



**Faithful to Thee,
Cynara**

by

jat sapphire

Summary: In the midst of an IA rampage and a murder case that comes too close to home, Starsky and Hutch both must consider exactly how much loyalty they owe to the women they once loved.

This is a slightly revised version of the story that appeared in the S&H Slash Virtual Season 5. It also includes three shorts at the end that are connected to the primary story and the series: Words Made Flesh, Cup of Decaf, and Dreamland.

Starsky and Hutch has been off the air for over 25 years, but has certainly not been out of the hearts and minds of the fans. ZebraThree Productions was formed by a group of writers and other creative individuals whose mission is to produce a series of stories that will create a virtual 5th season of Starsky and Hutch. Our virtual season begins after the events depicted in Sweet Revenge, the final aired episode of Starsky and Hutch. The S&H Slash Virtual Season had three full seasons before ending production. All three seasons were also available in hard copy zines. Information and episodes can be found at the [Starsky and Hutch Slash Virtual Season](#).

Faithful to Thee, Cynara

by jat sapphire

...I was desolate and sick of an old passion When I awoke and found the dawn was gray: I have been faithful to thee, Cynara, in my fashion. --Ernest Dowson, "Non sum qualis eram bonae sub regno Cynarae"

Starsky had been crying in his sleep lately. Hutch didn't know what to do.

The first time, he'd woken hearing a kind of catch and gasp, and said "Shtarss," or something, barely awake.

The bed, and Starsky's whole body, jolted and he said, sounding startled and alert, "Huh? Hutch? What?"

"What y'rself," Hutch said. On his back now, he reached out in the blackness until he hit Starsky's warm skin. Hairy. Must be his leg. Hutch stroked against the grain of the hair, found Starsky's hip and then his arm. It was rigid, elbow locked, hand dug into the mattress. Starsky was sitting up, so Hutch did too, trying to see more than vague pale and dark shapes. "Babe? You okay?" His reaching hand hit Starsky's face, must be the cheekbone, before finding the roughened curls, the warm ear. And belatedly he registered that the cheek had been damp.

He heard Starsky take a deep breath and let it go.

"Were you dreaming?" Hutch asked.

"No. Don't remember. Maybe," said Starsky. He moved slowly into Hutch's arms and held him. Hutch kissed a nearly invisible forehead, nose, lips. Starsky pulled back. "I'm tired," he said.

"Okay, lie down," and Hutch led the way, pulled his lover down, and tucked the unresisting, sleep-softened body into his own. Starsky touched Hutch's face lightly, his upper lip, his cheek, then fingered his hair. Sighed. Gripped Hutch's shoulder hard, then relaxed his hand but left it there, his pinky riding the biceps and his thumb the collarbone.

They both went back to sleep. Hutch didn't think anything of it.

But it happened again, several days later, and that time Starsky wouldn't roll over when Hutch put a hand on his shoulder. He rubbed his face--Hutch could see it as well as feel the movement--and said in a gravelly voice, "'S okay," but it wasn't okay.

That morning he bounded out of bed and was in the bathroom before Hutch could speak. So when he came out, Hutch didn't say anything, not anything real. "Jerk, it was my turn," he grumbled, but they both knew that was just a game.

Hutch stood under the shower, thinking. Things were tough at work, so it was probably connected to that. Stress.

A lot of things were happening at once. IA was on some kind of rampage, and nobody in the squadroom knew why, but suddenly every little as well as big thing was being combed through: cases they'd half-forgotten, cases under trial, new cases. The only comfort, when Hutch found himself in the office with Dryden's round eyes on him, was that this wasn't Hutchinson singled out, or even the maverick duo of

Starsky and Hutch, but the whole damn department.

And then there was Lem Feldgruber, the new guy. He was lightly-built, dark, with wiry hair at the edges of the yarmulke he always wore; he had a sarcastic mouth and a Jewish mother whom he often quoted--all in all, enough like Starsky to get under Hutch's guard, and Starsky's, too. They'd shown him a rope or two though he wasn't riding with them, answered questions, taken him to The Pits to get what Starsky defined as *good* food....

But he wouldn't eat it. Lem kept kosher. He had little bags of food that he carried around, and he'd go to the Pits but only to drink water, and that only from a paper cup. Hutch could think without even trying of a dozen times when Starsky and he had been undercover or talking to a snitch or just anything, and it would have been awkward or even dangerous not to have eaten whatever was in front of them.

Lem was argumentative as well, and it came off as if he thought he knew better than men who'd worked the streets for years. Better than Hutch, though that was only mildly annoying, given his long experience with Starsky. Better than Starsky--and that, oddly, got so far under Hutch's skin that he could scarcely stand to be in the room when it happened. Naturally, that must irritate Starsky, too.

They were passing the locker room Monday--not in there much themselves since they didn't wear uniforms--and heard something, a muffled shout and a clang like a locker shutting, only not like that.... Hutch looked at Starsky and they charged in.

A couple of uniformed cops, guys they barely knew, had Lem pinned against the lockers, hoisted onto his toes. His shirt was half off and there was a little cut at the corner of his mouth that was bleeding, though not badly.

"What the *fuck*?" Starsky said, his voice rising, and the one not holding onto Lem--Graham, his name was--backed up a step. Hutch had the other one by the shoulder and arm in a moment, peeled him away, and Lem got himself together while Starsky went into a rarely-used senior-officer mode. His voice dropped and his eyes were cold. "Suppose," he said, "you tell me what is going on here."

"Little rough-housing," said the man Hutch still held. Hutch read his nametag: Howarth. He was nearly as blond as Hutch and about the same height, hair brushed back from a widow's peak.

Hutch flexed his hands and saw the whites of Howarth's eyes as they rolled from Hutch to Starsky and back. "Little too rough," Hutch said, silkily, but not quite managing senior-officer himself. Had to settle for incipient bad-cop.

The man's face drew together, his control visibly stretched to breaking point, and Hutch thought for a moment he was going to spew out all the stuff he'd just been saying to Lem. But his eyes darted over to Starsky and back, and he clamped his jaw shut.

So Hutch knew what it was about, and was suddenly too angry to be that bad cop. Start shoving someone around when he was really on the edge, and things would get out of hand too fast--and IA was turning cartwheels everywhere, Hutch reminded himself, while rage still beat its wings under his ribcage and screeched in his ears. His hands tightened involuntarily.

"Hutch," said Starsky evenly.

So Hutch let go. "This isn't going to happen again," he said, and was proud his voice wasn't shaking.

"Course it isn't," Lem said, re-tucking his shirt and sounding much too casual. "It was nothing, guys, you're overreacting."

Hutch released his grip, lifted his hands, and stepped away, his mind a careful blank. He worked on *not* just transferring his anger to Lem. Howarth and Graham left. Starsky hadn't budged an inch.

"What was that?" he asked Lem. "Huh? We try to back you up, help you out--"

"And what if I don't want your help? Don't *nursemaid* me, *Detective*," the younger man said, and whisked out of the room, leaving the door swinging behind him. Starsky looked after him.

"Come on, Starsk," Hutch said at last, and put a hand on his partner's shoulder. Starsky took a breath and went out without a word.

And then, in the squadroom, they'd had the cases to deal with. Two they were working, more or less, plus patrol, and Hutch wasn't sure whether it really was uglier and harder than usual or whether he was just stressed out, too. For all he knew, he was *bawling* in his sleep. Starsky wouldn't talk about it out of bed any more than Hutch would.

It was Wednesday, the day that Starsky often went to The Marshall Center for Exceptional Children, where Terry had once worked. He still volunteered there, and now that he was well and back to active duty, he went once or twice a week to see the kids, play a little basketball or whatever; Hutch usually went along but wasn't sure about this time. Around ten minutes to three, he looked across the paper-strewn desk-space at his partner's bent head. "Starsk?"

"Yeah?" Starsky didn't look up.

"If you want to get going to the Marshall Center, I can do these forms, call Jablonski," a cop in another precinct whose information they needed. "Or should we do another fifteen minutes together and then both go?"

Starsky's eyes were on Hutch now, and there was something in them Hutch couldn't quite identify, "I, I think I'd better go. Don' wanna be late, huh? Sally's expecting me special today, she said last time."

"Such a flirt," said Hutch mildly, and Starsky grinned, mostly as usual.

"I'll tell her so, from you." He got up, slung on his jacket and was putting the bottom of the zipper together when Hutch went past to the in-basket, grasped his shoulder and leaned in.

He kept his voice low. "It was you I meant. So tell her...I'm not sharing."

He'd done things like that before, and so had Starsky, never when it would be a real embarrassment, and the other had sometimes laughed it off, sometimes been mock-offended, sometimes flushed a little.

This time Starsky jerked away, and it seemed involuntary. Baffled, Hutch pulled back his hand and just stood straight, watching.

"Uh," said Starsky, "I'll go. Then. See you. Later."

"Whenever." Hutch heard the word fall from his lips into silence, into the spot Starsky was looking, which still wasn't toward Hutch.

Starsky left. Hutch put the file in the basket, went back to his desk, and looked at the objects on it. Pulling the phone toward him slowly, he dialed Jablonski's number.

"Uh, Detective Sergeant Hutchinson here," he said absently.

"Aren't you sure?" asked Steve Jablonski.

Hutch pulled himself together. "Hmm, *am* I sure? Yes. I'm sure, Steve. How about you, you sure?"

"Okay," and the other man was laughing, "okay. You're calling about the Katrou case, right?"

"Surprise. Same as yesterday."

"Haven't got much of anything new. Grigor and his lovely bride are still not inclined to open up. I'm positive myself we're looking at a protection racket, but they aren't talking, and you know the waiters are all family boys."

"You think they were behind on the payment, or reluctant to sign up, or what? Not like they came to you about it, so why *was* there a corpse in their restaurant Monday morning?"

Steve sighed on the other end of the line. "I don't *know*, Hutch. And nobody, *nobody's* uttering. We've been asking every snitch we've ever had. I tell you, we've never been so unpopular."

"Aww, now nobody'll buy tickets to the precinct picnic. Or sign your birthday card."

"Yeah, it's rough going without the bouquets I used to get. But seriously, last two days nobody in the squadroom can get *piSS* out of a snitch. They all seem to be running scared."

Hutch tried to weigh what he knew of Steve and his colleagues, tried to think whether this was likely the result of too-insistent questioning or the threats of the protection ring, or just plain annoyance at being badgered, which after all even happened with Huggy from time to time. He couldn't tell. It wasn't his turf, and though he was acquainted with Steve and his partner and a few others, didn't really have a feel for the atmosphere in the Seventh Precinct. He'd never worked there, even as a rookie.

He tried to sound encouraging. "Well, even striking out tells you something. I guess."

"Oh, thanks, Hutch."

"You think--" the thought had occurred to Hutch more than once, but he'd suppressed it before as unlikely-- "you think maybe the murder is something else? Not part of the protection racket? You've, well, asked about them separately, of course."

"It's a stretch," Steve said, but he wasn't offended and wasn't brushing the idea off. "You getting that vibe from your case?"

Hutch sighed, thinking about the elusive whiff of an idea he'd had. "It's just...the Martinezes...they were scared about the body, and they were scared about something else, might be protection, but it just didn't feel like the same fear to me. I know that's not much to go on."

"I can't say I picked that up from the Katrous. Hmm, I'll think about it now, though. What does Starsky think?"

What was Starsky thinking--now that was the ten-thousand-dollar question. But at least Hutch knew what he'd say to this, because he already *had* said it. "He thinks the protection thing is enough trouble for one case without dredging extra stuff up. And he thinks he's the one with the hunches and I'm stepping on his heels."

Steve laughed again. "You guys. You're like an old married couple. Bickering. I'm not mediating, okay? You work it out, and if you get something stronger than a hunch, you let me know."

"I will. And you let me know if anything breaks on your end."

Hutch hung up, went back to the last of the forms he was filling out, and tried not to worry about whatever was eating Starsky. Without notable success.

About half an hour after Starsky had left Metro, Hutch got into his car to drive home. Now that he and Starsky were sleeping together, they actually drove to work separately *more* often than they had before the shooting. Hutch wondered whether it would ever occur to someone like Dryden that such a change was a clue. He hoped not.

He drove past the Marshall Center, hoping Starsky wouldn't see him but too unsettled not to do it anyway. But there was nobody in the basketball court, nobody on the picnic table that was Starsky's favorite spot for private time with one of the kids. No Torino in sight.

Hutch got out, approaching the building with a weird kind of caution. It wasn't as if he actually expected to be attacked there or anything, but something was definitely off, strange. He went in, and was greeted as usual by the staff member on entrance hall duty. This time it was Fred, and Hutch asked after the family and the dog and answered questions about himself, and then Fred asked casually, "And how's Dave? Haven't seen him this week."

"No?" Hutch asked, but before he could really go into overdrive, Sally came out into the hallway.

"Ken! It's Ken!" she cried and ran toward him, then stopped about five or six feet away.

"Hi, Sally," he said warmly. "How are you doing?" He went forward and hugged her.

She hugged him back. "I'm getting so good at basketball. I was gonna show Dave today. I'm gonna beat him someday, just like Terry said I would."

"Bet on it, sweetheart," Hutch said. "But...Fred said Dave hasn't been here? So you haven't had a chance to show him today?"

"No," she said, and Hutch could tell she was trying not to mind. "He did say he couldn't promise."

He couldn't bring himself to just say goodbye and leave her. "Well, I know I'm not Dave, but would you like to show *me*?"

So they went out to the court, and she did make two or three baskets while Hutch watched her and looked over his shoulder and wondered whether it was completely crazy to start worrying already, or what *kind* of worrying he ought to be doing, exactly.

He praised Sally and told her silly jokes and tickled her, and she gave him a kiss on the cheek when he said goodbye. "I almost forgot how nice you are," she said to him. "Can you come next week again?"

"I'll try," he said, meaning it.

He got back in his car, remembering that Terry had asked Starsky to take care of Sally, make sure she didn't lose the self-confidence Terry had been trying so hard to help her develop. Between the two of them, they'd done a good job.

He wondered whether Terry would say the same about *him*, about not letting Starsky change. Or Ollie the teddy bear. And loving them both.

The love was the easy part. Never changing--that was impossible.

Hutch drove to the cemetery, not really clear in his own mind why, and parked not far from the entrance. The car tilted on the grassy swell beside the road. He got out and walked, aimlessly at first. There were no funerals so late in the day, and the wind came fresh through the trees and bushes, faintly scented by the flowers the cemetery grounds crew planted in long banks and the more acrid smell of the bunches and wreaths decorating the graves. Some were in vases, especially designed to push into the soil, and Hutch wondered whether the cemetery staff added water to them. He climbed a hill and went around an elaborate family mausoleum.

Far off down the hill, half-hidden by a lilac bush, someone was sitting on a bench, and Hutch knew right away who it was. Where they both were.

He walked slowly down the hill, trying to think of something to say when he got to Starsky, and really couldn't. Didn't want to accuse or whine or pressure him. Didn't want to imply there was anything wrong about still grieving for someone he'd loved so deeply. Hutch walked at an angle, and as he went he could see more and more of his partner--a knee, the arm propped on the back of the bench. Then Starsky's head tilted to the side and his hand moved as if gesturing. As if he were speaking.

And all at once Hutch felt so much like an intruder that he could go no closer. He turned and walked quickly back, got into his car with a slam, hit the accelerator harder than he'd meant and made the wheels spin in the gravel.

He drew up in front of Venice Place and parked, but didn't get out of the car right away. Instead, he looked at the curtained windows of Chez Ha33;la33;ne and wondered why there was a parking space here, right near the door. They'd been so busy lately that he'd had to park in back or even farther away. He could hear the deliveries in the morning, when he was there, and the evening clatter in the kitchen seemed louder...he shook his head, not knowing why the restaurant was filling his mind. Checking the rear-view for traffic, he left the car, crossed the street, all without thought. He stepped on the mail scattered inside his door, then bent to pick it up, went up the stairs, got the key down from the doorframe, opened his door. Stood there looking into his living room for several seconds as if the place had been tossed or something.

It hadn't. But it had been a couple of days since he'd been there, so that was probably why it looked a little strange. He went to the fridge and got himself a beer, dropping his mail on the kitchen counter, then back to the couch and sat, and it all should have felt normal, but it didn't. He put the can in front of him on the coffee table without opening it. Rubbed his face with both hands, pushed his fingers back through his hair, then got up and looked out the window.

There was nothing there to see, nothing unusual. A couple strolling on the opposite sidewalk, somebody walking a dog farther down. Cars passing. The long rays of a late sun throwing shadows across the street.

A run would be something to do. Hutch turned from the window, the empty parking spaces around his car, and went to find his sweatsuit.

Though he'd been outdoors with Sally and in the cemetery, there was something more relaxing about getting out and taking this familiar run. Maybe it was the air that smelled of the sea or the way he knew the rough patches of sidewalk and the landmarks that showed how far he'd gone.

Maybe it was the way he just felt his arms and legs moving, his breath coming and going, and didn't think about anything else at all.

The sun was really setting now, as he ran back the last few blocks to his place. He was anticipating the shower he was going to take, and then he'd drink that beer, and--

The Torino was parked in front of Hutch's dented and dusty vehicle. Hutch stopped and looked at the gleaming red hood for a little while, breathing heavily, before he went upstairs again.

Starsky was lying on the couch, his feet toward the door, legs crossed where they hung off the end. His arms had been folded under his head, but when Hutch came in, Starsky sat up, then got off the couch and they met in the space between coffee table and door. He put one arm around Hutch's waist and the other hand into wet strings of hair and pulled their mouths together.

