

GUARDIAN

Faithful till the End

By TibbieB

Chapter Fifteen

Starsky sat up in the hospital bed, fidgeting with the TV controller. Feeling much better after undergoing several breathing treatments, he was restless and ready to escape the confines of the hospital walls. He'd expected Hutch to be back by now, or at the very least, a phone call from him. What the hell was going on? Not a word about Bradley, nor about Parker. And no word from Dobey about Sam. Much more of this and he'd go bananas!

Hutch poked his head around the door, checking to see if Starsky was asleep.

"It's about time! Where the hell've you been?" Starsky snapped, his bad humor more obvious than he'd intended.

"Glad to see you're back to your old, grumpy, loud self, partner," Hutch answered, smiling, and happy to see Starsky's voice was back. He entered the room, closing the door firmly behind him, then produced a bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken he'd been hiding behind his back.

"Now, don't you think you could be a little nicer to the guy who risked life and limb to sneak this past Broom Hilda and her troops for you?" he teased.

"Oh, man, Hutch." Starsky scrambled to the side of his bed, forgetting to bother with the back of the ill-fitting hospital gown he'd wrestled to keep closed all afternoon. "This is terrific! They've been feedin' me nothin' but oatmeal and Jello all day. How'd ya know?"

"Well, let's just say I know you're one man who doesn't 'live by bread alone'."

Hutch rolled the tray-table over and positioned it so Starsky could sit on the side of the bed and enjoy the contraband chicken.

"Biscuits! You got biscuits—and grape jelly! Hutch, you're the best." Starsky looked up at Hutch, his face wreathed in smiles. "I'm feelin' better already."

Ashamed of his earlier outburst, Starsky paused long enough to apologize. "Look, partner, I'm sorry I jumped down your throat. It's just, I've been cooped up in here, nobody tellin' me nothin'. I was startin' worry somethin' may have gone wrong."

Without further preamble, he lit into the meal like he'd been starved for days on end. Hutch enjoyed watching Starsky eat with utter abandon, while he briefed him on what had happened with Bradley. Between bites, Starsky asked questions and offered his own opinions. "I don't guess there's any reason to postpone picking up Parker now," Hutch told him.

Starsky looked up from his meal “I wanna be there, Hutch. I wanna look that sucker in the eyes and show him that in spite of him, I’m alive.”

Hutch’s eyes met his. “I know, buddy. But I just spoke with the doctor, and he said you’ve got to stay at least one more day. They’re still concerned about pneumonia. I don’t think Dobey’s going to let us put it off that long.”

Starsky knew Hutch was right, but he didn’t want to see him go after Parker alone. They’d underestimated the man once. Hutch needed him there to cover his back. Starsky dismissed the fact that Mills would be there as back-up and was about to say as much, when the door opened and Captain Dobey and Huggy came in, laden with gifts.

“Hey, what’s cooking, brother?” Huggy said, taking in the picnic spread on the bedside tray. “No pun intended.” He chuckled lightly at his own joke, then proceeded to tie a large, brightly colored balloon bouquet to the bottom rail of the bed. “You’re looking much better than these turkeys told me, Starsky.” He nodded, indicating both Dobey and Hutch.

“Good to see you up, Starsky,” Dobey said, setting a large basket of fruit on a table near the door, then helping himself to an apple.

“Thanks, Cap’n. Good to be up,” Starsky said between bites.

Captain Dobey turned his attention to Hutch. “Mrs. Bradley just posted bail. Their high-priced attorney practically beat them to the station. Time to move on Parker. I tried to convince them she was better off in our custody until he’s apprehended, but they wouldn’t listen.”

“Cap’n, I wanna be in on the bust. This is our case,” Starsky said.

“You’re in no condition to be on the streets, Starsky. And don’t even think about arguing with me! Hutch, I want you to take Mills and the two officers waiting outside in the lobby over to Parker’s place and make the arrest now.” Dobey paused and reached inside his coat pocket.

“Here’s the warrant. Everything’s in order. We’ll need more to make the charges stick, but I want that bastard off the streets now. We’ve got enough to hold him for the time being.”

