

Modern Family

by Kerrys2Boys

By the time Starsky took his place at the window, at two in the morning on New Year's Day, there was nothing but rain and grime and endless emptiness to see. If there had been anything to see on the streets, it was long gone for now. The sickly yellow of the neon lights across the street were weak and dull, but cast enough light to show up the years of encrusted dirt on the window and its weathered surrounds. Mold-speckled curtains, brittle and yellow with age, framed the whole ugly picture of the world outside. From inside, where he sat, it was even worse. Even bleaker than the dark sheeting rain that cut through the miserable night outside.

Hutch was damn well right. Everything about this festering hole was ugly.

The early first hours of the brand new year found them stuck inside a grimy, flea-bitten hotel room that served as a strategic vantage point to survey the streetscape below and beyond. If the shabby, depressing décor wasn't bad enough, years of food smells, smoke, and stale odors of bodily excrement seemed to have seeped into the mildewed plasterboard and caught in the uneven floorboards, creating a layered sour stench.

And it was friggin' cold, too. Cold and damp inside the worn room and colder outside than it should be for an LA winter night. This small pocket of hell tucked into the dangerous streets of south LA had to be up there with the worst of the job sites he'd been stuck in. Still, if he could be bothered to put some effort into it, he'd probably recall worse.

Surveillance jobs encompassed just about everything that Starsky hated most about the downside of a cop's job—long hours of tedium and mind-numbing boredom and nothing whatsoever in the line of physical action—for the most part anyway. There wasn't a soul on the street and the side streets he was watching. Not even a stray, drunken New Years party reveler who might have inadvertently wandered into this shady danger zone. Those who might have braved the wet, dark, rainy night in search of further celebration would hardly be doing so in the area he and Hutch were staking out. Starsky was beginning to wonder if even hardened criminals would bother to choose this sort of night to do a deal.

In a perverse way he was beginning to hope for a little heart-stopping adrenaline rush—just a hint of some action going down to move the case forward and save him from sliding into total self absorption. How could he take three more hours of this? His eyes were already burning from the constant focusing of the street below, and his neck felt stiff from sustaining a forward-leaning straddle across a turned hard-backed chair. He could deal with the physical discomfort—as a seasoned cop he was well used to that. But, the long quiet hours that lay ahead were going to leave him defenseless against his inner voice. The one that wouldn't let up telling him that something was going on with Hutch.

It was more than just that Hutch wasn't happy about where they were and what they were doing. Hell, even an eternal optimist would be hard pressed to find something

positive about the situation. It was a bummer that they were stuck here and a double bummer given that it was one of the year's biggest party nights. They'd really gone and pulled the short straw with this year's "holiday" assignment.

Sure, it was only reasonable that holiday shifts had to be shared around. Sometimes though, it felt as though they did a little more than other officers. More than those officers with wives and kids and pressing responsibilities. Not like him and Hutch. Everyone knew that they had no such responsibilities. No wives, kids, or family ties. And so, as much as Starsky was a sucker for holidays like Christmas and New Year, he accepted that they were meant to be shared with families. He would have thought that Hutch, who really didn't seem to care much for festive sentiment, would be even less concerned about working the shifts. On the contrary, this time Hutch seemed mightily pissed off about it all.

He could sense Hutch behind him, still awake even though it was his turn to bunk out on the stained and threadbare excuse for a mattress, his duffle bag and jacket bundled up beneath his head as a pillow. Starsky could see the reflection of his reclining blond partner, or at least fragmented parts of him, in the filthy, wet window.

Their last exchange had been nearly an hour earlier when they'd swapped stations. It had been a terse bit of conversation—not even conversation—just more of Hutch's griping. Hutch had shaken Starsky awake to relieve him on surveillance after which he'd wasted no time in crashing on the creaking, rusted bed. Behind him, Hutch tossed and squirmed on the mattress, kicking out savagely at the bed end that was too close to his feet for his long body to stretch out comfortably, punctuating each kick with a hissed obscenity.

"What a piece of shit. They expect us to get some rest on this rust bucket of a cot?" Starsky heard the corroded iron of the bed screech as Hutch's boot slammed into it, but he didn't turn around. "What a fuckin' lousy way to spend to spend New Year's. Look at this crumbly shitbox, will you, Starsky? Just look at it! Look at us while you're doing it. Jesus, what a shitty, pathetic life we lead. Are we totally fucked in the head or what? Who else would be doing this sort of crap on New Year's Eve?"