Hutch was surprised, but kissed back. Starsky tasted his lips, pulled back, then kissed again, harder. Hutch opened his mouth and put both arms around his lover's body, felt all of the solid power of it against him, so much different from his past lovers--so much better. Holding Starsky, there was no one he regretted.

Starsky pulled back to grin, then pushed his face into Hutch's neck, kissed and then licked there. "How can your sweat turn me on so much?" he murmured. "Now. Damn." He moved still closer, pressed himself into Hutch, who held on tighter and let arousal and happiness fill him, wash through him. "Could eat you up," growled Starsky, working both hands under the wet sweatshirt, in back, petting skin that seemed to grow hotter even while the sweat cooled on it.

Hutch's indrawn breath hissed through his teeth and he wanted to pick his lover up and carry him to bed, but knew Starsky wouldn't really like it. Instead Hutch pulled back enough to put his shaking hands into springy curls, framing the long face, and say, "Want you so bad, Starsk." Kissed him quickly. "Come on."

Starsky was still grinning. "D'you think I'm saying no?" His evening-blue eyes were full of light. "I must be doing something wrong here." He lifted his chin and Hutch slid both hands down the long neck, ducked his head and kissed where the shirt-collar was open, down into warm chest hair and back up to the cool knot of Adam's apple, now moving under his mouth as Starsky swallowed and tipped his head farther back.

That abandon was what Hutch wanted, and the wet sound of his lover's breath was like a jolt of energy straight to his cock, making it jump and throb. He groped for the shirt buttons and undid them without looking, one by one, mouthing down Starsky's chest. He kissed a bullet scar, the long ridge of the incision and the abs that moved erratically with Starsky's breath. On his knees, Hutch fumbled with the tight denim fly while Starsky just let it happen, his eyes closed and hips forward. Hutch paused to look up, to hold this image in his mind, the way the sun touched those broad shoulders, dark curls, long lashes and taut closed face. The way Starsky waited, then opened his eyes and gazed down as if hardly aware for a moment where he was, and then impatiently opened his own pants and pushed them down, before lightly taking hold of the sides of Hutch's head.

"Please," he said softly, and even if Hutch had been reluctant he could not have borne to refuse.

He was not reluctant. His mouth watered as he lowered his head, all his senses engaged, musk in his nose and the shape of the head and shaft searing into his eyes, Starsky's hip under one hand and the base of his cock in the other. The heat and softness of that skin. The taste of those cloudy drops waiting for him. The sound of his own sucking, of the breath in and out of his nose, of Starsky's gasps and sighs.

Hutch shuddered with the joy of his own strength and his lover's surrender. He was doing this to Starsky, making him moan now and grope senselessly at Hutch's skull, pump his hips and shake as if his knees would give. Hutch wrapped his arm around to take some weight if Starsky really couldn't stand, but they

didn't fall before the hard flesh in his mouth swelled and jerked and spurting, flooding his mouth and his heart. He closed his eyes, drinking, making drowned and garbled sounds in answer to Starsky's groan.

Over too soon. Starsky pulled back a half-step and his soft, probably over-sensitive penis slipped away. Hutch stood, a little shaky still and his own erection aching while his partner tugged his pants up but left the fly open. Then he drew Hutch's head down to rest on one shoulder, still half-covered by the open shirt, rubbed his back again and nuzzled in his hair.

"I should shower," Hutch said after a few moments, hoarsely.

"You should get onto the couch. C'mon, babe, let me be good to you." The moving hands strayed lower, onto Hutch's ass, and even through the heavy sweatpants their touch made him shiver. "Mmm, yeah." Starsky worked one hand inside sweatpants and underwear, onto damp skin. Licked into the ear he'd been murmuring in and kissed inside the shell, moved his hand around inside the waistband until the ends of his fingers tangled in pubic hair and tugged a little. Hutch grunted as the jolt ran through him. "Give me that beautiful thing, come on," said Starsky, but Hutch didn't have to do anything other than stand there as the hand reached farther in, found and grasped his cock, which surged still more in response.

"Star-sky," Hutch said, standing upright, swaying, so turned on he could hardly bear it, "Starsky, please!" His hands clutched his lover's shoulders, his biceps, his hair, grabbing and letting go and grabbing again. The material of his sweatshirt ambushed him, enveloped his head and then vanished; he felt chill and heat chase each other along his nerves and trembled. Starsky moved in, steered him, and Hutch didn't really know where they were going until the couch nudged his calves and he remembered. And let his knees go, dropping into the cushions, letting Starsky push him down and pull the sweatpants away. There were wet soft touches on his belly and thighs and chest, and suddenly on the inside of his arm as he raised it to pull Starsky closer, and then his leg was being raised to hook onto the sofa back and he felt kisses on the inside of his knee and down his thigh. Hutch stretched out his other leg until it banged the coffee table, twisted his hips until they were held down with fierce strength, called out his lover's name and his need over and over as Starsky licked him, toyed with him, nibbled and rubbed and sucked.

"Oh, babe," Starsky's voice purred while Hutch's cock throbbed, momentarily abandoned. "You get like this, it's a mainline, it's a high bigger than any drug. Nothing else in the world, is there? Nothing else for me either." The words sank past the chaos of Hutch's mind as he felt his burning flesh swallowed up in that wet haven, petted by Starsky's tongue and taken into his working throat. The first time Starsky had done that, Hutch had been so moved, surprised, as well as turned on, that he'd come before Starsky was even finished swallowing, and now was hardly different. That Starsky--who'd thought of himself as straight for so long--should have learned this to please Hutch was a new amazement every time. Hutch reached for the mouth that held him, the jaw that opened for him, the throat that squeezed him, and tears swelled in his eyes as he felt the last rush before orgasm.

"Nothing else," he managed, and came.

They slept at Hutch's apartment that night. Hutch woke to the alarm, finding himself in the same position he'd fallen asleep in, so if Starsky had been awake or dreaming or even crying again, Hutch didn't know anything about it. In fact, as he could see while they showered, shaved and dressed, Starsky had the kind of bouncing energy that Hutch hadn't seen in him for too long. In the kitchen, he shook the pitcher of orange juice and complained about the absence of toast while Hutch scrambled some eggs that were fortunately still good. They'd just put the empty plates and glasses in the sink when the phone rang.

It was Dobey, and he began without so much as a hello. "Another restaurant murder. Can you get hold of Starsky? He's not at home."

"Yeah, I know where he is," Hutch said. Sitting with his ankles wound around the spindled chair legs, rolling his eyes at the kitchen ceiling, in fact. Hutch winked, grinning as he took down the address, hung up the phone. "C'mon, Gordo. Let's roll."

"Our turf again," Starsky said as he pulled away from the curb.

"Has its points," Hutch said, not having to explain that he meant not having to keep relying on men like Jablonski, who were good enough cops, but, well, not *them*.

"On the other hand, makes me feel like we shoulda caught 'em already."

Hutch, smiling, looked out the windshield and watched the ordinary morning streets roll by. He still had these moments of incredulous wonder, that he was here and Starsky was there, that they were working together again as they'd done for years. Or better. Hutch thought, on the whole, better.

They pulled up down the block from a little storefront restaurant. A police car was right in front of the door, and the coroner's wagon had pulled up behind it; Starsky had parked as close as he could get. As they walked up the sidewalk, Hutch saw the broken front window and glass shards glittering everywhere. Ironically, the red curtains blowing in and out of the ragged hole also glinted with silver thread. Above, a hand-painted sign read "The Silver Fan" in large letters and "Chinese Cuisines" in smaller ones.

The door was propped open, and they went in. The gurney was already in the room, and so was Dobey, standing with arms folded, frowning down at the corpse on the floor and then up at the two detectives. "Glad you boys could drop by," he said grumpily. "Take a look at this."

Starsky moved forward and Hutch craned his neck to see over his partner's shoulder--and then both of them froze. Hutch stared. After a moment, he took a sudden breath; Starsky half-turned and put his hand on Hutch's shoulder without looking at him.

The man on the floor was bulky. *Professional muscle*, Hutch thought, still half in shock. His hair was light brown, straight, and a little long; it lay tousled around his lax face, over his open eyes. A chair was on its side on the floor. The carpet was a mottled dark red, like the drying blood that had spattered out from the hole in the man's chest onto his shirt and bare forearms and hands. Hutch looked at the table nearest the fallen chair, which had a hollow plastic coffee-stirrer, a small square mirror streaked with two lines of white powder, and a lot of blood on it.

He looked back at the corpse. He knew the man. Starsky, of course, had recognized him too, and said so: "Fred Malloy."

Hutch had never heard the name until Ben Forest's trial, when Malloy had given carefully edited testimony in return for a reduced charge. But the face that had hovered over and mocked Hutch, the hands that had beaten and tied him and held his arm while he was shot up with heroin, those he could never forget.

And now the man was dead. It was hard to get his brain around the idea.

Dobey's voice cut through the fog in his mind: "Hutchinson, are you with us?"

"Yes," he said, looking his captain in the eye, and Starsky took away the hand that had been clutching his shoulder for the half-minute or so they'd stood staring.

All three men retreated to the far side of the room to observe and talk as the crime-scene team went about its work.

"Shot in the back," said Hutch, feeling the need to prove he was paying attention.

"Yes, different from the others," said Dobey.

"Drugs are new, too. A whole new angle." Starsky was thoughtful. "New case, maybe."

Dobey sighed. "Could be, could be." He seemed to cast off his own discouragement, and glared at them. "Can't tell 'til you jokers get your rears in gear, though, can we?"

Starsky's mouth quirked, and Hutch knew they shared the same half-amusement, half-irritation. "Just got here, Cap. Who found him?"

"Kay Fan. She came to get started cleaning the place, found more of a mess than she expected." He cleared his throat. "She called me at home. Her son's a friend of Cal's. Why I'm here."

Hutch asked, "Is she the owner?"

"No, her parents own it, though they don't run it day-to-day now. Semi-retired. They've got three, maybe four restaurants run by their children."

Starsky's eyebrows went up, which surprised Hutch a little; his partner certainly had cause to know about extended families. Hutch had never heard anyone else talk about so many uncles. "A regular franchise."

If it was the same case, this was an absolute gift, Hutch realized. Half a dozen leads just sitting here, and if there *was* a protection racket involved, they'd never have a better chance to find out about it. Personal friends of the Dobeys. Almost too good to be true. "Is Mrs. Fan--" he started, but Dobey corrected him.

"Ms. Fan. Divorced, went back to her maiden name."

"Ms. Fan then. She still on the premises, or down at the station, or what?"

"In the kitchen. The phone's there."

"All right." Hutch pushed away from the wall he'd been leaning on. Starsky threw him a sidelong look and a little smile that twisted the corner of his mouth and creased his cheek. On the way to the swinging doors between dining area and kitchen, Hutch wondered, not for the first or even the second time, what had happened in Starsky's head since yesterday in the squadroom. But Hutch was nervous about asking, as if that would break the good spell or re-invoke the bad one, so he supposed he would never know.

The kitchen was all stainless steel, like an enormous trap, shiny and clean but smelling remotely of disinfectant, boiled rice, and meat. Right inside the door stood a uniformed officer; Hutch nodded to her as he passed and got a nod in return. A woman who must be Kay Fan sat on a stool at the end of a long gleaming countertop, her shoulders a little hunched. As the door swung shut, she turned, startled, slipping off the stool.

She was short, perhaps five-foot-two or -three, her eyes large and stretched so wide that they seemed flat against her face, as if they could not close--but that was undoubtedly shock. He guessed her age at somewhere near forty, though she wore a short haircut like Dorothy Hamill's, with bangs curled slightly away from a central part on her forehead. Hair and eyes were both a warm woody brown. Another surprise. He'd expected her to look conventionally Asian, long, black hair, probably worn straight down, and eyes too dark to see the brown in them. Then he berated himself--next he'd be expecting a kimono or chopsticks holding her hair in a bun.

He smiled, and kept his voice low and soothing. "Ms. Fan? I'm Detective Sergeant Hutchinson," and he pulled out his wallet and flipped it open to show her his shield. She only glanced at it, which was normal--after all, she knew the front of the restaurant was full of police.

"Yes," she said, self-possessed but with a nervous edge. Her gaze traveled over his face. "What can I do for you?" Her speech was clipped and careful, not quite accented.

Relax, was Hutch's first thought, but he knew that was hopeless. He tried a smile. "I'd like you to tell me exactly what happened this morning." She frowned and opened her mouth--he raised his hand, palm out. "I know, you've already said it all at least twice. But I need the details, and you might remember one more little thing that would matter, or I might have a question."

"Or I might make mistakes," she said tightly.

Hutch shrugged. He began to wonder just why she *had* called Dobey. It was always possible that she'd thought that her connection with the captain would make all of them take it easier on her. Well, she didn't know them--he and Starsky were famous for not caring about connections.

She went on, "I know what it looks like, out there. I watch news, movies, television, I know what that mirror is about. But if anyone was using this place to sell drugs or take drugs or anything like that...I don't know who they are. None of us knows who they are or how they got in. I never have seen that man before."

"Good," said Hutch, and she focused suddenly on him, startled again. "Now that we've cleared that out of the way, tell me what happened this morning."

She sat down again, still watching him, and he moved forward slowly until he could put his notebook on the counter. He flipped it open, got his pencil ready, and met her eyes. "When did you get here? Where did you park?"

"I take the bus every morning. I get here around seven o'clock. Then, later, my sister relieves me and I take her car, do my errands, pick up Harry after school, and then I come back for dinner rush. It's a nuisance parking then, but we both have to be here. Then she goes, gets dinner and so forth for her family. Her children are younger--she has to be there for their bedtime. Then she or her husband come and get me so I don't have to take buses after closing time."

"That's a long working day," Hutch said, accepting the diversion temporarily. "You must see just about everything that happens here."

"That is right," she said warily.

"So this morning you were here around seven? Earlier?"

"Yes, I check my watch at the corner--I came in early today. Meant to be here at 6:30 but it was a couple minutes later." Hutch wrote down the time and she eyed his pencil as it moved. "I went in back here, you know. Always look in these freezers and pantry first thing, so I know what we are going to need. We get delivery but sometimes you need something isn't in there, so the sooner I know.... You know my brothers have Fan restaurants too? Emperor's Fan over other side of town, up near Ridgeway, very fancy place." Hutch wondered, amused, if Starsky had ever been there when he lived in the neighborhood. "And Scarlet Fan near the airport. If one of us need something quick, we call each other, maybe someone can run it over."

"Very sensible," Hutch said. "And this morning?"

"Everything was okay, so I checked this kitchen to make sure everything in here was clean. I'm here to close up but sometimes I miss something. Then out front, I leave that for morning so I can get home by midnight. Well, then--" she stopped abruptly, having run out of comforting routine.

"Then," Hutch prompted.

"I saw. Window first, it was blowing and there was such a mess of glass. I think first it's just a vandal, someone trying to make trouble for us--" Hutch made a mental note of that, not wanting to spook her by writing it down but intrigued that she saw the restaurant as a target. "Oh, but then I see the man. Blood. Table. I can't go close, he's just all over." She swallowed. "And then, I was back in here, trying to think what to do, call police or what, call my brother Spencer, maybe. Then I thought of Harold. And he--" she smiled suddenly, lighting her whole face-- "he took care of everything."

Her expression made Hutch very uneasy, but he didn't want to think too hard about why. Not right now. He went on with the questioning. "Think back to when you first stepped in the dining room. Besides the window, did anything catch your attention?"

She glared at him. "His *body*, I told you."

Hutch waved his hand and went on, "Besides that. Anything out of the ordinary? The chairs and tables just where they usually are?"

"Well," she said, as if thinking of it for the first time. "No. That table, it wouldn't be there, right in front of kitchen door like that. And it should have four chairs, not two. I think it was only two I saw. One on the ground and second on the other side." Hutch made a note.

"Later, we'll ask you to look again at the front of the restaurant to tell us where the table should be, if you can see the chairs, and so forth. Anything else you remember?"

She narrowed her eyes and evidently thought.

"There's a coat on a wall hook, isn't there? I think there is. It wasn't there last night."

"You're sure it wasn't?"

"Mhmm, yes, because I remember looking at wall there and noticing this dark streak, thinking about cleaning it."

That was pretty much the last information he got out of her. When he came out, the corpse was gone and so were Dobey and most of the crime-scene team. Starsky was standing among the ruins of the window, looking at it. Hutch picked his way over.

"This is weird, you know," Starsky said. "There's glass *everywhere*."

"Hmm, how unusual, seeing there's a big window gone."

"Dope." Starsky grimaced at him companionably. "I mean, you throw a brick or something from the street, there's glass inside. You shove a chair through from the inside, then the glass falls outside. But here it looks like they did *both*--or else used a grenade or something--there's glass in and glass out and glass on the furniture and glass--"

"--on the body?" Hutch asked.

Starsky stared. "Yeah." And then, after a breath, "No."

"What?"

"Damn, I need the photographs." He went with fast, almost leaping steps to a man standing with a clipboard at one side of the room, watching while two others blew fingerprint dust on the headwaitress' podium and the cash register. "Hey, McCallum," Starsky called.

Hutch hadn't noticed McCallum was the head of this team--he realized how much he'd been focusing first on Fred Malloy's corpse and then away from it. "Hi, Rory," he said.

"Oh, hey, Hutch. What d'you need, Starsky?"

"Pictures, yesterday. The corpse *in situ*. 'Kay?"

"I wasn't planning on keeping them for souvenirs," said McCallum mildly. "Soon as they're ready, Detective."

"Did you notice the glass?"

McCallum looked at Starsky as if he'd suddenly realized he had brain damage. "Yes, there is a lot of glass," he said.

