

Summary: Jim and Blair explore the options of a gay couple to start a family, and embark on a journey with miraculous consequences.

Categories: [The Sentinel](#) Characters: Blair Sandburg, Ensemble, Jim Ellison, Jim/Blair, Original, Simon Banks

Genres: Slash

Warnings: Anal Sex, Angst, AU, Birth, Complete, Explicit Sexual Situations, H/C, m/m, Scientific Conception

Challenges: None

Series: None

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Chapter 1 by NatalieL

Author's Notes:

Previously in a zine by the same title, published by AngelWings Press.

All "science" contained herein is completely science fiction from my own fertile imagination with ideas supplemented from <http://www.members.tripod.com/~annierichards/pregnant.htm> (no longer a valid URL, sorry) and comments from my betas.

Medical facts are from the book *What to Expect When You're Expecting**.

In this storyline, TSbyBS didn't happen.

Acknowledgments: I would like to extend my thanks to everyone who helped to make this a better story through suggestions and betas: Kimberly, Mary, Loren and H-A. Thanks bunches, gals!

"God, Jim, I didn't know it could get this bad," Blair panted. He was on his knees, leaning over the toilet. "There's nothing left to come up."

Jim rubbed his back in gentle circles. "Ready to try a little water?"

"No!" Blair retched, as dry heaves overtook him once again.

"But you need to keep up your fluids or you'll end up back in the hospital for dehydration. You know how Lynne'd slap my hands if I let that happen."

"Back off!" Blair growled. "I so do not need my Blessed Protector right now!"

Jim recoiled, stung by the sharp words. "I was just trying to help," he said softly.

Blair turned and sat on the floor, his back supported by the toilet bowl. "I know, Jim, I'm sorry. I just feel so shitty right now, and it makes me bitchy. I'm really glad you're here with me." He noted the disbelieving look on his lover's face. "Honest." He leaned forward to crawl across the floor, placing a peck on Jim's cheek and wrapping his arms around the man's shoulders.

Jim made a move to kiss Blair, but his lover pulled back. "You really do not want to taste my mouth right now," he laughed. "Let me brush my teeth."

He made a move to stand but the room spun and his knees gave way. Strong arms wrapped around his waist and steadied him, lowering him onto the now-closed toilet seat. "You okay?"

"Just a little done in by the nausea, I guess." Blair sighed and slumped his shoulders.

Jim knelt in front of him, resting his hands on Blair's knees. "Is there anything I can do? Anything at all?" He looked up into misted blue eyes. "Sometimes I feel like this is all my fault. I could have been the one."

"No, Jim, you couldn't. You can't get time off your job the way I can. You couldn't stand to be idle, while I've got my dissertation to work on. And," he looked Jim in the eye with a ghost of a smile, "I'm a whole lot younger than you."

"But the nausea?" Jim persisted, refusing to rise to the bait.

"Will go away with time, or so Lynne says," Blair assured him. "Meanwhile, do you suppose you could help me into the living room? I think I'd like to lie down on the couch."

"Sure thing, Chief." He swept Blair up in his arms, surprised that he seemed lighter than he remembered.

"Thanks." Blair settled himself on the couch, pulling his knees up to his chest in an effort to ease the sickness. "You think carrying me is hard on your back now," he teased, trying to lighten Jim's mood, "just wait seven months."

"When you blow up like a balloon, you'll be on your own," Jim chuckled. He perched on the edge of the couch and began rubbing soothing circles against Blair's back once again.

"Mmmm.... That's nice," the anthropologist murmured, snuggling into the touch.

"Feel better?" Jim leaned over to kiss Blair's cheek, then smoothed some fly-away hair from his face.

"A little," Blair said, his voice soft. "It comes and goes."

"Have you been able to keep any food down today?" Jim was worried that his lover seemed to be losing weight, instead of gaining.

"Some crackers this morning."

"That's all?" Jim was aghast.

"I really haven't felt much like eating, Jim," Blair explained. "Even thinking of food makes me nauseous."

"I'm going to get you some orange juice, and I don't want any arguments. It will increase your blood sugar and help replenish your fluids. You need to keep drinking, even if you can't eat. I don't want you passing out on me the next time you try to stand up."

Blair looked a little green when Jim returned from the kitchen with a tall glass of cold juice. He set the glass down and helped pull his reluctant partner to a sitting position. The world swam before Blair's eyes, and he grabbed his head to stop the spinning.

An arm immediately wrapped itself around his shoulder, and the glass of juice was pressed into his hand. "Drink," Jim ordered.

Blair sipped with lackluster enthusiasm, setting the glass down after drinking less than a fourth of the contents. Jim sighed and pulled his lover into an embrace. "I know this stinks, Sweetheart. You're so brave, so strong. I can't believe you're doing this for us... having our baby." Blair snuggled into his arms, content, for the time being, to be held and nurtured.

Ten weeks previously--
The Caitlin Infertility Clinic:

The office had the sterile appearance of so many doctors' offices. Blair shifted a bit uncomfortably in his seat, even though the chairs were richly cushioned. Jim reached over and patted his hand, smiling reassurances. "Nervous?"

"Yeah, a little. I know we talked about it, but this just makes it all seem so real, you know?" He looked around the office at the degrees hanging on the wall, at the family photos artfully arranged on the desk. "This is a big step. I don't know if I'm up to it."

"My Blair, not feeling up to a challenge? That'll be the day," Jim chuckled.

"But you're not the one who's going to have to put up with swollen ankles and an expanding waistline! I read the brochures, man, and this is not something to be taken lightly." Blair sighed, staring down at his hands.

"If you're having second thoughts, Blair, we don't have to do this. I don't want to push you into anything."

"No. No, I want to do this, Jim. Really, I do. It's just an awesome responsibility, you know?"

"Yeah, I know," Jim agreed just as the office door opened. A handsome woman dressed in a gray suit and a white doctor's smock entered the room.

"Good morning, gentlemen," she greeted, holding out her hand to the couple. "I'm Dr. Casey, but you can call me Lynne."

Both men had risen at her entrance.

"Hello, Doctor." Jim took the proffered hand and shook. "I'm Jim Ellison, and this is my partner, Blair Sandburg." Blair shook her hand in turn, and Lynne sat down.

After both men were seated, Lynne opened a folder on her desk and looked at it briefly. She smiled and looked up at the couple. "So, you've decided you want to add to your family. May I ask why you're going this route, instead of trying adoption?"

"Well," Blair began, "despite the fact that gay couples are gaining more recognition, there's still a stigma attached. Most adoption agencies don't want to give a child to a same-sex couple. They

feel a baby needs both a mother and a father."

"And you feel differently?"

"Oh, yeah! I was raised by my mom. She handled it all by herself, and I admire her for that. I never had a father in my life, and I think I turned out all right."

"'All right' is a relative term." Jim smiled mischievously. "But I agree. Blair and I are both capable people, and we're more than able to nurture a child. I don't see that the parents' gender should play a major role in child-rearing."

"Looking at your records," Lynne indicated the folder, "I don't disagree. So, you've decided to try our option instead?" She smiled as the two men nodded. "Well, then, let me explain the procedure a bit.

"First, we take an egg from an anonymous female donor. Using micro-technology, we remove the DNA from the nucleus of the cell." She paused to look in the folder on her desk. "I see you've decided that Mr. Sandburg will be carrying the baby?"

"Yes." Blair nodded in agreement.

"Well, Mr. Sandburg..."

"Blair."

"Well, Blair, we'll start you on hormone injections about a month before we implant the embryo. This will allow your body to adapt, and make you better able to carry to term. We'll then extract the DNA from one of your X-chromosome bearing sperm samples and inject it back into the egg. Next, the egg is placed in a dish along with several others and a sample of Jim's sperm is introduced. Hopefully, nature will take its course, and one or more of the eggs will become fertilized. The beauty of this procedure is that the resulting child will be truly yours, both of yours, genetically."

"Cool. I really like the sound of that, don't you, Jim?"

Jim smiled at the excitement in the young scientist's voice. "Yeah, that's great," he agreed.

Lynne continued. "We'll take one of the fertilized embryos and implant it in your abdominal cavity just under the peritoneum," she told Blair. "This will result in what is essentially an ectopic pregnancy. We'll need to keep you on high levels of estrogen and progesterone, especially during the first trimester, to ensure the embryo attaches properly and begins to grow normally. After that, the pregnancy itself should take over, and your body will produce the hormones on its own. We'll monitor the hormone levels carefully, supplementing if necessary. I should warn you, the possibility of hemorrhage is high, especially in the first three months. Chances are, if the pregnancy ruptures, you'd bleed to death internally before you could even get to a hospital." She looked at each man in turn, assuring herself they understood the risks. "There's one other thing to consider. Because of the high levels of hormones you'll be receiving, you'll probably develop breasts. I hope that won't be a problem." At Blair's look of distress, she added, "It's only temporary, during the pregnancy, and while you're on the hormones." Blair released a sigh, looking somewhat relieved.

"Ah, come on ... breasts. Think about it." Jim leered at his partner.

"Would you please get your mind out of the gutter and concentrate here a bit, Tarzan?"

"You calling me an 'ape man'?"

"If the shoe fits...."

Lynne recognized the nervous byplay for exactly what it was, a way to cope with the overwhelming implications of what these two were about to embark upon. "You're also going to go through all the ups and downs of any pregnancy," she added, "such as early trimester nausea, aching back, flat feet, that certain 'waddle' pregnant women are so famous for. I'd highly suggest you go home, discuss what we've covered here today, and see if this is really what you want to do. It's a big step, and entails high levels of risk. You should both be certain before we continue."

She smiled to ease the mounting tension in the room. "Now, do either of you have any questions?"

Blair looked up from examining his fingernails to look at the doctor. "You said you'd try to fertilize several eggs, yet you're only implanting one. If more than one embryo develops, what happens to the ones you don't implant?"

"That's a very good question, and I'm glad you brought that up. Unless you have objections, the remaining embryos will be frozen. That way, if anything happens and you lose the first implant, or should you decide to have a second child later, the embryos will be there for the procedure."

"What about the ones that we never use, though?" Blair persisted. He had rested his elbows on the edge of the doctor's desk and was leaning toward her, a worried look on his face.

"The dispensation of the remaining embryos is up to the parents. They can be frozen indefinitely, or they can be destroyed."

Blair gasped in alarm at the revelation. "No...."

"Please, Mr. Sandburg, don't be concerned. It will be your choice--yours and Mr. Ellison's. Of course, you can always donate them to other infertile couples or to research."

Blair sat back and resumed the study of his hands, which were resting in his lap. "It's our decision," he clarified.

"One hundred percent yours," Lynne assured him.

"Okay, then," Blair agreed. He looked up at Jim, who nodded.

"I think we need a little time to talk this out," Jim told the doctor. "We'll make another appointment for next week to let you know our decision."

"A wise choice, gentlemen. Should you decide that this procedure isn't your cup of tea, please just give us a call, and we'll cancel your appointment. It was very nice meeting you both. Good luck with your decision. It's a tough one, I know." She smiled and extended her hand once more. Jim accepted and shook, but Blair was nervously pacing near the door.

"I think I'd better get him home," Jim said, nodding his head toward his lover.
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"Maybe this isn't the right method for us, Blair," Jim argued.

"What other method is there? You honestly think some agency will let us adopt? You're not planning on going on the black market? Jim, you wouldn't!" Blair looked worriedly over at his partner.

"No, of course not, but think about it.... You could die. I'm not sure it's worth risking your life."

"Every woman who has ever had a baby risked something, too. My risks are just a little higher."

"A LITTLE? Listen to yourself! We're talking major surgery here, not to mention the hormones. Do you have any idea what female hormones are going to do to you? Do you?"

"Yes, Jim," Blair tried to answer calmly. "I've been reading up on it and I do know. I'll be moody; up one minute, down the next. My body is going to change, but that's a given. I may lose some body hair. I'll probably develop breasts. I may even start to lactate in the later stages. As disgusting as that sounds, I still want to do this." He paused, staring Jim down. "Don't you?"

"I'm just worried about you," Jim explained. "You understand that, don't you? You're the most important thing in my life. I don't know what I'd do without you. Of course I want the baby. I'm just ... just..."

"Worried, yeah, I know." Blair wrapped his arms around Jim's waist and rested his head against his lover's shoulder. "But it's going to be all right, you'll see."

One week later:

Doctor Lynne Casey looked across her desk at the couple. "It's good to see you again. I take it you've come to a decision?"

"We discussed it," Blair informed her, "and decided to go through with the procedure."

"Very good. We can start you on the hormones today, Blair. We have donor eggs on hand, so there should be very little delay. We'll get the semen samples today, before your production is limited by the hormones," she explained. "Do you have any other questions, before we get started?"

Blair turned to Jim and raised his eyebrows. Jim looked back, shaking his head slightly. Blair nudged him in the side with an elbow until, finally, Jim spoke up. "What about sex?"

Dr. Casey smiled. "You know, that's probably one of the most frequently asked questions by any couple considering a pregnancy. Generally, for heterosexual couples, as long as nausea and fatigue don't get in the way, there's really very little reason to abstain. In your case, however, because the chance of miscarriage is high, I counsel my patients to wait until at least the fourth month. Then, if you both feel comfortable, and everything else is going as planned, there's no reason to restrict your activity. Blair may find intercourse difficult after the eighth month, but whether you decide to abstain from that point on will be totally up to the two of you."

Jim reached across the small space separating them and squeezed Blair's hand. Turning back to the doctor, he asked, "So when can we get this show on the road?"

"How about right now? Blair, I'd like you to come in here," she stood, indicating the door to an examination room. "I'm going to give you a quick physical, start you on the hormone regime and then ask you to collect a semen sample for me."

"And the surgery?" Jim asked as Blair rose to enter the exam room.

"Well, the procedure for implanting the DNA and then fertilizing the eggs takes about a week from beginning to end. Blair should be on the hormone treatment about four weeks to get his body receptive to the implantation. We'll freeze the eggs and semen samples until he's begun his fourth week of injections. After that, everything should be good to go." She handed Jim a cup and

smiled. "The bathroom is that way. There are magazines, if you need the inspiration."

