

# Too Close To Home

*By TibbieB*

## *Chapter Seven*

Despite the steady stream of neighbors and friends coming and going, there was a quiet pall over the house. Hutch sat beside his mother, his arm draped protectively around her shoulders, quietly accepting the words of sympathy and love from their friends. His father had disappeared to the barn, seeking refuge amongst his thoroughbred horses. At first, Hutch was embarrassed that his dad chose to avoid the well-wishers, had even said so to his mother. In her wisdom and tolerance, Eileen reminded her son that Edward was dealing with their loss the only way he could. He'd never been a man who could show or share his emotions.

Starsky hung back, wanting to be near his partner, yet unwilling to intrude upon their grief. He knew what it meant to lose a loved one, and accepted that the bond between mother and son, at a time like this, had to take precedence over all else. He would stay within arm's length—ready to step forth when Hutch needed him. His heart ached for his friend, but he knew the grieving process was a very personal thing.

“You must be Dave Starsky.” Starsky looked up and was met by beautiful, large brown eyes and a smile that lit up the room around them.

“That’s right.” Starsky straightened, puffing out his chest imperceptibly. “And you are?”

“Sabrina. Sabrina Clark.” Her smile faded slightly. “Karen was my best friend. I still can’t believe this has happened.”

Starsky nodded. “Yeah. It’s pretty tough on everybody. Hutch and I had no idea we’d be facing this when we came out here.”

“I heard you found her.”

“Yeah. Well, actually, our dog, Sam, did. He led me to her.” Starsky’s eyes met Sabrina’s. “I know if you were her best friend, this is really hard on you, too.”

“Yes, it is. I loved Karen.” Her eyes moistened and her voice thickened. “She was like a sister to me. And she was so unhappy after Craig died.”

Starsky smiled at her sadly. “Look, when you feel like talking, I’d like to ask you a few questions. I’m gonna find the turkey that did this and nail him to the wall.”

“Sure. As a matter of fact, I may be able to point you in the right direction,” she answered solemnly. “I want to talk to you, but not here.” She looked around the room

furtively, then slipped a card into his hand. “Here’re my address and phone number. Could you stop by tonight, around eight?”

“Detective Starsky?”

Starsky looked up and saw the Hutchinsons’ next-door neighbor holding the telephone receiver. “You have a call.”

Starsky’s eyes sought Sabrina’s. “You got it. Eight o’clock.” He touched her elbow and smiled. “I’ll look forward to talking with you tonight. Excuse me, Id better take this call.” He reluctantly left her and went to the telephone in the kitchen.

“Starsky,” he spoke quietly into the receiver.

“Hi. This is Lynn Bradley...from the newspaper office.”

“Oh, yeah. Hi.”

“Listen, I heard about Karen. I’m so sorry. Please tell the Hutchinsons they’re in my prayers. Okay?”

“Sure. Thanks for calling.” Starsky had been taking such calls all day, trying to run interference for Hutch. He’d placed a notepad and pen next to the phone and jotted down names of the folks who called with condolences.

“Wait! Don’t hang up. I have some information for you.”

Starsky’s ears perked up, hoping that at last, they may have a lead to pursue.

“Brian told me that you guys wanted to know if I’d talked to Karen recently. I did.”

“That’s great.” Starsky flipped the tablet to a clean sheet of paper. “Why did she call?”

“She called about placing a classified ad. I gave her the information and she came in and filled out the form about three weeks ago.”

“What was she listing?”

There was a pause on the other end of the line. Finally, Lynn answered, “It was a ‘personals’ ad. I remember it because we don’t get many of them here.”

Unsure what she meant by “personals,” Starsky pressed for more information. “What kind of personals ad are you talking about?”

“It was the standard. You know—‘Single white female wants to meet nice white male’ et cetera...”

Astounded, Starsky's breath caught in his throat. This was the last thing he'd expected. How would Hutch take the news that his sister was advertising for a boyfriend?

"Listen," he said, dropping his voice. "Could you please pull the ad and let me come by and take a look?"

