

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!"

End of Chapter 1