He'd probably said more but Starsky had cued himself out after the first few lines. It was all so reminiscent of others Hutch had used several times already that evening and in the last few days. A variation of the same bitching resentment.

Starsky wondered if Hutch even heard the stuff he was saying? His ranting about the shitty life that "we lead" or "our fucking lives" or some such thing, rating the quality of the life that the two of them woke up to each morning, whether Starsky had a say in the evaluation or not. And, by Hutch's measure, their lives were coming way short of his expectations. Which was news to Starsky, because from his perspective nothing was different about their day-to-day existence. Had Hutch's expectations for life changed somehow while Starsky hadn't been watching?

With all that over-supply of misery and venting, it was surprising that Hutch wasn't asleep. He should be out for the count, not lying there as he was, staring open-eyed at the ceiling above the bed.

Starsky leaned into the window, staring out into the night. Not a thing. Not a goddamn solitary thing to be seen or even heard. Except Hutch's fidgeting restlessness behind him.

Starsky focused on the gloomy street beyond the room. When he finally said it, he wondered if it probably wasn't the best time to bring it up. In fact, he wasn't even sure why he did, but it was in his nature to be impetuous, especially when he was uncertain or cornered. He'd been feeling both of those things since an irritated Hutch had kicked the door closed behind them hours earlier.

"If you could have a child, would you?" He threw the question over his shoulder.

Starsky knew what Hutch would be thinking, that the obscure question was just another example of Starsky's rampant musings. He couldn't blame Hutch for that. He was well aware of his own tendency to fall back on spontaneous glib repertoire whenever he was bored or was feeling like some caged beast. But this question wasn't part of that.

Its origins were deep inside of him, rising up from some troubled dark center, working its way to the tip of his tongue all evening, as though it had to be let out, squirming and impatient to be released. It was out now, even if the timing of it might not be the best. Because, the worst of it was, he could hardly walk out of the room and leave his duty post if he didn't like the outcome.

Starsky waited. He put his chin down on his forearms pressing himself firmly against the hard surface of the wooden chair and looked out into the night while his thumb absently worked at the chipping veneer of the chair back. He could wait. Patience was something he'd learned to develop with Hutch.

"Starsky?"

"Yep?"

"What the hell sort of question is that?"

There it was. The bristling agitation. Hutch didn't like the question.

"One I've been wantin' to ask you for about a week or more now," Starsky answered truthfully. He didn't look back to see what Hutch was doing. "One that I've been wonderin' about since you said what you did to Molly just before Christmas."

"I said lots of things to Molly around Christmas," Hutch said distantly.

"I'm talking about that day last week when we drove her to that foster family, remember?"

"Of course I remember." And Starsky could hear in his voice that he clearly did and that he didn't like the memory.

"...And she wanted nothin' more than to get back in the car and drive home with us to your place—to stay with you—probably forever, if she could."

“I had to let her down,” Hutch said flatly.

Starsky let that go. Even though he knew it was important to Hutch, Starsky wasn't thinking about Molly. Selfish perhaps, but then he had his own needs, too. He had a need to understand something that had been stuck in his head for days. Something was eating away at Hutch and was therefore eating away at him, too. Starsky traced its beginning back to Molly.

That was when something seemed to have shifted inside of Hutch.

“When she asked you to take her back again, perhaps for good, you said you couldn't have a kid—not with your hours, your job.” Starsky paused, pressed his chin even harder into his arms as he said it. *Not with our shitty, pathetic lives.* “Not—well, being a bachelor and all. At least I think that was what ya' said.” He remembered clearly what Hutch had said and how he'd said it.

“She needed to know the score. The truth. Better than hurting her more by lying or pretending. It was tough on her, poor kid,” Hutch said, a hollowness in his voice.

“Seemed tough on you, too, Hutch. I saw your face. Saw it other times too, when you had her at your place. She—it—the whole thing cut you up. Did you think that I never even noticed that?”

That got his attention. Starsky could hear the drag of Hutch's long legs as he pulled himself upright on the sagging mattress, drawing his body up 'til he was sitting against the corroded bedhead.

