

“Desperate Measures”

By TibbieB

Chapter Four

Starsky walked through the woods, listening to the night sounds, sounds he wasn't at all comfortable with. When he heard the lonesome howl of the coyote again, he picked up the pace. Each snapping twig, each nocturnal bird call, and even the croaking tree frogs reminded him of a scene from some cheesy horror flick.

Brilliant, Starsky. Brilliant plan. If you wanted to help Hutch and take him on a vacation, why not Vegas, or...or...Disney World? Fishin' and campin'...brilliant.

By the time Starsky reached the wreckage, he was almost at a dead run. Debris was scattered in every direction, some still smoldering, in spite of the earlier rain. Even with the flashlight, he was able to find only one of the duffel bags of clothing—Hutch's. It was getting late and the temperature was still dropping, so Starsky decided not to spend anymore time searching in the dark. He would just bum a change of clothing from Hutch and come back tomorrow.

Just as he reached down and hoisted up the duffel, Starsky heard a scratching sound to his left. He turned around and was met by a pair of glowing, red eyes and a loud hissing sound. Instinctively, his left hand darted beneath his right arm, reaching for the Smith & Wesson. For the first time, Starsky realized he didn't have his gun. It was in the missing duffel bag. He had debated even bringing it along; but old habits die hard. So the gun had been packed in the duffel bag, just in case.

He swung the flashlight around, pointing directly at the intruder, half expecting to see the coyote. Instead, it was only a huge raccoon, scrounging for a free meal. But to Starsky, the city kid, he was a wild animal, intimidating, and scary. Deciding the party was over; the frightened raccoon scurried back into the forest.

Starsky decided to check out the area the raccoon had been scavenging. There, he discovered the paper sack he had stuffed full of candy bars, chips, and beef jerky sticks and brought along to snack on during the flight. Fortunately, most of the cellophane packages were still intact. It may have been junk food to Hutch, but to Starsky, it was manna from heaven. And he had the sneaking suspicion that by now, it would look pretty damn good to Hutch too.

Starsky opened the duffel bag and rifled through the contents, searching for Hutch's Magnum. He located the gun hidden beneath the clothes, but found no ammo, other than that already in the cylinder. Disappointed, but at the same time relieved at finding at least one gun, Starsky deposited the food sack and the gun into the duffel, then made one last pass around the airplane.

It was then he remembered Carl Parks.

Aw man, how could I forget Carl?

He felt a brief moment of guilt. But realistically, it wasn't exactly as if he hadn't had a lot on his mind. Starsky knew he couldn't bury the body right now, but it just didn't seem decent to leave him lying out in the open with wild animals already scavenging the crash site.

In spite of the fatigue and hunger plaguing him, Starsky knew what he had to do. Armed with the flashlight, he gathered a few of the larger, unbroken panels of the aircraft and covered the corpse as best he could. Then he placed heavier pieces of debris on top to weight them down. It wasn't exactly a perfect solution, but Starsky hoped it would hold until they could do better by the man.

Now totally exhausted, Starsky picked up the duffel bag and started back to the campsite. He had only taken a few steps when he turned around and came back. He promised to bring Hutch's fishing cap...and he damned-well wasn't going back without it.



Seth Carter sat at the air-traffic control panel watching anxiously. He could have sworn he heard a may-day. But the transmission was so broken up; he couldn't make out more than just a few words. Something about Klamath and a lightning strike. God knew, there had been some pretty bad weather in that area today. Anything could happen when the lightning and wind started playing games with small aircraft. Still, he just didn't have much to go on.

Co-worker, John McGinness stood behind Seth, looking at the screen too. "Maybe we can check some of the flight plan records and see if anyone isn't where he should be by now," John suggested. "Did the guy say where he was from, or give his destination?"

"Nah...well, maybe...hell, I don't know, John. I told you, I only made out a few words. Anyway, there's over a million acres of forest up there. Unless his emergency transponder is working, we'll never find him."

"Still, it may be worth a try. There are a lot of those small puddle jumpers that regularly fly folks out here for fishing and camping trips. Let's check with San Francisco and LA airports and see what we can find out."

Seth sighed, and he reached for his coffee mug, inscribed with a bright yellow smiley face and the fad phrase, 'HAVE A NICE DAY!'. "Sure, why not. Maybe someone has contacted one of the airports by now about a no-show."

"I'll make a few calls," John offered, then left Seth to drink his cold coffee.



When Starsky arrived back at the camp, he found Hutch sitting up, sound asleep. He looked so peaceful; Starsky hated to wake him. He reached out and gently touched the bandage on Hutch's head to assure himself the bleeding had not started again.

