

For the Love of Starsky

by **acmabry**

Summary: A few months ago, I was cleaning out an old barn and came across a box with old school papers. My heart skipped a beat, wondering if this contained a treasure I was afraid had been lost. I opened the box and there, in almost pristine condition was the very first Starsky & Hutch FanFic story I had written...in 1977...thirty-nine years ago...when I was sixteen years old... first in longhand and then typed on a typewriter!

It's my pleasure to share this with you. With the exception of a changing a few small things, cleaning up the punctuation and some timing issues (big, special thanks for Sandy for that), I tried to keep the story as true to my sixteen year old self as possible. The names in the dedication are high school friends who also loved the guys and gave me great encouragement as I worked on the story (along with my really cool English teacher).

And, in this special world of Starsky & Hutch, it's amazing how some things just fall into place for a reason. About a year ago, when I got back into the fandom world of Starsky & Hutch, I met a wonderfully sweet lady named Wanda thru a Facebook group. Over time, we have become best friends -- never met face to face -- but talk daily. We are both Starsky/Paul girls and know, that one day, we will meet him.

Wanda my sweet friend -- one time you said you wanted a love story with you and Starsky. A story that will have you two living happily ever after. Well, here is your story darling, your happily ever after love story. Enjoy my friend -- Happy, Happy Birthday! Hugs and love to you - Belle!

Starsky has fallen in love and must protect her from a crazed killer!

Categories: Gen

Genre: Action/Adventure, Romance

Warnings: No Warnings Needed

Story Notes: To: Sandra, Jane, Elaine, Theresa, Debbie, Donna, and others too numerous to mention, any my family for waiting so patiently so long for me to finish this story. Thanks.

June 8, 1977

Chapter One

To Detective David Starsky the ringing in his ears was one of the most horrible sounds in the world. It meant seven o'clock, time to get up. After he cut the clock off, he rolled over on his back. David Starsky was a good looking guy in his late twenties. His brown, curly hair fell limp over his face as he got up. His body was the kind that made girls swoon, he also had the most beautiful pair of blue eyes, at least some girls thought so. You might say he was the kind of guy a mother would want her daughter to bring home to marry. Finally, deciding it was time to move, Starsky headed for the shower, shedding what clothes he had on along the way. Fifteen minutes later he emerged, water glistening on his tanned, leanly muscled body. He walked over to the dresser and put on a pair of faded jeans (Levi's of course), a faded and much worn t-shirt, and a pair of tennis shoes. Walking to the den of his apartment, he glanced at the wall clock. Realizing he did not have much time to eat, he ran to the kitchen. Looking around, he grabbed a doughnut and glass of root beer and ran out the door.

Starsky pulled up fifteen minutes later in the parking lot of Vinnie's Gym, parking the car beside the only other one in the lot. A brown Ford that looked as if it had been through two world wars. There was a tremendous contrast between these two cars. Starsky's Torino was candy apple red, with a white stripe that was a foot wide and ran across the roof from side to side, just forward of the rear window, down the sides, and then forward to tapered points at the head. The only decoration of the Ford was a contoured round dent on the roof of the car. Starsky chuckled as he remembered how that dent got there.

As he entered the gym, the owner of the brown Ford was coming out of the shower. Detective Kenneth Hutchinson was also in his late twenties, with the same build as Starsky. But, there, the resemblance ended. Hutch, as he was called, was about two inches taller, blond hair and a more gentlemanly air about him. He was dressed in a black turtleneck sweater, with brown corduroy pants and boots, all topped off with a tan blazer.

Starsky smiled, thinking of the things they had been through together: poison, heroin, getting shot. He cared a great deal for this blond blintz -- more than even his own flesh and blood brother.

"Hi," said Starsky, "you about through beating up your body?"

"Hi," Hutch said, and added with an indignant air, "And I am not beating my body up, I'm keeping it in shape."

"All right, all right, whatever you say," said Starsky.

"Had breakfast yet?" asked Hutch.

"Yeah, I had a doughnut and a root beer on the way over," Starsky answered, walking over to a set of barbells.

"Starsky, you are going to rot your stomach out with that food! It's a wonder you are not dead now!" Hutch said as he poured a green liquid from his thermos bottle.

"Well, I'd rather die of malnutrition than drink that horrible looking stuff. It's a wonder you are not dead from poison!" Starsky said as he tried to lift a barbell, then jumped out of its way when he dropped it loudly on the floor.

"You are impossible," Hutch said shaking his head as he cleaned out his Thermos.

"No," said Starsky, gently stepping over the barbells, "You are impossible, I'm incorragable -- at least that's what Dobey said yesterday."

"That's 'incorrigible' Starsky," Hutch said shaking his head. It was always amazing to Hutch how Starsky could come up with his own language -- that made sense!

"Come on incorrigible, let's go," Hutch said, grabbing Starsky by his shirt and heading toward the door. "Who drives today?"

"I'm driving," Starsky said, shaking loose from Hutch and heading to the driver's side of the Torino. "My reputation gets ruined more and more every time I get into that pile of junk you call a car!"

Giving Starsky a face, Hutch climbed into the Torino and checked things out. They had numerous things in the car that they needed. A rack under the seat held the red light that was put on top of the car. Tear gas canisters, shotguns, and other things were also checked out. Hutch called Parker Center and logged them in just as Starsky pulled out into the street.

Wanda Peterson was a young girl who had just recently come to the town of Bay City. She was about 25 years old with brownish blond hair and big brown eyes. At this moment though, she was witnessing a scene that would change the rest of her life, being the eye-witness to the murder of a man. She started to slip away, but the murderer saw her. Wanda ran like the devil was at her heels, and he was.

"Hutch," said Starsky, "you have to understand that health food is not my bag. We don't mix. If I want to eat junk food, that's my right, isn't it?"

"Yeah, I guess you're right, but...hey Starsky! Watch out!" Hutch yelled.

Starsky saw her, but too late. By the time he had screeched the car to a stop, he heard her body hit the car. For a second all was quiet. It was as if time itself had stopped. Then, realizing what he had done, Starsky said quietly, "Oh My God." He shot out of the Torino and ran to the front of the car and knelt beside her. He felt for the pulse, it was weak, but still there, in the background, he could vaguely hear Hutch calling for an ambulance.

"The ambulance is on the way Starsk!" Hutch said. Hutch could tell that she was going into shock. "Starsky, do you have any blankets in the trunk of your car?"

"Oh, no why?" Starsky asked in a daze.

"She's going into shock, we need keep her warm." Hutch explained.

"Here, use my sweater, it's in the back seat of the car." Starsky said. The scream of the ambulance could be heard and it was getting louder. By the time it arrived, Hutch had succeeded in getting the crowd back a safe distance.

All the while this was going on another bystander watched with amusement, an evil sort of smile on his face. "She won't bother me anymore," he thought, "good riddance to her." And he walked off into the shadows.

At the hospital, Starsky paced the floor nervously. "What's taking them so long?" he asked.

"Starsk, if you quit pacing, it won't seem so long. Sit down and relax."

Starsky looked at Hutch and smiled. "Good ole Hutch, always calm and patient when I need him the most, couldn't ask for a better or more beautiful friend," Starsky thought. He walked over to the window and looked out. But, he wasn't looking at what was going on outside, he was looking in the sky and going back in time, back to a time when Hutch stood up to two guns to protect Starsky when he had been shot, back when they were racing against time to find an antidote for the poison that was running through his body. Back to a time when they laughed and cried together. Back to a time of "Me and Thee" when there was no one else to trust, only themselves.

"Starsky, Starsky," Hutch said, laying a hand on his shoulder and shaking him gently. "Captain Dobey wants to talk to us, it's about the girl."

"What? Oh, yeah, where is he?" asked Starsky fully back to this day and time.

"He's over there, waiting for us" said Hutch, jerking his head to the direction of the waiting room. "He has some information on the girl."

Captain Dobey was a large black man, almost six feet tall. He was in his late forties and weighing about 225 pounds. He had a reputation of being a very nasty guy at times, but he had a good heart, Starsky and Hutch knew that and they respected him greatly.

"We found out who the girl was, is, I mean," he corrected himself quickly when he saw the look on Starsky's face. "Her name is Wanda Peterson, age 24. She went to college for about two years, then quit, because she had some kind of trouble. She was majoring in nursing. She hasn't been back to school for a couple of years, guess she's trying to straighten things out."

"What kind of trouble did she have?" Starsky asked.

"We couldn't find that out, not many people know, but one thing's for sure, it's not police trouble. She has a clean record."

Just then, the doctor came into the room. He walked over to the small group of men, anxious and worried.

"Doc, how is she?" Starsky asked anxiously.

"She has a few bruises, a mild concussion, and..." he trailed off trying to find the right words.

"And what Doctor?" asked Starsky, imagining all sorts of things.

"Don't get me wrong, with therapy she should be able to..."

"Therapy?! Did you say therapy?" asked Starsky. "What do you mean therapy, therapy for what?" he asked anxiously.

"She's paralyzed from her waist down," he said quietly. There was dead silence for a few seconds. "When your car hit her, the impact sprained her back and there is excessive swelling. She's going to have to wear a back brace for a while, but like I said, with therapy, she should be walking in a month or so."

"Paralyzed!" whispered Starsky, not hearing a word the doctor had said. "Paralyzed, oh God Hutch, what have I done!" he cried, turning to face Hutch, "what have I done!"

Chapter Two

"Starsky," said Hutch, looking into his partner's face and feeling the pain that he was going through. "Starsky, you haven't done a thing!"

"I haven't done a thing!" Starsky shouted, "Hutch, I hit the girl. I hit her and now she's paralyzed because of what I have done to her!"

"Starsky, listen to me," Hutch said, grabbing him by the shoulders. "It couldn't have been avoided, she just ran out into the street. I didn't even see her until it was too late. Starsky, you haven't done a thing, not one thing, buddy." He finished quietly.

As Starsky looked into the face of his friend and listened to what he said, he knew in the very back of his mind that Hutch was right, but he just couldn't say it. The facts were too strong; it was his car, and he was driving it when he hit the girl. Maybe, later, he could admit it was not his fault, but not now, not right now.

"Thanks pal," he said quietly. Turning to the doctor asked "Can I see her now?"

"Well, for a few minutes. She's asleep, so be quiet," he told Starsky.

"Thanks Doc," Starsky said gratefully.

The room was dim, almost dark, but a small light had been turned on. Starsky could see the still form lying on the bed. As he walked to the bed, he noticed how peaceful she looked, even with the bandage around her head. "It's so quiet," he thought as he reached over to touch her hand. He felt the warmth and smoothness of it and he prayed she would be all right. Looking into her face, he saw that it was not as peaceful as he thought. Starsky could see where worry and trouble had taken a toll on her. But, despite all that, the freshness and warmth of her face seemed to make it glow.

Suddenly, her eyes opened ever so slowly. She glanced around the room, not knowing where she was or what had happened. Finally her eyes rested on Starsky. She smiled at him, somehow feeling safe and secure with him there.

Smiling back, Starsky said gently "Hi there."

"Hi," she whispered, "Where am I?"

Starsky had to get closer to hear her speak. "You're at Memorial Hospital, but don't worry about anything. You're OK, just go back to sleep and get some rest."

"I'm scared," she said softly. "Will you stay with me until I go to sleep?"

"Sure, I won't budge till you are in Never Never Land." It had seemed only a few minutes when he felt a hand gently on his shoulder. Starsky knew who it was without even turning around. "She's scared Hutch," he said softly. "You should have seen the look in her eyes when I said she was in the hospital."

"Well, I guess I would be scared too if I woke up in a hospital and did not know what had happened." Hutch said.

"Starsky, Hutch, come out here." Captain Dobey said poking his head through the door.

Starsky took one more look at her, then followed Hutch out of the room. As they entered the hall, they could see Captain Dobey talking on the phone. "All right, they are on the way."

"What's up, Cap?" Hutch asked walking up to the Captain.

"I want you two to go to Lakeside Marina right away," he said.

"Why?" asked Starsky, not wanting to leave the hospital.

"You two remember a guy named Lex Williams?" Dobey asked.

"You mean that drug exchange guy we busted a couple of months ago?" asked Starsky.

"Yeah, he's the one," said Dobey. "Or rather was the one."
Starsky and Hutch both looked at their Captain curiously.

"He's dead," Dobey said flatly. "Some kids found his body washed up on the beach. He's all cut up because the boats never saw him."

"Then how do you know that it's Williams?" asked Hutch.

"It's not a positive ID, but we are pretty sure. The autopsy will confirm the reports. I want you two guys to get down there and check out the grounds and the body."

"What killed him? If I remember right, he was a very good swimmer," asked Hutch.

"Bullet, from what they told me," said the Captain.

"Cap, I want to stay." Starsky stated.

"I want you two down there now." He said gruffly but gently.

Starsky saw there was no arguing with him, so he shrugged his shoulders and started off after Hutch.

"Starsky," the captain called. "I'll call you if anything happens."

"Thanks, Captain," Starsky said gratefully.

In minutes the red Torino, sirens going and lights flashing, pulled into the marina. There were a group of people dressed in uniforms, photographers, and plainclothesman, and of course, bystanders. No crime scene was complete without the bystanders.

As the two detectives forced their way through the crowd, they could see Sergeant Ferguson trying to keep the crowd under control. "Hi Dave, Hi Ken," he said. He was about the only guy on the force that did not call them by their last names.

"Hi Jim," they answered back.

"What's up?" asked Starsky.

"Those two kids found him washed up on the shore. From what we can tell, he had been shot in the chest, clean through the heart. But, it's really hard to get anything definite because he's a little cut up. The autopsy will tell us what we need to know, though."

"Where's the body?" asked Hutch.

"Over there," the sergeant said, pointing to the right as a group of men clustered about. "The kids are over there on those rocks."

"Thanks Jim," said Starsky. Turning to Hutch he said, "You take the body, I'll take the kids."

Starting to argue with him, Hutch stopped before he started. At this time, he did not feel like arguing with Starsky. "All right, but you buy me lunch."

Starsky laughed and turned toward the rocks. He could see two boys about eight or nine. Both of them looked a little shook up, but when they saw Starsky coming, they perked up and tried to look brave.

"Hi," said Starsky, "My name is Dave, what's yours?"

After a little pause, one of the boys said, "I'm Danny, he's Butch."

"Well Danny," said Starsky, now seated on a rock. "Want to tell me what happened?"

"Are you a cop?" Butch asked.

"Yes, I'm a cop." Starsky said.

"Do you have an honest to gosh police car?" Butch asked, his eyes shining brightly.

"No, my car isn't like a regular cop car. You see that red Torino in the parking lot with the white stripe on it?" Starsky said pointing to his car.

