

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

***Chapter 16***

The brown and tan Highway Patrol cruiser came to a screeching halt after exiting onto the emergency lane of I-5. A tall, lanky young man, wearing a traditional Oregon Highway Patrolman uniform, stepped out of the car and walked up to the LA Police Captain to greet him with a handshake.

“You must be Captain Dobe. I’m Lt. Combs.”

Dobe returned the handshake, without a smile. “Nice to meet you,” he muttered briskly. “Listen, I appreciate you meeting me here. As you know, once I left LA, I was out of my jurisdiction. Any sign of my men?”

“No, sir. But there’s a lot of territory to cover between California and Seattle. Parts of I-5 are pretty remote, so I’m not surprised no one has reported seeing an accident. Come on, we’ll take my car.”

As they walked toward the cruiser, Combs continued to talk. “Did you say they were driving a civilian vehicle? A red Torino with a white stripe down the side?”

“That’s right. Detective Starsky’s car.”

“Something that distinctive should be pretty easy to spot. Do you know for sure they were in an accident?”

“No, all I know is, they didn’t make it to Seattle. I don’t know how much your captain filled you in, but I’m concerned they may have been victims of foul play. Starsky and Hutchinson just brought in Leo Morrisetti, a heavy hitter we’ve been trying to nail for years. Their testimony helped send him up for life. One of my sources believes he put out a contract on them.” Dobe had to hustle to keep up with the energetic, long-legged man.

“Sgt. Starsky and Sgt. Hutchinson are the two detectives you’re looking for? I’ve been following that case in the papers. Those guys have moxie.” Combs walked to the passenger side and politely opened the door for the older, higher-ranking officer. “I wish we had more people to spare for the search, but with the budget cut-backs, and hiring freeze, we’re stretched to the limit. Of course, the APB’s out there, so our people have all been alerted; but Captain Benson could only send me here to personally offer my services. I hope you understand.”

Dobey planted himself in the front seat and slammed the door securely. “Look, I appreciate your cooperation, and any help you can give me in locating my men. I’d go out there by myself if I had to, but I want someone with the jurisdiction to arrest and prosecute these creeps if we catch up with them in Oregon.” Dobey reached into his pocket, plucked out a clean handkerchief, and wiped his perspiring face. “If the circumstances didn’t warrant it, I wouldn’t cross state lines and get involved like this. These two are my best detectives, and they’re capable of looking out for themselves. But this is different. They just left on vacation, and have no way of knowing they’ve been marked for a hit.”

After checking both ways for oncoming traffic, the highway patrolman pulled back out onto the road. “Well, Captain, I’ll be happy to assist in any way I can. If law enforcement can’t look after our own, we may as well pack it up and all go home.”

“Thanks, Combs.” Dobey smiled gratefully at the idealistic, young man. He vaguely reminded the captain of a rookie Hutch, fresh out of the academy. “You’re exactly right. We have to stick together. Law officers are a different breed.”

Combs nodded in agreement, his eyes never leaving the road. “I thought we’d just get on here and drive north, the same route they would have taken. We’ll keep our eyes open and monitor the calls coming through. Maybe someone on routine patrol will spot them.”

Dobey sat back, relaxing a little for the first time since Huggy’s call. It felt good to know he was doing something besides sitting behind a desk, waiting for a phone call. If Starsky and Hutch were out there—if they were in trouble—he’d find them. He just hoped he wasn’t too late.



Starsky had wrestled with the wires a good ten minutes, unsuccessfully trying to start the blue sedan.

“I thought you used to hot-wire cars with your buddies in New York,” Hutch needed. “What ever happened to those magic fingers you’re always bragging about?”

“Very funny, Blintz. If you think you can do better, be my guest.” Starsky had never had this much trouble starting a car, and it seemed the more he hurried, the worse he fumbled. Knowing the two hit men may appear on the scene any second didn’t exactly boost his confidence. He scooted from beneath the dash and sat up. “I’m gonna check under the hood, in case they took the distributor cap or something.”

“I doubt they thought we’d make it back, Starsk.”

“Yeah, you’re probably right. But something’s keeping it from turnin’ over.” The dark-haired detective hopped out of the car and ran around to the front, lifting the

hood and checking all the obvious possibilities. At first, everything looked in order. Then, he spotted it. One of the battery cables was corroded, and wasn't making contact. Starsky fished out his pocket knife and hurriedly scraped the green, powdery substance from around the battery post and the inside of the cable connector. Confident he'd resolved the problem, he reattached the cable and tightened it down.

Slamming the hood down, Starsky glanced toward the edge of the incline and saw Sam still watching the bottom of the ravine attentively. It appeared he hadn't moved an inch since taking up his post there. Content that the dog would alert them if the situation changed, Starsky got back into the car to try connecting the wires again and jump the starter.



Benny White and Al Bernard left the cover of the trees, zigzagging behind rocks and bushes in a lame attempt to conceal themselves while approaching the Torino. Sam watched them vigilantly, the muscles of his lean body tense. Pressing his body to the ground, the dog blended in with his surroundings and remained hidden from sight.

