

No Way To Spend New Year's Eve

by TibbieB

Chapter 1

Hutch stared out the window of the DC9, mesmerized by the flashing strobes dotting the wings of the airplane. In his mind he replayed the holiday visit with his family—disappointed, as usual, with the outcome. He didn't know exactly what he'd expected; a sudden healing in the breach between himself and his father just because it was Christmas? Not really. But he'd at least hoped for a cordial visit, free of arguments and recriminations. He told himself he wanted this for his mother's sake, but in moments of raw honesty, he knew he wanted it for himself, too.

Instead, his father had used every opportunity to make insulting comments about Hutch's job, his lack of ambition, his missed opportunity—or to sling innuendoes at him about his “strange relationship” with Starsky. Edward Hutchinson would never be capable of understanding the bond of friendship his son shared with David Starsky. Their partnership as detectives expanded beyond a working relationship. It was more than that. They'd learned to trust one another with their lives. Hutch knew if he could have chosen a brother, David Starsky would have been his choice. Starsky was more “family” to Hutch than Edward could ever be.

Closing his eyes momentarily, he felt the airplane begin its gradual descent to the bustling airport below. It was good to be home. This was where he belonged...this was where his life was...his family. Starsky was going to pick him up at the airport—most likely wearing those ridiculous red socks he believed made him look “Christmassy.” Hutch wondered about the two girls his partner had “fixed them up with” for the New Year's Eve bash at Huggy's tonight. *Leave it to Starsky to line up dates for New Year's Eve only two days before the big event.*

Hutch chuckled to himself. When it came to Christmas, Starsky was like a kid. He could hardly wait to see the look on his partner's face when Starsky realized he'd actually bought him a gift this year. It had been a long-running source of irritation to Starsky that Hutch refused to get caught up in the “euphoric sentimentalism of the holiday” and spend money on a gift for him. Not one to be easily discouraged, Starsky had, nonetheless, given his partner a present every year, confident he could change Hutch's outlook on the tradition of exchanging gifts. This year Hutch had actually broken down and bought him something. Now, he was anxious to see how Starsky would react.

The plane touched down with only a modest thump, then coasted along the tarmac to the gate. When Hutch stepped off the ramp at the gate, his eyes quickly scanned the crowd for Starsky's familiar crop of dark curls. Instead, he spotted Huggy waving at him from across the room. Hutch smiled and waved back then began working his way through the

crowd of disembarking passengers. As he approached, he could see the troubled expression on Huggy's face.

"Hey, Huggy," he said, reaching out to shake the wiry black man's hand. "Where's Starsk? I thought he was picking me up. Don't tell me he's already started celebrating without me."

"Man, am I glad to see you," Huggy said, gripping Hutch's hand like a steel vice, before steering him through the throng of people toward baggage pick-up. "Dobey called me, Hutch—looking for you. I'm afraid it's bad news," he said without preamble.

Hutch felt his stomach lurch to his throat and stopped in his tracks. He grabbed Huggy by the jacket sleeve and spun him around. "What do you mean? Something's happened to Starsky?" His eyes searched Huggy's face, hoping for reassurance he had misunderstood.

"Calm down, Hutch. I'll tell you all I know, man." Huggy gently pried Hutch's fingers from his jacket as he spoke, unsuccessfully trying to dodge passers-by in the process. "There's been an accident—a bad one."

The color quickly drained from Hutch's face. "Is he...is he okay?"

"To tell you the truth, I don't know." Anticipating Hutch's next question, he spoke quickly. "Honest. Dobey was on his way to the scene when he called The Pits."

"You mean it just happened?"

"Yeah. Seems he was on his way to the airport. Witnesses said an eighteen wheeler was following this little Chevy too close and when the dude slowed down for another car changing lanes, the turkey driving the semi hit his brakes and jack-knifed across three lanes. Starsky was caught in the crossfire." Huggy paused and took a deep breath before continuing. "That's not the worst of it."

