

## *'Til I'm Home Again* *by Brit*

*"Sometimes I wonder if I'm ever gonna make it home again  
its so far and out of sight.  
I really need someone to talk to, and nobody else  
knows how to comfort me tonight."  
~ Carole King*

Mile after endless mile flickered past the Greyhound bus window; the painted lines on the blacktop an endless rhythm of yellow smears. The last rest stop had placed him in Iowa, Interstate 80 stretching endlessly between fields of cattle and corn. He had lost track of the hours. Brooklyn could have been in another universe, as far away as it felt to him now.

*Brooklyn—home.*

David Starsky felt the all-too-familiar ache in his chest tighten with thoughts of his family's brownstone on 84th Street. All the images that made up his life flashed past his inner eye with the blurring lines on the highway: the quilted bedspread his grandmother had made by hand that kept him warm; the way the morning light streamed into the living room, casting a glare on the TV screen; the perfume Ma wore everyday without fail; the sleepy way little Nicky made his way down the hallway in the morning; the broken saw-horse he and his friends used as a the goal line for dead-end street football; the way his father would tousle his sons' curls every morning at the breakfast table.

His father's flag-draped casket as they lowered it into the cold New York City dirt.

A tear escaped from a dark blue eye and the eleven-year-old quickly wiped it away. Crying wouldn't do any good, certainly wouldn't change his circumstances, and he had already cried enough to last ten lifetimes—tears of loss, of anger, of need, of regret—they hadn't changed a single thing.

He took a steadying breath and turned his face toward the small blower positioned on the bulkhead. The breeze was stale, but less so at least than the rest of the stagnant air on the bus. After the brief stop in Chicago, the majority of the other passengers had debarked, leaving only him and a half dozen adult travelers to continue west toward California.

Loneliness settled like a rock in the center of his stomach and he shifted uncomfortably in his seat. For the hundredth time he thought of the uncertain future mapped out before him. He had met Aunt Rose and Uncle Albert years ago, and spent some time with them when they were in the city for his father's funeral. They were nice enough people, and California might be as neat as they said, but it wasn't home.

Then again, home hadn't felt like home for months now, not since *then*. His father's murder had been the catalyst of his feelings of disembodiment, as if he were suspended in time, with nothing to pull him back to the present. The months that followed were a blend of numbness and emotions overwhelming him with their intensity. Everything and everyone around him changed and nothing felt right anymore. Nothing felt like *home*.

So now he was being sent away from the only place he had ever known, to grow up with relatives he barely knew. His mother had told him it was nothing he did; it wasn't a result of the trouble he was getting into more and more frequently as he sought outlets for the anger that seemed to consume him, but to give him a fresh start. Putting some distance between him and the raw grief at home just might give him some perspective.

David rubbed his burning eyes and sniffed. He'd been unable to sleep on the bus, other than a few catnaps. A quick glance over his right shoulder showed an open field with some horses grazing in it north of the four-lane highway. The morning sun threw streaks of light through the mist around the mares and foals, making the scene unworldly. He wished he had his father's camera as he climbed out of his seat and crossed the aisle. Settling on one knee, he looked out the window to watch the countryside pass his line of vision. Neat farmhouses occasionally flashed by, and he wondered who lived there with a life so different from his home in Brooklyn.

*No, I don't have a home anymore. I don't belong anywhere.*

An overwhelming longing rushed through him as he looked past the fields to the northern sky, the ache for a sense of home radiating from him like a fire. With his fingertips pressed against the window of the bus, David Starsky sighed and rested his forehead against the cool pane.



Ken Hutchinson climbed the last step of the stairs and crossed down the hallway to his bedroom. His father had left halfway through breakfast for an early meeting across town and his mother was preoccupied with whatever it was that mothers are always dwelling on. He even felt the absence of his younger sister who had spent the night at a friend's. The house seemed even emptier and more sterile than normal.

The eleven-year-old entered his bedroom and picked up his football, spinning it in his hands as he made his way to the window seat facing the south lawn. An uneasy sense of loneliness nudged him as his gaze swept past the rolling hills surrounding his Minnesota home. Why was it that their big house on the hill was just that—a house—and not a place where he felt he belonged?

*What am I missing?*

He knew there was a big world out there past the rolling lawn, and he let his gaze linger to the south. With his fingertips pressed against the window of his bedroom, Ken Hutchinson sighed and rested his forehead against the cool pane.

*2/24/01*