“Right, Cap’n.” Hutch took the document from Dobey, then turned to Starsky. “Sorry, partner. But you know he’s right. Parker could go after the Bradleys.” Starsky was disappointed, but nodded he understood.

“Oh, one more thing before you go,” Dobey said. “There’s something outside here I want you both to see.” Dobey signaled Huggy to raise the blind at the window behind him.

Standing in the bushes just outside the window, were the two paramedics from the night before, Fireman Allen Sewell, and Sam. The dog’s ears pricked up instantly when he spotted his two humans.

“Sam! It’s Sam, Hutch!” Starsky clamored out of bed and rushed to the window. By the time he and Hutch got there, Huggy had the window open so they could reach through and pet the excited, wiggling, seventy -pound dog.

Sewell struggled to keep Sam from scrambling through the window into Starsky’s arms. Sam was so happy to see Starsky and Hutch, he forced his head through the small opening and took turns licking their faces. In spite of his ordeal the night before, the dog seemed no worse for the wear. Gage and DeSoto watched in amusement. To them, it seemed to be a draw as to which of the two detectives was happiest to see the dog.

“He’s a real trooper,” Roy told Hutch. “This is Allen Sewell, the firefighter who brought him out and administered CPR after you left. We’ve been on duty, or I’d have tried to get in touch with you sooner.”

“We can’t thank you enough.” Starsky’s voice was filled with emotion, as he reached through the window to shake Allen’s hand. “We thought he was a goner.” Allen smiled, glad that he’d found the courage to go back for the dog. Sam jerked free and plunged his head between them, demanding Starsky’s attention.

“Your captain tracked us down,” Gage added. “We tried calling your homes; of course, no one was there. We were just getting ready to call the hospital to see if you guys had been admitted, when Captain Dobey contacted our chief and asked him to locate us.”

“We appreciate your taking care of him,” Hutch said sincerely. Sam was still trying to wriggle his way through the window, barely avoiding knocking Gage on his butt in the process.

“I, uh, well, I hate to ask this, but can you hang on to him a little while longer until I make this arrest?” Hutch asked hesitantly. “Starsky won’t be released from here until tomorrow, and I don’t know how long this is going to take.”

Before the firefighters could answer, Huggy piped up from the corner. “It’s cool, Hutch. These guys probably need a break from Big Dog by now. He can go home with me. Huggy Bear and the little dude will get along just fine.”

“Ah, thanks, Hug,” Starsky said, clutching both sides of Sam’s comical face to avoid another wash-down from the giant tongue. “I’ll be outta here tomorrow and I’ll come straight over and pick him up.” Starsky gave Huggy a big grin, then turned back to Gage, DeSoto, and Sewell. “And then I wanna buy you guys drinks at The Pits, and maybe shoot a few rounds of pool.”

“Sounds good,” DeSoto answered, instantly liking this friendly, warmhearted man. He was truly glad that Sewell had gone back for the dog. He obviously meant a great deal to both men. Like firemen, cops laid their lives on the line every single day. If they could do anything to help one another and make life a little easier, then he welcomed that opportunity.



The two black-and-white police cruisers pulled up in front of the Parker home without flashing lights or sirens. No need to tip Timothy Parker off to their arrival. Hutch sat in the front seat of one with Mills, spearheading the arrest. *Starsky should be here*, he thought.

“Okay, let’s make this as quiet and uneventful as possible,” Hutch said, checking to make sure his Magnum was loaded. He placed the gun back into the holster and stepped out of the car, signaling the others to follow.

“Clark, go around back, in case he decides to take off. Johnson, his room is on the south side of the house. Cover that area, in case there’s a window he could use. Mills, you and I will take the front.” Hutch paused and looked around at the group.

“This guy may, or may not be armed. My guess is—not. His weapons of choice are explosives and arson. Just the same, don’t take any chances. I think we have the element of surprise on our side, since he thinks he’s killed the only two people who were getting close to catching him. He nearly killed my partner, and has already murdered one retired police officer trying to make an extra buck as a night watchman. So be careful.” Everyone nodded their understanding then moved into position.