Afraid to know, but more afraid not to know, Hutch whispered, "Tell me."

"That machine of Starsky's run up under the truck and is wedged there. Hutch—it's a fuel tanker. When Dobey got the call, they were still trying to figure out a way to get Starsky out of the car."

"Is he? He's not...." Hutch's voice died in his throat, unwilling to utter the words aloud.

"The cop that radioed it in said he was alive."

"Take me there—NOW!"

Chapter 2

Huggy maneuvered as close as the highway patrol's barricades would allow. When their progress was blocked, Hutch baled out of the car and went on foot toward the crowd gathered near the wrecked tanker. A flash of red and white was clearly visible, confirming the Torino was snugly entangled beneath its trailer. Seeing it with his own eyes was more frightening than Hutch had even imagined, and he wondered how Starsky could have possibly survived the impact. Before he had time to ask who was in charge, he felt Dobey's broad hand on his shoulder.

"Hutch, thank God you made it."

"Cap'n, how's Starsky?" Hutch turned and looked at the familiar face of his captain, unnerved by the fear in the older man's eyes.

"I don't know, son. They pushed everyone back about five minutes ago. I'm afraid the tanker's started leaking fuel. They've abandoned the idea of cutting the car loose with a blow torch—afraid the sparks may ignite the whole area. The Chief has sent for that contraption they call 'the Jaws of Life', but it's being used at multi-car accident about ten miles from here. They'll get it here as soon as possible." Dobey rubbed his eyes, wishing this was just a bad dream so he could wake up.

"I'm going up there," Hutch said, pushing past Dobey.

"They won't let you through—"

"Let's see them try and stop me," Hutch shot back over his shoulder. Before anyone realized what he was up to, he'd slipped past the barricade and was halfway to the tanker.

"Hey, you can't go up there!" One of the young patrolmen stepped in front of Hutch, cutting him off. "That thing could blow. I've got orders to keep everyone back."

Without missing a beat, Hutch whipped out his badge and answered authoritatively, "Detective Sergeant Ken Hutchinson, Special Rescue Division, dispatched from the Mayor's Office."

Surprised, the patrolman leaned forward to try and get a better look at the detective's credentials.

"I never heard of—"

Hutch met the young man's stare head-on, his eyes hard and his jaw set. "Then I suggest you go call the Mayor at home and check it out. I've got a job to do here and I don't have time to stand around explaining the politics of disobeying a direct order from the Honorable Mayor Steed."

Taken aback, the less experienced patrolman stepped aside and let Hutch pass. With no one else between him and the tanker, Hutch was there in a few long strides. Squatting down, he looked up under the truck to assess the position of the car and determine where the driver's seat had ended up, then skirted around the truck to the front end of the car. All he could see protruding out from beneath the trailer was the right front fender of the Torino. Hutch bent down and scooted underneath the tanker until he was even with the mangled passenger door, which hung loosely by its bent and twisted hinges. From that angle, he could see Starsky, jammed between the steering wheel and the seat, lying on his side in the seat of the Torino.

"Starsky! Starsk, are you okay?"

"Hutch?" came the weak reply.

"That's right, pal," Hutch answered, crawling closer to the car as he spoke.

Starsky lifted his head and made eye contact as Hutch slipped in as near as he could get on the floorboard of the vehicle. Despite his blurred vision, Starsky could see the trepidation in his partner's eyes.

"How'd you get down there? Huh?" Hutch asked gently, while groping in the back seat until he found the raggedy cushion they always used when on overnight surveillance. Before Starsky could answer, Hutch carefully lifted his friend's head and eased the pillow beneath it.

"I, uh, I ducked when I saw the trailer comin' at me. Couldn't think of a better plan at the time."