"No, I mean, there was glass on the body, did you notice? Anything odd?"

This time McCallum seemed to be really thinking back. "I saw the glint, on his jacket and shirt and face--you know, though, I don't think there was any on the rest of him."

"No!" Starsky almost crowed the word. "No, that's what I thought!" He turned to Hutch. "I gotta check the pictures, but it looks like the glass coulda been sprinkled on top of him."

Hutch nodded, trying to fit these pieces together. The window broken out from both sides--before or after Malloy was dead? Why put glass on top of him? He turned toward the wall near the door, and there was indeed a long dark overcoat hung there. He went over to it, took it off the hook, shaking it a little almost unconsciously to dislodge some of the stray fingerprinting dust. There was no glass on the coat. It was too heavy in his hands, though it was a thick wool, and he checked the pockets--his fingertips met the chill blunt end of a gun handle. "Starsk." His partner was there instantly. Hutch said, holding the coat out, "There's a gun in here."

"Bag it," and Starsky turned to get an evidence bag.

They put the whole coat in it, and as they tried to get the soft, thick stuff into the bag without touching it any more than necessary, Hutch said softly, "Starsk, am I being paranoid?"

"I dunno--what are you thinking? That this perp practically wrote us a note after being totally invisible for two other murders?"

"That's it. And, well, how was Dobe, you think?"

An uneasy dark gaze met his. "Yeah, I did notice that. How'd you? You were hardly here."

Hutch shook his head. "It was the Fan woman, the way she, well..."

"Oh, no." Starsky wasn't disagreeing, though he shook his head. "Oh, Hutch, damn."

"I'm wrong, maybe," Hutch said, but Starsky shook his head again.

"There's something." He looked across at the kitchen doors, as if he could see through them to the woman behind. "I'm not feeling good about this case," he said.

"No," Hutch agreed. "Wish it'd stayed in Seventh Precinct after all. Jablonski could have it."

They tried Huggy for one kind of information about Malloy's recent activities, the police department files for another. Neither was particularly informative. Malloy had been on parole, and had skipped the last two meetings with his counselor. Huggy said he hadn't run across any news of Malloy being in town, but added, "Y'know I don't travel in them kind of circles. Forest's old boys got their own little club, and Huggy Bear ain't got the en-tray."

Hutch asked, phone receiver tucked between chin and shoulder while he looked through another manila folder of useless paper, "Do you know at least who's got Forest's old territory?"

"Split up. The horse and snow one way, with the protection racket. The 'imports' another, and the girls 'n boys yet *another*. Nobody in Forest's gang was big enough to hold it all together. Monk was the closest--"

Monk had died in an alley, in a shootout with Starsky, as Hutch looked on helplessly from the top of a fence. "And he wasn't anywhere near close enough," Hutch said. He thought Monk had been stupid, actually.

"Right. Think it's Mule Harris got the smuggling. Don't know about the drugs or the protection. The prost--" Huggy suddenly stopped, cleared his throat. "Uh."

"Somebody come in?" Hutch tucked the phone in tighter.

"Uh, no. Hmm, where was I? Lost myself in my wonderful web o' words. Should see my new menu, it's a treat just to behold--"

"Huggy, come on. We both know every thing your kitchen makes, and the menus are plain scary, and you were in the middle of telling me about which of Forest's old boys is running his prostitution." Nothing on the other end of the phone for a moment. "Come on."

"Well, it's just hearsay, and I don't know--"

"Huggy--"

"--might not be welcome *or* true, and I draw the line--"

"Huggy!"

Starsky looked up from the other side of the desk, hands in a file-folder of his own, and watched him.

"You know the individual I've heard of," Huggy said warily.

Thinking back, Hutch was still at a loss. Yes, there'd been three men holding him captive, and Forest.... Forest was in jail and all three of the others were dead. "I don't know anyone in Forest's organization. Unless you're trying to tell me that old lush Mickey--"

Huggy mumbled indecipherably, something like, "eenieadun."

Really irritated now, Hutch didn't bother to hide it as he spoke. "Huggy. Do I have to put on my jacket, get into the car, drive over there and choke it out of your long skinny throat? Because right now that looks like a really good idea to me."

Starsky grinned. Then he winked. Hutch felt his own mouth twitch with his partner's good humor.

Then he abruptly lost all desire to smile as Huggy said clearly, "All *right*, then, I'll just lay it on you. I hear that the hookers now belong to Jeanie Walden. You remember. Jeanie."

There wasn't as much air in the room as usual. The walls were too close. Starsky's face looked strange and Huggy's voice was very small and tinny, getting farther away--the thud of the phone against the desk explained why, and Hutch looked down at the receiver, then picked it up.

"Hutch?" Huggy was saying it; Starsky was saying it. Hutch swallowed and looked into the face, the eyes, that knew him through and through, had taken the crushed bits that Forest and, yes, poor Jeanie had left of him and glued him back together into the man he'd been before, with pure love. Starsky had held him, suffered with him, hidden him, healed him, and would do the same now if Hutch needed any of it.

"Yeah," he said to Huggy, "I'm here," and moved his mouth into a curve for Starsky, but it wasn't a smile and it was obvious his partner wasn't buying it. "It's okay, Huggy, thanks, uh, for telling me. Sorry I flew off the handle." He swallowed. "Hell of a case."

"I bet," said the telephone. "Not the kind of news I live to give, my friend." Meanwhile, across the desk, Starsky was doing his narrow-eyed laser impression. Much better than his Bogart.

"Yeah, well, shouldn't be relevant. After all. The prostitution's based in Vegas, right? Can you try again about the drugs end? And thanks for the info on Harris." Saying the right things, moving his mouth, his brain still in park. He finished the call and set down the receiver. And couldn't tell Starsky, not before he could get his own thoughts back in gear. "Later," he said.

"Hutch--"

He stood up. "*Later.*" Went out into the hallway, and Starsky didn't follow.

In sight of the squadroom windows was a staircase, and Hutch turned without thought into its false shelter, climbing swiftly. It only went up one flight, to the labs and some more offices. He walked quickly past the doors, desks, windows, to a heavy fire door, pushed it open and let it clang shut after him.

The concrete of this back staircase was all sharp edges, shadow and light both harsh, the metal pipe of the railing cold and rough when he touched it. He let go and climbed past landing after landing, each bare bulb striking his eyes.

In his mind was a gentler light.

He hadn't been living at the cottage on the canal for very long, and seemed never to have the time to just explore the neighborhood. So one night before a day off he set his alarm, determined to take a walk and get a look at the area.

The morning was grayish, neither raining nor sunny, the air moving smoothly, no gusts and no chill. Turning away from the water, the lure of beach and park, he walked along far more ordinary sidewalks, between duplexes and featureless brick apartment buildings. He saw flowerboxes full of geraniums and macrama³³; hangers held plants on a few balconies. He could have been anywhere--Duluth, New Jersey, Florida.

He found himself on Oxford, passing shops and restaurants and offices, and then crossing into the manicured green of the Marina. Across grass and through trees he could see a thicket of masts and flags, lines and sails. Here, on the flat land open all the way to the ocean, there was more wind. At first the sight of a girl at one of the picnic tables under the trees, huddled into her raincoat and what looked like a stadium blanket, did not seem all that strange.

Then he looked again, and realized she must have spent the night there, or not far away. She was bedraggled, and her eyes as he approached were huge with fear. Slim, fair as snow, as pathetic as a lost kitten, she made him feel protective before she'd even spoken.

"Don't be afraid," was the first thing he ever said to her.

Starsky had obviously thought, when they finally met, that Hutch was crazy in love, and had smirked and joked but given the free cordiality that he always did to any girls Hutch introduced. Jeanie had moved a little closer to Hutch as he spoke her name. She smiled, but the expression was unsteady, and she seemed almost unable to keep up the conversation. Evidently, something in Starsky's manner, his energy or his sensual eyes, reminded her of the men she'd spent time with for Forest's profit.

Or else she'd just been piling on the pathetic stuff for Hutch's sake. She did that, and he usually knew it, but didn't call her on it. If it made her feel safer, if she took a little control of her life by manipulating Hutch in that small way, he was willing to let her.

One thing, though, he wanted only truth about. The first time they'd gone to bed together, she'd mewled and writhed like a cat in heat, and he'd practically laughed at her. "Jeanie," he said, a hand on her cheek and the other on her shoulder. "Jeanie, stop."

She froze. A rabbit looking at a wolf.

"Baby," he said, stroking her face, "don't, sweetheart, don't. Don't be scared, don't fake it. I'm not paying you. Not paying anybody. You don't owe me this. Jeanie, sweetie, I just want you to feel good, just want to feel good with you. Okay?" She was silent. He asked again, with as much patience as he could find, "Okay?"

At last she nodded. "Hu-utch," she whispered, "oh, Hutch." Her hand covered his, held tightly.

She didn't come. But she smiled when he did, and he believed it was a real smile. She didn't try to fake orgasm, anyway, and in a way that was more gratifying than if she'd screamed her way to heaven.

She'd run away from Ben Forest nearly as simply as a child might, with less than fifty dollars in cash and very little else. The blanket, she'd taken off one of the small boats in the marina. She'd claimed she didn't know which boat it was, and Hutch hadn't pushed her. She was so frightened. It was a wonder she'd had the courage to even try to run, and she spent every day looking over her shoulder, absolutely certain that Forest was searching for her.

Hutch couldn't help but be moved at the way she clung to him, lit up like a candle whenever she saw him, liked to stay close beside him even when she slept. It was several days before she'd let him introduce her even to Starsky, nearly a week before she'd consider working at Huggy's. But she trusted Hutch. That trust was intoxicating.

A month and a half later, she had her own apartment. Hutch didn't have a key to it. He didn't mind, either. It felt right for her to have her own space.

One night, he'd picked her up from work and said, "You eaten? Want to get something or come to my place?"

*"No," she said. "I want you to come to **my** place."*

*And that, he felt, was the first time they ever really made love. She set the pace and made him lie still, but she wasn't **working** so hard anymore. He watched as she touched his arms and chest, kissed him and knelt over him, and he loved the pink flush in her face and the little wet sounds of her mouth on his skin. She liked*

it. When she lowered herself onto him, twisting her hips a little and smiling down, then leaning forward to brush her hair across his chest and face, he groaned, not just because it felt fantastic but because she was at last happy. Happy in bed. And the contractions around his cock were the real thing.

*Only a few days after that, she'd seen someone in the bar. One of Forest's men. She'd called Hutch in such a state he'd hardly known what she was talking about, and she insisted he pick her up, take her away **now**.*

"Where are we going?" he asked when they were in the car.

*And suddenly it turned out she hadn't just drifted away without a plan or a destination. There was a beach house near Sea View Point, owned by a woman named Marissa who'd been one of Ben Forest's stable until an even bigger fish took a fancy to her. She'd been Jeanie's friend, offered to help her if she ever needed it, and Jeanie had been saving her like an ace up the sleeve. Marissa was away, but Jeanie had **her** key.*

It was, oddly, a blow. He'd thought she didn't have anyone else to trust and there had been a sweetness about that. But he took her to the beach house and promised over and over not to tell where she was, not anyone, no, not even Starsky. He had a long weekend coming up, four days off, and they'd meant to take a drive up the coast, but he wasn't sure what she'd want to do now.

He'd been on his way to find out, just stopping at home to shower and change, when Forest's men jumped him. Knocked him out, dropping him into the dark.

Now, Hutch emerged from the fire stairs onto the roof, the sun bright and hot but not as ruthless as the lights on the landings. The air smelled of asphalt and dust. He walked past a hooded vent, around a raised skylight. He couldn't quite see in and wondered what room it was.

He'd broken his promise to Jeanie, eventually, when he was coming down hard from the dope they'd given him. He'd broken the implicit vow of his partnership before that, not giving Starsky the truth. And she'd broken faith with him in the end, he couldn't help but feel. Not in going with Forest. He'd known she couldn't help that. But when Forest was arrested, and she said first that she couldn't bear to be with Hutch after all he'd been through because of her, and then tried to say she'd be back someday--at that moment, he looked at her smooth hair and face, contracting only slightly with grief, and thought she just couldn't stick it out. Couldn't really get away and be free with him either. And he backed off, let her go, unable to hold her if she wasn't, in herself, free to be there.

So apparently she'd gone back to Vegas and put the same bonds on other women she'd broken off herself, if only for a while.

The thought made him feel ill. His mouth twisted and he rubbed his stomach as he paced around the roof.

It was, he thought after a while, a foolish place to be. Yet there was a sort of weird comfort in it. It reminded him of Starsky....oh, yes, the night he'd shot Bellamy, even though the man had pumped him full of poison and both partners thought only Bellamy knew the antidote. Starsky'd shot him rather than let Hutch be killed; Hutch had crawled along the surface of the roof in the dark, closer to death with each inch, to win life for Starsky.

Hutch stood in the broad daylight with his eyes shut, thinking of his partner. The way he'd slumped into Hutch's arms then. The way he felt to hold now. The look in his eyes--all the looks he had.

Then, smiling, Hutch went back down the stairs. *Later*, he'd said. It was later now.

A couple of hours afterward, they had their heads together over the file--literally. Hutch could feel Starsky's

breath as he said, "Okay. Sequence of events?"

"Window's got to be first," Hutch said. "Then they're in, then the coke?"

"Table."

"Oh, right, they moved it. Okay, break the window in, move the table. Yeah, McCallum's report says there's scuff marks here--" Hutch pulled out a photo and pointed to the place-- "where the legs went across the carpeting, so that's where the table was. Then they broke the window out, then sat down comfortably to do a few lines?" He raised his head and looked at Starsky.

"Weird, but worry about that later. Then Malloy gets shot from behind, falls out of the chair."

"The shooter *moves* the chair and decorates the body with a little glitter, puts the gun in the pocket and hangs up the coat, and leaves with at least one hand full of glass splinters."

"Must have worn gloves," said Starsky.

"Which he took with him, but left the coat and gun."

"Well, *were* there prints?"

Hutch sighed, re-checking the typed report. "No. Well, a couple of smudgy latents. No matches. It is the murder weapon, though. Unlicensed."

"Dandy." Now Starsky sighed, pushed himself back. One hand was on the table and one on Hutch's arm. "Time to report to Dobe." He grimaced, but Hutch didn't want to discuss that right here and now either.

As Hutch got up, he saw Lem at the file cabinet near the door, looking at them with an expression Hutch couldn't read, but it didn't seem very friendly. The younger man looked back into the file drawer without speaking, and Hutch got up and followed Starsky into the captain's office.

Dobe was impatient. "Kay, uh, Ms. Fan called me during my lunch hour to ask how the investigation was coming along, and I didn't have a thing to tell her. I want to make sure that doesn't happen again."

"Change your phone number?" Starsky suggested. Dobe glared at him.

Hutch spoke quickly, to divert attention. "We got the scene report, and preliminaries on the gun. We need to find out what Malloy was doing there, whether he was connected to the other restaurants at all, if there was a drug connection there, too. Need to trace the gun, keep Jablonski at the Seventh current, that kind of thing. It's just a lot of legwork, Cap'n."

"I'm assigning some more men," Dobe said, so unexpectedly that they just stared. "Feldgruber's just finishing the file update I assigned him, and you can have a couple of uniforms if you want them. The ones on that beat are Graham and--"

"Howarth," Starsky interrupted, the word nearly a groan. "Cap--"

"Well, what?"

Hutch tried. "Howarth and Graham and Feldgruber and, well, us. It's just not--"

Dobe's eyes narrowed and he drew down his chin, so Hutch knew he was genuinely irritated. "Can't you work with those men?"

Starsky's voice was flat now. "Howarth and Graham are bigots. We stopped 'em beatin' up Feldgruber not two weeks ago right downstairs in the locker room. Okay? They're friggin' Nazis."

Hutch knew this would not work. Dobey's whole attitude toward prejudice was that one saw it, noted it, and worked around it, if not ignored it. Though Hutch realized that if every bigot in the department vanished there wouldn't be enough cops to cover the beats, still it was a hard pill to swallow every time the issue was raised.

"And you didn't see fit to report it? You didn't think I'd be *interested*?"

"Well, what could you have done!" Starsky had raised his voice, too.

"Damn it, Starsky! I can't do anything now, can I? Out of the blue, over a week late, with no documentation? But I tell you this," and the captain let his voice fall. When Dobey did that, he meant business. "Anything happens again, you *tell* me, you *document*. What the hell d'you think IA is for, just givin' you cowboys grief?"

"That *is* what they seem best at," Hutch said, since it seemed to be his turn to be the calm one.

Dobey shot a glare at him this time. "This department has a policy. It's in your handbooks. If you've forgotten it, this is the time to review it. And *follow* it. Are you with me?"

"Yes, Captain," Hutch said.

"You'll work with Feldgruber and the other two, then."

Hutch hesitated to answer for both of them this time, so he waited until Starsky said, "Yeah, okay," reluctantly.

After another pause, Dobey said gruffly, "Well, what're you waiting for? Get going!"

The good news was that this was definitely the old Dobey.

Starsky went out the hall door, so Hutch followed the same way. "Where'd you go before, Hutch?"

"Roof."

The dark head nodded, and Starsky led the way to the staircase.

It was a completely different experience following Starsky up the fire stairs than it had been to go up alone with his mind full of memories. The scenery was better, certainly. Now the bright landing lights ghosted around Starsky's hair, outlined his body, before blasting in Hutch's face. As they turned away from each light, it cast Hutch's shadow across the denim-clad muscles of Starsky's butt and legs. Sunlight would have been better. A spotlight, still better. But this was good, and Hutch didn't have any obligation to seem indifferent, so he could look all he wanted.