"Yeah," Butch said looking over to the Torino.

"Well, that's my car," Starsky said proudly.

"Really!" said Danny, his voice full of excitement. "Can we ride in it?"

"Not today Danny, but tell ya what. Tell me what happened and I'll see if I can arrange a ride -- ok?"

"Sure -- that would be great," both boys answered together.

"Well," started Danny. "Butch and I was walking along the beach trying to find a good spot to watch the boat show. We saw this thing lying on the beach and thought it might be a fish or something. We ran up to it and found out it was a guy. At first, we thought he was asleep, then we saw that he was really hurt, so we ran into the shop up there and told the people. That's when they called you guys." He finished wide-eyed.

"Yeah, it scared me!" said Butch.

"Can I ask you something, Dave?"

"Sure," said Starsky cheerfully.

"Did you ever get scared about something? I mean, like when you get to go find a mean guy and you got to walk in the dark. Do you get scared?"

Starsky answered the little boy quietly. "Yeah Butch, I get scared. But, I say a little prayer and that helps. It's not dumb or sissy to be scared, it shows that you are human and makes you a better person. Okay?"

"Great! Now I know it's not stupid to be scared. Thanks, Davey" said Butch joyfully.

"Starsky," Hutch yelled, "Come here."

"Comin'," he answered. "You guys stay here, someone will be by to take you home," Starsky told the two boys.

"Will they take us home in a police car?" Danny asked excitedly.

"I'll see what I can do." Starsky said. "You guys just stay here out of the way."

"What's up?" Starsky asked coming down off the rocks.

"It's Williams all right." Hutch said. "I wonder why they dumped here by the Marina."

"I think I know" Starsky said. "The kids said they came on him while looking for a spot to see a boat show."

"You mean," started Hutch, "that someone hit Williams, then dumped him in here knowing about the show and thinking the boats would get to him before anyone else?"

"By George, I think the ole chaps got it." Starsky said in a British accent.

"Hey Dave!" Ferguson called, "Dobey's calling you on the radio."

"He must be calling about Wanda," he said urgently. Starsky turned and ran for the car.

"Zebra 3, this is Dobey, come in, over" said the voice over the little box.

Reaching inside the car, Starsky grabbed the mike and spoke into it. "Zebra three, go ahead," Said Starsky.

"Starsky, Wanda's awake and you need to get over there. She's not too happy about her condition, not happy at all." Dobey said.

"On our way, Cap." Said Starsky as he jumped into the car.

"Let me speak to Hutch after you two get going." Dobey requested.

After they got into the car, Hutch took the mike and said, "Hutch here, Captain."
"Was it Williams?" he asked.

"Yeah, someone plugged him and then dumped him into the river hoping the boats would get to him before we did."

"Any idea as to how long he's been dead?" Dobey asked.

"Nope Captain, we'll know that when the autopsy report is done." Hutch answered back.

"Hutch," Starsky interrupted, "Ask him about Wanda, how is she doing?"

"Captain, Starsky wants to know how Wanda is doing."

"She's all right physically. But, she's got a very negative attitude about her paralysis. She wants out of the hospital, too."

"We're here now Captain," Hutch said as they pulled into the parking lot.

"I'll see you two back at the office" said Dobey, "over and out."

"Zebra three, out." Hutch said as Starsky parked the car. Starsky started to get out, but hesitated and then retreated back into the car, staring out into space, searching for something. Hutch was already out and heading inside when he realized his partner was not behind him. Going back, he bent down and saw Starsky staring out, looking a million miles away.

"Hey," he said gently placing a hand on Starsky's shoulder. "What's wrong?"

"Huh," said Starsky, coming out of his dream. "I was just thinking of what I should tell her," He said thoughtfully.

"Tell her what?" asked Hutch

"Tell her that I was the one that hit her. I want to help her, but she might think I'm doing it out of pity for her and she might not even want my help."

"Well, there's only one way to find out," Hutch said. "Just tell her, then see how she feels. Maybe she'll accept your help. But she might think like you said, that you are doing it out of pity, or because you feel you are obligated to help her. Be sure Starsky that you want to help her. Don't do this because you feel obligated or sorry, do it because you want to." Hutch finished.

"I really do want to help her Hutch." Starsky said determinedly.

"Well, tell her that and make her believe it." Hutch told him.

After thinking for a second Starsky said, "Thanks Hutch, don't know what I would do without you."

"All in a day's work my friend," said Hutch imitating W.C. Fields, "all in a day's work."

Minutes later, they emerged on the fourth floor. The doctor was just coming out as they stepped off the elevator. "How is she?" Starsky asked.

"She's fine physically, but her attitude toward the paralysis isn't good. If she wants to walk, her attitude has got to change and soon. She's giving up already, does not even want to talk about starting therapy. The longer she refuses and tries not to walk, the slimmer are her chances of walking again."

"Does she know who hit her yet?" asked Starsky.

"No, she's asked, but I thought I'd leave that up to you." The doctor said.

"Thanks Doc, can I go into see her now?" Starsky asked.

"Sure, go in and good luck." As Starsky walked away, the doctor turned to Hutch and said, "You have a remarkable friend Detective Hutchinson. He really cares for others."

"I know Doc, he's one of a kind. I could not asked for a better friend," Hutch said proudly.

Starsky poked his head in the door to see if Wanda was asleep. Instead, he saw a lonely girl, trying to fight the world all by herself and losing. "Hello," he said cheerfully. "How ya feeling?"

"Considering the fact that I can never walk again, I've never been better in my whole life!" she said harshly. "Who are you anyway? What right have you got to come barging into my room!"

"My name is Dave," he answered patiently. "I came in here earlier and spoke to you, but you probably don't remember. I just wanted to see how you were feeling. Doctor Johnson said that with therapy and a body brace, you can be walking again really soon."

"Well, if you're so smart, maybe you can tell me something! How can I do therapy when I can't even move my foot or my big toe! And, while you are at it, how about telling me or finding out who hit me. I'd like to tell that person a thing or two, the dumb clot!" she said hotly.

The words she said cut through Starsky like a knife. He knew she was mad and she would be even madder when he told her. Finally, he said quietly, "I don't know about the therapy part, I guess that's up to you. But, I can answer your second question. I know who the person is that hit you. I know that that person really wants to help you, he's been through the ringer worrying about you."

"Well, quit giving me his life story and tell me who it is," she said impatiently.

Starsky took a deep breath and looked her straight in the eye and said, "Me." He saw the hate well up in her eyes, it cut through him like the words had before.

"You're the one that hit me? I should have realized it. You ran me down, so now you feel sorry for yourself and for me. You think I need your help, well I don't! I don't need your help, or the doctor's help or anyone else's help! I'm paralyzed and I can't do anything about it. I'll just stay in a wheelchair for the rest of my life! I'll..."

"No you won't!" Starsky yelled. "I don't want to help you because of what I did to you. I want to help you because I care about you. And, if you'll get your tail outta that darn bed and work, you can walk." He said roughly. "You just gotta put some sweat behind it. No one around here is gonna feel sorry for you. Everywhere you go after you get outta here, you're going to be looked down on! You're going to have to look up and people will look down on you. Not because you are in a wheelchair either, but because you had the chance and the ability to walk and you blew it! Threw it away like it was a piece of garbage! There are a lot of people who would give everything they own to have the chance you have because they can't walk. And what do you do with your chance? Do you keep it? NO! You throw it away and wallow in your own pity and expect other people to wallow with you. We'll, I'm sorry I ever tried to help you because you don't want any help, you want pity. Well, Lady, I don't believe in giving pity! SO, you won't get any from me!" and he turned to walk out of the room.

"Dave!" said a tearful voice. Starsky stopped half out and half in the door, listening to what she had to say. "Dave, I've had it rough these past two years, I'm afraid to trust anyone. You're right, I do want someone to pity me, but not anymore." She was quiet a moment and then said in a voice full of determination and will, "What I'm trying to say Dave is, will you help me? I'm sorry for what I called you, I really am. Oh, Dave please help me, I do want to walk again!" she was crying hard now.

Starsky turned and looked at Wanda. He saw the pain, the anguish, everything that she had gone through had come to the surface in tears for the first time. He could see the tears in her eyes, tears that had stayed inside and were only now beginning to escape. But, most of all, he saw a young lonely scared girl, with no one to turn too. She was all alone in a great big world. Starsky walked over to her and took her in his arms. He felt her relax, Wanda was trusting him. Quietly he said, "Don't worry, I'll help you, Wanda."

"You won't leave me?" she asked in a tired and fearful voice.

"No, I won't leave you, I promise." He said softly.

"Thank you Dave, thank you." She said gratefully. And she fell asleep in his arms, feeling safe for the first time in two years.

Chapter Three

The next few days were sort of blurry, they went by so fast. Captain Dobey had given them a few days off. Wanda had been fitted for a brace and was starting her therapy. A closeness Starsky couldn't explain or understand was beginning to form for Wanda. Hutch noticed it too. He knew what it was though. His partner, his friend, was falling in love.

This morning, Starsky pulled into the lot of the gym a little later than usual. When he got out, he was whistling and smiling as if he did not have a care in the world.

"Where ya been?" Hutch asked before Starsky could even get into the door good. "I thought you had been in a wreck or something!"

"I was talking to Wanda," explained Starsky. "She called about the time I started out the door. She said for us to get there as quick as we could."

"Why, is something wrong?" Hutch asked anxiously? His feelings for the girl were strong also.

"No," said Starsky walking over to the candy machine, "She sounded sort of excited. I can't figure out what it is though." Looking up, he saw the owner of the gym come from the shower room. "Hi Vinnie!" Starsky said cheerfully.

"Hi Starsky, how you doing?" he asked the detective.

"Fine, just fine now." Starsky said with a twinkle in his eye.

Vinnie saw the twinkle and looked at Hutch agreeing with what Hutch had told him.

"Come on lover boy," Hutch grabbed Starsky and started pushing him toward the door, "let's get to the hospital."

Starsky waved bye to Vinnie as Hutch pulled him out the door, Vinnie just smiled and shook his head at the two detectives.

"Who drives today?" Hutch asked, already knowing the answer.

"You can drive the Torino," answered Starsky, throwing the keys to Hutch. "We'll take your car tomorrow, I promise." Starsky said with one hand behind his back, fingers crossed.

After the usual check up on the materials they had in the car, they got started. Hutch went through the streets smooth as ice, they both knew the streets like the back of their hands. Of all the beats on the force, theirs was the toughest but then again, they were the toughest cops on the force.

"Hey, isn't that Huggy Bear" asked Starsky, breaking the silence,

"Yeah, let's see if he had anything on Williams," said Hutch as he made a U-turn in the middle of the road, pulling alongside the curb.

Getting out of the car Starsky said, "Don't you know you can't do that?"

"Do what?" asked Hutch, not knowing what to expect now.

"Make a U-turn in the middle of the road." Starsky said dryly.

"So, give me a ticket," Hutch cut back.

"Don't tempt me, I just might," Starsky retorted smiling, by this time, they had reached Huggy and turned their attention to him.

Huggy Bear was sweeping the sidewalk in front of his tavern. He was a tall, lanky black man that could get any information for the two cops that was needed. Huggy was also a great friend of these two. He would do anything for them.

"Hi Huggy," said Starsky.

"Hello, I see you two are up to your old stuff of giving each other grief." He said.

"Of course," said Hutch. "It's the only thing that makes him interesting."

Starsky did nothing but give Hutch a crazy face, while Hutch smiled back.

"How's Wanda?" Huggy asked.

"She's fine," answered Starsky. "We are on our way to the hospital now to see her."

"Huggy," asked Hutch. Huggy turned his full attention to Hutch, from the tone of his voice, Huggy could tell that Hutch wanted to know something. "So you know anything about how or why Lex Williams got shot?"

Thinking for a minute, Huggy shook his head. "All I know is what you two know, I picked that up from the streets."

"Well, if you find something else out, let us know." Starsky said to the black man.

"If you two can find the time to come around tonight, I might have found something out," Huggy said.

"We'll be here around 6, okay?" Hutch said as they headed to the car.

"I'll see you then," Huggy said and went back to sweeping as Starsky and Hutch started off for the hospital.

Ten minutes later, the Torino pulled into the parking lot. As they were heading for the building, Hutch had to jerk Starsky out of the way of a car.

"Would you watch were you are going Starsky!" Hutch said as he grabbed his friend by the arm, "You're gonna get hurt!"

"Well, what better place to get hurt than at a hospital," Starsky said, with an innocent smile spreading across his face.

"I give up, you big dummy, there's just no hope for you. You're an idiot," Hutch said in an exasperated tone. Starsky did nothing but keep on smiling.

It took them but a few minutes to reach the fourth floor. Wanda had been transferred to a private room a day earlier and was loving it. And, from what the doctors were saying, her therapy was coming along fine. Wanda had completely changed for the good since she had had come in, a totally different girl. She told Starsky once that, maybe, the accident was the best thing that could have happened to her.

As they entered her room, they could sense something was up. Both of her doctors were in the room.

"Hi there kids!" said Starsky who still had that silly smile on his face. Hutch walked in behind him and waved quietly to everyone there.

"Hi," said Wanda, trying to keep her excitement in. "What took you so long?"

Starsky turned to Hutch and said, "Look at that, not even in the door good and she starts to nag us." Then he threw up his arms as if giving up. Turning to Wanda, he explained, "We had to stop and see a friend about some important business. Now, what's all the excitement about?"

"Well, I have something to show you," said Wanda as she flung the covers off her legs. "The therapy sessions are finally paying off!" And with that, she moved her toes and slightly moved her foot.

The room was silent for a second, then Hutch broke the silence by saying, "Starsky, did you see that? She moved her foot!"

Starsky could only smile for a few minutes and then looked gently at Wanda. Quietly, he said, "Yeah, I saw it." She repeated the process with her other foot. "It's the most beautiful sight in the world. Oh babe, that's wonderful." He took her in his arms and hugged her tightly.

"Doctor Wilson said we could go down to therapy and start my walking tomorrow." She almost squealed with delight.

"Isn't that too soon?" Starsky asked concerned.

"No," said Dr. Wilson. "In fact, it's the best time. The muscles are just starting to wake up, so we're going to help them by getting her on her feet."

As this conversation was going on, Hutch could see the look of worry and blame on his friend's face gradually wash away. The joy of seeing Wanda move her feet and the realization that she would walk again made Starsky forget about the accident; he no longer blamed himself.

"Sgt. Hutchinson," said a nurse who stuck her head in the door. "There's a phone call for you from a Mister Huggy Bear, he wants to speak with you."

"Thanks, I'm on my way," answered Hutch. Giving Wanda a kiss of her forehead he said, "Be good, I'll see you later."