“You're a little tougher than me in that department, Starsky.” He hesitated, shifted on the bed, the ironwork creaking beneath him. “I've always been in awe of you in that way. You've had your own share of hurt and loss when you most needed it—losing your father at such a young age and being shipped across the country—and you were strong enough to survive it. I'm not so good at looking at that sort of stuff—facing it head on like that.” Starsky stole a glance at the reflection and saw Hutch looking at his hands. “I didn't like doing that to Molly. Leaving her like that. Didn't like to see her disappointment when I told her. All she wanted was to be with someone over Christmas,” Hutch said softly. “Kids—hell, people in general, shouldn't have to be alone at Christmas time.”

“What about you, Hutch? You think you can go through life being alone for all the Christmases that lie ahead?”

“That's a dumb question, Starsk. I'm not alone. I've got my own family. Not like Molly.”

“Hutch, you barely talk to your own family, let alone see them at Christmas. I don't even think you spoke to your dad at all this Christmas.”

“He wasn't inside the house when I called and spoke to Mother. Besides—“

“Besides, you're not really a Christmas enthusiast. I know,” Starsky filled in.

“No—I was going to say...” Hutch paused, shifted again, “something else...” But he didn’t. He stopped at that and Starsky caught the frustration in his sigh, like he was disappointed he hadn’t said it after all.

It was enough to have Starsky turning in his seat, away from the window and the surveillance just for a quick moment. He needed to look at Hutch for real and not just in a reflection when he said the rest. “But the bit about being alone in the future, say, if you don’t have your own kid or kids. Don’t settle down? Don’t have a wife. What then? What if you end up like Molly one day? All alone on Christmas Eve?”

Hutch swung his legs over the mattress and stood up. With a sigh and a stretch, he walked over to where Starsky sat and took his place beside him, standing and staring out the window, almost unconsciously picking up the slack, maintaining the watch while Starsky was not. Getting the job done, keeping up the surveillance despite the distraction of the conversation. Despite his bitching and groaning about a cop’s life Hutch would never fail to give his all to the job. Not even for a moment did Starsky doubt that—even though it might have been convenient that Hutch would use the task of surveillance to distract him from the conversation. Conviction. It’s what made Hutch such a great cop and an even better human being.

“What’s brought all this on, Starsk? Post Christmas melancholia? New Year’s Eve blues? Simple boredom?” Hutch asked him softly, any irritation replaced by the warm modulated voice that could so easily make Starsky forget his purpose—hell—could almost make him forget to take his next breath. Still, he wasn’t about to let Hutch deflect him with that buttery voice. God, how he loved that voice, and oh how he loved to be deflected by it—but not now.

“I’m not the one who’s been down in the dumps since Christmas, pal. I’m not the one who’s retreated into the famous Hutchinson silence for the last week and who’s been huffin’ and puffin’ over there on that bed for the past hour. I’m just tryin’ to figure out if this look-at-this-shitty-life-we-lead stuff is all about resentin’ that you haven’t got that Golden Book family yet. That you might not ever get it while we lead this life—together.”

Hutch looked sideways at him from the window, his concentration divided between his partner and the view outside. To balance it, to balance them. Starsky turned to resume his own studied vigil of the street outside. He might have been hoping before for some definitive action to unravel, but now he wanted the quiet street to stay quiet. If anything did go down and they missed it, Dobey would skin them alive and they would never forgive themselves either. This stakeout, this case was important to the Department.

But then what was happening between the two of them now was also important—to both of them. It was like a case all their own. The case between the two of them.

“A what? What did you call it? A ‘*Golden Book Family*’? Jesus, Starsky what is going on in your head?”

“My head? I’m more interested in what’s goin’ on in yours, partner.”

“You think I want a child? Is that what this is about, Starsk?” He sounded almost pained.

“Perhaps... Why not? A Molly maybe, or a Pete even.” Starsky tried for a lopsided grin but it was a strain to pull off. “A Kiko of your own. A wife to go home to at night and to kiss goodbye in the mornings. The chance to make a family like the one you might always have wanted, like the one you never got to experience when you were a kid yourself. A family for all the Christmases ahead that you might actually begin to enjoy when you have loved ones to share them with,” he finished, almost lamely, he thought, and then looked away, back to the dark gloom of outside. It seemed easier to look outside than to find what effect his words might have had on Hutch. He was almost fearful of what he might see reflected in the face of the only bright thing in the dimly lit room.

