of the discarded pieces of wood laying around into a crude step stool, Washington clamored over the side of the dumpster and dropped down onto the grimy floor, careful to avoid stepping on his friend. The metal was blisteringly hot under his palms, but he hardly felt it. Kneeling gingerly, he laid a gentle hand on Starsky's overheated skin, stunned to feel the weak pulse still throbbing in his carotid. "Hutch!" Darryl shouted. "Hutch! He's still alive!"

No other words would have penetrated Hutch's grief stricken brain. "What?" he whispered, the world turning too fast for him to completely comprehend the Brick's meaning.

"Starsky's alive," Washington repeated, picking up the unmoving man. He straightened, standing in the dumpster with Starsky in his arms, the body as limp as a corpse.

Clenching his jaw so tightly his teeth ground together in an attempt not to be sick again, Hutch wiped his eyes at the sight. Oh, shit, what was supposed to happen next? He literally couldn't think of a sensible course of action.

Willing hands were reaching up to relieve Washington of his burden so he could climb out. McShane and Zebra lowered Starsky to the ground, using the bolt cutters to clip the handcuffs in two. Hutch snapped out of his paralysis, his eyes riveted on the battered body of his partner. He could see the tattoo on Starsky's left arm, that vile rape of his individuality.

"In the house," he managed a coherent thought. "It's too hot out here."

Washington climbed out of the metal prison and scooped up Starsky's limp form as effortlessly as if he were carrying a little child. He recalled their playful joking on the fateful day he'd earned his detective's shield when he'd bantered that he could easily lift the smaller man. Here was the proof.

Carrying Starsky into the living room, he lay him on the carpet under the watchful eyes of the others. Sandrine sat unmoving on the couch, an afghan clutched around her, despite the heat. The radio still blasted rock and roll so loudly it was painful to the ears. Hutch hauled Adams into the room, using a second pair of cuffs to secure him to the staircase banister.

"I didn't have anything to do with it, it wasn't my fault," Adams still babbled until Zebra threatened to slug him into silence.

"Don't go out tonight, it's bound to take your life, there's a bad moon rising..." roared the lead singer of CCR from the radio's speakers. Hutch flinched, the song an assault.

"Turn that damn thing off!" he ordered, kneeling beside the prostrate body.

McShane complied, stopping the song in mid-word. It wasn't until then that Hutch allowed himself to touch Starsky's feverish face, checking the pulse to reassure himself.

"Get some cool, wet cloths, maybe ice inna bag," Washington directed to the co-pilot. "Anythang you can find in the kitchen. We need to get him cooled off as quickly as possible." He snagged two pillows from off the couch, raising Starsky's feet higher that his head.

Starsky was a mess, his face and arms covered with bruises and painful looking reddened patches-
first and second degree burns from contact with the hot metal of the dumpster. His lips were dry and cracked, dotted with dried blood, and his swollen tongue protruded from his mouth. He looked brittle, his skin as dry as parchment paper.

"Wet his skin, put bags of ice under his arms and in his groin t'cool down the body. But nothing to drink."

Thankful to be doing something helpful, Hutch tentatively stroked Starsky's face with a cold, wet rag as McShane and Zebra followed Washington's directions. "You know a lot about this," Hutch said gratefully, thinking he sounded stupid, but so immensely relieved to have found Starsky still among the living he didn't care.

"We can't give him anything to drink?" Zebra reiterated, holding up a glass of water.

"Ah can't remember why," Washington said desperately, looking momentarily stricken, having been the voice of authority up until then. "Ah was a camp counselor in Georgia...it's hot there in the summer, kids get dehydrated and sun stroke. But Ah can't remember why you can't have a drink..."

"Brick," Hutch assured, "You knew more than any of us did. It's okay." He laid his palm against Starsky's forehead, feeling the incredible heat coming off his skin. Starsky radiated heat like a portable space heater, his internal thermostat damaged by the dehydration. His own body could no long naturally decrease his temperature without that essential fluid—plain water. Hutch continued washing his friend's body with a cool wet rag, lingering on the left arm, sickened by the numbers inscribed on Starsky's forearm.

Closing his hand around Starsky's, he silently vowed to hunt Peter van Geller down like the rabid dog that he was. Suddenly, the hand under his stiffened, the arm contracting spasmodically. Starsky's body jerked, his legs tightening and kicking out rhythmically, dislodging the pillow under his feet.

"What's happening?" Sandrine's voice rose up fearfully.

"He's seizing." Washington pushed the coffee table further away so Starsky's flailing limbs wouldn't hit a solid object. "Don't let him bite his tongue, turn him on his side. Get a rag between his teeth."

Inserting a terry cloth towel between Starsky's chattering teeth, Hutch cradled his partner's head, holding on until the body stopped moving, leaving a stunned silence in the room.

"Will he be all right?" McShane asked.


It was nearly half an hour before the reassuring sound of sirens sounded from far down the access road. Another cascade of heat lightning flashed across the sky, brightening the darkening morning. It was hot enough to fry eggs on the concrete, but the crowding black cumulous over the house were pregnant with rain.

"They won't be able to get in through the gate," Adams spoke up smugly. van Geller had built that fence like a fortress.

Zebra simply rifled the handcuffed man's pockets for his keys, tearing Adams' car down the gravel road at Indy 500 speeds to open the gate from the inside. The emergency personnel immediately took over the property, cordoning off the crime scene and bringing necessary equipment for the mortally sick man. Meredith and Dobey arrived with the sheriff, the last car that managed to park in the now jam packed front yard.
Meredith approached the house on rubbery legs, unwilling to get her hopes up too high. She'd gotten the message that David was alive, but for how long? How badly was he hurt? Pausing on the threshold of the small two story gray house, she let the uniformed men and women swarm around her. Except for the plethora of police and sheriff vehicles parked haphazardly in front, the house looked like such an innocent little place. There was no lurking theatrical menace like the Bates homestead in Psycho. Then why did she have such a hard time walking through the door?

"Joanie?" Washington held out a hand, his large body blocking her view of the interior of the house, "Y'okay?"

"Yes," she lied. "How is he?"

"They're working on him," he replied, not sure what to say. "Havin' a hard time findin' a place t'start an IV."

"He always was such an idiot." Meredith crossed her arms tightly over her chest, fingers digging into her biceps, the pain keeping the tears at bay. She was determined to be strong, after all, she was a Detective Sergeant first grade in the Police Department. People should see her in control, an authority figure. She'd visited hundreds of crime scenes in her career, why was this any different? Because it was Starsky. "Won't even give up a little blood? I'll have to talk to him."

The paramedics were still hunched over Starsky's unmoving form performing their medical tasks. Dobey was watching, his usually gruff face gone, leaving a naked hopelessness. Hutch caught her eye as she moved closer to the little knot of people on the carpet and pulled her into a tight squeeze.

"He's alive."

"Yes," she agreed, knowing she was supposed to. "Too stubborn to die."

"I'll believe that."

"Riverside General has a helipad," the dark haired paramedic with a look of an American Indian spoke up, his face frustrated. He directed his comments to Fergus McShane. "Can you take him up in that whirlybird?"

"Sure. Done it in 'Nam," the pilot agreed with a nod, his heavy braid bouncing on his shoulder.

"He's got shit for veins right now, too dehydrated. I'd rather get him to the hospital and have the doctors work on him there than waste time here."

"Mike," the blond haired female 'medic called. "I got a butterfly in his hand, but it won't last long." She indicated a tiny needle with little green winglike pieces sticking precariously out of Starsky's battered left hand, allowing precious fluids to flow into his body. "Running Lactated Ringers wide open'll blow that sucker fast."

"Then we'd better leave quick," McShane decided. "It's gonna rain any minute anyway."

It struck Meredith absurdly that Starsky was a southpaw and wouldn't be at all pleased to have a needle in his gun hand. She finally reached out to tangle her fingers in his dirty dark curls as he was loaded onto a portable gurney, feeling the frightening heat coming off his skin. "He'll be all right?"

"We're doing everything we can, ma'am," Mike answered, holding the IV bag aloft so that Zebra and his blond partner could push the gurney outside.

Then they were gone. She clasped her right hand in the left one, preserving the heat from the brief
contact with her lover. The others in the room finally came into focus as she heard the helicopter's blades whirr prior to take off. Police were everywhere, tearing apart the desks, opening drawers and cupboards, searching for any and all evidence to link van Geller to the bombing. They had already come up aces. There were diagrams to bombs, detailed descriptions of the Brotherhood's crimes, and plans for more. Shouts from the back yard heralded the discovery of a cache of plastique, exactly what they were looking for.

Hutch walked across the floor to check on Sandrine. The ragged dark haired girl was giving her statement to the lead investigator, clutching the brightly colored afghan tightly to her shoulders. He hadn't really registered her appearance previously, but now he was astounded how closely she resembled Starsky. Same unruly dark curls, which on the girl cascaded half way down her back, and the same astonishingly dark blue eyes. They could have been siblings. How remarkably twisted that van Geller had sex with the same kind he professed to despise. Sandrine held out her mutilated left arm, tears running down her face as she described the tattoo.

Still surveying the innocuous looking room, Meredith focused on the hulking figure still handcuffed to the stair railing. She dissected the man's face from his military style buzz cut to the broad shoulders, muscle just beginning to give way to an older man's fat. With a speed no one in her periphery expected, she launched herself at Adams, slugging him in the jaw.

"So you're the high and mighty Brotherhood? Huh? You think you have such power over me? Over people who aren't like you?" Meredith raged, her brown hand leaving a red print on his fair skin. "You think this makes you a righteous Christian? You and your kind are vipers, sucking the life from good people." Other hands pulled her away from her prey, dark brown arms and pink ones enveloping her in a bear hug.

*****

A snake in the grass.

That's what he had to be for now. Hidden and quiet, regrouping and replanning.

He'd found a lair. There were still loyal members willing to protect their leader from his enemies until the right time. Now was the time to lay low.

Spies in his midst. Who could truly be trusted? By now, the police would have found his camp, his prisoners. How could he correct the situation? No one could know his mind. Secrets must be kept, guarded against the spies.

They'd have liberated the prisoners by now. The media would print all the lies fit to print and he'd learn where the spies were staying. That was the time to strike, not now. For now he kept his head down, fangs tucked into his gums, like a harmless little snake in the grass.

*****

"Dehydration is a tricky thing," the Riverside Emergency room doctor continued. "The body requires rehydration, but we can't just flood his body with water. His electrolytes are completely out of whack--sodium level in his body is way too high, and if we reverse that too quickly it can lead to an osmotic imbalance." He paused to take a breath, letting Hutch get a word in edgewise.

"Osmotic imbalance?" he repeated, the information meaningless to his sleep deprived brain. Nothing the doctor said was registering.

"If we go too quickly, the water enters his brain cells and could lead to cerebral edema--brain
swelling. He's already seized twice, which is a result of the dehydration, so we have to proceed extremely cautiously."

"T-thank you, Doctor Pham." Meredith just wanted to rush into the ER and find Starsky now. She hadn't seen him except for that brief touch back at van Geller's house and her body yearned to renew the contact. What was taking so long? "Is there anything else we should worry about?"

"Unfortunately, yes." The Asian man pursed his lips, "Renal failure is a distinct possibility. Blood tests called B-U-N and creatinine were drawn and the levels were dangerously high, showing his kidneys are not working properly. His blood has toxic amounts of what we usually pee off. And if his kidneys don't start to work within--say 24 to 30 hours, they may not work at all."

Hutch felt like he'd been kicked in the gut. How much more could there be? How much more could Starsky's body take? He glanced over at Washington, who looked just as shell shocked as the rest of them.

"Has his temp'ure gone down any?" Washington latched onto the one thing he understood.

"You did good work in the field," Pham admitted. "Anything to cool him off was beneficial. He's still quite febrile, and despite the convulsions, his EEG was normal."

"That's positive news, isn't it?" Meredith asked cautiously. "When can we see him?"

"He's unconscious, and I've called the plastic surgeons to come look at his arm, but maybe in an hour or so?" The man consulted the chart in his hand. "Sorry, but I've got to get back to work. We can page you if you want to wait in the cafeteria?" He phrased it like a question, but the tacit implication was that there was no use waiting around in hopes he'd call them any sooner.

"Ah could use somethin' t'eat," Washington said. In his family, tragedy always brought food in its wake. Someone sick? A casserole. A death? A whole ham. His stomach told him dehydration rescues demanded pie and ice cream, and a lot of it. And about a gallon of water. The insane heat had parched them all, even though the rain had started with torrential suddenness about half an hour after the helicopter had borne Starsky away. He, Hutch and Meredith had already been on the road, driven through the sheeting water by a grim faced patrol car officer who had been assigned to chauffeur them to the hospital. "Hutch? Joanie, you comin'?"

"Yes, Brick," Meredith agreed absently, pushing her fingers under her tight chignon to relieve the pressure on her head. "I don't know if I can eat, but I need caffeine."

"Now, that ain't at all healthy," Washington cajoled. "You need a nice bowl of soup and some pie. Too bad my Granny Mae-Belle ain't here. She'd whip up some ham hocks in pot likker faster'n you can whistle Dixie."

"Your Granny Mae-Belle is the most amazing woman." Meredith latched onto the silly subject, something unthreatening to think about. She’d heard about the great woman many times before, and Mae-Belle always had the answer to everything. "I'd love to meet her."

"Tell you what." Washington grinned conspiratorially, glad himself for some levity. "You get that Little Davey t'marry you and Mae-Belle will be here to bless the weddin' in a heartbeat."

"It's a deal."

Walking was beginning to take more concentration than Hutch could muster. His heart was thudding against his ribs, and his chest too tight to breathe. For half a second he wondered if he could be having a heart attack. Bracing one arm against the closest wall, he tried getting his breathing under
control as blackness started narrowing his vision.

With great difficulty he could hear Washington's concerned voice calling his name. Then, almost as quickly as the frightening symptoms had started, they receded, leaving him weak kneed and shaky.

"Y'look even more pale than usual, blondie," Washington said affectionately, using Starsky's favorite nickname for Hutch. "You need t'eat, get some rest."

"Good idea," Hutch agreed weakly, too miserable to object. The subject of food held little appeal for him, though.

Washington, taking over the role of caretaker, got both his friends to eat some lunch, and all discovered that the lowly Riverside General hospital cafeteria served surprisingly excellent desserts, brought in from a local bakery. Brick had two pieces of the berry pie, smothered in vanilla ice cream. Meredith opted for the Chocolate Decadence five-layer cake that would have never appeared on her diet under normal circumstances.

Hutch managed most of a bowl of ice cream covered in fudge sauce. The cold made his sinuses ache, but it felt good to indulge in such excess.

"He'll be all right, won't he?" Meredith licked the last of the chocolate from her fork. "I mean, we got him in time. He's alive, and his kidneys'll start working..."

"I hope so," Hutch agreed. Washington was right, food had helped. He was no longer woozy and the whole day was feeling much more hopeful. They had found him, after all.

As if on cue, an overhead page recalled them to the emergency room where they learned that Starsky was being installed in the Intensive Care Unit and after that they could visit, two people at a time.

Washington waited outside the ICU, letting Hutch and Meredith have time with Starsky first. There was so much to contend with, so much to take in. So he was alive, but could he live a normal life? None of the doctors were making predictions just yet.

Captain Dobey had arrived in time to see the patient transferred to his new accommodations and was relieved to see that Starsky did look marginally improved with several liters of IV fluids now in his body. He hadn't awakened thus far, and there would be a lot of waiting before he did.

