

# Too Close To Home

By *TibbieB*

## *Chapter Eleven*

Starsky sat on the small concrete bench, just outside the funeral home. Hutch had asked him to come to the visitation with him, and, despite his reluctance to be there, Starsky had consented. Hidden in the shadows, he was certain Edward Hutchinson had not noticed him sitting there. The man had bolted out the door, apparently feeling the need to distance himself from the crowd. When Starsky heard his sharp intake of breath and saw Edward clutch his chest, he sprung off the bench and went to the elder Hutchinson. “Are you okay, sir?”

Startled, Edward swung around, his face a mixture of hurt and anger. “What are you doing here skulking in the shadows, spying on people?”

“I-I wasn’t spying. I thought—” Starsky was relieved to see the man wasn’t having a heart attack, but realized he’d inadvertently interrupted Edward’s private moment of grief.

“Yes, you were!” Edward accused. “Everywhere Ken is, you’re always lurking in the background. Let’s get something straight, shall we?” Edward’s voice rose louder, as his anger mounted. “Despite your unbelievable audacity and your inexhaustible efforts to insinuate yourself into our lives, you *are not* part of my family, and I’d appreciate it if you’d keep your nose out of our family business!”

Reeling from Edward’s venomous words, Starsky was speechless. Before he could recover, he heard Hutch’s voice cut through the night air.

“Dammit, Dad, what are you screaming at Starsky about?” Hutch stepped off the portico and walked toward the two men.

“Stay out of this, Ken. He has no business being here!”

Hutch’s face was a mask of anger as he stepped between his father and Starsky. “Yes, he does. He’s here because I asked him to come. And I’m not going to stand here and let you insult him like that! Starsky’s here because he’s my friend, and to me, he *is* family.”

“Hutch, this isn’t the time to argue—” Starsky interrupted.

“What is it with you two?” Edward asked suspiciously. “Why are you always so quick to jump to his defense? I don’t understand this...this...‘relationship’ of yours.”

“No, I don’t suppose you do,” Hutch said heatedly. “You’ve never let anyone get close enough to you, not even your own children! You’re too busy controlling everyone around you to develop *any* kind of relationship.” Hutch couldn’t seem to stop the hurtful words from flowing. “How could you possibly understand something you’ve never experienced? You don’t know what it means to have a friend, Dad, because you’re too spiteful and self-centered—”

“Hutch, don’t.” Starsky pulled his partner back, hoping to stop them before they both said things they couldn’t take back. “Let it go.”

Breathing hard, Hutch’s eyes flashed with anger. “He needs to hear this, Starsk!”

“Maybe,” Starsky said. “But not now.”

Hutch’s breathing evened slightly, as he began to calm down. He knew this battle with his father had raged throughout his entire life, and nothing he could say would change their relationship. Starsky was right; Karen’s memory deserved more respect.

Edward glared at them, waiting for the next volley. When there was none, he lashed out again, “What a poor excuse for a son you are. How dare you take his side against me? I’m your father, dammit!”

Hutch held up his hands, a silent plea for his father to stop. “I can’t talk to you, Dad. I’m here for Mom and Karen. I have nothing more to say.”

Edward’s eyes bulged with anger, but he said nothing further; he simply turned on his heel and strode back into the funeral home.

Starsky laid his hand on Hutch’s shoulder. “Listen, buddy, I think it’s best if I go back to the house. My being here’s just upsettin’ your dad. I need to walk Sam for a while, anyway.”

Hutch turned his eyes to Starsky, searching his face, trying to read his thoughts. Starsky smiled at him and, in a familiar gesture of reassurance, patted him on the stomach. “It’s okay—really.”

“Starsk, I’m sorry—”

“Hey, no big deal. He’s in a lotta pain right now; just cut him a little slack. Okay?”

Hutch sighed tiredly, the hours of sleeplessness catching up with him. “Okay...all right...I’ll see you back at the house then.”

