

## GUARDIAN II

### *The Luck of the Draw* by TibbieB

#### *Chapter 11*

Before Dobby left for home, Starsky and Hutch finished filling him in on what they'd found in Bowman's apartment. Worry lines creased the veteran cop's face as he listened, realizing Bowman had some greater motivation than his desire to get rich quick. This was a man with a vengeance. Dobby's years on the force had taught him that people like Bowman seldom released hostages.

"Cap'n, we can't let Reynolds deliver the ransom." Starsky lowered his voice even though Mr. Reynolds had left the room. "This guy's gonna kill 'em both. I have a gut feeling about it."

Hutch felt a chill run up his spine. He felt the same, and hearing Starsky voice it aloud made it all the more valid.

"What makes you think we can stop him?" Dobby snapped, fatigue shortening his patience. "All I can do is suggest he let one of us do it. I can't exactly order him, you know."

"Let me do it," Hutch volunteered. "I think he'd trust me."

"Hey," Starsky interrupted indignantly, "Why you? Why not me?"

"Because he said the first time we met him that he trusted us. Remember what he said? He wanted us on the case because of the part we played in getting Joanna Haymes back safely. *I* was the runner."

"You've got a point, Hutchinson."

"I should do it this time, Hutch." Starsky felt a cold knot of fear settling in his stomach. The vision of Hutch being gunned down by kidnappers still haunted him at night sometimes. It'd seemed like an eternity before he'd reached his partner and seen for himself that the bulletproof vest had worked—had saved Hutch's life.

"No, Starsk. I think Reynolds will go along with it if he holds on to the idea we can pull it off just like last time."

"Starsky, I think Hutchinson's right. The fewer unknown variables, the more likely we're going to sell the idea to Reynolds. You two work it out. I don't really care what you have to do, as long as Reynolds can be convinced to cooperate."

Starsky's features hardened, clearly perturbed by the decision Hutch and Dobey had made, despite his objections.

"Now, get your butts out there and see if anyone can give you a lead. Maybe we can still find the girl before time for the drop, and save us all a lot of grief." Dobey left the room, stopping to tell the officer standing at the library entrance that he was going home for awhile. The other FBI and police personnel on duty had changed shifts hours ago; only Dobey had stoically waited out the long night with Reynolds.

Starsky stormed toward the door too. Hutch had to walk fast to catch up with him. Starsky strode on, almost it seemed, purposely leaving Hutch behind. Once they were in the car, Hutch looked over at his partner's profile. The grim visage hadn't changed since Dobey had backed Hutch's suggestion about the drop.

"Wanna talk about it?" Hutch saw the muscle in his partner's jaw tighten in response.

Starsky turned the ignition key. He ignored Sam's cheerful welcome as the dog leaned his head over the back seat and slobbered down the front of Starsky's well-worn leather jacket. "What's to talk about? I think you and Dobey already worked it out fine without any input from me."

Hutch took a deep breath. He hated the tone of Starsky's voice; that short, terse inflection he only used when he was really pissed. The morning sun was up now, and in the light, Hutch could see the tired lines around his partner's eyes, remnants of a long night with too little sleep.

Starsky cranked the engine and threw the car in gear, inadvertently squealing the tires as he popped the gears and the car lurched forward. Deciding to give Starsky time to cool down before raising the issue again, Hutch removed the sunglasses from his shirt-pocket and took refuge behind the concealing, dark glass.

"Where are we headed?"

"Got'a stop by my house and see if the plumber showed up." Starsky answered without taking his eyes off the road.

"How's it coming along?" Hutch hoped a little polite conversation would lighten the mood. Sam sat down quietly in the backseat, sensing a change in both men's attitudes when they'd returned from the Reynolds house.

"Fine."

"What's left to be done?" Hutch attempted to keep up the light conversation.

"The pipes are leakin'. Huggy has a friend comin' out today who's gonna repair the commode and the bath tub faucet. That room still smells pretty bad. Landlord's supposed to send someone to fumigate it again." Starsky's eyes stayed glued to the road. His answers were civil, but to the point.

