

GUARDIAN II

The Luck of the Draw by TibbieB

Chapter 4

Hutch pulled up in front of Starsky's new home and parked behind a pickup truck brimming over with tools, ladders, and construction-type odds and ends. He was glad to see that Huggy's contacts had come through. Maybe Starsky and Sam would be able to move in by the weekend as planned.

Poking his head around the door to the master bedroom, he saw Starsky at the top of a ladder, painstakingly painting the narrow strip where the wall and ceiling met. He was wearing Hutch's old red bandanna tied around his forehead, the same bandanna he'd used as a bandage when the two of them had been stranded in the Klamack National Forest last year. Since that narrow escape, Starsky had decided the raggedy, faded bandanna was his good luck charm, and wore it faithfully whenever an opportunity arose. Hutch smiled, noticing the light sprinkles of blue paint dotting his partner's face and clothing.

"Starsk."

Startled by the sound of Hutch's voice, Starsky almost lost his balance, but grabbed the top of the ladder and righted himself. "Bout time you got here, pal. Half the day's gone and there's still a ton of work left to be done."

"Half the day? Starsky, it's only 9:30. And you know, this *is* my day off." Hutch set a box of donuts and a thermos of coffee on a wooden crate near the door. "I guess it's too late for a coffee break."

Starsky scurried down the ladder. "Hold on. Those aren't crème filled are they?"

"Well, only half of them. The rest are jelly. Maybe I can just give them to the workmen." Hutch made a great show of looking into the adjoining hallway. "Where are they?"

"Give me those." Starsky snatched the box out of Hutch's hand. "They can have some after we're finished." Opening the carton, his eyes were lit with anticipation. "These chocolate crème or vanilla?"

"Both. I'll take vanilla."

Surprised by the uncharacteristic request, Starsky handed Hutch a donut then opened the thermos. The rising steam filled the room with the aroma of freshly brewed coffee. Starsky could tell it was his favorite Kona blend, the beans Hutch had bought and kept on hand for special occasions.

“What’s the occasion, partner?”

“Just wanted to celebrate your getting this great place—providing a home for Sam—and introducing me to Jackie.”

Starsky grinned as he poured some of the special brew into a Styrofoam cup and passed it to Hutch. “Now we get down to the real nitty gritty. Your date last night must’a gone pretty well.”

“You could say that.” Hutch’s lips curved upward, turning into a hint of a smile. “She’s fantastic, Starsk. We talked until two this morning.”

“Talked?” Starsky waggled his eyebrows at Hutch.

“Yes, talked. She’s really interesting, and bright. Did you know she’s talked Gina into enrolling in enough classes to earn a degree in forensic chemistry? It’ll mean a big step up career-wise from being a technician.”

“Of course I did. Gina told me all about it. I think it’s terrific.” Starsky poured another cup of coffee and fished out a chocolate crème for himself.

“She’s really quite a girl, Starsk. She’s pretty, fun, and she makes me laugh.”

In spite of his effort to not let it show, Starsky couldn’t help but worry Hutch might be setting himself up for another disappointing romance. He’d stood by and seen his best friend hurt too many times already. He felt compelled to offer some carefully worded warning.

“Hutch...” He stopped, groping for the right words. “I just don’t wanna see you rush into anything.”

“Don’t worry about me; I know what I’m doing.” Hutch’s tone closed the door to further discussion.

“Wait...” Starsky reached out and laid a hand on his partner’s arm.

Already regretting his sharp reply, Hutch smiled reassuringly. “It’s okay, Starsk. I mean it. I’m okay.”

A silent moment passed between them, then Starsky smiled too. “Okay. But I’m here if ya need me.”

Hutch nodded his understanding.

Starsky abruptly changed the subject. “Gina called this morning and said she got in touch with the guy who put together the first Search and Rescue unit here in LA. Said they’re lookin’ for new

recruits and are havin' a meeting tonight at the VFW building on Piedmont and she wanted to know if we could come."

"Sure. I'm ready to get started. Besides, I miss having Sam around."

Starsky smiled and nodded agreement. "Yeah, I know what ya mean. I didn't know I was so used to the big Goomba. It's only been a coupl'a days and I already miss him."

As an afterthought he added, "Hey, why don't you bring Jackie along?"

"Sounds good. I'll give her a call now. Your phone hooked up yet?"

"Yeah, in the kitchen. Leave your dime on the counter," Starsky joked, then climbed back up the ladder with a fresh tray of paint.

Hutch went to the kitchen to make his call. Just as he was hanging up the phone, a loud crash and an angry, "Damn!" came from the direction of the bedroom. Hutch rushed back down the hall to see what all the commotion was about, and found Starsky sprawled on the floor, flat on his back, his face, hair, and a good portion of his body covered in blue paint. The rest of the paint was splashed haphazardly on the walls and the newly polished wooden floors.

"Don't even think of sayin' it," Starsky warned, the paint running in little rivulets down his face. Hutch felt the laughter bubbling up, but fought hard to keep it from erupting as he reached down and offered his partner a hand.

"You hurt, Starsk?"

"Only my pride," he grimaced. "How 'bout grabbin' a towel so I can mop some of this mess off before I traipse it through the house?"

"Sure. But I've got to tell you—blue's a good color for you."

End of Chapter 4