

## **GUARDIAN II**

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

#### ***Chapter 2***

Stan Bowman lay alone in his bed, staring up at the ceiling. It had been a miserable day. The visit to his father in the nursing home had been both disappointing and stressful. It wasn't easy seeing his old man gaze out at the world through empty eyes, not even acknowledging his son's presence.

As if that wasn't bad enough, the administrator of Shady Meadows had summoned him to the office. He bluntly told Stan that in light of his being three months behind in paying the bill, they would have to transfer his father to a State facility, as an indigent patient. That was the final straw.

After half an hour of arguing, the administrator had reluctantly given Stan thirty more days to come up with the back-payments. It wasn't like he really gave a damn where the old man stayed, but he hadn't given up yet on the idea that his father had been squirreling away some money in a secret bank account somewhere. So he needed to keep close tabs on the old boy, just in case he came around.

Only two years ago, Charles Bowman had been a successful businessman, owner of his own investment firm. As Charles' only child, whose every whim had been indulged, Stan knew he'd someday inherit his father's business. So what was the point of busting *his* ass going to college and working his way up the ladder? Innately a lazy person, he'd been content to wait for his old man to provide a cushy job in the company. He'd intended to make it known that he was the boss's son, a privileged character. Yes...life had been good.

Then, Charles Bowman lost everything. The gambling, his addiction to alcohol...it had all converged and destroyed not only his life, but his family as well. Out of desperation, he'd gone to his old friend, Martin Reynolds and begged him to buy the company; his last chance to get out from under the mountain of debt he'd amassed.

Reynolds had reluctantly agreed; and out of a sense of loyalty to an old friend, had actually given him more than the company was worth. But rather than using the money to make a fresh start, Bowman drove straight to Vegas that night, and lost every red cent in less than twenty-four hours.

When Charles Bowman finally returned home the next night, he couldn't face his wife with the truth. Instead, he went into the library and downed a bottle of thirty-year-old scotch, shirring up his courage for what was to come.

Later that night, Janet Bowman came downstairs and found her drunken husband sitting in the dark, clutching an empty scotch bottle in one hand, and a loaded pistol in the other. He tearfully confessed his foolishness and begged her forgiveness. Then Bowman pointed the pistol at his temple

and told his wife goodbye. Seeing what he was about to do, she tried to wrestle the gun away from him and in the tussle, was shot through the heart and died in his arms.

Realizing what he'd done, Bowman placed the gun to his own temple again and pulled the trigger. But death wasn't in the cards for him. Instead, he was condemned to a sentence of silence and solitary confinement in what remained of his injured brain. No one could say how much he understood, whether he could hear them, or if he even recognized that he was still alive. Only the shell of a man, his days were spent staring out at the world with empty eyes, windows to an empty soul.

These were the details Stan Bowman chose to ignore; some thought because it was too painful to accept that his father was a failure, a drunk, and a coward. But those who *really* knew him thought it more likely that he just refused to believe that his gravy train had been derailed.

As the hours ticked by, his hatred for Martin Reynolds intensified. In his warped mind, Reynolds' wealth and power were a direct result of cheating Bowman's father out of his business, when in reality, the entrepreneur had taken a financial loss on Bowman Investments. It helped, having someone to blame. The frustration and anxiety seemed to subside a little when he concentrated on the hatred. Anything but the truth.

"You're going to pay, you bastard," Bowman uttered aloud in the darkness. "You're going to pay in more ways than one..."



The doorbell rang just as Gina closed the oven door. Starsky and Sam were right on time. Gina greeted Starsky with an affectionate peck on the cheek. She looked past him and realized that Hutch was nowhere in sight. "Don't tell me he isn't coming," she whispered.

"He's comin'. Don't worry. I threatened his life," Starsky whispered back. Sam, who'd been patiently waiting for a morsel of attention, decided it was time to make himself more conspicuous by lifting his head under Gina's hand, urging her to give him a little pat.

"Hi, Sweetie." Gina scratched the dog's ear and smiled at him fondly. "You been a good boy today?"

