Summary: Starsky and Hutch scramble to discover the identity of a serial killer with no apparent link among the victims.

Part 1 - Recompense - Does Bay City have a serial killer on the loose?

Part 2 - Measure for Measure - Starsky and Hutch are hot on the trail of a killer. How many more must die?

Part 3 - Spare the Rod - As Starsky and Hutch narrow the search for the killer, new evidence leads them to fear that the next victim could be someone close to them.

Story Notes: Created for the Internet Audience.

Categories: Gen

Genre: Action/Adventure

Warnings: Author Chooses Not to Use Archive Warnings
"Zebra Three, come in, please. Zebra Three."

Starsky, trying to get some sense out of one-half of a domestic dispute while Hutch was trying to interview the other half, heard the call and groaned. It had already been one of those days. One call right after another and all of them people unwilling to cooperate in order to make two detectives' lives a little easier. He glanced at his partner, who was looking about as frazzled as he felt. "Hang on a second, okay?" He said to the husband, who glowered and declined to answer. Starsky trotted over to the car and lifted the mike. "Zebra Three."

"We have a report of a 187 on 10th and Hadley," the dispatcher said. "Same M.O. as the one two weeks ago."

"You're kidding," Starsky said.

"Control does not kid," the dispatcher said, a bit coldly. She was new and had come to the Ninth from the Tenth, and her reputation preceded her. In fact, they had commonly referred to her as "The Ice Queen."

"Just a figure of speech," Starsky said. "We're in the middle of a call, Control."

"I doubt the 187 will get up and run away," she said. "I'll inform the unit on the scene that you'll be delayed, Zebra Three."

"Roger." Starsky hung up the mike, looked over his shoulder at Hutch interviewing the wife, then over at the husband, who had lit a cigarette and sat down on the front porch steps. He started back across the yard. "Hey, partner, our day just got worse."

Hutch flicked his eyes in Starsky's direction but didn't answer.

Starsky went back to the husband and tried again to get the man to tell him exactly what had happened. Both spouses looked like they'd been in the ring with Rocky and Apollo Creed, but so far, he and Hutch hadn't been able to figure out who had started it and who they ought to arrest.

"Look," the man said, "why don't you and him just go deal with that 197 or whatever it was, huh? Me and Marsha get into these spats all the time. It ain't no big deal. We'll make up, just like always, and we'll just go inside and -- "

Starsky raised his hand to stop him before he could finish the sentence. "Please," he said. "I had the world's greasiest tacos for lunch. And it's a 187."

The guy grinned. "Whatever. I'm tellin' ya, Officer, the neighbors just overreacted, okay? Go on. I ain't gonna die from a fat lip and neither will she."
Starsky looked over at Hutch, who had overheard the exchange. "I'm tempted, partner."

"So am I," Hutch said. He looked back at the woman. "Can you two at least keep it down to a
dull roar for the rest of the day and give your neighbors some peace and quiet?"

"That's what we been tellin' ya for 20 minutes," she said sullenly.

"Let's go," Hutch said to Starsky.

The marked unit and the coroner were waiting for them at 10th and Hadley, a slightly decaying
apartment house where a lot of twenty-something singles and young married couples lived.

"Upstairs. Apartment 224," said the uniformed officer guarding the street.

The second officer and the coroner were in the apartment. The place was totally trashed, and the
young man was lying half across his bed, strangled, with duct tape over his mouth.

"Just like that girl a couple of weeks ago," the coroner said, snapping another photo. "Same age,
too. He's 33. He died about 6:00 this morning."

"You have a positive ID on him?" Hutch asked, reaching out to pull the sheet away from the
corpse's face.

"Yeah. Next door neighbor ID'd him," the uniformed officer said. "His name's Paul Martin,
single, native to Bay City. Grew up over on the other side of town. Worked for a print shop a few
blocks from here. Neighbor's known him for a couple of years and says he was about as average
as they come. She's pretty upset, but she's over there waiting for you."

"Thanks." Hutch led the way to the next apartment, where a young woman a few years younger
than the dead man was sitting on her couch, her eyes red from crying. He identified himself and
Starsky and asked her to tell them anything she could about Martin.

"I can't imagine who'd want to kill him," she said, shaking her head. "And this neighborhood isn't
that bad."

"Did you hear anything?"

She shook her head. "No. But I sleep very soundly, and the man with the camera --"

"The coroner," Starsky supplied.

"He said Paul died early this morning. I must have been asleep. I went over there about an hour
ago to see if he wanted to grill a couple of steaks with me, and his door was open, but he didn't
answer when I called, so I went in and..." Her eyes welled up again and she covered her face
with her hands.

"Were you two dating or anything?" Hutch asked as gently as he could.

She shook her head and took a deep breath. "No, nothing like that. We were friends."
"What can you tell us about him, about his friends, where he hung out, things like that?" Hutch asked.

"He didn't go out much," she said. "He broke up with his last girlfriend about..." she frowned and thought. "I think it was four or five months ago. He works at Zippy's on Holland, about eight blocks away, and he usually walks back and forth. He says," she stopped and shook her head, "I mean, he said it was good exercise. Oh, God." She pushed her hair back and tried to keep from crying again. "Somebody's gotta call his mom."

"We'll do that," Starsky said.

"Will you?" she said gratefully. "I've got her number, but I don't know exactly where she lives, just the general area."

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Starsky and Hutch got the number and went back to Martin's apartment to see if they could figure out whether its being trashed meant the place had been burgled or if the killer had fought with Martin.

"Maybe he's just a slob," Starsky said as they searched.

"I don't think so," Hutch said. "This was no robbery, Starsk. Look around. I think whoever did this just wanted to destroy the place." He pointed at a pile of records smashed to bits. "Somebody stomped on those just to ruin them. And his lava lamp's broken. And get this," he added, picking up pieces of a torn poster that was on the floor. It was the ubiquitous "LOVE" poster so many people had. "There is no way a burglar would have bothered with this."

"You could be right," Starsky said, picking through a scattered stack of books. "You ever read this one?" he asked, holding up a ripped copy of "Zen and The Art of Motorcycle Maintenance."

"It took time to do all this," Hutch said. "I'd be willing to bet this part was done after the guy was dead. It's almost like a revenge thing."

"And it's just like that girl," Starsky said. "Maybe a connection?"

"Maybe."

"Wonder what though."

Hutch walked to the front door and examined the frame and strike plate. "No evidence the door was jimmed." He also walked outside and looked at the windows that could be reached from the balcony that ran along in front of the second story apartments. Walking back into the apartment he told Starsky, "No evidence the window was forced either."

Starsky went back next-door to ask the neighbor if Martin kept a key under his mat or somewhere else outside. She told him he didn't.
He met up with Hutch walking back out of the victim's apartment. "Well, looks like he let his murderer in through the front door. Someone he knew?"

"Could be."

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"Let's head over to the dead girl's place and check for any other similarities."

"Right."

The murder a couple of weeks back had taken place in another part of town. Starsky and Hutch had investigated that scene, but taking another look around seemed like a good idea. The other victim had also lived on the second floor of an apartment building, but this one was a lot nicer.

After getting the manager to let them in, the two men looked again for signs of forced entry, and what items had been trashed. Just like at the other scene, the door and windows showed no evidence of tampering. The apartment still had not been released by the Bay City Police Department to be cleared out, so they found the contents exactly as they were the day the body was discovered. This victim's personal belongings also seemed to have been destroyed in a determined manner. Her record collection was also smashed, her books scattered about the living room, and some of her artwork ripped.

When they finished with the apartment, Hutch wanted to head down to the precinct to look at the victim's case folder.

"Let's grab some dinner first, huh?" Starsky said. "I'm starving."

"You're always starving, Starsk."

"You're not hungry? We didn't even stop for lunch today, unless you count one greasy taco."

"Yeah, I guess so. Where to?"

"Leading question, Blondie. How about Julio's?"

"How about not."

Starsky glared at his partner. He wasn't in the mood for an extended argument about the location for their dinner. "Okay, you pick then. Not someplace with just butterfly bones though, okay?"

Hutch smiled at him. "I know, how about Angie's? You can get something greasy and I can still have a salad." He was glad to see Starsky with a healthy appetite again.

"You got it." Starsky wasted no time heading for the restaurant.

Starsky was enjoying his cheeseburger and fries while Hutch munched on a chef's salad. Hutch reached across the table and snagged a couple of fries.
"You want some Tabasco with those?" Starsky asked helpfully, extending the bottle of red sauce.

"You're kidding, right?"

"Suit yourself. How's the salad?" Starsky reached over and picked some croutons off of Hutch's salad.

"Pretty good. Ham's a little hard."

They sat together talking about the case and eating off of each other's plates for about thirty minutes. When they were finished, Starsky asked, "You buyin'?"

"Nope. Your turn, partner."

"No way; lunch was my turn."

"We never made it to lunch, mush brain."

"Oh yeah!"

Starsky paid the bill and they headed back to the car. As they left the restaurant, a disheveled looking street vendor pushed his way up to Hutch and shoved a bunch of roses in his face.

Hutch backed up a step and started to sneeze.

"Gesundheit!" Starsky said.

The dirty little man was saying, "Buy some roses for your sweetheart?" He took a step closer to Hutch again.

Hutch put his hand up, "No, thanks."

"Aw, come on now. Good-looking guy like you must have a sweetheart. Do a guy a favor, buy some roses."

Starsky stepped between his retreating, sneezing partner and the little man putting a hand on his dirty jacket. "Back off, man, he said he didn't want any!"

The little man backed away from the hostile detective. "Okay, okay. I'm just tryin' to make a living here." He turned around and walked away pushing a small cart filled with roses in five-gallon buckets of water.

Poor Hutch couldn't stop sneezing for several minutes. The man had shoved the roses directly in his face. Starsky went back inside the restaurant and returned with some napkins for his partner. He couldn't help but laugh.

"Achoo! So, you, Achoo, think this, Achoo, is funny, Achoo!" Hutch managed to get out between sneezes.
Starsky was nearly hysterical. "Gesundheit, buddy! I'm sorry. Roses, man. You and roses!"

Hutch blew his nose and looked at Starsky with an icy glare. "Yeah, well you won't think it's so funny when I'm killed by a runaway florist truck someday. Karma. Achoo!"

"Come on, let's go back to the precinct. You have some allergy pills in your desk, don't ya?"

Hutch nodded, blowing his nose again.

The sneezing had subsided by the time they reached Metro. Starsky fetched Hutch a cup of water to take his pills with and went to the file cabinet to pull the case folder on the previous victim.

"Lydia Harris, age 33." He said as he pulled his chair around next to Hutch's so they could look at the file together. They looked at the coroner's pictures of her. Same duct tape and similar ligature marks on her throat as those seen on the new victim.

Reading through her file, neither detective could find anything linking the two victims, other than the fact that they both lived on the second floor and they were both 33 years old. The buildings were nothing alike, not even painted the same color. One was on a quiet corner of a side street and the other in the middle of the block on a busy street. Lydia Harris was a kindergarten teacher and Paul Martin worked in a print shop. They didn't seem to have any common hangouts, based on the investigation so far. Martin was a Bay City native while Harris was born on Guam. Her family had been military and they moved frequently.

"Well, maybe the autopsy report will tell us something." Hutch said, not really holding out much hope that it would.

"I'm beat, Hutch. Let's call it a night, pick it up again in the morning, 'kay?"

"We're not gonna get anything else out of this tonight. Sounds good." They put the case file away and headed for home.

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The autopsy report for Harris was waiting when they got to work the next morning, with a note from the M.E. that Martin's would be on their desk by noon. Hutch sat down to go over it. Starsky went back to the files of the two victims, looking for a link.

"Hey, Stark, listen to this. The M.E. says the duct tape was placed over Harris' mouth after she was dead."

"Huh?" Starsky came over to read over Hutch's shoulder. "Why would you do that?"

"I don't know. You'd think the duct tape was to keep them quiet while you killed them."

The two men looked at each other in silence for a few moments. "You thinkin' what I'm thinkin'?" Starsky finally said quietly.

"Some kind of ritual?" Hutch said.
Starsky nodded. "Gotta be a connection."

"I don't know what it could be," Hutch complained, reaching over to pull the files in front of them. He studied them in silence for a while. "All I can find," he said, "is that they were the same age and lived on the second floor. Damn it."

"Ritual killers usually leave something behind," Starsky said. "Maybe we ought to check out their apartments again and list all the stuff in them."

Hutch sighed. "You know how long that could take? And besides, the things that make sense to a ritual killer might not -- " He stopped at the look on Starsky's face. "I know," he said in answer to the look. "We have to do it. I'd just rather not."

"Me, too," Starsky said. He reached for his jacket, but just then the assistant M.E. came into the squad room with a folder.