The quiet room got quieter, no voices to fill it, just the sounds of gusty rain hitting the window at a sharp angle. There was the rustle of Hutch’s shirt as he moved and the even measure of his breathing. Then came that deep Hutch sigh that meant Starsky had yet again given him cause for displeasure or irritation. And yet, the firm grip that came and settled on his shoulder, made by Hutch’s big rough hand, warm despite the coldness around them, didn’t feel like an irritated gesture.

“You know, Starsky, I think people have largely got us figured all wrong.”

Starsky looked up sharply, confused by the statement. Even a little worried. “In what way?”

“Everyone says that you and I have this silent communication thing going on between us,” Hutch started to expand.

“Yeah?”

“—and I’m sure that a lot of the time, we do. But—“

“But? There’s a ‘but’?” Starsky was getting more worried.

“I think that for the big stuff, the really important stuff, we seem to often mess it up. The communication side of things,” Hutch said. “Or at least I do. I *know* I do. You’ve just proved it to me again.”

“I have?”

“Starsk, listen to what you’ve just asked me, for God’s sake. You’ve been walking around since Molly thinking that—that I somehow want a kid of my own, a... a...” he sucked in a little breath and blew it out as though it took effort to say it, “...a wife? A whole family that will what? Somehow give me a sense of belonging?”

“Well, ya’ did say you couldn’t have a kid with the life you lead.”

“And I can’t. And I wouldn’t. Not with our jobs, not with the lifestyle that goes with it.”

“So are you wishing that you had a different job?” Starsky asked. “Not just a different job—but a different lifestyle? You really seem to have been seriously pissed off with things in the past week.”

“I suppose I have. This job makes it hard to remain starry-eyed about life for very long. Molly and her terrible circumstances just brought that all home to me again.” His voice trailed off. “And—at the worst time of the year—Christmas.”

“Hutch. Listen. I’m not just talking about Molly here, even though I know that what went down with her rocked you hard. It’s more than that.” Starsky stopped for a moment, not sure whether he should push his concerns any further with Hutch being as closed off as he had been—as he still seemed to be.

“Then tell me,” Hutch said simply and patiently enough that Starsky felt he could.

“I guess I was scared that you were feelin’ like you wanted more than what you and I can have together. With what we’ve got together, just the two of us. No kids, no happy families sharing in our relationship. I was frightened that when you spent time with Molly—saw her with Kiko and his family—that it made you aware of what you secretly wanted to have, too.” It was a lot to say, a lot for Starsky to choke out, around a throat constricted with emotion. Until he had put it all out in front of him, he really didn’t appreciate how worried he’d been that he might be holding onto Hutch too hard. Holding on to a partner that wanted something more in life than he could give him.

Hutch nodded his head slowly in understanding. “I see.”

Starsky didn’t think he did.

“Hutch.” Starsky stood up and faced him. “If you’re unhappy with all of this,” he nodded his chin toward the window to encompass the sordid desolate street beyond where they stood, “this ‘shitty’ job and our life, then maybe we should talk about it.”

“Talk about what?”

Okay, so Hutch wasn’t going to make this any easier for him.

“Your unhappiness, Hutch. Your God-awful misery of the last week—that’s what.”

“I’m sorry if I’ve been bringing you down with my pessimism. Being here tonight,” Hutch waved his hand about, “hasn’t helped my bad mood. I should’ve realized my funk wasn’t fair to you. I know how festive times, like Christmas, mean so much to you—”

“Hutch, I don’t need you to treat me like some kid because it’s Christmas or—“ he frowned, frustrated that Hutch was missing his point.

“No, you’re right. You don’t. You need to be treated like who you are.” Hutch smiled softly.

“Huh?” Starsky pulled back his head a little in surprise, uncertain of where Hutch was heading.

“I mean, that I need to be more mindful about remembering that I should be grateful for the family that I do have,” Hutch said cryptically. At least it seemed cryptic to Starsky who had no idea of what he was talking about.

“You’ve lost me, Hutch. I’m still back tryin’ to figure out the bit about not being treated like a kid who loves Christmas too much for my own good.” Starsky smiled a little sheepishly and then cocked his head in question. “What’s this got to do with you being grateful to your family? I thought you and your family weren’t close.”

