

The Weight of Love

By Patt

Art by Banbury

William Ellison glanced out his kitchen window and realized what a gift he had been given just six months previously. He had had a heart attack and ended up having triple bypass surgery. Even though his boys fought a lot of the time, they had come together at the hospital and become closer to each other and to William. Jimmy had found out that William had two enhanced senses and somehow took it in stride, with the help of Blair Sandburg. William had found out about Steven's fiancée, Frances, and had fallen in love with her himself. He understood what Steven saw in her from the first day. The best part about his recovery was how close he had become to Blair. He knew all along about Jimmy and Blair, but was waiting for Jimmy to tell him. Jimmy never did, because he still acted like a young child around William some of the time. William decided, that morning, that he was going to call Jimmy, Jim from now on. Maybe he was treating him like a child all along. So, no more Jimmy. His son would be called Jim from this day forward.

William was feeling quite well considering the surgery he had gone through. And with the help of Jim and Blair, he now had things to do during the week to keep him busy. He went on Monday, Wednesday and Friday to St. Patrick's Church, where they had a senior meal site and activity center. From 9:00 until lunch he played poker and again after lunch until 2:00. He had made some very good friends by going here and would be forever grateful to everyone for helping him get jump started. On Tuesday and Thursday he went to the library by his house and read from 10:00 until 12:00 to pre-school children and sometimes kindergarteners. He enjoyed that the most. The children made him feel young again.

Now, he was getting ready for the wedding of his youngest son. William felt bad that Jim and Blair would be robbed of a wedding ceremony and reception because they were a gay couple. If William had his way, he would be giving them a party anyway. However, Jim had asked him to just leave it alone. So, William kept the idea in the back of his mind, but didn't say anything to either of the two men.

Steven was marrying the nicest girl, named Frances Miller. She came from a very large family which had made for some problems of late. Steven asked Jim to be his best man and Blair to be his groomsman. They were both so honored, but Frances's family had other ideas about who should be in it. Her oldest brother, Mike, decided to turn some of the family members against her because she asked a gay couple to be in the wedding. Frances had not backed down at all. She told them that they would have to decide to either go or not to go, but either way she was getting married and they would have to live with not being a part of it, if they refused to come. Well, three of them weren't coming, including big mouthed brother Mike and Frances was hurt about it, but refused to give in to pitying herself. She and Steven were going to have a fantastic wedding whether her family was all there or not. William wished that they would all think about it some more and show up, but he didn't have any right to say anything to them. He didn't even do a good job with raising his own sons, let alone giving advice to someone else's children.

Everything was going to be great. Tonight, Jim and Blair were having them over for dinner at their new house. William was very excited to see the new place. Jim and Blair had bought a gorgeous one-story brick house that they talked about constantly. Jim wouldn't let anyone come over until they were all done moving and settling in. William was so anxious to see the new place and so were Steven and Frances. He was happy to be a part of their lives and be included in family affairs. There was a time when William wouldn't have been included. William was so glad that those days were behind him. William had made some good friends at the meal site, but still felt like he needed family even more.

William washed his coffee cup out, took one last look at the backyard and decided that that day would be an excellent one for shopping for a perfect gift for Frances and Steven. He even thought he might give them a very generous Visa gift card that had enough money to buy all new furniture. He had done the same thing for Jim and Blair and decided maybe that would be his best route.



He had to go read to the children at the library that morning and then he was meeting two men, Stanley and Thomas, for lunch. William was so glad to have made good friends. Stanley and Thomas were great to be around. Both of them were older than William, but had very young ideas. All in all, between his friends and his activities, he had more than enough to do.

William got dressed, talked with Sally for a short time and then left the house at 9:30 so he had plenty of time to get to the library. Today was going to be another great day. William smiled all the way there.

"Are you as excited as I am to have people over for the first time, tonight?" Blair asked.

"I'm super excited. Everyone is going to love the new furniture and the new house. It looks great. I'm glad that we have time to have everyone over before the wedding, because afterwards, they would be gone for the honeymoon and settling into their new lives," Jim stated.

"I forgot to mention that I invited Megan for dinner tonight also," Blair said.

"Why?" Jim wondered.

"She's like part of the family. She's one of my best friends and I wanted her to see the house tonight along with everyone else. Is there a problem?" Blair asked.

Jim pulled Blair in for a quick kiss and said, "No problem, just wondered. The more the merrier."

Blair smiled. "Now that's more like it."

"Is there anything I can help with? The house looks terrific and it smells as good as it looks," Jim asked.

"Nope, everything is done. I just have to heat everything before they all get here. We're all set," Blair said happily.

Jim looked over at Blair and asked, "Would you mind if I went to the station and got caught up on some paperwork?"

"Just a moment and I'll go with you. We don't have to be back until 6:00, so hang on," Blair said as he hurried out of the kitchen and into their bedroom. Before long he was back and raring to go.

Jim just smiled at his lover and partner. He had secretly hoped that Blair would come along, but didn't want to bug him if he was busy.

They were driving on the highway, when they saw the accident. Jim said, "Call it in for more back up. There are at least five cars involved."

Blair called and reported it and stayed on the phone as they drove up and parked on the side of the road. A policeman walked up to Jim and said, "I'm sorry sir, but you can't advance, there are several people hurt and we need to make room for the ambulances."

Jim whipped his badge out and said, "I'm Detective Jim Ellison and this is my partner, Detective Blair Sandburg. What can we do to help?"

"The paramedics haven't arrived yet and we have one man that is bleeding a lot and stuck in his car. Do either of you have any medical training?" Officer Dunlap asked.

Blair answered and said, "Jim has medical training. Show him the way."

"Okay, and Detective Sandburg if you could come with me and help with a pregnant woman, I would appreciate that," Officer Dunlap said, hopefully.

"Be careful, Jim."

"You too, Blair," Jim said as he headed in the direction of the vehicle that was smashed up the worst. There was a fire department worker trying to get the door open on the car and they were having a hard time. Jim listened and heard that the man in the car was hyperventilating, so he walked up and said, "I need to calm the victim down. Let me squeeze in here."

No one knew what else to do, so they moved to one side and started work on the door again. Jim leaned down into the car and said, "My name is Jim, what is your name?"

"Mike..."

"Listen Mike, I know you're scared, worried and just downright hurt, but you have to try and calm down a little bit. Can you take hold of my hand, so I can take your pulse?"

The man took hold of Jim's hand, like it was a lifeline. Jim checked his pulse and found it not as bad as he had thought it would be. "Mike, your pulse is a little fast because you're upset and hurt, but not too bad. I want you to take some deep breaths and try and relax a little," Jim advised.

Mike did as he was told, but still was holding on for dear life.

Jim then said, "You've got a lot of blood on your face, let me wipe it off with my handkerchief. It's clean, you don't have to worry." Jim then smiled to help make the scared man relax a little. It worked. He started breathing easier and calming down.

"Mike can you tell me where you're hurt other than the gash on your forehead?"

"I'm in a lot of pain in my back. I don't know why. Are they going to be able to get me out of here in time?" Mike asked, still holding on to Jim's hand.

"Don't you worry, these are some of the best firemen I know and they won't let you stay in this car any longer than you have to. Are you having any pain in your arms and legs, Mike?"

"No, Jim. Just my back and my head. I'm getting a little dizzy, though, is that normal?" Mike asked worriedly.

Jim looked over at the fireman and frowned. "Yes, Mike, you probably have a concussion. They'll have you out of here soon enough."

"Will you ride to the hospital with me?"

Jim looked at the poor man and felt sorry for anyone who was alone when something like this happened.

"I'll be glad to ride up to the hospital with you when the time comes. I hear the big guns coming now. It's the Jaws of Life, so you'll be out of there in moments," Jim said.

"Do you promise that I'm not going to die?" Mike asked.

Jim smiled and said, "I promise. Now relax, they're opening the door now. When they bring you out, it's going to hurt, so don't tense up if you can help it. Take the easy little breaths like I just taught you and see if you can stay calm and not hurt yourself any further."

"Thank you so much, Jim. I don't know what I would have done if you hadn't have come into the picture," Mike said gratefully.

"It's my job, Mike. Now, just relax, they're going to pull you out now," Jim said.

Mike let out a loud moan when they began to move him. The fireman said, "Could you let his hand go so we can get him out easier?"

"Hey, he's holding mine, I'm not holding his. He's afraid to let go. Let's try and work around this and get this show on the road. I hear the ambulance coming, so they'll be able to transport him soon," Jim explained.

The fireman looked at Jim like he was nuts. "Detective, you couldn't have heard anything over the motor running for the Jaws of Life."

Jim just grinned at him as the ambulance drove up and came to a quick stop. Jim just smirked then.

They got a back board and put Mike on it and with Jim still connected they started for the ambulance. "Mike, I need to tell my partner where I'm going to be. I'll be right back," Jim said as he patted Mike's hand.

"You promise?" Mike asked.

"I promise, I'll be right back," Jim said as he ran for the red Mustang with the pregnant woman in it.

"Chief, I'm going to be riding to the hospital with Mike. Could you drive my truck to the station?"

"You okay, man?" Blair saw all of the blood on Jim's clothing and started worrying right away.

"I'm fine, here are the keys. I have to go," Jim said as he rushed over to the back of the ambulance and got in.

Mike smiled and said, "You're back."

Jim smiled and said, "I am."

"They think I ruptured my spleen, is that something bad?" Mike asked.

"It can be, but you'll be at the hospital in a jiffy. Don't worry so much. They'll take good care of you at Cascade General." Jim noticed that Mike had grabbed his hand again, which made Jim smile.

The EMT's were giving him pain medication according to what the doctor said and hoped Mike would calm down a little. His blood pressure was way too high.

Mike was in a lot of pain, but Jim helped him work through some of it with breathing exercises. That also helped take his blood pressure down some. Everyone was wondering how he was doing it. Before long, they were at the emergency room and they were wheeling Mike into a room. The doctor told Jim, he had to let go of him, so they could work on him. Jim wondered if everyone was nuts. After all, Mike had Jim's hand, not the other way around. Smiling at Mike he wished him well and left the room.

Jim could hear them working on him and knew Mike would be fine. Jim went to the restroom and washed his hands and his arms that had been covered with blood. Then he pulled his cell out and called Henri Brown.

"Brown..."

"Hi Henri, its Jim. Could you possibly send someone that isn't busy to Cascade General to pick me up? I had to ride with a victim to the hospital and now I'm stranded."

"Sure, I'll come and pick you up. I'm not doing anything. Did you hear about your partner?"

Jim immediately panicked and asked, "What happened?"

"Calm down, dude. He delivered his first baby today. He's pretty hyped up. He's down in the shower right now. You'll probably be back here before he's back at his desk."

"Thank you, H. I'll see you in a few minutes," Jim said.

Jim walked up to the front desk and asked the nurse on call if she could give him Mike's last name for the reports he would no doubt have to fill out.

"Detective Ellison, it's nice that you stayed with him. His name is Mike Miller and his family has been contacted. Would you like to wait and talk to them?" Melanie asked.

Jim shook his head no and said, "My ride's,here. I have to go. Talk to you later, Melanie. Thank you." Jim rushed out to the parking lot to a waiting and grinning Henri Brown.

Jim jumped into Henri's truck and shut the door. "I could use a shower, H."

"That you could, man."

They both smiled as Henri drove off.

When Jim got to the station, he went right down for a shower and clean clothes. Blair was downstairs talking to Rafe when Jim walked in and got into the shower.

"I'll see you upstairs, partner," Blair called out as he headed for the elevator.

"I'll fill you in when I get upstairs," Jim called back.

Blair wondered what he had to tell him that was so important, but didn't really worry about it, because he was still on his freaking high from delivering a healthy baby girl. The mom was naming her Savannah Blair. Blair still couldn't believe how awesome it was to bring a new life into the world. Even if he was just along for the ride.

When Jim got upstairs everyone was surrounding Blair's desk, patting him on the back. Jim walked up and patted him, too. "Congratulations on the baby girl, Blair. I heard they named her after you."

"Aw, thanks, Jim. Not really after me. Just the middle name. Her name is going to be Savannah Blair. Isn't that a kick?" Blair asked bouncing in place.

Jim pushed everyone aside and said, "I need to talk to my partner in private."

"Interrogation room 2 is open, man. I'll meet you in there," Blair said, wiggling his eyebrows making everyone laugh.

Jim looked very serious when he said, "Hurry up, I have something to tell you."

