

No Way To Spend New Year's Eve *by TibbieB*

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 its 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....

End of Chapter 3