"Here's Martin's P.M.," she said, handing it to Starsky.

Starsky opened it and read through it quickly. Suddenly he looked a little sick.

"What?" Hutch said, holding out his hand for the folder.

"They found -- " Starsky wet his lips.

"A piece of chalk in Martin's mouth," the assistant M.E. supplied.

Now Hutch looked a little sick. "In his mouth?"

She nodded. "Weird."

"More than weird," Starsky said. "That's perverted." He looked over at Hutch. "I think we got a psycho on our hands, buddy."

"No kidding," Hutch said. "We better get moving."

First, they had to rule out the possibility of the duct tape being a coincidence, though neither of them really thought it was. They asked R&I to run a check on similar M.O.s and Charlie, overwhelmed with requests as always, complained bitterly but promised they'd have the information by the end of the day. Then they went to Harris' apartment and went through it with a fine-tooth comb, cataloguing every item and making a separate list of items that didn't seem to belong in a young woman's apartment.

She'd been a bit of a pack rat, unfortunately, and they found all kinds of odd things -- gumball machine toys, children's books, dozens of tiny little figurines, and enough different kinds of pencils, crayons and markers to supply an entire elementary school, Hutch said to Starsky with a grimace.

"But she was a teacher," Starsky said, on his knees next to her bedside table, going through the drawers. "Of course she'd have little toys and stuff for the kids."
"Why didn't she keep this stuff at school, then?" Hutch asked. He made another note on his list.

Starsky shrugged. "Dunno." He pulled a plastic baggie and a pipe out of the bottom drawer. "Oops," he said with a wan grin. "Bet her school didn't know she was smokin' this stuff."

Hutch glanced at it without much interest. "Everybody smokes that stuff," he said, going back to the closet where he'd been working.

"I don't," Starsky protested.

"You know what I mean," Hutch said. "Write it down, but I doubt that's going to be any help."

Starsky shrugged and wrote it down and added it to the pile next to him. When he finished with the bedside table, he stuffed everything back into the drawers. "You find anything weird?"

Hutch sat back on his heels. "Nope, not really. I mean, nothing you wouldn't expect a girl her age to have around, especially a teacher." He looked at the clock on the nightstand. "It's almost six. Wanna break for supper or go over to Martin's?"

"Supper," Starsky said.

They went to a hamburger stand nearby to save time, and while they were eating, a street vendor came by with roses. Hutch winced away, but the man paid no attention to them. The tired, shiftless way he was walking made it look as though he'd had a bad day -- and his buckets were still full of roses.

"Kind of sad," Starsky said, as the man went down the block.

"What is?"

"An old man like that having to sell flowers to make a buck," Starsky said. "Walking around in the heat all day, maybe only making a few dollars for all his work."

Hutch smiled at him fondly. "You old softie."

Starsky reddened and shrugged. "Well, how would you feel if he was your grandpa or something?"

"There's guys like him all over the city," Hutch pointed out. "We just saw one yesterday, remember?"

"I know." Starsky went back to his French fries.

Martin's place was much more Spartan than Harris' had been, and it only took a couple of hours to catalogue his belongings. His record collection -- most of it destroyed -- tended toward the Judas Priest and Black Sabbath end of the rock and roll spectrum. His books were heavy on Kurt Vonnegut and James Bond-style novels. Starsky found a bag of marijuana in the man's kitchen, too, most of it gone, and Hutch found a ruler under his bed among the girlie magazines.
"What do you suppose he used that for?" Hutch asked, holding it up.

"Measuring?" Starsky said with a wicked grin.

"Very funny." Hutch tossed it aside and looked at his notebook. "Nothing," he said disgustedly. "What now?"

"The usual," Starsky said. "Track down the people they knew and ask nosy questions."

Hutch nodded. "Tomorrow, huh?"

When they got back to the Torino, Hutch called in to see if Charlie had made any progress on the similar M.O. "Zebra 3 to Control, come in please."

"Go ahead, Zebra 3."

"Patch me through to Charlie Collins." Hutch waited a minute while the call was connected.

"R&I, Collins."

The man sounded tired. Hutch felt sorry for Collins. Charlie had a gift for sifting through information and feeding it into the department's computers. Metro's detectives kept him busy almost constantly.

"Yeah, Charlie, this is Hutch. You got anything for me yet?"

"Nothing exact. Other crimes with duct tape though. The usual mostly, hands tied with it. One guy came in with it over his eyes like a blindfold, and we even have one where the dead girl was completely wrapped in it like some kinda duct tape mummy. No other cases where the victim was strangled and had duct tape across the mouth."

"Thanks, Charlie." Hutch didn't really expect to get that lucky.

Starsky saw the disappointed look on Hutch's face and decided it was time to relax a little. They were off the clock and he wasn't ready to go home.

"Buy me a beer?" That was Starsky's signal that he wanted to go to Huggy's.

"Sure thing." Hutch agreed; time to see the Bear.

The detectives settled in their favorite booth at The Pits, waiting for the proprietor, Huggy Bear, to come and join them. They didn't have to wait long as Huggy strolled over with three beers and then slid into the booth next to Starsky.

"What's happenin', amigos?" Huggy asked amiably.

Hutch shrugged and decided to make a fashion commentary instead of answering the question. "Hug, that shirt could do three sets at the Copacabana."
Starsky quipped, "I don't know, Hutch. Looks more like the latest in jockey-chic for Churchill Downs to me."

Huggy looked down at his fuchsia satin shirt with large red dots on it. "The Bear likes to make a fashion statement."

"That's no statement. That's a one-man show!" Hutch said. Huggy laughed.

"Well, gentlemen, I didn't come over here just to be insulted." He tried to look wounded, but he grinned instead. "So, like I said before you two decided to evaluate my threads, what's happenin'?"

"Nothin' good, Hug." Huggy paid closer attention as Hutch's face shifted from playful to serious in a heartbeat.

Starsky continued, "You remember we told you about that kindergarten teacher who got murdered a coupla weeks ago?"

"Yeah, I remember. Strangled, right?"

Hutch nodded and said, "Right. Well, a guy was murdered yesterday and it looks like the same M.O. as the Harris woman's killer."

"Heavy."

"We can't figure out what the two victims have in common so far. The only thing is they were both 33 years old and they both lived on the second floor. Starsky and I went through their stuff today and didn't find anything that matched." Hutch took a sip from his beer and mentally ran through the list of items they had found at the two apartments.

"Where'd they work?" Huggy asked.

Starsky answered, "We thought of that. Lydia Harris was a school teacher and Paul Martin worked in a print shop."

"Lydia, huh? I think I went to school with a chick named Lydia. Your victim's almost the same age as me. You don't think she could be...nah, my Lydia moved to Detroit years ago. 'Sides, her name was Lydia Barker."

While Starsky and Huggy continued to discuss the case, Hutch pulled out his notebook and reviewed the things he had written down about the two victims. He flipped from page to page, first in one direction, then the other. Something was bothering him but he couldn't seem to focus on it. His notes also included the list of friends, family, and associates that he and Starsky would interview starting in the morning.

Starsky looked over at Hutch occasionally. He knew his partner's mental gears were turning and he didn't want to interrupt the process. Hutch was a master at clicking together the pieces of a case like a jigsaw puzzle and Starsky could see the master was at work.
Huggy got up to take care of some customers and Starsky glanced over at Hutch. He hadn't even noticed that Huggy was gone.

"Hey?" Starsky asked tentatively.

"Hmm." Hutch mumbled. Starsky could tell Hutch needed a little more time so he quietly sipped his beer and waited. A few minutes later, Hutch's head looked up, his eyes clearly displaying his frustration.

"I just know we're missing something, but what?" Hutch said as he rubbed the bridge of his nose.

Some days it didn't matter how much time Starsky gave him for quiet reflection. "Relax, buddy. It'll come, we just don't have enough info yet."

"I looked over the list of names for both victims. No duplicates. Let's start with Harris' contacts." Hutch seemed to have a plan in mind and Starsky agreed.

Starsky knew why Hutch was so determined. "Hutch, I bet you're thinking what I'm thinking about this case."

"What's that?"

"If those two victims aren't involved with each other somehow, we could be lookin' at the start of a serial killer."

"Exactly. Could be even if they are involved. I hope not, Starsk. Whoever killed those people was bent. Who knows what his motives are?"

"Could be worse. We both live on the second floor. Thank God we're not also 33."

"Weak, Starsk."

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Their first stop the next morning was Martin's grandmother. His parents had both been dead for years; his grandmother had raised him.

"Mrs. Tinker?" Hutch said when she came to the door. "I'm Detective Hutchinson. I spoke to you on the phone this morning."

She tried to smile, but it didn't quite come off. She held the door open. "Can I get you boys some coffee?" she asked after showing them to seats in her living room.

"No, thanks, ma'am. We'll try not to take too much of your time," Starsky said, his courtly manners coming out as they usually did with older people. "We just want to ask you a few questions about your grandson to help us find his killer."

She bit her lip and nodded. "Anything I can do."
"Do you know his friends and the places he hung out at?" Hutch asked.

She nodded again. "I can't imagine anyone wanting to kill Paul. He was a good boy. Always wanted to be an artist, but didn't quite have the knack, so he turned to printing. He was saving up to open his own shop. He bowled with a league on Thursdays and he went to church every Sunday and belonged to a Bible study group for young singles. He wasn't a bit wild anymore."

"Anymore?" Hutch said, his eyebrows going up.

"Oh, when he was a boy he was kind of naughty," she said. "But that was years ago, when he was in junior high school. You know, talking back, getting in scuffles in the schoolyard, that kind of thing. Nothing serious. He's never been in trouble with the police or anything like that. But he was kind of a handful. By the time he was a sophomore in high school it had all blown over. Just growing pains."

"How old was he when his parents died?" Starsky asked. He remembered being "a handful" himself after his dad died.

"He was ten. He moved in with me right afterwards and it was a year or so after that when he started getting hard to handle. And he was an only child, so his parents doted on him." She sighed and wiped a tear away. "I got so many notes from his teachers I was half wild. Didn't know what to do for him. I even took him to a counselor for a while and he told me Paul was 'acting out' and just to give him lots of love."

Hutch glanced at Starsky. He knew his partner had been through something very similar when he'd come west to live with his aunt and uncle. "But he got over that?"

"Oh, yes, finally. And he was always as attentive as could be. Called every couple of days, came over for Sunday dinner, ran my errands for me. We were...very close." She wiped away another tear.

"He didn't have any enemies?"

"Heavens, no," she said. "And I've been wracking my brain trying to figure out who could have wanted to kill him. I can't think of a soul, honestly. It had to have been just a nut."

The two men exchanged another glance. That was pretty much what they were thinking, too, except that the ritualistic manner of the two deaths had to mean the killer knew Martin or that Martin in some way stood for someone the killer did know.

"Does the name Lydia Harris mean anything to you?" Hutch asked.

Mrs. Tinker shook her head. "No, I'm afraid not. Why?"

"She was murdered a couple of weeks ago, exactly like Paul was," Hutch said gently.

"Oh, dear," Mrs. Tinker gasped. "Just like Paul?"
Hutch nodded. "We thought there might be a connection." He pulled a photo of the dead girl from his shirt pocket. "Does she look familiar?"

Mrs. Tinker took the photo and studied it for several moments, frowning. Finally she handed it back. "I'm sorry. I don't think I've ever seen her before."

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"You know, Hutch, maybe we're all wet with this connection thing," Starsky said as they were on their way to see Harris' parents.

"I don't think so," Hutch said. "We just haven't found the connection. There's gotta be one."

"He could just be a random killer," Starsky said.

Hutch groaned. "Don't say that. I don't even want to think about that."

Joe and Doris Harris lived in a slightly decaying residential area in a bungalow with a carport and one scraggly palm tree in the front yard. They were only recently retired, but even in the two weeks since their daughter's death they had aged visibly. Starsky and Hutch had already interviewed them once, but they thought it was worth coming back to try to find a connection between Lydia and Paul Martin.

Neither of her parents recognized Martin's name or photograph. Mr. Harris handed the photo back to Hutch after they'd studied it.

"I'm sorry," he said.

Starsky was looking at a row of photos above the couch. The Harris' had four children, and the photos showed all four in various stages of childhood. "Which one is Lydia?" he asked Mrs. Harris.

She smiled, a little wanly, and pointed to a couple of them. They showed an overweight girl in thick glasses with braids and braces. "She was the proverbial ugly duckling who turned into a swan," she said with a little tremor in her voice. "I'm afraid she had a tough time in school. She got teased a lot."

Starsky was stunned. The beautiful young woman who had been murdered had no resemblance to these photos at all.

"She really enjoyed going to her ten-year high school reunion," Mrs. Harris said. "No one recognized her, and she got to lord it over all the boys who ignored her in high school."