And touch. As they turned the third corner, he lengthened his step and reached out, brushing the back of Starsky's neck and cupping it in his palm. As they began to climb the next flight, the hand slid over to Starsky's shoulder, where Hutch hung on, only one stair behind now as they climbed. Knowing that they were alone gave the gesture an extra intimacy, like a faint sound ringing under their footsteps against the concrete.

They reached the roof door, passed through it, Starsky holding it and then letting go when they were both outside. Then he leaned back against the scraped and dirty paint, folding his arms and looking at Hutch,

speculative but somehow very much inside his own head, independent. It didn't occur to Hutch to move closer, to hold him, or even to speak.

"How were you feelin', up here before?"

Hutch hadn't said much when he got back to the squadroom, little more than Jeanie's name. The compassionate flash in the dark-blue eyes had brought back too much emotion, and they'd moved quickly on to more public and more immediately useful topics. And now, though he knew what Starsky meant to ask, Hutch answered something else: "Close to you."

Starsky's mouth quirked, and then he looked past Hutch, who turned to see what his partner saw--the empty space, the high lip around the edge, the protruding vent. When he looked back, the line of Starsky's mouth had relaxed, and all he said was, "Bellamy."

"Yup."

"I'd still do it." Starsky's voice was quiet, matter-of-fact.

"I know," said Hutch. "So would I."

Starsky walked away from the door now, around the skylight, as Hutch had done. "Since," he said, then took a few more steps before going on. "Since...it happened, have you thought about her much? Jeanie?"

"No, not really."

Starsky looked skeptical. Hutch stepped toward the skylight himself, and tried to explain.

"I felt guilty for a while. For giving her away. I'd think of her, and it was like thinking about the heroin. A kind of sick feeling, and a craving, and weakness--weakness in myself. And when I really lost the drug craving, Jeanie was over for me, too. That's the truth, buddy." He meant to smile, but knew the expression was sad--not for Jeanie, though. "At Vegas, when we were under cover there, and then afterward, when Jack was...dying...you know I never thought of Jeanie at all? We were back here when I finally remembered she was probably living there. And I wondered a little, but then forgot again." He swallowed, got courage enough to say, "It was never like--" but felt again that sense of intrusion, couldn't name Terry.

"Gillian?" Starsky finished for him.

They spent so much time doing that, sharing sentences or just *knowing* what the other had left unsaid, that it felt surreal to have Starsky misunderstand this way. But in another way, he was right: Jeanie wasn't like Gillian, and he had taken much longer to get past the later grief.

Starsky let him think for a while, turning to look out over the parking structure and the roofs of nearby buildings. Not much of a view.

"Weird how this case is bringing up all this past," Starsky said at last. "Even stuff we don't know about, like with Dobey."

"You should have seen the Fan woman, Starsk. Saying his name. I don't know whether it means something in the past or now--you know her son's named Harry?"

"Short for Harold?"

"I don't know."

Starsky's grin was self-mocking. "Feel like we should go question Edith."

"Or she should question us," Hutch said, though it was the last thing he wanted. "Hey, send Lem."

"Oh, now there's an idea."

Hutch looked ostentatiously down his nose. "Somebody's gotta have 'em."

Starsky pretended to glare and advanced on Hutch, who waited for him, then grabbed his shoulders and instead of pushing away, pulled him close. Looked at the face only slightly below his, felt the quick exhalations on his skin, so different now than when they had been working over the file.

"A bad idea?" Starsky said, but didn't sound certain either way.

They *were* at work. So Hutch didn't kiss the mouth so temptingly near, but did push his cheek against his lover's, wrapped both arms around him, hugged tight. Starsky's grip was hard, too. It felt so simple and good that Hutch didn't want to stop, but gradually their embrace loosened, eased apart, and they looked into each other's eyes.

Out of nowhere, Hutch said, "Next time, I want to go with you to the Marshall Center."

Starsky took a startled breath, and his eyes flickered with an expression that was gone too fast to be read. But he didn't look away, and when Hutch touched his face with hesitant fingertips, Starsky caught and held them. Then drew them to his lips and kissed the index, then the middle finger. Suddenly, he grinned and said, "'S no fun anyway, if I'm flirting without you there to watch," and twisted away, pulling Hutch to the fire door. "C'mon, gotta earn an honest living."

Jorge and Luz Martinez, owners of the Fiesta restaurant where the first murder had taken place, were adamant that they had never seen Malloy. Luz, especially, would hardly look at the photograph that Starsky held out to her, and retreated into frantic Spanish. Hutch interrogated the couple in both languages, using whatever had last been spoken and feeling a little like some hunting animal following the twists and turns of its prey. It was unpleasant, especially seeing the whites of Luz's eyes as she looked from the policemen to her husband and back.

Climbing back into the Torino, Hutch sighed, and as Starsky plopped into the driver's seat, he sighed even more deeply. Suspecting parody, Hutch looked over, but all he could see as they pulled into traffic was the tension in his partner's jaw and neck.

After a minute or two, Starsky spoke. "Do you ever wish you were working with Flores again, at times like that, with the Martinezes? So you wouldn't be doing all the work?"

"No, are you crazy?" Hutch turned in the seat, took a breath, the same old rant rising to his lips, and then just exhaled. "Aren't you ever gonna believe me? I only ever want one partner. Should I have it tattooed on my forehead?"

Starsky's mouth twitched. "Now, that I'd like to see," he said.

Hutch pointed to one side of his forehead, where the hair was receding above the right temple: "David--" he tapped the center where he could feel his own frown line-- "Starsky's--" and on the left side-- "partner."

"Return to the following address," Starsky said, reaching out to twirl one fingertip across Hutch's cheek as if writing. Unfortunately, as he was driving, he wasn't looking, and the finger jabbed suddenly into Hutch's

flesh and then was snatched away. "Sorry."

"I'm branded for life," Hutch said, rubbing the spot though he was sure there wouldn't be a mark.

Smiling, Starsky drove on.

Hutch harked back to the case: "Anyway, what they were saying wasn't the important part. You tell me, partner: do they know Malloy?"

"Absolutely. Luz jumped a foot when she saw the picture. Might help to get her alone. Or Jorge for that matter. Maybe if he wasn't busy protecting the little woman, he might let us know something."

"It'd help to have a couple more facts to rub their noses in," Hutch said.

As if in answer, the police radio sputtered. "Zebra Three, Zebra Three, come in."

Hutch glanced at Starsky's grin and picked up the receiver. "Zebra Three here."

"Telephone call, a Mr. Huggy Bear," said the dispatcher's indifferent voice.

"Patch it through, will you please?" The more mechanized the voice on the radio sounded, the more Hutch felt driven to react as a feeling human being. "Thank you."

"All yours." Then another crackle, then Huggy's voice.

"Hutch? That you?"

"Yeah, Huggy, I'm here. What's up?"

"Been askin' about the drugs, like you said. Word on the street's that you can get what you want in the local family restaurant. Not every one, o'course--look at my own fine emporium, clean as a whistle."

Starsky reached for Hutch's hand and pulled the receiver over. "You got family I don't know about, Hug?"

"I'm sure I do, Detective. The Bear family tree is *ex-ten-sive*."

"C'mon, guys." Hutch took the receiver back. "Well, Huggy, tell us more. The murder scenes are some of those accommodating restaurants?"

"The one in Seventh is a ways off my beaten path. So to speak. But, yeah, the Fiesta and the Silver Fan. I'm working on a list of the others, have it for you as soon as I got it. It's a nice set-up." Huggy spoke with reluctant admiration. "They get in through one of the family, not the owners but their kids or cousins or somebody workin' there. Then, if somethin' like this goes down--"

"Everybody clams up, just what happened," Hutch said.

"You got it."

"You don't know who any of the specific contacts are?"

"Nope. Ain't the family boys and girls that actually deal. But if I was you--" Huggy hesitated.

"Spit it out."

"I'd talk to that Fan kid. I seen him around, Hutch, and it ain't like I see Cal Dobe or other members of the

chess club and debate team. Y'know? Just a few days ago he was on Marshall Street." Porn Row, as cops called it. Hutch winced. "And he's carryin' somethin' heavy, that kid. Reminds me of Junior Walters before Jackson bought it."

"Before?" Starsky asked, sounding startled.

"What was that noise from the peanut gallery?" asked Huggy, so Hutch repeated it. "Sure, before. You the ones caught him with a bag o' pills in his pocket, playin' basketball with his dad and two cops! He ain't a stupid kid now, and he wasn't then. He had his mind some serious distance to do something that dumb. This Fan kid looks like it, too. You check him out."

"Yes, sir," Hutch said, "Captain Huggy, sir."

"You *ask* me for info, you get what's in my mind."

"I'll remember that next time," Starsky said in a fake grumble.

Hutch said, "It is a scary thought, isn't it?"

"I got a restaurant to run," Huggy told them with dignity. "I'll talk to you turkeys later."

Hutch put the receiver down and turned to his partner. Starsky whistled through his teeth and drove.

"You know," Hutch said after a while, "I don't want to interview that kid at home with his mother."

"We need *some* adult." But the glance through Starsky's lashes said he agreed.

"Principal."

"Works for me. Where's the kid go to school?"

"Same as Cal?"

"Hmm. No. Not from where he lives. I think Huggy's right, they're in some club, something like that."

"Could *be* chess--Cal plays." Hutch smirked a little, anticipating Starsky's reply.

"Oh, I remember." Not too long ago, they'd had dinner with the Dobeys, and Cal had wiped up the board with Starsky, delighting Hutch, who could rarely beat his partner.

"Dobey'd know the school."

"Yeah," said Starsky with as little enthusiasm as Hutch felt.

But there was little alternative, so they called in, got Dobey, asked him the name of the school, and were unsurprised when he knew exactly, name and street address. "It's a wonder he didn't give us directions," Hutch muttered as he put the receiver on its hook.

Starsky said thoughtfully, "I really want a look at this kid."

"Hang on for twenty minutes," Hutch answered.

In fact, Harry Fan looked very much like his mother, short and slim with honey-pale skin, the cap of his hair sleek under the fluorescent light of the principal's office. He hesitated in the doorway, one hand on the mustard-yellow paint of the frame, the light catching the lenses of his aviator-shaped glasses and obscuring

his eyes.

The principal, Mr. Josephson, said, "Come in, come in, son," with the kind of professional heartiness that was certain to turn off any kid and most adults. "Sit down, sit down."

An echo as well. Hutch, secretly gritting his teeth, smiled at the boy.

Harry entered the principal's office with astonishing poise and looked questioningly from one cop to the other.

"I'm Detective Hutchinson." Hutch showed his badge. "That's my partner, Detective Starsky. We have a couple of things we'd like to ask you."

"You work with the big guy, don't you?" asked Harry.

"Is that what you call him? Captain Dobey?" Starsky's face was full of mischief. Hutch's mouth was twitching, too.

Josephson was not amused. "That's hardly respectful, young man."

"He doesn't mind," said Harry. "At least he usually doesn't mind." He dropped his eyes, as if remembering something suitably chastening, and Hutch realized he was being winsome on purpose. "I don't do it often, anyway, I call him Uncle Harold."

Starsky told him, "Never mind. We want to know about your mother's restaurant."

"Yeah? What about it?"

"There was a break-in," Starsky explained. "A man was killed."

Harry blinked. "A man?"

"Not one of the staff. Your mother found him."

Harry said nothing at all for a few seconds, biting his lower lip and staring through the big lenses of his glasses. Then he asked, "Mom's okay, isn't she? I mean, this isn't, you didn't come here...she is okay?"

Starsky reassured him. "Yes, she's fine. Honest."

"Okay," Harry said uncertainly, and shifted his gaze again, back and forth between the partners, sliding past Josephson almost as if he were not there. "You," swallowing, "wanted to ask me about the restaurant? I mean, it's not like *I* was there this morning."

"In general," Hutch said. Then he caught Starsky's lifted eyebrows in a swift look and knew how they were playing the interview. Ping-pong. Maybe it'd keep Josephson busy, anyway.

Harry's brow contracted in what might have been honest puzzlement. "What kind of general?"

"You hang out at the restaurant much, Harry?" asked Starsky.

"No." They waited, and eventually the boy began to speak again, with a startling teenaged normality: "It's kinda boring, you know, and my mom wants me to do stuff when I'm there. Like I don't have enough chores. She thinks I ought to, you know, enjoy it because it's our family business, like it's biology or something. That's so dumb, you know? Like cutting stuff up or washing glasses is, like, genetic?"

"Like, no," Hutch said, lips curving in amusement despite himself.

Harry grinned a little in return.

Hutch went on, "So you avoid the place? Does that mean you wouldn't know who was a regular customer or who worked there?"

"Well." Harry sobered. "Not exactly. I know most of the waiters and stuff. They're mostly related anyway. Somehow, Mom says. She knows back to, like, China."

It was Starsky's turn, but he paused, probably letting Harry begin to wonder where this line of questioning was aimed, and then asked something completely different. "If you don't spend time at the restaurant, where do you hang out? With Cal Dobey?"

"Uh, no," Harry said, "not a lot. We're both in chess clubs, so we run into each other at matches, and our parents go way back. So sometimes they visit us, or we go to their place. I mean, he's, he's great, you know, he's been great to me." He scratched his nose, then rubbed under the nosepiece, jiggling his glasses up and down. After that, he moved his right foot up on the rung of the chair, then took it down again.

"He's a little older than you are, isn't he?" Hutch's voice was gentle, partly in memory of this age, when a year's difference was like a geological era, and partly to set up for Starsky.

"A little. Fourteen months, Mom said."

Starsky leaned forward in the plastic chair, making it creak as he put an elbow on his knee and half pointed at Harry. "So-o," drawing out the vowel, "was it you took him to Marshall Street or the other way around?"

Harry's eyes widened, and he sat so still that he looked very small. Very young.

Suddenly Josephson had to weigh in. "That's not a good neighborhood. Harry, what were you doing there?"

"What does any boy, any age, go there to do?" Though Starsky was still smiling, the expression was ruthless, and Harry looked back at Hutch, brown eyes pleading.

Hutch wasn't going to rescue him. "Or were you just passing through on your way to another family restaurant?"

And the kid knew what he was talking about. Just for a second it showed, when he jolted a little in the chair. "Other restaurant?" he asked, and by that time it was gone, but Hutch had seen it and he was sure Starsky had, too.

Now Starsky backed off, just as Hutch would have done if it had been his turn. "You're a smart kid. Do you beat Cal at chess?"

"Sometimes. Not much, he's real good."

"Your grades are high?" Hutch turned slightly toward Josephson, and the man spoke at once.

"Harry's on the honor roll."

"He is? Good job, Harry." And Hutch meant it.

Starsky said, "Then you're too smart to let this go on. And you can help us stop it."

"People are getting hurt," Hutch said softly. "A lot of people, even before the murders. The drug trade hurts people, Harry. I know you've heard things like that before, maybe believed them, maybe not. But in the other two restaurant murders, the people who died were...connected. A regular customer, a staff member. It could have been someone you knew. Someone related to you. Even your mom." The last was stretching it, but Hutch doubted Harry knew much, if anything, about the other two murders. And the idea clearly hit Harry where he lived. The boy gulped and looked back and forth between them.

With a slight rustle, Starsky took a few photos from the case files out of his inside jacket pocket and spread them like a hand of cards. "Take a look at these for us. Tell us if you know any of them. If you remember seeing them at all."

Harry's hands were clenched on the seat of the chair, as if he did not dare to touch the photographs. Starsky waved them a little, head tilted to one side, holding Harry's eyes with his own, until the tense fingers let go and Harry took the pictures, tentatively, holding them by the corners.

The one on top was Estevan Martinez, cropped and reprinted from his high-school prom photo; Harry glanced at it and tucked it behind the others. The second was Jennifer Pappas, her laughing face turned a little as she spoke to someone out of the frame. She seemed to be at an outdoor gathering; in the background, some sort of paper garland looped up to a tree branch over her head. That photo stayed on top of the stack a little longer, but Hutch thought that was probably only because Jennifer had been so pretty. The third picture, hopelessly unlike the others, was Malloy's mug shot, cropped to be less obvious but still cold black and white, his expression almost as blank as it had looked from the floor of the Silver Fan.

Harry raised his head and looked at Hutch. The edges of the photographs vibrated slightly. "Yeah," the boy said faintly. "Him."

"What about him?" Hutch asked.

"He's the one," Harry said. "The one that, well, the one--" he looked at Josephson, and then back at Hutch-- "he must be the one killed in our restaurant, right?"

Hutch leaned forward, willing Harry to forget Josephson and be straight with them. "But that's not what you were going to say, is it?"

Harry sat still again, mouth clamped in an unhappy line.

Starsky got up, abruptly, and Harry jumped--then relaxed as Starsky turned to the principal. "Could I have a word with you, Mr. Josephson?" A hand on his arm, a gentle hustle, and the two of them were near the office window, not looking at Hutch and Harry, speaking low.

Reaching to touch Harry's shoulder, Hutch said, "We didn't come here to get you in trouble. Not with the principal or anybody else. We find out you committed a crime, we're going to nail you, but you didn't, did you? Starsky's telling Mr. Josephson now that it's important that you tell us the truth, without being afraid that stuff's going to come back to haunt you. Just talk to me. Harry."

"He frightened my mother," Harry said. "I...Mom comes to get me after school and takes me home, but then she has to get back to the restaurant, and I'm by myself unless I go someplace. I don't always tell her where I go. Or sometimes I do go to the restaurant, hang around and go home with her, maybe on Friday, you know, 'cause she gets all bent out of shape about it if she knows I'm up late on a school night."