Hutch stirred, then his eyes flew open in surprise. "It's okay, buddy. It's only me," Starsky reassured him. "Sorry I woke you, but I got'cha some dry clothes here. I'll give you a hand."

"I was starting to worry. What took you so long?"

"Took awhile to find your bag. Never did come across mine. You'll have to share some of your clothes with me until I can do a better search in the daylight. And, I guess I should go ahead and tell you—Carl didn't make it, Hutch."

“Aw God, Starsk, I didn’t even think about Carl.” Starsky could hear the remorse in Hutch’s voice.

“Yeah, well, he bought it on impact, I think. Anyway, there weren’t any signs of him havin’ ever regained consciousness. I found his body when I was lookin’ for you this afternoon.”

Hutch reached up with his good hand and gripped Starsky’s shoulder. He could see his friend was on the brink of exhaustion and that he was affected by Carl’s death.

“I, uh...well, I couldn’t bury him, Hutch; so I had to cover up the body to keep the wild animals from gettin’ to him.”

Hutch looked up at his partner; concern etched his face. He knew Starsky had never spent time in the woods, so naturally, he would be a little uneasy around any wild animal. Hutch hoped there hadn’t been any scary encounters at the crash scene.

“Did you see anything?...bear?...mountain lion?” Hutch knew these animals were common place in the forests of northern California. A predator nearby could mean trouble for them. The surprised look on Starsky’s face told him his partner hadn’t considered these possibilities.

“Just a dumb raccoon,” Starsky answered. “I don’t know who was more scared, him or me. I did hear a wolf or somethin’ howlin’. It seemed a little too close for comfort, if you ask me.”

Hutch smiled, but decided not to tease Starsky. He thought, for a city boy, Starsk had done a hell of a good job keeping them alive so far. He watched as his partner started pulling clothes out of the duffel bag.

“Listen, Blondie, I ain’t tryin’ to get fresh with you, or nothin’; but you’re gonna need help gettin’ out of those wet clothes.” Starsky waggled his eyebrows, bringing a soft chuckle from Hutch. He knew Starsky was trying to lighten the mood.

As it turned out, the only way to get the wet jeans off without hurting Hutch’s leg further was to cut them off. Once they were both in dry clothes, Starsky opened the paper bag of snacks and dumped them on the sleeping bag.

“Chow time,” he said proudly, looking at Hutch for a reaction.

“Starsky, I never thought I’d live to say this, but I’m sure as hell glad you have a penchant for junk food.”

Starsky smiled at Hutch and spread the assorted snacks out for him to choose from. “I ain’t gonna forget you said that, Pal. Next time I want a quarter for the candy machine, just remember, you owe me.”

They each chose one package, agreeing to conserve food until they had a better idea of what they were up against. They ate in companionable silence—and no filet mignon ever tasted better.

Afterwards, Starsky helped Hutch to get situated in one of the sleeping bags, and zipped it up to his chin. The temperature had already dropped low enough that they could see their breath when they talked. Starsky hoped the downy bedrolls would be enough to keep them warm. He snuggled into his own sleeping bag and started to lie down.

Hutch looked over at him and asked, “Aren’t you going to turn off the lantern, Starsk?”

“Uh...I don't think we should do that, Hutch. I mean, you know...what about the bears and stuff?” Starsky was clearly more than a little nervous.

“Starsk, we'll use up all the fuel, then we'll be in the dark tomorrow night.”

Starsky grumbled, but knew Hutch was right. He turned over and shut off the lantern. Hutch had to stifle a laugh when he heard Starsk scoot his sleeping bag a little closer. With only the light from the moon, the forest sounds seemed closer, the croaking of the frogs a backdrop for the serenade.

“Hutch, you asleep?” Starsky whispered.

“No. My leg hurts too much.”

“You know, we're lucky to be alive.”

“Yeah.... Listen, Starsk...I, well...you know I'm not really very good at saying thanks, but...thanks for looking after me today.”

“Hey, what are partners for? You'd do the same for me.” Hutch heard Starsky turn toward him. “We're gonna be okay. Tomorrow, I'll go for help.”

“Starsky, you don't know how to find your way through the woods. You could get lost and never be seen again. I say we stick together. Let's stay here, near the crash site. Surely, someone will come looking for us.” Hutch—always the voice of reason.

“Maybe. But I don't think anybody's lookin' for us. Carl said he didn't think his may-day was picked up.” Starsky flipped onto his back. “You warm enough, Hutch?”

“Yeah, I'm fine. Now, go to sleep, mother hen.”

