In Between Days by Annie

Summary: Post Sen Too part two. Can Jim and Blair get their friendship back on track? And then they made Murder 101 and TSbyBS and the world went to hell in a handbasket!

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Chapter 1: One
THURSDAY PM

He knew I was watching him, though he pretended not to notice, acting as if he was engrossed in whatever anthropological study he had in front of him. I could see the hot spots of color on his cheeks, and as he glanced quickly and surreptitiously in my direction, the dark shadows under his eyes. He had probably been expecting some sort of explanation for the way I'd been behaving toward him over the past week, but how could I explain something I didn't understand myself?

Finally, he sighed. "Jim? Would you quit doing that?"

"Quit doing what, Chief?"

"Watching me. I'm trying to read here."

"Sorry. Go ahead and read. Hey, you want some of that herbal tea?" I asked.

He flicked his hand impatiently at me, as if waving away a fly. "No, thanks. Look, I'm tired, think I'll just go to bed, okay?"

"Sure, yeah, bed's probably a good idea. You know, Chief, maybe you should go back to the hospital tomorrow, get checked out. Your lungs sound sorta wheezy to me."

"My lungs are fine, Jim. Jeez, I wish you wouldn't eavesdrop on me with your senses like that."

He stood up too quickly and swayed for a second, which gave me the opportunity to grab his arm with one hand and place my other on his forehead, trying not to notice how he moved (flinched, would probably be a more accurate a term), away from my touch.

"Dammit, Sandburg, you've got a fever. I knew you should have stayed here instead of following me down to Sierra Verde."

"It's fine, Jim, " he said irritably, pulling his arm free of my hand and moving past me. "The doctor said that my chest would be a bit tight for a while. I mean, it's not every day you get drowned, you know?" he said
with finality, sloping off to his room.

"Yeah, Blair, I know," I whispered, not wanting him to know how scared I still was at the realisation that I'd almost lost him.

I locked up and went to bed, trying to sleep, willing myself not to send my hearing down the stairs to check on him.

FRIDAY AM

I rolled over blearily at the sound of the alarm and went quietly down to the kitchen. Blair was asleep. I could still hear the faint wheeze of his breathing I'd heard the night before. I made coffee, hoping not to wake him. There was no need for him to come into the station today, but I didn't fancy my chances of winning that argument with him, if he woke before I left. I drank the coffee and wrote a quick note, telling him to go to the doctor, then, hearing him stirring, I threw on my clothes and headed out the door. I could have a shower and shave at the station.

Simon met me at the door of the squad room. "Hey, Jim, how you doing? Where's the kid?" he asked, glancing around.

"I left him at home, Captain. He's still got a fever and he's wheezing a bit. Thought he could use the rest. Not much going on at the moment, anyway. I mostly just came in to write up reports," I answered.

"He okay? Guess that trip wore him out more than he'd admit. Not surprising with what he'd been through just before."

"Well, you know Sandburg. He'd never admit to feeling lousy. I told him to go back to the doctor, get some more antibiotics or something. I'm sure he'll be fine," I said, with more confidence than I actually felt.

Simon headed for his office while I hit the shower, grabbing a Danish on the way to my desk. Trying to keep my mind from wondering how Blair was doing, knowing he'd be pretty pissed when he found out I'd left without him, I concentrated on the mound of paperwork I'd left behind when I'd headed down to find Alex. It was an at least an hour before I could see the pile beginning to recede, and I was just weighing the pros and cons of calling him to see if he wanted a ride to the doctor's office when a key ring hit the papers I was working on.

"Chief, you feeling better? You're looking a bit better," I said, glancing up, injecting a nonchalance into my voice that I didn't come close to feeling. Blair actually looked like hell, and I could tell that, yep, he was pissed at me, alright.

"Oh yeah, I'm fine, Jim but you know, I already told you that like a hundred times since we got back. Anyway, man, this is it, okay? You don't want me working with you, that's cool, then I'm figuring there's not much point in me living at the loft either. Here're the keys, I'll catch you round." He swung on his heels, and then had to grasp the edge of the desk to keep from toppling over in his hurry to get away.

"Whoa, whoa, Blair! What's brought this on, man?" I jumped up and snagged his elbow. "Of course, I still want you to work with me. I just figured you could use the extra rest today. There's not much to work on right now. Here," I picked up the keys and tried to press them into his unwilling hand, "Take the keys back, Chief. I don't want you to move out. We'll still be working together. Blair, come on," I said as firmly as I could. I'd already kicked him out once. There was no way I was doing it again.

