

## 50 Shades of Starsky and Hutch

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Plot: Big Earl is out of prison, and the only thing he wants for his birthday is Hutch.

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Starsky was madly typing away on a report at his desk. The squad room was almost empty, but that was because David was an early bird. He liked to get things done quickly and efficiently, which left more time for crime-fighting.

And meeting girls.

He zipped the form out of the typewriter to slide it under Captain Dobby's door, because even his ever-punctual superior hadn't arrived yet.

Fastidious about almost everything in life, Starsky started a pot of Mister Coffee that would await his fellow officers upon their arrival.

"Psst!"

Two hands grabbed his shoulders at the coffee pot, and he was surprised to see his partner Hutch when he turned around.

"Why so early?" Starsky asked. "Gonna ask Dobby for some time off? You have a stack of cases over there on your desk to go over. We need to hit the streets in about five."

"Shh," Hutch shushed as he looked around, even though no one else was around to hear.

It was then that the dark-haired cop gave his partner a closer look.

"What's up? You look skittish. Stalker-girlfriend skittish. Or like you're about to get injected with heroin. Or like you can't find your wheat germ."

"No," Hutch said putting his forefinger to Starsky's lips. "Shh. Be quiet. He might hear."

"Who might?"

"Big Earl."

"Big Earl's in prison, my blond friend."

"Was in prison. He's out on good behavior."

"How? Who? What? When? Why?"

"I don't know, and does it matter? He's out, and it's his birthday."

"So? Wait. How would you know that?"

"He called me last night. I haven't been able to sleep. He said he wants to meet me for a drink, for his birthday. He says he's been to a toy store and bought all kinds of trinkets to celebrate. I'm scared."

Starsky hugged him tight. "Aw, Hutch, don't be scared. Big Earl's all talk."

"How easily you forget. Need I remind you of the double dragon routine?"

"NO! PLEASE! NO REMINDERS!"

Coffee cup halfway to his mouth, Starsky fought back his gag reflex.

"Why'd you have to bring it up?"

"I know," Hutch said soothingly as he stroked Starsky's cardigan-clad shoulder. "I know, buddy. I have flashbacks every time I hear the name Earl." Even now he winced at the name.

"So what are we gonna do?"

"I don't know, partner, but he's going to come after us come hell or high water."

"Unless we do something to head him off."

"Like what? What could anybody ever do to stop Big Earl?"

"Well, Hutch, we beat him at his own game."

"What do you mean?"

"An undercover operation. So smooth. So convincing. He'll never want to set eyes on you again, much less meet up with you."

"Okay, so what do you have in mind?"

"I'll be your backup all the way, see. You wear a wire. I'll know every little thing that's going on. You're going to play his game, but one that he won't like. He'll get so turned off, he'll run screaming in disgust."

"So, like, I go along with his kinky stuff?"

"Better than that. You take your own toys. Play your own game. He'll hate it."

"But what if—"

"No what ifs, Hutch. I'll be right there. I won't let anything bad happen to you. He'll wish he'd never heard the name Ken Hutchinson."

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Not much embarrassed Ken Hutchinson, but going into an adult store for some adult gadgetry did (because he normally didn't need any goodies to take care of the ladies), and it showed on his face when he carried his purchases out to the Torino to the waiting Starsky.

"You could have at least gone in with me," Hutch drawled in a soft voice as he set the box of toys between his feet in the floorboard of the passenger seat.

"And blow your cover?" Starsky asked. "They know me in there."

Suddenly Hutch's stone turned agitated. "*Really?* Really, Starsky? Because I could have used the emotional backup in there."

Starsky hit the steering wheel with the palms of his hands. "Okay! Okay! Get out of the car."

"What? Hey, no, it isn't that important now. Let's just go. Big Earl's waiting for me at Huggy's."

"Nope," Starsky said a bit peevishly as he got out of the Torino and started taking off his cardigan and his Adidas, and other items of clothing, which drew a few stares from passersby on the sidewalk in front of the store, and from passing motorists. "You're right. We're partners. If I can't undercover with you all the way, what's the point? Get out and take off your clothes."

Hutch peered at him from the passenger seat. "Huh?"

"I'll be you. You be me. I'll go back in there and get some more stuff. A pair of handcuffs and a box of chocolates you got in that little box ain't gonna cut it with Big Earl. He's into dragons, remember?"

Sudden urgency, Hutch said, "And a little bit more," as he got out of the car too, and began undressing.

Finally, when Hutch was dressed in Starsky's cardigan, jeans, and Adidas, Starsky in Hutch's brown corduroys, varsity jacket, and Earth shoes, Hutch said, "We look good, but it'll never work."

"Why not?"

"No wigs, amigo. We can trade clothes all day long, but our hair isn't right."

"Oh," Starsky said, still a bit angry—more at himself than anything or anyone else—"I got wigs."

He went to the rear of the Torino and inserted the key.

Hutch joined him at the trunk. "You got my hair?"

"And mine," Starsky said sorting through his wig case. "'cause, you just never know when you have to go undercover as yourself."

