

GUARDIAN

Faithful till the End

By TibbieB

Chapter Ten

“So, what do you think?” Hutch asked as they were walking back to the car.

“I believe him. Don’t you?”

“Yes. Did you hear the emotion in his voice when he was talking about having a kid? If Carol was murdered, Starsk, it wasn’t by Frank Bradley.”

In the front seat of the Torino, Sam planted his front paws on the dashboard and watched his humans approaching. His tail began its customary frenzied wag, anticipating their arrival. Starsky looked up and saw the dog’s face looming above the steering wheel. “Hutch, do you think Sam’s okay in the car? I mean, I read somewhere about dogs having heat strokes.”

Hutch smiled to himself. *This is the guy who doesn’t like dogs*, he thought. “It’s probably not the best situation,” he admitted, “but if we’re careful to park in a cool place, this time of the year he should be okay.”

Starsky unlocked the car and they both got in. As usual, Sam was all over them, licking their faces and walking on them with his over-sized paws. It didn’t matter if they were gone ten minutes or two hours, he was just as glad to see them. “Knock it off, Sam!” Starsky struggled to get the excited dog off him. When he finally succeeded, Sam moved on to give Hutch the same treatment.

“So, where do we go from here?” Hutch asked, stretching to look around the rottweiler at Starsky.

“I don’t know,” Starsky answered, as he cranked up the engine, “but I think we’re onto somethin’ here.”

Hutch ordered Sam into the back seat, and was dumbstruck when he obeyed. “I believe we’re going to have to install a seatbelt in the back seat to keep him out of your hair while you’re driving,” Hutch said with a deadpan expression. As though he understood what Hutch was saying, Sam flopped his front paws over the seat and rested his head on Starsky’s shoulder.

Starsky looked down at the dog’s face, then over at Hutch. “Are you kiddin’? Half the time you don’t even buckle your own. How’re you gonna make him wear one?” Starsky gave him a lopsided grin before pulling out of the parking lot. “We haven’t checked out Carol’s apartment,” he said, changing the subject. “Maybe we’d find somethin’ there to tell us whether or not she had help jumpin’ out of that window.”

“I’m afraid it’s too late for that,” Hutch replied. “Any clues left behind have probably been wiped out by the cleaning crew.”

“Good point. But I guess it wouldn’t hurt to ask. I got the address from Fran the other night.” Since Hutch didn’t object, Starsky took that as agreement and headed in the direction of Carol Parker’s last residence. They went directly to the manager’s office and presented their IDs, asking for permission to search the apartment.

“Oh, I’m sorry, Detective Starsky. That apartment was rented last week. I’d have to get permission from the current resident before letting you go in. I mean, no one told me it wasn’t okay to rent it,” the nervous manager explained. “Did I do something wrong by doing so?”

“No, not at all,” Hutch reassured her. “Ms. Parker’s death was officially classified as suicide. We just wanted to double check and make certain nothing was overlooked.”

“Well, I had our regular cleaning service come in after Ms. Parker’s family removed her belongings. The housekeeper did find a few small items that were left behind. I’ve been meaning to call Mrs. Parker to pick them up, but quite frankly, it slipped my mind. I doubt she’d mind if you looked through them.”

“That would be terrific,” Starsky told her. “And when we’re done, if you want, we can take ‘em over to Mrs. Parker for you.”

“Oh, would you? That would be nice. I’ll get them right now.” The woman went to the adjoining room and returned shortly with a small pasteboard box containing various items. “You can use that desk in the corner, if you’d like to take them out and look at them,” she said, handing the box to Starsky.

Hutch followed him to the desk and watched as Starsky began pulling the items out one by one. They found a bud vase with the initials “CP” etched into the glass, one taupe-colored Isotoner glove, a tiny porcelain unicorn statue, one rhinestone earring, and a casual snapshot of Carol Parker standing on a boat dock with Frank Bradley. Nothing unusual. They exchanged disappointed looks.

“None of this is gonna help us,” Starsky said, placing the items back into the box.

“We can take this stuff over to Mrs. Parker and see if she can identify it.”

“Even if she can’t, it won’t mean anything. Carol was living by herself for quite a while. Her mother might not recognize things she bought after leaving home.”

Hutch looked down, studying the items in the box, when suddenly his eyes went wide. “Unless...” He reached in and picked up the rhinestone earring. “...this is the real thing. If this is a diamond, it could be worth a mint. And either it’s a gift from Bradley, or it belongs to someone else. Either way, if we can locate the mate to it, we might know who killed Carol.”

Starsky clearly followed Hutch’s train of thought. “You mean, if it’s hers, maybe someone stole them, but dropped this one when they killed her. If not, then it belonged to the murderer.”

“Right,” Hutch said, smiling. “Of course, I know it’s a stretch, but we don’t have anything better. And I’m still not sure how all this is connected to the fires.”

“I believe they *are* connected, though,” Starsky said. “Let’s take this earring to a jeweler and find out if it the real McCoy.”