Starsky smiled at the thought. "I'll bet they were sorry they'd done that."

Mrs. Harris smiled back, a real smile this time. "It was a lot of fun for her. But you know, she wasn't bitter about it. She used to joke about being a late bloomer. And I think it made her that"
much more sensitive to her own students. She absolutely wouldn't stand for any of the kids getting picked on."

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"I don't get it," Starsky said to Hutch later as they were stopping for a bite to eat. "Both the victims seemed to be paragons of virtue. No trouble. No bad marriages or ugly relationships. Normal, nice young adults trying to live their lives. Why the hell would somebody wanna kill them?"

"That's what we need to find out," Hutch said, stealing a French fry. His own plate held another good, healthy chef salad, but even if he wouldn't order junk food, he wasn't above sharing Starsky's.

Starsky went on as if he didn't even see Hutch stealing his food. "You s'pose there's something about both of 'em having kind of rough childhoods? I mean, Lydia was 'an ugly duckling' and Paul was an orphan?"

"That'd make sense if they were the killers. Doesn't seem to make sense their being the victims," Hutch said, stealing another French fry.

"No, guess not." Starsky sighed. "Damn it."

"We could try asking Doug if anything clicks for him," Hutch suggested.

Doug Barnes was a psychologist friend of theirs who sometimes helped out with the department's cases.

"It's worth a try."

Barnes listened in silence as Hutch listed the evidence they had so far. He frowned. "That's not a lot to go on," he said. "I do wonder about the duct tape, though. That sounds like the killer had a reason to want to 'shut up' his victims. And both were strangled?"

Hutch nodded. "Some kind of electric cord, the M.E. says. But there was no cord near either body."

"He might have brought it with him," Barnes said. "If it was part of the ritual, he might even have used the same cord on both of them."

Starsky shivered. "That's sick."

"It is," Barnes said. "Have you asked at mental hospitals to see if anyone has a thing about duct tape?"

"A 'thing'?" Hutch asked with a grin.

"Technical psychological term," Barnes answered, grinning back. "I wouldn't expect a layman to understand it."
"Could their age or the fact they lived in second-floor apartments have anything to do with it?" Hutch said, going back to the business at hand.

"It could," Barnes said. "And you say their records and posters and things were destroyed? That's part of the ritual, too, I'd say. For some reason, those possessions had to 'die' just like the people did. The killer wanted to make a point that those things are part of what made the victims 'evil' and in need of destruction."

Starsky shivered again. "You're gonna give me nightmares."

"Could this be the first time the killer has done this?" Hutch asked.

Barnes frowned again. "It could. Sounds planned to me. Revenge, you know? Something he's been thinking about for a long time. Try the mental hospital angle, and if you come up with any other common links, call me. I'll try to come up with some kind of a profile."

"Thanks, Doug."

Starsky felt a cold shiver run up his back as he pulled up to the parking lot of Caballo Point Hospital for the Criminally Insane. This was where George Prudholm had been held for years before they finally brought him to trial. Hutch noticed the reaction and patted his partner on the forearm.

"Hey, you okay going in there?" He asked softly.

"Yeah, I'm fine. Just kinda creepy knowin' Prudholm was here for so long. No big deal." Starsky shrugged it off and climbed out of the car. Hutch was often impressed by Starsky's ability to put aside his personal feelings to get the job done. Things might upset him about a case, but he kept going. Anything that made him think of Terry's death was still hard for him to deal with and Hutch supposed it would always be that way.

They had an appointment to speak with Dr. William Jackson, the hospital's director. This was not the first time they had been in the office, but their previous visit had been years before when another doctor was at the helm. When they were ushered into the man's office, they were both surprised at the change in the décor. The previous director had his office decorated in what Hutch had termed "early psych ward." Cold, sterile, all white walls with steel and Formica furnishings. No art on the walls, just the man's many diplomas. His desk had been completely clear except for a telephone, a pad of paper, and a cup with a few writing instruments in it. The man himself had been formal, distant, and cheerless. Starsky had judged the man a "cold fish."

Dr. Jackson was the previous director's diametric opposite. He was a tall man of about sixty with a kind face and a firm handshake. He greeted the detectives warmly, inviting them to sit in his overstuffed leather chairs. The office was completely redone with art, beautiful wooden furniture, and plants. Dr. Jackson's desk was completely covered with paperwork, pictures of his family, patient charts, and what looked to be the remainder of his Chinese takeout lunch. Starsky liked him already.
"I hope you gentlemen don't mind if I finish my lunch while we chat. I never seem to have time to eat anymore. Always eating standing up or walking to an appointment." Dr. Jackson shook his head.

"Go ahead, doc. Believe me, we understand." Starsky said.

Hutch began, "Dr. Jackson, we're investigating a couple of murders and we were wondering if you could help us out with some information."

"Of course, if there's anything I can do I'm happy to help. You know I can't divulge anything that would violate doctor/patient privilege of course."

"Of course." Both detectives nodded.

Starsky continued, "Doc, have you released any patients, in say the past two or three months, who had a history of physical violence of a ritualistic nature?"

"Well, Detective Starsky, most of our patients have a history of being physically violent. Is there something in particular you are getting at?"

"The two murders we are investigating were people who appear to have had nothing in common." Hutch explained. "They were both strangled and the killer put duct tape over their mouths."

Starsky added, "The M.E. says the duct tape was put there after the victims were already dead. That's one reason we think it's the same killer. Have you treated anyone who had a thing for duct tape?"

Dr. Jackson laughed. "Well, that's something I've never been asked. A thing, huh?"

Hutch smiled, "A friend of ours is a psychologist. He said that was a technical term."

More laughter from the doctor. "Just so, just so. Hm, a thing?" He muttered, "duct tape" a few times and appeared to be contemplating the question while he cracked open a fortune cookie and extracted the fortune. "You will be blessed with stamina," he read. Then a sly smile crept over his face and he said, "You know these things are funnier if you add...." He stopped himself there, "well, never mind." Starsky smiled at his partner as if to say, "see, it's not just me."

"No, I'm sorry, I can't think of anyone with a tape fetish, duct or otherwise. We have released a few patients in the last three months, but no one I would believe capable of the ritualistic murder of two strangers."

Hutch added, "The victims were both 33 and they both lived on the second floor in their buildings. Could that mean something?"

"Possibly."
Starsky and Hutch explained the murder scenes to him and got the same response Doug had given. "Sounds like some sort of revenge plot perhaps. I'm sorry I can't be if more assistance. If I think of anything else, where can I reach you?"

Hutch gave him a card. "Thanks, doc. We know how busy you are."

As they stood to leave Starsky said, "Nice office."

"Well, I spend a lot of time here. I like it to feel lived in. The director before me didn't even have any artwork on the walls. To each their own."

As they left the office, both men noticed one of those "Love" posters hanging near the door. They shot each other a glance, each one remembering the poster ripped up at Martin's apartment. He saw them notice it and Dr. Jackson said from behind them, "My daughter gave me that and I don't have the heart to get rid of it."

Walking out to the car, Starsky said, "Lots of people have that poster. I think almost everyone had it at some time or another."

"Yeah, I know. Something about it bugs me though. Seems like there are a lot of those things on this case."

"Relax. I keep tellin' you something will click sooner or later."

"I'm just afraid this guy is going to strike again before we can turn something. Thinking this psycho is out there waiting to randomly kill another 33-year-old is creepy, Starsk."

They both hoped the case would end here, but neither one believed that. The distinct and unsettling feeling that these two victims were just the start of a bigger case hung heavily around them. Neither of them enjoyed waiting for the next victim to turn up to get more clues.
Kate Carter hummed to herself as she got the groceries out of the trunk of her car and closed the lid. Hoisting the paper sack on one hip and the dog food in the other hand, she sorted her house key out of the rest on the ring and went to the small bungalow she had recently moved into. She could hear Koko whining and snuffling on the other side of the door.

"Hang on, sugar, I'm coming," she called to him, but it only made him start barking. She laughed as she got the door open and the little poodle started dancing around her feet on his hind legs. "Yes, sweetie, I got your food," she reassured him. "Come on, I'll give you some. Take it easy."

Still talking to the dog, she went into the kitchen and poured out some food into his dish before she started the pot boiling for spaghetti and put the rest of her own food away. She flipped on the radio to listen to the news while she worked and heard the usual crime mayhem and weather reports without really paying attention until a name caught her ear.

"Police report that they have several leads on the murders of Lydia Harris and Paul Martin, but no suspects have yet been identified."

Kate stopped what she was doing. Lydia Harris...why was that name familiar? She wracked her brain, but couldn't remember where she'd heard it before. Maybe she'd read something about the murders in the newspaper? She finally gave up and finished getting her supper started, played with Koko for a while, and ate dinner in front of the television. Ever since Barry had started his residency at the hospital her evenings had assumed the same routine: come home from work, fix supper, eat in front of the TV, go to bed alone...but it wouldn't be forever, and it couldn't be helped. Koko climbed up in her lap and she let him have a little of her garlic bread as she watched tonight's sitcoms.

At 11, she turned out the lights and went to bed. Koko curled up at her feet and soon both were asleep. She didn't know how much later it was when she was awakened by Koko's frantic barking and growling. Barry, home early for a change? She sat up and listened and tried to quiet the dog, but Koko was too agitated and he wouldn't growl at Barry. Her heart began to pound. And then she saw him. A man, little more than a shadow in the darkness of the bedroom doorway. Terror froze her.

He came toward her, slapping something against his hand, something that looked like a rolled-up cord of some kind. He didn't say a word, just kept coming, and Kate was paralyzed with horror. When Koko snapped at the man, he merely picked up the toy poodle and hurled him at the wall with such force that the dog fell limply to the floor. That finally broke Kate's paralysis.

"What the hell do you think you're doing!" she shouted at him, tears in her eyes. She scrambled out of bed and started to go to Koko, but the man, with a surprising amount of strength -- he wasn't that big, now that Kate was standing up -- grabbed her arm and twisted it behind her painfully. He still hadn't said anything. He pulled her arm up behind her until she was on her knees, and the tears in her eyes were now of pain. With his free hand, he unrolled the cord in his
hand. And before Kate even realized what was happening, he had it around her throat and pulled tight. Only then did he speak.

"It's called corporal punishment," he hissed into her ear.

And everything went black.

A string of bank robberies that had included one bank guard's death had absorbed Starsky and Hutch's time for over a week. When they could steal a few moments away, they continued to work on the murders of Martin and Harris, but they still hadn't discovered any connection between the two. Every bit of information they turned up on both victims reinforced their impression that both were perfectly normal young adults, with no shady acquaintances, no buried secrets, no enemies, and no reason for anyone to want to kill them. They had come to the conclusion that the killer didn't know either one and had just chosen them because they fit some image in his own twisted mind. Doug had agreed.

"I can't imagine what it is yet," Doug had told Hutch over the phone that morning, "because serial killers usually stick to a type. Young women with blonde hair or nurses or teenagers. Jack the Ripper chose hookers. But a young woman and a young man? With no physical characteristics in common and different jobs? I don't know, Hutch. I'm going through my books and files, trying to come up with something."

"Thanks, Doug, I know you're doing your best," Hutch said. "Keep in touch."

"Okay."

They had just finished reviewing the security tapes from the latest bank robbery and gotten a good ID on one of the thieves, whose mask had fallen off in his hurry to escape, when the radio beeped.

"Zebra Three, a 187 at 1936 Eucalyptus, Venice. Please respond."

Hutch answered, "Zebra Three, control. That's out of our jurisdiction."

"10-4, Zebra Three. But it looks like your case. Dobey okayed your involvement."

Hutch glanced at his partner. "Control, you mean our two murders?"

"Affirmative, sergeant."

"Roger. On our way." Hutch looked at Starsky again. "Terrific."

"Really," Starsky said sourly, turning the car toward Venice.

The cottage in question was about four blocks from Hutch's old cottage in Venice, on a quiet street. An ambulance and a black-and-white had already arrived and the uniformed officers were interviewing neighbors. A man in his mid-thirties, wearing a rumpled shirt and tie and with dark
circles under his eyes was sitting on the bumper of a car in the driveway with his head in his hands. They couldn't see his face.

Starsky showed his badge to the officer in charge. "Starsky. This is Hutchinson. Whatcha got?"

"His name's Dr. Barry Carter," the young officer said. "He's a resident at Receiving. Just came off a 30-hour shift and came home about an hour ago. Found the place trashed and his wife and her poodle dead in the bedroom. He's pretty upset."

"Wouldn't you be?" Starsky inquired, a bit sharply. He had no use for the Joe Friday style of cop who thought you couldn't be professional and human at the same time. He turned toward the man while Hutch stayed behind to get any other information the officers had. He introduced himself to Carter. "Can you tell me what happened, doctor?"