Confiscating a phone from the nurse's station, the Detective Captain made several calls to his subordinates for the latest information. The news didn't cheer him up much, but he thanked the unit nurses for the use of the telephone before walking down the hall to the waiting area to join Washington. "Talked to Lt. Parker, at the house. They're finding enough shit to put the Brotherhood behind bars for the rest of their natural lives, but no sign of van Geller or Sherman, and that Adams is a big dumb ass."

"Ah got that impression, too." Washington shoved his big hands into his back pockets.

"I'm having Adams driven back to headquarters. Want another crack at questioning him?"

Even though he knew he was second choice, Hutch would have been the one to lead an interrogation under normal circumstances, Washington still felt a stab of pride. He wasn't just the junior detective, he had something to contribute, and Dobey was giving him the chance. "Yes, sir," he replied, a nasty smile on his dark face.

"I suppose Hutchinson and Meredith'll want to stay here." Dobey's voice trailed off uncertainly. He kept remembering the horrible days after Starsky was shot by James Gunther's goons. Hours of
waiting, fearing the worst. Then he'd pulled through, recovered, come back to work only to have this happen not even a year and a half later. It stunk.

"Ah should talk to the Rabbi personal. Tell him what's going on," Washington said, seeing Hutch and Meredith emerge from the ICU. "How's he doin'?" he directed the question to them.

Shrugging, Meredith hugged herself. "They have to regulate his salt and potassium really carefully or it...uh...can cause damage by going down too fast. So, it'll take a long time. And they want him to pee, but nothing so far."

"We'll take turns staying with him until he wakes up," Hutch added tiredly. He couldn't remember when he'd slept. What was the date? Wednesday? No, today was October 8th, Thursday. He'd been up late with Starsky on Saturday, slept reasonably well Sunday night and then it had been all downhill since then. Monday night's sleep had been fraught with nightmares and he hadn't laid down for more than two or three hours since then. Not that Washington or Meredith could possibly have gotten much more rest than he had. But Meredith still looked gorgeous, even with dark circles under her luminous brown eyes. Washington looked like a big bear late for his annual hibernation, big shoulders hunched, eyes droopy but dangerous under the half-mast lids.

Walking tentatively into the hushed, but bustling ICU, Washington was pointed in the right direction to his partner's bedside. Nearby, several doctors hovered over another unfortunate man who had twice as many tubes coming from his body as Starsky did. Perversely, that made Washington feel vaguely cheered.

He looked down at his friend's quiet, unmoving form. Starsky looked as different from his infectiously boisterous awake self as a tiger was from a sleeping house cat.

"Little Davey, man, you can't do this," he stated firmly. "Ever'body wants you t'come back. This ain't natural. Van Geller hasn't beat you, you still have work to do. Y'know the Rabbi expects you t'be there for the talks-can't disappoint him."

Even thought the ICU had no external windows, Washington could hear the drone of the rain on the building. Inside the hospital they were insulated, safe in a warm protected cocoon. Here Starsky would be well cared for and Dobey had already assigned round the clock guards for the door. No one knew what van Geller would do next.

With a sigh, the Brick left his partner to the care of the nurses, joining the other detectives in the hall in time to hear the Captain explaining that they'd be driving back to LA together. Dobey gave Meredith a comforting pat on the shoulder before leaving with Washington.

Taking first watch at her lover's bedside, Meredith urged Hutch to take a nap in the waiting area. There were large overstuffed chairs that opened up to beds, and it took Hutch no time at all to nod off. He had no more searching dreams, the object of his quest had been found.

*****

Voices talked over him as if he weren't there, discussing him, dissecting him. Sodium levels. High uric acid levels. Renal failure. Infection in the wrist, could be osteomyelitis, need more blood work. Minor lac on the left side, looks like a knife wound--wonder how that happened? Bruising to the neck, ribs, arms, just about everywhere. The burns on his arms should heal well. And the marks on his left wrist...

Starsky closed his ears to the voices, letting himself drift along in a calm, empty river. He didn't want to hear what they had to say anyway. It hurt to hear what had been done to him in the name of Aryan
Brotherhood. His body didn't hurt. He'd stopped feeling long ago, stopped being associated with that battered shell and moved on to this place. No hurt, no shame, no fear, no abuse.

A sharp sensation invaded the radial artery on his left wrist, another needle drawing blood. Under normal circumstances it should have hurt like hell, but Starsky's body didn't react, keeping the pain away from the soul hiding deep inside. There had been enough pain, he didn't need more.

The river's water lapped against his skin, cooling the fever, supporting his tired body, the waves carrying him along without any demands or expectations. Wasn't there some river in India that could heal, renew? A tiny portion of his brain pondered the trivia question, but it wasn't enough to awaken his spirit just yet. He needed to rest.

More voices, more blood test, never leaving him alone.

The voices cajoled him, urging him to open his eyes, move a finger.

Not yet. Not yet. He wanted to float in the refreshing water, let it cover his head until only his nose was showing.

Then there was a voice he wanted to respond to, a face he wanted to see more than the rest of them. If only they'd stop poking him for just a few minutes, he could float to the surface, and climb out onto the beach.

*****

Late at night, the ICU quieted, but the needs of the critically ill patients never let up. There was always lights on and constant motion, the nurses tirelessly performing their chores to the incessant noise of beeping monitor alarms. It was amazing that any of the sick people could sleep, Meredith thought wryly. She felt leaden with fatigue but couldn't relax in here.

"David, I'm going to go out to take a nap, but Hutch'll be here in just a minute," she whispered, giving his left hand a quick squeeze.

"No."

It was barely a sound, mostly a puff of air, but the word startled her. "Starsk?" She gasped in surprise.

His blue eyes opened slowly, blinking in the overhead lights. "Why're...? Yer s'posed t'be in Wash'ton," he managed with a raw, dry throat. She quickly supplied him with ice chips to suck on, since he wasn't allowed to take oral fluids yet.

"I had a great need to see you," Meredith said, blinking her own eyes to resist the tears that threatened to spill.

Hutch had reached the bed in time to see his best friend's eyes open, and grinned foolishly. "Where have you been? We were all sorta worried about you."

"Both worry too much," Starsky replied, his mouth still powder dry despite the melting ice. His body ached with a frightening intensity, but he tried to ignore it.

"I dunno, you give us plenty of practice," Hutch scolded.

Meredith slipped another spoonful of ice between Starsky's lips, caressing his cheek with her free hand. It was so right to touch him once more, and his temperature had decreased enough to where it
didn't scare her to feel the heat. He leaned into her palm, his eyes closing again, but when Hutch grasped Starsky's hand, he responded with brief pressure before falling back to sleep.

Assured that Starsky was on the road to recovery, Hutch and Meredith were persuaded by the night nurses to go to a local motel to get actual sleep in actual beds. Although his protection mode was still working overtime, Hutch was relieved to know there were armed police guards outside the ICU and relented. The Motel Six was a bare five minutes away from the hospital and his body was about to shut down and force him to sleep on his feet.

Renting rooms side by side, the two detectives spent no time in sundry pastimes such as checking out the closet space or turning on the TV, both were asleep less than ten minutes after they'd unlocked their doors.

Awakening at nine thirty in the morning, Meredith was momentarily confused. Where was she? The memories took her by surprise, slamming back into her conscious mind with a physical force. Starsky was in the hospital. Quickly phoning the ICU, she not only discovered that the doctors were now guardedly optimistic, but that Hutch had already been in that morning. Starsky was sleeping at the moment, but there were plans to let him take clear liquids at lunch, if all went well. That is, if he voided.

Letting herself relax under the hotel shower, Meredith pondered how ridiculous the nurse's statement might sound to someone outside the medical profession. They wouldn't let Starsky eat until he voided. That is, in other words, peed, and he probably didn't need to go all that much since he wasn't allowed to eat and had a tube stuck up his penis. Apparently, that's why he was on so much IV fluids, and the tube was to measure the result, but she knew she'd feel a lot more comfortable, not to mention Starsky's comfort, when they removed all those various catheters and let him eat and 'void' naturally.

The idea of putting on the sweaty clothes she'd donned in the wee hours Thursday morning had little appeal, so in a fit of female pampering, Meredith decided to go to the mall. She'd left D.C. without so much as a toothbrush, and until she returned to her little Torrance apartment, she had only the Hawaiian t-shirt and jeans. Thank God she'd managed to hang onto her credit card with everything that was going on!

A rental car and a map to the nearest shopping mecca directed her to a megalith of stores.

First stop, an early lunch at the sandwich nook, with the LA times spread out in front of her. Washington had been good to his word and given reporter Andrew Cleary an exclusive; with caveats. The was a vivid description of the rescue of Detective Sergeant Starsky and Sandrine bar Din, but no mention the conditions they'd been found in or what had been done to them. Adams had obviously talked. He revealed much unknown information about the bombing and other plots van Geller had in mind, but as usual, the police had kept certain crucial facts to themselves. These were important in to secure airtight convictions of those arrested. Peter van Geller's handsome face loomed large on the front of the paper, accompanied by a slightly smaller photo of Albert Sherman. Wanted felons. The FBI was already in the process of adding their stats to their list of the most wanted in America.

Other news of the day reported that Rabbi Micah Bachman's peace talks were scheduled to begin without delay, now that Detective Starsky had been found. Heavy security was expected to help ensure that nothing ruined the day for those attending the conference.

Shaking off the tendrils of fear the article had given her, Meredith let herself go wild in the mall. After obtaining the essentials a woman couldn't live without, especially when staying in a motel, she browsed through the racks of currently fashionably attire. Pushing aside the sensible skirts and
blouses she usually wore as a police detective, she selected a bright red and gold silk blouse, a tight black mini and black heels.

A few more pedantic purchases of casual t-shirts and slacks, and she headed for the men's department. She practically maxed out her credit limit in one morning, but the results went a long way to healing the hole in her soul. Starsky would be all right, she had new clothes and the peace talks were now, no doubt, in full swing. Sometimes, after a rain, there was a silver cloud in the sky. Metaphorically speaking, anyway, since the sky over Southern California was sullen and gray, the temperature a good twenty-five degrees cooler than the previous day.

*****

Practicing a few yoga breaths in his car while Dave Murphy maneuvered through traffic, Micah Bachman couldn't keep the goofy grin off his face. This was it, and despite the terrible events of the last month, the talks were going to come off and be productive. "Thank you, Miriam," he whispered to himself, the memory of his wife still a sharp ache under his breastbone, but he was becoming used to the idea of her death.

Micah had been awakened by the shrill ring of the phone, and when he'd picked up the handset, the voice of the caller had brought with it the goofy smile.

"Hey, Micah," Starsky rasped, his swollen tongue and ravaged throat making speech difficult. "What'er you still doin' in bed on the most important day of your life?"

"Dave!" the Rabbi crowed. The Brick had, of course, told him of Starsky's rescue, but actually hearing him speak made the miracle all the more real. "How are you doing? You still in bed, too?"

"I'm okay," Starsky dismissed his medical ailments, waggling his eyebrows at Hutch sitting in the bedside chair. "Nobody'll let me get up, so I'm gonna miss the first day of the conference, but I guarantee, I'll make it there in a day or two."

"I'm counting on it, if you're feeling up to it," Micah agreed. "Brick told me..."

"Just a minute, Micah, Hutch is buggin me..." Starsky held the receiver as far away from his partner as he could, but the taller man's reach was longer and he didn't have bruised ribs to contend with.

"Give me the phone." Hutch plucked it from Starsky's fingers. "Micah," he addressed the man on the other end of the line, "tell Starsky that he'll miss the conference, to stay in bed and let himself heal, cause otherwise I'm just going to have to knock him out with the butt of my gun. Oh, and good luck with the talks today."

"I have my orders." Bachman laughed. "Thanks, Hutch."

"Say good-bye." Hutch handed the phone back to his glowering friend.

"When do I take orders straight from you?" Starsky said to Hutch, then listened to the Rabbi on the other end of the line for a few minutes, nodding, saying, "see you in a few days, Micah."

"Take care of yourself, Dave." Bachman had hung up the phone with contentment. "You're in my prayers," he added, padding into the bathroom for a shower, knowing Starsky would have underplayed any need to be prayed for.

Now he was jolted back to the present as the car bumped into the convention hall parking lot, the property jammed with a wide assortment of people. Television cameras swiveled to catch the car's arrival, half a dozen reporters poised with microphones to get the slightest comment from the Rabbi.
"Look at this mob!" Dave Murphy gave a short whistle. "But doesn't look hostile."

There was a sea of blue uniforms circling the building, checking the purses and bags of the people entering, but very little hint of the riot or violence that had been rumored at. And the length of the line snaking into the doorway astounded Micah.

"That has to be far more people than were signed up originally," he observed in reverence. "There are a few protesters over there, though."

"Enough cops here to deal with half a dozen Klansmen," Dave said dryly. "Knock 'em dead today, Rabbi."

"I'll knock 'em on their keisters anyway." Bachman felt to make sure his yarmulke was seated properly on his red, wiry hair and climbed out of the car, letting a blue uniformed officer escort him into the back entrance, all the while waving the reporters away with a friendly hand. "I'll give a statement afterwards, guys!"

Watching from a quiet bench on the edge of the park like grounds, Peter van Geller let the crowds swarm around him, pretending to read a newspaper while breakfasting on a Danish. It had been difficult to find a paper without his face staring out from the front page, so he'd had to finally settle on the sports page, with its asinine ramblings on the World Series.

In deference to his newfound and unwanted fame, van Geller hadn't shaved since he'd fled the Temecula compound and used a brown dye to disguise his blond hair. Luckily, he was one of those very Aryan sorts whose beards grew more reddish than blond. With mirrored sunglasses, a recently purchased baseball cap honoring the World Series and a blue windbreaker to complete the picture, he was certain none of the dumb flat foots standing around the convention hall would recognize him, even if they tripped over him.

Over the edge of the paper, he watched the paltry group of protesters with a sour face. None of his followers had shown up. He had been planning to stage a demonstration so frightening that the Rabbi would have fled the building rather than to continue his ludicrous talk of peace between races. It was maddening to think of the missed opportunities, the pamphlets and newsletters stolen by the police on the raid on the Waverly office, and the damage he could have inflicted. Now, his empire was in ruins, he had only a handful of people willing to heed his message. The others, even the ones not grilled by the police, had been frightened away, and only a few would even answer his phone calls. He was just lucky there were a few faithful members who wouldn't turn him in!.

Then there was that thieving bottom crawler Sherman. He'd disappeared without a trace and with every cent from the corporate accounts, too. He could hardly fathom the breadth of Sherman's treachery. The sheer audacity of the deceit was so wide in scope it would have impressed him had he not been so galled by the act. It was fortunate that Helmut van Geller had taught him well. Never trust even those closest to you, because like Brutus, they are the ones in position to shove a knife in your back. The money from the Waverly bank was gone, as well as three other accounts buried under levels of subterfuge to throw off investigators. Luckily, money stashed in the house and at a quiet little bank in Temecula would keep Peter's head above water and aid in the cause.

With another shake of his head at the lame attempts by the ragtag band of Klan members and skinheads to protest the talks with their crudely worded banners and placards, Peter van Geller got up and joined the line to enter the building.

A small reception desk was set up in the lobby, volunteers checking off the names of those enrolled and handing out nametags and synopses of the proceedings. Rabbi Bachman's earlier hope that the conference could be one where visitors could freely come and go had been nixed as too high a
"Name?" a pretty girl with a cap of blue black hair cut short enough to be a boy's asked pleasantly.

