

Seasons of the Heart

By Linda B.

“Do you ever get tired of it, Hutch?”

“What?” Confused, Hutch looked around at the blue sky, waves rolling onto the beach, and the bikini-clad girls. “Tired of the beach?”

“No.” Starsky struggled to keep the exasperation out of his voice.

“You lost me, buddy.” Being lost in one of Starsky’s conversations wasn’t unusual; the way his mind jumped around never ceased to amaze Hutch. “Can we start this conversation over?”

Starsky sighed before he indulged the blond sitting next to him. “Do you ever get tired of the blue sky and warm weather?”

Hutch’s eyes widened and his jaw dropped open. “You’ve got to be kidding. Why would anyone ever get tired of blue sky and sun? Look around. The water rolling onto the sand, the sea gulls—”

“That’s not what I mean. Do you ever miss not having seasons?”

“We have seasons.”

“No. I mean *real* seasons, like having snow in the winter and the colors in fall?”

“Miss the snow? In Duluth? I’d take this any day. Wouldn’t you? I can’t imagine winter in New York was a piece of cake. Snowfalls in a large city must be a nightmare, what with the icy roads, the snowplows snarling everything up. The only way to describe it is wet and cold. What fun is that? You’ve been out here too long if you’re forgetting what winter is really like.”

“Yeah, I guess.” Starsky was silent a moment. “I just miss the changes sometimes. They mark time, like a calendar. Around here, Thanksgiving feels like the Fourth of July.”

“Don’t you think you’re exaggerating a little, Starsky?” Hutch grinned.

“Well, ya get the idea.”

“You certainly don’t have any trouble celebrating Christmas.” Hutch nudged Starsky with his elbow.

Starsky's smile spread across his face. "Hell, no."

Hutch watched a family of four pass by. The two boys ran ahead, while the parents followed, arms loaded with beach chairs, umbrellas, cooler, and assorted beach toys. "What made you think of the seasons on a day like today?"

Starsky shrugged. "I don't know. Those trees over there by the sidewalk, I guess." Starsky pointed down the beach to their left. "Look at them. The few trees that do change color out here turn brown. Then the leaves drop off."

"What's the matter with that? That's nature."

"They should be bright and colorful. After all, it's their last hurrah."

Hutch chuckled. Only his partner would look at leaves as animate objects. "I never thought of it that way. I guess I didn't think it was that important."

"Little things are important, Hutch," Starsky scolded.

"Now, you sound like my mother."

"She's a smart lady."

"I know. Look how I turned out." A push from Starsky sent Hutch sideways. Hutch grinned as he righted himself. "Okay, okay. Tell me what's so important about leaves all of a sudden. They grow on trees, change color, and fall to the ground. Next year, they'll do the same thing. What's the big deal? It's obvious you never spent hours raking them."

Laughter from the two boys as the waves hit them drew Starsky's attention before he replied. "Nick and I were about their age when Pop took us to Central Park. Ma packed a picnic lunch. Pop packed our baseball gloves, a bat, and a ball. It was a great day." Starsky closed his eyes, visualizing the day—remembering. "The sky was clear blue, and the sun shone on the leaves. They were every color—green, pumpkin, yellow-gold, even a bright red. It was pretty windy and they were falling off the trees. We even watched the squirrels burying their acorns. Ma said it was going to be a long, hard, winter since they were so busy."

Hutch watched the emotions play across Starsky's face. It was easy to picture the curly-haired little boy playing in the park with his family.

"Nick and I got this great idea. We spent a long time gathering up armfuls of leaves and made a huge pile. It was so big that the three of us—Nick, Pop, and me—could jump in and roll around. We even buried Pop in the leaves, like it was sand. Ma sat on the blanket and laughed at us, calling us 'her three kids.' It was a lot of fun."

“Sounds like you had a great time.”

Starsky stared out at the water and swallowed hard. “He was murdered the next week.”

Hutch closed his eyes; his throat, suddenly thick, made it hard to swallow, to speak. It was easy to forget the loss Starsky had suffered so long ago. He rarely brought it up. “I’m sorry.”

Starsky turned, his eyes meeting Hutch’s. “It’s okay. Once in a while something triggers a memory...”

“A great memory.”

Starsky smiled. “Yeah.” He stood up and broke into a run. “C’mon, I’ll race you to the water.”

Hutch scrambled to his feet. “That’s not fair!”



A week later, there was a knock at the door and Starsky came out of the bedroom, dust cloth slung over his shoulder. He opened the door and was surprised to see a large box on the porch. He carried it inside and set it on the sofa. He wasn’t expecting a package from his mom, but she’d been known to surprise him before. Whatever it was, it didn’t weigh very much. And it came via overnight delivery.

Anxious to see what was inside, he tore at the tape. It was then he noticed the return address of Duluth, Minnesota. Curious, Starsky wondered what Hutch’s mom would be sending him. But then Christmas wasn’t that far off, and maybe Mrs. Hutchinson was sending something to hide for Hutch, like she’d done in the past.

Starsky pulled up the flaps and stopped. He looked inside and looked again. Delighted, he reached in and lifted out an armful of crinkly greens, oranges, crimsons, and golds and flung them in the air—a smile spreading from ear to ear.

The End