

Even At Rainier



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Story by Bluewolf

"Jim. My office."

Simon's voice was almost unnaturally quiet... and since when did Simon say 'Jim' when he was calling for me?

This didn't sound good.

I saved the report I was halfway through writing - a job Blair actually enjoyed and made so easy! But Blair was at Rainier proctoring exams all week, and I was left to get on with my own report writing. Then I pushed myself to my feet, ever so slightly stiff from sitting over the computer for the best part of an hour, crossed to Simon's office and went in. Automatically, I closed the door, worried by the look on his face.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"Blair," he said.

"Blair? He's - "

"Been shot."

"Shot? He's at Rainier - "

"Yes." He pointed to a chair. "Sit down. I'll tell you what I know, and then I'll take you to Cascade General.

"Apparently his 201 class was sitting an exam today."

I nodded. "He's been very pleased with that class."

"Apparently someone from the 101 class burst into the room about ten minutes after the exam started and began firing an automatic gun at the students. Most of them had the sense to drop to the floor, try to hide under desks, but not all. Blair tried to stop the guy and was hit twice... The guy saved the last bullet for himself.

"He's dead, and so are two of the students he hit. Two others were shot but survived. And Blair... "

"He's not dead. I'd know." And I would know. I've never told anyone, but there's a connection between us that I can't explain. I think Blair has the same kind of awareness of me, but it's not something we've ever discussed.

"He'd not dead, but it doesn't look good. He lost a lot of blood before the EMTs got there. That was as much as Suzanne Tamaki could tell me - she phoned as soon as the scene was secured and the injured taken to the hospital.

"Now go and shut down your computer and we'll get on the road."



Almost numbly, I obeyed. In some ways I resented the waste of time - why hadn't Simon just said, "Come with me!" and told me about it when we were already in the car on the way to the hospital? But I thought I knew. He was making sure I wouldn't lose it in the car. That if I did lose it, it would be in the privacy of his office. But I wasn't about to lose control of myself just yet. Not until I knew how Blair was, not until I knew if he was going to be all right.

And it wasn't as if I could go and batter the guy who shot him into a bloody pulp - he'd taken the coward's way out and shot himself.

When we were in the elevator going down to the garage, I asked, "Does anyone know why - ?"

"Not yet. Tamaki is getting statements from the other students, but unless he yelled something while he was shooting we may never know. Though I'm not sure how good a university campus security officer will be - "

"Suzanne's good," I said. "She was a detective in Tacoma before she moved to Rainier. A case involving young kids stressed her out; but law enforcement was a job she enjoyed. She thought campus security would be a bit more... well, mundane."

"She came to the wrong place, then," Simon muttered. "Wasn't it you who once called Cascade the most dangerous city in America?"

The comment didn't really merit an answer, but I grunted an agreement.

The elevator had reached the garage level, and we headed for Simon's car.

We went with lights and siren, paying no attention to the speed limit, and even so Simon seemed to be driving far too slowly. He pulled in to a space reserved for emergency vehicles, slapped the police permit onto the dashboard and we hurried in.

The girl on reception - Marcia - was one we knew. "Captain Banks! Detective Ellison! We were expecting you. They're operating on Blair now."

"Have you any idea how he is?" I asked.

Marcia shook her head. "They only told me that much so that I could let you know. But if they're operating, he has to be holding his own; if he was too weak they'd keep him sedated and medicated, wait for him to gain some strength. I don't even know what happened to him. He was just rushed straight through."

"He was shot," Simon told her.

"Captain Banks!"

I glanced around at the same time as Simon. A Patrol cop - Mike Kelly - had come quite close - I really was distracted not to notice him, though he was one I knew, and knew wasn't a danger to me.

"Got something for us, Kelly?"

"Yes, sir. My partner and I answered the call to Rainier, and came in with the victims. Al went down to the morgue with the bodies; I stayed here with Petra Young - Blair and the other

injured student were sent straight through to the trauma center; Petra wasn't as badly hurt and is having to wait her turn to see a doctor. But I expect you'll want to question her?"

Simon nodded. "Ms. Tamaki is interviewing the uninjured students, but the more statements we can get, the better, even though, according to what I was told, the gunman is dead?"

"Yes, sir. Petra's over here."

I glanced at Marcia before following Simon. "Thanks."

"I hope Blair does make a full recovery," she said as she turned her attention to a new arrival.

The girl who sat there was probably about nineteen, and looked somewhat shell-shocked. There was a bandage around her upper left arm.

"Ms. Young? I'm Captain Banks. This is Detective Ellison - "

"Mr. Sandburg works with you, doesn't he."

"Yes," Simon said. "Can you tell us what happened?"