Jim gave her a caustic glance, but took the proffered cup and turned in the indicated direction.

Four weeks later:

"You ready for this?" Jim held Blair's hand as the gurney was wheeled toward the surgery suite.

Blair gave Jim's hand a weak squeeze. "As ready as I'm gonna get," he whispered, groggy from the light anesthesia he'd already been given.

"I'll be here when you wake up," Jim told his lover as he stood by the swinging double doors and watched Blair disappear behind their impressive bulk.

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"How are you feeling?" Jim hovered over the ghostly pale form in the hospital bed.

"Sore," came the soft response.

"That's to be expected." The voice of Dr. Lynne Casey sounded from the doorway. "You just had major abdominal surgery. We'll have you up and walking the hallways by this evening, and, if you behave yourself, you can go home in two days." She walked over to the bed.

"The surgery went very well. I don't foresee any problems with this pregnancy, except for the normal discomforts you'd expect. I do expect you to take it extra easy the next couple of months, though. I'm not ordering bed rest, but I do expect you to restrict your activities. Nothing even remotely strenuous." Blair nodded his agreement. "Feel any nausea yet?"

"No," Blair answered, not feeling up to long conversations.

"Well, then, do you feel up to a little Jell-O?" Blair made a disapproving face. "Maybe a little applesauce or pudding?" Blair shook his head, suddenly looking a little green around the edges.

Grabbing the nearest container off a side table, Jim shoved it under Blair's chin just before the young man emptied the contents of his stomach. He winced at the stench, barely remembering to dial down his sense of smell. He wiped up the mess when Blair was finished and offered his lover a glass of water. Blair sipped cautiously, unsure if even that would stay down.

"Sorry," Blair apologized weakly. "Didn't mean to puke on you like that." He settled back against his pillows, looking exhausted.

Dr. Casey patted his shoulder. "It gets better," she assured. "I'll come by and check on you this evening. If either of you want to get a hold of me before then, just tell one of the nurses. They all know how to contact me."

"Thanks, Lynne." Blair smiled weakly. "We really do appreciate this."

"No problem, Blair. You just take care of yourself and that baby." She turned to leave.

Jim leaned down and placed a chaste kiss on Blair's forehead. "I'll be right back." He followed Dr. Casey out into the hall.

"Lynne?"

"Yes, Jim?"

"You're sure everything's fine?" he asked nervously. "You can tell me, you know, if it's not."

Dr. Casey smiled and shook her head. "It's a risky procedure, I won't kid you there, but Blair pulled through with flying colors. I really don't expect any problems. We'll monitor him closely, especially through the first trimester, but I don't see any reason, at this point, why you should worry."

Jim looked marginally relieved at the news. "Thanks," he said succinctly.

"You just take care of him," Dr. Casey admonished, "and he'll do fine." She smiled and walked off, leaving Jim to return to the new mother-to-be.

Six weeks:

Jim settled on the couch next to his weary partner, wrapping an arm around sagging shoulders. "Have a rough day?"

"You know it.... The toilet has become my new best friend."

"I wish I didn't have to go into work and leave you here by yourself, but Simon's got this big serial murder case, and he wants me heading the task force."

"It's okay, Jim. Really. There isn't anything you could do, anyway."

"Of course there is. There's got to be," Jim insisted. "It's my fault you're going through this. Here, let me get you a glass of juice...." He started to rise, but Blair laid a hand on his forearm.

"I don't want any juice, thank you, and it's not your fault. We decided this together, remember? I knew going in what it was going to be like. So it's a little rough now; it's going to get better." Jim looked doubtful, but wrapped his arm back around his partner's shoulders.

"Jim, I don't know a single person who does guilt better than you. Don't sweat it. I'm okay." He pulled Jim's hand away from his shoulder, and placed it on his belly. "Can you feel her, hear her?" he wondered.

Jim looked thoughtful. He laid his head next to his hand on Blair's abdomen and concentrated. "I can't feel anything yet, but there's a soft 'whooshing' that might be the heartbeat."

"Or my stomach complaining," Blair noted.

"No, not that. I can hear your heart, your stomach, all your internal sounds. This is separate. This is our child."

"Wow," Blair breathed. "Oh, wow."

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"Jim! Jim!" Blair called out, frantic.

The Sentinel came skidding in from the bathroom, wrapped only in a towel, to find Blair sitting on the hardwood floor. He dropped to his knees, his protector instincts fully engaged.

"Oh, God, Jim ... it really hurts." Blair had his arms wrapped around his mid-section, and was hunched over, rocking in time with his sobs.

"Where? Where does it hurt?" Jim tried to untangle Blair, but the younger man was strong, refusing to release the hold on his stomach. "Blair, talk to me!" He continued to pry at Blair's arms.

"Cramps. Oh, man! They really hurt!" His words were hissed through clenched teeth.

Jim wrapped his arms around the huddled figure, trying to pull Blair to his feet, mindless of the fact his towel had loosened and fallen into a pile at his feet.

"Noooooo...." Blair sobbed. "Hurts." He clawed at the Sentinel, desperate for help, yet not wanting to be touched.

"I'm getting you off the floor, Blair, then I'm calling an ambulance." He pulled the resisting body to a semi-upright position, then scooped Blair into his arms and carried him to the couch.

Blair immediately tipped over, lying down and curling around his pain in the classic fetal position. Jim went for the phone, dialing 911 and giving the pertinent information. He then rushed up the stairs to throw on some clothes. By the time the ambulance arrived, Jim was ready. He followed the emergency vehicle to the hospital, his own lights flashing and siren blaring.

"I'm here, Babe," he cooed, slightly breathless, as he reached the gurney the medical technicians had just removed from the back of the ambulance.

"Don't go," Blair pleaded, grabbing Jim's hand and not letting go. Jim walked beside him into the critical care unit of Cascade General.

"I'm not going anywhere. Just hang on, help is near." He stroked sweat-damp curls off Blair's face, wiping away tears of fear and pain as well. "Everything's going to be okay." He kept up a quiet chatter until a doctor stepped into the examining room.

"You'll have to wait outside," the doctor said, not bothering to introduce himself. Pushing Jim aside, he began to examine Blair. "Where does it hurt?"

Blair just moaned, too far gone into the pain to be aware of the doctor.

"He's pregnant," Jim growled, causing the doctor to jump.

"What?" The doctor turned to find an angry and overprotective Sentinel nose-to-nose and toe-to-toe with him.

"I said, he's pregnant," Jim repeated. "We're part of Dr. Lynne Casey's male pregnancy program. He's six weeks along. The severe abdominal cramps started about an hour ago."

The doctor gave the nurse a few quick instructions for pain relief medication for his patient, then guided Jim outside the room. He instructed a passing nurse to page Dr. Casey, stat. He then turned to the Sentinel. "I'm Dr. Jordan, the attending physician. We need to get some information from you. Please follow me." He took Jim to the front desk, where the distraught man was directed to fill out the requisite paperwork.

Back in the examine room, Blair stirred and cried out. "Jim!"

Jim barreled through doctors and nurses, knocking them aside like ten-pins in a rush to get to his lover. "I'm here, Blair. I'm here."

At the sound of his lover's voice, Blair quieted and slipped into a fitful sleep. Jim fidgeted at the bedside until Dr. Casey arrived. No amount of hospital staff could convince him to budge.

When Lynne entered the room, Jim stepped aside to give the doctor room to examine her patient. After checking his chart, she did her own brief physical checkup. Her face was serious, but not grim.

"What's wrong?" Jim asked, edging his way back to his lover's side.

"There's a chance he's miscarrying," she said. "We'll take him in for an ultrasound. If I can't get what I need from that, we can try an MRI. I want to make sure he isn't rupturing."

"Rupturing?" Jim nearly exploded. "My God, he could die!" He turned back to the pale man lying quietly in the bed next to him.

"It may be nothing more than severe abdominal cramps," Lynne tried to reassure him. "It's frightening, but not that uncommon. If that's all it is, we can simply admit Blair overnight to make sure everything's okay, and let him go home."

"And if not?" The threat in Jim's voice was clear.

"If not, we'll have to take him to surgery, remove the embryo and correct any internal damage."

Jim visibly wilted at the news. Lynne put a hand out to steady him. "He's going to be fine. You got him here early enough for treatment. Please try not to worry. Why don't you go sit in the waiting area? I promise I'll get back to you just as soon as I know anything." Jim dug himself in, not wanting to be separated from Blair. "We can do this more quickly if you let us do our job. Please wait outside. Is there anyone you can call?"

Jim shook his head. "We haven't told anyone yet."

"Well, maybe now is the time," she said gently.
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"Blair, Sweetie?" Lynne brushed a hand across her patient's forehead. "Are you with me here? I'd like you to open your eyes."

Blair's eyes fluttered open after a few seconds, the usually bright blue glazed from the drugs he'd been given.

"That's good." She smiled at him. "Are you in any pain now?"

Blair shook his head, his meager attempt at movement barely noticeable.

"Good. I'm going to do the ultrasound now. Don't worry, this isn't going to hurt." She smeared his abdomen with the lubricant and began to glide the sensor over the area, her eyes glued to the monitor. "Damn," she whispered. "Sarah, can you help me here?" she asked the nurse who was in the room with them. "I need to roll Mr. Sandburg onto his side, and I don't think he's going to be much help."

The two women rolled the semiconscious man to his right side, and Lynne tried the sensor again from the adjusted angle. After a couple minutes of concentrated effort, she sighed. "This isn't working. The picture isn't clear enough at this stage."

"Sarah, step over here, will you?" Lynne positioned the nurse in Blair's field of vision. "Blair, Honey? Blair?" The young man opened his eyes again with an effort. "This is Sarah. She's going to stay with you for a bit while I go out and talk to Jim, okay? If you need anything, you just tell her." Blair nodded and closed his eyes again. "Watch him carefully, okay?" She patted Sarah's

back on her way out.

Jim stood as he saw Dr. Casey come through the double doors into the waiting area. "Is everything all right?" he asked anxiously.

"I couldn't get a clear enough picture with the ultrasound. We're going to need to get him in for a MRI scan. I'm scheduling an emergency session, but it's going to take about a half an hour. Would you like to come back and sit with Blair until we're ready?"

"You have to ask?" Jim rolled his eyes at the doctor.

She chuckled. "I didn't really think I needed to. It's just procedure, you know." She led the way back to the room where Sarah watched over the sleeping man. She pulled up a chair. "Just make yourself comfortable. See if you can get him to talk to you. I'll be back to collect him just as soon as I can get an opening for the MRI. It shouldn't be long."

Jim picked up one limp hand from the exam table and lifted it to his lips. "You with me here, Chief?"

"Jim?" Blair's eyes opened with an effort, and he tried to smile.

"How are you feeling?" Jim brushed his palm across Blair's forehead and down his cheek. His lover's temperature was slightly elevated, but not seriously.

"Not so hot," he mumbled. "Sleepy."

"Yeah, I hear they gave you some of those really good drugs," Jim chuckled.

Blair tried to smile again, but it took too much effort. "What's wrong? Why does it hurt?"

"Doc Casey says it's probably just abdominal cramps," he said, hedging around the more frightening aspect.

"Or...?" Blair asked, always astutely aware of when Jim was holding back.

"Or ... you may be miscarrying," he answered softly. Blair squeezed his hand tightly, a sob of fear and regret bursting from his throat. Jim brushed the tears from Blair's cheeks. "There, there, Blair. It's going to be okay," he soothed.

"I don't want to lose our baby!" The desperation oozed through each word.

"I don't want that, either," Jim agreed, gently stroking the sweat-matted hair. "Dr. Casey is doing her best to help us. It's going to be okay, Blair, please believe that."

"Hope so," Blair sighed. "Been through too much already."

"You're telling me? I'm the one who has to carry you around after you've puked your guts out."

"Ha, ha, Mr. Comedian. Wanna trade places?"

"No way." Jim turned serious. "There's no way I could have handled this. You're a marvel, you know that?"

"How do women do this, Jim? How do they do it over and over?" He allowed his eyes to slip closed from exhaustion.

"I don't know, Kiddo, but you're doing a great job. You just have to hang in there. I'll be right here with you every step of the way."

"Thanks, Jim." Blair's voice trailed off. Jim didn't have the heart to keep pushing. Blair was obviously exhausted and needed the rest. He sat holding the cool, clammy hand until Dr. Casey returned.

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"The MRI was reassuring," Dr. Casey told Jim about forty minutes later. "There's no tearing of the membranes, and the embryo appears to be firmly attached and growing normally. Congratulations, Daddy." She stuck out her hand.

Jim accepted and shook hands. "But what about the cramps?" he asked worriedly. "What caused that awful pain Blair was in? Could it happen again?"

"I can't tell you the exact cause of the cramping. This happens in a small percentage of cases. It may have been muscles exhausted by the frequent vomiting. You told me Blair's nausea has been quite severe?"

"Yeah. There are days he barely leaves the bathroom. I've had an awful time getting him to eat anything. Even keeping his fluid levels up is a struggle."

Lynne reached into her pocket and withdrew a prescription pad. "I'm going to write Blair a script for some anti-nausea medication. This won't stop it completely, I'm afraid, but he should see a marked improvement. Give it a week. If the nausea doesn't get better, call me and we'll do a more thorough exam. As for it happening again: if it happened once, there's always that chance, but if this medication does the trick on the nausea, I don't think you'll see a return of the cramps."

"Thanks, Lynne."

"No problem. And don't worry, Jim. This is all perfectly natural, even expected. Blair and your baby are going to be just fine." She guided him back to the chairs. "Why don't you take a load off for a bit. I'll send word when Blair is settled; you can go see him then."

"Hey, Doc," Jim called as Lynne turned to go. "Thanks again."

"You're welcome."

When the doctor had left, Jim began to fidget. He got up to pace, finally finding himself in front of a bank of pay phones. He dropped in his quarters and dialed.

"Banks," came the growl from the other end of the line.

"Simon?"

Something in Jim's voice alerted the police captain. "Jim, what's wrong? Is Sandburg hurt?"

"No, sir ... yes, sir ... well, no, not really," the detective stammered.

"You at the hospital?" Banks asked.