Blair could tell, something was up. Suddenly, it wasn't that funny anymore. He walked briskly into interrogation room 2 and closed the door. "Okay, man, you have my attention. What happened?"

"You know that guy from the accident that wouldn't let go of my hand? I think he might be Frances Miller's brother. I mean his name is Mike Miller and there are a ton of Mike Millers in town, I'm sure, but I have a feeling. What do we do with that?"

"Holy shit... I have no idea what we do with that. We can't tell Frances, because that would just be wrong. I guess we just have to keep it to ourselves. It's too bad, he's such an ass. It was Mike, right?" Blair asked.

"Yes, it was Mike. I was thinking about going up and introducing myself and not acting like I knew him, but it didn't work out in my head," Jim said, laughing.

"You did a good thing, man, even if he doesn't think so."

"That's just it, Chief; he does think I did a good thing. He was happy I was by his side. It would ruin the moment if he knew who I was, so we just keep it to ourselves. Okay?"

"Sounds good to me, Jim. Now, let's get out there and get some paperwork done," Blair said.

Jim hugged him super fast and said, "I knew you would deliver that baby just dandy. You're a good man and you did a good thing, too, Chief."

Both men walked back to their desk and sat down to start paperwork. The only thing Jim was happy about was they didn't witness the accident or anything like that, so they didn't have to fill out any paperwork about that. Blair agreed with that except he had to fill out the form for delivering a new life into the world on the highway.

After six hours, they brought Mike Miller into his room on the surgical floor and the doctor asked who he was supposed to talk to.

Mike's mother said, "You can talk to me, he's my son."

"Hello, Mrs. Miller. My name is Doctor Matt Reid. We had to remove his spleen, which was ruptured in the accident. Due to the fast talking and actions from the detective at the scene your son is alive and well today. He was very lucky to have him keep him calm and help him get through the pain. Surgery went very well and Mike will be able to go home in three days."

"Could we have the detective's name, so we could send a basket of fruit or something?" Mrs. Miller asked.

"I can tell your son, but not you. It's up to him, if he wants to share it. Now, I suggest you all leave and let him get some rest. You can see him tonight and see how he's doing then."

They all hugged and kissed Mike and left the room. A very groggy Mike asked, "Could you write down his name and number for me, please?"

Doctor Reid smiled and wrote down Jim's name and the station number on his business card. "Rest now and I'll see you tonight before I go home."

"Thanks, doc."

As soon as the doctor walked out of the room, Mike looked at the card and sucked in a big breath. Jim Ellison? That's who saved his life? Mike took the card and tore it up in little pieces and hoped he never had to tell anyone about it.

Before long, he was sleeping and dreaming about the kind eyes that helped him get through the worst day of his life.

William, Steven and Frances all showed up at Jim and Blair's house at 6:00 as planned. As soon as Jim let them in, all they could smell was the wonderful scent of dinner.

"Oh my gosh, what are we having?" Frances asked.

"Hawaiian baked ham and all the trimmings. Blair worked really hard on it and he was nervous," Jim said.

"I'm sure it's great," William said. "I see that Megan Connor is here, too."

"Yes, Blair invited her, I hope you all don't mind," Jim said.

"Everyone likes Megan," William said, smiling.

"Let's see this house, big brother," Steven said, pounding Jim on the back as he said it.

Jim took them all for a guided tour and everyone fell in love with the house.

"Okay, we have wine, beer and other drinks, but I have to take your car keys away if you're going to drink any of them. We have four bedrooms, so you can stay over. They were all furnished as you could see. Now, let's go see the kitchen and see what Blair is up to."

They all walked into the huge kitchen, and everyone embraced Blair, talking and smiling at the same time. Blair was a little overwhelmed and Jim could tell by his heartbeat.

"Everyone, let's go in the dining room and sit down and I can get the drinks for everyone. Blair has to finish dinner with Megan."

They all walked into the dining room and Jim took orders for drinks. "Wow, I actually feel like a bartender."

Frances laughed and said, "If you're a good boy, you might get a huge tip."

It was a very good ice breaker. Even Steven laughed hard at that one. Jim asked everyone what they would like to drink and he asked Frances and she said, "Oh, I have to drive, because my brother was in a terrible accident today, so I have to go and see him tonight. I hope you won't all think us rude for leaving right after dinner."

"Oh, that's too bad, Frances. Give him our best." Jim walked into the kitchen and got everyone's drinks and brought out a tray filled with wine, beer and sodas. When he walked through the kitchen door carrying it, Steven said, "Jim, I think you missed your calling. You're handling that tray like a pro."

Again, everyone laughed. "Yeah, well, Blair made me practice before you got here. He's a slave driver," Jim kidded.

Jim handed everyone their drinks and took the tray back into the kitchen. Blair smiled at him and said, "It's time to serve dinner."

So Megan, Blair and Jim all took out numerous things and set them all on the table. Things were going smoothly. As they all ate dinner Megan told everyone about Blair delivering a baby and having the baby named after him. They all began to ask questions and Jim just smiled and nodded his head when asked a question. The evening was going well. Finally Jim said, "Blair, Steven and Frances have to leave early because her brother was in a terrible accident and she wants to go see him tonight after we eat. So we'll save them some dessert, how does that sound?"

Frances smiled and said, "You two are the best friends a gal could have. I know why Megan is always over here. You're great. Thank you for this wonderful dinner."

Steven wasn't going to be outdone by his wife, so he said, "We love the house, and the kitchen is perfect if you can make meals like this in it. Dinner was delicious and I would gladly have dessert later on."

Jim smiled at all of them and said, "Dad, I'll take you home once you're ready to go."

"I was thinking about having a little more wine and staying the night," William said.

"That works too," Jim answered.

Megan smiled and said, "Well, damn it, I'm going to have some more wine and stay in another room. I can borrow a tee shirt to sleep in, can't I, Jimbo?"

"Hey, you've gone all night long without calling me Jimbo. If you want something to sleep in, you had better be nice," Jim teased.

"Okay, Jim. I love this house. It's so spectacular. It has everything you'll need," Megan replied.

Blair said, "Frances, when you have time after your honeymoon, we would like to find out what we have to do to become foster parents."

"Oh my gosh, you're kidding. Already? This is so perfect. I see some fantastic children come through the system that need a good home. I'll start the paperwork for you tomorrow and we can get the ball rolling before we leave. I'm so thrilled for you. I understand why the house is so big. You wanted a family." Frances went over to Jim and hugged him and then hugged Blair.

"We'd better go, Frances," Steven reminded her.

"I'll see you sometime tomorrow with paperwork, names, numbers and a few other things you'll need to become foster parents. I'm so darn excited," Frances said as they got ready to go.

Frances hugged everyone goodbye and then they walked out the door to head to the hospital.

"Dinner was terrific," William said, happily.

"Thank you, William, it was my pleasure. I love to cook. Actually, so does Jim. This kitchen is perfect for both of us," Blair said.

Megan said, "I'll help with dishes, why don't you and your dad go relax, Jim?"

"That would be really nice. More wine, dad?"

"Yes, I wouldn't mind another glass of wine. Thank you. Let's go and sit down in that nice den you have. Maybe we could catch the evening news," William suggested.

As soon as they settled in the den, Jim turned on the tv and a camera was on Jim helping the guy in the ambulance. William was so damn proud of his son, but then he saw the frown on Jim's face and asked, "What's bothering you, son?"

"Dad, I'm going to tell you something, but you can't tell anyone. I mean, it must never get to Frances," Jim said cautiously.

"Tell me. It can't be that bad."

Jim told him all about helping the man and the man holding Jim's hand the entire time and asking Jim to go in the ambulance with him. William waited for something bad to have happened and then Jim told him. "It was Mike Miller, dad. Frances must never know that I was the cop that helped her brother."

"My God, it's a small world. I can't believe he didn't say something to you when you were holding his hand," William pointed out.

"First of all, he was holding mine. Secondly, he's never met me and I've never met him. He doesn't know it was me. He'll never know who did it and that's the way I want it."

"But Jim, this might help with the wedding ordeal," William stated.

"I don't want him to go to the wedding just because he thinks he owes me something. I was doing my job, dad. Nothing more, nothing less. I just want to forget all about it," Jim said.

They started watching the news because William now knew when to argue with Jim and tonight wasn't the night.

At about ten o'clock, Jim took William to one of the spare rooms and gave him a toothbrush and toothpaste and hugged him goodnight. Blair and Megan were still in the kitchen doing dishes.

Jim went into the kitchen and Blair was finishing up with loading the dishwasher. "I just came in to see if I could help," Jim joked.

"Very funny. We worked really hard. I think we both deserve a big glass of wine for that," Blair said.

Blair looked into the living room and asked, "Where is William?"

"He's getting ready for bed," Jim answered.

"I think I want to go to bed too," Blair said, very seriously.

Megan jumped up and said, "I'm tired too. We all have to work in the morning, so that'll work out well. See you in the morning, Jim and Blair. Sleep well. Thank you for everything tonight."

Blair showed Megan to another spare room, handed her a tee shirt and they all wished each other well and went to bed.

Once in their bedroom, Blair said, "I told Megan about Mike."

Jim said, "I know, I heard you. It's okay, she won't tell anyone that shouldn't know."

"If we're really quiet, will you make love to me?" Blair asked sweetly.

Jim locked their door and started to strip Blair and before long they were both into it big time and Jim made slow passionate love to his mate. They made no noise, so they wouldn't embarrass either William or Megan. Once they were done, Jim cleaned them up and pulled Blair into his arms for the night.

"Jim, are you sure you want to take the big step with foster kids?"

"Yeah, I want to do it more than you can imagine. In fact, I'd really like to adopt instead of foster, but we have to start somewhere, right?" Jim asked.

"It's only four days until the wedding and Frances is taking time out to do this for us. She's one in a million. We couldn't ask for a better sister-in-law. Don't you agree?"

Jim smiled and nodded. He turned the light off on the nightstand and said, "Let's get some sleep. I love you, Blair."

"I love you, Jim."

Jim listened to all of the sounds in the house and liked the sound of friends and family in their home. The sound of all of their heartbeats lulled Jim to sleep within moments.

The following day, after William left, Jim and Blair went to work. When they got there Frances was there already with papers.

“Could we talk somewhere in private?”

Jim led the way to one of the interrogation rooms and shut the door. “Is there a problem, Frances?”

“No, I talked to my boss and said that we can get you on the fast track of getting approved because you both have such good backgrounds. He wants your papers filled out as soon as possible, because we have about eleven children that are in need of a place to live. So, the sooner we get everything done, the sooner you can get approved. Here are the forms for all of your co-workers and your boss. Try to get them to my office by 3:00 today. Mr. Lipton wants this all taken care of by then. You need to fill out these forms and your dad needs to fill one out. I already filled out the ones for Steven and myself. Maybe you could ask Captain Banks if you could take off part of the day to get this all finished. Mr. Lipton thinks that if we get all these papers in, he can have you approved for a home inspection in two days. Wouldn't that be wonderful?”

“Frances, I can't believe you found time to work our lives into yours with your wedding coming up. Thank you so much,” Blair said as he hugged her close.

“It's my pleasure. Now get busy and get these all in to me by 3:00. See you later,” Frances said with a huge smile.

Jim walked her to the elevator and then they handed out the forms for everyone to fill out and started filling out there's too.

At noon, they took off for the day having collected everyone's papers and dropping the ones off at William's that he needed to fill out. Blair helped him do it, because he seemed unsure of himself. Once they had his in hand, they took everything to Frances by 1:00. Jim was impressed at how fast they got it done. They were ready for a home inspection and any other type of inspection that came up. Then all they had to worry about was the personal interview and Jim wasn't sure if they did Psychology reports or not. They couldn't get appointments for those interviews until after they inspected the house.

Two days later, Mr. Lipton called Jim at home and asked if they could come for a home inspection. Then they were going to interview everyone that filled out paperwork. They

would then set up the appointments for Jim and Blair's interview. Jim got excited realizing they were on the road to becoming foster parents.

Blair was over at Steven's house, seeing if he could help with anything for the wedding. He left Jim to deal with the home inspection. He knew that Frances was ready to have a nervous breakdown, but that was only the half of it. She came rushing out of the bedroom she shared with Steven and said, "You won't believe who just called."

"Who?" Steven asked.

"Mike. He wanted to tell me that everyone is going to be at the wedding and he hopes we'll be able to get past all of this ugliness. Do you believe it?" Frances was on the verge of tears.