"We'd just started the exam," she said. "A man came in - he had a gun, and started firing it. Most of us ducked down, tried to shelter under our desks - I was a little slow, and... " She held up her arm. "I heard Mr. Sandburg saying 'Lynton, what are you doing?' but then the man turned and shot him. He yelled 'Why didn't you give me a pass mark, you bastard?' And then he turned the gun and shot himself."

Lynton. I knew the name... I'd heard Blair mention it. A sports jock... I half turned to look at Simon. "Sandburg happened to mention him just a day or two ago. Blair said Lynton had to take some academic subjects, but he had no interest in anything academic. He apparently reckoned that he'd have a career as a player, then go on to become a coach. It might be worth checking with the Rainier coach, see what he thought of the guy."

Simon nodded. "I'll get someone on that." He walked quickly towards the door, where there was a public phone.

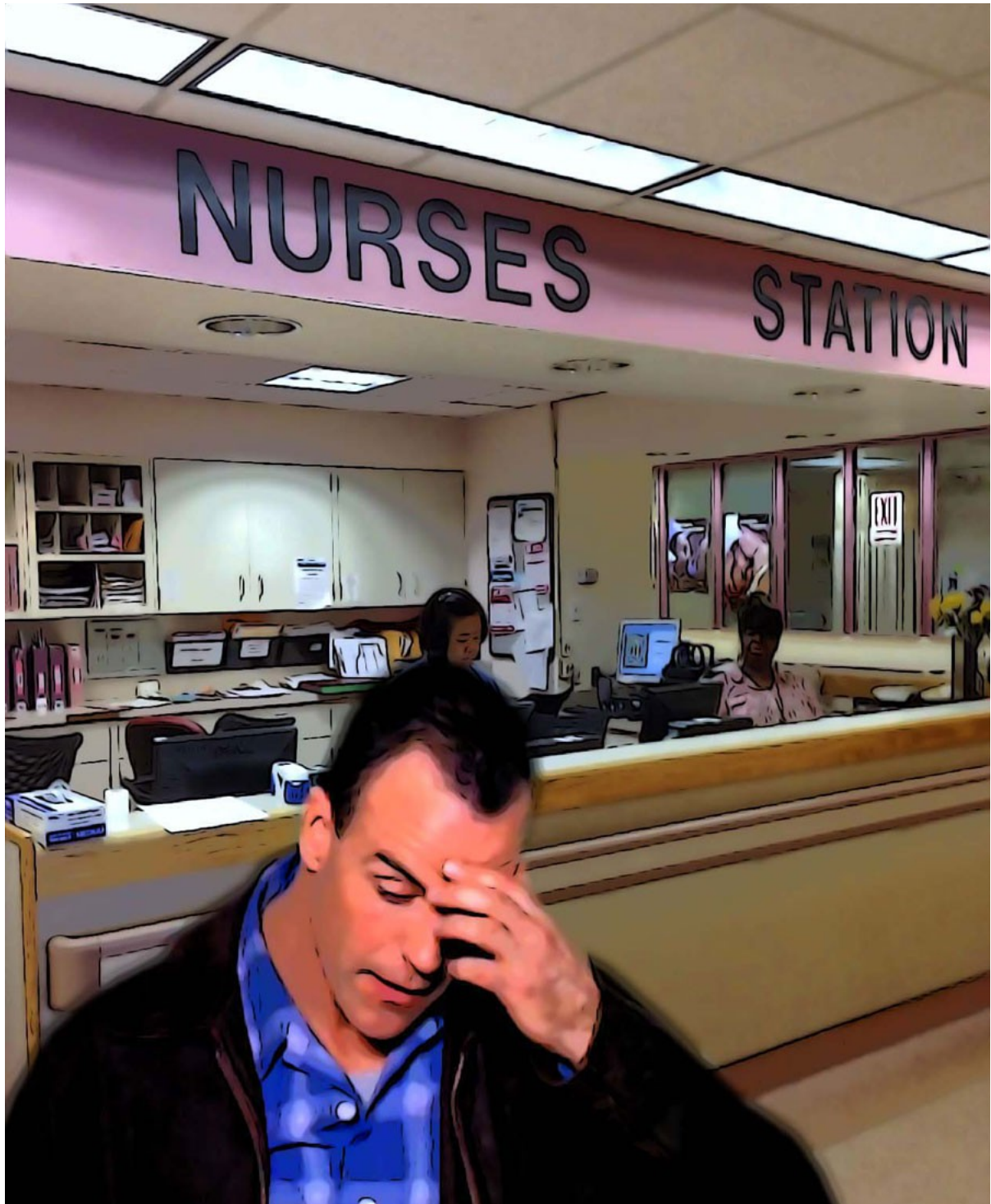
"Detective Ellison!"

I glanced around. Sophy - one of the nurses we knew well - was coming towards me. I nodded to Kelly and Petra. "Thanks," I said then headed for Sophy. "Blair?"