Carter's eyes were red with a combination of tears and exhaustion, but he pulled himself together enough to answer, "When I got home, the door was unlocked," he said in a low voice. "That's not like Katie, she's very careful when she's home alone. So I was scared before I ever went in and then I found her in the bedroom..." He had to stop to steady his voice.

"Take your time," Starsky said gently.

The man nodded. In a moment, he went on, "She was sort of lying across the bed, str-strangled, and she had a piece of duct tape over her mouth." He paused again and looked up to meet Starsky's eyes. "She had a...oh, hell, I can't remember what they're called, one of those things kids use in school to make circles in geometry class -- "

"A compass," Hutch said, coming up behind Starsky.

"Yeah. One of those. It was stuck into her hand," he indicated the palm of his hand, "but it had been put there after she was dead."

"How do you know that?" Hutch asked. He hadn't heard what the other officer had told Starsky.

"I'm a doctor," Carter said. He wet his lips. "It didn't bleed. And Koko -- our dog -- was lying in the floor by the wall, with his neck broken. And the place was destroyed. I mean, books and records smashed and torn up, pictures yanked off the wall and flung onto the floor..."

"Anything missing?"

Carter shrugged and rubbed at his eyes. "I don't know. I didn't look. I just called you guys."

"I'm sorry I have to ask you this," Starsky said, "but can you prove you were at the hospital all night?"

Carter wiped a tear away. "Yeah. It was a busy night and I was only off duty for about an hour for a nap. That was -- " he glanced down at his watch. "God, that was about 5:30 yesterday afternoon."
Starsky jotted that down in his notebook. Then he and Hutch went inside to look at the crime scene.

Kate Carter was still lying where her husband had found her, partially on and partially off the bed. Hutch pulled the sheet back to look at her and saw the duct tape across her mouth. He shuddered a little and put the sheet back over her face before looking at the compass stuck into her hand. The dog was also still lying where he'd landed, and Starsky examined him. There was a little blood dried on the fur around his mouth.

"Looks like the killer slammed him into the wall," Starsky said, glancing at the matching smear of blood above where he was crouching.

"Same kind of marks on her neck," Hutch said, pulling the sheet back again. "Ten to one it's the same guy."

"That's exactly what I was afraid you were gonna say," Starsky said, joining Hutch to look at the marks.

"We have a serial killer all right. Better get the crime lab team in here." Starsky walked back outside to make the call.

Hutch looked down at the little dog. Why kill the dog? He was too little to cause any trouble. He thought about the man waiting outside, coming home to this. Hutch wondered if there would be anything to connect this woman with either of the previous victims.

The other victims had lived in second floor apartments -- this one in a house. That eliminated one commonality. Hutch looked around the house for the victim's purse. Finding it, he pulled out her wallet to look at the driver's license. She had turned thirty-three the previous month. That thread remained. Starsky walked back toward him. "She was thirty-three, Starsk. That has to mean something, but what?"

"I talked to the ambulance attendants. They're gonna take her down to the morgue for us." Starsky said. "I don't know, I just didn't want that poor guy to watch the meat wagon take her away."

"Yeah." Hutch put a hand on Starsky's shoulder. He knew inside that tough-cop exterior, his partner was sentimental and he cared about the victims and their families. "Is there someone we can call for him?"

Starsky handed him a number, "This is his brother's number. Will you call? I'm gonna go wait outside with him till the lab team gets here."

Hutch took the piece of paper, "Sure. I'll stay in here and start looking around. He watched Starsky walk back outside, his shoulders slumped. Hutch could tell he was taking this case hard.

The crime lab team arrived and started their meticulous work. Hutch had already written a few pages of notes in his small notebook by the time they started. Mike Rodgers, the head of the team walked up and shook Hutch's hand. "Another one, Hutch?"
"Looks like it, Mike. She's in the bedroom. Hey, would you get the pictures out of the way first. We need to get her out of here. Her husband's waiting outside."

"Sure thing, Hutch."

Starsky walked back in to tell Hutch that Dr. Carter's brother had arrived, but they wouldn't leave as long as the victim was still here. Hutch explained they were taking the pictures first.

When the victim and her husband were gone, the two detectives started cataloging the items in the house as they had done the other two scenes. As the crime lab team finished each room, they started making their lists.

The record collection that was smashed this time included jazz greats, some rock and roll, and even a few 78-rpm wax platters. Pictures of the couple were scattered all over the house and every book was pulled down from the shelves. Hutch found a copy of Shakespeare's sonnets under the bed and made a note to ask Dr. Carter if it belonged to them. He had a feeling it didn't. Starsky found a copy of "Little Women" hacked to pieces on the living room floor.

The next two days were spent investigating the crime scene and the background of this latest victim and her husband. Just like in the other two cases, the investigation did not produce a murder weapon. The only fingerprints in the house belonged there. Dr. Carter's alibi checked out, although the detectives never doubted it would.

The M.E.'s report confirmed the cause of death to be strangulation, probably using the same implement as the first two victims. The duct tape was put on post mortem and this time a paperclip had been placed in the victim's mouth. Notes on the first victim did not include a reference to anything being found in her mouth. Hutch made a note to inquire about that.

Katie Carter was a dental hygienist. She worked at the same office for the past three years. The office was located in Venice, not near either of the other victims. She had several close friends and a sister living in Bay City. Katie and Barry Carter met in Chicago where he went to medical school. She was working in the dental office closest to campus. After graduation, Barry had gotten an internship at Memorial Hospital in Bay City. The couple had married and moved to Bay City, which was Katie's hometown. Barry still worked at the hospital as a resident in the Trauma Department.

Neither the victim nor her husband had any history of trouble with the law or anyone else. They paid their bills on time, attended church on a regular basis, and they got along with their siblings. Two days into the case with no more than three or four hours sleep each and they still had nothing. Both men were tired, hungry, and frustrated. They had stopped speaking to anyone but each other several hours back when Dobey bellowed for them from his office.

"Starsky, Hutchinson, get in here!"
Hutch looked up at his partner, not liking the dark circles he saw under Starsky's eyes and wondering if he looked as whipped. They stood and walked into the captain's office. Starsky sank down into a chair and Hutch leaned against the door after he closed it.

"Cap?" Hutch said tentatively.

"I just got off the phone with the commissioner. One of the Carters' neighbors went to the media. The lid's off this case."

"Terrific." Starsky said, closing his eyes and leaning his head back against the chair. The department had tried to keep quiet the fact that they were working on a link between three cases. Each time they investigated one of the scenes, more people became involved. The risk increased that someone would blow it and tell the press that they were looking at a serial killer. They all knew that the media would sensationalize the case and start a panic in the city. What had already been a difficult case just became harder.

Hutch asked, "Do they know whose case it is?"

"Uh-huh. Calls have already started coming in from reporters looking for you two. I told the switchboard to take messages on all the calls until I can set up a liaison officer."

Hutch signed deeply. "Cap, this isn't going to make our job any easier."

Hutch crossed to the window and looked out to the parking lot below. The media were already well represented. "Uh-oh. Guess we can't get out of here without facing them now."

Starsky kept his eyes closed when he said, "No comment."

Captain Dobey said, "What?"

"Just practicing."

Hutch laughed. "Hold that thought."

"I'd better get moving on that liaison if they're already out there." Dobey said.

When Hutch looked back over at Starsky, he was starting to doze. Great. He's so tired he can fall asleep in 30 seconds.

Dobey noticed too. He realized the two men had been on duty almost all of the past 48 hours. "Hutchinson, take your partner home. Get some sleep."

Starsky opened his eyes again, "Hey, I'm awake."

Hutch walked over and held his hand out to give Starsky a boost up out of the chair. "Come on, partner. Let's go out the back before it gets any worse out there. You might be awake, but I'm beat."

He turned Starsky toward the door, looking back at Dobey. "Thanks, Cap. We'll call you later."
Starsky stopped to pick up some of the files on the way out of the squad room. "Maybe we can go over these later after we've had some sleep. Who knows, maybe we'll see something we've missed till now."

"Maybe. I know there's something. I still can't get what it is though." Hutch said. They walked down the stairs toward the back door. As they got closer, they could hear the reporters outside.

"You ready for this, buddy?" Hutch asked his exhausted partner. Starsky was still having a hard time with this case. He was tired and Hutch was worried about him facing the throng of reporters like this.

"Yeah, I'm the picture of civility, partner. No comment, no comment."

The two men paused for a moment to gather their reserves of strength before going into the mob. Starsky thought he recognized a few of the reporters from Prudholm's trial. And the reporters certainly seemed to recognize Starsky and Hutch.

"Sergeant!"

"Detective!"

"Starsky, what have you found out?"

"Is it true we have a serial killer loose in the city?"

Both men simply put their heads down and muttered "no comment" and tried to get past the horde to the car. Flashbulbs kept going off and tape recorders and microphones kept showing up in their faces.

"Officers, this is a huge story!" called one of the younger reporters. "You owe it to the public, if only so they can protect themselves!"

Starsky whirled around and opened his mouth, but Hutch grabbed his arm and all but dragged him along.

"There'll be a statement from the department later!" Hutch called over his shoulder. "We will not be making any statements!" He opened the car door and gave Starsky a shove to get him started, then hurried around to the driver's side, pulling his keys out of his pocket on the way. In a few moments, they were away.

"This is my car," Starsky remarked.

"I know that," Hutch said, a little breathless. "I didn't want to argue with you about talking back to those cheeky bastards."

Starsky chuckled. He adjusted the files more comfortably on his lap and let Hutch drive to his place. Once they were there, Starsky spread the files on Hutch's coffee table and got out his
notebook. Hutch got his out, too, and they started studying their notes again from the beginning, hoping the connection -- whatever it was -- would click for them.

"Okay," Hutch said, for maybe the tenth time. "All three victims were strangled with some kind of electrical cord."

"Check."

"All three were 33-years-old."

"Check," Starsky said. "Hey, you don't think -- "

"What?"

"Three victims. All 33-years-old. Maybe that's the end?"

"I wish, but I doubt it," Hutch said.

Starsky sighed. "Okay, okay. And all three had duct tape on their mouths, put there after they were dead. What the hell is THAT?"

"Doug said it could mean the killer wanted to shut them up."

"So he knew them," Starsky theorized, "and for some reason he wanted to make a point of the fact that they wouldn't be able to tell something about him now?"

"But how could they know him?" Hutch asked. "There's no connection between the three of them. Didn't work together. Didn't live in the same neighborhood. Didn't go to the same church or even bank at the same damn bank!"

"There's gotta be something. They're all the same age. That might be it," Starsky said.

"They didn't go to college together, if that's what you're thinking," Hutch said. "I checked."

"Couldn't be Boy Scouts," Starsky said.

"Especially since two of 'em are girls," Hutch returned tartly.

Starsky gave a wan grin. "Born in the same hospital?"

"Sure," Hutch said, pretending that was a real possibility. "And the killer was their doctor and dropped all of them on their heads in the delivery room and he's afraid they're gonna tell and he'll lose his medical license."

"Little League?"

"GIRLS, Stark." Hutch rubbed his eyes.

"Campfire Girls?"
"Then how do you explain Martin, buddy?"

"Maybe he's a sissy," Starsky said.

Hutch groaned.

"I'm hungry," Starsky said. "Why don't we order a pizza? I can't think when I'm hungry."

"Go ahead," Hutch said. "No anchovies. And no hot peppers."

"Aw, you take all the fun out of it," Starsky complained. He made the call and came back. They hashed out other improbabilities for a while until there was a knock at the door.

"That was fast," Hutch said, standing up and reaching into his pocket. He examined the crumpled bills. "I don't have enough."

Starsky reached into his own pocket and produced a five, handing it over.

Hutch went to the door, but when he opened it, it wasn't their pizza. It was the young reporter from outside the precinct. "What the hell are YOU doing here?" Hutch demanded, starting to shut the door in the young man's face.

"Please, Officer," the reporter said. "I can't go back without a story, my editor'll kill me. Give me something, anything!"

Hutch opened his mouth, but Starsky had launched himself from the couch and put himself between Hutch and the reporter. Hutch could almost see smoke coming out of his ears. "Easy, buddy," he said automatically, but Starsky shook his hand away and glared at the kid.

"You want a story?" he said angrily. "Is that all this is to you, kid, a 'story'? What the hell are you thinking, huh? Three people are dead!"

The reporter blanched a little and took a step back. "I kn-know that," he stammered. "But you don't understand --"

"I understand," Starsky snapped. "I understand just fine. What paper are you with? What's your name?"

"The -- The Chronicle," he said. "Uh, Jim Cl-Clark."

