

Picking Up The Pieces

By TibbieB

Chapter One

Starsky stood at the window and watched the delicate snowflakes fall, gently covering the ground in a soft white blanket. Although he'd enjoyed spending the holidays with his mother and Nicky, he was ready to return to the warmth of Southern California and the day-to-day activities of his life as a detective with the Bay City Police Department. Christmas hadn't been the same without Hutch...

Starsky had believed this vacation would be good for both of them—a time for distancing, giving them each a little space. The last few months had been rough. No—worse than rough. At times, almost unbearable. After Rigger was assassinated while under their protection, it seemed to Starsky that their lives and friendship had begun to slowly unravel. They'd gradually been drifting apart, bickering and getting on each other's nerves. It seemed the tiniest, most insignificant incident would set off a monumental argument.

Of course, it had all come to a head with Kira. Even now, the memories of what had transpired between the three of them were painful for Starsky to recall. Thank God, they'd both come to their senses and realized she didn't give a flip about either of them—had, in fact, played them both for fools. Unfortunately, that realization had almost come too late.

Starsky had forgiven Hutch his indiscretion and tried to convince himself that, if anything, it had strengthened their friendship, drawn them back together. But deep in his heart, the pain still lingered. In his entire life, he'd never felt so betrayed as the day he'd confronted Hutch—walking out of Kira's bedroom, still buttoning his shirt, a look of undeniable guilt imprinted on his face. Starsky believed that if Hutch had plunged a knife through his heart, it couldn't have hurt any worse than the agony he felt at that moment.

They'd talked about it later—at great length. The depth of Hutch's remorse was immeasurable, and Starsky knew that. He knew it with his brain...but his heart still ached. Sure, they'd picked up the pieces and moved on, but for some indefinable reason, Starsky couldn't forget that moment of ultimate betrayal and grieved for the innocent, lighthearted days of their friendship—the way it had been before.

So, when the Hutchinsons had called and asked their only son to come home for Christmas, Starsky had encouraged him to go. Eileen Hutchinson had planned a big wingding—a reunion of sorts—including relatives Hutch hadn't seen since he was a child. She'd been anxious for him to be there and pretty much told him she wouldn't take no for an answer. Of course, Hutch had asked Starsky to go with him, but he'd politely

declined, insisting he needed to spend Hanukkah with his own family, discretely omitting that he thought they'd both benefit from some time apart.

Hutch had searched his partner's face, believing Starsky had an ulterior motive for turning down the invitation. As much as he hated to admit it, he knew Starsky hadn't been himself since Kira. It was the one instant in his life that he regretted above all others—betraying his best friend with a woman who'd meant absolutely nothing to him. To this day, he didn't understand why he'd done it—sexual attraction? Ego? Jealousy? More likely...stupidity. Sure, Starsky had said, "Let bygones be bygones"—even joked about it and suggested they turn the tables on her. But from the moment he'd stepped through that bedroom door, their lives had changed. Nothing, absolutely nothing, between the two of them had ever been the same.

Hutch had agonized over the incident and tried to make it up to his partner, but he knew instinctively that Starsky now held back a part of himself, never quite letting down his guard. This was a constant source of grief to Hutch. He knew he'd literally give his right arm if he thought he could wipe out that short chapter in their lives and go back to the way they'd been before. But sadly, Hutch was beginning to believe there was no going back. Reluctantly, he accepted his mother's invitation and flew to Minnesota for Christmas.

"A penny for your thoughts," Rachel Starsky said, slipping her arm around her son's waist. "You seem so solemn. Something bothering you?"

"No, nothin', Ma." Starsky turned and draped his arm around his mother's shoulders. "Just thinkin' about work."

Rachel's eyes searched his face, not quite convinced her oldest son was being completely honest. She'd sensed a sadness in David ever since he'd arrived home for the holidays. Not wanting to pry, Rachel had avoided asking questions, but now that he would be leaving the next day and still showed no signs of opening up to her, her motherly instincts demanded she offer him a sympathetic ear.

"Come in the kitchen with me. I baked some of those chocolate chip cookies you and Nicholas used to fight over when you were little boys. Just made a fresh pot of coffee, too."

Starsky smiled at her and gave her an affectionate hug. "I was wonderin' if you'd get around to that before I left." Following her into the kitchen, he pulled out a chair at the table and sat down, while she poured two cups of coffee and joined him. On the table was a platter of still warm cookies, their delicious aroma causing his mouth to water.

Rachel sipped her coffee and watched him down two cookies before she spoke a word. Then, peering over her cup, she went straight to the point. "Honey, I wish you'd tell me what's bothering you. You've been here a week, and the entire time, you've seemed depressed. Did you break up with a girl or something? Are things not going well at work? Or do you just miss Hutch and your other friends?"