"They're just getting him stitched up, but he seems to be stable. One bullet was a straight in and out through the shoulder; didn't do much damage. The other was trickier and did do some damage to his chest, but Dr. Gundorf is very good."

"Gundorf? I don't think I know him?" God, how sad is it that I know all the emergency staff, and some of the ICU and ward nurses, by name.

"He's new - just been with us about five weeks. But you can take my word for it, Blair couldn't be in better hands."



Sophy left me sitting in the corridor while Blair was settled in to ICU, where he would be kept for at least twenty-four hours, while she went in to help the nurses there.

Blair. I'd thought once or twice about cutting him loose, about telling him - not totally truthfully - that he'd taught me so well I could manage without him. I'd thought that if he wasn't tailing around after me, he'd be safe. But he'd been shot at Rainier... at Rainier, where I'd always assumed he would be safe. Where he should have been safe. I buried my head in my hands, fighting back the tears my father always said were unmanly, the sign of a baby.

"Detective Ellison?" The voice was quiet, with just a trace of an accent. I looked up.

A doctor stood there, his face quietly sympathetic.

"Yes. You Dr. Gundorf?"

"Yes. Your friend has been relatively lucky. Two ribs were badly broken and his shoulder blade cracked. A splinter from one of his ribs nicked a lung, but not badly. The most difficult part of the operation was getting out all the splinters of bone from his ribs. Mr. Sandburg will be in some pain for two or three weeks - I understand from the nurses that you have the same address?"

"Yes - we're roommates."

"And that he resists taking medication?"

"He believes in natural remedies, but I'll make sure he takes anything you prescribe."

"Good. There will be an antibiotic, of course, and he will need to take painkillers for those two to three weeks, at the very least."

"He'll take them," I promised.

Gundorf nodded. "You can go in to see him now. Visiting time in ICU is usually limited, but I understand from the nurses that Mr. Sandburg usually rests more quietly if you are there - I am not sure I like that word 'usually'..."

"He's been hurt a few times as a result of my work," I admitted.

"I see. Well, if it will help him to rest, I will not try to restrict the length of time you remain with him."

"Thanks," I said. "And Doctor - it works both ways. Any time I'm hurt, I rest more quietly if he's there."

That first day, Blair still hadn't recovered from the anesthetic when the nurses finally kicked me out. I was reluctant to go, but I was also anxious to learn what the Rainier coach said about Layton.

I went back to the loft via Wonderburger - I didn't feel like cooking anything, and any other take out would just undermine the fact that Blair wasn't there - even when we ordered our own preferences, for example in Chinese, we usually ended up stealing a little from each other's plate.

As I ate, I phoned Simon.

"Jim. What's the word on Sandburg?"

"He was still out for the count when I left, but his doctor sounded optimistic, said he'd been pretty lucky. Did you find out anything about Layton?"

"Lynton," Simon said. "He was on a sports scholarship, but was close to losing it. Quite apart from his academic work, where he was totally failing, Wallace - the Rainier coach - said Lynton didn't even train properly - he was basically lazy, thought he was so gifted he didn't need to train. He was never going to make the grade as a professional, let alone ever become a coach, unless maybe for kids just starting to learn the game.

"Word of the shooting had spread, and when he heard who was involved Wallace said he wasn't totally surprised. Lynton apparently wasn't someone who could accept failure, even though he was too lazy to work for success."

I went back to Cascade General about nine in the morning, and went straight to ICU. By then Blair had been moved to a room. I did pause long enough to ask about the student who'd been badly hurt; he was still in ICU, but expected to make a full recovery. So I made my way to where Blair had been moved. The nurses at the station there were new to me - I had to flash my badge and claim that I needed to speak to 'Mr. Sandburg' about the shooting before they let me go in to see him. As I turned away from them, I was thinking that I might have an 'I'm staying!' battle to fight in an hour or so, but for the moment...

As I went into the room, Blair looked over at the door, and his eyes lit up.

"Jim!"

"Hi, Junior. How you feeling?"

"All right, as long as I don't try to move. But I need info. After Tom Lynton shot me, what happened? And... how many of the students were hurt?"

"I'm sorry, Chief. Two were killed, two were injured. One's still in ICU, the other wasn't badly hurt. Lynton killed himself."

Blair sighed. "He had potential, he just wouldn't apply himself."

"According to Coach Wallace, he was about to lose his scholarship - he wouldn't even apply himself to sport, thought he was so good he didn't need to practise."

"Gods, what a waste."

"Just what the final trigger was, we'll probably never know," I said. "Now - you just concentrate on recovering."

"Yes, Dad."

I stayed for most of the morning, then left, knowing that Blair would be home in a day or two. But as I walked down the corridor, I thought back over things that Blair had said about Lynton, and thinking - since he was obviously suicidal, it was a pity he hadn't killed himself before he went on a rampage with a gun, rather than after.

At least Blair had survived.

I walked on down the corridor...