That was the point when Hutch stepped forward even closer, the hand on Starsky’s shoulder moving up to his hair, his thumb to his cheek, his face dangerously close to Starsky’s—not too close for Starsky’s comfort, but for two male cops in the middle of a surveillance job. Two cops who were standing at a hotel window with nothing but a gaudy curtain to shield them from the street below.

“I’m only realizing that I’ve never really talked openly enough about my family to you,” Hutch admitted wistfully.

“Hutch, I’m not asking you to explore all of your relationships here. Your family is your own business, but anytime you want to talk about them to me, you know you can. But what I’ve been tryin’ to say here tonight is—“ Starsky knew he was going to have to say it now, before he lost the nerve. *Straight to the point and clean cut.* He put his hand up to his own chest emphasizing his role in what he was saying. “Hutch, if you’ve come to realize that you’re not happy—if you’re no longer happy with us, with me,” and God that hurt him a lot to say, “well—ya’ only have to tell me.”

There. He’d said it.

“No longer happy with you?” Hutch said it in the strangest way, like it was a bunch of foreign words he was practicing for the first time.

“Yeah—like—if you’ve decided that it’s time for you to have a family. A family of your own.”

“A family of my own?” Hutch repeated like Starsky was talking Russian or something.

Starsky felt his brow tightening in frustration. Why did it feel like he had to help Hutch understand him? Could he make it any clearer? He wasn’t sure he could take the pain of saying it again. “Yes—a proper family,” he repeated and hoped not to hear it echoed back to him yet again.

“I have a family, Starsky. A proper family.”

“Sure—but I meant—to make one of your own. The next generation of Hutchinsons.” Wow, did that twist his heart. Burn his brain with the imagery it created.

Christmas card photos, the classic nuclear family. Hutch sitting proud and happy, his arm draped possessively about the shoulders of his pretty stylish wife, her long blond hair a matching halo to Hutch’s, her small hand placed lovingly on his knee, while their two—hell, make that three—flaxen-haired children sat cross-legged at their

parents' feet, secure in the love of their parents, beaming at the camera with big smiles. Picture card perfection.

A sudden jarring horn blow from the street jarred the stillness and the ethereal glow of the image was lost and he was back in the dark, dirty room and the job at hand.

Starsky moved closer to the window, his body tensing as he pulled himself back to the reality of his mission, all the while acutely aware of Hutch watching him intently.

The blaring pierce of the car horn receded into the distance. “Nothin’—just some passing idiot wanting to cause a stir.” He didn’t sit back down again, but stood ramrod straight, his attempt to maintain his vigil back in place. It was suddenly easier than looking at Hutch who was beginning to make him uncomfortable with his steady gaze.

“Starsky?” Hutch asked, his voice so soft that he seemed almost uncertain.

“Can I tell you about the family I *do* have, Starsky?”

“Sure—if you want to, Hutch, but I don’t think you need—“ Starsky was beginning to feel that he had really screwed up this whole attempt to get to the bottom of what was bugging Hutch. Maybe he should have left the whole discussion ‘til they weren’t here. Maybe he shouldn’t have even brought it up. “But look—I shouldn’t have started this discussion. Go back and try to get some sleep. It’s my watch now—I’ve got this covered. I’m sorry I interrupted your rest.”

He wasn’t sure he even wanted to hear what Hutch had to say on the matter anyway. The lousy night and shitty atmosphere was quickly draining him.

“No—I want to. I really feel the need to talk about my family. It seems important right now that you get to hear about them.” The sincerity in Hutch’s voice was almost tremulous. That, and his sudden desire to bring his family up, caught Starsky off guard.

“Okay. I’m listenin’,” Starsky said, a little unsure of Hutch’s shift in mood.

“Well, let me see.... First there’s my father,” Hutch began and Starsky tried to hide the momentary confusion at the uncharacteristic warmth in his partner’s voice. “He can be the wisest man I know when he comes out with things that no one else seems to be able to see or understand. He’s great at giving advice and telling me when I need to pull my head in, and he’s always there to kick my ass just enough when I become too complacent or self-centered. A father that knows how to give me tough love.”

He paused as though sorting his thoughts and Starsky felt himself stiffen with concern. *What the hell?*

Was this Hutch’s post-Christmas emotional crisis? Hutch and his father had nothing like this sort of relationship to Starsky’s knowledge.