Hutch reached into his jeans pocket for a handkerchief, then lightly dabbed at the trickle of blood that ran a trail down Starsky's forehead into his eyes. That's when Hutch noticed his skin, which had already taken on a gray pallor, was cold to the touch. Starsky didn't even seem aware that his body was involuntarily shivering. "Quick thinking," Hutch praised him. "But what do you say we put our heads together and see about getting you out of here now?"

Starsky's ineffectual attempt at a smile came out as a grimace, when he felt a sharp pain run up his left leg. "I'm all for that," he grunted. "But according to the fireman that was under here until a few minutes ago, I ain't goin' anywhere right away. Hell of a way to spend New Year's Eve, huh, partner?" Starsky winced again as another stab of pain shot through his leg.

Reaching out to place a strong hand on Starsky's shoulder, Hutch watched in dismay as his friend rode out the pain. "I'll say it is." Hoping to distract Starsky, he added, "Look, Starsk, if our dates fell through, you didn't have to go to all this trouble to get out of telling me. I mean, I may have been a little disappointed, but I'd have gotten over it." Stretching over Starsky to try and get a look at what was causing so much discomfort,

Hutch found he couldn't see anything except the crushed dashboard of the Torino, covering Starsky from the waist down. "Does it hurt much?" Hutch asked.

Starsky rolled his eyes heavenward. "No, Blintz. I'm just boning up on my impersonation of a man trapped beneath a ten ton vehicle so I can be the star attraction at Huggy's bash," Starsky sniped back. Then, looking around, he realized for the first time that Hutch was alone. "Hey, where're the firemen? They were here, then all of a sudden, everyone left. I thought they came back with you."

Tiny puffs of white air appeared before Starsky's lips as he spoke, reminding Hutch uneasily that the cool evening temperature could hasten his partner going into shock. Sliding out of his jacket, Hutch tucked it around Starsky snugly, covering as much of his body with it as possible. "They had to get another piece of equipment, buddy. Just sit tight. I'm gonna hang around until they get back."

"They been gone a long time, Hutch. Where'd they have to go? Detroit?"

Before Hutch could answer, he saw the expression on Starsky's face change from curious to worried. "Hutch, you smell that?" Starsky's eyes were wide with alarm. "It's gasoline. There's a leak somewhere." The panic already beginning to build in his voice, he warned, "We gotta get out of here!"

"Calm down, Starsk. It's okay, it's okay," Hutch said soothingly. "We'll be fine. Let's just not panic, all right?"

"Hutch, this whole damn thing could blow up," Starsky told him, amazed that someone as astute as Hutch couldn't figure that out on his own.

"It won't," Hutch said decisively. "Now, we'll just stay cool and wait for the firemen. I'm not gonna leave you, Starsk, so there's no reason to be worried. Trust me."

Starsky looked up into Hutch's eyes, finally understanding what was happening. That's why the firemen were gone. The tanker had been leaking and they'd cleared out. Hutch was here—alone—even though he knew the risks. "Hutch, I want you to leave," Starsky said quietly. "I know what you're tryin' to do, and I appreciate it. But it won't do any good for both of us to go up in smoke. Now, go."

Two sets of determined eyes locked. "What? And miss out on all the excitement?" Hutch tried teasing. When he received only an angry glare in response, he sobered and added, barely above a whisper, "No way, pal. I'm here for the duration. Nothing you can say will change that."

"Hutch, listen to me." Starsky reached up and grasped the front of Hutch's shirt, needing reassurance he'd be taken seriously. "This is nuts. If the firemen can't get me outta here, you can't. I don't want you to die tryin'. So do this for me, huh?" He swallowed hard before continuing. "Clear out, okay? That's what I want—really."

Hutch laid his hand over Starsky's. "Starsk, you're wasting your breath. You know my answer. And I don't believe for one second that if I was the one stuck under this tanker that you'd run for the hills. So please, spare me the arguments. I'm not going, and that's final."