"I take it he's out of the hospital?" Blair asked.

"Yes, he got out last night and he said he did a lot of soul searching while he was in there and decided I was more important than anything. I'm so happy, I can't believe it."

"I think someone said that already," Steven teased.

"Steven, cut me a little slack. I never dreamed they would change their minds. I'm so happy. Now, I need you to leave for the day and I want to show Blair my dress and everything and get his opinion."

Steven smiled at his excited wife-to-be and kissed her on the top of the head. "I'll go sit with Jim while he waits for the inspection. Call me there."

"Thank you, honey."

As soon as he drove off, she said, "Swear you won't tell anyone?"

"I swear. Now tell me," Blair ordered.

"I'm 8 weeks pregnant, maybe a little more."

"Oh my God, you're pregnant?" I don't believe it. This is wonderful news," Blair said.

"Yes and I've gained a little weight, so I need to know if it really looks bad with this dress or not. I need the truth, okay?"

"You got it." Blair hugged her and kissed her on the cheek.

Blair sat down and waited for Frances to come out and model the dress. The dress did look differently when she walked out of her room. She now filled out the bust line and her waist was a little thicker. Even with that, she looked beautiful in the dress.

"It's perfect, Frances. I'm serious, you look utterly gorgeous. Aren't you going to tell Steven, now?"

"I'm telling him at dinner tonight. But we'll save the big news for everyone else for next month. But you can tell Jim. He should be able to know about it too. Thank God the wedding is soon, because I wouldn't be able to fit into it in two or three weeks."

Blair laughed as Frances went to take off the gown. When she came back out, she said, "Can we talk wedding for a little while? I have some simple questions you might be able to help me with."

"Sure, you know you can ask me anything, any time. Now what's up?"

"I have to add the extra members of my family to the table setting and I was wondering how you felt about my brother Mike sitting at your table. I think it would do him good," Frances suggested.

"Is Jim sitting by me?"

"Yes, he's next to you. I didn't want to separate you," Frances answered.

"Why are you putting Mike by us?" Blair really wanted to know.

"I think that it would do him good to sit by you and get to know both of you for the evening. He's really a nice guy once you get past the rough exterior."

"So, he's a little like Jim?" Blair asked.

"Let me rephrase that. If you look deep enough, you might find someone you could be friends with. He's nothing like Jim. I don't love him as much as I do Jim."

Blair looked at Frances and smiled. "That's one of the nicest things I've ever heard said about him. Thank you."

"I feel the same way about you. Now let's find good places for the others to sit," Frances said as she got the place setting book.

They laughed and talked as they figured out all they needed to do. Blair loved Frances as much as he would have loved a sister.

Jim and Steven were waiting for the inspection, and Steven could tell that Jim was nervous.

"Jim, have you noticed that dad has begun calling you, Jim?"

"Yes, he told me in confidence that he thought he made me feel like I was a child sometimes and that's why he called me Jimmy. To tell you the truth, I'm thrilled. I hate being called Jimmy. It's bad enough I have to put up with Megan calling me Jimbo. But Jimmy was worse. Are you

trying to get me thinking about other things, so I won't be as nervous about the inspection?" Jim asked.

"I was trying, but I guess I failed," Steven said, laughing.

The doorbell rang and Jim jumped up to answer it. Steven caught up to him and said, "Don't be so nervous, Jim. These things happen all the time and this house is great."

"Thanks, Steven." Jim opened up the front door and said hello to the two inspectors.

The man introduced himself as Daniel Fry and his partner as Nicole Davis.

Jim shook both of their hands and said, "This is my brother Steven Ellison, he's here to give me moral support."

Daniel and Nicole shook hands with Steven next.

Daniel said, "May we get the inspection started?"

"Sure," Jim replied, "we'll sit in the living room and wait for you to get done."

"That would be perfect, Jim," Nicole said.

They walked off with their laptop and notepads and started in the kitchen.

Steven whispered, "Do you hear them in any of the rooms?"

Jim smiled. "I hear them in all of the rooms. So far, they haven't said anything bad, but I don't know what their idea of great is either. So we'll just have to wait and see."

Two hours later, Jim and Steven stood up when they entered the living room. Nicole smiled and said, "No need to look so nervous, Jim. Everything looks fine. We just have to discuss our findings with our boss, get the report typed up and send it in for approval. Relax, the tough part is over."

"Thank you so much," Jim said as he walked them to the front door. "I hope to hear from you soon."

"It takes a while, Jim, so relax and don't worry about it," Daniel said.

Jim closed the door after they walked out and just stood there looking lost.

"What's wrong, Jim?" Steven asked.

"I think Daniel is not on our side. I think Nicole was, but not Daniel. This might not turn out as well as we wanted it to," Jim explained.

"You're jumping to conclusions, Jim. Knock it off. How about dinner with our wives?" Steven teased.

Jim let out a bark of laughter and said, "Good idea, little brother. We better call them and tell them we're on the way."

After calling Blair, Jim locked up the house and both men drove over to Steven's house.

When they arrived at Steven's, Blair and Frances were making a nice dinner.

Jim came in and kissed Blair softly and Steven did the same with Frances.

Blair beamed with happiness. "We were so busy talking we didn't even hear you."

"Did you get all of your work done, Frances?" Steven asked.

"Yes, Blair helped me do it all. Now tell us, how did the inspection go?" Frances asked, sweetly.

Jim looked across the room and saw the dirty look Steven was giving him, so he answered, "Everything went fine. They'll call us with the results."

"It went that badly?" Blair asked, looking scared.

"How did you know that?" Steven wondered aloud.

"I know Jim better than anyone else and I can tell when he's upset. Now tell me what happened," Blair said.

"The girl's name was Nicole and she was totally on board, I could tell by the way she talked and smiled. But Daniel wasn't. I think he didn't believe it was a good idea for us to be foster parents. Steven told me I was overreacting, but I felt like I was right."

"We gave it a shot, Jim. That's all we could do. Now we wait for the answer and move from there," Blair said, trying to smile.

Jim moved towards him and pulled him into his arms and held on for dear life. "We gave it a hell of a shot, Chief. No matter what, we're going to have each other forever."

Frances started to cry and left the room. Steven followed close behind her, wanting to check on his almost wife.

"Why was Frances crying?" Jim asked.

"It's up to her to tell you, not me," Blair replied.

"You mean, she actually told you she was pregnant? It's about time. I've had a hard time keeping this news all to myself."

"You knew?" Blair asked.

"She smells different and the weight she's gained was another clue and then I could hear a little heartbeat," Jim said, very happily.

"That is so cool, Jim. Don't say anything until she tells Steven," Blair said as Steven walked into the room wearing a huge smile.

"We're pregnant!"

Jim went over to his brother and hugged the stuffing out of him. "Congratulations, Steven."

Blair then hugged him and said, "This is the best news we've heard in a long while. I think you need to tell your dad, though. He could use the good news."

"I'll call him and tell him now," Steven said as he picked up the phone. Frances walked in and grabbed the phone. "I'll ask him over for dinner and we'll tell him while he's here."

The men all smiled at how easily she gained control of the situation. She was one tough cookie.

Frances called and asked William over for dinner and told him to come then and hung up the phone when she was done talking. "And that's how we will tell our father and father-in-law he's going to be a grand-father."

William smiled as he got ready to go over to Steven's house. He wondered if Frances and Steven were finally going to tell him the big news. He never would have said anything, but he could hear an extra heartbeat about two weeks ago and he noticed that Frances had gained a little bit of weight. These senses had always been a little bit of a pain, but since Blair had taught him some control issues, he was doing better. He knew that Frances was farther along than she thought because of the heartbeat.

William locked up the house as he left and felt like a million bucks for the drive over to their house.

When William arrived he smiled at Jim and Jim knew that his father already knew. This meant something special to Jim. He finally shared something with his father. They could both hear things and not say a word about it.

They all sat down and Steven said, "How do you feel about becoming a grand-father?"

William was up so quickly that it surprised everyone. He hugged Frances and told her how much he loved her. Then he hugged Steven and told him the same. Then while he was at it, he hugged the two uncles-to-be.

Frances said, "You're taking this rather well. I'm so glad."

"Why wouldn't I? I've wanted a grandchild for a long while. And God knows that Jim and Blair are dying to become uncles."

Blair smiled. "We sure are. We can't be happier."

"Is anyone ready to eat? Dinner is done and remember, I'm eating for two," Frances said, laughing.

They all sat down at the table and started dishing up their food. Everything looked good and tasted even better.

"So, are you excited for the honeymoon?" Blair asked.

"We're counting the days. There are two," Steven said.

"I can't believe that in two days we're going to have another member of the family," Jim said.

William felt like a million bucks. Not only did he survive the surgery, but he was spending time with his family right and left and now he was getting a grand-child. He couldn't wait to tell his new friends at the meal site.

"I'm thrilled to be part of this family. At first, I thought some of mine weren't coming to the wedding and it ruined it for me. Honestly, I was depressed, but now I feel like a new person," Frances stated.

Steven looked troubled. "Frances, you didn't tell me you were depressed."

"I didn't want to worry anyone, but I feel much better now. I needed my family to get their heads on straight. Thank you all for putting up with me," Frances said.

William snickered and said, "Families are a pain in the butt, Frances. I'm sure you'll find that out about us too."

They all helped clean up after dinner and then William left first. As Steven walked him to the door he asked, "Are you all right, Dad?"

"Yes, I'm just tired. I need my beauty sleep," William kidded and started out the door.

"Thanks for coming, Dad. Frances is wild about you."

"And I am about her, too. In two days you're going to have a wonderful wedding and nothing will make it go wrong."

"Thanks. See you in two days, Dad," Steven said as he watched his dad go to the car and leave.

Frances asked, "Was he tired?"

"Yes, that's what he said," Steven answered.

Blair asked, "Not to change the subject, but where are you going again for your honeymoon?"

"An 11 day cruise to the Mexican Rivera. We can't wait to go," Frances replied.

"We went on one for 11 days, too. The food was pretty awesome and we had a good time at the ports of call. You're going to have a blast. Now, I don't know about anyone else, but I need to get home and go to sleep. We'll see you both in two days," Jim said.

Frances hugged them both and walked them to the door. "Drive carefully and sleep well."

Blair got into Jim's SUV and they started for the house. "So do you want to talk about the inspection?"

"No, not really. If it goes through, it goes through. If it doesn't, it wasn't meant to be. Either way, we're both happy the way things are right now, right?" Jim asked.

"Oh yeah, I'm happier than I've been in years. I really love Frances. She has become a very good friend to Megan and me. We do things together that you might not be that crazy about doing."

"Chief, I would do anything for you."

"You are going to get so lucky when we get home," Blair answered. Jim always knew exactly what to say and when.

"Rain check. I really am tired, babe."

"Okay, I'll hold you to that. Guess who is going to be sitting at our table at the wedding reception?" Blair asked.

"Who?"

"Mike Miller. How do you feel about that?"

"Well, he's coming to the wedding. He's decided that we weren't as awful as he thought and came to his senses. I'm glad he'll be sitting there. He was a nice guy," Jim admitted.

"You're a nice guy, Jim. You have really come to terms with this haven't you?"

"Blair, I needed to, because it's for Frances, not for us. I wanted her to be happy and I'm glad it's working out. It's going to be a beautiful wedding. Think how lucky this child they're having will be to have all of the aunts and uncles from her side of the family."

"And our side of the family, too. This baby is going to be super special," Blair said.

"Tomorrow is going to be a busy day at work, trying to catch up so we'll be off for the wedding. I almost forgot about the rehearsal dinner tomorrow night. That'll be nice too," Jim said.

As they pulled into the driveway and then into the garage, Blair said, "I'm so damned happy, Jim."

Jim leaned over and kissed his mate and said, "So am I."

They walked into the house together and got ready for bed. Both of them were tired, so it was a good night for just cuddling and going to sleep.

"Ellison and Connor!" Simon barked out his office door.

They both stood up and walked over to him and Jim said, "You called?"

"I need the two of you to look into a rape that happened last night. She won't talk to anyone, so I'm hoping that Connor can help her open up. This is the fourth one in a month. This guy is getting more dangerous every time. She's at the hospital. This guy did a really bad number on her. Are you two up for it?" Simon asked.

"Yes, I am," Connor replied.

"I hate dealing with rape victims because they usually don't open up to men," Jim said.

"So just go along with me and let me know if you hear anything out of the ordinary that could help me get somewhere with her. We can do it, Jim," Megan assured him.

