

**GUARDIAN III**  
**“The Chase”**  
*by TibbieB*

***Chapter 14***

“Captain Dobby, there’s a Mister...Bear?...on line two for you. Shall I take a message?”

Dobby’s brow wrinkled momentarily, wondering why Starsky and Hutch’s friend would be calling him. Perhaps he had a lead on some case they’d been working prior to Morrisetti’s trial. “Put him through.”

“Dobby here. What can I do for you, Huggy?”

“Hello, Captain. I picked up some talk on the street that’s making me very uncomfortable. I tried to contact Starsky and Hutch, but the lady tells me they’re on vacation.”

“I’ll be glad to check out anything you may have for them.” Dobby leaned back in his chair, twirling a pen with the fingers of his right hand.

“Well, it seems that that cat, Morrisetti, has hired a couple of major league hit men do a piece of work on a certain two detectives who helped put him behind bars.”

Dobby leaned forward abruptly, the pen dropping to the desk with a thump. “Is this a reliable source, Huggy?”

“Primo, Captain. This dude don’t give me any jive talk. I’m a little nervous that the dynamic duo may be history if I can’t get word to them, like now. Dig it?”

“They’re on their way to Seattle to enter Sam in some sort of Search and Rescue competition. They probably arrived early this morning. I’ll call the hotel where they’re staying and warn them to stay on their toes.”

“Okay, that’s good. Thanks, Captain.”

“Oh, Huggy...”

“Yeah?”

Dobby cleared his throat, uncomfortable with expressing his gratitude. “I appreciate all you do to help my boys. Starsky and Hutchinson are, well, ahem...lucky to have a friend like you.”

Embarrassed by the unexpected compliment, Huggy didn't respond immediately. "Yeah...okay. They're pretty cool. Good to the brothers and the sisters on the street, always remembering the ones nobody else wants to bother with."

A moment of silence stretched between them before Huggy spoke again. "Later..."

"Right," Dobe answered, before dropping the receiver back into the cradle. A few seconds later, he leaned forward and pressed the intercom button. "Carol, please get the front desk of that hotel where Starsky and Hutchinson are staying."

"Right away, Captain."

As he waited for the hotel desk to ring their room, an easy feeling crept up his spine. Drumming his fingers on the desk, he mulled over the possibilities—and none of them were pleasant. A man like Morrisetti was capable of anything, and had the money and power to issue a death warrant from his prison cell with very little effort. "I'm sorry, but Mr. Hutchinson and Mr. Starsky haven't checked in, sir. Would you care to leave a message, in case they do?"

Dobe looked down at his watch, then rubbed the brow between his eyes, feeling a headache beginning to blossom. "Yes...yes, tell them to call Captain Dobe. They know the number." He hung up the phone and quickly buzzed the intercom again.

"Yes, sir?"

"I want to put out an APB on Starsky and Hutchinson..."



When they made it past the fallen redwood, the going got easier. Hutch did pretty well keeping up with Starsky and Sam; even so, he knew he was slowing them down. Once the woods thinned out enough, he gained the confidence to walk close behind Starsky, rather than maintaining physical contact with him every step of the way. Approaching the gutted Torino and the highway, Sam became agitated, somehow sensing what lay beyond the tree line was unpleasant. The dog forged ahead, darting in and out of sight, but never quite venturing beyond voice range.

In his impatience to reach the road, Starsky picked up the pace too, unintentionally widening the gap between himself and Hutch. When Hutch tripped on a rotted stump lying half buried in the ground, he went into a nose dive, ending in a four point landing, his hands and knees bearing the brunt of his weight. Starsky looked back just in time to see him struggling to get back on his feet.

Annoyed at his own thoughtlessness, Starsky rushed back to help him up. “You okay? Awww, man, I’m sorry,” he apologized, brushing the leaves and grime off the knees of Hutch’s jeans.

More frustrated than angry, Hutch pushed his hands away. “I can do it myself!” Starsky pulled back, but tried again to apologize.

“I’m sorry, Hutch. I wasn’t paying attention. Sam’s all excited, and I was tryin’ to see where he was goin’. I think we must be getting near the highway.”

“I’ll try to move faster,” Hutch mumbled, embarrassed for taking out on Starsky his own exasperation at not being able to keep up.

Rather than withdraw, Starsky remained steadfast. Remembering his own experience wearing a blindfold, after Emily was accidentally blinded by a bullet from his gun, Starsky said honestly, “I think you’re doin’ terrific. A hell of a lot better than I could.” He reached down and turned Hutch’s hands palm up. Seeing the raw abrasions, he took out his handkerchief and gently dabbed at them, removing the dirt and debris. “These hurt?”