"Eric Cartwright," Van Geller supplied with a smug smile. When he'd called a few days before to register, he'd been informed that he was one of the last allowed to enroll, due to seating capacity. Wouldn't Bachman and his ass-sociates be surprised when they found out who they let in the building?

The main meeting room was already crowded with people finding seats, settling their belongings and eyeing those sitting near by. There was certain to be a wariness in the group, since many of these people had lived with the tenet "Hate first, don't ask questions later" but nothing unpleasant had happened so far. In fact, just the opposite, most people were going out of their way to be accommodating to their neighbors. Van Geller found a seat in the last row, mentally checking out the nearest exits and recalling Fredricks' description of the building from when he'd planted the bomb.

Bachman attained the stage to a roar of applause, joining a group of other clergy from every sort of religion. A modest looking man introduced himself as Monsignor Jesus Lopez-Gonzalez, presented the usual greetings, an explanation of the talk's goals and which speakers would go when. There were plans to have the audience break into smaller groups to address personal ideologies and forums for discussion of the progress they were making.

Standing up, Micah felt such a wave of optimism viewing the sea of faces in front of him that he had to grip the sides of the podium for support. "In my press conferences to promote these talks, I have repeated the slogan "Communication is the key to universal understanding". Now, I'm not saying you have to agree to have communication. Agreeing to disagree is equally worth while--diversity is the bedrock of our country. It defines our way of life. Who hasn't enjoyed a bagel with a schmear for breakfast, a pepperoni pizza for lunch and take-out wontons and egg rolls for dinner? There are places in this world where that wouldn't be possible. Jewish, Italian and Chinese cuisine all in one day. All mixed up in your stomach. I'm not talking about conforming to certain styles or cultures or uniformity of ideas. That would be bland. I'm talking about the melting pot, as it has been called...

Unable to stomach much more of the thought of all that unpalatable food mixing around inside him, van Geller slipped out, asking directions to the men's room from one of the security personnel. He walked confidently down the hall in the pointed direction, but then slipped quietly into the first empty room when out of the guard's sight. The rest of the morning was spent scouring out the layout of the building. He had Fredrick's scribbled diagram, of course, but it would be less than professional of him to rely on another's work. van Geller found a seat in the last row, mentally checking out the nearest exits and recalling Fredrick's description of the building from when he'd planted the bomb.

Joining the group once again just as the lunch break was announced, van Geller felt a stirring of confidence returning. He might not have the backing of his followers any longer, but the job wouldn't be as hard as he'd thought. He nodded pleasantly at the dark haired girl who'd checked him in at registration, and chose a seat near her in the communal cafeteria.

After mingling with his fellow attendees and making interested murmurs at their irritating chatter regarding discussions that had occurred, van Geller stayed just long enough at the afternoon session to let himself be seen. Slipping out a side door while one of the traitorous ex-skinheads was explaining his epiphany, Peter knew what he had to do. With that in mind, he drove a good distance away to a small gun shop he'd selected from the Yellow Pages.

It took almost no time to select a gun. To match his Bonanza alias name, he chose a long barreled revolver, with fancy scrollwork on the butt. Hefting the pistol in his hand, he nodded thanks at the dumb ass shop proprietor. Poor shit didn't even know he'd just sold a gun to the FBI's number one security risk.
wanted man. He felt like a renegade—an outlaw—with just the right weapon for the job. He paid cash, throwing a box of bullets on the counter and loading them into the gun's chamber before he departed.

*****

"Isn't there anything to do around here?" Starsky grouched, feeling rotten, no longer satisfied to lie in bed. His skin was super sensitive, with an irritating deep itch that left him so restless he couldn't relax, but was still too tired to move around much.

"Starsk, it's the ICU, most people are sick here." Hutch crossed his arms, leaning back in his chair, a half smile on his lips. Starsky might be in a foul mood, but Hutch was willing to forgive just about anything this morning. "Watch TV."

"I already did." Starsky didn't want to admit the flickering screen hurt his eyes and made his already aching head ring. He glanced around the room, taking in the busy nurses and doctors. The other patients in the unit were in fact all either unconscious or asleep. "Isn't there a newspaper or somethin'?"

"Aw, Starsk...you don't want to read it."

"You always say that," Starsky insisted. "Stop protecting me, Hutch. I need to read it."

Reluctantly, Hutch stood just as the doctor came over to fill Starsky in on his condition. Realizing it was a good time to take his leave, Hutch went out to the gift shop to purchase the day's paper and a selection of current magazines. He thought about getting Starsky a couple of candy bars but changed his mind, figuring chocolate would probably not be the first food the doctors allowed him.

He judged the time perfectly, the doctor had gone on to counsel another family by the time he returned, and he placed the newspaper on Starsky's blanket covered knees without comment. van Geller's handsome, supercilious face stared out from below the headline.

"Friday," Starsky read the date on the top corner with a flat tone. "I can't even remember two days."

"You scared me, Starsk." Hutch left the magazines on the bedside table, watching his friend closely.

"I scared myself." Starsky put his hand flat over the blond man's picture. Closing his fist, he crumpled the front page into a ball. "I could feel myself dying, Hutch. Everything was slipping away. I couldn't stop it and I didn't even care anymore."

"Starsky, you lived through it and I'm not even sure how."

"I don't know what to think or how to feel about it all." Starsky looked down at his bandaged wrists. He didn't even want to know what was under the dressings. "Should I be grateful to be alive? Angry at him? Disappointed with God because he didn't let me die? How am I supposed to feel, Hutch?"

His heart twisting painfully in his chest, Hutch slid down until he was perched on the side of the bed, uncertain of how to ease his friend's anguish. "There is no guide, Starsky. I don't think anybody knows, and if I gave you some easy platitude, it would just ring false. What's the emotion that you feel strongest, right now?"

"Peace," Starsky said simply. Releasing his hold on the newspaper, he turned his ink stained hand over, palm up, accepting Hutch's clasp. "I used to feel so angry, lotsa rage inside me. I wanted to go after that worthless specimen of humanity." His voice trembled just once, but he continued more
firmly. "Then he threw me away like I was trash and... it just wasn't worth it anymore. I just wanted to be back with you an' Meredith an' everybody. Does that make any sense?"

"I think so." Hutch smiled. "What did your doctor say?"

"Uh..." Starsky tried remember the man's exact words, but his brain was muddled and he was already weary from just talking. It was even hard to read the newsprint after he'd flattened out the front page. "The salt an' potassium are gettin' closer to normal, there's a..." He laughed shortly with a bitter sound. "Trend in the right direction on the kidney function studies, whatever the hell that means. And then the really fantastic news of the day is the tendons in my wrist are all ripped t'hell and need surgery. I shoulda known I couldn't get out of my own handcuffs..." This time a sob escaped, his voice wavered as if he were physically waging a battle against the urge to cry. "I couldn't get away, Hutch...and they..."

"I know." Hutch pulled him into a hug, letting Starsky hide the tears against his shoulder.

"You asked me what I was feelin' the strongest, but the anger's number two and it's fightin' back..." Starsky hiccupsed, wiping his eyes with the back of his bandaged left wrist. "It's pushing at me, but it's so hard to carry. I got tired. But how do I just let go of it, Hutch?" He sounded pleading, unable even to decipher his own confusing emotions. "They h-hurt me in ways I didn't think were possible."

"Deep down," Hutch agreed. "And all these feelings aren't going away over night, Starsk. You have to let yourself heal, like the rest of your body. Probably talking to Micah would be a good thing."

"I told you I was going to the talks." A glimpse of the old patented David Starsky impish grin reasserted itself on his battered face.

"No, you're not," Hutch said firmly, but knew he was probably not going to win that argument.

"Another visitor to see you, Sergeant Starsky." A sweet faced nurse placed a cup of juice on the bedside table, next to the magazines. "And if you drink this down, Dr. Talbot will think about pulling your Foley catheter."

"Does that mean I can just think about drinkin' it?" Starsky retorted, not at all ready to put anything into his stomach. He had a low level but persistent nausea that chased away any desire for food or drink. The smell of the apple juice made him swallow against the sudden bitter pressure at the back of his throat.

"Wow," Hutch said, directing Starsky's attention away from the nauseating liquid.

"You like?" Meredith dropped several large shopping bags to the ICU floor.

"Oh, yeah." Starsky grinned, drinking in Meredith's stunning appearance.

She pirouetted coquettishly in her newly purchased finery, smoothing an imaginary wrinkle on the tight curved flank of her black leather mini skirt. The brilliant red and gold of the blouse accented her creamy brown complexion, giving her a glow even the flat white hospital lights couldn't diminish.

Hutch put a hand over his partner's eyes, freely admiring his best friend's girl. "I dunno, Starsk, I don't think your doctor would allow this kind of thing. Could be bad for your recovery, maybe your heart."

"Oh, but other parts of my body are workin' fine." Starsky batted away the hand, reaching out for Meredith's. "Where you been?"
"Shopping." She grinned back at him, overwhelmingly happy to see the improvement in his condition.

"That could be dangerous, too," Hutch interjected.

"Well, if you don't want your present..." she teased, pulling the bags over to the bed.

"I always want presents," Starsky said eagerly.

"I knew that." Meredith gave him a quick kiss on the mouth, lingering against his skin, her hand tangling in his dark curls as he pressed against her lips for a second go round.

"Slow down, you two." Hutch laughed, "He needs his rest."

"Speak for yourself, blondie," Starsky groused, but watched with interest as Meredith rooted around in her shopping bags for shirt boxes. She handed each man one, then changed her mind and switched them.

"Open them," she prompted, sitting in the bedside chair, and crossing her incredibly long legs. Starsky’s was a deep blue shirt, the exact color of his eyes. He nodded his thanks, suddenly conscious that the last blue shirt he’d been wearing had probably been cut from his body by the paramedics trying to save his life. Tears filmed his eyes and he ducked his head to hide them.

Hutch saw Starsky's struggle and quickly opened his own box, admiring the pale blue, almost gray shirt nestled inside. It would suit his fair skin and lighter blue eyes perfectly. "Thank you, Meredith, it's beautiful."

"I like to shop when I'm stressed." She dismissed his thanks, but looked pleased none the less.

"Well, I guess I'll leave the two of you alone for a while." Hutch tucked the shirt box under his arm, shaking a finger at them. Starsky had gained control on his fragile emotions once more, capturing Meredith's hand in his. "Don't get yourself thrown out of the ICU."

"Like that would be a bad thing," Starsky retorted to his retreating figure.

Dobey had arranged to have Hutch's Ford driven up for his use, and he found it in the hospital parking lot just where the cop who'd delivered it had said it would be. Driving down the freeway without any real plan, he still recognized where he was intent on going. Temecula. Not that there was anything left to find there. Police and crime lab crews had swarmed over the property in the last 24 hours. He still had the overwhelming need to visit the site once more. What was it the department psychologist was always going on about? Closure.

Even driving down the freeway, the wreckage from the fires could be seen. Whole fields gone, just the remain of barns, charred fence posts and a hulking shell of a burned out tractor remaining. The air was full of ash, black flakes stirred up by the cars speeding past. Such devastation.

Hutch could fell the sting of unshed tears in his sinuses and sniffed to keep them at bay. He didn't even know why he wanted to cry. For the loss of the landscape, or Starsky's near loss? Maybe it was for his own near loss.

When he'd first met Starsky, the man's in-your-face aggression, cocky attitude and New Yorkeze had irritated Hutch's much more restrained and cultured personality. But Starsky was like a puppy. He butted against you until you had to pet him. Then pay attention to him. Underneath the cleverly cultivated facade of the goofy kid was a quick mind that could solve a case just by noticing the little
pieces that didn’t fit together. His tendency to flaunt authority had gotten him into trouble plenty of times with Internal Affairs, but it had also brought in perps when conventional methods had failed. More importantly, Hutch had discovered a true friend who saw beyond his own façade to the inner man. Starsky pushed him to loosen up, let out his silly side, and voice his hidden soul. Starsky never minded when Hutch lashed out at him, often brushing it off with a snide comment about temper. In retrospect, Hutch realized he often was not as much of a friend to Starsky as the other was to him. Whenever a case got really stressful, whenever too many cups of coffee and too little sleep frayed his nerves he took it out on the closest person, his best friend Starsky. But Starsky rarely reciprocated, usually just returning the jibes with a smile Hutch found particularly aggravating. And one he treasured more than diamonds.

*Keep on irritating me, Starsky, cause it keeps me on my toes.*

Staring at the barbed wire topped fence surrounding the van Geller property, Hutch found himself wishing the fire had raged across the land and consumed this cesspool, too. After they collected all the evidence to convict the rat bastard, of course.

The ground in front of the little house was churned and muddy from a day of rain and countless police and emergency personnel tramping in and out. Tire tracks were rutted deeply into the mire where trucks had backed up to the garage to haul away critical evidence. The interior of the house was no longer the tidy haven for Hitler's followers it had been. Fingerprinting dust covered every surface, drawers had been flung open and the contents carted away, leaving just extraneous bits of paper to occupy once bulging files. Muddy footprints marked the carpet so Hutch could no longer pinpoint the exact place he’d sat cradling Starsky's seizing body. There was the detritus of every police search: scummy half drunk cups of coffee, crusts of sandwiches and donuts littering the tables. It was no longer a home. No sense of the van Gellers remained. The house and its contents had been discarded, left to fate until such time that it was no longer needed for a trial. Who would live here after what had been done in the name of white supremacy?

Wandering into the back yard, Hutch lingered in front of Sandrine’s prison before walking with dread the few hundred feet to Starsky’s. It was just a dumpster, his inner voice insisted, but the minute he reached his hand out to touch the blue metal box, his resolve crumbled. Sinking into the damp ground, he let out the tears than had lurked all afternoon, a howl of pain escaping. Covering his eyes, he cried for them all, victims of a man who had worshipped a monster.

*****

Finding himself well accepted by his fellow peace talk attendees by the second day, van Geller discovered it was easy to slip in and out of the seminars at will. There seemed a constant stream of people taking trips to the bathroom or to grab a cup of coffee. In between scheduled sessions, informal groups spontaneously gathered to discuss the latest points made, and often spread themselves out into empty office rooms. Thus, the guards took no notice of van Geller’s travels around the convention center. He stayed just long enough in a few lectures to catch what was being discussed. Having a printed syllabus helped this charade immensely; then he made his way into the bowels of the building. He learned its secrets, explored the building's skeleton-planning his campaign to bring down Bachman, and his subsequent escape, with infinite care.

*****

The sun finally made a reappearance on Saturday, but it was a weak version of its former self. Clouds still obscured most of the sky, and the sun’s warmth only managed to take the sudden autumnal chill out of the air. The world seemed a different place than only a few days before, and in truth, Hutch knew it was. He felt himself straddling two worlds--one half at Starsky's side in the
hospital, the other yearning to join the on-going investigation. Van Geller had still not been located, ditto Albert Sherman. How had they escaped the net the police had flung over Southern California? It was infuriating, and frightening. If they could slip away so silently, how could Starsky be kept safe? He didn't want to leave, and yet knew he needed to.

"You're lookin' more alive, Little Davey," Darryl Washington said heartily, nodding briefly at Hutch sitting in the window seat reading a newspaper.