"Okay, Jim," Starsky said with ice dripping from every syllable. "You listen to me for a minute, huh? I'm gonna tell you something and I want you to remember it."

"Starsky, Dobey said --"

"I know what Dobey said," Starsky answered. "This ain't got nothin' to do with the case. It's got to do with real life."

Hutch shut up.
"Look, kid," Starsky said. "You show up after the blood's mopped up and the bodies are gone and you ask a bunch of questions and go back to your clean little desk and write all about somebody's pain, but you don't feel it, do you? You don't have to tell little kids their daddies are goin' to jail or break it to parents their kid's dead or watch a teen-ager ruin his life 'cause he don't believe there's anything better waitin' out there. Do ya?"

"No, sir," Jim said quietly.

"We do, pal. We gotta do all those things and we gotta worry at the same time that somebody's gonna blow our heads off. Every damn day we gotta do this, Jim. Now you listen." Starsky leaned forward and fixed Jim with that piercing glare that usually made suspects only too happy to tell everything they knew. "To you, this is a 'story.' But to three grieving families, this is an empty chair at the dining room table! It's somebody they love that they ain't never gonna hug or kiss again! It's a funeral they gotta go to! And you'd better by God remember that!"

Jim took another step back.

"We can't fix it, but we ain't gonna let you or any other reporter compromise our case so we can't catch whoever did this. You got that, Jim?"

"Yes, sir," Jim said, backing up even further. "I understand, sir."

"Good!" Starsky slammed the door.

Hutch followed him back to the couch, and when another knock came a couple of minutes later, he tried to get to the door first, but Starsky was too quick for him. He yanked the door open and the look on his face would've scared anyone, but the pizza delivery boy that stood there wasn't much more than a kid, and he almost dropped the pizza.

Hutch pushed Starsky aside and smiled. "How much do we owe you?"

The two detectives hashed the case out almost all night, finally falling asleep where they sat about 3 a.m. Hutch woke up first, when the newspaper thudded against his front door, and yawning, got up to go get it. He opened it up on the way back to his seat and was stunned at the headline.

"Bay City's Officers Have a Heart."

"Uh, Starsky?" Hutch nudged his partner with his toe. "Starsk! Wake up, buddy."

Starsky groaned and stirred and finally opened one eye. "'s 't mornin'?"

"Wake up, dummy. Look." Hutch moved to sit next to him and showed him the headline. "Dobey's gonna kill us both."

Starsky visibly paled. "Uh oh."
Hutch hadn't read the story, only the headline, but once he started reading, he realized the story had nothing to do with their case. "Hey, wait, this isn't so bad."

BAY CITY -- If the citizens of this city have the idea that the "thin blue line" that stands between them and the criminal element is only interested in glory, they're wrong. The officers who work the streets of Bay City care.

There are three open murder cases in Bay City today, and the officers in charge of the investigation will not rest until those cases are solved. But not because they want the credit or the "collar" or because they enjoy the chase or even because it's their job.

These officers want to help ease the pain of grieving families.

Sergeant David Starsky informed this reporter last night that the journalists who write about crimes are lucky; we don't have to see the faces of the families affected by crime. We don't have to give the bad news and we don't have to share the pain. We show up after it's all over.

But officers like Starsky and his partner Kenneth Hutchinson have to work the front lines and they put their own safety at risk to do so. This may seem an obvious statement. Perhaps it is. But until every person reading this article has stood face to face with an officer of the law and heard the pain in his voice as he describes what it means to tell a child his father's going to jail, or deliver the bad news that someone has died, then you don't understand what a police officer faces every day.

It's tough. But they keep doing it. And they do it, Starsky said, because they care.

"To you, this is a story," Starsky said. "But to three grieving families, it's an empty chair at the dining room table. It's somebody they love that they won't ever kiss or hug again."

"That ain't exactly what I said," Starsky complained.

"So he's got better grammar than you do," Hutch said with a grin. "Besides, he wasn't exactly able to take notes while you were hammering him."

"Guess not."

Starsky smiled at Hutch. "So, is Dobey gonna kill me?"

"Not a chance. You made us all look like cops who care." Hutch laughed lightly.

Starsky's smile faded quickly. "Don't we?" He looked so sad; Hutch's heart ached for him.

"Starsk, you wanna tell me what's buggin' ya?"

"No."

Hutch was worried. Starsky almost never tried to keep his feelings from his partner. "I'm sorry, Gordo. I'm worried about you. Talk to me. Please?"
Starsky looked about as dejected as Hutch had seen him in a long while. "I'm sorry, Hutch. I didn't mean to worry you. You know, I really don't know what it is. If I did, I'd tell ya."

"Aw, buddy, come on now. Think about it. I know this case has been tough on both of us. For some reason though, you've taken it extra hard. Why?" Hutch wasn't going to let it go. He knew Starsky would feel better if he talked about it.

"It's just that it seems so . . . evil. The victims aren't just dead. This killer is trying to destroy who they were. Their lives, their memories. All that stuff he breaks up at the scenes. I can't believe these cases aren't linked somehow. I just can't. If I believe that, how can we stop it?"

Hutch sighed. "I know, buddy. You're right this is an awful case. I think you're also right about the link. We just gotta find it. The guy's a wacko, Starsk. Don't take it so hard that we haven't been able to get into his head yet. We will."

"I just hope we do before he kills again."

"Me too, partner."

They talked about the case while Hutch made a quick breakfast. Starsky wasn't going to feel any better until the case was solved, but at least Hutch knew what he was thinking. They cleaned up and hit the streets, a little unsure of where to go next.

Hutch decided to drive his car for their shift. He might not be able to help Starsky feel better, but he could at least let him relax a little while he did the driving. The battered LTD was sitting at a traffic signal on the outskirts of Venice when an old man stepped off the curb and shoved a bunch of roses under Starsky's nose.

"Want some flowers, pal?" The old man croaked at him.

Starsky shoved him back out of the window. "Back off, old man." He was in no mood for this nonsense. Hutch sneezed.

"Gezhundheit."

Hutch sniffed. "These street vendors are really getting aggressive. You'd think we were in New York City."

Starsky smiled at him. "Nah, if we were in New York, he woulda shoved me back, then started washing the windows on this heap. We'd have been invited to pay for the privilege too."

"ACHOO!"

"Gezhundheit."

The detectives decided to stop at the M.E.'s office first. They were still waiting for an answer to the question of whether the first victim had anything in her mouth. No note had been made of it
in the autopsy record so the victim had to be exhumed. The report was supposed to be ready that morning.

Handing the report to Starsky, the M.E.’s office secretary shook her head sadly. "This guy sure is a sicko."

Starsky opened the file and scanned through it. The M.E. had found a school hall pass in her mouth. "What the hell?" He handed the file to Hutch who read it and shook his head.

"What the hell?" Hutch said.

Starsky quipped, "There an echo in here?"

"Starsky, do you think our killer could be a school principal maybe?"

"Why?"

"The stuff we're finding around the victims and in their mouths all seems related to school somehow. Chalk, the ruler, this hall pass."

"Maybe a teacher?"

"Let's get back over to the precinct and start looking through those files again." Starsky suddenly had some enthusiasm and Hutch was glad to see it. Finally, they had a break in the case.

As Starsky slid into the passenger seat, the radio beeped, "Zebra 3 from Control. Come in please."

Starsky shot Hutch an "oh no" look as he picked up the mic and answered. "Zebra 3, go ahead."

Every time they got a call he was worried it would be another victim.

"See Officer Baxter at 1159 Alameda, code 33."

"Roger."

Hutch said, "Another victim. Damn it."

Captain Dobey had worked out the code 33 signal with the department's officers and dispatchers when he knew the media was on their tails. He had called Hutch and let him in on it the previous evening.

They pulled up to a small house about three miles from the Katie Carter's home. Officer Kent Baxter walked up to them. "This one's not dead, guys."

Hutch said, "What?"

"Yeah, the victim's roommate, Erika Snell, found her still alive about thirty minutes ago. They took her to Memorial. Victim's name is Bernice Jackson."
"Was she conscious?" Starsky asked.

"No, but the roommate says she talked to her for a minute before she lost consciousness. She's inside."

The two detectives hurried inside to speak with the woman. They introduced themselves and sat facing her. The living room was trashed, just like the other crime scenes.

"Can you tell us what happened?" Hutch asked her gently.

"I'm a nurse and I work the night shift. I came home about half an hour ago and found Bernice. She was lying on the floor in her room. Well, mostly on the floor, her legs were up on the bed. At first, I thought she was dead." Erika was crying.

"Did she by any chance have duct tape across her mouth?"

Erika sniffed and nodded the affirmative. "Yes. I took it off so she could breathe better. She came around a little and coughed." Erika held out her hand. She had a small pink pencil eraser in it. "She coughed this out of her mouth. Oh my God." Hutch took it from her and put it in his pocket.

She put her head in her hands and cried.

"The officer outside said your roommate said something to you?"

Erika nodded. "The strangest thing. I was able to revive her for a few minutes. She said just one thing before she passed out again -- 'corporal punishment.' What does it mean?"

The partners looked at each other with raised eyebrows. Corporal punishment? Maybe it was a marine drill sergeant, or a prison guard. The clues were coming in, but the connection was strange. Why these particular victims?

"How old is your roommate?" Starsky asked.

"Bernice is thirty-two. Well, she's almost thirty-three. Her birthday's next week."

They thanked Erika and asked for permission to look around the home. Officer Baxter had ordered a lab team so they were careful not to disturb anything. In the victim's bedroom, they noticed an alarm clock on the floor. The time had stopped at 6:12, five hours had passed. They found a small black piece of chalkboard under the victim's bed.

"I think we need to talk to Doug again," Hutch said.

"Really."

Doug listened without comment as the two of them laid out all the clues they had so far. He raised his eyebrows at some of the things the victims had had in their mouths, but only made some notes on a legal pad on his lap while they talked. When they finished, he shook his head.
"I wouldn't want to meet this one in a dark alley," he said with a long sigh. "I think maybe your hunch is right. This person's got something to do with a school. An old classmate, maybe?"

"But they're all from different places," Starsky objected.

"Are you sure? Can you look into their backgrounds? What if this is the kid everyone else picked on? And now he's getting revenge?"

Starsky glanced at Hutch. "It's sick, but he might be right."

"They are all the same age," Hutch agreed. He looked back to Doug. "He?"

Doug nodded. "It's very rare for women to be serial killers, Hutch. And on top of that, women who murder very rarely choose strangulation as their method. Women poison or sometimes use a knife, but strangulation requires more upper-body strength than most women have, especially if the victim struggles. And one of the victims was a healthy young man. I can't see a woman being able to subdue him long enough to strangle him. It's not sexist," he added in answer to Hutch's raised eyebrows. "It's just biological fact. Go ahead and check your files for female murderers and you'll see I'm right."

Hutch rubbed his face. "Okay. So we're looking for a man, and maybe he was in school with our victims."

"I'd say that's a good bet," Doug said. "It's worth looking into, anyway."

Their next stop was supposed to be the hospital. Starsky called ahead and found out that Bernice Jackson had died shortly after being brought to the Emergency Room. He sighed as he replaced the microphone. In addition to his regret that she had died, the detectives were hoping for an eyewitness account from her. That would have been a big break in this case. Hutch turned the LTD back toward Metro.

"I doubt this is the kid everyone picked on," Starsky said to Hutch on the way back to the precinct. "Didn't Lydia's mom say she was the kid who got picked on?"

"Yeah, she did," Hutch said. "So unless there was another kid who got picked on even more, that kind of washes that theory out."

They sorted through files again, re-read their interview notes, and still the glaring fact kept coming back that all four victims had been from different places. But Starsky and Hutch were nothing if not thorough, so they got on the phone.

Lydia Harris' mother said she had gone to Garfield High School in Richmond, VA. Paul Martin had gone to St. Agnes, a Catholic high school in Bay City. Kate Carter -- Kate Winslow, then -- had gone to MacArthur High School in a suburb of Chicago. And Bernice Jackson had attended Roosevelt High School, also in Bay City.

"Damn," Hutch said, looking over the information. "Back to square one."
"Maybe not," Starsky said. He was looking at the files again. "Remember school, Hutch? Remember when the peer pressure thing first hit and you first realized how important having the right haircut and the right kinda jeans was? How old were you?"

"Junior high," Hutch said instantly.

Starsky nodded. "Exactly. Hormones kicked in, the girls who'd had cooties for six or seven years suddenly started to look pretty good, and it was Geek City."

Hutch grinned. "Not necessarily."

Starsky gave him a playful punch in the shoulder. "Okay, Blond and Beautiful, maybe not for you. But for us mortals, that was the year we first realized what the word 'miserable' meant."

"Your point? If you have one?"