Hutch and Mills gave them a couple of minutes to get situated, then knocked on the front door. Mrs. Parker opened it. “Yes? What do you want now?” she asked when she recognized Hutch.

“Mrs. Parker, is your son home?”

“Just a minute,” she said shortly. “Wait here.” Chloris Parker tried to close the door in their faces, but Hutch used his foot to prevent her from doing so.

“Mrs. Parker, we have a warrant for you son’s arrest. Now I suggest you cooperate, or we’ll have to charge you with obstruction of justice. So please step aside.” Though polite, Hutch’s voice brooked no argument. The startled woman opened her mouth to protest, then thought better of it and moved away from the door, allowing Mills and Hutch to enter.

The distraught woman broke into tears and buried her face in her hands, when she saw her son emerge from the hallway into the living room. “Mother—” Timothy Parker’s voice died in his throat as his eyes came to rest on Hutch and Mills.

“No...it can’t be...you’re dead!” He began backing into the hall. “I killed you...you can’t be here!”

This brought a fresh onslaught of tears from his mother. “Oh, no, Timmy. No! Don’t say anything else.” She ran to her son and threw her arms around him. “It’s a mistake...he didn’t mean it!”

Timothy wrapped his arms around his mother, comforting her. “It’s okay, Mother. I did it for Carol. Bradley murdered her—he had to pay. He got her pregnant, then murdered her.”

“Frank Bradley didn’t murder Carol. Margaret Bradley went to see her, and there was a struggle. She says it was an accident,” Hutch told him. “A formal investigation is already underway, and Mrs. Bradley has turned herself in.”

“But...I know he did it! I just know he did,” Parker protested.

Mills stepped forward. “Timothy Parker, you are under arrest for the murder of Marvin Jones. You have the right to remain silent; anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law....”



Hutch peeked into the hospital room, checking to see if Starsky was asleep yet. The hour was late, but Hutch had finally finished with the paperwork on the Parker arrest and thought Starsky may have waited up to hear how things went. Hutch could’ve just called, but he felt the need to talk to Starsky in person. He knew his partner had wanted to be in on the final phase of solving this case, and Hutch felt badly that he couldn’t be. Besides, he needed to apologize for overlooking an important clue that might have kept Starsky from being in that booby-trapped building in the first place.

Starsky was lying propped up in bed, reading, of all things, “The Joy of Sex.” It was all Hutch could do to keep a straight face, while he quietly eased into the room to catch Starsky red-handed.

“What’re you reading there, Starsk?”

Starsky literally jumped, the book flying from his hand and landing in the middle of the bed. He scrambled to retrieve it and slide it under the covers, none-too-smoothly.

“Geez, Hutch! Ya tryin’ to give me a heart attack? Didn’t anybody ever teach you how to knock!”

A smile played at the corners of Hutch’s lips. “I thought you’d be glad to see me.”

“Well, I gave up on you. Don’t you know visitin’ hours ended an hour ago?”

“Yeah. I had to bribe Broom Hilda to let me in after hours, but I wanted to fill you in on the case. I didn’t realize you’d be involved in scientific research, or I would’ve waited until morning.”

“What? Oh this?” Realizing Hutch had already seen the book, Starsky slipped it out from under the covers and tried to play it cool. “I was just curious what kinda quack would’ve come up with this ‘over-the-hill-at-nineteen’ theory.”

“Oh, I see.” Hutch nodded his head knowingly. “And have you learned anything?”

Determined not to let Hutch get the best of him, Starsky shot back, “Yeah. I didn’t know the human body could be twisted into a pretzel and not break anything.” With that remark, they both burst into laughter. They laughed until they couldn’t catch their breath, until tears were rolling down their cheeks.

The stress that had been building over the past several days had reached its peak, and at last, they could let it go.

“I’m serious, Hutch,” Starsky said, wiping the tears from his eyes. “I mean, have you looked at these pictures? Notice they’re all drawings instead of photographs? You know why? Because nobody could do this stuff without breakin’ *somethin’*.”

Hutch finally regained control and stopped laughing long enough to reply, “Yeah, I’ve seen it. I’ve even tried some of it. It’s not as easy as they make it look.”

