

GUARDIAN II

The Luck of the Draw by TibbieB

Chapter 9

Huggy looked up from behind the bar when the two detectives entered the club. He wasn't surprised to see them. He'd not had any helpful information when Hutch called earlier, and hoped something had happened to help break the case. Kidnapping was a nasty business, especially when children were involved. Even hardened criminals looked down on people who hurt kids.

"I been expecting you two. What's happenin'?"

Starsky and Hutch each took a seat at the bar. "We're hoping you can tell us," Starsky answered for them. Huggy drew a couple of beers on tap and set them on the counter in front of the two cops.

"I been asking around all day. Everybody wants to know what the dude looks like. Got the sketch?"

Hutch reached into his jacket pocket and produced a folded xerox copy of the artist's sketch of Bowman. "I think we've got a positive ID. We're holding off on releasing the name in case the guy panics."

"I dig it. May get scared and waste the kid." Huggy looked at the drawing, trying to recall if he'd ever seen the man before; he didn't look even vaguely familiar.

"He doesn't have a record," Hutch said, reading Huggy's mind. "We're going by the station now to pick up a search warrant and hit his apartment. Thought we'd drop this by for you to show around."

"Yeah, okay. Check back after and I'll try to have somethin' for you."

"Thanks, Hug." Starsky tossed a couple of bucks on the bar for the untouched beers.

"Yeah, well don't thank me yet, Starsky. But I'll see what I can do."



The apartment was in a rundown section of the city, the streets crowded with homeless people--some users, some dealers, some just down on their luck and nowhere to go. The front door to the shabby apartment building was jammed and it took several attempts before Starsky finally forced it to

swing open. They went directly to the apartment manager, who was less than accommodating, and showed him the warrant.

“I knew that guy was trouble,” the sixtyish, balding man said when he reappeared at the door with the keys. “Been here five months and ain’t paid his rent on time even once.” The man didn’t bother putting on his shoes, just padded out into the hall in stocking feet, his huge beer-belly drooping low over the waistband of his jogging pants. Hutch noticed that the grungy undershirt he wore looked like it hadn’t seen a washer and detergent for the better part of a month.

“So he’s been here five months? Seen him in the last coupl’a days?” Starsky asked. They followed the man up three flights of stairs.

“What do I look like? His personal secretary?” he snapped back sarcastically.

Starsky reached out and grabbed the grotesque man by the waistband of his pants, bringing him to an abrupt halt. When the guy turned, he found Starsky inches from his face, in no mood to argue.

“Listen, asshole, there’s a young girl’s life at stake here. I don’t have time for your bullshit. Just answer the question.”

“Okay, okay...calm down. I ain’t seen him since day before yesterday. He had some big black car I ain’t never seen before, parked in the alley out back. I was takin’ out the garbage. Looked like he was puttin’ a new license tag on it or somethin’.”

“That’s better. Now, that wasn’t so hard was it?”

“Starsk...” Hutch laid a restraining hand on his partner’s shoulder. “Let’s search the room. Maybe we’ll find something.” He turned to the manager. “Step aside. Don’t try to open the door until we’re sure he’s not in there. You could get hurt.”

The obese man quickly moved to the other side of Hutch, who was pressed up against the wall left of the door. He waited for Starsky to get into position on the right, then used the barrel of his gun to rap on the door.

“Police, open up!” No response. Again. No sound from within.

“Okay.” He motioned for the man to unlock the door.

“You ain’t gonna tear the place up are you?” The manager fumbled around with the key and finally succeeded in unlocking the door. Starsky motioned him back then he and Hutch entered the room, their guns poised. Once they were sure the room was empty, they began a systematic search, all the while ignoring the complaining man who continued to stand in the doorway sputtering about ‘damages’ and ‘rights’.

“Starsk, come in here a minute.”

Starsky followed the sound of Hutch's voice and found himself in Bowman's bedroom. The walls were cluttered with snapshots, mostly Polaroids of the Reynolds family.

"Would ya look at this. I'd say Stanley Bowman's been a busy boy," Starsky said. As he came closer he could see that the majority of the photos featured Jenny; at home, at school, and many places he didn't recognize.

Hutch could feel the bile rising in his throat as he looked at the pretty, innocent teen's photos tacked all over the wall. "This is one sick puppy."

"Hutch, this kid's in real danger."

Hutch took a deep breath and tried to focus. "It's worse than we thought. Come on, let's search this room. Maybe we'll find something to help us figure out where's he's holding her."

"Like this?" Starsky held up a crumpled sheet of paper he had discovered on the dressing table. "It's a bill from Shady Meadows Convalescence Home. This is probably where his father's staying. Think he could help us?"

"I doubt it. According to Reynolds, he can't even help himself." Starsky tossed the invoice back onto the dresser and began searching the drawers. "You think maybe that's what this is all about? Revenge, not money?"