"Maybe we're asking the wrong question. Let's ask where they went to junior high."

"But if they grew up all over the country, what makes you think they could've gone to the same junior high school, and somehow they all wound up dead in Bay City?" Hutch inquired.

"It can't hurt to ask," Starsky insisted.

"Okay, okay. We'll ask."

Four phone calls later, they were staring at each other in dismay. All four victims had attended the same Catholic grade school in Bay City, Our Lady of Perpetual Sorrow. Kate Carter and Paul Martin -- whom, it turned out, had been "Pablo Martinez" in grade school -- had grown up in the parish church. Lydia Harris, her mother said, had gone to Our Lady of Perpetual Sorrow from fifth to seventh grade, until her father was transferred to Texas, and later to Virginia. They'd returned to Bay City while Lydia was in college. Bernice Jackson had attended the school for part of her seventh grade year.

"So they were all there for seventh grade," Hutch said. "That's the link. It's gotta be."

Starsky nodded. "We need a list of the entire seventh grade class that year. Ten to one our killer's name is there."

"I need a drink," Hutch said, rubbing his forehead. "What say we move the discussion to Huggy's?"

"Good idea."

Huggy's was hopping, usual for this time of day, so Starsky and Hutch squeezed themselves into seats at the end of the bar and accepted the beers Diane brought them. Huggy looked harried and harassed, and they didn't expect him to be able to talk to them, so they drank their beers and discussed the case in low voices -- or as low as possible in the din.

It was the better part of an hour before Huggy could even get away long enough to say "hello."
"How goes the case, gentlemen?" he asked while drawing a beer for a customer.

"Rotten," Starsky answered. "Four victims and we just figured out they all went to junior high together."

"Huggy!" the impatient customer called.

"I'm comin', I'm comin'," Huggy answered crossly. To Starsky and Hutch, he said, "So you figure that's the link?"

Hutch nodded, but Angie rang the bell from the kitchen and Diane was all the way across the room delivering another order.

Huggy muttered something impolite under his breath, delivered the beer, picked up the food and grabbed the ticket. "Sorry, guys, it's a madhouse tonight."

"So we see," Hutch said with a grin. "Listen, ask around, will you? See if you can find anything out about that school?"

"Sure, sure," Huggy said, turning to go.

"It's called Our Lady of Perp..." Hutch began, just as another customer almost collided with Huggy.

Huggy barely managed to keep from dropping the tray and this time he cussed out loud. Starsky chuckled.

"It's called what?" Huggy asked.

"Our Lady of Perpetual Sorrows," Hutch said, but Huggy was halfway across the room by then. "Think he heard me?" Hutch asked Starsky.

"No," Starsky said, watching their friend duck and dodge as he made his way to the table and delivered the food. "We'll try again tomorrow. He's too busy to mess with us now. Come on, let's go check out that school."
Our Lady of Perpetual Sorrows had seen better days. The school was in the heart of the inner city and its exterior was slightly tattered. Starsky thought it looked tired. The school lacked a playground, so the children were playing on the asphalt parking lot. A class of kids was playing basketball in one corner of the lot, using a battered hoop the net had fallen away from long ago.

"Wonder if the school was this run down back in the day." Hutch commented.

"Really. Kind of a bleak place to go to school."

Starsky and Hutch proceeded to the school office and asked the ancient secretary if they could speak with the principal. She could barely see and had to put on her reading glasses to look at their proffered badges.

"Oh, dear," the poor lady exclaimed. "Is one of the children in trouble?" She squinted up at Starsky.

"No, ma'am, nothing like that." He reassured her.

"We're investigating a case, ma'am, and we would appreciate it if we could have a word with your principal."

"Yes, yes, right away." The elderly lady shuffled off and into a door on the opposite wall.

"Geez. Hutch, that lady may have been here when our victims were."

"Starsk, that's been twenty years. You don't think...."

Hutch's comment was interrupted when the door opened again, and the elderly lady motioned in their general direction.

"Come in officers, Mrs. Sandling will see you now."

A friendly looking woman of about fifty stood and walked around her desk to greet them. "Good afternoon, gentlemen. I'm Rhonda Sandling. Won't you sit down please?"

"Thank you, ma'am. I'm Detective Ken Hutchinson, and this is my partner, Detective David Starsky." Starsky offered her a small wave of his hand accompanied by a tense smile.

"You look uncomfortable, Detective Starsky. Did you attend Catholic School?" Mrs. Sandling smiled wryly. The ability of a simple school building to make some adults uncomfortable was a sense of endless amusement for her.

"No, ma'am." Starsky looked sheepishly between her and his partner. "I guess the principal's office always makes me a little nervous. I spent a lot of time there."

She laughed softly, "Oh, I won't bite, detective. Your partner doesn't look uncomfortable."
Starsky laughed too. "Nah, Blondie here was the perfect child. Best all-around everything, captain of whatever, most likely to fill-in-the-blank. You probably know the type. The only time he ever went to the principal's office was to pick up an award."

Hutch said, "Don't let that get around, ma'am. Bad for my macho, tough-guy cop image to let it leak that I was in the glee club."

"Your secret is safe with me. What can I do for you gentlemen today? Mrs. Crawley says it's not about one of our children."

"Not exactly. Our visit is about some of your former students though." Starsky started to explain. He shot a look at Hutch who picked up the signal that Starsky wanted him to tell her the reason for their appearance.

"Mrs. Sandling, have you heard about the recent string of related homicides in the city?"

"Oh yes, terrible thing." She shook her head sadly.

"Before I go any further, some of what I'm going to tell you isn't public knowledge and we need it to stay that way. The media is already having a field day over this case." Hutch said.

"Of course, I won't say anything."

"My partner and I have reason to believe the victims all attended your school in the seventh grade. They are all the same age and their relatives have verified that they were enrolled here." Hutch paused for a moment, noting the look of shock on her face.

"Oh no. Are you sure? How old were they?"

"Yes, ma'am," Hutch continued. "They were all thirty-three years old."

"Well, most seventh graders are twelve- or thirteen-years-old. That would have made their date of attendance during 1959 to 1960, right?"

Starsky said, "That sounds right. Could we review your records for that year?"

"Gosh, I'm sorry, but I'm not sure if that information is still around even. We had a filing room flood about ten years ago when our water main broke. A lot of our older records were destroyed."

That was terrible news. Without a class roster, they might not be able to break this case until every student in the class was dead -- every student except the killer.

"Can you find out for us? We need a class roster for that year. Is there a storeroom we could look in for the records? Please, Starsky and I can look through them."

"Unfortunately, they aren't here anymore. We have a storage unit at the Diocesan office. I'll call over there and get some of the office staff to open it up for you. I think it's best if they look. Is there somewhere I can reach you?"
Hutch handed her one of his cards and thanked her. "Let us know if we can help you search. We need those names if we hope to catch the killer and prevent more deaths."

"I understand. I'll call you the instant I know something." She stood and escorted them out of the office.

"Wait a minute!" She exclaimed. "The pictures. I forgot about the class pictures. Come with me."

Starsky and Hutch followed Mrs. Sandling down the hall to a set of display cases. Hanging inside the back of the cases, along with the trophies and mementos, were pictures of each class that had attended Our Lady of Perpetual Sorrows. The school opened in 1952 and every class was represented.

Mrs. Sandling pulled a set of keys out of her jacket pocket and opened one of the cases. She took out the frame for 1959/1960 and handed it to Hutch. "Will this help?"

The entire school must have been in that picture. A group shot taken on bleachers in the parking lot. She pointed to the top row.

"The top row would be the seventh and eighth graders."

Starsky said, "We really need the names."

The principal hit herself on the forehead with the palm of her hand and said, "What's wrong with me? Mrs. Crawley has a file with each class and their pictures. Individual grade pictures. Those have always been kept in the office and it wasn't flooded."

They returned to the office. Within a few minutes, the detectives had a black and white picture of the seventh grade from the 1959/1960 school year. Each child was shown in a small headshot and their names were in a legend alongside each row. They scanned the names and found Kate Winslow, Pablo Martinez, and Lydia Harris. Bernice Jackson was not in the picture. Looking through the photographs of each child, they noticed one with a name and no photo. The child's name was "Hazel Brown."

Starsky asked, "Is it okay if we hang onto this for now? We'll get a copy of it and bring this back to you."

"Yes, of course. I'll go call the Diocese now and let you know what else we can find."

Hutch said, "Thanks, Mrs. Sandling. Oh and, don't forget to keep it quiet."

"Mum's the word, detective." She took her fingers and made a locking motion over her lips.

Starsky remembered something. "How long has Mrs. Crawley been here?"

"Oh, she's been here since the school opened, almost thirty years."

"Any chance she might remember any of these kids?" Starsky pointed at the picture.
"I doubt it. Mrs. Crawley has a hard time remembering where she parked her car. She actually reported it stolen once when she parked it on a different street around the corner."

"She's still driving?" Hutch asked, his expression conveying his dismay.

"Yes she is. Mrs. Crawley is still driving a 1956 Desoto Firesweep. Pepto-Bismol pink no less. She's harmless and she only lives about five minutes from here. Did you want to speak with her?"

"Maybe later. After we've had a chance to look over this photo and see your records," Hutch answered.

"Fine then, I'll be in touch." She shook their hands and went back to her office.

When Hutch turned back to say something to Starsky, he noticed a pained expression on his partner's face. "Starsk? You all right?"

"Oh, Hutch. I just had a terrible thought. What if our four victims ain't the only ones?"

"What? We haven't had any other homicides like this other than these four."

"No, no, not here. What if there are other victims in this picture in other cities?"

Hutch absorbed that thought and said, "Man, you could be right. Let's head back to the station and make some phone calls."

*****

Starsky studied the photographs while Hutch made out a request for information. They didn't know where to start looking for the rest of the members of the class, so they were going to start with the DMV in hopes that there was some information on where they might be living.

The faces in the photos, in varying stages of puberty and adolescence, made Starsky a little sad. Seventh grade had been a tough time for him personally, and knowing that some of the children pictured were dead now, with others possibly in grave danger, was poignant.

He easily recognized Lydia Harris. One of the photos on her parents' wall was her seventh-grade class picture. He had to use the list of names to spot Paul Martin, who had had a mustache and longish hair as an adult. He didn't look anything like the crew cut, serious-faced boy in the class photo.

Starsky studied the blank space where Hazel Brown's photo should have been.

"Hey, Hutch."

"What?"

"Wonder why there ain't no picture for this Hazel Brown."
"Maybe she was absent that day?" Hutch guessed.

"My mom always made me go to school on picture day even if I was half dead," Starsky said.

Hutch grinned. "Mine, too. But that school's in a poor neighborhood and sometimes poor people don't think things like that are important."

"I guess," Starsky said, still looking at the photos.

Hutch called the DMV and gave them a list of all the names in the class, asking for information on any of them and explaining why it was a top priority. They told him it would take a little time, especially considering most of the girls had probably changed their names at marriage and would be listed under their current last names.

"I know. Do the best you can," Hutch said. He hung up with a sigh. "Now for R&I," he said to Starsky.

"Charlie's gonna kill us," Starsky said.

"I know."

Charlie made a big show of complaining that "everyone wants everything yesterday" but he did promise to run the killer's M.O. through the computers and see if anything popped out. "How many kids were in this class?" he asked.

"Thirty," Hutch said.

"Wonderful," Charlie grumbled. "Thirty people you want me to track down, and they could be anywhere."

"Twenty-six," Starsky corrected. "Four of 'em are dead."

"It's still a lot of names," Charlie pointed out.

*****

Several hours later, Charlie called back to say three members of the class were dead of various other causes, which eliminated them. A girl named Diana Suzewitz had died of cancer as a teenager. Two boys, Alan Wickline and Donald Gibson, had died in Vietnam. And a surprise: Charlie had recognized the name of another of the boys, Tom Canaday, who played drums in a band called Windswept and who had a hit record on the charts.

"I never heard of them," Starsky said suspiciously.

"They're country," Charlie said. "And Tom Canaday is very much alive. I just saw him on TV the other night on Johnny Carson."

"So we're down to twenty-two," Starsky said.
"It's still a lot of names," Charlie complained and hung up.

Starsky grinned and put the phone down. "We're making progress."

"Damned slow progress," Hutch said.

The DMV managed to find a handful of names listed in California -- five -- but Starsky and Hutch could only find phone numbers for three of them. Apparently the other two had changed their addresses but not updated their driver's license records.

John Luckenbill was an obstetrician in San Diego and had been delivering a baby when Lydia Harris was killed. Hutch called the hospital to double-check, and the man was telling the truth. That eliminated him.

Caroline Wagner was a nun in Sacramento who went by the name of Sister Mary Caroline and taught in a Catholic high school there. She could account for her whereabouts for the time of Paul Martin's and Kate Carter's deaths and her story, too, proved true.