"Yeah."

"Well, sit tight. I'm coming."

Jim stood with the phone to his ear for at least a minute after the soft click of the disconnect. How

was he going to tell Simon? What was he going to tell Simon? His boss had only recently come to terms with the fact that Jim and Blair were a couple. The rest of Major Crime was still officially oblivious, despite the rumors that abounded.

"Paging James Ellison, please come to the front desk." Jim turned at the sound and quickly made his way across the room. "Mr. Ellison?" the clerk behind the desk asked.

"Yes. What is it?"

"Dr. Casey left word that Mr. Sandburg is settled in his room and is ready for visitors. Room 253, right through those doors. Take Elevator B to the second floor and turn right."

"Thanks." Jim threw the word over his shoulder as he made his way quickly through the indicated doors.

When Simon Banks arrived ten minutes later, the waiting room was deserted. He approached the desk.

"May I help you, sir?" the clerk asked.

"Blair Sandburg. He was admitted this morning?"

The clerk quickly checked her computer. "Room 253, in the maternity wing...."

"Maternity wing?" Simon gasped, his jaw dropping in surprise.

"Right through those doors, Elevator B to the second floor and make a right," the clerk instructed.

"Maternity wing?" Simon repeated.

The clerk checked the computer once more. "Yes, sir. Room 253...." She wasn't given a chance to finish. Simon Banks was through the doors and on his way to the elevator.

He paused outside Room 253, hesitant to go in. Sandburg's name was on the door, but this couldn't be right.

"Come on in, Simon," Jim's voice floated out from behind the closed door.

"How'd you know it was me?" the captain asked, entering the room and getting his first good look at Sandburg in weeks.

"Well, sir, you reek of..."

"...cigars," Simon finished in tandem with his detective. "So, what happened this time, and why the maternity wing? Were they out of beds everywhere else?"

"No, Simon." Jim indicated a chair in the corner of the room. "Pull up a chair. I think you need to be sitting down."

"What's going on here, Jim?" Simon settled himself next to the detective.

"Well, sir, you know that Blair and I are a couple...."

"As much as I try to ignore that fact, yeah, I know," Simon grumped, uncomfortable with the intimate relationship between his detective and the police observer.

"We wanted a family, Simon," Jim explained. "The adoption route is a rough one for gay couples and we really wanted a biological child." Simon sat quietly, staring at the man next to him as realization began to dawn. "We went to the Caitlin Clinic and entered into their male pregnancy program. Blair is pregnant, sir."

"Blair is WHAT?" Simon's voice exploded into the room. Even though he had half expected the answer he'd gotten, the concept still came as a shock.

"Shhh, sir. Blair's asleep."

"Not anymore," came a groggy voice from the bed.

Suddenly solicitous, Jim turned to his lover. "You feeling okay? Hurt anywhere?"

"Nah, I feel okay. Just a little achy." Blair rubbed at his belly.

"I'll call the nurse, get you something for the pain."

Blair grabbed Jim's arm as he reached for the call button. "I'm fine, Jim. Give it a rest, okay?"

"Yeah, sure, Blair. Sorry." He actually managed to look contrite.

"The baby?" Blair wondered, fully awake for the first time since the ambulance had brought him in.

"The baby's fine, Sweetheart. We're going to be daddies."

"Cool," Blair replied, sinking back into his pillows and closing his eyes. "What caused the cramps then?"

"Lynne said she thought it was just your muscles protesting all the vomiting. She's given me a prescription to fill for you that should help."

"Good."

"Simon's here," Jim informed his sleepy lover.

Blair opened his eyes and looked around. "Oh, hi, Simon. Thanks for coming by. Did Jim call you?"

"Yeah, he sounded pretty worried about you, kid."

"I'm not surprised. I think I scared him earlier this morning. Heck, I scared me."

Simon shook his head, disbelief still plain on his face. "You're pregnant." He looked at Blair, trying to comprehend, to see the changes. "Pregnant."

Blair chuckled at Simon's discomfort. "Six weeks and counting. Dr. Casey says if everything stays on schedule, the baby will be due in early November. She said she'd firm the date for the C-section after I'm in my third trimester."

Simon just shook his head. "I've come to expect this kind of revelation from the two of you," he sighed. "You never do anything the easy way, do you?"

"Not if there's a harder solution; no, sir." Jim smiled.

"You going to tell the rest of the bullpen about this?"

"We can't keep it a secret forever," Blair reasoned, "but we'd like to try for a while yet. Once I start to show, we'll have to come out and tell everyone."

"Half the detectives don't even know you're a couple yet, and the other half only suspect. Don't you think this will come as a bit of a shock?" Simon looked from one man to the other, and back.

"Well, maybe we can have a 'coming out' party before Blair begins to show. What do you think, Blair? Ready to come out of the closet?"

"I've been ready, Jim," the young man said, coming more awake as he warmed to the subject. "Heck, everyone thought I was gay, anyway, despite my dating every skirt in the precinct. It's you who've been holding back." He patted his lover's hand. "It's okay. Maybe Simon would let us use his office for a little commitment ceremony?" He turned to the big man, who shrugged. "Maybe you'd wear a ring?" He turned back to Jim, looking hopeful.

Jim shook his head, but a huge smile was plastered on his face. "You're really something, Casanova. Yeah, all right, I'll marry you, but you know that later everyone's going to think it's because I knocked you up."

"Ha, ha, Ellison. Just wait until I get you home."

"All talk and no follow-through, Sandburg," Jim growled playfully.

"'Sandburg', my ass," Blair snapped back, smiling.

"That's what I'm hoping for, but it never materializes."

Simon cleared his throat uncomfortably, bringing the two men's attention back to him. "Too much information, gentlemen. Let me hold onto my illusions a little while longer, okay? This will all get real enough way too soon for my tastes anyway."

"Sorry, Simon," Blair smiled sheepishly. "I'm really glad you came."

"You take care of yourself Sandburg," the captain said gruffly. "And you, Jim, I don't want to see you back at work until Monday, you hear me?"

"Thanks, Simon. We really appreciate it." Jim's attention immediately returned to Blair.

"Well, I'll just see myself out, then." Simon pulled the door open and stepped through.

"Bye, Simon!" Blair called after him.

Once the door had closed, Jim dove in for a kiss. "I thought he'd never leave," he commented lustfully.

"Oomph, uh ... ow...." Blair pulled back and grabbed his stomach.

"Geez, I'm sorry, Blair!" Jim reached for the call button, only to have his hand batted away again.

"Somebody's in Blessed Protector overdrive today. I'm fine, Jim, just a tad less enthusiasm, okay?" He grinned and pulled the hapless Sentinel down for a gentler mutual exploration of their mouths.

After finally coming up for a breath, Jim looked down with affection on the man resting in the

hospital bed. "I'm damn glad you're going home tomorrow."

"Make that double for me!" Blair enthused.

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Chapter 2 - Eight Weeks by NatalieL

Eight weeks:

"I can't get my jeans fastened," Blair complained. He was lying across the bed, trying to suck in his stomach, but to no avail.

"You're not showing that much yet," Jim argued.

Blair just looked at him for a few seconds before replying. "These are my good jeans, Jim. They were always snug. Now, they don't fit at all."

"Wear something else."

"I don't have anything else! Everything's either dirty, too tight, or both. I need to breathe, Jim!"

"Try a pair of mine." Jim tossed him a clean pair of jeans.

"Yeah, right," Blair grumped, catching them before they could hit him in the face. "And roll up about six inches of the pant leg. No thanks."

"You've gotta wear something. I can't take you to the precinct for our wedding in your birthday suit."

"That would be interesting, wouldn't it?" The gleam that lit Blair's eyes worried Jim. His lover had a playful streak, and sometimes it was hard to tell when he was joking.

"You gotta take me shopping. I can't get married in these!" He struggled to peel off the too-tight denim.

"And what do you plan to wear to go shopping?" Jim, the ever-practical, pointed out.

Blair picked Jim's pants off the bed. "These, I guess. Doesn't much matter what I look like just to go shopping." He pulled on the jeans and rolled up the legs. "Let's move. The party won't wait all day."

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"They're baggy."

"You look fine, Chief."

"I couldn't find a pair that would fit around my waist without being baggy everywhere else."

"You're too hard on yourself. Nobody's going to notice. Besides, they simply don't make maternity clothes for men. You're going to have to get used to making do with what you can find."

They got off the elevator and walked over to the doors of Major Crime, arriving just before 4:30 in the afternoon. "You ready for this?"

"Go for it." Blair nudged his lover through the doors and into the bullpen, and was immediately mobbed by well-wishers.

"Welcome back, Blair!"

"How was Borneo?"

"Is it good to be home?"

"Are you tired from your flight?"

"Jim sure has been on edge while you were gone. Called in sick a lot."

The questions and comments continued like wildfire, while Blair tilted his head up with questioning eyes to his lover. Jim shrugged. "I had to tell them why you were gone so long. I told them you were on an expedition to Borneo."

"Thanks a lot," Blair sighed and went back to the welcome wagon, obfuscating his way out of the corner Jim had painted him into.

"Ellison! Sandburg!" Captain Banks bellowed from the doorway to his office. As the pair made their way through the crowd, Simon continued. "Didn't you have something you wanted to tell everyone? Some good news?"

The milling crowd quieted, and looked expectantly toward the three men standing in the office doorway.

"Go on, Jim," Blair encouraged. "It's your show."

"Why does it have to be mine?" he asked, sotto voce. "Why can't it be yours?" Blair poked him in the ribs with an elbow and scowled his patented Sandburg scowl. Jim capitulated. "Well," he began, facing his audience, "since Blair has, uh, been gone so long, well, you know the old saying, 'Absence makes the heart grow fonder,' and, well, when Blair got back, he'd been gone so long, you know, that...."

Blair took pity on him. Jim was running out of breath, speaking in one long, disconnected sentence. "That he proposed, and I accepted," Blair finished.

You could have heard a pin drop in the crowded bullpen. Slowly, the voices began to return. A few of the hard-line cops turned away in disgust, mumbling something about fags in the PD. Most of their friends took a few minutes to come to terms with the idea.

One by one, they stepped up to offer congratulations and best wishes.

Joel Taggart, Rafe and Brown all looked shell-shocked. The news had come suddenly, and as an overwhelming revelation. It was taking some time for the information to be processed, but in the end, Jim and Blair were still the same people. Did this really change anything?

Joel finally stepped forward. "I'm happy for you guys, I really am," he commented, shaking their hands. "I wish you all the best."

"Thanks, Joel." Jim smiled warmly at the bomb squad captain.

Rafe and Brown also came forward to offer their congratulations, after the briefest of hesitations. Jim and Blair accepted all the best wishes from those of their colleagues who felt comfortable enough to approach them.

"Simon has agreed to let us use his office for our commitment ceremony," Blair announced to the room at large. "Afterwards, everyone's invited over to Bailey's Pub for the party." Sounds of approval echoed around the room as Simon ushered the couple into his office.

Joel Taggart stuck his head through the door. "Is this a private ceremony?" he asked, uncertain of his welcome.

"Come on in, Joel!" Blair waved his friend into the office. Behind him stood Brown and Rafe. "Don't just stand there," Blair motioned to them. "Come on in."

Once everyone was inside and comfortable, Simon turned to the couple. "Okay, so how do you want to do this?"

"Well, sir," Jim began, "we really didn't have anything prepared, no vows or anything like that. We've got rings to exchange...."

"Am I too late?" Megan Connor rushed to the office door, breathless from her dash from the break room.

"No, no ... come on in, Megan," Jim told her. "You're just in time, as a matter of fact."

As Megan settled herself with the other witnesses, Jim picked up Blair's left hand and slipped a plain gold band on the third finger. "I promised you forever, Blair. Guess this is it."

Blair pushed Jim's ring into place with a heartfelt, "Forever, man."

Time seemed frozen for several heartbeats as the couple spoke volumes to each other through their eyes. The spell was broken when Megan piped up. "Kiss him already, Jim!"

Needing no further urging, Jim pulled Blair against his chest and buried a hand in the mass of curls at the back of his head, angling in for a kiss that had everyone watching holding their collective breath.

When it was over, the couple turned to their assembled friends. "Bailey's, people! Meet you there!" Jim called over Blair's head. There was a mass exodus, leaving Jim and Blair in Simon's office with only the captain, Taggart, Brown, Rafe and Megan Connor.

"Congratulations, you two." Megan walked up to wrap both men in a group hug. "It's about time, you know. We all wondered what was taking you so long."

"It just takes some of us longer than others to find a ticket on the clue bus," Blair teased. "Let's go, okay? I could use a beer."
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"No beer, Chief," Jim admonished as they stepped up to the bar. "Ginger ale would be good."

"But, Jim, it's just one beer! To celebrate our wedding!" Blair groused.

"You're not supposed to drink any alcohol. None. Zero. Zip. Nada. Not good for Junior in there." He patted Blair's tummy.

"Ginger ale, on the rocks," Blair told the bartender. When the man passed him the drink, Blair picked it up and headed toward a table filled with their friends. Jim followed on his heels, wondering how he'd managed to get in the dog house at his own wedding reception.

Blair sipped cautiously at his drink. It had been a long day, and he found he tired more easily.

Jim watched him closely. He didn't like the pallor that was creeping into his lover's complexion.

"Um, will you all please excuse me a minute?" Pushing back his chair, Blair rose from the table, making his apologies, and headed for the men's room.

Jim decided to stay and put up a front, but he dialed up his hearing to keep track of his lover. The sounds of retching came clearly from the restroom, making him flinch in sympathy.

"What's the matter with Sandy?" Megan asked.

Pulling his attention away from the sounds of illness, Jim turned to the Aussie Inspector. "I think he brought a bug back with him from Borneo. Flu, maybe. He hasn't been feeling too well since he got home."

"Maybe you ought to go check on him," Taggert suggested.

Taking the opening, Jim excused himself and bolted for the men's room.

"Blair?" He looked around, his eyes finally landing on the stall where the young man was kneeling over the toilet bowl. "You okay?" He rubbed Blair's shoulders and stroked gentle circles on his back.