"I don't know, Starsk, but I'm really scared for Jenny. Seeing this room, I'm less optimistic that we'll get her out of this alive."

"Look." Starsky interrupted. He held up a map of the city. "He's marked off some areas in red."

"You're kidding. This guy's not exactly a pro is he?"

"Could'a left it here to throw us off."

"He doesn't even know that we've figured out who he is," Hutch pointed out. They spread the map out on the bed between them.

"This isn't gonna help much. He's marked four different areas, all of them large. It could take a coupl'a days to search 'em." Starsky folded the map and slipped it into his jacket pocket and continued the search.

Hutch went into the kitchen and found the telephone with a message pad mounted on the wall beside it. "Starsky, he has Reynolds' name and phone number written next to the phone. It may not help us find Jenny, but it's a hell of a compelling piece of evidence."

“Better go ahead and call Dobby and let him know we’ve confirmed Bowman’s our man. Maybe he’s called by now,” Starsky said, joining him in the kitchen.

The call to Dobby was disappointing; no word from Bowman and no sightings from the APB. The captain lowered his voice as he told Hutch that the Reynoldses were both approaching their breaking points. “I hope we get a break before it’s too late.”

“Cap, it could already be too late.”

Dobby said nothing, his silence confirming he had considered the possibility.

“We’re going back by Huggy’s. Maybe he had some luck showing the sketch around,” Hutch told him.

Dobby sighed deeply. “Yeah, okay. Then you two go home and get some rest. I’m going to stick around here.”



The stop by Huggy’s was unproductive. He promised to call if he heard anything and gave the two exhausted cops a couple of burgers on the house before they left.

“Wanna go by Gina’s and see how Sam did?” Starsky suggested as he cranked up the Torino.

“Sure, why not? Don’t think it’s too late? It’s almost midnight.”

“Nah, I told her we’d try to come by if it was possible. Maybe Jackie’s there too.”

Jackie answered the bell and invited the guys in. At the sound of Starsky’s voice, Sam loped into the foyer and greeted both men with boisterous woofs and lots of wet, slobbery kisses. He couldn’t think of a more perfect ending to a great evening.

“Hey, Big Dog. How ya doin’ boy?” Starsky affectionately scratched Sam’s ears and accepted his good-natured nuzzles. Then Sam quickly abandoned him to lavish an equal measure of affection on Hutch.

“We’d about given up on you two,” Jackie said, leading them into the living room. Curled up in an overstuffed chair with a book, Gina looked up and smiled.

“Hope we aren’t dropping by too late.” Starsky gave Gina an apologetic smile before bending down to brush her lips with a soft kiss.

“Not at all. In fact, I would’ve been disappointed if you hadn’t. Any luck on the case?”

“Well, we know who the creep is, but don’t know where he’s keeping the kid.” Starsky thought for the hundredth time how nice it was to have a girlfriend who not only understood what it was to be a cop, but was also interested and knowledgeable about his job. Even more important, she seemed to understand the bond that he and Hutch shared, and didn’t resent their friendship.

When Hutch and Jackie sat down on the sofa, Sam didn’t wait for an invitation before planting himself between them. “How did he do in class?” Hutch leaned forward, trying to see past the dog’s gigantic head. Jackie didn’t seem the least bit bothered by the intrusion.

“I didn’t go along. Had to run some tests for the DA tonight on the Jordan murder case. But according to Gina, he was terrific.”

“You’d have been proud of him,” Gina said. “Tom told me he’d never seen a dog catch on so quickly.”

Sensing they were talking about him, Sam jumped off the sofa and joined Starsky in the large lazy boy chair. His weight triggered the spring mechanism in the chair, and Starsky found himself catapulting backwards until the chair reached an abrupt stop. Sam’s front paws pinned him down while the dog delivered an affectionate face washing. “Knock it off, ya big lug!” Realizing he was fighting a losing battle, Starsky closed his arms in a big bear hug around the wiggling dog.

“I’d say he misses you,” Gina giggled at the comical pair.

“Kind of looks that way,” Starsky agreed. “So, Big Dog, did you behave yourself?”

“He was as good as gold, and I think he enjoyed it just as much as I did.” Gina’s voice was filled with warmth as she bragged on Sam’s performance.

“Tom has a natural talent with the dogs and Sam took right in with him. We started out with scent tracking.”

Starsky continued to absently scratch behind the big dog’s ears while he listened.

“Each trainer had to give him a personal item to hide; then with the timer running, the dogs had to locate them. Sam found my scarf in record time for a beginner.”

“That’s not surprising to me,” Starsky boasted. “You’re a smart dog, aren’t you fella?” Sam’s big pink tongue lolled out the side of his mouth, dripping saliva all over Starsky’s shirt while his tail beat a rapid tattoo on Starsky’s knees.