To Sam, it sounded like 'blah—blah-blah. Blah blah blah blah blah blah blah?' But he had her attention now, and that was all that really mattered. Sam felt like a pretty lucky dog. He had three great people in his life, and that was more than any stray or abandoned animal could ever hope for. He looked around at the sound of another human entering the room. She was a pleasant looking person, about Gina's size. Her voice had a musical sound to it that he liked. She gave Sam a warm smile then patted him on the head, instantly earning his admiration.

"Hi, David. Where's your friend?" Jackie looked around the room expectantly.

“He’ll be here any minute.” Starsky hoped he sounded more convincing than he felt. He was actually worried that Hutch may have chickened out. Just then, the bell rang.

“I bet that’s him now,” Gina said. Hutch looked a little nervous as he was invited in, but before he could even say hello, Sam loped to where he stood, reared up, and planted a big kiss on his nose. All four people laughed at the dog’s uninhibited display of affection. Hutch’s eyes widened as he spotted the petite brunette standing next to Starsky. His reaction didn’t pass without Gina’s notice.

“Hutch, I want you to meet my new roommate, Jackie Kent.”

Hutch flashed her his best smile—the smile women found irresistible—the ‘sexy, yet innocent-all-American-boy smile’. Starsky knew that smile. He’d seen Hutch in action too many times not to recognize it.

“I’ve been looking forward to meeting you, Jackie,” Hutch said smoothly. Starsky’s eyes rolled back in his head, forcing Gina to turn away to hide her amusement. She knew all too well how charming Hutch could be when he wanted to. If she wasn’t already crazy about Starsky, that million dollar smile would have affected her like it did most of the women who passed through Hutch’s life.

“Come on in guys. How about a beer? Wanna give me a hand, David?” Gina kicked into ‘hostess’ mode, and headed toward the kitchen, dragging Starsky by the hand. Sam fell into step and merrily followed, optimistic he could con at least one of them out of a treat.

Sam sat quietly at Gina’s feet, while she went about the task of arranging cheese and vegetables on a tray. Starsky sat on the counter and talked about the new house, all the while helping himself to the hors d’ oeuvres, earning a scolding slap on the hand. When no treat appeared to be in sight, Sam let out a quiet little woof, just in case they’d forgotten him. It was a somewhat comical sound, coming from a ninety pound dog

“Hey, thought we had a talk about beggin’, Big Dog,” Starsky chastised. Sam stood up, his tail waving like a flag.

“He’s okay.” Gina turned and dropped a cheese cube into the cavernous mouth. Sam swallowed the morsel whole, loudly smacking his lips in the process.

“Have you given anymore thought to the Search and Rescue Program?” she asked Starsky.

“Yeah. I’m interested. You really think he’s got potential?”

“Sure of it. He was the brightest dog in his obedience classes. He’s so eager to please, he responds to praise better than any dog I’ve ever trained.” Gina added little colored toothpicks and a sprig of parsley to the snack tray then asked Starsky to grab the beers. They joined Hutch and Jackie in the den, and found they were already laughing and talking like old friends.

“So how come I never heard of this group?” Starsky asked, drawing the attention of the other couple.

“This is a totally new program. There aren’t very many in existence. The one here in LA is a pilot program made up totally of volunteers. I think Sam is a perfect subject. We’re talking about the Search and Rescue Program,” Gina explained to the others.

“Starsky told me about your idea. I think it’s worth looking into,” Hutch volunteered.

“These people go all over the United States with their dogs to help search for people in disaster areas, to search for lost children, track escaped criminals. Some are even trained to do water searches,” Jackie added. “This program could save hundreds of lives when, and if we ever have another big quake here. Think how valuable they’ll be in searching for people trapped in collapsed buildings.”

Starsky started liking the sound of this. “So, how do we get Big Dog in? And could we just volunteer for assignments here in LA?”

Gina took the beer he offered and settled down on the sofa next to him. “It’s all voluntary, David. You only volunteer for assignments you want to participate in. Sam would be one of the few dogs who could perform with multiple handlers. You, Hutch and I could all work with him. It should be pretty simple since he’s already trained to obey all three of us. And you could quit anytime you like. The catch is, we’d have to work gratis. We wouldn’t even be reimbursed for our expenses. But I believe it would be very rewarding and I think Sam could be one of the best in the business.”