"Megan, I'm glad you're so sure of it, because I think is going to be a really long day and night. Simon, I have to remember the rehearsal dinner is tonight."

"You'll be done by then. You can pick it up the day after the wedding, also. Both of you try your best and good luck," Simon stated as he walked them to the elevator.

Jim gave a thumbs up sign to Blair as he left and Blair wondered what they were up to, but knew it wasn't his place to ask. He would find out about it later that day, anyhow.

Jim and Megan arrived at the hospital and went to the room she was in. When they walked in, they were somewhat shocked by what they saw. This woman's face was beaten so badly you couldn't even tell what she really looked like. Her eyes were swollen shut, giving her an even sadder appearance.

Megan walked into the room very quietly and said, "Linda, my name is Megan Connor. I'm an Inspector for the Cascade Police Department. I was wondering if I could talk to you."

A tear slid out of the woman's right swollen eye and she said, "I can't help you."

"Linda, he is getting worse every time he hurts a woman. The next one might not live," Megan said softly.

"She might be better off. This man hates women so badly that he beats us until we can't even see him anymore. Not that I want to, anyhow, but he is a very sick individual and he threatened me."

Megan got a little closer and said, "He told you not to go to the police?"

"Yes," Linda answered quietly.

"Do you remember what he looked like?" Megan asked, next.

"I'll never forget what he looks like. But I have to have protection if you expect me to help you. Who will protect me?"

Jim spoke very softly. "My name is Detective Jim Ellison and we have many caring police officers that would be in charge of staying by your side until we find this man. My partner, Detective Blair Sandburg and I will be here for you as of Sunday. In the meantime, I will get the other officers ready for their duty to watch out for you. How does that sound?"

"I'm afraid to sleep, because he said he would be back," Linda said, sadly.

"We'll be here, Linda. Now could you give us a description so we can begin looking for the man? And once you can see again, you can tell a sketch artist what he looks like and we'll have something more to go on," Megan said.

Linda began to give them the description and what the monster did to her. Jim was actually sick to his stomach, and he imagined Megan was too. Before long, they had a good description, knew where he picked her up and a few other things to go on.

Megan said, "Jim, why don't you call the station and ask Rafe and Brown if they can come up to the hospital and take the first shift. We'll ask Joel and Bishop to take the next shift. Linda, you will be with someone all the time. Try and relax, I know that's a silly thing to say to someone that has been through what you have, but you're going to have to trust us. Your life is in our hands now."

Jim walked out to the hallway and got the schedule worked out with Simon. Even Simon was going to take a shift. That's how badly they wanted this man caught and punished.

Jim walked back in the room and said, "They'll be here in an hour. So, we'll just hang out here and keep Linda company."

Megan spoke in a soft tone and discussed different types of therapy that Linda could go for while she was in the hospital. Jim realized he didn't know any of that. They needed to have classes in how to deal with rape victims. Jim, himself, knew that she was frightened of him and he was of her. That's not a good combination.

Megan ended up calling the nurse in and telling her what Linda needed for the next week. The nurse said they would set everything up right away.

When Rafe and Brown got there, Megan introduced Linda to them and Jim and Megan left for the day.

Once in the SUV, Megan said, "I'm sick to my stomach."

"That makes two of us."

"Well, at least she'll be safe for the time being. God, I hope we can find this monster," Megan said.

"We will, don't worry about that. We won't give up until we've got him behind bars. I think the FBI should be called in on it. This man is a pure animal and we need some help," Jim confessed.

"I can't believe you just said you think we should call in the FBI. I think I might agree with you. Maybe we could talk to Simon when we get to the station," Megan replied.

The drive to the station was pretty quiet, each of them having their own thoughts about the victim.

At the station, Jim parked and they got out and started upstairs.

"The big dinner is tonight, am I right?" Megan asked as they climbed the stairs slowly.

"Yes, and I'm 'so' not in the mood for it. Our job sucks sometimes," Jim admitted.

"Everything will go fine. Don't you worry about it. Once you leave and get dressed up to go out tonight, you will forget the ugliness and know only good things for a short time," Megan said.

"You're right, of course. This is their big day. I don't want to ruin it. So, I'd better get with the program."

They both walked through the staircase door of the bullpen and were greeted by everyone there, including Blair.

Jim could see the concern in Blair's eyes and wished he could hug him and tell him not to worry, but this was work and that wouldn't fly.

He sat down at his desk and Blair asked, "How are you?"

"I'm good. We have to leave pretty soon to get ready for the dinner tonight. Did you remember?"

"Of course I remembered. I can't wait to go for the dry run," Blair kidded.

Jim gave him a high five and began to work on his report to take into Simon's office. He also got out a sheet to fill out to ask the FBI to step in. Blair looked over and said, "You're asking the FBI to step in?"

"Blair, this man is a monster. Wait until you meet this young girl. He destroyed her in two horrible hours. She can't see because he beat her so badly. So she can't do a face with a sketch artist until she gets better. No one knows how soon that will be. We can watch out for her, but I think the FBI would have a safe house that would be more comfortable than the hospital. She's so broken, Blair."

"She's not broken, Jim. She just needs some help. We'll see that she gets the right help, too. What department are you asking for with the FBI?"

"I was thinking the Special Victims Unit with the FBI. I mean, we have one here, but I think it's more like a serial rapist now and it should be treated as such. What do you think?"

"I think you're right. Fill out all the paperwork and we'll hand it to him as we leave," Blair suggested.

Jim got up when he was done and went and got Megan Connor. They knew they should do it together.

Jim tapped on Simon's office door and Simon looked up and smiled as he said, "Come in."

"Here are the reports. And I have a request for a Special Victim's Unit in the FBI to be called immediately. I feel horrible about leaving for the next two days, but this needs to be taken care of and soon. Megan can help get Linda used to the FBI coming in. She worked well with

Linda. Here are all of the forms filled out and I need to leave right now to make it to the dinner," Jim said, trying to rush.

"Get out of here. Thanks for filling out all the forms. We'll take it from here. Enjoy the wedding," Simon ordered as he pushed Jim out of his office.

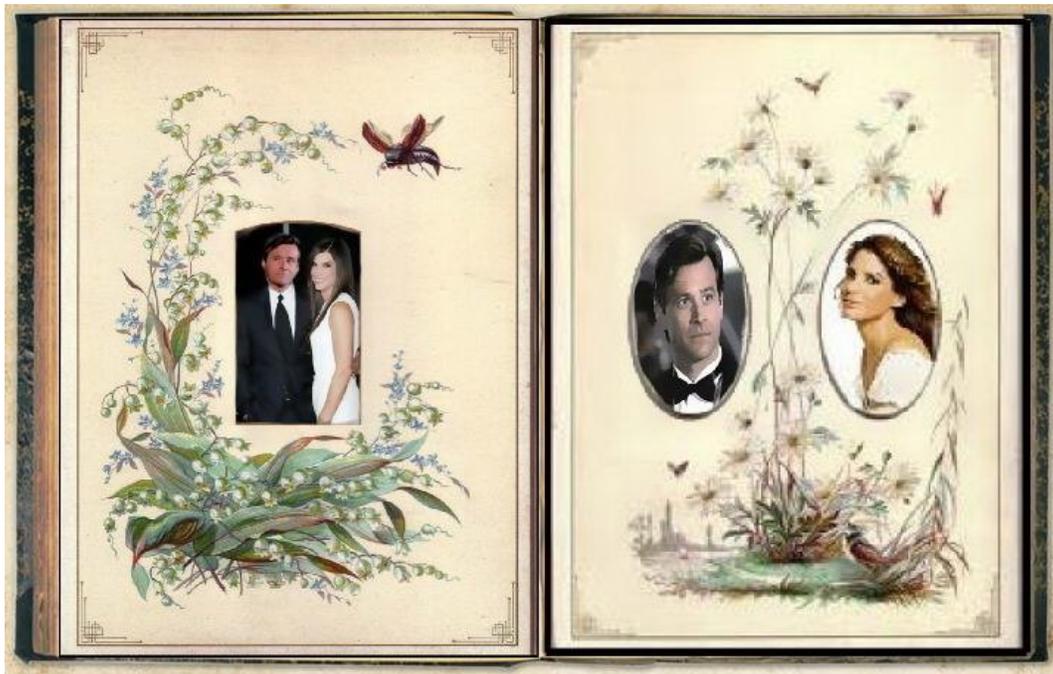
Jim grabbed Blair and they left in a hurry, so they could change before dinner.

Once Jim and Blair arrived at the church, they saw the look of relief on both Steven's and Frances's faces. They had probably wondered if they were coming at all.

Jim and Blair shook hands with everyone there and they went and stood where they were supposed to, to rehearse the big affair. Once everyone had it down correctly, they all left to meet at the restaurant of Frances's choice. Jim and Blair were thrilled because it was Claim Jumper and they loved it there.

The boys had been a little nervous about meeting all of the people in her family, but it went well. Jim shook hands with Mike, as if he had never met him before. Jim figured if he wanted to tell Frances, he could tell her.

The evening went well and Jim could see how excited Steven and Frances were about the next day. William was giving them little pep talks about how stressful a wedding can be, but Jim realized that Frances was really getting into all of this. She acted like she was truly enjoying it.



They said their goodbyes and left to go home and rest for the big day. Blair talked Jim's leg off the entire way home and for a change, Jim was glad of it.

The big afternoon, turned out to be a gorgeous day. The weather was sunny, warm and no wind. Jim and Blair arrived to help Steven keep from having a nervous breakdown. William arrived to help them handle Steven. Between all of them, they were doing pretty well.

The church started filling up and Steven finally started calming down. William went and sat in the first row of pews with Frances's family. He had gotten pretty close with some of them, and he enjoyed their company.

It was finally time and the men were standing in front of the altar when the wedding march started playing. The Maid of Honor was first and then the Bridesmaid was next, followed by a beautiful Frances walking down the aisle with her dad. The dress was perfect and the veil was absolutely stunning. Jim looked over at Steven and could see the tears in his eyes. Then he glanced at Blair and saw them in his eyes too. Jim knew he was going to have to be the strong one.

Once Frances arrived at the altar, the priest took over and it went fairly quickly. Everything was going smoothly. When the priest said, "You may now kiss the bride." Blair was close to tears.

It had been a perfect wedding. Everyone was there that was supposed to be and nothing had happened to throw a wrench into the works. As Steven and Frances walked out of the church, everyone else followed.

"Jim, I think the reception is right downstairs," Blair said.

"Yes, it is. Let's get dad and go have a reception," Jim said, smiling.

When they walked in, they found the table that they were sitting at. William was seated with Frances's parents, but Jim and Blair were four tables from there. Jim saw Mike sitting there and he and Blair sat down across from him.

"It's really nice that you didn't mention to anyone about us meeting before," Mike said softly.

"Not my place. If you wanted Frances to know, you would have told her," Jim answered.

Other people started to sit at the table so no more was said about that. They were all asking questions about Jim and Blair and Blair was answering everything he could. All was going well. Mike noticed that everyone seemed to accept Jim and Blair as a couple and they even liked them. Blair was telling some wild stories that even made Mike laugh and it turned out to be an

excellent table to be sitting at. Dinner was served and it was quite a nice setup. The food was delicious and Jim was quite impressed. Then he found out that Frances's sister owned the catering service. Jim was going to have to remember that. The food was great.

After everyone finished eating and the plates were cleared, they asked if the Best Man had anything to say. Jim was very nervous about giving a speech, because he wasn't a speech sort of guy. But he was going to give it a try, anyhow.

Jim stood up and walked to where Frances and Steven were sitting, next to the cake and began his speech.

"Good evening everyone. First of all it is my honor to thank all of you for becoming a part of Steven and Frances's wedding celebration. For my part, I want you to know that Steven whined to our father until dad finally forced me to write this speech and recite it today. Then I want you all to notice, how close he is to the cake. He was always trying to get all of the dessert."

There were a few laughs and that was enough to get Jim to go on.

"I know that a lot of you travelled from all different places just to come here. So we thank you for such a tribute. Steven and Frances will truly make a fantastic couple and I'm happy that things have been well for them so far. On a different note, because of this wedding I've met a lot of Frances's relatives for the first time. Regardless of what she's been saying, I think you're all great."

This made a lot of the family laugh. Jim was feeling surer of himself.