"Hey," Hutch laughed as he picked up a wig of dark curly hair. "There you are."

"And," Starsky smiled as he pulled out a blond wig remarkably similar to his partner's hair, "here you are. After the toy store, we'll swing by hardware."

After they put the wig on, they smiled at the completion of their ensemble.

"Perfect," they said in the same voice, then went into the toy store together.

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Still dressed as each other as they cruised down the street toward Huggy's, Hutch said, "Hey, man, thanks for helping me out back there. It would have been a little awkward paying for that dragon trap as myself."

"Don't worry about it," Starsky said. "As a matter of fact, I'm gonna do you one better. You keep my clothes on. I'll keep yours on. And I'll be the one meeting Big Earl. All you have to do is wait in the car. He'll never speak to you again."

"Ah, buddy, I appreciate it, but I can't ask you to do that. It's too dangerous."

Starsky rammed his elbow into the car door. "Are we partners or not?"

"We are."

"Are we buddies or not?"

"We're best friends."

"Then let me do this. The thought of Big Earl playing out his dragon fantasies on you again just eats me up."

"Hey," Hutch said soothingly as he patted his friend's white leather-clad arm. "Shh. It's okay. Calm down. You can do it. Just do it, remember? Do it."

Starsky took a big breath and let it out slowly—something Hutch had taught him to do in tense situations.

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It was almost dark when Starsky parked in front of Huggy's and turned the engine off.

Hutch gave him a gentle look. "You gonna be okay by yourself?"

"Yeah. Just be ready if I need backup. Big Earl may spot the mike."

"Are you sure? Because we're partners. We do everything together."

"Just give me that duffel bag."

Hutch reached in the back seat and handed Starsky the big, heavy bag of toys.

"Hutch," Starsky said giving his partner a serious look. "It's been good having you around. If something happens to me in there—"

"No, Starsk, don't say it."

"No, really. If something happens to me in there, just know that you're the best partner I ever had. No one can rein me in like you can."

Hutch reached over and gave him a hug. "This won't be our last hug, partner. I promise."

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Big Earl looked much the same as he had when Starsky and Hutch had talked to him through the glass at the prison—embellished denim and a fishnet hairnet with a cigarette tucked halfway in.

As the figure in the varsity jacket and corduroys approached, Big Earl stiffened in the back booth of Huggy's, a smile of pleasure lightening his face.

"Hya, Blondie," Big Earl said rising to his feet. "Wasn't sure you'd make it."

Starsky lifted the duffel bag. "Happy birthday, Earl."

Starsky had forgotten how big and intimidating Earl looked. Now that he was out of prison and standing right in front of him, he looked massive. Earl was built like a semi. But it served only to fuel Starsky's will to succeed in keeping him off his partner's back and out of his mind.

Big Earl glanced at the duffel bag. "What's in the bag?"

"Your birthday present. Or I should say presents. Because this bag is full of what Big Earl likes."

The smile on Earl's face spread even wider. "Now that's what I want to hear. My place or yours?"

"Upstairs"

Big Earl's gaze followed the nod of Starsky's head. Then the big man followed the detective toward the set of stairs.

Huggy did a double take behind the bar. "Hey, Star—I mean, Hu—I mean—"

"Shh," Starsky said with a finger to his lips. "I'm undercover."

"I dig," Huggy said with a look at Earl. "I dig. Yell if you need any help."

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Once upstairs, Earl said, "Okay, Goldilocks, let's see what you got in the bag for me."

The duffel bag made a thudding sound as it hit the table. Starsky was an expert at disguises, but he had to admit to himself that taking on the persona of his partner and best friend was his most challenging role yet, if not a little unnerving. Hutch's safety and honor were at stake. He couldn't blow his cover. He couldn't jeopardize Hutch's self-esteem and confidence. So he took another deep breath, let it out slowly, and said in a slow, casual drawl, "So, you wanna check out the dragon balls vise grips first?"

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Hutch was half-dozing in the driver's seat of the Torino when he heard the sounds of agony—or was it ecstasy—in the receiver in his ear.

"Yes!" Hutch said as he sat up straighter and gripped the gearshift. Starsky was getting somewhere. He was making his mark. He was teaching Big Earl a lesson he'd never forget. The big man would never stalk him again.

*"HUUUUATCH!!!!"*

It was Starsky, yelling his name out of character. But it was Big Earl who came charging from Huggy's front door in a panic, half-dressed and struggling to put his clothes back on—hairnet pulled down over his face, jumper cables hanging from his belt, vise grips from his earlobes.

Now, Starsky emerged, duffel bag in hand.

"That's right!" Starsky yelled as Earl fled down the street. "The name is Hutchinson! Ken Hutchinson!"

After Earl disappeared around the corner in a blur of fear, Starsky got into the passenger seat and smiled at Hutch.

"Success!" Starsky shouted happily. "Let's go for ice cream!"

Hutch smiled with caution, but relief, as he started the Torino. "Wow. Did you see the way he took off? What'd you do to him?"

"What I do to all of my romantic interests," he said with a cocksure smile. "The Starsky special."

The End