

# Too Close To Home

By *TibbieB*

## *Chapter Eight*

Starsky checked his watch and saw it was nearly 5:00 p.m. Pulling up in front of a phone booth, he searched through his pockets and dug out a dime. On the third ring, Hutch answered the phone.

“It’s me.”

“Where are you?”

Starsky craned his neck to read the street signs. “A phone booth at Tenth and...uh...Midview. How’re you doing?”

Hutch ran a tired hand over his face, drained by the emotional roller-coaster he’d been on since discovering Karen’s body. “Okay, I guess. Still a few people stopping by. Mom wants me to take her down to the funeral home. They called to say we can see Karen now.”

“Is your dad okay?”

“Who knows? He finally came in a few minutes ago. He’s going with us. Oh...uh...did the lead pan out?”

“Hard to say. But I’m workin’ on it.”

“Starsk.” Hutch’s voice sounded exhausted. “What are you *not* telling me?”

“Nothin’. I mean it.” Starsky smoothly changed the subject. “Look, I thought maybe I’d go by the coroner’s office and see if the autopsy’s back.”

“Good idea.”

“And then, I’m goin’ by and see Sabrina. She said she may have something for us.”

Surprised, Hutch pressed for more information. “What’s she talking about? Did you ask her who Karen was seeing?”

“Not yet. But she seems to know something that she thinks is important.”

“Yeah, okay.” Hutch was quiet for a moment.

“Hey...” Starsky hesitated.

“What?”

“How are you—really? Are you holdin’ up okay?”

“Yeah, I guess. It’s just so...so hard to accept.”

The silence stretched between them. “Starsk...”

“Yeah?”

“Thanks, buddy. I mean, thanks for being here. For taking care of some of the details, like the coroner.”

“I wouldn’t have it any other way, partner.”



After leaving the coroner’s office, Starsky followed the directions to Sabrina’s home and arrived about ten minutes before the appointed time. She greeted him cordially and invited him in.

“I feel like I’m intruding,” he apologized. “I know this must have you very upset and all.”

“Yes, it does. I can’t imagine what it’s going to be like without Karen. We’ve been more like sisters than childhood friends. We started first grade together and graduated in the same class.”

Starsky accepted the seat she gestured toward and waited politely for her to continue.

“And I’ve always looked up to Ken like he was *my* big brother, as much as he was Karen’s. Did Ken tell you how the three of us formed a little club, complete with a secret clubhouse and all? There was an old ramshackle, abandoned house on their parents’ property that should have been torn down years ago. Would you believe it’s still there?” She smiled, a long-forgotten childhood memory taking her back momentarily to when the three of them were inseparable.

“So Hutch, I mean Ken, was close to his sister?”

“Was. Yes, they were very close growing up. Of course, in recent years, they seemed to have drifted apart. I hated to see that happen. I think she could have used a strong shoulder after Craig died.” The sadness crept back into her brown eyes.

“Sabrina, do you have any idea who could’ve wanted to harm Karen? Did she tell you about anyone bothering her? Threatening her?”

“No, nothing like that. But, well, I didn’t want to be the one to bring this out. I mean, I know it’ll hurt Eileen and Ed. Karen made me swear not to tell them.”

Seeing the young woman struggle with her conscience over the promise she’d made to her dead friend, Starsky decided to help her along. “But she met a guy from a personals ad and was seeing him, right?”

Taken completely by surprise, Sabrina’s eyes went wide with amazement. “How did you know that?”

“Hey—I’m a big-city detective, remember?” he teased, giving her a lopsided grin.

Sabrina smiled back. “Oh, yeah, I forgot.” Both of them laughed, relieving the tension that had been hanging over them since the conversation began.

“I found out by talkin’ to the newspaper office,” Starsky explained. “But I don’t know who the guy is. That’s where I’m hoping you can help me out.”

“His name is Glen Willis. Karen went out with him a few times, but had decided not to see him anymore.”

“Do you know anything about him? Where he works, or maybe his address?”

“I have no idea where he lives, but I do know he works as a bartender at Smiley’s Tavern.”

“A bartender? Are you sure?”

“Of course, I’m sure, Dave. Karen knew her mom and dad wouldn’t approve. I mean, I realize she was thirty years old and widowed, but this is a small town, with small town hang-ups, and the Hutchinsons have always been pillars of the community. Karen regretted having acted on a whim, posting that ad. Can you imagine what Ed’s reaction would have been?”

Starsky shook his head in disbelief, picturing the senior Hutchinson blowing a gasket and disowning his daughter for having succumbed to loneliness.

“Did you meet Willis?”

“Once. Karen invited me to have dinner with them. A real jerk. I think he’s one of those professional gigolos, like you see in the movies. He was so smooth-talking, dressed to the nines, and very condescending toward women.”

“Capable of violence?”

“That’s hard to say from one dinner together. But I thought perhaps when Karen told him she didn’t want to see him anymore, maybe they got into an argument, and—who knows—he could have lost his temper.”

“Sounds reasonable.” Starsky reached into his coat pocket and pulled out a small notebook, jotting down Willis’ name and the bar where he worked. “How about a physical description?”

“That’s easy. Gorgeous. Blond hair, blue eyes, and the build of a weight-lifter. Believe me, he’ll be easy to pick out of a line-up.”

Starsky busily scribbled in the notebook, then looked up at her again. “I stopped by the coroner’s,” he said quietly. “Karen’s neck was broken. You could be right about Willis. He’d be strong enough to do that.” He hesitated before making the decision to tell her the rest. “Sabrina...Karen was raped.”

The young woman’s hand flew to her mouth, stifling a sob, and Starsky instantly regretted sharing that detail. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to upset you more, but it’s sure to be in the papers, and I didn’t want you to find out that way.”

Trying to keep from falling apart in front of the detective, she suddenly stood up. “Oh, where are my manners? I put on a pot of coffee just before you arrived. Would you like some?”

Recognizing the ploy to keep a tenuous hold on her emotions, Starsky stood up, too. “Thanks, but I think I better get home. Hutch and his folks were going to the funeral home, but I expect they’ll be back soon. I wanna be there when Hutch arrives.” He reached out and touched her elbow. “Are you gonna be all right?”

Her trembling voice belied the contrived smile she was struggling to maintain. “Yes...yes, of course.” She didn’t speak again until they reached the door. “Listen, I’m glad you came by. I’ve cried so much today, my head feels like it’s stuffed with cotton. It makes me feel better, knowing I may be able to help you find this psycho.”

“Well, you’ve sure given me something to start on here.” Before opening the front door, Starsky reached down and tipped her chin up so he could look into her eyes as he spoke. “I think Karen was lucky to have a friend like you,” he said, sincerely.

Tears pooled in her eyes again, and she looked away, dabbing them before they could fall. “Thanks, Dave. I’m glad you’re the one who’s breaking this news to Ken. From what Karen told me, you guys are as close as brothers.”

“Closer,” Starsky said solemnly. “I’m not lookin’ forward to tellin’ him, but I’d rather it came from me. Thanks again.” He stepped out into the cold night air and sprinted back to the car, hoping to beat Hutch home.



*End of Chapter Eight*