“Good idea. We’d better drop Sam off at Huggy’s since this could take awhile.”



Mrs. Parker opened the door wearing an apron, having just finished placing a roast in the oven. “Now what?” she asked, her voice tinged with irritation.

“Hello, Ms. Parker,” Starsky said. “This is my partner, Detective Hutchinson. May we come in and talk to you for a moment?”

“We’re sorry to bother you again Mrs. Parker,” Hutch apologized, “but we have a few of your daughter’s belongings that were left behind in her apartment.”

“Well, come on in,” she said, stepping aside so they could enter. As they followed her into the living room, Mrs. Parker bent over and picked up a model car that was lying on the floor, then placed it on the coffee table. “Watch your step. Timmy’s been playing around with those cars of his again.”

Starsky squatted down and took a closer look at the radio-control car. “This is pretty neat. A 1965 Mustang, Hutch. Take a look.”

Hutch picked up the car, something tugging at his memory. But he couldn’t quite lay his finger on it. He set the miniature car back on the table. The woman sat down in a chair across from the sofa where the two detectives sat. “Mrs. Parker, would you mind identifying these items and telling us if you know whether or not they were Carol’s?”

Mrs. Parker sifted through the box, picking up each item. “Don’t recognize anything except the unicorn. Carol used to collect them; this was her favorite. I didn’t see it that day I cleaned out the apartment, so I assumed it had been broken years ago.”

For the first time since meeting her, Starsky noticed a hint of sadness in the woman’s voice. “What about the earring?” he asked. “Do you remember seeing your daughter wear a pair like this? Are they a family heirloom you gave her?”

“No, never seen it before. Probably just a cheap imitation, though. Carol never made enough money to afford diamonds.”

“No, it’s real all right. We just came from a jeweler who said it’s a half-carat diamond. He also said it’s a very old piece. That’s why we thought it might’ve been in your family for a long time.”

“Heavens no. Never owned a piece of real jewelry in my life except my wedding band.”

“Do you mind if we keep this for now, then?”

“I guess it’s okay—although I don’t know what good one earring’s gonna do anybody.”

All three turned and looked as Timothy Parker walked into the living room and looked around nervously. “What’s going on here? Why are you cops back? Has something happened?”

“We just brought some of your sister’s things that were left at her apartment,” Hutch answered. “But if you have a moment, we’d like to talk with you.”

“I, uh, I’m kind of...busy at the moment.”

“This is my partner, Detective Hutchinson, Mr. Parker,” Starsky added. “This won’t take five minutes,”

“Well, okay. What do you want to know?”

Hutch started first. “Tim, do you know if your sister was involved with a man at the time of her death?”

“I wouldn’t have any way of knowing a thing like that. My sister and I weren’t very close.”

“Well, if she’d been in some sort of trouble, would she have come to you for help?”

“What kind of trouble?” Mrs. Parker interrupted. “Carol was a good girl.”

“Tim?” Hutch prompted.

“No. No...I don’t know what you’re talking about. You’ll have to excuse me now. I have a migraine. I have to go lie down.” He quickly went to his room and closed the door. Starsky and Hutch exchanged glances, then stood up to leave.

“Thank you for your time, Mrs. Parker, and for letting us keep this earring. Once we’ve completed our investigation, we’ll return it to you.” Hutch dropped the earring into his pocket as they left.

“Timmy boy’s lyin’ through his teeth,” Starsky said, as they pulled away from the Parker residence.

“Zebra Three, Zebra Three. Do you copy?”

“Control, this is Zebra Three. Go ahead,” Hutch spoke into the mic.

“Zebra Three, there’s a woman calling with information regarding your case. Do you copy?”

“Control, this is Detective Hutchinson. Go ahead and patch her through, please.”

“Hutch? Is that you? This is Fran.”

“Hi, Fran. Yeah, this is Hutch. You have something for us, Fran?”

“I don’t know how helpful it is, but I went through Carol’s desk and found an appointment card for an OB/GYN doctor. The date would be about right to coincide with when she told me she was pregnant. Maybe you can get some information from them.”

“Good work, Fran,” Hutch replied. “Go ahead and give me the name and address and we’ll stop by there.”

“Doctor Phillip Colby, 8840 Dunfries Street. Hope that helps.”

“We really appreciate this,” Hutch said sincerely. “And, Fran...uh, I’ll call you later, okay?”

“Oh, sure...that would be nice. Bye, Hutch. Oh, tell Dave I said hello, okay?”

“Come on, Romeo,” Starsky teased. “You’re on company time.”

“Okay, I’ll tell him,” Hutch said. “Bye.”

Hutch placed the mic back on the console. “Maybe we’re finally going to get somewhere with this case.”

“Yeah, could be. I wanna go see Bradley to find out if he can identify the earring. If he doesn’t know anything about it, then it’s a pretty safe guess that it belonged to the murderer.”

“Maybe between Bradley and Dr. Colby, we’ll turn over a few stones and find some answers,” Hutch agreed.

