

GUARDIAN III
“The Chase”
by TibbieB

Chapter 3

Starsky sped up the Torino and deftly merged back into the traffic on I-5. Beside him, Hutch was unwrapping the burgers and putting straws into the covered soft drink cups. “I still don’t see why we couldn’t just eat there,” he complained. Sam’s head appeared above his shoulder, the huge nose sniffing delightedly at the aroma of french fries and hamburgers.

“I told you, I wanna save time,” Starsky answered. “I’ve never been to Seattle, and I wanna take in the sights.”

“There’ll be plenty of time. I don’t see what’s the big hurry. I wanna stop tonight and get a room. Just take a leisurely trip and enjoy ourselves—make a real vacation of it,” Hutch expounded. “Besides, too many hours in this car, and my back will be killing me by the time we get there.”

“Awww, come on; quit your whinin’, will ya? I ain’t gonna pay for a motel room when we can drive straight through. I’m not made of money, ya know.”

“That’s a weak argument from a man who’s just agreed to pay \$150 for a door that doesn’t really need replacing.”

Starsky shot him a disparaging look.

From the back seat, Sam woofed, impatiently urging Hutch to get down to the business of unwrapping his burgers. Traveling with the big dog wasn’t a problem, but trying to feed him in a moving automobile was always a bit awkward. Hutch still thought Sam should be restricted to dog food, but the animal was as much of a junk food junkie as Starsky now. Living in the house with Starsky had definitely affected his eating habits. Hutch had all but given up on trying to influence the dog’s diet—or Starsky’s diet, for that matter.

“We’re stopping, Starsky. If you’re too cheap to get a room, you can stay in mine. We’ll just ask for one with two double beds.” Hutch turned around and placed the bowl of crumbled hamburgers on the back seat for Sam.

Starsky guided the car along the highway, whizzing in and out, changing lanes without the slightest hesitation. Hutch tried not to watch. You’d think I’d get used to his driving. Having offered to take a turn at the wheel, and been turned down, Hutch decided to eat his lunch and enjoy it. He unwrapped Starsky’s and handed it over to him first.

“Even if you don’t want to stop overnight, at least think about Sam.”

Starsky looked at him quizzically.

“He needs some exercise,” Hutch continued. “Just because you can ride twenty-two hours straight in a car, doesn’t mean he can.” He knew Starsky’s love for the dog could always be used to his advantage. “Don’t you think he needs a break?”

After a moment’s silence, Starsky nodded. “Okay, you win.” Taking a bite of his sandwich, he turned his attention back to the road. “We’ll stop—but not before dark. That way, we’ll have most of the trip behind us.”

Satisfied he’d won a small victory, Hutch sat back and enjoyed his burger and fries.

END ORR

The traffic had begun to thin out as they left the noise and confusion of the city behind. With the windows open, and a warm breeze wafting in, the ride was a pleasant one. Neither man felt the need for conversation, but was comfortable breaking the silence whenever some random thought crossed his mind. Despite Starsky’s lead foot on the gas pedal, Hutch was enjoying the trip. Still, the events of recent days in the courtroom encroached on his thoughts.

“Do you think Morrisetti’s going to try anything?” he asked Starsky.

“Like what?”

“Oh, I don’t know. You saw what he said as they were leading him from the courtroom.”

Starsky glanced over at his partner, tipping his head to one side, implying anything was possible. “I don’t plan to lose any sleep over it. You know every two-bit punk we’ve ever busted has threatened us. You think this one’s different?”

“I don’t know, Starsk. Morrisetti can hardly be tagged ‘a two-bit punk’. The man has connections, and the money to run his crime machine from prison. All I’m saying is, we’d better be alert. And I’m still not convinced he’ll never get out of prison. We both know that with the flaws in the criminal justice system, slime like Morrisetti usually finds a way to circumvent the law.”

Starsky considered Hutch’s words, knowing his partner had a penchant for looking beneath the surface of things and coming up with some very valid conclusions. “You got’a point. Trouble is, we can’t be watchin’ over our shoulders twenty-four hours a day. If we start that, we may as well go into another line of work.”

