

# Too Close To Home

By TibbieB

## Chapter Six

Starsky pulled into the driveway in front of Karen's house and cut off the engine. When he opened his car door, Sam bounded over the seat and scrambled past him. "Looks like he's ready for a little exercise."

Hutch got out also, and started up the drive. "I'm going to see if I can find an address book," he told Starsky. "Why don't you toss Sam a few balls and let him work off some of that energy?"

"Good idea." Starsky watched Hutch retreat up the driveway, before reaching into the car and retrieving Sam's ball. "Wanna play ball, Big Dog?" Starsky held up the ball where the dog could see it.

Sam woofed loudly, then ran out for a pass. About twenty feet out, he skidded to a stop and waited expectantly to catch the first throw. Starsky drew back and lobbed the ball out past the dog, forcing him to chase after it, before scooping it up near the edge of the clearing. Sam snapped it up and ran back to Starsky, dropping it at his feet for a repeat performance.



Hutch searched through the drawers of the huge mahogany desk that had served as Craig's "home office," but came up empty. He knew an address book would be their best bet to find out with whom his sister was spending time. He stopped and looked around the room, trying to think like Karen. *Where would she keep her address book? Where are the telephone books?*

Hutch went back to the kitchen and yanked out the counter drawer located beneath the telephone. There he found the local phone book and a small red address book. Snatching it up, he began thumbing through, not exactly knowing what he was searching for, but hoping something would jump off the page. There were only five men's names in the book, and Hutch didn't recognize any of them, but he did recognize one name—Sabrina Clark—Karen's closest friend in high school. According to his mother, Sabrina and Karen had remained steadfast in their relationship over the years. If his sister was dating someone, perhaps Sabrina would know his name and how to reach him.



Starsky threw the ball again and watched the big dog lope after it, showing no signs of fatigue. They'd been at it about ten minutes, and, rather than slowing down, Sam seemed

to be gaining momentum and energy from the exercise and brisk autumn air. Starsky could feel the muscles in his arm beginning to tire. The red ball scrunched in his big mouth, Sam ran back and deposited it at Starsky's feet again.

“Okay. One more time. Then I'm done for, okay?”

Sam looked up impatiently, and woofed loudly, urging Starsky to hurry. The man picked up the ball and pitched it as far as he could, putting his body weight behind it. He watched as the ball sailed over Sam's head, then cleared the far boundaries of the lawn and disappeared into the woods. Sam followed it and vanished into the cover of the trees, just as the ball had.

Starsky waited, but Sam didn't reappear. Scanning the treeline with his eyes, he called the dog, expecting him to come flying out of the woods any second. Finally, after the third shout from Starsky, Sam appeared at the edge of the woods, barked excitedly, then ran back amongst the trees.

“Sam! Come here, right now!” Sam reappeared, barked, and ran back into the woods again. Obviously, Starsky decided, the dog was trying to coax him into the woods, probably chasing a skunk or squirrel. Beginning to lose patience, Starsky stomped across the lawn and followed the agitated dog into the woods.

He hadn't gone far when, up ahead, he saw Sam sitting at attention. Once the rottie was sure he had his human's interest, he barked again, hoping to entice Starsky to come see his discovery.

“What d'ya think you're doin', you big goomba?” Starsky chastised half-heartedly. He realized the dog had been cooped up in the car most of the day and needed to work off a little energy. Still, the detective wasn't in the mood for games. As he approached, Sam barked again. Starsky was less than ten feet away when he realized what the dog was trying to show him. He stopped dead still, reluctant to face what lay just beyond his reach.

Sam whined and lay down beside the form on the ground. Reluctantly, Starsky took another step closer. The sunlight filtering through the canopy of trees, glanced off the cloud of silvery, blond hair. Starsky's mind froze.... The next few steps were tortuous, but he had no choice. When he reached Sam and his discovery, Starsky dropped to his knees and carefully, almost reverently, brushed the spun silver tresses aside. Ice blue eyes gazed up toward the heavens, void of expression, frozen in death. Starsky was mesmerized by the familiar, yet different features. So much like Hutch, yet fragile and feminine. The pain shot through him like a bullet, knowing he'd have to be the one to tell his friend the truth about Sam's grizzly find in the woods. Poor Karen, she had been here all along...



Hutch stared out the window, drawn there by Sam's incessant barking—not the normal, playful yapping he was accustomed to, but an urgent, excited sound that made the detective uneasy. He reached the window just in time to see Sam summon Starsky into the woods. Seconds passed, then minutes, and neither his partner nor the dog returned. Hutch went out the back door at a clip, determined to find out where the two had disappeared to.