As his initial excitement subsided, Sam relaxed and settled himself like a heavy wool blanket across Starsky’s torso, resting his massive head on his person’s shoulder. With a deep sigh, he turned his head at an awkward angle to look at Hutch, seeking approval of his decision to stay with Starsky a little while.

“Look at this. I told ya he likes me better,” Starsky gloated.

“He doesn’t like you better, Starsky,” Hutch argued. “He just thinks you’re a big, lumpy bed.”

“Oh yeah? Well, I don’t see him over there resting his head on *your* shoulder.” As the two started their bickering again, Sam came to attention, wondering what happened to set them off this time. He turned his anxious face to Gina, willing her to intercede.

“Poor baby! You guys are upsetting him,” Gina scolded. Sam hopped off Starsky’s lap and went to Gina. Without waiting for an invitation, he jumped onto her lap and began the ‘face washing’ ceremony once again.

“Traitor,” Starsky grumbled.

“Oh I don’t know, Starsk. If I had a choice of sitting in your lap or the lap of a beautiful woman, it would be an easy choice for me,” Hutch teased.

When the four of them began laughing, Sam looked around the room, unsure what was so funny. It didn’t really matter, though. All he cared about was being included in this world where everyone apparently loved him.

Realizing it was getting late and that they could be called back to the Reynolds estate at any time, Hutch reluctantly suggested they call it a night. When Sam saw them preparing to leave, he planted himself squarely in the doorway and refused to move.

The minute the door cracked, he used his nose to open it far enough to barrel past the four people and take a flying leap through the open window of the Torino. Impatiently, the dog poked his head out the window, barking for the two men to take him home.

“Oh no! Sam, you get back up here this instance,” Gina called. Starsky and Hutch followed her to the car, intending to help her coax Sam out. When they arrived, he hopped into the back seat, taking his normal “patrolling” position, obviously ready for action.

Gina marched up to the car. Utilizing the basic lessons in ‘Dog Obedience 101’, she sternly ordered the dog, “Sam—Come!”

Sam lowered his head, not making eye contact with the woman. He knew the drill. He knew he should obey. But knowing and doing were two different things. Gina waited till the count of five, then, again, “Sam—I said come! She didn’t think it was possible for a solid mass the size of the rottweiler to dissolve into a little puddle in the back seat of the car, but before their very eyes, he flattened himself out and tried to disappear from sight.

“Come on out’a there, Sam.” Starsky pulled the back of the passenger’s seat forward, hoping the dog would jump out on his own. No response.

“Let me try again.” Gina came forward, deciding on a softer tactic. She stooped down just outside the car door and coaxed, “Come on, Big Dog, it’s time for the guys to go. You have to stay with Jackie and me a few more nights. They still love you.” No response.

“I’ll handle this.” Hutch forcefully strode up to the car and said in a stern voice, “Okay Sam, this isn’t funny. Come out of there right now.”

Sam’s ears flattened against his head, as his body once more seemed to wilt before their eyes. As a final gesture of dejection, he laid his big head on his front paws and let out a pitiful whine.

Starsky leaned forward and looked down at the woe-be-gone expression on the dog’s face and saw what he thought must be tears in his eyes.

“Oh man, Hutch! Look what ya done now! He’s cryin’. I can’t believe you’d make him cry.”

Feeling lower than low, Hutch leaned in and looked at the dog’s mournful expression. “I’m sorry, Sam,” he mumbled self-consciously, then reached in and tried to pet the dog’s head. Sam inched away from his touch and dropped head down on his paws again.

“I didn’t mean it, boy.” Hutch couldn’t believe he was actually apologizing to a dog. But it was distressing to see the dog so demoralized. “Come on, Sam. Let’s be friends again.”

This time, the dog allowed Hutch to pat him on the head. Sam tried hard not to respond, but couldn’t keep his tail from wagging a little. Hutch took this as a sign that most likely, he’d been forgiven. “I believe we’ve just been given a lesson in ‘Guilt 101’,” the blonde detective complained.

Starsky turned to the two women and said almost apologetically, “Listen, I think maybe it’ll be okay if he comes home with me tonight. Nobody’s gonna be around to see me smuggle him in.”

“What about your case?” Even as she spoke, Gina knew it was pointless to argue.

“We’re gonna mostly be on the street, aren’t we, Hutch?”

“Mostly,” Hutch agreed, not willing to say anything else to upset Sam.

“Well, it’s up to you. If you need to bring him back over, you k

now where the spare key is.” She reached up and gave Starsky and quick kiss, knowing his decision was made. “Just try to get a little rest, okay? You look exhausted.”

As the Torino pulled away from the curb, Jackie looked at her friend and shook her head.

“Good grief. What a trio.”

Gina laughed to herself. “Yeah...aren’t they great?”

End of Chapter 9