

# GUARDIAN

## *Faithful till the End*

By TibbieB

### *Chapter Seven*

By the time they reached the house, the pain shot had kicked in, leaving Hutch drowsy and relaxed—so much so, he couldn't stand on his own two feet and walk from the car to the house. After three failed efforts, Starsky decided he'd just have to carry him. Sam sat patiently in the back seat of the car, watching the two men, sensing that he should be still and wait.

“Hey, Blondie, can you hear me?” Hutch slowly nodded that he could, but didn't do a very convincing job of it. “I'm gonna go open the door, then I'll be back for you. Don't try to get out by yourself, understand?” Again, a slow-motion nod was the only response.

In a few seconds, Starsky returned. First, he draped Hutch's good arm around his neck. “Hang on to me now, buddy. Don't wanna drop you.” Once Hutch responded to that order, Starsky slid his arm under his friend's legs and lifted him out of the car, careful not to cause further pain to the wounded shoulder. Even though Hutch was the larger of the two, Starsky managed to make it from the car to the sofa without too much difficulty.

Sam jumped out of the car without his leash and followed closely behind, timing his steps to stay at Starsky's heels, but not get underfoot even once. He stationed himself beside the sofa like a sentinel and watched with solemn eyes as Starsky laid Hutch down gently, then went to turn back the bedcovers.

When Starsky returned, Hutch was sound asleep. “Okay, ya big lug, let's get you to bed.” He lifted Hutch again and carried him to the bed, then proceeded to remove the sleeping man's shoes. Sam had followed them into the bedroom, watching every move Starsky made. He seemed to sense Hutch was incapacitated and wasn't quite sure what was going on. Finally, he went to the foot of the bed and jumped on, then discretely inched up until he could lay his head on the pillow right next to Hutch's.

“That's a good, boy,” Starsky praised him. “You gonna watch over Hutch while I go get his prescriptions filled?” Sam raised his head and cocked it to one side, listening to Starsky's voice, then gently laid it back on the pillow. “Okay, that's fine. I'll be back in a jif, and I'll stir up some chow for us.” Satisfied that Hutch was sound asleep and that he was in “good paws,” Starsky slipped out of the house and went to the corner pharmacy.



Hutch awoke to the aroma of bacon frying in the kitchen. He knew he was at home, in his own bed, but was still foggy from the pain medication. Then he vaguely remembered waking up during the night with a deep ache in his shoulder. But the minute he stirred, Sam, who had remained on guard throughout the night, had jumped off the bed then returned seconds later followed by Starsky. The dog had sat on the

floor next to the bed and watched while Starsky gave Hutch another pain pill and glass of cool water. Exhausted, by even this small amount of effort, Hutch had quickly fallen back to sleep and remembered nothing after that.

Shaking off the drowsiness, Hutch sat up on the side of the bed for a moment, and discovered his legs were much stronger this morning. He went into the bathroom and washed his face and his one hand that wasn't confined by the sling. When Sam heard him splashing around in the sink, the dog trotted into the bathroom to investigate. "Hi, boy," Hutch said when Sam reared up and placed his paws on the bathroom countertop.

"Hey! You up?" Starsky called from the kitchen. "Bacon's done. Ready for your omelet?"

"I'll be right there," he called back. Seconds later, Hutch came into the kitchen, Sam close on his heels. "I feel like I have a hangover, Starsk. Must be the pain medication." He pulled out a chair from the kitchen table and sat down.

"Probably. You slept like a baby for six hours straight. Then Sam came and got me about three, and I popped another pill in ya. You've been asleep ever since."

"Thanks for staying here last night, buddy," Hutch said earnestly. "I was really out of it."

"Yeah, well, it's a dirty job, but somebody's gotta do it," Starsky teased. "Besides, I had plenty of help." He nodded toward Sam who'd taken his place next to Hutch's chair. Starsky set a cup of steaming hot coffee and a plate of food on the table in front of Hutch. Nicely arranged on the plate were four strips of crispy bacon, two slices of toast, and a delicious-looking omelet; beside it, a jar of Hutch's favorite jam—boysenberry.

"I found some of that stinky cheese you like so much in the refrigerator and crumbled it up in your eggs."

"It's feta, Starsky, feta—and it isn't stinky. It's a very healthy gourmet cheese made from goat's milk. Do you have any idea what all goes into the making of this cheese?"

"All I know is, I offered some to Sam and he wanted to roll on it...you know...like it was somethin' dead he found out in the yard." Starsky set a plate of scrambled eggs on the floor in front of Sam (sans the cheese), then brought his own plate to the table and sat down across from Hutch.

