

GUARDIAN II
The Luck of the Draw
by *TibbieB*

Epilogue

“Just put it down here...no, here...on second thought, maybe over here would be better.” Indecision crinkled Gina’s brow as she changed her mind for the third time. Starsky and Hutch had moved the sofa so many times, they were both ready to throw up their hands in surrender.

“Well, it’s your place,” she conceded. “Where do *you* want it?”

Hutch rolled his eyes in exasperation, willing Starsky to take control of the situation. He wasn’t sure who’d appointed Gina “director of the move” to Starsky’s new home, but at this rate, it was going to take days!

Before Starsky could answer, Sam bounded onto the sofa and plopped down, heaving a loud sigh. “I guess that settles it,” Starsky said. “We’ll leave it right here.”

Hutch perched on the arm, waiting for Gina to change her mind again. Except for a couple of dark bruises and a few minor scrapes and scratches on his face and hands, there were no obvious signs that he’d been virtually ‘buried alive’ only two days earlier.

Quietly Huggy peered around the door, hoping he’d timed his visit to avoid moving the heavier pieces of furniture. “Hi, Huggy! You’re just in time for a beer,” Jackie said, spying him from across the room. Carrying a tray of ice cold bottles of brew and a bowl of corn chips and salsa, she joined the others.

“Just here to deliver a little housewarming gift; one that no respectable, bachelor pad should be without.” With a flourish, Huggy stepped from behind the door carrying a large, silvered, disco-ball. The gaudy, sphere glittered beneath the ceiling light, it’s tiny mirrored scales winking, and casting colored beads of light on the walls.

Starsky’s reaction was something akin to awe, as he reverently reached out and touched one of the mirrors. “Aw, geez, Hug, ya shouldn’t have.”

Hutch glanced at Jackie, who was smiling at Starsky’s childlike response to the garish prop.

“This is terrific, Hug.” Starsky exclaimed, “Just what the place needs—right Hutch?”

Hutch tried to hide his dismay at the idea of a mirror ball hanging in the ceiling of his partner's living room. Good grief, wasn't the flashing traffic signal light in the corner enough? Just how much could a man take?

"Actually, Starsk—"

"Actually, it makes an interesting conversation piece," Gina smoothly interjected.

Taking the hint, Hutch politely changed the subject. "Huggy, I thought your cousin, the plumber, was going to take a look at that faucet in the bath tub. It's still not working correctly."

Huggy shrugged, avoided meeting Hutch's eyes, and mumbled, "He already came out. Says there's nothing he can do about it. It's not a plumbing problem."

"What do ya mean, 'it's not a plumbin' problem? He calls a faucet turnin' on all by itself not a plumbin' problem?"

"He checked it out, Starsky," Huggy hedged. "He even put a new fixture on and tried it, but the same thing happened. This isn't a job for a plumber, if you dig."

"Well, I don't dig. Just what are ya tryin' to say?" Starsky pressed for an explanation, but Huggy was evasive.

"That's all I know, man. Leroy says there's nothing no plumber can do about *that* problem. Sorry, Starsky, but that's the way it is."

"So what am I supposed to do? Huh? Do I need to get some other kind of repairman out here? I don't understand what's goin' on."

"I think he's trying to tell you it's the ghost," Hutch suggested. Aside from the almost indiscernible twitch at the corners of his mouth, the blonde's expression was strictly deadpan.

"Aw come on, Hutch, don't give me that. You don't even believe in spirits and stuff. Stop tryin' to make a fool out'a me."

"No...he's right, man." Huggy reluctantly met Starsky's astonished glare. He'd hoped to avoid this conversation entirely, but resigned himself to having to be the one to tell Starsky what people were saying.

"It took me calling in a lot of favors just to get Leroy out here. This place has a rep. Nobody wants to come near it."

Starsky's looked from Huggy's face to his partner's, then back again. "Hutch put you up to this, right?"

“Don’t be paranoid. I didn’t put him up to anything. But I did do some checking on this place. I’m not sure you’ll want to know what I found out.” Hutch managed, with great difficulty, to maintain a serious expression.

Starsky swallowed hard, his Adam’s apple noticeably bobbing up and down. “Go on...”

“Seems that the guy who died here drowned in the bath tub. He was fully clothed, so it’s on the books as an unsolved homicide. Someone apparently slipped up behind, overpowered him and held him under the water until he drowned.”

Starsky’s face went from skeptical to deathly white in two seconds flat. Still unwilling to accept this wasn’t just another of Hutch’s pranks, he quickly recovered and assumed an attitude of total indifference. “Yeah, right—and I suppose Abe Lincoln’s ghost can be seen strolling up and down the hallway at midnight too, huh?” he said drolly.

“I’m serious, Starsk. I pulled the report on this place and that’s what the autopsy showed. It was ruled a homicide by asphyxiation, but no suspect or motive was ever discovered. Maybe Charlie—that was his name—is just trying to finish his bath.”

Hutch didn’t dare chance a look at Jackie, for fear he’d lose it and burst out laughing. He almost felt sorry for Starsky; but everything he’d just told him was the truth. Of course, there was a logical explanation; there had to be. He just didn’t exactly know what it was yet. Still, he’d have a little fun with his partner in the meantime.

“I still say you’re makin’ this up. You tryin’ to scare me or somethin’? Huh? Is that it? Cause it ain’t gonna work.”

“Okay. Al right. Believe whatever you want.”

“I know there’s no ghost in this house,” Starsky told them adamantly.

“*How* do you know?” Huggy asked. “Maybe Hutch is right. Maybe the dude doesn’t know he’s dead.”

“I know cause of him.” Starsky pointed at Sam, who had made himself quite comfortable. The 110 pound dog took up at least half of the sofa. Laying on his back, all four paws extended above him, he resembled an armadillo who’d met an untimely end while tangling with an eighteen-wheeler on the highway.

“I’m not following you. He’s not exactly intimidating, unless the ghost is afraid Sam will roll off the sofa and land on him,” Hutch countered.

“Well, everybody knows dogs have a sixth sense,” he explained smugly. “If there was a ghost here, Sam would know it.”

As though on cue, the dog’s head snapped to attention, his peaceful slumber, and dreams of dancing soup bones disappearing in a blink. Ears peaked high, the rottweiler cocked his head at an awkward angle and listened. Slowly the hackles on his muscular back rose, as a low guttural sound rumbled from deep within his throat. Spellbound, the five humans watched as Sam quietly abandoned the sofa, and on silent paws crept to the bathroom. As he pushed the door open with his huge snout, the sound of running water could be heard drifting back to where they stood.

Finally breaking the silence, Hutch turned and smiled cheerily at Starsky’s wide-eyed, almost comical expression.

“You know, I think you’re right, Starsk. Dogs really *do* have a sixth sense.”

Hutch affectionately slung an arm around Starsky’s shoulders and beamed, “Happy housewarming, partner!”

The End

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March 2000

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