"So they tell me." Starsky gave a half smile with a shrug. He'd earned a room on the regular medical floor, no longer considered critical enough for ICU. There had been some worry amongst his doctors that his kidney functions weren't improving as quickly as they'd hoped, but talk of possible dialysis to remove the toxic levels in his blood had died a hopefully natural death. In fact, in the last hour his nurse had expressed annoyingly perky encouragement because of the several inches of dark amber urine in the bag hanging ceremoniously over the side of the bed. The catheter was still stuck up his pecker, which was not only uncomfortable but awkward, since he couldn't get up and walk or even sit without help, because of the danger of the tube slipping out. He still felt like crap; achy and nauseated, and his skin itched deep inside from the uric acid build-up in his blood. But if the doctors thought he was less critical, more power to them. The single room was far less noisy and bright than the ICU. It also had a bedside telephone just for him and a TV he didn't have to share.

"Brought you a present." Washington dug into the bag he carried, extracting a glossy book with a reprint of Mona Lisa on the cover and some watercolor felt pens.

"Everybody's bringing me stuff," Starsky crowed.

"Color the great masters?" Hutch read the title with a laugh. "For Starsky?"

"It's a lot a'fun," Washington defended. "Ah do it all the time."

"Got nothing better to do." Starsky took the book, flipping through the black lined copies of great masterpieces. "Any of those naked girls from Pompeii?"

"Sure." Washington grinned, opening to a page with a vertical rows of ancient maidens cavorting in tiny bikinis.

"They're not naked."

"It's G rated." Washington shrugged.

"What do you know about Pompeiian art?" Hutch asked with amusement, still content to be talking to Starsky at all, even about obscure mosaics.

"The colors are amazing after all these centuries," Starsky answered, straight-faced. "Gimme those pens, Brick, I haven't colored in years."

"Here's one of The Concubine by Manet," Washington pointed out. "She's nude."

Hutch felt almost like an interloper, watching the two of them explore the book. They obviously shared some in joke that he knew nothing about, and he experienced a brief stab of jealousy that Washington knew something about Starsky that he didn't. It was irrational and stupid to be jealous of their time together, but after almost losing Starsky, he was.

"Hutch, can you get us somethin' to drink?" Starsky asked, sweetly.

"You actually going to drink it if I do?" Hutch countered, knowing it was mainly a ploy to get him
"Hey!" Starsky gaped at him comically. "I had that juice at noon. And Jell-o," he added for Washington's benefit.

"Two spoonfuls," Hutch corrected. "What do you want?" He knew there was something going on between the two of them. Starsky might keep up the charade for a while but he usually couldn't lie to Hutch long. And then there was Washington, whom Hutch felt he could break down easily. He just had to bide his time, giving Starsky a false sense that he'd gotten away with whatever it was.

"Seven-up," Starsky ordered, not really caring.

"Coke?" Washington put in.

"Be right back," Hutch agreed, leaving.

"Did you bring it, Brick?" Starsky perused his selection of watercolor pens, deliberating over the correct blue to color in a rendition of the famous Japanese ocean wave woodcutting.

"Ah'm not sure it's such a good idea, Little Davey," Washington protested.

"You're reconsidering after you already brought it?" Starsky held out his left hand with a scowl. "Give it here."

"What'd you need it for in th'hospital?" Washington dug into his carryall again, producing a steel blue .38.

"Protection." Starsky hefted the gun in his hand, mentally acknowledging the different size and weight from his usual weapon.

"There're guards on the door, Starsky." Darryl observed his friend unhappily. Starsky had every reason in the world to be paranoid, even downright terrified of a sneak attack, but he looked weirdly calm and detached.

"Need to be prepared." He leaned over, tucking the gun under a pile of magazines in the bedside drawer.

"You think van Geller'll come here?"

"Why? What have you heard? Hutch won't tell me nothing and I'm stuck in bed until they pull this damn tube out of my dick."

"Ah don' know where he is, if that's what you mean. Nobody's seen him." Washington shoved his hands into the pockets of his Burberry knock-off. "Adams says Sherman musta run—with the money from every one of the Brotherhood's bank accounts, from what we can d'duce."

"He tried...for just a minute to stop them." Starsky swallowed tightly, his throat still bruised from Camden's grip.

Washington waited, certain there was more he meant to say, but Starsky just selected a pen and uncapped it. "When's your doctor gonna spring you loose? Rabbi wants you t'come for the final dinner on Monday night."

"Tell him I'm comin'." Starsky ducked his head, inking in a long swell of ocean wave with Caribbean blue and indigo.
"I'm back!" Hutch announced heartily, in case they were still discussing something they didn't want him to hear, but neither looked particularly guilty. "And look who I found." He indicated his head at Meredith, who had been taking a walk on the grounds while the weather permitted.

"Hi, Joanie." Washington leaned down to give her a peck on the cheek. "You look nice."

"Well, thank you, kind sir." She patted his cheek, glancing to see it Starsky noticed. "You see what a nice Southern boy can do?"

"I think you look good, too," Starsky said, knowing he was supposed to.

"You look good, too?" she echoed. "I get a whole new wardrobe, and that's all I get?"

"Yeah, Starsk." Hutch placed the forgotten soft drinks on the table, giving his attention to Meredith's clothes. Today she had on a tight, lavender t-shirt, which featured a low cut neckline to emphasize her cleavage, and purple slacks. "You're supposed to complement a woman. Very nice color on you, Meredith."

"I'm from New Yawk, we don't tawk lihk that." Starsky exaggerated his childhood accent, glad the teasing was keeping his attention off the increasing aches all over his body. It must be getting close to time for another round of medication, there was an annoying pressure in his head he wanted to ignore. Grabbing her hand, he growled, "C'mere, woman."

"Well, I think you need some lessons," Meredith answered archly, but let herself be pulled onto the bed.

"Ah think ah read this script." Washington laughed, scooping up his coke. "It's where the two good guys exit."

"You got the part," Starsky muttered, leaning his forehead against Meredith's. This was where he was meant to be.

"What'd you bring him?" Hutch asked, just managing to keep the accusation out of his voice.

"Th'book."

"And...?"

"He wanted a gun."

"Damn, Brick!"

"Well, d'ya blame him?"

"No." Hutch took a breath to steady himself. "He's scared, but...it's not the safest place to be keeping a gun."

Busyng himself with popping the top on the soda can, Washington shrugged. "How's he doin'? They gonna let him out?"

"In a couple days, I guess," Hutch agreed. "But he'll need to go back in next week or so, at the hospital closer to his house to have surgery on his wrist."

"The right one," Washington clarified, taking a drink of Coke. "What about th'other one?"

"He won't even mention that one...it's like it comes up, but he can't talk about it." Hutch gritted his
teeth against the burning pain in his chest that appeared every time he even thought about the tattoo. "I talked to the plastic surgeon myself. There're new laser procedures that can...erase the ink right off the skin. It takes more than one treatment, but I think that's what he should get--just need him to admit it's there in the first place."

"Jist wait it out, Hutch."

"Man, I don't think I should leave." He shook his head to clear all the disturbing images that kept crowding his brain. "Maybe..."

"You need t'be part of the investigation. Ah'm here now. Joanie's here. You can go and be back tomorrow, if y'want to."

"Yeah, I know." Hutch shook the big man's hand. His own hand was long and slender, good sized, but the big brown paw that returned his grip easily surrounded it. "Keep him safe."

"Ah didn't do such a good job b'fore, but Ah'll give it mah best."

"Brick, it was never your fault." Hutch slugged him gently on the bicep. "He's a handful."

*****

Hutch slept in his own Venice apartment for the first time in weeks, watered his plants, strummed aimlessly on his guitar and got back to the business of being back in Ken Hutchinson's world and not that of Ken Chambers. Truth be told, he hardly even wanted to go back to that miserable little studio on Mayflower street and retrieve the few things he'd brought over there. He wanted this to be completely and finally over. That just wasn't going to happen soon enough, though. There were too many loose ends; especially the whereabouts of van Geller and Sherman. The newspapers speculated endlessly over where the two had escaped to--other countries, by plane or even cruise liner, since at least one of them was carrying a sizable fortune. Hutch had other thoughts. He knew Peter van Geller wouldn't just let his whole plan die such an ignominious death. He was still in the Los Angeles area, planning and waiting for the right moment to strike. And Hutch wanted to be ready for him.

Returning to Metro headquarters after three days away brought back a wash of left over emotions from Starsky's disappearance. He tried tidying up the desk to rid himself of the misplaced anxiety, focusing on each piece of paper, deciding whether it needed to be tossed or filed. The scribbled phone list that Starsky had doodled a naked woman's form on was tucked carefully back into his desk drawer.

After a sufficient time, Hutch was mentally prepared for his next job. He would interrogate John Adams himself. The only one of the unholy three to have been captured, Adams had been questioned countless times, but never by someone who had actually worked so closely with him. Maybe he could get the bastard to spill the beans. Already, the anger in his belly simmered, and he didn't mind fanning the flames, remembering Adams' whiny attempts to distance himself from the crime when Starsky had been found so near death.

*****

Adams' eyes shifted warily between Hutch and the interrogation room door. Uncomfortable under the cop's impenetrable blue gaze, he shifted nervously in his seat, tapping his fingers in a staccato rhythm on the tabletop scarred with years of cigarette burns. He feared Chambers--no make that Hutchinson--more than all the other cops who'd questioned him combined. He'd been friendly with the man, shared a beer. Chambers had seemed like one of their sort, salt of the earth, loving his
fellow white man. He had deceived John Adams. It rankled in his soul that he had shared confidences with the traitorous cop--told him secrets when he should have kept silent.

Blowing out noisily though his mouth, he kept sneaking glances at the blond cop who hadn't moved since he'd entered the room. Adams licked his lips, jiggling his knee, then resuming the rat-a-tat on the table, the links on his handcuffs jingling. Unnerved by Hutchinson's unnatural silence, he spoke, "Uh-so-uh...that Jew cop's okay, huh? He didn't die." He tittered, an obscene sound in so large a man, a phony smile plastered on his face.

"No thanks to you," Hutch answered impassively. "What do you think would have happened if he had?"

"Hey, I been cooperating. I talked to that nig...black cop. I'm getting immunity."

"For some of the crimes, not all of them." Hutch finally pulled out a straight-backed chair and sat.

"Yeah, I guess."

"But luckily Starsky didn't die, so you didn't get saddled with Murder one."

"Ain't no torture charge," Adams scoffed. He'd talked to his attorney, he knew what he'd been charged with.

"Aw, did I say torture? Sorry, I meant false imprisonment, kidnapping, assault with intent...what'd you do it for, Shithead?"

"Don't know what you're talking about."

"I know you put those filthy numbers on his arm...into his skin," Hutch said softly, the danger radiating off his in waves. "I watched you inking those swastikas on Metzger and the others. So proud of your accomplishments. So why'd you do it to my partner?"

"Hey, Peter tol' me to. Wasn't my idea."

"It's never your fault, is it? Guess you never think for yourself," Hutch snarled. "Where the hell is van Geller."

"I told that nigger--uh, Washington, I don't know." He deliberately pronounced the word don't.

"You don't seen to know much." Hutch shook his head. "Sure, you gave us some tantalizing clues to the bombing, but it doesn't do a bit of good if we don't get van Geller. So, again, where is he?"

"Man, he bailed on me!" Adams blurted out. "He left after he heard you were a cop."

"Who told him?"

"Margaret."

"So, despite all our efforts, he's still got a core of followers," Hutch mused, disappointed but not surprised at the woman's duplicity. "Where do you think he's hiding?"

"I don't know." Adams punched each word with a rap of his fist on the table. "I told you."

"Daniels, Metzger, Fredricks, Camden and Jake--all in jail. More'n a dozen others whom we can
prove were involved in illegal activities. Who's hiding him, Adams?"

"He doesn't tell me stuff," Adams whined, "You worked with him. He thinks everybody's out to get
him. Always accusing everybody..."

"He told you more than he ever told me," Hutch continued with quiet force. "You were his second
Lieutenant. In charge of recruitment, the secret membership meetings, procuring the women. You
knew everybody in the Brotherhood. So where is he?"

"I've been in here." Adams held out his cuffed hands. "Chained up like some dog. How would I
know?"

"Just like you chained up my partner and left him in a dumpster to die? You don't know anything, do
you? You're just as dumb as an ox, huh?" Maybe it was transferred anger from Starsky, maybe it
was just the asshole Adams sitting in front of him denying everything like a Mafioso on the witness
stand, but Hutch's rage burned white hot in defense of his best friend. And unlike Starsky, his anger
had no distressed sadness mixed in. He was just royally pissed off.

"Hey!" Adams started to rise in anger, then remembered where he was and that he didn't know the
answer to the questions Hutch was asking.

"What do you know, anyway?"

"Nothin' that you want to know." The shackled man shrugged elaborately, still afraid Hutch might
pull out that mammoth pistol and do what he'd threatened in Temecula. "Except that Peter's gonna
kill that red haired Jew-boy an' you'll never see him coming."

"Shut the hell up!" Hutch smacked the wall with the flat of his hand, the sound making Adams jump.
"No matter how much immunity you get for the petty ass stuff, fella, you'll still be in prison for a
long, long time. And y'know I've heard there's a lot of you kind in Folsom-white supremacy's big
inside, huh? You could be real popular."

"I know some guys..." Adams trailed off, not sure what he was getting at.

"Yah, but y'know, child molesters, now that's a whole different ball of wax."

"I didn't do that shit, man."

"Since Sandrine Bar Din pressed charges, we've talked to five other unsolved rape cases. Very pretty
girls... a couple very young. One of 'em fourteen."

"Peter never does any minors."

"But he did. And you did." Hutch reached over and pushed back Adams' sleeve to reveal the
lightening bolt S scar below the Nazi insignia tattoo. "All the girls remember the handsome blond
guy named Peter and his hulking friend with the tattoo." He patted the other man's arm before
Adams pulled his cuffed hands back. "Maybe I should get your machine out of the evidence room.
It's only one floor down. Or just use a dirty needle and India ink, huh? Like they do in prison? And
ink something wicked across your forehead, huh? Child molester? Tortures little girls? Huh?" He
advanced around the table, poking his finger in Adams' chest. "How popular would you be in prison
after that, you think?"

"You can't do that against my will! I got rights." Adams tried to back up, away from the menace in
Hutchinson's eyes.
"I can't? Like you couldn't do it to my partner? To Starsky? What kind of rights did you give him?"

"That's not fair. I was under orders."

"I forgot, you don't think for yourself, just some kind of Nazi puppet. Well, Adams, who ever told you life was fair? I'm talking to the lawyers about revoking any immunity you may have been granted, cause I want you in prison for a good..." He poked his finger at Adams' breastbone one last time, "Long time."

"I want my lawyer," Adams squeaked.

"Sure, we're done. You don't know anything." Hutch shut his eyes to rid himself of the view of Adams' thick necked, fleshy face, crew cut and tiny ears. Turning, he stalked out of the interrogation room, calling for the uniformed officer standing guard outside the door.

Sitting in the squadroom, in the chair on the side of the communal desk that Hutch thought of as Starsky's was Elsa Hottstedder. Her silvery blond hair was elaborately French braided down her back, emphasizing the elegant line of her jaw and high cheekbones. She gave a tentative smile when he walked up, standing to meet him.

"Detective Hutchinson?" She asked, her voice a mixture of uncertainty and determination.

"Ken." He shook her hand warmly, very aware of his body's keen awareness of her presence. Waving her back to her seat, he dropped down into the other chair, crossing his legs over the sudden warmth in his groin. "I'm glad to see you, Elsa, but a little surprised. I wasn't sure if you wanted to remain in contact." He chose his words carefully, not wanting to start in a direction she wasn't prepared for.