Hutch’s mind wandered back over times and events he’d rather left undisturbed; instances where his partner’s life had been at stake, threatened by some freak they’d

brought to justice. Gunther, Prudolm, Marcos, Jennings, just to name a few. They'd almost taken Starsky from him, and in the process, taught Hutch a valuable lesson—never underestimate the enemy. He didn't think he could endure going through another close call like those. Maybe it was time to change professions. The thought had definitely crossed his mind more frequently over the past year. Without being obvious, he stole a glance at Starsky, who also appeared distracted by his own thoughts. Jobs could be replaced. Friends couldn't.

Sam lay on the back seat, his head buried in the green and white bag of treasures that Hutch had left open last time he gave the dog a bowl of water. The rottie rooted and snorted his way through the contents, creating an unwarranted amount of noise.

“What's he doing back there?” Starsky stretched his neck, checking the rear view mirror, but couldn't see the dog from that angle. Hutch leaned over the back seat and spied Sam searching through the bag for some elusive item, most likely in one of the five major food groups of “Meats”, “Biscuits”, “Rawhides”, “Liver Bits”, or “Beef Jerky”.

“Sam...Sam...”

Ignoring Hutch entirely, the canine continued his desperate quest to locate some missing, precious commodity. “Sam, knock it off, will you? What're you looking for, anyway?”

The big dog looked up, his teeth clutching the shiny red ball he'd discretely dropped into the bag, when Starsky wasn't looking. Proud of his success, he promptly reared up on the back of Hutch's seat and dropped the ball into The Light One's lap. Hutch smiled and whispered, “Starsk...look. Here's what all the ruckus was about.”

Starsky looked over and saw the red ball lying in Hutch's lap, and the huge black and rust colored head resting on Hutch's shoulder, waiting for him to pick up the ball and throw it. “I don't think there's much chance of a game of catch in here, Big Dog.”

Sam glanced over at Starsky, not understanding a word of what he'd just said, except The Dark One's nickname for him. He impatiently turned his attention back on Hutch, who picked up the ball and handed it back to the dog. “He's right, fella. There'll be time, and room to play catch at the motel tonight. I'm sure they have a field or someplace behind the building where we can play.

Sam held the ball in his mouth, disappointed that Hutch wasn't interested in playing. Using his big paws, he sidled across the back of the seat to Starsky's side of the car. Laying his head on his other human's shoulder, Sam dropped the ball into The Dark One's lap, hoping for more success. Starsky chuckled, impressed by the dog's persistence. “Uh, uh. No room in here.” He picked up the ball with his free hand, and dropped it on the front seat between Hutch and himself.

Disappointed, Sam hung his head over the seat, peering down at the ball, his hopes of a romp dashed. He loved riding in the car, but a dog could only watch so many trees speed by without wanting to use one of them! With a heavy sigh, he sat back on the seat and tried to look pitiful. Perhaps if he looked really pitiful, they'd change their minds.

“Hey, I forgot.” Hutch reached into the pocket of his baseball jacket and pulled out a shrink-wrapped bag containing a large, imitation bone. “I picked this up at the health food store last night.”

Starsky shot him a look of disbelief. “What? Don't tell me you found dog treats at the 'health food store.'”

Sam slid his noggin back over the seat and rested his chin on Hutch's shoulder as he watched him unwrap the treat. “Carrot bone. Made up of compressed carrots, barley, wheat germ, and other healthy stuff. One hundred percent natural ingredients. If he's going to eat snacks between meals, they should at least be something healthy.”

Starsky let out a long suffering sigh and shook his head in amazement. “I guess next you're gonna tell me that he's actually gonna like—”

In mid-sentence, Sam's head darted forward, snatching the carrot bone from Hutch's hand. Without bothering to sit down, the big dog chomped and crunched noisily on the bone-shaped, compressed vegetables, smacking his lips and slobbering over the back of the seat onto The Light One's shoulder.

Hutch smiled smugly, and gave Starsky an 'I told you so' look. “You were saying?”