"Actually, as I was trying to figure out what to say, Steven mentioned clearly that I should steer away from embarrassing him. So, before I begin with telling you the stories, I shall share to you some smaller things about Steven: he was born, he went to school, he got a job, and now he just got married. Enough said! Now, on to the good stuff! Let me tell you about Frances..."

This made even Steven laugh. And Frances was very moved.

"Frances, you look sensational today and are such a beautiful, caring, loving person. Your delightful personality, glorious smile, generous nature and caring warmth are just some of the many reasons why Steven should consider himself the luckiest man in the world."

Frances' mother was wiping her eyes.

"Here's to the bride – may she share everything with her husband...and that includes the housework. Here's to the groom, a man who kept his head even while he lost his heart."

Steven groaned at this one.

"May your love grow larger, may nothing ever take it away, may your household multiply, and may your hearts never be divided!"

This time, Jim noticed that Frances's dad was wiping his eyes.

"I feel honored that I was asked to stand up for Steven and Frances on their special day. Thank you for picking a wonderful wife who has made our lives more complete. Thank you also for being a good man to Frances, so that her life is filled with love and joy."

This time, both Steven and Frances looked like they were going to cry.

"Here is to the best life you could possibly have and know that all of us are here for you anytime at all. You make a perfect couple and this makes us all very happy."

Everyone could tell Jim was winding down.

"Congratulations, Frances and Steven. May the world treat you well and may you have great dreams. Now, eat the cake and get busy getting to the airport for the honeymoon. "

The hall erupted in applause. Jim wasn't expecting that and this moved him. He was so glad the toast had gone well. Here he had fretted about it and it went just as well as the entire wedding.

After the cake, Steven and Frances left for the airport. They had a busy eleven days coming up. As Frances hugged Jim and Blair together, she whispered, "I hope you have good news for me when we get home."

"Don't you think about anything but you and Steven for the next eleven days. We'll see you when you get back," Jim said as he hugged her back.

As they left, everyone threw bird seed, because they don't throw rice anymore, and it was the perfect ending for the perfect wedding.

When Jim and Blair arrived home, Jim asked, "Would you mind if we went to the station to see how the case is going?"

"Wouldn't mind it at all. I'd like to meet Linda and talk to her about some specialists that deal in rape survival."

"I would like to have a class taught at the station about how to cope with these types of cases. I wasn't prepared at all and thank God, Megan was there, so she took over completely. We all should know who to contact and what to say or do. Do you think you could talk Simon into a class at the station like this?" Jim asked.

"That is an excellent idea. I'm really proud of you for suggesting it. I'll handle Simon, you have to make sure everyone goes to the classes. That can be your job."

They changed clothes, and drove to the station to find it hopping. There were FBI agents all over the bullpen.

Simon called Jim and Blair into his office, right away. "Just wanted you to know that we are officially off the case. FBI SVU took it over and they have a lot more man power than we do. Connor already went up to the hospital and introduced the specialists who are going to work with the victim. So, there is no need for you to be here. They're collecting all the paperwork right now and will be gone shortly. Get out of here. Go home and relax."

"Thank you, Simon," Blair answered as he walked out the door.

"I thought they would at least want us to work with them on it," Jim said, disgustedly.

"Jim, you're the one who called them in, so don't give me a hassle for doing what you wanted."

"You're right, of course. Talk to you tomorrow morning," Jim said before he left the room.

Eleven days later:

Jim decided to put a new faucet in the kitchen and was busy doing that, while Blair was just cleaning the house. The phone rang and Jim knew Blair wouldn't hear it with the vacuum going. Jim got off the floor and answered it, "Ellison."

"Hello there, this is Nicole Davis. I was calling to see if we could set up the interviews with you and Blair. It took a little longer than we had planned but now everything seems to be on board. We have an opening in two weeks, if you're available."

"Yes, two weeks will be fine. Whatever date it is, we'll work it out," Jim answered.

"Then how about the 13th, at 8:00?" Nicole asked.

Jim wrote it down, smiling the entire time and said, "That will be perfect. Thank you so much."

"You will be interviewed by two other people that you haven't met before, I didn't want you to think it was me and Daniel doing the interview," Nicole explained.

"We're looking forward to it. Do you need anything else?" Jim asked.

"That will do it. Good luck, Jim."

Jim hung the phone up and rushed out of the kitchen to find Blair. He found him in one of the spare rooms, polishing the furniture.

"Guess who just called?" Jim asked excitedly.

"Nicole?"

"Wow, you're a good guesser. We have an appointment on the 13th at 8:00 in the morning. I can't believe they finally called. I honestly thought they had just decided to not allow us to become foster parents. It seemed like it took forever and now we have to wait another two weeks."

"Everything takes time, Jim. We just had to be patient. See, it paid off."

"Oh who do you think you're fooling? You were worried about it too? Every time we saw a child your heart would beat faster and you would get this sad look on your face," Jim said.

"Seriously? I thought I was keeping the worry to myself, pretty well. Just shows you what I know."

"That's why I didn't say anything. I knew you were trying to be brave all by yourself," Jim teased.

"Oh shut up," Blair kidded, back.

"I wonder who we have to see?" Jim said.

"Nicole didn't say anything about having to see a psychologist for the state. We'll do just fine," Blair assured Jim.

"I sure hope so," Jim replied.

They both knew that the next two weeks were going to be hard ones, but they knew that they had to wait and see what happened. They also knew that once the interviews were over it could still take a month or more before they heard anything.

Jim couldn't keep his mind on anything these days. When they went over to Steven and Frances's house to see them after their trip, Jim couldn't stay focused for ten minutes. Now, he was having trouble at work. Simon was going to call him on it, if he didn't straighten up. Blair wasn't much better. This was the longest two weeks of their lives.

Simon barked, "Ellison, my office."

Jim frowned and stood up. Megan Connor walked by and patted Jim on the back and said, "I'm glad it's not me he called in there."

"Thanks, Megan," Jim said, very sarcastically.

Jim knocked and walked into Simon's office and said, "You wanted to see me, sir?"

"Oh knock off the sir shit. You and Sandburg are worthless these days, waiting for that interview. I'm giving you the next three days off so you can drive each other crazy at home, instead of here."

"Thank you, Simon."

"You're welcome, now leave."

Jim smiled and left the office. He grabbed his jacket and told Blair, "We're off for the next three days."

"All right, that sounds good to me. Let's get out of here."

Rafe asked, "Did Simon spring you for a couple of days?"

"Geeze, were we that bad?" Jim asked.

Brown laughed and said, "Just nervous tension and it made you a little grouchy. Once those interviews are over with, you'll feel better."

"Then it'll be another wait after that," Blair reminded everyone, "we can't expect to get off every time we're frustrated, so we'll try and get a handle on this."

Megan smiled and patted Blair on the back. "We're here for you, Sandy."

"You're all the best, thank you," Blair said as they walked to the elevator and got on.

As soon as the door shut, Jim said, "Honestly, I'm nervous about the interview."

Blair was shocked. "Why?"

"Because, I believe that they will be looking for anything and everything we say or do, incorrectly. That's like a field day when it comes to me," Jim confessed.

"Jim, you're being paranoid. Calm down and we'll take this slow. We're in no rush for this anyhow. Right?"

"Blair, I'm getting older and I was hoping to help raise a child before I was my dad's age," Jim said.

Blair burst out laughing. "You mark my words, you'll probably do better on the interview than I do. I'm willing to make a small wager, although then they would ask if we gambled and we would have to say yes."

"You always know how to make me feel better. Thank you," Jim said.

They got off the elevator and climbed into the SUV and started for home. Jim was actually glad to have a couple of days off. He was sure Blair felt the same way.

That afternoon at the house, Jim heard the doorbell ring and went to answer it. It was Steven and Frances. He opened the door with a big smile on his face.

"Come on in, what are you up to?" Jim asked.

"I was bored and thought I would discuss some names with you and Blair and get your opinion because my new husband has no taste."

Jim threw back his head and laughed. "Steven, you're going to have to agree on something. What are the names you don't like?"

"I don't like any of the names she's chosen for a boy. Where is Blair?" Steven asked, looking around.

"Let me get him, he's doing laundry. I'll be back," Jim said. He took off for the laundry room and hoped he and Blair weren't going to witness a first fight for Steven and Frances.

He poked his head in the laundry room and said, "We have company and they're fighting."

"Who is fighting?" Blair asked, looking concerned already.

"Steven and Frances. They're fighting over baby names already," Jim said.

"Oh, how cute. Let's get out there and help them out," Blair replied.

Both men walked out into the living room and found nothing but quiet. That was worse than the arguing. Jim sat down across from them and said, "So, Frances, what name is your favorite?"

"For a boy, Harper Jude. I love the sound and the look of it, and Steven said no son of his was going to be named Harper," Frances said, angrily.

Blair smiled and said, "I love it. It is an old English name for one who plays the harp. Nothing wrong with this name at all. I really like old English names."

"You haven't heard the best part yet. She wants to use Harper for either a boy or a girl. Do you believe it?" Steven was in shock.

"Harper Lee is the author of *To Kill a Mockingbird* and she's a woman, so it could be used for either gender. I like Harper for a girl, too. What is the middle name you've thought about?" Blair asked, Frances.

"Harper Joy, is what I like for a little girl. What do you think, Jim?" Frances asked.

"I like both of them. They aren't real common, so no one else would have that exact name. I like it. Why don't you think about it some more, Steven? It's a good strong name for either gender. It's not a wimpy name at all. In fact, why don't you name him Harper Jude Steven Ellison or Harper Stephanie Joy Ellison?"

"I like my name being in it somehow. That would be good, I think, but seriously, you both like the name Harper? What if they call that baby, Harp? What would you think of that?" Steven asked.

"I would think I would have to smack them," Blair answered.

"So would I, Blair. I'm not real fond of nicknames anyway. Although, Jim reminds me of a Jim, so that's all right."

Jim smiled. "I hate nicknames, too, Frances. I was called Jimmy for years and still do get it from my uncles and aunts. But yet, Steven was called Steven."

"Did you ever call him Stevie?" Frances wondered.

"Yes, I called him that all the time, but when we were older I decided to call him Steven. The name suited the man he grew into."

"The name does suit him," Frances agreed.

"Did anyone ever call you Fran or Franny?" Jim asked.

"No, thankfully. I was lucky. No one ever called me anything but Frances."

"I call you Fran sometimes," Steven says.

Jim smiled and said, "Well, stop it."

Blair looked over at Steven and said, "What names do you like?"

"I was thinking of naming the baby Steven Junior if he was a boy or Stephanie if she was a girl."

"I don't like the Junior names myself. I think it's confusing to have that many people with the same name. Plus I like using Steven as the middle names anyhow," Blair said.

"Exactly what I told Steven. I don't care for the name Stephanie at all, but as a middle name I could handle it. I didn't want a little Steven running around the house. I was really stuck on the name Harper. I know that sometimes I'm stubborn," Frances said sadly.

"Maybe Steven could think on the name Harper a little more and learn to like it. If it's Harper Jude Steven or Harper Stephanie Joy, he might grow to love it. Steven, you could call the baby that while it's in her belly and see if you warm up to it," Blair suggested.

"I guess I could do that."

"Really? You would do that for me," Frances asked.

"Frances, I would do almost anything for you. I was blindsided by the name Harper, but now that two other people think it's a cool name, I would probably go with it. In fact, let's count on calling the baby Harper while he's in your belly."

Frances went into his arms and kissed him soundly. "Thank you, honey. I've loved this name since I first heard it as a child."

"Steven, are you hoping for a boy?" Jim asked.

"I don't care as long as the baby is healthy. Why, did you guys want a boy for us?" Steven asked Jim.

"No, I couldn't care less. I will love little Harper no matter what he or she is. I think it's great that you've already decided on a name for him or her. That's half the battle right there," Jim said.

Blair said, "I haven't talked to Jim yet, but I know he won't mind me saying this. I was wondering if we could do the nursery for you? I don't mean, we would choose the things you need, I mean we would pay for it so that his or her room will be ready when he or she is born."

Jim smiled over at Blair and said, "Good one, Chief. I think that's a great idea, before everyone in Frances's family tries to take over. Just kidding, Frances."

"They are already trying to take over. We just told them one day ago and they are driving me insane. I don't even want to tell them the name we chose, because I can tell you they won't like it."

"We don't want to be pushy, but we'd like to do the room for Harper. Do you agree with us?" Blair asked.

"I think it's a wonderful idea. Blair, what about you and me doing the design for the entire room?" Frances said.