Hutch nodded, hoping the boy would get to his evidence before Starsky was done distracting the principal, but unable to push any more than with a firm grip on the thin shoulder. Harry licked his lips and went on.

"But last Friday, I'm walking up the alley to the back door, and there's this big car there I never saw before. And this guy comes out--he looked *furios*--and he gets in and the car is, like, gone. Burning rubber right in the alley. And I go in and Mom is really scared. She was trying to hide it, and she wouldn't tell me what he said, but it really *scared* her."

Kay Fan--back to her again. And she had lied to them, and maybe to Dobey. Hutch caught himself in the midst of a sigh and didn't let it go, keeping his eyes on Harry. "Had you ever seen him before that?"

"Uh, yeah. I don't know where exactly, but he looked kinda familiar."

"Try to remember."

"No, it was just one of those feelings." There was something evasive in his expression, but Starsky and Josephson were coming back, and anyway they had to get to Kay Fan before she picked up her son and heard all about this interview. Hutch thought whatever Harry was still hiding would probably keep. He let go of the boy's shoulder and took the photographs from his unresisting grip, handing them to Starsky.

So Starsky didn't sit down, tucking the photos back into his pocket, and Hutch got up, too. "Anything else, Starsk?" A shake of the dark head. So Hutch ended it: "Thank you," he said, "we'll probably talk to you again, Harry, but thanks for your help. And thanks, Mr. Josephson, for letting us take up some of Harry's class time."

Everyone made polite sounds, and Starsky shook Josephson's hand, so Hutch followed suit; Harry escaped down the corridor and the detectives went the other way, out of the building.

"She lied," Hutch said as his partner was starting the car. "She knew Malloy."

"Figured that was why you quit. The kid's got more for us."

"Yeah. Catch her before he can tell her we talked to him--after that, maybe take 'em together?"

"Depends," Starsky said, though Hutch knew it did. "What about Dobey?"

Hutch did sigh now, feeling like it was the same breath he'd suppressed before. "We may have to ask *him* that." Then he grinned. "At least we know Harry isn't Cal's brother."

"Not much family resemblance, is there?"

"Too skinny."

Starsky shook his head with a half-smile.

They parked in the alley behind the restaurant, almost as if they were there to get a perp who might run this way. It was a narrow, uneven thoroughway dotted with garbage bins, big ones for the restaurants and shops that faced one street, smaller ones for the private houses on the other side of the block. Howarth and Graham had been making the rounds of the neighbors this afternoon, and Hutch hoped they'd found something useful.

Starsky led the way into the kitchen, which seemed full of people all talking at once. Kay Fan, in the middle of the room, was gesturing and speaking over the voices of at least three of her employees. "All'ight, all'ight--Sett-a down!" Hutch heard her accent clearly, now. She wasn't facing the door, so when the others saw Starsky and Hutch and quieted, she went on for a moment, gaining poise as she spoke: "I got window fixed, so we will be open tonight. I tell you."

"Boarded up!" said a younger Asian woman, her hands on her hips, with half an eye on the detectives, but obviously unwilling to give up the fight. "You think there's gonna be a big dinner rush in a place that looks like a bomb been here? Or a fire?"

"Rizabet, shut up!" But Kay looked mortified when she'd said it.

The other woman shook her head with a small, angry smile. "Kay, Chrissake, you sound like you just got off the boat. And somebody's here--maybe you know them?"

Kay whirled around and stared.

"You remember me, Ms. Fan? Detective Hutchinson? Is there somewhere we could go to talk to you?"

"I got--I've," she said carefully, "I haven't got much time. I have to go get Harry."

"Just a brief talk," Hutch said. "My partner and I just have a few questions."

She took them into the dining room, which looked dark with the big front window covered with plywood. Though the red and silver curtains were closed, some of the wood was visible, and anyway a customer entering the restaurant from the street would know exactly what the spangled fabric was covering. But now nobody was there but the three of them.

She was leading the way to a booth on the far side of the room, but Starsky stopped at a table under one of the recessed ceiling lights. "Here, Ms. Fan," he said politely, and gave her one of his charming smiles as she turned in surprise. He pulled out a chair for her, and when she still didn't come back, he turned the palm of his hand outward and gestured as if the chair were a prize on a game show.

She gave in, but looked suspiciously at both men as they took their seats. Hutch thought she looked amazingly like her son. If she wore aviators and his hair had a wedge cut--

Starsky dug in his pockets and brought out the photographs. "Have you seen any of these people before?"

She looked at the pictures of Estevan Martinez and Jennifer Pappas. "They're so young," she said, looking up, much less hostile.

"Not much older than Harry," Hutch said.

"No, not much." She looked back down at the photos. Then she put aside Estevan's picture, saw Malloy's, and stiffened. "All right." Every consonant was brittle and in place. "This is the dead man I found this morning. Of course. Did you actually come back just to show me this?"

"No," Starsky said, "we came back to get the truth from you."

She stared at him, outrage on her face. The photos slid from her fingers to the tabletop.

Hutch said, "We've been informed that you spoke to this man, Fred Malloy, on Friday some time after three o'clock. When he left, he appeared to be angry. What did you talk about?"

She didn't speak for a few seconds, and then said, "I want to talk to Harold."

"Do you?" Starsky asked after a moment.

She dropped her face into her hands, her elbows on the table, one resting on the picture of Malloy.

They let her hide for a while. She didn't seem to be crying. And when she raised her head again, her face was dry.

"You think I shot him."

"We don't think anything yet," Hutch said, "except that you haven't told us the same story as our other informant did."

She swallowed and Hutch knew they had her. "He, he said if we didn't pay him, we'd be sorry. He didn't really threaten, you know, not anything specific, but he stood over me, he was so big, and the way he smiled frightened me. He mentioned Elizabeth, and he mentioned Harry, and I, I paid him. I sold my car. But it was too much, and I couldn't pay, and anyway I felt so ashamed."

"Why didn't you talk to Captain Dobby then?" asked Starsky.

"I couldn't," she said and hid her face again.

Hutch, knowing she couldn't see him, shook his head, and Starsky raised his eyebrows in return.

"I didn't tell anybody, not even my brothers. Then I came in this morning, saw him there, and I thought, thank God. It's over."

Starsky's voice was low but firm. "It's not over."

"No." She looked past both of them, at where the window had been. "I know now."

"What about the drugs?" Hutch asked.

"I told you--" she stopped, then making a little face, went on, "Yes, okay, I told you I didn't know him, too. But I was telling the truth about the drugs."

"We're told drugs can be bought at this restaurant."

"I don't believe it. I don't know anything about it."

Hutch couldn't tell whether that was true or not.

She looked at her watch, and got halfway out of the chair. "I have to get Harry, he's waiting."

But as she spoke the last word they all heard a remote sound like a gunshot, and then, much closer, from the kitchen, a scream.

Starsky pushed the woman back into her chair while Hutch dashed to the door and stood next to it with his shoulders pressed against the wall, pulling his Magnum from its holster. By that time, Starsky was on the other side, his own gun drawn; they looked at each other across the brown padding of the swinging door. Fingers on triggers, barrels pointing up, both sets of lungs breathing fast and deep, both cops listened hard. Hutch heard excited voices, pitch and volume up and down, but could make out no words. Starsky's eyes held his as they had a hundred times, a thousand. Hutch smiled, and Starsky's teeth flashed, too.

Then Hutch hit the door a hard smack and Starsky dashed in low, Hutch leaping in behind him, another scream in his ears and a crash as at least two pots hit the floor. "Freeze! Police!"

The scream ended in a little choke. The only sound was the door swinging and a pot still rolling.

The restaurant staff were scattered around the room as if they'd dived for cover. Three, including Elizabeth Fan, were crouched behind the stainless steel island. Someone was in the corner next to the stove, head sheltered by the metal hood over the burners. Another person had jumped up onto the space where the clean dishes emerged from the washer and curled up in a ball. That was presumably where the pots had fallen from.

A man in white, a staff member with a drooping mustache that Hutch vaguely remembered from their arrival, was near the back door, clearly seconds from complete panic. His eyes were wide and he looked wildly around, the snub nose of his little pistol wavering from wall to counter to back door and back to the two policemen.

"Put down the gun," Hutch said, and the man replied loudly, vehemently, but in Chinese.

This was crazy. The Magnum was aimed right *at* the man. Starsky's gun must be on him, too, though Hutch couldn't spare the time to look. The strained voice went on incomprehensibly. "Somebody *tell* him," Starsky said. "Tell him to put it down."

No one spoke.

Hutch was drawing breath to try once more when he heard a voice behind him--Kay Fan's--in rapid fire nasal vowels and consonants, tones sliding up and down, and the man stared and answered, lowering the gun.

Ms. Fan spoke again. The other people in the room were beginning to relax a little.

The man's voice got louder, and he waved the gun some more. Everyone in Hutch's line of sight ducked, except Starsky, who rolled to the side and got to the end of the island. He grabbed the stew pot lying there. Hutch braced himself for the diversion he knew was only seconds away.

Ms. Fan stepped up beside Hutch, still talking: soothing, promising--anyone could tell that much.

The man shook his head, but stooped and put the gun onto the floor. Hutch threw himself forward, knocked the gun to one side, and grabbed the man, pushing him against the outer wall, spinning him to face it and getting him into position.

"What are you doing?" Kay Fan shouted, and the others began to clamor too.

"What does it look like he's doing?" Starsky would have picked up the gun, Hutch knew. Handcuffs pressed into Hutch's hand just as they were needed, and Starsky's voice went on, "Arresting a man who threatened--what is it, eight?--eight people with a gun. Could you translate his rights?"

"He's my cousin!"

"And?"

Hutch fastened the second cuff and looked at the confiscated gun, which Starsky was holding by the barrel, about six inches from Kay Fan's indignant face.

"Remember this? It's loaded. He was waving it everywhere. We're gonna take him down to Metro and find out why. Now are you gonna help us read him his rights?" After a moment, Starsky went on, "He has the right to remain silent." And waited.

Kay spoke in Chinese, but glared at him.

"If he gives up that right, anything he says can and will be used against him in a court of law."

She translated that too, and the rest of the Miranda rights. Then she said, still angry, "I'm calling Harold right now."

"Do that," said Starsky.

"We'll need to talk to you and Harry again," Hutch put in, figuring she couldn't get much angrier, so they might as well get it all over with. "Should we come back to the restaurant? Or wait until you get home?"

"Do you know when she *gets* home?" That was Elizabeth Fan, bristling with even more obvious anger than her sister's. "All day long she's been talking to cops! Don't you ever *stop*? Now you're going over to her place at midnight to badger her! Why not do something useful like get after whoever that was in the alley? You know, shooting? That's what set Li off, he thought they were coming to get him or something--"

Starsky was already outside.

Cold terror clawed Hutch's lungs and throat. Abandoning Li in the handcuffs, Hutch leapt after his partner, seeing nothing else as he burst into the alley and the door banged behind him.

Starsky was rising to his feet, having evidently used the Torino as cover before realizing the firing was over, looking farther down the alley. Hutch turned to see a man sitting on the ground, cuffed to the metal handle of the dumpster behind him. He was cursing, almost weeping, twisting his body and batting at a uniformed cop--Graham--who was kneeling beside him and holding onto the man's thigh. As the detectives approached, Hutch could see the blood on the corner of the dumpster, on Graham's hands, on the ground under the prisoner's leg. A handgun lay on the ground about three feet away.

Hutch picked up the gun, feeling he'd seen way too many of them lying around loose lately.

"Interesting litter they got around here," said Starsky.

Hutch stood over the two men on the ground. "Hi, Graham. Where's your partner?"

"Getting the squad car. Calling the ambulance." Graham didn't look up. The man on the ground bucked again and Graham's hands slipped, letting a gush of blood out onto the already-soaked material of the man's trousers.

Grasping the injured man's shoulder, Hutch said, "You need to sit still. I know it hurts, but you'll bleed to death if the wound isn't kept closed."

"Fuck off, motherfucking pig!"

Starsky, crouching next to Graham, looked ruefully up at Hutch. "People used to say we didn't look like cops."

"You don't," said Graham curtly.

"It's the company we're keeping," Hutch said. His voice sounded hollow to his own ears. They were in an alley, not the Metro parking garage. The blood smell stung his nostrils, hot and metallic, but it had been worse that morning in the restaurant. Looking down at Starsky was the trigger, was giving him this choking, terrified feeling. Even though what he felt now was only a shadow of the flashbacks that had ruined his sleep for months, he stepped back and muttered something about kitchen, prisoner, Torino, and got out of there. Nothing he could do anyway.

Back at Metro, Dobe told them tomorrow was soon enough to bother Kay and Harry Fan, and by that time Hutch was so blind tired that his first feeling was gratitude.

With maddening difficulty, they'd tracked down a Chinese-speaking officer to translate and interrogated Li Fan; they'd talked to Lem Feldgruber and assigned him the Martinezes to interview the next day; they'd gone over the information Graham and Howarth had collected before they'd run into the B and E in the alley. That confrontation had begun completely by chance, as the man had been burgling a store next to the residence where the two cops were asking questions. They'd heard the glass break, had run out, and the thief had tried to escape via the alley, pulling a gun when the cops followed him. Since the squad car had been parked large as life on the street the whole time, Starsky maintained the thief belonged in one of those stupid criminal tricks lists. Hutch was too tired even to tell him to shut up when he made the same joke for the third time. But then, looking at his partner, he saw the dark smudges under his eyes and knew Starsky was near the end of his rope, too.

It was nearly seven o'clock. Hutch sat in the Torino and tried to crack his neck, flex his shoulders, feel not quite so old. Starsky got stiffly into the car.

"You okay?" Hutch asked by reflex.

"No."

A year ago that would have been a trivial remark.

"What's wrong?"

"What do you *think*?" Starsky snapped. "I'm stiff and sore and it's four hours later than we usually get off, and that used to be *nothin'* and now it's not!" He started the car and pulled out into traffic. Then he changed lanes too quickly--the car behind them honked--and looking in the rear-view mirror, swore under his breath.

They drove another block. Hutch cracked the knuckles in his right hand and then flexed it, looking at how the tendons moved.

"Let's get a pizza and celebrate," he said at last.

"Celebrate?"

"You just feel *normally* shitty. Just like I do."

Starsky checked his blind spot, unnecessarily, and Hutch knew he wasn't ready to smile yet.

"Plus I'm not cooking. And neither are you."

After a few more car lengths, Starsky said, "I knew there was a reason you called yourself the brains of this outfit."

"Sweet-talker."

But it was Starsky's idea that they go to The Pits for their pizza.

Huggy had a few more restaurants to add to the dealing list, and asked curiously after the Silver Fan case.

"Watch out," Hutch said, rather sourly, because he'd wanted to relax. "You're in danger of earning a

consultant's fee."

"Been years since you paid me. By the time I present my accounts, Hutch, my man, it'll be half the BCPD budget. So Li Fan was the doorman? He was right, you know, it was his turn to fall. Think he took down Malloy instead?"

"I don't know how he even talked to Malloy," Hutch said, remembering the glacial pace of the interrogation.

Huggy said, "Oh, I'm sure he knows more English than he's letting on."

"Yeah, but that's not saying much." Starsky rubbed his eyes.

"Beddy-bye, Detective." Huggy turned to Hutch. "Take this sleepyhead home and tuck him in."

"When did he get so bossy?" Hutch said after their friend had taken the remains of the pizza away to wrap.

"Dunno. Wasn't lookin'. Not to mention, sometimes he sounds like he knows *every* thing we do. What was that stuff about tuckin' me in?"

Hutch looked at his weary partner and smiled in spite of his own fatigue. "You look like you need it. And I'd be glad to. Want a teddy bear? Warm milk?"

"Knowing you, there'd be some of that liver powder in the milk. And no, I don't need a teddy bear." He leaned closer, one hand on Hutch's leg. "I've got something better."

"You *are* something better." But Hutch thought, oddly and poignantly, of Ollie.

A blow woke him, and he grunted with the impact although it wasn't really hard. "Starsky?"

The body beside him in bed thrashed again, and a foot struck his leg, a hand moved in the air. "Nuh," came Starsky's muffled voice.

Fast asleep. Hutch rubbed the nearest bit of his lover's body, expecting him to settle down. He could feel the incision under his hand, and he palmed it gently, but Starsky writhed and then turned on his side, facing away. "Mnuh gh."

Hutch smiled a little at the dream language and laid one hand between the sharp shoulderblades. "Too thin," he murmured. "Still." The heel of his hand ran down the knobby spine; his arm slid around his partner's waist, pulling them closer together.

"Dun," said Starsky more clearly, rocking away, breathing harder.

Hutch got up on his elbow and peered down. The face beneath him was working, though sluggishly. The mouth parted in a grimace; the brows lowered.

"Ah--" The pain in Starsky's voice pierced the dark, and so did the gasp that followed.

Sitting up, Hutch eased the sleeping man onto his back gently, both palms on the warm skin. "Starsky. Starsky, wake up. Come on, babe, come back to me," even as he wondered why he was doing this, and why he chose those words. Come back to me?

He stroked the stubbled jaw, the hard ribs. Bending lower, he moved one knee between Starsky's for

balance. The dark eyes blinked, opened, bleary and unhappy, the expression obvious even in such limited light. "Starsky," said Hutch desperately.

"No," Starsky said, squirming, struggling, "Not now, not now!"

Hutch knelt up, then backed off the end of the bed, stumbling a little and bracing himself with both hands on the mattress. It was a ludicrous movement but nothing was funny about it just now. "What, what," he said, helplessly, "Wh-- God damn it! What's going on, what's this *about*--" He stood up. Starsky didn't answer, up on both elbows now, just staring. Hutch tried to believe this was a nightmare of his, that he was going to wake up and it would just be a normal night, himself wrapped around Starsky or the other way around.