The doctor’s office was on the way to Bradley Enterprises, so the two detectives decided to stop there first, hoping someone would be available who could answer their questions. The waiting room was crowded with women, most of whom were in various stages of pregnancy, some looking like they would deliver within the next ten minutes, others barely showing at all.

The doctor wasn’t available to see them right away, but sent word out with the nurse that he’d be happy to work them in if they could wait another fifteen minutes. In the meantime, Starsky struck up a conversation with the receptionist, a nice lady in her mid-forties who expressed genuine remorse when he told her that Carol Parker was dead.

“Such a lovely girl,” she said shaking her head sadly. “Beautiful red hair, and what you’d call a ‘peaches and cream’ complexion—nothing like that fellow with her. I swear, he was covered with so many freckles, you couldn’t have stuck him with a pin without popping one.” *The lady has a colorful*

way with words, Starsky thought with amusement. Then the significance of what she had just said dawned on him.

“Say that again? There was a guy with her when she came in?”

“That’s right. Last time I saw Ms. Parker, he brought her here. They had a terrible argument right here in the waiting room. They kept their voices down, so I couldn’t hear what it was about, but there was no doubt they were fighting. I still don’t know who he was, or why he came with her that day. There was something about him that made me think they were related, but they didn’t really look alike.” Two lines on the phone began ringing at the same time and she reached for the receiver. “Please excuse me, Detective. I really must answer these phones.”

Starsky walked back to where Hutch sat flipping through a copy of “Working Mother” magazine. It took a monumental amount of willpower on Starsky’s part not to make a wisecrack about his partner’s choice of reading material. Before he could tell Hutch what the receptionist had said, the nurse opened the door and motioned them back. Dr. Colby sat at his desk, dictating notes about his last patient into a small recorder. He clicked it off and stood up to greet them as they entered.

“Come in and have a seat. I’m Dr. Colby. How can I help you?”

Hutch introduced them both and proceeded to tell the doctor about Carol’s death. He told them he hadn’t heard nor seen it in the newspaper, and he seemed quite upset. “This is a tragedy,” he commented. “A very nice young woman, and she was extremely excited about her pregnancy.” Although they hadn’t told the doctor they suspected Carol Parker was pregnant, he seemed to assume they knew, and neither one of them let on that there’d been no autopsy.

“Doctor, do you know who the man was that brought Ms. Parker here last time?” Starsky asked. Hutch was surprised by the question, since he didn’t know yet about Starsky’s conversation with the receptionist.

“No. I didn’t ask. I knew Carol wasn’t married, so I assumed he may be the baby’s father. But I don’t ask questions that aren’t pertinent to my patient’s health. You know, it’s hard to believe Carol would commit suicide when only days earlier she was ecstatic at the prospect of motherhood. I guess we never know what goes on inside someone else’s mind.” There was a short silence while they were all digested that philosophical thought.

“Well, thanks, Doc,” Starsky said. “We appreciate you takin’ time out of your busy schedule to see us.”

“Is that all? I don’t feel I’ve been of help.”

“You have been,,” Hutch assured him. “You told us about Ms. Parker’s state of mind concerning the pregnancy. We needed to know if an unwanted pregnancy could have prompted her to take her own life.”

“In my personal opinion, the answer is no. But then, I’m not a psychiatrist. All I can tell you is, she was one happy young lady when she left here that day.”



As they headed toward Bradley Enterprises, Starsky filled his partner in on his conversation with the receptionist in Dr. Colby’s office. “So it sounds like Timmy brought his sister to the doctor, even though he told us he didn’t know anything about her personal life. I *knew* that turkey was lyin’ to us.”

“So they argued? Do you think he wanted her to get an abortion?” Hutch began theorizing. “Or maybe *he* pushed her out of the window? But why? Jealousy? Maybe he’s a sicko who had a thing for his own sister. Maybe he killed her, and now wants to kill Bradley to keep him quiet. I’ll tell you what, Starsk, this whole thing just keeps getting more and more weird.” Hutch winced slightly and shifted to take the pressure off his shoulder. Although the change in expression was subtle, Starsky could tell he was in pain.

“Hey, you all right? You hurtin’ again?”

“Nah, I’m fine,” Hutch answered lightly.

“How long since you had a pain pill?” He could always tell how Hutch felt by looking at his eyes. It was something Starsky had learned to do long ago, and he was seldom wrong. “Why don’t you let me take you home to lie down for a while. Huh?”

“I’m fine. I wish you’d stop treating me like an invalid, Starsky,” Hutch snapped, a little harsher than he’d intended. Immediately sorry, he added, “We’re on a roll here, partner; I don’t want to miss anything. I promise I’ll take a pill when I get home and can go to bed. The damn things make me feel like I’m sleep walking.”

Starsky decided to drop it, knowing arguing was futile. “Let’s see Bradley, then pick up Sam, and I’ll take you guys home. He’s had enough time to eat Huggy right into bankruptcy. Don’t want him to wear out his welcome or nothin’.” Hutch chuckled at the image Starsky had brought to mind.

End of Chapter Ten