"What a great idea. And Steven and Jim could be in charge of putting all furniture together and hanging shelves. Sound good to everyone?" Blair asked.

Frances was really into it. "We could all paint the walls and trim. I love the house and the room, so it'll be perfect."

Steven smiled and said, "You both have made this pregnancy a real joy for us. I think this is going to be fun, when do we start?"

Frances frowned and answered, "They say you shouldn't do anything until after you are six months along. We don't want to jinx the pregnancy. So we'll wait for a few months yet."

Jim said, "Have you had an ultrasound? You look much bigger than three months pregnant."

Steven looked at Frances and said, "Are you further along?"

"Yes, but I didn't want to screw up the wedding. We'll find out for sure when we see the specialist on Tuesday. I think I might be four months."

"It doesn't matter to me how far along you are. It's still going to be a precious baby for us, so I'm happy either way," Steven said and kissed Frances.

Blair smiled. "Then if you're four months, that's only two months away to get the nursery ready. I like the sounds of that."

Frances hugged him and said, "We just love you two."

Jim hugged her next and said, "We're crazy about you two, also."

"Jim and Blair, would you like to go with us for the ultrasound? I know you'll never have your own and I think you should be able to experience it. You would just see my belly is all, what do you think?" Frances suggested.

"I would be so honored to go along for the first one. It's something we'll never get to do, so you're right, we would love it. Wouldn't we, Jim?"

"Sure..."

Frances smiled and said, "Mark it on your calendar. Oh, I'm going to have to call you because I don't remember the date off hand."

"Yes, just call us with the date. We'll be there with bells on."

"Enough about us, how are you two doing?" Frances asked.

"Jim is nervous about the interview for the foster parent program. I am too, but just not as nervous as he is."

"You boys are going to do perfectly. Stop worrying. I'm telling you, they'll be lucky to have you. They called me and interviewed me about you. It was sort of exciting. I felt like you were both going to be getting some news soon," Frances said, happily.

Blair said, "Frances can I speak with you in the kitchen?"

"Sure," Frances answered and followed Blair into the room.

"I have to tell someone, so you're it. Jim is killing me with too much sex. I swear it's like he's trying to get me pregnant or something. We not only do it every night, but sometimes, every morning, too. I'm exhausted."

Frances couldn't help but laugh and then she hugged Blair. "Tell him to slow down. He's trying to make you feel better, when in all actuality; he's probably just trying to make himself feel better. Talk to him tonight, Blair."

"I will. Thanks, Frances." Blair kissed her cheek and walked into the living room. A blushing Jim was waiting for them and Blair couldn't help but snicker.

Steven yawned and said, "I'm exhausted. Let's get home and take a nap before dinner."

"Okay. We'll talk to you guys in the next few days and see how things are going. Try not to worry about anything and before long the time will be up. It's going to go great. Trust me," Frances promised.

Jim hugged her and then hugged Steven. Blair did the same. They walked them out to their car and watched them drive away. Then they walked back into their beautiful home.

"So you don't want to do the ultrasound?" Blair asked.

"I didn't think you even noticed," Jim said.

"Yeah, I noticed, I just didn't want to make a big thing out of it in front of Frances."

"I think that's a very private thing and we shouldn't be included," Jim explained.

Blair smiled at him. "We're going to do it, buster. So get used to the idea."

They went into the kitchen to see what they were going to start for dinner.

"So, I'm killing you with sex?"

"Yes, Jim, you are. I'm exhausted, aren't you?"

"Actually, I'm super exhausted, but I wanted to make you happy during this trying time."

"Every other night would work for me, man," Blair said kissing his Sentinel.

"You got it. Oh good, tonight we sleep," Jim joked.

"Now, let's get busy with dinner," Blair said.

Two weeks later, Jim and Blair went in for the interviews and it took much longer than they had planned. But they knew that once it was done, that was it. No more interviews. They were both told that they would be called with the results when the decision had been made.

They went back to work afterwards and tried not to worry about it. They knew that it was going to be hard, but working would help pass the time.

Jim and Blair were sent out to a call as soon as they arrived. A husband had killed his wife and children. As disgusted as Blair was, he still read the man his rights and put him in the patrol car for the ride to the station.

Jim couldn't understand how people could do that to their loved ones, but this happened quite often. Jim found it frightening. There was nothing to really do or say, the man had confessed to the policeman that got the call. It was just paperwork and pictures they would have to file.

One week later, Jim and Blair went with Steven and Frances to the doctor's appointment for the ultrasound. Blair was so excited, he could hardly think.

They whispered to each other in the waiting room and when they called Frances back, the three men almost raced to get back there with her. They laid Frances back and exposed her belly and started putting the gel on it. Then the doctor ran the ultrasound over her belly and said, "Do you all see the baby? You are definitely farther along than you had believed. Do you want to know if it's a boy or girl?"

They all looked at each other and Frances realized that Jim must have already figured it out. "Yes, I want to know."

"It's a boy. You're four months pregnant, not three. Everything looks good. His heart is strong and loud. Do you all want a picture of the baby?" The doctor asked.

Jim was the first one to answer. "We would love one for our house. We could frame Harper and put it up for everyone to see."

The doctor laughed and said, "I like that name. Very unusual and sounds nice." He pressed buttons and little pictures came out of the machine and you could make out the baby in them, they were so good. Jim and Blair both had tears in their eyes when they looked at theirs. They hugged each other and then Frances and Steven, too.

They left the appointment and went home to put the picture up. They were that excited. Not just Jim and Blair, but Frances and Steven were thrilled, too.

Two months later, Jim and Blair were busy planning the room redecorating when the phone rang.

Jim answered the phone, "Ellison."

"Hello, Jim. This is Nicole Davis. We finally got all the paperwork back and you and Blair have been approved for the foster parent program. We need you to come in to the office and sign some papers and tell us what ages of children you prefer. Can you come in sometime this week?"

"Nicole, we could come in today, if you have the time; we're both off," Jim offered.

"That would be perfect. Do you remember where the office is?"

"Yes, we sure do. Thank you for calling," Jim said before he hung up the phone.

Blair said, "We got the approval?"

Jim picked Blair up and swung him around, kissing his neck the entire time. "We need to go and sign papers right away. As in now. So maybe you could call Frances from the SUV while we're driving there."

"She's going to be so excited, Jim. I think she's as excited about this as we are. Remember she said it takes a long time to get the results back, but they would come around. She was right. Man, I can't believe that soon we might have a child of our own."

During the drive there, Blair called Frances and told her why they weren't coming over to do the room that afternoon. Blair was right, she was as thrilled as they were.

When Blair got off the phone, Jim asked, "Could you call my dad?"

Blair called William and told him the good news. William was almost as excited as they were. "Why don't you and Jim come over to my house when you're finished filling out the paperwork? I'd like to talk to you both anyway," William said.

"Sure, we can stop by on our way home," Blair answered.

Once he got off the phone, Jim asked, "Why do you think he wants to see us? Did he sound all right?"

"Jim, stop worrying, he sounded fine. He sounded happy. I think he wants to share in our news. Maybe we'll take him out to dinner to celebrate."

"That would be good. Let's do that for sure," Jim agreed.

When Jim and Blair walked into the office of the foster parent program, they were all smiles. Everyone in the office knew that someone was very happy.

Jim told them they were there to see Nicole Davis and they told them to sit and wait.

Jim and Blair began the waiting game again. There was a young man sitting in the waiting room, watching Jim and Blair like a hawk. Jim finally looked at him and asked, "Is something wrong?"

"No. Sorry, I didn't mean to stare, but Ms. Davis told me about two guys that were coming in today and I saw you guys and wondered if you were the two guys," the young man said.

"Well, we are two guys, but if you mean are we two guys together, then yes, that would be us," Blair answered.

"I meant no harm. I'm just not used to seeing two guys together," he said.

"No harm done. Have a good afternoon," Jim said.

The young man went back to reading a magazine and only staring at Jim and Blair occasionally.

Nicole opened up the door and said, "Jim and Blair."

They stood up and walked into Nicole's office. Once they sat down she had them fill out and sign everything she had for them and then she leaned back and said, "So do we have an age preference?"

Jim looked at Blair and asked, "Do you have a preference?"

"No, any age is good for me," Blair replied.

"Same here," Jim agreed.

"Well, did you see that young man in the waiting room?" Nicole asked.

"Yes, he was staring at us when we first got here, but it was because he's not used to seeing two men together," Jim explained.

"He has nowhere to go. He's 12 years old and has been in four foster homes. We keep hoping one will work, but he's a handful. His name is Miles Grant. Would you be interested in meeting him and taking in a 12 year old?"

"I would love to meet him," Jim replied, quickly.

"First, we would like to hear all about him. Why didn't the other homes work? How does he do in school? Is he a loner or an outgoing person?" Blair asked.

"Let's see if I can answer most of your questions. Honestly, he said they were mean to him in the other homes and ran away because of that. I don't know that to be the actual case, I'm just telling you what he has told me. He doesn't do well in school because he's dyslexic and a loner. He has no friends to speak of and he's a very unhappy child. I'm not sure he's the right fit for you and Jim," Nicole said.

"We could try, though, am I right?" Blair asked, "I've dealt with people with learning disabilities and it's a hard life. We'd like to give him a fair chance, wouldn't we, Jim?"

"I agree. We can't expect everything to be all rosy and perfect, that's not the way life works out anyway. How does he feel about two gay men taking him in?" Jim asked.

"He's not too wild about it, but he has nowhere to go but with you, or he goes to a half-way house for unwanted children. They are as bad as it sounds," Nicole explained.

"Could we talk with him first before you do? And maybe we can get somewhere with him or at least give him a choice of where he could go," Blair said.

"I'll bring him in and you two take all the time you need. I hope he works with you, because he's like a little lost soul. I feel bad every time I place him in a home that doesn't want him. I'll be right back," Nicole said as she walked out to the waiting room and got Miles.

When the door opened both Jim and Blair looked up and saw a scared looking 12 year old. They wanted to make him feel at ease right away, so Jim said, "Let's get down to business, Miles. My name is Jim Ellison and my partner's name is Blair Sandburg. You can call us Jim and Blair. You probably don't want to live with two gay men, am I right?"

Miles shook his head yes and continued looking at the floor.

"The nice thing about it is that you don't have to. There are other options for you, I'm sure Ms. Davis told you about them, am I right?" Jim asked.

"It's not a good place. I don't want to go there," Miles answered.

Blair jumped in and said, "Then that leaves us. Which do you dislike more?"

"The half-way house. I know someone that went there and he hated it. He said he had made more mistakes in his life than he could get away from. I would go with you, if you understand that I'm not gay."

Jim smiled and said, "Of course you're not gay. We would like to try this out. There is a good school in our neighborhood and I think it would work well, starting at a new school and making new friends."

"Would I get my own room?" Miles asked.

"Yes, you would have your own room with a computer and a desk. Do you like computers?" Blair asked.

"Sort of, I've never had one and I'm dyslexic and I need help with everything. Did Ms. Davis tell you how much trouble I had at the other houses?" Miles asked.

"She sure did, but Blair used to be a teacher, so he's good at helping with homework and things like that. Not that I'm not, but he's even better. Did Ms. Davis tell you that we're policemen?"

"No, she didn't tell me that. I've been in trouble before. You might not want me," Miles offered them an out.

"Our work and home life are two separate things, so stop worrying so much. When would you like to move in?" Blair asked.

"I have my bag in Ms. Davis's office. I could move in tonight if you would let me."

"We'll let you, Miles. Now, let's get Ms. Davis in here and we can tell her the good news," Jim said opening the door to a waiting Nicole.

"Come on in, Ms. Davis. Miles has decided to give us a chance and try it out at our house. When can we take him?" Blair asked.

"His things are in my office, you could take him home tonight. Miles, are you sure you want to go with them? You don't have to."

"I sort of do, Ms. Davis. I havenowhere else to go," Miles reminded her.

"But we don't want you going to Mr. Ellison's and Mr. Sandburg's house if it's only for that reason. Is there any other reason?" Nicole asked.

"Blair was a teacher and could probably help me with school work. Jim could help too. I like that about both of them, that they're willing to give me a chance. So I figured I would give them a chance, too."

"This sounds like it just might work out, Miles. I'm glad you're giving them a chance," Nicole said.

"Thank you for finding them for me, Ms. Davis."

"You are most welcome. Now, come to my office, all three of you, and we'll get the papers signed and get Miles's clothes."