Starsky studied Hutch's face for some sign of weakness; some indication that there was a chance he could get through to the stubborn blond. Finally deciding it would be easier to move Mount Everest than Hutch once he'd made up his mind, Starsky looked away and lowered his head back to the cushion.

For the next few seconds, they were both silent. The pungent odor of the gas fumes seemed to be growing stronger. They both knew it, but neither one said so aloud. Reluctantly, Hutch looked past the floorboard at the asphalt beneath them and saw the petroleum beginning to pool. The shiver that ran up his spine wasn't caused entirely by the cool night air.

Chapter 3

The moments ticked by slowly. Unable to stand another second of silence, Starsky turned his head toward Hutch and asked a little too cheerfully, "So how was Minnesota? Nice Christmas?"

Hutch shrugged noncommittally. "About what I expected."

Starsky was astounded so much dejection could be packed into four words. "Mmm... Your Dad hasn't mellowed out any, huh?"

Hutch snorted. "Hardly. He was his usual upbeat self." Hoping to change the subject to a more positive note he asked, "How about you? Who'd you spend it with?"

"Actually, when Kiko and Molly found out I was spending Christmas alone, they strong-armed Mrs. Ramos into inviting me over." Starsky answered, while thinking how weird it was to be having this conversation under these circumstances. His eyes crinkled with merriment when he talked about the people and events of Christmas day. "Mrs. R's a terrific cook, ya know? And those kids...they're the greatest. The three of us played a little B-ball after dinner. I swear, Molly can shoot rings around Kiko now. I think she's finally discovered baseball's not the only game in town."

Hutch nodded, a yearning look in his eyes. "You know, Starsk, just because a person is a blood relative, that doesn't necessarily make them family."

Starsky arched one eyebrow and looked up at his partner inquisitively. "You mean like you and me?"

“Exactly. And like the Ramoses. I’d have felt a lot more at home here with you guys than where I was.”

Starsky didn’t miss the wistful note in Hutch’s voice. It made him sad. “I’m sorry, partner.”

“Hmmm? For what? You didn’t do anything.”

“Sorry that you had a lousy Christmas, and now, an even lousier New Year’s Eve. I mean, this is no way to spend New Year’s Eve—sittin’ under a fuel tanker with another guy, just waitin’ for it to blow up.”

Hutch chuckled. “Not exactly a rosy picture you’re painting there. How about the part where the fire department comes back with the piece of equipment they need and rescues us?”

Starsky shook his head. “All I can say is they better get here soon. If these fumes are any indication of our situation, this baby’s leaking like a sieve. There is such a thing as fires starting from static electricity. I read about it Popular Mechanics,” Starsky added, just beginning to warm up to the subject.

“How are you guys doing under there?” Both detectives looked in the direction of the voice to see the friendly-looking, chubby, red-faced fireman staring back at them. Fred Carlyle was a veteran when it came to difficult rescues. When he’d heard a police officer was in trouble, he’d finished up as quickly as possible at the other accident and rushed to the scene with the ‘Jaws of Life’ to help free Starsky.

“It’s been fun, but I wouldn’t mind goin’ home now, if that’s okay with you,” Starsky answered him cryptically.

“Man, are we glad to see you,” Hutch said, breathing easier than he had since Huggy had broken the news to him at the airport.

“Got here as soon as we could. Sorry you had to wait,” Carlyle apologized. “Uh...Detective Hutchinson, is it? I think you’ll need to leave now and let us take over. This could get a bit hairy.”

Hutch cut his eyes back at Starsky and saw the apprehension mirrored there. “If it’s all the same with you, I’ll stay.”

“I understand your concern, but I have to insist you join the others behind the barricade now.”

Hutch was about to argue when Starsky interrupted. “Hutch, it’s okay. Do as the man says, huh? It’ll be fine.”

Hutch hesitated, moved toward Carlyle, then lowered his voice and asked in hushed tones, “Look, what’s the plan here? This place is saturated in gasoline. One spark and it’s all over.”