After a few seconds, Starsky dropped flat on his back again, staring at the ceiling now, mouth tightly shut.

Eventually Hutch turned and left the bedroom.

They were at Starsky's tonight. Hutch had a robe here somewhere but he was still sleepy enough to feel that navigating around the furniture was hard enough without looking for anything specific.

It would have been nice to feel the night air all over, and he walked to the French doors, but chickened out at the last moment. A headlight from the road would catch him, and not only was he naked, he was the *wrong* naked man to be on the deck. He stared out the square glass panes of the doors and rubbed his chest absently. Thought about air, traffic--there was a car, passing now, the headlights flaring and dipping--time. He couldn't read the kitchen clock. It could have been any time after the last light died, before the first pre-dawn glow.

Damn, it hurt. He hurt. It was literal, a tightness in his chest, and he couldn't tell whether it was more like something swelling tumor-like inside or something crushing from outside. He was too tired, too defenseless, couldn't explain what he needed or make Starsky talk or....his forehead was against the door. His stomach hurt, maybe because one fist was pushed into it so hard. He moved that hand, uncurled it, placed it against the glass.

"Hutch."

The word was spoken so softly and so near that he felt the puff on his skin, near the shoulder, more than heard the voice. He closed his eyes tighter. Then told himself to be a man, not to sulk, especially when nothing had been fucking *wrong* when they went to sleep. So he turned, and Starsky's hand settled at his waist, rubbed a little. The dimmest of light fell from the door onto the tan skin, but the darkness of those eyes swallowed it.

The touch of Starsky's hands was as soft as the darkness, as tentative and gentle as if he feared Hutch would pull away. Both hands were in Hutch's hair; lips touched between his eyebrows. Starsky murmured, "Come back to bed."

Hutch didn't budge. "What just happened? What the *hell* was that?"

Starsky sighed. "Come on. I'll tell you."

It still felt surreal as they lay down, Hutch on his back and Starsky draped around him, heads on one pillow. They held each other for a while in silence. Hutch tried to relax, and did yawn, but didn't think he could sleep.

"Isn't this ever...*strange* to you?" Starsky said at last.

He had to tell the truth, to match the honesty of their skins pressing together. "No. It's like, it's what--" if

only the truth were as easy to say as to feel-- "I've always needed this." He reached with his empty hand, filled it with Starsky's skin, the curve of his shoulder. "Walking away from this bed when you were in it, that was so strange I couldn't even *think...I....*" He swallowed and was silent.

"I love you," said Starsky. "Really. I love *us*, I've loved everything, the sex. I just, sometimes, I wake up and I'm, I don't understand it but I'm just *sad*. It's not you. Swear it."

"What do you dream about?" Hutch couldn't keep from asking but didn't really think he'd get an answer.

"I don't remember." A long pause. Starsky seemed to grow heavier, warmer, as he got closer to sleep. He yawned, and so did Hutch. "Somebody...doesn't matter. Love you."

Somebody. Hutch lay still, and despite the blanket of Starsky's body, felt cold.

Up early the next morning after sleeping very little, Hutch felt on edge, as if a word would snap his temper or make him jump. He got out of the shower and put a towel over his head, rubbing briskly, with short jerky movements that didn't make him feel any calmer but at least kept him awake. And when a warm hand settled on his back, he was not startled, after all.

"Move over, babe," Starsky said, and squeezed past into the shower, patting Hutch's butt as he went.

As they drove up to the Fans' house, a bungalow only a little bigger than the one Hutch had once lived in, they saw Dobey's car on the street. Starsky pulled the Torino up behind it.

"Tell me why we couldn't just sleep in, if he was gonna be here," Starsky said as they walked up to the front door.

Hutch thought of two comebacks and part of a third, but none of them were things he wanted to be caught saying on the doorstep. So he shrugged and rang the bell.

Dobey opened it. "Get in here."

Starsky, irrepressible as ever, slid through the half-open door and said, "Didn't know you'd be helpin' us out, Cap'. *Good* morning."

Dobey gave him the kind of look they usually saw in his office when he was between them and the Commissioner or IA. The one that said that he knew this situation wasn't their fault, but was perfectly willing to yell at them anyway to let off a little steam.

So Hutch just smiled sweetly, said, "Good morning, Captain," and worked his way through the little foyer area, around Dobey's considerable bulk. The last thing Dobey looked like to Hutch, right now, was someone's romantic fantasy.

The living room seemed miniature, perhaps because the sofa had a low back, the pictures were hung lower on the wall than Hutch expected, and the Fans themselves were small. Hutch noticed with amusement that Starsky looked taller than usual as he greeted Ms. Fan in front of a coffee table no higher than his shin.

Kay Fan looked past Hutch to Dobey and smiled. It wasn't a very emotional expression, but Hutch recognized the impulse to find one person no matter how many others the room held.

"I've been here about a quarter-hour," Dobey began, and Starsky immediately interrupted, as if to be sure to keep everything moving normally.

"Then you've got the statement, right? Nothing for us to do but chat," and he turned his most charming smile on Kay Fan.

She was as unaffected by it in her own living room as she had been in the restaurant. "He persuaded Harry to...tell me some things he should have told me before," she said, which explained why Harry was looking hunched and unhappy, sitting at one end of the couch.

As the others found places to sit elsewhere, Hutch moved over beside the boy, said, "May I?" and sat without really waiting for a reply. Harry looked at him warily. Hutch wasn't surprised: yesterday's idea that Harry could tell things to the police safely, and that his mother would never find out, had been effectively destroyed this morning.

"Was there anything we didn't already know?" he asked with a smile.

Harry said nothing, unappeased.

Dobey answered: "There were a few things not in the reports. *If* the reports were complete. There was a thing or two you apparently told Harry that wasn't in your official version."

"Cap'n, as an informant--" Starsky tried.

"As a *minor*," Dobey said. "Do you have any idea what an opposing attorney could make of--"

"Harry's not going to *court*!" Harry's mother was horrified.

"I hope not," Hutch said, and then turned back to the boy. "Wouldn't you rather speak for yourself?"

Obviously, Harry would. "I, um, told you I'd seen that guy before, you know? But not where?"

"Yeah." Hutch tried to keep it casual.

"Well, it was," Harry squirmed a little in his seat like a much younger child, "while I was out. One night, after school."

"Was anyone with you?" Hutch was hoping for an adult witness.

This, by the whites of his eyes, was not the question Harry expected.

"Who?" Hutch insisted.

"This, uh, lady."

Hutch bit his lip, didn't dare look at Starsky, or any of the other adults for that matter. Had to hand it to the kid, though--no working girl would have given Hutch the time of day at Harry's age.

"Can you give us a description?" he managed to ask. "Or a name?"

"She's sorta tall. Blonde hair, really really blonde, you know, it lights up."

Starsky was looking at Hutch, a slight curve to his mouth that said he'd been distracted from witness description for a moment. Hutch frowned at him. He shrugged.

Harry went on, "She's thin, just so pretty. And her voice is, like, nice. Soft. I didn't think, I mean nobody would--" and he stopped, on thin ice.

"Okay," Hutch said. "Did she ever tell you her name?"

"She was just nice to me," Harry said doubtfully. "She told me to go home to my mom and stay out of the way of people who were gonna, like, try to get me hooked or something--and that's when she pointed out that guy, the dead guy. She really had a thing about him. When he left the restaurant, she was, like, following him. And then she told me to go home again, and I did." He looked at his mother under his lashes. Hutch thought she was not so much angry as trying to assimilate this picture of her son with a prostitute, even one with a stereotypical heart of gold. Anyway, she didn't say anything, and it was left to Starsky to break the silence.

"You didn't answer Hutch's question, about the name. Mean to tell me you had this long talk, and she never told you her name?"

Harry's mouth was ajar for most of this speech. He looked shocked, which was so strange that Hutch had no idea how to react either.

"He," and now the boy was looking at Dobby, "he called him Hutch."

"So do I," said Dobby. "So do a lot of people. Short for Hutchinson. It's his name, son."

"But *she* talked about Hutch. I couldn't, like, understand all of it, she kind of mumbled sometimes and I didn't want to ask, she seemed upset and I--"

Starsky was leaning forward now, elbows on his knees, no humor left in his face. "Name. Tell us her name."

"Jeanie."

Hutch rubbed his face. Again.

When he lowered his hands, nothing had changed.

"This is really freaking you out, isn't it?" asked Starsky, driving.

"Well, gee, Starsk, I wonder why? A woman I haven't thought of for years, suddenly pops up in the middle of a murder investigation, saying my name?"

"A woman you were in love with." Starsky's voice was quiet. "Let's not forget that part."

"Forget?" Hutch was ready to say something scathing about strings tied to fingers, or notes in his diary, but then, like an echo, he heard *how* Starsky had spoken and the fight drained out of him. He sighed. "No," he said. "I'm not forgetting it, but I think you're...." He didn't know quite how to put it.

"I'm what?"

It wasn't jealousy, not exactly; Hutch knew that, so he didn't want to say the word. Mostly pity, he suspected. And a little of whatever it was that had made him feel so shut out in the cemetery. "I went out with her, Starsky. Longer than a lot of girls, and of course the fact she was a fugitive and needed my protection made a difference. And," a breath, surprising himself, as if he'd lost track of his own need for air, "there's nothing about that, that whole time, that I could ever forget. But if you think I'm still thinking about Jeanie, feeling for Jeanie--"

"Feelings don't turn off that easy. And yours are strong. Look at how you were when Van came back."

"This isn't like that."

"God, I hope not." And now for the first time since the bombshell burst, Starsky's mouth relaxed and he almost smiled.

Hutch shook his head, feeling irrationally better himself. "I went out with Jeanie, I didn't marry her. Wouldn't have, ever. And now, Starsk, now I'm taken."

Now there was definitely a smile on the long mouth. "Yeah."

Hutch reached over, touched just at the corner of the smile. "I'd like to start this day all over again."

Starsky turned his head, took the fingertip into his mouth and as quickly, released it. "And not as early."

"Not to work as early."

"Not to work at all, if I had my druthers."

It was a nice fantasy. Hutch could see them there, in Starsky's bed, as the sun began to fall across the foot, and then moved higher...sun on Starsky's bare skin, in his hair...but he mentally shook himself. There were a few other things they needed to think about. "We have to find her."

Starsky nodded. "She needs an alibi bad, that's for sure."

They spent most of the rest of the day looking fruitlessly. A waitress and one of the regular customers remembered Harry and Jeanie at the restaurant, a sleazy bar and grill that was a surprising addition to the list of coke distribution sites. "Narco is gonna love us," Hutch said as they left the place, but it was little comfort during the hours they looked in hotels, strip joints, bars, brothels, all over Porn Row and the surrounding neighborhood, and couldn't find another trace of Jeanie Walden. Huggy had no ideas. Their other informants didn't seem to know anything, though a few of them recognized Malloy.

"Kind'a guy that has a big crowd at the funeral," Starsky said thoughtfully. They'd just gotten back into the car after another snitch grimaced at Malloy's photograph and stared blankly at Jeanie's.

"Why d'you think so?"

"Cause a lot of people want to make sure he goes into the ground."

Hutch snorted, which was probably the effect Starsky was looking for.

They had parked at a corner, next to a vacant lot where Elijah sometimes preached, but he wasn't there today. When they got to the vagrants-and-dumpster-divers level of informant, they were nearly done. Anyway, the shadows of the wire fence were falling onto the Torino's dashboard, far enough to make Hutch say, "What time is it? Gotta be after two?"

"Not yet," Starsky told him. "One-forty."

"Close enough for jazz. Let's head back to Metro, see what Lem and the two Aryan-Nation-boys found."

"Okay." As they made their way through the increasing traffic, Starsky asked, "And when we find her? If she doesn't have an alibi?"

"Starsk, she couldn't have--for God's sake, you remember her. She was so, she just, just, couldn't."

Starsky's voice had fallen low; Hutch felt the stakes had abruptly soared. "It's a long time ago, Hutch. When you knew her."

That was undeniable, so Hutch didn't try. Starsky bit his lip, leaned forward and changed lanes at speed. As the Torino leapt into a space in the next lane, Hutch braced himself against the dash. "Careful, careful!"

"Always."

"Never," Hutch corrected.

Lem had gotten much more out of the Martinezes. In light of this evident gift for interrogation, Hutch found himself with new respect for the younger officer, though Lem almost lost those points immediately for the attitude he put on. "All you have to do is keep pushing," he said to Hutch.

"It wasn't a problem when they switched to Spanish?" Hutch knew Lem didn't speak it.

"I just kept asking them to speak English again. If the subjects want to cooperate, they'll oblige," Lem said, smug.

He had, in fact, gotten Luz Martinez to admit she'd seen Malloy. Interviewing Jorge and some of the other staff, he'd also pulled together a good deal of information about the dealing at the Fiesta. So Hutch wasn't in a position to put the uppity kid in his place. He just *wanted* to.

Graham and Howarth had located a neighbor who'd heard the window of the Silver Fan being broken; always providing that had been the point of entry, the break-in was fixed at about 2:45 AM. The neighbor--an elderly woman who said she had such terrible insomnia that she never slept again after being woken--claimed not to have heard the shot, but perhaps she was exaggerating about the insomnia. There was certainly no doubt there had *been* a shot.

Hutch typed up reports, and Starsky filed them. Exactly at three o'clock, Hutch grabbed his own jacket and Starsky's from the backs of their chairs, and dropped Starsky's over his head as he stood at the filing cabinet.

Flores, on the other side of the squadroom reading a file over Lizzie's shoulder and drinking a cup of coffee, started to laugh. "Don't let the door hit you on the way out."

Hutch responded in Spanish, and Flores laughed harder.

"What?" asked Lizzie, and Starsky echoed, "What?" as he turned, pulling the jacket off.

"No," said Flores, "I'd rather not give you ideas. Either of you."

Starsky scowled impartially at all three of them. "I'm gonna learn...*Chinese*. For the insults."

"Good idea," said Hutch, opening the door. "Then next time we won't wait an hour and a half for an interpreter."

"If the subjects want to cooperate, Hutch--" Starsky took the door from his hand and gestured him through it.

"--they'll bend over the table and drop their pants," Hutch muttered as they went down the hall.

Starsky chuckled, the rich sound that meant he was both amused and surprised. On the other side of the double doors, starting down the stairs, he asked with patently false innocence, "Should I be looking for you to do that?"

Hutch rolled his eyes, which Starsky might not even have seen³³; perhaps why he chuckled again as he got into the car, the sound even sexier now.

"What?" asked Hutch.

"Oh," and Starsky looked slightly embarrassed, maybe even flushed, "just thinkin'."

"Don't hurt yourself," Hutch said automatically. But Starsky still had a half-smile on his face, and he licked his lips as he started the car. "About what?"

With a sidelong glance, Starsky said, "I'm picturing you in one of the interrogation rooms. Ready to cooperate."

Hutch tried imagining it as the car pulled out. His stomach, chest, and cheek would be against the flat, cool formica; his hands would grasp the edges. The rooms could feel cold, but were sometimes stiflingly close and hot. They always smelled of cigarette smoke. The air would strike his naked ass, feather across it as Starsky moved behind him. Warm, damp hands would settle on his skin, spreading him...Hutch took a deep breath and shifted on the car seat.

Looking out the side window, he changed the perspective and pictured Starsky in the harsh light, against the scratched formica, with his pants around his knees. That sent a surge all through Hutch's body.

"Yeah?" said Starsky.

Hutch had to clear his throat before he could speak. "It's sexier with you," he said.

Starsky reached over, put a hand on Hutch's thigh and held on tight for a moment, then rubbed circles with the palm.

They were getting to the point where they'd have to turn one way for the expressway or another for the shortest way to Venice. "Your place or mine?" Starsky asked.

They ought to spend a night or two apart, Hutch thought. If Dobey had to call again and *again* couldn't find one of them at home...but Hutch didn't want to be alone. He wanted Starsky and knew Starsky wanted him. "My place. Then at least we can take separate cars in the morning."

"I am not thinkin' about tomorrow morning until it gets here," Starsky said firmly.

Morning seemed a long way off, now, while moonlight fell with ridiculous romanticism through the skylight and glanced from every leaf in the greenhouse. They lay on the cushions from the couch and the chenille bedspread Hutch rarely used, and it was lumpy but better than the bare floor. Hutch bent over Starsky, tasting the skin of his neck and chest like a connoisseur: a kiss under the ear where Hutch took a breath of Starsky's hair and aftershave; a kiss where the blood beat so strongly in the big carotid; a kiss on the hard curve of muscle at the shoulder, cooler and more salt; a kiss on the slim, rigid collarbone, and a nip for good measure because the bone seemed to beg for it. Starsky's breath puffed, too lightly to count as laughter, too easily to be startlement. Hutch raised his head and looked into his lover's eyes.

Starsky grasped one arm and ran the fingers of the other hand through Hutch's hair as it hung halfway down his cheek. "The moon's lighting you up," Starsky said.

Hutch kissed his nose. "See any stars?"

"Not with a kiss like that."

Hutch bumped his forehead into Starsky's.

"Oh," and Starsky didn't sound remotely credible in his surprise, "you meant in the sky!"

Hutch kissed the impudent mouth, and Starsky pulled them together so tightly that Hutch felt he was sinking into the body beneath him. Becoming Starsky. The smell of sandalwood, the texture of stubble and firm muscle, the drag and give of his skin, like silk. Starsky's hair smelled sweet as the plants around them, his sweat was fresh-baked as new bread. Hutch felt as if he were spinning, a change in gravity, the cushions giving against his side and then his back. Starsky, now on top, broke the kiss and braced himself on his elbows, hands framing Hutch's head.