"I...I've done a lot of thinking the last few days." She was wearing a russet skirt and a braided belt with long tassels that she twisted absently around her forefinger. "About my life. Things I've done. Things you said...So on Friday I went back to Millbrae and Sons and applied for the job."

"The place where you couldn't talk to the receptionist?"

She nodded, the blond braid swinging. "I'd never spoken willingly...um...intentionally to a colored before, except y'know to a store clerk. And I usually try to avoid them, too."

"How was it?" Hutch asked gently.

"Scary, but I did it. And I got the job." She gave him a dazzling smile. "I start Monday, secretary to Mr. Millbrae Jr."

"Congratulations."

"The one thing I'm worried about is having to talk to Marvella, I'm afraid I'll say something...she takes the wrong way, and get fired."

"Then you need to practice. Think of safe topics. Don't start out big, after all, you just met. Hello, nice weather works really well."

"Yes." Elsa twisted the tassel around two fingers and then let it unwind in a curly spiral. "I'm really going to try to change. I think I am prejudiced, only I never thought much about it. Everybody I know is the same way."

"You know me."
"Well." She laughed self-consciously. "I even tried to get into those peace talks but you couldn't go for just one day, and they were all filled up."

"I'm proud that you gave it a try." Hutch nodded, "You should celebrate. Are you doing anything tonight?"

"Are you asking me out?" Elsa countered, a little gleam in her summer sky blue eyes.

"You're in such an adventuresome period of your life, maybe you'd like to meet a few of my friends." Hutch admired her fine boned face, warming to the idea of taking her out on a real date. He'd spoken almost without thinking, but realized he really wanted to go out with her. As long as she could rid herself of the ugly bigotry, that is. Thoughts of Angela flitted though his mind, but he was far more attracted to Else, if she could change. Angela had always been an enjoyable pastime, not a long-term romance. Elsa fascinated him, and not just because she was strikingly beautiful. How much had her prejudices affected her life? And could she learn to be comfortable in an integrated world?

Hutch remembered his father teaching him how to swim by tossing the four year old child into the pool and waiting for him to come sputtering to the surface, splashing his arms wildly. The old man had never once lifted a hand to help his son back out of the water. He'd learned to swim, but it had taken awhile.

Total immersion. That's what he planned for Elsa, but with a kinder hand. If she was scared they'd leave, but a big step towards her independence might be just a little drink and maybe a meal at Huggy Bear's.

"If you feel uncomfortable, we can go." Hutch cupped his hand around her elbow, rubbing his fingers on the soft skin of her inner arm. "But at least one drink, okay?"

"Not so hard." Elsa smiled uncertainly, with a tiny shrug. "This place is owned by one of your friends?"

"Yep, and I haven't seen him in a while. Huggy can be a little overwhelming for anyone, so just remain cool and you'll have him eating out of your hand."

Hutch led the way into the semi-dark bar, glad it appeared to be a relatively quiet night. Sunday at 5:30 was hardly party hour.

"Have a seat, I'll go get us drinks." Hutch held out a chair for Elsa, letting the tip of her braid dance along his arm as she sat. It sent shivers over his skin, feeding the heat in his groin. "Beer? Domestic? German?"

Elsa laughed, her teeth perfectly white in the gloom. "Actually, Mexican if he has it."

"I'll go out to the corner liquor store and get some if he doesn't." Hutch shared the laughter. "Cuervo with lime."

"Perfect," she said, but her eyes were on the man behind the bar. Tall, thin as a whippet and a chocolate brown, he was wearing a rainbow hued shirt and bright blue jacket. She looked away, embarrassed, unsure of what her reactions should be.

"That's Huggy Bear," Hutch confirmed. "Honest, Elsa, he won't bite. All you have to do is say hello."

"This is very hard. It's like I'm looking at everything from a different direction."
"Sounds about right," Hutch agreed. He caught Huggy's eye, crossing to the bar.

"Return of the prodigal son!" Huggy proclaimed, leaning over the counter to give him a clap on the back. "How's it shakin', Man?"

"Better than a few days ago." Hutch put in his order.

"I read about Starsky. That man's a psycho." Huggy shook his head, flipping the caps of two Cuervo Golds.

"And the paper didn't report it all," Hutch said soberly. "He's still in pretty rough shape. I'll tell you about it another time." He pointed out Elsa, who gave a nervous wave. "That's Elsa."

"Very pretty." Huggy raised his eyebrows approvingly.

"She's...uh...not used to people like you." Hutch wasn't sure how to put it into words.

"Gregarious, macho bar owners?"

"How bout bar owners of a darker hue?"

"Oh." Huggy frowned, his face hard. "She one of them folk you were hangin' with? Not good company, Hutch."

"I think she has a real interest in change."

"The she oughta be talkin' to Rabbi Micah, not coolin' her heels in a black man's establishment."

"Huggy," Hutch chastised carefully. "Give her a chance."

"You gonna be seein' more of her?"

"Depends."

"On what?"

"A lot of things. Huggy, just be cordial."

"I ain't no sweet drink but I know how to make nice with the customers." Huggy plopped the beer bottles onto a tray with a little more force than necessary, adding a bowl of lime quarters and a salt shaker.

Hutch made the introductions, getting a soft hello from Elsa and a strained, formal greeting out of Huggy, not at all his usual effusive manner when encountering a new pretty face at the bar. Huggy left abruptly when hailed by another customer.

Clinking bottles with Elsa, Hutch took a long swallow, then bit into the juicy green fruit, savoring the sour/sweet taste.

Elsa drank also, sucking on the lime wedge, her pink tongue licking the last of the juice from her bottom lip. "Ken, do you remember--I think it was one of the first days you were at the...Brotherhood...we watched Bachman give a speech on the TV."

"Yes."

"I never..." she paused, then began again. "He quoted 'Love thy neighbor.' I didn't know that Jews
had the ten commandments."

Hutch was floored for a moment, astonished by her appalling lack of knowledge. "But, Elsa, y'know Moses was Jewish. He led the children of Israel out of Egypt and somewhere in that forty years got the commandments."

"I just never made the connection," she said, her voice dropping into a whisper so that the blare from the jukebox nearly drowned her out. "But the Jews killed Jesus, didn't they?"

"I think the Romans did that." Hutch watched her, taking occasional drinks from his beer. Elsa had ducked her head as if suddenly very interested in the gold label on her bottle.

"I keep thinking of things." She poked her finger into the lime, letting the juice soak into her napkin. "Stuff my Dad said, boyfriends... and I'm not sure what's real and what's not. It's like I'm standing on ice and there's a giant crack between my feet. The ice is breaking apart and I can't even keep my footing anymore." Her blue eyes were wet with tears. "I'm afraid to talk to everyone now. It used to be so simple. I knew who was good and who was bad. Black and white."

"Jews and Christians," Hutch finished for her. "And then there's all those Hindus, Muslims and Catholics."

"Oh, God," she wailed. "I can't do this. I feel like I'm going to suffocate in here."

"Okay." Hutch threw some cash on the table, guiding her out without a second word. As they were leaving, he caught Huggy watching them with a neutral expression.

"I'm sorry, Ken, I like you, I really do. But it's too much." Elsa hugged her arms over her chest, pulling the jacket that matched her russet skirt tighter.

"I know. And you've actually taken a big leap, Elsa," Hutch consoled, rubbing her back. "Acknowledging that you have difficulty with this."

She took panicky, choppy breaths, trying to calm herself down. "Difficulty doesn't even begin to come close to it. Listen, I have to get up early to start my new job in the morning. I...I'd like to try this again, sometime?"

"Sounds good to me." Hutch smiled at her, "Since you left your car at headquarters, I guess we'll have to spend a while longer together."

"Oh, yeah." She laughed self-consciously. "What's good drive home conversation? The World Series?"

"You know baseball?" Hutch asked incredulously.

"Do I know baseball!" She snorted, with a flip of her long braid.

Elsa did know her way around the great American pastime, and was able to control the conversation all the way back to the parking lot. This only heightened Hutch's interest in her. Despite the dismal failure of his total immersion experiment, he knew he would see her again. Maybe subject her to an evening with Starsky and Meredith--that could be the proof of the pudding.

Back home in his own apartment, Hutch found himself with time on his hands and very little to occupy himself. It was early on a Sunday evening. He should call Angela, if just to give her the it's over speech, but he didn't feel like it. He could go back to Huggy's and soothe the waters, but hell, Huggy was the one who'd acted like a jerk. He had to have had other customers he didn't approve of
in that pit of a bar over the years. Dinner was probably a good idea, but there was very little food in the cupboards. He was just on the way out again to hit the neighborhood grocery when the phone rang.

"Hey," he answered by way of greeting.

"Hey, I used to know a guy named Hutchinson who lived here, but I think he changed his name to Chambers..."

"The old Hutch is back." Hutch grinned, Starsky sounded like his old self.

"Glad to know." Starsky tucked his feet under him, sitting Indian style in the hospital bed. "What's going on?"

"Why, you bored? Nothing at all, where's Brick and Meredith?" Hutch had a sudden attack of nerves. What was Starsky doing by himself? "Are you alone? Are you...?"

"Don't get all bent out of shape. There's still acoupla uniforms on the door, which by the way, I think is really overkill...Brick has some 'brotha' in Riverside, and his wife does braids, so Meredith went with him to have dinner there and get her hair done." Starsky paused to take a drink from the 7-up on the bedside table. Now that he could keep fluids down, he couldn't seem to satiate his thirst.

"Poor Starsk, left behind."

"Yeah, well, not exactly up to dinner party standards yet." Starsky shrugged.

"When were you ever?" Hutch quipped, that last statement too invitingly open for ridicule. Starsky must not be feeling very well yet, he'd usually shoot back with a stinging retort, but he let this one slide by. "You getting out tomorrow?"

"Yep. Got that garden hose pulled out, and it hurt like a son of a bitch. Now I have to prove I can go by myself by noon Monday. I said I've been doing it since I was two, I didn' figure it would be so hard..." He squirmed, remembering the first painful attempts to urinate without the catheter in, but his body needed to reestablish the normal internal functions and all were not quite in perfect working order yet. "Next time, if I'm unconscious, don't let some doctor shove one of those things up me again, hear?"

"There'll be a next time?" Hutch said, half teasing, "I don't like the sound of that."

"No. You know what I mean." Starsky rubbed his aching temple, "So, what's going on with van Geller?"

"No one can find him," Hutch answered. "I interrogated Adams, but he claimed not to know, and to a certain extent, I believed him. I think van Geller likes to control everything. He's buried himself in the dirt somewhere, until just the right time."

"That's where he belongs." Starsky shivered, hating the way his body reacted involuntarily. van Geller may be a monster, but he was just another monster in a long line Starsky had encountered in his police career. What made him any different? Starsky didn't want visceral feelings to affect how he acted as an officer of the law, but he knew that they did. He was scared of Peter van Geller, and was comforted by the sight of butt of the .38 under the pile of magazines beside him.

"Starsk?" Hutch broke into the silence zinging along the phone line. "You okay?"

"Yeah. Sure, terrific. Why shouldn't I be?"
"I can be there in under two hours if you want some company."

"Nah, Meredith'll be back soon, with new hair. It'd get too crowded.," Starsky assured heartily, his heart rate accelerating as memories flooded his soul, drowning his spirit. Oh, God, please not now. Try not to think about it.

"Starsky, say something!" Hutch was getting frightened now, Starsky's breathing sounded ragged, and he hadn't responded to his name being called twice.

"What?"

"You didn't hear me."

"Must be a bad connection. I gotta get some sleep. S-she'll want to be up late talkin' an' stuff. Y'know, I'm tryin' to convince her to go back to Washington to finish the seminar, cause the instructor already told her that it'd be okay, and uh--then she'd be able to teach this stuff herself and tour the country teaching it to other cops..."

"Stop," Hutch ordered, Starsky hadn't taken a breath since he'd started the run on sentence. "Talk to me." He listened to the intake of air that proved Starsky had inhaled. "And not about Meredith. You need to get rid of all that shit or it'll eat you alive."

"So everybody keeps tellin' me." Starsky recalled the conversation about forgiveness he'd had with Washington on the first day of their partnership. He wasn't ready yet to think about all of what had happened to him. Just go slow, take tiny little bites out of it, no need to ingest it whole. "Adams...Did he say why? He finished...what he started, didn't he?"

Anyone else might not even understand what Starsky was eluding to, but Hutch wasn't just anyone. He spoke Starskyese. He also knew at that moment that Starsky would probably never open up to some hospital appointed psychiatrist, so it looked like he was drafted into the job. "On your arm?" He asked carefully, wanting Starsky to say it out loud.

"Yesss."

Well, he hadn't said the words but he'd acknowledged its presence. That was a start. "I asked him. He said van Geller ordered him to do the tattoo."

"Did you see it?" Starsky had closed his eyes, unable to even look at the bandage wound around the arm he was using to hold the phone to his ear.

"Yeah, I did," Hutch agreed. "Did you look at it?"

"No. I don't want to."

"I talked to the plastic surgeon." Hutch described the conversation he'd had with the doctor. "He can get rid of it," he concluded.

"That's good. Soon. Then, maybe I could get a naked woman instead, huh? Or a heart with Mom under it?" Starsky's voice shook, but his attempt at levity showed he was more in control.

"Or a big red Torino," Hutch added, smiling fondly. He paused, knowing what he was going to say next would be met with stubbornness. "Starsk, have you heard of Post Traumatic Stress?"

"S'what Viet Nam vets get."
"Or anyone who's had really bad shit happen to them," Hutch reasoned.

"Well, Dr. Hutchinson, when did you get your degree while I wasn't lookin'?" Starsky asked sarcastically. "You think I'm messed up?"

"Listen, I just think that maybe...

"I need to see a shrink?" Starsky sneered. "Thanks a lot, buddy. I appreciate your back-up, pal. I gotta go, bye." With that less than satisfactory last word, Starsky slammed down the phone, angry that his hands shook as he did so. Everyone kept harping on him to talk about it, get it off his chest, let out the demons. He wasn't ready, and he certainly wasn't going to make nice chat with some sixty dollar an hour interrogator with a parchment degree on the wall. They could all go to hell, he'd already been there, thank you very much, and didn't relish reliving it. So why did Hutch's words ring so true?

"Well, Hutchinson, that went really well," Hutch chastised himself, staring at the handset now blaring the dial tone, hoping that Starsky would reconsider and call back. It didn't happen, and he reluctantly hung up.

He was certainly batting a thousand tonight. He'd managed to scare off Elsa and piss off Huggy and Starsky in mere hours. He and Starsky had never had a fight that lasted more than 24 hours, both would be talking by tomorrow, even if neither ever apologized or referred to the actual argument again. And despite his objections, he knew exactly where Starsky would be on Monday evening after he left the hospital, so if nothing else changed between then and now, he'd see him in person at the peace talks dinner.

*****

A pale blue eyed man settled himself in the first class seat of the South Pacific cross-country Nightflyer, catching his reflection in the night darkened window. The new look still impressed him. A reddish dye, a tight perm, and contact lenses gave him such a different attitude that he felt confident buying any newspaper with his picture on it. No one had yet recognized him! They were all such fools, with Peter van Geller being the King of fools. The man had been totally blinded by his maniacal hatred for a particular group of people and look where it had gotten him? He'd be arrested in just a day or so.