"Come get me when you are through talking to him." Starsky said.

As Hutch left the room, both doctors followed, using the excuse of having to see another patient.

"I have the strangest feeling that this little scatter of people was on purpose," Starsky said, looking at Wanda.

"I don't care if was or not, I'm glad we're alone," she said, putting her arms around Starsky's neck. "Well, how do you like the foot moves? It's that latest thing in a paralysis victim."

"I love it, I absolute love it," he said, taking her into his arms and holding her tightly. "You're gonna be all right, did you know that? You're gonna be all right." He looked deep into her eyes. Bending to her, he kissed Wanda and as he did, he felt something burst inside of him. A small feeling that grew with the kiss. It was love, he was in love. Starsky wanted this moment to go on forever, he wanted her to stay with him always. Then, the kiss was over, the embrace gone for now, but in the hearts of two young people, the seed of love was born and growing into full blossom.

"I'll see you tomorrow, won't I?" she asked.

"Wouldn't miss it for the world," Starsky answered.

"Thank you Starsky," Wanda said gratefully.

"For what?" he asked.

"For helping me and giving me a purpose to live again," she said with tears in her eyes.

"You did the biggest part of it. You worked for it, fought for it, you deserve it," he said.

"Well, I know I couldn't have done it without you. Thank you David." And they kissed again, feeling the love grow stronger and stronger.

A few minutes later, as they were talking, Hutch stuck his head in the door and said, "Starsky, let's roll, they found the gun that may have shot our friend Williams."

"Okay," Starsky said reluctantly, "I'm coming." Looking back to Wanda, he said, "See you tomorrow, okay?" kissing her gently on the forehead.

"Okay, but come early, so we can get started," she said.

"I'll call you tonight and find out when I can come."

"All right, be good." She said to him as he walked out the door.

"Always am," he answered back as the door closed.

"Always am what?" Hutch asked.

"I'm always good, that's what." And he smiled and walked off before Hutch could say anything.

The gun had been found about five miles from where Lex Williams had been discovered. They couldn't tell at that moment whether it was the murder weapon. But, the lab boys confirmed it while the guys were at lunch. A Saturday night special that could be bought in almost any joint and dumped almost anywhere. And of course there were no fingerprints.

Starsky called the hospital, but Wanda was asleep, so he didn't talk to her. A few fights were broken up and one was booked for disturbing the peace. Around six, the two detectives went to see Huggy and get some food.

It was crowded as usual, and would be that way until closing time at 2am. Huggy had seen them come in and motioned for the two detectives to follow him upstairs.

"Where's Starsky?" asked Huggy as they entered the room.

"Oh, he went to make a call," answered Hutch looking for the food.

"How many times has he called her?" asked Huggy.

"How'd you know he called her?" Hutch asked surprised.

"I didn't, but I figured he would because of that strange look on his face," answered Huggy.

Hutch smiled at Huggy and nodded in agreement. Huggy Bear has seen the look of love on Starsky, too.

At that moment, the subject of their conversation was on the phone waiting for his call to go through.

"Memorial Hospital," said the voice

Starsky asked for the fourth floor, when they answered he asked, "Wanda Peterson in 401 -- is she still asleep?"

"No, Mr. Starsky, she's not asleep, she's eating. I gather you want to talk to her?"

"How did you know this was me?" he asked confused.

"You are the only one who ever calls since she arrived. I'll plug you in now."

"Thanks," said Starsky.

Starsky heard one ring and Wanda picking up the phone. "Hello?" she said.

"Hi hon, this is Dave," he said happily.

"Hi Dave," she answered excitedly.

"How are you feeling?" he asked.

"Okay, I guess, but I miss you terribly," she said with a sigh.

"I miss you too. I called before, but you were asleep -- did you get a good nap?"

"I slept wonderfully, dreamed I was walking through green meadows and woods," she said blissfully.

"Well, one day you will be doing that soon, so don't worry," Starsky said.

"I'm not worried," she answered truthfully.

"Listen babe, I've got to go. Hutch and I are meeting with a friend. You be good, Okay?" he told her.

Laughing she said, "To quote someone I know, I always am!"

"I wonder who said that?" Starsky said, also laughing. "Hey, what time do we need to come over tomorrow?"

"After lunch, around 2. So, Hutch is coming?" she asked excitedly.

"Yeah, neither one of us will miss this for the world. I really have to go honey. Hutch is motioning for me to come on. If I don't, he might pull me outta here and take the phone booth with him!"

"All right, guess I will let you go," she said reluctantly.

"Don't sound so down and out kid, I'll see you tomorrow." Starsky told her.

"I know, but tomorrow is such a long time away," she said quietly.

"Well, just go to sleep and dream sweet dreams and tomorrow will be here quicker than you think, Okay?"

"Okay, guess you are right. Tell Hutch hi," she said. "Goodbye Dave, see you tomorrow," and she hung up the phone.

"Starsky hung up the phone and ran up the stairs to the small room where Hutch waited for him.

"Well, I'm glad to see you decided to get off the phone," Hutch said as Starsky walked into the room. Hutch asked how Wanda was doing as Starsky went looking for food.

"Oh, she's fine. Said for us to come to the hospital around 2 tomorrow. She was eating when I called, speaking of food, where's ours, I'm starved" Starsky asked rubbing his hands together eagerly.

Just then, Huggy walked into the room with a tray full of food. Starsky had a double cheeseburger, fries and soft drink. Hutch a bowl of apricot soup and carrot juice to drink. Miraculously, there were no arguments over the food, they were both too tired and too interested in what Huggy had to say.

"Whatcha got Hug?" Starsky asked with a mouthful of food.

"Well," he started. "The reason William got his was because he was taking a little out for himself. Seems he's been exchanging dope for the money, sort of like a go-between. The suppliers found out that he was taking a little bit for himself and they didn't like it. So, they brought in a fixer to get rid of him. Guess they didn't want to get involved in the murder.

"You mean," started Hutch, "that Williams collected the dope, gave it to someone in the streets, got the money from whoever that was, and kept a little for himself?"

"That's the story, they didn't suspect him until now because he took small amounts of money and the suppliers never knew exactly how much they were getting for their deal." Huggy explained.

"How did they find out he was taking money from them?" asked Starsky.

"One of the buyers called and complained about the merchandise, quoted a figure of money they never got and then they got suspicious. They followed him one night and sure enough, he took money from the guys." Huggy finished.

"Have you got anything on who might have killed him?" Hutch asked.

"Yep, he's a new guy in town. His name is Tom Crocker. He has a habit of getting the people with simple things, then he dumps the person a couple of miles away. His specialty is the heart, front or back, don't make no difference to him. He's 30 to 35 years old, white, middle height, and dark hair. That's about all I could get and I was lucky to get that. Like I said, he's new in town and there's not much on him," Huggy finished.

"That's enough for now. At least we got something to go on." Hutch said. "Did your informants ever say anything about special features, like scars, limps, anything like that?"

Huggy thought deeply, trying to remember all the information. "Yeah, he does have a scar, on his left arm. Seems he wanted to be brave and not get it sewn up right -- had to prove something I guess."

"Beautiful!" exclaimed Starsky. "We get a hold of R&I and see what they got on him and maybe we can get this cleared up."

The next hour or so was spent on small talk and laughter. These three never tire of their friendship, a triangle of love for each other, and a brotherly love that would bind them together

through thick and thin and the worst of times. Hutch got out a guitar and they were soon belting out 'Hundred Bottles of Beer on the Wall' -- laughing with tears by the time all the bottles had been sung off the wall.

After they left Huggy's, they called R&I and asked about Crocker. Then Hutch drove in the direction of Vinnie's Gym to pick up Starsky's car. They were both quiet, considering how much they had been cutting up earlier. But, Starsky's quiet was more than a regular quiet. He was a million miles away, lost in his own little world that no one but David Starsky knew about. Hutch sensed this great quietness of his friend and wanted to know what was wrong, but also knew not to ask. Hutch knew, when the time was right, Starsky would come to him and they would talk it out.

After pulling into the parking lot, Hutch started to get out. All of a sudden Starsky began to talk "Hutch, what's happening to me?" he asked turning to look at his friend. "I mean, I feel something inside every time I think of Wanda. I feel so good all over. I can't seem to get my mind off of her. She's always there, in the smallest sense sometimes, but she's there. I'm confused, I don't know what's going on," he finished, his voice full of anguish.

"Starsky, I know what's happening to you. You are in love kid, with that girl over at Memorial. But, you are not sure if what you feel is really love, or a feeling you have because of the situation and the part you played in getting her to the hospital," Hutch explained.

"How can I be sure?" Starsky asked.

"I can't tell you that," Hutch said. "You have to find that out for yourself. And, when you find it out, you'll know and there won't be any questions about it."

Thinking for a minute, Starsky pondered deeply about what his friend had just told him. He wished that he might know already, that was impossible and he knew that. Looking at Hutch he said in a gentle voice, "Thanks buddy, I swear I don't know what I would do without you sometimes. You make something so difficult sound so easy. Thanks!"

Smiling, Hutch said, "Just be sure of your feelings when you do find out. Make sure it's the real thing, or you both will be hurt badly. I know from experience." He was referring to his first marriage that had failed.

Hutch got out of the Torino while Starsky moved to the driver's side. Hutch followed Starsky for a few blocks as they proceeded home. Then Hutch blinked his lights a few times as a way of saying good-bye to Starsky and turned off into the night.

The next morning Starsky was out of the house early. After picking up Hutch they ran their beat and around 9, called R&I to see if they had info on Crocker.

"Zebra-Three to Control, over," Hutch said into the mike.

"Control, go ahead Zebra-Three," was the reply.

"Patch me through to R&I, please," Hutch requested.

"R&I, this is Greg speaking," answered a husky voice on the other side of the mike.

"Greg, this is Hutch. Have you got anything yet on that Tom Crocker guy we called about yesterday?" he asked while casting a reproachful glance at Starsky -- who had barely missed hitting a car. Starsky just smiled innocently at Hutch and shrugged his shoulders.

"Yeah Hutch, we have what you want. Had to send all the way to DC for the info." Hutch could hear papers shuffling as Greg gathered the files. "Crocker Tom," Greg began to read. "About 33, brown thinning hair, 5'4, grey eyes, 145 pounds. He's got a scar on his left arm that you two already know about. He was a small arms specialist in the Army, dishonorably discharged."

"Why?" Hutch asked as he and Starsky exchanged glances.

"For shooting a couple of guys through the heart. They could never get enough evidence to convict him, but it was enough to kick him out," Greg said.

"Any last known address?" Starsky asked.

"No, the FBI almost had him in Arizona last year, but he got away," Greg responded.

"Boy," whistled Starsky, "we got a tough one."

"Yeah," agreed Hutch. "Well, thanks Greg. Zebra-Three out."

"Welcome, R&I out," Greg answered.

The rest of the morning dragged by slowly. Starsky was constantly looking at this watch and Hutch thought of plastering it to his nose a couple of times. He hoped they would both live to see 2pm.

After a quick lunch at Huggy's, they pulled into the hospital parking lot very close to 2pm. They rushed through the halls, coaxed slow elevators and finally reached the PT room where Wanda was.

Starsky thought she looked tired and nervous and wondered if this was being pushed, but he saw fire and determination in those eyes and knew she would not back down. After a few minutes of small talk, the doctors decided it was finally time for Wanda to begin.

Dr. Wilson rolled Wanda to the end of the walk ramp. It was only a few feet long, but seemed like miles to Wanda.

"Now Wanda" started the doctor. "We are not expecting you to walk the whole way, just a few steps. Maybe ¼ of the way. That's all for now," he instructed her.

Wanda nodded and looked over to Starsky. "Dave," she asked, "will you stand at the other end for me?"

"You bet," and he walked down the ramp, turning toward her with an encouraging smile.

Again, the doctor instructed, "Wanda, don't push yourself. This is the first time and believe me there will be other times. Remember, the first step is the hardest. After that, it's all good, just relax and concentrate."

Wanda nodded in agreement. Looking toward the walker, all of a sudden she felt a huge fear well up inside her. "What if she couldn't do it? What if her legs wouldn't move? What if...?" and then she looked up and saw Dave Starsky. The man who had come into her life so unexpectedly, the man who gave his help and caring so unselfishly, standing there waiting for her half way down. Looking at him, her fear disappeared. She prayed to God to please let her make it to his arms, where she felt so safe and secure.

"Now or never," she thought to herself. Beyond Starsky, she could see Hutch standing and watching. He gave her a wink and a smile and she knew she would have to make it...she would make it. Locking the wheelchair in place, she reached up and grabbed the bars, pulling herself up to her feet, feeling as if her arms would fall out.

"Well, at least I am standing," she thought. Concentrating, she put her right foot forward, screaming in her mind to make it move. There, it moved. Now, to the left foot, screaming in her mind to also make it move forward. Two steps and she was exhausted and felt she could go no further. But, she pushed on, repeating the same process, taking two more steps.

This was harder than she thought, I can't do this, I have to quit. Then she looked at Starsky and saw the look in his face -- willing her to keep moving forward...and she did. Sweat was pouring down her face, and she felt as if every muscle in her body would let go and tear into a million pieces.

Then, she felt the loving, warm, strong arms of Dave going around her, catching her from falling, holding her gently. She was crying from the strain, but knew she had made it and was so very happy. Starsky gently wiped away her tears and sweat while everyone rejoiced and whooped for happiness.

"Thank you Dave," she whispered.

"For what?" he asked as he continued to wipe her face and picked her up, taking her to the wheelchair.

"You kept your promise, you didn't run out on me," she said.

Hutch bent down beside her with a grin to challenge the Grand Canyon. He had come to look upon her as a little sister, "You were great, sis!" he said. "Beautiful!"

"Thank you," she said quietly. She was still lying in Starsky's arms where he had knelt to the floor.

Both doctors were elated as to how well she had done. But, Wanda was given strict orders to return to her room right away and get some rest. There would be time tomorrow and the following days for more walking.

By the time, they had reached her room, Wanda had fallen asleep in the wheelchair. Starsky gently picked her up and placed her in the bed. He pulled the covers over her and gently stroked her forehead.

"Have you figured out what kind it is yet?" Hutch asked quietly.

"What kind is what?" Starsky asked, wiping a wisp of hair from her face.

"What kind of love is it you feel for her?"

"For a few minutes I was sure, but I'm not now. It's like a door that keeps slamming in my face, just as I begin to understand it. It's so darn frustrating! I just don't want to hurt her," Starsky said.

"Don't worry partner, it will come to you soon enough. Come on, let's leave her so she can get some rest," Hutch said, gently pulling on his partner's arm.