Starsky laid the book on the table. “How did you get hold of a copy of that book here in the hospital?” Hutch asked.

“Well, to tell you truth, I bought it the other day after you were raggin’ me about not reading anything but comic books. It kinda bothered me that you thought I was ignorant or something.”

Looking at Starsky’s face, Hutch could see he was dead serious. “Oh, come on, Starsk, you know I didn’t mean to put you down. I kid with you like that all the time.” Starsky said nothing. “I’m sorry,” Hutch apologized. “I didn’t mean anything by it. Okay?” He felt like a heel for not having realized his offhand remarks were hurtful.

“Yeah, well, I guess it just kinda hit home. I mean, it’s true I *don’t* read as much as you do.” Starsky looked down as he spoke. “Anyway, Huggy went by my place and picked up some clothes for tomorrow. I asked him to bring me *somethin’* to read. He said this was the first thing he saw.”

Hutch swiped his hand across his face, imagining that Starsky must have been embarrassed when Huggy showed up with the book.

“He kinda surprised me, Hutch. He didn’t make one single joke about it. In fact, he said he’d like to borrow it when I’m done.” Starsky smiled from ear to ear, letting Hutch know that he was okay with how things had worked out.

Hutch pulled up a chair closer to the bed and sat down. “We took Timothy Parker into custody without a hitch. He was at the house when we arrived, and he didn’t resist. At first I thought I was going to have to take his mother in, too.”

Starsky shook his head in sympathy. “I feel sorry for her, don’t you? I mean, her daughter’s dead and her son’s goin’ to prison. She’s gonna be all alone.”

“Yeah, it’s a sad case any way you look at it.” Hutch was quiet for a few seconds, then cleared his throat before continuing.

“Look, Starsk. I had another reason for coming by here tonight, besides telling you about Parker. I owe you an apology, partner. I had the answer right before my eyes and was too dumb to see it. I could have prevented you from being in that building when Parker torched it.”

“What’re you talkin’ about?” Starsky looked puzzled.

“Do you remember when Gina called and I told you about her profile of our suspect? Computer technician, electronics buff?”

“Yeah.”

“She said something else, and I forgot to tell you. She said it could be someone who built and played with remote-control boats and planes.” Hutch paused and waited for Starsky to see the connection. “Starsk, when we went back to see Parker, I practically tripped over an electronic, remote-control, model car sitting on the floor in the living room. Something clicked in my subconscious, but it just wouldn’t surface. Don’t you see? If I’d made the connection and told you about it, you would’ve known better than to go to the Model Car Club building without back-up. I let you down, buddy.”

Starsky mulled over what Hutch was telling him for only a second. “Aw, come on, Hutch, that wasn’t exactly an obvious clue. I mean, I remember picking up that cherry little mustang and looking at it. I didn’t make the connection either. Besides, you were taking pain medication and were feelin’ pretty lousy at the time. It wasn’t your fault I did a dumb ass thing like goin’ off without back-up.”

“But you weren’t the one who talked with Gina. I should’ve known; I should’ve put two and two together. You couldn’t have, because I didn’t tell you. You could’ve been killed because I forgot to tell you something really important.”

Starsky listened, but couldn’t find it in his heart to blame Hutch, or be angry with him.

“Hey...listen to me. It wasn’t your fault. You’re only human. Why you wanna put yourself on a guilt trip, Hutch? Huh? I ain’t mad, now, am I?” Starsky smiled.

Hutch was quiet for a moment. “No, I don’t suppose you are.”

“All right, then,” Starsky said. “Subject closed. Okay?”

“Oh, one more thing, Starsk.”

“Yeah? What?”

“Gina asked me to discreetly let you know she isn’t seeing anyone right now. I think she wants you to call her.”

“And you forgot to tell me that? Hutch! How could you? Man, I’ve been wantin’ to go out with Gina for two years! I always thought she was, you know, involved with someone. How could ya forget to tell me somethin’ that important? Now I really *am* pissed! You should’ve told me sooner.”

“Calm down. Good grief, Starsk, you can call her when you get home tomorrow. It’s not like she’s been waiting at the *altar* and I forgot to tell you!”

End of Chapter Fifteen