Remembering the house's background, Hutch teased, "Must be where the dead body was."

Without missing a beat, "That's right," Starsky answered. "The master bath."

"Think you'll feel comfortable using that room?"

"Why not?" Starsky's eyes stayed straight ahead. He was in no mood for small talk; and he sure didn't feel like taking any lighthearted kidding from his partner right now.

"I just thought..." Hutch's smile faded. He knew Starsky was really bugged about his handling of the scene earlier, and until they talked about it, there would be no peace. They rode in silence for a few moments before Hutch broached the subject.

"So, what's it gonna take to make you talk about this like two adults?"

"Don't know what'cha mean."

"Like hell you don't. Starsk, why does it matter which one of us makes the drop? We both want the same thing...to get Jenny back."

The muscle in Starsky's jaw tightened. He didn't answer. Hutch pushed harder.

"I didn't volunteer because I thought I could do it any better than you. It just seemed to me that Mr. Reynolds would be more agreeable if we didn't change from the way things were done last time."

"Fine," Starsky snapped. "We'll do it your way." Before Hutch could say more, Starsky pulled the car up in front of the vacant house.

On the front porch, Huggy was having a heated argument with one of the workmen. Before Starsky could get out of the car and to the porch, the workman grabbed up his toolbox and stormed away. Hutch bailed out of the car right behind Starsky and Sam.

"What's goin' on here? There a problem?" Starsky asked, stepping onto the porch. Sam trotted past him and up to Huggy, to deliver a friendly lick on the hand. In turn, Huggy gave him the expected affectionate pat on the head. "Hey, Big Dog," he said warmly, before turning his attention back to Starsky.

"The dude was tellin' me he wants more money. We had a deal and I said no way—especially for a stupid reason like the one he gave me."

"Like what?"

"Starsky, believe me, you don't even want to know."

“Yeah, I do. What’s the deal?”

Huggy cleared his throat and looked down at his feet. “Claims it’s haunted,” he mumbled.

Hutch’s head snapped up. “What did you say?” He was sure he’d misunderstood.

“I know, it’s nuts, huh? Said one of his crew’s been hearing stuff. You know, voices.”

“You’ve got’a be kiddin.” Starsky couldn’t believe his ears.

“Now why would I want to put you on, Starsky? That’s the only plumber I could find that was willing to work so cheap.”

“Who’s supposed to be haunting the place, Hug?” Hutch asked. If he and Starsky hadn’t just been arguing, Hutch would have enjoyed this opportunity to harass his buddy a little; but he was pretty sure that right now, that would be a very bad idea.

“I don’t know man. I don’t think the dude introduced himself, if you dig.”

Starsky rubbed his tired eyes. This latest kink was too much to deal with right now. Jenny’s fate and Hutch’s safety were his foremost concerns at the moment; and dealing with the house, haunted or not, was just not his top priority.

“Look, Huggy, don’t worry about it. If bad comes to worse, I can stay with Hutch a few days and leave Sam with Gina again.”

“Sorry, Starsky. I’ll keep trying, man. Maybe my cousin Benny can hook us up with someone.” Huggy was surprised at Starsky’s calm reaction to the “haunted house” news. He knew Starsky’s tendency to be a little on the superstitious side and figured he’d be disturbed by the rumors.

“The case is coming to a head,” Hutch explained. “We have less than twenty-four hours to locate the girl before the drop.”

Huggy nodded sympathetically. “You guys do what you have to do. I’ll get in touch with Benny. And Starsky—if you guys need someplace for Big Dog to crash a few days, you know—I mean, it’s okay for him to stay with me”.

As though he understood every word, Sam reared up and placed his paws on Huggy’s shoulders before rewarding him with a big, sloppy, wet kiss.



Back on the streets, the two detectives made the rounds, pumping all their collective snitches, and even some not-so-friendly sources who could, from time to time, be coerced into giving up a bit of

information for a good cause. One thing most criminals detested was one of their own harming a child. Starsky and Hutch were hoping to cash in on that sentiment.

