

Miserable

By Linda B.

Miserable, that's how I feel. Just plain miserable.

Pulling his heavy white and black sweater tighter around him, Starsky struggled to slow his shivering. As early as this morning, he knew something wasn't right.

Waking earlier than normal, he felt like he hadn't slept at all, and he was surprised to find he was drenched in sweat despite the cool morning breeze entering the window. He headed for the shower, hoping it would revive him a little. While sipping on a cup of coffee, he decided to take advantage of the early morning light. Picking up his camera off the dresser, he had just about reached the door, when the phone rang. Starsky hesitated, unsure at first whether he should answer it or just leave, but he found himself turning to pick up the phone. It might be Hutch.

"Starsky."

"Mornin', Starsk. Hope I didn't wake you."

"Nah, I was up already." For reasons he couldn't put into words, Starsky was relieved to hear Hutch's voice. Instantly reflecting on how and what he'd said, he hoped his relief didn't come through in his voice. His partner would be instantly suspicious. "What's up?"

"Kiko and I are going fishin'. Just wondered if you wanted to join us."

Starsky briefly considered the idea. He really would like to spend the day with them. If just hearing Hutch's voice was comforting, wouldn't he feel better spending the entire day with him? *Grow up, Starsky, there's nothing wrong. Besides, Hutch needs time to be with Kiko, he sees enough of you.*

Knowing that Hutch and Kiko were at an important juncture in their Big Brother relationship, Starsky responded, "Nah, thanks for the offer, but you know me and fishin', we don't exactly get along. Besides, I have plans."

The disappointment in Hutch's voice almost made Starsky reconsider. "You sure, Starsk? We'd love to have ya come."

"Thanks, buddy. Maybe next time."

So he'd spent the day in the park. And in the end, he'd spent more time watching people than photographing them. Feeling slightly off kilter all day, it had been easier to watch the people than try to be part of them. Even the chili dog he'd had for lunch left a funny taste in his mouth.



Now he knew why. It was evening and he was sitting on his couch, wrapped in a sweater, staring numbly at the TV. He was aching all over, running a fever, feeling plain miserable. *Why'd I tell Hutch I wouldn't go with 'em this morning? At least if I was with him and Kiko, I wouldn't be feelin' miserable all by myself.*

He knew he should get up, make some tea, take some aspirin—do something—but all he wanted to do was sit there and drown in his misery. Truth was—he missed his partner. He hated being sick, but it was even worse being sick alone. Having Hutch nearby couldn't help but make him feel better. Hutch loved playing mother hen, to the point of being annoying sometimes, but when you were feeling downright miserable maybe that wasn't such a bad thing.

When he was a little boy, he always felt better when his mother was around. She always seemed to know just what made him feel better. One day when he was about nine, he'd had a bad cold and stayed home from school. His mom, even though she was busy cleaning and ironing, would still check in on him every half hour or so, bringing medicine, water, juice, or just tucking him in. That particular day he hadn't felt much like eating, even though she tried everything, including her chicken soup, which normally he couldn't resist.

“What can I bring you, Davey? You have to eat something. What would make you feel better?”

Thinking hard, he'd answered, “Oreo cookies.”

Smiling at her son, she repeated, “Oreo cookies would make you feel better?” Seeing his solemn nod, she tucked him in and said, “Okay, I'll see if we have some. You try to get a little sleep and I'll be back.”

A little while later, the sound of his mother entering the room woke him. He smiled at the sight of the tray in her hands. A tray with a book, two glasses of milk, and a plate of Oreo cookies. He scooted up to lean against his pillows as his mom sat down next to him. While she quietly read to him, they'd shared the cookies and the milk. Finally, he'd fallen asleep and when he'd woken a few hours later, he'd felt better. It got to be a family joke that Oreo cookies were the world's best medicine. Every time he'd gotten sick after that, his mom always had Oreo cookies on hand to help him get well. It wasn't until years later that he'd found out that his mom had left him sleeping that day and had walked five blocks to the store to buy him those cookies.



Miserable. That's how I feel. Starsky, curled up on the couch, aching from the roots of his hair to the tips of his toes, whispered, “Hutch, when ya gettin' home?”

Realizing how dumb that probably sounded coming from a grown man, Starsky chastised himself. *Boy, am I sounding like a little kid. I should be ashamed of myself. Hutch and Kiko are having a great time together and all I can think of is having him here with me. I need to grow up.*

Closing his eyes, he felt himself drifting off into a restless sleep.



“Starsk? Wake up, Starsk.”

Feeling a gentle shake waking him from his feverish dreams, Starsky opened his eyes. Looking into the concerned blue eyes of his partner, Starsky blinked several times, unsure if what he saw was real or imagined. *Hutch! Hutch was here.* He started to sit up but felt a restraining hand on his shoulder.

“Not too fast. Just stay under the covers and rest. Sorry to wake you, but I heated some soup and I want you to eat it before it gets cold.”

“Hu-u-tch?” Starsky, surprised at how raspy his voice sounded, swallowed rapidly several times and gratefully drank from the glass of orange juice Hutch held out to him. “Whenja get here?”

“A little while ago. Why didn’t you tell me you were sick?”

“Didn’t know I was coming down with anything. It just kinda hit me...all of a sudden. Where’s Kiko?”

“I dropped him off before coming by to check on you. Here, take some aspirin with that juice.”

Starsky reached out to take the aspirin from his friend’s hand, surprised by the two blankets wrapped tightly around him. “Whaddaya mean, ‘check on me’?”

“Something bothered me all day long, and on the way home I finally figured it out. When I talked with you this morning you just didn’t sound right.” Hutch saw the look of disbelief on Starsky’s face and shrugged. “Don’t look at me that way. I can’t explain it. I just knew Kiko and I had to come back early so I could check on ya.”

Starsky pulled the covers up tight around him, stilling the shivers. It didn’t really matter what had brought Hutch home early. It only mattered that he was there.

Hutch walked into the kitchen and returned with the warm bowl of soup. “Here ya go, Starsk. Eat up. You’ll feel better.” As Starsky sat up a little straighter, coughing, Hutch placed his hand on his partner’s shoulder and squeezed. “Besides, I can guarantee it. I stopped at the store on the way home. When you finish this soup, I have a surprise for you.”

Starsky looked up at his partner with sudden interest, “Surprise?”

Hutch couldn’t help but grin as he received the expected response. “Yeah, I stopped and picked up some Oreo cookies. Knew they always make ya feel better.”

Starsky returned the grin as he reached for the bowl of soup. *Somedays feelin' miserable wasn't so bad.*

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