He twisted his arm out my reach and dropped the keys back to the desk. "Jim, ever since we got back I've been trying to get you talk about what went on down in Mexico. And what's been happening between us
since we got back. I am so tired of being brushed off, man. This was important to me, to try to get things back on track. But all you've done is ignore it or act like a bear with a sore head whenever I'm around. Guess you were waiting for me to take the hint. And before you ask, I've got somewhere to stay. I mean, I did take care of myself before you came along."

I saw Simon staring at us from his office door, and I shook my head at him as unobtrusively as possible.

"Come on, Chief, why don't we go somewhere and talk about this? I know how tough things were on you with that business with Alex, I know I gave you a hard time over it, but that's in the past now. We can get past this," I said, hoping like hell we really could.

"Forget it, Jim. There's nothing more to talk about. Just leave it, alright? I'll see you round, man. I'll pick up the rest of my stuff on the weekend."

He stalked out of the office. I thought about chasing after him, but I knew it was pointless. When Blair was this intent on something, all I could do was wait for him to cool off and then try to talk some sense into him. Strangely, I also felt a sense of something like relief that he wouldn't be working with me anymore. Before I could analyse that emotion more fully, Simon waved me into his office.

He closed the door behind me and perched on the corner of his desk. "What's going on, Jim? I thought you said Sandburg was too sick to come in?"

"He is, Simon. Well, I thought he was anyway. I wanted him to go the hospital, so I didn't wake him to come to work. Now he's all bent out of shape because he thinks I don't want to have him as my partner," I replied.

"Aha, and is he right about that?"

"No, it's nothing like that, Simon. Like I said, he's sick and I just figure he's better off at home."

"You know, Jim, you've been pretty rough on the kid lately." Simon held up his hand to cut off my protest. "I mean, one day you're desperately trying to save his life and then down in that jungle you left him pretty much to fend for himself. And since you got back, things haven't been exactly smooth between the two of you. Are you sure you're not trying to cut Blair adrift because you think if he's not around you, he can't get hurt?"

My head jerked up at Simon's words. Somehow he'd managed to express what I'd only sensed in the back of my mind but not been able to explain to Blair. Now, my feeling of relief at Blair not working with me made sense. I'd already lost him once, and now, it seemed, lost him again. But at least this time I knew he was physically safe, even if I felt emotionally lost.

"Listen, Jim, you and the kid are the only ones who can sort this out. But I'll tell you now I'm not real happy about you doing your Sentinel thing out there without Sandburg to ground you. He's pulled your butt out of the fire too many times to count and whether you like it or not you still need him to back you up." He put his hand up to stop me as I tried to jump in. "Sort it out, Jim. Besides, he's still your friend, isn't he?"

"Simon, I didn't kick him out," I said defensively. *Not this time anyway,* the niggly little voice in my head said accusingly. "He's a big boy. He wants to do his own thing, that's fine with me. But, if it'll make you feel better I'll talk to him about staying on as my partner, alright?" *Shit!* said the doom laden voice of my thoughts as I headed back to my desk, Nice going, Ellison.*

FRIDAY PM
I still hadn't come up with any way to explain what was going on to Blair by the time I got home. But the minute I walked into the loft I knew I was going to have to come up with something and soon. There were half-packed boxes on the floor of Sandburg's room, but no sign of him. Looking around I noticed that he'd removed his books from the living room. Even the hideous New Guinea tribal mask I was always on his case about was gone.

Well ... there was a big part of the problem right there. There hadn't been many times in the past few weeks when I hadn't been on his case about something.

My house rules, for instance. They'd become a running joke between us - my anal-retentive thing, as Sandburg had come to call it. But since Alex, I'd been bitching about his untidiness constantly and I guess he'd started to feel the joke had worn thin.

Then, when I'd found out about Alex I'd kicked him out and then told him he'd abused our friendship and my trust. Even went so far as to tell him I didn't think we could get past this rupture in our relationship. The few times we'd discussed it since we got back he'd blamed it on my territorial imperative going into overdrive from sensing another Sentinel on my turf. Intellectually, I knew he was right. After all, he was the expert on what made my senses tick, but I knew it had hurt him, anyway. I tried to remember if I'd actually said the words, "I'm sorry" to him for that, but I had no conscious memory of it. Truth to tell, we'd come back from Sierra Verde, and I'd just hauled everything back up from the basement where I'd put it and then gone and picked up his stuff from that dump he'd been staying in before Alex had... Well, I wasn't quite ready to delve into that particular memory just yet.

Simon had insisted we take the week off when we got back. At the time, I was glad. I knew Blair wasn't completely well still, despite his assurances to the contrary and I felt pretty beat myself. At the time, I'd figured it would give us time to sort things out. Talk things through and hopefully, get things back to what passed for normal in the world of a Sentinel and his Guide.