The morning rounds proved to be worthless, and around noon, Starsky wheeled into a taco stand and ordered lunch for both of them, without bothering to ask his partner if he had any preference.

“So...what? Is this your way of getting even with me?” Hutch looked up from the greasy bag of fast food Starsky dropped into his lap.

“Don’t know what you mean.” Starsky dove into his own bag and retrieved a beef burrito, unwrapped it and placed it in a disposable pie tin he fished from beneath the front seat. Anticipating lunch, Sam dropped his front paws and head over Starsky’s shoulder, salivating at the aroma of beef and spices.

“Tell me you’re not giving that to Sam,” Hutch said dryly.

“Course I’m givin’ it to him. We can’t very well sit here and eat in front of him, can we?” Starsky twisted around and placed the pan on the back seat. Almost before it left his hand, Sam began gobbling the burrito down, slurping and smacking his mouth in delight.

Hutch cut his eyes at Starsky, in a show of disgust, only to be ignored while Starsky began unpacking his own meal.

“You realize there are beans in that.”

“So? Beans are good for him.”

“Beans give you gas.”

“Maybe they give *you* gas. They don’t bother me, and they won’t bother Sam either.”

“How can you know that for sure, Starsk. They could blow him up like a blimp; they could give him a stomach ache. Are you willing to take that chance? He depends on us to keep him healthy.”

Starsky stopped unwrapping his food and looked up at Hutch. “Look—he’s my dog too! Now you may be able to talk Dobey into goin’ along with your plan for the drop, but I’ll be damned if you’re gonna tell me what I can feed my dog!”

Hutch just stared at him, speechless that Starsky could even link the two unrelated issues. “Starsky, this isn’t about the dog, or the burritos. You’re still pissed because I’m making the drop. Go ahead and admit it. I’ve tried to get you to talk about it all day—now lets talk about it and get the hell over it!”

Hutch’s outburst was met with stony silence. Starsky sat motionless for several seconds then turned and faced his partner. “Okay. Okay, I’ll *tell* you why I’m pissed.” Their eyes locked.

“Seems to me that anytime we have a risky assignment, you put yourself out there. On the line.”

“No more than you do.”

“I don’t see it that way.” Starsky looked down at the assortment of greasy fast food in his lap. “I’m afraid you’re gonna get yourself killed. I keep seeing you flying through that glass door, and thinkin’ you were dead. You know as well as I do, this guy’s sick. I’m worried that when you show up there in Reynolds’ place, Bowman will go berserk and blow you away.”

Hutch reached out and laid his hand on his partner’s shoulder. “Starsk...it would be the same if you were going in.”

“Maybe so. But you didn’t even talk it over with me, Hutch. We’re partners. We’re supposed to discuss things like this before jumpin’ in head-first.”

Hutch stared at Starsky’s profile, aware of the tension in his face. “You’re right. I’m sorry. I just wasn’t thinking, buddy. I mean...I really believe Reynolds is going to object to not making the drop himself, and I was trying to follow the same pattern we did with the Hayems case. Okay?”

“Okay. I accept your reasons, but it doesn’t change how I feel about it.” Starsky still didn’t look at him.

“What’s it going to take for us to get past this? We have a job to do, and I don’t want to go into it with bad feelings between us.”

“Me neither.” Starsky’s eyes finally met his. “How ‘bout we draw straws or somethin’.”

Hutch smiled, giving up the battle. “Okay. If that’s what it takes.”

Starsky slipped the straw out of his coke cup, whipped out his pocket knife, and cut it into two pieces, one long, and one short. “Short one goes.” He turned his back and positioned the straws in his hands, concealing the length of each. He held the straws out for Hutch to pick one.

Hutch hesitantly reached out and selected a straw, drawing the short one. Disappointment flashed across Starsky’s face, but he didn’t argue. Hutch had gone along with his suggestion, and now it was settled.

## ***End of Chapter 11***