The two men stopped momentarily when they came upon the smoldering ruins of the Ford, and looked for signs that the two detectives and their 'hell hound' had come back through. White's hunting experience paid off again when he found the imprint of Starsky's Adidas in the ashes near the car.

"I told you they'd come back the same way they went in," he bragged to his partner. "They're already on the highway, maybe even at the car."

"You don't think they took our car, do ya Benny?" Al's eyes bulged worriedly at that prospect.

"Only one way to find out," White answered, nodding toward the steep incline.

"I don't think I can climb with this hand." Bernard shoved his injured appendage in front of his friend's face. "Look how swollen it is."

The area around the puncture wounds was still a little swollen and red streaks extended down into Bernard's fingers. Inwardly White thought the injuries looked painful, maybe even warranting a doctor's attention. But it went against his grain to offer any modicum of sympathy.

"Don't be such a wimp," White scoffed. "The sooner we take these guys out, the sooner we're gonna get out of here."

Pushed to the breaking point, Bernard bristled back at him, "Why can't you go, Benny? Why does it always have to be me?"

“We're both going, you idiot. We'll split up—I'll come up behind the car, and I want you to come up in front of it. That way, one of us will have the drop on them.”

Disappointed he'd have to make the grueling climb back up the incline, Bernard lost the spunk to argue. “Okay, I'll go. But I don't like it. What if that dog's waiting up there?”

“You have a gun, don't you?”

“Well, yeah,” Bernard hedged.

“Then what's the problem? Use it.”

Bernard nodded, short, quick little bobs of the head. A smile slowly crept across his face. “Okay...yeah...I will, I will,” he agreed. The thought of killing the dog made his pulse race with excitement. “He'll be sorry he ever hurt Al Bernard. He'll be real sorry.”



Perched on his lookout at the top of the embankment, Sam watched the two gunmen enter the clearing. Although they made a half-hearted attempt to conceal their presence, he spied them immediately. The dog hunkered down closer to the ground and waited to see their next move.

After a few short moments of examining the ruins around the Torino, they stole toward the bottom of the incline. His ears peaked high, sensitive to every minute sound, Sam watched as White branched off to the left, then disappeared among the trees that grew near the base of the ravine. When Bernard reappeared right beneath the dog's vantage point, Sam lost interest in White's whereabouts, focusing on the culprit close at hand. Then, just as quickly, the second man disappeared among the trees too. Sam stood up and leaned far out over the edge of the precipice, but saw no sign of either gunman. Not knowing what else to do, he ran back to the blue sedan to warn his humans.

When Sam reached the car, Starsky's legs were still dangling out the door, as he lay on his back twisting the exposed wires together for the final stages of the hot-wire job. Seeing The Dark One occupied, and believing his mission was too urgent to wait, Sam opted for enlisting The Light's One's help. He trotted to the other side of the car and looked up beseechingly at Hutch, grabbing his attention with a soft, but anxious bark. “Bwoof.”

“Starsky.”

“Hmmm?...what?”

“I think Sam's trying to tell us something.”

Starsky's curly top popped out from beneath the dash again. "Oh yeah?" Immediately alert, he bailed out and started around the car to take a look, almost colliding with the anxious animal in the process. "Did you see 'em, Big Dog?" Sam whined, then trotted back toward the edge of the ravine. When Starsky didn't follow quickly enough to suit him, the dog came back and prodded him with a soft, but more impatient bark.

"I'm comin', just cool your jets, fella." Pulling the Magnum, Starsky checked the chamber then leaned down next to Hutch's window. "Stay here, keep your gun handy, and keep low. We'll be right back."

A worry line creased the blond's already tired features. "Starsk, be careful."

Starsky patted him on the forearm. "Always am, partner." Holding the gun up, ready for action, he followed the uneasy dog back to the ridge. Dropping onto his stomach, next to Sam, they both searched the area below for any signs of movement. The dissatisfied rottie inched forward on his belly.

"Watch it, boy. Not so close to the edge." Starsky reached out with his free arm and pushed the dog back an inch or two. "You're gonna fall if you aren't careful."

Still upset that he could no longer see the gunmen, the dog was not easily deterred. In his opinion, there was nothing to do but go down and roust them out. When Starsky noticed the dog creeping forward again, he grabbed the leather collar and pulled up sharply, bringing them nose to nose.

"No. I don't want ya goin' down there. I don't have time to chase after you. I've already had to run you down three times on this trip and my patience is wearing thin. Okay?" Starsky delivered the edict with his best 'and I mean business' look, before releasing the dog.

Sam cocked his head to one side, not understanding a single word Starsky had said, except "No". Sometimes, The Dark One seemed to forget they were from different species, talking to him in 'human', expecting him to know all those human words that sounded like a bunch of garble to him. Try as he might, Sam had only been able to master a few key words and phrases, like 'hungry', 'go out', and 'red ball'—the important stuff a dog needed to know.

Starsky made one more quick scan of the ground below, then started back to the car. "Stay here and watch for 'em till I call you, okay? And no runnin' off."

Sam saw he couldn't make The Dark One understand they were down there somewhere. When Starsky got back into the car, the big dog took one last look at the blue sedan before quietly beginning his descent down the steep hillside.

*End of Chapter 16*