But, as usual, I'd screwed up. Instead of talking, I'd blown Blair off every time he tried to discuss it. A lot of it was guilt, plus that mysterious feeling I'd developed of wanting somehow, anyhow, to keep him from being hurt again. The more he'd pushed it, the more irritated I'd become until the week that should have been healing had become one where we'd tiptoed as though on broken glass around each other; whenever we couldn't completely avoid being together, that is.

A tentative knock at the door had me on my feet in seconds. I pulled it open. "Sandburg! Where the hell... Oh, sorry, Conner, I thought it was Blair."

Conner looked at me in puzzlement as she walked past me. "Why would Sandy knock on his own door? Oh, bugger, Jim! You did it again, didn't you? Kicked him out. How could you?"

"Hey, hold it, Conner. I didn't kick him out. He left of his own volition, okay? What are you doing here, anyway?"

"I just came by to see how Sandy was. Do you mind?" she asked.

"No, no. That's fine. Have a seat. Would you like a beer?" I asked as she relaxed onto the sofa.

"Sure. That'd be nice. No chance you've got any Cooper's in that fridge, I suppose?"

"Coopers?" I queried. "Oh right, that Australian beer you're always bragging about. Nope, sorry just good old American," I said as I handed the bottle to her and perched on the corner of the coffee table across from her. "So, how have you been, Conner? Busy?" I asked, trying to make conversation, hoping like hell she wouldn't ask too many probing questions about what had happened between Sandburg and me.
"Yeah, flat out like a lizard drinking. We didn't all get time off like some people," she said with a grin. Then, "Do you want to talk about it?"

"About what?"

"You and Sandy?" she clarified.

"I don't know. I left him here today when I went to work, because I was worried about him. Then he busts into the bullpen and says something about me not wanting to work with him any more. So, he's moving out. I don't even know where he went."

Simon had told me Conner had worked out a little about my Sentinel capabilities and while I wasn't ready to get deep and meaningful with her, I knew she cared about Blair. I felt I could talk to her a little about what had happened. Hell, maybe she could give me some insight into this that I hadn't thought of myself.

"Well, you didn't exactly act as if you were glad to see him when we got there and then when he tried to help, you took off after Alex and left Sandy behind with me. I can understand why he'd think that, " Conner replied quietly.

"I thought he understood I had to do that on my own." I said, realization beginning to dawn. *God, Chief, I'm so sorry. You thought I was cutting you loose even then. That you'd done your bit to help me and now it was wham bam, thank you ma'am, you're out of here, Sandburg!* And then we'd come home and I'd held him at arms length and moaned about his lack of housetraining.

Conner shook her head at me sadly. "I think he probably just felt that maybe you felt you were ready to go back to working on your own. I mean, Jim, you hardly spoke to him all the way home," she said.

I jumped as I heard a knock at the door and went to open it.

"Rafe? What are you doing here?" I asked, trying to keep an upbeat tone.

"Hey, Jim, is Hairboy here?" he asked, shouldering past me through the door.

*Jeez, what is this? The annual general meeting of the Blair Sandburg Appreciation Society?*

"Aah, no, Rafe, not right now. Is it important?" I asked. Conner was one thing but I was damned if I was going to let the entire Major Crimes team in on my secret.

He sat down next to Conner, nodding a hello.

"Not sure, Jim. Could be. A woman came into the station tonight looking for Blair."

*Table leg.* I could hear the traitorous voice in my head repeating the jibe I'd thrown at Blair every time he'd looked at a pretty girl.

"She said Blair saved her kid by pushing him out of the way of a car today," Rafe continued.

"What?! " Conner and I gasped in the same breath. My mind flashed back to the same man pushing me out of the way of a garbage truck, the first day we'd really met.

"Yeah, well, that's why I came over. She said the kid's fine, just a couple of bruises but that Blair was bleeding pretty bad from his arm when they got him up. He refused to stay around for the paramedics. Just
made sure the kid was okay and then took off. But they found his observer's pass at the scene. That's how they tracked down who he was. They just want to say thank you."

He held out the pass. I took it from him and found my eyes drawn to the bloodstains obscuring the picture. Blair's blood. I could see every drop, then every cell, every molecule...

I could feel Conner's hand on my back, hear her voice. "Jim, snap out of it. Come on, Jim. Come on, mate."

I gasped and was in the loft again. I deliberately averted my eyes from the badge in my hand. I didn't want to zone again.

"You alright, Jim?" Rafe asked anxiously.

"Yeah, I'm fine," I said, brushing off his concern. "Thanks, man. I've got to go out for a while. Sorry, you don't mind, do you?"

"It's fine, Jim," Conner said, understanding in her eyes. "You get going, I'm going to get Rafe to take me out to track down any pub that sells Coopers Beer, right, Rafe?"