Hutch considered criticizing Starsky for feeding eggs to the dog, but was too hungry to needle Starsky right then. Having not eaten for nearly twenty-four hours, he tore into the breakfast with zeal. Starsky watched with amusement, waiting for Hutch to make some cutting remark about his cooking. Hutch looked up and saw the expression on his partner's face. "This is delicious."

"Even with the stinky cheese?"

Hutch laughed. “Yeah, Starsk, even with the stinky cheese.”

After breakfast, Starsky took Sam out for his morning run, while Hutch relaxed on the sofa and reviewed the notes they’d compiled so far on the arson case. The phone rang and Captain Dobey’s gruff voice came over the line.

“Hutch, I didn’t expect you to answer the phone. I guess this means you’re feeling better.”

“Still pretty sore, Cap’n, but I could be a whole lot worse. According to Starsky, I slept like the dead last night.”

“Where the hell *is* Starsky, anyway? I’ve already left two messages at his place. I’ve got IA nipping at my heels because he never came in here yesterday and submitted his report on the shooting.”

“Uh, well, Cap’n, he’s on his way in. I think he wanted to stop by his place and change clothes,” Hutch lied. He knew Starsky was in trouble, and he felt responsible. “Don’t come down on him too hard. I was really zonked out on pain medication last night, and he hung around here to keep me from wandering out into traffic.”

“Don’t tell me how to do my job, Hutchinson!” Dobey blustered. Just then, Starsky and Sam came barreling through the back door, while Hutch frantically waived his good arm, signaling them to be quiet.

“No, sir, Cap’n. I’d never do that—”

“If Starsky’s still there—and I have a sneaking suspicion he is—tell him to get in here NOW, or he’ll have the imprint of my size fifteens on his backside for a month!” Before Hutch could respond, Dobey slammed the phone down, to make sure he got the point across.

“He’s such a teddy bear,” Hutch said, as Starsky stood there breathing heavily and sweating from head to toe. “I think you’d better get to the station now, before Dobey blows a gasket.”

“Oh, damn! I forgot to go by there last night and file my report!” Starsky ran to the bathroom, stripping off his jogging clothes as he went. Hutch heard the water in the shower come on, as the bathroom door slammed shut. In five minutes flat, Starsky was on his way to the station.

“I’ll call you,” he shouted on the way out. “Take it easy and don’t do nothin’ physical ‘til I get back!”

“I beg your pardon?” Hutch asked as the front door closed behind his harried friend. Sam ran to the door and barked, upset that Starsky had left without them.



Starsky had just finished typing his report and talking with the boys from IA, when Minnie appeared at his desk with the Parker file in hand.

“‘Mornin’, sweetheart. I was just comin’ down to see you.”

“Yeah, yeah, that’s what you tell all the girls, isn’t it?” she jibed good-naturedly.

“Now, Minnie, you know you’re special,” he came back smoothly.

“Ah, if that were only true. You’re a real sweet-talker, Starsky. Even though I know you’re handing me a line, I love to hear it just the same.” She laid the file on the desk in front of him. “Here’s the file on your suicide victim. Looks pretty straight-forward. Of course, I don’t know what it is you’re looking for.”

“I got a tip that this may not have been a suicide. Just wanna check it out. Call it a hunch, but I believe this one may have fallen through the cracks.”

“Well, there doesn’t seem to have been much of an investigation done. Apparently, the officers thought it was open and shut.”

“So I heard. I just wanna see it for myself. Maybe there *was* no reason for an investigation.” Starsky opened the file, then turned to Minnie. “You’re terrific, you know it?”

“Yeah, I’m the Mother Teresa of the BCPD,” she replied cryptically, then patted him on the shoulder before exiting the room.

Starsky looked through the file that contained a picture of Carol Parker, or rather, what had once been Carol Parker. After falling sixteen stories to the street below, it was difficult to tell from her remains if she’d been a pretty girl. Fanned out around her head was a mass of beautiful, long, silky dark auburn hair. She appeared to be very petite and on the slender side. *What a waste*, Starsky thought as he gazed at the photo of the corpse. He read the police report. Cold. Matter-of-fact. Useless.

*Name: Carol Lynn Parker*

*Race: Caucasian*

*Sex: Female*

*Age: 27*

*Height: 5’4”*

*Weight: 105 lbs.*

*Marital Status: Single*

*Next of Kin: Chloris Parker, mother; Timothy Parker, brother*

*Occupation: Administrative assistant*

*Cause of Death: Massive internal injuries sustained from fall.*

*Victim had history of manic depression. Prescription drug, Elavil, found in victim’s bathroom medicine cabinet.*

That was it. Nothing about the pregnancy. Nothing about the level of drugs in the bloodstream at the time of death.