“I hate to have to agree with you, but that pretty much sums up the situation. But it’s not like my team and I haven’t dealt with similar rescues, Detective. You have my word; we’ll do everything we can to get your partner out of here safely. I’ve got three men standing by outside with hoses to wash this area down and keep it hosed down with foam while two of us are operating the machine. There’s also an ambulance and two paramedics standing by on the other side of the truck.”

Hutch worriedly rubbed his forehead, thinking about the blast of cold water the firemen would deliver and it’s affect on the already shivering Starsky. “I’m worried he’s going to go into shock.”

“I know you are. So are we, not having any way to determine the extent of his injuries,” Carlyle agreed. “But right now our objective is to get him out of here as fast as possible. The truth of the matter is, you’ll just be in our way.”

Put so bluntly, there wasn’t much of a rebuttal Hutch could offer. His instincts told him to stay, but his common sense dictated he cooperate for Starsky’s sake. “Okay. Just give me a couple of seconds with him, all right?”

“Sure,” Carlyle agreed. “But make it quick. Every second counts.”

Hutch climbed back through the opening where the car door had once been and lowered his face close to Starsky’s.

“Well, partner, looks like their throwing me out. You gonna be okay?”

Starsky gave him a lopsided grin, hoping he looked a lot more confident than he was feeling. “Okay? Are you kiddin’? It was starting to get a little too close in here. What’d they feed you on that plane anyway? Tostadas?”

Hutch smiled, reaching out to pat Starsky’s arm one last time. As their eyes met, both sobered, but said nothing. Reluctantly, Hutch released his tenuous hold and began to back out of the vehicle.

“Hey...” Starsky whispered.

Hutch looked up and saw him nod. *I’ll be okay.*

Hutch nodded back then quickly moved away before he could change his mind and demand the right to stay. The walk back to the barricade seemed eternal. Hutch couldn’t look back....

Chapter 4

Captain Dobe paced back and forth just behind the police barrier, wearing out a path in the asphalt, waiting for Hutch to return, waiting for the firemen to do something, waiting to see his men safe again. In the background, Huggy hovered inconspicuously. Once again, Dobe was struck by the odd friendship his two detectives and the informant shared. What an unlikely alliance. Not only had Huggy cleaned up his act a good bit since getting involved with Starsky and Hutchinson, he'd actually developed a loyalty toward them that Dobe admired. Of course, that street went both ways. How many times over the past few years had they put their butts on the line for Huggy? The captain knew they'd turned a blind eye more often than was wise, but in the long run, the friendship had paid off in more ways than he could count. This was a rough town and a hell of a rough job—a man needed all the allies he could muster.

“Here comes Hutch!” Huggy shouted.

Dobe looked up just as Hutchinson slung his long leg over the barricade, clearing it with ease. “They made me leave—said I was in the way,” he told the two men before they could ask.

“What’s going on under there?” Dobe asked, stepping back to make room for Hutch.

“They’re getting ready to use that machine they sent for, Cap’n. Said I’d be in the way.”

“How’s my main man, Starsky, doing?” Huggy asked. “Is he conscious?”

Hutch ran a tired hand over his face. “Yeah, but I can’t tell how badly he’s hurt, and gas is standing all around.” He fought to keep the quiver from his voice as he continued, “It’s...it’s not good. I’m afraid they’ll accidentally ignite the tanker. One spark...that’s all it would take.”

Dobe cleared his throat. Never one for knowing the right words to say at the right time, he tried to reassure Hutch and Huggy, “They know what they’re doing. They’re trained professionals.”

The moments dragged by endlessly while the three men stood on the sidelines and watched the firefighters wrangle their heavy hoses to keep the area washed down in fire retardant foam. Beneath the truck Carlyle and his partner, Jamison, made two unsuccessful attempts before finally positioning the machine at just the right angle to pry open the mangled metal and upholstery without damaging the police officer trapped beneath the wreckage.