“Sting a little, that’s all.” When Starsky, applied a slight pressure to stem the bleeding, Hutch instinctively drew back.

“Sorry.” Starsky said softly. Looking up, he studied Hutch’s face, wondering what was running through his mind. Seeing his friend this helpless was hard to take. The abrasions somewhat cleaned, he stuffed the handkerchief back into his pocket. A moment of silence passed between them before Starsky spoke again.

“Think you can make it now?”

Hutch smiled contritely, “Yeah...let’s go.” His hand on Starsky's shoulder, he took a hesitant step to follow, then stopped. “Starsk.”

Starsky paused and looked over his shoulder. “Hmmm?”

Hutch ran a hand over his face. “Look, I’m...I’m sorry I keep lashing out at you like that. It’s just...”

“Hey.” Starsky smiled sadly, and rubbed his own tired eyes. “I know.”

As the two men started out again, they heard the big dog barking up ahead. “Damn, I wish he’d keep it down,” Starsky cursed.

“Maybe he’s at the Torino.”

“Yeah, maybe. Looks like the trees are thinning out, so it’s possible,” Starsky told him. “This all looks familiar.”

As they broke through to the clearing, Sam stood before them, wagging his tail; in the background sat the burned-out shell of what had once been Starsky’s pride and joy. Tiny wisps of gray smoke still spiraled upward in various spots, not quite having burned out yet. The smell of charred leather and paint hung heavy in the air. Seeing the car again—beyond salvage, and literally unrecognizable, Starsky felt a lump rise in his throat. He stepped away from Hutch, contemplating looking for his gun among the ruins; but when he approached, he could see it was a lost cause.

Hutch didn’t need his sight to see the pain etched in his partner’s face—he could feel it—filling the air like an electrical charge. Even Sam felt it. The dog slowly approached The Dark One, then sat down beside him.

“Starsk? You okay, buddy? Where are you?” Hutch took a step forward, his outstretched hand groping the air.

“Yeah. I’m here,” came the barely audible reply. Starsky’s eyes were transfixed on the Torino, but his hand reached out and made contact with Hutch’s.

In his mind’s eye, Hutch envisioned the demolished car. One of the most vivid images he saw before the first manifestations of blindness had enveloped him, Hutch knew he wouldn’t soon forget the smoldering automobile. He’d always given Starsky a hard time about ‘the Tomato’, but it had all been in fun. The fact of the matter was, they’d shared a lot of good times in that car, had a lot of memories—some good, some bad; but it had definitely played an important role in their years together. He waited silently, his hand gripping Starsky’s, in a gesture of empathy.

The first to break contact, Starsky gruffly choked out the words, ready to put this scene behind them. “Come on. We got’a make it to the road before those turkeys show up.”

Sam looked up at him with questioning eyes. He thrust his big head beneath The Dark One’s hand, offering comfort. It seemed to Starsky the dog felt his grief. “Ready to go home too, Big Dog?” In response, the rottweiler chuffed softly.

Purposely diverting his eyes from the wreckage, Starsky led Hutch past the car, giving it a wide berth. ‘It was only a car’, he reminded himself. He had more important things to think about right now. It was up to him to get Hutch and Sam away from here safely. He knew making it up that steep hill with a blind man in tow would be no easy feat.



As the two exhausted men arrived at the old camp site where they'd stopped the night before, Benny White wasn't in the least surprised to see the pile of brush gone and the dark mouth of the cave yawning before them.

"Hey, Benny, would ya look at that?" Al Bernard stared into the dark cavern. "How come we didn't see this last night?"

"Because it was camouflaged with this brush, you moron." White gestured with his hand at the randomly scattered branches and limbs.

"You think they were in there the whole time?" Bernard's eyes bulged, astounded by the possibility their prey had been right beneath their noses for two full hours without being detected.

"That's exactly what I think. Damn! I can't believe we were so close!" The artery on Benny White's neck stood out markedly, giving his face an unpleasant purple-mottled appearance.

"So you think they waited until we left and doubled back? Or just went in a different direction?"

"What would you do, Al? Just think about it a minute, if that's not too painful for you?"

White's insult wasn't lost on the other man. Again, he felt his own temper flare, fed-up with the constant barrage of insults heaped on him by his own partner. "I'd head back for the road and try to wave down help," he speculated.

"And that's exactly what they've done. The only question remaining is, how much of a head-start did they get? Did they leave as soon as we did, or did they wait until daylight? In either case, we'd better get our asses back to the road before someone stops to help them.

## ***End of Chapter 14***