

“Desperate Measures”

By TibbieB

Chapter Eight

Starsky lay near the entrance of the cave, watching the fire pop and crackle. He was exhausted and sore, but at least the pain in his shoulder had finally started to ease up. In the distance, he had heard the mountain lion’s scream twice already, so he wasn’t taking any chances on letting the fire go out.

Lying behind him, Hutch had succumbed to a restless sleep. Rationally, Starsky knew that he wasn’t to blame for what Bracken had done to Hutch today, but he still felt rotten he hadn’t been there to protect his partner. Now, he was bound and determined not to let anything else bad happen to Hutch.

In the quiet of night, he had plenty of time to think about just how desperate their situation had become. He knew that Hutch’s physical condition was tenuous, at best. If his leg became infected, gangrene could set in. And if that happened, Hutch would die unless he got adequate medical attention.

Starsky was discouraged. Usually the optimist of the duo, he was finding it harder and harder to keep up a good front. Because he knew that Hutch was depending on him to get them home, Starsky was determined he’d do whatever necessary to accomplish that end. Obviously, Hutch was in no condition to travel, nor could he be left alone to fend for himself while Starsky went off to search for help. It was Catch 22. He just hoped that by now, someone realized that the plane was missing.

Starsky could have kicked himself for not telling anyone back home where they were going. He had made up that cock’n’bull story about winning a sweepstake and had glossed over the details so Captain Dobey couldn’t check it out. Now, here they were in the middle of nowhere and nobody even had a clue where to look for them. How many times had Hutch turned to him in his best Laurel and Hardy voice and said, ‘Another fine mess you’ve gotten us into, Stanley?’ Starsky smiled to himself. *This time you’re right, Hutch. It’s a fine mess alright...*

He fought sleep as his eyelids grew heavier. *Got’a stay awake...got’a keep the fire goin’...got’a look after Hutch...* That was his last thought before fatigue won the battle.



Haunted by fever-induced nightmares, Hutch was agitated, thrashing about and fighting to free himself from the sleeping bag. He mumbled incoherently, and called out loudly, first for Gillian, then for Starsky—arguing with some unseen demon, as the fever raged through his body. Tears streamed from his bloodshot eyes as he relived the scene in Gillian’s apartment. Starsky woke up with a start and scrambled on hands and knees to where Hutch lay. He reached out and touched Hutch’s face, and discovered he was burning up with fever.

“Calm down, buddy. I’m right here. Come on, Hutch, you got’a be still now.”

Starsky's heart was pounding and he felt a cold knot of fear in the pit of his stomach, realizing that while he was sleeping, Hutch had taken a turn for the worse. Starsky kept talking, trying to calm him, trying to penetrate his delirious dream world. Finally, in desperation, he wrapped his arms around Hutch and held on tightly to restrain him from doing further damage to his leg. Starsky was surprised at how strong Hutch was as he fought to hold him still. Finally, Hutch tired, and the fight drained from his body.

Once he stopped struggling, Starsky eased him back down and fetched what was left of their precious water supply. He patiently coaxed Hutch to take a few sips, hoping it would help cool the fever and relieve the delirium. Then, not knowing what else to do, Starsky soaked his handkerchief with water and used it to wipe Hutch's face.

"Ma use to wipe my face with a cool cloth when I was sick," he said, as much to himself, as to Hutch. He smiled as he thought back to when he was a little boy. "I remember when I had the measles, she musta done this for hours. Every time she thought I was asleep, she'd try to slip outta the room. But I wouldn't let her." Starsky wet the cloth again and repeated the process many times throughout the night. He kept up the one-sided conversation, hoping the sound of his voice would somehow reassure Hutch that he wasn't alone.

After awhile, Hutch quieted and drifted into a peaceful sleep; and Starsky began a vigil which would last until daylight.



When Hutch woke up the next morning, he found Starsky sitting in an upright position, leaning against the rock wall. His right hand was resting on Hutch's head. Hutch's whole body ached and his mouth felt like sandpaper. At least the intense, burning heat that consumed his body the night before was gone.

Hutch quietly eased from beneath Starsky's hand and unzipped his sleeping bag. He vaguely remembered Starsky forcing cool water past his parched lips last night. Or was it a dream? Then he saw the empty canteen lying beside Starsky's leg. In his left hand was the still-damp handkerchief.

They had made it through another night. Hutch could see dark smudges under Starsky eyes, the result of too little sleep. He still had Hutch's bandana tied around his head; his hair matted with leaves, dirt, and dried blood. Hutch could see where the bullet had grazed Starsky's shoulder yesterday—more dried blood, evidence of inadequate cleansing and lack of medical supplies.

God, he's pitiful to look at! And what's he do? Sits up all night taking care of me. Hutch smiled to himself and shook his head in amazement. Starsky was such an enigma to him. His tough-guy image fooled most people; but those closest to him knew his capacity for kindness and his undying loyalty to those he loved.

Lost in thought, Hutch wasn't conscious of the sound right away. But then it grew louder; just a hum, at first. Then louder, and closer. He deliberately listened now, trying to identify the source. His mind was groggy from the after effects of the fever, but slowly, recognition came.

"Oh, my God...oh my God! Starsk, wake up! Wake up, buddy! I think I hear a helicopter!" Hutch began shaking Starsky and yelling at the same time. "Wake up!"

Starsky was so startled, it took a few seconds for him to comprehend what Hutch was saying. Then he was on his feet; rushing out into the open, scanning the sky for a glimpse of the craft they could both hear so nearby.

“The fire, Starsk! Throw some more wood on the fire!” Starsky reacted instantly and began throwing twigs and sticks on the smoldering fire. At first, it didn’t catch, but when he scooped up an armload of dry leaves and tossed them on the coals, the flame leapt up and restarted the campfire.

They were like two school boys—Starsky dancing around, flapping his one good arm, calling out to the search team, while Hutch joined in by cheering his partner on to ‘yell louder, add more wood, jump up and down more’!

The chopper passed them by, unseen, and appeared to move away from them. Starsky ran after the aircraft, but no one seemed to notice. Hutch’s heart plummeted at the prospect of being so close to rescue, then abandoned. Desperate to keep them from leaving, Hutch barked out more orders. “Starsky! Come back here and throw more wood on the fire!”

Realizing that he was getting nowhere running after the helicopter, Starsky rushed back to the sparse campfire and frantically threw more fuel on the flames. They both watched the sky anxiously. Starsky thought he saw the helicopter hover in one area for a few seconds—move away—then return.

“They see the plane!” he shouted to Hutch. “They see the plane!” By now, their campfire was blazing pretty good. The smoke billowed upward, catching the attention of a paramedic onboard the helicopter.

“There they are!” he shouted over the rotor blade noise. “See them? Two men, on the other side of that stand of pines. See? There—by those rocks.” The pilot pulled the chopper in a wide circle and started toward the plume of smoke. He grinned as he watched a scraggly looking fellow wearing dirty clothes and a red bandana tied around his head, jump up and down like an Indian doing a rain dance.

“I think those guys are ready to go home,” he said, laughing at Starsky’s gyrations.

“They’re comin’ back, Hutch! They’re comin’.”

“I see they are, buddy. I think we’re going home.” Hutch’s eyes closed briefly as he sighed with relief. It looked as though their ordeal was about to come to an end.

Starsky turned and looked at him. Neither said a word, but the meaning was clear. They had made it. And they had made it together.



End of Chapter Eight