

Too Close To Home

By *TibbieB*



Note to the readers: *If you have not read my trilogy, "The Guardian Series," please allow me to introduce Sam, the rottweiler mix, Starsky and Hutch's search and rescue dog. Sam was adopted by the boys as a puppy, in "Guardian I," when they discovered him, frightened and abused, in the house where his drug-dealing owner had been shot and killed. If you enjoy his interaction with Starsky and Hutch in "Too Close to Home," you may also wish to catch him in "Guardian I," "Guardian II," "Guardian III," and "Smile for the Camera," which can be found on the websites listed at the front of this zine.*



Chapter One

"Kenny, it's Mom." Hutch sat up in bed and glanced at the clock. Seven a.m. "I'm sorry to call so early, but I wanted to catch you before you left for work. I never know what days you'll be on duty."

"Is everything okay, Mom?"

"Well, not exactly. Your dad thinks I'm overreacting, but I've been thinking about calling you all night. It's Karen."

Fully awake now, Hutch swung his legs over the side of the bed and planted his feet on the floor. "Has something happened to her? Is she okay?"

"Don't get too alarmed, honey. It's just...well, we haven't seen or heard from her in three days. You know how depressed your sister's been since Craig died. I mean, they were married six years and she's been absolutely lost without him."

Hutch rubbed his eyes, trying to clear his thoughts and ask the logical questions any cop would. But it wasn't all that clear-cut when a member of his family was involved.

"Have you been over to her place? Reported her disappearance to the police?"

"Yes, of course, we went over there. I have a key, and when she didn't answer the door, we went in. Everything looked normal. Nothing was disturbed, and it didn't appear the house had been broken into. We called the police right away, but they weren't very

helpful. They said she hasn't been gone long enough, and if the house didn't look like a crime scene—”

Mrs. Hutchinson's voice broke, her tenuous hold on self-control finally dissolving. “Mom...Mom...is Dad there with you?”

“Yes.”

“Put him on the phone, okay? And try not to worry. I'll be there as soon as I can make the arrangements.”

“Thank you, son,” she whispered through her tears.

Hutch could never bear to hear his mother cry. She was always such a strong woman. He knew if she was this distraught, there was a legitimate reason.

“Kenny...I love you.”

Hutch closed his eyes, his heart breaking at the desperation in her voice.

“I love you, too.”



Starsky dropped his newspaper back on the table and got up to answer the door. Who on earth would show up at a person's door at 7:30 in the morning? Sam sat up from his comfortable spot on the blanket near Starsky's feet, but didn't seem particularly interested in investigating.

“Some watchdog you are,” Starsky flung back over his shoulder, as he peeked through the glass panel and spied Hutch standing on the other side. He slid the deadbolt over and opened the door.

“What are you doing here so early? I thought we were gonna meet at the track at eight-thirty.”

Hutch brushed past him and headed directly for the kitchen, stopping only long enough to give Sam a cursory pat on the head. Tail wagging, the dog padded into the kitchen behind him, then watched Hutch pour himself a cup of coffee.

“Come in,” Starsky mumbled, as he closed the door and followed his partner. “Oh, and have a cup of coffee,” he added with an amused smirk.

Hutch looked up, already sipping the hot liquid from the cup, unfazed by Starsky's cheeky comments.

“Starsk, I’ve got to leave town tonight. I wanted to let you know before I contact Dobby.”

Instantly regretting his earlier sarcasm, the smile faded from Starsky’s face. “What’s goin’ on? Something happen?”

“My mother called this morning, upset and worried. It seems that Karen’s disappeared. Dad agreed with Mom that the local authorities aren’t doing anything to locate her, and they’re both scared out of their wits.” Hutch reached up and rubbed the back of his neck, absently attempting to relieve some of the tension centered there. “They need me. I have to go.”

Starsky could see by the worry lines in his partner’s face that he wasn’t going only for their sake. “Of course you do. When do we leave?”

Hutch looked surprised for only an instant. He should have known Starsky wasn’t one to stand by idly when he thought Hutch might need him. “I think Dobby will okay family emergency leave for me, but there’s no way he’ll approve it for you. That would be stretching it—even for us.”

Unperturbed, Starsky picked up his coffee cup and slugged down the remainder in two gulps. “Maybe not. But he’ll okay vacation. I’ve got ten days comin’ to me.”

Hutch smiled, moved by the loyal gesture. “I can’t let you use your vacation for this. I know you’ve been saving up those days to take that Cancun ‘singles’ cruise you’re always talking about. I can handle it.”

“Well, like it or not, looks like you’re gonna be stuck with me. If something’s happened to Karen, you may need me. Ya know I’m the smart one in this partnership, so don’t even *think* about leavin’ me behind.”

