

Christmas Memories

By Linda B.

“What’s wrong, Starsk?” Hutch looked at his partner sitting on the floor amid pieces of tinsel, strings of lights, and boxed ornaments. He chuckled. “You don’t like putting Christmas back in the box?”

Starsky looked up and grimaced. “No. I don’t like it. I like the lights, the decorations, the songs, the way people smile at each other and wish each other good cheer, the memories—”

“The presents.”

Starsky glared at him. “Yeah, the presents, too.” He carefully folded the string of lights in his hands and slid them into their box. “You spend all year looking forward to Christmas—”

“Well, maybe you do,” muttered Hutch.

“What?”

“Nothing. Go on.” As much as Hutch failed to find Christmas a wonderful time of year, he loved watching the little boy in Starsky emerge. And as usual, when it was time to take down the tree and put everything away, Starsky became melancholy. He had a feeling it was going to be a long night. “Can I get you a beer?”

Starsky nodded, then stood up and gently removed a poorly painted Santa ornament from his tree. “It’s history, Hutch.”

“Well, of course, Christmas is historical.”

“No, your Christmas tree is history—family history. Did you ever think about it, Hutch?”

“Can’t say that I have.” Hutch placed Starsky’s beer on the coffee table and looked at the ornament Starsky held in his hand. “What’s the history of that one?” He didn’t mean to mock his partner, but sometimes Starsky got carried away. “It’s Santa. So what? What’s the big deal? Looks to me like it needs a new paint job.”

A flash of anger, followed by a shadow of sadness, crossed Starsky’s face, and Hutch instantly regretted his choice of words.

“One year, Nick, Ma, and me made ornaments. It was the first year without Pop, and I think Ma was trying to keep us busy. We mixed up this plaster stuff and put it in

moldings. After it dried, we painted them. I painted this one.” Starsky looked up and grinned, the pain of Hutch’s words forgotten. “It does need some help, doesn’t it?”

Hutch looked at Santa’s slanted eyes and too rosy cheeks and imagined Starsky painstakingly painting the ornament. “Looks great to me.”

Starsky laid the ornament in the box and reached for another. “And this one...don’t you remember it, Hutch?”

Hutch looked closer but shook his head. All he saw was a twisted braid resembling a candy cane, another symbol of the commercialization he hated so much.

“It was from Molly. Don’t you remember? She and Kiko made it the Christmas—”

“—she lost her dad.” He recalled the painful sound of the little girl, pretending to be brave, as she cried in his bed. How could he have forgotten?

“And this one...it’s a seashell from the trip my family made to the Jersey shore one summer. We collected a bunch of shells, and Ma glued on ribbon and these pieces of dried flowers. She sent it to me a couple years ago; thought I might want to hang it up. She’d made several, so she gave Nicky and me each one. And this star...Aunt Rosie gave it to me.”

“Starsky, your family is Jewish. Why all the interest in Christmas ornaments?”

Starsky shrugged. “The neighborhood we grew up in had a lot of Catholics. They shared their holidays and we shared ours.” He grinned at Hutch. “As kids, we got double the gifts.”

Starsky continued to reach for other ornaments, briefly sharing their history before gently placing them in their allotted slot. “Hey, Hutch, how about this one?” Starsky looked up and grinned. “It’s made out of birch, like the Indians used in their canoes. Your mom gave it to me when we went to visit them a few Christmases ago. I love the painting on it. When I look at it, it reminds me of you.”

Hutch blushed. Again, he’d forgotten the ornament, but not the event. It was the first trip he and Starsky had made to Minnesota together. How could he forget sitting up into the wee hours of Christmas morning while Starsky charmed his mother as she fed him holiday goodie after goodie? “Sure, Starsk, who could forget that trip?”

“We had a good time, didn’t we?” Starsky’s face lit up with recalled pleasure.

“We did. Didn’t my mom make you her second son?” Hutch lightly cuffed the back of Starsky’s head and took the ornament from his hand. He held it briefly before laying it in the box.

“See, I told you, Christmas is about history, about memories. It’s not just lights and ornaments—and presents.”

“I guess, if you look at it like that.” He watched Starsky reach for the last ornament on the tree. It was a little white bear with a red scarf and green hat. “And what’s the memory with that one, buddy?”

Starsky blushed and cradled the bear in his hand. He lovingly straightened the scarf and made sure the hat was on securely. “You’ll think I’m silly.”

“Not any more than I already do.” Hutch smiled to take the sting out of his words. He knew that as silly as Starsky acted at times, the sentiment and love he demonstrated was never silly. He’d been the recipient of that love too many times to take it lightly.