After the door was closed, Wanda opened her eyes. "Oh Dave," she said through tears that had been welling up inside her. "Please love me, for I love you so very much."

Then she closed her eyes and slept, and dreamed of the man she loved, of David Starsky.

Chapter Four

The next few weeks flew by. Wanda was progressing rapidly and the two detectives were well pleased. They came to the hospital every day to see her, Hutch could see the love between them grow stronger every day.

One day about a month after the accident, Starsky and Hutch walked into Wanda's room and found the girl bubbling over with the excitement.

"Hi!" she said excitedly in a high-pitched voice.

"Hello, little sis," said Hutch smiling at her excitement. She liked being called that and Hutch got one of the prettiest smiles every time he called her little sister.

"Where's Dave?" she asked peering over Hutch's shoulder.

"He's getting something to eat from the machine," Hutch told her.

"Oh, I do wish he would hurry up, he can be so slow sometimes," she complained with a pout.

"Why?" Hutch asked, laughing at her excitement.

"You'll find out when Dave gets in here, if he ever does!" she said with a gleam in her eyes.

"You stinker," Hutch shot back with a smile.

"I know it," she said laughing. Just then Starsky walked into the room looking downcast and forlorn.

"It robbed me, the darn thing robbed me!" Starsky yelled.

"Wait a minute, what robbed you?" asked Hutch, thoroughly confused.

"The candy machine, that's what. I put two dimes in for a candy bar and then I got nothing...nothing?" he pouted.

"Well, maybe your selection was empty," Hutch offered as a suggestion.

"No, it wasn't," Starsky said. "Cause the guy just filled it up right before I got there!"

"Would you two please forget about that and be quiet!" Wanda said, breaking in on the argument.

The two detectives all of a sudden became quiet and looked at her quizzically.

Then, with blank looks on their face, they proceeded over to the bed. Wanda was doing all she could to keep from lashing out at these two goons. They were never serious and one day she was going knock what sense they did have out of them.

"Good," she said triumphantly. "Now, Dave, don't worry about losing your money because I am going to make it up to you."

"How are you going to do that?" Starsky asked.

"Because a week from tonight, I'm going to fix you and Ken a steak supper with all the trimmings. Ken, you can bring a date, too."

Starsky looked blankly at Hutch and said: "I think she's trying to tell us something."

"Sure, she's trying to tell us something." Hutch said with a big grin on his face. "Starsk, I got a question."

"What is it?" Starsky asked, having fun at this game.

"What's she trying to tell us?" Hutch asked dryly.

"Oh, that's easy," Starsky said and started to explain. Then he looked at Wanda and said, "What are you trying to tell us?"

Wanda threw up her hands in despair. "You two are crazy?" she said, "Are you that dumb? Are..."

"Now, I think she's trying to insult us," Hutch said to Starsky.

"I think so, too," agreed Starsky.

"All right, all right, I give up. I'll tell you both what I'm trying to tell you."

"Yippee!" cried Starsky, jumping up and down like a child.

"I think he's flipped," Wanda said to Hutch.

"Hon, he's been flipped ever since I've known him," Hutch answered. "Starsky, Starsky, would you calm down so she can tell us?"

Stopping suddenly, Starsky put a sad look on his face, then he sat down on the bed. "What's the secret?" he asked.

Wanda looked at them both and said: "I'm getting out of here tomorrow!"

Smiling wide, Hutch said, "Beautiful!" Then he bent over and kissed her on the cheek. "That's great isn't it Starsky. Starsky, Starsky, hey dummy!" Hutch said loudly.

"Oh, hi there!" Starsky said, his brown eyes alive with mischief. "I was just contemplating the dangers of your cooking."

"Pooh, you're impossible, Dave Starsky" she squealed, throwing a pillow at him.

At that time, a nurse popped her head in the door and said: "Phone call for you Hutch, it's Captain Dobey." Starsky and Hutch had been around the fourth floor for so long, the nurses knew who the guys were.

"Thanks Sally, I'm coming," said Hutch getting up and walking toward the door. Turning around he said to Wanda and Starsky, "Be back in a minute, don't do anything I wouldn't do." And he ducked out of the door, just missing the pillow that had been meant for Starsky earlier.

Looking at Starsky she said, "Let me sit by the window, I love looking at the people and feeling the sun on my face."

"Sure thing, hold on a minute, let me get a chair beside the window." Giving her a little kiss, he went off to the window and put the chair up to it. Then he went back to her. "Want to walk or should I carry you?" he asked.

"Carry me, I don't feel like walking," she answered

"Lazy," he said with a smile as he picked her up.

"I know it," she retorted and snuggled up to him as he carried her to her chair. Walking back to the bed, Starsky got a blanket to lay over her. When he got back to her, he found her gazing out the window.

"Hey, where are you?" he asked, laying the blanket over her.

"At home, in the Carolina mountains," she sighed.

"Which Carolina are you from?" Starsky asked sitting cross-legged on the floor in front of her.

"North. Dave, have you even been to the Blue Ridge Mountains?" she asked in a quiet voice.

"No, can't say that I have," he answered.

"You've missed something then. In the morning, when the sun comes up, the whole sky is ablaze with the fire of many different colors. The mountains have a blue tint to them. You can even see the next state if the day is clear and you are high enough. I love to climb them and be all by myself. It's like my own little world," she said with misty eyes.

"Why do you like the mountains so much?" Starsky asked.

"Maybe because they are so big, reaching for the sky and asking everyone to reach it with them. When I go to the mountains and climb them, I feel safe and warm. It's like the mountains themselves are reaching out to protect me and help me." She said, "The mystery that surrounds them is fascinating," she added quietly.

"What mystery?" asked Starsky, now caught up in the whole thing.

"The Indians that used to live in them, the paths that have long disappeared where people would walk to a new land and new life. Also, the home it provides for the animals. Like a great big

mother keeping all her children safe and out of danger. Mountains give me a peace inside, too. Their bigness and simpleness, their beauty and peace. The love that they have for other things." She finished in a far off voice.

"Sounds beautiful," Starsky said quietly.

"It is beautiful. Very beautiful."

Starsky looked at her deeply. The sun was shining on her face, her own simpleness and beauty was like that of the mountains she just described. All of a sudden, he felt something burst inside, like a dam finally letting go after holding all the water it could. He knew then, Starsky finally knew what it was like to really be in love. He loved her, plain and simple love.

"You know, it's been a few minutes and you still haven't told me your reaction." Wanda said, feigning hurt.

"Reaction to what?" Starsky asked.

"I'm going to get out of here tomorrow, David Michael!" she said, almost at wit's end with him.

"Oh, that's right. Well, I'll tell you how I feel about it," he said getting on his knees and looking at her in the face. "This is how I feel about it." And he kissed her, a beautiful, warm kiss that seemed to last an eternity. He loved her so much and she loved him. It was unreal, yet it was real. When they parted, they looked at each other and knew in their heart of their love to each other. Then, they kissed again.

It was at this time that Hutch decided to walk in. When he saw them he smiled, clearing his throat and knocking on the door, he proceeded into the room saying, "Dobey wants us in his office as of five minutes ago!"

"You sure pick a grand time to come in a room, partner." Saying the last very icily.

Hutch just smile at the remark and tone of his voice. He knew Starsky wasn't mad at him, maybe a little irritated, but not mad...he hoped. "Well, I'm sorry, I'll try to remember next time."

"Yeah, you do that," Starsky said as he got off the floor. "Have you been talking to Dobey this long?" he asked.

"No, I only talked to him for a couple of minutes," answered Hutch.

"What did you do the rest of the time, stand at the door?" Starsky accused.

"No, I didn't stand at the door, I was talking to Sally." Hutch told him. "Wanda, it's still all right for me to bring a date to supper isn't it?" he asked her.

"Sure, I want you to. Have you got a date?" she asked, her eyes dancing.

"Yeah, that's was I was talking to Sally about, she said she'd love to come," he told her.

"Wonderful, we'll have steak and potatoes and maybe a few other surprises," she said with a twinkle.

"Hutch," said Sally, who had just appeared, "you two better get going. Dobey just called and if you two don't get over there soon, he may send the army after you."

"Thanks Sally," said Hutch, "Starsky, don't know about you, but I think we better get going."

"I agree completely." Turning to Wanda he asked, "Want me to take you back to bed?"

"No, I'd like to sit here a bit longer, if I need any help, I'll call Sally," she told him as he bent to kiss her. "Don't be mad at Hutch, he didn't mean to barge in," she pleaded with him.

Starsky smiled and said, "Honey, I was never mad at him. I was just kidding him. Don't worry, he knows I'm not mad." Starsky gave her a gentle kiss and turned to leave. "Call you tonight," he said over his shoulder.

"See ya sis," Hutch said, blowing her a kiss.

"Bye Hutch," she said smiling.

As they entered the parking lot, Starsky dug in his pockets and produced the keys to his car. "Want to drive?" he asked Hutch.

"Sure," he said catching the keys that Starsky threw to him.

Climbing into the car, the two men set off for Dobey's office. All was quiet inside the car and out. They were riding through their beat to check it out. Pulling up ten minutes later, they quickly hopped out of the car and ran up to the office of Captain Dobey.

"I don't care what you say, find those two goons and find them now!" Captain Dobey hollered to the people in the other office. As the door to his office slammed shut, Starsky and Hutch came into the squad room.

"Captain Dobey wants you," they all said together.

Starsky and Hutch looked at the group crazily and then made a beeline for Dobey's office.

"What's up, Cap?" Starsky said cheerfully. He walked in and plopped himself down in the chair, putting his feet on the Captain's desk.

"You are!" he bellowed. "I called the hospital forty-five minutes ago, what took you so long?"

"We rode through the beat before we came here," Hutch said as he kicked Starsky's feet off the desk. Starsky just gave him an icy glare and put his feet back on the desk.

"Get down to the morgue. Another guy just got brought in and I think you'll be interested in his description," Dobey said to them.

"What do you mean?" asked Starsky, his feet still on the desk, ignoring the glare he was receiving from his boss.

"Shot the same way Lex Williams was," he informed them.

"Through the heart?" Hutch said, jumping to his feet.

"Yep," answered Dobey.

"With a Saturday Night Special?" asked Starsky, his feet hitting the floor.

"Yep," he agreed again.

"Let's go," Hutch said, heading to the door.

"Right behind ya old' pal," Starsky said as Hutch disappeared. "Thanks Cap," Starsky called back to Dobey.

"Yeah, sure, anytime," the Captain said to an empty office.

The two detectives hurried downstairs to the morgue. For weeks, their trail on Crocker had been sour, they had gotten nowhere. Huggy didn't even have a thing; maybe this would be the break to put them on the right track again.

The man who had been shot was 25-30 years old. He had been dead for about four hours when hikers found him in the woods. His name was Roger Wile, a delivery man for the same operation Williams worked for. There wasn't much they could do except look at the body and his personal things. It was too late to go where they had found him, so they called it a day and headed to Vinnie's to get Hutch's car.

"Sure you can get home in that thing?" asked Starsky sarcastically.

"Yes, I can get home," Hutch said with a sneer that made Starsky laugh. "My car is in a good a shape as yours."

"Then why is yours falling apart and mine staying together?" Starsky asked.

"Forget it, I don't feel like arguing about it," Hutch told him in a dry voice.

"OK -- but you are only admitting that I'm right and you're wrong," Starsky informed him. And, before Hutch could say anything else, Starsky slammed his door shut and squealed his way out of the parking lot and onto the street beyond.

"I ought to arrest him for disturbing the peace...my peace," Hutch said hotly. Going to his car, he proceeded to open the door, but the handle fell off. "Oh, no," he groaned. "Why me? Why is it always me?"

A mile away from Hutch, Starsky was heading home, planning to call Wanda as soon as he got there.

He pulled into his drive a few minutes later, got out, locked the door and bounded up the steps into his apartment. As he entered, the phone was ringing.

"Hello," he said.

"Starsk! Good, you make it home all right." Hutch said with relief.

"Yeah, no problems, why?" Starsky asked, taking his jacket and gun off.

"When I pulled out of the gym, a car pulled up behind me. I took the long way home and he was behind me all the way."

"I didn't see anyone," Starsky said. "Think it could have been Crocker? Word is around that we are looking for him."

"Could be, he's probably still hanging around town, laying low, since he knocked off Wiles," Hutch said. "Oh, have you talked with Wanda yet?"

"Nope, you got to me first."

OK -- give her my love and you be on the lookout -- be careful, partner," Hutch warned.

"OK -- I will -- no worries."

After talking with Hutch another few minutes, Starsky went to kitchen for a peanut butter sandwich and glass of milk. Stretching out on the couch, he called the hospital, asking for the fourth floor.

"Fourth floor, Nurse Kelp speaking," came Sally's voice.

"Sally, this is Dave, can I speak to Wanda?" he asked.

"Hi Dave, sure thing, let me put you through to her room."

A few seconds later, he heard the phone ring and a voice said lightly, "Hi Davey."

"Hello my sweet, how are you?"

"I'm all right, excited about getting out of here tomorrow and I miss you."

"Miss you too, babe. Hey, where are you staying? Hutch and I could pick up some clothes for you to wear home."

"Oh, I don't have a place to day. I arrived in town the day I ran into you." And then she giggled, realizing what she had said. "Excuse the pun, didn't mean to say it."

"You're excused, you can come to my house and stay if you want." Starsky suggested. A quiet pause was heard on the other side of the line. "Wanda, is anything wrong?" Starsky asked quietly.

"Oh, no, nothing's wrong...I think." She said worriedly.

"What do you mean, you think?" Starsky asked, a little worried.

"David, umm, not sure how to tell you this." Wanda hesitated.

"Wanda," just say it," Starsky said gently.

"Well, Dave, I am a little old fashioned. I don't think I should stay with you because of what might happen and I don't want it to," she said cautiously.

"Look babe, I love you, didn't really realize it until this afternoon, but I do. I promise you on my love that I won't do anything, you don't have a thing to worry about."

"Well," she said hesitantly.

"Look, do you have any money?" Starsky asked.

"No, I don't," she answered.

"Well, then, that settles it. You can some stay with me...I promise. Nothing will happen.

After a moment of silence, Wanda agreed to stay with Starsky, knowing she would be okay.

"All right" Starsky said excitedly. "Listen hon, better let you go so you can rest. See you tomorrow around lunch -- ok?"

"All right...Dave?"

"Yeah?"

"I love you, too. Don't know why, but I do," she told him.

"I love you too," he said softly. "Bye, my love."

"Bye," answered Wanda.

Starsky hung up the phone and finished off his sandwich and milk. Going over to the kitchen, he placed the items in the sink. Looking out the window, he spotted a car. Had someone followed him? Was that Crocker on their tails? Just then the car pulled away.