The man who now called himself Mark Fermacher smiled. He knew for certain that van Geller wouldn't be able to stay away from the peace talks and that would be his undoing. He should have planned better, not let the prejudice get in the way of the total plan. Now, someone else had his money and power and he was left with nothing, just the way it was meant to be.

Mark Fermacher had always believed in setting his own course, not letting others influence his life. He'd gotten through college despite a stupid set of parents and less than stellar high school grades. He'd excelled at MIT. He'd excelled at making a bomb to set all the Jewish population of LA on its collective ear and now, he would excel at whatever else he put his mind to.

Giving a friendly smile to the sweet faced woman across the aisle, who nodded in return, Fermacher opened his paper to read the exploits of the FBI's number two wanted man-Albert Sherman-somebody he didn't know anymore.

*****

Finishing his morning prayers in his little office behind the main conference room, Micah Bachman felt satisfied. Here it was, the last day of the talks and there'd been no violence, no bombs, and no
more threats. The talks had gone as well as he could have expected. Oh, sure, there'd been the usual tension and dissention brought on by spirited debates and opposing view points, but everyone here had worked together in the united spirit of a shared goal. Even those who'd argued the loudest agreed that progress had been made. Prejudice could be untaught. It was possible, and the people he'd shared these walls with the last few days were living proof of that.

He was planning to sit in on the lecture by Lutheran minister Robert Carson before his own seminar after the break. The other speakers had been wonderful, insightful and provocative--proving that his was not the only viewpoint. If some agreed wholeheartedly with him, others swayed towards the more conservative angle of Carson, or the middle of the road views of Monsignor Lopez-Gonsalez. It was important to show the skinheads, ex-white supremacists and others of their ilk that it was perfectly all right to have differences of opinion without breaking down into petty threats and anger.

To be truthful, Micah was also glad there had been others to share the workload. He thought maybe he'd take a few days off after all this--maybe go to Hawaii--someplace not associated with work and Miriam. He and the other clergy had split the weekend so each could take their own Sabbaths to practice their own faiths. Thus, he'd been able to take off on Saturday for worship and had done all the morning lectures on Sunday to let those of Christian persuasion go to their churches. But a few weeks of relaxation were in order after the months of stress.

"Micah," Moses Reinhart said from the hall, juggling a load of paperwork in his arms. "You have the final tally on who's gonna be at the dinner tonight?"

"It's there somewhere." Micah waved a hand at the desk. "I talked to Dave Starsky this morning and he's getting out of the hospital and probably driving straight over. So, there's four in his party."

"Yeah, we reserved a table just for them, right near the front," Moses agreed, setting down his own pile of papers and finding the one the Rabbi had indicated. "You and all the rest of the clergy are on the dais, then, Mama and Senator McCallum."

Micah grinned impishly. "Tell me Mose, your mother and the senator...?"

Looking amazingly embarrassed for an adult, sexually experienced man, a blush rising up from his dark beard, Moses nodded. "They've been very discrete, what with everything that's happened with Miriam and all, but they've been seeing each other for a while."

"I think it's great," Micah said, a sharp ache cramping his heart for just a moment. If only he'd had more time with Miriam. Had she known about her mother's happiness?

"I'll have to say Mazel Tov tonight."

"And another one to you, Micah." Moses waved his arms to take in the world around them. "You've been brilliant. I wasn't sure this would all come off, I guess I just didn't have your faith."

"Some days I didn't know if I had any," The Rabbi sighed. "But I had Miriam." He tapped his breastbone, then straightened his yarmulke and walked out to join the crowd gathering for Rev. Carson's talk.

"Rabbi."

"Rabbi Bachman!"

Immediately he was swarmed with admirers, all wanting a word with the great one, each intent on putting forth his or her own personal stamp on the proceedings and volunteering to help with any further projects. Suddenly, there were so many possibilities and not enough time and money to
address them all.

Shaking hands and attempting to answer each question, Micah caught sight of a man on the edge of the group sipping coffee. He looked oddly familiar, but somehow off and Micah groped his memory for the young man's name. It didn't come, and when he looked over again, the brunet with a reddish beard similar to the Rabbi’s own had disappeared.

Laughing to himself for having an attack of paranoia, Micah focused his whole attention on a young blond woman who'd just admitted to some fairly vicious racial attacks in her high school days. This required more of him than some vaguely suspicious person in the group. Of course he'd looked familiar, he'd spent three and a half days with these people. They all looked familiar, even if he hadn't memorized three hundred different names. So why, even as he consoled the woman, did his mind keep going back to the thought that the man looked suspicious?

van Geller laughed, ducking his head over his morning cup of coffee. It was the closest he'd ever gotten to the Jew. He had such a heady sense of omnipotence, like he was controlling the actions of every single person in the building. He was the ultimate puppeteer, holding the strings and choreographing the whole show.

Finding a seat as Rev. Carson claimed the stage, van Geller sneered at the prissy minister gesturing ineffectually to quiet the still chattering crowd. It wasn't until Bachman stood and shushed them that the audience settled, turning towards the front to watch Rev. Carson.

Pow. Van Geller entertained himself by aiming a pretend pistol and picking off the Lutheran before aiming at his intended target, the Jew.

Pow.

Nobody in this room knew what he planned to do that evening, and the knowledge of this gave him satisfaction for the entire lecture.

*****

"Ready t'go?" Washington asked, watching as Starsky stuffed the last of his possessions into a duffel bag Meredith had provided.

"I was ready hours ago, but the idiot doctors wouldn't let me go!" Starsky groused. It was almost three in the afternoon, but his urologist hadn't signed the release papers until he'd given up what seemed a larger than necessary amount of fluids. Blood sample, urine...Finally, the gruff faced doctor had peered at him through coke bottle-lensed glasses and pronounced him in fair condition, adding that he should go home and rest for at least a week. There were all sorts of complications from near renal failure; urinary tract infections, bladder infections and even kidney stones. It had been way more information than Starsky cared to hear. "Is Meredith bringing the car around?"

"Should be out there now." Washington picked up the duffel, raising his eyebrows in a slightly threatening manner until Starsky sat in the wheelchair the nurse had wheeled in.

His departure from the hospital was a trifle less dramatic than his entrance, but Starsky didn't mind in the least. Brick pushed the wheelchair down the corridor, flanked by the two silent uniformed guards and out into the pickup area. Their late departure had discouraged the media, who'd been waiting since early that morning, so with a quick transfer from wheelchair to car, neither of the two lurking photographers got a picture.

"Well, you cleaned up nice." Meredith shifted around in the driver's seat to admire the dark gray suit
and tie she'd bought for Starsky to go with the deep blue shirt.

"He looks like he's in Guys n' Dolls," Washington put in, sliding into the back after putting the bags in the trunk.

Meredith let out the brake, driving slowly though the hospital parking lot to avoid the photographers still intent on getting their shots.

"I like that show," Starsky defended, "Nothin' like a dame..." he warbled.


"I got that." Starsky reached for Meredith's hand, giving it a squeeze. He didn't feel one hundred percent yet, but he was ecstatic to be out of the hospital. "An' what are you, anyway, an expert on all art and theatre?"

"As a matter of fact, Ah am," Washington confirmed smugly. "An' don't you two start sparkin' up there while Joanie is drivin' or she'll put us into a ditch."

"Sparkin'?" Meredith echoed with a laugh in her voice. "Then, you can drive. I have to get gas anyway, Brick, we can switch then. Wouldn't want to put us in a ditch." She took advantage of a red light to plant a kiss on Starsky's cheek.

"You can be chauffeur." Starsky grinned, stroking Meredith's soft brown cheek. "And we'll make out in the back seat."

"I get all the fun," Washington groused good naturedly, happy to see the two of them back together, and Starsky on the mend. Meredith bumped the car over the curb into a Shell station, getting out to start pumping the gas. He jumped out to assist her, teasing her for doing the 'manly' job dressed in an elegant dress and high heels.

Starsky slumped in the back seat watching Washington and Meredith laugh together, wondering if he should get out and try to call Hutch on the pay phone before they got back on the highway for the hour's drive. He'd warred with himself all morning about calling Hutch back. The one time he'd tried, he's gotten the message that the blond detective was out of the building for several hours. He hadn't left a message. The rest of the day had been filled with endless, annoying tests and a boring renal ultrasound that took forever. He still felt cold from lying on a bare gurney while the tech had moved a blunt ended scope smeared with icy goop across his belly creating weird black and white images on his monitor screen. The urologist and his assistant had hummed and a-hun'd back and forth before pronouncing his kidneys on the mend despite the ache Starsky felt all along his back. Still, he regretted not getting in touch with his best friend.

Watching the freeway rush past as Washington put on the speed, Starsky yearned for his former life, even if it had only been a month ago since he'd lived it. It seemed like a million years ago since he'd been cruising around with Hutch in the Torino, rounding up snitches and rousting small time bookies. The bomb had done more than destroy the temple, it had destroyed his life. Nothing had been the same since.

"Your hands are like ice, blue eyes." Meredith wrapped both of hers around Starsky's, scooching closer on the bench seat to lay her head on his shoulder.

"Y'know, Little Davey, I bin talkin' to Captain Dobey an' he says I kin partner with Hutch for the month 'er two 'til you're back on your feet."

"Don't get too comfortable, Darryl," Starsky said snidely, ruder than he'd intended to be, "I'm not
dead yet."

"David!" Meredith raised her head to peer at his angry face. "What's gotten into you?"

"Didn' mean anything by it, Starsky," Washington consoled, surprised by the outburst. "I ain't steppin' into your shoes."

"They wouldn't fit anyhow," Starsky teased, surprised himself. "Sorry, man, I'm just not myself lately."

"S'okay. Ah'd just as well hang around with one of the two of you guys than be stuck out like a fifth wheel when the famous Starsky and Hutch get back together."

"Well, with my luck you can just be the regular replacement partner whenever one of us ends up in the hospital."

"I don't like the sound of that." Meredith laced her fingers through Starsky's.

"You ain't heard mah theory, Joanie." Washington grinned at them in the rear view mirror. "Bout the bullet magnet there."

"He's blowin' smoke," Starsky protested, but was once again subjected to the entire roster of his gunshot wounds and an addendum on the rest of his police work acquired injuries. Luckily, it was a long car ride to the convention center.

*****

Hutch surreptitiously checked his pocket watch, judging how much time he had left before it was time to leave for the Peace talks final night dinner. He'd spent the day assisting the original bombing investigation team sifting through the wealth unearthed at the Temecula house. There was now such an incredible surplus of evidence to sift through that there was more than enough for five detectives to do. Already, prosecuting attorneys were drafting documents to bring the perpetrators to trial, and several key members of the Brotherhood had been picked up and requisitioned. As Hutch had always surmised, most of the others knew little to nothing about the temple bombing. That had been van Geller's special project, his silver trophy.

There was still much to be done to make an unbeatable case against Peter van Geller, but Hutch took his leave, wanting to have time to talk to Starsky alone. He sincerely regretted the argument. Although to be truthful, he did think Starsky would benefit from some professional counseling, not just baring his soul to his best friend. That is, if Starsky would ever even open up at all. Recently, he could sense Starsky holding himself impossibly tightly, as if he'd fly into bits at the slightest provocation.

Oddly, he knew that getting back on the streets, reestablishing their partnership would loosen Starsky up. One late night on a boring stakeout might actually be therapeutic. But with his upcoming wrist surgery, late night stakeouts would not be happening for a while.

Driving home to dress for the dinner, Hutch rehearsed what he planned to say to his best friend, not to offend but to plant a more positive attitude about therapy in his brain.

*****

The last discussion of the peace conference had ended early on Monday to allow all participants to prepare for the evenings' festivities, and redecorate the meeting rooms into dining areas. White table clothes were placed over lowly rented tables, adorned with crystal vases of cut flowers and glittery
sprinkles of silvery confetti. Alliance for Peaceful Co-existence banners, and photographs taken in
the last few days of the peace talk members, were erected on easels around the periphery of the
room, giving it a much more intimate atmosphere.

van Geller had begun his work even before the caterers and waiters finished theirs. He was proud of
his own handiwork. That bastard Sherman had always made it seem as if explosives were so difficult
and precise. The bomb had sat in the trunk of his car for days since he'd left Temecula. No premature
detonation. It had taken no work at all to change a few wires and timing devices. Hadn't needed no
explosives expert, Albert.

Now, just had to get through the interminable after-dinner speeches and awards. It just wouldn't do to
spring the surprise too soon. Timing was everything. Grandpa Helmut had always said that. Trust the
old man to know exactly the right words to say at the right time. He had to select the exact time to
give Bachman his special award before the rest of them got theirs.

Folding into the shadows of the hallway, blending into the scenery, van Geller watched at the
crowds of diners started to arrive. The success of the talks had brought out some luminaries of the
political world who now jostled for a position on the Rabbi's coat tails, riding along as if they'd been
with him the whole time. With a chuckle, he slid away to finalize his preparations.

Micah found himself constantly surrounded by men whose names he'd only read in the papers, and
indulged in a bit of star struck admiration himself. He appealed to their inflated egos to get the
political and financial support he needed to fulfill the second phase of his dream.

Glad for the extra inch that put him above the average person, Hutch searched the crowd of cocktail-
in-hand partyers, but didn't see the three faces he was looking for. He did recognize the Rabbi, his
brother in law and Dave Murphy, all wedged in a corner with half a dozen reporters and what looked
to be the lieutenant governor of California. Good. With high-ranking brass like that around, the
security had to be extra tight tonight. Just because nothing had happened thus far did not assuage the
gut feeling Hutch had that van Geller was going to pull out a doozy before the dessert.

"Champagne, sir?"

Hutch accepted a tulip glass of bubbly from a black jacketed waiter, sipping the wine. Mrs.
Reinhart's influence was obvious, it wasn't five dollar a bottle plonk, but real Napa Valley vintage
champagne. His estimation that he might actually enjoy himself a little raised a notch.

Easing himself out of the throng streaming towards the bar, Hutch checked out the security. There
were armed, uniformed police at all doors and invited guests and peace talk participants were only
being allowed in through one outside entrance so that all could be discreetly searched for weapons.
The only reason Hutch had been able to hang onto his pistol was his detective badge. He chatted
briefly with the policewoman in charge of security, asking if she'd had the building searched for
bombs. This was a known m.o. of van Geller's, after all.

Not looking at all offended by the question, she told him they'd swept the building that afternoon,
and since there'd been police presence at all entrances since then, she doubted there was need for
concern.

Knowing there was always a margin of error, Hutch would have pressed the point, but he finally
captured sight of his friends coming through the metal detector. Starsky had set it off, and the on-duty
cop, a crew cut with a beer belly and a healthy dislike of long haired trouble makers, was getting
ready to frisk him.

"Don't worry." Hutch held his detective's shield in front of the suspicious man's face. "They may
look like wanted felons, but they're all on our side." He grinned at the uniform's astonishment when Meredith and Washington held out their detective badges as well.

Starsky just managed to look both surly and triumphant, since he no longer possessed a badge. Just another thing he'd have to replace.

"Thanks, Hutch." Meredith tucked her gold shield back into the tiny, black beaded evening bag she carried. The security cop was still giving her surreptitious glances as though he'd never seen a detective wearing a black cocktail dress with jet beads scattered across the bodice before. She patted the new thick braids coiled around the top of her head like a sleeping snake with a smirk.

"You carryin' concealed, buddy?" Hutch asked Starsky, thinking his partner didn't look at all up for an evening of over cooked meat and speeches. He looked so tired he probably wouldn't have made it though a night of warmed milk and Lawrence Welk.