Starsky looked over at his partner. Hutch nodded, silently agreeing to give it a go. He loved Sam and was proud of how far the dog had come from being the abused puppy he and Starsky rescued from the house of a murdered drug dealer only a few months earlier. He knew the dog had potential, and that he loved people. He also believed Sam would revel in the attention.

“Well, if the Blintz is in, I’m in.” Starsky grinned at Hutch, and reached down to scratch the dog’s ear. “How about you, buddy?” Sam woofed loudly, not entirely clear on what Starsky had asked, but from the tone of his human’s voice, he felt sure it must have been good.

The evening passed quickly, coming to an end much too soon. “I hate to break up a good party,” Gina said, “but I know we all have to go to work tomorrow.” Starsky’s arm closed around her tenderly. He didn’t want to call it a night, but he knew she was right.

Hutch stood up first, not wanting to wear out their welcome. “Listen Jackie,” he said quietly, “do you mind if I call you? I had a great time tonight.”

Jackie smiled at him, her blue eyes twinkling with good humor. “I’d really like that, Hutch.”

They walked to the front door, while Starsky helped Gina clear the table. Hutch reached out tentatively and tilted Jackie’s face upward, grazing her lips gently with a soft kiss. He was pleasantly surprised when she responded by pressing back with an unexpected eagerness. Encouraged, he moved

closer, his tongue coaxing her lips apart. After a few seconds, Hutch stepped back, not wanting to press his luck too far. "I'll call you tomorrow."

Jackie looked a little breathless as she nodded her agreement. "Good night, Hutch. I had a really nice time."

"Me too." Hutch smiled at her then sprinted to the beat up old Ford, ecstatic with the way things had gone. It had been awhile since he'd enjoyed the company of a woman so much... For once, Starsky had been right!



Starsky leaned against the Torino, Gina resting against his chest, his arms casually encircling her waist. It was obvious they were comfortable together. Neither felt the need for pointless chatter. They'd been casual friends a number of years; then Sam came onto the scene, creating the catalyst that finally jump-started their relationship.

"Great evening, David. I think Jackie and Hutch actually liked one another."

Starsky smiled, remembering the schoolboy expression on his partner's face when he was introduced to Gina's roommate. "Yeah, the Blintz was all ready to find fault with another blind date. I had to threaten him with bodily harm to get him over here."

"I figured as much." Gina laughed softly. "I hope it works out. Both of them are so nice."

"Well, if it doesn't, it doesn't. We introduced them; that's all we can do. No matchmakin', you hear me?"

Gina leaned her head back, resting it against Starsky's cheek, while gazing up at the stars. "I promise. Whatever they do, it won't become a problem between us. Agreed?"

Starsky's embrace tightened, drawing Gina closer to him. He loved the smell of her hair. His lips played along her ear lobe as he spoke.

"Agreed. Now, how about a kiss, then I have get goin'. Hutch and I have to go early tomorrow mornin' for fire-arm re-certification."

Gina turned and smiled at him languidly, then moved closer to feel his warm lips against hers. She parted hers willingly, to allow his tongue to enter and deepen the kiss. Within a heartbeat, she had physical proof that Starsky was beginning to enjoy himself. She wanted nothing more than to go with the flow, but reluctantly pulled back and quickly kissed on the tip of his nose. "Home!"

"You really know how to hurt a guy," he complained good-naturedly. With a final pat on the head for Sam, Starsky slid behind the wheel of the red Torino and cranked up the engine.

“Thanks again for keepin’ Sam. I’m gonna be moved into the house before the end of the week. I promise.”

“No problem. He’s a sweetheart. I think I love him as much as you and Hutch do. I’ll start the process to get him into the program this week. I understand they have a waiting list, so it may take awhile.”

As though he understood every single word, Sam moved closer to Gina and nuzzled her hand with his cold, wet nose.

Starsky couldn’t help but feel a little hurt that the dog was so amiable to staying behind with Gina. In spite of that, Starsky gave her a lopsided grin. “Here’s lookin’ at you, sweetheart,” he drawled, using his best Bogie impersonation before backing down the driveway. In the rearview mirror, he saw them standing together, watching until he drove out of sight.

***End of Chapter 2***