The next page gave a statement taken from Chloris Parker at the time the police notified her of Carol's death. Mrs. Parker appeared to accept without question that her daughter had taken her own life. No mention was made of interviewing Timothy Parker, or whether he was an adult or a minor.

He thought it was pretty sloppy that no one had contacted Timothy to get a statement. Although Starsky wasn't close to his brother, Nick, he knew that many siblings were close enough to share with one another things they wouldn't dream of telling a parent. He made a mental note to contact Timothy Parker.

It wasn't much to go on. And Hutch could be right—maybe he should be taking a closer look at the list of disgruntled employees, rather than following up on a hunch. He copied down the Parkers' address and telephone number and stuck it in his coat pocket. After one more look at the photo, longing to know what Carol had looked like *before*, Starsky closed the file and went in to meet with Dobey.



Hutch was asleep on the sofa when Starsky let himself back into the house three hours later. Sam had been snoozing on the floor next to him since Starsky left. Before Starsky could get the door open, Sam ran to meet him, rousing Hutch in the process.

“Hey,” he said as he sat up and stretched. “How'd it go with IA?” .

Starsky set two pizzas, one veggie, the other with “the works” on the coffee table in front of Hutch. “No sweat. I don't know why Dobey had his drawers in a wad; all the witnesses' statements agreed, so there wasn't anything to dispute. He shot you, I shot him. Simple. Those goons from IA just need to hassle somebody on a regular basis, and this week it was my turn.” He went into the kitchen and brought back paper plates, napkins, and two ice cold Cokes.

“I've been through this file again, and there are only two more employees who look like possible suspects to me,” Hutch told him. “Both of them still work for Bradley, but may have a bone to pick. One was recently passed over for a promotion, for the third time. The other filed a sexual harassment suit against her supervisor and lost the case. It's possible they may be pressuring her to resign.”

“Well, Minnie had the information on Carol Parker for us. There's nothin' that'll jump off the page at you, but I have this gut feelin' that we need to dig deeper on this one.”

Hutch, used to his partner's hunches, had learned to take him seriously. “In that case, let's follow that lead first.”

“I'm gonna see if I can locate her brother, Timothy,” Starsky said. “I don't know, he may be just a kid. The weird thing is, no one took a statement from him.”

Hutch moved the paperwork aside and one-handedly served up two slices of pizza on a paper plate and passed them over to Starsky. Sam moved in on the pizza until Hutch slammed the lids of both boxes shut to keep him out. The disappointed dog turned to Starsky and was rewarded with a pepperoni slice, immediately bringing criticism from Hutch, who worried that Sam was learning bad habits.

As soon as they were finished eating, Hutch reached for his shoes and started putting them on. "I'm ready when you are."

"Whoa. What do ya think you're doin'?" Starsky asked. "You aren't goin' anywhere."

"I'm fine, Starsk. I haven't needed a pain pill since early this morning. Besides, you need someone to watch your back. We don't know what we may be getting into here."

"No way. You're gonna stay here and rest." Starsky stood up and headed for the door. "Sam will keep you company. All I'm gonna do is locate Timothy Parker and talk to him. We don't even have any reason to think he's a suspect yet." Sam's ears had perked up at the mention of his name. He followed Starsky to the door, expecting to go along.

"You stay here with Hutch, Big Dog," Starsky said, unconsciously tagging the dog with a nickname that he'd soon come to respond to as readily as his real name. Sam looked up and wagged his tail. "I said, stay with Hutch. Stay." Starsky pointed in the direction of the sofa as he gave the command. Sam looked at Hutch, then at Starsky, before sauntering back to the sofa. There he resumed his post next to Hutch and lay down.

"Good boy," Starsky praised him, smiling at the dog, exceedingly pleased that Sam had obeyed.

"This is getting spooky," Hutch said, wide-eyed. "I think he actually understands you."

"Just the Starsky charm, Blintz. Works every time," Starsky shot back, before closing the door behind him.



Starsky rang the bell at the modest Spanish-style, one-story house where Mrs. Parker and her son lived. He was greeted by a plump, silver-haired woman in her sixties.

"Yes?"

"Mrs. Parker?"

"That's right. May I help you?"

Starsky flipped open his wallet and showed her his shield. "I'm Detective Sergeant Starsky with BCPD. I'd like to speak with you and your son about the death of your daughter, Carol."

“I don’t understand. I gave a statement to the policeman when he came and told me my daughter had killed herself.”

“Yes, ma’am, I know you did, but I just have a couple more questions. More importantly, I was hoping to speak with Timothy.”

“Well, okay. But I don’t know what this is all about. Come on in, Detective. I’ll go get Timmy.”  
*Timmy.* Starsky was disappointed. He’d hoped Timothy was an adult who could shed some light on his sister’s death. Starsky sat down and waited, taking in his surroundings.

