

GUARDIAN III
“The Chase”
by TibbieB

Chapter 18

The gun still pointed at White, Starsky looked over his shoulder to see Hutch standing behind him, holding the confiscated pistol. At his feet, Al Bernard lay in a crumpled heap. As the implications of the scene hit full force, Starsky’s mouth dropped open.

“Hutch? How’d you—”

Hutch’s blue eyes, wide with shock, stared back at his partner’s. “I...I can see, Starsk.” As he drank in the amazement reflected in Starsky’s features, a smile slowly spread across his face.

Holding the gun with his left hand, stripping his leather belt off with the right, Starsky prodded White with his foot. “Roll over, turkey and put your hands behind your back.”

Hutch stooped down and checked Bernard’s body for a pulse, and confirmed the man was dead. Dropping the now empty pistol on the ground beside him, Hutch stepped over the body and joined Starsky. “Could you use an extra hand?”

“As a matter of fact, I could, partner. I got’a hand it to ya. One bullet in that gun, and you made it count.”

With a lopsided grin, Starsky passed Hutch the belt and waited for him to bind White’s hands securely. When Hutch finished, he looked up at Starsky, his eyes alert and happy. “I can see. You’re a little blurry, b...but I can see you, Starsk!”

Overcome with joy and relief, Starsky pulled Hutch into a bone-crushing bear hug, then just as quickly, released and held him at arm’s length, needing to see for himself if it was true. For the first time in nearly forty-eight hours, the eyes staring back at him were alive and filled with a mixture of excitement.

Starsky’s own sapphire blue eyes glistened with unshed tears. To keep from making a spectacle of himself, he resorted to a lame attempt at humor. “I told ya everything would be okay. Didn’t I? Huh? When’re you gonna wise up, Blondie, and admit I’m always right?”

Before Hutch could dispute that grandiose claim, a highway patrol cruiser, siren full blast, screeched to a halt behind the blue sedan. Hutch stepped back, arching one eyebrow. "Looks like the Cavalry finally arrived."

"Yeah. And as usual, a day late, and a dollar short."

Hutch clapped his partner on the shoulder, good-naturedly, and they walked back toward the highway. Standing beside the cruiser, microphone in hand, was a young patrolman reporting his coordinates to headquarters. Both detectives were surprised when Dobeys head popped up over the roof of the blue sedan. "Here they are!" he shouted to Combs. Caught off-guard for a second, Dobeys almost smiled before his stern, more familiar, 'all business' countenance fell back into place.

"Where have you two been?" he barked, hoping they hadn't noticed his moment of indiscretion.

Amused by Dobeys pathetic attempt to keep up his tough-guy act, Starsky shrugged casually. "We're just enjoyin' the great outdoors, Cap'n. How about you? What're you doin' here?"

A smile teased the corners of Hutch's mouth, waiting to see what excuse Dobeys gave for coming to rescue them.

"Can't I trust you two to stay out of trouble for even a day?" Dobeys blustered, his eyes drawn to the bloody bandanna tied around Hutch's head. Taking in their appearance for the first time, he noticed they were both filthy, especially Starsky. Leaves and other debris clung to his curly head, and smudges of what looked to be soot, covered the front of his shirt and jeans. His left eye was black and puffy. The right one was already beginning to swell shut, matching the purple bruises coloring his cheekbone. Hutch was missing at least two buttons from his shirt. Dried blood stained his face and neck, not to mention a dark bruise that ran from his temple down the side of his face. It was pretty apparent they'd been to hell and back. Knowing they'd expect no less, he criticized gruffly, "You look like a couple of refugees from a garbage dump."

"We decided to dress casual while on vacation," Hutch quipped.

"I don't need any of your smart aleck answers, Hutchinson!" Dobeys snapped.

"Got a prisoner over there, Cap'n. And a dead body." Starsky nodded toward White, lying trussed up a few yards away. "There were only two of 'em."

"Captain Dobeys," Combs called from the car. "Two units are on their way here. One can take the suspect into custody. Do we need an ambulance?"

Dobeys gave the two detectives the once over again. "Yeah...and a coroner's wagon too," Dobeys answered, giving them both an 'I dare you to argue with me' look.

“I know you seem to have everything under control here, but I want you both to get checked out by a doctor. I’ll take Sam in the cruiser with me.” Dobey looked around. “Where’s Sam?”

Starsky’s eyes flew wide open. “Sam!”

Hutch spun around and looked at him. “Sam? Starsky, where is he?”

Starsky swallowed, his Adam’s apple bobbing nervously. “That turkey said his partner musta killed him. In all the excitement, I guess I forgot...”

“Let’s not panic,” Hutch cautioned. “We’ll search the area; maybe he’s just wounded—we can get him to a vet.” The blond detective started toward the edge of the ravine.

“Wait, Hutch.” Starsky hurried after him. “You sure you can see well enough to climb down there?”

Dobey stood by, totally forgotten. None of this made sense to him, but obviously, the dog was missing. “What does he mean, ‘can you see well enough’, Hutchinson?”

“Oh, nothing, Cap’n. I was just blind yesterday,” Hutch answered distractedly.

Dobey’s eyes narrowed, even more confused than before. “Wait a minute! Does this have anything to do with that bandage around your head?”

“It’s a bullet wound, Cap’n,” Starsky interjected before turning back to Hutch again. “I’ll find him, Hutch. You better take it easy.”

“Things are just a little blurry. I can see well enough to search for Sam.”