They followed her into her office and signed everything they needed to sign and she took a picture of Miles for Jim and for Blair in case he was ever lost. She gave the pictures to each of them and they got ready to leave.

"Thank you for giving us a chance, Nicole, it's been a long wait, but it was worth it," Blair said.

"You are welcome."

"I thank you, too. This is going to work out just fine, you wait and see," Jim said as he opened the door for Blair and Miles.

"Good luck, Miles," Nicole said sweetly and Miles gave her a little hug, which shocked all of them.

Jim said, "Follow Blair and we'll get in the SUV and go to your new house. You can pick out which room you want. We have three spare rooms."

"Cool," Miles answered and followed Blair to Jim's SUV.

"This is your car?" he asked, somewhat shocked.

"Yes, Blair has one almost like it, but his is in burgundy. I myself like greens better, than reds," Jim said.

"I like this color of green, it's not real common. Or at least I haven't seen too many of them in town," Miles said.

"Let's get in and drive to the house and then you can tell us what you need. We'll go clothing shopping, shoe shopping and every other kind of shopping you'll need to have. Never feel bad about asking for something. If we can get it for you, we will," Blair said.

As they drove, everyone was quiet, so Blair decided he would break the ice. "Our sister-in-law is pregnant with a little boy and they're going to name him Harper. What do you think of that?"

"I've never met a Harper before, so that's neat, I think," Miles said.

"What is your middle name?" Jim asked.

"Miles Carter Grant."

"Oh, I like the name Carter, it sounds very dignified and grown up," Blair said.

Jim pulled into the driveway and pulled into the garage and Miles said, "This is where I'm going to live?"

"What do you think so far?" Jim asked.

"This is the nicest place I've ever lived. I like it here already," Miles said, smiling for the first time.

Blair undid his seatbelt and said, "Come on, Miles, let's pick out your room."

"I can't believe I get a choice."

"There will be many choices here and sometimes they might not be ones you like, but we're going to try and make your life happier than it has been," Jim said.

Miles followed Blair inside the house and Blair showed him each of the three bedrooms and Miles said, "I think I like this one, because it has a bathroom connected to it. Could I have this one?"

"This is now your room. There is a desk with a computer over there and you have a lot of room for having friends over to stay if that comes up," Blair said.

"Could you teach me how to use a computer, Blair?" Miles asked.

"We'll start this weekend, learning the basics. It's going to be fun," Blair promised.

Jim poked his head into the room and said, "We were thinking about taking my dad out for dinner tonight, if that's good with you. If it isn't, we'll just invite him over to the house for dessert to meet you."

"That's fine, but I don't have any clothes better than I have on right now," Miles looked defeated.

"That's not a problem. We've got plenty of time for shopping and you can pick out some new clothes. Blair is really good at helping with that. I'm more into shoes and backpacks," Jim said.

"So we're going shopping right now?" Miles asked.

"Is that all right with you?" Blair questioned.

"It's fine with me. I can't believe I get a room like this and on top of that, I get new clothes. This is so great. Thank you, both."

"No need to thank us, we're here to take care of you. Now, let's go shopping. Blair will you call my dad while we're driving?"

"Sure I will. We'll meet him at Claim Jumper at 6:30. That will give us plenty of time to shop, shop, shop," Blair said, smiling.

Once in the car, they all buckled up and Jim was impressed because he didn't have to tell Miles to buckle up. Things were going well, so far.

Blair pulled his cell phone out and called William. "Hi William, this is Blair. We were lucky enough to get a foster child today and wondered if you would like to meet him at dinner tonight, at Claim Jumper, at 6:30."

"This is awesome news, Blair. How old is he?" William asked.

"He's 12. You're going to like him and his name is Miles."

"I have a cousin named Miles. It's an old name, but a good one," William said.

"So is 6:30 good for you?"

"Yes, I'll be there. Congratulations to both you and Jim. I can't wait to meet him," William said before he hung up the phone.

"Okay, that's all taken care of, Jim. Now, let's go shopping at the mall. We'll be able to find things all over the place and they have that fantastic shoe store there, that you like so much. I bet Miles will too. Do you love sneakers, Miles?"

"I do. I had a pair once, but someone stole them and I never got a new pair. Instead I had to wear these. They are two sizes too big for me," Miles said.

"Well, you won't have that problem anymore. Now, let's get down to business," Blair said as Jim parked in the mall parking lot.

Jim could tell Miles was nervous, but didn't know why. "Miles, what's bothering you right now?"

"How do you know something is bothering me?" Miles asked.

"I can feel it radiating off your person. Now what's wrong?" Jim asked again.

"I don't want you guys to go into the dressing room with me. Would that be all right?"

Blair smiled and said, "That's fine, but you have to walk out of the dressing room so we can see if it fits or not. Do you know what size you wear?"

"I wear a size 14. And my shoes are size 8," Miles said.

"Let's get started," Blair said as he got out and Blair knew that Jim was upset about the gay thing, but Miles would get used to them as time went on. Jim was an adult and could figure this out on his own.

They went to the shoe store first and got four pairs of sneakers in different colors. Then they got a pair of dress shoes and slippers. It was enough to get Miles started. Then they went to the clothing store that all the kids seemed to be going to and Miles picked out about 20 outfits. Although, Jim informed Blair that they aren't called outfits for men. They're sets. Miles was laughing about that. Next was underwear, socks and pajamas. Then they were officially finished, for that night, anyhow.

After they put everything in the back of the SUV, Jim said, "What are you going to wear tonight?"

"I thought since we're going somewhere nice, I would wear the pair of Dockers you got me and dress shoes," Miles answered.

Blair smiled at Jim and said, "I'm wearing jeans and sneakers. William will probably be wearing the same."

Jim laughed and said, "Okay, we'll all wear jeans and sneakers. How is that?"

"It's perfect," Miles replied.

Jim said, "You're going to like my dad. He's pretty nice now that he's trying to get into heaven."

Miles started to laugh and said, "You guys are funny. I like that."

"We're not always funny, Miles. We're going to have serious days when you might not even like us. But always know we're doing it for you. Speaking of you, we'll go get a list at the school tomorrow for school supplies and also a list of tutors to get you caught up with the rest of the class," Blair said.

"I get a tutor?"

"Yes, that will help you get caught up. There is nothing worse than being the new kid and being behind. So, we'll get that taken care of first thing in the morning. Jim, will you go to work and explain that I need to be off for a few days to get Miles set up in school?"

"I'll call Simon tonight and ask if we can both get off for three days. We've got the time coming, and then we'll have more time to do things with Miles too."

"Okay. Sounds good. Miles you're stuck with us old guys tomorrow and the next day at least. When school starts, you can walk home from school since it's only three blocks away, but you have to come right home and call us to let us know you made it," Blair said.

"So, you're not going to take me and pick me up every day?" Miles asked.

"Nope, you're 12 and you're old enough to know between right and wrong. We're going to trust you," Jim said.

"When am I going to meet your sister-in-law?"

"You'll meet Steven and Frances in the next couple of days, right, Jim?"

"Or you could call and ask them if they would like to meet us at Claim Jumper. Then Miles can meet his new family," Jim said.

Blair called Frances and she answered, "Ellison's."

"Hi Frances, would you like to meet us at Claim Jumper at 6:30 and meet our new foster child?"

"Oh, Blair, that is the best news I've heard all day. Yes, we'll be there. I'm going to hug you and Jim so hard when I see you. You've waited a long time for this. How old is he?"

"He's 12. He likes his room so far, loves his new clothes and shoes and wants to meet the family, go figure," Blair kidded.

"We'll see you at 6:30. What is his name?" Frances finally asked.

"Miles. Isn't that a nice name? It suits him, you wait and see," Blair said.

"Talk to you soon, Blair," Frances said before she hung up.

"Where is your family, Blair?" Miles asked.

"My mom is in India right now. Wait until I tell her the news. She'll come back as soon as she can. I never met my dad and I don't have any more family to speak of, so this is what you're getting," Blair said.

"I like that there aren't too many people to remember. Should I call your dad, Mr. Ellison, Jim?"

"You can if you want. He'll probably ask you to call him something else. Who knows with grand-parents?" Jim replied.

"So you think if I like it here, I could stay a long while?" Miles asked, timidly.

"Oh yeah, that's the goal to have you stay until you go to college," Blair answered.

They parked in the garage and began to unload all of Miles's packages. He was very excited. Once he got everything in his room, he shut the door and Jim smiled.

"He's trying everything on again. He probably has never had new clothes before. This will be a new experience for him," Jim said.

Jim and Blair changed shirts on for dinner and Blair knocked on the door and said, "Miles, we're going to leave soon, are you almost ready?"

Miles opened the door and Jim and Blair were impressed. He looked very cute in his jeans, polo shirt and matching sneakers. "How do I look?" Miles wondered.

"You look great. Come on, let's get on over there and get the table," Jim said as they all walked towards the garage.

Once they were driving to Claim Jumper, Miles said, "I've never had my own room. And especially a nice room like that. I love it. Thank you so much for the clothes, the shoes and giving me a roof over my head."

"You're very welcome, Miles," Jim said, happily.

"You're a great kid and I see great things happening from here on in," Blair replied.

When they arrived at Claim Jumper, Jim asked for a large table. They said it would be a 20 minute wait. "Oh well, we didn't have anything to do yet, anyway." Jim said.

William walked in the front door and smiled at Jim and Blair and then saw the young man that was with them. He was a good looking child and cleaned up really nicely. William walked over to him and said, "I'm William." Then he shook hands with Miles.

"Hello, William, it's good to meet you. Your son is really a nice man. So is Blair. I've never had a home like this before, so it's really great."

The two of them continued talking until Steven and Frances walked in. She went up to Miles and said, "I'm Frances and I welcome you into the family." She then hugged the stuffing out of him.

Miles smiled and said, "It's good to meet you, Frances. I really like the name you have chosen for the new baby. Harper is a cool, cool name."

Jim stood up and said, "Our table is ready, follow me."

They all followed him with Steven talking to Miles about how great it was that he was living with Jim and Blair.

The entire evening was filled with good conversation and happy talk about family and life in general. Before long Miles was yawning and looked like he was going to fall asleep.

"I hate to be a party pooper, but I'm tired. We're going to call this a night. Thank you all for coming out to meet Miles. And thank you, Miles, for accepting our family," Jim said.

"I'm tired too, Jim," Miles said quietly.

Blair almost laughed. They all said goodbye to one another and then they were in the SUV again, heading home.

Jim looked in the rearview mirror and saw Miles sleeping and smiled and told Blair to look.

"Kids are always so sweet and darling when they're sleeping," Blair whispered and then smiled.

Once they got home, Jim woke Miles up and told him to get ready for bed. He had all of his toiletries in the bathroom off his room. Before long, he walked out and said, "Goodnight, Jim and Blair. I had a really great day and night. Thank you again for taking me in and showing me what life could be like."

"We'll see you in the morning, Miles. Sleep well," Blair said.

"Goodnight, Miles. If you need anything, you just yell. We're right over on this half of the house," Jim added.

"Night." Miles walked into his new room and shut the door quietly. He was exhausted and couldn't wait to test out his new bed. That seemed strange, calling it his bed. He had never owned one before. Once, he had an air mattress, but that was about it. He slipped into bed and couldn't believe how comfortable the bed was. Soft, but not too soft. Nice and warm and inviting. Miles looked up at the ceiling for a while and realized he might not be able to get to sleep right away for a few days. He was that nervous. That was the last thing he thought about.

Jim sat on their bed and said, "He's sleeping already. At first, I could tell he was nervous, but then all of a sudden, he was sleeping."

"Good, that means he is comfortable with us and the house. We'll both listen to be sure he's all right all evening long. It's weird, having someone in the house, isn't it?"

"Yes, Chief, it is. It's going to take us awhile to get used to him being around, just like he has to get used to us. Let's lie in bed and you can talk to me until I fall asleep."

Jim looked over and Blair was already on his pillow, sound asleep. Jim smiled and got in beside him and fell fast to sleep, too.

The following morning, Jim got up and Miles was already in the kitchen.

"If you teach me how to start the coffee, Jim, I could do that when I'm up first."

"Come here and let me show you how it's done," Jim said as he slowly showed Miles exactly how he liked his coffee. "Now, if Blair comes and tells you I don't need that much coffee in the basket, ignore him. I love strong coffee."

Miles laughed and sat back down at the bar. "Could I help make breakfast or something?"

"I was going to make pancakes; do you like to make them?" Jim asked.