Starsky wondered who it was as he turned back into the den and started to clean up. His love was coming home tomorrow and the place had to be perfect.

Meanwhile, in the car that had just pulled away, a sinister man with a scar sneered and said, "So, Wile was telling the truth after all and my audience is still alive. Well, I'll just have to fix that permanently!" He drove off, melting into the night.

Chapter Five

The next morning was beautiful. The sun was shining brightly and Starsky was feeling good as he came back into his house with the paper. Plopping down on the couch, he started to read it just as the phone rang. Sighing he reached for it. "Hello," he said.

"Hi Starsk, how are you this morning?" Hutch said cheerfully.

"Oh, I'm just fine, till you called," Starsky said. "Where are you, did Vinnie get a jukebox in the gym?" he asked.

Ignoring the cut, Hutch said, "I'm at Huggy's. Meet me here as soon as you can, Huggy has something on Crocker."

"Be there in fifteen minutes," Starsky said getting up from the couch.

"Sooner if you can..." Hutch said.

"Don't be so darn impatient," muttered Starsky as he hung up the phone. "Guy can't even enjoy the paper anymore."

Ten minutes later, Starsky walked in Huggy's. He saw Hutch and Huggy at a corner booth. He walked to them and said, "What's Up?"

"Plenty," Hutch said worriedly.

"Uh-oh, you can tell he didn't get his carrot juice and seaweed this morning," Starsky said as he slid into the booth beside Hutch.

"Would you two be quiet," Huggy said irritably. "I got to get back to work."

Smiling, Starsky motioned for Huggy to begin.

"There's a rumor going around that Crocker is out to get an eyewitness," Huggy told them. "This person stumbled into one of his killings. Crocker's got a lead on who it is but no one knows yet," he finished.

"Huggy and I figured this person must have seen the first killing, since that spot is more populated than the rest," said Hutch.

"Are there any ideas as to who it might be?" Starsky asked them both.

"None," Huggy said flatly. "Seems Crocker is being very hush-hush about it."

"Hey Huggy!" a voice from the kitchen yelled, "Come here, we need ya!"

"All right, I'm coming," he hollered back. "Well guys, as the saying goes, 'duty calls', if I hear of anything else, I'll let you know." And he walked off.

"What time do we pick up Wanda?" Hitch asked.

"Around lunch. Hey, maybe we can get her a little early and take her out to eat," Starsky suggested.

"Well...call and find out," Hutch said gesturing toward the phone.

A few minutes later, Starsky came back and said they could pick up Wanda around eleven.

"She's still asleep, so I didn't talk to her."

"Anything wrong?" Hutch asked, noticing the worried look on Starsky's face.

"I dunno. Doc Wilson sounded kind of worried. I wonder if it was about Wanda," Starsky said.

"Look Starsk, Wanda isn't his only patient. It's probably another patient he is worried about. And, there really may be nothing wrong; he could just be tired," Hutch suggested.

Starsky smiled and told himself nothing was wrong, but deep down inside, he still worried.

"Come on Blondie, we better get going or our beat will fall down."

A few minutes later, they were on the street, keeping an eye out for the bad guys while bantering and joking back and forth. Around ten, they pulled up to the hospital, and headed inside. Starsky was bubbling over with excitement, being in love was so great! As they walked past the nurse's station, Sally called out to them and asked them not to go in Wanda's room right now. "Go in the waiting room," she instructed. "Doctor Wilson will be right in to talk with you."

"What about Wanda?" Starsky asked, "She's expecting us."

"I'll take care of her," she assured them. "You two just go and wait for the doctor, he'll be there in a few minutes," and she walked toward Wanda's room.

A few minutes later, Doctor Wilson walked into the room and greeted the detectives with a comforting smile.

"Doc, what's wrong with Wanda? Is she all right?" Starsky pounced, with Hutch close on his heels.

"On the contrary, she's as healthy as can be expected," The doctor told them. "But, last night, she had a bad dream of a man with a gun running after her. She was running and running, but always ran into something red. She would run and the man would keep following her," Doctor Wilson told them.

"Did she see a face?" his detective sense kicking in.

"No, she didn't. But, I think she was dreaming about something that happened to her just before the accident," he answered. "Dave, is she going home with you?"

Starsky nodded his head yes, wondering in his mind who Wanda could have been running from.

"Good, then this is what I want you to do. Take her home, keep her feeling safe and warm. If she has any more of these dreams, be there for her. If she remembers what happened before the accident, she could get hurt. Keep a close eye on her," the doctor instructed.

"What makes you think this was before the accident?" Hutch asked, his detective senses kicking in also.

"Because of the red that kept hitting her in the dream. Detective Starsky's car is red, right?" the doctor asked.

Hutch nodded yes as Starsky asked if he should ask Wanda about the dream.

"No," the doctor said. "Only if she wants to -- that's the safest thing to do right now."

"OK doc, I promise you, I'll keep her safe. Nothing or no one is going to hurt Wanda," Starsky said with a fierceness to his voice.

"I know you will, Detective. Now, go get Wanda, before she decides to escape down the back stairs!" he said with a laugh.

Walking into the room, Starsky and Hutch noticed she looked a little pale. But, as always, she was smiling. Today, Wanda looked especially good.

"Look what Sally got for me!" she told the guys excitedly. "She went out and got all these new clothes for me!"

Starsky looked at Wanda and agreed -- the brown turtleneck and skirt really made her look good. Starsky knew then that she was the most beautiful girl in the world.

"Babe, you look great as usual," Starsky told her as he kissed her gently on the forehead.

"I totally agree!" Hutch said, also planting a kiss on top of her head.

Wanda smiled, reveling in the love she felt. Then, mischievously she asked, "What's for lunch?"

"Look at that Hutch, not even out of the hospital yet and she's hollering for food," Starsky said with a laugh.

"Hey, I have been eating hospital food for a month -- I am ready for some real food," Wanda said with a gleam in her eye.

"Well, you will be out of here in a minute," Sally said entering the room with a wheelchair.

Wanda saw the chair and started to protest, but Doctor Wilson cut her off saying, "I know you don't need it, all the patients say that. But...get in," her ordered gently.

"Come on, Sunshine. I'll wheelie you outta here," Starsky said laughing as Wanda settled into the chair.

Reluctantly, she got into the wheelchair. But, in a few minutes she was giggling with delight as Starsky did wheelie her out of the hospital. Outside, while Starsky went to get the car, Wanda thanked Doctor Wilson for all he had done for her. She kissed Sally, realizing how much she would miss her friend. Wanda had spent many a night in the hospital talking to Sally about Starsky. "Hmm..." Wanda thought, "Maybe I should get her and Hutch together."

Just then, the screeching of tires and a red car came into Wanda's sight. For a second, she panicked, remembering her dreams and running from the man with the gun. Starsky pulled up beside her and Hutch and with that big smile of his said, "Taxi anyone?"

Hutch had felt Wanda tense, but said nothing to Starsky. Instead, he placed his hand on Wanda's shoulder to calm her and said, "Yes, the lady would like a ride to the best pizza place in town."

"Right away," said Starsky, getting out of the car and going to Wanda's side. "Here, let me help the little lady."

Hutch had climbed into the back seat of the car, while Starsky helped Wanda settle into the front seat.

"The best pizza place in town -- right," Starsky said as he got into the car. "Why not steak or something like that?" he asked.

"Because I love pizza," Wanda said with a twinkle in her eye.

"Well then, my dear, pizza it is," Starsky said as he kissed her lightly in her nose.

"Have her lay down when you get home Dave," the doctor instructed. "I'll call tonight and see how things are going."

"Why have I got to rest?" Wanda asked in a pout.

"Because, you are still not completely well and you need rest to get well," the doctor said. "You better do this young lady," Doctor Wilson said sternly.

"She will, don't worry about that." Starsky assured the doctor.

Wanda frowned at Starsky, but deep down inside, she liked the idea of sleeping where Starsky would be close to her, especially if she had a bad dream again. For the first time in a long time, Wanda felt safe.

Putting the car in gear, Starsky headed in the direction of Huggy's. Wanda looked in wide-eyed fascination at the sights of Bay City. She had never seen a city so big and wondered why Starsky and Hutch didn't get lost.

All of a sudden, the quiet was broken by a crack of static and "Dispatch to Zebra Three."

Hutch sat up from the back seat and leaned over to get the mike as Starsky handed it to him.

"This is Zebra Three, come in dispatch," Hutch said.

"Hutch, where are you and that partner of yours?" hollered a voice over the phone.

"Oh, hi Cap," said Hutch, startled. "We just picked up Wanda and are heading to Huggy's for lunch. She was to be released today -- remember?"

"Oh," said the Captain, his voice taking on a much different tone.

"She's staying with Starsky for a while," Hutch informed the captain.

"Well, I just wanted to say that you both have the rest of the day and tomorrow off," Dobey said quietly.

Starsky had stopped for a red light and it was a good thing he did. When he heard what Dobey said, his eyes got big as saucers as he turned to look at Hutch.

"Um...thanks Captain, when did this come about?" Hutch asked, looking at Starsky too.

"A few minutes ago. Enjoy, but be in an extra hour the next morning," Dobey said.

"Are you sure, Captain?" Starsky asked, taking the mike from Hutch's hand.

"Yes, I'm sure. Now go! Dobey out!"

Starsky handed the mike back to Hutch and said, "Zebra Three out," and then muttered, "I think."

Still in a daze, Hutch asked "How did we rate a day off?"

Starsky said, "I don't know, but let's not worry about, let's enjoy it!"

The trio of friends pulled to the curb of Huggy's a few minutes later. "We have arrived at the best pizza place in town, milady." Starsky said as he took Wanda's hand and helped her out of the car.

"May I have the honor of escorting you to the door?"

Wanda smile, taking Starsky's arm and headed to the door.

Hutch climbed out of the car and stood against it watching the two people he knew that this was going to be the beginning of a different Starsky. But, not too different he hoped.

"Hutch, are you going to stand there all day or are you going to come in?" Starsky asked.

"I'm coming," said Hutch. "I'm coming."

Huggy saw them come in and head for the corner table that they usually sat at. He also noticed the girl with them. She was leaning on Starsky's arm and Huggy could tell by the way he treated her that she was the famous Wanda.

He strolled over to them and asked "What would you guys like?"

"For you to turn down the color of your suit is good for starters," Starsky said.

"There is nothing wrong with my suit," Huggy said in defense. He was dressed in an orange suit from his hat down to his shoes. "You're just jealous because you don't have one."

"I'd be afraid someone would mistake me for an orange and eat me," Starsky said.

Huggy started to say something when Hutch cut in. "If you two would stop for a second, I'd like to order for me and Wanda. Then you can go back to yakking."

Starsky realized that he had not introduced Wanda to Huggy and he proceeded to do it. "Huggy, I want you to meet a very good friend of mine...Wanda Peterson. Wanda, my love, this is Huggy Bear." Then Starsky quickly added: "The light of our lives." Huggy looked as if he were going to pounce on him.

"Huggy, the lady would like the best pizza in the house." Hutch said before any more could be said.

"What would you like on it?" Huggy asked.

Starsky looked at Wanda and she said: "Whatever you two want is fine with me."

"All right then," Starsky said. "Let's have a large one all the way. Does that suit you?"

Wanda nodded her agreement and Hutch said, "Sounds fine with me."

"You are going to eat a pizza?" asked Huggy incredibly. Starsky stared at his partner as if he had lost his mind. "A pizza with cheese, mushrooms, pepperoni, and all those other kind of things."

Looking from Huggy to Starsky he said: "Yes, it's a special occasion." Then he said dryly, "And besides, I do eat regular food every now and then."

Huggy shrugged his shoulders and walked away shaking his head. Starsky noticed the confused look on Wanda's face and explained. "You see, honey, Hutchinson here is a health food nut. Carrot juice, asparagus cup ?, etc. So, when he eats a pizza, well, all I can say is that it's very unusual."

Smiling she leaned over and kissed Hutch. "That's sweet, Hutch. But you don't have to eat pizza on my account."

"I want some pizza today, so don't worry about," Hutch told her.

"What are you all planning to drink?" Huggy asked walking up to the table.

"I'll have a beer," Starsky said.

"Make that two beers," Hutch cut in.

"And what do you want, my love," Huggy asked Wanda.

"Well, in you have it, I'd like a soft drink. I drank beer one time and I got sick. Swore I'd never drink it again," she said.

"All right then, two beers and a soft drink coming up." and He walked off.

"Hutch, what are you planning to do tomorrow?" Starsky asked.

"Sleep late, then piddle around the house. What are you planning to do?" he asked.

"Well, if Wanda wants too, I thought we could go on a picnic." Starsky said.

Immediately Wanda's eyes lit up and she said: "I haven't been on a picnic in a long time!"

"Wanna come?" Starsky asked Hutch as he smiled at Wanda's excitement.

"Nah, I think I'll pass this time. Besides I think you two would want to be all alone," Hutch said.

Just then Huggy walked up with the pizza. "Here you go kids. Eat, drink, and be merry. Enjoy it, too."

They devoured the pizza. Wanda had never tasted anything so good. She gazed around the room and wondered in amazement at the different types of people here. She was fascinated and a little scared. So many people, and she was so new to it all. It was enough to make anyone scared. Then she felt Starsky near her and looked to him. He was smiling and cutting up with Hutch. All of a sudden she didn't feel scared.

With Starsky she knew she would be safe. She smiled and finished her pizza with a sense of security she hadn't felt in a long time.

Within the hour, they were leaving and on their way to Starsky's house. First stop was by Vinnie's so Hutch could pick up his car. By the time they reached there, Wanda had fallen asleep.

"I'll drop by later on to see how she is," Hutch said.

"Before you come, how about stopping by the store and getting a loaf of bread? I would do it, but I want to get Wanda home." Starsky asked.

"Sure thing," Hutch said and walked off to his car.

Making sure she was comfortable, Starsky gently backed out of the drive and started home. Ten minutes later he pulled up into his drive. He leaned over and kissed Wanda gently on the cheek.

"We are home, Sunshine."

Wanda looked into the back and didn't see Hutch.

"We dropped him off at his car a few minutes ago," Starsky told her.

"I must be more tired than I thought," she said wearily.

"Come on, Sunshine, let's get you into the house and into bed." Starsky said getting out of the car. When he reached her side he picked her up. She started to protest but, Starsky quietened her. She snuggled up close to him and was happy. He carried her to the bedroom and laid her on the bed.

"I haven't got anything to wear," she said.

