

GUARDIAN

Faithful till the End

By TibbieB

Chapter Six

When Starsky pulled into Hutch's driveway the next morning, he wasn't surprised to see Sam trotting along beside him. "Mornin'," Starsky said, not even commenting on the dog's presence as they climbed in.

"Morning," Hutch answered. He was obviously in a good mood. Sam stopped to give Starsky a sloppy kiss before climbing over the seat to assume his place in the back. This time Starsky took it in stride.

"Where do you wanna start?" Hutch asked, clearly anxious to get on with the investigation.

"I've been thinking, maybe we should go ahead and check out Carol Parker's death. If Fran's right, there could be a motive for the fires that we just haven't figured out."

"True, but I don't think we should focus totally on that incident without checking out the people I told you about last night—those who were fired from Bradley Enterprises over the past year." Sam moved to the right and hung his head over Hutch's shoulder, who absently reached up and scratched the dog under the chin without a pause in the conversation.

"No doubt about it, Starsky, Bradley Enterprises is big business, and they're pretty cold when it comes to getting rid of people they don't need anymore. At least three of them had over ten years of service with the company at the time they were terminated."

"Yeah, I picked up on that, too. I really *was* lookin' through the file last night before the 'black tornado'..." Starsky indicated Sam with a nod toward the dog. "...laid into me."

Hutch grinned, remembering the chaos Sam had created. He opened the file folder to a page of notes he and Starsky had made last night. "Okay, let's try to question Davis Sims, Derrick Huff, and Julie Alexander this morning. Then we'll go back to the station and pull the file on the Parker suicide and check that out in the afternoon." Hutch always liked having a plan.



By noon, the two detectives had met with Sims, an ex-middle manager who seemed pretty happy about receiving an early retirement, even though it had not initially been his idea. He'd found he could live quite comfortably on his retirement income and bragged about enjoying spending time in his garden.

Julie Alexander was an executive secretary who'd been dismissed when her direct supervisor left the company. Though initially bitter toward her former employer, Ms. Alexander was now working at a job

that paid ten thousand more a year than Bradley had. In fact, she seemed extremely happy with the outcome.

“I saw in the papers that two of Bradley’s holdings were destroyed,” she told them. “I couldn’t help thinking it couldn’t happen to a more deserving guy. But frankly, I didn’t even care enough to finish reading the article.”

Their efforts to locate Derrick Huff revealed that the ex-receiving clerk had left Bay City when he was fired for showing up for work intoxicated. Friends said he returned to his hometown somewhere in Texas. Apparently, Huff had family there who wanted to help him get into rehab. It had been simple to confirm he’d left LA at least two months before the first fire. So, they’d eliminated the three employees who seemed to have the strongest motives to cause Bradley Enterprises a problem.

Starsky pulled into the parking lot of one of his favorite delis and turned off the motor. “I don’t know about you guys, but I’m starved’.” Sam woofed loudly, indicating he agreed.

“Well, at least I can get something here that’s halfway healthy. Why don’t you go in and get our order while I wait here with Sam?” Hutch suggested.

Starsky was back in a flash with a chicken salad on pita for Hutch, and a triple-decker club with chips for himself. Sam wagged his tail happily and salivated on Hutch’s shoulder, as Starsky unwrapped two large kielbasa sausages and placed them on a paper plate for the dog.

“Starsky, you’re gonna make him sick, feeding him stuff like that,” Hutch complained.

“Hey, I thought you said we have joint custody,” Starsky argued right back. “That means when he’s with me, he can have real food. You can feed him seaweed biscuits and granola kibbles when he’s with you.”

Hutch shook his head in resignation., knowing there was no point in arguing with Starsky when it came to food. After finishing their meal, they sat in the shade for a while and Starsky called the station to speak with Minnie.

“Minnie, darlin’, this is Starsky. I need your help. Yeah—again.” Hutch listened to the pro at work. “Listen, Hutch and I are checkin’ into a reported suicide that happened about six weeks ago.” Starsky listened for a second. “Right. Victim’s name, Carol Parker. Address, Brandywine Apartments, here in the city.” Silence again. “Terrific. You’re the best. Oh, I don’t know...” Starsky looked at his watch. “...about an hour?” Hutch rolled his eyes, as Starsky looked over at him with a smug expression. “Okay. See you then. You’re a sweetheart. Yeah, I know--I owe ya. Bye.”

“You should be ashamed of yourself,” Hutch said, only half-seriously.

“What? She doesn’t mind,” Starsky defended himself, as he started the car.

“All units, all units in the vicinity Market and Twenty-seventh, reported 211 in progress. Repeat a 211 in progress. All units in the vicinity of Market and Twenty-seventh, please respond to silent alarm.”

“That’s only three blocks from here,” Hutch said, snatching the radio mic off the console. Starsky pulled the car into traffic while slapping the red light on the roof of the Torino.

“Control, this is Zebra Three. Responding to the 211 at Market and Twenty-seventh. We are three blocks from the site. Repeat, Zebra Three responding.”