Benny White and Al Bernard weren't the best two hit men on the West Coast, but Pinson had discovered it wasn't easy find someone crazy enough to murder two high profile cops like Starsky and Hutchinson—not even for the enormous fee he was offering.

White and Bernard were as different as day and night, forging an unlikely, but effective partnership. The most obvious difference was in their physical appearances. Where Benny White was a tall, skinny, forty-something man, who wore his frizzy brown hair pulled back in an outdated ponytail, Bernard, only a couple of years younger, was a big-boned, slightly overweight fellow who hadn't had a strand of hair on his head since 1968.

Their clothes and choices in cuisine were as diametrically different as their outside interests. Al Bernard enjoyed spicy pizza and a cold Schlitz, while watching a good, sweaty, wrestling match on the tube. And no one, or no thing would ever convince him what he saw in the ring was anything but the 'gospel truth'. Benny, on the other hand, fancied himself an intellectual, when in reality, he had a tenth grade education.

Unlike his odd friend, he preferred fancy foods, the names of which he had trouble pronouncing. He sought his extracurricular activities in more cultural pursuits, such as being a third-rate chess player. He touted this inferior accomplishment as proof of his superior intellect. It was pretty safe to say the only things they DID have in common were their greed, and a total lack of morality.

The red and white Torino was an easy target, even on the busy California expressway. As they crossed over into the less populated state of Oregon, the car could be tracked a full mile down the road.

“Keep a little distance, will you?” White snapped at his partner. “The traffic’s thinned out enough now that they might notice a tail.”

Al Bernard shot back an annoyed look. “Don’t tell me how to do my job! How many times have we been spotted when I was driving, huh? Besides, these guys may be cops, but they’re cops on vacation. They ain’t looking for no tail.”

“Hang back a little, just the same.” White always had to have the last word. It was one of his more irritating personality traits. Benny White knew he was smarter than his cohort, but he had to admit, occasionally Bernard proved himself to be useful. Their three year association had been quite lucrative. But pulling off this job would put them in another league. No more two-bit hits for them. Once word got out they’d done a couple of cops for Mr. Lou Morrisetti, they’d be able to name their price.

“How’d you find out about the vacation anyway?” he asked, as an afterthought.

“Details, Benny, details. Ain’t you always saying that’s what separates us from the amateurs? I know a guy who works as a janitor at the police station. I gave him a couple of bucks to check the duty roster they post in the ready room every week. These two jokers are taking a whole week off and driving to Seattle. There’s plenty of desolate road on this route, so we’ll just bide our time until there ain’t no witnesses.” An ugly smile twisted Bernard’s lips. “I think our two detectives are about to have a very, very bad accident.”

White laughed sadistically, as he imagined how much he’d enjoy watching two ‘pigs’ rolling down some steep embankment, their car exploding in a ball of fire, as the gas tank ignited. It was a very pleasing image, indeed. They’d used this ploy before, and it always worked great. The bodies would burn beyond recognition, right along with the evidence.

“Yeah...a very bad accident,” he agreed. For once, it looked like his partner had done something right.



“Better pull over here, Starsk. Sam’s getting pretty restless.”

Starsky glanced at the rear view mirror and saw Sam pacing from side to side, poking his head out first the left back window, then the right. It had been a couple of hours since they'd eaten their lunch on the run, so it stood to reason the dog needed to make a pit stop. Starsky began looking for a sturdy patch of shoulder to pull over on.

Once they'd rolled to a stop, the dog began barking and bouncing up and down, causing the car to rock from side to side. Hutch opened his door and Sam flew over the back seat, using the blond's lap as a springboard to the out-of-doors. Before either man realized what was happening, he headed into the woods.

"Sam! Wait up!" Hutch scrambled out of the car and chased after the rottweiler, concerned he'd lose his way in the unfamiliar woods. Starsky was right on his heels. Hutch came to an abrupt stop when he caught sight of Sam, frozen, hackles raised. A low guttural sound rumbled from deep within his throat. Not more than fifteen feet from the rottweiler stood a skunk, tail raised, and poised for battle.

Hutch lifted a warning hand as Starsky bounded up behind him.