Eventually, Starsky was overcome by exhaustion; Hutch heard his partner's heavy, even breathing, and knew he had finally fallen asleep.



Hutch woke suddenly. His thinking muddled, he tried to move, but was constricted by the sleeping bag. Then he heard it again—a large animal trudging through the trees toward them.

“Starsky. Starsky!” he whispered loudly. The zipped sleeping bag kept him from reaching out and shaking Starsky awake.

“Hmmm...what? —What?”

“Wake up, Starsky! There's something out there.”

That short sentence brought Starsky wide awake. “What? Where?” he sat up quickly, “Where, Hutch?”

“In the woods. For God sake, be quiet. Could be anything.”

Starsky quickly unzipped his bag and scrambled backward, colliding with the still-confined Hutch. “What should we do?”

“Well, for starters, Gordo, you could let me out of this sleeping bag.” Hutch was still whispering, hoping not give away their presence.

Starsky hastened to unzip Hutch's bag, then scrambled around, searching for the duffel. He frantically pulled the clothes out, digging for the Magnum.

“What are you doing?”

“Lookin' for your gun—what do you think?”

“Starsky, if it's a bear, that gun won't kill it; just piss it off royally. Even if it's a mountain lion, unless you make a clean kill with the first shot, you'll make things worse. Light the lantern. Maybe the light will scare him off. Or at least blind him a little.”

“Yeah, or make it easier for him to find us.” Starsky’s eyes were wide as he finally pulled the gun out of the duffel. Hutch had seen his partner face cold-blooded killers and not blink an eye, but just the prospect of a bear or a mountain lion had him scared witless.

“You sure about this, Hutch? I mean, what if it doesn’t work? Huh?”

With a deadpan expression, Hutch answered, “Then we make a lot of noise and you do a couple of your disco moves and scare him to death.”

Starsky turned and glared at Hutch with a look of sheer horror.

“Look, Starsk—light the lantern. If he comes any closer, fire the gun in the air and try to scare him off. But don’t shoot him. I know what I’m talking about.” Hutch tipped his head to one side, signaling Starsky to do as he said.

While Starsky was deciding whether or not to follow Hutch’s plan, a hulking, golden form emerged from the trees. Walking on all fours, the stealthy mountain lion glistened in the moonlight, lifting his head and sniffing the air, as if trying to pick up a scent—their scent.

Deciding there was nothing else to do, Starsk quietly pulled the lantern toward them and lifted the globe to light it. As the mountain lion turned his head in their direction, Starsky froze, waiting for the big cat to realize where they were. “Light it, Starsk. Now!”

As the lantern flame flared to life, the lion jerked backward and let out an unnerving scream that sounded like a woman in agony. Starsky and Hutch both backed closer to the wall of the cave, waiting to see what the cat would do next. Finally, he moved forward, zigzagging as he advanced.

“Oh, terrific. Anymore brilliant ideas?” Starsky flicked the cylinder open on the Magnum, checked the ammunition, then snapped it back in place.

“Now...I, uh...think *now* would be a good time to shoot the gun, Starsk.”

“Don’t you wanna invite him in for a nice little midnight snack or somethin’, huh?” The mountain lion inched closer.

Starsky moved forward with the light, hoping his movement would spook the big cat and encourage him to retreat. Aware that each shot he fired diminished their precious supply of ammo, Starsky decided to try Hutch’s facetious suggestion of making noise to scare off the cat.

He picked up the lantern and advanced toward the lion, shouting, “Get outta here! Get! Get!” while flailing the lantern ahead of him. Instead of retreating, the mountain lion gave another blood-curdling scream.

“That’s it! You’re pissin’ me off, Tony!” Starsky raised the Magnum above his head and fired. The mountain lion jumped straight into the air, then turned tail, and scurried back into the forest.

Starsky held his breath—waiting—expecting to see the cat reappear from the woods. After several tense seconds, Hutch spoke.

“Starsk—buddy, he’s gone. You can relax now.”

Starsky released his breath, not even realizing that he had been holding it. Once he was certain the lion was really gone, Starsky retreated to the cave entrance. He dropped to the ground, then scooted backward into the cave until he bumped into Hutch. The contact startled him so badly he jumped.

Catching Starsky with his good arm, Hutch pulled him back against his chest, and steadied him there for a moment until he was calm. “He’s gone, Starsk. You did good.” He could feel his friend’s heart hammering beneath his hand.

“Yeah, well I just hope he doesn’t come back. I’d hate to have to hurt ‘em.” Hutch chuckled and squeezed Starsky’s shoulder. “Me too, partner...me too.”



End of Chapter Four