"Sure, Megan," Rafe said bemusedly as she steered him through the door. "What the heck is Coopers beer?"

I grabbed my jacket off the hook and headed to the car park minutes behind them. I was heading to the one place I thought Blair would be. I figured, despite his protestations to the contrary, that he wouldn't have had time to find anywhere else to stay, especially considering his chronic shortage of funds.

I parked in the University grounds. Fortunately, the guards knew me so I had no problem getting into the Anthropology building or getting them to call an ambulance as a precaution. As I approached his office, I could see a faint light glowing under the edge of the door. The door handle turned in my hand and I entered as quietly as I could.

"Chief?" I called. I could see him huddled on the bare-bones sofa in the corner of his office. I dialed up my senses. His heart was racing, his breathing still slightly wheezy. I could smell blood in the room and as my sight pinpointed his form, I could make out a bloodstained gauze bandage twisted around his arm haphazardly.

He turned toward me. "Jim?" he asked in a husky voice.

"Yeah, it's me, Chief." I knelt beside him, my hand reaching automatically to secure his, putting pressure on the wound. "Just keep breathing, Chief, okay?" I said quietly, "I'm gonna get you to the hospital. Just try to relax."

"It really hurts, Jim," he breathed, his other hand clutching mine.

"I know, buddy. Help will be here soon." I saw that he'd passed out. I stayed where I was, clutching his arm in my grip, determined to stem the bleeding, only moving aside when the paramedics arrived and he was finally on his way to the hospital.

SATURDAY AM

He looked better the next time I saw him. The long gouge in his arm from the car's fender sewn with 50 stitches, blood and fluids replaced, even his incipient pneumonia under control, thanks to broad-spectrum antibiotics.
"Hey, Chief, how are you doing?" I asked as I seated myself next to his bed.

"Okay," he responded quietly. "Bit sore, not too bad."

"Wanna tell me how you got hurt?"

"Aah, no big deal. I was in that shopping mall near home... near the loft. I saw this little kid in the middle of the parking lot, only a few yards from me. This idiot in a truck came speeding round the lane, I knew he didn't even see the boy. He didn't even slow, Jim! So I just ran out and scooped the kid up. Guess my arm caught the bumper when I fell. I'm just glad the boy's all right."

"Trouble magnet!" I reached out and tousled his hair affectionately. "Even when you're not backing me up, you manage to get hurt. What is it about you, Sandburg? Do you have a big sign on you somewhere saying, 'Attack Me'? You want to blow this joint? The doc said you can go home as long as you have someone to keep an eye on you."

"You sure, Jim?" he asked hesitantly. "We haven't exactly been getting on great the past couple of weeks. I can go to stay at Megan's or Rafe's or Joel's."

"Aah, yeah, the fan club," I said. "Blair, come home, okay? I promise this time we'll talk it through, when you're up to it. I won't brush you off again. I want to explain. I just didn't want you to get hurt again because of me."

"Guess I can do that all by myself, can't I?" he asked.

I nodded.

"Okay, Jim. Let's go home," he said.

SATURDAY 6PM

I fixed a light dinner and made up Blair's bed. I'd go and pick up the things he'd taken with him in the morning. After we'd eaten, I steered him into the living room and settled him on the sofa.

"I need to say some things," I began. "When I took off on my own down there it was because Incacha told me in a vision that I had to face the danger alone, that my friends could not follow me there. I guess that was to do with my own inner journey as a Sentinel. But, Chief, I still need you to help me here. Incacha would never have handed his responsibility onto you if he didn't want you to be my Guide in the here and now. Do you believe that? I asked.

Blair nodded slowly. "I guess so."

"There's one other thing I need to say, Chief. And then we'll try to put it behind us, okay? Unless you have anything more you need to say."

"What's that, Jim?"

"I'm sorry, Blair."

SATURDAY PM

I heard the music before I woke up. Looking at the clock I saw it was after 10 p.m. Groaning, I pushed aside the blankets and started to stumble down the stairs. I guess Sandburg was definitely back home!
"BLAIR!" I shouted. "What's going on? I thought you'd gone to bed."

He reached out to turn the music down a little. "Oh, sorry, man. Guess I'm already back to breaking the house rules. Megan gave me this CD as a coming home present. It's The Cures' 'Standing On A Beach' album. Great English band, man. I'll keep it down, though. Didn't mean to wake you up," he said with an apologetic grin.

I slumped down on the bottom step, smiling in spite of my tiredness.

"It's okay, Chief. They're not too bad. What's the name of the song?" I asked.

"This one?" he said, checking the album cover. "It's called 10-15 Saturday Night. Synchronicity, hey?"

The End.

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