"Yes, you do. You can wear one of my old shirts," Starsky told her. Walking over to his dresser he opened a drawer and started to rummage through it. Soon he found a tee shirt and threw it to her. Giggling she caught it "Put that on and crawl into bed. I'll be back in ten minutes." She saluted him as he walked out the door. He went to the kitchen and got down a glass. Noticing the door was opened, he went over to shut it. When he glanced out the door, he saw a car across the street that had been there when he and Wanda had pulled in. Stepping out onto the porch to get a better view, the car suddenly sped away.

"Could it be Crocker?" he thought. Seeing that the car was out of sight he went back into the house.

He went to the bedroom door and knocked. "Wanda, you ready for me? If you're not, tough cause here I come."

"Come on in," Wanda said giggling.

"Well," he said, "How do you like my bed?"

"I love it," she said. "I might just steal it from you."

"I'd just buy me another one," Starsky retorted. By now, he had reached the bed and he sat down on it.

They looked at each other for a moment, then Starsky bent down to kiss Wanda.

She was caught up in it and she was dizzy from the effect of the kiss. For a long time after they just held each other. Wanda with her head on his shoulder and Starsky with his arm around her. Then, gently he laid her down on the bed and smiled at her.

"Close your eyes and go to sleep. I'll be in the next room if you need me," he said gently. "I love you, Wanda."

Wanda looked up into those blue eyes of his and smiled. Never had she felt like this before for anyone. She was a little scared of it. Scared it would go away and leave her empty again. But she saw something in his eyes she had never seen before. A determination to live, to be strong, and to protect those he cared for.

"I love you, too Dave. Oh God, how I love you," she said with tears in her eyes. "Will you promise never to leave me? If you do, I'd die." She reached for him.

He took her in her arms and promised to never leave her, he would always be there. "Do you remember in the hospital when you stayed until I was asleep? You held my hand and promised not to leave?" she asked him.

"Yes, I remember," he said.

"Would you do that now?" she asked him quietly.

"You bet," Starsky told her. "Now close your eyes and go to sleep."

Five minutes later she was asleep. Starsky gently pulled his hand out of hers.

Before he left, he kissed her gently on the forehead. He looked at her for a moment as the sun shining in the room touched her face ever so gently, making it glow. "Sleep well, sunshine, sleep well." He walked out of the room.

At the same time that Starsky was admiring Wanda, a man walked into his filthy one room apartment. A cruel, wicked smile was on his lips.

"So," he muttered, "the cop has brought his little lady home for further rest. I'll just help them along by giving her some of my own kind of rest. A permanent rest!" and he threw a Saturday night special on his bed.

Starsky had laid down on the couch. He himself was almost asleep, when he heard a key in the door. Knowing it was his, Starsky met him at the door, motioning for Hutch to be quiet.

"Where's Wanda?" Hutch asked, taking the bag to the kitchen.

"She's in my room asleep," Starsky said. "Go on and look."

Hutch went over to the bedroom door. Quietly he opened it and checked on her. Satisfied she was asleep and all right, he closed the door quietly.

"Want some?" Starsky asked offering him a glass of milk.

"No thanks, I got a steak dinner waiting for me."

Starsky noticed for the first time how dressed up Hutch was. Giving a whistle he said, "You celebrating our day off a little expensively aren't you?"

"Yes and no. I've had this date set up for weeks," Hutch answered. "Plus, I'm celebrating."

"Well," said Starsky, "Don't celebrate too much." Looking out the window, Starsky gazed up and down the street. Suddenly he saw the same car that was there this afternoon. The car was slowly coming down the hill.

"Hutch," Starsky called in a foreboding tone of voice.

"What is it?" Hutch asked, instantly alert. He knew that the tone of his partner's voice could only mean trouble.

"See that car there?" He said nodding his head toward the window. "It was parked there this afternoon when Wanda and I got home. When I spotted it, the car took off."

"I think we better be careful where we step. If that is Crocker, he's probably hot on our tails."

"Look, he's stopped the car," Starsky said. "Want to go out the back and cross the street so we can sneak up on him? If we're lucky we can jump him in the car."

"What if we are not lucky?" Hutch asked dryly.

"We'll find out when we get there." Starsky said.

"Well, let's go, my steaks are getting cold," Hutch said.

Starsky started through the den with Hutch close at his heels. They both pulled out their guns and checked them. Reaching a window, Starsky raised it and motioned for Hutch to go first.

"A window?" Hutch asked amazed "You want me to go through a window in these clothes?"

"Well, we can't go out the front door. Just jump on that roof, then jump to the ground. As simple as that," Starsky said.

"If these clothes get messed up, you are going to pay for them," Hutch said as he climbed out the window. Jumping to the roof below him, he stepped aside so Starsky could follow him. When they were both down on the ground they ran down the alleyway behind Starsky's house. They ran for about a couple hundred feet. Then they turned down another alley. When they reached the end of it, they cautiously peered around the corner to see if the car was still there.

Starsky gave Hutch a go ahead sign and they darted out into the street. Starsky was running down the middle of the road and Hutch was running along the sidewalk. They had both drawn their guns, but unless they absolutely needed to, they would not shoot.

Crocker spotted them when they were about 25 feet away. Cursing under his breath, he pulled his gun out in case he needed it. He put the key in the ignition and the car would not start. Cursing again he looked to see where they were. Then he tried the car again and found that it would crank.

Out of his rear-view mirror he could see Starsky coming up to the back of his car. Crocker slammed the car into gear and pulled into the street Starsky never saw the car. All he felt was a great gush of wind and something slam into his chest. Then he felt himself flying and hitting the back of a car on the other side of the street. He hit the car with a jolt that would have shook L.A. For a second he felt as if all his insides would fall out. Then he felt the relief of darkness.

Chapter Six

"Oh my God," Hutch muttered running across the street to Starsky laying on the street. By the time Hutch had reached him, Starsky was beginning to regain consciousness Hutch gently lifted him up and leaned him against a car. "Hey buddy, you all right?"

Through the inky blackness, Starsky could barely hear Hutch. It was as if Starsky was hearing Hutch through a muffled box. He could feel Hutch gently probing to see if there were any broken bones, all the while he could hear him talking. "Keep talking Hutch," Starsky thought, "Just keep talking and let me know you are there." Shaking his head Starsky tried to swim through the blackness, it only made the pain in his head greater, and the burning in his chest greater.

Hutch, satisfied that there were no broken bones opened Starsky's closed eyes and peered in them. "Good," he thought "the pupils aren't dilated. The dummy's got a harder head than I thought."

Hutch waited a few seconds and contemplated on whether to move him or not. Starsky started to call his name. Hutch called his name to help bring him out of it. Starsky slowly opened his eyes and tried to bring them into focus.

In the back of his mind, but getting closer he could hear Hutch calling him. Starsky reached out his hand for Hutch to take. He did and pulled Starsky out of the maze of blackness surrounding him.

A few minutes later Starsky was fully awake. His head hurt, but he was alive. Suddenly, a scream pierced the air.

They looked puzzled. Then as a second scream sounded, Starsky realized that it was Wanda. Jumping up, all pain gone from him, he took off for the house, Hutch was close at his heels. They both took the steps three at a time bursting through the front door, running to the bedroom. Wanda was sitting up in bed with a mask of pure terror on her face. She screamed again as Starsky took her in his arm, and she started to struggle against him so Starsky kept calling her name and holding her more tightly. Finally, she realized it was Starsky holding her and began to calm down.

Hutch came over and sat down on the bed beside Starsky. "What happened honey?" he asked gently.

Wanda held on to Starsky tighter, and he could feel her trembling. He was grateful that Hutch had asked her, because he couldn't have.

Wanda took a deep breath and started to tell them her dream. "It was a dream, like the ones I had in the hospital, only it was in more detail. There was a white stripe running down the red, and I could make out something that looked like buildings. Then, I thought I saw a man. I couldn't see him too good, but I'm almost sure that it was a man. He kept running toward me, and I kept running from him, but the red thing always got in my way! Just before I woke up, I could hear him laughing and calling my name saying he was going to be rid of me!" she cried quietly on

Starsky's shoulder for a minute. He laid her gently back on the bed and promised to be back in a few minutes.

Walking into the den, Starsky's mind raced to try and figure out what was scaring Wanda so much. Glancing at the clock, he asked Hutch what time his date was. He was looking for an excuse for Hutch to leave, so he could be alone and think.

Hutch sensed this and said "It's 6:30 so I guess I'd better go. You sure you are going to be all right, pal?"

Starsky nodded and reached up to pat him on the shoulder when a wave of pain and dizziness spread over him. Hutch grabbed him and carried Starsky over to the couch.

"I'll be all right. It's just all this at once had finally got to me," Starsky said as Hutch helped him to the couch. "Go on and enjoy yourself. I'll be all right in a minute."

Hutch looked around the room picking up a blanket off the chair, he laid it gently on Starsky. Starsky was already asleep, so Hutch decided to go on. He poked his head in and saw that Wanda was already asleep, too. Locking the door after him, he left to meet Sally.

Starsky awoke gently. He had had a dream of him and Wanda alone together by a lake and then they were running through fields of flowers and green grass. He reached up and touched his forehead, it still hurt him, but not as much as before. His chest felt a little better too. Looking at his watch, he saw it was 9 and he realized he was hungry. Jumping off the couch, a wave of dizziness caused him to sit back down real quick. "Don't do that again Starsky. Take it slow and easy," he muttered. So, he stood up slow and easy, took a deep breath, and walked over to the kitchen. A note addressed to him was on the countertop.

Starsky,

Sally and I went and got you two some hamburgers. They are in the oven on warm. Check in on you later, and take it easy. Hutch.

"So, he went out with Sally huh? Well, at least he brought us some food." Just then the phone rang. Starsky hurried over to it, and jerked the phone off the hook, grimacing because of the pain. "Don't do that either, old boy," he muttered to himself. "Hello?"

"Dave, this is Doctor Wilson, how's my prize patient?" came the voice over the phone.

"Hi Doc, she's fine. She's been sleeping since about the middle of the afternoon. She had another dream this time from what she said, it's beginning to get clearer."

"Good, that's what we want, that will help in the healing process. Unless you think I need to, I won't come over tonight" the the doctor said

"I don't think that there is any need of it. If anything happens, I'll call you. By the way, Doc, would it be all right to take Wanda on a picnic tomorrow? I think getting out would do her a lot of good."

Thinking for a moment the doctor said, "If she gets plenty of rest, and doesn't do too much."

"Sure thing Doc - whatever you say. Thanks," Starsky said happily.

After talking to the doctor a few more minutes, Starsky headed for the kitchen when he heard a thump from Wanda's room. Running into the room, he found her sprawled on the floor and trying to get up.

"In case you didn't know it, the bed is a lot better to sleep on than the floor," Starsky said dryly.

Wanda scowled at him and said, "Stop running your mouth and help me up."

Starsky walked over to her and gently picked her up and put her in the bed. Then he started to laugh.

"Well, what in the world is so dang funny? " Wanda asked knowing all too well that he was laughing at her.

"You should have seen yourself sprawled out on the floor it was hilarious. You know, it's not the most pleasant thing in the world to walk in and see your girlfriend on the floor. I don't know who it scared more, me or you," Starsky said laughing hard. By now he had come and helped Wanda to the bed, sitting down beside her he started to speak but another spasm of laughter came to him.

Wanda grabbed a pillow and hit Starsky full in the face, knocking him off the bed. "See how it feels, you laughing hyena," she said with mischief in her eyes.

Looking at her he said, "You're gonna be sorry for that lady."

Haughtily, Wanda asked, "Yeah, well what are you gonna do mister?"

"This," and he picked up the pillow and swiped her with it.

Wanda grabbed another one and the fight was on. She swung at Starsky, but he came back up and knocked her flat on her back. Then, Wanda flung with all her might and caught Starsky in his midriff. The pillow fight continued on for a few minutes with one swing and a bellow of laughter. Starsky took the pillow from Wanda as she swung at him and told her it was time to stop.

"Why?" asked Wanda pouting like a little girl.

"Because I am hungry, that's why. If you're not just stay in here and I'll eat your hamburger," Starsky said.

"You eat my hamburger David Starsky and I'll eat your nose!" Wanda threw back at him.

"Well, come on then and quit running your mouth!" Starsky said heading out of the room.

"David," Wanda said.

Starsky turned and looked at her. With a mocking smile on her face she said, "How about getting me a housecoat or something that I can wear."

Starsky threw his hands up in the air and went to the closet.

Rummaging through it for a minute, he pulled out a housecoat and threw it at her.

"Be there in two minutes." And he walked out of the room. Going into the kitchen, he went to the oven and got the hamburgers out. He got down a plate and put the French fries and a hamburger on each plate. Glancing up he saw Wanda coming out of the bedroom. "You look like a shrimp in that thing," he cracked.

"Ha, go jump," she retorted. "Anything you want me to do? Yeah, look in the freezer and get the ice out so we can put it in the glasses," he told her. "There's some tea and soft drinks in the refrigerator. Get out what you want."

"What do you want, darling?" She asked him going to the refrigerator.

"I think I'd like some tea," he said.

Wanda poured the drinks and took them to the table. Starsky pulled her chair out and she sat down. They ate silently for a few minutes then Wanda noticed the bump on Starsky's head.

"What happened to your head?" she asked

"What? Oh, I bumped it on the counter last night back." He didn't want to tell her the truth, not just yet. "Don't worry, my head's harder than you think."

They finished eating and sat down in the den to watch TV. Starsky sat down on the couch and Wanda sat beside him.

"Know what?" Wanda asked cuddling up to him.

"No, I don't know what, I've never met him," he said.

Scowling Wanda said, "Are you ever serious? "

"Sometimes I am, sometimes I'm not. Depends on the mood I'm in. What do you want me to know?"

Sighing, Wanda held Starsky tighter as if she were afraid he would go away.

Quietly she said, "I'm falling in love with you." Looking at him she added, "I'm scared too, Starsky"

He could see the fear in her eyes and asked, "Why are you scared?"

"I was hurt so bad before, it's hard to for me to trust anyone, much less fall in love with them. Dave, I can't take being hurt that bad again." She started to cry.

Holding her tighter in his arms, Starsky said, "Do you remember the first night in the hospital when I held your hand because you were scared and alone. Remember I promised not to leave you and you trusted me?"

By now Wanda was quiet and listening to him and yes, she did remember that night. She remembered the strength he gave her by holding her hand .

"Wanda," he said placing his hand under her chin and raising her head to look at him. "There is no need to be scared. Trust me like you did that night in the hospital and never lose that trust. I love you and will never hurt you...believe that."

He was looking at her eyes and he saw the tears and the trust in them.

Wanda said with all the determination in her voice she could get, "I believe you Dave and I trust you." Then he kissed her.