"Don't I always?" Starsky asked rhetorically.

"No shoulder holster."

"Ankle." Starsky pulled up his left pants leg just enough to reveal the edge of a leather holster. "My arm isn't back in the game yet."

"Joanie, want something to drink?" Washington knew when his two friends needed some space.

"Yeah, they've got great champagne, and some hors d'oeuvres over there," Hutch directed across the room to an elegant table laden with bite sized delicacies. "And we've got a reserved table near the front."

"Starsky, you want something?" Meredith leaned in to her lover. Even the low level lighting, designed for a calming, enjoyable evening didn't disguise the fact that he already looked pale, exhausted and in pain. "A coke to wash down a painkiller?" she suggested as sweetly as possible.

"Sure." He smiled for her benefit, amazed at how much the car ride had worn him out, and he'd slept half the way. Unfortunately a multi car pile-up about fifteen miles past Riverside had delayed them for nearly forty-five minutes, and he'd missed his pill deadline by quite a while. "Hutch'n me'll go snag some seats at the table."

"Starsk, you don't have to be here." Hutch caught him by the left arm as an already tipsy ex-skinhead over balanced into Starsky's right side, then lumbered off unsteadily without even an apology. Hutch could feel the stiffness in his friend's whole body as Starsky tried to hide the wave of pain that shot through him from the drunk's impact against his managed wrist.

"I already am, no point in leaving now." Starsky sat at their designated table, holding his bandaged arm against his body. He hated his weakened state, determined not to ruin the evening for the rest of them. "I told you I was coming."

"Listen, I was a jerk last night. I shouldn't have tried my psych 101 on you..."

"Hey, everybody's got their own opinions, just don't fight with me right now." Starsky was so utterly vulnerable Hutch's words caught in his throat. Tilting his head up, Starsky smiled tiredly, total forgiveness in his indigo eyes. "And who knows, maybe you got a point, I'm just not ready yet, y'know?"

"You think I might actually be right?" Hutch held his gaze for a moment, reflecting the love back, then grinned. "That must be a first."
"Don't let it go to your head, it's big enough now." Starsky had fumbled a pill bottle out of his jacket pocket but couldn't open the childproof cap. "Here, put your brawn to some use." He held out the prescription bottle.

"Here's your coke." Washington placed a wineglass full of cola in front of Starsky, keeping a glass of champagne for himself.

Meredith seated herself at the table, with a tulip glass of her own and a small plate overflowing with finger foods.

"Does this make me the designated driver?" Starsky washed down two Vicodin with the soft drink.

"Only if you call me a cab," Hutch teased, toasting the other three with his glass. "I'm sure your doctor said no driving for a while."

"You're a cab," Starsky smart-assed. "My doctor said a whole lot of really unpleasant stuff before he'd let me leave, so the less I hear about him, the better."

"What about the case?" Washington brought up, filching two cheese puffs off Meredith's plate. She pushed it into the center of the table so everyone could share.

Hutch immediately tried a wedge of toast with liver pate. He noticed Starsky didn't partake as the others were doing, but said nothing. Meredith was daintily munching on a slice of French bread spread with brie. Unlike other cocktail parties arranged for the Rabbi, this one was not completely kosher, but had a mixture of foods intended for all tastes.

"You mean, did van Geller turn up?" Hutch shook his head, chewing on his snack. "We've got enough evidence to put him inside for the rest of his natural life, but he's apparently not interested in cooperating."

"He's not finished yet," Starsky said softly, suddenly fearful. The last thing he wanted to think about were those days in the dumpster, but the memories always swamped him when he was least prepared for them.

It was like he'd dropped back down in that cesspool and he could feel the superheated metal against his bare arms again, only he was in a pleasantly temperature controlled room and wearing a wool suit. To cover his ragged nerves, he sipped the overly carbonated Coke and coughed when the bubbles slid up his nose.

"S'a good thing you didn't have any champagne." Meredith laughed, giving him a pat on the back, but her large dark eyes were scared despite her words. "Why don't you think he's done?"

"He won't stop until he gets what he wants. Or we get him," Starsky said obliquely.

From the front of the room, there was a tinkling of silverware against crystal, a perfect pristine tone rising above the ambient chatter in the dining room, hanging in the air until the voices had died away. The diners' focus turned to the main table set up off the floor by a small platform so that those who sat there could be seen. Micah Bachman's seat was in the middle, behind a low arrangement of roses and carnations, but the lieutenant Governor sat to his left, with the other clergy involved in the peace talks ranged down the table. On the far end from Starsky and Hutch's table sat Mrs. Reinhart, her son, and Senator McCallum. Dave Murphy, and his date, Nina who was also an undercover cop, sat two away from Bachman in their capacity as bodyguards.

"I want to thank you all for coming." Micah stood, resplendent in a charcoal gray suit with a wine red tie, beaming at the audience. Just these words brought laughter and a smattering of applause from
the appreciative crowd. Of course they had come. They were his converts. "These last few days have been such a revelation to me. The experiences I have had here--giving my opinions, listening to yours, arguing, reasoning and learning will stay with me for a lifetime as I hope they will for each of you. This has been the first leg of a fantastic voyage that I urge you all to join with me. The family of my slain wife Miriam has donated a sum of money to fund a new permanent home for the Alliance for Peaceful Co-existence. We have purchased the land where the Temple Beth Sharon once stood and will be able to break ground as soon as the police are finished with their investigations. Once we start to build, the new center will be renamed the Miriam Reinhart Bachman Center for Peace."

This news brought another round of applause from those listening, Meredith pursed her lips, tears springing to her eyes at the thought of the other people who had been trapped in the bombed building and lost their own lives, as well as the ones who had escaped. Having been all the way across the country when the tragedy occurred, she had not had the full impact that the others had felt. It was doubly frightening to her now, with Starsky still bearing the scars of his far more recent brush with death. She glanced over at him, but he was speaking quietly with Washington and didn't notice her scrutiny.

"A small plaque will be placed just inside the front door to commemorate those who lost their lives in the bombing, and pictures too, if the families wish it." Bachman nodded to his brother-in-law who came around the table to pull back the cloth on an easel on the left side of the room. He revealed a photograph of Miriam blown up to poster size.

With a start, Hutch recognized the origin of the photo and glanced over at Starsky, who looked equally surprised. It was the Labor Day picture Starsky had taken of Miriam right before she'd stuffed hot dogs into her husband's mouth. The hot dogs had been cropped out, but the mischievous glee and pure joy of being shone in her face. It was a marvelous picture, not the usual somber portrait that graced most lobbies, but one which could only make the viewer smile back with happiness.

"She would have liked that." Meredith nodded, trying to blink away the tears, clasping Starsky's left hand. "It's like her, full of life."

"My brother-in-law, my wife's twin Moses Reinhart will be director of the center, and I will continue in my capacity as teacher--for that is ultimately what a Rabbi is-- and conduct classes and seminars, such as this one, to educate. We must all regain the power to think for our selves, and not let others cloud our judgment. We must be free to use our own minds and ears to listen to each other. To hear all sides of a problem before a solution can be found and then unite for a commonality of goals. To find a moral center that we all can agree on and uphold. As I have constantly repeated, communication is the key..."

"To universal understanding!" voices from the crowd joined, shouting the line with their mentor. The room erupted in applause, the representatives of the media surging forward to request more information from Bachman.

"This is the official statement," Moses announced formally, standing between the press and the main table. "It is all we will say to the press at this time. We request that the reporters leave now so that we may have our dinner together, privately." He gave a signal to the police to come over and escort the photographers and media hounds from the room. Most left quietly, but a few were still shouting back questions as waiters began to circulate through the room with plates of salad.

"It'll be half an hour before we get food back here," van Geller groused to his tablemates. Their location was so near the door he could feel the breeze blowing in every time one of the reporters was escorted out. Someone must have left the lobby doors open to have such a draft. Not very good security. He grinned excitedly to himself, hardly able to keep his glee under control. This was the
night he became a superstar. Everyone would finally know who called the shots—and it wasn't some spindly, long-legged, red haired Jew. Real Americans would look at him with pride, knowing what he had begun.

"Eric, there's still some cheese puffs left." Emily, of the short black curls and snappy black eyes, smiled coquettishly at her date. She still couldn't believe her luck. Eric Cartwright had to be one of the best looking men she'd gone out with in, well, forever. He even reminded her of someone, probably a movie actor, Redford maybe, but she couldn't quite put her finger on it. "Could you get me some?"

"Maybe later, Em," he answered gruffly, his eyes on Bachman starting to work the room, pausing at each table, delighting all with his patented charm.

"But..."

"I'll get some, Emily." Her older brother Dick rose in disgust, not having liked his sister's date from the first time he'd met him.

The Rabbi's news of a permanent home for the Alliance created fodder for conversation around every table. Even those who had not previously exchanged words now chatted together, imagining the future possibilities of the new center.

"Rabbi, you certainly know how t'stir up the group." Washington clapped his former colleague on the back when Bachman approached their table.

"All things are possible now, Brick," Micah greeted his friends especially warmly, "I just want the world to know. Dave, I'm so thankful to see you here." He laid a hand on Starsky's shoulder, giving a gentle squeeze, "L'chayim, yasher koach. {To life, may you have strength}"

"Micah, wild horses and Hutch..." Starsky made a face at his partner, "couldn't have kept me away."

"After the main course we're having a couple of speakers up to say a few words." Micah stepped back to let the waiters deliver plates of mixed greens and tomatoes, gesturing at the podium in the middle of the main table. "I want to introduce you. It'd be very inspirational."

"Aw, no," Starsky groaned, "No, Micah."

"C'mon, Starsk," Hutch teased, "You know how you love to perform."

"I look like hell," Starsky protested, wishing he didn't feel like hell as well.

"You look like a miracle," Meredith whispered.

"It's up to you." Micah stroked his beard. "I don't want to push. You've been pushed around enough lately." He helped himself to the last of the hors d'oeuvres sitting in the middle of the table, "Haven't had anything to eat yet. Dave, with all the talks finished, I'm ready to resume our Hebrew classes once again."

"Don't you think I'm a little past the age for a Bar Mitzvah?"

"Never."

"I can't wait to be first in line to give the Bar Mitzvah boy a kiss." Meredith nudged Starsky, giving a demonstration of her intentions.
"Doesn't that mean he's an adult then?" Hutch speared a lettuce leaf with his fork. "It'll never happen. He's the biggest kid around."

"He is well past thirteen." Micah laughed.

"Peter Pan, he ain't." Washington dug into his own salad. "More like Huck Finn."

"Wouldn't mind a raft ride down the Missouri River," Starsky mused. Floating on water sounded really good right then. He was more tired than he wanted to let on, and the drugs had finally kicked in so he was just the slightest bit disconnected: sort of floating was a pretty good description for it.


"You sure?" Starsky challenged.

"I'll leave you to argue this one." Micah sketched a wave. "Got to go press the flesh with a few hundred friends."

"Now, I always had trouble spelling that." Meredith paused with a forkful of greens halfway to her mouth. "M-I-S...are there two S's?"

"Two sets of two S's and two P's," Hutch put in.


"You're worse than he is." Hutch pointed his fork at Starsky. "Always sprouting some trivia."

"It's important t'know how to spell," Washington defended himself, straightening his tie as if affronted, but there was a merry expression on his dark face.

"Okay, if you can spell, that would put you a notch up above Starsky," Hutch said. "He can't. How're you at writing up reports?"

"Ah excel."

"That's actually the truth," Meredith joined in. "At Sutter precinct, everyone knew that Darryl Washington got his arrest reports in on time, and correct the first time."

"I'm impressed." Hutch leaned back in his chair to peruse at his newest partner. "I can't tell you how many times I have to remind Starsky to finish up his paperwork."

"Hey!" Starsky pulled himself back into the conversation, ignoring the salad he wasn't about to eat.

"Oh, he's got some good points...I just can't think of any..." Hutch continued the teasing, but let his eyes roam the room. He was relaxing with the good wine and company, but still felt uneasy. He had to remind himself he wasn't one duty, this was supposed to be a festive night to celebrate Bachman's success, but the couldn't rid himself of that nagging sense of doom.

"I can think of a lot of good points." Meredith ran the back of her hand down the sharp line of Starsky's jaw, soothing his emerging headache. "He's sweet, cuddly, and has great hair."

"Sounds like you're describing a dog!" Starsky retorted.

"That's about right," Hutch agreed. "I'd describe you like a dog, a puppy..."

Light dinner table conversation got them through the salad and a nice main course of brisket,
potatoes and green beans. A selection of classical music filtered through the chatter, played by a small string trio.

Starsky found himself spacing out for long minutes so that he'd come back to a comment he couldn't comprehend in the least, and had to grope to understand what was being discussed. He picked at his meal. He was usually quite fond of brisket, and would have relished some on an onion roll with a lot of mustard--some other day, just not this one.

All his dinner companions noticed Starsky's lack of appetite, but it was to be expected when he'd barely advanced to a regular diet before being discharged from the hospital, so none made any comment. Meredith planned to stay about an hour longer, then suggest they leave, giving Starsky no options in the matter.

As the waiters came by again with refills of wine and water, Hutch excused himself to use the restroom. He walked within two feet of a table by the exit, from which Peter van Geller had only just vacated minutes before.

Emily Horn had just realized her date had deserted her and looked around in frustration. Where had Eric gone? She dejectedly finished her champagne in one gulp, her dreams of the perfect date going down with a crash. He'd left without a word before dessert, even.

van Geller hadn't wandered the halls of the convention center for three days for nothing. He knew every unmarked door, every shortcut between halls and every way to slip by undetected by even the sharpest eyed guard. His only worry was laughing too loudly and being heard before he'd delivered his surprise.

Micah stood at the podium, urging those who had prepared short statements to come forward, and that he had a few awards to present to some of the peace talks participants. Nicely calligraphied certificates were handed out to the other clergy thanking them for their efforts on behalf of the Alliance.

"Ah'm goin' to th'bar for a beer-had enough of this wine," Washington whispered, "Joanie?"

"No, thanks." She shook her head distractedly, listening to one of the ex-skinheads thank Bachman for his total change of outlook.

Most of the speakers were wending their way up from their seats, creating a constant sea of movement between the waiters, those planning to speak and a few restless onlookers like Washington who'd gotten up to stretch their legs. Meredith had about decided she'd really like to use the ladies' room one time before going home, but wasn't at all sanguine about leaving Starsky alone at the table. Her decision was made when Dave Murphy came over to say hi. The round table on the floor actually gave him a better vantage point to keep his eyes on Rabbi Bachman than the seat two down the main table where he'd been.

"How ya doin', Starsky?" Dave asked. "When'd you get out of the hospital?"

"Today."

"And you came here?" Dave Murphy cried in amazement, "When you coulda been home in your own bed? You just had to have some brisket?"

"Yah, I'm getting' kinda sleepy, too." Starsky shrugged, "Believe me, this food's a whole lot better'n' the hosp..." He trailed off, his eyes riveted to the podium. In all the confusion of people coming and going, a man had slipped quietly behind Micah Bachman and placed a gun to his head. "Dave,
"That's..."

"It's my turn to speak now, everybody just sit down quietly, nothing's gonna happen if you just be happy little Jew lovers and..."

"Van Geller." Murphy half stood, his hand going for his shoulder holster.

"Detective Murphy, you can just move your hand away from that gun nice and slow." van Geller saw the movement, placing one hand on Bachman's shoulder to keep the gun nice and steady against his neck.