The voice of logic and authority, Dobey stepped in front of Hutch. “If there’s something wrong with your vision, you’re staying here. And that’s an order.”

“But, Cap’n—”

“You and I’ll search the immediate area. Combs and Starsky can take the ravine.” He turned to Starsky. “Do you think he’s down there?”

“I don’t know, Cap’n. He could be anywhere. I guess we’ll start here and work our way to the bottom.”

“I’m coming with you,” Hutch argued one more time.

“I got’a agree with Dobey on this one. Don’t take any unnecessary chances. I’ll find him...I promise.”

“Yes, but—

“Come on, partner. Have I let you down yet? Hmmm? Stay up here with Cap’n Dobey, okay?”

Knowing he was outnumbered, Hutch reluctantly nodded. The longer he stood there arguing, the longer it would be before they found Sam. And if he was injured, time was their enemy.



Tired beyond words, Starsky pushed on, knowing he wouldn’t rest until he found the rottweiler. He also knew Sam well enough to believe the dog would’ve forfeited his life if he thought he was protecting one of his humans; and that’s what scared Starsky most.

He’d lost sight of Lt. Combs. They’d gone in opposite directions, had covered the hillside, and were approaching the bottom of the ravine. Both men called the dog’s name as they searched, but Sam didn’t respond.

Having finished searching his section, Starsky started back up the incline, discouraged, and clinging to the hope that Combs had had better luck. He hoisted himself up to a level patch of ground, then started for a small stand of trees up ahead. As he passed, Starsky thought he heard a sound. He stopped, straining to hear it again. Nothing. Only wishful thinking on his part, he figured, and continued back toward the road. But before he took more than a dozen steps, he heard the sound again. He was sure of it. A whimper. It sounded like a whimper.

“Sam? Sam, is that you, Big Dog?” Again he heard it, so soft it was barely audible. But this time, he pinpointed the source. Without a doubt, it was coming from a clump of bushes no more than twenty feet from where he was standing. “Bwoof,” came the faint reply.

“Sam!” Starsky stumbled over the rocky terrain, running toward the sound. Slipping, he fell on his backside, then scrambled to regain his footing. “Sam!”

Slowly, the massive rust and black head peeped around the bush at Starsky, making another pitiful whining sound. Head down, and tail tucked, the dog slunk from behind the bush, toward The Dark One. Relief flooded Starsky as he ran and met the dog, scooping him up into a jubilant hug.

“Sam! There you are! Man, I thought for sure we’d lost you. You okay?” All smiles, Starsky hugged the dog to him, before trying to check him for injuries. Overjoyed

to see The Dark One alive and well, Sam was a flurry of excited tail wagging and slobbery kissing. Starsky's examination turned up nothing more serious than an ugly knot the size of a small egg, which stood out in sharp relief on the top of Sam's noggin. Sam had already forgotten the bump on his head. Perhaps he was a little embarrassed. The human had distracted him with the gun long enough to whack head with a rock. His big tongue snaked out, slurping The Dark One's face in a gesture of affection.

"I knew you wouldn't go down without a fight." He scratched the dog's ears, and patted him on the back, grateful he was really okay. Hugging the dog close again, it occurred to Starsky how much he and Hutch had come to love this big, affectionate critter. "Come on, fella. Hutch is probably drivin' Dobey nuts by now. Let's get back, before they put out another APB on us."

Releasing his hold on Sam, Starsky stood up, and gave the dog one final scratch under the chin. "Heel, boy." As the two hurried back to where Hutch and Dobey were waiting, they spotted the Forestry helicopter hovering above what Starsky suspected was the wreckage of the Torino. It looked as if the Cavalry truly had arrived now.



When Starsky and the large dog came into view, Hutch's face lit up like a Christmas tree. Before he could utter a word, Sam broke pace next to Starsky and charged toward him. Like an arrow, the dog gracefully left the ground, and literally flew into Hutch's arms, knocking the man flat on his back. Starsky walked up beside Dobey, grinning broadly, and together they watched Hutch try to fend off the arsenal of slobbery dog kisses.

"I see you found him. Glad he's okay." Dobey smiled, and shook his head in disbelief of Hutch's tolerance.

"Yeah. Me too. The big galoot took quite a knock on the head. He did it again, Cap'n—he put his life on the line for us. He's really somethin'." Starsky's voice was filled with pride.

"He's smart, all right." Dobey agreed, then watched Starsky from the corner of his eye, as he added humorously, "I just can't figure out why he hangs around with you and Hutchinson."

"Thanks a bunch, Cap'n," Starsky answered drolly, letting Dobey enjoy his friendly jibe at their expense.

Dobey slapped him on the back and laughed, his belly jiggling. Turning toward the sound of the ambulance siren, the captain sobered. "Come on. Time for you both to get checked out by a doctor. When that's done, you'll want to clean up. God knows, you could use a clean change of clothes." The Captain wrinkled his nose at Starsky's grimy condition, drawing a look of reproach and indignation from the younger man.

“I beg your pardon, Cap’n. But I’d like to see how you’d look after two days in the wilds of Oregon, fightin’ off wild animals and crazed hit men—not to mention havin’ your car blown to smithereens and your partner go blind as a bat—and don’t forget that looney-toons dog tearin’ off through the woods every time my back was turned for a second...”

Hutch rolled his eyes heavenward as Starsky droned on. Dobby shook his head in resignation, knowing he wouldn’t hear the last of this story for a long time. Only Combs seemed interested in listening Starsky’s tale of woe.

“And then there was the giant tree—did I tell you about the tree yet, Cap’n....?”

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