The house was decorated with an eclectic combination of furnishings, ranging from cheap, worn upholstery on the sofa, to a beautiful, old, upright piano, which had most likely been in the Parker family for several generations. On top of the piano was a collection of family photographs. One featured an attractive young woman in her early twenties, her gorgeous auburn hair cascading down her shoulders. The sparkle in her bright green eyes and beautiful smile implied this was a happy time in her life. Starsky felt sad as he gazed at the picture. He was pretty certain this was *Carol before*.

Mrs. Parker returned in just a few minutes. “Detective Starsky, this is my son, Timmy.”

Starsky looked around and was surprised to see that Timmy was actually a man who looked to be in his early to mid-thirties. The detective extended his hand to shake. Timothy had the same dark auburn hair as his sister, but not her good looks. He was tall and gangly, to the point of looking awkward when he walked across the room. He wore heavy, dark-rimmed glasses, which he nervously pushed up on the bridge of his darkly freckled nose before accepting Starsky’s hand. Dressed in black double-knit slacks and a white short sleeved shirt with a skinny black tie clipped on at the collar, Parker looked as though he may have just come in from work.

“Nice to meet you Mr. Parker. Thank you for speaking with me.”

Timothy looked down toward the floor but nodded, “Sure. Mother said you had some questions about my sister.”

Mrs. Parker gestured for Starsky to sit down, then she and Timothy did the same.

“That’s right,” Starsky answered. “I was reviewing the file on your sister’s case and noted that no one took a statement from you at the time Carol died.”

“There really wasn’t anything I could tell them,” he said nervously. “I wasn’t there when it happened.”

“I was just wondering if Carol ever talked to you about suicide.”

“No.”

“Do you know of any reason she would do something like that?”

“No.”

“Would Carol have confided in you if something was wrong?”

Still not looking Starsky directly in the eye, Parker fidgeted a bit before glancing toward his mother. “Uh...no,” he finally said.

Starsky didn't push; he could see there was no point. Clearly, Timothy Parker was afraid to talk in front of his mother. But the detective in Starsky told him there was more he *could* tell, if he'd only open up.

“What's this all about?” Mrs. Parker asked. “My daughter suffered from depression. I told her she needed help, but she didn't listen to me. She never listened to me. Just because I was her mother, I didn't know anything.” The woman's voice sounded more angry than remorseful. “I knew she'd never come to any good. She was just like her father. He didn't take responsibility for anything either.”

“Mother, please,” Timothy whispered, his face betraying his embarrassment.

“Don't make excuses for her, Timmy. She could've been more like you. You're such a good boy.” She patted her son's knee. “My son is a genius with the computer, Detective. He's going to be very successful someday. Carol could have taken a lesson from his example”

Parker stood up, obviously uncomfortable with his mother's profuse praise. “Mother, I've asked you not to talk like that.”

“And why not?” she asked, undaunted by his pleas to stop. “I know you're going to find a job real soon, then everyone's going to see what a smart boy my son is.”

Starsky watched the interaction between mother and son, thinking this was a *weird* pair. He decided to get the interview back on track. “So do you work in the computer industry, Mr. Parker?”

“I, uh, I'm kind of unemployed at the moment--”

“But not for long,” his mother interrupted.

“Mother!” Timothy irritably shoved the heavy glasses up on his nose again. “I've not worked for the past six months,” he told Starsky. “It's just a temporary set back. Carol was helping us out in the meantime.”

“Did you know any of Carol's friends?”

“She never introduced us to her friends,” Mrs. Parker said bitterly. “She was ashamed of her family. My daughter was always trying to be something she wasn't.”

“Mother, Carol was good to us. Please don't criticize her. You know that it upsets me.”

Starsky knew he was getting nowhere; Timothy wasn't going to tell him anything with his mother present. "Well, I won't take up any more of your time." He opened his wallet, took out a business card, and scribbled his and Hutch's home phone numbers on the back before handing it to Parker. "If you think of anything, give me a call. The dispatcher can always get in touch with me when I'm on duty. But I also wrote my home phone number and my partner's number on the back for you. I'm Starsky, he's Hutchinson--"

"I still don't understand why you're asking these questions," Mrs. Parker interrupted.

"Oh, one other thing. There wasn't a note, was there? You know, giving a reason why she'd want to take her own life?" Starsky watched Timothy Parker's eyes shift downward before answering.

"No. No, not that we're aware of," he answered quietly.

"Okay." Starsky walked to the door where Mrs. Parker was already waiting to let him out. "Thank you both for your time."

As he walked back to the car, Starsky had a strong suspicion he'd hear from Timothy Parker—soon.

***End of Chapter Seven***