Kevin O'Reilly was a priest whose permanent address was in Bay City, but he was on sabbatical in Rome, studying canon law. The diocesan office confirmed that he'd been there for nearly a year and had not made any trips back to California in that time.

"Nineteen," Starsky said.

"Why do I feel like I'm living in 'Ten Little Indians'?" Hutch said with a groan, rubbing his eyes and yawning.

"Huh?"

"An Agatha Christie book," Hutch said. "Ten people go to this house for a weekend and one after another they die. You don't know who the killer is or what the motive is until the end, and even then, it's a surprise."

"You read Agatha Christie books?" Starsky asked with a grin.

"It's better than Superman comics," Hutch retorted.

*****

It wasn't until the next afternoon that they got any more information. Charlie had tracked down one other murder like theirs. This one was in Corinth, Mississippi, a young man named Michael Harrold, and the M.O. was exactly the same. He'd been killed at home three months previously, his mouth covered in duct tape postmortem, and he'd had a key in his mouth. His apartment had been trashed, with records and books destroyed. And he was 33-years-old.

Starsky looked at the class photo. "There he is," he said to Hutch, pointing to the picture of the young Michael, wearing horn-rimmed glasses and looking young for his age.

"I wonder if Huggy's found out anything yet," Hutch said.
"Let's go make sure he caught the name of the school," Starsky answered. "He wouldn't have heard anything we said to him the other day." He reached for his jacket just as the phone rang. "Starsky."

"Dan Deardorf, David. How ya doin'?"

Dan was an old childhood friend of Starsky's who had also become a cop in New York City.

"What's up, Dan? Sorry this ain't a very good time -- "

"It's about that case you got," Dan said. "The duct tape? We had one like that. I happened to be in the records room when the request came in."

"You had one? Tell me about it."

"Just like yours, Dave. Her name was Julie Boggs and she was 33. Everything was just the same. Trashed apartment, duct tape over the mouth, the whole nine yards. Creepy."

Starsky reached for the photo and found Julie Boggs. "Yeah. She was in that class. You solve it?"

"Huh-uh. No clues and no witnesses. Only fingerprints were hers and her boyfriend's, and he's in the clear. He was at work and could prove it when she died."

"You sure of him?"

"Yeah. He's my sergeant," Dan said.

"Oh." Starsky felt a little silly. "Sorry."

"He was pretty torn up," Dan said. "If you guys out there solve this one, it'll help him a lot."

"When did it happen?"

"Six months ago."

"Six months?" Starsky motioned to Hutch to pick up the extension. "You sure?"

"I'm sure. I was on the scene."

"Then this guy's been operating longer than we thought," Starsky said.

"What's the scoop, anyway?"

Starsky glanced at Hutch and Hutch gave a slight nod. So Starsky explained their evidence and theories so far. Dan whistled. "Holy Christ. That's a psycho you got there, pallie."

"No kidding," Starsky said.
"And your headshrinker friend thinks it's a picked-on kid in that class, huh? You track down anyone in the class who's still breathin' who could tell you who got picked on?"

Starsky looked at Hutch again, this time with self-disgust. "Why didn't we think of that?"

"Dunno," Dan said cheerfully. "Maybe you're just dumb."

"Thanks a lot," Starsky said with a grin.

They got back on the phone to Dr. Luckenbill and put their question to him.

He was silent for a moment while he thought about it. "Seventh grade was a long time ago, Sergeant," he said.

"I know," Starsky said. "Try."

There was another silence, and finally he said, "There was a girl named Lydia. Poor kid, she was gawky as hell --"

"She's one of the victims," Starsky interrupted.

"Oh, really? That's too bad." Luckenbill thought again. "Uh, one of the boys...let's see, I can't remember his name, but he was black. And he took a lot of guff."

"Black?" Starsky reached for the photo, which Hutch handed to him. Four of the kids were black; three of them were boys. "Why did he take so much guff?"

"I can't remember," Luckenbill said apologetically. "I don't think his being black had anything to do with it. Seems like it was something else. I just can't remember what."

Starsky read the names of the black boys to him in the hope that it would shake his memory loose. "Leroy Dixon. David Mills. William Lucas."

"I'm sorry," Luckenbill said again. "None of them ring any bells. I'll keep thinking about it and call you if anything comes to mind."

"Thanks." Starsky broke the connection and called Sister Mary Caroline to ask her the same question. She also immediately thought of Lydia, but after he told her Lydia was dead and asked about boys, she drew a blank, too.

"I'm sorry," she said. "But I never took much notice of the boys. I was awfully shy then and terrified one of them would talk to me. I think the only boy I talked to at all was Hazel...uh...what was his last name?"

"Hazel?" Starsky's eyebrows went up. "Hazel was a boy?"

Sister Mary Caroline laughed gently. "Yes, poor child. He was even shyer than I was. New boy that year, and non-Catholic. Terrified of the nuns. Hated the uniform -- and it was ugly, bless his heart. Girls wore these hideous blue and gray plaid jumpers with white blouses and boys had to
wear black pants and white shirts with these simply awful plaid ties. Bow ties, in fact. The idea behind uniforms is to level the playing field, so to speak, so none of the children feel strange if they can't afford nice clothes, but honestly, Officer, I think they feel even stranger in those awful uniforms."

"Do they have uniforms at your school?"

"Yes, indeed," she said, laughing again. "And they're just as hideous as ours were."

"Do you remember anything about Hazel? His picture isn't in the class photo."

"Just that he was painfully thin and shy and shorter than most of the class," she said. "A dear boy, as I recall; that's why I wasn't afraid of him like I was with the others. But it's not like we were friends or anything. I just felt sorry for him and so I said 'good morning' or something of that sort on occasion."

"Did he get teased?"

"Oh, heavens," she said. "Everyone got teased for something. I don't think anyone in the class escaped that. They called me Sister Goody Two Shoes because I wanted to be a nun, and they called Lydia Four Eyes and Metal Mouth and they called Pablo Speedy Gonzales."

"And Hazel? Do you remember what they called him?" Starsky persisted.

She thought about that and finally said, "No, I'm sorry. I'm sure he got teased about his name, but I don't really remember."

"Okay, thank you, Sister."

"Certainly. I wish I could be of more help."

Starsky hung up and said to Hutch, "Ten to one, Hazel's our killer. Can you imagine growing up with a name like 'Hazel'?" He shuddered.

Hutch grinned a little. "That would be pretty awful, I agree. So how do we find him?"

Starsky said, "DMV had nothing on a Hazel Brown. Let's check with the FBI, see if they have any records. I'll give them a call."

"I'll follow up with Mrs. Sandler about those school records." Hutch said.

When Mrs. Sandler answered the telephone, she explained that she was just about to call them. The search through the records at the Diocese had turned up a box with some material from that class. She thought it might be interesting.

"Thanks a lot. Where is the Diocesan office?" Hutch asked.

"Oh, don't worry about that. I am having it brought to the school. If you'll come by in the morning, I'll have it for you first thing."
"Great. Is nine okay?"

"Perfect. See you then."

Starsky was hanging up the phone from speaking with an agent at the local FBI office. They would start a search for Hazel Brown and get back to him as soon as they had something.

"Stark, in case you were wondering what that loud noise is, that would be my stomach growling. I feel like we forgot to eat a few meals in a row. You ready to run down to Huggy's?"

"Been meaning to do that for a while now. Let's hit it. We can get back on this in the morning."

Hutch looked concerned. "You sure we shouldn't come back tonight?"

"Hutch, you know how long that FBI search is gonna take. We might as well get some sleep after Huggy's. Eating isn't the only thing we've been skipping too much on this case."

"I know. I'm just worried about the rest of the people in that class."

Both of them hated the idea that another person could become a victim before they turned something useful.

"We're doing everything we can, Hutch."

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The drive to Huggy's was a quiet one with each of them lost in thought. When they weren't talking about this case they were thinking about it. Although they often got wrapped up in a case, this one was more like being immersed.

When they arrived at The Pits, the place was packed. Every booth and table was taken. Looking around, neither of them could spot Huggy. They walked up to the bar and waited a few minutes to get Diane's attention.

"How you boys doin' tonight?" She asked, setting a beer on the bar in front of each of them.

"Not too bad," Hutch answered. "Where's the Bear?"

"Huggy's not here tonight. Be back tomorrow. He had to run down to San Diego to see a friend."

Starsky asked, "Did he leave anything for us?"

"Nah. Said to tell you if you stopped by that he's still working on it, but nothing yet. He saw the news report on the school and the murders. Funny thing is he went to that school. Said he was glad he was thirty-four. The people being killed were the year after him. Funny coincidence, huh? You guys want a couple of specials?"
Starsky wasn't too fond of funny coincidences. He also was still mad that the media had gotten wind of the information about the Catholic school. He made a note to grill Huggy about the school and his time there when they caught up with him the next day.

"Yeah, we'll be back by the pool tables." Starsky touched Hutch on the elbow and pointed toward the pool tables. Hutch looked distracted, watching a man sitting at the end of the bar.

Starsky turned his head and looked where Hutch was staring. The man under his partner's scrutiny was unremarkable. He had on a dark coat, his dark shoulder length hair was greasy and stringy, and he was nursing what looked like a boilermaker. The one odd thing about him was the dark sunglasses he was wearing inside. Starsky looked around for a cane or a dog but saw neither in evidence to indicate the man was blind. He turned back to Hutch and shot him a "What?" look.

Hutch answered the look. "When Diane said Huggy was not gonna be here tonight, that guy reacted."

"Maybe he's waitin' on Huggy for something."

"Maybe. I don't know though. He just sort of gave me a funny feeling that's all."

Starsky smiled at him. "You been hanging out with Huggy and Joe Collandra again?"

Hutch followed Starsky back to the pool tables, turning occasionally to watch the man in the dark glasses. His cop's instincts were telling him it was something, but he had no idea what it could be. By the time Diane came out with their food, the man was gone.

"Diane, that guy sitting at the end of the bar in the dark glasses, you seen him in here before tonight?" Hutch asked as he took the plates of food from her.

"Nope."

"Did he say anything to you?"

"Just ordered his drink. I was pretty busy though. He got here a little while before you did. He ordered a boilermaker. Anything else?"

"No, thanks."

Starsky looked at him. "What's with you and that guy?"

"Probably nothing. Let's just eat."

Starsky knew better. His partner's instincts were excellent. If Hutch thought there was something strange about the man, he was more likely to be right than wrong. The man was gone and there was nothing they could do about it though. They ate, played a few games of pool, and left for the evening. About ten minutes after they left, Diane went looking for them. She had been so busy
all evening she hadn't had the chance to tell them something. The man in the sunglasses had not left a tip and what he did leave seemed strange. He had left behind a broken piece of chalk.

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The next morning, they sat with Mrs. Sandling in her office and opened the box she had for them. Luckily, this box was not damaged by the water main disaster. Mrs. Sandling was right; the box contained some interesting items. The first thing they found was a copy of the class picture. Then they pulled out the seating roster. Starsky stared at it for a few minutes and then looked up at Hutch with wide eyes.

"Oh my God. Look at this list. The kids sat in the class pretty much in the same order as the victims have been killed." He passed the sheet over to Hutch.

Hutch read through the names and Starsky was right. The first row of students were all dead. The next row was too, with the exception of the child who sat closest to the classroom door -- Hazel Brown. The name directly behind him belonged to Donald Gibson, one of the boys who died in Vietnam.

"Starsk, are you thinking what I'm thinking?"

"Yeah, this Hazel Brown is not the killer at all. What's the chance he would remember the seating arrangement from a class twenty years ago?"

They looked at each other and said simultaneously, "The killer is the teacher."

Mrs. Sandling looked shocked. She excused herself for a moment to go and pull the personnel file for the teacher.

Starsky continued to look through the box, noting that there was a large file folder full of detention notices for the students in the class. Most of them were for talking in class or playing pranks on the teacher.

Hutch opened up the folder on Hazel Brown. His mother had transferred the boy from a local public school. Hazel had gotten into some trouble in school the previous year -- fights, truancy, and failing grades. He was forced to repeat the seventh grade. The file included his transcript from the public school and a note written by the principal that his mother was hoping the more disciplined atmosphere in the Catholic school would help her son. He had attended on a compassionate scholarship, his tuition waived by the school due to his mother's financial situation.

"Hutch, we've gotta find out who Hazel Brown is and where to find him. He's probably the next victim."

Mrs. Sandling walked back into the office with a file folder. "That class had a lay teacher, a Mr. Holten. His record has several notes in it about the principal counseling him to be less angry in class. Looks like that year was his last here. I also see several letters of complaint from parents about how he treated the students. The final notation says he went up to San Francisco to teach
summer school and never came back because he had been admitted to a mental institution up there."