Before he could chew on this any further, Hutch continued. “My mother can be infuriatingly overprotective and likes to smother me with affection when I’m hurt or upset—even though I’m a grown, tough man. She knows me so well, it’s frightening.

I couldn't live without her nurturing and caring, but I don't often let her know that or I'd be completely mother-henned to death." He smiled gently and gave Starsky a pointed look.

"Hutch? Ummn?" Starsky's unease increased. Hutch's mother saw him but once a year. *Was he talking about his childhood memories? No. He'd referred to himself as a grown man. Jesus.... This was not good.*

"Then there's my brother." The smile as he said it became almost beautiful and if wasn't for the words that went with it, Starsky might not have been able to resist reaching out to touch the lips that made that smile so breathtaking.

His brother? Oh God, should he stop this right now? Was Hutch losing it completely?

"My brother is my soul mate, my closest kin. He looks out for me, protects me, and walks beside me. I couldn't love him anymore than I do. I think you know how that feels, Starsky," he said.

"Yeah—well—Nicky and I ain't all that close these days but—" Starsky heard his worry as he stumbled on the words. "Hutch—you know you don't have a brother, don't you? Not a real brother..."

But Hutch was still smiling, and not the sort of smile that made Starsky think that he was joking or being stupid, or even doing one of his put-one-over-on-Starsky acts. No, it was the sort of smile that meant he seriously believed his own story.

"My sister," he was off again, "isn't around a lot. My brother and I are just so tight, I guess, it's hard for her to make a place in my life. Still she makes her presence felt when she thinks I need some bossing about. She understands my fears and insecurities, and she'll tell me what I need to hear, even if I don't want to hear it. And lastly there's—well, I don't think this member of the family will come as a surprise to you, Starsk." Hutch laughed lightly.

Starsky wanted to tell him that in fact, everything he'd said in the last few minutes was a surprise—one big overwhelming surprise. But he didn't. He didn't because he was starting to understand, finally, that Hutch wasn't having some sort of New Year's Eve breakdown, after all.

No—his partner was just being the big, blond, enchantingly lovable man that he could so often be.

Hutch reached up to pull gently on Starsky's curls, his eyes soft with fondness. "I'm the proud father of a rascally little boy, some hellcat kid with dark curls and an impish grin who keeps me on my toes every day and never lets me get old. Without him there would be no one to remind me that I'm never too old to find the magic in life. Magic that's always there, just waiting for me. I get to see life all over again through his young, idealistic eyes, and it's like I'm getting another chance to be a kid myself. He gives me a second chance at experiencing all the things I missed out on when I was a kid myself. With him in my life, I get to explore parts of me I didn't know existed—silly, inane, joyous parts."

“Oh, Hutch. Oh, babe...” Starsky murmured, as not just comprehension, but the full emotion of what Hutch was saying, hit him hard.

“This kid of mine is particularly impish at Christmas, when he never gives up on trying to make me understand the simple pleasures of giving to others. If I didn’t have the kid in you, Starsky, I might have given up long ago on humanity.” Hutch sucked in a huge breath then, his intake shaky with the intensity of what he had said. It was as though it had all come out in a big rush, like some massive purging of his heart and feelings. He took a moment to look closely at Starsky, and Starsky stood still beneath his heavy gaze, knowing that his face would be showing every feeling that Hutch’s words had put there.

“I didn’t think—didn’t know there was a family like that for you, Hutch.” Starsky could barely breathe himself, let alone speak, but he somehow choked it out. “I—I’m really pleased to hear you say you’ve got all that in your life.”

“I do, and I’m grateful for it every day, but never say it or make it nearly clear enough, and I’m so sorry for that...” Hutch closed his eyes tight, fighting to get the next words out. “Oh, Starsk? Don’t you see?”

And when Hutch said his name like that, as though it was some delicate beautiful artifact he was holding in his trembling hands, his eyes and face alive with sheer wonderment at the object, Starsky knew how deeply Hutch was feeling and how intensely he wanted to convey it.

“You’re my family,” Hutch said. “You’re the most important person in my life, and the only person I will ever need or want to come home to every day of that life—and even more so on special days like Christmas. You’re my parents, my siblings, my child, and my partner—and you couldn’t make me feel anymore loved than you already do.”