“Ten-four, Zebra Three. Suspects may be armed and dangerous. Name of business: Kwon Cho Market. Repeat—may be armed and dangerous.”

Starsky expertly guided the Ford through the heavy traffic, using only the red flashing bubble to clear the traffic from his path. He eased the car to a quiet halt in front of the supermarket, just as two black youths wearing ski masks burst through the door. Both were frantically waiving pistols in the air, the shorter of the two dragging a terrified Oriental woman along as a shield.

“Damn!” Hutch spat. “I hate when civilians are involved.”

“Yeah, well, I don’t think anybody asked us,” Starsky answered, pulling his Smith & Wesson from the holster under his jacket. The two robbers still had their backs to the street and didn’t seem to realize they were headed right toward the two detectives. “How you wanna do this?”

Hutch pulled out his Magnum and quickly checked the chamber. “The hard way, I guess.”

They made eye contact for a split second before executing their move, and Starsky said barely above a whisper, “Hey....” *The unspoken reminder to be careful.*

Hutch nodded “Yeah, you, too....”

Simultaneously, they threw open the car doors and dove in opposite directions, taking shelter behind other cars parked close by. When in place with guns drawn, Hutch signaled his partner he was ready, then shouted, “Police! Stop right there!” The first man whirled and fired without hesitation, striking Hutch in the left shoulder. It happened so quickly, Starsky wasn’t sure he could believe his eyes. Adrenaline pumping, he rose up from behind his cover and shouted, “Police!” As the gunman quickly turned toward him, Starsky fired three shots in rapid succession, striking him all three times. The second youth quickly shoved his hostage to the ground and threw up his hands.

“Don’t shoot, Mister, I give up! I give up!”

“Hutch, you okay? Speak to me, partner,” Starsky called out. No response.

“Drop the gun, slowly,” Starsky ordered, not taking his eyes off the youth until the gun was safely on the ground. “Now put your hands behind your head and don’t even breathe.”

Starsky anxiously looked over at Hutch who was lying on his side adjacent to the car. “Hutch!” Before Starsky could shove the assailant to the ground and cuff him, Sam leaped out of the car and ran to where Hutch lay. The bewildered dog lay down, placing his head on Hutch’s shoulder. “Stay there, Sam,” Starsky told the dog, as he snapped the handcuffs shut and picked up the surrendered gun. Within seconds, Starsky had secured the criminal and was by Hutch’s side.

He quickly bent down and eased Hutch onto his back, moving Sam aside in the process. “Hutch, buddy, you okay? Huh? Hutch?” Starsky held Hutch’s face between his hands, urging him to open his eyes. He could see where the bullet had entered Hutch’s left shoulder, but couldn’t tell how bad the wound was.

“Starsk?” Hutch blinked several times, trying to clear his vision, then looked up at Starsky’s worried face. At the same time, he felt a wet nose nudging his neck. Hutch was dazed, but conscious. Starsky pulled Hutch into an upright position and braced him against his own body, then used his handkerchief to apply pressure to Hutch’s shoulder wound.

“You really gave me a scare, buddy,” Starsky said. He watched as Sam inched forward again and laid his head and front paws over Hutch’s legs. “Or maybe I should say you gave *us* a scare. Be still now. Help will be here soon,” Starsky assured him.

Turning to the crowd that had gathered, he shouted, “Somebody call an ambulance! We’ve got an injured police officer here! And somebody check on that guy.” When the bystanders seemed too stunned to act, he snapped. “Do it! Now!” The store merchant jolted into action, ran back into the store and made the phone call.

Starsky held onto Hutch with one arm and grasped Sam’s collar with the other hand, afraid the frightened dog would run off when the ambulance roared onto the scene. “How you doin? Huh?” he asked Hutch every few seconds.

“I’m okay, Starsk. Really...it’s not too bad...I’m okay,” Hutch reassured him. Sam whined again and moved in even closer, almost covering Hutch’s lap. He smiled at the dog and laid his hand on Sam’s head. “Starsky, I think he’s even more of a mother hen than you.”

“Impossible,” Starsky mumbled, a little smile teasing the corners of his mouth. The ambulance cut its siren as it rolled to a stop just feet from where Starsky and Sam stood guard over Hutch.

When the paramedics took over, Starsky put Sam back into the car and joined the other police officers who’d arrived on the scene. He gave a statement to Officer Tate and promised to go by the station later and file his report. Because of the shooting, he knew IA would be involved. The paramedics told him the wounded gunman was in critical condition, but being young and strong, he’d probably survive.

Starsky hurried back to the ambulance before the paramedic could shut the door. “You gonna be okay, buddy?” he leaned in close and asked Hutch.

“Yeah, I just hate like hell that this could slow down solving our case.”

“Don’t worry about that. There’s lots of stuff you can do while I’m on the street,” Starsky consoled him. “You aren’t gettin’ outta doin’ your share just because of this.”

“Detective, we need to get your partner to the hospital now. You’re welcome to follow. We’re going to Metro General,” the paramedic said, climbing in next to Hutch.

“Right. Okay. I’ll see you there, Hutch,” Starsky said, as the paramedic pulled the door shut in his face.