"To tell you the truth, I've never had anything but donuts or cold cereal. This is my first time hanging out in a kitchen," Miles answered.

"We'll go grocery shopping and get things you like today. Then we can stock the pantry. That way if you get hungry during the night, you could get something to eat."

"Boy, that would have been great last night. I woke up really, really early and I was starving," Miles admitted.

"After today, you'll never be hungry again. Let's get the pancakes started, Miles."

Blair was outside the kitchen listening and was filled with sadness at how much neglect this child had to go through all his life. He couldn't be sad in front of Miles. Time to put the happy face on. Blair walked into the kitchen and said, "Good morning, Jim and Miles."

"Good morning, Chief. Did you sleep well?"

"I did. How did you sleep, Miles?" Blair asked.

"I can't believe how soft that bed is in my room. I slept really well until my stomach woke me up from the growling."

Blair looked sad for a moment and said, "You know this house is yours too, if you're hungry, you come into the kitchen and see what's in the fridge or the pantry. Never be afraid to eat when you need to. I remember as a kid, I was starving all the time."

"That's how I feel a lot. Thank you for making this place so nice for me. Are we going to my new school today?"

Jim started cooking the pancakes and answered, "As soon as we're done with breakfast and we've had our coffee."

They sat down and had breakfast, cleaned up, with Miles helping and got ready to go to school. Blair had already called and found out what they needed to do, so he was on top of things.

In the SUV driving to the school, Miles said, "So I get to walk to and from school every day?"

"Yes. You'll be getting a key later today and then you have to call us at the station as soon as you get home. Even if it's just to leave a message saying you made it home in one piece," Jim said.

Jim parked and the three of them walked into the school. Jim could tell how nervous Miles was. He wished he could help him get through that, but they didn't know him well enough to try and get close. For now, they would have to help from afar.

They went to the main office and talked to the woman in charge, named Beth. "Good morning, Beth, my name is Jim Ellison, this is Blair Sandburg and this young man is Miles Grant. He needs to start school here and has just moved into our home. Here are his papers from his last school."

Beth smiled as she took the papers and said, "It's good to meet you Miles. Here is a list of school supplies that you will need." She then typed into the computer all of the information on the paperwork and said, "Okay, here comes your schedule. You are starting the year late, so you

don't get to choose your electives you have to take what we have left." She gave a printed out schedule for Jim, Blair and Miles. "Now, we'll see you first thing on Monday."

"Thank you, ma'am," Miles answered nicely.

Beth looked stricken. "You can call me Ms. Wilson. Never ma'am."

Jim smiled and so did Blair. "Thank you so much for helping us get this handled so quickly," Blair said.

"You are most welcome, but you're not done yet. We need all of this information filled out from both of you," Beth said smiling.

Jim groaned at the four pages they needed to fill out. But they both sat down with the clip boards and got busy. Before long, Blair took his up and Jim turned to Miles and said, "He's always been an over achiever."

Miles snickered and waited for Jim to finish his up, which did take a lot longer than Blair's.

When they were done, they went out to the SUV and got in. "Should we go shopping for the list right now?" Blair asked.

Miles said, "That would be great."

"Shopping it is," Jim agreed.

Blair laughed and said, "You have no idea how badly he hates shopping, so consider yourself very special."

"Thanks, Jim."

"You're welcome, Miles."

Shopping went off without a hitch and the weekend went well too. Jim and Blair had a barbecue and invited Brown, Rafe, Megan, Simon and Joel, so Miles could meet them.

Everyone enjoyed themselves and Miles was having a very good time. And Jim was fairly certain that he had a major crush on Megan. Jim knew that Megan knew too and kept winking at Jim.

They played horseshoes in the back yard and then they all played basketball in the driveway until it was time for everyone to go. Blair showed them all up with his basketball skills.

Once everyone had left, Jim said, "Would you like to help get the kitchen cleaned up?"

"Sure," Miles answered.

The two of them worked side by side at the sink, while Blair put all of the food away in the fridge. Before long, the kitchen looked just like it did before they started.

"Thank you, Miles."

"You don't have to thank me. I really like it here. I've liked everyone I've met so far and I like you and Blair more than I have ever liked anyone. For the first time in my life, I feel like it's going to work out," Miles explained.

Blair said, "We like you too, Miles. Thank you for accepting us."

"I'm going to take a shower and then go to bed. I'm exhausted. I have to get up early tomorrow for school. See you in the morning," Miles said as he walked off.

"Night, kiddo," Jim called out over his shoulder.

"Night, Miles," Blair said.

Both men stood side by side as they watched the happy young man walk into his room.

Jim locked up the house, turned off all of the lights and they went into their room and shut the door. He pulled Blair into his arms and said, "I love this. This wonderful feeling in my stomach. This is what we've been missing. I know things won't always be as easy as they have been, but I'm still going to love it."

Blair held Jim tight. "I'm feeling the same way. This is how life is supposed to be. Miles is going to have a grandpa, a grandma, aunt and uncle and soon a little cousin. This is a pretty great life Jim. We couldn't ask for more."

They just stood together for a long time, soaking up the love. They knew that they had finally gotten exactly what they had dreamed of.

Three Months Later:

Jim and Blair were sleeping when the phone rang at 4:30 in the morning. Jim answered, "Hello?"

"Jim, its Steven. We're at the hospital. Frances started labor, so she's giving birth this morning. I just wanted to let you know."

"We'll be up shortly. Tell her to wait until we get there," Jim kidded.

"I don't know if she can, Jim."

"Steven, I was joking. We'll be there soon. We can't wait to see Harper."

Jim said his goodbyes and hung up the phone. Blair was already up and getting dressed, trying to tame his hair.

"I'll wake Miles up and see if he wants to go with us," Jim said as he started out the door.

"Of course he'll want to come along. He's wild about Steven and Frances and I swear he's as excited about the baby as we are."

"Okay. I'll get him up, then," Jim said.

Jim walked down the hallway and could hear Miles in the bathroom taking a shower. Miles must have heard the phone and then heard Jim talking to Steven.

Jim went in and got dressed and brushed his teeth, almost bursting with excitement. He couldn't wait to see Harper.

Once both men were ready, they waited in the living room for Miles. Miles walked out smiling and asked, "Do I get to miss school?"

"I guess you do," Jim said.

"You needn't look so darn excited about it," Blair joked.

"Hey, nothing is more important than seeing Harper for the first time," Miles said, excitedly.

"It is good news. Come on, let's get up to the hospital and see our nephew and cousin," Jim said, happily.

As they drove towards the hospital, Miles said, "I forgot to tell you both something yesterday."

"What?" Jim asked.

"I got an A on my report that you both helped me do for science. The teacher was really impressed with the research I did and the drawings."

"This is very good news, Miles. Congratulations," Blair said.

"I didn't think it was good enough for an A, but the teacher sure liked it. He was impressed that I could draw that well. In fact, he asked me if you and Jim did it for me."

"You're kidding? Well, I'm not too happy about that. What made him decide that it was yours?" Blair asked.

"He asked me to draw something I liked, so he could see for sure it was my work, so I drew a picture of the mountains in Sedona, Arizona. I told him we went there and I loved it. He said he totally believed me then. Don't be mad, Blair. He was just making sure because that was part of the rules."

"I know, but I don't appreciate the fact that he thought you cheated," Blair said.

Jim chimed in and said, "A lot of kids cheat, Blair. You should know this more than anyone. And this teacher just wanted to be sure before he gave him the A. Stop worrying about that. We've got a new nephew coming into the world. That's enough for our plate now."

"That's true. Hurry up, already..."

"Isn't it freaky that we just finished the nursery last weekend?" Miles asked.

"Yes, someone was looking out for us. Now Harper has his own room," Blair answered.

Jim rushed as fast as the law would let him and they found a good parking spot and got out and made their way up to the maternity ward.

Jim could hear the women crying and screaming as he got off the elevator. He always wondered why some women screamed and some didn't make any noise at all. He was hoping that he wouldn't have to hear Frances suffer.

Jim walked up to the desk, said who they were there for and the nurse said, "You'll have to wait in the waiting room, right over there. I'll let Mr. Ellison know that you're here."

Blair smiled and said, "Thank you, Rebecca."

The three of them headed over to the waiting room across the hall and sat down for what they hoped wouldn't be a long haul.

Jim and Blair had told Miles about his senses they knew they would have to. It was something Miles could keep secret. Miles whispered, "Jim, can you hear Frances?"

"Yes, she's in the delivery room right now. Steven is coaching her really well. He's not panicking, just like they taught him to do. They're telling her to push harder, so the head can make it out," Jim said.

"It's so cool that he can do that," Miles said to Blair.

"Tell me about it. I'm jealous, big time right now," Blair whispered.

"He's out and they are cleaning him up. The doctor said everything looked good. The nurses just told Frances and Steven that he weighs 6 pound 4 ounces and he's twenty-one inches long. He's got a good set of lungs on him. Now they wrapped him up and took him over to bond with Frances and Steven," Jim continued.

"This is so exciting," Miles said.

The nurse came out and said, "Is there a Jim Ellison here?"

"Yes, ma'am. I'm Jim Ellison."

"You are the proud uncle to Harper Ellison, who is doing just fine. You'll be able to see him in about a half-hour. So just relax until then. You could always go down to the cafeteria and get coffee," Nurse Barker said.

"We'll do that, thank you," Jim answered.

All three of them walked down to the cafeteria and got coffee and hot chocolate.

They took their cups upstairs to drink in the waiting room so they wouldn't miss anything.

About half-way through their drinks, Steven rushed out the door, so excited he looked like he was going to burst. Jim hugged him, really hard and said, "Congratulations."

Then Blair hugged him and told him the same thing. Finally Miles hugged him and said, "When do we get to see my cousin, Harper?"

"Right now, they moved him up to the front row so you can get a good look at him," Steven said as he led the way to the nursery window.

They looked down at the little guy that said 'Baby Ellison' and got tears in their eyes. He had a full head of hair, a nicelyshaped head and darker skin.

"He's beautiful," Miles said touching the glass, as if he could feel Harper through it.

"Thank you, Miles. He's going to be so lucky to have an older cousin to show him the ropes."

"Steven, he's just gorgeous. Where did he get the tan?" Blair asked.

"Well, you know that Frances has some Italian in her blood, so maybe we got a little Italian."

Jim hugged Steven once again and said, "You and Frances did a great job."

"Thanks. We like him."

"When can we see Frances?" Miles asked.

This made all three of them feel so good. Miles had really grown close to Frances in the last month. "She should be in her room by now. Let's go find her," Steven said.

She was in room 502 and sitting up and looking beautiful as usual. It was hard to believe she had just had a baby. That's how good she looked.

The first one over there was Miles. "I love my new cousin."

"Harper is going to love you, too, Miles. I'm so glad you came up with the guys. I didn't know if they would drag you out in the middle of the morning."

"I heard the phone ring and heard Jim talking to Steven and I jumped right in the shower, so they couldn't say no," Miles said.

She smiled and hugged him some more. "You're going to be a fantastic older cousin and Harper is going to be blessed because of it. Now Jim and Blair get over here," Frances ordered.

Jim was first and didn't say anything, just held her close. Finally he found his voice and said, "He's gorgeous, Frances. You two made a wonderful baby."

Blair was next with a huge hug and told her, "We can't wait until you get to go home so we can all hold him. This is going to be so much fun."

Steven stepped up by Frances's side and said, "I think you should rest, honey. They said he would be coming in to nurse in about an hour. You better rest up for it."

Jim said, "Come on everyone, let's let Frances get some sleep. When do you get to go home?"

"Tomorrow," Steven answered.

"Then we'll leave you alone up here and visit once you get home so we can see him up close and personal. We'll see you tomorrow," Blair said.

"Night, everyone," Frances called out.

All three of them said, "Night."

Jim turned and asked, "Steven do you want to call dad with the news?"

"Already did, big brother. He's thrilled."

"Okay, see you tomorrow," Jim said as he followed everyone out of the room.

They walked down to the SUV and got in. Miles was the first one to say something.

"Thank you, Jim and Blair, for giving me such a great home, a great life and a great family. I've never had this before and I'm so happy," Miles said.

"We're very happy, too. Thank you for being such a great kid and giving us nothing but good things in our life," Jim said.

"I agree with Jim. We've been truly blessed. Thank you for agreeing to give us a chance," Blair said.

As they drove home, Jim realized his heart was heavy from the weight of love. And this was fine with him.



The End