"Yeah, it's just the nausea. I'll be so freaking glad when this part is over with. It'd be really nice to be able to hold down a meal once in a while."

"What does Doc say?"

"I'm not gaining weight quite as fast as she'd like, but the baby's healthy."

"We're going to have to do something about that gaining weight thing."

"I'm okay, Jim. Really. The pregnancy, the hormone treatment; it's all playing havoc with my system. Everything'll even out pretty soon."

"You guys okay in here?" Rafe asked from the doorway of the lavatory.

"Yeah, everything's fine, Rafe," Jim answered. "I think I'd better get Blair home, though. He's still, uh, jet-lagged."

"I'll make your excuses for you. You just get him home and take care of him.... Get better soon, kid."

"Thanks, Rafe. I'll try." Blair chuckled as the door closed behind the junior detective. "In another seven months," he mumbled into Jim's shoulder as the older man lifted him to his feet.

"Let's go home."

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Chapter 3 - Fourth Month by NatalieL

Jim looked up from his dinner preparations as the door to the loft opened and a weary Blair Sandburg dragged himself inside. He dropped his backpack under the coat hooks, tossed his keys in the basket and peeled off his jacket. Every movement shouted exhaustion.

"Rough day?"

"You could say that." Blair dragged his protesting body over to the refrigerator and pulled out the orange juice, pouring himself a glass. "I administered finals in two classes today, then had to have an oral exam of my own in front of three profs and the dean. You know how I love doing that!" He sighed, taking a fortifying sip of the juice. "Now I've got papers to grade. Everything's

due by Friday. Thank God for the summer break. I'm going to need it!" He pulled out a chair at the dining table and sat down.

"You're taking the fall semester off, right? I mean, Rainier, they don't know about the pregnancy, do they?"

"No. I haven't told them, and I don't intend to. I put in for a year's research sabbatical. They said they'd approve it on one condition."

"Yeah? That's great news. What's the condition?"

"That my dissertation is finalized and ready to turn in at the end of the sabbatical."

"Think you can do that? You're going to have your hands pretty full for a while."

"It's nearly done. I just need to organize my notes and start writing. Maybe I can make some progress over the summer."

"Ready to eat?" Jim walked over and placed a plate of sesame chicken stir fry in front of the young man.

"Oh, God, yes!" Blair enthused. "It's been so great being able to eat again. I was beginning to think the nausea wasn't going to go away. This looks great!" He took a bite, a look of rapture on his face. "Mmmm...."

"Go for it, Junior. You're eating for two now, you know."

Blair ate with enthusiasm, much to the entertainment of his lover. It was good seeing Blair's appetite return. It had been far too long since the kid had been able to keep down a decent meal. His recent weight gain pleased the fussy Sentinel to no end.

After dinner, they settled on the couch, Blair snuggling down into his lover's embrace. As Jim placed a kiss on top of the head tucked under his chin, a thought occurred to him. "Didn't you have an appointment with Dr. Casey this afternoon?"

"Mm-hmm," came the muffled response. Blair had buried his face in Jim's chest, nestled comfortably under one arm. "That's why I was so late getting home."

"And...?" Jim prompted when an explanation was not immediately forthcoming.

"It went well."

"That's good." Jim paused. "That's it? 'It went well'? What did she have to say?"

"The baby's developing as expected. She's pleased the nausea is gone and I've put on weight."

"That's all good."

There was another lull in the conversation. Then Jim felt a cool draft of air on his bare skin as Blair slowly unbuttoned his shirt. A trembling hand stroked its way tentatively across the muscled surface as though worshipping his body. It had been forever since Blair had touched him intimately. He shivered with anticipation.

"She said it was okay now." Lips caressed each puckered nipple in turn, lingering to suckle lightly over his heart.

Jim cupped his lover's face in both hands, raising his head to look at him. "You mean...?"

"Uh huh," he confirmed. "I mean...." His hands fumbled at Jim's belt as he held his eyes with a hypnotic stare.

"Oh, God, Blair. I'll be gentle, I promise." Jim's mouth covered his lover's, drinking in the sweet taste.

Blair pulled back slightly. "Uh, Jim?" The Sentinel looked at him questioningly. "I've had a hard day, and I'm really grimy. Shower?" He climbed off Jim's lap, holding out a hand to help the older man off the couch, and led him toward the bathroom.

Once the water was running, Blair turned to continue disrobing his lover. "God, you're so beautiful!" he sighed. "I've really missed this." He continued to stand in the steamy bathroom, fully clothed.

"Don't you think you're a little overdressed for this party?" Jim smiled as he began to unbutton Blair's shirt. As he was about to push it off his shoulders, the young man clutched the edges closed, suddenly shy. "What's the matter? I know it's been a while, but it's not like I've never seen you naked before." He pried gently at Blair's hand, trying to make him let go.

"You've never seen me naked like this." There was a noticeable tremor in the voice.

"It's all right," Jim soothed. "I love you. You don't have to be embarrassed."

Reluctantly, Blair allowed Jim to peel his fingers away from the cloth and remove his shirt. For a moment, Jim just stared, then he reached out to cup the small roundness of a breast. Blair flushed scarlet, apprehensive of Jim's reaction to this new development. His breasts were no more than little humps in the hairiness of his chest, but he thought they looked atrocious--worse than the bulge that was starting at his waistline.

"So beautiful," Jim murmured, kissing the rounded mounds while removing the rest of his lover's clothes.

Blair stood rooted to the spot as the Sentinel's gaze swept over his naked body for the first time since the surgery to implant the embryo. Sensitive hands glided across the new curves, hovering blissfully over his stomach for a few moments. He hadn't felt this shy and vulnerable since the very first time he and Jim had made love. He finally found his voice.

"Say something, man. I'm dying here."

"Beautiful," the Sentinel whispered. "So beautiful."

Blair swallowed the lump in his throat, trying to think of something smart ass to say in return. It was as though as his waistline grew, he was losing brain cells. He was at a total loss for words. Eventually, he realized he was shivering.

"Let's get in the shower before the hot water's all gone, okay, Tarzan?"

"Lead the way, Jane." The comment earned Jim a sharp slap on his butt. He laughed, and helped his lover step into the tub and under the spray.

Standing behind Blair, Jim pulled the young man against him, savoring the simple feel of their naked bodies pressing together.

Blair leaned into the embrace, feeling Jim's hard cock rub against his backside. He tilted his

head back to rest on Jim's shoulder while the larger man ran soapy hands over the roundness of breasts and belly, mapping out the new contours of his guide and lover.

The warm hands ranged lower, gently washing Blair's flaccid penis and balls. The younger man's nervousness over his new body image had put a damper on his arousal. Now, under the appreciative hands of his lover, Blair felt the stirrings of need. His cock began to swell, until it stood firm, pressed against the bulge of his belly.

"You are so sexy like this. I can't believe how sexy you are." Jim's mouth nipped and sucked at Blair's throat while he rubbed his aching cock against the crack of Blair's ass.

The young man moaned, turning in his lover's arms to face him. "Love you," he whispered, capturing Jim's mouth as hot needles of spray sluiced over their bodies.

After a few minutes, Jim pulled away. "Let's finish up," he said. "I don't want to take you in the shower. I want it slow and gentle, in our bed." He turned Blair around again, washing his back, then bending to give each leg a thorough soaping. He admired the masculine contours of Blair's ass and thighs, his muscular calves, his strong ankles. Working his way back up, he lingered fleetingly once more over belly and breasts, unable to believe the miracle transforming his lover. He shampooed the rich, thick curls. Blair's hair had grown longer and thicker in the past months, shining like a russet halo around his softly rounding features. Even his strong, square jaw had softened as his pregnancy continued to advance. Every nuance of change was a turn-on to the Sentinel, whose heightened senses magnified everything about the man he loved.

When they were finally finished, Jim wrapped his lover in fluffy white towels and led him from the steaming bathroom to the stairs of the loft. Towels slipped off one by one as Blair climbed the stairs, leaving him naked and glowing by the time he reached the top. Jim folded his arms around him, and lowered him onto the bed.

Blair lay on his back, fully exposed to the hungry eyes of the Sentinel. At one time, he had gotten used to the idea of hyper-sight taking in every imagined flaw and imperfection, but now, with his insecurities elevated to new heights by his changing body, he squirmed under the scrutiny.

Jim straddled him, leaning over to brace his arms on either side of Blair's shoulders, and bent for a kiss. Blair allowed the touch, opening his lips to the questing tongue, letting his lover plunder his mouth, as he lay quiet and unresponsive. After a minute, Jim pulled up.

"What's wrong, Blair?" He sat up and rolled to his side, watching his lover.

"I-I do-don't know," Blair stuttered, unshed tears welling in his eyes. "I guess I ... I guess I don't feel very sexy right now."

"You're the most beautiful thing I've ever seen," Jim tried to assure him, stroking the tears away with his thumb. "You don't doubt me, do you?"

"No ... no, but ... but ... I-I j-just can't see how you'd think that. I mean, I've got breasts now! They're great and all--on women--but this is me we're talking about. It just doesn't seem right. Lynne said she didn't think I'd ever get big enough to need a bra," the words came out in a rush, accompanied by a shudder at the thought, "but she did tell me it would probably get worse before it gets better, and I might start leaking colostrum in my third trimester. That's gross!"

"Shh, shh...." Jim put a finger to Blair's lips to still the onslaught of words. "You're having our baby, Blair. I can't think of anything more loving and sexy than that. Whatever changes your body is going through only reflects that love. You make me hot, Babe, so hot." He rubbed his erection against Blair's thigh, wrapping a hand around Blair's flagging erection, stroking it back to fullness. "We're so good together. You're so good for me. I love you."

He propped himself up on an elbow and leaned over Blair again, taking the nipple of one small breast into his mouth and suckling gently. Blair cried out, arching into the sensation. His nipples had never been the source of this much pleasure before. He moaned as Jim increased the suction, fingers lightly teasing and rolling the other nipple. Jim nipped, and Blair cried out, his orgasm overtaking him quickly and unexpectedly.

"God, Jim. Oh, God! That was ... that was incredible!" he panted.

"You ain't seen nothing yet," Jim mumbled, lapping up the come that coated Blair's belly. His lover squirmed beneath him, helpless to control his body's reactions. As Jim laved his spent penis before moving on to suckle his balls, Blair felt the stirrings of another arousal begin deep in his loins.

Jim reached over to the night stand, snagging the tube of lubricant and coating his fingers. "Roll onto your side for me," he instructed, pushing gently at shoulder and hip to help his partner maneuver.

When Blair was comfortably situated on his side, with his knees partially drawn up, Jim inserted one slick finger past the tight ring of muscle in his ass. A hitch of breath told Jim that his lover was experiencing some discomfort. He petted the shower-damp hair and whispered in his ear, "It's been a long time, Baby. Just relax. We're gonna take this really slow and easy. I love you; remember that."

Blair let out the breath he was holding and felt Jim's finger slip deeper as his passage relaxed. He took Jim's free hand and laced their fingers together, bringing their combined hands to his lips. He kissed each of Jim's knuckles, softly, reverently. "Love you, Jim."

"Trust me?"

"Always."

"Relax for me now," Jim whispered in his ear. Blair took a couple of deep breaths, and Jim could feel the tightness around his finger release. Gently, he inserted a second finger, going as slowly as he could manage. Even so, he could sense the discomfort he was causing by the tension in the muscles of the body spooned with his. "We don't have to do this now, Blair," he said finally, pulling out his fingers and laying his hand on the roundness of Blair's abdomen.

"No! Oh, Jim, no, please." Blair rolled so that he was able to look at Jim. "You weren't hurting me, honestly. It felt so good, almost too good, to have you in me again. I'm sorry. Please, don't stop now."

"You sure?" Jim asked, not entirely certain his lover wasn't obfuscating for his benefit.

"Never been more sure of anything in my life. See, Jim?" He took his lover's hand and placed it on his groin. Already he was hardening yet again. "I need you in me. Please?" he pleaded.

Jim grazed his lips in a gentle kiss, then rolled his lover back onto his side. He slipped two fingers back inside, gently stretching the muscle, taking his time. "Think you can take three?" he asked. Already robbed of coherent speech, Blair simply nodded and waited. Soon a third finger entered his passage, making him feel incredibly full. Taking a minute to adjust to the feeling, he exhaled and relaxed, letting all three fingers slip completely inside.

Beginning a gentle finger-fucking, Jim felt his own erection begin to ache as his lover, lost in the sensations he created, tossed his head and moaned in pleasure. A slight sheen of perspiration gilded his body, giving Blair a glow in the muted light of the loft.

Jim withdrew his fingers and positioned his cock at the entrance to Blair's body. Applying gentle pressure, the head slipped past the tight ring of muscle. He waited until he felt Blair relax against him, then he pushed in deeper. His lover bucked his hips back, speeding the torturously slow impalement.

Rocking slowly, Jim established a gentle rhythm: shallow, shallow, deep, shallow, shallow, deep. Adjusting his angle a bit, he hit Blair's prostate on the next deep penetration. A sob of unadulterated joy choked from the throat of his lover.

"Again," Blair panted. "Again."

Jim picked up his pace, pounding harder as Blair began rocking his hips in counterpoint. Lost to the lustful mating urge, Jim forgot his promise to be gentle, but Blair was beyond caring.

"Oh, Jim! Oh, God!" he cried out as repeated hits to his prostate brought on a monumental orgasm, rocking his entire body. His channel clenched tightly around the invader, milking Jim with its spasms.

Unable to hold out any longer, Jim's cries blended with his lover's as he shot his seed deep within him.

Both men collapsed in a sweaty heap, still joined together, holding each other tightly. When reason began to return to oxygen-starved brains, Jim stroked wet hair away from Blair's flushed face and looked at him worriedly. "Are you all right?" he asked quietly.

"Abso-fucking-lutely!" Blair chuckled. "That was fantastic!"

"I didn't hurt you? Hurt the baby?"

"No way! That was the best sex I think we've ever had." He smiled sweetly at his lover, trying to erase the concern. "Here," he said, pulling away slightly and rolling onto his back. "Put your head here." He patted his swollen abdomen.