As good as his word, Starsky followed closely behind the ambulance as it sped toward the hospital. Subdued and quiet, Sam lay in the front seat next to him. Starsky reached over and stroked the dog’s head, wondering if the gun shots and shouting reminded him of his life at Slick Willie’s. He could tell the dog was confused by Hutch’s absence. “I know fella, I’m worried, too. He’ll be fine, you’ll see.” Sam lifted his head and laid it over on Starsky’s knee, needing the physical contact for reassurance.



“Detective Starsky?” A gray-haired woman in her late fifties approached Starsky in the hallway outside the emergency room. Small in stature, but large in presence, Starsky knew without being told that she was the doctor.

“That’s right.”

“I’m Doctor Anderson. Detective Hutchinson said you’d be taking him home.”

“You mean you’re gonna release him? He’s gonna be okay then?”

“That’s right. Well, actually, I wanted to keep him overnight, but he raised such a ruckus, I believe we would have to tie him down to do so. He should be okay, though—that is, if you or someone responsible will be there overnight in case that wound starts bleeding again.”

“No problem. I’ll stay over at his place and look after him,” Starsky said eagerly, knowing how Hutch detested staying in the hospital, even if it *was* only overnight.

“It was a clean wound, meaning the bullet went in and came right out on the other side. No major arteries were involved, no bone splintering. He is one heck of a lucky guy—if you can say that about being shot, I mean.”

“When can he go? Can I see him now?”

“You can go on in. They’re bandaging it now and we’ll put his arm in a sling to restrict movement. I gave him a shot for pain, so he’s a little groggy. Of course, a nurse will take him out to your car in a wheelchair, but you may have some trouble getting him into the house. I hope he doesn’t live in an upstairs apartment.”

“No, that’s not a problem. And I can handle him. Don’t worry about that,” Starsky said confidently.

She smiled at him. “I’m sure you can.”

“When can he return to work?”

“My, my, you boys must love your jobs,” she said tongue-in-cheek. “That’s the first thing Detective Hutchinson asked me, too. I told him in two days, if there are no complications. He’s restricted from any strenuous physical activity. I’m recommending desk duty for at least two weeks. Just because he’s a healthy, strong young man doesn’t mean he can’t bleed to death,” she peered through thick-glassed spectacles at Starsky’s attentive face.

“Keep that in mind, and see that he does, too. Okay?” she said in a no-nonsense voice. “If he ends up back in here because he’s disregarded my orders, I’m going to hold *you* responsible. Understood?” Starsky nodded agreement and the felt like he was in school again, receiving a dressing down from the assistant principal, Mrs. Brown. When the little woman was satisfied she’d hammered across her point, she handed him a prescription for pain medication and another for an antibiotic, then headed back to tend to other patients in the ER.

“Wait, Doc,” Starsky said, stopping her just before she reached the over-sized swinging double doors. “What about the other guy...the one I shot?”

“Oh, he’ll make it and be around to rob someone else in a few short weeks,” she answered, her sarcasm barely disguised as humor. “You did hit him all three times, but nothing life-threatening.” She then disappeared through the stainless steel doors.



Captain Dobey stood by, holding a bag with Hutch’s belongings as the nurse rolled the wheel chair to the curb. Starsky brought the Torino around to the pick-up area, relegating Sam to the back seat to make room in front for his wounded partner. Dobey stepped back surprised when he spotted the rottweiler in the backseat.

“Starsky, where’d that dog come from?”

“What dog, Cap’n?” Starsky asked innocently. Even though he was a little groggy, Hutch enjoyed the puzzled look on Dobey’s face.

“Don’t get smart with me, Starsky! I can see that dog in the back seat!”

Starsky came around to the passenger’s side to open the door for Hutch. “Oh, *that* dog. Don’t know, Cap’n. Just showed up in the back there all of a sudden,” Starsky teased.

Sam excitedly danced around in the back seat, anxious to greet Hutch, as Dobey helped the injured man into the car. “Stay back, Sam,” Starsky warned the dog. “Stay!”

Much to his surprise, the dog obeyed and lay down submissively on the seat.

“How’d you do that, Starsk?” Hutch asked, amazed that the dog had responded.

“It’s a gift, Blintz,” Starsky boasted, reaching over and snapping Hutch’s seatbelt securely. “Thanks, Cap. I’ll be in later to do my report. Just let me get my partner here settled.”

“Just make sure you do! You know Internal Affairs when there’s been a shooting. It should be routine. We already have more than a half dozen written statements from witnesses who confirm the kid shot Hutch before you shot him.”

“Thanks for coming, Cap’n,” Hutch said sincerely.

“Think nothing of it, Hutchinson. And, Starsky—where did you get that dog?!”

Starsky turned to his partner. “What dog? I don’t see a dog. Do you see a dog, Hutch?”

Hutch picked up his cue, never missing a beat. “I don’t see a dog. You see a dog, Cap’n?”

The tires of the Torino squealed as Starsky shot the gas to it, leaving their irritated captain standing on the curb shaking his head.

End of Chapter Six