

## **No Way To Spend New Year's Eve**

*by TibbieB*

### *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.

*End of Chapter 2*