“Christ, stop it, Hutch, please. You’re goin’ to have me in tears...and I can hardly be doin’ that when we’re s’posed to be here workin’...s’posed to be watchin’ the street...”

Truth was of course, it was already too late for that. Starsky could barely see Hutch’s beloved face for the watery film across his eyes. He felt the physical evidence threatening to spill down his cheeks. “It’s too much damn emotion to take in one go while we’re here and can’t—“

Hutch had moved in closer. His hands were no longer playing in Starsky’s curls, but had moved to the back of his neck, pressing firmly, insistently to pull his head forward, not near enough that their mouths were touching, but near enough for Starsky to feel Hutch’s breath, see the contours of his upper lip, smell his skin. Closer than Starsky could bear to have him without doing something about it—something that would be ill-advised while they were on duty.

“I know,” Hutch said. “And you’re right. We need to get this shift behind us. But in less than four hours we’re finished here for two whole days straight. Two days, Starsk. Imagine that.” Hutch tipped his head to whisper the suggestive notion into

Starsky's ear, the baby soft ends of Hutch's bright hair brushing over Starsky's upper cheek.

Starsky smiled provocatively, but it was more for show than anything. What he was really feeling was flooding relief and sheer emotional joy. Hutch had dispelled his greatest fears. He'd made it clear that he was more than enough for him, all that he wanted. That was as much as anybody could ask for from someone they loved. He was the center of Hutch's world and nothing could surpass that feeling.

"Forty-eight hours all to ourselves," Starsky said, echoing Hutch's sentiment.

"How will we possibly fill those hours?" Hutch said, putting the icing on his speech of his love for Starsky with a reminder of what they shared on other more intimate levels.

Starsky could barely resist the game. "What do ya' want to do with them, babe? I'd rather you tell me than imagine it myself. Tell me..." Starsky purred back at him.

"Well—I'm thinking that when we get this job behind us," Hutch suggested softly, keeping one hand on Starsky as he cast his gaze up and down the street below, "that I'd like to be spend some quality time—totally private time, with my very favorite family member. I mean—no parents, no siblings—and definitely NO kids." Hutch pressed his lips into a firm line as though he was trying to hold back a laugh.

Starsky pulled back. His eyes narrowed. "Hutch," he warned, "I can be your dad, your brother, I guess your mother-hen mom, too. And, you know, the kid bit comes easy for me when I'm in that sorta' mood. I'm even prepared, if I had to, I suppose—on a really bad day—to be your damn sister. Christ, I can't believe I said that." He held up his hand as though warning Hutch not to push him any further. "But I'm tellin' ya, Hutch, there ain't NO WAY, no way in hell, that you're goin' to paint me as your wife!"

"Did I say wife?" Hutch asked, all innocence and blinking eyes.

"No, but..."

"If I did—say wife," Hutch smiled in teasing merriment, "I'd paint you as a super sexy, mind-blowing hot wife."

"You say it and see what—" Starsky growled.

"But I didn't say wife. I don't have a wife. I know that sounds a little amoral when I've got a kid in the house, too—but then, we live in progressive times, Starsk." He grinned. "We're a modern family."

"A modern family, hey?" Starsky cocked his eyebrow and grinned.

"One that I think works—at least for us." Hutch smiled.

"So, this modern family doesn't have a wife—and thank God for that. So—then? Spill it. Who is this favorite family member you're wanting to spend the next two days with then?"

“You need me to tell you?” Hutch seemed surprised. “I thought it’d be obvious, Starsk, “ Hutch murmured thickly as he lifted Starsky’s hand up to his chest. Hutch pressed Starsky’s hand over his skin so that Starsky could feel his heartbeat. “I’d be one very lonely man if it wasn’t for my favorite person. The one that makes me feel as though I truly belong, truly matter. The person who has this part of me, right here,” Hutch pressed Starsky’s fingers firmly against his chest, “the person who is my heart, my soul, my equal. My beautiful free-spirited lover. You. Only you, Starsky.”

After that, Starsky found, and knew Hutch did, too, that the dirtiness of the small room receded, and the monotony of the surveillance job seem less boring. After that, the early hours of the first day of the New Year gave promise that Hutch might well be right.

Modern families worked.

Sometimes, if people were really lucky, modern families worked beautifully.