"What the—?"

"Shhhh..." Hutch whispered. "Just back away slowly. We still might get out of this without getting sprayed."

"What about Sam?" Starsky whispered back.

"Call him, but don't yell. Make too much noise, and you'll spook the skunk. What's that command you give him sometimes to bring him back very quietly? Use that."

"Okay." Starsky slowly lowered his body to a squatting position. "Sam, ease back..." he whispered. "Ease back, boy."

At first the rottweiler paid no attention, being far too interested in this unusual looking animal with the defiant, black, beady eyes. After pretending he didn't hear Starsky for as long as he dared, Sam reluctantly stole a glance back at the two men. He knew his humans expected him to obey when they gave him a direct command, but he suspected this new and exotic creature could be lots of fun, maybe even offer a few surprises. Surely they'd understand how a guy would want to explore the possibilities!

"Ease back, Sam!" Starsky whispered a little more forcefully. Sam knew he'd pushed his luck as far as he dared, and had better shape up and do what was expected. Not wanting the strange animal to have the final word, the dog growled one more time-- just for good measure. The black and white critter before him raised its tail a centimeter higher, twitching it back and forth like a warning flag.

“Oh, no...oh no...Starsk. We better back out of here, nice and easy, and let Sam fend for himself.” Hutch slowly stepped back another three paces, snagging Starsky by the elbow and pulling him along with him.

“Wait a minute, will ya? How’re we gonna ride in the car with Sam if he gets sprayed?”

“I don’t know, but I sure as hell don’t intend to get sprayed right along with him,” Hutch whispered back.

“Sam! For the last time, boy, EASE BACK!”

Tucking his tail, the big dog began slowly backing toward his humans, reluctantly giving over to the urgent tone in Starsky’s voice. The skunk eyed the unfamiliar foe warily. Finally deciding retreat was his best course of action, he scurried back into the safety of the dense woods.

Both men sighed with relief, and sagged to the ground as Sam turned and trotted back to them, obviously pleased with himself for having shown the skunk who was boss. Hutch reached down and patted the obedient dog. “Good boy, Sam. You had me worried for a minute there.” Sam looked up at The Light One, relieved that his friend seemed to have forgiven his momentary lapse in obedience.

“I knew he’d come,” Starsky bragged. “Question was, would it be before or AFTER he got sprayed?”

“Let’s get back on the road,” Hutch suggested tiredly. “I think you’ve had enough exercise for now, Big Dog.” Sam jogged between the two men, pacing his speed to theirs.

As the three returned to the Torino, none of them noticed the light blue sedan sitting in the emergency lane, less than a mile from where they were parked.

“Pass me a Milky Way.” Starsky started the car and pulled back onto the highway. “They’re in the glove compartment.” Hutch opened the glove box and was met by an avalanche of candy bars and snack cakes.

“One of these days you’re gonna OD on junk food,” Hutch complained irritably, as he cleared the floorboard of runaway candy. “And don’t expect me to be there to pick up the pieces. I’ll be a robust old man, jogging in the park with beautiful women on either side of me, while you’re wasting away in some nursing home, teeth rotted out from too much sugar, your muscles turned to flab by food preservatives, and not a single curly hair left on that hard head of yours.” Hutch didn’t crack a smile as he painted the grim futuristic picture. He glanced over at Starsky in time to see his partner’s Adam’s apple bob up and down as he swallowed hard. It took a concentrated effort, on Hutch’s part, not to burst out laughing at the pained expression on Starsky’s face.

“That ain’t funny, Hutch. You’ll stop at nothin’ to spoil my enjoyment of a good candy bar, will ya?” Starsky's voice dripped with sarcasm. Hutch could almost see the wheels turning in his friend’s head as he envisioned the two of them in the distant future. Slowly, a smile returned to Starsky’s face.

“You know I’m gonna be a better lookin’ old man than you are. Why should ‘then’ be any different than now?” Starsky shot him one of his best Starsky grins, and snatched the Milky Way out of Hutch’s hand. “So it ain’t gonna work, partner. Shut up and have a candy bar.”