"Sure," she said, agreeably. Lynn really wanted to help with the investigation. Although they'd never been close friends, she'd known Karen in high school and thought she was a very nice person.

Starsky glanced at his watch. "Will you be there another hour?"

"Yes. We don't close 'til five."

"Thanks, Lynn. You're a sweetheart."

Starsky dropped the receiver back onto the cradle. Knowing Hutch would wonder what had happened, he decided against slipping away without saying anything. He waited for the friend who was talking to Hutch to walk away, then bent down and whispered to him, "Listen, buddy. I'm goin' into town to check on something. Will you be okay?"

Hutch's eyes flew to Starsky's face. "A lead?" he asked, hopefully.

"Maybe. Too soon to tell. You stay here with your mom; let me check it out."

Hutch started to rise and insist on going along.

Starsky pressed his shoulder lightly. "Please. Just stay here. I promise if it's anything, you'll be the first to know."

Hutch didn't protest, knowing Starsky would keep his promise. As he started to leave, Starsky stopped and came back. "Hey, I left Sam up in my room, asleep on the bed. Want me to take him with me?"

Hutch shook his head. "Nah, he'll be okay," he answered. "Actually, I kind of like having him around right now."

"Yeah," Starsky agreed, "I know what ya mean."



Starsky pulled up in front of the newspaper office and shut off the ignition. Through the glass, he saw the attractive brunette and recognized her from their visit the day before.

"Hi," Lynn greeted him, as the tinkling door bell announced his arrival.

“Hi.” Starsky rewarded her with a heart-stopping smile. “Thanks for callin’. I appreciate your help.”

“Well, I don’t know how helpful this is, but since you asked, here’s the ad.” She slid the form across the counter toward him. “This is what we give folks to fill out when we’re running a classified for them.”

“So, Karen actually came in and filled out this form herself?” Still amazed at this latest revelation, he picked up the sheet of paper and quickly scanned it.

“Single, white female, loves animals, long walks in the woods, and classical music, seeking serious relationship with white, thirty-something male. Please write and send photo to: Ad, P.O. Box 121, Redwood Valley, MN, 30031”

Even seeing it with his own eyes, Starsky found it hard to believe. This would devastate Hutch. Even more, it would devastate Karen’s parents.

“Yes, she did. I took it myself. Have to admit, I was a little surprised.”

“Do you know if anyone responded?”

“No. I’m sorry, but the responses never come back through us. Most people do what she did. They get an anonymous mail box at the post office and have the responses mailed to them. That way, if they don’t like what the person has to say, they aren’t risking being identified.”

Starsky let out a disappointed sigh.

“I feel sure she got a response,” Lynn offered. “I saw her at the movies a couple of weeks ago with this really good-looking guy.”

“You did?”

“Yes. I didn’t recognize him, though. Sorry I can’t give you a name or anything.” Not wanting to end their conversation, Lynn racked her brain for any information that may help him. “This is a small town, Detective. Someone was bound to have seen them together besides me, someone who may know him. All I remember is that he was very handsome, tall, blond, and had a great physique. You know, like he worked out with weights.”

Starsky listened, piecing the puzzle together in his mind. “I can’t tell you how much I appreciate this.”

Lynn beamed a smile at him. “If I think of anything else, or hear anything around town, I’ll call, okay?”

“That would be great. Thanks again.”

As he started out the door, Starsky turned back again. “Would it be too much trouble to get a Xerox copy of that ad?”

“Not at all.” Lynn took the form into the print shop area and made a copy.

“Did the sheriff ask about this?” he asked, as she handed it to him.

“No. I haven’t heard from him at all. Should I call him?”

Starsky weighed the wisdom of what he was about to say. “If you don’t mind, I’d rather keep this between us until I have a chance to talk to Karen’s family. I’m certain they don’t know about any of this. Of course, if the sheriff comes in and asks, you need to tell him the truth.”

Lynn smiled. “Don’t worry. It can be our secret for now.”



*End of Chapter Seven*