"Bingo," Starsky said. "Thanks, Mrs. Sandling. Can I hang onto this class roster and Holten's file?"

"Yes, anything that will help."

As they walked through the office on the way out, Mrs. Crawley said, "Oh officers! I heard you were looking for Hazel Brown and I remembered something."

Hutch turned to her, "What's that, ma'am?"

"Hazel was a boy. Does that help?"

Hutch smiled at her and winked at Starsky. "Yes, ma'am. That's a big help, thanks."

They ran back and hopped in the car. Hutch called control for a patch through to the FBI office to check on their progress with Hazel Brown.

"Any luck with our search?" Hutch asked the agent Starsky had spoken with the last time.

"Yes, I left you a message early this morning, but I guess you didn't get it."

"We had some things to do this morning outside the precinct. What was the message?"

"Well, it's not much, but I have a record of a Hazel Brown from Bay City. He's black, male, thirty-four years old. The record says he has an alias, also known as Huggy Bear. That's all I have."

"Thanks."

"I thought Diane said he went to that school the year before this class. Oh my God, Huggy's the next victim."

Starsky punched it as Hutch put the red light on the top of the car and hit the siren. They were headed for The Pits.

*****

Martin Holten was sitting at his table reading the paper. The media frenzy over his string of murders fascinated him. The class of children he was now killing had been evil. Their bad behavior caused him to have a mental breakdown and he had spent nearly twenty years in a psychiatric institution. The state of mental health care funding in California had been partially responsible for his release. The money to treat patients like him was gone. He was believed to be manageable with medications and outpatient therapy. Too bad he never went to the therapy sessions and he refused to take his medication. The drugs made him dopey and overly passive. He liked the powerful feeling that had returned to him when he stopped taking the drugs.
His mission to destroy the seventh-grade class of 1959 had been satisfying. He had spent the past twenty years thinking about them, remembering their antics, and planning in his head how he would give each of them the corporal punishment they deserved.

He sat playing with his weapon -- the power cord from an overhead projector. That seemed so fitting. One of the favorite tricks the children played on him that year was stealing the power cords from the overhead and film projectors. They also liked to steal the light bulbs, but he didn't know how to efficiently execute someone with a light bulb. No, the projector cord suited his needs just fine. Once the victims were dead, he placed a memento in their mouths and sealed them shut with duct tape. He had promised them all he would shut them up for good if they didn't start behaving in class. They hadn't listened.

The previous evening had found him waiting in a bar called The Pits. Finding Hazel Brown had been a little more challenging than the others because he had changed his name to Huggy Bear. He remembered the young boy as a poor student, shy in class. He had failed the seventh grade in public school and had been sent to Our Lady of Perpetual Sorrows to help him become a better student. The boy had participated actively in the stealing of his projector cords though, despite his shyness. Holten was disappointed that Huggy was not at the bar the night before, but he could be patient. He would try again later in the day. Hazel Brown would be dead as soon as he could find him alone at his place.

*****

Huggy had driven since late in the night to get home from San Diego. He and his "friend" -- actually a lady he'd met when she came into The Pits -- had gone to dinner and a show and then stayed up until the wee hours talking and making love. Huggy was well satisfied with his trip and whistled as he let himself into The Pits through the back door and started up the stairs to the apartment above. He was going to have to open the place, sleepless night or not, so there was no sense in going home, but that's why he kept a bed upstairs. Sometimes he needed it for a catnap in between shifts.

Huggy kicked off his shoes, tossed his jacket toward the chair, fell into bed and went immediately to sleep. Sometime later, he woke up to go to the bathroom. He rolled over and opened his eyes and looked up into a vaguely familiar face.

"Hey!" Huggy said, startled. "Who the hell are you and what are you doin' here?"

"It's called 'corporal punishment,' Hazel Brown," the old man said, softly and with a bit of glee. He unrolled what looked like an electrical cord.

Suddenly Huggy remembered who the man was -- his seventh-grade teacher, Mr. -- Mr. -- Holten, that was it. He was so puzzled by the man's presence that he didn't think to be afraid until Holten knocked him sideways on the bed and flipped the cord around his neck with amazing speed. Then Huggy started to struggle; sure that he could overcome the much older man without much trouble.
But Holten had a startling strength, and he held Huggy down and tightened the cord until Huggy couldn't breathe. And he couldn't break free. As he weakened and his vision started to go dark, he heard another sound.

"Huggy!" Starsky's voice came up the stairs and, in another moment, both detectives burst through the apartment door. "Freeze!" Starsky ordered Holten, holding his gun on him.

Holten merely tightened the cord.

Starsky was afraid to fire due to Holten's half-prone position on top of Huggy. He launched himself at the man and hit him with the butt of his gun. But though Holten rocked from the force of the blow, he didn't let go of the cord, and Starsky could see that Huggy was fading.

Hutch was right behind him, and he hit the man also, right in the temple, finally forcing him to let go as he slid off Huggy, stunned. Hutch took care of cuffing Holten while Starsky gently turned Huggy over and got the cord off his neck. He could see bruises already forming, but Huggy coughed a couple of times and opened his eyes.

"Hey, you okay?"

Huggy swallowed, rubbed his neck and tried to nod. "Yeah, think so," he said hoarsely. "What the hell is going on?"

Hutch yanked the old man unceremoniously to his feet. "Meet our serial killer, Hug," he said. "Martin Holten. I believe you know each other."

"Man, I ain't seen him since I was 13," Huggy said, and coughed again. "Why the hell would he wanna kill me?"

"Good question," Starsky said. "Why did you want to kill Huggy?"

"They're bad," Holten said. "They're all bad. They have to die. Every one of them. They have to die."

"Who has to die?" Huggy demanded.

"The kids in your class," Starsky said. "He's been killin' all of you, one by one. Even some in other states."

"Why?" Huggy rose to his feet, a little shaky. Starsky held his arm to steady him.

"Because you're bad," Holten said. He didn't seem at all disturbed to be in cuffs. He simply stood there.

Huggy shook his head. "I don't know what the hell you're talkin' about."

Holten's eyes glittered. "I spent 20 years in an institution because of you, all of you. And every day of those 20 years, I planned how I was going to get even with you. You can stop me for a while," he said to Hutch, who had a firm grip of his arm, "but eventually they'll let me out again,
and I'll finish what I started. I'm not going to stop until every last one of the little bastards is dead!"

"What could a bunch of seventh-graders do to you?" Starsky demanded. "That's crazy."

"Yeah, isn't it?" Holten said. "That's what they say at the hospital, too. I'll tell you what they did. They fought. They were insolent. They played tricks on me. They wouldn't behave. They wouldn't do their homework. They talked back. I told them I'd shut them up someday. And I have."

Starsky and Hutch both looked at Huggy. His eyes were wide.

"We were kinda bad," he said to them. "But hell, fellas, all seventh-graders are bad. It's what they DO. And this guy," he gestured at Holten, "it didn't help that he was one of these nervous, wimpy types. He squeaked when he was mad at us and we thought it was funny and..." He shrugged. "Good God, who'd've thought he'd come back 20 years later and try to kill us all?"

Huggy argued with Starsky and Hutch about going to the hospital, but they insisted, partly because they were worried about him and partly because they needed the paper trail to help convict Holten. Once the ambulance had left with Huggy and a black-and-white had taken Holten away, they made sure Huggy's place was locked and headed back to start the mountain of paperwork. They hadn't Mirandized Holten before he'd started confessing, but neither of them expected it to be difficult to get a confession on the record. Crazies usually wanted to talk about their crimes and how clever they'd been. When they finished with Holten, they'd head to the hospital to pick up Huggy.

TAG

The detectives were right about Holten. After they read him his rights, he waived the presence of an attorney and offered them a full confession. He provided details on two more murders of classmates the investigation had been unable to locate. One was killed in Seattle and the other in Phoenix. In all, the man had murdered eight innocent people. After his arraignment, he would be transferred to Caballo Point under the care of Dr. Jackson, pending a decision as to whether he could be tried.

Huggy was treated and released from the hospital emergency room. The doctor said he was lucky. Based on the lengthy list of victims, Huggy agreed. The only thing he had to worry about now was that his two favorite cops knew something about him that he had hoped would never be revealed to anyone again.

Sitting in their favorite booth at The Pits, Starsky and Hutch were having a meal on the house, courtesy of the grateful proprietor. Captain Dobey was sitting with them, enjoying a bowl of wonton soup, ever amazed at Huggy's ability to pull any type of food out of his kitchen.

"So, Huggy, did it do you any good to transfer you to the Catholic school?" Starsky asked between bites of his burger.
"I guess so. Guess I was so grateful to get back to public school, I behaved myself enough to graduate. Probably never woulda done that if I hadn't done time at Troubles." Huggy replied with a smile.

"Troubles?" Hutch was curious.

"Yeah, Our Lady of Perpetual Sorrows was just too much to say. We always just called it Troubles."

"I thought Catholic school teachers were supposed to be nuns." Starsky said.

"Not always. If I remember correctly, Mr. Holten was gonna be a priest at one time. Feature that."

Starsky let his mind run with that idea. "Really," he said with a chill and a shudder echoed by his partner. Hutch's imagination was less vivid about such things than Starsky's, but he picked up the image as if Starsky had broadcast it directly into his head.

When their dinners were finished and the plates cleared away, Hutch announced they had some gifts for Huggy.

Hutch had a jar of hazelnuts for Huggy. He presented them with an innocent look. "We've been thinking, Hug. Maybe you should consider switching to these instead of peanuts for the bar. Lots of people are allergic to peanuts."

Dobey agreed. "That's a great idea, Hutch."

Huggy accepted the jar without comment. Then he turned to Starsky. "You got somethin' to add to this, Curly?"

"Who me?" Starsky was wide eyed.

"Don't give me that 'who me' look. You're about as innocent as a fox in the hen house."

Starsky put on his most wounded expression. "Now, Huggy, that hurts. I have a nice present for you, but I don't know if you're gonna get it if you got that attitude."

Hutch said, "Now, Starsky, Huggy can't help it if he's paranoid right now."

"Paranoid!" Huggy growled.

"Huggy, you were almost killed. Perfectly normal for you to be a little paranoid." Dobey offered helpfully.

"Starsk, Huggy didn't mean that. Give him the present. Come on now. You know, Hug, Starsky had to go to a bunch of antique stores and flea markets to find this thing."

Huggy put his hands up in defeat. "Go ahead, man. Do your worst."

Starsky handed Huggy a box with a sly smile.
Dobey warned him, "Don't hurt his feelings, Huggy. He went to a lot of trouble."

Huggy sighed and opened the box. Inside was a lunch box with a cartoon picture of Hazel the maid from the old television series.

"Cute. Thanks." He had to chuckle in spite of his distress at what could be next. "You know I'm waitin' for the other shoe to drop, fellas. Hit me with it so we can move on, huh? Y'all are being cruel to the Bear."

Hutch started to giggle, turning a little red as he choked out "Hazel? Hazel?" He slapped the table with his hand, trying to catch his breath.

Dobey added with a warm laugh, "What was your mom thinking, Hazel? I mean, Huggy."

Huggy said, "That's pronounced 'hay-zelle' not 'Hazel' like the maid, man. Captain, I'm surprised at you. You should know that."

"I do, but it's more fun the other way."

Hutch's giggles had started to infect his partner too. Starsky gasped, "Geez, Huggy, was your mom TRYING to get the crap kicked out of ya?" That only made Hutch laugh harder. "Hutch, you better go outside and get some air." Starsky advised. Hutch just shook his head, tucking his chin and refusing to make eye contact with his partner. That was only making it worse.

"I was named after a guy my mom knew in South Carolina where she grew up. You see why I changed it?" Watching Hutch's struggle to regain control was starting to make him laugh, too.

Dobey asked, "When did you change it?"

"After I graduated. I turned eighteen and my mom couldn't stop me. Best thing I ever did."

Dobey grew a little more serious. "Who knows? That might have saved your life. Gave these guys some extra time to solve this case since Holten had a hard time finding your new name too."

"Hey, how did he find me?" Huggy asked.

Hutch was better, but he was still incapable of answering. He touched Starsky on the arm and indicated for him to answer.

"Hutch found out Holten got it through an archived copy of the local newspaper. He ran across a legal notice of name change. Your attorney must've filed it." Starsky explained. Huggy whistled.

Dobey said, "He may be crazy, but the man would have made a good detective."

Huggy smiled at his friends. "Thanks, amigos. I owe ya. Oh, Starsk, I appreciate the lunch box. I think I'll save it. Somebody might pay good money for that someday."

Starsky laughed. "For a lunch box from an old TV show? No way, man."
The End