Murphy did as he was told, stilling his hand.

"Now, you...pretty girl in the blue dress," van Geller addressed a young woman at the adjoining table who, like nearly everyone else in the room seemed to have been shocked into a frozen state.

"Get the detective's gun out of his holster and push it under this table." He nearly had to repeat himself a second time before the woman stood hesitantly, slipped her hand under Murphy's jacket and retrieved his service revolver. Bending down she tossed it up under the main table's cloth, then sat abruptly, as if drained by the exercise.

Micah could feel the cold steel against his carotid, his increased heart rate causing the gun barrel to bounce slightly with every beat of his pulse. How was he going to get out of this one? It had happened so suddenly; one moment he was thanking an ex-Klansman for his conversion, the next van Geller had a gun to his neck. He looked out onto the crowd. Every pair of eyes in the room was focused on him, or really on van Geller, and he began to fear that he wouldn't live to see the next few minutes pass.

"Mr. van Geller..." Micah began.

"You're not fit to say my name, Jew," Van Geller hissed. "Shuddup." He pushed the gun up so hard against his prisoner's neck, Bachman could hardly breathe. "I'm in control now, and you Jew bastards aren't gonna tell anybody what to do anymore. This is the apocalypse. Didja read my Manifesto, huh?"

From the back of the room, Meredith stopped just as she was about to step through the doors into the hall, van Geller's voice overly loud through the podium microphone. Oh God, how had he gotten up there? She automatically opened her purse, then remembered she hadn't carried a gun that evening. Where was Brick? Hutch? And most importantly, what was Starsky doing?

Hutch exited the bathroom to see half the lobby guards start pelting for the dining room doors, their guns drawn. Oh, shit. Something big had gone down while he was in the damn men's room!

"You people just don't get it that you can't associate with Jews-they're filth, isn't that right, Starsky?" he growled, his eyes blazing fire at the man he'd tried to kill, seeing no threat from the battered man. "Nothing but human trash."

Standing at the bar, Washington kept his back to the diners until he'd eased his .45 out of the shoulder holster, flicking off the safety. Clutching the gun, he slipped his hand into his jacket pocket, motioning the wide-eyed bartender to silence. Now, if he could just get up to the front of the room without van Geller spotting him, but there was no movement in the room. He couldn't take a step without some sort of distraction.

"Things are gonna change from now on. It's a whole new world out there, but the end is so near for you. The final days are upon you," van Geller spoke carefully into the mic. He didn't want anyone to
miss the impact of his words. "The Jew here and I are gonna leave in just a minute, but the rest of you stay, finish dinner. There's a really good chocolate mousse coming. I already had some."

He laughed, a weird and ominous sound, turning his attention across the room to the guards hovering in the doorway. "Drop your guns, gentlemen and come on in, have some chocolate mousse. I'll bet there's extra. Wouldn't want your last meal to be..."

The crack of gunfire only preceded the little red wound that blossomed in his forehead by a fraction of a second, but it was hard to say who looked more surprised, van Geller or David Starsky.

The dark haired detective held his .38 in perfect position, as if posing for a shooting catalogue, right wrist supporting the left gun hand. He'd fired unconsciously, freeing his gun from the ankle holster and taking a firing stance so quickly he'd had little time to think. He now looked down at the gun, stunned by his own actions, lowering his arm until the gun hung loosely from lax fingers.

Micah jerked back as the bullet slammed into van Geller's brain, spraying blood across those sitting nearby, his suit splattered with scarlet matter. The next few moments were a blur of disjointed fragments out of time, people and voices overlapping each other like a badly edited Robert Altman film. The guards, diners and clergy seemed at cross purposes, all running in different directions--most of the tide heading pell mell for the exits while security tried to attain the stage to seal off the crime scene.

"Stop!" Micah Bachman spoke with authority into the microphone, although his insides were heaving. "Please, everyone, we must leave in an orderly fashion, take your time..." His voice, so trusted by most who had attended his lectures and seminars, had the desired effect. The audience still streamed for the doors, but their panic eased...after all the danger was past now, wasn't it?

"Starsky?" Hutch wasn't even sure how he'd gotten back to the table so quickly, but he slowed his mad dash, hesitant to startle his friend.

Meredith was seated by her lover's side, her hand out for the gun.

"He's dead, huh?" Starsky spoke with an eerie quality to his voice, placing the .38 on Meredith's palm. His demeanor was stripped of any recognizable emotion, raw and unguarded as a wounded child. "Cause it ain't over, he isn't done yet."

That's when Hutch knew without a doubt that there really was another bomb.

There were luckily no more casualties. van Geller had obviously planned to talk a long time when he'd set the timer. He certainly had planned to give himself enough time to get away before the blast went off. The bomb squad found the device buried in the pot of a Ficus tree stuck innocuously in a rarely used back office. There was enough plastique there to reduce the entire block to rubble, far more than enough to destroy the nearly four hundred people involved in the peace talks.

Ten minutes still remained on the clock when the sergeant found it after a half hour's search. It was successfully dismantled, giving Hutch the first feeling of safety he'd had in weeks. The Brotherhood was truly gone. Now they just had to deal with the fallout but it was anyone's guess how long that would take.

*****

Pausing in the Mercy Hospital gift shop, Hutch browsed the newest display of Halloween paraphernalia. Grinning to himself, he selected several items and a handful of the tiny chocolate bars common to the season. Starsky always loved dressing up, usually as some sort of gruesome monster
from the late night movies. Since he'd still be on medical leave for some time to come, it was a good bet that he'd want to at least give out candy dressed in something suitably scary.

The last week had been a hard one. Starsky ended up back in the hospital just over 24 hours after he'd left the first one with a urinary tract infection. What with his upcoming wrist surgery on top of the antibiotics, he'd just stayed put for seven days. Hutch and his detective colleagues had been inundated by reams of paperwork after the peace talks dinner with the newspapers, Internal affairs and financial backers of the alliance all wondering how van Geller had gotten such free rein to run wild for days without anyone in authority noticing him. Washington and Hutch were both glad they had the alibi of being with a sick friend for much of that time, since the excrement had certainly hit the fan in a big way in the police department. Lax security and incompetence were some of the nicer terms being batted around.

Micah Bachman, with his usual forgiving attitude, wasn't even making comments to the press. He didn't want to dirty waters already muddied by anger and name calling, especially when he had nearly three hundred followers needing comfort and solace to get them through the days following the horror. He had visited Starsky every day in the hospital, bringing along along beginning Hebrew texts and readings from the Torah to encourage his student's education. When not totally knocked out with drugs, Starsky had immersed himself in the literature with a sincerity that amazed all his friends. Nearly dying twice in such a short time could do that to a person.

Hutch wasn't still sure Starsky had recovered from the shooting. Outwardly, despite two days of fever from the UTI, rampant nausea from the antibiotics and then having to recover from the effects of anesthesia and wrist surgery, he seemed quiet and calmer, far less intense than the first few days in the Riverside Hospital. Meredith's constant attentions might have had something to do with that, but she was gone now. Starsky had finally succeeded in convincingly her that he could in fact survive with her in Washington D.C. for a few more weeks. Finishing the training on drug enforcement could give her a salary increase, and very probably a leg up in the department. There was no way Starsky was willing to stand in the way of her advancement just because he was once again in the hospital. Hutch had driven Meredith to the airport himself, that very morning, but he was just the slightest bit concerned how her absence would affect his partner.

"Anybody home?" Hutch rapped on the door, seeing the hospital bed jacked up into a sitting position, linens scrunched up at the foot looking like a cyclone had hit them, a book entitled 'Reading from right to left made easy', the Great Masters coloring book, a balled up Popsicle wrapper, and several blue and green slips of paper that turned out to be Monopoly money, but no Starsky.

"I'm in here, just a minute!" came a voice from the tiny bathroom.

"Need any help?" Hutch inquired, setting down the bag from the gift shop on the bedside table. The room was a whirlwind of flower arrangements, get well cards and the assorted junk that always seemed to accompany Starsky everywhere. He was generally a neatnit, but his fascination with minutiae meant he generally had half a dozen toys, gadgets and oddities at all times.

"No thanks, even the nurses let me go by myself these days," Starsky retorted, swinging open the dividing door. He was finally having real success at going by himself, too. "You get Meredith off okay?"

"On the plane, buckled in with a magazine and a pillow." Hutch watched Starsky make his way carefully across the room, the oversized pressure dressing on his right wrist almost overbalancing him. "You okay with her leaving?" he asked, quickly clearing a space on the bed by sweeping all the junk off to the end with a flick of one arm.

"I'm the one who told her to go, remember?" Starsky sat on the edge of the bed to remove his
slippers, "We do real good phone calls." The hot pink blush that uncharacteristically colored Starsky's cheeks gave Hutch more of an answer.

It wasn't until Starsky had situated himself back amongst the covers and Hutch had helped him fluff up a pillow for his back that he noticed a new dressing on his left wrist. Starsky always kept the tattoo covered, usually with a slightly ratty looking ace bandage since the wounds from the handcuffs no longer needed to be kept bandaged, but this was entirely different. A small patch of gauze was secured in place with two perfectly aligned pieces of tape. "You have something done?" he asked in a casual voice.

"Yeah." Starsky took a steadying breath, the subject still very literally a sore one. "First of many laser treatments. And it wasn't anymore fun than having it put on."

"I'll bet." Hutch winced sympathetically. "Did you take a look at it before...?"

"No, I've seen it often enough, when I was a kid." Starsky flipped over his wrist so the bandage was upwards. "This is for my Aunt Chava, because she couldn't."

Knowing of whom he spoke, Hutch didn't pursue it further. If that was how Starsky was coping with the cruel assault on his heritage, by linking it back to his family, so be it. The generosity of spirit was so in keeping with Starsky's usual nature. "How're you doing otherwise?"

"I'm getting there." Starsky shrugged self consciously. "Since you an' Meredith were gone, had to keep myself busy..." He indicated the mess of toys and books at the end of the bed. "But turns out I had a lot of visitors this morning."

"Well, that's good."

"Yeah, it was like a regular parade. Huggy brought me donuts..."

"Gee, sounds like I'll have to give him a lecture on the proper diet for a patient."

"Yeah, well, he's got some kind of beef goin' with you about some girl? What have I bin missin' out on, huh?"

"Huggy didn't like my choice in dates."

"And I take it you're not talkin' about Angela."

Hutch shook his head, "Elsa."

"Have I met her..." Starsky trailed off as the name registered. "From the Brotherhood Elsa?" he squeaked involuntarily.

"She's trying to change, I'm trying to help her."

"Are you outta your mind?" Starsky's upper body surged forward so he was nearly nose to nose with Hutch sitting on the chair. "You're insane, you know that don't you? No wonder Huggy's snarling. You like her?"

"I wouldn't be dating her if I didn't like her," Hutch answered, he'd been wondering how to bring up the subject all week.

His second date, the Friday before when Starsky was snowed under with post surgical drugs, had gone much better than the first. Alone, in an intimate setting they'd discovered they really enjoyed
each other's company--there were just a lot of off limit topics of conversation that could really foul up their relationship if they weren't careful. Elsa was making a concentrated effort to turn her mindset around, but it would take much work, and in the long run, Hutch wasn't sure they could weather the fireworks. But then again, two dates was far too soon to tell.

"So, you've dated her more than once?" Starsky asked in a neutral tone. He would have crossed his arms but neither could bear pressure against the wounds. He settled for easing back onto the bed, right arm resting on a pillow.

"Yeah," Hutch searched his face for a reaction, but Starsky had retreated, pleating the sheets with two fingers of his left hand. "What do you think?"

"Why? I haven't even met her."

"Because I really want your honest opinion."

"Wait'll we double date. You, Elsa, me'n Meredith," Starsky replied after a minute. "Then, I'll give you the full critique." He grinned wolfishly, full of ginger.

"You can be very mean when you want to be, you know that?" Hutch rolled his eyes, even though it was exactly the same idea he'd been toying with. "I'd better prepare her. It's no wonder I let you be bad cop all the time."

"You let me?" Starsky retorted with a laugh. "Just remember to tell that t'Brick, cause he think's he's the bad cop. He an' Dobey happened to come by this morning at the same time." He pointed to a large arrangement of mums and autumnal colored leaves over by the window. "The Cap'n's always bringing big bunches of flowers."

"That time I had the plague." Hutch nodded, "He musta brought a bouquet every time he stopped by, felt like he was courting me."

"Better him than Elsa, maybe," Starsky snarked, then looked abashed. "Sorry, I didn't mean that. I should keep my big mouth shut until I meet her. Is she pretty?"

"Have you seen that model Susan Anton?"

"Tall, blond, legs go on for miles?"

"About the same."

"Mmm." Starsky's eyes widened. "Just be careful, huh? Cause she could really mess you up."

"Stark, I'm not as naïve as you think."

"No, you're just a wide eyed kid from Duluth and I'm a street punk from the wrong side." Starsky flexed the fingers of his right hand with a wince, the healing wound inside the bandage an odd combination of painful and itchy. "Nobody said we'd work out either."

"You did have a busy morning, three visitors and a romp with the plastic surgeon, did you get any sleep?" Hutch tried changing the subject.

"That wasn't all." Starsky saw the white bag on the table, "Hey! What'd you bring me?" He snagged the bag, rummaging around inside to extract the contents. "Vampire teeth!" He inserted the plastic fangs into his mouth, like any ten-year-old kid, then proceeded to unwrap one of the candy bars.
"Don't eat with your mouth full," Hutch deadpanned. "Who else came by?"

"Dr. Margolin." Starsky popped the teeth out to take a bite from the candy, toying with a tiny wind-up ghost. "We just talked awhile."

"And he is..."

"She's a...psychiatrist."

_Good for you, Starsky_, Hutch thought. "It go okay?" he said aloud, going for low key. Let Starsky control how much he wanted to reveal.

"She-uh-confers with your diagnosis, Dr. Hutchinson." Starsky wound up the ghost awkwardly, then set him to lurching across the table.

"You told her what I said?"

"Yep." He relaxed back against the pillow, watching the ghost until it tumbled off the narrow table, falling onto his sheet covered knee. He was more at ease than Hutch had seen him since before Temple Beth Sharon had been bombed. "It wasn't as easy as talking to you, but she took a couple more courses than you did, so maybe she'll work out."

"I'm glad, Starsky."

"We talked about me shooting...him."

"You did, huh?" Hutch was impressed, Starsky hadn't spoken word one of that since the night it had happened.

"Y'know, it was like I wasn't even there. My hand just raised the gun and fired." Starsky held out his left hand, as if pointing the weapon, then opened his fingers to show there wasn't anything there. "I wasn't even angry any longer, not by then."

"You saved Micah's life, and probably even body else in the building," Hutch said softly, placing his bigger hand over Starsky's, clasping it firmly.

Starsky gave him a lopsided David Starsky special. "Thanks."

"For what? I didn't do anything. You got to be the hero."

"Givin' a damn, I guess."

"No problem." Hutch held the connection, healing the wounds. They were getting back to their center, back where they could stand side by side, because they didn't work separately half as well as they did as a team.

"You keep remindin' Brick that the partnership is only temporary," Starsky gave Hutch's hand a squeeze before letting to go to unwrap a second candy bar. "And someday, Hutch, I promise, I'll tell you the whole thing, okay? Maybe on some stake-out, after a couple o' burritos."

"I'm counting on it." Hutch snatched a candy bar of his own from the bag, content. All was right with the world for at least the rest of the afternoon.

FIN
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