Starsky sipped his own coffee, avoiding her probing eyes. “I don’t know what you mean, Ma,” he lied.

“Of course you do,” she retorted. “And, believe it or not, getting it off your chest may help.”

Starsky silently stared at the platter of cookies, wondering how his mother could still be so perceptive of his moods and thoughts after all these years apart. It suddenly occurred to him that she might be right. He’d not discussed what had happened between him and Hutch with anyone—not even Huggy. It was just too damn personal. But maybe, just maybe, sharing the hurt with his mother would make him feel a little better. Maybe she could offer him advice. Maybe he just needed to say the words out loud.

“It’s Hutch,” he muttered quietly.

“What about Hutch? Has something happened to him? I thought he was in Minnesota with his family.”

“He is.” Starsky lifted his eyes and met hers. “Something happened between us that I’m just havin’ a hard time dealin’ with.”

Rachel laid her hand on his arm, encouraging him to continue. “Tell me about it. Maybe I can help.”

It was the opening he needed. The story poured from him, as though of its own volition, non-stop and painfully honest. No glossing. No excuses. And when he was finished, he felt empty and sad.

Rachel’s face remained passive throughout his story, never once interrupting him, letting the anguish flow out of him, hopefully purging him of the burden he’d wrestled with for the last several months. When he was done, she was quiet for a moment. When she did speak, she chose her words carefully.

“Have you forgiven him?”

“Yes,” he answered honestly, “but I just...well...I just don’t feel the same. I don’t feel any anger or malice. I just feel disappointed...and I don’t trust him anymore.”

She walked over to the counter, picked up the coffee decanter and refilled their cups, then sat back down before speaking again. “David, let me tell you something I’ve learned the hard way. No one can hurt us as deeply as those we love most. But if we truly love them, we forgive them and move forward. If you truly love Hutch, like I believe you do, you’ll put this behind you and begin rebuilding your friendship.”

Starsky opened his mouth to speak, but she held up her finger, warning him to wait until she finished. “You don’t know how happy I’ve been to see your friendship with Hutch. I know you and Nicky aren’t close. There’s the age difference, and you left here when he was still a little boy. And…” she hesitated, “...he doesn’t always do the right thing. I know he’s been in trouble with the law, and with you being a policeman like your father—well, my point is—Hutch is the brother that Nicky should be to you. He’s a good man, David, and he loves you dearly. I honestly believe he’d lay down his life for you.”

“I used to believe that,” Starsky said, barely above a whisper. “Now, I’m not as sure.”
“Well, unless the pod people have invaded his body and he’s an altogether different person from the man I know—he would.” She chuckled at the absurdity of her own words, bringing a smile to her son’s face as well. “If you let this—this—” she groped for a non-profane word for Kira, “floozy come between the two of you and destroy the incredible friendship that you share, it’ll be a tragedy.”

Starsky considered her words, knowing they rang true. “So, Ma, how do I get past this? I mean, it’s not like I haven’t tried.”

“You not only forgive Hutch, you accept that it happened, that it’s not important, and that it certainly isn’t worth losing the best friend you ever had over. You just said yourself that you realized you didn’t love the woman. If Hutch isn’t in love with her either, why should the two of you let this ruin your friendship?”

When his eyes met his mother’s, Starsky saw the challenge in them. But he still had doubts.

“How do I trust him?”

“Didn’t you say when he apologized, he said nothing like that would ever happen again?”

Starsky nodded.

“Has he ever lied to you?”

“No,” he admitted sheepishly.

“Did he deny sleeping with that woman?”

“No.”

“If he was honest with you about that, why can’t you believe he’ll be honest with you about everything else?”

When Starsky didn’t answer, Rachel reached down and took his hand in hers.

“Son, don’t let this eat you up inside. Lots of people have been through so much worse in a relationship and gotten over it. Hutch is your friend, and that’s not something you should willingly throw away. Think what your life would be like if you never saw him again—if he was no longer a part of your world. I’d be willing to bet you’d miss him more than you can even imagine.” She smiled at him and squeezed his hand reassuringly. “Promise you’ll think about what I’ve said?” she prompted.

Starsky smiled at her, then reached over and lightly kissed her cheek. “Yeah, I promise. I know you’re right. I just need to work it all out for myself, I guess.”

“Okay!” Rachel stood up and gave him a self-satisfied smile. “Why don’t you go clean up a little and take your old mother out to dinner? I’d love a good Italian meal that I didn’t have to cook myself.”

“You got it,” he answered, heading for the bathroom. He paused at the door, looked back over his shoulder and flashed her the first genuine smile she’d seen since his arrival. “Thanks, Ma.” With that he disappeared down the hall.

Rachel sighed, tears springing to her eyes as the years rolled away. He looked just like his father when he smiled like that. God, after all these years, how she still missed Mike!



End of Chapter One