Once the debris was removed, the two paramedics gently transferred Starsky onto a stretcher and then into an ambulance. It seemed, in the blink of an eye, he'd been whisked away before Hutch realized he was free of the fuel tanker.

Carlyle trotted toward the barricade and was met halfway by Hutch, who'd seen the ambulance speed away. "How's my partner? How bad is he hurt? Where'd they take him?"

"Whoa," Carlyle held up his hand. "I was coming over to give you a report; figured you guys would want to take your car to the hospital. They're going to County General. From what the paramedics said, they don't think his injuries are life threatening."

Hutch felt his body go limp with relief. Starsky's not going to die. That was all that he needed to know.



Starsky sat up in bed, flipping the channels of the TV in his hospital room. The pain in his leg from having the broken bone set had subsided with the help of a strong narcotic the nurse had added to his I.V. He was feeling pretty good at the moment.

Hutch, smelling of gasoline, his face smudged and his clothes damp and grimy, poked his head around the door and grinned. "Hey, buddy. Sitting up already?"

"Hutch! Man, am I glad you're here! Look, I'm feelin' no pain—nurse gave me something terrific that took care of that—and I'm thinking if you'll help me get into my pants, we can still make that party at The Pits. Don't want to keep our two lovely ladies waiting."

"Starsk, you can't be serious!" Hutch answered incredulously.

Eyeing his partner a little closer, Starsky suddenly thought he saw the wisdom in Hutch's response. "Oh yeah, I guess you're right. You look like somethin' the cat dragged in. I couldn't be seen in public with you like that. Why don't you go home and clean up, and I'll take a short nap." Already, Starsky's eyes were beginning to droop from the effects of the injection.

"Yeah, right, Starsk," Hutch agreed, playing along for the moment. It was obvious Starsky wasn't going anywhere—with or without pants. "But first, I want you to see something."

"Oh yeah? What?"

Hutch set a large shopping bag on the foot of the bed and lifted out a box wrapped in bright red foil paper with a shiny gold bow on top. "I, uh, I brought you a gift back from Minnesota," he said shyly.

Astounded, Starsky was temporarily speechless. He reached out and tentatively touched the wrapping, as if he thought doing so would make it suddenly disappear. “You...you bought me a...a Christmas present?” He turned large, child-like eyes up at Hutch. “You bought me a Christmas present!”

“No—no—I never said it was a Christmas present, Starsky. Don’t go putting words into my mouth. It’s...it’s just a gift. From one friend to another.” Hutch was already wondering if he’d live to regret this impetuous act of sentimentalism.

“Can I open it now?” Starsky asked excitedly.

“Of course you can. I mean, Christmas is over—and—and it’s not a Christmas present anyway.”

Starsky ripped the paper with the zeal of a ten-year-old, discarding bow and all without a moment’s hesitation. Before him stood a beautiful solid cherry box, all four sides enclosed with thick, beveled glass. The craftsmanship was breathtaking. He stared at it, thinking the color of the cherry was as warm and rich as his heart felt at the moment.

“It’s...it’s for your ship, Starsk. I mean, you’ve spent so much time building the damn thing, I thought you needed something nice to display it in. This friend of mine back home has a wood shop. He only makes things on special consignment. I sure hope your ship will fit in it.”

Starsky felt the emotion rise in his throat. He wanted to say thank you, but couldn’t seem to find the right words. Swallowing hard, he looked up at Hutch, his eyes bright with unshed tears.

“Hutch...I don’t know how to say what this means to me.”

“You don’t have to say anything,” Hutch answered self-consciously.

“And, uh, well...” Starsky continued, “Thanks for sticking with me back there, partner. I don’t mind admitting I was a little scared.”

For a moment, Hutch didn’t trust his voice to speak; then, slowly, his lips began to twitch with a mischievous smile. “Well...I guess I figured no one should have to get blown up *alone* on New Year’s Eve.”

The End
12/31/02