As he left the beautifully manicured lawn and entered the wooded area, he thought he saw movement straight ahead. Just a few feet farther, he spied Starsky and Sam. They were huddled together, looking at something on the ground. Hutch chided himself for his foolish concern. Obviously, Sam had been chasing squirrels again, and must have—for the first time—actually caught one.

“Starsk—”

Starsky bolted to his feet, turning a stricken face to Hutch. Crouched at Starsky's feet, Sam's ears lay flat against his head. Before Hutch could ask what they were up to, Starsky had covered the distance between them, bringing the two men face-to-face.

“Hutch...come on, let's get outta here.” With a firm grip on his partner's shoulders, Starsky tried to steer him back toward the house.

“What's wrong, Starsk? What's going on here? Did Sam kill something?”

Starsky's face was drawn and pale. “Hutch...Sam didn't do anything. It's...it's...let's go back to the house and talk.”

Suddenly, Hutch realized this wasn't about Sam killing some animal. *Starsky wouldn't be this upset unless he'd found—*

A cold wave of fear swept through Hutch, as he searched Starsky's face and saw both anguish and sympathy. Panicking, he pulled to the side, craning his neck to look past Starsky. That's when he realized what his partner had been shielding his view from seconds earlier. *Oh, no...please, God, no....* Slowly, his eyes met Starsky's. “Who?”

“Hutch...*please.*” Starsky's voice was thick with emotion. “Don't go over there—”

“Get out of my way!” Hutch wrenched free and shoved Starsky aside, knocking him to the ground with a thud.

Desperately, Starsky lunged out, grabbing his leg. “Hutch, wait!”

Hell bent and determined to see for himself, Hutch kicked free of his partner and stumbled toward the gruesome scene before him. As he drew closer, his worst fear became a reality. Lying in the grass like a broken, discarded doll, was the body of his

sister. Devoid of life, she seemed unreal, bringing to mind the wax figures in a museum their father had once taken them to visit when they were children.

Sinking to his knees beside her, Hutch reached out a shaking hand and tenderly touched the cold, inanimate face, then gently closed the vacant, unseeing blue eyes. “Karen,” he whispered, more a plea than a question. “Karen, no....” Hutch felt a sob rise in his throat, choking him, but he swallowed it back. His eyes stung, but he shed no tears. There was no room for grief. No time for pain. Only numb disbelief. This couldn’t be happening...it was all a bad dream.

“Hutch?” Starsky knelt beside him, his own heart breaking. He laid a sympathetic hand on Hutch’s shoulder, trying to comfort him. “I’m...I’m sorry, buddy,” he said quietly. “I didn’t want you to see her like this.”

“How? How did she die?” His eyes met Starsky’s, wanting answers that his partner didn’t have. “Why? Who could do this? She was a good person. So gentle, so kind.”

“I don’t know...I don’t know, partner. But no one else can hurt her now.”

Hutch gazed at his sister’s face, memories of their childhood rushing back in flashes, momentarily pushing aside the pain and remorse. Then, noticing that from the waist down, she was covered by Starsky’s jacket, he asked the question he feared most. “Was she raped?”

Starsky stared at the ground, answering barely above a whisper. “I think so. Her clothing is...well, it looks like she was assaulted.”

Hutch closed his eyes tightly, trying to block out the images that forced their way into his brain. The pain in his heart surged. He fought it, blocked it out, focusing on only one thing. He’d find out who was responsible and make them pay. Raising his eyes to meet Starsky’s, he spoke calmly. “Go to the house and call the sheriff. I’ll stay here with her.”

“Hutch.” Starsky swallowed hard, struggling to keep his own emotions in check. “I don’t think that’s a good—”

“Go, damn it! Now!”

Starsky flinched, but tried again. “Let me stay. You call. You shouldn’t be here alone.”

“Starsky, get the hell out of here! She’s *my* sister! I’m staying with her!”

Slowly rising, Starsky reached down and gently touched Hutch’s hair. “Are ya sure?”

“Yes, I’m sure.”

Reluctantly, Starsky left him and returned to the house to make the necessary calls.

Sam whined, then inched closer and lay down beside Hutch to wait. As the eerie quiet of the forest surrounded them, Hutch gazed down at the body of his only sibling, knowing what he had to do. He and Starsky would find the person responsible—and God help him when they did.



*End of Chapter Six*