Following orders, Jim pressed an ear against Blair's stomach. He soon relaxed.

"Hear anything?"

"The baby's heartbeat."

"Really? Cool." Blair petted the short hair on his Sentinel's head and marveled at his luck in finding his life's work embodied in his life's love. He closed his eyes, and soon drifted off into a completely satiated sleep.

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Chapter 4 - Fifth Month by NatalieL

"I think it's about time, don't you?" Jim asked.

"If you say so. I suppose people are going to start noticing sometime soon, anyway."

The pair stepped off the elevator and stood at the doors to Major Crime.

"Deja vu," Blair grinned. "Didn't we do this before?"

"Sure feels like we did, Darwin. Enough procrastinating. Let's get it over with." Jim opened the doors and stepped through, followed by his constant shadow.

"Hey, Jim! Hi, Blair!" Brown greeted the pair. "Long time, no see, Hairboy. Whatcha been up to?"

"Finishing out the semester at Rainier," Blair answered. "Lots of tests to be graded, but I finally got everything turned in. I'm a free man."

"Now that he's out of school," Brown turned to Jim, "you'd better take that boy jogging with you. He's putting on a little weight." He reached out to give Blair's tummy a pat.

"Jogging isn't going to help, H," Jim informed him before turning his back and walking away.

"What did he mean by that?" Brown asked, turning to Blair. The anthropologist just shrugged and smiled, and followed Jim to his desk.

Megan waltzed over, happy to see Blair back in the bullpen. "You're looking all flushed and healthy, Sandy," she commented. "If I didn't know better, I'd say you were pregnant." She chuckled.

"Why would you say that?" Jim wondered.

"Well, look at him." Megan gestured in the young man's direction. "He glows."

"Cat's out of the bag," Blair grinned mischievously at Jim. "She guessed." Then turning back to Megan, "You're right. I'm pregnant. Going on eighteen weeks."

The Aussie looked curiously from one set of blue eyes to the other. "You're pulling my leg, right?"

Blair glanced briefly at Jim before turning back to Megan. "No, Megan, it's the truth. You've heard of the Caitlin Infertility Clinic?" She nodded. "They have a new male pregnancy program there, run by a Dr. Lynne Casey."

"I've heard of her. She has quite a reputation for thinking outside the box. So, you really went through with this procedure?" Her mind began to click. "Then you weren't in Borneo, were you?"

"No, Megan. I was in the hospital having surgery, then home puking up my guts for nearly three months."

"At the commitment ceremony?"

"Already eight weeks."

"Then it wasn't the flu at the party."

"It wasn't the flu," Blair confirmed.

"Oh, Sandy! I'm so happy for you!" She flung her arms around the surprised man, hugging him tightly, then repeated the performance with Jim. By the time she was through, she had the attention of the entire bullpen.

"What's going on out here?" Simon Banks bellowed, storming out of his office to find his absentee detective and police observer sitting together at Jim's desk.

Megan was grinning ear to ear. "Sandy's preggers!" she announced to the room at large.

The room suddenly became quiet. Everyone turned to the two men seated at the desk. "You'd better come clean," Simon suggested, not unkindly.

"That's why we came in today, sir," Jim told him. He turned to the assembled group. "The short of it is, Blair and I decided we wanted a baby and we couldn't adopt."

"So we went to the Caitlin Infertility Clinic," Blair picked up the story, "and met with Dr. Casey."

"She runs the male pregnancy program there," Jim explained.

"And so now I'm, well, I'm...." Blair stuttered to a halt.

"Preggers!" Megan crowed.

"How far along are you?" Joel Taggert asked.

"Eighteen weeks." He hiccuped and quickly placed a hand over his stomach, looking decidedly confused.

"What's the matter?" Jim wrapped an arm around Blair's shoulders.

Blair took one of Jim's hands and placed it on his swollen belly, holding it there. After a couple minutes, he said, "There! That! Did you feel it?"

"I felt something," the Sentinel admitted. "It just felt like a flutter or muscle spasm."

"Like butterflies in my stomach," Blair said, disbelieving. "I just felt the baby move!" He looked at their friends with wide, owl-like eyes. "She moved!"

"It's probably just indigestion," Jim reasoned.

"No, no, Jim.... Lynne said anytime after the fourteenth week, although around eighteen to twenty weeks is more the norm for a first pregnancy. It's the baby, Jim. I feel her."

"Do you know the sex yet?" Megan asked.

"It's a girl." "It's a boy." The voices sounded simultaneously. Both men broke out in laughter.

"We don't know yet," Blair admitted. "I think it's a girl."

"From the way you're carrying, I'd agree with you," Megan said.

"How he carries the baby has nothing to do with its sex," Jim argued. "It's a boy."

"Why? Because you say so?" Blair looked at his partner in mock disgust. It was an old argument.

"Because I'm the Sent..., uh, because I know."

"It's too early to tell like that," Blair reasoned. "Let's not argue here, okay? Besides, does it really matter?"

"No, I don't suppose it does." He turned to his boss. "Got anything you need us to do while we're in, Simon?"

Simon, who had been standing on the fringes of the crowd, stepped in to break it up. "Everybody get back to work. You can talk to the new mother-to-be and his husband on your own time." There was grumbling from the crowd, but they broke up and headed back to their respective desks.

"Talk to you later, Sandy." Megan blew a kiss in his direction as she headed back to work.

"Yeah, Megan. Thanks." Blair waved as she walked off.

"So, you two hanging around here for a change?" Simon asked. "I was beginning to wonder if I'd lost one of my best detective teams."

"Got any paperwork that needs doing?" Jim asked. "I don't want to take Blair on any ride-alongs right now."

"Understood," Simon agreed. "I'm sure we could find something for you to do around here."
~oOOOo~

The day had been longer than either man had expected. Between the piles of paperwork dropped on their desk, and the frequent interruptions of well-wishers, they were kept busy long past the five o'clock hour.

"You boys hungry?" Simon asked, exiting his office as he put on his coat. "It's about time you went home. You don't have to make up all the work in one day. If you want to come along, it's my treat."

Jim's eyes lit up at the prospect, but one look at Blair changed his mind. The young man looked drawn, exhausted. He hadn't complained. In fact, he'd worked harder at the paper load than Jim had, but now he was paying for it.

"I think we'd better pass this time, Simon. Thanks. Blair tires easily these days, and it's been a long day." He unconsciously stroked his lover's hair.

Simon noticed the proprietary gesture and smiled. "You'd better get the kid home then," he said gently.

"Night, Simon."

"Good night, Blair. You take care."

After their boss had left, Jim helped Blair to his feet, wrapping an arm around his shoulders. "Ready to get out of here?"

"You bet."
~oOOOo~

After a dinner of take-out Thai food, the couple settled on the couch. Blair sat at one end, while Jim stretched himself out, settling in his favorite position with his head in his lover's lap, an ear plastered against the gentle swell of his belly.

"Is she talking to you, Jim?"

"Yeah. He says you're doing a damn fine job being his mommy."

"Fuck you, James," Blair said with affection.

"That could be arranged...."

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Chapter 5 - Seventh Month by NatalieL

Blair bent over his laptop, pecking away at the keys with studied concentration. "Humanity has long dug into its past in the hope that it will shed light on its future," he wrote. "Perhaps what this

reveals is that it is the best of ourselves that will survive and lead us through the next millennium. Watching our every step will be our tribal protectors, The Sentinels, and their insight will further illuminate the spiritual connection of all things. THE END."

Jim walked up behind the concentrating anthropologist and wrapped his arms around his shoulders, leaning down to whisper into an ear. "How's it going?"

Startled, Blair jerked backed, whacking Jim's chin with the back of his head. "Oh, geez, I'm sorry, Jim! Are you okay?"

Jim rubbed at his aching jaw. "I'll live. How's the dissertation?"

"Finished! Can you believe it? I still need to do a little refining, some tweaking here and there, but it's essentially done ... finally!"

"Do I still get to read it?"

"You bet. Just like I promised. Let me go get my printer and I'll print you a copy." He tried to push up off the couch, but fell back against the cushions. A second try wasn't any more successful. "Um, Jim?" He looked up at the amused Sentinel. "You're either going to have to help me out here, or get the printer yourself."

"Where'd you store it?"

"In my old bedroom," Blair told him with a knowing smile.

Jim reached down and grabbed hold of Blair's hands. "In that case, I guess I'll help you haul butt. There's no way I'm going into that wasteland!" He chuckled as he pulled Blair to his feet. He watched with barely-contained amusement as his very pregnant lover waddled across the floor to what had once again become a storage room.

Blair emerged a few minutes later carrying the printer. Jim was at his side almost immediately. "Here, let me take that. You shouldn't be carrying anything heavy."

"The printer's not that heavy," Blair protested weakly, allowing Jim to take it from him.

After the device was settled next to the laptop, Blair began making the connections, then hit "print." The machine clacked and clattered as it began spewing out the pages that represented the young anthropologist's life work. It took nearly forty-five minutes and almost a ream of paper before silence finally reigned once more in the loft.

Blair put a password on the file and closed it out. After turning off the laptop, he gathered the papers in the printer and tapped them into a neat pile. "Here you go," he said, presenting his pride and joy to Jim. "It wasn't easy, but I managed to mask our identities without compromising the data. I hope they'll buy it."

"When do you have to turn it in?"

"Beginning of spring term," Blair answered nervously. "They'll want me to defend it shortly after that."

"Is that going to be a problem?" Jim had cued in on his lover's nervous energy.

"No. Oh, no, not a problem," the young man answered, bouncing from foot to foot.

"Then what's the matter?"

"Will you just read it, please?" Blair begged. "You know your opinion is more important to me than any committee's. I need to know if you approve, or if there's anything you want changed."
~o000o~

It was three o'clock in the morning when Jim finally put down the paper. Blair had fallen asleep beside him, pillowed on his shoulder. "Blair?" He shook the young man gently. "Time to get up and go to bed."

Dark blue eyes blinked sleepily. "What time is it?"

"After three in the A.M.," he was told. "Way past time for your beauty sleep." Jim stood up and reached down to help his lover off the couch.

Blair wavered slightly before gaining his balance. As they started for the stairs to their bedroom, he asked, "What did you think? Of the dissertation?"

"I thought it was a work of art, worthy of a multimillion dollar book signing, movie rights and, heck, maybe even a Nobel prize."

"You are so full of bullshit," Blair chuckled. "What did you really think?"

"Well, you know that I'm uncomfortable with that fear-based response thing...."

"But, Jim, it's the fear that motivates you. It's not a bad thing," Blair began the old argument.

"I'm not arguing with you tonight, Chief," he said, pulling back the covers and helping Blair find a comfortable position lying on his side. "I really think you did a good job with it. If the committee doesn't award you that Ph.D. in the spring, they'll have to answer to me."

"Thanks, Jim," Blair mumbled, already half asleep once again.

"Good night, Love." Jim bent down to kiss Blair's cheek, then crawled into bed and spooned himself around his lover.

~o000o~

"Do you want to tell anyone about it?" Jim asked over breakfast.

Blair pondered the idea over a bite of eggs, then shook his head. "I think I'd like to keep it a secret for now. I locked up the printed copy this morning, and the computer file is password protected. I've still got a little polishing to do, and besides, it's going to be another five months before I defend it. I think I'd like to just keep it all under wraps for the time being."

"I yield to your wisdom, oh great soon-to-be-Doctor Sandburg."

"You are so full of shit," Blair said lovingly and smiled.

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Chapter 6 - Eighth Month by NatalieL

"I think we should throw Sandy a baby shower." Megan was lobbying her cause in the break room.

"You mean a party with those silly games like seeing who can make the most baby names using an anagram of the mother's name?" Rafe asked.

"Or seeing who can diaper the dolly fastest?" added Brown.

"No thanks," they answered in unison.

"But they need so much for the baby," Megan continued. "They need a crib and a stroller, clothes, lots and lots of nappies...." Her face lit up with an idea. "It doesn't have to be a traditional shower. We could make it a poker night party, and everyone brings baby gifts."

The men looked thoughtful. "That could work," Brown conceded.

"We'll have it at Jim and Sandy's place," said Megan, warming to the subject, "so that Sandy can crash early if he gets tired. I'll bring the snacks and you guys can bring the beer."

"Sounds like a plan," Rafe agreed. "Who all is invited?"

"Well," Megan considered, "you two, Joel and Simon? If anyone else wants to contribute, we can take up a collection from the rest of Major Crime for some of the larger gifts."

~oOOOo~

"There's someone at the door," Jim mentioned, just before the knock.

"You get it, I have to pee," Blair said, waddling off to the bathroom.

Jim opened the door to a chorus of "Surprise!" Simon, Megan, Joel, Rafe and Brown stood in the doorway, loaded down with food and gifts.

"Uh, come in," he said, somewhat taken aback. Blair had had a rough day between a badly aching back and a bladder infection that wouldn't give way to the antibiotics Dr. Casey had prescribed. The couple had planned for a quiet and early end to their day. Yet who could turn down their best friends, especially when said friends were bearing food and gifts?

"Come on in," he offered, taking several containers from the top of the stack that Megan juggled.

"We have to go down and get more stuff," Simon said, edging his way through the door to set his pile of gifts near the fireplace.

"Where's Sandy?" Megan asked.

"In the bathroom. That damn bladder infection is still bothering him."

"Sorry, mate. Maybe we should come back some other evening."

"Megan!" Blair came out of the bathroom, arms extended for a hug. "Wow... wasn't expecting you here tonight."

"If you're not feeling well, Sandy, we'll go. I just wanted to give you a little baby shower. Thought maybe we could play a hand or two of cards. I brought the snacks; Rafe and Brown have the beer."

"You can stay," Blair assured her. "I'll just take a load off and rest." With some effort, he lowered himself into the yellow chair by the fireplace. "Seems to be the only seat in the house I can get up from without help these days," he chuckled.

The rest of the partygoers returned with several large packages, and another pile of smaller ones.

Megan started unwrapping the food; pouring chips into bowls, getting the dips and veggies unwrapped and finding a place for the cooler of iced beers.

The rest of the guys settled around the table with a deck of cards. "Going to join us, Hairboy?" Brown called.

