

Too Good To Be True

by TibbieB

Chapter 8

Standing at the front door of the elaborate mansion, Hutch impatiently rang the bell again. He was about to start pounding on it with his fist when a maid, dressed in a traditional domestic uniform answered. He flipped out his shield and introduced himself, asking to speak with Mr. or Mrs. Collins. The maid showed him to the sitting room and instructed him to wait while she checked with her employer.

Hutch seated himself in the enormous room, and studied his surroundings while anxiously waiting for her to return. The room was somber, with heavy drapes in muted burgundy tones, blocking the sunlight which may have otherwise made it seem less oppressive.

Knowing every moment that passed minimized his chances of finding Starsky alive, Hutch's patience was wearing thin. To calm his nerves, he got up and walked around the massive room. Though he wasn't an expert on furniture and antiques, he knew enough about them to doubt the heavy mahogany, hand-carved candle stands and matching secretary were reproductions. In one corner stood a floor-to-ceiling mahogany bookcase, its shelves laden with "first editions", obviously worth a mint. He distractedly perused the titles, then turned his attention to the fireplace. Above the mantel hung a family portrait, picturing the Collinses with their young son, William, probably at the age of five or six. Despite the artist's obvious skill, he'd not captured any sign of warmth in the faces of his patrons. Hutch wondered if it was an accurate depiction.

Although he had waited only a few minutes, it seemed like hours to Hutch. What if Collins' parents refused to see him? It wasn't like they were suspects. Any information they could give him would have to be voluntary. The situation would definitely have to be handled with kid gloves. Hutch nervously paced back and forth in front of the fireplace. Undoubtedly, they'd recognize his name. Starsky could be dying, and he was here, hat in hand, praying these people could at least point him in the right direction. Just as he thought they weren't going to come, he heard someone enter through the door behind him. Hutch turned and faced William Collins' mother.

"It really is you. I must say, I'm surprised at your audacity, Detective Hutchinson." The matronly, silver-haired woman approached him without extending a hand of welcome.

"Mrs. Collins, I...I...appreciate your seeing me," Hutch stuttered. "I assure you I wouldn't impose on you like this if it wasn't absolutely necessary."

"I can't imagine what business you may have with me now that my son is dead; but I *am* a civilized woman, and am willing to listen to what you have to say."

“Thank you. I...uh...need to know about Angelique...your son’s fiancée. Do you know where she is?”

“Why ever would you need to see her? Hasn’t the poor girl been through enough?”

“It’s a matter of life and death, Mrs. Collins. If you know... know anything, please tell me. My partner’s life is at stake here.”

Martha Collins gestured for him to sit down, implying to Hutch that he’d gotten her attention. “I have no idea what you mean by that, but I would like to hear more before I give you any information regarding Angelique’s whereabouts.”

“I don’t have a lot of time. In fact, I’m worried it may already be too late. But I realize you’re entitled to an explanation.” Hutch briefly outlined what he knew about the situation, pulling out all the stops. If this woman knew anything, and he was certain she did, then he didn’t have time to pussy-foot around, playing twenty questions.

At the conclusion of his hastily delivered story, Mrs. Collins let out a deep sigh, whispering, “Oh, dear. It’s worse than I thought.”

“Detective, I’m afraid I believe every word you’ve said. When my son first brought Angelique home to meet us, we were both convinced she was a conniving gold digger. But nothing would please William but to marry her.” She stood up and walked toward the fireplace, gazing up at the family portrait.

“Of course, we never could control our son. It was as though he did things just to spite us. I told my husband the more we talked against such a union, the more determined William would be to see it through.”

Hutch fidgeted in his seat, interested in what Mrs. Collins was telling him, yet anxious to get to the information he so desperately needed, and be on his way. But he realized he would get it only on her terms.

She turned and looked at him, her eyes challenging him to dispute her next words. “You may not believe it, but we did try to help William end his drug addiction. I’m sure, being a law enforcement officer you could never understand what it’s like to be addicted to heroine.”

Hutch looked down at the floor, afraid she might see that he did understand—all too well.

“I knew he’d eventually end up in prison, but nothing I said or did deterred him from the self-destructive path he’d chosen. So when he was arrested, we were supportive, but resigned to the fact he would serve time in prison.”

Her voice held a slight tremor, though she tried to conceal it from Hutch. “What I wasn’t prepared for was the news that he’d been stabbed to death by an inmate.”

“You have my sympathies,” Hutch murmured earnestly.

“But, you asked me about Angelique, and I’m afraid I’ve strayed from the topic.” Hutch watched as she discreetly dabbed impending tears from the corners of her eyes.

“My husband and I were shocked by Angelique’s reaction to all this. When William was arrested we fully expected that would be the last we saw of her. You know, the ‘goose with the golden egg’ was going to prison. But she stood by my son resolutely. Promised to wait for him. She was convinced he would get out on parole for good behavior, and they could marry.

When we were notified of William’s death, Angelique was staying here as our house guest. A police officer came to give us the news. Angelique became hysterical. Why, I had to call my doctor and have him come out and give her a sedative just to calm her down.”

Hutch listened quietly, while inwardly willing her to hurry the story along.

“She went into a deep depression. I tried to convince her to go in for counseling, but she refused. The days passed, and she became more and more withdrawn. Frankly, I was quite worried that she may attempt suicide.

Then one morning about two months ago, she told me at breakfast that she was leaving. Was going to get a job and an apartment. I tried to talk her out of it, but she insisted she would be fine. She reminded me that her servant—body guard—whatever that Demetrius fellow was—would look after her. I insisted she take some money for living expenses until she was settled. Believe it or not, I had to become rather adamant before she’d agree.”

Mrs. Collins walked back over to the sofa and sat down, facing Hutch. “Then four days ago she called me. Asked if she could use the cabin up on the lake. It was a place she and William spent a good bit of time together. She also asked for money to buy two airline tickets. She seemed nervous and almost reluctant to ask for the money—said she just wanted to go home and be with her family. Of course, I immediately agreed to both requests. I had no reason to question why she wanted to use our cabin.”

Hutch came to his feet instantly. Finally, the break he’d hoped for. “Please, Mrs. Collins—you’ve got to tell me how to get to that cabin. I believe that’s where they took Starsky, and from the looks of the last photos they sent me, every minute I delay, the more likely it is he’ll die.”

She hesitated for only a split second. “Yes, of course.”



Hutch didn't bother waiting to be shown the way out. He broke into a run as he slammed the Collins' door behind him. Jumping into the Torino, he slapped the mars light on the roof and threw the car into reverse in one fluid movement. Once he was back on the highway, he reached for the radio mic.

"Control, this is Zebra3. Patch me through to Dobey RIGHT NOW!"

"Ten four, Hutch. Patching you through."

"What do you have, Hutch?"

"I think I know where they're holding Starsky, Cap'n. I'm on my way there now. Can you dispatch some black and whites and an ambulance? I'm sure he'll need medical attention...if I get there in time."

"You will," Dobey assured him. "I'm coming too. Now tell me where."



A cloud of dust followed the Torino as Hutch jammed the gas pedal to the floor and fish-tailed around a curve and off the main highway. Gravel flew in all directions, and Hutch absent-mindedly wondered if Starsky would chew him out about getting his "baby" dirty. That thought made him feel as though a knife was being twisted in his heart. *What if I'm too late? Please God...*



End of Chapter 8