“Well, don’t laugh. It’s the first ornament I put on each year—and the last one I take off.”

“It must be special.”

“It is. Terry gave it to me on the only Christmas we had together.” Starsky placed the bear in the box and closed the lid. He turned to Hutch. “See, Christmas is about memories.”

“And love.”

“And love.”



Hutch assisted Starsky in storing the boxes, picking up the tinsel, and dragging the tree out to the garbage. They sank gratefully onto the sofa.

“Salute...” Hutch held up his beer and clanged Starsky’s bottle, “...to the New Year.”

“Salute.”

Hutch watched Starsky’s face in the dimming light. His partner had become quieter as the evening progressed. “Where’s your usual enthusiasm, Starsk? What’s wrong? Too many memories?”

“No, the memories are good ones.” Starsky shrugged. “I can’t explain it. Just an uneasy feeling, I guess. Do you ever wonder if you’ll see another Christmas?”

“Sometimes I just hope we see another day. We can’t know what’s out there, or what’s going to happen.”

“Or what memories each day could bring.”



Six months later.

“Sir, sir. You can’t take anything in there.” The nurse ran around the counter and stopped Hutch as he reached her patient’s door.

“It’s just a small bag, nothing special. See.” Hutch opened the bag for her inspection.

The nurse peered in.

“How’s he doing today?” Hutch stared through the glass of the ICU, anxious to see Starsky. His partner had been in the room for a week now, courtesy of Gunther.

“About the same. He’s sleeping right now.”

“Good.”

Surprised, the nurse looked at Hutch suspiciously. “I thought you might want to wake him.”

“I just want to make sure he’s okay. Don’t worry; I won’t wake him. I know he needs all the sleep he can get.”

“And by the looks of you, I’d say the same goes for you.”

Having just returned from arresting Gunther and overseeing that he was processed correctly through the system, Hutch knew he was unshaven and badly in need of some rest, but he wanted to be sure Starsky was okay. “Can I see him for just a minute?”

“Okay, go ahead.”

Hutch smiled and gave the nurse’s shoulder a quick squeeze. He eagerly pushed the door open and went to sit next to his partner. They had come so close. For a few minutes, he marveled in the constant rise and fall of Starsky’s chest as he breathed. Hutch rubbed his hands across his tired face and breathed a sigh of relief. Starsky looked okay, and the machine continued its regular rhythm—its beat of life. Starsky’s life.

Hutch stood up and stretched, a soft moan escaping as his aching muscles complained. It was time to go home, but first he had one more thing to do.



Starsky weakly opened his eyes and blinked. Was he conscious? Looking around, he spotted the nurse in her usual location near the door, but the seat next to his bed was empty—no Hutch.

Starsky blinked again—and again. He knew they kept him on lots of pain pills, but he'd never seen these prisms of colors before. He stared ahead, trying to focus. Then he realized what they were. Strung across the glass window of his room, were lights—a strand of tiny, multi-colored Christmas lights.

He tried to shift, to see the lights better, when the moan he tried to suppress escaped. The nurse was instantly at his side. “Detective Starsky, are you okay? Can I get you anything? Some water?”

“Yes.” The croaked reply he managed to get out frustrated him.

The nurse hurriedly supplied the water with a straw. “Just a sip...and not too fast.”

Starsky thankfully sipped. As the nurse replaced the cup on the stand and reached for his wrist to take his pulse, he asked, “Did my partner do that?”

The nurse turned to look at the twinkling lights. She smiled. “Yes. Oh, and before I forget...” She reached into her pocket. “He left something for you. He said I should open it for you when you wake up.”

Starsky looked at the little package she held in her hand.

“Do you want me to open it now?”

“Whatcha waitin’ for? Christmas?”

Starsky watched as she tore off the paper. She opened the tiny box and removed its contents, placing it in her palm. “It looks like some kind of ornament.”

Starsky looked at the miniature red car, with a crooked hand-painted white line on its side, resting in her hand. He swallowed hard to clear the lump in his throat. A piece of string had been slid through the driver’s side window and out the passenger’s. A Christmas hook was tied at the top.

“Can I hold it?”

The nurse placed the car in Starsky’s hand. His fingers curled up, encircling it. He slowly raised his hand to get a better look.

“He said to tell you, ‘It’s for next year’s Christmas memories.’ Does that make sense?”

“Yeah.” Starsky tenderly rubbed the side of the car with his thumb. “It’ll be the first one on the tree.”

The End
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