Hutch went back inside, as Starsky headed for the car. Thinking of his own father, he felt sad that Hutch had never had the love and companionship he’d shared with *his* dad the few short years they had together.

“Detective Starsky?”

“Yeah?” Turning, he saw the funeral director walking toward him.

“There’s a young lady on the phone asking for you.”

“Thanks.” He followed the man back into the building, going through the employee entrance and into the office.

“Hello?”

“Detective Starsky? This is Lynn Bradley.”

“Oh, hey. How are you?”

“Fine. I’m sorry to call you at the funeral home like this, but I found something in my research that I think may be important to your investigation.”

With one short sentence, she had his full attention. “That’s terrific. What is it?”

“I...uh...I don’t really want to talk about it on the phone. Can you meet me at the newspaper office in about fifteen minutes?”

“Sure.”

“I’ll wait at the back door. I don’t want anyone to see us.”

“Right. I’ll be there in fifteen minutes. Thanks, Lynn.”

Starsky hung up the phone and hurried to the door of the sitting room where Hutch stood talking with a group of people. Trying not to be rude, Starsky discretely tapped him on the shoulder and whispered, “I’ve got another lead. I’m gonna check it out.”

“Wait a minute, I’ll come with you.”

“No, stay here with your folks. I can handle it. I’m gonna meet Lynn over at the newspaper office. Says she has some more information for us.”

“Starsk, can’t you wait a few minutes? I really wanna come along.”

Glancing over at Eileen Hutchinson’s tired face, eyes swollen from too much crying, Starsky shook his head. “I think you need to be here with your mother. If it’s legit, I promise I won’t do anything without you. Okay?”

Less than satisfied, but realizing it was the best compromise, Hutch agreed. “Just be careful.”

“Always.” Starsky made his way through the crowd and left the funeral home, optimistic that he may soon have something concrete with which to work.



Starsky parked the car in the alley behind the newspaper office, and cut off the engine. He sat back and tried to relax, waiting for the young woman to show. But when thirty minutes passed, he began to worry something was wrong. Thinking back on the conversation, he wondered if he’d misunderstood, and she was already waiting inside the office for him.

Retrieving a flashlight from the glove box, Starsky got out of the car and went to the back of the building. Not wanting to startle Lynn, he figured the best course of action was to knock on the door first. But after a third unanswered knock, he tried the knob, and to his amazement, the door swung open. Cautiously peering into the darkness, he called Lynn’s name, but there was no response. Starsky hoped there were no surprises lurking in the darkness, and belatedly wished he’d had time to go back to the house for his gun.

Using the flashlight to find his way, he crept through the dark building, systematically checking each room as he went. He found nothing out of the ordinary until reaching the editor’s area, where a tiny shaft of light splayed from beneath the door of Brian Goodwin’s office. Aiming the flashlight beam at the door, Starsky slowly opened it and peeked in. On the floor lay the desk lamp, its green glass banker’s shade shattered, the bulb still glowing. From the looks of things, there’d been a struggle. Sheets of paper were scattered haphazardly about the room, and newspapers strewn over the floor, along with several books and file folders.

Stepping into the room, Starsky reached down and picked up one of the newspapers, which was folded open to the classified ads. Karen’s ad had been circled in red. He knew then, whatever had happened here, was connected with the case. Stooping down, he righted the overturned lamp and quickly sorted through the scattered newspapers, hoping to find a clue as to what had happened here. Lynn’s life could be at stake, and that had to be his first priority now.

Most of the newspapers, he discovered, featured articles about the Hutchinsons, or about Craig and Karen—including the report of Craig’s death. One older paper pictured the smiling bride and groom, announcing their wedding. As Starsky stood up, he placed the papers on the corner of Goodwin’s ransacked desk and noticed all the drawers had been pulled out and dumped onto the floor.

As he stepped over the broken lamp, his eye caught a glint of gold, winking and sparkling beneath the glowing bulb. Bending down, he lifted it from the shards of shattered

glass—a delicate, gold chain, and dangling from one end was a fragile, antique gold heart.



*End of Chapter Eleven*