"Nah. Wouldn't be right of me to take all your money, considering you brought over all these gifts," Blair quipped.

Ignoring the men, Megan crossed the room with a beer in one hand and a 7-Up in the other. She sat on the edge of the coffee table, facing Blair. She handed him the soda.

"Thanks."

"No worries, Sandy." She paused, giving him a good long look. "Are you feeling okay tonight?"

"Not really," he admitted, reaching a hand behind himself to rub at the small of his back. "My back's been killing me lately. Lynne says it's partly due to my having a narrow pelvis. I'm not built to 'spread' like a woman. And this bladder infection.... Geez, I have to go again." He tried to push up, but dropped back in the chair.

Before Megan could even get to her feet to help, Jim was there, pulling Blair up out of the chair. "Need help?"

"Nah. I can still go to the bathroom by myself, thank you." He shook his head and smiled at Megan. "He's so protective. Gets a little claustrophobic in here at times." They both chuckled at Jim's scowl.

"Be that way. I'm going back to take your share of the winnings tonight, Chief. You're going to be sorry you didn't play."

"And sit on one of those hard dining room chairs? Are you kidding? My tailbone would never forgive me!" He lumbered past the group of card players and headed for the bathroom.

Megan walked over to the table. "Maybe we ought to let Sandy open his gifts, and then get out of here. Better yet, let's just go and let him open them when he's feeling better. He really looks beat tonight." She turned to Jim. "Sorry about the surprise party. I never even considered that Sandy might be too tired. It was thoughtless of me."

"You meant well, Megan." Jim smiled. "Besides, I think Blair enjoyed the surprise. He was grouching something terrible before you all showed up."

"Sure ... dis the pregnant guy behind his back." Blair came out of the bathroom. "I know you were talking about me. I suppose everyone's thinking about packing up and leaving? Well, think again." He pulled up an extra chair and squeezed his way between Joel and Rafe. "I changed my mind. Deal me in."

~oOOOo~

An hour later, Blair had a pile of chips in front of himself, while everyone else's stash was looking pretty thin. He spread out his cards in a long, luxurious manner, revealing a royal flush. "Read 'em and weep," he said, raking in the pile of chips from the middle of the table.

"I think maybe it's time we open the presents, don't you?" Jim interrupted before the good-natured complaining could get too loud.

"I think that's an excellent idea," Megan agreed.

"Uh, Jim?" Blair looked across the table at his lover. "Suppose you could come over here and help me lift my petrified butt off this chair?"

Jim walked around the table and pulled him up. Blair winced, leaning against the strength of his partner. Jim wrapped an arm around him and led him to the couch.

"Oh, no, Jim. Not the couch!" Blair said in mock horror. "I'll end up spending the night there!"

"You need the room for all the gifts," Jim explained. "Besides, I want to sit next to you. I'm in on this too, you know."

Once everyone was settled, Megan brought over the first of the gifts.

"From Simon and Daryl," Blair read the card before tearing into the packages. There was an assortment of baby garments, a hand-knit baby afghan from Simon's ex, and several rattles and small toys. "Gee, Simon. Thanks. This is great."

Jim rubbed Blair's aching back as he leaned forward to accept another stack of gifts. "You know, we learned the sex of the baby today," Jim told his friends.

"Really? So, which is it; boy or girl?" Rafe asked.

"Girl." Blair grinned triumphantly at Jim.

"I knew it!" Megan bragged. "Congrats! Any ideas for a name yet?"

"Yeah. We decided on Laurene Victoria, after both our maternal grandmothers," Jim told her.

"I think that's a beautiful name! Oh, I'm so excited!"

"Not nearly as excited as I am," Blair grouched. "I will be so glad to see my feet again. You wouldn't believe how hard it is getting dressed in the morning." He sighed and continued tearing at packages.

A half hour later Blair and Jim were surrounded by piles of baby clothes, toys, blankets and packages of both disposable and cloth diapers. "Wow," Blair breathed. "This is too much, guys."

"Daryl and I actually had fun shopping," Simon confessed. "It's been a long time since I had to buy anything that small!"

"How about that stuff over there?" Brown indicated a stack of four gifts still sitting next to the fireplace.

Megan got up and picked up the smallest of the large packages. "This one's from me," she said.

Tearing off the paper with abandon, Blair said, "But you've already given us enough.... Oh, Jim!"

"It's an automatic swing, Sandy," Megan explained as if the young man couldn't see for himself. "It's perfect for when the baby's fussy, or you need to put her down for a bit. You just push the button and it swings her to sleep."

"Wow, that's really great, Megan! Thanks!"

Rafe and Brown dragged the largest package across the hardwood floor. "This one's from the Major Crime gang. Not everybody could come tonight, but most people wanted to contribute."

"You open it, Jim," Blair begged, falling back against the couch cushions.

Jim tore the paper off the box, revealing a crib.

"Something to keep you busy putting together while you wait for little Laurene to arrive." Rafe chuckled.

"Thanks a lot, guys," Jim replied with a touch of sarcasm.

"Just a couple more," Brown said, bringing them over. "These are from the guys in Vice. Word got around we were throwing you a shower, and some of the guys wanted to contribute."

The gifts turned out to be a highchair and stroller. Jim promised to make sure he thanked all the proper people in the morning.

The room was strewn with paper and boxes, the gifts piled high next to Blair on the couch, but the guest of honor was sound asleep. Jim smiled at him. "He had a busy day."

"We kind of figured that," Simon said, a note of warm affection coloring his voice. "Why don't you take care of him while we clean up?"

"Sounds like a plan. Thanks, Simon." He turned his attention to the sleeping man. "Blair? Blair, Honey? Time to wake up." He shook him gently.

Blair stirred and opened heavy-lidded eyes. "Wha...?"

"You fell asleep, Buddy. Time to get up and go to bed."

"Wake up to go to sleep?" Blair sounded a bit confused.

"You need to take your meds and get into your night clothes," Jim explained. "Here, let me help." He stood and tugged on Blair's arms until he managed to lever the reluctant bulk out of the cushions. He guided the young man toward the bathroom, standing behind him while he brushed his teeth and took his medications.

"How about you pee one more time before we go upstairs?"

"I don't have to go," Blair complained.

"You'll have to go as soon as we get upstairs if you don't do it now."

"I can't see my dick."

Jim sighed, pulling the elastic band of the sweatpants down and reaching in for Blair's penis. He pointed it at the bowl and ordered, "Pee."

"I can't pee with you holding my dick," Blair complained.

"Then you hold it," Jim growled, placing Blair's hand on the organ and taking a step back. "Now, pee." After about a minute, the tinkling sound of urinating filled the room. "About time. I thought you said you had a handle on this going to the bathroom thing," Jim muttered, too quietly for the half-asleep younger man to hear. He helped Blair wash his hands, then guided him back out of the bathroom and toward the stairs to their bedroom.

"G'night, Sandy!" Megan called, looking up from the cleaning.

"Good night, Megan, guys," Jim answered for Blair who was totally out of the picture, slowly trudging up the stairs to bed.

When they got upstairs, Blair collapsed onto the mattress. Jim stripped him of everything but his boxer shorts and his over-sized tee, then pulled back the comforter and slipped him under the covers. He leaned down to place a loving kiss on his temple, then turned to go downstairs to see the gang off.

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Chapter 7 - Ninth Month - October by NatalieL

Jim came home from work to find the loft festooned with black and orange crepe paper streamers. The banister and corners of the room were decorated with polyester fiber spider webs. Toy bats and spiders hung from every high surface the nine-month-pregnant Sandburg could reach. "Clings" were plastered on the glass doors announcing "Happy Halloween," while the mad interior decorator himself stood at the kitchen table elbow-deep in the largest pumpkin Jim could ever remember seeing.

"How did you get that thing in here? You're not supposed to be lifting."

"Joel brought it in for me. Isn't it great? You want to carve the face?"

"What is all this?" Jim looked around at the clutter passing as decorations in their home.

"Halloween's coming. I just wanted to get into the spirit, so to speak. It's my favorite holiday after Chanukah/Christmas. Besides, you gotta get used to this decorating for the holidays thing. We've got a kid on the way."

"Yeah, yeah," Jim grumbled, hanging up his coat and walking over to where Blair was wielding a large kitchen knife with the ease of someone used to carving pumpkins. It was then that Jim noticed a dozen more finished Jack-o'-lanterns perched on their patio. "Blair...."

"Yeah, Jim?" Blair looked up, oblivious.

Jim just shook his head and smiled. Blair was really getting into this fatherhood thing. "Nothing." He came around behind his lover, wrapping his arms around the growing bulk, and kissing his neck.

His hands slipped up under Blair's shirt, caressing the rounded breasts, pinching the sensitive nipples. "Ow! Hey!" Blair jumped, nearly slicing a finger with the large knife.

"Sorry," Jim said, sounding truly contrite. "Are you all right?"

"Yeah, just warn a fella when you're gonna do that, okay?" He turned glowing eyes on his lover, full lips slightly open, inviting the kiss.

Jim leaned in for the kill, capturing the willing mouth with his own, while his hands went back to caressing Blair's sensitive nipples. The stimulation started the colostrum, the "pre-milk," to leak, dampening the roaming hands. Blair grimaced, pulling away.

"God, I hate that! Now I'm gonna have to shower again."

"Blair?" Jim felt in turns rejected and confused.

"Leaking ... it's the leaking. I hate it. I was prepared for losing my waistline, even for developing breasts, but this? I dunno, man, it's just gross."

"Oh, I don't know," Jim commented. "I think it's kind of sexy."

"You think everything's sexy these days," Blair retorted drily. "I think it's disgusting." He turned

and headed toward the bathroom.

"Need company?" Jim asked softly, almost afraid of his lover's response.

Blair paused and turned, smiling an apology. "You made the mess, you come clean it up."
~oOOOo~

Pulling the shower curtain aside, Jim stepped into the tub next to Blair. The warm spray sluiced over their bodies, relaxing tense and tired muscles. Blair leaned back against Jim, content to let his lover soap his body down, massaging out the tightness.

"You know what being pregnant makes me miss the most?"

"No, what?"

"Being able to see my dick. I know that women complain about not being able to see their feet. That doesn't bother me so much. Well, I miss them, I really do, but I can still slip into my shoes. But, you know, going to the bathroom can be a real chore when you can't see your dick."

"I can imagine."

"Can you? Can you really? Try tying a pillow around your waist the next time you have to pee."

"I get the picture. You want to see your dick again."

"Yeah, I mean, does it still look the same? Different? Hell, I don't know. The rest of my body has been going through all sorts of changes. Has my dick?"

"Oh, I don't know," Jim mused. "It was always a mighty fine dick. Still is. Looks a little smaller, dwarfed under that overhang of yours, but I'm sure that's just a perspective issue."

"You think it might have actually gotten smaller? All these hormones and all.... My breasts have gotten bigger, why wouldn't my dick get smaller?"

"It's not smaller."

"How can you be sure?"

"I've measured it against mine."

"And...?"

"Mine's bigger. Always was. But yours hasn't changed size."

"Fuck you, Ellison."

"That could be arranged...."

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Chapter 8 - Thirty-nine Weeks - October 29 by NatalieL

"You shouldn't be here, Chief. You should be at home with your feet up, resting."

Blair Sandburg, mother-to-be, sat comfortably reclined in one of the padded chairs from Simon's office, his feet propped on a second chair. Putting down the paperwork, he looked at Jim. "I do have my feet up, and I am resting. Since I finished up the dissertation, there's nothing to do at home. At least here I can feel useful."

"Yeah, well, if you get tired, tell me. Simon'll give me the time off to take you home."

"I'm okay, Jim. Stop fussing. You're the one acting like the mother hen!"

Both men looked up as Simon approached Jim's desk. The man looked positively grim. "Jim, I need you in the field."

"Simon...."

"I know I promised you no field work while Sandburg was pregnant, but we really need you on this. There's a hostage situation at the Speedy-Mart down on Collins and Fifth. Three gunmen holding five hostages. We've got police snipers at the site, but we need a way to hear and see what's going on in there."

Jim stared at his captain, then glanced sideways to look at his partner. Blair shrugged. "Go, man. They need you." As Jim pushed back his chair to stand, Blair dropped his feet and laboriously made his way out of the chair. "But I'm going with you."

"Like hell you are!" Jim exploded. "Your C-section is scheduled for next week. You can barely get out of that chair. There's no way you're coming out to the field."

"You're going to need me there, to help with your senses."

"No way. Huh-uh, Sandburg. I was doing this job long before you came along. I can do it without you now."

"You weren't doing it with your senses on-line. What if you zone?"

"Simon can snap me out of it. You're not going. It's not negotiable."

"You're damn right it's not negotiable!" Blair shouted back. "It's my decision, and I'm going!"

"Are not!"

"Are so!"

"Simon?" Jim turned pleading eyes to his captain.

Simon frowned and shook his head. "No way, Sandburg," he backed up his detective. "It's too dangerous. It's an armed hostage situation, not the sort of thing you should be anywhere near."

"Look, Simon ... Jim...." Blair's pleading eyes flicked from one man to the other and back. "I know it's dangerous, but it's dangerous for Jim, too. You want him there for his senses, don't you?" he asked the captain.

"Well, yeah, actually. We have plenty of fire power, but we need to hear what's going on in there in order to size up the situation. A negotiating team has been sent for, but we need some reconnaissance now."

"Jim, you know when you concentrate too much with one sense you risk a zone out," Blair reminded him.

"And, like I said, Simon knows how to bring me out of a zone. You don't need to be there."

"Look, Jim," Blair spoke with his most persuasive tone, "Simon's the only other person besides me who knows about your senses. He's going to be busy, man! He's got police and snipers to

coordinate, and the negotiating team coming ... he won't be able to keep an eye on you all the time."

"Kid's got a point there," Simon conceded.

Spurred on by the captain's comment, Blair continued. "Whenever you use your senses, you sort of freeze in place because you're concentrating so hard. The changes in your body language between listening and zoning are minute. I've spent the last three years studying you, I know those changes when I see them. You need me there, Jim!"