Wanda remembered the hurt and pain that happened the last time she was kissed like this. It came back to her like a rush of wind, and she was scared. Then, she remembered where she was and who she was with and the hurt and pain were gone forever

Wanda and Starsky talked quietly about each other for the next few minutes. Then was a knock on the door. Starsky saw that it was Hutch so he hollered for him to come on in.

"Hi there!" said Hutch cheerily.

"Hi Ken, thanks for the burgers," Wanda said.

"How do you know he got them?" asked Starsky

"Because you left the note beside the refrigerator." she answered

"Your welcome, hon," Hutch said planting a little kiss on her cheek.

"I guess Starsky didn't want to leave me here alone so he sent you, right?" asked Wanda.

Hutch could tell by the look Starsky gave him that he had not told Wanda what happened. "Right you are," he said, "And when I got back here he was snoring away."

Just then the telephone rang and Hutch answered it. Huggy Bear was on the other end.

"Hutch, I got some more information on the person Crocker is trying to get at in case you're still interested." Huggy said loudly. In the background the jukebox was going full blast and the restaurant was at its peak of business

"Huggy, I'll be right over," Hutch said.

"No need, I haven't got enough to drive this far," Huggy said quickly.

"Okay then, what have you got?" asked Hutch.

"The sex of our phantom witness is female. She's Caucasian, as you policemen say, young, and from what I hear he's out to get her and bad. Seems that she's the first and only person to ever witness one of his jobs and that doesn't do too well for Crocker's record," Huggy said.

"Is that all?" Hutch asked while he was writing down the information that Huggy had given him.

"Yep, sorry it couldn't have been more, but my source had to run. If you know what I mean," Huggy implied.

"Yeah," smiled Hutch. "I know what you mean. Thanks a lot Hug, be seeing you."

"What did Huggy have to say?" asked Starsky as Hutch hung up the phone. Hutch relayed the details of the conversation to Starsky. While the two detectives were talking they did not notice the look on Wanda's face. The look of bewilderment and confusion.

Starsky and Hutch did not realize that the very person they were talking about was sitting right beside Starsky, safe in his arms for a brief moment. Wanda saw what happened and she remembered. She shuddered and closed it out of her mind. Frightened she moved closer to Starsky. He felt her move and realized she was shaking. "What's wrong, honey?" he asked.

Closing her mind to what she had remembered she said: "I was thinking about tomorrow, the picnic, and how much fun we're going to have."

Starsky felt sure that there was something else, but he did not press it. He only said, "That's for sure. We're going to have a lot fun."

Hutch stayed around the house for another hour or so talking with Wanda and Starsky. Around 10 he decided to go home, kissing Wanda he said goodnight Starsky walked him to the door and said, "I'm taking Wanda to my special place tomorrow just so you know where we are, and don't get any ideas to come and see how we are doing -- okay?"

Hutch smiled and said, "Don't worry, I won't crash this party. I promise. Have fun." and he left.

Walking to Wanda, Starsky picked her up in his arms. When she started to say something, he said, "If you want to go on the picnic tomorrow, you got to go to bed." She smiled and laid her head on his shoulder. He took her into the bedroom and gently put her on the bed. Giving her a kiss he said, "Good night, Sunshine."

"Why do you call me Sunshine?" Wanda asked.

"Because you have made my life a whole ray of sunshine, always bright and happy. I love you," he explained.

"I love you, too, Dave" and they kissed again.

Starsky went to the den and lay down on the couch. In minutes he was asleep. Again he dreamed of Wanda, her brown hair and eyes that shone like stars, of soft green grass and the warmth of her love.

He didn't sense or feel the presence of another person on the room.

Wanda had slipped quietly into the room. She looked at the sleeping man on the couch and felt her love for him grow. He reminded her of a big teddy bear that you could cuddle whenever you needed a friend. Taking a blanket that was draped over a chair, she laid it over the sleeping form of him. Gently she whispered, "I love you Dave Starsky, never forget that."

Starsky woke the next morning to the smell and sound of frying bacon. Wanda heard him get up and she said, "Hurry up and take a shower; you've got enough time before breakfast is ready."

Starsky got up and went to the shower. Ten minutes later he emerged from the bedroom. Walking over to Wanda he slipped his arms around her waist and said, "Do you realize how long it's been since I've had scrambled eggs and bacon?"

"A long time, huh?" Wanda said slipping her arms around his neck.

"No, as a matter of fact about two days ago," he replied.

Frowning at Starsky he ducked barely missing her hand and sat down. "But never any as good as this," he added as he bit a piece of bacon. Wanda thought of swinging at him again but she decided against it.

"Can you run me to a store so I could get me some clothes for this afternoon? Then maybe we can go by the grocery store and get some food, too," Wanda asked.

"Sure thing, we'll go when we get through eating," Starsky said. They continued eating for a little while and then dressed and left for their shopping. Later on after finishing up at the grocery store, Starsky felt pride for Wanda. She had progressed so far and was going so good. He realized that she had become more open and alive in the hours since she had been out of the hospital.

"Hope you like fried chicken, Dave," Wanda said as he got into the car.

"Sure do, I love it," he said.

"Good, that's what we're having," she said, giving him a kiss.

All of a sudden the radio crackled. and said: "Zebra three, come in Zebra three."

Sighing, Starsky muttered under his breath, "I knew it wouldn't last, it never does." Wanda giggled as Starsky said, "This is Zebra three, go ahead Cap."

"Starsky," said an irritated voice over the radio, "where is that Benson report? It was supposed to be on my desk today!"

"Oh, shoot, knew I forgot to do something yesterday. I haven't even started on it." Starsky said that quietly not meaning for Dobey to hear it, but he forgot to release the button, so Dobey heard it all.

"Starsky!" Dobey roared. "Get down here and get that report done, now!"

"Cap, it's my day off," Starsky said pleadingly. "Can't Hutch do it?"

"No, he can't do it. I can't get in touch with him. Anyway, it was your responsibility to get it done. And, I don't care if it is your day off. Get down here," he said.

"Dave," Wanda broke in. "Go ahead, I have to fix the food and you would just get in the way. I don't mind, it's going to be a couple of hours anyway."

Sighing, Starsky said, "I'm on my way, Cap. I got to take Wanda home first."

Starsky took Wanda home and took off to the office as fast as possible.

He raced through the report, making the typewriter burn he was going so fast. When he finished, he stormed into Dobey's office, slammed the report on the desk and stormed back out again. Dobey thought a windstorm had just blown through. When Starsky got home, he took the stairs two at a time. Unlocking the door he went in. Wanda did not hear him come in and he walked up to her and slipped his arms around her waist. "Hello Sunshine."

Wanda jumped and almost dropped the chicken leg on the floor. "Dave Starsky, don't you ever do that again, if I had dropped-"

"Oh be quiet and give me a kiss. It's the least I deserve after a long day's work at the office." she started to say something, but he cut her off with a kiss.

Starsky helped her to pack up the food and in no time at all they were ready to leave. A few minutes later, Starsky pulled up to a secluded spot a few miles out of town. They walked for about 100 yards through the woods when they came to a clearing. Wanda gasped at its beauty. The clearing formed a kind of half circle around a small pond. The water was crystal clear and the whole place seemed to have an air of unreality about it.

"Dave, it's beautiful," she said quietly as they walked toward the pond.

"I found it one day while I was chasing a bad guy. I almost lost him I was so wrapped up in it. The only other person besides you who knows about this place is Hutch. I come here when I want to get away from everything," Starsky said.

"Thank you for letting me see it, it's beautiful. I love it."

After they ate, they went for a walk exploring the pond and the woods around it. Starsky picked a wildflower for Wanda and she put it in her hair. Acting like children, they put their feet in the water and started laughing like they had never laughed before.

That evening at the car as they were leaving, Wanda said, "Let's come back here."

"You bet we will," Starsky said and he kissed her. "I love you, Sunshine. Never forget that"

"I won't because I love you, too" she answered quietly.

It was dark when they finally reached home. Laughing, they climbed the stairs, totally unaware of the lonely figure across the street. Neither of them noticed as he lifted a gun and pointed it toward them. He waited, waited for just the right moment to be rid of his problem.

Starsky was fishing for the keys to the door when he heard the shot ring out and hit the woodwork a few inches over Wanda's head.

"Get down," he said jerking her to the floor just as another shot rang out.

"Are you all right?" he whispered urgently. "Yeah," she said shakily. "Dave, I felt bullet fly by me. It was so close."

"Shh, it's over now. Whoever it is can't get you down here. I'm going to unlock the door, you slide in and lock it back once you are inside. Bolt it with a chair or something. Then, go call Hutch and tell him to get over here fast. Whatever you do, stay down and don't turn on any lights. In my bedroom, in the second drawer of the nightstand there is a loaded gun. After you call Hutch, go in there and get it. Stay in the bedroom until you hear my or Hutch's voice. Don't open the door to anybody else and shoot the gun if you have to."

"I don't know how to use a gun," she said fearfully.

"Just cock it and pull the trigger, that's all." He showed her how to do it.

"Please be careful," she said.

"I will, now get in there and do as I said." Wanda crawled into the house and Starsky waited to hear the latch click. Another shot rang out and Starsky knew he was going to have to move or be a sitting duck. He took off down the stairs and crouched behind one of the cars taking a shot in the direction of the bullets. He hoped that Hutch would be here soon. Starsky knew he couldn't get him alone, not as dark as it was. He glanced toward the apartment, and then heard the motor of the car and the squeal of tires. He stepped out into the street to shoot at it, but there was nothing to shoot at. All he saw was a pair of red taillights disappearing over the hill. He swore softly and took off toward the apartment and Wanda.

"Where is Wanda?" asked Hutch as Starsky opened the door for him.

"She's asleep. Doctor Wilson came over and gave her something to calm her nerves." answered Starsky.

"I got Huggy scouring the town to try and find Crocker, and Dobey's pulled in a couple of extra units to help look for him."

"Thanks, pal." Starsky said in a faraway voice.

"What are you thinking about?" Hutch asked.

"About the way he shot at us," Starsky said.

"What do you mean?"

"He didn't shoot anywhere near me, Hutch. He shot at Wanda. The first shot missed her by inches, and so did the second shot. Hutch, he didn't try to shoot anywhere near me."

"Maybe he was trying to scare you off his trail by shooting at her." Hutch said.

"No, he wouldn't be that dumb, he probably checked into us and he would know that a stunt like that would only put me more on his trail." Starsky answered.

Thinking a minute, Hutch said, "Well, then why did he shoot at Wanda?"

Starsky looked at Hutch with the "think hard you'll figure it out look."

"Wait a minute, buddy. You're not saying that Wanda is the girl that Crocker is looking for?"

"Well, why not? The whole thing falls into place when you look at it that way. Huggy said he was looking for a girl who could pin him down. And that would explain why she was running the day I-" Starsky paused remembering that day then he finished quietly, "the day I hit her."

"Her dreams, too. That would explain her dreams of running from someone and something red that always hits her." Hutch added.

"You're right, Hutch," said a quiet, tired voice from the direction of Starsky's bedroom. "I saw him shoot a man, and, well, he saw me. So I ran. I ran as fast as my fear could carry me. You know the rest," she said looking gently at Starsky.

"Wanda," Starsky said walking over to her, "If I showed you a picture of him, could you identify him?"

"I sure could, he's been in my dreams too long to get rid of him."

"Tomorrow we'll go down to the station and you can pick him out?" he said to her.

"Sure," she said. All of a sudden, the thought of seeing him terrified her and the tears formed in her eyes "I'm scared Dave. Oh God, I'm scared."

Taking her in his arms he said, "Don't be afraid. He'll have to go through me to get to you. Hutch and I both are here and we won't leave."

"Promise?" she said looking at Starsky deeply.

"I promise," he said kissing her on the forehead. "Now go back to bed and don't worry." He turned her and gently pushed her into the bedroom.

The two detectives talked until late that night. Hutch decided to stay overnight and in minutes they were asleep.

"Hey Starsk, wake up," said Hutch shaking him the next morning. "Come on, Wanda's got breakfast ready, and I'm starved."

"Good morning," said Wanda cheerfully. Wanda placed the food and on the table and then headed toward the bedroom.

"Aren't you going to eat?" Hutch asked.

"No, I'm going take a shower. When you two get through, you can be sweet and clean off the table."

"I think we just got volunteered to clean up the kitchen," Starsky said dryly. Hutch nodded in agreement.

An hour later, the threesome walked into the squad room at Parker Center. "Welcome to our home away from home, Sunshine," Starsky said. "This is my desk and that's Hutch's there in front of me."

They had arrived at the police station a little later than expected because Starsky took a different route in case Crocker might follow them.

"Hutch!" bellowed a voice from across the room.

"And that, my love, is Captains Dobeys office," Hutch said, wincing as Dobeys continued his barrage of loudness.

"It took you two long enough to get here. I thought you might have gotten lost." Just then he saw Wanda and got quiet very quickly showing his embarrassment.

"Oh, hello, Wanda," he said, "How are you?"

"I'm fine, thank you Captain," Wanda said laughing.

"Well, uh, the pictures are in my office." He gestured toward the office.

Wanda walked in and sat down in front of the desk. Dobeys shot a look of warning to Starsky and Hutch who were enjoying it all. He went to a drawer in his desk and got the pictures out. Handing them to Wanda he said, "Crocker is in these pictures, Wanda. Look through them carefully and pick him out."

Wanda nodded and started looking through them. The first two were definitely not him. They were fat and shorter than Crocker. The third was of a black man, the fourth picture was Crocker. When Wanda saw him, the memory of last night and the nights before came flooding over her and she stiffened.

Starsky could feel her tense, he knelt down beside her chair and asked, "Sunshine, is that the one?"

Wanda could not speak, she could only nod in agreement.

Starsky took the pictures from her and handed them to Dobby, then he took Wanda in his arms. He held her tightly as the memory came to the surface in tears. Dobby and Hutch quietly left the room.

"You must think I'm an old cry baby," she said between tears.

"Why do you say that?" Starsky asked.

Wanda brushed tears from her face and said, "For crying so much and-"

"Hey listen here my love," he interrupted gently. "You've got a perfect right to cry, you have been through a lot."

"Oh Dave, I love you so much. Please be careful. Don't get hurt, please." And she cried again.

"I love you too, Sunshine, and I will be careful. I got Hutch to look after me, and besides we got a date for another picnic remember?"

Just then Dobby came in and said, "Starsky, get going, Huggy just called and gave Hutch an address on Crocker. Hutch is waiting for you outside."

"Cap, will you call a cab for Wanda so she can go home and rest?" Starsky asked him.

"Sure thing," he told the disappearing Starsky. "Be careful," he said to himself.