"Now I see stars," he said. "They fell down here." And there was a kiss, and there, and there, as Starsky made his own oral journey over Hutch's face, neck, and chest.

Looking up, breathing through his mouth, Hutch watched the ring of cloud around the moon give and shift, banks of soft fluff moving over the dark expanse of the sky. He thought he saw Venus, or maybe Jupiter, and another planet lower down, but no actual stars.

Starsky's beard-stubble rasped across his nipple twice, back and forth, and then a third time, on the edge of pain. Hutch pulled up on Starsky's shoulders and saw his silhouette against the dim movements in the sky, then tugged him down to map the shadowed curves of ribs and whorls of chest hair like nebulae. Licked a scar. Starsky sat up, rubbing the wet spot.

Letting that argument go without speech, Hutch found the furry thighs that straddled him and kneaded up their backs, wriggled as Starsky knelt up higher. Now his knees were in Hutch's armpits and his calves the length of Hutch's ribs.

"What're you doing?" Starsky asked.

"Fuck my mouth," Hutch said.

Actually, they had to rearrange the cushions and their bodies, a little, but in a minute or two Hutch had his arms around the warm thighs again, and Starsky bent over and braced himself while Hutch took heat and salt, wetness and width, between his lips and rubbed it with the flat of his tongue.

"Okay," Starsky said in a thin, hoarse voice. He pressed in slowly, and Hutch hummed his acceptance, pushing on the hips in his hands. Then Starsky pulled back, and thrust forward again, still tentative. The bulk pressing against Hutch's soft palate felt dangerous, but the moving hips between his hands felt safe. His mouth watered; he sucked harder; Starsky moaned and began to pump more rhythmically.

Hutch's head bounced a little in the cushions, and he felt the nudge against the portal of his throat with every thrust. But Hutch knew just where each rocking motion was going, guided it. And Starsky was filling his mouth, dancing against the night sky, eclipsing the moon again and again as he watched entranced.

Nothing else in the world, he would have said if he could speak. *No one else*. Starsky was the air he was breathing, the movement of the blood in his veins, the heartbeat, faster now, a rising storm. The clouds were blowing back from the moon. "Oh!" and Starsky was coming, jetting down his throat, rebounding around his tongue and teeth. Hutch sucked and swallowed, his eyes shut despite himself, the sensation sweeping through him.

Starsky withdrew, shaking, and lay down, half on Hutch and half in the cushions. He petted Hutch's hair, and they lay breathing unsteadily together, one coming down from orgasm and the other still going up.

A hand found Hutch's cock, cupped it against a warm furry thigh, and Hutch moved in and out of this tunnel of his lover's flesh. The truth was that any part of their bodies would do, as long as they were together. Any touch was erotic. Anything they made was love. Hutch kissed skin but had stopped caring where, only realized it was throat when he felt the strong thrum of his own name there, heard "Hutch, come on, Hutch," and the sound was so needy that it tipped him over the edge. He made a sound like Starsky's dream language and felt himself pumping, releasing. Fell, it seemed, all the way from the clouds to the cushions under the skylight, into Starsky's arms.

Breathing was their only movement after that. They held on hard and did not speak.

Hutch didn't know he had fallen asleep until he woke. And then it was a shattering, heart-stopping shock that woke him, a noise he had been too fast asleep to consciously hear but which echoed in his nerves and muscles. Starsky was awake too, and they clutched each other and panted, pulses racing but not, this time, with lust.

There was a crash and thump, startling them again.

"Downstairs," Hutch said, and let go of his partner, rolling over and getting to his feet. Starsky was up, too. They spent a second or two looking for their clothes in the dark and then Hutch ran for his bedroom, giving it up, though he saw the sudden glow that meant Starsky had turned on the light behind him.

The nearest drawer held sweatpants and he pulled a pair on, stepped into loafers, went for the closet and his holster.

"Shirt?" asked Starsky, but Hutch shook his head, pulling down his leather jacket instead.

Starsky was on the couch by this time, wrestling with a shoelace.

"Call it in. I'm going down," Hutch said.

"Wait, we'll both--"

"No."

"Dammit!"

But Hutch was already on the stairs. There was a narrow passage at the foot of the staircase that led to the back of the building, and he slipped into it, surefooted--eased the back door open and slipped out. The restaurant should have been shut up and dark for hours now, but the kitchen door was ajar and light seeped through it, puddling on the ground.

Hutch sidled up to the line of light, drew his gun, and placed a tentative hand on the edge of the door--listening, barely breathing. When he couldn't hear even the rustle of cloth or footsteps, he slowly pushed the wood under his hand, looked, then stepped through the opening.

The Chez Ha33;la33;ne kitchen was less industrial looking than the one in the Silver Fan. Though there was enough stainless steel to throw a harsh light everywhere, there was also a black iron circle suspended from the ceiling where a set of copper-bottomed pans hung; another rack on the wall held cast-iron skillets. Hutch glimpsed a pale marble slab and a mortar and pestle, but paid them little mind--there was no perp here, no one at all but himself casting reflections in the scratched steel, so he crossed quickly to the swinging door.

Something bumped in the dining room. Not too close. Hutch shouted "Police! Freeze!" and burst through

the door.

The first thing he noticed wasn't alive--it was the mirror that hung on the wall under his staircase, a huge thing with gilt paint spidered across it to match the vines on the wallpaper. At least, it had looked like that. Now it was in about a million pieces, a few big jagged ones still on the wall and smaller ones blasted everywhere he looked, across dark carpet and cream tablecloths and even glinting from the little gold wall lamps and shelves, like an especially cruel snow.

And then he saw a swing of hair nearly as bright, the flash from the barrel of a gun as it was raised between them, the pale round of a face he'd dreamed of, remembered, could hardly believe was really here. Jeanie.

With the hand that wasn't holding the gun, she reached up and tucked a long, loose strand behind her ear, a gesture he'd seen so often that it was almost comforting. "Jeanie," he said, and saw the whites of her eyes and her teeth. Something like a smile.

"Hutch. Don't be afraid," she said, and then he was.

The gun was still aimed at him. His own was aimed at her. Still, he didn't fool himself that he had the advantage. Her eyes were wild and dark, a look he had never seen from her but had from so many people over the years that he could almost tell what she'd taken and how long ago. Not that it mattered.

What mattered was that she was up where he could only reach her if he were lucky and didn't make any mistakes, and that Starsky was getting back-up and would charge down here at any moment. "Jeanie," he repeated, "why are you here?"

"I said I'd come back," she said, her voice just as sweet and childlike as ever. "No. I said I wouldn't come back. Didn't I? And you said you wouldn't look for me. You kept your promise."

"Why?"

"Why...I guess," and, alarmingly, she gave a little sob, "you didn't really *want* to find me. So you didn't look. I'm sorry, Hutch," and she wrapped her free arm around her body, "sorry I'm back."

"I meant why did you come into the restaurant here," Hutch said gently.

"I've been looking for where you live."

This was not good news. "L-looking for me?" he asked, and silently cursed his lagging tongue. "Do you want to talk to me?"

"No," she said, "but I wanted to know where you lived, where I could see you, where you went and shopped for groceries and did laundry. I saw you running in the morning. And I saw you bringing home a bag of stuff. And I saw you...and I didn't see you a lot, Hutch. You're not here very much. I looked for where you went but I couldn't find you."

Hutch didn't know how to reply to this. His gaze slid a little, and he registered the shards of mirror again. Looked back at the gun, which hadn't budged. "Did you break the mirror?"

"This is a bad place," she told him.

"Why is it bad?"

There was a lengthy pause. She was very slightly frowning, as if the light were too bright or too dim, or as if she were thinking hard about something.

Hutch tried, "Was the Silver Fan a bad place, too?"

She looked around at the scattered points of light. "The stuff on the back of a mirror isn't really silver," she said. "But I think those lines on the front were really gold. Don't you?"

"I don't know," he said.

"Yes, you do," and her voice was cross.

He certainly hadn't meant to irritate her. But he didn't want to talk about the mirror, either.

While he was still hesitating, she said, sternly, "This is your restaurant. It's in your building. Why did you let it get bad?"

"Bad?"

"Hu-utch," she said, with the little whine that he'd once found endearing. "You're not still doing it, are you? Show me." She lifted the gun. "*Show me.*"

He realized she meant heroin. "No, Jeanie," he said, "look, I'm not," fumbling, trying to unsnap the right cuff of his jacket without losing his aim with the Magnum. He meant to push up the sleeve.

"Take it off." She was squinting into the gun sights.

So he reached over, slowly, put his gun on the nearest table, and unzipped the jacket. Now all he had on above the waist was his holster, and the butt of the Magnum was only barely within reach. He turned both arms to show her the unmarked skin inside his elbows.

She came closer to look, bending her head. But she was still too far away to rush with the gun in that position. Hutch wondered where Starsky was, which way he'd come in.

"It could be something else, though," Jeanie said, straightening up and staring him in the eye. He remembered how pale and pretty her eyes were, like art glass--he'd spent a long time looking into them and seeing the little facets and shifts in their color--but now they were red-rimmed and the pupil was almost all he could see. "There are a lot of other things."

Like whatever it was she'd taken. Probably cocaine, he thought. She didn't seem to be hallucinating, and her movements were abrupt, her muscles tense. A small one at her jaw was jumping. Her lips moved unsteadily when she wasn't speaking.

"Ben," she stopped and breathed through her mouth, eyes round with distress, then went on, "Ben gave me lots of things."

Hutch could believe it, and it made him angry at Forest all over again. "Ben's not here," he started, but it was the wrong move.

"I know that!" she snapped. "Of course I know that! There's nobody here. I planned it that way." She looked around the room, and the gun sagged in her hand. When she was facing the front window, she said, "It was Fred, Fred who--" and her mouth trembled. So did her hands. Hutch reached over, a smooth, silent movement, and snagged his own gun from the table top. "It was Fred. I had to."

When she turned back, Hutch had his gun up, braced in both hands, his feet apart. "Jeanie, put your gun down," he said. The Magnum's muzzle was less than a yard from her body.

She gaped at him. "Hutch?"

He didn't want to fire. She didn't seem to know what was going on at all. "Jeanie! Put it down!"

There was a movement behind him, and Starsky said, as loudly and cheerfully as if he were meeting her for the first time in The Pits, "Well, look who's here! Hey, Jeanie, you're back in town!" From the sounds, he was moving rapidly to one side, and she turned her head to track him.

Hutch leapt forward and took her gun, throwing it across the room and grabbing her now-struggling body in one arm. The relief made him weak in the knees, but he just held on and waited for Starsky's help.

"Forgot your cuffs again?" But Starsky was pulling his own out.

"Wanted to leave something for you to do."

Jeanie was crying, sobbing hard, and still trying to talk. "B-Buh--" She clung to Hutch's arms, twisted her shoulders as Starsky pulled back on one wrist to cuff her. "Huh-- I, I had-- I *had* to." When both hands were cuffed she just lay against Hutch's body, rubbing her face into the hollow under his shoulder. Her tears smeared on his skin. She wailed, "Help me! Hu-u-utch!"

He braced her shoulders and glared unreasonably at Starsky. "Where's that fucking back-up? And what the hell took you so long?"

"Tried the front door. Figured breaking it in'd be *too* much of a distraction. Went round the back."

Hutch nodded. He thought of apologizing for his tone, but something else occurred to him, so he went on instead, "You've just gotten here, so where's the Torino?"

Starsky nodded. "I'll move it." He patted Hutch's shoulder, the one not under Jeanie's head. "We're good to go, Blintz."

And they mostly were. Hutch could hear the Torino pull up, then sit idling until the sirens came close, then stopped. Starsky's voice called out and other voices answered, mingling with his; that would be the revised version of the night's events. When the uniformed cops came in to get Jeanie and look at the damage, Hutch went back upstairs to get a shirt. He found the cushions had been tossed approximately back on the couch, and the chenille bedspread was twisted up in a ball on the floor of his closet. Before he went downstairs, he straightened the cushions. He expected to go back up to answer questions, but as he emerged from the street door, Jeanie was making a sound like a small child trapped in a nightmare, a hopeless moan that brought up the hair on the back of his neck. "I'll ride with her," Hutch told Juarez, who'd been trying to get her into the back seat of the squad car, "and we can do the paperwork."

"See you at Metro," Starsky called, and got into his car.

Jeanie pressed herself against Hutch until he finally pulled her onto his lap and held her while she murmured his name, "Help me," and fragments about Malloy, Forest, mirrors, Harry Fan.... He stopped listening. When she came down they might be able to get a coherent story out of her. He held the shuddering body closer, thinking of the detox cells, but what alternative was there?

None he could think of. Nothing he could do.

When he got into the Torino about an hour later, he put his head on the back of the seat and closed his eyes, then felt a light touch on his hair. "Tough night, Blondie."

"Worse to come," he answered without looking.

"We'll go to my place and get some shuteye. I left a message for Dobby."

Hutch's mouth curved, though his eyes were still shut. He knew Starsky would see. "Pal."

"Always."

Dobby called them into his office and told them sit down. "Li Fan wants to make another statement."

Hutch rubbed his eyes wearily at the thought.

"When's Cheng coming?" asked Starsky, referring to the officer from Second Precinct who had interpreted for them the last time.

"He's not," Dobby said. "Ms. Fan is coming in with him, and she'll translate."

"Did y-- um," Hutch caught himself, tried again with a little tact, "is Legal okay with that?"

With some irony, Dobby said, "Yes, Hutchinson, our legal department has been apprised. We'll have this statement on tape in case we need to refer to it, and when Mr. Fan testifies, he'll have a court-appointed translator. Do you approve?"

"Sorry. Yes. When will Li be here?"

"Now that you two have decided to drop in, I'll call her, and they'll get here as soon as they can."

Dobby seemed much more relaxed about Kay Fan now. That surprised Hutch a little, and he wondered why, but none of it was his business, past or present.

He had questions that were far more urgent, both personally and professionally. Li Fan might have some of those answers.

When he saw the man again, standing next to the chair in an interrogation room, he was surprised because Li held out his hand, his head tucked down a little, and waited until Hutch shook it, and then Starsky did too. "Apo'gies for past lewdness," Li said--or, no, he couldn't mean that. Kay Fan looked irritated and opened her mouth; Hutch abruptly understood.

"It's all right," he said. 'Rudeness' wasn't how he would have described it anyway.

"I speak some Engr-- English. I was frighten."

Hutch told him, "We want you to speak freely, say what you need to say. Your cousin's here to translate for you. Go ahead and speak in Chinese."

"I'm thinking of learning it, anyway," Starsky said with a sidelong look and a grin. "So you're doing me a favor, letting me hear it."

Hutch didn't roll his eyes only because he didn't want to distract Li, who was looking back and forth amongst them as he spoke.

Kay began, "First thing he wants to say is that he knew the dead man. He," she swallowed, her eyebrows drawing together and the lines beside her mouth deepening, "he let Malloy in to begin with. Gave him a key to the restaurant. For drugs."

Li, nodding, went on. Kay translated, "He has used drugs before, years ago, but not cocaine. He liked the energy, how he could cook and then go home and read, and didn't have to sleep until he needed more drug. It was expensive, though, and when he learned he could get paid for making one spare key and setting up covered dishes for the dealer with drug packets in, he said yes. But later he got scared. He watched TV programs and news, and he heard his children talking about gangsters. And he thought about it, felt bad about--" Kay faltered-- "about deceiving me, and about what, w-what might happen to the res--" she stopped, groped in her purse, pulled out a tissue and blew her nose. Then she looked up fiercely as if daring them to make anything of her moment of distress.

Li spoke again. She nodded.

"So he's wanting to get out. He tries to tell Malloy so, but then he hears of these other murders. When Malloy tells him to come to restaurant after hours, he said yes but did not go. And *Malloy* was dead next day. He was very frightened then. He wanted to go home, but I told him to work."

"You're saying *Malloy* killed Estevan Martinez and Jennifer Pappas," said Hutch, just to get it completely clear.

Li leaned forward, looked from Hutch to Kay, and spoke. Hutch thought it was a question.

"The people who died in the other restaurants," he clarified.

Now Li nodded. "Him. He kill. He told me." Looking at Kay, he went on in Chinese.

"Malloy told him, come to meet me, let me talk you out of it. We'll speak of the drugs and how much you need them. We'll speak of what has happened to others who wanted to leave."

"Not exactly a confession," Starsky pointed out.

"Close," Hutch said. He felt elated. Jeanie hadn't killed those youngsters.

Starsky was looking at him and obviously knew what he was thinking. Later, when he said across their desk, "Lem's back," Hutch knew just what *that* meant. Feldgruber had been taking Jeanie's statement. Now, here he was to boast to Hutch about it.

In fact, Lem sat in the empty chair next to Starsky and said, almost gently, "Hi, guys. Uh, Hutch?"

"Yeah?"

"Miss Walden, um, asked me to tell you that she'd like to talk to you."

"Now?" Hutch felt as if he had a whole aldermanic district in his head, all voting different ways about that little proposal.

"It wouldn't have to be now. Just, you know, when you can."

"Later, then," Starsky said, with a level, serious gaze that held onto Hutch as securely as a touch. Then, without moving so much as an eyelash, he said to Lem, "Tell us what's in the statement."

"She killed Malloy. She admits it. I think," Lem said, wondering, "she still thinks it was basically the right thing to do. She came here from Vegas partly to see you, Hutch, and partly to get Malloy. They, um, had mutual," Lem looked aside, embarrassed, "work contacts."