"I don't like the idea any better than you do, Jim, but the kid makes sense. I'm going to be too busy to watch you every minute, and I can't afford to lose one of my best detectives." Simon sighed in defeat. "I think we need him. I'll see to it he stays safely behind police lines. I'll even assign him a bodyguard."

"No, Simon. He's not going, and that's final!" Jim stomped toward the door, grabbing his coat, leaving his captain and lover standing next to his desk.

Blair looked up at the tall captain, fear and pleading in his eyes. "Don't let him go out there alone."

"Jim!" Simon barked. "Get your ass back here!"

The angry Sentinel turned on his captain. "I thought you needed me at the scene. I'm going."

"Not without Sandburg."

"Simon..." The name was a growled threat.

"We'll find him a vest, but we need him there, Jim--just in case," Simon reasoned.

Throughout this exchange, Blair wisely remained silent. Finally, Jim capitulated. "If you can find him a vest that fits, and if he stays way back behind the lines..." He glared at his lover.

Blair held up both hands, warding off Jim's anger. "Whatever you say, Jim. I'll do whatever you say, I promise."

Twenty minutes and a lot of aggravation later, Blair was finally fitted with a Kevlar vest. It had taken some doing, but they finally located the one vest the department had procured for its pregnant officers. "Why would any pregnant woman in her right mind go out into the field, anyway?" Jim wondered.

When they arrived at the scene, Jim parked the truck a block away. "You stay here with the truck," he ordered.

"Jim, I need to be able to see you. I'm not the sentinel here, you are. If I can't see you, I can't help you."

"You also won't get hurt."

"Jim ... what's the point of my coming along if I can't help you if you need it?"

"That's my point! You shouldn't even be here!"

"Aw, Jim ... c'mon. Let me help."

Simon walked up to the truck. "There's been no change in the hostage situation. We need to hear what's going on in there, Jim. Come on." When Jim hesitated, Simon added, "I'll take care of the kid. We'll keep him behind the lines. Now get going!"

Jim went on ahead while Simon stayed back with Blair, who moved much slower than his partner. They arrived at a line of police vehicles and stopped. "You stay put here, Sandburg. You should be able to see and hear everything fine from here, and you'll be out of the line of fire." Turning to the two cops standing nearest them, he ordered, "Minsky, Devlin, see to it Sandburg stays right here."

"Yes, sir," Devlin answered.

Jim edged out to the front of the line drawn by the police. He could clearly see the three gunmen inside, weapons pointed at the frightened hostages. Focusing his hearing, he listened in on their conversation.

"They've got us outnumbered. I say we give up and get out of here with our skins intact. Ain't worth no two hundred dollars getting killed."

"You idiot! You think they'd just let you walk out there? These people are our only chance." The man grabbed a female hostage by her collar and put the gun to her head. The whimpering woman shook like a leaf beneath his hands. "I say we kill 'em one by one until they let us go."

The third man, looking nervous, grabbed a male hostage. "I'm with Brinner. I say we kill 'em, starting with this one."

"Simon," Jim hissed into the shoulder mike he was carrying. "They're talking about killing the hostages one by one until we let them go. I think they're close to taking the first one."

"Right. Thanks, Jim." Simon switched frequencies and began issuing orders to the sniper team.

Jim crept closer to the mini-mart, eyes and ears locked onto the action inside.

Blair watched from his position of safety, worried to see Jim edging ever closer to the store. To his horror, he watched as Jim froze into place, head cocked as though listening to something no one else could hear. "My God, he's zoned!" Blair's heartbeat kicked into overdrive. He had to get Jim out of there before the shooting started.

The officers who were supposed to be keeping an eye on the police observer were currently concentrating on the action out in front of the store. Blair used the opportunity to slip away and run toward the zoned-out Sentinel.

Reaching Jim's side, he grabbed at his sleeve. "Jim! Jim, listen to me. You've got to come back now; it's dangerous out here. Follow my voice back, Jim. Come on!" He shook the oblivious man. "Let's get out of here. I really don't like this."

Inside the store, the perp with the male hostage released the safety on his gun and loaded a round into the chamber. One of the police snipers, keeping watch through his gun's scope, fired off a round into the shop, taking the man out before he could kill the hostage.

All hell broke loose. The other perps began firing through the windows at the police outside. Snipers and uniformed officers returned fire in a hail of bullets.

The additional noise, along with the coaxing sound of his guide's voice, brought Jim out of the zone. Too late he heard the dull thud of a bullet hitting a vest. The hands that had gripped his arm so tightly slipped off as Blair sank to the ground with a cry of pain.

"Blair! Oh, God, Blair!" His hands ripped at the coat, exposing the Kevlar vest with one spent slug in the lower abdominal region.

Blair moaned, blinking back tears. "Hurts, Jim. Oh, God, it hurts!" He clutched at his belly, curling into a ball on the pavement of the parking lot.

"We've got to get you out of here, Chief," Jim insisted, tugging at his lover, trying to get the man back on his feet. "Come on, help me out here," he huffed. "You're getting too heavy for me to lift. Stand up, Blair. Please."

Rolling to his knees, Blair pushed himself up. With Jim's help, he made it to his feet. Still doubled over from the pain in his gut, he hobbled back behind the safety of the line of cars, sinking to a sitting position behind the nearest vehicle.

Calls of "officer down" and orders for an ambulance carried above the sound of gunfire.
~oOOOo~

"How is he, Doc?" Jim fretted. "Is he going to be okay?"

"There's heavy bruising of the muscle at the point of impact," Dr. Casey began, "but no significant damage. The ultrasound looked good. Your daughter is fine. I see no reason to change the date of the C-section. Just take Blair home and see that he rests."

"Easier said than done," Jim grumped.

"He is a headstrong one, isn't he?" Lynne chuckled. "He's going to be sore for a few days. I'd be prepared for some bitchiness if I were you."

"So what else is new?"

Lynne smiled. "You can go get him now. I think he's anxious to get out of here. For some reason, he doesn't seem to like hospitals much."

"Thanks, Doc." Jim walked through the door of the treatment room to gather his guide and take him home.

"It's about time you got here," Blair grouched. "I've been dressed for ten minutes. These people here don't think I'm capable of getting up and walking out on my own."

"These people are here to see you don't get hurt. Let's go home." He put out an arm which Blair grasped as he slid off the exam table.

"Man, this hurts." A hand went to cradle his belly, taking some of the weight off the bruised area.

Wrapping an arm around his partner to steady him, Jim placed a hand on the protruding belly, gently stroking the roundness. "She's okay," he whispered. "You're okay. You scared the shit out of me, Rambo. I thought I'd lost both you and the baby." Jim's fear was clearly reflected in his voice, along with his unbounded relief that his love and family were safe.

"Sorry, Jim. I didn't mean to scare you, but you were zoned! I couldn't leave you out there like that. You were a sitting duck!" Blair still trembled at the thought.

Jim guided the young man out to the truck and helped him to climb in. "No more of this, okay, Chief? I'm back to desk duty until after Laurene is born."

"Great, 'cause I don't think I could do this again." Blair grinned at him weakly. "Home, James."

Jim put the truck in gear and pulled out of the hospital parking lot.

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Chapter 9 - October 30 by NatalieL

Against his better judgment, Jim had allowed himself to be talked into going to work. Blair sat home alone, nursing his injury and trying unsuccessfully to stave off boredom. He picked up the remote control, clicking on the Discovery Channel, and settled in to watch a program on cloning.

As he stretched out on the couch, he felt a tightness seize his abdomen. He blinked in surprise, then tried breathing through the cramping. The tightness eased, and he settled in to watch the program.

At noon, Jim surprised him by coming home for lunch and bringing sandwiches from Leibowitz's Deli down the block. Blair dug through the bag with abandon.

"Tongue? Wow, thanks!" He pulled the paper back from his sandwich and sank down onto a chair in the dining area.

Jim set a glass of juice in front of his partner and settled down across the table. "How's it going?"

"Boring. What did you expect?"

"I expect you to be resting," Jim said in no uncertain terms.

"There's only so many hours in a day a guy can sleep." Blair sighed expressively before taking another bite of his sandwich. "Thanks for bringing home lunch; this is really good."

"Well, I figured after the day you had yesterday, you deserved a treat."

"You've finally forgiven me then?"

"For nearly getting yourself and our baby killed? No." Jim's face softened as he took in the stricken look from across the table. "But for saving me--yeah, I do. You're a brave man ... crazy, but brave. Just don't do it again, okay?"

"No way. I'm on hiatus from police work." Blair chuckled, then clutched at his abdomen, a hiss issuing from clenched teeth.

"Blair? What's wrong?" Jim was up and around the table, kneeling next to his lover.

"It's just cramps," Blair said, breathing normally again. "They're not so bad, really."

"Maybe we should take you back to the hospital and have it checked out." Jim was fretting again. "Do you want to lie down?"

"Nah, I'm fine, Jim. You can stop fussing." Blair batted Jim's hand away.

"Maybe I should take the afternoon off."

"Jim, you're not listening again. I'M FINE. Your hovering makes me nervous."

"You don't take good enough care of yourself," Jim complained.

Blair gathered his remaining patience around him like a cloak. "I appreciate that you're worried, Jim. It's flattering, but I can take care of myself. I'm just going to stretch out on the couch and veg

this afternoon. Good enough for you?"

"I suppose." Jim hesitated. "You'll call me if you need anything?"

"Of course. You know I would," Blair assured him, allowing Jim to help him over to the couch and put his feet up.

Jim fluffed the pillows beneath his guide's head and feet. "Comfortable?"

"Eminently. Now, get out of here before Simon calls and wonders where you are."

"You're sure you're okay?"

"Yes, Jim," he answered, patience fraying. "Thanks for bringing lunch. I enjoyed it."

"Want me to bring something home for dinner?"

"I was thinking about putting a lasagna casserole in the oven later."

"I'll pick one up from Marie's. You shouldn't be on your feet."

"Jim, I'm not an invalid! Let me cook, all right?"

The phone rang. Blair beat Jim to the handset, as the phone was on the floor next to the couch.

"Yeah, Simon. He's just leaving," he said as he watched Jim close the door behind him.

~oOOOo~

The smells of pasta and garlic wafted down the hall as Jim exited the elevator on the third floor. He opened the front door to find his lover busy in the kitchen, his gravid profile a welcome sight after a long day at the office. Walking over, he wrapped Blair in his arms from behind, kissing his cheek and following him around the kitchen as he attempted to finish their dinner.

"It's hard enough moving this bulk around without you hanging on for the ride," Blair grouched affectionately.

"I missed you," Jim said by way of explanation.

"I missed you, too, but if you want to eat tonight, you'd better let go. Here," he said, grabbing a head of lettuce. "You tear up the lettuce for our salad; all the other veggies are already chopped."

"You've been a busy one today," Jim commented, tearing the lettuce into a large bowl. "Weren't you supposed to be resting?"

"This all looks like a lot more work than it really is," Blair admitted. "I've been resting all day. I'm tired of resting. I need to move, keep the circulation going." He pulled the casserole out of the oven, and slipped the garlic bread in for browning.

They settled down to eat, Blair digging in with an appetite as ravenous as though he hadn't eaten all day. Jim looked on with amusement. Blair's appetite had been nearly insatiable the last few weeks.

"I had a talk with Simon today," Jim began, between bites of pasta. Blair looked up, but his mouth was full. "I asked how he'd feel if I started my paternity leave a week early."

Blair swallowed and washed the food down with some water. "Jim ... you don't need to do that."

"I've got plenty of vacation time and sick leave that I've never used. Add that to the six weeks paternity leave, and I could stay home with you and the baby for up to three months." His eagerness shone in his eyes.

"Sure, Jim," Blair agreed, giving in easily. He could see how much this meant to his life partner, his lover, to his Sentinel. He would pick and choose his arguments. This one wasn't worth the energy.

After dinner, they settled on the couch, Jim stretched out with his head resting in Blair's lap. Blair had his feet on the coffee table, in direct violation of House Rule No. 6, not that Jim cared. House rules had gone out the window when Blair got pregnant. Nothing was more important than pampering the mother-to-be. He listened to the patter of the small heartbeat, felt the strong kicks.

"Wow, that was a real bruiser," Blair commented, rubbing a hand over the top of his belly. "She's going to be a handful, I can tell."

"Just like her mother." The comment garnered him a slap on the shoulder.

"I would've hit your butt, but I can't reach," Blair complained. "You'd better not start calling me 'Mommy'. This little girl has two daddies and you're just going to have to get used to the idea."

"Yes, Dear," Jim murmured teasingly, rubbing gentle circles on the swollen belly as he continued to listen to the hypnotic sounds of the heartbeats. He froze as he felt the muscles contract beneath his hand. A moan issued from above him, followed by short, sharp pants of breath. "Blair?"

"Just another cramp, Jim. I'm okay."

"Maybe we should call Lynne."

"You worry too much." He stroked the short-cropped hair. "You know, I think fixing dinner wore me out. I'm going to hit the sack early tonight."

"Want me to come with you?" Jim asked, resuming his soothing belly rub.

"That's okay, you can stay up. Isn't there a Jags' game on TV tonight?"

"Yeah, they're playing Portland again. Pretty even match-up. You sure you don't mind?"

Blair smiled warmly at his lover. "I'm not really the best of company right now," he admitted. "Besides, you earned some quiet time. Enjoy the game."

Jim sat up and helped Blair to stand. "Need help getting upstairs?"

"Nah, I can make it." Blair grabbed onto the banister and slowly began his trudge up the stairs. Jim listened to the rustling noises as his lover undressed and pulled back the covers. The squeak of protesting bed springs brought a smile to his face. Not much longer now.

Turning on the TV, he adjusted the volume to sentinel hearing level so as not to disturb Blair's sleep, and settled in to watch the game.

At half-time, Jim got up to grab a beer. As he walked past the bedroom, he heard a soft cry. Bounding up the steps two at a time, he was next to the bed in seconds. Placing his hand on Blair's abdomen, he felt the strong contraction of the muscles. He pressed his ear near his hand, listening to the increased heart rate of their baby.

"All right, Chief. We're doing this my way this time." He tugged Blair into a sitting position. "Get dressed, we're going to the hospital."