"You think a lot of them, don't you?" Wanda asked.

"You bet I do. They are the best two cops on the force, and they are like sons to me. Only, don't you tell them I said that. Just between you and me."

Wanda agreed although she figured that Starsky and Hutch both knew it.

Meanwhile, Detectives Starsky and Hutch were speeding to the address that Huggy had given them. In minutes they screeched to a stop in front of a dilapidated building.

"What apartment number?" Starsky asked jumping out of the car.

"4D," Hutch said on his heels.

"Let's go," Starsky said and they pulled their guns running up the stairs. They paused every so often to make sure no one was on their trail. When they finally reached the fourth floor, they paused to take notice of their surroundings. They ran down the hall toward the apartment, stepping to each side of the door, preparing to jump in. "Crocker, this is the police! Open up!" Hutch yelled.

"Think he's split the scene?" Starsky asked when no one answered.

Nodding his head, Hutch said, "I'll knock the door in and you cover me."

Starsky stood back a few feet and aimed his gun toward the door, he signaled to Hutch that he was ready. Hutch rammed into the door. Hutch flattened out on the floor while Starsky tensed for Crocker. Everything was quiet and still as Starsky looked quickly over the room to see if anyone could be hiding there. "Everything's clear," he said as he helped Hutch up, "Guess our hunch was right."

They entered the little one-room apartment. It was small and dirty, and it smelled of oldness. Beer cans were strewn about and empty cigarette packs. Starsky walked over to a depressing dresser and opened the top drawer. He filtered through the few items in it and found a small case in the bottom of it.

"Hutch, come here a sec," Starsky called. He had taken the case out and was examining it, careful of the fingerprints.

"What is it?" asked Hutch waking over to his partner.

"A pretty little box that is just big enough for a Saturday Night Special. It's all nice and lined, too. In red velvet even," Starsky said sarcastically.

They looked around for a few more minutes and realized that there was nothing more they could do here. Climbing into the car they decided to head back toward the station and drop off the case. Then Starsky wanted to get home to Wanda. Suddenly, dispatch called with an urgent message for them to call Huggy. The guys realizing they were only a block from The Pits, drove there quickly. Huggy saw them and waved anxiously for them to stop.

"Wonder what's wrong?" Starsky said as he pulled over. Huggy was at the car before it even stopped.

"Dave, where's Wanda?" he asked anxiously.

"At my place, why?" Starsky asked. Huggy had never called him Dave before, so he knew something big was up.

"Because, I just got word that Crocker was heading over to your place to get Wanda," he said.

Starsky's face went white and a feeling of emptiness tore through him. "Oh my God!" he said, "He could be there now!"

"Let me drive, Starsk," Hutch said firmly.

"No, I can drive!" Starsky said, irritated about the fact that Hutch wanted to fuss about driving at a time like this.

"And get us both hurt or killed, so we can't help Wanda!" Hutch said to him sternly. Starsky realized that he was right and Hutch wouldn't let him go until he got his way. Starsky jumped out of the car and Hutch took his place and they took off.

At that very moment, Wanda Peterson was trying to run away from this man for a second time in her life. He had forced his way into the house and was now in the process of trying to capture her.

"Thought you could beat me, huh?" he said smirking. He jumped over the couch toward her, but she managed to elude him. "Bet you thought that boyfriend cop of yours could protect you. Well, where is he? Where is he now? Because he sure isn't doing his girl any good."

Wanda started to run for the bedroom, but Crocker grabbed her and pulled her close to him. She could feel her skin shrivel at his touch and prayed for Starsky to get here. She closed her eyes tight so she wouldn't have to look at his face and he slapped her.

"Open your eyes! Open them up and take a good look at me! You got a good look before, why not now?" he said mockingly. He was prolonging the terror for her and he loved it. "You are a right pretty girl, got to give that cop credit for one thing, he sure does pick them pretty."

Wanda was terrified. She could only imagine what he would do to her before he killed her. She could feel his rough hand caress her face and she wanted to scream, but didn't have the voice. She opened her eyes, fearful that he would hit her again, and to her horror found him bending close to her as if he was going to kiss her. She started to wiggle and squirm, but he just held her tighter, and again he hit her across the face.

Just then the sound of sirens reached Crocker's ears and he cursed quietly. "Well, my pretty little lady, looks as if he's come to the rescue after all. It's a shame that he's late." He looked around for a way to escape, but saw none. It was then he decided to take Wanda with him as protection. Pinning her arms behind her back, he started for the door.

Starsky and Hutch screeched to a halt across the street just as Crocker brought Wanda out of the house. Starsky could see the bruises on her face where Crocker had hit her. If Hutch had not been there to stop him, he would have jumped Crocker then.

"Crocker," yelled Hutch. "Let her go and give up. You won't accomplish a thing by killing her. You'll end up dead yourself."

Crocker laughed and pulled Wanda down the stairs to his car. He knew he had the upper hand with them and he meant to play it all the way out.

"Look what happens to the girl if either one of you tries to stop me." He put his gun up to Wanda's head. Wanda was in a state of shock, but she knew that Starsky was out there, and she knew that he would get her out safe.

"Wanda," yelled Starsky, seeing the dazed look in her eyes. He knew she had to be alert and this was the only way to do it. "Crocker, if you hurt her, I'll tear you up into so many pieces!"

"Listen to the big man talk," Crocker said sarcastically. Down inside he knew the cop was serious and he knew he had to get away. He kept inching toward his car, knowing that the cops were waiting for a slip up. He got closer to the car, then something caught the corner of his eye and for a split second the gun eased from Wanda's head. Wanda knew what was happening and

in a second she brought her foot down on him as hard as she could. In that instant Crocker let her go and she elbowed him in his stomach. He doubled over in pain and Wanda again ran from him as she had never run before.

Starsky and Hutch took advantage of it and started to Crocker, but he recovered and shot at them. He glanced quickly for Wanda and saw her behind some cars. He raised his gun to shoot but never had the chance. Starsky and Hutch opened up on him and he fell to the ground a few feet from Wanda.

For a second all was quiet, then the small cry of a scared girl reached Starsky's ears. He ran over to her and knelt down beside her as she broke down and began to cry harder. Starsky took her in his arms and held her tightly.

"Hold me Dave," she pleaded, "Hold me and don't let me go, please."

"I won't, Sunshine," he promised. "I won't let you go." And he held her tighter.

Hutch walked over to them and placed his arm around them both protecting them from the outside world for these few moments. He held them both as tight as he could, giving them his love and comfort. "It's over," he whispered to them. "It's all over."

Wanda looked up at Hutch, then she looked at Starsky. "I love you both, very much. I'm the luckiest girl in the whole world to have you two."

Then she gave them both a hug and a kiss. She glanced over to the dead body of Crocker and shuddered. Then, as if a great weight had been lifted, she smiled. She was free of him forever and she was happy.

Chapter Seven

Dave Starsky walked jovially into the office at the police department.

Hutch was already there sorting out papers for a report. He glanced up at Starsky who was whistling and said, "You look awfully happy for a guy who just had a flat tire."

"I just feel good, that's all," Starsky said, munching on a candy bar.

Hutch was about to say something when the voices of two little boys could be heard. "Where is Detective Starsky and Hutch?" they asked. The officer pointed to the two detectives and the boys went to them.

"Butch, Danny," Starsky said as he recognized them.

"You 'member us?" asked Danny, unable to believe it.

"Sure do," said Starsky. "How could I forget such good detectives?"

Then Hutch, who was trying to remember them, realized that they were the boys who found Williams' body on the beach.

"Then," said Butch "you remember that you promised us a ride in your car?"

"I sure did. Want to go for ride now? I can take you home," Starsky asked, becoming a kid again himself.

"Yeah," they said, their faces shining.

So, Starsky took the boys home. They were tickled pink and could hardly wait to tell their parents.

Starsky smiled, he loved nothing more than pleasing kids. Wanda had said that he had a special knack for kids, she had seen it in him when they went to the zoo with some kids from the orphanage. She had said it was because Starsky was such a kid himself. She honestly believed he had never grown up.

Wanda, the one who always smiled, the one who cared for kids as much as he did. Oh God, how he loved her. He never knew that love could feel so good and be so strong.

Starsky finally tore himself away from the kids and headed back toward the office. When he did get back, he found Wanda waiting for him.

"Hi, Sunshine," he said, giving her a hug. It was then that he noticed the small suitcase beside the desk. "What's that for?" he asked.

"C'mon," she said, "Captain Dobe said we could talk in his office." And she took his hand and led him in there.

After they went in, he repeated his question, "What's the suitcase for?"

"Dave," Wanda said softly, "I'm leaving on the four-thirty flight." Starsky turned pale as she said this. She was leaving him. The only girl he could ever love was leaving and he couldn't think. Why? He racked his brain trying to think if he had done something to hurt her.

Wanda saw the hurt on his face and explained, "Dave, a lot has happened these past few months. For the first time in a long time I can stand up on my own two feet and be myself. I mean that literally, too. I'm a new person than who came into this city. I witnessed a murder, almost been killed, and been paralyzed. I know you don't like me to talk about those things, but even as bad as they were, they helped me to live again. But, most of all and the best thing of all -- I met a man, a beautiful man who really cares about me and who really loves me. I met someone who helped me more than anything to overcome my self-pity and to live gain...I met you Dave Starsky."

Starsky was silent for a minute, scared to speak lest the moment be broken and he never see her again. He looked at her face and tried to drink in every detail of it. Finally he asked, "But, why have you got to go and why now, all of a sudden?"

Walking to the window she said, "To get my head straight, and to see my family. I haven't seen them in two years or more, maybe I'll even go back to school, I want to go home, home to my mountains and see them again. I have been thinking about this for a while, David. I just did not want to tell you -- I did not want to hurt you. I have to go back home, David. I have to." She said, hoping beyond hope that he would understand.

"Will you be back?" he asked taking her in his arms and holding her tightly.

"Oh, my love, wild horses couldn't keep me away. David, I love you too much to give you up. We've been through too much together to throw it away like that," she told him.

Starsky kissed her then, a kiss with as much love as he could give her in it. It would last till she got back, and he knew she was coming back. "I love you, Sunshine," he said, holding her tightly.

"I love you too, Dave," she answered, wishing this moment would never end.

Just then, Hutch poked his head in the door and said "Wanda, the cab's here."

"Thanks, Hutch, I'm coming," Wanda told him.

"What do you need a cab for?" Starsky asked. "I can take you."

"No," Wanda said determinedly, "It would only hurt more and make the goodbye worse. Oh David, just hold me tight for a minute, hold me tight." And she cried. Then (remove comma) she raised her head and they kissed again. Starsky held her tightly not wanting to let her go. Finally, he let her go and she walked toward the door. "I love you Dave, never forget that. I love you. And I will be back. I promise." And she walked out of the Captain's office to the outer office, leaving Starsky in the office, alone.

"Is he okay?" Hutch asked, handing Wanda her case.

"As well as can be expected. Oh, Hutch am I really doing the right thing?" Wanda asked.

"Do you think you are doing the right thing?" Hutch asked her back.

She thought for a minute then said, "Look after him Hutch. Take care of him for me."

"I will, and you hurry back. Ya hear, little sister." Hutch said hugging her tightly.

"You know what?" Wanda said.

"What?" he asked. "Dave had perfect taste when it comes to picking out his best friends."

"Well, my lady, his tastes are the same when it comes to picking his girlfriends," Hutch told her smiling and placing a gentle kiss on her forehead.

"Guess I better go. Take care Hutch, I'll see you soon." And she walked out of the office.

Hutch walked into Dobey's office and found Starsky staring out the window.

"Is she gone?" Starsky asked quietly.

"Yeah, but she'll be back." After a pause Hutch asked, "Hey Starsk, are you sure?"

"Sure about what?" Starsky asked.

"Sure about your feelings for her?" Hutch reminded him.

Then Starsky smiled, remembering the conversation between them in Vinnie's garage some time ago. "Yeah, I'm sure." Starsky said. "I'm sure that I love her, really truly love her. And not because of what has happened. I honestly love her."

"I know," Hutch said gently. "I just wanted to hear you say it, so you'd be sure." And he left the office, closing the door behind him.

Starsky stood gazing out the window, then he saw Wanda come out of the building. He resisted the urge to call to her, but instead just watched her. Even as he was looking at her, the sun shone on her face, reminding him of an angel. He saw her look upwards and he waved to her, she waved back and the cab took off.

Starsky watched till it completely disappeared, holding the memory of Wanda's smile in his mind.

He whispered as the tears rolling down his cheeks, "I love you Sunshine. Always and forever, I love you."

Epilogue

Starsky was in a bad mood -- it seemed he was that way most of the time now. Over a year since Gunther's shooting and still there were setbacks. This latest was a fall down the steps of his apartment which resulted in a broken leg. A broken leg that was healing but now required therapy. Something he was not looking forward to at all -- especially since he was in a rehab two hours from Bay City and Hutch. He could just think of all the trouble his partner was getting into without him around. And, he still could not figure out why Hutch had insisted Starsky come to this rehab facility.

Giving the wheelchair a violent shove, he headed toward therapy, wanting to get this done and over as soon as possible. Turning a corner, so caught up in his bad mood, Starsky ran right into the therapist coming down the hall. Starsky stopped the wheelchair and turned it around, ready to grouse at the person who got in his way. Instead, his heart stopped and memories of another time came flooding back.

"Well David," said a voice he thought he would never hear again, "it seems that we have done this before. I really wish you would learn to slow down."

"Wanda!" Starsky said incredibly. "Is that you, really you, what are you doing here?"

Laughing, Wanda got to her knees, grabbed Starsky's wheelchair and pulled it close to her. "Yes David, it really, really is me. I am a physical therapist now and was just transferred to this facility about a month ago. I'm here to help you get out of this chair and back on your feet...for good."

What Starsky did not know is the meeting she and Hutch had this past weekend when she saw that Starsky was to be her patient. He had told her of all the things Starsky had been through: poisoning, shooting, kidnapping, Terry, and Gunther. Wanda cried hearing of all the pain, hurt, and fear that Starsky had faced.

"Sunshine," Starsky whispered to Wanda "You're back?!"

Holding Starsky's face in her hands, Wanda looked deep into his blue eyes, glittering with unshed tears. She gently kissed his forehead, his nose, and his lips, "Yes my love, I told you I would be back...and here I am. I love you David, and I'm not leaving you again, ever."

Six months later, Starsky and Wanda were wed. A small, special ceremony with Dobey, Huggy, Sally, and, of course, Hutch all there. At Starsky's (and now Wanda's) special spot they pledged their love to family, friends, and each other. A love that would last a lifetime.