"Lem." Hutch waited until the younger man's eyes met his own. "I know what she's been doing. I knew

when I met her before that she'd been a call girl, and Huggy told us she's been running Forest's old prostitution ring in Vegas. Okay? Just tell us what she said."

Lem looked baffled, a little dazed. "Okay. She knew Malloy because he had the drug organization that had belonged to Forest. And they both knew the same people. They told her where he'd go, and she found him and followed him. For days. She'd lose him, or she'd go off after you, Hutch. And then she'd pick him up again. She got to know his rounds. That's how she ended up at the Silver Fan when he was there. He was already laying out the lines when she got there--she didn't know why, but she thought the opportunity was perfect. And just--" Lem shook his head a little-- "shot him."

If Lem expected shock, he didn't get it. Hutch wasn't sure what he felt. Jeanie had killed the man who, about four years ago, would have killed Hutch. She'd killed the murderer of two young people who had probably used drugs, and had connived at dealing them, but certainly had not deserved death. He remembered Estevan's body crumpled at the bottom of a staircase, neck broken; Jennifer smothered with a pile of tablecloths, her clothes torn as if in a sexual assault.

He remembered Jeanie's wide, dilated stare, the way she'd clutched him and wept. The broken mirror.

No, he didn't know how he felt.

"Did she mention the window?" Starsky seemed oddly near Hutch's thoughts.

"She broke it so it would look like a B and E. She wore gloves. She'll go up for Murder One."

"But she was high as a kite," Hutch protested. "Come on. When I saw her, she was *gone*."

Lem said, "She says she was at the Silver Fan, too. But, Hutch, she *planned* it. She'd meant to do it for months."

"Information, too," Hutch said. "I bet she knows about the whole operation, the protection, even the smuggling, probably. She could bargain."

"Her lawyer'll tell her about that," Starsky said. "C'mon, Hutch, gotta let it go."

"Could *you*?" But he'd spoken with too much force. He could see wheels turning in Lem's head. Hutch held on to himself, growled, "Go on."

Taking a deep breath, Lem did. "She used a chair to break the window and watched the glass falling. She said it was like ice. And then it dawned on her that if someone broke in, the glass would have gone the other way, so she went outside and smashed the rest of the window. Brought the chair back in and looked at the glass, she said, because the light was in it, and it made a good sound falling. And put some on Malloy."

"Saw that," Starsky said. "Why?"

"I didn't understand that part. I'm not sure, really, that she does either."

"No, probably not."

"It's overrated," said Hutch, getting up. "Motive. Sometimes I think none of us has the slightest fucking idea why we do anything."

Starsky looked up but said no word. Lem opened his mouth, then shut it. For a moment he looked more like Starsky's brother than Nick ever had.

"I'm taking five. I'll see you later," Hutch said.

He didn't go to see Jeanie, and he didn't go up to the roof again. He wandered around the corridors, looking at people going in and out of offices, interrogation rooms, storerooms. Watched people in line in front of counters. Went out and stood on the front stairs for a while, in the sun. Starsky liked to park at this entrance, and seemed able to find a space at the most unpromising times of day. But the Torino wasn't here now. It was in the parking garage, where Hutch still hated to go.

Funny, he'd been abducted from his canal house, and that hadn't kept him from living there. He'd been attacked at Venice Place before, too, and the place had been trashed. Of course he'd been upset about it, but he hadn't sold the condo. Even when it wasn't him, when Abby had been attacked while she was setting up a special dinner for the two of them, he'd hated that it had happened but the place didn't bother him.

But whenever he was in the garage now he looked for the spot where the squad car had been parked with assassins in it. The stains on the concrete where Starsky had bled.

A bad place, Jeanie had called Chez Ha33;la33;ne. Strange that she'd taken that kind of dislike to it.

Maybe he'd ask her why. Or maybe he'd quit trying to understand motives.

Judging from Dryden's attitude in the interviews he insisted on having with Hutch, IA seemed to agree with Jeanie that Hutch should have somehow prevented drug dealing in the restaurant below his apartment. Hutch found himself in the middle of an investigation that lasted several days and tried his temper severely.

He was sitting at his table, his head pillowed on his crossed arms, and Starsky was behind him rubbing the knotted muscles of shoulders and neck and upper back. "Oh...." Hutch groaned with a sensation that was only partly erotic.

"My pleasure," Starsky murmured, his breath stirring the hair on the back of Hutch's neck and the blood in his groin. Then Hutch felt nuzzling in his hair and wet, soft warmth between the tendons of his neck as Starsky kissed him once, then again at the top of his spine, then between his shoulder blades. Then, casually, went back to doing massage and even back to talking. "Order a pizza tonight?"

Hutch turned his head to the side, cheek now against the back of his own hand, and smiled. "Isn't there anything in the fridge?" He knew darn well there was.

"Green stuff."

"It photosynthesized all its life, Starsk. It gets to be green."

"And I get to not eat it."

"You're such a kid."

"You're--" Starsky broke off. Smoothed over Hutch's shoulders and down his upper arms, with slow, warm hands. "Gorgeous," he said softly.

"I think you're just softening me up."

"You needed it--you came in here stiff as a board."

Hutch turned his face back into the darkness of the table. "Fucking IA," he said. But after a few moments he

remembered what he hadn't told Starsky. "You know what's funny, though?"

"What? I can't hear you, mumble boy."

Hutch sat up. Starsky stepped around and sat in the other chair. "I said," Hutch paused for effect and to frown without meaning it, "you know what's funny?"

"I think I have a pretty good idea. Try me."

"Dryden asked me what I'd been doing before I called you and went downstairs. I said sleeping, but he didn't believe me."

"Are you getting to the punch line? 'Cause I'm not laughing yet."

"He kept asking about Jeanie, when I knew she was in town, who told me. Where I'd been that night. Finally, Starsk, finally I got it. When she was downstairs buying drugs and dinner, and I was with you-- Dryden thought Jeanie and I were together. He thought she was up here and went down to trash the place. The uniforms, Juarez and his partner--"

"Connery."

"Yeah. One of them, I guess, said it looked like I'd had a wild night already, or something. Dryden's convinced Jeanie was up here and we had crazy sex. Then she got up while I was still asleep and went down to shoot up the mirror. And maybe me."

They didn't really laugh, but they were grinning at each other. Starsky shook his head. "That's what you get for not even grabbing a shirt and smoothing down your hair." He stood up again, but Hutch reached around his waist and pulled him close.

"That's what I get for having a partner who ravishes me on the floor of my own greenhouse."

Looking up like this reminded him a little of the blow job he'd given Starsky in front of the couch. Again the dark head was a little bent, the dark eyes wide-open and full of love. Starsky ran his hands from Hutch's face into his hair. "Who ravished who?" asked Starsky.

They looked at each other for what seemed a long while.

"Sally asked about you this afternoon," Starsky said.

"Yeah? She beat your ass at basketball yet?"

"Not yet," and Starsky's lopsided smile said he didn't expect it. "You coming along next time?"

"If I can. I sort of promised Jeanie--you know it's got nothing to do with this fantasy of Dryden's. Not a cover-up."

"I know, babe." Starsky's fingers stroked back and forth on Hutch's scalp, closed on wisps of hair and opened again.

"It's just that she asked me, so I visit."

"I know. You think I can't sympathize? Jeanie had you, once, and now she's lost you. Going cold turkey has got to be easy in comparison."

Hutch tightened his arms again, and Starsky swayed. "I wish we could wipe out the past. Both of us. Start fresh. Or keep things, oh, separate."

"I don't." Starsky bent to kiss Hutch's mouth lightly, then stood up again. "I wish the past didn't make you feel all knotted up and guilty. But that's you. I knew you were a neurotic when I fell in love with you." Starsky smiled. "Turn it off for a minute, Blondie." He tapped Hutch's forehead. "Give the little hamster in there a rest. The wheel's whizzing around now, I can see it. Stop. Let's eat, or take a run, or make love."

"Oh, my God, multiple choice. It's too hard--what should I choose?" Hutch buried his face in Starsky's stomach as if he were overwhelmed, but then pulled the shirt-tails out of his jeans and blew a big loud raspberry against his skin, making him laugh and squirm.

They didn't make dinner for a long time, and the run they put off until at least the next day.

That night, there were no tears.

Words Made Flesh

by jat sapphire

"Children show scars like medals. Lovers use them as secrets to reveal. A scar is what happens when the word is made flesh."

--Leonard Cohen

Sometimes they did sleep apart.

Today--stretching into tonight--they'd been at a stake-out where they had been too close to ignore each other, too focused on the watch and the boredom to talk, after a while, and too on-duty to fool around. It was an irksome combination, and they'd agreed they could use space and quiet tonight.

They hadn't even seen the suspect clearly enough for a court ID.

Never mind, Hutch told himself. Nothing to worry about. Their relief would see him, or they'd see him tomorrow. He wouldn't get away.

And meanwhile he needed to sleep, run tomorrow morning, have a good breakfast, so he wouldn't snap Starsky's head off for nothing at all.

He lay in bed, not checking off item number one on his list. Looking up at dim smudges of headlights sliding along, refracted from street to windows to walls to ceiling. Missing the warmth of his partner even as he felt relieved to not have to deal with him every single minute of the day. *Yesterday, really*, he corrected himself. The red numbers on his alarm clock read 12:07.

He rubbed his palm against his bare hip, knowing how he could get to sleep but weirdly reluctant.

Hell with it. What was he waiting for? It was even money that if Hutch asked Starsky tomorrow, he'd say he had jerked off, too.

Hutch started slow. This was the hand he'd burned, years back, and the skin bore a faint dark tattoo over his palm and onto his fingers...and a shallow starburst of scar lines, though Starsky said he couldn't feel them. That bothered Hutch in ways he couldn't speak of, had no words for.

Now he let the ridged skin abrade him as he reached down his own leg to find where the lines were like stretch marks, all that was visibly left of the surgery he'd had after being pinned under his car. He sometimes stood in the shower and traced those marks, looked at their rosy tracks like letters in an alphabet no one could read. If he concentrated, he could tell where the screws were that held his bone together. There. And there. He brushed his fingertips back and forth and around, tickling lightly, fixing the image in his mind as he stroked his cock with the other hand and felt it begin to fill.

Good...good. He breathed deeply, listened to the work of his lungs. No other breathing. Faint traffic noises. Wind from the ocean.

On his forearm, on the inside near the wrist's soft hollow and twisting around, was the seam of the cut he'd gotten in the hospital garage while Starsky lay in Intensive Care. On the other arm was where Diana had stabbed so fiercely and so uselessly, a thick outline along his biceps. Here on his chest, the faint pucker and ridge of the bullet scar near his heart, so near. Starsky had kissed him there once, when they'd been talking about scars. Briefly, gently, not as if he really needed to.

At times like this, Hutch thought that he could still feel the tiny indentations where the stitches had been.

They weren't visible--he'd checked in the bathroom mirror. He could see the splayed damage of the entry wound and the neat line of the surgical incision, silvery pink that flushed redder than his other skin under hot water. It seemed more sensitive, too, though he knew that it literally had fewer nerves. He liked to look at it.

Back and forth, end to end, he stroked the mark of his danger and the doctors' care. He thought of Starsky's scars--more, larger, rougher, newer. Those marks Hutch fingered, pressed his palms over, smoothed and kissed, licked and rubbed his own against as they spooned naked to sleep.

He held in his mind the regrown hair over the entry scars on Starsky's chest, the new directions it grew, the way its texture differed. Softer? Or just shorter? Hutch couldn't tell exactly, though he focused hard on it, tried to recreate the sensations as he stroked, pumped, tickled himself...and here was the oldest, most precious scar, his circumcision.... Starsky's *tasted* different from the rest of his cock, Hutch swore. He could feel it in his mouth. He could feel Starsky under his hands, against his body, skin, hair, scent, taste--

--Scars--

He jolted, felt the spurts of semen leave him, spatter, dribble down onto his hand. His eyes were screwed so tightly shut that yellow spangles and shapes swam there, and then he relaxed all at once, sighing.

He couldn't make Starsky understand. They'd talked enough about the scars--Hutch had said over and over that they were fine, they were beautiful, they symbolized his partner's survival, his bravery, everything Hutch loved most about him. And Starsky thought he was being humored, a kind of medicinal praise. He didn't get it.

Hutch *loved* the scars. They spoke to him, said "life" and "love" and "sex." They turned him on.

He thought, only a little facetiously, *if Starsky hadn't had any, now **that** might have been a problem.*

Cup of Decaf
by jat sapphire

"I hope that's decaffeinated, Harold."

He looked down at the cup in his hand as if he hadn't just been drinking from it, as if he'd never seen it before. Then he looked up at his wife.

Edith, in her nightgown, looked like everything he'd wanted for years. The gown was cream-colored, a soft and vaguely gleaming material that snagged on the rough skin of his palms but felt good as it slid across her skin. He'd asked at one point, and she'd told him what the stuff was called, but damn if he knew now. It was *like* Edith, though, that stuff. Fancier than he'd dreamed he could have when he was a boy, and his mother had worn a vast tent of flannel in unbelievably ugly colors because the cloth had been marked away down in price. But not frivolous, his Edith or her nightgown, not satin or silk or anything that cost a week's salary and only wrinkled and tore and spotted. Nothing cheap and nothing gaudy about her. He stretched out his arm and she walked over to stand inside the curve of it. He pulled her close.

"I think it is," he said, holding her close and breathing her in.

"I think it's not," she said. He never drank the decaf stuff unless she made him do it.

She put her arm around his shoulders, bent to nuzzle in his short-cropped hair. "My crazy man," she said softly. "How *are* you gonna sleep now? And what kept you so long anyway?"

"Paperwork." He'd sat and stared at it in his office until he couldn't fool himself any more that he was working. But he had been *trying* to do paperwork, so it wasn't a lie.

He hated to lie to Edith. He was no good at it anyway.

"Uh-huh," she said now, unconvinced.

"I saw Kay today," he told her, though he'd sworn to himself he wouldn't until, well, until he had to. "A man's been killed in her restaurant."

She held him tighter as if to comfort Kay through him. "Oh, poor woman." She kissed the crown of his head.

"Strangest thing," he said, "so strange, Edith, but when we were talking I kept, kept thinking...all those years ago..."

"I remember."

He was sure she did. She had been the one to get up and answer the door, 3:00 in the morning on a school night, and she'd made Kay sit down on one of their teetering chairs pulled up to the sink, while Edith cleaned the blood off her face and she wept. Harold remembered that he'd been embarrassed that he was stuck in his robe and pajama bottoms while his good pants and jacket hung plain as day over another chair and his books and briefcase lay tidily on one quarter of the little round table. And he remembered that he'd gradually forgotten about it as he listened to Kay weep out her shame and anger and fear.

"Leave him," Harold growled. "He's not worth it. A decent man don't hurt his wife," and it was a measure of the hour and his anger that he didn't even notice the slang as it left his mouth.

Kay's face was so naked when she looked at him that a number of unwelcome truths became clear to all three of them. He'd sort of known, as they worked together over the college papers he found so hard to write and the college mathematics she found so hard to do, with occasional questions or answers from Edith--he *had* sort of known that Kay was smiling at him awfully warmly, nudging her seat closer to his, but his wife had been right *there* the whole time, hadn't she? There was nothing wrong in it, and it had been pleasant to see the admiration in Kay's eyes.

Well, he could kick himself. Though the person he *really* wanted to kick was the bastard who'd given her that black eye.

He wondered, all these years later, if that moment of utter embarrassment for all of them was partly why she'd gone back that night. She didn't leave the bastard for almost a year, when she was pregnant with Harry and Edith had already had Cal.

He leaned into Edith, rested his cheek against the soft snaggy cloth, rubbed it back and forth a little. His eyes were shut.

"Oh, baby, come to bed, forget all of it," she said, and he nodded but didn't open his eyes or move away from her warmth.

Must've been decaf after all, he thought when she took the cup out of his hand. 'Cause he sure could sleep now, he knew he could.

Dreamland
by jat sapphire

There was mist/there wasn't.

He stumbled across land that went unpredictably up and down, little ridges like a plowed field, but when had he ever been in a plowed field? Or, then, it curved in longer swells like waves, or sudden jolts like stairs he was going down in the dark.

He dropped into the grass as it liquefied, as the land moved freely, turned to water, ocean, sand dunes. He spat sand from his mouth.

He couldn't find himself. No idea where he was.

"What the *hell* is going on?"

He needed to find Terry. She would know. Her sun-blond hair, her blue eyes, haunted him as he searched, as he tried to swim in some direction.

Wait. Those eyes weren't Terry's, were they? That hair?

He was so *alone*. He could hear people laughing, people having sex, people's feet running like hell away, then back--oh, playing basketball.

"Strike one," he called out. "Hey, where are you?"

The last time he'd dreamed this, he thought, suddenly clear about it, the *last* time, he'd found the steep corrugated iron of a dockside, and crawled up it, hauled himself out of the water with stains all down his clothes and bleeding from a half-dozen scrapes. Filthy dirty. He had made his way through the dark, smelly streets to the Torino, driven like a madman, found the graveyard, and gone looking for Terry there. He knew she was there. He could talk to her.

But now he couldn't remember whether he *had* found her.

Fucking dream. His arms were so tired, and his chest ached, and he wanted *out*. He heard...

...a voice...

...a voice he loved...

"Don't!" He put his hands over his ears, pressed hard, and sank, opening his mouth, eager to take the water in because he was crying too hard, had cried too long, and he didn't want to get dehydrated.

Then he woke.