For once, Blair didn't argue, he simply started pulling on the clothes Jim tossed at him. They made their way carefully down the stairs and across the room to the front door. "Wait here a minute," Jim said, leaning the exhausted man against the wall and running back up the stairs for the hospital bag they had packed last week. "Don't want to forget this, just in case." He guided Blair out the door and into the elevator.

The slow and cautious drive to the hospital became a mad dash with lights and sirens as another cramp caused Blair to double over in pain. "Make it stop, Jim," he pleaded, then all thought was lost to the effort of breathing through the pain.

He skidded the truck to a halt outside the maternity wing of the hospital. Running around to the passenger side, he helped Blair down, settling him into a wheelchair as soon as they got inside the doors.

He approached the desk and got the attention of the nurse on duty. "Blair Sandburg. He's not due in until November 7th for a C-section, but he's cramping now. It's gotten pretty bad."

The nurse walked around the desk and knelt by the wheelchair. "Blair?" She put a hand on his belly, feeling the tightening of the muscles. "You with me here?"

"Yeah," the young man hissed. "Make it stop, okay?"

"How long have these cramps been happening?"

Jim grimaced. "Most of the day, I think. Blair kept putting me off, saying it wasn't important, that he was okay."

"How far along is he now?" the nurse asked Jim.

"Thirty-nine weeks. His C-section is scheduled for next week."

A thought occurred to the detective. "He was shot yesterday." The nurse looked up, startled. "He was wearing a vest, but took a hit in the stomach. Could that be causing this?"

"Any number of things could be causing it," she answered cautiously, "but that's one of the possibilities. He's nearly term, though, so this could be an imminent rupture. Let me put in a call to Dr. Casey. We'll admit Blair for observation in the meantime." She shoved the paperwork in front of Jim, then stepped behind the wheelchair and pushed Blair through the swinging double doors.

"We're just going to make you comfortable, Blair. Okay?" The nurse took him into a room and set the brake on the chair. She rummaged in the cupboards until she found a smock that would fit. "Do you need any help getting undressed?"

Blair shot her a look of total disgust. "I'm still capable of undressing myself," he snapped.

"All right, then. I'll be back in a few minutes to help you get into bed." She took one look at her stubborn patient and added, "Don't you try it on your own. You need help. By the way," she said, her voice softening, "my name is Colleen. Buzz me if you need help before I get back."

Blair struggled with his clothes. He danced around the room as he tried to pull off his pants, nearly overbalancing and falling down. Leaving on his boxer shorts, he pulled the soft cotton gown on, tying the strings in the back, then plopping down in the nearest chair to wait for Colleen's return. "Wish Jim would hurry up and get here." He shivered in the cool room.

A few minutes later, Jim entered, followed by Colleen.

"Ready to get into that bed?" She smiled at the disgruntled young man. He stood and walked over to where she was standing. "This bed's down as low as it'll go," she explained, "so you'll need to use this step stool to get in."

Blair stepped up with the nurse on one side and Jim on the other to steady him. He slid onto the bed and tried to get comfortable. Colleen raised the head of the bed and placed some extra pillows behind his back and head. "How's that?"

"Okay, I guess."

"Dr. Casey will be here in about twenty minutes," Colleen explained as she stuck a needle in the back of Blair's hand and started an IV. She patted his hand reassuringly. "Don't worry, okay? Everything's going to be fine."

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"Well," Lynne said when she arrived and had a chance to examine her patient. "Looks like little Laurene had her own ideas about when she was ready to be born."

"What do you mean, Doc?" Jim fidgeted with the edge of the blanket covering Blair.

"The baby is full-term, and she seems ready to be born tonight. The cramping at this stage of the game most likely indicates the beginnings of a rupture of the ectopic. We'll have to do an emergency C-section tonight." She turned to her patient. "How do you feel about that, Blair?"

"I'm ready. Please, just make the pain stop," he pleaded.

"Okay, I'll send the anesthesiologist up to get you started. We'll do a spinal block, so you'll be awake during the delivery, Blair. Jim, if you want to be there to keep Blair company, you may." She turned to leave. "I'll see you in about a half an hour."

The anesthesiologist arrived a few minutes later with a cart load of equipment. "Hello, Blair. I'm Dr. Carter, your anesthesiologist. This will just take a few minutes and you'll be good to go. All right?"

"Anything to get this over with."

"All right, then. I need to get you rolled onto your side. Jim?" The doctor looked up as the other man nodded. "Okay, Jim, I want you to help. Grab Blair's arms and pull. I'll roll from the back. Blair, I want you to let us do all the work, okay? You just relax. You've got the easy part here."

The two men maneuvered Blair onto his side and the doctor readied a needle. "Jim, could you pull his shorts off, please? Sorry, Blair. No room for modesty when you're having a baby."

Jim tugged the boxers off, tossing them on the pile with the rest of Blair's clothes.

"Okay, now I'm going to give you a local anesthetic to numb the area where the spinal will go. It's just going to be a little prick," he assured.

Blair squeezed Jim's hands hard as the needle was inserted. He held his breath until he felt it being removed.

"You're doing great, Babe," Jim cooed. "Hang in there. It's almost over." He leaned in to place a kiss on Blair's forehead.

Dr. Carter poked around Blair's spine. "Feel that?" Blair shook his head. "Okay, I'm going to administer the block. I need you to arch your back and flex your knees and head. Just pull yourself into a ball. Okay?"

Blair did as he was told, trembling slightly. Jim continued to soothe with soft words and gentle strokes.

"Hold perfectly still now. I'm going to insert a needle near your spinal cord. You shouldn't feel a thing during the procedure. Tell me if you're in any discomfort, okay?" Blair nodded, too nervous to speak. The doctor continued the procedure until the anesthesia was administered. "Let's get you rolled onto your back again," he said, pulling gently against Blair's shoulder and hip to roll him back.

"That's it. I'll be monitoring your progress during the surgery. You may feel a little nausea. The drug I gave you sometimes has that side effect. If you feel like vomiting, don't try holding it in. Let someone know, all right?" He patted Blair's shoulder. "See you in surgery."

~oO0Oo~

Jim stood at the head end of the operating table, a sterile drape shielding both himself and Blair from the surgery going on at the other end.

"You may feel some pressure as we cut, Blair," Lynne warned, "but there won't be any pain. We'll cut into the abdomen and remove the baby," she said as she began her incision. "You'll feel some tugging sensations, but again, there shouldn't be any pain. After that, you'll get to hold your precious bundle for a bit while we finish up down here. Shouldn't take more than thirty minutes."

"How do you feel?" Jim asked, looking down at the pasty-white complexion of his lover.

"I'm okay. Feels weird, though," Blair admitted.

"If you feel any discomfort, let us know," Dr. Carter reminded him.

Blair nodded and closed his eyes. "I so want this to be over," he sighed.

"Soon, Blair. Soon," Jim soothed, brushing sweat-damp hair from Blair's forehead.

The squalling cry of a baby echoed through the room. After a quick cleaning and check-up, the blanketed bundle was laid in Blair's waiting arms. "Congratulations, Daddy," Lynne smiled. "You have a bouncing baby girl, born at 12:01 A.M. on Halloween!"

Blair peeled back the blankets to reveal two dark blue eyes, an upturned nose, and a rosy pucker of lips. He stroked the tiny face with one finger. "She's perfect, Jim! Isn't she perfect?"

"Absolutely, one hundred percent perfect," Jim agreed, kissing Blair and Laurene in turn. He pulled the wrapping back a bit more, revealing a cloud of fine strawberry-blonde curls. "She looks just like her daddy."

"Which one?" Blair laughed.

"The pretty one, of course," Jim said, his face deadly serious, but his voice lighthearted.

"We need to take Laurene up to the nursery for a bit," Lynne explained. "We'll get her weighed and measured, run a few quick tests, and you can have her back. I'll be keeping you in the hospital three days, Blair, barring complications. Do you want rooming in, or do you want us to keep Laurene in the nursery and just bring her in for visits and feeding?"

"I'd like rooming in," Blair told her.

"Great. I like that choice. Just remember, if you ever get too tired, we can always take her to the nursery so you can get your rest."

~oOOOo~

"Seven pounds, twelve ounces; nineteen-and-a-half inches," Lynne told them as she placed Laurene back into Blair's arms. The young man cuddled and cooed at the infant, as Lynne watched, wondering.

"Blair?" she asked, pausing momentarily. "What do you think of breastfeeding?"

"Huh?" Blair looked up from his bundle in shocked surprise.

"You've been leaking colostrum these past few weeks." She noted the look of disgust forming on her patient's face before deciding to continue despite it. "While it's certainly not a requirement, it's very beneficial to the baby to have that pre-milk. You pass on all your immunities through it, and help keep your baby healthy. Here, let's try something." She reached over to untie a couple strings on Blair's hospital gown, peeling back the fabric to expose the small mound of his left breast, which was currently leaking a cloudy, transparent fluid. She adjusted Laurene in his arms until her tiny bud of a mouth connected with the nipple. Like a duck to water, the tiny mouth latched on and began to suck.

Blair and Jim stared in amazement. "Wow...," Blair breathed. "Oh, wow. That's ... that's ... incredible!" He stroked one miniature cheek with a finger as his daughter suckled eagerly.

"I don't know if this is something you'll want to continue," Lynne said. "We always advocate breastfeeding, but with our male patients it's a touchy subject. You might not produce enough milk, so supplemental bottle feedings could be needed. It's your choice."

"What do you think?" Jim asked, almost afraid of the answer, not knowing which answer he wanted to hear.

"It's so ... so ... incredible, transcendental," Blair sighed. "God, it feels so right." He looked up at Jim with radiant eyes.

"Guess that answers your question, Doc." Jim smiled.

"Yup, guess so," Lynne agreed.

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Chapter 10 - Halloween - later that afternoon by NatalieL

The gang from Major Crime came to the hospital loaded down with balloons and toys, more gifts for the new baby and parents. When they arrived, they found Jim in the rocker with Laurene, and Blair asleep in bed.

Megan immediately walked over to Jim and peeled blankets back from Laurene's face. "Oh, what a dolly! She looks just like Sandy!" She scratched at the baby's chin and coo-cooed into her face.

Jim pouted. "What, she doesn't look like me at all?"

"She's got your chin, your long fingers," she said, letting the baby's hand curl around her index finger. When Laurene let out a yell and began crying, Megan chuckled. "And she's got your temperament. Poor Sandy!"

"Poor Sandy, my ass!" Jim complained. "All he has to do is lie there in bed and soak up the

congratulations. Time to go back to work," he said, shaking the young man awake.

"What?" Blair grumbled, still sleepy.

"Laurene's hungry again," Jim told him, shoving the bundle into his lover's arms.

"But she just ate!" Blair complained, unfastening the gown's tie and exposing a breast. Megan looked on in surprised approval, while Simon and the other men of Major Crime turned away, embarrassed.

"You make a good mother," Megan commented. Blair flushed.

Noting the reaction of his colleagues to the breastfeeding, Jim flipped the light-weight blanket up over Laurene's head, effectively covering the feeding. "All clear, guys," Jim chuckled.

"I didn't know Sandburg was breastfeeding," Simon commented, turning around.

"Neither did we, sir, until a few hours ago. He says it's 'transcendental'."

"Sounds like Sandburg, all right."

"Oh, go blow it out your...."

"Blair!" Jim interrupted. "Watch your mouth around the baby!"

"Oh, like she didn't hear things like 'fuck my ass' and 'Jim, oh, Jim fuck me harder' when she was in the womb." Their visitors colored slightly at the intimate look into the private lives of their friends.

"Too much information, Sandburg," Simon admonished. "We just stopped by to see your little bundle and check on how you were doing."

"Everything's fine, Simon. We're good." Jim grinned. "Guess it's a good thing I put in for that early leave."

His boss chuckled. "Leave it to Sandburg to fuck with the schedule."

"Um, sir.... He's still on the hormones, and, um...."

"Turns me into a foul-mouthed bitch," Blair filled in, smiling. "Watch what you say."

"I guess maybe I'd better herd them out of here," Megan said, making motions to the men in the room to make their exit.

One by one they came over to give their congratulations and get their first look at Laurene Victoria Sandburg-Ellison. Snuggled in her daddy's arms, with a proud papa leaning over them both, she blew milky bubbles in their faces.

"We'll come by to visit again when you're settled at home," Joel Taggart told them before he was shoved out of the room by a pushy Aussie Inspector.

"What do you think, Blair?" Jim asked when everyone had finally gone.

"I think it was really nice they all stopped by, but it's really nice they're all gone, too. I'm exhausted."

"Yeah, I know the feeling," Jim agreed, kicking off his shoes. "Mind if I join you?"

Blair scooted over on the large bed, rolling over to face into the center. Jim climbed on top of the covers, stretching himself out. Laurene lay cushioned between them.

"She's such a miracle, Jim," Blair marveled, watching the squirming bundle on the bed.

"Not nearly the miracle you are," Jim whispered, leaning across their child to kiss his lover passionately.

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Laurene Victoria Sandburg-Ellison  
Born: October 31, 1999, at 12:01 A.M.  
Cascade General Hospital  
7 lbs. 12 oz., 19.5 inches  
Mother: Blair Sandburg  
Father: James J. Ellison

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THE END

End Notes:

* What to Expect When You're Expecting by Arlene Eisenberg, Heidi E. Murkoff, and Sandee E. Hathaway, B.S.N. Published by Workman Publishing, New York. ♦ 1984, 1988, 1991, 1996 by Arlene Eisenberg, Heidi E. Murkoff, and Sandee E. Hathaway.

*Additional author's note: Against the advice of a beta with some medical background and experience with the concept of male pregnancies, I have gone ahead with the idea of Blair nursing the baby. I've been told that in actual male lactation, the hormones given to sustain the pregnancy would taint the milk causing hormonal defects in the child, including stunted growth and even possibly puberty as early as age two. In light of this, no doctor would recommend mpreg breastfeeding. I also realize that this might be a major turn-off to some readers, but it just felt so right, such a Blair-thing to do, that I honestly didn't want to cut it from the story. Consider it science fiction, consider it AU, but please don't throw stones. {g}

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