Hutch knew it was useless to argue, but gave it one more try. “What about Cancun?”

“Hey...you know I can’t afford that cruise. That’s just a pipe dream. Somethin’ to look forward to. If I take it too soon, I’ll just have to come up with another pipe dream.” Starsky flashed him a mischievous grin. “What say we call Dobby at home and see if he’s awake yet?”



Starsky looked at his watch for the hundredth time, beginning to think this flight would never end. Fidgeting in his seat, he turned to look at the clouds outside the cabin window. Anything to take his mind off Sam.

“He’s okay,” Hutch said.

Starsky looked back at him, wondering how the blond was able to read his mind so easily.

“He’s perfectly safe.”

“I bet he’s scared to death. He’s never been on a plane before, and I hear those baggage compartments are cold,” Starsky complained. “What if the plane goes down and nobody lets him out? Huh? Have you thought about that?”

“Starsky, if the plane goes down, we’re all in trouble, not just Sam. Now, we talked about this before we decided to bring him along. If we’re ever going to volunteer for search and rescue missions outside Bay City, he’ll have to fly. This is a good learning experience for him *and* us.”

“Yeah, but we’re together—and he’s all alone down there,” Starsky added, refusing to dismiss the crashing plane scenario.

“It’ll be fine. We’ll land in another thirty minutes.” Hoping to divert Starsky’s attention, he changed the subject. “I asked for a compact car. Cheaper. But they were all out, so we’re getting a mid-size for the same price. I’d say that’s a lucky break, wouldn’t you?”

“Terrific. As long as it runs,” Starsky replied distractedly.

“It’s a hundred and ten miles to Redwood Valley, but it’s mostly good highways, so the trip goes by fast.” Hutch studied Starsky’s profile and could see his face was taut with anxiety, worrying about the big dog in the baggage hold. Starsky had become more and more protective of Sam since the dog had come to live with him. Of course, there was good cause for his devotion. The animal had saved both their lives on more than one occasion. Hutch loved the dog a great deal, too, but having grown up with animals on his folks’ ranch, he was more accustomed to having them around. Sometimes it seemed to him that Sam was more like Starsky’s child than his dog.

“I thought you said there was an airport there. Why couldn’t we just fly in?”

“Because, it’s just a little municipal airstrip. The landing field is only big enough for small private planes. We’d have to hop a puddle jumper to get there, and that’s more expensive than renting the car. Besides, we’ll need transportation while we’re there.”

“Good point.” Starsky looked up just in time to smile at the stewardess walking toward them. As the attractive young woman passed, Starsky made a point of reading her nametag. “She’s really somethin’, huh?”

Pretending he hadn’t noticed the pretty, young stewardess, Hutch busily flipped through the pages of his Newsweek magazine and answered casually, “Who? Oh...oh, her. Yeah. Cute.” Hutch could see by the look on his face, Starsky was about to make his move.

The brunette walked back by, this time stopping in the aisle next to their seats. She smiled at Starsky and asked politely, “Is there something I can get for you, sir?”

Turning on the charm, Starsky answered brazenly, “As a matter of fact, there is, Donna. How about a cup of coffee and your phone number?” He flashed her what he considered his “sexy” smile and winked flirtatiously.

Embarrassed by Starsky’s lame attempt at panache, Hutch stared down at his magazine, wishing he could sink through the crack between their seats. He really didn’t want to witness his partner’s humiliation, even if he did bring it on himself!

“Would you like cream and sugar with that?” Donna smiled sweetly, blatantly ignoring his request for her phone number.

Starsky’s smile faded slightly, but he recovered quickly, pretending not to notice her dismissal. “Both, please.”

Passing up a prime opportunity to rib Starsky, Hutch studied the magazine article intently and let the moment slide. There were just some things a guy shouldn’t get grief over. Soon the stewardess returned with Starsky’s coffee, sans phone number and further conversation.

Before they knew it the jet touched down, making an effortless, smooth landing, and the passengers began to disembark. Donna waited at the front door of the airplane, saying goodbye to passengers and returning their coats to them from the coat compartment near the cockpit. Hutch thanked her and filed off the plane just ahead of his partner. Starsky stopped to retrieve his coat, and Donna handed it to him with a smile.

“I hope you enjoyed your flight, Mr. Starsky. And please be sure and check your coat pockets later.”

Puzzled, Starsky opened his mouth to ask what she meant, but the pretty brunette was already busy with the next passenger. The two detectives hurried to the area designated for pet pick-up and waited for Sam’s crate to be delivered. Starsky absently slipped his hand into the pocket of his coat and discovered a small piece of folded paper. Opening the tiny note, a smile lit up his face. The note read: “Donna Echols, 952-555-1289.”



End of Chapter One